

The POLLY PAGE
CAMPING CLUB



IZOLA L. FORRESTER



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**THE POLLY PAGE
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The Polly Page Yacht Club

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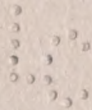
HIGHER AND HIGHER INTO THE THICK BRANCHES

THE POLLY PAGE CAMPING CLUB

BY

IZOLA L. FORRESTER

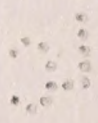
AUTHOR OF "THE POLLY PAGE YACHT CLUB,"
"THE GIRLS OF BONNIE CASTLE," ETC.



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THE POLLY PAGE CAMPING CLUB

CHAPTER I

THE ADMIRAL'S SECRET

At the top of the stairs Polly paused, buttoning her sweater, her head on one side like a meditative bird. There was some mystery in the air, and she couldn't get even a hint of it.

The Admiral had been unusually genial at luncheon, but several times Polly had caught him exchanging long knowing glances with Mrs. Langdon, whereupon Aunt Evelyn had started making what Lillie Anna would have called "surreptitious and cursory remarks."

It was something they were trying to keep a secret from her, of that much Polly felt certain. Even now she could hear them talking softly together in the study, and nobody ever disturbed

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the Admiral's afternoon nap there unless a serious conference was necessary.

"The blessed darlings," thought Polly comfortably. "They're hatching something and are afraid that I'll find them out." She leaned over the polished balustrade and gave a warning cough just to let them know that she was coming down.

Instantly there was silence in the study, guilty silence. Mrs. Langdon stepped into the lower hall as Polly came down.

"I thought you had gone, Polly."

"Just going now. The train won't be in until 2.15. Did you or grandfather want me?"

Better give them a chance to tell her, Polly thought magnanimously. She watched Mrs. Langdon as the latter bent over the white lilacs in their tall lavender vase. It seemed that Aunt Evelyn made pictures in everything she did, she was so graceful.

"You will meet the other girls at the station?"

"Some of them. Only the committee is allowed to be there to meet Kate. Don't you want to come too, Auntie?"

"No, child, thank you. Run along."

Polly went, as she told herself, philosophically. That was one element which she had acquired

during her last year at Calvert Hall, philosophy. Nearly all of the seniors acquired it before spring, Sue Warner said, but it usually wore off by the end of May. This was only April, so Polly's still clung to her and it made her very patient and considerate in her dealings with the Admiral and Aunt Evelyn. It appeared that no matter how tall you grew or how old you were, you never even approached the grown-up stage to those nearest and dearest to you.

The railway station at Queen's Ferry looked like a bungalow, it was so low and quaint, built of gray field stone with ivy covered walls and mullioned windows. It seemed to convey its own particular greeting to all travelers who were fortunate enough to leave the train here. On the circular patch of green grass a pattern of flowers, begonias, pansies and mignonette, in summer time spelled out the words "Queen's Ferry." Polly wished they said something personal instead, like "Welcome Home." They always seemed to say it to her whenever she went away on any jaunt and returned.

Waiting today on the platform was the reception committee, appointed specially by the Senior Class of Calvert Hall to meet Kate

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Julian. It hardly seemed three years since Kate had been chaperon and "ship's husband" of the merry yacht club at Lost Island. She had graduated that June, and had taken up her hospital training in New York the following fall.

"Dear old Kate," Sue bubbled over the instant she saw Polly. "The train's almost due. I suppose we really should have a speech of welcome or something formal, shouldn't we, Polly?"

"Not for Kate. If it were Isabel here, we'd have a band and a flower twined carriage and a speech of welcome on parchment, wouldn't we, Isabel?"

"Maybe you will yet," said Isabel happily, tucking her arm in Polly's. The girls laughed, for she was still the same Lady Vanitas, always fond of ceremonials, or, as Crullers put it, "the pumps and vanities of this mortal life."

Four members of the Senior Class, the four that Kate had known best, had been appointed as a committee of welcome—Polly Page, Isabel Lee, Sue Warner, and Ted Moore, for although she was growing up, no one but Miss Calvert ever called Edwina anything except "Ted." Back in the old days when they had been Freshmen, Kate had been their favorite in the Senior class, and

had chaperoned them and mothered them generally.

"Guided our wayward footsteps and taught us how to tame a chafing dish," Polly had said once.

So now they waited to greet her on her first return to Queen's Ferry since her marriage to Doctor Elliott. Besides the four class-mates, there was Ruth Brooks. There had been some argument over her admittance to the committee, since she had left Calvert the previous year, but Polly insisted that, even if you were unfortunate enough to leave before all the other members of the Vacation Club, that was no reason why you should not be an honorary member of the *alumnæ* for life.

Peggie and Natalie were disqualified for admission and so were Hallie and "Crullers," not through any special iron-clad rule of order, but because they represented the younger crowd. Two new members had been added to the Vacation Club nearly every year to take the places of those who had gone the way of honorable Seniors. This last time the additions had been the Morris girls, Vera and Betty, whom Polly and her crew had met on the motor trip and Marjorie Lawrence.

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“Don’t you begin to feel old, girls?” asked Isabel. “It seems years and years since we started school at Calvert.”

“No, I don’t,” Polly returned flatly. “And I’m never going to let myself feel old, not when I’m ninety-two, and going around with a gold headed cane and a lace cap with a pink bow. I love pink. I do hope Kate will be just the same, and not have grown settled and dignified.”

“She’ll have to be dignified if she’s a doctor’s wife,” Ruth declared. “And, besides, she had two years of training before she was married. Nurses are always rather settled in their ways. I suppose they get so used to having people mind them.”

“Wasn’t it odd for her to marry the doctor who gave her her very first case?” Ted said. “The idea of studying for two years towards your heart’s desire, then switching off and just getting married.”

“But that was Kate’s heart’s desire, Ted. Doctor Elliott had been on the house staff at the same hospital where she took her training. I forget which one it was now, but they got a lot of the poor cases there, and he had charge of the children’s clinic. Then after she had finished her

course, she went out as a visiting nurse from one of the settlement houses, and she met him in that work too. I know Kate keeps up her work even better now than she could have if she hadn't married him for their tastes are similar, and their aims too. They're both in Child Welfare work now in New York."

Ruth paused. It was a long speech for "Grandma" to make, and she flushed over it. Kate had corresponded with her ever since leaving Queen's Ferry, and Ruth had envied her her chance to get in touch with actual conditions in the great centre of human life and endeavor. For Ruth, life had narrowed down to remaining at home with an invalid mother, and trying to fit her ambitions and longings to the measure of daily duties.

"Oh, but it's so wonderful, girls," Isabel exclaimed. "Real love is made up of sacrifice. Think if she had been like some girls, and had insisted on his giving up that work and going in for a good practice that would pay."

"I don't think Kate would look on it as sacrifice, though. They're just pulling together in the work they both love," said Sue.

Polly nodded happily over at Sue, who always

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took an argument seriously. Polly hardly ever did. As she said, arguing made wrinkles and tied your brain up in knots, so what was the use? If the other fellow wanted to think differently from the way you did, let him. Anyway, it added interest and diversion to the world to have varying opinions.

"I wonder," Sue added gloomily, "if some day Peggie and the other youngsters will be coming down here to welcome some of us home. I hate to leave school and start growing up."

"I don't, do you, Polly? I think it's glorious to go forth into life's battle and feel one's self expanding, and expanding—"

"Isabel's either planning to be a dirigible or one of those cannon balls that spreads itself all over creation," Ted commented. "If there's going to be any expanding, the Club does it altogether. United we stand, expanded we blow up."

Polly had to laugh with the rest. Hands deep in her sweater pockets, she stood where she could watch the perspective of track leading north towards Washington. She was trying to think of two things at the same time, what the girls were saying and what it was the Admiral and

Aunt Evelyn could be planning. It was useless to imagine they were not in some secret together. Polly knew the signs. And Queen's Ferry did not admit of much variety in the way of surprises. It could not be anything about Calvert Hall. The Easter Vacation of two weeks began on Monday. She had planned to devote that time to settling with the other girls all the plans for the summer vacation.

Up the shore came the long whistle of the train bound south from Washington. Ted and Sue slid off the baggage truck they had been ornamenting, as the station agent came leisurely forward.

"Plenty time, plenty time," he told them. "Did you know the Admiral's driving down along the road yonder, Miss Polly?"

"Grandfather!" exclaimed Polly in surprise. "Oh, are you sure, Andy? He can't be coming down to meet Kate or the Doctor, so it must be somebody else. I just knew he had a secret from me."

"Well, you'll know it in a minute," Ted said. "There she comes."

CHAPTER II

A GUIDEPOST OF FATE

THE Admiral beamed smilingly as he stepped from the carriage and came down the platform towards the group of waiting girls.

"I'm a reception committee all by myself," he told them. Polly slipped her arm through his, and began to coax, but he was immovable this time. "No, matey. You let me alone, and just go ahead and welcome Kate and her Doctor boy."

"Please tell," begged Polly. "It's some one else who's coming, isn't it?"

"There's Kate!" called Sue, waving frantically at one of the car platforms, and dancing up and down until Ted's hand gripped and held her steady.

"Nice way for a Senior to be acting. Bow sedately, Susan, and mind you keep your feet on the ground."

For the moment Polly deserted the Admiral and assembled her committee of welcome for the

returned wanderer. Kate's face had brightened with happiness at sight of the old-time school-mates, and she stretched out both hands to them as the train drew to a standstill. Beside her was her husband, Doctor Elliott, and the girls approved her choice at first glimpse of him. He was about twenty-six, rather short in stature and stockily built, with thickly curling blonde hair, and blue eyes that half closed when he smiled. Only his rimless eyeglasses conveyed a professional air, although, as Ted said afterwards, just why rimless eyeglasses should make a person look as if he had just won a degree was more than she could say.

"You precious old crowd, come here and say hello," cried Kate, stepping down among them. "Here they are, Bob," she called, turning to the Doctor. "Polly with the brown eyes, and Grandma here beside me. She is Ruth, you know. And the terrible soul twins, Sue and Ted, and Lady Vanitas. Where's Crullers, Isabel?"

"Disqualified for serving on the committee," said Isabel. "Peggie and Natalie and Hallie and she couldn't come, but we're letting them make walnut fudge for you. You always loved it, remember?"

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"She does yet," smiled the Doctor.

"Oh, Kitty Katherine, how good you do look—" Polly stopped short. Two hands shut her eyes, and a voice told her to guess who it was.

"Caught you napping this trip, lady bird," the Admiral said merrily. "Give you a dollar this minute if you can guess right."

"Only one guess?" asked Polly, laughing.

"No, keep along until you get it."

So she tried. It was none of the girls, of that she felt sure. They all were accounted for. And it was somebody who had come down from Washington. Senator Yates's family was down at White Chimneys in tidewater land, so it could not be any of them. Penelope had returned to New York after the motor trip the previous year, and Cary Dinwiddie was too busy getting ready for her marriage with Marbury Yates to make any flying trips to Queen's Ferry.

"Is it Aunt Faith?" she asked, but when she was turned around and kissed, it was not Aunt Faith at all, but Aunt Millicent from New York. As Polly said, it was simply wonderful to have three such aunts, just like having three fairy godmothers.

"Oh, how she has grown," Aunt Millicent exclaimed, the tears rising and sparkling in her pretty dark eyes as she looked at Polly. "Sixteen, aren't you, Polly?"

Ruth came over from the group of girls around Kate, and laid one hand on Polly's shoulder.

"Go on if you like. We'll take care of the Doctor and Kate now."

But Polly insisted on performing all the introductions. Flushed and happy over the surprise, she wanted Mrs. Abbott to know each one of the school-mates who had grown so dear to her during the four years at Calvert.

"Bless me, I know them all as it is," exclaimed Aunt Milly, who was like the Admiral, plump and full of happiness. "Didn't I get all the snapshots you sent me from last year's trip, and I managed to pick each one out, too, just from Polly's descriptions. Where are you going this year, girls?"

"Oh, we haven't decided that yet," Ted answered for the others, but Sue helped her with details as usual,

"It's going to be a camp somewhere."

"Better come with us," Kate said. "Doctor is

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to take charge this year of one of the city welfare camps in the mountains for children and mothers. That would be real work for you all."

"Where do you expect to go?" asked Mrs. Abbott. "You know I really feel like doing missionary work whenever I hear anyone speak of camping out. The last two years we have found such a beautiful place, and I want to tell about it."

"Tell it later, Milly," advised the Admiral. "If you once get these girls started talking vacations, you'll never get away. They have been provisioning and coaling up for their next cruise for the last six months, and still nobody knows what port they're heading for."

"We'll see you soon again, Kate," called Polly, as she followed in the wake of the Admiral to the carriage where waited Balaam. All smiles and bows, he sat up on the high seat, his old blue broadcloth coat brushed until it was speckless, and every button freshly polished in honor of "Miss Milly's" home-coming.

She tenderly reached up her hand to the old man. Balaam was a treasured part of Glenwood and all its childhood memories, and now that Aunty Welcome had passed away, he was

the oldest of the servants, older even than Aunt Mandy or Uncle Peter.

“Land, chile, land! Gord bless yo’ soul,” he said unsteadily, taking off his high silk hat with a trembling hand. “If Ah ain’t jes’ glad ter see yer. Held yo’ in mah arms when yo’ was five hours old. Yes, Ah did. Welcome, she cum ’long de lower hall, and she say, ‘Balaam,’ she say, ‘what yo’ guess Ah got hyar?’ ‘Bundle,’ says I. ‘Bundle! Pouf,’ ses she. ‘Most precious prize package yo’ evah see, man.’ Den she show me, an she let me hole yo’ in mah arms fo’ jes’ a lil minute while Ah ses a prayer.”

“I know you did, Balaam,” Mrs. Abbott responded, her face all glowing with smiles. “It is so good to get back home again, and be beloved.”

“It’s the prettiest time of the year with all the roses in bloom,” Polly said. “I wish Uncle Thurlow and the boys could have come too.”

“They don’t seem much like boys any more. Phil is studying architecture. He has always been a builder in his dreams of the future, you know. Jack has gone in for real estate; very prosaic, but he is thoroughly modern. He tells Phil he may improve the land after he has sold

it. They are both of them dear boys. We'll miss them this year when we go up to the castle. It's the first time they have been left behind in the city, but they will come up for two weeks of vacation any way."

"Castle?" repeated the Admiral. "Aren't you progressing rather rapidly, Milly? Is it an air castle of Phil's or has Thurlow adopted an ancestral home?"

"Dear me, no, father," laughed Mrs. Abbott. "Don't you dare to laugh at me. Polly, I wonder you don't train him better. It's not an ancestral home at all. It's a big gray stone place with a tower on it way up in the mountains. An artist friend of Thurlow's built it for himself and wandered away to some corner of the earth. I think he went on an assignment from one of the magazines, but any way he disappeared, and we heard of this lovely place, so Thurlow took it for three summers. It's near Montalban in northern New York, up in the Helderberg range."

"I never heard of them before," Polly put in, interestedly, as the carriage rolled along the roads leading towards Glenwood. "Where are they, Auntie? Sounds like ancient Germany. Cas-

gles and black knights and kobolds tumbling down chimneys.”

“Well, you’d find plenty of mysteries and stories up there if you went. They lie between the Catskills and the rise of the Adirondacks. We’ve never tried camping there, but I should think it would be delightful. There is good water and plenty of wood, and you have several villages within walking distance.”

“Are there any people right near by? We did want to get out where it was really wild.”

“It’s wild enough. You don’t want to be isolated. In case of a sprained ankle or any illness, you’d be glad enough to be able to send three and a half miles down the mountain for a real doctor. But around the castle there are only a few old farms, and some cottages built by people who have come and gone for years,—artists, most of them. I tell Thurlow if I didn’t have one in my own family, I would get tired of seeing them around sketching.”

The Admiral chuckled. Nobody knew better than he how proud Milly was of her tall artist husband. But Polly listened with wide eyes of speculation.

“It sounds splendid. You know, Auntie, we

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girls are only waiting for a place to light on, and this wouldn't be so very far away. Just from here to Washington, then on to New York. Could we go up the Hudson to Albany from there, and so over to wherever it is?"

"Yes. Straight up from Albany to Montalban. There is a mountain lake too where you can all swim and have canoes. You'd love it, Polly. One artist girl came up from New York last year with two friends and a dog, and they had a regular gypsy wagon and a tent. They had touched at all the nicest places along the road up from New York and finally chose our corner of the mountains as the best place to settle down in for the rest of the summer."

Polly slipped her arm around the shoulder nearest her.

"I always believe in following guideposts of fate," she said, with a little sigh of relief. "You don't know how I've had those girls on my mind and been wondering about the best place to camp. You make a lovely guidepost, Aunt Milly."

"Do I?" laughed Aunt Milly. "Well, we can talk more about it after I get you to New York. Did they tell you you were going back with me for a week?"

“Not a single word,” Polly declared. “That must have been their secret besides your coming today. Why, they’ve been just like a couple of children at Christmas time, Auntie, planning and whispering, and thinking all the time that I didn’t know what they were up to.”

“Do you think you want to, lady bird?” asked the Admiral.

“Want to go?” Polly repeated. “Doesn’t he ask the foolishest questions? That’s what Aunty Welcome always said. I’m just crazy to go. I want to find out what you eat and wear and do when you’re camping.”

“I can tell you,” said the Admiral. “You just fold back the curtains of the past, and step forth into the forests as near like primæval man as you can get in these days. Forget the towns, and let all the clocks run down, and leave behind all calendars. Upon my word, Millicent, I believe I’d like to do it myself. Haven’t camped out since I was a boy.”

“We leave behind too much fun just as soon as we think we’re getting grown-up,” replied Mrs. Abbott. “I don’t believe in letting these youngsters have all the joy of spring and youth. Phil and Jack are much more serious and dig-

nified than their father and me. I think you'd love it, Father."

"But there you are," Polly said helplessly. "We want to get 'way off by ourselves, and here you'll make it a regular family settlement. Suppose you take one mountain and we'll take one, and you can wigwag at us when you feel lonesome or anxious."

"I think the first wigwag would come from the campers to the castle," Aunt Milly laughed. "Oh," she drew in a deep breath as Glenwood came into view; "how good it is to get home again!"

CHAPTER III

KATE'S DOCTOR BOB

KATE had said they planned to stay about a week at Oakleigh, the old Julian place down on the Bay shore.

The following day Polly saw her and the Doctor both at church, and smiled over at them from the old square Page pew. Tradition told how years before there had been one portly old ancestor of Polly's called "King" Page. He had ruled over Glenwood many years and had stood at the head of affairs in Queen's Ferry after the War of 1812.

Polly had often heard Welcome tell about the old "King," of his temper and his pride, and how his wonderful collars came up on each side of his face, and stood out in long stiff points. During sermon time he would fall asleep in the big pew, and old Dr. Philipps, who had been rector then, would turn towards him half unconsciously and preach a little louder and with in-

creased emphasis until he had stirred "King" Page out of his Sunday dreams.

Polly dearly loved the old stone church. There were not many pews in it, and a gallery encircled three sides. Outside the gray walls were covered with Virginia creeper, and there was an old churchyard in English fashion with clipped box hedge-rows around the burial plots, and flat marble tombstones as well as slate and granite ones. Today, when service was over, Mrs. Langdon and her sister lingered to greet old friends of Millicent's, and Polly went over to where Kate had been showing the Doctor several historic stones.

"Can't you drive over to Oakleigh this afternoon, Polly?" she asked. "I've asked the girls over for tea. We don't expect to stay very long and I want to talk over your summer plans with you. Perhaps we can help each other. Where do you expect to go?"

"We don't know yet. Aunt Milly is anxious for us to try the place up in the Helderberg Mountains where she has gone for two summers. You see, that wouldn't be far from New York and the expense would be light because we could travel nearly all the way by boat."

"Dear me," sighed Kate, "I do wish *we* could find a suitable place where the expense would be light."

"Are you going to camp this year?"

"In a way we are. Doctor will have full charge of the largest welfare camp this summer and I shall help him of course. We want to find some place where the scenery is lovely, the location healthful, the expense light, and where there is nobody around who objects to children. Because we'll probably have over a hundred at various times and we must be where we can spread out."

"Wouldn't it be funny," said Polly musingly, as she stooped to pick a sprig of myrtle from the ground, "if we all landed on the same spot of earth, Aunt Milly, and the kiddie camp, and ours."

"Coax Mrs. Abbott to drive over with the Admiral and you this afternoon, and talk to Doctor about it. He's half persuaded as it is."

Polly laughed. The plot was one after her own heart.

"I'd love to, Kitty Katherine. You know it won't be the same this year, although I love all the girls, of course. But Ted won't go, and

Ruth thinks she can't on account of her mother's needing her, and if Ted won't go, ten to one Sue drops out. That leaves only Isabel and myself of the original Hungry Six crowd that first year at school. Still there'll be eight of us any way in the camp."

"Just look at the Doctor and the Admiral; they are like two old chums," said Kate happily. "Bob's having a splendid time."

"Grandfather always fastens on to anyone who will listen to him when he gets on the tombstones," laughed Polly. "He simply adores anyone who has never seen the Page inscriptions and is willing to listen to him expound them. I'm going over right away to rescue the Doctor from my ancestors."

Threading her way through the narrow box-bordered paths where the violets were already blooming, she came to where the two men stood, and slipped her arm through the Admiral's as she always did when she wanted him thoroughly under control.

"Listen, Grandfather dear, we're going to Oakleigh for tea and you can have the Doctor all to yourself this afternoon. Is he telling you all the history of the inscription, Doctor?"

"Not one of them, Miss Polly," the Doctor assured her. "We're discussing tents. The Admiral is telling me to buy tents at the government supply stores to use in my welfare camp. We plan to get some house as a central base, and then to have several tents."

"We shall want tents too. I don't know much about the different kinds. Two sleeping tents with four cots each I planned to have, if they were large enough, and then a sort of cook tent with a flap. I like to eat out of doors."

"How about when it rains?" asked the Admiral. "You're fair weather campers. I suppose you'd have a cave handy then, wouldn't you?"

"It really would be nice," Polly agreed. "I've always liked the idea of living in a cave. Remember, Grandfather, how once when we were little Sue Warner and I ran away down the river bank, and dug a cave? Mandy helped Aunt Welcome find us."

"Who'll help find you this summer if you're lost?"

"But we'll be so wise in woodcraft, and won't get lost. You don't know how we girls have posted ourselves about everything. We have

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read all the books we could get about the best way to camp out, only the queer part is that nearly every authority advises a different way."

"The fundamental rules are the same everywhere," the Doctor told her. "Get a healthful location. Take care of what you eat and where you get your drinking water. Out in California, where I came from, we boys used to take our ponchos, a blanket and a frying pan, a fishing rod and a rifle, and face the open any time."

"What did you eat?" asked Polly, anxiously. "We are going to bring our food supplies down to just as small a quantity as possible, and still I'm afraid we'll need pack mules."

"Corn meal and bacon were our staff of life. Get near a lake or river where you are sure of a good fish supply. I would locate close to a farm house too, where one could buy fresh vegetables, fruits, eggs and milk."

"I do believe you're right," Polly said thoughtfully, "and we were planning to get just as far away from a chimney as we could."

"A chimney, child?" repeated the Admiral. "What for?"

"I mean the sight of one anywhere in the surrounding view, don't you know? It wouldn't

seem just like camping if we could see houses anywhere around."

"Well, it's good that you are able to pick and choose," smiled the Doctor. "My poor little city kiddies are happy if they may only walk around on Mother Earth without any 'keep off the grass' signs."

"Where do they come from?"

"Please don't ask Bob any more questions, now, Polly," Kate protested, coming up to them. "This afternoon you may talk camp gossip to your heart's content. Mrs. Langdon sent me to tell you to come at once."

Polly said goodbye, and hurried on with the Admiral to catch up with the rest of the family.

"Oh, I do like Kate's Doctor Bob," she said, snuggling down between the two aunts in the big carriage. "I always used to wish I had been born a twin, because I'd have been a lot of company to myself, but I suppose if you marry somebody you really like and all your ideals and ambitions are the same, it's almost as good as having a twin around."

They drove past Ruth's home to give her Kate's invitation for tea at Oakleigh that afternoon, and she promised to see that it reached the

other girls. Most of the regular girls up at the Hall had gone home for Easter, excepting Crullers and Peggie, and they had been at church, clustered with some of the younger Calvert girls, around Miss Honoria. Sometimes Peggie would get sleepy during the sermon hour, and then Miss Honoria would administer a gentle tap with the hymnal on the back of the hand nearest her. One day Peggie had roused with a start and answered aloud, "Yes, ma'am!" All the day pupils who lived at Queen's Ferry, like Ted, Sue, and Polly, sat in their own family pews, but the others were "Honoria's Chickens," as Ted nicknamed them, and all kept close under the Calvert wings.

"We're ever so much more important than you day girls," Crullers would assert. "We have to behave ourselves and keep up the traditions of Calvert in public."

Ruth stood beside the carriage, and heard Kate's message doubtfully.

"I'll tell Sue, but I don't think I shall be able to go because Mother has one of her lonesome days."

"Oh, dear," exclaimed Polly, when they drove on. "I do hope, if I am ever laid up with any-

thing, that I won't have lonesome days and make everyone stay around until I get over my glooms."

"Never mind, girlie," Aunt Milly answered comfortably. "Ruth is love's little martyr. Abby Brooks has gloomed ever since she was a girl at school with me at Calvert Hall. And it isn't ill health that causes it, either. It's just disposition. One of the most interesting and wonderful old persons I ever met is a friend of your uncle Thurlow's in New York. He used to be a diplomat, and has traveled all over the world, but has been blind for years. Yet once a week he gathers around him his circle of friends, and he is the happiest and most contented of them all. That is Stanton Phelps, Father;" turning to the Admiral, "you remember him, don't you? It was his son who built our castle, and then disappeared, Lindsay Phelps."

The Admiral smiled and nodded his head.

"Polly must go with you to visit him and present my very best remembrances and wishes. He used to be one of our old crowd of boys. Brock Cary and Stant Phelps—"

"Was Brock Cary the old Commodore we met last year at Sunnyside?"

"He didn't seem a bit old to me," chuckled the Admiral. "Just a boy, a mere boy, but it is forty years ago and more since we had such good times together. Be mighty sweet to Mr. Phelps, Polly, mighty sweet, and mind you don't tell him you think he's old."

"I love to hear grandfather tell about when he was young, Aunt Milly," Polly said later, when they had reached Glenwood. "It doesn't seem long ago at all to him, and when I look back to when I was five or six, it seems ages ago. Did you feel yourself growing up all at once when you were sixteen?"

"Not all at once because I was always short for my age, and the day I did put my hair up I cried, I remember. I must have been seventeen."

"Seventeen," Polly repeated regretfully. "I don't want to put mine up then. I like to braid it and wind it around my head like you see in the Rosetti pictures. But it does seem as if somehow I have grown up very fast this last year. Maybe it is on account of its being the last year at school. We've simply crammed knowledge. Some of the girls expect to go through college, and take special courses, but I don't want to, Aunt Milly."

Aunt Milly smiled leniently, but said nothing.

"I want to coax grandfather and Aunt Evelyn to travel with me. If I could I'd get a private car and fix it all up, and just couple it on to any train I felt like taking. Grandfather only laughs at me, though. He and Aunt Evelyn still treat me as if I were a child, and I suppose they always will. One day I told grandfather I didn't see what I'd ever find to study about after I left school."

"What did he say?" Millicent's eyes twinkled just as the Admiral's had a habit of doing when he was inwardly amused.

Polly frowned seriously.

"Why, he told me that scientists say the brain isn't fully developed until you're eighteen."

"And some are never developed," Aunt Milly laughed. "Run long, childie, and get dressed. Though I know just what you mean, and all the problems you are facing. Don't try to cut all the Gordian knots at once, Polly."

Polly slipped two arms close around her neck, and rubbed her cheek against hers like a kitten.

"You're such an old dear, Aunt Milly. I'd forgotten how awfully nice you are. Aunt Evelyn reminds me somehow of the king's daughter

in the Bible, remember? She was 'all glorious.' And Aunt Faith is tender and sad. But you just seem human, you know."

Aunt Millicent patted the brown hair lovingly. "It's a dear old everyday world after all, Polly, and we need a love and a faith that will stand plenty of everyday wear and tear. Remember the princess who was given her choice between the prince who came dressed in velvet and gold and the youth in woodland green? She chose the forester lad because he would wear better."

"I wouldn't have, not unless I meant to step down from my throne, and leave off my own velvet and gold. She should have chosen the one that matched her own estate," said Polly. "But maybe she loved the other one, and only tried to make an excuse for choosing him."

Milly gave a little sigh, almost involuntary, and looked down at the face so near her own.

"How soon our princess will be grown up," she said half wistfully, for Polly was the only representative of the girl element in the younger portion of the family. "I wonder who you'll marry, Polly?"

"The right one," Polly said teasingly. "When I see him coming along will I be sure to know

him, I wonder? Did you care for Uncle Thurlow the very first time you ever saw him?"

Milly laughed softly, and put her questioner away. There was a pretty flush in her cheeks.

"I think perhaps I did. Run along and get dressed this minute."

CHAPTER IV

THE ROCKE OF THE DAWN

OAKLEIGH was one of the old Bay Shore estates, and Polly had loved to visit down there when she was a little girl.

The drive turned in from the main road past low, broad stone posts, and wound up through woodland thickets full of laurel and rhododendron bushes. Gray, and weather-stained, the house stood high on the hillside, its wide pillared galleries facing the beautiful view of the Bay.

Here old Major Julian, Kate's father, used to sit in the cool shade in summer and in the sunny corners when the days grew chill. He was usually to be found with his wooden peg stretched out on a chair before him, plenty of books and papers at hand, and a couple of old setters beside him asleep on the ground. Here he sat and lived over the past, and Polly had often coaxed him to tell of the conquest of Indian lands that lay beyond the Mississippi.

He had been sent west in the early seventies,

and could tell tales of fights with the Apaches and Piutes down through Nevada and Arizona that thrilled one. The Admiral drove out to visit him regularly, and Polly usually accompanied him. She loved to sit and play with Nip and Tuck, the two setters, while the old Major sat gazing off at Chesapeake Bay, his gray eyes clear and sharp under their bushy eyebrows, his face always ready to wrinkle into a smile over some of the Admiral's quips.

He had been unable to meet Kate and her Doctor at the station on her arrival, and Mrs. Julian rarely left him alone, but Queen's Ferry believed it could trust the Major to stand by his colors, and welcome the man who had taken Kate away from Oakleigh into the whirl of city life.

On their arrival Sunday afternoon, the girls left the Doctor to finish his chat with the Admiral, and Aunt Milly renewed her old friendship with Mrs. Julian. Mrs. Langdon always liked to have the Major all to herself. He was full of southern chivalry. As Kate said, "If it hadn't been for Dad's wooden leg, he'd have out-danced every youngster in southern Virginia, so there's a providence in all things."

“Crullers can’t go this summer after all,” Hallie said as soon as they had left the house. “We left her weeping.”

“Peggie lent her the top sheet from her bed, and I gave her a bottle of smelling salts that Annie May left in the dormitory when she was making beds.” Nat’s brown eyes fairly gleamed with mischief. “She’s perfectly wretched, Polly. Just got a letter from home yesterday afternoon. Her mother says she has trotted around vacation time long enough, and she’s needed at home.”

“What a pity we can’t have an auxiliary camp for lonesome mothers,” said Polly. “Then Ruth could go and Ted’s mother and now Crullers’s.”

“Well, I think if Mrs. Adams could only know how we need Crullers to keep us all good-natured, she’d let her come,” Hallie declared. “Jane Daphne is part of the joy of nations. She should not be narrowed down to one family in her earthly scope.”

“Does she still eat crackers in bed?” asked Kate. “I do think that was Crullers’s worst habit, really. To have her visit you just as you were settling down for the night and leave

cracker crumbs in the bed! I never found a punishment to suit the crime. It was awful."

"But she's a dear, anyway," Polly protested, tenderly. "I do hope she can go with us. Nipper is almost as much fun, only she doesn't stumble over everything, like Crullers."

"Nipper? She's a new girl to me, isn't she?"

"She's Vera Morris. We met her and Betty, her sister, last summer on the motor trip. Margery's new too, Margery Lawrence, and they're all three going with us camping. We call her Pipes. Oh, Kate, she's got the funniest little high pitched soprano you ever heard, and she will sing, you know. They're spending the Easter vacation down home."

The girls had strolled with Kate down from the veranda, where tea was to be served later, to the old-fashioned garden and then to the grove. From the house the grounds of Oakleigh sloped to the shore of the Bay. The paths wound in and out through a grove of trees, dipping into miniature ravines, and rising to heights where rustic seats had been placed invitingly. Some gentle Virginia deer nibbled at the grass down in the hollows. Polly could remember how she had played they were wild unicorn back in the days

when, as a child, she had driven over with the Admiral.

One favorite spot of Kate's was up where the path led out of the grove and ended abruptly on a high ridge of land overlooking the water. On its summit was a great flat rock, upheld at each corner by smaller stones, and hollowed out in the center. Steps had been cut in the rocky slope to reach it, and the girls never tired of hearing its story from the Major's lips.

It was said that long ago, before Sir Walter Raleigh had ever looked upon the shores of this virgin land, the Indians had used the old rock as a sacrificial altar to the rising sun. The Major had an account of the ceremonial in an old document written by some bold voyageur who had ventured up the Chesapeake, Mother of Waters, and had found there the peaceable, picturesque people.

“For an houre before sunrise theye did kneele, men and women bothe, upon the earthe before this rock, which they called **Rocke of the Dawn**. There was no sounde to be heard, save onlie twit-terings of wakening birds and the strange drums on which these people beat. When the first beame of heavenlie light was beheld above the

horizon, the fire upon the altar then was lighted and the sacrifice consumed thereon. This was the first creature killed by the hunters since sundown. And as the smoke did ascend righte pleasantlie, the younge maidens rose and danced with much grace and beautie around the rock."

When they arrived at the old rock now, Polly sat down on it, her feet tucked up under her, and gazed off at the blue waters, gleaming dazlingly bright in the sunlight.

"Remember, Kate," she said, "How Sue and Ruth and I used to come out to see you and make believe that we were the dancing maidens of grace and beauty? Kate would never condescend to caper, girls, but she would climb the rock, and play she was high priestess of the dawn."

"Oh, I love all the old ceremonials and folk lore," Kate exclaimed. "It all comes back now that I'm home again. It's the oddest thing, but in New York, all this seems to fade away like a dream. I mean once you're plunged right into real life."

"But this is real life, isn't it?" asked Hallie, digging the accumulated leaves out of the hollowed space on the altar.

"I know just what Kate means," Isabel broke in, enthusiastically. "Yonder in that great, teeming whirlpool of human endeavor—"

"Whoa, my lady!" cried Polly, teasingly. "You're taking a poetic flight. That sounds just like

" 'In the world's broad field of battle,
In the bivouac of life—' "

"But that's what I mean exactly," protested Isabel. "We never see anything of real life here in Queen's Ferry the way Kate does in the city. And when we don't see it and know all about it, how can we feel sympathy?"

"You'd all feel sympathy soon enough if you could go, as I do, to the children's clinic with the Doctor. It makes one long to gather them up, the poor little warped products of fate and circumstance, and take them out to where light and air can heal them. I'm so glad he is to have charge of the welfare camp this year. We expect to look after over a hundred children, that are to be sent up in relays. If we had more money, we'd be able to do for more children."

"How much does it take?" asked Polly quickly.

"Altogether? I don't know," answered Kate.



AND GREEN

HER ATTENTION ON THE SEMI-CIRCLE OF GIRLS

"It's hard to figure exactly, but they say five dollars means a two weeks' vacation to a city kiddie."

"Five dollars! And here we girls have saved about two hundred so far towards our summer camping, and plan to get more before June. That would mean forty children bound for the open."

"Now, Polly, quit," Natalie told her vigorously. "We've worked hard and worried lots to garner in those shekels, every last lone dollar. And now you're seeing visions of donating it all to Kate's pet charity. We're a summer charity all by ourselves."

"But listen a minute." Polly left Chesapeake to look after itself, and turned her attention on the semi-circle of girls on the pine needles around the rock. Overhead the tall pines swayed their boughs lazily in the light off-shore breeze. "Everybody that you've ever heard of who has tried camping out gets fearfully tired of doing nothing. I mean girls. The boys pitch in and work, but girls always say after the novelty has worn off, they don't know what to do. They're usually ready to come home by about the second week."

"Tired of doing nothing?" repeated Peggie eagerly. "That seems funny, Polly. When we camp out up in Wyoming, we never think of getting tired. We all go with father and mother the way we did two years ago when you girls were there, and each one has certain things to attend to; dishes to wash, or cooking to do, or beds to make,—something any way. And after the camp work's done, you want to tramp off and collect things, or fish. Why, the time just flies!"

"It's because you're a ranch girl and know how to camp, having been every year. Down east it's all different. Isn't it, Kate?"

"The Campfire Girls are changing things a good deal," Kate answered.

"Betty and Nipper belonged to them last year up at Birchwood Camp in the Berkshires," Natalie said. "They say it was glorious, the ceremonials and the camp spirit, and everything."

"Well, we can't turn into Campfire Girls temporarily," Polly protested. "We're just running up for one summer. And we'll have plenty of fun, girls, ceremonials, and camp feasts, and fishing and swimming, and all that, but let's get in something else. Nat almost hit it when she spoke of the camp spirit. We'll have plenty of

camp spirit. We always do dandy team work together, and we don't scrap or fuss."

"We did last year," said Sue, meditatively. "Ted and I."

"And Hallie and Betty will get tangled up sure as fate if we put them in the same tent," Polly agreed laughingly, "but I mean anything serious. So it seems as if we're fitted for taking up some real work that may help others."

"I know." Ruth smiled over at her. It was rarely that "Grandma" spoke, and today, though she had managed to get away while a neighbor stayed with the "lonesome" mother, she had seemed unusually quiet. "Polly sees those hundred and one children that Kate and her Doctor are going to bring up out of New York, and she wants you girls to pitch in and help."

"Not all of the time," Polly added. "But just supposing we did get a camping place close by where Kate locates. We could have loads of our own fun, and still help look after the welfare kiddies. The summer would mean something then. We're getting older now, girls, don't you know—"

"We're not, Polly," protested Hallie. "I'm only fourteen, and Betty's going on fifteen."

Nat's only fifteen and Peggie's betwixt and between. We don't want to work in vacation time."

"Well, don't, blessed child," Polly returned soothingly. "We'll form a Toddlers' Brigade, and you can play all day long. But no bloomers or middies for you. Rompers."

She dodged laughingly as a volley of pine needles was fired at her by the infants.

"But you're not in earnest, are you, Polly?" asked Kate, her dark eyes under their level brows regarding the eager, joyous face up on the rock a bit anxiously. "It takes more than willingness and enthusiasm to handle such a proposition as we're going to tackle, you know. It isn't all fun or glory either. We're allowed four helpers, and two of those do the housework. The children range from four years old up to seven. I'd love to have you, but could only undertake to pay for two, you see, five a week with board."

"If we earned money that way, we could take turns, and work in pairs, then give up some of our money to the welfare treasure box. Would we have to keep them clean, Kate, or teach the young mind the beauties of nature?"

“Both, I guess, Isabel,” Kate said amusedly. “Some of the mothers are allowed to come with the sickly little ones, and they always help with the care of the others. It is more likely you girls would have to amuse and teach them. They will be just the age when they’re into something every minute.”

“When I go to New York with Aunt Milly,” Polly declared, “I’ll find out all about the place in the Helderbergs. And about camp outfits and supplies too. What color rompers do you want, Hallie?”

“Never you mind getting me any rompers, Captain,” Hallie answered sturdily. “If the rest want to work, I’ll work too. I don’t mind if we take it in relays, but I’m just longing to live in a tent and sleep on pine boughs. I’ve heard Nipper tell of bacon bats until it makes my mouth water. We tried to have one once, remember, Peg? Tell Mrs. Elliott about it.”

“It was up in Hallie’s room,” Peggie said shyly. “We coaxed Annie May to give us some lean strips of bacon, and tried to toast it on hat-pins over the gas jet, but it dripped fearfully. So Hallie held crackers under it while I toasted, and it was awfully good.”

"Tasted kind of funny, though," Nat declared. "Maybe it was the gas. We'll use hickory in the woods. Isn't it time we were going back?"

Polly rose, and stretched out both arms to the sun just dipping below the fringe of woodland in the west.

"Good-night, sweet prince!" she called. "Wonder what the Indians called him."

"I suppose we must be going," Kate said. "We always stay down here talking and forget about everything else. But this time the old sacrifice rock really did start something."

"Let's dedicate the spot to Kate's Kiddies," suggested Ruth.

So, laughingly, but with an undercurrent of deeper meaning and intent, the girls faced the sunset and swept it low curtseys before they went down the old path, Indian file. Kate's arm rested lightly around Polly's shoulders as they two came last together. It was a newborn, silent partnership.

CHAPTER V

WANTED: A GROVE

By the end of the week it had been settled that the camping club should aim for a summer at Montalban. As Kate told them, it did away with all uncertainty for the girls, and with Mrs. Abbott so near them at the castle, and the probability of the welfare camp being pitched in their vicinity as well, there was no need for taking any extra precautions.

“Doctor and I are going to run up and look the ground over as soon as we get back to town, and if it is suitable, and we can find a house, we will go there. You can’t look after a lot of children in tents. There must be an old farmhouse up in those mountains some place. Come and see us in the city, Polly, surely now. I want you to know about the work there.”

Polly promised. She was so excited over the prospect of a week in New York that she was “treading the air,” as Ted said.

"It's terrible to have to watch your preparations and know that I can't go this year," Ted said. "Will you miss me, girls?"

"Miss you?" repeated Crullers, ecstatically. "I'll miss you awfully, Ted. Who was it saved me from Isabel when things went wrong? Who was it always saw that I had plenty to eat at all times? Who'll protect me now? Miss you, Ted?"

"There, that's sufficient," Ted said, complacently. "Don't chant at me any more. Makes me think of the prophet:

"'Let my right hand forget her cunning if I forget thee, oh, Jerusalem!'

Crullers, you're a dear old standby, any way."

"Thought you couldn't go this year, Crullers?" Polly looked up from the pad of paper on which she was figuring. It was after lunch the day before her departure, and the girls had come over for a last chat. The Admiral was lying down, sleeping. In the garden the two aunts wandered along the old paths, living over their girlhood days there together, with Uncle Peter trotting after them happily, letting them help him in planning the spring planting.

Polly usually spent this hour in mid-afternoon out on the broad veranda, excepting when she was at school. The west corner had been fitted up with long Japanese shades and willow furniture, with hammocks hung from long chains overhead, and here the girls had gathered. "Pipes" Lawrence was back, but not the Morris girls.

"Maybe I can," Crullers replied happily. "I knew you'd all miss me so terribly that I wrote to Mother every single day, beautiful beseeching letters that would make the Obelisk weep. It really depends on what Polly's going to feed us on in camp. Nipper declared you favored pellets, Polly."

"Soup pellets," amended Margery. "I heard her."

"We'll make you assistant cook, Crullers, and then you can get all you want to eat. How can you worry over what we're going to eat, any way?" Polly tapped her forehead with her pencil, and looked with a far-away glance at the strip of blue sky just visible beyond Crullers's head. "I want to rest and invite my soul. Who said that, girls?"

"Thoreau, when he was building that dear lit-

tle shack of his down by Walden Pond that cost about fifty-nine cents," Ted informed her.

"Just you let Honoria hear you speaking lightly of that shack or its builder," Ruth warned, "and there will be trouble. Any way, I think it was Marcus Aurelius."

"I want a grove, girls," Hallie announced. "Let's advertise for a grove in the Helderbergs or thereabouts. A beautiful, secluded grove with rural free delivery and a lake or a river. Then we can get old clothes and a tent and some fish-poles. That's all we'll need."

"It is going to be much cheaper than last year, really. Only outfits and fares and food on the simple life plan. We can go nearly all the way by boat, too."

"Oh, why not hike?" Natalie asked. "Nipper says they always hiked at Birchwood."

"Nipper and Nat always want the strenuous life like Ted," Isabel sighed. "I don't want to hike, girls. We'll be in the wilds of Canada yet, Polly, if you don't look out, carrying canoes and duffle bags on our backs."

"I won't," Ted declared dolefully. "It's all settled. I can't go this year. Mother says she

does think I might stay at home for one summer and get acquainted with the family."

"And of course, if Ted can't go, I don't want to," Sue added. "We've always been chums, even if we did scrap. I'll keep her company."

"Well, we're surely losing two joyous hearts out of our company of pilgrims. I don't like charter members to drop out," Polly told them. "Peggie, you're sure of going, aren't you?"

Peggie nodded, blushing as she always did when she was addressed abruptly.

"Mother promised I could this year because last year I had to go west for Jean's wedding."

"What about a faithful chaperon?" asked Sue. "If Ted and I were going along of course you would not need anyone to look after you, but as it is, I think you must have a guardian angel."

"We haven't picked her out yet," Polly answered. "Let's lay her on the knees of the gods until we've settled this food supply question, and what you girls want me to buy for you in New York. I don't see why we can't all wear serge skirts and dark blue middies with white ones for best. In camp we can wear bloomers. We'll have to do our own washing and economy counts. No tubs either. That means we'll be like the

French peasant girls and wash on stones in the handiest brook.”

“Listen, girls,” said Ruth suddenly. She had been helping Polly make up her lists, three different ones. “Here they are finished; the things you’ll need just for your own personal use, the food supplies, and the general camp outfit from a lantern to tent pins. I made out the list of eatables for eight girls to last four weeks.”

“Won’t we last any longer than that?” Polly asked mischievously. “I’d double it, Ruth.”

“Well, if you’re going to help Kate, you can earn extra money and stay longer. Once you get there, it won’t take so much just to live. And then here is a list of camp furnishings. Polly, don’t you think it would be better for you to just get the prices and compare values at different stores, then order from here after you get back? They can ship the goods direct to wherever you go, Montalban, isn’t it? and that will save your handling any of it at all. Each girl must furnish her own kit and bring her own towels, one pair of blankets, and a poncho.”

“What’s a poncho?” asked several of the girls.

“Some kind of a pony, isn’t it?” Crullers asked,

thoughtfully. "No, that's a pinto. What is a poncho? Something good to eat?"

"It's invaluable as an article of food, child," Ted assured her. "When attacked by starvation in the wilds, you take a slice of your poncho and broil it delicately, or it can be cut into small pieces and made into a savory ragout."

"Ted!" laughed Ruth. "Aren't you ashamed to lead Crullers along like that. It isn't so at all, Jane Daphne. A poncho is a big waterproof cloth that can be used as a covering or as a sleeping bag. I guess you can wrap things in it too, and roll it up like soldiers do their blankets, and carry it around your shoulders."

"There's a hole in the center where you can stick your head through, and walk out in the pouring rain smiling and serene," Sue said happily. "Nipper's got some snapshots of herself at the Birchwood camp, where she looks like a towseled terrier with her head sticking jauntily out of her poncho."

"Don't forget a medicine box," cautioned Peggie. "Remember at the ranch how handily the arnica and witch hazel came in."

"I've put that all down," Ruth said. "How about good fishing rods, girls?"

"You just cut the poles in the woods and carry lines and hooks up with you," Crullers answered.

"Jane Daphne!" Polly's tone was almost plaintive. "Do you think you can furnish a camp like ours with its fish supply, catch any kind that comes along and only use those wobbly little wood poles?"

"You ought to get real bamboo fishing rods and real hooks and flies," Ruth declared positively. "That's why men and boy campers always have good luck fishing, and girls will face the wilds with a line and a bent pin and expect to land trout and pickerel. Crullers would starve if she relied on fish chowder."

"Oh, I know," Polly exclaimed. "We'll get boxes of the real bait. They're all colors, flies and frogs and minnows and Dobsons. All colors and striped like barber poles, some of them; aren't they, Ruth?"

"I've seen them," Ted said, quite calmly. "Crystal eyes and pink and green fins. Regular circus crawfish and minnows. Quiet, home abiding mountain fish go perfectly crazy over them."

"Ted, be quiet a minute. All I can see now is a picture of Crullers in bloomers and middy trolling circus bait in mountain streams. We'll

take her in different effective poses and send the pictures down to you and Sue."

"Say, seriously, girls, don't forget to take plenty of films along," Ted warned. "Last year I was sending ahead for extra supplies all along the line. And each girl should take along a camp log-book too, and stick in her pictures under the right dates. You can make up your own if you like. Get a lot of art mounts and stick your 'snaps' on them, then bind with white birch bark. They're stunning."

"Each one ought to have her own kodak," Polly agreed. "If you don't, you're apt to get them all mixed up, the films and pictures both, so that nobody gets a complete set."

"I shall bestow my kodak on Peggie," Sue said, "because she doesn't talk as much as the rest of you, and artists are always silent people."

Peggie flashed a quick, grateful glance over at her. Only the older girls like Sue, who had been at the ranch two years before, knew what a treat lay ahead for the girl from the Crossbar. It was the first summer she had ever spent away from home, but Polly had written several letters out to Mrs. Murray begging her to let Peggie

stay at Glenwood when school closed, and the Admiral himself would be responsible for her.

"There is two hundred and fourteen dollars in the treasury," Sue said. "I can't be treasurer if I'm not going, any more than Ruth could. Why don't you elect Nat, or let me appoint her as my substitute? Nat's fifteen, so she has some poise and balance."

"Nipper's nearly sixteen," Natalie replied with dignity. "It isn't a question of age. It's just natural aptitude. Pass over the treasury box, Sue, and I'll guard it."

"I won't buy anything for the trip until I've looked around and compared prices," said Polly. "Aunt Milly will go around with me and help, I know."

"You're our official scout, Polly," Hallie suggested.

"Scout of the commissary department," Natalie corrected. "You know, girls, somehow I feel as if this is going to be different from other campings. I've camped before, but we never took it seriously."

"Well, we'll take this seriously before we get through," Polly declared cheerfully. "We *are* going to be different from other campers. We'll

rest and invite our souls, but between times we'll go over and help Kate and her Doctor teach their kiddies to be happy and healthy. Here is an old rule for happiness, girls. Aunt Milly told it to me, and I'm going to burn it on a strip of bark, and hang it on the tent pole over the mirror. Then every one will see it often. Now listen.

“‘Something to do,
Someone to love,
Something to hope for.’”

“I like that,” said Ruth thoughtfully.

“What do we hope for?” asked Crullers.

“Dinner time, goose,” Polly answered, laughingly. “That is what you'll be hoping for most of the time.”

On Saturday morning the Admiral personally conducted her down to the railway station with Aunt Milly. Polly had asked the girls not to come, but just as the train was moving slowly out, Crullers ran around the corner of the station, a great bouquet of violets in one hand.

“Polly, catch!” she called, and threw it straight at the open window.

“Isn't that just like Crullers,” Polly said, burying her nose in the flowers. “We used to

call her 'Eleventh hour Jane.' I won't price pink rompers for her after all. She's an old dear."

CHAPTER VI

IN TAKESHI'S DOMAIN

"I LOVE to go to places where I've never been before," Polly declared, coming up the stairs from the tracks at the Pennsylvania station in New York. "What a splendid tomb this place would make, Aunt Milly, wouldn't it? Isn't it Mahomet whose remains are in some sort of a casket suspended in midair with a lodestone? Crullers would like that."

"There's Thurlow, bless his dear heart," Mrs. Abbott cried, hurrying ahead. "Never mind Mahomet now, Polly. See him standing there gazing around as helpless as a baby. Lost and bewildered in a crowd without either me or Takeshi. Here we are, dear."

Polly had not seen her uncle in several years. She had always liked him—her "one special uncle," as she called him. Mrs. Langdon was a widow and Aunt Faith was unmarried, so Uncle

Thurlow had to bear the avuncular honors of the family. He was very tall and boyish looking, with curly iron gray hair, and brown eyes full of fun and good humour.

“Well, Polly,” he asked, “how are all your numerous family? The Admiral and Aunt Evelyn, Uncle Pete and Mandy? Are there any more?”

“Lucy Lee and Stoney,” Polly amended as they crossed the great central concourse towards the Seventh Avenue entrance. “They are all well. Oh, yes, and Balaam. We forgot him. He’s specially well. Aunt Evelyn said when she first came that we didn’t need them all, but we do. Mandy cooks and Uncle Pete takes care of the garden. Then Balaam has the carriage house and the stable on his mind, he says, and Lucy Lee is housemaid. Stoney just takes care of Grandfather. When all Mandy’s children grow up, we’re going to find them something to do too.”

“I don’t doubt it a bit,” said the big artist uncle, merrily. “How will they all ever get along without you, Polly, for a whole week?”

“But I’ve been away all summer long, so they’re quite used to it now.” Polly said it in all

seriousness. "And as long as Aunt Evelyn is there, I know Grandfather will be all right."

"I think I'd get daily bulletins to be sure," Uncle Thurlow said teasingly.

The Abbott home was on West Twelfth Street off Fifth Avenue, down in the old section of the city. It made Polly think of some Washington houses, red brick with white stone trimmings, and a deep set colonial doorway with a brass knocker on it. The window boxes held crocuses in bloom, and beside the doorstep were small lemon trees. As the taxicab drew up in front of the house, Polly leaned forward and saw the flowers.

"Aren't they dear and pretty? We're going to have a flower festival next month, Aunt Milly, each girl to represent some spring flower, you know, and I'm to be the crocus. What verse could I say? It's to be for our vacation fund, and we want it to be novel. Ted said I ought to be glad that I was so delicate and exclusive that the poets had passed me by."

"I remember one that I used to like," Millicent said. "Try this:

"And crocuses a queen might don,
If weary of a golden crown,
And still appear as royal!"

"You always have the right thing tucked up your sleeve." Polly was just going to lay her cheek against that sleeve when the door opened and she caught her first glimpse of the Japanese houseboy, Takeshi. Before the summer was over Takeshi had become a familiar object to all of the girls up at Montalban, but Polly never forgot her first impression of him. He was so dignified and yet so smiling and bland. He wore eye glasses and had a curious little drooping moustache, and the most serious manner possible. He met them as if he had been the host and they the guests to some mysterious ceremonial.

"Why, Aunt Milly, the way he handled Uncle Thurlow was too funny!" Polly said as they went upstairs to Mrs. Abbott's room. "Just like a little terrier taking care of a big St. Bernard. He actually pets him, doesn't he?"

"Takeshi pets us all and bosses us terribly, Polly. Your Uncle brought him back with him from Honolulu two years ago. He had served in the Governor's house there, so of course, he feels this is entirely friendly condescension. I never cross him at all. Once I did discharge him because I wanted a maid, but he simply wouldn't

go. He said he wanted to stay and take care of Uncle Thurlow. Said he thought he needed lessons in Japanese art. Isn't that comical?"

There were lots of curious things in the house besides Takeshi, Polly found out. Cleo, a Great Dane, slept nearly all the time on a wolfskin beside her master's easel in the studio at the top of the house. And nestling between her big front paws Polly found a white Persian kitten with wide blue eyes and beautiful fur.

"That is Wise'ums," Mr. Abbott explained. "Descended from Bubasti, sacred cat of Thebes."

"Truly, Uncle Thurlow?"

He laughed down at her like a big boy as he stood washing some watercolor brushes.

"Certainly she is. Look over yonder at the clock and see if you can tell time as the orientals used to."

Over in a corner stood a tall clock case, carved from some rare sweet scented eastern wood, and inlaid with mother-of-pearl. Closed doors with carved peacocks on them shut in the round dial space.

"That came from Burmah. Open the door and find the answer to all time servers."

Polly obeyed and opened the doors. Inside

there was no dial at all, only an ivory tinted skull swinging from fine wires.

"B-r-r-r, I don't like that at all," she shivered. "Don't you think the ancients made altogether too much fuss over bones and skulls, Uncle Thurlow?"

"*Memento mores*, Pollykins."

"But not with skulls. I like to remember death by the falling leaves and the flowers that go by with the seasons. I don't think it's right even to picture Death as a skeleton. We went up to Washington last winter to see the old miracle play, 'Everyman,' and it was quaint and interesting, but there was Death, all rattling bones, and playing a dirge on a little snare drum."

"Polly, you are a joy," Aunt Millicent declared, laughing. "You're even more of a household diversion than Takeshi. What is your own particular version of the Dark Angel?"

"Not at all dark," Polly answered rather earnestly, sitting on a curved Roman chair with Wise'ums on her lap. "He must be the gentlest, strongest one of all the sons of light. Why don't you paint a picture of him some day, Uncle, without a single bone visible?"

"Perhaps I shall. One that will resemble the

Arabs' conception of Azrael, he who conducts the spirit." He lifted a large canvas and set it into a gold frame for her to see. "How is this meantime?"

"Polly will like that," Aunt Millicent said. "I'm not sure that she won't be hunting some like him up in the Helderbergs this summer."

It was the picture of a young faun perched lonesomely on an old red cairn. Desolation lay around, a widespread, barren wilderness, but overhead a delicate new moon shone in an amber and jade sky. The faun sat with relaxed limbs, resting his chin on both palms, elbows balanced on his tentlike knees, looking straight out at one with brooding, tantalizing eyes.

"Wherever did you find him?" Polly cried. "What is he sitting on?"

"A cairn. Sounds Scotch, doesn't it, but in the hill country north of the Campagna in Italy you come across these pagan burial mounds. I call him 'The Last Faun.' It was suggested by a couple of lines I read somewhere:

"Sitteth by the red cairn,
A brown one, a hoofed one."

You would like my Pippino."

“Who is he?”

“The model for this chap. Pippino brings us fresh vegetables and salads every day from the Italian quarter below here just across the Square. Takeshi does our marketing and found him for us. He is a Roman boy about fifteen, I think, isn't he, Milly? I know he helps support a family of six.”

“What would Kate say to that, Polly?” Aunt Millicent asked, smilingly. “How she would scold about our modern conditions. She'd want to trot Pippino's little sisters into some institution and his mother out to work, and our own picturesque Pippino into a trade school.”

“And they'd wither like flowers.”

“What do they do now?” asked Polly.

“Well, Angelo is a younger brother and he helps his mother manage a pushcart down on MacDougal Street. They do a rushing trade too. We'll go and call on them before you go home. Maddelena and Carmela go to school and Tori just tumbles around under the pushcart all day and thrives mightily. Her name is Vittoria. I named her myself for the noble lady that Michael Angelo loved, but they cut it down to Tori. And that makes me think, Polly, Pippino

has promised to take us down to a marionette theatre while you are here."

Polly's eyes sparkled.

"Oh, it would be lots of fun. And we mustn't forget to visit Mr.—what was his name? The old gentleman who was a boy with grandfather."

"Mr. Phelps. And go to all the sporting goods stores and camp outfitters. Pollykins, you'll have to get up speed."

Polly smiled and looked around the great shadowy studio. It was so restful away up here at the top of the house. There were couches piled with cushions, and folios of sketches and rare engravings and photographs of works of art. Here was a teakwood table and a long seat before it, inlaid heavily with mother-of-pearl. Over it hung a hideous Chang war mask, with a cherry satin mandarin coat beneath, embroidered with clambering gold dragons.

From the beamed ceiling strange temple lamps depended from long chains, and a queer hand-wrought iron lantern swung from the end of a long pike that Dogberry might have carried in his rounds.

Broad hanging shelves of weathered oak held all sorts of treasures. There were little squat

jade images beside delicately veined Favrile glass from Bohemia. A Toltec idol of terra cotta lifted its head beside a line of ivory elephants coming over a curved Japanese bridge. Across one corner of the room was a screen from some Indian prince's palace. Mr. Abbott told her it had been used to shut off the gallery of the women in the great banqueting hall from curious gazers.

"I know," Polly replied, "so that they could tiptoe out and peer between the carvings to see what was going on. It used to be the same in the old halls of the Norman barons too, only they didn't have such close screens. How the girls would love to rummage in here!"

A circular staircase wound down through the central part of the house. Polly's room was on the second floor looking out on a tiny garden plot with a Japanese tea house on it. Two dwarf pines had been planted there and wistaria clambered over the arbor. The pines, Polly thought, looked like queer serpent forms all entangled, with their odd gnarled boughs.

In her room there were no antiques, but white woodwork, and ivory colored willow furniture. There were apple-blossoms in the satiny wall-

paper, and on the chintz cushions and couch coverings.

"This is your nest for a week, girlie," Aunt Millicent told her. "Takeshi will bring up your trunk when it comes. You don't know how nice it seems to have a youngster around again."

"But I'm not one any more, am I?" Polly pleaded wistfully. "I'm sixteen."

"That's only a kiddie. Since the boys grew up it has seemed rather lonely with just them and Thurlow and me. We need youth around us to keep us young, you know. No, you don't know that yet, but you will some day. Youth and happiness are both contagious. We have so many young friends coming in all the time, and Thurlow likes it. He has a splendid crop of budding geniuses coming up. In the mountains he has a summer class that works in the open with him, and they are nearly all young students that he has taken under his wing and in whose success he believes."

"It's half the battle when somebody believes you will be what you hope you will, isn't it?" asked Polly.

"Indeed it is. But dress for dinner now, pigeon," said Aunt Milly with a light kiss on

the brown hair. "Put on a pretty gown for I want this to be an evening that will be remembered."

CHAPTER VII

THE COMMISSARY SCOUT

WHEN dinner was served, Takeshi came out in the lower hall and struck lightly on a bronze dinner gong, four bells of varying size, each with its own mellow tone.

Polly had paused for one last survey of herself in the oval mirror with its gold rococo frame. She had put on her favorite dress; white it was, soft and fine, and simply made, such as Aunty Welcome had always loved to see her wear. Around her throat she wore a band of black velvet clasped with a quaint old pin of her grandmother's, black enamel set around with pearls, and a tiny spray of them in the center.

"If you behaves as good as you look, chile," she told herself as Welcome used to do, "you'll do credit to all mah bringin' up and sufferin'."

As she was going down the staircase, she heard somebody speak her name from the floor above. It was Philip, twenty now, but the same curly

haired, merry eyed boy she remembered. As Aunt Millicent said, he had inherited the Page eyes and dimples from her, and the curly hair from his father.

“How do you do, Pollykins?” he said, catching up with her. “Why, you’re almost grown up, aren’t you?”

He took both of her hands, and kissed her, and they went downstairs to where Jack and his father stood talking before the low fire in the wide hall. Jack was twenty-two, and Polly felt rather shy, remembering how she had sent these two big cousins little teasing messages whenever she had written to Aunt Millicent.

“I never thought you’d be so tall, Jack,” she said, “or I wouldn’t have sent the box of mistle-toe at Christmas and the nuts.”

“You wouldn’t, eh? Well, then, I’m mighty glad that nobody told you the awful truth.” Jack smiled down at her admiringly. This was a very charming little cousin to acquire all at once.

They followed Mrs. Abbott and her husband into the dining-room, and Polly had to repress a startled “Oh!” at the surprise there. There was no tablecloth of linen, as they had at Glen-

wood, but the richly polished wood was embellished by the delicately embroidered Japanese plate mats. In the center of the round table was a tiny garden of Nippon, with real water for a pond, and a miniature bridge. On the water, lilies bloomed "for real," as Lucy Lee would say. There were curious little figures in boats and on islands here and there, with a few arbors scattered about, and the oblong Torii, arches that proclaim the approach to a temple or shrine in Japan. All about the circle of the garden stood candles in little green bronze frogs for candlesticks.

"You have everything so pretty, Aunt Milly," Polly said happily. "Why, it's like playing house."

"We like to play, and then it reminds Takeshi of home," Uncle Thurlow said quite gravely, even though beside his chair stood Takeshi, smiling like a genial, ivory idol. "Wait until you come up to the castle and find us there in our summer togs! It will be quite different. Jack, as you boys aren't going up for all summer, why not let Polly take your canoe? Can you manage one, Polly?"

"I can swim," Polly said eagerly.

“Well, that’s all that’s necessary,” Jack answered, laughing at her with the rest. “It’s quite easy to catch on to handling a paddle. You learned to sail the catboat at Lost Island all right. And if you can swim you won’t mind a tip over now and then. The lake there isn’t very deep.”

“We all can swim, and I’d love to have the canoe if you’re sure you don’t want it.”

“Then it’s a go. I wish we boys were going up to help rig up your tents.”

“So do I, but still, it’s better perhaps that you’re not,” Polly added serenely. “You’d be a diversion, you know, and take up too much time altogether. Besides, we girls want to learn how to put up our own tents.”

“How about driving tent poles?” asked Phil.

“Well, I don’t know. I wonder why one couldn’t just choose two young trees that were the right distance apart, put a support across, and hang up one’s tent. Then you’ve got your tent poles rooted right in the ground so no storm can blow them over.”

“I should think it might work all right. It takes you to think up new plans, doesn’t it, Pollykins?”

"Aunt Milly," Polly appealed, "please tell Phil he mustn't call me Pollykins. It's so childish and I'm really almost grown up now."

"Almost," teased Phil.

"No scrapping, children," Aunt Millicent intervened. "How about firearms? You're not taking any, are you, Polly? I shouldn't."

"We didn't plan to, but how about snakes?"

"Phil shot a snake over my head one day up there," Jack said. "Remember, Phil? It was down in our tent near the shore and I was asleep on a couch inside the tent. We had some shelves of canvas we had rigged up behind the couch, and first thing I knew I heard Phil tell me to lie perfectly still. Then he shot. It was a snake curled up behind me on the shelf, with his head hanging down. We'd killed one that morning and I guess this was its mate. Any way, this little brother of William Tell shot it."

"It wasn't poisonous," Phil added modestly. "Just a black snake, only sometimes if they're angry they'll whip out at you and might snap around your arm or neck. Though they would not harm you."

"Oh, I don't like that," Polly said. "We

won't kill any mates in the first place. Any more things to warn me against?"

"Don't get lost in the caves," cautioned Jack. "There are a lot in the mountains up there that have never even been explored. No one knows how deep they extend underground."

"With those beautiful crystal icicles hanging all around; stalactites, don't you call them?" Polly leaned forward, all animation. "Oh, we saw such wonderful ones at the Luray Caverns and the Weyer Caves last year in northern Virginia."

"These haven't any crystal decorations, but you may find remains there of prehistoric races and animals. You found some bones, didn't you, Father?"

"Don't let them tease you, Polly," Aunt Millicent said. "There are plenty of caves, but the only prehistoric relic I ever saw was an old horse skull that Phil took down there and hid for his father to find and exult over."

"And there's a woman hermit on top of old Baldy Crest. You want to visit her," Jack insisted. "Her name is Sarepta Jones. Dad painted a picture of her gathering wood, and it looks just like one of the witches from Macbeth."

Before dinner was over Polly felt as if she had made a start towards all the summer's fun. The two cousins knew every place of interest around Montalban, and just the way to run a camp. They helped her make out her prospective list of camp supplies, and advised her as to the best places at which to buy.

"You don't have to carry all your food supplies with you. Make out a weekly list and send down either to one of the city stores, or to the village, and they'll send it out parcels post. Then you're sure of getting fresh goods. If there's anything else we can help out with, send out a long call for help, and we'll come running."

"It's awfully kind of you, Jack," Polly said. "I may have to before I get through."

The next day they got an early start, Aunt Millicent and herself, and went on a cruise through the stores. Polly was enthusiastic over the camp outfits. Each one seemed just a little better than the last, she declared, and how on earth was she to know which one was best?

"Take the one that combines simplicity and lightness with comfort," advised Aunt Millicent. "You want tents that you can be sure won't give

out in a storm. I'm not sure but what Doctor Elliott's advice isn't best about them, and you'd better try the government supply stores where you can pick up a good second hand tent."

"I want three medium sized ones," Polly said, "not over fifteen dollars each. That's all we can pay."

"You can get them for that. Then you want cots. The canvas ones are all right if you have soft blankets underneath."

"How about sleeping bags that you stuff with leaves or pine needles?" asked Polly wisely.

"No, dear heart, not to sleep on. You sleep inside your sleeping bags, and if you want to stuff anything with pine needles, choose a poncho, I should think."

"But they're not bags, are they, Aunt Milly?"

"Oh, I don't know," Aunt Millicent laughed. "I shall have to send the boys out with you. Get all the catalogues and they can mark the best things to look at."

This seemed a good plan, so Polly returned laden with catalogues, and even Takeshi was appealed to about their contents.

"Takeshi knows how to reduce food to its lowest common denominator," Phil said. "He can

pack the most food in the smallest compass of any one I ever saw."

The next day Pippino was introduced. He was out in the garden with Takeshi, bargaining over vegetables, and Polly thought it was like a scene from a foreign country instead of prosaic New York. Takeshi, when he was at his morning duties, wore a native gown of dark gray cotton, embroidered in blue. Pippino was hatless, his shirt open at his tanned throat, and a scarlet scarf knotted loosely under the collar.

"Ah, you see de picture de Signor paint of me?" he asked, flashing a smile at Polly that showed his white even teeth and gleaming dark eyes. "I make ver' fine boy, yes? You come down some day where I live. See Angelo, my big little brother. He ver' much more handsome than me."

"Isn't he a dear?" Polly exclaimed. "Did he say when he'd take us to the marionettes?"

"The last night you are here. I want you to finish all of your shopping first, then you may play, young lady. You must telephone to the Doctor's office, and see if he and Kate are back yet. We shall want to visit the kiddie clinic."

Polly telephoned and found that they were ex-

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pected back the following day, so it was arranged that the shopping should be concluded by then, that the remainder of the visit might be devoted to amusement.

CHAPTER VIII

KATE'S KIDDIE CLINIC

IT was a wonderful week to Polly, not only, as she wrote home to the girls, from the standpoint of novelty and adventure, but because she learned so much of conditions she had never even guessed at before.

“I knew about sick babies and poor people, of course, before we went to Kate’s kiddie clinic,” she wrote to Ruth, who was older than the others, and would understand better. “Everyone does. As Grandfather likes to quote, ‘the poor ye have with you always,’ until you get so used to seeing them suffer that you don’t mind it any more. But here in the city, Ruth, it isn’t one or two or ten families, like we have at home down in the Hollow, but it’s hundreds and thousands. Kate says you have to shut your eyes to the sea of them, and think only of the circle right around your own self which you are able to reach and help. Just the minute you begin figuring out

how to help everyone, you feel like the clock that thought how many times it must tick in a year, so it got discouraged and stopped short. I guess we have to keep on ticking if we ever expect to help very much."

The evening before they visited the clinic, Kate and the Doctor had invited Mr. and Mrs. Abbott and the boys to dine with them in Polly's honor at their little studio apartment down on Stanton Street. It was on the East Side near the Williamsburg Bridge. As they turned into the crosstown approach, Polly could see the beautiful shadowy outline of the great stone arches looming up into the sky, the long cables outlined against the night with myriads of electric lights.

"It looks like a great diamond necklace," she said. "Or, no! I know, Uncle Thurlow, like the Bridge of Souls I've read of somewhere, in Japan, isn't it?"

"You're quite as sentimental as your Aunt Milly," Mr. Abbott asserted. "Takeshi and I have a hard time keeping her away from this part of town. She knows every little old curio and antique shop from Cooper Square to East Broadway."

"Oh, but Polly would like the Russian quar-

ter," Aunt Milly said. "I found one tiny shop under the shadow of the elevated on Allen Street, where they sold seven-branched candlesticks, braziers, and hammered copper bowls. You would have loved them, girlie. I thought of course they were all antiques until I found two barrels out in the little court-yard filled with earth. Then the little Russian girl told me her father used them to bury away his new goods in, so as to make them look old, because the Americans are so strange. They like all their copper and brass very green and old looking."

"I wouldn't have cared," Polly said valiantly. "They'll all be old some time. Why not start your great-great-great-grandchildren's antiques for them?"

They found Kate and her Doctor in a new-law apartment house on the corner of Grand Street. Once inside their door, all the outer world seemed blotted out as if by magic. As Kate said happily, it was their own private island. There were five rooms and a kitchenette, where Polly and Mrs. Abbott helped Kate with dinner, although it was so tiny in its spick-spanness that there was barely room for more than one to turn around in it.

"It's just a baby kitchen," Polly exclaimed, poking about curiously. Everything had been planned for artful concealment. There were rows of deep drawers underneath the shelves surrounding the room on two sides, with glass doors enclosing the shelves. Kate cooked with electricity, a process which simplified even this phase of the culinary duties, and when Polly saw all of the shining contrivances, she declared that she wanted wires run out to the camp for the summer.

"I don't see why electricity should be so exclusive. Perhaps some day we'll all carry handy pocket batteries and a coil of wire to hitch it to any lightning rod we find convenient."

"Takeshi would enjoy that," Mr. Abbott said genially. "I've found out that Polly and Takeshi belong in the same category, and I'm not so sure but what Mrs. Elliott does also. You're all looking for labor saving devices, and it is wrong. Labor is sweet and handicraft is the most satisfying of man's creative efforts."

"Oh, but it's so much nicer to be able to turn the switch, and catch the current, isn't it, Kate?" Polly protested.

Kate called that she must refuse to argue,

much as she wished to, as it would certainly spoil the gravy if she did.

“And there you have the triumph of handiwork again,” cried Uncle Thurlow. “How could any pressing of a button produce gravy such as this.” He peered over Polly’s shoulder into the cook’s domain. “It takes real art and the touch of the knowing hand, doesn’t it, Pollykins?”

“Here, child,” Aunt Milly handed him the heaped-up platter of fried chicken. “Carry this in and hush your talk. Kate’s giving us a Virginia dinner: fried chicken, roast ham, sweet potatoes, and goodness knows what all. It makes me hungry just watching her fix it up.”

After dinner was over, they sat around the large mission table in the glow from a squat Russian copper lamp, the light twinkling through its shade of perforated copper in curious patterns.

Out of doors it was warm and springlike. Kate had opened the windows wide, and Polly and she sat on the broad window-seat, looking down at the great pulsing city, crowded to overflowing with humanity. They were on the eighth floor. Eastward lay the East River, and below them lighted streets threaded paths

through the darkness. On the corner below them a street piano poured out its flood of rippling melody.

“Isn’t it all wonderful?” Kate said softly, leaning her chin on her hands. “You know when I first came north, Polly, I was afraid of it. But after a time I got acquainted with it, and it became a great brooding mother to me. Sometimes it tramples down its young the way the animals do, and even devours them, but still it is a mother. Our clinic is just below here, near the settlement. You are coming to visit it in the morning. It is only a store that we have rented and fitted up, but it does very well. Each new clinic that is started in districts like this is a center of healing and helpfulness, and good always spreads faster than evil if you give it half a chance.”

At nine o’clock the following morning, Polly and Mrs. Abbott were promptly on hand outside the clinic. They had found the place easily, as Polly said, because it looked so clean. Outside the whole street looked old and weary. Open basements yawned like hungry mouths, filled with old clothes, second-hand furniture, fruits, vegetables, and babies,—babies of all sorts and

sizes,—the weariest, wisest looking babies that Polly had ever seen.

Inside the building everything was spotless. White paint and white tiling had worked wonders, and two white-clad nurses were in attendance, besides Kate and the Doctor. Although it was so early, there were many waiting mothers in line, each with her burden in her arms and most of them with several children clinging to their skirts besides.

“Oh, dear,” said Polly wistfully, “babies should be the most precious things in the world, and here they can’t be precious because there are so many. They can’t all find room, can they?”

The Doctor smiled at her,—his kind, all-knowing, patient smile,—as he sat down at his desk and reached for his report blanks.

“One philosopher has called them the ‘much-too-many.’ We are just beginning to realize they are the most precious things in the world, just beginning, Miss Polly.”

“Polly, I do want you to see Bennie’s baby,” Kate said just then. A little chap of about ten had edged his way into the long white sunlit room, and had seated himself on a bench near the door with a baby on his knees. He handled

her in motherly fashion, too, waiting his turn cheerfully.

“We’re going to take him and the baby, too, up to the camp with us for the summer. His mother does day work, cleaning and scrubbing, so it’s up to Bennie to look after the baby, and when she seemed sick, he just trotted her down here to us to make her well. That’s what they all say when they come to us, and it’s so pitiful sometimes. ‘Please make my sick baby well.’ Sometimes it seems almost hopeless, but we feel that with every baby saved we have won a new victory.”

Polly nodded her head in silence, watching Doctor Elliott at his work; the delicate patience that guided his questioning of each scared-eyed mother, the way he handled the frail ailing ones with strong, skillful hands. As fast as one mother left the chair beside his desk, another took her place, all through the long morning.

“Sometimes we have as many as sixty here,” Kate told her. “You see, one woman tells another one, and so they keep on coming to us. Don’t you think it’s a big work, Polly? I love it. Yet some of the women that I have talked with say they think it such a useless work, that

nature is always over prodigal, and even with her humanlings sends out too many, so there will be plenty left after death and disease wipe out the weaklings. Why, this way one feels almost a partnership with God in healing and making the crooked straight."

"You're a dear, Kitty Katherine," Polly said warmly, squeezing her hand in hers. "You're a dear, and so is your Doctor boy. We girls want to help all we can this summer and we will too. If Bennie can cuddle a sick baby and look after it, I guess we can."

"But we need so much more money. When I think how few we shall be able to take up with us to Montalban compared with those left behind, it makes my heart ache. If we only had a few thousands to do with, even a few hundreds. Why, Polly," Kate laughed and bit her lip, hesitating before she went on, "sometimes I am ashamed of myself. Bob took me to the opera not long ago—I had been longing to hear 'La Boheme'—and I saw one woman who wore a tiara of diamonds with a stone in the center that is said to be worth \$200,000. Don't tell even Mrs. Abbott, but I simply longed to snatch it for my sick babies."

“Don’t listen to her,” Doctor Elliott turned his head to protest smilingly. “She’s fearfully radical since I married her and let her help me.”

There came a lull in the work, and he stood near them watching the weighing of a little Italian *bambino*.

“Fine! Gained eight ounces,” he announced. “Kate was certain two weeks ago that I had better send it to a hospital. Wait until we get him up to the mountains; eh, Nedda?”

Nedda, the young girl with the baby, smiled back shyly, her dark eyes full of gratefulness. She gathered her blanket wrapped baby close against her heart and hurried over to a corner to dress it.

“She is only sixteen,” Kate told them. “She doesn’t belong in our district, but Pippino’s mother sent her over to us. You see how good news spreads. After you visited us at Oakleigh, you must have written home to Mr. Abbott—”

“I did,” exclaimed Milly. “I told him all about your work and the Doctor’s, and where the clinic was. Pippino was posing for him, and he must have talked to him of it.”

“‘A bird of the air shall carry the matter,’” quoted the Doctor. “And from so small a be-

ginning we save Nedda's baby for her, and he will summer up in the mountains. She is to help with the cooking, too, to earn a little extra money."

"You know, Aunt Milly," Polly said when they were on their way homeward at noon time, "I never used to worry about what the rest of the world beyond Queen's Landing was doing, and now I feel interested in every single blessed thing. Why is it?"

"Getting older and wiser, Polly. What are you planning now? Something nearer to 'the Heart's desire'?"

"I don't quite know myself," answered Polly. "You see, I'm only beginning to plan, but I do so much want to help Kate with her work. I wish I had lots of money to hand over to her instead of just the little nest egg we girls have been able to save."

"Why don't you speak to Mr. Phelps about it? It couldn't do any harm, and he is always interested in helping people. I don't know which is worse, to have the money and not know what to do with it, or not to have the money and still see forty different ways in which it would do good."

"Let's go and see him this afternoon," Polly

proposed eagerly, her eyes sparkling as they always did when she had struck a fresh line of action. "Please, Aunt Milly, right now while I'm full of it all. The idea of any money lying idle as long as there's a hungry child in the world, or a hungry mother either! Maybe they're not all hungry, but I'll bet a cookie if they'd always had enough to eat they wouldn't get sick so easily."

Mrs. Abbott shook her head. "Not today. We are going to see him Friday evening. Thurlow telephoned to him this morning, and made the arrangement, so we must keep it. Think and plan. Remember everything that ever happened started with somebody's thinking about it. We're going to lunch at a little Italian restaurant I know, and go home by way of Spring Street, and up McDougal, so that you can see Pippino's family in all their springtime glory."

CHAPTER IX

PIPPINO'S FAMILY

THEY crossed from the East Side into the Italian quarter where, as Aunt Milly said, nearly every block represented a separate province of the homeland. The streets were full of bright colors, pushcart flower vendors, women and children with dashes of brilliant colors in their clothing. Even the people themselves looked happier, Polly thought, than on the East Side.

"They come from the land where every child is born with a song on its lips instead of a cry," Aunt Milly said, stepping over a dusky-haired, big-eyed toddler flat down on the sidewalk. "Isn't that a beautiful old-world church on the corner? I love its flagged court-yard and broad steps fairly alive with children. We should have our churches like that on week days, not closed and full of dusty lonesomeness. See that girl yonder, dancing and spinning her tambourine in the air."

They stood for a few minutes on the curb

watching a slim, olive-skinned girl dancing in the street, while a smiling old woman played a street piano for her. The children gathered thickly around, laughing and swaying to the music.

"This seems better than over among the Russians and Hebrews," said Polly. "I should think that Kate would rather have the clinic over here. Her people look so sad and worn out."

"But that's where help is needed most, girlie. Maybe we'd look sad and worn out too if we'd been stepped on for centuries. That is Prince Street yonder, where we are going to the marionette theatre Saturday night. After that it's home again for you, Pollykins."

"Oh, and I've had such a splendid time, Aunt Milly! It was dear of you and Uncle Thurlow to bring me up here and just spin me around from one thing to another. I'll never forget it, and somehow it has started me to thinking along all sorts of new channels. You'd call them that, I guess. Ruth says when you really begin to learn things your brain cells start popping like popcorn. Is that so?"

Aunt Milly laughed. "I'm sure I don't know. Ask Mr. Phelps. He likes all sorts of new problems and ideas."



A SLIM, OLIVE SKINNED GIRL DANCING IN THE STREET

"I only hope that he'll like me, so I can talk to him about those sick kiddies," Polly said, laughing.

With that they reached the restaurant, and turned into an open basement door. This led through a long hall and out into a back yard. As they passed the kitchen, the Italian cook, in a tall white cap, turned around from the big stove and smiled at them, waving a spoon in salute. A pretty dark-haired woman, whom Aunt Milly called Madame, gave them seats at a little round green table in the yard, between two rows of small lemon and orange trees planted in green tubs. Vines were bursting into leaf on the pergola overhead and on each table stood a little jar of jonquils.

Polly was delighted at the unexpectedness of it all. The little square back yard was turned into a bower, and two stories up the clothes lines swaying with their commonplace burden seemed like huge winged birds.

The lunch was deliciously cooked and delicately served; broth first, then a bit of baked bluefish, *pot au feu*, salad, ice cream, and *café noir*. A big black cat with jade green eyes rambled down from the open gallery, and seated

itself beside them as they ate, turning its head from side to side as if it felt responsible for the hospitality of the place.

“The boys and I come here in the evenings sometimes,” said Aunt Milly, reaching for one of the long thin breadsticks. “Your uncle doesn’t like foreign cooking. You know, it’s all a funny mistake, Polly, thinking that such places are for artists or the real art crowd. They are not at all. Artists—and Takeshi and I know this to be true—artists love to be fed on planked steaks, roasts, and all sorts of solid food,—square meals, as Jack says.”

“I think myself as Stoney does about raspberries,” Polly declared. “When Mandy asked him which he liked best, red ones or white ones, he had his mouth full and told her ‘Bofe are best.’ I think I’d like this sort of thing sometimes, and sometimes the other.”

After lunch was over, they crossed town to MacDougal Street and slowly walked up it towards Washington Square, until they came to Pippino’s mother. On both sides, the street was lined with pushcarts, but there was no pushing or crowding in the little street market. Everyone seemed to be happy and leisurely; as Polly

remarked, it was nice of them all to look that way whether they felt it or not.

Signora Fanchetti sat beside her pushcart crocheting lace, nodding and smiling as she counted her chain before rising to greet her guests. She was large and rosy-cheeked, with soft black glossy hair and dark eyes like Pippino himself. Delightedly, she showed Polly all her wares. Strings of red peppers and reed hoops of dried figs were hung on a string overhead. On the cart itself lay bolts of handmade lace and gayly colored ribbons, little gilded images of the saints, and colored candles for *festas*. Down at one side was a tall brown crock filled with sweet pickled limes.

Tori was rescued from her favorite playground under the cart and smiled obligingly at Polly, her face half hidden in her mother's red apron.

"She vera bad child," said the Signora pleasantly. "Twice she have run from me to follow after street piano, two times already. Pippino say to tie her to pushcart. All the time mos' she is dancing and dancing too mucha."

"Don't say that, please, Mrs. Fanchetti," pleaded Aunt Milly cheerily. "Children can't

dance too much, can they? It's just like telling the flowers they must not lift up their faces to the sun. Wait till you get her up in the mountains with us next summer! You know, Polly, we are going to have Pippino up for one of the summer class models, so the entire family will be with us for a week. We've promised them Phil's tent and you will see them all."

"Oh, you mucha too good to my Pippino," the Signora cried, her big, soft eyes shining with quick tears. "He say Maddelena, too, must be in the great Signor's pictures, one little Roman melon seller."

"Won't she be dear?" Aunt Milly replied. Then, as they went away up the street towards the Square, she added, "Maddelena is so pretty. Thurlow is going to paint her with bare feet and a little blue skirt and white waist, with her thick brown curls around her face, holding up the gold meshed melons to sell in the old fountain square in Rome."

"I do wish," Polly exclaimed ardently, "that Ted and Peggie could study art. Peggie loves to model, and Ted can draw. If she were only going up with us! But she isn't. She'd love it so much, and I know she wants to be some kind

of an artist when she's grown up. She's got it all in her, the talent, and the enthusiasm, and the love of it."

"Has she patience too? She will need that most of all to succeed."

"Maybe not. Not so much as Peggie has. Peggie can model beautifully, Aunt Milly, all in miniature, you know. She did our heads in bas relief this last winter, and you can actually tell us apart. Ted tried to sketch us, just dashed off little studies, you know, and you could hardly tell one from another."

"I don't doubt it one bit," said Aunt Milly, mischievously. "I've been to some art exhibitions with your uncle where I had the same trouble, but don't tell him or Takeshi that I said so. Takeshi doesn't think that I appreciate true art anyway, ever since I banished some Japanese prints from the library to the studio. I like their lovely orange and violet sunsets, but not the spoon faced ladies with the long finger nails. Now, it's homeward bound for us," as they came to the Square, "and tonight you must rest."

CHAPTER X

THE LONELY KING

POLLY wrote long letters back to Glenwood and to the girls that evening, seated at the little colonial writing desk in her room.

Wise'ums had formally adopted her, and these days was usually curled up on the white rug before the dresser instead of between Cleo's big paws.

Letters had come from Natalie and Sue, both enclosing additional items which the girls had forgotten to include in the camp outfit list.

“‘Lentils, dates, peanut butter, and all other nutritious food of the desert,’” Polly read aloud from Sue's letter. “‘See authentic accounts at the public library.’ If that isn't Susan all over, Aunt Milly! And Nat says to be sure not to forget several hammocks. She throws back my own saying at me, about resting and inviting your soul. We'll not have much time for hammocks, I'm thinking.”

“Oh, yes, you will. You have no idea how all this energy will slip off your shoulders once you get up into the pines and relax. We’ll order a good canvas hammock with a wind shield and padding, and you can draw lots to see which one shall occupy it at stated intervals.”

“I’ve just written to Ruth that it seems best to divide the things into those which can be shipped directly from here to Montalban, and those which we girls will need to have down home, like our shoes, suits, and so on. It isn’t going to cost so much after all, and Nat says they have given a spring social this week, clearing—let’s see,” she referred to the letter beside her, “oh, yes, twelve dollars and fifty cents. And next week Ruth’s going to have a colonial tea at her house, in costume. We give some sort of affair each week to clear up a little money, even if it’s only a candy pull at school at ten cents each. It all counts up. I think two hundred dollars will nearly see us through this year, with what we can earn from Kate, and we want to hand over a clear hundred to her if we’re able.”

“Tents are a big item of expense.”

“I know, but if I do as the boys suggested and buy the second-hand army tents, they won’t be

so much. We'll need three sleeping tents, one shelter tent where we can do our cooking, and a long plank table. Isn't there a handy boy up there to put things together for us, Aunt Milly? Somebody that you know?"

"There's Flickers, if he wouldn't be too shy. Your uncle hires him to keep the oil stoves cleaned and filled. That may seem comical, but it takes time and patience just the same. His real name is Will Jones, but we call him Flickers, he's so uncertain. You make all possible arrangements with him to come and work the following day, and he seems delighted. Then he vanishes for about a week and turns up unexpectedly some day to ask whether we don't want something done."

"Why not hobble him the way they do ponies out West when you don't want him to get away from you?" Polly's dimples showed mischievously. "I think we'll find a way to make him work. I'll put Flickers down as part of the camp equipment, anyway."

The next day they made a final round of the shops, and prepared for the visit to Mr. Phelps in the evening. He lived uptown near Central Park in an old brownstone house somewhat out

of date among its neighbors of the French Renaissance. It was squarely built with little balconies outside the lower story windows, and covered over with ivy.

Friday evening was one of Mr. Phelps's at-home nights, and Polly never forgot the first glimpse she had of him, standing between the two long library windows, talking to a young girl with a spray of peach blossoms tucked in her bodice. He was very tall, with long white curly hair, and the most contented face imaginable. His complexion was as pink as a child's, and his eyes were dark blue. There was something more than mere contentment in his face, and in the expression of the sightless eyes.

"I couldn't just catch it at first," Polly said later, during the drive home to Twelfth Street, "but now I know what it is. It's compassion and understanding of all the world's troubles. Remember, Uncle Thurlow, the old king in 'Pippa Passes,' the one who sat in the sun judging the people?"

Mr. Abbott smiled and nodded his head, his eyes half closed as he looked out at the newly leaved trees of the Avenue. He quoted softly, half under his breath:

“The gods so loved him as he dreamed,
That, having lived this long, it seemed
No need the king should ever die.”

“That’s the one,” cried Polly. “He was a wonderful old king. I think Mr. Phelps would look just like him if he had a wreath of holly or mistletoe in his hair. Maybe I’ll send him some for Christmas. And it doesn’t seem as though he were blind when his eyes are wide open and he looks right at you as if he could see you. He laid his hand on my head to find out how tall I was, and it felt like a benediction.”

During a lull between the coming and going of guests, Mr. Phelps talked with Polly and listened while she eagerly unfolded her plans for the summer.

“I don’t know anyone excepting you and Grandfather who would take an interest in it as we girls have planned it,” she told him earnestly. “I’m sure he will help me because he always does, but we shall need more. I mean Doctor Elliott will. It seems as if we were in partnership with him, now that he is willing to let us help him.”

“Then I must help too,” Mr. Phelps answered cordially. “I don’t know much about it, but I’m

not going to let Admiral Bob Page get ahead of me. How much do you charge per orphan, Miss Polly?"

"They're not orphans at all. They're mothers with sick children."

He laughed down at her like a tall, white haired boy. "To be sure they are. I always leaned to orphans myself. They're very forlorn, orphans, if you've ever noticed. Tell your Doctor to come and visit me soon and tell me more about his clinic. Tell him that I will help him. Perhaps I will even come up to Montalban myself this summer and visit at the Castle, so I shall see you all there. I used to go every year."

Polly remembered what Mrs. Abbott had told her while they were at Glenwood about young Lindsay Phelps, the artist friend of Uncle Thurlow's, who had built the castle and then suddenly gone away. She wished that she might ask about him then and there, why he had gone away in the first place, and why he had never come back. This kingly old gentleman did not look at all stern or quarrelsome.

She was thinking of all this while Mr. Phelps told her of the merry days at college when the Admiral and he had been chums, and suddenly

she caught sight of a portrait hanging above the bookcase close to where they stood. It was the head of a boy. In some way he made her think of Pippino, with his dark curly hair and bright young face, full of boyish eagerness.

"Isn't that a nice face?" she exclaimed softly. "It looks like one in Uncle Thurlow's studio, a boy with a violin. I forget whether the artist was Franz Hals or Leonardo Da Vinci. I don't know about the different schools, yet, you see, but it's just such a boy and such a face."

Mr. Phelps looked up at the picture too, and his fine old face softened with tenderness.

"Thurlow painted that for me some years ago. It is a portrait of my son, Lindsay." It seemed as if his eyes must be able to see the face. "They tell me that it is very like him; though, of course, he is grown to manhood now. Perhaps he will come back this summer. He used to be very fond of Montalban, where you are going."

"Has he gone very far away?" Polly dared to ask gently.

"The last time I heard from him he was in Italy, at Ravenna where Dante spent his exile, but he will surely come back when he has found that for which he is seeking."

She did not ask any more questions. For some reason she could not, not with that old sightless face before her, full of love and faith. But later, after they had reached home and she sat for a while as usual before Mrs. Abbott's open fire, she referred to their talk.

"Do you know what it is that Lindsay Phelps is seeking, Aunt Milly?"

Aunt Milly was combing out her long fair hair and braiding it, seated before the little oval mirror of the dressing table.

"Bless me, Polly, what next?" she answered. "How should I know? In fact I thought that he had disappeared indefinitely. Does his father know where he is?"

"The last time he heard, he was in Ravenna, Italy."

"And you found that much out, you little witch, when he never tells us a thing about Lindsay, not a single thing. I must tell Thurlow, for he loves the boy. It's a mystery, his going away from the city, and never showing up again; two years it is now. And Mr. Phelps is always silent about him when we know he loved him dearly."

"I like his face in the picture," Polly said thoughtfully. "I think I like it better than any

face I ever saw. I mean, of course, a face not in our family," very sedately.

"Pollykins, you're romancing."

"No, I'm not, truly, Aunt Milly. I do hope that he comes back safely some day, after he has found"—she repeated Mr. Phelps's words dreamily—"that which he is seeking."

CHAPTER XI

A CLUE FROM ITALY

“ONLY one more day,” Jack said dolefully, when they assembled for breakfast the following morning. “Won’t you be sorry, Polly, not to hear Takeshi’s welcome signal on the old gong?”

“Indeed, I will. I wish we had a big one for the camp, something for Crullers to hit every morning, like a bass drum, you know. Are you going with us tonight?”

“We are,” Phil answered for him. “We like the marionettes, too. We often go with mother to see them.” He stood behind his mother’s chair holding it back for her, and smiling down from his height of five feet, eleven inches, at the little mother. “Isn’t she a dear roly poly sort of a mother to have, Polly?”

“Don’t pay the slightest attention to him, Polly,” Aunt Milly protested. “He adores the marionettes and comes home spouting Childe Roland by the yard. I don’t know which end

of the story we'll hear tonight, but you know it is rather like the plays they have at the Chinese theatres. They run a narrative play through consecutive nights for a week at a time, all scenes woven about the adventures and exploits of a certain hero. Childe Roland is the favorite, or Orlando, as they call him. He and Charlemagne fight the Saracens, and he wins the love of Blanchefleur, or is her name Blanchemains? I forget which now. It is the quaintest little theatre, up four flights of stairs, and they treat you as if they were giving a performance by royal command."

Polly was fairly a-tiptoe with anticipation when evening came, and they started downtown. Walking across Washington Square to the car, she looked around her, sniffing the air happily.

"Do you know I've grown to love it all; the old Square and the trees and the fountain, even the funny little *bambinos* tumbling around. Just see that wisp of a new moon, Aunt Milly, behind the gold cross on the Memorial Church, and the evening star so close to it. Everything seems to tremble with springtime down here. See that boy resting at the edge of the fountain, the one with the basket of images. Isn't he a

real picture? I didn't know New York had such beautiful quiet old places. I thought it was all new."

They found a little outpost sentry at the lower entrance to the marionette theatre. He was about eight years old, with big black eyes, and a curiously wise little face. Colombo, he said his name was, standing very straight,—Colombo Palesi.

"From Rome?" asked Polly, as she went up the long dim flights of stairs behind him. "Are you and Pippino neighbors?"

"Not from Roma, signorina. From Ravenna," he replied proudly. "I speak very good English. I not speak like my mother and father. I translate for them very good."

From Ravenna, thought Polly. That was the place where Mr. Phelps had said he had last heard from Lindsay.

"Have you been here very long?"

"Four year only. My big brother Beppo, he come last week. He paint all faces on our marionettes very fine. My mother and sister, they dress the figures, and my father, he tell the story."

"What do you do?"

"Tonio and me we work the figures. You

know how? Up overhead we work them with iron rods and wires. It is very hard to do. You have to be strong in the arms and wrists, and quick."

"What good English you speak, Colombo."

"I have to," he said simply. "I go to school, and when I come home I have to teach my mother and father English too."

They came to a long narrow room with a small stage at one end. It had been freshly scrubbed and was still damp, but wild flowers stood in glasses here and there on the window sills, and up on the old square piano in one corner were daffodils and jonquils.

"After it is over, you will come behind the scenes and be introduced to all our actors," Colombo said with a smile, as he bowed and left them to do his part in the performance.

"How seriously they all take it, don't they?" Polly whispered.

"But it is serious," explained Phil. "Night after night the people come up here to listen to old Signor Palesi roar out his great lines, and they are very partial to their favorite heroes. Wait till you hear the applause when Orlando does any stunts, or Blanche fleur is rescued by

Charlemagne. The Palesi are very famous as marionette makers in Italy. They have done this for generations, father and son, and the old man is a dandy chap. Looks like Dumas senior. Here they go.”

Polly watched and listened wide-eyed, as the clumsy, gayly clad figures went back and forth upon the little stage, and Papa Palesi's voice stormed from the wings with the noble rage of Charlemagne or the heroic challenges of Orlando. When Blanche fleur tripped on, stubbing her toes at every step, it was a woman's voice that spoke the lines.

“That is Francesca, his daughter, speaking now,” Phil told her under his breath. “Like it, Polly?”

Polly nodded her head in silence. Of course she liked it, but through it all, while Saladin stormed the holy city, and Charlemagne challenged him to mortal combat, she thought of Lindsay Phelps. It did seem strange that he should have gone to Ravenna, and now, here these people were from the same town. She made up her mind that she would ask the newcomer, Beppo, who painted the faces, whether he had met a brother artist back in the little hill

town where exiled Dante lived, looking from its castled steep towards Florence.

After the curtain fell, they went upon the stage and were introduced to the entire family. After she had been taken over to Blanche fleur and asked to admire her exquisite bridal costume, Polly at last found a chance to ask Beppo where he had painted the new head for the figure.

"I bring this one with me but this time from the old country," he told her happily, patting the figure's head. "All winter I have worked there on new heads. I do the men by myself, but not the women faces, for they must be very fine and beautiful. This is painted by a friend of mine in Ravenna."

"Mr. Phelps?" The name fairly sprang from her lips in her eagerness, but he smiled and shook his head.

"Not Mr. Phelps himself. A boy he show how before he go away from Ravenna, boy named Luigi."

"But do you know where Mr. Phelps himself has gone?"

"To Rome in February." Beppo shrugged his shoulders. "After that I know not. In April he was to return as soon as Donna Cos-

tanza return. Then he had to come, that I know. It is business, very important."

"Is she young?" asked Polly. It seemed such a pretty name, Donna Costanza. How Isabel would have at once begun to weave a romance!

"Oh, no! Old, old and wrinkled like a winter apple in May," laughed Beppo. "He wished to paint her picture, so he said; but also, he have business with her. Surely he must come back."

And that was all, for just then Signor Palesi came and wished to show Polly how the rods worked above the stage, how they made the marionettes walk and raise their arms and turn their heads.

It did seem too bad to catch a clue and lose it all in a minute, just as if Lindsay had put his head up above the horizon and wigwagged at her, then dropped back again to the other side of the world,—to Ravenna and Donna Costanza. It was all she could learn from Beppo, though. Luigi would know more of the American artist who painted faces so well, but he did not. Still, she thought hopefully, it was something, and it had dropped at her feet right out of a clear sky.

That night she wrote a letter to Mr. Phelps. It was an eager, "busy" letter, as Sue would have

said, telling him what she had found out, and almost urging him to find out more for himself. Was it not a great deal to know that his boy would be at Ravenna in April? But after she had sealed and sent the letter, Polly pondered all by herself on who Donna Costanza could be, and why on earth Lindsay Phelps should want to trail away over to Italy to find her.

CHAPTER XII

THE LAST CALVERT POW-WOW

THE answer came to her after she had returned to Glenwood. Mrs. Abbott had sent her home on the midnight limited train in charge of her own maid, a rosy cheeked Swiss girl named Teenie Marie. It was really Christine Marie, but Aunt Milly always called her Teenie Marie, which suited her much better.

“I’m sure I don’t need a guardian when I travel,” Polly had declared pleadingly, but all to no purpose. It was to please Aunt Evelyn and the Admiral, Aunt Milly told her soothingly, so Teenie Marie went along, and was sent back safely as soon as she had personally conducted Polly to the Admiral’s convoy.

The first day at home was so full of greetings,—as Lucy May put it, “comings and goings and doings,”—that Polly felt as if she had been away a month. The girls were eager to hear from her own lips what luck she had had in hunting the

summer camp outfits and all about Kate's kiddies.

The second day after her arrival brought the letter from Mr. Phelps. Polly picked it out eagerly from the mail at the breakfast table, and gave a cry of delight that made Aunt Evelyn glance up inquiringly.

"Oh, it's from him," Polly said, quite as if they knew all that she had been doing. "See," she cried, holding up the envelope, with its curious handwriting, clear, but with the characters standing upright like musical notes or Arabic figures. "I do hope he is pleased."

"So do we, so do we," the Admiral agreed heartily. "Is it from any craft flying our flag, Polly?"

"From Jack or Phil, I suppose." Aunt Evelyn spoke tranquilly. "Nice boys."

"But it isn't," protested Polly, opening the letter. "It's from Mr. Phelps. The old dear, to write back to me so soon. Do you mind very much, Aunt Evelyn and Grandfather dear, if I read it to myself first? It's something very special and a secret too, but I'll tell you all about it later."

"Well, upon my soul, I like that," the Admiral

exclaimed boyishly. "A secret, and she saw him just once. Polly, sometimes you surprise even me,—sometimes. Fire ahead, though, and signal me when you're ready. I'm going out on the porch."

It was a close, humid morning with a light mist rising from the warm earth. Tan lay stretched out near the willow armchair in the corner facing the Bay, lazy and sleepy, and Polly had to step over him in order to perch herself on the Admiral's arm-chair. When she was there, she always felt perfectly safe in springing anything new. It was really having him at a disadvantage, for she could hug him, and run her fingers through his thick curly iron-gray hair, and not give him a ghost of a chance to escape. First of all, she told him about Beppo, and what she had found out about Lindsay up at the marionette theatre.

The letter was very characteristic of Mr. Phelps. First he told of how, on Saturday night, he had called up Doctor Elliott, and had invited him up to dinner the following day,—him and Kate.

"And now, you see, I'm launched, and nothing can stop me from going into partnership with

the orphans, or was it half orphans? At all events, I like your big Doctor, and I think he's on the right track.

“So, dear child, you have sent out an arrow of longing after my lost boy. It is very sweet of you to take the interest or even to try to guess at the heartache he has left behind him. And it is because you have done this that I am going to tell you more about him, then you will understand why it is I feel so sure of his return.

“Probably you do not know that Lindsay is not my own son. So far as the birthright goes, he is not, but Mrs. Phelps and I never felt any difference. Not having been blessed with any little ones of our own, we decided to adopt one. And this was Lindsay. He was a little foundling, brought to the Foundlings' Home in New York City by an Italian nurse. We were shown the records such as they were. He was of American parentage, born in Ravenna, Italy. His father and mother were both dead, and the nurse did not feel that she could care for the baby herself, so she brought him to the Sisters. It all seemed satisfactory, and he was a splendid laddie, so we took him for our own. Mrs.

Phelps died when he was five years old, and I was left to bring the little lad up by myself.

“That is all I know, personally. It satisfied me; but when Lindsay came of age, and I told him the truth, he was all broken up. I did not think the boy would take it so to heart. He wished to go abroad and look up the old birth records, and try to find some trace of the old nurse or her family. The name was Costanza Neri, I remember.”

“There,” exclaimed Polly triumphantly, “and that’s her name, Costanza Neri.”

“God bless my heart and soul, Polly,” said the Admiral, vigorously blowing his nose, “I don’t see where you get your nose for news. Not from my side of the family. Milly is the only one inclined that way. What are you going to do about it now that you have found him? That’s what I’d like to know.”

“I can’t tell exactly,” Polly said confidentially. “You see, he isn’t found for certain yet, but I do think after all these years of care and love that he should think about poor old blind Mr. Phelps left alone there in New York. What’s money after all? It’s not fair to forget all he has done for him. I’d love to tell him so, but

one has to be fearfully tactful when one is trying to manage anything."

"I don't doubt it one bit," agreed the Admiral, "not a bit. Go ahead full speed, matey."

"I think I might send just a nice letter to him at Ravenna, a sort of reminder, don't you know, that he is expected back."

"Better mind your p's and q's and keep to your own course."

"What would you think, Grandfather Admiral, of a captain who kept to his own course after he had picked up a C.Q.D. call? Isn't that better than minding your p's and q's? Mind your C.Q.D.'s. Supposing that I had found out from Beppo, and never said one word to Mr. Phelps? Why, it was just thrown at me, and I had to tell. Is Lindsay really nice?" She eyed her grandfather speculatively, as if wondering whether, after all, the young man could be worth the trouble, and the Admiral laughed.

"I'm sure I don't know. I haven't seen the lad in years. But if you and Milly have made up your minds that he is to come back and live the way Stant wants him to, you'll succeed. Don't try to draw me into it, though. It's your own doings, as Welcome used to say."

“But I think it is the right thing to do,” Polly declared, hopefully. “I think we’re terribly responsible for other people’s happiness. It seems as if God is putting things in front of us all the time, just to find out whether or not we’ll do them for Him. And when we don’t do them, why, it sort of breaks the chain, don’t you know? I think I’ll write the letter.”

So, in the midst of the spring rush over coming examinations and preparations for the summer camping, she did find time to send off a letter over seas to the little mediæval hill town, where Casa Neri stood in its own small olive grove above the village. And once it had gone, Polly promptly forgot about it in the fun of the closing days at Calvert.

The girls of the Senior Class had planned their own festivities, a farewell midnight feast the Saturday before Commencement week, a June walk in costume, and a luncheon to the faculty, with Miss Honoria Calvert in state at the head of the table, and their beloved Fräulein at the foot.

The luncheon was a great success. Polly proposed a toast to Fräulein Ottima Wieboldt. “The ever blessed Timmie,” she began, “who has

guided our wayward and wandering footsteps through all the hidden and devious paths of knowledge with much wailing and gnashing of teeth—”

“Whose teeth, Polly?” asked Crullers, innocently.

“Our teeth, goose. To continue: And without whose never-failing sympathy and encouragement we never could have reached our present summit of endeavor and accomplishment—”

“Beware of the summit, Polly,” quoth Ted under her breath, as she sat next the speaker. “Pride goeth before a fall.”

“To her, the most patient, the most understanding, the most gentle of teachers, blessed Timmie!”

And Fräulein wept, and had to take off her spectacles and let Polly shine them up for her before she could respond to the toast.

Then Isabel gave the toast to Miss Calvert, though the girls were sure that she would not stick to the path of pure rhetoric. But Lady Vanitas did, stuck to it clear from base to summit, and set a flag on the topmost crest, so to speak. Miss Calvert’s clear-cut, pale face fairly blushed with pleasure over Isabel’s delicate com-



POLLY PRESIDED AT THE HISTORIC CHAFING DISH

pliments and glowing encomiums. Altogether, it was the close of a memorable week.

To the girls who composed the Outing Club, the happiest time of all was the meeting held in Peggie Murray's room. Polly presided at the historic chafing dish, and all the original Hungry Six members were present, excepting Kate alone. Of course the later members—Natalie and Peggie, Vera and Betty, Hallie and Marjorie—were permitted to be present, but only as admiring spectators, and participants in the feast. It was the five "originals" who delivered the orations, and who prepared the feast, and they surely did reign for the night. There were Sue and Ted, Isabel, Ruth, and Polly. And such an exchange of reminiscences! Crullers begged to be admitted, but as she had not been a "really truly" member, the girls said she could not share in the higher rites.

"After I've done everything for you for years," Crullers cried passionately; "after I've suffered again and again—"

"When didst suffer, maiden?" sternly demanded Ted.

"Falling from the back wall the night you sent me after pickled limes and pralines! I skinned

my knee awfully, and nearly broke my neck too."

"Still thou art but Hebe," Ted insisted mildly. "Thou wast permitted to carry the cup and the basket too."

"Don't scrap this last night, girls," pleaded Isabel wistfully. "It seems so sad that this moment can never, never come again." She waved a spoon above the chafing dish while Polly made the pimento sandwiches. "Who knows what the future holds in store for us—"

"I can prophesy what it holds in store for you if you let that crab meat *à la* Newburg burn or curdle," Ted interrupted. "Here, Macbeth, 'Give me the daggers!'"

She took the fork and spoon away and brandished them at an imaginary Duncan. "Now go on, Isabel. Moan some more at us, all about fate and battle, murder and sudden death. When shall we six meet again! Go on, while I stir the fatal brew."

"Ted, you haven't one bit of sentiment in you," Isabel declared. "Don't you feel any thrill of impending separation?"

"Impending fiddlesticks! I have a firm belief that we shall keep on meeting each other every now and then all through life. You can't help

it with people that you like. There's a sort of invisible magnetism—"

"Did you ever see any visible magnetism?" asked Sue scathingly. "Ted, you're out of your depths. Ladle out the crab meat and let others wear the crown. I'm all hollow."

"Sue's an aching void," Polly laughed, handing over a sandwich to the suffering one. "Let's pledge ourselves, girls, to at least one reunion each year. I don't see why we couldn't do that. Grandfather goes up to meet a lot of his schoolmates at Annapolis every year for a royal old time. Let's resolve to do it right now. Choose a date—"

"Better make it a movable feast," said Ted practically. "Then we can write around beforehand, and see if everyone can attend. Suppose it should happen to be somebody's wedding day and she couldn't come? Let's make it provisionally the tenth of June."

"Is that a regular motion, Madam President?" Sue asked anxiously. "Because I didn't bring along my book of minutes."

"No, it's not, because we're not in regular session. We are not in unity assembled together. This is a love feast—"

"A pow-wow," suggested Peggie shyly, as she sat cross-legged on the big Indian rug before Polly's chair.

"Pow-wow it is, small daughter of Wyoming. Suppose we say that we will hold our annual pow-wow henceforth on or about the tenth of June at Glenwood."

Everyone promised faithfully to attend, and Isabel declared that now she felt much better, and as though they had lent a helping hand to fate.

Commencement Day came and went, and Polly marveled at the small ripple it made. Four years ago, at her first Commencement when she had felt herself launched as a sort of baby Freshman, it had seemed far more exciting. Calvert, of course, was not like a real college. It was a preparatory school where you could take your choice. You could either be finished off after grammar school, or you could be prepared for real college. It was convenient in many ways, Ted said, and satisfactory from all aspects.

Polly felt that she was being prepared for something, but it would not be college. It had been settled that Aunt Evelyn and the Admiral

should travel—go on what he termed his last cruise—and Polly was to go with them. She had been given her choice of remaining with Aunt Milly in New York or of going, and had chosen to share the fortunes of the rest of the crew, as she put it.

“Then we’ll go by sea as much as we can, matey,” the Admiral had decided. “It takes longer and you have a better time. We’ll round the two capes and visit the islands and certain ports of call I have in mind. It will keep us happy and busy for a year or so, until you’ve put on long dresses and have to get out of your middy suit for regulation togs, see? If I don’t steer you straight, the girls would have you pinning on your bridal veil before you’d seen the world at all.”

“Bridal veils are so far off, Grandfather,” Polly answered happily, both arms around his neck and her cheek close against his, “that I don’t care one bit about them.”

“Maybe so, but I’m not taking any chances. Every Glenwood bride for the last three generations has gone down those steps in her ’teens.” The Admiral’s eyes filled though his lips were firm. It was not a pleasant prospect to think of

the coming day, even four or five years off, when the last little bride would step from under the tall white portico, wave good-bye to Glenwood, and leave Tan and himself sitting on the old porch alone.

CHAPTER XIII

CASA NERI RESPONDS

“WHAT’S a slicker, Polly?” asked Natalie, going over her personal outfit the day before the exodus. “You have down on the list three pair of boots—soft low ties, rubber soled sneakers, and high leather scout boots—bloomers, middies, underwear of cotton crepe to be washed in any handy wayside brook, bathing suit, and slicker or poncho.”

“They’re about the same thing, I think,” Polly answered, down on her knees at her own camp kit. “I know it’s something you put around you, and it’s waterproof. I’ve ordered one apiece. I do love these skirts of Russian crash, don’t you, girls? And wait until you see our folding tent shelves that you can stack everything on.”

“It’s a wonder Polly hasn’t suggested folding us up out of the way too,” Vera said with a sigh. “We’ve got folding stools, folding shelves, and folding table. Betty’s even made some folding book racks.”

"I'm going to start a camp library and you'll all enjoy it too," said Betty placidly. "We each take along two books that none of the rest have read, and they go a long way."

"Did anyone think of jack knives?" asked Margery suddenly. "We'll need them up there in the woods."

"Child, did you think we would lead you into the forest primæval without jack knives?" replied Polly blithely. "Listen to this, all packed and shipped to Montalban for us." She read the list in triumph: "Jack knives, pocket compasses, rubber drinking cups, waterproof matchboxes, bag of wire nails, two axes, four lanterns, medicine case, screw top bottles, surgeon's plaster, needles, pins, thread, rope, twine.' There. Phil and Jack helped me make it out and said that we'd need every last thing on it, and maybe more too. How much money have we spent altogether, Sue?"

"One hundred, seventeen dollars, and fifty-five cents," came back from the retiring treasurer promptly. "And that includes one second-hand army cook tent, \$8.50, and three second-hand army wall tents, \$15 each. I think we've done splendidly so far."

"We've each furnished our own camp kit, remember," Natalie put in. "The tents are always the biggest item."

"These are plenty large enough for us, girls," said Polly. "There will be room for two cots in each, wash stand, table, and odds and ends. And we can sell them at the end of the camping out, if we want to, so I thought they'd be a good investment."

"What do you get for third-hand tents?" asked Crullers seriously.

"Tut, tut, child," Polly laughed, patting her head. "Don't ask foolish questions at the last minute. And girls, another thing, I ordered enough provisions sent up for two weeks. By the end of the first week we'll know just what we need, and what can be bought on the spot from the farmers."

"And we start Wednesday morning!" Marjorie fairly glowed as she said it. "Wish we had an airship."

"Some people are never satisfied. You'll go by way of Old Point Comfort, young lady. We get the steamer there for New York, then change and go up the Hudson to Albany, and on by rail to Montalban. Aunt Evelyn's going as far as

New York with us to see that we don't get lost on the way. Then she will visit Aunt Milly and we will meet Kate and the Doctor, and go up with them. Kate says they've got a splendid old farmhouse, all run down, and unpainted."

"I know what you forgot, Polly," Crullers said. "A camp chaperon."

"I've heard about the fatal gift of beauty, Jane Daphne Adams," Ted exclaimed, "but you take the cake for the fatal gift of always remembering the most uncomfortable facts of life. Who wants a camp chaperon? You'll all be models of good behaviour without Sue and me this year."

"Now, listen," Polly said happily. "I've wanted it to be a surprise. We're going to have a camp chaperon, and she's a dear, too, just as nice as Miss Penelope was last year. It's Aunt Milly, girls. She says that Takeshi and Uncle Thurlow will be perfectly contented all by themselves at the Castle, for Uncle's going to have a summer class there of budding geniuses."

"Genii," murmured Vera.

"These are just plain geniuses, Nipper," Polly returned serenely. "And they'll want every single corner in the Castle to paint in and live in,

so Aunt Milly's awfully glad to escape and get into a middy blouse and skirt like the rest of us. Isn't it a dandy idea?"

It certainly was, the girls all agreed. The camp chaperon had been a sort of *bete noir* that they had avoided even in conversation. She was necessary of course, but where could she be found, the perfect camp comrade and chum who would likewise know just what to do if anything happened?

"Stop chortling over it," Ted said at last. "You're all chortling like a lot of penguins."

"Penguins don't chortle, Ted," Crullers began dubiously. "What is it that chortles? And what does it really mean?"

"Means that you volubly and gleefully express your delight and satisfaction over something," said Isabel. "Still it is an obsolete word."

"Tush, child," Ted replied gently. "I often chortle. And even if I am not to be in the camp with you, my spirit will chortle at rosy dawn and dewy eve over your luck in having Mrs. Abbott for a chaperon. So, Lady Vanitas."

On Tuesday Ted and Sue left for the former's home at Lake Winona. As Ted said, if you had to go through something unpleasant, the sooner

it was over the better, and she declined to mope around Queen's Ferry until the last gun was fired after the departing campers.

Polly, with Peggie and Ruth, went down to the station to see the two off. It was early in the morning, and the rest of the girls were "slumbering still," like Kathleen of old, Sue said.

"You dear old starter of things," Ted put her arms around Polly for a farewell hug. "Please miss us all the time this summer. I feel as if I was being banished into exile. Here we part on the frontier."

"It's no use trying not to. I know that I'm going to weep just like Crullers the minute the train moves out. Peggie, stand by." Polly tried to smile, but it did seem like the first step in the general breaking up of school ties to see Ted slip out of the life at Queen's Ferry. She had been part of all the fun at Calvert Hall for four years, and one of the moving spirits of the Vacation Club. Warm-hearted, impulsive Ted; she was the first one to plunge into any partisan quarrel and the first to see the right way out and to patch it up.

There were real tears in Polly's eyes, and in Peggie's too, when they turned back up the hill

road after the train pulled out of sight around the curve of the shore line. By the time Glenwood was reached, though, there was too much work waiting for them both to allow of time being spent in mourning.

"We've got all we can attend to without weeping over the departed ones," Polly said.

"Oh, Polly, please don't call them that," pleaded Isabel. "It's such a bad sign."

"I don't believe in any signs excepting four-leaved clovers and new moons," Polly said comfortably.

Aunt Evelyn had insisted on bringing all the girls down to Glenwood after Commencement Day had closed the Hall, so there were Peggie, Hallie, Vera, Margery, Betty and Crullers, all happy guests, waiting expectantly for the hour of departure to Old Point Comfort. Crullers's mother had relented, and she was to go with the party after all. Isabel was the only girl in the Camping Club, besides Polly herself, who was a resident of Queen's Ferry.

"Finish all your packing and preparations tonight, girls," Aunt Evelyn told them, after dinner was over. "There won't be time in the morning before we leave."

Accordingly, every detail was attended to that night, each suitcase was packed with care, and every article was petted and patted as it was laid in place. The girls laughed at Crullers, who was fondling her new scout boots; yet each one of them had felt the same thrill every time they had looked over the camp outfits. Over and over again, each had secretly gone to Polly's to try them on, and imagine herself up in the mountains, sniffing pines. The outfits represented such splendid times to come.

A little past ten Polly came softly downstairs, holding her blue Chinese kimono around her, and hunting for the Admiral. The others had all gone to bed, even Aunt Evelyn, but there was a light under the study door and she tapped lightly.

"Come in," called the Admiral drowsily. He was sitting by the south window where the rose vines and honeysuckle clambered, having his good-night smoke with Tan on guard as usual. "Hello there, matey," he said cheerily. "Got your crew all below?"

"All above, you mean," Polly chuckled, setting her candle down on the table. The Admiral had clung to candles, and Polly dearly loved their soft mellow light. Ted always said that

Polly was predestined to old-maidship because she delighted in candles, cats, and open fireplaces.

“Just give Polly a purring cat, a singing tea kettle, and a crackling fire, and she’ll never marry in this world,” she used to say, all of which Polly indignantly refuted. Of course she liked all three, but only as a sort of environment or setting where she might rest and plan all sorts of campaigns.

“Every general likes his camp fire,” she would say. “Napoleon was always having his picture painted in front of one.”

Tonight she drew a handy footstool over near the Admiral’s chair, and seated herself.

“I only came down to say good-bye to you all by myself, you dear Grandfather. Are you going to miss me fearfully? Well, listen, then. I want you to do something for me; there’s nobody else who can do it, understand, so I know you will, won’t you?”

“No fair promising before I know what you’re after,” warned the Admiral.

Polly laughed. “I haven’t said one word about it to anybody. Remember the letter that I wrote last April to Ravenna?”

“Bless my heart, I’d forgotten all about it.”

“So had I,” she said placidly, “but it’s come back to roost, and as a blessing too. He got it all right,—Lindsay Phelps, I mean. I have had a letter from him at last. He has been very ill at the Casa Neri and his old nurse has been taking care of him. I really think getting my letter has made him homesick. See, dear, here is his answer.”

“Read it, child, read it. I haven’t my glasses.”

So Polly softly read the letter from far Ravenna.

“*My dear Miss Polly:*

“It was ever so kind of you to take so much trouble over a stranger. I did not think that anyone cared to know what special spot of earth I happened to be on, so I have not written to any friends or to my father.

“‘And so the old Castle is to be occupied. I am glad that Mr. Abbott cares enough about it to live there, and that you are planning to be near this summer. You will enjoy the life up there. I often wish I were back again.’”

“That’s hopeful, isn’t it?” interpolated Polly.

“‘All that I came over here to accomplish has

been finished, and I hope to sail for New York by the end of June. I have not yet written to Mr. Phelps and would rather you did not tell him to expect me. Let it be a surprise. I wish we might all meet at Montalban. Don't you think you could manage to coax father up there with the Abbots? I really think you might, for you are responsible for my even wishing to come back home at all. Your letter was an inspiration.

“Trusting that we may all meet at the Castle, I am,

“Yours gratefully
“LINDSAY PHELPS.””

“Now, sir, what do you think of your granddaughter as a diplomat?”

The Admiral leaned back his head and chuckled. “I'll leave it to Stanton. But I'm mighty glad the boy's coming home. I suppose, now, you want me to beguile Stant up to Montalban?”

Polly leaned back on the stool, her hands clasping her knees, and eyed him admiringly.

“You dear! It's wonderful of you to guess it before I had said one word. I'm hoping that just as soon as we're gone—it will be pretty lonely here for you anyway—”

“First rest that I've had in a year,” he sighed.

"Tan and I were going to keep bachelor's hall, but I suppose it's a case of heave anchor and away. Let's get these sailing orders right now. I'm to go to New York, see Stant, and get him up to Montalban. Where do you propose putting us after we get there?"

"With Uncle Thurlow and Takeshi at the Castle. And then Lindsay will come from abroad and we'll manage the reunion, see?"

"What if they don't want to reunite, eh?" asked the Admiral shrewdly.

"Oh, I think they will. They need each other fearfully. Anyone with half an eye can see that. So it's our duty, just plain duty, to bring them together. Of course I can understand how Lindsay would want to hunt up who he really is. Everyone is anxious to be sure he is who he thinks he is. That sounds mixed, but you know what I mean. Still, Lindsay should have remembered the poor old blind king sitting alone in the sun. That's all for tonight." She leaned over him lovingly, her cheek pressed to his, her long brown hair mingling with his short iron gray curls. "Isn't it lovely to understand each other perfectly and always be ready to stand by in case of trouble. You do stand

by so nobly, Grandfather Admiral dear.”

“Tush, child, tush,” laughed the Admiral. “To bed with you. It’s hoist sails and away at daybreak.”

“But you will come, won’t you?”

“I’ll do my best,” he promised, and Polly went upstairs satisfied, for the Admiral’s best was sure to turn out right.

CHAPTER XIV

SEEING NEW YORK

“THIS makes me think of the year we all went up to Lost Island on the ‘Hippocampus,’ girls, remember?” said Isabel, lifting her face to the sea breeze as the steamer headed up the coast from Old Point Comfort, bound for New York.

It was a gay little group that stood up forward on the hurricane deck, Mrs. Langdon in its center. It was the first time she had borne the honors of club chaperon.

“And doesn’t she look beautiful?” Vera said in an undertone to Betty. “Margery said last night she thought she was just like a dowager queen.”

“Whoever heard of a dowager queen?” scoffed Betty. “You say the Queen Mother. Still she is awfully stately, and handsome, and all that. Wonder how she’d look out in the woods? That’s the test, Nipper. Imagine her in khaki.”

“If she went to the woods, she would need pa-

vilions and accoutrements like the ancient Saxon queens did. Velvet and fine linen too. It's all I'd ever wear if I had ashen gold hair and such a profile."

"You'll keep to khaki," Betty comforted her as a sister should. "Still I'm glad it's Mrs. Abbott that's going with us girls to camp. We don't know what may lie ahead of us and we want somebody who is kind of rugged, don't you know?"

During the sea trip the girls were very proud of their chaperon, however, and on their best behaviour, although Crullers did say once that the reason she was so good was because Ted and Sue were not there to stimulate her to action.

"I feel so sweet tempered and good, girls," she sighed plaintively. "It almost frightens me."

"Never mind worrying over it, honey," Hallie soothed her. "It will all pass away once we get to the pineland. Just wait till you're put on kitchen duty. If there's anything can beat doing up a lot of dishes after a fish dinner, I want to see it."

"Polly's taking a lot of paper pulp dishes, so we won't have to do so much dish washing," Isa-

bel said tranquilly. "It was my suggestion."

"Precious Lady Vanitas! Farseeing Isabel!" chanted Hallie and Natalie together until Polly bore down upon them.

Two double state-rooms had been taken, holding four girls each, and Mrs. Langdon shared a single one with Polly across the cabin. Polly had told the stewardess where they were bound and all about their plans, so that she hovered over them protectingly all the way up the coast.

It was dawn when they passed the Jersey fishing banks. The girls were up and on deck, all excepting Crullers, watching the fishing fleet of gray-sailed boats slip by in the morning mist. Some seemed sure of being run down by the steamer, but they held to their course and she waited for them to pass, and they scudded along almost under her figurehead.

"I've always wanted to enter New York harbor early in the morning," Polly said eagerly, leaning on the forward rail and watching the shore line shape itself out of the pearl and gold of the morning haze. "Aunt Faith used to have a copy of 'Paradise Lost' with Doré's illustrations, and this makes me think of some of them. The wideness and immensity of it all, as if there were

no shores. Oh, we're slipping up to the Narrows now, aren't we, Aunt Evelyn?"

"Just ahead of you, Polly. There are two forts and to the left is Staten Island." Mrs. Langdon put her arm around Polly's waist, and pointed out the forts ahead, their guns nosing up out of the embankments.

"Wish I could see Kill von Kull," Crullers said anxiously. "I've always wanted to see that and Spuyten Duyvil. Polly, where's Kill von Kull?"

"Somewhere behind Staten Island," Polly replied. She stood up, her hands deep in the pockets of her gray sport coat. Its collar was turned up for there was a tang of coolness in the air. They were coming in through the Narrows now, with all the splendid panorama of the lower Bay opening up before them. On the left lay Staten Island, its billowy hills green as the sea, its north shore bristling with shipping.

Now and then they passed a foreign ship swinging at anchor with some motor boats around it or huge lighters taking off freight. On the right was Gravesend Bay, then came Brooklyn with Bay Ridge, a strip of green treetops along the high driveway, and finally Governor's

Island, a dot of emerald green that seemed to drop right under their bows out of the mist.

“And there she is at last, bless her,” cried Betty, rapturously. “‘Though I should live a thousand years, I never can forget it!’”

“Now what is it, little spouting sister?” Nipper wound a loving arm around the younger member of the Morris family. Betty pointed at the Goddess of Liberty, a glorious sunlit figure looming up at their left.

“She is a stately lady, isn’t she?” Polly said, her eyes wide with interest. “Maybe some time, ages and ages from now, another race will find her toppled over in the Bay and haul her out, then set her up as we did Diana of the Ephesians, and say that we used to worship her. Wouldn’t that be funny, Aunt Evelyn?”

“The group that I like best of all,” Peggie put in, flushing a little as she always did when she had mustered up courage to put forth an opinion of her own, “is that of Electra and Orestes, because she is just as tall and as strong as he is, with her arm around his shoulders. They are equal—brother and sister. This statue makes me think of her. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if all the race were like that?”

“So we should be,” Natalie answered quickly, “if all the girls of all the ages had been born out in the open like you, Peggie, and brought up in the mountains. We’re petted and toasted and coddled too much.”

“Natalie, stop just a minute, and do look at the city lifting out of the mist,” exclaimed Polly breathlessly, turning her head towards them. “It looks like a city in the clouds.”

Gradually it took form and shape as they neared it, that vague, pearly outline in the sky. First it had seemed to hang before them on the clouds like a mirage. Then slowly, the mist seemed to slip back as they steamed towards it, the boat turning up the North River towards its slip, and the girls could trace familiar objects, the long curve of the Brooklyn Bridge with its newer sister bridges beyond, old Castle Garden, such a queer little antique touch on the green of Battery Park, and far uptown one tall white tower so fair and majestic that it seemed, as Natalie said, like the cap of Fujiyama, the snow crested mountain of Japan, which she could remember having seen long ago.

“Now, girls, listen one moment,” Mrs. Langdon said when they were nearly in. “Your boat

leaves for Albany at five, I think. It is nearly nine now. That gives you quite a good day in New York. Mrs. Abbott has very kindly offered to entertain us all, but don't try to do too much."

"We won't, Auntie," Polly promised, mentally figuring just how much they could cover in the time.

But after they had located Aunt Milly on the long pier, and had been whisked home with her, they found everything already planned and settled. Uncle Thurlow had a car and Mr. Phelps had urged the use of his own large limousine for the girls' outing. So Aunt Milly took Polly, Peggie, Crullers, Betty, Hallie and Natalie under her wing in the limousine, with Maxon, Mr. Phelps's chauffeur, to look after them; and Mr. Abbott ran his own car with Mrs. Langdon, Isabel, Vera, and Margery as his charges.

"Such a brood," Aunt Milly said merrily, as they started down Twelfth Street and turned up Fifth Avenue. "First of all, I want you to see the Park in the early morning. We think it is so beautiful then, although nearly all other New Yorkers go to it in the late afternoon. It's straight up Fifth Avenue now, and Polly can be

our megaphone man and point out all the spots of interest."

"Shall we go down on the East Side where the baby clinic is?" asked Betty anxiously. "Polly's talked of nothing in New York excepting the baby clinic, Takeshi, and Mr. Abbott's studio. I don't wonder at her remembering Takeshi. Isn't he the cutest little bronze man ever, Mrs. Abbott?"

"He'd commit *hari kari* right on the spot if he heard you call him anything so undignified," Aunt Milly answered teasingly. "Don't you know, Betty, that Takeshi carries the weight of the world on his shoulders?"

"You know, it's the queerest thing," Hallie broke in suddenly, "most of these big beautiful houses you see are boarded up."

"Closed for the summer," Mrs. Abbott told her.

"What a waste of material! Why don't they hand them over to somebody like Doctor Elliott and do some good with them. Here one part of the city is boarded up and empty and Polly says the other part is all overcrowded. Why don't they even things up?"

"They don't think about it, Hallie," Mrs. Ab-

bott said gravely. "I don't know but what you may be right, but how would you like to have everyone running over your house?"

"Oh, look at the Park, girls!" Peggie exclaimed as they turned into the beautiful shaded Mall. "How I'd love to ride through here on horseback."

"Wish we were going to camp right over there on those rocks," Crullers sighed. "It's all so nice and handy."

"We're going to have luncheon at historic Claremont," Mrs. Abbott said. "You'll like the trip through the Park and over to Riverside Drive and on up to Claremont. I do want you to have at least one hour in the Metropolitan Museum, though."

The morning seemed to fly by. Peggie begged to be left at the Museum and called for on their way back from Claremont.

"I don't care a bit about not eating, Mrs. Abbott," she pleaded, "if I can only stay here longer." But the girls carried her off just the same, and when she was seated in the old dining-room overlooking the splendid sweep of the Hudson, she agreed it was better to "see all."

The afternoon was taken up with an hour in

the Museum of Natural History,—all the time they could spare—and the run back to the little house on West Twelfth Street.

“We don’t want to try taking you all through the crowded West Side streets in a car,” Mrs. Abbott said, “and besides you must rest a little before going to the boat.”

When they reached the house, another surprise awaited them. Tea was served in the studio, and who should be pouring it but Faith Page, Polly’s youngest aunt. In some way, it seemed to Polly as if Aunt Faith never grew any older. It was as if the kind years shut their eyes and let her pass on untouched. She was tall and slender, with beautiful wavy hair and wistful gray eyes. Aunt Milly was plump and lovable like the Admiral, and Aunt Evelyn had always been the beauty of the family as well as the eldest of the sisters, both rather hard facts to live up to; but Aunt Faith was like one of the daughters of the Moon, Polly said, that Dante and Virgil watched as they strolled about in the shadowy silver twilight.

Honorable Lady Faith, as he persisted in calling her, was the only member of the family excepting Mr. Abbott himself, to whom Takeshi

succumbed. Even Polly had failed to subjugate the little Jap, but he hovered over the gracious lady at the tea table with a smile of perfect happiness.

"Oh, Aunt Milly," Polly said softly from where she sat curled up on a big couch by the open window. "Takeshi is just like the big plump Buddha in the new art gallery at the Museum. He has the widest happiest smile, hasn't he, girls? Just look at him beam on Aunt Faith when he comes back now."

The bell downstairs gave its faint mellow ring, and presently Takeshi returned, bowing in Mr. Phelps and Uncle Thurlow.

"Never say that I can't spring a surprise myself, Polly," the latter said. "Behold a guest for your tea, young lady."

"Only for a few minutes," protested Mr. Phelps. "We came to take you down to the Albany boat at five, and it is now after four."

Deftly Polly managed to detach him from the tea table group for a few minutes and have him all to herself over in a corner.

"I did want a chance to thank you for helping Doctor Elliott so splendidly," she said

eagerly. "We never thought that you would care so much."

"It isn't a case of caring so much," he protested smilingly. "But if you girls could give a hundred from your little hard-earned nest egg, I should have been a nice friend to the cause if I couldn't give in proportion!"

"Still, it was splendid. And we're all hoping that you will come up to the Castle, and then, perhaps, run over to our camp this summer. Won't you, please?"

He shook his head doubtfully, while Polly almost held her breath, thinking of the Casa Neri and her letter from there.

"Hardly that, Lady Polly. I'm rather a quiet old chap, you know, and it's quite a trip."

Polly's eyes sparkled. She wanted so much to put her arms around him just as if he had been the Admiral, and tell him all about her surprise, but that would have spoiled everything.

"Perhaps you will come, though. Have you heard anything more from—" she hesitated.

"From Lindsay?" he spoke cheerfully. "Yes, one letter more. It was a good, manly sort of letter, quite like the boy himself, but it told me nothing new."

"The cars are waiting, girls," called Aunt Milly, coming from the front windows. "Let's say good-bye."

"And drink a stirrup cup," added Uncle Thurlow, towering above the circle around Faith, with one tea cup raised in mid-air. "Here's to the next meeting of the clan and their friends at the Castle."

Polly was busy saying good-bye to the two aunts, and each one filled her head with characteristic injunctions.

"Do be careful, Polly, of snakes and mosquitoes," Mrs. Langdon begged. "Have you netting flaps to protect the sleeping tents? And you might remember to wear a hat now and then, so as not to have too many freckles. And look out for the drinking supply, Polly. That is most important, and don't get acquainted with all the natives."

"Dear heart," whispered Aunt Faith, slipping her arms around Polly, "be sure and choose a site for your camp with a beautiful outlook towards the sunset. And sing every evening around your campfire. Remember, Polly, white hyacinths to feed the soul even while you buy bread for the body."

Takeshi stood bowing on the front steps as they went down to the waiting cars.

“Good-bye, Takeshi,” said Polly. “We’ll see you at the Castle.”

“May you walk on sunbeams all summer in the favor of Amatarasu,” responded Takeshi, blandly.

“Now, I wonder what he meant,” Polly thought, but she told Peggie aloud, “Well, I hope we do walk on sunbeams, but we’re taking along our ponchos in case of rain just the same.”

She was the last one to reach the big car, and had to sit on Peggie’s lap on one of the rumbles. It was only a short run through old Greenwich Village to the Albany Line pier on West Street, but a thrill of excitement came when the two cars swung down the long covered runway to the steamer, pursued by a running line of porters.

“Oh, it’s just like going abroad, isn’t it?” said Betty.

“I don’t know because I’ve never been,” Halie sighed. “But if it’s anything like this, I hope I’ll go some day. I’m just like the Admiral’s Stoney. ‘I suttinly do love comings and goings.’”

“Take good care of your Aunt Milly,” Mr.

Abbott cautioned Polly at the last minute. "I'll be at the Castle inside of a couple of weeks. There goes the last bell. Good-bye, girlie."

Mrs. Abbott hurried aboard with her brood around her and a couple of porters loaded with suitcases. Crullers steadfastly refused to be separated from hers, and at last, just as the boat moved out of its slip into the river current, she dove into it in triumph and produced her surprise.

"I've brought it all the way from Queen's Ferry, and never told a soul, girls," she exclaimed breathlessly. "Dangle it out now good and plenty."

"Oh, you dear old Crullers!" cried Polly, as the wind caught the long flag and fluttered it out over the heads of the group of girls standing up in the prow of the big white steamer. White it was, with broad blue letters outlined in crimson, and it proclaimed to all the world at large:

THE POLLY PAGE CAMPING CLUB.

CHAPTER XV

MAPLEDENE FARM

THE girls were so completely tired out that not one of them remained up late that night going up the river. Not even the beauties of the Hudson by moonlight could coax them out on deck. Once past Storm King, after they had all eaten a good dinner, one by one they turned into their berths and slept peacefully until the boat docked at Albany the following morning.

From Albany on to Montalban, the journey was made by rail, changing cars once at Schenectady. After leaving here the train swung out through the great Mohawk Valley with its splendid views of green glades sloping to upland meadows that blended higher up into the forests on the foothills of the Helderbergs.

On this last train there were only a baggage car and a couple of wooden passenger coaches, old-fashioned ones, with dark red velvet covered seats, swaying lamps, and a remonstrating

squeak from one end to the other. The engine puffed and rattled all the way up through the mountains most delightfully. Betty declared it fussed just exactly the way the old conductor did. He was short and stout, and he objected volubly to the heat and to the dust and to the way the whole system in general was run. Sitting in the last seat before the open door, he told Polly all about his career on the railroad. As Isabel said, Polly always managed to get acquainted with people, and coax their whole life history out of them inside of ten minutes.

“Started first on cattle trains down in Texas when I was ’bout nineteen,” he said. “Liked it, too, till I married a girl at one of the ranches we used to pass on our way through to El Paso. I’d be sitting up on the running board, and she’d be way over yonder, watching for me, and we’d wave to each other. Every other day that was. She wore pink a whole lot,—pink dresses, and pink sunbonnets, and pink hair ribbons—”

“I love pink too,” put in Polly interestedly. “Go on.”

“Oh, Polly,” called Natalie from the platform, “do come out and see the way we’re just skirting around these mountains.”

"In a minute," said Polly. "What else?"

"Well, one day I says to our engineer, 'Charlie,' I says to him, 'I'm going back to get that girl and marry her.' And so I did. Found out later that was what she wanted me to do. But she wanted to come north, so here we are."

"Where is she?" asked Polly.

He smiled comfortably and pointed back east along the track.

"Two miles out of Albany in the big green house on the State trolley line. We've got six children too."

"Have they nice names?" Polly always liked children to have nice names, not especially romantic ones, but names that meant something.

"Fine. Sib, Kit, Nan, Len, Fred, and Pip." He rattled them off easily. "Let's see, that ain't what the Missus calls them either, but the only place you'd find the right ones is in the Family Bible. Sib is Sybil Lenora. Kit is Katherine Mary. That's two. Nan is short for Nancy, and Len for Leonard Percy. Fred's plain Frederick after his dad, and little Pip's named for her mother, Lydia Emily. Pretty good choice, ain't they?" He rose reluctantly.

"You may see Len up your way," he continued.

“He’s working for Mr. Butts in the grocery at Montalban. You see there’s a lot of artist folks up there, and Len he wants to learn how to draw and paint, and he thought he might catch on to the knack of it being around all the time. Good-bye. We’re getting there now. Hope when you come back, you get this train, and when you go to Albany look for the big green house.”

“I will.” Polly fairly glowed with pleasure, as she promised. “And if I see any of the children I’ll wave to them, and they’ll wonder who it is.”

“Polly, you’re simply incorrigible,” Aunt Millicent said when the father of six had safely deposited them all on the platform at Montalban. “And I heard your Aunt Evelyn tell you to be sure and not make promiscuous acquaintances.”

“He isn’t promiscuous, Auntie,” Polly said, waving to the departing train, “he’s the father of Len, and Len’s going to sell us groceries all summer, and he wants to take lessons from Uncle Thurlow.”

“Well, he’d better stick to the railroad, I think.”

“Oh, not the conductor,” laughed Polly. “Len. That’s one of his boys.”

The other girls had started in to reconnoitre at once. The station consisted of a platform with a semaphore at one end, a little express shack, and a waiting room about as large as an ordinary ticket office. There was a rusty drum stove raised on bricks in its center, two benches, and a drinking tank with "Ice Water" painted on it invitingly, and not a drop inside.

Backed up to the platform were two carryalls, each seating six besides the driver. The said drivers were perched on a baggage truck in the shade of the north end of the shack, and eyed the party shyly. But Aunt Millicent knew her ground, and went straight over to them.

"How do you do, Flickers. And Jimmie too. I'm glad your father could spare you both. You got Mr. Abbott's letter, didn't you?"

Flickers rose and the girls caught their first good look at one who was to be an important accessory of the camp all summer long. He was tall and thin and as free from curves as a brand new slab from a mill. His overalls were too short, and his sleeves were rolled high above his tanned bony wrists. Thick, tawny hair fell in a circular fringe from beneath a crownless rim of straw. Afterwards the girls found out that

Flickers never approved of hats, but he did like a shade for his eyes in the sun, so he compromised by removing the crown of his straw hat and wearing just the brim.

This he raised now in answer to Mrs. Abbott's greeting, and smiled the broadest, most sheepish smile imaginable—a smile that closed his eyes, widened his face, and showed where he had lost two front teeth. Jimmy, the younger brother, hid behind the far side of the shack. It developed that he was to drive one carryall and Flickers the other, and so the party was to be conveyed up the mountain.

“There's a hotel on the other side of the valley,” Aunt Millicent explained on the side. “Mr. Jones, Flickers' father, has the livery privilege for the station, and nothing in the way of news ever escapes him. I am sure he is eyeing us now from the hotel veranda through a spy-glass, and if he does miss anything Flickers will tell him all about it as soon as he gets back.”

All unconscious of this diagnosis of the family characteristics, Flickers was unhitching the brown mares from the post and backing them into position.

“Did our goods arrive, Flickers?” asked Mrs. Abbott.

“Yessum. Jimmie and me took ’em up last night and left ’em at the Doctor’s.”

“That’s right. Climb in, children. We’ll have to divide up. Isabel, you take four with you and ride with Jimmie. It’s about three and a half miles.”

“Where’s the village?” asked Polly, looking around at the barren road leading uphill from the station.

“This here’s the village.” Flickers turned his gaze on her reproachfully. “Yonder’s the store. Mr. Butts keeps it, and he runs the post office and laundry too and ’tends to the express. Pa does everything Mr. Butts and Len can’t ’tend to, and I do everything Pa can’t ’tend to, and Jimmie he does everything I can’t ’tend to. That white house up the other way is where Mis’ Butts lives and the church and schoolhouse are farther along. There’s four other houses too, only you can’t see ’em in summer time, ’count the trees.”

Hallie and Betty giggled and had to be bundled hastily into the other wagon before Flickers’ suspicions should be aroused. They would need

his services, and the Jones's sensibilities were easily ruffled. Aunt Millicent turned the topic of conversation deftly.

"How are they all getting on at the Doctor's place? Have any of the children come up from the city yet?"

"Guy," exclaimed Flickers, suddenly grown eloquent. "Guess there be. 'Bout seventeen more or less. All sorts and sizes. Mr. Butts says he guesses they got in the fifty-seven varieties all right, and then some. Doctor's a fine fellow. She's fine too. When Len's busy, I take things up for them from the store, and the mail too. They've got the old Yerrington place all fixed over. Used up twelve cans of white paint on it, big cans. I know, 'cause I carried it up and Pa put it in the farm journal that week. Papered it all through too, and shingled the red 'ell,' and put white oilcloth all over the kitchen and the buttery. She's a good one to hustle."

It was the first note of enthusiasm that he had sounded, but when the three and a half miles were covered and the teams turned up the maple bordered lane leading to Mapledene, Kate's new domain, the girls agreed with Flickers that she was a "good one."

The big two-story farmhouse stood far back from the road with rock maples in front of it and two "ells," jutting out at right angles on each end. Throughout it had been made cheery and habitable with fresh paper and paint, white curtains, little white beds, and new rag rugs laid on painted floors. Kate was in her element and keenly enjoyed showing the girls and Mrs. Abbott every improvement that she and the Doctor had made. Two of the nurses from the clinic were on hand, and some of the mothers had come up with the first consignment of babies.

Out in the vegetable garden the Doctor was working, putting up birch poles for his beans to run on.

"You are to lunch here with us, or rather, have dinner, for we have ours in the middle of the day, country fashion," said Kate, as they strolled out to meet the Doctor. "And afterwards you can tramp up the mountain to your own place. Flickers can drive over with your boxes and tents while you're eating, and he and Jimmie will help you put them up."

"We ought to put our own tents up," Vera protested. "When you're real campfire girls you always have to learn how to put up your

own tents, and you win an honor that way."

"That's fine," Polly answered firmly, "but we're amateurs at it, every one of us, and we'd better have Flickers' help. We don't want to be down in the ruins in the wee sma' hours of the morn, Nipper."

Back of the farmhouse was a pine grove and an old well with a long well sweep over it. Kate explained that she had all she could do to keep the four-year-olds from sliding down it most of the time, but the well was covered when not in use. After the well came a flagged walk under a rustic pergola made of white birch and covered over with grape vines.

"We have all kinds of fruit, girls, and we'd love to share some of it with you. We'd give it to you, but this is all for the kiddies' benefit, so we're selling what we can't use ourselves. Have to count the nickels and dimes, you know. We have two cows too, thanks to Mr. Phelps, and can sell you milk."

Polly looked at the animated figure beside her—dear old Kate, brown haired, rosy cheeked, tanned, brimful of energy and happiness, and encased in a brown and white checked apron over her white linen dress.

When they reached the doctor, he was asking Jimmy's advice about the runner beans.

"Kate Julian," Polly said, "I think you're the luckiest girl in the world. If I ever do get married, some time away off, it will be because you and the Doctor are so happy together. You're a standing advertisement for Cupid."

"Oh, go along, Polly," Kate retorted, flushing. "We're only mates, that's all,—good running mates."

"Where is the Castle from here?" asked Margery, coming towards them with her hands full of June roses, pink and white, and two blue-eyed youngsters in pink rompers escorting her.

There seemed to be kiddies in pink and blue rompers all over the place, wherever one looked. They scudded out from under the bushes and appeared unexpectedly around the corners of the wood-shed and the corn-crib. The barn was full of them, in the empty horse stalls and in the hay mows. They sprawled on the lawn grass and kicked their heels blissfully in the air. They slept in hammocks and in odd corners of the wide porch, curled up like sleepy kittens. The youngest ones had their mothers with them.

The whole upper floor had been changed into a big dormitory, and showed two long rows of little white beds.

“We can manage thirty a week,” said Kate, “and that’s doing mighty well for the first year when everything is rather experimental. But Bob’s right in his element. What I’m hoping you girls can do is to take turns, two each week, or half a week, helping me make the kiddies happy. Doctor will look after their diet and general health, and I can manage to keep them fed and clean with the help I’ve brought up. But they can’t just roll around like this all day. They get tired of doing nothing and fight together. They’ve got to be amused. I don’t care what you do, give them Montessori treatment, or summer kindergarten, or anything to keep them happy and interested, so they won’t wander down the road or tumble into the well when we’re not watching them. Bennie’s here with his baby, Polly.”

Polly said at once that she must see Bennie before they started for the camp, but he had gone after berries with some of the older children, and she was only rewarded with a glimpse of Nedda peeling vegetables in the shade of the pergola

with her baby in a wash basket beside her, kicking and talking to itself.

Flickers and Jimmy had gone ahead with the tents and supplies.

“I sent over a little two-burner oil stove I had,” Kate said at the last minute, as they were ready to hike up the mountain road. “It’s all very well to talk about your open fires after you get on to the knack of them, but you may want something quickly and this will come in handy on wet nights when the wood doesn’t want to burn. Which ones am I to expect down here to help me to-morrow?”

Margery and Isabel wanted to try first, and as the other girls all declared that Polly could not be spared, it was agreed that these two should be at Mapledene Farm from nine till three every day for a week, and earn five dollars each, to go towards the expenses of the camp.

“Here’s something that will come in handy,” the Doctor said, handing up a box of empty ammunition shells. “I brought a lot of these with me on the advice of an old hunter, for waterproof match boxes. You’ll probably need them when you start out tramping. Don’t forget the forestry warnings. If lost follow three trees in

a line or a running brook, and don't leave any fires to smoulder. Smother them in earth. I guess that's all for now. If you need us, you can light a signal fire on the big rock by the lake shore."

"Oh, I had forgotten that we had a lake," exclaimed Polly joyously. "We can swim, then, girls."

"Where did you suppose the boys went canoeing, goosie?" Aunt Millicent laughed. "Up in the air? It's a good-sized lake we think at the Castle. Agoonah Lake, the Indians called it, but we say Loon Lake. Good-bye, Kate. Wish us luck and safety. I've got quite a brood on my hands."

Kate and the pink and blue kiddies made a group of color on the green lawn as the campers started off on their mountain hike. They looked like a big flower bed, Polly thought. She looked back often to wave her hand and smile until they turned off the dusty main road into a path, single file, that led up through tall pines. It was a shortcut over the mountain to Loon Lake, and they wanted to arrive before the sun got low.

It might have comforted the heart of the old white-haired king, the king that sat blindly in the

sun with his riches around him and no love to comfort him, if he could have seen these toddlers from city streets out in God's own land, happy and growing well.

“Oh, I do hope that Grandfather can get him here,” she said to herself. “It might mean a hundred kiddies more.”

CHAPTER XVI

PITCHING CAMP

THE boys had driven around by the longer route, taking the old timber road up over the mountain, but Aunt Millicent was certain she could find her own way by the shorter cut.

“The Castle lies just off to the west there, girls,” she told them as they stopped for the first breathing spell. “You can see it from here in the autumn after the leaves fall. It has two high square Norman towers. What’s the matter, Crullers?”

Crullers stood with uplifted face, eyes closed, and a smile playing about her mouth.

“It’s the wind in the pines,” she said. “Don’t you all love it, girls, swishing back and forth? I do. I hope we get a camp site near the pines.”

“We’ve left the selection of that to you girls,” Aunt Millicent answered. “As long as the boys always camped on the south shore of the lake, and found it the best location, it seemed as if it

might suit you too, so I told Flickers to drive over there. You can choose for yourselves where you'd like the tents pitched. It is high and dry with a good water supply, and no underbrush near. I told the boys to wait until we got there."

They went on up the winding path through the great cool aisles of pines, Polly and Mrs. Abbott leading. There was no luggage to carry and they made good time.

Suddenly they came out on a rocky ridge of land, about two miles from Mapledene, with the lake lying below them. It looked as smooth as a mirror in the midday heat, although the breeze lifted the tall water reeds and grasses at its margin. Here the path became a zigzag affair, leading them down along a strip of sandy beach, then up over the ridge, where they had to clamber across the trunks of fallen trees, or push back willows and alders to get by, until at last a hail came to them from a high point of land ahead, and Flickers stood there waving his hatbrim at them.

"It's up here," he called.

They climbed up the slope eagerly, one after the other, but Crullers lost her footing, and

would have rolled all the way down had not Natalie caught her by the dress. Even Isabel lost some of her dignity over that last stretch, and landed on the plateau breathless and laughing with the rest. They all were enthusiastic over the place. The woods fell back in a semi-circle, leaving a sort of plateau that sloped gradually to the beach. All about them lay the forest,— pines, oaks, chestnuts, with now and then the slender, glistening stem of a silver birch or the ruddy bark of a mountain ash.

Down along the shore were huge trunks of dead trees, grotesque and heavy, but promising well for firewood. Before them lay the lake with its ever-changing face of beauty. Before the summer was half over, they had all grown to love it, the face of Agoonah, as Polly called it. High up in the mountain's lap it lay, wooded heights rising hundreds of feet above it on all sides. Their reflections turned the lake into a glimpse of another land.

“If you think you're too near civilization all you have to do is take your canoe and go across to the island and camp there,” said Mrs. Abbott. “It belongs to the cranes and muskrats. The boys used to camp there often in the fall, during

the hunting season. Now, the first question is, where shall we put the tents?"

All of the girls favored the plateau. There was a prettier spot farther along the shore where the pines came down to meet the water, but in a thunder storm the plateau would be safer from falling boughs. So the plateau was officially chosen for the camp site. It was not over half an acre in extent and there was sufficient shade from the tall fringe of trees at the forest edge.

Flickers and Jimmie went at the tents and the girls at the boxes and bundles of supplies, but in the excitement of tent raising they all deserted the commissary department and went over to help the boys drive in tent pins and hoist the tent. After the big tent was up Jimmy vanished into the woods and came back with some big fir boughs.

"Going to nail 'em up in front," he said.

"Oh, Jimmie, you've got a poet's soul," Polly exclaimed. "It's the final touch, isn't it, girls? Like a flag raising."

"Now, what about a fireplace?" said Aunt Millicent.

"There's one down on the shore we boys use for cooking fish," said Flickers. "What sort of a one

do you folks want? Just stones put around in a circle, or do you want the kind you swing a pot over?"

"The kind you swing a pot over, I think," said Polly. "To begin with, anyway. Perhaps we could build a big rock fireplace later on."

Aunt Millicent took charge of the beds and bedding, with Peggie to help. Polly and Natalie went at the kitchen supplies, and the little ones were delegated as woodgatherers. Isabel began putting up shelves. It was warm even on the borders of the lake, but they did not mind the heat. When the first tent shelter was up, their traveling dresses,—serge skirts and white middies,—were changed for the camp suits of Russian crash, middies and bloomers. They were all in what Betty called "woody colors," soft oak tans, dull mossy greens, misty grays, and blue as soft as a wild dove's wings.

"I think we look awfully nice," Vera exclaimed, eyeing the rest admiringly. "I like these suits better than serge bloomers and white middies. This way we're all different, and it gives a chance for temperament to show up. Polly, you're an inspiration in that lichen brown. It's just like a moth's wing."

"Is it?" Polly laughed, rolling up her sleeves and digging out a mess of camp kettles from the box. "Well, I don't feel one bit like a moth, or a butterfly either. I'm a wild bee on a honey trail. Oh, wouldn't it be great if we could find some honey, girls? How do you, Aunt Milly?"

"I buy mine," Aunt Millicent replied. "It saves time, and neither Takeshi nor your uncle would follow any honey trails out here for me. All you have to do, I believe, is to watch for a bee to pass by, and just follow him home."

"Welcome used to tell me that," said Polly thoughtfully. "I wonder what you do when you catch up with him."

"Pull his teeth out," Betty answered seriously. "Somebody help me with the dining table. I've just found Polly's folding table, but I don't know how the cap fits. Do you stretch this on tree trunks, Polly?"

"There were uprights that should have come with it," Polly told her. "You sink them deep in the ground, I think, and put the canvas over the top. The tops of the uprights fit into pockets on each end, and clamp in."

"Clamp in?" repeated Betty, struggling with the aforesaid uprights. "You'll have to take a

hammer and nail these. The whole thing would collapse if you tried to load one of our dinners on it. This is made for the serving of capsuled food, Polly."

"I think we'll get Flickers and Jimmie to build us one," Polly remarked hopefully. "A good long table with planks and cross pieces underneath. For tonight why couldn't we take a couple of these planks and put across two barrels?"

There were three good-sized tents besides the cook tent, which was of the shelter model, with a broad flap that lifted up from the front and tied to two young trees. The boys had selected a location where the trees could be utilized. Polly had figured on putting four cots in a tent, and on using two tents to sleep in, and one for a sort of living tent with room for the chaperon's cot. But three cots were as many as would fit comfortably in a tent and leave room to turn around.

"One at a time might get up and dress," Vera suggested, "and the others wait their turns. Polly, I wonder you didn't find some sort of folding or hanging bed arrangements for us. I think I shall build me a nest in a treetop."

"It's all right," Aunt Millicent declared, com-

ing out into the open air, hair rumpled and face flushed. "Polly, Peggie, and I will take one tent, and the rest of you can choose lots."

"Don't let Betty get in the same tent with Hallie," sang out Pipes. "The rest of us will never get any sleep."

"I'm going with Nat and Isabel," Betty replied decisively. "Vera's going with Hallie and Pipes."

"Where are you going to put me?" asked Crullers plaintively. "In the canoe?"

"No, precious old pal, we won't put you in any canoe," Polly assured her. "You're so fairy-like, Crullers, that we just forgot you. I know you can squeeze in with us some place. We'll take turns having an extra cot in each one of the tents if necessary."

"I'll go with Betty," Crullers said. "If it's too crowded we'll fold my cot up in the daytime. Or, I know, put it crossways at the back of the tent, Betty, with yours, feet to feet."

"Fine," Betty agreed. "Like the bodies in the catacombs, or do they stand up straight? I forget, but it doesn't matter. Oh, girls, last summer, when we camped up in Vermont, we came across the strangest old burial ground with

the gravestones made of a sort of sandstone. One of them had this verse on it:

“ ‘Here lies Orlando Tinkham Tift,
Of intellect surprising,
Beloved by all, he’s sure to cut
A figure at the rising.’ ”

“Betty Morris,” exclaimed Vera. “You ought to be ducked for that. Wait till I get you out in the canoe!”

“Don’t scrap,” Polly pleaded. “We’ll never get done if you do. Betty, help me put up these hanging shelves in the cook tent. You just slip the wooden slats inside the cloth, see? I want to look at the fireplace the boys are building.”

Proudly, and sheepishly too, Flickers and Jimmie exhibited their handiwork. They had carried up big flat stones from the shore, and had arranged them for a fireplace opposite the cook tent. Then two forked sticks were driven into the ground about four feet apart with a strong, straight stick laid across them for pot hooks to hang from. Hallie had advised plenty of pot hooks as they served more purposes than one.

“We’ll fix up a rock fireplace where you can build bonfires if you want it,” Flickers said.

“Or there’s a big rock down on the shore that you can use. That would be better, ’cause this time of the year everything’s dry and Mr. Butts’s second cousin’s fire warden, so we have to watch out. This one’ll cook all right for now, won’t it?”

“Splendidly,” Polly told him. “And we’ve got in some dry wood, to start with to-night.”

“Well, you’d better pile some of it in a corner of the tent,” advised Flickers. “Supposing it comes up a rain, then what? Though it don’t matter with birches. You can burn them wet or dry. Not that it’s likely to rain, but it might. Pa says to always be prepared for the unexpected, then when it does hit you all you have to do is hunch your shoulders and blink, because you was prepared. Guess that’s all we can do for you to-night, ain’t it?”

“That’s all I think of. But, Flickers—” Polly paused wondering how to impress it on his memory. She had remembered suddenly all that Aunt Millicent had said of Flickers’ propensities for disappearing days at a time just when you were needing him. “You’ll surely bring up our mail every day and come for grocery orders, won’t you? And we’ll pay you fif-

teen cents an hour when you work for us. How is that?" -

Flickers grinned approvingly. So did Jimmie, and, pocketing their earnings for one day, they drove down the mountain road, back to the village, to tell Mr. Jones and Mr. Butts all about the new camp and just what was in the boxes.

It was sundown before the campers sat down to rest. Everything was unpacked and in place even to the wire nails and folding canvas water buckets. The cots were made up, each with its gray blanket that was to do double service. Later on they hoped to go on a tramp to the top of Baldy Knob, the highest nearby mountain, and sleep in the open over night, so the blankets had eyelets to lace to their sleeping bags for that occasion.

The tents had floor coverings of khaki duck, although Aunt Millicent said she was certain the boys would have to lay floors for them, about a foot above the ground.

"It's a good dry spot, and I don't believe we'd have any snake visitors, but still I'd rather have the floors. In case of rainstorms, we're safe from dampness."

"Altogether, though, it does begin to look

real," Polly said happily, dropping full length on the grass. "And I'm hungry as a wolf. We haven't drawn lots yet to see who is to look after the cooking and dishwashing, the wood gathering, and the tent cleaning."

"Let's do it in the morning," Natalie coaxed. "I don't feel as if I could meditate on another thing until I've eaten and slept out in this mountain air."

Aunt Millicent had gone over to the cook tent. Now she came back to the circle on the grass with what Crullers called a concentrated expression.

"Has anybody seen the matches?"

Each member of the circle looked hopefully at the next one, but there was only silence and the truth slowly dawned on them. There were no matches.

"Don't you know, we were going to order them at the village store in Montalban," said Polly, "and when we saw how little the village was we never thought of going to the store. Haven't we a single one, Aunt Milly?"

"Not one."

"I'll run after the boys," Betty proposed.

"Run three and a half miles down the mountain? It's sunset now, Betty."

Vera stood up suddenly. "I know what to do. Let's twirl a stick in dry, rotting wood, and it will light."

It really didn't seem possible a stick could stand so much twirling and still refuse to ignite. Each one tried her hand at twirling. Vera told them that all you had to do was to hold the stick very firmly and steadily, and then roll it rapidly between your palms, keeping the twirling end in the dry, porous wood.

Polly remembered distinctly having read somewhere that if you rubbed two sticks together they burst into a radiant flame. So, patiently and vigorously, they all worked down on the beach over the dry driftwood, never realizing what a curious picture they made kneeling there on the sand in the sunset glow with the lake behind them, reflecting each beautiful sky tint in its tiny wavelets.

Suddenly there came a hail from the bank, a curious hail unlike any they had ever heard. Standing out in the open space before the tents was the figure of a woman, bareheaded, her curly iron-gray hair hanging loosely around her tanned, strongly featured face. She had a head like one of the old sibyls, Peggie declared later,

but there was no scroll of fate in her hand, nothing but an oak staff nearly as tall as herself. Her dress was made of blue jean like overall goods, cut in one piece and tied around the waist with a piece of rope. Beside her was a shaggy haired dog, quite as nondescript as she was.

"It's Sarepta," Mrs. Abbott said. "How did she ever find out that we were here so soon. Be nice to her, girls. She's perfectly harmless, only a little queer."

"What you doing down there?" Sarepta called, shading her eyes and peering down at them. It was the expression of her face that held one's attention. Queer she might be, but there was wisdom and strength in her features and a whimsical glint in her eyes as though she, too, had looked at the world and found it good.

Nobody knew her real age. For years she had lived up on Baldy Knob in a house that was little more than a "leanto." In summer, she always closed her door and moved far up the mountain to a cave where she slept when it was inclement, otherwise she used a bed of leaves and moss between two great rocks in a deer wallow.

Several times Mr. and Mrs. Butts had per-

suaded the county authorities that Sarepta needed looking after, but some bird of the air must have carried the matter, for when they traveled up the mountain to find her she had vanished.

“Land alive,” she told Mrs. Abbott one day, the previous summer, “can’t a body live out of doors without being called crazy? Pretty doings. I ain’t a mite crazier’n you artist folk, trudging over the mountain to hunt places to paint. I know the prettiest spots up here too, but I ain’t going to tell where they be. Nobody knows but me’n the deer. Yes, Nicodemus knows too, but he won’t tell, will ye, Nick?”

And Nick, the big shaggy dog that seemed her only friend, would wag his tail and cock his ears appreciatively.

She had granted her friendship to the Abbots from the beginning of their stay at the Castle, and now she smiled happily at all the brood gathered around Mrs. Abbott, as they came up the path from the beach.

“I asked the boys to let me know when you come, and Jimmie let out a holler when they drove down the mountain. But I knew all along you was coming.”

"How did you know, Sarepta?" asked Aunt Millicent, kindly.

The old face seemed lit up by a hidden fire.

"Had a dream," Sarepta answered, lifting her palm high in the air towards the lake. "Dreamt I saw a signal fire right over there."

"Oh, did you dream where there were any matches?" Crullers asked eagerly, almost pushing Betty over in her anxiety to see the speaker. "We need some terribly."

"Always carry matches," Sarepta said calmly, diving deep in the pocket of her blue jean dress and bringing up a tin box with a cover to it. "Have to be careful carrying loose matches. Start forest fires. Most folks don't care, but I love trees, and it hurts 'em fearfully when they burn. Here's matches for ye."

The girls stared as if fascinated at the withered hand holding out these treasures to them. After half an hour of twirling and worrying, here Sarepta appeared and handed out matches as if they were pine needles.

"You're just an angel," Polly exclaimed. "Just an angel, Miss Jones—"

"Call me Sarepta," Miss Jones interrupted firmly.

"Sarepta, then. We were having an awful time trying to get a fire started, and thought we'd have to eat crackers and cheese for supper. Can't you stay and have something really good now?"

Sarepta eyed her suspiciously for a minute. Nobody ever invited her to stay for dinner. She was the waif of Baldy Knob, known to every child and grown person for miles, and feared by them. But something she saw in Polly's big brown eyes reassured her. Here there was good-fellowship and gratitude too, and she felt the invitation was given in good faith. She pushed back her hair and smoothed the front of her wrinkled, wood-stained gown.

"Thank ye just the same," she said, "I guess not to-night. I only came down to see the signal fire lit up and to make sure my dream had come true."

It was hard to say which the girls enjoyed most that first night out in the open, the preparing and eating of the evening meal, or the building and lighting of the big campfire down on the huge flat rock by the lake shore. They gathered around it, the firelight dancing and throwing strange grotesque shadows on land and water.

Crullers and Betty rambled off by themselves while the rest were singing, and Sarepta stood apart, watching the group around the flames. Finally, as the girls were singing, they saw her lift one hand as if in benediction, and slip away among the shadows.

When only the embers were left, the campers prepared for their first night's rest. All was quiet in the camp for a while, and then there came a subdued shriek from the tent where Isabel lay with Natalie, Betty, and Crullers.

Aunt Millicent arose, wrapped a kimono around her, and went over to find out what the trouble was, Polly hurrying behind her, all ready to face any emergency.

Isabel was sitting upright, with her knees drawn up to her chin, and her blanket wrapped close around her.

"My bed is just full of burdock stickers," she said. "And those two over there are lighting matches under the bedclothes."

"Oh, no," Betty returned sweetly. "We're training fireflies to use in future emergencies, Mrs. Abbott. See?"

Out from under the blankets the two culprits produced a couple of empty bottles, and in the

bottles now and then glowed the pale fitful light of fireflies.

“Crullers, you come over and sleep in our tent,” Polly coaxed laughingly, but Crullers refused. Upon her promising faithfully to be quiet and train no more for that night, Mrs. Abbott and Polly departed, and peace finally descended on the camp.

CHAPTER XVII

THE CASTLE DOMAIN

THAT first week in camp had its trials as well as its compensations, according to Isabel, who was the first to object to the demands of outdoor life. She had never been a very good campaigner, and here she dreaded the early rising, the skirmish for breakfast, and the long tramp down the mountain trail to Mapledene Farm. For it had fallen upon her and Margery to help Kate with the kiddies this first week.

“You just ought to stay here and hustle for firewood the way we do,” Betty and Crullers told her forcibly. “We bring in bundles on our backs.”

“Yes, or cook,” Hallie sighed. “Peggie and I are the scullery maids. We wash the dishes, pare vegetables, and get down on our hands and knees and blow the dying embers into gay, crackling life again.”

“An it please your royal highness,” Natalie

sang out, her head poked around the tent flap, and one hand waving a canvas water bucket in the air, "we are the chambermaids. We tidy the tents, change the towels, carry fresh water, and make the beds. Don't we, Nipper?"

"Next week it will be our turn at Kate's kindergarten," Vera answered cheerfully. "You and I, Nat, will teach her ladyship true heroism."

"Just wait till you find yourself with thirty-two children to amuse, each one wanting to do something different at the same identical moment in about five different languages or dialects," Margery said. "Heroism is the right word to use. I never appreciated before all that Doctor Elliot and Kate were doing."

Flickers kept his word valiantly for two whole days, appearing bright and early at the camp ready for work. Polly said she knew he would be ill if he kept up the record, but when the third day came, all predictions were fulfilled. Flickers was missing. Jimmie drove up that afternoon to take the grocery order for Mr. Butts. He said he hadn't seen Flickers around any where, but he kind of thought most likely he'd gone fishing.

"I don't blame Flickers for going fishing a

day like this," Polly declared. It was a fitful day, now sunny, now with a low-hanging cloud clipping past them with a dash of rain. "Why don't we go fishing, girls? There's a place I discovered when we were in swimming yesterday, a point of land where the rocks project out over the lake, and we could perch up there and fish. It's only about half a mile down the shore from here."

"Live bait, or circus brand, Polly?" Crullers inquired.

"Live. Wait till I find something to dig with. We can find plenty of worms around the roots of old trees."

It took nearly half an hour to get out the fishing tackle and prepare for the expedition. Polly and Betty found plenty of bait and at last all excepting Mrs. Abbott trailed down the shore path.

"I must write some letters to-day, children," she said. "So run along, and bring your dinner back with you."

Confidently they approached the little rock peninsula; but lo, at a turn in the shore, they caught a glimpse of it and found it already occupied. Flickers, the recreant Flickers, lay

thereon, flat on his back, his hat brim carefully adjusted to shade his eyes, in his hands a paper covered book. Arranged conveniently within arm's reach were three pronged sticks whereon rested Flickers' fishpoles. At their indignant hail, he sat up and grinned down at them reproachfully.

"Pretty good fish running to-day," he called happily, "I've got a fair sized string already. Coming up?"

"If you won't mind us, Flickers," Polly answered, with distinct sarcasm, but it passed over Flickers' hatbrim even as the summer rain clouds over the top of Baldy Knob.

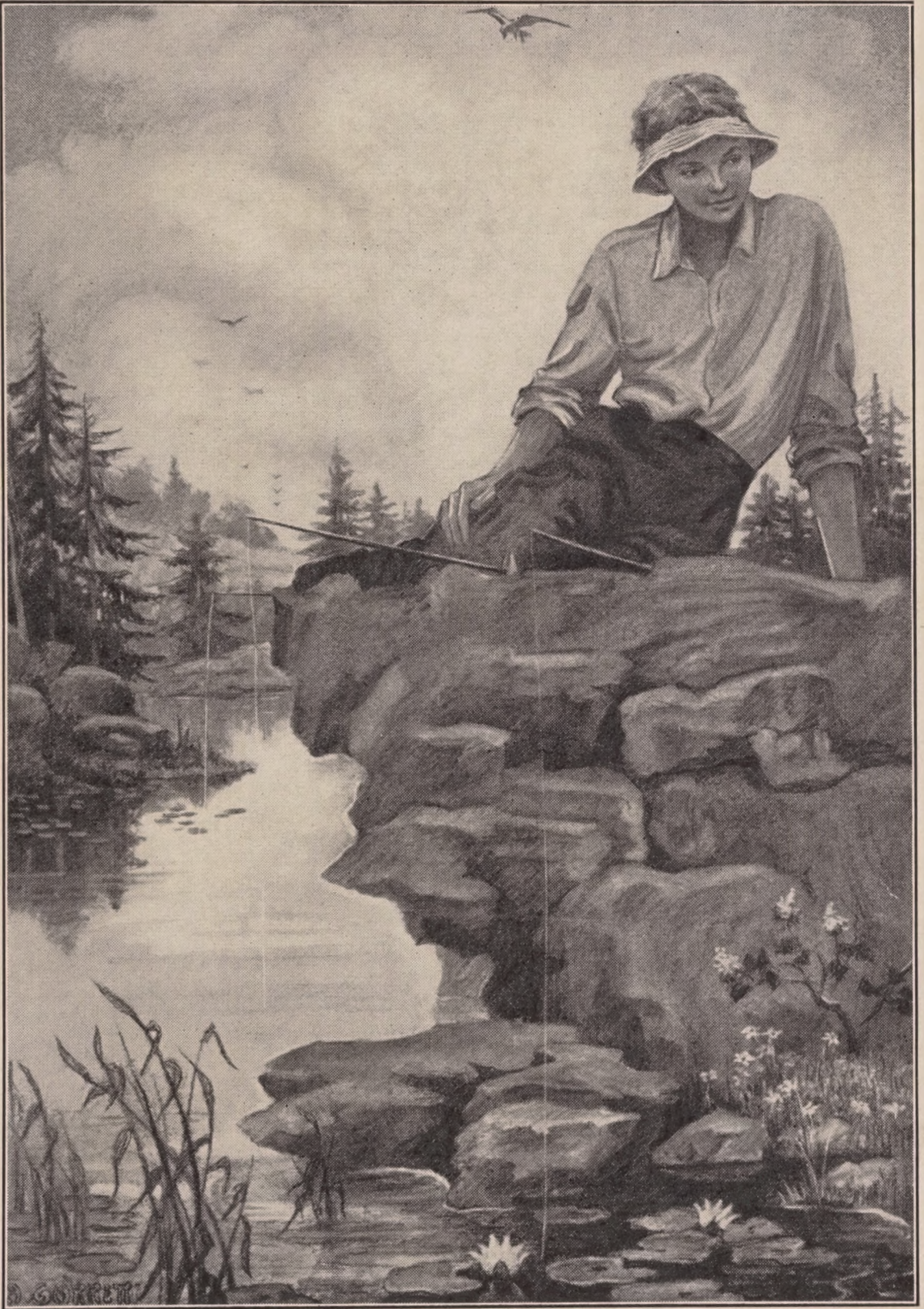
"Land, I don't mind. Come right along. There's plenty and more too. I like to come up here, set my lines, and read till the bells ring."

The girls hastened up the rocks.

"What bells?" they asked eagerly.

"See there!" cried Flickers proudly, pointing to the ends of the poles. "See the bells? When there's a bite, it jerks the end of the pole, and the bell tinkles. Sometimes they wake me up."

"Do you ever sell the fish?" asked Crullers delicately. Her eye was always on the larder, but Flickers shook his head.



"PRETTY GOOD FISH RUNNING TODAY," HE CALLED

"Why, no. I'm just catching these for you folks. Ain't I working for you?"

"We must let him alone," Polly told them while he waded out to untangle Betty's line fast hooked into an alder. "Flickers is 'way ahead of us in foresight and wisdom."

Towards the end of the week, a letter arrived from Uncle Thurlow announcing that he and Takeshi would arrive the following Tuesday. A few of the students might come up beforehand, he said, and Pippino's family would be there by Monday to take possession of the Castle and clean up the garden.

On Saturday Aunt Millicent proposed a tramp over from the camp to open the place and look it over before the arrivals. It was nearly two miles from Agoonah Lake. They took the old-time trail the boys used down to the main road that led up from the village.

"Hikers all," Polly called merrily, surveying the band as they stood by the trail dressed in bloomers and middies with long staffs in their hands.

"'How shall I my true love know,
From another one?
By his cockle hat and staff,
And his sandal shoon.'"

“Well, I just wish I had on ‘sandal shoon,’” Vera protested, sitting by the roadside and taking off her high boots. “I want soft moccasins. I don’t care for snake bites or anything so long as I can go light footed through the forest green.”

“It isn’t very far now. Why, you’ll have to walk five times as far as this over to King’s Peak, but we’ll stay over night there and you can try your sleeping bags.”

“Why do they call it King’s Peak, Aunt Milly?” Polly asked. “I always want to know how places receive their names.”

“Because it is said that, years and years ago, the lost Dauphin of France passed through here on his way from the Adirondacks, and that he stayed up there on the mountain in camp with the Indians. They called him Lazarre, but to the whites he was Eleazar Williams. You know, girls, one reason why we are fond of this country is because Mr. Abbott was born and brought up on Lake George. He can remember his grandmother telling him how the Indians used to come down from the North Mountains, selling baskets of sweet grass. Some of them told of an old Indian princess who had an ivory missal

bound in gold, and on it the royal crest of France and the name 'Louis.' ”

“Was he the real Louis, Aunt Milly?”

“How do I know?” Mrs. Abbott smiled. “It might have been true. It was believed that the little prince escaped from the Bastille with his tutor, and fled to England and from there to New France. Those who could remember have left a record of this man Eleazar Williams, telling how he was brought among the tribes as a little boy by a white man, and the Indians were told he was a prince. Who knows? For the sake of romance I like to think the son of Mary Antoinette roamed over our beautiful mountains and left his royal stamp upon them.

“There are lingering trails of romance all over this northern New York country. There is a roadside tavern on the way to King's Peak where it is said Aaron Burr often put up, and they show an old inkwell used by Daniel Webster, and some pewter mugs that Winfield Scott and some of his staff drank from. Under the big elm in front of the house is an old mounting-stone. The initials 'A. H.' cut into it, stand for Alexander Hamilton, they say.”

“Just as if he ever had time to stop and hew

them into the rock," Betty said doubtfully. "Initials are awfully deceptive things anyway. Last year while we were in Vermont, Nipper found some carved on an old, old bridge, and they read 'G. W.,' so we thought of course they stood for George Washington. Every good American thinks those initials stand for that name always, but this time they didn't. They meant 'Go west.' Yes, sirree; didn't they, Nipper? There was an old man lived in a shack along the side of the river, and he said the road wasn't safe along the east shore, so he had just carved that sign. And when we suggested that maybe some people wouldn't know what it stood for, he asked us what in tunket it could stand for but 'Go west.'"

"Betty, you're delightful," Aunt Millicent laughed, "but just look ahead. Doesn't anyone see gray towers?"

"Four gray walls and four gray towers,
Overlook a space of flowers,
And the silent isle embowers
The Lady of Shalott,"

chanted Betty, with a roguish expression on her sunburned face.

"There are only two towers at our Castle, but we have an overgrown terrace, an old rose garden and a sun dial. No skeletons in armor though."

"Polly likes skeletons," Natalie remarked mildly, but Polly was ahead and out of hearing so the challenge passed unheeded.

They came down the winding forest road to the Castle domain. Old orchards compassed it on three sides, and beyond these were fields of daisies up to the edge of the birchwoods. Still farther on, past the slender white birches, rose pines and red oaks and thickets of hazel and mountain laurel.

The front approach was a joy to any nature lover's heart. Only the gray towers were visible from the roadway, visible above the tapering tops of huge Norway pines. The square white posts at the entrance gates were old and worm-eaten, half toppling over, and covered with clambering woodbine. All around the grounds was a high rock wall backed up with young birches and hazel bushes. It was too tall to see over, but after one had passed beyond the old posts up the curving driveway, three deep terraces, one above another, became visible, rising to the steps of the Castle.

Below them stood the four enormous Norway pines like stately sentinels.

The girls had never before seen such pines as these. They were not tall and slender like the white pines of the west, nor with bare trunks branched only at the top, like the yellow pines of the south. Polly thought these must be hemlocks, they were so broad and had such splendid sweeping boughs, touching the ground on all sides. Investigation proved two to be hemlocks, and two to be Norway pines with beautiful large cones and heavy glossy needles.

Rose bushes grew rankly along the terraces. Uncle Thurlow did not approve of gardeners. He said they defaced the beauties of nature, so Takeshi was the only person allowed to produce any landscape effects around the Castle. The grass grew uncut all summer long and the borders of hardy annuals grew with it, happy and prospering. It was daisy time now, and the girls wandered about, knee deep in the white flowers. Crullers found a place where blackcap raspberries grew along the stone wall and perched herself within easy reach, gathering enough in a folding pail they had brought, to provide some for lunch.

Up in the apple trees some birds trilled rebukingly at the invaders, and one big black cat-bird hopped along the grass after them, scolding all the way.

Aunt Millicent walked up the overgrown path to the side porch and unlocked the door. At each end of the house on the south side was a round gray tower built of the native rock. The entire house had been constructed of it, and within they found a great living room, wainscoted and beamed in oak.

“All of the rock is from the quarry below here, and the timber came from the sawmill down at Blow-me-down Pond,” Aunt Millicent explained, showing them through the place.

“Where is that, Aunt Milly?” Polly seized on the odd name at once.

“The mill? Farther down the mountain. You follow our river until it comes to the big dam and there’s the mill. They call it Blow-me-down Pond because years back some chap lived there whose mill was a ramshackle wreck that blew down every now and then. So he kept adding a timber here and a brace there, but never rebuilding. Finally there came an autumn gale, and some one driving by during the storm found

him sitting out on a rail fence, smoking placidly. 'Wind's been at me off and on for years,' he said. 'Now I just moved out and told the pesky thing to go ahead and blow down, if it wanted to.' We'll have to go down there some day for a jaunt. Let's open up these windows and let some fresh air in, girls."

They rambled all over the building, looked into the studio high in one of the towers, and saw the splendid view over the great valley with its distant rim of purple mountains.

The living-room was the acknowledged triumph, though, of the whole Castle. It stretched across the entire front. There were all manner of seats built into odd nooks, rows of unexpected bookshelves inviting one to rest and browse, a fireplace into which barrels could have been piled, and sunlight flooding all of it.

At the back the house was built around an inner garden like the early Californian and Mexican *patios*. A fountain spouted four jets high in the air here, and the girls were delighted at the low encircling Roman seat where one could sit and trail one's finger tips in the cool water.

"Oh, I do think whoever built and planned

this must have loved beautiful things," Peggie exclaimed.

"It *was* some one who loved beautiful things," Aunt Millicent returned, her face full of tenderness; "poor Lindsay Phelps!"

It was on the tip of Polly's tongue to tell what she knew of Lindsay Phelps, but Betty was taking off her shoes and stockings preparatory to wading in the fountain and was calling on the others to follow her example. After the long mountain climb, it was too tempting to resist.

"Run along, all of you, for we still have the walk back," Aunt Millicent said. "We can lunch on berries, but think of the dinner waiting."

"Um-m-m!" breathed Betty and Natalie together. Crullers looked self-conscious and a bit proud.

"We could eat it this minute," said Natalie, "but the fireless cooker is doing its work, isn't it, Crullers? You're sure you didn't forget to put the things in, aren't you?"

"Sure, Nat," Crullers declared. "I fixed everything just right."

While the rest had hurried to clear away the

breakfast dishes and straighten up the tents, she had been delegated to look after the scalloped potatoes and the Brown Betty pudding. With broiled ham and fresh biscuits, they would have a feast when they returned from their tramp.

Accordingly all the way on the return trip, they discussed the special charms of that dinner, the advantages of fireless cookers in general, and of Crullers' method of making Brown Betty pudding in particular.

"Dear old Crullers, whom we all jump on and blame for everything that goes wrong," Polly said, throwing one arm over Crullers' nearest shoulder. "We never even guessed that you could cook, Crullers, dear, until you explained the intricacies and mysteries of scalloped potatoes a la Crullers to us."

"Oh, it's easy enough if you only have to put it in a box like that," said Crullers comfortably. "Of course in a real oven you must watch them and be careful they don't burn."

"Oh, rare Crullers, how I do love thee," Betty intoned sweetly from the rear. "Didst put loads of lemon peel and raisins in thy Brown Betty pudding? I was named for Brown Betties and

I know whereof they should be made, gentle damsel."

"I put in a whole box of raisins and not too much toast, and then little dabs of brown sugar here and there and melted butter and cinnamon—"

"Cease, cease!" Betty waved her back to silence. "I'm so hungry now I can hardly keep my weary feet on the upland track. This is the upland track, isn't it, Polly? Let's hurry. Let's gather up our remaining strength for a real home dash."

So the last half mile was a sprint through the woods that rimmed the border of the lake. It had been a splendid jaunt. Even Aunt Millicent had rosy cheeks as she put on an enveloping apron and helped Polly carve off generous slices of ham while Peggy made the biscuits. It had been discovered early in the week that the Murray recipe for biscuits took the cake, as Pipes put it. If it were possible to twist anything around the double way, she usually could do it. Anyway, Peggie had been appointed official biscuit-maker for the camp. She stood in the cook tent now rolling out the dough, when suddenly Crullers let out a cry of alarm.

Vera and Natalie were busy setting the long table out in the shade and Hallie had run down to the lake where they kept the butter crock in a cool place.

“Why, they haven’t cooked one bit in your old fireless cooker!” Crullers exclaimed, lifting out the shiny aluminum kettles. “They look just the way they did when I put them in there.”

Everyone trooped over to look at the tragedy. There were the Brown Betty pudding and the scalloped potatoes as she said, just as they had been when she had put them in.

“Crullers!” Polly cried reproachfully, even accusingly. “Crullers Adams, didn’t you start them cooking first?”

“Didn’t I what?” asked Crullers aghast.

“Start them cooking over the real fire first?”

“Why, no. Doesn’t this cook them? I thought you didn’t need any fire if it’s a fireless cooker.”

“Oh, I die, I die,” moaned Betty. “I mean I starve, I starve. Crullers, you ought to be rolled off the rocks at dawn.”

But the rest laughed. It was the best thing to do, with the tears tumbling from Crullers’ wide blue eyes.

“Never mind,” said Aunt Millicent hopefully. “We’ll open up some of the canned luxuries. Turn the potatoes into the large frying pan and brown them and the Betty will do for supper. But, Crullers, listen. Don’t you dare say you can cook any more. We forgive you, only you can’t cook.”

“You can fish with Flickers,” Polly comforted her. “You do really fish beautifully, Crullers, and you have better luck than any of us, so you win out that way even if you can’t use a fireless cooker. And we forgive you, don’t we, girls?”

Whereupon, led by Betty and Natalie, the girls formed a circle around the forlorn and hapless figure and chanted right sweetly,

“We forgive, we forgive, we do forgive our Crullers!

Our Crullers we do, we do for-give, ah, yes,

We do for-give!

But may she never, never, ah, never—do—it—more!”

CHAPTER XVIII

CRULLERS FINDS THE WANDER ROSE

IT was at breakfast the beginning of the second week. The sun had risen gloriously and wakened them all. By six the muffins, raspberries and cream, and bacon omelet were on the table. The latter was Aunt Millicent's idea. She would toast tiny squares of bread the same as for soup croutons, cut the bacon in little squares too, and toss them in the pan before she turned over them the beaten eggs for the omelet, and the girls declared it the real success of the morning.

"I know what we've all forgotten in this camp," Polly said suddenly. "A name for it. We just call it 'the camp.' It should be blessed and dignified with a proper name."

"Camp Joyful," suggested Betty, right off the reel.

"Camp— camp— camp," rambled Crullers meditatively, "camp Sufficiency? Camp Calvert? Camp Comfort?"

“Forest Glen Camp.” Isabel gave this after a few minutes’ thought. “We want to express the beauties of the place.”

“Camp Pocahontas,” Peggie suggested.

“Try to get something characteristic,” Aunt Millicent advised. “You’re here for a good time and to get back as close to the heart of Mother Nature as you can.”

“I know,” Hallie exclaimed. “Pan! Something about Pan. It really is suitable, Polly, because I expect to see his funny head with the little horns bob up at me any time at all behind a rock or some bushes.”

“I think,” said Polly, “we ought to name it for the lake. Agoonah Camp. It’s from the Indian language, it’s soft and musical, and it means something. What did you tell us it meant, Aunt Milly?”

“Lake of the Wild Loon. Another name we have up here for the small lake over near the Castle is Wa-po Lake, Sunbeam Lake that is, or Sun-in-the-Water.”

“Oh, I like Lake of the Wild Loon,” laughed Polly. “This is really a camp of wild loons. Let’s take a vote on it, not a rising one, a tapping one. All in favor of Agoonah Camp tap on the

table with their knives. Contrary minded, no. The taps have it."

Betty stood up on the wooden bench Flickers had constructed for them, and spread her arms wide.

"Agoonah, we christen thee, camp of the loons!"

"As I remember," Isabel remarked, "the loon is a good nest builder anyway, and minds its own affairs."

"It does," Polly agreed, "but it rambles all over creation first, and sees the world."

So Agoonah Camp it was named. Vera, who had taken Ted's place as club photographer, said she was going to try to get a snap at a real live loon, and use him as a mascot.

"Not alive?" Crullers questioned. "You mean to use it like a sort of crest, don't you, Nipper, on our post cards and letters?"

"Exactly," Vera said. "Crullers precious, you always seem to make everything so simple. We'll fix a loon somewhere around these here diggings and he'll do for the camp crest. A loon rampant or couchant, girls? Also, we do need a few gules and bars argent?"

"You're always making fun of me," Crullers

returned a bit huffed. "Betty and Hallie say just as foolish things as I do, only they are not noticed."

"Oh, caitiff heart, to tell on us," Betty teased. "Wait till we get thee out in the canoe far from help and duck thee right lustily."

"No, you won't. Not this week anyhow. Natalie and I are the next to teach Kate's kiddies," Crullers replied proudly. "We start in this morning. So, Brown Betty."

"I wonder how she'll ever get on," Polly said later, as she watched Nat and Crullers go down the short cut towards Mapledene Farm. "It seems as if Crullers isn't fitted for anything special, doesn't it, Aunt Milly?"

"Yes, she is. Every single one of us is fitted for something. It's only a question of finding the right groove," Mrs. Abbott answered happily. "I shouldn't wonder if Jane Daphne finds her element right down there among those kiddies."

Aunt Millicent's prediction was correct. By Thursday Crullers had proved herself a wonder at managing the children. She never tired of them, and she did not try to invent new methods of infantile education as Isabel had. All the old

favorite games were used with really splendid results, Kate and the Doctor said. With Natalie's help, she guided the feet of toddlers from Italy, Poland, Russia, and even two from Hungary, through the mazes of London Bridge, There Came Three Kings A-Roving, Duck on a Rock, Touch Tag, Blind Man's Buff, Farmer in the Dell, and even the old time Copenhagen.

"Why, I didn't know there were so many games until Crullers started them," Natalie declared. "When they grow tired of one, she always has a new one up her sleeve. And she can sing all the nursery rhymes and make up little plays for them. Our Crullers has been hiding her light under a bushel. She is a child of genius."

"I'm glad I'm something at last," Crullers said with relief. "I've played cupbearer to all the Seniors and Juniors at Calvert until I can hardly see straight. It's fearful being mixed up with so many coming geniuses when you're not sure what you are yourself. Here Peg's going to be a sculptress, and Nipper's going to take up the scientific raising of roses, and Pipes wants grand opera, and Isabel will probably marry a bishop or a senator—"

“Go on, Crullers, do go on,” begged Hallie, as she paused. “You do grumble so interestingly. Give me a fortune, and what about Betty and Polly?”

“Oh, that makes me think,” said Crullers abruptly. “Yesterday we saw two gypsy wagons and four horses down in the Hollow.

“And we went over and asked a girl who was picking daisies if any more gypsies were coming, and she said yes, later on. She didn’t look very barbaric, but still she jingled a little, bangles on her bracelet and around her neck, and her hair was down in two braids.”

“It’s probably Judy,” Aunt Millicent interposed cheerfully. “She’s usually the first of the art students to show up around here. “I told you about her before when we were in Virginia. Judith Terry her name is, a very clever girl.”

“Why does she go around in gypsy wagons?” asked Isabel.

“I suppose it appeals to her. You know what the Declaration of Independence says, Isabel, about the individual pursuit of happiness. One year she did Cornwall and Wales in a gypsy cart, I believe, with two girl student friends. They

picked up the idea over there. We'll have to go and call on them."

When Flickers came up with the mail that morning, there was a general acclamation, for he brought a letter announcing the arrival that day of Takeshi and Uncle Thurlow.

"Ahead of time too," sighed Polly. "I knew this would turn into a family gathering before the summer was half over. Pretty soon we'll have a letter from Grandfather announcing his coming with Aunt Evelyn to be sure we are quite safe. Whatever could we do with them here in the camp? We'll have to move over to the island to get out of reach, girls."

"I think we might have an auxiliary camp over there for emergencies," Hallie agreed. "We could take over one tent, or build a sort of shack out of logs, but we never could do it alone."

"We could if we had the logs." Polly grasped at the new idea. It promised novelty and adventure, delightful adventure. "I don't see why we couldn't cut the logs too, and saw them up if we had to. Nobody knows what we could do if it were really a case of emergency. I feel just as if I wanted to build a log cabin even

if it's only to find out whether or not I could if I did have to."

"Easy as anything," Betty responded happily. "Didn't we girls wield the buck saw one day when Flickers left us in the lurch? I wanted to swing the axe too, but you were afraid I'd cut off a toe. Let's build our own log cabin and not say a word about it to Flickers or anyone."

"Flickers and Jimmie especially," assented Polly, "or we'll see it as a local item in the Mont-alban Farm Journal."

The island was nearly half a mile long and well wooded. Tuesday morning after the camp work had been attended to, the girls took the canoe and paddled over to reconnoiter. Mrs. Abbott watched them from the bank. Polly sat in the prow as "stroke," and behind her were the others, two by two. Every afternoon since their arrival they had been hard at work drilling, and now they kept good time with their paddles.

Shading her eyes from the brilliant sunlight sheen on the water. Aunt Millicent waved to them and received a paddle salute in return. It was more than summer fun the girls were having, she thought; more than woodcraft and camp cookery they were learning. The little crew in

the canoe with its even stroke seemed to symbolize the gradual working together in co-operative endeavor, the mutual reliance on each other, and the stronger better comradeship the life in the forest brought to the surface.

Betty and Isabel had thrown little banderillos at each other all the long term at Calvert Hall; while Natalie and Hallie had always rasped a bit on each other's sensibilities in little matters, although taken in the long run they were good pals. But in some way up here in the mountains, they had all gained a wider outlook.

The little every-day things that were ordinarily irritating, here were just laughed at and passed over. The *esprit de corps*, that binds a party of explorers together as securely as the rope guards Alpine climbers from peril, was being felt more and more among the girls. They were dependent on one another for happiness and fun and everything that made up the well-being of the camp. Each one was responsible, not alone for her own personal comfort and enjoyment, but also for that of the others.

It was wonderfully stimulating, too, after they fell into the spirit of it and, best of all perhaps,

it had come unconsciously without any preaching or direction.

“The highest beauty is always within,” Mrs. Abbott had said one night when they sat around the camp fire. “What we see is only the outward reflection. You are doing team-work here in the camp, learning to keep step with each other. As Takeshi would say in his poetic Japanese style, you are learning the dance of the stars, each dependent on the other for rhythm.”

“Crullers, don't you dare to trip on the Milky Way,” Betty had advised sagely, for it had fallen to Crullers and Natalie that week to carry the milk can back and forth to Mapledene Farm for replenishment.

But Crullers had only smiled back. The quick retort did not rise to her lips as easily as it used to. She was too busy thinking up new games and occupations for teaching the children at the farm. And this was a revelation to Crullers as well as the rest.

“I never knew what I wanted to do or be,” she told Polly after they had landed on the island and were strolling up the beach. “I didn't like art specially, or music or anything really professional, don't you know, like the rest of you

girls. I only liked children and good things to eat. And now I've found out that they like me too, I mean the children, and I can manage them all right. Kate says if I want to when I finish school I can come to her and the Doctor and take up the work with them. And I pick up languages too. Listen, Polly, 'Mia bambino, mia carissima, buono niente.' "

"It sounds kind of tangled, but maybe it's all right," Polly answered hopefully. "Anyway, you're winning out, Crullers, bless your modest little heart. When I think how you've toted pickled limes and pralines for us for years, I'm awfully glad. Life looks different when you can see the road ahead. I came across the dearest bit of poetry that has such a big urge in it. Listen, now." She said the verses under her breath, so the others could not hear, her hands clasped behind her head, her face uplifted to the mountains, as they halted a minute under some pines.

"Since I found the wander rose,
Smiling skies are o'er me;
Dew-wet lane and hawthorne hedge
Open green before me.
Rain may fall, I heed it not,

For whate'er the weather
Luck and I go hand in hand
Down the world together.

"Petals tinged with sunset light,
Glowing fresh and golden;
Stem hung green with fairy moss
From a forest olden;
Scent of fern-wet forest aisles,
When the day is dying;
Fares the Wander Rose I found
On my heart close lying.

"Since I found the Wander Rose
Smiling skies are o'er me;
With the long white road unrolled,
Stretching free before me.
Winter snows I heed them not
For whate'er the weather
Luck and I go hand in hand
Down the world together."

"Are you two ever coming?" called back Vera.

"Right away, right away," Polly answered.

"We're flying up in the blue sky together on the wings of poesy."

After looking the island over thoroughly, a site was finally selected. It must face the south and therefore be on the farther shore from the

camp, away from the gaze of the casual onlooker.

“Who’s the casual onlooker here?” asked Betty. “Flickers or the chipmunks?”

“Just you wait till the Judy girl from the gypsy wagon comes over to see us and Uncle Thurlow’s students drop casually in to see whether we’re picturesque or not. You don’t have to put any uprights in a log cabin, do you, girls? Just pile logs in a square and fill in the chinks, then roof it over flat.”

“Sounds like the front sun parlor to a dug out,” Natalie remarked judicially, “but it may work out all right. Who’s going to cut the logs?”

“We can hire Flickers to draw them up to the camp and then we’ll ferry them over here secretly at midnight,” Hallie suggested blithely. “We can’t let any one come down here, Polly.”

“But by rights, we should be absolutely independent and cut them ourselves,” Polly said firmly. “I’ll ask Aunt Millicent what she thinks. You know if we were what we pretend we are—girls alone in a forest primæval—we’d have to do everything for ourselves.”

“Hush, girls, do hush,” whispered Vera. “I’ll

get him in just a minute if you'll only keep quiet."

She had been lying on a little rise of ground below them watching through the bushes a patch of marshy land beyond where they had been walking. Camera leveled, she aimed at a bird down on the wet sand. It was like a miniature cassowary or even a very young turkey, Betty said in describing it later, and it stalked about daintily. Cautiously Vera snapped it, and sat back triumphantly.

"Girls, I have an idea that is a loon, and he's probably caretaker of the island and has had one eye on us all the time."

"Nipper, a loon that size!" Peggie laughed. "Loons are the great northern divers and come from the Arctic circle in cold weather, but not as far south as this; do they, Polly?"

"Then what is it if it isn't a loon?" asked Vera before Polly could get in a word. "And there must have been loons here sometime or the Indians wouldn't have named the lake Aagoonah. Simple logic, Betty."

"That creature is a sand piper," Isabel declared. "It's a wonder Nipper didn't call it a baby ostrich."

“Listen,” Polly warned. Over the water from the camp came a long halloo.

“That doesn’t sound like Aunt Milly,” she said. “And Flickers wouldn’t call us. Let’s hurry, girls. There’s something new happening at the Camp of the Wild Loon.”

CHAPTER XIX

THE HIKE TO BALDY KNOB

WHEN they reached the camp, the first person they beheld was Takeshi. Standing like a sentinel on guard before Aunt Millicent's tent, he gravely saluted them.

"Most beautiful day. I think not maybe it will rain," he remarked quite in the tone as if he had graciously arranged the weather to suit their happiness and convenience. "Mr. Abbott present himself in one second."

"Here we are," Aunt Millicent said, emerging from the tent. "I'm only exhibiting all our wonderful folding contrivances and conveniences, so he will be jealous over in his old bachelor quarters. Wasn't it nice of him, though, girls, to ride up that old timber road hunting us to be sure we were all right?"

"Splendid," the girls exclaimed, as Uncle Thurlow came forward, asking how the camp witches were getting along.

"You may call him Uncle Thurlow if you like," Polly said generously, hugging one coat sleeve. "I don't blame you a bit if you want to."

He did seem specially good to look at today, somehow, they all thought. It was all very well to talk about lonely log cabins, and islands where no man might land, not even Flickers; but this big, strenuous, merry-eyed uncle was immediately adopted by every girl in camp. His help might be a very desirable thing before the summer was over, they thought.

It had been a long dusty trip up from New York in the machine, he told them. Even Takeshi had said several times he wished the honorable gods would let fall a little rain.

"And we do need it badly," Mr. Abbott said, leaning back from the long plank dinner table under the trees after he had finished dinner with them. "Be careful in every way over here about fire, and if you see a pillar of smoke hanging over the forest anywhere, give the alarm. We are all volunteer firemen up here, those who love the woods. Bank your fires with ashes at night if you need to keep them over, and don't drop any matches around. Know what I do up here?"

Takeshi taught me how. I'm rather fond of my pipe when I'm out painting or sketching, so when I light a match, I stick it down in the ground to extinguish it. Try it. Now, children, I'm going to run away with your guardian for the afternoon. She has to be my guardian and see that the Castle is settled properly. Remember, you are all invited over there any time you feel like coming."

Polly managed to get in a word just as he was getting into the machine.

"Is Mr. Phelps coming up, do you think, Uncle Thurlow?"

"Not that I know of, Pollykins. Not unless your Aunt Faith persuades him to come. I believe she and Evelyn are rather petting him up, and trying to get him away from New York. Every man needs some wise and sweet woman like your Aunt Millicent to boss him delightfully and make him do what he should do in order to lead a calm, happy existence in this topsy-turvy world."

"Be still, you great boy," Aunt Milly exclaimed, as he tucked her in beside him. "First you compliment me and pet me and then you and Takeshi are quite liable to turn around and de-

nounce me because I like the Adirondacks better than Fujiyama."

The girls stood and waved good-bye as the big touring car went rather gingerly down the timber road, bumping over the high ridges of turf between the ruts.

"They'll have an awful time until they hit the State road," Polly said. "It's all bumps and thank-you-ma'ams between."

Betty and Isabel were on duty in the cook tent, washing the dishes. In some way, the camp seemed actually lonesome after the last purr of the motor died away. Peggie thought they had better write home letters. They could get out the paper pads and all line up at the table under the trees. Marjorie wanted to wash.

"I don't approve at all," said Betty from the tent. "Pipes, how can you suggest washing on a glorious afternoon like this? If that especial act appeals to you as the poetry of motion, go ahead, but I shall hike forth as a light-footed adventurer just as soon as I've finished these seventeen hundred pots and pans that Polly has left."

"I'll do them the end of the week, Betty," Isabel promised; "just as soon as my rubber gloves come up."

“Picture the rubber gloves of Lady Vanitas doing a graceful and decorous Marathon over the hilltops from New York to this rock ledge,” Polly teased. “I don’t want to write any letters, Peg. Let’s all go scouting as Betty says. Let’s go to the caves.”

“Polly, you angel, you deliverer from letter writing,” Hallie exclaimed thankfully. “Peggie’s always suggesting something highly virtuous just like Miss Calvert, and you feel like a villain if you don’t buckle down and do it properly. Where are these deep, dark holes in the ground that we are to explore secretly? My finger-nails are cracking, my finger-nails are cracking.”

“What for, goosie?”

“The thrill of expectancy.”

“It isn’t far, girls,” Betty called. “Flickers said you couldn’t miss them because they’re under that big overhanging rock ledge you can see from Eagle Rock.”

“Yes, but you can’t see it from any other point along the way, can you?” asked Isabel doubtfully. “Of course, we’ve got compasses, but we don’t know the exact point we’re aiming at.”

“Remember what Aunty Welcome used to tell

us, it's better to aim at a star and hit the bar post than to aim at the bar post and hit the ground," Polly replied cheerfully. "If we make a start for the caves, we may land something else half-way there even if we don't reach them."

"You know, Polly," Betty came out of the cook tent, a dish towel dangling from one hand and a plate elevated in the other, "you're a dandy old philosopher and encourager."

"I think a philosopher should always encourage people," Polly declared laughingly. "We want no tubs or lanterns in our club, and anyone who wants to share our sunshine is entirely welcome."

"Oh, gay hearted Miss Diogenes, I follow thee gladly."

"If you don't stop dancing around, we'll never get a start. Hallie, you get out the drinking cups and pilgrim staffs."

"And a lunch, please let's take a lunch," Marjorie pleaded. "Pimento cheese and crackers, and bacon. We could have a bacon bat over on the rocks. If we should get lost we shouldn't starve. We'd have to go on short rations. Once there was a little girl—"

Polly slipped both hands over her eyes suddenly and finished up,

“Who wouldn't say her prayers,
And she had to go to sleep 'way upstairs.”

Mountain gobble'uns will get you, Pipes, if you don't watch out.”

“I think we're perfectly safe,” said Isabel placidly. “We have the direction firmly fixed in our minds.”

“Quite so,” Betty agreed, “and if we lose our bearings, Commander Polly will have to climb a tree with our valued assistance and locate our destination.”

Laughing and teasing one another, they took the trail, after getting into bloomers, tramping boots, and middies. A note was written and tacked to the tent pole in the cooking domain for Aunt Millicent to find should she return first, and they started up the mountain path leading from the wood-road to above timber line.

It was a beautiful day, warm but with a light breeze blowing off the lake. As they went higher into the green depths of the forest, their gay chatter ceased. Something of the forest silence fell on them. It was so wonderful, the great sweeping expanses that opened up before them at each clearing. Once they came to the edge of a great natural gash in the side of the

mountain, a sheer drop of hundreds of feet, although looking down, one saw only the tops of trees, their branches stirring like the ruffled wavelets of a green sea.

Polly parted the thick bushes, holding them back with Isabel's help, and the others crawled to the edge and peered down.

"It's like looking out of a tower window, the highest tower in the world," Marjorie said softly. "See how the mountains deepen to purple away off over there. You can hardly tell whether they are mountains or clouds."

"Do you girls remember this in Tennyson's 'Day Dream'?" Betty's usually merry tone was a bit subdued as she stood with lifted chin looking off at the mountains.

" 'Across the hills and far away
Beyond their utmost purple rim,
And deep into the dying day,
The happy princess followed him.' "

"There you have it again," Peggie spoke up suddenly. "'Followed him.' Just like a squaw. Why didn't he put his arm around her, and the two of them walk side by side together?"

"Peg, you haven't any soul for poetry," Betty

declared sadly. "He probably didn't give a rap how she chose to walk so long as she accompanied him."

Higher up they came out on a wide clearing where there had been a saw mill in the winter time. The lumbermen's shack was still there, with a crooked stove pipe sticking out rakishly at one end, and in a circular space was a heap of sawdust and chips.

"Now, wouldn't those be handy for our kindling!" Hallie exclaimed. "If we only had some way of carrying them. Peg, you and I could come up with potato sacks and get some on our backs tomorrow, the way we did the pine cones."

"I should think it would be awfully cold up here in the winter, chopping wood."

"You never get cold when you're out working in the open, Isabel. If you were here chopping wood—"

"Think of our precious old Lady Vanitas out chopping wood with her dainty white hands all chapped and cold," Polly said, sympathetically. "She'd have to wear lambskin gloves, and carry around a little gold topped bottle of rosewater and glycerine all the time; wouldn't you, Blanch-

mains? Oh, girls," she stopped suddenly. "That makes me think of something—"

"What does? The bottle of rosewater?" asked Betty, interestedly.

"No. The name, Blanchmains. It means white hands, and it was the name of the pretty marionette at the Parisis."

"Plural, Parisi, Polly," Isabel suggested. "You must speak correctly."

"All right," Polly retorted a bit recklessly. "I wonder what's happening at the Casa Neri, that's all."

"Did you ever hear anything else from Ravenna?"

"Never mind asking questions, Hallie. It's a secret."

And not another word could they coax from her about Ravenna or the Casa Neri, or Donna Costanza. But as she tramped with the rest through the green gold gloom of those pine aisles, Polly wondered if Lindsay had ever been up there, and loved it too. Perhaps way off on the olive crowned heights where Dante had dreamed years before, he longed for the good old mountains of the home state. A line drifted into her mind from one of her favorite poems, "Pippa

Passes," something about an unsuspected isle in the far sea, and a mountain there,

"Whole brotherhoods of cedars on its brow."

Here were whole brotherhoods of hemlocks and tall pines. All about them they rose, straight and beautiful against the rich deep blue of the summer sky. Sometimes they saw a mass of rough sticks high in the top boughs of one, and wondered whether it was an eagle's nest, or at least a hawk's, or maybe a crow's. As Betty said, surely it was one of them.

Under foot lay layers and layers of pine needles, no one knew how many years they represented, that thick soft fragrant russet carpet of needles that made a bed for ferns to grow in. It seemed as if they found all kinds, the tall palm-like fronds of the large mountain fern, the maidenhair always in clumps by itself, the sturdy Boston, green all winter long, and tiny lacy ones that clung around the rock edges delicately.

"Time for first rations," Polly said as they came to a rambling brook tumbling over itself as it raced over a rocky bed under the pines. They sat down and munched crackers and pimento

cheese contentedly; then a pool deep between rocks teased them to inspect it more closely, and they all went in wading. It was cold, but after a minute of heroism they became used to it, and Peggie led them along the glen bottom, following the brook's running waves. Suddenly Polly stopped and pointed up among the trees. There, under a mass of overhanging hemlocks, was a rustic seat built just where it commanded a full view of the beautiful ravine and brook.

"Now, whoever did that?" she asked delightedly. "Somebody who loved it all. My runaway, I think, girls. Isn't it dear?"

Up they clambered, over rocks and ferns and dead underbrush and fallen limbs, until they reached it. It was made of white birch, and held four of them. There was a supporting platform under it, about six feet long, and the others sat on this. Betty and Polly had brought their kodaks, and took snapshots of the group. Afterwards Isabel snapped them too. Finally Peggie proposed that they all carve their initials on the back of the seat.

"Do you suppose he'd mind?" asked Polly.

"I think he'd love it if he ever comes back to see them," Betty returned. "It shows that a

lot of others found his rest place and loved it too."

"I would call it the 'Peace Spot,' " Polly said. "Think what it must be here at sundown!"

It was hard to tear themselves away from the beauty of the glen, but, as Betty said, if one's motto happened to be "Excelsior," one had to keep going.

It was nearly four by Isabel's wrist watch when they finally saw the great rocky ledge overhanging a deep ravine. Under the ledge were the caves, and even at a distance the girls saw them. They looked like great dark eyes peering from beneath heavy brows, forever brooding and dreaming in the great silences of the mountain.

"But how on earth do you get to them?" Polly said, as they stood looking up. "A goat could hardly climb that rock face."

"There's a secret way, Flickers said, they call it the Indian ladder," Peggie answered. "I think there used to be a real ladder that hung down that you had to climb."

"I don't see any." Polly and the others stared up at the long expanse. "I suppose this is Devonian drift, as Miss Calvert would remark; isn't it, girls?"

“Somebody’s looking down at us,” Peggie said softly. “There’s a head in that third one; see it, girls?”

Nobody spoke a word. Looking up the face of the rocks, they could see leaning out of one of the caves under the huge ledge, a head, and then an arm waving to them.

“It’s Sarepta Jones,” exclaimed Polly with a sigh of quick relief. “Whatever is she doing away up there? Come along, girls, if she can get there, we can.”

CHAPTER XX

SAREPTA ENTERTAINS

THROUGH the underbrush that grew thickly along the base of the cliff, they made their way until they came within calling distance of Sarepta. She was making signs to them, and pointing.

“Come through the cave,” she shouted to them.

“Through the cave,” repeated Polly. “How can we do that?”

“She’s pointing down this way,” Peggie called, pushing ahead of the rest along a narrow path that one had to part the bushes to find.

“But it only comes bang up against the sheer rock wall.”

“No, it doesn’t, it doesn’t, girls,” Peggie exclaimed. “There’s a cave here. I’m going in.”

Under the great ragged ledge of rock they all went, following the little winding trail cautiously. It went in about twenty-five feet before it turned, and went around like a circular staircase. Isabel

said it was like the salt mines, and Marjorie said no, it was like the caves of the Dolomites where the cave bear skeletons have been found. As it grew darker, the girls hesitated, but presently Sarepta's voice sounded beyond urging them forward.

"Ain't a thing to harm ye," she called. "Just step right along the path. It comes out again up here."

Sure enough, it did. After a long climb, feeling their way along the rock walls, they finally emerged into a large cave, one side of which was open and looked out from beneath the great rock ledge.

"That's where I watched ye from," Sarepta said, eyeing them happily. "Seems pretty good to have callers, even if you did sort of walk in on me. I can't say take a chair, but there's some old potato sacks yonder that I sleep on. Makes a good bed too, with plenty of leaves and ferns underneath. Know the kind of ferns to get for your bed, don't ye? Pollypods, that's the sort. Them big tall ones like pa'ms. Pollypods, we call them."

"Do you really live up here, Sarepta?" asked Polly.

“Don’t you like it?” Sarepta asked calmly and mildly. “It’s the coolest place on a hot night, and the warmest one on a cold night that you ever saw. I’m a sight more comfortable up here than you folks be down in that camp. I wouldn’t feel safe a minute there, it’s so public. How’s the Missus?”

Polly told about the arrival of Mr. Abbott, and how he had whisked away the camp chaperon.

“And you got into mischief the minute her back was turned, didn’t you?” asked Sarepta, her dark eyes twinkling a bit. “Did you bring a lantern along? No. I thought as much. How in tunket did you expect to see the caves without any lanterns or candles? Never mind. If I haven’t got one around somewhere, we’ll send Nicodemus up to Gabriel for one. Anything I don’t have around handy, I just send up to him for, and he sends it right down.”

The girls tried not to notice what she said, but every one of them was certain she meant the angel Gabriel, and as Polly said later, it was fearfully embarrassing to have her speak of him in such a friendly way. But in a few minutes Sarepta had taken an old piece of paper and a stub

of a pencil and had laboriously written a message on it. Then she called the dog and attached it to his collar, and told him to go along and trot up to Gabe's with it.

"He'll bring one back all right," she said. "Like enough Gabe will come down with him to take you all through. It'd be just like him."

Polly thought it was a good thing Crullers was not there. Nothing could have repressed her, no lecture on consideration for another's infirmities, or courtesy to one's hostess, nothing at all. Crullers would have laughed, but the rest sat and listened with wide eyes. As Isabel said afterwards, the point was that she really believed he would come down.

"We ought to divert her mind now," she whispered to Polly, so they began asking her what flowers grew on her side of Baldy Knob, and whether she was ever lonesome.

"Yes, I was once," Sarepta answered thoughtfully. "I went down to Albany to visit a niece of mine who thought I was crazy because I chose to worship God in the forests and on His mountains, and I was so lonesome I didn't know what to do with myself. But we ain't never lonesome up here where we know all about everything,

Nick and me. When I get tired of one cave I move into another, but this one's my favorite. I call it my sky parlor. There ain't such another view as this in all New York State."

"Let's have our lunch here," proposed Betty suddenly. "You wouldn't mind, would you, Sarepta, if we had a nice little bacon bat out on your stone parapet?"

"Don't mind a bit. Got any matches this time?" Sarepta laughed with them and helped get things ready for the bacon bat. She even permitted them to use her fireplace, one she had rigged up herself between two rocks. Across them she had laid an old iron rod for a crane, and underneath it the rock was somewhat hollowed out, so that it held a fire well.

The girls never forgot that afternoon. It was so romantic, sitting around the fire toasting slices of bacon on long sharpened sticks, and eating some of Sarepta's store of fruit.

"Almost live on fruit," she told them. "Fruit and hulled corn and corn meal mush, and a few vegetables. Never eat a mite of meat though. Can't bear to see anything killed and can't bear to eat anything that's been killed, neither. Gives me the shudders."

The sun had started downward towards the purple rim of the distant mountains when Nicodemus came back. The girls heard his bark before he came in sight, and then they saw somebody behind him, stalking up the secret entrance to the caves. He was so tall that he had to stoop to walk along the passageway, a big, loosely-built man with a thin white beard and moustache. He was talking to the dog and smiling.

"That's Gabriel," Sarepta said pleasantly. "He lives on top of the mountain same as I do down here. He's crazy too, folks say, but it ain't so. He studies the stars and he has to live away up on top of the mountain so he can see them all. If you follow the old Indian trail it will lead you up to his place. Howdy, Gabe."

Old Gabriel nodded his head rather shyly at sight of Sarepta's afternoon reception, but when they explained to him what they wanted, he agreed to take the girls through the caves. These were not like the Virginia ones they had seen the year before. There everything had been done by man to make the way through easy and attractive. Here there were no electric lights or hand rails. They just followed old Gabriel's lead, and the flickering light of his lantern

through vaulted chamber after vaulted chamber, and along low passages. To the girls, it was far more awe-inspiring and adventurous than the other trip had been, and they breathed a sigh of relief when he brought them out into the fresh air.

"But this isn't where we went in," exclaimed Hallie.

"'Bout half a mile below," Gabriel explained. "This way's quicker over to the lake. Want I should go along and show you the way?"

"You know all the different trails and roads through these mountains, don't you, Mr. Gabriel?" asked Betty.

"Last name's Chevril," answered Gabriel. "Folks 'round here can't get it right, so they call me Old Cheerful, and I'd just as soon they did. My folks are all from farther north near the Canadian border. Got French blood in them. Good-bye and good luck to you." He stood at the turn of the trail smiling. "I guess you can find your way now. When you come up again, come to my place. It's as high as you can go. The stars walk tiptoe there at night and at dawn you can hear the sons of the morning sing like Job did."

"Oh, goodness," Betty exclaimed when they had left him. "I think if I stayed up here with Gabriel and Sarepta I'd get crazy too. You listen to them until you feel the same way, just as if everything that really is, wasn't, and everything that isn't, was."

"Betty's got it twisted a little, girls," laughed Polly. "She's really quoting Scripture. 'For the things that are seen are temporal, but the things that are unseen are eternal.'"

"Well, anyway, I'll never forget going through those caves with him leading us and Sarepta and Nicodemus bringing up the rear," Betty insisted. "It was the strangest experience. What would Miss Calvert have said?"

"I know," Marjorie exclaimed, and she imitated the Lady Honoria's tone perfectly as she said: "'Most extraordinary!'"

"Don't," Polly said with a sigh. "You make me homesick. I won't hear it after this year any more."

"Poor old retiring commander," Betty tried to soothe her. "What do you think you'll do with yourself, now that you're reaching the sere and yellow leaf, or is it sere and faded?"

"Let's talk about something good to eat," Hal-

lie begged impetuously. "I can't bear to think of Calvert without Polly. Where's that saw mill we passed on this road before?"

"It wasn't this road. Gabriel led us to another." Polly paused to consult her compass. Betty, with Marjorie's help, was singing at the top of her lungs:

"I'm a-going away by the light of the moon,
And I want all de children for to follow me,
I hope I'll meet you darkies soon,
Halla—halla—halla—hallelujah!

"In de morning, in de morning by de bright light,
When Gabriel blows his trumpet in de morning."

"We'll be wishing for Gabriel to blow his trumpet long before morning if we don't get the right path out of this wood," Polly said grimly. "We've missed the timber trail and are going southeast instead of south the way he told us to."

"But we're going down the mountain," Vera declared. "We're sure of getting to the bottom, aren't we? We couldn't get lost."

"It's a quarter of six," Isabel remarked with a shiver. "Why on earth didn't we bring our sleeping bags. Think if we should have to stay out all night!"

"We'd go right back to Sarepta and her caves," Polly said lightly although she was wondering just where they were. "Will you have an outside cabin or an inside, Lady Vanitas? I think I'll choose to sleep on the parapet. Didn't the little bed of leaves look inviting?"

"Oh, Polly, hush, please," begged Pipes mournfully. "I wonder if we are really lost, girls. I don't see a single familiar object."

"Keep a-going, Sarepta said, if we should miss the path," Polly replied. "Let's not get rattled, girls. You know the wilderness terror is a figment of the brain, so Miss Calvert told us."

Hallie and Betty giggled outright. It relieved the nervous tension and they all started again although there was no sign of a beaten path. Polly and Vera took the lead, bending down sometimes to push forward through the tangled vines and thick underbrush. The rest followed Indian file, each holding back the branches to keep them from snapping in the next one's face. It was hard, slow work, and the minutes were precious. Once when they came to a little natural clearing, they stopped to catch their breath and rest a minute, and Betty reminded Polly of her suggestion.

“I said you’d have to climb a tree to see where we had landed. Try a pine, Polly. They’re easy.”

Polly’s face brightened. “I will. There’s a lovely big one over yonder, and I know I can get up into it. Come along, fellow pilgrims.”

At the base of the big pine they played they were Zouaves. Hands on their knees, they made a stepladder for Polly to mount, and laughing, half falling, she made her way up over their backs until she could catch the lowest boughs and swing herself up. From there it was easy. She climbed up, higher and higher into the thick branches, until she could part them and see out over the smaller trees. Down below the girls heard a shout of joy.

“Are we near the camp?” she called.

“No, children, we’re not,” Polly answered, “but we’re only about a quarter of a mile from the Castle. I think I’m a wonderful pathfinder.”

Betty sank down on a mossy bed.

“Leave me here among the woodland violets. I’m going to be Titania and go beautifully mad like Sarepta.”

“Violet time’s gone by. Come along now.

It's only a little way farther on," Peggie said sensibly.

"'Farther on, farther on,
I'll be happy farther on,'"

sang Betty feebly. "I feel as if I couldn't take another step."

"Poor weak lamb," Hallie sympathized. "Polly, didn't Mr. Abbott say that Takeshi had bought chickens for their dinner tonight? Shall we be in time for chicken *a la* Nipponese?"

Betty sat up at once and declared she felt instantly revived, so again they started off, Polly leading as scout, and came out on the State highway just above the Castle grounds.

Aunt Millicent was out on the side stone porch, fixing the rambler vine that had fallen down. When she saw them, her brown eyes opened wide with amazement. Tired they were and dusty from their long tramp, but rosy and radiantly happy. Leaning on their tall staffs, they smiled up at her, and begged an invitation to dinner.

"For pity's sake, where did you all drop from?" she exclaimed helplessly. "Of course you may have dinner. I think Takeshi is having roast chicken for us. Where have you been?"

“Following Gabriel’s trumpet through Sarepta’s caves,” Polly told her merrily. “And we didn’t lose our way either.”

“Thanks to great presence of mind, one pine tree, one compass, and Polly’s good luck,” Vera put in. “Good old scout, isn’t she, girls?”

But this time they were too weary even to raise a cheer, and Mrs. Abbott hustled the whole lot up to the big cool rooms to rest and bathe before dinner.

CHAPTER XXI

JUDY, GYPSY PRINCESS

THE next week it was Peggie's and Vera's turns down at Mapledene, and the second day Flickers came up to the camp bearing a note for Polly and one for Mrs. Abbott likewise.

They were busy working on the island log cabin, but it was the noon hour, and Flickers stood watching them as Polly opened her letter.

"There isn't anything you can do for us today, thanks, Flickers," she said.

"Yes, I know, but Pa'll want to know what was in the letters," answered Flickers innocently and serenely.

"Well, I never," exclaimed Polly, but Aunt Millicent laughed heartily, and told Mr. Jones's eldest hope to bear the glad tidings back to his father that the entire camp had an invitation to spend the day at the farm on Thursday. Flickers drove away, completely satisfied, and Polly said the notice would appear in due time now, in Mr. Jones's Farm Journal.

The cabin was progressing spasmodically. One particular joy of Agoonah Camp, the girls said, was its absence of system. System in a camp, after one had run to the primæval forests to be free, simply didn't go at all, and was not to be tolerated. So far as the camp work was concerned they were all glad to do team work faithfully, but when it came to recreation, there must be a free rein.

"You see, we're every one of us different and fearfully individualistic," Betty remarked, as she brought out a lot of birch bark she had tucked away underneath her cot, and prepared to make little picture frames of it, bound with sweet grass strips. "Nipper isn't satisfied unless she's out with that camera aiming at birds, bees and butterflies, whereas I have a love for the fireside."

"Yes, you have," Polly broke in teasingly. "You're the worst trumper in the camp."

"Tramp in the camp would have sounded better," Betty returned truthfully. "I'm the tramp of the camp, the tramp of the camp, of the camp, camp, camp. Makes a dandy refrain, girls. I'm going to try it on a tin pan as soon as the sun goes down."

"Like your merry roundelay?" Pipes rose

and lifted up her voice in song, and the rest joined in, Natalie from her tent, and even Aunt Millicent from the hammock where she was taking a siesta.

“Come to dinner, come to dinner,
Hear those bells, hear those bells.

Bacon and potatoes, bacon and potatoes,
Pork and beans, pork and beans.”

This was Betty’s adaptation of an old school round, that the girls had often used at Calvert Hall.

“Freres Jacques, freres Jacques,
Dormez vous, dormez vous,
Sonnez le matin, sonnez le matin,
Ding dong bell, ding dong bell.”

“Hush, hush,” cried Isabel pleadingly. “I’m writing a home letter and I can’t hear myself think.”

“Peace, peace, perturbed spirit,” soothed Betty. “Lo, at thy plaintive wail, we cease. Polly, let’s think up something new, something—what was it Isabel was chanting at us girls last night from her tent? Oh, I know. Let us restore the spirit of adventure in the real things of life.”

"That's enough, Betty Morris," Crullers said darkly. "The last time you did I found grasshoppers in my bed."

The girls all laughed. It was impossible not to enjoy thoroughly any mishap that befell Crullers. She was so trustful, so credulous, that it was a constant temptation to try something new on her. Polly was the only one to whom Crullers confided any of her ambitions now, and they were high ones.

Thursday came and they all went down to review Kate's kiddies, or kindergarten, for Aunt Millicent said it was a real garden of children. Every week fresh batches came up from New York, and some were shipped back. They came pale and listless and went back "whooping," so the Doctor said. Nedda was plump and rosy now, and her big boy tried to stand on his feet, strong and happy.

"Never can I say t'ank you to the Signor and Signora," Nedda said sadly. "They are angels."

"Kate, you're an angel in a gingham apron," Polly told her.

"You *have* to be one," Kate answered placidly. "It takes the patience of Job, and the sweet tem-

per of your Aunt Evelyn to run this place. Doctor's getting wrinkles, but I only get new freckles. Still we've won out," she laughed happily; "and every one told us we were taking hold of too big a proposition to run successfully. We've managed to take from twenty to thirty youngsters a week and give them a taste of the country, and tuck away in their little minds the picture of all this. Maybe some day it will bear fruit. Perhaps some of them will want to come back where there aren't any 'keep off the grass' signs."

It seemed as if each new day brought with it a new adventure. Friday they went for a long walk over the mountain-side to Blow-Me-Down Mill and talked to its owner, picked some of his water lilies and cat-tails, and stopped at the gypsy camp to meet Judy, the artist girl who was taking lessons from Mr. Abbott. She was making a brigand stew, she told them, as they came up. It cooked over a rousing fire, the big gypsy kettle swinging from three sticks.

Judy knelt beside it, poking the stew vigorously.

"The brigands have a wonderful way of making stews," she told them, shaking back her curly

red hair out of her eyes. "Did you ever meet a brigand, girls? I have, Capitano Alfredo di Mont' Alarno. In Italy near Pisa. He had come to visit his old mother there, down from the northern mountains. And he showed me how to cook this mess. Red and green peppers, tomatoes, potatoes, the finest of beef cut into squares, onions, savory herbs, all sorts of things. I like to see just how many different things I can put in, and still make it come out a success."

It *was* a success, they assured her later when they had all sampled it. Sitting around in a circle with the pendant pot in the center, they solemnly helped themselves, while Judy chatted with Aunt Millicent of art in general and Uncle Thurlow's new angle in it in particular.

"And I think it's perfectly dandy the way you girls are camping over yonder," she said at last. "I came up here a few years ago, all run down and with no heart for anything, and look at me now. Why, I even chop what wood I need myself. I think girls must be different from what they used to be."

"We're wonderful people, Judy," Polly answered. "Just ask Takeshi. He told me the

other day that women were made from the moon's tears and the sun's smiles."

"That sounds like Lindsay, doesn't it, Mrs. Abbott," Judy smiled suddenly.

"Does she know Lindsay Phelps?" Polly asked on the way back to the camp, as she walked beside Aunt Millicent.

"Who, Judy? Why, yes, I believe so. Nearly all of your uncle's pupils know him. Isn't it a shame he isn't here this summer? I can't bear to think of him away off there among strangers. You haven't heard from his father, have you, Polly?"

"Not since we came here," Polly said. "But I know he'll surely be up, Aunt Milly, I feel it in my bones. How your Judy girl blushed when she spoke of Lindsay."

"They were good friends," Aunt Millicent said, and Polly noticed she did not smile as she spoke. Whereupon she plunged ahead for information quite as Flickers himself might have done.

"Is it a romance, Aunty? Tell me, please. I think it would be beautiful to have a romance happen up here, and Judy is a darling with those thick red gold curls all over her head and her funny eyes. Did you notice her eyes? We all

did. They are hazel, I suppose, only they look like moss agates, brown and gold and green all mixed up nicely. And she is fair-skinned too, only for that little sprinkling of freckles over her nose. Tell me all about her and Lindsay, do, Aunt Milly."

Then Aunt Millicent laughed. It was impossible to resist Polly's coaxing.

"Very well, then; only mind, no gossiping. Judy is odd in her notions, and she says she wouldn't marry a man with a great deal of money for anything. She wants to be free to go away in a gypsy wagon if she feels like it. And, of course, Stanton Phelps's daughter-in-law couldn't very well do that."

"I don't see why not," Polly expostulated. "What's the use of having all the money you want if you can't do just as you like with it? I'm sure if Grandfather and I were wealthy like Mr. Phelps, we'd have a perfectly dandy time cruising everywhere. Maybe we'd go in a canal boat if we felt like it, what do you call it? Snubbing, that's it. Maybe we'd want a gypsy wagon too. I know I'd love to have one like Judy's. It's all padded inside with yellow satin and little mirrors set in, and silk curtains at the win-

dows. She bought it from a gypsy princess, she said, and it's just as comfortable and convenient as any abode. I like that word, don't you, Aunt Milly? Abode. It sounds sort of settled and contented."

"Perhaps, Polly, but I know Lindsay wouldn't like to live in one, not even if he were honeymooning. I wish the boy would give up his wild-goose chase and come back home where he belongs. I think he's altruistic."

Polly wrinkled her forehead.

"Means something about being good to others before you think of yourself, doesn't it? I don't believe he's that at all. He's selfish because he never thinks of all Mr. Phelps has done for him, and he simply trots off to the other side of the world to hunt up his own people the minute he finds out he doesn't really belong to the dear old man."

"That wasn't his idea in going, childie. Lindsay is a big brown-eyed boy, full of dreams and ambitions quite apart from the question of money. He felt it was not right for him to remain in a false position any longer. If he were not the real son of Mr. Phelps, it was not right for him to receive so much from him."

Polly listened with her lips closed firmly, and her own opinion unchanged. All her sympathies remained with the tall white-haired king, sitting alone and blind, while the boy he had loved as a son traveled far away, hunting a dream.

“I think as long as he has been given all the love and care that a real son would have had, he should have given the same in return. Money isn’t much after all, and I think the loneliest people in all the world are the ones with money and no love, like poor old Mr. Phelps. If he had been a foundling in a basket now—”

“He was almost,” Aunt Millicent returned gently. “Remember how Mr. Phelps explained it to you last spring? He was left at the Foundlings’ Home in New York by the old Italian nurse. Perhaps there wasn’t a basket, but all your other romantic details are there for you, Polly.”

“Well, I think if I had been left like that,” Polly insisted, “I should rather have remained a mystery. Then I could whisper to myself, ‘Lo, maybe I am a lost princess,’ when probably I was only a gypsy kiddie, see?”

“No, you wouldn’t either. You would long

every minute of the day to know who you really were. We're very much attached to our own personalities, ladybird."

Still Polly held to her own idea in the matter, but she took to running down to the pretty pine hollow by the mill brook, where Judy had her camp. There was another artist girl sharing it with her, a tall, fair-haired girl who took lessons up at the Castle with the regular summer class there, while Judy went up only as the mood seized her.

And gradually Polly drew from her something more about Lindsay Phelps. Very gradually, for Judy was reticent and a trifle cross when his name was mentioned.

"Polly, never, never fall in love with any son of Adam, but learn and labor truly to get thine own living and do thy duty in that state of life unto which it has pleased God to call thee."

Judy would often stand, encased in her blue linen painting smock, one hand uplifted, holding either a paint brush or a cooking spoon, and deliver impromptu orations on love and matrimony while Polly listened attentively.

"Would you like to marry another artist,

Judy? Then you'd both think and work in the same line."

"Yes, and who'd cook and mend and clean up the studio? And probably he'd follow the fearful new schools, and I love the old."

"Uncle Thurlow belongs to the new. He paints things that just look like paint smudges until you stand away off from them."

"Nonsense. He has his own school, Polly. Don't talk art to me. I get it all day long, and can't even make pancakes but what they smell of turpentine." Judy laughed, pushing back her red curls from her face. "Is that log cabin of yours done yet? Maybe I'll rent it from you if the roof doesn't leak."

"It hasn't any roof yet, but it will have."

Judy nodded her head, and intoned softly and sadly:

"Oh, I wish my room had a floor,
I wish my room had a floor,
I don't care so much for a window or a door,
But I wish my room had a floor!"

"We could stretch a canvas fly over it protem," Polly said encouragingly. "And it would be lots of fun having you near."

"I don't want anything pro. tem.," Judy said firmly. "I've been living pro. tem. for several years. I was even engaged pro. tem."

"To Lindsay?" Polly put it mildly, and Judy fell beautifully and unsuspectingly.

"Yes. Last summer. Oh, Polly, I don't mind telling you after all." She threw down her brush, and came over to the shade where Polly sat. "One day we had been for a long tramp up past the timber line. Perhaps you know the big ravine over west. I had been painting one spot there where the brook makes a turn over a mass of rocks—"

"I know," Polly interrupted eagerly. "Where the seat is. We found it the day we went hunting the caves."

"It's a disconcerting place, isn't it?" Judy smiled whimsically, her head on one side, her hands planted squarely on her slender hips. "You forget there are such things as other people, or money, or anything. And when somebody who is wonderfully nice talks to you, you are apt to promise what they ask, aren't you, Polly? Then when you have to climb down from the green and gold world you find you were only making believe you were a princess of leisure.

So you put on your old paint apron again, and when the prince comes to call, you sweep him a nice low curtsey and say, 'An it please your royal highness, I've changed my mind.'"

Polly watched her with wide eyes. "Is that the real reason why he went abroad, Judy?"

"Maybe," said Judy demurely. "Quien sabe? That means who knows? Don't you like it, Polly?"

"I only hope that he comes back and runs away with you."

For a moment Judy was silent and the mirth died out of her eyes. She stood looking off at the great sweeping valley below them and the rim of the mountains beyond.

"Sometimes I almost wish he would myself," she answered.

CHAPTER XXII

THE ADMIRAL ARRIVES

IT was the middle of August. Agoonah Camp was dozing, so Betty said, in the lazy afternoon. After five weeks of woodcraft and campcraft, the girls had settled down into the happiest, cosiest sort of homeness, as though that particular patch out of the forest belonged to them alone, and was a start in homesteading.

Over on the island the log cabin stood completed, a standing monument to what the feminine mind and hand could accomplish, Polly declared, when it once set out to do a thing. They had persuaded Flickers to haul shingles as far as the camp, and now even Judy said it was a weatherproof abode.

Several times the girls had gone over at sundown and stayed over night in their sleeping bags, making believe they were in the forest primæval. And it seemed true too, with the wood noises all about them, and the low lapping of the water on the shore.

The canoe had taught them confidence on the lake and they cruised all around it one day, and held a bacon bat on the farther shore, three miles from the camp. The day they entertained Kate's kiddies from the farm, they took them out a few at a time and gave them a voyage around to all the points of interest: the big fishing ledge, the island, the old otter hole, the swimming bay, and one fine stretch of white sand they had named Crescent Beach. Another place was Council Rock where the Indians had lighted huge fires back in the old days. One night Uncle Thurlow brought up a carload of art students. They piled up masses of brushwood and far into the night the great flames leaped above the lake waters, and the circle around it sang all the heart songs they could think of.

Judy sat next to Polly and once she turned and said softly,

“Lindsay'd like this sort of thing.”

Polly moved restively and sighed. Why on earth didn't Lindsay appear before this summer had gone by, and his gypsy sweetheart had moved her little caravan along the highroad out of his reach?

The summer home at Mapledene Farm was to

close on the eighteenth, and Polly and Betty went down for the final week. It was delightful work. Polly enjoyed every minute of the time, and the money the girls had earned made it possible for them to stay two weeks longer in camp.

It was Friday morning when Flickers stopped at the white picket fence in front of the tall rock maples.

“Pa got word to meet the two forty-five up from Albany.”

“Who’s coming?” Polly called, from where she sat under the trees with a wide circle of children around her.

“Dassent tell,” Flickers answered cheerfully. “Got some more news too. Sarepta’s missing.”

“Just hiding, isn’t she?” Polly rose now, and came to the gate. “She wouldn’t go away.”

“Well, she has gone. She always sits on a rock up near the Castle and waits for me to drive by with her daily paper. Pa says he guesses Sarepta’d give up and die if she didn’t get the daily paper to cheer her along. And just as soon as she gets it, she scoots like a rabbit into the brush, and that’s the last I see of her till next day. Well, she ain’t been on that rock all this week.”

"She's sick," Polly said decidedly. "You tell Mrs. Abbott when you go to the camp, and some of the girls will go over to the cave and look after her, I know they will. Why didn't you tell before, Flickers?"

"She ain't sick," chuckled Flickers, delighted at having started something interesting. "She's on her honeymoon. I was going to scare you, but you scared too easy. She and Gabe walked clear over to Totersville and was married by old Judge Bingham, and they're housekeeping up in old Gabe's log cabin on top of the mountain."

Polly did not laugh. It was too wonderful to laugh over. Sarepta with her visions and dreams and old Gabriel with his star gazing—how had love ever come to this strange pair?

"I think it's because they were both lonesome," she told Kate after Flickers had gone jogging along the road. "And they both love the mountains and the wilds. Do you know, Kate, I think they'll be perfectly happy."

Kate laughed at her seriousness. "It's an ideal match, Polly, and I'm sure you started it. The best part is they'll believe in each other, and no matter how crazy they may seem to the rest

of the world, they'll understand each other's vagaries and dreams. Sarepta will mother Gabriel and believe all he tells her about the Little Dipper and the Ursa Major."

So engrossed was she in thinking about the bridal pair, that Polly forgot Flickers' other message until after the midday dinner, when most of the little people went to sleep. Betty and she were shelling lima beans on the shady veranda when Jimmie drove up ceremoniously in the two-horse rig, and the next instant the pan of beans went flying to the ground and Polly was running down to the Admiral's embrace.

"I knew you'd come, you old dear," she exclaimed rapturously, clinging to his shoulder. "Where's Mr. Phelps? You haven't come without him?"

"Do you think he's in my suitcase?" smiled the Admiral. "He's coming up in the machine. Can't stand the railroad this weather. Where's the camp?"

"Polly can go this afternoon. We won't need her," Kate told him, as she met them at the veranda steps. "I know you want her with you, Admiral."

But Polly said no, she would stick to the ship.

Jimmie knew the way up to the camp, and could drive from there to the Castle where the Admiral was to be a guest.

“Doesn’t he look splendid?” she said to Kate after he had gone. “Now if my old blind king will just come and give you and the Doctor about ten thousand dollars—”

“Or cents even.”

“Oh, it will be dollars. Kings do not even handle cents. Then I want—”

She hesitated. Almost the secret had popped out. Not even to Kate would she tell how she was building on the hope that Lindsay would keep his word, and come up to Montalban. She had not told Judy either. Somehow it seemed to be between Lindsay and herself. He had said he would try to come. Every day now, when Flickers brought up the mail, she looked for a letter telling of his arrival in America.

“I suppose you want him to endow a wonderful new hospital in New York for Doctor to run and carry out all his pet notions in?” Kate smiled over at her from the desk where she sat. “Polly, you’re a schemer, know it?”

Polly laughed, and went back to the children. They hailed her with little squeals of joy and

Betty said she washed her hands of all discipline while Polly was around.

“Who wants discipline?” Polly cried, tossing one of the Fanchetti brood in her arms. Mrs. Fanchetti, Pippino, and Angelo lived in Phil’s tent up in the big orchard behind the Castle; but Tori, Maddelina, and tiny Carmela were at the farm. It had been such a wonderful summer to them all, and as Kate said it was only a starter. Every year they would come up and if necessary find a larger place so that more children could be accommodated. Officially, Mapledene’s summer colony for sick babies closed that day, but Kate and the Doctor were staying over a few days more, and keeping some of the children with them. Mrs. Fanchetti came down to help, all smiles and ejaculations of pleasure over her brood.

“We’ll see you all up at the camp before we leave for good,” Kate said when Betty and Polly were ready to leave, “and I can’t thank you girls enough for the way you’ve all pitched in and helped me.”

“You’ve helped us too, Kitty Katherine. There isn’t a single girl in the whole crowd that hasn’t come back from her week here feeling bet-

ter and broader. It's done every one of us a world of good."

"I love it," sighed Betty, "and I dread to leave all my precious kiddies. You know I can't make up my mind whether I'd better turn into a kindergarten teacher or have a family of six all my own. I'm convinced now my mission is teaching young ideas how to shoot and young legs how to climb poles and run in a straight line."

Laughing and turning often to wave back to the figure on the veranda, they went up the road together. Nedda ran out from the kitchen to call good-bye to them and to hold up the baby, while Tori was screeching blissfully, "I wanta Pol-lee!"

"Did Kate tell you the Doctor says Crullers may come next summer and take up her work with them?" Betty asked, when they were out of hearing. "Think of what that means for her."

"It's splendid. Dear old Crullers! Perhaps she'll do more good in the world than any of us. Ruth's got to stand by in her home and Kate's the Doctor's running mate, but I shouldn't wonder if Crullers started off on a new path of her own. It has made the biggest kind of differ-

ence in her, just her finding out that she was good for something."

"Polly," Betty breathed softly under her breath, "the bridal pair are approaching. What shall we do?"

Along the stretch of road ahead of them came Sarepta and Gabriel, each with a tall staff as usual, and after them trotted Nicodemus. They were chatting together, and once Sarepta stepped into the bushes to gather some flowers that struck her fancy. When she caught sight of the girls, she smiled and waved her hand to them.

"We're going down to the store after some things," she said happily. "Gabe's going to put up shelves and a cupboard for me, and fix the roof so it won't leak. Come up and see us."

"There you are," Polly exclaimed, when they had congratulated them and passed along. "She's slept out in all sorts of weather for years, and now as soon as she's married, she makes him fix the roof. Aunt Milly will love that. I'm relieved, though, to be sure she'll be taken care of. Probably each one thinks they'll take care of the other one."

"Listen!" Betty stopped short. "I thought I heard a machine."

"It's the saw-mill," Polly returned. "Let's hurry. Tonight we are to have the Council Fire and I want Grandfather to come. Hope the girls have piled plenty of wood. What are you stopping for, Betty?"

Betty stood still, listening.

"Well, you can say it's twin saw-mills if you like, but I can hear a machine running over towards the Castle. Is Judy coming tonight?"

"She was to come up to camp early and stay over night on the island with Peggie and Nat. I think she'd just as soon live like this all the time. She says she dreads going back to the city."

"Who doesn't," Betty answered gloomily.

But by the time they had reached the camp and had told the news, the gloom had vanished. It was hard telling which created the most interest and excitement, the marriage of Sarepta and Gabriel, or the arrival of the Admiral.

The camp took on a gala appearance. Boughs of pine were crossed over the entrance to each tent, and a flag floated from the cook tent. Even if it did have to be furled at sundown it was something to have it there, Crullers said. Out on the Council Rock the huge pile of brush

satisfied even Polly's craving for the spectacular. After supper was cleared away, they dressed in their wood togs, as Polly called them, laying aside the working outfits of bloomers and middies for the Russian linen dresses. And when the first hum of the Castle car could be heard off down the road, Polly set a match to the pile so that it would flash a greeting to their coming guests.

CHAPTER XXIII

LED BY THE FIRELIGHT

JUDY sat in solitude on the rocks above the circle around the fire.

“Don’t mind me a bit, Polly,” she said. “I’m blue and lonesome and cross as two sticks. Just let me fight it out with myself. It’s dear of you to be bothered with me at all. I’ll miss you awfully.”

“Me too,” said Polly cheerily. “You look like a real gypsy tonight, Judy, with those strings of red berries in your hair. You must tell all our fortunes by the firelight.”

So after the arrival of the Admiral and Mr. Abbott, they coaxed her down from her pinnacle and she sat in the glow of the leaping flames, her hair shining like ruddy gold. One by one the girls knelt before her, and presented their palms, and each was told the future. Once she began, Judy fell into the spirit of it, and wove spells

of witchery around her fortunes. It seemed almost as if she guessed the secret hope of each heart. Peggie was to win fame as a sculptress, but never could she be coaxed away from her Wyoming ranch, not though crowned heads and mighty ones of the earth's high places besought her to "do them in clay."

Isabel was to travel far and marry a statesman.

"That's Randy Dinwiddie," said Betty, but Hallie demurred. Randy was her favorite next to Marbury Yates, and if anyone was to marry Randy, it was Polly.

Crullers was to attain her heart's desire, Judy told her solemnly, and Crullers smiled loftily. The day of her dependence had passed. Now she was no longer cup bearer, but an honored member of the council fire circle. Her heart's desire would lead to achievement, and already she had written home to tell of Doctor Elliott's offer for next year.

Marjorie's star pointed to a glorious career as a singer.

"But I pipe up fearfully, Judy," she protested.

"The pipes of Pan are shrill and sweet," re-

plied the gypsy gravely. Betty chanted slowly:

“ ‘Oh, hark! oh, hear!
How thin and clear,
The horns of Elfland
Faintly blowing.’ ”

Vera would be a child of Nature, anything at all from running a farm to hunting with a camera, and Natalie would travel in distant lands. Last came Betty and Polly. Betty knelt laughing and begged for a really good fortune. She wanted a great big Virginia home, she said, with horses and dogs and something going on all the time.

“You’ll have to marry,” Judy said. “Some one tall and dark, and here I see that you will rule.”

“Indeed I will,” Betty agreed. “But then I’ll be so wonderful he won’t mind a bit. Your turn, Polly.”

Polly knelt, her two long braids falling on each side of her face, Indian fashion. Behind her stood the Admiral and Aunt Millicent and back in the shadows, leaning against a tree, was Mr. Abbott, watching the scene contentedly.

“I see happiness here,” Judy bent over the

tanned and hardened little palm, "happiness which comes from your own efforts. You must beware of too much fire, too great an effort, too fierce a flame."

"Now what does that mean?" asked Polly.

"Starting things you can't finish," Betty prompted.

"Too much power for your engine," laughed the Admiral.

And Polly laughed too, flushing, for over-enthusiasm was one of her faults.

"And here is water and you travel far upon it, but return faithful to your first dreams."

"There you are, Polly, remember?" Betty said:

"Over the world, and under the world,
And back at the last to you.'"

"There isn't any 'you' though," Polly replied, smiling. "What's your own fortune, Judy? Let me tell it."

Judy tried to beg off, but they all declared it was only fair for her to try a dose of her own medicine, and she gave Polly her hand.

"Oh, I see, I see here," Polly fairly smacked her lips over it, "success and fulfilment. Yes,

it is, too, Judy. That criss-cross on your fate line means success, but what is this that zigzags down from it into the life line?"

"That's where I cut myself with the potato knife," Judy answered in a laughing tone. "Go on, oh, seeress."

"Comes into thy destiny one who shall—"

"Pardon, everybody," came Takeshi's mild voice behind them in the darkness. "We have been to the camp and called and there has not come any answer, so we are here, led by the firelight."

"Led by the firelight," Polly remembered those words long afterwards as they all rose and faced the unexpected guests. For there were two, old Stanton Phelps and beside him one whom Polly recognized at once. It was the original of her Florentine boy's picture. She did not need Judy's little cry to tell her this was Lindsay.

Straight and tall he stood beside his father, and he looked only at Judy in her green gown, with the red berries in her hair. Polly had slipped her hand in Mr. Phelps's, while the Admiral and Uncle Thurlow welcomed him. She felt like chuckling the way Crullers always did when things came true. She did not need the

reassuring clasp from Mr. Phelps's hand to make her understand that everything was right now between them, this brown-eyed boy of his and himself.

Then Aunt Millicent insisted on their going back to the camp, as it was chilly and damp by the lake now in the late August nights. It seemed like going through some enchanted forest with the orange colored moon rising in the sky back of old Baldy Knob, and the night birds calling drowsily in the undergrowth.

Peggie was just ahead of Lindsay and he leaned forward to say, "I know you're Polly."

"No, indeed, I'm not," Peggie exclaimed shyly. "Polly is away behind with Mr. Phelps."

So back he went, climbing over the fallen trunks of trees that lay across the beach, their tops half in the water, until he found Polly carefully guiding her king.

"I'm glad you've come," she said happily. "I've always thought you would, but it's mighty nice to have it come true. And you look just like your picture, too."

"We're going to keep bachelor hall at the Castle for another week," Mr. Phelps told her. "Your Uncle Thurlow and the Admiral and my-

self. The student crowd have gone, I believe, and Takeshi will have only us to bother with. By the way, your Aunt Evelyn told me to be sure to remind you not to get freckled."

"We're all freckled and tanned beautifully," Polly answered, laughing. "There hasn't been a single accident and we haven't set fire to the woods or done anything that Aunt Evelyn was afraid we might. It's been a dandy summer. I wish I could come back next year in a gypsy wagon like Judy does."

"So do I," said Lindsay, and only Polly caught his meaning. Judy was ahead with the other girls. Only once, as she climbed into the canoe with Peggie and Nat to go across to the island cabin, did she speak to him.

"Good night, Lindsay."

"Good night," he called back. "I'm coming over in the morning."

"Polly, you old matchmaker," Aunt Millicent said when the visitors had gone and they were in their tent. "See what you have started. And Mr. Phelps has always liked Judy. Don't you remember the first time you went to see him she stood talking to him—"

"I know, with peach blossoms in her hands,"

cried Polly. "I've always wondered why Judy looked familiar to me."

"Just as if you had met the Obelisk again," teased Aunt Millicent. "I always thought that Lindsay cared for her, but his going away like that for two years—"

"Maybe she sent him away," said Polly. "Girls are so queer, Aunty. I know Judy likes him. She told me so."

"Really? Well, I only hope she'll tell Lindsay so," with a sigh. "Go to sleep now, childie, if you can with that big round moon staring at you."

It was hard to, but finally she dropped off into dreamland and thought that Judy was the maiden who danced in the firelight at the Druid rites when the world was young and the old blind king reigned.

It was early the following morning when Agoonah Camp had its first caller. He came up the old timber road whistling, and Betty stopped paring potatoes to listen.

"Whence comest this jarring note?" she called. "That is not Flickers."

"It's only Lindsay," Aunt Millicent replied. "Had your breakfast yet, son?"

“Long ago. Jove, but it seems good to be back home, Mrs. Abbott.” He stretched his arms widely as if he could have taken in the mountains in one embrace. “Dad and the Admiral are going fishing. Can I stay with you folks?”

Could he? They welcomed him eagerly and each one found something for him to do. The oil stove needed fixing and the canoe had been acting rather queerly. The big tent had blown down in a thunderstorm, and needed a firm hand of control. Finally Polly asked him if he knew how to keep rain out of a log cabin.

“Fill up the chinks.”

“But what can we fill them with? You’d better come over to the island and see for yourself what I mean,” she insisted. “I’ll row you across.”

Not a word did she tell him of whom he might find over there. Judy had decided to stay over and sketch until noon, and Polly had accordingly rowed her over after breakfast and then come back. So now, as soon as Lindsay stepped on shore, Polly pushed away from the bank.

“Aren’t you coming too?” he called to her.

“Please don’t ask questions,” she coaxed.

“Judy’s there somewhere, and you must find her. I’ll sit out here in the canoe and chaperon you if you like, but go find her.”

So for nearly half an hour she stayed there among the lily pads, waiting while he obeyed her. At last they came in sight, and Judy’s lashes were wet where she had been crying, but Polly did not mind. There were little round damp spots too on Lindsay’s nice clean white linen coat.

“Polly,” he said, when she joined them, “I’m going to call you that if you don’t mind. Polly, we’re going to be married and live on this island excepting when we go on a jaunting trip in Judy’s wagon.”

CHAPTER XXIV

LEAVING THE GYPSY TRAIL

OF all weddings, Judy's was the quaintest, the girls thought.

"You see, Polly," she said, "I haven't anyone at all to care for me, and when I put the wagon away for the winter, I go back to the studio on Washington Square, and live with some of the girls. So Lindsay wants me to marry him right away."

"She objects to ceremonial affairs," interposed Lindsay, "and I don't see why we can't be married at the Castle or in the Hollow, or anywhere she fancies."

"At the Castle," Polly said. "In the inner garden where the fountain is, and we'll all be bridesmaids."

But long before the wedding day came, she sat there in the inner garden beside Mr. Phelps, and heard the story of the journey to Ravenna from Lindsay's own lips.

“I had those two names to go by, Ravenna and Costanza Neri,” he said. “So I made straight for Ravenna, and hunted up the Casa Neri. It’s a little house on the slope above the town, and when I found it, Donna Costanza was not there. She is old and goes farther down on the Campagna to stay with her married daughter in the winter. I stayed there though, only going to Florence to study a few weeks. And when I was sure she was at home, I went there.”

“Did she know you?” asked Polly breathlessly.

“No, but she remembered who I was after I had told her what I myself knew. And then,” his voice grew tender and low, “then she took me to my mother’s tomb. She died when I was a baby, and my father brought me here with old Costanza to care for me. It was after his death that she placed me in the Foundlings’ Home.”

“And what is your really truly name?”

He smiled at Polly’s eagerness.

“She could not remember the first, only that I was called Laddie. I found the record in the little church there, ‘Wilfred Gordon.’ It’s mighty queer seeing your own name for the first time.”

“And the whole thing is clear now, and you’re satisfied?” asked Polly.

“All clear, thanks to your management,” he answered, smiling down at her as she sat beside his father. “I’d never have ventured back if it had not been for your encouragement, telling me about Dad and how beautiful Montalban was.”

Kate and her Doctor had gone back to the city long since, but two days after the wedding Polly had a letter from her telling the good luck that had befallen the kiddie summer camp project. In memory of the waif he had loved and fathered, old Stanton Phelps gave fifty thousand dollars as an endowment fund for the founding of a real summer home at Montalban.

Polly sat with the letter in her hands, and slowly the tears came to her eyes.

“The old darling,” she said softly, “the splendid old king who sits in the sun.”

“Well,” Betty exclaimed when the news had spread around the camp, “Agoonah isn’t such a loon of a place after all, girls. I think it has started something that will go on and on. Polly, it’s all your doings.”

“Mine?” Polly echoed. “When I’m only the signpost that points the way. It’s been all our

doings. Can't you see the Doctor fairly beam? Why, he can buy even the Castle now and have it for his precious waifs and sick kiddies."

"No, ma'am, he won't do any such thing," Aunt Millicent interposed.

"Is Uncle Thurlow going to have it, Aunt Milly?"

"No, but our summer occupancy expires this fall, and Lindsay wants to bring his gypsy bride back there to live instead of in New York. I suppose part of the winter they will spend with Mr. Phelps in town, but most of the year will be passed here in the mountains they both love."

"And what will you and Uncle Thurlow do?"

Aunt Millicent's brown eyes were full of mischief.

"Is it possible that one secret has been safe from you, Pollykins? We're going to build a big summer lodge right here on the shore of Lake Agoonah, and if you like you may come up and live on your island, you or any of the dear girls who have made this summer such a joyful remembrance for me."

"But we'll all be scattered after this year," Natalie exclaimed, sitting cross-legged on the ground before the camp chaperon. "I'm to go

with father out to California and Peggie will be in Wyoming, and Polly rounding the capes with the Admiral. I shall always think of her as finding all the little coral isles in the seven seas—”

“How could there be any coral isles in the Arctic, goose,” demanded Betty practically.

“Never mind, Nat. I will hunt up the coral isles and send you chunks of them.”

Nat rolled with joy. It was so like Polly to promise “chunks” before she even had a glimpse of the ship she might sail in.

“I don’t care,” Polly returned happily. “Half of the joy of life comes from a capacity to enjoy everything, yesterday, today, and tomorrow, and if you keep expecting a thing to happen, it usually does. Maybe I won’t be sailing to coral isles at all. Maybe next summer I’ll tuck Ruth under my arm and march right back up here. I’m never disappointed when anything doesn’t come true. There are always half a dozen other hopes to take its place.”

But all the same, the last few days at the camp were rather melancholy ones. It had been such a glorious summer. Every wood trail and timber road now had its memory for them. They

had penetrated to every inlet along the lake shore. They knew the forest lore, the signs of animals, and haunts of birds, and all the strange calls and sounds, almost as Sarepta did. It had planted deep in each girl's heart a love for the open, for the splendid silences of Nature, and for her majesty when she is found in state among the mountains.

Camp was broken the last day in August. Flickers and Jimmie came up to help load the boxes and tents on the wagons, and the girls were to make the trip back in the two machines, Mr. Phelps's big touring car and Uncle Thurlow's husky little roadster, as Betty dubbed it. They brought back memories of the motor trip of the previous year. When they had all climbed in, they looked back at the camp site. The stone fireplace seemed a mute reminder of all the feasts it had helped to prepare. The yellow trampled squares of grass where the tents had stood, the two tall trees where the hammock had swung, and the long timber table still standing beneath the pine shade, made the girls feel sad.

"Good-bye, Agoonah!" Betty and Polly called from the machine they were in, and all the girls took up the cry. For the moment, they felt a

thrill of the old Indian superstition, as if the spirit of the beautiful mountain lake might rise from its sparkling waters and call back to them in loving greeting.

"Polly, you're crying!" Aunt Millicent said.

"No, I'm not," Polly smiled up at her, though her big brown eyes were full of tears. "Only I always hate farewells and finishes, and this is only the beginning of them. We've got to drop Peggie and Nat at Albany to take the west-bound trains, and Betty and Nipper'll be leaving me at Washington, and Marjorie at Baltimore. Only Crullers and Hallie and I will go to Queen's Landing."

"I won't, Polly," Crullers said wistfully. "I've got to go home."

"Poor old Crullers!" began Hallie, but Crullers stopped her.

"I'm not," she exclaimed valiantly. "I'm good old Crullers, grand old Crullers. Don't you dare call me poor old Crullers any more. I'm coming back to Montalban next summer to be Kate's right-hand helper."

"Oh, do look," Polly said quickly. They had turned off the mountain road into the state road that led to the village, and sitting there on her

favorite rock was Sarepta, but no longer clad in the dingy one-piece dress. Her hair was combed up and pinned on top of her head, although little curls escaped and fell softly around her happy old face. She wore a black and white checked dress with a lace collar, and on her left hand there sparkled her new gold wedding ring. As the two machines stopped, she shook hands with each of the girls.

“I told Gabriel I just had to come down and take a last look at all of ye,” she explained. “I dreamt last night you was a-riding through meadows of lilies and asphodel, so I guess you won’t have any accidents. And Gabriel went out just as the morning star was rising over Baldy Knob and he says all the signs are good for ye. He put it different and real poetical. He said: ‘The stars in their courses are a-working for Cæsar.’ Thought I’d come down and tell ye.”

“It’s awfully dear and kind of you, Sarepta,” Polly said. “We’ll never, never forget how kind you’ve been to all of us, and you never minded us running all over your mountains a bit.”

“Good-bye, Sarepta, good-bye,” they all called

back to the tall, spare figure on the big gray rock, while Flickers, who had backed his two-horse team to the side of the road to let the machines go by, lifted his whip in final salute.

“’Bye, everybody,” he shouted. “Here’s wishing you luck. Pa sent best regards, and said for me to tell you he’d have a full account in the *Farm Journal* Saturday.”

“Oh, aren’t they all nice to us,” Polly exclaimed, as she sat back on the leather cushions, laughing but crying too. “I wish Judy and Lindsay were here, but we’ll see them in New York. She’s the happy princess now, girls, remember?”

And Betty, poet laureate of Camp Agoonah, lifted her voice in the lines Polly always loved:

“ ‘Across the hills and far away,
 Beyond their utmost purple rim,
 And deep into the dying day,
 The happy princess followed him.’ ”

THE END





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