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Title: The Corner House Girls Among the Gypsies

Author: Grace Brooks Hill

Illustrator: Thelma Gooch

Release date: June 12, 2011 [EBook #36400]

Language: English

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE CORNER HOUSE GIRLS AMONG THE GYPSIES ***

E-text prepared by Roger Frank
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One young woman brought a great pan of stew and bread and three spoons to the van. *Frontispiece.*

CORNER HOUSE GIRLS AMONG THE GYPSIES

HOW THEY MET
WHAT HAPPENED
AND HOW IT ENDED

BY
GRACE BROOKS HILL

Author of "The Corner House Girls," "The Corner House
Girls on a Houseboat," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY
THELMA GOOCH



BARSE & HOPKINS
PUBLISHERS
NEWARK, N. J. NEW YORK, N. Y.

BOOKS FOR GIRLS
The Corner House Girls Series
By Grace Brooks Hill
12mo. Cloth. Illustrated.

THE CORNER HOUSE GIRLS
THE CORNER HOUSE GIRLS AT SCHOOL
THE CORNER HOUSE GIRLS UNDER CANVAS
THE CORNER HOUSE GIRLS IN A PLAY
THE CORNER HOUSE GIRLS' ODD FIND
THE CORNER HOUSE GIRLS ON A TOUR
THE CORNER HOUSE GIRLS GROWING UP
THE CORNER HOUSE GIRLS SNOWBOUND
THE CORNER HOUSE GIRLS ON A HOUSEBOAT
THE CORNER HOUSE GIRLS AMONG THE GYPSIES

PUBLISHERS
BARSE & HOPKINS
NEWARK, N. J. NEW YORK, N. Y.

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The Corner House Girls Among the Gypsies
Printed in U. S. A.

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THE CORNER HOUSE GIRLS AMONG THE GYPSIES

9

CHAPTER I—THE FRETTED SILVER BRACELET

If Sammy Pinkney had not been determined to play a “joey” and hooked back one of the garage doors so as to enter astride a broomstick with a dash and the usual clown announcement, “Here we are again!” all would not have happened that did happen to the Corner House girls—at least, not in just the way the events really occurred.

Even Dot, who was inclined to be forgiving of most of Sammy’s sins both of omission and commission, admitted that to be true. Tess, the next oldest Corner House girl (nobody ever dignified her with the name of “Theresa,” unless it were Aunt Sarah Maltby) was inclined to reflect the opinion regarding most boys held by their oldest sister, Ruth. Tess’s frank statement to this day is that it was entirely Sammy’s fault that they were mixed up with the Gypsies at all.

But—

“Well, if I’m going to be in your old circus,” Sammy announced doggedly, “I’m going to be a joey—or *nothin’*.”

“You know very well, Sammy, that you can’t be that,” said Tess reprovingly.

“Huh? Why can’t I? I bet I’d make just as good a clown as Mr. Sully Sorber, who is Neale’s half-uncle, or Mr. Asa Scruggs, who is Barnabetta’s father.”

“I don’t mean you can’t be a clown,” interrupted Tess. “I mean you can’t be just *nothing*. You occupy space, so you must be something. Our teacher says so.”

“Shucks!” ejaculated Sammy Pinkney. “Don’t I know that? And I wish you wouldn’t talk about school. Why! we’re only in the middle of our vacation, I should hope.”

“It seems such a long time since we went to school,” murmured Dot, who was sitting by, nursing the Alice-doll in her arms and waiting her turn to be called into the circus ring, which was the cleared space in the middle of the cement floor.

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"That's because all you folks went off cruising on that houseboat and never took me with you," grumbled Sammy, who still held a deep-seated grouch because of the matter mentioned. "But 'tain't been long since school closed—and it isn't going to be long before the old thing opens again."

11

"Why, Sammy!" admonished Tess.

"I just *hate* school, so I do!" vigorously announced the boy. "I'd rather be a tramp—or a Gypsy. Yes, I would."

"Or a pirate, Sammy?" suggested Dot reflectively. "You know, me and you didn't have a very nice time when we went off to be pirates. 'Member?"

"Huh!" grumbled Sammy, "that was because you was along. Girls can't be pirates worth shucks. And anyway," he concluded, "I'm going to be the joey in this show, or I won't play."

"It will be supper time and the others will be back with the car, so none of us can play if we don't start in pretty soon," Tess observed. "Dot and I want to practice our gym work that Neale O'Neil has been teaching us. But you can clown it all you want to, Sammy."

"Well, that lets me begin the show anyway," Sammy stated with satisfaction.

He always did want to lead. And now he immediately ran to hook back the door and prepared to make his entrance into the ring in true clowning style, as he had seen Sully Sorber do in Twomley & Sorber's Herculean Circus and Menagerie.

12

The Kenway garage opened upon Willow Street and along that pleasantly shaded and quiet thoroughfare just at this time came three rather odd looking people. Two were women carrying brightly stained baskets of divers shapes, and one of these women—usually the younger one—went into the yard of each house and knocked at the side or back door, offering the baskets for sale.

The younger one was black-eyed and rather pretty. She was neatly dressed in very bright colors and wore a deal of gaudy jewelry. The older woman was not so attractive—or so clean.

Loitering on the other side of the street, and keeping some distance behind the Gypsy women, slouched a tall, roughly clad fellow who was evidently their escort. The women came to the Kenway garage some time after Sammy Pinkney had made his famous "entrance" and Dot had abandoned the Alice-doll while she did several handsprings on the mattress that Tess had laid down. Dot did these very well indeed. Neale O'Neil, who had been trained in the circus, had given both the smaller Corner House girls the benefit of his advice and training. They loved athletic exercises. Mrs. McCall, the Corner House housekeeper, declared Tess and Dot were as active as grasshoppers.

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The two dark-faced women, as they peered in at the open doorway of the garage, seemed to think Dot's handsprings were marvelously well done, too; they whispered together excitedly and then the older one slyly beckoned the big Gypsy man across the street to approach.

When he arrived to look over the women's heads it was Tess who was actively engaged on the garage floor. She was as supple as an eel. Of course, Tess Kenway would not like to be compared to an eel; but she was proud of her ability to "wriggle into a bow knot and out again"—as Sammy vociferously announced.

"Say, Tess! that's a peach of a trick," declared the boy with enthusiasm. "Say! Lemme—Huh! What do *you* want?" For suddenly he saw the two Gypsy women at the door of the garage. The man was now out of sight.

"Ah-h!" whined the old woman cunningly, "will not the young master and the pretty little ladies buy a nice basket of the poor Gypsy? Good fortune goes with it."

"Gee! who wants to buy a basket?" scoffed Sammy. "You only have to carry things in it." The bane of Sammy Pinkney's existence was the running of errands.

"But they *are* pretty," murmured Tess.

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"Oh—oo! See that nice green and yellow one with the cover," gasped Dot. "Do you suppose we've got money enough to buy that one, Tess? How nice it would be to carry the children's clothes in when we go on picnics."

By "children" Dot meant their dolls, of which, the two smaller Corner House girls possessed a very large number. Several of these children, besides the Alice-doll, were grouped upon a bench in the corner of the garage as a part of the circus audience. The remainder of the spectators were Sandyface and her family. Sandyface was now a great, *great* grandmother cat, and more of her progeny than one would care to catalog tranquilly viewed the little girls' circus or rolled in kittenish frolic on the floor.

It sometimes did seem as though the old Corner House demesne was quite given up to feline inhabitants. And the recurrent appearance of new litters of kittens belonging to Sandyface herself, her daughters and granddaughters, had ceased to make even a ripple in the pool of Corner House existence.

This explanation regarding the dolls and cats is really aside from our narrative. Tess and Dot both viewed with eager eyes the particular covered basket held out enticingly by the old Gypsy woman.

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Of course the little girls had no pockets in their gymnasium suits. But in a pocket of her raincoat

which Tess had worn down to the garage over her blouse and bloomers, she found a dime and two pennies—"just enough for two ice-cream cones," Sammy Pinkey observed.

"Oh! And my Alice-doll has eight cents in her cunning little beaded bag," cried Dot, with sudden animation.

She produced the coins. But there was only twenty cents in all!

"I—I—What do you ask for that basket, please?" Tess questioned cautiously.

"Won't the pretty little ladies give the poor old Gypsy woman half a dollar for the basket?"

The little girls lost hope. They were not allowed to break into their banks for any purpose without asking Ruth's permission, and their monthly stipend of pocket money was very low.

"It is a very nice basket, little ladies," said the younger Gypsy woman—she who was so gayly dressed and gaudily bejeweled.

"I know," Tess admitted wistfully. "But if we haven't so much money, how can we buy it?"

"Say!" interrupted the amateur joey, hands in pockets and viewing the controversy quite as an outsider. "Say, Tess! if you and Dot really want that old basket, I've got two-bits I'll lend you."

"Oh, Sammy!" gasped Dot. "A whole quarter?"

"Have you got it here with you?" Tess asked.

"Yep," announced the boy.

"I don't think Ruth would mind our borrowing twenty-five cents of you, Sammy," said Tess, slowly.

"Of course not," urged Dot. "Why, Sammy is just like one of the family."

"Only when you girls go off cruising, I ain't," observed Sammy, his face clouding with remembrance. "Then I ain't even a step-child."

But he produced the quarter and offered it to Tess. She counted it with the money already in her hand.

"But—but that makes only forty-five cents," she said.

The two Gypsy women spoke hissing to each other in a tongue that the children did not, of course, understand. Then the older woman thrust the basket out again.

"Take!" she said. "Take for forty-fi' cents, eh? The little ladies can have."

"Go ahead," Sammy said as Tess hesitated. "That's all the old basket is worth. I can get one bigger than that at the chain store for seven cents."

"Oh, Sammy, it isn't as bee-*you*-tiful as this!" gasped Dot.

"Well, it's a basket just the same."

Tess put the silver and pennies in the old woman's clawlike hand and the longed-for basket came into her possession.

"It is a good-fortune basket, pretty little ladies," repeated the old Gypsy, grinning at them toothlessly. "You are honest little ladies, I can see. You would never cheat the old Gypsy, would you? This is all the money you have to pay for the beautiful basket? Forty-fi' cents?"

"Aw, say!" grumbled Sammy, "a bargain is a bargain, ain't it? And forty-five cents is a good deal of money."

"If—if you think we ought to pay more—"

Tess held the basket out hesitatingly. Dot fairly squealed:

"Don't be a ninny, Tessie Kenway! It's ours now."

"The basket is yours, little ladies," croaked the crone as the younger woman pulled sharply at her shawl. "But good fortune goes with it only if you are honest with the poor old Gypsy. Good-bye."

The two strange women hurried away. Sammy lounged to the door, hands in pockets, to look after them. He caught a momentary glimpse of the tall Gypsy man disappearing around a corner. The two women quickly followed him.

"Oh, what a lovely basket!" Dot was saying.

"I—I hope Ruth won't scold because we borrowed that quarter of Sammy," murmured Tess.

"Shucks!" exclaimed their boy friend. "Don't tell her. You can pay me when you get some more money."

"Oh, no!" Tess said. "I would not hide anything from Ruth."

"You couldn't, anyway," said the practical Dot. "She will want to know where we got the money to pay for the basket. Oh, *do* open it, Tess. Isn't it lovely?"

The cover worked on a very ingeniously contrived hinge. Had the children known much about such things they must have seen that the basket was worth much more than the price they had paid for it—much more indeed than the price the Gypsies had first asked.

Tess lifted the cover. Dot crowded nearer to look in. The shadows of the little girls' heads at first

hid the bottom of the basket. Then both saw something gleaming dully there. Tess and Dot cried out in unison; but it was the latter's brown hand that darted into the basket and brought forth the bracelet.

"A silver bracelet!" Tess gasped.

"Oh, look at it!" cried Dot. "Did you *ever*? Do you s'pose it's real silver, Tess?"

"Of course it is," replied her sister, taking the circlet in her own hand. "How pretty! It's all engraved with fret-work—"

"Hey!" ejaculated Sammy coming closer. "What's that?"

"Oh, Sammy! A silver bracelet—all fretted, too," exclaimed the highly excited Dot.

"Huh! What's that? 'Fretted'? When my mother's fretted she's—Say! how can a silver bracelet be cross, I want to know?"

"Oh, Sammy," Tess suddenly ejaculated, "these Gypsy women will be cross enough when they miss this bracelet!"

"Oh! Oh!" wailed Dot. "Maybe they'll come back and want to take it and the pretty basket, Tess. Let's run and hide 'em!"

CHAPTER II—A PROFOUND MYSTERY

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Tess Kenway was positively shocked by her sister Dot's suggestion. To think of trying to keep the silver bracelet which they knew must belong to the Gypsy woman who had sold them the green and yellow basket, was quite a horrifying thought to Tess.

"How *can* you say such a thing, Dottie Kenway?" she demanded sternly. "Of course we cannot keep the bracelet. And that old Gypsy lady said we were honest, too. She could *see* we were. And, then, what would Ruthie say?"

Their older sister's opinion was always the standard for the other Corner House girls. And that might well be, for Ruth Kenway had been mentor and guide to her sisters ever since Dot, at least, could remember. Their mother had died so long ago that Tess but faintly remembered her.

The Kenways had lived in a very moderately priced tenement in Bloomsburg when Mr. Howbridge (now their guardian) had searched for and found them, bringing them with Aunt Sarah Maltby to the old Corner House in Milton. In the first volume of this series, "The Corner House Girls," these matters are fully explained.

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The six succeeding volumes relate in detail the adventures of the four sisters and their friends—and some most remarkable adventures have they had at school, under canvas, at the seashore, as important characters in a school play, solving the mystery of a long-lost fortune, on an automobile tour through the country, and playing a winning part in the fortunes of Luke and Cecile Shepard in the volume called "The Corner House Girls Growing Up."

In "The Corner House Girls Snowbound," the eighth book of the series, the Kenways and a number of their young friends went into the North Woods with their guardian to spend the Christmas Holidays. Eventually they rescued the twin Birdsall children, who likewise had come under the care of the elderly lawyer who had so long been the Kenway sisters' good friend.

During the early weeks of the summer, just previous to the opening of our present story, the Corner House girls had enjoyed a delightful trip on a houseboat in the neighboring waters. The events of this trip are related in "The Corner House Girls on a Houseboat." During this outing there was more than one exciting incident. But the most exciting of all was the unexpected appearance of Neale O'Neil's father, long believed lost in Alaska.

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Mr. O'Neil's return to the States could only be for a brief period, for his mining interests called him back to Nome. His son, however, no longer mourned him as lost, and naturally (though this desire he kept secret from Agnes) the boy hoped, when his school days were over, to join his father in that far Northland.

There was really no thought in the mind of the littlest Corner House girl to take that which did not belong to her. Most children believe implicitly in "findings-keepings," and it seemed to Dot Kenway that as they had bought the green and yellow basket in good faith of the two Gypsy women, everything it contained should belong to them.

This, too, was Sammy Pinkney's idea of the matter. Sammy considered himself very worldly wise.

"Say! what's the matter with you, Tess Kenway? Of course that bracelet is yours—if you want it. Who's going to stop you from keeping it, I want to know?"

23

"But—but it must belong to one of those Gypsy ladies," gasped Tess. "The old lady asked us if we were honest. Of course we are!"

"Pshaw! If they miss it, they'll be back after that silver thing fast enough."

"But, Sammy, suppose they don't know the bracelet fell into this basket?"

"Then you and Dot are that much in," was the prompt rejoinder of their boy friend. "You bought the basket and all that was in it. They couldn't claim the *air* in that basket, could they? Well, then! how could they lay claim to anything else in the basket?"

Such logic seemed unanswerable to Dot's mind. But Tess shook a doubtful head. She had a feeling that they ought to run after the Gypsies to return to them at once the bracelet. Only, neither she nor Dot was dressed properly to run through Milton's best residential streets after the Romany people. As for Sammy—

Happily, so Tess thought, she did not have to decide the matter. Musically an automobile horn sounded its warning and the children ran out to welcome the two older Corner House girls and Neale O'Neil, who acted as their chauffeur on this particular trip.

They had been far out into the country for eggs and fresh vegetables, to the farm, in fact, of Mr. Bob Buckham, the strawberry king and the Corner House girls' very good friend. In these times of very high prices for food, Ruth Kenway considered it her duty to save money if she could by purchasing at first cost for the household's needs.

"Otherwise," this very capable young housewife asked, "how shall we excuse the keeping of an automobile when the up-keep and everything is so high?"

"Oh, *do*," begged Agnes, the flyaway sister, "*do* let us have something impractical, Ruth. I just hate the man who wrote the first treatise on political economy."

"I fancy it is 'household economy' you mean, Aggie," returned her sister, smiling. "And I warrant the author of the first treatise on that theme was a woman."

"Mrs. Eva Adam, I bet!" chuckled Neale O'Neil, hearing this controversy from the driver's seat. "It has always been in my mind that the First Lady of the Garden of Eden was tempted to swipe those apples more because the price of other fruit was so high than for any other reason."

"Then Adam was stingy with the household money," declared Agnes.

"I really wish you would not use such words as 'swipe' before the children, Neale," sighed Ruth who, although she was no purist, did not wish the little folk to pick up (as they so easily did) slang phrases.

She stepped out of the car when Neale had halted it within the garage and Agnes handed her the egg basket. Tess and Dot immediately began dancing about their elder sister, both shouting at once, the smallest girl with the green and yellow basket and Tess with the silver bracelet in her hand.

"Oh, Ruthie, what do you think?"

"See how pretty it is! And they never missed it."

"*Can't* we keep it, Ruthie?" This from Dot. "We paid those Gypsy ladies for the basket and all that was in it. Sammy says so."

"Then it must be true of course," scoffed Agnes. "What is it?"

"Well, I guess I know some things," observed Sammy, bridling. "If you buy a walnut you buy the kernel as well as the shell, don't you? And that bracelet was inside that covered basket, like the kernel in a nut."

"Listen!" exclaimed Neale likewise getting out of the car. "Sammy's a very Solomon for judgment."

"Now don't you call me that, Neale O'Neil!" ejaculated Sammy angrily. "I ain't a pig."

"Wha—what! Who called you a pig, Sammy?"

"Well, that's what Mr. Con Murphy calls *his* pig—'Solomon.' You needn't call me by any pig-name, so there!"

"I stand reprov'd," rejoined Neale with mock seriousness. "But, see here: What's all this about the basket and the bracelet—a two-fold mystery?"

"It sounds like a thriller in six reels," cried Agnes, jumping out of the car herself to get a closer view of the bracelet and the basket. "My! Where did you get that gorgeous bracelet, children?"

The beauty of the family, who loved "gew-gaws" of all kinds, seized the silver circlet and tried it upon her own plump arm. Ruth urged Tess to explain and had to place a gentle palm upon Dot's lips to keep them quiet so that she might get the straight of the story from the more sedate Tess.

"And so, that's how it was," concluded Tess. "We bought the basket after borrowing Sammy's twenty-five cent piece, and of course the basket belongs to us, doesn't it, Ruthie?"

"Most certainly, my dear," agreed the elder sister.

"And inside was that beautiful fretted silver bracelet. And that—"

"Just as certainly belongs to the Gypsies," finished Ruth. "At least, it does not belong to you and Dot."

"Aw shu-u-cks!" drawled Sammy in dissent.

Even Agnes cast a wistful glance at the older girl. Ruth was always so uncompromising in her decisions. There was never any middle ground in her view. Either a thing was right, or it was

wrong, and that was all there was to it!

"Well," sighed Tess, "that Gypsy lady *said* she knew we were honest."

"I think," Ruth observed thoughtfully, "that Neale had better run the car out again and look about town for those Gypsy women. They can't have got far away."

"Say, Ruth! it's most supper time," objected Neale. "Have a heart!"

"Anyway, I wouldn't trouble myself about a crowd of Gypsies," said Agnes. "They may have stolen the bracelet."

"Oh!" gasped Tess and Dot in unison.

"You know what June Wildwood told us about them. And she lived with Gypsies for months."

"Gypsies are not all alike," the elder sister said confidently in answer to this last remark by Agnes. "Remember Mira and King David Stanley, and how nice they were to Tess and Dottie?" she asked, speaking of an incident related in "The Corner House Girls on a Tour."

"I don't care!" exclaimed Agnes, pouting, and still viewing the bracelet on her arm with admiration. "I wouldn't run *my* legs off chasing a band of Gypsies."

They were all, however, bound to be influenced by Ruth's decision.

"Well, I'll hunt around after supper," Neale said. "I'll take Sammy with me. You'll know those women if you see them again, won't you, kid?"

"Sure," agreed Sammy, forgiving Neale for calling him "kid" with the prospect of an automobile ride in the offing.

"But—but," breathed Tess in Ruth's ear, "if those Gypsy ladies don't take back the bracelet, it belongs to Dot and me, doesn't it, Sister?"

"Of course. Agnes! do give it back, now. I expect it will cause trouble enough if those women are not found. A bone of contention! Both these children will want to wear the bracelet at the same time. Don't *you* add to the difficulty, Agnes."

"Why," drawled Agnes, slowly removing the curiously engraved silver ornament from her arm, "of course they will return for it. Or Neale will find them."

This statement, however, was not borne out by the facts. Neale and Sammy drove all about town that evening without seeing the Gypsy women. The next day the smaller Corner House girls were taken into the suburbs all around Milton; but nowhere did they find trace of the Gypsies or of any encampment of those strange, nomadic people in the vicinity.

The finding of the bracelet in the basket remained a mystery that the Corner House girls could not soon forget.

"It does seem," said Tess, "as though those Gypsy ladies couldn't have meant to give us the bracelet, Dot. The old one said so much about our being honest. She didn't expect us to *steal* it."

"Oh, no!" agreed Dot. "But Neale O'Neil says maybe the Gypsy ladies stole it, and were afraid to keep it. So they gave it to us."

"M-mm," considered Tess. "But that doesn't explain it at all. Even if they wanted to get rid of the bracelet, they need not have given it to us in such a lovely basket. Ruth says the basket is worth a whole lot more than the forty-five cents we paid for it."

"It *is* awful pretty," sighed Dot in agreement.

"Some day they will surely come back for the bracelet."

"Oh, I hope not!" murmured the littlest Corner House girl. "It makes such a be-*you*-tiful belt for my Alice-doll, when it's my turn to wear it."

CHAPTER III—SAMMY PINKNEY IN TROUBLE

Uncle Rufus, who was general factotum about the old Corner House and even acted as butler on "date and state occasions," was a very brown man with a shiny bald crown around three-quarters of the circumference of which was a hedge of white wool. Aided by Neale O'Neil (who still insisted on earning a part of his own support in spite of the fact that Mr. Jim O'Neil, his father, expected in time to be an Alaskan millionaire gold-miner), Uncle Rufus did all of the chores about the place. And those chores were multitudinous.

Besides the lawns and the flower gardens to care for, there was a good-sized vegetable garden to weed and to hoe. Uncle Rufus suffered from what he called a "misery" in his back that made it difficult for him to stoop to weed the small plants in the garden.

"I don't know, Missy Ruth," complained the old darkey to the eldest Corner House girl, "how I's goin' to get that bed of winter beets weeded—I dunno, nowadays. My misery suah won't let me stoop down to them rows, and there's a big patch of 'em."

"Do they need weeding right now, Uncle Rufus?"

"Suah do, Missy. Dey is sufferin' fo' hit. I'd send wo'd for some o' mah daughter Pechunia's young 'uns to come over yere, but I knows dat all o' them that's big enough to work is reg'larly employed by de farmers out dat a-way. Picking crops for de canneries is now at de top-notch, Missy; and even Burnejones Whistler and Louise-Annette is big enough to pick beans."

"Goodness me!" exclaimed Agnes, who overheard the old man's complaint. "There ought to be kids enough around these corners to hire, without sending to foreign lands for any. They are always under foot if you *don't* want them."

"Ain't it de truf?" chuckled the old man. "Usual' I can't look over de hedge without spyin' dat Sammy Pinkney and a dozen of his crew. They's jest as plenty as bugs under a chip. But now—"

"Well, why not get Sammy?" interrupted Ruth.

"He ought to be of some use, that is sure," added Agnes.

"Can yo' put yo' hand on dat boy?" demanded Uncle Rufus. "'Nless he's in mischief I don't know where to look for him."

"I can find him all right," Agnes declared. "But I cannot guarantee that he will take the job."

"Offer him fifty cents to weed those beet rows," Ruth said briskly. "The bed I see is just a mat of weeds." They had walked down to the garden while the discussion was going on. "If Sammy will do it I'll be glad to pay the half dollar."

She bustled away about some other domestic matter; for despite the fact that Mrs. McCall bore the greater burden of housekeeping affairs, Ruth Kenway did not shirk certain responsibilities that fell to her lot both outside and inside the Corner House.

After all was said and done, Sammy Pinkney looked upon Agnes as his friend. She was more lenient with him than even Dot was. Ruth and Tess looked upon most boys as merely "necessary evils." But Agnes had always liked to play with boys and was willing to overlook their shortcomings.

"I got a lot to do," ventured Sammy, shying as usual at the idea of work. "But if you really want me to, Aggie—"

"And if you want to make a whole half dollar," suggested Agnes, not much impressed by the idea that Sammy would weed beets as a favor.

"All right," agreed the boy, and shooing Buster, his bulldog, out of the Corner House premises, for Buster and Billy Bumps, the goat, were sworn enemies, Sammy proceeded to the vegetable garden.

Now, both Uncle Rufus and Agnes particularly showed Sammy which were the infant beets and which the weeds. It is a fact, however, that there are few garden plants grown for human consumption that do not have their counterpart among the noxious weeds.

The young beets, growing in scattered clumps in the row (for each seed-burr contains a number of seeds), looked much like a certain weed of the lambs'-quarters variety; and this reddish-green weed pretty well covered the beet bed.

Tess and Dot had gone to a girls' party at Mrs. Adams', just along on Willow Street, that afternoon, so they did not appear to disturb Sammy at his task. In fact, the boy had it all his own way. Neither Uncle Rufus nor any other older person came near him, and he certainly made a thorough job of that beet bed.

Mrs. McCall "set great store," as she said, by beets—both pickled and fresh—for winter consumption. When Neale O'Neil chanced to go into the garden toward supper time to see what Sammy was doing there, it was too late to save much of the crop.

"Well, of all the dunces!" ejaculated Neale, almost immediately seeing what Sammy had been about. "Say! you didn't do that on purpose, did you? Or don't you know any better?"

"Know any better'n *what*?" demanded the bone-weary Sammy, in no mood to endure scolding in any case. "Ain't I done it all right? I bet you can't find a weed in that whole bed, so now."

"Great grief, kid!" gasped the older boy, seeing that Sammy was quite in earnest, "I don't believe you've left anything *but* weeds in those rows. It—it's a knock-out!"

"Aw—I never," gulped Sammy. "I guess I know beets."

"Huh! It looks as though you don't even know *beans*," chortled Neale, unable to keep his gravity. "What a mess! Mrs. McCall will be as sore as she can be."

"I don't care!" cried the tired boy wildly. "I saved just what Aggie told me to, and threw away everything else. And see how the rows are."

"Why, Sammy, those aren't where the rows of beets were at all. See! *These* are beets. *Those* are weeds. Oh, great grief!" and the older boy went off into another gale of laughter.

"I—I do-o-on't care," wailed Sammy. "I did just what Aggie told me to. And I want my half dollar."

"You want to be paid for wasting all Mrs. McCall's beets?"

"I don't care, I earned it."

Neale could not deny the statement. As far as the work went, Sammy certainly had spent time and labor on the unfortunate task.

"Wait a minute," said Neale, as Sammy started away in anger. "Maybe all those beet plants you pulled up aren't wilted. We can save some of them. Beets grow very well when they are transplanted—especially if the ground is wet enough and the sun isn't too hot. It looks like rain for to-night, anyway."

"Aw—I—"

"Come on! We'll get some water and stick out what we can save. I'll help you and the girls needn't know you were such a dummy."

"Dummy, yourself!" snarled the tired and over-wrought boy. "I'll never weed another beet again—no, I won't!"

Sammy made a bee-line out of the garden and over the fence into Willow Street, leaving Neale fairly shaking with laughter, yet fully realizing how dreadfully cut-up Sammy must feel.

The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune seem much greater to the mind of a youngster like Sammy Pinkney than to an adult person. The ridicule which he knew he must suffer because of his mistake about the beet bed, seemed something that he really could not bear. Besides, he had worked all the afternoon for nothing (as he presumed) and only the satisfaction of having earned fifty cents would have counteracted the ache in his muscles.

Harried by his disappointment, Sammy was met by his mother in a stern mood, her first question being:

"Where have you been wasting your time ever since dinner, Sammy Pinkney? I never did see such a lazy boy!"

It was true that he had wasted his time. But his sore muscles cried out against the charge that he was lazy.

He could not explain, however, without revealing his shame. To be ridiculed was the greatest punishment Sammy Pinkney knew.

"Aw, what do you want me to do, Maw? Work *all* the time? Ain't this my vacation?"

"But your father says you are to work enough in the summer to keep from forgetting what work is. And look how grubby you are. Faugh!"

"What do you want me to do, Maw?"

"You might do a little weeding in our garden, you know, Sammy."

"Weeding!" groaned the boy, fairly horrified by the suggestion after what he had been through that afternoon.

"You know very well that our onions and carrots need cleaning out. And I don't believe you could even find our beets."

"Beets!" Sammy's voice rose to a shriek. He never was really a bad boy; but this was too much. "Beets!" cried Sammy again. "I wouldn't weed a beet if nobody ever ate another of 'em. No, I wouldn't."

He darted by his mother into the house and ran up to his room. Her reiterated command that he return and explain his disgraceful speech and violent conduct did not recall Sammy to the lower floor.

"Very well, young man. Don't you come down to supper, either. And we'll see what your father has to say about your conduct when he comes home."

This threat boded ill for Sammy, lying sobbing and sore upon his bed. He was too desperate to care much what his father did to him. But to face the ridicule of the neighborhood—above all to face the prospect of weeding another bed of beets!—was more than the boy could contemplate.

"I'll run away and be a pirate—that's just what I'll do," choked Sammy, his old obsession enveloping his harassed thoughts. "I'll show 'em! They'll be sorry they treated me so—all of 'em."

Just who "'em" were was rather vague in Sammy Pinkney's mind. But the determination to get away from all these older people, whom he considered had abused him, was not vague at all.

CHAPTER IV—THE GYPSY TRAIL

Mr. Pinkney, Sammy's father, heard all about it before he arrived home, for he always passed the side door of the old Corner House on his return from business. He came at just that time when Neale O'Neil was telling the assembled family—including Mrs. McCall, Uncle Rufus, and Linda the maid-of-all-work—about the utter wreck of the beet bed.

"I've saved what I could—set 'em out, you know, and soaked 'em well," said the laughing Neale. "But make up your mind, Mrs. McCall, that you'll have to buy a good share of your beets this

winter.”

“Well! What do you know about that, Mr. Pinkney?” demanded Agnes of their neighbor, who had halted at the gate.

“Just like that boy,” responded Mr. Pinkney, shaking his head over his son’s transgressions.

“Just the same,” Neale added, chuckling, “Sammy says you showed him which were weeds and which were beets, Aggie.”

“Of course I did,” flung back the quick-tempered Agnes. “And so did Uncle Rufus. But that boy is so heedless—”

“I agree that Sammy pays very little attention to what is told him,” said Sammy’s father.

Here Tess put in a soothing word, as usual: “Of course he didn’t mean to pull up all your beets, Mrs. McCall.”

“And I don’t like beets anyway,” proclaimed Dot.

“He certainly must have worked hard,” Ruth said, producing a fifty-cent piece and running down the steps to press it into Mr. Pinkney’s palm. “I am sure Sammy had no intention of spoiling our beet bed. And I am not sure that it is not partly our fault. He should not have been left all the afternoon without some supervision.”

“He should be more observing,” said Mr. Pinkney. “I never did see such a rattlebrain.”

““The servant is worthy of his hire,”” quoted Ruth. “And tell him, Mr. Pinkney, that we forgive him.”

“Just the same,” cried Agnes after their neighbor, “although Sammy may know beans, as Neale says, he doesn’t seem to know beets! Oh, what a boy!”

So Mr. Pinkney brought home the story of Sammy’s mistake and he and his wife laughed over it. But when Mrs. Pinkney called upstairs for the boy to come down to a late supper she got only a muffled response that he “didn’t want no supper.”

“He must be sick,” she observed to her husband, somewhat anxiously.

“He’s sick of the mess he’s made—that’s all,” declared Mr. Pinkney cheerfully. “Let him alone. He’ll come around all right in the morning.”

Meanwhile at the Corner House the Kenway sisters had something more important (at least, as they thought) to talk about than Sammy Pinkney and his errors of judgment. What Dot had begun to call the “fretful silver bracelet” was a very live topic.

The local jeweler had pronounced the bracelet of considerable value because of its workmanship. It did not seem possible that the Gypsy women could have dropped the bracelet into the basket they had sold the smaller Corner House girls and then forgotten all about it.

“It is not reasonable,” Ruth Kenway declared firmly, “that it could just be a mistake. That basket is worth two dollars at least; and they sold it to the children for forty-five cents. It is mysterious.”

“They seemed to like Tess and me a whole lot,” Dot said complacently. “That is why they gave it to us so cheap.”

“And that is the very reason I am worried,” Ruth added.

“Why don’t you report it to the police?” croaked Aunt Sarah Maltby. “Maybe they’ll try to rob the house.”

“O-oh,” gasped Dot, round-eyed.

“Who? The police?” giggled Agnes in Ruth’s ear.

“Maybe we ought to look again for those Gypsy ladies,” Tess said. “But the bracelet is awful pretty.”

“I tell you! Let’s ask June Wildwood. She knows all about Gypsies,” cried Agnes. “She used to travel with them. Don’t you remember, Ruth? They called her Queen Zaliska, and she made believe tell fortunes. Of course, not being a real Gypsy she could not tell them very well.”

“Crickey!” ejaculated Neale O’Neil, who was present. “You don’t believe in that stuff, do you, Aggie?”

“I don’t know whether I do or not. But it’s awfully thrilling to think of learning ahead what is going to happen.”

“Huh!” snorted her boy friend. “Like the weather man, eh? But he has some scientific data to go on.”

“Probably the Gypsy fortune tellers have reduced their business to a science, too,” Ruth calmly said.

“Anyhow,” laughed Neale, “Queen Zaliska now works in Byburg’s candy store. Some queen, I’ll tell the world!”

“Neale!” admonished Ruth. “*Such* slang!”

“Come on, Neale,” said the excited Agnes. “Let you and me go down to Byburg’s and ask her about the bracelet.”

"I really don't see how June can tell us anything," observed Ruth slowly.

"Anyway," Agnes briskly said, putting on her hat, "we need some candy. Come on, Neale."

The Wildwoods were Southerners who had not lived long in Milton. Their story is told in "The Corner House Girls Under Canvas." The Kenways were very well acquainted with Juniper Wildwood and her sister, Rosa. Agnes felt privileged to question June about her life with the Gypsies.

"I saw Big Jim in town the other day," confessed the girl behind the candy counter the moment Agnes broached the subject. "I am awfully afraid of him. I ran all the way home. And I told Mr. Budd, the policeman on this beat, and I think Mr. Budd warned Big Jim to get out of town. There is some talk about getting a law through the Legislature putting a heavy tax on each Gypsy family that does not keep moving. *That* will drive them away from Milton quicker than anything else. And that Big Jim is a bad, bad man. Why! he's been in jail for stealing."

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"Oh, my! He's a regular convict, then," gasped Agnes, much impressed.

"Pshaw!" said Neale. "They don't call a man a convict unless he has been sent to the State prison, or to the Federal penitentiary. But that Big Jim looked to be tough enough, when we saw him down at Pleasant Cove, to belong in prison for life. Remember him, Aggie?"

"The children did not say anything about a Gypsy man," observed his friend. "There were two Gypsy women."

She went on to tell June Wildwood all about the basket purchase and the finding of the silver bracelet. The older girl shook her head solemnly as she said:

"I don't understand it at all. Gypsies are always shrewd bargainers. They never sell things for less than they cost."

"But they made that basket," Agnes urged. "Perhaps it didn't cost them so much as Ruth thinks."

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June smiled in a superior way. "Oh, no, they didn't make it. They don't waste their time nowadays making baskets when they can buy them from the factories so much cheaper and better. Oh, no!"

"Crackey!" exclaimed Neale. "Then they are fakers, are they?"

"That bracelet is no fake," declared Agnes.

"That is what puzzles me most," said June. "Gypsies are very tricky. At least, all I ever knew. And if those two women you speak of belonged to Big Jim's tribe, I would not trust them at all."

"But it seems they have done nothing at all bad in this case," Agnes observed.

"Tess and Dot are sure ahead of the game, so far," chuckled Neale in agreement.

"Just the same," said June Wildwood, "I would not be careless. Don't let the children talk to the Gypsies if they come back for the bracelet. Be sure to have some older person see the women and find out what they want. Oh, they are very sly."

June had then to attend to other customers, and Agnes and Neale walked home. On the way they decided that there was no use in scaring the little ones about the Gypsies.

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"I don't believe in bugaboos," Agnes declared. "We'll just tell Ruth."

This she proceeded to do. But perhaps she did not repeat June Wildwood's warning against the Gypsy band with sufficient emphasis to impress Ruth's mind. Or just about this time the older Corner House girl had something of much graver import to trouble her thought.

By special delivery, on this evening just before they retired, arrived an almost incoherent letter from Cecile Shepard, part of which Ruth read aloud to Agnes:

"... and just as Aunt Lorina is only beginning to get better! I feel as though this family is fated to have trouble this year. Luke was doing so well at the hotel and the proprietor liked him. It isn't *his* fault that that outside stairway was untrustworthy and fell with him. The doctor says it is only a strained back and a broken wrist. But Luke is in bed. I am going by to-morrow's train to see for myself. I don't dare tell Aunt Lorina—nor even Neighbor. Neighbor—Mr. Northrup—is not well himself, and he would only worry about Luke if he knew.... Now, don't *you* worry, and I will send you word how Luke is just the minute I arrive."

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"But how can I help being anxious?" Ruth demanded of her sister. "Poor Luke! And he was working so hard this summer so as not to be obliged to depend entirely on Neighbor for his college expenses next year."

Ruth was deeply interested in Luke Shepard—had been, in fact, since the winter previous when all the Corner House family were snowbound at the Birdsall winter camp in the North Woods. Of course, Ruth and Luke were both very young, and Luke had first to finish his college course and get into business.

Still and all, the fact that Luke Shepard had been hurt quite dwarfed the Gypsy bracelet matter in Ruth's mind. And in that of Agnes, too, of course.

In addition, the very next morning Mrs. Pinkney ran across the street and in at the side door of the Corner House in a state of panic.

"Oh! have you seen him?" she cried.

"Seen whom, Mrs. Pinkney?" asked Ruth with sympathy.

"Is Buster lost again?" demanded Tess, poising a spoonful of breakfast food carefully while she allowed her curiosity to take precedence over the business of eating. "That dog always *is* getting lost."

"It isn't Sammy's dog," wailed Mrs. Pinkney. "It is Sammy himself. I can't find him."

"Can't find Sammy?" repeated Agnes.

"His bed hasn't been slept in! I thought he was just sulky last night. But he is *gone!*"

"Well," said Tess, practically, "Sammy is always running away, you know."

"Oh, this is serious," cried the distracted mother. "He has broken open his bank and taken all his money—almost four dollars."

"My!" murmured Dot, "it must cost lots more to run away and be pirates now than it used to."

"Everything is much higher," agreed Tess.

CHAPTER V—SAMMY OCCASIONS MUCH EXCITEMENT

"I do hope and pray," Aunt Sarah Maltby declared, "that Mrs. Pinkney won't go quite distracted about that boy. Boys make so much trouble usually that a body would near about believe that it must be an occasion for giving thanks to get rid of one like Sammy Pinkney."

This was said of course after Sammy's mother had gone home in tears—and Agnes had accompanied her to give such comfort as she might. The whole neighborhood was roused about the missing Sammy. All agreed that the boy never was of so much importance as when he was missing.

"I do hope and pray that the little rascal will turn up soon," continued Aunt Sarah, "for Mrs. Pinkney's sake."

"I wonder," murmured Dot to Tess, "why it is Aunt Sarah always says she 'hopes and prays'? Wouldn't just praying be enough? You're sure to get what you pray for, aren't you?"

"But what is the use of praying if you don't hope?" demanded Tess, the hair-splitting theologian. "They must go together, Dot. I should think you'd see that."

Mrs. Pinkney had lost hope of finding Sammy, however, right at the start. She knew him of course of old. He had been running away ever since he could toddle out of the gate; but she and Mr. Pinkney tried to convince themselves that each time would be the last—that he was "cured."

For almost always Sammy's runaway escapades ended disastrously for him and covered him with ridicule. Particularly ignominious was the result of his recent attempt, which is narrated in the volume immediately preceding this, to accompany the Corner House Girls on their canal-boat cruise, when he appeared as a stowaway aboard the boat in the company of Billy Bumps, the goat.

"And he hasn't even taken Buster with him this time," proclaimed Mrs. Pinkney. "He chained Buster down cellar and the dog began to howl. So mournful! It got on my nerves. I went down after Mr. Pinkney went to business early this morning and let Buster out. Then, because of the dog's actions, I began to suspect Sammy had gone. I called him. No answer. And he hadn't had any supper last night either."

"I am awfully sorry, Mrs. Pinkney," Agnes said. "It was too bad about the beets. But he needn't have run away because of *that*. Ruth sent him his fifty cents, you know."

"That's just it!" exclaimed the distracted woman. "His father did not give Sammy the half dollar. As long as the boy was so sulky last evening, and refused to come down to eat, Mr. Pinkney said let him wait for that money till he came down this morning. *He* thought Ruth was too good. Sammy is always doing something."

"Oh, he's not so bad," said the comforting Agnes. "I am sure there are lots worse boys. And are you sure, Mrs. Pinkney, that he has really run away this time?"

"Buster can't find him. The poor dog has been running around and snuffing for an hour. I've telephoned to his father."

"Who—*what?* Buster's father?"

"Mr. Pinkney," explained Sammy's mother. "I suppose he'll tell the police. He says—Mr. Pinkney does—that the police must think it is a 'standing order' on their books to find Sammy."

"Oh, my!" giggled Agnes, who was sure to appreciate the comical side of the most serious situation. "I should think the policemen would be so used to looking for Sammy that they would pick him up anywhere they chanced to see him with the idea that he was running away."

"Well," sighed Mrs. Pinkney, "Buster can't find him. There he lies panting over by the currant bushes. The poor dog has run his legs off."

"I don't believe bulldogs are very keen on a scent. Our old Tom Jonah could do better. But of course Sammy went right out into the street and the scent would be difficult for the best dog to follow. Do you think Sammy went early this morning?"

"That dog began to howl soon after we went to bed. Mr. Pinkney sleeps so soundly that it did not annoy him. But I *knew* something was wrong when Buster howled so.

"Perhaps I'm superstitious. But we had an old dog that howled like that years ago when my grandmother died. She was ninety-six and had been bedridden for ten years, and the doctors said of course that she was likely to die almost any time. But that old Towser *did* howl the night grandma was taken."

"So you think," Agnes asked, without commenting upon Mrs. Pinkney's possible trend toward superstition, "that Sammy has been gone practically all night?"

"I fear so. He must have waited for his father and me to go to bed. Then he slipped down the back stairs, tied Buster, and went out by the cellar door. All night long he's been wandering somewhere. The poor, foolish boy!"

She took Agnes up to the boy's room—a museum of all kinds of "useless truck," as his mother said, but dear to the boyish heart.

"Oh, he's gone sure enough," she said, pointing to the bank which was supposed to be incapable of being opened until five dollars in dimes had been deposited within it. A screw-driver, however, had satisfied the burglarious intent of Sammy.

She pointed out the fact, too, that a certain extension bag that had figured before in her son's runaway escapades was missing.

"The silly boy has taken his bathing suit and that cowboy play-suit his father bought him. I never did approve of that. Such things only give boys crazy notions about catching dogs and little girls with a rope, or shooting stray cats with a popgun.

"Of course, he has taken his gun with him and a bag of shot that he had to shoot in it. The gun shoots with a spring, you know. It doesn't use real powder, of course. I have always believed such things are dangerous. But, you know, his father—

"Well, he wore his best shoes, and they will hurt him dreadfully, I am sure, if he walks far. And I can't find that new cap I bought him only last week."

All the time she was searching in Sammy's closet and in the bureau drawers. She stood up suddenly and began to peer at the conglomeration of articles on the top of the bureau.

"Oh!" she cried. "It's gone!"

"What is it, Mrs. Pinkney?" asked Agnes sympathetically, seeing that the woman's eyes were overflowing again. "What is it you miss?"

"Oh! he is determined I am sure to run away for good this time," sobbed Mrs. Pinkney. "The poor, foolish boy! I wish I had said nothing to him about the beets—I do. I wonder if both his father and I have not been too harsh with him. And I'm sure he loves us. Just think of his taking *that*."

"But what is it?" cried Agnes again.

"It stood right here on his bureau propped up against the glass. Sammy must have thought a great deal of it," flowed on the verbal torrent. "Who would have thought of that boy being so sentimental about it?"

"Mrs. Pinkney!" begged the curious Agnes, almost distracted herself now, "*do* tell me what it is that is missing?"

"That picture. We had it taken—his father and Sammy and me in a group together—the last time we went to Pleasure Cove. Sammy begged to keep it up here. And—now—the dear child—has—has carried—it—away with him!"

Mrs. Pinkney broke down utterly at this point. She was finally convinced that at last Sammy had fulfilled his oft-repeated threat to "run away for good and all"—whether to be a pirate or not, being a mooted question.

Agnes comforted her as well as she could. But the poor woman felt that she had not taken her son seriously enough, and that she could have averted this present disaster in some way.

"She is quite distracted," Agnes said, on arriving home, repeating Aunt Sarah's phrase. "Quite distracted."

"But if she is extracted," Dot proposed, "why doesn't she have Dr. Forsyth come to see her?"

"Mercy, Dot!" admonished Tess. "*Distracted*, not *extracted*. You do so mispronounce the commonest words."

"I don't, either," the smaller girl denied vigorously. "I don't mispronounce any more than you do, Tess Kenway! You just make believe you know so much."

"Dot! Mispemounce! There you go again!"

This was a sore subject, and Ruth attempted to change the trend of the little girls' thoughts by suggesting that Mrs. McCall needed some groceries from a certain store situated away across town.

"If you can get Uncle Rufus to harness Scalawag you girls can drive over to Penny & Marchant's for those things. And you can stop at Mr. Howbridge's house with this note. He must be told about poor Luke's injury."

"Why, Ruthie?" asked little Miss Inquisitive, otherwise Dot Kenway. "Mr. Howbridge isn't Luke Shepard's guardian, too, is he?"

"Now, don't be a chatterbox!" exclaimed the elder sister, who was somewhat harassed on this morning and did not care to explain to the little folk just what she had in her mind.

Ruth was not satisfied to know that Cecile had gone to attend her brother. The oldest Kenway girl longed to go herself to the resort in the mountains where Luke Shepard lay ill. But she did not wish to do this without first seeking their guardian's permission.

Tess and Dot ran off in delight, forgetting their small bickerings, to find Uncle Rufus. The old colored man, as long as he could get about, would do anything for "his chillun," as he called the four Kenway sisters. It needed no coaxing on the part of Tess and Dot to get their will of the old man on this occasion.

Scalawag was fat and lazy enough in any case. In the spring Neale had plowed and harrowed the garden with him and on occasion he was harnessed to a light cart for work about the place. His main duty, however, was to draw the smaller girls about the quieter streets of Milton in a basket phaeton. To this vehicle he was now harnessed by Uncle Rufus.

"You want to be mought' car'ful 'bout them automobiles, chillun," the old man admonished them. "Dat Sammy Pinkney boy was suah some good once in a while. He was a purt' car'ful driber."

"But he's a good driver *now*—wherever he is," said Dot. "You talk as though Sammy would never get back home from being a pirate. Of course he will. He always does!"

Secretly Tess felt herself to be quite as able to drive the pony as ever Sammy Pinkney was. She was glad to show her prowess.

Scalawag shook his head, danced playfully on the old stable floor, and then proceeded to wheel the basket phaeton out of the barn and into Willow Street. By a quieter thoroughfare than Main Street, Tess Kenway headed him for the other side of town.

"Maybe we'll run across Sammy," suggested Dot, sitting sedately with her ever-present Alice-doll. "Then we can tell his mother where he is being a pirate. She won't be so extracted then."

Tess overlooked this mispronunciation, knowing it was useless to object, and turned the subject by saying:

"Or maybe we'll see those Gypsies."

"Oh, I hope not!" cried the smaller girl. "I hope we'll never see those Gypsy women again."

For just at this time the Alice-doll was wearing the fretted silver bracelet for a girdle.

CHAPTER VI—THE GYPSY'S WORDS

That very forenoon after the two smallest girls had set out on their drive with Scalawag a telegram came to the old Corner House for Ruth.

As Agnes said, a telegram was "an event in their young sweet lives." And this one did seem of great importance to Ruth. It was from Cecile Shepard and read:

"Arrived Oakhurst. They will not let me see Luke."

Aside from the natural shock that the telegram itself furnished, Cecile's declaration that she was not allowed to see her brother was bound to make Ruth Kenway fear the worst.

"Oh!" she cried, "he must be very badly hurt indeed. It is much worse than Cecile thought when she wrote. Oh, Agnes! what shall I do?"

"Telegraph her for particulars," suggested Agnes, quite practically. "A broken wrist can't be such an awful thing, Ruthie."

"But his back! Suppose he has seriously hurt his back?"

"Goodness me! That would be awful, of course. He might grow a hump like poor Fred Littleburg. But I don't believe that anything like that has happened to Luke, Ruthie."

Her sister was not to be easily comforted. "Think! There must be something very serious the matter or they would not keep his own sister from seeing him." Ruth herself had had no word from Luke since the accident.

Neither of the sisters knew that Cecile Shepard had never had occasion to send a telegram before and had never received one in all her life.

But she learned that a message of ten words could be sent for thirty-two cents to Milton, so she had divided what she wished to say in two equal parts! The second half of her message, however, because of the mistake of the filing clerk at the telegraph office in Oakhurst, did not arrive at the

Corner House for several hours after the first half of the message.

Ruth Kenway meanwhile grew almost frantic as she considered the possible misfortune that might have overtaken Luke Shepard. She grew quite as “extracted”—to quote Dot—as Mrs. Pinkney was about the absence of Sammy.

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“Well,” Agnes finally declared, “if I felt as you do about it I would not wait to hear from Mr. Howbridge. I’d start right now. Here’s the time table. I’ve looked up the trains. There is one at ten minutes to one—twelve-fifty. I’ll call Neale and he’ll drive you down to the station. You might have gone with the children if that telegram had come earlier.”

Agnes was not only practical, she was helpful on this occasion. She packed Ruth’s bag—and managed to get into it a more sensible variety of articles than Sammy Pinkney had carried in his!

“Now, don’t be worried about *us*,” said Agnes, when Ruth, dressed for departure, began to speak with anxiety about domestic affairs, including the continued absence of the little girls. “Haven’t we got Mrs. McCall—and Linda? You *do* take your duties so seriously, Ruth Kenway.”

“Do you think so?” rejoined Ruth, smiling rather wanly at the flyaway sister. “If anything should happen while I am gone—”

“Nothing will happen that wouldn’t happen anyway, whether you are at home or not,” declared the positive Agnes.

Ruth made ready to go in such a hurry that nobody else in the Corner House save Agnes herself realized that the older sister was going until the moment that Neale O’Neil drove around to the front gate with the car. Then Ruth ran into Aunt Sarah’s room to kiss her good-bye. But Aunt Sarah had always lived a life apart from the general existence of the Corner House family and paid little attention to what her nieces did save to criticise. Mrs. McCall was busy this day preserving—“up tae ma eyen in wark, ma lassie”—and Ruth kissed her, called good-bye to Linda, and ran to the front door before any of the three actually realized what was afoot.

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Agnes ran with her to the street. At the gate stood a dark-faced, brilliantly dressed young woman, with huge gold rings in her ears, several other pieces of jewelry worn in sight, and a flashing smile as she halted the Kenway sisters with outstretched hand.

“Will the young ladies let me read their palms?” she said suavely. “I can tell them the good fortune.”

“Oh, dear me!” exclaimed Agnes, pushing by the Gypsy. “We can’t stop to have our fortunes told now.”

Ruth kept right on to the car.

“Do not neglect the opportunity of having the good fortune told, young ladies,” said the Gypsy girl shrewdly. “I can see that trouble is feared. The dark young lady goes on a journey because of the threat of *ill* fortune. Perhaps it is not so bad as it seems.”

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Agnes was really impressed. Left to herself she actually would have heeded the Gypsy’s words. But Ruth hurried into the car, Neale reached back and slammed the tonneau door, and they were off for the station with only a few minutes to catch the twelve-fifty train.

“There!” ejaculated Agnes, standing at the curb to wave her hand and look after the car.

“The blonde young lady does not believe the Gypsy can tell her something that will happen—and in the near future?”

“Oh!” exclaimed Agnes. “I don’t know.” And she dragged her gaze from the car and looked doubtfully upon the dark face of the Gypsy girl which was now serious.

The latter said: “Something has sent the dark young lady from home in much haste and anxiety?”

The question was answered of course before it was asked. Any observant person could have seen as much. But Agnes’s interest was attracted and she nodded.

“Had your sister,” the Gypsy girl said, guessing easily enough at the relationship of the two Corner House girls, “not been in such haste, she could have learned something that will change the aspect of the threatened trouble. More news is on the way.”

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Agnes was quite startled by this statement. Without explaining further the Gypsy girl glided away, disappearing into Willow Street.

Agnes failed to see, as the Gypsy quite evidently did, the leisurely approach of the telegraph messenger boy with the yellow envelope in his hand and his eyes fixed upon the old Corner House.

Agnes ran within quickly. She was more than a little impressed by the Gypsy girl’s words, and a few minutes later when the front doorbell rang and she took in the second telegram addressed to Ruth, she was pretty well converted to fortune telling as an exact science.

Sammy Pinkney had marched out of the house late at night, as his mother suspected, lugging his heavy extension-bag, with a more vague idea of his immediate destination than was even usual when he set forth on such escapades.

To “run away” seemed to Sammy the only thing for a boy to do when home life and restrictions became in his opinion unbearable. It might be questioned by stern disciplinarians if Mr. and Mrs.

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Pinkney had properly punished Sammy after he had run away the first few times, the boy would not have been cured of his wanderlust.

Fortunately, although Sammy's father was stern enough, he very well knew that this desire for wandering could not be beaten out of the boy. Merely if he were beaten, when he grew big enough to fend for himself in the world, he would leave home and never return rather than face corporal punishment.

"I was just such a kid when I was his age," admitted Mr. Pinkney. "My father licked me for running away, so finally I ran away when I was fourteen, and stayed away. Sammy has less reason for leaving home than I had, and he'll get over his foolishness, get a better education than I obtained, and be a better man, I hope, in the end. It's in the Pinkney blood to rove."

This, of course, while perhaps being satisfactory to a man, did not at all calm Sammy's mother. She expected the very worst to happen to her son every time he disappeared; and as has been shown on this occasion, the boy's absence stirred the community to its very dregs.

Had Mrs. Pinkney known that after tramping as far as the outskirts of the town, and almost dropping from exhaustion, Sammy had gone to bed on a pile of straw in an empty cow stable, she would have been even more troubled than she was.

Sammy, however, came to no harm. He slept so soundly in fact on the rude couch that it was mid-forenoon before he awoke—stiff, sore in muscles, clamorously hungry, and in a frame of mind to go immediately home and beg for breakfast.

He had more money tied up in his handkerchief, however, than he had ever possessed before when he had run away. There was a store in sight at the roadside not far ahead. He hid his bag in the bushes and bought crackers, ham, cheese, and a big bottle of sarsaparilla, and so made a hearty if not judicious breakfast and lunch.

At least, this picnic meal cured the slight attack of homesickness which he suffered. He was no longer for turning back. The whole world was before him and he strode away into it—lugging that extension-bag.

While his troubled mother was showing Agnes Kenway the unmistakable traces of his departure for parts unknown, Sammy was trudging along pretty contentedly, the bag awkwardly knocking against his knees, and his sharp eyes alive to everything that went on along the road.

Sammy had little love for natural history or botany, or anything like that. He suffered preparatory lessons in those branches of enforced knowledge during the school year.

He did not care a bit to know the difference between a gray squirrel and a striped chipmunk. They both chattered at him saucily, and he stopped to try a shot at each of them with his gun.

To Sammy's mind they were legitimate game. He visualized himself building a fire in a fence corner, skinning and cleaning his game and roasting it over the flames for supper. But the squirrel and the chipmunk visualized quite a different outcome to the adventure and they refused to be shot by the amateur sportsman.

Sammy struck into a road that led across the canal by a curved bridge and right out into a part of the country with which he was not at all familiar. The houses were few and far between, and most of them were set well back from the road.

Sometimes dogs barked at him, but he was not afraid of watch dogs. He did not venture into the yards or up the private lanes. He had bought enough crackers and cheese to make another meal when he should want it. And there were sweet springs beside the road, or in the pastures where the cattle grazed.

Few vehicles passed him in either direction. It was the time of the late hay harvest and everybody was at work in the fields—and usually when he saw the haymakers at all, they were far from the road.

He met no pedestrians at all. Being quite off the line of the railroad, there were no tramps on this road, and of course there was nothing else to harm the boy. His mother, in her anxiety, peopled the world with those that would do Sammy harm. In truth, he was never safer in his life!

But adventure? Why, the world was full of it, and Sammy Pinkney expected to meet any number of exciting incidents as he went on.

"Sammy," Dot Kenway once said, "has just a *wunnerful* 'magination. Why! if he sees our old Sandyface creeping through the grass after a poor little field mouse, Sammy can think she's a whole herd of tigers. His 'magination is just *wunnerful*!"

CHAPTER VII—THE BRACELET AGAIN TO THE FORE

While Sammy's sturdy, if short, legs were leaving home and Milton steadily behind him, Dot and Tess were driving Scalawag, the calico pony, to Penny & Marchant's store, and later to Mr. Howbridge's house to deliver the note Ruth had entrusted to them.

Their guardian had always been fond of the Kenway sisters—since he had been appointed their

guardian by the court, of course—and Tess and Dot could not merely call at Mr. Howbridge's door and drive right away again.

Besides, there were Ralph and Rowena Birdsall. The Birdsall twins had of late likewise come under Mr. Howbridge's care, and circumstances were such that it was best for their guardian to take the twins into his own home.

Having two extremely active and rather willful children in his household had most certainly disturbed Mr. Howbridge out of the rut of his old existence. And Ralph and Rowena quite "turned the 'ouse hupside down," to quote Hedden, Mr. Howbridge's butler.

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The moment the twins spied Tess and Dot in the pony phaeton they tore down the stairs from their quarters at the top of the Howbridge house, and flew out of the door to greet the little Corner House girls.

"Oh, Tessie and Dot!" cried Rowena, who looked exactly like her brother, only her hair was now grown long again and she no longer wore boy's garments, as she had when the Kenways first knew her. "How nice to see you!"

"Where's Sammy?" Ralph demanded. "Why didn't he come along, too?"

"We're glad to see you, Rowena and Rafe," Tess said sedately.

But Dot replied eagerly to the boy twin:

"Oh, Rafe! what do you think? Sammy's run away again."

"Get out!"

"I'm going to," said Dot, considering Ralph's ejaculation of amazement an invitation to alight, and she forthwith jumped down from the step of the phaeton.

"You can't mean that Sammy has run off?" cried Ralph. "Listen to this, Rowdy."

"What a silly boy!" criticised his sister.

72

"I don't know," chuckled Ralph Birdsall. "'Member how you and I ran away that time, Rowdy?"

"Oh—well," said his sister. "We had reason for doing so. But you know Sammy Pinkney's got a father and a mother—And for pity's sake, Rafe, stop calling me Rowdy."

"And he's got a real nice bulldog, too," added Dot, reflectively considering any possibility why Sammy should run away. "I can't understand why he does it. He only has to come back home again. I did it once, and I never mean to run away from home again."

Meanwhile Tess left Ralph to hitch Scalawag while she marched up the stone steps of the Howbridge house to deliver Ruth's note into Hedden's hand, who took it at once to Mr. Howbridge.

Dot interested the twins almost immediately in another topic. Rowena naturally was first to spy the silver girdle around the Alice-doll's waist.

"What a splendid belt!" cried Rowena Birdsall. "Is it real silver, Dot?"

"It—it's fretful silver," replied the littlest Corner House girl. "Isn't it pretty?"

"Why," declared Ralph after an examination, "it's an old, old bracelet."

"Well, it is old, I s'pose," admitted Dot. "But my Alice-doll doesn't know that. *She* thinks it is a brand new belt. But of course she can't wear it every day, for half the time the bracelet belongs to Tess."

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This statement naturally aroused the twins' curiosity, and when Tess ran back to join them in the front yard the story of the Gypsy basket and the finding of the bracelet lost nothing of detail by being narrated by both of the Corner House girls.

"Oh, my!" cried Rowena. "Maybe those Gypsies are just waiting to grab you. Gypsies steal children sometimes. Don't they, Rafe?"

"Course they do," agreed her twin.

Dot looked rather frightened at this suggestion, but Tess scorned the possibility.

"Why, how foolish," she declared. "Dot and I were lost once—all by ourselves. Even Tom Jonah wasn't with us. Weren't we, Dot? And we slept out under a tree all night, and a nice Gypsy woman found us in the morning and took us to her camp. Didn't she, Dot?"

"Oh, yes! And an owl howled at us," agreed the smaller girl. "And I'd much rather sleep in a Gypsy tent than have owls howl at me."

"The owl *hooted*, Dot," corrected Tess.

"Well, what's the difference between a hoot and a howl?" demanded Dot, rather crossly. She did so hate to be corrected!

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"Well, of course," said Rowena Birdsall thoughtfully, "if you are acquainted with Gypsies maybe you wouldn't be scared. But I don't believe they gave you this bracelet for nothing."

"No," agreed Dot quickly. "For forty-five cents. And we still owe Sammy Pinkney twenty-five cents of it. And he's run away."

So they got around again to the first exciting piece of news Tess and Dot had brought, and were discussing that when Mr. Howbridge came out to speak to the little visitors, giving them his written answer to Ruth's note. He heard about Sammy's escapade and some mention of the Gypsies.

"Well," he chuckled, "if Sammy Pinkney has been carried off by the Gypsies, I sympathize with the Gypsies. I have a very vivid recollection of how much trouble Sammy can make—and without half trying.

"Now, children, give my note to Ruth. I am very sorry that Luke Shepard is ill. If he does not at once recover it may be well to bring him here to Milton. With his aunt only just recovering from her illness, it would be unwise to take the boy home."

This he said more to himself than to the little girls. Because of their errand Tess and Dot could remain no longer. Ralph unhitched the pony and Tess drove away. 75

Around the very first corner they spied a dusty, rather battered touring-car just moving away. A big, dark man, with gold hoops in his ears, was driving it. There was a brilliantly dressed young woman in the tonneau, which was otherwise filled with boxes, baskets, a crate of fruit, and odd-shaped packages.

"Oh, Tess!" squealed Dot. "See there!"

"Oh, Dot!" rejoined her sister quite as excitedly. "That is the young Gypsy lady."

"Oh-oo!" moaned Dot. "Have we *got* to give her back this fretful silver bracelet, Tessie?"

"We must *try*," declared Tess firmly. "Ruth says so. Get up, Scalawag! Come on—hurry! We must catch them."

The touring-car was going away from the pony-phaeton. Scalawag objected very much to going faster than his usual easy jog trot—unless it were to dance behind a band! *He* didn't care to overtake the Gypsies' motor-car.

And that car was going faster and faster. Tess stopped talking to the aggravating Scalawag and lifted up her voice to shout after the Gypsies.

"Oh, stop! Stop!" she called. "Miss—Miss Gypsy! We've got something for you! Why, Dot, you are not hollering at all!" 76

"I—I'm trying to," wailed the smaller girl. "But I do so hate to make Alice give up her belt."

The Gypsy turned his car into a cross street ahead and disappeared. When Scalawag brought the Corner House girls to that corner the car was so far away that the girls' voices at their loudest pitch could not have reached the ears of the Romany folk.

"Now, just see! We'll never be able to give that bracelet back if you don't do your share of the hollering, Dot Kenway," complained Tess.

"I—I will," promised Dot. "Anyway, I will when it's your turn to wear the bracelet."

The little girls reached home again at a time when the whole Corner House family seemed disrupted. To the amazement of Tess and Dot their sister Ruth had departed for the mountains. Neale had only just then returned from seeing her aboard the train.

"And it's too late to stop her, never mind what Mr. Howbridge says in this note," cried Agnes. "That foolish Cecile! Here is the second half of her telegraph message," and she read it aloud again: 77

"Until afternoon; will wire you then how he is."

"Crickey!" gasped Neale, red in the face with laughter, and taking the two telegrams to read them in conjunction:

"Arrived Oakhurst. They will not let me see Luke until afternoon. Will wire you then how he is."

"Isn't that just like a girl?"

"No more like a girl than it is like a boy," snapped Agnes. "I'm sure all the brains in the world are not of the masculine gender."

"I stand corrected," meekly agreed her friend. "Just the same, I don't think that even you, Aggie, would award Cecile Shepard a medal for perspicuity."

"Why—*why*," gasped the listening Dot, "has Cecile got one of those things the matter with her? I thought it was Luke who got hurt?"

"You are perfectly right, Dottie," said Agnes, before Neale could laugh at the little girl. "It *is* Luke who is hurt. But this Neale O'Neil is very likely to dislocate his jaw if he pronounces many such big words. He is only showing off." 78

"Squelched!" admitted Neale good-naturedly. "Well, what do you wish done with the car? Shall I put it up? Can't chase Ruth's train in it, and bring her back."

"You might chase the Gypsies," suggested Tess slowly. "We saw them again—Dot and me."

"Oh! The Gypsies? What do you think, Neale? I do believe there is something in that fortune-telling business," Agnes cried.

"I bet there is," agreed Neale. "Money for the Gypsies."

But Agnes repeated what the Gypsy girl had said to Ruth and herself just as the elder Corner House girl was starting for the train.

"I saw that Gyp of course," agreed Neale. "But, pshaw! she only just *guessed*. Of course there isn't any truth in what those fortune tellers hand you. Not much!"

"There was something in that basket they handed Tess and me," said Dot, complacently eyeing the silver girdle on the Alice-doll.

"Say! About that bracelet, Aggie," broke in Neale. "Do you know what I believe?"

"What, Neale?"

"I believe those Gypsies must have stolen it. Then they got scared, thinking that the police were after them, and the women dropped it into the basket the kids bought, believing they could get the bracelet back when it was safe for them to do so."

"Do you really suppose that is the explanation?"

"I am afraid the bracelet is 'stolen goods.' Perhaps the children had better not carry it away from the house any more. Or until we are sure. The police—"

"Mercy me, Neale! you surely would not tell the police about the bracelet?"

"Not yet. But I was going to suggest to Ruth that she advertise the bracelet in the *Milton Morning Post*. Advertise it in the 'Lost and Found' column, just as though it had been picked up somewhere. Then let us see if the Gypsies—or somebody else—comes after it."

"And if somebody does?"

"Well, we can always refuse to give it up until ownership is proved," declared Neale.

"All right. Let's advertise it at once. We needn't wait for Ruth to come back," said the energetic Agnes. "How should such an advertisement be worded, Neale?"

They proceeded to evolve a reading notice advertising the finding of the silver bracelet, which when published added not a little to the complications of the matter.

CHAPTER VIII—THE MISFORTUNES OF A RUNAWAY

In this present instance Sammy Pinkney was not obliged to exert his imagination to any very great degree to make himself believe that he was having real adventure. Romance very soon took the embryo pirate by the hand and led him into most exciting and quite unlooked-for events.

Sammy's progress was slow because of the weight of the extension-bag. Yet as he trudged on steadily he put a number of miles behind him that afternoon.

Had his parents known in which direction to look for him they might easily have overtaken the runaway. Neale O'Neil could have driven out this road in the Kenway's car and brought Sammy back before supper time.

Mr. Pinkney, however, labored under the delusion that because Sammy was piratically inclined, he would head toward the sea. So he got in touch with people all along the railroad line to Pleasant Cove, suspecting that the boy might have purchased a ticket in that direction with a part of the contents of his burglarized bank.

The nearest thing to the sea that Sammy came to after passing the canal on the edge of Milton was a big pond which he sighted about mid-afternoon. Its dancing blue waters looked very cool and refreshing, and the young traveler thought of his bathing suit right away.

"I can hide this bag and take a swim," he thought eagerly. "I bet that pond is all right. Hullo! There's some kids. I wonder if they would steal my things if I go in swimming?"

He was not incautious. Being mischievously inclined himself, he suspected other boys of having similar propensities. The boys he had observed were playing down by the water's edge where an ice-house had once stood. But the building had been destroyed by fire, all but its roof. The eaves of this shingled roof, which was quite intact, now rested on the ground.

The boys were sliding from the ridge of the roof to the ground, and then climbing up again to repeat the performance. It looked to be a lot of fun.

After Sammy had hidden his extension-bag in a clump of bushes, he approached the slide. One boy, who was the largest and oldest of the group, called to Sammy:

"Come on, kid. Try it. The slide's free."

It looked to be real sport, and Sammy could not resist the invitation given so frankly. He saw that the bigger boy sat on a piece of board when he slid down the shingles; but the others slid on the seat of their trousers—and so did Sammy.

It proved to be an hilarious occasion. One might have heard those boys shouting and laughing a

mile away.

A series of races were held, and Sammy Pinkney managed to win his share of them. This so excited him that he failed for all of the time to notice what fatal effect the friction was having upon his trousers.

He was suddenly reminded, however, by a startling happening. All the shingles on that roof were not worn smooth. Some were "splintery." Sammy emitted a sharp cry as he reached the ground after a particularly swift descent of the roof, and rising, he clapped his hand to that part of his anatomy upon which he had been tobogganing, with a most rueful expression on his countenance.

"Oh, my! Oh, my!" cried Sammy. "I've got two big holes worn right through my pants! My good pants, too. My maw will give me fits, so she will. I'll never *dare* go home now."

The big boy who had saved his own trousers from disaster by using the piece of board to slide on, shouted with laughter. But another of the party said to Sammy:

"Don't tell your mother. I aren't going to tell *my* mother, you bet. By and by she'll find the holes and think they just wore through naturally."

"Well," said Sammy, with a sigh, "I guess I've slid down enough for to-day, anyway. Good-bye, you fellers, I'll see you later."

He did not feel at all as cheerful as he spoke. He was really smitten with remorse, for this was almost a new suit he had on. He wished heartily that he had put on that cowboy suit—even his bathing suit—before joining that coasting party.

"That big feller," grumbled Sammy, "is a foxy one, he is! He didn't wear through his pants, you bet. But *me*—"

Sammy was very much lowered in his own estimation over this mishap. He was by no means so smart as he had believed himself to be. He felt gingerly from time to time of the holes in his trousers. They were of such a nature that they could scarcely be hidden.

"Crickey!" he muttered, "she sure will give me fits."

The boys he had been playing with disappeared. Sammy secured his bag and suddenly found it very, very heavy. Evening was approaching. The sun was so low now that its almost level rays shone into his eyes as he plodded along the road.

A farmer going to Milton market in an auto-truck, its load covered with a brown tarpaulin, passed Sammy. If it had not been for the holes in his trousers, and what his mother would do and say about it, the boy surely would have asked the farmer for a ride back home!

His hesitancy cost him the ride. And he met nobody else on this road he was traveling. He struggled on, his courage beginning to ebb. He had eaten the last crumbs of his lunch. After the pond was out of sight behind him the runaway saw no dwellings at all. The road had entered a wood, and that wood grew thicker and darker as he advanced.

Fireflies twinkled in the bushes. There was a hum of insect life and somewhere a big bullfrog tuned his bassoon—a most eerie sound. A bat flew low above his head and Sammy dodged, uttering a startled squawk.

"Crickey! I don't like this a bit," he panted.

But the runaway was no coward. He was quite sure that there was nothing in these woods that would really hurt him. He could still see some distance back from the road on either hand, and he selected a big chestnut tree at the foot of which, between two roots, there was a hollow filled with leaves and trash.

This made not a bad couch, as he very soon found. He thrust the bag that had become so heavy farther into the hollow and lay down before it. But tired as he was, he could not at once go to sleep.

Somewhere near he heard a trickle of water. The sound made the boy thirsty. He finally got up and stumbled through the brush, along the roadside in the direction of the running water.

He found it—a spring rising in the bank above the road. Sammy carried a pocket-cup and soon satisfied his thirst by its aid. He had some difficulty in finding his former nest; but when he did come to the hollow between two huge roots, with the broadly spreading chestnut tree boughs overhead, he soon fell asleep.

Nothing disturbed Sammy thereafter until it was broad daylight. He awoke as much refreshed as though he had slept in his own bed at home.

Young muscles recover quickly from strain. All he remembered, too, was the fun he had had the day before, while he was foot-loose. Even the disaster to his trousers seemed of little moment now. He had always envied ragged urchins; they seemed to have so few cares and nobody to bother them.

He ran with a whoop to the spring, drank his fill from it, and then doused his face and hands therein. The sun and air dried his head after his ablutions and there was nobody to ask if "he had washed behind his ears."

He returned to the chestnut tree where he had lain all night, whistling. Of course he was hungry; but he believed there must be some house along the road where he could buy breakfast. Sammy

Pinkney was not at all troubled by his situation until, stooping to look into the cavity near which he had slept, he made the disconcerting discovery that his extension-bag was not there!

"Wha—wha—*what?*" stammered Sammy. "It's gone! Who took it?"

That he had been robbed while he went to the spring was the only explanation there could be of this mysterious disappearance. At least, so thought Sammy.

He ran around the tree, staring all about—even up into the thickly leaved branches where the clusters of green burrs were already formed. Then he plunged through the fringe of bushes into the road to see if he could spy the robber making away in either direction.

All he saw was a rabbit hopping placidly across the highway. A jay flew overhead with raucous call, as though he laughed at the bereft boy. And Sammy Pinkney was in no mood to stand being laughed at!

"You mean old thing!" he shouted at the flashing jay—which merely laughed at him again, just as though he did know who had stolen Sammy's bag and hugely enjoyed the joke.

In that bag were many things that Sammy considered precious as well as necessary articles of clothing. There was his gun and the shot for it! How could he defend himself from attack or shoot game in the wilds, if either became necessary?

"Oh, dear!" Sammy finally sniffed, not above crying a few tears as there was nobody by to see. "Oh, dear! Now I've *got* to wear this good suit—although 'tain't so good anyway with holes in the pants.

"But all my other things—crickey! Ain't it just mean? Whoever took my bag, I hope he'll have the baddest kind of luck. I—I hope he'll have to go to the dentist's and have all his teeth pulled, so I do!" which, from a recent experience of the runaway, seemed the most painful punishment that could be exacted from the thief.

Wishing any amount of ill-fortune for the robber would not bring back his bag. Sammy quite realized this. He had his money safely tied into a very grubby handkerchief, so that was all right. But when he started off along the road at last, he was in no very cheerful frame of mind.

CHAPTER IX—THINGS GO WRONG

Of course there was no real reason why life at the old Corner House should not flow quite as placidly with Ruth away as when the elder sister was at home. It was a fact, however, that things seemed to begin to go wrong almost at once.

Having written the notice advertising the silver bracelet as though it had been found by chance, Agnes made Neale run downtown again at once with it so as to be sure the advertisement would be inserted in the next morning's *Post*.

As the automobile had not been put into the garage after the return from taking Ruth to the station, Neale used it on this errand, and on his way back there was a blowout. Of course if Ruth had been at home she could scarcely have averted this misfortune. However, had she been at home the advertisement regarding the bracelet might not have been written at all.

Meanwhile, Mrs. McCall's preserve jars did not seal well, and the next day the work had to be done all over again. Linda cut her finger "to the bone," as she gloomily announced. And Uncle Rufus lost a silver dollar somewhere in the grass while he was mowing the lawn.

"An' dollars is as scarce wid me as dem hen's teef dey talks about," said the old darkey. "An' I never yet did see a hen wid teef—an' Ah reckon I've seen a million of 'em."

"Oh-oo!" murmured Dot Kenway. "A million hens, Unc' Rufus? *Is* there that many?"

"He, he!" chuckled the old man. "Ain't that the beatenes' chile dat ever was? Always a-questionin' an' a-questionin'. Yo' can't git by wid any sprodigious statement when she is around—no, suh!"

Nor could such an expression as "sprodigious" go unchallenged with Dot on the scene—no, indeed! A big word in any case attracted Miss Dorothy.

"What does that mean, Unc' Rufus?" she promptly demanded. "Is—is 'sprodigious' a dictionary word, or just one of your made-up words?"

"Go 'long chile!" chuckled the old man. "Can't Uncle Rufus make up words just as good as any dictionary-man? If I knows what Ah wants to say, Ah says it, ne'er mind de dictionary!"

"That's all very well, Unc' Rufus," Tess put in. "But Ruthie only wants us to use language that you find in books. So I guess you'd better not take that one from Uncle Rufus, Dottie."

"Howcome Missy Ruth so pertic'lar?" grumbled the old man. "Yo' little gals is gettin' too much l'arnin'—suah is! But none of hit don't find de ol' man his dollar."

At this complaint Tess and Dot went to work immediately to hunt for the missing dollar. It was while they were searching along the hedgerow next to the Creamers' premises that the little girls

got into their memorable argument with Mabel Creamer about the lobster—an argument, which, being overheard by Agnes, was reported to the family with much hilarity.

Mabel, an energetic and sharp-tongued child, and Bubby, her little brother, were playing in their yard. That is, Bubby was playing while Mabel nagged and thwarted him in almost everything he wanted to do.

"Now, don't stoop over like that, Bubby. Your face gets all red like a lobster does. Maybe you'll turn into one."

"I *ain't* a lobs'er," shouted Bubby.

"You will be one if you get red like that," repeated his sister in a most aggravating way.

"I won't be a lobs'er!" wailed Bubby.

"Of course you won't be a lobster, Bubby," spoke up Tess from across the hedge. "You're just a boy."

"Course I's a boy," declared Bubby stoutly, sensing that Tess Kenway's assurance was half a criticism. "I don't want to be a lobs'er—nor a dirl, so there!"

"Oh-oo!" gasped Dot.

"You will be a lobster and turn all red if you are a bad boy," declared Mabel, who was always in a bad temper when she was made to mind Bubby.

"Why, Mabel," murmured Dot, who knew a thing or two about lobsters herself, "you wouldn't boil Bubby, would you?"

"Don't have to boil 'em to make 'em turn red," declared Mabel, referring to the lobster, not the boy. "My father brought home live lobsters once and the big one got out of the basket on to the kitchen floor."

"Oh, my!" exclaimed the interested Dot. "What happened?"

With her imagination thus spurred by appreciation, Mabel pursued the fancy: "And there were three little ones in the basket, and that old, big lobster tried to make them get out on the floor too. And when they wouldn't, what do you think?"

"I don't know," breathed Dot.

"Why, he got so mad at them that he turned red all over. I saw him—"

"Why, Mabel Creamer!" interrupted Tess, unable to listen further to such a flight of fancy without registering a protest. "That can't be so—you know it can't."

"I'd like to know why it can't be so?" demanded Mabel.

"'Cause lobsters only turn red when they are boiled. They are all green when they are alive."

"How do you know so much, Tess Kenway?" cried Mabel. "These are my lobsters and I'll have them turn blue if I want to—so there!"

There seemed to be no room for further argument. Besides, Mabel grabbed Bubby by the hand and dragged him away from the hedge.

"My!" murmured Dot, "Mabel has *such* a 'magination. And maybe that lobster did get mad, Tess. We don't know."

"She never had a live lobster in her family," declared Tess, quite emphatically. "You know very well, Dot Kenway, that Mr. Creamer wouldn't bring home such a thing as a live lobster, when there are little children in his house."

"M—mm—I guess that's so," agreed Dot. "A live lobster would be worse than Sammy Pinkney's bulldog."

Thus reminded of the absent Sammy the two smaller Corner House girls postponed any further search for Uncle Rufus's dollar and went across the street to learn if any news had been gained of their runaway playmate. Mrs. Pinkney was still despairing. She had imagined already a score of misfortunes that might have befallen her absent son, ranging from his eating of green apples to being run over by an automobile.

"But, Mrs. Pinkney!" burst forth Tess at last, "if Sammy has run away to sea to be a pirate, there won't be any green apples for him to eat—and no automobiles."

"Oh, you can never tell what trouble Sammy Pinkney will manage to get into," moaned his mother. "I can only expect the very worst."

"Well," Dot remarked with a sigh, as she and Tess trudged home to supper, "I'm glad there is only one boy in *my* family. My boy doll, Nosmo King Kenway, will probably be a source of great anxiety when he is older."

"I wouldn't worry about that," Tess told her placidly. "If he is very bad you can send him to the reform school."

"Oh—oo!" gasped Dot, all her maternal instincts aroused at such a suggestion. "That would be awful."

"I don't know. They do send boys to the reform school. Jimmy Mulligan, whose mother lives in

that little house on Willow Wythe, is in the reform school because he wouldn't mind his mother."

"But they don't send Sammy there," urged Dot.

"No—o. Of course," admitted the really tender-hearted Tess, "we know Sammy isn't really naughty. He is only silly to run away every once in a while."

There was much bustle inside the old Corner House that evening. Because they really missed Ruth so much, her sisters invented divers occupations to fill the hours until bedtime. Tess and Dot, for instance, had never cut out so many paper-dolls in all their lives.

Another telegram had arrived from Cecile Shepard (sent, of course, before Ruth had reached Oakhurst), stating that she had been allowed to see her brother and that, although he could not be immediately moved, he was improving and was absolutely in no danger.

"If Ruthie had only waited to get *this* message," complained Agnes, "she would not have gone up there to the mountains at all. And just see, Neale, how right that Gypsy girl was. There was news on the way that changed the whole aspect of affairs. She was quite wonderful, *I* think."

By this time Neale saw that it was better not to try to ridicule Agnes' budding belief in fortune telling. "Less said, the soonest mended," was his wise opinion.

"I like Cecile Shepard," Agnes went on to say, "and always shall; but I don't think she has shown much sense about her brother's illness. Scaring everybody to death, and sending telegrams like a patch-work quilt!"

"Maybe Ruth will come right home again when she finds Luke is all right," said Tess hopefully. "Dear, me! aren't boys a lot of trouble?"

"Sammy and Luke are," agreed Dot.

"All but Neale," said the loyal Agnes, her boy chum having departed. "I don't see what this family would do without Neale O'Neil."

In the morning the older sister's absence seemed to make quite as great a gap in the household of the old Corner House as at night. But Neale rushed in early with the morning paper to show Agnes their advertisement in print. Under the "Lost and Found" heading appeared the following:

"FOUND:—Silver bracelet, antique design. Owner can regain it by proving property and paying for this advertisement. Apply Kenway, Willow and Main Streets."

"It sounds quite dignified," decided Agnes admiringly. "I guess Ruth would approve."

"Crickey!" ejaculated Neale O'Neil, "this is *one* thing Ruth is not bossing. We did this off our own bat, Aggie."

"Just the same," ruminated Agnes, "I wonder what Mr. Howbridge will say if he reads it?"

"I am glad," said Neale with gratitude, "that my father doesn't interfere with what I do. And I haven't any guardian, unless it is dear old Con Murphy. Folks let me pretty much alone."

"If they didn't," said Agnes saucily, "I suppose you would run away as you did from the circus."

"No," laughed her chum. "One runaway in the neighborhood is enough. Mr. Pinkney has been up half the night, he tells me, telephoning and sending telegrams. He has about made up his mind that Sammy hasn't gone in the direction of Pleasant Cove, after all."

"We ought to help hunt for Sammy," cried Agnes eagerly. "Let us take Mrs. Pinkney in the auto, Neale, and search for that little rascal."

"No. She will not leave the house. She wants to greet Sammy when he comes back—no matter whether it is day or night," chuckled Neale. "But Mr. Pinkney is going to get away from the office this afternoon, and we'll take him. He is afraid his wife will be really ill."

"Poor woman!"

"She cannot be contented to sit down and wait for Sammy to turn up—as he always does."

"You mean, he always gets turned up," giggled Agnes. "Somebody is sure to find him."

"Well, then, it might as well be us," agreed Neale. "I'll tune up the engine, and see that the car is all right. We should be able to go over a lot of these roads in an afternoon. Sammy could not have got very far from Milton in two days, or less."

CHAPTER X—ALL IS NOT GOLD THAT GLITTERS

Quite unsuspecting of the foregoing plans for his apprehension, Sammy Pinkney was journeying on, going steadily away from Milton, and traveling much faster now that he did not have to carry the extension-bag.

The boy had no idea who could have stolen his possessions; but he rubbed his knuckles in his eyes, forced back the tears, and pressed on, feeling that freedom even without a change of

garments was preferable to the restrictions of home and all the comforts there to be found.

He walked two miles or more and was very hungry before he came to the first house. It stood just at the edge of the big wood in which Sammy had spent the night.

It was scarcely more than a tumbled-down hut, with broken panes of glass more common than whole ones in the windows, these apertures stuffed with hats and discarded garments, while half the bricks had fallen from the chimney-top. There were half a dozen barefooted children running about, while a very wide and red-faced woman stood in the doorway.

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"Hullo, me bye!" she called to Sammy, as he lingered outside the broken fence with a longing eye upon her. "Where be yez bound so airy in the marnin'?"

"I'm just traveling, Ma'am," Sammy returned with much dignity. "Could—could you sell me some breakfast?"

"Breakfast, is it?" repeated the smiling woman. "Shure, I'd give yez it, if mate wasn't so high now. Come in me kitchen and sit ye down. There's tay in the pot, and I'll fry yez up a spider full o' pork and taters, if that'll do yez?"

The menu sounded tempting indeed to Sammy. He accepted the woman's invitation instantly and entered the house, past the staring children. The two oldest of the group, a shrewd-faced boy and a sharp-featured girl, stood back and whispered together while they watched the visitor.

Sammy was so much interested in the bountiful breakfast with which the housewife supplied him that he thought very little about the children peering in at the door and open windows. When he had eaten the last crumb he asked his hostess how much he should pay her.

"Well, me bye, I'll not overcharge ye," she replied. "If yez have ten cents about ye we'll call it square—an' that's only for the mate, as I said before is so high, I dunno."

102

Sammy produced the knotted handkerchief, put it on the table and untied it, displaying the coins it held with something of a flourish. The jingle of so many dimes brought a sigh of wonder in unison from the young spectators at door and windows. The woman accepted her dime without comment.

Sammy thanked her politely, wiped his mouth on his sleeve (napery was conspicuous by its absence in this household) and started out the door. The smaller children scattered to give him passage; the older boy and girl had already gone out of the badly fenced yard and were loitering along the road in the direction Sammy was traveling.

"Hullo! Here's raggedy-pants," said the girl saucily, when Sammy came along.

"How did you get them holes in your breeches, kid?" added the boy.

"Never you mind," rejoined Sammy gruffly. "They're *my* pants."

"Stuck up, ain't you?" jeered the girl and stuck out her tongue at him.

Sammy thought these were two very impolite children, and although he was not rated at home for his own chivalrous conduct, he considered these specimens in the road before him quite unpleasant young people.

103

"Ne'er mind," said the boy, looking at Sammy slyly, "he don't know everything. He ain't seen everything if he is traveling all by himself. I bet he's run away."

"I ain't running away from you," was Sammy's belligerent rejoinder.

"You would if I said 'Boo!' to you."

"No, I wouldn't."

"Ya!" scoffed the girl, leering at Sammy, "don't talk so much. Do something to him, Peter."

Peter glanced warily back at the house. Perhaps he knew the large, red-faced woman might take a hand in proceedings if he pitched upon the strange boy.

"I bet," he said, starting on another tack, "that he never saw a cherry-colored calf like our'n."

"I bet he never did," crowed the girl in delight.

"A cherry-colored calf," scoffed Sammy. "Get out! There ain't such a thing. A calf might be red; there *are* red cows—"

"This calf is cherry-colored," repeated the boy earnestly. "It's down there in our pasture."

104

"Don't believe it," said Sammy flatly.

"'Tis so!" cried the girl.

"I tell you," said the very shrewd-looking boy. "We'll show it to you for ten cents."

"I don't believe it," repeated Sammy, but more doubtfully.

The girl laughed at him more scornfully than before. "He's afraid to spend a dime—an' him with so much money," she cried.

"I don't believe you've got a cherry-colored calf to show me."

"Gimme the dime and I'll show you whether we have or not," said Peter.

"No," said the cautious Sammy. "I'll give you a dime *if* you show it to me. But no foolin'. I won't give you a cent if the calf is any other color."

"All right," shouted the other boy. "Come on and I'll show you. Come on, Liz."

"All right, Peter," said the girl, quite as eagerly. "Hurry up, raggedy-pants. We can use that dime, Peter and me can."

The bare-legged youngsters got through a rail fence and darted down a path into a scrubby pasture, as wild as unbroken colts. Sammy, feeling fine after the bountiful breakfast he had eaten, chased after them wishing that he had thought to remove his shoes and stockings too. Peter and Liz seemed so much more free and untrammelled than he!

"Hold on!" puffed Sammy, coming finally to the bottom of the slope. "I ain't going to run my head off for any old calf—Huh!"

From behind a clump of brush appeared suddenly a cow—a black and white cow, probably of the Holstein breed. There followed a scrambling in the bushes. Liz jumped into them with a shriek and drove out a little, blatting, stiff-legged calf. It was all of a glossy black, from its nose to the tip of its tail.

"That's him! That's him!" shrieked Liz. "A cherry-colored calf."

"What did I tell you?" demanded the boy, Peter. "Give us the dime."

"You go on!" exclaimed Sammy. "I knew all the time you were story-telling. That's no cherry-colored calf."

"'Tis too! It's just the color of a black-heart cherry," giggled Liz. "You got to give up ten cents."

"Won't neither," Sammy declared.

"I'll take it off you," threatened Peter, growing belligerent.

"You won't," stubbornly declared Sammy, who did not propose to be cheated.

Peter jumped for him and Sammy could not run. One reason why he could not retreat was because Liz grabbed him from the rear, holding him around the waist.

She pulled him over backward, while her brother began to pummel Sammy most heartily from above. It was a most unfair attack and a most uncomfortable situation for the runaway. Although he managed to defend his face for the most part from Peter's blows, he could do little else.

"Lemme up! Lemme up!" bawled Sammy.

"Gimme the dime," panted Peter.

"I won't! 'Tain't fair!" gasped Sammy, too plucky to give in.

Liz had now squirmed from under the struggling boys. She must have seen at the house in which pocket Sammy kept the knotted handkerchief, for she thrust her hand into that pocket and snatched out the hoard of dimes before the owner realized what she was doing.

"Hey! Stop! Lemme up!" roared Sammy again.

"I got it, Peter!" shrieked Liz, and, springing up, she darted into the bushes and disappeared.

"Stop! She's stole my money," gasped Sammy in horror and alarm.

"She never! You didn't have no money!" declared Peter, and with a final blow that stunned Sammy for the moment, the other leaped up and followed his wild companion into the brush.

Sammy, weeping in good earnest now, bruised and scratched in body and sore in spirit, climbed slowly to his feet. Never before in any of his runaway escapades had he suffered such ignominy and loss.

Why! he had actually fallen among thieves. First his bag and all his chattels therein had been stolen. Now these two ragamuffins had robbed him of every penny he possessed.

He dared not go back to the house where he had bought breakfast and complain. The other youngsters there might fall upon and beat him again!

Sammy Pinkney at last was tasting the bitter fruits of wrong doing. Even weeding another beet-bed could have been no more painful than these experiences which he was now suffering.

CHAPTER XI—MYSTERIES ACCUMULATE

"And if you go to the store, or anywhere else for Mrs. McCall or Linda, remember *don't* take that bracelet with you," commanded Agnes in a most imperative manner, fairly transfixing her two smaller sisters with an index finger. "Remember!"

"Ruthie didn't say so," complained Dot. "Did she, Tess?"

"But I guess we'd better mind what Agnes says when Ruth isn't at home," confessed Tess, more amenable to discipline. "You know, Aggie has got to be responsible now."

"Well," muttered the rebellious Dot, "never mind if she is 'sponserble, she needn't be so awful bossy about it!"

Agnes did, of course, feel her importance while Ruth was away. It was not often that she was made responsible for the family welfare in any particular. And just now the matter of the silver bracelet loomed big on her horizon.

She scarcely expected the advertisement in the *Morning Post* to bring immediate results. Yet, it might. The Gypsies' gift to the little girls was a very queer matter indeed. The suggestion that the bracelet had been stolen by the Romany folk did not seem at all improbable.

And if this was so, whoever had lost the ornament would naturally be watching the "Lost and Found" column in the newspaper.

"Unless the owner doesn't know he has lost it," Agnes suggested to Neale.

"How's that? He'd have to be more absent-minded than Professor Ware not to miss a bracelet like that," scoffed her boy chum.

"Oh, Professor Ware!" giggled Agnes, suddenly. "*He* would forget anything, I do believe. Do you know what happened at his house the other evening when the Millers and Mr. and Mrs. Crandall went to call?"

"The poor professor made a bad break I suppose," grinned Neale. "What did he do?"

"Why, Mrs. Ware saw the callers coming just before they rang the bell and the professor had been digging in the garden. Of course she straightened things up a little before she appeared in the parlor to welcome the visitors. But the professor did not appear. Somebody asked for him at last and Mrs. Ware went to the foot of the stairs to call him.

"'Oh, Professor!' she called up the stairs, and the company heard him answer back just as plain:

"'Maria, I can't remember whether you sent me up here to change my clothes or to go to bed.'"

"I can believe it!" chortled Neale O'Neil. "He has made some awful breaks in school. But I don't believe *he* ever owned that bracelet, Aggie."

The first person who displayed interest in the advertisement in the *Post* about the bracelet, save the two young people who put it in the paper, proved to add much to the mystery of the affair and nothing at all to the peace of mind of Agnes, at least.

Agnes was busy at some mending—actually hose-darning, for Ruth insisted that the flyaway sister should mend her own stockings, which Aunt Sarah's keen eyes inspected—when she chanced to raise her head to glance out of the front window of the sewing room. A strange looking turnout had halted before the front gate.

The vehicle itself was a decrepit express wagon on the side of which in straggling blue letters was painted the one word "JUNK," but the horse drawing the wagon was a surprisingly well-kept and good looking animal.

The back of the wagon was piled high with bundles of newspapers, and bags, evidently stuffed with rags, were likewise in the wagon body. The man climbing down from the seat just as Agnes looked did not seem at all like the usual junk dealer who passed through Milton's streets heralded by a "chime" of tin-can bells.

He was a small, swarthy man, and even at the distance of the front gate from Agnes' window the girl could see that he wore gold hoops in his ears. He was quick but furtive in his motions. He glanced in a birdlike way down the street and across the Parade Ground, which was diagonally opposite the old Corner House, before he entered the front gate.

"He'd better go around to the side door," thought Agnes aloud. "He must be a very fashionable junkman to come to the front of the house. And at that I don't believe Mrs. McCall has any rags or papers to sell just now."

The swarthy man came straight on to the porch and up the steps. Agnes heard the bell, and knowing Linda was busy and being likewise rather curious, she dropped her stocking darning and ran into the front hall.

The moment she unlatched the big door the swarthy stranger inserted himself into the house.

"Why! who are you?" she demanded, fairly thrust aside by the man's eagerness.

She saw then that he had a folded paper in one hand. He thrust it before her eyes, pointing to a place upon it with a very grimy finger.

"You have found it!" he chattered with great excitement. "That ancient bracelet which has for so many generations been an heirloom—yes?—of the Costello. Queen Alma herself wore it at a time long ago. You have found it?"

Agnes was made almost speechless by his vehemence as well as by the announcement itself.

"I—I—What *do* you mean?" she finally gasped.

"You know!" he ejaculated, rapping on the newspaper with his finger like a woodpecker on a dead limb. "You put in the paper—*here*. It is lost. You find. *You* are Kenway, and you say the so-antique bracelet shall be give to who proves property."

"We will return it to the owner. Only to the owner," interrupted Agnes, backing away from him again, for his vehemence half frightened her.

"Shall I bring Queen Alma here to say it was her property?" he cried.



"You have found it!" he chattered with great excitement.

"That would be better. If Queen Alma—whoever she is—owns the bracelet we will give it to her when she proves property."

The little man uttered a staccato speech in a foreign tongue. Agnes did not understand. He spread wide his arms in a gesture of seemingly utter despair.

"And Queen Alma!" he sputtered. "She is dead these two—no! t'ree hundred year!"

"Mercy me!" gasped Agnes, backing away from him and sitting suddenly down in one of the straight-backed hall chairs. "Mercy me!"

CHAPTER XII—GETTING IN DEEPER

"You see, Mees Kenway," sputtered the swarthy man eagerly, "I catch the paper, here." He rapped the *Post* again with his finger. "I read the Engleesh—yes. I see the notice you, the honest Kenway, have put in the paper—"

"Let me tell you, sir," said Agnes, starting up, "*all* the Kenways are honest. I am not the only honest person in our family I should hope!"

Agnes was much annoyed. The excitable little foreigner spread abroad his hands again and bowed low before her.

"Please! Excuse!" he said. "I admire all your family, oh, so very much! But it is to you who put in the paper the words here, about the very ancient silver bracelet." Again that woodpecker rapping on the Lost and Found column in the *Post*. "No?"

"Yes. I put the advertisement in the paper," acknowledged Agnes, but wishing very much that she had not, or that Neale O'Neil was present at this exciting moment to help her handle the situation.

"So! I have come for it," cried the swarthy man, as though the matter were quite settled.

But Agnes' mind began to function pretty well again. She determined not to be "rushed." This

strange foreigner might be perfectly honest. But there was not a thing to prove that the bracelet given to Tess and Dot by the Gypsy women belonged to him.

"How do you know," she asked, "that the bracelet we have in our possession is the one you have lost?"

"I? Oh, no, lady! I did not lose the ancient heirloom. Oh, no."

"But you say—"

"I am only its rightful owner," he explained. "Had Queen Alma's bracelet been in my possession it never would have been lost and so found by the so—gracious Kenway. Indeed, no!"

"Then, what have you come here for?" cried Agnes, in some desperation. "I cannot give the bracelet to anybody but the one who lost it—"

"You say here the owner!" cried the man, beginning again the woodpecker tapping on the paper.

"But how do I know you own it?" she gasped.

"Show it me. In one moment's time can I tell—at the one glance," was the answer of assurance. "Oh, yes, yes, yes!"

These "yeses" were accompanied by the emphatic tapping on the paper. Agnes wondered that the *Post* at that spot was not quite worn through.

Perhaps it was fortunate that at this moment Neale O'Neil came in. That he came direct from the garage and apparently from a struggle with oily machinery, both his hands and face betrayed.

"Hey!" he exploded. "If we are going to take Mr. Pinkney out on a cross-country chase after that missing pirate this afternoon, we've got to get a hustle on. You going to be ready, Aggie? Mr. Pinkney gets home at a quarter to one."

"Oh, Neale!" cried Agnes, turning eagerly to greet the boy. "Talk to this man—do! I don't know what to say to him."

The boy's countenance broadened in a smile.

"Say 'Hullo!' and 'How-de-do!'"

"How's the world a-using you?""

quoted Neale, and chuckled outright. "What's his name? What does he want?"

"Costello—that me," interposed the strange junkman. He gazed curiously at Neale with his snapping black eyes. "*You* are not Kenway—here in the pape'?"

Again the finger tapped upon the Lost and Found column in the *Post*. Neale shook his head. He glanced out of the open door and spied the wagon and its informative sign.

"You are a junkman, are you, Mr. Costello?"

"Yes, yes, yes! I buy the pape', buy the rag and bot'—buy anytheeng I get cheap. But not to buy do I come this time to Mees Kenway. No, no! I come because of this in the paper."

His tapping finger called attention again to the advertisement of the bracelet. Neale expelled a surprised whistle.

"Oh, Aggie!" he said, "is he after the Gypsy bracelet?"

The swarthy man's face was all eagerness again.

"Yes, yes, yes!" he sputtered. "I am Gypsy. Spanish Gypsy. Of the tribe of Costello. I am—what you say?—direct descendent of Queen Alma who live three hunder'—maybe more—year ago, and she own that bracelet the honest Kenway find!"

"She—she's dead, then? This Queen Alma?" stammered Neale.

"*Si, si!* Yes, yes! But the so-antique bracelet descend by right to our family. That Beeg Jeem —"

He burst again into the language he had used before which was quite unintelligible to either of his listeners; but Neale thought by the man's expression of countenance that his opinion of "Beeg Jeem" was scarcely to be told in polite English.

"Wait!" Neale broke in. "Let's get this straight. We—we find a bracelet which we advertise. You say the bracelet is yours. Where and how did you lose it?"

"I already tell the honest Kenway, I do *not* lose it."

"It was stolen from you, then?"

"Yes, yes, yes! It was stole. A long ago it was stole. And now Beeg Jeem say he lose it. You find—yes?"

"This seems to be complicated," Neale declared, shaking his head and gazing wonderingly at Agnes. "If you did not lose it yourself, Mr. Costello—"

"But it is mine!" cried the man.

"We don't know that," said Neale, somewhat bruskiy. "You must prove it."

"Prove it?"

"Yes. In the first place, describe the bracelet. Tell us just how it is engraved, or ornamented, or whatever it is. How wide and thick is it? What kind of a bracelet is it, aside from its being made of silver?"

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"Ah! Queen Alma's bracelet is so well known to the Costello—how shall I say? Yes, yes, yes!" cried the man, with rather graceful gestures. "And when Beeg Jeem tell me she is lost—"

"All right. Describe it," put in Neale.

Agnes suddenly tugged at Neale's sleeve. Her pretty face was aflame with excitement.

"Oh, Neale!" she interposed in a whisper. "Even if he can describe it exactly we do not know that he is the real owner."

"Shucks! That's right," agreed the boy.

He turned to Costello again demanding:

"How can you prove that this bracelet—if it is the one you think it is—belongs to you?"

"She belong to the Costello family. It is an heirloom. I tell it you."

"That's all right. But you've got to prove it. Even if you describe the thing that only proves that you have seen it, or heard it described yourself. It might be so, you know, Mr. Costello. You must give us some evidence of ownership."

"Queen Alma's bracelet—" began Costello.

The junkman made a despairing gesture with wide-spread arms.

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"Me? How can I tell you, sir, and the honest Kenway? It has always belong to the Costello. Yes, yes, yes! That so-ancient bracelet, Beeg Jeem have no right to it."

"But he was the one who lost it!" exclaimed Neale, being quite confident now of the identity of "Beeg Jeem."

"Yes, yes, yes! So he say. I no believe. Then I see the reading here in the pape', of the honest Kenway"—tap, tap, tapping once more of the forefinger—"and I see it must be so. I—"

"Hold on!" exclaimed Neale. "You did not lose the bracelet. This other fellow did. You bring him here and let him prove ownership."

"No, no!" raved Costello, shaking both clenched hands above his head. "He shall not have it. It is mine. I am *the* Costello. Queen Alma, she give it to the great, great, great gran'mudder of *my* great, great, great—"

"Shucks!" ejaculated Neale. "Now you are going too deep into the family records for me. I can't follow you. It looks to me like a case for the courts to settle."

"Oh, Neale!" gasped Agnes.

"Why, Aggie, we'd get into hot water if we let this fellow, or any of those other Gypsies, have the bracelet offhand. If this chap wants it, he will have to see Mr. Howbridge."

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"Oh, yes!" murmured the girl with sudden relief in her voice. "We can tell Mr. Howbridge."

"Guess we'll have to," agreed Neale. "We certainly have bit off more than we can chew, Aggie. I'll say we have. I guess maybe we'd have been wiser if we had told your guardian about the old bracelet before advertising it. And Ruth has nothing on us, at that! She did not tell him."

"We're likely," concluded Neale, with a side glance at the swarthy man, "to have a dozen worse than this one come here to bother us. We surely did start something when we had that ad. printed, Aggie."

CHAPTER XIII—OVER THE HILLS AND FAR AWAY

122

Costello, the junkman, could not be further ignored, for at this point he began another excitable harangue. The Queen Alma bracelet, "Beeg Jeem," his own sorrows, and the fact that he saw no reason why Agnes should not immediately give up to him the silver bracelet, were all mixed up together in a clamor that became almost deafening.

"Oh, what shall I do? What *shall* I do?" exclaimed the Corner House girl.

But Neale O'Neil was quite level-headed. Like Agnes, at first he had for a little while been swept off his feet by the swarthy man's vehemence. He regained his balance now.

"We're not going to do anything. We won't even show him the bracelet," said the boy firmly.

"But it is mine! It is the heirloom of the Costello! I, myself, tell you so," declared the junkman, beating his breast now instead of the newspaper.

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"All right. I believe you. Don't yell so about it," said Neale, but quite calmly. "That does not alter the fact that we cannot give the bracelet up. That is, Miss Kenway cannot."

"But she say here—in the paper—"

"Oh, stop it!" exclaimed the exasperated boy. "It doesn't say in that paper that she will hand the thing out to anybody who comes and asks for it. If this other fellow you have been talking about should come here, do you suppose we would give it up to him, just on his say so?"

"No, no! It is not his. It never should have been in the possession of his family, sir. I assure you *I* am the Costello to whose ancestors the great Queen Alma of our tribe delivered the bracelet."

"All right. Let it go at that," answered Neale. "All the more reason why we must be careful who gets it now. If it is honestly your bracelet you will get it, Mr. Costello. But you will have to see Miss Kenway's guardian and let him decide."

"Her—what you call it—does he have the bracelet?" cried the man.

"He will have it. You go there to-morrow. I will give you his address. To-morrow he will talk to you. He is not in his office to-day. He is a lawyer."

"Oh, la, la! The law! I no like the law," declared Costello.

"No, I presume you Gypsies don't," muttered Neale, pulling out an envelope and the stub of a pencil with which to write the address of Mr. Howbridge's office. "There it is. Now, that is the best we can do for you. Only, nobody shall be given the bracelet until you have talked with Mr. Howbridge."

"But, I no like! The honest Kenway say here, in the paper—"

As he began to tap upon the newspaper again Neale, who was a sturdy youth, crowded him out upon the veranda of the old Corner House.

"Now, go!" advised Neale, when he heard the click of the door latch behind him. "You'll make nothing by lingering here and talking. There's your horse starting off by himself. Better get him."

This roused the junk dealer's attention. The horse was tired of standing and was half a block away. Costello uttered an excited yelp and darted after his junk wagon.

Agnes let Neale inside the house again. She was much relieved.

"There! isn't this a mess?" she said. "I am glad you thought of Mr. Howbridge. But I *do* wish Ruth had been at home. She would have known just what to say to that funny little man."

"Humph! Maybe it would have been a good idea if she had been here," admitted Neale slowly. "Ruth is awfully bossy, but things do go about right when she is on the job."

"We'll have to see Mr. Howbridge—"

"But that can wait until to-morrow morning," Neale declared. "We can't do so this afternoon in any case. I happen to know he is out of town. And we have promised Mr. Pinkney to take him on a hunt for Sammy."

"All right. It is almost noon. You'd better go and wash your face, Neale," and she began to giggle at him.

"Don't I know that? I came in here just to remind you to begin to prink before dinner or you'd never be ready."

She was already halfway up the stairs and she leaned over the balustrade to make a gamin's face at him.

"Just you tend to your own apple cart, Neale O'Neil!" she told him. "I will be ready as soon as you are."

At dinner, which was eaten in the middle of the day at this time of year at the old Corner House, Agnes appeared ready all but her hat for the car.

"Oh, Aggie! can we go too?" cried Dot. "We want to ride in the automobile, don't we, Tess?"

"We maybe want to go riding," confessed the other sister slowly. "But I guess we can't, Dot. You forget that Margie and Holly Pease are coming over at three o'clock. They haven't seen the fretted silver bracelet."

"That reminds me," said Agnes firmly. "You must not take that bracelet out of the house. Understand? Not at all."

"Why, Aggie!" murmured Tess, while Dot grew quite red with indignation.

"If you wish to play with it indoors, all right," Agnes said. "Whose turn to have it, is it to-day?"

"Mine," admitted Tess.

"Then I hold you responsible. Not out of the house. We have got to get Mr. Howbridge's advice about it, in any case."

"Ruth didn't say we couldn't wear the bracelet out-of-doors," declared Dot, pouting.

"I am in Ruth's place," responded the older sister promptly. "Now, remember! You might lose it anyway. And *then* what would we do if the owner really comes for it?"

"But they won't!" cried Dot, confidently. "Those Gypsy ladies gave it to us for keeps. I am sure."

"You certainly would not wish to keep the bracelet if the person the Gypsies stole it from came here to get it?" said Agnes sternly.

"Oh—oo! No-o," murmured Dot.

"Of course we would not, Sister," Tess declared briskly. "If we knew just where their camp is we would take it to them anyway. Of course we would, Dot!"

"Oh, of course," agreed Dot, but very faintly.

"You children are so seldom observant," went on Agnes in her most grown-up manner. "You should have looked into that basket when you bought it of the Gypsies. Then you would have seen the bracelet before the women got away. You are almost *never* observant."

"Why, Aggie!" Tess exclaimed, rather hurt by the accusation of her older sister. "That is what your Mr. Marks said when he came into our grade at school just before the end of term last June."

Mr. Curtis G. Marks was the principal of the High School which Agnes attended.

"What was Mr. Marks doing over in your room, Tess?" Agnes asked curiously.

"Visiting. Our teacher asked him to 'take the class.' You know, visiting teachers always *are* so nose-y," added Tess with more frankness than good taste.

"Better not let Ruth hear you use that expression, child," laughed Agnes. "But what about being observant—or *unobservant*?"

"He told us," Tess went on to say, "to watch closely, and then asked for somebody to give him a number. So somebody said thirty-two."

"Yes?"

"And Mr. Marks went to the board and wrote twenty-three on it. Of course, none of us said anything. Then Mr. Marks asked for another number and somebody gave him ninety-four. Then he wrote forty-nine on the board, and nobody said a word."

"Why didn't you?" asked Agnes in wonder. "Did you think he was teaching you some new game?"

"I—I guess we were too polite. You see, he was a visitor. And he said right out loud to our teacher: 'You see, they do not observe. Is it dense stupidity, or just inattention?' That's *just* what he said," added Tess, her eyes flashing.

"Oh!" murmured Dot. "Didn't he know how to write the number right?"

"So," continued Tess, "I guess we all felt sort of hurt. And Belle Littleweed got so fidgety that she raised her hand. Mr. Marks says: 'Very well, you give me a number.'"

"Belle lisps a little, you know, Aggie, and she said right out: 'Theventy-theven; thee if you can turn that around!' He didn't think we noticed anything, and were stupid; but I guess he knows better now," added Tess with satisfaction.

"That is all right," said Agnes with a sigh. "I heartily wish you and Dot had been observant when those women gave you the basket and you had found the bracelet in it before they got away. It is going to make us trouble I am afraid."

Agnes told the little ones nothing about the strange junkman and his claim. Nor did she mention the affair to any of the remainder of the Corner House family. She only added:

"So don't you take the bracelet out of the house or let anybody at all have it—if Neale or I are not here."

"Why, it would not be right to give the bracelet to anybody but the Gypsy ladies, would it?" said Tess.

"Of course not," agreed Dot. "And *they* haven't come after it."

Agnes did not notice these final comments of the two smaller girls. She had given them instructions, and those instructions were sufficient, she thought, to avert any trouble regarding the mysterious bracelet—whether it was "Queen Alma's" or not.

The junkman, Costello, certainly had filled Agnes' mind with most romantic imaginations! If the old silver bracelet was a Gypsy heirloom and had been handed down through the Costello tribe—as the junkman claimed—for three hundred years and more, of course it would not be considered stolen property.

The mystery remained why the Gypsy women had left the bracelet in the basket they had almost forced upon the Kenway children. The explanation of this was quite beyond Agnes, unless it had been done because the Gypsy women feared that this very Costello was about to claim the heirloom, and they considered it safer with Tess and Dot than in their own possession. True, this seemed a far-fetched explanation of the affair; yet what so probable?

The Gypsies might be quite familiar with Milton, and probably knew a good deal about the old Corner House and the family now occupying it. The little girls would of course be honest. The Gypsies were shrewd people. They were quite sure, no doubt, that the Kenways would not give the bracelet to any person but the women who sold the basket, unless the right to the property could be proved.

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"And even if that Costello man does own the bracelet, how is he going to prove it?" Agnes asked Neale, as they ran the car out of the garage after dinner. "I guess we are going to hand dear old Mr. Howbridge a big handful of trouble."

"Crickey! isn't that a fact?" grumbled Neale. "The more I think of it, the sorrier I am we put that advertisement in the paper, Aggie."

There was nothing more to be said about that at the time, for Mr. Pinkney was already waiting for them on his front steps. His wife was at the door and she looked so weary-eyed and pale of face that Agnes at least felt much sympathy for her.

"Oh, don't worry, Mrs. Pinkney!" cried the girl from her seat beside Neale. "I am sure Sammy will turn up all right. Neale says so—everybody says so! He is such a plucky boy, anyway. Nothing would happen to him."

"But this seems worse than any other time," said the poor woman. "He must have never meant to come back, or he would not have taken that picture with him."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed her husband cheerfully. "Sammy sort of fancied himself in that picture, that is all. He is not without his share of vanity."

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"That is what *you* say," complained Sammy's mother. "But I just feel that something dreadful has happened to him this time."

"Never mind," called Neale, starting the engine, "we'll go over the hills and far away, but we'll find some trace of him, Mrs. Pinkney. Sammy can't have hidden himself so completely that we cannot discover where he has been and where he is going."

That is exactly what they did. They flew about the environs of Milton in a rapid search for the truant. Wherever they stopped and made inquiries for the first hour or so, however, they gained no word of Sammy.

It was three o'clock, and they were down toward the canal on the road leading to Hampton Mills, when they gained the first possible clue of the missing one. And that clue was more than twenty-four hours old.

A storekeeper remembered a boy who answered to Sammy's description buying something to eat the day before, and sitting down on the store step to eat it. That boy carried a heavy extension-bag and went on after he had eaten along the Hampton Mills road.

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"We've struck his trail!" declared Neale with satisfaction. "Don't you think so, Mr. Pinkney?"

"How did he pay you for the things he bought?" asked the father of the runaway, addressing the storekeeper again. "What kind of money did he have?"

"He had ten cent pieces, I remember. And he had them tied in a handkerchief. Nicked his bank before he started, did he?" and the man laughed.

"That is exactly what he did," admitted Mr. Pinkney, returning hurriedly to the car. "Drive on, Neale. I guess we are on the right trail."

CHAPTER XIV—ALMOST HAD HIM

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Neale drove almost recklessly for the first few miles after passing the roadside store; but the eyes of all three people in the car were very wide open and their minds observant. Anything or anybody that might give trace of the truant Sammy were scrutinized.

"He was at that store before noon," Agnes shouted into Neale's ear. "How long before he would be hungry again?"

"No knowing. Pretty soon, of course," admitted her chum. "But I heard that storekeeper tell Mr. Pinkney that the boy bought more than he could eat at once and he carried the rest away in a paper bag."

"That is so," admitted Mr. Pinkney, leaning over the forward seat. "But he has an appetite like a boa constrictor."

"A *boy*-constrictor," chuckled Neale. "I'll say he has!"

"He would not likely stop anywhere along here to buy more food, then," Agnes said.

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"He could have gone off the road, however, for a dozen different things," said the missing boy's father. "That child has got more crotchets in his head than you can shake a stick at. There is no knowing—"

"Hold on!" ejaculated Neale suddenly. "There are some kids down there by that pond."

Suppose I run down and interview them?"

"I don't see anybody among them who looks like Sammy," observed Agnes, standing up in the car to look.

"Never mind. You go ahead, Neale. They will talk to you more freely, perhaps, than they will to me. Boys are that way."

"I'll try," said Neale, and jumped out of the car and ran down toward the roof of the old ice-house that the afternoon before had so attracted Sammy Pinkney—incidentally wrecking his best trousers.

As it chanced, Neale had seen and now interviewed the very party of boys with whom Sammy had previously made friends. But Neale said nothing at first to warn these boys that he was searching for one whom they all considered "a good kid."

"Say, fellows," Neale began, "was this an ice-house before it got burned down?"

"Yep," replied the bigger boy of the group.

"And only the roof left? Crickey! What have you chaps been doing? Sliding down it?" For he had observed as he came down from the car two of the smaller boys doing just that.

"It's great fun," said the bigger boy, grinning, perhaps at the memory of what had happened to Sammy Pinkney's trousers the previous afternoon. "Want to try?"

Neale grinned more broadly, and gave the shingled roof another glance. "I bet *you* don't slide down it like those little fellows I just saw doing it. How do their pants stand it?"

The boys giggled at that.

"Say!" the bigger one said, "there was a kid came along yesterday that didn't get on to that—*till afterward.*"

"Oh, ho!" chuckled Neale. "He wore 'em right through, did he?"

"Yes, he did. And then he was sore. Said his mother would give him fits."

"Where does he live? Around here?" asked Neale carelessly.

"I never saw him before," admitted the bigger boy. "He was a good fellow just the same. You looking for him?" he asked with sudden suspicion.

"I don't know. If he's the boy I mean he needn't be afraid to go home because of his torn pants. You tell him so if you see him again."

"Sure. I didn't know he was running away. He didn't say anything."

"Didn't he have a bag with him—sort of a suitcase?"

"Didn't see it," replied the boy. "We all went home to supper and he went his way."

"Which way?"

"Could not tell you that," the other said reflectively, and was evidently honest about it. "He was coming from that way," and he pointed back toward Milton, "when he joined us here at the slide."

"Then he probably kept on toward—What is in that direction?" and Neale pointed at the nearest road, the very one into which Sammy had turned.

"Oh, that goes up through the woods," said the boy. "Hampton Mills is over around the pond—you follow yonder road."

"Yes, I know. But you think this fellow you speak of might have gone into that by road?"

"He was headed that way when we first saw him," said the boy. "Wasn't he, Jimmy?"

"Sure," agreed the smaller boy addressed. "And, Tony, I bet he *did* go that way. When I looked back afterward I remember I saw a boy lugging something heavy going up that road."

"I didn't see that that fellow had a bag," argued the bigger boy. "But he might have hid it when he came down here."

"Likely he did," admitted Neale. "Anyway, we will go up that road through the woods and see."

"*Is* his mother going to give him fits for those torn pants?" asked another of the group.

"She'll be so glad to see him home again," confessed Neale, "that he could tear every pair of pants he's got and she wouldn't say a word!"

He made his way up the bank to the car and reported.

"I don't know where that woods-road leads to. I neglected to bring a map. But it looks as though we could get through it with the car. We'll try, sha'n't we?"

"Oh, do, Neale," urged Agnes.

"I guess it is as good a lead as any," observed Mr. Pinkney. "Somehow, I begin to feel as though the boy had got a good way off this time. Even this clue is almost twenty-four hours old."

"He must have stayed somewhere last night," cried Agnes suddenly. "If there is a house up there in the woods—or beyond—we can ask."

"Right you are, Aggie," agreed Neale, starting the car again.

"Sammy Pinkney is an elusive youngster, sure enough," said the truant's father. "Something has got to stop him from running away. It costs too much time and money to overtake him and bring him back."

"And we haven't done that yet," murmured Agnes.

The car struck heavy going in the road through the woods before they had gone very far up the rise. In places the road was soft and had been cut up by the wheels of heavy trucks or wagons. And they did not pass a single house—not even a cleared spot in the wood—on either hand.

"If he started up this way so near supper time last evening, as those boys say," Mr. Pinkney ruminated, "where was he at supper time?"

"Here, or hereabout, I should say!" exclaimed Neale O'Neil. "Why, it must have been pretty dark when he got this far."

"If he really came this far," added Agnes.

"Well, let us run along and see if there is a house anywhere," Mr. Pinkney said. "Of course, Sammy might have slept out—"

"It wouldn't be the first time, I bet!" chuckled Neale.

"And of course there would be nothing to hurt him in these woods?" suggested Agnes.

"Nothing bigger than a rabbit, I guess," agreed their neighbor.

"Well—"

Neale increased the speed of the car again, turned a blind corner, and struck a soft place in the road before he could stop. Having no skidding chains on the rear wheels of course, the car was out of control in an instant. It slued around. Agnes screamed. Mr. Pinkney shouted his alarm.

The car slid over the bank of the ditch beside the road and both right wheels sank in mud and water to the hubs.

"Some pretty mess—I'll tell the world!" groaned Neale O'Neil, shutting off the engine, while Agnes clung to his arm grimly to keep from sliding out into the ditch, too.

"Now, you *have* done it!" shrilled the girl.

"Thanks. Many thanks. I expected you to say that, Aggie," he replied.

"M-mm! Well, I don't suppose you meant to—"

"No use worrying about how it was done or who did it," interposed Mr. Pinkney, briskly getting out of the tonneau on the left side. "The question is, how are we going to right the car and get under way again?"

"A truer word was never spoken," agreed Neale O'Neil. "Come on, Agnes. We'll creep out on this side, too. That's it. Looks to me, Mr. Pinkney, as though we should need a couple of good, strong levers to pry up the wheels. You and I can do that while Agnes gets in under the wheel and manipulates the mechanism, as it were."

"You are the boss, here, Neale," said the older man, immediately entering the wood on the right side of the road. "I see a stick here that looks promising."

He passed under the broadly spreading branches of a huge chestnut tree. There were several of these monsters along the edge of the wood. Mr. Pinkney suddenly shouted something, and dropped upon his knees between two outcropping roots of the tree.

"What is it, Mr. Pinkney?" cried Agnes, running across the road.

Their neighbor appeared, erect again. In his hand he bore the well-remembered extension-bag which Sammy Pinkney had so often borne away from home upon his truant escapades.

"What do you know about this?" demanded Sammy's father. "Here's his bag—filled with his possessions, by the feel of it. But where is the boy?"

"He—he's got away!" gasped Agnes.

"And we almost had him," was Neale's addition to the amazed remarks of the trio of searchers.

CHAPTER XV—UNCERTAINTIES

The secret had now been revealed! But of course it did not do Sammy Pinkney the least bit of

good. His extension-bag had not been stolen at all.

Merely, when that sleepy boy had stumbled away the night before to the spring for a drink of water, he had not returned to the right tree for the remainder of the night. In his excitement in the morning, after discovering his loss, Sammy ran about a good deal (as Uncle Rufus would have said) "like a chicken wid de haid cut off." He did not manage to find the right tree at all.

The extension-bag was now in his father's hands. Mr. Pinkney brought it to the mired car and opened it. There was no mistaking the contents of the bag for anything but Sammy's possessions.

"What do you know about that?" murmured the amazed father of the embryo pirate. He rummaged through the conglomeration of chattels in the bag. "No, it is not here." 144

"What are you looking for, Mr. Pinkney?" demanded Agnes, feeling rather serious herself. Something might have happened to the truant.

"That picture his mother spoke of," the father answered, with a sigh.

"Hoh!" exclaimed Neale O'Neil, "if the kid thinks as much of it as Mrs. Pinkney says, he's got it with him. Of course."

"It looks so," admitted Mr. Pinkney. "But why should he abandon his clothes—and all?"

"Oh, maybe he hasn't!" cried Agnes eagerly. "Maybe he is coming back here."

"You think this old tree," said Mr. Pinkney in doubt, "is Sammy's headquarters?"

"I—don't—know—"

"That wouldn't be like Sammy," declared Neale, with conviction. "He always keeps moving—even when he is stowaway on a canalboat," and he chuckled at the memory of that incident. "For some reason he was chased away from here. Or," hitting the exact truth without knowing it, "he tucked the bag under that tree root and forgot where he put it."

"Does that sound reasonable?" gasped Agnes.

"Quite reasonable—for Sammy," grumbled Mr. Pinkney. "He is just so scatter-brained. But what shall I tell his mother when I take this bag home to her? She will feel worse than she has before." 145

"Maybe we will find him yet," Agnes interposed.

"That's what we are out for," Neale added with confidence. "Let's not give up hope. Why, we're finding clues all the time."

"And now you manage to get us stuck in the mud," put in Agnes, giving her boy friend rather an unfair dig.

"Have a heart! How could I help it? Anyway, we'll get out all right. We sha'n't have to camp here all night, if Sammy did."

"That is it," interposed Sammy's father. "I wonder if he stayed here all night or if he abandoned the bag here and kept on. Maybe the woods were too much for his nerves," and he laughed rather uncertainly.

"I bet Sammy was not scared," announced Neale, with confidence. "He is a courageous chap. If he wasn't, he would not start out alone this way."

"True enough," said Mr. Pinkney, not without some pride. "But nevertheless it would help some if we were sure he was here only twelve hours ago, instead of twenty-four."

"Let's get the car out of the ditch and see if we can go on," Neale suggested. "I'll get that pole you saw, Mr. Pinkney. And I see another lever over there." 146

While Mr. Pinkney buckled the straps of the extension-bag again and stowed the bag under the seat, Neale brought the two sticks of small timber which he thought would be strong enough to lift the wheels of the stalled car out of the ditch. But first he used the butt of one of the sticks to knock down the edge of the bank in front of each wheel.

"You see," he said to Agnes, "when you get it started you want to turn the front wheels, if you can, to the left and climb right out on to the road. Mr. Pinkney and I will do the best we can for you; but it is the power of the engine that must get us out of the ditch."

"I—I don't know that I can handle it right, Neale," hesitated Agnes.

"Sure you can. You've got to!" he told her. "Come on, Mr. Pinkney! Let's see if we can get these sticks under the wheels on this side."

"Wait a moment," urged the man, who was writing hastily on a page torn from his notebook. "I must leave a note for Sammy—if perhaps he should come back here looking for his bag." 147

"Better not say anything about his torn trousers, Mr. Pinkney," giggled Agnes. "He will shy at that."

"He can tear all his clothes to pieces if he'll only come home and stop his mother's worrying. Only, the little rascal ought to be soundly trounced just the same for all the trouble he is causing us."

"If only I had stayed with him at that beet bed and made sure he knew what he was doing," sighed Agnes, who felt somewhat condemned.

"It would have been something else that sent him off in this way, if it hadn't been beets," grumbled Mr. Pinkney. "He was about due for a break-away. I should have paid more attention to him myself. But business was confining."

"Oh, well; we always see our mistakes when it is too late. But that boy needs somebody's oversight besides his mother's. She is always afraid I will be too harsh with him. But she doesn't manage him, that is sure."

"We'd better catch the rabbit before we make the rabbit stew," chuckled Neale O'Neil. "Sammy is a good kid, I tell you. Only he has crazy notions."

"Pooh!" put in Agnes. "You need not talk in so old-fashioned a way. You used to have somewhat similar 'crazy notions' yourself. You ran away a couple of times."

"Well, did I have a real home and a mother and father to run from?" demanded the boy. "Guess not!"

"You've got a father now," laughed Agnes.

"But he isn't like a real father," sighed Neale. "He has run away from me! I know it is necessary for him to go back to Alaska to attend to that mine. But I'll be glad when he comes home for good—or I can go to him."

"Oh, Neale! You wouldn't?" gasped the girl.

"Wouldn't what?" he asked, surprised by her vehemence.

"Go away up to Alaska?"

"I'd like to," admitted the boy. "Wouldn't you?"

"Oh—well—if you can take me along," rejoined Agnes with satisfaction, "all right. But under no other circumstances can you go, Neale O'Neil."

CHAPTER XVI—THE DEAD END OF NOWHERE

Mr. Pinkney and Neale went to work to hoist the motor-car into the road again. No easy nor brief struggle was this. A dozen times Agnes started the car and the wheels slipped off the poles or Neale or Mr. Pinkney lost his grip.

Before long they were well bespattered with mud (for there was considerable water in the ditch) and so was the automobile. Neale and their neighbor worked to the utmost of their muscular strength, and Agnes was in tears.

"Pluck up your courage, Aggie," panted her boy friend. "We'll get it yet."

"I just feel that it is my fault," sobbed the girl. "All this slipping and sliding. If I could only just get it to start right—"

"Again!" cried Neale cheerfully.

And this time the forewheels really got on solid ground. Mr. Pinkney thrust his lever in behind the sloughed hind wheel and blocked it from sliding back.

"Great!" yelled Neale. "Once more, Aggie!"

She obeyed his order, and although the automobile engine rattled a good deal and the car itself plunged like a bucking broncho, they finally got all the wheels out of the mud and on the firm road.

"Crickey!" gasped Neale. "It looks like a battlefield."

"And we look as though we had been in the battle all right," said Mr. Pinkney. "Guess Mamma Pinkney will have something to say about *my* trousers when we get home, let alone Sammy's."

"Do you suppose the car will run all right?" asked the anxious Agnes. "I don't know what Ruth would say if we broke down."

"She'd say a-plenty," returned Neale. "But wait till I get some of this mud off me and I'll try her out again. By the way she bucked that last time I should say there was nothing much the matter with her machinery."

This proved to be true. If anything was strained about the mechanism it did not immediately show up. Neale got the automobile under way without any difficulty and they drove ahead through the now fast darkening road.

The belt of woods was not very wide, but the car ran slowly and when the searchers came out upon the far side, the old shack which housed the big, red-faced woman, who had been kind to Sammy, and her brood of children, some of whom had been not at all kind, the place

looked to be deserted.

In truth, the family were berry pickers and had been gone all day (after Sammy's adventure with the cherry-colored calf) up in the hills after berries. They had not yet returned for the evening meal, and although Neale stopped the car in front of the shack Mr. Pinkney decided Sammy would not have remained at the abandoned place.

And, of course, Sammy had not remained here. After his exciting fight with Peter and Liz, and fearing to return to the house to complain, he had gone right on. Where he had gone was another matter. The automobile party drove to the town of Crimbleton, which was the next hamlet, and there Mr. Pinkney made exhaustive inquiries regarding his lost boy, but to no good result.

"We'll try again to-morrow, Mr. Pinkney, if you say so," urged Neale.

"Of course we will," agreed Agnes. "We'll go every day until you find him."

Their neighbor shook his head with some sadness. "I am afraid it will do no good. Sammy has given us the slip this time. Perhaps I would better put the matter in the hands of a detective agency. For myself, I should be contented to wait until he shows up of his own volition. But his mother—"

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Agnes and Neale saw, however, that the man was himself very desirous of getting hold of his boy again. They made a hasty supper at the Crimbleton Inn and then started homeward at a good rate of speed.

When they came up the grade toward the old house beside the road, at the edge of the wood, the big woman and her family had returned, made their own supper, and gone to bed. The place looked just as deserted as before.

"The dead-end of nowhere," Neale called it, and the automobile gathered speed as it went by. So the searchers missed making inquiry at the very spot where inquiry might have done the most good. The trail of Sammy Pinkney was lost.

Neale O'Neil wanted to satisfy himself about one thing. He said nothing to Agnes about it, but after he had put up the car and locked the garage, he walked down Main Street to Byburg's candy store.

June Wildwood was always there until half past nine, and Saturday nights until later. She was at her post behind the sweets counter on this occasion when Neale entered.

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"I am glad to see you, Neale," she said. "I'm awfully curious."

"About that bracelet?"

"Yes," she admitted. "What has come of it? Anything?"

"Enough. Tell me," began Neale, before she could put in any further question, "while you were with the Gypsies did you hear anything about Queen Alma?"

"Queen Zaliska. I was Queen Zaliska. They dressed me up and stained my face to look the part."

"Oh, I know all about that," Neale returned. "But this Queen Alma was some ancient lady. She lived three hundred years ago."

"Goodness! How you talk, Neale O'Neil. Of course I don't know anything about such a person."

"Those Gypsies you were with never talked of her?"

"I didn't hear them. I never learned much of the language they use among themselves."

"Well, we got a tip," said the boy, "that the bracelet belonged to this Queen Alma, and that there is a row among the Gypsies over the ownership of it."

"You don't tell me!"

"I am telling you. We heard so. Say, is that Big Jim a Spaniard? A Spanish Gypsy, I mean?"

"I don't know. Maybe. He looks like a Spaniard, or a Mexican, or an Italian."

"Yes. I thought he did. He comes of some Latin race, anyway. What is his last name?"

"Why—I—I am not sure that I know."

"Is it Costello? Did you hear that name while you were with the Gypsies, June?"

"Some of them are named Costello. It is a family name among them I guess. And about that Jim. Do you know that I saw him yesterday driving down Main Street in an automobile?"

"You don't mean it? Gypsies are going to become flivver traders instead of horse swappers, are they?" and Neale laughed.

"Oh, it was a big, seven-passenger car," said June. "Those Gypsies have money, if they want to spend it."

"Did you ever hear of a Gypsy junkman?" chuckled Neale.

"Of course not. Although I guess junkmen make good money nowadays," drawled June Wildwood, laughing too. "You are a funny boy, Neale O'Neil. Do you want to know anything

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else?"

"Lots of things. But I guess you cannot tell me much more about the Gypsies that would be pertinent to the bracelet business. We hear that the Costello Gypsies are fighting over the possession of the heirloom—the bracelet, you know. That is why one bunch of them wanted to get it off their hands for a while—and so gave it into the keeping of Tess and Dot."

"Mercy!"

"Does that seem improbable to you, June?"

"No-o. Not much. They might. It makes me think that maybe the Gypsies have been watching the old Corner House and know all about the Kenways."

"They might easily do that. You know, they might know us all from that time away back when we brought you home from Pleasant Cove with us. This is some of the same tribe you were with—sure enough!"

"I know it," sighed June Wildwood. "I've been scared a little about them too. But for my own sake. I haven't dared tell Rosa; but pap comes down here to the store for me every evening and beaus me home. I feel safer."

"The bracelet business has nothing to do with you, of course?"

"Of course not. But those Gypsies might have some evil intent about Ruth and her sisters."

"Guess they are just trying to use them for a convenience. While that bracelet is in the Corner House no other claimant but those Gypsy women are likely to get hold of it. Believe me, it is a puzzle," he concluded. "I guess we will have to put it up to Mr. Howbridge, sure enough."

"Oh! The Kenways's lawyer?" cried June.

"Their guardian. Sure enough. That is what we will have to do."

But when Neale and Agnes Kenway, after an early breakfast, hurried downtown to Mr. Howbridge's office the next morning to tell the lawyer all about the Gypsies and Queen Alma's bracelet, they made a surprising discovery.

Mr. Howbridge had left town the evening before on important business. He might not return for a week.

CHAPTER XVII—RUTH BEGINS TO WORRY

Oakhurst, in the mountains, was a very lovely spot. Besides the hotel where Luke Shepard had worked and where he had met with his accident, there were bungalows and several old-fashioned farmhouses where boarders were received. There was a lake, fine golf links, bridleparks through the woods, and mountains to climb. It was a popular if quiet resort.

Ruth and Cecile Shepard had rooms in one of the farmhouses, for the hotel was expensive. Besides, the farmer owned a beautifully shaded lawn overlooking the lake and the girls could sit there under the trees while the invalid, as they insisted upon calling Luke, reclined on a swinging cot.

"Believe me!" Cecile often insisted, "I will never send another telegram as long as I live. I cannot forgive myself for making such a mess of it. But then, if I hadn't done so, you would not be here now, Ruthie."

"Isn't that a fact?" agreed her brother. "You are all right, Sis! I am for you, strong."

Ruth laughed. Yet there were worried lines between her eyes.

"It is all right," she murmured. "I might have come in any case—for Mr. Howbridge advised it by this letter that they remailed to me. But I should not have left in such haste, and I should have left somebody besides Mrs. McCall to look after the girls."

"Pooh!" ejaculated Luke. "What is the matter with Agnes?"

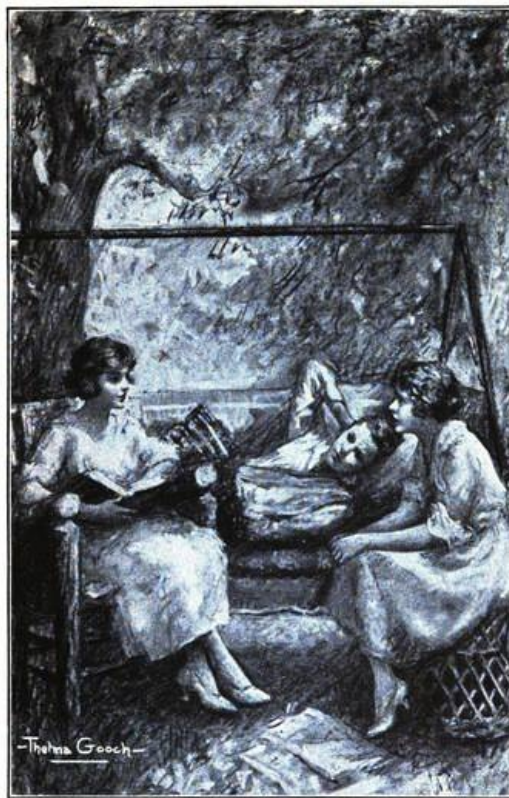
"That is just it," laughed Ruth again, but shaking her head too. "It is Agnes, and what she may do, that troubles me more than anything else."

"Goodness me! She is a big girl," declared Cecile. "And she has lots of sense."

"She usually succeeds in hiding her good sense, then," rejoined Ruth. "Of course she can take care of herself. But will she give sufficient attention to the little ones. That is the doubt that troubles me."

"Well, you just can't go away now!" wailed Cecile. "You have got to stay till the doctor says we can move Luke. I can't take him back alone."

"Now, don't make me out so badly off. I am lying here like a poor log because that sawbones and you girls make me. But I know I could get up and play baseball."



The girls could sit under the tree while Luke reclined on a swinging cot.

“Don’t you dare!” cried his sister.

“You would not be so unwise,” said Ruth promptly.

“All right. Then you stop worrying, Ruth,” the young fellow said. “Otherwise I shall ‘take up my bed and walk’—you see! This lying around like an ossified man is a nuisance, and it’s absurd, anyway.”

Ruth had immediately written to Mr. Howbridge asking him to look closely after family affairs at the Corner House. Had she known the lawyer was not at home when her letter arrived in Milton she certainly would have started back by the very next train.

She wrote Mrs. McCall, too, for exact news. And naturally she poured into her letter to Agnes all the questions and advice of which she could think.

Agnes was too busy when that letter arrived to answer it at all. Things were happening at the old Corner House at that time of which Ruth had never dreamed.

Ruth was really glad to be with Cecile and Luke in the mountains. And she tried to throw off her anxiety.

Luke insisted that his sister and Ruth should go over to the hotel to dance in the evening when he had to go to bed, as the doctor ordered. He had become acquainted with most of the hotel guests before his injury, and the young people liked Luke Shepard.

They welcomed his sister and Ruth as one of themselves, and the two girls had the finest kind of a time. At least, Cecile did, and she said that Ruth might have had, had she not been thinking of the home-folk so much.

Several days passed, and although Ruth heard nothing from home save a brief and hurried note from Agnes, telling of their unsuccessful search for Sammy—and nothing much else—the older Kenway girl began to feel that her anxiety had been unnecessary.

Then came Mrs. McCall’s labored letter. The old Scotchwoman was never an easy writer. And her thoughts did not run to the way of clothing facts in readable English. She was plain and blunt. At least a part of her letter immediately made Ruth feel that she was needed at home, and that even her interest in Luke Shepard should not detain her longer at Oakhurst.

“We have got to have another watchdog. Old Tom Jonah is too old; it is my opinion. I mind he is getting deaf, or something, or he wouldn’t have let that man come every night and stare in at the window. Faith, he is a nuisance—the man, I mean, Ruth, not the old dog.

“I have spoke to the police officer on the beat; but Mr. Howbridge being out of town I don’t know what else to do about that man. And such a foxy looking man as he is!

“Neale O’Neil, who is a good lad, I’m saying, and no worse than other boys of his age for sure, offers to watch by night. But I have not allowed it. He and Aggie talk of Gypsies, and they show me that silver bracelet—a bit barbarous thing that you remember the children had

to play with—and say the dark man who comes to the window nights is a Gypsy. I think he is a plain tramp, that is all, my lass.

“Don’t let these few lines worry you. Linda goes to bed with the stove poker every night, and Uncle Rufus says he has oiled up your great uncle’s old shotgun. But I know that gun has no hammer to it, so I am not afraid of the weapon at all. I just want to make that black-faced man go away from the house and mind his own business. It is a nuisance he is.”

“I must go home—oh, I must!” Ruth said to Cecile as soon as she had read this effusion from the old housekeeper. “Just think! A man spying on them—and a Gypsy!”

“Pooh! it can’t be anything of importance,” scoffed Cecile.

“It must be. Think! I told you about the Gypsy bracelet. There must be more of importance connected with that than we thought.”

She had already told Luke and Cecile about the mystery of the silver ornament.

“Why, I thought you had told Mr. Howbridge about it,” Cecile said.

“I did not. I really forgot to when the news of Luke’s illness came,” and Ruth blushed.

“That quite drove everything else out of your head, did it?” laughed the other girl. “But now why let it bother you? Of course Mr. Howbridge will attend to things—”

“But he seems to be away,” murmured Ruth. “Evidently Mrs. McCall and Agnes have not been able to reach him. Oh, Cecile! I must really go home.”

“Then you will have to come back,” declared Cecile Shepard. “I could not possibly travel with Luke alone.”

The physician had confided more to the girls than to Luke himself about the young man’s physical condition. The medical man feared some spinal trouble if Luke did not remain quiet and lie flat on his back for some time to come.

But the day following Ruth’s receipt of Mrs. McCall’s anxiety-breeding letter, Dr. Moline agreed to the young man’s removal.

“But only in a compartment. You must take the afternoon train on which you can engage a compartment. He must lie at ease all the way. I will take him to the station in my car. And have a car to meet him when you get to the Milton station.”

The first of these instructions Ruth was able to follow faithfully. The cost of such a trip was not to be considered. She would not even allow Luke and Cecile to speak about it.

Ruth had her own private bank account, arranged for and supervised, it was true, by Mr. Howbridge, and she prided herself upon doing business in a businesslike way.

Just before they boarded the train at Oakhurst station she telegraphed home that they were coming and for Neale to meet them with the car, late though their arrival would be. If on time, the train would stop at Milton just after midnight.

When that telegram arrived at the old Corner House it failed to make much of a disturbance in the pool of the household existence. And for a very good reason. So much had happened there during the previous few hours that the advent of the King and Queen of England (and this Mrs. McCall herself said) would have created a very small “hooroo.”

As for Neale O’Neil’s getting out the car and going down to the station to meet Ruth and her friends when they arrived, that seemed to be quite impossible. The coming of the telegram was at an hour when already the Kenway automobile was far away from Milton, and Neale and Agnes in it were having high adventure.

CHAPTER XVIII—THE JUNKMAN AGAIN

When Ruth started home with Luke and Cecile Shepard several days had elapsed since Neale O’Neil and Agnes had discovered that Mr. Howbridge was out of town.

The chief clerk at the lawyer’s office had little time to give to the youthful visitors, for just then he had his hands full with a caller whom Neale and Agnes had previously found was a person not easily to be pacified.

“There is a crazy man in here,” grumbled the clerk. “I don’t know what he means. He says he ‘comes from Kenway,’ and there is something about Queen Alma and her bracelet. What do you know about this, Miss Kenway?”

“Oh, my prophetic soul!” gasped Neale O’Neil. “Costello, the junkman!”

“Dear, me! We thought we could see Mr. Howbridge before that man came.”

“Tell me what it means,” urged the clerk. “Then I will know what to say to the lunatic.”

"I guess he's a nut all right," admitted Neale. He told the lawyer's clerk swiftly all they knew about the junkman, and all they knew about the silver bracelet.

"All right. It is something for Mr. Howbridge to attend to himself," declared the clerk. "You hang on to that bracelet and don't let anybody have it. I'll try to shoo off this fellow. Anyway, it may not belong to his family at all. I'll hold him here till you two get away."

Neale and Agnes were glad to escape contact with the junkman again. He was too vehement.

"He'll walk right in and search the house for the thing," grumbled Neale. "We can't have him frightening the children."

"And I don't want to be frightened myself," added Agnes.

They hurried home, and all that day, every time the bell rang or she heard a voice at the side door, the girl felt a sudden qualm. "Wish we had never advertised that bracelet at all," she confessed in secret. "Dear, me! I wonder what Ruth will say?"

Nevertheless she failed to take her older sister into her confidence regarding Queen Alma's bracelet when she wrote to her. She felt quite convinced that Ruth would not approve of what she and Neale had done, so why talk about it?

This was the attitude Agnes maintained. Perhaps the whole affair would be straightened out before Ruth came back. And otherwise, she considered, everything was going well at the Corner House in Milton.

It was Miss Ann Titus who evinced interest next in the "lost and found" advertisement. Miss Ann Titus was the woman whom Dot called "such a fluid speaker" and who said so many "and-so's" that "ain't-so's." In other words, Miss Titus, the dressmaker, was a very gossipy person, although she was not intentionally unkind.

She came in this afternoon, "stopping by" as she termed it, from spending a short sewing day with Mrs. Pease, a Willow Street neighbor of the Corner House girls.

"And I must say that Mrs. Pease, for a woman of her age, has young ideas about dress," Miss Titus confided to Mrs. McCall and Agnes, who were in the sewing room. Aunt Sarah "couldn't a-bear" Miss Ann Titus, so they did not invite the seamstress to go upstairs.

"Yes, her ideas is some young," repeated Miss Titus. "But then, nowadays if you foller the styles in the fashion papers nobody can tell you and your grandmother apart, back to! Skirts are so skimpy—and *short!*"

Miss Titus fanned herself rapidly, and allowed her emphasis to suggest her own opinion of modern taste in dress.

"Of course, Mrs. Pease is slim and ain't lost all her good looks; but it does seem to me if I was a married woman," she simpered here a little, for Miss Titus had by no means given up all hope of entering the wedded state, "I should consider my husband's feelings. I would not go on the street looking below my knees as though I was twelve year old instead of thirty-two."

"Maybe Mr. Pease likes her to look young," suggested Agnes.

"Hech! Hech!" clucked Mrs. McCall placidly. "Thirty-twa is not so very auld. Not as we live these days, at any rate."

"But think of the example she sets her children," sniffed Miss Titus, bridling.

"Tut, tut! How much d'you expect Margie and Holly Pease is influenced by their mother's style o' dress?" exclaimed the housekeeper. "The twa bairns scarce know much about that."

"I guess that is so," chimed in Agnes. "And I think she is a pretty woman and dresses nicely. So there!"

"Ah, you young things cannot be expected to think as I do," smirked Miss Titus.

"I take that as a compliment, my dear," said the housekeeper comfortably. "And I never expect tae be vairy old until I die. Still and all, I am some older than Agnes."

"That reminds me," said Miss Titus, more briskly (though it did not remind her, for she had come into the Corner House for the special purpose of broaching the subject that she now announced), "which of you Kenways is it has found a silver bracelet?"

"Now, *that* is Agnes' affair," chuckled Mrs. McCall.

"Oh! It is not Ruth that advertised?" queried the curious Miss Titus.

"Na, na! Tell it her, Agnes," said the housekeeper.

But Agnes was not sure she wished to describe to this gossipy seamstress all the incidents connected with Queen Alma's bracelet. She only said:

"Of course, you do not know anybody who has lost such a bracelet?"

"How can I tell till I have seen it?" demanded Miss Titus.

"Well, we have about decided that until somebody comes who describes the bracelet and can explain how and where it was lost that we had better not display it at all," Agnes said, with more firmness than was usual with her.

"Oh!" sniffed Miss Titus. "I hope you do not think that *I* have any interest—any personal

interest—in inquiring about it?”

“If I thought it was yours, Miss Titus, I would let you see it immediately,” Agnes hastened to assure her. “But of course—”

“There was a bracelet lost right on this street,” said Miss Titus earnestly, meaning Willow Street and pointing that way, “that never was recovered to my knowledge.”

“Oh! You don’t mean it?” cried the puzzled girl. “Of course, we don’t *know* that this one belongs to any of those Gypsies—”

“I should say not!” clucked Miss Titus. “The bracelet I mean was worn by Sarah Turner. She and I went together regular when we were girls. And going to prayer meeting one night, walking along here by the old Corner House, Sarah dropped her bracelet.”

“But—but!” gasped Agnes, “that must have been some time ago, Miss Titus.”

“It is according to how you compute time,” the dressmaker said. “Sarah and I were about of an age. And she isn’t more than forty years old right now!”

“I don’t think this bracelet we have is the one your friend lost,” Agnes said faintly, but confidently. She wanted to laugh but did not dare.

“How do you know?” demanded Miss Ann Titus in her snappy way—like the biting off of a thread when she was at work. “I should know it, even so long after it was lost, I assure you.”

“Why—how?” asked the Corner House girl curiously.

“By the scratches on it,” declared Miss Titus. “Sarah’s brother John made them with his pocketknife—on the inside of the bracelet—to see if it was real silver. Oh! he was a bad boy—as bad as Sammy Pinkney. And what do you think of *his* running away again?”

Agnes was glad the seamstress changed the subject right here. It seemed to her as though she had noticed scratches on the bracelet the Gypsies had placed in the basket the children bought. Could it be possible—

“No! That is ridiculous!” Agnes told herself. “It could not be possible that a bracelet lost forty years ago on Willow Street should turn up at this late date. And, having found it, why should those Gypsy women give it to Tess and Dot? There would be no sense in that.”

Yet, when the talkative Miss Titus had gone Agnes went to the room the little folks kept their playthings and doll families in, and picked up the Alice-doll which chanced that day to be wearing the silver band. She removed it from the doll and took it to the window where the light was better.

Yes! It was true as she had thought. There were several crosswise scratches on the inside of the circlet. They might easily have been made by a boy’s jackknife.

“I declare! Who really knows where this bracelet came from, and who actually owns it? Maybe it is not Queen Alma’s ornament after all. Dear, me! this Kenway family is forever getting mixed up in difficulties that positively have nothing to do with *us*.”

“The silly old bracelet! Why couldn’t those Gypsy women have sold that basket to Margaret and Holly Pease, or to some other little girls instead of to our Tess and Dot. Mrs. McCall says that some people seem to attract trouble, just as lightning-rods attract lightning, and I guess the Kenways are some of those people!”

Neale did not come over again that day, so she had nobody to discuss this new slant in the matter with. And if Agnes could not “talk out loud” about her troubles, she was apt to grow irritable. At least, the little girls said after supper that she was cross.

“Ruth doesn’t talk that way to us,” declared Tess, quite hurt, and gathering up her playthings from the various chairs in the sitting room where the family usually gathered in the evenings. “I don’t think I should like her to be away all the time.”

This was Tess’s polite way of criticising Agnes. But Dot was not so hampered by politeness.

“Crosspatch!” she exclaimed. “That’s just what you are, Aggie Kenway.”

And she started for bed in quite a huff. Agnes was glad, a few minutes later, that the two smaller girls had gone upstairs, even if they had gone away in this unhappy state of mind. Mrs. McCall had come in and sat down at some mending and the room was very quiet. Suddenly a noise outside on the porch made Agnes raise her head and look at the nearest window.

“What is the matter wi’ ye, lassie?” asked Mrs. McCall, startled.

“Did you hear that?” whispered the girl, staring at the window.

The shade was not drawn down to the sill, and the curtains were the very thinnest of scrim. At the space of four inches below the shade Agnes saw a white splotch against the pane.

“Oh! See! A face!” gasped Agnes in three smothered shrieks.

“Hech, mon! Such a flibbertigibbet as the lass is.” Mrs. McCall adjusted her glasses and stared, first at the frightened girl, then at the window. But she, too, saw the face. “What can the matter be?” she demanded, half rising. “Is that Neale O’Neil up tae some o’ his jokes?”

“Oh, no, Mrs. Mac! It’s not Neale,” half sobbed Agnes. “I know who it is. It’s that awful

junkman!"

"A junkman?" repeated Mrs. McCall. "At this time o' night? We've naethin' tae sellit him. The impudence!"

She rose, quite determined to drive the importunate junkman away.

CHAPTER XIX—THE HOUSE IS HAUNTED

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"Why do ye fash yoursel' so?" demanded Mrs. McCall in growing wonder and exasperation. "Let me see the foolish man."

She approached the window and raised the shade sharply. Then she hoisted the sash itself. But Costello, the junkman, was gone.

"There is naebody here," she complained, looking out on the side porch.

"But he *was* there! You saw him," faintly declared Agnes.

"He was nae ghost, if that's what you mean," said the housekeeper dryly. "But what and who is he? A junkman? How do you come to know junkmen, lassie?"

"I only know that junkman," explained Agnes.

"Aye?" The housekeeper's eyes as well as her voice was sharp. "And when did you make his acquaintance? Costello, d'you say?"

"So he said his name was. He—he is one of the Gypsies, I do believe!"

"Gypsies! The idea! Is the house surrounded by Gypsies?"

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"I don't know, Mrs. McCall," said Agnes faintly. "I only know they are giving us a lot of trouble."

"Who are?"

"The Gypsies."

"Hear the lass!" exclaimed the troubled housekeeper. "Who ever heard the like? Why should Gypsies give us any trouble? Is it that bit bracelet the bairns play wi'? Then throw it out and let the Gypsies have it."

"But that would not be right, would it, Mrs. McCall?" demanded the troubled girl. "If—if the bracelet belongs to them—"

"Hech! To this junkman?"

"He claims it," confessed Agnes.

"Tut, tut! What is going on here that I do not know about?" demanded the Scotch woman with deeper interest.

She closed the window, drew the shade again, and returned to her seat. She stared at Agnes rather sternly over her glasses.

"Come now, my lass," said the housekeeper, "what has been going on so slyly here? I never heard of any Costello, junkman or not. Who is he? What does he want, peering in at a body's windows at night?"

Agnes told the whole story then—and managed to tell it clearly enough for the practical woman to gain a very good idea of the whole matter.

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"Of course," was her comment, grimly said, "you and that Neale could not let well enough alone. You never can. If you had not advertised the bit bracelet, this junkman would not have troubled you."

"But we thought it ought to be advertised," murmured Agnes in defense.

"Aye, aye! Ye thought mooch I've nae doot. And to little good purpose. Well, 'tis a matter for Mr. Howbridge now, sure enough. And what he'll say—"

"But I hope that Costello does not come to the house again," ventured the girl, in some lingering alarm.

"You or Neale go to Mr. Howbridge's clerk in the morning and tell him. He should tell the police of this crazy man. A Gypsy, too, you say?"

"I think he must be. The bracelet seems to be a bone of contention between two branches of the Gypsy tribe. If it belonged to that old Queen Alma—"

"Fiddle-faddle!" exclaimed the housekeeper. "Who ever heard of a queen among those dirty Gypsies? 'Tis foolishness."

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The fact that Costello, the junkman, was lingering about the old Corner House was not to be denied. They saw him again before bedtime. Uncle Rufus had gone to bed and Linda was so easily frightened that Mrs. McCall did not want to tell her.

So the housekeeper grabbed a broom and started out on the side porch with the avowed intention of "breaking the besom over the chiel's head!" But the lurker refused to be caught and darted away into the shadows. And all without making a sound, or revealing in any way what his intention might be.

Mrs. McCall and the trembling Agnes went all about the house, locking each lower window, and of course all the doors. Tom Jonah, the old Newfoundland dog, slept out of doors these warm nights, and sometimes wandered away from the premises.

"We ought to have Buster, Sammy Pinkney's bulldog, over here. Then that horrid man would not dare come into the yard," Agnes said.

"You might as well turn that old billy-goat loose," sniffed Mrs. McCall. "He'd do little more harm than that bull pup—and nae more good, either."

They went to bed—earlier than usual, perhaps. And that may be the reason why Agnes could not sleep. She considered the possibility of Costello's climbing up the porch posts to the roof, and so reaching the second story windows.

"If he is going to haunt the house like this," Agnes declared to the housekeeper in the morning, "let us make Neale come here and stay at night."

"That lad?" returned the housekeeper, who had no very exalted opinion of boys in any case—no more than had Ruth. "Haven't we all troubles enough, I want to know? This is a case for the police. You go tell Mr. Howbridge's clerk about the Gypsy, that is what you do."

But Agnes would not do even that without taking Neale into her confidence. Neale at once was up in arms when he heard of the lurking junkman. He declared he would come over and hide in the closet on the Kenways' back porch and try to catch the man if he appeared again at night.

"He is a very strong man, Neale," objected Agnes. "And he might have a knife, too. You know, those Gypsies are awfully fierce-tempered."

"I don't know that he is," objected Neale. "He looked to me like just plain crazy."

"Well, you come down to the office with me," commanded Agnes. "I don't even want to meet that excitable Costello man on the street when I am alone."

"I suppose you are scared, Aggie. But I don't think he would really hurt you. Come on!"

So they went down to Mr. Howbridge's office again and interviewed the clerk, telling him first of all of the appearance of the junkman the night before.

"I had fairly to drive him out of these offices," said the clerk. "He is of a very excitable temperament, to say the least. But I did not think there was any real harm in him."

"Just the same," Neale objected, "he wants to keep away from the house and not frighten folks at night."

"Oh, we will soon stop that," said Mr. Howbridge's representative. "I will report it to the police."

"But perhaps he does not mean any harm," faltered Agnes.

"I do not think he does," said the man. "Nevertheless, we will warn him."

This promise relieved Agnes a good deal. She was tender-hearted and she did not wish the junkman arrested. But when evening came and he once more stared in at the windows, and tapped on the panes, and wandered around and around the house—

"Well, this is too much!" cried the girl, when Neale and Mrs. McCall both ran out to try to apprehend the marauder. "I do wish we had a telephone. I am going to *beg* Ruth to have one put in just as soon as she comes back. We could call the police and they would catch that man."

Perhaps the police, had they been informed, might have caught Costello. But Mrs. McCall and Neale did not. The latter remained until the family went to bed and then the boy did a little lurking in the bushes on his own account. But he did not spy the strange man again.

In the morning, without saying anything to the Kenway family about it, Neale O'Neil set out to find Costello, the junkman. He certainly was not afraid of the man by daylight. He had had experience with him.

From Mr. Howbridge's clerk he had already obtained the address the junkman had given when he was at the office. The place was down by the canal in the poorer section of the town, of course.

There were several cellars and first-floors of old houses given up to raggickers and dealers in junk of all kinds. After some inquiry among a people who quite evidently were used to dodging the answering of incriminating questions, Neale learned that there had been a junkman living in a certain room up to within a day or two before, whose name was Costello. But he had disappeared. Oh, yes! Neale's informant was quite sure that Costello had gone away for good.

"But he had a horse and wagon. He had a business of his own. Where has he gone?" demanded the boy.

He was gone. That was all these people would tell him. They pointed out the old shed where Costello had kept his horse. Was it a good horse? It was a good looking horse, with smiles which seemed to indicate that Costello was a true Gypsy and was not above "doctoring" a horse into a deceiving appearance of worthiness.

"He drove away with that horse. He did not say where he was going. I guess he go to make a sale, eh? He will come back with some old plug that he make look fine, eh?"

This was the nearest to real information that Neale could obtain, and this from a youth who worked for one of the established junk dealers.

So Neale had to give up the inquiry as useless. When he came back to the old Corner House he confessed to Agnes:

"He is hiding somewhere, and coming around here after dark. Wish I had a shotgun—"

"Oh, Neale! How wicked!"

"Loaded with rock-salt," grinned the boy. "A dose of that might do the Gyp. a world of good."

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CHAPTER XX—PLOTTERS AT WORK

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The adventures of the Corner House girls and their friends did not usually include anything very terrible. Perhaps there was no particular peril threatened by Costello, the Gypsy junkman, who was lurking about the premises at night. Just the same, Agnes Kenway was inclined to do what Mrs. McCall suggested and throw the silver bracelet out upon the ash heap.

Of course they had no moral right to do that, and the housekeeper's irritable suggestion was not to be thought of for a serious moment. Yet Agnes would have been glad to get rid of the responsibility connected with possession of Queen Alma's ornament.

"If it is that Costello heirloom!" she said. "Maybe after all it belongs to Miss Ann Titus's friend, Sarah Whatshername. Goodness! I wonder how many other people will come to claim the old thing. I do wish Ruth would return."

"Just so you could hand the responsibility over to her," accused Neale.

"M-mm. Well?"

"We ought to hunt up those Gypsies—'Beeg Jeem' and his crowd—and get their side of the story," declared Neale.

"No! I will not!" cried Agnes. "I have met all the Gypsies I ever want to meet."

But within the hour she met another. She was in the kitchen, and Linda and Mrs. McCall were both in the front of the house, cleaning. There came a timid-sounding rap on the door. Agnes unthinkingly threw it open.

A slender girl stood there—a girl younger than Agnes herself. This stranger was very ragged, not at all clean looking, and very brown. She had flashing white teeth and flashing black eyes.

Agnes actually started back when she saw her and suppressed a scream. For she instantly knew the stranger was one of the Gypsy tribe. That she seemed to be alone was the only thing that kept Agnes from slamming the door again right in the girl's face.

"Will the kind lady give me something to eat?" whined the beggar. "I am hungry. I eat nothing all the day."

Agnes was doubtful of the truth of this. The dark girl did not look ill-fed. But she had an appearance of need just the same; and it was a rule of the Corner House household never to turn a hungry person away.

"Stay there on the mat," Agnes finally said. "Don't come in. I will see what I can find for you."

"Yes, Ma'am," said the girl.

"Haven't you had any breakfast?" asked Agnes, moving toward the pantry, and her sympathies becoming excited.

"No, Ma'am. And no supper last night. Nobody give me nothing."

"Well," said Agnes, with more warmth, expanding to this tale of woe, as was natural, "I will see what I can find."

She found a plate heaped with bread and meat and a wedge of cake, which she brought to the screen door. The girl had stood there motionless, only her black eyes roved about the kitchen and seemed to mark everything in it.

"Sit down there on the steps and eat it," said Agnes, passing the plate through a narrow opening, as she might have handed food into the cage of an animal at a menagerie. She really was half afraid of the girl just because she looked so much like a Gypsy.

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The stranger ate as though she was quite as ravenously hungry as she had claimed to be. There could be no doubt that the food disappeared with remarkable celerity. She sat for a moment or two after she had eaten the last crumb with the plate in her lap. Then she rose and brought it timidly to the door.

"Did you have enough?" asked Agnes, feeling less afraid now.

"Oh, yes, Lady! It was so nice," and the girl flashed her teeth in a beaming smile. She was quite a pretty girl—if she had only been clean and decently dressed.

She handed the plate to Agnes, and then turned and ran out of the yard and down the street as fast as she could run. Agnes stared after her in increased amazement. Why had she run away?

"If she is a Gypsy—Well, they are queer people, that is sure. Oh! What is this?"

Her fingers had found something on the under side of the plate. She turned it up and saw a soiled piece of paper sticking there. Agnes, wondering, if no longer alarmed, drew the paper from the plate, turned it over, and saw that some words were scrawled in blue pencil on the paper.

"Goodness me! More mysteries!" gasped the Corner House girl.

Briefly and plainly the message read: *Do not give the bracelet to Miguel. He is a thief.*

Agnes sat down and stared almost breathlessly at the paper. That it was a threatening command from one crowd of Gypsies or the other, she was sure. But whether it was from Big Jim's crowd or from Costello, the junkman, she did not know.

Her first thought, after she had digested the matter for a few moments, was to run with the paper to Mrs. McCall. But Mrs. McCall was not at all sympathetic about this bracelet matter. She was only angry with the Gypsies, and, perhaps, a little angry with Agnes for having unwittingly added to the trouble by putting the advertisement in the paper.

Neale, after all, could be her only confidant; and, making sure that no other dark-visaged person was in sight about the house, the girl ran down the long yard beyond the garden to the stable and Billy Bumps' quarters, and there climbed the board fence that separated the Kenway yard from that of Con Murphy, the cobbler.

"Hoo, hoo! Hoo, hoo!" Agnes called, looking over the top rail of the fence.

"Hoo, hoo, yerself!" croaked a voice. "I'd have yez know we kape no owls on these premises."

The bent figure of Mr. Murphy, always busy at his bench, was visible through the back window of his shop.

"Is it that young yahoo called Neale O'Neil that yez want, Miss Aggie?" added the smiling cobbler. "If so—"

But Neale O'Neil appeared just then to answer to the summons of his girl friend. He had been to the store, and he tumbled all his packages on Con's bench to run out into the yard to greet Agnes.

"What's happened now?" he cried, seeing in the girl's face that something out of the ordinary troubled her.

"Oh, Neale! what do you think?" she gasped. "There's been another of them at the house."

"Not one of those Gypsies?"

"I believe she was."

"Oh! A *she!*" said the boy, much relieved. "Well, she didn't bite you, of course?"

"Come here and look at this," commanded his friend.

Neale went to the fence, climbed up and took the paper that Agnes had found stuck to the plate on which she had placed the food for the Gypsy girl. When he had read the abrupt and unsigned message, Neale began to grow excited, too.

"Where did you get this?"

Agnes told him about it. Of course, the hungry girl had been a messenger from one party of Gypsies or the other. Which? was Agnes' eager question.

"Guess I can answer that," Neale said gravely. "It does look as though things were getting complicated. I bet this girl you fed is one of Big Jim's bunch."

"How can you be so positive?"

"There are probably only two parties of Gypsies fighting over the possession of that old bracelet. Now, I learned down there in that junk neighborhood that Costello—the Costello who is bothering us—is called Miguel. They are all Costellos—Big Jim's crowd and all. June Wildwood says so. They distinguish our junkman from themselves by calling him by his first name. Therefore—"

"Oh, of course I see," sighed Agnes. "It is a terrible mess, Neale! I do wish Mr. Howbridge would get back. Or that the police would find that junkman and shut him up. Or—or that Ruthie would come home!"

"Oh, don't be a baby, Aggie!" ejaculated Neale.

"Who is the baby, I want to know?" flashed back the girl. "I'm not!"

"Then pluck up your spirits and don't turn on the sprinkler," said the slangy youth. "Why, this is nothing to cry about. When it is all over we shall be looking back at the mystery as something great in our young lives."

"You can try to laugh if you want to," snapped Agnes. "But being haunted by a junkman, and getting notes from Gypsies like that! Huh! who wouldn't be scared? Why, we don't know what those people might do to us if we give up the bracelet to the wrong person."

"It doesn't belong to any of the Gypsies, perhaps."

"That is exactly it!" she cried. "Maybe, after all, it is the property of Miss Ann Titus' friend, Sarah."

"And was lost somewhere on Willow Street—about where your garage now stands—forty years ago!" scoffed Neale. "Well, you are pretty soft, Agnes Kenway."

This naturally angered the girl, and she pouted and got down from the fence without replying. As she went back up the yard she saw Mrs. Pinkney, with her head tied up with a towel, shaking a dustcloth at one of her front windows. It at least changed the current of the girl's thought.

"Oh, Mrs. Pinkney!" she cried, running across the street to speak to Sammy's mother, "have you heard anything?"

"About Sammy? Not a word," answered the woman. "I have to keep working all the time, Agnes Kenway, or I should go insane. I know I should! I have cleaned this whole house, from attic to cellar, three times since Sammy ran away."

"Why, Mrs. Pinkney! If you don't go insane—and I don't believe you will—I am sure you will overwork and be ill."

"I must keep doing. I must keep going. If I sit down to think I imagine the most horrible things happening to the dear child. It is awful!"

Agnes knew that never before had the woman been so much disturbed by her boy's absences from home. It seemed as though she really had lost control of herself, and the Corner House girl was quite worried over Mrs. Pinkney.

"If we could only help you and Mr. Pinkney," said Agnes doubtfully. "Do you suppose it would do any good to go off in the car again—Neale and me and your husband—to look for Sammy?"

"Mr. Pinkney is so tied down by his business that he cannot go just now," she sighed. "And he has put the search into the hands of an agency. I did not want the police to get after Sammy. But what could we do? And they say there are Gypsies around."

"Oh!" gasped Agnes. "Do you suppose—?"

"You never can tell what those people will do. I am told they have stolen children."

"Isn't that more talk than anything else?" asked Agnes, trying to speak quite casually.

"I don't know. One of my neighbors tells me she hears that there is a big encampment of Gypsies out on the Buckshot Road. You know, out beyond the Poole farm. They have autovans instead of horses, so they say, and maybe could carry any children they stole out of the state in a very short time."

"Oh, dear me, Mrs. Pinkney! I would not think of such things," Agnes urged. "It does not sound reasonable."

"That the Gypsies should travel by auto instead of behind horse?" rejoined Sammy's mother. "Why not? Everybody else is using automobiles for transportation. I tell Mr. Pinkney that if we had a machine perhaps Sammy might not have been so eager to leave home."

"Oh, dear, me!" thought Agnes, as she made her way home again, "I am sorry for Mr. Pinkney. Just now I guess he is having a hard time at home as well as at business!"

But she treasured up what she had heard about the Gypsy encampment on the Buckshot Road to tell Neale—when she should not be so "put-out" with him. The Buckshot Road was in an entirely different direction from Milton than that they had followed in their automobile on the memorable search for Sammy. Agnes did not suppose for a moment that the missing boy had gone with the Gypsies.

CHAPTER XXI—TESS AND DOT TAKE A HAND

Up to this time Tess and Dot Kenway had heard nothing about the Gypsy junkman haunting the house at night, or about other threatening things connected with the wonderful silver bracelet.

Their young minds were quite as excited about the ornament as in the beginning, however; for in the first place they had to keep run exactly of whose turn it was to "wear" the Gypsies' gift.

"I don't see what we'll do about it when Alice grows up," Dot said. She was always looking forward in imagination to the time when her favorite doll should become adult. "She will want to wear that belt, Tess, for evening dress. You know, a lady's jewelry should belong to her."

"I'm not going to give up my share to your Alice-doll," announced Tess, quite firmly for her. "And, anyway, you must not be so sure that it is going to be ours all the time. See! Aggie says we can't take it out of the house to play with."

"I don't care!" whined Dot. "I don't want to give it back to those Gypsy ladies."

"Neither do I. But we must of course, if we can find them. Honest is honest."

"It—it's awful uncomfortable to be so dreadful' honest," blurted out the smaller girl. "And I think they meant us to have the bracelet."

"All right, then. It's only polite to offer it back to them. Then if they don't want it we'll know that it is ours and even Ruth won't say anything."

"But—but when my Alice-doll grows up—"

"Now, don't be a little piggie, Dot Kenway!" exclaimed Tess, rather crossly. "When your wrist gets big enough so the bracelet won't slip over your hand so easy, you will want to wear it yourself—just as I do. And Agnes wants it, too."

"Oh! But it's ours—if it isn't the Gypsy ladies'," Dot hastened to say.

Two claimants for the ornament were quite enough. She did not wish to hear of any other people desiring to wear it.

As it chanced, Tess and Dot heard about the Gypsy encampment on the Buckshot Road through the tongue of neighborhood gossip, quite as had Sammy's mother. Margaret and Holly Pease heard the store man tell their mother; and having enviously eyed the silver bracelet in the possession of the Kenway girls, they ran to tell the latter about the Gypsies.

"They've come back," declared Margaret decidedly, "to look for that bracelet you've got. You'll see them soon enough."

"Oh, Margie! do you think so?" murmured Tess, while Dot was immediately so horror-stricken that tears came to her eyes.

"Maybe they will bring the police and have you locked up," continued the cheerful Pease child. "You know they might accuse you of stealing the bracelet."

"We never!" wailed Dot. "We never! They gave it to us!"

"Well, they are going to take it back, so now!" Margaret Pease declared.

"I don't think it is nice of you to say what you do, Margie," said Tess. "Everybody knows we are honest. Why! if Dot and I knew how to find them, we would take the bracelet right to the Gypsy ladies. Wouldn't we, Dot?"

"But—but we don't know where to find them," blurted out the youngest Corner House girl.

"You can find them I guess—out on the Buckshot Road."

"We don't know that *our* Gypsy ladies are there," said Tess, with some defiance.

"You don't dare go to see," said Margaret Pease.

It was a question to trouble the minds of Tess and Dot. Should they try to find the Gypsies, and see if the very ladies who had given them the bracelet were in that encampment?

At least it was a leading question in Tess Kenway's mind. It must be confessed that Dot only hoped it would prove a false alarm. She was very grateful to the strange Gypsy women for having put the silver ornament in the green and yellow basket; but she hoped never to see those two kind women again!

The uncertainty was so great in both of the small girls' minds that they said nothing at all about it in the hearing of any other member of the family. Had Ruth been at home they might have confided in her. They had always confided everything to their eldest sister. But just now the two smaller Corner House girls were living their own lives, very much shut away from the existence Agnes, for instance, was leading.

Agnes had a secret—several of them, indeed. She did not take Tess and Dot into her confidence. So, if for no other reason, the smaller girls did not talk to Agnes about the Gypsies.

The Kenways owned some tenement property in a much poorer part of the town than that prominent corner on which the Corner House stood. Early in their coming to Milton from Bloomsburg, the Corner House girls had become acquainted with the humble tenants whose rents helped swell the funds which Mr. Howbridge cared for and administered.

Some of these poorer people, especially the children near their own age, interested the Kenway girls very much because they met these poorer children in school. So when news was

brought to Agnes one afternoon (it was soon after lunch) that Maria Maroni, whose father kept the coal, wood, ice and vegetable cellar in one of the Stower houses and who possessed a wife and big family of children as well, had been taken ill, Agnes was much disturbed.

Agnes liked Maria Maroni. Maria was very bright and forward in her studies and was a pretty Italian girl, as well. The Maronis lived much better than they once had, too. They now occupied one of the upstairs tenements over Mrs. Kranz's delicatessen store, instead of all living in the basement.

The boy who ran into the Kenway yard and told Agnes this while she was tying up the gladioli stems after a particularly hard night's rain, did not seem to be an Italian. Indeed, he was no boy that Agnes ever remembered having seen before.

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But tenants were changing all the time over there where Maria lived. This might be a new boy in that neighborhood. And, anyway, Agnes was not bothered in her mind much about the boy. It was Maria's illness that troubled her.

"What is the matter with the poor girl?" Agnes wanted to know. "What does the doctor say it is?"

"They ain't got no doc," said the boy. "She's just sick, Maria is. I don't know what she's got besides."

This sounded bad enough to Agnes. And the fact that the sick girl had no medical attention was the greater urge for the Kenway girl to do something about it. Of course, Joe and his wife must have a doctor for Maria at once.

Agnes went into the house and told Mrs. McCall about it. She even borrowed the green and yellow basket from the little girls and packed some jelly and a bowl of broth and other nice things to take to Maria Maroni. The Kenways seldom went to the tenements empty-handed.

She would have taken Neale with her, only she felt that after their incipient "quarrel" of the previous morning she did not care immediately to make up with the boy. Sometimes she felt that Neale O'Neil took advantage of her easy disposition.

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So Agnes went off alone with her basket. Half an hour later a boy rang the front door bell of the Corner House. He had a note for Mrs. McCall. It was written in blue pencil, and while the housekeeper was finding her reading glasses the messenger ran away so that she could not question him.

The note purported to be from Hedden, Mr. Howbridge's butler. It said that the lawyer had been "brought home" and had asked for Mrs. McCall to be sent for. It urged expedition in her answer to the request, and it threw Mrs. McCall into "quite a flutter" as she told Linda and Aunt Sarah Maltby.

"The puir mon!" wailed the Scotch woman who before she came to the old Corner House to care for the Kenway household had been housekeeper for Mr. Howbridge himself for many years. "There is something sad happened to him, nae doot. I must go awa' wi' me at aince. See to the bairns, Miss Maltby, that's the good soul. Even Agnes is not in the hoose."

"Of course I will see to them—if it becomes necessary," said Aunt Sarah.

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Her idea of attending to the younger children, however, was to remain in her own room knitting, only occasionally going to the head of the back stairs to ask Linda if Tess and Dot were all right. The Finnish girl's answer was always "Shure, Mum," and in her opinion Tess and Dot were all right as long as she did not see that they were in trouble.

To tell the truth, Linda saw the smaller girls very little after Mrs. McCall hurried out of the house to take the street car for the lawyer's residence. Once Linda observed Tess and Dot in the side yard talking to a boy through the pickets. She had no idea that the sharp-featured boy was the same who had brought the news of Maria Maroni's illness to Agnes, and the message from Hedden to Mrs. McCall!

The boy in question had come slowly along the pavement on Willow Street, muttering to himself as he approached as though saying over several sentences that he had learned by rote. He was quite evidently a keen-minded boy, but he was not at all a trustworthy looking one.

Tess and Dot both saw him, and that he was a stranger made the little girls eye him curiously. When he hailed them they were not quite sure whether they ought to reply or not.



"They want that silver thing back. It wasn't meant for you."

"I guess you don't know us," Tess said doubtfully. "You don't belong in this neighborhood."

"I know you all right," said the boy. "You're the two girls those women sold the basket to. I know you."

"Oh!" gasped Tess.

"The Gypsy ladies!" murmured Dot.

"That's the one. They sold you the basket for forty-five cents. Didn't they?"

"Yes," admitted Tess.

"And it's *ours*," cried Dot. "We paid for it."

"That's all right," said the boy slowly. "But you didn't buy what was in it. No, sir! They want it back."

"Oh! The basket?" cried Tess.

"What you found in it."

The boy seemed very sure of what he was saying, but he spoke slowly.

"They want that silver thing back. It wasn't meant for you. It was a mistake. You know very well it isn't yours. If you are honest—and you told them you were—you will bring it back to them."

"Oh! They did ask us if we were honest," Tess said faintly. "And of course we are. Aren't we, Dot?"

"Why—why— Do we have to be so dreadful' honest," whispered the smallest Corner House girl, quite borne down with woe.

"Of course we have. Just think of what Ruthie would say," murmured Tess. Then to the boy: "Where are those ladies?"

"Huh?" he asked. "What ladies?"

"The Gypsy ladies we bought the basket from?"

"Oh, *them*?" he rejoined hurriedly, glancing along the street with eagerness. "You go right out along this street," and he pointed in the direction from which he had come. "You keep on walking until you reach the brick-yard."

"Oh! Are they camped there?" asked Tess.

"No. But a man with an automobile will meet you there. He is a man who will take you right to the Gypsy camp and bring you back again. Don't be afraid, kids. It's all right."

He went away then, and the little girls could not call him back. They wanted to ask further questions; but it was evident that the boy had delivered his message and was not to be cross-examined.

"What *shall* we do?" Tess exclaimed.

"Oh, let's wait. Let's wait till Ruth comes home," cried Dot, saying something very sensible indeed.

But responsibility weighed heavily on Tess's mind. She considered that if the Gypsy women wished their bracelet returned, it was her duty to take it to them without delay. Besides, there was the man in the automobile waiting for them.

Why the man had not come to the house with the car, or why he had not brought the two Gypsy women to the Corner House, were queries that did not occur to the little girls. If Tess Kenway was nothing else, she was strictly honest.

"No," she sighed, "we cannot wait. We must go and see the women now. I will go in and get the bracelet, Dot. Do you want your hat? Mrs. McCall and Agnes are both away. We will have to go right over and tend to this ourselves."

CHAPTER XXII—EXCITEMENT GALORE

When Agnes Kenway reached the tenement where Maria Maroni resided and found that brisk young person helping in the delicatessen store as she did almost every day during the busy hours and when there was no school, the Corner House girl was surprised; but she was not suspicious.

That is, she was not suspicious of any plot really aimed at the happiness of the Corner House family. She merely believed that the strange boy had deliberately fooled her for an idle purpose.

"Maria Maroni! What do you think?" Agnes burst out. "Who could that boy be? Oh, I'd like to catch him! I'd make him sorry he told me such a story."

"It is too bad you were troubled so, Agnes," said Maria, when she understood all about it. "I can't imagine who that boy could be. But I am glad you came over to see us, never mind what the reason is that brings you."

"A sight you are for sore eyes yet," declared the ponderous Mrs. Kranz, who had kissed Agnes warmly when she first appeared. "Come the back room in and sit down. Let Ikey tend to the customers yet, Maria. We will visit with Agnes, and have some tea and sweet crackers."

"And you must tell me of somebody in the row, Mrs. Kranz, who needs these delicacies. Somebody who is ill," said Agnes. "I must not take them home again. And Maria looks altogether too healthy for jelly and chicken broth."

Mrs. Kranz laughed at that. But she added with seriousness: "There is always somebody sick here in the tenements, Miss Agnes. They will not take care themselves of—no! I tell them warm flannels and good food is better than doctors yet. But they will not mind me." She sighed.

"Who is ill now?" asked Agnes, at once interested. She loved to play "Lady Bountiful"; and, really, the Kenway sisters had done a great deal of good among their poor tenants and others in the row.

"Mrs. Leary. You know, her new baby died and the poor woman," said Maria quickly, "is sick of grief, I do believe."

"Ach, yes!" cried Mrs. Kranz. "She needs the cheerful word. You see her, Miss Agnes. Then she be better—sure!"

"Thank you!" cried Agnes, dimpling and blushing. "Do you really think I can help her?"

"And there is little Susie Marowsky," urged the delicatessen shopkeeper. "That child is fading away like a sick rose. She iss doing just that! If she could have country eggs and country milk—Ach! If we were all rich!" and she sighed ponderously again.

"I'll tell our Ruth about her," said Agnes eagerly. "And I'll see her, too, before I go home. I'll give her the broth, yes? And Mrs. Leary the jelly, bread, and fruit?"

"No!" cried Mrs. Kranz. "The fruit to Dominic Nevin, the scissors grinder. He craves fruit. You know, he cut his hand and got blood poisoning, and it was so long yet that he could not work. You see him, too, Miss Agnes."

So altogether, what with the tea and cakes and the visits to the sick, Agnes was away from the Corner House quite three hours. When she was on her way home she was delayed by an unforeseen incident too.

At the corner of Willow Street not far from the brick-yard a figure suddenly darted into Agnes' path. She was naturally startled by the sudden appearance of this figure, and doubly so when she saw it was the Costello that she knew as the junkman, and whose first name she now believed to be Miguel.

"What do you want? Go away!" cried the girl faintly, backing away from the vehement little man.

"Oh, do not be afraid! You are the honest Kenway I am sure. You have Queen Alma's bracelet," urged the little man. "You will give her to me—yes?"

"I—I haven't it," cried Agnes, looking all about for help and seeing nobody near.

"Ha!" ejaculated the man. "You have not give it to Beeg Jeem?"

"We have given it to nobody. And we will not let you or anybody have it until Mr. Howbridge tells us what to do. Go away!" begged Agnes.

"I go to that man. He no have the Queen Alma bracelet. *You* have it—"

"Just as sure as I get home," cried the frightened Agnes, "I will send that bracelet down to the lawyer's office and they must keep it. It shall be in the house no longer! Don't you dare come there for it!"

She got past him then and ran as hard as she could along Willow Street. When she finally looked back she discovered that the man had not followed her, but had disappeared.

"Oh, dear me! I don't care what the children say. That bracelet goes into Mr. Howbridge's safe this very afternoon. Neale must take it there for me," Agnes Kenway decided.

She reached the side door of the Corner House just as Mrs. McCall entered the front door, having got off the car at the corner. The housekeeper came through the hall and into the rear premises a good deal like a whirlwind. She was so excited that Agnes forgot her own fright and stared at the housekeeper breathlessly.

"Is it you home again, Agnes Kenway?" cried Mrs. McCall. "Well, thanks be for *that*. Then you are all right."

"Why, of course! Though he did scare me. But what is the matter with you, Mrs. McCall?"

"What is the matter wi' me? A plenty. A plenty, I tellit ye. If I had that jackanapes of a boy I'd shake him well, so I would!"

"What has Neale been doing now?" cried the girl.

"Not Neale."

"Then is it Sammy?"

"Nor Sammy Pinkney. 'Tis that other lad that came here wi' a lying note tae get me clear across town for naething!"

"Why, Mrs. McCall! what can you mean? Did a boy fool you, too?"

"Hech!" The woman started and stared at the girl. "Who brought you news of that little girl being sick?"

"But she wasn't sick!" cried Agnes. "That boy was an awful little story-teller."

"Ye was fooled then? That Maria Maroni—"

"Was not ill at all."

"And," cried Mrs. McCall, "that boy who brought a note to me from Hedden never came from Mr. Howbridge's house at all. It nearly scar't me tae death! It said Mr. Howbridge was ill. He isn't even at home yet, and when Mr. Hedden heard from his master this morning he was all right—the gude mon!"

"Oh, Mrs. McCall!" gasped Agnes, gazing at the housekeeper with terrified visage. "What can it mean?"

"Somebody has foolit us weel," ejaculated the enraged housekeeper.

"But why?"

The woman turned swiftly. She had grown suddenly pale. She called up the back stairs for Linda. A sleepy voice replied:

"Here I be, mum!"

"Where are the children? Where are Tess and Dot?" demanded Mrs. McCall, her voice husky.

"They was in the yard, mum, the last I see of them."

"That girl!" ejaculated the housekeeper angrily. "She neglects everything. If there's harm happened to those bairns—"

She rushed to the porch. Uncle Rufus was coming slowly up from the garden, hoe and rake over his shoulder. It was evident that the old colored man had been working steadily, and for some time, among the vegetables.

"Oh, Uncle Rufus!" cried the excited woman.

"Ya-as'm! Ya-as'm! I's a-comin'," said the old man rather querulously.

"Step here a minute," said Mrs. McCall.

"I's a-steppin', Ma'am," grumbled the other. "Does seem as though dey wants me for fust one t'ing an' den anudder. I don't no more'n git t'roo one chore den sumpin' else hops right out at me. Lawsy me!" and he mopped his bald brown brow with a big bandanna.

"I only want to ask you something," said the housekeeper, less raspingly. "Are the little ones down there? Have you seen them?"

"Them chillun? No'm. I ain't seen 'em fo' some time. They was playin' up this-a-way den."

"How long ago?"

"I done reckon it was nigh two hours ago."

"Hunt for them, Agnes!" gasped the housekeeper. "I fear me something bad has happened. You, Linda," for the Finnish girl now appeared, "run to the neighbors—all of them! See if you can find those bairns."

"Tess and Dottie, mum?" cried the Finnish girl, already in tears. "Oh! they ain't losted are they?"

"For all *you* know they are!" declared Mrs. McCall. "Look around the house for them, Uncle Rufus. I will look inside—"

"They may be upstairs with Aunt Sarah," cried Agnes, getting her breath at last.

"I'll know that in a moment!" declared Mrs. McCall, and darted within.

Agnes ran in the other direction. She felt such a lump in her throat that she could scarcely speak or breathe. The possibility of something having happened to the little girls—and with Ruth away!—cost the second Corner House girl every last bit of her self-control.

"Oh, Neale! Neale!" she murmured over and over again, as she ran to the lower end of the premises.

She fairly threw herself at the fence and scrambled to her usual perch. There he was cleaning Mr. Con Murphy's yard.

"Neale!" she gasped. At first he did not hear her, but she drubbed upon the fence with the toes of her shoes. "Neale!"

"Why, hullo, Aggie!" exclaimed the boy, turning around and seeing her.

"Oh, Neale! Come here!"

He was already coming closer. He saw that again she was much overwrought.

"What has happened now?"

"Have you seen Tess and Dot?"

"Not to-day."

"I—I mean within a little while? Two hours?"

"I tell you I have not seen them at all to-day. I have been busy right here for Con."

"Then they are gone! The Gypsies have got them!"

For Agnes, without much logic of thought, had immediately jumped to this conclusion. Neale stared.

"What sort of talk is that, Agnes?" he demanded. "You know that can't be so."

"I tell you it is so! It must be so! They got Mrs. McCall and me out of the house—"

"Who did?" interrupted Neale, getting hastily over the fence and taking the girl's hand. "Now, tell me all about it—everything!"

As well as she could for her excitement and fear, the girl told the story of the boy who had brought her the false message about Maria Maroni, and then about the message Mrs. McCall had received calling her across town.

"It must be that they have kidnapped the children!" moaned Agnes.

"Not likely," declared the boy. "The kids have just gone visiting without asking leave. In fact, there was nobody to ask. But I see that there is a game on just the same."

He started hastily for the Corner House and Agnes trotted beside him.

"But where *are* Tess and Dot?" she demanded.

"How do I know?" he returned. "I want to find out if there is something else missing."

"What do you mean?"

"That bracelet."

"Goodness, Neale! Is it that bracelet that has brought us trouble again?"

"It looks like a plot all right to me. A plot to get you and Mrs. McCall out of the house so that somebody could slip in and steal the bracelet. Didn't that ever occur to you?"

"Goodness me, Neale!" cried Agnes again, but with sudden relief in her voice. "If that is all it is I'll be glad if the old bracelet is stolen. Then it cannot make us any more trouble, that is one sure thing!"

Tess and Dot Kenway, with no suspicion that anything was awaiting them save the possible loss of the silver bracelet, but otherwise quite enjoying the adventure, walked hurriedly along Willow Street as far as the brick-yard. That they were disobeying a strict injunction in taking the bracelet out of the house was a matter quite overlooked at the time.

They came to the corner and there, sure enough, was a big, dusty automobile, with a big, dark man in the driver's seat. He smiled at the two little girls and Tess remembered him instantly.

"Oh, Dot!" she exclaimed, "it is the man we saw in this auto with the young Gypsy lady when we were driving home with Scalawag from Mr. Howbridge's the other day. Don't you remember?"

"Yes," said Dot, with a sigh. "I guess it is the same one. Oh, dear, me!"

For the nearer the time came to give up the silver bracelet, the worse Dot felt about it.

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The big Gypsy looked around at the two little girls and smiled broadly.

"You leetle ladies tak' ride with Beeg Jeem?" he asked. "You go to see the poor Gypsy women who let you have the fine bracelet to play with? Yes?"

"He knows all about it, Tess," murmured Dot.

"Yes, we will give them back the bracelet," Tess said firmly to the Gypsy man. "But we will not give it up to anybody else."

"Get right into my car," said Big Jim, reaching back to open the tonneau door. "You shall be taken to the camp and there find the ones who gave you the bracelet. Sure!"

There was something quite "grownupish" in thus getting into the big car all alone, and Tess and Dot were rather thrilled as they seated themselves on the back seat and the Gypsy drove them away.

Fifteen minutes or so later Agnes came to this very corner and had her unpleasant interview with Miguel Costello. But of course by that time the children were far away.

The big Gypsy drove them very rapidly and by lonely roads into a part of the country that Tess and Dot never remembered having seen before. Whenever he saw anybody on the road, either afoot or in other cars, Big Jim increased his speed and flashed by them so that there was little likelihood of these other people seeing that the two little girls were other than Gypsy girls.

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He did nothing to frighten Tess and Dot. Indeed, he was so smiling and so pleasant that they enjoyed the drive immensely and came finally in a state of keen enjoyment to the camp which was made a little back from the highway.

"Well, if we have to give up the bracelet," sighed Tess, as they got out of the car, "we can say that we have had a fine ride."

"That is all right. But how will my Alice-doll feel when she finds out she can't wear that pretty belt again?" said Dot.

There were many people in the camp, both men and women and children. The latter kept at a distance from Tess and Dot, but stared at them very curiously. They kept the dogs away from the visitors, too, and the little girls were glad of that.

"Where can we find the two ladies that—that sold us the basket?" asked Tess politely, of Big Jim.

"You look around, leetle ladies. You find," he assured them.

There were four or five motor vans of good size in which the Gypsies evidently lived while they were traveling. But there were several tents set up as well. It was a big camp.

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Timidly at first the two sisters, hand in hand, the silver bracelet firmly clutched inside Tess's dress against her side, began walking about. They tried to ask questions about the women they sought; but nobody seemed to understand. They all smiled and shook their heads.

"Dear me! it must be dreadful to be born a foreigner," Dot finally said. "How can they make themselves understood *at all*?"

"But they seem to be very pleasant persons," Tess rejoined decidedly.

The children ran away from them. Perhaps they had been ordered to by the older Gypsies. By and by Tess, at least, grew somewhat worried when they did not find either of the women who had sold them the yellow and green basket. Dot, secretly, hoped the two in question had gone away.

Suddenly, however, the two Kenway girls came face to face with somebody they did know. But so astonished were they by this discovery that for a long minute neither could believe her eyes!

"Sammy Pinkney!" gasped Tess at last.

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"It—ain't—*never!*" murmured the smaller girl.

The figure which had tried to dodge around the end of a motor van to escape observation looked nothing at all like the Sammy Pinkney the Kenway girls had formerly known. Never in their experience of Sammy—not even when he had slipped down the chimney at the old Corner House and landed on the hearth, a very sooty Santa Claus—had the boy looked so disgracefully ragged and dirty.

"Well, what's the matter with me?" he demanded defiantly.

"Why—why there looks to be most *everything* the matter with you, Sammy Pinkney," declared Tess, with disgust. "What *do* you s'pose your mother would say to you?"

"I ain't going home to find out," said Sammy.

"And—and your pants are all tored," gasped Dot.

"Oh, that happened long ago," said Sammy, quite as airy as the trousers. "And I'm having the time of my life here. Nobody sends me errands, or makes me—er—weed beet beds! So there! I can do just as I please."

"You look as though you had, Sammy," was Tess's critical speech. "I guess your mother wouldn't want you home looking the way you do." 222

"I look well enough," he declared defiantly. "And don't you tell where I am. Will you?"

"But, Sammy!" exclaimed Dot, "you ran away to be a pirate."

"What if I did?"

"But you can't be a pirate here."

"I can be a Gypsy. And that's lots more fun. If I joined a pirate crew I couldn't get to be captain right away of course, so I would have to mind somebody. Here I don't have to mind anybody at all."

"Well, I never!" ejaculated Tess Kenway.

"Well, I never!" repeated Dot, with similar emphasis.

"Say, what are you kids here for?" demanded Sammy, with an attempt to turn the conversation from his own evident failings.

"Oh, we were brought here on a visit," Tess returned rather haughtily.

"Huh! You *was*? Who you visiting? Is Aggie with you? Or Neale?" and he looked around suddenly as though choosing a way of escape.

"We are here all alone," said Dot reassuringly. "You needn't be afraid, Sammy." 223

"Who's afraid?" he said gruffly.

"You would be if Neale was with us, for Neale would make you go home," said the smallest Kenway girl.

"But who brought you? What you here for? Oh! That old bracelet I bet!"

"Yes," sighed Dot. "They want it back."

"Who want it back?"

"Those two ladies that sold us the basket," explained Tess.

"Are they with this bunch of Gypsies?" asked Sammy in surprise. "I haven't seen them. And I've been here two whole days."

"How did you come to be a Gypsy, Sammy?" asked Dot with much curiosity.

"Why, I—er—Well, I lost my clothes and my money and didn't have much to eat and that big Gypsy saw me on the road and asked me if I wanted to ride. So I came here with him and he let me stay. And nobody does a thing to me. I licked one boy," added Sammy with satisfaction, "so the others let me alone."

"But haven't you seen either of those two ladies that sold us the basket?" demanded Tess, beginning to be worried a little.

"Nope. I don't believe they are here."

"But that man says they are here," cried Tess. 224

"Let's go ask him. I—I won't give that bracelet to anybody else but one of those ladies."

"Crickey!" exclaimed Sammy. "Don't feel so bad about it. Course there is a mistake somehow. These folks are real nice folks. They wouldn't fool you."

The three, Sammy looking very important, went to find Big Jim. He was just as smiling as ever.

"Oh, yes! The little ladies are not to be worried. The women they want will soon come."

"You see?" said Sammy, boldly. "It will be all right. Why, these people treat you *right*. I tell you! You can do just as you please in a Gypsy camp and nobody says anything to you."

"See!" exclaimed Tess suddenly. "Are they packing up to leave? Or do they stay here all the

time?"

It was now late afternoon. Instead of the supper fires being revived, they were smothered. Men and women had begun loading the heavier vans. The tents were coming down. Clotheslines stretched between the trees were now being coiled by the children. All manner of rubbish was being thrown into the bushes.

"I don't know if they are moving. I'll ask," said Sammy, somewhat in doubt.

He went to a boy bigger than himself, but who seemed to be friendly. The little girls waited, staring all about for the two women with whom they had business. 225

"I don't care," whispered Dot. "If they don't come pretty soon, and these Gypsies are going away from here, we'll just go back home, Tess. We *can't* give them the bracelet if we don't see them."

"But we do not want to walk home," her sister said slowly in return. "And we ought to make Sammy go with us."

"You try to *make* Sammy do anything!" exclaimed Dot, with scorn.

Their boy friend returned, swaggering as usual. "Well, they are going to move," he said. "But I'm going with them. That boy—he was the one I licked, but he's a good kid—says they are going to a pond where the fishing is great. Wish I had my fishpole."

"But you must come back home with us, Sammy," began Tess gravely.

"Not much I won't! Don't you think it," cried Sammy. "But you might get my fishing tackle and jointed pole and sneak 'em out to me. There's good kids!"

"We will do nothing sneaky for you at all, Sammy Pinkney!" exclaimed Tess indignantly. 226

"Aw, go on! You can just as easy."

"We can, but we won't. So there! And if you don't go home with us when the man takes us back in his car we certainly will tell where you are."

"Be a telltale. *I* don't care," cried Sammy, roughly. "And I won't say just where we are going from here, so you needn't think my folks will find me."

One of the closed vans—something like a moving van only with windows in the sides, a stove-pipe sticking out of the roof, and a door at the rear, with steps—seemed now to be ready to start. A man climbed into the front seat to drive it. Several women and smaller children got in at the rear after the various bales and packages that had been tossed in. The big man suddenly shouted and beckoned to Tess and Dot.

"Here, little ladies," he said, still smiling his wide smile. "You come go wit' my mudder, eh? Take you to find the Gypsy women you want to see."

"But—er—Mr. Gypsy," said Tess, somewhat disturbed now, "we must go back home."

"Sure. Tak' you home soon as you see those women and give them what you got for them."

He strode across the camp to them. His smile was quite as wide, but did not seem to forecast as much good-nature as at first. 227

"Come now! Get in!" he commanded.

"Hey!" cried Sammy. "What you doing? Those little girls are friends of mine. You want to let them ride in that open car—not in that box. What d'you think we are?"

"Get out the way, boy!" commanded Big Jim.

He seized Tess suddenly by the shoulders, swung her up bodily despite her screams and tossed her through the rear door of the Gypsy van. Dot followed so quickly that she could scarcely utter a frightened gasp.

"Hey! Stop that! Those are the Kenway girls. Why! Mr. Howbridge will come after them and he'll—he'll—"

Sammy's excited threat was stopped in his throat. Big Jim's huge hand caught the boy a heavy blow upon the side of his head. The next moment he was shot into the motor-van too and the door was shut.

He heard Tess and Dot sobbing somewhere among the women and children already crowded into the van. It was a stuffy place, for none of the windows were open. Although this nomadic people lived mostly out of doors, and never under a real roof if they could help it, they did not seem to mind the smothering atmosphere of the van which now, with a sudden lurch, started out of the place of encampment. 228

"Never you mind, Tess and Dot, they won't dare carry you far. Maybe they are taking you home anyway," said Sammy in a low voice. "The first time they stop and let us out we'll run away. I will get you home all right."

"You—you can't get yourself home, Sammy," sobbed Dot.

"Maybe you like it being a Gypsy, but we don't," added Tess.

"I'll fix it for you all right—"

One of the old crones reached out in the semi-darkness and slapped Sammy across the mouth.

"Shut up!" she commanded harshly. But when she tried to slap the boy again she screamed. It must be confessed that Sammy bit her!

"You lemme alone," snarled the boy captive. "And don't you hit those girls. If you do I—I'll bite the whole lot of you!"

The women jabbered a good deal together in their own tongue; but nobody tried to interfere with Sammy thereafter. He shoved his way into the van until he stood beside Tess and Dot.

"Let's not cry about it," he whispered. "That won't get us anywhere, that is sure. But the very first chance we get—"

No chance for escape however was likely to arise while the Gypsy troop were en route. The children could hear the rumble of the vans behind. Soon Big Jim in his touring car passed this first van and shouted to the driver. Then the procession settled into a steady rate of speed and the three little captives had not the least idea in which direction they were headed nor where they were bound.

Back at the old Corner House affairs were in a terrible state of confusion. Linda had returned from her voyage among the neighbors with absolutely no news of the smaller girls. And Agnes had discovered that the silver bracelet was missing.

"It was Tess's day for wearing it, but she did not have it on when she went out to play," the older sister explained. "Do you suppose the house has been robbed, Neale O'Neil?"

Neale had been examining closely the piece of paper that Agnes had found stuck to the plate on which she had fed the beggar girl the day before and also the note Mrs. McCall had received purporting to come from Mr. Howbridge's butler. Both were written in blue pencil, and by the same hand without any doubt.

"It's a plot clear enough. And naturally we may believe that it was not hatched by that Miguel Costello, the junkman. It looks as though it was done by Big Jim's crowd."

"But what have they done with the bairns?" demanded the housekeeper, in horror.

"Oh, Neale! have they stolen Tess and Dot, as well as the silver bracelet?" was Agnes' bitter cry.

"Got me. Don't know," muttered the boy. "And what would they want the children for, anyway?"

"Let us find out if any Gypsies have been seen about the house this afternoon," Agnes proposed. "You see, Neale. Don't send Linda."

Linda, indeed, was in a hopeless state. She didn't know, declared Mrs. McCall, whether she was on her head or her heels!

Neale ran out and searched the neighborhood over. When he came back he had found nobody who had set eyes on any Gypsies; but he had heard from Mrs. Pease that Gypsies were camped out of town. The store man had told her so.

"Oh!" gasped Agnes, suddenly remembering. "I heard about that. Mrs. Pinkney told me. They are on the Buckshot Road, out beyond where Carrie Poole lives. You know, Neale."

"Sure I know where the Poole place is," admitted Neale. "We have all been there often enough. And I can get the car—"

"Do! Do!" begged Mrs. McCall. "You cannot go too quickly, Neale O'Neil. And take the police wi' ye, laddie!"

"Take me with you, Neale!" commanded Agnes. "We can find a constable out that way if we need one. I know Mr. Ben Stryker who lives just beyond the Pooles. And he is a constable, for he stopped the car once when I was driving and said he would have to arrest me if I did not drive slower."

"Sure!" said Neale. "Agnes knows all the traffic cops on the route, I bet. But we don't *know* that the children have gone with the Gypsies."

"And we never will know if you stand here and argue. Anyway, it looks as though the silver bracelet has been stolen by them."

"Or by somebody," granted the boy.

"Ne'er mind the bit bracelet," commanded the housekeeper. "Find Tess and Dot. I am going to put on my bonnet and shawl and go to the police station mysel'. Do you children hurry away in the car as you promised."

It was already supper time, but nobody thought of that meal, unless it was Aunt Sarah. When she came down to see what the matter was—why the evening meal was so delayed—she found Linda sobbing with her apron over her head in the kitchen and the tea kettle boiled completely dry.

That was nothing, however, to the condition of affairs at one o'clock that night when Ruth,

with Luke and Cecile Shepard, arrived at the old Corner House. They had been delayed at the station half an hour while Ruth telephoned for and obtained a comfortable touring car for her visitors and herself. Agnes did not have to beg her older sister to put in a telephone. After this experience Ruth was determined to do just that.

The party arrived home to find the Corner House lit up as though for a reception. But it was not in honor of their arrival. The telegram announcing Ruth's coming had scarcely been noticed by Mrs. McCall.

Mrs. McCall had recovered a measure of her composure and good sense; but she could scarcely welcome the guests properly. Aunt Sarah Maltby had gone to bed, announcing that she was utterly prostrated and should never get up again unless Tess and Dot were found. Linda and Uncle Rufus were equally distracted.

"But where are Agnes and Neale?" Ruth demanded, very white and determined. "What are they doing?"

"They started out in the machine around eight o'clock," explained Mrs. McCall. "They are searching high and low for the pair bairns."

"All alone?" gasped Ruth.

"Mr. Pinkney has gone with them. And I believe they were to pick up a constable. That Neale O'Neil declares he will raid every Gypsy camp and tramp's roost in the county. And Sammy's father took a pistol with him."

"And you let Agnes go with them!" murmured Ruth. "Suppose she gets shot?"

"My maircy!" cried the housekeeper, clasping her hands. "I never thought about that pistol being dangerous, any more than Uncle Rufus's gun with the broken hammer."

CHAPTER XXIV—THE CAPTIVES

That ride, shut in the Gypsy van, was one that neither Tess nor Dot nor Sammy Pinkney were likely soon to forget. The car plunged along the country road, and the distance the party traveled was considerable, although the direction was circuitous and did not, after two hours, take the Gypsy clan much farther from Milton than they had been at the previous camp.

By eleven o'clock they pulled off the road into a little glade that had been well known to the leaders of the party. A new camp was established in a very short time. Tents were again erected, fires kindled for the late supper, and the life of the Gypsy town was re-begun.

But Sammy and the two little Corner House girls were forbidden to leave the van in which they had been made to ride.

Big Jim came over himself, banged Sammy with his broad palm, and told him:

"You keep-a them here—you see? If those kids get out, I knock you good. See?"

Sammy saw stars at least! He would not answer the man. There was something beside stubbornness to Sammy Pinkney. But stubbornness stood him in good stead just now.

"Don't you mind, Tess and Dot," he whispered, his own voice broken with half-stifled sobs. "I'll get you out of it. We'll run away first chance we get."

"But it never does *you* any good to run away, Sammy," complained Tess. "You only get into trouble. Dot and I don't want to be beaten by that man. He is horrid."

"I wish we could see those nice ladies who sold us the basket," wailed Dot, quite desperate now. "I—I'd be *glad* to give 'em back the bracelet."

"Sh!" hissed Sammy. "We'll run away and we'll take the bracelet along. These Gyps sha'n't ever get it again, so there!"

"Humph! I don't see what you have to say about *that*, Sammy," scoffed Tess. "If the women own it, of course they have got to have it. But I don't want that Big Jim to have it—not at all!"

"He won't get it. You leave it to me," said Sammy, with recovered assurance.

The van door was neither locked nor barred. But if the children had stepped out of it the firelight would have revealed their figures instantly to the Gypsies.

Either the women bending over the pots and pans at the fires or the children running about the encampment would have raised a hue and cry if the little captives had attempted to run away. And there were a dozen burly men sitting about, smoking and talking and awaiting the call to supper.

This meal was finally prepared. The fumes from the pots reached the nostrils of Tess, Dot, and Sammy, and they were all ravenously hungry. Nor were they denied food. The Gypsies evidently had no intention of maltreating the captives in any particular as long as they obeyed and did not try to escape.

One young woman brought a great pan of stew and bread and three spoons to the van and set it on the upper step for the children.

"You eat," said she, smiling, and the firelight shining on her gold earrings. "It do you goot—yes?"

"Oh, Miss Gypsy!" begged Tess, "we want to go home."

"That all right. Beeg Jeem tak-a you. To-morrow, maybe."

She went away hurriedly. But she had left them a plentiful supper. The three were too ravenous to be delicate. They each seized a spoon and, as Sammy advised, "dug in."

"This is the way all Gypsies eat," he said, proud of his knowledge. "Sometimes the men use their pocket knives to cut up the meat. But they don't seem to have any forks. And I guess forks aren't necessary anyway."

"But they are nicer than fingers," objected Tess.

"Huh? Are they?" observed the young barbarian.

After they had completely cleared the pan of every scrap and eaten every crumb of bread and drunk the milk that had been brought to them in a quart cup, Dot naturally gave way to sleepiness. She began to whimper a little too.

"If that big, bad Gypsy man doesn't take us home pretty soon I shall have to sleep here, Sister," she complained.

"You lie right down on this bench," said Tess kindly, "and I will cover you up and you can sleep as long as you want to."

So Dot did this. But Sammy was not at all sleepy. His mind was too active for that. He was prowling about the more or less littered van.

"Say!" he whispered to Tess, "there is a little window here in the front overlooking the driver's seat. And it swings on a hinge like a door."

"I don't care, Sammy. I—I'm sleepy, too," confessed Tess, with a yawn behind her hand.

"Say! don't *you* go to sleep like a big kid," snapped the boy. "We've got to get away from these Gyps."

"I thought you were going to stay with them forever."

"Not to let that Big Jim bang me over the head. Not much!" ejaculated Sammy fiercely. "If my father saw him do that—"

"But your father isn't here. If he was—"

"If he was you can just bet," said Sammy with confidence, "that Big Jim would not dare hit me."

"I—I wish your father would come and take us all home then," went on Tess, with another yawn.

"Well," admitted Sammy, "I wish he would, too. Crickey! but it's awful to have girls along, whether you are a pirate or a Gypsy."

"You needn't talk!" snapped Tess, quite tart for her. "We did not ask to come. And you were here 'fore we got here. And now you can't get away any more than Dot and I can."

"Sh!" advised Sammy again, and earnestly. "I got an idea."

"What is it?" asked Tess, without much curiosity.

"This here window in front!" whispered the boy. "We can open it. It is all dark at that end of the van. If we can slide out on to the seat we'll climb down in the dark and get into the woods. I know the way to the road. I can see a patch of it through the window. What say?"

"But Dot? She sleeps so hard," breathed Tess.

"We can poke her through the window on to the seat. Then we will crawl through. If she doesn't wake up and holler—"

"I'll stop her from hollering," agreed Tess firmly. "We'll try it, Sammy, before those awful women get back into the van."

Fortunately for the attempt of the captives their own supper had been dispatched with promptness. The Gypsies were still sitting about over the meal when Sammy opened that front window in the van.

He and Tess lifted Dot, who complained but faintly and kept her eyes tightly closed, and pushed her feet first through the small window. The driver's seat was broad and roomy. The little girl lay there all right while first Tess and then Sammy crept through the window.

It was dark here, and they could scarcely see the way to the ground. But Sammy ventured down first, and after barking his shins a little found the step and whispered his directions to Tess about passing Dot down to him.

They actually got to the ground themselves and brought the smallest Corner House girl with them without any serious mishap. Sammy tried to carry Dot over his shoulder, but he could

not stagger far with her. And, too, the sleepy child began to object.

"Sh! Keep still!" hissed her sister in Dot's ear. "Do you want the Gypsies to get you again?"

She had to help Sammy carry the child, however. Dot was such a heavy sleeper—especially when she first went to sleep—that nothing could really bring her back to realities. The two stumbled along with her in the deep shadows and actually reached the woods that bordered the encampment.

Suddenly a dog barked. Somebody shouted to the animal and it subsided with a sullen growl. But in a moment another dog began to yap. The guards of the camp realized that something was going wrong, although as yet none of the dogs had scented the escaping children exactly.

"Oh, hurry! Hurry!" gasped Tess. "The dogs will chase us."

"I am afraid they will," admitted Sammy. "We got to hide our trail."

"How'll we do that, Sammy?" gasped Tess.

"Like the Indians do," declared the boy. "We got to find a stream of water and wade in it."

"But I've got shoes and stockings on. And Mrs. McCall says we can't go wading without asking permission."

"Crickey! how you going to run away from these Gypsies if you've got to mind what you're told all the time?" asked Sammy desperately.

"But won't the water be cold? And why wade in it, anyway?"

"So the dogs can't follow our scent. They can't follow scent through water. Come on. We got to find a brook or something."

"There's the canal," ventured Tess, in an awed whisper.

"The canal, your granny!" exclaimed the exasperated boy. "That's over your head, Tess Kenway."

"Well! I don't know of any other water. Oh! Hear those dogs bark."

"Don't you s'pose I've got ears?" snapped Sammy.

"They sound awful savage."

"Yes. They've got some savage dogs," admitted the boy.

"Will they bite us? Oh, Sammy! will they bite us?"

"Not if they don't catch us," replied the boy, staggering on, bearing the heavier end of Dot while Tess carried her sister's feet.

They suddenly burst through a fringe of bushes upon the open road. There was just starlight enough to show them the way. The dogs were still barking vociferously back at the Gypsy camp. But there seemed to be no pursuit.

"Oh, my gracious! I've torn my frock," gasped Tess. "Do wait, Sammy."

The boy stopped. Indeed he had to, for his own breath had given out. The three fell right down on the grass beside the road, and Dot began to whimper.

"You stop her, Tess!" exclaimed Sammy. "You said you could. She will bring those Gypsies right here."

"Dot! Dot!" whispered Tess, shaking the smaller girl. "Do you want to be a prisoner again? Keep still!"

"My—my knees are cold," whined Dot.

"Je-ru-sa-lem!" gasped Sammy explosively. "Now she's done it! We're caught again."

He jumped to his feet, but not quickly enough to escape the outstretched hand of the figure that had suddenly appeared beside them. A dark face bent over the trio of frightened children.

"He's a Gyp!" cried Sammy. "We're done for, Tess!"

CHAPTER XXV—IT MUST BE ALL RIGHT

As Mrs McCall told Ruth Kenway when she arrived with Luke and Cecile at the old Corner House, the other Kenway sister and Neale O'Neil had not started out on their hunt for the Gypsy encampment alone. Mr. Pinkney, hearing of the absence of the smaller girls, had volunteered to go with the searchers.

"Somehow, my wife feels that Sammy may be with Tess and Dot," he explained to Neale and Agnes. "I never contradict her at such times. And perhaps he is. No knowing where that boy of mine is likely to turn up, anyway."

"But you do not suppose for one instant, Mr. Pinkney, that Sammy has come and coaxed my sisters to run away?" cried Agnes from the tonneau, as the car started out through Willow Street.

"I am not so sure about that. You know, he got Dot to run away with him once," chuckled Mr. Pinkney.

"This is nothing like that, I am sure!" declared Agnes.

"I am with you there, Aggie," admitted Neale. "I guess this is a serious affair. The Gypsies are in it."

Between the two, the boy and the girl told Mr. Pinkney all about the silver bracelet and the events connected with it. The man listened with appreciation.

"I don't know, of course, anything about the fight between the two factions of Gypsies over what you call Queen Alma's bracelet—"

"If it doesn't prove to be Sarah Turner's bracelet," interjected Agnes.

"Yes. That is possible. They may have just found it—those Gypsy women. And the story Costello, the junkman, told us might be a fake," said Neale.

"However," broke in Mr. Pinkney again, "there is a chance that the bracelet was given to Tess and Dot for a different purpose from any you have suggested."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Neale and Agnes in unison.

"It is a fact that some Gypsies do steal children. Now, don't be startled! It isn't commonly done. They are often accused without good reason. But Gypsies are always more or less mixed up with traveling show people. There are many small tent shows traveling about the country at this time of year."

"Like Twomley & Sorber's circus," burst out Agnes.

"Smaller than that. Just one-ring affairs. And the shows are regular 'fly-by-nights.' Gypsies fraternize with them of course. And often children are trained in those shows to be acrobats who are doubtless picked up around the country—usually children who have no guardians. And the Gypsies sometimes pick up such."

"Oh, but, Mr. Pinkney!" cried Agnes, "we are so careful of Tess and Dot. Usually, I mean. I don't know what Ruth will say when she gets home to-night. It looks as though we had been very careless while she was gone."

"I know what children have to go through in a circus," said Neale soberly. "But why should the Gypsies have selected Tess and Dot?"

"Because, you tell me, they were playing circus, and doing stunts at the very time the Gypsy women sold them the basket."

"Oh! So they were," agreed Agnes. "Oh, Neale!"

"Crickety! It might be, I suppose. I never thought of that," admitted the boy.

He was carefully running the car while this talk was going on. He soon drove past the Poole place and later stopped at a little house where the constable lived.

Mr. Ben Stryker was at home. It was not often that automobile parties called at his door. Usually they did not want to see Mr. Stryker, who was a stickler for the "rules of the road."

"What's the matter?" asked the constable, coming out to the car. "Want to pay me your fine, so as not to have to wait to see the Justice of the Peace?"

He said it jokingly. When he heard about the missing Kenway children and of the reason to fear Gypsies had something to do with it, he jumped into the car, taking Mr. Pinkney's place in the front seat beside Neale.

"I've had my eye on Big Jim Costello ever since he has been back here," Stryker declared. "I sent him away to jail once. He is a bad one. And if he is mixed up in any kidnapping, I'll put him into the penitentiary for a long term."

"But of course we would not want to make them trouble if the children went to the camp alone," ventured Agnes. "You know, they might have been hunting for the two women who sold them the basket."

"Those Gypsies know what to do in such a case. They know where I live, and they should have brought the two little girls to me. I certainly have it in for Big Jim."

But as we have seen, when the party arrived at the spot where the Gypsies had been encamped, not a trace of them was left. That is, no trace that pointed to the time or the direction of their departure.

"Maybe these Gypsies did not have a thing to do with the absence of Tess and Dot," whispered Agnes.

"And maybe they had everything to do with it," declared Neale, aloud. "Looks to me as though they had turned the trick and escaped."

"And in those motor-vans they can cover a deal of ground," suggested Mr. Pinkney.

Agnes broke down at this point and wept. The constable had got out and with the aid of his pocket lamp searched the vicinity. He saw plainly where the vans had turned into the dusty road and the direction they had taken.

"The best we can do is to follow them," he advised. "If I can catch them inside the county I'll be able to handle them. And if they go into the next county I'll get help. Well search their vans, no matter where we catch them. All ready?"

The party went on. To catch the moving Gypsies was no easy matter. Frequently Mr. Stryker got down to look at the tracks. This was at every cross road.

Fortunately the wheels of one of the Gypsy vans had a peculiar tread. It was easy to see the marks of these wheels in the dust. Therefore, although the pursuit was slow, they managed to be sure they were going right.

From eleven o'clock until three in the morning the motor-car was driven over the circuitous route the nomad procession had taken earlier in the night. Then they came to the new encampment.

Their approach was announced by the barking of the mongrel dogs that guarded the camp. Half the tribe seemed to be awake when the car slowed down and stopped on the roadway. Mr. Stryker got out and shouted for Big Jim.

"Come out here!" said the constable threateningly. "I know you are here, and I want to talk with you, Jim Costello."

"Well, whose chicken roost has been raided now?" demanded Big Jim, approaching with his smile and his impudence both in evidence.

"No chicken thievery," snapped Stryker, flashing his electric light into the big Gypsy's face. "Where are those kids?"

"What kids? I got my own—and there's a raft of them. I'll give you a couple if you want."

Big Jim seemed perfectly calm and the other Gypsies were like him. They routed out every family in the camp. The constable and Neale searched the tents and the vans. No trace of Tess and Dot was to be found.

"Everything you lay to the poor Gypsy," said Big Jim complainingly. "Now it is not chickens—it is kids. Bah!"

He slouched away. Stryker called after him:

"Never mind, Jim. We'll get you yet! You watch your step."

He came back to the Kenway car shaking his head. "I guess they have not been here. I'll come back to-morrow when the Gypsies don't expect me and look again if your little sisters do not turn up elsewhere. What shall we do now?"

Agnes was weeping so that she could not speak. Neale shook his head gloomily. Mr. Pinkney sighed.

"Well," the latter said, "we might as well start for home. No good staying here."

"I'll get you to Milton in much shorter time than it took to get here," said the constable. "Keep right ahead, Mr. O'Neil. We'll take the first turn to the right and run on till we come to Hampton Mills. It's pretty near a straight road from there to Milton. And I can get a ride from the Mills to my place with a fellow I know who passes my house every morning."

Neale started the car and they left the buzzing camp behind them. They had no idea that the moment the sound of the car died away the Gypsies leaped to action, packed their goods and chattels again, and the tribe started swiftly for the State line. Big Jim did not mean to be caught if he could help it by Constable Stryker, who knew his record.

The Corner House car whirred over the rather good roads to Hampton Mills and there the constable parted from them. He promised to report any news he might get of the absent children, and they were to send him word if Tess and Dot were found.

The car rounded the pond where Sammy had had his adventure at the ice-house and had ruined his knickerbockers. It was a straight road from that point to Milton. Going up the hill beside the pond in the gray light of dawn, they saw ahead of them a man laboring on in the middle of the road with a child upon his shoulders, while two other small figures walked beside him, clinging to his coat.

"There's somebody else moving," said Mr. Pinkney to Agnes. "What do you know about little children being abroad at this time of the morning?"

"Shall we give them a lift?" asked Neale. "Only I don't want to stop on this hill."

But he did. He stopped in another minute because Agnes uttered a piercing scream.

"Oh, Tessie! Oh, Dot! It's them! It's the children!"

"Great Moses!" ejaculated Mr. Pinkney, forced likewise into excitement, "is that Sammy Pinkney?"

The man carrying Dot turned quickly. Tess and Sammy both uttered eager yelps of recognition. Dot bobbed sleepily above the head of the man who carried her pickaback.

"Oh, Agnes! isn't this my day for wearing that bracelet? Say, isn't it?" she demanded.

The dark man came forward, speaking very politely and swiftly.

"It is the honest Kenway—yes? You remember Costello? I am he. I find your sisters with the bad Gypsies—yes. Then you will give me Queen Alma's bracelet—the great heirloom of our family? I am friend—I bring children back for you. You give me bracelet?"

Tess and Dot were tumbled into their sister's arms. Mr. Pinkney jumped out of the car and grabbed Sammy before he could run. 253

Costello, the junkman, repeated his request over and over while Agnes was greeting the two little girls as they deserved to be greeted. Finally he made some impression upon her mind.

"Oh, dear me!" Agnes cried in exasperation, "how can I give it you? I don't know where it is. It's been stolen."

"Stolen? That Beeg Jeem!" Again Costello exploded in his native tongue.

Tess nestled close to Agnes. She lifted her lips and whispered in her sister's ear:

"Don't tell him. He's a Gypsy, too, though I guess he is a good one. I have got that bracelet inside my dress. It's safe."

They did not tell Costello, the junkman, that at this time. In fact, it was some months before Mr. Howbridge, by direction of the Court, gave Queen Alma's bracelet into the hands of Miguel Costello, who really proved in the end that he had the better right to the bracelet that undoubtedly had once belonged to the Queen of the Spanish Gypsies.

It had not been merely by chance that the young Gypsy woman who had sold the green and yellow basket to Tess and Dot had dropped that ornament into the basket. She had worn the bracelet, for she was Big Jim's daughter. 254

Without doubt it was the intention of the Gypsies to engage the little girls' interest through this bracelet and get their confidence, to bring about the very situation which they finally consummated. One of the women confessed in court that they could sell Tess and Dot for acrobats. Or they thought they could.

The appearance of Miguel Costello in Milton, claiming the rightful ownership of the silver bracelet, made the matter unexpectedly difficult for Big Jim and his clan. Indeed, the Kenways had much to thank Miguel Costello for.

However, these mysteries were explained long after this particular morning on which the children were recovered. No such home-coming had ever been imagined, and the old Corner House and vicinity staged a celebration that will long be remembered.

Luke Shepard had been put to bed soon after his arrival. But he would not be content until he got up again and came downstairs in his bathrobe to greet the returned wanderers.

Agnes just threw herself into Ruth's arms when she first saw her elder sister, crying:

"Oh! don't you *dare* ever go away again, Ruth Kenway, without taking the rest of us with you. We're not fit to be left alone." 255

"I am afraid some day, Agnes, you will have to get along without me," said Ruth placidly, but smiling into Luke's eyes as she said it. "You know, we are growing up."

"Aggie isn't ever going to grow up," grumbled Neale. "She is just a kid."

"Oh, is *that* so, Mr. Smartie?" cried Agnes, suddenly drying her eyes. "I'd have you know I am just as much grown up as you are."

"Oh, dear, me, I'm so sleepy," moaned Dot. "I—I didn't sleep very well at all last night."

"Goodness! I should think Sammy and I ought to be the ones to be sleepy. We didn't have any chance at all!" Tess exclaimed.

As for Sammy, he was taken home by an apparently very stern father to meet a wildly grateful mother. Mrs. Pinkney drew the sting from all verbal punishment Mr. Pinkney might have given his son.

"And the dear boy! I knew he had not forgotten us when I found he had taken that picture with him. Did you, Sammy?"

"Did I what, Mom?" asked Sammy, his mouth comfortably filled with cake.

"That picture. You know, the one we all had taken down at Pleasant Cove that time. The one of your father and you and me that you kept on your bureau. When I saw that you had taken that with you to remember us by—"

"Oh, crickey, Mom! Buster, the bull pup, ate that old picture up a month ago," said the nonsentimental Sammy. 256

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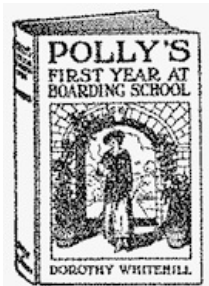
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