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Title: The Underpup

Author: I. A. R. Wylie

Release Date: July 20, 2010 [EBook #33212]

Language: English

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE UNDERPUP ***

Produced by Jan MacGillivray

THE UNDERPUP

By

I. A. R. Wylie

The Penguins were always breaking out with something. Miss Thornton, who had run Camp Happy Warriors for years and still believed there was good in everyone, said it was merely their age. The Penguins were older than the Peewits, who still trailed attenuated clouds of glory; and were younger than the Pelicans, who were beginning to talk mysteriously about Life, Beaux, and Parties—things so far removed from the Peewits that they weren't even interested, but near enough to the Penguins to exasperate them into having marvelous ideas of their own.

So the Penguins were wonderfully set up when they first realized that they had a Social Conscience. They felt that even Priscilla ("Prissy") Adams, their counselor, who generally thought their ideas dreadful, would have to admit that a Social Conscience was a good idea.

Clara VanSittart had brought it to camp with her, just as the previous summer she had brought the first pair of white mice. Clara was a fat, earnest child with spectacles, who would one day be chairman of a Women's Club. Her mother, who was several chairmen already, had discovered the Poor that winter—rather to their consternation—so that Clara knew that at the very moment when the Penguins were sitting round their campfire, surrounded by trees and stars and lakes, and faintly nauseated with toasted marshmallows, there were poor, half-starved children literally gasping for air in New York City's crowded, stifling streets. There was even a place called Hell's Kitchen, it was so hot and awful. Clara knew all the best words like "underprivileged," and by the time the last marshmallow had been

drawn from its prong the Penguins were in tears.

"But it's no use just crying," little Janet Cooper said. She was usually so afraid of everyone, including herself, that they all stared at her. "We ought to *do* something," she said. And dived back into the shadow like an alarmed young tadpole.

No one had ever accused the Penguins of inertia. They proceeded at once to do something. And the counselors wished afterward that it had been white mice again.

* * * * *

Thus it came about that one April morning the following year Pip-Emma Binns sat at her desk by the classroom window and wrote an English composition called "Trees." Or rather she was not writing. She was chewing bits out of a wooden pen-holder and balefully regarding the back of Vittoria Emanuella Perozzi, the class' champion essayist. Vittoria used words which Miss Perkins called metaphors and similes and which Pip-Emma called baloney. If a person looked white, why not just say so? Why bring in sheets? However, Miss Perkins thought a lot of that sort of thing, and so, no doubt, would the dames who were giving a prize of two months' vacation in some swell kids' camp for the best description of trees.

What did a tree look like? In Pip-Emma's opinion it looked like a tree. But she knew that wouldn't get her anywhere—certainly not to Camp Happy Warriors, where Pop and Ma were hell-bent on her going. She pulled her dark brows together. She wiped an inky hand over her black hair drawn back into a short defiant pigtail. Then inspiration struck her, too. Very carefully she wrote two sentences. "I can't describe trees. I haven't seen any." And signed it Emma Binns.

It was like a metaphor. It wasn't true. It was baloney. But to Mrs. VanSittart and her committee it was just too heart-rending. No trees. Poor little Emma Binns! As for Vittoria Emanuella Perozzi, she had evidently seen so many trees so often and so beautifully that, in the committee's opinion, there was no urgent need for her to see any more of them.

* * * * *

The Happy Warriors were gathered with their counselors and under their respective banners in Grand Central Terminal, and Clara VanSittart inspected the Penguins like a colonel inspecting a regiment before battle. She gave last orders. After all, the Social Conscience had been her idea, and it had to go over with a bang so that even the Pelicans would be impressed.

"Every Penguin," she said, "must remember to be kind. The poor kid won't be able to do the things we do, and I guess she'll do a lot we don't. But you're not to look s'perior or call her down so as to hurt her feelings. We've got to remember we'd be like her if we didn't belong to the Privileged Classes." It was a prepared speech and had more than a suggestion of Mrs. VanSittart's firm handling of committees. "And don't laugh at her mother," Clara concluded. "She's sure to be pretty awful."

As it happened, Mrs. Binns, who went out as daily help, had no time to go running round after a lot of queer-sounding birds. She'd given Pip-Emma's new middy costume a final admonitory twitch. "And mind you behave like a lady," she'd said, swallowing her tears, "or I'll sock you."

Mr. Binns, who might have been heavyweight champion of the world if he hadn't busted his hand early in life on the skull of a certain Black Bruiser, drove Emma to the station in the cab of his truck. "Keep yer chin covered, Pip," he said, grinning, "and don't pull your punches."

Pip-Emma, staggering through the unfamiliar immensities of Grand Central under the weight of her suitcase, felt sickish. She hated leaving Pop and Ma. She loathed being a Penguin. She'd seen a penguin once at the zoo, and she'd seen no sense in it. She despised her costume. It would take weeks to live down the jeers and cheers which had greeted and pursued it to the end of 45th Street on Eighth. She hated leaving the Gang. It was her Gang. She ruled it with despotic efficiency. In fact, when she and Clara VanSittart, introduced by a worried Prissy Adams, shook hands, two born chairmen unconsciously locked horns.

Clara said, "How d'you do?"

And Pip-Emma said, "I'm fine."

It was one of those social blunders that Clara had foreseen and that had better be dealt with at once. Clara said kindly: "I'm so glad you're fine. But I didn't really want to know, you know."

"Why not?" Pip-Emma asked.

In the perceptible silence a Peewit was heard to titter, and the outrageous sound startled Clara out of her poise. She said, "Just because I don't," quite rudely.

And Pip-Emma, remembering Pop and Ma, retorted that it was dumb to ask questions if you didn't want to know the answers.

It was a short but sharp encounter—Mr. Binns would have described it as a feint with the left followed by a nice right to the jaw. Clara VanSittart had a blinking, winded look, and all the Penguins said, "How d'you do?" as though they couldn't help themselves.

Only little Janet added very timidly, "I hope you'll have a swell time."

And Pip-Emma said, "Sure," much too much as though she were sure.

But she stayed right by Janet. If you find yourself among a bunch of strange kids, you gotta get yourself a Gang. You gotta pick out some poor mutts that don't know how to hold their end up and sock anyone who jumps on 'em. Then they're your Gang. Pip-Emma knew on sight that Janet couldn't hold her end up to save her neck, and that sooner or later she, Pip-Emma, would have to sock the fat girl in the eye.

Clara VanSittart did not know this. She sat next to Emma Binns in the Pullman, determined, without heat or anger, to explain Social Usages and Camp Customs. But Pip-Emma did not seem to want to listen. From her middy pocket she had produced three small sea shells and a tiny flexible rubber ball, and she was doing things with them on the back of her suitcase. It was Mr. Binns' favorite method of getting himself a free drink, and Pip-Emma was no slouch herself. Also if you're getting a Gang, you don't run after it. You let it come to you. If kids saw you up to something they didn't understand, they flocked round like a bunch of hungry sparrows. Gradually the Penguins' excited chatter died down. They were watching her. They were beginning to flock. Pip-Emma knew without looking at them. There was a lot Pip-Emma knew, though she didn't always know she knew it.

"I don't see what you're doing," Clara said fretfully. "What is it? A game?"

"Sure. I put the ball under one of the shells—like that—and you bet where it is."

"All right. I bet. It's there."

"But you haven't betted anything."

Clara blushed hotly. As a well-bred Penguin, she found it impossible to explain that all the Penguins had sacrificed their first week's pocket money to the maintenance of Emma and their Social Conscience.

"I can't. I—I haven't anything."

"You gotta bead necklace."

"All right. I bet it."

It was incredible. Her eyes had deceived her. Pip-Emma took the necklace. Other Penguins, shocked at their leader's failure and convinced of their own right-sightedness, backed their guesses with small gold rings and other detachable possessions. Janet Cooper, who hadn't anything else, bet her Penguin Badge, which was like pledging the family Bible. But, as it happened, Janet won. She was the only winner. Pip-Emma nodded approval of her.

"You're not such a dumb cluck," she said.

Some Peewits, perched respectfully on the outskirts, burst into disrespectful squeaks, and the Penguins refused to meet one another's eyes. At that moment Prissy bore down on them. She was kind but firm.

"What a clever trick, Emma! But it is a trick, isn't it? It wouldn't be quite fair to bet about it, would it? Besides, Happy Warriors don't bet."

Pip-Emma handed back her winnings. She was thoughtful and deliberate. She made no protest. But the Pullman, usually the scene of such happy tumult, sank into an oppressive silence.

But on the bus ride from the station to the Camp the Penguins began to preen their damp feathers.

They loved the Camp. They were proud of the big dining room built like a woodman's cabin and the open sleeping tents circled with military precision round the campfires. They were proud of themselves. They got up to the bugle on the coldest mornings and made their beds and fetched water and built fires. They were strong and brave, as Happy Warriors should be. When Emma Binns saw how wonderful it all was and what a fine bunch they were, she'd feel pretty small. And they'd have to be awfully nice to her and not rub things in.

So they felt better and began to sing. And the twins, Pauline and Claudine Bennett, bounced joyfully in their seats.

It was Pip-Emma's longest journey. She was getting tired and homesick. She'd never been homesick before. It was like toothache in the wrong place. Right now Pop and Ma would be sitting down to Ma's special steak and onions. Afterward, it being Saturday, they'd go to an early show at the movies and finish up with a Pineapple Temptation or maybe a Banana Royal at Hader's drugstore. They'd be feeling pretty mean, too. They hadn't really wanted her to go. They'd wanted her to have a swell time and live like the rich kids did, with butlers waiting on you behind your chair and maybe breakfast brought you on a tray, like in the movies. Because one day Pip-Emma, who was smart as a whip, was going places, so she'd better know how things were done before she got there.

The Gang would be out now in force. Pip-Emma's heart contracted. Maybe they were missing her. Maybe, though, if she sent them post cards showing the swell way she was living, they'd be kinda sunk. She'd tell 'em she had a Gang of her own already and that they were swell kids.

They weren't, of course. She looked them over gloomily. Sissies. Just to look at their nails was enough. As to her Gang, it consisted for the moment of one pale small kid who jumped if you spoke to her.

The station bus swung round a curve.

"There!" the Penguins shrieked together. And they all looked at Emma.
"There!" they said.

Pip-Emma looked.

"It's our Camp," Janet explained in her thin high voice. "There's the lake. And that's our dining hall. And there, among the trees, is the Penguin Circle, where we sleep."

Emma said nothing. It was as though, at the wave of a wicked wand, Roxy's and all its ushers had been bewitched into ruins and rags. And it was more than Emma, at that moment, could bear. Her sharp, sallow little face puckered. To the Penguins' consternation, she burst into a storm of tears.

Before supper Clara VanSittart summoned the Penguins to a hasty powwow. They drew Prissy into it, the situation being beyond them.

"P'raps it was the trees upset her," Janet hazarded. "You know, she's never seen any."

The twins shook their heads. "It wasn't the trees. When we showed her our tent, she said her uncle slept in a place like that."

"What's her uncle?" the Penguins demanded indignantly.

"He's a W.P.A. worker," the twins said in unison, "and he's helping build a post office somewhere. She said there weren't any houses, so they had to live in tents."

Clara VanSittart drew a shocked breath. The truth was obvious. To Emma Binns their Camp was just a camp. When she heard that she'd have to make her bed, light fires, and wash dishes, she'd write home. She'd tell her people—probably dreadful people—that that was how the VanSittarts lived.

Clara took a firm lead. She proposed at once that Emma Binns should not make beds. When the time came, she was to be led away to some remote spot while the Penguins made hers and did her share of the chores. Clara explained that bed making was the sort of thing that poor Emma probably had to do at home. It wasn't a treat. And maybe she was underfed. She didn't look very strong. It was their duty, belonging as they did to the Privileged Classes, to make Sacrifices.

It was a simple supper, nourishing but Spartan. When Pip-Emma, seated at the Penguin table, thought of the Pineapple Temptation Ma might be eating at that very moment, her gloom deepened. But she wasn't going to cry again. Not if she had to bite her tongue out. She'd never cried like that before in her life.

The Penguins suddenly burst into song:

"We are the happy Penguins—
We play without a care;
We don't worry who wins the game,
So long as we play fair!"

At that moment every Penguin was stricken by the same thought. The memory of their unpaid gambling debts rose in their midst like a reproachful specter. Their song wavered and sank to silence.

From her point of vantage at the Pelican table Miss Thornton viewed them anxiously. "The Penguins seem depressed," she said. "Is anything the matter?"

"I guess it's their Social Conscience," Prissy Adams said grimly, "getting the better of them."

After taps Clara VanSittart laid a packet on Emma's cot. She had no business to be talking at all. And it was almost another speech.

"We feel," she concluded, "that Prissy didn't understand."

In tense silence Emma undid the parcel. It contained her legitimate winnings. She didn't want their darned old beads, but she wrapped the things up again and slipped them under her pillow. "O.K.," she said.

The Penguins crept into their beds. They had made a noble gesture. They had cleared their consciences. But for some reason or other they slept badly.

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The Penguins followed each other on the springboard in rapid succession. They performed every dive they knew and some they didn't, with an almost desperate fervor. And after each feat they turned anxious faces to the small figure in the cheap black bathing suit perched on the landing stage, its face between its fists, like a Gothic imp peering down malevolently on the world from a cathedral buttress. But in fact Pip-Emma wasn't even looking at them. She was worrying about Pop and Ma and the Gang.

Prissy Adams climbed out of the water and stood beside her. "Don't you want to go in, too, Emma?" she said. "Don't you want to learn to swim?"

"Nope," Pip-Emma said. "It's cold, and I'm scared."

"Of course you're not," Prissy said. "Happy Warriors are never scared," she said with a brightness that she hoped wouldn't become a habit.

"I ain't a Happy Warrior," Emma said. "And I'm scared."

"But supposing someone were drowning, wouldn't you want to be able to save them?"

"We don't drown down our way," Pip-Emma retorted bleakly. "We ain't got no water."

It was almost as pathetic as the absence of trees. And, as a statement, much more accurate. Except on hot summer nights when good-natured street cleaners turned their hoses on the ecstatically squealing Gang, there was no water. Pip-Emma, remembering those glorious occasions, hunched herself dismally, and the defeated Prissy strode on her way. At the same moment Janet bobbed up from among the woodpiles.

"Gee, that was swell of you, Emma!"

Pip-Emma peered down. "What was?"

"Saying you were scared. I'm always scared. But I'd be too scared to tell anyone."

Pip-Emma stretched out a skinny arm and pulled Janet up beside her. "What you scared of?"

"Most everything."

"Why?"

Janet sighed. "It's something wrong with me. The doctors say it's—it's a complex. An in—inferiority complex."

"What's that?"

"It's a thing you get, like measles."

Pip-Emma looked at Janet dubiously. "I don't see no spots."

"You don't have spots. You just feel mean. You want dreadfully to do things. But you know you can't. So you don't."

"What things?"

"Well, like the swimming race next Saturday. Mummy and Dad are coming up for it. Prissy says I could win the Penguin Trophy if I didn't have my complex. But Clara knows she's going to win. So she will. She hasn't got any complex. She just overeats."

They sat side by side in melancholy silence. But Pip-Emma's misplaced toothache was easing off. Janet might not be the Gang. But she belonged to Emma. Ever since Emma had said she wasn't a dumb cluck she'd followed Emma round like a little lost dog that had been found. If anyone belonged to you like that, you had to look out for them.

"I wish my Pop and Ma were coming up," Pip-Emma said suddenly.

"Why? Are you homesick, too, Emma?"

"I dunno. I want Pop and Ma."

"It's no good wanting, is it?"

"Well, you've got yours, haven't you?"

"Not really. Not together. I mean—they don't live together."

"Why not?"

"They don't have to. Dad's got a place in Florida and Long Island and Maine and New York. So when they quarrel, they just go off. Different places. And I can't be with either of them because the other won't let me," Janet choked. "I guess they'll quarrel Saturday," she said.

"Gee, that's tough." Pip-Emma gave a small hoarse chuckle. "Pop and Ma get mad sometimes. But Ma says, 'You old son-of-a-gun, I guess I gotter live with you and like it.' And Pop says, 'I like it fine, you old so-and-so.' And he takes us out and gives us a sundae at the drugstore. Ma says you can't stay mad in two rooms."

"I wish we lived in two rooms," Janet said.

Pip-Emma knitted her black brows. "Maybe," she said, "you might tell 'em so."

"I'd be too scared."

But Pip-Emma was after her thought like a terrier after an elusive rabbit. "If my Pop and Ma were here, I'd jump into their darned old water. I wouldn't care how cold it was. I wouldn't be scared. Maybe if your Pop and Ma are along, you'll win the race, and then you'll never be scared again."

"But I shan't win it. I'll lose my breath like I always do. And Clara's so fat. She just has to float."

"Maybe if she was sick—if she eats something—"

"She can't. Prissy's got her on a diet. She's Prissy's pet."

Pip-Emma put her arm over Janet's shoulder. It was an accolade, and Janet knew it.

"Gee—you poor kid!" Pip-Emma said, and relapsed into deep thought again.

The two wandered off the landing stage together. Outside the gameroom Claudine was writing up a notice on the blackboard. The twins went to a progressive school where you learned spelling only if you felt the urge. The twins had never felt it.

"You don't spell Saturday with an 'a' in the middle," Pip-Emma said.

A hot and flustered twin rubbed out the word with a lofty air of apprehended carelessness, and Pip-

Emma wrote it in for her.

"If I spelled like you do," she said, "old Perks would give me hell."

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The harassed Penguins pinned one of their last hopes on horses. It seemed probable that if Pip-Emma had never seen any trees, she had never seen horses, either—or only from a distance—and that she would be impressed. But it turned out that Pip-Emma's uncle had a horse—not the W.P.A. uncle but the mounted-cop uncle—and that it was a bigger and better horse than anything in the Camp stables. Pip-Emma had actually ridden it from Ninth to Tenth Avenue. Moreover her uncle had chased Squint-Eyed Peters down Forty-fifth Street and shot him and his armored car so full of holes that it was hardly worth while cleaning them up. Pip-Emma told the story after taps and in such gory detail that the Penguins didn't know or care that discipline was going to the dogs.

They learned at the same time that Mr. Binns, in his unregenerate youth, had been an Englishman and had fought in the Great War and that Emma's name was Pip because in English soldier language Pip-Emma meant anything that happened after midday. And Emma had happened in Hell's Kitchen at 3:30.

The Penguins sat up in their beds and listened spellbound. The glamour surrounding Wall Street, Big Business, and the kind but stoutish and baldish gentlemen who were their fathers was suffering an acute depression. The prospect of their fathers' appearance on Saturday and of Pip-Emma's dispassionate appraisal filled the Penguins with uneasiness.

Things had come to such a pass that when on Friday evening, after the Camp singsong, Clara felt Emma's arm slip through hers, the VanSittart pride positively glowed. It was the first time that Pip-Emma had seemed to notice Clara—which was a humiliation in itself, seeing that Pip-Emma was really Clara's own idea. And Clara, thanks to Prissy's training diet, was low in her mind anyway.

"Guess what I've found!" Pip-Emma whispered.

But of course Clara couldn't guess anything.

"I've found where they've got all tomorrow's ice cream. Buckets and buckets of it."

Clara, as top Penguin, wavered. Some lingering Penguin rectitude still glowed in her, but only faintly. After all, she was hungry. She was being starved to death. And no one cared. Only Emma Binns seemed to know what she was suffering.

"Dare you!" Pip-Emma said.

It was Clara's chance. Now she could show the stuff in her. Being born on Park Avenue didn't mean necessarily that you were a dumb cluck. She let Pip-Emma lead her by devious paths through the deserted kitchen. Then to the huge icebox. And there it was—buckets and buckets! Clara's first handful didn't even make a dent.

"I bet I can eat more than you can," Pip-Emma said.

At breakfast the next morning Miss Thornton made an unusual appearance. She was grave and even troubled.

"Children, a serious thing has happened. Last night someone must have broken all our Camp rules. Someone opened the icebox and ate several pints of our ice cream. I hope—I'm sure—the culprit will stand up at once and not spoil our happy day for us."

Pip-Emma stood up at once. "It was me, Miss Thornton."

"But, Emma, dear, why? Didn't you have enough to eat? Were you hungry?"

Pip-Emma said simply and bravely, "I guess I'm always hungry."

Miss Thornton felt the sudden tears come into her throat. Poor little Emma Binns! No trees. Never enough to eat. And not without a forlorn charm. Prissy Adams, who had caught a glimpse of Clara's greenish countenance, remained grim and unmoved.

"Dear child, you should have told me. Come to my tent afterward. We can talk it over. Meantime it was fine and brave of you to tell the truth. It shows that you are a real Penguin—" she gave her warm, beloved chuckle—"almost, but not quite, perfect."

Everyone laughed and cheered except the Penguins, who for some unknown reason sank into the profoundest gloom. Clara VanSittart had left the table hurriedly.

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Pip-Emma peeked out of the tent. The Penguin Circle was near the lake, and she could see the parents, looking better from a distance, lined up on benches along the water's edge. She could pick out Janet's parents because they were younger than the others. They didn't seem to be quarreling. They didn't seem even to be speaking to each other.

"O.K.," Pip-Emma said. She walked beside Janet like a trainer. She gave last instructions. Everyone knew Janet was her Gang. So Janet, who had never won anything, had to win. It was Prissy's opinion that if Janet did win, the Penguins, as a class, were licked. She said sharply to Clara,

"If you feel as bad as you look, you'd better throw up the sponge."

It was an unfortunate suggestion. Clara gulped. But she was game. The prestige of the Penguins, the VanSittarts—one might say the whole Social Register—was in her hands. She mumbled, "I'm a' right," and slid with a smothered moan into the water.

Mr. and Mrs. Cooper waved dutifully to Janet. In her white cap and bathing suit she looked like a pet white mouse in charge of a dark and aggressive field mouse. Both parents had the same thought, with one small but important variation: "If he (she) had made a decent home for the poor child, she might have amounted to something."

"How's the little old complex?" Pip-Emma asked.

"I—I don't know, Pip. I think it's all right."

"Don't think about it. You ain't got it, see? So you're going to win. 'Cause you swim better than any of 'em. You just got to know it, and you'll be fine."

"Honest, Pip-Emma?"

"Honest."

From the water Janet looked up with adoration in her eyes. "I'll try."

"Sure. I got my shirt on you, kid."

Janet paddled to the starting line. It was true that she swam better than the others. She'd learned all the strokes from the best teachers. But it hadn't seemed to help. Everyone knew that anyone could beat Janet Cooper. Now Pip-Emma believed that she was going to win. She'd put her shirt on her. Janet watched the flag. She kept her heart steady, saying to herself, "Pip-Emma's shirt—Pip-Emma's shirt—"

Mr. Cooper looked away as the flag dropped. He couldn't have said why, except that he hated to see the poor little runt left at the post. Gosh, hadn't they fed her every vitamin on God's green earth? He had a dim notion that the dark field mouse had flashed past in front of him yelling like an Indian and that he had a sharp pain in his arm. Mrs. Cooper had pinched him savagely.

"Look!" she said.

Mr. Cooper looked. It was worth looking at. The white cap was level with the leader—it was drawing ahead—smoothly, with clean, rhythmic strokes. The green cap made a game spurt. Probably those last five yards were the bravest effort of Clara VanSittart's life. But everything was against her—ice cream, conscience, and Pip-Emma. She lost her stroke, took a mouthful of lake, and foundered. The watchful Prissy in the motorboat hauled her in like a drowning puppy. The rest of the entry, consternated, gave up the struggle. They were up against the imponderable—sheer inspiration. Pip-Emma's Gang flashed past the winning flag like a silver fish.

The Penguins cheered. Their pride, their self-esteem, had foundered with their leader. But honorable Camp tradition demanded that they should cheer. Pip-Emma collapsed breathless. She saw Janet climb out of the water and her Pop and Ma go to meet her, trying to look as though they weren't fit to burst. Janet threw her wet arms about them both, and then the three of them turned toward the tents, Janet walking in the middle. She walked differently. She had her head up and was swinging her cap and talking hard, like someone accustomed to being listened to.

Pip-Emma stood up. Alone and hidden by the trees, she performed an exultant war dance. She did not know it. But it was Hell's Kitchen dancing on Park Avenue.

To celebrate Miss Thornton's birthday the Happy Warriors went on a two days' hike. The Peewits camped on the other side of the Lake, which gave them the illusion they had hiked an enormous distance. The Penguins were to climb the Little Mountain, and the Pelicans the Big Mountain. Miss Thornton stayed in camp. Having been wakened at the crack of dawn by eager voices singing "Happy birthday, Miss Thornton," she felt justified.

At the last moment one of the Penguin counselors went down with a cold, and Prissy had to take on the Penguins single-handed. Ordinarily she wouldn't have cared. The Penguins, as campers, were almost annoyingly efficient. But they were in bad shape. Their morale was shot to pieces. They had lost faith. They weren't even sure whether they liked hiking, or the Camp, or one another, or themselves. They watched Pip-Emma and wondered anxiously what she thought.

Pip-Emma wouldn't have told them for the world. In fact she didn't really know. But as she climbed up through the cool shadows of the forest, with Janet tagging at her heels, something happened. It was as though she really were seeing trees for the first time. They weren't the dusty, forlorn exiles she had known in Central Park. They weren't even the sheltering, friendly Camp trees. They were free and proud. It was terribly exciting to come out suddenly on an open space and look down on them brandishing their branches in the wind like the spears of a great army.

And when at midday the Penguins built a fire and cooked sausages and bacon over the embers, that was fun. Pip-Emma felt that even Ma would think it fun to cook under trees. One day when Pip-Emma was rich and famous, she'd bring Pop and Ma up here and show them how. Pride in herself as a woodsman who knew where you should build a fire and where you shouldn't began to kindle in her. When she got back, she'd tell the Gang. There were a lot of things the Gang didn't know that Pip-Emma knew now. She'd sit on the stoop of the shabby brownstone house, with her face between her fists, and tell them: "Then, one day, we went on a two days' hike. Gee, that was swell!" She wouldn't tell about her Gang, because it consisted of just one Penguin. And the kids wouldn't understand.

They began to climb again. But there was a change somewhere. The wind had died down. They were surrounded by a dense silence. And when they looked at one another, faintly uneasy, they saw that a thin veil hung over them. Prissy saw it first. She didn't like it. But just when she made up her mind that one of the mountain mists was creeping up on them and that they'd better turn back, she put her foot on a hidden root and went down as though she'd been shot. The pain was so bad that she cried out. Only once. Then she set her teeth. But she couldn't get up.

"It's my ankle," she said quietly. "I guess I've broken it."

The Penguins knew all about splints and first aid. Prissy sat very white with the sweat running down her cold face. She'd seen Pip-Emma watching her intently, and not for a king's ransom would she have so much as groaned. In a sort of way she was glad this had happened. She'd show Pip-Emma something.

"One of you had better go back to the Camp for help," she said.

And even as she said it she knew that no one must go. The mist was like a besieging enemy whose scouts having found them defenseless now bore down on them in full force. They could hardly see one another. They'd have to stay together till the fog lifted. Sometimes, if the wind didn't come up, a fog lasted for two days. And their provisions had been sent ahead to their night's camping place.

"Better build a fire," Prissy said calmly.

She was worried and in bad pain. But she mustn't show it. The fire was hard to start. The wood was damp, and they'd used all their kindling. They sat as close as they could get to the sullen, smoky warmth.

Pip-Emma put her arm over Janet's shoulders. Clara sat on her other side. Clara was shivering a little. Almost unconsciously she and Pip-Emma edged closer to each other.

They took turns finding wood. Night added black shadows to the muffling fog. It was getting colder. Pip-Emma had saved one of her sausages, wrapped greasily in a paper napkin. She'd been hungry before—that time Pop and Ma had both lost their jobs. There'd been days and days when Pip-Emma had had this gnawing pain. So it didn't worry her. But fat old Clara must be feeling real bad. She was always hungry anyway.

"Here," Pip-Emma said softly.

Clara VanSittart gave one look at the sausage. Then she shut her eyes tight. "Thanks—I guess I won't, though. The others haven't anything."

Pip-Emma looked at the sausage, too. She glanced anxiously at Janet. Janet shook her head. So Pip-Emma tossed the sausage over her shoulder into the forest. It was no good to any of them. One of the twins grinned at her—a friendly, shy sort of grin. And suddenly Pip-Emma was sorry.

She was sorry she'd made old Clara sick before the race. After all, Clara couldn't help being fat and always hungry. She was sorry she'd taken the kids' beads. Prissy was right—the shell trick was just a trick. So it wasn't fair. Prissy was a good guy. She had guts; she could take it.

The twins had put their extra coats over Prissy. There'd been quite a gay argument about it. Now Prissy leaned exhausted with pain against a tree, trying to smile at them.

"It's a real adventure," she said.

They nodded and tried to laugh back at her. All the same they were just kids. They were scared, too, and awfully cold and hungry. They were fighting back tears. Pip-Emma knew. And suddenly Pip-Emma began to sing.

"We are the happy Penguins—
We play without a care . . ."

At first they just gaped at her. They couldn't believe their ears. She'd never sung their songs. She'd made them feel how silly they were. And now suddenly, joyfully, they understood. Pip-Emma was a Penguin. She was one of them. And with a sensation like the breaking of a bad pain Pip-Emma knew, too. They were all her Gang.

The fog-smothered forest rang with their young voices.

* * * * *

Prissy had fallen into a doze, and Janet lay close to her for warmth. But Clara and Pip-Emma talked softly to each other.

"We gotter do something," Pip-Emma said.

"I bet I could find the way," Clara whispered back, "if you'll come with me."

"Sure. You bet," Pip-Emma said.

They stood up cautiously. The Penguins roused themselves from their half-frozen torpor to look at them. Clara made an authoritative gesture, silencing them. After all, she was still top Penguin.

"We're going for help," she whispered.

The two slipped out of the clearing. They held hands. They knew that if they let go of each other they would be lost. They had only two ideas—to keep together and to keep going down, hoping that at the bottom they'd strike some familiar landmark. It wasn't much of a hope. They were like blind children, picking their way. Things hit them in the face and clutched at them. And when they stopped, breathless and shivering, they heard soft dreadful sounds. Their clothes were torn. Their hands and faces, though they did not know it, were scratched and bleeding.

"You awfully scared, Clara?" Pip-Emma asked.

"Not awfully—not with you, Pip."

Hell's Kitchen and Park Avenue pushed on together.

And at daybreak the forest ranger opened the door of his cabin to them. He and his wife had been up two nights with a sick child, and he was half-asleep and not at all sure that he wasn't seeing things.

"We're Happy Warriors," Pip-Emma said, "and we're all lost."

It wasn't anyone's fault that the forest ranger's child had the measles and that the Penguins who had never had the chance to catch anything went down with it like ninepins. The Penguin Circle was quarantined, and at night Pip-Emma sat alone by the campfire. The doctor had said: "She'll be all right. She's been exposed probably to every germ known to man. She's a survival of the fittest." So Pip-Emma was allowed to help nurse the Penguins and sit on their beds when they were convalescing and tell

them hair-raising stories of Hell's Kitchen. She made up some of them. And the adventures of the mounted-cop uncle grew gorier and gorier. The Penguins seemed to like them gory.

Little Janet was sicker than any of them. But when Pip-Emma held her small feverish hand, she'd fall contentedly asleep.

Except for Janet's feeling so bad it was kind of fun. At night Pip-Emma and one of the Pelicans lighted the Penguin campfire so that the Penguins in their open tents could see the flames dance. And as they got better, Pip-Emma would start them singing—"We are the happy Penguins."

Pip-Emma had a song of her own which she'd learned from Pop, who had sung it on Salisbury Plain:

"I'm 'Enry the Eighth, I am.
I've 'ad seven wives before,
And I don't mind if I 'ave one more—"

It was a ribald, not very intelligible song. But it had a rousing chorus. Miss Thornton, in her tent writing reassuring letters to anxious parents, looked up at Prissy, who was helping in her wheelchair.

"Is that a Camp song?" she asked.

"No," Prissy said. "But it's all right."

* * * * *

And then came the last night of all. And Pip-Emma sat alone by the campfire for the last time. Everything was packed and ready. Tomorrow they were all going home. Tomorrow Pip-Emma would be back with Pop and Ma and the old Gang. She'd have an awful lot to tell them—about their Great Adventure, and the Camp powwows and singsongs and marshmallow feasts. She'd learned some things, too, that she'd have to break to Pop and Ma very gently—the way you wore your napkin, for instance, and not picking your teeth, or making noises with your soup.

She'd never see Janet again or Clara or Prissy or Miss Thornton or the trees or the stars or the lake shining under them. She wasn't going to cry about it, though.

She was trying so hard not to that she didn't know she wasn't alone any more. There was a little scuffling sound. She looked up. And there were the Penguins, all around her, wrapped in their blankets and looking just like Penguins.

Clara VanSittart was making a speech again. "We want to give you this, Pip-Emma," she said, "and we hope you'll always wear it."

It was the sacred Penguin Badge.

"Gee, you bet," Pip-Emma said huskily.

They were gone, as quickly, as silently as they had come. It was as though they knew how Pip-Emma felt.

But little Janet crouched beside her. "Don't cry, Pip."

"I ain't—I'm not crying."

"Yes, you are. I'm crying, too. Listen, Pip. Next year you're to come back. Miss Thornton says so. 'Cause you're a real Penguin."

"Honest?"

"Honest. And Daddy wrote. He says that was a swell idea about not staying mad in two rooms. He says you must be a swell kid. You're to spend the Christmas holidays with us—and p'raps I can stay with you. Daddy says your Pop and Ma might be able to knock some sense into us all."

Pip-Emma choked. Janet was holding her hand hard.

"Pip—"

"Yes?"

"We're going to be friends always, aren't we?"

"You bet."

Taps sounded. It was a sad, lonely sound in the night. Pip-Emma stood up bravely.

"We gotter go in now," she said.

Because, after all, she was coming back next year, and some day she was going to be top Penguin. So she must keep discipline.

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