

The Treasure  
of  
Balden Place

by  
Francis Carranah



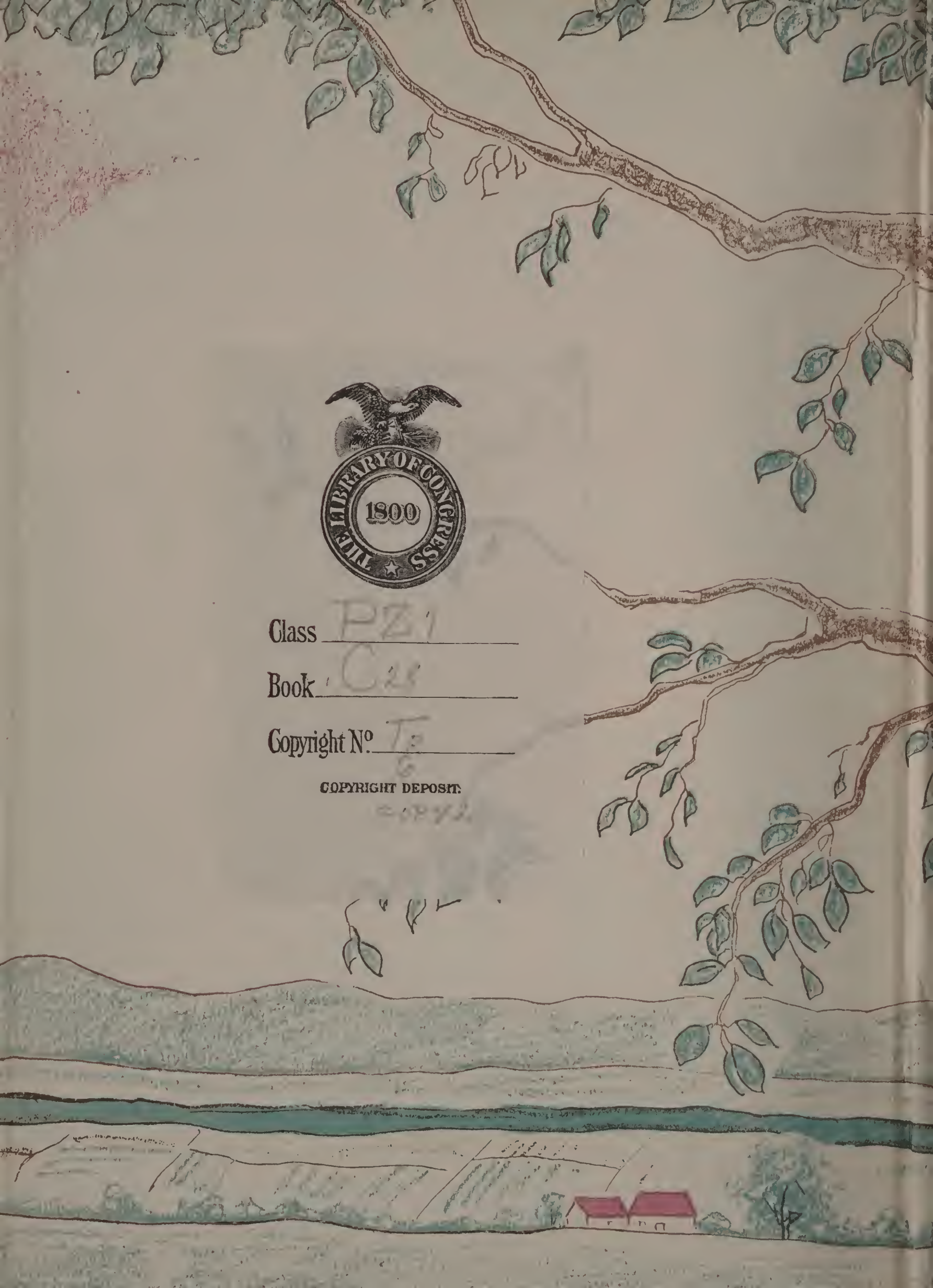


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*It's strange—the feeling a big empty house  
gives a person.*

*The* TREASURE of  
BELDEN PLACE

by  
FRANCES CAVANAH

*illustrated by*  
LUCILLE WALLOWER

A Mystery Tale of Lost Heirlooms

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To Isabel Hamer Smith,  
whose mother was the *Patty* of this story.

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## FOREWORD

Treasures are the heritage of children, and a treasure hunt is the supreme adventure. Mystery is a rightful part of childhood; the deciphering of the unknown is a natural and worthy impulse.

Belden Place yielded many treasures—not only the jewels for which Patty and Patsy make such a gratifying search. It yielded secrets of the past to the young adventurers, and these secrets enrich their lives. The pre-Civil War days of the Underground Railroad become living days, and the great-grandmother who had been such a valiant figure during those troublesome times becomes a living figure.

Aside from entertainment, the story does much toward building up an understanding of American life and the things for which it stands. The conditions of Civil War days become a part of the tale, and the reader, in the midst of narrative interest,

all unconsciously absorbs facts of definite informational value.

May the treasures which Patty and Patsy found at Belden Place also enrich the lives of the boys and girls who read about them!

*The Treasure of Belden Place* will prove to be one of the most enticing treasures of any juvenile library.

—THE PUBLISHERS.

## CHAPTER I

### BELDEN PLACE

“YES, it must be there some place,” said Mr. Whitney, as he tied up my sack of sugar.

“You don’t mean there’s a secret room in my Grandfather Belden’s house — one that nobody knows anything about?” I gasped, so excited that I almost dropped the package he handed me over the counter. “Oh, Mr. Whitney, are you *sure*?”

“Well, now, that’s what my father told me when I was just a little shaver, and he knew your great-grandpap pretty well. It was during the late fifties and the old house was one of the stations, as they used to call ’em, in the Underground Railroad.”

“And the secret room must have been the place he hid the poor black folks,” I said. “Why, Patty will be so thrilled that—”

“I wouldn’t set *too much* store by what I told you,” Mr. Whitney interrupted a bit doubtfully. “More’n likely, they walled the secret room up long ago.”

I looked the old storekeeper straight in the eye. “You haven’t just been teasing me, have you?”

“Indeed, I haven’t, little missy,” he said seriously.

“I’ve just been telling you what my father told me once.”

Patty Morrison was my cousin and she and her mother, who was my mother’s sister, still lived in the rambly old house at the edge of town that had belonged to our Grandfather Belden and to his father before him. Everybody in Fayetteville called Patty and me “those Pat girls” or the “twin cousins,” because she was born just one day after I was, and we were both named Patricia after our Great-grandmother Belden. Mother and Daddy were living in San Francisco at the time, so they didn’t know anything about Aunt May having a little girl named Patricia. And, of course, Aunt May didn’t know anything about me; and by the time letters had a chance to travel back and forth, we were already named and our births had been registered. But when we moved back to Fayetteville, it hadn’t been so confusing as you might think, because I had been nicknamed Patsy and my cousin was called Patty.

Patty and I were to be separated for a whole month, so I wasn’t at all happy as I walked home from the grocery store—in spite of the splendid secret that old Mr. Whitney had told me. I was



crazy to begin exploring the old house, which the townspeople still called Belden Place, and I knew that my cousin would be, too, because she loves treasure hunts just as much as I do. You see, Great-grandmother Belden's jewels had disappeared very mysteriously, away back in Civil War days, and no trace of them ever had been found. But now I had a hunch that they might be in the secret room.

Daddy had to be away on a business trip, so Mother and I were leaving the next day to spend four or five weeks at a very stupid hotel at the seashore where we had gone for several summers. My cousin and aunt were going to the mountains, and Patty said that her hotel was just as stupid as mine. Our cottage was to be closed, but Aunt May was leaving Belden Place in charge of the new housekeeper—John the gardener's sister—who was to come down from Arlington, the city twenty miles up the river. Of course, my aunt stored the silver and things like that in the bank, but you couldn't put antique furniture in a lockbox, no matter how valuable it was. The gardener had all he could do looking after the grounds and the greenhouses, and he seemed very anxious to have his sister with him.

I stopped at the hollow tree which Patty and I

used for a post office. We were always leaving letters for each other there and little surprise packages—paper dolls and things like that—and, sure enough, this time I found a note. I opened it hurriedly and read: “Isn’t it wonderful? Mother just told me. Hooray!”

What she meant by that I had no idea, but I knew that when Patty said, “Hooray,” she *meant* “Hooray.” If her mother knew, then mine would, too. Besides, they were waiting for the sugar at home, so I had to go there first. I broke into a run, sure that something very splendid must have happened.

But Mother’s first words didn’t make me feel so certain. “I’m sorry to disappoint you, Patsy,” she said, and suddenly all the rest of me seemed to sink right down into my stomach. Perhaps there wasn’t to be any surprise after all. Then Mother went on, “Would you mind very much if you didn’t go to the seashore this summer—if you had to stay up at Belden Place with Patty instead?”

“Would I mind?” I said, and I gave Mother such a hug that she cried out, “Have a heart, Patsy darling!”

“Why, Mother,” I told her, “I’d rather stay at

Belden Place than anything I know of, if I can be with Patty. And I love my river better than all the seas in all the world.”

“I’m glad of that, Daughter, because I don’t care about having a good time if my little girl can’t have a good time, too. You’ve heard me talk of Mrs. Richards. Well, she is planning to have a house party—a reunion of our old college crowd—and your Aunt May and I are very anxious to go.”

“Will Mrs. Fisher, Aunt May’s new housekeeper, take care of us?” I asked.

“Yes. May says that she seems so reliable and kind and that John has always been so trustworthy, that we need not hesitate to leave you youngsters with her.”

“Mother,” I begged, “I just can’t wait another minute to see Patty. Please, may I go up there, just for a tiny while?”

Mother laughed. “Run along, but be back by half past five. We’re having an early dinner.”

Belden Place was at the very edge of the town, so I had quite a distance to walk—as distances in small towns go. There were several acres to the grounds, just as there had been in Great-grand-

rather's time, and though Aunt May had received many good offers, she wouldn't have sold any of it for anything.

On one side was the orchard where Patty and I loved to play in the summer. In the back were the greenhouses and, facing a side street, the gardener's cottage, now unused and much in need of repairs. Grandmother Belden had started with a conservatory, just because she loved flowers. Then when Aunt May had come into possession of the property and Patty's father had died, she had gone into the florist business and had added more greenhouses. John had charge of them and lived at the house, but he had several other gardeners who came in to help him by the day.

I turned in at the gate and followed the winding gravel walk up the sloping terraces to the wide porch with its high, round pillars. The house had once been yellow, but now it had aged into a musty, grayish brown, wherever any of the bricks peeped between the ivy. A long hall, upstairs and down, opened into rooms on either side—huge rooms with huge fireplaces, just like the ones that Great-grandfather had had in his home in Virginia. Why, there was even a fireplace in the high-ceilinged kitchen,

which formed a wing by itself, with only a walled-up garret above it.

Patty saw me coming and hurried down the walk to meet me. She was *such* a pretty girl, with long golden-reddish curls and dark brown eyes and a dimple in each cheek which looked nice when she talked and perfectly darling when she smiled. But the dimples weren't showing very much just then, and I saw right away that she was in the dumps about something.

Before I even had a chance to say a word about what Mr. Whitney had told me, she burst out, "Oh, Patsy, Mrs. Fisher doesn't want to stay." And she dragged me into the hall where her mother was talking with John, the gardener, and his sister.

Mrs. Fisher looked much older than her brother. She wore a shabby black hat and a lightweight wrap. She was rather tall and a little stooped, and she seemed very tired, and worried, and discouraged. But she had such a nice smile that I soon forgot everything else.

"I'll gladly raise your wages," Aunt May was saying. "I intended to do that when I learned that the children were to be left in your care."

“Oh, it’s not that, ma’am,” Mrs. Fisher answered, looking more troubled than ever.

“Is it that you don’t like children?” my aunt suggested.

“Oh, no! I — I love children.”

But that must be it, even if she wouldn’t admit it, I decided. Mrs. Fisher didn’t want to look after Patty and me, and Aunt May’s plans had been changed so suddenly that she hadn’t had time to let the new housekeeper know before she came on from Arlington.

I stepped up to her and, acting just as grown-up as I could, I said, “Mrs. Fisher, Patty and I shall try not to be a bit of trouble, and we’ll be very careful to mind you.”

“Bless your heart!” she said, smiling down at me. “I’d *like* to stay.”

Here John interrupted. “I hope you won’t think it—queer, Mrs. Morrison, but if I can see my sister out on the porch a minute, well, maybe I can get her to change her mind.”

“Good for you, John! Do all you can for me,” Aunt May told him.

They started out, but at the door he turned. “If my sister stays,” he asked, and seemed to hesitate,

“do you reckon she can have the back, west room?”

Aunt May seemed surprised. “Why, I suppose so. For the summer anyway. We have never used that room because it seems impossible to heat it. It isn’t in very good repair, but if Mrs. Fisher really wants it—”

“It’s because it’s at the head of the back stairs,” John hastened to explain, “and with me sleeping just at the foot of the stairs and it being a strange house and all—”

Aunt May cut John’s struggling explanations short. “It will be quite all right,” she said. “She will be near enough to hear the girls if they should call.”

A queer little pucker drew Aunt May’s eyes together as she watched the gardener and his sister walk the length of the long veranda and stand there, near the honeysuckle vine, in earnest conversation with each other. “Well,” she said, “I’ve had house-keepers make all sorts of propositions to me, and requests, and demands, even; but never have I had one who begged to sleep in the shabbiest room in the house.”

“What if she won’t stay?” Patty looked worried.

“There’d be nothing we could do but close up Belden Place,” Aunt May replied.

“You and Mother wouldn’t give up your house party?” I asked.

“We’d have to, dear. We couldn’t leave you girls with just anybody, you know. I’ll take Patty to the mountains, as I first intended, and your mother probably will decide to go to your same old seashore resort with you.”

My aunt was called to the telephone, and Patty and I looked at each other in dismay. If Mrs. Fisher wouldn’t take charge, it would just spoil everything.

“What’s the matter, Patsy?” my cousin asked. “You look so funny.”

“I’d like to have a conference with you,” I whispered, remembering this was what Daddy always said, whenever he had to talk over anything important with another person. “I must see you alone.”

“Oh, stop trying to be so mysterious,” Patty laughed and tried to act indifferent. But she led the way into the library all right and closed the door behind us; and when she sat down beside me on the davenport, I saw that I really had aroused her curiosity. It seems that Patty is always the one



who is telling *me* interesting things, and it was fun to turn the tables just this once.

“In this house,” I began, as solemnly as I knew how, “there is a secret room.”

Patty wasn't at all impressed, as I had thought she would be. She burst right out laughing and said she guessed she hadn't lived at Belden Place all her life for nothing. “Why, Patsy, I know every inch of this old house. Whatever gave you that idea?”

“Mr. Whitney gave it to me,” I retorted. “Our Great-grandfather Belden told his father all about it and said that he used to hide the runaway slaves in there, when they were trying to escape from their masters down south.”

When I said that Mr. Whitney was the one who had told me, Patty began to pay attention. She knew and I knew that he was one of the oldest residents of Fayetteville and that there wasn't much of anything he didn't know. Then when I mentioned the poor black folks our great-grandfather had done so much to help in the days before the Civil War, she began to perk up like everything.

“There may be something to it,” she said, grabbing hold of my arm, her hands icy cold in her excitement. “You know, this house was one of the

stations in the Underground Railroad, and Great-grandfather really did hide the runaway slaves.”

“Then didn’t he have to have some place to hide them?” I asked.

“Of course, he did. Oh, Patsy, we’ve been wanting something exciting to happen and here’s a real mystery for us to solve.”

“And a real treasure for us to find,” I added.

“Treasure?”

“Goosey! Don’t you remember that old story about the mysterious way Great-grandmother’s jewels disappeared so long ago. We might come across them in the secret room.”

Patty gave a whoop and began waltzing me across the floor. “Wouldn’t it be wonderful if we could find them while our mothers are away, and surprise them when they get back?”

Of course, that was the very plan I had had in mind, but I knew that nothing very wonderful would happen if Mrs. Fisher didn’t consent to stay and look after us. I looked up at the old grandfather’s clock and saw that it was quarter after five.

“Oh, dear, I wish she’d hurry up and decide before I leave. Do you suppose it would do any good to go out and try to persuade her?”

My cousin rather doubted it, but we decided it would be worth trying. Then just as we opened the screen door leading onto the porch, we met John and Mrs. Fisher coming in. I looked at Patty and Patty looked at me; but now that we were face to face with them, it was hard to know how to begin our persuading.

“I hope you’ll like the back, west room,” Patty said at last. “It isn’t pretty like the other bedrooms—but—but it has a scrumptious view of the orchard.”

The tall, sad-looking woman smiled, and the troubled look left her eyes for a moment. “That’s what my brother told me,” she said.

“Oh, Mrs. Fisher,” I blurted out, “I hope that you decide to stay.”

She gave me a long, searching look; and then she looked at my cousin in exactly the same way. I squirmed and Patty squirmed, and we put our arms around each other. She seemed to be trying to read our thoughts—as people say in books—and it made us feel uncomfortable.

Mrs. Fisher turned to her brother. “All right, John,” she said, “I’ll try it.” And the two of them opened the door and went inside to find Aunt May.

Patty took me as far as the gate; or rather we

raced each other to the gate, for we had to find some way of getting rid of our excitement.

“I believe I’m going to like the new housekeeper,” I panted, catching up with my cousin, who had reached the goal just ahead of me.

“Me, too,” said Patty. “But didn’t she act strange? I believe that Mrs. Fisher will be another mystery for us to solve, Patsy.”

There was no time to stop and talk about it then, because I realized if I were to reach home by five-thirty, I’d have to run every step of the way. But Patty’s words kept repeating themselves to me as I hurried along; and as my feet would strike the pavement with soft, resounding thuds, I seemed to hear instead that one fascinating word—mystery, mystery, mystery.

Oh, I was quite sure of it—a month of fun and adventure lay ahead of us.

## CHAPTER II

### THE SURPRISE

THERE was little time to think of mystery and adventure during the days that followed. Both houses were in a flurry of packing, and I didn't even see my cousin until the next Thursday when we drove over to Arlington to take our mothers to the train. We had written them nice long train letters, and by combining our allowances for the last two weeks we had had enough to buy them a box of candy.

The four of us were squeezed up together in the back seat, with Patty and me in the middle. We hadn't intended to say anything about the candy until time for the train to leave, but when Mother hugged me up close to her, somehow or other I let the secret out and there was nothing to do but to hand over the present then and there.

"It was dear of you to think of it," said Mother.

"Well," Patty answered, "it's our last chance to do anything for you for a whole month."

"Oh, no it isn't," said Aunt May. "Do you really want to do something to help me while I'm away?"

Patty nodded.

"I'm having several pieces of that old furniture up in the attic fixed over by a Mr. Whiteside of Arlington, and he's promised to call for them next week. Would you like to take the upholstering off the sofa and those two old horsehair chairs?"

"Of course, Mother," my cousin promised.

"I'll help, too," I said.

"That's fine," Aunt May answered, "because Mr. Whiteside will do the work a little cheaper if the upholstering is taken off first. I'm also having that old bureau down in the basement fixed up, so you might clean the rubbish out of the drawers while you're about it."

When it came to telling Mother good-bye at the station, it was much harder than I had expected. But I had made up my mind I wouldn't cry, and I didn't. I knew she was looking forward to that house party, and I wasn't going to do a single thing to worry her. We waited there until the train pulled out, and the last she saw of me, I was smiling away like everything.

We had driven over with Mrs. Meredith and Peg, and if it hadn't been for them, I'm afraid it would have been a mighty gloomy ride back to Fayette-

ville. Peg is one of our best friends and just about the jolliest girl I've ever known, and some of the things she said would have sent Patty and me into gales of giggles at any other time. Her mother tried to cheer us up by telling us that she and Mr. Meredith were planning to take our Jolly Half Dozen Club for a ride in their new launch the following afternoon and that we would have a picnic supper on the Kentucky side. But even that didn't seem to do much good.

At the end of our twenty-mile ride back to Belden Place, we found Mrs. Fisher in the front doorway waiting to welcome us. It was the first time I had seen her since that day more than a week before when her brother had made that odd request about the back, west room. I had liked her then and I liked her now—there was something so comfortable about her—and I felt we wouldn't miss our mothers quite so much with her there to look after us. But there was something queer about her, too, just as Patty had said, for though she smiled she didn't seem to mean it. Not that she was cross or anything like that—it was only that she looked so worried.

“Now if you'll run upstairs and change into play

dresses," she said, "I think John has a surprise for you."

Change into play dresses at four-thirty in the afternoon—that was a funny thing to do. The housekeeper must have noticed how astonished we were, for she added quickly, "You'll understand when you see it."

We rushed upstairs to the big front bedroom, which I was to share with my cousin during my stay at Belden Place. The housekeeper had unpacked my trunk, and when I opened the door into the closet there hung my dresses in a gay little row like posies in a flower bed. I picked out a blue-checked gingham—the one with the little appliquéd flowers forming the pockets—and Patty slipped into the tan linen with the Buster Brown collar and the brown tie I've always liked so much. We were down on the front porch again before you could say, "Abra Cadabra" three times or even twice, and there we found John grinning so mysteriously that we were sure something very nice was about to happen.

"Make 'em blind their eyes," he said to his sister.

So Patty and I closed our eyes tight shut and put our fingers over them. Mrs. Fisher turned us



around again and again. And then she began walking us, guiding our steps through the orchard, I suspected, from the feel of the ground beneath my feet. It wasn't easy to mix us up—we knew Belden Place too well for that.

Finally Mrs. Fisher brought us to a stop and said, “Now you may uncover your eyes, girls.”

We did and, as we had thought, we were in the orchard, and we were standing beneath the old apple tree we had so often climbed.

“Look up!” said John.

We did that, too, and there, perched in the branches above us, was a darling little house.

“Why, John!” Patty gasped, and climbed up into the old apple tree almost before she had finished saying it.

“Oh, goody!” I squealed and climbed up after her.

What we found was not a really truly house but a platform about six feet square, with a railing around it high enough to keep us from tumbling off. The green-leaved branches with the sunshine sifting through made the walls—if you used your imagination just a little—and the blue sky made a roof. On one side where the branches parted was a window,

and through this we could look out over the other trees and have a glimpse of the Ohio River beyond. The river was beautiful that day—quiet and glassy and very blue, except where a passing skiff sent out rays of indigo into the pale stream. (I used that sentence in a composition once and the teacher marked it “A.”)

“Thank you, John,” Patty called, leaning over the railing and looking down at him. “You’re one of the nicest people in Fayetteville.”

“It’s a perfectly scrumptious surprise,” I added, “and I think you’re awfully smart.”

The gardener blushed at our praise and seemed as happy about it as we were. He’s always like that—he gets more fun out of planning surprises for people than almost anybody that I know.

“I’m glad you like it,” he called back to us. “I told your mothers that I thought you would.”

He went back to the house then with his sister and left us alone to enjoy our quaint little treetop home.

“Isn’t it like a bird’s nest,” I said, “tucked up here above the world? No wonder birds sing all the time—I feel like trilling, too!”

“It will be like a fairy bower in the springtime,”

Patty answered dreamily, "when the pale pink blossoms are in bloom."

"And like an everlasting Thanksgiving feast, when the fruit is ripe," I added. "We can reach out and pick an apple whenever we want to."

There were many plans to be made for the new play house, and it seemed that both of us were running over with ideas. Patty remembered an old rag rug up in the attic, which we could use as a floor covering, and I thought of bringing cushions up to make the place more comfortable. And perhaps John would give us a porch box which he could fill with rich earth and nail in place on the outside of the railing. It would be fun to have a little flower garden of our own up among the treetops.

"We've forgotten the most important thing of all," said Patty. "We haven't given it a name."

"How about 'Treetop House'?" I asked.

"I like 'Fairy Bower' better."

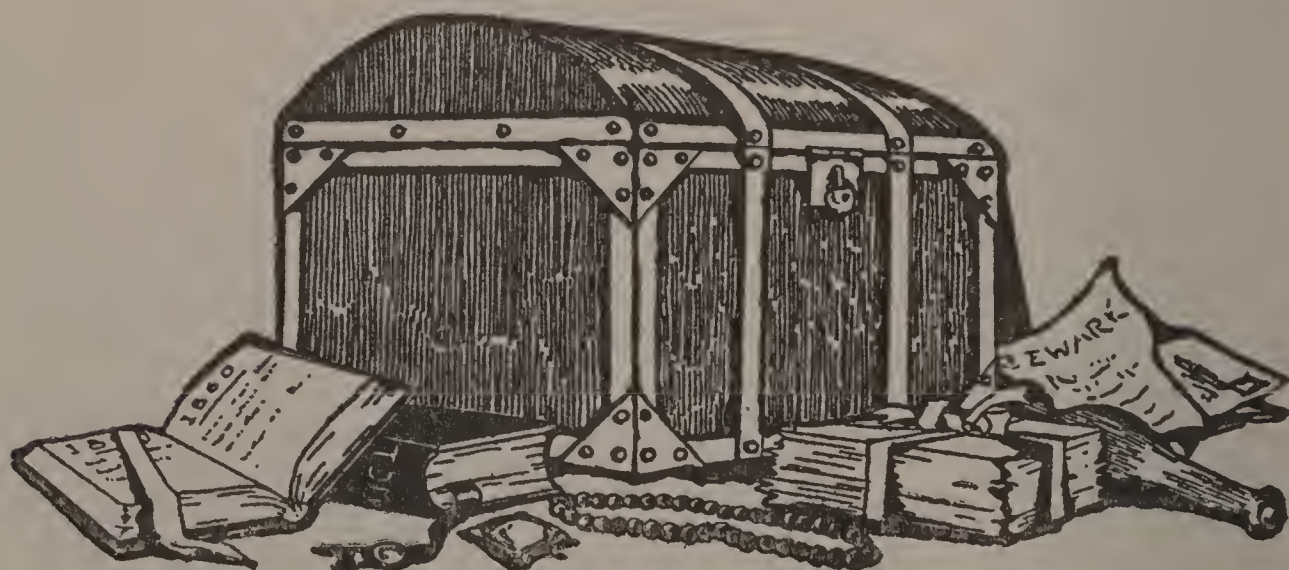
But that didn't seem to suit exactly either; and we thought and thought and thought. Finally I had a wonderful idea.

"Don't you remember how Peter and the Lost Boys lived in the treetops? Let's call this the Peter Pan House."

“The very thing!” said Patty. You can pretend you’re Peter, and I’ll be Wendy because I have long curls.”

We left the tree house reluctantly when the dinner gong rang and I said I thought Peter Pan certainly had an advantage over ordinary mortal children, never having to pay attention to bells and things like that.

“But even Peter had to stop playing long enough to eat,” Patty argued; and when we sat down to the new housekeeper’s first dinner, we decided that we had a few advantages, too. For never, in Never Never Land, I am quite certain, was there such a good cook as Mrs. Fisher.



## CHAPTER III

### THE BEGINNING OF A MYSTERY

**W**E WERE so tired that night that we decided to go to bed right after dinner. We didn't intend to let ourselves drop off to sleep until our regular bedtime; but it would be fun to undress early and crawl into the big canopied bed and read out loud to one another. I had borrowed a copy of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* from the public library more than a week before, but we hadn't had time to finish it on account of helping our mothers and we could hardly wait to get back to it again. Patty and I just love boys' stories anyway.

"We mustn't get so excited about the Peter Pan House that we forget the mystery," I said as we undressed. "That's the important thing to remember."

"Of course," Patty answered, "but the play house is going to be an awfully good place to think in. So we musn't forget that either."

I laughed, because my cousin always was arguing that it was easier to think in the treetops than down on the ground. I've even known her to climb up in a tree when she had a particularly hard arithmetic

problem to solve. She said she could do twice as well in her school work in the tree-climbing season; but so far as I could tell, she had mighty good grades the year 'round.

It was Patty's turn to read, so she took the side of the bed nearest the table lamp. Usually the big four-poster bed with its rich silk canopy gives me the feeling of being in a tent—not the kind we use when we go camping, but the beautiful sort of tent the people who live on the desert are supposed to have. To-night, though, it was more fun to pretend the bed was a haunted house. Tom and Huckleberry Finn had a very scary adventure in a haunted house, once, and it made the story seem so much more real.

“Go on,” I said. “We stopped last time where the boys dared each other to go upstairs.”

My, that was an exciting chapter and Patty read as fast as she could, so we wouldn't have to wait very long to find out what happened. It seemed to me I hardly breathed from the time Injun Joe and his wicked companion entered the downstairs of the haunted house and the boys overheard them plotting. It was all a little scary, and I put my arm around Patty's neck just for the comfort of it. When she reached the place where Injun Joe started



There, perched in the branches above us, was a darling little house.





to climb the creaky stairs and was about to discover the hiding place of the two boys, I got so excited that I began hugging her tighter and tighter. I didn't even realize what I was doing until she yelled, "Ouch, you're choking me!" She didn't take time to say anything more, but hurried on with the reading until the boys were safe again.

"I wish I could make up an exciting story like that," I said.

"Perhaps you won't have to make it up. Maybe we'll have a thrilling adventure our own selves that you can write about."

"A story about discovering the secret room?" I asked.

"Yes, or about finding the jewels Great-grandmother Belden lost."

The clock down in the library struck nine times. "Go-to-sleep! Go-to-sleep! Go-to-sleep!" it seemed to say. A moment later we heard Mrs. Fisher knocking at our door, and when she opened it we were surprised to see her looking so pale. Her hands were twisting the corner of her apron as though she wanted to tear it into bits. Her eyes, too, were queer—there was a "haunted look" about them, as I read in a story once.

“Isn’t it about time you were asleep?” she asked, and her voice was shaking.

We weren’t at all sleepy and we were anxious to go on with *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*; but remembering what we had promised about minding, Patty reached over and turned out the table lamp. “Good night, Mrs. Fisher,” she said.

“Sleep tight and pleasant dreams,” I added.

“Good night,” said the new housekeeper. I tried to tell myself that I was imagining things; but I couldn’t help feeling that a note of relief had crept into her voice.

I must have dozed then, for the next thing I heard our bedroom door creak open. I awoke with a start, to feel Patty’s hand squeeze mine and to hear her soft “Sh!” in the darkness. There in the doorway stood Mrs. Fisher, faintly silhouetted against the dim light of the hallway. Quietly she tiptoed over to our bed and—I don’t know why I did it—but I closed my eyes. Afterwards my cousin said that she did, too. Then, evidently, satisfied that we were asleep, the housekeeper tiptoed out again and the door closed with a second little creak.

“No, I haven’t been asleep,” Patty explained, “so I wasn’t scared. But I was afraid you would be.”

“She hasn’t any right to spy on us,” I said crossly, for I *had* been frightened. “We told her we’d put the light out and try to go to sleep and she should have believed us. Our mothers never doubt our word, and I don’t like it.”

“I don’t think she meant to spy.” My cousin cuddled up close to me and slipped a cold hand into mine. “I don’t know what it is, Patsy, but—but—I just feel it. There’s something awfully strange about this house to-night.”

I squeezed her hand and tried to get her mind on something else. That “something else” happened to be the secret room, and we fell to talking of it in whispers.

“You were right,” I said. “This is like being in a book. Let’s call it the mystery room.”

“All right, but first we must figure out where it is and then find a way to get into it.”

“In the stories there is nearly always a secret door or a sliding panel,” I reminded her.

“I asked Mother about it, and she laughed at me. She said she was sure Grandfather Belden never had heard anything about a secret room and that if his own father had had anything of the sort, he certainly would have known it.”

“But Grandpa was only a baby then.”

“I asked Mother specially about that place over the kitchen,” Patty went on. “There’s a window there, you know. But she said it was just a walled-up garret and that Great-grandfather probably thought the house didn’t need an extra storeroom with such a big attic overhead.”

“My mother didn’t know anything about it either,” I said. “I asked her where Great-grandfather hid the runaway slaves, and she said she didn’t know—in the attic perhaps.”

Suddenly I felt Patty clutch me in the dark.

“Listen!” she whispered.

For a moment I couldn’t hear a thing. Then I knew what she meant—someone was creeping up the stairs. Someone was coming step by step, slowly and cautiously. We slipped out of bed and tiptoed to the door, afraid to move and yet not daring to stay still. The stealthy footsteps continued and, when they reached the top of the stairs, they paused outside our door. We held our breaths for an instant. And then we heard the sound of steps again—this time they went past our door and down the hall.

“Let’s call someone,” I whispered.

“It was probably Mrs. Fisher on her way to bed,” said Patty, with a little break in her voice. “Or John perhaps. I don’t want them to think we’re fraidy-cats.”

“I don’t care what they think,” I answered. “I—”

I never finished my sentence, for out of the stillness came a cry—a very strange, peculiar cry. Then there was a crash.

That decided us. Hand in hand, we raced down the hall. In no time at all we reached the house-keeper’s door, and began to pound on it and call to her. I tried the knob, but it seemed as though someone were holding the door on the other side.

Then came Mrs. Fisher’s voice. “Go back to bed, girls!” She sounded a little scared herself and rather cross.

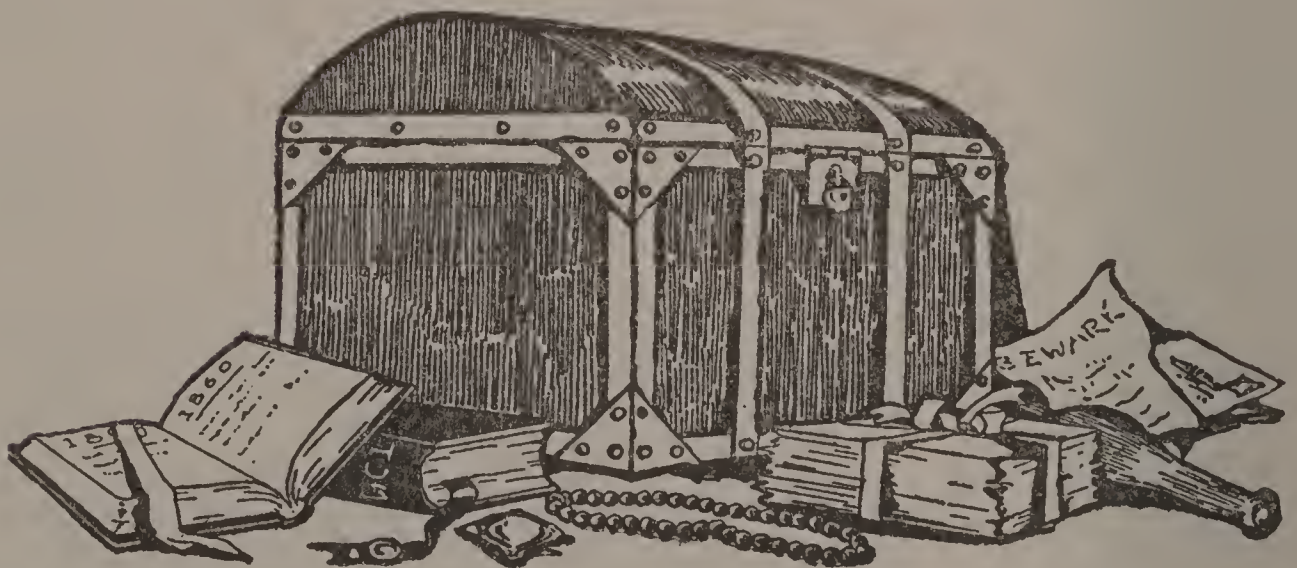
“But we heard a noise,” quavered Patty, “and someone crying.”

“Everything is all right. Now you must go back to your room at once.”

After that, there was nothing to do but to retrace our steps.

“It was only our imaginations anyway,” said Patty, and I agreed with her.

Then, just as we turned to go into our room, we heard the cry again.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE WARNING

**W**E DIDN'T call Mrs. Fisher this time. Instead, we opened the door to our room and made a dive for the bed and burrowed deep into the bedclothes. I don't know how long we lay there, neither of us daring to say a word. Then I heard Patty giggle, and when I peeped out from beneath the covers, I saw her pull the chain to the table lamp beside our bed.

“Aren't we silly?” she said. “There's nothing that can hurt us, and if there were, what good would it do to hide under the covers?”

Of course, I knew that this was true, and suddenly I felt very brave again. And no sooner had I begun to feel this way than we heard more footsteps down the hall. I looked at Patty and Patty looked at me, and we both looked at the bedclothes. Then we pushed them away from us and sat up very straight. The footsteps paused before our door and we heard a low call.

“Patty, dear, let me in!”

It was Mrs. Fisher's voice—soft and kind again, no longer cross. The next instant she opened the

door and came over and sat down on the side of the bed, her arm holding Patty close.

“My poor lambs!” she said, and held out her other arm to me.

All at once I seemed to realize I was very lonely for my mother and that no matter how sweet and beautiful a cousin Patty is, she’s not quite so comforting at night. So I crawled across the bed and snuggled inside the hollow of Mrs. Fisher’s other arm.

“I don’t see why you wouldn’t let us in,” said Patty in her straightforward way, looking up at her.

“I don’t see why you were so cross.” I glanced up at her, too, and it seemed to me that she was looking very red for a person who had been so pale only a minute before.

“It must have been because I was so tired,” the housekeeper explained haltingly, with long pauses between her words, “and a little—er—frightened myself—when you made that terrible racket on my door. I—I—I’m sure I didn’t mean to be cross.”

She looked so sad and I felt so sorry for her—though I didn’t know why I should—that I put my



arms around her neck and whispered, "We know you didn't."

That seemed to please her. "How would you like to have me make two gingerbread men tomorrow?" she asked.

"Oh, oh!" I cried, clapping my hands softly, and "Oh, oh!" cried Patty. Then she added, remembering I guess, what her mother had told us about not causing any extra work, "We'd love them if they wouldn't be too much trouble."

"No trouble at all," she assured us. "Now you lie down and try to sleep, and I'll sit here by you till you drop off."

The next morning we had quite a disappointment. This was the day that Peg Meredith's father was to take our club for a ride in his new launch. Afterwards, we were planning to have a picnic supper and go in bathing on the Kentucky side.

I wonder if many of you know what a wonderful feeling a big river like the Ohio gives you. Of course, the ocean gives you a much grander feeling, if you know what I mean; but then it's not so cozy, because you can't see anything on the other side. It's such fun to look at two states at once, and when I first moved to Fayetteville, I thought that this was one

of the nicest things about the town. It seemed quite thrilling to be able to drop into another state for supper, and then back home again by bedtime.

Our club was called the Jolly Half Dozen, because as a general thing, we were such a jolly crowd. But as for Patty and me, *we* weren't jolly when we looked out of the window that morning. No, indeed! There were big gray clouds in the east, and it looked as though it might rain any minute.

We dressed quickly, and as we dressed we began to talk of our strange experience of the night before.

"I'm afraid we made Mrs. Fisher feel badly," said Patty. "We probably woke her up, and she said that she was scared, too."

"Yes, and she was nice afterwards," I answered. "I think it's lovely of her to make those gingerbread men, don't you?"

"Tell you what, let's be just as nice to her as we can to-day. I'm going down to the greenhouse right now and pick her a bouquet before breakfast," Patty finished, as she combed the last tangle out of her red-gold curls.

I followed her about ten minutes later. As I went into the dining room Mrs. Fisher was putting the

finishing touches to the breakfast table. She made some remark about the gingerbread men she would make for us as soon as she finished her work and smiled, and patted me on the shoulder, and seemed to do about everything she could to be nice to me.

Patty walked in with her bouquet, but I saw right away that she wasn't thinking of the flowers. She motioned to me behind the housekeeper's back, and I knew that she wanted to see me alone—that she must have something very important to tell me. I started to follow her out into the hall, when Mrs. Fisher turned and saw us.

“Sit right down, girls,” she said. “Breakfast is ready.”

After that, of course, there was nothing to do but to sit down, though I was fairly bursting with impatience. Patty gave the flowers to Mrs. Fisher, who was very much pleased with them. Then she left us for a moment to get something from the kitchen.

“What is it?” I whispered.

But, evidently, Patty was afraid we might be overheard, because she began to talk to me in the deaf and dumb language. The housekeeper came back just then, bringing the bacon and hot biscuits.

The minute she was out of the room again, Patty began once more to try to tell me something on her fingers. I had been learning the finger alphabet, but I didn't know it very well yet. About all I could make out were the words "open" and "window," and I didn't see much sense to that.

As we were eating, the rain began to come down. My cousin and I nearly always spent the rainy days in the roomy old attic at the top of the house, so I was not surprised to hear her whisper to me after we were through, "Go up to the attic and wait for me. I'll be there in a minute."

But it was more than a minute before I saw Patty Morrison again. I climbed the steep stairway that led to the old attic, with its spinning wheel in the corner, its discarded old furniture, its trunks holding bright shimmering gowns of another century, and the interesting old carved chest which overflowed with treasures on those rainy days that Aunt May found time to come upstairs and open it for us.

As I waited, the rain poured on the roof in the fascinating pitter-patter that I loved to hear. And as it fell, it seemed to say, "Patty-hurry-up! Patty-hurry-up!"

Finally Patty came—very breathless and excited—and threw off the raincoat she had worn to protect herself from the shower. “It’s closed,” she announced, in the very tone of voice she always uses when we play show together.

“What’s closed?” I asked. For the life of me, I couldn’t make out what she was talking about.

“The window over the kitchen, of course.”

I was so disappointed that I couldn’t keep from showing it. “Well, was *that* why you were making all those signs at the breakfast table? I don’t see anything in that to get excited about. It always *has* been closed.”

“But when I went after the flowers this morning, the window was open,” she insisted. “I tell you, Patsy Spaulding, that window never has been open since I can remember. That was what I was trying to make you understand at breakfast.”

“Perhaps John raised it from the outside,” I suggested.

“Why *should* he?” Patty demanded. “And how *could* he? None of our ladders are high enough to reach that window. “Don’t you see,” she went on, when I still looked dubious, “that place over the kitchen must be the mystery room? There’s no other

place in this house where there could be a secret room anyway.”

“And there must be an invisible door some place,” I cried, now as excited as my cousin, “and I bet it’s in the north wall of Mrs. Fisher’s room. It must be, because her bedroom is right next to the place over the kitchen.”

“We’ve got to go over every inch of that wall, Patsy, until we find the secret spring or whatever it is that will open the door for us.”

“Let’s play we are detectives and solve the mystery,” I suggested.

“*Play* we are detectives,” said Patty scornfully. “Why, we *are* detectives, you little goose. Let’s go over and sit on Great-grandmother Belden’s old sofa and think it all out, just as real—I mean *other* detectives would.”

But here another surprise awaited us—there was no sofa. The old couch that always had stood under the east window was gone.

“That’s funny,” said Patty. “That’s the sofa Mother is going to have Mr. Whiteside do over. Oh, I hope it hasn’t been stolen.”

She stopped suddenly, and I followed her gaze to

a far, shadowy corner of the attic, where the old carved chest stood. "What is it?" I asked.

"I thought I saw something move," she whispered.

I laughed. "Goosey! I don't see a thing, and I don't believe you did either."

Patty must have felt rather foolish, for she gave a queer little shaky laugh and said, "I guess my imagination must be working overtime, as old Mr. Whitney would say."

By this time the rain had stopped and, looking out of the east window, we saw that the sun was shining just as brightly as though there had never been any bad weather to tease us. Just then we heard a bell down on the first floor and—in another minute—Mrs. Fisher calling Patty to the phone.

It was Peg Meredith on the wire to tell us that her father thought the day would be a fine one after all and for us to meet them at the boathouse at one o'clock. We had promised to take sandwiches as our part of the lunch, and I suggested that we not bother the housekeeper but that we make them ourselves. Mrs. Fisher was not in the kitchen, but we made sure that there was plenty of ham in the ice box, and strolled down to the grocery store to buy some bread.

We were back in fifteen minutes and, while Patty was buttering the bread, I went to the ice box. But to my surprise, there was no ham.

“That’s funny!” Patty exclaimed. “I wonder where Mrs. Fisher is.”

“There’s nothing to do but buy some sandwich filling,” I answered. “I’ll run down to the store, while you ask John to pull us some fresh lettuce.”

When I came back, Patty was talking away, at a great rate, to Mrs. Fisher in the kitchen. She was telling her about our picnic and—to my surprise—about our hollow tree post office and the letters and gifts we used to leave for each other there, before I came to Belden Place to stay. I was a little provoked about it for a minute—to think that Patty would tell the new housekeeper about it when we had always kept it a secret from *everybody*, that is, everybody but our mothers.

But the next minute I wasn’t provoked at all, for Mrs. Fisher was saying, “Sure, I think it a fine thing to do. What would you say if *I* left a little surprise for you there sometime?”

“You mean our gingerbread men?” I asked.

The housekeeper laughed pleasantly. “I’m not saying, but you’d better keep sharp eyes on your



post office for a while. That sandwich filling's all right, of course." She changed the subject abruptly. "But how would you like some ham sandwiches, too?"

She went to the ice box and opened the door. And there was the ham, just as we had seen it a half hour ago.

There was no time to stop and figure it out then—we were in too much of a hurry to have lunch and get over to Mr. Meredith's boathouse. Peg and her father and mother and the other girls—Jane and Barbara and Carolyn—were waiting for us; and we were so interested in the new launch and were soon having such a dandy time that we forgot all about the mystery at Belden Place.

And no wonder, for we had a perfectly scrumptious afternoon! We went swimming, and built castles in the sand, and played that we were princesses wrecked on a desert island. That is, we were all princesses except Peg, who had to be the prince who rescued us. Then it seemed pretty hard for one prince to have five princesses on his hands, so my cousin and I turned into princes, too, and that made things just right.

Jane said it was too bad that Patty had to be a

prince because she had the golden-reddish curls that are considered so stylish for princesses. After we started to play, though, we changed our minds, for when Patty pretended to be a prince, she made us feel that she *was* one.

Jane and Barbara and Carolyn hid behind a tree stump and were the princesses imprisoned in a high tower by a wicked ogre. Peg and Patty and I galloped up on our prancing chargers—we used long sticks for horses—and surrounded the castle.

“We demand entrance, Sir Wicked Ogre,” Patty called.

Only silence greeted her request.

“Release these suffering princesses,” Patty cried again, dismounting from her horse and waving it in the air. (I mean, of course, that she was waving her stick in the air, for now she was pretending that it was a sword.)

“Speak, thou cruel tyrant,” she went on. “Listen to the heart-rending cries of thy prisoners.” The princesses wailed very beautifully and wrung their hands like movie stars, but the ogre said not a word.

“Be silent at thy peril,” Patty said, and at that all three of us began hammering at the walls of the castle. The princesses had to step back to keep

from being hit, as we whacked away at the tree stump. Then when we had gained admittance—at least, Patty said we had—the stump became the ogre and she challenged him to a gory duel. Peg and I sat down and watched her anxiously, as did the others—even Mr. and Mrs. Meredith. We knew that she was only battering away at a tree stump with a stick, but she did it so well she almost made us believe she really was a prince fighting for the lives of three fair maidens.

“Ogre, thy end has come!” She rested one foot on top of the stump, in the very way a fairy tale hero always puts his foot on the chest of his vanquished foe. Peg and I hopped up, and each prince grabbed a princess, and led her out of the dark tower into the sunshine. By this time it was almost twilight, but then no fairy story ever ended that way.

Mr. Meredith soon had a big fire blazing on the beach, and its cozy glow made our suppers taste twice as good. We toasted marshmallows for dessert, and sat around the fire, and told stories.

“Patty,” said Mrs. Meredith, “I’m in charge of the program at the community house next Thursday for the benefit of the new day nursery the Women’s Club is starting. Would you give a reading?”

“I’d love to, if—if you think I could do it well enough.”

“I’m sure of it, after seeing you play the part of a prince this afternoon.”

I could tell that Patty was thrilled, and I believe I was as tickled as she was. She had given readings at school lots of times, but she had never been on a big program before. I knew that a large crowd was expected at the Women’s Club Benefit and that some real musicians and entertainers from Arlington were going to perform; and I was awfully proud that Patty was my cousin.

Night was almost upon us when we left the boat-house; but we assured Mr. Meredith that we could reach Belden Place before the dark caught us. I stopped when we came to our hollow tree post office.

“Do you suppose Mrs. Fisher might have put something in this afternoon—our gingerbread men, perhaps?” I asked my cousin.

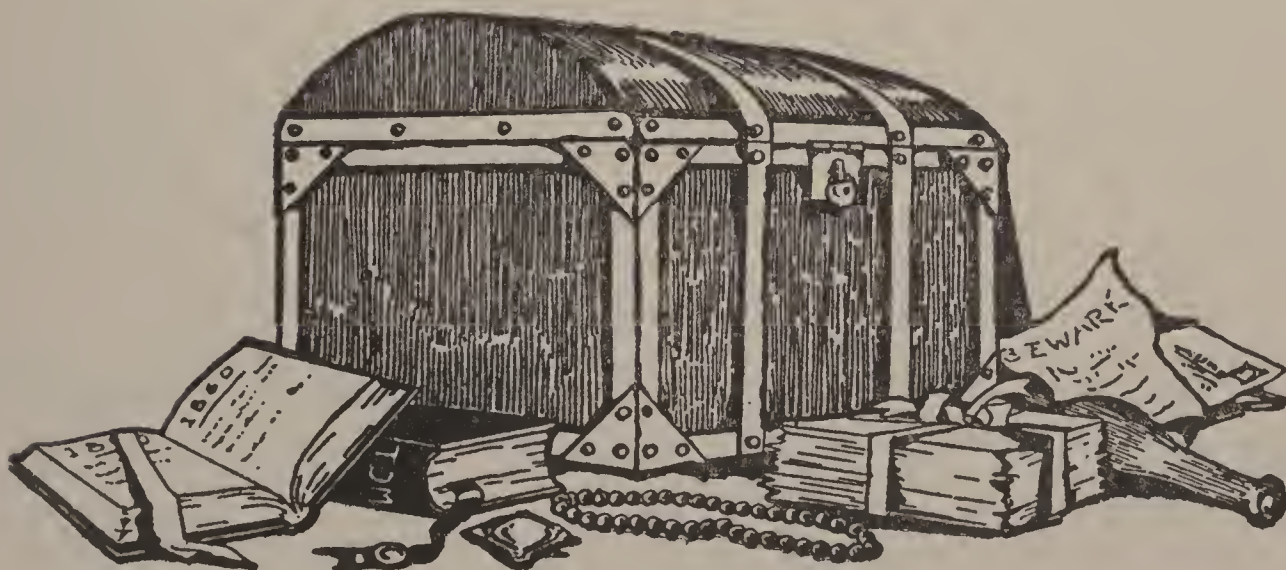
“She might have,” Patty answered, and I put my hand inside.

But it was not a gingerbread man that I drew out. It was a note.

We opened it and saw that it was written in a

round, scrawling hand. Straining our eyes in the dim light, we managed to read:

“Beware. Do not come nere the hiden room. Bewear.”



## CHAPTER V

### THE MYSTERIOUS BASEBALL BAT

“**T**HAT settles that,” said Patty, folding up the note and slipping it into her pocket. “We’re going to find that hidden room to-morrow.”

“If we can,” I reminded her.

“We’ll simply have to. Do you think I’m going to let anybody tell me to stay out of a room in my own house? Somebody has been in that room and has come out to leave this note, and I think I know why.”

She stopped in that tantalizing way she has when she begins to tell a secret, and I said, “For goodness sake, Patty, hurry up and tell me what you think.”

“Well, I believe that somebody had discovered the treasure,” she said slowly.

“You mean Great-grandmother’s lost jewels?” I interrupted.

“Yes, and that somebody is coming back for them and doesn’t want to have us prowling around in the meantime.”

“But if he can’t use a ladder—”

“He won’t need a ladder. He can go through the secret door, sometime when Mrs. Fisher isn’t in her room.”

“Then I suppose it’s up to us to find the door before he gets back,” I said, inclined to take my cousin’s view in the matter, since I had no better suggestion to offer. “Let’s not tell the housekeeper. Let’s have it for our own secret—just us two.”

Patty was fussed. “I don’t suppose I should have told her about the post office. That was our secret, too. She was so kind, though, and looked so sad that I guess I wanted to cheer her up. Anyway, it all came out.”

By this time we had reached Belden Place, and the housekeeper met us in the hall. “Did you have a good time?” she said, and when we answered, “Yes, indeed,” she added, “You’ll find your gingerbread men on the kitchen table.”

I looked her straight in the eye, just as I imagined a real detective might. “We stopped at the hollow tree post office,” I said. “We thought you might have put the gingerbread men in there.”

I expected her to blush or stammer or shift uneasily from foot to foot—or to do something or other to show she knew about that dreadful note—but she only shook her head. “No, I was so busy all afternoon that I just finished baking them. You

keep right on watching your post office, though—you'll find a surprise there yet."

And suddenly I found myself wishing to tell Mrs. Fisher all about the secret room and the mysterious warning, as Patty had told her about our hollow tree. But just then my cousin, who had hurried on to the kitchen, gave a little squeal. "Oh, Patsy, come here! These are the darlingest things you ever saw."

I was beside her in an instant and had picked a cinnamon drop off the coat of one of the gingerbread men, just to sample him. Then I nibbled a tiny bite off his heel where it wouldn't show much and saved the rest of him for some other time.

The next morning the sun was shining brightly; it was a perfectly glorious day to play outdoors. And that was exactly what the housekeeper suggested that we do when we went downstairs.

And that was exactly what we didn't want to do—we wanted to examine the north wall of Mrs. Fisher's room. Every inch of that space would have to be gone over. We were sure that the secret door to the mystery room was there, and being sure of that much, we simply had to find it. While we dressed, we had been trying to decide which of us



should ask the housekeeper if we could play in her room that morning. Neither of us was very anxious to do it, because it did seem a queer request to make. My cousin suggested that we draw straws, but since there weren't any straws nearer than the broom in the kitchen, we had to think up another way of deciding it.

"I have it," I said. "The one of us who finishes dressing last will have to ask her."

This didn't turn out to be a very good suggestion, so far as I was concerned. I thought because I had bobbed hair that I would be sure to get through first. So perhaps it served me right when Patty beat me—I never saw her get dressed so fast before.

"What in the world shall I tell her?" I whispered, as we went down the broad stairway together.

Patty grinned. "That's up to you."

So you know how disappointed we must have been when Mrs. Fisher suggested that we play in the orchard that morning.

"Please, we'd rather not," I said. "You see, there's something in the house we'd like to do."

But she was firm. "I told your mothers that I'd see that you had plenty of outdoor exercise. So I believe you'd better play in the orchard every morn-

ing for a while. What, with your play house up in the big tree and all, I'd think you'd want to!"

Of course, that settled it, because we had made such an extra-special promise that we'd mind and not ask any questions or beg or tease when Mrs. Fisher told us to do a thing. Of course, we loved our Peter Pan House and were anxious to get back to it and fix it up as we had planned—it was only that there were more important things to attend to now.

As soon as we were out of the dining room, Patty whispered, "Never mind. We can finish *Tom Sawyer* this morning and search for the mystery room after lunch."

This made me feel all good inside myself again, for as much as I wanted to discover that secret door, I also wanted to get back to Tom and Huck and find out what they did after they left the haunted house.

"Let's get the book and some cushions," Patty went on, leading the way into the library, "and then we can ask Mrs. Fisher for a few of those oatmeal cookies. Say, Patsy, have you seen *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*?"

"It's on the library table," I answered, gathering up several sofa cushions from the window seat.

“That’s what I thought, but it’s not here now.”

“I laid it there yesterday, just before we left for Mr. Meredith’s boathouse.”

“Well, that’s funny,” said my cousin for the third time in two days, as she pulled another book from one of the shelves. “I wonder what will disappear next. Do you think we should tell Mrs. Fisher?”

But Mrs. Fisher didn’t give us a chance, because when we reached the kitchen she was nowhere to be found. So we helped ourselves to a plate of cookies and hurried out into the orchard.

“Oh, dear,” I said, when we reached the tree house, “how are we ever going to climb up there, loaded down with all these things?”

“We’ll have to call John to help,” said Patty.

But when John came he had a better plan than that. He fastened a big market basket to the end of a stout rope, and tied the other end of the rope to a limb of the tree. And there was a regular pulley, into which we dumped our cushions and pulled them up into the tree house without a bit of trouble.

When we asked the gardener about fastening a flower box to the railing, he pretended just at first to think it a very foolish idea.

“What do you want to raise?” he asked. “Onions?”

“Of course not.” I couldn’t help laughing. “We thought it would be nice to have a flower garden up in the tree tops. We’d take care of it ourselves.”

“It would be too shady for most flowers,” he said, “but I reckon I could transplant some pansies. Would that suit you?”

We followed John into the greenhouse and helped him fill a flower box with rich, black earth. After he had hauled it up into the Peter Pan House in the basket pulley and nailed it to the outside of the railing—on the south side where we liked to pretend there was a window—he showed us how to put out the pansy plants. They were already in bloom and gave quite an air to the place.

“Now I’m going to bring one of those rugs down from the attic, and everything will look beautiful,” said Patty.

“What do you want with a rug?” asked John. “It would get dirty right away.”

“But it’s an old rug we never use, and it would make everything so cozy.”

“Well, I wouldn’t,” John went on. “Your mother wouldn’t like it.”

Perhaps he was right, but I couldn't help feeling that, for some reason or other, he didn't want us to go into the house.

Patty had brought along a copy of *The Arabian Nights*, and after the gardener left us we settled down to enjoy it. But we didn't read much that morning. We were too busy puzzling over a few of the strange things that had happened and the odd way the housekeeper sometimes acted. And we were too taken up with thoughts of the exploring tour we expected to make that afternoon and of the secret door we hoped to find. We must have talked longer than we realized, because the sun was high in the sky when we saw Mrs. Fisher hurrying through the orchard. What surprised us was that she had on her hat and was carrying over her arm the shabby black coat she had worn the first day we saw her. She paused at the foot of our tree, a little out of breath and rather embarrassed, it seemed to us.

"My brother and I must go to the city. I'm sorry to leave you here—" she hesitated— "to leave you here alone, but I'm sure you will be all right. We'll not be away long."

"Oh, that will be all right," said Patty politely.

"Your lunch is ready and set out on the table."

the housekeeper called and hurried away, as though she was afraid we might ask her a question she didn't want to answer.

It was lonely in the big dining room, with our places set at one end of the long table. "Why can't we eat up in the Peter Pan House?" my cousin suggested.

The idea of eating in the treetops, as Peter and Wendy had, appealed to me immensely. Mrs. Fisher had left a cold lunch for us, anyway, except for the hot cocoa which we drank at once. Then we put the cold meat and the bread and butter and the tomato salad on a tray and carried it into the orchard. We had no difficulty in hoisting our luncheon to the Peter Pan House in the basket pulley; but we had nothing to eat on when we got it there.

"I'll get my little table," said Patty and rushed off to the house. But though the table was small—it was the one she had used for tea parties when she was just a little thing—it was too big to go into the basket.

"If we had a clothesline to tie around the table, we could pull it up that way," I said.

"John will have one," Patty answered, and led

the way into the little room off the main greenhouse where he kept his tools and supplies.

We found the rope, as we had expected, and we found a surprise, too. It was a baseball bat, with the initials "J. F." cut into the handle.

"What would John want with this?" I asked. "He's too big to play ball."

"His last name isn't Fisher, anyway," my cousin said, looking at the initials. "It's Mackey."

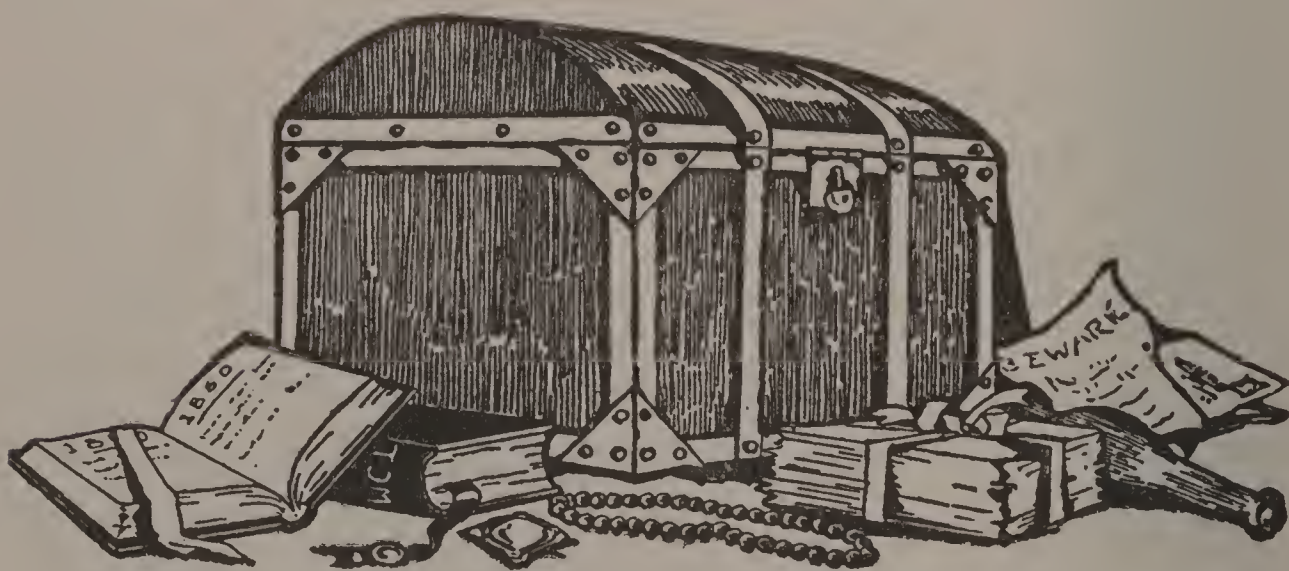
"Then whose bat is this?"

"That's what I intend to find out as soon as John comes home."

It was scrumptious, having our luncheon up in the treetops, and we decided we would do it often. I suggested that it would be fun to entertain our Jolly Half Dozen Club up there sometime—that is, if John thought the house were strong enough to hold six girls all at once. Perhaps it would be better to wait until our mothers came home, and could help us get things ready. We were sure that the girls would enjoy it. They could wear their play clothes, and for once we wouldn't have to worry about keeping clean. Carolyn wasn't very good at climbing trees—she was rather fat and roly-poly—but with the rest of us to help her, she could manage it.

“I don’t believe Peter and Wendy ever had a better time than we’re having,” I said, kneeling before the little table, Japanese fashion, and buttering a piece of bread.

“No,” said Patty, “and I’m sure they never had a more thrilling mystery to solve.”





## CHAPTER VI

### THE SECRET DOOR

**W**E WERE nearly through eating when Patty looked at me accusingly. "Patsy Spaulding, you didn't ask if we could play in Mrs. Fisher's room this afternoon."

"I forgot everything about it," I said, feeling awfully guilty. "But I don't believe she'll mind if we go in *without* asking. All we want to do is to examine the north wall."

"We certainly wouldn't hurt anything," said Patty. "I guess it will be all right."

I piled the dishes on the tray and set it carefully in the basket. When I saw all the crumbs we had dropped on the floor, I began to think John had been right about the rug. I wanted to go into the house and find a broom, but my cousin insisted that there was no sense in sweeping up a few crumbs. The birds would soon eat them, and enjoy the feast besides. She was as anxious as I was to keep the Peter Pan House looking spick and span, but if we brought up the broom and gave it a thorough cleaning twice a week, that would be enough.

“Do you think we really will find the jewels in the secret room?” I asked.

Patty nodded and climbed down to the ground to take the basket which I slowly lowered. So I had to wait until I had climbed down after her before I asked my next question.

“What do you suppose they will be like?”

“I don’t know, but I’ve heard Mother say that they were very beautiful.”

“I hope we find some pearls,” I said. “They’re so soft and creamy-looking, and I like them better than any other jewel.”

“I hope we find some diamonds,” said Patty. “They look so much like stars.”

“I hope we find some emeralds.”

“I hope we find a topaz.”

And we went on, making a regular game of our wishes, until we reached the kitchen door.

It’s strange—the feeling a big empty house gives a person. I suppose it was because we knew the housekeeper was away that everything seemed so lonely. We decided that since we were going to use Mrs. Fisher’s room to “aid us in our explorations” (that was what Patty said) that the least we could do was to wash the luncheon dishes for her first.

Every board in the old kitchen seemed to creak, as we walked across the floor, and the dishes, rattling in the stillness, sounded like cannon crackers. Just why I don't know, but I felt that something very exciting was about to happen and I wasn't sure whether I wanted it to or not.

"Everything's so creepy," I said. "I wonder if we hadn't better wait until Mrs. Fisher comes back before we begin our search."

"Pooh!" said Patty. "An old house often seems this way. If you had lived here as long as I have, you wouldn't think a thing about it."

But for all her boasting, I believe she felt a little shaky, too. Every move we made seemed to waken an echo in the old house; and when we climbed the broad, front stairway, each step seemed to have a spite against us—it creaked so loudly. My cousin kept insisting that there was no reason on earth, let alone at Belden Place, why we should be frightened and that, anyway, detectives had to be brave.

When we opened the door into the housekeeper's room, we wondered if all our plans hadn't been for nothing. It was an awfully unromantic looking room, and it didn't seem possible that there could be a secret door anywhere about. The north wall

was perfectly blank, with no panels which looked as though they might open, and not even a picture where a spring might be hidden. There was a single piece of furniture against the wall—a heavy, old-fashioned dresser—and a door which Patty said opened into a clothes closet.

“Let’s pull out that dresser,” I suggested. “I don’t see any other place where there could be a secret door.” But, though we went over every inch of the wall behind the heavy old piece of furniture, no door sprung open to reward our efforts.

“We’d better go over the whole wall that way,” said Patty, as we rolled the dresser back into place. “We’re sure to find the spring if we do, for there’s no place else where it *could* be.”

Evidently, she was wrong, because we worked for several hours without success. Once I was sure I heard a noise on the other side of the wall. I grabbed my cousin by the arm, ready to run, but she wouldn’t budge a step. She put her ear against the wall and listened and made me do the same thing. She was right—there wasn’t a sound—and I felt foolish.

I don’t believe we missed a single spot of that north wall. We felt it and pressed it and knocked

it—and nothing happened. I never saw Patty so disappointed before, and I was feeling the same way.

“It’s no use,” she said, blinking back the tears.

She stopped suddenly, and this time she was the one who clutched me excitedly. There *was* a noise. Someone was climbing the stairs. The steps were coming down the hall now, and presently they stopped outside the very room that we were in. Quick as a wink, Patty opened the closet door and dragged me inside with her. She closed the door after us, just as the door of the room opened and someone walked inside.

It was too dark in the closet to see each other, and I was afraid we might be overheard if we whispered. But I know that Patty and I were thinking the same thing that minute—the person, who had left the note for us in our hollow tree post office, had come back for the treasure hidden in the mystery room. If we only dared peek, perhaps we could find out where the secret door really was.

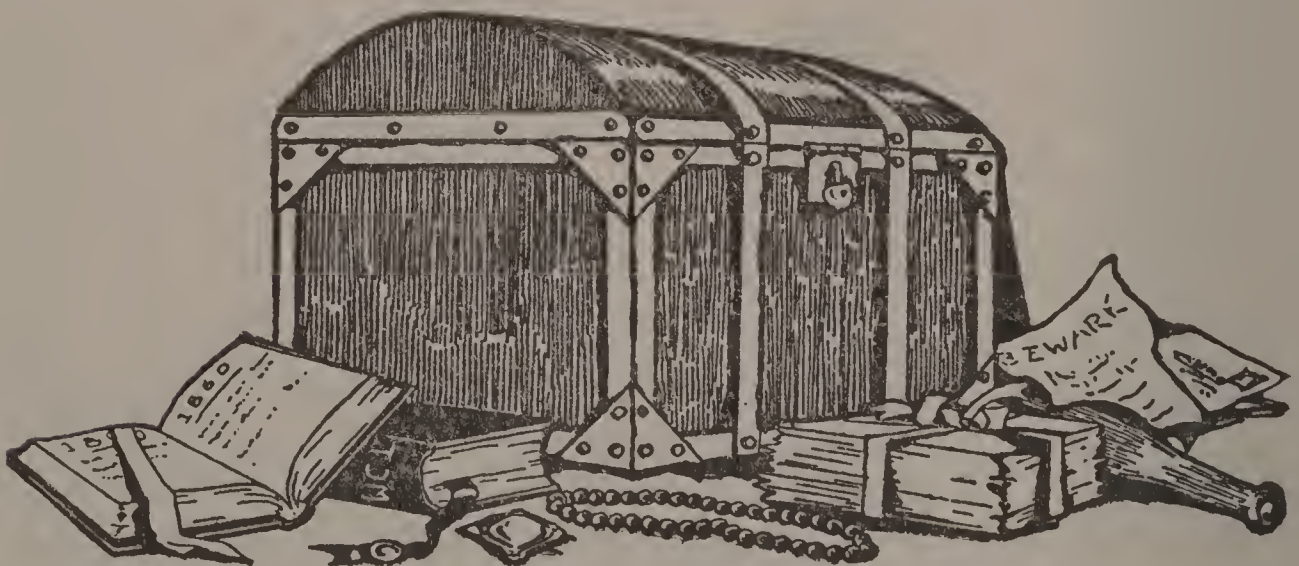
The next minute we heard Mrs. Fisher talking to her brother. I was so relieved I almost giggled. “I feel so foolish,” Patty whispered. “What will Mrs. Fisher think when she finds us hiding in her closet?”

“We’d better tell her right away,” I whispered back and started to get up from where I had been sitting on the floor.

As my hand touched the wall, I heard a little snapping noise, and I had the strangest feeling. It seemed as though the wall behind us were fading away into nothingness.

I turned and looked, and found that now I could see quite plainly. Yes, it was moving. The back wall of the closet was swinging outward—away from us.

We had found the secret door to the mystery room.



## CHAPTER VII

### JIMMY

**I**N a moment we forgot all about Mrs. Fisher in her room; we forgot about John the gardener. We had thoughts only for the mystery room that opened before us. We stepped inside, and there—like Silas Marner—we saw what looked like gold.

And then—like Silas Marner, too—we saw that the gold was the soft curly hair of a little girl.

We slipped over to the rude crib where she lay sleeping. “Oh, isn’t she just too good to be true?” whispered my cousin, who had always wanted a baby sister more than anything in the world, and, for that matter, so had I.

The child couldn’t have been more than a year and a half old, but her hair was quite thick and formed in cunning little ringlets all over her head. I could hardly keep from kissing her, she looked so cuddly lying there. But though I didn’t know very much about babies, I knew one thing—you must never wake them up when they are asleep.

But that was only our first surprise! The next thing we saw was the old sofa we had missed from the attic the day before, and it was made up with

sheets and blankets, as though someone had used it for a bed. On top the covers was a copy of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, and it was a library book just like ours.

And then we saw the boy. He was about ten years old, and he was standing over in a far corner of the room. His hands grasped the back of a chair, and he was staring at us in a mute, appealing way. We knew at a glance that he was frightened, for his freckled face had gone quite pale.

Patty tried to put him at his ease at once.

“What’s your name?” she asked.

“Jimmy Fisher,” he answered, his voice so low we could hardly hear him.

“Oh,” I cried, “I didn’t know Mrs. Fisher had a boy.”

“You mustn’t blame Mom,” he said quickly. “The Home couldn’t take us for another month and we just had to have some place to stay.”

“Are you going to live at an orphanage?” Patty’s voice sounded flat and disappointed. The boy nodded. “And is your little sister going with you?”

“Yes,” he answered, and looked as though he wanted to cry, but being a ten-year-old boy, he couldn’t.



“What’s her name?” I asked.

“Jean.”

“She’s so cunning!” exclaimed Patty. “I’ll be very careful not to wake her up. May I just barely touch her, Jimmy?”

“I don’t guess it makes so much difference if she *does* make a noise,” he said, “now that you know we’re here. Sometimes I just couldn’t keep her quiet.”

“We haven’t heard anything since night before last,” I answered. “But then we haven’t been in the house much, except at night, and our room is pretty far from yours.”

Jimmy seemed almost at ease by this time, and now he grinned. “That was the night we came,” he answered. “A neighbor in Arlington—that’s where we used to live—had been keeping us for a few days. Then Uncle John went after us and brought us here. Jean cried as we went through the hall, and I had to go and stumble over a chair.”

“Was that the reason your mother wouldn’t let us in, when we pounded on her door? Were all of you inside?”

“Yes, and poor Mom was worried, too. She thought we were done for.”

All this time Patty had been over by the crib, feasting her eyes on that darling baby, and I don't suppose she could resist any longer, for she picked the little thing up and held her in her arms. As might have been expected, Jean woke up. She saw right away that Patty was a stranger and, with a little cry, held out her arms to Jimmy. But Patty only held her tighter, and that made the baby cry right out loud and her mother in the next room heard her.

It must have been a terrible shock to Mrs. Fisher when she walked through the closet to the mystery room and found us there. Her face went white, just as Jimmy's had, and she almost staggered over to the old sofa. She buried her face in her hands, and there was the most dreadful silence for a minute. Then she raised her head and called brokenly, "John, oh, John!"

When the gardener walked in and discovered us, poor fellow, he seemed about flabbergasted, as Mr. Whitney would say. He was so astonished that it would have been funny, if he hadn't been so distressed about it, too.

"I'll be jiggered!" he exclaimed, and walked over and laid his hand awkwardly on his sister's shoulder.

“You mustn’t blame her none,” he said. “It was my idea.”

“I was simply desperate,” moaned the housekeeper. “Oh, Patty, what will your mother say?”

“Let’s all go down to the library,” my cousin suggested tactfully, and with that wonderful poise that always made me feel so proud of her. “Please, Mrs. Fisher, may I carry the baby? I’ll be very careful.”

We all trooped downstairs, and there were many explanations. But John was always interrupting his sister, and the housekeeper was always interrupting John, and Jean was always interrupting everything, because she was so sweet that we’d have to stop and play with her every once in a while. So it took quite a while before we knew the whole story, but in the main this was what we learned.

Poor Mrs. Fisher, after the death of her husband, had found that she could not get a situation because of her two children. It seemed that nobody wanted a housekeeper with a ten-year-old boy and a baby girl. She tried her best to keep them with her, but after a while she didn’t have any money left and she couldn’t find a position. John sent her all he could, but that wasn’t enough, and besides Mrs. Fisher didn’t feel that it was right for her younger brother,

who wasn't much more than a boy himself, to have such a burden. That was what had made her decide to put the children in a Home, though the thought of having them away from her just about broke her heart.

There was a very nice orphanage, kept up by some society in Arlington, where she had been living; but the matron couldn't possibly make room for the Fisher children before another month. Then John's letter had come, saying that my aunt needed a new housekeeper and that the family was to be away for several weeks.

"I know I should have asked Mrs. Morrison if it was all right for me to have the children here while she was away," said Mrs. Fisher, "but so many people had refused me that I didn't dare. I knew they wouldn't hurt the furniture or anything like that, so I didn't think it would do anybody any harm, if I brought them *without* asking."

"Was that why you didn't want to stay when you found that Patsy and I were to be here?" my cousin asked.

The housekeeper nodded. "Yes. But John had discovered that hidden room, and he thought we could manage that way. But I soon saw we couldn't."

Mrs. Fisher had sent us to the orchard that morning, so that Jimmy and Jean could come out of their cramped quarters for a while. Then she had realized that she couldn't keep on getting us out of the way for a whole month; and she and John had gone to the city that afternoon to ask the matron to reconsider and take the children right away.

"But she says she just can't do it," the housekeeper finished dully.

"Please don't worry about it," Patty begged her. "I'll write mother to-night, and tell her everything, and ask her if Jimmy and Jean can't stay right here until the end of the month."

But, though my cousin told Mrs. Fisher not to worry, she sounded rather worried herself.

"I think John was mighty smart to discover that mystery room," I said, "when our mothers and even our grandfather didn't know anything about it." I wanted to change the subject, for one thing, but I also was curious to know how he had done it.

John blushed at this praise. Blushing was a habit that the whole family seemed to have.

"I discovered it sorta by accident," he said. "No one had ever used the room, so I kept my narcissus bulbs there, in the closet, till they began to sprout.

One morning I found that a mouse had been nibbling my bulbs and, seeing a hole in the baseboard, I poked in a stick.

“Oh, what happened?” Patty asked.

“Why, the whole back of the closet flew open.”

“But there is no baseboard in the closet now,” I said.

“It came up easily and I took it out, so my sister could get to the baby quicker, if she had to.”

All this time poor Jimmy had been sitting over in the corner, not saying a word. He was timid, but for all that, he was such an interesting looking boy that I knew he would be lots of fun to play with.

“Come on, Jimmy,” I cried. “Let’s go out in the orchard and play ‘I Spy.’ ”

His big gray eyes lighted up at once, and I knew he must have been very lonely during the last two days. We played for about an hour before we heard John calling us to dinner.

“Mom had a hard time feeding us,” said Jimmy. “She got everything ready down in the cellar, so nobody would see her. Of course, she expected to pay for what *we* ate.”

“Patsy,” said my cousin, “that’s what became of the ham yesterday. And Jimmy had the sofa out of

the attic and he had borrowed our copy of *Tom Sawyer*, and it was his baseball bat we found.”

“Yes,” I answered, “but I still feel worried about that note we found in our hollow tree post office.”

Jimmy began to get red. “You mustn’t blame that on Mom,” he said. “She didn’t know I wrote it.”

Patty and I looked at him in astonishment, and Jimmy struggled on with his confession. “I got awfully tired, up in that little room, so yesterday morning I went up in the attic to play. Purty soon, you girls came and I had to hide—and one of you almost saw me. I—I—heard everything you said about hunting the secret room and I didn’t know what would happen to Jean and me if you found it. I didn’t want to bother Mom about it, so I wrote the note to try to scare you.”

“How did you know anything about our post office?” I asked.

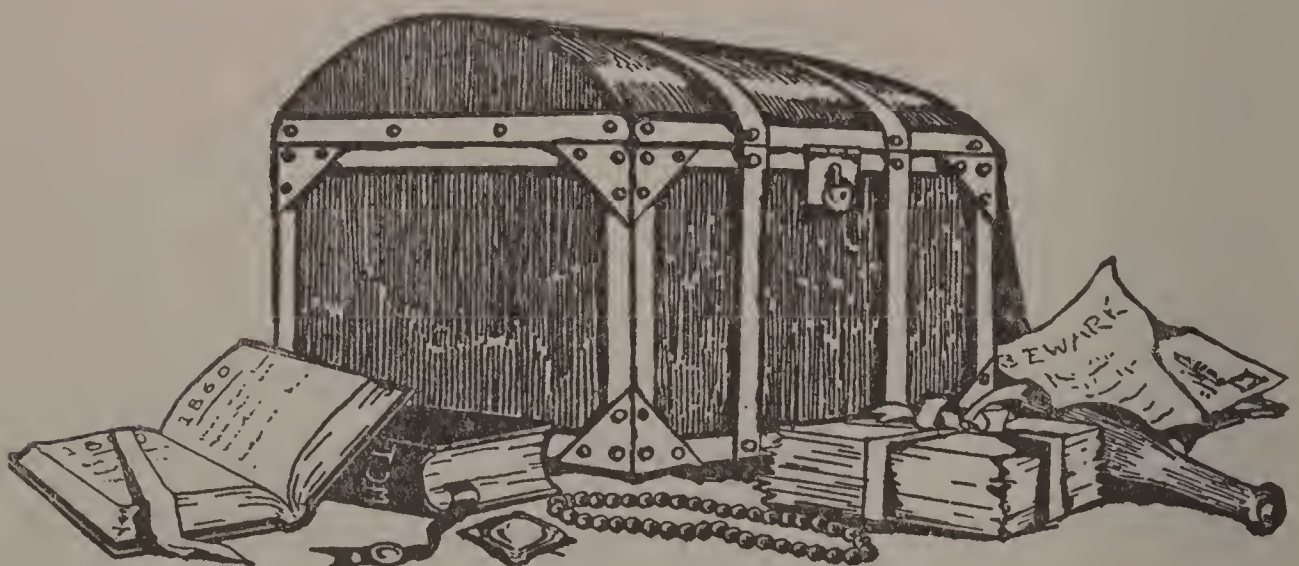
“When you took that launch ride, Mom let us go downstairs to play. She told me about the hollow tree near the grocery store and how to get there, because she wanted me to take some gingerbread men down there before you got home. She didn’t get them baked in time, but I slipped out anyway and left the note.”

"I'll say this for you, Jimmy Fisher," Patty told him. "You don't know how to spell."

I was rather surprised at myself for not feeling mad at Jimmy for writing that scary note to us. But I just felt sorry for him instead. I guess that my cousin did, too, because she went on to tell him that though he wasn't a good speller, she just knew he would make a dandy playmate, and that it would be more fun to play with Jean than with all the dolls in all the world.

"Oh, we'll have a wonderful time," she finished.

"Yes, if your Mom will let us stay." We could tell that he was awfully in earnest about it—he looked so wistful and so sad. "Oh, Patty, do you suppose she will?"







*It was fun the next morning showing Jimmy  
over Belden Place.*



## CHAPTER VIII

### NEW FRIENDS

**P**ATTY wrote to Aunt May that night, and it wasn't an easy letter to write either. *We* didn't think that Mrs. Fisher had done anything wrong in bringing Jimmy and Jean without asking, and we didn't see how our mothers could have the hearts to blame her. Still, when it came to putting it right down on paper, we had a harder time making a satisfactory explanation than we had counted on.

“Dear Mother,” my cousin wrote. “We have had the most thrilling adventure. We found the secret room right over the kitchen—and guess who was living in it! Mrs. Fisher's boy, Jimmy, and his little sister, Jean.”

“I don't believe that would do, Patty,” I said, when she looked up at me to see what I thought. “It's too—too sudden.”

“I guess you're right.” She tore up the sheet and pulled out a fresh one. “Oh, what can I say—that the housekeeper has had a very sad life and that she brought her children here to stay until the Orphans' Home could take them?”

“That’s better, but it’s not quite right yet. What we need is a—a—”

“A what?” asked Patty.

“A dip-lo-mat-ic opening.” I finally got the words out. I had heard Daddy say that expression often when he was getting ready to make an important speech; but when I tried to say it myself, the words didn’t come so easily.

“What’s that?” asked Patty.

“Well,” I tried to explain, “I think we should try to prepare them before we break the news. You might write, ‘Dear Mother: What I am about to say may surprise you; but please read my letter through before forming an opinion.’”

“That sounds fine,” said Patty, hurrying to get it down on paper. “What shall I say next, Patsy?”

“Mrs. Fisher has had a very sad life,” I went on dictating, “and she couldn’t find a position because she had a ten-year-old boy and baby girl whom nobody wanted. They are going to a Home next month, but until then there is no place for them to live. So the housekeeper brought them to stay at Belden Place and hid them in the secret room—”

“But Patsy,” my cousin interrupted, “I haven’t said anything about the secret room *yet*.”

“That’s all right. You won’t have to write the letter over. You can just put it in a footnote, as they do in our school books.”

So Patty drew a star after the words, “secret room,” and then she drew another star at the bottom of the page, and after it she told about the important discovery we had made.

The letter got harder and harder as we went along. Finally, we finished it by saying that though we knew the whole affair sounded rather queer, everything was really all right, because we loved Mrs. Fisher, and Jimmy was a nice boy, and Jean was simply the darlinest baby we had ever seen.

“Thank goodness, that’s done.” My cousin stamped the letter and laid it on the dresser ready to be posted the next morning. “I don’t believe I ever could have written it, if you hadn’t helped me, Patsy.”

As we undressed and crept into bed, I kept thinking of all the important things that had happened in one day. At bedtime the evening before we hadn’t discovered the secret room, and we hadn’t even known about Jean and Jimmy.

“Did you notice what a coarse little dress Jean was wearing?” I asked. “A pretty baby like that ought to have some pretty clothes.”

Patty was thoughtful for a minute, then quite suddenly she said, "Why can't she have them? There's a whole chest filled with my baby things up in the attic."

"Did your mother save them?"

"Lots of them. I know she won't mind if I give some of them to Jean."

That was the beginning of our plans for our surprise party the next day. There were all sorts of things up in the attic that could be used for Jean—Patty's baby crib and some of her old playthings. We decided to get them together and put them in Mrs. Fisher's room while she was preparing lunch. Afterwards we'd slip upstairs again and when she opened her door, we'd shout, "Surprise!"

It was fun the next morning showing Jimmy over Belden Place. He had seen something of the grounds the afternoon our Jolly Half Dozen Club went over to Kentucky. But that wasn't like having us show him all the points of interest—the terrace where we coasted in the winter, the grapevine swing in the orchard, the marten and wren houses, and the fountain where two stone children held up a stone umbrella to protect themselves from the water that

rolled off the sides of the parasol in little wiggling streams.

It was funny about Jimmy. He didn't seem at all timid after he became acquainted, and already it seemed as though we had known him for a long, long time. But it wasn't until we showed him the gardener's cottage that we saw just what a lonely time he must have had of it since his father died.

"Gee," he said, "wouldn't it be grand to live there? Wouldn't it be dandy to have a *home* like that?"

Patty and I looked at each other behind his back—we both were surprised. True, the honeysuckle vine over the front porch gave the house a very homey air, and it would have been a cunning enough little place, if it hadn't been so run down. Still, we couldn't see why Jimmy should go into such raptures over it.

"That's the gardener's cottage," Patty explained. "Your Uncle John couldn't use it, and Mother hasn't bothered about having it fixed up. It needs lots of repairs before anyone ever could live there, and it's been less expensive for him to stay at the house."

Jimmy didn't say another word about it. But he looked awfully wistful, and somehow Patty and I just knew he was thinking how much nicer it would

be to live with his mother and sister in a real home spelled with a little h, than to go to a big Home spelled with a capital.

“We haven’t told you about our surprise yet.” I was eager to change the subject. I wanted to see if I couldn’t bring a *glad* look back into those big gray eyes.

My cousin stopped short. “Why, Patsy Spaulding! It won’t be much of a surprise now.”

I couldn’t tell her, with Jimmy right there beside us, why it was I had given the secret away like that. So I said instead, “I don’t see why he shouldn’t know about it. The surprise isn’t for him.”

Jimmy looked embarrassed. “If it’s anything you don’t want to tell me, you needn’t.”

“I suppose we might as well,” Patty answered. “You may be able to help us.”

“Of course, he can,” I said. “We never could get that crib down from the attic by ourselves.”

When we told Jimmy of our plans, his gray eyes shone. “Oh, gee whillikins,” he said, “won’t Mom be tickled? And Jean—say, I’ve always wondered what she would look like all dolled up.”

He was so happy about it that Patty and I looked at each other a second time behind his back. We



were glad now that we had let him in on the secret and of one thing we were certain—we were going to like Jimmy Fisher very much.

We hadn't finished our tour of Belden Place—why, we hadn't even visited the Peter Pan House—but after that nothing held out any prospect of pleasure but the attic. Jimmy was simply beside himself with joy when Patty opened the drawers of the chest and pulled out several dainty little baby dresses. She found a blue silk coat, too, and a crêpe de Chine bonnet to match, with three tiny ruffles edged with lace.

“I hope this fits her,” I said. “I want her to wear it when I take her picture with my new camera.”

The old attic yielded other treasures, too—a teddy bear put carefully to bed in the bottom drawer of the chest three years before, a little blue enameled crib, a high chair and a baby carriage. We had a hard time getting all the things down the steep attic stairs, especially the crib; and once we thought we would have to call John to come and help us. We managed without him, though, because we wanted him to be surprised, too. The housekeeper was down in the kitchen getting lunch, so—although we made quite a lot of noise—we were in no danger of

being discovered. Jean was with her mother, and John, of course, was out in the greenhouse.

“I wish we could wash these,” said Patty, laying the little dresses out on the bed. “But I’m sure Mrs. Fisher would rather do it herself.”

I sniffed the lovely fragrance of the sheets I was laying on the crib, glad that bedclothes were in no need of an immediate laundering, and folded a baby blanket across the foot of the bed. The teddy bear I set up in one corner, ready for Jean to play with.

“What’s the matter with you youngsters?” the housekeeper asked when we went down to lunch. “You look as though you’re up to something.”

“We are,” I answered. “Something nice.”

Luckily, for our plans, Mrs. Fisher consented when we asked if we could take Jean upstairs and play with her awhile. Our only disappointment was that Jimmy’s uncle had an errand for him to do and he couldn’t come with us. We put the baby in her crib and pulled up the sides, so that she couldn’t possibly fall out, and you should have seen her grab for that teddy bear. She gurgled over it and put a chubby finger on one of the puppy-dogs on the baby blanket and said, “Pretty,” again.

“I hope Jimmy gets back in time to shout, ‘Surprise,’ with us,” I said.

And, as if in answer to my wish, the door opened and Jimmy popped in. “Hurry! Mom’s coming up the stairs,” he said and disappeared into the closet.

Patty and I crouched down on the farther side of the bed; and when Mrs. Fisher came in all she could see for a minute were the dresses, spread out for her inspection, and Jean playing in her blue enameled crib. Then the closet door flew open and my cousin and I jumped up, and three voices yelled, “Surprise.”

We had hoped, of course, that Mrs. Fisher would be pleased, but we had had no idea how very happy we would make her. She fingered the little dresses, as though she loved them, and wheeled the crib nearer the window and ran her hand over the soft folds of the blanket.

“You’re the two dearest girls in the world,” she told us.

“Jimmy helped us a lot,” I said.

“Sure, I did,” he said. “They never could have gotten that crib down the steps without a man’s help.”

We all laughed at the funny way he strutted

across the room, and Patty protested when Mrs. Fisher said she could only take the things as a loan. But whether they were being loaned or given to her, Jean didn't care, for she kept on laughing and gurgling and trying to put the teddy bear into her mouth.

"May we take her riding outside in the baby carriage?" I asked.

"You certainly may, after she has had her nap," her mother answered.

Mrs. Fisher wanted her to have one of her new dresses to wear, so she selected a silk one and washed and ironed it while it was still wet. Jean looked adorable in it, and my cousin and I were as proud as peacocks as we wheeled the carriage down the street and everyone stopped and looked at the baby.

It was almost as good as having little sisters of our own.

## CHAPTER IX

### SPAULDING, MORRISON AND FISHER, DETECTIVES

**I**T WAS so much fun to play with Jean that it wasn't until the next morning that we got around to showing Jimmy the Peter Pan House. He was quite impressed, especially when we hoisted our cushions up into the tree by means of the basket pulley.

"This is where I'm going to come to write my stories," I said, after we had made ourselves comfortable.

"Patsy is going to be an author when she gets big," my cousin explained, "and I'm going to be an actress."

"She's almost an actress now," I said. "She takes part in school plays, and she's going to give a reading at the Women's Club Benefit for the new day nursery."

"Yes, I am, if I ever find anything to read," said Patty, a worried little frown puckering her eyes. "None of the poems I already know will do."

"What will you do when you grow up, Jimmy?" I asked.

Jimmy looked embarrassed. "You won't laugh?"

"Of course not. We told *you*, didn't we?"

"Then—well—I want to be an artist."

"I think that's splendid," said Patty. "When I'm an actress, you can paint my portrait."

"And you can illustrate my stories," I added.

Jimmy shook his head. "No," he said, "I want to paint scenery—things like that river over there."

He jerked his thumb in the direction of the Ohio—smooth, glassy, and majestic looking, with the trees on the Kentucky side nodding to us in a friendly way, just like folks. The gesture itself was awfully unromantic, but never had I seen anyone's face so radiant as Jimmy's was that minute. He took a piece of drawing paper from his pocket and unfolded it.

"Why," I gasped, looking at the water color sketch he held out to me, "it looks like the Ohio River."

"It *is* the Ohio River," said Patty. "It's—beautiful, Jimmy. It—it—makes me have a little thrilly feeling down inside of me."

Jimmy's eyes were shining. "That's why I painted it," he said. "The river always makes me feel—well, like you said, you know."

"Won't we be proud of you when you get to be a

great painter," I cried. "But, of course, you'll have to go to art school first and—"

I stopped, for the light had died out of Jimmy's face. I knew I must have said something I had no business saying, but I couldn't imagine what it was.

"Does it cost a lot—to go to art school?" he asked.

So *that* was the trouble. If Jimmy had to go to an orphan's home, there probably wouldn't be any money for his education after he finished public school. I was embarrassed, but my cousin, as usual, seemed to know exactly what to do.

"I suppose it does cost a great deal," she said, "but I should think you could earn the money yourself."

"I used to earn money when we lived in Arlington," he said, "but I always gave it to Mom. She didn't like to take it—but—you see, she—had to."

"I tell you," Patty suggested, "let's all three start to earn money to pay our way through college. It will be fun—all doing it together, and we have nearly a month before Jimmy has to go to the Home." My cousin was thinking fast. "Why, we could form a regular company. Wouldn't Spaulding, Morrison and Fisher sound fine?"

“Sure,” I said. “It *sounds* fine, but what could our company *do*?”

“Don’t be so impatient, Patsy Spaulding. Can’t you see I’m trying to think?” She held up her hand. “Please don’t say a word just for a second. I have an idea by the tail feathers now and I don’t want it to get away.”

I giggled. That was the sort of thing that Mr. Whitney was always saying, and it was funny to hear Patty try to imitate him.

“I have it!” she cried suddenly. “Spaulding, Morrison and Fisher will find Great-grandmother Belden’s lost jewels.”

“That wouldn’t be earning money,” I objected. “We couldn’t sell heirlooms that have been in the family for generations, even if we found them.”

“There might be something in it for Jimmy anyway. I’ve heard Mother say that a reward was offered for their recovery when they were lost, and I bet she’d be so tickled if Jimmy helped us find them, that she’d give him a reward herself. And your mother would, too.”

Jimmy was all interest now. “When did your grandma lose her jewelry?” he asked.

“It wasn’t our grandmother who lost them,”



Patty explained. "It was our Great-grandmother Patricia Belden—the one that Patsy and I were named for. And the jewels were lost years and *years* ago, not very long after the Civil War."

"I don't see how *we* can ever find them, if your great-grandma couldn't."

"Well, of course, it *will* take some very good detective work," my cousin said gravely. "I have an idea—instead of being a regular business company, let's call ourselves Spaulding, Morrison and Fisher, Detectives."

"Yes, let's!" Jimmy and I cried, almost together. Then he added, "But, say, after you girls have been so nice to me—I—I wouldn't want a reward for helping you."

I suggested that we really should incorporate. I didn't understand exactly what that meant, but we knew that lots of firms did and we wanted to be business-like. I climbed down from the tree and ran into the house for ink and paper, so that we could draw up the articles of incorporation, as Daddy always called them.

In Great-grandfather Belden's old Sheraton desk in the library, I found the paper, two pens and a bottle of black ink. Then, upstairs in the room I

shared with my cousin, I came across some red ink. I had to giggle to myself when I thought of the use we would make of it and of how surprised Patty and Jimmy would be.

I passed through the kitchen on my way out, and Mrs. Fisher stopped me. "How would you like some lemonade?" she asked.

We were beginning to find out that that was one of the nice things about Jimmy's mother—she was always thinking up the most surprising little surprises. I squealed right out loud, I was so tickled, and told Mrs. Fisher what a dear we thought she was. She arranged a tray, with three glasses and the pitcher of lemonade; and I put my pen and ink and paper on the tray, too, and carried it out to the Peter Pan tree.

"Look what I have!" I called. "Hurry and let down the basket."

My, that lemonade tasted good, and the oatmeal cookies had just come from the oven and were still warm. We spilt some of the lemonade in pulling the basket up, but there was plenty to go around anyway.

"What's that red ink for?" Patty asked, still munching a cooky.

“Just wait and see,” I told her, dipping one of the pens into the black ink. I knew that I had her feeling awfully curious.

“We, the undersigned,” I wrote, “do hereby form the company of Spaulding, Morrison and Fisher, Detectives, and declare ourselves incorporated.”

“Oh, is that all there is to it?” Jimmy sounded disappointed.

I shook my head. “I’m not at all sure how it’s done, but I think we should have a pledge of some sort, even if the grown-up firms don’t. We might pledge ourselves to neither eat nor sleep until we find the jewels.”

Patty laughed. “That’s too risky!”

Jimmy thought so, too, and we were sure that Mrs. Fisher never would consent anyway; so I simply wrote: “We hereby pledge ourselves to find the jewels lost by Patricia Belden.”

“Now,” I said, “where’s the red ink? We’re going to sign our names in blood.”

Patty and Jimmy laughed so hard that if it hadn’t been for the railing around the Peter Pan house, I’m sure they would have fallen off. I told them I didn’t see anything so funny about it; the ink was just the color of blood and lots more practical. They

kept right on giggling, but they signed their names all right. Afterwards, when we told Mr. Whitney about it, he declared that the old-fashioned pirates certainly could have learned a thing or two from us. And he laughed, too, till he almost fell off the high stool where he was sitting.

After our articles of incorporation were signed, the talk turned again to Great-grandmother's jewels. Of course, Jimmy wanted to know the whole story; so we told him how they had disappeared very mysteriously and how we happened to start to search for them.

"Our mothers didn't know anything about a hidden room," I said, "so we called it the mystery room and started to hunt for it. We thought we *might* find the jewels there."

"You know the rest." Patty took up the story. "We found the room—it's the one back of your mother's, the one you've been using."

"Gee!" he exclaimed. "I think you girls are awfully smart!"

"Oh, I don't know," said my cousin gloomily. "There weren't any jewels there, and about everything that Patsy and I had figured out was wrong.

We discovered the secret door, of course, but all we found was just an ordinary room.”

Suddenly, Jimmy seemed almost bursting with some wonderful secret. He really did—that’s the only way to describe him. “Just think,” he said, “I saw a real treasure with my own eyes and didn’t know it.”

“Jimmy Fisher, what are you talking about?”

But he seemed determined to string us along for a while. “Did you say it was just an *ordinary* room?” He paused in the tantalizing way he must have picked up from Patty. “Well, I’ve found something that may make you change your minds.”

“Don’t tease us,” I begged. “What is it that you’ve found?”

“If you want to know that,” he answered, “you’ll have to come up to the mystery room and see.”

## CHAPTER X

### THE LITTLE OLD HORSEHAIR TRUNK

**P**ATTY shinned down the gnarled old tree trunk in a jiffy, and Jimmy clambered after her. He wasn't quite so used to climbing trees as we were and, therefore, he wasn't nearly so quick at it, even though he was a boy.

Breaking up what was left of the cookies, I scattered the crumbs on the floor of the Peter Pan House for the birds. I saw that Patty and Jimmy were hurrying off without me, so I put the lemonade pitcher and glasses in the basket, along with the cooky plate and the pens and ink and paper, and lowered them to the ground.

"Wait for me," I cried, climbing down and gathering up the things in the basket.

Patty and Jimmy stopped and when I caught up with them, I panted, "It's no fair—leaving me to tidy up and then not waiting."

Patty put her arm around me. "Slowpoke!" she teased. "Detectives don't have time to wait."

In the kitchen Patty and Jimmy stopped long enough to get a drink. But they didn't waste any

time about it, because I went on ahead and paused at the foot of the broad stairway in the hall. Here was my chance to get it back on them.

“The last one upstairs,” I called, “is a perfectly *dumb* detective.”

I ran up the steps after that, and I could hear Patty and Jimmy panting and giggling as they came after me. I reached the top first, with my cousin just behind. But about two-thirds of the way up, Jimmy stumbled and that made him the last of all.

But he was awfully good-natured about it. “Call me a dumb detective if you want to,” he said. “You’ll change your tune after you see what I’ve found in the mystery room.”

We had to go through Mrs. Fisher’s room, of course, in order to get to it. The minute we opened the door, Jimmy said, “Aw, shucks! Now you girls never will get down to business.”

He was just about right, too, for the first thing we saw was Jean, sitting up in her crib, laughing and holding out her arms to us.

My cousin knelt down on one side of her, and I knelt down on the other side. “Now, patty-cake for us, Jean,” I begged. “You should just see her do it,

Jimmy. I taught her last night while you were out in the greenhouse with your Uncle John."

"Aw, you girls make me tired," he grumbled.

"Why, Jimmy Fisher!" said Patty indignantly. "Don't you love your baby sister?"

"Sure!" he answered, and then he began to try to act important. "But *detectives* can't stop to play with babies, when they're on the scent of an important mystery like this."

"I guess he's right!" Patty sighed, and after both of us had given Jean another hug, we followed him into the mystery room.

We found his mother in there, putting the room in order. The old horsehair sofa that Jimmy had been sleeping on may have been valuable as a piece of antique furniture, but as a bed it certainly wasn't very comfortable. We had insisted that he move into a larger and nicer room, and early that morning he had taken all his personal things out—the few that he had.

"Now, what are you youngsters so excited about?" The housekeeper smiled at us, as she finished dusting the old chest in the corner.

"We're detectives," Patty announced gravely, as she sank down beside me on the sofa. "Spaulding,



Morrison and Fisher, Incorporated! Doesn't that sound scrumptious?"

Mrs. Fisher didn't laugh, as lots of older folks would have. That was another one of the things about her that made us love her—she always treated us as though we were grown-up.

"May I ask," she said, "what you are trying to detect?" I thought I saw a tiny twinkle in her eye. But I wasn't sure, for the next instant she was looking very serious again.

"Just at present," I answered, "we are searching for Great-grandmother Belden's jewels, which disappeared more than sixty years ago."

"That's quite a big order, isn't it, for your first job?"

"It's not exactly our *first* job," Patty told her. "Patsy and I discovered this room, you know. But, of course, that was before we took Jimmy into the firm."

All this time, Jimmy had been searching through the drawers of the old chest. "Mom," he asked, "do you know what became of my flash light? I left it in here."

"Oh, is that what you're looking for?" his mother

said. "Your Uncle John borrowed it last night."

Jimmy was out of the door almost before she had finished her sentence, and the housekeeper went back to her own room to finish her darning. She said she thought that we two girls should have the knees of our stockings reinforced with leather. But she laughed when she said it; so we knew that she wasn't really cross about it, even though we did cause her lots of extra darning. I suppose it *is* pretty terrible the way Patty and I always burst out our knees. It's really too bad that we can't wear socks any more.

Jimmy was gone for several minutes, so we leaned back against the old horsehair sofa and looked about us. What we had named the mystery room was a very ordinary looking place after all. It was just like any other room, except that the sloping walls on two sides made it unusually cozy. If the ceiling had just tried a little harder, Patty said, it might have succeeded in touching the floor. As it was, the straight-up-and-down parts of the walls, which were made of paneled wood instead of plaster, weren't more than three or four feet high. The wood was worm-eaten now, with knotholes in several places, and the slanting ceilings had a number

of big stains where the rain must have seeped through.

Just then Jimmy came back with the flash light, but he didn't say a word to us. He simply walked over to the west side of the room and began to run his hand over the wooden wall in a queer sort of way. We asked him several times what he was trying to do; but it wasn't any use, because he didn't even seem to hear us. After a while, though, he began to seem worried.

"I can't find it any place," he muttered.

"Find what?" I asked.

"I guess you're not the only person to discover a secret spring."

"Oh, did you find one, too?" cried Patty. "What did it open, Jimmy?"

"You'll know in plenty of time," he answered stubbornly.

"Do you mean to say," I asked him, pretending to be shocked, "that you really found a secret spring and that you've forgotten where it is? You're some detective, Jimmy."

He blushed, and I saw that he was taking my teasing pretty much to heart. So I was quick to add, "Let us help you hunt."

“No, I found it once, and I guess I can do it again.”

“Oh, *I* know what it is,” said Patty. “One of the panels in that wood isn’t a panel at all but a little door instead.”

“You’re right there,” Jimmy admitted. “But what good does it do us if we can’t get into it? I just happened to press a little place in the wall and the door opened.”

“What kind of a place?” I asked. “What did it look like?”

“It didn’t look like anything special. It was just a little spot that pushed in when you touched it, and then one of those little panels swung open like a door.”

After that he was willing to have us hunt, too. Every panel looked just alike, and we stopped teasing Jimmy, because we saw that he really couldn’t be blamed for forgetting where the secret spring was hidden. He still refused to tell us what it was he had discovered, and it seemed as though we simply couldn’t stand it if we had to wait much longer to find out.

And then—just as we were almost ready to give up—Jimmy found it again. He just happened to

press the right spot down near the floor and the little door creaked open.

He looked up at us triumphantly, pulled out his flash light and crawled into the dark hole that opened up before us. We peeped inside, ducking so as not to knock our heads against the ceiling, and could just barely make out the outline of his form back in a dim corner, right underneath the eaves. The little place we looked into was barely more than five feet wide but seemed to be as long as the room itself. Perhaps it was just another safeguard that Great-grandfather Belden had provided for the runaway slaves, in case the mystery room had been discovered. Nobody could have stayed in there very long at a time, though, because of the way the roof slanted down to meet the floor.

Jimmy was tugging at some dark object and pushing it toward the door. Patty slipped a moist hand into mine, and I could hear her, breathing hard, right there beside me. Somehow, we just knew that Jimmy had discovered something awfully important.

“Give me a hand, can’t you?” he called, and we reached inside and helped him pull the dark object out into the light. For an instant, we couldn’t tell

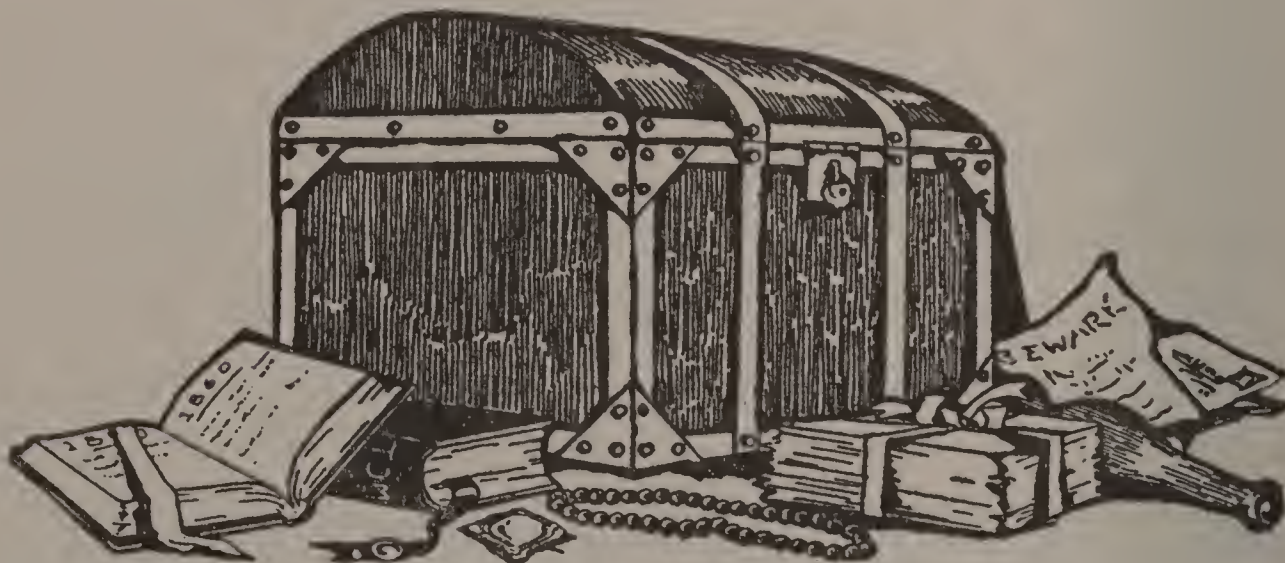
what it was, it was so covered with dust and cobwebs. Then I found a dust cloth and wiped it off and there it was—a little, old-fashioned horsehair-covered trunk, studded with brass tacks. And on top, more tacks forming the letters, was the one word—Patricia.

Jimmy reappeared, all covered with cobwebs, too, and with a funny smudge on his left cheek.

“That’s it,” he said, his eyes shining.

“You’ve found them, Jimmy,” I cried. “You’ve found the jewels.” And I began tugging at the lid.

But, try as I would, the lid refused to yield. The trunk was locked.



## CHAPTER XI

### THE OLD DIARY

**WE** WERE so excited by this time that we hardly knew what we were doing.

“The lost jewels!” I repeated in a voice I just couldn’t keep from shaking.

“She didn’t own a whole trunk full of jewelry, did she?” Jimmy asked, his eyes almost popping out of his head.

“Course not. I mean that the jewels must be inside.”

“Why didn’t you tell us about this before?” Patty demanded, coming over and helping me tug at the lid.

“I didn’t think it was any of my business, that’s why,” he answered. “I discovered that secret spring and the door sorta by accident the first day I was here, and I crawled inside and found the trunk. I didn’t try to open it because I didn’t want to go snooping around in other folks’ things. Besides, I didn’t know that there *were* any missing jewels till this morning.”

“Just think,” I wailed, “we have the lost treasure right here and can’t get into it.”

It was Patty who proved herself the resourceful one, as usual. "That lock doesn't look very strong to me. Jimmy, run downstairs and ask your uncle for his crowbar."

I sat down on the trunk, with very much the feeling of a night watchman of a bank or a jewelry store. Common sense should have told me that the jewels were just as safe now as they had been all these years, hidden in that secret cubby-hole off the mystery room. But when I thought of the necklaces, rings, bracelets, and things that Great-grandmother must have lost, I couldn't keep from feeling that they might be a little more secure if I were sitting on the trunk.

When Jimmy came back with the crowbar, we opened the lock without a bit of trouble, and threw back the lid of the worn little old horsehair trunk. And Patty and I forgot all about the jewels in our joy over what we found there.

"Oh, here's Great-grandmother's wedding gown," I cried, holding up the yellowed satin dress, with its full skirt and bertha of wide lace, and running my fingers over its smooth folds. "I know, because this is the dress she wore in the little daguerreotype picture Mother has of her."



“And just to think, it once was white,” said my cousin softly, the very way one talks when one’s in church.

But Jimmy was feeling in quite a different humor, and suddenly he began to giggle. He rolled up into a little ball, he laughed so hard. He held up a queer contraption made of steel wire and woven cotton casing and broad strips of tape and crinoline.

“Why, you’ve found some hoops,” I said and giggled, too, for they really did look funny. “Gracious, I’m glad *we* don’t have to wear things like that. There wouldn’t be much use in having Peter Pan House if we did.”

We found other clothes in that old horsehair trunk—lace-trimmed petticoats, a lace scarf, a cashmere shawl, and dainty slippers with pretty rosette bows. There was a velvet wrap, too, trimmed with lace. Afterwards, we learned that that particular kind of coat was called a mantilla and it was Maltese lace we had admired so much.

Best of all was the darling little bonnet of white velvet, lace frills, and white ribbon strings that tied beneath the chin. But though it was very cunning to look at, when Patty and I tried it on in front of Jimmy’s mirror, we decided we really preferred the

hats our mothers wore. As for Jimmy, he laughed so hard when he saw us, that his mother came and stood in the doorway a minute to see what it was all about.

Then in the very bottom of the trunk, we found a little sandalwood box, delicately carved. The jewels at last! But when I opened it, there was no glittering array of gems and precious stones. There was only a worn, faded-looking, little satin-covered book. Jimmy's face fell, and I began flipping the closely-written pages to try to hide my disappointment.

But Patty! Why, Patty Morrison had begun to dance a regular Indian war dance in the middle of the floor, and to whoop like half a dozen Indians all at once. "Patsy Spaulding, you little stupid!" she cried. "Don't you know what we've found? Patsy-of-the-long-face, Patsy-of-the-long-face!" she began to tease as she twirled around again and again.

"Does she often act like this?" Jimmy asked.

He was so serious about it that I wanted to laugh. But I was so provoked with my cousin that I wouldn't.

"Not often," I answered. "But she went to danc-



*Patty and I forgot all about the jewels in our joy  
over what we found.*



ing school last winter and perhaps she's trying to show us a new step."

Patty flung herself down beside me on the sofa, exhausted; rested her head on my shoulder and stared ahead of her, as though lost in thought. I knew this trick of hers, and decided I would act indifferent, too. But I couldn't do it—my curiosity got the best of me.

"For goodness sake, Patty Morrison, don't you dare keep me waiting another minute," I said.

She looked at me lazily, through half-closed lids. "I must say," she answered after a while, "you're not up on the family history."

After this Patty dropped her languid, grand-lady sort of air and explained. It seemed that Great-grandmother Belden had been an unusual woman in many ways—unusual and *very* interesting. She had known and admired Harriet Beecher Stowe and, like her famous friend, had used her pen to do what she could to bring an end to slavery. She didn't write long books, as Mrs. Stowe did, but articles for the magazines, using not her own name but that of a man, so few people outside her own family had known anything about it.

Of course, I knew most of this, but I didn't know

that Great-grandmother had kept a diary during Civil War days. Aunt May had often heard Grandfather Belden say what a shame it was that it had been lost. His mother had had so many thrilling experiences helping the runaway slaves escape to Canada and had been so plucky about it, that her journal was just like a regular story book. But something or other had happened to the diary—whether it had been destroyed or lost, no one had ever known.

And now—and now we held that very diary in our hands. No wonder Patty was thrilled!

As I took the worn little book from the old sandalwood box, we discovered beneath it several packets of letters, yellowed with age now, and tied up into neat little packets with narrow blue ribbon. And there, too, we found the miniature.

“It’s Great-grandmother Patricia,” my cousin said softly. “It’s like the daguerreotype—but lovelier.”

“You’re just like her, Patty,” I said, looking at the beautiful young face of the miniature. Great-grandmother’s red-gold hair was parted in the middle, brought back over her ears, coiled loosely at the back and allowed to hang in very short, thick

curls. Around her throat there was a string of pearls. She was wearing a simple, dark dress and a white lace fichu fastened by a brooch—a large topaz, surrounded by small diamonds. Of course, we didn't know until we read the diary, just what the stones were called; we only knew the brooch was very beautiful.

Great-grandmother was smiling, and in each cheek there was just the suggestion of a dimple. Her dark eyes were like Patty's, too.

“You look something like her yourself,” my cousin answered loyally.

I shook my dark, bobbed head. I knew I didn't.

When we looked over the letters, we found that one was a note from Abraham Lincoln, written during his first campaign for President and thanking Great-grandmother for her hospitality when he had visited and spoken in Fayetteville. There was another note from George Harrington Randolph who had once been governor of our state, but we didn't take time to read it then. Most of the other letters had been written by Great-grandfather, and they were love letters. So we put them back into the box and closed the lid.

But it was different with the diary. “Mother

said that Grandfather Belden made quite a search for it, because he wanted to have it published. Great-grandmother hadn't made it the personal thing that some folks make their diaries, and he knew she wouldn't have minded. So it's perfectly all right for us to read it," Patty finished. "I'm sure of that."

Fascinating reading that diary made, too! It was small wonder that people had called our Great-grandmother Patricia a remarkable woman.

There were accounts of gay balls and gay riding parties. It gave us quite a thrill to learn that it had been a big treat in the days before the Civil War to take basket dinners across to the Kentucky side, just as it is a treat for our Jolly Half Dozen Club to do it today. But instead of crossing in a gasoline launch or skiff, we found that the young folks of the sixties simply rode their horses down to the water's edge and were ferried across, just as automobiles are ferried across now.

When Mrs. Fisher came to call us to lunch, we looked up with a start. It was hard to realize we had been reading from ten o'clock till twelve.

"Goodness, they had good times in those days," I said, "even if they didn't have radios and things."



“They worked hard, too,” Patty added. “Why, Great-grandmother spoke of weaving and spinning, just as we would talk of darning a stocking. The only difference,” she went on, dimpling mischievously, “when she said she was going to do a thing, she went ahead and did it. But when *we* say we’re going to darn our stockings, we forget and Mrs. Fisher does it for us.”

“Never mind, Mrs. Fisher,” I said gaily, smiling up at her. “We’ll wash the lunch dishes to-day and every day. We aren’t named Patricia for nothing.”

We didn’t waste much time doing the dishes that day—we were too anxious to get back to the diary upstairs. All three of us turned in and helped—I washed, Jimmy dried them and Patty put them away, since she knew where they belonged better than we did. Mrs. Fisher was at her darning again when we passed through her room on our way to the mystery room, but she waved us aside when we offered to help her.

“Go back to your detective work,” she said. “Jean’s asleep and I’ve nothing else to do.”

“Just think,” said Patty, as she settled herself at one end of the old sofa and we drew our chairs up close. “I bet that Great-grandmother sat on this

very sofa and wrote in this old diary just lots of times.”

Although the upholstering had been mended many times, it was very ragged now, and I poked my fingers in and pulled out some of the funny, crinkly hair that it was stuffed with.

“And here we’re sitting on the same sofa and reading the same diary!” I said.

Patty began to pore over the diary, and after a few minutes she looked up, her eyes shining. “Oh,” she cried breathlessly, “it’s just wonderful—all about the Civil War and the Underground Railroad. Great-grandmother tells about one family—Jake, an old colored man and, Mandy, his wife and their little grandchild. They crossed the Ohio, just as Eliza did in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. She doesn’t say anything about ice, but it was awfully cold anyway. They made for this house first, just as all the runaway slaves did, because they knew they would be safe here.”

Patty was so excited and talked so fast that we could hardly understand a word she said. She made room for us on the sofa, one on either side of her, and peering over her shoulder, we began reading for ourselves. Two slave-catchers were hot on the trail

of the negroes, and Great-grandmother had been in doubt as to what she should do, as Great-grandfather was away from home. But the terror in the black eyes of the runaways had won her sympathy; and when the sheriff, in behalf of the slave-catchers, pounded on the front door and demanded entrance, she hid the man and his wife and their grandchild in the secret room. Admitting the sheriff, she told him as calmly as she could to go ahead and search the house. He had been unable, of course, to find any trace of Jake and his family, and when night came the slaves made their way northward, under Great-grandmother's guidance, to the next station in the Underground Railroad.

“When poor old Jake left he was so grateful the tears ran down his cheeks,” the diary said. “And we were so touched by his gratitude that we could hardly keep the tears back either. ‘I’s gwine to pay you back som’ day, Missus Belden,’ he insisted. ‘I’s gwine to com’ back som’ day.’”

“Poor old man!” I said. “I wonder if he ever did come back.”

The phone rang and when Patsy returned from answering it, she seemed worried. “It was Mrs. Meredith,” she explained. “She’s getting the

Women's Club Benefit program ready for the printer, and she wants to know the name of my reading before evening."

"I wouldn't learn anything new," I told her for the twentieth time.

"But there's nothing I already know that will do," she answered. "There's to be a big crowd there and the tickets are expensive and I want to do my best and give something that they'll like. Oh, dear, I wish Mother were here to help me."

I had always admired Patty for being so conscientious, but now I was provoked because she really did know a dozen lovely poems and I didn't see why she was making such a fuss. I didn't say anything else, though, because every time I told her this, she insisted that she must give something *dramatic*. She sat there, staring into space, her hands clasped tightly in her lap. For the moment, the little satin-covered book and the mystery were forgotten. Then suddenly she looked up at us, her brown eyes shining.

"Oh," she cried, "oh!" and began twirling me around the room till I was breathless. "Oh," she said again, "I've got the most fascinating idea."

## CHAPTER XII

### PATTY'S FASCINATING IDEA

**W**HENEVER Patty said she had a fascinating idea, I knew she meant it. I also knew how she liked to tease and keep a person in suspense, so I answered very calmly, "Oh, you have?"

Jimmy seemed surprised that I wasn't more interested, and he was the one who said, "Tell us, quick!"

"Well," Patty answered, drawing out her words, "I think it would be nice for Patsy to write a play."

"A play?" I asked. "What about?"

"About what we've just been reading in the diary—about Jake and Mandy and how Great-grandmother helped them to escape. The three of us could give it instead of my reading at the Club Benefit next Thursday."

"Oh, Patty, you do have the most scrumptious ideas, even if you are a tease," I cried, squeezing her hard. "I'd love to do it, if you think I could write something good enough."

"Sure, you can! I thought I'd like to play the part of Great-grandmother—unless you—" She hesitated.

"Of course," I said. "You look like her and I

don't. Besides that would be the main part, and you're the only one who could do it well enough."

"Are you sure you wouldn't mind?"

"You know I wouldn't. I'd rather play Mandy anyway. I've always wanted a chance to black my face."

"Where do I come in?" asked Jimmy.

"Why, you'll be Jake, the runaway slave," I said.

When we started to think about it, we realized that there were many things to be considered besides just writing the play. That was a big enough job, and I would have to finish it within the next two days so that we could commence rehearsing. I was all shaky at the thought, but there never was anything I wanted to do so much. Why, the thought of writing a play that would be given before all those people thrilled me so I could hardly wait to begin.

Patty insisted that Jean play the part of Jake's child, but Jimmy and I considered that a great joke. The idea of trying to make that little golden-haired, blue-eyed mite look like a colored baby! It couldn't be done—that's all, even if we blacked her face, and we knew Mrs. Fisher never would consent to that. It was just as well anyway that we use a big doll for the part, because Jean might be a little hard to

manage. If she tried to run off the stage or cried or anything like that, we might even forget our lines. If I wrapped my doll up in a blanket and held it close to me, the audience would never know the difference anyway.

We remembered, too, that we would need someone to take the part of the sheriff; and for a few minutes it seemed that we would have to give up having the play at all.

“Let’s go down and talk it over with Mrs. Meredith,” Patty suggested. “Perhaps she can tell us what to do.”

“We should ask her about it anyway,” I said, “because she may not like the idea at all. If she doesn’t, there’s no sense in going ahead and making a lot of plans.”

I slipped the miniature into my pocket and my cousin took the diary. Before we started we two girls went to our room, and I parted Patty’s hair in the middle, drew back her curls and held them in place with a barrette at the nape of her neck. If she had looked like Great-grandmother Belden before, she looked ever so much more like her now, and I wanted Mrs. Meredith to see the resemblance for herself.

We insisted that Jimmy go along, and when we got there we found Mrs. Meredith reading on the big screened front porch. She looked surprised when we introduced our new friend; Aunt May had told her about Mrs. Fisher but hadn't mentioned any children. Patty and I looked at each other—perhaps she wouldn't understand if she knew we had found Jean and Jimmy hidden in a secret room. We didn't know what to say; but just then Peg came out pushing the tea wagon and we didn't have to say anything at all.

“Don't you think I'm a nice girl?” she asked saucily, wheeling the tea cart into a position before her mother's chair. “I saw you coming and you looked so hot that I went out to the kitchen and made this lemonade straight off.”

“Then I'm going to look hot every time I come here.” I took the tall, cool glass Mrs. Meredith poured for me.

“How different you look to-day, Patty,” said Peg abruptly.

“That's because she has her hair parted in the middle,” I answered for my cousin. I took out the miniature and passed it around. “Don't you think Patty looks like Great-grandmother Belden?”



“There certainly is a strong resemblance,” said Mrs. Meredith, looking at the lovely miniature and then at my cousin.

Peg eyed us keenly. “What are you girls up to, anyway? You seem thrilled to pieces about something.”

We were, of course, and so was she, when she heard our plans. Her mother listened eagerly while Patty read aloud from the diary the passages about old Jake and Mandy, and she agreed with us that the incident furnished excellent material for a play. She thought that it would be of particular interest to Fayetteville people, because Great-grandmother had been so well known there, but—

“Oh, Mother,” said Peg, “I don’t see why there has to be any ‘but’.”

“It’s just this, dear,” said Mrs. Meredith, “we only have until next Thursday, and I’m afraid we couldn’t get it ready in time. I have so much else to attend to.”

“The play will be very short,” I told her, “and we can begin practicing day after to-morrow.”

“It’s not that, Patsy. I can spare the time for several rehearsals and I can help you with the writ-

ing part of it. It's the costumes and the scenery that make me hesitate."

"Mom would make the costumes," said Jimmy, "and Uncle John would attend to the scenery. I just know he would."

Mrs. Meredith consented then, on the condition that my play would turn out to be as good as she thought it was going to be. Peggy and Patty shouted, "Goody!" and Jimmy grabbed his cap and threw it up into the air and caught it—not one of them had an idea what a big *if* that was. It was simply up to me to write a play that was good enough—that was all there was to it.

I was beginning to learn that it's no cinch to be a playwright. There are so many things to consider—the cast, for instance. We would need four characters besides the baby, and there were only three of us to take the parts. Patty suggested that Jimmy could be both the old colored man and the sheriff, since they wouldn't be on the stage at the same time. Mrs. Meredith shook her head—it would be impossible to change costumes quickly enough—and besides Jimmy didn't like the notion. Then Peg, who is a tom-boy anyway, suggested that she dress up as a sheriff.

“I’ll talk way down in my boots like this,” she said, making her voice sound like a bass drum, “and if I’m dressed up as a man, no one will know the difference.”

We all laughed at that, and her mother said, “No, darling, I think we’ll have to ask your brother, Tom, to take the part.”

“Oh, do you think he would?” I asked.

Tom was Peg’s big fourteen-year-old brother and usually he wouldn’t pay much attention to us younger children. I knew he would make a wonderful sheriff with that deep, gruff voice of his. Once in a while, he would talk way up high, too; but his mother said that was because his voice, which was changing, hadn’t changed quite all the way. It always embarrassed Tom just dreadfully when this happened; but it didn’t happen very much any more and every day his voice seemed to be getting gruffer. I never would have had the courage to ask him to be in a play with three ten-year-old children—a play which *I* had written at that. But wasn’t I tickled to hear his mother say she knew he would be glad to do it!

“Well, if Tom’s going to be in it, I am, too,” said Peg decidedly.

“There isn’t another part for a girl, dear,” Mrs. Meredith reminded her.

“Can’t you squeeze me in some place, Patsy?” Peg insisted. “I think you might.”

At first I didn’t see how I could manage it, and I was awfully embarrassed because I liked Peg and, besides, her mother was being so nice to us. Then Patty suggested that we let her be old Martha, Great-grandmother’s trusted housekeeper, who was more of a friend than a servant. After thinking it over, I realized that this would make it much simpler for me in getting the play started. I had intended to have Great-grandmother come out on the stage alone and talk out loud to herself in order to let the audience know what it was all about. But Peg’s mother said that was a very old-fashioned way of doing and that it would be much better to have her carry on a conversation with her housekeeper instead.

“What are you going to call it?” asked Peg. And there was something else to decide. Patty suggested *In Search of Freedom*, and I thought of *The Escape*, and we didn’t know which to choose.

“Why not *Leaves from an Old Diary*?” asked Mrs. Meredith. “It’s a title that would interest the peo-

ple of Fayetteville, and we could explain on the program that the playlet is founded on an incident in the life of your great-grandmother.”

“Oh, we’d love that,” Patty and I cried, almost in one breath.

It seemed that everybody was anxious to help us with that play. John went right up to the attic with us when we reached Belden Place and looked over the pieces of furniture we wanted to use. He could take two or three of the old horsehair chairs over to the community house in the wagon he used for delivering flowers; he could haul the marble top table over, too, if we wanted it, and he would see that everything was brought safely back again.

Aunt May had several tan, paneled screens stacked up in one corner of the attic, and John set them up side by side to show us how much they could be made to look like the walls of a room. He even figured out a way we could have a secret door leading to the mystery room. Each screen rested on little legs about three inches high, two to each panel of each screen. By sawing off the legs of just one end panel, it could be made to swing outward on its hinges when the time came for Jake and Mandy,

to hide. After the play, he could glue the legs back in place, and no one would know the difference.

The housekeeper was lovely about the costumes, too. It would be an easy matter to fix up something for Jimmy and me, so we decided to attend to Patty's dress first. All of Great-grandmother's clothes were too big for her, when she tried them on; and it was Mrs. Fisher's suggestion that she make a dress out of dark cambric like the one in the miniature and pay for it out of the housekeeping fund. Patty could still use the hoops and the lace fichu we had found in the little old horsehair trunk.

"May I have the Peter Pan House all to myself to-morrow morning?" I asked that evening after I had gone about the library, gathering up all the pencils I could find.

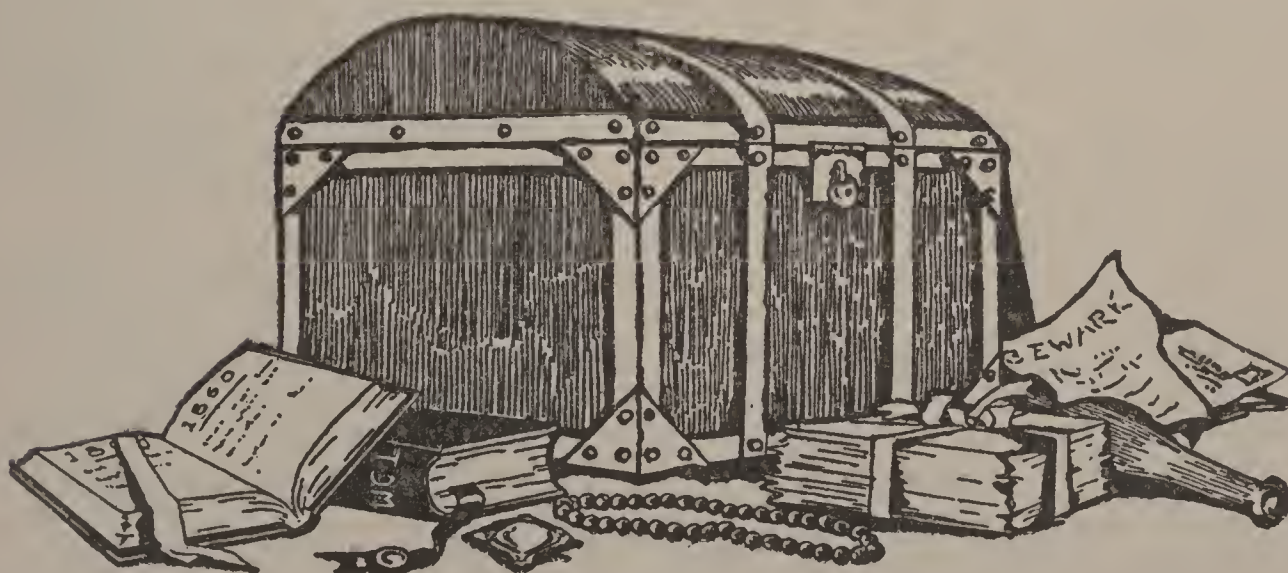
"Why?" said Patty in surprise.

"I want to work out your fascinating idea without anyone to bother me. I promised Mrs. Meredith to go down to-morrow afternoon and let her see what I have written on the play."

The next morning I scribbled away, all alone in our little treetop house, with only the birds to watch me. The river shone blue beyond the orchard, and I thought of the time when it was a perilous stream

to cross for the black folks, and when one shore meant slavery for them and the other freedom.

I scribbled away, and as I wrote I forgot that I, too, was not living in that far-away day when Great-grandmother hid the slaves.



## CHAPTER XIII

### PATSY SPAULDING, PLAYWRIGHT

“**D**E GOOD Lawd bress you!” I mumbled to myself. “Ye’ll hab yer rewa’d in heab’n, Missus Belden. De good Lawd bress you—”

“For goodness sake, Patsy Spaulding, give us a rest,” said Patty, stopping up her ears.

“But what if I forget my lines?” I wailed, rubbing some more brown grease paint on the left side of my nose, where the white skin was beginning to show through in spite of the generous application Mrs. Fisher had given me.

“After writing the play yourself, I shouldn’t think you’d forget the one line you have to say,” Patty answered, swishing her black cambric skirts as she walked over to the other mirror in the dressing room to fasten Great-grandmother Belden’s white lace fichu with my gold bar pin. “What if you had to remember all *my* part?”

Of course, there was no answer to that, so I was careful to mumble under my breath as I pulled on the black woolly wig Mrs. Meredith had rented in Arlington and tied a red bandanna handkerchief around my head to make a turban like the ones



colored people used to wear. My cousin had been exaggerating when she said I only had one speech to give—I had three. That may not have been very much, compared with all the lines she had learned, but I couldn't help feeling a little nervous, now that we were in the dressing room getting ready and the actual performance was less than a half hour away. I knew those three speeches of mine backward, but still there was the chance that I *might* forget. If I did, with all those people looking on, I was sure I would simply die of shame. Jimmy had told me he felt the same way; but there was more excuse for him, because he had a bigger part.

Peg, wearing a long gray cambric dress and a white cap and apron, opened the door. She laughed when she saw me.

“By jiggers,” she said, “I bet you look more like Mandy than she did herself.”

I pulled an old brown shawl closer over my ragged dress, and looked in the mirror. A little ragged colored woman looked back at me, and drew her shawl closer, too. I picked up my big doll wrapped in a blanket and hugged it to me, and she hugged her grand-baby. It bothered me to see her looking so frightened. Then I realized that it didn't matter—

Mandy was supposed to be scared of the sheriff anyway.

“This grease paint makes my face tickle, but I’m glad I look all right.” I glanced at my cousin, sitting up very straight in a stiff chair. She couldn’t sit any other way with those hoops she was wearing. “Wouldn’t it be nice to look all right and beautiful at the same time, as Patty does?”

“I bet you feel more comfortable than I do,” Patty answered, squirming as I am sure Great-grandmother Belden *never* squirmed. “Goodness, I’m glad hoops went out of style.”

Patty was lovely in the dark dress and white lace fichu; and when Peg’s mother came in and coiled her auburn hair in a loose, low knot, allowing the ends to hang in short, thick curls on her white neck, she looked exactly like the Great-grandmother Belden we had seen in the miniature.

“Oh, Patty,” I said, “I wish Aunt May and Mother could see you now!”

An Arlington violinist was finishing a solo before the curtain, and the next number would be ours. We tiptoed out for a last look at the stage, to see that everything was ready. It was surprising how much like a real room it looked with only those

screens for a background. We had found a bound volume of *Godey's Lady's Book*—that's a magazine people used to read—in the attic, and torn some of the old-fashioned prints out of it and hung them on the screens, just as though they were walls; and Patty had brought out a sampler Great-grandmother had worked when she was a little girl. This we hung in the center, in the most prominent place of all. The horsehair chairs and the marble top table were the only furniture, but you can't imagine how cozy and homelike it all was.

The boys followed us out onto the stage, behind the drawn curtains. Tom was very fierce and business-like in the chaps and broad-brimmed hat of a sheriff of the fifties, and Jimmy was looking very scared as old black Jake. Tom handed me one of the printed programs—the first one I had seen—and when I came to the part that told about *us*, this was what I read:

### LEAVES FROM AN OLD DIARY

Founded on an actual incident in the life of Mrs. Patricia Belden, as related in an account entered in her diary, January 20, 1858.

## DRAMATIZED BY PATSY SPAULDING

## Cast

Mrs. Belden .....	Patty Morrison
Martha, her housekeeper.....	Peg Meredith
Jake, a runaway slave.....	Jimmy Fisher
Mandy, his wife.....	Patsy Spaulding
The Sheriff .....	Tom Meredith

With a little thrill I folded up that program and slipped it into the neck of my dress. Then I peeped out through the curtains at that large audience applauding the violinist—the audience that was to see *Leaves from an Old Diary*. And then I knew why it was I had felt worried and anxious and nervous. It hadn't been because I had a few lines to say and was afraid I would forget them. No—it was because it was my play those people out in front were waiting to see, and I wanted them to like it.

Martha was alone on the stage when the curtains parted, dusting and setting the room to rights. The hush in the audience gave place to a soft murmur of admiration when Great-grandmother Belden entered, looking very quaint and lovely in the velvet and Maltese lace mantilla and the little white velvet bonnet tied beneath the chin with ribbons.

There was a soft laugh when Patty untied the bonnet and handed that and her wrap to the housekeeper, but it was hushed when she began to speak. It wasn't really a laugh anyway—it sounded as though the audience had just smiled out loud.

“My husband has gone, Martha,” said Great-grandmother with a sigh. “I wish that I might have gone to Washington with him, but I am needed here.”

“You are, indeed, Mrs. Belden, with some of those poor runaway black folks crossing the river nearly every week.”

Great-grandmother wrung her hands in distress. (It really was wonderful the way Patty did it.) “Oh, I pray that none of them will come, while Mr. Belden is away,” she said. “My heart is sad for them, yet it is a grave responsibility we take, Martha, when we hide them and help them to escape.”

She took up her knitting then, and the two of them talked about the Fugitive Slave Law which provided that when runaway slaves were found, even in the northern states, they must be returned to their masters. But as a human being, Great-grandmother declared, she would always be ready to help another human being, if her help were

needed. After that she began to sing in a sweet, clear voice, "Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord," and Martha began dusting the same piece of furniture for the fifth time. (We had tried to make Peg move about the stage a little bit more, when we were rehearsing, but when I peeped out from behind a screen, I saw that she had forgotten all about it.)

Suddenly, the song was interrupted by the sound of a loud knocking on the big front door. (Jimmy made it by pounding on the wall with my little toy iron.) Great-grandmother seemed startled and told Martha to find out who was there. When Peg came out to us, we began murmuring, loudly enough for the audience to hear our voices but too softly for anyone to know what we were saying. Martha rushed back onto the stage, very excited, and reported that two runaway slaves, with their little baby, sought admittance. They were shivering with cold and very hungry, and a slave-catcher was pursuing them. Unless Great-grandmother took them in, he would find them surely and they would be forced to return with him. Great-grandmother wrung her hands again—(I just know Patty is going to be a great actress when she grows up.)—and

declared that no matter what the penalty might be for aiding us she would not turn us from her door. Then very proudly she instructed Martha to bid us enter. (She stamped her foot when she said it, and it was wonderful.)

When we followed Peg back onto the stage, I forgot everything but one fact—that I was a runaway slave, scared and cold and hungry and that I was throwing myself on the mercy of a kind and beautiful woman. Jimmy must have felt the same way about it, because when he began pleading for protection, his voice shook and it wasn't with stage fright either. He had never done half so well in rehearsals as he was doing then.

“Massa's sent de slave-catcher arter us,” said Jimmy, “an' ef yo' don' help us, Missus, we'll hab ter be gwine wid him dis night.”

“Why did you run away, poor man?” asked Great-grandmother.

At that I began to sob—(I may not have had many lines to say, but I had a hard part anyway. It isn't easy to cry—that is, when you're just making believe you're doing it.)—and Jimmy explained that we had been sold to a new master who was unkind to us.

“Dey done tole us dat dis Mistah Belden is a good man and he’d help us git to a place whar dere be no slaves,” I said.

Great-grandmother seemed greatly troubled as she explained that this was true. If her husband were only there he would have driven us that night to a house farther north that was also called a station in the Underground Railroad. On the following night the man who lived there would have helped us to escape to a third house, and in time we would have reached Canada where we would be free.

But the difficulty was—Mr. Belden was away, and there was no man she could call upon who would be in sympathy with us. Just as Great-grandmother told us that, there was another loud knocking at the door. Martha hurried out and returned with the word that the local sheriff demanded entrance. His help had been sought by a slave-catcher, and Mandy and Jake had been traced to this house. He demanded that Mrs. Belden give us up at once.

Martha began to wring her hands, too, (Peg didn’t do it nearly so well as my cousin.) and told us that we must go back and be slaves again. The local sheriff did not believe in helping the runaway



black people and, when he found them, he always returned them to their owners.

Great-grandmother drew herself up to her full height. "There are no slaves in my house. There are only my guests, who from this day on, God willing, shall be free. Quick, Martha! We shall hide them in the secret room. Then you may bid the sheriff enter," she finished with a note of triumph in her voice.

Martha went over to one of the screens and began fumbling as though searching for a hidden spring. Then slowly one of the panels swung inward— (Mrs. Meredith was standing back of it and pulling it open.)— and Jimmy and I disappeared inside.

There was quite an argument between Mrs. Belden and the sheriff. He reminded her that severe penalties were inflicted on people who helped runaway slaves to escape and that it was his duty to find us. Great-grandmother replied very calmly that he was welcome to search the house, and he did. Once, when he was off the stage, hunting for us in another room supposedly, she came over and opened the secret door.

"Keep very quiet, my good people," she said softly, "and you will be safe."

The sheriff was very angry when he could not find us. He came back and stood right in front of the secret door, and the audience got awfully excited—as Jane and Barbara and Carolyn told us afterwards—because it seemed that any instant he might discover us.

Tom had been playing his part wonderfully. His voice had been gruff and heavy up till then, and he said, “You have a place you hide them, and some day I’m going to find it. Take care, Mrs. Belden, take care!” And what do you think happened when he said, “Take care!” in that dramatic way? His voice changed. Yes, it squeaked; and of course the audience couldn’t keep from laughing.

Great-grandmother let us out of the secret room after the sheriff had gone, and told Martha to prepare us a hot supper, as we were going on a journey. Her husband was away, and there was no man she could trust, but when darkness fell, she herself would drive us on to the next station in the Underground Railroad. Jake promised that he would return some day to repay her for her kindness—(Jimmy tried to make the tears run down his cheeks, but he couldn’t manage it.)—and I knelt and kissed the hem of her dress.

“De good Lawd bress you. Yo’ll hab yo’ rewa’d in heab’n, Missus Belden,” I said; and the curtain fell amidst a storm of applause, as the paper said next day.

The audience clapped and clapped, and we all went back on the stage and bowed. Mrs. Meredith told Patty to go out alone and curtsy, and she insisted that I should, too, since I was the playwright. I didn’t like to in my Mandy costume, but there was nothing else to do, because by the time I would have changed my dress and taken off my make-up, the people might have stopped applauding. I didn’t really mind, though, when I went out to bow—the audience was so nice and clapped so loud.

“Now, children, hurry and get dressed for the reception,” said Mrs. Meredith, for our playlet had been the last number on the program.

The people went into the big lounge after that; and the members of the Jolly Half Dozen Club, who hadn’t been in the play, served refreshments. Jane stood behind the punch bowl and was so excited when she poured me a glass that she almost spilled it. “You were simply wonderful,” she said. Barbara and Carolyn both swooped down on us with trays of cookies, jabbering their congratulations and for-

getting that there were others waiting to be served.

*Everybody* was lovely to us and declared they had enjoyed the play. And a dear old lady came up to Patty and me and said, "I am Mrs. Hanna, and I knew your great-grandmother when I was a little girl."

I believe that thrilled us more than anything that had happened all evening, and the three of us slipped off to a quiet corner and talked. Mrs. Hanna explained that she hadn't lived in Fayetteville since she was a child and that she was there visiting her niece, Mrs. Craig, whom we both knew.

"I certainly didn't expect to see a play about Mrs. Belden, when I came to-night," she said. "I believe your great-grandmother was the kindest and most beautiful woman I have ever known. I used to worship her from afar, and one time when she was especially sweet to me, I walked about on air for days."

"Oh, tell us about it, please," said Patty eagerly.

"Well, my mother had sent me on an errand up to Belden Place," said Mrs. Hanna. "Your great-grandmother was very distressed because her jewels had recently been stolen; but that didn't keep her from inviting me in and serving me with tea quite



*"Leaves from an Old Diary"—Dramatized by  
Patsy Spaulding.*



as though I were grown up. Of course, we just pretended I drank tea—it was really milk—and afterwards she took me into the garden and picked me a big bouquet.”

The old lady was silent then, as though lost in her thoughts of the far-away tea party, when Great-grandmother had treated a little girl as though she were grown-up. We knew what a nice feeling that gives one—we always appreciate it when folks treat us that way.

“I’ve been wondering,” said Mrs. Hanna, “if the Jake in the play was the old slave who found Mrs. Belden’s jewels for her.”

Patty and I gasped. “Why, did Jake find the jewels?” I asked.

“Some old colored man did, didn’t he?” she said. “A runaway slave your great-grandmother had once befriended.”

“We never heard anything about it till this minute,” said Patty, “and, Mrs. Hanna, we’re hunting for those jewels now.”

“Won’t you tell us everything you know about it?” I asked.

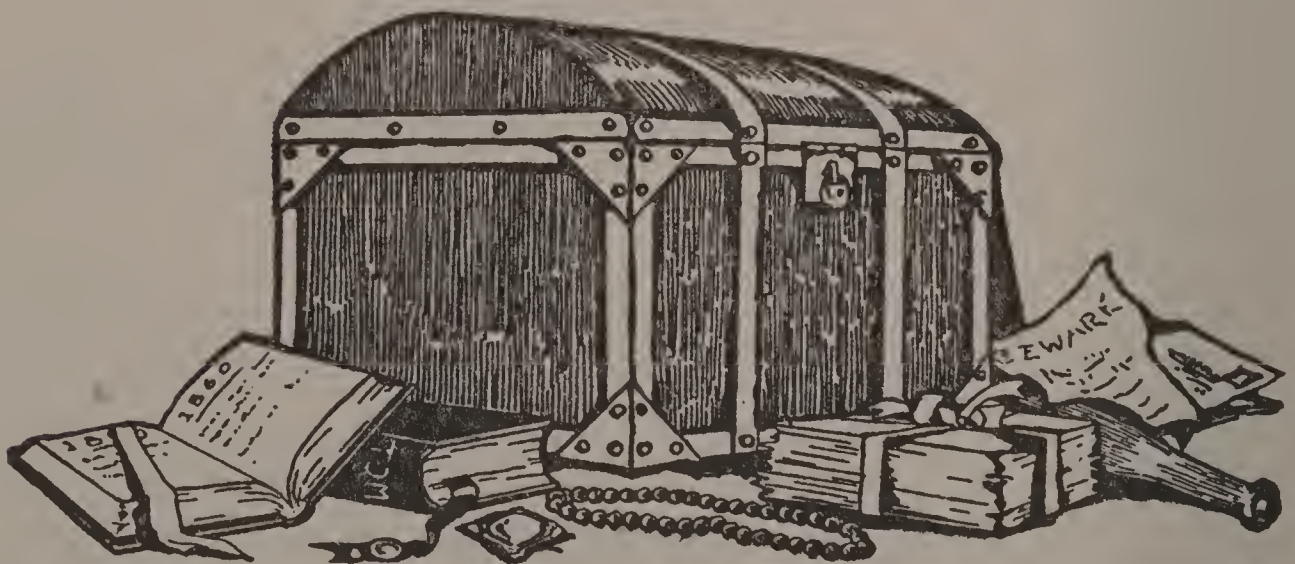
“But, my dears,” said Mrs. Hanna, evidently surprised by our sudden interest, “I don’t know *any-*

thing. I only remember vaguely hearing that some old colored man had found them.”

Wasn't that exasperating? Patty and Jimmy and I could think of nothing else on our way home—the playlet and the reception were very far away and didn't seem to matter any more. It was plain that the old diary had still other secrets for us.

“We must read it clear through,” I said, “and not let anything interfere again.”

“Yes,” answered Patty, “we're going to get back to work on that mystery the first thing to-morrow.”





## CHAPTER XIV

### THE MISSING PAGES

**WE** LOVED Mrs. Fisher—Patty and I both did —and it wasn't because she didn't make us mind her, either. In the end we always found ourselves doing the things she told us to, but she would be so nice about telling us her reasons that we never felt the least bit huffy. Why, we minded her as a matter of course, just as we would have minded our mothers.

The morning after the play, I announced to Patty and Jimmy that I thought we should call a conference.

“Yes, we made a very en—en—enlightening discovery last night,” said Patty, stumbling over the “enlightening” a little. I don't believe she had ever used the word before, although she wouldn't have admitted it for anything. I rather suspect that Patty looks up one word in the dictionary every morning, for there isn't a day passes that she doesn't spring a new one on us. In fact, only about a half hour before I had found her in the library before the dictionary stand and she had blushed like anything.

“Shall we meet in the mystery room or in the Peter Pan House?” asked Jimmy.

I hesitated. I really thought the treetop house would be more fun, but it didn't seem quite the proper place to discuss such important matters. “I think the mystery room would be more business-like,” I answered.

We were washing and drying the breakfast dishes, and Mrs. Fisher was in the pantry cleaning the shelves. She stopped her work for a moment and stood in the doorway.

“I don't like to disappoint you,” she said, “but couldn't you wait until afternoon to hold your conference?” She seemed to smile a little over the last word, but I couldn't be sure.

“Why?” asked Patty.

“You've been staying in the house so closely for the last few days, with your mystery and your rehearsing, that I believe you'd better play outdoors this morning.”

“Couldn't we hold the conference in the Peter Pan House?” I asked.

The housekeeper shook her head. “No, a good, brisk game of baseball would be even better. After-

wards, if you like, you can have your lunch as a picnic.”

Wasn't that just like Mrs. Fisher? She had promised our mothers she would see that we had plenty of outdoor exercise, and she was going to keep her word. But whenever she told us to do a thing we didn't want to do, she always had a little surprise tucked up her sleeve to make it pleasanter for us—that picnic, for instance.

John said he thought we were awfully funny youngsters, not to want to play out in the orchard that most boys and girls would give their heads for. He laughed when we tried to explain that we *did* want to but that we also wanted to stay indoors and have a conference. There are times when I almost wish I were twins. Then one of me could be doing one thing and the other me could be doing something else equally interesting—all at the same time. Of course, that's silly, because if I were twins, I'd only be one of them and the other one would be my sister.

“You play for about two hours,” said John, “and then come out to the greenhouse. I might have a surprise for you, too.”

“As nice a surprise as the Peter Pan House?” I asked.

He grinned. "Well, that will be for you to decide."

Jimmy went after his baseball bat with the initials J. F. carved into the handle—the very same bat that had aroused our curiosity only a little over a week before; and he said he was going to show us how to play *real* baseball. Of course, there wasn't anything very real about a game with only three people in it; but each of us took turns pitching, batting, and catching, and in that way we got the exercise we needed, and had lots of fun besides.

My cousin and I wanted to make up a team among the girls; but we couldn't do that very well until we knew a little more about the game ourselves, and I believe Jimmy was the best person we could have found to teach us. He had played on the Fifth Grade team of his school in Arlington, and from a few of the things his mother had told us, we knew that he had practically won several victories for his room. Of course, Jimmy in his own modest way had said, "Aw, shucks, I didn't do anything much," but the first time we saw him bat, we knew his mother was right. Why, he could "knock a grounder" any time, but he said that was because we girls were such easy pitchers.

“All you need is a lot of practice,” he told us two hours later when we put up the ball and bat and the three of us went to see the surprise John had promised us.

We found the gardener back of the greenhouse, doing nothing more romantic than digging a hole. When he saw us, he took a piece of white chalk from his pocket, marked a circle on the ground and handed his spade to Jimmy.

“Suppose you do your own digging,” he said. “Don’t get outside the chalk lines and don’t make your hole more than a foot deep.”

He beckoned to Patty and me and, completely mystified, we followed him. We knew from experience that it wouldn’t do any good to ask what he was up to. The old smoke house had recently been torn down, since it was in no condition to be used and Aunt May didn’t need it anyway; and John led us to the pile of bricks which had not yet been hauled away. Gathering up a pile of them in his arms, he told us to take some, too, and in silence the three of us walked back to Jimmy.

“Now,” said John, grinning all over with pleasure at the thought of the surprise he was giving us,

“we’re going to build a furnace so you can cook your lunch outdoors.”

“Whoop-ee!” Patty shouted, and “Hurrah for Uncle John!” yelled Jimmy. As for me, I just stood there without saying a word, I was so tickled. I was thinking, too, that I wished Daddy, instead of being a lawyer, made his living by running a greenhouse and had to hire someone to take care of it. It must be wonderful to have a person always thinking up surprises for you, but when finally I got my voice back and said so, Patty reminded me that all gardeners are not like John.

We built a little wall of bricks around the hole Jimmy had finished digging, laying them very carefully. After we had broken up some kindling and carried several chunks from the woodpile, John built us a fire down in the hole and laid a grate from an old gas stove on top of the bricks. Then everything was ready for us to cook our dinner.

John looked after the fire for us while we three children ran into the house to wash our hands and gather up supplies. Mrs. Fisher already had put plates and knives and forks and a skillet into a basket for us; and by the time Patty had taken some eggs and bacon and tomatoes from the refrigerator

and I had found some cookies and rolls in the bread box, we had quite a load.

“I guess we’ll just have to take turns cooking,” my cousin suggested when it was found that each one of us wanted a chance to fry some bacon and eggs over that clever iron grating. She tried it first, and while we waited, I sliced some tomatoes on each plate and Jimmy opened all the rolls and buttered them. The fire was getting hotter every minute, and we all burned our bacon a little and the eggs we fried looked awfully brown. But then nothing like that ever matters on a picnic anyway.

“Gee, but I like bacon and egg sandwiches,” said Jimmy, between bites.

“These tomatoes taste good, too,” said my cousin. “I’m glad we thought to bring them.”

“Everything would be perfect,” I added, “if we only had a nice cold drink. This bacon makes me thirsty.”

And as if in answer to my wish, Mrs. Fisher appeared around the corner of the greenhouse, carrying a tray of tall, cool glasses of orangeade.

Much as we had enjoyed it, I don’t believe we had ever worked so hard for a meal before—at least, Patty and I hadn’t. Our work had made us tired

and our meal had made us feel contented, so perhaps it was no wonder that we just kept on sitting there after we had finished eating.

Patty yawned. "I don't believe I ever want to move again."

"What do you girls say to having our conference right here?" Jimmy suggested. "Who cares if it isn't business-like?"

"All right," I answered, for I seemed to have more pep left than they did. "I'll run upstairs and wash my hands and get the diary. We'll have to have that, you know."

We believed that if there was anything to the story about an old slave finding the jewels that we would probably read something about it in the diary. It really seemed that Mrs. Hanna had been thinking about some other jewels, because the ones Great-grandmother had lost had never *been* recovered.

"At least, it's a clue worth following up," said Patty. "And if there *is* anything to it, I have a hunch that Jake was the one who found them."

It was my turn to read, and anyway I had to, because I was the only one of the three who had clean hands. The whole diary made fascinating reading, but just at that moment we were only interested in



finding out something about the missing jewels. They hadn't disappeared until after the war had been over a year or two, so I turned the pages hastily to the entries for 1867. Every page seemed to hold a story, but I kept right on until I came to the entry we were hunting.

"They're gone," I read, "the topaz and diamond brooch my husband gave me on my wedding day, my cameo, my belt buckle, the string of pearls my mother brought from England, the amethyst earrings, my bracelet and my rings, even my slipper buckles.

"The entire household, including the servants, spent Friday in Arlington attending the fair; and when we returned about six o'clock, we found the remains of a feast which some uninvited guests had prepared for themselves in the kitchen. There were no other signs that robbers had been here, and at first we believed that only harmless tramps had visited us.

"Later, when I found my empty jewel case, we notified the sheriff of our loss. He has scoured the county for us, and the sheriffs of the adjoining counties have joined in the search. They have met with no success whatever, and there seems to be nothing

else that we can do. I am almost in despair, and spent the entire morning mending several foolish little rents in the sofa, just to get my mind on something else. We have offered one hundred dollars as a reward for the recovery of the jewels, but I doubt if any good will come of it."

"Mr. Whitney was right!" I cried. "Just think, Jimmy! A one hundred dollar reward, and you shall have every cent of it to go to art school."

I still had my nose buried in the diary. "Here's something else," I said, "written about a week later."

And once more the three of us bent our heads over the yellowed leaves of the old book.

"A very strange thing happened to-day," Great-grandmother had written, "and I believe it throws much light on the loss of the jewels. A little boy came to our door this morning, having walked all the way from Blufton, ten miles down the river. The child wasn't very clear in his explanations, but it seems that a boat had been docked for a few minutes near his father's farm and an old Negro named Jake had come on land to give him a message he was very anxious to have delivered to me.

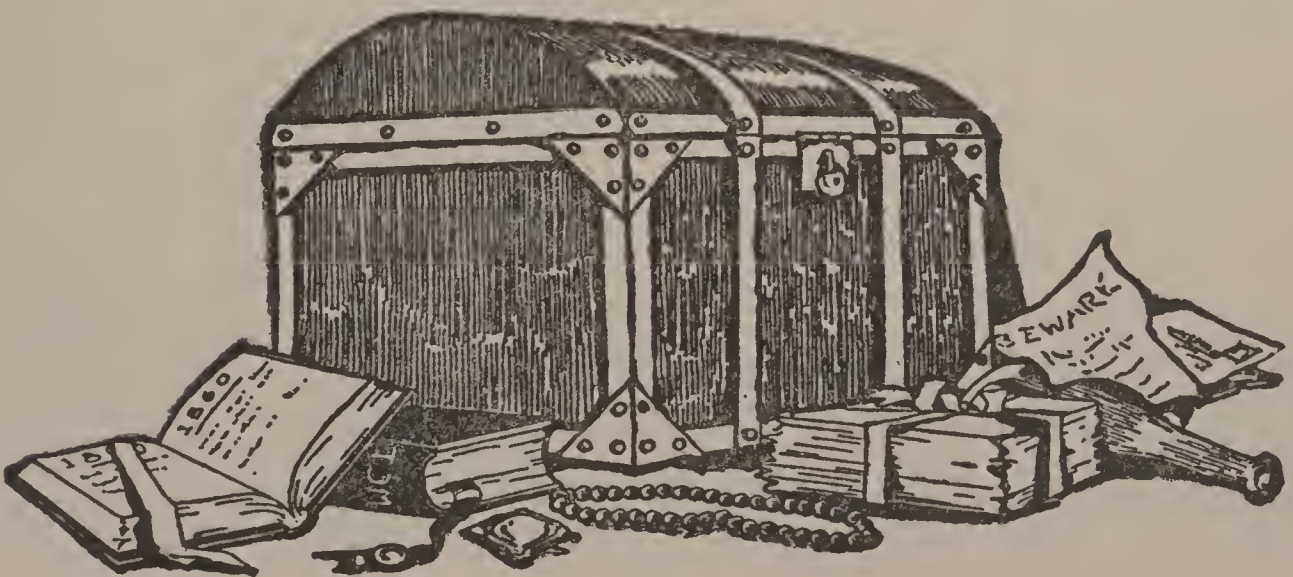
"Jake, probably the old runaway slave we befriended several years ago, is working on an Ohio

River boat, the name of which the boy was unable to remember; and when it stopped at Fayetteville, the old man received permission to come up and thank us for what we had once done for him. That was last Friday, the day we were in Arlington, and of course he found none of us at home. But he did find—”

“Why, what’s the matter?” Jimmy said. “Something’s gone!”

“I—I don’t understand,” I stammered.

But the minute I said it, I knew that I did understand. Several pages had been cut from the diary of Great-grandmother Belden, and with them was gone the secret of the missing jewels.



## CHAPTER XV

### A PARTY AND AN APPOINTMENT

“WE SIMPLY must find those missing pages,”

I said. “Ask your Uncle John for his flash light, Jimmy, and we’ll go up to the mystery room and examine that dark little cubby-hole again.”

When we explained to Mrs. Fisher that we were about to make an important discovery, she offered to wash our picnic dishes, and we promised to do the dinner dishes that night instead. It was a good thing we had on our old clothes, for after we had crawled into the cubby-hole we looked so dusty and cobwebby that our own mothers might have had to look twice before knowing who we were. After that we searched the room and then the attic, but try as we would, we could not find the missing pages to the diary. At last our quest brought us back to the mystery room and the little sandalwood box.

“Perhaps we’ll find those pages in among these letters,” Patty suggested. “Let’s look anyway.”

That was how we happened to come across Governor Randolph’s letter again. Of course, he hadn’t been governor when he wrote it, but just a young man building up a law practice in Arlington. The

letter was dated June 5, 1880, about fifteen years after the disappearance of the jewels, and was written from New Orleans.

“This proves it,” cried Patty, looking up from the yellowed sheets. “The jewels are in the house some place.” And she read the note aloud to us.

“My dear Mrs. Belden, I am the proud bearer of a message to you from an old runaway slave you once befriended. A few days ago I was on a Mississippi steamboat on my way to the gulf, when an old negro, Jake, by name, sought me out, having heard that I came from Arlington. He was too old and weak to be of much use on the boat any longer; but they kept him on for old times’ sake, I was told, for he had served them faithfully for sixteen years. Old Jake asked at once if I knew the Beldens of Fayetteville, and when I told him that, indeed, our families had been friends for many years, his black face lighted up with joy.

“His request was that I thank you for your kindness to him and his family during the troublesome days of the Underground. He had once called to thank you, about two years after the close of the war, he said. His boat was docked at Fayetteville for less than an hour, but he had received permission

to call at Belden Place for a few minutes. On arriving there, he found you away, robbers in the house, and the family jewels piled in a heap on Mr. Belden's desk, while the thieves helped themselves to a feast in the kitchen.

"There was no time to turn in an alarm; his boat was leaving in a few minutes; and he realized that he would be serving you very poorly if his presence were discovered there. The fact that he was able to hide the jewels and send you a message afterwards has given the old fellow joy and satisfaction ever since. He felt that, in saving them, he had partially repaid you."

Patty laid the quaint, old-fashioned letter down, unfinished. "Now we need those missing pages more than ever," she said.

"Let's ask Mr. Whitney what to do," I suggested.

Patty and Jimmy thought this the very thing, and we started at once for the grocery store.

On the front porch we met the postman who handed my cousin and me both a letter from our mothers. Out of Patty's envelope flew a crisp new five dollar bill, and out of my envelope flew a five dollar bill just like it. We had been so interested in our treasure hunt that we had completely for-

gotten that this was my eleventh birthday and that the next day would be Patty's—and that was an almost unheard of thing for either of us to do.

Our letters said just about the same thing—that our mothers were sorry they couldn't be with us and that we were to spend our five dollar bills for anything we pleased. Under ordinary circumstances, this would have been enough to send prickly thrills all up and down our backbones, but we were so much taken up with our mystery just then, that we took the news quite calmly. We had written our mothers about *Leaves from an Old Diary*, and they seemed very pleased. In fact, most of my letter was about that, and so was my cousin's.

I saw that Jimmy was watching us anxiously. “Do—do—your mothers say anything about—about Jean and me?”

Patty looked up with a little frown. “Mine does,” she answered, “and I don't understand it, either. She says, ‘Who is this Jimmy who is helping with the play?’ ”

“Don't you suppose she got our first letter, telling her all about it?” I asked.

“It doesn't look like it,” said Patty. “She doesn't

mention that letter, and I believe she thinks Jimmy is some boy visiting in Fayetteville.”

“Oh, dear!” I said. “Now we’ll have to write and explain all over again.”

I didn’t mean to sound impatient, but I guess I did, because when I looked at Jimmy, he was digging the toe of his shoe into the ground and looking altogether miserable.

“Cheer up!” Patty told him. “I—I believe they’ll let you stay.” She was trying hard to keep the doubt out of her voice, but she didn’t succeed very well and Jimmy knew it.

Of course, Mr. Whitney teased us about being detectives, just as we had expected that he would. But after a while he sobered down and said, “Well, now, I reckon you youngsters are on the trail of something important.”

“Of course, we are,” said Patty. “But we don’t know what to do next.”

“We came to you for advice,” said Jimmy timidly.

“Ho, ho!” Mr. Whitney laughed. “I don’t sell advice, young sir. I sell cheese and crackers and—”

“Then you can *give* us the advice,” Patty cut in quickly.

Mr. Whitney laughed again. “If I were doing



it," he said, "I'd go over to Arlington and see Charles B. Randolph, the attorney. Your mothers know him, and so does Patsy's father."

"Oh, was he any kin to the governor?" Jimmy asked.

"His son and about the only person living that I know of who can give you any help."

That was how it happened that we decided to spend our five dollar bills on a trip to Arlington. We were surprised to learn that, though Jimmy had lived in the city all his life, he had never been to Humboldt Amusement Park — why, he had never been on a merry-go-round even, or on a ferris wheel or in the House of Mirrors.

"That shall be our birthday party," I said. "If your mother will take us over to Arlington tomorrow, we can see Mr. Randolph in the morning, have lunch at the hotel Mother always goes to, and spend all afternoon at Humboldt Park."

When I saw how Jimmy's face lighted up with pleasure, I was glad I had made the suggestion, if for no other reason than that. "Gee!" he said. "Gee!"

Mrs. Fisher consented to our plans, and John said that he could manage with Jean for the day. So at

eight o'clock the next morning, the four of us were down at the interurban station, ready for the hour's ride into the city. We called at Mr. Randolph's office the first thing, but here we had a disappointment.

"Mr. Randolph is leaving town this evening and will not be in his office at all to-day," the pretty secretary told us. "Mr. Thorndyke, his partner, will be glad to see you."

"No," Patty told her, "it isn't business exactly we want to see him about."

"How long will he be gone?" I asked.

"Six weeks."

I must have looked very distressed about it, for she said, "Are you friends of his?"

"Our mothers are," Patty answered. And she smiled at the secretary, as only Patty can smile, and gave her our names.

The pretty young lady smiled back, took the telephone receiver off the hook and called a number. Presently we heard her talking to Mr. Randolph's residence.

"He is out now," she informed us, turning from the phone, "but is expected back in about an hour. If you care to stop in again, perhaps I can arrange

an appointment for you at his home this afternoon.”

That was the reason we had our birthday party at Humboldt Park in the morning instead of after lunch. Never before had we found the ferris wheel and the merry-go-round so much fun as we did that day, and that was because we enjoyed watching Jimmy enjoy them. A new feature had been added to the park since Patty and I had visited it nearly a year before—a roller coaster—and when we begged to go on it, Mrs. Fisher hesitated.

“I know it’s perfectly safe,” she said, her eyes following one of the little cars that was shooting up and then down and then up again at such an amazing rate of speed. “But it certainly doesn’t look like a fit place for three ten-year-olds to be alone.”

“You forget,” said Patty, dimpling mischievously, “that two of us are eleven years old now.”

“All right,” Jimmy’s mother laughed. “You may go, but I’m going with you.”

Mrs. Fisher was certainly a good sport. She didn’t enjoy that ride nearly so much as we did—in fact, we rather suspected she didn’t enjoy it at all. Every time the car swooped down and we had that funny, sinky feeling in our stomachs that made us want to giggle, she looked as though she wished to

scream. But she didn't say a word about it—she just told us that she'd wait outside for us while we went into the House of Mirrors.

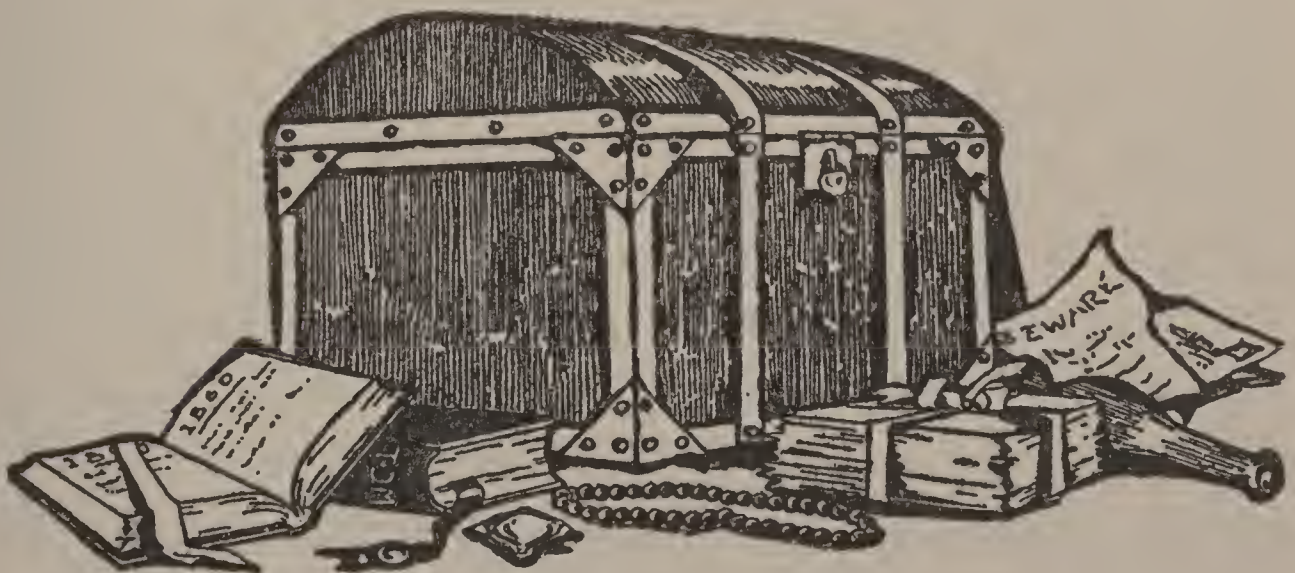
After we had laughed at seeing Jimmy as a fat boy, and Patty as a tall, lean giant, and me as a funny roly-poly little dwarf, it was time for lunch, and we took a street car down town to the hotel. Since it was a birthday party, Patty said we should order anything we wanted—even to half-a-dozen different kinds of dessert, if we wished to. But Mrs. Fisher put a stop to that, so we were satisfied with chocolate ice cream and cake.

We were very serious again when we called at Mr. Randolph's office a second time. What if he couldn't give us any time that afternoon and we couldn't see him for another six weeks? I didn't see how we could stand it if we had to wait that long to solve the mystery. Besides, our mothers would be back before then, and we wouldn't have any surprise for them.

But when we walked up to the desk of the pretty secretary, she had good news for us. "Mr. Randolph will be glad to see you for a few minutes at his home, if you care to go out so far. Will three o'clock be convenient?"

It wasn't only convenient, it was heavenly; but of course I didn't tell her that. She wrote the address on a sheet she tore from a little pad of paper; and I thanked her in a very dignified way and so did Patty. I'm sure she didn't suspect that we wanted to let out a regular Indian war whoop then and there.

Wouldn't she have been surprised if we had?



## CHAPTER XVI

### THE TOPAZ BROOCH

**WE** TOOK the street car out to Mr. Randolph's home on Parker Avenue, and all the way there we kept wondering if he were going to be the sort of person it is hard to talk to. It's queer about grown-ups; but sometimes the things that are awfully important they think are funny, and the things that are really funny they think are serious. I suppose we should have thought about it before, but now that we were to meet the ex-governor's son face to face, it was hard to know how we should go about asking the questions we had come to ask.

"If he laughs," Patty said, "I'll simply die of embarrassment."

But Mr. Randolph didn't laugh. He received us cordially in his study, and he listened with a great deal of interest when we told him our story. He smiled, of course, but it was the right kind of a smile. We realized at once that it wasn't going to be hard to tell him things, for we liked the way he looked at us out of the kind brown eyes behind the dignified spectacles. Why, I even mentioned the detective agency we had organized, and he didn't even

seem surprised that children our age should think of doing such a thing.

He only said, "You certainly have done some splendid detective work thus far."

"We thought maybe you could tell us something else the old colored man said about hiding the jewels—something that perhaps your father told you," I explained.

"I'm sorry," he answered, "but I can't do that. I do not remember ever hearing my father speak of the incident." He was thoughtful for a minute. "I'm not sure—but I believe that I *can* help you out on those missing pages. I happen to be in possession of my father's personal correspondence, and I seem to remember seeing several pages, obviously torn from a notebook of some sort. There's a vast amount of it," he continued, walking over to a filing cabinet on the other side of the room, "but my secretary went over it recently and got it into some order, so this shouldn't be hard to find."

He turned to the compartment labeled "B" and after a short search he pulled out a large envelope marked Belden.

"Here you are, I believe," said Mr. Randolph,

opening the envelope and handing us the missing pages to Great-grandmother Belden's diary.

Patty, Jimmy, and I—all three—gasped. "How do you suppose your father happened to have them?"

"Here's a letter from Mrs. Belden," he said. "Perhaps this will explain it."

And, leaning back in his large swivel chair, he read the letter aloud to us:

"My dear Mr. Randolph,

"You cannot know how grateful I am for your kind letter and the message of gratitude you bring me from old Jake. But I must confess that my gratitude is almost equalled by my curiosity, for the jewels the old negro took such delight in hiding for us never have been found. About a week after they disappeared a child brought a message from Jake, but his explanations were very unsatisfactory. I have recorded the details of our conversation with the boy and of the search that followed it, in my journal of that period. This makes the whole thing so much clearer than I can possibly make it, after so long a time, that I am cutting the pages from my diary and sending them to you for your perusal.

"I am writing to you in the hope that in the light of what you will read here, you may recall some hint



old Jake may have given of where he hid the jewels. It may be just some little thing that will clear up the mystery—something you did not consider important when you wrote me before, supposing, as you did, that the jewels had been recovered long ago. Or perhaps you can tell me the name of the boat, on which Jake is working, and we can trace him in that way.

“Some day, when you have time, will you please return these sheets to my diary, so that I can mend my little book again?”

“With best wishes to your good mother, believe me

Ever gratefully yours,

PATRICIA BELDEN.”

“Is Governor Randolph’s answer there?” I asked.

“No,” the attorney replied. “Unfortunately, that was written before the days of carbon copies, but if you will look carefully among your Great-grandmother’s things, probably you will find it.”

“One thing is certain,” Jimmy said. “The jewels are there some place.”

“I wouldn’t be too certain of finding them,” Mr. Randolph warned us. “If my father could have given Mrs. Belden any real hints, she probably would have discovered them herself. She was pretty smart,

you know.” He must have seen how disappointed we were, for he added quickly, “But who knows? You *may* find them. One never can tell what these twentieth century youngsters will do.”

We kept the missing pages to the diary, of course, and the attorney apologized for his father, who, though a great man, was an absent-minded one as well, and had probably forgotten all about the request that the pages be returned.

We caught the five o'clock interurban and had just started to read those precious sheets of paper when we looked up and saw Peg Meredith and her mother in a seat across the aisle. Of course, Peg talked the whole time, and there was nothing to do but to give the pages to Mrs. Fisher for safe-keeping until we got home. Naturally we were disappointed; still it was nice to hear Mrs. Meredith say how everybody enjoyed our play.

“It’s a good thing to remind people that our town played an important part in the Underground Railroad,” she said. “The older folks have forgotten, and the children don’t even know it.”

She went on to tell us about a big pageant she hopes to stage after school opens in the fall. It will be easier to get a large number of children together

then, and the teachers will be here to help. The pageant is to portray the history of Fayetteville and—think of it!—she wants to use my playlet as one of the episodes.

We were tired when we reached Belden Place, but not too tired to see Jean for a minute. We found John on the porch, putting a new hinge on the screen door.

“The baby’s in there.” He nodded toward the library.

“Has she been any trouble, John?” his sister asked.

“Trouble?” he answered, trying to act solemn. “She’s been into this, that, and the other; and the only pay I’ve earned this day is as a nursemaid and not as a gardener. The little mite!”

We had to laugh at the sheepish way John grinned. He never said much about it, but we knew that he adored the baby just as much as any of us, even when her curiosity led her into mischief, as it was always doing.

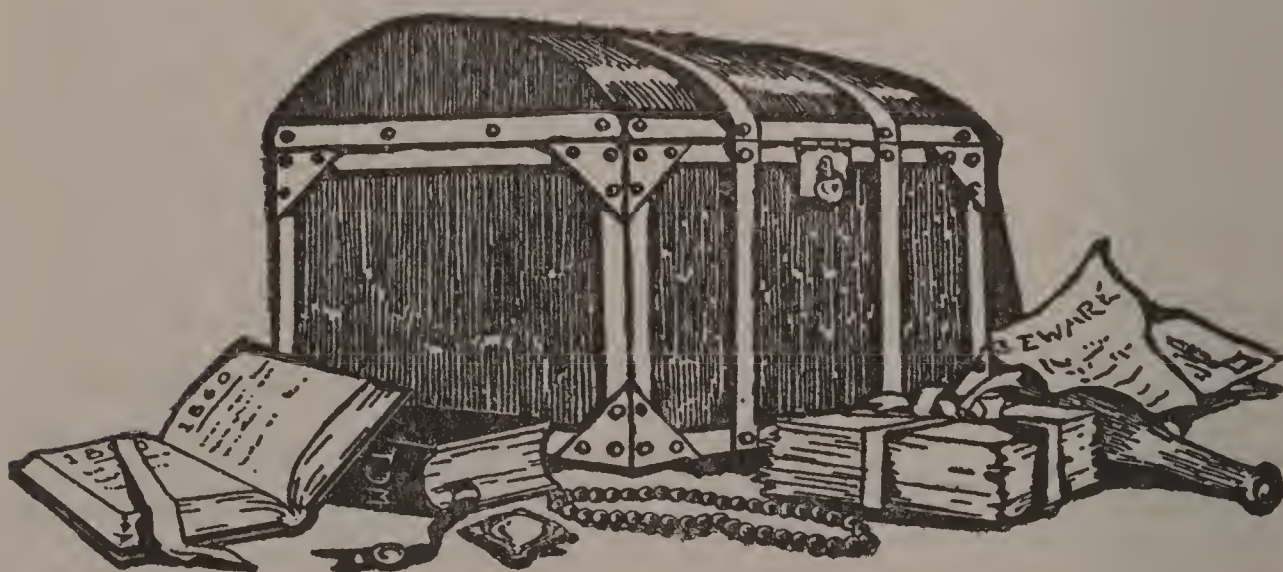
The instant we appeared in the door of the library, Jean came running toward us. She was such a darling, laughing and dimpling and chattering, in the

way that babies chatter without saying anything, that I started to pick her up.

Then suddenly I drew back, in astonishment.

“Pretty!” she cried happily. “Pretty!” and held out her hand to me.

And there on Jean’s pink little palm lay a topaz brooch surrounded by tiny diamonds. It was the brooch we had seen in the miniature, and on the back were engraved the words: *To my bride, Patricia Belden, 1855.*



## CHAPTER XVII

### GREAT-GRANDFATHER BELDEN'S DESK

**M**RS. FISHER took the brooch away from Jean. "Is this your mother's?" she asked Patty.

"Oh, no," my cousin explained. "That must be one of the pieces of jewelry my great-grandmother lost nearly sixty years ago."

The housekeeper was startled. "Then how could Jean have gotten hold of it?" she asked.

"That's just it," I said. "But if a year-and-a-half-old baby can find the brooch, I guess that two eleven-year-old girls and a ten-year-old boy can find the other jewels."

We thought perhaps John could help us, but when we called him into the library, he was as surprised as we had been. "By jiggers!" he exclaimed. "Where did she find that?"

And that was all the information we could get out of *him*. Of course, he had taken care of Jean all day, he said, but who could keep an eye on that little grasshopper every second?

"Oh, dear," said Mrs. Fisher, rather exasperated but smiling in spite of herself at the rueful expression on her brother's face. "I wish you were more

observing, John.”

Jimmy took the brooch from his mother, looking just a tiny bit scared at the idea of holding such a valuable piece of jewelry in his hand, and held it out before his little sister. “Tell us where you found it, Jean,” he begged.

Jean held out her hands eagerly for it, but all she would say was “Pretty! Pretty!”

“That won’t do any good, Son,” his mother interrupted. “She’s too little to tell you. And now suppose, before we have any more detective work, we find a safe place for that brooch and have some dinner.”

Mrs. Fisher sounded tired, and Patty jumped up quickly. “We’ll help you,” she said, and we hurried to our room to wash and change our dresses.

After dinner, quite a stiff breeze blowing across the river made the evening chilly, mid-August though it was. We didn’t really need it, of course, but Patty asked John to light a fire in the old fireplace in the library. It made everything seem so much cozier and our mystery so much more important. Mrs. Fisher was putting Jean to bed, and we three children sat down on the floor before the fire to read the missing pages to the diary.



*And there in Jean's pink little palm lay a topaz brooch surrounded by diamonds.*





“We shouldn’t call them that now,” I said. “The pages aren’t missing any longer. Why, look here! Great-grandmother has written something in pencil at the top of the first sheet.”

Patty peered over my shoulder. “She’s just copied a little of what we read on the page that came just before this. I suppose she didn’t want to tear out a whole sheet from the diary, just for the sake of a few words, and yet she wanted Governor Randolph to have the whole story. Read it out loud, won’t you, Patsy?”

“A very strange thing happened today,” I began, stumbling over the words just a little at first, because the penciled lines were blurred now and hard to read, “and I believe it throws considerable light on the loss of the jewels.”

“Oh, we’ve heard that once,” my cousin broke in. “Let’s begin where we left off last time. She told, didn’t she, about how old Jake called and found none of them at home?”

“But he did find—” I began to read again.

“Yes,” Jimmy cried excitedly. “What did he find, Patsy? That’s what we want to know.”

“But he did find robbers in the house,” I went on

reading, "and a heap of jewels on the desk in the library."

"It must have been that very desk," my cousin interrupted to point out to Jimmy the old Sheraton secretary over in the corner. It belonged to Great-grandfather Belden."

"Fellow detectives," I said in just as business-like a way as I knew how, "shall I presume with the reading?"

"Oh, she means resume," Patty giggled. "Yes, Patsy, darling, please presume!"

I threw a sofa cushion at her, and the minute I did it I was sorry. It certainly is not a good time to start a pillow fight when three detectives are just about to make an important discovery. But Patty showed her usual presence of mind. Instead of hurling the sofa cushion back at me, she sat down on it, and I went on with the diary.

"The robbers were in the kitchen," I read, "when old Jake arrived, according to the small boy's story, and, thinking themselves quite alone, no doubt, were helping themselves to a feast out of our cellars.

"Jake had only a few minutes before he must return to his boat, and there was no time to call for help. He heard one of the robbers coming down the

hall, and, knowing he would fare ill if caught there, he hid the jewels and escaped.

“But the tragedy is that we do not know where he hid them. It was only after much difficulty and several hours of careful questioning that we were able to get this story from the little boy. But all our questioning did no good when it came to finding out the hiding place of my lost jewels—the child simply could not tell us.

“The boat had docked only a short time about ten miles down the river, and the old darky had only a few minutes to give the message to the boy. Poor old man who was once a slave! Of course, he could not write, and it probably never occurred to him to ask someone else to write a letter for him or that the child was rather young and—if I may say so—a little stupid to be entrusted with such a secret. At any rate, all we could learn as to the hiding place of the jewels was that the old man had ‘stuffed them in, yes, sah, stuffed them right in’ and had laughed over the joke he had played the robbers.

“This message, incoherent though it was, gave us fresh heart to make another search. And searched we have—in every room—but these last efforts have proved as fruitless as the others. Either the hiding

place that old Jake chose is too hard for anyone to find, or it was so easy that the robbers themselves discovered it."

I laid the diary down. "Oh, do you suppose those terrible old robbers could have found the jewels *after all?*" I cried.

Jimmy shook his head. "I don't believe your Great-grandma was right there," he said.

"It's perfectly clear to me where those jewels are," Patty interrupted, although the way she said it didn't sound half so cocksure as the words themselves did. "Old Jake probably discovered another secret room or cubby-hole and hid them in that."

I reminded her that, since Great-grandfather had built the house himself, he would have known about all the secret places, even though other folks didn't, and that they would have looked in those places first of all.

"But there might be a hidden place in some of the furniture," Jimmy suggested. "You said that your Great-grandpa brought some of it here from his home in Virginia."

"That's a dandy idea, Jimmy," I said. "Some of the furniture even came from England and there

might have been some secret compartments that Great-grandfather didn't know about."

We wanted to start in then and there, looking over the furniture, but Mrs. Fisher came downstairs and insisted that we'd better go to bed. It had been an exciting day, and she said that a good night's rest would make us feel refreshed for our search.

The next morning right after breakfast—which she insisted that we eat, though none of us felt the least bit hungry—we began our examination of the furniture, starting in with the music room right across the hall from the library.

"There's no need wasting time on any of the new pieces," Patty said. "Just the things that were here in Great-grandmother's day—for instance, that piano."

And my cousin lifted up the top of the old square, rosewood piano and peered inside, then began running her hands over the shining surface, as though searching for a spring or a secret opening. I opened the door of the old mahogany clock on the mantel. On the lower part of the long glass door there was a picture of a field of daisies with a little girl about my age gathering a big armful of them, but the painted daisy field concealed nothing more alarm-

ing than the pendulum. Jimmy began examining, in turn, the three high-backed, rush-bottomed chairs. After that we tried the little carved table over in the corner and the Queen Anne highboy, but without the least success.

It was pretty discouraging and presently Jimmy stopped working altogether. He looked out of the window, whistling softly under his breath, but when suddenly he turned to us and began to talk, we saw that he hadn't just been idling.

"Has your great-grandpa's desk always been in that room across the hall?" he asked.

"I suppose so," I answered. "That room has always been the library. At least, I think so, because some of the bookcases are built right into the walls."

"Then wouldn't the jewels be in there near the desk, where old Jake found them?" he went on.

"I don't know." Patty was doubtful. "I don't imagine the desk itself has been moved, because Great-grandfather used that room for his study. But lots of the other furniture *has* been changed about, and we're likely to find the piece we want most anywhere—in here or up in the attic—"

But Jimmy stuck to his point. "If Jake found the jewels on the desk," he interrupted, "wouldn't the

first place he'd think of hiding them be *in* the desk. And wasn't Jean *near* the desk when we found her with the brooch?"

Patty and I stopped short. "Of course," I cried.

"And in the stories, the old desks are always having secret compartments and things like that," added Patty, as excited as I was.

Aunt May had often joked about the furniture in her house. There was a time when having so many old-fashioned things had been considered rather shabby. But now she said she had learned that if she would just wait long enough, everything she had would come back in style. It was that way with Great-grandfather's old Sheraton secretary-desk, made of inlaid mahogany. A few years ago it was worth practically nothing, so far as money goes. But now, if Aunt May had wished to sell, it would have brought almost any price she cared to ask. It was a roomy old affair, with a place for books on top. We had no difficulty opening the glass doors, but the top shelf was so high we had to stand on a chair to reach it.

Although we took out all the books, we could find nothing of interest there. Below the desk proper, two doors opened into a roomy compartment, con-

sisting of several shelves, now unused. We examined these carefully, too, but there seemed to be nothing to discover.

“We’d better look at the desk part,” Patty suggested, as she sat down in Great-grandfather’s old chair and pulled back the lid. What we saw were two thick columns, dividing the back part of the desk into three sections. There was a tier of four drawers on either side and, in the middle part, two drawers, one on top the other, and, above these, four pigeon-holes.

We tried to pull the drawers out all the way, in order to examine them more thoroughly, but they opened so far and no farther. Whether they were stuck or were not intended to open all the way, we could not tell.

We looked through all of them, one after the other, but found only useless odds and ends. Then in the last drawer, the lower one of the left-hand tier, we made our discovery. It had seemed to move more easily than the others, from the start, and Jimmy kept monkeying with it, till, with a jerk, he had it out.

“I just pressed down on it very hard, when I



pulled," he explained, "and that must have released the spring that held it."

"That drawer is not as long as the others," I said. "Perhaps—"

I didn't dare say it, but, of course, I was hoping that I'd find the jewels at the back end of that dark little tunnel where the drawer had been. I put my hand inside.

My fingers encountered something cold, and I cried out before I thought. You should have seen Patty and Jim perk up.

"Are they the—are they the—," my cousin gasped.

The next instant I had pressed the spring and the left-hand column opened about an inch. Jimmy grabbed it, and when I let go the spring, it snapped back, holding his fingers tight.

He winced a little but said nothing, while Patty and I began to pry at the wood to get his hand out. At last, I had sense enough to touch the spring again.

"Whew, I won't try that a second time," Jimmy exclaimed, "We can use this paper weight to hold it. Let me feel that spring, Patsy."

He tried it, but it didn't do any good, because the column seemed stuck like all the drawers.

“It’s the place where old Jake hid the jewels,” Patty cried, her breath coming in sharp little gasps. “We must get into it. Bring a hatchet, Jimmy. We’ll break it open if we have to. Mother won’t mind when she finds out why we did it.”

That showed just how excited Patty really was. Why, Aunt May would have been terribly upset if we had started hacking at her beloved old Sheraton secretary and so would Patty, under ordinary circumstances.

But at that moment none of us considered that. We were so interested in the old desk and finding the jewels that it seemed impossible for us to think of anything else, even for a minute. Just then Mrs. Fisher walked into the room.

“Mr. Whiteside has come for the old furniture,” she said. “Have you taken the upholstering off the sofa and the chairs?”

We looked at one another in dismay. “Can’t he come some other time?” I asked crossly.

Mr. Whiteside was standing in the hall and heard me. “Why, yes,” he said obligingly, “I have another call to make in this neighborhood, and I can come back in half an hour.”

“Gee,” said Jimmy, after the man had gone.

“That doesn’t help us much. It’ll take every bit that long to get that old horsehair off.”

“Oh, dear!” I said. “We can’t leave the desk, now that we’re just about to find out everything. We just can’t! Don’t you suppose Mr. Whiteside could take the upholstering off himself?”

Patty looked as though she wanted to cry, but she said with quite a determined air, “You may do as you please. But I promised Mother I would help her save expense by taking off that upholstering, and I’m going to do it.”

It was just about the hardest decision I ever made in my life, but I knew we couldn’t desert Patty.

“And we’re going to help you,” I said. “The secret drawer will just have to wait another half an hour.”

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE JEWELS OF THE FIRST PATRICIA

**A**S IT turned out, this was a very lucky decision. Patty raced up the stairs. At the top she turned, just as I reached the bottom step.

“Bring some newspapers,” she called.

I turned back to the hall table for the morning paper, which lay there, still unopened. Jimmy disappeared through the back door of the long hall and came back an instant later with a screw driver and a pair of pliers.

It was only a minute or two more before we had the papers spread out on the floor in the mystery room, in our efforts to be tidy, and had begun to pull out the huge brass-headed tacks in the sofa, slipping the screw driver in behind them to pry them loose, then using the pliers. But this was too slow for my cousin, and, taking a pair of heavy shearers from Mrs. Fisher’s work basket, she split the horsehair and even cut out huge, jagged pieces in several places. The three of us delved right in, taking out handfuls of the funny, crinkly stuffing.

We were working at a rate of speed that would have done credit to the first Patricia herself. And

not one of us had a word to say. But we were all *thinking* the same thing—we were wondering about the secret compartment in the old Sheraton desk and how we were to get into it. It seemed as though we simply couldn't bear it if we didn't find those missing jewels pretty soon.

And then—*and then*, my fingers closed on something round and long and smooth, and when I brought out my next handful of crinkly stuffing, something else came with it.

“Great-grandmother's pearls!” In my astonishment I could only whisper the words, as I showed them to the others. They were soft and lustrous and very smooth and beautiful, and as I held them up against the light a soft pink glow came from them.

It is a strange thing that at that moment none of us stopped to admire them or to exclaim in our surprise over finding them in that strange place. I simply put the pearls in the pocket of my dress and with one accord we again turned to the old sofa. If we had worked fast before, we worked in a frenzy of haste now, but though we made the horsehair fly, the supply of our jewelry mine, as Patty called it, seemed to be exhausted.

“This isn’t going to get us anywhere,” she declared. “We’ll have to go slower.”

And we did, although it wasn’t easy when we were so excited. We began examining that crinkly stuffing very carefully and, sure enough, pretty soon we found a pair of amethyst earrings.

“Oh, aren’t they beauties?” I cried, and slipped them into my pocket beside the pearls.

It was at this moment that Mrs. Fisher walked in to tell us that Mr. Whiteside was ready for the sofa. She had been up in the attic, taking the upholstery off the two chairs, and he already had loaded them into the wagon.

“Oh, he’ll simply have to wait,” wailed Patty, and I let the housekeeper take a peep into my pocket—my jewelry pocket, as we afterwards called it.

Mrs. Fisher looked just about flabbergasted, but she didn’t let her surprise get the best of her commonsense. She turned in and helped us strip the rest of that upholstery off the sofa, until all of it lay on the newspapers, with, goodness knows, how many jewels inside of it. Then we managed to carry the sofa out into the next room, and Mr. Whiteside and his men came up and took it away.

Now that we had wrecked our jewelry mine, our

next job was to find out what else had been inside of it. If Mr. Whitney had seen us, he would have said we were acting like chickens with their heads off, but with Mrs. Fisher there to help us, we began to work more calmly.

And from then on our search began to yield one interesting piece of jewelry after another. There were several rings, a cameo, a belt buckle and another one of coral, a gold bracelet shaped like a serpent, with ruby eyes; a pair of silver slipper buckles, some gold beads and two arrows with diamond heads which, we afterwards learned, had at one time been worn as ornaments for the hair.

“Goodness!” I said. “I feel like a walking jewelry store or a safety vault.”

“That’s the only place for them too,” the housekeeper suggested, looking worried at the idea of having to be responsible for so many jewels. “You’d better take them down to the bank this morning, and leave them there till your mothers get back and decide what to do about them.”

“How do you suppose they ever got in that old sofa?” Jimmy asked, still feeling rather awed. He had never seen so many jewels at one time in his life before, and for that much neither had we.

That was a hard question to answer, for Patty and I had been wondering just about the same thing. But finally we figured it all out.

Old Jake, in his haste, must have split several holes in the back and seat of the sofa with a knife—or, perhaps the horsehair was beginning to show wear and was a little holey already—and dropped the jewelry in, piece at a time, and then patted it down to look smooth, so as not to arouse the suspicions of the robbers. Well, he must have patted it down to look so *very* smooth that even Great-grandmother Patricia hadn't suspected, and had merely darned the slits in her own neat way to get her mind off the loss of the jewels. That much the diary had told us.

“But how did Jean get hold of that brooch?” Jimmy insisted.

“She probably reached up to the sofa and put her hand inside one of the holes,” my cousin answered. “You’ve noticed how worn the upholstery was, haven’t you, and how Patsy and I were always poking our fingers in to feel the crinkly stuff inside? Well, probably Jean liked the funny, tickly feel of it, just as we did.”

“Jean deserves a reward,” I said, “a new doll any-



way. With all *our* poking, Patty, we never pulled out a thousand dollar brooch, or whatever it is that such things cost.”

We started for the bank then, but before we left we simply had to know what was in that secret compartment in Great-grandfather's old desk. John opened it for us without a bit of trouble. It was merely stuck and had required greater strength than ours to get it open—that was all. But all we found were some old letters — interesting but not particularly valuable, so far as we could see. Among them was the letter from Governor Randolph in answer to Great-grandmother Patricia's note, but he had no information to give her—nothing that would have helped us in our search. True, he had written the officers of the boat that employed Jake. But in the meantime the kind old negro had died, and no one knew his story.

John walked down town with us, and Patty and I pretended that we were bank messengers and that he was the plain clothes man who was guarding us.

When we took the jewelry in to Mr. Carney at the bank, he was very much impressed and complimented my cousin and me on being splendid detectives. We told him that Jimmy had done just

as much as we had and that we wanted him to have every cent of the one hundred dollars reward that Great-grandfather had offered.

Mr. Carney screwed up his face the funny way he always does, when he's feeling especially thoughtful, and said, "Who's Jimmy?"

"He's lots of things." Patty laughed. "He's the housekeeper's son; he's the gardener's nephew; and he's the mystery boy—the one we found in the secret room."

My cousin told me later that she hadn't intended to say anything like that at all. Somehow it had just slipped out, but after she had said that much there was nothing to do but to go ahead and tell the whole story. A thrilling story she made out of it, too, but evidently the banker didn't think so.

"Oh, so that was the boy who helped you with your play."

"Yes. Didn't he do his part well?" I asked, but Mr. Carney didn't seem interested in that either.

"It's fortunate you brought the jewels to the bank," he said briefly. "Are you quite sure you have them *all*?"

"What—what do you mean?" I asked. I didn't like his tone of voice.

“Nothing, Patsy,” he answered, “except that I want your mothers’ address. As an old friend of the family, I feel that I should let them know the situation.”

Patty and I looked at each other. All of a sudden we realized just what it was that Mr. Carney meant. Maybe, he thought that our dear, kind Mrs. Fisher—we could hardly bring ourselves to even think it—but perhaps he thought that Jimmy and his mother weren’t quite honest—and all because they loved each other and the children had no place else to go. A lump came right up in my throat when I tried to answer him.

“Why, Mr. Carney,” I said, “we’ve already written Aunt May about Jimmy and Jean. She hasn’t answered yet, but we know it will be all right—Jimmy’s such a *nice* boy. And Mrs. Fisher—why, we just love *her*. She’s always baking us gingerbread men and doing things like that.”

This seemed a good argument to us, but somehow the banker didn’t seem to appreciate it. He just smiled down at us in the way we didn’t like to be smiled at, as though he didn’t think *we* knew anything at all. It was hard to say anything after a smile like that, but Patty managed it.

“Anyway,” she said, “we are going to let Jimmy have all the reward.”

Mr. Carney shook his head. “I wouldn’t count too much on *anybody* getting a reward,” he said, “since the man who offered it is no longer living.”

My cousin and I walked home in silence. “It’s a shame!” I burst out finally, as we turned in at the gate. “I know that Jimmy wouldn’t ask for a reward. But he does want to study art so much and this money would give him such a dandy start.”

“That’s not what is worrying me right now,” Patty answered. “You could see that Mr. Carney didn’t understand about Mrs. Fisher. What if he writes and tells Mother that the housekeeper did something very wrong and our mothers think so, too, and won’t let Jimmy and Jean stay till the orphanage can take them.”

I stopped short—I hadn’t thought of that. “Maybe Aunt May won’t want Mrs. Fisher or John anymore either. Oh, I *wish* that Mr. Carney wasn’t going to write. If we could just *see* our mothers first, I know they would understand.”

But the troubles of the day weren’t ended, as we found out when we looked over the mail on the hall table. There was the letter we had posted to Aunt

May the morning after we had discovered Jean and Jimmy in the secret room; and it was marked: "Not listed in directory. Return to sender."

"Why, you put on the wrong street number," I said. "Mrs. Richards lives at 3563 Weston Avenue, not 563."

"Don't I know that?" said Patty miserably. "I should have addressed it in care of Mrs. Richards anyway. Oh, how could I have been so careless?"

"Never mind! We can send this same letter to them in another envelope and write a note explaining how it happened to come back to us. We might tell them, too, we have a wonderful surprise for them when they get home."

Patty was so downcast about her mistake that I did my best to console her, although I wasn't feeling very perky about it myself. No wonder our mothers had asked who Jimmy was. I only hoped *our* letter would reach them before Mr. Carney's did.

## CHAPTER XIX

### REWARDS AND DISAPPOINTMENTS

**I**T WASN'T long before nearly everyone in Fayetteville knew what we had found, and the reporter from the Evening Banner came to see us and wrote about it in the paper. The next Sunday the story was copied in the Arlington Herald, with a big headline saying: "Children Find Heirlooms Lost Half a Century." And we just couldn't help feeling a little proud when we saw that. One of the men on the paper wrote and asked us for our pictures, but since our mothers weren't there to tell us what to do, we didn't think we'd better let him have them.

Oh, it was just lots of fun—having people stop us on the street and say, "Well, well, we never knew we had three first-class detectives living right here in Fayetteville.

And old Mr. Whitney down at the grocery store said he thought he ought to have *some* credit because he had started us to hunting for the mysterious room and in that way we had found, first Jean and Jimmy, then the diary, and then the jewels.

"But the jewels weren't in the mystery room at

all," we insisted, "till about three weeks ago when the sofa was moved in for Jimmy to sleep on. They were in the old sofa that we've sat on just hours and hours, reading and playing make-believe games."

"Leastwise," said Mr. Whitney as he handed us each a piece of candy across the counter, "I started you on your search."

This was true, of course, but then we couldn't answer him anyway, because he had given us perfectly unchewable pieces of taffy.

Three days passed, but no word came from Mother or Aunt May. The suspense was terrible—it almost took away the thrill of being good detectives and all that. Patty and I didn't say a word about Mr. Carney taking Aunt May's address to write to her, but we were worried and I guess we showed it. At any rate, Jimmy, and his mother too, seemed to feel that something was wrong and watched the mail box almost as closely as we did.

Patty and I were out on the front porch, embroidering, the morning of the fourth day. "If the postman doesn't bring a letter this afternoon," said my cousin, "I'm going to 'phone Mother by long distance."

She had no more than said it than the town jit-

ney stopped at the front gate. Joe, the driver, took out the baggage and opened the door—and Mother and Aunt May stepped out. Patty and I were down to the gate before you could wink, and were being hugged and kissed.

Our mothers were almost as excited as we were. “What’s all this finding the lost jewels?” Aunt May demanded, as the four of us went up the gravel walk, her arm around Patty and Mother’s arm around me.

Patty and I stopped short in amazement. Mother laughed.

“Joe, the jitney driver, told us. But it can’t be true, can it?”

I don’t believe I was ever happier than at that minute—why, I even forgot Jimmy, and Patty did, too. When our mothers learned that we had actually found the missing jewels, they were just about as pleased as we had been. They were awfully proud of us, too. Really, it almost made me want to be a lady detective instead of an author when I grow up.

There was nothing to do but to take Mother and Aunt May down to the bank then and there, although they hadn’t had a bite of lunch. They were so thrilled when they saw the jewels, and, since they



were the only heirs, they divided them then and there. The jewels would belong to my cousin and me some day, they told us, and perhaps they could have two of the more simple rings cut down for us to begin wearing right away. Mother took the pearls and promised that they should be mine when I was twenty-one, and Aunt May said that Patty should come into possession of the diamond and topaz brooch on the same day.

On the way back to Belden Place I asked Mother about the reward and explained how Jimmy had helped us. Since Patty and I were to have the jewels, we thought that he should get something out of it, too.

Mother's face clouded. "It was because of Jimmy that we came home so suddenly," she said. "But it wasn't to give him a reward."

"Did you get a letter from Mr. Carney?" I was almost afraid to ask it.

Mother nodded. "It came in the same mail with yours."

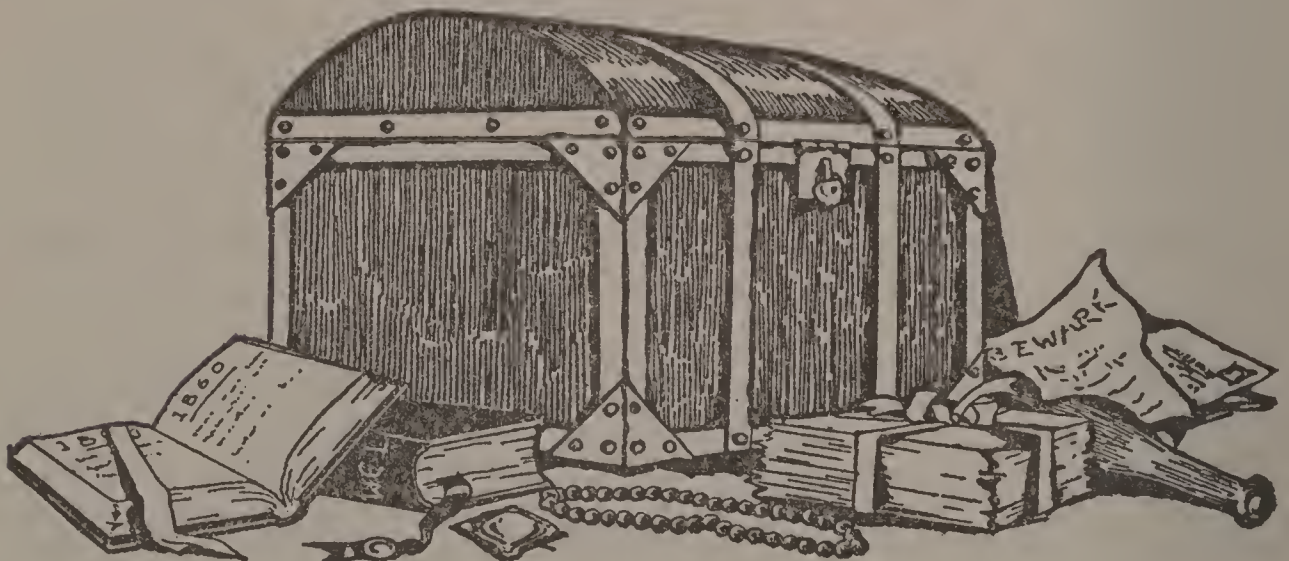
I didn't say anything—I just couldn't—and Mother went on, "We didn't like it—Mrs. Fisher hiding the children that way. We thought we had

better hurry right back and straighten matters out.”

I couldn't help it—big girl, though I am, I cried. Luckily, we had reached Belden Place by this time, and Mother led me over to the garden seat beneath the old mulberry tree, and I told her the whole story.

“Mrs. Fisher just had to do it,” I finished. “There wasn't any place for Jean and Jimmy. Oh, Mother, please don't let Aunt May send them away.”

“Don't cry, Patsy,” she said, holding me tight. “We'll have a talk with the housekeeper after lunch.”



## CHAPTER XX

### SEVERAL TREASURES

**WE** NEVER knew what went on behind the closed door of the library that afternoon. Mother and Aunt May were in there, and John and Mrs. Fisher. Jean was asleep upstairs in her little crib. Jimmy was out on the porch with us; and he seemed shaky and pale, just as his mother had, when she passed through the hall a few minutes before. We knew what that waiting meant to Jimmy—the conference in the library was to decide, not only whether he and Jean could stay for the rest of the month, but whether his mother could stay at all. I am sure that was what worried him most. My cousin and I had tried our best to explain the situation to our mothers, and now all that we could hope for was that they would understand.

We couldn't bear it any longer—just waiting around like that; so we went into the orchard to play hide-and-seek. But a very half-hearted game it was, and we were glad to stop when we saw John leaving the back door for the greenhouse. Jimmy followed him, and Patty and I went around to the front to find our mothers.

Aunt May was just turning from the telephone. "May Jean and Jimmy stay?" I asked.

She put her arm around me. "Don't know, Patsy. I must talk it over with your mother first—and—and—have an answer to my phone call, too."

Mother changed the subject as she led the way out on the porch. "Now, girls, give us all the details. How did you know where to look for the jewels in the first place?"

"We didn't," I told her. "But after we found Great-grandmother Belden's diary—"

Aunt May was all attention. "Did you actually find the diary, too? For goodness sake, let me see it! Quick!"

Patty ran and got it for her in a hurry and when we slipped away we left Aunt May reading it aloud to Mother. It was nearly dinner time when we heard them calling us.

"Listen, girls!" Aunt May said, her breath coming and going in quick little gasps, in her excitement. "We're very happy to think that you found the jewels. But, do you know, I believe a greater treasure is in this little diary. The descriptions of Civil War days are quite unusual, and the parts about the runaway slaves are so touching and inti-

mate and personal. I know a publisher who I believe will be glad to get this book.”

“Oh, do you really think so?” I cried. “Then Jimmy can have his reward, can’t he?”

“Bless your hearts!” Mother put one arm around Patty and another around me. “All three of you will have your reward, if this book takes as May thinks it will. In any case, we’ll be glad to pay the one hundred dollars to Jimmy for helping you.”

“We’ll put the money in the bank just as it comes in,” promised Aunt May, “and we’ll be letting it draw interest for you until you are ready to go off to school.”

Glad as we were to hear this, there was something else we were more eager to know just then. “Can—can Jimmy—” Patty began.

The telephone rang and Aunt May hurried in to answer it. When she came back she nodded to my mother. “Yes, it can be fixed up,” she said. “At very little cost, too, if John and Jimmy care to do the work.”

Then both of them laughed when they saw that Patty and I were about to burst with curiosity.

“Go and call Mrs. Fisher,” Mother said.

We couldn’t imagine what it was all about, but

we hurried to do as she told us. We called Jimmy, too, and brought Jean along.

“John just phoned,” Aunt May said, when we were all together, “and the estimates on the materials to repair the gardener’s cottage are reasonable enough—in fact, lower than I had expected. I think, Mrs. Fisher, you’ll be very comfortable there with your little family.”

Mother had a suggestion, too. The Women’s Club expected to open its day nursery in another month and Mrs. Fisher could leave Jean there in the daytime when Jimmy started to school in September.

All this time Patty and I had been almost too surprised by the turn events had taken to say a word. Evidently, now that our mothers had talked with Mrs. Fisher, they didn’t blame her any more. In fact, Aunt May said that she was such a fine woman and such a good housekeeper that she couldn’t afford to lose her.

“And will Jean and Jimmy live here all the time?” I asked, hardly able to believe the good news.

Mother nodded—they hadn’t wanted to tell us until they were sure of it themselves—and Jimmy burst out, “I’m to help Uncle John fix it up, too—

that swell little house, you know, that I liked so well that day.”

“There will be other little jobs around Belden Place, too,” Aunt May said, “for a boy who wants to save his money to go to art school. I’ve seen some of your work, Jimmy, and I think it’s well worth saving for.”

My goodness! Things had been happening so fast that we had forgotten the reward. When we told Jimmy, he was so happy that, timid though he was, he simply had to begin turning handsprings to get rid of his excitement. And Jean cooed and Mrs. Fisher wiped something out of her eye with the corner of her apron.

“I’m very grateful,” she said hesitatingly, “and I’m sorry that you had your visit cut so short.”

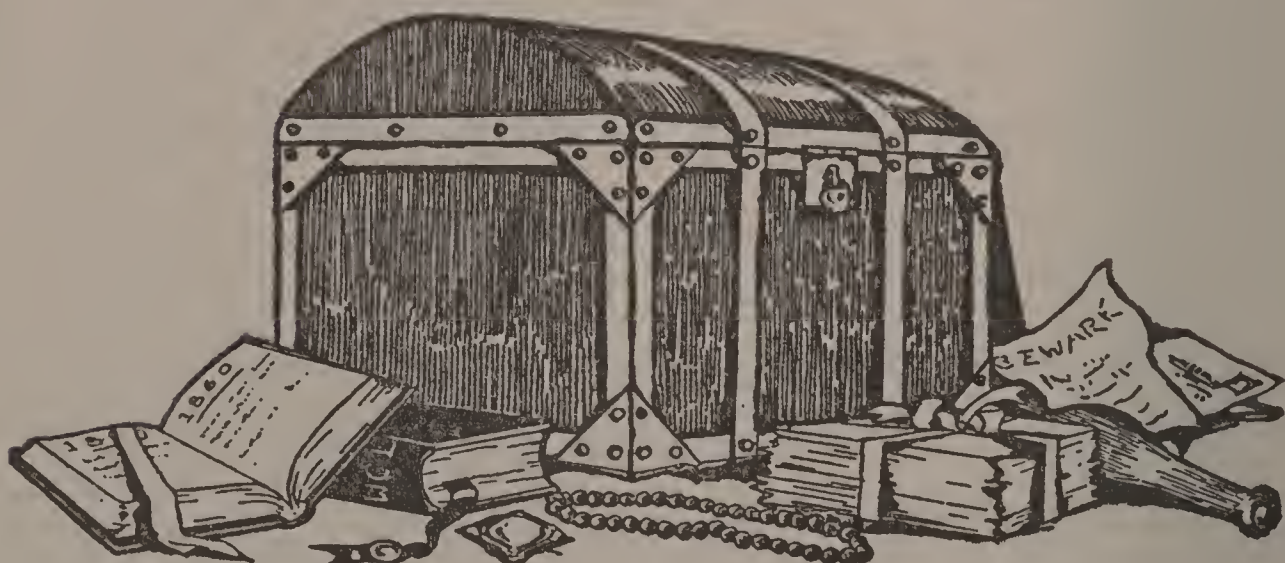
“It was worth it,” Mother assured her, “to come home and find that our daughters had discovered the long-lost treasure of Belden Place.”

“Yes,” Aunt May agreed, “it was. But this is what I call the real treasure.” And she held up the worn little diary that had belonged to Great-grandmother Patricia.

“When Jimmy is a great artist,” I said giggling,

“perhaps we’ll say that we found the treasure when we discovered him.”

Patty picked up Jimmy’s little sister and held her close. “I think that Jean’s the treasure of Belden Place,” she said. “If you can find a nicer treasure than a year-and-a-half-old baby, I’d like to see it.”











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