

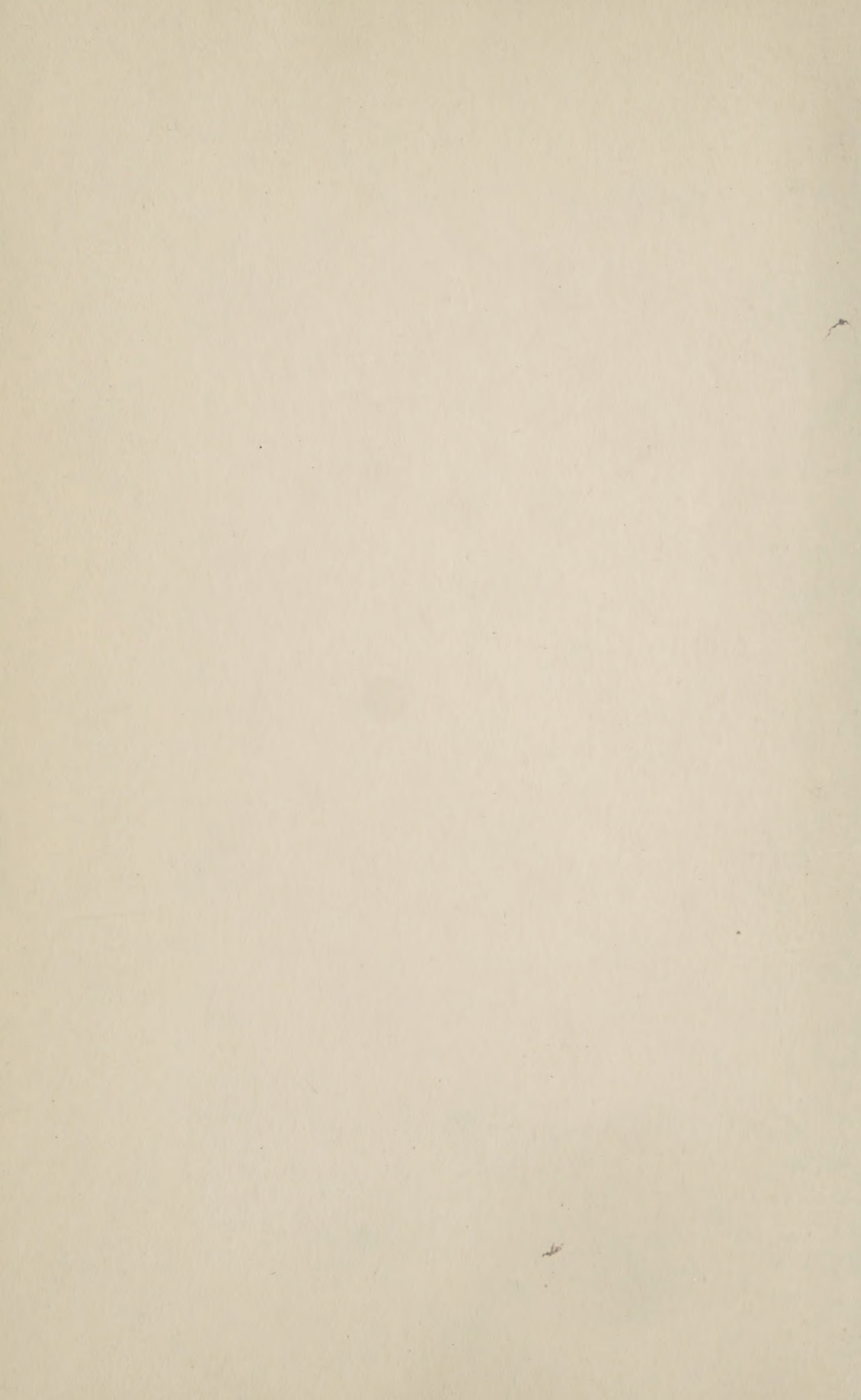
*Lucky Penny
of Thistle Troop
A Girl Scout Story*



Amy E. Blanchard











Lucky Penny of Thistle Troop

A Girl Scout Story

By
AMY E. BLANCHARD

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W. A. WILDE COMPANY

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CHICAGO

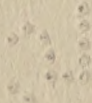
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LUCKY PENNY OF THISTLE TROOP



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Foreword

THE Girl Scouts are too well known to make necessary an introduction to their organization, but because of their rapidly increasing numbers, the expansion of their activities, the importance of the part they play in civic movements, it may not come amiss to draw attention to the individual development which exerts so strong an influence upon the home, and upon their immediate companions. As each petal of a flower adds to its beauty and completeness so may each member of a troop do her part in unifying and beautifying the body of Girl Scouts so that future generations will "rise up and call her blessed."

A. E. B.

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Lucky Penny of Thistle Troop

CHAPTER I

LUCKY PENNY STARTS OUT

ALMOST everyone thought her name was Penelope, but it wasn't; it was Penrose, S. Penrose Atwood. Penny kept the S a deep dark secret, hoping that eventually it would be consigned to oblivion and that no one would ever see the family Bible in which was written Samantha Penrose Atwood, born August 15, 1906. From the first she ignored her grandmother's old-fashioned name and as soon as she could write signed herself, Penny Atwood. Lucky Penny the girls called her because of her faculty of getting out of scrapes, and, nine times out of ten, of getting what she wanted.

"You have only to wish for a thing and it comes," pouted her friend, Brownie Burton. "I never saw anything like it; somebody or something must wish things on you. Now you tell me that you have had a thistle pin sent to you, and you know we have both looked all over town for one."

"Oh now, Brownie, I don't always get what I

want," declared Penny. "I am wild for a new set of furs and I don't see the slightest prospect of getting any."

"They'll come, see if they don't; a fox will come along and drop his skin at your front door, likely as not."

"Maybe it will be a monkey," returned Penny laughing. "Wouldn't that be queer? Monkey fur is fashionable, however. Poor little monkeys, I feel sorry for them when they have to go around with organ grinders; they look as if they realized how ridiculous they look dressed up in that silly way; they aren't pretty at the best."

"That's just like you," responded Brownie. "I believe you would be sorry for a rat or a mosquito."

"I am, sort of sorry, only I can't say that I love them. It must be dreadful to be the kind of creature they are, despised by everybody."

"I don't imagine they realize that they are despised," responded Brownie practically. "They are out for food; I suppose that is about all there is to it. That reminds me, Penny, are we supposed to furnish anything for the returning heroes?"

"We shall furnish them with an example of how well we can march in a parade."

"Oh, pooh! You know what I mean. What those boys don't know about marching isn't in the vocabulary."

"Miss Varney didn't say we were to furnish any-

thing to eat. I suppose our mothers will attend to that while we do the ornamental."

Brownie giggled, as was her frequent habit. She had no vanity, for she well knew that she was no beauty, and to consider herself an ornament tickled her fancy. "Speak for yourself, John," she said.

"Oh, I didn't mean that I, personally, would be ornamental, but that the Girl Scouts as a body show up pretty well."

"Your apology is accepted, mademoiselle. Look here, Penny, what badges are you going to try for this winter?"

"Don't quite know; bugling for one thing, I think. Just now clothes appear to be the subject upon which Mother and I are setting our minds. Oh, Brownie, I do want a set of new furs tremendously; my old ones are beginning to look like a singed cat; I don't see how they can last the winter out."

"Maybe you'll get them for Christmas."

"Don't want to wait; want them now. I am just turning over in my mind the best argument to present to Dad so he will tell me I can get them right away."

"Maybe you'll get them at Christmas, as I said before. Your father wouldn't listen to you on a warm day like this."

"Of course I shall choose a cold day, the first real cold one when I can come in shivering. Then, I suppose all Father will want to know is why I wear such thin clothes."

“But you don’t wear thin clothes as a rule, not the diaphanous kind that some girls do.”

“I’ll have to that day.”

“It won’t work,” declared Brownie, shaking her head. “He will only be disgusted and tell you to go and put on a sweater and warmer underwear. I know these fathers.”

Penny laughed. “Reckon you’re right. I’ll have to contrive some other way. I shouldn’t want to be hypocritical anyway. Where’s the Manual? We may as well be looking up merit badges and things.”

Brownie brought the book over to where Penny was swinging in the hammock. The two sat down with heads together and turned over the pages of their handbook. They were quite unlike in looks. Penny was rather tall for her age, and, without being a beauty, had a bright, attractive face, honest gray eyes which looked at you frankly, a sweet red-lipped, well-shaped mouth, her best feature, a nose whose nondescript character she secretly deplored, brown hair; “plain brown,” she described it, “only I’m glad it isn’t the lanky kind, even if it isn’t curly.”

Brownie quite answered to what her name suggested, for she looked like a Brownie: round prominent eyes, a wide mouth, a snip of a nose, thin arms and legs, lank mouse-colored hair. But she was the best-natured thing you ever saw and was clever beyond any of her school friends. Whatever she attempted she carried through and was really a great stimulus to

her sworn friend, Penny Atwood. Penny, while not so clever, was lucky. If she fell into a scrape she always managed to fall out of it by reason of her own wits or of Brownie's cleverer ones. If there happened to be an extra hard lesson, it was sure to happen that the easy questions were given to Penny. If she wanted anything very much somehow it came her way. It certainly was true that the Fates were kind to her, probably because she was always so appreciative of the good gifts they chose to bestow.

The two girls were on the side porch of the Atwoods' house. They were fond of this tree-embowered, vine-enclosed retreat, especially on warm days. Davy, Penny's little brother, was stretched out at full length on the grass within easy hearing distance of any exciting talk. Sometimes their voices were lowered to a whisper, but, Davy argued, when they were excited they raised their voices. He was not old enough to become a Boy Scout, consequently his interest was very keen in the doings of the Thistle Troop of Girl Scouts to which his sister and Brownie Burton belonged. Davy not only looked with great respect upon all the activities in which his sister was concerned, but he turned to her for moral support, and brought her all his difficulties, being sure that she would never break a promise, and if she said a thing was so that it was unfailingly true.

"Do Girl Scouts always speak the truth?" Davy once asked his sister.

“They should,” she answered, “for the very first law is the one that says a girl’s honor should be trusted.”

“It must be awful hard,” Davy had said thoughtfully. “Will I have to do that when I am a Boy Scout?”

“You sho’ will,” his sister had told him. In consequence Davy, from being given to the practice of telling wildly imaginative tales, pruned them down by degrees, so that now when he said he had seen Jimmy Burns catch a fish eighteen inches long you could believe that it measured as much as sixteen, maybe. At all events, Davy was trying not to invent marvellous yarns, and that is saying something.

He lay there on the grass staring up at the sky until certain odors from the kitchen attracted his attention, then he sat up and sniffed the air. “Gingerbread!” he exclaimed, then, turning a couple of preliminary handsprings, he took his way to the kitchen.

“That little wretch of a Davy has been lying there listening to every word we have said,” remarked Penny.

“Well, he didn’t hear much,” returned Brownie. “There were no secrets this time.”

“No, but there might have been. He certainly is a child of investigating mind. Talk about curiosity! he has more than the whole Thistle Troop put together. I’m glad we chose the thistle, aren’t you? No one can fool with us without getting stung.”

“But that’s not the only reason we chose the

thistle," returned her friend. "It is very beautiful in form and color; it has a sweet odor and has certain uses."

"Oh, of course, and it lends itself to decoration most charmingly. Don't let me forget to show you my thistle pin. It is a perfect darling. Wasn't it nice of Aunt Agnes to send it to me? She bought it in Scotland years ago, and when Mother wrote to her of our Thistle Troop she sent it to me."

"I am crazy to see it."

"Come on, then."

Tossing her books and work into the hammock Penny led the way to her room through a hallway redolent with the odor of freshly baked gingerbread. At the head of the stairs she softly opened a door already on a crack. "Listen to Davy and Rilly scuffling," she whispered.

From below came the sound of voices raised in discussion. "You cl'ar out," cried Rilly. "'Tain't no use w'arin' out yo' voice astin' me fo' gingerbread outen the oven fo' hit's done."

"But, Rilly, it must be done. I saw it and it was real brown," protested Davy.

"Yuh let me ketch you op'nin' dat oven do'. Screepin' and scropin' up behin' mah back. Ef dat gingerbread ain't all drap flat an' be all soggy an' heavy 'tain't mah fault, hit yo'n. Comin' hyar an' worritin' me dis a way. I soon have one o' dese yer worritin' puppies un'er foot. You cl'ar out."

“ But, Rilly, you will give me a piece as soon as it is done, won't you? ” Davy spoke wheedlingly.

“Ain't gwine cut no fraich gingerbraid fo' no-buddy.”

“ Just a little piece? I say, Rilly, make me a little one, just a teeny little one.”

“ Big ner little, no suh. Cl'ar out. You wuss'n a mosquito.”

There was the sound of Davy's slowly retreating steps. Penny closed the door and the two girls went on.

“ That sort of thing goes on regularly,” Penny remarked. “ Davy may have gone but he'll be back in a minute.”

“ And then what? ”

“ The same thing over, but in the end there will be a small cake baked especially for him, from the 'scrapin's' Rilly will tell him, at the same time being sure to insist that the next time she will scrape the bowl so clean there will be none left for a little cake, and she 'reckons he needn't count on any more; this is the very last.' She adores Davy, for you know Rilly has been with us ten years.”

“ Fortunate for you.”

“ Yes, isn't it? She wouldn't stay only she is 'sot in her ways.' She is the real old-fashioned kind, you see, dislikes change, calls us her 'fambly,' and has been devoted to Davy ever since he was born.”

“ And you? ”

“ Oh, I’m only second best. Here is the pin. Isn’t it a dear? ”

“ Perfectly lovely,” declared Brownie, taking the pin to examine. “ I love the silver leaves and the purple stone in the middle. I should think you would wear it all the time.”

“ It came only yesterday, but I mean to wear it very often. Here comes Davy and I’ll venture to say he is eating gingerbread.”

To be sure when Davy appeared at the door he triumphantly held up a cake from which he had taken a huge bite. “ Look!” he cried, “ I’ve got some and you’ve got none.”

“ Piggy, piggy, honk, honk, honk,” Penny slowly grunted.

“ Ah-h, you’re only mad because you haven’t any,” Davy declared.

“ If you were a perfect gentleman you’d offer us yours,” remarked his sister.

“ But I’ve bitten into it,” was the reply.

“ You could break off the bitten part and give us the rest.”

Davy looked wistfully at his gingerbread, then lingeringly began to detach a piece from one side, coming slowly forward as he held out the larger part to his sister.

She caught him to her and gave him a hug. “ I wouldn’t take it for the world, honey-bug,” she said. “ I was just trying your mettle.”

"But I do want you to have it," insisted Davy with a sudden access of generosity.

"Offer it to Brownie first."

"Won't you have some?" Davy offered his cake with an expression which said: "I'd rather you wouldn't."

Brownie laughed. "I'm not famished, and I would rather not spoil my dinner by eating so near the time for it. Thank you very much for your hospitality."

Davy escaped noisily before any more demands could be made upon him, and retired to a secluded corner where he could finish his gingerbread in peace.

The sound of his clattering footsteps had scarcely died away when from the garden some one coo-eeed. "That's Beck, I'll be bound; she said she would hunt me up this morning," said Penny, going to the window to call down: "That you, Beck? Come right up." And in another minute Rebecca Cole appeared.

"What do you think, girls?" she began excitedly without preliminary. "We're going to clean up the town and we're going to adopt a Belgian; that is, maybe."

"Which is the maybe, the cleaning up the town or the Belgian?" asked Brownie.

"The cleaning up the town is for sure, you can bank on that; the Belgian depends."

"Who is to do the adopting? your parents?" inquired Penny.

"Bless you, no; the Thistle Troop of Girl Scouts is

to do it if it's done, but all that can wait. I'm in a desperate hurry on account of this cleaning up process."

"Just tell us this," interrupted Brownie. "Is this Belgian to whom you so mysteriously refer, is it a him or her, man, woman, or child?"

"It's a girl, twelve or thirteen, I believe. Don't ask me any more, for I haven't time to tell you. This other business comes first."

"I thought the first matter of importance was to get ready to welcome the returned soldiers?" said Brownie.

"This cleaning up campaign is part of what we are to do. We intend to do the welcoming in a clean old town; it's part of the celebration."

"But what are we expected to do; go into the streets with brooms?" inquired Penny.

"Of course not. You will hear all about it this afternoon. There is to be a special meeting of the Thistles. Miss Varney asked me to see as many of the girls as I could, and she will call up the rest. She wants every member to be sure to be present."

"What about the Belgian girl? Is she here or do we have to take her on sight unseen? Who is going to look after her? Where will she live?"

"Can't tell you about it now, for I don't know myself," answered Becky rising from her seat on the floor. She was a tall, long-legged, long-armed girl, always growing out of her clothes. She had short,

dark curly hair, brown eyes, a humorous mouth, rather a large nose. "I've got to get on," she continued, "agreeable as this present society may be. I've got to scout it to most of the patrol, so it's 'Off again, on again, gone again, Finnegan.' Good-bye, girls. Four o'clock sharp, and don't you dare not to come." And off she went.

"Beck is a corker," remarked Brownie. "She's the most enthusiastic one among us. I don't wonder Miss Varney likes her to be Patrol leader. She takes any amount of trouble to make things go. This town will be clean if Rebecca Cole has anything to say about it. Well, Pen, I must be off, too. It's most time for dinner."

"Better stay and have some with us. There will be gingerbread with whipped cream for dessert."

"Sounds mighty alluring, but I'd better go. Mother will need my help. Call for me, won't you?"

Penny promised and saw her friend to the door with a last word of: "See you this afternoon."

Her mother came up the steps just as Brownie went out. "What have you girls been doing all morning?" she asked.

"Oh, Girl Scout things, principally," Penny answered. "Isn't it exciting, Mother, that we are to help clean up the town? Have you heard about it?"

"Yes, I have heard that it would be a part of the programme, although the committee upon which I am serving had to look out for another end."

“What end?”

“The food end. We want to give those boys a royal welcome.”

“What are you going to do in the way of food?”

“We’re going to give them all the ice-cream and cake, all the sandwiches and coffee that they can stow away.”

“They’ll like that. You are on the reception committee, too, aren’t you? I wish I were, but then we shall be part of the escort, and that counts for something. We are to have a very important meeting this afternoon. Do you know anything about the Belgian girl, Mother?”

“What Belgian girl?”

“I don’t know what one. Becky Cole was here and told us there might be one for us to adopt.”

“You don’t mean that we, as a family, are expected to do that?” exclaimed Mrs. Atwood, sitting down in a porch chair and taking off her gloves.

“Oh, no, I don’t think so. It is all rather hazy as yet. We shall not find out at once, Becky said.”

“Of course one wants to do everything within reason for those wonderful Belgians,” Mrs. Atwood went on, “but ——”

“You wouldn’t exactly like me to have a Belgian sister, would you?” said Penny, voicing her mother’s thought.

“I should have to think about it very carefully before I decided,” said Mrs. Atwood, looking very seri-

ous. "If my little girl were among strangers and in need of a home I should hate to think that it would be denied her."

This made Penny look serious, too. It was a situation she did not like to contemplate. "Becky said something about the Thistle Troop adopting her," she told her mother with an air of relief, "so maybe we shall have only to take her on shares like they do farms."

Mrs. Atwood laughed. "You speak as if she were a mowing machine or something of that kind. How should you like to be taken on shares?"

Penny considered this for a moment before she answered: "I don't believe I should like it at all. I might for a little while; it would be like visiting, but to think that you had to keep on moving around forever and ever would be perfectly horrid."

"Then let us hope that we can do better than that for the little girl from Belgium. I wonder where Davy is. It is time he was getting ready for dinner."

"The last time I saw him he was eating gingerbread. He and Rilly had their usual scrap over it, of course."

"That is always part of the programme. I don't believe Rilly would think she had done her duty if that were left out."

"I suppose she thinks it has the same effect as the ginger."

"I haven't a doubt of it. Go and see if you can find

Davy, Penny dear. It is warm out here and I must go in. Your father will be coming in a minute."

Penny hunted around and finally came upon Davy playing with a team of dead mice which he had harnessed to the half of a canteloupe rind. "For pity's sake, David Atwood, what in the world have you got there?" cried Penny. "How can you play with those disgusting things?"

"They're not disgusting," retorted Davy. "They are quite fresh; they came out of the trap only this morning, and we had the canteloupe for breakfast. I am playing Cinderella, and I am sure that is a beautiful fairy tale; you say so yourself."

"But Cinderella's mice were alive."

"If these were you'd be so scared you would squeal like a—like a crow."

"Crows don't squeal; they caw."

"Well, anyway, I'm sure a canteloupe is nicer than a pumpkin any day."

"That may be, but you'd better come in and get ready for dinner. Wash all that awful stuff off your hands. Ugh! it makes me shiver to think of it."

Davy gave an admiring glance at his team as he came away and then fell to examining his hands which to his mind bore no trace of any "awful stuff," but which he must wash, he realized, before he could come to the table. So he obediently followed his sister, wondering why girls were so fussy.

CHAPTER II

CLEANING UP THE TOWN

THE girls were prompt that afternoon in meeting in the hall where their Captain, Miss Varney, was waiting for them. Curiosity was rife, for this special occasion was quite outside their usual gatherings. Each girl wore her Girl Scout uniform and those who had badges displayed them. Miss Varney looked around at the eager faces and smiled. There was evidently no lack of interest this afternoon. "Well, girls," she said, after the usual preliminaries, "the City Fathers have paid us the compliment of asking our help in cleaning up the town. We not only want it spick and span for the boys' home-coming but for our own good. It will be better if the girls were to hunt in couples. To every pair a certain district will be allotted. All the Girl Scouts in town are to help, the Boy Scouts, too. Each couple in our troop is to make a report to me at the end of each day. Anything which is beyond our jurisdiction or our powers to relieve will be looked after by the proper authorities to whom I report in my turn. Here are some printed slips—please give them out, Becky—which will tell you how to proceed."

There were many excited questions, much discus-

sion, but at last the girls all understood what they were expected to do, and the meeting broke up.

“It doesn’t look so awfully easy,” said Penny as she and Brownie started for home.

“Oh, we’ll soon get the hang of it,” returned Brownie cheerfully. “Of course all we shall notice at first will be bits of paper flying about, then we’ll see something else, and so on. Miss Varney said we must use our judgment about entering the yards, especially those that look doubtful. It won’t need more than a peep in most cases.”

“Very likely you’re right,” agreed Penny, “although I’d hate to have some virago throw scalding water on me, or even give me a tongue lashing.”

“We may get the words but I doubt if we get the water,” declared Brownie, “and we can get out if we see that coming. I shall not mind a storm of words, in fact it might be rather funny.”

“It will be exciting, to say the least,” replied Penny. “Do you know I think it will be a good plan to begin right at our own homes. Can’t you fancy Rilly? She will give us a foretaste of what we may expect at times.”

“Oh, Pen, what fun. Do get her going right away.”

The girls giggled, and then with serious faces, which they had some difficulty in maintaining, they went around to the back of the Atwood house where they found Rilly crooning a camp-meeting hymn as she laid

out some dish towels on the grass. With an air of great dignity the two girls stalked past the old woman, and began peering around, investigating the corners of the yard.

Rilly watched them for a few minutes, her arms akimbo. "What yuh lookin' fo', chilluns?" she asked at last. "Yuh alls done los' sumpin'?"

Penny, who had already flung Davy's team of mice and the canteloupe rind into the garbage pail, was now unearthing a pair of old shoes and some soiled rags which she had discovered under a pile of leaves. She pointed tragically to these as she said: "We've not lost anything, but we have found something, and to think it should be in our own back yard. Why did you hide them there, Rilly?"

"Law, child, dey isn't hid; dey's jes' frowed away," answered Rilly blandly. "Goblage man won't tek nothin' like that, an' what I gwine do with 'em when dey ain't no furnace fire goin'?"

Penny looked rather nonplussed. Rilly generally did get the best of an argument, and her excuses were unassailable. "I don't know what to do about it," said the girl turning to Brownie. "The City Fathers say we've got to clean up the town and here I am facing the problem of our own back yard before we've fairly started on the job. Why couldn't they go in with the ashes, Rilly?"

"'Tain't no ashes dis time o' year when we cooks on de gas stove."

Penny turned her attention to the pile of stuff she had unearthed. "All that junk, tomato cans and broken bottles under those leaves, who would have thought it? I don't know what the City Fathers will do to us," she went on, shaking her head at Rilly reproachfully.

"City Fathers! I say City Fathers!" ejaculated Rilly, wiping her hands on her apron. "'Tain't no city fathers ner mothers either has any business in dis yer back yard 'cep'in' dey name o' Atwood, das what I says. City Fathers, humph!" She turned toward the house, indignation showing in the set of her shoulders and the toss of her head.

The two girls stood watching her with mirthful eyes. "Isn't she great?" said Brownie. "I wish we might expect to get as much fun out of every one."

"But after all," said Penny, turning again to the heap of refuse, "the question now before the American public is: What is to be done with this stuff?"

"Suppose we bury it," suggested Brownie.

"Fine scheme!" agreed Penny. "We might leave out the cans, for they aren't really very bad, and we can bury them deep under the leaves, then when the ashes are collected again they can go in with them. It doesn't seem quite nice to leave them, but I'm afraid we can't dig a deep enough hole for everything."

"We'll do our best, but if we are to start in digging up everybody's back yard we'll have our hands more than full."

“We aren’t responsible for any but our own, are we?”

“No, I suppose not, and we aren’t exactly responsible for them; it’s up to our parents.”

“Then ——”

“Oh, let’s have the fun of doing this one and if we find it’s too much for our feeble powers we can pass over the job to whomever it may concern.”

“All right. I’ll go get something to dig with.”

She ran off to a shed outside the kitchen door and presently returned with two spades, then they valiantly set to work at the nearest practicable point to the heap of leaves. At the end of a few minutes Penny stopped to wipe her streaming face. “I didn’t know it was so hot and I hadn’t an idea it would be such hard work,” she said.

“Neither did I,” responded Brownie. “I don’t suppose we need go very deep. The ground is so hard and dry that it would take us ages to dig a very big hole.”

Just at this moment they heard some one whistling at the gate, then some one called out: “What are you doing, girls?”

The girls looked up to see two boys standing on the other side of the fence. “We’re cleaning up the town,” Penny made answer with a laugh.

“May we come in? That’s our business, too,” returned the taller of the boys, “and we want all the laurels that are coming to us.”

"You're welcome to any you may get here," returned Penny. "Come on in."

"This looks like gardening," said Rufus Marshall, the boy who had spoken.

"It may look like it, but it isn't. You know the order has gone forth from the powers that be that the town has got to be cleaned up and we Girl Scouts are to do our part of the cleaning."

"Likewise have we Boy Scouts to do our part."

"And isn't it disgraceful," continued Penny, "that we have to begin with the Atwoods' back yard? Look at that mess."

"Exactly and precisely where I began," returned Rufus laughing, "and likewise and similarly I found just such another mess in our back yard, only to be perfectly frank, ours was worse. I don't call this bad at all."

"It is a relief to my mind to hear you say that," Penny told him. "I really felt disgraced, for I didn't believe anyone but Rilly could get together such a heap of disgrace."

"You don't know our Bridget. Really, you could have left this under the leaves and almost all of it would have rotted with them."

"Not the cans and bottles."

"No, they wouldn't, of course. Here, give me that spade. This is no work for ladies. After all it isn't a bad plan to bury the whole outfit."

"What did you do with yours?"

“Got it ready to burn, found the wind was in the wrong direction, so I left it and to-morrow we’re going to get Paddy Bourke’s cart and haul the things to the dump heap. For your mess, as you call it, I think this is the better way. Our yard isn’t as big as yours. What isn’t flower border and grass plot is brick walk. I say, Jess,” he turned to the other boy, “why wouldn’t it be a good plan to follow up the Girl Scouts’ discoveries? They could go on ahead and locate what’s to be carted away, and we’ll come get the stuff. Of course, I don’t mean anything that is legitimate trash for the garbage, but things like these. It would expedite matters, it seems to me.”

“Good scheme,” returned Jesse Gale. “What is your territory, girls?”

Brownie told him and he nodded in agreement. “Just suits us. We go that route, too. I guess this is deep enough, Rufe. Here goes, tin cans and broken bottles in the sub cellar, shoes next, rags on top of them. That makes the finest sort of ragout. Now for the top crust.”

“Not a rag out, a rag in,” said Penny, at which attempt at a pun the boys groaned dismally.

“Wouldn’t believe it of you, Penny,” said Rufus. “Now this is done, what next?”

“Got a rake?” asked Jesse. “We want to get those leaves into a neat pile.”

Penny ran off to get the rake, casting her eyes to the right and left as she returned. “I reckon that is

about all here," she decided as she gave the rake into Jesse's hands. "I don't believe Rilly has anything more concealed about the premises. Thank you ever and ever so much. I feel so nice and orderly. We are going to Brownie's next, but you know everything will be in apple-pie order there."

"Of course where there are Brownies at work," remarked Rufus. "I suppose you begin your real campaign to-morrow. Lucky this crusade has started before school begins."

"Probably that's why they did start it now," said Brownie. "We are going to get off very early. We begin at Silver Street."

"Then I'll tell you what: we'll start at the other end, Gold Street, you know, and we can meet you at the junction of Market. You can make a list of the places we are to stop and we can attend to the carting," Rufus proposed this.

"Good work, Rufe," commented Jesse. "We'll have this burg so slicked up the boys won't know it when they get back."

"I'd hate that," rejoined Rufus; "we don't want to get them homesick. Let's get on, Jess. You won't fail to keep the tryst, girls, Market and Gold—or Silver. Just look out for Paddy Bourke's green equipage."

"That was just lovely of those boys," said Penny as she carried back the tools.

"It sho' was. I am glad they are to be on the job

to-morrow," said Brownie; "it will relieve us of a lot of responsibility. There's nothing like team work after all. Come along and let's see what is doing at our house."

But the Burtons' house and premises were above criticism, and the girls parted to meet the next morning in order to begin the day's round. Each had provided herself with a note-book and pencil and felt very important. During the first part of the day they were quite enthusiastic, although they were received variously, sometimes with smiles, sometimes with frowns, but generally when they explained their mission they were promised hearty coöperation.

"It isn't near as bad as I thought it was going to be," said Brownie, as they turned the corner of the street where they had been working.

"No, it isn't," Penny agreed, "but that is a nice street, and most of the people know us, so they wouldn't be rude. It doesn't look so promising in this direction."

"No, it doesn't," acknowledged Brownie rather dubiously. "These are mostly old houses, and in some of them several families live. I reckon now begins our tug of war."

She was not far out of her reckoning, for here they met a different spirit, either defiance or complete indifference, although there were exceptions enough to keep them from being utterly discouraged. It was when they attempted to enter the last house on the

street that they found themselves entirely at a loss how to meet the situation. The house was rather a large one, and in its best days had been quite handsome. A fine old doorway showed that it had been a long time since it had known paint. Many of the windows were broken and were stuffed with rags, shutters were off in many places, bricks had fallen from nearly every chimney.

The two girls looked it up and down. "I don't believe anyone lives here," said Penny.

"It will be just as well to find out," replied Brownie mounting the steps and knocking sharply on the door, for there was no sign of a bell, the place where it should have been presenting only a hole.

"Knock again," advised Penny as no one responded to the knock.

Brownie knocked louder and again they waited. "I reckon you're right," decided Brownie when they found waiting of no avail.

"Perhaps they are all at the back. I see there is a gate and a side yard. Suppose we try to get in there, and that will give us our chance to examine it."

Brownie agreed to this. They found the gate sagging on its hinges and dragging heavily on the ground, but by their combined efforts they managed to lift it sufficiently to allow them to squeeze inside. Then they stood still aghast.

"Well," exclaimed Penny after a survey of the place, "this beats the Dutch. It's the very worst yet.

Look at all those cats, Brownie; there must be a dozen, at least."

"And chickens, just roaming around anywhere."

"Tin cans, rags, old furniture, all sorts of stuff. It's perfectly awful. Somebody must live here to feed the chickens and the cats. Let's go to the door at the back; there must be one."

They made their way around through piles of refuse, scaring cats from their lairs and chickens from their roosts. A hen cackled wildly as she flew from a nest in a barrel, and a one-eyed cat bristled angrily and growled defiance as they neared the door.

"It's like some old ogre's den that you read about in fairy tales," declared Penny, as they stepped up to the back door.

After many knocks and much patient waiting they heard footsteps inside, then the door was opened a crack and a grisly head appeared. "Who are you and what do you want?" queried an old man scowling at them.

"We are Girl Scouts," began Penny bravely, "and we have come ——"

"Don't know anything about you and I never give to charity." The old man cut short her speech and slammed the door in her face.

It was a moment before Penny recovered herself enough to turn to Brownie and say: "Did you ever?"

The two girls looked at one another for a moment and then broke into irrepressible giggles.

"It wouldn't do to climb in one of those broken windows," at last said Brownie between giggles.

"Or to try to batter down the door."

"That would be house breaking."

"It is already broken."

At this Brownie started off again, but finally the two girls subsided enough to discuss the situation with some soberness. "All we can do is to report it," Penny decided.

"We'll tell the Boy Scouts and maybe they can do something with the ogre. He really does seem like an ogre, doesn't he?"

"Or a wizard. These cats don't look any too well fed, by the way; I wonder what the old man gives them to eat."

"Eggs, maybe."

"He probably eats those himself. Perhaps the cats catch mice and rats; it looks like a very ratty place."

"Oh, Pen, perhaps he is a miser and has treasure hid away; that would account for his saying that he never gave anything to charity."

"Of course, although he must be fond of animals, and I don't believe a miser would harbor so many. Two or three would be enough to keep the mice and rats away."

"Well, there is no use in our lingering here; it's time to meet the boys, anyway."

"Just wait till I jot down a few notes in my notebook."

"You can do that outside. I don't like to linger here among all these cats."

"They won't hurt you."

"Maybe not, but they stare at you in such a disconcerting way that it gives me the shivers."

"Poor little pussy cats; I'm afraid they don't have a very happy time, they look so meagre and witchy."

"I suppose you are imagining how you would feel if you lived with an ogre," said Brownie laughing.

They managed to squeeze through the gateway again, but decided that they would get the boys to come and put the gate in place, then Penny having jotted down her notes they went on to meet the boys.

Paddy Bourke's green cart was easily discerned, and the boys were not far off. They came up eagerly. "Well, girls, what sort of morning have you had?" asked Rufus.

"We've had a high old time," responded Penny. "At first it was plain sailing and everyone was as nice as could be, then it began to get worse, and just at the very last we struck a regular old ogre's den, all full of bones and cats and things."

"Whew! Sounds interesting," put in Jesse.

"It might be if we could get inside, but when you have the door slammed in your face what are you going to do?"

"Is that what happened?"

"That is exactly what did. We thought maybe you boys could tackle the ogre better than we could, but at

any rate we shall report the house. There are one or two others that are pretty bad, but this beats the bunch."

"Tell us where it is and we'll beard the ogre in his den," said Rufus.

"But you won't hurt the cats?" Penny spoke up.

"Of course not. What do you take us for?" answered Rufus somewhat indignantly. "Tell us where the place is and we'll go right around."

"First let us give you a list of the places where you are to go to gather up junk that is to be carted away. Two or three of the people were really quite grateful when we told them you would call with a cart, for they didn't know how to dispose of the trash. I suppose you have had a busy morning."

"You can bet we have, and it looks as if we would have a busy afternoon with cats and chickens and ogres to dispose of."

"Suppose you can't get in that house either, what shall you do?"

"Ho, that's an easy one. We'll go armed with the law."

"I'd love to say: Open in the name of the law," said Penny turning to Brownie. "You see we didn't know exactly whether we had a right to say that, and if we had done it we didn't know what the old man might do, shoot us or something."

"Was it as bad as that? He can't be a very prepossessing old person."

“He isn’t, but I saw one darling kitten.”

The others laughed, knowing Penny’s love of kittens. “Well, give us his ogreship’s address,” said Jesse, “and we’ll see what can be done.”

“Don’t forget to tell us what happened,” said Penny as the boys went off.

“We’ll come around your way and report,” Rufus called back.

“This afternoon?”

“Yes, when the day’s work is done.”

“That’s good,” declared Brownie to Penny. “I’m crazy to find out what they will do. I’d feel sort of cheap if they were to get in when we couldn’t.”

“I shouldn’t, for he may be a sort of—sort of —— What’s the name for a man that hates women?”

“Oh, let me see—misanthrope; no, that isn’t it, a— a—misyoganist? That doesn’t sound quite right either. We’ll have to look it up in the dictionary. Maybe he is that. Penny, something tells me it is dinner-time.”

“The same sort of something is telling me. I am as hungry as a hunter.”

“Well, we have been hunters this morning and have a right to be hungry. Let’s knock off for the present. Miss Varney said we mustn’t go too hard and wear ourselves out.”

“I shall not feel quite so worn out when I have had something to eat, though I must confess I am wondering how I am to get up the energy to walk home.”

“Come home with me and have dinner,” Brownie suggested. “It’s much nearer and you can telephone your mother.”

“Oh, but ——”

“There isn’t a single but in the case. Come right along; Mother will be delighted and we’re going to have apple cobbler.”

That settled it, and Penny made no further protest.

CHAPTER III

TOMMY THISTLE

IT was late in the afternoon that the boys appeared to give an account of their mission. The girls were on the lookout and ran to the gate as soon as the boys came whistling up the street. "What news? What news?" cried the girls.

"Well, we got in," answered the boys as they came up.

"Part way in," corrected Jesse, "but we did interview the old man."

"How did you manage it?"

"When we found that he didn't answer our knock we went off and hid, for we knew he would be bound to come out some time, if not from curiosity at least to feed the chickens or something like that." Rufus told them this.

"And what did he do? What did he say? Was he very ogreish?" the girls asked with one breath.

"He is a poor, miserable old snipe, that looks as if he didn't eat enough to keep soul and body together, and I don't believe he does. He talks like a fairly well educated man, says he was born in that house and hopes he may die there, and I should say he would if

he stays there much longer. He was so upset and shaky when we told him he must clean up the place that I felt sorry for him." Jesse contributed this information.

"I don't exactly see what is to be done about it," Rufus went on. "He certainly isn't able to do much himself, and resented our going in at all. We did manage to get inside one room, and such a place as it was, cats everywhere, chickens roosting all over the furniture, everything higgledy-piggledy. He ought to be looked after, but who is going to do it?"

"Of course we shall have to report it, for the case comes within our district," said Penny with a troubled look.

"We told him the authorities would have to look into it," returned Jesse, "and he almost wept."

"But hasn't he any friends to look after him, no relations?" asked Brownie.

"He says not. He says the only friends he has in the world are his cats and chickens."

"Oh, dear!" Penny drew a long sigh. "I didn't dream that anything so dreadful would come our way. I wish we could do something about it."

"We four could clean up the place if he would let us," remarked Brownie.

"And at the end of a week it would be just as bad as ever," declared Rufus. "No, it should be something more than that, something that would give permanent results."

“Well, all we can do is to tell Miss Varney about it,” decided Penny, “for we don’t have to take all responsibility.”

“We sure don’t,” replied Rufus.

“Well, you have done a great deal, yes, a very great deal in seeing him at all,” said Penny earnestly, “for now instead of thinking of him as an ogre we can pity him for being a poor, miserable old man, friendless and alone.”

“Funny how your point of view changes when you get at the core of things,” said Jesse thoughtfully. “We went there prepared to bullyrag the old codger and we came away wondering how we could help him.”

“Well, so long, girls,” said Rufus, “we must be moving. Let us know how the thing works out.”

“We will do that,” the girls promised, and then the boys went off.

“We must go right away to Miss Varney with our report,” said Penny. “It’s getting late.”

“Yes, and this matter should be attended to at once. Somehow it seems more important than all the rest. If the man is ill he should have a doctor.”

“And if he is hungry he should have food. If he is proud and a gentleman it is going to be pretty hard to deal with him; I can see that.”

Brownie agreed that it would be, and the two hurried off to the Captain of their troop to lay the matter before her.

Miss Varney showed the deepest interest in their report, and promised to take up the matter at once. "Don't worry over it, girls," she said. "Leave it all to me. I will consult the proper persons, and you may be sure that whatever seems best will be done." So with this assurance they were obliged to be satisfied, though it must be said that Penny lay awake a long time that night wondering what would become not only of the old man, but of his animals.

She could scarcely wait to swallow her breakfast the next morning before she was off. "Where are you going so early?" asked her mother.

"To see that old man," Penny called back and was out of sight before her mother could say another word. She had worked out a plan while she was dressing, and with Penny to plan was to perform. On her way she stopped at a corner grocery and bought a bottle of milk. A little further on she went into a butcher's shop and came out with a small package in her hand. Then she continued her way till she came to the old house which she and Brownie had dubbed the Ogre's Den. She hesitated a minute before going around to the gate, looking the house up and down, then she ran eagerly up the steps to pick up a little black kitten which she saw crouching in the corner by the door. "You poor little thing," she said caressingly. "I wonder if you belong in this house."

"Meow!" said the kitten, making no struggle to get away.

“I certainly believe you do,” Penny went on. “I’m going to take you around to the back and see if it seems familiar to you. Perhaps if the old man sees you he will come out.”

She carried the kitten around to the sagging gate, and squeezed her way through. Hunting around she found an old tin can into which she poured some of the milk from the bottle. The kitten lapped it eagerly. When it appeared satisfied Penny poured out more of the milk, and took from the parcel she carried some bits of meat which she threw on the ground, and then she stood off to watch events. Presently from under a pile of boards stole cautiously forth a gray cat, from another hiding place crept a black-and-white one, then appeared a yellow one, and, as Penny looked, she saw issuing from the house several more cats one after the other.

“That’s funny,” said Penny to herself. “The door must be open. Now’s my chance.”

Picking up the kitten, which seemed perfectly at home, she went toward the door. The cats eyed her suspiciously but went on eating. Penny went up to the door and knocked. After waiting a while she knocked again. The door was still ajar, and presently she pushed it softly open, then she stepped inside. There was no one in sight. Curled up in a dilapidated armchair was another cat, a very old one, Penny decided. Upon a shelf was another one asleep, and as she moved further into the room from the depths of a

cupboard flew a hen cackling loudly. Penny went over to the spot, peered into a box and found a newly laid egg. "That's handy," she said with a little chuckle, "to have your breakfast provided to order."

She stood still to take a survey of the room which showed signs of being continuously occupied by both man and beast. An old lounge with broken springs stood in one corner. Several soiled comfortables lay in a heap upon it, looking as if they had been tossed there by some one who had lately gotten up. A cup with dregs of tea in it stood on a table, egg shells lay beside it. Penny tiptoed across the room and peered into the cupboard which was bared of everything but a little sugar in a cracked bowl, a few crackers and some corn-meal, although she presently did spy on the floor in a corner a bag containing some screenings for chicken feed. "Pretty slim rations I should say," murmured Penny.

She shut the cupboard door and stood still in the middle of the room listening. There was not a sound to be heard within the house, except the solemn ticking of an ancient clock which stood on a shelf over a rusty stove. Emboldened by the silence Penny pushed open a door and tiptoed out into a dimly lighted hallway. Other rooms opened out of it. Stepping softly across this the girl opened one door after another. She saw heavy pieces of furniture in some of the rooms, portraits on the walls, but no human presence. "It is sort of ghostly," she whispered. "Perhaps I'd better

not go further, for there's no telling what I might come across. I think I'll make a lot of noise and then if there is anyone up there I shall be heard."

Then she went around slamming doors, and walking heavily as she went, listening once in a while for some sound from above, but none came, and finally she went back into the room which was evidently the kitchen, and found the little kitten sitting on a table placidly washing its face. "I reckon you belong here all right," said Penny, "but I hate to leave you. I wonder what has become of that old man. He certainly is far from being a good housekeeper. I never saw such a dirty place in all my life and there isn't a sign of a broom anywhere. I reckon I'd better go to Miss Varney's if I want to find out anything. Good-bye, kitten; I may see you again."

She went out softly, closing the door, then, on second thoughts, she left it ajar. "There isn't much to steal," she said to herself, "and maybe the cats will want to get out. I'd better leave it as nearly as possible as I found it."

Passing into the yard she saw that the cats had devoured every scrap of meat and had taken all the milk. She picked up the empty bottle, deciding to take it home and wash it before returning it to the grocer. As she stood looking about the chickens came flocking to her, evidently asking for breakfast.

"I wonder if I dare feed you," said Penny. "It seems rather a liberty to take, but I believe I will risk

it." She went into the house, brought out some screenings and scattered them on the ground, then she filled an old tin pan with water, wormed her way again through the gate and walked rapidly toward Miss Varney's home.

"That was really an adventure," she soliloquized. "I suppose I ought to have brought Brownie with me, but I thought perhaps if only one of us went to the old man he wouldn't be scared to come out. I wonder where in the world he is. He might have been upstairs ill or ——" She gave a quick gasp and hurried on faster.

"You are an early bird," was Miss Varney's greeting. "Where is Brownie?"

"I didn't stop for her," Penny began breathlessly, "because I went right straight to that old man's. Oh, Miss Varney, do you know where he is? He wasn't in the house, at least not down-stairs, and I was too scared to go any further."

"Yes, I can tell you exactly where he is," said Miss Varney with a smile. "He is in the hospital."

"Oh, then he is ill."

"Yes. I sent Dr. Gates right over last evening, and he said he must go at once to a hospital for treatment. He had a great time persuading the poor old fellow to go, but when he told him that the authorities might send him to a charitable institution or even to the poor-house he consented."

"How long must he stay there?" asked Penny.

“That is uncertain. The doctor wants to look him over thoroughly before he can decide.”

“Then where will he go? When he comes out, I mean, and what will become of his animals?” Penny looked troubled.

“Oh, my dear, those are really vital questions that cannot be settled at once.”

“I fed the chickens and the cats,” said Penny, “and I think I will do it every day till we know what is going to happen. You don’t suppose they will drown all those dear cats, do you, the City Fathers, I mean? There is such a cunning little black kitten, so friendly and darling.”

“That would seem a pity, to destroy them, I mean, but they mustn’t be neglected and allowed to starve; that would be worse than putting them out of the way.”

“We could try to find homes for them if the old man isn’t coming back. I would do my best, and so would Brownie; I think some of the boys would, too.”

“That’s a good suggestion, Penny. We’ll have to see about it.”

“What is the old man’s name? Could I go to the hospital to see him?”

“His name is Mason, and I will ask the doctor about your going to see him.”

With this Penny was obliged to be satisfied, and she went soberly away, stopping to see Brownie before she went home. They were to go on their second tour of

investigation, but were advised not to go at it as vigorously as they had done the day before. "You will wear yourselves out before the week is over if you keep up this pace," Miss Varney cautioned them, "and I would take a good long rest, in the middle of the day when it is warm."

Brownie was discovered helping her mother to make pickles, but declared the job would soon be finished and then she would be ready to start out again on the business of cleaning up the town. She listened interestedly while Penny told of her morning's adventure. "Why didn't you come for me?" she asked.

"Well, you see," said Penny, "I thought maybe if Mr. Mason, that's his name, Brownie, if he were to see me there alone and feeding the cats he might come out and talk to me, but if there were two of us he mightn't."

"I don't see why not. I don't see why he should be more scared of two girls than of one."

"I didn't think he would be scared exactly, but only more ready to come out."

"I don't see the argument," replied Brownie; "however, as long as you didn't see him it doesn't matter."

"I'm going again this evening to feed the cats, so if you'd like to go along——"

"If you are going to buy milk and meat for all those cats every day it will cost you a pretty penny," Brownie warned her. "Meat and milk are so awfully high."

“Yes, I know it, but I shall not have to do it long, and I am using my own pocket money, so it’s nobody’s business but my own,” Penny answered with some heat.

“Oh, of course,” Brownie agreed hastily, “only we shall all want to save up for the Belgian girl.”

“Oh dear, yes. I had forgotten her. Well, I can’t let those poor cats starve, Belgian or no Belgian. Are you ready, Brown?”

“All but washing my hands and taking off my apron. I wonder what we shall strike to-day.”

“Not another forlorn old man, I hope.”

“And another family of cats; you will be dead broke if we do.”

But there were no more such cases found in this day’s rounds, yet they had by no means finished with old Mr. Mason. When they made their report to Miss Varney that evening they were told that the old man would be in the hospital for a long time, in all probability.

“Will he get quite well?” Penny asked.

“It is doubtful, but the doctor hopes he will improve enough to be removed to some home,” Miss Varney told her.

“Oh, dear, he won’t like that any better than the hospital, I am afraid. Then, Miss Varney, we’ve got to do something about the cats. I wish I could see him.”

“Well, my dear, there is no objection. He is not

too ill to receive visitors, the doctor says, and indeed I believe it would cheer him up to feel that some one took enough interest to come to see him."

"Then I'll go to-morrow and take him some flowers. What about you, Brownie?"

"I'll go the next day, so we can string along the visits."

"So much the better," declared Miss Varney. "You are doing finely, girls. Don't forget to wear cheerful faces when you go to the hospital."

Armed with this permission Penny started out the next day, though not without some perturbation. She had been to the hospital before and knew the head nurse, so the mere fact of being a visitor did not disturb her, but she wondered how she would be received by the patient himself. She carried a large bunch of bright dahlias as she started out, but laid these down on the grass and ran back.

"Forgotten something?" her mother called out.

"I want to get a basket," replied Penny without further explanation.

She came back with the basket, laid the dahlias in it and went on. Leaving the regular route to the hospital she turned off to enter the yard of the house now called Mr. Mason's instead of the Ogre's Den. The cats and chickens all came to meet her with expectation of a meal. "Not yet, my dears," said Penny. "You'll have to wait till later, but I can promise you that you are not to go without a supper."

The little black kitten rubbed against her, purring softly. "I'm going to take you to make a visit," Penny said, stroking the little creature and then putting it into the covered basket from which she took the flowers. "Maybe you won't like it, but I think your master will be glad to see you. Good-bye, you others; I'll be back after a while."

At the hospital she asked for the head nurse. "Miss Converse," she said, "I've come to see Mr. Mason and I've brought him these flowers, and"—she hesitated,—“would it be all right if I were to take his kitten in to see him?”

"Why, my dear," Miss Converse looked dubious, "I'm afraid that would never do. You see, he is in the free ward, and there are others there."

"He is a real clean kitten," expostulated Penny with a wistful smile. "His mother washes him every day. He is in this basket, and has been so good all the way."

Miss Converse looked amused, though she said: "I think you'd better let me take charge of him while you make your visit."

"Couldn't Mr. Mason have just one little peep at him?" begged Penny, greatly disappointed.

Miss Converse shook her head. "Sorry, my dear, but it wouldn't do."

So Penny was obliged to go into the free ward bearing only her flowers.

Mr. Mason, very pale and thin, but exceedingly clean, was quite a different person from the grisly

ogre, though he gave no sign of being glad to see Penny, who smiled down upon him and said: "I'm Penny Atwood. I've brought you some flowers out of our garden. I brought your little black kitten, too, but they wouldn't let me take him in here."

At this piece of information a wan smile came over the patient's thin face. "How do you know anything about my kitten?" he asked.

Penny gave the flowers into the hands of a nurse who came up to take them, promising to put them in water, then, seating herself in a chair by the bedside Penny began to explain. "Why, don't you remember," she began, "I came to see you yesterday with a friend, only you—you didn't care about seeing us, so we went away." She tried to put the matter as delicately as possible, but won no answer. "Then," she went on, "I thought I would call again this morning, but you weren't there, only the darling kitten was sitting on the steps. Perhaps you would like to know," she paused a little, "that I have fed the cats and the chickens, and they are getting along all right."

The old man studied her face for a moment before he asked: "What did you do that for?"

Penny opened her eyes wide. "Why, because—— Don't you want anyone to feed them? Would you rather they'd starve?"

The man gave a negative shake of the head: "Oh no, oh no. Poor things, poor things, what is to become of them?"

“Would you like me to get good homes for them? I would try very hard.”

The patient looked at her in silence for a moment. “I cannot understand it,” he said quaveringly. “I have no claim upon you.”

“Oh, yes, you have,” returned Penny cheerfully, “all our friends have a claim upon us, and our Girl Scout book says that we must be a friend to all the world. Do you know about Girl Scouts? You know about Boy Scouts, of course, everybody does; well, we are as near like them as girls can be, and the very first thing we do is to promise first: to do our duty to God and our country; second: to help other people at all times; third: to obey the laws of the Scouts. One of these laws is that we must be kind to animals; that is the very easiest one for me, because I do love animals, and I can’t bear to see them suffer.”

The old man listened in silence to this explanation. Penny drew her breath and then went on: “If you would like me to try to get homes for the cats I certainly will try, as I told you before. Would you like me to?” Then suddenly realizing that this implied that he would not be able to take charge of them again, she continued diplomatically: “Of course, when you get well, you could have them back again.”

“I shall not get well,” the old man said. “The doctor has told me. I may live some months, perhaps a year or two, but I shall not go into my old home again, the home where I have lived all my life. It was

a pleasant home once, but after my dear wife died I couldn't, I couldn't ——” He broke off, and Penny, full of sympathy but not knowing just what to say, leaned over and stroked the wrinkled hand that lay outside the covers. Presently Mr. Mason recovered himself and said in an altered voice: “You are very good to take this interest in me and my pets, and I shall be very grateful if you will see that they have homes, very grateful indeed.”

Penny rose to go. “I will come and tell you all about them, and I shall start right away to see what I can do. I shall take the kitten myself, I know Mother will let me, and he shall be the mascot for our troop of Girl Scouts. I am going to call him Tommy Thistle. Good-bye. I am coming again just as soon as I can.”

She went off smilingly, but the old man lay with closed eyes, tears trickling down his cheeks.

So Tommy Thistle did not go back to his old quarters, but to a meeting of the Thistle Troop, where he made “his meow,” as Brownie said, and was enthusiastically elected as the troop's mascot.

CHAPTER IV

PENNY MAKES A SACRIFICE

IT was one thing to promise and another to perform, Penny found out before a week was over, for although the number of cats diminished, it was very difficult to find homes for twelve. The mice which Davy had used in his play of Cinderella seemed to be the advance guard of others, for Rilly complained that she was having trouble in keeping them out of the pantry.

“Then we can take one of the cats,” said Penny, triumphantly. “I’ll ask Mr. Mason which is the best mouser among them, and we’ll take that; can’t we, Mother?”

“It does seem the best way to get rid of the mice, but what about your Tommy Thistle?”

“Oh, he isn’t mine altogether; he is the mascot of the Thistle Troop. He goes to all the meetings, and the girls club together to pay for the milk he drinks.”

“Is that all the food he has?”

“No, but it is most all, and there are plenty of scraps from the table to give him the rest of what he needs. I think Tommy Thistle is a nice name for him because he is prickly and fluffy both.”

“ You don’t think a strange cat will hurt him? ”

“ But it won’t be a strange cat; it will be at least an acquaintance, if not a relative.”

“ I see,” Mrs. Atwood smiled. “ Well, I see no objection to our taking one of the cats.”

“ Good! Good! That leaves only five to be provided for. If they were all kittens I shouldn’t have so much trouble, but so few persons want old cats, especially when they are ugly. All the young, good-looking ones are picked out. I suppose you wouldn’t mind an ugly one so long as it is a good mouser and doesn’t get into trouble.”

“ You must see what Rilly says. You know she is very autocratic and it wouldn’t be so pleasant for the cat if she were to take a dislike to it.”

“ That is quite true, and she likes to be consulted. I’ll try to see Mr. Mason to-day and ask him about the mousing qualities of the different ones. I wish cats didn’t have to have mousing qualities, or else that mice were not such objectionable, gnawing little beasts, for they are very cunning. Roy Harlan has a pair of white mice and they are too pretty for words. Roy is very fond of them and that is why he wouldn’t take a cat. Leila Sheldon wouldn’t take one because she has a bird, and she said horrid things about cats. I told her that she didn’t know them and had an entirely wrong idea of them. I told her that people ate birds and she might as well say she hated people.”

“ What was her answer to that? ”

Penny smiled. "She said she would hate anybody who ate her bird."

Leaving her mother laughing at Leila's way of begging the question, Penny went off to interview Mr. Mason. The two had become very good friends by this time, and under careful treatment the old man was improving beyond what had been expected. Rufus Marshall and Jesse Gale had agreed to sell the chickens if Penny would undertake the cats. The eggs, too, which they collected they were able to sell at the highest market price, and they had no difficulty in finding customers for the chickens in their own troop of Boy Scouts.

After a satisfactory visit to the hospital Penny returned home to talk things over with Rilly. She approached her subject diplomatically, knowing Rilly's peculiarities. "Caught any more mice, Rilly?" she began by asking.

"Not a blessed one. Dey is gettin' too clever. Dey knows dat trap. Ef dat little kitten was bigger he'd soon show 'em. He mighty peart, dat kitten is."

"I suppose a grown cat would be better. If we knew one that was a real good mouser it might be the best thing, don't you think?"

"Mebbe, but how is yuh goin' to tell? Don't want no triffin', no 'count cat around, stealin' an' gettin' under foot."

"I know where there are two fine mousers. Suppose you go with me to pick out one of them."

“Whar dey at?”

“The same place that Tommy Thistle came from. I went to see that old man to-day and I was talking about the cats. You know I’ve promised to get homes for them all, if I possibly can. There are six left, so we can have our pick.”

“All right, yuh wait till I gets my wuk done dis afternoon and we’ll go cat huntin’.”

This suited Penny exactly. If she had approached Rilly in any other way probably she would have had no success. It was policy to get her interested, and then propose a plan of action.

The two started off together, Rilly very important, quite as if she were going on a government mission. Once arrived she looked around with the greatest contempt. “Yuh calls this a house,” she said.

“What would you call it, Rilly?” Penny asked.

“I calls it a pig pen,” she replied with a chuckle.

“It isn’t anything to what it was. You should see what the boys have done. They have carted away lots of trash from the outside, and have begun to clear up inside.”

“Huh! Whar dem cats?”

“Oh, around, in different places. They will come as soon as they know I have something for them to eat.”

She put some food down on the ground and in a few minutes the half dozen cats were there. Rilly looked them over critically.

“Mr. Mason says that one-eyed gray one is the best hunter of them all.” Penny gave the information.

Rilly shook her head decidedly. “Uh uh, don’t have no use fo’ no one-eyeded cat. He looks ’zackly lak ole cunjur man what live off in de woods down by my gran’mother’s. No, ma’am, don’t want no one-eyeded nothin’. Sho’ would bring me bad luck.”

“What about that gray one? She’s good, too.”

“Das all right. I laks her looks. She kinder pleasant-faced. She got nice big eyes. We teks dat one.”

That settled it, so the gray cat was bundled into a basket, in spite of some resistance, and was borne off to her new home. “Have to shet her up fo’ a few days an’ feed her well,” declared Rilly, “an’ den mebbe she fin’ her way back. Cats sutt’nly is onery about dat. Ne’ min’, we try an’ coax her to stay. I skeered yuh ain’t nuver get rid o’ dat one-eyeded ole cunjur cat. How many is yuh say dey is lef’?”

“There are only five now. Don’t you know some one who wants a nice cat?”

“I say nice. Nobody want dem leavin’s. Yuh has bit off mo’n yuh kin chaw, chile, when yuh say yuh fin’ homes fo’ all dat raffle raffle.”

Penny sighed, but so persistent was she, and so lucky, Brownie said, that by the end of the week she had disposed of all the cats except the unfortunate “one-eyeded” one. She still had hopes even in this unpromising direction and finally she was rewarded.

"Are there none of Mr. Mason's neighbors who would like the poor creature?" asked Mrs. Atwood when Penny went to her discouraged.

"Nobody." The answer came with a sigh. "You see, Mr. Mason wasn't popular because he kept to himself and was so queer. You know the neighborhood was a very nice one once, but it isn't any more, though his house is just on the edge of it and there are nice houses beyond. The neighbors thought him proud and eccentric, imagined he was a miser or something, so he had no friends."

"I see. Well, my dear, you must have patience and in the meantime the cat will not suffer, for you are very faithful in feeding it."

Then one day Penny came in triumphantly announcing: "Old One Eye has a home, a real nice one."

"You don't say so," exclaimed her mother. "Really, my dear, I never believed that would happen, and have been thinking the most merciful thing would be to have him put out of the way. Tell me about it."

"Well, it was this way: Just as I was going in the gate to feed old One Eye, I saw the nicest looking old Irish woman, so clean and comfortable looking, so I went up to her and asked her if she knew anyone who wanted a cat. She looked at me a minute and then she said with a brogue you could cut with a knife: 'Is it a cat thin? It's meself that wouldn't moind, ef I loiked the baste.'" Penny was a good mimic. "Then I told her about Mr. Mason and all that, and

she was just as interested, and went in with me to find One Eye. As soon as she saw him she lifted up her hands and said: 'Wurra, wurra, look at the wan eye of it.' Then I was afraid that would be an objection, but it wasn't, for when I asked her she said: 'Would I be moindin' a little thing loike that? I would not, for didn't me own man, Mike O'Rourke, have but the wan eye, an' a good man he was, an' as good a shoemaker as if he'd three eyes in his head. I'll take the baste and it's Mike I'll call him.' "

"Oh, Penny, that doesn't sound as if it could be true," commented her mother.

"But it is, every word of it," Penny assured her. "So then she took off her shawl and we bundled up One Eye—Mike, I mean—in it, and I went with her to help in case he got obstreperous, but he didn't; I think he was lonely and was glad of company. She has a 'nate little house' in one of those back streets near the market, and everything was as nice as possible. We gave One—no, Mike,—the milk and meat I had brought for him and that is the end of the chapter."

"And quite an interesting one. I never saw such a child for adventures. I know what Brownie Burton will say."

"What?"

"She will say: 'Isn't that Penny's luck to have that old woman come along at the psychological moment?'"

“I don't think it was exactly luck; it might have happened to anyone.” Which was true, in a sense, although Brownie maintained that it was quite outside of what might have been expected.

“Now that you are through with feeding cats you can just save your money for something else,” remarked Brownie the next time the two girls met.

“Have you something special in mind?” asked Penny.

“Yes, I have. We've got to look out for that Belgian girl, you know.”

“Oh, Brownie, you don't mean that we've got to support her.”

“Not exactly that, but she has hardly a rag to her back, and everyone has been sending all they could spare to devastated France and those places so I doubt if there will be many left-overs, so what we can't get in any other way we shall have to buy. Besides, she can't stay where she is forever, and while we are looking for a permanent home for her she will have to be fed.”

“Oh dear! Here we've just settled poor old Mr. Mason, in fact we have not settled him, and here comes along this new thing.”

“But we knew about Louise Fallon before we ever heard of Mr. Mason.”

“That is true, but somehow he seems to belong to us by right of discovery. Where is this Louise? Have you seen her?”

“She came day before yesterday and is staying with the Varneys, but she can't stay there always. We shall see her this afternoon when our troop meets.”

“At Miss Varney's, isn't it? I really do want to see the girl, and of course we must do all we can for her. I know Mother will help.”

“So will all the mothers, but they are all pretty busy. We thought when the war was over there would be nothing left to do, but there seems to be a plenty left. It will take a long time to get things back to where they were in France and Belgium, not to mention other places.”

“So I suppose we shall have to keep on making sacrifices. Well, I am willing.”

After seeing little Louise Fallon that afternoon, and hearing her story there was not a girl in the Thistle Troop who was not ready to go to the limit in giving up all she could in order to help the young refugee, but no one, perhaps, made a greater sacrifice than Penny Atwood. She was very thoughtful as she walked home with Brownie, and the two parted soberly, Penny going directly home to seek out her mother, whom she found on the side porch with a basket of mending. The weather was still very mild, and the garden showed few signs of approaching autumn.

Penny seated herself in the hammock, swinging gently back and forth as she watched her mother deftly darning a pair of Davy's trousers.

She was so long silent that her mother looked up

presently to ask: "Did you have a good meeting, daughter, and did you see the little Belgian girl we have heard about?"

"We had a fine meeting, and, yes, Louise Fallon was there." Penny lapsed into silence again.

"You're not very expansive, dear. What's the matter?" said her mother after a few minutes. "Tell me about Louise. What is she like?"

"She is small and pale with big dark eyes, such a sad little face, and no wonder. Think of it, Mother; her father was killed in battle, her mother died from cold and exposure after they had to flee from their home, which was burned to the ground. Her brother was taken prisoner and died in Germany, so she is all alone in the world. I didn't know anyone could have so much trouble." There was a little catch in Penny's voice as she spoke.

"It is sad, so very sad," murmured her mother, "and we who have everything cannot do too much for those who have lost everything."

"That is what Miss Varney says. Mother, are you and Father going to give me a new set of furs at Christmas? Please tell me."

Her mother looked up in surprise at the sudden change of subject. "Why, yes, dear, we thought of it. Why do you ask?"

"They would cost a good deal, wouldn't they, even the cheapest kind?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

“Then, would you just as soon give me the money?”

“Why, I don’t know. You need furs, I think. Yours are really quite shabby. I was looking at them the other day when I was unpacking our winter things.”

“Yes, I know they’re shabby, but they would keep me warm, which is the main thing, and think what the money would buy for Louise.”

“So that’s the idea.” Her mother laid down her work and looked at Penny with a tender smile. “Well, I will talk to your father about it, and if you want to make the sacrifice I will not stand in your way. You must not decide too hastily. You mustn’t do anything and then regret it so you want to change your mind.”

“I have decided,” replied Penny firmly. “I did on my way home, and I shall be ever and ever so much happier knowing that Louise is comfortable than if I paraded around in new furs when she hadn’t enough clothing.”

“I am very sure of that, dear child. Very well, I will speak to your father about it.”

“And if he agrees could I have the money right away and would you help me buy the right things for Louise? You see she will need stockings and shoes, and shoes cost such a tremendous lot, then she ought to have a warm coat and warm underclothing.”

“But you couldn’t expect to provide her with everything.”

“No, but I was just thinking of all the things she would need. Of course the other girls will help, and there will be a few left-overs. Have I any?”

“Not many, I am afraid, for we have sent away all the things we could spare. I think there may be a hat.”

“I’ll tell you who ought to have things and that’s Becky Cole; she fairly shoots her arms and legs out of her clothes. I never saw anyone grow so fast. I tell her she is an inch taller every time I see her.”

It was no later than the next evening that Penny’s father called her into the library. “Well, daughter,” he said, “I hear that you are asking for Christmas gifts in September. Isn’t that a little previous?”

“It might be for furs,” responded Penny, “but it isn’t for some other things.”

“Automobiles, for instance. Well, here is what should buy you a set of furs.” He handed her a check.

Penny looked at it and then fell back into a stuffed chair. “All that!” she cried.

“You didn’t expect to get a set of furs for nothing, did you?” said her father smiling. “You might have, if you had used up all those old cats you have been so interested in.”

“Oh, Dad, as if I would do such a thing.”

“Oh, I didn’t expect you to, and that is why I gave you this check.”

Penny jumped up and flung her arms around her father’s neck. “Oh, but you are the dearest kind of

blessed old daddy. I am pleased all to pieces." Then she started to rush out to her mother but paused on the door-sill. "Did Mother tell you what I want to do with it? I don't want to pretend it is for furs when it isn't."

"No pretending is called for," her father assured her. "I have all the inside information, so run along and do whatever your mother thinks best."

Waving her check high in air Penny ran to where her mother was. "Look! Look!" she cried. "Did you know it was going to be such an awful lot?"

"What is an awful lot?" inquired her mother.

"Money, this check Father has just given me. To think you meant to give me such an expensive set of furs."

Her mother laughed. "To tell you the truth, daughter, I have a notion that it wouldn't have been so big if it had represented furs for you, but because of the real purpose your father stretched it a little."

Penny gazed at the check exultantly. "Can we start right off to-morrow to do the shopping for Louise? We'd better take her with us, so she can be fitted properly."

"Don't you think it would be better to find out exactly what she needs? There may be contributions, and we don't want to duplicate."

"That is so. Then I'll call up Miss Varney and ask her to tell me what she is sure will be needed and we can start in with those. She has got to have shoes,

that I know, and underwear, I should think, stockings, too, for everybody wears out those things before they get too small for them."

Her mother smiled at her eagerness. "You are mighty anxious to spend the money, aren't you? I think Louise may be able to exist a few days with what she has now."

"I suppose she could, but she would feel so comfortable knowing that she had enough. If you were a little girl, a little refugee girl that hadn't had anything new for ever so long, wouldn't you be immensely pleased to get things?"

"Your argument is unanswerable. Go along and call up Miss Varney if you want to," said Mrs. Atwood smiling. "Bless the dear child," she whispered as she watched Penny speed from the room.

She was back again in a few minutes. "Miss Varney will make a list, she says, and I am to go over for it to-morrow, and Louise can go shopping with us in the afternoon. She will need shoes certainly, Miss Varney told me, so we can get those anyhow even if we don't get anything else. I'd hate to go around with shoes too big for me and all run over at the heels, and those are what she has. You see, Mother, they fixed her up the best they could over there, and she came straight here as soon as she landed."

"I understand, and I am very glad she is here and that we can help her."

“You see, Mother,” Penny sat down on a low chair and rested her elbows on her knees, her chin in her hands, “if it hadn’t been for the Girl Scouts she might not have come, but it was a friend of Miss Varney’s who used to be the Captain of a troop, who discovered her. This friend was working for the Red Cross or something, and she wrote to Miss Varney about Louise, then Miss Varney wrote back and told her that she could answer for her Girl Scouts and that she knew we would do everything in our power for Louise, so then this lady sent Louise here in charge of someone who was coming back.”

“I am very glad Miss Varney could answer for her Girl Scouts, for that means that my daughter, being one of them, is a person to be depended upon.”

“We couldn’t be Girl Scouts unless we were to be depended upon. We’ve got to be kind and helpful, we’ve got to make ourselves trusted, and we’ve got to be a friend to all. We shouldn’t be playing fair if we did otherwise.”

“I am very glad my little girl understands the true spirit.”

“She wouldn’t be her mother’s little girl if she didn’t,” returned Penny laying her cheek caressingly against her mother’s hand.

And then Davy came bouncing in, so the intimate talk stopped, but in spite of her sacrifice, or rather because of it, Penny went to bed that night a very happy girl with the pleasant anticipation of go-

ing shopping with her mother and Louise the next day.

She was just ready to pop under the covers when a sudden thought came to her, so she slipped on a wrapper and slippers, stole down-stairs and peeped into the room where she had left her mother sitting. She was there still alone, and Penny crept cautiously in. "Why, Penny," exclaimed her mother, "what is the matter?"

"Nothing except that I want to know if you can speak French very well."

"That is a very funny thing to bring you down-stairs when you are all ready for bed. Why do you want to know?"

"I was just wondering what we would do about Louise, for you see she can speak scarcely any English, and I am afraid my French is worse than her English."

"I wouldn't worry about that. I think we can make out. Certainly I shouldn't let it keep me awake."

"Well, I just couldn't go to sleep till I knew how you felt about it."

"I feel quite equal to the emergency. Now run along or you will take cold."

"Then kiss me another good-night and I'll go *toute suite*. Is that right?"

"It will pass," her mother told her with a kiss, and Penny sped up-stairs again.

CHAPTER V

ANTIQUES OF SEVERAL KINDS

THE shopping expedition with Louise did not turn out to be the joyous affair Penny had hoped it would be. The little stranger was painfully shy, would not express a preference for any one thing, and left everything to Mrs. Atwood's decision. Perhaps this was just as well, for she could be relied upon to exercise good judgment, consequently, while shoes, stockings and underwear were not very exciting purchases, Penny took all the pleasure she could in buying them and paid the bill with great satisfaction, rewarded by seeing the first actual smile come over Louise's face as she regarded her neatly shod feet.

By the end of the week Louise was nicely fitted out, various half worn frocks, two or three sweaters, one or two hats were contributed, yet few persons had much left to give, and a neat blue serge suit was Penny's crowning purchase.

"There's just one more thing I want to do," Penny told her mother, "and that is to ask Louise to spend Christmas with us. You know the Varneys always go

to that married sister for their holidays, and besides there are no children in that family. Do you mind, Mother?"

"Certainly not, and you might have a little holiday party for her."

"Oh, Mother, that's good, good. We can ask some of the boys and have a real jolly time, but, oh, dear, Louise hasn't any party dress."

"Never mind about that; something will be provided, I am sure. Christmas is some time off, you know."

"Yes, and school begins next week and we've still a lot to do for Mr. Mason."

"Isn't he well provided for?"

"For the present, yes, but there are all those things of his that must be thought of."

"Why not leave them in the house?"

"That's where they are, but you see it is this way: He has a small pension, for he was in the army, you know, but it really isn't enough for him to live on, and he shouldn't live alone, even if he were able to look after himself, which he isn't. If the house were only fixed up he might rent it; he won't sell it while he lives, he says, and I really think, now that he is so much better, that he has a notion of going back there, but he shouldn't do that, should he?"

"In my opinion he surely should not, but he is not a child and we cannot keep him from doing as he chooses."

“If you had the planning for him what would you do?”

“Why, let me see. I shall have to think a little before I answer that.”

Penny watched her mother deftly plying her knitting needles. She was making a sweater for Davy, and as she counted the rows it was evident that she was giving attention likewise to Penny's question. After a while she looked up with a smile—a smile which brought confidence to Penny.

“Ready?” asked Penny.

“Yes, I think so. This is what I should do. You say there are some handsome pieces of antique furniture in the house.”

“Yes, but they look awful. The chickens have roosted all over everything down-stairs.”

“In all the rooms?”

“It looks so to me, but maybe up-stairs they haven't.”

“Well, I should get that furniture in as good condition as possible and then sell it at private sale. With the money realized I should put the house in as good order as I could afford and then try to rent it. As I remember, it is very well built and would not need as much repair as the first glance would indicate. Of course it would not bring a high rent, but the amount added to the pension might pay Mr. Mason's board in some quiet place, if he would be willing to do that way. A little fresh paint, some new panes of glass, repairs

on the roof, a thorough cleaning would make the house quite habitable and there are persons who might prefer it to a more modern one. I remember that it has a very good Colonial front door, and indeed the whole house has quite an air, or would have if it were not so run down."

Penny listened attentively, looking at her mother admiringly as she unfolded her plan. "I think you are the most clever woman I ever saw," she commented when her mother had finished. "I don't believe I could have thought of all that if I lived to be a thousand years old. Don't you think I'd better talk it over with Mr. Mason and see what he says? Hurrah, Penny has a bright idea all her own! I'm going to get the Boy Scouts interested in fixing up that furniture. It would bring twice as much if it were in good order."

"Of course it would. Score one for Penny. I see no objection to your talking it over with Mr. Mason. His mind has been so long in one rut that probably he never has thought of it."

"Yes, poor old soul, he simply became more and more melancholy after his wife died, and didn't care how things went. It's no wonder, either, living there with not a human to speak to, and brooding over his loss. The more I talk to him the more I discover what a really intelligent man he is. I was telling him about Louise and he was much interested. He told me he had been to Belgium, and had travelled over nearly all

Europe. You would never have thought it, would you?"

"Scarcely, from what you have told me."

"I am going to take Louise to see him. She will like to go when she knows he has been to her country. Mother, I am just thinking: Who will sell the furniture? We haven't thought about that, have we?"

"No, we have not. We'd better find out whether he would be willing to sell it before we worry over that part. Some scheme will present itself, I haven't a doubt."

And the scheme did present itself, for Mr. Mason was won over to see that Mrs. Atwood's plan was a good one, although at first he would not consider it for a moment. However, the next time that Penny went to see him he told her that he had changed his mind.

She found him in a wheeled chair sitting out upon an upper porch in the sunshine. "Why, Mr. Mason," she exclaimed, "isn't this fine? I am sure you are going to get well."

"I do seem to have fooled the doctors," he replied, "and I shall cumber the earth longer than they expected, very likely. With a view to that I have been reconsidering that matter we were talking about the other day, about the furniture, you know. Why should I keep it? I cannot use it myself, and if others should value it why should not that satisfy me? So, my dear, if you will add this kindness to your many others, I shall be very glad to have you take the transaction in

hand. I will think over the matter of the house and we can talk of that later."

"I shall be very glad indeed to do what I can, although you see it was my mother's idea."

"But how was it your mother interested herself to that extent?"

"Oh, I asked her if she were planning things for you what would she do?"

"So then the idea did originate with my little friend, Penrose Atwood. I have wondered many times since I have been in this place why in the world it was that you should have been so kind and cordial to a miserable old man who had given you occasion to think anything but well of him."

"Oh, but I like you," said Penny simply, "and I think it is perfectly ghastly for anyone to be without friends. I really haven't done anything but come to see you a few times and bring you flowers that didn't cost anything."

"But what about my cats that you worked so hard to find homes for?"

"Oh, but I did that for the cats, not for you."

Mr. Mason leaned back and gave a little mirthful chuckle. It was the very first time Penny had heard from him anything approaching a laugh. "Then, in the name of the cats, I thank you," he said. "I can never repay you and I'm afraid the cats cannot."

"Oh, but Tommy Thistle does. He is such fun, and Mrs. Gray has caught ever so many mice."

"I am glad she has a sense of her obligations."

"I suppose you will want to sell all the furniture, Mr. Mason."

"No, I think not," he answered after a reflective silence. "I cannot make up my mind to part with certain pieces. I will make a list of them and have it ready for you the next time you come."

So Penny went away feeling that she had accomplished a good work. Her next step was to hunt up Rufus Marshall and Jesse Gale, for these two, she felt, had a common interest in the old house and its furniture, not to mention the owner himself. As good luck would have it she encountered the boys on her way home, and being full of her subject, was able to interest them, too. "Gee!" cried Rufus, "but that's a scheme. Of course we'll help, won't we, Jess?"

"Count on me," replied Jesse.

"And we'll get the rest of the boys to come into the deal. If a whole lot of us get at it we can get the stuff cleaned up in short order. How are you going to sell it?" Rufus was the questioner.

"We haven't come to that part yet," confessed Penny.

"And how will you know what to ask for it?" queried Jesse.

This was another thing Penny had not thought of, and she said so.

"I'll tell you what," suggested Jesse, "we can go around to the dealers of good stuff and find out their

prices for the same sort of things and we can ticket ours accordingly."

"Great head, Jess," cried Rufus, knocking off Jesse's hat and rubbing the boy's sleek head. "The next thing is to think of some way of letting people know there is furniture to be sold and that it is the real thing, none of your fake stuff, of which there is so much on the market."

"I didn't realize that there were so many ends to this business," declared Penny. "I'm afraid I'm not a business woman."

"You're not any kind of woman, just a real girl," said Rufus teasingly.

"Well, if I am a girl I am glad I am a real one," retorted Penny, not to be teased.

"You are the genuine article, all right, all right," declared Jesse.

The three walked up the street together, discussing the best way to advertise the furniture, and finally they decided that they would put up notices in certain prominent places, that two boys should be in attendance on Saturday afternoons at the old house, outside of which should be tacked up a big poster announcing that rare old furniture would be placed on sale on Saturday afternoons. Having settled this Penny parted from her friends at her own gate and went in feeling that she had accomplished a good afternoon's work.

She gave Mr. Mason a detailed account of the plans

when she went to him for the list of reserved furniture. She found him again out on the sunny porch.

“It is wonderful, quite wonderful,” he declared when she had finished her recital. “Please thank those fine fellows for me. Here is the list of those things I shall want to keep. You will see that there are some pictures, mostly portraits, upon the list. The rest can be disposed of, a few may be rather valuable. Then, my dear, there is a trunk in the attic which I should like you to have. The contents may not be worth much to you, though you may find some things you may like to keep. Whatever is there is yours, the rest you can give away. If there is anything that little Belgian girl can use, please let her have it, after you have selected for yourself. The articles belonged to my dear wife, and there is no one to whom I would rather give them than you.”

“Oh, Mr. Mason,” said Penny, quite touched. “I feel very, very much complimented that you should want me to have your wife’s things.”

“She would like you to have them, I feel very sure. I have not opened the trunk since I turned the key on it a month after she died, but the things were put away in camphor and should be in good condition. This is the key. The trunk is marked: Katharine Mason, and is the only one locked.” He handed Penny a small key which she took with the feeling of having received a legacy, and then she went away somewhat awed, rather excited, and altogether curious.

She was glad to come across Brownie before she reached home and was pleased that she had such a startling piece of news to tell. "Isn't it exciting?" she said. "What do you suppose is in that trunk? I am dying to see."

"Oh, I imagine you will find only a lot of old-fashioned clothes. Of course Mr. Mason would value anything that belonged to his wife and can't see why they wouldn't be very acceptable to you."

This rather dampened Penny's ardor, but she was none the less eager to behold the contents of the trunk. "I'd like to go now," she confessed, "but it's near supper time and it will be pokey in that old attic, besides I think I ought to tell Mother first."

"But please do let me go with you when you do open it," begged Brownie. "Call me up to-morrow morning and tell me when you are going and I will meet you there at the house."

Penny agreed to this and went her way, telling herself that one did not have to go far for excitements these days. She rushed up-stairs crying, "Mother, Mother, where are you? I have something exciting to tell you."

Mrs. Atwood answered from her room, and Penny did not delay in reaching her. "What is the excitement?" asked Mrs. Atwood, looking up from the letter she was writing.

"Why, I have a legacy, at least it is a sort of legacy, for I never saw the person the things belonged to,"

then she told her mother Mr. Mason's wishes regarding the trunk, ending up with: "Of course there may not be a thing I shall want, but it is sort of nice to think of looking them over. You won't mind my having anything there that I really do want, will you, Mother?"

"I suppose not, though I warn you that an old lady's belongings will scarcely prove very attractive to a little girl."

"That's about what Brownie said, but still one can never tell. Brownie wants to go with me to look the trunk over."

"I think I'd better go, too," said Mrs. Atwood thoughtfully, "or, better still, have the trunk sent directly here."

"Oh, Mother, do let us look it over first; it will be so much more romantic to go up into that old attic; like a story-book."

"Are you sure it is safe?"

"Oh, yes, I think so; there are stairs that go up. We explored it with the boys one day. That reminds me, Mother, the boys have offered to see to selling the furniture. Isn't that fine? Things certainly are coming out beautifully."

She could scarcely wait till her mother should be ready to go with her the next morning. They found Brownie looking out for them and the three lost no time in getting around to the old house. Their way led through streets swarming with children, none too

clean, but once they had turned the corner respectability lay beyond. The boys' good work was displayed in a yard freed from rubbish, a house aired and set in some sort of order, though there was still much to be desired.

"Just wait till they get to painting it, and fixing up those broken windows," said Penny, feeling a sort of ownership in the place which impelled her to make excuses.

They climbed the steep stairs into the cobwebby attic, which had not been touched by the boys. Dust lay over everything, and in the dim corners quaint objects were only half visible. Here were queer old handboxes stacked up, an old wooden cradle, a spinning wheel, a great loom, odds and ends of furniture, mostly broken pieces. The two girls went poking around, and finally came upon the trunk marked: "Katharine Mason." Penny took out her key and fitted it in the lock. It turned easily.

"This is it," she announced. "We'd better drag it out nearer the light," she added excitedly.

Brownie lent a willing hand and, as the trunk was not large, they soon had it over by the window, then all three fell to examining the contents. There was a strong odor of camphor when the lid was lifted, and they found the tray neatly packed. It disclosed an old-fashioned lace shawl, another Paisley one, some half-worn gloves, pieces of lace yellow with age, veils such as the girls had never seen, a couple of little

black silk aprons and, last of all, a box of old-fashioned trinkets.

“It seems almost sacrilegious to be turning over these things,” said Mrs. Atwood with a sigh. “I can just imagine what that dear old lady was like.”

“But don’t you believe she would like her things used?” queried Brownie practically. “I’m sure it is better that someone should have the good of them than that they should lie away here till they practically fall to pieces.”

“I dare say you are quite right,” returned Mrs. Atwood, “but one cannot help having a momentary feeling of intrusion. Let’s see what is underneath.”

Here they found more clothing, stout cotton nightgowns very ample as to width and elaborately trimmed. “She must have been rather a little person,” commented Penny as she shook out one of the garments and held it up. “I wonder what is in this package so carefully wrapped up and pinned.”

“It’s easy to find out,” remarked Brownie.

“Oh,” cried Penny as she freed a dress from its folds, “isn’t that the dearest, floweriest, silkiest little frock? Mother, what sort of stuff is it made of?”

Mrs. Atwood examined it. “I believe it is what they used to call silk tissue. I remember that my grandmother had a dress of it.”

Penny sat looking it over admiringly, then suddenly she clasped her hands and cried, “Oh, Mother, you said there would be a way and this is it.”

"A way for what? Somehow I don't see inside your mind," returned her mother smiling.

"Why, don't you know? To get a party frock for Louise. This will just suit her and it can be made over for one of her Christmas gifts. You must not tell, Brownie, but Mother and I have a plan that we will relate to you later. Don't you think it will be just the thing, Mother?"

"But why don't you take it for yourself?" asked Brownie. "I am sure it would suit you just as well as Louise."

"Oh, but I have the Paisley shawl," responded Penny, draping it around her young person, and drawing down the corners of her mouth, as she glanced at herself in a cracked mirror opposite. "Besides, my young miss, we don't know what else we may find. This goes to Louise all right, all right, so do the nightgowns," she added with a chuckle.

"It gets more and more camphory the further down you go," said Brownie as Penny dived into the depths of the trunk. "What's that?"

"Don't know," returned Penny, bringing forth a large package. "It feels quite soft. I think probably it is a coat." She unfastened the paper in which the article was wrapped, peeped in and gave a little squeal. "Look," she cried, holding up a muff.

"Furs, as I live," cried Brownie. "Let's see the rest."

Penny was busying herself in getting to a long

tippet with many tails. "Isn't it funny?" she cried. "Did you ever see anything such a queer shape? But isn't it pretty fur? What kind is it, Mother?"

"It is what was called fitch, I believe, and it is certainly very pretty. Well, dear, you are provided with furs in spite of yourself."

"Lucky Penny," cried Brownie. "Did ever anyone know such a piece of luck?"

Penny grinned. It was just as Brownie said, a piece of good luck. "I am as pleased as Punch," she declared, "and I don't care what else we find, whether it be bombazine dresses, or flannel petticoats or what." These articles were exactly what she did find with other things of more or less value, the best being a pretty figured challis and some quaint sprigged muslins. At the very bottom of the trunk was a black coat of obsolete cut but of good material.

"There," announced Penny, "that's the last, and I am sure I shall not want that. What shall we do with it, Mother?"

"Just now the best thing to be done is to put everything back in the trunk. We will have it sent home and then we can make up our minds what is the best use to be made of everything."

"Have you looked over that box of trinkets?" questioned Brownie.

"Not very carefully, but they are too old for me anyhow, and if ever I do use them it will be when I am grown up. Mother doesn't like to see schoolgirls

diked out with jewelry and ornaments, do you, Mother?"

"Decidedly I do not, for I think it shows very bad taste. Lock the trunk, Penny, and we will go on. We have spent more time here than I expected."

"I suppose it will cost something to have those furs made over," remarked Brownie on the way out.

"Yes," replied Mrs. Atwood, "but I think the muff will do as it is; the lining is perfectly good, and I know a woman who will come in and alter the tippet, so it need not be a great expense and we are saved buying some other things and can afford it."

Penny gave her mother's arm a squeeze. "You are always such a comforter," she whispered.

Her mother smiled down upon her. "You will have a very nice set of furs, my dear."

Penny did have a handsome set of furs, as it turned out, and so voluminous was the tippet that it served to make a little muff and a small neckpiece for Louise, too, much to Penny's satisfaction, for this added to the list of Christmas gifts to be given to the little stranger.

CHAPTER VI

DOTS AND DASHES

A PARTY of girls and boys were sitting on the Atwoods' side porch busily engaged in preparations for a fancy dress party which the Girl Scouts were to give the Boy Scouts. The boys were doing the mechanical parts while the girls did the sewing.

"How's that for a helmet?" asked Rufus, holding up a pasteboard affair. "Where's the silver paint? Hand it over, Jess. Do you think it looks all right?"

Jesse regarded the helmet critically. "Try it on," he suggested.

Rufus did so and raised a laugh, for the helmet completely extinguished him. "Have to take a reef in it," he decided, taking out his knife.

Penny laid down a tinselled robe to watch him. "Isn't it funny," she said, "that boys always use knives where girls use scissors?"

"It isn't any funnier than a lot of other things," returned Rufus.

"What a banal speech," remarked Becky Cole, tipping her head to one side as she held off a bodice at arm's length.

"Banal," repeated Rufus contemptuously. "It makes me tired the way some people get hold of a new word and air it upon all occasions."

"I didn't know that banal was a new word," returned Becky calmly. "I fancied it was incorporated into the French language some time ago."

Rufus looked across at Jesse and winked one eye then the other in a meaning manner. Jesse winked back in something the same way, then both boys laughed.

Penny watched them with an expression half puzzled, half interested. "Oh, stop your scrapping," she cried. "You and Becky always have to argue when you get together, Rufus. You remind me of that old man down at the blacksmith's shop on Main Street. I believe he just lives to argue."

"Oh, that old chestnut," returned Rufus. "He is quite a character. I believe he must be the oldest inhabitant, and yet he can do quite a lot of work. He helps Andy for a while and then he goes out and leans against a tree watching for someone to come along and argue with him."

"Beneath the blacksmith's spreading tree
The village chestnut stands,"

put in Brownie quietly.

Everyone laughed. "That sounds just like Brown," said Jesse. "Here, who'll lend me a needlewoman's hand with a plumed bonnet? If I am to be a High-

lander it will never do to have my plumes drooping the wrong way."

Brownie offered her help and the work went steadily on with much laughter, many jokes and some sparring till it was time for the party to break up. Brownie was the last to go. "Do you know," Penny whispered to her when the others were out of hearing, "I believe those boys have some sort of signs or code or something. I watched them and I am sure of it."

"Morse code, of course," Brownie decided immediately. "How did you think they were using it?"

"With their eyes. One would wink with one eye two or three times, then with both eyes, then with one or the other eye, then there would be an answer from the other boy. Oh, I am sure of it. Now I mean to learn that code, for I don't mean to have them saying things we can't make out."

"Good scheme. I'll learn, too, and we can use it and fool them in the same way. Don't tell anybody."

"Not I. Let's begin right away to learn."

"That will suit me. We can telegraph with our hands as well as our eyes, and it will be lots of fun."

"I'd like to begin this afternoon, but there are those costumes to finish and lessons to learn."

"And to-morrow is the great day of the home-coming. We'll have to put it off till that is over and the party, too, then we'll pitch in. Don't forget to come early to-morrow."

She went off and Penny returned to the porch where

she found Rilly examining the dress to be worn at the party. "What all dish yer spingly spangly stuff?" inquired Rilly.

"It's what I am going to wear to a party we girls are going to give the Boy Scouts," Penny told her.

"Humph!" Rilly viewed it with semi-amusement. "Looks lak one o' dese yer circus ladies! Is yuh gwine horseback?" She chuckled at the idea.

"No, of course not. This will have a long train, so," Penny held up the dress, "and I'll wear a sweeping veil fastened to a pointed head-dress."

"Jes lak a bride." Rilly was beginning to be interested.

"Not exactly, but something like. I just love the train; it looks so distinguished."

"Ain't it de troof now? It sho do look extinguished." Rilly regarded Penny with admiration as she gave a demonstration of how the train would be worn. "What Miss Brownie w'ar?"

"She is going as a gipsy and Becky Cole as a Spanish girl. Rufus Marshall is going to dress as a knight."

"Black, dark night?"

"No, not that kind of night, the kind that delivers lovely ladies from cruel captors."

Rilly did not in the least understand this, but not wishing to display her ignorance merely nodded as if she quite comprehended, and asked, "Is Davy gwine dress up, too?"

“No, he is too little.”

“Ain’t he gwine to de party at all?” Rilly was quite concerned for her favorite.

“No, for there will not be any but big boys there, and big girls.”

“Humph!” Rilly walked off with a toss of the head, no longer interested in a party to which Davy was not invited.

However, the next evening when Penny was arrayed in all her splendor and Brownie in her gipsy dress called for her, Rilly looked them both up and down, and gave her opinion as soon as the door closed after them. “Miss Penny, she look fine, but t’other one she looked tacky.” And, to tell the truth, poor little Brownie never could carry off dress with any kind of good effect or style; nevertheless, she always had a good time, better than most girls who were more conscious of their appearance.

The party was, as the newspaper reported it, “a most enjoyable affair,” but it was eclipsed by the rollicking entertainment given to the returned soldier boys. To this Davy was permitted to go, thus salving Rilly’s feelings. That home-coming occasion was a great day, and the Girl Scouts felt that they had a large part in it. They stepped along valiantly in the parade, passed numberless dishes of ice-cream and plates of cakes to the returned soldiers, helped to wash dishes, to decorate the hall where the reception took place, joined in the songs, and altogether made them-

selves useful, and ornamental as Penny would have it. And indeed they were ornamental in their neat uniform, with bright young faces smiling under their hats. If a Girl Scout must be always cheerful, surely upon this occasion it was not a very difficult task.

After this big event the town settled down into its usual quiet, the girls devoting themselves to their studies, Penny and Brownie giving such time as they could to the Morse code. The boys were planning some sort of entertainment in return for the girls' hospitality, and there were many conjectures as to what it might be. Those who professed to know declared it was to be a Hallowe'en party, while others announcing that they knew quite as much about it, asserted that it was to be an outdoor entertainment, for the weather was still warm enough for it.

Meanwhile there were many matters of interest to occupy the thoughts of the girls of Thistle Troop. There were many ready to enter the Tenderfoot class and for these uniforms must be provided. There was a big rally when all the troops in the town came together to discuss ways and means, and it was decided that some sort of money-making scheme must be adopted. One suggested a carnival, another a concert, a third a bazaar. Finally this last found the greatest favor, for, said Brownie Burton shrewdly, "people are always ready to buy foolish things for Christmas as well as sensible ones." Each troop was to have a booth where as many attractions as could be

devised might be offered. Of course this started up big ambitions immediately, as there was not a Girl Scout in town who didn't want her booth to outshine all the others. It was at the first meeting of Thistle Troop, after the big rally, that the girls were so brimming over with enthusiasm and had so many ideas to put forth that Miss Varney decided that nothing short of a committee could attend to the schemes offered.

"You are too much for one solitary female," she told them. "I never knew such active minds. Even with our lieutenant and patrol leader I don't think we can cope with you, and I shall call upon some outsiders to lend their judgments. Now let each girl in Thistle Troop decide upon some attractive feature, present her plan to me and I will consult the committee, for if two heads are better than one a number of heads should be better than two. Now go to work."

"I know what I'd like to have," said Penny as she and Brownie passed out of the room with heads close together, "I'd like to have a telegraph apparatus, and get people to send their telegrams from our booth. They would be willing to pay a little extra and we could have the profits."

"Do you think we could work that all right?" said Brownie thoughtfully. "We'd have to be pretty expert in the first place, and in the second place we mightn't be able to get the thing set up, wires and all that; it would be rather expensive, wouldn't it?"

Penny was silent for a moment, then she broke out with "Wireless! Wireless! Why can't we have a wireless? Roy Harlan has one in his back yard. He knows all about it, and I'm sure he'd put one up for us, and send messages too, if we wanted him to, though I'd rather we'd do that part ourselves. I'll see him right away."

"I believe you have struck a novelty, Pen," said Brownie in a satisfied tone. "We might get Roy to explain the workings to those who are curious, and to help us out if we should get mixed up in sending messages, but we must keep it dark, for we don't want anyone else to get ahead of us."

"I don't mean anyone shall, for I shall lose no time in seeing Roy and I know he'll do all he can; he'd love to."

Suddenly Brownie began to dance up and down, clasping her hands and shaking them ecstatically. "I've thought of something else! I've thought of something else," she cried. "Goody! Goody! Goody!"

"Tell me, tell me quick."

"Dan Patten's aeroplane. I believe he would take up passengers for so much and give us the proceeds. It doesn't go very far up, but so much the better. He made it himself, you know, but they say it is perfectly safe. If that wouldn't be an attraction, I don't know what would."

"Oh, Brown, it would be perfectly splendid. I

think you are awfully clever to have thought of it. Shall we go to see the boys on our way home?"

Brownie considered this for a moment before she answered. I don't like the idea of our running after boys even for a matter of business. I think it would be better if we were to call them up and ask if they will stop at my house this evening. You call up Roy and I'll call up Dan. We won't explain exactly, but we will ask them if they are willing to help us make the bazaar a success, and that will spur them on."

"You are so clever," returned Penny admiringly, "so diplomatic. I would never have thought of anything like that."

"Perhaps not," Brownie acknowledged, "but you would have tumbled into something quite as good without thinking; you always do."

The boys responded with alacrity to the call for help, and there was a great powwow at Brownie's house that evening. Roy confessed that it would be something of a job to rig up a wireless, but declared himself very ready to attempt it.

"It's a corking good idea," he said. "I wonder some of us haven't thought of it before. Where are you going to have the bazaar?"

"It isn't quite decided," Brownie told him. "We shall want plenty of room and a place we can get cheap, if we can't get it for nothing."

"Why not use the old Mason house?" Dan spoke up. "You could throw all those big rooms into one,

and there would be lots of space in that yard for a wireless."

"Boy, you've spoken," cried Roy. "We've sold off most of the furniture, you know, and the rest could be stored in one of the upper rooms. You could use some of those, too, for your various departments if you find you need them."

"That's truly a royal scheme," exclaimed Penny, at which speech the boys groaned, although Penny protested that she didn't mean to make a pun. "I'll see Mr. Mason to-morrow," she declared.

"Better consult Miss Varney first," Brownie warned. "We can't carry all this off with a high hand, you know. We've got to submit our ideas to her and she talks them over with the committee, so we don't know whether we can even have the wireless or the aeroplane."

Brownie's common sense remarks rather subdued the enthusiasm, and after this they talked possibilities rather than actualities.

It was well that they did not count too much upon the success of their schemes, for though after discussion, Penny's idea of the wireless was adopted, Brownie's idea of aeroplane flights was entirely set aside. It was not to be thought of, the committee decided. "A home-made machine with an amateur aviator, why, my dear, there would surely be an accident, and we could not be responsible for such risks," Miss Varney told the crestfallen Brownie. "It is

too bad that we must veto your plan, but I am sure you will see that it is not a safe one."

So poor Brownie retired quite cast down, and dejectedly reported the decision to Dan who had worked himself up into quite a state of enthusiasm over the project. He had expected to win laurels for himself as well as to add to the gains of the Girl Scouts, but seeing that Brownie felt worse about it than he did he tried his best to cheer her up.

"I reckon after all it is best," he said, "for supposing there were an accident and the plane went wrong I'd reproach myself for the rest of my life, supposing I escaped being killed myself. Why, even the best of aviators have accidents, you know."

So Brownie was comforted, and realized that hers had been rather a wild scheme after all. "But here I am left high and dry," she mourned, "and haven't an idea to offer."

"Oh, you'll think of something," returned Dan consolingly. "What's the matter with having a photograph gallery? You can take dandy photographs and we boys can help you develop them."

"Oh, Dan, you have saved my life," cried Brownie. "Of course I could do that. I have an awfully good camera, really I have, and we could fix up a very attractive place in one of those upper rooms where there is a good light, or could even take them out-of-doors. You are a perfect dear to have thought of it and to offer to help. I know Miss Varney will approve."

"I'll be the gent who takes the orders, if you say so," continued Dan, pleased at this reception of his suggestion.

"You are an angel without wings," replied Brownie. "I'll let you know just as soon as possible what the committee say. I told you, didn't I, that they were mightily pleased at the idea of using the Mason house? Pen saw Mr. Mason and he was perfectly delighted at the idea of giving it for the purpose. He won't take a cent for it, and said that it was a small return for all that had been done for him by the Scouts, so that is settled."

"Fine and dandy," responded Dan heartily. "It looks to me as if you would have a big success."

And a big success it was. One could scarcely have believed that so much originality would be displayed by a group of girls. The Thistle booth was particularly pretty. Monica McIlvaine, who was especially clever in designing, made the decorations of thistles which were stencilled upon the draperies, and appeared upon artistic posters. Rena Mills contributed thistle shades for the lights. Penny's telegraph office was very popular, but even more so was Brownie's photograph gallery. Tommy Thistle presided over a cage of catnip mice, himself occupying the other half of the cage which was partitioned off for his use. It is needless to say that not a mouse was left unsold when the affair was over. Vendors of various wares wandered about the big rooms. There were those who

sold pop-corn, those who sold bottles of vanilla extract, hair tonic, baking powder, fudge, and many other home-made products. Indeed, it was quite wonderful that so many ingenious methods of making money had been devised.

“Still I’m mighty glad it’s over,” said Penny when the last telegram had been sent, and she sank down wearily on a rustic bench in Brownie’s photograph gallery. “It’s been lots of fun and I’ve enjoyed every minute, but I’m dead tired.”

“My work is only just begun,” sighed Brownie. “All these prints to be made and sent off.”

“But we’ll all help,” declared Dan, coming over with two or three of the other boys.

“We will that,” Roy Harlan put in. “You needn’t fall down on your job for lack of help, Brown. We’re no I. W. W.’s, and we don’t care how many extra hours we put in, do we, boys?”

“You bet your sweet life we don’t,” Rufus answered.

“Well, I can just tell you this,” said Brownie gratefully, “when your turn comes you will find us Girl Scouts to the fore ready to help you.”

“That’s the talk,” said Rufus. “Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of the party, as the typewriters have it. I say, that was a good scheme of Becky Cole’s to have a typist corner and write letters. She says she did mighty well. You Thistles certainly showed originality.”

“We did have some good ideas,” said Penny modestly. “What is it, Davy? More ice-cream? I don’t see how you can eat it. I think you must have consumed twenty-four cones in the past twenty-four hours.”

“But it’s awfully warm work being messenger boy,” complained Davy, “and you said if I would deliver the telegrams I should have all the ice-cream I wanted.”

“But I’m afraid you will be ill.”

“Oh, no, he won’t,” Rufus assured her. “The capacity of a small boy for ice-cream is unlimited, and I never saw one the worse for it. Come along, Davy; I believe I could manage another cone myself.”

“Why not all of us indulge?” remarked Dan Patten. “It’s on me, Jess. You girls sit here if you are tired and we’ll bring you the cones.”

“What would we have done without those boys?” said Brownie as they went off. “Dan has been my right hand man, always so jolly and alert. I never could have had half so many orders but for him.”

“And Roy has been just as good to me. He knows the code like a book and when I got rattled he was always there to help me out. I feel as if my brain were a record of nothing but dots and dashes, but it’s been splendid practice, and I can wink messages from henceforth without half trying.”

It was not long before she was able to put her powers to the test, for presently two boys sauntered in and sat down near by. The girls knew them, though

not very well. "Weren't Dan Patten and Roy Harlan in here a little while ago?" asked one of the boys.

"Yes," Penny told them, "but they have gone to get us some ice-cream."

"Then they are coming back."

"We hope so," Penny answered with a laugh.

The boy looked across at his friend and began a series of winks which were answered in turn. Penny regarded them watchfully. Just then the other boys' returning footsteps were heard upon the stairs, and the two who had been questioning Penny arose and went toward the door. But Penny was before them. "No, you don't," she cried. "Watch the lights, Brownie!" And before the two invaders could carry out their plan of turning off the lights and grabbing the ice-cream cones from the returning boys Penny had warned them: "Look out, Dan! Look out, Roy! The Huns are upon you!"

Without understanding exactly what she meant those bearing the cones ran down-stairs again, Brownie relighted the gas jets and the jokers were nonplussed.

"When you want to send telegraphic messages don't do it with your eyes," Penny advised. "There may be others around who understand the code as well as you."

"It was only a joke," said Warren Kirk, the eldest of the boys.

"Not a very complete one. I'm glad you're not Boy Scouts," said Penny severely.

"We didn't mean any harm. Can't you take a joke?" said Warren.

"Not when it deprives me of a much needed cone of ice-cream," replied Penny, dimpling.

"Oh, well ——" Warren began lamely, but he did not finish his remark as his companion interrupted by saying:

"Ah, come on, Warren. What's the use of hanging around here? There's nothing to see and nothing to do. I'm going home."

"A very wise decision," remarked Penny with cool politeness. And the two departed, making way for the other boys who now came back with the ice-cream.

"What was the row?" asked Roy.

Penny told him.

"Just like that pair," said Dan disgustedly. "They're always up to some foolish trick. They thought that would be funny, but this is no time nor place to rough house. I should think they would know better. I'm glad you spotted their joke."

"It's one on them," said Jesse, who, with Rufus, had also come in to join the group. "I'll bet they were surprised," he added laughing.

"I sho' am glad," replied Penny nibbling her cone. "I must tell Rilly about it. She just dotes on that kind of tale, and is always talking of persons who try to 'undermine' her. What's going on down-stairs, boys? They are folding their tents like the Arabs, I suppose."

“That’s about the size of it,” Dan told her. “Are you going to shut up shop, Brownie?”

“Might as well. The show’s about over, and we can come to-morrow and clear up.”

“That’s where the little Boy Scouts get in their solid work,” said Rufus. “We’ll be on hand to do the manual labor.”

And so the bazaar was ended, Tommy Thistle was borne home triumphantly, the lights were put out and the old house left to the few little mice that were not of the variety to be sold, but who scampered through the silent rooms feasting on such crumbs as had been left for their gleaning.

CHAPTER VII

LOUISE AND THE QUEEN

PENNY was sure of a merit badge for her knowledge of the Morse code, while Brownie expected honors for her skill in photography. The girls were working hard for the badges they must earn before becoming first class scouts and were hoping another year would see them promoted to this rank.

Little Louise Fallon, who was still with Miss Varney, had passed her Tenderfoot test and was very proud of having become a real Girl Scout. She was learning English rapidly, though she still made funny mistakes at which she was as ready as anyone to laugh when they were explained to her. The hunted expression was leaving her eyes and the forlorn droop of her mouth was now more frequently changed to a smile. The question of her future was still undecided, but meantime she was very welcome in Miss Varney's home, and the happy association with girls of her own age was rendering dimmer those tragic memories which haunted her days and nights in the earlier weeks of her arrival.

“There are many things I do not understand,” she confided to Penny one day when the two were out for a walk. “What is this I see: ‘No trees passing’? It is so strange, this. I am much puzzle over this.”

“What do you mean?” said Penny, puzzled on her own part. “Where do you see that?”

“Many time I see. I show you. Perhap we encounter this bimeby, then I show.” They walked on for a short distance then suddenly Louise caught Penny’s arm. “It is there. You see, on that wall?”

Penny looked and then burst out laughing. “You dear, funny Louise,” she cried, “it is not trees passing, but trespassing, and it means you are not to go on that person’s grounds without permission.”

“Ah-h!” Louise began to laugh, too. “I am a stupid, am I not? I think this something so strange, and it is not so at all. Nevair mind, one day I learn. Where is it we go now?”

“I thought we would go to some greenhouses a little out of town. I want to get some flowers for my mother’s birthday. We can get such lovely fresh ones at the place I speak of, cut right from the stem.”

“I like this we are to see the greenhouse. The flower so beautiful. You give me many pleasure, you do.”

“I wish I could give you more. I will tell you, Louise, what I should like to do; I should like to take you to see the king and queen, your king and queen, and the young duke who are now in this country.”

“I, too, would like this more than anything, but I must not complain for I have many things I do not think to have. It would be a great pleasure, yes, but it is hopeless to wish for them if they do not come to our town.”

“No, but they might pass through even if they do not stop. We will find out and we could go to the station and perhaps catch a glimpse of them. We can go around that way on our way back from the greenhouse, and ask when they are expected.”

“Oh, my Penny, would you do that?”

“Why, certainly. Why not? It may do no good, but then we might happen to find out.”

The end of their walk brought them to the greenhouses, damp, sweet smelling places where gracious roses, royal chrysanthemums, brilliant geraniums were reigning. It was hard to choose, but Penny finally settled upon some gorgeous chrysanthemums which, she decided, would last longer than anything else, and these she bore away well satisfied. “They will look lovely on Mother’s desk,” she told Louise.

“They would look lovely anywhere,” returned Louise heartily.

They turned their faces toward the town, but instead of taking the route which led directly to her home Penny steered toward the railway station. “Oh, what a crowd!” she exclaimed as they approached the platform. “There must be a wedding party or something. Let’s hurry up, Louise. Maybe we’ll see the

bride." As a bride is always a person of interest to any girl of any nationality wherever she may be, Louise hastened her steps.

But there seemed to be no one upon whom the central interest appeared to be fixed when the girls found themselves a part of the crowd. All were looking up the track for some approaching train.

"I wonder where everyone is going," remarked Penny. "There must be a fair or something, although it is pretty late in the day to be starting off. I'm going to ask the policeman." Penny was never backward in using her tongue when there was an object to be gained. She worked her way to where the tall policeman was keeping adventurous persons from crowding the tracks. "Will you please tell me what is going on?" she asked. "Why is there such a crowd?"

The policeman smiled down at her good-naturedly. "Why, don't you know the king and queen of Belgium are coming along presently in their special train? It may stop for a few minutes and these people are hoping to catch a sight of the royal party."

"Oh, oh, oh! aren't we lucky?" cried Penny. "Louise, did you hear? We are just in time to see your king and queen. They are coming this way."

Louise clasped her hands and the tears came to her eyes. "My king! My queen!" she murmured. "Do you think we shall really see them?"

"Oh, I do hope so," returned Penny earnestly.

“There is an awful crowd, to be sure, but we will try to get nearer.” She turned again to the burly policeman. “Do you think we could get nearer to the tracks?” she asked. “This little girl is a Belgian refugee. Her father was killed in the war and her mother died from cold and hunger. Some friends brought her over here and expect to find a home for her. It would mean such a lot to her if she could see her king and queen. Could you help us to get through the crowd so we could be close to the train when it comes along?”

The man looked at Louise with new interest. “You bet your life I can get you as close as you want to be,” he said firmly. “Come along.”

“Keep close to him,” Penny whispered to Louise. “Take hold of his coat tails, if necessary.” She pushed Louise forward, taking second place herself.

With a shout of, “Here, clear the way!” the policeman managed to pilot the two girls through the increasing throng, reaching the edge of the platform just as the train came thundering along. “Stand back! Stand back!” cried the policeman as the people pressed forward. “Keep close to me,” he said in an undertone to the two girls, as he used his stalwart arms to force back the eager company.

The train slowed up, stopped, and on the platform of the special car stood the queen. “There she is, sis,” said the policeman, one eye on Louise and one on the too adventurous crowd.

“Speak to her! Speak to her!” Penny whispered eagerly. She tore the wrappings from her chrysanthemums. “Here, give her these. Quick! Quick!” She thrust the flowers into Louise’s hands, and pushed her forward.

“Madame, Madame, my queen, I am Belgian,” quavered Louise, holding up the flowers.

The queen leaned out, but being a little woman she could not quite reach the flowers, which Louise, standing on tiptoe, tried in vain to hold up high enough for her to grasp.

Then suddenly the little Belgian girl felt herself lifted up in a pair of strong arms so her face was on a level with the queen’s, and sovereign and subject looked into each other’s eyes. The flowers were taken into the queen’s hands, Louise felt a light kiss upon her forehead, a tender voice murmured: “Thank you, my child.” Then the train sped on.

Louise felt herself gently lifted down to the platform, and looking up with swimming eyes, she saw the policeman smiling down at her. “Worked that pretty slick, didn’t we?” he said.

Louise caught his big hand and laid her wet cheek against it. “I thank you, a thousand times I thank you,” she said brokenly. “Nevair, nevair shall I forget this kindness. She kissed me! You saw she kissed me! Such a wonderful thing to remember all my life, and you, you it was who was so kind, so good as to give me this great good fortune.”

“Ah, that’s all right,” said the embarrassed man. “That was easy. Glad to accommodate ye.” And he moved off without allowing Louise a chance to say another word.

She was quivering with excitement when she turned to Penny, almost sobbing with emotion. “You saw, you saw,” she said in a trembling voice.

“Wasn’t it fine?” returned Penny enthusiastically. “I think that policeman is a Jim Dandy. I was so afraid the queen couldn’t reach the flowers. I’d just like to hug him, only I don’t suppose he’d like it,” she added. “Did you see the king, too? He came to the platform of the car just as the train was moving off. I waved my handkerchief and he took off his hat, not to me especially, of course, for everybody was shouting and waving handkerchiefs.”

“I saw him, too, but the queen, the queen, she kissed me,” murmured Louise, forgetting all else in this great fact.

It was not till they had gone part of the way toward home that Louise suddenly came down to earth when she remembered that Penny had given up the flowers which were intended for her mother. She stopped short with a little cry of dismay, clasping her hands in the way she so frequently did. “Oh, Penny, my Penny,” she exclaimed, “you have given me your flowers, and now you have none for your mother. How I am an ungrateful!”

“Oh, never mind,” responded Penny nonchalantly.

“I can get flowers any day in the year for Mother, but it is only once in a lifetime that one has the pleasure of getting them for a queen.”

“But it was not you who gave them,” protested Louise, still dissatisfied.

“Why, yes, I did. I gave them to you to give to the queen and so long as she has them it amounts to the same thing,” returned Penny magnanimously.

“But now you have nothing for your mother, and that makes me very sad.”

“Don’t you bother your dear head about that. I will explain to her and will get her some flowers out of the garden; there are some cunning little red buttony chrysanthemums just coming into bloom, and she will like them just as well when she knows. I know my mother well enough to assure you that it will please her a thousand times more to know that her flowers have gone to the queen than if she had dozens for herself.”

And Penny was quite right in her opinion, as was proved that very evening. Leaving Louise at Miss Varney’s door she went on to her own home, finding her mother up-stairs ready to give ear to Penny’s tale. “Oh, Mother,” she began, “what do you think has happened?”

“Something very wonderful, to judge from your excitement,” returned her mother smiling.

“It is really wonderful this time. Sometimes I do have wonderful things to tell you, don’t I? Remem-

ber Mrs. Mason's trunk. This is quite a different thing, but in a way it is perfectly splendid." Then she went on to tell her story, at the end saying, half wistfully, "and so, you see, I have no birthday gift for you."

"But, dear child, I consider that you have given me a most beautiful gift, the gift of a very great happiness. I am delighted that Louise should have received such an honor, such a joy, and that you should have been the cause of her receiving it, that you were so generous."

"I really did it on the spur of the moment," confessed Penny. "I was just carried away by excitement."

"Nevertheless it was a generous impulse, and that pleases me."

Penny leaned down to kiss her mother. "I'd rather have you than any queen in the world," she said, "but Louise has no mother, and it meant much more to her in every way."

Then she went down to the garden where the little red chrysanthemums were bursting from their olive green wrappings. The light was fading. Rilly in the kitchen was singing in a very high key: "I'se gwine to shine 'way ovah yondah." The sparrows were twittering in the vines. There was an odor of burning leaves in the air, an autumnal tang. Penny felt very happy as she snipped off the flower-bearing twigs from the bushes. It was a beautiful world. Her life was

full of pleasant happenings. She was surely "lucky Penny."

With her hands full of the ruddy flowers she went back into the house, taking her way through the kitchen this time that she might get water in which to put the buttony blossoms. Rilly broke off her song to ask, "Whar dat Davy?"

"I'm sure I don't know," returned Penny. "I've been out all the afternoon. I haven't seen him since lunch, but I can tell you whom I did see and that is the king and queen of Belgium."

Rilly laid down her rolling-pin. "Is yuh?" she exclaimed. "Was dey w'arin' dey crowns?"

"Not to-day. I suppose they take them off when they are travelling," said Penny with a little giggle. "They were on the train, you see." Then she gave an account of the meeting to which Rilly listened with many ejaculations of: "Uh uh! Ain' dat de troof? I say queen," ending up with the comment, "I reckons dat little Belgy gal so stuck up she won't speak to no-buddy what ain't quality."

"Indeed then she will. She isn't that kind of proud," retorted Penny.

"Yuh gwine hunt up dat Davy chile?" queried Rilly, as Penny bore off her vase of flowers.

"Oh, he'll be in by supper time," returned Penny confidently. She carried the flowers up-stairs to put them on her mother's desk, and then sat down to watch the process of Mrs. Atwood's toilet, always an interest-

ing matter when one was going out to dinner, Penny told her. "Is it going to be very big and formal?" Penny asked.

"Oh, no, only about a dozen intimate friends will be there, but as it is in honor of my birthday I must look my best. I don't like to leave you children alone, but ——"

"Children can't always expect to go tagging around after their parents," Penny put in philosophically. "You look perfectly dear, Mother. I love you in that misty blue. I hear Father's key in the latch, so I suppose I must skurry along and give him a chance to dress."

"Be sure to cut nice big slices of the birthday cake," her mother called after her.

"Don't you want to save it uncut?"

"No, indeed, I want you children to enjoy it just as if I were here."

Penny went on down-stairs, sliding both hands along the baluster to increase her speed. She met her father in the hall, but he was in a hurry and could not wait to hear her story of the queen. She went out on the porch to watch for Davy, but up to the time of her parents' departure he had not come. Still it was not very late, although it was getting dark, for the days were short, but Penny began to be a little anxious as the time for supper approached and no Davy appeared. "I believe I'll call up Billy Beach," she said to herself. "Like as not Davy is there and has forgotten that it is

getting late. When he and Billy get absorbed in some new play they don't know how the time goes." She called up Billy only to learn that he had not seen Davy that afternoon.

Penny hung up the receiver and stood uncertain what to do next. "I shouldn't be at all surprised if he had gone off somewhere with that horrid little scamp of a Sam Potter," she said to herself. "I am just not going to wait supper for him. I am as hungry as a hunter, and he can take what he can get when he comes in." She rang the bell for Rilly and seated herself at the table.

"Whar Davy?" was Rilly's question as she appeared at the door with a plate of hot biscuits.

"I don't know and I don't care," replied Penny crossly. "I'm not going to wait for him. I'm hungry and he knows as well as I do what time we have supper."

"Might give the po' fella a little bit o' chance," grumbled Rilly.

"I'm not afraid he will starve when you're around," returned Penny, helping herself to a biscuit.

Rilly went out muttering to herself, as it was her privileged way of doing when there was no company. No one could carry herself with more formality when occasion required, but she considered that no ceremony was necessary when Penny supped alone.

Penny enjoyed a hearty meal, helped herself lavishly to the birthday cake, and then retired to the library to

prepare her lessons for the next day. As time passed, from feeling merely annoyed she began to be a trifle anxious. When it grew later and later and still there was no sign of Davy she was really alarmed. She went to the kitchen to find Rilly nodding in her chair. It was no use to arouse her, Penny decided, and it was not worth while to disturb her parents. She would wait till ten o'clock and then she would see. It was entirely too quiet and lonely all alone in the library, she decided, and therefore she went up to her own room, put on a wrapper and sat down again to her studies. The town clock struck half-past nine—quarter of ten—ten, but still no Davy. "I can't stand it any longer," murmured Penny, "I'll have to call up Father."

She turned to go down to the telephone, but just at that moment heard a sharp click against the window. She listened. The sound was repeated. She went to the window, opened it and looked out. Below stood a small figure muffled in a blanket. A little further away stood another figure similarly enveloped. "Is that you, Davy?" called Penny with a feeling of relief.

"Yes, it's me," came the answer. "Is Father there?"

"No, he and Mother have gone out to dinner."

"Please come down and let us in."

"I'll come." Wondering a little who was included in the "we," Penny went down, feeling disposed to treat the culprit with dignified severity. "David At-

wood, what do you mean by coming in at this time of night?" she began to say when she faced the boy.

"We didn't mean to come in at all," replied David in a small voice, "but we got so cold and we heard things and we got scared of wild beasts and we thought we'd better come home."

"I should think you'd better be scared. What about scaring me to death wondering what had become of you? Who is that with you?"

"Sam Potter."

"What is he doing here?"

"He's afraid to go home."

"He is, is he? Where did you get those blankets?"

"Off of my bed."

"For pity's sake. Well, come in and tell me what you have been up to. I never heard of anything so crazy."

She held the door open while the two children crept in, trailing the blankets behind them. They looked so droll that Penny was forced to hide a smile, though she still kept up a severe manner. "Go into the library," she ordered, "and take off those blankets. I never saw anything so filthy; you have about ruined them dragging them through the dirt. Now tell me where you have been."

Davy seated himself dejectedly and Sam slipped into a place by his side on the sofa. "We went camping," Davy began to explain.

"Camping? Where did you go?"

“Oh, off there,” Davy waved his hand to describe an indefinite place. “We took something to eat but it wasn’t near enough. We thought we would find a farmhouse where they would give us plenty, but we walked and walked and didn’t find any farms at all. We thought if we came to the woods we might shoot some game ——”

“What with?” Penny asked.

“Sam had his pop-gun, or we might catch some fish; they always do, in books, but we couldn’t find a trout stream.”

“I should think not,” Penny murmured. “Well, go on, then what?”

“It got dark and we were awfully tired, so when we came to a little piece of woods we climbed the fence and rolled ourselves in the blankets and lay down under the trees, but we got so cold and we heard queer noises, and then we thought about how nice and warm it was at home, and we thought about a good hot supper, so we decided we would wait till next summer before we really went camping, and we started for home. We got awfully tired of carrying the blankets.”

“How far did you go?”

“I don’t know, but it was awfully far. A man came along in a wagon and brought us part way back. We rolled up the blankets and sat upon them. Sam got sleepy, but I didn’t. Is there anything to eat, Penny?”

“You don’t deserve one mouthful,” said Penny,

“but I suppose you’d better have something.” The two looked so forlornly miserable, so little, so pathetically helpless, that suddenly all resentment faded away, and Penny went out to waken Rilly, who came to the fore with alacrity, brought out her reserves of food, petted, coddled, commiserated, till the adventurers were quite chirked up and felt that they had done rather a big thing after all.

Still, when it came to facing paternal judgment neither boy was ready for the ordeal. Davy went up to his sister and pulled her head down that he might whisper: “Can’t Sam stay all night, and won’t you telephone to his mother and tell her he’s here?”

“Very well,” returned Penny, “I’ll do it.”

Emboldened by this concession, Davy went further: “And won’t you ’splain to Father and Mother?”

“I don’t know exactly what ’splaining there is to be done,” Penny answered, “but I’ll tell Mother and leave it to her to get you out of the mess. Now go right to bed.”

This command the two little chaps were only too ready to obey and they scurried up-stairs, leaving Rilly to supply other blankets and Penny to telephone to Mrs. Potter that her recreant son was safe.

CHAPTER VIII

THE HAND-BAG

THE consequences of Davy's escapade were more far-reaching than might have been expected, and as it sometimes happens that good comes out of evil, so it did in this case.

It was not till the next morning that Penny told her mother of her long wait for her little brother. "I was getting so worried," she concluded by saying.

"And no wonder," said her mother gravely. "I am afraid those two boys are not good for each other. They have too much imagination, and one spurs on the other to foolishness. Where are they?"

"I think they are out in the garden. Sammy has been hanging around all morning. I believe he is afraid to go home, and as long as it is Saturday he doesn't have to go to school."

"I'm afraid he hasn't a very wise mother," Mrs. Atwood said half to herself.

"She seems very generous," returned Penny. "She spent a lot of money at the bazaar."

"I think she is generous and kind-hearted. I wish you would find the boys and send them to me."

Penny lingered at the door before carrying out her

mother's wish. "Please don't be very cross to Davy," she said wistfully. "They did look so forlorn and miserable when they came in, and they were all done up, and oh, so hungry. I think they worked out their own punishment."

"That is often the way," returned her mother. "I hope I shall not be unjust, but one must get at the motive in affairs like this."

Penny went on and found the two boys in the back garden; neither was playing very boisterously, and when Penny approached they both stood awkwardly awaiting her approach. "Mother wants you, Davy, and you, too, Sammy," she said.

"What does she want us for?" asked Davy.

"She will tell you."

"I'll bet you've been blabbing."

"She had to know when Rilly showed her those blankets, and anyway it was right that she should know."

Very reluctantly Davy started toward the house, Sammy following at snail's pace. At the door of Mrs. Atwood's room they paused. "Come in, boys," said Mrs. Atwood pleasantly. "Now just sit down and tell me all about it," she added as they entered. "Begin at the beginning and tell me why you went off in that way. Weren't you comfortable at home? Don't you like your beds? Is there anything wrong with the food? Has anyone been treating you harshly?"

The boys hung their heads. "Well, no-o," Davy

began, "it wasn't that, but you see we thought we'd go to Alaska, to the gold fields, and make a lot of money, then when we got back everybody would be so pleased and surprised."

"How long did you expect to be gone?"

"Oh, a year or so."

"And didn't you think your parents would be worried?"

"Yes, we did think of that, but we meant to write and tell them."

"So very considerate," Mrs. Atwood murmured. "And how did you think to get there? It is a long way, you know."

"We were going to work our way. We did have some money to start with——" Davy glanced at Sammy.

"Tell her," said Sammy laconically.

"We did have some money," Davy repeated it, "but we lost it."

"Lost it? How was that?"

Again Davy looked to his companion for encouragement. Sammy nodded for Davy to go on.

"It was in a bag," Davy continued, "and we were going to keep other things in it. We were in the five-and-ten cent store getting some candy and things. We had gone quite a long way before we found out that the bag was gone. I said we had left it in the store, but Sammy says it was stolen by some footpads that were following us."

Mrs. Atwood repressed a smile. "Did you see the footpads?" she asked.

"No, but Sammy is sure they came along behind us and snipped it off his arm; it had a leather handle."

"Was there much money in it?"

"Yes, a great deal, twenty dollars or so."

"It was Sammy's money, of course, and the bag was his, too, I suppose."

"Yes, at least——" Davy paused again and looked to Sammy for further encouragement.

This time Sammy spoke up. "It wasn't exactly mine, but it was all right, for I have that much in the bank and I was going to write to Mother to take that in place of what was in the bag. I wouldn't have taken it, of course, unless I could pay it back."

"It was your mother's bag, was it?"

"Well, yes, but I knew she wouldn't mind, for she has ever so many others and this was an old one."

"Was there anything else in the bag besides the money?"

"Nothing but some old papers, but I'm sorry I lost it."

"Is that why you didn't want to go home this morning?"

Sammy looked abashed at this direct question. "Well—well, I—I—don't suppose Mother will like it, but—but—maybe I can find the thieves. If I only could discover their secret den I would go there disguised as a peddler or something."

The idea of little, scrawny, hop-o'-my-thumb Sammy disguised as a peddler and invading a robbers' den was too much for Mrs. Atwood and she had to smile. "It seems to me," she said, "that it would be a better plan to start your investigations at the five-and-ten cent store, and take up the robber clue later if necessary. By the way, whose was this brilliant idea of going to Alaska, yours or Davy's?"

"It was mine," replied Sammy, somewhat proudly and officiously.

"Oh, I see. Then, when you decided to come back why did you come with Davy instead of going to your own home for the night?"

"I didn't want to leave Dave in the lurch," Sammy answered importantly, "and, besides, my mother often goes out and leaves me alone with the servants most all night. Lots of times I spend the night with some of the boys and she doesn't care a speck. She doesn't even know where I am, sometimes, and so I knew she wouldn't mind."

Mrs. Atwood drew a quick sigh. Without meaning to be, Sammy was really pathetic. The idea that any mother should not care where her little boy might be at night was something that this mother could not understand, and at that moment she forgave Sammy much.

Just then the telephone rang. Mrs. Atwood answered. "Is my boy, Sammy, at your house?" was asked.

"Yes, he is right here, in this room," replied Mrs. Atwood.

"Won't you please ask him if he has seen anything of a black leather hand-bag. I have mislaid it, somehow, and there are some very important papers in it which I must have. I think I left it on the library table, but it is nowhere to be found."

Mrs. Atwood repeated this to Sammy, who turned very red and then pale. "Oh, please—please," he stammered, "tell her something. Tell her I borrowed it and—and —— Oh, please tell her something."

He was so agitated, looked so little and helpless that Mrs. Atwood could but feel sorry for him. The situation was not a pleasant one, but she tried to make the best of it. She turned the matter over in her mind before she answered Mrs. Potter. "Sammy says he did see the bag," she told her. "He borrowed it, he says, but thinks he left it somewhere."

"Where? Where?" came the eager question. "There were not only papers in it, but a sum of money and a draft for a large amount which anyone might cash."

"I hope we can find it," replied Mrs. Atwood, though with small hope that this could be done. "We are going now to hunt it up. I will call you up as soon as there is any word of it."

"I see. You think he has left it somewhere around in your house. I am much relieved. Thank you a thousand times."

Mrs. Atwood repeated the conversation to Sammy, who trembled violently and then burst into tears. "I didn't know—I didn't know ——" he sobbed. He was so nervous and hysterical that Mrs. Atwood forbore to press home the seriousness of the loss, but feeling that her own son was somewhat concerned in it, she determined to do her part in making a search.

"You must go to the five-and-ten cent store," she told Sammy. "It is barely possible that you left the bag there and that it may have been turned in at the Lost and Found desk. Penny shall go with you, for I have an important business engagement which will keep me at home. You can describe the bag and I certainly hope and pray it may be found. You'd better go, too, Davy, for you may remember just where you stood when you were buying—candy, was it?"

"I remember exactly," returned Davy. "Don't cry, Sammy, maybe we'll find it."

Penny was summoned and was quite appalled at the magnitude of the loss. "It is perfectly terrible," she exclaimed, "and I should think Sammy would cry; I know I would if I had done such an awful thing."

At these words Sammy burst into a louder wail, and Davy, realizing that he was not altogether innocent, joined in, so that it was with difficulty that Penny could marshal them into any sort of gait when she got them out on the street. "They will think I am taking you to jail," she warned.

"Maybe that's where I'll have to go," mourned

Sammy. "I'm so awful bad I ought to go, but I'll never do it again."

"And I'll never, never go to Alaska, not even when I'm grown up and know for certain that there is a pile of gold to be had." Davy contributed this.

It was two very pale, red-eyed little boys that Penny piloted to the Lost and Found desk, but her heart leaped with joy when the girl in charge asked: "What kind of bag was it?"

"A black leather bag," Sammy told her.

"About so big," Davy added, measuring the size with his hands.

"It had a leather handle," Sammy continued.

"When was it lost?"

The two boys looked at each other. Davy was the more certain of the two. "Yesterday afternoon, about, about four o'clock. It was four, Sammy, because it was getting sort of dark, and we'd come from school." He turned to the girl. "We had it over there by the candy counter, for Sammy took some money out of it to pay for the candy; it was that chewy kind of candy that lasts a good while."

"Do you know what was in the bag?" The girl addressed Penny.

"Some papers, a draft for a large sum of money, about twenty dollars in bills, a little change, a card case with two or three cards with different addresses on them, tradesmen's cards, I believe. Can you remember anything else, Sammy?"

“There were some handkerchiefs and a lead pencil, a tiny little note-book, too. There was a letter, but I mailed that, for it was sealed and had a stamp on it.”

“Is this the bag?” The girl handed out one from a locked desk.

“Yes! Yes!” cried the boys in delighted tones. “It wasn’t stolen and we left it here after all,” said Davy triumphantly.

“Are you the owner?” the girl addressed Penny.

“No, but this little boy’s mother is,” Penny told her, “and it was he who lost it.”

“It seems rather a valuable bag for such a little boy to have,” continued the girl. “I think the owner had better come for it herself. I will speak to Mr. Smith and see what he says.”

She went off and returned with Mr. Smith, who agreed with her that it were better the owner should claim it herself. “Not that I doubt your right, or that you have identified the bag,” he said, “but in such a case it would be more satisfactory to us as well as to the owner; moreover, I think that for so valuable a thing there should be some reward for the finder.”

“I think so, too, and I am sure Mrs. Potter will agree. How would it do for me to telephone her and ask her to come and claim the bag?” said Penny.

“Excellent. Come into the office and use our ’phone.”

Leaving the two boys outside Penny followed the man, and soon was able to reach Mrs. Potter over the

'phone. "Your bag is found, Mrs. Potter," she said, "but you will have to come and claim it."

"Mercy!" cried Mrs. Potter. "Why, where are you? Isn't this Mrs. Atwood's residence, and who is this speaking?"

"I am Penny Atwood and I am at the five-and-ten cent store where your bag was found."

"That is the most mysterious thing I ever heard," Mrs. Potter responded. "I haven't been to the five-and-ten for ages."

"But Sammy has," Penny told her, with an idea of giving some clue to what Sammy's mother might expect to hear.

"Oh, very well. I will come immediately. Is Sammy with you?"

"Yes, he is here."

"The little wretch. I will be there as soon as possible."

And indeed she must have used all possible speed, for in a very short time Penny saw her automobile stop before the door. "Where is Sammy? Oh, there you are, Penny. This is awfully good of you. I have been worried to death over those papers. You are sure it is the right bag?"

"Sammy says so."

"I don't understand yet what he had to do with it. I have a mind to give him the worst whipping—— Yes, Sammy Potter," she went on, catching sight of her son. "I have a mind to give you a good trouncing."

“She will when she learns the facts,” thought Penny, but she did not know that Mrs. Potter’s threats were seldom carried out, and that the bag recovered there was little left for Sammy to fear. She led the way to the place where the bag was in keeping, saw it safely delivered into Mrs. Potter’s hands and heard Mr. Smith say: “We thought, Mrs. Potter, that you might like to reward the little boy who found the bag. It was certainly very honest of him and I imagine from his looks that he not only deserves but needs what you may feel disposed to offer.”

“Why, of course,” returned Mrs. Potter, generous at all times and especially so on this occasion when her relief was so great. “Where is he?”

“We have his address. He had not thought of leaving it till we suggested that he should. It is over in a poor part of the town.”

“Oh, dear, I am in a great hurry to get to bank before it closes, as it does so early on Saturdays. I wonder if you have someone you could send.”

Mr. Smith hesitated when Penny spoke up. “I can go, Mrs. Potter, if you like.”

“Oh, my dear, would you? How kind of you. I will take Sammy along with me, and Davy, too, if he wants to go. I have to see my lawyer after I leave the bank, but I can take you that far in my car.”

Penny agreed to this, and after taking leave of the kindly Mr. Smith with many thanks on Mrs. Potter’s part, they left the store.

At the bank Mrs. Potter thrust a bill into Penny's hand. "Give the child this," she said, and disappeared into the bank.

Penny saw that she had handed her twenty dollars, and considered this none too large an amount, so she put it carefully into her purse, hailed a street car and proceeded on her errand. It was getting colder. The wind whistled around corners and heaped the dry leaves in brown and yellow masses along the gutters and around the roots of trees. Penny wore her shabby furs but rejoiced that the new set would soon be ready. It must be terrible to have no fire and no food, she thought as she approached nearer and nearer and nearer to the poorer part of the town.

At a certain corner she left the car, looked about her and then turned into a narrow street whose little houses were of the humblest sort. Before one of these she paused to look at the number. The door stood open and she heard a man's voice, loud and emphatic: "I say you've got to get out," she heard. "I've waited as long as I mean to, and I've been patient. You give me that rent now or this afternoon you're put out."

Penny stood still chilled with horror. She had heard of such things as persons being dispossessed, but it had seemed a far-off, unreal thing, and here was she facing the fact. She was so moved, so interested that she could not stir, and presently she heard a child's voice raised in protest. "You stop talking that way

to my mother. Give us a little time. You ain't going to be cheated out of your money."

"I've heard that tale before and just once too often," the man's voice began again. "Promises ain't nothin' but hot air, and I'm sick and tired of them. Out you go this afternoon, and let me see you dare to take away a stick of furniture the law don't allow you."

Then a red-faced man hurried from the house with a final threat of "You'll get out by three o'clock or I'll know the reason why."

Penny sprang aside to let him pass, then went up the steps and looked at the number which was too faint to be seen from below. Then she knocked at the door. After waiting a few minutes she knocked louder, and presently a little boy with face smeared and teary, came to the door. "Is this where Peter Nugent lives?" asked Penny.

"That's me," said the boy.

"Did you find a black leather bag at the five-and-ten cent store?"

"Yes, I did," replied the boy, "but I didn't take nothin' out of it, and I carried it straight to the desk, so I did." He spoke defiantly.

"When did you find it?" Penny pursued her questioning.

"Yesterday afternoon."

Penny glanced around her. There were women standing in doorways, children gaping at her from the

sidewalk. She did not want them to observe the transfer of the reward. "May I come inside a minute?" she asked.

The boy stood aside and she entered the dingy hallway. "That bag had some valuable papers in it, and some money," she said opening her purse.

"I didn't take nothin'." The boy looked at her unflinchingly with clear, long-lashed blue eyes.

"I know you didn't," returned Penny smiling, "and that is exactly why I am here. The lady the bag belongs to wants me to give you this," she took out the bill, "as a reward for your honesty." She handed him the money.

He took it in his smudgy little hand, looked at it in a dazed way for a minute, murmured a deep-breathed "Gee!" and then dashed into an inner room crying: "Mother! Mother!" all his heart in his cry.

"He might have had the grace to thank me," said Penny to herself as she turned away, "but I suppose he was too excited. Well, I hope it may do them good."

She had scarcely reached the lowest step, however, before Peter came dashing out of the house calling: "Lady, lady! please don't go. Mother wants to speak to you."

So back Penny went to be received at the door by a thin little woman wiping her eyes on her apron. "Please, miss," she began, "would you mind letting me know the rights of this? Petey is so excited I can't

make head nor tail of it. 'Twas something about a bag so near as I can make out."

"Peter found a bag at the five-and-ten cent store yesterday. He took it straight to the office where they made him give his name and address. When the lady the bag belongs to heard about it she wanted to give a reward for his honesty and sent me with the money. It was a very valuable bag, at least the things in it were valuable, and she was worried to death about losing it. She is quite able to give the reward, and thinks Peter is a very honest little boy."

"I've tried to bring him up honest," said his mother, looking down at him proudly. "Petey is a good boy, miss, but it's been hard for us to keep straight these days. It's as if an angel from heaven had brought us this money, for I am behind with the rent on account of me being sick with ammonia, and the lad not being able to get a job."

"I guess he won't put us out now," spoke up Petey with decision.

"He'll not. Perhaps you saw the landlord coming out just now, miss," Mrs. Nugent again turned to Penny. "He was threatening to take our furniture and set us out on the street with just the poor sticks the law allows. I was owing two months and am on the third, miss, and this lifts me out of a sore trouble. Please thank the lady a thousand times. God bless her and you, too, miss. Did ye thank the young lady, Petey?"

Peter hung his head and murmured: "Thank ye, miss."

"He do be bashful like," said his mother, "but he's a good boy, is Petey, and if he wasn't so small he'd be getting a job that would help out, but nobody'll take him on account of his size. He's right smart and could do errands and the like fine. Maybe ye'll be hearing of someone that wants a boy that's smart and willing."

"I will certainly inquire," Penny promised.

"When I get back me stren'th we'll catch up, but the times is mortal hard," the woman sighed.

Peter snuggled up close to her side. "Never mind, Mother," he whispered, "we got the rent money an' maybe I'll git a job."

Mrs. Nugent smiled and Penny went away wondering what they would have for dinner and casting around in her mind for a possible job for Peter. She was so absorbed that she let two cars pass her without getting on and nearly forgot where she was to get out.

CHAPTER IX

MR. SMITH AND PETER

“AND so for once good came out of evil,” said Mrs. Atwood when Penny went home with her story. “No one could have imagined that the escape of those two naughty little boys would result in good fortune for another little boy, but that is sometimes the way in this world.”

“Do you think they really meant to be so naughty?” asked Penny, ready to excuse her little brother.

“Perhaps not really, although they knew that running away from home was not a thing to do. They are both imaginative children, and Sam is allowed to read all sorts of sensational stories, so they were carried away by the idea of adventure, not realizing that they were too young to do what older boys might do. The boys in the stories that Sam reads are always going off into the world to make their way heroically and in the end return home to pay the mortgage on the farm, so why not Sam and Davy?”

Penny nodded understandingly. “I wonder if I will be as just and wise as you are when I am grown up.”

“ I hope you will be much wiser and more just; you will if your mother’s experience can help you.”

“ Wasn’t it lucky that I reached Mrs. Nugent’s just in the nick of time? ”

“ It certainly was. Lucky Penny again, I suppose you will say. Tell me some more about those two. An honest, hard-working woman deserves to be helped and we must see what can be done for them.”

“ She is a little skinny sort of woman, but clean. The little boy has big blue eyes with long black lashes. His hands weren’t very clean, but he looks straight at you, and I think his face might have been clean before he smudged tears all over it with his hands.”

“ That isn’t exactly what I wanted to know,” replied Mrs. Atwood smiling. “ I imagine they are Irish. Did the house look clean and orderly? Did the woman tell you what sort of work she was accustomed to do? ”

“ I didn’t see much of the house, but what I did see looked quite decent, and they didn’t seem to be the rag-taggy sort of people that some of their neighbors are. She didn’t tell me what sort of work she does.”

“ Well, we can go there and find out. Would Davy’s clothes fit the little boy? ”

“ They would be rather small, I am afraid, though he is not big. I imagine he is older than he looks, and he seems to want to get work very, very much. Mother, do you know Mr. Smith, the manager of the five-and-ten cent store? ”

“ No, but I think your father does.”

“He seems an awfully nice, kind man. I wonder if Mrs. Potter would have thought of offering the reward if Mr. Smith hadn’t suggested it. She was quite ready to do it when he did mention it, but she is sort of scatter-brained, don’t you think?”

Mrs. Atwood smiled. “Don’t let’s discuss Mrs. Potter, let’s go back to Mr. Smith. Now that Christmas is coming and all the shops are so busy perhaps he might find a place for Peter—is that his name?”

“Oh, Mother, that is a lovely idea. He would be sure of Peter’s honesty, wouldn’t he? He mentioned it, and seemed pleased that a poor little boy like that should not have kept the bag. It must have been an awful temptation when he knew the landlord was about to turn them out of house and home if they didn’t pay the rent. I wish, I do wish Mr. Smith would give him a job.”

“Why don’t you go and ask him?”

“I?” Penny looked startled.

“Yes; why not? A Girl Scout should be willing to help anyone at any time, and no one could tell the facts so well as you who have been to the house and learned what was going on.”

“Do you think he would consider me fresh and meddlesome?”

“Not if you were diplomatic about it.”

“How could I be? How would you go about it if you were I?”

“Well, I should tell him that you thought he would

like to know that Mrs. Potter had given the reward, and had commissioned you to take it. I would tell him the amount, and then tell him just what you saw and heard when you got there. That would bring up the subject of Peter's wanting a place, and if he does not suggest it himself, you could ask him if he knew anyone who might want to employ a boy like that."

"I could do that, couldn't I? Would you say any more?"

"If he still seems to be indifferent you might ask him to let Peter know in case he should hear of a job for him."

Penny thought this all over, finally deciding that she could undertake the mission without fear. "Would you go alone?" she asked finally.

"Yes, I believe it would be more effective if you would. You could tell him who you are, for as your father knows him it might arouse more interest in what you have to say."

"I could take Brownie with me as far as the store, just to give me courage, and she could be looking around while I interviewed Mr. Smith. Suppose he won't see me?"

"I think he will if you tell him Mr. Robert Atwood's daughter wants to speak to him."

"I hope I won't forget any of the telling points, but I reckon when I get started I won't, for I am interested. I suppose I'd better go while I am enthusiastic."

“It is always better to strike when the iron is hot. If you wait too long Mr. Smith will have forgotten the incident and your own ardor perhaps will have cooled somewhat.”

“Then off I go this blessed afternoon, for to-morrow will be Sunday, and there you are.”

She was rather quiet during the meal hour, for she really dreaded the interview with Mr. Smith. It was one thing to plunge into a matter of that kind without having premeditated and another to go at it with cold calculation. She was afraid she might not say the right thing, that Mr. Smith would think her forward, would be busy and cut her off short, would tell her that he could not attend to all the little boys who returned lost articles, or that he might not be willing to see her at all; indeed as the time drew near she rather hoped this last would be the case.

However, when she had called for Brownie, had laid the matter before her and received a most enthusiastic encouragement, she felt quite brave, so that not till she was actually in the store and had asked to see Mr. Smith did she feel any return of that disagreeable sinking of heart. Then she would fain have turned and fled, but knew that she must stick to her guns. She gave Brownie an appealing look as the message was brought that Mr. Smith asked if she would come to his office.

“Well, Miss Atwood,” said Mr. Smith, looking up from his desk as Penny entered, “what is it to-day,

something for your Girl Scouts, or is it a drive of some kind that you want to interest me in?"

"Oh, no," Penny returned, "I just wanted to tell you about the reward Mrs. Potter sent to the little boy that found her bag. I thought maybe you would like to know about it."

"Yes, yes, I believe I do remember there was something about a bag. It had some valuable papers in it, I think."

Then Penny told her story, interrupted only once or twice by a question from her listener. At the conclusion he said nothing more than: "Thank you very much for telling me this. I will bear the boy in mind in case we need anyone."

"For the extra Christmas work, anyway," said Penny wistfully.

"Exactly," answered Mr. Smith with a smile, and Penny went away not at all convinced that her effort had been worth while.

"Well," said Brownie eagerly when Penny had found her looking over toys, "what luck?"

"I did the best I could," responded Penny rather disheartedly, "but all he said was that he would bear Peter in mind."

"I suppose that was all one could expect him to say," returned Brownie comfortingly.

"But I did so want him to look delighted at the chance of getting an honest boy," declared Penny.

"Wasn't he nice and pleasant?"

“Oh, yes, though not what you might call enthusiastic. I like people to be enthusiastic.”

“But business men don't fall over themselves being enthusiastic about poor little boys,” Brownie said with a laugh. “You expect too much, my young miss. Now I prophesy that Mr. Smith will be up and doing just because he didn't talk much about it. You wait and see.”

“I don't see that I can do anything else,” returned Penny. “One thing I do see, Brownie, and that is we must not forget to send the Nugents a Christmas basket.”

“I should think we mustn't. Let me see, we have several new names on the list. There is Louise for one.”

“Oh, she is all arranged for, you know.”

“Yes, I know, but still she is a new one on the list. Then there is Mr. Mason; we mustn't forget him.”

“Indeed we must not. I don't suppose the poor old man has had a Christmas gift in many a year.”

“Probably not. Well, he shall have one this year.”

“He shall have two at least, and I shouldn't be surprised if he had more.”

“And now come the Nugents.”

“Mother is going to see Mrs. Nugent and then we can tell better what is needed there. It does seem to me as if we Girl Scouts would be busier than ever in spite of there being no war work to do.”

Then their talk wandered to other subjects while

down in the little house where the Nugents lived there was great rejoicing. If Penny could have seen what took place that evening she would have realized that she had no cause to criticize Mr. Smith. It was about eight o'clock when he arrived in the shabby little street, sought out the barely decipherable number, and knocked at Mrs. Nugent's door. Peter answered, looking askance at the strange gentleman, and fearing some new complication in the matter of rent. Many hard rubs in an unfeeling world had made him suspicious, and his Irish blood was ready to heat up at the first signs of offense. "Is this Peter Nugent?" asked Mr. Smith.

"That's me name," replied Peter curtly.

"Ask the gentleman in," came from his mother, none too far off.

Peter opened the door wider and Mr. Smith entered. He gave a quick glance to the surroundings as he was ushered into the small room. He observed that it was clean, if cheaply furnished and in none too good taste.

Mrs. Nugent pushed forward the best chair, a gaudily upholstered one, now shabby from long use. "Will ye be seated, sir?" she said politely.

Mr. Smith sat down. Mrs. Nugent took another chair, and waited with hands folded to learn what the visitor's errand might be. Peter, frowning a trifle suspiciously, stood by the door like some wary little terrier ready to bark at one who might prove an enemy.

"I am Mr. Smith, manager of the five-and-ten cent store," began the visitor. Peter's blood chilled. Suppose there was some mistake about that wonderful twenty-dollar bill which had already passed out of his possession into the hands of the landlord. It could not be recalled and how in the world could he ever make it good? He drew his black brows together more frowningly, and edged a little closer to his mother.

"Yes, sir," said Mrs. Nugent, not having the least idea of why this should concern her.

"This is your son, I suppose," Mr. Smith went on.

"It is, sir," replied Mrs. Nugent, still in the dark.

"How old is he?"

"He's eleven going on twelve, though small for his age. His father was something of a runt, though as fine a man as ever wore shoe leather." Mrs. Nugent had found her tongue.

"Yes, yes, he is small. I should have thought him younger. Didn't I see you in our store yesterday?" Mr. Smith turned to Peter. "Doing your shopping for Christmas, probably," he added with a little twist of a smile.

"No, sir. I was just looking," answered Peter. "I hadn't the price for anything like what you think. I liked to look. Gee! but there's a lot of nice things you can get for five or ten cents."

"And you picked up a bag," Mr. Smith went on, while Peter's blood again ran chill.

“Yes, sir, I found it over by the candy counter.”

“Why didn’t you keep it?”

Peter’s big blue eyes opened wide while his mother lifted her hand with a quick exclamation. “Hear to that!” she cried. “Why, sir, Petey would no more keep a thing that didn’t belong to him than he’d take it, and he’d starve before he’d do that last. We’ve scarcely two pennies to rub together these last months, but the two of us would go to the poorhouse rather than take a pin’s worth.”

Mr. Smith’s rather grave face broke into a smile. “I am quite convinced of that,” he said. “That is why I am here. This is a busy time of year with us, just before Christmas, and we need a lot of extra help. I am looking for an errand boy, for though we don’t usually deliver our goods, we do send home purchases above a certain amount. Do you know the town well, Peter? Can you find your way about and are you strong enough to carry rather heavy bundles sometimes?”

“You bet I can find my way anywhere,” replied Peter eagerly, “and just look at that.” He pulled up his sleeve to show his muscle, not so greatly developed after all, and giving evidence of scrawniness rather than strength, but Mr. Smith nodded appreciation while Peter scanned his face avidly. “If you’ll only try me, sir, I’ll work me legs off,” he said.

“We’d hardly want you to do that when the legs are the very thing you must use in running errands,”

returned Mr. Smith. "Well, Peter, if your mother is willing you can report at the store Monday morning at half-past seven. We can use you for the holidays anyhow, and if you prove competent and faithful we will keep you on after that."

"I'll work like a horse," promised Peter with shining eyes. "I'll do my very best, sir."

"That is all anyone could ask, and I hope we can keep you on. I forgot to say that we can give you"—he mentioned a fair enough sum,—“to begin with.” Peter drew in his breath and stretched himself up to as great a height as his muscles permitted.

"Oh, sir, oh, sir," said Mrs. Nugent brokenly as Mr. Smith rose to go. "I think the good Lord must have sent you, for we had happened upon sorry times till this blessed day. Who would have thought when it dawned that the luck would find us before night? May I be so bold as to ask how you happened to know that my Petey was so anxious to get a job?"

"Why, certainly. I don't mind telling you that it was Miss Penny Atwood who suggested that I might find something for him to do. She is the young lady who was here to-day to bring your son a reward for his honesty in returning the bag."

"Heaven bless her!" exclaimed Mrs. Nugent fervently. "I could see by the looks of her that she had a good, kind heart, and you, sir, may you never want a friend."

"That's a good wish," returned Mr. Smith.

"We'll look for you on Monday, then, Peter." And with a good-night he left two very happy persons, probably the happiest in that narrow little street.

It was a few days later that Brownie, coming into Penny's home, was almost knocked down by her friend's impetuous rush to meet her. "What do you think? What do you think?" cried Penny. "I was in the five-and-ten cent store to-day and who should be there working but little Peter Nugent. It is just as you said, Brownie. You told me Mr. Smith would be up and doing, and so he was. He didn't put off one minute seeing Peter, for he has been there since Monday morning. Isn't it fine?"

"I should say. How is he getting along?"

"Beautifully, at least I think so. I asked a person in charge of one of the departments and she said he did very well, but that a new broom sweeps clean, which I thought was rather disagreeable of her."

"You didn't see Mr. Smith?"

"No, and I didn't want to bother him, but when I do see him I shall thank him. I wish you could have seen Peter dashing around. I didn't stop him to ask any questions but Mother is going to see Mrs. Nugent as soon as she can get time and we shall find out all about it."

"Did you tell Mrs. Potter?"

"Yes, and she told Sammy. We didn't care about having Davy know, but, of course, Sammy will tell him. You would have thought to hear Mrs. Potter

that Sammy had done the noblest thing in the world by losing her bag. She gave him all the credit after threatening to give him the worst trouncing he ever had. No wonder poor little Sammy has no proper idea of right and wrong, scolded for a thing one minute and praised the next minute for doing the same thing."

"What about Davy?"

"Oh, Mother knew how to deal with him. I can tell you, Brownie Burton, we ought to give thanks on our bended knees that we haven't silly mothers. If we grow up to be stupid, foolish, brainless women it will be our own fault and not our mothers'."

Brownie was thoughtful. "I can tell you this, too," she said after a moment, "that the girls of this generation owe a lot to the Girl Scout movement, those that have silly mothers, I mean, and several of them have. If Mrs. Potter had been a Girl Scout when she was our age she wouldn't be so—so—sort of queer in her way of looking at things."

"She would have a better idea of values, my mother says," Penny continued the subject. "I think that is an awfully good way to put it. Mother says persons place false values on words and deeds until they learn real values. I didn't understand what she meant at first, but I am beginning to."

"It's just like admiring a stone that shines when it has no value at all," Brownie was thinking it out, "but when you put it to the test you learn that it isn't worth

anything compared to a true diamond. The thing to do is to know a real diamond the minute you look at it, and to be satisfied to wear nothing less. We shouldn't adorn our characters with any but gems of the first water."

"That's a lovely way to describe it," replied Penny admiringly. "I'm going to try to remember that. Don't let's wear any cheap, make-believe stuff. If you see me flaunting false jewels, just remind me, and I will try to get rid of them."

"All right, and you do the same for me."

Penny agreed to this, and the two went off to plan Christmas gifts.

CHAPTER X

CHRISTMAS FUN AND FEASTS

THE Girl Scouts were gathered in the big room which had been given over to them for their meetings. After the preliminary exercises were over Miss Varney called upon her troop to go on with the programme prepared for the afternoon, but this was entered into so half-heartedly, so absent-mindedly that she halted the proceedings to say, "Girls, what is the matter with you all? I don't find anything like the usual enthusiasm. What has happened?"

"Oh, dear Miss Varney," Brownie spoke up, "it isn't what has happened, but what is going to. When you say something about wig-wagging I am wondering what I shall give somebody for Christmas, and when you talk about the Morse code I am saying to myself: I mustn't forget to send so-and-so a Christmas card."

Miss Varney laughed. "I am afraid that is the way it is with most of us. Very well, let us make this an occasion to plan for Christmas. We will decide what is specially Christmas work for the troop, and talk over how the work is to be carried on. In that way perhaps we can get up an interest in this meeting." Almost simultaneously each girl gave a sigh of relief.

"Those baskets," Becky Cole spoke up. "How

many shall we need, and who shall see to buying them and packing them?"

"That brings us face to face with the question," said Miss Varney. "Suppose each girl writes down on a slip of paper the name of the person or persons in whom she is most interested. If it is a family tell how many must be provided for, and whether children or grown-ups. That will give us the number of baskets needed. Next we will find out what each girl can contribute, and so we can get around to something like system."

Becky gave around the slips of paper and soon the girls were whispering together and jotting down the names she had in mind.

"Suppose you take Mr. Mason and I'll take the Nugents," Penny said to Brownie, with whom she had paired off.

"What about Louise?"

"Oh, she's not in it; she is one of us," declared Penny. "She won't need a basket if she is spending the holidays with me."

Brownie giggled. "I should hope not. Well, I'll take Mr. Mason, although it doesn't seem as if he were one to send a Christmas dinner to."

"We aren't going to put dinners in every basket, are we? Miss Varney, are the baskets to have exactly the same things in them?" Penny asked.

"Why no, I should not imagine so. You wouldn't want to send a toy to a rheumatic old woman nor a

warm shawl to a five-year-old boy. I should hope we could use better judgment than that. It will depend entirely upon the needs of those you are sending to."

With a triumphant: "I told you so," Penny wrote: "Mrs. Nugent, poor widow. Peter, her son, eleven years old," and handed in her slip; the others did the same, and Miss Varney and Becky looked them over. The number of pensioners was announced, Becky and Monica were delegated to buy the baskets, a day was appointed for the baskets to be packed and the contributions received, and the meeting closed with more enthusiasm than was shown at its beginning. The Christmas spirit was stirred, and each girl hurried home to consult her mother about contributions to the baskets.

There was a spicy odor in the house when Penny entered. Rilly always began her Christmas preparations betimes. To-day she was making mince meat. Next she would make fruit cake and then the plum pudding. She was in her element, and had saved up, stored away and cajoled the grocer to send supplies till she was ready to concoct the traditional goodies as usual.

Penny followed her nose, which finally took her to the kitchen where her mother was stoning raisins and Rilly was paring apples. "My, how good it smells," exclaimed Penny, perching herself upon the windowsill and helping herself to a raisin. "Mother, could I have a pie to put in Mr. Mason's basket?"

Her mother smiled. "It doesn't strike me that it would be very appropriate for a sick man, and moreover, I doubt if he would be allowed to eat any of it, so the nurses would fall heir to it."

"I suppose that is so; then what could I have?" Penny asked, helping herself to another raisin, and thereupon bringing a grunt of disapproval from Rilly, who rolled her eyes toward her in a way which caused Penny to drop the raisin and pick up a sliver of citron instead. "What could I have?" she repeated.

"I think some fruit and a mold of jelly would be more to the purpose than pie."

"To be sure," Penny went on, "Brownie has taken over Mr. Mason as her special, and I have taken the Nugents. Could I have a pie for them?"

"Not a mince pie, I am afraid, for we are to make a very few and those are already planned for, except just one for ourselves. You might have a little plum pudding."

"That would be fine; and what else?"

"Sugar is so scarce that I am afraid you cannot have many sweet things, but no doubt a little will go a great way, and we can make up on other things, groceries, like tea and coffee. Everything is so abnormally high, you see."

"I know that and it is the very reason why we have to do the best we can for the poor people that will have a hard time to get anything at all for Christmas. Why, Mother, every girl in the troop had either a

family or an individual to provide for, and that would mean about twenty. Fortunately we did so well at the bazaar that we had a little left over after buying the uniforms for the Tenderfoots, so that will buy the baskets, those cheap splint ones. Some of the girls say they have some at home that are not needed, and that will help out. I think the boys will help out in giving presents to Mr. Mason, for they feel as if he belonged to them as well as to us. I should like to give him a tiny little present all by myself, on account of the trunk. What do you think would be nice for him?"

"How would a wool cap do, the kind I have been crocheting for the army hospitals? You say he sits out-of-doors now, and in cold weather it might be very well for him to have something he could pull down over his ears. I can show you how to crochet one. I am able to make one in a couple of evenings, so it should not take you long. I will provide the worsted."

"Bless you, darlingest mother, that will be just the thing and I would so much rather give something I had made myself. So much for Mr. Mason. We have everything planned out for Louise, so I think when we have provided for the Nugents I can rest my mind. Of course I don't have to provide everything for their basket, but I must help out with the others. One of the girls is going to contribute five pounds of candy, and another is going to make a whole lot of little cornucopias and bags, and still another will bring a batch of ginger snaps, so all those things can be divided up."

“You can have a peck of apples from the barrel which has just come from the country, and you can have a dozen oranges, and as for groceries I will order rice, tea and cereals enough for you to give as your share, and Rilly can make you an apple pie. I think that should suffice.”

“Perfectly splendid.” Penny thoughtfully picked up another sliver of citron and put it in her mouth, then she jumped down from her perch crying: “Oh, Mother, I have a perfectly beautiful thought!”

“Something to do with star-dust and roses, perhaps,” returned her mother, smiling. “These are ready, Rilly.”

“Oh, no. You needn’t laugh at me, Mother. This is really very sensible. I was wondering what we could give the Nugents besides things to eat, some real Christmas gift, and I have thought of those things in Mrs. Mason’s trunk, the things that neither Louise nor I could use, like flannel petticoats and bombazine dresses. Then there is that cloth coat, too.”

“That is a happy thought, Penny, even if we decide not to call it beautiful. If Mrs. Nugent has any skill in sewing she could easily alter those things.”

“I should think they would just about fit her as they are, for she is a little woman, you know. And bonnets—you remember there were bonnets that we didn’t know what to do with, in those funny old bandboxes. Mr. Mason said we were to dispose of all that stuff if we could. I don’t suppose Mrs. Nugent could wear

them as they are, but they could be made over, some of them. I saw a black velvet one that looked to me very nice."

"Very well, we will look them over and see what can be done, but what about the little boy? He can't wear bombazine dresses nor velvet bonnets."

"No, but he could wear shirts made out of the flannel petticoats," cried Penny triumphantly. "There are three or four and Mrs. Nugent can't wear them all."

"Another happy thought. What have you been using to brighten up your wits to-day?"

"Just the looking-glass of my mother's mind that is reflected into mine."

"My, my, what a bright daughter I have and what a complimentary one. Come, let us get out of Rilly's way; she is casting black looks at you, and I don't wonder. If you keep on picking at those raisins no one will have either a mince pie or a plum pudding."

Before Christmas Day arrived the baskets were all ready, and which gave the most pleasure it would be hard to say. To Penny's cap for Mr. Mason the boys added all sorts of little gifts from bootlaces to books. They also took up a collection to buy Mrs. Nugent a ton of coal, so, with fuel in the cellar, food in the larder and clothing enough for the coldest day, the poor little widow felt as if riches had suddenly descended upon her. As for Mr. Mason, all his ogreish manners had melted entirely away, Penny told her

mother, and a milder man could not be found. The sunshine of sympathy and kindness had thawed out the ice of unhappiness, so that he was almost genial when Penny found him surrounded by his books, flowers, Christmas cards, and gifts.

As for Louise, never had she had a more wonderful Christmas, for, in spite of the shadow of her great losses, it was a bright and happy season for her. Every girl in the Thistle Troop was ready with a gift, and on Christmas Eve Penny was constantly trotting to the door to receive some whispered communication and a mysterious parcel which she promptly hid away in a certain drawer where other parcels paraded themselves in tissue paper and bright ribbons. It was quite dark when Penny ushered Louise into the house. Both girls were giggling with excitement, and both were tired out, for they had been rushing madly about all day delivering baskets and attending to their own affairs. Davy was making weird noises with a tin horn and an improvised drum. Rilly, in the kitchen, was crooning over the finishing touches she was putting to her pies. Tommy Thistle, brave in a flaring red bow, sat in the front window framed by a holly wreath, "making a Christmas card of himself," Penny said. Madam Gray had no such ambitions, resented being dressed up and lay stretched out upon the kitchen hearth dreaming of elusive mice instead of the catnip one which was dangling from the Christmas tree. The house had a mingled odor of spicy food and Christmas

greens, across which drifted the scent of violet sachet when Penny opened the drawer where Louise's gifts were secreted.

Penny had not outgrown her desire to hang up her stocking. Next to hers she hung one for Louise, then came Davy's. In the gray light of early morning the two girls, sleeping together, heard Davy's whispered announcement: "It's morning. Get up!"

"Huh?" said Penny, stirring sleepily. But the next minute both she and Louise were wide awake. "Merry Christmas!" said one to the other under her breath. They slipped on their wrappers and slippers and joined Davy waiting outside their door. Then the three stole to the door of Mr. and Mrs. Atwood's room to waken the sleepers with "While shepherds watched their flocks by night," sung in fresh, childish voices. Then to their shouts of "Merry Christmas!" came answering ones from the room. After that the children scampered back, to grope for their stockings and to snuggle down under the covers while they examined what was hidden within the bulging receptacles of little gifts.

It was still dark when the tree was lighted and the gifts distributed. Penny was so busy in watching Louise and enjoying her delight over the pretty little party dress and the furs, not to mention the many less important presents, that she came near neglecting her own, for, in spite of the check which had been given to her in place of furs, she was not neglected, as she dis-

covered when she came upon a bugle from her father and a dainty organdy party frock from her mother.

"And I didn't expect a thing!" she cried, dashing at her father to the detriment of the bugle. "I did want a bugle awfully and this is such a beauty." She put it to her lips and gave the call to mess, rather squeakily, to be sure, but an unmistakable call, which, as chance would have it, was followed by Rilly's announcement that breakfast was ready.

And so the day went happily till evening brought the excitement of the Boy Scouts' entertainment in honor of the Girl Scouts. Many were the surmises concerning the character of this party, for the boys had kept their secret well, and all that was known was that the affair would wind up with a dance.

Penny arrayed herself with great pride in her new organdy, but was scarcely less proud of Louise in her dainty silk tissue, rose-colored and with a pink sash which well suited her. The dresses were simply made, as was becoming to schoolgirls, and though at the last moment it was discovered that Louise had no slippers, this lack was finally supplied, though not till after a period of real anxiety on Penny's part, for she was determined that Louise should appear as well dressed as any of the other girls. She went to her mother in true distress. "Oh, Mother," she said, "what is to be done? Louise has no slippers and how can she dance in heavy shoes, besides they won't look well with that light frock."

“We never thought of that, did we?” responded Mrs. Atwood, quite concerned. “I don’t suppose she could wear an old pair of yours.”

“I would gladly lend her even my new ones, but they would drop off her feet, which are so much smaller than mine, and yours would be as bad.”

Mrs. Atwood considered the question for a moment before saying: “Perhaps one of the other girls has a pair she could lend Louise. What about Brownie?”

“Oh, Brownie’s feet are long and narrow, and Louise has funny little short feet, not very narrow.”

“Well, think over your friends and see if you cannot hit upon some one of them who has feet something like Louise’s.”

Penny stood thoughtfully fingering the ends of her sash. She looked very sweet, her mother thought, like a representation of spring. The pale green organdy was very becoming, bringing more light to her hair and more color to her cheeks. She ran over the list of her friends, and finally said: “I think Leila Sheldon is the only one who might possibly have shoes to fit. Shall I call her up?”

“By all means, and ask her if she would mind coming around this way and bringing the slippers if she chances to have a pair she is not going to wear.”

“I know she’ll do that in a minute. I’ll tell her not to mind if they are a little shabby for we can blacken them up.”

She ran off and in due course of time came back

with the information that Leila didn't have any slippers but she did have a pair of pumps, which they had decided would do quite as well, and that she would bring them along presently. So Louise was properly shod, and the trio started for the hall where the entertainment was to take place.

There was a great chattering going on in the room where the girls entered to take off their wraps. Most of the Thistle Troop had arrived. Brownie came running up as soon as she caught sight of Penny. "The doors aren't opened yet," she said. "Aren't they making a mystery of it? How sweet you look, Pen. I didn't know you had a new party frock. Why didn't you tell me?"

"I didn't know it myself, that's why. It was one of my Christmas gifts, and such a surprise, for I didn't expect anything after that big check Father gave me, but I did get a whole lot of things. Dad gave me a bugle, and you will hear me tooting away most any time, then Mother gave the frock, for she said I needed it anyway. Auntie sent me these darling beads, and this love of a fan, so you see I am all dolled up for this special occasion without in the least expecting I would be."

"Well, you always are lucky, you know. Where is Louise?"

"Over there with Leila. I want you to see her; she is a dream in that frock. You never saw anyone so happy over her Christmas things; she actually cried.

Every girl in the troop sent her something and the Varneys did, too. She actually had more presents than I did. Did I hear someone say the doors were opened? Come on."

There was a rush for the big hall. As the girls flocked in they saw the room decorated with greens, flags and bunting. At the extreme end was a stage where sat an improvised orchestra. At a given signal from the much made up and bewhiskered leader there came such a blast as made every girl stand still and clap her hands to her ears. Then followed a curious combination of sounds in which harmony had no place, but in which the weirdest sort of instruments figured, the leader, meanwhile, going through the most exaggerated motions as he wielded his baton extravagantly. It was all very funny and for a moment the girls failed to see the real show.

However, in a few moments their attention was drawn to the stalls ranged around the room where various side-shows were displayed. Here was a monstrous sea serpent into whose capacious jaws a would-be mermaid thrust at intervals small china dolls. Close examination disclosed the fact that the serpent's eyes were made of large chocolate drops from which some of the coating had been cut away to show a white center. Next was a monkey cage where queer-looking creatures gambolled and made faces. Then was shown a much becurled singing doll, who was wound up vigorously by a person in red jacket and brass buttons, and who

sang in sharp falsetto, "Home, Sweet Home" and "The Last Rose of Summer," but who broke down ignominiously with a strange squeak at an unexpected moment.

At intervals from the upper end of the hall came a blood-curdling howl from the wild man of Borneo, who shook the bars of his cage vigorously and glared at visitors most horribly. Then there was a giant of prodigious height, upon whose knee sat—who but little Peter Nugent?—the pair being labelled, Chang, the Chinese giant, and Tom Thumb. Not a girl who did not recognize in the fat lady a well known member of the Boy Scout troop, Dicky—alias Fatty—Doyle, whose good-natured face broke into a broad grin as he perceived one after another of his acquaintances. The bearded lady was selling her photograph to the accompaniment of a ridiculous rigmarole which purported to be her life history.

Penny and her friends had scarcely completed their survey of the various stalls when there was a stir upon the stage and they turned to see a troop of trained animals under the control of a bespangled, short-skirted creature who snapped a whip, gave commands, and put through their stunts a motley collection of monkeys, dogs, cats and such like beasts, all too absurd for words. These climbed ladders, jumped through hoops, rode bicycles, played upon various instruments, and acted their parts with more or less credit; then came songs, solos and duets, the performance ending

with a short play which included many local hits and exhibited much cleverness upon the part of the boys who wrote it.

Altogether it was an entertainment which anyone might enjoy, and many were the compliments showered upon the performers, who received their honors modestly but who felt repaid for their hard work by the enthusiasm it aroused.

“I think that last tableau of old Father Time and the New Year was perfectly lovely,” Penny told Roy as they led off a folk dance. “Where did you get that darling baby Year?”

“It was my little sister,” said Roy, laughing. “I persuaded Mother to come with her, and let her appear just for those few minutes. I was afraid she would get stage fright, but she didn’t. If I hadn’t taken the part of old Father Time myself she might have been scared, but I kept whispering to her all the time, so she went through it all right.”

“If only the new year could be as happy as she looked nobody would ask anything better,” said Penny. Then they gave attention to their steps and the dance went on.

“How in the world did you happen upon Peter Nugent?” asked Penny as the dance was finished.

Roy laughed. “Don’t you imagine that there may be a Girl Scout who has a Boy Scout brother? All your lights aren’t hidden under bushels, my young friend. We heard all about Petey from Becky Cole,

and straightway pressed him into service. He makes a good Tom Thumb, doesn't he? We'll get him into our ranks before long, for he is perfectly wild over us Boy Scouts. I never saw anyone more pleased than his mother was when we went there and asked her to let us have Peter for our show this evening."

"Well, it certainly is the best show I ever saw," declared Penny. Then Rufus came up to claim her for a dance. And so it went on till home-going time came around before anyone was ready for it, but not till after a dazzling Christmas tree appeared on the stage as if by magic, and a portly Santa Claus handed out gifts for everybody, most of them in the form of jokes, which added to the merriment. It was a gala event for them all, but probably no two of the company went home in such a bewildered state of happiness as the Belgian refugee, Louise Fallon, and the little errand boy, Peter Nugent. That Penny was escorted to her door by Father Time and Louise by the sea serpent did not in the least amaze the two girls, who bade their companions good-night quite as if they had' been ordinary mortals.

CHAPTER XI

“BLOW, BUGLE, BLOW”

TOMMY THISTLE was sitting on the fence watching the sparrows. He had only lately taken to this form of amusement, as he had only lately taken to staying out nights, and had developed a voice of high range and great compass. To Penny's great horror he had caught one sparrow which he laid at her feet in triumph, but despite the fact that she threw cold water, literally, upon this sport, chased him indoors, scolded him, even switched him, he still preferred the hunt to any other entertainment. Meanwhile Penny was devoting herself assiduously to her bugle, upon which she tooted in season and out of season, a performance which no one resented more than Tommy Thistle, who at the first blast would flee to the furthest point beyond hearing that he could find. Why it should so affect his tender sensibilities no one knew, but that he did object he was always ready to show by prolonged and angry meows, and even by spitting and snarling whenever Penny started up a call upon her bugle.

Her first efforts were far from musical. Indeed,

they sounded like nothing so much as the bellowing of a cow, so perhaps it was no wonder that Tommy Thistle expressed his dislike. Brownie made all manner of fun of her friend and dubbed the bugle "the purple cow," by which name it was known henceforth by all her friends.

All this raillery but added to Penny's determination to sound the bugle calls better than anyone in her troop, and she practised diligently in spite of Tommy Thistle's pronounced objections and Brownie's banter, and, it must be said, sometimes to the complaints of her family.

Tommy Thistle was sitting on the fence when he heard Penny's warning blast. She had just discovered that this was the best means of dislodging Tommy Thistle, and had come to the door for that purpose. Down jumped Master Tommy, and with tail erect and every hair bristling he dashed past her to hide himself in the kitchen's furthest corner, from which every now and then came a protesting growl.

Having driven Tommy away from the sparrows, Penny continued her bugle calls, going through the entire number before she stopped. Just as she was turning back into the house a voice said: "Well, I hope you are through with that performance. Here I have been calling you for the past ten minutes and I could no more make you hear me than I could a post."

"Well, you see, Brownie," Penny replied, "I came out to drive Tommy in. He was watching the spar-

rows and I am so afraid he will capture another one. I have just discovered that he loathes the bugle and will get out of hearing as quickly as he can when I begin to play.”

“ One can’t much blame him,” replied Brownie teasingly, “ though I must say you are improving. I have half a mind to get a drum. Wouldn’t we make a pair? There is one thing about it, when we wanted the place to ourselves we need only begin to practise and everyone would give us a wide berth. There would be some method in that. Come along; you know there is to be a rally this afternoon, so you may as well let me take care of the purple cow while you get ready. You will want to make your bugle calls, you know.”

“ Of course I remember that there is to be a rally, although I forget what is the special interest this afternoon.”

“ The usual exercises at first, of course, and then cooking tests by some of the Tenderfoots.”

“ Good! ”

“ Why do you say good till you have tried them? It is my experience that it is not wise to pronounce on such stunts till you have tasted. Have you forgotten the time you, my young miss, put mustard instead of ginger in what was to be gingerbread? ”

“ Don’t remind me of that hideous experience. I could have sunk through the floor from embarrassment. It looked so good, too, as light as a feather, then that horrible taste.”

“ Oh, well, that’s over and past. You needn’t worry about it now for your gingerbread is a model for any girl in the troop. ‘To err is human,’ as Roy is fond of reminding us.”

Penny went in while Brownie took the opportunity of testing her skill upon the bugle. She didn’t succeed very well and told Penny when she appeared that she had decided to get a drum. “ But,” she declared, “ I will have to seek the highways and hedges unless I want to drive my mother crazy.”

“ You’ll have to wait for warmer weather for highways and hedges,” remarked Penny, picking up her bugle to give a final blast. This had the effect of driving Tommy Thistle back into the house, from which he was just emerging, ears back and tail twice its size.

The girls laughed and went on their way, soon arriving at the schoolroom, where they met for most of their rallies. It was a big airy room, the main hall of the building. There were classrooms above and below was the gymnasium which opened upon pleasant grounds. In these the girls could practise their exercises at any time, and they made the most of their opportunities. Now, however, it was cold for basketball or tennis, and the gymnasium was more popular than outdoors. On mild days one could see groups of girls gathered in corners to struggle with lengths of rope in which they essayed to tie intricate knots, but now there were no such earnest workers, no students

of First Aid, no wigwagging, for the trees were bare, and the girls shuffled through paths covered with fallen leaves, to reach the warm, sunny room, made attractive by plants in the windows and pictures on the walls.

Miss Varney was already on hand with Becky Cole, while three anxious little Tenderfoots sat whispering together in one corner of the big room. “Are we the first?” asked Penny.

“Yes, for a wonder,” replied Becky.

“It has happened before,” returned Brownie, going over to where the Tenderfoots sat. “I do hope you have something awfully good, children,” she said, sitting down.

Little Lucy Wilbur smiled. “I have,” she said confidently.

Then the door opened to admit another group of girls and presently Penny’s bugle call assembled the whole troop except one or two belated stragglers who hurried in at the last moment and breathlessly took their places in the marching ranks already beginning their drill.

Then came some wigwagging tests in which Monica became hopelessly mixed, and gave up the flags to Brownie, who acquitted herself much more creditably.

At last arrived the moment to which all the girls had been looking forward, considering it the crowning pleasure of the afternoon. Lucy Wilbur proudly advanced with a covered basket from which she produced a dish of stuffed eggs. These she set upon a

table already spread with paper napkins and paper plates.

“Eggs!” exclaimed Brownie, “and they are so tremendously dear!”

“But we keep hens,” explained Lucy.

Next Ruth Shields set out a plate of biscuits. Irene Miller opened a box of peanut brittle. Then the three devoted themselves most seriously to the making of cocoa which they served in cups brought from home. Unfortunately, however, no one had thought of bringing sugar, and there was great consternation when this was discovered. The three little girls looked at one another aghast. “What can we do?” exclaimed Lucy. “Nobody likes sugarless cocoa.”

“And if we go back home to get it the cocoa will all get cold and that would be worse still,” declared Ruth. Irene said nothing but stood looking sorrowfully at the steaming cups.

“What’s the matter, girls?” asked Miss Varney, rising from her seat at the head of the table and coming over to the little group.

“We didn’t bring a speck of sugar,” Ruth informed her, “and cocoa without sugar is just nothing at all. We can’t sweeten it with peanut brittle, and it will all get cold if we don’t serve it right away. What can we do?”

“Oh, that’s an easy problem,” returned Miss Varney cheerfully. “Dump all the cocoa back in the pot; it will be all the better for a little more cooking. My

house is nearest, so just run over there and ask my mother to give you the sugar you will need.”

“But can you spare it?” asked Lucy. “It is very hard to get, you know.”

“I am sure we can easily spare it, for we use very little and I happen to know that we have a supply on hand.”

“Oh, Miss Varney, I always thought you were an angel,” said Lucy, “but now I know it.”

“Don’t stop to talk about angels,” said the more practical Ruth, “but let’s hurry and get that sugar.”

“Don’t let the girls eat up all the biscuits and eggs before they get the cocoa,” was Lucy’s parting charge as she ran after Ruth.

Miss Varney went back to the table where the girls, indeed, had begun to test the tempting fare before them. “Don’t be in too great a hurry, girls,” Miss Varney warned them. “We must wait for sugar which the girls forgot to bring. They will be back in a minute, so restrain your appetites.”

“It is going to be mighty hard for me to restrain mine; I am simply suffering for one of those eggs,” confessed Penny.

“If those things taste as good as they look,” said Leila Sheldon, “those girls will have no trouble in winning their badges.”

“Speaking of badges,” said Penny, “I showed mine to Rilly, and she was consumed with envy, so yesterday she told me that her society was going to have

badges, too, and she meant to win one for cooking; she will, too. She asked me if I wouldn't make one for her."

"Of course you will," said Leila. "What is Rilly's true name, by the way?"

"Amaryllis, if you please, Amaryllis Cyarter, as she tells you. The name of her society is 'Sons and Daughters of Moses,' I believe. Do somebody tell a funny story or sing something while we are waiting for that sugar; I want my mind taken off the subject of food."

"One would suppose you had had no dinner," remarked Brownie, laughing. "I wonder why it is that most girls are ready to eat at any old time."

"They aren't in it with boys," declared Leila.

"Or young robins," Penny put in, to the amusement of the rest.

By this time the two Tenderfoots had returned with the sugar and all fell to with appetites which bore out Brownie's statement, for there was not a biscuit nor an egg left when the feast was over, and the three Tenderfoots were so greatly praised that there was not the slightest doubt but that they had passed this test well. They had already accomplished the task of tying certain knots, and other required tests, and were now ready to become real Girl Scouts. They busied themselves in clearing off the table, leaving what remained of the peanut taffy to be handed around at intervals.

“It seems to me that a folk dance would be in order,” said Miss Varney. “Who has a new one?”

“Louise, Louise,” cried one and another. “She knows a lot more than any of us.”

So, for the next half hour they all followed the pretty steps, keeping time to the cheerful little French air which Louise sang. The little foreigner was so anxious to be one of them, to show her appreciation of the hospitality offered that it was really pathetic to see how eager she was to be of use. She was rapidly becoming a great favorite with the girls, who found her stories of the war, her little foreign songs and plays most entertaining.

Penny’s bugle call brought the dancing to an end. “Exercise enough, girls,” said Miss Varney. “Now let us have some quiet sort of play. What shall it be?”

“Circumstances!” cried Becky.

“Limericks,” proposed Brownie.

“’Pon Honor,” suggested Penny.

“What’s ’Pon Honor?” asked two or three.

“It’s an old-fashioned game my mother told me about,” Penny informed them. “You all sit in a circle, one person in the middle, and each of the others asks the middle one a question which she is bound to answer with absolute truth.”

“Let’s try it. It might be lots of fun,” said Brownie.

The others agreed and the questioning began. At

first the queries were easily answered, but grew more exciting as they struck a more personal note. Leila was covered with embarrassment when she was asked to name her most charming qualities; Penny could not make up her mind to answer the question: "If not yourself which of us girls would you rather be?" Brownie, however, stood by her guns when she was asked to name her chief faults, and gave such a list of them that she brought forth more protests than endorsements, and there arose quite a clamor of argument, so that Brownie retired with more acclaim than she thought she deserved. Becky, however, did not come off so well, for someone took up the idea of asking an opinion of each of the other girls from the one in the center, who, in this case, happened to be Brownie.

"What is your opinion of Becky Cole?" came the question.

"I think she is very clever," replied Brownie promptly.

"What do you think is her chief fault?" spoke up the next.

"Oh, dear, must I tell?"

"Indeed you must; it's 'pon honor, you know," declared Penny.

Brownie glanced at Becky. "You won't be angry, Becky?"

"No, of course not."

"Well, then, I think that sometimes in her desire to

be smart she forgets to be kind, at least not really polite.”

“Is that true?” Becky appealed to the others.

No one spoke for a moment and then Brownie had the courage to say: “You know this is ’pon honor, Becky.”

Becky was silent for a moment. She was struggling between anger and contriteness. She knew she did not hesitate to sacrifice even her friends to her reputation of saying smart caustic things especially wounding to those who were sensitive. After a time contrition got the better of self-esteem and she drew a long sigh. “I am sorry,” she confessed. “I didn’t realize that the habit was growing upon me.”

Brownie was the first to praise. “Good old Beck! Now we know that you are a real Girl Scout. That took courage, and moral courage is much harder to acquire than physical courage is, in my opinion.”

“Oh, dear, don’t I know that?” sighed Monica. “It is the hardest thing in the world for me to say no. I crawlfish out of it every chance I get even though my conscience may be flaying me all the time. I hate to hurt anyone’s feelings and I hate to seem disobliging. What does make me so compliant?”

“I reckon it’s ‘wanity,’” Brownie asserted; “at least that’s what Mother says it is. The same thing that makes us want to be admired for being witty and smart and amusing makes us want to be admired for being agreeable and accommodating, so there you have

one and the same motive for two entirely opposite things."

"It is really dreadful how often we do forget to be nice to each other," said Becky, still contrite. "As Girl Scouts we should never forget to be courteous to all, even to those of our own age, and we do forget, often and often. Here am I, patrol leader, and I doubt if anyone says meaner things than I do. I vow I will try my best not to say sharp things again no matter how smart I think they are."

"After all," said Leila, "smart, personal things, especially when they have a groundwork of truth, are never kind, and above all things we want to be kind."

"Mother says that true politeness is only another name for thoughtfulness and kindness," Brownie continued, "and that a really thoughtful person is always polite no matter what the station in life."

"What should we do without our mothers?" cried Penny. "They are the greatest institution in the world. I don't know where any of us would get without them."

This speech, commendable as it was, brought a pang to at least two present, to Louise, who had no mother, and to Monica, whose mother was of the kind which Penny had designated as "scatter-brained," and who was of no earthly good in counselling her daughter.

It was Brownie who changed the subject by saying: "How very serious we are growing. I know it is the end of the year, and we should all be making good

resolutions, but don't let's do it when we are eating taffy.” The plates were handed around again and soon the company had recovered their high spirits.

Then Miss Varney, who had gone up to her classroom for a while, returned to see her girls playing leap-frog, and growing so merry over it that half of them were disqualified, lying prone on the floor shaking with laughter. They all sprang to their feet at sight of their Captain and saluted with such gravity as they could summon.

“Please excuse us, Miss Varney,” said Becky apologetically, “but Brownie was so absurd she set us all off.”

“There is really nothing to excuse,” Miss Varney told her. “That is a nice healthful exercise, and laughter doesn't hurt anyone. We'll have a song or two and then our closing exercises.”

They were still singing when they trooped up the street, a rosy-cheeked, khaki-clad company, Penny with her bugle taking the lead with Becky. At the corner came the bugle call which meant: “Scatter!” There were cheerful good-nights and in groups of twos and threes they all went in the direction of their own homes.

It was when they were going to bed that night that Penny noticed an unusually sad expression upon Louise's face. She wondered what could be wrong. Louise had gradually lost the mournful droop of her mouth, the terrified, hunted look in her eyes, and

seemed likely to become as happy a little girl as any of her companions. What had happened to bring back the cloud upon her face? Penny resolved to find out, so she went up to her little friend and put her arms around her. "What's the matter, Louise?" she asked. "Is it anything I have said or done?"

Louise shook her head but the tears welled up into her eyes.

"Has anyone hurt your feelings?"

Down went Louise's head upon Penny's shoulder. "It is nossing zat anyone has done," she sobbed. "You are all too kind to me, a poor orphan. But to-day I am sinking zat I have no modzer, no home. When zey say, 'What should we do wissout our modzers?' I am forced to remember zat I have none, and zat I do not know where will be my home. All are so kind to me. I love so all zese new friends, and when I sink it may soon be zat I part from zem, and go I know not where to someone who perhaps will give me ze home because of duty not of love I am in despair."

"Oh, but Louise, you must not look for such an unhappy lot. You may have quite the opposite experience; you may find a mother who will love you dearly. I mean to ask my mother to let you stay here till the very rightest one comes along. Please don't cry, Louise. I will tell my mother that I will divide everything with you. In case you must leave Miss Varney, I will beg her to let you come back to us and stay till the real true mother is found for you."

“Oh, Penny, my Penny, how you are a comforter,” said Louise, wiping her eyes. “It is so wonderful that you say zis. I will have the same faith and not again abandon myself to despair.”

So, although Louise’s thoughts wandered back to the old life, to Belgium and the beloved ones she had left there, she went to sleep with Penny’s arms around her and a smile upon her lips.

CHAPTER XII

THE SKATING CARNIVAL

PENNY did not forget her promise, and lost no time in fulfilling it. The holidays were nearly over and it was taken for granted that Louise's visit would end at the same time, although no set time had been mentioned. That the little refugee would return to Miss Varney's was taken as a matter of course. She now had acquired a sufficient knowledge of English to make it possible for her to enter school, and the principal of the school, which Penny and most of her friends attended, had offered to take her, free of charge, for the remainder of the session.

While the matter was fresh in her mind Penny found the opportunity of having a heart to heart talk with her mother when she was alone. She drew up a chair and seated herself very solemnly in front of Mrs. Atwood when this lady was in her room doing some mending.

"Mother," began Penny, "I want to talk to you very seriously."

"That is what one might infer from your appearance. What have I been doing?"

“Now, Mother, I am not joking. This really is serious; it is about Louise. Have you any idea of where she is going?”

“Do you mean from here? I suppose she is going back to Miss Varney, isn't she?”

“Yes, but after that; I mean where is she going when Miss Varney gives her up? Nobody in town seems inclined to give her a home for always, and now that she has friends here who love her it would be ghastly to send her to some place away off where we couldn't get at her or find out how she was being treated. You love her, Mother, don't you?”

“Why, yes, I am very fond of her. She is a dear child, and I don't see why you should fear that anyone would wish to ill treat her.”

“Perhaps not exactly that, but she might not be loved like a real daughter, and she ought to be.”

“I am afraid it would be hard for anyone to do that immediately, without having a chance to find out her good qualities.”

“Could you love her like a daughter?”

Mrs. Atwood leaned over and kissed her own child's earnest face. “I couldn't do that while I have my own dear little girl to love, I am afraid.”

“But suppose you should lose me.”

“Why, my dear, what a dreadful suggestion. Aren't you feeling well?” Mrs. Atwood smiled as she spoke.

“Oh, yes, perfectly, but I was only thinking that it

would be very nice to have someone to take my place in case I shouldn't live."

"Isn't that rather far-fetched? What are you driving at, Penny? Out with it. Let's get at what is in your mind."

"Well, Mother dear, it is just this: I can't bear the idea of having Louise go off among strangers. You have said yourself that Miss Varney is very good to keep her on like this, and of course she is, but she was going to inquire around during the holidays and if she couldn't find anyone willing to take Louise, why Louise would have to go, and what I want is to have Louise to stay with us till someone in our own town offers her a home. Why can't she?"

"Well, dear, for several reasons. In the first place it might become a permanent thing and I do not see how we could afford, in these hard times, to clothe and educate another daughter."

"She could have half my things," put in Penny eagerly, "and I would wear old ones; then, you know Miss Darby has said she would let her come to our school without charge for the rest of the year."

"Yes, I remember that, but it doesn't do away with the future years. If we were to adopt Louise we should expect to pay for her education just as we do for yours. It would not be just otherwise."

This aspect of affairs had not occurred to Penny. She thought it over before she said hesitatingly: "We could go to the public school."

“Yes, you could do that, but would you be willing to give up the school you are so fond of, your school-mates who mean so much to you, and all the interests connected with the school?”

Penny considered this. It would be hard, she began to realize. No longer would Brownie be her desk-mate, and she could not have Louise, who would be obliged to enter a lower class. No longer would there be the special group of friends to talk with over school matters, nor the teachers, her dearly loved Miss Varney, and others scarcely less to be regretted. True, Louise might go to the public school and Penny to Miss Darby's, and there would always be the Girl Scouts, most of whom, in the Thistle Troop, came from the same school. Penny sighed. Her enthusiasm began to wane till she remembered Louise's tears, then she said firmly: “Yes, I'd give up all that and more for Louise.”

Mrs. Atwood met this in silence. She had done her best to show her daughter the extent of the sacrifices she would be called upon to make, and still Penny was true to Louise. It might be as well to settle the matter at once by saying it would not be possible, yet there were Penny's appealing eyes which her mother could not withstand, so she put off the evil day by saying: “Well, dear, I shall have to think it over and speak to your father about it. You must remember that no matter how I might wish to decide he must have a voice in the decision, too.”

"Of course I realize that," returned Penny, "but won't you please ask him how he would feel if he had been killed in battle, and you had died by the wayside and Davy were a prisoner and I were over in Belgium among strangers without a home?"

She was so in earnest that her mother could not smile at the absurdity of such a situation, nor did she suggest a better way of stating the case, so she answered: "Very well, dear, we will let the question rest for the present."

"And meanwhile Louise can stay here?"

"That will depend upon what Miss Varney says, for, after all, it is she who is responsible for her and who should be consulted upon any matter concerning Louise."

So Penny went off half satisfied and the question was not brought up again for some time. In the first place Louise was to enter school, and must be championed and looked after by those of her friends who attended, then, the weather having turned suddenly cold, there were new sports to attract both boys and girls, skating being first and foremost in favor. It was not learned who the person was who proposed an ice carnival when skating should be at its best, but someone did and the idea was taken up with great enthusiasm. Penny was full of it. She came home from school overflowing with excitement. "Oh, Mother," she cried, "won't it be fun? There is to be a skating carnival. Everybody is going to dress up

and wear a mask, and there is to be a prize for the best skating girl and the best skating boy. Oh, me, wouldn't I like to get it! What would you wear? It's costume, you know, and there will be all sorts of lights and decorations and things like that."

"We shall have to see what is in the house that will do to make up for a costume. What would you like to wear?"

"I don't know. Brownie is going as a gnome, and Monica thinks she will go as a fairy."

"Won't a fairy costume be rather cool?"

"Oh, she can wear wadding or something under the frilly things and be warm enough. Rufus is going to be Jack Frost, I believe, and Dan wants to go as an Esquimau."

"Which shows excellent judgment on Dan's part, if it should be cold."

"Little Red Riding Hood might be a nice warm costume, or else something furry. I might go as a pussy cat; I think that would be funny."

Her mother laughed. "I think so, too. We shall have to see what can be done to make a pussy cat of my kitten. Does Louise skate?"

"I don't know. I never thought to ask her. I'll find out. By the way, Mother, Miss Varney wants Louise to come back, for a while anyway. Someone is coming to see her, Miss Varney, I mean, but she wants to see Louise, too. I have an idea, I don't really know, mind you, but I have an idea that the visiting

person wants to look Louise over with a view to adopting her.”

“I wouldn’t mention that idea to Louise, for it might make her very conscious and so ill at ease that she would not appear at her best.”

“If anyone were going to adopt me I should want that person to see me at my worst so she wouldn’t be disappointed when I didn’t behave myself.”

“There is something in that, I admit, for no one can be expected to be on good behavior every day in the year.”

“You will ask Louise to come back to us, won’t you, after the visiting lady has disappeared?”

“Suppose she decides to take Louise along with her.”

“Oh, dear, suppose she does. Well, if she doesn’t live in this town I hope she will not want her. Oh, dear, I hope she lives in this town, and is just as nice as she can be. If it doesn’t happen to be that way, what are we going to do?”

“We won’t cross that bridge yet. When is the carnival to be?”

“It depends upon the ice. We are all going to get ready and then dash at it when the favorable afternoon comes. Do you think you could make a pussy cat dress for me?”

“Why, I think so. I have the fur lining of a cloak which I am not using, and which I think I could contrive to make into a catty affair.”

“With a long tail and a pair of furry ears, and a catty mask, won't I look fine? If you want a pattern, Mother, you can take Madam Gray.”

She went off quite full of her plans. She was a good skater, one of the best among the girls, and had excellent reason to think she might win the prize. She turned over in her mind the girls who might possibly be her rivals, but she could think of none who had any better chance than she did. She had not bargained upon Louise and little dreamed that her friendship would soon be put to a sharp test.

Louise returned to Miss Varney's that same evening, and partly because she was a trifle lonely Penny got out her skates and went down to the pond to practise. Brownie, too, was there and came skimming up to her. “Where is Louise?” she asked.

“She's gone back to Miss Varney's.”

“Oh, has she? Penny, did you know that she can skate like a breeze?”

“No, I didn't know. How did you find out?”

“One of the girls told me, but she has no skates, and she said she couldn't join in the carnival contest on account of that. I have been watching you, Pen, and I prophesy that you'll be the winner.”

“Oh, do you really think I stand a chance?”

“Of course I do. The only girl who could outskate you is Dolly Whiting, and she has gone to boarding school, you know.”

Penny performed a few graceful flourishes, and

then returned to where she had left Brownie. "Becky Cole isn't half bad," she remarked.

"She can skate fast enough, but she is so ungraceful; she'll never be the winner."

Penny skimmed away again and came back to ask: "What about your costume?"

"Oh, I've settled on the gnome; it will be dead easy to get up. What about yours?"

"A pussy cat, I think."

"Oh, Pen, I wouldn't."

"Why not?"

"It won't be half so effective as something else. You should get up something graceful and bewitching."

"Well, aren't cats graceful?"

"Yes, but they go on four legs, which you will not do, and besides I think if you should wear a comic costume like that you could not skate half so well, for it will be clumsy and, besides, an attractive dress will be likely to have much to do with winning the prize."

"I hadn't thought of that," confessed Penny. "Well, I'll see. I have not really made up my mind."

"Well, take my advice and wear something pretty and becoming."

Penny made no answer to this, but took off her skates and declared she must be going home.

"You haven't heard what the prizes are to be, have you?" Brownie called after her as she stood gracefully poised on her skates.

“No,” returned Penny, turning back. “Have you heard?”

“They’re perfectly dandy ones; complete skating outfits from skates to caps.”

“Oh, Brown, how wonderful. Who is giving them?”

“Some member of the golf club, I believe, Mr. Hodges, I think.”

“Well, that will be worth working for,” responded Penny.

All the way home she was thinking, thinking, and struggling with herself. The battle was not over when she reached her room, where she sat down by the window and looked out upon the bare winter landscape. She knew perfectly well what she should do, but it was hard to bring herself to do it. For a while she indulged in visions of Penny Atwood, ravishly attired in a bewitching costume, the observed of all observers, as she gracefully skated up to receive the prize, but suddenly she shook her head frowningly at the vision, sprang from her seat and rushed up to the attic, coming back with a pair of skates dangling from her hand. Again she sat down, regarded the skates thoughtfully, then impatiently kicked them into a corner. “I just can’t do it,” she murmured. Then she ran down-stairs humming a little tune, and finally came upon her mother in the library.

“Well, honey,” said Mrs. Atwood, “have you decided to be a pussy cat?”

"Well, no, not quite," Penny answered. "I have been thinking, at least Brownie suggested, that something very fetching, very stunning in the way of a costume would be more likely to attract attention and help win the prize than something merely funny. What do you think?"

"Brownie may be right. Let us see what we could devise. Something in the way of a Frost Queen, or a snow fairy might be pretty, blue and silver for the queen, a silver crown, and glittering icicles trimming, a sort of tunic, might be managed and could be made very effective."

"That would be lovely," agreed Penny. "One of the boys is going to be Jack Frost, Rufus, you know, and he is much the best skater." Again she saw the picture of herself receiving the prize, but this time she skated up to the stand clad as a Frost Queen, and in company with Rufus, as Jack Frost. It was an alluring prospect.

She was silent so long that her mother finally looked at her questioningly. "Well, dear, where have you wandered? Shall it be the Frost Queen?"

Penny hesitated. She wanted to answer yes then and there, but there was that tugging at the sleeve of her conscience. Why couldn't Duty keep away and stop whispering? "I think I'll sleep on it," she said. "Which would be the most troublesome to make?"

"Of the three?"

"Yes, of the three."

“Really I don’t know. One would be just about as much work as the others, but don’t let that trouble you. I can get Miss Bodley to come in and help, but don’t put off your decision too long, or I shall not be able to get her.”

“I’ll tell you to-morrow, Mother dear, and you are a darling to be so ready to let me have my way.” She stooped and kissed her mother and went back again to her own room, picked up the discarded skates and examined them critically. “Pig, pig, pig,” she whispered to herself, “with a dear mother, and all you have, to want to stand in the way of that poor little girl. I am mortally ashamed of you, Samantha Penrose Atwood! Yes, you deserve to be called Samantha, a horrid, jealous, vain thing like you. And after professing to care so much not to want to give up the very first thing that comes in the way.” She made a face at herself in the glass and shook her fist at the mocking image. “I will, yes, I will. I’m not going to give you a chance to change your mind, Samantha, you disagreeable ugly creature. Don’t you dare laugh at me,” for in spite of herself she had to laugh at the face she was twisting into such absurd contortions.

Then she scrambled into her hat and coat, picked up the skates and dashed off, coming back within half an hour, rosy and smiling. She put her head into the door of the room where she had left her mother, and said: “Mother, I am not going to wait till morning to make up my mind. I have decided that I would

rather be a cat than a queen." Then she rushed up to her room to make ready for supper, coming down before it was ready and dancing out into the kitchen to tease Rilly. Catching up Madam Gray by the paws she began dancing around the room with her, to the sedate creature's disgust and Rilly's objections.

"What in de name o' grief you doin' dat-away?" inquired Rilly. "Ain' you see ole Gray don' lak it?"

"Oh, she doesn't mind, at least not very much," replied Penny, cuddling the cat in her arms. "I wouldn't hurt her for the world, would I, Madam Gray? You see, Rilly, I am going to turn into a cat myself pretty soon and I ought to know just how she feels."

"Law, Miss Penny, you talkin' cl'ar nonsense," said Rilly.

"No, I am not. I am telling you the plain truth. You'll see if I am not a great big cat pretty soon. You needn't look at me that way. You ask Mother."

"Law, chile, you foolin'. Ain' nobody gwine cun-jur you into dat respects. Dey mought make you *think* you look lak a cat, but you ain't, jes de same."

"You go ask Mother," Penny went on, her eyes full of laughter.

Rilly dropped the spoon with which she was stirring some batter and waddled majestically out of the room, coming back presently with Mrs. Atwood, who asked: "What in the world have you been saying to Rilly?"

“ I just told her I was going to turn into a cat and you know I am, Mother.”

Mrs. Atwood laughed. “ You shouldn’t be stuffing Rilly with such tales. Miss Penny is going to a skating carnival, Rilly,” she explained, “ and she is going to dress up to look like a cat.”

“ I say cat,” exclaimed Rilly, chuckling.

“ You mustn’t tell anyone,” Penny cautioned her, “ for we are going to wear masks. Of course we do know some of the costumes that are to be worn, but as a general thing we don’t want it known. You must come down to the pond and see us, mustn’t she, Mother? We can have a late supper that evening, can’t we? It is to be from four to six, so it will be dark enough for the lights, the illuminations, you see.”

“ That can be arranged very well, and I am sure we shall all want to be there,” Mrs. Atwood rejoined.

“ What dat Davy chile w’ar?” asked Rilly solicitously.

“ Oh, dear me, I hadn’t thought of that,” declared Penny, looking at her mother. “ Of course he can dress up, anyone can, I suppose. Do you think he will want to?”

“ Very probably he will, if you do. I can easily get up some sort of rig,” her mother told her.

Penny considered the matter for a moment before she exclaimed: “ Wouldn’t it be fun if he could dress as an owl? The owl and the pussy cat, you know. Would that be possible?”

Mrs. Atwood smiled at the idea and said: "We'll see." So it was left and Penny went off very happy that Duty no longer chided her and that she had turned over to the Fates any responsibility in the matter of winning a prize.

Davy was highly excited when told that he might appear in costume at the carnival, and wished to be an owl above all things. "Then I can hoot," he announced, and from then on he went around uttering hoots so often that he was in danger of disclosing the secret of his costume which really turned out remarkably well. Mrs. Atwood found an old plush cloak which she daubed with paint in imitation of an owl's feathers. It was too long, of course, but the part cut off served to make a close cap to imitate an owl's head, and with a big-eyed mask Davy made a very creditable owl. As for Penny she was the funniest looking cat ever, yet distinctly a cat. Davy declared he was almost afraid of her, she was so big, and Rilly almost rolled on the floor in amusement when she saw the pair, but was ready to declare that no power on earth would keep her away from the carnival.

"I nuvver espe'ted to see mah baby gwine 'round lak a ole hooty owl," she said, "but he sholy are a owl, an' Miss Penny she speak de troof when she say cat, but you hyar me, I don't want no sich cat in mah kitchen."

Then came a thaw and there was no carnival that week, but everyone anxiously read the weather reports and never was a cold wave more eagerly looked for.

CHAPTER XIII

THE PRIZES

AT last came the cold wave and the big pond was frozen over solidly. Big posters appeared. The carnival actually was to take place. As may be imagined, little else was talked of by the young people, for no one over a certain age was allowed to compete for the prizes. Costumes were much discussed. There were many conjectures as to what this or that one would wear and conversations would break off suddenly when those speaking edged too near to certain disclosures. Penny had kept her secret well, telling only Brownie what she intended to represent, and Brownie, who had at first criticized, was finally made to see that her friend's selection was right. Louise was out of town. She was making a visit to Miss Varney's sister, who had a friend considering the question of adopting the little refugee. The visiting lady who had come to Miss Varney's finally had decided that she would prefer a very young child, at which decision both Penny and Louise had rejoiced. Whether Louise would return in time for the carnival no one seemed to know and again Penny was contented to leave results in the hands of fate.

It was a bright, sparkling evening when the owl and

the pussy cat stole out of the house and, dodging foot passengers, at last reached the pond upon whose glassy surface a number had already gathered to compete for the prizes. Someone was at a turnstile to take the names of the competitors and to give them numbered tickets. A little further on was the stand where the judges were gathered. There was much bustling about, much laughter and excited talk. The pond was fringed by visitors who had come to look on. Already it was dark enough to get the effect of lanterns, torches, and festoons of lights which shone down upon an array of bright costumes, and upon many which were not bright. Here was Jack Frost with a sparkling white robe, and a beard of glass icicles, there was Red Riding Hood with her basket, the wolf trotting amiably by her side. There were fairies and witches, gnomes and giants, dignified queens and knights, grotesque, nondescript figures, and commonplace ones. Penny discovered a Frost Queen, and was glad she had chosen a more original character. With her little owl she stepped out upon the ice, hearing more than one comment. "The owl and the pussy cat, how clever!" "Oh, what a great big cat, and the cunning owl! There you have something original."

Penny turned her head in the direction of the speakers. "Meow!" she said. "Who-o-o!" cried Davy, and they dashed out upon the ice, leaving a trail of laughter behind them.

A bugle call brought the skaters back to the be-

ginning of the course. Those who did not enter the contest sought the shore to become onlookers. Presently Penny caught sight of a new figure and heard someone say: "I wonder who that is just arrived, a rabbit, isn't it?" "More like a hare," came the answer. Then Penny's heart beat faster, a hare, a little Belgian hare indeed, for she was sure that this was Louise. There was no time to find out, for again the bugle sounded and the skaters were off.

For a while Penny kept along steadily with the little owl at her side, then the owl dropped behind, and she flew along aware that those abreast of her were becoming fewer and fewer. Then Jack Frost shot ahead, and close at his heels, yes, it was the long-eared hare. Penny put forth her best effort and soon caught up with these two and a magnificently panoplied knight, who, too, had left the rest behind. The four went forward nearer and nearer the goal, for this was a race to the swift; later would come skill. Now Jack Frost was ahead, the hare close at his heels, then Penny began to gain and presently she and Jack Frost were alongside.

"Three cheers for the cat! Go to it, pussy!" came shouts from the shore.

Exhilarated, on her mettle, Penny made an extra effort, dared not look behind. It should be a fair race. She would do her best, and so would the hare, who probably had no idea of her identity. A sudden spurt brought the hare to the cat's side, another spurt

and she was ahead. Jack Frost reached the goal amid cheers and applause. He had won the first race. If he came out equally well in the matter of skill the prize would be his. The plumed knight came second and after him straggled a line of less agile skaters, but in their lead came first the Belgian hare.

Penny could not help the great wave of disappointment which welled as she realized how near, how very near she had come to being first of the girls to reach the goal. Indeed, the disappointment so overwhelmed her that she could not bring herself to go up to Louise with congratulations. There was still that test of skill, then let it be seen who came first.

Deliberately and gracefully the skaters glided back to the starting point, and then began a series of wonderful stunts. In and out, backward and forward, went the skaters, cutting circles, figures, showing marvellous feats of agility. It was hard to tell which one was the most graceful, the most nimble, the most accomplished. Penny had always felt that she had no reason to feel ashamed of her ability, and went through her various tricks adroitly, but after a while she stood still in amazement to watch Louise, who was performing feats far beyond the powers of anyone present, and when at last the little hare went hopping, hopping dexterously across the pond there arose such a shout as proved beyond doubt that she had outdistanced all competitors and that to her would go the girls' prize.

It was some time before Penny could summon up

sufficient grace to offer her congratulations, and there really was no hurry, for everyone was crowding around Louise, telling her how clever she was and asking where she learned such tricks. As she stood waiting for an opportunity to get through the crowd a little brown gnome clutched Penny's arm.

"Where did Louise get her skates?" asked Brownie. "I know she didn't have any."

"Maybe she brought them when she came back from her visit to the city," replied Penny evasively.

"I'm going to ask her," said Brownie, edging her way toward Louise.

Penny followed. Masks were now off, and there were many bursts of laughter as friends recognized one another. From under her furry, long-eared cap Louise's little face peeped out. She caught sight of Brownie, and pushed toward her. "Where is Penny? I wish to see Penny. What does she wear? I must see her and again sank her for the skates. Wissout zem I could never have come to zis so wonderful carnival."

Brownie cast a look of triumphant admiration at Penny. "Here she is," she cried. "Didn't you recognize her?"

Louise stared, and made a dash toward her friend. "You, you are ze cat!" she cried. "If I had known, oh, if I had known, nevair, no nevair would I have allowed myself to reach first that goal."

Then all Penny's envy melted away and the hare

was in the pussy cat's arms, if pussy cats may be said to have arms.

Then Rufus, as Jack Frost, came up to offer his congratulations and to receive them in turn, next the knight was discovered to be Royal, and the Frost Queen to be Monica. Becky appeared as a witch and Leila as little Red Riding Hood with Dan Patten as the wolf. Penny found Davy by means of his quavering hoot, and sent him off to look up Rilly. The crowd was beginning to disperse and the lights were going out.

"Where did you get your clever costume, Louise?" asked Penny as the two stood together.

"Miss Varney and her friends made it for me. It is clever, yes?"

"It is very clever and exactly suits you."

"Yours also is clever. Who did make?"

"My mother with the help of a seamstress. What isn't fur is crepe paper and the same can be said of Davy's costume."

"Also it is fine. Nevair before have I seen so many fine costumes. But for you, my Penny, I should not have seen them now. I tell Miss Varney of your great kindness in bringing the skates, and she say: 'We mus' invent for you a dress for zis carnival,' for you know I have told her zat at my home I skate always in winter since I was a ver' leetle child. Zese skates, Penny, I do not deprive you?"

"Oh, no, for I have not used them for two or three

years. I have outgrown them, you know, but I believe they would suit you."

"It is so kind, so soughtful zat you bring zem to me, to give me such a joy. I, I to win zis prize, to make all my friend so happy by so doing. I cannot yet believe it."

At this grateful speech Penny had a little gnawing feeling of shame, so she changed the subject by asking: "Did you enjoy your visit, Louise? Do you like the city?"

"I like, yes, but not so well as zis place. Are kind zese people, ze sister of Miss Varney and her family, but it is joy zat I return and I wish zat I do not go away again."

Then Miss Varney and some of her friends came up so Penny slipped away, encountering Brownie again on the outskirts of the fast thinning crowd. "Why did you do it, Penny?" asked Brownie reproachfully. "I set my heart on your winning that prize and you would have done it, too, but for Louise."

"Yes, I believe I would have, and at first, Brownie, I meant to. I will confess to you that I had a pitched battle with myself before I was ready to take those skates to Louise."

"Did you know it was Louise in that costume?"

"Almost at once, and then I made up my mind that I would do my best to win so that I could feel it was a fair thing for both of us. Well, you see how it came out."

"Aren't you awfully disappointed?"

"I was at first, but I couldn't be after I saw how delighted Louise was. Besides, Brownie, it would have been a shame to keep her out when she can do such wonderful stunts."

"Yes, I am compelled to admit that, but all the same I don't believe I could have given away my chance as you did."

"Oh, yes, you could; you would be the first one to do it. I know you, Brownie Burton. Here comes Rilly. Let's hear what she has to say. Well, Rilly," she turned to the old colored woman, "how did you like it?"

"What de reason yuh lets dat ole Bre'r Rabbit git ahead of yuh?" was what Rilly said.

"I couldn't very well help it. I did my best."

"Huh! I knows yuh did, but I nearly bus' mah th'roat yellin' to yuh not to let him git by."

"It wasn't a him; it was a her. Do you know who it was, Rilly?"

"No, I doesn't, but I lak to give him a lick across de haid fo' gittin' dat prize."

"You wouldn't want to give Miss Louise a lick across the head, would you?"

"Law, honey! Dat Miss Louise? I nuvver 'spicioned it. She sho' is one hopper. Well, dey ain't nobody, 'scusin' yuh an' Miss Brownie, I'd ruther see git it. I reckons me an' dis little owl better be gittin' back ef so be dey is any supper dis night. Law, Miss

Penny, I 'specks I gwine dream o' hants, all dem quare creeturs shootin' 'roun' lak wil' beastes." So saying, Rilly went off with Davy, leaving the girls to laugh over her comments, and soon to follow her.

The skating pond was in a small park near the edge of the town, and was quite near to where the Atwoods lived, therefore Penny felt that she need not hurry away. Automobiles went dashing by, little groups of visitors hurried to the street cars, but still Penny and Brownie lingered with other boys and girls who were not yet tired of the sport. They were circling leisurely around the pond when presently they nearly came into collision with two boys approaching from the opposite direction. All four stopped short just in time. Penny nearly lost her balance, so quickly did she pull up and laughed as she recovered herself.

"Hello!" exclaimed one of the boys who was clad in furs from head to foot, "I didn't know that was you, Pen. Wonder why I haven't come across you before. That you, Brownie? I didn't recognize you at first. Whither away?"

"Oh, nowhere in particular," answered Penny. "We are just killing time till we know supper is ready."

"I say, Pen," spoke up the second boy who was dressed as a Russian Cossack, "you should have had that prize. I don't believe in its going to an outsider."

"Well, but Louise isn't exactly an outsider," began Penny in protest. "She goes to our school, she be-

longs to the Thistle Troop, and I hope eventually she will live here for keeps."

"I agree with you, Jesse," Brownie interrupted. "I like Louise, but I am much fonder of Pen, and I feel aggrieved that she didn't get the prize. She would have had it, too, if she hadn't made it possible for Louise to enter the lists."

"Why, how's that?" Both boys looked interested.

"Now, Brown, never mind that," Penny spoke up.

"Well, you did, you know you did. You let her have those skates. I don't see how she could get along without them."

"Oh, almost anybody might have lent her a pair," rejoined Penny nonchalantly.

"All the same, nobody did, and no one was likely to."

"Miss Varney might have borrowed or bought her a pair."

"Not much. She isn't spending money on superfluities these days when she has other things, food and things, to buy for Louise."

"Well, all I can say is that it would have been a crying shame for Louise to have stayed away. It was a privilege to see her."

"She's a corking good skater all right, all right," admitted Dan. "The way she hopped across this pond was little short of magic. I don't see how she kept it up so long on skates. I know I couldn't do it, neither could Rufe, and he's the best skater among us."

"So, you see she deserved to win," exclaimed Penny

triumphantly, the more eager to plead Louise's cause the more she was opposed.

"Oh, when it comes to that, we don't question it," argued Jesse, "but the point is that as an outsider she shouldn't have entered the contest."

"That's all nonsense," said Penny heatedly. "She isn't an outsider, as I just explained."

"Well, considering that you stood the next best chance of winning I call that pretty generous," persisted Jesse.

"Oh, bother!" ejaculated Penny, and turned away, making graceful circles as she skimmed across the pond.

Her three friends stood looking after her. "Pen may not have won the prize," remarked Dan presently, "but I can tell you what, she has put herself on a pretty high pinnacle in my estimation. I take off my hat to her."

"And she never said a word about it," averred Brownie. "I found out by accident from Louise herself that Pen had lent her skates."

"So much the more to her credit that she did keep it to herself," declared Dan. "It isn't every girl who would have done it."

"Every girl isn't a Girl Scout," replied Brownie proudly.

"It would be a mighty good thing if every girl were to be," put in Jesse.

Then Penny came darting up. "I think it's time

we were going," she said to Brownie. "Rilly promised waffles for supper and we don't want to miss them."

"Just one more spin?" begged Dan. "Come on, Pen." So the two fur-clad creatures started off together, leaving gnome and Cossack to follow.

One more round and they took off their skates preparatory to their walk home. "I'm almost too warm," remarked Penny as she stood up.

"Same here," laughed Dan, "and yet it is pretty cold." They looked up at the dancing stars, brilliant in the clear atmosphere, and putting out of countenance the bobbing lanterns and failing lights strung along the shore.

"I should think Monica would have been cold," observed Penny. "I notice she went home early. Wasn't hers a pretty costume?"

"Oh, I don't know," Dan rejoined indifferently. "It looked as if she belonged on a Christmas tree or a Christmas card. I like yours much better, it is so much more original. Who got it up?"

"Mother planned it, then she and Miss Bodley put it together; they did Davy's, too. You saw him, didn't you?"

"The little owl? I should say so. Everybody was looking at you two when you came. If there had been a prize for original costumes there isn't a question of where it would have gone."

"Mine is a little bit cumbersome," admitted Penny,

“and the tail gets in my way unless I loop it up over my arm. It was nicer being a rabbit with no tail to speak of.”

“As the little Japanese child wrote in her composition: ‘The rabbit has a tail but we do not mention it.’”

Penny laughed, and then they all started off singing: “The owl and the pussy cat,” making passers-by smile as the fresh young voices echoed through the frosty air.

The waffles were not quite ready when they reached the Atwood house. Brownie had been bidden to supper, and catching sight of the boys at the gate, Mrs. Atwood went out and urged them to come, too. It did not require much urging, for where is the boy who refuses waffles? Rilly, like most of her color, rejoiced in company, and cheerfully added to the batter, so it was a merry company which sat down to enjoy the meal with appetites sharpened by exercise in the open air.

It was when her mother came to her room to kiss her good-night that Penny asked: “Were you disappointed, Mother dear, that I didn’t win the prize?”

“I think you have won a much bigger prize,” returned her mother, giving her a second kiss. “Brownie told me how it happened that Louise could be there, so I am much prouder of my child than if she had been honored openly. I hope she has no regrets.”

Penny hesitated. “I had a little bit at first,” she

answered candidly, "but I got over it, and now I am more glad than sorry. It is much better, isn't it, to make two persons happy than one?"

"It strikes me that you have made more than two happy. You gave pleasure to the entire company. Everyone who saw Louise doing so well must have been pleased."

"I hadn't thought of that part. Still, Brownie wasn't pleased, for one. She had set her heart on my winning, and so had some of the others."

"Nevertheless, if Brownie is a true and loyal friend, as I think she is, I haven't a doubt but she is better pleased, or will be when she thinks it over, than she would have been if you had come out first. She may not realize it, but down in the bottom of her heart she will feel that you won something much better than the prize which went to Louise."

"I hope so," returned Penny, meekly, "but please don't praise me too much, Mother. I don't want to be a smirky, self-satisfied heroine like some of those you read about. I despise that kind."

Her mother laughed. "Very well, we will drop the subject, though I will say that you did only what was right, and I shouldn't have thought much of you if you had done otherwise."

"I suppose that is what they call a wholesome statement," rejoined Penny. "I am glad you made it, for I couldn't feel very much set up after that. Between being a worthy Girl Scout and the kind of daughter

you would have me be I don't believe there is much danger of my becoming very conceited."

"Heaven forbid that you should be," replied her mother smiling. "Well, dear, good-night and sweet dreams. If I hear you meow in the night I shall think you have nightmare."

"Night cat, you mean," returned Penny.

"After such a dreadful joke I am not going to give a chance for another word except another good-night." And she went out leaving Penny too tired for many moments of wakefulness.

CHAPTER XIV

PENNY IS CROSS

PENNY came down to breakfast as cross as two sticks the morning after the carnival. Rilly said she got out of bed wrong, but Mrs. Atwood's opinion was that the child was worn out. "All this excitement has been too much for you, daughter," she said. "I think you'd better stay home from school to-day."

"Oh, Mother, I don't want to stay home," complained Penny. "I'm not ill."

"Perhaps not really ill, but you are tired. If you go to school, you must surely rest this afternoon and not go skating."

"Oh, but Mother," began Penny.

Here Davy broke in with: "I can go skating, can't I, Mother?"

"I can go skating, can't I, Mother?" smirked Penny in an undertone.

"Mother, make Penny stop; she's mocking me," cried Davy.

"Baby, baby, baby," said Penny, again under her breath.

Davy reached out a too short leg by sliding forward in his chair and managed to give the rung of Penny's

chair a vicious kick, causing her to spill the water she was about to drink. She set down her glass and glared across the table at Davy. "You little beast," she muttered wrathfully.

"Mother, Penny's calling me names," Davy complained.

"Here, here, what's all this?" Mr. Atwood put down his paper. "No quarrelling at table, or in fact at any time," he spoke authoritatively. "Penny, you are old enough to know better."

This reproof brought the tears to Penny's eyes, and lest they should overflow she arose and rushed from the table to her room where she had a good cry and then felt better, though still too aggrieved to go back to her breakfast. They were all against her, and she wished she were really ill, then they would be sorry that they treated her so, she told herself.

When she did not return Davy became more and more contrite. He was a tender-hearted little soul, and really loved his sister devotedly, so he was deeply concerned as the moments passed and she failed to appear to enjoy the griddle cakes which Rilly brought in smoking hot from time to time.

The meal over Davy looked wistfully at his mother, but she made no sign, so he lingered around for a few minutes and then went out into the kitchen where Rilly was loitering over her breakfast in the manner of those of her kind. A great pile of cakes was stacked up before her, a large cup of coffee steamed

by the side of her plate. This was a golden hour to Rilly.

Davy stood for a moment watching Rilly's deliberate method of eating, then he piped up: "Rilly, are you going to eat all those cakes?"

"Wha' fo' you ask me that?" said Rilly, rolling her eyes toward him. "Ain' yuh had 'nuff? Ef yuh eats any mo' yuh sho' will bus'," she added, transferring another cake to her plate.

Davy thought the remark might be applied to Rilly herself if she intended to demolish the pile of cakes, but he didn't say so. "I didn't want them for myself," he stated, "but I thought maybe Penny might like more. She didn't eat scarcely any and she has gone up-stairs without finishing her breakfast."

"She sick?" Rilly poured a generous supply of syrup over her cakes.

"No, I don't think so, but I think she is sort of, sort of upset."

Rilly viewed the stack of cakes critically. "I might spare her a couple," she said grudgingly, "ef so be she pinin' fo' mo'."

"I'll go ask her," said Davy, turning to run up-stairs with alacrity. Reaching his sister's room he peeped in. She was lying across the bed, her face averted, her head pillowed on her arm. Davy stood looking at her for a moment, then he stole softly down-stairs, meeting his mother as she was coming from the dining-room. "Mother," he said, "what do you suppose is

the matter with sister? She is lying on her bed just as still."

"I think she is all worn out," replied his mother. "I wouldn't disturb her. Why did you go up, son?"

"I thought maybe she would like some more cakes and I was going to take them up to her. I don't suppose she meant to be horrid; she was just tired and upset, wasn't she?"

Mrs. Atwood stooped to kiss the earnest little face. "I think that was all the matter. Run along to school, dear. I will look after sister," she said.

Davy gathered up his books and ran out the back way that he might stop in the kitchen. "You can eat all the cakes, Rilly," he said. "Mother will see to Penny."

Rilly's only reply was a muttered: "Humph!" but Davy noticed that the last of the cakes was lifted to her plate as he went out the door.

Mrs. Atwood attended to several small matters before she went up-stairs. Davy had left the door of his sister's room partly open. Mrs. Atwood went quietly in. Penny did not stir. Her mother softly stepped to the side of the bed and leaned over. There was no movement from Penny; she was sound asleep. Her mother gently drew a light cover over her and went out, closing the door after her.

Two hours later Penny woke up, rubbed her eyes, gave a long sigh and sat up. She looked drowsily around, but presently she became aware that it was not

early morning, but long past school time. "Mercy me!" she exclaimed. "I didn't mean to go to sleep. Well, it's too late for school now. I must make the best of it." She sat for a while on the side of the bed cogitating upon the events of the evening before and finally upon what took place at the breakfast table. "I must have been woozy to act so," she told herself. "Poor little brother!" After bathing her face and making her bed, she closed the window and sat down to her desk. Her Girl Scout manual was lying there. She picked it up and turned the pages idly. "Oh dear, oh dear," she sighed. "A pretty Girl Scout I am, and I have been so proud of getting out of the Tenderfoot class. I called Davy a baby, but I am a bigger one myself. I suppose pride must have a fall, and I have gone down kerflop. You must take things more seriously, Samantha, or you will never be a patrol leader." Penny always addressed herself by her despised name during periods of self-examination, but she never mentioned this to anyone, not even to her mother.

She was quite calm and serious when she crossed the hall to her mother's sitting-room a little later. "Well, dear," said her mother looking up, "did you have a good nap?"

"I should think I did. The idea of my going off like that at such a time of day."

"That proves that you needed the nap."

"I think I needed a spanking more," returned

Penny ruefully. "What did make me so mean to poor little Davy?"

"You were all tired out and your nerves were unstrung."

The tears again came to Penny's eyes. She wiped them away saying: "I am afraid they are a little on the bias yet. I thought you would have a scolding ready for me and here you are excusing me."

Her mother smiled. She knew Penny well enough to realize that in her present condition a scolding would only make her defiant while a little sympathy would make her even more contrite.

Penny sat quite still for several minutes, then she said: "Mother, do you think I should give up my badge to punish myself; I mean let you keep it, for a week, say?"

"What do you think about it?"

"I can't make up my mind whether it is serious enough or not. I know lots of girls do squabble with their brothers and sisters and don't think anything of it, but we are always such a peaceful family that it somehow seems worse for me than for some girls. A beast was a horrid name to call Davy, wasn't it?"

"I should not call it exactly a nice name. Suppose you give up your badge for a day, and leave it at that. I must tell you that Davy, too, was evidently quite remorseful, for he went up to your room to see if you wanted more breakfast which he intended to take up to you."

“The dear child.” Tears were again very near the surface. Penny winked them away saying: “I think you were right to say I’d better not go to school to-day. I seem ready to leak tears if you crook your finger at me, and if anything didn’t go just right at school I might make a spectacle of myself. I acknowledge that I do feel sort of queer. I can’t think of anything I want to do, and I loathe sitting still doing nothing. How would you suggest that I pass away the time?”

“Haven’t you an interesting book to read?”

“Why, yes, but it makes me feel squirmy when I think of just sitting around indoors with a book.”

“Then why not sit outdoors? Wrap yourself up well, and find a sheltered corner on one of the porches. The fresh air will do you a world of good, and you can be entertained at the same time.”

“That’s a fine idea, you blessed muzzie. I will carry out that same, and if that doesn’t cure me of feeling blue and seeing red, I’m in a worse way than I thought.”

She left the room, returning in a few minutes well bundled up, and slipped something into her mother’s hand. Mrs. Atwood smiled and nodded, then dropped the little badge into her work-basket, where it lay till Penny claimed it the next day.

Whether it was the bracing air or the stimulating book which had the effect of restoring Penny’s equanimity she could not say, probably it was the combination, but at any rate she was as bright as ever by dinner

time; moreover she had the courage to make her apologies to Davy, who, on his part, was more than ready to make up. Although she longed to go to the skating pond she resolutely put this notion out of her head and saw Davy go off without mentioning that she would like to go, too. She might have regretted this heroic attitude later on, if Brownie and Louise had not appeared almost immediately after dinner.

“Why in the world weren’t you at school this morning?” inquired Brownie.

“You weren’t ill, I hope,” said Louise solicitously.

“I was all tired out and Mother thought I’d best stay at home and rest,” replied Penny, glad that she could speak truthfully in giving this excuse.

“Well, I’m glad that was all,” said Brownie. “Louise and I were awfully afraid you were ill, weren’t we, Louise? Oh, Penny, Miss Varney sent word that she wants every girl to bring a song for the next rally. She says the other troops are away ahead of us in songs, that we have depended upon those already written and that we should try for something original.”

“What sort of songs?” inquired Penny, looking a little startled.

“Oh, any kind. Isn’t that it, Louise?”

Louise nodded. “Any kind, a marching song, a troop song, anysing zat will be of use some days. A song for when we camp, when we walk, when we make to paddle the canoe. I do not zis, yet, but I hope I

may some of ze days in summer, if so be I am here." She gave a little dubious shrug of her shoulders.

"I suppose we may as well get at it," said Penny rather dolefully. "There is no time like the present and it is better to have a thing like that behind you than before."

"But me, I cannot do," exclaimed Louise appalled. "I am not so well acquaint wis ze language as to do."

"Oh, we will help you if we have time," Penny promised, "and if we don't Miss Varney will."

"Better than that," Brownie put in, "she could translate a French song."

"Why not tell us of some pretty French song and let us all learn to sing it in French? I think that would be fine," declared Penny; "it would be different from the usual thing."

"That is so," agreed Brownie. "You can think of something, can't you, Louise?"

"I will try."

"Come on up in my room, then," proposed Penny. "It will be nice and quiet there so our thinking caps will not get knocked off."

They followed Penny to her pretty room and there they sat them down each with pencil and paper. When the thinking caps were properly adjusted they set to work and in due course of time each had produced verses which she was ready to submit for approval. Penny and Brownie agreed to take different themes, and to adapt the metre to some familiar air.

“ Mine is a marching song to the tune of ‘ Marching Through Georgia,’ ” announced Brownie. “ Shall I read it or sing it? ”

“ Oh, read it,” returned Penny, bearing in mind Brownie’s none too melodious voice.

So Brownie began:

“ We’ll take a constitutional ;
Let ev’ry lassie go.
We’ll tramp along through rain or shine
Or dust or sand or snow.
We do not mind the elements ;
We do not mind a breeze,
For we’re Girl Scouts, if you please.

Chorus:—

We are Girl Scouts
A mighty jolly bunch,
We are Girl Scouts
And we possess the punch.
We hike along right cheerily
Without a lagging foot,
For we’re Girl Scouts if you please.

We’re up the hill and down again,
Quite like the king of France ;
We hike five miles then home again,
And ready for a dance,
Or ready for a skating bout
If it should chance to freeze,
For we’re Girl Scouts, if you please.”

*Chorus—*We are Girl Scouts, etc.

“ I think that’s fine,” declared Penny heartily.

“ Well, I hope Miss Varney will think so,” returned Brownie doubtfully. “ I think it goes all right to the tune and that is about all I can say. Now yours, Pen.”

“ Oh, mine isn’t near so good as yours,” protested Penny modestly.

“ Well, we aren’t expected to be competing for laurel wreaths,” responded Brownie. “ If it’s singable at all, that is about all we can expect.”

“ I think this is singable, for I kept ‘ Jingle Bells ’ in my mind all the time. I heard a sleighing party going by the other night and they were singing ‘ Jingle bells, jingle bells, jingle all the way,’ and it sounded so jolly that I thought I would take that tune.”

“ It’s a pretty good tune, but don’t talk so much about it; give us the words.”

Thus adjured Penny began to read:

“ We’re a troop of girls,
 Scouts we say for short;
 See us khaki clad,
 Out for work or sport.
 ‘ Be prepared,’ our cry;
 Cheerfulness our rule
 Both in work or play,
 In the home or school.
 Fire-building, semaphore,
 Tying many knots,
 Wigwagging, first aid,
 Tending little tots,

Cook a meal, telegraph,
Sound a bugle true,
March like men, beat a drum,
These we learn to do.

Fun with work we mix,
Add a song for sweet,
Stir in laughs for spice,
There's the rule complete.
Give it lots of air,
Set it in the sun;
It will satisfy the taste
When the work is done.

Thistle Troop! Thistle Troop!
Mind your p's and q's;
Don't forget to smile a while
Though you have the blues.
Thistle Troop! Thistle Troop!
Keep the rules that so
You'll show the stuff you're made of
Everywhere you go."

"Why, Pen," cried Brownie, "I think that's just great. I don't see how you managed to get in references to so many things. I know Miss Varney will be pleased. I think it was a mighty good idea of hers to ask us to write these things for our weekly theme."

"She's an all right teacher as well as an all right captain," averred Penny.

"There goes Becky Cole," exclaimed Brownie, sud-

denly catching sight of Becky's long stride. "Let's call her over and read her the verses."

Penny rapped sharply on the window and as Becky's attention was attracted, beckoned to her, and in a few minutes she had joined the group.

"Whither away so fast?" asked Brownie. "You always go like the wind, Becky, or as if you saw your train coming and were afraid you wouldn't get there."

"It's my long legs," Becky explained. "I believe I can walk faster and reach further with my arms than any girl I know. I was hurrying home to tell Mother something I just heard. What do you think, girls? Miss Cropley is engaged."

Such a piece of news about one of their teachers naturally interested all the girls.

"Who's the man?" asked Brownie.

"When is the wedding to take place?" inquired Penny.

"The man is Dr. Irwin, and they are to be married in June after school closes. For my part, I don't see what he can see in her, a little skinny thing, not a bit pretty and with no style—and they do say ——"

The girls were silent for a moment and then Becky confronted three heads close together. Brownie had covered her eyes, Penny her mouth, Louise her ears. The color rose to Becky's cheeks. "Well," she began lamely, "they do say that she has the loveliest sort of disposition, and is a most devoted daughter."

Down came the hands from the three faces and the

girls laughed, so did Becky, who said apologetically, "I really don't mean to be a tattle-tale, girls, but it is a temptation to hand out bits of news that you know will raise a little ripple of excitement."

"Oh, one doesn't mind good news," explained Brownie, "but we want to draw the line at unkind gossip. It isn't worthy of a Girl Scout."

"Yes, I know that," replied Becky, "and really, girls, I am trying mighty hard not to be gossipy, and I appreciate your trying to help me."

"It is fine of you not to get mad, you nice old Beck," said Brownie. "Now that we have disposed of Miss Cropley, shall we read you our effusions, which under orders from Miss Varney we have made ready?"

"Oh, you smart things, have you done them already? I haven't even begun to think of mine. Of course I want to hear them."

So the verses were read and approved, then all three of the girls declared they must go, and Penny had the satisfaction of hearing them singing:

"Thistle Troop, Thistle Troop,
Mind your p's and q's,"

as they went off down the street.

CHAPTER XV.

“ IF YOU LOVE ME ”

THE carnival seemed to mark the climax of excitement for the young people of the town, for after that they settled down to the routine of school, meetings of the various troops, an occasional mild frolic at the house of one or another. Mr. Mason, still at the hospital, was visited regularly. Peter Nugent and his mother, being safely launched, required no more looking after. Peter kept his job, while Mrs. Nugent was called upon to do day's work so frequently that she could not fill more than half the places offered. The town was cleaned up, and kept clean by a newly organized civic club. The home-coming soldiers had scattered, and, in civilian dress, were not distinctly different from other men. Louise was still at Miss Varney's. Her visit to the big city had brought no further result, except that she was borne in mind by several ladies who wanted time to think over the question of adopting a little refugee. Although Miss Varney had grown very fond of the child she told Mrs. Atwood that she had no idea of giving her a permanent home.

“ My sister helps me out,” she said, “ and you all

have been so generous in the matter of clothing that she is really of very little expense.” So Louise went to school, became more and more proficient in English, studied faithfully, and gave no trouble. Her special friends were the girls of the Thistle Troop, who took her under their wing and never failed to invite her to all their little merrymakings, though generally she would be the youngest guest. She was learning many of the requirements for second class scout, was deft in tying knots, quick at wigwagging, and semaphore, but chiefly was skating her delight. She taught Penny many of her feats, and the two paired off whenever the skating was good.

So the winter went on till one day Monica announced that she was going to have a Valentine party, a very select one. The girls all knew it was sure to be that, for Mrs. McIlvaine was a most particular person when it came to entertaining. In every-day matters, such as her daughter’s studies, development of character, and use of time, she took little interest, but when it came to an entertainment she rose to the occasion, as she did also in matters of dress. She rather discounted the Girl Scout idea, and it was only because Miss Varney was captain of the Thistle Troop that she permitted Monica to join.

The McIlvaines lived in what was probably the largest and handsomest house in town. It was luxuriously furnished, had beautiful, well-kept grounds, and greenhouses as well as a conservatory. Mrs. Mc-

Ilvaine gave frequent affairs, but Monica rarely entertained her friends, so it was quite an event when she did so.

Most of the girls of Thistle Troop went to Miss Darby's school; the two who did not were Rena Mills and Flora Cassidy. These attended the public school, and by Mrs. McIlvaine were not considered in Monica's set, although two nicer girls did not exist in the town.

There was much whispering going on at recess the day that Monica announced that she was going to give a party. Every girl hoped she would be invited but no one could count upon it, since it was to be so "very select."

"Only twenty," whispered Becky Cole to Penny. "She told me so."

"Ten girls and ten boys," Penny gave this information on her part. "Do you suppose she will invite us?"

"She told me her mother hadn't made up the list yet."

"Oh, dear, I wish her mother would let me make it," said Penny.

Becky laughed. "I don't believe she will. Monica is a mighty nice girl considering the mother she has."

"She must be pretty nice, I think, to let Monica have a lovely party."

"Oh, she's nice enough that way."

"And I'm sure she gets Monica lovely clothes."

“I know that, but clothes aren’t everything. There are days when Monica doesn’t lay eyes on her mother from morning till night. She never asks her anything about her studies, never helps her with them; we girls and the teachers do that, never goes to her room to see if she is tucked in, and to say good-night to her; more than likely she is off at a card party or something, or at her club. As for the Girl Scouts she hasn’t much use for them. Mr. McIlvaine is pretty much the same. He is away from home lots of the time, or he is at his club, or going to business meetings, so he can’t see much of Monica.”

“Who told you all this?” queried Penny.

“Miss Bodley; she has been at our house sewing.”

“Oh, she’s an old gossip,” returned Penny contemptuously, “but whether she is or not I know we are all crazy to go to Monica’s whenever we get a chance; it is such a pretty house. I adore those huge fireplaces and the conservatory and all that.”

“Yes, so do I, only I’m scared to death of the butler.”

Penny laughed. “I don’t believe he would hurt a potato bug.”

“Maybe not, but he looks at you as if you were nothing more important, and I don’t like to be looked at as if I were a potato or any other kind of bug; I never saw such a haughty creature.”

“Except the floor-walker in at Mills and Waller’s. I think they must be brothers. Oh, me, there is the bell

and I meant to look over that last page of Latin before it rang." She hurried off and that was the last she thought about the party that day, or at least till evening brought back the subject. She was sitting in her room poring over her lessons, her lips moving as she conned a French conjugation, and her eyes wandering to the objects on her mantel when she concentrated her vision upon the little group of Japanese monkeys which stood there. For the moment the French verb was forgotten. "Hear no evil; speak no evil; see no evil," murmured Penny. "Someone ought to give a set of those monkeys to Becky Cole. I know what I'll do; I'll take mine to the next Girl Scout meeting and get Miss Varney to give us a talk upon them. She loves us to do things like that, and I'm sure we all need to be hauled up on the question of gossiping." She went to the mantel, picked up the monkeys and slipped the little statuette into her bag that she might have it ready for the next rally, then she returned to her verb.

In a few days the invitations for Monica's party were out and to her great joy Penny found herself one of the favored. Brownie, too, received an invitation, so did Becky Cole and Leila Sheldon. Flora Cassidy and Rena Mills were left out, so was Louise. The latter was not in the least aggrieved, although the same could not be said of Flora and Rena. These two were quite ready to listen to Becky's comments upon Mrs. McIlvaine which she voiced with much emphasis when the girls were gathering for the next rally. Monica

had not arrived, she was generally late, so Becky took this opportunity of expressing her opinion.

“You needn’t tell me,” said Becky, “that Monica couldn’t have had just whom she pleased. Don’t you suppose her mother consulted her? I can tell you that all those McIlvaines think themselves highbrows.”

“Oh!” Flora opened her eyes wide and looked at Rena.

“I don’t care,” said Rena bridling, “I don’t want to go to her old party. It will be as stiff as anything, I believe, and nobody will enjoy it. I’d rather stay at home where I can have some fun. You come over to my house, Flora, and we’ll have a good time, see if we don’t.”

Then Miss Varney came in with Louise and the girls skurried to take their places in line for the roll call. When they had gone through their drill, saluted the flag, repeated their promises, heard the minutes of the last rally, Miss Varney asked: “What shall we talk about? Has anyone a suggestion?”

Then Penny drew forth her monkeys and put them on the table. “I’d like to talk about these,” she said. Some of the girls giggled, scenting a joke, but seeing that Penny looked perfectly serious, they looked only expectant.

“That’s a fine idea, Penny,” said Miss Varney approvingly. “I suppose most of us know what these little monkeys are supposed to teach, but I am afraid that few of us take the lesson to heart. I am sure that

each one of us is ready to see evil, to hear evil, to speak evil sometimes. You see one monkey covers his ears that he may hear nothing he should not; the next covers his eyes that he may see nothing wrong, and the third covers his mouth so that he may say nothing evil."

"But, Miss Varney," spoke up Becky, "if we always did that we couldn't hear anything which was good, either."

Miss Varney smiled. "You take it too literally, Becky. It is only symbolical, so to speak, and to remind us to refrain from gossip. If each one of you would be reminded of the lesson whenever she looks at this little group, we might have less tale-bearing, at least I hope so. There is a good rule to go by: if you cannot speak well of a person say nothing at all. Nothing grows like gossip. Let's try it. Becky, suppose you whisper something to your next neighbor, let her repeat it to her neighbor and we'll see what comes out at the end of the line."

"Oh, we've played that before," cried one or two of the girls.

"Never mind, we'll play it again," said Miss Varney. "When you have whispered your remark, Becky, come here and tell me what you said and I will write it down so there will be no danger of your forgetting."

It was funny to watch the various expressions appearing on the faces of the girls as the remark was re-

ceived and passed on. The last one to receive it was Monica, who shut her lips firmly together and looked very indignant.

“Well, Monica,” said Miss Varney, “what was the way you heard what Becky said?”

“I don’t like to tell you, Miss Varney,” replied Monica. “It was perfectly horrid and just as false as could be.”

“That is the way with most gossip when it has passed along from mouth to mouth. Usually it is so garbled that the original remark is entirely changed. Tell us what you heard. We will not hold it against you, and I can assure you that what Becky said was very innocent. By the time it reached you no doubt it was something quite different.”

“Go on, Monica,” cried one and another, and at last Monica, looking quite distressed, said: “What I thought Rena whispered to me was this: ‘Did you see Penny Atwood acting the saintly part? She is a perfect old cat.’”

Becky was on her feet in a minute. “Oh! Oh! Oh!” she cried, “I never said anything like that. Did I, Miss Varney?”

“Don’t get so excited, Becky,” said Miss Varney. “No, of course you didn’t. Listen, girls. This is what Becky said: ‘Did you see Penny Atwood at the skating park? She was perfect. You couldn’t have told her from a cat.’”

Penny, who was really beginning to feel a little hurt,

joined in the laugh which followed, and looked as relieved as Monica did.

“So now, you see,” Miss Varney went on, “how great oaks of gossip can grow from very small acorns. That is something for all you Girl Scouts to remember. I think we have had a very good example of it, and we must all try to be on our guard, for the tongue is an unruly member. I think we must thank Penny for bringing her monkeys.”

This the girls lost no time in doing, and when someone cried: “We must thank the monkeys, too,” this was done with even more fervor.

No one ever told who it was that sent Becky a mysterious little box on St. Valentine’s Day. If she suspected she never said so, but she looked a little abashed when she opened it and found inside a facsimile of Penny’s little monkeys. She put them up in plain sight and the sender, at least, hoped she looked at them often.

But before this happened Rena and Flora found that they must set aside any grievance inflamed by Becky’s hints, for the very next day after the rally they received invitations, evidently belated, to Monica’s party. Neither was Louise forgotten, so it was a very happy little company which gathered at the McIlvaine house on the evening of St. Valentine’s Day. There were hearts and darts everywhere. Red rose hearts swung from the ceilings, golden hearts shaded the lights. The girls and boys were asked to bring each a valentine

to be slipped into a heart-shaped box at the entrance to the dining-room. Even the table was heart-shaped with Monica, the queen of hearts, sitting at the apex. The favors were small enamelled hearts, and the place cards were valentines.

“I suppose we are expected even to eat heartily,” remarked Brownie as she took her place.

It was such a delicious feast that there was no fear but that it would be eaten in that way, and, as it was in the nature of a supper to be partaken at the usual hour for that meal, everyone brought a good appetite.

Then each one was given a number and drew a valentine. Some were quite gorgeous affairs, others were the simplest sort of jingle. Louise drew one of the former, Penny one of the latter. These two were sitting together on a sofa when Louise whispered: “Let me see what you are draw.”

Penny displayed a simple little card on which was written: “If you love me as I love you, no knife can cut our love in two.” Louise laughed. “It is from me. I it is who bring this. I ask Miss Varney what I am to do, for I know not about this St. Valentine as you do, and so she do this for me. I am glad it is my Penny who has this, but if you wish I will change with you, for mine is a far more elegant one, yet I do not believe it speaks more true than this of yours.”

“I shall keep mine, you dear Louise,” said Penny, “for if it speaks the truth that is more than most valentines do.”

“And also you love me?”

“Indeed I do, very much.”

“But not so much as you do Brownie.”

“That is different. Brownie and I have been friends and playmates ever since we were babies. Our mothers were school friends; Mrs. Burton is my god-mother, as my mother is Brownie’s.”

Louise drew a long sigh. She adored Penny in a romantic sort of way as many young girls do older ones, and she longed to be first in Penny’s regard. She sat wondering what she could do to show Penny her extreme devotion.

Her meditations were suddenly interrupted by Penny’s exclaiming: “Oh, look there!”

Louise looked. The portières between this room and the next had been drawn to show a great frame in the shape of a heart against a lacey background ornamented with roses. In the middle of the frame there appeared a quaint little figure in old-fashioned dress, hooped and flounced skirt, silk mantle, gipsy bonnet. The curtains were drawn again and next was seen a lad in dress of the same period. After this one or another of the guests mysteriously disappeared to come into view within the frame clad in some pretty costume. Penny appeared as a shepherdess, Becky as a Spanish lady, Louise as a gipsy. At the very last came Monica in the very pretty dress she had worn all the evening. She had a basket of flowers on her arm, and tossed out to each present a little old-fashioned

nosegay done up in lace paper. Then there flashed out on the lace background a series of electric lights spelling the couplet:

“If you love me as I love you,
No knife can cut our love in two.”

Monica kissed her hand to her guests, made a deep curtsey and that was the end of that, though there was music and singing and dancing after this. It was rather late when the last guests made their farewells, all declaring that it was the loveliest party they had ever seen.

“And Mrs. McIlvaine was perfectly dear,” said Penny as she walked home with Brownie and two of the boys. “She started up the games and helped everybody to have a good time. I don’t think she is a bit stiff.”

“Who said she was?” inquired Brownie.

“Why”—it was on the tip of Penny’s tongue to mention Becky’s name, but she changed her intention just in time, and said: “somebody said so. I seem to have heard it somewhere.”

“Nobody is perfect,” rejoined Brownie sagely. “Probably the person who said that has just as many faults.”

Penny inwardly agreed to this but she kept her own counsel, and began discussing the various incidents of the evening.

Louise bore home her little bouquet and put it care-

fully in water, finding it fresh and bright the next morning. There were three horns to her dilemma as she looked at it trying to make up her mind how she should dispose of it. She felt that it was her duty to give it to Miss Varney, she wanted it herself, and she longed to bestow it secretly upon her beloved Penny. Finally she decided that she would send Miss Varney the elaborate valentine which she had drawn from the box, would keep the enamel favor as a memento for herself and would lay the little bunch of flowers upon the altar of affection. So she ran around by Penny's house on her way to school, and tied the flowers on the door-knob with a card which said: "From the one who loves you best, adored Penny."

Davy found the bouquet when he went out, and of course he read the card. "Pen, Pen," he cried, as he ran back, "here's a valentine for you, and I'll bet you won't be able to guess who sent it."

Penny came hurrying, tying her scarf as she came.

"See," said Davy, holding out the flowers. "It's just like the bouquet you got last night, all those little pink rosebuds, and the forget-me-nots and the lace paper. Who do you suppose sent it? I'll bet it was one of the boys."

Penny looked at the card and recognized the writing. "You're away off," she answered. "It isn't from a boy at all; it's from a girl."

"Ho, a girl wouldn't come tying it to the door-knob; she'd want to keep it herself."

“All the same, most sapient young sir, I am convinced it was a girl.”

“Well, who was it?”

“That’s for me to know and for you to find out.”

“Oh, all right. I don’t care who sent it,” said Davy loftily, picking up his books and stalking out.

“Poor, dear little Louise,” murmured Penny. “I know she would like to have these for herself.” She stood looking at the flowers for a moment, then she glanced at the tall clock in the hall. “I believe I shall have time,” she murmured. Then she rushed up-stairs to her room, drew her own little bunch of flowers from the vase which held it, replaced it with Louise’s bouquet, ran down-stairs again and hurried from the house. Stopping at a corner she tore a leaf from a pad of paper she had with her, scribbled upon it the words “Sweets to the sweet,” addressed it to Louise, stole up to Miss Varney’s front door and tied the flowers to the knob. Then she ran away laughing. The two bouquets were sufficiently unlike for Louise to discover that hers had not been returned, which fact she did ascertain when she reached home after school, and it is safe to say that she valued those which Penny had left for her far more than those she had taken to Penny. Neither of the girls mentioned the subject till many, many weeks after.

CHAPTER XVI

NICKNAMES

PENNY'S friends were not different from most boys and girls when they were given to fastening nicknames to one another, so naturally after the carnival she was called Puss almost as frequently as by her near-nickname of Penny. Louise was known as Bunny, just as Rufus was known as Tile, a soubriquet which had worked around from Rufe, as Maj had come to Royal from your Majesty. Brownie was never called anything but Brownie both at home and abroad. If anyone, even at school, had addressed her as Adelaide, she probably would have paid no attention. Dan Patten was seldom called anything but Pat, while Jesse Gale was known as Breezy by the boys. Just why these inventions please it is hard to tell, but it is without question that they are enjoyed, and sometimes afford opportunities for those flashes of wit which young folks relish.

It took Louise some time to get used to these pleasantries, and one day when she came into Brownie's house, hot, tired and annoyed, she could not under-

stand why the other girls laughed when Brownie called her a hot cross bun.

"But why am I zis?" she inquired, looking around at the group.

"Why is Ann?" said Brownie, and again Louise was in the dark.

"I'll tell you why," Penny offered to clear up the mystery. "You are hot, and cross, and the girls call you Bunny because of your having been a rabbit at the skating carnival. They are beginning to call me Puss, for the reason that I was dressed as a cat."

"Is vairy fonny, zis," returned Louise. "I now onnerstan', and, too, I laugh. I am a Bonny, so, and you are a Poos. Is vairy amuse me. It is more zan ze language of books zat I mus' learn."

"But you have done remarkably well in four months," Penny hastened to tell her.

"I hope," returned Louise in rather a discouraged tone.

"Tell us what is your greatest difficulty and we will all help you to get over it," Brownie volunteered.

"Ze grammaire is not so hard, but it is to pronounce. Most difficult of all is that th. My tongue refuse to go between the teeth."

"Then we'll put you through a course of training every time we get a chance," Brownie promised, "and after a while it will come perfectly natural. I am sure if I were in France or Belgium I should find greater difficulties than that."

"So say we all of us," Becky concurred. "I shall never be able to manage those irregular French verbs, those awful exceptions and those bewildering idioms."

"Oh, but yes," Louise contradicted. "You soon would learn; you who are so clever."

"Merci, mademoiselle," returned Becky with a sweeping curtsey.

"Louise always has something nice to say even when she is a hot cross Bun," remarked Penny, and Louise entirely understanding this time gave her hand a squeeze.

The girls had met this afternoon to make garments to send to the little children in devastated France and Belgium. Penny was busily crocheting caps, Brownie was knitting sweaters, Becky had a pile of little wrappers and nightgowns on hand ready to supply those workers who had nothing ready to work upon. Louise, who sewed beautifully, was doing finer things, baby dresses, petticoats and the like.

Since the talk upon the three monkeys the girls had made it a rule that all unkind gossip should be drowned out by a song, therefore at the first suggestion of such a thing someone started to sing. Nor was this the only occasion upon which they did this. The new songs were much in vogue, not Penny's and Brownie's alone, but others contributed. Everyone had made copies, Louise's little French song, among the rest, finding favor.

It was after the work was put away and Brownie

served her company cocoa, cake and fudge, that Penny made her great joke. Louise had shown her a pretty little country dance the day before, and Penny wanted all the girls to see it. Louise looked around the room where there was scarcely place for her performance, being, as it was, crowded with girls, all of whom wanted to see.

“Get up on the table and do it,” suggested Brownie. “It can’t hurt that old dining-room table; we have used it for everything imaginable.”

“Oh, but no,” protested Louise; “I might disfigure it.”

“It is no matter if you do,” declared Brownie. “We always have a cloth on it.” She switched off the cover and displayed a surface somewhat scarred to be sure.

“It won’t be the first time I have seen a-bun-dance on that table,” remarked Penny.

Everyone clapped, and in the further encouragement Louise was persuaded to mount the table and do her pretty dance.

She was in the midst of it when Miss Varney came in. “What in the world is going on?” she asked after looking in amazement at Louise, who stopped short in her performance.

Brownie explained the situation, and Miss Varney sat down to watch Louise finish her dance.

“Penny made such a clever joke,” Brownie said as she gave Miss Varney a cup of cocoa.

“And what was it?”

Brownie repeated it, and Miss Varney shook her head mournfully. “I couldn’t have thought it of you, Penny,” she declared. “That is as old as the hills. It is in a book of conundrums that my mother had when she was young.”

“But this isn’t a conundrum,” protested Penny, quite taken aback. “Really, Miss Varney, I never heard it before and I myself thought it was quite original.”

“That shows how often we plagiarize without being aware of it.”

“What is this plagiarize?” asked Louise who had come down from her platform and was standing by Penny, a place which she always sought.

“It means to appropriate something another has written, and give it out as our own,” Miss Varney told her.

“But Penny does not do this.”

“No, I am sure she is quite innocent, and indeed there are few of us who do not attempt to say witty things which others have originated. I have often heard someone make a very clever remark and have heard it repeated, perhaps the very next day, by another who thereafter was given all the credit.”

“There ought to be some way to indicate a spoken quotation,” interposed Brownie, “like making two little dabs each side the mouth, like the printed quotation marks. I think I will adopt that plan. How does it

work, Miss Varney?" She quoted Penny's joke making the dabs as she proposed.

"It looks absolutely silly," spoke up Becky Cole, "if you want my opinion."

Brownie smiled blandly. "But it was Miss Varney's opinion I asked."

"Then mine is superfluous, I suppose," returned Becky with a little sniff.

"How is the work coming on, girls?" questioned Miss Varney, changing the subject.

"Finely," Brownie told her. "We did a lot this afternoon. We want to get all the warm things done, caps and sweaters and such, before the cold weather is over."

"A good plan. I foresee that I shall be giving out a number of merit badges in the spring. How is your old pensioner, Mr. Mason, getting on, Penny?"

"Very well, Miss Varney," Penny told her. "He improves steadily, and by spring he will be out on the world again. He says he is hibernating like the bears. I do wonder what will become of him. He shouldn't be left to himself with no one to look after his wants."

"He should go into some comfortable home, an institution provided for such as he."

"Oh, but he would hate that so terribly. I know I should. Just think, after living in one spot all your life to suddenly be hiked off to a place you didn't like and where you had to mix up with people you didn't know and wouldn't like if you did know them."

“If I had no home at all, and one of that kind were provided for me I should try to bring myself into a state of gratitude, though perhaps it would not be easy,” Miss Varney told her.

“Yes, but if you did have a house all your own and a little bit of income, wouldn’t you want to have a sort of home all to yourself?”

“I suppose I would, but it is easier for a woman to make herself comfortable than for a man. What about his house, Penny? I think you told me the boys had fixed it up. Is it rented?”

“No, Miss Varney, not yet. The boys have fixed it up, painted and varnished and stopped leaks, so that now it is really quite livable, but no one seems to want it because it has no modern conveniences like electric lights and all that.”

“Too bad. Well, someone may come along who would be willing to take it as it is, or would be willing to go to the expense of putting in some of those things and take it out of the rent.”

“Oh, do you think anyone would do that?”

“Someone who might take a fancy to the house probably would not be averse to making such an arrangement. Who has the renting of it?”

“No one in particular, at least the boys have put a sign up, and have left the key with the people next door. Rufus Marshall and Jesse Gale said they would talk to anyone who might apply.”

“Not a very progressive way of advertising. It

should be in the hands of a real estate agent. However, I hope it will be rented and that a way will be found to establish your old friend comfortably. There are a great many problems to face these days. I must be going, girls. Don't fail to come to the next rally, all of you. We must face these problems together. Team work is everything, you know."

"We realize that when we get together for such work as we have been doing this afternoon, Miss Varney," said Becky.

"And when we had the bazaar," Leila chimed in.

"And on every other occasion," Miss Varney averred. "Good-bye, Thistles. I have enjoyed this glimpse of you, and the nice hot cocoa, too, Brownie."

She went off leaving the girls to pack up their belongings. Miss Varney was probably the most popular teacher in school, and was a much beloved captain of her troop. She lived with her mother and widowed sister in a pretty, though an old house, on a retired side street. The girls preferred that their rallies should be there rather than in the big schoolroom, though in the latter place there was more room for drilling and other exercises.

"It is always so cosey at Miss Varney's," declared Penny as she lingered with Brownie after the others had gone. "I should think Louise would hate to leave there."

"I suppose she will hate it, but there is no immediate prospect of her going, is there?"

“No, unless that Mrs. Somebody-or-other in the city decides to take her. She has gone south and won't be home till March or later and then she is to let Miss Varney know. It must be horrid to be waiting around till someone stretches out a patronizing hand and says, ‘Come, little girl, I will be charitable enough to give you food and clothes and a roof over your head.’”

“Oh, but Penny, it doesn't have to be like that. Anyone who really adopts her would love her and treat her exactly as if she were a daughter.”

“Perhaps so; I don't know,” responded Penny, feeling that to lose Louise at all was becoming a question she found it harder and harder to contemplate.

“You see,” Brownie went on, not at all feeling as Penny did about the matter, and, in fact, being a trifle jealous, “we should be very, very glad to have Louise settled, for you know Miss Varney isn't rich, and it certainly would be a relief to her if she could see Louise in a good home. I believe the Varneys own their house, but have very little more besides Miss Varney's salary. I think it was mighty good and kind of her to assume the responsibility of Louise for even a short time.”

“Oh, everyone would have to admit that,” responded Penny a little impatiently.

“I should think you were devoted enough to Miss Varney,” Brownie went on, “to want her to be the first one considered.”

“Of course I am devoted to her, but that doesn't prevent my wanting Louise to stay here in our town.”

“Which she is not likely to do. Now, to put it plainly: Which would you rather it should be, that Louise stayed indefinitely with Miss Varney and so put her to an expense she shouldn't afford, or that she should, Louise, I mean, should go to that city person?”

“Oh, Brownie, how you do try to press a point. I don't know; I'd have to think about it.”

“I wouldn't have to think a moment. I am perfectly sure and certain that I should prefer to have Miss Varney spared than Louise.”

“Then you don't care for Louise.”

“Oh, yes I do, but I'm not as crazy about her as you are.”

“I'm not crazy about her, but I'm very fond of her and I know she is of me.”

“Oh, yes, everyone knows that she is perfectly silly over you.”

“Who says so?”

“All the girls.”

This was wholesale comment, and Penny could not help feeling annoyed that her friendship and Louise's should be termed silly. She had done more for Louise than any of the others and it was perfectly natural that the little Belgian girl should care the most for her, yet she felt that she could not give this as an excuse, for it might seem like boasting of her good deeds. It was unlike Brownie to be caustic, so Penny concluded that

jealousy was at the root of her remarks. She and Brownie had been intimates always, and if it had been anyone but Louise who was concerned there might have been some reason for Brownie's attitude, but Penny felt that Louise stood apart, being not only a stranger but a refugee bereft of all whom she had loved. That her old friend should not stand shoulder to shoulder with her on this, as on other questions, made Penny feel quite aggrieved. She remembered upon looking back that Brownie's manner toward Louise had undergone a gradual change of late and that she was by no means as cordial as she had been at first. All this flashed through Penny's mind before she spoke, and as truth is not always welcome, Brownie was not ready to receive her remark in good part. "Well, you're all jealous; that's what's the matter," said Penny.

The color flamed up into Brownie's face. "It isn't so," she declared.

"It is, too," contradicted Penny.

"Excuse me," retorted Brownie, suddenly becoming very polite, "but you don't know what you're talking about."

"Excuse me," Penny was not to be outdone in politeness, "but I do know; you have made it quite apparent, enough for me to be very positive in my opinion, and also enough for me to decide that hereafter I shall consider Louise Fallon my best friend."

Such a declaration of independence was too much

for Brownie. She had come as far as the gate with Penny, but now she burst into a torrent of tears and rushed back into the house, leaving Penny standing.

For a moment Penny was inclined to follow her and make up the first serious quarrel she and her old friend had ever had, but pride had its way, so she turned toward home without once looking back. Brownie had been the offender; let her be the first to make overtures.

She walked home very rapidly, trying to suppress the lump which would rise in her throat whenever she thought that she had actually quarrelled with her best friend. It was the very first time they had parted in anger, for though they had had little spats sometimes they had always made up before separating.

“It isn’t as if it were I alone,” she said to herself, “but it concerns Louise, too, and I shall stand by her whether or no.”

It was pretty hard the next day at school when Brownie refused to speak to her, and was even more lofty in her manner when Penny sought out Louise at recess, much to the latter’s delight, and when school was out walked all the way home with the younger girl, but neither gave in. Penny made a point of appearing very devoted to Louise. They went around with arms about each other’s waist, walked home together, ate lunch in each other’s company, called each other *cherie*, or *bien aimee*, carried on low-toned conversations in French, and ignored all the whispered

comments, the liftings of eyebrows and meaning looks of the other girls.

As for Brownie, she was of all persons most miserable. Hot jealousy raged in her heart. The more pronounced were Penny's attentions to Louise the more unhappy she became. She could not see where it was to end. At times she was ready to fall at Penny's feet in contrite mood, to retract that offensive word, "silly," to do or say anything which would bring Penny back. Again she carried her head high, said she did not care, was very gay and scornful. When she was down in the depths she brooded and sulked. When her mood changed she sought out Monica as her special companion, and Monica, innocent little soul, felt flattered, because Brownie was very popular. Both of these two would walk past Penny and Louise whispering in some corner, and would laugh and chatter as if they were having a merry time. Brownie would nod condescendingly to Louise, would look over the top of Penny's head as if she did not see her, and then would turn to Monica with some such remark as: "I think I prefer rabbits to cats, don't you? Rabbits haven't much sense, but at least they are perfectly harmless." The more cutting the remark the more satisfaction at the moment, but afterward would come remorse, and at night Brownie would cry herself to sleep because of what she had said, and Penny would do likewise for the same reason.

So matters went on for two or three days, then

something happened which changed the current of affairs, and plunged both Brownie and Louise into such anxiety and grief that they turned to each other for consolation.

CHAPTER XVII

A LONG HIKE

“LET’S go on a good long hike.” Penny proposed this to Louise the first spring-like day. “I know the pussy willows must be out, and we can get some to bring home. I know a place where there are a plenty; it’s pretty far, but we won’t mind; we’re both good walkers.”

They started off early in the afternoon. The days were perceptibly longer, but the distance they meant to go demanded an entire afternoon if they would be back in good season. There was a breath of spring in the air although the wind was keen, and the sun was not yet powerful enough to melt little heaps of snow in north corners. These showed blue in the shadows, and the fences looked purple along a stretch of yellow road.

Penny drew a long breath as they turned off from the town and saw before them brown fields and woods already a trifle misty where the buds had begun to expand. “Isn’t it good?” exclaimed Penny. “I love the smell of the earth and to see those gaunt trees against the clear sky. Don’t you think bare trees are almost finer than leafy ones?”

“Your trees are so plentiful green,” responded

Louise. "In this country all is so plentiful. In my country we do not realize how big is this and how much you have."

"But you have nice things in your country, too. I have heard of the fine laces, the delicious pastry stuff, and all that."

"Oh, yes, it was so, and will be again. In Brussels so many fine things. The pastry shops there make the mouth to water. Do I speak that th better?"

"Oh, yes, much better. You seldom make a mistake now by saying zat."

"If I were to say mous instead of mouth as once I did, you would think I meant a little gray creature which run around and squeak," returned Louise laughing.

"And once you told me that Becky Cole was such a sinful creature; I was greatly shocked. You only meant that she was thin."

"I know better now than to say thinfu! when I should say but thin. I learn, yes, every day I learn, and you, too, *cherie*, you learn much French with me."

"Indeed I do. Monsieur Lefevre has complimented me on my improvement, but I told him that it was all due to you."

"He is a good old, this Frenchman teacher," responded Louise, and then seeing the smile come to Penny's lips, she asked: "What is this I do not say well?"

"We don't say an old or a blind or a lame, as you

do; we say an old man, an old woman. If we were meaning to say what you have just wished to say it would be this way: He is a good old man, this French teacher, or this French teacher is a good old man."

"I will remember. Is there something else, my Penny?"

"I can't think of anything just now, but, dear me, I make many more mistakes in French than you do in English."

"You would not if your ears heard constantly the language of my country as mine do of yours. Some day I wish it may be that you go with me to that country of mine. I shall keep that wish in mind always."

"Well, stranger things than that have happened, Louise; look at those crows over in that field. Aren't they funny? They look exactly as if they were having some sort of convention, and I believe they do that. I have heard that they do. What do you suppose they discuss? I'd like to understand the language of all the beasts and birds."

"Like that Siegfried who tasted of the dragon's blood and could then understand what all those creatures said. Yes, I should like that too."

"It might not be always flattering to hear their comments upon us humans. I can fancy one squirrel saying to another: 'Look at that huge creature which walks upon its hind legs and makes that queer cackling sound at times.'"

They both laughed, and became more and more

hilarious as they realized that they were making the queer cackling sound, but finally they subsided, and presently came to a bend of the road where another, and narrower, road began.

“We turn off here,” said Penny, “then we go through that piece of woods. After that we come to a little stream where I think we shall find the pussy willows. I do hope they are out.”

They trudged on and entered the woods where the wind was blustering through the branches of the trees, and sending the leaves whirling from underfoot to halt in furrowed heaps further on. “There should be trailing arbutus pretty soon,” remarked Penny. “It is our early spring flower which you have never seen.”

“Nor have I seen your spring so beautiful, for I am not in this country but only since the fall. What is this bird I hear?”

Penny paused from kicking her feet through the dry leaves, and listened. Except for the wind it was very quiet, and even the wind came in gusts, a subdued roar beginning afar off, then coming nearer and nearer till it filled the trees overhead, and passed on to die away at the edge of the woods. Once in a while there was a quick stir in the leaves as some little animal skurried from cover, or there was a sound of wings above, a quick snap of a twig, the shrill whistle of a distant train. The girls stood still listening, and in a few moments Louise exclaimed, “Hark, there it is again.”

“A bluebird, the first I’ve heard,” cried Penny. “Oh, the dear thing, he has come to tell us that spring is on the way. Now I’m sure we shall find the pussy willows.”

They hurried on, leaving the bluebird to repeat his message to the growing things, and before long they came to the little stream babbling along over the rocks, quite a vociferous little stream at times, though at others only a pleasantly murmuring one, rippling here, leaping there, cascading in one place, tranquilly flowing in another. The bushes along the brink had scarcely begun to push out their points of green, but aground in protected places were many low-growing plants already displaying flat verdant leaves. And there, sure enough, were the pussy willows.

“You darlings!” cried Penny, “I thought we could depend on you. Aren’t they the dearest little things, Louise, so soft and gray and furry? We must be careful not to get our feet wet, but I do want to get a good lot, some for school, some for you to take to Miss Varney and some for me to carry home. I am taller than you so I’d better get them and you can take them as I toss them to you.”

She picked her way cautiously to the most promising branches, broke off a few, then ventured further, but here came her mishap, for she slipped on the oozy bank and almost fell into the water. However, she regained her footing, and was soon making a more cautious descent upon the pussy willows. Then she

saw some alder tassels which she must add to her collection, which she finally decided was sufficiently large.

"I hope you didn't get your feet wet," said Louise anxiously.

"I think I did a little, for the water went over my rubbers in one place, but I don't think it will matter, for we will get quite warmed up walking. I believe we'd better go around the other way where it will be drier, and besides, we strike the trolley line somewhere, and can ride home if we get too tired."

They plodded along by the borders of the little stream, until they came to an open field. Here Penny stood still and looked around. "We cross this field in some direction," she said, "but I forget which. I'll have to take my bearings. Let me see; the sun is over there; that is west, of course. Now in which direction lies our town? We faced the sun most of the way along the road, so I should say the town lies to the east of us. We'd better face about."

"Then we shall be going exactly the way we have come."

"So we shall. Then we must cross the field, turn off somewhere and get out where we can go eastwardly. That must be right, for there is nothing left to do but that."

They crossed the stubbly field diagonally, coming out upon a wild place where there was no road at all, but only a collection of underbrush, rocks, and scrubby pines.

Penny surveyed the scene with a puzzled frown. "I don't remember this at all," she told Louise. "I wonder if we should have crossed the other way. No, this can't be right, there is nothing to do but to go back, and follow the line of the field to the other corner; that's obliged to be right. Are you tired, Louise?"

"A little, not much."

"We will rest for a few minutes when we get to the other side of the field. It is hard walking over stubble and rocks."

Indeed they were quite ready to sit down when they reached the opposite side of the field which they now saw opened upon a small clearing beyond which was a house and barn. "We must be near the road," remarked Penny with satisfaction, laying down her pussy willows and seating herself upon a rock. "Where there is a house there must be a road, for how could they drive in otherwise? We mustn't sit too long, Louise, for we want to get home before dark, and we've gone such a roundabout way that it has taken more time than I counted upon. Besides," she added with a little shiver, "the wind is very searching and we may take cold if we get chilled after walking."

They took up their line of march in a few minutes, passing through a barnyard, down a rough road till they reached the main one. "This must turn somewhere," observed Penny after a while, "for it doesn't go east at all, but south. We can't go back so we'll just have to follow it till we meet some one or get to a

turn. I don't suppose it can be very far before we come to another house and we can ask there."

They toiled on, neither willing to confess to the other how very weary she was getting. There was no house in sight, only field after field, patch after patch of woods, stretches of wild scrubby land where trees had been hewn down, leaving bare trunks and new undergrowth.

Presently Penny caught sight of something white flopping on the ground on the other side of the fence which bordered the road. "Look, look there, Louise," she cried. "What is that?"

They ran to the fence and looked over to see a white turkey hen half flying, half hopping along the ground. "Poor thing!" exclaimed Penny, "it has been hurt. I believe its leg is broken. I shouldn't wonder if it had been caught in a trap and had managed to get away, but with a broken leg. We can't let it stay there, for it may get into the underbrush and lie there till it starves to death. Oh, dear, what can we do? Hold these, Louise, while I get over there and see what I can do." She handed her pussy willows to Louise, climbed the fence and cautiously approached the turkey hen. The poor creature, exhausted from her efforts, was now lying still. Penny made a little crooning noise as she softly drew nearer. The hen looked up at her with soft pathetic eyes, recognizing, as animals often do, the presence of a friend. Penny knelt down, but the hen made no attempt to get away.

"I believe she would let me pick her up," said Penny to Louise, who was looking over the fence. "I am going to try. If I were able to lift her over to you, do you believe you could hold her till I get back to the road?"

"I will make my best effort," returned Louise gravely, laying down the bunch of pussy willows.

Very gently Penny put her hands under the hen and lifted her up. There was a slight struggle when she was transferred to Louise, but she kept quite still after Penny took her again and tried to hold her in a comfortable position.

"What are you going to do wis zis poor turkey?" asked Louise, forgetting her th in her anxiety.

"I am going to take her to the first house we come to. If she doesn't belong there the people can tell where she does belong and will return her to her owners."

"She is not very light, this turkey; I fear you will become much fatigued."

"It can't be very far now to a house."

"But it grows late. See how low is the sun."

"Yes, I see." Penny was really very anxious herself, very tired and chilly in spite of her exercise. She could not walk very fast with the turkey to carry, yet it was the furthest from her thoughts that the hen must be abandoned. She must be taken to safety at all hazards. What a lonely neighborhood. Where were all the houses? Where was the trolley line?

They must be going in the right direction, for there was no other in which they could go.

The red ball of sun was dropping behind the spear-like points of a grove of fir trees when suddenly Louise gave a little cry of relief. "Look, look," she said, "there are the poles, the lines of the trolley cars. Is it not so?"

"It is indeed," replied Penny. "Now we can't be far from houses. I know there are many along this route. Can you see any, Louise?"

"I think, I am not sure, that one shows a whiteness through those trees beyond."

"I think you are right, but I cannot be sure; it may be a church or a schoolhouse. There comes a car up the track. If it is the line I think it is, the one coming the other way would take us straight back to town. They run only every half hour, so if we see one coming you must take it and get back or Miss Varney will be worried."

"You, too, must go."

"No, I must see Madam Turkey to some safe place. I couldn't desert her now, after caring for her and bringing her this far."

"But," protested Louise quaveringly, "it would be worse for me to desert you than for you to desert the turkey."

"Not at all, for I shall take the next car, and if you wish you can ask Miss Varney to call up my mother and tell her not to worry if I should be a little late,

Don't you see, Louise, that it will be much the best for you to go on ahead and spare them all anxiety? I would come if I could, but I couldn't get in the car with this turkey, and if I were to take it to town I could never find out to whom it belongs, and I don't want to steal it."

"But, but"—Louise still protested—"how shall I know my way?"

"You can't miss it. The cars stop at the central square, where you know all the cars stop, and from there you know the way perfectly."

Louise could not deny this, but she was very tearful, and most unwilling to leave her beloved Penny at such a time. However, Penny was obdurate and the two stood watching the approaching car, which, as it whizzed past, they recognized as having come from their town. The down car would soon be in sight, they concluded, so they went up the track to where the pole with white band indicated where a stop would be made. With the going down of the sun the wind seemed more searching, and the chill in the air more suggestive of winter than spring.

"How cold it is growing," remarked Penny. "It is well I have the turkey to keep my hands warm. Isn't she good? She doesn't make the slightest attempt to get away."

"Poor thing, I suppose she knows she can't and surely she is more comfortable in your holding than she would be on the bare ground. Do you really think

it impossible, Penny dear, to take her with you in the car?"

"Not impossible, but why do it when she would have to be brought back here, and that would give a second journey? I would much rather get through with the business now. There comes your car, Louise. Have you car fare enough? It may be more than five cents."

"I have twenty-five. Miss Varney tells me I must never go out without a little money, and you know I had several gifts at Christmas, so I do not need more."

"You don't have to worry about where you must get out, for the car goes no further than the square, and from there it is not far."

"I worry only that I leave you here."

"But in half an hour I shall be taking the next car back. It is too bad that we can't go together, but I am sure this is best. I think I see your car coming. Say good-bye to the turkey; you probably will never see her again."

"You will be sure not to miss that next car?"

"I can't imagine my missing it. Don't forget to telephone to Mother that I am coming right along."

"I shall not forget and you will telephone me when you have arrived."

"I will indeed. Keep some of the pussy willows for me, and I will get them to-morrow."

The car was close now. Louise lifted her face for a farewell kiss, boarded the car, and was out of view.

Penny stood for a moment, feeling suddenly very lonely. It would soon be dark. She hoped that was a house dimly seen through the trees at the top of the hill. She took a firmer hold upon her burden, and set out valiantly toward the building.

CHAPTER XVIII

LUCKY PENNY IS UNLUCKY

IT was a toilsome climb up that hill. The turkey appeared to weigh several more pounds by the time the crest was reached, and Penny felt that she could not carry it much further. There were no lights in the building which she was trying to reach, and when she came up to it she found that it was not a dwelling house but a small white church. However, just beyond were houses, becoming nearer and nearer together as they increased in number, though there were not many. By the time she had reached the first house, a modest, homelike looking place where a cheery light was burning, she felt almost as if her limbs were giving out; her arms ached, her knees shook under her.

She stepped up on the porch, groped around to find the bell, rang it and felt as if it must be hours that she stood waiting before she heard footsteps in the hall. In reality it was in a very few moments that the door was opened by a motherly looking woman dressed in mourning. She had a strong, kind face, and there was an air of efficiency about her which at once appealed to Penny.

“I wonder if you could tell me where this poor turkey belongs,” began the girl.

The woman looked keenly at the pale tired face, then at the queer burden. "Won't you come in?" she said. "It is cold outside, and you look tired." She opened the door wider and Penny stepped inside. Without stopping in the little hall the woman led the way into a brightly lighted room where an open fire was blazing on the hearth. The room was simply furnished but it had an air of refinement. There were books on the table, pictures, carefully chosen, on the walls.

"You look tired," repeated the woman. "Won't you sit down?"

Still keeping her hold on the turkey, Penny found a chair and sat down. On her part the turkey uttered a feeble little "Konk," the bright light and fire evidently giving her reason to believe it was daytime again.

Penny felt a queer dazed sensation. She was dizzy and she shivered even in this pleasantly warm atmosphere. She sat still without saying a word till the woman spoke again.

"You were saying something about the turkey," remarked the woman encouragingly.

Penny tried to gather her wits together. "Yes, I was," she said slowly. "It is hurt. We found it by the road. I was afraid it would die. I want to give it to the owner." She got this far. The room swam around. It seemed to grow dark. Everything was slipping, slipping away from her. She tried to keep

her grasp upon the turkey, but that, too, appeared to be getting away from her. She heard a far-off voice say: "Quick, quick, Billy, bring some water." Then she lapsed into utter unconsciousness. For the first time in her life Penny had fainted.

When she returned to consciousness she was lying on a sofa, and someone with a kind face was bending over her. It slowly came back to Penny this was the person in whose house she was. She tried to sit up, but was gently forced back on the pillow.

"There, there, dear, don't try to get up," said her hostess soothingly. "Keep quiet and you will be all right after a while."

Penny closed her eyes again, but presently opened them to say, "I have to go. I must go. My mother will be so worried."

"Tell me your mother's name and address and I will telephone her. You are perfectly safe."

"My mother is Mrs. Robert Atwood, and we live at 356 Maple Avenue." Penny was able to tell this much then felt herself slipping off again into vacancy.

After a while she opened her eyes again to see the same kind face. "It is all right, dear," she was told. "I am Mrs. Towers and I shall look after you. I have telephoned your mother and you are to stay with me to-night, so think no more about it."

It was such a relief to Penny to think that she did not have to move that she lost sight of everything else, and lay quite still, drifting off, coming back, drifting

off again. Every time she opened her eyes there sat Mrs. Towers by her side. All sorts of queer objects appeared to float before her; all sorts of strange fancies possessed her. Only once or twice she spoke; the first time it was to say: "There was a turkey, or did I dream it?"

"Yes, there was a turkey," Mrs. Towers smiled, "and it is in good hands. You need think no more about it now."

Meantime there was consternation and concern in the house of Atwood. First Mrs. Atwood was called to the 'phone to take a message from Louise. "This is Miss Varney speaking, Mrs. Atwood," was what was heard. "Louise has just come in from a long tramp with Penny. They somehow lost their way, or at least went further than they intended, so were belated. They came upon a lame turkey which Penny insisted upon carrying to a place of safety, so she sent Louise home by the trolley and is coming herself on the next car. She wanted you to know so you would not be worried."

There was some more talk and then the conversation ended. Mrs. Atwood went to the kitchen. "You needn't wait supper, Rilly," she said. "Miss Penny won't be in for half an hour yet, and Mr. Atwood will not want to wait. You can save something hot."

"What de reason she ain't a-comin'?" questioned Rilly, always interested in what concerned any member of the family.

"She went off into the country and came across a lame turkey which she felt obliged to carry home."

"Ain' dat jes lak Miss Penny? Won'er to me it ain't a rat er a wil'cat. Tu'key, I say tu'key. She de mos' resumptious chile ever I saw." Just what Rilly meant by resumptious no one ever could find out, but it was a favorite word of hers and was used on all occasions. It was not intended to stand for presumptuous, nor for resoluteness; in this case it probably meant adventurous.

Mrs. Atwood was at the window watching anxiously for her daughter's return when the telephone rang again. Davy answered it. "Someone to speak to you, Mother," he announced.

Mrs. Atwood went to answer and heard a strange voice say: "Is this Mrs. Atwood, Mrs. Robert Atwood of 356 Maple Avenue?"

"This is Mrs. Atwood speaking," came the reply.

"I am Mrs. Towers. Your little daughter is at my house, and I think you'd better allow me to keep her over night. She has taken cold and is quite tired out."

"Oh, but my dear Mrs. Towers, I think she'd better come home. I can come out for her when my husband returns. He has gone back to his office, but will not be away longer than an hour; we can come out then."

"I don't want to be insistent," came back over the 'phone, "but I really think it would be wiser to let her

remain where she is. I am a trained nurse, Mrs. Atwood, or at least I have been up to the end of the war, and I hope you will permit me to advise you in this matter. There may be nothing at all wrong with your daughter, and she may be quite right in the morning, but it is possible that she is developing grippe. She has some fever and under such conditions you can see that it would not be prudent to allow her to go out to-night. I will give her the very best of care, I promise you, and will call you up first thing in the morning to let you know how she is."

"Oh, but Mrs. Towers, I can't impose on you in this way," protested Mrs. Atwood.

"It is no imposition at all, it is a very slight thing indeed compared to the things I did in France, and it would gratify me very much if you would give your consent."

There was a pause while Mrs. Atwood considered the question, then Mrs. Towers spoke again. "I am living in the little village of Marden, which, as perhaps you know, is about five miles from town. There is an excellent doctor close by whom I can call in if necessary, so please feel that your little girl will be properly cared for."

"You are really too kind, Mrs. Towers," Mrs. Atwood spoke again. "Do you think my daughter is really ill?"

"It is a little too soon to decide that, but I think it is a case where every precaution should be taken."

"Then I will trust your judgment, and you will let me know first thing in the morning how Penny is."

"I will not fail to do so, and I hope I may give you a good report."

"I do not know how to thank you."

"There are no thanks due. I have lost a precious daughter a little younger than yours. Need I say more?"

This ended the conversation, but in a few minutes the telephone rang again. This time it was Louise who wanted to know if Penny had returned, and was aghast when told where she was, and that she had been taken suddenly ill. "Oh, why did I leave her? Why did I leave her?" mourned Louise. "I should not have done so, should I, Mrs. Atwood?"

"It was much better that you did," Mrs. Atwood comforted her. "You could have done no good, and it would only have complicated matters if you had stayed. As it is I shall go out first thing in the morning and bring Penny home. I hope to find that she is much better and only needs rest and quiet."

"But she is wis strangers, and how will she be happy?"

"If she is not feeling well, it is better that she should be well cared for than to be exposed to the night and have the excitement of a journey home. I am going to call up Dr. Upton and will find out if he knows Mrs. Towers or anything about her."

"And please, if you will tell me."

“I will indeed. Now, don't worry, Louise. You have nothing at all to blame yourself for.”

The next thing was to call up Dr. Upton, who gave such a satisfactory account of Mrs. Towers that Mrs. Atwood's mind was set at rest. “Mrs. Towers?” said Dr. Upton. “I don't know of a better nurse. She is a lady in the first place, married Dr. Towers. He went over to France and died there, gave his life, in fact, for he never spared himself during the first year of the war, so when he had pneumonia he had no strength to resist it. Then Mrs. Towers, feeling that she could in a measure continue his work, went over and nursed the sick and wounded till the close of the war. She left her little son with relatives. There was a daughter who died when she was about twelve years old, a great grief to them that was. She took a little house at Marden, and lives there with her boy. A fine woman, Mrs. Atwood, a fine woman. I knew them very well. You couldn't ask that Penny should be in better hands.”

So while Penny was unlucky in having fallen ill away from home, yet it was her luck to have gone to Mrs. Towers. How long she lay on the sofa seeing visions she did not know. There was a little boy who came and went. She could not make him out. Sometimes she thought it was Davy, then Sammy Potter, again it would be Peter Nugent, but generally it was an unfamiliar face that she saw, a sunny little face with wide open blue eyes, rosy cheeks, a funny little

turned-up nose, and a mouth sometimes smiling, sometimes very grave. Then there were two tiny white objects which went around and around first in one direction then in another. They couldn't be white turkeys; they were much too small, but there was a white turkey that she knew something about. What was it about the white turkey? She endeavored to think but as she tried to snatch at facts they glided from her and she saw nothing but queer colored spots and figures weaving in and out in a sort of rhythmic dance, glowing, fading, brightening again, heard nothing but low toned voices.

In course of time she was conscious that she was no longer lying on the sofa but in a clean white bed. Whose room was this? It was not her own nor her mother's. Who was the woman with the kind eyes and the soft brown hair? Her mother did not look like that. Who was the gray-haired man who stuck something hard in her mouth and laid his head against her chest? It was not her father. She grew very weary of trying to find out these things. How her back ached, and those shooting pains up and down her legs, what did they mean? She didn't carry turkeys with her legs, but in her arms. What a queer world this was into which she had wandered.

So went the night, and the morning found a very ill Penny, but one quite unaware of what went on around her. For the next twenty-four hours her temperature ran high; she tossed and moaned rest-

lessly, muttering strange things about tiny white turkeys which would go round and round, about a little boy whom she called sometimes Davy, sometimes Sammy, sometimes Peter. Then she would call, "Louise, Louise, please don't let Brownie cry. I can't help it. I can't help it. I'm not a cat. Yes, I am a cat. I sit on the wall and try to catch birds."

Fortunate it was that she had fallen into such competent hands. Mrs. Atwood appeared as soon after she had Mrs. Towers's message as it was possible to reach Marden, for, learning that Penny had a bad attack of grippe, she left the house in Rilly's charge, packed a hand-bag, and called a taxi to take her to Penny's side. Mrs. Towers's calm strength did much to relieve her apprehension, even when matters were at their worst. Together the two watched, one during the day, one at night. Good old Dr. Appleton, close at hand, came in frequently. Dr. Upton came, too, but after a second visit gave over the case to his colleague, for by that time Penny's fever had decreased, and she needed only careful nursing.

She opened her eyes one morning and looked around the room quite sanely, seeing soft gray walls upon which hung but one or two pictures. A neat, quiet room it was, though entirely unfamiliar. She looked up and saw her mother. "Where am I?" she asked weakly.

"In the house of a dear friend," her mother answered.

“Brownie’s house? No, Brownie isn’t my friend any more.” The tears began to course down the thin pale cheeks.

“Don’t, dear,” said her mother soothingly. “Of course Brownie is your friend. She and Louise have come out here nearly every day to inquire how you are getting on.”

“She and Louise? Together?”

“Yes, always together.”

“But, but—what am I doing here?”

“You have been quite ill, but you are going to get well now. There, darling, don’t try to think. You shall be told all about it when you are stronger. Just lie still. Everything is going on exactly right. Your mother is with you.”

Penny closed her eyes again. She felt very tired, and was glad she could lie still and rest. She didn’t care very much about anything except to be let alone. Once in a while she looked to be sure that her mother was there, but that was the extent of her desire. She roused herself after some hours when she heard whispered talk in the room, and saw someone whose face was familiar, yet, strange to say, she could not place her. This person came over to the bedside and laid a cool hand on Penny’s head, smiling down at her as she did so. “Well, dear child,” she said, “how do you feel?”

“Like a rag,” answered Penny.

Mrs. Towers turned to Penny’s mother. “She’ll

soon be all right," she declared. "She must have a cup of broth."

The broth did not taste very good, not near as good as Rilly's chicken broth always did, and Penny pushed the cup away after a few mouthfuls.

"Don't you like it, dear?" asked her mother anxiously.

"No, it tastes queer, or rather it hasn't any taste at all."

Mrs. Towers nodded understandingly. "That is to be expected," she told Penny's mother. "It will be some time before things taste right."

And so it was, although all sorts of delicacies came from here, there and everywhere. Brownie brought broth, Louise brought jelly, Monica came with fruit, but none of these did Penny want and took only what was forced upon her. Yet her strength grew day by day and with it her interest in things. At first she could not bear her mother out of her sight, but gradually she realized the selfishness of this and was content that she should be left in Mrs. Towers's charge while her mother made a daily visit home. This new friend in time won her heart completely, and was ready to answer the questions which now Penny felt must be made. One of the first of these was: "Where is the turkey? There was a white turkey, wasn't there? I didn't dream about it?"

"No, indeed. You and the turkey appeared together."

“Tell me all about it.”

“It was just about dark when you rang my bell. I went to the door to see a little girl, about your size, looking very pale and tired and carrying in her arms a white turkey. You may imagine my surprise at this apparition. I asked her to come in, and she told me she had picked up the turkey on the road and wanted to find the owner. After this statement she casually fainted away.”

“Oh, dear, did I do that?”

“That is just what you did. I laid you on the sofa, and there you stayed till you were put to bed, for I was not long in finding out that you were a pretty sick girl who had been seized with an attack of grippe in the very sudden way which grippe has. I managed to get your mother's address from you before you wandered off into that strange land where delirium often takes us, and so I could let her know about you.”

“But the turkey. When I lost my bearings in that horrid way, what did I do with the turkey?”

“My little son, Billy, came in just in time to take it from you. Later on we discovered that it had a broken leg which I managed to put in splints. Billy made a coop for it out of a box and we kept it that night and part of the next day, feeding it, of course, meanwhile. Billy inquired around and found out where it belonged so we sent word to the owner, who came for it, and now it is going around as lively as you

please. It has always been a sort of pet, and they were exceedingly glad to get it back again."

"I thought it seemed very tame," Penny commented. "I certainly am glad it could go back where it belonged. Then there is another thing that puzzles me. I seem to remember seeing something very small and white waltzing around and around. Did I dream that?"

Mrs. Towers smiled. "No, that was as much of a reality as the turkey. Billy has a pair of little waltzing mice, Japanese, I believe they are. He had them in a cage in the living-room that evening, though he usually keeps them up in his own room."

"May I see them some day?"

"Certainly you may."

"I want to see Billy, too. I think he must be my dream boy. Has he very wide open blue eyes, a smiling mouth, and a cunning turned-up nose?"

"You have described him exactly."

"How old is he?"

"He is eight. My little girl, if she had lived, would have been twelve."

"He is just my brother Davy's age, and your little girl the age of Louise. What was your little girl's name?"

"Helen."

"That is one of Louise's names, Louise Helene Fallon. When may I see your Billy and the white mice?"

“Why, almost any time.”

“Now?”

Mrs. Towers considered this for a moment and came to the conclusion that Penny would be less excited in seeing Billy than in receiving one of her own friends, so she went off to call him, while Penny waited contentedly to make the acquaintance of her dream boy.

CHAPTER XIX

FRIENDS AGAIN

AFTER this it became a thing of daily occurrence that Penny should expect a visit from Billy and his white mice. A trifle shy at first, Billy soon became very much at home, and chattered away, entertaining Penny with news of the neighborhood and his school. Penny, on her part, told him about Davy, Sammy and Peter, about Tommy Thistle, Madam Gray, Mr. Mason, Louise, until Billy was eager to see them all.

The first day that Penny was allowed to sit up, propped around by pillows in a big chair, she had her first real visitors. Her father and Davy had come to see her while she was still in bed, but all outside the family were denied admittance. Spring had made quite a stride forward since that day when Penny heard the first bluebird. Pussy willows had given place to arbutus, arbutus to spring beauties and bloodroot. Scarce a day but Billy brought her some little blossom newly out. Forsythia flung its yellow branches gracefully across a lattice. The lilac buds were swelling. Maple trees began to show tiny red leaves.

Penny's chair was drawn near the window so she could look out. Simple and restful as the room was she had wearied of looking at the same things and was quite excited over a new scene. "Oh, how green the grass is," she exclaimed, "and the robins have come, I hear one. The hills over there are a real rosy purple, not the winter purple but a spring color. Oh, how glad I shall be to get out-of-doors again."

"I shall miss my little patient," said Mrs. Towers with a little sigh.

"I should think you would be glad to get rid of such a troublesome person," said Penny, laying her cheek against her nurse's hand.

"Indeed I shall not be, and Billy is already mourning over the fact that you are not to be with us always."

"I wish you would come to town to live, Mrs. Towers. Why don't you?"

"For several reasons. It is cheaper living here, and then my boy is free to run out-of-doors all he wants. Of course when he is older and has to go to another school I shall have to think about moving. You know Billy is all I have left, and it seems best just now that we should stay on here."

"But if you had your little girl you would go to town, wouldn't you?"

"Yes, in all probability I should. It would not be fair to keep her from making friendships which I should wish her to have."

"I would be one of her friends. Do you mind talking about her, or would you rather not?"

"I like to very much. There are very few persons to whom I can talk about her. Billy scarcely remembers her, and my nearest relatives are not many. Helen was such a dear child, so thoughtful for such a little girl. I used to look forward to the time when we could be even closer comrades."

"I should like it very much if I could see a picture of her."

"Then, my dear child, you shall. There is one in my room taken the year she left me, and it is the one I like best. I will get it."

She brought the photograph and Penny studied it earnestly. "Please tell me the color of her eyes and hair and then I shall feel as if I knew her. She looks a little like you, I think."

"But more like her father, with brown eyes, and hair much darker than mine or Billy's. I often think how happy those two must be up there together. Well, I should not be selfish; I have my Billy boy."

She carried the photograph back and Penny sat looking very thoughtfully out of the window. She wondered how Mrs. Towers could be so brave and cheerful after all she had suffered. Penny had said as much to her mother the day before and had received the answer: "It is because she has suffered so much. I think most times it is when persons have not suffered enough that they complain. When sorrow has laid its

hand heavily upon them they learn the value of courage and cheerfulness."

"You would have been just as brave, wouldn't you, if I hadn't lived?"

Her mother then gave her a swift kiss. "I don't know, Penny darling. I can't answer for myself under such a grief. I know I am very, very thankful that you were spared to us."

"Then I was really pretty ill, wasn't I?"

"Very ill for a time, but don't let us talk about that now. All my life long I shall be grateful to heaven that you happened to come to Mrs. Towers, and as for her, I cannot tell you what I feel. No sister could have done more."

Penny thought of this conversation as she sat looking out of the window watching the passers-by. There were not many, for most persons went the other way into the village. Once in a while a farm wagon would go lumbering along, or an automobile would whiz by. Sometimes persons who had been into the town on the trolley cars would hurry home with their arms full of bundles. It seemed strange to be sitting here five miles from home, looking at people who were perfect strangers, not a familiar face nor form. It was just as strange, and stranger, Penny reflected, that she had been stopping all this time in the house of a person she had never heard of a short time before. She would be just a little wee bit sorry to leave, for she had learned to love Mrs. Towers and Billy, too. What a

lot she would have to tell the girls, and what a lot they would have to tell her. She wondered if Brownie really wanted to be friends again, and what she would say when they met.

She had not long to wait to know this, for presently she saw two figures coming along the street, two that looked very familiar. Brownie and Louise coming to inquire after her. Oh, that she might see them. She rang the little hand bell left with her to use when she wanted anything, and in a moment Mrs. Towers came hurrying in. "What is it, dear, what is it?" she asked.

"Oh dear, Mrs. Towers, couldn't I see Brownie and Louise? They are my best friends, you know. It won't hurt me, will it? I do so much want to see them. They are just coming in the gate."

"You may see them if they will not stay too long."

"Tell them that and I know they won't. You tell them when they must go, and I am sure they will hurry right away."

Billy had gone to the door and was now half-way up the steps to ask his mother what he should say to the two girls. "You can tell them they may come up for a few minutes," said his mother.

Penny leaned forward expectantly. Brownie was the first to enter. She paused in the doorway, then took a hesitating step. Penny held out her hands, and Brownie rushed toward her, dropped on her knees by the side of the chair, and put her arms around her

long-time friend. "Oh, Penny, Penny," was all she could say.

"You do love me, don't you?" whispered Penny.

"More, more than ever."

Then Louise came in timidly, her eyes shining. She came close up to the chair but did not attempt an embrace. "My Penny, my Penny," she said softly. "What a joy to see you again."

"Aren't you going to kiss me, either of you?" asked Penny.

"Oh, may we?"

"I don't see why not. I won't melt unless your kisses are too ardent."

"That sounds like our precious old Penny," cried Brownie, leaning over to give her a delicate kiss on the cheek.

Louise followed her example, only she kissed both cheeks in foreign fashion.

"Sit down and let me look at you," said Penny. "It seems a thousand years since I saw any of my friends, and yet you don't look a bit older. Oh me, there are so many things I want to ask you, and so many I want to tell you that I don't know where to begin, especially as Mrs. Towers says you can't stay very long this first time."

"Then perhaps you'd better let us do most of the talking," Brownie suggested. "Give us an idea of what you most want to know and we'll try to give the information in a nutshell."

“I want to know all about Thistle Troop, all about school, all about what has happened to each of you separately, what the Boy Scouts are doing, what the teachers are doing, how the Nugents are getting along, how Mr. Mason is, and all the rest of it.”

The girls laughed. “That’s a pretty large order, as Rufe would say,” Brownie responded. “Beginning with Thistle Troop, I will say that we are getting up a fund to buy nature books, on trees, birds, flowers, anything of that kind. We are also planning our summer campaign.”

Penny sighed. “Just think how much time I have wasted being ill.”

“But it won’t be time wasted getting well,” returned Brownie cheerfully. “I told the girls that I hoped to see you for a minute, and they all sent their love, so did Miss Varney and Miss Darby, too.”

“We speak of you much, every day we speak, and we wish the day will soon come when you are again with us,” said Louise. “Me, I miss you so that I have no words to say how much. If it were not for Brownie I cannot tell what I should do, but she is so kind she will not allow me to become lonely.”

Penny gave Brownie a speaking look and Brownie smiled back happily. When the time came that the visitors must go it was Brownie who ran back for a last kiss. “You do forgive me, don’t you?” she asked.

“Of course, you dear thing. It was all so foolish,

such a little thing to quarrel about," Penny confessed. "I have had time to think of it and to realize what a goose I was to pay any attention to what you said."

"If you were a goose," returned Brownie penitently, "I was a whole flock of them. The idea of my being jealous of dear little Louise. I have tried to make up for it by taking your place so far as I could. You will always be first, as you should be, but we have grown very fond of each other."

"I am so glad," responded Penny, giving her old friend another hug. Then Mrs. Towers called up that Brownie would have to hurry if she wanted to catch the next car, so off she rushed, leaving a very happy Penny.

This visit appeared to be the impetus that Penny needed in order to improve rapidly. She was able to sit up longer and longer each day, and planned to go home in a week's time. Meanwhile she had visitors every afternoon. Monica, in a big shining limousine, came with a wonderful basket of flowers from the conservatory, Leila appeared with a pretty little bed jacket which she had knitted herself, Miss Varney came with Louise one afternoon, bringing a fascinating book. Even stately Miss Darby made a call upon her, and no less surprising was it that Mrs. Potter should call to ask after the patient. She brought Sammy with her, and while Mrs. Potter and Mrs. Towers were talking together Sammy made the acquaintance of Billy and the waltzing mice.

But the most surprising visitor of all was announced one morning when Penny was feeling particularly bright and well. "Do you think you could see a stranger?" asked Mrs. Towers. "One of my neighbors is very anxious to come up."

"I'm sure I feel well enough to see anyone," responded Penny, glad of a ripple to stir the monotony of convalescence. She was sitting in the big chair by the window, clad in the pretty pink wrapper her mother had brought her. The spring sunshine was streaming in, touching to brighter hues the many lovely flowers with which her friends had supplied her. Books and picture papers lay on the table by her side. The room was exquisitely neat, and Penny herself looked a very contented convalescent.

She heard footsteps on the stairs, a little piping voice, a deeper one, then Mrs. Towers opened the door and ushered in a great burly man and a little dot of a child. "This is our neighbor, Mr. Boggs," said Mrs. Towers, "and this young lady is Miss Cleora Boggs."

Mr. Boggs strode up and offered a massive hand. "Hope I see you better, miss," he said. "Cleora, come speak to the lady and thank her for finding your turkey, thank her pretty, now."

The dot came shyly up and held out a hand as tiny in proportion as her father's was big. "Thank you ma'am," said the piping voice.

"You are very welcome, very welcome indeed," Penny smiled at the small person. "I wouldn't have

had anything happen to the turkey for anything. It was such a nice gentle one. So it is yours?"

"Yes, miss," the man spoke up, "and it wouldn't have been anybody's but for you. We'd hunted the place over for it. You see, it's a pet. Cleora here's all we've got. Me and my wife lost three children before she came. She's kind of pindling, and don't grow very fast, but we're hoping she'll get a start after a while. She ain't but five. We do set a heap of store by her and it was pretty tough to have her pet turkey get away."

"Sit down, won't you, Mr. Boggs?" said Mrs. Towers, offering a chair, in which the big man seated himself gingerly and took the doll-like child on his knee. Her hair was carefully curled; she wore a bracelet and a ring, a chain and locket. Evidently she was pranked out especially for the occasion.

"Now tell the lady what we're going to do," said her father.

The child looked up in his face then shyly down again. Her father said something to her in a rumbling whisper. "We're going to give you a little turkey," Cleora's small voice shrilled out.

"Not a little one," Mr. Boggs prompted; "we're going to save one of the white turkey's brood for the lady's Christmas; that's what we're going to do, ain't we?"

Cleora nodded her head vigorously. "We're going to save one for your Christmas."

“And we’re going to take it to her ourselves.”

“And we’re going to take it to her ourselves,” repeated Cleora.

“Why, how perfectly fine that will be,” cried Penny, “but I am afraid I shall be robbing you.”

“Not a bit of it, not a bit,” insisted Mr. Boggs. “It was mighty good of you to lug that turkey all the way up hill along a right lonely road, mighty good. Any little old turkey we could give you wouldn’t in no way make up for the white one. I don’t know why it is, but Cleora thinks more of that turkey hen than of all her pets, don’t you, Cleora?” Again a vigorous nod from the child.

“I guess you must like animals,” Mr. Boggs continued, “or you wouldn’t have taken all that trouble about them.”

“Oh, I do,” responded Penny; “I think I like any animals, except perhaps rats.”

Mr. Boggs burst into a loud guffaw which he as suddenly subdued. “Excuse me, miss,” he apologized, “but most ladies are scared to death of mice; they don’t go so far as rats.”

“I’m not afraid of mice; in fact I rather like them. Billy has a pair of waltzing mice, and I like them immensely.”

“Waltzing mice? I never heard of that kind. They’d be something new, wouldn’t they, dot?”

Dot acquiesced with a nod, and Mrs. Towers offered to show off the mice when they went down-stairs.

“Reckon we’ve been here long enough,” at last said Mr. Boggs, rather hesitatingly and awkwardly. “We’d be proud and glad to have you come and see Cleora’s pets, miss,” he ventured. “Any time you happen to be out this way. We’re on a pretty lonely road, and the house sets right smart of a ways in, but it’s sort of pretty when you get there. Wife ain’t much of a visitor, but she asked me to give her thanks along with ours.”

After bidding Cleora to say good-bye “nice and pretty,” Mr. Boggs bore her off to see the white mice and left Penny smiling over the interview and ready to ask Mrs. Towers all sorts of questions when she next came in.

“They are good, kind people, plain as pipe stems, but as honest as the day, hard working and excellent neighbors. They have a big farm which they make pay. The little girl is their only child and the apple of their eyes. When she was born it was hardly thought she would live at all, but she was so cared for and cherished that she pulled through, and probably will grow stronger as she grows older. Mr. Boggs asked for your address, so I think you can count on that turkey next Christmas.” Mrs. Towers did not say more just then, for her attention was attracted by an automobile full of young folks which had just stopped before the door.

Penny saw, too, and cried out, “Oh, Mrs. Towers, there come a lot of my friends, boys and girls. It is

Saturday, you know, so there is no school. Oh, do you think I can see them?"

Mrs. Towers looked dubious. "Why, my dear, you have already received all the company you are entitled to in one day."

"But I feel so well," pleaded Penny.

"Then you can see no one this afternoon, but must take a long rest. How many of them are there out there?"

Penny counted: "Rufus Marshall and his brother, the brother is driving the car, so I needn't see him, one, Jesse is two, Dan is three, then there are Becky Cole, Brownie and Rena, oh, yes, and Flora Cassidy, I didn't see her, that makes seven altogether."

"I think you'd better leave out those whom you have seen already. Four should be the limit."

"Then will you please explain?"

This Mrs. Towers did with the result that the three boys and one girl, that girl being Flora, came solemnly into the room bearing gifts of fruit, flowers, books and magazines, but Penny greeted them so cheerfully and appeared so bright and well that the gravity soon unbent, although they were allowed to stay but a few minutes.

She was pretty tired by the time the morning was over, so when Louise arrived in the afternoon she was not permitted to see the patient. So great was her disappointment, as this was the first time she had come alone, that Mrs. Towers told her if she would stay

till after Penny had had her nap she could see her for ten minutes. Mrs. Towers knew all about Louise as she did about Mr. Mason, the Nugents, the work of the Girl Scouts, for she and Penny had many long talks together in which both grew confidential.

So while Penny slept Louise and Mrs. Towers chatted about many things, finally becoming so absorbed in their reminiscences of the war, the condition of things in Belgium and France, and finding so much in common, that time flew and it was dark before they knew it.

“Don’t you think you could spend the night with us?” asked Mrs. Towers. “I don’t like to have you go home alone, and I can telephone to Miss Varney that you are here. I have a little room next to Penny’s and would love to have you occupy it. Then we won’t let Penny know you are here till morning when she is fresh and bright. I really think she has seen quite as many persons as prudent to-day.”

Of course Louise was delighted at this proposition, and the matter was arranged without delay.

Therefore when morning came what was Penny’s surprise and delight to see entering with her breakfast tray, who but Louise. “Why, what in the world ——” she began. “How did you get here?”

“By the car,” replied Louise, all smiles.

“But so early, and Sunday morning, too.”

Louise’s smiles broadened. “What would you say if I am to tell you that I have been here all night?”

“Really? Why, Louise, and I didn’t know it. Why didn’t you come up?”

“Because that good Mrs. Towers tell me I must not. It is for the reason that I am so disappointed that she propose that I spend the night. She telephone Miss Varney to receive her permission and here I am to have the joy of a long talk with you this morning before any others come.”

“How perfectly fine. Isn’t Mrs. Towers the very best ever? I am so fond of her. You see, she has nursed many patients with influenza and knew just what to do for me.”

“We have had a wonderful talk last evening and have told each other many of the things which have happened to us during that war. Each has lost those dearest to them and I feel now as if I had known her always.”

“She is so strong and sweet,” continued Penny, nibbling her toast. “I hope we may see her very often.”

Louise hoped this, too, but had small expectations, for one of the reasons that she wanted a long talk with Penny was that the time was nearing when she would receive a summons to the city in case it was decided that her future home would be there. Neither dwelt upon the subject, but it was present in their thoughts as they parted that afternoon, and when Mrs. Towers came up after having seen Louise on her way she found Penny in tears.

“Why, my dear little girl,” she said, “what has happened? You cannot have quarrelled with Louise.”

“Oh, no, oh, no; it’s just because I am so fond of her and can’t bear to think that she may go away off where I shall hardly ever see her.”

“I wouldn’t trouble myself yet about that,” said Mrs. Towers. “The moment has not arrived and who knows what may happen before she leaves Miss Varney?”

So comforting herself with this thought, Penny watched from the window for her parents, who would soon be there to see her.

CHAPTER XX

LUCKY PENNY COMES BACK

IT was a great day for Penny when her mother appeared in Mrs. McIlvaine's big car to take her home. Superficial in many ways as Mrs. McIlvaine was she had the kindest of hearts, and insisted that her car be used for Penny's home-coming, and that she be allowed to go along in order to see that everything went properly. So Penny, well wrapped up, was tucked in the back seat and bade farewell to the little village of Marden. In his regret at seeing her go Billy was ready to offer her his precious white mice as a parting gift, but Penny told him that between Tommy Thistle and Madam Gray she feared the mice would fare badly, so Billy, relieved at not being compelled to give up his pets, yet having the satisfaction of having wanted to do the generous thing, saw the mice safe in their cage and then came to say good-bye with many promises of coming soon to see all the Atwood family.

Mrs. Towers, too, made like promises, but parted from her patient with a real heaviness of heart. The house would seem very lonely without her, and from that moment no doubt could be traced the beginning of

a plan which should develop so happily for more than those of that little household.

The nearer they drew to home the more excited was Penny. "It is well we are both here to hold her down," remarked Mrs. McIlvaine, "or else she would jump out the window, I'm afraid."

At last the car swung around the corner into Maple Avenue, and very soon they could see a little figure dancing up and down on the porch of the Atwoods' house. Then a voice shrilled out: "Here they come, Rilly! Here they come!" And there was Davy on the watch. Rilly, needing no second summons, was close behind him when the car drew up before the door, Madam Gray was at her heels and on the fence sat Tommy Thistle quite indifferent to all this excitement.

Penny giggled hysterically as the big chauffeur carried her up the steps and into the house where he established her on the couch in the living-room. Rilly came after importantly carrying wraps and hand-bags, her face on a broad grin, and her comments true to character. "Po' li'l' chile, comin' back home, bledged to be ca'ed in de house jes lak a baby. She sho' do look pale an' peaked. Nemmine, we feeds her up. She git back dem roses fo' long. Rilly know what she lak, an' she gwine see she has it, too." Indeed, there was danger that in her zeal Rilly would insist upon over-feeding the child.

Davy danced around, now in, now out, a new ques-

tion from him every other minute. How was Billy? How were the white mice? What about the little girl and the turkey, and so on.

At last Mrs. McIlvaine drove away, promising that Monica should come soon to see her friend, Rilly bustled out into the kitchen to begin preparations for a feast, much of which Penny would not be able to eat, Mrs. Atwood went up-stairs to see that Penny's room was ready for her, Davy went out to get Tommy Thistle, and Penny was left alone.

How good it did seem to get home again. Her eyes wandered over the room, taking in each familiar object, the pictures, the ornaments, the table on which stood the lamp, the rack of books, and other things well remembered. What happiness to get back to all this! She lay there till her father came in to dinner, bringing another joyful moment in his warm welcome to her.

"It's awfully nice to find out how much you all think of me," remarked Penny naively.

Her father laughed. "Did you never know it before?"

"I suppose I did, or rather I took it for granted, but you never said so much about it."

Her father gathered her up in his arms and held her close for a moment. "I suppose we don't always appreciate our blessings as much as we should till we come near to losing them," he said as he let her go.

This speech would have left Penny quite awe-

stricken if dinner had not been announced at that moment, and this was an important occasion, since she was to be allowed to have the meal with the family, an event which would not occur again for several days. Once in her room she might not be permitted to come down again till she was stronger.

Before he returned to his office her father carried her up-stairs, where she was very content to be. Her room was bright with flowers, vases of them everywhere, on the table, the mantel, the bureau, the window sill. "Where did they all come from?" questioned Penny, looking around at roses and daffodils, pansies and carnations.

"From various directions," her mother told her. "The Thistle Troop clubbed together to send the carnations, Monica brought the roses, Miss Varney sent the daffodils, and the Boy Scouts the basket of pansies."

"How good everybody is," said Penny, lying back on her pillows with a sigh of content. "It's worth while being ill once in a while to find out how much everyone thinks of you. I said something like that to Father and he said such a serious thing. Were you really in danger of losing me, Mother?"

"You were very ill when your temperature ran so high and there were symptoms of pneumonia. Both doctors were alarmed because of the very high fever, and oh, my dear, how I reproached myself for not having gone out that first night when Mrs. Towers

telephoned, but I was not feeling well and it did not seem serious then, so your father urged me to wait till morning."

"I'm glad you didn't come," said Penny reflectively, "for if you had we might never have known dear Mrs. Towers so well, and perhaps we should not have had the promise of a turkey for next Christmas."

This quite changed the current of thought, and after advising Penny to take a nap her mother left her. She lay smiling happily as she looked around the room which she was so glad to occupy again. Her beloved books close at hand, all her little girlish souvenirs on the wall, her favorite photographs, even her best beloved doll which she had outgrown not so very long ago, and which stared at her in smiling fixity from the corner she still occupied. Presently the doll's face became that of little Cleora Boggs, whose small piping voice sounded in her ears. Penny was so sound asleep that she did not know that Davy had spoken to her and did not hear him when he tiptoed out of the room with Tommy Thistle whom he had brought up to pay his respects.

It was not many days before Penny was downstairs, then she was able to sit on the porch in the spring sunshine, to take a drive with Monica and receive her friends whenever they came. She was looking forward to returning to school, but in the strenuous exercises of a real rally she could not expect to join for some time to come. However, she was to

meet her own patrol at Miss Varney's house as soon as the weather was moderate enough for an outdoor supper.

Meantime it began to dawn upon her that there was something afoot which the girls were trying to keep from her, some secret she was not to know yet. In the middle of a sentence one of her friends would suddenly clap her hand over her mouth, or would be glared at by some other, and break off short, looking very confused. Even her mother had a mysterious way with her at times.

"I believe you all are keeping something from me," she complained to her mother one day, "and I'd like to know what it is."

"Would you rather really know or would you like a very pleasant surprise?" asked her mother.

Penny considered this before she said: "So there is something. You can tell me that much, can't you?"

"Yes, there is something."

"Shall I have to wait long?"

"Not more than a week now, I think."

"Well, I reckon I can stand it that long," rejoined Penny, "but I would like to know what the secret is about, whether a person, a place, or whether it simply concerns me personally."

"It is about several persons, a place, and I am sure will concern you personally," responded her mother, smiling.

"Now, Mother, that makes it more mystifying than

ever," Penny complained, half laughing. "I believe you are trying to mix me up on purpose."

Her mother laughed. "Maybe I am."

She would say no more and Penny was obliged to bide her time, which she did with, it must be said, a good deal of grace. Then came a morning when she remarked at the breakfast table, "Week's up, Mother. Are you going to tell me the secret?"

Mrs. Atwood exchanged looks with her husband and both smiled. "You are to learn it to-day," she said.

"Right after breakfast?"

"Not immediately, I think. You may have to wait till afternoon."

"But why can't you tell me right away?"

"I am not at liberty to."

"Then it doesn't depend upon you."

"No, I really have very little to do with it."

"Oh, dear," sighed Penny, "the plot thickens, but there is one comfort, the agony will soon be over."

After all she did have to wait till afternoon, for as her mother told her those of her friends who were at school wanted to be with her when the surprise came off, so she was satisfied.

About three o'clock her mother said: "Penny, Monica wants to know if you can take a drive with her, a short one only?"

"Why, yes, but I did hope I should know the secret right away."

"The drive need not interfere with that; indeed, I

think it will help to pass away the time, for as I told you, Monica will not be going far."

"I believe she is going to take me to Marden to see Mrs. Towers, and that is the secret." She scanned her mother's face but saw no evidence that her guess was a right one.

Monica appeared bubbling over with excitement. "You're going, too, Mrs. Atwood," she said. "We want you there to hold Penny up when she begins to faint."

"Now I know we are going to Marden," declared Penny positively. But Monica only laughed, and bundled Penny into the automobile, who, contrary to her expectations, found that they were going in an opposite direction to that which would take them to Marden.

They had not gone many blocks when Monica said: "I hope you don't mind stopping so soon; we have a call to make."

"Oh, no, of course not," replied Penny politely.

But she was not at all prepared to find that they had drawn up before the door of Mr. Mason's house, and that it appeared to be occupied. The windows were open, and through them came the buzz of voices. There were thin white curtains in all these front rooms. The house had a spick and span appearance, which was quite new to Penny.

At the door she was met by Mrs. Towers. Penny returned her greeting mechanically, for she had caught

sight of Mr. Mason himself standing within the hallway. Beyond him was quite a company of people. The old man resembled very little the unkempt, wild-eyed person of Penny's earlier recollection. He was still rather pale, but had a dignified manner, was well dressed and smiled happily upon Penny as she shook hands with him. Within the big parlor stood the members of the Thistle Troop with their captain, those of the Boy Scouts who had been interested in the work of restoring the house, and a number of older persons. Penny looked around in bewilderment. The big room was adorned with flowers which stood, some upon Mr. Mason's mahogany table, some upon Mrs. Towers's desk. The pictures on the wall Penny recognized as having seen before, some in Mrs. Towers's house at Marden, some in this very room when she had been exploring the house. She gazed from one to another. Everyone was smiling and regarding her intently. It was evident that all knew the secret but herself. "What does it mean?" she asked.

Then all eyes were turned upon Louise, who stood by Mrs. Towers's side. "Let Louise tell, let Louise tell," came from first one then another.

Louise looked inquiringly at Mrs. Towers, who nodded an assent. So Louise stepped forward and stood before Penny. "Look at me, look at me," she said. "Do you know who I am? I am the daughter of Mrs. Towers, her adopted daughter, and this is our home."

“Louise!” Penny gave one ecstatic cry of delight and clasped Louise in her arms.

Somehow there seemed to be a sudden use for handkerchiefs to dab the eyes at that moment; even the boys tried to look unconcerned but several winked very hard and began to whistle softly.

“So this is the wonderful secret,” said Penny, looking around. “No wonder you wanted to keep it. But so far I only half understand; please somebody begin at the beginning and tell me all about it.”

“Mr. Mason, Mr. Mason,” came the cry. But he shook his head slowly but positively.

“Miss Varney, Miss Varney,” came a second suggestion, and after an approving nod from Mrs. Towers, Miss Varney began to explain.

“Well, my dear Penny,” she said, “although I do not want unduly to give credit to the Girl Scouts I must say that it all began that day when we started to clean up the town and you discovered this charming old house. You know, too, of Mr. Mason’s ill health, of his improvement and of his desire to find some comfortable home when he should come from the hospital. Then you have been so deeply interested in our dear Louise not to share in our anxiety to see her established where she could be happy. That all belongs to the first chapter. The second chapter began when you found the white turkey and knocked at Mrs. Towers’s door. Since you know Mrs. Towers better than any of us do we need not enlarge upon her

qualifications for mothering. In the course of conversations with various persons it came about that she had felt more than once that she would like to adopt a little girl in the place of her own, for, as she said, 'heaven sent her two children, and must have meant that she could take care of two,' so when she saw Louise the appeal was very strong, the more so since Mrs. Towers has spent two years in France nursing in the hospitals during the war and has seen many, many war orphans. So it came about that she made up her mind to be Louise's mother, and we are all very happy."

Penny went up and gave Mrs. Towers a silent embrace. "I just love you," she whispered. Then she looked questioningly at Mr. Mason. "But what about the house?" she asked.

"That is still another chapter," Miss Varney went on. "After she had made up her mind about Louise, Mrs. Towers decided that it would not be fair to take her away from her school and all the pleasant friends she has made, so she looked around for a house in town which would be within her means. She happened to ask me about this house which you had told her about and I proposed that she see Mr. Mason. The result was that they have made the happy arrangement that he is to board with her in his own home, furnish his own room and all that. Now you have the whole story."

Penny drew a long sigh. "It is like a fairy tale,"

she said. "Who could have thought that so many lovely things could come from what did appear pretty bad beginnings?"

"Many things in this world seem evil when you are living close to them," said Mrs. Towers quietly, "but they turn out blessed memories when you get them in proper perspective."

"Oh, Miss Varney," spoke up Brownie from a far corner, "you haven't told Penny that this is the house warming."

"To be sure I didn't. Well, Penny, that is what it is, and I hope you appreciate the fact that you are the only guest who didn't know where she was coming."

Then they all trooped to the dining-room to feast on strawberries and ice-cream, the former an early luxury sent by Mrs. McIlvaine from her hothouse. Rilly, who had been borrowed for the occasion, was in great form, and kept them all laughing by her running comments.

Thistle Troop went off in a body singing:

"Thistle Troop, Thistle Troop,
Mind your p's and q's."

The Boy Scouts followed, and soon the old house was left to its regular inmates.

Penny and her mother were the last to go. They had gone over the house from top to bottom, had seen Louise's room, with its furnishings, so familiar to Penny during those days when she looked upon the

same in her sick chamber, had seen where Mr. Mason had set up the furniture he had reserved for himself, had looked into the now exquisitely tidy kitchen, had peeped into the yard where one solitary cat reigned supreme, and had come away with a fuller belief in the hand of Providence.

Penny was so full of exalted emotions that she scarcely spoke all the way home. She and her mother stood together upon an upper porch to watch the sunset, rose and gold and faintest turquoise green. Penny was the first to break the silence. "Just suppose I had never joined the Girl Scouts," she said, "I might never have known Mr. Mason, nor Mrs. Towers. Isn't she splendid, Mother? If I had hunted the world over I couldn't have chosen anyone I liked half so well to be Louise's mother. It has been such a wonderful time, I shall never forget it. That old, old house, that seemed so forlorn and hopeless when we first saw it and now think how many happy people are in it. What a lot there is to do in the world when you take the trouble to look for it."

"So it has been a glad secret, hasn't it?" said her mother, drawing her close to her side.

"Oh, the very gladdest sort of secret, and the heart of it is that I have learned what a wonderful thing it is when you find out that you cannot be really happy unless you are doing something for others."

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