Title: Dorothy Dale's Camping Days

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Release date: June 18, 2005 [EBook #16091]
Most recently updated: December 11, 2020

Language: English

E-text prepared by Marilynda Fraser-Cunliffe, Jeannie Howse,
and the Project Gutenberg Online Distributed Proofreading Team
(https://www.pgdp.net)

SHE SLID INTO THE FRAIL BARK, AND
STARTED OFF.
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DOROTHY DALE'S CAMPING DAYS

BY

MARGARET PENROSE

AUTHOR OF "DOROTHY DALE: A GIRL OF TO-DAY," "DOROTHY DALE AT GLENWOOD SCHOOL," "DOROTHY DALE'S GREAT SECRET," "THE MOTOR GIRLS," "THE MOTOR GIRLS AT LOOKOUT BEACH," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED

NEW YORK
CUPPLES & LEON COMPANY

1911

(Other volumes in preparation)

Cupples & Leon Co., Publishers, New York

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DOROTHY DALE'S CAMPING DAYS

ToC

CHAPTER I

OUT OF A HAYRICK

"Oh, my!" exclaimed one girl.

"Oh, mine!" amended another.

"Oh, ours!" called out a third.

Then there was one awful bump, and the chorus was understood.

The old-style hay wagon, which was like a big crib, wobbled from side to side. The young ladies followed its questionable example, and some of them "sort of" lapped-over on the others.

"Dorothy Dale!" gasped one particularly sensitive member of the party, "we thought when you vouched for this affair that it would turn out all right!"

"But it hasn't turned out anything yet," replied Dorothy, "although we all came pretty near it—that time."

She clasped her hand around one of the braces of the hayrick, evidently determined that should she be "turned out" her arm would be responsible.

"That's just like you, Nita Brant," declared Tavia Travers, the latter really being manager of the occasion. "When I go to work, and hire a car like this, and especially stipulate that the ride shall be—rural—you kick on the bumps."

But scarcely had she uttered these words, when a "bump" came, with neither time nor opportunity for Nita's "kick." In fact, it was remarkable that the old hay wagon did not actually carry out its threat, to roll over in the direction toward which it wobbled.

"If you young ladies care to ride any farther," called out a man from the front of the wagon, "you better be still. I ain't put no corks in the holes in the bottom of this autymobile."

He chuckled at his own joke. The holes were only too apparent to the fair occupants of the hay wagon.

"Oh, it's all right, Sam," called back Tavia, "the only thin member of the party, who might by any chance fall through a hole, is dying from bumps, and we have a good hold on her. If you could see through the hay you would behold the human chain in action," and she gave Nita such a jerk that the latter declared the bumps were lovely, and begged to be allowed to do her own experimenting with them.

"He laughs best who laughs least," misquoted Dorothy, as the wagon continued to jog along. "I don't exactly like the—er—contour of the hill we are approaching."

"Why, that's the real thing in hills," declared Tavia. "I planned this road purposely to 'tobog' down that hill."

"I hope the old horses are hooked up securely," remarked Rose-Mary, whom the girls called Cologne. "I don't mind making a hill, but I hate to have the wagon make it in solo. I have had a try of that sort."

"Now say your prayers, Nita," ordered Tavia, "and don't forget to repent for snibbying my chocolates."

"Oh!" screamed Edna Black, *alias* Ned Ebony, "I do believe something is going to happen!"

"Sure thing," continued Tavia, in her joking way. "Do you suppose the girls from Glenwood ever go out without having 'something happen'?"

The old man was pulling at the reins, but his horses were starting to slide.

"Watch that fellow waltz," remarked Tavia. "Now, wouldn't he be great in a circus?"

The "waltzing horse" tried to sit down, but the farmer tugged at the lines, and otherwise objected to such conduct, and the unfortunate animal did its best to comply with the orders, which were now being flung at him, not only from the driver but from the girls in the wagon.

"Oh, hold them!" pleaded Nita.

"Let them run," suggested Tavia. "It will be over sooner!"

"Mercy!" exclaimed Dorothy, "there's a river!"

This remark was followed by a most significant pause. Evidently even Tavia saw the danger now.

And the old horses were frightened as well, for they backed, side stepped, and made every possible effort to avoid having the wagon, and its precious load, overturned into the deep river at the very side of the roadway.

"Don't yell so!" called Dorothy to the driver. "That won't help any and it hurts our ears."

"Is there no brake?" wailed Nita.

"There is likely to be one soon," Tavia assured her.

The girls were becoming more and more alarmed, and only Tavia kept up the jesting. The hill was very steep, the river fairly curled around it, and the horses grew more nervous each moment, under the strain that was being put upon them.

Deep in the bed of hay the girls from Glenwood School had ensconsed themselves. The horses were now going at such a pace that it would be rash to attempt to jump from the rick. Nita Brant actually made her way forward, and had now fairly grasped the old driver about the neck. She felt that he must know how to save himself, at least, and she determined to "take chances" with him.

Tavia did deign to sit up and notice the rate of speed the old horses had acquired. Her dark

eyes shot glances of daring admiration, and she reminded her companions that Roman chariot races were "not in it," just then.

Dorothy stood up bravely and agreed to call out, when they should be too near the river.

Suddenly there was a crash, and then the horses bolted!

"Something snapped!" called Dorothy. "Something is broken!"

No need to announce this, for, with the ominous sound, one of the horses broke from its traces, and the other was now dragging the old wagon along by the straps that had withstood the jerks and plunges.

"Oh, we will be killed!" screamed Nita, "There's the river!"

The girls made ready to jump.

"Don't!" begged Dorothy. "You will be dragged along in this stuff. You cannot jump through these braces."

Truly they were imprisoned by the uprights of the old-fashioned hayrick! But if they could not jump what could they do? Each face showed its panic of fear. If only the one remaining horse would break loose, it might not be so dangerous to fall over in all that hay!

A shriek from Nita turned all eyes to her. "The man!" she screamed. "He has fallen—under the wheels!"

By a single impulse Dorothy and Tavia grasped one of the rungs of the rick, and they threw their full weight on it until it snapped—then broke!

"Quick!" cried Dorothy. "Jump after me!"

Tavia needed no second invitation. In an instant she had followed Dorothy Dale, and, as they landed in the dusty roadway, shaken up, but not otherwise hurt, the runaway horse, freed from the interference of its mate that had broken loose, continued to drag the hayrick toward the dangerous river, which bubbled over the black and sharp rocks, scarcely concealed by the foam that broke upon them.

"Oh, the girls! The girls in the wagon!" gasped Dorothy, and she pressed bravely on, followed by Tavia.

CHAPTER II

ToC

TAVIA GOES BO-PEEPING

Well might Dorothy exclaim in terror at the fate that seemed imminent for the girls left in the wagon—the girls of Glenwood School—her dearest chums. Those of my readers who are familiar with the previous volumes of this series, will, perhaps, pardon the rather unceremonious manner in which I have just introduced the young ladies of this book. To those who are reading of Dorothy Dale for the first time, a few words of explanation may be necessary. And, in presenting the young ladies of Glenwood School, I must at once apologize for, and criticise Tavia Travers.

From the very first book of the series entitled "Dorothy Dale, a Girl of To-day," we find Dorothy striving bravely to induce Tavia to give up her stagey ways. Every predicament in the story was a "scene" to Tavia, while but for Dorothy's intervention, and gentle determination, these scenes would have been turned into tragedies for the wily Tavia. Then, in the second book, "Dorothy Dale at Glenwood School," Tavia and the young ladies of that institution got into many a "scrape" and, while Dorothy was one of the girls, in the true sense of the word, she managed to discriminate between fun and folly.

But what sacrifices Dorothy was actually capable of making for a friend were more clearly related in "Dorothy Dale's Great Secret," where she shielded Tavia from the consequences of her daring and foolish venture, of running away with a theatrical company. Through two more books of the series, "Dorothy Dale and Her Chums," and "Dorothy Dale's Queer Holidays," we find Dorothy still busy trying to reform Tavia, and while in each of the books there is plenty of other work for Dorothy to attend to, it seems that Tavia is her one perpetual charge. What Tavia thinks fun is not always of the safe sort, and what Dorothy thinks necessary Tavia often thinks may be passed by as some subtle joke. So it will be seen that each of these two interesting characters always has her own particular following, while the friendship between Tavia and Dorothy has withstood every possible test.

So we find the same young ladies in the present story, still indulging in their favorite pastime—getting into and out of mischief.

They had been out riding on an improvised chariot—a hayrick of the old-fashioned kind, like a cradle, filled with the fragrant timothy and redtop, when the accident, narrated in the first chapter, took place.

As Tavia and Dorothy ran after the wagon containing their friends, while the vehicle swayed from side to side in the road, they saw it give a sudden lurch, and almost topple over on the steep embankment which descended to the river.

Dorothy gave a gasp of fear, and Tavia covered her eyes with her hand. The next moment Dorothy saw the driver of the wagon crawling out from a clump of bushes. Guessing that he was not badly hurt, she ran on, for she had halted momentarily when she saw the vehicle sway so dangerously. Together she and Tavia sprang forward, to reach, if possible, before it toppled over, the swaying, bounding wagon.

Whether from an unconquerable spirit of fun, or from motives purely humane, Tavia had snatched up armful after armful of the loose hay, which had been spilled out on the road. In doing this she never halted in her running, but stooped over, like some gleaner in a field, urged on by the approach of night.

"Oh!" cried Dorothy. "If we can only reach them before——"

A figure darted out on the road just ahead of them, and the unexpected move interrupted Dorothy's exclamation.

"Oh, a man!" shouted Tavia, who was somewhat in advance. "Now we—will be—all right!"

Yes, a man had started down the hill after the runaway, but just how or why Tavia was sure that this would make things right, was not clear to Dorothy.

"He can run!" she called, "Can't he, Tavia?"

"Can't he!" replied Tavia. "But I'm not going to let him have all the glory. Here," and she tossed a bundle of hay to Dorothy. "Take it along for the—hospital beds. I'm going—to—run!"

"Going—to!" repeated Dorothy, all out of breath from her own efforts to catch up to the runaway.

But Tavia darted on. The strange man kept well ahead. Dorothy paused one moment from sheer exhaustion. Then she saw the wagon overturn!

The next instant she noted that the stranger had grabbed the horse by the trailing reins.

"Quick!" shrieked Tavia. "The girls may be under the cart!"

With strength gathered from every desperation Dorothy ran on.

She was beside the overturned wagon now, and without uttering a word she crawled in through the upright sticks, down amid the dust and hay.

Three girls, so wound together as to look like one, lay on one side of the wrecked vehicle.

"Dorothy!" gasped Rose-Mary. "Are you safe!"

"Yes, but you—Nita and Edna?" gasped Dorothy, pantingly.

"I think Nita has fainted," replied Rose-Mary. "But Edna is all right. Where is Tavia?"

"Safe," answered Dorothy. "A strange man stopped the runaway. Tavia is helping hold the horse. We must get the traces loose before we can attend to Nita."

She made her way out of the overturned wagon. The traces were unfastened and the horse was free, and the strange man was actually astride the animal.

"Why," exclaimed Dorothy, "that horse will bolt again. You had best make him fast somewhere!"

The stranger looked at her with the air of a Chesterfield.

"By kindness we alone subdue," he said.

Dorothy stared at him. What could he mean?

Tavia seemed to have forgotten the predicament of her companions—she appeared charmed by the stranger—who really was good looking.

"There comes the man who owns the horse," remarked Dorothy, as the frenzied farmer, whip in hand, ran toward the stranger, yelling all sorts of unintelligible things in the way of threats and predictions. He would see to it personally, he declared, that these things would happen to the man who dared ride his used-up horse.

"A fight to finish it off," exulted Tavia, and Dorothy, for the moment, felt as if she could find it in her heart to despise so frivolous a girl. The next second she remembered Nita, and turned back to the wrecked hayrick.

"It's all well enough for you to laugh," complained the badly-frightened Nita, "but I can't see where the joke comes in. Just look at me!"

"A perfect beauty!" declared Tavia. "The rips are all in one piece. That rent near the hem is positively artistic—looks like the river Nile!"

It was some time later, but they were still in the roadway. The farmer had patched up his

damaged rig, but would not listen to the girls' appeals to give them a lift toward town. He insisted it was all their fault for laughing and scaring the horses, and he vowed vengeance on the man who really had saved the team from positive destruction in the river.

The strange young man, after considerable gusto, all of which was wasted on the farmer, but hugely enjoyed by Tavia at least, had made his way off, leaving the girls discreetly to their woes. No one was actually injured, although, as Nita said, costumes had suffered severely.

"Wasn't he queer?" remarked Cologne, as she shook small bundles of hay from her Glenwood cap and blouse. "I thought I would laugh outright when he mounted the old horse a second time. He looked like somebody on a variety stage."

"Yes," added Tavia, "and Dorothy had to spoil the show by inducing him to give up the act. What if the farmer did ply the whip? That would only heighten the effect."

"Since we have to walk," Nita reminded the others, "it might be advisable to start."

"Great head," commented Tavia, "but do you realize that we shall be locked out? That the ogresses of 'Glen' will be ready—axe in hand, block in evidence, grin prominent——"

"Tavia!" exclaimed Dorothy, "do gather yourself up! That bundle of hay seems enchanted. As Nita says, we must be going."

Tavia almost lolled over on the soft hay, then she gathered it up with conspicuous tenderness, pressed it fondly to her heart, and agreed to start on. Each of the other girls was taking with her, back to the school, a similar souvenir; but Cologne and Dorothy threw theirs over their shoulder, in true rustic fashion, while Nita complained that she was not able to carry hers; though she did manage to bribe Tavia with a promised return of the chocolates to tie hers in with the extra sized bundle that Tavia was lugging along.

"Five miles of this will just about do me," declared Cologne. "I think it would have been infinitely better for us to have hitched on to the hay wagon, in spite of the old farmer."

"And to think that we paid him in advance! It's a wonder we have never had a single lesson in financial economy at gloomy Glenwood. 'How to cheat farmers; or, how to die game in a hayrick!' I must suggest the text to Mrs. Pangborn, our honored principal," declared Edna, as she, too, made her way along under the uncertain weight of a bundle of hay.

"But what are we dragging this stuff along for?" asked Dorothy. "Sure as fate, we will have to drop them when we get within the city, and why not anticipate? I vote for a drop right here!"

"Never!" declared Tavia. "These are to make up the sacrificial altar. If old Pangborn growls—won't allow the doors open—we will do it with a match!" and she signified that the hay would make a spontaneous blaze in that lamentable instance.

Dorothy saw more than a joke in the remark. Tavia was so ridiculously daring! It would be very wise to get rid of the hay before entering the sacred precincts of Glenwood.

The sight was most absurd. Five pretty girls, each dressed in the Glenwood blue and white, and each with a bundle of fragrant hay on her shoulder.

"There's a lamb!" declared Cologne. "I could do worse than give Mary's pet a treat," and she ran to the rail fence, jumped up on one of the queer crossed posts, and called all sorts of names to the surprised sheep, that scarcely stopped grazing to notice the girls outside of the barrier.

This spectacle induced the other students to climb up on the crooked fence, and presently the old rails were ornamented with the five girls in blue, with the hay bundles in hand!

It was getting dusk, and the sunset did not detract from the unusual scene. Great shafts of gold and scarlet fell down on that old fence, and a prettier sight could scarcely have been worked up, much less imagined.

"Here, sheepy, sheepy!" called Tavia.

"Here, lamby, lamby, lamby!" pleaded Dorothy.

"Here, woolly, woolly, woolly!" invited Nita.

"Here, kinky, kinky, kinky!" induced Edna.

"Here, Flossy, Flossy, Flossy!" persuaded Cologne.

But never a lamb, sheep or other species of animal named made a move toward the fence.

"I'll get a few!" declared Tavia, jumping down over the fence, into the meadow, and racing wildly among the sheep.

"The ram! The ram!" shouted Edna. "Tavia! He is coming directly for you!"

This was a signal for Tavia to turn back to the fence. The ram did follow her. She pulled down a rail, and bolted through the opening just as the savage animal and the great herd of sheep followed.

"Run, sheep, run!" yelled Edna, as the much-terrified girls scattered hither and thither, along the road, fully conscious that they were responsible for the safety of the frantic flock that had broken loose from their pasture.

"Now for the farmer and his whip!" gasped Dorothy. "I thought we had had enough of that for one afternoon!"

"Too much is enough," answered Edna dryly, "but Tavia likes it. May she have a real account of

the little lamb story for the English class to-morrow."

"Look! They are all following her!" moaned Nita.

"And they seem to think she is taking them home to supper!" added Cologne.

"What shall we do?" wailed Nita. "We will surely all be arrested!"

"Wish the police van would hurry up, then," sighed Edna, "I am getting tuckered out," and she glanced back again, to behold Tavia in the very midst of the flock of the now somewhat quieted sheep.

"A nice cool cell wouldn't be so bad," declared Cologne, who, being inclined to flesh, was apt to give out before her companions would give in.

"How are the 'Bo-Peepers'?" yelled Tavia, with a flourish of a stick meant to represent a shepherdess crook. "Or do you prefer the old Roman? There will be all kinds of conflagrations when Nero comes!"

"Isn't she dreadful!" retorted Nita, whose face was really a sickly white. "She gets us all into trouble, and then gloats over it."

"You wanted something real to write about to-day," Edna reminded her. "This would make a regular thriller!"

"But, as a matter of fact," began Dorothy seriously, as she stopped, and her companions halted with her, "what had we best do? We cannot walk into Glenwood Hall with a herd of sheep at our heels," for the animals were now following the girls along the road.

"Let's shoo them," suggested Cologne. "Maybe they'll shoo nicely."

"We'll get shooed when we try to get in to-night," murmured Edna. "And just when we were finishing up the year in rather good style. I hadn't a single thing against my name——"

"There's that man who saved the team," gasped Dorothy. "Mercy! Wherever does he come from? A man is worse than two herds of sheep—in our scrape with Mrs. Pangborn!"

Just as mysteriously as he had appeared before, the man with the Chesterfieldian walk, and the big slouch hat, turned into the road. Where he had come from, nobody could imagine.

"He has followed us!" breathed Nita. "Oh, dear me!" and she pressed her handkerchief to her eyes.

"If you cry we will tell him you are too ill to walk, and then, maybe he'll offer to carry you," blurted out Edna. "If one insists on being a baby, she must be babied."

This charge rather frightened Nita back to courage, or at least she pretended to it, for she promptly quickened her pace, and even hid away her handkerchief.

Tavia, too, saw the strange man as he emerged, seemingly, from nowhere, for she started on a run, laughing uproariously at the herd of sheep that trotted as she increased her pace, turned as she turned, and, in fact, seemed to be at a regular game of "follow the leader."

The young man stood carefully posed in the path, just where a huge stone afforded him a setting for his rather dusty boots.

"What a chap!" commented Edna. "Seems to me he has enough strikes and poses to make a good cigar box picture."

"Any particular brand?" asked Dorothy. "I might label it 'Spectacular,' with all rights reserved."

"Look at Tavia," begged Cologne with a smile. "The rights are 'reserved' in her particular direction."

"She's welcome," finished Dorothy, just as Tavia reached the spot where the other girls were now waiting, and where the young man stood like a statue.

"Another situation?" remarked the man, doffing his hat in the most gorgeous bow.

"Yes, the climax," answered Tavia. "What do you think of the scenery?"

"Mercy!" breathed Edna aside. "If they start that sort of talk we may as well camp out to-night."

But the young man did not express his opinion publicly. Instead, he stepped up to Tavia, and presently the two were conversing in subdued voices.

Dorothy did not like that. She, in fact, did not fancy this young man's "apparition" habit, and she now determined to force Tavia to a sense of her own obligations to reach Glenwood School without further delay.

"Girls," called Dorothy, "we really must hurry! Thank you, very much" (this to the strange man), "for your kindness this afternoon, but you see now, we have to get back to school. We would not have been out so long but for the fact that this is privilege day—school closes Thursday."

"Then why not make use of the privilege?" the young man asked, with a sly look at Tavia. "We don't meet—professional friends every afternoon."

The thought that Tavia might have met this man while engaged in her brief and notable stage career, as related in "Dorothy Dale's Great Secret," flashed across Dorothy's mind. With it came a thought of danger—Tavia was scarcely yet cured of her dramatic fever.

The sheep stood around in the most serio-comic style, and the seminary girls were scarcely less comic.

"Oh!" screamed Nita, suddenly, "there comes that awful farmer! And he has a whip!"

"Can't ride off on a sheep this time," remarked Tavia with ill-chosen levity. "Let's run!"

"Yes, let's!" chimed in Dorothy with a knowing look at Cologne.

At this the girls started off; and they did run!

When they reached the foot of the steep hill, Dorothy stopped to look back.

There, on the summit, stood the unmistakable form of the young man. Beside him posed the equally unmistakable form of the farmer and his whip.

And the sheep were flocked around them!

CHAPTER III

ToC

THE DISASTROUS DRAG

"It was perfectly delicious!"

"I'm glad you think so, Tavia. No, I am not, either; I am very sorry."

Dorothy put aside her notes, and sighed the last sigh for one night—that sort of content signal with which young girls usually put the final period to labor.

"Oh, Dorothy!" and Tavia flung herself down directly upon her friend's nicely pressed robe. "You always want to put the damper on. What's the use of being girls if we can't be——"

"Idiots!" added Dorothy, and she wondered why she so strongly opposed Tavia. "I'll tell you, Tavia, this business of chatting with strange young men is nothing less than foolish. I can't see where it becomes funny."

"It begins," said Tavia, balancing her pencil on her third finger, "at the point where Dorothy Dale turns preacher. A poor sermon is absolutely—funny."

"Thank you," returned Dorothy, without recovering her good nature, "but you must remember, Tavia, that we are leaving Glenwood in two days."

"I may leave to-night if you keep on," declared Tavia. "Dorothy, I never knew you to be so obstinate."

"Nor have I ever known you to be so foolish. Tavia, that young man is—queer. He is mysterious, and I have a feeling that he means harm."

"Pure jealousy, Doro," and Tavia jumped up and flung herself almost upon the girl who sat in the shade of the study lamp. "I am so sorry he did not take the notion to you."

Dorothy was accustomed to these outbreaks, and they merely meant a gesture, or whatever fling came with the speech; the words indicated absolutely nothing. She gave Tavia an answering smile. "Well, dear, we won't quarrel, at least this time. But see that it doesn't happen again."

"When shall we go home? Dear me! It does seem a long time between holidays," and Tavia tumbled down in the most nondescript heap.

"I shall be glad to see dear old Dalton," replied Dorothy. "Father and the boys are going with me to settle things up there. Then we will go to Aunt Winnie's. I hope you and I will be able to spend our vacations together. You know I am going to camp with Cologne, and she has included you in the invitation."

"As Dorothy's paper-weight—no, it can't be that—I could never keep anything down—it must have been Dorothy's watch-charm," interrupted Tavia, with a slight show of sarcasm.

"Rose-Mary was particularly anxious that you should come, Tavia," declared Dorothy, with emphasis, "and she has the reputation of never giving an insincere invitation. She likes you, and wants to enjoy you, as well as to have you enjoy yourself."

"Three cheers for the enjoys," retorted Tavia, "and may their shadow never grow less. But say, Dorothy, how did you get out of the scrape? I was a traitor to run, but somehow I couldn't stand for Higley's look. When she puts her alleged features at half mast, and sounds taps, I have to quit."

"But we had to stand. I can't see any good reason for telling you about it—making a report to the deserter."

"Now, Doro," and Tavia fairly melted into sweetness, "I simply cannot slumber until I have heard. Did Nita peach?"

"There was nothing to hide in our part of the—comedy," declared Dorothy. "Of course, we skipped the man part, and left out the hay cart dump, besides omitting the sheep act, and forgetting the farmer's whip——"

"Hip! Hip!" threatened Tavia. "Couldn't have done better myself. And no one ordered to the guard house?"

"You have not yet been accounted for," said Dorothy, with well-aimed meaning. "Miss Higley said she would see to your account herself."

"Will, eh? Not if I see her first. Did any one say I was there? I should think, with such remarkable skill at omitting, that you might have had the good taste to omit me."

"Tavia, does it strike you that this is packing-up night? That to-morrow we make all our bouquets of remembrance, more or less artificial, and that the day following——"

"We flit the flutter! And good riddance! I just abhor school—notice how I have improved? Last year I 'hated' it."

"And I must admit you have improved otherwise than in your vocabulary," said Dorothy. "Seems to me you have grown almost tall."

"Thanks, pretty maiden. Any more in stock like that?" and Tavia jumped up to get a look in the glass. "Tell me, before I shrink—in your opinion," she begged, making queer passes before the mirror. "But say, Doro, do you ever take a look at yourself? I have to say you are simply splendid, and that's putting it mild. The Dalton youths will be suiciding on account of the returned Calla—that lily is the one that stands beings boxed up without food or—atmosphere—for half the year, I believe, hence my comparison: you have withstood Glenwood, and come out of the ring more beautiful than when you entered. Oh, you need not protest! Everybody admits that you are a perfect Dresden, animated, of course," and Tavia gazed with unstinted admiration at the girl under the study lamp.

"Well, I hope I have not actually grown homely," conceded Dorothy, "for Aunt Winnie is so fond of a good appearance."

"Your hair is darker—that is, on the ripe corn shade. I like that better than the fourteen karat variety. I only wish mine would turn mahogany. I have a mind to turn it."

"I wonder the thoughts do not poison the roots—the idea of you saying a word against your hair! Why, it's simply wonderful! Edna says it sings in the sunshine."

"Oh, Ned pities me I suppose—she has such a fine crop herself. But I would—love—to—be handsome!"

"Suppose you start in to drag down some of that stuff you insist on taking home, Tavia," said Dorothy, indicating the decorations that hung on Tavia's side of the room. "Then it will be handsome is as——"

"Handsome didn't," misquoted Tavia. "I don't mind dragging it down, but I have a mind to get some one to help me. I might give out that we were having a 'doings' and so entice Ned Ebony, and a couple of the others."

"You compendium of laziness! You proverbial prolonger! There, I have used up more energy in giving expression to those expressions——"

"Than I should have used up in expressing the whole art gallery *via* the Amalgamated Express Company. Now, Doro, I am going to give a dragging-down evening. If you have anything you value, that might get in the drag, take notice," and she left the room, to gather in the innocent victims of her plot.

Dorothy laughed. She did love Tavia, and once more they were separating from the days and nights spent together at dear old Glenwood. The girls had occupied room "nineteen" in spite of the fact that their advance in class entitled them to other quarters, but each loved the apartment, and they had "grown into it," as Tavia remarked.

"I believe I had better rescue my things," mused Dorothy, "for there is no telling where the dragging may end," and, suiting her act to the words, she promptly put a pile of cushions on the highest chair, and began to take from her side of the room such trinkets as are inconceivably dear to the heart of every schoolgirl.

How differently her division of the room was decorated! Tavia had actually drawn a line—clothes line—straight across the room, marking out the territory of each. Dorothy had put up pictures, birds' nests, flags and the home colors, while Tavia had revelled in collapsed footballs, moth-eaten slouch hats, shot through and through, and marked with all sorts of labels, of the college lad variety. Then she had a broken bicycle wheel, in and out of which were laced her hair ribbons and neckties, this contrivance being resorted to in order to save the junk from the regulation pile—it being thus marked as a useful article. There were pictures, too, on Tavia's side of the room, but how they got there one could never guess from a birds-eye view—for the hanging indicated a sudden storm on "art day," without paper-weights. This same blow included the mottoes, and wise sayings; trophies of certain victories in the way of narrow escapes from dismissals, or such mementos as suspicious games outside the school grounds.

"No wonder Tavia wants help," thought Dorothy, as she hurried to get her own things safely put

in the box that stood ready. "I declare, she has the queerest taste—if such things are included in the taste faculty."

A shuffle and hum at the portal indicated the arrival of Tavia's guests.

"Enter!" called Tavia, as she threw open the door, "and with the kind permission of the fair hostess, proceed to drag. 'Drag if you must this good old bed, but spare my sister's rags, she said,'" and she deliberately kicked Dorothy's box across the room, while Edna, or Ned, proceeded to "shoot up" everything she could reach or at which she could lunge. Cologne, being Dorothy's friend, did the same thing on Tavia's side, Molly Richards, known as Dick, was not particular on which side she dragged, just so long as she got a hold on something.

"Oh, girls, do be careful!" pleaded Dorothy. "I have a tea set here I am so fond of—"

But the warning came too late, for at that very moment Ned had thrown a picture, frame and all, into the box that Dorothy had started to pack the tea set in. There was a crash, and even the reckless girls paused, for the sound of broken china is as abhorrent to any girl as is the bell for class to the Glenwoods.

Tavia dropped the pop gun she had been holding. "Doro, I am so sorry," she said. "I know you valued that set so highly. Take mine for it."

"Oh, no, indeed," replied Dorothy, her voice strained, for the set had been a gift from her little brother Roger, and he had used the first money he ever earned to buy it. "Perhaps I can have it mended."

Cologne, Edna, and Tavia put their heads together. Presently they apologized to Dorothy and left the room.

"Wonder what's up now?" Dorothy asked herself. She did feel badly—that tea set of all the things in her room!

She recalled how Roger had written that he had a surprise for her; then the arrival of the blue cups and saucers, and the note saying that the boy had sold lemonade, and thus earned his first money. Then, that he had spent the money for that set. And to think that it was ruined, for the crash told the woeful story of many pieces!

Dorothy did not feel like finishing her packing. She felt more like having a good cry. She was thinking of home, of her father, the major, then of her brother Joe, older than Roger, and lastly of dear, impetuous Roger himself.

Soon she would be home to them again! Was she not their mother ever since she could remember? For her own darling mother had been called away from her little ones so early in a promising life!

Sounds of voices in the hall roused her from her reverie.

Tavia entered first. But her following! Girl after girl crowded into the small room, until its very capacity was taxed beyond its possibilities.

"We've come!" announced Cologne.

"So I see," replied Dorothy, all confusion.

"To make amends for our damage," continued Cologne. "Every girl on the floor has contributed to the collection and we venture to present to you the most unique tea set that has ever gone in or out of Glenwood. Here," and she set her contribution down, "is my prettiest piece."

"And here is mine," followed Edna, placing on the table a real gold-and-white creamer.

"And mine—with my love," whispered Nita, putting down an egg-shell cup and saucer.

"Oh!" gasped Dorothy. "How lovely!"

"And, Doro, dear," added Lena Berg, "I brought my tankard. It was the best piece, and nothing else would satisfy the committee."

"I am sure——" began Dorothy.

"Not too sure," interrupted Dick, or Molly Richards. "For here is mine—it came all the way from Holland!"

"Girls! How can I take all these beautiful things? I am sure you must want them your own selves——"

"Not half as much as we want you to have them," declared Cologne. "The fact is, we were just waiting for such a chance as this. We are all gone—soft to-night. Take care we don't kiss you, Doro."

Tears were in Dorothy's eyes. She loved her school friends, and this was an affecting parting.

Tavia snatched up the banjo. She sang:

"Good night! Good night! Good night! Good night!
Good night again; God bless you.
And, oh, until we meet again,
Good night! Good night!
God bless you!"

The strain swelled into a splendid chorus, and, while they sang, the girls wrapped up the china

pieces, putting each safely in the box beside the damaged ones.

"Speech! Speech!" came the demand from Tavia's corner, and without further ceremony Dorothy was lifted bodily up on the table and compelled to make a speech. It was a dangerous, undertaking, for the sofa pillows that seemed to come from everywhere and nowhere put in so much punctuation that the address might have been put down as a series of stops. However, Dorothy did manage to say something, for which effort she was roundly applauded.

The night bell called them to the sense of school duties still unfinished.

"Oh, that old bell!" complained Nita, pouting.

Cologne drew Dorothy over in the corner. "Ask Tavia about the man on the horse," she whispered. "She got a letter from him!"

CHAPTER IV

ToC

THE PREMATURE CAMP

After all, the last days of school came and went, and the Glenwood girls had started off for their respective homes before Dorothy had a chance to fully realize that the vacation had really begun, and that each day of that delightful calendar now seemed suspended from the very skies, illumined with the prospects of the very best of good times.

Dorothy had promised to spend a greater part of the summer with Rose-Mary Markin at the Markin summer place, a delightful spot on Lake Monadic in Maine. This plan was particularly fortunate, as Mrs. Winthrop White, Dorothy's Aunt Winnie, with whom the Dales had lately made their home, was to go abroad, while Ned and Nat, Dorothy's cousins, had arranged such a varied itinerary for their summer sports, that one might imagine, to hear the schedule, that the particular summer involved must have been of the brand which has neither night nor autumn to mark its limits.

Then Major Dale, and Dorothy's brothers, Joe and Roger, were to take a long-promised cruise on the St. Lawrence, so that Dorothy was quite at liberty to plan for herself.

But these plans could never interfere with a visit to the Cedars, the White's summer home, and here, on the afternoon of which we write, Dorothy found herself at last surrounded by her family, and submerged in their joyous welcome.

"Roger, how you have grown!" she kept saying as her eyes, time after time, sought out the "baby" brother of whom Dorothy was so fond. "And Joe! Why, you are getting to look so much like Nat——"

"Here, now! No knocking!" called out the jolly Nat. "I don't want to be handsome, but I simply refuse to look ten years younger!" This last was said in imitation of the "lady-like way" girls are supposed to have in expressing their compliments.

"And me?" asked Ned, pulling himself up out of his high-enough height before his cousin. "What is the verdict? Am I not—ahem—stunning?"

"You are big enough, that's sure," admitted Dorothy, giving him a look of unstinted admiration, "and as to being stunning—I just imagine that you are even that—in your golf suit."

"There now!" and Nat went off into kinks; "he has to wear knickers to look cute. You ought to see me in my football togs if you want to behold something really magnificent."

"Here, here!" called out Major Dale. "When I was a lad it was considered a crime to keep a mirror in one's room. We used to keep one blind shut to get a reflection on the window pane for the neck-tie business, and we took a chance at the hair-part. But to hear you young ones! What you actually need, boys, is a little of the real thing in training. Why don't you pitch a tent out on your own river here, and go in for roughing it?"

"Great!" declared the boys' chorus.

"Now that's something like," continued Nat, "and it would do a lot toward patching up a fellow's finances. Let's see. Where's that itinerary? Suppose we make it two weeks at home—on the co-operative."

Like the proverbial wildfire, the suggestion spread, until within a short hour the boys, with Dorothy, were out on the river edge, selecting the spot upon which to pitch the "War Tent"—for war they declared it would be, "against masculine beauties." Dorothy found herself so busy

planning the boys suits, figuring out what they would require in the way of supplies and furniture, though this last was to be cut down to mere necessities, that she almost felt her own camping days had begun, as Nat expressed it.

"Now that comes of having a girl around," declared Ned. "If you had not come, Dorothy, we would never have had that admiration conference, and then we could never have discovered our own beautiful river, for in this case, I don't mind using a correct, and all right adjective, although usually I consider anything adjectivey rather too much of a spread."

He sauntered once more to the river's brink, where a short distance down stream could be seen the *Lebanon*, the family rowboat. Surely the place did warrant the boy extravagant use of "a correct adjective," and did look "adjectivey" away into the superlative.

Nat found just the spot for the tent, Roger and Joe were racing about like little human greyhounds, intent upon the scent of fun, and Dorothy took time to decide that perhaps this camp would prove as delightful as she expected that one to be, whither, in a few days, she must journey, and leave the dear home-folks, reluctantly, indeed. But then boys' fun always seemed like their idea of Fourth of July—just as noisy and just as unreliable. At the same time they always managed to put it off with a roar, and this roar had already set in for the Blanket Indians of "Cut-it-out-Camp."

Dorothy had promised her Aunt Winnie not to stay too long away from her, as there were so many things to be discussed before the aunt and her favorite niece should part for the summer. So that, now, Dorothy was hurrying to finish up her part of the camp map, and go back to the Cedars.

"We fellows must get a few good strong poles over there on the knoll," said Nat, "and I see no better time to get them than right now."

"Then I must go home," spoke Dorothy. "I have already overstayed my leave of absence."

"Can you go back alone?" asked Ned. "If not, I'll cut the trees by cutting out the work. See how well we have named the camp. It's in working order already."

"No you don't," interrupted Nat. "You've got to do your share of everything."

"I'll run back while you are talking about it," declared Dorothy. "I'm sure I know the way perfectly well."

"Be sure," called Ned, "for there are turns and twists in that woodland, that I think you are scarcely familiar with."

But Dorothy was gone. She ran along through the twilight-tinted woods, stopping now and then to look at the gray squirrels that capered up and down the trees, some making so bold as to run along the fence at her very side.

"This will make an ideal camping grounds," she was thinking. "I wonder the boys never thought of using it before."

Suddenly she heard a rustle in the brush. She stopped and listened. It sounded again, this time nearer. She looked about her, and, for the first time, realized that she was, indeed, in deep woods.

To call for the boys, Dorothy knew would be worse than useless, for it would simply notify any listener of her fears, so, instead, she walked along boldly enough, even whistling lightly as any Glenwood girl would do "when in doubt," according to the Glenwood code.

But she had not more than crossed the first small stream, made up of a number of springs, running through this wood toward the river, when something—a most grotesque figure—stepped out in her path!

It was too absurd to really frighten her at first, for it apeared to be a boy dressed up as a bandit, and surely any such prank could mean nothing serious, she thought.

"Good afternoon," Dorothy said, attempting to pass.

A queer growl was her answer, and the figure in the Indian suit, with a mask of red cloth, and all sorts of trappings hanging about from belts and straps, actually pointed what seemed to be a real gun at her.

"Hands up!" came the command.

Dorothy still felt like laughing. Surely this must be a trick of some boy in the neighborhood, she decided.

"Hands up!" again came the command, this time the gun being deliberately aimed at her head!

"What do you want?" demanded Dorothy. "Why should you stop me—with your nonsense?"

Dropping the old-fashioned gun the boy (for such she decided the person was) jumped at her, and grasped her hands, at the same time making an effort to tie them, with a bit of rope from the belt trappings.

"Stop! Stop!" Screamed Dorothy, now thoroughly frightened. "Help! Help!" she yelled at the very top of her terrified voice.

"Easy, easy," came the exasperating, sneering words from the bandit. "Take it easy or it will be all the worse for you. Now where do you keep the goods?"

He had actually succeeded in tying her hands and now held her prisoner with one strong arm

about her waist, and with the other hand he was endeavoring to unclasp her beautiful little gold bracelet. Fearing to lose her footing, in her frantic efforts to get free, Dorothy thought quickly. It would be better to lose her jewelry, than to have her life perhaps imperiled.

"You may take my—gold," she panted. "You seem to be stronger than I, and if you are not crazy you must be—a thief!"

"If you shout—I'll gag you," came the astonishing declaration, while the bandit struggled with the bracelet, and almost cut Dorothy's wrist on the knife with which he was trying to cut loose the circlet.

"Oh, don't," pleaded Dorothy. "Let go my hand and I'll give it you!"

How she wanted to yell! But if he should tie her mouth!

Voices sounded!

"Oh, it must be the boys," thought Dorothy. "If only they come this way!"

Her assailant heard the same voices, and desperately he pulled at the locked bracelet. As he made one final attempt to wrench it from Dorothy's wrist, his knife slipped, and cut clear across his own hand, the blood spurting from a long wound. With a cry he dropped his hold on Dorothy, and attempted to staunch the flow of blood.

Freed, Dorothy ran—ran as she felt she had never known she could run! She did not stop to call, although she judged that the boys might be near by; but ran on, across the marshes without any heed to the water, that even splattered up in her face, as she jumped from edge to edge of the rivulets, making her way out to the open roadway.

How her heart pounded! It did not seem to beat, but rather to strike at her breast and almost to strangle her.

It was getting quite dusk, but once on the road and she would feel safe.

"Hey there!" came a call in a familiar voice.

The boys were just coming out of the woods at the far end of the oaks.

"What's your hurry!" demanded Nat.

Dorothy felt like sinking down. The relief was almost as overwhelming as had been her fear.

"Oh, do hurry!" she called rather feebly. "I am almost dead!"

CHAPTER V

ToC

THE SEARCH

When Dorothy told her folks of what had happened, the boys could scarcely believe the strange story. That any one should actually make such a wild-west attempt at robbery, within reach of the Cedars, certainly did seem incredible. However, there was no disproving the marks on the girl's arms, where they had been rudely tied, nor could any one deny that in the attempt to remove her bracelet her delicate wrist had been badly bruised. At first it was thought best to at once notify the police, but, upon further consideration, Major Dale advised keeping the matter quiet, hoping that some one in the neighborhood would fall upon a clue to the daring young highwayman.

"I do hope the mystery will be cleared up before I leave for camp," remarked Dorothy, as the family sat in the beautiful library at the Cedars, discussing the strange affair. "I should never be satisfied with a written account of what may happen, when you find the culprit."

"Oh, we can tell you that right now," declared Nat, warmly. "When we find him we will lynch him, burn him at the stake, and have him imprisoned for life. When that sentence shall have been served we will make a fresh charge against him, and perhaps——"

"Put him in a reformatory until he is twenty-one," finished Ned. "Well, he deserves it! And to think that we should be almost within call! Dorothy, I am inclined to question the wisdom of your silence. Why didn't you yell like thunder?"

"And have him put some terrible gag down my throat?"

"And get all sorts of germs therefrom," added Joe. "Doro, you did just right, and we are thankful that you got off as well as you did," and her brother shook his head proudly, as if to say that a mere cousin could hardly know how a closer relative would feel on such a matter.

"I wish I could have seen him," mused Roger, to whom the whole story seemed like a wonderful tale of the West.

"Just for effect," put in Nat, with a laugh. "Roger is rather sorry he missed the show—he always falls for the scary part."

But Dorothy did not mind the child's natural curiosity. In fact she told him again just how the strange robber was dressed, and how fierce he looked at her through the holes in the red handkerchief.

"Maybe he'll come around to the camp," said Roger hopefully. "I'm going to have my rifle all ready."

"And I haven't yet told you of the adventure we had at Glenwood, just before school closed," went on Dorothy, realizing fully how delighted Roger would be with the tale of the hay wagon accident, as well as that of the scattered sheep. "We very nearly all lost a week's vacation through it, the principal was so indignant."

With splendid description, and with nothing startling left out, Dorothy went over the story. Even the larger boys became interested, and when she mentioned about the queer man, who sprang from nowhere, and who did things so unlike other people, Ned and Nat exchanged sly glances.

"You say he rode horseback like a real Indian?" queried Nat. "And that he sort of made up to my old friend Tavia?"

"I knew you would be jealous, Nat," answered Dorothy. "But you really must put Tavia out of your heart."

"Never!" and Nat struck a most tragic attitude. "Tavia will ever be the queen of my heart!" and he made a thump toward that organ, with seeming suicidal intent.

Dorothy laughed merrily. She knew very well how devoted Nat really was to her own best girl friend, and she also knew that Tavia fully appreciated the friendship of the handsome young cousin.

"When's Tavia coming?" asked Roger, another special friend of the girl without wisdom.

"I hope she will be here before I start for the Lake," replied Dorothy. "She always enjoys the Cedars more than she does any other summer place."

"Hope she does, too," replied Nat, with unhidden warmth. "I want to put a flea in her ear before she runs any further risks with the knight of the horse."

"Really," said Dorothy, aside to Ned, when she had an opportunity of speaking privately, "there is something very mysterious about that man. I have an uncanny feeling regarding him, and Cologne told me he had written a letter to Tavia."

"Did, eh?" and Ned, the elder of the White boys, instantly put on a defensive air. "Well, whoever he may be, he had better be careful. We happen to have a——"

"Children," called Major Dale, "if you are going out to look for your bandit, you had best be at it. He will have all his best holding-up-ing done and be off to his cave with the spoils before you—beard him outside of his lair."

Just what Ned was going to confide in Dorothy about the strange man was left unfinished much to Dorothy's disappointment, for she felt that the boys had some important clue as to the identity of the queer character. However, there was no time for further confidences, and she was obliged to run off to her little personal duties, while the boys made ready to explore the woods.

They proposed to lie in wait for the bandit for some time, and, if he did not put in an appearance, they planned to explore the woodland for at least half a mile around. They felt sure that they would come upon his tracks not far from the spot where Dorothy had been attacked, for it seemed reasonable to them, that any boy, or man, dressed as he was described to have been gotten up, would not attempt to go far from his hiding place.

With the White boys were two college friends, also home in North Birchland on their vacation, so that when the party actually started out they made up quite a squad.

"All got your guns?" asked Ned, as they sketched out their separate lines of advance, and made secret marks to show the starting points.

"Yep," replied Ben Nichols, the biggest boy in all North Birchland, whose particular "gun" was a golf driver.

So they started off. Roger insisted upon going, so Ned took him under his protection, while Joe kept within safe distance of Don Aikins, the young man from Bergen who claimed to be able to do anything, and any one, in the athletic world. He swung his light stick expectantly at the underbrush. Evidently he would be very pleased to have a swing at the boy with the roped-on armor.

It was splendid to have something real to hunt for—what boy, or girl either, would not have enjoyed the prospect—when there was not a question of being held up, but of holding up?

Then they separated.

Meanwhile Dorothy was very anxious. What if the boys should really come upon this daring young villian? What if little Roger should run off, and be overtaken? She almost wished she had

never told the whole story, for as she believed it all a wild whim of some foolish boy, she also felt that he would quickly see the danger of his sport. It was the morning after her adventure, and she was able now to regard it with less terror. Still her wrist did pain and she still trembled when she recalled how the knife had slipped, and how easily it could have severed her own vein, instead of severing the skin of the masked bandit.

She was thinking this all over, while shaking the creases from her lately-packed clothes, brushing the walking skirt, in which she had traveled to North Birchland, and generally putting her things in order, when Mrs. White, gowned for the street, entered the room.

"My dear," she began, "I am afraid you will lose the out-door joy of this delightful morning. Why not slip into your riding habit, and take a run on Cricket? He would be so glad to do it himself, poor pony! The boys are so busy with their camping that they forget a young horse wants some fun too."

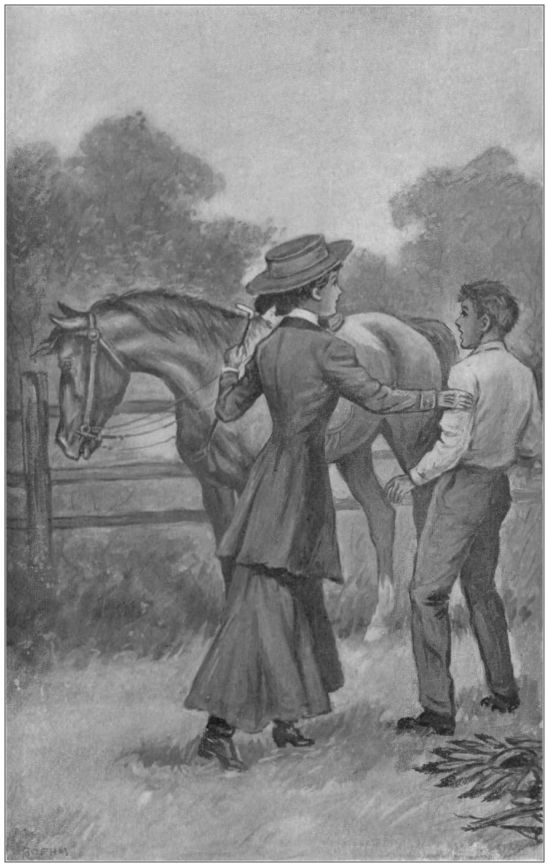
"I should be glad to, Auntie, but I feel I must get my things straightened out. The night I was packing up, the girls cut up so I had to hurry everything into my boxes in all shapes," replied Dorothy. "But I will take a canter as soon as I have finished," and she gathered up the pieces of broken crockery that had remained in her box after the "fall of China," as Tavia designated the accident to her tea set. "How lovely you do look, Aunt Winnie," exclaimed the girl, gazing with sincere admiration at the superb figure in rose broadcloth. "I do believe you have grown taller!"

"It's the style of this gown, my dear. These lines affect the Venus length. Ned declared when he first saw me in this that I was put together in sections—couldn't possibly be all in one piece," and she laughed in the deep, velvety tone that, perhaps, more than anything else about her interesting personality, proclaimed her the woman of unmistakable culture.

When she was gone, and Dorothy looked out into the inviting sunlight, she hurried with her unpacking, and was soon dressed in the simple tan-colored riding habit, that so well matched herself, as to make her look like a shade of the morning, when she mounted the pretty little bay pony, and set off at a canter along the North Birchland roads.

She soon forgot the fright of her boy-bandit, although she did wonder just where the boys were, and if they had found any evidence of that person's depradations.

"Come Cricket," she spoke to her pony. "We must try a cross-cut. I want some mandrakes."



"I DON'T WANT TO STRIKE YOU," SHE SAID,
"BUT YOU KNOW PRISONERS MUST OBEY."
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The horse pricked up his ears in response. Dorothy turned into a field where she thought the plum-shaped fruit would be found.

Dismounting, she threw the reins over Cricket's head and allowed him to nibble at the sweet

grass. Yes, there were the mandrakes with their finger-shaped leaves. And they were turning yellow. Dorothy gathered a few, then stood up to look about her.

"The bandit!" she gasped in a whisper.

He had his hand on Cricket's rein!

"Drop that!" she shouted. "You need not think I am afraid of you now!"

"What?" asked the boy, dropping his disguise like a thing held by one single fastening and moving as if to spring up into the saddle.

Dorothy fairly jumped over the tall grasses, and was beside the horse before the boy could mount. She grasped the bridle, and, at the same time, more firmly grasped her riding crop.

"Now I have you," she declared, gazing in wonderment at the very good-looking boy who tried in vain to escape from the stirrup in which his boot had stuck. Seeing her opportunity, Dorothy dropped the bridle and crop, and, with both hands, grasped the boy very much in the same manner as he had seized her the day before.

"Let me go!" he snarled, struggling to free himself.

"Not just now," replied Dorothy, coolly, for she saw that she was quite able to hold him, and that he was really only a very slight young boy. "I am going to have a try at your game," she added, smiling at her versatility.

The boy almost fell under the horse, but Cricket was so well trained that he did not attempt to go beyond Dorothy's orders.

"Steady, Cricket!" she said softly. "Now young man," to her prisoner, "I am going to do something very original. I am going to tie you to that pretty tree."

"You are not!" he yelled, but she had her whip in her hand and she raised it threateningly.

"I don't want to strike you," she said, "but you know prisoners must obey. Just step over there a foot or two!"

There was such authority in her voice that the boy looked up frightened.

"Don't hit me," he pleaded, "and I'll go!"

This was more than Dorothy expected, and as the lad moved to obey, she raised, with her foot, the rope he had dropped with his disguise, and grasped it in her hand with the riding crop.

"You see school girls learn a lot about 'team work,'" she said. "We have to do it in all sorts of games."

"What are you going to do with me?" asked the boy, who actually seemed more interested than frightened.

"Well, first I am going to make you secure. See, I just slip this rope around you—you had it all ready with that slip knot," and she put it over his head before he had a chance to protest. It fell over his hands, and she pulled the cord tight. Then, as he was standing near the tree, she dropped the rope to his feet, gave it a jerk, and springing around the tree she had him secure with two turns of the hemp, and a knot made after the style of one Nat had showed her how to fashion.

The boy burst out laughing.

"You're all right!" he declared. "You beat me! Where did you learn?"

"Oh, I often played bandit with my brothers, but never with a stranger before. Aren't you afraid? Don't you want to say your prayers?"

"I've forgotten them," he said with a smile. "Guess I forgot them when I started in at this—the two don't hitch."

"Not exactly," and Dorothy was fixing the rope more tightly. "But you did know some once. I can tell."

"How?" he asked.

"Because you don't swear. Didn't even when you cut your hand. How is it?"

"Sore," he replied. "Please don't pass the rope over the bandage."

"I won't," answered Dorothy with some tenderness.

The humor of the situation was apparent to both of them.

Dorothy, however, was determined not to relent, she would hold him a prisoner, she decided, until she found the boys. They would know best what to do. Certainly such a desperado was unsafe to be at large.

"Are you going to make the fire now?" he asked, in a mocking tone.

"No, I am just going to jump on my horse and leave you here to think of your sins. I am sure you will be here when I come back."

"Oh please, miss, don't go for the police," he begged, tears welling into his deep blue eyes. "I have never done anything wrong before—and I can see, now, how silly I was."

"I am not going after the officers," said Dorothy, "but you must know that you have done very wrong—you might have hurt me seriously."

"Oh, please let me go!" he pleaded. "I will promise you anything, and I never want to play Wild West again!"

"It was too real for play," retorted Dorothy. "But you need not be too alarmed. My cousins are good boys."

"Your cousins?"

"Yes, the White boys. Do you know them?"

"Ned and Nat? Of course I do! Oh, don't tell on me! Really I shall be disgraced forever."

He was crying. Dorothy felt herself weakening.

"I'll tell you where everything is, and I'll promise you anything in the world if you will only not—give me up. I can't bear to think of—poor mother. I could stand it—but she——"

"Is she ill?" and Dorothy quickly counted what a disgrace it would be to a good mother to find her son in such a plight.

"Yes, she is away from me all the time—with the nurses, and I haven't seen her in a week. It would kill her to know what I've been doing."

"Who takes care of you?" asked Dorothy. "Whom do you play with?"

"Oh, father is away, and I have plenty of money to buy guns and things. Then I go to plays a lot."

This was the sequel to the story, Dorothy thought. Would it possibly be safe for her to take the boy's word, and let him go? As he said he would be disgraced, and perhaps her kindness to him might be his clearest lesson.

How good-looking he really was! Even standing there, tied, his clear face, and light hair, could not be undervalued, from the point of fine looks.

Somehow he was just a bit like Roger—that same round baby face, and that one unmanageable curl that would hang down on his forehead in spite of years, and in spite of barbers.

"I'll tell you where I put all the things," he fairly sobbed, "and I'll give them all back, if you will only give me one more chance. I remember the Bible always gave folks a second chance."

Dorothy could not repress a smile. Yes, that was true—the Bible taught forgiveness.

"Quick! They're coming!" he pleaded. "Untie me, and I—I'll run."

Dorothy heard the voices. Quickly she untied the slip knot and almost as speedily as he had been tied, the lad was made free.

"No, don't run," ordered Dorothy. "You can just stay with me—get some grass for Cricket and ——"

"The togs! Where can I hide them?"

"Give them here! Hello, there boys! Did you find him?" called Dorothy, as that very moment she raised a clump of brush to hide the "togs" under, and at the same time she hailed the boys who just turned into the open field from the search through the woods.

"Nary a find!" called back Nat. "Guess you were 'seeing things,' Doro. We have come to the conclusion that the bandit lit on your brain."

"Maybe," replied Dorothy. "But see, my Sir Galahad," indicating the captive, who stood beside her. "He saved Cricket from a ditch, and I haven't had a chance to get his other name."

"Hello, Roy!" greeted Ned. "Glad to see you. Where have you been keeping yourself? We wanted you the other day for the town games, but couldn't find you."

"Hello, Roy!" shouted the approaching Joe.

"'Low there, Royal!" came from Roger, who just then threw away his bandit stick.

"I'm glad you are all acquainted," added Dorothy. "I must ask Roy to come up to the house this afternoon."

"I'll be there!" declared the boy, but only Dorothy knew why he spoke so earnestly.

CHAPTER VI

ToC

OFF FOR CAMP

"But Cologne won't wait another day. I have got to be off to camp," Dorothy insisted.

"Isn't our camp good enough?" asked Joe. "We have not seen you for so long—and now off you go again."

"Yes, and I thought she was going to cook for us. I guess I don't want to camp with the fellows cooking," murmured the disappointed Roger.

"I am sure I would love to stay at the Cedars longer," their sister assured them. "But you know I must keep my engagements, and I am to live in a real camp this summer."

"And Tavia is going, too," Roger went on. "If she was around here there might be some fun."

"Perhaps you both can come to Maine for a stay. Then you would see the great big moose you hear so much about. If they are not to be found alive I am sure we could manage to see some dead," said Dorothy. "Now be good boys, and I'll see if I can arrange that."

She was saying good-bye to her brothers, and a half hour later she had taken her chair in the train bound through New England *en route* for Maine. The few days spent at home had been so delightful—even her Wild-West adventure had ended up happily, for Royal Drake, the erstwhile bandit, did all he could to make up for his "crimes," and even went so far as to take Dorothy to a big tree, in the hollow of which he had hidden considerable loot, during his try at the "wild and wooly." This loot Roy took back to his own home, which had been the first scene of his juvenile depredations. He declared he did get out of a window with the stuff, and otherwise fulfilled the attempt in true desperado fashion, but before Dorothy left him, she felt that he had changed his mind as to the propriety of this line of "fun."

"I hope I meet Tavia on time," Dorothy was thinking, as she neared the station where her companion was expected to board the train. "If she keeps up her reputation, though, I won't. Something is sure to happen when Tavia goes traveling."

Summer folks were taking themselves and their luggage into the crowded cars. It did seem that the privilege of carrying freight personally was being abused, for old and young were simply bending down under the weight of the stuff for which they struggled to find room in the passenger coaches.

"That would simply spoil my vacation," Dorothy reflected. "It seems to me each season evolves some new sort of hamper to be hampered with."

"Doro!"

It was Tavia!

"Oh, hello—Tavia. I was so afraid——"

"You don't look it. I fancied I saw you sizing up that piece of architecture at the door. Gothic; isn't it?" and Tavia fell into the chair Dorothy had emptied for her. The "piece of architecture" took the sofa at the end of the car, and she appeared to need every bit of it for her hat, and other pieces of luggage.

"Funny how the porters always like that sort of thing," remarked Dorothy. "I don't believe they ever get a cent for it, either."

"But look at the glory," said Tavia. "Every eye in the car is on that sofa. My gaze is simply crowded out. Let's want something. Oh, yes. I have lost my—'Porter!'" called Tavia sweetly, at the same time touching the button at the window. The man in the brass-buttoned uniform turned promptly. "I have lost my hand bag," said Tavia. "I surely had it when I entered."

Persons in several seats around disturbed themselves. Dorothy's face flushed. How absurd Tavia was to make that confusion, just for fun.

Every time Tavia stooped to look under the seat, or about it, she would pinch Dorothy, which act did not add to the latter's comfort.

"Oh, I have it," exclaimed the wily one. "Thank you so much," and she smiled clear up and down the aisle. "I was sure I had it," and taking her seat, she managed, in the most conspicuously discreet way, to slip into the porter's palm something shiny.

"There," she added, when he was gone, "wasn't that neat, Doro? He is ours now for the rest of the trip, and the lady on the sofa is *nil*."

Dorothy knew it was worse than useless to protest, but this was not the sort of thing she considered fun.

"Did you have a pleasant time at Dalton?" she asked, hoping to get Tavia's attention. "I was so sorry I could not go up for a day."

"You might be glad," replied Tavia. "Of all the stupid times—I would have run away but for Johnnie. He took me fishing, and I—wore overalls! Oh, only out in the woods, of course, but it was sport, and I caught fish! It's skirts that hoodoo the catch. I have come to that conclusion."

"In what woods did you wear—overalls?" and Dorothy looked almost frightened. Might Tavia have the garb with her?

"Oh, away out Mushroom way. And I stretched out just like any respectable boy, and cast the line! Dear me, Doro! I would just loved to have smoked! That would have made it—perfect!"

"There isn't a shock left in me," Dorothy assured her, "so don't try so hard Tavia. I am simply

immune. You must have looked just—sweet—in overalls. I hope they were dark blue."

"*Are*," corrected Tavia, "*are* dark blue," and she wheeled around out toward the aisle just as a young chap in white flannels passed along. He looked down at her in that pardonable way common even in the best style of traveling. Dorothy breathed more easily when he passed out to the next coach.

"Wasn't he dear?" commented Tavia. "Doro, I just know we are going to have a perfectly bang-up time, this summer."

"Take care you come out of it without too much 'banging' up," cautioned Dorothy. "This summer business is getting exciting."

"Wonder if we will see the man of the horse? He who made such beautiful bows, and acted so—actly. Wasn't he lovely? My, I have dreamed of him, Doro!"

"Foolish," replied the other. "Nat said he fancied that chap would make trouble."

The thought that Cologne might have whispered to Dorothy something about Tavia getting a letter from this man just flashed across her mind. Tavia was always getting into some foolish scrape, and kept Dorothy busy getting her out, and it just occurred to Dorothy that it might not be a bad idea to let Tavia try getting herself out, should she repeat her usual indiscretions of risking too much for the sake of some trifling whim.

"Bangor! Bangor!" called the porter, and our friends gathered themselves up to make the change for Lake Monadic.

"I must get a shoe shine," said Tavia, as they stepped on the platform of the big depot. "Just wait here. I won't be three minutes."

"We only have five," Dorothy told her, "and if you are late—I must go on. Cologne is going to meet us away out from camp."

"Oh I'll be back," promised Tavia, and then she was lost in the throng.

CHAPTER VII

ToC

CAMP C.C.

"There is not another train out this evening," Cologne was telling Dorothy. "Wasn't it perfectly dreadful for her to leave you!"

"I expected something like that to happen from the start," Dorothy replied. "Tavia has a faculty for missing trains. I wonder what she will do?"

"There is just a chance that she may be able to make the way train, and switch off at the Junction, then, if she is lucky, she may flag the shore train and get to this spot about midnight. But what would she do then? Better stay out in civilization until daylight."

"I feel dreadfully, Rose-Mary, that she should give you so much trouble. I sometimes think Tavia ought to be——"

"Spanked," finished the girl, with a smile. "Well, with all her faults we love her still," and she tightened her hands on the horse reins. "Let us hope she will be more fortunate than we anticipate."

"Isn't this lovely!" exclaimed Dorothy, as they started over the hill in the depot wagon. "These are real Maine woods, aren't they?"

"Not the big-game kind. Those are farther out. But wait until you see our camp. Then you may say lovely!"

"And your camping suit," went on Dorothy. "Surely I may say lovely to that. It is perfectly splendid, and your cap is so becoming!"

"Think so? Yes, I like the cap, and it's handy. I've got one for you and one for Tavia—if she ever gets here to claim it," and Cologne handed the cap to Dorothy for close inspection. It was a jaunty blue affair with the letters "C.C." in gilt. These, Cologne explained, might stand for anything, but they mostly stood for Camp Cologne, or Camp Cozy, or Camp Clamor, although some of the members wanted it Camp Capital, Cologne said.

"We will end up by making it 'See See,'" declared Dorothy, "for it does seem one or other of us is constantly calling upon some one else to see something—there is lots to see."

A party of other campers came trooping along the shady roadway. Cologne knew them, and hailed them pleasantly.

"They are our neighbors," she said, "and they have the nicest brothers! I just want you to meet Teddy—he is too funny!"

"Don't you think that variety would suit Tavia better than me?" asked Dorothy. "I thought you always picked out the real good kind for me, the sort that wear collars all summer," and Dorothy laughed at the idea, for the day was warm, and the thought of a stiff collar was rather incongruous.

"Well, he must be nice, at any rate," replied Cologne, as they turned into a lane, a short cut over the woodland. "But, say, Dorothy, do you know I believe that fellow—the one who rode the farmer's horse—is out this way? I saw some one who had that same queer gait, and who wore his hat on the side of his head, and I am almost sure it was he. I was not near enough to see his face, but there is something so characteristic about his swing, I am sure I could not be mistaken. Did Tavia tell you anything about the letter?"

"No," replied Dorothy slowly, "but I do hope he is not going to spoil our camping days. I should never feel safe with him loitering about the woods. What could fetch him away out here?"

"Well, this is a great rendezvous for swell invalids and nature lovers," Cologne told her, "and of course, it may be a mere coincidence. I even might be mistaken."

"Let us hope you are," said Dorothy fervently. "I would not mind so much—but Tavia—Oh well, you know how queer she is."

"Yes, indeed I do, but never mind, Doro, we are going to have the time of our lives this summer, and we must not go into the missionary business for it's awfully wearing."

"It's quite a long drive out here, isn't it? I shouldn't think you would often take it after dark?"

"Oh, we never do, unless we have a whole party and go merry-making. But this evening I fear we will have to go for Tavia. Isn't it too provoking? It spoils my plans for to-night."

"I wonder what ever could have kept her? She had five minutes, and I warned her."

"Likely she saw something interesting, and determined to make those five minutes grow into ten. She has no respect for time, I know that, and as for the railroads, why it would tickle her to miss a train and make trouble for the next one."

"Oh, there are the tents! I see the white specks over that way. And there is the little lake!" exclaimed Dorothy.

"Yes, we are getting there. Come on, hurry up Jeff" (this to the horse), "we must get home by five and we have only three minutes. I promised mother to be back at five, and punctuality is an unbreakable rule of our camp. We made it so because we have always found that tardiness is the ruination of all good summers; even camp life must have rules," and Cologne urged the steed to a little faster gait.

"Is this your own horse?" asked Dorothy.

"No, but we have him for the summer. Mother insisted on us having a real old timer—safer, she thinks."

"And he knows all the roads, that's something," added Dorothy. "If we should get lost he could find our way home for us."

"Indeed, he could. I often give him the lines, and he goes along to the post office, and back again, without the slightest prompting. Here we are!"

Cologne drew up, not in front of a canvas tent, but beside a fine old barn.

"Is that the—tent—the camp?" asked Dorothy.

"Yes, but just wait until you see how we have it settled. There's mother," as Mrs. Markin appeared at the door and extended the most cordial welcome to Dorothy.

Swinging aside the great old-fashioned door, that opened in two parts, Cologne ushered Dorothy into the camp.

"Oh, how perfectly splendid!"

It was like a picture from an art magazine. The real rafters—no boxed-shaped beams set up like an uncovered porch roof—but rafters, that hung down low, fragrant with the scent of hickory, soft in tint, and brown with the polish and glow of years. Then the big field stone fire-place, with the "side walk" all around it, and the pieces of rag carpet!

"I have never seen anything so perfectly splendid!" chimed Dorothy, "how ever did you find such a camp?"

"The mater's idea," replied Cologne, enthused with Dorothy's delight. "There used to be a big house on this farm, but it was burned down. Mother knew the place and we got it. Isn't it a perfect mansion? Mater would not hear of us sleeping in the open—says tents fly away in the night. Let me show you the whole house."

The first floor—for there was a loft—was laid out in a living room, with many luxuries even to a hired, old-fashioned, square piano; the chairs, Cologne explained, had been bought at a second-hand shop along the mountain road; and the man who kept the shop was so surprised to have a call for such odd chairs and tables that Mrs. Markin was able to pick up some splendid pieces for

a mere trifle. Then the sleeping rooms, Mrs. Markin's and her daughter's, besides the guest room, were on the first floor, while Jack, the big boy of the family, had his "bunk" on the loft, and up there also was a "bunk" for any of Jack's friends who might pay him a visit.

The first floor rooms were divided by cretonne partitions, or curtains, made secure top and bottom, and the coloring of these screens gave the place an ideal tone in color. The kitchen was outside under a lean-to tent.

And the dining room! A broad porch with an uncovered roof. A canvas flap was hung over the roof to be used, or thrown aside, just as the weather ordained. The table was a matter of two "horses" and three planks, and the seats were of the same brand, only in a lower grade. The cover was of oilcloth, and the dishes were some wooden and some white enamel.

"You see," said Cologne, "Mother did not want us to be working always, so she made the table service a la Indian. We burn most of the dishes when we've used them, and they keep our camp fire going, or rather, they only start it. Then the metal plates are so easy to wash, and so hard to break. Oh, we have camping down to a system! I hope you will like the system."

"How could I help liking it! Why it's just ideal. It makes our pretentious homes look like cheap bric-a-brac," Dorothy declared.

"Well, come now and have tea—we are to have it alone, you and I, for mother is busy helping Jennie can berries, and Jack is never home until the cows come—we can see herds of them troup over that hill every night."

Cologne put a match to the small oil stove, and then when the kettle boiled she made tea in the proper way, pouring the water over the leaves as they nestled in the blue Delft pot on the table. The edibles were produced from an improvised cupboard, and in a remarkably short time Dorothy and her friend were seated at the long table, enjoying a meal, the like of which the visitor declared she had never before fallen heir to.

"It must be the air," she remarked, helping herself to a sandwich, "for I have never felt so alarmingly hungry."

"Jack says they are 'standwiches,'" remarked Cologne, "for he never gets a chance to eat one while sitting down."

"That's true," replied Dorothy, "for at the places where one gets them one is never supposed to sit down. 'Standwiches' they really are. I am anxious to see Jack. He gave me such a nice time when I visited you at Buffalo."

"Oh, he's a perfect giant," Cologne told her. "He grows while you wait. He's off fishing to-day. Promised to fetch home some nice fish for to-morrow's dinner. We get trout for breakfast in the stream over there. It's jolly to fish. I know you will like it up here, Dorothy."

"*Will* like it! I *do* like it! There is no future tense on that score. I have always longed for a visit 'way down east.' And how strange people talk! Just as soon as we passed Connecticut it was like going into a new country, the accent is so different. Tavia declared it was nothing but a left-over brogue of the Mayflower vintage. Of course, that's what it really is. But Tavia! I had almost forgotten her. Could we go out anywhere and look for her?"

"Hardly," replied Cologne. "But we could drive out to the station again, and send a message to the Junction. I wish Jack was here. He would know best what to do. It is too provoking!"

"And she is so apt to fall in with a 'friend,'" mused Dorothy. "I never saw her equal for picking up friends."

"There's an automobile," exclaimed Cologne, listening to the ripping of the atmosphere as a machine tore down the road. "We don't have many cars around here, it's too hilly."

"They're coming in the lane! It's Tavia!"

Both girls jumped up, and ran to the lane that wound around the camp.

Tavia was standing up waving her hand bag.

"She made friends this time," declared Dorothy. "Just like her to fall into something easy."

CHAPTER VIII

ToC

THE WILD ANIMAL

"Perfectly delicious," Tavia was exclaiming, in her reckless way, "never believed a barn could

be thus converted into a home." She tossed aside her traveling things. "And so sweet of you, Cologne, to ask poor me. The old joke, as if Rose-Mary-Cologne-Lavender could be other than sweet!"

"And so dear of you to get here," said Dorothy, with mocking voice. "We really thought——"

"Doro, dear, if you only would get over that abominable thinking habit! See what happened to me when I thought I was was going to be locked up for the night in the little railroad station! Why, along whisked an auto, and the lady with the scared-to-death-hair looked at me. Seeing me was believing. The chaufferine (it was a lady and my French is packed up) asked me in. That was what I got for thinking on the wrong stoop. And weren't they dears? Did you mind the veils? First I thought they were hoisted for rain clouds, and again, when I saw the blues and pinks, I decided for fair weather. There were enough colors to make a rainbow look like the milky way. And they asked me to come see them! Asked me! Why they begged me and made me give a cross-my-heart yes."

"But you won't go?" asked Cologne. "You know the Lamberts are—well—they are a troup of theatrical folks, and no one knows much about them."

"The only profession that hides the ego," broke in Tavia. "Now that is what I call cozy, to get away from the dear old nosey public. I wonder the whole world does not go in for the stage, and get a chance to walk through the streets, and have folks say, 'Isn't she perfectly sweet!' All the while one could be sticking out her tongue, and otherwise enjoying herself—"

"Tavia!" exclaimed Dorothy. "Do talk something akin to common sense if you cannot do better. And don't mix up your pronouns. You keep one bobbing through tenses and pronouns as if the thinker were a jack-in-the-box."

"All the same I would love to go over to that big white house in the cherry trees, and see a dress rehearsal. They play Shakespeare."

"You must not think of such a thing," declared Dorothy. "Since Cologne does not wish you to go in the strange set, you will surely comply, but I do not have to tell you that I am sure you will," and she turned away in evident distress.

The next morning the three girls started to camp in earnest. Tavia insisted that it was her share of work to fetch one pail of water from the spring, because, she said, she had to stoop down so low, and walk so far the effort was equal to Dorothy's dish-washing or Cologne's muffin-making.

"While you do the rest," she said, "I'll just run up, and look over the loft, the boys are out now, and Dorothy won't be afraid I'll forget my manners."

"You come here directly, and set this table for lunch," ordered Dorothy. "We are going out for trout, and will not be in until eating time, so we will get everything ready now."

"All right," answered Tavia, at the same time climbing up the ladder, and making her way to the loft.

"Oh, let her explore," said Cologne. "Then when she gets enough of it she will be satisfied."

"Don't touch any of the old guns up there," called Dorothy, "Jack says there are dangerous."

"All righty!" yelled Tavia from above. "But say wouldn't this be a handsome place to drop from?"

She was in the opening of the hay loft, lying on the floor with her head over the edge.

"Oh don't" begged Cologne. "Tavia, that is dangerous!"

Her voice was rather strained, Cologne was annoyed. Tavia jumped up, and, with a most unladylike "whoop," ran from one end of the loft to the other, exclaiming at every new found article of interest. Suddenly she stopped.

"Now what do you suppose she is at?" asked Dorothy, as she and Cologne listened.

"Maybe Jack's pipes. I am sure she would be interested in them. He has quite a collection."

"Oh! G-i-r-l-s!" came a shout from the loft. "Come quick! A wild animal!"

The voice left no room for doubt. Tavia did see something.

Cologne and Dorothy dropped their work and scrambled up the ladder.

"Over here!"

Tavia was on all fours, peering behind an old door that lay close to the side timbers of the barn. "Just look! His hair stands up like a porcupine, and his eyes! Oh, my! such eyes!"

Cologne and Dorothy looked.

"There certainly is something," admitted Cologne.

"It has straight black hair," exclaimed Dorothy, "and it does look fierce!"

"What shall we do?" asked Cologne. "Jack will not be back until night."

"And if we take our eyes off it we run the risk of having it under the bed to-night," said Tavia. "Now if only we could shoot a gun," and she looked at the line of weapons that decorated the side of the loft.

"I can load and fire a gun," declared Dorothy. "Wasn't my father a soldier?"

"Wasn't her father a soldier!" repeated Tavia. "Cologne you hump down there, and keep your

eye on the bear, while we get a gun, and load it. Then if it's all the same to you, I'll do down stairs, and out in the back yard until it is all over. I hate murder close by."

"I'll choose my own gun, if you please," said Dorothy, as Tavia was about to hand her an old musket. "I like the vintage of the last century at least."

"Are you sure you won't hurt yourself?" asked Cologne anxiously. "I think perhaps we had best try to box the thing in here. Shooting is rather risky."

"Not if I can get a gun I happen to know," said Dorothy. "You may both go out in the back yard if you choose. I must try the rifle first—oh, here is one just like father gave Joe his last birthday. I had a mind to borrow it to come out here to Maine woods, but I never dreamed of getting game right in camp."

"Don't shoot dis niggah!" pleaded Tavia, actually making for the ladder.

Dorothy went over to the open window and put the rifle to her shoulder. She pulled the trigger. There was no discharge. Not satisfied with one trial she worked the rifle until there was positively no possibility of any load being in the weapon.

"There, that's clean," she said. "Now for the cartridge."

Over on the wall hung Jack's ammunition box. Cologne was watching at a safe distance. Tavia had gone downstairs by way of a rope that Jack Markin used for descending. Dorothy put the load in, made sure it was all right, then went over to the beast's hiding place. She crouched down and took aim.

"Do—be—careful, Dorothy."

Crack!

"There! That fetched him!" exclaimed Dorothy. "I saw him roll over."

"Make sure he is dead before you pull the door away," again cautioned Cologne.

"Dead as a carpet tack," declared Dorothy. "Let's call Tavia and get her to pull him out. She ought to do something in this, our first hunt."

Tavia was called, and being assured that the thing had rolled the death roll, she came up the ladder, and with the aid of a long handled hay rake, she just ventured to touch the strange thing.

"It's dead!"

This was the signal for a series of antics such as Tavia might imagine to be popular in the Figi Islands when some real dainty morsel fell into the camp kettle.

"Oh, let us see what it is!" ordered Cologne. "Maybe we won't have to go trout fishing, it may do for dinner."

"It may, then again it may not," replied Tavia. "But May or Mamie, let's haul her out."

Dorothy put her shoulder to the frame door, back of which the thing was hidden.

"One, two, three!" she shoved it over. "Are you ready?"

"Let her go!" called Cologne, springing up on an old trunk.

But it didn't go, neither did it come.

The girls waited breathlessly.

"Pull him out, Tavia! What's the use standing there with a rake in your hand," said Dorothy.

"I want to make sure he does not revive," she replied, gingerly poking the rake handle a little further under the hidden corner.

"Oh, here," exclaimed Dorothy impatiently. "Let me take that implement and you hold this door. We ought to get the animal out in time for lunch."

They shifted positions. Dorothy jabbed the rake recklessly into the corner. Tavia moaned, and Cologne groaned.

Drag—drag—It was coming out.

"Mercy!" exclaimed Tavia.

"Goodness me!" gasped Cologne.

But Dorothy, who was the only one near the thing, simply dropped the rake and stood aghast—too dumbfounded to utter a syllable!

"What is it?" begged Cologne.

"*A WINDOW BRUSH!*" she gasped, at the same moment stooping to pick up the beast—the thing with the straight, long black hair that stood up in fierce bristles!

"A WINDOW BRUSH!" SHE GASPED.
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"But the eyes!" asked Tavia. "I saw terrible eyes!"

"Might have been imported fire flies," answered Dorothy. "I believe Jack has a penchant for odd bugs!"

"Oh, isn't that too mean!"

"And Jack's good cartridges!"

"But the brush is all right," declared Cologne. "We just needed a window brush to make the camp outfit complete. But don't let's tell the boys," she pleaded hastily.

"Oh, no!" chimed Tavia and Dorothy. Then all three in turn took the rope route down to the lower floor.

CHAPTER IX

ToC

A STRANGE MEETING

For several days after the "hunt" the girls kept up the joke on themselves. Time after time they threatened to let Jack, and his friend Percy, guess the truth, but Tavia, the most to be feared, did manage to keep the laugh purely feminine.

Dorothy and Cologne were gathering berries this morning, while Tavia ran off to a spot where she declared she could get the better kind of fruit, better than any they had yet secured. She turned in back of the big barn, then ran over behind the ice-house, and then she smelled apples, ripe apples.

"There are harvest apples around here, somewhere," she told herself. "I simply must find them."

From tree to tree she scampered along until she was out in the lane that ran into the next estate.

"That's a road," she was thinking. "And there's a man."

Glancing around to see if she could discern Dorothy or Cologne, Tavia had a sudden thrill of terror.

"I didn't know I had gone so far," she thought, "and that man is coming this way."

Something familiar about the manner in which the stranger advanced toward her attracted her attention.

"Looks like that man! It is he! The fellow who stopped the hay-wagon runaway!"

She was still frightened, but a trifle more at ease, since she recognized the man in the big slouch hat. "Whatever could have brought him here?" she asked herself. The next moment she was glad—glad that Cologne and Dorothy were out of reach.

"Oh, I'm not afraid of him," she thought. "Perhaps he knows I'm here——"

He was almost up to her. Yes, it was he—the same queer smile lurked about his face, and he had that indefinable air—was it attractive, or only different?

"Good morning, Maud Muller," he said doffing that unlimited hat. "I'm so glad to see you alone."

"Good morning," answered Tavia, "but I am not alone, I just ran away from my friends; they are over there."

"But not over here. It's all the same. I want to speak to you, and this is the best opportunity I could have wished for."

Tavia unconsciously picked up a stick. She felt queer, and he looked queer, so that altogether it was a very queer proceeding.

"I have news for you," the man resumed. "Is not your name Tavia Travers?"

"Yes."

"Then you must follow my advice closely and you will come into your own. Are you not from the town of Dalton?"

"I am."

"Then I am right, as I was sure I was from the start. Your father is a—is an officer in Dalton?"

"A squire," replied Tavia, bewildered now at his knowledge of her and her family.

"The same. I want to tell you"—he stepped up uncomfortably near to her so that his sleeve touched her—"I want to tell you there is a fortune coming to your family, and I can put you on the track to secure it. My uncle Abe"—he seemed to chuckle—"knew about it, he told me, and I had to swear on a Bible covered with blood, that I would never betray his secret!"

"Oh, my!" shuddered Tavia stepping away. "I don't think I can wait now." She was thoroughly frightened. "Couldn't you come down to the camp, and tell me? Then we could talk comfortably. The sun is very hot up here."

"But what I have to say is best said in the open," he answered vaguely. "I prefer this to all spots on earth." He paused and Tavia's first impulse was to run, but then——

"I won't ask you to believe me now," he said, his voice softening, "but if you will come to where I say I can prove my assertion."

"That there is a fortune left to my family? That is too absurd," and Tavia smiled. "Money does not run in our family."

"Exactly. That is why it has to be run into it—put on the track, so to speak. Well, I know what I am talking about. But if you are not interested——"

He turned as if to go. What if it could be true, and Tavia was throwing away the only chance she would ever have of learning the truth?

"Where did you want me to go?" she stammered.

"Meet me at the old stone bridge to-morrow at three, and I will convince you of the actuality of this wonderful inheritance—this inheritance which you so long have been deprived of—which you have been fleeced out of by my scheming Uncle Abe!"

His eyes flashed, and his voice trembled. Tavia thought she had never before seen such glassy eyes, and the way he fastened them on her gave her a most uncomfortable feeling. She even felt compelled to promise what he asked, and she did so.

He sauntered off, leaving the girl's head in a whirl. Who was he, and what did he know about her family?

He was right in his assertions about Dalton, also about her father. Surely there could be no harm in listening to his story, and the stone bridge was not far from camp.

Dorothy and Cologne were just appearing above the hill, Dorothy's yellow head bobbing up like some animated flower.

"Oh, you dreadful girl!" called Cologne. "We thought the gypsies had taken you."

"No such luck," answered Tavia, as the two came up to the apple tree. "But I did find some splendid apples. Help yourselves. I must sit down for a minute. I've been up the tree—no, up *a* tree," she finished with a laugh that neither of her companions understood.

"Harvests!" cried Cologne in delight. "I never knew they were here."

"Neither did I until I found them," replied Tavia foolishly.

"The climb gave you lovely red cheeks; Tavia," said Dorothy. "You ought to take climbing in the next school course."

"No sarcasm now, please, Doro. I don't feel a bit funny."

"But you look it," declared Dorothy, keeping up her teasing manner. "You always look funny when your cheeks get so red—"

"Danger of ignition, I suppose," and Tavia's voice was anything but pleasant. "Oh, there go the Lamberts!" as an auto swished around the road. "I must run away and see them some day—just before we go home, when Cologne won't have time, or heart, to scold."

"You wouldn't!" spoke Cologne. "Mother particularly warned me that we were not to take up with those theatrical folks, and mother is the boss."

"Oh, very well, if you really feel that way about it," and Tavia shrugged her shoulders.

Dorothy was shaking a limb of the apple tree. "What ghost have you seen Tavia?" she asked. "Someone has stolen away all your good nature."

"He's welcome," she replied. "Stagnant good nature doesn't keep well, and I have been keeping mine bottled up ever since you shot that window brush. The shock to my system—" and she imitated the manner of one affected with nerves.

"Yes, it was dreadful on all of us," agreed Dorothy, from whom the change in Tavia's manner could not be hidden. "But you must forget it, and think of the good time we are going to have to-morrow. Think of it! Going out in the real mountains, with real boys for guides! Of course you will have your pick of the boys, Cologne and I must be satisfied with what remains."

Cologne had scarcely spoken since Tavia mentioned the Lamberts, and Dorothy was doing her best to restore good nature and peace to both of her companions. Yet she was greatly annoyed at Tavia's rudeness. Why should she persist in ignoring common courtesy and thus keeping up that Lambert question?

"We must hurry back to the camp with our berries," Cologne at last ventured, "or mother will think some snake has eaten us up."

"And I particularly want to try my hand at berry tarts," declared Dorothy. "I was, at one time, considered quite a 'tarter.'"

Tavia gathered up some apples, and the others took their berry baskets. They walked slowly over the hill back to the camp. Jack was waiting for them.

"Say, girls!" he began as they neared the dining room steps, "the boys have a great scheme on for to-morrow. But I am not to tell you about it."

"Isn't that lovely," came from Tavia in rather mocking tones.

"But I am commissioned to tell you," he went on with an arch look at Tavia, "that you are to rest this afternoon for sufficient unto to-morrow is the weariness thereof."

Then they began to prepare lunch, but Tavia remained outside, asking Jack some seemingly foolish questions.

CHAPTER X

ToC

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF TAVIA

After a morning spent in anticipation of the good time Jack had promised (and Jack and his friends did know how to give the girls a good time) something happened just as they were about to start off to the woods.

Tavia was missing!

At first the matter was taken as a joke, as it would be quite like Tavia to run off and hide in the hay loft, or in any other outlandish place; but when, after all kinds of calls, and a thorough search

of the premises, she failed to be located, there was reasonable alarm among the campers. The Hays girls from Camp Happy-go-Lucky, had joined the party that intended going into the deep woods, so they, too, aided in the search for Tavia.

"I give up," said Jack finally, mopping his forehead, for in spite of the beautiful bracing air of the mountains, the act of running over the hill and into the valleys made him perspire.

"Isn't it queer!" exclaimed Dorothy, thoroughly alarmed. "I have a feeling that something has happened to her."

"Don't you worry," Jack suggested. "You will be sure to find out that Tavia has happened to something. She has a faculty for that sort of thing. Let us go off on a day's fun. No use spoiling it all on account of a whim—I am sure it is nothing more."

"She did complain of a headache," Cologne remembered, "and I gave her a little soda. She may have thought it best to hide with the headache rather than to worry us about it."

"We haven't tried the brook," suggested pretty Hazel Hays. "I am always afraid of brooks."

"But Tavia swims like a fish," declared Dorothy. "I would never think of harm coming to her in the water."

"Let's try, at any rate," agreed Jack, who never opposed Hazel. "Although, unless that big frog gobbled her up, I cannot imagine any possible danger."

At this the party set off over the hill to the frog pond. Hazel trudged along with Jack, Brendon Hays divided his attention between Dorothy and Cologne, while a very little young man, Claud Miller, by name, and the midget by reputation, took care of Nathalie Weston, a visitor at Camp Lucky.

Every one could joke but Dorothy. To her the situation was beyond that.

"I'll wager we find her up a tree eating apples," lisped Claud. "I never saw a girl so fond of sweet apples as Miss Tavia. She told me so herself."

"Told you, you never saw a girl—now Claud! Don't get excited that way. It's dreadfully hard on your nerves and on your friends."

"But I say, now, Jack——"

"Claud, dear, don't. Save it until we find Tavia, and then say to your heart's content."

Dorothy had run on ahead and was now looking over the little rustic bridge into the frog pond. The water was not deep, but there were plainly footprints along its muddy edge.

"There has been some one here to-day," declared Cologne, "and no one ever comes on our grounds—away up here at any rate."

"They are the footprints of a man," Jack decided. "Did Tavia, by any means, know a man who wore boots size ten?"

"The only folks she knew in these parts are the Lamberts," answered Cologne. "And she did say, even as late as yesterday, that she would run over to see a rehearsal there—when I wasn't looking."

"Jolly!" exclaimed Claud. "I have been wishing so much for a chance to know that younger Lamb. She's the very sweetest——"

"Spring lamb?" asked Cologne, teasingly. "Claud, you should never take spring lamb upon the recommendation of a strange butcher. It might turn out to be mutton."

This sally caused Claud to laugh so vigorously, that he held his hand over his watch pocket apprehensively.

Dorothy was looking under the black bridge. The footprints seemed to turn in beneath the culvert, and then they were lost in the deep, dark mud.

Not one, except perhaps Cologne, knew the thoughts that stirred Dorothy so riotously. What if Tavia had gone over to Lamberts, and so would incur the displeasure of their hostess? Or, if she had met that queer man? But she could not have done that! Reckless as she was, she could not be unaware of the danger of doing such a fool-hardy thing as that!

"I'm going down under that oak tree," declared Hazel, with an arch glance at Jack. "There's trout in that stream, and it's too late to go over to Moose Hill, or Deer Hollow which ever it is."

"Neither," replied Jack. "It's Moose on the level. Yes, we may as well explore Trout Trammel—though I doubt if they'll come up even at the sight of those fly colors you wear, Hazel."

"Don't you like this suit? Why it's the very thing—all the way from New York. And just see the navy emblem."

The invitation brought Jack up very close to the sleeve of Hazel's sailor suit. Yes, he liked that emblem, first rate, and he said so, once or twice.

"I vote for a trip to the Lambs," voiced the dainty Claud. "If no one else wants to go I don't mind, in the least, running over and making inquiries."

"Oh, don't run, Claud;" cautioned Jack. "It's dreadful on your watch pocket. Just walk over and give my love to the girl who wears the rainbow around her head. Tell her that I saw her and she will guess the rest."

"Well, if she happens to be out on the lawn, might I ask her to join in this girl-hunt?"

"Oh, you're hunting a lot!" exclaimed Cologne in something like impatience. "Now, Claud, this it no joke! We are out to find our lively-loving, luckless little friend, Tavia."

"I'm afraid it's useless," sighed Dorothy. "We may just as well wait—perhaps she will return at lunch time."

But lunch time came, and lunch time went by, without any trace or track of Tavia being discovered.

Finally Dorothy broke down, and went to her own room. Cologne followed her, and there, in the secret nook in the big camp farm, the two girls discussed every possible clause of the case, and tried with heroic effort to shed some light on the mystery.

"Was it the Lamberts? Or could it be——"

"Oh, she would never go off with a stranger," declared Dorothy over and over again. "Surely our Tavia has more common sense than that."

"But it is so lonely up here—no," Cologne corrected herself, "you are right, of course, Dorothy. She will be back—just as soon as she feels like coming. That's Tavia!"

But they little knew the danger to which the younger girl had unwittingly exposed herself.

No wonder Tavia could not be found within or without the precincts of the camp.

CHAPTER XI

ToC

WHEN THE BOYS CAME

Dorothy had always loved her cousins, Ned and Nat, but when they arrived at the camp, the day after Tavia's disappearance, she fancied she had never before fully appreciated them. They came in the *Firebird*, their automobile, and declared that they would camp out in the open Maine woods, cook in the open, make soups of lily bulbs, stirred with the aromatic boughs of the spruce, and otherwise conform to all the glorious hardships peculiar to the pioneers—according to the stories told by said pioneers.

But the absence of Tavia put a damper on everything.

"We have got to start out and trace her," Jack Markin told Ned and Nat. "It is inconceivable where she could have gone to."

"We certainly shall start out at once," declared Nat, who was always Tavia's champion, to say nothing of his being her special friend and admirer. "I have known her to do risky things before, but this is the utmost."

"I never saw such a girl," growled Ned. "Just when a fellow expects to have a first-rate time, she puts up something that knocks it out."

Dorothy was disconsolate. Her eyes showed the result of a sleepless night, and her usually pink cheeks were quite pale.

"She would never stay away of her own accord over night," she sighed, "whatever she might do during the day."

"Now, Doro, dear," consoled Cologne, "you must not look at it that way. It is perfectly surprising what may happen, in a perfectly safe way, after one has found out, while before that time such things seem utterly impossible. Haven't we had lots of that at Glenwood?"

"Yes, things do happen that seem anything but likely," Dorothy admitted. "And I do hope that such will be the case this time. I wish we knew!"

"We had a great time in Dalton," said Nat, "the day we went over to see the old place—your old place, Dorothy. The major asked us to go in to look after a leak in the roof, and just as we went into the old plumbing shop we heard a racket. It seems that a fellow named Mortimer Morrison, a stage-struck chap, played a part on the local stage, and while delivering his lines he gave his audience a treat—the real thing in tragics. He went crazy—wild, stark, staring mad! He was an escaped sanitariumite—he got out, found the stage at Dalton, and was having a gay old time when the——" Nat suddenly stopped. "What's the matter, coz?" he asked.

Dorothy was sitting on the rustic bench, at the side of the old corn crib, and she went pale as her cousin told the story. Cologne was beside her, and, as Nat asked what the matter was,

Cologne grasped Dorothy's trembling hand.

"What, Dorothy?"

"Why the—man! That man! He is the one who saved the team—the one who wrote the letter to Tavia. I found a part of it. She never told me, but it blew open at—my very feet. And that name was on the piece of paper!"

"Tavia know that—loon!" Ned exclaimed.

"We all knew him—if he is the same one," declared Cologne, for Dorothy was too agitated to speak. "We happened to get in trouble with a hay wagon, and an old team of horses, and he helped us out. Come to think of it he did act queer!"

"And he is around here—now?" asked Nat.

"Yes, I saw some one the other day whom I am sure could be no one else. He had the most peculiar walk. Did you see him in Dalton, Nat?"

"I was just going to tell you that while we were in the plumbing shop a fellow sauntered by. He wore a hat—like a cowboy, and otherwise looked queer. Well, when the plumber sighted him he rushed to the 'phone and called up the only officer in Dalton—Tavia's father, and told him the lunatic was just sauntering down the road. But from last accounts he was still sauntering—the squire didn't overhaul him."

"And likely he was just wise enough to get far away," commented Ned. "Now why on earth would Tavia have anything to do with a specimen of that kind?"

"It would be impossible to guess to what trick he might resort in order to get Tavia to meet him, or to even become interested in his stage schemes. You know Tavia has a very pardonable weakness for anything theatrical," said Dorothy.

"All Tavia's weaknesses are pardonable, as far as you are concerned, coz," ventured Ned.

"But the hunt," interrupted Jack. "We had better get at it. The girl we malign may actually——" He looked at Dorothy and so left the surmise unsaid.

An hour later Ned and Nat, with Jack and Claud, started out in the *Firebird*, it having been decided that it would be best for all the boys to go together in the auto, as they could then cover any amount of ground, and not have to worry about Dorothy and Cologne. The two girls went their way in the cart, old Jeff, the horse, being looked upon as quite a competent guide.

It was really the first good opportunity that Dorothy had had to see the glories of the Maine woods, but what were they to her to-day? What mattered the long lines of spruce, the dainty larch, or the tangled arbor-vitae, to her now?

To all Cologne's enthusiastic efforts to point out these beauties, as well as to distract Dorothy, she only answered with the most vague acquiescence.

"If we don't find her to-day——" she faltered.

"But we shall," insisted Cologne. "I feel it! Tavia will be back at camp for supper!"

"Are we far from camp now?" asked Dorothy, looking along the fir-lined road to the wilderness beyond.

"No, we are only just around the bend. Would you like to get out and walk? I think I hear the honk of the *Firebird*."

"I believe I would like to walk," said Dorothy. "I have such a—stagnant feeling. The walk in this air ought to dispel it."

"Suppose we tie Jeff up here, and let him graze, while I go over to that camp"—indicating a white speck between the trees—"and then I may inquire if any one has seen a girl like Tavia pass up Oldtown way?"

"And I might take the other direction, and ask at those camps. I see quite a colony over that way," said Dorothy.

"And we will both meet here in——"

"An hour," finished Dorothy. "If we are to search, there is no sense in running back and forth—so long as we can keep our directions straight."

"And you are sure you won't get lost?" asked Cologne, with a smile. "Perhaps losses are like accidents—they come in groups."

"Oh, I have a compass on my watch guard. Let me see," and after consulting the instrument, she faced north. "I will go due west and come back due east. I surely can't get lost if I follow that."

"Now, Doro, don't go too near the edge of anything. I never saw such edgy-edges as they are up here in Maine. Looks to me as if this part of the world was made last, with the jumping-off places for the men who did the making."

"For the jump back into—eternity? Quite an idea, Cologne," said Dorothy, as the two girls prepared to part.

"Good-bye, Jeff," called Dorothy. "Eat a good meal. We may not get back to camp for lunch," and she patted the old horse.

"Pity we didn't fetch some 'standwiches,'" shouted Cologne, who was already making her way through the thickets that carpeted the path. "If you find any dwarf cherries bring me some, Dorothy."

"Wild strawberries will do me," responded Dorothy, as she, too, got away from the tree where Jeff was tied. "I don't fancy either of us will die of hunger!"

"Not in the Maine woods!" Cologne predicted.

Then they lost sight of each other.

Only Jeff was left to mark the spot from which they started.

CHAPTER XII

ToC

THE EDGY-EDGE!

Dorothy stood and looked down. It was a very steep descent, and the bottom, a black sheet of water, that looked like ink.

The danger of the spot seemed to fascinate her. Then the thought that perhaps poor, wilful Tavia had fallen down such a place; that perhaps at that very moment, she lay alone, helpless, at the bottom of a cliff!

"But there is a road down there," Dorothy mused. "I never would have thought to find a roadway along those rocks. Even the Indians, who very likely, made most of these trails, might easily have found a better and safer road to and from the same woodland ways."

Then she remembered that the lumbermen had use of streams in their traffic, and she decided that this was one of the roads made for their log teams.

Still fascinated with the danger, she looked over again. A sudden dizziness seized her. She tried to step back, but the ledge seemed to crumble beneath her feet!

Staring wildly at the black water below, she was pitched forward—down, down, down!

Then she thought the water would save her; that it was not rough and sharp like the rocks! She thought she would rest awhile on that soft bed! After that she ceased to think!

Dorothy Dale lay there alone, unconscious!

Trundling along the narrow roadway, old Josiah Hobbs and his wife, Samanthy, rode in their farm wagon. They had been to town with berries and in the back of the covered vehicle the empty crates told quite as plainly as the contented smile on the wrinkled faces of the couple, that berries were in demand that morning, and that the Hobbs' kind had met a ready market.

Near the elbow in the lower road, at the foot of the precipice, where lay so still the form of pretty Dorothy Dale, the old horse slowed up. Mrs. Hobbs saw the girl lying by the water's edge.

"Mercy on us, Josiah!" she cried. "It's a girl!"

"Sure as you live!" replied the old man, giving the reins a jerk. "What can have happened to the little one?"

"Pray to goodness she ain't dead!" went on Samanthy. "Let me get to her!" and before her husband could straighten his cramped limbs, she had crawled out, and was beside Dorothy.

"Is she?" asked Josiah, hesitating.

"She is," replied the wife. The pair seemed to define each other's meaning in spite of the vagueness of their words.

"But she's awful weakish," whispered the wife. "We got to get her somewhere."

"Samanthy!" and the farmer's voice trembled, "mebby she the gal from the asylum! She that escaped! Let's load her up on the cart and fetch her home."

"You old skinflint! To cal'late on the half-dead girl," and she raised Dorothy's head tenderly. "But all the same she got to get somewhere, and ours is as near as any other house. Here, take hold," she put her arms about the helpless form. "Mercy on us! Lucky if she don't die before we get her there. Make that horse know he's to go. If that whip won't do, yank up a tree and let him have it."

The farmer trembled visibly as he helped put poor Dorothy in the wagon. If she could only have known!

The woman dragged off her apron and her jacket to make something of a pillow for the pretty yellow head, that lay so still. Suddenly Dorothy opened her eyes.

"As sure as you live," whispered Samanthy, "It *is* that girl from the san—sanitation! I saw her once out with the nurse, and this is her!"

"And there's a reward——"

"Shet up!" she snapped. "Lay still, dearie. You're awful weak and we're taking you home."

"Home!" murmured Dorothy in a dazed way.

"Yes, to mommer and popper!" This from the farmer.

"Shet up, you, Josiah! How do you know she wants to go to them folks! There, dearie, is your head hurt?"

Dorothy only moaned and closed her eyes again.

"Heven't you got a drop of anything? Not even a peppermint? I told you not to eat them all at a gullup," growled the woman. "I never saw the like of you fer gluttonin', Josiah!"

"And I never saw the beat of you fer growlin'. How do you feel, missy?"

"Will—you—shet—up? Josiah Hobbs! Don't you see she's sleepin' like a babe?"

"And do you think it's her? The one from the sanitation?"

"Shet up!"

"And there's a lot of money in that. Well, we need it."

Mrs. Samanthy Hobbs simply pulled the farmer's long shaggy beard that bobbed up and down, goat fashion. Her "shet-ups" seemed exhausted.

Dorothy heard a little—she could hear the rumble of the wagon, and she could feel the hard, rough, but kind hand of the woman who smoothed her brow in a motherly way. That in itself was enough to make her close her eyes and feel content.

What a power is the hand of woman! Even though it be hardened by the hardest kind of work it has in it the magic stroke of tenderness.

"Now, there," Samanthy would murmur, "soon you will be in bed. Then we will fix you all up nice."

Bed! Dorothy thought she was in bed—it was so much better than the stones, and that black water.

But she was getting her senses and with them came pain. Her head hurt, and the wagon jolted so that she was sore all over.

"We have only a few more trots, then we will be at home," soothed Samanthy. "After that you kin sleep in a feather bed—as soft as your own white hands."

She was smoothing those hands—they were very white, and very soft. What had turned Dorothy Dale's camping days into this tragedy? Where was Tavia? And what was to become of Dorothy?

Strange how illness melts the strongest! Dorothy just wanted to rest—to rest—yes, to rest!

At the dingy back door, the old horse stopped. The farmer and his wife almost carried Dorothy in, and the strain made her close her eyes again; made her forget everything.

After much talk between the farmer and his wife, and many contrary directions, Dorothy was finally enveloped in a nightdress that even Tavia in her palmiest days could not have anticipated. It was big, it was broad, it was long, and it was roomy!

But it was sweet and clean, and Dorothy closed her eyes directly after Samanthy Hobbs put to her lips a drink of catnip tea!

"She's the girl from the asylum," whispered the farmer's wife. "Jest keep still and we will git her back all right."

CHAPTER XIII

ToC

THE SAD AWAKENING

Such a long, lovely sleep, on that fluffy feather bed! Everything so sweet, so wholesome, even

in her half-conscious state Dorothy knew that things about her were right—that they were "homey."

Then the smooth-roughness of that woman's hands, the life of them seemed to cry out comfort, while the harsh flesh told another story.

Twice Dorothy had opened her eyes over a pan of chicken broth. She had to take it, and she was glad of it.

Then, outside in the hall room, that was really nothing more nor less than a landing for the unrailed stairs, she thought she could hear the old-fashioned voice of a very old-fashioned man—he wanted to fetch her something, and he didn't seem to care just what.

"Couldn't I git her a hunk of thet sausage that we brung home?" he begged.

"You loon," was his answer. "Are you set on murder? Do you want to kill her outright?"

This repressed his enthusiasm. "Never do I," he declared, "spite of the reward, Samanthy. Don't she look like what our little 'un ought to look like if—she grew to look?"

"You loon! How could you tell what she ought to have looked like when her own mother never saw her try? Oh, Josiah," and the lines of hardship melted into possibilities, "wouldn't it have been lovely—if she did—live—to look!"

"'Tweren't your fault—nor mine, Samanthy. He knows, and mebby thet's why He sent this 'un. Ain't she purty? And I don't care a durn about the sanitarition folks. Of course—if we've found her—and they want her——"

It was a strange sight. Those two wrinkled old faces peering into the blossom that lay on that feather bed!

"Josiah Hobbs! You are an old loon! I can't see how you kin make out that this is heaven-sent," and she brushed a fly from the white forehead.

"Oh—yes—you—kin, Samanthy. Else why did you shoo thet fly?"

"Shet up! Do you want to rouse her?" and she went over, and pulled down the green curtain with the pink rose border.

"Are you sartin thet—she's the one?"

"Didn't I say I seen her? Are there so many cornsilk heads around here? Now, the question is——"

"Jest what I was a-thinkin': The question is——"

"We kin lock this room—and put the bars ag'in the shutters. But I don't want to scare her."

"It's the best, though. We hev got to make it s'cure. I don't 'magine she'll care fer awhile, any way. And then we kin tote her back to the sanitation."

"Well, we'll see. Now, you sneak off and I'll tuck her in. Poor lamb! To think that she's looney!"

"Ain't it a shame! If our'n was alive we wouldn't care if she could think or not—we would think fer her—wouldn't we, Samanthy?"

"Mebby," she answered, giving the quilt a smoothing. "But there's no tellin'. She might have run off——"

The remainder of the soliloquy was lost in the red and white quilt.

There Dorothy slept. The tin dipper of fresh water was on the wooden chair at her side. The green curtain was drawn down to the very sill of the window. The door was shut—and it was hooked on the outside.

How long she slept she could not by any means know, but certainly the sun had sailed around to the window, that wore no curtain, and through which the glint of a fading day cut in like a faithful friend to poor Dorothy Dale.

She groped her way over to the door. It was bolted, and the windows were securely fastened.

The awful truth forced itself into her fagged brain. She was a prisoner! Why? What had she done? Wasn't that woman kind? And did not the man go to the spring for water? She heard him say so, and he was a feeble old man. Why was she locked—barred in that smothering attic room?

She picked up a heavy block that lay near, and with it rapped vigorously on the bare floor.

A shuffling of feet on the stairs told that she had been heard, and presently the not unkindly face of Samanthy Hobbs made its way into the room.

"Why am I locked in?" gasped Dorothy. "Why do you not let me go back to my friends?"

"Hush there, now, dearie," and she smoothed the hand that lay idly on the red and white quilt, as Dorothy stood beside the bed. "You'll be all right. Don't you go and get bothered. We've sent fer the doctor, and when he comes, he'll fetch you right home to your maw. But you have got to keep quiet, or else the fever will set in, and then there's no tellin'. I told Josiah that we would do fer you like as if you was our'n, but you must not talk, dearie. You must be mournful still."

"WHY AM I LOCKED IN?" GASPED DOROTHY.
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Dorothy looked keenly into the face that leaned over her. What did it mean? Whom did they take her to be?

"Do you know who I am?" she ventured.

"Why of course we do, lovey. But don't you bother to talk. The doctor will be here in the morning, and he'll take you back to your maw."

"I have no mother," sighed Dorothy. "I am a stranger around here, and I hope you will not keep me from my friends. They are probably looking for me now."

"Course they be. But now a little chicken soup? No? Then a sip of tea. It's revivin'. Josiah! Josiah! Come with that milk! How long does it take to milk a brindle cow?"

The fresh milk was brought, and crowded upon the already well-filled wooden chair.

"Thank you very much," murmured Dorothy, "but I cannot eat or drink. I must go to my friends!"

In spite of her will the tears came. At the sight of them the woman shuffled off. Evidently tears were too much for Samanthy Hobbs.

"I'll leave you a candle—no, I guess I had better jest raise the lattice, and if you wants anything I'll hear you if you knocks. Don't you worry, dearie. Samanthy Hobbs ain't no—well, she ain't, that's all!"

Then Dorothy was alone—all alone in the stuffy room. Could she escape; get out of a window—anything to be in the free open air, and to run—run back to dear old camp?

She tried every crack, every window, the old door, even the hole that opened out on the slant roof.

Barred! Locked! Everything was locked against her!

"Oh, must I die here?" she murmured. Then she fell back on the bed, on the red and white quilt. Sobbing, too weak to cry, too weak to think, but not too weak to know!

CHAPTER XIV

ToC

TAVIA'S MISTAKE

Meanwhile Tavia Travers, the light-hearted, reckless Tavia, realized that she had made a dreadful mistake. It was the second afternoon since she had left the camp, and she was at the railroad station, waiting for something unforseen to develop that would enable her to get back to her friends.

It was such a lonely place—away out there in the woods, and she had spent one awful night locked up in that station!

"I'll walk," she declared, "if I cannot get away from here before dark!"

Walk! Fifteen miles to Innernook! With hardly a chance of a single town in between!

It was at the little rustic bridge that she had met the man, according to the appointment made under the harvest apple tree.

"Come with me and I will prove to you that what I say is absolutely correct," he declared. "I have an old uncle out at Breakaway, and he will tell you about the fortune with his own lips—I shall make him do so."

"But is it far?" Tavia had demurred, for she did not just like that glassy stare in the man's eyes, handsome though he was.

"Only a pleasant little train ride—it will do you good to get away from this place. They call it camp—I would call it 'cramp,'" and he chuckled at his attempted joke.

Tavia had not been inclined to go. He had seen that she hesitated.

"Well, if you think I am not brotherly enough, I can take you to my sister Belle. She is surely sisterly enough—she will meet us at Durham."

This had convinced Tavia. Surely if they met his sister at the first station, there could be no harm in her going. And though the story about the fortune might be vapory, it was fun to have had such an experience—to actually run away!

Poor foolish Tavia! *Was* it fun to run away?

At the station, of course, there had been no sister Belle, but Tavia could not turn back now. This man seemed so compelling—so completely her master! What was his strange power?

On they had gone, he telling all sorts of absurd stories about the money, which, he claimed, was actually secreted in his uncle's house. But long before he reached the station at Breakaway Tavia had decided that he was insane—and that *she* had been insane not to have realized this awful truth before.

Then she knew that she must humor him—what might happen if she crossed this strange man of iron will, who had only to ask her to do such a ridiculous thing and she did it?

To run away from camp! Fun! Yes, it was funny, very——

"When we get to the station I will go on ahead," he had said, to her immense relief. "Then, when I have told uncle you are coming, and I have gotten him into his good clothes—uncle is very vain when there are ladies around—then I shall return for you," and he had waved himself like a tall young sapling, in that conceited self-conscious pose peculiar to the stage and to—but Tavia was not sure. Perhaps, after all, he might not be altogether unbalanced.

With many protestations of his earnestness he had left her at the little railroad station, and as she saw him saunter down the tan-barked path, she had been glad; then again she was sorry.

It was dreadful to be all alone there, and night coming on. Even the station was locked; to whom could she go or whom could she ask for money to get back to the dear old camp?

For two long hours she had sat there, then the old station agent hobbled along, and opened the ticket office. Tavia told him something of her plight, but instead of saying that she had come away from her friends on the word of a perfect stranger, she pardonably made the man out to be a distant cousin.

"Hum! That fellow with the long hair? Well, I guess they'll git him to-night. He's got loose from the sanitarium on the hill, and there's been a lot of looking for him in the last two weeks. Seems to me he's jest about toured the country," said the old man as he dusted the window shelf with his cap. "I reckon they'll git him now. And you was out with that chap?"

"Why—yes, no, that is——"

"Your cousin, eh? Say, miss, he ain't nobody's cousin. But like as not he thinks he is cousin to the president himself."

"If I could only borrow a dollar!" sighed Tavia.

"Well, you could if I hadn't been caught with that trick twice this summer. Why, if I gave you a dollar, girl, you would make me believe I was your cousin, too."

This retort angered Tavia, and she determined to ask no further favors from this old man. Though he did wear the uniform of a Civil War veteran, he certainly had poor manners.

"What will happen?" she asked herself, confident that something must happen to relieve the situation.

"The best I kin do," growled the old station agent, "will be to fetch you a bite to eat back from my boardin' house; and then let you sleep here till mornin'——"

"Sleep alone in a station!" exclaimed Tavia. "I'm not afraid of anything—but—I don't believe I'd like to stay in this—place all night. I have a horror of rats."

"Rats! No rats around here. I've got the best cat in the country. Switch is his name, an' that's him—he's no slouch."

"But shut up alone with a big strange cat——" and Tavia looked at the animal curled up under the beautifully-blacked and summer-shined stove.

"Well, you kin do as you please, miss, but there ain't no more trains your way to-night, supposin' you did have a ticket."

Tavia looked out over the gloom that was quickly descending upon the little hamlet. Soon it would be night! No one but that station agent in sight! No place to go, but over the hills to his boarding house, or perhaps to some farm house; where, should she have the courage to make her way through the fields up to a cabin, perhaps fierce dogs, that were already howling and barking, would become more her enemies than would be the cat, and the solitude of the station.

"And is there no church—no minister's house where a stranded girl might get shelter?"

"Nice young girls don't often get stranded," replied the old man not unreasonably, "and if I was you I'd keep my trouble purty much to myself. You kin depend upon Sam Dixon. If I say I'll do a thing I'll do it; and no harm will come to you in this here station for a night. Besides, I come over for the ten o'clock train, and I'm back for the milk train before daylight."

Something about this speech convinced Tavia she was unfortunate, and it would be best to keep her trouble to herself, for what would strangers care about her predicament? Could she deny that it was through her own fault that she had been thus situated?

"I'm goin' along now, and say," said the agent, "if you like I'll just lock the office, and give you the outside door key. There ain't no tramps, but if you should be timid, before I come back, just turn the key in the door."

"Oh, thank you," Tavia was compelled to say, for this was a condescension; "I'm sure I shall not be afraid—in the twilight."

"Well, take the key anyhow," and locking the inner office he came out in the open room. "I'll fetch you a bite—I'm glad I ain't got no gals to—get left over from way trains."

How Tavia Travers ever choked down the biscuit and the slice of ham that Sam Dixon brought back to her that night—how she actually fondled old gray Switch, and was glad of his friendly purring during that long, dreary night, as she lay cuddled up in the very farthest corner bench—how the night did, after all, go by, and a very gray dawn bring the welcome step or limp of the station agent, only Tavia—poor unfortunate Tavia—could ever know!

And it was the next day—daylight at last!

To-day she must get back to camp if she had to walk!

Oh, she *must* get back! Surely something would happen to assist her!

CHAPTER XV

ToC

WHEN THE TRAIN CAME IN

In a very dark corner of the station Tavia found a broken washbowl, and from the water pail she carried two cups full of water, with which to refresh her worn and haggard face.

Sam Dixon had brought her word that she might ride back to his boarding house with him, and share his coffee, but she was to say that she was his niece, and that she was on her way to her grandmother's, "like little red riding hood," chuckled Sam, when he disclosed his plan.

Tavia cared little for coffee, but she was weak, and the fear of being again left in the station alone prompted her to accept the well-meant invitation. In fact, she had in her hours of

desolation become quite fond of the little old man with the blackthorn cane.

"Yes, I'll go gladly," she answered, and his pleasure could not be doubted.

Accordingly, when the milk train had pulled out, and the station was again locked, Tavia jumped into the narrow carriage beside the old man, and, asking if he would not like to have her drive, she pulled up the reins, and they started off.

Here was a new experience. If only now she could forget the agony that Dorothy must be experiencing, it would not be so dreadful to go at this early morning hour, over the dewy roads, in the ramshackle buggy with her benefactor at her side.

"At any rate," she thought to herself, "I'll have a good story to tell when I *do* get back to camp."

"Is your place far?" she asked of Sam, more for the sake of talking than of asking.

"Not so very. You see, it has always been rather rough out this way—lumbermen and the like always puttin' up at Dobson's. That's why I thought you was better off in the station, than to try to make your way about last night. And some of them rough fellows stop at my place—that's Dobson's—so while they're out now is your chance to get a hot drink."

As he spoke, a rough man, indeed, passed the carriage in which Tavia and Sam were riding! Wasn't he rough! Tavia instinctively shrugged up closer to the old man beside her.

"Uncle Sam, was that a—woodman?"

Tavia fell in quite naturally to calling the station agent Uncle Sam.

"Yep, he's one of the sort," taking care to keep his smile focussed on the man, who although he was going in the opposite direction was able to keep his eye on Tavia. "You see they are the most suspicious set—takes a man a lifetime to know them, a woman an eternity, and then she has to depend upon their good nature."

Tavia smiled, and hurried the old horse until his ears "sassed her back." They jogged along—every moment nature was getting more and more wideawake, until Tavia feared she would really wake up to the magnitude of her own personal offence, everything else seemed so straightforward and so upright!

Why in the world had she ever listened to the ravings of that man with the soft hat and the hard smile?

After all, Dorothy must be right—and she, Tavia, was wrong. Yes, it was indisputably wrong to do the things that had seemed so smart before—things that Dorothy could never laugh at.

She sighed heavily. Sam heard it.

"What's wrong?" he asked, looking over his glasses, and under his wrinkles.

"Oh, nothing," Tavia sighed further. "Only I am wondering what my friends are thinking—of—me—about me."

"Well, there's scarcely any doubt about that think," he replied. "Like as not they think you are drowned—no good friend would ever think you were—stranded!"

Sam's logic was irresistible. Tavia had not thought of this contingency; they might think her drowned!

"I must hurry to get back," she said suddenly. "I wonder could I do any little work, at your boarding house, to earn the price of my—ticket?"

"You couldn't manage to stay over until the afternoon, do you think? I have some mending I'd be mighty glad to get done—and then I could give you a ticket," said Sam.

"Oh, that would be splendid!" exclaimed Tavia. "I would willingly wait over even if I had a chance to go sooner, for you have been so good to me, Uncle Sam," she said warmly. "I shouldn't want to go until I had done something for you."

"Then it's a bargain. While you're eatin' your coffee, I'll grab up the things, and you kin mend over in the station. We'll stick to the story that you are my niece, and you kin come inside the office and mend all you like, and it ain't nobody's business. You see, sister died last year, and I ain't had nobody to fix up the things for me since."

"I'll be very glad to do what I can," said Tavia, "but I never was much good at sewing. However, I'll do the very best I can, Uncle Sam."

"Sure you will, and that'll be all right. Here we are. Now, you just wait while I get the horse's oats, and then we'll get ours."

The house before which he drew up was of the old Colonial type—the posts had been white, and imposing at some time, but they were now neither white nor any other true color. Also, they threatened to topple over on the vines, that so kindly did their part in trying to make the old place look alive.

An old man sat on the porch, smoking his pipe. Sam Dixon spoke to him as he passed around the house to get the horse his breakfast. Presently a woman, enveloped in gingham dress, and lost in a gingham sunbonnet, came out and stood in wonderment, looking at Tavia. She glared at her for a moment or two, and then, without speaking a word, entered the house again. This was not a very cordial welcome for Tavia, but she patted the horse, and pretended not to notice the slight. Then Sam came limping along with the oats in a nose bag for Major.

"Now eat," ordered Sam, "and——" Then it struck him that he had not fixed on a name for his "niece." Tavia saw his embarrassment, but before she could suggest a name, he added, "Betsy, you and me's hungry too, I reckon. Let's see what Sarah has to eat in the kitchen."

"All right, Uncle Sam," replied "Betsy," with a smile, "I am hungry."

They entered the house, and soon were seated on the old-fashioned hickory chairs, before some steaming cakes, and equally steaming coffee. Tavia was indeed hungry, and she "fell to," as did Sam, without any unnecessary ceremony.

How strange it was! But what if the folks at camp thought her drowned? At any rate she must earn her ticket back.

What an eternity it seemed since she stole away to that little bridge—she could not bear to think of it now! And what would Dorothy think. Ah, how little Tavia knew what poor Dorothy was thinking at that very moment!

"Now, when you're ready, we'll hop along," said Sam as Sarah came in the room, and looked to see if her guests would take more coffee. "How's things to-day, Sarah?"

"Ain't you heard?" she replied ambiguously.

"No, what?" pressed Sam.

"Why, a girl has 'scaped from the hospital. 'Tain't very safe fer a strange girl to be around here now. It might be her," and she shot an unmistakable threat at Tavia. "Ain't never heard you speak, before, of Betsy, Sam. Where's she bin?"

"Say, Sarah. Is there any money up fer findin' the girl?" he asked, and there was no mistaking *his* meaning. "'Cause it ain't no use fer you to—speculate on Betsy. She's no house-pital breakaway."

But Sarah looked at Tavia with unveiled suspicion. Tavia felt it—and the thought that she was a stranger, and might be mistaken for the escaped girl, made her most uncomfortable.

It was a relief when Sam returned from up-stairs, his articles that needed mending done up in a clumsy bundle, and his hat cocked on his head with the army badge over the back of his neck.

CHAPTER XVI

ToC

A HARROWING EXPERIENCE

When Dorothy awoke, to find herself still in that attic room, to know that it was not all an awful dream, but a terrible reality, the full meaning her position flooded into her strained mind, like some awful deluge of horror!

That the people who held her captive did so for some undefinable reason was perfectly clear; but why they did so, was just as mysterious as was their reason for plying her with coddling words, as if she were a baby.

Realizing that they would not let her go her way, Dorothy determined, as she lay there, with the moonlight making queer shadows on the slant wall, that she would escape that day!

How little did Tavia know of the danger into which she had thrown her best friend!

"And I wonder," thought Dorothy, "if Tavia is safely back at camp? And what do the folks think of me?"

A sigh, as deep as it was sincere, escaped from her lips, and she crawled out of bed to see if daylight was near.

"Such a long night!" she sobbed, "and to think that I am a prisoner!"

The low windows were shut, and the air of the room was stifling. Dorothy groped around to see if she might find the candle that she had noticed on the stand, but it was gone.

"They haven't even left me a match," she told herself. "Did they think I would eat matches?"

Then she decided she would raise a window if she had to break it open. A curtain roller lay on the floor. With this she tried to pry up the uncertain sash, and in doing so she fell over a low stool.

The noise disturbed the folks in the lower rooms, for directly Dorothy heard a shuffle of feet on the stairs.

At first she felt indignant, then her helplessness prompted caution, and she hurried into bed.

The door opened softly.

"What is it, dear?" asked Mrs. Hobbs, who, as Dorothy could see, was enveloped in a robe of the same pattern as that which she herself wore. "Did you call?"

"Oh, thank you. I only wanted a little air," replied Dorothy. "Couldn't we open a window?"

"Well, perhaps we had best not, dearie," replied the woman. "There might be a draught."

"I wish there was," Dorothy could not help replying. Then she quickly added: "Don't you think fresh air is very good at this warm season?"

"Oh, yes, for some folks," said Mrs. Hobbs, tucking the warm bed clothes more warmly about the sweltering girl. "But, you see—well, this room—we don't always open the windows—fer company."

"I will be able to go back to my friends in the morning," said Dorothy promptly. "I am sure it has been very kind of you to take care of me as you have done."

"Now, don't talk too much dearie," ordered the woman. "You see, head troubles—that is, when a girl falls on her head—she has got to be dreadful careful, fer a long time."

"Oh, my head is not hurt," declared Dorothy, as she leaned upon her elbow. "I feel able to walk back to camp now."

"Camp?" asked the woman.

"Why, yes. Didn't you know I came from a camp out Everglade way? I was with one of the other girls from camp when I—got lost," finished Dorothy quite helplessly.

"Some folks don't call them places 'camps,'" Mrs. Hobbs ventured. "But of course the name ain't got anything to do with it."

"What do they call them?" pressed Dorothy.

"Oh, now, you never mind. You will be all right. Jest go off to sleep, and as soon as Josh milks, I'll fetch you a nice drink of the warm suds—it's splendid fer nerves."

Dorothy was completely mystified. Perhaps the old woman was queer, and she might better humor her.

"Well, I may sleep a little more," she said, "and then when daylight comes, I shall be ready to start off. Would you mind handing me my jacket. It has my purse in it, and I want to make sure that it is all right."

Samanthy Hobbs hobbled over to where Dorothy's clothes lay in a heap. She fumbled through the garments, and Dorothy distinctly saw her take the beaded purse in her hand.

"That's it," said Dorothy.

"No pocketbook here," replied the woman.

"Why, that little beaded bag I saw you take from my pocket; that is my purse!"

"Ain't no sign of sech a thing here," declared the woman, who was at that very moment trying to secret the purse in the folds of her robe.

Dorothy was more puzzled than ever. Would this woman steal her pocketbook? How could she ever get away from the place if penniless?

"Give me that purse," the girl demanded, jumping up out of bed, and attempting to get hold of the beaded trifle.

"Josh! Josh!" called the woman. "Come up here and help me! She's gettin' vi'lent!"

"Violent!" repeated Dorothy, "I ought to get—crazy, to be shut up here—this way."

"Well, dearie, I didn't want to scare you," said the woman, in that tantalizing voice, "but if I was you, I wouldn't get any crazier than I was—if *I* was *you*."

"Crazy! Do you think I'm crazy? Is that it?" and poor Dorothy fell back upon the bed.

Fortunately Josiah did not hear his wife call, and of course did not come in answer.

"There now, there now!" and Mrs. Hobbs smoothed out the bed things. "I will fetch you some nice, warm milk. And perhaps to-day I'll be able to send you back to your ma."

"I have no mother," insisted Dorothy. "I told you that my name is Dorothy Dale, and my father is Major Dale of the United States army. If any one attempts to—wrong me, *he* will see that they are punished."

With all the vehemence she could muster up Dorothy spoke these words, and she saw that they had some effect upon Mrs. Hobbs. Would she believe her, and let her go?

"Well, of course, you are a stranger to me," said the woman, "and, as I live, girlie, I intend to do right by you. But it's finding out the right that sometimes makes the wrong."

"Oh, I am sure Mrs. Hobbs you have been kind," Dorothy said, in a sobbing voice, "but you see how dreadfully hard it is to be kept away from one's friends. Why, I don't dare to think how they feel! How my cousins are worrying, and, of course, they have sent word to father. Oh, dear Mrs. Hobbs, help me to get back! Help me to get away to-day, for if I don't—they will think I am—dead!"

Dorothy had actually seized the woman's hands, and was almost kneeling before her. To be away for two days and a night!

The woman looked keenly into Dorothy's blue eyes. She smoothed back the pretty, neglected yellow hair, and she brushed the flaming cheek kindly. "I would not harm you for the world," she declared, "for if you are not the lost girl—you are—an angel!"

"Here, Samanthy!" called Josiah, from below stairs. "Come and git me a cup of coffee. I ain't got all day to wait around! I've got to git to town!"

"All right, Josh. I'll be there right away. Now, dearie, jest you be patient, and everything will come out all right."

"But can't I have a window open? I am almost smothered. You know I am used to almost living out doors."

"Well," then, she whispered, "wait till Josh gets off and I'll slip up and fix you. He's awfully fussy about some things."

There was nothing for Dorothy to do but wait. But how long it seemed! How close the day was, as the sun opened up on that hot roof! Oh, if she did not get away, surely she *would* go crazy!

She could hear the old farmer grumbling. Evidently he was not pleased about something. But Mrs. Hobbs was cautioning him not to speak so loud. Of course they were afraid of being overheard. "If she opens the window," Dorothy decided, "I'll drop to the piazza roof! Then I can escape! Oh, I must escape!"

She dare not, however, make any preparations to get away until after the farmer had gone to town; until after Mrs. Hobbs had opened the window and until after—she hoped this would happen—after Mrs. Hobbs went off to the fields for her berries.

CHAPTER XVII

ToC

STRANGER STILL

"You kin mend furst rate, Betsy," complimented old Sam Dixon, as Tavia plied her needle in the little ticket office, "and do you know, I've taken quite a shine to you? You might be my niece if you liked. I have a penny or two, and there ain't no pockets in shrouds."

Tavia looked up in surprise! After all, might there be "a fortune" somewhere for her or for her family? The thought seemed too absurd.

"Why, Uncle Sam, what do you mean?" she asked.

"Even Sam Dixon can't live forever, sis, and you know it's sort of lonely to think, that, when he goes, there won't be no one to think of him, like he thinks of them. That's why I want your name and address. But there comes the train from the city. Would you mind attendin' to the window while I run out with the mail bag?"

"Certainly I will—I know where the tickets are, and can ask you the price if any one wants to buy one." Wasn't it queer to sell tickets?

But that was the train to the city!

"Oh, Uncle Sam!" called Tavia. "Isn't that the train I should go on?"

"Without giving me your address?" and he was running down the platform with the mail bag. "Couldn't you wait till the next?"

There seemed nothing else to do! But to stay longer away from camp?

Well, she might as well be content now. It was too late to get a ticket, too late to say good-bye to Sam, too late to do anything but attend to the people who came in the station after the train pulled out.

"Have you seen the carriage from the sanitarium?"

The speaker, who had just alighted from the train, addressed Tavia, but the latter was so surprised that she caught her finger in the ticket stamper. Before the little window stood a young woman in the garb of a nurse—and she wanted the carriage from the sanitarium.

"If you will wait a minute or two the agent will be back," said Tavia in her very nicest voice. "He is just putting the mail on the train."

"Dear me!" and the nurse turned away. Then she returned. "Are you his daughter?"

"No, his—his niece," quibbled Tavia. What else could she do just then? And didn't Sam say he would adopt her?

"Well, since you are going to be around here we may as well get acquainted—I shall probably have plenty of calls at the station. I see you are the whole service outfit. The telephone, telegraph, and, I suppose, the—Press Bureau."

"Oh, yes," replied Tavia, not grasping the sarcasm of the "Press" remark. "Uncle Sam has a great deal to attend to."

The nurse laughed to show her pretty teeth, Tavia thought. She was pretty, and her immaculate white linen was immensely becoming.

"My name is—Bell—Mary Bell," she said, "and yours is——"

"Betsy Dixon," replied Tavia. (Oh, what a tangled web we weave!)

"What a charming name—Betsy Dixon! Quite like a—bullet from Molly Pitcher's gun," said the nurse. Tavia smiled but failed to catch the significance of that remark. Betsy was a good old name. Why like a war bullet?

"Here is the station agent," said Tavia, as Sam limped back. "Uncle Sam, have you seen the carriage from the sanitarium?"

Tavia could not overlook the joy in that name—Uncle Sam. It was so simple, and so mouth-fitting.

"Here it comes," replied Sam, also noting how nicely Tavia fell into her role. "But is this the new nurse? I have an important message for Miss Bennet. That's her—in the carriage."

"Miss Bennet! Why, she's my classmate! I never expected to find her, out here in the hills," spoke the stranger.

The carriage drew up to the little platform. Miss Bennet alighted and Miss Bell hurried out to meet her.

"Oh, you dear thing!"—this was very extravagant for trained and graduated nurses—"to think I should meet you here! Isn't it just too nice!" It was Miss Bell who said that.

"Why, Mary Bell!" replied Miss Bennet. "How glad I am to see you! And what a surprise! You are the new nurse! And I never knew it. I'm just starting out on such an interesting case! A young girl, the dearest little thing, has escaped from the sanitarium, and I came out with the carriage to hunt her up. We had word last night that an old farmer—named Hobbs—had caught her. It may not be true, but I am going out there to see. It's a lovely ride. Can you come?"

The girl who escaped! Tavia remembered Sarah's story.

"Miss Bennet, I have a message for you," said Sam, very slowly. "It came in over the wire a half hour ago." And he handed her the yellow slip of paper.

Miss Bennet looked at it.

"Oh, my!" she gasped. "My mother!" and she dropped upon a nearby bench. "She—is—dying!"

Her face turned as white as the linen she wore. Instinctively Tavia ran for the water at the corner of the room. Miss Bell snatched up a paper and started to fan her.

"There, dear, don't faint," said the new nurse. "Of course, you must go to her."

"But! I must go after the escaped girl!" gasped Miss Bennet, and she again almost swooned. "Oh, my darling mother! All I have in the whole, wide world!"

"You go to her. Take my coat and hat, and I will take your case. Agent, what time does a train leave for Mountainview?" She had the telegram in her hand.

"In just two minutes. There's the bell now."

"Come Laura, get into this coat and take my hat. You will reach home before anything serious happens, and perhaps, when your dear mother sees you——. We must hope for the best."

Laura Bennet slipped into her friend's coat and took the little Panama hat that Miss Bell handed to her. "Then you will go after the girl and return her to the sanitarium? It will be your first case. Can you manage it?"

"Certainly I will. You run along for the train. Have you a ticket? Mountainview," she called to Tavia.

Tavia stamped the ticket. Sam was inside, but she had it ready before he had made his way to the window.

"And how shall I know the girl?" asked Miss Bell.

"Know her? Oh, yes! Why, you can't mistake her. She's the prettiest little thing, with yellow hair and blue eyes—there is not another like her. Oh, how frightened I am! It is so good of you, Mary!"

And she was on the train.

Miss Bell got into the wagon with the driver from the sanitarium. Tavia was wishing that the drive had been in the other direction, for then she could have gone in the carriage perhaps, and have caught a train at the switch station. That she was staying so long away from camp now began to worry her. What would Dorothy think!

"Uncle Sam, couldn't I get a train earlier by going over to the station I heard you telephone to?" she asked. "I don't mind a good walk."

"Why, yes, that's so," replied Sam. "Of course I'd like to keep you, Betsy. You make a first-class assistant agent. But I know how you feel, and I wouldn't have you stay longer than you wanted to. There'll be a train here soon for the Junction, and if you are sure you can make the other—you'll have to flag it with your handkerchief—then, if you get left, there will be no train either way. I don't know as you ought to risk it."

"Oh, I can manage very well," she assured him. "I'll take the train, and get the other from the Junction, all right. I am so much obliged to you. I would love to stay longer, if I could, but perhaps I may be able to come up again while I'm at camp." She tried to fix up a little, it was so miserable to have had one's clothes on all night.

"Well, there's the train," and he pulled open the switch, which was operated by a lever in the ticket office. "Good-bye, Betsy, and I won't forget you."

"Nor will I forget you, Uncle Sam," said Tavia with something like real sentiment in her voice. "I am glad I got lost just to have found you."

"Now, don't mix up the instructions," Sam Dixon warned her. "There ain't no agent around the Junction—in fact, there ain't nothin' around there but wild animals."

"Oh, really, wild animals?" she asked in surprise.

"Used to be a great place fer huntin', but beasts don't like the railroad, so you don't need to be afraid of them. Good-bye, Betsy; good-bye!"

And Tavia started for camp.

CHAPTER XVIII

ToC

MISTAKEN IDENTITY

Mrs. Hobbs came back to Dorothy as she had promised, and also, as she had promised, she did open a window.

This open window was Dorothy's hope. If she could only slip out of it, and drop to the little piazza below!

Mrs. Hobbs had brought up a cup of warm milk, and a slice of toast. Dorothy took it thankfully, and felt stronger.

"You feel better now?" asked the woman. "I have to go over the hill for berries—we have a great crop to-day, and Josh had to go away on business." If only Dorothy knew what business! "Do you think you'll be all right if I fetch you something to read?"

"Why, of course. I feel very well to-day, and I shall be glad to sit by the window and read," said Dorothy.

"Here's a book. I got it off last year's Christmas tree, but I ain't had no time to read it." She handed Dorothy a volume bound in red and inscribed "Myrtle and Ivy." There was nothing to show whether it was an agricultural guide, a spiritual retreat, or a love song.

"It's a pretty book," said Dorothy, "and I am sure I shall enjoy it."

"Yes, then I'll be off. Only let me tell you one thing dear," and the woman came up very close to Dorothy, "you must promise me not to try to get away until I can take you to the station. Josh has the wagon."

"All right," replied Dorothy with an amused smile. "Why should I try to get away?"

"Don't know, dear, only I must have your promise."

Dorothy felt queer—she had reason to be grateful to Mrs. Hobbs, and to give a promise would involve an obligation. Yet she must make her escape. Some disturbance downstairs saved the girl further anxiety on the question of the promise. Mrs. Hobbs ran down to the door, and she did not return.

The summer morning hours sent in their greeting through the small window that opened above the porch. Dorothy was nervous, she must leave just as soon as she saw Mrs. Hobbs disappear over the hill, when she would be out of the sight of the house. And her purse was gone! Well, once out on the clear roadway, surely some one would befriend her. What a dreadful thing it was

to be a prisoner! And not to know why she was imprisoned! Her beautiful hair had not been combed in two days. Dorothy did the best she could to make it smooth with her side comb, but the depth of the hair, and the size of the comb, made the matter of actual hair-dressing a difficult task. But there was fresh water in the basin, and she could wash, which was one comfort. "If only I had my purse," she thought, "with my little looking glass. Well, it will scarcely matter how I look —so long as I do not attract attention."

As if Dorothy could help attracting attention!

Mrs. Hobbs's generous form had dropped behind the hill. There was nothing to wait for now, Dorothy must get out of that window.

The window frame was that sort that runs to the roof and has not far to go. It was really not half a window, but it was large enough for the girl's slim form to slip through. It was no distance to the roof, then she could slide down the post.

Dorothy was out. She sat upon the roof and with a careful move slid toward the edge.

She must stop near a post, as she could not stand up!

Yes, what blessing! She was directly above the post!

Dorothy was not an athlete, but she was always able to climb. She swung around the post—down—down—to the ground!

But no sooner had her feet touched the welcome earth that a shrill scream startled her!

She was puzzled and alarmed until she saw a big, green parrot in a cage. And the bird was screeching to the limit of its capacity. Mrs. Hobbs could hear it! Should Dorothy throw a mat from the porch over its cage!

No, the door was opened, the bird was out,—and it was actually flying at Dorothy!

"Mama! Mama!" it yelled. "Come quick! Come quick!"

Snatching up a stick, Dorothy made an attempt to strike the green thing as it flapped toward her. But she could not hit it! And if she turned to run it would likely settle its claws into her head. Yet she must run! Mrs. Hobbs—

Without time for further thought Dorothy did run; down the lane, and into the road.

The parrot had not followed! Dorothy was out on the road, she could surely get back to camp now. Oh, how glorious it was!

Gratefully she raised her eyes to the clear sky. Her heart sent up its thanks—to the Friend who is never hidden from those who seek Him.

"And there comes a carriage," she told herself, as a rumbling of wheels took her attention. "Perhaps the driver will give me a lift."

The wagon was hidden from view as the road turned sharply just under the oaks. Dorothy waited. Yes, and there was a young woman in the carriage. Wasn't that fortunate?

The carriage turned so close to Dorothy that she had no need to take a single step to hail it. And it was almost stopped, yes; it did stop now.

The young woman in the carriage was garbed in white—a nurse.

"Is this the Hobb's place?" she asked of Dorothy.

"Yes," replied the girl in surprise.

Then the nurse jumped out of the carriage. She looked keenly at Dorothy.

"Do you—stop there?" she asked curiously.

"I have been stopping there," answered Dorothy, now completely mystified by the young woman's manner.

"Is your name——"

"My name is Dorothy Dale, and for some reason I have been—hidden away from my friends," said Dorothy bravely. "I was just about to ask you to assist me to get back to them. I was in camp at Everglade."

"Why, of course I will assist you!" replied the nurse in the most affable manner. "Get right into the carriage, and we will have you back at camp in no time." Dorothy hesitated. The nurse consulted a small note book.

"Come right in, dear. We are going straight down to Everglade," and she touched Dorothy's arm to urge her.

"Strange, I feel so nervous about falling into traps," said Dorothy honestly, looking deeply into the eyes that were investigating every feature of her own fair face. "But you see I did fall, literally, and——"

"Of course, and you were hurt." Dorothy could not understand that caressing manner. It was identical with that exercised by Mrs. Hobbs. "Now, come," and Dorothy did step into the carriage. "We will drive along quickly, so that we may reach camp before luncheon. James, hurry your horse."

For a few moments Dorothy felt as if she must collapse. The strain of her escape from the old house, then her fright from the bird, and her fear that Mrs. Hobbs would overtake her. And now

to be actually riding back to camp! What would her friends say to her? Oh, how good it would be to relieve them of all their anxiety, and to be really going back well—comparatively well, at any rate.

"I've had quite a time of it these last two days," she remarked, glancing timidly at the figure in white beside her, "but it seems all things come out right—if we only have patience."

"But I wouldn't talk dear—the sun has been warm, and you are quite overheated. Wouldn't you like to rest your head here, on my lap?"

Dorothy sat up erect. This was surely unheard of. Who was this nurse? Where was she taking her?

"I am perfectly well, thank you," she said in the firmest tones she could command, "and I really would like to know where we are going? Why do you treat me as if I were ill or a child?"

"There, there," and the nurse touched Dorothy's hand. "Of course you are perfectly well, and of course, we are going to camp. James, is your horse asleep?"

But Dorothy was frightened. There was something mysterious in it all. Another wagon approached. It drew slowly along.

Mr. Hobbs!

Dorothy's heart gave a leap as his old wagon stopped! The nurse put her head out of the little curtained window and made signs to him.

"All right! All right!" he replied. "Yes, that's her!"

"That's her!" repeated Dorothy. "That's me! What is this trick? Let me out of this carriage instantly, or I will call for help!"

"If you do not keep quiet, I shall be obliged to restrain you," said the nurse. "Miss Harriwell, we are taking you back to the sanitarium. I am your new nurse."

"Sanitarium! New nurse! Miss Harriwell! I am Dorothy Dale, and I have never been inside a sanitarium!"

The carriage dashed into a driveway! A big brownstone building confronted them.

A corps of nurses hurried out to the path!

When Dorothy saw them she fainted!

CHAPTER XIX

ToC

CAMPING DAYS

Tavia got off the train at the Junction, but she did not get on the one that went toward Clamberton—it flew by. She waved her handkerchief—she waved her coat, she told herself she waved her soul, but that train simply would not stop.

And she was miles from nowhere!

"Well, I'll walk it!" she declared. "I don't care how I get there, I'm going to keep my nose toward camp!"

To walk the railroad ties! That was one thing Tavia loathed—they were so regular, so straight, so abominably correct.

"Of course railroad ties were never built for human feet, even the straight and narrow are not as straight as these."

She moved along for a hundred or so of ties, then she threatened to sit down. Tavia was desperate, but even in her present surprising state of mind, the railroad ties were too much for her, and she kept on.

"I might fly," she reflected, looking boldly at the ocean of blue above, "but there isn't a machine in sight."

More and more ties until she came to a small bridge.

"Well, I suppose if I try to walk this thing I shall presently find myself holding a session with some slimy, muddy frogs. Ugh!" and she looked between the ties at the lurking depths of mud and other things on either side of the railroad embankment. "I just hate—uncertainties."

She stepped cautiously a little farther. "Well, if I fall it serves me right. I shouldn't have done this!"

Tavia—poor Tavia!

The place was very lonely. Tavia realized this. She knew instantly that she was in the woods. It may have been her primitive hatred of the forest that inspired this sentiment, but there was always something about the depths of solitude that made her want to laugh—it was positively funny to her. Something must happen.

"If there were a single human being in sight," she sighed. Then she repeated, "I said 'single.'"

It was almost dusk. She thought of old Sam. Wasn't that funny! Then of her mending—shirring socks! When he tried them on he might change his mind about making her his heir.

"And that loon!" This last referred to Morrison. "When I believed him, I may, some day, believe myself!"

She picked out a few more ties, and came to another and larger culvert. "Suppose a train should come," she gasped. The strain of the past few days was having its natural revenge—reaction. Her depression had soured into hilarity. "Well, I'll run the bridge—I have always heard it is the only safe way." She looked up, far beyond the ties. She would have closed her eyes, but that strange feeling of sight-security, which does not depend upon sight, compelled her to look—but not at the ties.

Every time she planted her foot down she expected to go through, foot and all, but, somehow, she did not sink down between the ties.

"It would take a funnel to put me safely down that way," she decided. "I guess I would have to have a very big hole to drop through."

It seemed to Tavia that everything she had to do must be made easy for her, even dropping through railroad ties!

She had crossed the bridge and now she stood for a moment mocking it.

"I should burn my bridges behind me," she mused, "but it takes time and talent, even to burn bridges."

Those who knew Tavia would scarcely have recognized her now, could they have viewed her through the glass with which she was magnifying her faults. Tavia had been tried, she had tried herself, and after having had an opportunity to board any of three trains going toward camp, here she was again—stranded!

"I'm a first-class simpleton," she decided. "Dorothy was right; always right. I'm a rattle-brain; and they think I am drowned. That is more reasonable, and more charitable, than to think I could be so foolish."

"I guess I couldn't get along very well without Dorothy," she went on thinking, as she trudged forward. "She always kept me together. But at least I'll try to do her training justice now. I'll try to walk back to camp."

A narrow path ran beside the rails. This, Tavia thought had been trodden down by tramps. Beyond, there seemed nothing but woods, and it was getting dusk. Well, there must be houses or huts somewhere, and she would walk on.

Peering through the trees, Tavia thought she saw a white speck. It might be a bird—no, it was too large! What could it be?

It moved swiftly—now she could see it was—not a person! But it couldn't be anything else, since there really were no ghosts. But were there really none? Just now Tavia felt as if nothing was certain, not even her own personality.

There it was again, out in the clear path! All in white! Oh, it must be a spirit!

How silly!

"It's a girl," Tavia said aloud. "Oh, how glad I am to see the face of a human being!"

It was a girl, and she moved swiftly toward Tavia.

"Oh, how do you do?" she began. "I was afraid you would not come."

Tavia wondered. Did the girl take her for some one else?

"I'm awfully glad to meet you," answered Tavia, noting how pretty the creature was, what splendid blond hair, and such eyes! "I was just getting—frightened."

"Frightened! Why, we will soon be all right. I have ordered my airship. Can you fly?"

Could she fly? Was the girl crazy?

Then Tavia noticed a strange glare in the wonderful blue eyes. She might be insane! Maybe she was the girl who had escaped from the sanitarium!

"I love to fly—it is my one ambition in life. But they would never let me, so I just came away by myself; and isn't it sweet of you to meet me away out here? There, did you see that bird? That's the way to fly," and the strange girl threw her arms up and down, until Tavia wondered whether she could be fooling, or was really insane.

"I have never tried to fly," replied Tavia, feeling very silly, "but lots of people have gone crazy

over it."

The moment she had said "crazy" she felt that she had made a mistake. The girl turned on her as if to strike her.

"Crazy! You call flying crazy! It's crazy to walk, crazy to stand, but it is noble to fly!" and again she worked her arms bird-like.

For the moment Tavia felt like running away. Then she thought that would not be wise, for how did she know but that the girl might have the strength they say insane people have; and that she might hit her with a stone, or do something to injure her? Besides, it seemed better to be with her than alone in that woods. Tavia decided she would humor her.

"Of course, we shall all fly, some day," she said, as the girl turned almost upon her. "I would love to learn how!"

"You shall! I will teach you! My airship is not far away."

"Do you know the road to Everglade?" asked Tavia, without the slightest hope of getting an intelligent answer.

"Why, yes; Everglade?" and her eyes set more deeply. "I have a friend in camp out that way."

In camp! Then she was not altogether insane, for there were many campers at Everglade.

"Yes," said Tavia, "so have I. We can walk along together."

This seemed to satisfy the girl, and she did start to tramp along. Tavia noticed how neatly she was dressed, and did not fail to see a beautiful chain and ornament about her slender white throat.

"But it's a long way," spoke the girl. "My name is Bird of Paradise. What might yours be?"

"Betsy Dixon," replied Tavia aptly. "Yours is a much prettier name. May I call you Birdie?"

"Certainly, and I shall call you Betty. I have a friend named Betty."

For some moments they walked along in silence. The two girls were as different in dress and manner as were Dorothy and Tavia, and the latter noticed how much like Dorothy the strange girl was. About the same height, same colored hair, and the same deep, blue eyes.

"Are there no houses near here?" asked Tavia. "I am afraid night will catch us soon."

"Oh, yes, there is a hotel over that ledge. It is there I am taking you."

Tavia hoped it was true. She had passed through the stage of sensitiveness, and was now only anxious to get somewhere or near somewhere, for the night. She had made up her mind that she would ask the first person she met to help her, with money or by directing her to shelter. There was no longer any doubt as to her distress—night was coming and she was almost worse than alone, and in the woods.

The girl in white walked along humming now, waving her arms every time a bird passed, and when she did speak to Tavia her remarks seemed more rambling than ever.

"We seem miles from every place," remarked Tavia weakly. "I do wish——"

"There! There!" exclaimed the strange girl. "There is my flying station! See that precipice?" pointing to a cliff far out on the ledge of the hill over which they were walking. "Just over there is my station. I told you I was Bird of Paradise. I am not—I am Madam Fly-Fly, the French balloonist. Now watch me!"

"Don't!" shrieked Tavia. But it was too late. The girl had rushed to the edge of the cliff, and with a wild wave of her arms had thrown herself over!

Tavia, stunned at the suddenness of her tragic action, stood for a moment looking down at the heap of white that lay so far below her.

Then she turned cautiously, and started down the dangerous descent herself, clutching at brush and bramble as she tried to reach the girl, who might be dead, in the moss and rocks that made such a beautiful setting for the stream rambling on, unmindful of the terror on its brink.

Tavia must reach the girl; but what then?

CHAPTER XX

ToC

HAPLESS TAVIA

Step by step, or rather, move by move, Tavia struggled to reach in safety that heap of white.

"Oh, if she is only alive!" moaned Tavia. "Why did I not induce her to go back to the Junction? I saw she was insane—and now!"

A huge stone offered her a pause in the dangerous descent. She stopped and listened.

Then she called: "Birdie! Birdie!" No answer. "Perhaps she hears and does not know—that name. Madame Fly-Fly?" she called again, and she thought the sleeve moved—always that attempt to fly.

Tavia slid down from the rock, trembling in limb and throbbing in nerves. She had a terrible fear that the girl was either dying or dead. There with her alone!

On a perfectly flat stone the form lay. Tavia was beside it now. She stooped and listened.

"Thank the good Lord she is alive!" gasped Tavia fervently. "I must—lift—her!"

But there was little trouble in turning the light form over, so that the white face looked up into Tavia's.

"Oh!" sighed the girl. "Where am I? Who are you?" There was a change—a great change in her manner.

"Oh, I am so glad you are alive!" breathed Tavia. "And how do you feel?"

"As if something—moved in—my head. Where is mother?"

There was no rambling, she spoke coherently!

"Are you hurt?" pressed Tavia. "If only you can move?"

"I am sure I can," the sufferer replied, at the same time making an effort to sit up. "I feel better—somehow. How did you come to me? I had a terrible dream."

"I met you. Do you remember your name?"

The girl did not answer at once. Then she said very slowly: "I am Mary, but they call me Molly."

"Mary what?"

"Mary Harriwell."

Tavia knew better than to ask more questions just then. She almost forgot their predicament in the joy of seeing the girl apparently sane.

"I wonder if you can walk?"

"I am going to try. Just give me your hand—there, that's it," and the sufferer pulled herself up and stood beside Tavia.

"I wonder might there be a path? I was so alarmed when you fell, that I did not take time to look for one, I just slid down the rocks. But to get up would be very different."

"It is—dark, almost. We will have to look—I can't talk—just now. I have that strange feeling in my head."

"You must not talk. Just follow me, lean on me! Oh, I am sure we will get up safely; and once upon the road we must find some help!"

Tavia was afraid to look with too much scrutiny into the white face, afraid she might again see that wild-eyed warning.

Following the mossy way they trudged along. How far away even the sky was! Could two girls be more desolate?

Thoughts of camp, and of Dorothy, almost crushed Tavia. Young and strong as she was, her experience was beginning to leave its mark. She felt weak, and was hungry!

But the strange girl seemed to have recovered her reason! Tavia must not falter, she must get up, out to the roadway.

"This looks like a path," she said. "Yes, it is a path. See, the brush is trodden down, and the ferns are broken. Oh, some one must have been here lately, and that means that they can not be very far away now!"

"What is your name?" asked the strange girl suddenly.

"Tavia—Tavia Travers. And I am lost—far away from every one!"

Tears welled into Tavia's eyes. Yes, she was lost!

"And I am—lost! How strange that we should meet."

"But are you not hurt? You walk——"

"Yes, something does hurt, but I don't mind, for that awful dream is gone. I can walk, and then when—we are—found——"

"Oh, yes. I am sure you will be all right as soon as we—are—found!"

They had almost reached the crest of the hill. Up there at least they could see.

"I hear a step," said Tavia. "We must hurry."

It was difficult to do that, however, for Mary, or Molly, limped painfully.

The step was plain now, as it crushed the dried leaves and brush.

The figure of a man was next seen. The girls waited. He came along with a free air, and swinging gait. The man wore a slouch hat——

"Oh!" screamed Tavia. "We must run, or hide! It is that dreadful man! That—other—that lunatic!" and she clutched the arm beside her, and dragged the frightened girl to the edge of the roadway.

Mortimer Morrison, with his big, rough, mountain stick, was about to pass!

CHAPTER XXI

ToC

AT THE SANITARIUM

When Dorothy recovered consciousness she lay on a white cot, by an open window, and the strange nurse sat beside her.

"Where am I? What am I here for?"

"Your doctor is away, he will be back to-morrow—soon," the nurse corrected herself. "Then perhaps you—may go out."

"But why am I here? This is a hospital, and I am not ill."

"No, not exactly ill," and Mary Bell had her own very serious doubts about the condition of the young patient—never had she seen a demented girl so perfectly sane. "But it is best for you to await your own doctor's orders," she finished.

"My own doctor? What is his name, please?"

"Dr. Ashton. Do you remember him?"

"I have never heard the name before," replied Dorothy, looking about her anxiously at the sanitary appointments of the white room. "I suppose this is a sanitarium for nerves."

"You have been here long enough to know that much," said the nurse with a smile, "but you seem to have a new kind—of nerves."

"I have only been here a few hours, I should judge, but it did seem an eternity. Are they not going to send for my friends? They will be distracted. I have been away from them for so long."

Again that uncertain look came into the face of the nurse. Surely if this girl had been demented she must now be very much better. Her talk was entirely rational.

And Dorothy was thinking: "Surely if they believe I am crazy they must be crazy themselves! The sounds around here are enough to shake any one's nerves."

Some one was singing. The shrill voice rent the air like some weird cry from a lost mind. It made Dorothy shiver.

"You think I am—demented," she asked finally. "But there is some great mistake. I am Dorothy Dale of—Dalton. I was camping at Everglade—and I have had a dreadful time of it since I fell, and was picked up by that old farmer."

Dorothy's eyes were full. She had made up her mind, since her escape from the Hobbs house, that she must wait—wait until those around her saw their mistake. At any rate, it was something to be among intelligent people, if they were nurses and doctors, and as they plainly believed her to be an escaped patient she must wait until some one came to identify her. But now it was very hard, and she was very, very lonely, and very nervous with those poor demented people singing, sighing, laughing and calling from all over the place.

"I am sorry Miss Bennet had to go away, before I saw you," said the nurse, vaguely. "It would have been better——"

"Miss Bennet?"

"Yes, your regular nurse."

"I never had a nurse since I had the measles," said Dorothy, and she really felt inclined to laugh. "Would you mind if I sat up at the window? I feel perfectly strong now, and I want to remember what the blessed world is like."

"Of course you may sit by the window," replied Miss Bell, assisting Dorothy into a robe. "And I don't blame you for wanting to see out of doors. Sometimes I hate being a nurse."

"I should think you would. It is enough to turn one's own head. Oh, I do wish some one who knows me would come! My father and all my folks will be frantic. Is there anything more dreadful than being lost in the Maine woods!"

"You are the strongest sick girl I ever saw," declared the nurse. "I hope I have made no mistake."

"Well, indeed you have," replied Dorothy. "I tell you I am not and have never been a patient at any institution. I thought there was some test of mentality—the eye, isn't it?"

"But nurses cannot make tests," answered Miss Bell. "We have to wait for the dear professional, all-powerful doctors to do that. This is my first day here, and I think I am going to be almost as lonely as you are."

"I am sorry for you, but *you* may *leave* if you wish. It is quite different in my case!"

"My dear, if you can only be content to-night, I promise you some one will come to-morrow. They have sent for your mother—Mrs. Harriwell."

"Oh, the mother of the lost girl? Well, she will know. But I must stay all night in this dreadful place—all night?"

"I promise not to leave you. They will send another nurse to relieve me, but I will decline to go. Somehow you have almost convinced me there is a mistake."

"Thank you," replied Dorothy. "Perhaps it will be best not to complain."

She was looking out at the beautiful grounds and thinking of the dear ones whose hearts must be torn with anguish for her. If only she could telegraph!

"Do you think I could send a message?" she asked, "to my friends—to my cousins, at Everglade?"

"I am afraid not—until after the doctor sees you. You see, some other patient—a man named Morrison—is blamed for having helped you to escape."

"Morrison?" repeated Dorothy. "That is the name of the man who is to blame for all this trouble; that is, we blamed him for inducing a friend of mine to leave our camp."

"He has a faculty for inducing people to leave," said Miss Bell. "We hope we will soon be able to catch him—then it is not likely that he will get another chance to exercise that faculty. Three patients left the day that you did."

"The day that *she* did," corrected Dorothy. "Well, nurse, since you are so kind to me, we must be friends, and I must not make you any unnecessary trouble."

"One has to be kind to you," said the nurse, putting her cheek close to Dorothy's. "I must comb out your hair. It has been neglected."

"Yes, but that will be easily fixed up again. Such matters seem scarcely to trouble me now. There are so many bigger things to think of."

The nurse got comb and brush, and started to smooth out the long, light tresses.

"What is that scratch?" she asked, stopping to look at a mark on Dorothy's neck.

"It may have been the mark left there by Mrs. Hobbs' parrot," said Dorothy, "or it may be one of the scratches I got when I fell over the cliff. You see, I have been having a dreadful time. But when it is all over I will have something worth talking about, to tell at camp. I hope you will call upon us there. You would not be lonely if you knew our boys."

"But if you are not Mary Harriwell, what can have become of her?" asked the nurse with sudden conviction. "And I was sent to find her!"

"But you were directed to find me, were you not?" said Dorothy, in her quick way of helping one out in distress. "I do not see how you could be held responsible."

"But the girl—if she is still at large, she may be dead or injured," said Miss Bell, showing more and more that she did not believe Dorothy to be the person wanted in the sanitarium. "I must ask —did no one here know you—or her? Must we wait for that one doctor?"

"At any rate," said Dorothy, "I was almost ill, and you have saved me from those dreadful people. My folks will never blame you."

"If there is a mistake—I'll run away. I could never stand the disgrace," and the nurse buried her face in her hands.

"It seems to me a perfectly plain case of mistaken identity, and as you knew neither me nor the girl wanted, I do not see how you could have done otherwise than to take me. I am sure I must have looked and acted—demented."

"I am perfectly positive that you are not now," declared Miss Bell. "And no time should be lost in searching for Mary Harriwell."

"Then I could send a message to camp? Let them know I am safe?" and Dorothy sprang up with more emotion than she wished to show, for her every move was being watched.

"Well, the doctor will be here in the morning, and it is night now. There would be no way of

straightening this out until you are positively identified."

"What a dreadfully lonely place Maine is! If I were near home—or near any place where people would know me——" Dorothy was saying.

"Miss Bell, you are wanted at the 'phone," interrupted an attendant, appearing at the door. "I'll stay until you get back."

Miss Bell left the room, and Dorothy did not look at the young woman who had taken her place. There was something so humiliating about being suspected of insanity!

"How do you like it here?" asked the newcomer.

"Very well," replied Dorothy, hurt by the sarcasm apparent in the voice.

"Then why did you run away? Didn't we treat you all right?"

Dorothy made no reply. The nurse came over, and glanced at her keenly.

"You look pretty fine. Guess the tramp did you good. They have sent for your mother. She will be here to-morrow. I sent the message, and I told her your mind had cleared up. I hope I made no mistake."

"I hope not," replied Dorothy, feeling that it was useless to try to explain. "I shall be glad—when she comes."

"I'm the night attendant. I will be here in an hour to give you your bath," said the young woman.

"I am perfectly capable of taking my own bath," replied Dorothy, with indignation.

"Perhaps; but we don't trust patients in the water alone. I hope you won't give me any trouble. I'm tired to death to-night."

"I will try not to," said Dorothy.

Soon Miss Bell returned. Her face was flushed and she appeared greatly excited.

"That *man* Morrison has been seen," she said to the other nurse. "And two more Mary Harriwells have also been seen. Strange thing how many girls can get demented when *one* is looked for. But the man—they say he is not safe."

"Oh, he's the greatest case we ever had here. He kept us all busy as his audience. He's stage-struck, you know," said the other.

"Have you heard anything of a girl named Tavia Travers?" asked Dorothy timidly. "It was searching for her that brought about all this trouble, and I wonder have they found her yet."

"Tavia Travers," repeated Miss Bell. "A girl who says she is Tavia Travers was seen going along the road with the supposed Mary Harriwell, and of course if she is helping her hide, she may be arrested. Is she a friend of yours?"

"Yes," sighed Dorothy. Then she fell to thinking how terrible it all was.

"It began the day we had the hay wagon accident," she decided. "The moment that man crossed our path he—left his shadow, as dear father would say. Well, to-morrow I must be set free again."

The nurses were talking quietly together. A shuffling in the hall disturbed them.

"A new patient?" asked Dorothy.

"No, likely an old one returned," was all the information she got.

CHAPTER XXII

ToC

THE CLEW

"I cannot go another step," sighed the girl with Tavia, just as Morrison passed.

"Hush!" cautioned Tavia. "I would rather die than have him see us! I simply cannot stand the thoughts of it all, and on *his* account."

They had succeeded in getting behind a huge tree at the side of the path. The man sauntered along and stopped within five feet of them.

The sick girl was cringing with pain. The injured foot became more painful every moment.

"What is he looking for?" whispered Tavia. "If he only——"

"There's some one else coming," said Molly. "I hear voices."

"Yes. A crowd of men! They must not see us," declared Tavia. "Oh, they are in uniform! They are after some one!"

"Me!" moaned Molly. "Oh, don't let them take me! I must stay with you. I can get help——"

They crouched down in the deep grass. The man out on the path was still there, beating a tree with his stick. He did not seem to notice the approaching crowd.

The strangers were up to him now.

"That's him!" the girls heard them say. "That's Morrison."

"Who are you?" demanded the queer man.

"Well, we are just friends," said a tall man with a gold-trimmed cap. "We have been looking for you. Won't you come over to the hotel and stay for the night?"

"Not much," replied Morrison. "I never go into hotels—I only go on the legitimate stage. I was never a cheap actor."

"Well, come along to the legitimate stage then," said the man kindly. "We will take good care of you."

"I have lost a friend," went on Morrison, in a rambling way, "and until she is found I do not leave these woods."

Tavia's heart stood still. Would the men find them?

"Oh," sighed the girl with the injured foot, "I will throw myself into the creek before I will go back to the——"

"Hush! They have got him!"

Two strong men had taken hold of Morrison. At the signal of a shrill whistle two other men came up the path.

Morrison struggled frantically. In the excitement Tavia and Molly stepped out of their hiding place, but there was so much confusion trying to overcome Morrison, that the girls were not noticed.

"Oh, mercy!" gasped Molly, "they will hurt him."

"Not likely," said Tavia. "They are hospital attendants."

"There is the wagon! Oh, I remember it! They took me in that!"

"Molly, dear! You are not to remember anything—except that you are with me!"

"But what shall we do when they go? It is night!"

"We will find shelter some place. I am an expert on finding shelter!"

The girl rested her head against Tavia's shoulder. Whatever compunction Tavia had felt for her part in the unfortunate state of affairs, she felt at ease now in the thought that she had saved this girl. That the hospital men were attending to Morrison, and that he would soon be out of reach of harming her, also consoled Tavia.

"It is not bad here," she said. "I am sure there are cottages near by."

"I—don't—remember," breathed Molly. "I guess I was never out this way before."

"If only I knew—— But what is the use of my acting like a baby?" exclaimed Tavia. "I am sure the folks at camp think me dead. Dorothy, especially, will be heartbroken."

"They are taking him away!"

The men had seized the struggling Morrison, and were carrying him to the roadside, where the wagon stood waiting.

Tavia wondered if she was doing right or wrong in not making her presence known. Then she thought how hard it would be to have Mary again placed in a sanitarium, and she decided to fight her way alone. But it was getting dark. They could now barely see the men lifting that struggling form into the closely-covered wagon.

"I wonder how they knew he was here?" mused Tavia. "If they had not found him what would have become of us?"

"Oh, my foot! I am sure something is broken!"

With these words Molly sank down, helpless. The wagon had rattled off, and again the girls were alone in that deep wood, with night settling down.

"I am strong," declared Tavia. "I can carry you."

"But where can we go? Oh, I did not know I was hurt! I am afraid my leg is broken!" sobbed Molly.

"There must be some house or hut near here," declared Tavia, "and I will carry you along until we reach it. We can not spend the night here, starving."

The strange girl was indeed light in weight. Naturally slight, her sickness had also taken flesh from her, so that when Tavia put her arms about her, and the other threw her arms over Tavia's shoulders, the two trudged along over the rough path, and soon were out on a roadway.

"There is a camp over there," said Tavia, as they came in sight of something white, just showing through the sunset. "We must go to that."

"I can walk," insisted Molly. "It is too much——"

"So can I carry you," argued Tavia, "and if you have any bones broken you must not strain them further."

It did seem a long way to the tent, but the road that led up to it showed travel, and was therefore more easily followed.

"Strange I am not afraid of anything," murmured Molly. "If we do have to stay in the woods all night, I shall not be afraid."

"That is because you are stunned—you had a very bad fall," said Tavia. "I feel that way myself—I have gone through a great deal, lately, too."

"Now, let me walk—it is only a step," begged Molly, at the same moment getting down from Tavia's arms. "Here we are right at the tent."

Welcome shelter! Never were two girls more in need of it.

"And the queer part of it is," said Tavia, "I am supposed to be a joke—to get and take everything funny. This is certainly no joke. How do you feel, dear? I hope these people will let us in. We may get some camping days after all."

They timidly made their way to the tent. It was closed!

"No lights," remarked Molly. "Oh, Tavia. My head hurts again!"

"Mercy!" exclaimed Tavia, without showing why she was so alarmed. "Do you suppose it is just a headache or——"

Molly had sunk down on her knees. Tavia sprang to the flap of the tent, and dragged the rope from the stake.

"Empty!" she cried. "But we must get in. Come, Molly, I can lift you, and whoever may be the owners of the camp, surely they will not turn us out to-night."

"But if they are rough men——"

"No, rough men do not furnish a tent like this. See the pictures pinned up; and what is this?"

Tavia had lighted a candle that was placed conveniently near the flap, with matches at hand, showing that whoever lived in the tent intended to return at dark, and so had their light ready. Beside this candle was a printed slip of paper. Tavia read:

> "A thousand dollars reward for information that will lead to the finding, dead or alive, of Dorothy Dale and Tavia Travers."

"Dorothy gone too!" shrieked Tavia. "Then they are scouring the woods for us, and that is why this camp is deserted!"

"If only I could walk!" breathed Molly.

"Never mind. We will stay here—until something else happens—but who can tell what that may be!"

The shock of the news about Dorothy absolutely stunned Tavia. With it went all her strength, all her courage, and she felt then like lying down to die!

CHAPTER XXIII

ToC

DOROTHY'S ESCAPE

When Miss Bell returned to Dorothy's room in the sanitarium, after her talk over the telephone, Dorothy saw that her anxiety had reached a state of prostration. She seemed convinced that she had taken to the institution the wrong girl, and the dread of disgrace, especially as she was a new nurse in the house, seemed to weigh very heavily upon her. She would come up and look into Dorothy's face, examine the pupils of her eyes, and then go away sighing.

"Are you sorry I am not demented?" asked Dorothy, with as much in her voice as she could command. "Just think what a good time you will have, when we get back to camp."

"I will run away," was the only reply the new nurse would make.

Night came, and the nurse lay down to rest. Dorothy pretended to do the same thing, but she had resolved to get out of that sanitarium, without bringing disgrace on this young woman. But the attempt would be fraught with danger. If she were caught, not only would she be returned to the sanitarium, but she knew there was another ward——

Dorothy did not permit herself to think of this. "I am going to get away before daylight," she said. "Then, when the mother of the missing girl comes and I have gotten away, they will not know whether it was her daughter, or me."

But to get away would mean trouble for the nurse also. She would be blamed for leaving Dorothy unguarded!

"The other attendant comes in at five in the morning," decided Dorothy, "then I must—go!"

It was an awful thought! She could hear the guards pacing up and down the corridors, she had seen the high fence with its iron palings, and as to gates—there were guards all about them.

"The nurse's clothes!" thought Dorothy. "If I could get into Miss Bell's things! They are here—in her suit-case. Then I might walk out! But I would faint if they spoke to me? No, I would not, I must have courage! I must be brave! In getting out I may save my dear folks more anxiety, and I can save this poor little woman!"

She looked kindly down at the sleeping nurse. The face, even in sleep, was troubled, and the young woman tossed uneasily.

Every hour the clock struck in the outside hall, but Dorothy heard it in her prison room. Her mind was first forming this plan, and then that, until she felt, if she did not get some sleep, she would never be able to carry out any plan at all. Finally, as the steps and voices in the hall grew fainter, Dorothy did fall asleep, but only to wake with a start just as the clock struck five.

A tap sounded at the door. Miss Bell was dressed and waiting. The nurses were going down to breakfast, and as she left Dorothy, with a pleasant word, the other attendant stepped in, picked up a novel, and without noticing Dorothy, any more than if she had been wooden, she sank lazily down in a chair, and started to read.

How could Dorothy get on her disguise now? She sighed heavily, and almost gave up her plan. But not quite, for in desperate straits one clings to the proverbial straw, and now Dorothy was clutching frantically at—anything—at hope.

A man poked his head in at the door.

"Hello, Tom!" said the attendant, in no polite voice, "What have you got for me?"

The man winked, and Dorothy turned away. "Can't you leave her?" he whispered.

The woman looked at Dorothy, who pretended to be almost stupid. She had hidden her face in her hands.

"I guess she'll keep," Dorothy heard her say, and with that the nurse stepped out of the door, and Dorothy heard a laugh in the hall. But she did not yet dare to move. In another moment the woman returned. "I have got to go out for a minute," she said; "just take this pill and sleep. You look tired."

Dorothy saw in the woman's hand a slip of yellow paper. Of course it was some message that would violate the rules. And the woman had given her some medicine to make her sleep.

"I am *too* sleepy now," said Dorothy. "Let me alone."

That was all the attendant wanted. Quickly she went out, and then Dorothy jumped up. It was but a moment's work to open the suit-case, and slip on the plain, white, linen dress. Then for something on her head. Yes! the cap, there it was all ready to be put on for the day's work. The looking glass reflected a new Dorothy!

She did look like a nurse, and then no one yet knew Miss Bell. But she might be back from breakfast at any moment!

Hurry, Dorothy! Hurry!

One more look! The long dress seemed strange, but not so strange as the agitation that filled her heart and tingled her nerves.

She opened the door, and went out into the hall, just as an attendant was turning out the electrics, for it was daylight.

"Good morning!" said the first guard, sitting in his big chair, while the marble hall seemed like an ocean to Dorothy.

"Good morning!" replied Dorothy lightly.

Then the nurses were leaving breakfast. She could hear the voices. If only she could get out before Miss Bell came!

"Did you see the new girl?" she heard some one say.

"Yes, and she has been called into the office!"

That would give Dorothy time!

More guards—so many there seemed to be now, and each with his "good morning!" But Dorothy had taken courage. She felt better out of that room; it was glorious to be so near freedom.

"Is that the new nurse?" said a big man, who actually stood at the door.

"Looks like her," replied another, with something like a sneer.

"She'd be a lot of good with any one but—babies," said a third. Then he stepped up to Dorothy. She felt as if she would drop down. "Out early," he said, peering into her frightened face.

"Yes, is that time right?" she asked on the spur of the moment, thinking to divert his attention from her face.

He looked up at the big clock. "If it was right—it wouldn't be here," he replied with a laugh. "But don't get lost. You are on duty at seven," he went on, "but I guess a sniff of air won't do you any harm. We all take what we can get in that line."

"Yes," and Dorothy tried to smile. He had not discovered her! But when Miss Bell reached the room——

Oh, if she could only fly—over those big stone walls. But the outside was even more closely guarded than was the inside, especially since two patients had so lately escaped.

Down the steps went the trembling girl. How splendid it was in the fresh morning air!

"And if I can only get a message back to camp," she was thinking. "What will happen to dear father if I am not soon discovered?"

Over the stone walk she sped. She glanced down the path. The front gate was impossible. Back of the institution she saw a great barn—then water! Oh, if she could but pass the stablemen. They would not be as keen to suspect as would be the guards.

Every one seemed busy. They were cleaning the horses, and fixing up the big stables. Merry morning words floated through the air, and it seemed to Dorothy that her presence, that of a nurse, as they supposed, was always the signal for some joke, or some frivolous remark. But there was no harm in this, she thought. Inside of stone walls everybody must be akin.

"Hello, there!" called a rather young man, who in shirt sleeves, was rubbing down a horse. "Where are you going so early?"

Dorothy scarcely dared answer. But fate saved her, for at that moment the horse took fright at something and broke away from its post.

Instantly there was confusion, and Dorothy was forgotten. Up on the terrace were patients out in the air with guards, and in that direction dashed the horse, while every man from the stable ran after it.

This left Dorothy almost free.

She saw a summer-house on the edge of a lake. Yes, and there was a canoe!

What a chance!

She shoved that canoe over the smooth grass, straight for the water. The paddles were inside, and Dorothy knew that once she was upon the water she could escape.

Shouts from the terrace almost stunned her. She pushed the canoe into the stream, slid into the frail bark, and started off, just as the stablemen came back over the grounds with the fractious horse!

CHAPTER XXIV

ToC

A LONELY RIDE

No sooner had Dorothy paddled around the bend in the stream that led into the river, than she heard the alarm bell of the sanitarium ring.

"That's the alarm for me!" she told herself, "but they can never see me in this narrow pass. How fortunate that no one saw me take the boat. And I suppose they think I escaped from the front gate during the excitement about the horse."

Dorothy was right in her surmise. So reasonable did it seem that she had passed out by the front gate, when the guards came to the rescue of those in danger from the frightened horse, that no one thought of looking at the rear of the institution.

"I wonder where I am going?" she thought. "Perhaps this river runs into a dangerous rapid. I have always heard that Maine waters are full of surprises."

"At any rate, this is lovely," she went on musingly, "and, somehow, I feel that I will get back to camp before nightfall."

The water was as smooth as glass, and in the sunshine that every moment became more insistant, Dorothy, in her linen dress, paddled away with all the skill she had acquired in dear old Glenwood School lake. She had discarded the nurse's cap, and the coat, and as her own suit was beneath the linen, she was only waiting for an opportunity to discard the skirt.

"It pulls," she thought. "I might as well drop it now."

At this she stood up in the canoe very cautiously, and with one move of her hand dropped the skirt into the bottom of the boat. "There, that's more like paddling," she thought.

Adjusting herself again, she picked up the blade and plied it through the clear water.

Suddenly the report of a gun startled her! Was it at her that the shot had been fired?

Glancing over at the bank she saw something fall.

Could some person have been shot? The season for shooting was not opened, but perhaps——

Then her alarm subsided. A man, who looked like an Indian, or a lumberman, was pulling at something—it was a beautiful young deer!

Indignation filled her heart. But what could she do? Alone on that water, and that man so near with his gun!

Fortunately, he was so interested in looking at his game that he thought it not worth while to look at whoever might be passing in the skiff; so, once more, Dorothy slid out of danger down the placid stream.

In all her trouble she had kept the little watch and her compass, and just now it occurred to her that by consulting the magnetic instrument she could tell whether she was going in the direction of Everglade.

She paused in her action to look at the trembling needle.

"Yes, I am going toward camp—due east."

How lightly she paddled along! It seemed now that the sanitarium was past finding, for the noise of the bell and the whistle had ceased, and that everything, even the talking of the man to himself as he pulled the deer over his shoulders, was gone, and Dorothy was all alone on the delightful lake, moving toward camp. It all seemed like some horrible dream—all but the thought that she was going back—back to her dear ones, who must be so anxious.

"I hope I have saved poor Miss Bell," she thought. "That girl seemed to dread something more than the mere mistake in taking me in instead of the other patient."

She slowed up, to gather some water lilies. "I'll take them to Cologne," she thought. "I wonder where the girls are? I suppose scouring the country for me. Well, Tavia must have been found, at any rate. Poor foolish Tavia! I hope they have not blamed her."

A gentle swish of the water startled her. She turned to see two canoes approaching!

"Are they after me?" she thought, and her heart jumped. "I must have some excuse ready if they question me. I will just say I am from Camp Capital, and have come out for exercise. They may not know how far away our camp is."

She heard the other paddles in the lake. Then they ceased to cut the water. On either side of her canoe the two other craft suddenly appeared.

"What if this boat is marked!" she thought. "If it should have some lettering to show it is from the sanitarium!"

That was the first time this had occurred to her. But the canoeists were now actually looking very pleasantly at her—two young men. They seemed too well-mannered to speak, and Dorothy wanted so much to speak with them, now that she felt they had no idea of her predicament.

Finally one said: "We beg your pardon, but might you have a bit of canvas, that you could let us take? We have a small leak in the side of this canoe and the water is coming in."

Dorothy breathed a sigh of relief. Then she looked about her boat—although she knew it was quite empty when she slid it into the water.

"I'm afraid not," she replied. "I never carry anything for such an emergency."

"It's a delightful morning," said the other young man, out of pure civility. "Have you been out long?"

"Oh, no, not very—that is, it does not seem long to me," stammered Dorothy still afraid that she would be caught in some new trap. "I love the water."

"You seem to," agreed the young man with the college cap. "We have been out with a searching party. Have you heard of the strange disappearance of two young girls?"

Dorothy gasped. "Two?" she repeated.

"I suppose we ought to say three, since one from a sanitarium has not yet been discovered. But the insane, they say, have some weird manner of attracting self preservation."

"Have they been dragging the lake?" asked Dorothy, her voice all a-tremble.

"No, not yet, although many have wanted to. But we have so many people lost in these woods

every summer, that we feel it is a case of that kind. We suppose the girls, who did not go off together, met later somehow, and in trying to make their way back, got deeper into the woods."

"And their folks from camp?" asked Dorothy.

"We have not been to see them," said the young man, "but some of the boys there are friends of ours, and as soon as we have looked this place over, as well as we can do it, we are going up to Everglade. The girl's father is an old soldier, and they say he is still a soldier in this trouble."

Dorothy felt as if she must speak—must ask them to take her back to the camp, wherever it might be. But suppose they should take her for that demented girl? No, she must find her way on alone. Perhaps she could follow them.

By this time the two canoeists had glided on ahead. Dorothy felt as if her heart would choke her! Then her father was still bearing up, waiting for her! She must soon reach him!

A shout from the bank, and the two young men turned into shore. "Come on," some one called. "We have a clew. Get in here. We must get over to——"

But that was all Dorothy heard, and again she was alone on the lake.

For the space of a moment or so she felt that she had made a mistake, then came the awful thought of that sanitarium, and the knowledge that the people from there were searching everywhere for her.

"No, I will go down the lake a little farther. At least I am free now," she told herself.

It was nearing noon, she could tell by the sun, and she felt the need of food. Just below her she could see that the lake broadened, and there she determined to stop.

Her arms were getting stiff, and the sun burned down on her head, which was uncovered.

"Seems to me I hear voices," she thought. "I must go in to shore."

Gracefully she swung into the grassy bank. No sooner had her paddle sent her boat within reach of shore than she saw——

"Oh, my! It is our camp!" she yelled frantically, jumping out, and attempting to run up the hill toward the barn. But eager ears had heard her voice.

The next moment Dorothy Dale was clasped in the arms of her father.

CHAPTER XXV

ToC

LOOKING FOR TAVIA

What joy there was in that camp when Major Dale actually carried in Dorothy!

A signal had been arranged to notify those in the woods if any good news came, and as Major Dale placed his daughter in the arms of Cologne, Mrs. Markin ran out of doors, and blew the big horn, until she had no more breath left.

This was heard by Jack, Ned and Nat, who were just then preparing to drag the lake.

There were no words to express the joy all felt, but Dorothy looked around for Tavia, and asked frantic questions.

"You must not think of her," insisted Mrs. Markin, bringing in some warm tea. "You have done enough for her. Of course," she hurried to add, seeing the look that came into Dorothy's face, "we will find her, but you are not to leave this camp—well, I don't know when we will let you leave it again."

"Oh, you darling!" Cologne was crying hysterically. "I can never let you out of my sight again! To think that I should have done so in those deep woods."

"I have had a great time exploring," said Dorothy, sipping the refreshing tea, "and I think, Cologne, that there are many kinds of camping days. But if you will only let me go out, I have an idea I know where Tavia might be."

Then she told of her trip on the lake, and how quickly the young canoeists left the water to answer a call of a clew having been found.

Ned stood looking down at Dorothy, to make sure that she was in the flesh. Mrs. White had not been told of Dorothy's disappearance. They felt, however, that they would have had to notify her had Dorothy remained away until another sundown.

Nat was speechless. His handsome face showed the signs of his days and nights of anxiety, and he was not entirely relieved since there was even now no clew to Tavia.

"Let's go up the river," he suggested. "At least Dorothy is safe, and we can leave her, but Tavia ——"

"I could not stay indoors," declared Dorothy. "I should go to pieces! The only thing that will save me is action. Let me help look for Tavia!"

She pleaded and begged, and at last Mrs. Markin agreed that it might be best to let her have the freedom of the air. Of course, Dorothy had not yet told all of her story—all the folks knew definitely was that the lost had been found.

It took scarcely no time for the searching party to be made up again. The boys from the next camp had their craft already on the water, while Ned and Nat had but to push off their rowboat.

"Why do you think Tavia is somewhere about the river edge?" asked Ned in his practical way.

"Because, when I came down I heard some one call, and two young men from their canoes answered promptly that they would follow the clew. Now, if I can only find the spot——"

"Where in the world did this canoe come from?" exclaimed Jack Markin, as he espied the boat in which Dorothy had escaped from the sanatarium. "It is marked 'Blenden!'"

"Blenden!" repeated Ned. "Why that's the asylum over the hill!"

Everybody looked at Dorothy, awaiting a word from her. She was almost like herself now, after the manner in which blessed youth alone can recuperate.

"I was not particular about whose boat it was," she said simply. "So long as I found something to get back to camp in."

"I don't think it right that Dorothy should leave mother," began Cologne. But Dorothy interrupted her.

"Did you ever notice, Cologne dear, how a storm clears? It takes a light wind, doesn't it? Well, this little excitement will clear things up for me."

Wise Dorothy was, of course, not opposed. She belonged to the class of persons who seem to be capable, and who really are, except where their own personal safety or comfort is concerned. They always have a reason and an answer, simply because others do not take the trouble to fathom the motive for this sacrifice. Dorothy had determined to find Tavia, and whatever her excuses, they were all subservient to that motive.

"I would rather get in with Nat and Ned," she said, as the party prepared to get off in the boats. "I am really too tired to scull."

"What's this?" asked Jack, picking up the nurse's garb from the bottom of the sanitarium canoe. "I declare! Dorothy has been masquerading!"

He held up the linen skirt, and the white cap. Of course the very next thing he did was to put the cap on his head.

Every one but Cologne laughed—she seemed too stunned to so soon forget the horror of the loss of Dorothy.

The young ladies from the neighboring camp had decided not to go on the water—in fact their chaperon had refused to allow them to go; "there had been so many horrible accidents around there of late," she declared.

Major Dale stood upon the bank, and watched his daughter. To the others it might seem like a dream, but to him it was very real. Dorothy had been such a daughter, and even now she was proving herself the Major's "little corporal." Nor did Dorothy miss the look that had buried the smile on her father's face.

"Now, when we get that naughty Tavia back," she called, "we will have a celebration, Daddy."

"You bet we will," replied the major warmly. And then the party started down the river.

"I cannot see how Tavia could be along the river bank and not hear us," argued Ned. "Dorothy, you have not told us your story at all. Were you both kidnapped?"

"I have never seen Tavia since that morning we went for berries," she declared. "But my! What an age it has been since then!"

"I guess it has," blustered Nat, in his whole-hearted way, and he bent over his oars. "I don't want another batch of time as long as the last."

"And, of course, you could not get us any word," ventured Ned. "We fell down on that—it was my one mile-stone."

"But it is strange how secret some places can be kept," said Dorothy, cautiously. "It seems that they are so afraid of—publicity. There! That looks like the place where the canoeists went ashore. No, it is farther up, near the willow. We must pull in there and search. I do wish I could have—but what is the use of wishing."

"Mere waste of tissue," said Ned with a smile. He was only a boy—a big boy, but the fright of having lost Dorothy had not left him unscathed.

The others in the boats took the signal from Nat, and were making for shore. It was a rough place indeed; first rocky, then a matter of holes, and after that it was trees—dense, stubborn

trees.

A sense of horror stole over Dorothy as she again stepped into the woods, but in her brave way she instantly decided that it was merely a matter of reflection, and the question in hand was not one of memory, but one of facts. Tavia was still somewhere in those woods, or she was—No, she must be in the woods!

First calling, then running from point to point, the party searched, but Cologne would not lose her hold on Dorothy.

"You are not going to get away from me this time," declared the girl. "I shall always blame myself for losing sight of you."

"Cologne! As if I am not big enough to take care of myself!" cried Dorothy, thinking how she had cared for herself through more difficulties than any of them could possibly imagine.

All through the woods could be heard shouts and signals from the parties that were out searching for Dorothy, for Tavia and for the girl from the sanitarium.

"Lots of people get lost in these woods," commented Ned. "I have been reading of them all my life, but now I guess I can write tales myself."

The voices of our friends had attracted a party from the sanitarium. Dorothy was the first to recognize a guard, and as he came toward her, she screamed and ran into Ned's arms.

"Oh, don't let them take me again!" she begged. "They think I am that other girl! Stay near! Hold me! Don't let them take me!"

Instantly the excitement was intense. From the hospital party two men had come up, while of the campers, Jack, Nat and Ralph hurried close.

"Why should they take you?" demanded Ned.

"Oh, they made the mistake before, and I suppose they have seen their boat."

Quick to act as to think, Ned picked Dorothy up in his arms and turned into a natural hiding place.

"There, they have not seen you! Let them look—further on!" he whispered.

Of course the others could not even guess what had caused the sudden change in Dorothy's manner, but Ned knew it was not mere excitement.

"Here," he said, "is a pillow of moss. You and Cologne stay here, while I go out and see the hospital men. I will assure them no patient of theirs is with us."

Dorothy lay back exhausted. If only they would go along! But suppose they should find Tavia, and take her to that dreadful asylum!

Voices, very near, gave her a chance to listen. She heard some one say that a young girl had that morning escaped from the institution in the house canoe, and that the boat was now lying close by.

But in turning into the deep brush the strange men had not actually caught sight of the frightened girls, as the heavy woodland offered all sorts of excuses for visions.

"Well, we must get her," said one of the men. "She walked right past me, and said 'good morning.' But how was I to know who the new nurse, or the new patient was? The trouble is now with the mother. She is beyond consolation."

CHAPTER XXVI

ToC

DOROTHY'S SUCCESS

The boys from Camp Capital, together with their neighbors, held a consultation there in the woods. They had heard from the sanitarium attendants that, not only had a young girl escaped, and not yet found, but that some weeks previously, a man, "stage-struck," as they put it, had gotten away, and it was to his help that the departure of the girl was attributed. Dorothy, from her hiding place, heard all this, and knew only too well that the man referred to was none other than Morrison.

"And this fellow has been caught?" asked Ned, anxiously.

"Yes," replied one of the men. "We took him in again yesterday afternoon."

"Is he too demented to tell anything? That is, to know who was with him while he was free?" went on Ned.

"Oh, he just talks in a rambling way about a girl who, he declares, should have a fortune that his uncle has hidden away. He has really never been entirely off, but one of the kind who rides a hobby, you know," said the man. "His hobby is theatricals."

"But has he an uncle? Might he have taken a girl to that man?" persisted Ned. "You see, we have reason to believe that the girl we are in search of, met this man. Now, if he has been captured, what has become of her?"

"That's one of the questions we may have to answer before our Board of Inquiry," replied the man with no small concern. "It is easy enough for those lunatics to get away, but to get them back is harder. And the girl's mother is a widow, with all kinds of money."

Dorothy could scarcely keep still. Only the pressure of Cologne's hands kept her from telling what she knew of the story. Then the fear of again being mistaken for Mary Harriwell—that was too great a risk.

"Is there absolutely no clew?" asked Nat, almost in despair, for he was always fond of Tavia.

"Yes. The station agent at Lexington tells a story about a girl coming to him and staying in the station alone all night. But he declares she had dark hair and brown eyes, while Mary Harriwell is a blonde. Others about the station agree with him. That girl left for the Junction night before last, and was not picked up dead or alive since. The officials of the road have had searched every inch of the track. Seems that old Sam Dixon is very worried about this because he let the girl go. He did not know just who she was, but to hear him talk you would think it was his daughter. Well, we must go beating farther along. This searching, and with night coming, is no fun. We wish you luck, and if you find your girl let us know."

So the parties separated and then Dorothy was free to leave her hiding place. She longed to tell her friends the strange story, but she knew that the finding of Tavia was the one and only thing to be thought of just then.

"Are you sure that this is the direction in which the boys went?" asked Nat, with something like a sigh.

Dorothy looked over the rough woodland. "No," she said, "there was a swamp, for I distinctly remember that they picked their way through tall grass, and about here the grass is actually dried up."

"Then to find a swamp," said Nat. "Seems to me there are more kinds of trees in Maine, and more kinds of things to catch at a fellow's——"

A cry from Ned stopped the speech.

"Oh!" he yelled. "Something has my foot! Come quick!"

"Oh, maybe it is a rattlesnake!" gasped Cologne.

"Or maybe a big rat," added Jack, as they all ran back to where Ned lay in the grass, trying to free himself from whatever it was that held him.

"It hurts!" he said. "Get it off!"

Jack was the first to get down and look at the struggling boy.

"A trap!" he announced. "Easy! Don't pull it, Ned."

"More things than trees and lost girls in the Maine woods," exclaimed Nat. "Gee whiz! I wonder what we'll strike next."

"Just take a strike at this trap," begged Ned. "Seems to me it takes—oh! be careful, Jack, that hurts!"

"Let me!" suggested Dorothy. "I can open it, without hurting him," and she stooped over her cousin. "Oh, you poor boy! It has cut right through your shoe. Now, Jack, just hold the end of the chain so that it cannot slip back," she ordered. "Cologne, dear, can you unlace this shoe?"

"Oh, of course," growled Nat, "it takes a girl!"

"Any objections?" asked Ned, getting back to his good humor. "Now if this were Nat it would take a whole boarding school of girls."

Dorothy and Cologne very gently helped the boys get the steel trap free from the shoe. It took some time to do it without pressing the jaws still farther in through the leather, but they succeeded.

"Now, you must go back in the boat," decided Dorothy. "We cannot run the risk of having your foot poisoned."

"Never!" declared Ned. "I have often had worse than this, and have gone on after the game."

He got to his feet, but limped as he walked The foot had been lacerated.

"What foolish hunters ever put that trap there?" he asked.

"I would not be surprised if it were the man who shot the deer," replied Dorothy, as if the others knew of that happening.

"Shot a deer! At this season!" exclaimed Jack.

"Oh, I think he was an Indian. I saw him as I came along in the canoe," replied Dorothy. "I thought at the time it was against the law. Can you walk, Ned? I do wish you would go back."

"Seems to me we ought to separate," interposed Ralph. "We can never make any headway by searching all together."

"Well, I will not leave Dorothy," declared Cologne, stoutly. "I left her once——"

"No, I left *you* once," corrected Dorothy, in her own way of always taking the blame. "I think, however, Ralph is right. Suppose the boys keep along the water, and Cologne and I go farther in."

"Then I go with you," said Ralph gallantly. "It is not altogether safe in the deep woods. There might be lunatics——"

"Or muskrat traps," groaned Ned, who walked with difficulty.

At this they separated.

For some time they heard nothing more than their own voices calling back and forth.

"Isn't it awful?" sighed Cologne. "Dorothy, I think it is utterly useless. I am afraid she is—dead."

"I know she is not," declared Dorothy, "and I am not going to give up until I have searched every inch of this wood. Now I am going to shout!"

"Tavia! Tavia!" she yelled, and her clear voice struck an echo against the hills. "Tavia! Tavia!" she called again.

"Hark!" said Cologne. "Didn't I hear——"

"I heard something!" declared Dorothy, and the sound came from back of the hill. "Boys! Boys!" she shouted, but they were now too far away to answer promptly. "Don't try to follow, Cologne. I feel that I can run like the wind. I heard Tavia's voice, and I heard it—right—over—there!"

As she flew through the woods Cologne, in distress, tried to summon the boys. She feared Dorothy would fall again, over some rock or cliff. But there was no use trying to stop her. She had heard Tavia's voice, and that was enough.

CHAPTER XXVII

ToC

ONE KIND OF CAMP

"Oh, Tavia! Where are you?"

It was Dorothy who jumped from rock to stone, and over bush and bramble, through that deep dark wood, which now, in the shadow of sunset, threatened again to bring anguish to our young friends. "I heard you," she called. "Answer again!"

But this time there was no response.

"Oh, what can have happened?" wailed Dorothy. "Surely she is—not too ill—when she called and whistled just now."

She was talking, but no one was at hand to hear her.

Cologne was doing her best to reach Dorothy, but she had made a turn to notify the boys, and was really too surprised, and frightened, to make anything like the progress that her friend was able to make through the rough forest.

Dorothy stopped and listened. She had reached a cleared spot, where the branches of a beautiful fir stood out over a greensward, like a natural tower. Without hesitating a moment, Dorothy easily scaled the strong branches, and presently could see from the height of the fir tree a spot—ideal! Yes, and there was something white on it!

"Cologne!" she called. "I see a tent!"

By this time Cologne had reached Dorothy.

"Oh, do come down," she begged. "If you should slip——"

"But I shall not slip. There was no use in running wild through the woods, when I could get a distinct view from here. It may be a gypsy camp. Where are the boys?"

"They seem to have gotten away, somehow," sighed Cologne. "Oh, what shall we do? We cannot go alone to that camp."

"Indeed I am going," declared Dorothy. "I heard Tavia's voice, and now I see a tent. If she is

held there, we must go to her at once."

Cologne was terrified, but the experience through which Dorothy had passed in the last few days seemed to make all other fears look insignificant.

She had slid down the tree, and was now making her way in the direction of the tent. It was near the edge of a natural bank, that stood like a wind-shield against the rocks.

This shelf made a covering for the spot, so that only from some elevation such as from the tree could it be seen for any distance.

"Come on, Cologne," said Dorothy. "I see a path to the place. It must be somebody's camp."

"Why not wait for the boys? Give me your whistle. I must call them. Where can they have gone to?"

"I am not going to wait one moment," declared Dorothy. "She may be suffering!"

The bent grass and weeds showed the way, Dorothy hurried along, only stopping to listen for the hoped-for voice. But there was no word from Tavia.

Cologne was almost behind Dorothy, but she could not conquer her fear. She hesitated to make the first attempt to reach the tent.

Jumping over a small stream, Dorothy was beside the camp furnace. The next moment she stood looking at Tavia!

"Tavia!" she exclaimed.

"Hush!" whispered Tavia. "We must not wake her. Oh, Dorothy!"

Like a poor, crushed bird Tavia fell at Dorothy's feet. She sobbed convulsively, but choked back every possible sound.

"Darling!" whispered Dorothy. "What is it?"

"The sick girl! She has almost died!" sighed Tavia. "Oh, I dared not answer again. She was so frightened at my voice!"

"Run back, Cologne, and meet the boys," said Dorothy. "Tell them to go for a doctor!"

Glad to get away, Cologne turned, just as the boys came racing over the hill. They stopped, at her raised hand of warning, but Nat would not go back when he heard that Tavia had been found. Softly he made his way along, Ralph following at some distance, while Ned and Jack hurried to the shore near where they had left their boats. They knew that just across the river they would find a camp, in which might be found Dr. Ashton, from New York.

It was almost pitiable to see how Tavia clung to Dorothy, never suspecting, of course, that Dorothy had herself gone through an experience more trying than her own.

"Let me see her," suggested Dorothy. "I will be very careful."

She stepped within the tent. Instantly she was struck with the resemblance between herself and the girl who lay on the cot.

The sick girl opened her eyes.

"Tavia!" she murmured.

"What, dear?" asked Dorothy, for Tavia had not yet recovered herself.

"I—am so—much better. I would—like to—sit up."

"Not just yet, dear," soothed Dorothy, putting her hand to the hot forehead. "It will be better to rest to-night."

"But you—must not stay—longer—from your friends," she said. "Leave me, and look for them. Then come back."

"We are here," ventured Dorothy, aware that the girl was worrying about Tavia. "We have come to take you both home."

"Not back there!" and the girl sat bolt upright, and looked into Dorothy's pale face.

"No, to camp, with us, with Dorothy and with Tavia. Then we will send for your mother."

"Oh, I am so glad," she sighed, lying back on the pillow.

Nat had Tavia in his arms. She was now almost hysterical, and like the Nat he had always been, he turned the tables by accusing Tavia of having all the camping to herself.

"While we were digging up frog ponds looking for you," he scolded, "here you had set yourself up in one of the best establishments in the State."

"Oh, Nat," she sobbed. "If you only knew!"

"Every girl says that," he replied. "I suppose it would be a first rate thing if a fellow did only know—about a girl like you." He was doing his best to quiet her, and he knew that to scold is a good sort of treatment for too much nerves.

Meanwhile Cologne and Ralph had ventured nearer. They seemed afraid that a voice would harm some one, and Cologne only whispered.

"Tavia dear," she said, "whatever has happened?"

"She has promised to tell me first," said Nat, again showing his good sense in saving Tavia just then. "And we are not to hear one word until we get back to camp."

"Here come Ned, and Jack, and Doctor Ashton," interrupted Ralph. "Who is sick?"

"A friend of Tavia's, with whom she was stopping," said the wily Nat. "That was why she could not get word to us. Her friend was very sick, and her folks were all away."

Tavia looked her gratitude into Nat's manly face. The boys and the doctor had reached the tent.

"Wait here," ordered the doctor as he stepped within.

And it was Dorothy Dale who took up her place by the physician's side, as he did all that he could to unfold the case of Mary Harriwell.

"And how ever did you find this camp, one of the best for miles around?" asked Nat of Tavia, as they awaited the doctor's verdict.

"We fell into it. Whose is it?"

"Why the Babbitts left in a hurry last week—some one ill. They have not sent down for their things yet."

"Lucky for us," remarked Tavia. Then they heard the doctor moving about in the tent, and lowered their voices.

CHAPTER XXVIII

ToC

GOOD NEWS

"Oh, such good news!" exclaimed Dorothy, emerging from the tent. "It is worth all our trouble."

"What!" asked a chorus.

"She will be better! She has recovered her reason. The doctor says some shock——"

"Oh, but it was an awful shock," interrupted Tavia. "I believe if I had any reason it would have destroyed mine."

"Always knew there was a method in your madness, Tavia," said Nat. "Now, that's something like!"

"We are going to take her to camp to-night," went on Dorothy, too serious to take a joke. "Doctor Ashton says nothing could be better for her."

"There are camps, and camps," persisted Nat.

Ned was talking to the doctor. "We can carry her on the cot, just as well as not," insisted Nat. "There are four of us."

"And put her in the boat—well, I think that will be all right," answered the doctor. "The present trouble is more of a morbid fear than anything else," and he put his stethoscope in its case. "As soon as she feels the fresh air, and realizes that she is out of all harm's way, I think she will——"

"Sit up and take notice," interrupted Nat, for he could not help making light of the troubles with which he felt the girls were too heavily burdened.

"Exactly that," agreed the doctor. "Miss Harriwell could not have fallen into better hands. I will, however, see her safely into the boat."

It was a delightful task to assist the sick girl, realizing what it would mean ultimately. Dorothy insisted that Tavia go on ahead with Cologne, as she had had, Dorothy said, enough of nursing. But Tavia wanted to leave some word at the tent—a written word about its use. To this no one would agree, so she was obliged to go on without doing as she wished.

Down the cliffs started the party. Tavia, with Cologne, was soon joined by three of the Hays girls, from the next camp, who, although they had not been allowed to go with the searching party, managed to follow them at a distance, and who had heard of the discovery when the boys went for the doctor.

Then came the boys, Ned, Nat, Ralph, and Jack, carrying Molly on a cot. Dorothy held Molly's hand, and talked cheerfully to her as they all moved carefully along.

Doctor Ashton had reason to be particularly interested. It was he who had taken his vacation from the sanitarium when Molly made her escape.

He, too, had been impressed by the similarity between Dorothy and Molly, but, of course, he did not speak of it; neither did he know of the trouble which that resemblance had made for Dorothy.

The trip on the water was made without a mishap, and, as the doctor said, Molly gained strength and courage with almost every new breath.

Then to the camp! Dorothy ran on ahead, for Molly was walking.

"Oh, what has happened now?" asked Mrs. Markin, seeing the boys supporting Molly.

"Nothing but good news this time," replied Dorothy. "We have found Tavia, we have found a sick girl, and we have brought them all back to have a good time at Camp Capital."

This was good news indeed—Dorothy always knew how to cheer.

"Welcome!" announced the lady, planting a kiss on Dorothy's now flushed cheek. "There is a visitor waiting for you," he added.

"For me?"

Mary Bell, the nurse, stepped out on the camp porch. She was smiling, and all the anxiety had left her face.

"You little robber!" she said to Dorothy. "Where are my clothes?"

But before she could get a reply she saw Mary Harriwell. She was too well trained to need an explanation of the case as it stood now.

There were, to her, two Mary Harriwells!

"Twins!" was all that Mrs. Markin could say, as she helped the sick girl up the steps.

Miss Bell instantly took charge of Molly. She was removed to a quiet room in the camp barn, away from all noise and all confusion.

"Daddy," whispered Dorothy, as the major stood looking lovingly at her, "come on."

She led him to the stable, where the old horse Jeff stood waiting to take his part in the important work.

"Let's hitch up and drive over to Blenden. We can make it before dark, and I want to be the first to tell Mrs. Harriwell. I could never trust to a message."

With a word to Mrs. Markin, the major agreed. It was not so long a journey when the straight road was taken—it was the turns and twists that led every one astray. But Major Dale knew the road, and he and Dorothy went merrily on, with words of love and tenderness that only such a father and daughter know how to exchange.

Dorothy learned that the boys, Roger and Joe, had not heard a word of her trouble, and she at once determined not to tell even her father all that she had suffered. She had to explain, of course, about being in the sanitarium, but about the Hobbs imprisonment, she decided to say nothing.

Reaching the sanitarium, Dorothy shuddered as she asked the guards at the gate if she might see the superintendent, but when the man doffed his cap to the distinguished looking major, Dorothy again gained her composure.

Mrs. Harriwell sat in the hall, and was evidently much distressed.

Dorothy stepped up to her, and the woman started.

"Molly!" she gasped. Then she saw her mistake.

"But we have come to take you to Molly," said Dorothy, "and I want to be the first to tell you the good news! Molly is better!"

"Better!" repeated the woman vaguely, the deep lines of trouble shadowing her pale face.

"Yes, she wants to see you—she knows all about everything——"

"Your daughter, madam," said Major Dale, "has recovered her reason."

"Impossible!" gasped the poor mother.

"Not at all," declared the major. "But come along, and you will see for yourself."

An attendant had stepped up, and was looking curiously at Dorothy. She took her father's hand.

"Any word?" asked the nurse.

"Not for you," replied Mrs. Harriwell with dignity, "I find there are better places than sanitariums for—nervous girls. Come along, sir. Thank you," as she took the major's arm, and left the place.

How that mother listened to Dorothy's words! That her daughter had talked as Dorothy said, that she was at a nearby camp—— Oh, it was good news indeed!

"And she is going to stay with us," Dorothy warned her. "We will not let her go to any more hospitals."

"Never!" exclaimed the mother firmly. "Molly may stay any place she chooses. She is all I have, and I so nearly lost her!"

It was a beautiful evening. The sun had just set. Over the hills could be seen tents, their flags

flying and their happy young and old owners could be heard singing, calling, and shouting; could be seen building fires, and doing all the thousand and one absurd things that humanity insists upon doing every time it gets the chance.

"It is lovely to camp," ventured Dorothy. "We have had rather an interrupted season, but I hope now we shall make up for it."

"If money will help you, it shall be yours," declared the anxious woman, "for my daughter has more than she can ever use."

Dorothy looked at her in silence. Then it was well indeed to have been lost and found, for the sake of this dear girl!

"This is our camp," said Dorothy, as they reached it.

Mrs. Harriwell fairly ran up those barn steps.

But who would try to tell what happened when she found her daughter?

CHAPTER XXIX

ToC

THE ROUND-UP—CONCLUSION

"It's up to Tavia!"

"I have told you every word I am going to tell," she declared.

"Oh, no you haven't," objected Nat. "I want to know about that stagey fellow. I don't quite fancy his interference."

"He didn't interfere," declared Tavia, "and I am not going over that thing again."

"Oh, no, he didn't interfere," repeated Ned. "He merely had it all his own way. Now, if I had long hair——"

"Ned," interrupted Dorothy, "please don't. You must remember that the poor fellow was not responsible."

"Lucky dog," murmured Ned, giving Cologne one of his favorite looks (Ned had a fancy for Cologne).

"Then I think that Dorothy ought to tell her part," insisted Jack. "We have heard rumors of terrible things!"

"Mere rumors," said Dorothy with a laugh, "Why shouldn't I be entitled to my own experience? Haven't I paid it all back to you?"

"Nope. Not for the shoe that caught in the trap," said Ned facetiously.

"Nor for visiting absolute strangers like those Hobbses," added Cologne, "and they are completely out of our set."

"Well, I don't mind," agreed Jack. "We have found Molly."

"Jackie, you do know a good thing when you see it," complimented Ned.

Molly sat out on the low camp stool very close to Jack, and it was plain there was no objection on the part of either as to this particular closeness.

"Ralph says nothing——" began Tavia.

"But saws wood," added Ned, with a wink, for Ralph seemed to have appropriated Dorothy.

Altogether they were a happy set of campers. It was only ten days since the close of that distressing search, that had taken up so many of their camping days, but there was still left plenty of time for the best of outings, which their keenness after their troubles made the more merry.

Camp Dorothy was the name of the new tent that Mrs. Harriwell had sent up immediately after her daughter's installation with the campers. With the express came two maids, one for work, and the other to look after Molly. Mrs. Harriwell had to be content with stopping at a nearby hotel, but every day she came over to the camp, and really was almost like a young girl herself, so great was her joy in the sudden restoration of her daughter's health. It developed that the sick girl's case had been one of pure melancholia, following a shock of grief, and that her association with Dorothy and her friends was the one thing she most needed. The second shock, in falling,

had restored her reason.

But Tavia could not forget that her fault had caused great trouble to Dorothy, and try as the latter did, she could not get Tavia to resume her usual good spirits.

"But it takes Nat," whispered Cologne, as he and Tavia sauntered off to catch imaginary trout. "Needn't worry about Tavia's nerves."

"I move," said Ralph, "that the—heroine—ahem, be excused from duty for the period of two weeks. Every time I ask Dorothy to go for a sail, she has to wash dishes."

Dorothy blushed prettily. "I must do my share of the housekeeping," she insisted. "Besides—it's fun."

Ralph was not to be put off this time, however, and he declared that if Dorothy did not go for a sail with him that very afternoon—he—would—drown—himself.

"Oh, such luck!" shouted Ned. "Too many fellows around here——"

Major Dale stood watching, but hardly listening.

"What's the answer, Uncle?" asked Ned, seeing that the major had something to say.

"I have just been wondering," he said with a twinkle in his eye, "what would have happened if Dorothy had not gone up that tree. And you boys——"

"That's all," interrupted Nat, who had returned to the group. "You are excused."

"I have been wondering," put in Mrs. Harriwell, who, with Mrs. Markin, was enjoying the afternoon on the porch within hearing distance, "what would have happened if Dorothy had not been mistaken for Molly. It was a lucky mistake."

But Dorothy insisted she had done nothing extraordinary. Yet she could not help but wonder what would happen next. And what did happen will be told in another book, to be called, "Dorothy Dale's School Rivals," in which we shall learn the particulars of some stirring doings at Glenwood Academy.

"All the same," declared Tavia, a little sheepishly, "I don't believe it pays to try to keep Dorothy out when there's a question of——"

"Common sense," finished Cologne. "There's the cowbell. And it's Tavia's turn to cook supper!"

Tavia sprang up and darted down the path. Nat followed.

"She hasn't learned to work yet," commented Cologne. She never knew a thing about how Tavia darned the station master's socks.

Camp Dorothy had been closed tight all day. As tea-time struck, the maid threw up the big flap. "Surprise! Surprise!" she called, and such a feast as was spread! The very best that could be obtained for miles about Everglade.

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