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Roe Carr**

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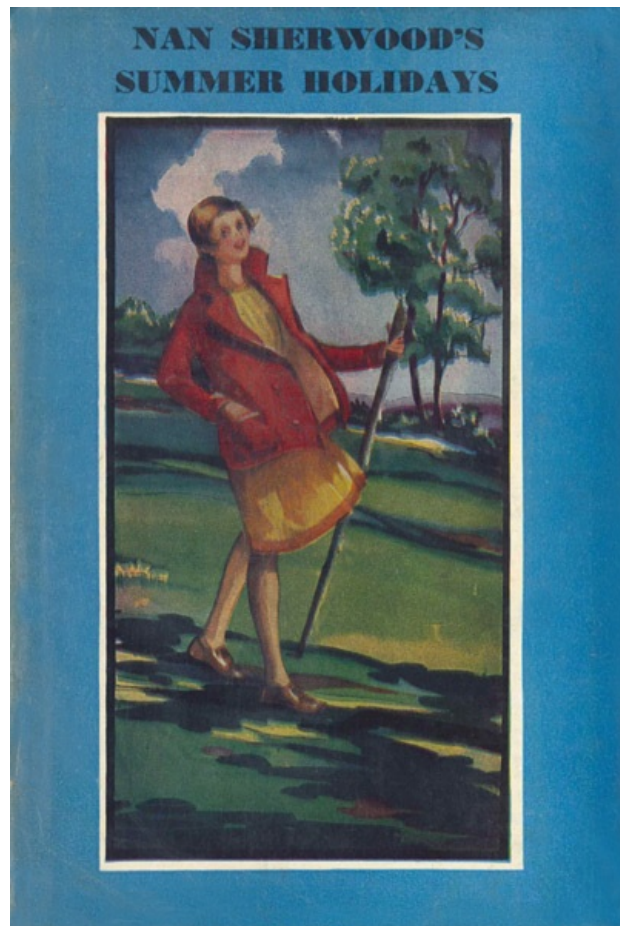
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK NAN SHERWOOD'S SUMMER HOLIDAYS



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BY

ANNIE ROE CARR



THE WORLD SYNDICATE
PUBLISHING COMPANY
CLEVELAND NEW YORK

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[1]

NAN SHERWOOD'S SUMMER HOLIDAYS



CHAPTER I

NEW YEAR'S EVE

"I just can't believe it's true! I've pinched myself a dozen times. I've pulled my own hair. I've looked at myself in the mirror again and again and told myself that it is a fact, that I am I, Nan Sherwood of Tillbury, United States of America and student of Lakeview Hall, and that I am going to sail away next spring to Scotland to visit—"

The end of the sentence was lost in a muffle as Nan pulled off the simple silk frock she had been wearing.

Bess Harley, her closest friend since primary school days, finished it.

"Emberon, the home of your mother's ancestors." Her voice sounded unusually heavy. Nan looked around and immediately was all contrition, for Bess's eyes were full of tears.

"Why, Bess, darling, forgive me. I'm nothing but a thoughtless old meany." So saying, she wiped Bess's tears away and sat down beside her. [2]

Bess caught her lip between her teeth and shook her head as she fought for self-control. "I'm just an old silly myself," she half apologized. "But I can hardly bear the thought of your going so far away from all of us for a whole summer. And it's true you are going, Nan, as true as the fact that Walter Mason cut in on more than half your dances tonight."

With this jibe, Bess' eyes twinkled, and she felt better.

Nan blushed. "Oh, Bess, was it really so bad? I told him not to, but he said he was under orders to see that I didn't get into any more scrapes."

Bess laughed. "You dear! Of course, it was all right. We all danced with him—for a few seconds at least."

Nan looked somewhat unconvinced. Walter, she felt, was paying her rather special attention these days and because she did like him, she hardly knew whether to be pleased or angry. She succeeded only in being embarrassed.

Now, a knock diverted her thoughts. She jumped up, but before she could open the door, two of her other companions at Lakeview Hall entered.

"May we come in?" It was pretty little Grace Mason speaking. After her followed Rhoda Hammond, her dark eyes sparkling with excitement. [3]

"Oh, Grace, it was such a nice party!" Nan exclaimed enthusiastically as she placed chairs for the two visitors. "Your mother and dad are perfect peaches to have us all here tonight."

Grace smiled shyly. "It was fun for me, too. Do you know, I've never before stayed up to watch the old year out and the New Year in! It's my first New Year's party."

"And we'll always remember it, too," Rhoda chimed in. Then she looked rather sad, for it was the first time she had ever spent the holiday away from her pretty blind mother, her dad, and Rose Ranch.

"Yes," it was curly headed Bess speaking now. "We will. Would you believe it? Tonight when I stood down there near the big windows, looking out across the room, and saw you all with dishes of ice cream in your hands, the clock chimed out eleven-thirty and I felt as though Mrs. Cupp should come in, clap her hands, and tell us all to report to Dr. Prescott's office tomorrow. That's almost always happened, you know, when we have had a really good spread at school."

The girls laughed merrily. They had pictures in their minds of everybody at the party dropping their dishes and scurrying away at the appearance of Mrs. Cupp. [4]

"If you feel too guilty," Nan looked across at Bess, "I'll tell Dr. Beulah when we get back to Lakeview next Wednesday. Perhaps she can be persuaded to impose the silent treatment on you."

"Oh, Nan," Bess laughed, "Remember the time she did that to you and I tried so hard to make you talk. It was so dull having a roommate who did nothing but shake her head when I opened my mouth and let out words of wisdom."

"I don't remember," Nan tried to keep her face straight as she made the statement and then paused before she added—"the words of wisdom."

The girls all laughed. Then there was silence as each one thought of all the good times they had had in the past years. It was Grace who spoke first.

"Mother will be in before long, I'm afraid," she said, "to tell us that we must go to bed. Nan, before she does, tell us more about your going to Europe. Just imagine—"

"Please, Grace," Nan interrupted her friend. "I'm sorry, but I can't tell you anything more tonight."

With this, all the girls looked more questioning than ever and Rhoda protested, "But Nan, you can't be mysterious about a trip abroad. We simply couldn't stand it!" This was unusual coming from the generally quiet Rhoda and for a moment they all looked at her. Her face flushed slightly. The words sounded strange even to her. Could she be forgetting those southern manners that always made her so mindful of others' feelings? Now, as she saw the expression on Nan's face and then looked at Bess, she guessed at Nan's reasons for wishing to delay talk of the European trip. With her usual tact, she changed the subject entirely.

[5]

"Have any of you made any New Year's resolutions?" she asked.

Almost as quick as Rhoda to sense the reason for Nan's unwillingness to talk, Grace answered the question.

"I've thought of a million things I ought to resolve to do, but it's so discouraging. I never seem to be able to keep any of my resolutions."

Nan smiled her thanks to both of the girls, and then turned to Bess. "There's one resolution we all ought to make," she said.

"What's that?" Bess asked as she tried to guess what fault they all had in common.

"To be nicer to Linda Riggs when we go back to school."

"Nicer to Linda Riggs!" Bess exploded. "Why, if I make any resolution at all about that girl, it will be to utterly ignore her when I get back! Nicer to Linda Riggs! Why, Nan Sherwood, and after all she has done to you! If I had her here this minute I'd like to slap her snobbish face. Just because her father happens to own a railroad, she thinks that she owns the world."

[6]

"Why, Bess!" Nan exclaimed. "Be quiet! There's no point in your talking that way about her, no matter what she does. If you don't keep quiet, I'll think you are as bad as she."

"Maybe so," Bess half admitted. "Just the same, I wish she wasn't coming back to school at all. I don't think she should be allowed to after causing that explosion. She might have killed us all."

Nan nodded her head at this last. It was true that Linda had done a very risky thing in meddling with the steam valve in the basement of the school.

"Yes, but even so, I'm going to be nicer to her in the spring term," Nan resolved. "Maybe she has some good qualities we don't know about."

"Nan means," Rhoda interpreted, "that there is some good in all of us. Perhaps she is right. Perhaps Linda has never been given a chance."

Bess snorted very inelegantly. "You can all turn the other cheek if you want to," she insisted, "but I'm not going to. She's just a mean hateful old thing, and I don't care what you think, Nan. I'm going to watch her. You had better do it too, if you're going to live to go to Europe."

[7]

At this, Grace giggled. "Nan could live through almost anything, I believe," she said. "Mama says she never knew a girl who at Nan's age had had so many adventures and had come up so smiling from all of them. Dad agrees. He thinks Nan has a charmed life, that she has at least nine lives—"

"Like a cat?" Nan interrupted, for she was embarrassed at this praise of herself. Now, her eyes twinkled as the girls all laughed. Nan was really a charming girl. Her clear brown eyes were frank and trusting. Her brown, bobbed hair, cut in a wind-blown style and brushed so that it shone and looked soft and silky, gave her an almost boyish appearance. But her quick sympathy, her readiness to help anyone in distress, and her fondness for children made a real girl of her. Everyone liked her, but Bess Harley liked her most of all.

Bess was a pretty girl with curly hair. Though indulgent parents had spoiled her so that she was inclined to over-value the luxuries money could buy, her constant association with Nan through the years had somewhat remedied that. However, this New Year's Eve, she did feel out of sorts. The thought of being separated from Nan was still new to her. Moreover, she was envious. She had heard some place that Linda Riggs was going to spend the summer in Europe, and she did not want Linda to go any place that she couldn't go. Now, as she sat quietly, after expressing herself on the matter of that overly proud young person, she was really thinking of ways and means of persuading her parents to let her go to Europe, too.

[8]

"Anyway," Grace brought the girls back to the subject of Linda, "maybe Nan is right. So, I hereby resolve," she said solemnly, "to be nice to Linda Riggs for one whole month, the month of January. During that time, I will not say one mean thing to her."

"Bravo!" Nan applauded. "And you, Rhoda?"

But it was not Linda Riggs that troubled the pretty southern girl. She had really never had any direct contact with her. So when Nan turned to her, she began, "Well, Linda doesn't really annoy me. I simply overlook her. But there is something else that does bother me. You all know that when I first came to Lakeview Hall, it was hard for me to fit into your way of doing things."

The girls nodded their heads sympathetically. Rhoda had stood apart from them for some weeks after her arrival but they had forgiven her for her apparent misunderstanding of them. They had long before forgotten that she had been a "poor sport" at the hazing when she first entered Lakeview. Now Rhoda herself brought it back to mind.

[9]

"I simply couldn't understand your way of making me welcome when I came north," she said in her own soft southern drawl. "I puzzled about it for a long time, sure all the while that you were wrong and I was right!"

Nan caught her eye and smiled. "We were mean, weren't we?" she admitted.

"Oh, Nan, it wasn't you," the loyal Bess interposed. "You tried to make everything easier for Rhoda, but we simply wouldn't help you. Why, I believe we were jealous," she ended as though the idea was an entirely new one. "Girls, remember how Rhoda looked the first time we ever saw her?"

They all nodded.

"You were lovely," she went on speaking directly to Rhoda.

Rhoda blushed slightly at the frank praise, but Bess paid no heed. "You were dressed in the most perfect brown hat and coat I've ever seen," she continued. "I'll never forget it."

"Nor will I," Rhoda ruefully agreed. "I have never in my life felt so strange and so entirely alone. You were all talking among yourselves and having a grand time. Everyone seemed to know everyone else. I was such an outsider! And when Laura Polk addressed me as Rollicking Rhoda from Rustlers' Roost, the wild Western adventuress that you had heard so much about, I wished that the floor would open wide and swallow me." [10]

"Since it didn't, I wanted to turn and run, run as fast as I could back to Rose Ranch and the people I knew. Have you ever felt like that?"

"Many, many times," Grace agreed heartily. "I've wanted to run when I flunked in recitations before the whole class. I've wanted to go away and hide just dozens of times when things went wrong. I can hardly bear it when Mrs. Cupp tells me before everyone that Dr. Beulah wants to see me."

"Especially when Linda Riggs is there and hears it and looks as though she was the most perfect person in the world," Bess chimed in. "Sometimes, when I see her looking that way when you people have to go to the office, I feel as though I'd like to tell all I know about her."

At a warning look from Nan, Bess subsided. Nan patted Grace on the shoulder. "You mustn't take those things too seriously," she said. "We all feel that way."

"But you just can't help yourself," Rhoda continued. "My mother has always tried to teach me to have poise, but generally, when I feel as I did that night, I forget everything she has ever said, and I act like such a fool. I feel miserable afterwards, because I know how disappointed she would be." [11]

"Now, I want to resolve to be a good sport, no matter what happens. I want to remember to stand my ground and not run just because things seem to be unpleasant."

The girls were silent for a moment after this. Rhoda was so utterly sincere that they realized for the first time how unhappy she must have been in the days after her hazing, when for so long they ignored her.

"Well, I declare," the cheery voice of Grace's mother broke in on the silence. "A good old fashioned round table, I do believe!" She had entered the room quietly and now stood alone near the doorway. "I hate to send you all off to bed, but it really is getting late. Tomorrow you must all be up early, pack, and catch that early train for Lakeview. I promised Dr. Prescott on my word of honor that I'd have you all back to school on time."

At this, the girls got up, wished one another and Mrs. Mason a Happy New Year, and then prepared for bed.

"It has been a happy, happy day," each one thought as she pulled the covers up over her shoulders and fell off to sleep. It was only Nan who lay awake. She was thinking of her trip and wondering what lay before her. But had the others been able to see into the future, they, too, would have lain awake thinking, and planning, and hoping. [12]

CHAPTER II

SECRETS

"Where's Nan?" Rhoda whispered as she stuck her head into Bess and Nan's room at Lakeview Hall.

Bess got up from the gayly covered studio couch where she had been reading and opened wide

the door. "It's all right. Come on in," she invited. "Nan's gone away for the afternoon, down to old Mrs. Bagley's to see how she's getting along."

"How did you manage?" Rhoda asked as she pulled off her pretty brown sports coat. "Do you think she smells a plot?"

"Oh, I don't think so. She's been intending to go down there for some time, and today was the first free time she has had. I'm sure she doesn't suspect, but we will have to be careful."

"I know it! Nan's so smart that she will catch on in a minute if we make her suspicious at all." Rhoda lowered her voice to a whisper as someone passed by the door. "When are the others coming?" she asked when the footsteps had died away. [14]

"They'll be here any time now," Bess answered. "I can hardly wait, can you? I'm so anxious to get things started."

Rhoda nodded as she peered out of the double windows near her to see if she could sight her friends coming up the long hill from the village.

"Anyone coming, Sister Anne?" Bess laughed.

Rhoda grinned. "Do you always feel like the sister of Bluebeard's wife, too, when you keep watching for someone?" she asked.

"Always. For some reason, that gory fairy tale and Cinderella were my favorites when I was a kid."

"I liked them, too," Rhoda agreed, "but they weren't my favorites, not by any means. I was brought up on stories of buried treasure, tales that have been handed down from generation to generation till no one knows whether they are true or false."

Rhoda's eyes were alight as she spoke, and her face had a far away look on it. She was recalling the tales an old Spanish maid had regaled her with as a child. They were tales of bloody massacres, of hidden treasure, of gold and silver and rubies and sapphires locked in heavy Spanish chests and concealed in caves, of lost mines, richer than any man has ever remembered, of wandering tribes who knew the answers but would never tell lest the wrath of God descend upon them and wipe them all away. [15]

She sighed softly.

Bess sat quietly, waiting and hoping that Rhoda would talk more. But the girl was silent, as she once more looked down the hill. "You're expecting Grace Mason, Procrastination Boggs, and Laura Polk, aren't you?" she asked.

"Yes, they've been the closest friends Nan has had here," Bess returned. "So I asked them all."

Bess was right. They were Nan's closest friends, as anyone who has read the complete Nan Sherwood series knows. Of all the girls, Bess is the only one who has been with Nan since the beginning. She made her appearance in the very first volume of the series, "Nan Sherwood at Pine Camp, or the Old Lumberman's Secret." This volume opens with Nan living happily on Amity Street in Tillbury with her mother and dad.

She goes to Tillbury High School, enjoys sports, makes good grades, and is popular with her classmates. Her only real regret, which she carefully conceals from her parents, is the knowledge that she cannot afford to accompany Bess Harley to Lakeview Hall where they had both always hoped to go together. Suddenly Papa Sherwood loses his job and Mama inherits a fortune in Scotland that makes it necessary for the two to cross the ocean, leaving Nan behind. The plucky young girl then accompanies her uncle, a bluff, hearty lumberman, to Northern Michigan. There in a series of adventures that follow one on the other in swift succession, Nan clears up the mystery surrounding her uncle's title to a valuable piece of property and wins the admiration of all whom she meets. [16]

In "Nan Sherwood at Lakeview Hall or the Mystery of the Haunted Boathouse," the two girls arrive at the big boarding school on the bluff overlooking Lake Huron and immediately find themselves in trouble with Laura Riggs. In chapter after chapter of fun and excitement and thrills galore we see the two girls at school. Constantly getting in and out of difficulties themselves, they involve their new friends, Grace Mason, whose acquaintance you have already made in this book, Laura Polk, a lively red-headed girl with a vivid imagination, and Amelia "Procrastination" Boggs, a serious soul with a roomful of clocks. But perhaps the principal character is a ghost that nearly does away with Mrs. Cupp, the stern watchful assistant of Dr. Beulah Prescott, the school's principal. Nan meets the ghost and conquers it with some help from Walter Mason, Grace's brother, amid much mystery and much trouble. [17]

This over, the Masons invite Nan and her friends to spend the Christmas holidays with them in Chicago. So, in "Nan Sherwood's Winter Holidays or Rescuing the Runaways" we see her continuing her adventures in the biggest city she has ever visited. How she makes friends with a famous movie star and solves the mystery of the disappearance of two young farm girls who have come to the city to make their fortunes is told in this volume.

In her next big adventure, recounted in "Nan Sherwood at Rose Ranch or The Old Mexican's Treasure", our heroine and her friends meet Rhoda Hammond a pretty, young westerner at

school and accompany her to her home, a big ranch, for their vacation. What a vacation that is! A raid! An antelope hunt! A stampede! Lost treasure! And a pretty Mexican girl, Juanita! This is a volume brimming over with new experiences.

From Rose Ranch, Nan and her chums return once more to Lakeview to work and study. They do well, so when Mrs. Mason invites them all to accompany Grace and Walter to Florida, they have no trouble getting permission from home. In "Nan Sherwood at Palm Beach or Strange Adventures among the Orange Groves" they all have a part in solving poor old Mrs. Bagley's troubles, and Walter has cause to admire again the boundlessness of Nan's pluck. [18]

She is as generous as she is plucky, and so the Saturday afternoon on which this chapter opens, Nan is down in Freeling, the village below Lakeview Hall, working away in Mrs. Bagley's cottage.

"By the way, how is Mrs. Bagley?" Rhoda asked, in an effort to keep herself from watching the windows so constantly.

"Oh, she's getting along all right, I think, since she got her money. But you know how Nan is. She's always afraid something might happen. Why, I honestly believe that she still fears that those horrid men who tried to get the deed to Mrs. Bagley's property away from her might turn up again after they get out of prison."

"Why, Bess Harley, I don't believe she thinks any such thing!" Rhoda exclaimed. "You are the one. You know you have been frightened half to death of the dark ever since Nan had those awful scares down in Palm Beach!"

Bess looked guilty. "Well, maybe it is me," she conceded ungrammatically. "But I do worry, at times about Nan. Sometime something's going to happen to her—"

"Going to happen to whom?" queried a new voice and Laura Polk, red-headed and freckle faced and homely but withal very likable, bounded into the room. [19]

In the confusion that followed the question went unanswered. Grace and Amelia Boggs were right at Laura's heels. "Don't ask me why we are late," Laura grinned impishly, "Or I might tell."

"That is just what I am afraid of," Bess replied.

"—And if you don't, I'll tell anyway," Laura continued. "We met a tall handsome dark-haired man —"

"You didn't either," Bess interrupted.

"Well, then he was short and fat."

"Laura Polk, you know very well that you didn't meet any man at all. You either lingered too long over the chocolate soda that you have spilled on that plaid skirt or, and this is more likely, you relied on Amelia's watch which is always slow."

"If it isn't old Sherlock Holmes himself! And what a disguise! Why, Sherlock, if it weren't for your super intellect and your remarkable powers of observation, which no one could mistake, I'd swear on a stack of Bibles that you were Elizabeth Harley of Lakeview Hall, otherwise known to her intimates as Lunch-Box Lizz. Really, Sherlock, you amaze me," Laura continued as she turned Bess slowly around. "Amazing, truly amazing." [20]

Bess laughed and blushed. "Lunch-Box Lizz" was an appellation that was hard to swallow, but she knew from of old that there was absolutely no use in trying to silence Laura.

"Anyway," she retorted, as she winked at Rhoda, "You missed the fudge that Mrs. Cupp sent up to us."

"If Mrs. Cupp sent you up fudge, then I'm a monkey," Laura returned. Nevertheless, she proceeded to look around for the empty plate, muttering the while that if Bess was any kind of friend at all she'd have saved some of the loot.

Bess watched her for a few seconds. Then feeling anxious to get on with the business of the day, she laughed, "There's no plate and no crumbs and no fudge, but you're a monkey, anyway, Laura Polk."

Laura laughed, as the other girls joined in. "Well, you see it's like this," she explained, "It's been so long since I've had anything besides a chocolate soda, that I'm just starved for something good to eat. But, Bess, since I wouldn't eat any old chocolate fudge even if you offered it to me on a great big silver platter, will you please break down and tell me what all the mystery is about." [21]

"Yes, for Pete's sake," Amelia exploded, "What have you got on your mind? You and Rhoda have been going around the last two days looking as though you knew the answer to why Dr. Beulah wanted to know if our parents were at home this winter. What a question that was! I wrote home right away to find out what was up. What happened? Nothing. I don't even get an answer."

"What's more, I don't either," Rhoda joined in. "Do you know I haven't had a letter from my mother for two weeks now! I hope that if Dr. Beulah has something to write home, she is getting more response than I am."

"Oh, we're all neglected," Laura dismissed the question. "What I want to know is, what have you two companions in mystery cooked up now? Come on, spill it," she looked menacingly at Bess.

Bess turned to Rhoda, "You tell them," she said.

Rhoda shook her head, "No, it's your idea. Come, Bess, they are dying to know."

Bess cleared her throat. "Well—", and she looked around the room at the girls sitting on the chairs and cross-legged on the floor. It was nice to be there holding their attention.

"Bess Harley," Laura threatened, "Don't you go trying to pull any of my stunts. It's all right for me to go round working up suspense, but I won't have you doing it. I can't stand it. Are you going to tell what's eating you, or aren't you?" [22]

Bess got up, went to the door and looked up and down the hall, "Just want to make sure that Linda Riggs isn't around," she explained.

"Oh, she's not here at all now and you know it," Laura laughed. "Come on, you tell us your secret and I'll tell you really and truly what Grace and Amelia and I were doing down in the village this afternoon."

Bess looked doubtful. "She will, honestly," Grace couldn't contain herself any longer. "If she doesn't, I will. Now come on, Bess, don't be mean."

"Can't you guess?" Bess asked. "Can't you guess, when you know as I do that Nan will be leaving about the end of April to go away?"

"Can't you guess," Rhoda chimed in, "When you know that it's a secret, that it's about Nan, that you are all—"

"Invited," supplied Amelia.

"That there will be food," Grace put in her bit.

"That everybody will know eventually," Bess added.

"That it's to be a great big surprise party on Nan!" they all chorused together, and then laughed. [23]

"Sh! Did I hear somebody at the door?" Bess broke in on the confusion.

Immediately everybody was silent. The room was quiet as a tomb, as Bess got up and went to the door.

CHAPTER III

 [24]

PLANS AND MORE PLANS

She clasped the knob firmly in her hand and opened the door suddenly. Though she saw nothing, she felt something soft and furry brushing against her legs. She turned white and screamed.

It was Laura who brought her back to her senses. "Oh Bess, be quiet!" she commanded. "You'll have the whole dormitory in here. You'll spoil everything. You are not afraid of a cat, are you?"

"A cat!" Bess exclaimed.

"Yes, a cat. What's more it is as frightened as you are!" Laura said in great disgust. "How did it get into the building anyway?"

"How do I know?" Bess asked shortly, for she was still frightened.

"Now, there, don't take it so hard," Amelia comforted her friend, as Bess turned to view her unexpected visitor.

In a far corner of the room, its back arched high in anger was a very black, very angry looking cat. [25]

"What's the matter, pussy cat?" Rhoda coaxed. "Did Bess nearly scare you out of a year's growth?"

But the cat was not to be appeased. At the sound of Rhoda's voice directed toward it, it moved, slowly, around the edge of the room with its back still arched, however, and its heavy tail slowly curling.

"Ooh, it *is* mad!" Grace exclaimed as she got up from her place on the floor. "Better get it out of here."

"What do you suppose I'm trying to do?" Bess helplessly asked.

Laura took command of the situation. "Now, don't move, any of you," she warned. "I've a way

with cats.”

“And it doesn’t work,” Amelia rejoined, as the black ball of fury snarled at the red-headed girl.

“Well, I’ll show you, Mrs. Cat, who is boss.” Laura’s temper had been aroused. She grabbed Grace’s green suede jacket.

“Get out of here—now,” she ordered, shaking it before the animal.

The cat turned, leaped over a chair, jumped up on a bookcase, sprang to the window-sill and pushing out the already loose screen, it leaped across space to a tree outside, jumped to the ground and was disappearing around a corner just as the girls, recovering from their surprise, got to the window.

[26]

“Well, that is that.” Laura pretended to wash her hands of the whole matter. “Did I get rid of that cat, or didn’t I?”

“You did!” Bess agreed emphatically, as she slammed down the window as though to preclude the possibility of the animal’s doing a leap in reverse as she had seen swimmers do in news reels. “But will you tell me,” she asked, “what it all means?”

“Simply that someone left a door open downstairs,” answered the practical Amelia.

“And the cat smelled a mouse. So she came up here.” Rhoda dismissed the question.

“Oh, you two know what I mean,” Bess exclaimed impatiently. “I don’t like black cats, especially when they walk right in on a party I’m planning.”

“You think it casts a great big black spell over everything?” Laura supplied.

Bess shook her head. She was almost in tears.

“Oh, come, Bess,” Rhoda put her arm around the girl’s shoulder. “Don’t be like that. That black cat can’t do you or anybody else any harm. Don’t be superstitious.”

Bess smiled through her tears. “Guess I was more upset than I thought,” she half apologized. “If that door is closed,” she nodded toward the one the cat had entered, “let’s go on with what we were talking about.”

[27]

The party! The girls now all sat down close together in a circle on the floor. It was Bess who remembered in spite of her recent scare.

“Say, you two,” she said, addressing Laura and Amelia. “You had a secret, too. What was it?”

Both the girls looked guilty.

“You fooled me!” Bess was indignant.

“No, not exactly that, O Suspicious One,” Laura denied, “But the truth is that Amelia and I had thought of a going away party too, and we were down in the village to find out about how much it would cost.”

“Just a whole gang of people with a single idea,” Rhoda laughed.

“And that idea is Nan!” Bess agreed. “Now let’s get busy before she comes,” she continued as she raised her arm to note the time. The watch had been a Christmas present and Bess was still self-conscious about it and very, very proud. “It’s four-thirty,” she said. “We’ll all have to get ready for dinner shortly, and Nan will be here, if she isn’t coming already,” she added as she heard footsteps in the hall.

“Sounds like Mrs. Cupp,” Laura whispered.

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“It was,” Bess breathed a sigh of relief. “No one else rustles like that.”

“Good reason,” Laura couldn’t help adding. “No one else has a figure like that.”

The girls giggled appreciatively.

“How will we organize this?” Bess appealed to Rhoda for help.

“Let’s have committees,” Grace answered the question.

“I’ll take charge of food,” Laura jumped in with a suggestion.

“Not if I have anything to do about it,” Amelia contributed her bit.

“And I’d like to know why not!” Laura retorted.

“Simply because I was just down in the village with you and I know what kind of food we would get, if you did the buying, just one course after another of chocolate sodas with chocolate cream, and then you would top it all off with devil’s food cake a la mode.” With this, Amelia looked significantly at the spot on the front of Laura’s skirt.

“Oh, darling, let’s make peace,” Laura capitulated, “or we will never accomplish anything at all this afternoon. I nominate Rhoda to have charge of the food. Do I hear a second?”

"I second the motion," Bess replied. "All in favor say 'Aye'."

There was a chorus of "Ayes".

"The motion is carried," Bess, the self-appointed chairman closed the question. "Now, who wants to take charge of the guest list?"

"Aren't we getting pretty high-hat with guest lists, and all?" Laura asked. "Just ask the people to come. There doesn't have to be any fuss about it."

"Oh, Laura, it's about time you grew up," Bess silenced her friend. "We're going to do this party up right. It's not going to be a secret midnight spread, though they are fun," and her eyes twinkled as she remembered the one down in the boathouse at which they had entertained Mrs. Cupp.

"Let's make this different than anything we have ever had before. Let's make it dignified and have everybody wear party dresses. Let's invite Dr. Beulah and Professor Krenner. Nan loves them both. I'm sure she would feel very proud, if they came."

"Bess, you will have to hire a hall," Grace rather timidly interposed. "How can we ever entertain all those people? They'll scare the life out of me. Just imagine going up to Dr. Beulah and saying, 'We are going to have a party, will you come to it?' What if she said, 'No!' Then what would the person who had asked her say? Why, it gives me gooseflesh just to think about it."

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"Never you mind, little Gracie, you won't have to do the asking," Laura reassured her, "We'll let either Bess or Rhoda do that."

"That's an idea!" Amelia approved. "Rhoda already has a job. Bess, you make up a list of people you think we ought to invite and then you invite them. It seems to me, though, if you are going to do it in a grand manner, you really ought to write out the invitations, and that you will have to invite Mrs. Cupp."

The girls groaned.

"That's right." Amelia stuck to her point.

For a second Bess looked crestfallen, almost as though she had rather give up the party than have grim looking Mrs. Cupp present watching over it.

Laura, however, cheered her up. "Never mind, Bess," she consoled, "she's really not so bad, you know, after you have thawed her out with something warm to drink and given her something good to eat. Really, she can be quite human when she wants to be."

"At any rate, we don't have to think about Linda Riggs this time," Bess said in an effort to find one patch of brightness in the situation. "My, doesn't it seem good not to have her here this term!"

"Better than anything that has happened to us for a long time," Grace agreed. "But let's not crow too loud about it, you never know when she will turn up. Then you'll invite Mrs. Cupp, too?" she asked Bess, looking as though she was very glad she didn't have to do it.

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"I suppose so," Bess agreed half heartedly. "How many will we invite?"

"I've been wondering about that, too," Rhoda spoke up. "And I can see no end to a list. Nan has so many friends that it is positively embarrassing! We can't possibly have a dinner, even if Dr. Beulah and Mrs. Cupp would let us. There just wouldn't be enough room."

"Nor enough money," Amelia added significantly.

"That's right," Laura stuck in her oar. "How are we going to get the money to pay for all of this?"

The question fell on a quiet room. No one had thought of paying for it!

Finally, Bess broke in on the silence, "Maybe I could get my father to send me some extra money this month," she offered doubtfully. "I could write and ask him for two months' allowance at once. I think he would do it." Bess did have a way with her father and mother that usually secured for her what she wanted, for she was an only child and they loved her dearly. For this reason, she had no conception at all of the value of money. "You seem to think," Nan often told her, "that it is something you go out and pick off from bushes. Don't you know that people work for money?"

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Now it was Amelia who put a damper on Bess's generous but thoughtless offer. "That wouldn't be fair at all," she rejected Bess's proposal.

"Why?" This from Bess.

"Because we are all giving the party, and we all want to help."

"Thata girl, Amelia," Laura applauded slangily.

"Why can't we," Rhoda began slowly as though she hadn't quite worked the idea out in her own mind yet, "make up a list of people that we know would like to do something for Nan—goodness knows, there's enough of them—and invite them asking each one to contribute fifty cents to help take care of expenses?"

"But we couldn't ask Dr. Beulah to give fifty cents!" Grace cried out without even thinking.

"Of course not!" Laura agreed. "But we could make out a list of extra special people whom we would invite as guests. They wouldn't pay anything at all."

"That's perfect!" Bess chimed in. "That takes care of everything. At fifty cents apiece, we will have some money left, and we can use that to buy Nan a going away present."

"And Laura and Amelia and I will be the committee to buy the gift," Grace added. "And let's have the party on a Sunday afternoon and just serve simple refreshments so that there will be lots of money left over!"

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"Yes, we want to get something nice for Nan, something that she would never buy for herself and something that she will use all the time she is away, so that she will think of us often," Bess added rather sadly, for she wasn't quite reconciled yet to Nan's going away without her.

"Sh! I hear someone coming, and it's not a cat this time," Laura whispered in the silence that followed Bess's statement.

Bess jumped up. "Everybody get busy," she just had time to say, "so that this will be the very nicest party Lakeview Hall has ever seen," before Nan burst into the room on the conspirators.

CHAPTER IV

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DOUBT ON ALL SIDES

"Do you think she suspects?" Amelia asked Laura as the two walked down the corridor of the dormitory after working their way out of the confusion that followed Nan's breaking in on their secret meeting.

"She's pretty smart," Laura answered. "We'll never be sure but I think that Rhoda saved the day."

"The poise that girl has!" Amelia admired. "Every once in a while she does something with such grace and tact that you can just feel the generations of good breeding that are in back of her. She always knows what to say and when to say it. She's a girl in a million and so utterly unaware of it all too," she added half wistfully.

Tall, thin, angular Amelia had grown somewhat self-conscious about herself in the days since she first came out of Wauhegan to Lakeview Hall. It had done her good, however. She was developing into a less abrupt, more considerate sort of person than she was when, as a newcomer to Lakeview, she had taken part in the Procession of the Sawneys.

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"Yes, she is unaware of it, fortunately," Laura answered. "She would be an awful snob, if she wasn't. Now, take Nan. I don't think she could be a snob no matter what happened to her. She's true blue all the way through."

"That's because she has known what it is to be poor," Amelia replied. "Her family has often had to fight to get along."

"Not even money would have made a difference," Laura maintained. "Not to our Nan. Gee, but she's swell!"

But how "swell" she was, neither of the girls could really know, even as they couldn't know what a big surprise the surprise party they themselves were planning was going to be. Even as the arch-conspirators talked and planned the days away, a certain lady that was head of a certain school that you have all heard about in the Nan Sherwood books smiled to herself.

"This school is so full of plots," Dr. Beulah Prescott said to herself one night as she closed her office before retiring, "That I'm afraid it is positively demoralizing." But as she said it, her grey eyes twinkled and she looked for a moment as though she liked nothing better than plots and plotters. "Now let's see," she paused as she put the keys into her purse, "tomorrow I must see Professor Krenner and get in touch with Grace's parents again. I don't see how we are going to manage about Walter."

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At the thought, she shook her head. Then she smiled again to herself. "Problems, problems, problems all the while," she said as if she relished them all.

Alone in her own apartments in the dormitory that night, Dr. Beulah sat down with books and maps and plans and worked away until the small hours of the morning.

"Is there something wrong?" Nan asked the next day as the girls left German class. Bess started guiltily.

"What do you mean, 'wrong'?" she asked.

"Oh, I don't know exactly," Nan replied. "It's just a feeling I have that there is something in the air. Say, Bess, is Dr. Beulah sick?"

Bess breathed a sigh of relief. "Safe again," she thought. "Why, not that I know of," she answered quite truthfully. "What makes you ask?"

"I was up last night, late, sorting out some things that I don't want to take away with me, because I couldn't sleep, I was so excited. There was a light across the garden court in Dr. Beulah's apartment. I wondered about it then, but forgot it this morning until I noticed that Dr. Beulah was not in Chapel. That's quite unusual."

"I noticed that, too," Bess puzzled, "but then so many strange things have been happening lately, that I've given up trying to solve them."

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"Do you expect me to believe that?" Nan teased.

"Well, anyway," Bess half retracted what she had said, "I'm not as interested as I once was."

"And why, pray tell?" Nan was curious now.

Bess blushed, but the postman coming down the hall toward the offices relieved her discomfiture and perhaps saved the situation. It was hard for Bess to keep a secret from Nan.

Now they both paused to speak to the genial old man who brought their mail up from the village. "Anything for us?" It was Nan who spoke.

"Sure, and if it isn't pretty Nan Sherwood this fine mornin'," the old Irishman paused to look through the mail he was carrying. "And pray, who'd be after writing you in this springtime. Is it poetry you are expecting from some good-looking young gentleman?"

Bess giggled and Nan blushed till even the tips of her ears were pink.

Old Pat went on fingering his way through the mail, "Dr. Prescott, Professor Krenner, Lakeview Hall, Dr. Prescott again. Sure and she's a fine lady. And another and another for her." He looked up regretfully at the girls. "There's none for you today," he shook his head sadly, for Pat did love a romance. "Sure and you'd better tell him where he is headin' in," he shook an admonishing finger at Nan as he started on.

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"But Pat," Nan and Bess stopped him again, "are you sure there's nothing there for us from Tillbury?" Pat sighed and looked through again.

"So you'll not give up," he chuckled. "Well, let's see. Till—Tillbury," he almost spelled out as he looked at the postmarks. Nan put out her hand.

"But it's not for you, girlie. Not today. Nothing for either of you," he added and walked on, leaving two very crestfallen and somewhat worried girls behind him.

At first neither spoke, and Bess swallowed a hard lump in her throat. Nan put an arm around her shoulder. "Never mind, honey," she consoled. "We'll probably hear tomorrow."

"But there was something there from Tillbury, I saw it."

"Oh, you probably made a mistake," Nan said, though she too felt sure that she had seen a Tillbury postmark. "You're not such an expert at reading upside down. Moreover, those postmarks weren't stamped very plainly, and it would be easy to misread them."

"Nan, you might be able to convince yourself that everything is as it should be, but you can't convince me." Bess stamped her foot. "Do you know that something has happened and are you keeping it from me?" she half accused Nan.

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"Elizabeth Harley, what are you saying?" Nan was genuinely indignant. "Here, I've been thinking all week that you were keeping something from me, you've been acting so strangely, but I've said nothing about it. Now you go and jump on me."

This brought Bess to her senses as nothing else could have. She laughed and with remarkable control for her, carried the situation off and allayed Nan's suspicions. "Oh, Nan, have you?" she burst out. "If I've been acting more strangely than usual it's because I have been worried about not hearing from mother. It's two weeks now, you know." And she seemed so utterly sincere about it, for she was in part, that as they pushed open the big doors of the class building they were in and walked across the quadrangle to the Hall, Nan believed her entirely.

That night, Bess was alone for a second with Rhoda. "Do you know," she confided, "I'll be so glad when this party is over that I'll be willing to kiss Mrs. Cupp—well, almost," she qualified, as a picture of that lady came to her mind.

Rhoda laughed. "I want to be there when you do it," she said. "But tell me, why are you so anxious to have the party over and done with? I thought you loved to plan parties."

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"I do, generally, but I'm so afraid that I'm going to have a fight with Nan before this one is over that I don't know which way to turn. We've never had a fight as long as we have known one another. Wouldn't it be just my luck to have one over something nice I was trying to do for her!"

"Don't worry, you won't have a fight. Nan won't let that happen. Anyway, the party is tomorrow afternoon, so there is only one more day to wait." Rhoda's face was alight, for she, too, found it hard to wait.

"Have you been able to find out," she continued, "what it is that Laura's committee has bought for a present?"

"No, not yet," Bess answered. "I've asked, but they vow they won't tell unless they know what the refreshments are going to be."

"And I won't tell that," Rhoda confirmed a previous stand. "Besides, I think it's more fun, if the committees do keep their decisions secret. It's like Christmas when every cupboard and closet in the house is brimming over with surprises."

"Yes, isn't it. Do you know, I'll bet I won't sleep a wink tonight," Bess admitted. "I'm so excited about the whole thing."

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"Sleep tonight!" Rhoda exclaimed. "Why, I haven't slept for a week!"

"I wouldn't have either, if I had had your job," Bess admitted. "I think it is the hardest one of them all."

"I liked it," Rhoda smiled. "How did your end of it work out?"

"You'll see for yourself, tomorrow," Bess looked mysterious, too. "I'll just say this, Dr. Beulah is the most charming person I've ever come across. She wrote the sweetest note thanking us for the invitation! And she offered to help us in any way she could. In fact, do you know what she's done?"

Rhoda shook her head.

"She's solved the problem of what to do with Nan until everything is ready. She asked her if she would mind going down to the village tomorrow morning on an errand that will take her all day. Then she asked her to call Mrs. Bagley and bring her up here for Sunday afternoon tea. And did Nan ever fall for it? It did my heart good. She's going to be the most surprised person in this county tomorrow!" Bess rubbed her hands gleefully. It was fun putting something over on Nan!

Sunday was a grand day, bright and clear and fresh as only an early spring day can be. The crisp ruffles of the curtains in Nan and Bess's room waved slightly in the breeze. Nan dressed herself in a fresh looking dark silk print as she breathed deeply of the soft, warm air.

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"Oh, it's good to be alive!" she exclaimed, "and this is one of those days when you feel sure there is nothing but good in store for you."

"Maybe so," Bess responded as unenthusiastically as she could, for she was afraid to let Nan even guess at her own excitement. "My only hope is that there is a good breakfast waiting downstairs in the dining hall. This being Sunday, I would like orange juice and pancakes and sausage and some good hot cocoa with whipped cream swimming around on top."

"Ugh!" Nan made a wry face. "You and Laura Polk and your whipped cream. I don't see how you can bear to have it for breakfast."

"Don't let it trouble you, darling," Bess was in an extraordinarily pleasant mood, "we won't get it. You'll never catch Mrs. Cupp feeding us whipped cream at any time. Says it's not good for our school-girl complexions." With this, she went off to bathe and dress.

"You don't mind," Nan called after her, "do you, if I don't wait for you this morning. I want to go to early chapel so that I can go down to the village on the bus."

"Run along, and forget me," Bess urged her. "I'm going to take my own lazy time about dressing this morning. I'm going to late breakfast and late chapel and late everything. I've got spring fever with a bang."

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So Nan went off and left a houseful of schemers behind her.

CHAPTER V

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SURPRISE FOR EVERYONE!

At long last came four o'clock. Dr. Prescott walked down the big, winding stairway of the castle-like structure that she had transformed from a run-down neglected dwelling into a boarding school for girls. She was proud of the school, proud of the work she had done there. She looked up. Why, she was proud of every big beam that supported the high ceilings!

As she entered the long reception room with its lovely bouquets of fresh spring flowers and was greeted by Rhoda Hammond, she had a momentary twinge of regret. "The girls were getting so much older! Today," and she smiled a little to herself as the thought crossed her mind, "they were acting especially grown-up." She looked down at the lovely corsage of sweet-smelling violets on her gray dress and touched them tenderly. They were a gift, a thoughtful one, from the girls who had planned the party. Now, as she circulated among them all and felt the excitement that there was in the room, she was glad that she had a secret too. She looked across the room and caught Professor Krenner's eye. He smiled and nodded. How nice everything seemed!

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Meanwhile Bess and Rhoda and Laura were conferring near a big silver tea tray. There were piles of dainty sandwiches on it, olives and pickles and salted nuts, a plate of lemon slices with whole cloves in the center of each, a bowl of sugar cubes with lovely silver tongs projecting from it, a graceful silver pitcher filled with cream, and, off to one side, pretty cups and saucers were stacked, waiting to be used.

"Oh, I wish Nan would come," Bess exclaimed.

"She'll be here any minute now," Rhoda answered, "and when she comes—"

But the sentence was never finished, for just at that moment Nan, accompanied by Mrs. Bagley, appeared in the doorway, and with one accord everyone called, "Surprise!"

It was a moment such as Nan had never experienced before. She seemed stunned, unable entirely to comprehend what was happening. Then, as all her friends came forward, smiled and shook her hand and Dr. Beulah leaned over and kissed her, she seemed to regain her composure. But she admitted later in private to Bess that she hardly knew all afternoon what she said or what had been said to her.

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There were one or two things, however, that did stand out clearly in her mind.

Before the tea was poured, Laura, as chairman of the gift committee, called her to her side, and, in the name of all those present, put three boxes in her hands and told her to open them. From the first, Nan pulled forth a gay corsage of daffodils which Bess promptly pinned to her shoulder. How pretty they looked there! So yellow and bright! Nan looked down at them, seeming for a moment to forget her other gifts.

Bess prodded her. So did Laura. Nan murmured a pardon and picked up another box. It was the largest of the three, much longer and wider than the first and was tied with a big perky bow which Nan proceeded to untie, oh, so slowly, it seemed to her friends, for in her confusion her fingers fumbled over the knot. Finally, however, the ribbon was off, the cover removed, the tissue paper pulled aside, and Nan drew forth a lovely long satin negligee, more beautiful than any she had ever seen.

"How lovely!" she exclaimed and buried her face for a second in its softness, for she was so happy that she was almost crying. Then she looked out at all the faces watching her.

"Oh, I thank you, many times I thank you," she said, before she looked down at the robe again. It was hard to tear her eyes away from it. But at another prod from Bess, she looked down at the third package on the table near her. "Could it be—?" She opened it and pulled forth the cleverest pair of little bedroom slippers! Everything was just perfect!

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Nan smiled shyly at her friends. "What could she say?" In the pause that followed, Dr. Prescott came to her rescue, moved over closer to her, and, standing between her and Bess, she spoke.

"May I have the attention of all of you, for a moment?"

Immediately, everyone was quiet, expectantly waiting.

"What was coming?" The question was in everyone's mind. The girls looked at Dr. Beulah and then at one another, as a million answers rushed through their heads.

She smiled reassuringly into their puzzled faces, seemed about to speak, but then paused as though to choose her words carefully. Finally, she began.

"I don't know as I have ever," she said, "been prouder of Lakeview Hall and all it stands for than I have today, and today somehow marks a turning point in its history.

"You all know that my life has been bound up in the fortunes of this place for some years now. When I first came here, there were about twenty-five girls registered. We taught a little French, some music, fine needlework, literature, and something of the social graces. Walking was about the most strenuous of the sports for girls in those days. Hiking was unheard of, for young ladies, I mean. It was considered quite the thing to grow pale and to faint on the slightest provocation, that is, if the young lady did it gracefully.

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"Nan here would have been quite out of place in that old school with her bobbed hair, her keen enjoyment of all the sports, and her interest in Professor Krenner's class in architectural drawing."

The girls laughed. Although the course had been listed in Lakeview Hall's catalogue ever since Professor Krenner joined the faculty, Nan had been the first to actually elect the subject. The story of how and why she did had long ago become a campus joke as those who have read "Nan Sherwood at Lakeview Hall" are well aware.

Now, for the first time Nan herself began to see how really queer that listing "Architectural Drawing" must have looked when it first appeared on the catalogue. She giggled, as she thought of young women with long dresses that trailed along the gravel paths of the campus taking such a serious course.

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Sharing the joke with Dr. Beulah, she smiled up at her.

"Yes, Nan would have been quite out of place there," Dr. Beulah repeated. "Not one among those twenty-five girls was trained to take care of herself. Here, today in the very hall where they sometimes gathered for their lessons in "The Social Graces" and practiced entering and leaving the room, using that door over there," she said, nodding toward the doorway from which Nan had first viewed the surprise party, "you girls of the modern day have planned a party for one of your number who has had more adventures than those girls had ever dreamed or read about.

"Whereas they walked, danced some, and fainted most expertly, you go boating, hiking, horseback riding, and, in the winter, sleighing. You play basketball and volleyball and golf. How they would envy you! Now, your party is for one among you who is going to Europe. There, all sorts of adventures await her. Just as Nan cannot imagine what these will be, just as I could not have twenty years ago imagined this big school with its two hundred self-reliant girls, you young ladies in planning this party had no conception of what a big thing was going to happen to you shortly.

"While you have been whispering and plotting among yourselves looking forward to this day which is being so successful, I, too, have been fostering a few secrets."

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At this Bess looked over at Nan. There was an I-told-you-so gleam in her eye. Nan nodded quickly. They were both thinking of their conversation of a few days ago in the corridor, both remembering their disappointing encounter with the old mailman. They turned their eyes back toward Dr. Beulah's face. How sweet she looked! Nan sighed. If she would only hurry and get to the point of her talk! Nan felt that she simply could not wait any longer.

"Nan's parents," Dr. Beulah continued, "felt that they wanted her to go to Europe under the chaperonage of some responsible person, and so, several months ago they wrote to me."

This was news to Nan, and she was all attention as Dr. Beulah went on.

"I made inquiries of the schools and colleges which offer conducted tours and was about to recommend that Nan join a party from a girls' school on the Hudson that was going to England. However, before the letter was written to Mr. and Mrs. Sherwood, Grace Mason's mother asked me a question that has changed everyone's plans."

Rhoda Hammond put a reassuring arm around Grace, who blushed slightly as all eyes were turned on her.

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"She and Mr. Mason," the head of the school explained, "wondered whether it would be possible for me to recommend a girls' camp for Grace to stay in for the summer. Well, one thing led to another, and before the week was out Professor Krenner and I were in conference behind closed doors.

"As a result, plans have been definitely made," her voice was clear and firm in spite of the excitement in it, "for a whole party of you to go to England this spring to see the king and queen crowned in London!"

CHAPTER VI

[52]

ADVENTURES AHEAD!

There was a murmur of surprise in the room as Dr. Prescott made her announcement. She raised her hand to quiet it and waited a moment before she went on.

"Much as I would have liked to have all of you go," she continued finally to the expectant girls before her, "that was impossible. So, it was necessary to choose those girls who have been outstanding in one way or another since they have been here at school. Another year, there will be more of you able to go, for I hope on this trip to be able to establish contacts that will make exchange scholarships between Lakeview Hall and similar schools abroad, possible. Therefore, to those who have that keen desire to make the trip, to be explorers too, and do not find their names on the list which I shall read presently, I want to say, 'Don't be too disappointed.'

"Most of you are younger than the girls who have been chosen, and your opportunity will come when you are a little older. Then you may profit by the experiences that we shall have on this first trip, yes, and by our mistakes too, for, in a sense, we shall be explorers setting out for strange

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countries. We are going to find out for sure whether the things we have been reading and hearing about for these many years are true. We are going to see whether, if we board a boat in New York and sail east, we really come to a continent called Europe on our maps.

“Those of you who follow after, will but verify our findings and will have as strange and wonderful experiences then, as we shall have now. So, again I say, you will not be the girls I think you are, if you do not, after the list is read, rally round those girls who are going. Help them all you can. There is much to do between now and the time they sail, and they and the school will need your help.

“Now after conferences with your parents and teachers, I have chosen and secured permission for the following six girls to go: Nan Sherwood, Amelia Boggs, Grace Mason—”

The room was tense with suspense as she paused to clear her throat, for she was excited too, almost as excited as the girls themselves.

“Rhoda Hammond—” She smiled over at the girl, for she was fond of this proud southern girl, so different, she thought, than the rest of her brood.

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“Laura Polk and—”

Nan put her arm around Bess’ shoulder. The same question was in both their minds. Could it be possible that Bess’ name was not on the list?

“Elizabeth—Harley!”

The room was in a hubbub. Nan was kissing Bess and Bess kissing Nan; Rhoda, shaking hands with Laura; Laura, telling Grace not to cry; Dr. Beulah Prescott, looking as though her customary serenity was most difficult to maintain; and Professor Krenner was smiling his kindly smile on all of them.

Everyone shook hands with everyone else and the girls that weren’t going were so lifted up by the excitement that they hardly knew who was going and who was not. In the commotion, Rhoda somehow or other managed to pour the tea, and Amelia, Bess, Nan, Laura, and Grace to pass the sandwiches and olives and pickles and cakes and nuts and candies, but no one, as Rhoda dolefully remarked afterwards, knew what they were eating.

“The refreshment committee could have served mounds of spinach,” she said, “instead of molded boats of ice-cream, and no one would have been the wiser.” Maybe so. At any rate, the little round sandwiches, the long narrow sandwiches, and the sandwiches shaped like balls and covered with cheese, were all eaten to the last crumb. The olives, pickles, and nuts disappeared. Finally, the ice cream and fancy cakes were all gobbled up, too, so that when the matron of the Hall had the maid wheel out the tea-wagon, none of Rhoda’s refreshments were left.

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It was quite the nicest party Lakeview Hall had ever had. That night no one slept very soundly, least of all the six girls on Corridor Four who were going to England for the Coronation of the King and Queen.

All rules, Dr. Prescott, had wisely said, would be suspended for the one night. Though Mrs. Cupp shook her head lugubriously over the “goings on”, at ten o’clock that night Laura, Grace, Amelia and Rhoda found themselves by one accord collected in Bess and Nan’s room.

“What if it’s all a dream?” Rhoda asked as they lounged about on the day-bed and in the easy chairs. “What if we awaken tomorrow and find that none of it’s true, that it is as we thought when we planned the party in the first place? What if we find that only Nan is going after all?”

“That wouldn’t be a dream. That would be a nightmare,” Laura answered. “The thing I can’t understand is, how I managed to get in under the wire. I was never more surprised in all my life than I was when she read my name. Imagine me, the red-headed cyclone from nowhere, going to Europe. Even my well-known imagination fails at the prospect. I can believe some of my own stories quicker than this one that the powers that be have thought up. Truth is indeed stranger than fiction. I never thought that I would live,” she said as though she was at least a hundred, “to see the day when I would admit that.”

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“Nor did I either,” Nan said contentedly. How pleased she was that all her friends were going! “Remember the night we sat up like this in this very room and talked of going to Florida. We thought nothing could be so grand as that! Now the whole lot and caboodle of us,” she went on inelegantly, “are going on a little jaunt over to Europe.”

“Yes,” Laura laughed and tried to yawn, “it’s all in a day’s work.”

“The thing that tickles me,” Bess spoke up at last, she had been quite silent since the party, unable yet to accept the fact that she was, after all, going to Europe with her chum, “is the way Dr. Beulah kept my name until last. Did you see the twinkle in her eye when she finally read it off? I almost died of suspense when she said ‘Elizabeth’ and then hesitated for so long before she said ‘Harley’.”

“I did, too,” Nan said. “Really, Bess, if your name hadn’t been on that list with all the others I would have wept bitter tears with you. I don’t believe I could have gone without you.”

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“Nan, do you mean that, honestly?” Bess asked.

"Honest and truly," Nan reiterated. "But, girls," she cried suddenly to them all, "there's something I know that none of you do."

"What is it?" they all chorused.

"Oh, I don't know whether I ought to tell or not," Nan teased.

"Nan Sherwood," Bess threatened, "if you don't break right down and tell us at once I'll—I'll—I'll throw this pillow at you." With this, she picked up one big soft pillow and raised her arm as though to pitch it right at Nan.

"I'll give up," Nan capitulated amid much laughter. "Do you know," she said slowly and solemnly as though to give her words greater weight, "That Professor Krenner is going to Europe, too, this summer, that he will be in London when we are, and that he will take us on some of the sight-seeing tours that we are to take?"

"Oh, that's nothing," Grace Mason depreciated. "I know something better, that none of you know. My mother and father are going to London and they are going to meet us there before we leave! What's more, they are going to take Walter with them!"

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Nan blushed. She had been secretly wondering whether or not Walter was going to get a chance to go to Europe this summer. She had been reluctant to ask Grace, because she hated so to be teased. Now she tried to be nonchalant about it.

"Oh, that's nice," she said, trying to act very much disinterested. The girls exchanged significant glances.

"Yes, *isn't* it," they emphasized.

Nan was dying to ask how it happened that Walter was going and who it was that had told Grace, but she didn't dare to ask any questions. She held her peace and hoped that someone else would solve the riddle.

For a few moments, no one said anything. It was like a mutual conspiracy to tantalize Nan, but after a while, Bess' own curiosity got the better of her. "How do you know, Grace," she asked, "surely no mail has come through to you lately?"

"Not a particle!" Grace exploded. "But Dr. Beulah says that everyone has been so busy with these plans, writing back and forth, checking and rechecking on details, that there was no time to write just ordinary letters. It was she who told me that dad is going over on business and that Walter and mother are going along with him. Why, I'm almost as pleased as Nan," she tormented her friend further, though she was secretly pleased that Nan liked her brother so much.

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"But tell me, Nan," she begged. "What were you and Dr. Beulah talking about so earnestly in the corner over your tea. I wanted like everything to interrupt, but even though everything was so informal that no less a person than Mrs. Cupp condescended to congratulate us, I hesitated to break in on one of Dr. Beulah's *tete-à-tetes*. I hope she doesn't scare the life out of me, while we are away. Imagine, being with her every day, eating—you do eat on a boat, don't you?—at her table, walking the deck with her, and perhaps even sharing your cabin with her!"

Nan laughed heartily at Grace's last exclamation. "Why, Grace Mason," she burst forth, after she had wiped her eyes with her handkerchief, "If you were dressed in clothes instead of those pajamas, I'd take you by the ear right now and march you straight over to Dr. Beulah's apartment and introduce her to you. She doesn't bite. She's one of the nicest, if not the very nicest, person I have ever known. I can't imagine a pleasanter person in all this wide world to take us on this trip.

"She was telling me," she added as an afterthought and in answer to Grace's question, "that we are to go over on a steamship line that will land us in Glasgow, for we are to stop first at Emberon. It seems some distant relatives of mine want to be the first to welcome us when we land."

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"What fun!" Bess exclaimed. "All the words about going sound like magic, don't they? Sailing, walking on deck, landing, and passports and visas and going through customs. Do you know," she admitted, "it almost scares me, when I think of all the strange new things that are going to happen. Why, we will be foreigners in a strange country!" she ended in amazement.

"Yes, and I hope they don't treat us as we treat them sometimes," Nan added.

"Well, they hadn't better," Bess retorted indignantly, as all the girls joined heartily in laughing at her. Bess laughed too, when she realized what she had said, "What I mean is—"

"Never mind, Bessie," Nan comforted. "We know you are not as rude as you sound, and that you don't mean half of what you say," she ended teasingly.

"Oh, I don't care what you say," Bess returned nobly, "I feel so happy that I am going to be on that boat with all of you that there is nothing that you could say that would bother me."

"Not even," Laura goaded her, "the statement that we are going over cabin class while Linda Riggs is going first class on the same boat."

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"It's not true," Bess denied without thinking.

"Of course it isn't, Bess," Rhoda looked reprovingly across at Laura. "No one has heard a thing

about Linda for months now. She might just as well be living in another world so far as we are concerned."

"I wish she was." Bess pouted somewhat as she made the statement. The truth was that she was secretly triumphant at the thought that if Linda was going to Europe, she was too. She half hoped that somewhere they would meet, that sometime she would be able to embarrass Linda as Linda had frequently, in the past embarrassed her. But even as the thought crossed her mind, Nan whisked it away by saying, "I wonder what it will all be like!"

CHAPTER VII

[62]

A MYSTERIOUS LETTER

"Oh, Nan, there's so much to do before we go that I sometimes think we never will get started!" Bess exclaimed to her roommate one morning several weeks later.

She was sitting on the floor sorting a boxful of things she had been saving for her memory book and was holding the dance program of the Grand Guard Ball they had attended during their first year at Lakeview, when she spoke.

Nan did not answer.

"Nan, aren't you listening to what I say?" she asked without looking up. She flourished the dance program in the air. "Doesn't this bring up memories though," she said half wistfully. "When I remember what a jewel Walter was that night, I'm almost jealous," she went on.

Again there was no answer. Bess looked up.

"Why, Nan Sherwood, whatever is the matter?" she cried when she saw the expression on Nan's face. Dropping the things in her lap on the floor, she got up and went over to the day-bed where Nan was reading a letter.

"Nan, tell me," she urged. "Don't sit there looking as though the bottom had dropped out of everything. What's happened?"

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"Oh, don't be silly," Nan forced a smile, "I just received a letter from home and it made me homesick. That's all."

"You homesick!" Bess didn't believe a word of it.

"Yes," Nan reiterated rather crossly, "I began to think how far away we are going and how seldom it is we see our parents these days. It made me sad for a while."

Bess accepted the explanation without further comment. She knew that it wasn't altogether true, just as she knew that it would be utterly impossible to drag the real facts from Nan at the moment. However, she determined not to forget the incident. But despite her resolve, it was not until several weeks later when they were on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean that the subject was reopened. Then it was not Bess who reopened it, but a set of very peculiar circumstances.

Now, to further divert Bess' attention, Nan put her letter away, most carefully, and began to busy herself about the room. So, they were both sorting out their belongings when Grace broke in on them.

"What do you think?" She was breathless with excitement for she had run all the way from the mail boxes where she had read the letter she was now waving in her hand, "I've just had a letter from home and mother and dad say that you should all come to Chicago with me for a few days during the holidays."

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"They say that it is almost necessary," she continued as she noted the doubtful look on Nan's face and Bess' too. "Because you can take care of your passports and visas much easier there than from Freeling."

"Mother says further," and Grace turned to her letter to read directly from that,

"Dad and I have at last given Walter our consent to take his car along with him. He wants to so much! We feel that since it might be the only time he ever makes the trip that we will let him do as he wishes in so far as possible. So you and the girls may plan on taking a few side trips to Stratford-on-Avon, Canterbury, Eton, Windsor, and wherever else you have a mind to go by auto—that is, and this always holds true, if Dr. Prescott is willing. You are to be in her hands entirely, you know."

"Now, don't fail to keep in touch with me, Grace. I want to know at every step how your plans are progressing."

“Isn’t—that—just—grand!” Bess was the first to speak after the letter was finished. “Oh, Grace, your mother and dad are so good to us. Think of it, Nan, we will be able to take some drives over the lovely English countryside in the spring of the year.”

“I am,” Nan answered quietly, though inside she was really more excited than Bess. She liked Walter’s car and had already had some pleasant drives in it. Now, she could see herself in imagination skimming over the English roads. “By the way,” she turned to Grace, “when is it Walter will be crossing?”

“Oh, not until several weeks after we do,” Grace answered. “Dad’s going to be busy until well into April. But we’ll all be together for the coronation, I am sure. Did I tell you this? Mother says someplace at the beginning of her letter that a business acquaintance of Dad’s has written that we may watch the procession go by from his offices. It seems he is right down in Piccadilly and has an ideal location. The King and Queen and all of them will pass right by there on their way to Westminster from Buckingham Palace to be crowned. Then, they will pass by, too, on their way back. Why, dad says that if we bought such seats, we would have to pay at least a hundred dollars apiece!”

“Oh, Grace, what would we do without you!” Nan exclaimed. “That’s the biggest piece of news yet! Dr. Prescott has been having trouble getting good seats for us, I know, for we put in our bid so late. I wrote to the solicitors in Edinburgh who handled mother’s inheritance just the other day to find out whether anything could be done. It will be almost a month before I can possibly hear, and I was so afraid that it would be too late! Now, you have settled the problem entirely.”

Grace blushed. She adored Nan. Praise from her sent her spirits skyward. Now she returned to her original question. “Will you stop in Chicago at the beginning or the end of the vacation,” she persisted.

“Oh, at the end,” Nan capitulated. “I couldn’t possibly stop at the beginning, I am that anxious to get home and see Momsey! There are at least a million questions I want to ask her about all of this. I wish the Easter vacation was twice as long as it is and that it was going to begin tomorrow. Then I wish that we were leaving the day after vacation ends. Oh, girls, I sometimes feel I’m going to burst!

“If you only knew how much I’ve wanted to see all those places Momsey and Papa wrote about when they were over in Scotland a year or so ago! They tell me that the old castle that belonged to the ancient Lairds of Emberon is a queer spooky old place. Most of it is not in use anymore, but there are a few rooms that have never been closed. These are the ones that are to be ours for the time we stay there. Sounds thrilling, doesn’t it?”

“Thrilling!” Bess took up the word. “Why, there’s nothing like this trip ever happened to us before!”

“What are you people cooking up now?” It was Laura’s voice that broke in on them. “I declare, sometimes I think I’d better move my trunk and belongings right into this room. Then I’d be on the spot when things happened.”

“My sentiments exactly,” Rhoda chimed in as she entered.

“Late as usual,” Laura observed as Amelia also came in. “Now tell us what we’ve been missing.”

“Oh, we’re all to stop at Grace’s in Chicago before we come back to school. Her mother has a whole list of things that can best be done from there.” Bess couldn’t wait for Grace to extend the invitation.

“Yes, that’s the truth,” Nan verified Bess’ statement. “Now you’d all better clear out of here,” she laughed. “I love every hair of your funny heads, but I can’t accomplish a thing when you’re around. Do you realize that after all, we’re at school, and that trip or no trip, we’ve got to get through with exams before we leave?”

The girls sobered up at once.

“Ooh Nan, don’t bring them up,” Laura begged. “I just remembered that I faithfully promised the French Prof that I’d prepare my lesson for tomorrow. She declared today that she was utterly disgusted with the assignments I had been handing in. Poor thing! I have been trying her patience.”

“And I and I and I,” they all chorused.

“Now, get out!” Nan laughed, but never-the-less achieved firmness.

“Well, guess we’d better take the hint.” Laura started for the door and the others followed. “Bet I get a better French grade than any of you, tomorrow,” she challenged, just before the door was closed behind them with an air of finality.

“Such people!” Nan laughed to Bess when they were once more alone. “There’s one thing I’m sure of—”

“And that?” Bess looked up.

"Mrs. Cupp is going to be so happy when the bus drives away from the entrance of this school carrying all of us and our baggage, that, if she were human at all, she'd dance a little jig of joy."

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Bess giggled. "If I thought she'd do that I'd almost be willing to stay, for that would be something worth seeing."

"Bess, there are so many things worth seeing," Nan took up the end of the sentence seriously, "that I wish I were quintuplets so that I could be in at least five places at once."

"You and me, too," Bess agreed, "but just now the one me that is here is going to buckle down to work. Those exams are no joke."

So the two girls took out their books, and before long there was no sound to be heard in the room but the ticking of the clock and the occasional turning of a page. They studied until the signal came, "Lights out!"

CHAPTER VIII

[70]

OLD FRIENDS AND AN ENEMY

"Welcome to our city!" It was Walter's hearty voice greeting Nan and Bess as their train pulled into the busy Chicago station.

Nan caught her breath. How nice he looked! How much older he seemed. She smiled up at him.

"You seem to have a habit of meeting us at stations," she remarked. They all laughed, remembering Nan and Bess' first entrance into Freeling, their first ride with Walter and Linda Riggs' consequent anger.

"And you seem to have a habit of going places," Walter returned as he smiled back at them. How pretty they looked! How much older they seemed! How pink Nan's cheeks were! Could it be that she was embarrassed? The very same thoughts that were running through Nan's mind were running through his. They both felt easier when Grace, Amelia, Laura, and Rhoda descended on them.

"Come on, you old pokes," Grace said. "We've got things to do."

"Yes," Amelia contributed her bit, "and we're late already." With this she looked meaningfully at her latest acquisition—a new wristwatch.

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"What, another?" Laura appeared to be stunned at the information.

"Yes, funny," Amelia wrinkled up her nose at her friend. "It was a going away present from my dad. Don't you like it?"

The girls all crowded round to see. It was a pretty little thing, small and oblong and tailored looking and it went quite perfectly with the pretty tailored suit that Amelia was wearing. She turned it so they could see her initials on the back and the date, all engraved in Old English style.

Now as they crowded into the Mason town car and were whisked away to the big Mason home, they compared notes on their visits. Nan and Bess had been to four—no less than four—bon voyage parties, and they were laden with all sorts of gifts from their friends and former classmates at Tillbury High School. Rhoda was the proud possessor of new luggage, the gift of cowboys on her Dad's ranch. Amelia had her watch, Grace a sizable check to do with as she pleased on her trip. And Laura had the greatest surprise of all.

She had had her bright red hair curled so that it was like a soft halo all around her pert little face! "Turn around," the girls commanded when she took her hat off.

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"It looks just darling, Laura," Bess said.

"Perfectly lovely," Nan agreed. "You'll be the belle of the boat."

"Do you really like it?" Laura sounded just a little worried as she looked at them. "Do you think that Dr. Prescott will approve?" she asked Nan anxiously.

"Of course she will," Nan answered confidently. "Why Laura," she said, turning her friend's head around so that she could get a side view again, "you've changed from an ugly duckling to a pretty young lady. I don't see how Dr. Prescott could possibly object."

Laura grinned roguishly. "Do you know, when I look into the mirror, I hardly recognize myself, but then when I open my mouth and hear what comes out, I'm perfectly sure that I haven't changed a bit. Then I feel utterly discouraged." She looked as woeful as possible, when she finished the sentence, but nothing could disguise the fact that Laura and the whole crowd of

Lakeview Hall students were on top of the world. It was a merry bunch that tumbled out of the car and into the Mason home.

In no time at all, they had unpacked, washed, changed their clothes and were coming down the broad stairway together for lunch. They stopped midway.

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"Whose voice is that?" Bess whispered the question.

"Could it be—" Nan paused to listen again,— "Dr. Beulah?"

"I'm afraid it is," Grace laughed. "In the excitement, I forgot entirely to tell you. Mother asked her to stop on her way back to school, too, and we are all to go together this afternoon for our passports."

"Hey, come here!" It was Nan's whisper again, arresting Laura who had tried to retreat up the stairway as soon as she heard Dr. Beulah. Nan caught her by the arm. "You can't do that," she said, "You've got to face the music sometime."

"Just give me a little time," Laura entreated. "This is too unexpected. Let me have time to think up something to say."

"Then you would be in trouble." Nan started down the stairs. "Come on, brace up," she whispered.

At that moment, Mrs. Mason heard them all and came to the stairway. "Come, girls," she called. "Lunch is ready."

Nan held fast to Laura's arm and advanced into the room.

Dr. Prescott looked up at their entrance. "Why, Nan, how well you are looking."

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"And—Laura! Why, Laura Polk!"

Laura looked sheepish and blushed, but for once no words came forth. Dr. Prescott looked at her thoughtfully. Finally, the verdict came.

"Well—" she said slowly, but with a bright gleam in her eye. "I must admit that though I have always been opposed to artificial curls, you look very charming, Laura, and I don't blame you a bit for doing it. Now, turn around so that I can see the back."

Laura turned.

"Yes, it is indeed—charming, very becoming to you," she repeated. "Don't you like it, girls?" she nodded toward the others and in the general conversation that followed, Laura regained her composure.

Lunch was followed by a conference in the Mason library. Then they were all whisked off to the photographers to have passport pictures taken. Each one was taken into a small room, seated on a chair, and told to look straight into the camera. In a second it was all over.

"Don't they look just awful!" Bess exclaimed when she saw hers. "Why, they can't use that thing to identify me. I won't even admit that I posed for that." She laughed.

"But will you look at mine!" this from Laura. "I look like—like—"

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"Like Puck," Nan supplied the word which Laura was searching for. "Imagine the trouble we'll have dragging you past immigration officials and through customs. We'll have to explain to every officer we meet, 'No, this isn't Puck. This is Laura Polk.' And they'll look at you and make marks in their notebooks. Then they'll talk among themselves and debate as to whether or not they should lock you up in a dark dungeon."

"That's the girl, Nan." Laura commended her friend, "And if they hear you they'll lock you up with me. The United States Government will protest—"

"Oh, no, it won't," Amelia cut in. "It will send word to keep you locked up, two such crazy loons! Now, if we don't get a move on, the Passport Agent's office will be closed and none of us will ever be able to even leave the country!"

"What's this about not leaving the country?" Dr. Prescott came into the room from an inner office.

"Oh, we were just teasing Laura," Nan explained, "about her passport photo. They are all really very poor, Dr. Prescott. Do you think that they will be all right?" Nan was genuinely worried.

Dr. Prescott smiled at her. "Don't fret, dear," she reassured her. "Everything will be quite all right, I'm sure."

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It seemed so. They went to the Passport Agent's office, stopped at a bank to find out about foreign money, to tea—"so that we can get used to having it in England in the middle of the afternoon," Grace explained.

Before they parted so that each might do her own errands, Dr. Prescott called Nan aside. "Will you do something for me, Nan," she asked.

"Of course." Nan was all eagerness. It was an honor to be asked to help Dr. Prescott.

"Will you stop at the travel agent's on Madison Avenue and pick up the portfolio of maps and time-tables he is holding there for me? You can't miss the place, it's near the Wrigley Building, and it has a huge revolving globe of the world in the window. It won't take you long, and it might be an interesting place to stop."

How interesting and upsetting this errand would be—neither could know as Nan waved good-bye to her friends and went off adventuring by herself. Just as Dr. Prescott had said, she couldn't miss the Wrigley Building, nor the window with the revolving globe. She stood for a second watching it, watching North and South America, the Atlantic Ocean, Europe and Africa, Asia and Australia, the Pacific Ocean merge, one into the other, as the ball moved around. Then she tore herself away, opened the door, and went in. [77]

There, standing at a long counter talking to the agent, was Linda Riggs, proud and superior looking as usual! Nan gasped. Linda turned, and the two faced one another.

"Why, Linda!" Nan spoke first, but Linda looked her up and down, stared into her face coldly and most rudely, and then, without saying a word, turned her back.

Nan tried to cover up her confusion, as she went forward to claim Dr. Prescott's folio. Could she have made a mistake? She looked again. No, no one could mistake the angle of that up-turned chin.

"I'll take the cabin on the upper deck," she heard Linda say in her slow affected way. "I want the very best cabin you have," she said, talking a little louder so that Nan couldn't help but hear. "I always like the best of everything."

It was really disgusting to hear the girl talk. Everyone in the office looked up at her. She might have been a pretty girl, but instead she looked over-dressed, haughty, and artificial. Two or three in the room laughed to themselves and turned away. They did not even like to look at her. Others shook their heads. Nan tried not to pay any attention. She wanted to get out of the office as soon as possible. She asked for Dr. Prescott's package quietly and would have gone without even looking at Linda again, but that girl's own words stopped her. [78]

"I beg your pardon," she heard Linda saying to one of the agents, "but who is that girl that is leaving now. It—seems that I have seen her someplace before. Oh, yes, she is the one who was caught shoplifting in a Chicago department store." She said it loudly so that everyone could hear.

Nan stopped. They couldn't say that about her. It wasn't true! She knew it, and so did Linda. Everyone who has read "Nan Sherwood's Winter Holidays" knows it. But here Linda was, declaring it was true in front of a whole crowd of strange people!

Nan wanted to protest, but the agent who had given her Dr. Prescott's package spoke quietly. "If I were you," he said, for he knew that what Linda was telling was a lie, "I'd say nothing. Here, let me help you." He took her by the arm and escorted her to the door. "Don't let it bother you," he said as she went out.

Linda turned and followed Nan with her eyes. "What strange people," she drawled, "one meets." No one paid any attention. They had liked Nan. [79]

Outside, Nan held the package close to her side and lost herself in the crowd. It had been hard, not answering Linda, but by keeping still, she had won the day. Now, as she walked along Madison Avenue thinking of what had happened, she remembered Linda's first statement, "I want a cabin on the upper deck, the best you have."

As she thought of it, she breathed a short prayer. "Please don't let Linda be on the same boat with us," it said.

CHAPTER IX

THEY'RE OFF

"Ticket—passport—traveller's checks—baggage tags—trunk keys." Nan checked them off on her list as she put them into her purse. "There, Bess," she said, turning to her friend, "everything is done, and I'm all ready, absolutely all ready to go. And you?"

The two girls were standing in their room in Lakeview Hall as Nan asked the question. They were both dressed in tweed coats and matching felt hats. Around them stood their baggage, waiting for the school janitor to take it down to the school bus. It was the day of all days, the day on which they were leaving for Europe.

Bess looked bewildered as Nan put the question to her. "I—I—I—guess so. I guess I'm all ready,"

she answered. "Do you know, I'm so excited that I hardly know whether I'm going or coming. I can't remember what I packed and what I didn't pack. I don't know—why, I don't even know where my baggage keys are!" she exclaimed as she began to look frantically around the room. "What will I do?"

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Already she was moving pillows, looking under books, in the corners of chairs, and around the floor. Nan joined the hunt and when Laura, a few seconds later, stuck her head in the doorway, they were both turning the room upside down in search of the keys.

"Say, you two," the red-headed girl began, "They're coming for your trunks next. Be ready. We've just time to catch the train." With this she disappeared.

They heard Rhoda's voice down the hall. "Everybody ready? The bus is coming."

They heard Amelia. "Grace," she called, "Dr. Prescott says to come downstairs. It's time to go." She sang the words out.

But it was not until they themselves heard the chug-chug of the old school bus as it rolled up to the entrance and came to a halt that Nan discovered the keys in the most obvious place of all, the lock of the trunk itself!

Now everything was all right. Bess gave one more look at herself in the mirror. The janitor came for the luggage. The girls took one last lingering look at their room. Then they left.

The next morning they awakened in New York City to one of the most exciting days they had ever had. Everything around them was new, for none of them had ever been to this largest city in the world before. As they came out of Grand Central Station, with porters hurrying after them with their luggage, they were caught up in a rush of people hurrying to work.

[82]

"Oh, Nan!" Bess grabbed for her friend's arm.

"Oh, Bess!" Nan exclaimed. "Did you ever see anything like it!" Nan's face was shining. She looked around for the rest of their crowd, caught Dr. Prescott's eye, and smiled. It was all so new and so much fun! Dr. Prescott smiled back. But there was not time to say anything.

They piled into a big car and went threading through the heavy morning traffic, under elevated railway tracks, past tall white buildings, through narrow crowded streets, around big double decker busses, and finally rolled to a stop at the wharves.

There ship after ship was lying in the docks. There were great big ones, bigger than any hotel they had ever seen; little fishing schooners with loose sails flapping in the breeze; busy tugs nosing around; and off in the distance, a gray United States battleship was lying at anchor.

Everyone was hustling about. The place seemed one mad scramble of porters, sailors, travellers, trunks, luggage carts, and taxis depositing more and more people all the time. It seemed as though the whole United States was sailing off for foreign ports. Unconsciously, the girls huddled together. Dr. Prescott looked anxiously down at her brood and realized for the first time what a task she had undertaken. Then Nan touched her arm.

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"There, Dr. Prescott," she said, "there it is, our ship."

Sure enough, there ahead of them, riding proudly in the dock was their boat, the S. S. Lincoln. But before they could reach it, before Bess could place her foot on the gang-plank as she had been seeing herself do for weeks past, in imagination a familiar voice cried excitedly, "Here they are! Here they all are!" and they looked up into the faces of mothers and fathers and friends who had come to see them off.

Immediately the whole rush of the outside world was forgotten. Nan was in Mopsy Sherwood's arms. Rhoda was kissing her father. Amelia was assuring hers that her watch was running perfectly. Laura was off to one side talking to her mother. Grace was telling her folks all about the trip from Lakeview. Bess was declaring to her mother that she had her keys—safe. There were introductions all round and then the group made its way up the gang plank, proudly and happily and a little bit tearfully.

"Nan Sherwood—Miss Nan Sherwood—Nan Sherwood—" Gradually the fact that Nan's name was being called sifted through the minds of the happy crowd. It was Bess who noticed it first.

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"Nan, why, Nan, they're calling your name," she tried to get her friend's attention. At last Nan looked up.

"A telegram for Miss Nan Sherwood," the boy called again. Nan reached through the crowd for it.

"Miss Elizabeth Harley—Miss Harley," the boy began calling again. So, one by one, the girls received letters and telegrams, cards and flowers and books, candy and fruit, gifts and messages from friends in Florida and Chicago and Michigan and the West where Rhoda lived, wishing them "A Safe Journey and a Happy Landing!"

Because of all the excitement, it was not until the cry rang out "All's ashore that's going ashore," that Mopsy and Papa Sherwood were able to warn Nan. "Now," Papa Sherwood said, "Remember, there are—as I have told you before those at Emberon who might want to do you harm. Some there have never become reconciled to your mother's having inherited the fortune. They might try to make trouble for you."

"Please don't worry," Nan herself looked serious as she answered her father. "I'll be most careful."

[85]

"Careful, did you say?" Bess was at her side. "Why Mrs. Sherwood, of course we'll be careful. We'll all be very careful." Then as she noted the serious expression on both Mr. and Mrs. Sherwood's face, she stopped short. Bess looked puzzled. Somewhere in the back of her mind there was something unsolved that this reminded her of. She tried to remember, but couldn't. It troubled her vaguely even as she kissed Mrs. Sherwood good-by. Then she forgot it, for Nan was laughing and smiling and telling her mother and dad to hurry and get off if they didn't want to be taken along too.

Next, they were all standing at the ship's rail, waving with hats and handkerchiefs to the crowds on shore. The ship's orchestra was playing one last tune. Tugs pushed at the boat. Slowly and majestically, it moved away from the dock to the harbor and the open sea, carrying Nan Sherwood and her Lakeview Hall friends along with it.

CHAPTER X

[86]

TROUBLE FOR NAN

"Now what?" Bess was feeling a little forlorn as the big ship gathered steam and the figures on shore faded away to nothing.

Nan turned. She had been watching the white sea gulls swooping in great arcs down over the boat, missing it, and turning to swoop again. It looked like such fun!

"I haven't the slightest idea," she answered, "but let's go and find out." She took Bess's hand and went inside, down the elevator, through a long corridor toward their cabins.

Midway, they were stopped by a white jacketed steward. "I beg your pardon, Miss," he addressed Bess, "but are you Miss Sherwood?"

Bess couldn't find her tongue. Nan spoke up. "I'm Nan Sherwood," she said, "Is there anything wrong?"

"How many pieces of baggage did you have?" he answered her question with another.

"Two," Nan answered quickly.

"What were they?"

"A small trunk and a suitcase."

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"The color?" He was making notations on a small slip of paper.

"Brown."

"Did you have them sent to storage or directly to your cabin?"

"To the cabin."

"Were they properly tagged?"

"Why, I thought so," Nan was completely baffled at the questions.

"Your cabin number?" He smiled at the girl now. "There's been some confusion," he said, "and one of the other passengers is quite excited about it. I'm trying to straighten out the difficulties."

"648. I thought my baggage was in my cabin." Nan was puzzled now.

"Of course it was," Bess chimed in. "Your father and my father came down and checked on that to make sure before they got off the boat. I'm certain they said your baggage was there. Come let's look."

The two girls and the steward continued down the corridor to the cabins where the rest of the Lakeview crowd was already at work unpacking.

"Oh, here they are now." Rhoda looked up as the two girls entered. "We were just wondering about you. The angriest looking red-headed man we've ever seen was just here demanding to see Miss Sherwood."

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"He was near-sighted and slightly hunch-backed," Laura continued. "He lifted his shoulders, puckered his brows, and peered at Rhoda as though she was either hiding you in this cabin or lying when she said that she didn't know where you were."

"He looked slowly around," Grace contributed, "as though you must surely be here. I thought for a moment that he was going to open the cabinet. But he hesitated and just stared at it. I'm sure he looked right through those doors and saw that you weren't there." She shuddered as she remembered the man's expression.

"Yes, and when Rhoda advanced toward that doorway, easing him gently out, you know," Amelia too looked frightened, "his face got so red that I thought he was going to die of apoplexy."

"Then all of a sudden he changed," Rhoda took up the story again. "He begged our pardon, said there was some confusion about baggage, and went away to find a steward."

Nan turned to the steward at her side. "Is that the man whose baggage you are enquiring about?" she asked.

"Answers the description perfectly, Miss." He was all politeness. "If you will pardon me now, I would like to see your luggage." [89]

The other girls moved to one side and attempted to get their scattered belongings out of the way. The cabin was small, and they had not yet finished unpacking. Laura and Amelia, whose cabin was across the corridor left—reluctantly.

The steward stepped over the other bags in the room and went directly to Nan's trunk. He looked at it carefully, turned it over, and examined the tag. Finally, he looked up. "I'm sorry, Miss Sherwood," he said, "The porters have made a mistake. This luggage was meant for room 846 instead of 648. See."

Nan stepped over the luggage, as he had done, and looked at the tag. "No," she said, more puzzled than ever, "that isn't my luggage. I can see now that it isn't quite the same color, though it is the same size and shape."

"But where is yours?" Bess asked the question that was on the tip of Nan's tongue.

"I'll bring it presently." The steward picked up the bag and walked out.

"Has the great mystery been solved," Laura asked as she and Amelia came back into the cabin.

"Well, partly," Nan said slowly, for she was still puzzled. "I don't see how Papa made such a mistake. I don't understand this yet." [90]

"You would understand it even less, if you have seen the villain in the piece," Laura volunteered. She liked mysteries. "If I were in your shoes," she continued, "I wouldn't venture out of this cabin at any time during the crossing and I wouldn't let a morsel of food cross my lips until some one had tasted it. At night, I'd lock that porthole and bar the door, and I'd never stay alone for a second. You're in danger, lass." She shook her head sadly. "There's a deep, deep plot," she added, as she saw that Bess seemed to be believing every single word of what she was saying, "to do away with you. Only the utmost caution will ever get you over this Atlantic Ocean alive." Her voice was deep and husky as she finished the sentence, and her eyes stared ahead as though she could see into the future.

"Oh, Laura, be still," Nan laughed at her friend. "You have Bess believing you now, and if you are not careful, she'll be seeing hunch-backed men disappearing into every cabin along that corridor."

Bess said nothing. Her busy mind was remembering Papa Sherwood's warning just before he left the boat. "There are those at Emberon," he had said, "that might want to do you harm. Be careful!" Again, as then, she had a vague feeling that there was something that had happened in the past, something strange and mysterious, that she ought to remember. Again, it eluded her. [91]

She shook herself, partly in annoyance, partly to bring herself back to the present and cabin 648. "He's awfully slow in bringing that baggage, isn't he?" she asked.

Amelia looked at her watch. "Yes, he's been gone fifteen minutes," she answered. "Maybe you had better ring for another steward, Nan. There is something queer about all of this."

"Yes, do!" Grace urged. "I feel rather frightened."

"Now there is no sense in getting all worked up over nothing." Nan was the only one who really appeared calm. "Baggage often gets mixed in the boats."

"Nan, will you please stop being calm, and do something?" Bess was working herself up into a real frenzy. "Maybe someone has stolen your luggage."

"Then you'll have to wear my clothes and will you ever be a sight!" This from Amelia who was fully two inches taller than Nan and much, much thinner.

"Or mine," This for Laura who was shorter than Nan, and plumper.

"I thank you all, but I guess I'll wear my own." Nan stepped toward the doorway as a steward knocked. [92]

"Miss Sherwood?" he asked. Nan opened the door.

"Why-y-y, yes," she answered, hesitantly, for it was not the same steward who had taken the

other bag away.

"Your bag, I believe," he half questioned as he dropped it inside the doorway and left.

The girls could hardly wait until they had examined it. The number on the tag was wrong just as the mysterious visitor had said, and the bag did look much like the other.

"Nan, get your keys!" It was Laura speaking. "It looks to me as though this lock has been meddled with."

"Right here," Nan opened her purse.

The six girls all stooped over the bag, as Laura tried the key. "Oh, that isn't the right one." She was impatient at the delay.

Nan handed her another.

"Please, will you all move round so I have more light?" Laura asked. "This doesn't seem to fit, either."

They stood up and watched her.

"Something is wrong, Nan." Laura moved to one side. "Here, you try."

Nan took the key, fussed with the lock a second, pushing and pulling, until finally the case flew open.

CHAPTER XI

BESS HOLDS HER TEMPER

[93]

Nan said nothing, but sat staring at the contents, a puzzled expression on her face. The girls looked from the trunk to Nan and back to the trunk again.

"Everything is all right, isn't it?" Bess asked the question.

"I—don't—know." Nan answered slowly and doubtfully. "Everything seems to be as I left it. Yet somehow it's all changed too."

"What do you mean?" Grace questioned timidly.

Nan looked up from her place on the floor into the anxious faces of the girls around her. "I'm as baffled as you are," she admitted. "I can't really tell whether anyone has touched the things in my trunk or not. The underwear—slips—stockings—blouses" she touched each pile of things as she named it,—"pajamas, and even the dresses, are folded the same and in the same places as they were when I packed. I'm sure of that."

"Still, when that case flew open, I had a peculiar feeling that someone besides myself had been through it and touched everything there."

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"Ugh." Bess shuddered. "Don't say things like that, Nan. They give me the creeps."

"Me too," Grace was really pale. "Especially when I remember the expression on that hunchback's face when he asked for you."

"What are you going to do about it?" Rhoda inquired. Generally calm, Rhoda was seriously worried now. The red-headed man had looked mean.

"Yes, what are you going to do?" Bess repeated the question. She was more troubled than any of the rest, because she had more reason than they to be suspicious.

"Come, Nan," Amelia urged, as Nan sat, silently considering. "You've got to do something."

"Oh, girls, I don't know what to do," Nan finally burst forth. "It can't be reported. The whole thing would sound silly. The purser would probably pat us on the back, tell us to be good, and warn us not to read so many detective stories. I'm afraid that there is just nothing to do but keep quiet and see what happens next, if anything. After all, it might have been a very innocent mistake."

Laura snickered. "I only hope no innocent mistakes come walking into my cabin," she said. Then she grew serious. "Really, Nan, I'm not generally a fraidy-cat, but if I were you, I would be careful and watch out for red-headed men. I can't for the life of me see why anyone in the world would be after you, but strange things do happen."

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"I will be careful," Nan agreed. "Now, I wonder what that gong was I heard a few minutes ago."

"Girls, girls, girls!" It was Dr. Prescott at the doorway. "What have you been doing? Don't you know that the second gong for dinner has rung and that if you don't hurry you won't get anything to eat."

"Nothing to eat! And me so starved after the whiffs I've been getting of the fresh salt air." Laura was up and out of the room before she had finished the sentence. Amelia followed after. Ten minutes later the girls were headed down the corridor to the ship's dining room.

"Have you got your ticket?" Nan asked as she held up a little red card that resembled the seat stubs in a theatre.

"Ticket, what ticket?" Laura stopped short.

"The ticket for your place in the dining room." Bess was proud of this bit of knowledge.

"Why, I never had one," Laura declared. "They never even gave me one."

"Oh, yes they did," Bess assured her. "Remember, after the purser looked at our passports when we came aboard ship, he sent us to a window where the dining room steward was sitting. The steward had a plan of the dining room before him, with all the tables pictured on it. He looked at us and at our passports and then gave us this little stub. Remember?"

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Laura looked perfectly blank. "What will I do now?" she asked.

"Here, you take mine," Bess was feeling generous. "Since I know just where to go, I'll go up and get another. You all start eating, though. Don't wait for me." With this she was off to the purser's office.

"Come on, Laura." Nan took Laura's arm as the girl hesitated wondering whether, if, after all, she shouldn't get her own ticket.

"Yes, or we won't get anything to eat." Amelia was slightly impatient. "Come, let's hurry. There doesn't seem to be anybody else around at all. Do you know where the dining room is?" she turned to Nan with the question.

"I do," Laura answered. "It's up on Deck B. I looked in when I first came down to our cabin. Just follow me."

There was music as the girls hurried up the stairway and in through wide double doors. "Looks like a hotel dining room," Grace whispered as the chief steward came toward them.

"Your stubs, please?" he asked and then escorted them to a big round table in the center of the room, a table all their own, perfectly set for seven people.

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There was a low bowl of flowers in the center and a card which read,

"To Nan Sherwood,
S. S. Lincoln,
c/o Chief Steward.

"May each day of your journey be more exciting and more pleasant than the one past."

"Who is it from, Nan?" Even Dr. Prescott was eager to know. She had been sitting at the table waiting for the girls to appear.

Nan turned the card over. "Why, how nice!" she exclaimed, "and how thoughtful!" Then she looked up at Dr. Prescott and the girls waiting at their places. "It is from a famous movie actress," she said rather shyly, and her face was all aglow, "whom I met once in Chicago. She's a perfectly grand person." Nan was silent as the details of that meeting rushed through her mind, as she remembered how an unfortunate encounter with Linda had brought it about. As she sat down, she wondered idly whether the summer holidays that were before her would be as exciting as those winter holidays, spent in Chicago at Grace's home, had been.

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"What's happened to Elizabeth?" Dr. Prescott asked as she picked up her menu. "Not sea-sick already, I hope?"

"Far from it," Nan laughed. "Bess is too busy being an ocean traveller to even have time to think of such a thing. Really, Dr. Prescott," Nan leaned across the table and said earnestly, "you can't imagine what a kick we are getting out of all of this. It's like something girls do in story books."

"And the journey has just begun." Dr. Prescott smiled at her young charges. "It all brings my first trip—I was a little older than you are now—back to me most vividly. Now, what will we have to eat?"

"Oh-h-h, will you look at this menu," Laura spoke up now. "Not much like one of Mrs. Cupp's—" she stopped suddenly and blushed. It was hard to remember that Dr. Prescott, the head of Lakeview Hall, was present. Laura looked up over the top of her menu, ready to apologize. But Dr. Prescott seemed not to have heard. She seemed wholly occupied in choosing the mid-day meal. "What a brick she is!" Laura thought to herself as she, too, turned to the business at hand.

"Just one warning," Dr. Prescott cautioned before the girls turned to the table steward to give him their orders. "You eat about six times a day on the boat—" She paused as the girls gasped.

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"You have a big breakfast, bouillon and wafers in the middle of the morning, lunch, tea and cakes in the afternoon, dinner, and then before you go to bed, there are sandwiches and perhaps something warm to drink. If you are going to eat each time," she went on, "you'll have to be careful. Otherwise you'll be spending the hours in your stateroom. There," she finished, "that is my only lecture for the day. Now, do as you will."

So they chose—carefully, except Laura, who could not resist having both French pastry and ice-cream for desert. "Bess will never forgive me," she spoke up after she had ordered, "if she doesn't get here in time for this first meal on the boat."

"She ought to be here any time now," Amelia looked at her watch. "It doesn't take long to get your table card. You don't suppose they lock the dining room doors when everyone is in and that they won't let her through now?" she directed the question to Dr. Prescott.

"Why, I hardly think so." Dr. Prescott smiled. "People are coming and going all the time, you see."

"Bess will get here. Never fear." Nan spoke up confidently. "Let's eat. She told us not to wait." As the lunch progressed, however, from soup through a dainty salad and slices of cold chicken to dessert, Nan grew uneasy. [100]

"It is strange that she doesn't appear," she finally admitted, and was about to leave the dining room and go in search of her when Bess was ushered to the table.

"I'm sorry to be so late," Bess murmured as she sat down and unfolded her napkin, "but I couldn't help it." Her face was flushed. She looked confused and angry.

"Please don't say anything now," she begged as Nan was about to speak. "I'm afraid I'll make a scene, if you do, but if ever I see that girl again—"

She stopped short as the steward presented her with a menu.

CHAPTER XII

A SCORE TO EVEN UP

"Now tell us what happened!" The Lakeview girls were reclining in deck chairs on the sun deck in the late afternoon. Dr. Prescott was in her stateroom, making it more presentable, she said, so it was the first opportunity to talk over Bess' experience.

Bess raised herself up and tucked the steamer rug more securely around her legs. The April breezes were fresh, and rather chilly.

"It still makes me mad," she fumed as she yanked the rug around further. "You can't go anyplace, not even across the ocean, but what that girl turns up."

"What girl?" Laura feigned innocence.

"Linda Riggs, of course." Bess was utterly disgusted. "When I left you down in the corridor, I went straight up to the steward's window. I took my place in line with others, paying no attention to anyone. All I cared about was getting my ticket and getting down to the dining room. I moved along in line like the others and was just about ready to show the steward my passport, when someone gave me a shove. [102]

"Well, I wasn't going to stand for that, so I stood my ground."

"You mean," Nan interpreted, "that you shoved right back."

"Well, if you want to call a little push that, yes," Bess admitted. "But if I'd known who it was, I would have knocked her down."

"Why, Bess!" Nan was horrified and amused. "You little beast! I'm surprised at you."

"She's always getting us into trouble." Bess was indignant all over again. "There I was, minding my own business, thinking nice thoughts, and having quite a perfect time. No one was farther from my concern than she. And what happens? She walks right into me, pushes me aside, never begs my pardon, and presents her passport first."

"Then what did you do?" Laura asked. She was as amused as Nan.

"What could I do?" Bess inquired sharply. "I couldn't fight with her there in front of all those people. She had the advantage and knew it. She's the most unfair person I've ever come across. I hate her!"

"Was that all that happened?" Laura was reluctant to let the subject drop.

"All! Wasn't that enough?" Bess exploded again.

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"Well—yes." Laura admitted. "But don't you know anything more about her. Did you leave right away?"

"Of course not!" Bess answered resentfully. "How could I? I didn't even have my check yet for the table. There wasn't anything to do," she added regretfully, "except to take a place behind her in line and listen to her make her demands of the steward."

"Now we are getting someplace," Laura leaned forward as Bess let drop this piece of information. "What did you find out about her?"

Nan shook her head at this line of conversation. She did not approve of eavesdropping. But no one paid any attention to her.

"Oh, it makes me angry all over again to think of it," Bess jerked at the steamer rug again. "As I said before, she didn't pay any attention to me. I might have been just anyone."

"She gave the steward her passport, stepped back slightly, almost treading on my feet, and looked at him through a lorget—"

"You mean lorgnette," Laura interrupted, "but it doesn't matter. Go ahead."

"Lorgnette, then," Bess corrected. "Anyway, she looked at the steward through it as though he had been put there just to do as she ordered, as though he was a puppet that she could dangle as she wished.

[104]

"You know how she does it in that stuck-up way of hers. Why, if I had been him, I would have thrown the plans right in her face. But he was just as meek as I am before Mrs. Cupp, the fool!"

"Bess, do be careful," Nan put a restraining hand over her mouth, "other people will hear you."

Bess lowered her voice as she went on. "She told him that he had made a mistake, a perfectly dreadful mistake. Devastating, I think, was the word she used—whatever that means. At any rate, he had given her a stub for a table down here in Tourist Class."

"And, my dears, Linda Riggs," Bess mimicked Linda's voice as she continued, "the daughter of the great railway magnate, never has anything but the best, the very best, when she travels."

At this Nan hooted. She was remembering her own encounter with Linda at the travel agent's a few weeks previously.

"And then—" Laura wanted more about this exciting encounter.

"Then he begged her pardon. Can you imagine that?" Bess looked at her friends for an answer. There was none. "Gave her a new stub, asked her if there was anything else he could do for her, and all but personally escorted her back to First Class.

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"She didn't even thank him for his trouble. She just turned, looked some of the people up and down as though they were curiosities in a zoo, and swept over to the elevator."

"What? She didn't walk on you again," Laura was purposely baiting Bess now.

"I should say not!" Bess answered emphatically. "Before she turned, I stepped way back so that there wasn't any more danger of that."

"Good for you, Bess," Rhoda now spoke up for the first time.

"It seems to me," Nan grinned impishly as she thought about it, "That one or two of us made a New Year's resolution about Linda Riggs. Remember Bess?"

"Remember, why should I remember?" Bess asked. "I never in all this wide world made a resolution about Linda, unless it was to get even with her for the times she has embarrassed us."

"Oh, but Bess," Nan pursued her train of thought, "You remember how, after the New Year's Eve party at Grace's, we went up to our room and made resolutions?"

"You did." Bess corrected her abruptly and very positively. "You and Grace said that for one month you would be nice to Linda, no matter what happened. Then Linda never did come back to school, so it didn't count."

[106]

"Anyway," Nan attempted to dismiss the unpleasant subject, "There's no reason why she should bother us. She's up in First Class."

"Yes, and we're down here in Tourist." It was a sore point with Bess, who was always irritated when Linda was able to show her superiority in money matters. Bess wanted most intensely to be able to look down on Linda. She wanted to have something so much better than Linda that the arrogant girl would envy her.

"Even so," Nan resolved as she rose from her deck chair, "I'm not going to let her spoil my trip. Come," she half coaxed, "Come, Bess, let's all take a turn about deck."

"Yes, let's," Grace encouraged, "I'd like to walk once, clear around the boat."

"But you can't," Laura supplied the information, as she looked at Bess, "You can walk only so far and then there's a gate that separates you from first class."

"Please, forget it!" Nan looked reprovingly at Laura. "Come with me," she invited again. "I know a place where you can stoop under some rigging and come out on a little part of the deck that's almost like a balcony with the ocean below it and nothing but the sky above."

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"And I know a place," Rhoda contributed, "where you can get way up front, so that you are at the prow of the boat. When you stand there, you feel as though you yourself are cutting through the water."

"A mermaid at large." Laura laughed. "I know that place, too. I found it right after lunch and thought, until now, that it was my private property."

"But I know a place that's even better than that," Grace boasted. "It's a large room with portholes all along both ends. There are tables in it—"

"And tea and cakes for all who come," Laura finished. "Let's go there."

They went, but neither tea nor cakes could make Bess forget that she had a score to even up with Linda.

CHAPTER XIII

[108]

FRIENDS ABOARD SHIP

"Hello, down there!" Nan stretched her head over the edge of her berth and looked down to the bunk below where Bess was still sleeping. "Hello, I say," she repeated a little louder when the first call brought no response. Then she waited. She could feel the vibration of the great ship as it forged ahead and hear faintly the steady throb of its engines. It was nice to be getting someplace, she thought, even while you were asleep.

"Hello!" Nan called again. "You awake?"

Bess rubbed her eyes and leaned out so she could see Nan above. "Of course I am," she declared. "How long have you been awake?"

"Oh, for hours and hours," Nan responded. "I heard the first gong for breakfast and then the second. After that I went back to sleep."

"You didn't either!" Bess was really awake now. "But if you did," she continued half hopefully, "it's too late to get breakfast in the dining-room, so we'll just have to ring that bell over there by the door and ask the stewardess to bring our breakfast to the cabin. Just think of being able to order anything you want and having it brought to you on a big tray!"

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Bess stretched luxuriously and then turned over on her side. "You know," she said, "I feel like a movie queen. My pajamas are of satin and fine lace. My robe is long and trailing with marabou around the neck. These bed covers are made of silk and down, and your bunk up there is not really a bunk. It's the canopy of my bed."

Nan looked over the side. "I beg your pardon?" she asked as though she hadn't heard.

Bess started to repeat, "Your bunk is the canopy"—but didn't finish, for Nan was up and on her way down the ladder which stretched from the floor to her upper berth.

"I can't sleep any longer on this canopy," she laughed. "Moreover, I'm starved and a tray would never hold all I'm going to eat this morning. You may stay here, my movie queen, and eat daintily from a tray while your back is propped comfortably against pillows. I want bacon and eggs," she finished, as she opened the wardrobe at the end of the berths and took out a skirt and bright sweater.

"You may spend your morning in the cabin," she went on, washing and dressing the while, "but I'm going out on the deck and see what's doing." She combed her hair before the mirror over the washstands and sat down at a small dressing table while she tied a three-cornered scarf around her head. With a small hand mirror, she looked at it from all sides, and then pulled a wisp of hair out at the front and looked again. Satisfied, she put the mirror down, blew a kiss to her lazy chum, and was off.

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Not waiting for the elevator, she walked up the stairs, opened a door, and stepped out. The morning sun was already high above the horizon, and the deck was bright with its light. Nan squinted her eyes. Then, as she became accustomed to the dazzle and opened them wide, she saw approaching her a merry looking, pleasant person, the ship's hostess.

"You are—" the stranger paused and smiled at Nan.

"Nan Sherwood." With this Nan was introduced to a group of young people her own age.

First, there was Hetty Warren, a young English girl whom Nan liked right away. She had blond hair and blue eyes and a complexion even fairer than that of most English girls. She had, she told Nan a little wistfully, just left her parents in Washington, where her father was a member of the English Embassy. Her grandmother was taking her back to London to witness an event which she said, no grandchild of hers would ever miss, the crowning of the new King and Queen. [111]

Then, there was Jeanie MacFarland, a brown-eyed Scotch lass whose father, she said proudly, was on the Edinburgh committee to buy a gift for the king. And Maureen O'Grady, Irish as her name, headed first for home and then for London. Her mother was helping to make the lace for the Queen's train.

Oh, they all had stories, these girls. One had lived once in far away India, in Bombay. Another, in the British colony in Shanghai. The father of one was a caretaker at the King's favorite castle and the brother of another, a lieutenant in His Majesty's Fleet stationed at Gibraltar.

They were coming from all corners of the world, Nan found, to be in England in May, to see the King and Queen parade in a golden coach from Buckingham Palace to Westminster Cathedral, to attend the balls and the garden parties and the Colonial fairs, to see the King review the British fleet at Spithead and hear the crowds cheer the pretty little princess at her party for the English school children. Everyone, young and old, Hetty's grandmother said, was to have a part in the joyous week.

School children throughout the Empire were to have seven days of vacation. "Boy Scouts from Australia and India and British South Africa are even now," she told Nan, "coming on boats to act as a special guard for the little prince. Others, in England and Scotland have charge of the tremendously big bonfires that will be lighted on each hilltop the night after the king and queen are crowned. These beacon fires will proclaim to everyone that a new King and Queen have come to the throne. And, with the lighting of the fires, the people all over the British Empire will sing 'God Save the King.'" [112]

"Yes, and the Girl Scouts," Hetty went on, "are having a big party in the gardens of Buckingham Palace. The little princess will be there and the Queen too. A thousand poor children have been invited and the princess has a gift for each one. They have a gift for the princess too, and one for the Queen. Oh, I can hardly wait until the big day arrives."

"And," Jeanie contributed, "All over Scotland, the wee lassies and laddies have each given a tuppence piece to their school teachers. When the King and Queen come to Edinburgh after the golden crowns have been put on their heads, all this money will be put in a golden bag and presented to the Queen. Her Majesty will use it to help the children whose fathers were killed in the wars. An orphan from one of Her Majesty's orphanages will present it at a banquet which the Lord Mayor will give." [113]

"Will you be there?" Nan was wide-eyed,

"If I only could." Jeanie's voice was full of longing.

"If we only could," Hetty echoed the statement and included everybody.

"But it's not for the likes of us," Maureen shook her head as everyone fell silent. "It's for the great ladies, they who live up in the castles on the hills and in the palaces in the cities. They were born to such things. No, it's not for the likes of us," she repeated.

"Don't, Maureen," Hetty said earnestly. "Don't say that. Don't say it isn't for the likes of us!"

Hetty's grandmother smiled at the seriousness of her grand-daughter. "Hetty is remembering," she said, "the time the Queen stopped at our country cottage."

"Were you there?" The girls all looked at Hetty.

"No, it was before she was born," the bright-eyed old lady went on. "It was back in the days of the good Queen Victoria before people drove around in gasoline buggies." She stopped as though she had finished, but Nan saw a twinkle in her eye. [114]

"Please go on," she begged. "Please tell us all about it."

"Now, Grandmother," Hetty laughed, "you know you want to."

The old lady ruffled her grand-daughter's hair playfully, as she continued, "We were sitting in the kitchen, my mother and I. She, like the model housewife she was, God bless her soul, was scouring pots and pans and giving me a few instructions on the proper behavior of a young lady.

"Mind what I say about your curiosity," she was telling me, when a crash outside interrupted. She dropped everything, making such a clatter as I've never heard since and nearly fell over me in her anxiety to get to the window.

"Glory be!" I heard her exclaim and ran after her. There, in front of the house a big coach had broken down. Two coachmen had climbed down from their high seats and were helping three ladies out the door and up the path to our house.

"My mother whisked off her blue checked apron, smoothed down her hair and opened the door. I stood back—afrighted, as the three grand ladies came into the front parlor. Then I disappeared back into the kitchen. Mother made tea and gave them shortbread and was so a-flutter herself that she broke one of her company dishes.

"They wanted to pay for it, but she wouldn't let them. She said it was nothing at all. After they went, I saw her wiping a tear out of her eye and she scoured the pans harder than she ever scoured them before. That night she told my father that she was never going to pay any attention to any big coaches again. [115]

"But weeks later when another big coach stopped in front of the house, she was at the door again. This time a man came and left a big box. Mother said it wasn't for her, but he insisted it was. Finally, she accepted it, and he had hardly driven away, before she and I were opening it." The old lady paused here to enjoy the eager faces of the young girls around her. Then she cleared her throat and went on.

"Inside we found a dozen dainty cups and saucers and a card. Our visitors had been two princesses and Her Majesty, Queen Victoria!"

"And great-grandmother always said," Hetty added, "that the great Queen herself painted the cups. So, Maureen," she ended triumphantly, "you don't know, really, what there is for the likes of us."

"No, you don't," her grandmother agreed, "so make the most of today. Now, begone with you all, and gather up the news of the ship and bring it all back to me. There are many strange people aboard," she ended, closing her eyes and so dismissing the girls.

CHAPTER XIV

A STORM AT SEA

"How strange the sky looks!" Nan exclaimed. She and her Lakeview Hall companions were standing on deck watching the sun drop below the horizon. [116]

"How cold!" Grace added, as she pulled her coat around her, held it in place with her hand, and then huddled closer to Nan as if for protection.

"A-a-and the wind!" Rhoda supplied, with difficulty. "It's l-l-lashing at me so that I can't—get—my breath."

"Nor—me—either." Amelia gasped. "I—I—I guess the Captain was right after all. He said, there was going to be a heavy gale tonight. Come, let's go in."

"Oh, stay just a minute longer," Nan pleaded. "I like to see it roll. Look, see how the fish are jumping the waves! They are coming in higher and higher all the time. I wonder how this boat behaves when there is a real storm at sea."

"One of the sailors told me this morning," Laura volunteered, "that 'she's a trusty old tub', if that will comfort you any." [117]

"Oh, I don't need comforting," Nan replied. "I'm not afraid."

"You mean to say you wouldn't be afraid in a storm?" Grace asked incredulously.

"Of course not." Nan answered. "Would you?"

"I'll tell you the answer to that later," Grace threw over her shoulder as she made for the doors to go in. "Just now I'd rather watch this from the windows in the lounge where it's warm."

"We'll be in, in a second," Amelia called after her, "Save a place for us. Have you people seen the ship's log?" She went on, turning to Nan. "It's posted inside, near the elevators. There is a map of the United States, the Atlantic Ocean, and Europe with the course of our voyage marked in little lines on it. Each day the purser sticks a flag, representing our ship on this line, so that it shows where we are and how far we have traveled during the day. Underneath, there is a little weather chart telling how fast the wind is going, what the temperature is, whether or not the sea is rolling, and what might be expected for the next twenty-four hours."

"What does it say for today," Nan asked.

"The temperature is dropping—"

"We know that," Laura interrupted. "What else does it say?"

"That the sea is slightly rolling." [118]

"We can feel that," Laura put in again, for the ship was rolling with the waves.

"That we are headed into a storm. There, Miss Smarty, you didn't know that," Amelia laughed.

"Did too," Laura retorted. "My creaking bones told me. Now, I'm going in before I get rheumatism." So saying, she followed Grace. The others, except Nan, whom not even Bess could persuade to come in as yet, followed her.

Alone on the dark deck, Nan stood for a while at the rail, watching the white foam of the waves, listening to the roar of the wind, and glancing now and then at the clouds, swiftly gathering overhead. Save for a pale moon, the only light was the ship's beacon which every few seconds, passed in its circle, over Nan's head.

Once, Nan was tempted to follow her friends. She could hear voices, singing and laughter, and the sound of a piano inside. She even started toward the door, but then a dark passageway at her right tempted her and she went exploring.

Hugging the side of the boat closely, she followed around through the passageway between the ship's riggings, and then on down the deck until she came to the barrier between first and second class that Laura had taunted Bess about. She examined it carefully. It was impossible to get by. There was no moving it. She tried sliding it and pushing it. It wouldn't budge.

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She turned and retraced her steps, going back to some narrow iron stairs that went up. The "Keep Off" sign, which she couldn't read in the dark, she shoved aside. She was determined now to make a complete circle of the boat. She went up the stairs, around another deck, and down some steps again.

This was becoming a real adventure and Nan was enjoying every minute of it. If her conscience troubled her at all, she paid no heed. Others on the boat had told her of going out of bounds, and she could see no real harm in it.

She walked around deckchairs piled high against the side of the boat, caught a glimpse of some phosphorescent fish in the ocean, and walked over to the rail. How pretty they looked in the deep black of the water! She stood for a while watching the colors at play and then went on. It was almost as though she was motivated by some force outside herself.

She heard no sounds from people in the boat now, for she had passed the lounges and the recreation rooms. She felt almost alone on the boat, and laughed a little to herself as she thought how timid Grace would be in such a situation. However, Nan liked it.

It brought back to her mind nights at Pine Camp. How far away all that seemed now! How far away it was! Northern Michigan was in another world. The people there, Aunt Kate, Injun Pete, Toby Vanderwiller, and Gedney Raffer, all of them, were like people she had dreamed about. She shook herself impatiently, driving away some eerie thoughts, and then went on until she came to the very back of the vessel, the stern.

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Here she stopped, and looked back over the ocean which the boat was putting behind it. The wake, the white foamy path of the boat stretched out as far as she could see. The waters, which made it, rolled aside in big white waves leaving the center black and deep.

How much colder it was getting! And how much rougher! Nan clung to the rail, and held her head high as the wind whipped her hair back so that it stung the sides of her cheeks. She watched the waves coming, each one higher than the last and angrier. She counted them, "One, two, three," someone had told her once that the seventh was always the highest, "four, five." She could feel the spray on her face and the air was full of mist. "Six, seven—why the seventh wasn't any bigger than any of the rest! And—eight." It was the eighth that was the biggest of all! It climbed up the boat, over the rail, and across the deck, taking Nan off her feet!

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She lost her balance completely, wrenched her arm as she fell, and was afraid for a second that she would go over with the wash of the wave. But she held on, and as the boat righted itself after the inundation, Nan rose to her feet, half dazed.

She rubbed her hair out of her eyes, winced with the pain in her arm, and being very careful now, started toward the door. She stopped short.

Was that a cry she had heard? She raised her head, listening attentively for some sound other than the roaring of the waves. There wasn't any. She must have imagined it. She went on across the deck, now shiny after its bath with sea water. There was something white at her feet. She stooped to pick it up—a handkerchief. Again, she thought she heard a low moan and stopped dead still.

Yes, there it was again. Nan hesitated, deciding whether to investigate herself or call for help. The crash of the waves drowned out everything and decided Nan. She could hear them coming, one, two—what direction had the sound come from?—three, four, five. There it was again, over at her right. She started toward it and lost her balance, grabbed hold of a flagpole, and then crept forward. Six—seven—it was the seventh that was the biggest this time, but before it had struck with its full force Nan's hand reached out and grabbed the coat of someone lying on the deck. With her other, as the wave struck, she held fast to the pole.

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There it was, the wave! It came up and over the two, tugged at them, first their hips, and then their feet, and finally reluctantly, went on over the side without them.

Nan screamed, again and again. The form at her hand seemed to have no life. There was no answer to her call. She, herself, was weaker, much weaker than she thought.

She got up slowly and painfully and tried to pull her burden after her. She couldn't budge it. She could hear, as from some far off land, the waves coming again. She shook her head, aware now that her senses had been dulled. Now, she could count them again, one, two—the second one splashed lightly over the deck. They were getting higher all the time. Three, four—Nan reached down with her strained arm, put it under the limp form, and half dragged, half carried it to the door, a partial shelter, as the fifth wave swept like a fury over the deck.

Nan reached up to open the door. It was locked. In a frenzy, she beat upon it. It was double locked against the storm! She knocked it again, screamed, and then, for the first time in her life, fainted dead away.

CHAPTER XV

[123]

IN THE SHIP'S HOSPITAL

"I hope she dies of pneumonia!" Bess was frankly crying as she walked down the corridor toward the ship's hospital. "I'd like nothing better than to witness a funeral at sea, if it was Linda Riggs'," she stated most emphatically, and then wiped her eyes.

"She's a cat, that's what she is or she would have died long ago. Remember," she recalled, "when we planned that surprise party on Nan back in Lakeview and that black cat came into the room. That was the soul of Linda Riggs," Bess vowed. "She's a cat and a witch."

Grace looked impressed, but Laura snickered.

"See here, Bess," Rhoda stopped and put a restraining hand on Bess's arm. "You're not going into that hospital room and talk like that before Nan. She needs rest and quiet. The doctor said so. Now, are you going to curb your anger, or aren't you?"

"Oh, I will," Bess answered. "Just give me a couple of seconds to cool off. Every time I think of Nan risking her life to save that good-for-nothing, it riles me clear through. Nan's so good to everyone, and Linda, well, she tramps all over everybody."

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"There, Bess, take it easy," Laura for once tried to placate the girl. "We won't have any more trouble from her this trip. The nurse told me Linda has to stay in bed until the boat docks. If Nan is careful, she'll be down in her own cabin tomorrow."

"So remember, Bess," Amelia implored, "not to say anything about Linda or about that other either."

"What other?" Bess asked, and then remembered. "Oh, you mean the cabin?" she supplied the answer herself.

"Yes, just keep still about everything unpleasant," Rhoda warned. "We want Nan out of here as soon as possible." With this, she pushed open the white door of the ship's hospital and a nurse came forward.

"You've come to see Miss Sherwood," she smiled.

"Yes," Rhoda was spokesman for the group. "Is it all right for us all to go in together?"

The nurse looked doubtful a moment, noting the marks of tears that were still on Bess's cheeks. Bess felt her glance and blushed. "Oh, I'm all right now," she reassured the nurse. "I promise to be good," and she smiled so winningly that the nurse gave in.

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"Well, you may go in," she said, as she looked professionally at her watch, "for half an hour. But remember, you are not to disturb the patient." With this she opened the door to a private room, and the girls went in.

There, lying in a white hospital bed, looking pale and very wan, was Nan. She smiled at their entrance. "I'm all right," she said. "Don't look so scared. Come in and sit down."

They did, and it was a few seconds, a few awkward seconds, before anyone could think of anything to say. Twice Bess opened her mouth to speak, but when her friends looked at her warningly, she closed it again.

Finally, Rhoda found her voice. "Why, Nan," she asked, and her glance, like that of the other girls was riveted on a big bouquet of red roses, "where in the world did you get those flowers?"

The color came back into Nan's cheeks. "Can't you guess?" She grinned rather defiantly at them.

"They aren't from anyone on the boat."

"But how could anyone on shore know?" Bess already had her suspicions as to the person.

"And if he did," Grace was very positive about the "He," "How could He send them?"

"Come, Nan, spill it," Laura was as curious as the rest. "Heroines can't have secrets, you know. Their lives are public property." [126]

"That's just what I am afraid of." Nan nodded from her place among the pillows. "However, I couldn't keep it to myself if I wanted to. They're from Walter!"

"But how—" Bess just couldn't wait.

"He sent them from shore when the boat was in dock and asked the steward to keep them until we were in mid-ocean. They brought them up here this morning and when I opened my eyes—there they were." Nan's eyes were shining and her cheeks were almost as red as the roses.

"They are just gorgeous," Rhoda stooped over to smell them, "so red, and fragrant, and fresh."

"Aren't they though?" Nan reached out and touched them softly. "But tell me now," she looked up. "What's new?"

"You should know," Laura answered. "You are the news around here. Everyone's talking about you. There are at least a dozen different versions of what happened last night making the rounds of this ship. One has it that Linda actually went over the side of the boat and that you leaped in and saved her from drowning. Then you caught hold of a rope, and a sailor, out to see that everything was shipshape, heard your cries, and hauled the two of you in." [127]

"Another," Amelia said further, as Nan laughed, "has you in a fight with Linda. Oh, I mean," she corrected herself when Nan looked worried, "that Linda is supposed to have become so frightened that she didn't know what she was doing. She tore at your hair and scratched you. (Here Nan ran her hand over her face. It was perfectly whole.) Finally, when you realized that she was beyond reason, you are supposed to have hit her over the head so hard that you knocked her out!"

"And another—" Laura began.

"Oh, don't tell me any more," Nan shook her head. "I don't know how I'm ever going to go out of here and face all those people. It scares me to think of it."

"You needn't worry, Nan," Rhoda took her friend's hand in hers. "We'll all rally round. Everybody, really, is just being grand. I didn't know there were so many nice people in the world."

"Isn't it so?" Nan forgot her embarrassment. "Look at that pile of cards and notes and books and magazines. Why, I believe all the passengers on the ship have stopped in to ask about me and one little boy"—she stopped and giggled before she went on—"wanted my autograph! Can you imagine anything so silly? But tell me, what did happen? I fainted, didn't I? I don't remember a thing after I found those doors were locked." [128]

"Oh, Nan," Bess couldn't restrain herself any longer. "Maybe you were there for hours, we don't know. We only know this: after we left you out there on deck we all went into the lounge and talked and played games for a long time."

"We wondered where you were, didn't we?" She looked at the others for confirmation. They nodded their heads as Bess went on, "but we thought that you were probably off somewhere with that English girl, what is her name?"

"You mean Hetty Warren?" Nan supplied.

"Yes, that's it. Well, we thought you were with her and her grandmother until about ten o'clock when we went down to the cabin and met Hetty. She was bringing a travel book about England to you. She said she hadn't seen you all evening."

"We were worried then, and she went with us to see whether you were with either Jeanie or Maureen. They said they hadn't seen you, either. We didn't know what to do then, so finally we went to Dr. Beulah. She had been in her cabin all evening, because she wasn't feeling very well. She called a steward and he said he would hunt you up. He was gone for hours, while we sat in her cabin and talked and wondered and worried." [129]

"When he finally came back, he didn't have any news! Dr. Beulah got up and dressed then and called the Captain. He told us all to come up to his office. We went at once, and he asked a million questions about you. Then he got busy on the phone and started a boat-wide search."

"It wasn't any time at all after that when they called Dr. Beulah and told her to come to the hospital right away." Here Bess started to cry again, for she remembered so vividly how frightened they had all been at that call.

"Oh, Bess," It was Nan speaking. "Come here, I'm so sorry I caused you all that trouble."

"Anyway," Bess grinned through her tears. "Dr. Beulah went up and the first person she saw there was Linda Riggs. I guess she was pretty disgusted herself for once, though she would never

say it. Then the nurse took her in to see you.”

“Oh, I remember from then on,” Nan continued. “I came to when they were carrying me here, so that when Dr. Beulah came up I knew what it was all about. I was only scared for fear she would give me the scolding I deserved for going off that way by myself. But she didn’t. She just took me in her arms and kissed me and then went off and talked to the nurse and doctor. I don’t know what she said or did to them, but they have been fluttering around me all the time as though I was a Royal Princess.”

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“Wait until you get up!” Laura exclaimed. “Then you’ll find out who you are.” She looked both merry and mysterious as she said this last. Nan looked questioningly at her.

But there was no opportunity for any more talk. The nurse came in, felt Nan’s pulse and smiled at the girls.

“I’m sorry,” she said, nodding toward the door. So they got up and left, leaving Nan looking wistfully after them.

CHAPTER XVI

[131]

THE HUNCH-BACK AGAIN

“But this isn’t where our cabin is!” Nan exclaimed the next morning as Bess and Rhoda, one on each side of her, walked her slowly from the hospital back to the stateroom.

“Yes, it is, Nan,” Rhoda maintained.

“But ours was number 648. It was an outside cabin.” Nan continued to protest. “Or have I gone completely batty?”

“I wouldn’t say that,” Rhoda teased, “though you do do some pretty strange things sometimes. However, this is your cabin now and it’s not an outside one. There just wasn’t another outside one free.”

“But why did I need another? What was wrong with the one I had? What happened? Please tell me,” she pleaded. The questions tumbled one after another out of Nan’s mouth, for she was impatient, still somewhat shaken after her frightening experience during the storm.

“Oh, Nan, it’s nothing at all,” Bess comforted. “That is, I hope it isn’t, because it’s all my fault,” she added very contritely. “It was so warm here the night of the storm that I opened the porthole when I came down to leave my heavy coat. Amelia called me and told me to hurry and, rattle-brained as I am, I ran after her completely forgetting about the storm and the porthole. You can guess what happened. One of those big waves that nearly did away with you plopped in and made a miniature lake.”

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“Was anything ruined?” Nan asked.

“Nothing, except my own silk dress. Remember, I threw it down in disgust that afternoon because the snaps had been pulled off the sleeves. Well, you should see it now. It’s a complete wreck. Serves me right to have to get along without it. I only hope you don’t feel too disappointed in the new cabin.” Bess looked genuinely troubled.

“Don’t worry,” Nan reassured her friend. “I don’t care what kind of a cabin I have,” she said lightly, for such things really didn’t matter to her.

But the words were hardly out of her mouth when Bess pushed the door open and revealed to Nan a big stateroom with twin beds, a chaise longue, two big easy chairs, dainty dressing tables, a large wardrobe, and a little private sitting room!

Nan gasped. “This isn’t ours,” she exclaimed incredulously.

Rhoda and Bess looked from Nan to the stateroom and back again to Nan. “It is,” they cried. “It’s yours.”

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Nan stepped into the room and looked around. The sitting room had big windows overlooking the deck and the sea. There were books and magazines, a victrola, comfortable chairs and a rug. Over it all the morning sun was streaming.

“But why?” Nan’s eyes were wide open in amazement.

“Captain’s orders,” Rhoda answered.

“Why?” Nan persisted.

"I told you why," Bess smiled. "It's because our cabin was inundated by the recent flood."

"I still don't believe that's the truth," Nan asserted. "But I love this place just the same."

"Do we walk right in?" It was Laura at the door. "Or do we have to send cards first?"

"Oh, Laura!" Nan exclaimed. "Come here. Have you seen this?" She moved the dial of a small radio.

"Have I seen that? Why, darling, I moved your things in," Laura laughed. "And what's more, I was here when the Captain came."

"The Captain!" They all exclaimed at once.

"Yes, he came down in all his glory. He has a stern looking face complete with a Vandyke beard, and he wore a uniform with epaulettes and much fancy braid. He carried a cap in his hand. He came 'to see if Miss Sherwood's stateroom was satisfactory.'" Laura tried to clip the sentence off as the Captain had. [134]

"You should hear his accent!" she exclaimed. "It's Oxford or Cambridge or something equally as exclusive, I'm sure. I'm quite in love with the man! He's perfectly darling!" she finished.

"I beg your pardon." The girls jumped and looked up, startled, for it was a man's voice. They recognized at once the uniform, the cap, and the Vandyke beard. It was the Captain! He must have heard them!

He looked sternly down on their confusion. "Miss Sherwood?"

"Yes, Captain." Nan answered meekly and started to get up.

"No, no," he motioned her to remain seated.

Nan sat down again. The voice was one that was accustomed to being obeyed.

"I merely wanted to make certain that everything was satisfactory." He looked critically about the room.

"Oh, it is! It is!" Nan exclaimed. "It's just perfect!" Not even her confusion could keep the note of sincerity out of her voice.

The Captain seemed preoccupied with his inspection of the stateroom. "Your baggage has been moved." It was more a statement than a question. "You are feeling—well." [135]

"Yes, thank you, sir," Nan hastened to reply. Had she felt otherwise she wouldn't have dared to admit it in the face of his assurance.

"You want for nothing?"

"No—no, sir. Nothing at all." Nan was annoyed at her own inability to be at ease. If only he had come at another time!

Then his glance seemed to take in Laura for the first time.

"And Miss Polk, I trust that you are comfortable too." Again, it was a statement and Laura gulped, not knowing whether she was supposed to answer or not.

"I thank you, ladies." With this he turned and went out.

Even before his measured tread was entirely out of earshot, Laura was lamenting. "If only I had kept my mouth shut!" she exclaimed. "'Oxford or Cambridge accent.'" She sounded completely disgusted. "'I'm in love with the man! He's perfectly darling.' And then he walks in on me! What can I do? You can't walk up to a man and apologize for anything like that." She looked hopelessly at her friends.

Nan was laughing so hard she was holding both her sides and so was Bess. Rhoda was stuffing a handkerchief into her mouth. "Oh, I never saw anything so funny in my life," she said. [136]

"Funny!" Laura was indignant. "I'd like to know what was funny about that! Funny!" she muttered.

"Oh, Laura," Nan was wiping the tears out of her eyes. "If you could have seen the expression on your face when he asked whether you were comfortable, you would laugh too."

Laura grinned with them at this. "The old meany," she said. "He heard every word of what I said, and he was just rubbing it in. And I thought he was a chivalrous old duck! I wish he would come back now. I'd tell him what was what."

"Don't, don't say that." Rhoda raised a protesting hand. "You'll meet him soon enough as it is."

"Oh, no, I won't," Laura denied. "I'm not going to stir out of my cabin from now until the time the boat docks. I just couldn't face that man again." She turned as though to leave, but stopped as Grace came into the room.

"What man?" Grace asked. "Did you see him too?" Her face was pale and scared looking.

"What are you talking about?" Rhoda rushed over and closed the door behind Grace.

"That man, that red-headed hunchback. Oh, the one that went through Nan's bags. Surely, you haven't forgotten him. Did you see him, too?" She directed the question at Laura again.

"Why, Gracie, no, I haven't seen him." Laura was very serious now. "Have you?"

"Oh, yes." Grace was pale and frightened. "He's out there. I think he followed me down the hall." She was almost hysterical.

Laura moved toward the door and reached out as if to open it.

"Don't do that!" Grace's voice was a command. "He followed me. I tell you he followed me!" She almost shrieked the last.

Nan got up, went over to the girl, and put a reassuring arm around her. "Grace, please," she begged. "Get hold of yourself. You'll be making us all panicky. There, now, calm down." She wiped the girl's eyes.

"Oh, you're treating me like a baby!" Grace shook herself out of Nan's arms. "I tell you—" She paused and, for a second, the room was in complete silence.

Through it came the sound of a knock at the door. The girls looked questioningly at one another, but no one moved. Then, they heard it again, faintly.

Laura stirred. "I'm going to open it," she whispered. Nan nodded her head. But before Laura could, they heard Amelia's voice. Everyone breathed a sigh of relief.

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Nan herself walked to the door and threw it wide open. "Come in, Amelia," she said, and then closed the door after her friend.

"What's up?" Amelia sensed the tenseness in the room right away.

"Did you see anyone at all in the corridor?"

Nan answered the question with another.

"Why, no." Amelia looked puzzled. "No one, that is, except the stewardess. She's sitting out there on a stool, knitting."

"You didn't see the red-headed hunchback?" Grace couldn't believe it. "You didn't see him standing right out there watching this room?"

"Are you sure, Amelia," Nan asked the question, "that you didn't see anyone besides the stewardess?"

"Positive," she answered. "I know, because as I came down the corridor I looked for people."

"Why?" Nan questioned her again.

"Say, what is this?" Amelia asked. "The third degree or something? I looked simply because I've been wondering what kind of people lived down in this end of heaven. Evidently they are all queer." She looked significantly at the people around her.

"Well, you'd be queer, too," Grace asserted, "if you'd seen and heard what I did. I was coming down the corridor alone thinking of Nan and the new cabin when I heard someone say in a mean rasping voice, 'Well, you find out the answer pretty soon, or you'll never live to see Scotland again.'"

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"I was scared and would have run, but the cabin door opened. As it did, I ducked into another and waited. Oh, it seemed as though I was there for hours in some strange person's cabin, afraid to stay and afraid to go. Finally, I couldn't stand it any longer, so I opened the door quietly and looked out. There was no one in sight. I tiptoed down the corridor, and was just about to come in here, when I saw that awful looking hunchback standing out there.

"I'm sure he was watching this cabin. I would have turned and run or gone right past him, but I saw his eyes." Grace shuddered.

"They're terrible eyes. I couldn't go on. I had to come in here." Grace looked up at Nan as though asking for approval for what she had done.

"Of course you did, Grace," Nan said quietly and soothingly. "Of course, you had to come in. But tell me," she questioned further. "Why did you say he followed you?"

"Did I say that?" Grace looked puzzled.

They all nodded.

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"Oh, I don't know," Grace shook herself as though she had difficulty in remembering clearly. "I guess I was just afraid he was, and I knew that his eyes were on me. Why should he watch this cabin?" She looked up at Nan. The others followed her glance. They too felt, somehow, that Nan knew the answer.

Nan sat silently considering.

Should she tell them what she knew or shouldn't she? Could she trust them? She looked around at their faces, at Rhoda's and Amelia's, and was tempted to tell. Both of these girls seemed to be

calm in all the excitement. "They might be able to offer some help if needed," Nan thought. Then she heard Grace stifle a sob and saw again how frightened and worried the girl looked. She hesitated. She looked up at Bess, her closest friend, and was tempted again.

There was a noise outside. Bess jumped nervously. She was scared, too. Then Laura spoke, and Nan gave up all thought of revealing, at the present at least, what little she knew about the things that were happening.

CHAPTER XVII

[141]

NAN PUZZLES OVER HER SECRET

"I wonder if your hunchback is the mysterious passenger everyone is talking about," Laura said thoughtfully, when she was convinced that Nan was not going to speak.

"I never thought of that!" This from Rhoda. "But it all fits together perfectly. They say he never appears at the table for his meals and that he has his own servants to take care of him."

"Yes," Bess contributed, "a steward told the stewardess and the stewardess told me that no one of the ship's crew has been in that cabin since the boat left dock."

"It must have been the same stewardess," Laura picked up the story, "who told me that nothing has gone right in this end of the ship since he came in. She says there has been trouble, trouble all the while. She's a superstitious old soul. She thinks he has cast a spell over everything around here." Laura's voice was a half whisper as she imparted her information.

"Well, you'd think so too, if you had seen him," Grace whispered too. "I don't see why in the world they ever let him get a passport and get on the ship."

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"Oh, I heard somebody say today," Amelia supplied, as Grace's statement recalled the conversation to her mind, "that he came up the gang-plank in New York behind the queerest looking outfit he'd ever seen in all the times he has crossed the ocean."

"He said the man was all swathed up to the eyes in an overcoat and a heavy scarf of Scotch plaid. His collar was turned up and his cap pulled down so that none of his face was visible. He said nothing to anyone, refused to let a porter take a small black valise he was carrying, and went directly to his cabin."

"The man who was telling the story said his stateroom is close by, but that he has never once met him in the halls. However, he did say, that from time to time he has heard someone in that cabin speak in a strong Scotch burr, ordering a servant around in no uncertain terms."

"Did the man that you heard," she looked at Grace, "speak like that?"

"Amelia, I didn't notice what kind of an accent he used!" Grace sounded almost impatient. "I was too frightened to notice anything like that. I only know what I've told you already."

"Did the man who came looking for me that first day we came on the boat speak like that?" Nan hardly dared to ask the question. She wanted information, but she didn't want to give any.

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For a moment the girls sat thinking. Then Laura spoke up. "You would think that we would have noticed that," she said, "but I can't honestly say I did. It was all such a surprise and we were so excited anyway that I only noticed what he looked like."

"Well, he didn't say very much," Rhoda added. "Remember. He spent most of his time looking around the room and at us as though he wanted to be sure to remember us always. Ooh, I don't like to think about it."

"Nor I either," Bess was most emphatic. "I haven't seen him at all, and still I don't like to think about it. It's perfectly horrid to have him bothering us at all, and if he ever follows me, I'm going to scream so loud that everybody on this boat will come running. He has no business at all annoying us this way. We haven't done anything to him."

"Nan didn't want his old baggage. It wasn't her fault that it was brought to our cabin. Why, I'll bet he did it himself or ordered that servant of his to do it. What for, I don't know, but if he's queer, there is no accounting for what he does. I wish they would lock him up or dump him overboard or something. We just get rid of Linda and then he comes here to annoy us. Why can't people leave us alone?" Bess was thoroughly incensed. "We only have a couple of more days on boat—"

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"Oh, come let's forget it all," Nan interrupted. She was more than anxious to put the problem aside for the time being. "Let's talk of something else. Or even better than that, let's go upstairs

and see the pictures the ship's photographer has been taking."

"What photographer? What pictures?" Amelia looked puzzled.

"You mean to say you haven't seen the photographer at all!" Bess was incredulous. "Why, he's always around with that camera of his. It's almost impossible to sit or stand any place on deck without his taking your picture!"

"Old Procrastination Boggs," Laura teased, "has been so busy trying to figure out the time so as to keep her clocks straight that she hasn't known what was going on around her. Have you decided yet," she asked, "whether you set the clock ahead or back when you are traveling east?"

"I went into Amelia's cabin last night," she explained to the others, "and there she was sitting on the floor with her clocks all around her. She looked just as she did the night we first saw her in her room at Lakeview. This time, however, she had a pencil and paper in her hand. At first, I thought she had lost her mind, for there were little marks like chicken scratches on the paper."

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"Oh, it didn't look like that at all," Amelia protested. "You just don't recognize a good sketch when you see one. That round mark was the sun. The long straight one was the path it takes as it moves from the east to the west."

"But the sun doesn't move," Rhoda interrupted. "The earth does."

"Well, anyway," Laura continued her teasing, "there she was on the floor with her clocks. Each one was set at a different time and Amelia was drawing pictures. I heard her muttering to herself, 'Now, if the sun rises in the east and sets in the west and the ship travels east, then we lose no, we gain time. No, we lose time.' She couldn't make up her mind, so she began all over again, 'if the sun rises in the west, I mean the east, and we travel west, no east'—Say, which way are we traveling?" Laura had confused herself.

"East." Nan laughed. "And don't go any further or you'll have us all confused. Upstairs, near the Purser's window, there's a blackboard. On it, it says, 'Ship's passengers please note: set your watches ahead 40 minutes each night at 9, if you wish them to agree with ship's time.'"

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"I know that now," Amelia laughed, ruefully. "I saw it the morning after I'd had such a time. And you needn't act so superior," she looked at Laura, "because you sat down on the floor with me and tried to figure it out too!"

The picture that this brought to mind caused all the girls to laugh.

"Let's go up and see those photographs, right now," Laura changed the subject.

"Yes, let's," Amelia agreed. So, walking and talking the six friends left the cabin and went to an upper deck.

"Bess Harley," Nan exclaimed as they stood around the pictures. "How did you ever manage to get yours taken so many times?"

Bess blushed. She had contrived to have her picture taken more than anyone else. Now, as she thought of the number of times she had purposely posed, hoping that the photographer would see her, she felt guilty. There were pictures of her in the deck chair, posed against a life preserver, and standing at the rail. There was one of her in a bathing suit on the morning she had gone swimming, another of her in slacks when she was headed for the ship's gymnasium, and another in leather jacket and skirt when the wind was blowing so hard that her hair was standing on end.

"Anyhow, they are all cute," Nan comforted, "and I'm as jealous as anything, because there aren't any of me."

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"Oh, yes, there is, Nan. Look!" Rhoda pointed her finger to a picture of Nan posted right in the center of the board. The photographer had caught her when she was totally unaware of the rest of the world. He had made a silhouette of her on the ship's rail, in the place she called her balcony, looking out over the sea.

"Oh, how nice!" Nan herself was pleased. "I'll have to send one home to Mommy." Then a sad look flashed across her face. She was lonesome sometimes amid all the new strange things for her mother, her father, and the little cottage on Amity street. There were times when she wished most earnestly that she could consult with her father or have the bright hopefulness of her mother's comfort to encourage her.

Her thoughts flashed back to her father's warning and then to the letter she had received at Lakeview Hall, the letter she had concealed from Bess. Was this hunchback who seemed to be watching her connected in any way with either of the two? Was he the one her father was warning her against? Had he had anything to do with the letter? Nan resolved to get it from the purser with whom she had left her valuables, look at it again, and see whether it contained any undiscovered clues.

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"What's the matter, Nan," Bess brought her thoughts back to the present. "Your mind seems miles away. We've all ordered our pictures, and you haven't had a word to say for the last ten minutes."

Nan started guiltily, laughed with them at her own absent-mindedness, bought photographs of herself and her friends for her memory book, and then, with them, went into the ship's store to

buy souvenirs for friends back home.

So, in spite of Grace's frightening experience, the morning was a gay one for the Lakeview Hall crowd and the afternoon brought a surprise that even Bess, in her wildest dreams of the nice things that might happen to them on the boat, had never imagined.

CHAPTER XVIII

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THE CAPTAIN'S DINNER

"Oh, Nan, I wonder if all the girls received them! I hope they did!" Bess was waving a small white envelope in her hand. "Look, it has the boat's flag engraved on it and the United States flag too. Isn't it just too perfect for words!"

"Nan," Bess hugged her friend, "I'm sure, as sure as I am of anything, that it's because of your saving Linda the way you did, that we got them."

Nan's face was alight too. "Oh, Bess, it isn't either," she contradicted. "It's because Dr. Beulah is the person she is. The Captain was going to invite her and he thought he had to invite us too, or we would get into trouble. He doesn't trust us since the night of the storm."

"You old silly," Bess was not to be gainsaid. "You are just being modest. But go on. I don't care what the Captain thinks anyway as long as he continues to do things in the grand manner. This cabin," she looked around it proudly—already she had sent many letters home telling friends and relatives about every little detail of its luxuriousness, "and now these invitations. Why, we are practically the belles of the boat, even if Dr. Beulah," she said dolefully, "does try to make us remember that we are still children."

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"Oh, Bess, she doesn't either." Nan sprang to the defense of their preceptor. "You know she doesn't. You know she had been just as nice as she could possibly be on this trip. She couldn't let you wear that dress you wanted to the other night. It wouldn't have looked right. It was, just as she said, too formal for a young person to wear. It makes you look old. She was really very pleasant about it."

"Of course she was," Bess calmed Nan's ruffled feelings. "I was only fooling. She was just as sweet as she could be. Now, come, let's go up and see if the others have received cards, too."

"Oh, we have, we have!" Grace exclaimed excitedly when Nan and Bess finally located the others. "We all have invitations to the Captain's table for dinner tonight! Dr. Beulah says we are to go, that we may wear our very best dresses, and that we may stay up tonight for the costume ball. It's to be the very nicest night on board ship, for tomorrow morning, early, we sight land and some of the passengers will be leaving." Grace was breathless as she finished the end of the sentence.

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"But where's Laura?" Nan looked in vain for the red-headed girl.

"Yes, where is she?" Bess echoed, and then added, "Surely, she received one too. The Captain didn't leave her out, did he?" Bess looked worried, for she remembered suddenly Laura's unfortunate encounter with the commander of the boat.

"She received one all right," Rhoda responded, "and she's down in her cabin practically crying her eyes out."

"Why?" Nan and Bess chorused.

"She says she can't possibly go to that dinner and face him. She knows he will laugh at her. She says she has never been in such an embarrassing position before. She almost wishes she hadn't come on this trip at all. You go, Nan, and see what you can do with her. The more I say, the harder she cries. I have never seen her in such a state."

"All right. You people stay here and I'll see if I can persuade her to come up." Nan started off, but then changed her mind and came back for the rest of the girls. "Come, let's all go down," she suggested. "I think, after all, that that would be better." So they went.

They found Laura lying across her bunk with her face buried in the pillow. Her shoulders were heaving and she was sobbing.

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"Oh, Laura, don't take it so seriously," Nan stooped over the sobbing girl and gently pulled her around so that she faced her friends. Her eyes were red and swollen with crying, and her red hair was tousled. She put a wadded, tear-wet handkerchief up to her eyes and wiped them.

"I—I—I guess you would take it seriously too," she wept, "if you couldn't go to the Captain's

dinner, if you had to send regrets, saying you were ill."

"Laura, you haven't done that, have you?" The girls all gasped.

"N—N—Not yet!" Laura sobbed some more. "But it's not because I didn't try to write it. I've got to ask Dr. Beulah how to address it," she sniffled. "I guess I'll go up and ask her now." She sat up on the bunk. "Then it will be all over with."

"Laura," Nan took her friend firmly by the shoulders. "Don't you know that you can't refuse. An invitation from the Captain is practically the same as a command."

"Well, I guess I can't go if I have scarlet fever." Laura was still crying.

"Yes, but if you have scarlet fever, we can't go either," Bess was troubled. "I don't care what you tell him, but you can't tell him that." A look from Nan silenced Bess. [153]

"See here, Laura," Nan shook her friend. "You've got to come to your senses. You simply have to go. You might just as well make up your mind to do it now, because you are going if we have to dress you and drag you there." Nan tried to look very serious, but somehow she couldn't suppress a twinkle that came to her eyes. Already the other girls were smiling. They knew that Laura would have to give in. The situation seemed amusing now.

"You wouldn't go either," Laura continued, "if you had said the things I did and he had heard you. The next time I'm going to keep my mouth shut."

"Of course you will," Nan sounded full of conviction. "And this time you'll go, and he will shake your hand, and you'll smile up at him, and then everything will be all right."

"Do you really think so?" Laura was already more than half willing to be convinced.

"I haven't a doubt in the world but what it will," Nan sounded very positive.

"Then I'll go," Laura gave in at last, "if you'll all promise on your word of honor to stick by me and come to my rescue if anything embarrassing happens." [154]

"We will, Laura, we will." Grace was almost jumping up and down with joy. She grabbed Nan's hand. Nan took Laura's. Laura took Bess's. Amelia and Rhoda were drawn into the circle and they all danced around the cabin until they fell breathless to the floor.

"Oh, such fun!" Bess wiped the tears of excitement out of her eyes, as they all proceeded to the business of deciding what to wear to the Captain's dinner and how to dress for the costume ball.

That night was unforgettable.

Laura and the Captain were friends just as Nan had said they would be. Bess was a triumph in a pretty silk dress. Amelia and Rhoda were almost speechless when they were seated between two tall handsome army officers enroute to London to take part in the coronation, but they forgot themselves and had the time of their lives as the dinner progressed. Grace, in her place next to a foreign diplomat was equally well taken care of.

And Nan, well, as the reader has already guessed, the dinner invitation was in her honor. She was seated in the place of honor next to the Captain and never was a young girl more praised and honored in an evening than she.

It was all very grand and lovely. Bess had her moment of supreme rejoicing when she saw out of the corner of her eye that Linda had recovered and had been allowed to come down for dinner. There she was, across the dining room from the Captain's table, watching with envious eyes her former schoolmates at Lakeview Hall. Bess might be forgiven, if, when paper caps and toy horns were passed out, she blew her horn extra loud—a blast of triumph in Linda's direction. [155]

CHAPTER XIX

LAND IS SIGHTED

The next morning all the cabins on the boat looked as though a cyclone had struck them. The cabins belonging to the girls from Lakeview Hall were no exception.

"Bess, if we go on collecting things at this rate," Nan protested to her friend, "we'll have to buy new luggage. Nothing short of a huge trunk will hold everything."

"I know it," Bess laughed. "And it's so hard to throw anything away." She was holding favors from the costume ball of the night before in her hand. "I simply can't part with these."

The two girls were packing. It was very early in the morning, but the boat was due to make its [156]

first stop shortly, and they wanted to be on deck when land was sighted. "I can't part with these either," Nan held up the limp bags of a half dozen balloons. "A handsome army officer got them for me last night, by climbing up on a chair and pulling them by their strings down from the ceiling."

"Wasn't the ballroom lovely, though?" Bess paused in her packing, while she remembered the lights and the palms and the balloons and the other decorations. Then she recalled all the people in fancy costume marching around, dancing and singing. [157]

"The nicest thing of all," Nan paused in her packing too, "was that glass promenade through which you could see the stars and the sky overhead. The moon was so big and full that no other lights were needed. I shall never forget it—nor that quartet of sailors that sang all those funny old sea ballads and then danced the hornpipe."

The girls laughed together at the recollection, and then busied themselves in earnest. Nan kept the balloons for a couple of children back in Tillbury whose idol she was. Bess kept the favors, because she couldn't bear to throw them away.

Again and again, the ship's foghorn blasted the early morning quietness. "I'm sure we must be almost in sight of land." Bess hurried faster.

"But the steward promised," Nan protested, "that he would tell us so that we would be up on deck when land was sighted."

"You don't suppose he has forgotten?" Bess questioned.

"I don't think so," Nan was a little worried too. "But let's hurry and get out of here. I wouldn't miss seeing Maureen off for anything."

"Oh, is she getting off here?" Bess took one last look around the cabin to see whether she had all her belongings. [158]

"Sure an' she's headed right for Dublin." Nan tried to give an Irish turn to her sentence.

"You'll never see her again?" Bess was wide-eyed as it suddenly dawned on her that they were saying good-by, perhaps forever, to their shipboard acquaintances.

"Never say that," Nan unconsciously interpreted the lesson Hetty's grandmother had taught so sweetly several days before. "You never know when or where you will meet these people again. Have you kept many addresses?"

"Oh, just dozens," Bess answered. "If I ever hear from a third of them again, I'll be happy."

"I feel the same way," Nan agreed. "Only Maureen, Hetty and Jeanie have all agreed to have tea with us in London. I knew you would all approve." She looked up at Bess.

"Approve? Of course," Bess agreed. "Tea in London with Maureen, Hetty, and Jeanie. Oh, I hope they won't forget."

"They won't," Nan said confidently, as she got up from her place on the floor by her bags. "There, I'm all packed and ready for the steward to come and put the tags on them. Are you?"

"Just a second—yes, I'm all ready, too, now." Bess closed hers. "Let's go up on deck." So they went up and out, and saw, for the first time while on the boat, the sunrise. The sky was full of promise for a bright day. [159]

Even as they watched the light breaking brighter and brighter, the ship's whistle gave three loud blasts. There were three more from shore, and Nan clutched Bess's arm. "See, there it is—Ireland, the coast of Ireland. See the lights?"

"Sure an' 'tis me home," Maureen had come up behind them, "the grandest place in all the world."

"What county is that?" Nan looked to Maureen for information.

"I'm not so certain," Maureen replied, "but I'm after thinking that that's the coast of Donegal, and a lovelier spot you'll not find for many miles. Beyond lies Londonderry and after that you'll be seeing Portrush and then at last Belfast! It's beauty, beauty all the way."

"Your America, it's fine and grand with all its tall buildings and great cities, but me heart is warm for Ireland. There me mother and father and little brothers and sisters will be waiting. Oh, it's good to be back." Maureen wiped tears from her eyes.

"Come, Maureen," Nan and Bess were close to tears too, for her pang of homesickness had turned their own thoughts back to America. "Come, let's go down into the dining room. Let's see if we can find one big table so that we can all have this last breakfast together." As she finished speaking, Nan tucked Maureen's arm through hers and started. [160]

It was a merry breakfast and a sad one in the weird light of the dining room, half daylight, half electricity. There were people glad to be home and people sad to be parting from newfound friends. Breakfast was eaten hastily, so that everyone was up on deck waving goodbyes, calling last minute messages, urging care, and trying to joke, all in one breath, as the great steamer settled to anchor and a small tender nestled up to it.

Maureen's dad, a burly looking Irishman with eyes of the deepest blue and lashes long and heavy, came aboard and took her in his arms. "Sure and 'tis good to have me baby home agin," he said. "And it's mighty fine you're looking in that perky new bonnet." He pushed her straw hat up and looked into her eyes. "And it's not changed a bit you are after all that long journey," he added.

He turned to her friends, "And you'll not be comin' to Ireland this trip?" He sounded genuinely disappointed. "But you'll be comin' back." He smiled kindly down upon them all. "And then you'll be stoppin' here and we'll be meetin' you and you'll be off to Dublin Town with the likes of us."

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Nan liked Maureen's father. So did her friends. As he and Maureen went across the gang-plank to the tender, they all hung over the rail and waved. "We'll be seeing you in London," Nan called.

"Don't forget," Bess followed suit, "it's tea in London in coronation week."

CHAPTER XX

[162]

BE CAREFUL, NAN!

"Are your passports all stamped for landing? Is your baggage tagged for Glasgow? Are you sure you have everything?" Dr. Beulah smiled down at the excited brood of young girls under her charge. "Have each of you a supply of English pounds and shillings? In short, are you ready to leave this boat and step your foot on foreign soil?"

They were all standing together on the boat's deck watching the maneuverings as the ship came to rest in its dock just outside Glasgow. There had been no end to the excitement since the girls waved Maureen off at Belfast and the ship steamed across the North Channel to the Firth of Clyde, passing countless fishing boats along the way.

Bess had turned from waving Maureen off and started back to the cabin. Midway, she had a strange presentiment that something was vitally wrong. She walked gingerly down the hallway, looking to the right and left at the narrow corridors between groups of staterooms. When she came to that from which Grace had said the Scotch hunchback had come forth several mornings before, she walked very quietly and listened attentively. She neither heard nor saw anything. It was as if the cabin was empty.

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That in itself was strange, for the doors of all the cabins along the way were open. In each, baggage awaited porters who were even now busy in front cabins labeling it and carting it to an upper deck. "Maybe the mystery has taken his baggage and walked out on us," Bess thought as she continued down the corridor intent on making one more check of the stateroom to make certain that nothing was being forgotten.

The thought relieved her, and she was even humming a little tune when she turned into her own stateroom. She stopped short. There, kneeling in front of Nan's baggage, was the red-headed hunchback!

He turned and looked at her. She would have screamed, but in a flash he was at her side and his hand was clamped over her mouth. He looked at her very intently with strange piercing eyes.

But his voice was almost gentle as he spoke. "'T would be weel, ver-r-ry weel," he said in a strong Scotch burr, "if ye didna speak. These things ha' no par-r-t of ye." With this, he turned and left the room.

Bess sank into a chair, full of conflicting emotions and was there thinking, when Nan came into the stateroom after her.

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"Bess, why Bess," Nan exclaimed, "what is the matter with you? You looked scared to death."

Bess whimpered softly, "I am." This sounded strange coming from Bess, and was strange in the face of her avowal of a few days before that if she ever came upon him alone she would scream so loud that everybody on the boat would come running. It was strange too, because Bess, generally, when upset at all, responded with a torrent of words. Now, she looked wilted as though every ounce of energy had been squeezed out of her.

Nan got her a glass of water and held it as she sipped slowly. Then she smiled wanly and sat silent, for a while, collecting her thoughts.

"Nan, it's that red-headed hunchback again," she said, finally. "You've got to tell me what you know about him. I came upon him just now in our cabin. He was over there," her voice grew stronger as she spoke, but sounded sharp and nervous, "by your baggage."

Nan went over and carefully examined her locked baggage. It hadn't been tampered with. She felt this instinctively just as soon as she put her hands on it. What had the hunchback intended to

do before Bess discovered him?

"What did he say to you?" She turned to Bess.

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Bess considered before answering. Were the deformed little man's words a warning? Had he meant that she shouldn't repeat what he had said? Had he meant that she shouldn't tell of his presence at all? Bess was startled as this latter thought came to her, startled and frightened.

"I—I—don't remember what he said," Bess began.

"Elizabeth Harley," Nan looked down at her sternly, "You know very well that you remember what he said. Come, now, tell me. I have to know."

"*You* have to know!" Bess was angry now. "Nan, I'd like to know, too, what all this is about. This man has been watching you ever since we boarded the steamer in New York. You know it, and I know it, too. Moreover, your father warned you, just before he left, to be careful. I thought at the time that it meant nothing more than the warning my mother gave me, to take care of my luggage and myself. Now I think differently. Somehow, his voice sounded more earnest than that of the rest of our parents. I think he meant more.

"Then there's something else, some other clue that I can't quite remember, that makes me certain things are all wrong. Nan, please explain what it's all about," Bess pleaded. But before Nan had a chance to say anything, Bess went on untangling the confused jumble in her own mind.

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"There's this I can't understand either," she said, "Grace couldn't remember whether he had a Scotch accent or not. I think it's something you couldn't possibly overlook."

Nan made a mental note and kept quiet, hoping, that Bess would go on revealing what she had found out.

"Besides," Bess continued, all unaware that she was doing just what Nan wanted her to do, "Grace was scared to death and kept talking about his piercing eyes that looked right through you and made you do what he wanted you to. The other girls spoke about them too, after he confronted them in the cabin that first morning. His eyes are strange, but when he spoke to me, his voice was as gentle as it could possibly be. Why, he all but patted me on the shoulder." Bess herself was surprised that the thought didn't bring any feeling of revolt.

Nan looked at her. "Why, I'd almost say you liked the mysterious old Scotchman," she said in a surprised tone.

"No, not that," Bess responded thoughtfully, "but I did feel almost sorry for him. He looked meek and gentle, but withal very frightened as he left this room.

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"When he said, referring to the mysteries hereabouts, 'that these things didna ha' no part of me,' he really sounded very kindly."

"Did he say that?" The question was out before Nan thought. She had been worried for fear the plot that involved her would draw her friends into its net.

With Nan's question, Bess suddenly realized that she had revealed all she knew without learning a thing. "Why, you double-dyed deceiver," she said in a surprised tone, "I've told you everything I know, and you haven't said a thing."

Nan looked confused. "I couldn't help it, Bess," she confessed. "I had to know what had happened, and there seemed no other way of finding out. Now, let's forget it all for the time being."

"Just tell me one thing," Bess begged, when she saw that Nan was not going to reveal all that she knew. "Do you know who the red-headed Scotchman is?"

Nan considered the question. "I'm not certain," she said as though to herself.

"But you think—" Bess spoke quietly, hoping that Nan would finish her deliberations aloud. She was trying Nan's own tactics now.

"That it is some distant member of my mother's family," Nan said slowly. "I saw the names and stateroom numbers, on a bulletin outside, of those who are disembarking at Glasgow. The man in cabin 846 is Robert Hugh Blake! 'Hugh' is an old family name on my mother's side and 'Blake' is her maiden name.

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"You remember the passenger list that was given us at the Captain's dinner?"

Bess nodded her head. Hers was among the things she was saving for souvenirs.

"His name is on that, too. And it has his home listed as 'Glasgow.'"

"You don't know anything more about him. You've never heard your mother or anyone speak of him?" Bess followed up Nan's revelation, hoping to hear more.

Nan ignored the first question. "Momsy never did speak very much of her people in Scotland," she said in answer to the second. "She was very fond of her great uncle, Hugh Blake, the one whose estate she inherited, but I don't think she ever saw him. She liked him, because her father

did. She loved everything that he loved. Since this great uncle is the only one he ever talked much about, he is the only one I know of.

"Oh, she has mentioned others, vaguely, from time to time, but I don't remember their names. However, I don't think I've ever heard the name of this particular person."

"Do you know at all why he should be camping on your doorstep?" Bess questioned further. [169]

But Nan was not revealing any more now. Certain that her friend had recovered from her shock, she ignored the question, took one more look at her baggage, and called a steward. He came promptly, and before Nan and Bess left their stateroom again, all the baggage had been taken upstairs.

"There, I guess that fixes that," Nan observed as they left the stateroom for the last time. "The steward will have charge of the baggage now until we land."

"What I can't understand," Bess began as though there was only one question left in her mind, "is why Mr. Robert Hugh Blake is so determined to get into your baggage. What have you that's so valuable?"

"Nothing, lassie, nothing," Nan answered. "Only a lot of dresses that wouldn't become him, even if he could get them on."

Bess giggled at this. Nan took her by the arm. "Please," she said earnestly and quickly, "don't say anything to anyone about what has happened today. I'm sure it wouldn't do any good."

Bess remembered a similar promise, given at a time of other trouble in Florida, just as those readers who have read "Nan Sherwood at Palm Beach" will remember. "Of course I won't," she reassured her friend. [170]

Nan looked her thanks. As the sound of the skirling of bagpipes reached them, they hastened their steps and joined Dr. Beulah Prescott and the rest of their Lakeview Hall friends on deck, and so were in the group when Dr. Prescott asked the question, "Are you ready to leave this boat and step your foot on foreign soil?"

CHAPTER XXI

 [171]

WELCOME, LASSIES, TO SCOTLAND

Dr. Beulah's question went unanswered. The clank of the chain as deckhands dropped the gangplank from ship to shore attracted the attention of the girls even as she asked it. Now they moved forward slowly, with the rest of the passengers.

"We're almost there! We're almost there!" Bess could hardly contain herself. "Now we are getting nearer and nearer and nearer. One more step. Two more steps. We made it!" she exclaimed triumphantly as she stepped her foot on the gangplank and carefully walked its length. Nan was at her heels. Then one by one the others disentangled themselves from the crowded deck and joined those on shore, until they all stood together, "like a group of lost baffled children," Dr. Prescott said, as she joined them and herded them through a door and into a long shed-like station.

There, everything seemed in confusion. "It's like the Grand Central Station in New York and the dock where we boarded the ship all rolled into one," Laura whispered into Nan's ear.

"Yes, only you don't see kilted highlanders and bagpipes and English officers in either of those places," Nan returned, waving and smiling across the top of somebody's bags to Hetty, who had attracted her attention from the distance. [172]

"Welcome, lassies, to Scotland." A voice from behind them caused them to turn and there was Jeanie. "Ha' ye learned your way about yet?" she grinned at her American friends.

"We're no so guid as that." Nan recalled as best she could her own mother's Scotch dialect, but let it go again as she called after Jeanie, "Remember, it's tea in London during coronation week."

"Aye, and I'll not be forgettin'," Jeanie flung over her shoulder before she was lost in the crowd of English, Irish and Scotch people.

"Porter, porter, porter." "Taxi, taxi." "Car for Royal Scott Hotel." The calls were all around them in more variations of the English tongue than they ever knew existed.

"Here, girls, this way," Dr. Prescott beckoned them to follow her. "Here's the baggage."

Bess turned and followed her. Rhoda, Amelia, Grace, and Laura were already at her side. Nan

started too, but a small child, tears streaming down its face, halted her.

She stooped down, pulled its grimy fists out of its eyes, pushed its blond hair back, and comforted, "There, child, there. Don't cry. What has happened?"

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"I didna ken." The child cried harder than ever.

"Are you lost?"

"I didna ken," the answer was the same, but he grabbed hold of her coat and pulled her along after him.

She glanced back toward her friends, but could catch no one's attention. She stopped. The small force below her tugged hard at her coat.

"Ye canna stop noo." He was a persistent little Scotsman.

"No, I canna," Nan thought to herself and followed, wondering what it was all about. He led her past the baggage, the train, and a small window where men were busy changing American dollars to English pounds. They passed lunch carts, magazine racks, and an information tower. Once Nan stopped, but the little urchin's eyes filled so quickly with tears that she gave up completely and resolved to find out what was wrong.

Finally, they came to a high iron fence through the gates of which no one could go without a passport or permit. The small boy shied away from this public entrance, followed the fence around to its joining with the wall. There, stuffed between fence and concrete floor, was a bagpipe almost as big as the child himself. He stooped over and tugged at it. It wouldn't budge.

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Nan knelt down and tugged, too. Between the two of them, after much twisting and turning, pushing and pulling, the bagpipe was pulled through. The child swung a strap over his shoulder, looked up at her brightly now, and with a "thank ye, thank ye" ran along ahead of her playing "On the Bonnie Bonnie Banks of Loch Lomond."

She saw him once again before she left the station. It was just before the train pulled out. He stood beneath her compartment window and played the same tune again. This time tourists were throwing pennies and ha'pennies at his feet and he was smiling broadly.

He waved up at Nan and called, "Noo ane for ye." She laughed and nodded, as he swung into the tune a third time. At the end, Nan tossed him a coin. He fingered it carefully, his Scotch thrift fighting with his feeling of gratitude, but finally the better man won and he threw it back up to her.

The sound of his playing was still in her ears as the train pulled out for Emberon. Though she could not have known it then, the single tune that he knew was to be a kind of theme song playing itself most unexpectedly through her Emberon experience.

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The ride from Glasgow, Great Britain's second largest city, to Emberon, a small village on the coast of one of Scotland's many fjords took only a few hours.

"It was a short ride," Nan wrote later to her mother, "from Glasgow to Emberon, but such fun! The trains were queer, like those you see sometimes in the movie with a corridor the whole length of each car. The passengers all sit in little compartments that have two seats facing one another. We all sat together, of course. Laura, Bess, and Dr. Beulah were on one side and Grace, Rhoda, Amelia, and myself on the other. When we ate, as we did soon after we were outside the city, the steward pulled a little table down between us so that we were really quite snug and cozy.

"It was nice, eating Scotch broth (and how good it was!) while a Scotch landscape unwound itself at your side. I say this now, but, really, we were so excited that we hardly knew at all what was happening. Oh, mother, we are seeing so many strange new things all the time that my tongue can hardly keep up with my eyes! When I get home I'm going to talk and talk and talk until you feel as though you had taken the trip yourself, but then you and Papa know all about it, because you were here not long ago.

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"You'd be surprised how many people I meet who remember you. The old coachman who met us at the station, the people in the village, oh, everyone here, tells me what a nice mother and father I have, until sometimes I grow very lonesome to see you. I got your cable at Glasgow. I am being very careful, truly, and I will write you all about everything when I get to Edinburgh where I am hoping there will be some letters from you. Until then—

My love,
Nan."

"Until then"—the words were simple, but how much was to happen "until then."

Nan had been told what Emberon was like and had told her friends, but even then it came as a surprise. She had known that it was a gray and dreary looking place high up on a hill some distance from the village, but how dreary she never could have imagined.

It was dusk when they drove up the steep rough road that was the only entrance to the ancient estate. The high old-fashioned carriage that they had climbed up into at the station rocked precariously from side to side as the horses, almost as ancient as the carriage itself, pulled it along.

In the half light, the girls looked at one another and at Dr. Beulah. "It's almost spooky," Grace huddled closer to Laura as she spoke, "isn't it?"

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"These old estates," Dr. Beulah explained, "were almost all fortresses at one time. They are built high up on hills so that they have a natural means of defense against the surrounding country. The original owners were lords who were almost kings in their own right. They fought, now against one another, now against England, holding princes and princesses, kings and queens as pawns. No man knew for sure who was his friend and who his enemy.

"The stakes were high in those days. Each man thought that Scotland was his for the fighting. So, when he got himself some land and built himself his castle, he went out to conquer the surrounding country. It was fight, fight, fight all the time, one Scottish clan against another.

"Then it was Scotland against England and the Scottish world was full of spies. That very song the lad back in the station played over and over again 'On the Bonnie Bonnie Banks of Loch Lomond,' is the story of a Scotsman who was captured by the English. The lake itself is not very far from here."

"I believe," she went on, as she saw that she had the attention of all the girls, "that the hero of that song belonged to one of the Highland clans and was captured by the English at the battle of Culloden. He was taken to Carlisle where he was tried for treason and condemned to be executed.

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"But as a special favor," she paused and waited while the carriage went around a sharp bend in the road, and then continued, "the night before his execution, he was allowed to receive a visit from his betrothed. In bidding her goodbye—and she is supposed to have been a very beautiful Scotch girl—his heart turned homeward to the scenes of other, happy days. He told her that his spirit would be there before she arrived, that he would meet her at their former trysting place."

"We'll meet where we parted in yon shady glen,
By the steep, steep side of Ben Lomond."

Nan was humming the words over to herself even as the carriage came to a stop before the gates of the ancient estate. The driver climbed down from his high seat in front and pulled a rope. A bell rang in the distance, the gates opened, and now, almost proudly, the horses pulled the carriage up a short driveway and stopped. A proud dignified old gentleman came out to greet them.

CHAPTER XXII

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EMBERON

"Welcome, thrice welcome to Emberon," he greeted. "And you, my dear," he continued as they walked in through big doors to a high old hall, "you, I'm sure, are Nancy Sherwood." His voice was soft and low as he spoke to her. He placed his hand on her head. "A Blake through and through," he went on, smiling down at her surprise at his instant recognition.

"The same clear eyes, determined little chin, and proud carriage. Your mother has it too, when she is well. And her father before her, Randolph Hugh Blake—he was a wee lad when he first visited his uncle here—he had those eyes. You are all cut from the same pattern as Hugh Blake, the well-beloved steward of Emberon for nigh on to sixty years.

"We are glad to see you, little mistress," he said quaintly, as he rang a bell for a servant.

Nan looked up, startled, at the term "mistress." Was it right to address her so? A wave of shyness came over her. She looked about at the ancient hall with its obsolete firearms hanging on the walls, its big soft rug, tapestries, and the armor of a knight long dead standing in the corner. So this was Emberon! This was the estate her mother had inherited! This was the place her mother and father had visited a year, two years before, while she had been in Pine Camp and then at Lakeview Hall. Nan drew a deep breath, trying hard to realize it all.

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For a few moments, they all stood around telling the venerable old gentleman, James Blake, who was a distant relative of Mrs. Sherwood's, of their journey. Then, as the servant he had summoned appeared, he spoke again to Nan with the utmost deference.

"Your apartments are ready upstairs," he said. "Go quickly, for it is late and some in the village have prepared an entertainment for the lassies from America. It is quite necessary that you go down, for most of them down there are people who know the Blake story from beginning to end. Hugh Blake was an idol in these parts.

"He treated those who were under him with such kindness and thoughtfulness that they looked upon him almost as a father. He took care of them when they were sick, watched over them when they were in trouble, comforted them when their young folks went off to the cities or to America. He saw that none went hungry. He helped them whenever he could, and when he died, they mourned as though he was one of theirs. Now they are anxious to see his youngest descendant.

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"Though I know you are tired," he chuckled as they all shook their heads, "you must make the most of your short stay here. Upstairs, my sister has everything in readiness. Now, begone with you." He dismissed them and turned toward the big fireplace to warm his hands.

"Why, Nan Sherwood!" Bess exclaimed as soon as they left the reception hall, "it's a castle! And you are the princess!" Although Bess was fooling, she was very much impressed at all she had seen.

"You are my subjects and you had better behave," Nan laughed as they were ushered into a group of big bedrooms with high canopied beds, huge chests, heavy rugs, thick damask drapes, everything dark and faded, the luxuries of ages gone by.

"Yes, princess of Emberon," Laura made a brief curtsy. "We are at your command. Your ladies in waiting await your orders." She took Nan's hand and led her to a high-backed oaken chair where Nan seated herself for a moment.

"Your subjects, madame," Laura waved her hand toward the others, and then added, "They don't amount to much, but they are the best we have to offer at present."

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"That's treason!" Amelia exclaimed, "treason! We're loyal subjects and true. We are daughters of Scotland and defenders of the Blake clan."

The girls were acting. It was their own version of a scene from a class play they had once acted in at Lakeview. The room's setting had brought it all back to mind. But in acting they were prophesying too, prophesying something even more romantic than the scene the present brought to mind.

"Defenders of the Blake clan! Ah, how it needs you! Come, rally round!" Nan pretended to sound the call to battle as she left her regal seat and plunged into the job of unpacking.

The others followed suit. The stern faces of the ancient lairds of Emberon that looked down on them from heavy gilt frames on the wall never saw six more industrious girls than those in the Lakeview crowd as they unpacked and dressed.

Once Laura looked up at them. "I must say," she said then to Nan, "that this isn't a very cheerful looking bunch of ancestors that is watching us."

Nan paused in her work to look, too. "They aren't, are they?" she agreed, walking around the room and looking intently at each of their faces. "These are portraits, I think, of the first of the lairds of Emberon. A fighting lot they were and as straight-laced as the best of the Scotsmen."

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"They look it," Laura answered. "I, personally, feel as though they disapprove of every single dress I'm taking out of this bag."

"Let's see, how should they be made to satisfy those crusty old gentlemen?" She held one up to herself. "It should be tighter in the bodice, have a ruff around the neck, and the skirt," she looked down at the trim pleats in her own, "oh, that's all wrong! It should be long and full, just touching the floor. No wonder they disapprove. I am disgusted myself," she added, looking up at one of the solemn faces and winking.

"Why, Laura Polk," Rhoda had been watching and listening to the little by-play, "You had better be more respectful to your hosts," she nodded toward the portraits, "or tonight, at the parade of the ghosts, you will be taught a well-deserved lesson."

"Parade of the ghosts!" The exclamation was Grace's.

"Why, of course, I had forgotten completely about that," Laura looked very serious. "At the stroke of midnight in these ancient castles, all of the skeletons come out of the closets and the dungeons and the secret stairways and the cellars and the attics, walk through the halls, rattle around a bit, clank a few chains and then do some fancy haunting. If they are healthy ghosts, they groan. If they are weaklings, they just whistle round a bit. Oh, there is no end to the excitement in these hoary places.

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"Besides the ghosts and skeletons, there are always a few dissatisfied retainers who welcome the first opportunity to polish off the living owners. They hang around," Laura was entirely oblivious to the fact that she had, for once in her life, startled Nan, "in caves, abandoned buildings, and sometimes behind sliding doors, and appear on the slightest pretext.

"But never fear, my lassies," her voice came from the depths of her case, as she searched around the bottom for a small gold bracelet, "the line of the lairds of Emberon has died out, the Princess tells me, and so there's no one here to be polished off. We have nothing to worry about," she ended as she found the bracelet and clasped it around her wrist, "except ghosts and skeletons."

"And old Mr. Blake who is waiting downstairs for us, I am sure," Nan added as she moved toward the doorway.

"He wouldn't harm a hair of anyone's head," Rhoda joined Nan. "Are all the Blakes so nice?"

Nan didn't answer. Both Laura and Rhoda had brought to mind one of the Blakes whom she was trying hard to forget—Robert Hugh Blake, the hunchback. She remembered suddenly that she had forgotten completely to reread the letter that had come to mind again those last days on the boat. Now, there was no time as together they went out, joined Dr. Prescott, and descended to the Great Hall where old James Blake was awaiting them. [185]

"Are you all quite comfortable?" He smiled at the excited faces. It was good to have voices and laughter ringing through the rooms again. It reminded him of the old days when people were always about. In his mind's eye he saw men returning from the hunt, couples dancing, great tables groaning with food, excited groups discussing politics, Christmas parties for the young folk, feasts for everyone, servants and all, on the master's birthday.

Then, in a flash, for he was a religious soul, the vision changed, and it was Sunday morning. The Laird himself was at the head of the room, there near one of the two great fireplaces. The Bible was open before him, and he was reading to the household of Emberon, kneeling in the Great Hall before him.

Those had been the good days. James Blake wiped an involuntary tear out of his eye. He was an old man and tears came easily. [186]

"Come, come," he said gruffly as he nodded to the girls, "the carriage is waiting and already we are late." He led the way out of the room to a side entrance. Soon the dull sound of the horses' hoofs beating against the road was echoing back through the night to the castle, as the carriage wound its way down the road to the lighted village.

CHAPTER XXIII

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SCOTTISH GAMES AND SCOTTISH TUNES

It was a gala scene that met their eyes as they drove into the village.

There, around a game field lighted by myriads of small electric bulbs, the whole population of the town was collected. Everyone was in holiday mood. All eyes were riveted on a brass band of kilted Highlanders marching up and down the field when Nan and her friends made their appearance. At a signal, the band struck up a happy welcoming tune as the girls were ushered directly to a group of seats opposite the very center of the field. Everyone stood up and clapped.

"Seems almost like the good old high school days at Tillbury," Bess whispered to Nan, "I half expect a cheerleader to appear."

"Sh!" The warning was Nan's, for after the girls acknowledged the greeting by bowing and smiling and had seated themselves, the contests began.

First, there was the bagpipe competition. At opposite ends of the field on wooden platforms, raised so that everyone could see, the Angus MacPhersons, Donald MacDonalds, and James Mackenzies of the village marched very slowly around and around playing jigs and reels and all sorts of Scottish Highland tunes. [188]

How weird the music seemed to the ears of the American girl! It wasn't gay enough for Bess who liked only the jazz music that she could hear at home. She grew restless. But Nan and Laura, always interested in strange new things, sat on the very edge of their seats, anxious not to miss any detail of what was happening.

"How I'd like to awaken Mrs. Cupp some drizzly dark morning with bagpipe music!" Laura's eyes danced merrily at the thought.

"You'd be expelled as sure as anything," Nan whispered back. "Will you look at that?" She almost fell off the edge of the seat in her excitement.

The Highlanders had retired for a while and, racing across the field now, were teams of two men each, one pushing a wheelbarrow and the other in it. When they missed the goal, as they generally did, a bucket, suspended from a beam above the goal line, tipped and drenched the two with water, to the great amusement of the crowd.

"Oh, what fun!" Laura exclaimed. "Look! There goes another bucket over. He got it right in the face!"

"And look at the next one," Bess was interested too, now. "Is he going to get by safely? No, look, Nan!" She grabbed her friend's arm. "The wheelbarrow and everything is going to go over now! Are they hurt?" She closed her eyes and looked the other way. [189]

"Oh, Bess, they're not hurt, they're just half drowned," Nan was laughing heartily. This was fun to watch, better than any circus. The crowd cheered and laughed and clapped and laughed again. "Tilting the Bucket" was one of the favorite Scottish games.

Next came the highpoint of the evening—the dancing of the Highland Fling and the Sword Dance. Such dancing! The tall, straight, skirted Highlanders with their white jackets and green kilts went from movement to movement, swinging rhythmically and gracefully, leaving the girls breathless at the end. The crowd applauded, long and loudly.

The dancers came back and did the Highland Fling over again. The crowd wouldn't let them leave. They cheered and whistled. The dancers repeated again and again, each time doing it better than the last.

The group of three that finally won the evening's prize, a five pound note, climaxed their conquest of the crowd by donating the money to the village coronation fund! The winner of the bagpipe contest followed suit and then the Broad Jump champion, the winner of the Mile Run and the Hurdle Races joined in. Before the crowd really realized what it was doing, everyone was throwing coins toward the center of the field. The band started to play "God Save the King!" Everyone stood up. They sang, first the English National Anthem and then Scotch song after Scotch song.

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Finally the lights blinked. The band played "God Save the King" again and everyone moved slowly away. It had been a grand evening with some fifty pounds added to the village fund for a stupendous celebration on the day of the crowning of the King and Queen.

Nan and her friends shook hands with the committee that had planned the evening's entertainment. Villager after villager stopped to talk with this young descendant of Hugh Blake who had come from far away America to see the old estate. They were simple folk, straightforward and honest in their appraisal of the brown-eyed American, but they found nothing to criticize. Somehow, Nan was able to make them feel that she was one of them, and as they went away gossiping about Old Hugh and young Nan, they all agreed that she was a "bonnie, bonnie lassie."

The committee, escorting the visitors back to the carriage, urged them to stay in Emberon for the coronation celebration.

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"Aye, and it will be a gr-r-r-and day here," William MacDonald, the chairman, urged. "In London, noo, I'll gr-r-r-ant ye, it will be ver-r-ry guid too, but mind ye, ye cudna find no better celebration than the one here at Emberon. It's ver-r-ry proud we are of his Royal Highness and her Ladyship. They pass here ver-r-ry often on their way to the North. Aye, and even once they stopped to watch the games. That was the time young MacDonald, my nephew, ye ken," he explained proudly, "tossed the caber so high and over so cleanly, that the guid king himself, mind ye, shook him by the hand. Aye, and that was a gr-r-r-and day." The old man stopped while he thought it all over again, remembering how he had stood right next to his nephew when the king congratulated him.

"Will ye stay?" He repeated his invitation, as with an effort, he shook the memory of that bygone day from his mind and came back to the present and the young Blake lass.

"Noo, and she cudna," old James Blake stepped into the conversation. "Ither, bigger things," he lapsed into the dialect of the villagers about him, "are hers in London town."

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Old MacDonald looked up. A flash of understanding passed between the two.

"Ye're right, Jamie," he said, "and she's a right bonnie lass to carry on."

With this, Nan and her friends were hurried along by James Blake toward the carriage, and in the moonlight, they drove up the steep hill toward the gray castle on the summit.

CHAPTER XXIV

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AN ACCIDENT NEAR THE CASTLE

What a ride! Earlier in the evening, Grace had called it spooky. Now she said nothing, but just sat thinking, watching the tall old trees through the carriage window as the equipage rumbled along.

She thought of her mother and father and Walter and of the coming meeting in London. She thought of Nan and her brother and smiled. She thought—but the thought winged away, as the carriage swayed far over to the right, and James Blake stuck his head out and shouted to the driver, "Be careful there!" The carriage slowed down. Grace breathed easier. Then the warning was forgotten and the whole thing forged ahead again, bumping over stones and rocks and ruts.

The horses seemed possessed. The old carriage creaked and groaned under the strain. Momentarily, the passengers felt that the whole thing would topple over, or that the carriage, like the one-hoss shay, would collapse into a thousand pieces. Grace now was visibly frightened. Nan looked at her anxiously and gave a warning look to Bess whom, she was afraid, would break out in a tirade against the carelessness of the driver. Finally, they rounded the sharp turn in the road which Nan remembered as just preceding the castle gates.

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They all breathed easier. They could see the castle now, beyond the gates and beyond the drive. But just as they looked reassuringly at one another, just as old James Blake murmured, "Home again," the carriage gave a sharp lurch. The horses stopped suddenly, stumbled, regained their balance, and then stood, shaking their heads vigorously. The carriage gave one mighty shake, shivered, and settled down to silence on its ancient springs.

Inside, the occupants were jolted one on top of the other. The girls unscrambled quickly. Young and hardy, the jolt did not hurt them, but old James Blake had toppled over so that he was lying senseless against the door.

Nan knelt down beside him. She pulled out a handkerchief and pushed his tousled hair back from his face. There was an ugly gash in his forehead. Dr. Prescott felt his pulse. It was faint. Together, they raised him to the seat.

They called for the coachman. There was no answer. They exchanged significant glances. "Do you suppose he was hurt, too?" Grace could hardly speak she was so frightened.

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Laura made a move to get out, but as she did so old James Blake stirred. "Dinna go out there," he murmured as he slowly opened his eyes. He looked around. His eyes found Nan and he reached out and touched her. "I dinna ken what it's all about," he said weakly and seemed about to drop off again. He caught himself.

He raised his hand and tried to push the door open. It was stuck. He knocked at it weakly with his fist. Then he kicked at it and it flew open.

"Hey, up there," he called to the coachman.

There was no answer. He got out, slowly and painfully. Nan followed and took his arm. He patted hers reassuringly.

"Better take care, lass," he murmured, half stumbling, half walking around to the front of the coach. Nan shook herself impatiently as an eerie feeling came over her. Nevertheless, it was comforting to hear someone descend from the coach at her back.

"Be careful, Nan." Dr. Prescott's voice came through the darkness.

"Can I help you?" It was Laura's tone, low and confident.

"We're all right," Nan called back. She stood now, next to James Blake looking up at the coachman's seat. It was empty!

What had happened? A number of possibilities flashed through Nan's mind as she moved closer to James Blake. Had the driver been hurt and fallen down the other side? Had he jumped down and run away after the carriage stopped so suddenly? Had—had he been in the carriage at all during the wild drive up the hill?

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She followed James Blake as he picked his way carefully around the whinnying horses. Was this all a part of the strange series of events that had seemed to pursue her ever since she knew for certain that she was to make this trip?

Nan stepped up beside the old Scotsman when he paused to examine the feet of one of the horses in passing. What did he know about all of this? She determined to ask him when they were alone again. Now, she took comfort in noting the kindly expression on his face as he rubbed the head of one of the horses that seemed to be hurt. The animal nuzzled his nose in the master's hand.

"Easy now," he encouraged and almost at once the animals stopped the impatient shaking of their heads.

They reached the other side of the coachman's seat and fearfully looked around. There was nothing there. They walked back over the road for several yards. Still they found no signs of the missing person.

James Blake scratched his head reflectively. "Come, now," he took Nan's hand firmly in his, "come, stay close to me and we'll clear this mystery up." His voice sounded confident, but inside he was sure, as sure as he was of anything that this was no mere accident.

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He felt the warmth of Nan's hand in his. He noted her apparent fearlessness. "The lass should never have been allowed to come to Emberon," he thought and was annoyed that his own desire to see her had allowed him, in the early months of the year, to persuade himself that it would be all right.

Why hadn't he allowed the Edinburgh solicitors who had handled the estate carry out the final terms of the will of old Hugh without his meddling? Ah, but it was too late to think of that now. She was here and had to stay, at least for the night. Perhaps tomorrow he could send her on to Edinburgh. But now, now it was best to get her mind off this—accident. It was best to get her

back in her apartment at Emberon. He could guard her there.

"Come, lass," he spoke, as he turned from his search along the side of the road, "these things are not for young ladies. You and your friends must go back to the house. We'll let someone from there make the necessary inquiry."

"But what if the coachman is lying along the road, hurt?" Nan protested. "If we wait, it might be too late to help him. Please, let me look down the road a way further." She almost wrenched her hand free from his as she spoke. [198]

"That's a brave lass," he complimented her. Nevertheless he didn't let her go. He turned abruptly and started back toward the carriage. Against her will, she went along with him.

"Did you find him?" Laura was waiting beside the door of the carriage as they came up to it again.

Nan shook her head. What was this all about? Why had old James Blake stopped the search for the missing coachman so suddenly? Exhausted from the day's events, the landing at Glasgow, the trip to Emberon, the excitement over the Scotch games, and then this mystery, she felt impatient with the old gentleman. She was still afraid that the coachman lay out there in the dark somewhere, injured.

Her feeling of impatience continued as James hustled the girls into the carriage, closed the door after them, and then walked alone to the big gate and pulled three times on the big bell rope.

In the stillness of the night, the girls, huddled in the carriage, could hear very faintly the sound of the bell up at the big house. Then they heard, or thought they heard, the sound of a door, footsteps, and at long last, there was someone at the gate. Though they couldn't see anyone, they knew that James Blake was in whispered consultation. [199]

Finally, there was the grating noise of the gates swinging back on rusty hinges. James Blake sent a man from the house to drive the carriage the rest of the way. The girls were glad to hear the slapping sound of the reins as the new driver put them in place over the horses' backs.

The carriage pulled out of a rut, lunged forward and then came to a stop again.

"Careful!" The voice was that of the old steward. The driver tried again. This time a horse stumbled.

"Whoa, there," James Blake ordered, "we canna drive them. The poor beastie is hurt."

So it happened that at sometime after midnight, six Lakeview Hall girls and Dr. Prescott got out of a carriage and walked along the lonely entrance road to Emberon Castle.

CHAPTER XXV

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JAMES BLAKE DOES SOME EXPLAINING

They were all wary as they picked their way over the dry rutted road, but Nan more so than any of them. Even as James Blake felt responsible for her, so she felt responsible for her friends. There was small comfort now, in this lonely place, in the memory that the hunchback had told Bess that "these things had no part of her." The accident, if such it might be called, on the hill just now, might very well have killed them all. Nan shuddered as she thought of how serious it might have been.

She peered this way and that into the tangle of bushes, grass, and thistles along the way, not knowing what she was looking for, but suspicious of every dark shadow.

Once, she looked gratefully up at the sky, the big moon, and the bright stars. She stumbled.

"No star gazing tonight," Laura steadied her as she almost fell. "And what a moon, and what a sky, and what a shadow." Laura pointed off to the right. "Look," she whispered, half in fun, half in seriousness, "look, it's like a man carrying something long in his hand." [201]

Nan's glance followed Laura's. The shadow—was it a man's? She watched it. Was it moving? Then she breathed a deep sigh.

"Oh, Laura," she chided her friend, "it's only a tree! Will you stop teasing?"

"What was a tree?" Grace was on edge too, anxious to get inside, anxious to get away from this castle that had seemed so wonderful and so grand only a few hours ago.

"Nothing, Grace." Nan tried to keep her own voice from seeming worried as she spoke. "Laura's seeing things in the dark."

Grace didn't answer, because she had been seeing things too. In the face of Nan's quietness and calmness, it did seem silly. With this thought, she felt encouraged and looked more bravely around her. An owl hooted. She jumped. All the girls jumped. It was Dr. Prescott's voice this time that calmed them down.

"Almost there, girls!" her voice actually sounded cheery in the night.

"Aye, and safely too." Old James Blake had been particularly silent since they left the carriage. Now, he spoke with a great sense of relief. Already he could see that a door was open and inside there was light and security.

He stepped his foot on the first of the broad stone steps and stood there as the girls walked on up through the door and into the light of the great hall. After watching them disappear, he turned, gave one last penetrating glance into the night, but saw nothing to disturb him further. He listened then for the sound of the horses, heard one whinny. It was a rather pleasant, comforting sound. He was satisfied that they were being properly cared for, so he too walked up the steps, conscious now for the first time that the wound in his forehead ached and that his head hurt.

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The pain angered him. Again he turned away from the light. This time, he shook his fist at the unseen forces out there in the dark.

"Ye'll not do her harm," he said, "as long as James Blake can fight." With this, he set his chin firmly and followed the American lassies into the castle.

Already, at Dr. Prescott's insistence they had found their way to their rooms. She lingered in the apartment until they had undressed and were safely in bed. Then she herself carefully closed their doors before she returned to the Hall where James Blake was sitting before the big open fireplace, puzzling over the whole situation.

"Your head, is it injured badly?" There was a real note of concern in her voice as she spoke. She liked this old Scotsman, even if she couldn't understand the ways of his household.

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"It's nothing at all," he waived all consideration of himself. "Are the lassies all right?" He nodded his head in the direction of the stairs.

Dr. Prescott knew by his tone that his entire thought was for them. "Quite all right at present," she answered as she sat down in the chair he had pulled out for her with a quaint courtly sort of grace. "Now, tell me," she entreated, "what is this all about? What happened down on the hill?"

He didn't answer at once, but sat thinking. Should he tell as much of the story as he knew? Would it help or hinder this woman to know? For a moment he sat appraising her. She looked capable enough, he decided, but then, there was no telling about women. He shook his head and winced, without thinking, at the pain. After all, he decided finally, this pleasant looking woman was Nan's guardian in the absence of her mother and father. It was only fair that she know everything that he did. Then, too, if things worked out rightly, she would have to be Nan's sponsor in the whole London business.

Dr. Prescott, though she couldn't read his thoughts exactly, knew, from her long experience with people, approximately what was going on in his mind. She sat silent while she saw him coming to his decision.

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Eventually, he spoke. "You know, of course," he said, "the story of Mrs. Sherwood's inheritance?" Dr. Prescott nodded her head. "And why Nancy is here?" he continued.

Dr. Prescott was a little puzzled at this question. "Why—yes," she agreed slowly, "to see the estate."

"Yes, in part." James Blake seemed to be feeling his way along now. "That is the reason that was given, at least, for our anxiety to have her come, that and the fact that we wanted to see her. An old man's whim, you know, that is what Nan's mother, bless her heart, thought. But actually, there is more behind this than appears on the surface.

"Old Hugh Blake was more of a power in this section of Scotland than most people of this generation realize," he went on. "The Blake family, in the beginning of Scotland's history, was, if you will pardon my saying so, for I, too, am one of his descendants, because of its wealth and intelligence, very close to the royal family. However, the old line gradually died out. This explains how it happened Mrs. Sherwood inherited the estate.

"But in the old days, when the clans hereabouts practically ruled the country, the Blakes of Emberon were frequently called to London to advise the king's ministers. At such times they were generally rewarded in one way or another. Sometimes it was with land, sometimes with important foreign posts, sometimes with court privileges that were highly prized in those days. Yes, and highly respected," he added, as the thought of the day's happenings again crossed his mind.

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"So it happened that Hugh Blake the fourth, the original Laird of Emberon—it was he who built this Hall we are sitting in—back in the sixteenth century performed a service to the King that won for him an ambassadorship to France. It was a particularly ticklish post then, for France and Scotland and England were continually having trouble.

"Well, Hugh Blake, he is supposed to have been a very charming young man at the time, gifted

and well-educated, became a favorite at the French court, and well-beloved of the French king. So it was, that once, in the tangled history of the time, he succeeded in getting some concessions from the French that were most advantageous to the English.

"London and the court there was so pleased with young Hugh that they bestowed on him and his descendants forever the privilege of assisting at the coronation of English kings." His voice was excited and nervous as he finished the sentence.

"You understand what I am saying?" The old man looked at Dr. Prescott intently. Then he shook his head. [206]

"Perhaps I don't make myself quite clear," he added. "The simple fact is," he explained further, "that Mrs. Sherwood's inheritance carried with it the right to assist at the present coronation! Moreover, her great uncle, Hugh Blake, who got his name from the old line, specified to those of us who were his friends, that young Nan, if she seemed to us to be worthy, should be the one to carry on! That is why we wanted her to come. That is why the villagers were so anxious to see her. And that is why," he lowered his voice now, "I was fearful of her safety out there this night."

"You mean there is some opposition?" Dr. Prescott asked when she found her voice after this amazing story had been told.

"Yes, on the part of one or two," the old man admitted, "who think, and wrongly so, that if some means can be found to prevent Nan's taking part at the crowning this spring, they will be able to prove their right to carry on when the court of claims, where such things are argued before the king's representatives, meets a few days hence in London."

"Does Mrs. Sherwood know of all of this?" Dr. Prescott asked further.

"Not yet. This portion of the inheritance was bestowed under the terms of another will which was put in my keeping by Hugh Blake. The Edinburgh solicitors who handled the estate for Mrs. Sherwood when she and her husband were here, know this story I have told you, however. Even now, they are awaiting word from me as to how to proceed. They are anxious, too, for Nan to come. Tonight, with your consent," he continued, "I will send off a cable to America, explaining the circumstances. We will not proceed until we hear from Nancy's parents." [207]

Somewhere in the large rooms of the old castle a clock now chimed slowly, one, two, three.

Dr. Prescott looked at her watch. "Will you be so kind," she said as she arose from her chair, "as to wait and send that cable in the morning? What you have told me here tonight has come so unexpectedly that I'd like an hour or two to think it over before communicating with Nan's parents."

"You don't object," James Blake seemed startled at the mere thought, "to Nan's taking part in the coronation?"

"None whatsoever," Dr. Prescott hastened to assure him. "It will be a great privilege and honor indeed, doubly so, because she is an American girl."

"Aye, that has been some of the cause for trouble," he said, "with the people hereabouts. They didn't want the honor to go across the seas. But Nancy's mother, when she came over to take possession of the estate quite won the heart of everyone. Now Nancy has done the same. There will be no more trouble of that sort," he promised, "and no more trouble of any kind, if I can help it." He finished the sentence belligerently. [208]

His own fighting mood brought back to Dr. Prescott's mind the accident in the carriage.

"Do you know at all what happened tonight?" she asked.

"You mean what caused the accident?" he parried, for here was something he did not want to talk about as yet.

"Yes."

"I am not certain as yet," he admitted half the truth, "but if you will have faith in an old man and leave your question rest for a few hours," he was very serious as he spoke, "I will answer it later. There is no need for you to worry," he concluded. With this he walked with her over to the stairway and watched her as she went up.

Alone in the hall now, he rang a bell and called for the servant who had been left with the carriage.

NAN'S DISAPPEARANCE

Somewhere on the estate a cock crowed.

Nan stirred sleepily and turned over. The cock crowed triumphantly again. Nan turned once more and saw that the morning sun was filtering in through the heavy drapes at the windows. She rubbed her eyes and stretched. She looked around. Where was she? Then she spied the ancestral portraits frowning down upon her and she remembered everything.

So she had slept after all! She remembered vaguely an urge the night before to stay awake and watch to see that nothing happened. Why, it was music that had lulled her to sleep! She remembered it now, the faint far away sound of a bagpipe playing. It had been like a dream, for with the wind around the castle and the creaking of the old floors, she had been completely unable to follow the thread of the tune. It had come, died away, and come again. In trying to follow it, she had fallen asleep at last.

Now she lay listening. There were no sounds at all to be heard in the old castle. She got up quietly, slipped into her robe and slippers, and walked softly over to the windows, careful all the while not to disturb anyone. She pulled the curtains back and stood looking down on the castle grounds, seeing them in the daylight for the first time. [210]

The big gray stone building she was in, she could see now, was built on a pinnacle so that on all sides there were valleys below. She remembered what Dr. Beulah had said the night before about the old castles. Now she saw in imagination the leaders of clans in days gone by standing where she was, watching the approach of the enemy below.

She peopled the towers that she could see with beautiful princesses, the crumbling walls of the older unused parts of the castle with knights in armor, singing, talking, laughing, and fighting. She imagined all sorts of plots and counterplots, and now in the valleys there was grain growing and cattle grazing! How pretty it looked in the early morning sunshine! So different than it had seemed the night before!

Now she thought again of the accident on the hill. What had caused it? Could she learn more by daylight than she had been able to by night? A bird sang cheerily outside. Another flew across her line of vision. Everything seemed to be beckoning her to come out and explore. She turned from the window and dressed hastily. Perhaps she could solve last night's mystery by going down the hill. Perhaps she could solve it and set everyone's mind at rest! [211]

She opened the door carefully and walked slowly down the big staircase into the Great Hall. There James Blake was asleep before the big fireplace where the embers of last night's fire were still burning. She saw that his head was bandaged and that he looked tired and worried, even in sleep. She couldn't know that he had dropped off only a half hour before from sheer exhaustion. He had spent the few hours remaining after his talk with Dr. Prescott and his servant in personally watching to see that nothing further happened.

Now, as he slept, she walked quietly past his back. He stirred and muttered something. She stopped. He sank back into quiet sleep and she went on and out, opening the door carefully and closing it the same.

James Blake stirred again and awakened then with a start. He looked around. "Auld fool!" he muttered. "Sleeping, when ye'd set yourself to watch those lassies." He got up and walked around the room. Everything seemed to be all right. Stiff from his night in the chair he stretched, threw a knotted log of wood on the fire, and then rang for a servant. [212]

"The young lassies upstairs are tired," he said. "See that everything is kept quiet so they will sleep until late. Before the day is over, they will be off to Edinburgh." So it was not until hours after she had slipped through the door, walked down the road past the bushes that had seemed such a menace the night before, and passed through the gate, that Nan's disappearance was discovered.

It was Bess who missed her first. Awakening much later than Nan, she lay for some time enjoying the luxury of the room in which she slept. She noted every detail of the furnishings and determined that when she returned to school in the fall, nothing of all this would be lost in the telling. She half hoped that she would have the opportunity to tell Linda Riggs. In her mind's eye, she picked out one or two others that she would like to impress. No one that she knew, she thought with satisfaction, had ever even seen such a place as this old castle, much less stayed in one.

The more she thought of it, the grander it seemed. A little feeling of envy came over her. Why was it that the nice things that happened to Nan never happened to her? Why couldn't her father or mother have a place like this? Bess was a thoughtless unappreciative little person at times. Though her father and mother gave her everything within their means, she was still dissatisfied. Her hand touched the satin cover that was over her. As quickly as the feeling of envy had come, it went. She listened for sounds. Was Nan awake in the next room? [213]

She got up and stuck her head in through the door. The bed was empty! Was everyone except herself up? She went across the hall to Laura's room, and found her still sleeping. She looked in the big double room where Amelia and Grace were. They were sleeping too. So was Rhoda. She

debated once as to whether or not she should look into Dr. Prescott's apartment. "I don't dare to do that," she decided, "Nan's probably downstairs waiting for us. Maybe she will come up, if I stay here."

She went back into her own room, and because she was cold, she crawled back into bed. But then her curiosity as to Nan's whereabouts got the better of her. Maybe Nan was out exploring! It would be fun to walk around the castle grounds!

She dressed almost as quickly as Nan had, slipped out quietly too, and went downstairs.

"Weel, lassie," James Blake greeted her as she entered the big hall. "Ye're up bright and early this morning."

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"But I'm not the first," Bess smiled back, "Where's Nan?"

"Why, the lass is still asleep," he began heartily, and then noting the puzzled expression on Bess's face, he added, "Isn't she?" A world of possibilities came to his mind as he asked the question and he repeated it before Bess could answer. "Tell me quickly, isn't she upstairs? Isn't she with her other friends, with the school mistress? Isn't she about up there some place?"

Bess was frightened too now and turned. "I'll ask Dr. Prescott," she called over her shoulder as she went up the stairs. "Shall I?"

"Aye, lass, and be quick!" Old James Blake followed her half way up the stairs.

But Dr. Prescott, awake herself in her apartment, heard their voices, and came out on the landing. "Is there anything wrong?" Before the question was answered, she knew the response. "Nan's missing!" For a moment the two older people stood with Bess between them looking hopelessly into one another's faces. Then they all got busy.

A hurried check of Nan's room showed that what they feared most had not happened. The young girl had left the apartment of her own accord. She had not been kidnapped, at least not while in her room. "She's probably just gone exploring." Bess took the whole thing calmly at first, for she knew Nan's habits.

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"Aye, maybe so," old James Blake agreed, "but 'tis better to have her here with us. We'll all do our exploring together." With this, he called the servants and tried to check on Nan's movements. No one had seen her.

A search was organized. Everyone was sent to a different part of the estate. Old James Blake himself climbed to the top of the highest tower and looked out over the grounds. He came down sadly.

There was no Nan to be seen or found anyplace.

CHAPTER XXVII

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BESS HAS HER SAY

"I just can't believe things won't turn out all right!" Bess exclaimed, as she and her other Lakeview Hall friends sat together in Nan's room in the great castle. "And I hate having to stay here! I don't see why they can't let us help too! After all, Nan's our friend and if she is in trouble, we ought to be allowed to help her get out of it."

"But Bess," Rhoda spoke softly, "they told us to stay here so that we would be handy in case we were needed. I'm sure that if there was anything at all in the world that we could do, Dr. Prescott would call us."

"I'm not so sure of that," Bess answered. "She treats us most of the time as though we were babies. It happens this time," she continued with some satisfaction, "that we know more than anyone about what has been going on."

"What do you mean?" Laura spoke up now.

"Well, for one thing," Bess began, "we know about the hunchback and nobody else does."

"Do you think he has anything to do with this?" Laura looked at Bess intently. "After all, you know, no one is certain but what Nan has just gone out and lost herself. You all know how she likes to wander around strange places by herself."

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"I said that downstairs, myself," Bess answered, "but I don't believe it at all. Nan wouldn't worry us like this. Moreover, when we got on the train at Glasgow I thought I saw that old hunchback getting on, too. I didn't say anything about it then, because I didn't want to spoil the good time

we were having. But I'm sure I saw him." She waited, watching the effect of her announcement on the others.

"Well, that settles it," Laura got up, "I'm going right downstairs now and tell them about him. Maybe it will help them to find Nan."

"Don't you do that." It was Bess who stopped her. "We promised Nan we wouldn't say anything about him and we're not going to. Anyway, Dr. Prescott would be angry to know that those things happened on the boat and that we didn't tell her. You know she would, and it would spoil all the rest of our trip."

"Maybe Bess is right," Grace agreed timidly. "Maybe we had just better wait for a while and see what happens."

"We'll wait for two hours," Amelia looked at her watch, "and if Nan hasn't come back by then, I think we should tell everything we know. It really might help Mr. Blake. He seems terribly worried." [218]

"Yes, there's something more to this than we know about, I'm sure. I heard Dr. Prescott and him talking about sending for some people in the village to help join in the search."

"Have they done it?" Bess asked quickly.

"I don't believe so," Laura answered. "She asked him to wait, to give Nan time to come back if she had wandered off by herself. She doesn't want any of this to get into the newspapers, if she can help it."

"Oh, if it does, it will frighten all our people back home and we'll have to go back right away, I know," Bess was worried at this thought. "Why didn't Nan stay here with us?"

"Maybe we ought to tell all that we know now," Rhoda returned to the question that had been set aside a few moments before. "It certainly can't do any harm. Dr. Prescott probably will scold us, but that's nothing beside the risk of harming Nan by not telling."

"Rhoda's right," Laura got up once more, "and I don't care what the rest of you think, I'm going downstairs now and tell. I just can't stand sitting here any longer and not doing anything."

"All right, then," Bess gave in, for she too was becoming tired of just waiting. "Let's all go down together. Are the rest of you agreed?" [219]

Grace still seemed reluctant to go, for she was one to obey orders and felt that if the people downstairs wanted them, they would call. She said something of this to her friends.

"Oh, Grace, don't be so afraid," Laura was impatient with her now, "You can just bet that, if they thought we had anything at all worth telling, they would have asked us long ago. Now, come on, don't be a baby."

"Maybe it isn't worth telling." Grace was growing stubborn now.

"Well, all I can say is," Laura replied to this, "that if the fact that a mysterious person went through Nan's luggage once and then followed her from the time we got off the boat until we got here isn't worth telling, then nothing is. Now, come on."

There was no more argument. Together the girls went downstairs to where James Blake and Dr. Prescott were holding consultation with two villagers who had been called in when Dr. Prescott had finally given her consent to ask for outside help.

"You understand," James Blake was saying, as they entered, "the lassie has gone off by herself and been lost. There is to be no word of anything else told to anyone, but we want a thorough search made of every likely hiding place in the neighborhood. No one would hurt her, but as you both know, there might be good reason to keep her in hiding until after the good king is crowned. Now, mind you, hold your tongues, and report back to me as quickly—" He left the sentence unfinished as he saw the girls. [220]

"What is it lassies?" He smiled reassuringly down at them.

Laura plunged into her story without any preliminaries.

"And he was—a hunchback—red headed—with strange eyes?" The old man seemed to grow much older even as he repeated the words. "Then it is as I feared. The man we want is Robert Hugh Blake, my own poor, misguided brother!"

He rubbed his hand across his face, as he spoke. For a moment, he looked as though the whole thing was more than he could possibly stand.

Those in the room watched him silently, feeling at once how deeply he was hurt. To Bess alone, the name, Robert Hugh Blake, had a familiar ring. As she heard it, her thoughts flashed back to the last day on the boat when she had surprised the hunchback at Nan's luggage. She remembered Nan's revelation then, remembered her own puzzling over a clue that just escaped her memory. [221]

Now, she puckered her brows over it again and tried to go back further over the things that had happened. There! No, it didn't quite come. She tried harder, sure now that the fact that was

escaping her had an important bearing upon the present mystery. She went back in time over the scenes on the boat, their farewells to their parents, the trip to New York, the last days at school, the worry when for so long they didn't receive any letters—

There, she had it now! It was a letter, the mysterious letter Nan had read in their room at Lakeview! It was the letter Nan had refused to explain, although it had left her nervous and excited! Bess remembered the scene all quite clearly now. She knew now, as she knew then, that Nan's explanation that it made her homesick wasn't the truth. She knew that that letter had been the beginning of all their troubles!

Without thinking further, she blurted out what she knew about it. James Blake, Dr. Prescott, everyone in the room listened intently to everything that Bess had to say. For once, she made a clean breast of everything and told all that she knew of what had been happening.

"And where, lassie, is that letter?" James Blake made a distinct effort to forget his own sorrow at the turn of events. Action was needed now. [222]

"I don't know, unless it is in her bags," Bess started upstairs at once. "I'll go look." At last she felt important, as though she was doing her part to help locate Nan.

But much as she wanted to, she couldn't find the note in question. She looked over everything most thoroughly, admiring, even in her excitement, the extreme neatness of Nan's bags. But she found nothing unusual at all. She went slowly back downstairs and reported.

"Did you ever see the letter at all?" Dr. Prescott questioned her, "the envelope, the stamps, or the postmark?"

Bess shook her head, wishing now that when she had first noticed Nan sitting troubled over it, she had insisted on knowing what it was all about. "If I hadn't been so interested in that old memory book," she thought regretfully, "I might have known more now."

But regrets were of no use, now. All in the room felt regrets in one form or another, but that did not bring Nan back.

Old James Blake had sat silently by, during Dr. Prescott's questioning, knowing that she thought as he did, that the letter Nan had received in Lakeview was some sort of warning as to what would happen to her, if she left the United States. He knew, too, that in asking about the postmark, she was trying to find out whether or not it had been mailed in Scotland. [223]

"There is only one thing to do," he spoke rather sadly, "and much as I hate to have it happen, I must tell you to do it. You must ring that bell over there, call for a servant, and either go yourself or have him go and report this whole thing to the authorities. It's a case, I think, for Scotland Yard."

"You are sure that that is the only course?" Dr. Prescott was most sympathetic.

"Yes, I am sure," the old man said, "My brother, the one whom you all call the hunchback, was injured during the late war so that he was deformed for life and his mind was affected. He has, since his discharge from the hospital, been a recluse, refusing to see anyone except myself and a very few friends. He has spent most of his time searching old family records with the aim in view of writing a family history.

"He has always loved this estate and felt, for no very good reason, that he and I were the logical heirs. When it passed to someone across the water, the blow almost killed him. However, he recovered, and we kept him under close guard when Nancy's parents were here some time ago. [224]

"Apparently, after their departure, since they left the care of the place in our hands, he was resigned to what had happened. However, when the old king died and he saw that our old Scotch privilege of taking part in the coronation was given to an American, the old wound was reopened. For days he was like a mad man around here. Then he quieted down, and I thought that he was accepting fate again. When he disappeared some weeks ago, I made a quiet search. Unable to find out anything, I let the matter rest, hoping against hope that he had gone into retirement as he often has in recent years.

"What must have happened you know as well as I. That he is somewhere in this vicinity, I am certain, as certain as I am that he was the driver of the coach last night on the wild drive up the hill. Why it was that he stopped, that he didn't carry out what I think was his original intention, to drive you all over the embankment, I can only guess.

"It wasn't for fear of losing his own life, I know. I believe that it was concern for me. We have always been very fond of one another."

He said this last simply, and made a motion, as no one else moved, to go himself and pull the bell chord.

CHAPTER XXVIII

NAN COMES INTO HER OWN

"Wait!" Dr. Prescott gave the command as the old Scotsman raised his arm to pull the chord. "Someone's coming!"

With one impulse, everyone in the room turned toward the door. They were all tense as it was opened from without and a group of villagers entered with Robert Hugh Blake in their midst!

"I tell you," he was protesting, "I don't know where the lassie is." His eyes were wild and staring as he spoke. "I tell you I don't—" He broke off his sentence when his eyes lighted on his brother. His whole attitude changed. "James, I don't know where she is," he almost whimpered.

James Blake stepped over to his brother's side. He motioned to the others in the room to keep quiet.

"There, there, Bobby," he spoke as he would to a child, "Of course you don't know where she is now. But where was she when you last saw her?"

"Down in the old gatehouse at the foot of the hill." Robert Blake answered. He was accustomed to obeying his brother. "But I didn't hurt her, not at all." His voice was earnest as he spoke and so sincere, that even Dr. Prescott, worried as she was, believed him. [226]

"I was there playing on the bagpipe," he continued, "as I always do, when she came in through the door. I swear that that's the truth. She sat and talked to me for a long time. She's a sweet little lassie. Then I excused myself and went out for something, telling her that I would be right back. But I locked the door behind me. I was going to keep her there until it was too late for you to find her, but I had forgotten something—" he paused as though he couldn't remember what it was.

"Your bagpipe," James Blake supplied.

"Yes, that was it. It was my bagpipe," he went on looking at his brother throughout his confession. "When I opened the door again, she wasn't there! How she got away I don't know."

"Well, I do!" James Blake's exclamation fell like a thunderbolt on the rapt listeners. "I know where she is," he repeated, "And I'll have her here in a minute now!"

"Have who?" Everyone look around startled. It was Nan's voice!

James Blake went over to her side. "Then you found it, lass! You found it!" His voice rang out through the Hall. "I might have known you would find it!" In his joy, he forgot completely that the assembled crowd didn't know what he was talking about. [227]

"Found what?" Dr. Prescott asked the question everyone had on his tongue.

"The passage, the secret passage from the old gatehouse to the castle here," he answered. "Only a few know of its existence. Evidently my brother here has forgotten. How did you find it, lass?"

"I scarcely know," Nan admitted. "When I found myself locked up, I tried all sorts of ways of getting out without any success at all. I was standing on a chair and trying to climb to that window high above—"

"But that's impossible, lass," James Blake interrupted.

"I know," Nan agreed, "but I was so anxious to get out of there that nothing seemed impossible. Climbing up as I did, I felt closer to the outside anyway. I thought, too, that there was a slight chance of my getting hold of those rough stones that the walls are made of in such a way that I could climb up to the window.

"I couldn't, of course, but in trying, my foot slipped into a nick of some kind in the wall. I pressed down hard on it, hoping to boost myself up. I couldn't. I slipped. I fell. When I picked myself up, I saw that a sliding panel on the opposite wall had moved to one side leaving a great opening. [228]

"I went through. It closed then. I walked on through the dark, and after what seemed ages, I came to the end. I groped around, knowing that there had to be something to make another panel move. Finally, I found it."

"That you did, lass," James Blake was beaming on her now, "and there's not another in England or Scotland or America either that would have found the same. I am proud of you, so proud of you that I'd like to have you stay here always. But that's not to be. Already there are things afoot that require your presence and the presence of your friends in London."

"In London! I know, but we're not leaving here yet, are we?" Nan's voice was almost pleading. "Not when we've just come."

"Yes, lass, that you are." James Blake was regretful, too. "But you'll be coming back."

"But why, why must we leave so soon?" Nan had learned just enough in her morning adventures about the grounds to make her want to explore every inch of the old castle. She had even

considered, on her walk down the road and through the fields to the fateful gatehouse, the possibility of staying in Emberon through the coronation.

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She had toyed with the idea of giving up the great London celebration so that she could live in the castle for a while. She had dismissed the thought, of course. Mr. and Mrs. Mason and Walter were to be in London. She was to meet the friends she had made on the boat there, and the London celebration at the crowning of the new King and Queen would be, she knew, grander than anything she had ever seen.

She wanted to go on to London and she wanted to stay here in Emberon, too! These things all rushed through her mind as she stood in the great old Hall talking to James Blake.

"Yes, lass," he repeated, "you've got to go. There's something waiting there for you that's far greater than anything that's ever happened to you before.

"You, in America, I don't know what you play when you are wee tots, but the children here are kings and queens when they play. A wooden box is their throne. With a lace curtain as a train for the queen then, and gold paper for a crown, they have all the trappings of royalty. All take part. Some are aids to the king. Others, to the queen.

"They live and breathe this from the time they first begin to notice things around them. So when the old king dies and the new king and queen come to live at Buckingham Palace and go to Westminster Cathedral to have the state crowns, gold with all sorts of precious jewels in them, put on their heads and the state swords put in their hands, then all the wee tots pretend they are ladies-in-waiting to the queen or gentlemen attendants of the king.

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"When they see the grand pictures every place of the crowning at Westminster, they imagine themselves giving a sword to the king or helping to arrange the train of the queen. Aye, in imagination they are all there in that beautiful Cathedral helping with the service.

"But actually, only a few are so honored in real life. The privilege to assist at the crowning of the English king is passed down by great families from generation to generation." He paused here to let the young lassies get the full importance of his words.

Nan looked from him to her friends. What was this all about? What did it have to do with her going to London? Dr. Prescott seemed to know! She was smiling down at Nan. The other girls, did they know, too? They seemed to understand. Their faces were radiant as the old Scotsman spoke, for the truth is, they were understanding for the first time what James Blake had meant an hour before. He had said something then about the privilege of taking part in the coronation going across the water. Could he have meant—

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Now they all looked up at him as he concluded. "Nancy dear," he said, "as you know, the old Blake line has died out. Those who would have carried out the ancient privilege of assisting at the present crowning in London are dead. However, under terms of the will of the late Hugh Blake, you" he spoke low and slowly now, but very distinctly, "are chosen to act as a lady-in-waiting to the queen, God bless her soul! That is why you must be off to London now."

CHAPTER XXIX

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LONDON ON HOLIDAY

"But I don't want to do it!" Nan was up in her room in the old castle, packing, when she made this astonishing remark.

"Why, Nancy Sherwood, how you talk!" Bess just wouldn't believe that anyone could be so foolish as to mean what her closest friend had just said. "You don't want to be in Westminster Cathedral with all those lords and ladies, ambassadors and ministers, kings and queens, when they crown the English king and queen? Why, Nan, you don't mean that at all. You know you don't."

"I do too mean it." Nan's chin was firm and her voice very positive as she spoke. "I want to be with all of you, just as we had planned, when we are in London."

"Don't be silly!" Bess paused in her packing to look at her friend. "You'll have a better time than any of us can ever hope to have. If I didn't like you so much, I'd just be green with envy. Think of it! You'll see the whole royal family and talk to them.

"You'll have a long white court dress like those we have been seeing in the papers. You'll be driven up to Westminster in a carriage behind the royal coach and you'll go in there and see everything that we can only read about. And if you don't remember every single detail of what happens, I'll never speak to you again!

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"You'll see all the court dresses, the ermine capes, the little coronets of the peeresses, and the

grand coronation robes of the king and queen. You'll see the little prince and princess, the duchess and her handsome husband, and that new Ambassador from the United States that everyone is talking about.

"You'll see them all and talk to them. Why, it's all something to dream about and here it's happened to you! Oh, Nan, I'm so excited I could cry."

"There, there, Bess," Laura came into the room, "if you cry all over that taffeta dress you are packing, you'll die of grief and never see Nan in all her glory."

"Nan," she turned to her friend, "you run along downstairs. They want you. I'll finish your packing and don't you dare let anyone at all hear you say what I heard you say to Bess about not wanting to be a lady-in-waiting to the queen! Forsooth! They hang people for less or else they throw them into musty old dungeons and let them die. It would be a shame to have you pining away in a prison, while we were sitting in the pleasant May sunshine watching golden coaches full of fair ladies drive by."

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"Oh, I'll be good from now on," Nan promised as she disappeared down the stairs.

There, everything was in a turmoil, and Nan was the center of it all. It was, "Nan, darling, here's a cable from your mother," "Lass, a telegram from Edinburgh," and "Miss Nan, a phone call from London," and a thousand and one other exciting things until Nan didn't know which way to turn next.

Then she was whisked off with her friends to a train. They had a private coach this time, one provided by the village of Emberon from the funds collected at the celebration on the night of Nan's arrival. The whole town turned out to see them off. There was music and laughter and good wishes all round and a promise exacted from Nan to come back again.

James Blake was the last to bid her good-by. He pushed her through the crowd that swarmed about her on the station steps, took her into her coach, and seated her.

"Now, lass," he said, "forget the unpleasant things that have happened and remember that Emberon is your home, too."

Nan nodded her head, and swallowed the lump that was in her throat. She couldn't speak. The excitement in leaving the castle and listening now to all the nice things that were being said was almost too much.

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The old man understood her feelings, so without waiting for her to answer, he went on. "When you are down there in London, don't forget that the Blakes are a proud lot and that on this occasion, you are their representative. If you find that I can help you further, call me by phone. I'd give the world to be there," he added longingly, "but other matters that you know about keep me here. My brother must be taken care of now."

"So, lass," he ended, "do your best and make us all proud of you." With this, he kissed her lightly on the cheek and left her. The last thing that she saw clearly on the station steps, as the great engine gathered speed, was old James Blake waving goodbye with a big white handkerchief. The last thing that she heard was the refrain of "The Bonnie, Bonnie Banks of Loch Lomond."

"Oh, I remember now," Nan exclaimed, when the last cottage in the village had disappeared from view, "I remember what it was that poor old Robert Blake was playing on his bagpipe! It was that song they were just singing back there. And that was the song that I heard last night when I dropped off to sleep."

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"Why, that must be the lake he was telling me about this morning in the gatehouse when he told me something of his boyhood. He said he couldn't remember the name of the place where he used to go so many times alone when he was a lad, to read and write and dream, but that he was sure that it was beautiful."

"He said that there was a mountain by a lake that had clear green water in it. He said that once when he was there, he came upon a camp of gypsies and that the old queen told his fortune."

"What did she say?" Bess asked when it seemed that Nan wasn't going to go on.

"She told him all about his youth," Nan continued rather sadly, "and then about the war. After that she stopped. She said that she couldn't be sure whether he was going to live through it or not."

"Oh, dear," Nan looked away from the girls and out the windows at the landscape skimming by, as she finished, "I feel so sorry for him!"

"So do I," Grace agreed. "But, tell us, Nan, why was it he insisted on searching through your baggage the way he did?"

"Oh, Grace, he wanted to get that letter I told Mr. Blake about," Bess answered the question. "What I want to know is, what became of it?"

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"Yes, and what in the world was in it?" Laura contributed.

"I had it with me when you were hunting for it," Nan explained, "and as for what was in it—it was a warning that if I came to Scotland and to Emberon that I'd never live to see the coronation!"

"Nan! And you didn't say a word to anyone about it!" Bess felt like scolding her friend. "You might have been killed!"

"I know I was foolish," Nan admitted. "And I hereby promise never to do anything like that again," she ended solemnly.

So, all the way to London, the girls talked of things that had happened and things that were going to happen. Their one big regret was the fact that they weren't going to see Edinburgh on this trip. Messrs. Kellam and Blake, attorneys for the Emberon estate, had insisted that Nan go directly to London to present her claims to assist at the coronation.

The next morning found them rolling into Euston Station where Walter, Mr. and Mrs. Mason, and Professor Krenner were all waiting for them. How good it seemed to see familiar faces!

"My, this is the very nicest part of the trip!" Nan exclaimed and then blushed when she saw that Walter's eyes were upon her.

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The others were bundled into a taxi, but Walter insisted that Nan go in his car to her hotel. So her first sight of London and the River Thames was with Walter, a fact that she was never to forget in her whole long happy life.

In the days that followed, Nan Sherwood and her friends were in a constant whirl. There were a million things to be done and a million places to go, and they wanted to do everything and go every place.

With banners flying from all the buildings, bunting draped across streets, and wreathes bearing portraits of the king and queen hanging every place, London was in a festive mood. The streets were thronged with people of all nationalities. Troops from all over the British Empire, to the number of 50,000, added color and gaiety to the crowd.

Every hotel in the great city was filled to capacity. Big ships lay at anchor in the port, floating hotels for visitors from Australia, South Africa, the American continents, the West Indies, from the remotest corners of the globe.

During the day, all these people poured out into the streets. With bands playing, troops marching, parades wherever you looked, it was all very gay and exciting.

"Did you ever see anything like this in your whole life?" Nan looked about and laughed. Walter was at her side, making way for her, as she pushed her way through the crowds outside the royal offices where the court of claims had just met.

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"No, Princess," Walter grinned down at her.

"Oh, don't call me that," Nan protested. "Really, I sometimes feel awfully silly about this whole business. Imagine me acting as lady-in-waiting to a queen. Did you see all those people stare at me in there?"

"They weren't staring. They were admiring you." Walter could be gallant at times. Now he was secretly a little awed at the turn of events, impressed by Nan's new importance, for her claim had been presented to the solemn be-wigged court and accepted.

She was to assist at the coronation and, according to an ancient ruling, receive in payment eight seats inside Westminster to be distributed as she willed! Their promised seats in Piccadilly, obtained by Mr. Mason, had been of the best, but these, these were priceless! It was impossible to buy them. They could be obtained only through a special grant from the king, even as Nan had received hers.

Now, she could hardly wait as Walter drove slowly along with the left hand traffic that is peculiar to London. She had seats, she thought to herself, for Bess, Laura, Amelia, Rhoda, Grace and Walter—how nice he was being to her!—Dr. Prescott, and Professor Krenner, and she wanted to tell them all right away!

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CHAPTER XXX

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THE KING IS CROWNED!

The day of the coronation came at last. It was a bright clear day, king's weather the Londoners called it.

The streets all along the route of the procession were crowded with great masses of people, held back from the road by London bobbies. They hung out of windows, sat in trees, covered the tops of buildings, and filled immense grandstands. Some of them had been in their places all night.

Others, long before dawn, had found their way through the dark streets. It seemed as though all the world was there, waiting expectantly for the royal family.

When the procession came at last, wave after wave of cheering swept along the crowds. From her place in a coach, Nan looked out on a merry happy throng, for the king was well beloved by his people.

Nan, with others who were to surround the royal family in its moment of triumph, was ushered through a side door of the Cathedral and taken to her place under the great pointed arches. Here, in this church, every English sovereign since the beginning of England's history had received his crown, and here, now amid the tombs of kings and queens and the distinguished dead of all ages, a new king and queen were to take their vows. [242]

These things ran through Nan's mind as she glanced about the Cathedral and tried to locate her friends. Was that Bess that she saw in a gallery high above her? And that Walter sitting next to her? Nan puckered her brows and looked again. Yes, it was, and she had no more than found them, when the deep tones of the great cathedral organ spread out through the church. The Westminster choir joined in singing, "I was glad when they said unto me, we will go into the House of the Lord."

With this, the king and queen entered, walking slowly and solemnly down the long coronation carpet to the altar where they stopped and knelt.

During the service that followed, so solemn and serious that many in the church were crying, Nan, for the first time began to realize what a great honor had been bestowed upon her in allowing her to be present. She felt humble and insignificant as the ceremony proceeded from one climax to another.

When the Archbishop of Canterbury finally placed the crown on the king's head and said, "God crown you with a crown of glory and righteousness," no other sound could be heard under the great vaulted arches. Then, as he finished his words, drums and trumpets broke into a clamor and the shout of "God Save the King!" rang through the Abbey, from floor to roof, while far away outside, guns announced to the waiting throngs that a new king had been crowned. [243]

The peers put on their coronets. In the same manner as the king, the queen was crowned. The peeresses put on their coronets.

When it was all over, a procession formed and passed, under the slanting rays of light that came through the big rose windows, to the wide open doors and then out, where all London waited to sing and shout, "May the King live forever! Long live the King!"

"I'll never forget it," Nan said to her friends, her Lakeview Hall friends and Jeanie, Hetty, and Maureen at the tea that followed. It was the tea that had been planned so long before on the boat, and was given now by Hetty's grandmother in honor of Nan so that all might hear of the wonderful things that had been happening.

"Nor will we," her friends echoed, for each had seen something special in the coronation.

So we will leave them, comparing notes on the biggest event of their summer holidays. As we go out, it's Hetty who turns to Maureen and reminds her, "Remember, grandmother said on the boat that you never can tell what's going to happen to the likes of us." [244]

Maureen nods her head, and Hetty adds as we close the door, "What happened to Nan proves it."

You can hear them talking about it now and agreeing. You'll agree too, if you read of their further adventures in the next exciting volume in the series, "Nan Sherwood on the Mexican Border."

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*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK NAN SHERWOOD'S SUMMER HOLIDAYS ***

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