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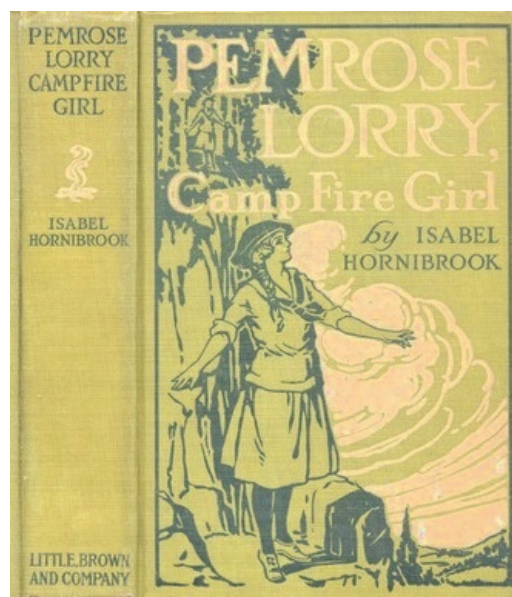
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### PEMROSE LORRY CAMP FIRE GIRL

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By ISABEL HORNIBROOK

—  
DRAKE OF TROOP ONE  
SCOUT DRAKE IN WAR TIME  
COXSAIN DRAKE OF THE SEASCOOTS  
PEMROSE LORRY: CAMP FIRE GIRL

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Not a remote sign of a biplane decorated the sky overhead.  
FRONTISPIECE. *See page 171.*

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# PEMROSE LORRY

## CAMP FIRE GIRL

BY  
ISABEL HORNIBROOK

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY  
NANA FRENCH BICKFORD



BOSTON  
LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY  
1921

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Norwood Press

TO THE MEMORY OF MY MOTHER, VETERAN AUTHOR,  
WHO FIRST HAD AN ADMIRATION FOR THE  
WISE WOMAN WHO SAVED THE CITY,  
THIS STORY IS DEDICATED.

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## PREFACE

THIS, the first story written upon the latest and unique conquest of the age, the conquest of empty Space, with the subsequent reaching out to the Heavenly Bodies, has the permission of the conquering inventor, Professor Robert H. Goddard.

May it bring to every Camp Fire in America, and to boys as well, the romance of the transcendent achievement, beside which all dressing of fiction pales!

The Author also acknowledges her indebtedness to Professor Frank G. Speck for permission to reprint the music of the Leaf Dance.

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PEMROSE LORRY  
CAMP FIRE GIRL

# CHAPTER I

## A QUAKER GUN

1

"AND will the Thunder Bird really lay its egg upon the moon? Such a hard egg, too! Will it-really-drop a pound weight of steel upon the head of the Man in the Moon?... Oh! de-ar Mammy Moon-what a shock she'll get."

The girl, the fifteen-year-old Camp Fire Girl-all but sixteen now-to whom Mammy Moon had been the fairy foster-mother of her childhood, ever since she lay, wakeful, in her little cot, looking up at that silvery face of a burnt-out satellite, picturing it the gate of Heaven and her mother's spirit as bathed in the soft, lunar radiance behind it, caught her breath with a wild little gasp whose triumph was a sob upon the still laboratory air.

2

"Lay its egg in a nest of the moon! A dead nest! It will do more than that, little Pem!" Toandoah, the inventor, turned from fitting a number of tiny sky-rockets into the supply chamber of a larger one,-turned with that living coal of fire in his eye which only the inventor can know, and looked upon his daughter. "Yes, it will do more than that! The Thunder Bird will lay its golden egg for us-if it drops its expiring one upon the moon. It will send us back the first record from space, the very first information as to what it may be that lies up-away up-a couple of hundred miles, or so, above us, in the outer edges of the earth's atmosphere of which less is known at present than of the deepest soundings of the ocean. Our Thunder Bird will be the-first-explorer."



"Oh! de-ar Mammy Moon-what a shock she'll get." Page 2.

The man's eyes were dim now. For a moment he saw as in a prism the work of his fingers, those little explosive rockets-the charges of smokeless powder-which being discharged automatically in flight, would send the Thunder Bird upon its magic way, roaring its challenge to the world to listen, switching its rose-red tail of light.

3

Then-then as the mist cleared those deep, glowing eyes of his became to his daughter a magic lantern by which she saw a series of pictures thrown upon the sheeting whitewash of the laboratory wall, culminating in one which was almost too dazzling for mortal girl of fifteen-though born of a great inventor-to bear.

"And to think," she cried, rising upon tiptoe, swaying there in the February sunlight, "just to think that it's a Camp Fire Girl-a Camp Fire Girl of America-with the eyes of the world upon her, who will push the button, throw the switch upon a mountain-top, launch the Thunder Bird upon its glor-i-ous way, send off-send off the first earth-valentine to Mammy Moon!... Oh! Toandoah-oh! Daddy-man-it's too much."

4

Pemrose Lorry clasped her hands. Her blue-star eyes, blue at the moment as the tiny blossoms of the meadow star-grass for which some fairy has captured a sky-beam, were suddenly wet.

A slim, girlish figure in forest green-last sylvan word in Camp Fire uniforms which she was trying on-she hung there, poised upon an inner pinnacle, while sunbeams racing down the whitewash did obeisance before her, while spectroscopes, lathes and delicate balances, brilliant reflectors, offered her a brazen crown.

“Well-well, it’s coming to you, Pem-you sprite.” Her father shot a sidelong glance at the nixie green as he fitted another little rocket into its groove in the larger one’s interior, where the touch of a mechanical appliance, like the trigger of a gun, in the Thunder Bird’s tail, would ignite it in flight. “You alone, girl as you are, know the full secret of the Thunder Bird, as you romantically call it, the principle on which I am working, child-in so far as you can understand it-in creating this model rocket for experiments and the master sky-rocket, the full-fledged Thunder Bird, later, to soar even to the moon itself-Mars, too, maybe-you alone know and you have kept it dark. You’ve plugged like a boy at your elementary physics in high school, so’s to be *able* to understand and sympathize-you’ve lived up to the name I gave you-”

5

“My chowchow name!” interjected the girl, winking slily.

“Well! it is a mixture.” Her father echoed her chuckle. “But I guess you’ve been son and daughter both, you good little pal-you sprite of the lab.”

“Oh! Toandoah-oh! Daddy-man-I’m so glad.”

Here there was a little laboratory explosion, a rocket of feeling fired off, as the owner of that hybrid name, Pemrose, came down from her pinnacle and, perching upon a low tool-chest at the inventor’s side, took the humbler place she loved,-fellow of her father’s heart.

6

“I-I used to wish I was all boy until I became a Camp Fire Girl; that bettered the betty element a little,” she confided, the spice of her mixed cognomen floating in her eye.

It was a joke with her, that chowchow name-original mixture-and how she came by it.

Her father, Professor Guy Noel Lorry, Fellow of Nevil University,-Toandoah, the inventor, she called him,-wearing his symbol, a saw-toothed triangle, embroidered with her own upon her ceremonial dress-had at one time almost prayed for a son, a boy who might help him to realize the dream, even then taking hold upon his heart, of conquering not the air alone but space-zero space, in which it was thought nothing could travel-so that old Earth might reach out to her sister planets.

7

He planned to call the boy Pemberton after his own father.

Likewise the mother of the maiden in green now seated upon the tool-box had longed for a daughter and aspired to name her Rose, in tender memory of a dear college chum, a flower no longer blooming upon earth.

And when the little black-haired mite in due time came, when she opened upon her father eyes blue as the empyrean he hoped to conquer, he had cried out of a core of transport lurking in the very heart of disappointment: “Oh! by Jove, I can’t quite give up my dream: let’s name her Pemrose. If she had been a boy, I’d have called her Pem.”

The young mother blissfully agreed-and did not live long to call her anything.

Grown to girlhood, the sprite of the laboratory, who had looked through a spectroscope at seven, clapping her small hands over the fairy colors-pure red, orange, green, blue, violet, separated by little dark, thread-like lines, each representing some element in that far-away upper air which her father hoped to master-preferred for herself the boyish Pem to the oft-worn Rose.

8

But in order to square accounts with what she called the “betty” element in her, she evened things up on becoming a Camp Fire Girl by choosing a name all feminine wherewith to be known by the Council Fire.

Wantaam, signifying Wisdom-a Wise Woman-was the title she bore as one who wore the Fire Maker’s bracelet upon her wrist and had pledged herself to tend as her fathers had tended and her fathers’ fathers since time began, that inner, mystic flame which has lit man’s way to progress from the moment when he forged a bludgeon to conquer his own world, until, to-day, when he was inventing a Bird to invade others.

9

And it was that Wise Woman who spoke now; she, of all others, who knew the secret of the magic Thunder Bird; and who, trustworthy to the core, had “kept it dark.”

“Oh! if I’ve ‘plugged’ hard in the past over those fierce first principles of mechanics, electricity, optics, heat and the rest-and those ‘grueling’ laws of gravitation-that’s just nothing, a scantling compared to the way I’m going to study and make a hit when I get on into college,” she cried; “so-so that, some day, I can, really, work with you, Toandoah-you record-breaking inventor-oh! dearest father ever was.”

Laughingly, passionately she flung an arm around the neck of the man in the long, drab laboratory coat, half strangling him as he bent over the two-foot model rocket, testing it with his soul in his finger-tips, from its cone-shaped steel head to its steering compartment, thence to the supply chamber with all the little propelling rockets in it, down to its complicated nozzle, or tail.

10

“Why-why! there’s no knowing what you and I may be doing yet, when we strain our wits to cracking, is there, Daddy-man?” she exulted further. “You say, yourself, that once space is conquered, that horribly cold old zero space outside the earth’s atmosphere, anything devised that will move through it, as our Thunder Bird can do, then-then there’s no limit! We might be shooting a passenger off to the moon now, provided the Man in the Moon would shoot him back,” gayly, “if only the master sky-rocket, twelve times as large as this little model you’re working on for experiments, were ready. The re-al moon-going Thunder Bird! Oh, dear!” Her little fingers restlessly intertwined. “How-how I can har-rdly wait to throw the switch upon a mountaintop and-watch it *tear*, as the college boys say!”

11

"Sometimes-sometimes I'm inclined to think it will never 'tear'; that another than I will be the first to reach the heavenly bodies." Toandoah sighed. "For where are the funds coming from, Pem, the little bonanza-fairy gold-mine-necessary to gorge our Thunder Bird for its record flight-fit it out for its novel migration to the moon, eh?" The inventor clasped his hands behind his head, whistling ruefully. "Funds, child! Already, it has pecked through the biggest slice of mine!"

"Ah! but-ah! but-" the girl suddenly flashed upon him a sky-blue wink-"ah! but the third *nut* hasn't been cracked yet, remember, for the Bird to peck at that. Isn't it in four weeks from now-oh! in five-" the slight figure swaying like the blue-eyed grass upon its tall green stem, blown by a wild breeze-"in five weeks from now that the third drawer will be opened, containing the third and last installment of Mr. Hartley Graham's queer, queer drawn-out will. When it is-oh! when it is-maybe, then, at last, there will be something coming to the University, our University, to benefit your inventions, Daddy."

"My child! when that third nut is cracked, 'twill only benefit a 'nut'." The man chuckled drily now. "In other words, the remainder of Friend Hartley's fortune, all that his sister, Mrs. Grosvenor, hasn't already got, will still be held in trust by me, as executor of the will, for-for that griffin of a younger brother of his who cleared out over twenty years ago and hasn't sent a line to his family since."

"Was Mr. Treffrey Graham-really-such a-zany?" Pem asked the question for the nineteenth time, her black eyebrows arching.

"My word! 'Was he?' A-a regular hippogriff he was, child! A hot tamale, like that Mexican fruit which burns you if you bite into it! At college one could hardly come near him without getting scorched by his tricks. Remember my telling you about my putting in an appearance in class one day-Physics 3-boasting of the latest thing in student's bags, setting it down beside me-and not seeing it again for three weeks? The terrible Treff, of course! The climax came, as you know, when he locked a gray-haired professor into the padded cell for opposing baseball too early in the season, while the campus was still soft."

"Mer-rcy! And kept him there for ages-in that stuffy little room, all wadded and lined with brown burlap, used for analyzing sound-the prof not able to make himself heard!"

The listener, girl-like, drew fresh excitement from a faded tale.

"Yes-that meant expulsion, of course, and his family, one and all, turning a cold shoulder on Treff, before he went away for good-nobody knew where. His engagement was broken off. His brother Hartley saw to that-married the girl himself."

"I wonder-I wonder if the Terrible Treff ever married?" Pem musingly nursed her chin,-and with it a wildfire interest in the "hot tamale."

"I heard he did. Somebody said so-somebody who met him out West, years ago-that he was a widower, with a little son. But-apparently-he has no more use for his family."

"No more-no more than his sister, Mrs. Grosvenor, has for us since you were made executor of that outlandish will, left, piecemeal in three drawers, to be opened on the first three anniversaries of Mr. Graham's death-and not her husband!" Now it was an entirely new breeze of excitement, a stiffening, pinching draught, which swept the forest-green figure upon the tool-chest until its voice grew thin and sharp and edged as the blades in the box beneath it. "Oh-h, yes! she's at daggers dr-rawn with us now-on her high ropes all the time, as you'd say. And-and she sneers at your inventions, father! She calls the rocket, the rocket," half-hysterically, "the moon-reaching rocket,-a Quaker gun-a Quaker gun that'll never be fired, never go off-never hit anything!... *Oh-h!*"

With her hand to her green breast at the insult, the girl bounded, blindly as a ball, from her box, across the laboratory-and on to a low platform.

Through her raging young body there shot like a physical cramp the knowledge that Quakers, noble-hearted Friends, did not use any guns; that the mocking term was but a by-word, a jesting synonym for all that was impotent-non-existent in reason and power-a dummy.

Savagely she applied her eye to the tall, ten-foot spectroscope rearing its brazen height from this low pedestal.

Without, beyond the glaring white-washed laboratory, was a February world, equally white, of zero ice and snow.

Through the spectroscope she saw a world in flames-blood-red.

It was not more flaming than her thoughts.

Her father's transcendent invention just a faddist's dream! The Thunder Bird a joke-a *Quaker Gun!*

"Bah!" Convulsively her little teeth bit into her lower lip as she adjusted the telescope portion of the instrument for analyzing light-reducing it to prismatic hues-a little.

And now, lo! a world brilliantly jaundiced-her orange-the snow being a wonderful reflector of the sun's divided rays.

"Father! Father-r! I used to love Una Grosvenor. Now I h-hate her! If her mother made that horrid speech about a Quaker gun, she repeated it, before all the boys and girls in our Drama Class, too! If I see her this afternoon at the Ski Club, the skiing party out at Poplar Hill, I shan't speak

to her. And we used to be so chummy! Why—" the girl fluttered now, a green weathercock, upon the two-foot platform—"why, we used to stand side by side and measure eyelashes, to see which pair was going to be the longer. I'll wager mine are now!"

With a veering laugh the weathercock was here bent forward, striving to catch some brazen glimpse of a winking profile in the polished brass of the spectroscope.

Her father laughed: this was the Rose side of her-of his maiden of the patchwork name-the Rose side of her, and he loved it!

"But-but Poplar Hill! Poplar Hill! Why! that's away outside the city line-out at Merryville," he exclaimed, a minute later, in consternation. "Goodness! child, you're not going off there to ski to-day-in a zero world, everything snowbound, no trolley cars running?"

"Oh! the trains-the trains aren't held up, father." The coaxing weathercock now had a green arm around the neck of the man in the long, drab coat. "And I just couldn't give up going! I'm becoming such a daring ski-runner, Daddy-man; you'll be proud of me when you see! Why! I can almost herring-bone uphill; and I'm getting the kick-turn 'down fine.' Darting, gliding, stemming, jumping downhill-oh! it's such perfect fun, such creamy fun; I'm not a girl any longer, I'm just a swallow."

"One swallow doesn't make a summer; all this doesn't change the weather." The inventor glanced anxiously through a window.

"No, but it's such a very short train-run. Puff! only six miles on the two o'clock express bound north, why-why! the very train that you and I will be taking, later, Daddy-man, along in May, when you try out experiments with that little model rocket you're working on now, upon old Mount Greylock-highest mountain of the State. Oh-h! if ever a girl's thumb itched, mine does to press the little electric button and start it off, to fly up a couple of hundred miles, or so, to send you back your golden egg, sreee-the first record from space. Oh! through all the fun of slope and snow I'll be thinking of that the entire time to-day-the whole, enduring, livelong time. Yes!"

---

## CHAPTER II GIMCRACK ICE

SHE was thinking of it two hours later-having gained her coaxing point-seated in the well-nigh empty parlor car of the north-bound express, that green-aisled Pullman being the first car behind the cab and plodding engine which, regardless of schedule, crept along slowly and warily to-day upon ice-shod rails.

But as she caressed the honorable thumb-the little girlish member which would press the button while all the world wondered-and peered out through a window fairly frosted, lo! again she saw a landscape dimly in flames-blood-red-as viewed through the spectroscope of her own raging thoughts.

For ice was within the car, as without.

There-there, seated almost on a line with her, on the other side of the moss-green aisle, and only three other distant passengers in the compartment, was the girl whose caricaturing tongue had repeated the indelible insult about a Quaker gun; whose mother considered her father a mere chuckle-headed dreamer, with his visions of bridging the absolute zero of space-just a mild three hundred degrees, or so, lower than the biting breath of Mother Earth at the present moment-and reaching worlds far away amid the starry scope.

Pemrose had kept her word about not speaking. She just dropped one pointed little icicle in the shape of a nod upon her one-time friend as she sank into her own swivel chair and threw off the heavy coat with which she had covered her ski-runner's silken wind-jacket and belted skiing costume of pure, creamy wool, with its full freedom of knickerbockers.

"There's Una-Una Grosvenor!" Her face frosted over at the thought. "Oh, mer-rcy! how I hate her-shall everlastingly hate her-for passing on that sneer about the Thunder Bird.... And I know-ow her eyelashes aren't as long as mine now!"

Mingled spice was in the furtive glance which Toandoah's little pal, his maiden of the chowchow name, threw across the narrow train-aisle at the delicate young profile opposite, outlined against a crusted window.

"And she still has that funny little near-sighted stand in one of her dark eyes, too-Una! Although they're pretty eyes-I'll admit that!" mused the critic further. "Goodness! won't she open them one of these days when the world is all ringing with talk of Dad and his rocket: when the Thunder Bird, the finished, full-fledged Thunder Bird, undertakes its hundred-hour flight to the moon.... For, oh! I know-ow that it will go, some day-some day." The girl stared passionately now into the future in the frostscript of the pane near her. "Man would not let it fail, God *could* not let it fail-just for lack of funds-however that third nut may turn out-that third section of a queer will!"

And now the mulled world outside changed again, shading from blood-red to fairy rose-color as seen through the spectroscope of hope.

She became lost in the most magnificent dream that ever entranced a Camp Fire Girl yet-with any hope of fulfillment.

Standing of a starless night upon a lofty mountain-top, she was looking up at Mammy Moon, dear, silver-footed Queen, so near to the heart of every Earth-daughter!

In the darkness she felt the eyes of the whole world upon her-she but a satellite reflecting her father's light-its joint ear was bent to catch the wild, triumphal song-sob of her heart.

And at the words: "Ready! Shoot!", Toandoah's battle-cry, she was pressing the electric button which, connected with a switch in the Thunder Bird's tail, would start it off, pointed directly for the moon, to light up that silver disc with a bright powder-flash visible here on earth.

24

She was mesmerized by its wild, red eye. She was watching it switch its rosy tail feathers, two hundred feet long, that dashing explorer, as, roaring, it leaped from its mountain platform at incredible speed for an incredible flight.

She was echoing the college boys' untamed slogan: "Watch it tear; oh! watch it tear-the fire-eater."

She....

But what-what was this? Was she tearing with it? Was she, she herself, just a shocked girl, at the heart of its rapid-fire explosions?

Was she being hurled with it through space, blank space, Absolute Zero, below what human instrument could register,-or human girl encounter and live?

All she knew was that she was being flung, first forward, then backward; and then, oh, horrors! against the train window near her where glass was all splintering and crashing, through which ice and water, mad, mad water and ice, were rushing together.

25

There was an awful, punching jolt, a frenzied shriek of steam, a splashing, hissing roar-that, surely, could not be the steel Thunder Bird's challenge, unless it had suddenly become a wading goose-and, lo! she was hurled straight out of her dream across a Pullman aisle, fast flooding, right into the girl with whom she had once vainly measured eyelashes,-between whom and herself had existed that thin bridge of ice but one little minute before.

Alas! poor human ice that couldn't stand a moment under the blows of Nature's ice-hammer.

Both pairs of girlish lashes were stark with terror now.

"Una! Una! Una! Ac-ci-dent! Tr-rain accident! Gone through-through into-the-lake!" moaned Pemrose, half stunned, yet conscious, as she was ten seconds before, that they had been crossing frozen water.

26

Water! A pale pond, now plainly seen through awful, swirling, wave-blocked window-gaps! Yet across its wan and shattering crust there shone a trail of fire, red fire, heart fire-vivid at that moment as the Thunder Bird's pink tail feathers switching through the space of horror-and somewhere in that stretched consciousness which is beyond thinking, Toandoah's daughter knew that it was the Camp Fire training in presence of mind.

"Una! M-mer-rcy! Una! Water's r-rushing in-n-in so fast-through windows-doors ahead-m-may dr-rown right here, 'less we can f-fight it-get out," was her struggling cry as, paddling desperately like a little dog, she found herself topping the flood, that lashing, interned lake-water, now blotting out window-frames on one side of the car-groping with icy fingers for the painted ceiling of the Pullman-then undulatingly sinking below them on the other.

27

For it was a case just half-a-minute before, while Pem was still sanguinely loosing the Thunder Bird, of small pony-wheels on the big express engine striking a frog in the rails, an icy groove, and skidding,-then recklessly plunging down four feet, those runaway ponies, from the low bridge which they were crossing on to the ice, dragging the engine, the cab and the two front cars with them.

And now-now-to the inventor's daughter, the girl-mechanic, who had plugged so hard at her high school physics that she might understand her father's work, came a thought that was worse, worse even than the hiss of the imprisoned flood, tossing her like a cork: the engine might explode-the sneezing, sobbing engine, with the steam condensing in its boilers-wreck the car she was in-she and Una!

28

No! She did not think of herself alone. All the frail girlish ice was a gimcrack now.

But the terrors of the swamped car, that snuffling threat of steam ahead-a deep bass uz-z-z!-momentarily made a gimcrack of other things too-of everything but the desperate instinct to get out-free, somehow.

Calling upon Una to follow, she headed for a dripping window-gap, to seize the moment when the flood, now lower upon that side, might give her a chance to paddle through-scramble through-escape on to the cracking ice, before the opening was again blotted out.

But together with the cruelty of glass-splinters, ice-spars scratching her set face, came the shock of an inner splinter: an inkling, somehow, that Una was helpless, could not follow, that, battered by concussion, tossing like a log upon the flood's breast, her senses had almost left her.

29

Many waters cannot quench love-the love of a daughter for her genius-father.

In that moment-that moment-there leaped up in the breast of Toandoah's child the fire, the red



fire, which alone can carry anything higher, be it rocket or girl's heart.

They had called her father's invention a joke, a Quaker gun, Una and her mother.

*Never* should they say that of his daughter's pluck: that it was a dummy which would hit no mark,-or only to save itself!

"Una!" Wildly she seized the other girl's creamy flannels, buoyed like a great, pale water-lily upon the imprisoned lake-water. "Catch-c-catch me by the belt-Una! I-I'll try-y to save you! Oh-h! s-stick ti-ight now."

And the daughter of the man, still sitting afar in his quiet laboratory, fitting little powder charges into a model Thunder Bird, set herself to battle through the swirling gap of that half-covered window-frame-clutched and hampered now-yet upholding, even if it was her daring death-thought, Toandoah's honor in the flood.

30

## CHAPTER III

### THE WRONG SIDE OF HER DREAM

31

THE ice had been thick-ribbed, product of a bitter winter, but it could not withstand the shock of a hundred and eighty tons of leaping locomotive-it splintered in all directions.

Of the whole long train, however, only two cars and the cab had followed the engine's plunge when those skidding pony-wheels turned traitor, and were now ice-bound and flooded in the middle of a small lake, while the remainder of the fast express, with one coach actually standing on its head, hanging pendent between the ice and the bridge, was not submerged.

It was as if a steel bar were hurled violently at that solid ice, when one end only would pierce the crust and the remainder be left sticking, slanting, up.

When Pemrose, a Camp Fire Girl of America, greater at that moment than when her hand should loose the Thunder Bird, because she was determined that whatever might be said of her father's invention, nobody should ever say that his daughter's courage was a Quaker gun, paddled through the window-gap of that swamped Pullman, towing Una, she found herself in such a vortex of zero water and shattered ice that all the strength behind her gasping breath turned suddenly dummy.

32

"S-stick tight, Una! Oh-h! stick tight," was the one little whiff that speech could get off before it froze-froze stiff behind her chattering teeth, in the pinched channel of her throat.

And then-then-she was clinging to the jagged spur of an ice-cake, her left hand convulsively clutching Una's flannels, while the eddies in the half-liberated water around them, spreading from a blue-cold center to a white ring, made horrid eyes-goggle-eyes-which stared at them.

To Pem-little visionary-plunged from her dreams of pressing the magic button on a mountain-top, of watching the Thunder Bird tear, tear away moonward, switching its long tail of light, the whole thing seemed an illusion-the wrong side of her dream.

33

It was as if she had soared with that monster rocket, Toandoah's invention, outside the earth's atmosphere, were being hurled about in the horrible vacuum of space, its unplumbed heart of cold, so far-so annihilatingly far below the balmy zero point of old Mother Earth on a February day when two light-hearted girls were going skiing.

She was growing numb.

In vain did her waterproof wind-jacket, the ski-runner's belted jacket of thin and trusty silk, defend, like a faithful wing-a warm, conscious wing-the upper part of her body.

The deadly water was encroaching, clasping her waist with an icy girdle,-stealing under it, even to her armpits.

And the petrifying little hand which had left its fistling in the train,-the thick mitten that should have grasped the balancing stick in all the wild swallow-fun of climbing, stemming, darting amid slope and snow upon a wintry hillside-could not hold on very long to the glacial spur.

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The ice-cake was threatening to slip away, to seesaw, turn turtle and waltz off, to the tune of blood-curdling sounds: screams for help here, there, everywhere, always with the background of that menacing hiss of steam in the great engine's boilers-that low, sneezing uz-z-z! as if it were taking cold from its bath-the engine that, at any moment, might explode.

Frantically she would have struck out, the little girl-mechanic, and fought the whole ice-pack to get away from that threat, to reach a solid crust, but she knew that she could not "swim" two, herself and Una.

Yet would they go under-one or both-perish in water not deep because of the starving cold, even if-if the engine...?

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Her teeth snapped together upon the thought, its diddering horror. Surely, it was as bad a predicament as could be for a girl!

But, suddenly, through all the horripilation there seemed to shine a light.

Somehow, Pem was conscious of it in the poor numb sheath of her own girlish being—and beyond.

And she knew that her stark lips were praying: “Oh! Lord—oh! Father—help me—e to hold on. Don’t let us—go—under! I want—I want so—o to live to see Daddy’s rocket go off!... He ...”

The stiff sobs tumbled apart there, as it were.

But the Light remained, the Presence, so near as it seemed to Pem at the moment—even as she had felt it before upon a mountain-top, or at some matchless moment of beauty—that she almost lisped confusedly: “Daddy in Heaven!” as once, a two-year-old, she had prattled it at her father’s knee.

Then what—what? Another voice prattling near her—chattering icily! A bully human voice!

“Gosh! Something r-rotten in the State of Denmark,” it gasped. “Jove! I like excitement, but I’d rather be warm enough to enjoy it. Oh! Dad, if there are any others left in that car, the one on end, you help ’em. I must attend to these girls.”

“T-take her first—Una!” flickered Pem, a spicy flicker still, as she felt a strong grasp on her shoulder and looked up into the face of a broad-shouldered youth in a gray sweater; the engine might explode, but, to the last, they should not say of Toandoah’s daughter that her courage was a Quaker gun.

“Jove! but you’re game,” flashed the youth. “Well, keep up—hang on—I’ll be back in a minute!”

The minute was three.

He had to lift the second girlish victim almost bodily out of the water and drag her with him as he wriggled and crawled over the broken ice-pack, to reach a firm spot, where he picked her up and—with all the vigor of an athletic eighteen-year-old—carried her to the shore, now not more than twenty yards off.

“Humph! I was just in time, wasn’t I?” he ejaculated on the transit. “By George! You’ve got pep, if ever a girl had—I’ll wager you pulled your friend out of the parlor-car and held her up! Some horripilation, eh?” breezily. “Now—now what have you and I ever done that the Fates should wish this on to us—that’s what I’d like to know?”

It was what the daring little ski-runner, Pem, herself, had been vaguely wondering; she liked this jolly wit-snapper who preferred his excitement warm.

“Ha! there goes the engine exploding,” he gasped a moment later, as he set her down. “Bursting inward! Now, if it had done the mean thing, burst outward, piling up the agony, doing a whole lot of damage, ’twould have been quicker about it.... Oh—you! Dad,” to a gray-bearded man, with a gray traveling cap pulled down almost to his eyes. “Here, I’ll hand over these girls to you now! Will you look after them? I’d better go back.”

Simultaneously there was a low, sullen roaring, the crack of doom, as condensed steam sucked in the heavy steel casing of the locomotive’s boilers and shattered it like an eggshell.

In Pemrose it shattered something too.

Wildly she looked into the eyes of the man in the tourist’s cap and was conscious that in one of them horror was frozen into a fixed stand, as it was in one of Una’s, as he helped her up a snowy bank.

And, with that, her brain laid its last egg for the present, as the Thunder Bird would drop its expiring one upon the dead surface of the moon, in the knowledge that, the Fates notwithstanding, she was still alive—still alive, to see the great rocket go!

And as for its completion—as to the little gold mine necessary to gorge it for its record flight—why! the third rich nut of which she had spoken a little while ago in her father’s laboratory, had not yet been cracked: the third mysterious drawer containing the third and last installment of a dead man’s very strange will had not yet been opened.

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## CHAPTER IV

### THE SECOND WRECK

THAT third nut was cracked just five weeks later in the firelit library of what had been Mr. Hartley Graham’s home—the home of a man who during his lifetime, so it was occasionally said, had been, in some ways, almost as eccentric as his madcap brother—and concerning the latter his college chums, those who knew him long ago, were of the opinion that he was a freak whose “head grew beneath his shoulder.”

The house, a white marble mansion on Opal Avenue, finest of the old residential streets in the University city of Clevedon, was now occupied by the sister of the two, the mother of Una, who had snapped her fingers at the Thunder Bird, calling it a joke, a dummy, a Quaker gun.

That jeering nickname still rankled in the breast of Pemrose, who looked more like a colorless March Primrose, owing to the lingering shock of that train wreck, upon the spring morning in early April when the family lawyer whose duty it was to settle the affairs of the man who had left

three separate portions of his will in as many drawers, to be opened on three successive anniversaries of his death, drew forth the last.

She was not the only pale girl present.

By her side was Una, neighbor again in heart as in body, who laid one little agitated fist on Pem's knee while preparations for reading the will were being made, the two girls nestling together, as in chummy days, three years before, when in the peacock pride of thirteen they had conceitedly measured eyelashes.

And the remorseful affection mirrored in that little near-sighted stand in one of Una's pretty dark eyes was only typical of an entirely similar state of feeling in the once scornful breasts of her father and mother.

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Mrs. Grosvenor was no longer "on her high ropes," as Pem had said in her father's laboratory; to-day she seemed to be, rather, on a snubbing-line which brought her up short now and again, even in the middle of a speech, when she looked at the inventor's blue-eyed daughter, his trusty little pal—and that, sometimes, with spray in her eyes, too.

Also, her glances in the direction of the inventor himself, Professor Lorry, with whose name the world was already beginning to ring, were appealing—not to say apologetic.

She was quite sure now that any man who could turn out a daughter, not yet sixteen, to behave in a fearful emergency as Pem had done—without whom her own daughter would not be here to-day, as Una constantly kept repeating—could never forge a gun, be it rocket or rifle, that would hit no mark!

She even expressed some agitated interest in the great invention, inquiring when the first experiments with the little model Thunder Bird, upon a mountain-top, were to take place.

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And as for her husband, he boldly declared himself deeply interested in the conquest of the upper air and space—so far beyond the goal which any aviator had dreamed of reaching yet.

He even went so far as to say that he would be glad to see the remainder of a fortune, represented by that third section of a will, go for the furtherance of the professor's wonderful moon-reaching, planet-reaching scheme, instead of being "hung up" awaiting the return of the dead man's younger brother who had been such a queer flimflam fellow in youth,—whose family did not even know whether he was dead or alive.

And, at first, while the shell of that third nut was being solemnly cracked by the reading of opening sentences of the will—oh! how the heart of Pemrose jumped, like a nut on a hot shovel—it did seem as if the kernel were going to be a rich one for the Thunder Bird.

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For now, according to the testator's wish, if his brother, Treffrey Graham, had not yet returned to claim his portion of his elder brother's wealth, then the money—a little bonanza, indeed, a solid fortune—was to be turned over, forthwith, to the University of his native city, to be used for developments in the science of the air—the upper air and what lay beyond it—chiefly for the furtherance of any inventions that might be put forward by the dead man's trusted friend, Professor Lorry.

It was here that two pale girls, abruptly transformed from April primroses to June roses—oh! such pinkly blooming tea-roses—gave simultaneously a wild little shriek.

It was here that Pem, dazzled, saw the Thunder Bird, with a clear sky, tear-tear away moonward—and noticed at the same time, through some little loophole in the watch-tower of her excitement, the figure of a man with a gray tourist's cap pulled down to his eyes, rather waveringly crossing the street without.

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He circled to avoid an April puddle,—she saw him clearly through the broad library window, at a distance of some fifty yards, beyond a flight of marble steps and a graveled entrance.

A queer little shiver, a horrid little shiver—a snowflake in summer—drifted down her spine!

The figure had an icy background. She had seen it before amid the terrors of that February train-wreck. The boy who saved her, the boy with the jolly tongue in his head, humorous amid the "horripilation," had addressed it as Dad.

And then—then, she caught her breath sharply, as something blew upon her, hot and cold together—and came back to the library, to the present moment.

For the gray-haired lawyer, with his mouth opening gravely, wide as a church door, with a little forward pounce of his body upon the typewritten sheets, the sheets that meant life or death—flight or stagnation—for the Thunder Bird, was beginning to read again.

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"Ah, but that's not all, even yet!" he said. "This curious will has dragged its slow length over three years—and now we haven't finished with it, quite. Here's a codicil still to be read—its last word, written later, just two days before Mr. Graham's death, so it seems."

Alack and alas! that was the moment of the second wreck; the moment for one jubilant girl of the dire breakdown, when the Victory Express to Clover Land, goal of blossoming success, crashed through into zero waters of blankest disappointment,—almost as bitter as those in which she had held up her friend.

For the last word of the strung-out will set forth that, whereas it seemed borne in upon Mr. Hartley Graham, with life drawing to a close, that he had not been quite fair to his madcap brother in youth, and that the latter would some day return, the disposal of his wealth in the

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other direction named—to the University and for invention—should not come into effect for at least twelve years after the opening of that third drawer.

“And so—and so, it’s all hung up for another dozen years—unless Treffrey Graham comes back to claim the money! Well! I’m sorry, Professor Lorry; there’s many a slip ‘twixt cup and lip,” said the lawyer, laying down the codicil with a blue look; he was interested in invention, progressive invention—he had never thought that the Thunder Bird was a Quaker gun.

“And so it’s all hung up for the next twelve years,” was the baffled cry which went around the circle, with no single note of longing for the wanderer’s return.

It would not have been very flattering to the terrible Treff, if he was alive and present to hear, thought a gnashing Pemrose: to the exile who had been such a hazing firebrand at college, burning out the fine flame of youth in the straw blaze of senseless pranks,—a griffin and shatterpated jester.

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## CHAPTER V

### SHE SAVED A CITY

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“AND SO—and so it’s all hung up for another twelve years—the Thunder Bird’s flight! For I don’t suppose there’s much chance of the money coming from another direction.”

Pemrose Lorry echoed the cry, repeated it desolately, hours later, standing in her own room—a room that was a sort of sequel to herself, as every Camp Fire Girl’s nest should be.

Her father had echoed it, as she sat very close to him, driving home in the Grosvenor’s limousine.

“Well! so far this strung-out will has been for us much cry and little wool, eh, girlie,” he muttered; and for the first time she heard discouragement in his voice; perhaps he had “banked” upon that third nut more than he admitted.

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“So the money is hung up for the next dozen years, as far’s any benefit to the invention is concerned,” he went on presently, just before his own home was reached. “I’d better be putting my time into something else, I guess,” with a raw scrape in the tones. “How-how about a machine for the manufacture of paper clothing, eh, or airdrawn rugs—” sarcastically—“prosperity, *riches*, in that! Ha! Get thee behind me, Satan—but don’t push!” added the inventor whimsically, thrusting his head out of the auto window,—with a sound that was neither laugh nor groan.

“Get thee behind me, Satan—and don’t push!”

Tears sprang to those blue eyes of Pemrose now, as she recalled the half-piteous tone in the voice.

Toandoah was discouraged. Toandoah was tempted—tempted to sacrifice the highest claim of his intellect, his original dream, or the dream whose originality he had made practical, of reaching the heavenly bodies; of being a pioneer in exploring the Universe outside his own earth and its enveloping atmosphere; of finding out the secrets of that mysterious upper air, and where it ended, of getting back a record of it—the Thunder Bird’s golden egg, the first record from space.

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And the girl in her buoyant young heart of hearts felt that hope—nay, certainty—were still there, green, springing, as the first signs of happy springtime in the world outside.

How-how was she to make him feel it; she his little Wise Woman, his laboratory pal?

Her eye went to the emblems upon her wall: a pine tree on a poster, typical of strength, a banner with a sunburst, the sun shedding warmth upon the earth.

And then—then! To the little squat figure of a woman, as the Indians depicted her, with a torch in her hand, Wisdom’s torch—her own emblem as Wantaam of the Council Fire.

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But there was another representation of that Wantaam—that Wise Woman. Pem had designed it herself, painted it herself upon a two-foot poster, gaining thereby a green honor-bead for handicraft.

And before that the girl, wrestling with the heavy disappointment of that tantalizing will, brought up—her hands clasped.

It was a curious scene: a lot of little tents with a wall around them, the same symbolic figure of the woman with the torch stood upon the wall, pointing a stiff arm at a man outside, a warrior, who had a knife in hand.

Underneath were printed in flaming characters two Indian words: “Notick! Notick!” signifying: “Hear! Hear!”

“I always did feel fascinated by that Wise Woman who saved—a-city.” Pem looked adoringly at her handiwork. “A besieged Jewish city, away back in King David’s time! To be sure, one reads of it in—in what’s a bloodthirsty chapter of the Old Testament! And she saved the town by ordering the death of a rebel, a traitor, proclaiming that she, herself, was loyal and faithful to the king—so were her people—making Joab, David’s captain, that man with the knife, outside the wall, listen when she cried to him: ‘Hear! Hear!’ She had more sense than the men about her—and one isn’t told the

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least thing further about her, not even her name. That's what makes her mysterious-and fascinating.... Yet she saved a city!"

The girl drew a long breath—a suddenly fired breath.

Was it up to her now to save a city: the citadel of her father's courage—of that rose-colored conviction which is half the battle on earth or in the air? How was she to do it?

Her eye went wandering around the room. Trained to the eloquence of symbols, it lit on something. Just a sheen of pearls and a little loom upon a table—myriads of pearly beads, woven and unwoven, with here and there a ray of New Jerusalem colors, ruby, emerald, blazing through them—the New Jerusalem of hope.

"Ah-h!"

Breathlessly she caught it up, that something, four feet and a half of the beaded history of a girl,—pearl-woven prophecy, too!

Hugging it to her breast, that long leather strip, an inch and a half in width, on which her glowing young life-story was woven in pearls, with those rainbow flashes of color—the loom with it—she hurried out of the room.

Never, perhaps, did a professor's laboratory, the stern, hardware "lab." of a mechanical engineer, react to anything so fairy-like as when Pem, scurrying down a flight of stairs to the workshop which her father had fitted up in his own house—not his University laboratory with the tall spectroscope—sat down to a table and began industriously to weave.

Turning from a bench where he sat fiddling with a steel chamber, part of the anatomy of a fledgling Thunder Bird, of one of those small model rockets which he was fitting up for experiments on a mountain-top, the inventor watched her listlessly.

"Hullo! What's the charm now, the thing of beauty? That—that looks such stuff as dreams are made of." Toandoah drew a long breath.

"No, it isn't dream-stuff, father; it's history, the history of your life and mine, all told in symbols, woven into a chain, a stole—see—to wear with my ceremonial dress. It—it's my masterpiece." Pem looked up, all girl, all Rose, now. "I didn't want to show it to you until it was finished. But now—now—don't you want to see it?"

Listlessly, still, her father drew near, his tall figure in its long, drab laboratory coat looming like a shadow behind her shoulder.

"See there—there's where it begins with the Flag I was born under, the Stars and Stripes," excitedly. "And look," softly, "that gold star stands for Mother who died when I was two. And there you are, Toandoah, with that queer Indian triangle having the teeth of a saw, the emblem of invention."

"What! That funny, squat figure, with something like a three-cornered fool's-cap on my head and the moon above it, looking through a tube!" There was a laugh in the inventor's throat now; the grim "Get thee behind me, Satan!" look, with the cloud of that codicil to a will, were melting away from him. "Well, go on!" he encouraged smilingly. "Artistic, anyhow! I believe you Camp Fire Girls would weave magic around a clock pendulum."

"And here—here am I—Wantaam, a Wise Woman. There's the Thunder Bird, see, the symbol of the great rocket. Here are you and I, Dad, upon a mountaintop, watching it tear—oh! tear away."

He laughed again at the two stiff, woodeny figures, the comet-like streak of fire above them.

"And this—the quill fluttering down attached to a kite! Humph! That stands for the Thunder Bird's diary, I suppose, otherwise the golden egg—the little recording apparatus coming down on the wing of its black parachute."

The inventor laughed amusedly again, glancing sidelong at *his* masterpiece, the little five-inch openwork steel box, having in it two tiny wheels with paper wound, tapelike, on one and a pencil between them. This carried in the head of the Thunder Bird, big or little, would keep a record of as high as it went by the pencil automatically making marks so long as there was any air-pressure, like a guiding hand, to move it.

"Yes." The weaver nodded. "And here—here is the Will being read!"

The girlish voice was lower now, the girlish feet treading doubtful ground, as she pointed again to those two quaint, stubby figures, with a third one reading from a parchment.

But there was no doubt at all in the young voice which presently gathered itself for a climax.

"And see—see there—those little yellow dots I'm weaving in now; those are gold pieces, father, the money that *is* coming to us from somewhere for you to finish your invention. Yes! and I'm going on to weave in the moon, too, and the little blue powder-flash before her face, to show the Thunder Bird has got there. For it is going to get there, you know!" Pem's blue-star eyes were dim now, but in them was the wisdom of babes—the wisdom oft hid from the wise and prudent.

"Daddy-man!" She bowed her head over the pearl-woven prophecy, speaking very low. "I could always tell you my thoughts. Somehow, at that awful time of the train-wreck, when we were in the icy water, Una and I, before the boy came, the big boy who saved us, through—through all the 'horripilation', as he called it, I seemed to see a light; the—the Light of Light Eternal, as we sing—God—and I knew, oh-h! I knew—ew, at the last, that we weren't going to dr-rown.... I know just as

certainly now that you're going to launch the Thunder Bird, to go-o where nothing-Earthly-has ever gone before.... Father-r!"

Silence fell upon that passionate little cry in the dim workshop.

Only the beauty of the pearl-woven thing upon the table spoke-the record to go down to posterity.

Then into the silence tiptoed the voice of a man, whimsical, slightly, yet with a touch of tender awe in it, too:

"And none knew the Wise Woman who saved the city!"

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## CHAPTER VI

### A HOTSPUR

"Oh! I'm so glad-just so glad I don't know what to do with myself-that those experiments with the lesser Thunder Bird, the smaller sky-rocket, which won't make the four-day trip to Mammy Moon, but will only fly up a couple of hundred miles, or so, and drop its golden egg, the diary, to tell you where that blank No Man's Land of space begins will still be carried out this spring from the top of old Mount Greylock. If they had been given up, it would have broken my heart-so it would!"

It was evening now, late evening, in the dining room of the professor's home, looking upon the green University campus.

The girl with the grafted Rose in her name, grafted on to a foreign stem, was pouring out her father's after dinner coffee-and her own full heart, at the same time. "Ouch!" She shivered a little. "I don't like to think of that 'diddering' cold of empty space; not-not since the train-wreck. I'm like the big boy who saved us then, and was so jolly; I'm out for excitement if I'm warm enough to enjoy it, eh?"

"Humph! Well, here's somebody who's willing to take a chance on carrying his warmth, his fun too, with him into space."

The professor laughed as he drew a sheet of thick letter paper, broad and creamy, from his pocket.

"Oh! is it somebody else ... you don't mean to say it's another hotspur applying for a passage in the real Thunder Bird when you start the big rocket off for the moon, eh?"

The girl glanced over her father's shoulder.

"Yes, one more candidate for lunar honors! And this one is the limit for a Quixote. Young, too, I should say!" Again Toandoah's deep chant of laughter buoyed his daughter's treble note, as he began to read:

Professor G. Noel Lorry,  
Nevil University.  
My dear Sir,

Having learned that you are perfecting an apparatus that will reach any height-even go as far as the moon-and that it will be capable of carrying a passenger, I should like to volunteer for the trip.

I have always wanted to say 'Hullo!' to the Man in the Moon, on whose face I have often looked from an aeroplane already; and I am ready to try anything once-even if it should be once for all!

Yours for the big chance,

T. S.

P. S. I respectfully apologize for not being able just at present to give my full name, but will, with your permission, furnish it later."

"Humph! Mr. T. S.! 'With your permission,' where do you write from?" Pemrose bent low over the primrose sheet. "Oh! from Lightwood. Now,-now where is that, Daddy?"

"There's a little, one-horse village of the name among the Berkshire Mountains, not far from fashionable Lenox." Her father smiled.

"Lenox! How lovely! Why! that's where you and I are going to stay-stay for a week or two-isn't it, father, *en route* for Greylock and the experiments. You know the Grosvenors have invited us-and they have a wonderful old place up there. Una's mother is carrying coals these days-" Pemrose winked-"coals of penitence in her heart for ever having sneered at your invention, Daddy."

"Hot ones, are they? Well! I wish she'd hasten and spill them out before she reaches Lenox." The inventor chuckled. "Let me see, she was born there, I believe, at their mountain home-yes, and one or other of her brothers, too."

"Ho! Was it-was it the unicorn; I-I mean the oddity; the Thunder Bird's rival for all-l that money?" The girlish hand shook now as it wielded the coffee-pot. "Oh, dear! wouldn't his horn be exalted if he never came back?" With a droll little catch of the breath. "Una and I are as friendly as ever now, Dad," ran on the girlish voice, hurriedly leading off from the neighborhood of the will. "And she's to be taken out of school early, when we go, because she has been so nervous since the train-wreck. So chummy we are-oh, as chummy as in the old days when we measured eyelashes and she laughed at my 'chowchow' name!" The speaker here shot the bluest of glances

through those twinkling lashes at their reflection in a neighboring teapot, older than Columbia herself.

"Chowchow, indeed! It just suits you, that compound. There's a vain elf in you somewhere, Pem, that sleeps in the shadow of the Wise Woman."

"Maybe-maybe, there's a nickum! That's Andrew's word, Andrew's word for an imp, a tomboy. He's the Grosvenors' Scotch chauffeur, you know, who talks with a thistle under his tongue. Well! nickum, or not!" the girl was a rosy weathercock again. "I-I'm just dying to get up to the mountains, to climb the Pinnacle, the green Pinnacle, that rough, pine-clad hill, with Una-and sit in the Devil's Chair!"

"*What!* My Wise Woman sitting in the Devil's Chair! Why! 'twould take a daredevil nickum, indeed, to do that."

The inventor threw up his hands, laughing again, as he beat a retreat to his hardware den, his laboratory, where there was ever a magnet, potent by night or day, to draw him back.

Yet when still another six weeks had passed and Pemrose, with all the green world of spring in her heart, stood, breathless, upon that Lenox pinnacle—a pine-clad mountainette some thirteen hundred feet above sea-level-lo and behold! there was a nickum sitting coolly in the Devil's Chair.

A brazen feat it was! For that Lucifer's throne was a curved stone seat, a natural armchair, rudely carved out of the precipice rock, more than a dozen sheer feet beneath the crest where she stood with Una-Andrew of the thistly tongue having driven the two girls up to the foot of the peak on this the third day after their arrival, with the May flies, amid the mountains.

"A nickum-oh! a nickum, indeed—a daredevil nickum-sitting in the Devil's Armchair, with his feet dangling down-down over the deep precipice! Look!"

Pemrose pirouetted in excitement at the sight.

"Yes, and, goodness! he seems to be enjoying it, too. Not turning a hair. Oh! if 'twere I-I should be so-o dizzy."

With the more timid cry in her pulsing throat, and that little appalled stand, a star of mingled consternation and admiration beaming, bewitched, in one dark eye, Una turned from the spectacle-turned, shuddering, from the hundred-and-odd feet of unbroken abyss extending from the nickum's knickerbockered legs, nonchalantly swinging, to an awed grove of young pine trees, rock-ribbed and boulder-strewn, far below.

"Oh! I don't want to look at him," she cried cravenly. "How will he-ever-climb back up here again?"

"Tr-rust him—" began Toandoah's daughter, then suddenly clutched her throat, her widening eyes as round, as bright, as staringly blue as the mountain lupine already opening upon the world's surprises, in sunny spots, among the hills.

Those eyes were now fastened to the back of the nickum's close-cropped head, to his broad shoulders in a rough, gray sweater, noting a certain "bully" shrug of those shoulders at the surrounding landscape, as if, monarch of all he surveyed, he yet felt himself a usurper in his present seat.

"Something rotten-something rotten in the State of Denmark!" crowed Pemrose softly. "I wonder if he's getting that off now? Una! Una! It's He ... He!"

"Who? Who?"

"The man-the boy-who saved us after the train-wreck ... without whom we mightn't be here-now! Ah-h!" was the softly tremulous answer, as the blue eyes danced down the rock, with frankest recognition, friendliest expectation, to that daring, nonchalant nickum figure, now coolly drawing up its toes for a climb.

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## CHAPTER VII

### THE PINNACLE

IT was an exciting situation.

Pemrose, who like the enthroned daredevil liked excitement, if she was warm enough to enjoy it, had not hoped for quite such a tidbit when she came to the mountains,—at least, short of the little Thunder Bird's record-breaking flight.

"Oh! I did so want to run across him again. I do so long to thank him! Why-why! we might never have escaped from that awful wreck, got out of the zero water, but for him, Una." The blue eyes were wet now, frankly wet, bluebells by a mountain brook—the little bursting brooklet of feeling within.

"I-I'd like to thank him, too!" gushed Una, with that little fixed star twinkling most radiantly in one dark eye, the slight stand which characterized it only at intense moments when feeling

reached indefinite altitudes. "Oh! how glad I am now," she ran on breathlessly, "that we made Andrew leave the car down in a garage at the Pinnacle's foot and bring us up here for a sort of picnic supper," sending a sidelong glance scouting round for the tall, capped figure of the grizzled chauffeur who, a brief ten years before, had been driving his "laird's" car upon Ben Muir, a heathery mountain of his native Highlands.

Trustworthy as day, a capable driver and zealous Church Elder, he was one to whose guardianship Una Grosvenor, the apple of her parents' eye, might safely be intrusted with her visiting friend while her father golfed and her mother lunched and played bridge in complacent peace of mind.

"Oh! she's all right with Andrew; he's such a true-penny!" was her father's dictum. "Safer with him, up here, than she would be with maid or housekeeper! And, after that shock in the winter, the doctor wants her to be out of doors among the hills morning, noon and night-practically all the time, if she can!"

Ah! so far, so good. But just at this unprecedented moment of excitement Andrew, the true-penny, had encountered another Scot, who emigrated before he did, and was breezily "clacking" with him at some distance from where two breathlessly expectant girls gazed down upon the black top of the nickum's head-and at his wheeling shoulders in the great armchair.

"Oh-oh! there he goes-see-curling up his legs, drawing up his feet carefully, turning in the seat-standing up!" cried Pemrose, all Rose at this crisis, prematurely blooming, as if it were June, not May, as she stood on tiptoe to meet a dramatic moment, reveling in the thought that the daredevil did not know what a surprise awaited him on top here, what a welcome-heart-eager gratitude.

She bit her lip, however, upon the impulsive cry, for she saw two girls, younger than herself, with a ten-year-old boy, who had been watching the climber's feat from a near-by mound, turn and look at her curiously.

They were evidently acquainted with the daring usurper of the Devil's Chair.

For, having drawn up his legs until his knees touched his chin, then raised himself to a standing position on the grim stone seat, cautiously turning, his strong fingers gripping the granite chair-arms, when his back was to the precipice beneath and his face almost touching the twelve-foot, well-nigh perpendicular rock which he had to climb, he actually had the hardihood to wave his hand to them.

"Now-now comes the 'scratch'!" he shouted laughingly. "I'm going to hook on to that 'nick' in the rock, there, just over my head, and draw myself up. Had to 'shy' it coming down-for fear it would catch in my clothing."

"Didn't I-tell you it was him?" burst forth Pem, with all the vehemence of a little spring torrent, in Una's ear as she caught the ring of the chaffing voice which had railed at the Fates for "wishing a wreck on" to unoffending youth, and was so boldly challenging them now.

And just as free and frank in her girlish gratitude as that torrent bubbling impulsively out of the earth, when the nickum reached the crest again, she sprang forward, hand outstretched, to meet him. Her eyes, blue as the little fairy blossoms of the star-grass now, were breeze blown in the meadow of her gladness.

It was nothing-nothing not to know the name of one who had saved you from death, she thought.

By the rescue you knew him!

And he knew her!

Those eyes, those keen, girlish eyes which had looked through the spectroscope a hundred times, in her father's laboratory, into the remote mystery of that far-away upper air could not be deceived.

By the sudden, startled heave of his shoulders, whose defiant shrug she remembered so well, by the quick intake of breath, as its climbing hiss sharpened to a whistle-almost a rude whistle in the excitement of the feat he had just performed-by the little stare of breathless surprise, of quandary, in his dark eyes, glowing like Una's, he recognized her ... and passed her by.

Recognized her as the girl whose "pep" he had complimented for putting another's life before her own-and didn't want to have anything more in life to say to her!

Well! the Heavens fell upon the Pinnacle as Pem drew back-annihilated.

Snubbed for the first time in all her blue-sky life-and by a boy, too!

To be sure, indeed, the nickum, his glance darting past her to Una, had gone by with a slight inclination of his bare head that was a stony bow.

To be sure, when one of the girls of his acquaintance questioned him about the view from the Devil's Seat, there was a sort of creak in his voice as he answered:

"It's-a-corker! You can see away off: far-rms, lakes, all the other mountains-Mount Greylock, too, in the distance! But-but it's a cat's-foot climb down-there!" breaking off breathlessly, as if feeling were making a cat's-paw of him.

"Oh! you can really see Mount Greylock! As far away as that! Well! I'm going to try-y it, too," ventured one of his girlish companions whose age was fourteen. "Summer and winter, I've done a



lot of climbing, up here!”

“You try it! Any girl try sitting in the Devil’s Chair! Why! there isn’t a girl living who could do it,” crowed the gray-shouldered youth: and now his tones were lordly, as if he were picking himself up after an inner tumble.

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“Hey! Is that so?” Pem-over-hearing-ground the words between her teeth.

“Have you never heard of Camp Fire,  
What a shame! What a shame!  
*If* you’ve never heard of Camp Fire,  
You’re to blame! You’re to blame!  
Then don’t take a nap,  
For we’re on the map,  
Ready to prove it with s-snap!”

She hissed the last word at the nickum’s back, as he halted at some distance with his companions.

“Una! I’m going to do it,” she panted. “I’m going to slide down that rock there, turn round and sit in the Chair—then draw myself up again, as he did. I’ve got on sneakers. I know I can! I’ve done some breakneck climbing with father—yes! and with my Camp Fire Group, too.”

“I—I’ll give you all my marshmallows that we brought with us to toast at an open fire, if you do!... Yes! and one of my two little thistle pins—pebble pins—that Andrew and his wife brought me from Scotland, when they went home last year, *if you do*.... Wasn’t he just hor-rid? He didn’t want to speak to us—to know us!”

77

Una’s face flamed upon the bribe, and was so pretty lit by that fixed star in the eye, that it must have been a zero-hearted nickum who could turn his back upon it.

“Hold my hat,” said Pem: if she had been a boy, the tone would have meant: “Hold my coat while I thrash him!”

Unhesitatingly she stepped to the precipice-brink and measured the distance to that Devil’s Chair very coolly and critically with her eye.

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## CHAPTER VIII

### A USURPER

78

GATHERING her short, green skirt about her, for she wore, as on that February day in her father’s laboratory, what he called the “nixie green”, the sylvan Camp Fire uniform, the inventor’s daughter stretched herself breast downward, upon the flat ledge of the Pinnacle’s crest.

Working her body carefully backward, without another glance at the precipice beneath, she slid warily over the edge, her face to the rock, and down the dozen feet of almost smooth, nearly perpendicular slab, until her feet touched the stone seat of that curved armchair, a deep embrasure in the mountain granite.

It was not such a wildly difficult feat then for a girl on her mettle to turn cautiously until her tingling back was pressed hard against the slab, and thus to lower herself to a sitting position on the rocky throne.

79

For that Devil’s Chair was a spacious one—fairly so! The seat extended outward at least three feet and was roomy enough to allow of two people standing upright on it at the same time.

And what a view old Lucifer must have from it, was Pem’s first thought—provided he didn’t, as an Irishman would say, reside away from home!

Off to the right and left stretched the wonderful landscape of the Berkshire Hills, Massachusetts’ Highlands—the Berkshire mountains in May where, afar, a summit snow-cap vied with the driven snows of blossoming fruit trees, lower down; where the pink-shot pearl of a lake gleamed, opal-like, from an emerald setting, and many a silver thread winding, expanding, showed where some madcap river or brook had become with spring a wild thing.

“Oh, hurrah! I can really see off to Mount Greylock—old King Greylock—even the steel tower upon it—oh! so plainly,” murmured the madcap in the Chair, and nestled triumphantly against its rocky back.

80

“Greylock, cloud-girdled, from his purple throne,  
A shout of gladness sends,  
And up soft meadow slopes, a warbling tone,  
Of Housatonic blends.”

Yes! she felt as if they were two throned dignitaries, she and Greylock; for she wore the crown of derring do, and King Greylock, still wearing a thin diadem of snow, was enthroned for ever in her imagination as the favored peak from which the first experiments with her father’s immortal rocket were to be made.

Upon Greylock's crest within a week or two, maybe—at all events before summer dog-day heat clogged and fogged the air—her transcendent dream—or the first part of it—would come to pass: her yearning thumb would press the button and start the little Thunder Bird off, to fly up a couple of hundred miles, or so, with its diary in its cone-shaped head, and send back that novel explorer's log, the little recording apparatus, attached to a black silk parachute—the first, the very first record from the outer realm of space.

81

No wonder that old Greylock sent her back a shout of gladness now, as, squirming in the Chair, she turned her gaze away from the distant mountain to green meadow slopes, to the right, where the broadest silver ribbon, intertwined with the matchless landscape, showed where the Housatonic River, the blue Housatonic, flowed and sang.

"Oh, dear! I wouldn't have missed this for anything," she exulted silently. "But the idea of that perfectly horrid boy actually daring me to do it! He didn't mean to, but he did—strutting off, like that, crowing about his climbing! As if a girl were—gingerbread! Well—" indignantly—"that was just one with his passing Una and me when we only wanted to thank him, felt as if we naturally must thank him, for—for.... Bah! I won't think of the horrid wreck now! Or of him, either! I'll be taken up with the view! Isn't it exquisite—sublime? Not interrupted as it is up there on the—Pinnacle's—crest!...—Ah-h!"

82

The little pinched exclamation came when—all too suddenly—she changed the point of view, and looked down.

Beneath her yawned the precipice over which her feet dangled—treading air, with never a break between them and that grove of dwarf pine trees more than a hundred feet below, pointed by their glinting rocks.

The little trees bowed to her, now, like servants—green pages.

But, somehow, their homage made her feel uneasy; it put too great a distance beneath her and them.

The crown of daring which she wore did not fit quite so easily.

She began to feel like a usurper whose head might at any moment be taken off.

83

And, with that, she decided to vacate!

Drawing up her feet much more gracefully than her predecessor had done, she curled her body in the seat and raised it slowly until she was in a standing position, grasping the stone arms of the chair, turned—turned rather sickeningly, to be sure, until her breast was against the broad rock down which she had slid, then reached upward for a handhold by which to climb—to draw herself up.

There was one. The nickum—churlish climber—had pulled himself up by it. Like him, she had fought shy of it, sliding down, for fear it should catch in her clothing.

A little spur it was, projecting from a slight fissure, what he called a "nick," in the rock, rather more than half-way up,—a good seven feet from the rocky armchair.

Breathlessly she reached upward, to grasp it.

And, lo! her lips fell apart—like a cleft stone.

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At the same time her heart slunk out of her body and dropped into the precipice behind her.

Her fingers just missed that spur—fell short!

They touched it; they could not curl over it—and grip.

Flattening herself to a green creeper against the rock which seemed spurning her, wildly she stretched every tendril—every sinew.

In vain! Make as long an arm as she could, this daring Pem, her five feet three of slim girlish stature would not become the five feet nine of the daredevil who preceded her!

Emergency balks at extension.

That right arm, racked, fell limply back.

The blue of her eyes, hooking to the spur, if her fingers couldn't, grew glazed like enamel.

She felt as if she were tumbling backward already, the daring essence of her, to break her too spunky backbone among those glowing pine-dwarfs far beneath.

85

Spread-eagled against the rock's cruel breast, she turned a blanched face, a convulsed face, upward!

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## CHAPTER IX

### JACK AT A PINCH

86

"KEEP COOL! Don't stir! I'll reach you in a moment!"

As the cry, the reassuring cry, came ringing down to her, Pemrose felt the blood start again from where it was frozen at the back of her neck and surge through her flattened body, which, greenly spread-eagled against that gray rock, the head turned slightly aside, was not unlike the quaint Indian figure of the Thunder Bird upon a pedestal,—the emblem of her father’s invention.

As the first blind moment of terror passed—the blankness of the discovery that, strain as she might, she could not reach that spur of the rock, the nearest hand-hold, and draw herself up to safety—she saw two rescuing figures loom out on high.



“Keep cool! Don’t stir! I’ll reach you in a moment!” Page 86.

The first was that of the chauffeur, Andrew, summoned by a piercing cry from Una-Una whose delicate face was white and square now as the marshmallows in the box under her arm, with which she had bribed her friend to the madcap feat of sliding backward down a twelve-foot rock and sitting in the Devil’s Chair. 87

And Andrew the Scot saw the danger, heard it skirling in his ears, for he had been brought up among mountains.

He did not quite see what good he could do, that staid Church Elder, by joining the girl in the Devil’s Seat.

But he came of a Campbell clan which never flinched.

He was preparing to slide down, himself, when an arm—a left elbow rather—thrust him rudely back.

“T-take hold of this rope-end. Throw yourself flat on the ground there. Sit on him, you girls, so that he may not be drawn over!” cried a voice, pointed, vigorous. 88

Pem knew that it was the fiery voice of the nickum, the broad-shouldered youth, who had sat in the chair before her, whose crowing had been responsible for her feat.

Her colorless face was turned upward then and she had seen him push up the lower folds of his sweater with his left hand—even while its elbow sent the chauffeur back—and while his right, lightning-like, uncoiled a rope, a lariat, worn under it around his waist.

It was then that he shouted to her to “keep cool”; and that she, turning her head aside against the rock, became a living effigy of the Thunder Bird.

Not waiting to make the rope fast around his own body—or his body fast to it—he slid down.

The next moment he was standing beside her in the chair.

“Ha! So the ‘pep’ was in the wrong box that time,” he said coolly.

“Yes. Last time it was in the ice-box,” snapped she, as coolly, not to be outdone. “So you *did* remember-know me-us!” 89

“How could I help-remembering—that icy train-wreck?” He was slipping the rope in a noose under her arms. “Perhaps, some day.... Well! I’m glad to be ‘Jack at a Pinch’ again, anyway.”

"R-ready!" he shouted then.

And Pem was drawn up, to face a Highland squall from Andrew.

"Hoot! lassie, an' air ye sech a fechless tomboy that a mon mun keep his een sticket on ye a' the time?" the Scot angrily demanded. "How cud ye be sech a nickum as to try sitting in yon-Deev's Chair?"

"Ask-ask the other nickum; he did it first," flung back the rescued one.

But under cover of the broad scolding, the other, the Jack at a Pinch-friend in need for the second time-had again slipped off, without a word from either of the girls.

"Bah! he is a nickum-a mysterious imp," snapped Pemrose, the fire that smoldered behind her white face leaping up. "Can't be shyness with him; he doesn't look the least bit shy! Oh-h! what a fool I was to give him a chance to help me-save me-in a 'pinch', again."

Tears were springing to her eyes now,-tears of reaction.

She felt that an eighteen-year-old youth, privileged to save her life twice-it seemed a privilege at the moment-might, at least, have had the manners to let her thank him for it.

"Oh! he's the nicest and the-hor-rid-est-boy I ever saw," wailed Una, in tribute to the train-wreck, still a nightmare on her mind.

Both girls were dumfounded, as well they might be.

Pemrose, with her blue eyes under jet-black lashes-girdled, moreover, with her father's growing fame-Una, with lighter eyelashes and hair, and that little fixed star of angry excitement blazing in one sweet dark eye, they were the kind of girls whose good graces a boy would be the last to spurn, fair even for daughters of Columbia who, democratic in beauty, as in all else, never hatches out an ugly duckling.

They gazed in stormy bewilderment now after Jack at a Pinch walking off with his party whom, indeed, he had herded away.

Andrew was looking gloweringly after him, too.

"An' so he's the loon that sat in the Chair first!" grumbled the still angry chauffeur. "Aw weel-" the "dour" expression upon the speaker's long upper lip softening a little-"weel! he may be ill-trickit, but he's a swanky lad, for a' that. Aye, fegs! an' braw, too."

"Oh! he's 'swanky' enough-swaggering-but I don't think he's 'braw', handsome-not with that little stand in his eye-just like Una's, only more so." Pem added the last words under her breath. "But, oh! for goodness sake! let's get away from here," she cried wildly; "over to the other side of the Pinnacle, anywhere-anywhere-so that we won't see him again, before his strutting over what he's done, makes me-makes me-"

"Yes-it's pretty on the other side of the hill, easy climbing, much smoother-green and spring-like," assented Una soothingly, pouring balm. "It's all covered with young pine trees and just a few, very few, tall silvery birches. Not rough and rocky as it is this side!" glancing shiveringly down the precipice.

"Not another Deev's Chair in sight, I'll be hoping-fegs!" muttered Andrew, picking up a basket which he had carried from the automobile up the low mountainside, and in the late emergency had set down.

It contained cocoa, sandwiches, fruit and other toothsome dainties for a picnic supper.

"We have permission to make a fire, a Pin-na-cle blaze, to-to boil water and toast our marshmallows. Oh! of all things, all-ll things on this planet-I don't know what we may find on any other-that's 'banner', it's a marshmallows toast out-of-doors-isn't it?" chanted Una, intoning her delight to the trees, the low spruce and pine scrub, as she skipped among them, an evergreen sprite, herself, for she, too, now wore the "bonnie green", the Camp Fire short skirt, middy blouse and captivating Tam-o'-shanter-most nymph-like note in dress for daughters of the woodland.

"And-and I just know the dear-est, loveliest pin-ey nook," she went on in a choir-boy sing-song; "half-way down the Pinnacle's softer side it is, where we may build our fire. Halleluia! I suppose I'll have to get busy and gather fagots, as in Camp Fire rank I'm a Wood Gatherer. Oh, dear! Will you listen to old Andrew. Now what is *he* singing?"

The Scot, indeed, relaxing from prim silence and chauffeur ceremony here upon the Pinnacle's height, with only two young girls to marshal instead of the mechanism of lever and brake-although the former, as he had found to his cost might prove the worse handful of the two-was alternately whistling, with lips drily pursed, and crooning in the burr-like accents which adhered like a thistle to his tongue, his version of a very old song:

"Young lassie! Daft lassie,  
I tell ye the noo,  
I'm keepin' some fagots,  
An' a stick, too, for you!

"Singing whack fol de ri do!  
De ri do!

“A lassie, a dog,  
And an auld rowan tree,  
The mair that you thwacks ‘em,  
The better they be!”

“‘Thwacks ‘em!’ Pshaw! he’s flinging that in my direction—having a fling at me—for sitting in the Devil’s Chair,” laughed Pem, but the laughter was bitter, two-edged. “Oh! Una,” she burst forth shakily, “as long—as long’s ever I live, I’ll wish I hadn’t done it, letting—letting that Jack at a Pinch, as he called himself, that big, boorish boy, play friend in need to me—e again. Ugh-h!”

Her stung lips quivered and were twisted, partly upon the after-taste of terror.

“Humph! forget it—oh-h! forget it,” caroled the younger girl. “See that you don’t make a trouble out of it, for trouble is a hor-rid kettle-o’-fish for the troublers—see!... But—listen! Listen! Surely that’s singing—singing from somewhere—*other* singing!”

She paused on tiptoe, a green dryad, one little hand, fair as a flower-petal, curled about her startled ear.

But Pem was for the moment comfort-proof.

“Bah! ‘Tisn’t quite so easy to forget,” she murmured, bitterly.

Her less fragile fists were mounted one upon another under her chin as if to hold her head up. For the first time in her life she felt as if she were being asked to drink a cup of humiliation—she, Toandoah’s little pal—and she made wry faces over even a sip.

“Humph! Doesn’t it seem queer—queer—outlandish?” she snapped, bolstering the piqued head higher with each passionate adjective. “Here for three months, ever since February—since I recovered consciousness after that freezing wreck—I’ve been longing, oh! longing to meet again the boy whose chaff, whose very chaff, warmed one amid the horrors.... You didn’t hear it; you were too far gone. And, *now!*” The little fists lashed out. “Bah! Who could ev-er dream that he’d turn out such a ‘chuff’, as the boys say—an un-civ-il chuff?... Una! it’s never—it isn’t, it can’t be Camp Fire Girls?”

“It is! It is! I told you I heard singing.”

The answer was shrill with delight as the wiry note of the little black-poll warbler, nesting near.

“Why! Why! Goodness! That’s what I hurled at *him*; at his crowing, cock-a-hoop back!”

The older girl’s face softened, melted into whimsicality now,—into a freakish surprise that encircled, like a golden ring, her wide-open mouth.

Up-up from the Pinnacle’s softer side, its tender, heavenly side, the chant came ringing, the merry chant and challenge:

“Then—then don’t take a nap,  
For we’re on the map!”

“Camp Fire Girls! Camp Fire Girls! Here on the Pinnacle ‘map’!”

Pem caught her breath wildly. Never—oh! never was a turn of the tide more welcome.

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## CHAPTER X

### CAMP FIRE SISTERS

NEVER was a diversion more welcome!

“We’re on the map,  
R-ready to prove it with snap!”

Snap was in the very sunset as the evening breeze learned the song.

As for the inventor’s daughter, her joyous relief was now a hop and now a dance, anon a pine-caught hullabaloo, as she gleefully turned her back upon the Devil’s Chair and nickum memories—her face to the glowing sun of sisterhood.

“Camp Fire sisters! Camp Fire sisters! Was ever such luck?” she cried. “Oh! come, let’s find them—let’s join them.”

“Oh—let us!” assented Una, her excitement, too, running like wildfire through the wood.

And, presently, the two city girls, wafting themselves airily over boulders, threading their way in and out among pigmy pines, with here and there a needled patriarch among them, came upon a forest scene that might well have wakened Queen Mab from her sleep in a cobweb net and made her think that some, at least, of the fairy dreams with which she inspired mortals had come true.

A dozen, and more, of sylvan figures, the green tassels of their Tam-o’-shanters waving like the tasseled green of the cinnamon fern flitted busily in and out among their passive brothers, the

trees, not pines here, but a few beautiful stripling birches planted in a sunny spot.

To these white-stemmed saplings, tall and taper-like, some of the nymphs, maidens from thirteen to seventeen, were playing fairy godmother, affixing to their slender trunks placards proclaiming the exaction of dire forfeits from any wanton human churl found guilty of mutilating a silver birch tree, stripping it even of an inch of tender skin, thus entailing upon it decay and death.

100

Other of the maidens were gathering fagots for an outdoor fire to the tune of a version of Andrew's song, not without humor in the present crisis:

"Singing whack fol de ri do,  
'Twill comfort their souls,  
To get such fine fagots,  
When they've got no coals!"

One, brisk spoon in hand, was busily stirring some fairy brew, batter rather—an older figure superintending, Queen Mab herself maybe, having a golden sunburst embroidered upon the heaving emerald of her breast.

Now! to these came forth two other maidens, emerging, breathless, from the Pinnacle pines, and made the hand-sign of fire.

Up went gracefully a dozen green arms, in charming tableau, as the woodland nymphs paused in their work, their curving fingers typifying the warmth of the curling flame behind the finger—the Camp Fire welcome to heart and hearth.

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A genial flame which the Guardian—she of the golden maturity—put into winsome words, as she approached.

"Welcome—thrice welcome,—Sisters!" she cried. "We are the White Birch Group of Lenox, at present engaged in protecting our younger brothers, the little trees which we planted ourselves. I am Tanpa—signifying Birch—Guardian of the Group; in everyday life just Myra Seaver."

"And my name is Lorry—Pemrose Lorry—my ceremonial name Wantaam, a Wise Woman." Here the spokeswoman for the two strangers had the grace to blush, remembering the Devil's Chair. "And this—this is my friend, Una Grosvenor, who has just been initiated into 'Camp Fire.' We belong to the Woo-hi-ye—Victory—Group of Clevedon which, you know, is only a hundred miles, or so, from here; and we—"

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But Tanpa's face had become suddenly fascinated—illumined—to rival the sunburst upon her breast.

"Pemrose!" She echoed the words softly, with transient glow. "How novel—and pretty! But—Lorry! Oh—h! you don't mean to say—you don't tell me—that you're anything to the great inventor, of whom the whole world is talking: the professor who has invented an apparatus to—to travel anywhere through the air, through space—even to reach the moon?... Ah—h, there she is now! I wonder if she's listening to us!"

It was, indeed, at that moment that Yachune herself, the Silver Queen, showed her placid face above the Pinnacle pines, pale on the rim of the waning sunset. Did she dream of the Earth-valentine in store for her, mild old Mammy Moon?

No knowing! The Pinnacle, the green Pinnacle, towered until it seemed very near to her with the mounting pride in one girl's breast.

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"Toandoah, the inventor, is my father—oh! Professor Lorry, I mean. The Thunder Bird—the record-breaking Thunder Bird—is his invention. I call it that; an ordinary rocket he says it is."

Well! the sky was in Pem's eyes, of a truth, now, enough blue to make a Blue Peter, the flag of embarking, the flag of adventure; no rudeness of "nickum", earthbound, boastful, could ever humiliate her again, with Toandoah's emblem in her heart.

Yet, as she felt the Guardian's saluting kiss upon her young forehead, so starred by fate, as she was introduced, one by one, to her sisters of the White Birch Group and was invited, she the center of a flattering fuss, to sit with them by a Pinnacle blaze, instead of being at the pleasant pains to build her own fire, her thoughts would turn back—turn back every now and again, to Jack at a Pinch!

104

To the quick-witted, surefooted youth, so daring, if so unmannerly—such a chuff—who had not even waited to make the rope fast around his own body before sliding down the rock to the Devil's Chair a second time—and who had, a second time too, climbed, unaided.

But she said nothing of him—or of her recent escapade.

And she was glad that Una didn't!

Instead, she bathed every sore spot left by the experience in the glory of telling her new friends all that she might tell of the romantic, space-conquering Thunder Bird, while, above, the Man in the Moon, eavesdropping, learned of the surprise in store for him.

Perhaps he cribbed some hint, too, from the excited girlish tongue of the demonstration so soon to take place upon Mount Greylock, when the invention would be tried out; and lastly of the thrilling invitation to the White Birch Group to be present—not then—but on that Great Day, far ahead, when the real Thunder Bird, full-fledged with magic, red-eyed, fiery-tailed, would embark on its hundred-hour flight moonward, as Pem was sure it would start, no matter where the gold-

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mine to equip it came from.

"Well! we seem, truly-truly-to be treading the 'margin of moonshine land', don't we?" said the Guardian dreamily, enchantment in her voice. "I-almost-feel as if, some day, we might be inviting the Man in the Moon to supper with us here on the Pinnacle, to shoot himself back in the small hours. Joking apart, it does draw the Universe very near together, doesn't it-open the road to such wonderful possibilities!"

Her hands came together as she gazed, that graceful, green-clad woman, speechless, transfigured, along the aërial high-road on which the Thunder Bird would first pay toll by dropping its golden egg, its record, off-off beyond the low night-clouds to the mysterious skyways where daylight now mated with dusk and the lunar lamps were being softly lighted, even to the gateway of Mammy Moon herself. Throbbing, she flushed from head to heel, as she thought of the two hundred and thirty thousand miles to be traversed before the first barrier between the heavenly bodies had been let down-and the Thunder Bird had won home.

"It's-too-gr-reat for words," she said, a break in her voice now. "Well-ll! if we are not playing hostess to the Man in the Moon-quite yet-at least, we seem to be entertaining angels unawares, with the latest rumors from the sky," laughingly. "How about supper now? Later on maybe we can show you two dear girls that we-as a Group-can do something with red fire, too, a very earth-bound something, mere child's play compared to the future of your celestial Bird. Ha! But-what's-that?"

And then, for the first time in its yet unwritten story, the Thunder Bird had its nose put out of joint by a modest little earth-bird-a hermit, too, as it would be among the starry spaces-by a little, brown-backed evening thrush singing its good-night song in a thicket of scrub near by.

"O wheel-y-will-y-will-y-il-!"

it caroled, as a naturalist has translated the wonderful, silver-sweet prelude of the master-singer of the woods, the nightingale of America, rising, trilling until-now-with the voice-throwing magic of the ventriloquist, its song seemed to come from quite another corner of the thicket, while girls' hearts melted in their breasts, as, climbing a maypole of ecstasy, the notes trembled-fluted-upon a gossamer pinnacle of gladness at the close of a perfect day.

"Oh-h!"

There was no breath in girlish bodies for more than the one answering note of passion.

No wonder the Thunder Bird's nose was out of joint.

Earth has a magic all her own.

But was it ventriloquism at large? Had the hermit power to throw his melody right into the center of the ring of girls-so to answer himself?

It was the visitors' turn now for a stupendous sensation.

Almost as airy and flute-like, though not as liquidly sweet and soaring, were bird-notes which answered back from within the very halo of Pemrose herself; and she turned, with her heart in her throat, to see who-who had the thrush in her pocket.

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## CHAPTER XI

### MOTHER EARTH'S ROMANCE

SURELY, it was the sweetest grace ever said.

A duet between a hermit thrush and a Camp Fire Girl! Pinnacle vespers!

If gladness did not flow freely now, then human hearts were a desert!

Instead, they were enchanted ground, those girlish hearts, carried away by a sense that Mother Earth did not, after all, have to go outside her own atmosphere for her fairy-land,-her golden crown of romance.

"Wheel-y-will-y-will-y-il!"

preluded again the little brown hermit-lover, with the rufous tail and ruffled, speckled breast, from an evergreen twig of the low pine-scrub.

And, once more, the aping response, the counterfeit thrush-note, came from some little branch of that goodly green tree known as the White Birch Group.

"Who's doing it? Oh-h! who's doing it-answering?" breathed Pemrose Lorry, feeling thrown into the shade with her Thunder Bird; which wasn't altogether bad for her, either. "Oh! it's *you*, is it? Where's the whistle-the bird-caller's whistle?"

"Here. Look!" A maiden shy as a hermit-thrush herself, with rufous lights in her sleek brown hair, and tiny, red-brown specks flecking the iris of her eyes-corresponding to the many freckles upon her small face, with a luminous quality added-opened a volunteering palm.

In its concave hollow, also marbled with sun-spots, lay the magic whistle, the two gleaming tin disks about the size of a fifty-cent piece, joined one upon another with an eighth of an inch distance between them, through whose simple medium the music in the heart of a fourteen-year-old girl had so attuned itself to a little of the melody in the breast of the thrush as to draw-actually draw-the hermit himself forth on to a rock on the edge of the thicket, looking eagerly, a trifle doubtfully, for the raw singer-the mate, who had answered him.

"Romeo and Juliet!" laughed the Guardian. "Such a dear little feathered Romeo, with a beak lined with pure gold-and a fairy oboe in his breast! Juliet-" she lightly touched the brown-plumaged maiden-"Juliet answering from her balcony, this mound!"

"Only a parrot Juliet who can coin such shabby notes to answer him with!" breathed the girl, shyly nursing her whistle. "No doubt he's saying to himself: 'Shucks! Where's that hermit-or hermitess-'" merrily, "'with the frog in her throat, or the great, big worm?'"

"Oh! do-o try it again, anyway?" pleaded the visitors together. "It's won-der-ful! We'll be as still-as still as a nun's chapel!"

And obligingly, once more, the human thrush lifted up her notes of speckled sweetness compared to the silver purity of the strength which answered, the hermit fluting passionately upon his rock:

"the song complete,  
With such a wealth of melody sweet,  
As never the organ pipe could blow  
And never musician think or know!"

Carried beyond himself-perhaps after all, he was a lonely hermit-he actually hopped from his rock, unalarmed, towards the firelight, when-when the concert was suddenly interrupted by a woodland gorgon!

By Andrew who, rearing his six feet two of gaunt, hurlothrumbo length from a fern-bed, hooking stick in hand, suddenly lifted from the embers a boiling kettle.

"Fegs! 'twas like to scald somebody wi' its daffy simmer," he explained apologetically to the Guardian, being, in his capacity of chauffeur, used to camping emergencies among these picturesque hills-so like, in many respects, the wilds of his Scottish Highlands where the Lady of the Lake, an original Camp Fire Girl, shot her skiff across the blue-eyed loch.

"My certy! but 'twas pretty to see yon *merle*, though!" he murmured, having restored the kettle to sanity. "Fine it minded me, ma'am, o' the time when I was a boy, huntin' like a nickum for the nests o' mavis an' merle-blackbird an' thrush-when I'd rise 'wi' lark an' light!' Fegs!" Scotch humor ripping chauffeur silence, "yon was a thing to make a sober body young again; a while agone I don't know but I was feelin' like the last o' pea-time; an'-an', noo, I'm a green pea again,... or I would be but for the one sair memory," added Andrew, the true-penny, under his breath.

"Yes-yes, and you had to go jumping around like a parched pea, and frightening the beautiful merle, the thrush, away!" complained Una, aggrieved. "Oh! how did you ever learn to mimic its call, at all?" she cried, catching at the wrist of the human merle, now very practically engaged in toasting bacon-strips on the end of a stick.

"My brother taught me; my only brother, Stud-Studley-Studart they nickname him in camp-I don't know why," was the fluttering response.

"A corruption of Stoutheart, I should say!" supplied the Guardian, now busily frying flapjacks. "Of all the Boy Scouts in my husband's troop, he's the lion-heart," laughingly. "So I understand!"

"Yes, oh! yes, but he's so-o nice, with it," cooed the merle's brown-eyed "mate." "He has never-oh! never-squeezed me out of anything, just because I was a girl; always said that two-two-could hunt together and make good headway!" softly.

"And so they can: and so they will, when it comes to the grandest quest of all, the hunt for truth and justice at the polls, voting side by side! Girls! Dear-girls!" The eyes of Tanpa, the Guardian, were ablaze now with more than the firelight's glow, as she tossed her browned cakes on to a platter. "*Dear* girls! In the new, the wider future before us-soon to confront all of you-let us bring to it our Camp Fire hall-mark: the hall-mark of the woods: purity of the Pinnacle's breath, the 'pep' of the outdoor dawn-tenderness of the twilight, when we feel that God is near!... And now-and now! let us sing our grace, not for this food alone, but for the new manna which has fallen for us-the glorious manna of opportunity."

"If we have earned the right to eat this bread, happy are we, but if unmerited Thy blessings come, may we more faithful be!"

On wings of faith the moved chant floated forth, led by the girl-thrush in a sweet soprano, supported by the sonorous roll of the Pinnacle organ, the murmuring pine trees; and the voices of the slender tree choir, the slim, white-tunicked boy-birches, bore it aloft-aloft to Heaven.

"So you're not only gifted as a 'merle', you sing as a girl, too!" said Pemrose presently, nestling nearer to the maiden with the whistle in her green breast-pocket. "You must love birds very much in order to imitate a thrush-song like that."

"Well! my ceremonial name, as a Camp Fire Girl, signifies a little brown bird of the woods; so I thought it was 'up to me' to learn to converse with my kind!" was the half-shy, half-spicy answer.



"My brother Stud and I have no end of fun, now in the early summer when the birds have just arrived, and are mating, calling them around our camp."

"Here—here, let me explain that we have a sort of Community camp for boys and girls about three miles from here, on the wooded shores of The Bowl, that lovely, egg-shaped lake among the hills," put in Tanpa, an air-drawn picture in her glowing tones. "There are two big bungalows, a couple of hundred yards apart, one for the Troop, one for the Group! Of course, we can't occupy them all the time, at present, not until school is closed, but we constantly go out there over night—to watch the summer coming—and for week-ends."

"Oh! the lake and the woods around it are more wonderful now than at any other season of the year," put in one of the older girls, an Assistant-Guardian. "And we can always keep warm, you know, even if there is a cold spell in May, because the boys chop wood for us."

"Yes, and we do their mending; oh! and quite often the shoe pinches—the stocking, I mean—when the holes are just haggles!" The eyebrows of a fair-haired, pretty girl of fifteen were ruefully arched, over eyes of merriment. "But we do—do have such fun at our Get Togethers—our picnics and parties," went on she, whose ceremonial name was Aponi the Butterfly of the mountain group.

"Hur-ra-ah! There are two such Get Togethers coming off quite soon now—one the day after tomorrow—Saturday—a picnic at Snowbird Cave, to explore some other caves afterwards upon the further side of the river, the blue Housatonic."

This contribution came, piecemeal, from several feasting mouths together.

"Oh! the Housatonic—blue—Hous-a-tonic!" Pemrose bent demurely over her flapjack and cocoa, curling her toes under her as she recalled her view of it from the Devil's Chair. "And what about the second Get Together—when is that to be?" she asked.

"A week from Saturday: *Jubilate!* It's our anniversary day as a White Birch Group when we hold a sort of carnival in the afternoon in honor—in honor of the dear birch trees just bursting into leaf." Aponi fluttered like green tree-hair, herself. "And that's to be followed—whoopee!—by a party: a real, full-blown June dance in the evening—to which all the boys are invited. And—and, maybe, some girls not of our Groups will find an invitation tucked into their stockings, too," slyly. "But for the picnic this week the Boy Scouts are hosts."

"I guess, if they knew there were two strange girls in camp—such girls—they'd scuttle to 'come across' with an invitation, too!" laughed the one slangy member inseparable from every group, whose talk is the long stitch in the thread of conversation.

"Do you think they would? Oh! I don't know about that. Boys are such—such griffins, sometimes."

Wormwood was in the eye of Pemrose, pointing the accusation, a new and gloomy pessimism born of the Devil's Chair and Jack at a Pinch.

"*Ours* aren't!" It was the voice of the little girl-thrush lifted in blue-jay belligerence now. "Our boys aren't queer fish—not a bit!" rising to hot defense of Stud, the Stoutheart, who even in callow youth, was of opinion that Life in every phase was a game for two—in which two, of differing sexes, could hunt together and make good headway.

"To be sure, they do love to get off jokes on each other—and occasionally on us," went on Jessie, the brown-haired merle in maiden form. "They have a society of older boys in their camp called the Henkyl Hunters' Brigade. My brother Stud—he's a patrol leader—belongs to it. And they go on the war-path occasionally—and publish a bulletin about their doings."

"What's a henkyl?" Una's mouth was wide open; upon its gusty breath rode horned toads and plated lizards, in imaginary solution.

"A henkyl! Oh! if you ask *them*, they say it's a freak of an animal that they hunt up and down in the woods, trying to get its scalp, or—or catch it alive. Which they seldom or never do!" Jessie's eyes sparkled. "Stud says a whole 'henkyl' is hard to capture; it's so sure to shed its horns or its teeth just as you pounce upon it."

Pem was staring intently at the speaker, her black brows drawn together over eyes as speculatively blue as ever they had been in Toandoah's laboratory when grasping, or trying to, grave problems of the air.

"Oh! I know. I know!" she cried suddenly, the blue breaking up in the firelight into a harlequin patchwork of merry gleams. "A henkyl! Why-y! it's a joke. A joke that they're forever chasing up and down, trying to get a laugh against somebody,—that absurd brigade!"

"Companionship with a Thunder Bird has sharpened your wits," smiled the Guardian. "A practical joke it is, that most elusive thing to pull off whole, point and all, with the laugh entirely on one side! Well! we mustn't give them any occasion to turn the chase against us, air their wit in our direction, by failing in our demonstration presently—the signaling practice to which we challenged them; eh, Tomoke?"

"No, indeed!" A sixteen-year-old girl, gray-eyed, vibrant with energy, mobile as the Lightning, the mettlesome Lightning, from which she took her Camp Fire name, spoke up spiritedly. "We're going to flash a message right across the valley, over to old Round-top, that sleepy, dark mountain, a couple of miles away, just as soon as the daylight is all faded out," she explained.

"Oh, ho! That's what the Guardian meant when she spoke of showing us something—a display—with red fire, eh?" gasped Pemrose. "How are you going to signal—with what code?"

"Morse code—and a good, fat two-foot pine-knot, oozing with resin!" smiled the Lightning, vivid with inspiration. "How-how about sending over this message: 'Two strange girls in camp; you ought to meet them?'"

"Lovely! That will hit the mark!" came the appreciative chorus, to the song of logs. "Then-then you'll see old Round-top wake up, quick's a wink and 'come across' with an invitation—an invitation to that banner picnic the day after to-morrow!"

## CHAPTER XII

### OLD ROUND-TOP

"C. F. G.! C. F. G.!  
We are the Camp Fire C. F. G.!  
Oh! none with us can compare,  
For we looked over  
And picked the clover,  
And the World's lit up  
With our Camp Fires everywhere!"

"And, fegs! wi' an aging, sober body like mysel', if he isn't a-picking o' the clover blossoms, he's a-smelling o' them the night," softly soliloquized Andrew, the chauffeur, as he listened to that halcyon song around the Pinnacle blaze-feeling barred out of Clover Land himself, as he lay among the ferns, because of the "one sair memory", the whiff of heather ever and anon wafted to his nostrils, as it seemed, from the grave of a fifteen-year-old lassie away back in Scotland.

"Hum-m! if 'tweren't for that, I could maist fling out an' dance the 'Rigs o' Barley' a-watching o' those happy lasses," he whimsically confessed in the ear of a king fern. "I could, for sure, same's we used to dance it in the glen around a bonfire!"

But if the heather in his heart, reinforcing chauffeur primness, checked even the first lashing kick of a Highland Fling, it did not restrain him, that grave Church Elder, from taking part later in something fully as giddy; a wild and storming torchlight procession.

"Now! what we need, girls, is a good r-rich pine-knot, with a juicy, resinous knot in it, that will burn ten minutes, anyway, for signaling purposes," said Tomoke, the personified Lightning, as the "C. F. G." proclamation over, the magic moment came for the flashing of the light of this particular camp fire in speaking fire from mountain to mountain-across the mile and a half of intervening valley. That inflammable knot was not hard to find. Split with the toy axe which the girl who had won an honor bead for signaling carried at her belt—a modern Maid Marion, at home in all woodcraft—it blazed, transplendent, a foot-long flambeau, searching the Pinnacle's darkest nooks, winning sleepy birds from their slumbers, calling upon them to follow too, as Tomoke, nimble of foot as her aerial namesake, presently dashed up the hill, with it held high!

Brilliant as a starshell—where near-by objects were concerned—it counted the needles upon the little, awed pine trees. It painted the wild excitement upon leaping girls' faces, lit dancing Jack-o'-lanterns in their eyes as, scrambling, they followed the light-shod leader—gold-slippered by the torch—in a breathless tumble-up over rock and needled carpet, amid scandalized bough and shamefaced crag and little, blinking torrent.

It turned to nocturnal dewdrops the bright eyes of the birds,—scandalized, too, yet resolved, at all costs, to come in on the fun!

Robins, flame-breasted in the glow, a black-throated green warbler—blossom of the night—a purple grackle, its boat-tail stiff as a fan-shaped rudder, and, "leggeddy-last," a cawing crow, they circled on low wing after the brilliant torch,—all pecking at the wonder in the air!

It caught the whooping amazement on Andrew's smooth-shaven upper lip, shimmering through a veil of anxiety lest, somewhere, there might be another "Deev's Chair" around, or a madcap lassie to sit in it, as, with an irresistible "Hoot mon!" he brought up the rear of the fantastic revel; the rush of green-clad maidens, the elfin tassels of their Tam-o'-shanters waving, and of demented birds for the Pinnacle's tallest crag.

Poised upon that gray rock-shelf, high above the ground, her slight face with the shining eyes, framed in the radiant torch-light as in a golden miniature, the signaler's right arm held the blazing knot with its ragged, foot-long flame at arm's length above her head, then described a brief quarter circle to the left with it, quick, snappy-once, twice—the arm being extended on a level with the young shoulder so slim, so stiffened!

"See!—See! That stands for I: two dots! I, three times repeated, gives the call," breathed the Guardian at Pem's elbow, her mature face a gold-set miniature of excitement, too.

"Oh-oh! I wonder if they'll 'get us', those boys—those joking Henkyl Hunters?" The throbbing question was on every girlish lip. Eyes burned, like the torch, across the valley.

The mountains were falling asleep in their night-caps of mist.

But suddenly one of them, far away, grim and dim, lifted an eyelid—and responded.

The drowsy valley caught its breath—as old Round-top winked back.

Caught its breath with many a waking scintilla of light in the pointed flash of pool and stream!

A momentary, broken arc, a shattered rainbow dividing the flood of dusk above from the gulf of darkness below; and then—and then the triumphant cry in each gasping throat:

“They’ve got us! They see us! Now—now for the message: ‘Two strange girls with us. You....’”

But there the Lightning’s lore suddenly gave out, her signaling memory, as the news was vivaciously transmitted by staccato dot and lengthier dash, the latter being the same quarter-circle once described in a single movement to the right.

Over the valley the message was hung up. It was hung up in Pem’s heart, too,—and the honor, the fair grace, of boyhood with it.

If old Round-top unhesitatingly played up, “came across” with an invitation—an invitation to that alluring Get Together at the winter palace of the Snowbirds, then she would feel that a nickum’s rudeness was atoned for—and Jack at a Pinch might go his graceless road, never to prove a friend in need to her again—not if she knew it!

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“Invite them to the picnic ... and don’t forget the cocoa!”

The valley fairly bristled with the promptness of it—the skilled directness of the message, so rapidly, so spontaneously given that the poised Lightning on the crag was hard-pressed to keep up with the meaning—to read the handwriting of fire and give the interpretation thereof.

Old Round-top had seized the shining hour. The Henkyl Hunters were no “chuffs”, no conundrums, with the strange riddle of incivility up a sleeve.

“Invite them to the picnic—and don’t forget the cocoa!” Tanpa laughed. “Just like them! We did promise to lay in a fresh supply of sundries, as we pass through the town to-night—if there’s still a store left open. And that reminds me, girlies, that it’s getting late. We have no right to keep the birds out of bed any longer, demoralizing the feathered world.”

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But the Lightning had recovered its morale, its memory, prompted by a Morse code-card excitedly snatched from a green breast pocket and explored by the light of the dwindling torch.

“Invite-your-friends-to-our-d-a-n-c-e,” slowly spelled out Tomoke, giving back diamond for diamond.

She was beginning upon the word “A-ll”, but the pine-knot winked itself out in a dazzlement on “dance,”—in an effulgence of sparks that fell like golden rain upon the hearts of the visitors.

“Will it—will it be an outdoor affair—a piazza dance?” gasped Una. “Oh-h! I do love.... Now! Andrew!” She broke off suddenly at the chauffeur’s declaration that it was “magerful” show, “yon fire-talk”, that he never expected to see the like carried on by “tids o’ lassies”, but that it really wasn’t in him to stand there any longer rolling his eyes over it, like a duck in thunder. “Now, Andrew!” reasoned his employer’s young daughter. “You know that you’ve driven my father and mother, and Professor Lorry, too, to a dinner-party, where the professor is to give a talk about the Thunder Bird—and oh! may its fiery tale be a long one to-night—you won’t have to fetch them home for another two hours yet.”

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“Hoot! It’s soft as peppermint. I am wi’ ye, Miss Una, but it’s time for all lassies to gang home,” returned the other with paternal insistence, lifting his cap in questioning appeal to the Guardian.

“He’s right, dear. *We* must be starting for the home camp, too—just as soon as we’ve seen that our fire is thoroughly extinguished,” said Tanpa. “Our paths don’t lie in the same direction, but we hope they often will in future. As to the dance, it will be a piazza affair, if the evening is fine—the festive wind-up of an exciting day, our White Birch anniversary which we celebrate with rites and symbolic dancing, in honor of our patron, our woodland lady, the leafing birch tree.”

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“How lovely; per-fect-ly love-ly!” flowed from the visitors, both, in a silvery ripple.

“Well! how about your spending a few days in camp with us then—at our camp on the Bowl—if your elders are willing?” went on the gracious grown-up woman, with warmth as golden as the sunburst on her breast. “We’ll let Pemrose Lorry plant the tallest birch sapling in honor of the Thunder Bird. Long-long before it’s a full-grown tree, let us hope, the Bird will have made its great migration, crossing, not a continent, but space! And now, dears, *au revoir!* to meet again at Snowbird Cave.”

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## CHAPTER XIII

134

### COBWEB WEED

“WELL! you certainly are the laziest bunch; you’d carry a whole bakery in your knapsacks rather than do any cooking—especially if there are girls around. Lazy as Ludlam’s dog you are! Next time—next time, I’ll set you to peeling potatoes.”

It was the chaffing voice of the Scoutmaster, Malcolm Seaver, which spoke, addressing some twenty scouts who were scattered about the vine-draped entrance to Snowbird Cave, where,

yearly, the little gray-white junco birds—otherwise snow-birds—fluffy balls, with no heads to speak of, wintered among the low hemlocks near the cavern’s mouth and fed upon the spicy hemlock bark.

“I-I wonder if you could tell me of what breed Ludlam’s dog was, sir? If he could burn up daylight chasing his tail any better than this crowd can, lolling around on a picnic, he must be the limit.”

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The answer came with the low, drawling laugh of Stud Bennett, otherwise Studart, brother to Jessie, the “merle’s” calling mate, who was himself playing fiddle-faddle in the sunshine, after a four-mile hike.

“Humph! Well, *I’m* off to locate a spring—where’s the blue bucket? When I get back you’ll *have* to turn to, you dummies, build a fire and unpack the commissariat—otherwise rolls by the dozen. The ‘duff’ and Frankforts are in the ‘Baby’, I guess.” The Scoutmaster shot a glance at a big, brown duffle bag reposing on a mound, capable of containing ten bags of rations, each pertaining to individual scouts on a long hike, yet hardly sufficient to transport the “cates”, the luncheon for eighteen Camp Fire Girls and twenty scouts, plus a couple of invited guests, on a Together picnic.

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“Are there any boys and girls who are dying to come with me, to prospect for water?” he put forth alluringly, to the rhythmic swing of the big water bucket in his right hand, painted bright blue.

There was an instant volunteering flutter among certain green-clad girls and lads in khaki, breezing up from the grass where they had languished; others held back.

“I’d rather explore the cave—I love creepy caves—and we haven’t been half through it yet,” said Pemrose Lorry.

Forthwith Stud, the Henkyl Hunter, decided that cave-exploiting was the pastime for him; there was rarely a younger boy—Studart was barely fifteen—who did not become the captive knight of this older girl with the sky in her eyes under jet-black lashes!

Jessie, sister of Stoutheart, she of the thrush-song in her heart, wanted to be near to the girl who was mate to a Thunder Bird, too; and others were drawn by the same abstract birdlime—or else the bat-stirred cave had lures.

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“There—there’s a secret lobby in it,” said Stud, “a dark, rocky passage leading off from that queer black, three-cornered fissure in the right wall, ten feet from the ground—I guess nobody has ever explored it; nobody has cracked the nut of what’s behind that triangular crevice, so high up!”

“Come—come; that sounds exciting, very exciting!” remarked Tanpa, the Guardian, remaining behind too, as chaperon.

But her husband wheeled upon his jog-trot off after water, swinging his galvanized iron bucket after a manner to give the air the blues.

“Well! I wouldn’t try to crack the nut, solve the riddle, of what’s behind that queer-shaped crevice, Stud,” he said. “It’s black-black as a tinker’s pot in there. You wouldn’t know what you were heading into!”

“Aw, gammon! I wouldn’t be afraid to tackle that fissure—find out what’s back of it—although I’m not a Tin Scout—ha! ha!—out with the whole toyshop to-day; all my monkey trappings,” exploded a rough voice suddenly from among a trio of clownish-looking boys who hovered, vulture-like, on the edge of the picnic ground, transfixing with a sanguinary eye the Baby, whose soft heart was of blueberry “duff.”

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“An’ I tell you what’s more, if I were to climb up an’ in there, I’d trust to my own ‘bean’ and a few matches, ‘thout any gimcracks,” craked the boastful voice further, the special gewgaw on which the braggart fixed his eye, at the moment, being the little Baldwin safety lamp, four inches high, which Stud was just lighting, attached to the front of his olive-green scout hat.

“Tr-rust to your own ‘bean’—your own head—an’ what’s inside it! Well! I’ll admit it’s fiery enough,” flouted the Henkyl Hunter, piqued even in the presence of girls into giving back tit for tat. “But you’re carrying too many eggs in one basket, let me tell you, and you’re likely enough to take a leap in the dark an’ smash ‘em all.”

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“Ha! Am I now,” snarled the other, resenting the implication that his brick-red head was a brash basket into which to pack all his chances of safety, such as were not anchored to the poor stay of a few fickle matches.

“Am I now-ow?” he chortled, very red in the face—and tongue-tied—as he shadowed the picnic party through the cave.

At his wits’ end for a verbal retort, he presently proceeded, after the manner of his kind, to throw a stone in his own garden.

“See here! you kids, if you’ll let me stand on your shoulders, you two, I’ll give those Tin Scouts an eye-opener,” he said, retaliating after a manner to hurt only himself, as he addressed the two younger boys with him, his eyes cast up to that mysterious fissure, outlined, a rocky tripod, above his head, of which the Scoutmaster had remarked that all behind it was black as a tinker’s pot.

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Into that ebony pot, forthwith, climbing by the willing step-ladder of his companions’ bodies, Ruddy, the rashling, presently thrust his head—that flaming head with all his chances in it!

His body followed, finding entrance through the crevice amidships, so to speak, where it broadened out to some three feet across from the tapering point of the lowest corner.

"Oh-h! look at him. Do look at him!" panted the girls, held up in their search for pale-faced cave flowers and strange fungi by the "derring-do" act.

"Gracious! some of you scouts ought to stop him-re-al-ly ought to stop him," shrilled Jessie, catching her breath at the shock of darkness visible in the yawning fissure's mouth, where the brief flicker of a match now chased bogies. 141

"Humph! We can't head him off, Jess." Her brother disclaimed responsibility with a shrug-while the little lamp winked sarcastically from his hatbrim-but in the heedful tone of the boy who had been trained to feel-as Toandoah did with his little petticoated pal-that Life was a game in which two could hunt together, even upon the trail of a Thunder Bird, and make good headway. "We can't turn him back!" Stud shrugged his khaki shoulders. "But he'll strike a blind bargain in there. Ha! There goes another 'nigging' match!"

A frippery flame, indeed, its reflection flickered a moment, a gold tooth in the fissure's grinning mouth-darkness followed!

Two or three of the boy scouts-those who did not, like Stud, show incredulity, sarcasm gleaming, hawk-eyed, from a ruby lamp hooked to a hatband, and from a level eye beneath it-held their breath, dazzled; for the moment beaten at their own brave game of exploring. 142

So did the girl who had been piqued and dared into sitting in the Devil's Chair-with a sheer abyss beneath her!

Again did her wide-open, staring eyes, under their black lashes, sport a Blue Peter, the flag of adventure.

"Oh! he's plucky, anyhow. I wonder what he'll find in there?" her palms were laid together upon a spicy filling of excitement. "He really is daring-awfully daring, you know!"

"Ha! Courage cobweb-weed!" muttered Stud laconically. "Well-well, he'll have tears in his eyes before I go after him!"

And-with that-there was the rasp of a third "nigging" match, faintly-heard, far in, a momentary reflection, a tiny glance-coal, in the fissure's leering mouth! And-and, following that, a shriek!

A shriek, headlong, sinking and pitching-dying like a falling star, as if some clutch were stifling it. 143

"Hea-vens!" The girls, blanching, shrank against the opposite cave-wall, which shuddered behind them.

A bat, flying low, a winged Fear, brushed Tanpa's cheek, as she stood, transfixed,-and her cry was almost as hysterical as theirs.

In the blackness of that Tinker's Pot behind the looming fissure, were there other things-other things besides a boy, a broken braggart of a boy?

Was Death in the pot with him? Had he sipped of its mystery-only to perish? Death-it seemed a raving possibility-in the shape of some wild animal, perhaps-a live, a clutching claw!

Tales were always current among the mountains, trappers' tales-and most of them airy "traveler's yarns", too-of strange tracks seen in lonely spots, of lynx and bobcat; and even of the young and roving panther.

To be sure, a three-cornered tunnel, the second floor back of a lofty cave, would be the last place to look for such an ambush, unless there was some fly-trap opening to it from above. But there might be! 144

Boys and girls, both, their blood flamed upon the fear, then froze-until the silence, the bat-churned cave silence, was hung with icicles above them.

Then, once more, it was ripped from on top by that perishing shriek-passing strange, remote-but now it was as if the fissure's three-cornered mouth filled with it, faintly gibbered the one word: "C-caught!"

"'Caught!' Oh! Stud, you warned him; it's his own doing. Let those other two boys-his friends-climb up to him! Well-if you feel-you-must?"

Jessie's cry gibbered in agony in her throat, too, liquid as the thrush-tone in terror for its mate. But it struck a high note at the end.

For Stud's hand was groping mechanically for the bright little lamp above his forehead, as if for inspiration, his left for the lariat at his waist, in defiance of his threat that the desperado in the "pot" might have tears in his eyes before he would help him. 145

But there was something worse than cave-tears in question now-of that Studart felt sure.

And Pem, watching,-Jessie, too-caught from an entering shaft of day-light which shivered as if aghast, the reflection of the tightening glow upon his young face-the waggish features of the Henkyl Hunter!

And she recognized it, by the feeling of her stiff, cold cheeks, as she clapped her hands to them-did Toandoah's little chum-for the glow which had electrified her own when she fought her way out of a swamped Pullman, saving her friend, driving it into the teeth of the flood, and of the World, too, that neither her father's honor, nor his invention-nor anything he ever turned out-was a Quaker gun; letting fly with it faintly at a rescuing youth, too, when she bade him "take 146

Una first."

For by that glow as by an altar-lamp, in whose gleam she had worshiped before she saw as the strong boy's hand went automatically to his equipment that lamp and lariat were nothing-nothing-"without the heart of a Scout!"

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## CHAPTER XIV

### STOUTHEART

147

"W-WEDGED!... Wedged!"

Now-now it was another word which jabbered faintly in the dark fissure's mouth! A girl caught it-or thought she did.

"Wedged!" she echoed wildly. "Caught! Oh, maybe-maybe-there's nothing in there but Ruddy himself!"

"Maybe-so!" Stud panted heavily while, across an inner, gaping hollow, the next words took a giant stride to his lips: "Anyhow-I'm going up!"

"Oh-Studley!" But beyond this one faint cry, Jessie, stanch little partner,-the girl behind the lines,-said no more to hinder him now, as she watched the scout detach his little lamp from his hatbrim and hook it on to his khaki breast.

With it glowing there, a headlight for his gallant heart, Stud set himself to climb. Standing upon the shoulders of two brother scouts, in his belt a club snatched from one of them, he reached the lowest point of the tapering fissure.

148

"Ha! There he goes, in spite of his teeth," tremored a younger boy.

"His teeth aren't chattering!" Pem's eyes-lightning-blue-hurled back the charge.

The denial rang in Stud's ears as he thrust his head into the black opening, entering, amidships, as the former muddle-headed explorer had done.

"That girl's a trump-the girl with eyes the color of the little 'heal-all', that blue flower we pick up here in May! A trump! But so's little Jess, too!"

Thus did Stoutheart, a knight of to-day, pay tribute to the world he left behind him, when he felt in his exploring knees, now creeping along the bottom of the Tinker's Pot, that there was a chance of his leaving it behind forever.

"I don't see what else he *could* have done," said Tanpa, the Guardian, her fingers hysterically interlocking. "Somebody had to go up; and he's the oldest boy-a Patrol Leader. But, oh! I wish my husband were here. Run and meet him, a couple of you!" She glanced appealingly at the scouts. "Oh! do-and hurry him back-back from the spring."

149

Meanwhile Stud had forgotten even his backers in the feminine hearts below and was banking all on just one trusty ally-the headlight on his breast.

"Without the light, the little safety lamp, I couldn't do-o it," he told himself. "Gee! but it is as black in here as Erebus, a Tinker's Pot, indeed-the blindest passage-blindest bargain-I ever struck! So-so sharp underneath, too!"

Yes, difficulty masked was in the "bargain", yet he crept on over tapering ridges of rock that now and again buckled like teeth. But he knew by the parched sound of his own voice, as he shouted a question, that his courage might have ended in smoke, there and then, if it weren't for the little lamp at his breast.

150

So rosily it burned now, in here, that its feeding oil seemed the red blood of his heart!

"Anyhow-anyhow, with it, I'll be able to see which way the cat jumps!"

Here, Stoutheart more tightly gripped the club; the last words might prove more than mere figure of speech.

From ahead came strange, gurgling, choking sounds, rising from somewhere-growing weaker.

"Where-where are you, Ruddy? Answer! R-rap-rap out something, if you can!" he adjured.

And it was-truly-a rapping reply that reached him; a queer, hollow knocking at the door of some throat that semed shutting.

"My word! What on earth ... what in thunder's got him?" Stud felt his own breath blow hot and cold together, but-this crucial moment it came back to him-the eyes of a girl out there had driven it home, with blue lightnings, that he did not *have* to defy his teeth.

151

"Humph! I'm no quitter," he told the piloting breast-ray, blazing its ruby trail ahead. "Well-ll! for the love of Mike! Well! what do you know about that?... What have we h-here?"

In answer to his gasping snort, as he gaped and gasped there in the darkness, the little safety lamp told him what it made of it-of the staggering sight-it made a pair of big feet in rough cowhide boots tightly wedged by the ankles in a buckling switch of rock where two sharp, narrow

ridges that formed the bottom of the Tinker's Pot dovetailed into each other,-after the manner of rails at a switch.

Ruddy, the slipslop explorer, had gone in heels over head, so to speak. He was hanging by the heels now. Nothing visible of him but those pinioned feet!

"*Hea-vens!* he did strike a blind bargain. S-such a snag! The passage ends here. A drop! A-blank-fall of rock! Gee-ee!"

Dank-dank as cave-tears now was the moisture upon Stud's forehead. For the first time his teeth almost chattered. What would he see when he held the lamp over the edge of the Tinker's Pot into the horror of that empty space beyond where the passage broadened into blankness and the rock shelved sharply down? A dead boy? Or one so far gone from hanging that he could not be rescued?

At the first sight of those wedged feet he had felt inclined to laugh. Now he was laughing at the wrong side of his mouth, as he peeped over the brink.

"Oh-h! the rock *isn't* perpendicular; it slants down, though, pretty sharply-down into an inner cave-by gracious! And Ruddy, the way he's hanging his nose, is within an inch or two o' the floor of that other cave!... And, yet, he's helpless! Helpless as if he had a halter round his neck! Oh-h! if some of the other fellows were here."

But Stud did not seem to be quite alone; he was one and a half; for the hearts of two girls were pendent from *his* neck; outside he knew they were backing him,-praying for him.

Also, that frenzied gurgle from the victim's throat, his choking cry as the light struck him, the squirming body and up-rolling eyes told the boy scout that he was just in time; although the foam was pink upon Ruddy's lips and his congested head was a fire-ball, indeed,-that brash head with all his chances in it.

"Ha!

"No Loyal Scout gives place to doubt,  
But action quick he shows!"

The song, his own, the original march-song of his troop, sang itself through Stud's brain, seethed in the low whistle upon his lips, as, guided by his ruby breast-eye, he slid down into that strange and secret dungeon in which the black passage ended and, thrusting his sturdy shoulders under the pendent body of the victim whose convulsed hands clutched vainly at the bare slab, raised it so that the choking boy could breathe freely again-and in due time shake off the dizziness of his awful plight, hung up by the heels by the rock itself.

But not until the Scoutmaster came to his patrol leader's assistance could those pinioned feet be really freed and their owner brought to daylight again, not by a return via the fissure route, but hoisted in a rope-noose, as Pem had been from the Devil's Chair, through a grass-covered opening discoverable in the roof of that inner cave.

"Goodness! after all, he wasn't so much more foolish-headstrong-than I was. But Una! Una! If you ever-r tell them!" Thus did the maiden of the chowchow name spill her spice into her friend's ear,-burning spice, for, privately, she was shocked at seeing her own folly, parodied, vulgarized, as it were.

"Well! I should say! He was hanging between hawk and buzzard-if ever a fellow was," happened to be Stud's moved comment as, clinging to that lowered rope, he was hoisted, too, through that covert opening, the loyal little lamp upon his breast paling now into a penny candle held towards the sun.

But the rescuer's halo did not pale.

It burnished the picnic luncheon which followed, encircling, rainbow-like, little Jessie who basked in it more than did the rebellious hero, pelted with wild flowers by the girls-as symbolic of other bouquets.

"Oh! let up-let up-will you? Those big fellows will take me for the 'goat'-somebody's 'goat!'" protested Stud helplessly, striving to direct attention from himself by training it upon a straggling group of distant youths, really too far off to take stock of what was going on among the merry picnic party.

But Pemrose was taking stock of them. Her widening eyes, her reddening cheeks, the little piqued shiver that electrified her chin, told that one figure-one figure-called for recognition; called for it, indeed, so loudly that it couldn't be denied him.

Every member of that group-a canoeing party, a wading party, it was, just landed from the near-by river, the blue Housatonic-was a blaze of color.

But the sturdiest among them was simply barbaric. The warm sunlight of May dripped golden from his nickum shoulders, bronzed to the hue of a statue, bathed his bare knees and feet, his khaki shorts, the flame of an apricot jersey, the black and yellow cap,-the sheaf of mayflowers within his arm.

"Oh! how boys-big boys-do revel in color. A girl-any girl I ever knew-is demure in her taste beside them," murmured the Camp Fire Guardian, with amused, motherly tolerance.

"Pshaw! I think it's hor-rid. So flashy!" snapped Pemrose; Jack at a Pinch had made gorgeous his

incivility and was parading it before her eyes.

"Oh, boy! Look at that middle fellow. He'd have a grosbeak 'skun a mile!'" gasped Stud, following the direction of her glance, with a virtuous consciousness of his own cave-soiled khaki, moderately lit by merit badge and service stripe.

"Grosbeak! Oh, but I love grosbeaks! And all that color-why! it paints the landscape," came flutteringly from Aponi, the White Birch Butterfly, least Priscilla-like in her tastes of the Group, when she was not in Camp Fire green, or soft-toned ceremonial dress.

"Maybe 'twill paint the blues in old Tory Cave, if we run across them there," put in Tomoke, maiden of the flambeau and the fire-talk. "They certainly are a perfect 'scream', those big boys," her eyes merrily following that clamor of color now wending back towards the canoes.

"Humph! they'd have to 'go some' to leaven the blues of Tory Cave," remarked the Scoutmaster, laughingly addressing himself to a roll. "The biggest bonfire on earth wouldn't half dry the cave-tears there."

"Yes, that's the den of the Doleful Dumps-their diggings!" laughed a younger scout, flourishing aloft a mess-mug, the gray of his rolling eyes. "Bats-bats as big as saucers-no, soup-plates! And, far in-far in-the sound of running water, like a weak wind!"

"Running water! Invisible running water! A-weak-wind! Oh-h! do let us hurry and go on there. We have to cross the river; haven't we?" The gurgle of that cloistered brooklet was already in Pem's heart as her dilating gaze spanned the Housatonic, broad and open, "warbling" amid its soft meadow slopes, as she had looked upon it from the Devil's Chair. "But, goody! I hope we *won't* run across him there-Jack at a Pinch! Flaunting round like a grosbeak!" She bit the thought into an olive. "Stud's no grumpy riddle-if he is a Stoutheart, like the other!"

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## CHAPTER XV

### AIRDRAWN AËROPLANES

RUNNING water! Invisible running water! The voice behind the scenes prompting the play,-the grim play of bat and rat and reptile in old Tory Cave, where the rocks wept, the little strolling sunbeams clapped their hands, and the great fungi, primrose-skirted, drooped over a drama never finished!

It was even more romantic than the girls had hoped for,-such romance as clings, cobweb-like, to melancholy.

Like a weak wind, truly, a sad wind blowing from nowhere, was the purl of that hidden streamlet whose mystery no man had penetrated-nor ever seen its flow-mournfully as cave tears it dripped upon the ears and hearts of the girls.

"Pshaw! Who cares for weeping rocks, though they look as if they were bursting with grief and ready to tear their pale hair-that queer growth clinging to them. Humph! Only crocodile tears, anyhow, like 'Alice in Wonderland!'" cried Ista, the laughing Eye of the White Birch Group, whose everyday name was Polly Leavitt.

"It's *not* the tears and it's not that horribly sad lake with the little, blind, colorless fish in it, that I mind-it's the Bats!" screamed Una Grosvenor. "Oh-h!" as the mouse-like head of the cave mammal and its skinny wing almost brushed her face.

"Well! They're not brick-bats," came reassuringly from one of the boys, as the Togetherers ranged through the outer part of that vast Tory Cave-once the hiding-place of a political refugee, whose spirit seemed flitting among them in the filmy cave-fog which, dank and mournful, clung about the margin of that strange lake of fresh water where blind fish played.

Presumably fed by that cloistered brooklet, whose cell, far in, in an impenetrable recess, no human foot had ever trod, the lakelet had the floor to itself, so to speak, so that in places scouts with their lamps, and girls pairing off with their exploring brothers, one piloting eye between them, had difficulty in skirting it-without a ducking.

"Whew! a ducking in the dark-a cave-bath-horrible!" cried Pemrose. "Oh, mer-rcy! what-what is it?"

"Bah! Only a garter snake-a pretty fellow," laughed Studley, picking the slim, striped thing up from a corner of the blind lake where it was amphibiously basking, and letting it curl around his khaki arm, investigating the merit badges of the patrol leader.

The green and red of the life-saver's embroidered badge, the crossed flags of the expert signaler, the white plow of the husbandman, they enlivened the gloom a wee bit, winking up at the safety lamp hooked to his hat-band, as he bent over the illumined reptile.

But they did not challenge it as did the flash of an apricot sweater, blood-red in the ruby lamplight, of a black and yellow cap, several yellow and black caps, suddenly-eagerly-thrust near.

"He's big-big for a garter, isn't he, Buddy?" remarked a voice that did not come from the ranks of



Togetherers, of Boy Scouts and Camp Fire Girls, excitedly scrutinizing Stud's novel armlet.

Neither-neither was it the voice of the nickum, so much Pemrose knew, as she edged coldly a little away,-a little nearer to the dim and sighing lake-edge.

Yet he was among them, those gaudy big boys, whose flare of color merely striped the cave-dusk, like the dingy markings upon the snake's squirming back.

He actually had his armful of mayflowers, too, the nickum, not the snake; *passë* mayflowers, with the tan of decay on them, was nursing them carefully, as if they were part of a long lost heritage into which he had lately come-as if he were afraid to lay them down lest some alien should snatch them from him.

"He doesn't look like a 'chuff'-a boor. He looks like a really nice college boy, one with a hazing imp in his eye though, lur-king in that little star-almost a squint; so-so like Una's," thought the inventor's daughter, familiar with the student brand of boy. "Yet how could he be so uncivil to us, really-actually-snob us, after all he did, too? Goodness! wouldn't I like to get a chance to snub him?" It was the Vain Elf which slept in the shadow of the Wise Woman in the breast of Pemrose Lorry, that stored this wish, laid it up, a vengeful arrow in the blue quiver of her eyes, now shooting piqued, sidelong glances at those flaunting big boys. "Why-y *should* we run up against them here? Well! he'll never get a chance to play Jack at a Pinch-friend in need-to me again. Watch me-watch me pick my steps!" She picked them so at random, at the moment, moving off, that she came near slipping in for that eerie ducking, with the blind fish-pale as phantoms, swimming round-and Stud, flinging the striped garter away, hurried after her-Jessie, too!

"Gee! this is a peach of a cave; isn't it?" effervesced the scout sarcastically. "Melancholy so blooming thick that you could almost sup its sorrow with a spoon, eh?"

"It's a regular cave of despair." The lonely trill of the feathered hermit was in Jessie's answering note. "That sad voice of water, a cascade-a stream-far in, which nobody ever saw!"

"I'd give worlds to see it!" said Pemrose.

"So would I!" Stud's voice was pitched high. "If it weren't for the Scoutmaster.... Tradition says that whoever drinks of that hidden water will have luck."

"Well! I'd let somebody else have the piping times if I were you, Buddy-if they depend on a draught from that mysterious spring."

Now, it was the nickum who answered; the same scintillating tones they were-how bully they sounded then-which had quoted Shakespeare on "Something rotten in the State of Denmark", amid other depressing waters, half hidden, half liberated by their ice-cloak.

"I can look out for my own 'piping times'-thank you! And I'm not going to buy any pig in a poke-take any leap in the dark."

The scout's reply was bristling. To a fifteen-year-old patrol leader, a Henkyl Hunter, who went up and down upon the trail of a joke, there was a smack of condescension about that "Buddy", used twice by those big boys; perhaps he, too, at that moment, laid up something against the youth of the flaming tone and rig.

"Humph! hasn't he the nerve, butting in?" he muttered.

"He has-has all sorts of nerve," agreed Pemrose readily, glancing sideways after the boy whose courage she knew to be as high as his colors.

"The Scoutmaster wouldn't hear of our venturing in so far as to investigate that running water, anyhow," said Studley. "My eye! What's the rumpus now-the kettle o' fish?"

It was a shriek from one girl-half-a-dozen girls. It was a loud hiss, almost a whistle, from some pallid vegetation near the lake-edge. It was a black snake rearing a blue-black head and glittering eye within three feet of Una Grosvenor, novice among Camp Fire Girls, whose scream tore at the very stones of Tory Cave until they cried out in echo.

It was a dozen green-clad girls scattering wildly this way and that, olive-green aspen leaves tossing in a whirlwind, shuffling from pillar to post-from rock to darkling rock.

It was-it was a powerful reptile form, in armor of jetty scales, trailing its six-foot length away, the noise of its mighty tail-blows against the earth and flying pebbles calling all the Dumps-the Doleful Dumps-out of the dens where they hid here, making them take strange and shadowy shapes, gigantic shapes, of threat.

"Let me get out! Oh-h! I want to get out, away-anywhere!" shuddered Una. "This is no-o fun."

"Yes! it is-once you get used to it," laughed Pemrose, who-together with the Jack at a Pinch still hovering near-liked her excitement warm. "Look-look at him crimp himself along! Ever-ever see anything so crooked?" as the great muscle in the reptile's body contracted and relaxed upon its hasty retreat. "When we girls had our War Garden, a year ago, an old farmer said we planted our potato rows so straight that he 'vummed 'twould make a black snake seasick to cross from one to the other.'"

"Ha! Because he just naturally has to go ajee!" laughed her scout knight, estimating the length of that scaly corkscrew, if uncoiled, with his eye. "Pshaw! I've tamed 'em-and killed 'em, too," he added.

"Yes! a black snake wouldn't harm you, even if he did bite." Pem was still reassuring her friend.

"Did you hear him whistle?... But-but what's that?" It was just half a minute later that she put the question. "He isn't making that noise with his tail still; is he?"

She looked at Stud. Under the ruby eye of the lamp his face—the face of a Stoutheart—had turned suddenly pea-green.

His eyes were fixed upon a gleam of bloated yellow dimly seen, under the lee of a rock, not very many yards away—the venomous, pale yellow of the dropsical cave fungi.

"Why-why! it's only one of those horrid, blowzy, mushroom things. But *what's* the noise—like—like somebody rattling little marbles, dry peas?"

The girl felt her own breath go ratatat as she put the question.

"Oh-h! only some fellow rattling—rattling—beans in his pocket. Let's get away—quick!"

And then Pemrose knew what it was to look upon a Stoutheart "rattled."

But, with that, a voice, a cry, not loud, but strong, exploded like a spring gun in the cave,—suddenly halting advance.

"What's that outside? What's that outside?" it whooped. "Is it an aéroplane? *Two* aéroplanes? Oh! hurry out—and see."

"A dozen aéroplanes! A corps of aéroplanes!" boomed back those flaunting big boys, of whom the nickum was leader, playing up to the cue of the Scoutmaster who had started the concentrated cry. "Oh, hurry—hurry!"

She saw him fling his mayflowers on the ground, that strange youth, and snatch at Una's hand, to drag her along towards the low cave entrance. He made a wide, circling movement to catch at hers, too. But she dodged it. Never more should he play Jack at a Pinch to her! Never!

Through old Tory Cave there surged the noise of a rising wind, silencing that weak gust afar off, now baleful, the sound of the hidden water; reverberating among the rocks, it might be taken for anything, for the hum of aircraft—for a perfect onslaught of sky cavalry!

And the Scoutmaster's cry was convincing.

Yet-yet, when boys and girls tumbled tumultuously through the cave entrance—the girls by some mysterious understanding, first—not a remote sign of a biplane, even a meager *one*, decorated the sky overhead.

No flying wires sent down their challenge. And the hum resolved itself into what it was: the rising, random mockery of Ta-te, the tempest, laughing at their searching looks, going north, south, east and west, aloft, skirmishing in bewilderment to all points of the horizon.

"Hum-m. There isn't a *sign* of a buzz-wagon! Who pulled off that stunt-on-us?" bleated a few of the mystified younger boys, while Stud silently brushed moisture like cave-tears from his forehead.

So did the tall Scoutmaster, heavily breathing relief.

"Not an aéroplane in sight! Not a single one!" breezed the girls, all ready to be angry. "Who—who put that hoax over?"

"Varnish right—and aéroplane wrong!" It was the freakish voice of a nickum which answered. "No! No buzzer, as the boys say, but there was a rattler, in there, beside that rock. If some of you girls had gone ahead, you'd have stepped right on him!"

"A 'rattler!' A big rattlesnake! And—and you started the cry, to get us out quietly—quickly!"

"Not we! The Scoutmaster had the presence of mind to launch an aéroplane. We boomed it," came the laughing reply, as Jack at a Pinch, second fiddle now, marched off with his companions.

"Who-is he?" Pemrose caught wildly at the arm of Stud, who was wishing that he and not those patronizing big boys had caught the Scoutmaster's cue and created airdrawn aéroplanes by the corps. "Do you—do you know who he is; that biggest—that gaudiest—one among them?"

"Yes! No-o! I do—an' I don't!" stammered the boyish Henkyl Hunter. "I—we—" indicating his scout brothers—"have met him a couple of times in the woods; I guess his father an' he have a camp on the opposite side of the lake from ours. We've talked with him—tried to be friendly. And he—he's always jolly, you know—like now! But-but when it comes to finding out anything about either of them, gee, you might as well whistle jigs to a milestone—so-o you might!"

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## CHAPTER XVI

### THE COUNCIL FIRE

"Across the lake in golden glory,  
The fairy gleams of sunlight glow.  
Another day of joy is ending,  
The clouds of twilight gather low."

ANOTHER day of joy, indeed! Without peril of rattlesnake-or marplot nickum to spoil it!

"'Varnish right-and aëroplane wrong!' That's what *he* said when they laid that trap to get us out of the cave, without any fuss. But I say it's: 'Varnish right-and puzzle wrong!' All wrong!" snapped Pemrose to herself again and again, repeating an old saying during the week following that first Get Together. "Nobody-nobody has a right to drift around as a puzzle, these days! If ever I get a chance, see me snub him har-rd-though he did rescue me twice! Well, thank goodness! it was the Scoutmaster, not he, who played Jack at a Pinch in Tory Cave."

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And it was the Scoutmaster, in days gone by, with the help of his boys, who had built the great stone fireplace in the girls' bungalow in which a brilliant Council Fire was now blazing. Across the lake the golden glory stole, and girls came tip-toeing to the hearth-flame in soft, ceremonial dress, fringed and beaded, the firelight, like dawn, flushing the pearl of their headbands,-and Pem forgot the enigma of that eighteen-year-old youth who seemed to have a trick of bobbing up, now and again, under the lee of a summer holiday, like some menacing spar to leeward of a vessel in fair sail.

Well! to recall Stud's figure of speech, nobody was "whistling jigs" to his milestone heart now-or trying to. The fire was the fiddler; and wax was not softer or more responsive than the pliant breasts on which its music fell.

"I watched a log in the fireplace burning."

176

They whispered it one to another and under the spell of its transfiguring lay, bent forward, they witnessed the last act in a pine-tree pantomime.

A dazzling transformation scene it was: in the glow they could see, summed up, each transition of light and heat that went before: dawn's tender flame, the fierce blaze of high noon, ruby rays of evening streaming now across the Bowl-hill-girt lake without-gathered, all gathered, in a golden age behind them to feed the sap of a noble tree, here poured forth, amid a radiant ballet of flame and spark, to furnish life, light-inspiration-to a Council Fire.

"I watched a log in the fireplace burning,  
Oh! if I, too, could only be  
Sure to give back the love and laughter,  
That Life so freely gave to me!"

Tanpa, the Guardian, softly breathed it. And in the eye of more than one girl the wish was transmuted into a tear,-into something more tender, more transported, than a laugh, as the log, in a final spurt, gave all, and fell, like a tired dancer, upon the broad hearth, its rosy chiffons crumpled and fading into the pale gray of wood-ashes.

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"There it goes!" The eyes of Pemrose were a patchwork now, flame embroidered upon their shining blue; oh! if she were to give forth what Life gave to her, which of her Camp Fire Sisters would have such riches to reflect?

It had been hers-hers-to share the dream of a great inventor, to look forward with him to the pioneering moment-the beginning of that which would surely, in time, draw the Universe visibly together-the moment when the Thunder Bird should fly.

She never qualified that dream by an *if*, wherever the funds to equip it might come from-or even if it had to wait a dozen years, Toandoah's triumph, like that fortune "hung up-" for the great Bird to make its new migration to the moon, in proof that space was no barrier-when the Thunder Bird, giving all, as the log had done, would drop its skeleton upon the desert of that silent satellite.

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But there were steps to be taken in the meantime-exciting steps in the ladder of success. Those patchwork eyes, looking into the flame now, counted them, one by one, and hung in breathless anticipation upon the first: upon the moment, so soon to come off, when old Greylock would really send back a shout of gladness, for on his darkling summit the hand of a Camp Fire Girl of America would press the button and loose the lesser Thunder Bird to fly up the modest distance of a couple of hundred miles, or so, with its diary in its head, and send back the novel record of its flight.

"I-do-believe that my father sleeps with one eye open, thinking of that golden egg, as he calls it-the little recording apparatus," she said, when the White Birch Group, as one, asked that the special program for this ceremonial meeting should be a talk from an inventor's daughter upon this most daring enterprise of the age. "He says that if *that* does not drift back to earth safely with the crow-like parachute-if anything should happen to it, to the two little wheels, with the paper winding from one on to the other, all dashed with pencil marks-the world would call him a fool's mate.... If it did!" Pem's teeth were clinched. "But, of course, without the record, there would be nothing to show how high the little rocket had really flown-showing the bigger one the road," with an excited gasp.

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"Yes, I can understand how anxious he must be about the safe return of the egg-or the log-whichever you choose to call it-the first record from space, anyway." Tanpa's tone was almost equally excited. "And of course the wind may play pranks with the parachute-drift it away down the mountainside!"

"So that we'd lose it in the darkness-oh-h!" Pem shivered upon the thought. "But we'll all be on the lookout to prevent that, as many of us as are there-and that won't be more than a picked few, Dad says, to witness this first experiment.... When-when the real Thunder Bird flies, though-" she

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turned those patchwork eyes now, sky-blue, flame-red, upon her companions—"you'll all-all be there. And, oh! won't it-won't it be a sight to watch-it-tear?"

Drooping towards the fire-glow, lips parted in entranced assurance, the slight figure became lost in the same dream which had held it months before in a February Pullman, while a daring flame, like a red-capped pearl diver, plunging into the mystery of that fairy thing, that gleaming stole about her neck brought out milky flashes of luster-together with those New Jerusalem tints, jade and gold and ruby.

Finished now it was, the pearl-woven prophecy-fair record to go down to posterity!

In faith-such faith as had inspired Penelope, faithful wife, of old, to weave and unravel her endless web, steadfast in the belief of her husband's return, so the girlish fingers upon the loom had wrought the transcendent story to a finish. 181

To a finish even to the sprinkling of gold pieces, the yellow bonanza, coming from somewhere, to gorge the Thunder Bird, for its record flight; to a finish even to the celestial climax, the little blue powder-flash lighting up the dear, fair face of Mammy Moon!

But of one climax, more celestial still, Pemrose Lorry could not speak, not even to these her Camp Fire Sisters: of the evening of the second wreck-the wreck of hope after that third installment of a disappointing will had been read-when she had taken the four feet and a half of pearl poem to her father's workshop, the grim hardware laboratory, and out of the home of light, which she herself hardly understood, in her young, young heart, had told him, doubtful of the future, that she knew the invention would win out-the Thunder Bird go where nothing earthly had ever gone before. 182

And he had whispered something-something surpassing-about a Wise Woman who saved a city.

It made sacred every thought now, and humbled it, too, in the breast of this little sixteen-year-old girl, with the mingled yarn in her nature-the mingling spice in her name.

Others had these fair stoles, too, the history of their girlish lives woven in pearls of typical purity, crossed by vivid representations of events. Drooping to their knees, in symbolic beauty, finishing with the soft leather fringes on which a breeze sweeping down the wide chimney played, they flashed here and there in the high colors of adventure-the quaintly symbolized adventure tale.

But none could match the theme of the two little primitive figures upon the mounttain-top, the inventor looking through a tube, the comet-like streak of fire above them: the opening of a highroad through Space,-the first step towards a federation of the heavenly bodies. 183

The record to go down to posterity!

Yet old Earth had still her individual romance of seedtime and harvest, sun and storm, peril and deliverance.

Emblematically depicted these were in the pearl strip of a girl, with a winsome reflection of Andrew's thistle-burr in her speech. Born "far awa' in bonnie Scotland", the thistle and America's goldenrod blent their purple and gold upon her young shoulders; there was an idealized plow, representing the peaceful agricultural calling of her father,-and a jump from peace to peril in the primitively symbolized scene of a shipwreck through which she had been with him when crossing the Atlantic in a sailing vessel.

"We had all to take to the boats, you see," said Jennie McIvor, "for the ship was leaking so badly that she couldn't keep afloat but a wee bit longer; and we had a verra rough time until we were picked up." 184

A rough time, indeed, typified by the wildly driven little canoes-the most primitive form of the boat-tossed upon stiff water-hills, brooding above them the quaint, corkscrew figure, with the eye in its head, of Ta-te, the tempest.

Somehow, this eye-the spying wind's eye-haunted Pemrose that night, curled up in a previous suggestion of the Guardian's which, momentarily, had twisted itself, snake-like, around her heart.

Suppose Ta-te should prove cruel to her, as to Jennie whom she had eventually spared! Suppose, on the great night of the first experiment with Toandoah's little rocket, Ta-te, jealous of a rival in the small Thunder Bird which could out-soar all the winds of Earth-out-soar even the air, their cradle-should meanly seize upon the black, silk parachute, light as soot, anchored to the golden egg, the little recording apparatus! Suppose it should whirl both off, away from the eager hands stretched out to claim them, hide them in a dark recess of the mountain side, maybe, where they could not be found for days,-possibly never! 185

Ta-te *could* play fast and loose with her father's reputation, she knew; at least, with the witness to his success as an inventor.

"If the wind should do that," she thought, "then the World, some part of it-the horrid World-will say that Mr. Hartley Graham's last thoughts about that mile-long will were wise ones: that it was better-better to leave all that money 'hung up' awaiting the possible return of that madcap younger brother-who'll make ducks and drakes of it, most likely-than-to turn it over to a Thunder Bird," with a faint flash of a smile, "in spite, oh! in spite of the fact that daring volunteers-skilled aviators-are wild to take passage in the far-flying Bird."

Yes! even that youthful hotspur who used the cream of rough-edged paper, and was willing to try anything once, though it should be once for all. 186

The girl's thought reverted to him now as she gazed into the bungalow fire, seeing in the gusty flicker of every log that menacing spiral,—the brooding wind's eye.

It claimed her, that wild, red eye, even while her companions of the White Birch Group were excitedly discussing their picturesque plans for the morrow; for the celebration of their annual festival in honor of the birch trees bursting into leaf, for the odes, the songs, the dances, the planting, each, of a silvery sapling.

It mesmerized her, did Ta-te's eye, with its setting of flame, even to the exclusion of enthusiasm about the big dance—the joyous Together—in the evening, of which Una raved in anticipation now and again, and for which these two friends and rivals in the matter of eyelashes had brought their prettiest party dresses.

The elders presiding over the destinies of both had given a happy consent to Tanpa's invitation, and the two were now the guests for a few days of the mountain Group at their camp on the egg-shaped Bowl.

The sigh of the mountain breeze came soothingly across the lake to lull their slumbers as they lay down to rest, side by side, in the little bungalow cots of which a dozen ranged the length of the great water-side dormitory half-open, half-screened.

Yet Pem fell asleep imploring Ta-Te—and lost the little record altogether in her dreams!

Up and down old Greylock she plodded, looking for it, hand in hand with Toandoah,—but ever it eluded them!

Muttering, bereft, she tossed; then for a moment awoke, blinkingly sat up, to see the moonlight flickering—Mammy Moon's own smile—upon the pearl-woven prophecy beside her, from which she could hardly be parted by night or day.

Sleep again! And now it was not only the diary but the Thunder Bird, itself, that was lost,—astray in space, and she with it!

She was trying to catch it by the fiery tail-feathers when, all of a sudden—all of a sober sudden—those feathers became soft, flopping, buffeting,—real.

They brushed her parted lips. They flopped against her cheek. They even mopped the dews of slumber from her eyes.

“Hea-vens! W-what is it-t?”

Wildly she sat up—a second time—to see the dawn poking at her with a pink finger and the lake shimmering without, a great pearl found by the morning in an iridescent oyster-shell of mist.

And, within, a bumping, buffeting something, soft as moss, dun-gray as terror-blundering into every sleeper's face, as if testing its warmth, bowling its way along the line of cots.

“Cluck! Cluck! Flutter! Flutter! Awake! Awake! I'm lost! I'm lost!” it said.

“What is it? *What is it?*”

Never was such an exciting reveille as girl by girl bounded up—elastic—fingering a brushed, a tickled cheek.

The answer was a screech that made the morning blush, as if a ghost had invaded the Tom Tiddler's ground of open day light.

Una shrieked in echo.

Morale was undermined. Cots were vacated. Maiden jostled maiden, all colliding upon a gaping question that fanned sensation sky-high—until the bungalow fairly rocked upon a hullabaloo.

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## CHAPTER XVII

### A NOVEL SANTA CLAUS

“It's an Owl!”

“Only an owl—a little screech owl! Not—not so little, either! Where did it come from?”

“Yes! How on earth did it get in? Doors—windows—all are screened.”

“Glory halleluia! It came down the chimney. Look—look at the black on its feathers, the wood-smuts clinging to it! Down the big chimney of the living room!”

“Like Santa Claus down the chimney! Mercy! d'you suppose it played Santa itself? or did the boys push it down?”

“The boys! Those miserable Henkyl Hunters—always on the trail of a joke! If they did, they'll never own up! Never!”

Such was the substance of the uproar as the downy ball of mopping feathers took on a beak, claws and big brown eyes, blank and round, perching upon the foot-rail of a cot!

“Oh! it's as bad as the bats in Tory Cave. And they were so-o hor-rid!” wailed Una. “It-it just

tickled my lips with its wing. Bah!"

"Bad! It's not bad, at all; it's dear," cooed Jessie, the merle, feeling instant kinship with the bewildered bird. "Girls! Girls! I believe it's blind-blind as a bat, or as the pale fish in the cave. There it goes-look-knocking its head, this way and that, against the wall!"

Yes, the fluttering thing, of a sudden taking to flight again, was now playing shuttlecock, feathered shuttlecock, to the battledore of a broad sunbeam which batted it wildly hither and yon.

"Oh! keep back-quiet-maybe, 'twill settle down again," pleaded the merle.

"Hasn't it the face of a cunning little kitten? Such a wise, blinking, round-eyed kitten! Its head is reddish, not gray-and the rufous markings on its breast, too! Oh-h! I wonder if the boys did catch it in the woods and thought it was a good 'henkyl' to put down our chimney?"

But that, as the girls knew, would remain as blind a puzzle as the long, screened dormitory was to the dazzled owl, unable to see clearly in daylight, out visiting when he should have been in bed in the cool, dark hollow of a tree.

"Oo-oo-oo-ooo ... cluck!" it cooed and grumbled, pressing a dappled breast and wide-spread wings against a screen, the mottled back-feathers ruffling into a huge breeze-swept pompon.

"See! He's playing he's a big owl."

"Oh! I wonder if he'd let me-let me catch him." Jessie sighed yearningly.

"Do-o, and we'll tame him-keep him for a mascot!" It was a general acclamation.

And the feathered Santa, apparently having no objection to this rôle-finding himself no longer a waif in Babel-finally settled down again on the glittering head-rail of Una's cot, his fluffy breast to the outdoor sunlight, his solemn, kittenish face-the head turning round on a pivot without the movement of a muscle in the body-confronting sagely the delighted girls.

"Isn't he the dearest thing? Oh! I'm glad the boys played the trick-if it was the boys. I'd rather think he played Santa himself."

There was no inkling in Jessie's mind, as, so murmuring and softly barefoot, she stole up to the visitor, now motionless as a painted bird, of a much worse trick that those freakish Henkyl Hunters might play, a girl abetting them, too-shocking fact-before night fell again upon the pearly Bowl.

"Oo-oo-ooo! Boo! See me reverse!" It seemed to be what the owl was saying to the maidens as he turned the tables on them again and again with that teetotum trick of his swivel neck.

But he did not scream any more or offer the least objection when the merle took him to her tender breast, cooing reassurance.

"There! you've got a new singing teacher, Jess-a little screech owl. Little! My! he's big for a small-eared owl, isn't he?-nearly a foot long. Brush the camouflage off him-the smuts of the chimney!"

"Well-well, whether he enacted Santa Claus of his own accord, or whether he didn't-" thus Tanpa broke in on the last flow of speech which was a medley-"he's brought us one gift, anyway, the gift of a glorious day for our annual White Birch celebration."

It did prove a banner day, from the breakfast out of doors on the wide piazza in that matchless warmth of early summer when buds are bursting, trees singing themselves into leaf-for "all deep things are song-" when the inquisitive breeze peeps longingly into the yellow heart of the first wild rose and May is bourgeoning, flowering, into the joy of June.

Below the bungalow the three-mile lake, a mile and a half across-the transfigured Bowl-was still a softly glowing pearl, treasured in cotton-wool mists which entirely hid its real framing of lofty hills.

"When the mountains cease playing blindman's buff with each other, then-then it will be time for our morning swim, won't it? The first real swim of the season, too," murmured Tomoke, the signaling maiden, nestling coaxingly near to the presiding Guardian.

"Yes, if you think the water will be warm enough."

"Oh! it was quite warm yesterday when we paddled out around the float-the floating pier." Jessie, who was tempting the feathered Santa Claus, pampered captive under her arm, with every tidbit she could think of, from cereal to lake-cod caught by the girls themselves, looked down at that buoyant pier-a golden raft, at the moment-tossing a dozen yards from the base of a fifteen-foot cliff where the shore jumped sharply down to the water. Yesterday it had been wreathed with boughs for the coming festival: the swimming structure, naëvely composed of two great barrels, boarded over, with a broad plank, as a bridge, running out ashore.

To it a couple of shining canoes and two broad camp boats were moored; it also served as a springboard for diving.

Built by girl-carpenters themselves-with a little masculine help-presently to be garlanded with daisy-chains and buttercups, for the June carnival, and to hide its crudity, it stood, so the Guardian thought, exquisitely for the practical and the poetic in Camp Fire life, which ever in "glorifying Work" seeks Beauty!

The sun was seeking that too, just now, gloating over his own noble reflection in the green-lipped Bowl, benevolently promising, indeed, a day hot for the season, as well as radiant.

"Yes! the temperature has taken a leap ahead," said Tanpa musingly. "I think you can go in-for a short swim, any way."

"Notify me-notify me if you see me drowning-for I can't hear the voice of doom through my bathing cap!" laughed Una Grosvenor, two hours later, in consequence of this permission, wading coyly out beyond the float, to where the lake-water rose over the crossed logs of the Camp Fire emblem on the breast of her blue bathing suit.

"Oh! she's in no danger of drowning; she swims better than I-I do-o now," shivered Pemrose, rather wishing that June were July and the Bowl had undergone the gradual glow of a heating process. "Aren't you coming, Thrush?" she cried. "Aren't you coming in, Jessie?"

"I can't leave the owl! I believe the boys meant him as an anniversary present-though they went about presenting him in a queer way," was the fostering answer.

The other girls, however, were in the water, as those grigs of boys had been before them; the Bowl seemed to froth with their laughter, spray creaming around the bare, sunflushed arms flung above it, as if the lake itself, in festive mood, were a sentient sharer in the joy of these daring June bathers.

"Now-now who wants to dress and come out in the boats for a study of pond-life under the microscope?" cried the Guardian.

"Whoo! Whoo! That-that's a bait to which the fish always rise," cried one and another, eagerly splashing ashore blue of brow and covered with gooseflesh, yet loath to admit that on this the feathered Santa Claus' gift of a prematurely perfect June day the creamy Bowl was still too emphatically a cooler.

Up the rude sod steps of the cliff they trooped-a bevy of shivers-fleeing for warmth and the shelter of the bungalow.

"Oo-oo-oo! I've never been in bathing so early in the year before," shook out Pemrose, to whom the experience-the lingering chill of this mountain Bowl many hundred feet above sea-level-was rather too much of a weak parody upon her last freshwater ducking.

"Oh! you'll soon warm up. Come, hurry and dress! It's no end of fun studying water-snails and egg-boats-gnats' funny egg-boats-under a microscope, with the Scoutmaster," encouraged Tomoke, in everyday life Ina Atwood, blue as her lightning namesake, and rather hankering after the warmth of her pine-knot torch.

"Ye-es; and-and minnows-where every one of them is-is a chief Triton among the minnows!" laughed another girl, scrambling into her clothes. "Meaning no minnows, at all-all-ll Tritons!"

All Tritons, sure enough, rosy Tritons, brilliant now in the early summer, the breeding season, with wonderful colors, the males, especially.

Swimming about, near the surface, as the minnows usually do, the clear waters of the June Bowl became for the girls, looking, one by one through the large microscope over the boat's side, a "vast deep" in which leviathans played-fairy fish-seeing everything rose-color, painting themselves to ecstasy with the joys of mating, the joy of June.

"See-see they're not all red-or partly so-s-such a lovely pinky-red, especially around the fins and head-that's where they keep their pigment," said Tanpa. "Some have colored themselves like goldfish; others are greenish-or lighter yellow."

"Ha! While others, again, are gotten up as if for a minstrel show for their marriage-painted black, for the time being!" laughed her husband, the tall Scout Officer.

"Yes. That's why we like, girls and boys, to come down to our camp early in the season-if only at intervals-because we watch the summer coming and can study the wonderful lake life as at no other time," remarked the Guardian again, and then subsided into private life in the stern of the broad, red camp-skiff, scribbling something in verse form to be read at the White Birch celebration in the afternoon when land as well as lake was a-riot with young color, strewn with wild flowers for gay June to tread on.

"Oh! isn't it the most wonderful-wonderful season? In the city we go camping too late. The freshness isn't there." Pem's eyes were dim as she applied one to the lens of the microscope, to gaze once more at the painted Tritons; she was glad that in the freshness of the year it was-oh! so soon now-that the little Thunder Bird would momentarily color the skies and paint the World rose-colored in excitement over its demonstration-over the heights that could be reached-paving the way for the Triton of Tritons to come.

"Well! if we spend any more time with the minnows, we'll have to 'cut out' the 'fresh-water sheep', the little roaches, and the insects' egg-boats," said the Scoutmaster. "Speaking of the latter, I saw a curious one yesterday upon a stagnant pool over on the other side of the lake; perhaps the visitors would be interested in it."

The visitors were interested in the bare mention. Warming equally to comfort and excitement again, they clamored-Pemrose and Una-for a sight of that raft of gnats' eggs, so cunningly formed and glued together, minute egg to egg, hundreds of them, that it was a regular lifeboat-no storm could sink it, and pressure only temporarily.

Yet, after all, Pemrose only half heard the Scoutmaster's explanation of how the insect chose a floating stick or straw as a nucleus, placed her forelegs on it and laid the egg upon her hind ones, holding it there until she had brought forth another to join it, gluing the two together by their sticky coating,—and so on till the broad and buoyant boat was constructed!

Pemrose hardly heard, for as the party made its way to that stagnant pool, an overflow at some time of the sparkling Bowl, and hidden in a dense little wood, she had a sudden demonstration of how, under certain circumstances, a girl's heart is much more capsizable than a gnat's egg-boat.

Hers positively turned turtle—yes! really, turned turtle—at sight of a long, gray figure lying, breast down, amid undergrowth upon the margin of a little stream that was hurrying away from it to the lake.

She felt momentarily topsy-turvy, every bit of her, for anywhere on earth—aye, even if she were scouring space with the Thunder Bird—she would recognize that angular figure.

It had once pulled her up a snow-bank to the distant rumble of an engine's explosion.

Yes, and surely she had seen it again, once again, since then—although, sandwiched as it now was between egg-boats and painted Tritons she could not—for the moment—remember where.

"Fine day! Having luck? Catching anything?" hailed the Scoutmaster, with genial interest, as one woodsman to another, for the figure was angling with a fly-rod.

The latter shot a side long glance at the party from under a broad Panama hat,—then jammed that, rather uncivilly, further down upon his head.

"Bah! The fish aren't ex-act-ly jumping out of the water, saying 'Hullo!' to you!" it returned in the freakish drawl of a masked battery, shrinking deeper into cover amid the ferns.

Yet, when the Nature students had passed on, one quivering girl, with ears intently on the alert, heard it fire off something in the same fern-cloaked rumble about a certain fly being a "perfect peach" to fish with.

And the answer came in clear, ringing, boyish tones—from another angler presumably—momentarily rainbowing the wood.

"Yes—sure—that Parmachene belle is *the girl*, Dad! If—if there's a trout in the stream, she'll put the 'come hither!' on it."

"Bah! Likening a trout-fly to a girl! So like his 'nickum' impudence!" Pem's teeth—in her present mood—came together with a snap. And, of course, she couldn't see the gnat's raft when she arrived at the stagnant puddle, for she had borrowed the gnat's sting with which to barb the snub which she meant to inflict, some time, upon that angling youth who had sat, unabashed, in the Devil's Chair,—if ever luck held out a chance.

"Yes—yes! and if he had played Jack at a Pinch forty—eleven million times, I'd do it." Her eyes were flashing now like the sky-dots in the pool, forked by iridescent shadows. "So—so *here's* where they have their camp," craning her neck for a glimpse of a log-cabin amid the spruces. "Stud said it was just across the lake from the girls'!"

After that—well! who could be interested in gnat-boats when they had just lit upon the ambush of a Puzzle; a puzzle that would only open in a pinch and shut up, like a Chinese ring-box, afterwards?

And, moreover, that woodland lurking-place was just a bare mile and a half across the Bowl from the floating barrel pier, decked, as it was built, by girls' hands, and from the great heart's-ease bungalow, now, too, in process of decoration for the gala time in the afternoon around the White Birch totem; and for the blissful, far-off event, drawing nearer with every shining moment, the brilliant piazza, dance in the evening!

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## CHAPTER XVIII

### REPRISALS

"Her tunic is of silver,  
Her veil of green tree-hair,  
The woodland Princess donning  
Her pomp of summer wear.

White arms to heaven reaching,  
Shy buds that, tiptoe, meet  
The kiss of June's awaking,  
The season's hast'ning feet!

Oh, sure, a laugh is lisping  
In each uncurling leaf;  
The joy of June is thrilling  
Some sense to transport brief!



Sister of mine, White Birch Tree!  
That sense my own sets free,  
For in thy dim soul-stirrings  
My Father speaks to me."

It was Tanpa, with the sunburst upon her right breast, general symbol of the Camp Fire, and the birch tree in grace of green and silver embroidered above it upon emerald khaki, who read the verses which she had scribbled in the skiff's stern under cover of the general interest in water-snails, eggboats and "fresh-water sheep."

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"Most beautiful of forest trees—the Lady of the Woods!" came the responsive hail from eighteen green-clad maidens, tiptoeing around the Silver Lady, the emerald tassels of their Tam-o'-shanters skipping in the June breeze that peeped under her fluttering veil, still tucked with buds, to kiss those white limbs lifted to the skies, with surely, some bud of conscious joy.

It was June! Upon the cliff-brow, above the lake, wild roses were budding, too; and the girls' cheeks painted themselves with their reflection—even as did the blushing minnows in the lake.

But the lady of the woods had the best of it so far as decoration went. Never new-crowned head wore in its coronet Life as hers did,—fledgling life.

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For amid the heart-shaped leaves, so brightly green, was the cap-sheaf of summer wear:

"A nest of robins in her hair."

The poet who penned that line would have gloried in the sight of her, that bungalow birch tree, a tall, straight specimen, radiant as a silver taper from the black, frescoed ring about the foot to the topmost ivory twig, and here and there amid the fluttering, pea-green tresses a little tuft of conscious life—a nestling with open beak and craving, coralline throat.

He would have joyed in the sight of the tree-loving Group, too, as the earth was turned and the first silver sapling rooted deep to the music of Tomoke's voice, softly proclaiming:

"He who plants a tree,  
He plants love.  
Tents of coolness spreading out above  
Wayfarers he may not live to see.  
Gifts that grow are best,  
Hands that bless are blest,  
Plant! Life does the rest."

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And Life would do the rest—oh! surely—in the case of her father and herself, was the dewy thought of Pemrose Lorry as she planted her baby tree in honor of that novel Wayfarer, that would first traverse space and conquer it—bridge the gulf which made Earth a hermit amid the heavenly bodies—of the great invention, whereof poets in future ages would sing, that daringly took the first step towards linking planet with planet.

And the tender sapling was rooted in the hope that long before it was a mature tree that comet-like Wayfarer would start,—the Thunder Bird would fly.

Well! star-dust never blinded the eyes. But it certainly dazzled those of Pemrose, that young visionary, as she pressed earth around her sapling's root: would there ever come a time when the Camp Fires of Earth would hail the Camp Fires of some other planet across that illimitable No Man's Land of Space, first—oh! thought transcendent—first bridged by her father's genius?

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But with the high seasoning of that thought came the salty smack of another! All unseen in the planting excitement a tear dropped upon the spading trowel as she thought of that whimsical "Get thee behind me, Satan, but don't push!" plea of the inventor sorely tempted to commercialize his genius, thwart its inspired range, because of the difficulties about bringing his project to fruition—and of that money hung up, idle, for the next twelve years.

"Daddy-man thinks he'll be—well! not an old man, but that his best energies will be spent by that time, even if—"

But here the trowel dug vigorously, burying head over ears the thought of the possible return within that time of the "zany" who had been such a mad fellow in youth that, according to her father and others, it was like sitting on a barrel of gunpowder to have anything to do with him, so sure were you to come to grief through his explosive pranks. And yet, and yet—perhaps it was the dash of spice in her name—Pem could not help feeling an interest for his own sake in that "hot tamale", the Thunder Bird's rival in the will!

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So she spaded away, watering her sapling for the first time, herself, with that little tributary tear; and then, propitiating it, after the manner of the Indians, in the graceful Leaf Dance, capering around it, around the Queen Birch, too, with her companions, upon the lightest fantastic toe, their green arms outstretched and waving, to imitate the leaves above them, blown by the wind.

Went the phonograph upon the bungalow piazza, as it threw off the music, the quaint Indian accompaniment to those stamping, shuffling, skipping feet, to the queer little half-savage syllables, borrowed from the Creek Indians, upon the lips of the chanting, dancing girls, to the coconut hand-rattle wielded by Aponi, the Butterfly, most fairy-like of the green dancers, as she led and led, in honor of the new *idlwissi*, or tree-hair, the listening leaves—ethereal partners

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overhead.



Containing little pebbles picked from the lake-side, with a stick running through the painted coconut-shell for a handle, its gleeful rattle fairly turned girls' heads with the joy of June.

"I think we'll have to ask you to repeat that dance to-night for the benefit of the boys, your guests," said the Scoutmaster, who was manipulating the phonograph. "Fairyland wouldn't be 'in it' with the human leaves tripping in pink and gold and green and-no ordinary man knows what!"

Fairyland, indeed, seemed beaten hollow as "across the lake in golden glory" the waning sunbeams of early June bathed the little floating pier, wreathed in laurel and daisy chains, then climbed with flagging feet, like a tired angel, the sod-steps cut into the side of the steep cliff, and, gaining the top, joined their rose-colored brothers skipping among girlish forms in every fair hue imaginable, claiming partners in a dance as of Northern Lights before ever their human brothers, the scouts in gilded khaki, got a chance at a reel.

"Oh! I feel it in my toes that this is going to be a won-der-ful party," said Toandoah's little pal, kicking lightly, impatiently with those satin toes of her party slippers at the tufted grass, as she sat enthroned upon the sod of the cliff's brow, with two knights beside her, Stud of the stout heart, and a bright-eyed luckless tenderfoot, whose parents, in a fit of dementia surely, had named him Louis Philip Green, which, as he used only the initial letter of his second name, had of course entailed a nickname.

"You promised you'd dance the Lancers with me, although I'm only a tenderfoot," said Peagreen, nibbling a blade of grass as he lay prone upon the sod and shooting a glance, bright and eager as a robin's, in the direction of the black-haired girl with those skybeams in her eyes under inky lashes.

"Humph! The cheek of some kids who ought to be tucked up in their Beehive when-when that dance comes off!" grumbled the fifteen-year-old Stud, with the arrogance of a Patrol Leader, directing his glance at a brown, conical bungalow flanking a large one, where the younger boys turned in at what seemed to them unseemly hours, while scout veterans sat up overhauling the day's doings for an occasion of a laugh against somebody, practical joke, of course, preferred, to be published in the Henkyl Hunter's typewritten Bulletin and hung up in the porch next morning.

"Well! I'm safe for the Grand March, anyhow-and the Virginia reel, too, eh!" Stud dug congratulatory fists into his brown sides, wriggling aggressively upon the cliff-brow, like Peagreen figuratively hugging the ground with an impatient nose.

Privately he was inclined to the opinion that the blue-eyed girl's friend who had that little nearsighted stand in one of her dark eyes, and two dimples to Pemrose's one, was the daintier "peach" of the two-and that his own sister, Jess, was as pretty as either; but think of the distinction of leading off with a girl whose father would lead off amid the dance of planets, in sending a messenger to the moon, Mars, too, maybe!

"Whoopee!" He kicked the sod as if spurning it as common or garden earth-although there were moments when, like others-elders-in a skeptical world, he told himself that the Thunder Bird would prove, after all, a Flying Dutchman,-just an extravagant dream.

"So-so you were out on the lake this morning, studying pond life with the professor," he said, alluding to the Scoutmaster. "He's instructor in a college and each year he gets us started on something; last summer it was astronomy-he brought a small telescope along."

Pem's heels drummed more excitedly on the sod-the starry heavens were *her* scope.

"But we have a good deal of fun with the big compound microscope, too-and more without it," acknowledged Studley. "Fancy last week we caught a huge pike which had jumped clear out of the water, on to the bank, after a water-hen!"

"Where was that? How-how big was it?" The girlish questions mounted helter-skelter.

"The pike? Oh! he weighed about fifteen pounds. It was right over there, on the other side of the lake," pointing to the spot where the party interested in egg-boats had landed that morning. "He-he gobbled the hen, too."

"Did he?" But he might have been threatening to gobble her, judging by the start which the girl gave at the moment.

Her heart jumped down to the water's edge as abruptly as did the cliff beneath her.

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Her eyes were on a boat rowing out of the sunset's eye directly across the lake from that very spot.

There was but one individual in it and he—he was rowing by instinct, as the birds fly, for his gaze was glued to a newspaper sheet, the sun's own evening edition, gorgeously printed by the painted rays in every hue of the spectrum.

He was heading straight-straight for the floating wharf with its plank-bridge running out ashore.

Jack at a Pinch again!

"Do-do you know who he is?" Pem flashed the question upon the older of her two boy-knights.

"Well-ll! I guess so." Stud's joy in the recognition floundered a little. "He-he's the fellow—one of the fellows—who boomed the aëroplane, the other day, to get you girls quietly out of the cave, when there was a 'rattler—'"

"As if we'd have made a fuss, anyhow!" The girl's eyes blazed, again a patchwork, drawing their red center from the sun. "You said—you said that it was so hard to make friends with him, like whistling jigs to a milestone-ah!" Her own voice was suddenly stony. "Have you-oh! have you made any headway since?"

"Humph! Yes. I've found out something about him."

The patrol leader's preoccupied eyes were on the boat edging vaguely nearer to the wharf, with its one "nickum" figure, so nonchalantly rowing, so absorbed in the rainbowed sheet upon its knees that at this moment it awkwardly "caught a crab" and almost suggestively lost an oar.

Simultaneously, however, the phonograph on the piazza struck up, as a prelude to festivities, the Virginia reel, the notes tripping gaily out across the painted lake; and the rower shot one glance upward, as if to say: "I'll be there in time!" then bent his hungry nose to the paper again.

"What-what did you find out about him?" Pem's interest was equally hungry-positively famishing. "His name-eh?"

"Ha-that's the question! Over on Greylock the farmers' sons call him Shooting Star', alias 'Starry'," with a boyish laugh, "because when they were awf'ly hard up for a player in the last ball game of the series against Willard College, having lost their second baseman and substitute too, by gracious! he breezed along, an' the captain, hearing he had played on a college team, roped him in ... an'-an', what do you know, but he won the game for that mountain team with a home run! A home run over the left field fence! Bully!"

"But, surely, *they* know his-real-name!" Pem's aloof absorption in that fell like fog-drip even upon the glow from that left field fence.

"Maybe they do—and maybe they don't! He refused it to the fans. And when the Greylock coach cornered him he palmed it off as Selkirk. But my cousin who's pitcher on the team says in his opinion that was just 'throwing a tub to a whale'-something fishy about it, see?" Stud winked. "For 'Starry' an' his father—who's a queer fish, if ever there was one—had a camp then up on Greylock peak, and the postmaster in charge o' the Greylock mail owned that he received letters for them addressed to another name—only he couldn't-wouldn't-give it away."

"*Wha-at!*"

Pem's hand suddenly smote her lips.

Her wide eyes were no patchwork now. Stud had not thought that a girl's eyes could be so blue. It almost gave him the "Willies", their remote, peculiar sky-glow, as if afar-afar-they were seeing things.

"What!" she gasped again, while that vivid glow faded, became bluish, blank, the tint of "Moonshine"—of a strange, wild, nondescript dream.

Moonshine that seemed flooding her whole being!

And yet-although she was a quick-witted girl-it was too vague for her to draw from it one clear thought-only an uneasy, unreal, absolutely breathless feeling!

And then the queer, air-drawn sensation as suddenly passed—and with it the blue moon which had momentarily turned her world to nothing—"shooed" off by a very real, very tangible, quite pressing apprehension:

"He-he's not coming to the da-nce?"

She sprang up hurriedly, pointing to the boat below; to its one preoccupied figure, clad neither in rough sweater nor May-fly gaudiness, now, but, if the sunset didn't exaggerate, in a very becoming dark suit.

"Humph! I don't know! I guess he is! Didn't think he could pull it off for some reason or other—" Stud's shoulders were shrugged. "But, maybe, he's found where there's a will there's a way."

"Why-y?" The girl's lips were parted breathlessly, her foot involuntarily stamping.

"Oh! you know you told us to invite our friends to the party; not you, but the other girls did, when they signaled across that night from the green Pinnacle-gee! and it was some signaling, too." The scout's glance was teasing now as it shot up from the grass. "So-so one of the older boys he ran across that bunch o' fellows who were blooming round in the cave the other day—they're all from camps on the lake—and invited the whole five. This one thought he couldn't accept, but I guess

he's making a dash at it—at coming just the same!”

“Oh!... Oh, *dear!* I wish he wasn't!”

“Why?” Now it was the scout's turn to hang, breathless, upon the interrogation as he too jumped to his feet.

“Because—oh! because I'd be—be ever so much more comfortable without him—enjoy myself more.” Pem caught her breath wildly.

“Then 'twill be A. W. O. L. for him! ... A. W. O. L. for him—if I perish for it!”

“What—what does that mean?”

“Absent With-Out Leave, as they set it down in the Army!”

Mischief leaped to the Henkyl Hunter's eye.

He beckoned Peagreen from the grass to follow him. A whisper in the tender-foot's ear and down the winding sod-steps of the cliff they scrambled!

Pem knew that she ought to call them back; knew it from the white parting at the side of her throbbing little head to the toe of her satin slipper tumultuously beating the ground, as she sank down, an orchid amid her chiffons, to watch.

But it was a moment when the spice of her chowchow name had all spilled over; when the Vain Elf which, according to her father, slept in the shadow of the Wise Woman, was broadly-mutinously-awake.

The boat had drawn in alongside the decked float now.

It was gently rocking there, on and off, the rower having shipped his oars and laid them beside him, his strong fingers now and again hooking the wharf when there was danger of his drifting away, while his obsessed nose was bent closer still to the newspaper sheet, catching the last rays of daylight on it.

He did not look up when the scouts, running out over the plank bridge, spoke to him.

Suddenly one of them—Stud it was—leaned down and snatched the oars, lifted them high in the air, the nickum's evil genius having prompted him to lay them in the boat's side nearest the wharf; perhaps it was the demon which he had dared by sitting in the Devil's Chair.

At the same time Peagreen gave the boat a strong shove outward to where a current caught it and swept it further—mockingly further, towards the darkening center of the Bowl.

“Oh! I say—I say, you fellows, that's no stunt to pull off!” roared the nickum wrathfully. “I'm due at the dance now!”

“You're not coming to the dance. There's a girl here who doesn't want you!” rang back the voice of callow chivalry in the barbarous pipe of the tenderfoot.

And Pem, slipping up from the grass, her hands to her burning cheeks—for she had not meant it to go as far as this—stole back to the piazza, to dance away from the shamefaced ecstasy of reprisal in her heart.

Perhaps she would have felt that this was too sore a snub to inflict for any rudeness on Jack at a Pinch; perhaps she would have compelled her boy-knights to put out in the camp skiff and return those oars—under pain of not dancing with them, at all—had she seen the illuminated column over which the victim's nose had been so disastrously bent.

It was in every sense a highly colored description of her father's record-breaking invention, dwelling particularly, though vaguely, upon the experiments so soon to take place with a lesser Thunder Bird, a smaller rocket, from the remote and misty top of old Mount Greylock.

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## CHAPTER XIX

### A RECORD FLIGHT

It had come at last, that starless night, that stupendous night of which Pemrose had dreamed for a year, as she perched on a laboratory stool and watched her father at work, when the little Thunder Bird, the smaller rocket, would take its experimenting flight, its preliminary canter, up a couple of hundred miles, or so, into the air,—and on into thin space.

Most dashing explorer ever was, it would keep a diary, or log, of its flying trip.

But whereas travelers, hitherto, had carried that up a sleeve or in a breast-pocket, it would have its journal in its cone-shaped head; the little openwork box, five inches square, with the tape-like paper winding from one to another of the wheels within and the tiny pencil making shorthand markings, curve or dash, as the air pressed upon it, until it got beyond the air-belt altogether—out into that bitter void of space, where pressure there was none.

No wonder that the inventor called this log the golden egg, for when the magic Bird had flown its furthest, when all the little powder-rockets which, exploding successively, sent it on its way, were

spent, then its dying scream would release the log from its bursting head.

Back that would come, fluttering to earth on the wing of a sable parachute, lit on the way, as it drifted down two hundred miles, or so, by the glowworm gleam of a tiny electric battery, -a little dry cell attached to it!

And this, really, was, as Pemrose had said, the kernel of the present experiment to her father, the only witness to prove that the baby Thunder Bird had, indeed, "got there", flown higher than anything earthly had ever ventured before; and that if a little two-footer in the shape of a sky-rocket had done so much, then there was nothing to prevent a twenty-foot steel Bird from flying on indefinitely, -even to Mammy Moon, herself, or fiery-eyed Mars, perhaps.

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"I don't believe that Dad has slept for two nights now, thinking about its safe return," said Pemrose to Una, as in the starless, breeze-tickled night the two crouched together upon the mountain-top.

"Well! that little firefly, the tiny electric lamp-the 'wee bit battery', as Andrew calls it-will guide us to finding it when it drifts down," panted the other girl, excitement fixing that little peculiar stand, like a golden lamp, in her dark eye.

"Yes, but-" perhaps her dream in the bungalow of Ta-te, the tempest, was affecting Pemrose-"but suppose, oh! suppose, that the wind-there is a wind-should waft it away-away from us, down the mountainside, to where we couldn't find it in the woods-dark woods-to where somebody, some horrid meddler, might pick it up, and get a look at the Thunder Bird's diary before us ... the first record from so high up. Oh-dear!"

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The girl's sigh was echoed by that stealthy wind around her, in whose every whisper there was menace, as it swept through the long grasses and ruffled the ash trees of Greylock's summit.

Una, to whom this "half the battle", the quick locating of the parachute and its treasure, was not so vital, soared above all threat in this witching-time of excitement-the transcendent hour.

"The Thunder Bird's diary! Oh-h! the Thunder Bird's diary," she repeated dreamily, as if reciting a charm.

Being Camp Fire Girls of fervid imagination, the supreme invention, the beginning of old Earth's reaching out to the heavenly bodies, gained its crowning romance from them.

As moment by moment flew by romance in their young breasts became a sort of rhapsody that set every thought to wild music.

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To Pem it was as she had dreamed it would be, away back in her father's laboratory, before the February train wreck.

Hands seemed reaching out to her from everywhere, -she the satellite reflecting her father's light.

From the four quarters of the habitable earth eyes seemed trained upon her, as she knelt in a little island of flashlight, with her thumb on an electric button which, connected by wires with a platform about a hundred feet away, would throw the switch and release the magic Bird to flying.

"N-now, keep cool, Pem! Don't get excited-too ex-ci-ted-or-r you may miss the moment when they shout to you: 'R-ready! Shoot!'" breathed Una, so wrought up herself that her words had a sort of little zip, a hiss, in them, like the soft sighing of the breeze at the moment.

Pemrose knew that her father's thoughts were taken up all the time with that summit breeze, on how far it might affect the safe return of the golden egg, as he hovered about the low platform, a hundred feet away, on which the little Thunder Bird was mounted, together with his young assistant tightening up every bolt and screw for the record flight. A third tall figure hovered near, within the ring of distant flashlight, that of Una's father, as transported now over the whole experiment as if he had never hinted that the far-flying rocket was a Quaker gun.

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With the girls in their little fairy-like ring of electric light-to go out like a will o' the wisp presently-was their usual body-guard, old Andrew, who had driven the party up the mountain.

"Cannily noo, lassie! *Cannily*. Dinna be fechless-flighty!" The Scot was breathing like a Highland gust as he cautioned the girl whose tingling little thumb touched lightly as thistledown the fairy button. "Whoop!" he grunted sharply. "I reckon they're maist ready, noo, to gie it its fling-let it go!"

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It was at this moment that in the distant island of flashlight an arm was flung up. It was that of the professor's young assistant.

He forgot to bring it down again.

And, lo! a hush, as of a world suspended, fell upon old Greylock, -that grim, black mountain-top.

The long grasses ceased to whisper. The mountain-ash trees cuddled their little pale berry-babies in awe.

"All R-ready! *Shoot!*"

Toandoah's battle-cry it was.

A roar as of a small brass cannon, the first gun of the new conquest, responded, as the hand of a Camp Fire Girl of America pressed the button, triumphantly throwing the switch in the nozzle, or tailpart, of the mounted rocket, a hundred feet away.

Simultaneously the flashlights went out.

And in the darkness-into the blackness the little Thunder Bird soared.

Soared with the wild red eye of its headlight challenging the heavens themselves to stop it, with its comet-like tail of red fire streaming out full twenty feet behind it. 236

At lightning speed,-fifty miles the first minute, a hundred the next,-it leaped from its mountain platform straight up-bound for the vacant lot of space.

Explosion after bright explosion tore the cloud-banks as, one by one, the innumerable little rockets, which Pem had watched her father fitting into their grooves in its interior-far back in that quiet laboratory-went off.

And with each radiant roar higher-faster-it dashed, the little Thunder Bird, with never a puff of smoke to dim the spectacle-the transplendency of its flight.

"Michty! Michty!... *Magerful!*"

There was just the one skirl from Andrew, to lend it music on its upward way; he had not thought that he came to America to witness a thing like this.

"Magerful", indeed! Magical, indeed! The others were silent, swept away by the magic of it-the greater, moon-storming magic to come. 237

Only-only, they breathlessly asked themselves: "What next?"

Well! the immediate "next" would be the return of the golden egg, the diary, the falling fruit of the experiment, without which there was no proof of its success-of how high the fiery Bird had flown-before, its last automatic charge expended, it sang its swan-song somewhere in space.

At the increasing speed with which the little Thunder Bird flew-when miles were but a moment-the record might be expected back in a few minutes.

Minutes-but they seemed a moon's age!

It was Una-Una-who saw it first: the tiny speck of star-dust drifting down, down among the woolly clouds-dark as if the night had been shorn and its fleece hung out to dry-alighting here and there, the little firefly, in other words the atomy electric battery attached to the precious record, trying so hard, with the parachute's aid, to find its way back to earth from the lonely height it had reached. 238

Another quarter of a minute, and they could trace the outline of the black silk parachute, itself, a drifting crow with their prize in its claws; that prize which the inventor, at least, would have given ten years of his life to grasp-if, grasping it, he could see that the little pencil had duly made its record markings-the proof that his Thunder Bird had "got there."

"Glory halleluia! it's drifting down right into our laps-into the old mountain's lap, rather! The wind won't carry it far, I bet! 'Twill land within quarter of a mile of us, anyhow," shrieked the professor's young assistant, a college boy, an athlete, who had led the quarter-mile sprint on many a hard-won field, when the racing honor of a school was at stake; and he ran as never before to get the better of the tricky gusts and seize the parachute-faster, even, than the nickum, that mysterious youth, had run, when he saved the day for the mountain team at baseball. 239

"Hoot mon! Dinna ye let it get away frae ye into the dar-rk woods!" skirled Andrew, equally excited, and filled with awe of the raven parachute now springing, like a great, black mushroom, out of the night-and of the firefly which had been up so high.

"Oh! it is-it is drifting towards the dark spruce woods-where we'll have hard work to find it."

In the wild chase after the prize, Pemrose made a good third, as she thus shouted her fear.

"See-oh! see, it *is* landing," she cried again, "c-coming down-touching earth."

Yes! for one fleeting instant it did alight upon a mound, the shooting starlet, the little electric dry cell, winking brilliantly against the background of somber evergreens, now dark as Erebus, that girdle old Greylock's crown. 240

Then, freakish firefly, there, it was off again, the prey of the nickum gusts, before ever a hand could touch it-the black parachute rotating like a whirligig.

Never-oh, never-was such a chase for such a prize since mountain was mountain and man was man!

Once again the steely clog, the weight of the five-inch box containing the recording apparatus, the precious log, almost dragged it to a standstill! But the summit gusts were strong.

Even the college boy began to have heart-quakes and Pemrose heart-sinkings.

"Jove! What a stunt you're pulling off on us, you old black crow of a parachute-you booby-headed umbrella!" groaned he. "C-can't you stay put for just a second? Or are you bent on leading us a dance through the woods?" 241

He began to lose hope of its landing in his lap, that breezy athlete, as it made straight for the jaws of darkness now, the inky spruce-belt-the parachute coquetting with its pursuers, like a great black fan.

Was-was it the wind then?

Something-something caught it up, the golden log-the first record from space-something snatched it up and whisked it off, off into those blackamoor woods, while the feet of the foremost runner were still many yards away.

"'Twas na the wind! 'Twas mon or deil; I saw it loop out frae the boggart trees!" roared Andrew.

And now in his skirl there was a wild ring of superstition that turned girlish hearts quite cold.

"I saw it loup out frae the dark-dar-rk woods!" he insisted hoarsely.

Ah! but those dim spruce woods were faintly illumined now with strange little dots and dashes of light-the firefly winking passionately, as if somebody, some thief, were running with it. 242

And *they* ran, too, its rightful owners, in full cry, calling frantically upon the robber, whether thief, or tempest, to stop.

And the girls kept bravely up with the men. Or one of them did! For all the spice of her chowchow name was afire in Pemrose Lorry now; and she would have tackled the thief, single-handed, to get back her father's record.

Into the core of darkness-in among the ebony spruce-boughs-the jetty, frowning trunks, the snarling, brambly underbrush, dashed the chase, the hue and cry, not daring to turn on a flashlight and in its glare lose the one little piloting blink ahead, which now seemed to have considerable odds on them, as it fled helter-skelter through the woods.

"My word! this-this beats anything I ever dr-reamed of," gurgled the college boy. "The Thing, whatever it is, has us nicely fooled. There-there, it has switched off the 'glim' now-the little, telltale battery. Now-where are we?" 243

No one could tell, as they floundered about, three men, and two girls, in the mysterious night-woods-without a clew-Pemrose clinging desolately to her father now, Una to hers-while Andrew, the Church Elder, muttered weird Highland curses.

Nobody could tell where they were, indeed, figuratively, of course, except-except that the experiment was a failure, so far as any proof to the World was concerned!

Except that Toandoah's hopes were dashed,-if not broken!

The first record from Space was stolen,-or lost.

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## CHAPTER XX

### THE SEARCH

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No! She did not think the nickum had taken it,-that mysterious Jack at a Pinch!

This is what the bleeding heart of Pemrose told her over and over again within the next twenty-four hours,-and after that, too!

True, she had robbed him of his oars and a dance,-or had been responsible for the trick!

She had not made her scout-knights return those ashen blades until the morning after the dance, when they were surreptitiously deposited upon the opposite shore of the lake in the neighborhood of the camp near the insects' egg-boats.

And she had enjoyed herself hugely as the guest of the White Birch Group at the wind-up of the June carnival, while he, twice a rescuer, a friend in a pinch, was drifting helplessly out upon the dark night-waters of the Bowl, trying to paddle with his hands, within hearing of the festive dance music, until some good Samaritan from his own shore rowed out and gave him a homeward tow. 245

But all this, as the girl passionately told herself, was an everyday trick,-just a paper pellet thrown at one beside the overwhelming blow of the loss of her father's record.

And he who could quote Shakespeare upon "Something rotten in the state of Denmark", amid the horrors of a zero train-wreck, who "liked his excitement warm", had a sense of humor.

True humor is never without a sense of proportion.

It knows where to stop.

But if the nickum was not the thief,-who then?

Ta-te, the tempest-otherwise the mountain gusts-had to be acquitted too. 246

For at the first dawn after the blighted experiment some thin silk rags of a raven parachute were found clinging, soot-like, to bushes in the spruce wood, together with a portion of a twisted and bent wire frame.

There was not a trace of the diary, the golden egg, the little perforated steel box, with the recording pencil and paper in it. Deprived of its wing, that could not have gone on alone,-without some hand carrying it.

So the weary and despondent searchers were forced to accept Andrew's assertion that "mon or

deil" had robbed them; and it was plain from the solemn shake of the "true-penny's" gray head in its up-to-date chauffeur's cap that he, himself, was disposed to lay the blame on a "deev."

"It's plain to me, noo, that this auld Earth should bide where she belongs," he told the two girls, "not go outside o' her ain bit atmosphere-be sending muckle messages outside it-it's na canny."

He even respectfully delivered himself of this opinion to the inventor-to Toandoah, with the hungry look of loss in his eye, which occasionally wrought Pemrose to the point of choking sobs and to clenching her fists at the mysterious robber.

And he repeated it, with elaborations, did Andrew, on the second June morning after the loss when Professor Lorry, declaring that it would take a year to search every foot of Greylock Peak, and that he was not going to waste time in crying over spilt milk, went down the mountain with his young assistant and Mr. Grosvenor, who had business in the valley, to procure materials for another experiment-although not on the same scale as the first-the girls being left behind with the landlady of the little mountain inn where they were staying.

The chauffeur wore a "dour" look as he saw them depart, Una's father driving his own car; for the first time in all his well-trained service, the true-penny was inclined to sulk over being told to keep an eye on two "daft lassies", who refused to go down to the town, because they wanted to search some more-or Pemrose did.

So he sat on a bench outside the little mountain house, thirty-six hundred feet above sea-level, where there were no visitors at this early season, with the exception of the experimenting party, and, between whiffs of his pipe, discoursed upon the folly of simple earth folk in "ganging beyant themselves, thinking o' clacking wi' the Man in the Moon, forbye"-and, in tones seemingly bewitched, of the black shape he had seen jump forth from the woods.

"Pshaw! I do believe you think that it was some bad fairy, Andrew,-fairy or mountain 'deev', who stole the little record, and part of the parachute, too-spirited them away," said Una, with fanciful relish, having not quite grown beyond the fairy-tale age, herself.

"If that's so, girlie," said the mountain landlady-alas! for Andrew True-penny, alias Campbell, now came the evil chance over which he sulked-"if that's so, and you could only find the mountain wishing-stone, stand on it and wish three times-wish har-rd-maybe, the good fairies would give you back what you're looking for!"

"Where-where is it-the wishing-stone?" The little fixed star in Una's eye was never so bright-a twinkling star of portent. "The wishing stone on Greylock! Oh! I never knew there *was* one."

"Havers, woman! Dinna ye ken that ye hae a tongue to hold?" muttered the grizzled chauffeur, in a stern aside.

But the motherly New Englander-who, with her old husband, could not for a moment be suspected of the theft-had her heart full for two sorrowing girls.

"Why! it's a little over a mile from here, I guess, down the Man Killer trail, the third flat slab you come to. I'd go with you myself-though it's rough traveling, the steepest trail on the mountain-only my man is laid up with the rheumatiz, hangin' on to him like a puppy-dog to a root."

"Oh! we can find it for ourselves-hurrah!" shouted Una, almost squinting with anticipation. "I've never stood upon a real mountain wishing-stone before. Who-who knows what may come of it?"

In her young blood, as in Andrew's, was the extravagant excitement of the whole experiment,-this first step in the ladder of demonstration which was by and by to reach the moon-lending to all an unearthly touch.

"The-the Man Killer trail! Why! that's *one* place where we haven't searched-yet!" A moping Pemrose suddenly awoke.

To her, who had grown up amid the mathematical realities of an inventor's laboratory, who had "plugged" so hard at her elementary physics that she might be able to grasp the first principles of her father's work, some day-some day to work with him,-to her, the little girl-mechanic, a wishing stone was no golden magnet.

But the very fact that there was one spot, not so far from the summit, either-wildest spot on the mountain though it be-still unexplored, was enough to draw her restless feet anywhere, against any deadlock of difficulty.

"Ha! The Man Killer trail!" she whooped again. "Oh-h! we could easily find it; we saw a sign directing to it, as we came up the mountain."

"It's na a trail; it's just a hotch-potch o' rocks-some sharp as stickit teeth!" groaned Andrew, who saw his own doom fixed, in vain protesting.

He felt rather like a man who had been left behind to hold a wolf by the ears when, in the teeth of every remonstrance he could offer, he found himself, a little later, starting out in the rear of two adventurous girls, in quest of that third slab of a wishing stone-and the breath-racking Man Killer trail.

But those girls were, to some degree, seasoned climbers, both,-sure-footed as venturesome!

Through the dim limelight of fringing pine woods, across oozing mud-beds, soft from spring rains and freshets, over a babbling brook spanned by an elastic bridge formed of the interlacing roots of giant trees-where Una found much delight in bouncing up and down in anticipation of the magic stone-they stubbornly held their way, and came at last to the chaos of rocks crowding a



steep gorge which marked the head of the lonely Killer trail.

"Noo-I gang first!" said Andrew—a true-penny still, though the stamp was reversed. "My word!" he added sourly, "this is na trail-juist a scratch on the mountainside—an' the muckle rocks they're a flail for beating the breath out of a puir body."

"What-what do I care if they shouldn't leave me a pinch if only I could find something—even a few more rags of the parachute!" gasped Pemrose, in stifled tones of passion, as she climbed, hurry-skurry, over a piled capsheaf of boulders.

Indeed, that battling breath was at a low ebb in all three when, following the tangled skein of a sort of trail which the feet of daring climbers had beaten, here and there, amid the rocks, they reached in due time the third slab which, like the invisible running water in Tory Cave, was supposed to bring "piping times" of luck to whoever should brave the difficulties of the wild pass, to stand on it and wish.

"Oh-oh! there it is, at last," cried Una, her hand to her breathless side, "a nice 'squatty' slab—almost as smooth as glass—an' shaped like a mud-turtle. I wonder if there is a fairy underneath it—lurking under the rim. Now-now for the wishing cap!"

But before she could don Fortunatus' cap by breaking a wee branch from a dwarf cedar growing amid the crags and wreathing it, like a green cottage bonnet, around her head, she slipped upon the wet moss girdling the stone where a tiny spring bubbled, and almost pitched headlong down the trail, at this point particularly steep.

"Easy there, lassie! Ye dinna want to mak' o' that auld flat slab a tombstone, eh?" murmured Andrew, laying a great hand upon her shoulder, with a little smack of laughter upon his long, smooth-shaven upper lip.

But immediately he winced as if his own words hurt him, and Pemrose—herself in an aching mood—knew what he was thinking of, that grizzled chauffeur.

Una, her balance recovered, jumped upon the stone.

Surely, no wishing-cap ever before was so bonnie, so becoming as the fine, emerald needles of the little cedar branch gripped together under the dimpled chin, fringing the sweet, saucy, girlish face, the star in the bright dark eye so intently fixed.

Pem smiled; in the present crisis of her young life she didn't care if her friend's eyelashes were longer than hers by a whole ell. And Andrew sighed because of that one "sair memory" which had oppressed him on the Pinnacle.

The serio-comic passion in the green-framed face, the fervor in the one little clenched fist drooping at Una's side, might well have won over all the good fairy-hosts that ever landed in the wake of the Pilgrims, and set them to scouring Greylock for the missing record from on high.

"Now then! Pemrose, it's up to you! Turn your backbone into a wishbone."

The wreathed figure stepped from the pedestal,—a laughing June spot against the wintry grimness of the Man Killer trail.

Obligingly the inventor's daughter stepped up, closing her eyes half-humorously, doubling the drooping hands at her panting sides.

But, as suddenly, the eyelids were flung up, like shutters from the blue of day. The uncurling fists were outflung passionately.

"I can't! I *can't!*" cried Pemrose Lorry, choking upon her own wishbone. "I—I'm not in the humor for it—for foolery! I must go on-right on—and search! This—this is the shortest trail down the mountain, if it's the roughest—I know that!" She looked desperately at old Andrew. "If any mean thief—anybody—stole that record, there could be only one—one motive for it, my father-r says—curiosity; to be the fir-rst to see that very first record man has ever got from so high up—high up in the earth's thin atmosphere, where the air ends—and space begins!"

She seemed to have that whole zero void in her heart now, its light, stifling gases in her distended throat—Toandoah's little pal—as she looked distractedly down the gorge.

"Oh! it's pos-si-ble—just barely possible, that after he had satisfied his cur-ios-ity—or mischief—or whatever it was—he might have thrown away the little steel box, dropped it somewhere on the trail," she panted extravagantly. "Or—or we might even come on some more rags of the parachute and track him—track him to a camp! My father-r—"

It was the passionate break on that word, even more than the spice in the blue eyes, that went straight to the shadowed spot in Andrew's heart and found the little sprig of memorial heather, hidden there, the mountain heather, the tiny, pinkish blossoms, with the faint, wild tang, which he plucked whenever he went home to Scotland from a small grave in a hillside "kirkyard" on whose granite marker was printed: "Margery Campbell, aged fifteen!"

It had been as much the restlessness of bereavement as a desire to better their fortunes which had brought his wife and him to the New World, for she had been their only child, with the exception of one son, old enough to be in the American Army.

The fragrance of that imaginary heather-bloom tucked away in the impassive chauffeur's breast was occasionally apparent in a furtive glance thrown skyward, or in a momentary glisten of mist in the gray shell of the mechanical eye.

It had made the whole family of his employers very sympathetic towards Andrew, as to a friend. And now a whiff of that heather memory stood Pemrose in good stead.

"I reckon if leetle Margery were livin', she'd feel in the verra same way gin anny misfortune happed to me," he told himself.

"Aw, weel, lassie!" Thus he spoke aloud. "Since ye're set on gaeing on a wee bit further, we'll gang; but dinna get yer hopes stickit on finding onything!"

"Andrew-Andrew, himself, has found something! Look-look at him!"

It was barely twenty minutes later that the wildly startled cry burst from Una as the trio struggled on-on down the fitful path, between the rocky jaws of the Man Killer, where beetling crags loomed, fang-like, on either side of them and, here and there some swollen rill made of a green moss-bank a slimy mud-bed.

"He-he's hearing things, if he isn't seeing them. Oh, look!... Look at him!"

Una's hand was at her jumping heart-pressing hard as if to hold it in her body-as she beheld the tall figure of the chauffeur, motionless as arrested mechanism, upon the trail, ahead.

"I heerd a-skirl." Andrew's face was stony as that of the Old Man of Greylock-a featured rock-as he turned it upon the breathless girls.

"A skirl! A cry!" he repeated hoarsely. "'Twas na the yap of an animal, either! Somebody-somebody's yawping for help out here in this awfu' spot! Dinna ye hear it, children?"

They did. Their flesh began to creep.

Up, upward, struggling between great rocks, it climbed, that cry, where the stony teeth of the Man Killer bit the trail right in two.

"Help-h-help!" it pleaded. "Oh-help!" Then feebly, but fierily: "*Oh-h!* confound it-*help*, I say!"

That was the moment when Pemrose Lorry shook as if the old Man Killer were devouring her.

Was there-could there be something familiar, half-familiar, about the faint, volcanic shout: some accent she seemed to have heard before? And yet-and yet, not quite that, either!

"My word! Some puir body's hur-rted bad-ba-ad-like a toad under a harrow," grunted Andrew, and scrambled hastily on over a gray barrier of rocks,-the girls following.

Once again it limped painfully up to them, the cry, like a visible, broken thing. "Help-h-help, I say!" Then, feebly, in rock-bitten echo: "*Help!*"

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## CHAPTER XXI

### THE MAN KILLER

"WE must lift him out of the mud! Oh-h! even if it hurts him-terribly-we'll have to lift him to a dry spot."

It was Pemrose Lorry who spoke. Together with her Camp Fire sisters she had taken some training in first aid. And one agonizing accident which she had been told how to deal with was the case of a knee-cap displaced or broken.

There almost seemed to be a broken head on her own young shoulders through which wild, streaky lights and shadows came stealing, like moonlight through cracked shutters whose chinks are not wide enough to reveal clearly any object in a room.

It was the same breathlessly unreal feeling-the same dim moonlit groping, that she had felt as she sat on the cliff-brow with Stud, when he talked of the nickum and his father-and called the latter a "queer fish!"

For one thing she knew at a glance! She had seen the injured man, who lay calling for help in a miry spot of the Man Killer trail, before. Three times before, said lightning perception!

And it came upon her now, as emergency's stiff breeze blew the cobwebs from her brain, the occasion of the second time, sandwiched in between that zero day when he had dragged her up a snow-bank, the youth who saved her addressing him as Dad, and the smiling June one when he lay on a fernbed before his lake-shore camp, grumpily fishing.

"I-I saw him: I know I saw him-again-crossing the street outside Una's home on the day when the last installment of the Will was read," she realized, her hands coming together convulsively at the thought of the blighting codicil which hung up the fortunes of the moon-going Thunder Bird for twelve long years.

"He-he was wearing the same gray cap!" was the next cleaving flash of memory.

He was not really wearing it now. It bobbed in the rill beside him.

As one eye turned feverishly towards it, the third thunder clap of perception came in the staggering sense of how like he was to Una.

She might have been his daughter-Una-with that little fixed star of feeling set like a shining pebble now in her right, fascinated eye, reflected, exaggerated in the glazed cast of pain in the stone-gray eye of the man beneath her, whose climber's suit of homespun was daubed with mountain mud,-whose tweed cap was the brooklet's toy.

He had been trying to scoop up water in it.

And that brought Pemrose Lorry, Camp Fire Girl, to herself again, within quarter of a minute of her first laying eyes on him. 265

For there is one gallant anchor that will hold in any pinch,-when thought is shattered and speculation the maddest blur: the Camp Fire law: Give Service!

She unhooked her little camper's cup from where it hung at her green belt, and offered him a drink.

She dipped her handkerchief in the trickle of water and wiped the cold drops of faintness and agony from his forehead.

And then, when he had confided to Andrew, who knelt beside him, that he had slipped upon the wet, slimy moss beside the rill, as he ascended the trail, and broken his knee-cap by striking heavily against a confronting rock, she said that they must lift him to a dry spot.

"That's-r-right. She knows what to-do. Ouch! a-a knee-cap slipped, or broken-is-the deuce of a rack," groaned the victim, as they proceeded to raise him, the girls supporting, each, a knickerbockered leg, Pemrose the injured one, while Andrew took the main weight of the writhing body, until they laid it upon some dry moss. 266

Yes! and she knew further what to do, that Camp Fire Girl who wore the Fire Maker's bracelet upon her wrist, for plucking off her soft, green sweater she rolled it into a wad and placed it under the hollow of the injured knee, so flexing it, supporting it, while Una doubled hers into a pillow for his head,-Una who moved as if in a fantastic dream.

And then arose the question as to the next move; how to go about obtaining further help.

"We might-might make a stretcher with poles, saplings, with our sweaters, your coat, Andrew, and-and carry him down to the nearest farmhouse," Pem suggested.

"No-o thank-you!" The injured man shifted his shoulders ever so slightly upon one elbow and looked at her; the tiniest laugh shot the rapids of pain in his eye. "My son said you had a whole lot of 'pep'-same that's in your inventor-father, I suppose, who wants to bombard the moon!... My son who's play-ing baseball now down on the Greylock field-mountain's foot!" The sufferer here appealed to Andrew. "If you could-only-get him up here, I'd be all right! There's an auto at the nearest farmhouse-maybe they'd let you take it. Any one-any one can point out 'Starry'"-in a lame rush of pride-"player who made that home run-" 267

"Hadna I better bid him bring a doctor along too-a stretcher as weel?" put in the Scotchman dryly.

The victim nodded, looking at the other's cap.

"You're a chauffeur," he pleaded; "you'll drive fast?"

"Aye, fegs! Fast as God and gasoline will let me!" answered Andrew devoutly, with an anxious glance at the two girls. 268

As his tall, spare figure scrambled on down the trail, the sufferer raised his eyes to Pemrose.

"If-if you could t-twist my knapsack round from under me," he murmured; "there's a restorative in it-a few drops of ammonia-I'm faint!"

She did so-and turned for the moment as faint as he was.

The whole trail swam, grew black-black as the wisp of thin, ebony silk, parachute silk, with a fraction of a bent wire frame peeping out from one corner of that roomy knapsack.

"Well! are you going to desert me now-ow?... Now that the thief is so-o nice-ly bagged!"

The man looked up at her, some dash of whimsical fire in him mastering weakness; at the girl kneeling, bolt upright, with the black rag between her hands, and the twisted scrap of frame,-the frame which had drifted down two hundred miles.



The man looked up at her, some dash of whimsical fire mastering weakness. *Page 268.*

"Ar-re you-going-to desert me now?"

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Again the anchor held; the noble anchor: Give Service: it was as if a voice outside of her numbed self spoke the words.

The raven rags dropped from between her fingers,-their reflection from her face.

Steadily enough, she found the little vial lying amid the top layer in that pigskin knapsack, shook a few drops from it, into the thimble-like glass accompanying, mixed them with water, held them to his lips.

At the same time she dipped her handkerchief again and passed it over his forehead.

"Ha! Pity as well as 'pep' in you, eh? Good!" The sufferer actually winked one eye as the stimulant trickled down. "Well! my dear, the little recording apparatus is in that knapsack too; I-I make you a present of it-and of the codicil to my brother's will, as well.... You won't have to wait twelve years."

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Then, indeed, the trail seemed to double up, to wind itself around Pem's brain, rocks and all,-only every rock was gold-edged, a nugget.

Her eyes stared straight before her,-blue as the June violet that caught a drop from the spring near.

"Who-who are you?" screamed Una, forgetting that she was speaking to a broken man.

"How about my being your uncle, Treffrey Graham, my dear, who-who was such a mad fellow-in-youth; s-such an oddity? Oh-h! you've heard of him-have-you?"

The whimsical light in the pain-reddened eyes burned to mockery now. It showed the hippogriff, the "hot tamale", still there. Evidently eccentricity wasn't all dead.

"Humph! By Jove! I'm having some fun out of my broken knee, after all-electrifying you girls," gurgled the still racked voice. "Dramatic setting for a denouement, too, the old Man Killer trail!"

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"But why-oh! why-y did you do it?" Pem snatched up the rag of parachute again, her eyes going wildly from the soot-like scrap of silk to a wonderful, antique ring upon the little finger of the pale hand which twitched so strangely below her.

"What! S-steal the little record, you mean!" The bushy eyebrows were twitching, too. "Well! maybe I want-ed to make sure, for myself, that the rocket really had gone higher than anything earthly ever flew yet, before-before I resigned a fortune to it."

That was the moment when the nuggets all turned to rocks again for Pemrose. He saw the change in her face.

"Oh! I don't mean anything der-og-a-tory to your father, my dear"-pain snatched at the man's breath-"or to his invention, either. I knew him before you did. 'Why did I do it?' Curiosity-eccentricity, I suppose-anything you like to call it! I always was such a 'terror'-a regular zany, my college friends used to call me."

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A flash from those prankful days, erratic as a shooting star, shot the glaze in the sufferer's eye.

"And, then—and then, I really am interested in everything connected with the conquest of the air—of space—myself," the hampered speaker went on. "I've done a little flying, out West,—my son, too! I found out when the experiments with your father's in-vention—"

"We call it the Thunder Bird," put in Una, as pain again called for a break.

"Ha! Good name for it! Piles up the moon-going romance, eh? Well—ll," wearily, "having found out the par-ti-cu-lar night on which the lit-tle model rocket was to fly, I came up the mountain to a small camp that my son and I have ne-ar the summit-east side of Greylock. I was standing on the edge of the spruce woods, watching the whole performance. Then—then, when the parachute dragging the little recording apparatus blew towards me in the darkness, almost into my hand, I—why! I snatched it up and ran with it. Why? Oh, because I suppose the boy has never died in me: the boy that's 'part pirate, part pig!'" with a grating chuckle.

Incredible as it seemed, the low laughter, the treacherous tinkle, was echoed by girlish lips as that renascent urchin momentarily swaggered in the glaze of the suffering eye!

"And then—and then something told me—an aberration, I suppose, as my impulses usually are—that I had some sort of r-right to see the very first record man had ever got of that upper air, of Space, if-if I was go-ing to turn over a couple of hundred thousand dollars, for the pursuit of the—sov-er-eign invention."

"I—I can't believe it," murmured Pem into the stony teeth of the Man Killer.

"I meant to return the record next morning, but I was a-fraid your father might shoot me," to Pemrose. "Then, later, I heard he had gone down the mountain—that was yesterday and a mistake—I went-down, too, to beard him. A—a little more water, please! I could not climb again until to-day; I took the Man Killer trail, as being the shortest. And—here I am!" grimly.

"Incidentally, I gave our family lawyer a shock, little niece," he went on, as Una, plucking up courage, adjusted her sweater under his head; she began to like this uncle with the pebble-like cast in his stone-gray eye, she began to think that girls—Camp Fire Girls, especially, with their love of the fanciful—might have more patience with him than others had had.

"Yes! you bet I gave old Cartwright the staggers!" He laughed down the twinge of agony in his voice. "Called him up on the long distance telephone, told him I was Treffrey Graham back; that I had been in the East nearly six months, with my son; that I came pretty near disclosing myself on the—on the day when the third installment of my brother's will was read—actually walked up to the door of my sister's house, then shied off, because ... Oh, gosh! this knee."

The voice broke; it had really become a feverish babble of excitement now—pain's wild excitement.

"Well! What was I saying—yes! I didn't ring the bell because I hadn't made up my mind whether I wanted to claim any share of my brother's fortune, or not; you see he hadn't been very fair to me in youth-taking away my sweetheart. None of my family had—for—that-matter! I didn't know whether I wanted to meet them again. Although I liked the look of my little niece; I had seen her, at a distance, with her mother. And then, we didn't need the money, my boy and I! Had enough of our own; Treffrey Graham may be a terror, but he isn't a failure—financially!"

No—not by a long shot! said the flame of the pigeon-blood ruby upon the pale little finger, now curling significantly in air,—the gem whose fire in this wild spot seemed as erratic as his own, seeing that none but a zany would have worn it here.

"So—so I told old Cartwright this morning that I stepped out of that strung-out will," a smile curled the pallid lips now; "that I authorized him to make preparations, at once, for the turning over of the remainder of my brother's wealth, in his name and mine, to the University of our native city, to be used for the furtherance of Professor Lorry's won-der-ful invention for r-reaching in-de-finite heights."

"My father!... Oh! my fa-ther!" It was a wild little cry to which the Man Killer rang now, as the head of Pemrose Lorry went down upon her knees.

"Yes, I'm glad his way is clear—though, I suppose, only a man 'whose head grew under his arm' would have managed the thing as I have done." The sufferer winked through the veil of pain. "Now! my son is different. He's a dare-devil too—but he knows where to stop. You couldn't have bribed him to steal that record—though somebody played a trick on him the other night—robbed him of his oars and a dance—just when he had 'taken the bit between his teeth', too; said he was tired of this camouflage business, and he was going—going whether I liked it, or not!"

"Ah-h!" That was the moment when Pem's shoulders trembled like the needles upon the little green cedar sapling that grew by the rill: all because the Wise Woman in her was shaking the Elf, bidding her go to sleep for ever—which the Elf, very properly, refused to do, for, after all, undiluted wisdom would be a colorless cloak for any young back.

"Well! he—he wouldn't speak to us when we just wanted to thank him for saving us in that terrible train-accident," put in Una defensively.

"Ha! That was my fault, little niece. I made him promise, on coming East, that he wouldn't go near any of his relatives, risk being identified by them, until I had decided what to do about the legacy—and whether I was going to make myself known to them, or not. Now—ow, I hope you'll be friends. He's your own cousin—Treff junior."

And so Jack at a Pinch at last came into his own in the shape of a name!

"Yes, called after me, he is! Goodness! don't I wish he'd hurry up and get here, now-with the doctor?"

It was a hollow groan. Pain was, at length, getting the better of that capricious spirit.

"Can't-can't I do-anything-to make you more comfortable?" Pemrose asked.

Then suddenly remembering that it was he who was making the Thunder Bird's fortune, as impulsively as the little cedar tree leaned to the swollen rill, she bent and kissed the cold sweat of pain from his forehead.

"That-that's worth coming East for," murmured the man, his own eyes growing wet. "Little niece! don't you want to-follow-suit? I suppose, a year from now, your Thunder Bird will fly."

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## CHAPTER XXII

### A JUNE WOMAN

"I FEEL as if I was in the pictures!"

"Oh! I feel as if I was in the pictures."

It was the wild thought in each girl's breast, as minutes went on.

The loneliness of the mountain pass, nearly three thousand feet above sea-level, the rigors of the wind sweeping up it, chill now, June not yet being ten days old, the frowning crags, the remote heads of other tall mountains peeping over their shoulders, the two green dots of girls on either side of a broken man, they took it all in, to the full, most dramatically too-and felt as if they were in the pictures.

A surpassing moving picture reel, more telling than any they had ever witnessed, in which-oh, queer double-headed feeling-they were both actors and spectators!

But pain-pain left no atmosphere of unreality about it for the suffering man, for the sufferer who monopolized both their soft sweaters, while they shivered convulsively, until if it came to a beauty contest between the two now, the old Man Killer, awarding the palm, would not have made it dependent on a mere matter of eyelashes, but on which little nose was the least blue bitten.

Pain released something in that sufferer too,-a fire that was not all wild-fire! For suddenly he dragged Una's green sweater-roll from under his head and thrust it towards her with an imperious: "Put it on, child!"

"I shan't!" replied that child of luxury, as arbitrarily, slipping it back under the pallid cheek, above which the stand of agony in the stony eye told that the man was suffering almost to a point of delirium now.

"Who ever thought Una would be such a brick?" Pem nibbled the words between her chattering teeth. "She's shivering-yes! and frightened and trying to cry-but the brick in her won't allow it!"

There was no doubt that the uncle of her blood was a brick, too, for he fought the groans reverberating behind his clenched teeth, like a bee in a bottle, only breaking out now and again in a yearning prayer for the coming of his son.

"If he were only here-here!" he moaned; it was evident that the youthful daredevil who liked excitement, but "knew where to stop", was a tower of strength to the less balanced father.

Pem was longing uncontrollably for his appearance, also-for the rower whom she had robbed of his oars, while the sufferer seemed to find his only relief in talking about him.

"My son and I have been in bad scrapes before among-mountains," he panted, feverishly. "Once high up in the Canadian Rockies, we missed our guide who had gone back for provisions. Bad plight then, but the boy didn't 'cave'! He was only fifteen when he shot his bear in Arizona. He loves the West. But the East's in his blood. Just went wild over these Berkshire Hills, this spring, over his first sight of mayflowers! They seemed more of a treasure than the fortune he wanted to part with. *Hiff-f!*"

Before the eyes of both girls rose the clamor of color "blooming round" in old Tory Cave-the armful of passé blossoms flung down at the "rattler" scare.

"Yes-his Mother Earth has been good to him," muttered the whimsical voice. "Very good! Yet-yet such are earth-sons that he'd turn his back on her to-morrow-go off on a wild-goose chase after some other world-even a dead one-if only that moon-storming Thunder-Bird-"

"What! You don't mean to say-oh! did he write to my father about it-write to my father and sign himself 'T. S.'?" broke in Pemrose, glancing back along the trail which she had traveled these past few months and finding it stranger, more baffling than the Man Killer's.

"May-may-have done so," came the answer, with a faint chuckle. "I asked him when pressed for a name to give his mother's-his middle one-Selkirk. But he a lunar can-di-date! Not if I know it!"

With me, the moon may have the money-but not the boy!"

"The moon may have the money!" Pemrose Lorry glanced at the mud-stained knapsack lying by the sufferer,-the knapsack tucked away in which was the golden egg, the precious record; she would not unearth it and glance at it, because the second look, at least, belonged to her father.

This mature madcap upon the ground, this queer, practical joker, chastened now, if never before, had played on him a cruel prank, but, at least, he was not the fool who loved money for its own sake.

"If-only-I could do anything for him!" yearned the girl passionately. "Oh! I'd want father-father-to feel that I did ev-ery-thing for him."

And, as once before in a watery pinch, the thought of Toandoah's honor, Toandoah's debt to this trapped March hare, was the vital breath of inspiration.

"Have-have you any matches?"

Suddenly she bent to the ashen ear.

"In my br-reast pocket, yes." It was a feebly appreciative flicker.

"A fire! I-I a Camp Fire Girl-and not to think of it sooner! Una! Una! Get busy! Gather wood, quickly-quickly-all-ll the dry wood you can!"

And the friendly little cedar gave of its one brown arm, the spruce chit, the birch stripling, the pine urchin-all the hop-o'-my-thumb timber that flourished in this wild pass-contributed of the dead limbs torn from them by last winter's blasts, to burn up the chill in the old Man Killer's heart.

Una's little nose, piquantly tiptilted, warmed from a fashionable orchid-color to a cheery rose pink, with the excitement, the pressing adventure of trailing firewood among the rocks and dragging it captive to the new-born blaze which Pem was fanning with her breath and with the breezy bellows of her short green skirt.

As for the sufferer, hope stirred anew in him as he turned his head towards the flaming pennons of good cheer, while the fire, prospering gayly, feathered its nest with scarlet down.

He saw, too, that the fire-witch was preparing something in that red nest for him.

Raking out the first glowing embers, she filled her little aluminum cup at the rill and set it among them; when it steamed she shook into it a few drops from the little vial-the aromatic spirits of ammonia-and held it to his lips.

"It's the best I can do," she murmured, but her eyes stretched that best into an indefinite blue of longing to capture the pain even for a short time and bear it for him-for him who was making the Thunder Bird's fortune.

As before, the stimulant set the racked heart to sending strength through the freezing veins-and with it a touch of the whimsicality which Death alone could quench.

"Little girl!" Treffrey Graham's eye winked upon a mote of fun that softened to a mist. "Your father's invention is the gr-reatest thing yet; it's a Success-I know that from the one glimpse I had at the record-" Pemrose winced-"but-but you may tell him from me that I doubt if, after all, his Thunder Bird is the best thing he's turned out."

"Some-somebody coming! Oh-h, some-body-coming!" cried Una, at that moment, so that the man started up, with a heyday exclamation-and tumbled back, a wreck of groans.

For it was not his son. Neither was it the long-coated figure of the chauffeur, at sight of which each girl would have passionately hugged herself-if not him.

But it was a messenger whom Andrew had sent.

And at sight of her, of the fresh mountain rose in her cheeks, with its heart of American gold, the climbing flash in her hazel eye, Una just tumbled into sobs, herself, that little fixed star in her eye blazing pathetic welcome, for this was her first taste of emergency's pinch, emergency's call for sacrifice.

"Are you-oh! are you come to stay with us-us?" she cried, running forward with childish confidence.

"That I be-girlie!" responded the mountain woman, throwing a warm arm around her. "The man that borrowed our little aut'mobile truck and set off in it at a score down the mountain, the man with a queer blowpipe at the roots of his tongue, he told me that he had left two lassies up here on the lonely trail, with a badly hurt man. 'Woman!' says he, kind o' fierce-like, 'if they were yer own bit lassies, ye'd scorch the rocks, climbing to 'em.' 'Man!' says I," the Greylock woman paused, half-laughingly, to catch her breath, "'I never laid eyes on them, or on the broken-kneed man, either, but I'll warm the way, just the same.' But, mercy! it took me most an hour to get here-though only a mile of climbing-the old Man Killer is-so-o-fierce."

Her eye, at that, went to the fire, now brilliantly painting the trail, to the pillowed figure upon the moss, with the sweater-roll in the hollow of the injured knee.

"But, land sakes! I needn't ha' been in such a mad hurry getting here, after all-giving my skin to make ear-laps for the old Man Killer!" she cried, holding up two raw palms, flayed by indiscriminate climbing. "For, my senses! they're no stray lambs o' tenderfoot-those 'twa bit

lassies'!" mimicking Andrew's blowpipe. "They know how to take care of themselves in a pinch-and of somebody else, too!... And-and, see here, what I've brought you, honey, rolled in the blanket for *him!*"

"Cake-choc'late cake! C-coffee!" Una gasped feebly, confronted by the ghost of her everyday life.

She grasped the reality, though, of that normal life, somewhere waiting for her, with the first bite into the brown-eyed cake, while her sweater was restored to her thinly clad shoulders as the mountain woman spread her blanket over the injured man and tucked it under him for a pillow.

"You-you're a 'trump,' little niece-letting me have it for-r so long," he said wistfully.

And Una shyly forbore to answer.

Occasionally it is easier to land gracefully after a long jump than a short one in the case of an awkward gulf to be crossed! She saw that her friend Pemrose, no relation at all to this extraordinary uncle, could care for him and welcome him without embarrassment, while, with every doubtful glance in his direction, she felt, still, as if she did not quite know whether she was on her head or her heels.

She crept, for reassurance, very close to the mountain woman, the typical June woman, with the normal rose in her cheeks, and the golden buttercup for a heart, as she picnicked, subdued, by the trail fire.

"I don't think-oh! I don't believe I ever met anybody q-quite like you before. But I'm so glad you're in the world!" she murmured gratefully.

"And I just wish you could come into *my* world often, girlie," was the cuddling answer, "for it's lonely as old Sarum here on the mountainside-though where old Sarum is I don't know myself!" breezily.

"Nor I!" laughed Una.

"Old Man Greylock doesn't talk to one, you know-only roars sometimes." The woman lifted her eye to the dim peak above her, with the pale mists streaming, tress-like, about its crown, from which Mount Greylock takes its name; then her anxious glance returned to the sufferer. "Ha! there he goes-making faces at the pain again," she murmured pityingly. "And, mercy! I suppose 'twill be a blue moon yet-a dog's age-before his son can get here."

It was a long age anyhow; although, in reality, little more than an hour-a wild, wind-ridden, fire-painted hour-before three haggard men came stumbling up the trail.

Two carried a stretcher between them. One had a bag in his hand.

As they hoisted that collapsible stretcher between its poles over the last bleak hurdle of rock, one, the youngest, dropped his end of it, which the doctor, shifting his bag, took up.

Jack at a Pinch rushed forward.

And ever afterwards Pem liked that churlish nickum because he ignored her then; because he had no more consciousness of her presence, or of Una's, or of the June woman's, than if they had been rocks-blank rocks-by the trail, as he flung himself on his knees beside his father.

"Dad! *Dad!*" he cried, his face as gray-blue with hurry as his baseball flannels. "Oh-h! Dad, what have you been doing to yourself-now?"

"The biter bitten-Treff! Joker pinched!" came the answer in tones almost jocular, for the love in that boyish voice was a cordial. "Well! I guess I haven't got my death-blow now you've come. And-and the murder is out, boy: these little girls know all-ll: who you are-who I am!"

Then, indeed, Jack at a Pinch raised his head and looked straight across into the blue eyes of Pemrose Lorry.

"You must have thought me an awful 'chuff'," he said.

"I'm sorry about the oars," was the mute reply of the girl's eyes, but the least little tincture of a smile trickling down from her lip-corners, said: "But I'm glad I got even with you, somehow!"

However, there was too much "getting even" just now in this wild spot-Life grimly settling accounts with the dragon who had so often "hazed" others-for the boy and girl to spend any more conscious thoughts upon each other.

There was the terrible trip-the worst mile ever traveled-down the Man Killer trail, for him, strapped to the stretcher, after the doctor had examined the injury and found the delicate kneecap both slipped and broken.

"I guess if-if I pull through this, I'll be a-reformed-character; no more-no more eccentricity for me," he murmured dizzily to Pemrose who, when the trail permitted, walked beside him, stroking his hand,-and he rolled his eyes faintly, through the veil of the opiate which the doctor had given, at the knapsack beside him, wherein lay the golden egg.

And with his own hands, the Man Killer at last conquered, as they laid him in an ambulance, he took the five-inch, open-work steel box, the precious record, from that knapsack's depth and handed it to her.

She could not look at it, the little Thunder Bird's log of that two-hundred mile trip aloft, she could only jealously clasp it to her breast,-Toandoah's little pal.



"T-tell your fa-ther from-me," said the broken voice, "that Treff Graham is the same old Treff; that he m-may be a pirate, but he isn't a pig-not re-al-ly! That," faintly, "he apol-o-gizes-and steps aside; that, with all his heart-it's there, if it is a madcap-" wanderingly, winkingly, he touched his left breast-"he hopes that, a year from now, the highways of the hea-vens may be opened-the im-mor-tal Thun-der Bird will fly!"

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## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE CELESTIAL CLIMAX

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A YEAR from then it did!

It awoke the World with its challenging roar, silencing for ever, let us hope, the racket of guns upon this dear planet, leading man in future to seek his conquests in more transcendent ways, even outside Earth's atmosphere, as it took its pioneer flight again from the misty top of old Mount Greylock.

The World and his wife were there to see: scientists from the four quarters of the globe-Earth's great ones.

And other spellbound spectators, too: Una, the White Birch Group, their Boy Scout comrades-Stud fast developing into the type of hotspur who wanted to take passage for the moon-all massed in such a stupendous Get Together as made the mountain seem "moonshine land", indeed, to their thrill-shod feet.

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And never-oh! never since the history of Mother Earth and her satellite began did such a spectacular traveler start on such a flaming trip as when the hand of a Camp Fire Girl of America threw the switch and the steel explorer, twenty feet long, leaped from its platform high into the air, pointed directly for the moon, with a great inventor's mathematical precision,-trailing its two-hundred-foot, rosy trail of fire.

There was not breath-not breath, even, to cry: "Watch it tear!"

Only breath enough, in young girls' bodies, at least, to gaze off at Mammy Moon, loved patron of many an outdoor revel, and ponder upon the nature of the shock she would get when the Thunder Bird's last explosion lit up her fair face with a blue powder-flash-lit it up for earth to see!

"Do-do you think 'twill ev-er get there-two hundred and thirty thousand miles, about, when-when an eighth of an inch out at the start; and it would m-miss-miss?" breathed a youth who knelt by the heroine of the evening, the inventor's daughter.

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"Toandoah doesn't miss. My father doesn't miss." The young head of Pemrose Lorry queened it in the darkness, with a pride which made of old Greylock, at that moment, the world's throne. "But how-how are we to live through the next hundred hours-the next four days-the time the Thunder Bird will take to travel?"

Yet they did succeed in living through it and in leading time a merry dance too, for young Treffrey Graham, junior, all old scores forgotten, was proving a prince of chums, as spirited in play as he was prompt in a pinch.

And together-hand clasped in hand, indeed-by virtue of her being the inventor's daughter, he the son of the man who had resigned a fortune to the transcendent invention, side by side with two or three of those Very Great Ones, they stood, four nights later, looking through a monster telescope upon a mountaintop, and saw-saw the celestial climax, the first of the heavenly bodies reached.

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Saw the blue powder-flash light up the full, round face of the Silver Queen they loved, while the Thunder Bird, expiring, dropped its bones upon her dead surface.

"It's-got-there," breathed the youth. "What next? Some day-some day, maybe, we'll be shooting off there-together?"

"Yes! if only the Man in the Moon could shoot us back!" breathed Pemrose.

Already it had come to be "we" bound up with "What next?" for it would, indeed, be a zero "next" in which the hands of youth and maiden would not meet in comradeship-and love.

But the sun and center of the girl's heart was still-and would be for long-her father.

The greatest moment of that unprecedented night came when Toandoah bent to her, and said:

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"Little Pem! there was just one moment when I may have been discouraged, you remember! None knew the Wise Woman who saved the city."



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