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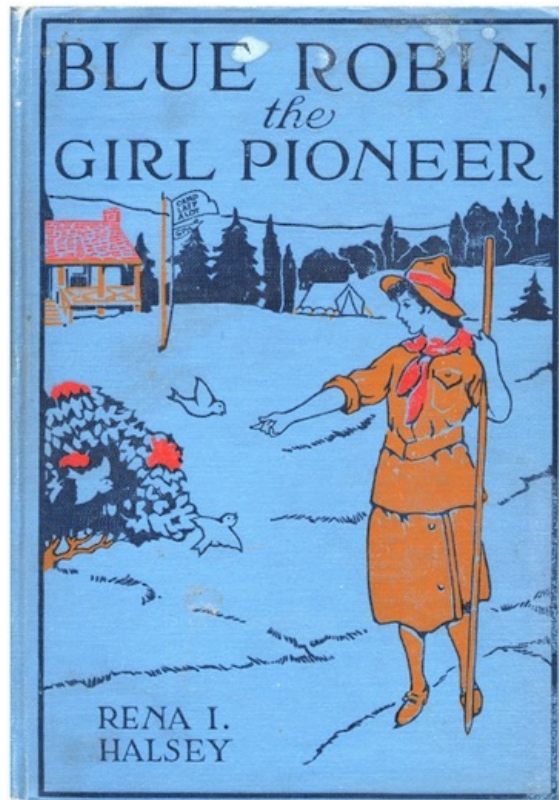
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK BLUE ROBIN, THE GIRL PIONEER ***





"What can I do for you? Are you in pain?"

BLUE ROBIN, THE GIRL PIONEER

BY

RENA I. HALSEY

ILLUSTRATED BY NANA FRENCH BICKFORD



BOSTON
LOTHROP, LEE & SHEPARD CO.

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BLUE ROBIN, THE GIRL PIONEER

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BLUE ROBIN THE GIRL PIONEER
IS
AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED
TO

MISS LINA BEARD
FOUNDER
AND
CHIEF PIONEER
OF
THE NATIONAL INCORPORATED
ORGANIZATION OF
THE GIRL PIONEERS OF AMERICA

WHAT ARE "GIRL PIONEERS"?

The first public meeting of the National Organization of the Girl Pioneers of America was held by the founder, Miss Lina Beard, in the quaint old Pioneer meeting-house on Broadway, in Flushing, New York, February 8, 1912.

The aim of the Organization of Girl Pioneers is: To cultivate in girls the sterling qualities displayed by our early pioneer women; to create a desire in them for a happy, broad, and useful life and to show them how to attain it; to give them things to do that are interesting, wholesome, and that will strengthen character; and to develop a love for out-of-door life by showing them how to live it.

The watchword of the Girl Pioneer is, "I Can."

The principles upon which the organization is founded are not simply taught as precepts, they are found and practiced in all the delightful activities of the movement. Outdoor life with its limitless avenues of interest: camping, trailing, woodcraft, learning to know the wild life of the open, its plants, its flowers, birds, common wild animals and insects; the stars and the meaning of the shadows, the use of nature's material in handicraft; all these and many more are opened to the Girl Pioneer, and by actual contact she is finding the beauty of truth and the wonder of reality. By her membership in this large organization she is learning to be less self-centered, learning to work with others and for others, and to share her enjoyments with others. By the joyous participation in field-sports, and such recreation as rowing, swimming, fishing, riding, kite-flying, stilt-walking, and the more conventional games, such as basket-ball, service-ball, tennis, and archery, she is learning to play honestly and fairly, and *is building up bodily health and strength* to keep pace with the mental and moral health that is being developed within her.

By her indoor life, lived as truly in the pioneer spirit as her life in the open, she is bringing into play the faculties of resourcefulness, of adaptability, of thoroughness, and the virtue of helpful kindness. She learns to do all household tasks, to do them well, and to be interested in them. She is taught in charming ways the use of her five senses, and is delighted to find that she can develop them and consciously enjoy them. She learns to care for the sick and the young children; she is proud of being able to render "first aid" according to the latest and best methods; she learns how to avoid accidents as well as what to do in case of accidents. She has a system of signs for blazing the trail which belongs solely to the Girl Pioneers, and she learns what to do in case she is lost when camping or trailing. In short, the Girl Pioneer's teaching makes her efficient in all fields. The mind and imagination of the Girl Pioneer are stimulated by true stories of heroism and the adventures of the early pioneers. Her merit badges are given the names of the women pioneers, including besides the early settlers those who were in helpful work for humanity. Her honors are shown by stars worn on the sleeve, which indicate the tests successfully passed and lead up to the final merit badge.

The Girl Pioneer colors, red, white, and blue, not only signify that the organization is national in extent but hold a still further meaning for the Girl Pioneers; red standing for courage, white for purity, and blue for truth. The graceful salute symbolizes a brave heart, an honest mind, a resourceful hand. The motto of the Girl Pioneer is, "Brave, Honest, Resourceful."

The Girl Pioneers have their khaki uniform with red tie and red hatband, which is practical, adaptable, and pleasing. They have their banners, their Pioneer sign, their initiation, with its ceremony and membership certificate; their rallies, field-days, and other general meetings indoors and out. They have their Pioneer cheer, and each Band and each group has a cheer of its own. There is the official song which all the Pioneers sing, and there are songs composed by the Bands.

Each Band is under the leadership of a volunteer director who furnishes acceptable credentials. The Band is composed of one group, or several groups, of from six to ten girls in each. The name of an American wild bird is chosen for the name of each group, and the Band is known by its number. The bird cheers of the groups are very breezy and inspiring.

The Girl Pioneer ranks are open to all girls, and the work is very helpful in Sunday-schools, public schools, private schools, camps, and all large societies for girls, such as Young Women's Christian Association, Young Women's Christian Temperance Union, playgrounds, etc.

The Daughters of the American Revolution, Colonial Dames, and like organizations seek to preserve the historical records and objects connected with the early life of our country, while the Girl Pioneers seek to revive and perpetuate the spirit that dominated the invincible men and women who made our nation possible.

The Girl Pioneer organization is governed by an Executive Board, of which the Chief Pioneer, Lina Beard, is the head. There is also a National Council composed of eminent and influential men and women living in various parts of the United States, to be called upon when needed.

The Pioneer folder will be sent upon application, and the Manual will be sent upon receipt of price, thirty-five cents, and seven cents for postage. For further information and for literature, address:

SECRETARY OF GIRL PIONEERS OF AMERICA,
FLUSHING, NEW YORK.

FOREWORD

A few summers ago I had the pleasure of being entertained by several Bands of The Girl Pioneers of America, on the wooded shores of one of Long Island's noted bays, at Camp Laff-a-Lot. As I watched these wholesome-looking, happy girls in their attractive uniforms, and saw their bright, animated faces as they made merry in joyous sport under God's blue, and then turned to the more serious employment of making bayberry candles, building camp fires, gathering wildflowers in their study of Nature, or blazing the trail as they made the woodland resound to their wonderful imitation of bird-notes, in the various calls of their groups, my interest was awakened. Later, as I gathered with them in the red glow of their Cheer Fire and heard their rousing Pioneer cheer, and their inspiring Band songs, and saw how a love for history and the true meaning of patriotism was engendered, while their minds and imaginations were being stimulated by their stories of the heroism of the women Pioneers, I realized that as our patriotic organizations were seeking to honor the Founders of our Nation by preserving historical records and objects, these Pioneer daughters were seeking to revive and perpetuate the spirit that dominated the men and women who brought to these shores, the grand principles of a civilization that has made our Republic the greatest in the world! It was in recognition of the nobleness of the aims of The Girl Pioneers of America, as well as in appreciation of the worthy Founder's efforts to bring out the best in them, that inspired me to set forth in a limited way these many truths, and so I was emboldened to write "Blue Robin, the Girl Pioneer!"

RENA I. HALSEY.
Brooklyn,
January 1, 1917.

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BLUE ROBIN, THE GIRL PIONEER

CHAPTER I—THE NEST IN THE OLD CEDAR

11

Nathalie came running up the steps of the veranda her brown eyes alight with excitement as she cried, "Oh, Mother, what do you think? Down in the old cedar-tree on the lawn is a nest of tiny blue robins—they're just the cutest things—do come and see them!"

"Blue robins?" quizzed her brother Dick from where he lay reading in the hammock. "Who ever heard of blue robins?"

"I think she means bluebirds," ventured Mrs. Page, looking up from the morning paper and smiling at the earnest young face of her daughter. Then her eyes dimmed, but she winked her lashes quickly as if to restrain a sudden rush of tears, rose in answer to the note of appeal in the girl's voice, and stepped to her side.

A moment later they were strolling across the new-grown grass of the lawn, the girl of sixteen supporting the slender, black-gowned figure of her mother, whose delicate, high-bred face with its impress of recent sorrow defined the youthful glow of the one that smiled upon her so tenderly.

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"Now, Mumsie, look!" whispered the girl as she pointed to a dark cavity in the trunk of the cedar but a short distance from the ground; "see, are they not robins?"

Mrs. Page's tired eyes brightened as she watched with keen interest the five bobbing heads with open bills, turweeing in hungry clamor, "Why no, Nathalie," she replied laughingly, "they are bluebirds."

At this instant they spied the mother bird as she flitted excitedly among the upper branches of the tree. Drawing her mother to one side, Nathalie whispered tensely, "Oh, there's the mother bird—she wants to feed them! Let's see what she will do!" Nathalie's eyes sparkled expectantly.

It was quite evident what Mrs. Bluebird was going to do, for she immediately jumped to the edge of the nest and dropped a fat, squirming worm into an open bill. As she poised over her nestlings she caught sight of the two figures under the tree. In another instant she had set up such a vigorous scolding that the interlopers were quite disturbed. Seeing, however, that they did not offer to molest her little ones, Mrs. Birdie finally subsided, cocked her head perkily on one side, and watched them with eyes that shone like two fireflies.

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Father bird now came flying up with another good-sized wriggler in his beak, which mother bird, with an eye to business, hastily snatched and dropped into a wide-open bill.

"Why, Mother," commented Nathalie, "do you see that the father bird is much the handsomer of the two, for he is of a deep blue color, while mother bird's feathers are grayish-blue."

Her mother nodded as she answered, "Yes, and his beautiful coat is in striking contrast to his throat and breast, which are reddish-brown."

"And the white feathers below," continued Nathalie, with keen eyes, "look like a white apron."

"But come, dear," interposed her mother, "we must go back, for I hear Dick whistling—he is getting impatient—I promised to get him a sofa pillow for the hammock."

As they stepped on the veranda, Dick inquired, with sarcastic inflection, balancing himself on the edge of the hammock and pushing it to and fro with his crutch, "Well, how many blue robins did you find?"

"We found five tiny bluebirds," responded his mother with unwonted animation as she seated herself in a low rocker, and then she continued in lower tone as her daughter disappeared in quest of the pillow, "Oh, Dick! I am so glad to see some color in Nathalie's cheeks again, for she has been looking very wan and pale. The poor child has not only suffered the loss of her father, but she has had to give up so many things—the very things, too, that a girl of her age longs for so much!" Mrs. Page sighed drearily.

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"Giving up college was the hardest," added her son, his face expressing the sympathy he hardly knew how to voice; "but she's a corker, for she has faced every disappointment like a little hero. I didn't know she had so much pluck in her."

"She takes after her father, he was always so cheerful about facing the inevitable—" His mother's lips quivered; she paused as if to gain control of her voice and then resumed brokenly, "Oh, Dick, to think he has gone—it seems as if it could not be true—"

"True enough," retorted Dick gruffly; and then he added, in a softer voice, "but after all, Mother, every one has to have trouble. We're having ours just now—that's all—and we've got to bear it. Things might have been worse, I suppose—we've got enough left to live on—oh, if it wasn't for this confounded knee of mine—to be helpless when—"

"Hush, Dick, don't say that," cried his mother in a pained voice; "just have patience, and you will be all right; have patience with me, too, dear, because I am such a coward to allow myself to get so depressed." She made a brave attempt at a smile. "It will be as you say, all right soon."

Hearing Nathalie's step, she hastily hid her tear-stained face behind the paper; then, as that young woman threw the sofa pillow at Dick's head, she exclaimed, "I am so glad, Nathalie, to see you take an interest in the new home. I think it is a lovely—"

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"Doll's house!" interposed the girl laughingly. "But, O dear, I must be careful, for when I called it a doll's house while Mrs. Morton was here she looked rather queer, and then I remembered that her house is not much bigger. But do you know, Mother," she rattled on girlishly, "I think we are going to be quite comfy in this little home—after a time of course," she hastened to add, "when we have become used to the change—and all—" she stopped abruptly, for she, too, was thinking of the dear father who had gone so suddenly—without even saying good-by, as she had so often wailed in the darkness of night—leaving Mother with only a meager income, and with poor Dick to take care of, and her and Dorothy, who didn't know enough to earn a penny!

A sudden slam of the door was heard, a "How are you, Auntie?" in a sweet, assured voice, and then with smiling eyes a tall, graceful, young woman, with shiny, fluffy hair came forward and kissed her aunt caressingly.

"Oh, Lucille, what do you think?" broke from Nathalie impetuously; "I found a nest of tiny bluebirds down in the old cedar-tree on the lawn!"

"Um-m, well, you are always finding something to enthuse over," remarked her cousin with careless indifference, "but I wish you would make that all-round maid of yours do my room, I want to write a letter." There was spoiled impatience in the girl's voice.

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Mrs. Page looked up with a startled expression as she murmured apologetically, "Oh, I forgot, Lucille. I will do it—I thought—"

"No, no, Mother," came from Nathalie hurriedly, as with heightened color and gentle insistence she forced her mother back to her seat. "I will do it."

Nathalie disappeared within the door. She had smiled sweetly for her mother's sake, but as she went up the stairs there was an upward lift to her chin that showed that she had a will and a temper of some weight. "Why is Lucille so mean," she questioned mutinously, "as not to make her own bed when she knows that now we shall have to get along with only one maid? Mother is not going to wait on her!" Her eyes gleamed with angry decision, and then the curves of her mouth softened as she struggled silently with her jarring thoughts.

Yes, it must be borne, for was it not a part of the great change that had come into her life with her first great sorrow? The shock of her father's death had dazed her, and she had suffered in a dulled, uncomprehending way until she was aroused from her grief by the many anxieties and disappointing changes that the financial tangle of her father's affairs had caused.

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Leaving their beautiful city home, giving up the many luxuries and the pleasures to which she had been accustomed, parting from her school friends, and coming to the unknown suburban town were bitter disappointments; the one that cut the deepest was giving up college, but the hardest to bear was Dick's accident!

The next moment the girl was hard at work picking up Lucille's disordered room, humming cheerily as she went about her task, for, after all, her cousin was independent—she paid her board—and now they would need every penny.

A resolute will and deft fingers can accomplish much in this workaday world, and so Nathalie soon finished her new job, as she called it, and sat on the veranda watching the robins as they hopped nimbly over the lawn, ducking their heads every minute or so to reappear with fat, dangling worms in their beaks.

Their cheerful twitter, the budding leaves on trees and bushes, and the many reminders of the revival of life under the warmth and glow of the spring sunshine thrilled her with exhilaration. Her depression vanished, she felt happy again, but vaguely perhaps, scarcely comprehending that the buoyancy of youth and the joy of life were compensations that dulled the harrowing edge

of grief.

With a long breath, as if to capture as much as possible of the spring balminess, Nathalie turned to see her mother seated in the low chair, with her basket of mending, wearing the same dazed, worried look on her face that had haunted the girl ever since their sorrow. She became keenly aware that her tireless mother, who had always stood ready to do the thousand and one things that were constantly calling her, was failing. Something swelled up in her throat, she fought valiantly a moment, and then jumping up, she grabbed the half-darned sock from her mother's hand, pitched it into the basket, picked it up and carried it over to her chair.

"Now, Mumsie," she declared in answer to her mother's startled look, "you are not to darn any more stockings; henceforth your humble servant is to be the champion mender." Nathalie's cheeks flushed, for as she raised her eyes she encountered those of a young girl about her own age who was just coming out of the adjoining house.

As her neighbor saw Nathalie, she smiled a cheery good-morning, showing a row of strong, white teeth, and then strode down the walk with the light step and easy swing of the athletic girl.

"Huh! what a queer rig," commented Lucille, with a supercilious raising of her eyebrows, as she noted that the girl wore a short brown khaki skirt over bloomers, a middy with a Turkey red tie, and a broad-brimmed hat banded with red. "Is that the Salvation Army's summer apparel?" Then seeing that the girl carried a strong staff in her hand, she added with a giggle, "Or perhaps she is some aspiring member of the militants."

"Why, I think the uniform—for I presume it is that—" interposed Mrs. Page, "is very attractive, and most appropriate for a Girl Pioneer."

"Why, Mother, how do you know she is a Girl Pioneer?" questioned Nathalie with mild amazement.

"Ah, I forgot to tell you that her mother, Mrs. Dame, called the day you were out walking. She told me that Helen, her only daughter, belongs to 'The Girl Pioneers of America.'"

"The Girl Pioneers of America!" repeated her daughter; "why, I never heard of them. Is it a patriotic society?"

"In a way I presume it is," returned her mother, "as it is an organization which trains girls to emulate the sterling qualities of the early pioneer women."

"I wonder what they do, and if it is anything like the Boy Scouts!" continued Nathalie interestedly.

"I think from what Mrs. Dame told me that it must be a sister society to that organization, for its object is to awaken within the girls a desire for healthy, outdoor activities, as well as a broad and useful life along many lines. I am sure in these days, when girls are so shallow and artificial-looking, and have no higher thought than getting all the pleasure they can out of life, that it is something which is sadly needed." Mrs. Page's tones were expressive.

"Oh, Aunt Mary," demurred Lucille, looking up with a frown from her novel, "one would think that you expected girls to dress and act like their grandmothers. I am sure one can be young but once, and if one doesn't have a good time then, what's the use of living? And for putting a little color on one's face, why, the most fashionable people do it nowadays."

Mrs. Page's face flushed slightly, but she replied with quiet dignity, "I am surprised, Lucille, to hear you talk that way, brought up as you have been, too. It is true," she continued, "that there is no harm in wanting a good time—as you call it—that is youth's privilege, and no one wishes to turn youth into age, but back of it all there should be common sense and a desire for right living. As for putting artificial color on a face that should represent the freshness and the natural bloom of youth, why, to me it is demoralizing."

Lucille frowned impatiently and resumed her reading.

"Mrs. Dame," continued her aunt, turning towards Nathalie, "said her daughter Helen was coming in to call on you; she will probably give you all the information you want about the new organization. I hope you will like her, dear, for she seems a pleasant, well-bred girl and surely will prove companionable to you. We might as well, all of us, try to forget our city life with its past pleasures, and see if we cannot adapt ourselves to our surroundings."

"Indeed I will try, Mumsie," replied Nathalie with a slight catch in her voice, as her thoughts turned back to her chums in the city, and she wondered what they would think of her humble little home. "But really, Mother," she spoke aloud, "I think Miss Dame has an awfully bright face, and I wish she would call, for I should like to know about the Girl Pioneers."

A few days after the finding of the bluebird's nest, Nathalie, enlivened by the desire to investigate her surroundings, and curious for new experiences, set forth on a little exploring tour to the woods on the outskirts of the town. She had tried to induce her cousin to join her, but that young lady was absorbed in running over a new ragtime song. Her sister Dorothy, aged twelve, had also declined on the score that she had an engagement with a girl neighbor who lived in the big house down the road.

Sunshine and youth are joy-bearers, and as Nathalie felt the air in fragrant little whiffs against her cheeks, she thrilled with pleasure as she strode briskly up the hill. A moment later, however, her shining eyes shadowed, and she unconsciously shivered as she encountered a cold glance from a lady, weirdly garbed in gray, who was just passing.

The color flashed to her cheeks; she felt as if some one had slapped her as the haunting vision of that uncanny stare of aversion from two steely-gray eyes penetrated her consciousness. Tempted by curiosity she turned and watched the peculiar-looking figure as it glided with almost specter-like swiftness down the hill.

"I wonder who she is and why she gave me such a harrowing glance," thought Nathalie. "Whew! she has frozen me stiff," and then a laugh brightened the brown eyes as she continued on her way. She had almost reached the top of the hill when she saw a large brown card on the walk. Picking it up she read, "Westport Library," and then the written name, "Elizabeth Van Vorst." Not a great loss, to be sure, but likely to cause inconvenience.

"Oh, I wonder if that lady didn't drop it, she had a book under her arm," flashed into the girl's mind. She hesitated—she did not want to climb that long hill again—but the next second she had whirled about and was running lightly down the slope in the direction of a Carnegie building that glimmered picturesquely between green-boughed trees.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," panted Nathalie as she held out the card to the gray lady who had just emerged from the library and was looking vexedly about on the walk in front of the building, "did you not lose your library card?"

The lady turned sharply, stared suspiciously at the girl a moment, and then, as her eyes fell upon the extended card, exclaimed coldly, "Oh, did you find it? Thank you, I am much obliged!" With a haughty glance of dismissal she turned and ascended the library steps.

Nathalie's eyes gleamed angrily, but with a toss of her head she was off on her second trudge up the slope. "Well, she is the limit—" she muttered. "Of all hateful, disagreeable, peculiar, mysterious creatures, she takes first rank." But when the girl reached the woods where the new-gowned trees and the white blossoms of the dogwood, which she had spied the day before, riding in a trolley car, rustled softly in the sunlight, as if in a spring greeting to the flower-seeker, the unpleasant incident was forgotten.

With eager eyes and cheeks aglow she began to break off a sprig here and there, lingering only to caress the snowy petals that tantalizingly brushed her cheek.

"What a beauty!" she exclaimed as she suddenly halted; "it will be just the spray to sketch." Up went her arm—a little higher—and then something went from under her; she tried to regain her footing, but slipped again on the moist turf. She felt her foot turn, and then came a sharp twinge that whitened her lips as she dropped, a helpless heap, on the ground.

For a few moments the girl forgot her dogwood blossoms, the slip, and the pain, and then she opened her eyes to realize, with a pang of dismay, that she must have fainted. Oh, she must have twisted her ankle, for when she tried to stand she almost screamed with the knife-like twinges.

She leaned her head against the tree with closed eyes, trying to think, but her thoughts seemed to run around in a circle, for she could see no way out of her dilemma. She was too far from the trolley line to hail a car, or to beckon to any passer-by who might be on the road.

She thought ruefully of how worried her mother would be if she did not return before dark. And who was there to look for her? Dick was helpless with his crutch, Dorothy would not be home until late, and Lucille—well, whoever heard of Lucille ever doing anything for any one but herself?

She screamed, but when her voice rang out with reverberating shrillness she clapped her hands to her ears. She would sing; and her fresh young voice broke forth into ragtime song.

But the ragtime quivered pathetically into a half-wail. What should she do? At last in sheer desperation she began to sing hymns; but they sounded so doleful in her nervous state that she desisted with a sound that was half a sob and half a laugh. She was about to embrace resignation to fate when she caught the glimmer of a brown skirt between the low-hung branches of the trees near by. In a moment there was a sharp crack of a twig, and Nathalie with a sudden exclamation of joy saw a young girl coming quickly toward her, wearing the same kind of a brown uniform she had perceived on her neighbor a few days ago.

"Oh, are you hurt?" asked the girl quickly, as she saw Nathalie's white face resting against the tree.

Nathalie, attempting to smile, told of her mishap, and then with widening eyes saw the girl run a few steps into the open. Then the short, staccato whistle of Bob White struck the air.

It was hardly a moment when, in response to this bird-call, several girls appeared in the opening beyond. A few hurried words with the girl who had signaled them, and they were around Nathalie, listening to the story of her accident.

After expressing their sympathy, two of the taller girls quickly slipped off their khaki skirts, unbuttoned them, and then, to the injured one's amazement, one of the girls pushed her staff through the belt of one skirt and hem of the other, while her companion did the same with her staff. They were improvising a stretcher, as neat and comfortable-looking as if it had just been removed from an ambulance.

While the stretcher was being made, one of the girls had taken from her knapsack a small black case from which she extracted a bottle. Hastily kneeling on the ground, after Nathalie's boot had been removed by her assistant, she bathed the injured foot, then, as her companion handed her a roll of white lint she bound it with a cotton compress, while Nathalie, with much curiosity, watched her as she quickly and skillfully performed the work of First Aid to the Injured. As she

rose to her feet and turned to direct her companions in the lifting of her patient on the stretcher, Nathalie recognized her next-door neighbor, Helen Dame, the Girl Pioneer!

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CHAPTER II—HER NEXT-DOOR NEIGHBOR

27

If Nathalie was surprised at the deftness and resourcefulness of these Girl Pioneers, she was amazed at the ease and comfort she experienced as the four girls strode forward, two at the head and two at the foot of the improvised stretcher.

Notwithstanding the sharp twinges in her foot, she felt as if she could have dropped into a doze if a sudden, jarring thought had not caused her to raise her head in search of her next-door neighbor. By the decision of her voice and her methodical manner of directing her companions as they prepared the "bed of ease," Nathalie had recognized this girl as the leader.

But Helen Dame was not to be seen. One of the girls, however, on seeing Nathalie's movement, commanded a halt and hastened to her side. "What can I do for you?" she inquired in an anxious tone. "Are you in pain?"

Her ready sympathy brought the tears to Nathalie's eyes, for her nerves were somewhat under a strain, but she fought them bravely back, and looking up with a reassuring smile replied, "Oh no, I am all right, but I was looking for Miss Dame. I am afraid if Mother sees me on a stretcher, she will think something very dreadful has happened."

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"Ah, Helen thought of that," was the quick reply, "and she has gone ahead to tell your mother that you have only hurt your foot, and to see if she can get Dr. Morrow to come over and look at it."

"Oh, how kind of her—and of you all—" there was a slight tremor in Nathalie's voice. "I am sure I do not know what would have become of me, alone there in the woods, if you girls had not come to my rescue."

As the girls walked slowly on with their burden, the one walking by the side of the stretcher told Nathalie that they were a group of Girl Pioneers, that they had been on a hike, and that her name was Grace Tyson. As they chatted pleasantly, Nathalie told of her recent removal from the city to Westport. With wise forethought she suppressed all mention of her former wealth and the many luxuries she had been used to, for fear that these suburban girls, not comprehending, might misjudge her and think that she considered herself above them. She had learned from the girls of her own set in school that when a newcomer took particular care to advise them how rich she was, her mates usually dubbed her a snob. So she only told of her great loss in the death of her father, how Dick, her older brother, had injured his knee in an accident and was an invalid, and how she liked her new home.

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In the companionship of this new girl she scarcely realized how quickly the time had passed until she saw her mother's anxious face bending over her, and heard a masculine voice say, "Well, is this the young lady who reached too high?"

Nathalie looked quickly up and immediately her heart went out to this big, bluff man with iron-gray hair and kindly blue eyes who picked her up as if she had been a manikin, carried her into the hall, and laid her on the couch. She recognized the face of the doctor who lived on the opposite corner whom she had often envied as he went chugging down the street in his automobile.

After the doctor had pressed her foot here and there with a touch as soft as silk from the gentleness of trained fingers, he brought forth some surgical plaster from a black case, and strapped the injured member, remarking as he did so on the surgeon-like way in which Miss Dame had bandaged it.

After the "exam," as Dick called it, was over, the doctor explained the case as a few strained ligaments, and said that with care his patient would be able to walk in about a week.

"A week?" sprang from the young girl involuntarily. Dismay shone in her eyes, but the doctor, with a fatherly pat, assured her that she had great cause for gratitude, as it might have been much worse.

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"The next time you go to gather dogwood blossoms, young lady," he advised jovially, "wear rubber heels, and then you won't slip on stones."

As the doctor bade her good afternoon, promising to come again in a few days to see how the foot was progressing, Nathalie thought of her rescuers, and raising her head peered anxiously around.

"The girls have gone, but they left a good-by for you," her mother answered to her look of inquiry, "and Miss Dame says she will be in to-morrow to see how you are."

By to-morrow Nathalie had begun to think it was not at all unpleasant to be a short-time invalid, and she jokingly requested her mother to see that her head was not screwed around from sheer conceit at being the recipient of so much attention.

Mrs. Morrow, the doctor's young wife, had sent her a beautiful bunch of yellow daffodils from the

very garden that Nathalie had been admiring all the week, while the little, silver-haired old lady next door—Nathalie could have hugged her, she looked so grand-motherly—had sent her a snow-frosted nut-cake. Lucille—an unheard-of thing—had condescended to alight from her pedestal of self and had played and sung Nathalie’s favorite selections all the morning. Even Dorothy, whose engagement book was always brimming over, had darned stockings for her. Of course, Nathalie knew that she would have to rip out every stitch, but that was the child’s way of showing that she, too, wanted to be sympathetic and kind.

The success of the day, however, was when Helen Dame’s dark eyes smiled at her from the adjoining porch, and she asked if Nathalie felt like chatting for a while.

“Indeed I do,” answered Nathalie animatedly, “I have been just dying to talk with you ever since you were so kind.”

“Oh, how sweet you look!” exclaimed Helen a few moments later as she shook hands with the patient, “with your pink ribbons—just the color of your cheeks.” For the girl’s color had deepened as her visitor laid a bunch of violets on her lap. “These are from the girls, the Girl Pioneers—that is our Pioneer song,” she added laughingly.

“I just love violets!” Nathalie sniffed at the purple petals. “And the girls, do you mean the ones who so kindly came to my aid the other day? Oh, Miss Dame, I hardly know how to express my appreciation of your kindness,” her voice trembled slightly, “in hurrying home to tell Mother.”

“Oh, that was nothing,” replied Helen with assumed indifference, although her eyes darkened in appreciation of Nathalie’s gratefulness, “that was only courtesy; you know we are Girl Pioneers, and kindness is one of the laws of the organization.”

“Do you know,” Nathalie broke in impulsively, “Mother thinks the girls very clever in making that stretcher; do tell me about the Girl Pioneers!” She hesitated for a moment. “Perhaps I am very ignorant, but I never heard of them until your mother told mine that you were a Girl Pioneer.”

Helen laughed with a gratified gleam in her eyes. “Oh, Mother!—she thinks it just the dandiest thing going. Mrs. Morrow, our Director, introduced the movement here. The founder is a friend of hers, so she is steeped to her finger-tips with it.

“She started me going—enthusiasm is contagious, you know—and I organized the first group. A group means six or eight girls; several groups form what is called a band.”

“Do you mean Mrs. Morrow, the doctor’s wife?” inquired her companion. “She must be lovely, for she looks so pretty flitting about the garden,” turning wistful eyes toward the corner house with its flower beds and green lawn. “I often watch her from my window.”

“Yes, she is a dear,” assented Helen, “and we girls adore her. Have you seen the twins?”

“The kiddies who go about in khaki uniforms and carry little poles.”

“Yes, baby Boy Scouts. You should hear them call themselves ‘the twims’; they both lisp. But there, I must tell you about the Pioneers—but I don’t want to tire you,” she paused abruptly, “for Mother says there is no end to me when I get talking on that subject.”

“But I want to hear about them!” pleaded Nathalie.

“Well, after I organized the group, the girls elected me leader, and Grace Tyson—that’s the girl who walked beside you coming home—my assistant. You see every group has to have a leader and an assistant from the group, and then when a band is formed there is a Director. Any one over twenty-one years of age can be a Director. After we formed our group, we had to get busy and qualify.”

“Qualify?” repeated her hostess, “that sounds big.”

“Yes, every Girl Pioneer has to qualify, that is to pass several tests to prove that she is competent to do the work. It is no end of fun training a girl to qualify, for you know she has to recite the Girl Pioneer pledge, and the Pioneer laws; she must give the names of the President and Vice-President of the United States, the name of the Governor of the State in which she lives, and then tell all about our country’s flag. She must know how to sew a button on properly,” Helen made a grimace, “to tie a square knot and to do several other things. After a girl has passed these tests, she becomes a third-class Pioneer; then after a month she can qualify for a second-class Pioneer, and finally for a first-class Pioneer. We can win merit badges, too, for proficiency in certain lines. Yes, you are right, it is a big thing to be a Girl Pioneer, for every true Pioneer’s aim is to be courageous, resourceful, and upright, under all circumstances and in all emergencies.

“You know, we have to pledge ourselves to speak the truth at all times, to be honest in all things, and to obey the Pioneer law.” Helen’s face grew serious. “Yes, and our laws mean something, too, for they stand for the doing of things that are worth while, the things that develop nobility of character, for, as Mrs. Morrow tells us, it is character that makes the great men and women of the world.

“But don’t think we are serious all the time,” she continued, her eyes brightening, “for we have heaps of fun. We take hikes; sometimes just a group go with their leader, but generally our Director takes the band. On these hikes we study woodcraft; that means we study the birds, their habits, and learn to know their songs and call-notes. We gather wild flowers, ferns, and grasses, and each girl reads up about the particular thing she finds and passes the information along. We study the trees, and the animals also by tracking their footmarks—well, to sum it all up, we study nature from growing things and living creatures.

"To read about things in a book is all right, Mrs. Morrow says, as it is helpful in identification and suggestion, but we strive to know things through personal experience. We are taught to find nature, too, in the crowded cities. That's big, isn't it?"

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"Big!" echoed Nathalie, "the word *big* isn't big enough to express it. I should say it meant—well"—she held out her arms, "the universe."

There was something so responsive in her words and attitude, although they did not exactly express what she meant to convey, that Helen, with almost boyish frankness, held out her hand, crying, "Good! let's shake. You are simply immense, Miss Page, or, in the words of our old French professor at school, 'you—haf—much com—pree—henshun!'" This was said in mimic tone with laughing eyes, a shrug of the shoulders, and with outspread hands.

"We have indoor rallies, or Pioneer circles, also, Miss Page, when our Director gives us delightful little talks on ethical culture,—only ten minutes—" she pleaded laughingly, "also on history, astronomy,—we call them our star talks,—and other instructive subjects.

"You will be surprised, perhaps, but these talks are very interesting, not at all tiresome. The girls listen with all their ears and we learn an awful lot. One reason is that Mrs. Morrow loves young girls—for you see, she isn't so very much older than we are—and she knows just how to talk to us, so that we don't feel as if we were being preached at, or having wisdom jammed down our throats. It is just dramatizing serious things through play, so as to make us remember them as well as entertaining us. Then we have spelling-contests, cooking-matches,—I call them trials by fire,—sewing-bees, and all sorts of old-fashioned things."

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"But you have outdoor sports, too, do you not?" asked her listener, who was intensely interested.

"Indeed we do, any number of them: swimming, horseback-riding, rowing, canoeing, basket-ball, tennis, dancing, stilt-walking,—we make our own stilts,—kite-flying,—and we make our own kites, too. In fact, we do just about everything that stands for healthful recreation and wholesome fun. Isn't that comprehensive enough?"

"How did you come to take the name 'Pioneer'?"

"Well, you see it was this way; as the Boy Scouts strive to imitate the chivalry and higher qualities of the knights of olden times, so we, their sister organization, endeavor to emulate the sterling qualities of the early pioneer women. They learned to be courageous, resourceful, and efficient, as the home-makers of the brave men who founded this Republic—"

"Do you mean the wives of the Puritans and Pilgrims?"

"Yes, we mean all those women, North, East, South, and West," Helen declared smilingly, "who helped their good men to build homes in the wilderness, who mothered their children with Spartan-like denial, and who—yes, who knew how to handle an old flintlock when they heard the cry of the Indian. Oh, no, I'm not originating, I am only an echo of Mrs. Morrow, who is way up on Colonial history.

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"The Pioneer Girls," she continued more seriously, "aim, by imitating the many qualities of these splendid women, to be worthy wives and mothers. Who knows?" she broke into a laugh, "the Girl Pioneers may be the mothers of men like Washington, Lincoln—O dear," she stopped suddenly, "I am talking as if I had to speed a thousand words a minute!"

"Oh, go on!" cried Nathalie, inspired by her guest's fervency, "I just love to hear you talk."

"It is very good of you to say that," declared Helen with a slight blush, "but I am almost 'at the finish,' as the boys say. But I must not forget to tell you that we love to gather around the open fire, cheer fires we call them, and tell stories. We generally try to make them stories about the pioneers, or heroic women, and sometimes we run in a story about some brave kiddie, for you know almost every one loves to hear about brave little children. Ah, that reminds me, did you ever hear about Mary Chilton? She was a real pioneer girl you know, for she came over with the Pilgrims." Helen nodded her head impressively.

"No, I have read about Lola Standish, and I believe—yes—I saw her sampler once, and I am quite up on all the points of Priscilla's courtship, but—"

"Who isn't?" replied Miss Dame, "for she was a dear. Mary Chilton was a friend of hers. Why, don't you remember she was the girl who made the bet with John Alden—slow old John—that when the little shallop struck Plymouth Rock (of course they never dreamed that they were going to make that old rock immortal) that she would jump on the rock first; and sure enough she did manage to land a second or so before John Alden."

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"Well, the Girl Pioneers aim high," declared Nathalie, "and I certainly think they must be worthwhile girls. I shall love to meet your Pioneer friends—they cheered me up—" she added, "for they made me think of the girls at school, especially Grace Tyson. Why, she is so much like my chum that it almost seemed as if I were talking to her the other day! Your friends all have such happy faces, and 'it is such a relief to see good red cheeks as made by Mother Nature,' as Mother says. Some of the girls one sees in the cities nowadays have such a made-up appearance, especially those on the avenue Saturday afternoons in New York."

"Yes, they have regular clown faces with their splashes of red, and their powdered noses," returned her neighbor laughingly. "I always feel as if I wanted to tell them they had forgotten to rub the flour off. It doesn't seem possible that any well-bred girl could think she looks nice all dabbled up in that way. But there, I am tiring you," she added hastily, "so I am going to say good-by. Oh, I came very near forgetting to ask if you would like to have the girls call on you—I mean

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the girls of our group?" she hesitated. "I think you would like them, although they may not be as fashionable as your city friends."

"Oh, but they are the kind of girls I like," protested Nathalie hurriedly, "for I do not care for girls who are nothing but fuss and feathers. Please do bring your friends, for I know I shall like them, and then, too, they may tell me more about the good times you have."

"Indeed they will," said Helen with decision; "they will be only too pleased. When shall we come, will Thursday be a good day for you?"

"Yes, indeed; I shall be here—still in this old chair I presume; I shall watch for them with great impatience, for you know," she added a little sadly, "they remind me of my schoolmates in the city. Oh, I have missed them dreadfully! Now, be sure to come—all of you!"

She rose in her chair to wave a good-by to her new friend, who, as she reached the gate, had turned and waved her hand.

Nathalie sank back in her chair with tear-dimmed eyes, for somehow that friendly salute had brought it all back—the faces of her merry comrades, and the happy care-free hours they had spent together. She swallowed hard, for Helen had waved her hand just the way the girls used to do when they came in afternoons for a chatty little visit, and then hurried away with just such a parting salute.

CHAPTER III—GIRL PIONEERS

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"Oh, I wish you would tell me something about your school life in New York," begged Helen wistfully; "I had a friend who used to go to one of the high schools. I hear they are very fine."

It was Thursday, the day the Girl Pioneers were to call on Nathalie, and Helen Dame had run over a few moments before their arrival to have a short chat with her new friend.

"Oh—I," Nathalie hesitated with rising color, "I did not go to high school. Yes, I know they are very fine, but I attended a private school kept by Madame Chemidlin."

An "oh!" escaped Helen involuntarily, as her eyes gloomed a little, but her companion plunged recklessly on.

"It is considered one of the finest schools in the city, because, well, for one thing, Madame is adorable, her father was one of the nobility, a political refugee from France, and then because the girls who attend come from the best families in New York. They were just dears—" with a sigh of regret—"Nellie Blinton, she was my chummiest chum, she's the one I told you Miss Tyson reminded me of, she has the same kind of a face as Nell, with big, dark eyes and the same gentle, ladylike way about her that my friend has.

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"Then there was Puss Davidson, she's awfully clever. She writes stories, and last year won a gold medal from St. Nicholas. She was Valedictorian of our class last Spring. You know I graduated then, but took a post-graduate course last winter and expected to enter college this fall, but now, of course, things are different." She spoke a little sadly.

Helen could not help feeling somewhat disappointed as she heard about these rich schoolmates of Nathalie's; she had taken a great liking to this girl with the daintily colored face with its rounding curves, lighted by eyes that held you captive with their frank, direct gaze. Although bright and clever-looking, this Girl Pioneer possessed no claim to beauty, for, as she ruefully commented at times, she had a nose with a knob on it. For that reason, perhaps, being free from that enviousness that characterizes so many girls, she was a beauty-lover. Too often she had made friends with girls just because they appealed to her love for the beautiful, only to realize when it was too late that good looks do not always mean pleasing traits of character. In fact, Helen was somewhat tired of being disappointed, and had vowed to her mother that she was never again going to care for a pretty girl. She was not sure that Nathalie was a real beauty, but surely, with her lovely brown eyes and the gracious little way she had, not at all self-conscious, but just real "self," she was in a fair way to become very popular with the girls.

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Her eyes clouded momentarily and something caused an unpleasant jar. No, she was not jealous of Nathalie, for she was willing to have her know and be liked by the other girls, but as she had been the first one to know her, she wanted to be her special friend. But then if she had always had so many high-toned schoolmates, perhaps she would not care to be a friend to a girl who was learning to be a wage-earner. Helen had always felt proud to think that some day she could be ranked among that class of highly regarded women, but would Nathalie think as she did?

There was something so straightforward, however, so honest, about Nathalie as she went on and told of her studies, her friends, and a few of the incidents in her school life in the big city, that Helen forgot her fears, and was compelled to believe that she would be doing her an injustice in fearing that she would choose her companions for what they had and not for what they were.

"Oh, here they come!" cried Nathalie at this moment as she caught a glimpse of a group of girls in brown uniforms coming down the street. She half rose from her chair and with sparkling eyes watched them as they came, a dozen or more, perhaps, up the steps of the veranda. In another second her eyes grew big as she saw each girl's hand placed quickly over her heart, then up to

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her forehead, and lastly held with open palm at a level with the right shoulder. It was the Girl Pioneers' salute to their leader, for Helen with a sudden straightening of the shoulders had responded to the greeting with a similar movement.

Nathalie had already stepped forward, leaning on Dick's crutch,—he had been relegated to the couch in the hall,—and was crying, as her color came and went in pink flushes, "Oh, I am so glad to see you!" extending her hand to the foremost girl, Grace Tyson. "I think it's just lovely for you all to come to see me!" nodding towards the rest of the group, with eyes that attested the cordiality of her welcome. She stopped abruptly, for the girls had broken forth into

"Hear! hear! hear! Girl Pioneer!
Come, give a cheer, G-i-r-l Pi-o-neer!"

"And a cheer for our hostess!" added Grace Tyson, lifting up her hand as she faced her companions. Before Nathalie could catch her breath there came another ringing cheer as each girl with smiling eyes shouted,

"Hear! hear! a cheer for Nathalie dear!
Girl Pi-o-neer! Girl Pi-o-neer!"

If Nathalie's color had been going and coming, it now flooded her face as she laughingly held out her hand to each one in turn, giving a soft little squeeze that made each girl vote her a comrade.

Grace and Helen now led Nathalie back to her chair, somewhat solicitous as to the sprained foot; but she laughingly assured them that she was all right. Then with animated eyes she bowed and smiled as Helen, who was spokesman for the group, began to introduce each one of the Pioneers in turn, in an offhand, half quizzing way that relieved the formality of the ceremony.

"This is Miss Jessie Ford, our literary scribe and Editor-in-chief of 'The Pioneer,' a penny newspaper issued monthly, devoted to the news and doings of the Girl Pioneers."

Jessie, a wholesome-looking girl with golden hair worn in a coronet braid, and with bright, keen eyes, shook hands pleasantly, half smiling at the words of their leader. "Yes, she is clever, our Jess, and progressive, too," went on Helen, her eyes twinkling, "which means a lot in these times." There was the suspicion of laughter in her tone.

"That she's progressive can't be denied," interposed Grace Tyson laughingly, "for when we had a Pioneer party a short time ago, Jess wasn't going to be outdone by any newspaper reporter and wrote a detailed description of each girl's costume and sent it to the 'Town Journal.' The paper appeared the afternoon of the 'come-off,' one of the girls saw the article, and suggested as a joke that we all change costumes. O dear, what a laugh we had on Jess!"

Miss Jessie, however, only smiled at all of this chaffing, as if proud of this proof of her alertness and stepped to one side.

"And this bluebird—oh, Miss Page did I tell you that each Pioneer group is named after a bird, and that ours is the Bluebird Group?" Helen had forgotten her teasing tone in her eagerness to impart this information.

"What a pretty idea," responded Nathalie, "and bluebird, the name of your group!" thinking of the nest of bluebirds she had found down in the old cedar.

Helen nodded with pleasure and then said, "This is Miss Kitty Corwin; we call her our pot-boiler—that means that Kitty always manages to keep the pot boiling not only by holding up her end of the line, but all the other ends, too, when the derelict Girl Pioneers forget to do so."

"And you might say she always carries all the pots and pans, too, when there's a hike," interposed the newcomer, with a nervous laugh. She was an awkward-looking girl about fourteen, all arms and elbows, but with a rather winsome face lighted by big, serious eyes. There was such nervous activity about her grip as she yanked Nathalie's hand like a pump-handle that that young lady had no doubts as to her surplus energy. As Kitty tried to make her escape there was a suppressed howl, and then a twitter, for alas, she had backed into one of her companions with such force that the victim almost lost her balance.

The girls, each one smiling, but with a palpitating heart as if doubtful what Helen would say when her turn came, all looked up expectantly as a tall girl, somewhat older than the others, but with a certain dash about her that added to her charm, came forward. She moved with willowy grace and had an ease of manner that accentuated the Pot-Boiler's embarrassed movements.

"Miss Page, allow me to introduce you to Miss Lillie Bell." There was a certain emphasis in Helen's tone as she presented this pretty, attractive girl, that indicated her pride in one of the most popular girls belonging to the group.

Miss Bell smiled in a self-assured manner as Helen introduced her, and then greeted Nathalie with sweet graciousness as she waited expectantly for her characterization to be given.

"Lillie is our story-teller," continued Helen with a gleam of mischief in her eyes, "a would-be thriller, for we all shiver with the creeps when she begins her yellow-journal romances. Her specialty is ghost tales, the kind that, as we sit in the dark around our cheer fire, its glare (blood-red, please note), casting weird shadows over our pallid faces—" Helen intoned in tragic burlesque, and then stopped with a laugh.

Lillie Bell, however, did not appear at all annoyed at this banter, but returned coolly, "I hope Miss Page, you will not believe all Helen says, for she dotes on teasing, but we get even with her when the chance comes." From a certain gleam in the smiling gray eyes Nathalie did not doubt

her, but as her voice was musical, and her manner impressive, bordering on the dramatic, she wished she could hear one of her thrillers.

"Observe," tantalized the spokesman as Lillie disappeared and her place was taken by a young girl who looked as if she was all blood and muscle, with ruddy cheeks, alert eyes, and the poise and bearing of one who was a frequenter of the gym.

As Helen said, "This is Miss Edith Whiton," she made an old-time curtsy, "generally dubbed the Sport, as she is the champion knee-doubler, arm-stretcher, toe-raiser, and all the rest of the ball-and-socket team."

With attempted nonchalance Edith twisted her shoulders and flashed Helen a quick glance as much as to say, "Wait, my turn is coming later!" She then stepped forward and shook Nathalie's hand, smiling pleasantly down at her with frank friendliness.

As she made her way back to her seat, a pale, studious-looking young girl with a head that looked almost top-heavy with its black braids, and who wore glasses, presented herself before Nathalie. She smiled nervously as Helen began, "Oh, this owl-like individual is Barbara Worth; she is very learned—she knows it all."

"Oh, Helen!" came in pained expostulation from the girl, as her eyes turned distressfully upon her hostess in shamed embarrassment.

"Oh, Barbara, don't mind," spoke up Lillie Bell kindly, "Helen is only in fun."

Barbara looked somewhat relieved at this brace to her injured feelings, and then stood nervously clasping and unclasping her hands together.

"Yes," went on Helen relentlessly, "we call her the Encyclopedia for short. Wait until you want to know something in a hurry, she will help you out, for she has the best heart in the world." With a little ripple of laughter Helen leaned forward and looking up at Barbara cried, "There, did I say anything so dreadful?"

Barbara smiled gratefully and then said quietly, "Yes, Miss Page, I have a fine library, it is grandfather's, and I shall—" she drew a deep breath—"always be glad to live up to my name."

There was loud clapping at this brave remark and then she was gone, but in her place stood a little lass who smiled bewitchingly at the girl in the chair, showing a coy little dimple in one cheek, and then with a slight frown waited for her executioner to behead her.

"This little damsel is Louise Gaynor," introduced Helen; "she is the Flower of the family—spelt both ways. We call her flower, because she resembles one," Louise bowed prettily with a surprised glance, "and then because she is an expert manipulator of the flour bag; she makes most edible flapjacks when we go on a hike. It is needless to say that we always have indigestion afterwards." There was a laugh at this, and then as the Flower disappeared, Helen drew to her side a diminutive girl who wore her flaxen hair in two large braids down her back. With her broad, good-natured face and cornflower blue eyes she was a miniature Gretchen.

"This is Carol Tyke—we spell it T-i-k-e, because she is a tike and the fag of the group as well." The little girl, who was about eleven, but small for her age, grinned at Nathalie and ducked her head. "She is a Junior Pioneer, not yet twelve. But we have her in training and she is taking tests daily, which doesn't give her much leisure time, does it, Tike?"

At last, much to Nathalie's relief, the introductions were over, and then she listened intently as the girls began to tell her of a hike they had taken the week before, when one of their number had found a hundred different leaf specimens.

"Yes, it was a leaf hike," said Grace. "We all have our own note-books; and make impressions from the leaves; that is, we print them in our books, and then write the date of the hike, the name of the leaf, and any other data we have gathered."

"I should think it would be very interesting," remarked her listener, as she thought of the outings she and her schoolmates used to take on Saturday mornings when they visited Bronx Park, and studied "cooped-up nature" as one of the girls used to call it, when they eyed some fierce monarch of the forest in his iron cage, or exclaimed over the beauties of some hot-house flower.

"We are going to have a wild-flower hike soon," volunteered the Tike, smiling at Nathalie in a most friendly manner. "The Sport says there are a lot of beautiful flowers in the woods near Edgemere, didn't you, Sport?"

"But I wish you would tell me something about your tests—is that what you call them?" Nathalie asked. "I should think they would be no end of fun if they mean making one do stunts, or anything in the hazing line?"

"Oh, we do not haze, or anything of that sort, for that would not be kind, and kindness is one of the laws of the Girl Pioneer," explained Grace. "By tests we mean trying to see what a girl can do that is useful, and if she can't do it, we teach her. We have to sew, cook, and know all the emergency things."

"You mean the First Aid to the Injured methods," corrected Helen; "knowing what to do to revive a person when almost drowned, how to put out a fire—"

"How to bathe and bandage a sprained foot—"

"You needn't tell me you know that," cried Nathalie with sparkling eyes, "for I know by experience," and then she told the girls what the doctor had said about Helen's skillful way of

binding her foot—in spite of that young lady’s blushes at this open praise—and how clever her mother thought the girls were for the ready way in which they had made the stretcher from their khaki skirts.

“Then we have to know how to restore a person who has fainted,” some one volunteered.

“And learn the Fireman’s Lift,” added another girl.

“Oh, let’s tell things from the beginning!” interrupted some methodical girl from the farther end of the porch.

“Oh, but I told Miss Page—” Helen stopped, for her hostess was looking at her with beseeching eyes, clearly due to the formal title.

“Won’t you please call me Nathalie?” the owner of that name ventured with a coaxing little smile.

“If you will say Helen,” replied the girl with evident delight.

The girls both laughed, shook hands on it, and then Helen continued. “Yes, I told Nathalie all about the tests for the third-class Pioneer. Well, to become a second-class Pioneer it is necessary to have been a third-class Pioneer for at least a month. Then you have to know how to cook a piece of meat properly—”

“Boil a potato as it should be done!” interrupted Lillie Bell. This was impressively said, and followed by a chime of laughter from the girls. 52

“And make a coal fire in a cooking-stove—ye stars!” ejaculated Grace, “when I made my first, I literally smoked every one in the house to a ham—but when I made my first out-of-door fire—”

“You didn’t do any better,” cried Lillie Bell irrelevantly, “for you sooted the whole bunch of us.”

“Oh, Lillie,” cried Grace in dismayed tone, “that wasn’t from making the fire, for I was the only one who made it with a single match, but it was from putting it out.”

“Now girls, don’t tell tales; for, as Mrs. Morrow says, we are all breakable and no one should cast the first stone,” called out their leader.

“Oh, the tests are all easy but the next one,” cried Edith Whiton, “that is not a cinch by any means: how to remove a cinder from the eye—”

“Or any other foreign substance!”

“We have to know all the primary colors, too,” went on Edith.

“Pshaw, any kindergarten kid knows that,” spoke the Encyclopedia, who up to this moment had taken no part in this flow of information, “but to tie a bundle properly, that means hard labor.”

“Yes, indeed,” added Jessie Ford quickly, “one has to have an awful lot of practice to do that. I worked so hard tying up bundles at home for every one in the house that Father suggested I apply for a position as bundle-wrapper at some department store. And I would have, just for a joke, if I hadn’t succeeded in making every one for whom I tied a bundle give me five cents—and I made a dollar.” Her eyes gleamed reminiscently. 53

“You have forgotten about the trees!” called out the Sport.

“Yes, we have to name three kinds of trees, three flowers and three birds.”

“Easy!” chimed the girls in unison.

“But the hardest—that was for me—” exclaimed Grace (Nathalie bent forward eagerly, for somehow she did like Grace), “was to earn or to save fifty cents and put it in the bank.” There was a general shout at this, for, as Helen explained in an aside to Nathalie, Grace was the richest girl in the Pioneer group. She had a beautiful home, her own automobile, her own allowance, and yet she was always hard up.

“She’s awfully generous, you know, and doesn’t know how to count her pennies,” she added wisely, “the way we girls do, because we have to. But she’s learning.”

But Helen’s whispered comments about her friend were not all heard by Nathalie, who suddenly stiffened, and with a quick exclamation leaned forward and stared curiously at a gray figure that was walking past the house with strained, averted eyes, as if fearful that she might see the group of merry girls on the veranda. 54

“Who is that lady all in gray?” she demanded, abruptly clutching Helen’s arm as her eyes followed the gliding figure of the strange-appearing woman whose library card she had found the day of her accident in the woods.

Helen looked up quickly in response to Nathalie’s question, but before she could answer, Kitty Corwin cried hastily, “Girls, look! there goes ‘The Mystic!’”

CHAPTER IV—NATHALIE IS ASKED TO BECOME A BLUE ROBIN 55

“The Mystic!” echoed Nathalie in mild amazement, while one or two of the group turned and

gazed curiously at the gray-shrouded figure hurrying by.

"You needn't ask me to look at her," asserted the Sport with a scowl, "after screwing up my courage as I did to ask her if we could use her terraced lawn for one of our drills; why, the glance she gave me almost froze me stiff!"

The girls laughed at Edith's tragic tone, while Lillie Bell retorted teasingly, "Well, she must be a chill-raiser, Edith, if she could freeze the marrow in your spine."

"Girls, you should not speak as you do about Mrs. Van Vorst," admonished Helen, "you know Mrs. Morrow says that she has suffered a great sorrow."

"Pshaw, we all know that," returned the Sport unfeelingly, "but that is no reason why she should make every one else suffer, too."

"Granted," rejoined Helen, "but she has grown to look at things through morbid eyes."

"I should think the gray gown she wears would make any one morbid," suggested Lillie. "But what is the use of discussing her? I believe she is just a crank with a fad," she added.

"Who is she, and why does she go about in that queer gray gown?" inquired Nathalie, insistently.

"She is Mrs. Van Vorst, the richest woman in town," explained Grace. "She lives in that big, gray house surrounded by the stone wall. Haven't you noticed it? It's on Willow Street, up on the hill. You must have seen it."

"Oh, the big house with the beautiful Dutch garden," exclaimed Nathalie, "and the queer little house at one side of it?"

"Yes," nodded Helen, "but that queer little house is an ancient landmark—a Dutch homestead—built on a grant of land given by Governor Stuyvesant to Janse Van Vorst way back in 1667. The Van Vorsts, or their descendants, have lived on that place for hundreds of years. Billy Van Vorst, the last of the line, married Betty Walton, a rich New York girl. He died some years ago, and—well, I don't know the exact story—" Helen hesitated, "but they say Mrs. Van Vorst has an awful temper—oh, I hate to tell it—and then it may not be true."

"But it is true," asserted Jessie Ford, "for Mother used to know Billy and Betty, too. She said shortly after Billy's death Mrs. Van Vorst became angry with her little child—I don't know whether it is a boy or girl—and—"

"Whatever it is," broke in Edith, "it is all distorted and twisted, looks like a monster, for I saw it one day in the garden, the day I was there. It is always muffled up so people can't see it."

"Well, anyway," went on Jessie, "Mrs. Van Vorst got into a temper with the child and shut it up in a dark room, and then went off to a reception or something, and forgot all about it."

"Oh, how could she?" ejaculated Nathalie with a shudder.

"Well, when she came home and remembered it—it wasn't in the room—"

"And they found it all in a heap on the pavement in the yard," again interrupted Edith, anxious to forestall the climax; "I have heard all about it, they say it was an awful sight."

"Dead?" cried Nathalie in a shocked tone.

"No, not dead," returned Jessie, "but it might as well have been. It had become frightened in the dark, said some one was chasing it, and in trying to escape climbed out on a shed and fell to the ground. Mrs. Van Vorst was ill for a long time, almost lost her mind. Then she gave up society and came down here and built this big house beside the homestead. She has lived in it ever since, but keeps to herself; she doesn't seem to want to know people."

"Oh, I don't wonder she mourns in gray then!" exclaimed Nathalie. "I feel sorry for her!"

"And so do I!" chimed Helen squeezing her new friend's hand responsively, "for she will have to suffer remorse all her life. Mother says she is to be pitied."

"Well, I should have more pity for her if she would let us have the lawn back of her house for our flag drill," remarked Lillie Bell, "or for one of our demonstrations."

"You can be sure I'll never ask her again," declared the Sport, vehemently; "I believe she hates us just because we are young, and can enjoy life when her child can't."

At this moment Grace arose and handed Nathalie a peculiar-looking envelope of rough brown paper. "No, it won't explode," she giggled, as she saw Nathalie handling the quaintly-folded envelope rather gingerly.

"You needn't think it is the butcher's bill, either," laughed Helen, "for it isn't. It is simply an invitation to one of our group meetings, or Pioneer Rallies, as we call them. We always use that kind of paper when we invite guests, for it was the kind used in pioneer times."

Reassured by Helen's explanation, Nathalie opened the envelope, noting the old-style script printed by hand in scarlet letters, evidently the work of one of the Pioneers. Then she slowly read aloud:

"They knew they were Pilgrims, and looked not much on those things, but lifted up their eyes to Heaven, their dearest country, and quieted their spirits within."

Ye presence of ye young maide, Mistress Nathalie Page is enjoined to appear on ye 23rd of this month at ye Common House (Seton Hall) on ye corner of ye cross roades to Bergen Town, to join with ye maides of ye colony of Westport in a seemly diversion and Mayflower Feast.

Postscript: Kindly come apparelled in ye meeting-house cloathes and behave as a young maide should so do.

From the Girl Pioneers of America, ye Many-greated-grand-daughters of ye Mothers of ye Pilgrim Colony, who came to this new world in ye good sloop MAYFLOWER in 1620.

The expression of wonderment in Nathalie's eyes changed to one of amusement as she laughingly cried, "My, but you are the real article!"

"Yes, the scribe did that," said Helen proudly; "I think it ought to be put in a glass case."

"Thank you!" promptly returned Jessie; "I accept your praise, but suggest, as industry is one of the laws of the Pioneers, that I should receive a special badge of merit, for if you could have seen me poking into those musty documents at the library to get the thing right, you would say I deserved it."

"But what does it mean?" demanded Nathalie curiously. "What have you to do with the Pilgrims?"

"Why, it means," explained Helen, "that we girls, to freshen up our minds on pioneer history, so that we may learn more about the women we emulate, name each of our rallies after some one group of pioneers, or some special pioneer woman, in memory of their service to us. Then we all talk about them, each one telling what she knows."

"Or what she doesn't know, generally," broke in Lillie, dryly.

"I guess you are about right, Lillie," added Grace, "for we are awfully rusty on pioneer history. It always seemed so stupid at school, but we have learned a lot since we started naming our rallies after pioneer things, and trying to see what we can cram. Why, girls," she cried suddenly, as if impelled by inspiration to tell the latest thing she had learned, "do you know that there were almost thirty children who came over with the Pilgrims in the *Mayflower*?"

"Well, I for one did not," remarked Jessie candidly; "I didn't know that the Pilgrims had any children; supposed they were just a lot of blue-nosed men who wore high ruffs and tall, round hats, and who went about with long faces, telling people they would go to the devil if they dared to smile."

"There, Jess," broke in Lillie Bell mischievously, "you needn't get profane over it."

"Of course they were grim and forbidding-looking," supplemented Kitty, "and—"

"And sanctimonious," added some one, "with their blue laws."

"Girls, you are all wrong," spoke up Helen, with a sort of call-you-down air, "it was the Connecticut elders who made the blue laws. The Pilgrims were sincere, earnest men. Remember what Mrs. Morrow said about them?"

There was a sudden silence for a moment, and then a faint voice was heard from the other end of the veranda. Every one pricked up her ears and craned her neck to see who was speaking.

"Ye Stars! it is the Flower of the Family," whispered Edith; "what has come to her?"

The sweet, low voice went on slowly, perhaps a trifle unsteadily, "God sifted a whole nation that he might send choice grain into the wilderness."

"Hooray for the Flower!" shouted some one, and then of course they all had to clap, while the editor-in-chief of the "Pioneer," who was sitting next to the speaker, jotted down this little saying with the air of an expert reporter.

"Now, do you suppose," went on Helen, "that these picked men—"

"This choice grain," corrected the Sport softly, who was trying hard to create a laugh.

"Edith, please be serious," admonished Helen, looking at that young lady with reproving eyes, but she was sitting with folded arms and eyes cast down, the picture of innocent and bland decorum.

Helen, seeing she had subdued the Sport for the time being, continued: "Yes, this choice grain was composed of not only sincere and courageous men, as we know, but the most tolerant of any of the first settlers in this country. But, of course, in serious, solemn times one is not apt to be funny. They were not really sanctimonious, they just got that name because they tried to live up to their convictions."

"But they got it!" retorted the Sport, who was always hard to convince in an argument. Helen flashed her eyes at her in rebuke, and then, turning toward Nathalie, said, "We are not only going to tell what we have learned about the Pilgrims at the rally, but we are to end with a Mayflower Feast. We do not expect to eat the things the colonists did, of course, but the table is to be decorated with May-flowers—that is with all the flowers that grow in May—so you see, it will really be a May-flower Feast."

"The Boy Scouts are going to pick the flowers for us!" chimed the Tike, her good-natured face beaming good-fellowship at Nathalie.

"Dr. Homer—he is Mrs. Morrow's brother—" supplemented Grace, "is the Scout Master of the Eagle Patrol, and as he is very anxious to make the boys chivalrous, he likes to have them help us all they can."

"But we are to have a great big entertainment," exclaimed Carol importantly, "very soon, and we're to sell tickets so that we can make money for the Camping Fund."

"And we have such a bright idea for getting up something novel in the way of entertainments," spoke up Helen interestedly. "Each girl is to put on her thinking-cap and get to work on an idea; it has to be original, nothing borrowed, or that has been used before, and then turn it in to our Director in proper shape to be carried out. All of these novel ideas are to be kept secret until we have had all of the entertainments, and then we shall vote for the one we think the best. The winners will receive merit badges for their efficiency."

"Oh, that will be great!" cried Nathalie, "but tell me, where are you going camping?" she questioned animatedly, for her thoughts had instantly reverted to a summer or so before when she and a party of school girls had camped up in the woods of Maine.

"We don't know yet," was Helen's practical rejoinder, "for we have got to know how much money we shall have to spend. But come, girls, be serious and tell Nathalie some of our sports and activities. We want to show her that we can do things worth while, you know."

"Oh, get Lillie Bell to tell us one of her stories!" cried the Sport, who was a warm admirer of the story-teller.

"Oh, I can't think of any now!" replied Lillie lazily. And then as a chorus of voices seconded this plea, she cried, "Really girls, I can't. I was up half the night studying for exam. But," her face brightened, "I will tell you about the picked chicken if you like. As it has something to do with our pioneer law, it will come in all right."

"Oh, yes, do!" pleaded her hostess, who had been wishing that she might hear one of the story-teller's thrillers.

"It isn't a blood-curdler this time, Miss Page," apologized Lillie, "so I cannot give you an exhibition of my reputed talent as a fictionizer. It is simply that Mother had a headache, Father was going to bring home a swell friend to dine with us, and as it happened, the butcher sent a feathered fowl, and our little Dutch maid was ill."

"Oh, it was maddening," she sighed in dolorous reminiscence, "but there was no way out of it, for we had to have that chick for dinner. So I set to work; some people say that when you try to do right everything rises up against you. So it proved to me, but I remembered our Pioneer motto, 'I Can,' and glued myself to that job. Verily, I thought that chicken must be a relative to the goose that laid the golden egg, for every feather I pulled, a dozen at least came to the funeral. But I won out, and went to bed with a clear conscience, and that fowl—inside of me!"

"Hooray for the Pioneer laws!" called several voices hilariously, and then at one and the same time, in their eagerness to give proof of well-doing, each one started to relate some personal experience. The effect of several story-tellers spinning yarns at the same time was so ludicrously funny that all the stories ended in merry laughter.

"Oh, let's vary the entertainment," suggested Grace, "and sing our Pioneer song for Miss Page."

In another moment the fresh young voices, accompanied by a swing of heads and a tap of feet, were singing, to the tune of "Oh, Maryland, My Maryland":

"We laugh, we sing, we jump, we run,
We're Pioneers, Girl Pioneers!
We're always having lots of fun;
We're Pioneers, Girl Pioneers!
The wild birds answer to our call,
These feathered friends in trees so tall;
We learn to know them one and all.
We're Pioneers, Girl Pioneers!"

Refrain.

We're Pioneers, Girl Pioneers!
We're Pioneers, Girl Pioneers!
We will be brave, and kind, and true;
We're Pioneers, Girl Pioneers!"

Nathalie, who was enjoying this musical treat immensely, and longed to join in, suddenly gave a start. She had heard a familiar hand strike the keyboard of the piano, and then start in with the tune the girls were singing, while a clear, high, soprano voice—one that the girl had never heard before—took up the air, and in a moment was leading the girls in their song, and as though accustomed to do it.

She saw one or two of the girls smile at another in a mysterious way, and began to wonder what it all meant. As the last verse came to a close, and there were three, Mrs. Page stepped through the low French window from the living-room on the veranda, followed by a figure in white and Dick, who was hobbling along on a broom turned upside down.

There was a silent moment, and then the Girl Pioneers had jumped to their feet and were saluting the lady in white, for it was Mrs. Morrow, their Director. No, they did not touch their shoulders

as in the salute to Helen, their group leader, but the forehead, in military salute.

Mrs. Morrow returned the salute, and then, as the girls broke into their Pioneer yell, came over to Nathalie without waiting for an introduction. But the young hostess had risen to her feet and was standing with outstretched hand.

"Oh, my dear! you must sit down, or you may strain your foot!" cried Mrs. Morrow anxiously, as she caught Nathalie's hand in hers and smiled down at her with luminous gray eyes, the kind that seem to radiate hearty good-will and cheer. Her greeting was so gracious, and there was such an undefinable charm in the bright face of the young matron, that Nathalie surrendered immediately.

"I did not mean to intrude on your sport, girls," cried Mrs. Morrow in a moment, turning toward the group, still holding Nathalie's hand, "but I was as anxious as you all were to meet our new neighbor."

The color deepened in Nathalie's cheeks as she cried in her impulsive way, "Oh, but you are not intruding at all, Mrs. Morrow; I am more than anxious to meet you, for—" she stopped a moment, and then flashed, "the girls all say you are lovely!"

There was a wild cheer at this, whereupon, the gray-blue eyes smiled at Nathalie again. Then turning, the lady nodded to the compliments so boisterously expressed by the girls. For a few moments it seemed as if each girl was trying to outdo every other girl as to who should win in this race for tongue speed, as they crowded around Nathalie and their Director.

Presently Nathalie looked up and laughed, for Dick did look so funny as he hobbled from one girl to another—he had always been a lover of girls—on his broomstick. As if divining why she laughed, Dick, who had heard her looked up. "Hello there, Blue Robin!" he cried teasingly, "what have you got to say about it?"

"Blue Robin?" repeated Mrs. Morrow in puzzled query, turning towards Nathalie, "why does he call you Blue Robin? That is the name of this group."

"But I thought the name of this group was Bluebird," answered Nathalie in some surprise.

"So it is," returned Mrs. Morrow, "but you know, bluebird means blue robin, too."

"There, Dick! I was not so far wrong after all!" cried Nathalie triumphantly, looking at her brother with convincing eyes. Then she turned and quickly told how she had found the bluebird's nest in the old cedar, how she had called the birdlings blue robins, and how Dick—who was a terrible tease—had plagued her about it ever since.

"But please inform me, Mrs. Morrow," now spoke that young man, "why you say bluebirds are blue robins?"

"Why, you know, the first bird seen by the Pilgrims when they came to this land was a bluebird—our earliest songster. As it resembled the robin so much, they wrote home to their friends and told of the beautiful blue robins they had seen in the new land."

"Oh, Nathalie," cried Helen with joy in her voice, "do you know the finding of the blue robin's nest surely must be an omen for good! Keep the name your brother has given you, and become a real bluebird, or blue robin, by joining our group and becoming a Pioneer!"

"Oh, yes, Miss Page, do!" came quickly to Nathalie's ears; "we should love to have you one of us."

"I'll coach you in the tests!" sang out Helen, who was ready to dance with pleasure to think that there was a prospect of her new friend becoming a Pioneer.

"And I'll help!" added Grace. "And so will I," "And I!" chimed several girlish voices.

Nathalie sat in embarrassed silence, hardly knowing what to answer to these many cordial invitations to join, and offers to help her do the tests. "I would love to be one of you," she spoke hesitatingly, "but I am not at all clever at doing things, for I can't sew, or cook, or do anything useful at all!" The girl's voice was almost plaintive.

"Ah, you are just the one we want, then," was Mrs. Morrow's quick reply; "we want girls who don't know how, so we can teach and train them in the right way."

There was loud applause at this remark, and then as the hubbub subsided somewhat, Mrs. Morrow held up her hand for silence. "Now, girls," she said, "give Miss Page time to think. Yes, we should be overjoyed to have you join the group, Miss Page, for later, in the summer, one of our bluebirds is to emigrate South for the winter, and we should love to have you take her place. I agree with Helen that the finding of the bluebird's nest in the old cedar meant that you were to become a true bluebird, or Blue Robin, as we shall have to call you."

Nathalie looked at Dick, and then at her mother. Mrs. Page was smiling at her so reassuringly that Nathalie understood that she gave her consent, and joyfully signified her willingness to become a Pioneer. With a bob of her head at Dick she declared, that she would become one if only to show her brother that there was such a thing as a Blue Robin.

Mrs. Morrow then explained that they had selected the bluebird as their mascot not only because it was the bird of pioneer days, but because the word blue means true, and Girl Pioneers were to be true in word, and thought, and deed. And then as a bird means swift, they were to be swift to the truth.

"The bluebird is also noted for its cheerfulness," she continued. "The Pioneers are to be cheerful.

It is a loyal bird; the Pioneers are to be loyal to one another, to their pledges and laws, and to every one and to all things that are right, good, and pure. The bird is also very gentle, and we want the Pioneers to cultivate kindness and gentleness. Flower," she called suddenly, "sing us that pretty little bluebird song you know."

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In compliance with this request the Flower sang, in her sweet soprano, a funny little song about a bluebird courting his lady love. Each verse ended with the call-note, "Tru-al-lee," which the girls caught up as a refrain and sang with sweet, low tones, the Flower's bird-like trill rising high above the others.

CHAPTER V—THE GRAY STONE HOUSE

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"Do you know, Helen," exclaimed Nathalie, looking at her friend with reminiscent eyes, "that it is only three weeks since I met you, but it seems like three months."

"That is because you have been on probation for a Pioneer," retorted Helen smilingly, "and are beginning to take life more seriously."

"Not very seriously, I am afraid," lamented Nathalie, "judging from the bungle I made in trying to learn that square knot."

"Oh, you will learn," encouraged Helen, "but I must be off, for I have some typing to do for tomorrow." Yes, Helen's new friend knew that she was learning to be a stenographer. When that little fact had been divulged in the natural course of events, Nathalie had listened with great interest to Helen's declaration of her life purpose—to be independent—not only for the pleasure that independence would bring to her, but because she wanted to earn money so that she could give her mother little comforts and luxuries that Mrs. Dame had been denied because her husband's income was limited.

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Instead of scorning her, as the girl had feared, Nathalie had wished her great success, apparently appreciating the unselfish motive that actuated her, while lamenting that she herself was not as clever.

"O dear," she had impulsively declared, "I want to earn money, too; oh, if I only had a purpose in life! I do not want to be a drone." And then on the impulse of the moment she had confided to Helen her many disappointments, and how anxious they all were about her brother Dick, fearful that he might never recover the use of his leg. To Helen it had seemed that since these mutual confidences a closer friendship had grown up between them, much to that young lady's joy.

She had just finished hearing Nathalie recite the Pioneer Pledge and laws, give the names of the Presidential party, as Nathalie called them, adding the name of the governor of the State in which she lived, describe the United States flag, sew a button on—as it should be done, she had declared with solemn unction—and then exhibit her skill at tying a square knot.

"After you become a Bluebird at the Pilgrim Rally to-morrow, I shall begin to drill you in the tests necessary to make you a Second-Class Pioneer," Helen had declared when the lesson was over and she began to gather up her sewing materials.

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"Oh, will you?" cried Nathalie, "but when can I become one?"

"In a month," was the reply, "if you pass the tests; but there, I shall never get my work done if I stand here and talk," and Helen started for the steps.

"Yes, and I am in a hurry to hear what Dr. Morrow says about Dick's knee," returned Nathalie as she followed her friend to the edge of the veranda. "You know he was in this morning to examine it; I am so anxious to hear what he had to say."

"How did your brother injure his knee?" asked Helen as she paused at the foot of the steps, "I have often wanted to ask."

"Why, he slipped on the ice just two days after Father's death," rejoined Nathalie, her eyes darkening sorrowfully. "The New York physician said it was only sprained ligaments and would be all right soon. But he has been growing worse—it pains him dreadfully sometimes—oh, you don't know how worried we are—" her voice quavered, "suppose he should be lame for life!"

"Oh, don't get nervous over it," advised Helen cheerfully, "but hurry in and see what Dr. Morrow said. To be sure he is only a one-horse-town doctor, but it is claimed that he is an expert surgeon," and then with a smile and a wave of her hand she hastened toward the gate.

Nathalie watched her friend with brightening eyes as she hurried across the lawn. Somehow the girl's companionship had revived her drooping spirits; the many little chats they had had about the Pioneers and the tests, coupled with the anticipation of becoming one, had in a measure brightened her life. To be sure, they could never take the place of her friends of the city, but might perhaps dull the longing for the things of the past and the desires that at times threatened to overwhelm her. She realized that she was beginning to take a keener interest in her surroundings, and felt that it was all owing to the Pioneers.

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"Nathalie, I am here—in the sitting-room!" called her mother's voice faintly a few moments later as she heard the girl's step in the hall. An apprehensive pang seized Nathalie's heart as she flew

to her mother's side.

"What did the doctor say, Mumsie?" she demanded anxiously. "Will Dick be lame?"

"I hope not, Nathalie, but there will have to be an operation—" her mother's voice sank to a whisper, "and oh, it will cost us several hundred dollars." Here Mrs. Page broke down, and burying her face on her daughter's shoulder wept silently. The girl gently patted the gray-streaked head as she hugged the slender form closely, but with intuitive divination she let her have her cry out, although she was seething with impatience, for she knew it would prove a relief to the mother heart.

"It is all right, I am just a coward." Mrs. Page choked a moment, then imprinted a wet kiss on the rounded cheek so close to her own as she felt the comfort of her unspoken sympathy. "I am sure Dick will be all right in time—but I am so worried—I have had bad news, too. It does seem as if misfortunes never come singly, as they claim," she said, thrusting a crumpled sheet of paper into her daughter's hand. 76

The girl's eyes swept the type-written page, once, twice, then in a tense tone she demanded, "Oh, Mother, do you mean that the Portland cement bonds are in danger—why, I thought—"

"They are to stop paying interest while the company is being reorganized; something has gone wrong. I was afraid of it, as they say cement is being sold at a very low figure."

"But perhaps it will only be for a time, you are crossing your bridges before you get there as Father used to say," Nathalie replied with attempted cheerfulness, "but did you not say that they were first mortgage bonds?"

"Yes, but child, we have got to live," exclaimed her mother irritably; "that money, the interest, is part of my income, and it is little enough—expenses are so heavy. And where the money will come for Dick's operation I am sure I don't know—but there, don't worry—it will be all right in time, I know." She sank back in her chair and dabbed her reddened eyelids with her moist handkerchief. 77

"But, Mumsie, tell me, why is it necessary for Dick to have an operation?" questioned Nathalie insistently with anxious eyes.

"The doctor says there is a bone in his leg infected. It will have to be removed, and a new bone put in."

"A new bone put in!" ejaculated Nathalie, "why—"

"Yes, it is something new in surgery," replied her mother. "Dr. Morrow says thousands of cripples have been made well by this new method of treating cases like Dick's. He says—" a long sigh—"if Dick does not have an operation, he will probably be lame, if he is ever able to walk at all." The tears began to glisten in Mrs. Page's eyes again, as Nathalie, with a sudden sharp realization what this would mean for Dick and all of them, turned and rushed from the room with the dread that if she remained a moment longer she too would fall to weeping.

She hastened up the attic stairs to her den; she wanted time to think. Oh, suppose there should be no money for the operation, and Dick should be lame all the rest of his life, Dick, who had always been so well and robust, and who for his athletic prowess had won so many silver cups and medals! She threw herself into the low rocker, and leaning her head on her desk began to cry softly; she did not want Mother to hear. 78

Oh, why did they have so much trouble? How hard it was to lose her father, her beautiful home and friends, to give up college, to have to live in that poky old town—even the Pioneers could not compensate for that—and then to have Dick lame because they had no money! Nathalie wept on in woeful lamentation, feeling with the untriedness of youth that she was a great martyr. Did not God's world owe her happiness? Was it not sinning against her in denying her right to its joys?

But even sorrow has its limit, and gradually her sobs died away to a shiver, as her head dropped wearily on the back of her chair. Oh, if she were not so helpless, if she could only earn money like Helen! But what could she do? She couldn't sew, she had no musical ability—like Lucille! A Bob White whistle, followed by a "Tru-al-lee!" beneath her window reminded her that she had promised to take a walk with Grace Tyson.

Yes, Nathalie knew that "Tru-al-lee!" for that young lady was the only Pioneer who could so successfully imitate that little bird's sweet trill. She jumped up quickly, and then with the buoyancy of youth cast all her dismal forebodings skyward and hurried down to the lower floor.

"I'll be down in a moment," she called out to Grace, who had just entered the hall and was chatting with Dick, who had been reading on the couch. She flew into the bath-room, scrubbed her face vigorously a moment, and then flying into her room grabbed her hat from its peg in the closet, and then hastened down the stairs humming blithely a new ragtime song as she went. 79

"I want to say good-by to Mother," she exclaimed as she nodded to Grace and hurried into the sitting-room. But when she saw the big pile of mending on the table in front of Mrs. Page, a sudden guilty pang assailed her.

"Oh, Mumsie," she cried, "don't you do that mending. I will do it when I come back. I meant to do it yesterday," she excused herself lamely, "but I forgot all about it."

"Never mind, daughter, perhaps it will keep me from worrying," was the reply; "as 'tis said, there is nothing like work to keep up one's spirits."

"Oh, Mumsie," the girl cried impulsively, rubbing her hands caressingly over her mother's cheek, "don't let's worry any more. We're just silly to cry over what may not happen," and then she added hopefully, "I'm sure things will come out all right."

Mrs. Page's eyes filled as she bent forward and kissed her would-be-comforter. "Yes, we are silly, no doubt," she smiled through her tears, "to waste time and strength worrying over what, after all, may not happen."

"But, Mother," suddenly questioned the girl with uneasy eyes, "do—do you think I ought to become a Pioneer?"

"Why not, Nathalie?" inquired Mrs. Page in surprise. "Perhaps it will teach you some of the many things you should know, for if we are to be poor, you may have to earn your own living. Resourcefulness, courage, those will be the things—" her mother's voice ceased abruptly.

Nathalie remained silent; there was a note in her mother's voice that seemed like reproof. A sudden depression seized her again as it came to her with renewed force how helpless she was, what things Helen did to help her mother, and the many useful things the Pioneer girls—plain girls, too, who had never had the advantages that she had had—could do.

But mentally pushing these reproachful thoughts aside with the rebellious feeling that she had never been brought up to do these things, that she had been born a lady, she stooped and kissed her mother hastily and hurriedly joined Grace on the veranda.

"Where shall we walk?" she asked that young girl, as they passed down the street. She glanced up at the blue sky, where snowy clouds drifted like rudderless ships at sea.

"Oh, I forgot to tell you, but Mrs. Morrow has asked me to deliver a note to 'The Mystic.'"

"'The Mystic?'" echoed Nathalie in doubting amazement, "why I thought she had never had anything to do—"

"To do with the people of the town," finished Grace. "Well, she doesn't as a rule, but she is one of Dr. Morrow's patients and had the grace to return Mrs. Morrow's call. I hate to go, as I know she dislikes young people, but of course I could not say no to Mrs. Morrow, and then, too, I rather think she is writing to ask her if we could have her lawn for one of our demonstrations. We had a lovely idea for a May-Day celebration, but we had to give it up, as we had no place to hold it."

"What were you going to have?" inquired Nathalie, as the two girls turned up the hill leading to the big gray house enclosed in its barrier of gray wall.

"We were going to get some ox carts and decorate them with Mayflowers, and parade to the grounds. There we were to choose a queen and dance around the May-pole in welcome to the goddess of spring. Fred was to be Robin Hood—O dear," she suddenly ejaculated with a dismayed face, "I do believe I left the note at home. What a ninny I am! Why, I pinned it to the cushion so I wouldn't forget it and then walked straight off and left it."

The girls stared blankly at one another a moment and then Grace cried, "Come, we might as well go back for it; do you mind? It is only a few blocks out of our way."

On receiving Nathalie's assent she added contentedly, "I'll get Dorcas to make us some lemonade to cool us off, and—why, I can show you my Pioneer room!"

"Oh, I should just love to see it!" enthused Nathalie; "Helen told me about it. She said she was going to suggest that the groups of the Pioneer band have a Pioneer room."

"Isn't it old-timey?" she mused a half hour later, as Grace ushered her into a low-ceiled room whose walls were flauntingly gay with a paper of many-colored tulips, which, Grace proudly admitted, was decidedly Dutch and for that reason had been selected.

Nathalie's keen eyes were lured to the photographs, water-colors, etchings, and cuts from magazines, all representative of pioneer days, that peeped from between the gorgeous rows of tulips. An etching of New Amsterdam dated 1650, with rows of one story houses, with their gable ends notched like steps, and weather vanes surmounted with grotesque designs of horses, lions, and geese, proved a great contrast in its quaint simplicity to the New York of to-day.

Her eyes swept from this pictured history to the four-poster with its dimity valance, and then on to the oval dressing table, resplendent with silver candle-sticks, snuffers, and a curious little Dutch lamp with a funny mite of a tinder-box by its side.

"But that clock is a dear!" she murmured as her gaze lingered admiringly upon a tall grandfather's clock in the corner, which returned her glance with such old-time solemnity on its ivory-tinted face that Nathalie's brain became a movie screen, one scene after another presenting themselves to her vivid imagination.

"Father gave that clock to me last birthday," informed Grace with pride; "it belonged to the Very Reverend Henricus Van Twiller, one of my forebears. See, there's his picture over the mantel," pointing to a seamed and dingy-looking canvass of said forebear, who looked down at them with stolid complacency.

"Yes, it is very old," continued Grace, "some unimaginative relative of Papa was going to chop it up with Georgie's little hatchet, but Father rescued it just in time. But you must look at the spinning-wheel. Grandmother gave it to me for being a thief."

"Yes," she rattled on, "I stole a satin bow from her old wedding gown for a souvenir, and when she discovered what I had done, the old dear not only forgave me, but added this spinning-wheel

to my collection of things ancient. See, here is the bow on the distaff. But come, let's go down and have the lemonade, I'm dying for a cooling drink."

As the two girls sat sipping the beverage, Grace suddenly sprang up crying, "Oh, there's Fred! I want you to meet him!" She began to wave and call frantically in the direction of the lawn, where a tall, well-formed youth was striding, nonchalantly swinging his tennis-racket.

84

"Oh, I say, kid, what do you want? I'm in a hurry!" came in response a moment later, as the youth stopped and eyed his sister impatiently, vigorously mopping his face, for the day was warm.

But as he caught sight of Nathalie, his excuses suddenly ceased, and with a few strides he reached the veranda and was eyeing the new girl's health-flushed face and sparkling brown eyes with much favor. After a hearty shake of the hand in answer to his sister's introduction, he dropped into a chair by Nathalie's side, and soon they were all chatting and laughing merrily as Fred told of some Scout adventure that had happened on their last hike.

"But you had an adventure, too, did you not?" he asked suddenly, looking at the young girl by his side with a glint of mischief in his eyes, "the day you were rescued by the Pioneers?"

"Oh, did you hear about that?" Nathalie cried, her face taking on a deeper tinge of pink. She had always felt the least mite ashamed of that mishap.

"Yes, and how about the blue robins?" he continued in a quizzing tone.

"Oh, Grace," exclaimed Nathalie, "you have been telling tales!" and then with a laugh, she told of finding the bluebird's nest, excusing her ignorance by the plea that she was a city-bred girl.

The conversation soon drifted to Boy Scouts, Fred being a Patrol Leader, and greatly interested in the organization. Finding that Nathalie had had some difficulty in learning knot-tying, he kindly volunteered to give her a lesson in that intricate art. His pupil proved an apt scholar, as it was not long before she had mastered the weaver's, the overhand, the reef, and had gained a fair insight into several other knots. Before the lesson had ended Fred had asked if he might not come up some evening with Grace, and give her another lesson and meet her brother Dick.

85

Nathalie's face dimpled; she hastened to assure him that she would be pleased to welcome them at the house, and that she knew her brother would be more than delighted to know a Westport lad. And then she told him all about her brother's misfortune, and how depressed he grew at times without his chums to drop in and cheer him.

The clock had just struck four when the girls, escorted by Fred, who claimed he was going their way, neared the high stone wall overtopped with gray turrets and nodding trees that looked as if they yearned to leap beyond their barrier.

"Wasn't it a queer idea to build a beautiful house like this and then fence it in like some old monastery?" questioned Grace. "See, here's a bell in the stone gate, the way they used to have it in olden times."

"Ugh! I hate to go in—the place gives me the creeps!" she shivered nervously. "Oh, Fred, do come in with us, we shall not be long."

86

Fred took out his watch, and finding that he was not hurried for time yielded to his sister's entreaties and rang the bell. Presently the door was opened by a stern-looking man in overalls, evidently a gardener.

He frowned unpleasantly when the girls asked to see Mrs. Van Vorst, but when Grace produced her note and said she had been sent by Dr. Morrow's wife, he reluctantly held the gate open for them to enter.

Nathalie gazed eagerly down the garden path, with its old-time hedge and tall pines that swayed gently to the rhythm of the May breezes, leading to the handsome modern structure at the end. It was colonial in design, with low French windows and overhanging Juliet balconies here and there. A long veranda ran across the front, with high white pillars, and a porte-cochère.

"This is the old Dutch shack," remarked Fred irreverently a moment or so later, as they stood in front of the weather-beaten landmark that clung like some ugly parasite to the stately mansion which towered above it.

Nathalie's eyes were awe-struck as her glance traveled over the sloping roof with its red chimneys, where quaint dormer windows stood forth like thrust out heads from its gray shingles. The long, low porch, only a foot from the ground, was almost lost to view behind the vines of honeysuckle and rambling roses screening the trellis. Bushes of hollyhocks, white peonies and many old-time posies grew in a riotous hedge around it.

87

Fred showed her the hatchet-scarred door-lintel, a memento of savage ferocity, and told of the little Dutch maiden who, from a small window above the door, fired on a group of redskins as they hammered against it, killing two. In the rear of the homestead he pointed out a grass-grown mound, where it was claimed an outhouse once stood, leading to an underground passageway, where the settlers at times took refuge when hearing the fiendish war-whoop.

As the girls nervously ascended the low steps leading to the broad-floored veranda of the gray house, Fred turned back towards the gate, promising to wait outside for them.

As the great door swung open in answer to their ring, and the butler's impassive face stared stonily at them, the girls were tempted to turn tail and follow Fred as he went whistling down the path. But Grace conquered the inclination, and with assumed boldness asked for Mrs. Van Vorst.

For an instant Nathalie thought the man was going to shut the door in their faces, but when Grace held out the note for confirmation of her words his impassivity relaxed somewhat, and with stiff formality he asked them to walk in. With hushed breath they gazed curiously about the hall, while a stag's head above a quaintly-carved table eyed them glassily.

The rusty swords, the flint-locks, and many other curios that decorated the casement, beneath faded canvasses of ancient dames and sires, possessed a weird charm for the girl. She was particularly beguiled by the wide oaken staircase with its daintily carved balustrade that rose spiral-like to the floor above, and to her imaginative ear there came the swish of a brocade gown as some haughty fair one, kin to the canvassed beauties on the tapestried walls, came with tap of dainty heel down the broad stairway.

But no romantic thing occurred as the butler, still retaining his sphinx-like mask, ushered them into a little reception room opening from the hall fitted up to simulate a Chinese pagoda. The girls seated themselves on two teakwood chairs and stared silently at the many curios that gleamed from cabinet and screen, each betraying some eccentric custom of the land of the yellow peril.

"O dear, I feel as if I were a beggar!" observed Grace with an apprehensive shiver. "Ugh, I should hate to have that grim-looking man come back and tell me my company wasn't wanted."

Nathalie burst into a giggle, which was quickly suppressed in sympathetic recognition of her companion's mood. Her eye was caught by a huge mandarin who grinned at her with a hideous leer, and she shivered, half wondering if some of the many evil spirits believed to inhabit China were not hidden behind his wrinkled brown skin, and were looking at her through his bead-like eyes, trying to hypnotize her with his sinister glare. Surely those glittering, shiny specks of eyes did move—oh, what was that? She jumped to her feet, crouching all of a heap in abject fear as she stared with horror-stricken eyes at the mandarin, as if that weird, shrill scream that had suddenly broken the grim silence had come from his mummy-like lips.

"Oh, what is it?" whispered Grace in a hoarse whisper, as she stared in paralyzed appeal at Nathalie.

Before Nathalie could answer another cry, more piercing and, if could be, more blood-curdling than the first, came echoing down the hall, followed by a demoniacal laugh which assured Nathalie that the terror was something more human than an old Chinese idol. Grace, with a frantic scream of terror that almost equaled in its intensity the one that they had heard sprang into the hall and rushed frenziedly toward the door!

Nathalie stood a moment in indecision, utterly at a loss to determine whence came the horrible shrieks, but in another instant, as another one rent the air with the same frenzied note of merriment, she hesitated no longer. As fast as her fear-tied feet would allow her, she flew into the hall, through the door that Grace had flung wide open, and with terror-winged feet and thumping heart rushed pell-mell down the wide steps and along the path after Grace!

CHAPTER VI—WORKING INTO HARNESS

A half-hour later the two girls stood on Mrs. Morrow's veranda, and with Fred's mocking laughter still ringing in their ears told of their hasty exit from the gray house. With shame-mantled face and downcast eyes Grace handed Mrs. Morrow her note.

In answer to that lady's surprised inquiries the story was told at length, a few extra flourishes unconsciously added to plead for the unexpected finale to their errand. But Mrs. Morrow was most kind, not at all like Fred, and did not laugh at them for being "scare-babies" as he had expressed it. She voiced her sympathy most generously, saying she did not wonder they were frightened, as she was sure at their age she would have done the same.

"I cannot imagine what it could have been," she pondered, in much perplexity. "I will ask the doctor. If he does not know he will probably hear about it, if it was really anything serious."

She smiled in a way that made Nathalie, whose intuitions were keen, exclaim hastily, "Oh, indeed, Mrs. Morrow, we did not imagine it at all. I am sure if you could have heard that terrible shriek—and that laugh! Oh, I can hear it still!" Her brown eyes emphasized her words as they darkened with the haunting terror that caused her to rush pell-mell after Grace.

"But I do hope," remarked Mrs. Morrow, "that Mrs. Van Vorst will never know that the young girls who took such sudden flight from her house were Pioneers, as Pioneers are supposed to be very courageous." There was a twinkle in her eyes as she spoke that partly atoned for the implication as to the girls' lack of courage.

They made no reply for a moment, and then Grace, as if to atone for her delinquency, exclaimed contritely, "Oh, I'm so sorry, Mrs. Morrow, I was frightened—but if you want me to—" her voice faltered, "I will take it to her again."

"No, indeed," quickly rejoined that lady, "I could not be so cruel as to send you there again, for no matter if the shriek was nothing, you were really frightened. I did not mean to rebuke you; I only wanted to seize this opportunity to show you what an important thing courage is—and how

we should cultivate it, even in small things. As for the note, I will get the doctor to take it or send it by post. I will have to confess, however, that I am disappointed, for I was so anxious to have Mrs. Van Vorst see what well-behaved and pleasing young girls belonged to the organization." 92

"And you sent me!" wailed Grace. "Oh, thank you, Mrs. Morrow, but what an arrant coward I have proved—and Nathalie of course would not have run if I had not!" The tears welled up piteously in her blue eyes.

"Oh, no, Grace," interposed Nathalie loyally, "I was just on the verge of running away myself!" And then she told them about the mandarin with the grinning mouth, and sinister, bead-like eyes, that she was sure had blinked at her. This caused a laugh and cleared the atmosphere of the unpleasantness that had been created by the morning's adventure.

The Saturday of the Pilgrim Rally—the day that was to make Nathalie a Pioneer—arrived. At an early hour of the morning the Pioneers of the three bird groups—each one with a package—began to file into Seton Hall, the little stone building used by the town for important meetings and often for social functions. Out of deference to Nathalie the girls had decided to bring their Pilgrim costumes with them—hence the mysterious packages—and not don them until she had been admitted to the organization.

With interested eyes Nathalie heard the Pioneers recite their pledge, give the sign, the salute,—the three movements of the closed hand, signifying a brave heart, an honest mind, and a resourceful hand,—and give the rousing Girl Pioneer cheer. She felt a trifle shaky, she confided to Helen who was seated next to her, dreading the ordeal of being made prominent as most girls do, but she regained her nerve somewhat as the Director arose and with a smiling nod of welcome began to call the names. 93

Certainly it was a pretty fancy to have each member respond to her name by giving the bird call of her group. The quick clear note of Bob White, the "Chip! chip!" of the meadow sparrow, and the oriole's greeting were all inspiring, but it was the melodious "Tru-al-lee!" of the bluebird group that held her with its sweet, low trill.

As Nathalie heard her name called when it came time to perform the initiative ceremony of making her a Pioneer, her head began to whirl, but setting her teeth determinedly, with squared shoulders and head erect, she walked down the aisle, faced the Director, and in a clear voice repeated her pledge. In answer to the question, would she remember that the honor of a world-wide organization had been placed in her hands, and that henceforth whatever she said or did was not done simply as Nathalie Page, but as a Girl Pioneer, she answered gravely, "I will!"

The second question was now asked, if she would try to live in such a way that through and by her example the words Girl Pioneer should come to mean all that was honest, highest, best, and most efficient in the girlhood of her country, she again replied with the solemn, "I will." 94

The Director now stepped to her side, and taking her by the hand said, "Nathalie Page, in the name of the Girl Pioneers of America, and by the authority vested in me as a Director, I receive you into our organization. You are now a Girl Pioneer of America. May you be a worthy successor of those women, brave, honest, resourceful, from whom our name is taken, and who in the early days of the country, standing side by side with the men, faced hardships, privations, and dangers, and helped to make possible the United States of America!"

Mrs. Morrow paused a moment, and then with one of her ready smiles took Nathalie's hand in hers and gave her a cordial welcome. Then turning toward the Pioneers she said, "Let us welcome our new member."

The girls sprang quickly but noiselessly on their feet, crying:

"Whom have we here?
A new Pioneer!
Come give a cheer
Girl Pi-o-neer
Nathalie Page!"

The new Pioneer unconsciously heaved a deep sigh when the ceremony was over and she was allowed to return to her seat. She was tempted to smile at her palpitating heart when going through such a simple ceremony as the initiation to an organization of girls; and yet she was vaguely conscious that it was a momentous episode in her life, and she firmly resolved that her vow should be a binding one, and that she would try her best to become a worth-while Pioneer and a Blue Robin. 95

The seriousness of her act became even more apparent as she listened with keen interest to Mrs. Morrow's little talk, which was, in memory of the day's celebration, about the Pilgrims. It was the desire to do right in the face of all difficulties which animated the Founders of this great nation in their struggle for Freedom and Right, and which led their wives, daughters, and sisters to forego the necessities of life, to cross an unknown sea and to face the perils of the wilderness and to aid them in their noble purpose.

It was this sacrifice of the things that made life endurable, and their strict adherence to duty that gave rise to the sterling qualities of unflinching determination, hardy courage, stern endurance, unrepining cheerfulness, untiring loyalty, patient industry, and quick resourcefulness that has gained the name of the Pioneer spirit, and made these early women founders of our nation models of all that is pure and best in womanhood.

Their Director then went on and told of the handicrafts of the Pilgrims, such as baking, brewing, sewing, knitting, quilting, spinning, planting the foodstuffs, carding wool, and the many industries that were necessary to keep life in those pioneer days.

96

As the new Pioneer heard the gentle, persuasive voice, she began to see life in a new aspect, and to understand something of what it meant to emulate these noble women. "In your hikes, before your cheer fires, in your camps, in your home and school life, as well as in the tests and your outdoor and indoor activities, and in your sports and games, keep these women as your cheer star," said Mrs. Morrow earnestly, "so that you, too, will be actuated by the qualities that ennobled them. And when the call comes, be kindly, helpful, resourceful, pure, and upright in the midst of all temptation and danger, and you will not only have the name of Pioneer, but will be filled with the real pioneer spirit."

Mrs. Morrow stood silent a moment and then repeated slowly:

"Life is more than the breath and the quick round of blood,
It is a great spirit and a busy heart.
We live in deeds, not years; in thoughts, not breaths;
In feelings, not figures on a dial.
We should count time as heart throbs. He most lives
Who thinks most, feels the noblest, acts the best."

—BAILEY.

The girls now seated themselves in a circle, and as Jessie read the news from the monthly "Pioneer," which reported a flower hike for the Saturday two weeks hence, they took out their materials and set to work. Some wove gay-colored yarn on small frames, others braided raffia baskets, or made squares of plaited slips of paper, while Mrs. Morrow told them something about the art of weaving.

97

After some time spent in learning this old-time craft, the Director asked the girls how they could best apply this industry to a very common fundamental of the home. There was a slight pause, and then some one called out "To the carpet!" Another girl ventured to say "Our clothes." Mrs. Morrow smiled as she said they were all right in a sense, but the particular craft she meant at that time was what Helen had timidly suggested, and that was, darning stockings!

There was a ripple of laughter at this truism and then, to Nathalie's surprise, there was a stocking drill, every one hauling forth a stocking from her basket and setting to work to practice this homely art. It was indeed a trial by needle to Nathalie, and she suffered some embarrassment when, after borrowing a stocking from her neighbor, and trying her very best to do it well, it was returned to her from the Director with the remark that she needed training in the science.

Later, when Mrs. Morrow came to her side and showed how neatly her stocking hole appeared after weaving her thread back and forth, and made Nathalie practice doing the same, the girl suddenly realized what a braggart she had been. "Oh, I told Mother I was the champion mender," she thought remorsefully. "What a bungle I must have been making of those stockings!" With the avowed purpose that she was going to make darning her life-work for the next three weeks, she laid her work aside and hurried with the girls into the adjoining dressing-room to get ready for the real Pilgrim time, when they were to represent the women of Plymouth town.

98

"Do you always have an all-day meeting?" she asked Grace, who was pinning a blue bird on Nathalie's gown, for at Helen's suggestion she was to appear at this, her first Rally, as a Blue Robin, in memory of the first songster that welcomed the Pilgrims.

"Oh, no, indeed," answered Grace, "but we departed from our usual plan, which is to meet in the afternoon only, unless we have a hike or demonstration, as we wanted to make our luncheon the Mayflower Feast. But, oh, Nathalie," she ended enthusiastically, "you are a veritable blue bird! Look, girls, isn't she the dearest? That bluebird blue makes her cheeks like pink roses!"

At this sudden thrust into notoriety the girl's color grew more vivid as she turned for the inspection of the girls. They grew very enthusiastic over her bluebird costume with its bluish-gray slip with scalloped edges, and bluebird cap edged with tiny blue wings, where a blue bird, standing up in the front, poised with outspread wings "ready to fly," as one of the girls asserted.

"Oh, it's only blue paper muslin," explained the "flier," as her mates had called her, when they examined the Blue Robin gown. "Helen helped me make it, and what a time we had making that birdie stick—hands off," she finished laughingly, as some too ardent admirer pressed her close, "or I shall not fly away but fall to pieces."

99

By this time, however, her admirers had found a new love in the Tike, who came dancing before them all in white. She was literally a bower of trailing arbutus, as sprays of that spring flower were fastened all over her gown.

"I am the Pilgrim flower," she piped pertly, "some call me the Mayflower blossom." And then catching up her skirts, with a low curtsy she repeated softly:

"Oh I'm the flower that never dies,
'Neath leaves so brown in bed so low.
The arbutus, who in glad surprise
Bloomed 'Welcome' from fields of snow
To our Pilgrim sires of long ago."

"Oh, here's Lillie Bell!" called some one. "Isn't she a duck of a dear!" Simultaneously the girls

forsook the Tike and flocked around Lillie, who, gowned in pure white, with kerchief and lace cap, represented Susannah White, the first bride of the colony.

"Yes, and I want you to note, girls," she asserted impressively, with a nonchalant nod to the welcome accorded her, "that I am not only the first bride, but the first mother of the colony, for my little Peregrine was born when the *Mayflower* rode at anchor in Cape Cod Bay, and Mrs. Morrow claims this is even a greater honor than to be the first bride. But, girls—" she ended abruptly, dropping her matronly pose, "have you seen Edith—she was to be Helen Billington—I never knew her to be so late before?"

"There! that accounts for the aching void in my heart, I know I missed some one," cried Jessie half mockingly. "O dear, what will become of my Pioneer article if the Sport does not appear?" The girls all laughed in appreciation of Jessie's serio-comic declaration, for it was generally conceded that Edith was the most active spirit of the band, as her sporting proclivities, her general good-nature, and her dashing escapades always furnished plenty of "copy" when any of their various hikes or demonstrations were in progress.

"Oh, don't fret; a bad penny always turns up!" chimed in Kitty, who did not particularly admire the Sport.

"I'll bet you a cookie that she has been arrested for appearing in disorderly apparel on the street," observed Grace roguishly; "for she told me she was going to dress at home."

"Oh, girls, aren't you ready?" at this instant asked Louise Gaynor, suddenly appearing in the doorway leading to the room where Mrs. Morrow, as Mistress Carver, the Governor's lady, was waiting to receive them.

"Her Sweet Graciousness, Mistress Carver, waits for you without in the Common House."

"Modest and simple and sweet, the very type of Priscilla,
Priscilla, the Mayflower of Plymouth!"

Thus hummed Lillie as she walked around this winsome representation of that Puritan maiden, surveying her critically, but with approving eye.

"Oh, you're just too sweet for anything!" warbled another bluebird, "you're—"

"You're too sweet to have to do your own proposing, methinks," broke in Jessie, touching one of the long golden braids that fell from beneath the demure little cap of this first edition of women's rights.

But at sweet Priscilla's gentle reminder that the first lady of the land should not be kept waiting, the merry girls ceased their chatter, did their best to assume the decorous manners of the Puritan women, filed into line, and were soon in the adjoining room.

Here they were greeted by Dame Brewster, the Elder's wife, no other than Helen, who, in ruffled cap and quaintly flowered gown, excelled even her own aspirations to appear like that motherly dame, as in speech of quaint wording she made each Mayflower damsel known to Mistress Carver.

After the greetings had been voiced, the first surprise came, and that was when the Tike came bounding into the midst of the gentle dames and informed them that a cheer fire was blazing on the grass-plot in the rear of the Hall. The Pioneers in profound wonder—as they had not expected to have a cheer fire—followed Mistress Carver to the garden, where a circle was formed around this magic inspirer of cheer, whose burning fagots snapped and crackled noisily, as if to do its share in the old-time celebration. It was in memory, Grace declared, of the many fires that had cheered the settlers in the cold and desolation of the new world.

Murmurs of wonder and queries about this mysterious surprise were silenced, as some one started a general clapping, a recognition often accorded the Pioneers' cheer star. Then, as they gathered around the flaming light, some one suggested that perhaps the Governor's lady could tell as to who was the magic fire-maker.

The lady in question, although disclaiming that she knew who lighted the magic inspirer, did finally admit that she could guess who had done it, but as that was a privilege that every one had, she had nothing to tell. However, the mystery remained unsolved, although some bright one ventured to suggest that it might have been the Sport, who was still missing, as she delighted to do the unexpected.

Immediately the missing Pioneer began to be eulogized for her clever and mysterious absence, as these representatives of hundreds of years ago circled about their emblem of cheer and romance. To usher in the first ceremony, or, as the girls sometimes called it "the christening of the blazer," some one called for the story-teller to give one of her thrillers. This cry was forthwith taken up by the little company, and became so imperative that Lillie at last complied with the request, and in a few moments was telling, in her usual impressive way, the story of those pioneers, the Pilgrim men and women, who fought the first battle for liberty and union on the shores of this land.

When Lillie's story came to an end, she received her usual applause, for every one had listened with the closest attention to the account of the many pilgrimages of these simple folk from the northeastern countries of England. In trying to serve God as they deemed right they had separated themselves from the English church and had begun to hold little meetings in the village of Scrooby. Hounded by the authorities they finally sailed to the low countries, which at that time were considered a place of refuge for the oppressed of all nations. They lived one year in Amsterdam, meeting for worship near a convent, whose sweet chimes called them to a low-

ceiled room, where they sung their songs of praise and read God's word.

But their wanderings were not over, and a year later they sailed on one of the great waterways of this Dutch land to Leyden. Here they remained twelve years in twenty-three humble little homes, built on a plot of ground known as the *Koltsteeg*, and called Bell Alley, just across the way from the great dome of St. Peter's church.

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Here in this land of foreign tongue their children grew up, learned their trades and, alas, many of the ways of these people, especially their methods of keeping the Sabbath, which were contrary to the beliefs of these God-loving people. It was for this reason as well as for others, that they started forth on their wanderings again, and migrated to the new land across the sea, sailing in the *Mayflower* on the twenty-second of July, 1620.

Nathalie was somewhat disappointed in the beginning, that she was not to hear one of Lillie's twentieth-century thrillers, but the story of the Pilgrims was so interesting that she felt amply repaid for her disappointment. Although familiar with their story in this land, she had never heard much about the lives of these founders before they came to America.

The tale of these ancient folk was rendered even more interesting by various interruptions at intervals, as when Dame Brewster read, in solemn tone, the Constitution formed by these people in the cabin of the *Mayflower*, said to have been written on an old chest, and known as The Compact, the first stone in the American Commonwealth.

The Governor's lady enlivened the tedious voyage over by telling of several little incidents that had occurred; one was when the *Mayflower* during a severe storm was saved from going to the bottom by some one wedging a *kracht*, or jackscrew, in a leak that had suddenly sprung amidships.

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Little Humility Cooper, one of the children of the *Mayflower* voyagers, an Oriole Pioneer, recited Mrs. Heman's "Landing of the Pilgrims," while sprightly Mary Chilton told of her race with John Alden to be the first one of the little company to step on Plymouth Rock. She added to the interest of this recital by giving a short account of this historical granite from the day it served as a foundation stone of her victory until the present time.

A Bob White told about the first American washday, and the fun the children had gathering sweet juniper boughs to build the fires, over which hung the tripod from which was suspended the kettles of that historic occasion.

Louise Gaynor, as Priscilla, recited parts of Longfellow's poem, "The Courtship of Myles Standish," with its picturesque account of the most romantic happening of the little town, while as Mistress Fuller, Barbara described Fort Hill and told about Captain Standish and his sixteen valiant men-at-arms who explored the hills and woods of the wilderness.

Kitty Corwin, as another Pilgrim dame, told of the erection of the seven little houses with their thatched roofs, built in a row on First, or Leyden Street, giving a rather exciting account of the many serious accidents that happened to the Common House where the stores and ammunition of the community were stored. And so, in picturesque detail, each feature of the story was brought forth to form in the minds of these twentieth century Pioneers a picture that would last through the years that were to follow, and help them gain an insight into the characters they were representing.

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Elizabeth Winslow, the first wife of the first American statesman, one of the first to pass away in the fatal sickness of that lonely winter; Mrs. Hopkins, who won fame as the mother of the boy Oceanus, born on the *Mayflower*; Bridget Fuller, the wife of the genial Dr. Fuller, and others, were all impersonated by some one of the Pioneers.

Even the ghosts, as Grace dubbed them, were heard from: Myles Standish's first wife, known as the beautiful English Rose, who died soon after reaching the new land, and Dorothy Bradford, the young wife of William Bradford, who came to her death by falling overboard while her husband was exploring the shores with Captain Standish and his men.

By the time the story with its variations had been told, the girls, tired of posing with old-time stiffness and ceremony, were all laughing merrily as some one of the band suddenly spied some comical or grotesque aspect of the impersonator, when the Tike screamed shrilly, "Oh, who is that?" pointing to a black-draped figure standing in the doorway of the hall, with red, perspiring face, hat cocked on one side, and a generally bedraggled appearance.

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It was the missing Pioneer, Edith, who, after the hubbub had subsided as to her untimely appearance and tardy arrival, pulled off her long black cloak and threw herself on the grass by the side of Lillie. With gasps and sundry emphasizing shrieks she told what had befallen her on the way to the Rally.

"Father was ill last night, so the first thing this morning I had to go for the doctor. Then as mother was busy attending to Father I had to get the youngsters ready,—they were going to a May picnic, for of course," Edith added petulantly, "no matter what happened to me, Mother would not have the kiddies disappointed."

Catching Mrs. Morrow's reproving eye, she stammered apologetically, "Of course, I would not have them disappointed myself—they are dears—but it lost me my morning; and then, just as I was hurrying by the gray house,—oh, girls—" dropping her voice to a tense whisper, "what do you think I heard?"

The tenseness of Edith's tone, coupled with her mysterious manner, had the desired effect, and the Pioneers all bent forward eagerly with expectant eyes, anxious to hear what she had seen and heard, while some too impetuous one called out, "Oh, do hurry and tell us what it was!"

"It was the most terrible shriek I ever heard," answered Edith, with a long-drawn sigh. Having succeeded in getting her audience where she wanted them she was anxious to prolong her triumph. "Why, my heart jumped into my mouth, and I—"

"Where did the noise come from?" inquired practical Helen impatiently, who never wasted any time in getting wrought up, as she called it, by the Sport's yarns.

"It came from the garden of the gray house," was the quick retort; and then, crossly, "I do wish, Helen, you would wait—you'll spoil the whole thing if you don't let me tell it properly."

Grace, who had been listening intently to the Sport's recital, looked up quickly and encountered a glance from Nathalie's eyes as she suddenly turned from Edith and looked across the circle at Grace to see if she had heard. But Grace, whose memory was still rankling with her adventure at the gray house, was afraid that if the girls knew they would plague her unmercifully for being a runaway, and hastily put her hand on her lips in warning not to tell what had happened to them.

Nathalie nodded loyally and then turned to hear Edith repeat, "Yes, the noise came from the garden of the gray house, I have always told you there was something queer about that place. At first I started to run away, and then I thought, 'O pshaw! whatever it is, it won't hurt me behind those high walls.' So I walked close up to the wall near one corner to see if I could not manage to climb up in some way and look into the garden. I had just spied a tiny hole in the lower part of the wall—I guess some boys had made it, you know they are always spying about that place, anyway—when I heard loud breathing. I looked up and saw a man creeping stealthily around the corner of the wall, as if dodging some one. Well, I just gave one look at him, he had great black, burning kind of eyes, staring out of a face as white as a corpse. He suddenly spied me, and by the uncanny glare he gave I knew right off he was the one who had been shrieking, he was the crazy man who lives there! Great guns! but I didn't wait to take another look, I took to my heels and flew. Then I heard steps thumping behind me—looked back—oh, girls," she shrieked hysterically, "he was chasing me, running after me as hard as he could!"

She gulped, and then with a gasp continued, "Oh, for a moment I thought I was doomed, but—well—you know I can run, and I did, for my life. I ran every step of the way here—and—oh, I'm so hungry! Have you had the feast yet?"

"What became of the man?" inquired Helen tersely.

"Oh, yes, what became of him?" added one or two others.

"I don't know and I don't care," asserted Miss Edith carelessly. "All I know is that he is as crazy as a loon, and that he lives in the gray house."

"Edith," exclaimed Mrs. Morrow sharply, "as long as you did not see the man come from the gray house do not say he lives there; and as for saying he is crazy, that is absurd. That is just an idle report; do not repeat it until you have proof that what you say is correct. He was probably a tramp, and may have been chased from the garden by one of the servants." Mrs. Morrow's face showed keenly her annoyance and disbelief in Edith's surmise.

"But what could the screams have been?" asked Helen, wonderingly, "if they really came from the garden?"

"Oh, I am sure they did," asserted the Sport positively, "for I have heard other people say that they have heard queer noises coming from that place. But girls," she exclaimed, as if anxious to dismiss the subject, "do tell me what you have been doing. Oh, I did so hate to miss all the fun."

"Yes, kiddie, it is too bad," consoled Lillie, putting her arm around her friend, "but we have not had the feast yet, we've just been listening to little stories about the Pilgrims—you know you heard me read my story the other day—" she stopped abruptly, for a sudden rustling in a clump of trees back of the garden had caused every one to turn and peer apprehensively over their shoulders.

"Oh," shivered the Sport nervously, "perhaps it is the crazy man!" She sprang to her feet and made as if to take to her heels again.

Every girl followed her example, and in another moment there would have been a wild stampede to the shelter of the hall, if a loud voice had not called out, "Welcome, Englishmen! Welcome!"

Simultaneously with these words a lithe form sprang into the midst of the terrified girls, who clung to one another with wildly beating hearts as with dilated eyes they glared at the intruder, a tall Indian youth, resplendent with a feathered head-gear. He was clad in deerskin trousers fringed at the seams, a string of hairy scalps hung at his belt, and he held a bow and arrow in his hands as he stood and looked down at this bevy of frightened colonial maids with a broad smile on his grease besmeared face.

There was just a second's pause, and then Helen shouted merrily, "Oh, it's Teddy Hart, and he's Samoset! Oh, girls, don't you remember? He was the Indian who came and welcomed the Pilgrims!"

Of course they all remembered, for had not Lillie dealt at length upon that very scene when telling her story? And Teddy Hart, why, he was a Boy Scout, one of Fred Tyson's patrol, which was known as the Eagle patrol.

This was all that was needed to make the girls forget the crazy man and the Sport's harrowing tale, and they crowded about Teddy crying, "Oh, Ted, where did you get the rig?" or, "What made you think of it?" and, "Isn't it the best ever?" This last was from the Tike who was hopping about the new arrival examining the hairy scalps—which turned out to be a few wigs borrowed from the village barber—with keen curiosity.

"Great Cæsar! give a fellow a chance to breathe, won't you?" fired the make-believe Samoset, as he mopped his face energetically. "Don't riddle me with questions; I'm not a target!"

Yes, this was the second surprise, or the forerunner of it, for before Teddy was ready to surrender his place as the hero of the moment, the beat of a drum was heard, and from the little bit of woodland where Ted had been hiding issued a group of queer-looking individuals. They were all attired in somber-colored clothes with broad white collars, high conical-shaped hats, and all carried guns and had swords clanking at their sides in good impersonation of the Fathers of their country. The next moment they had formed in line and with well-simulated solemnity of countenance, "as if going to meeting-house," tittered Grace, these sixteen men-at-arms, headed by Capt. Standish—who was no other than Fred Tyson—marched valiantly down the street towards the garden.

It was the Sport after all who saved the day for the Pioneers, for as they stood in dazed laughter wondering how to greet these unexpected guests, the Sport's hand shot up, and two seconds later the girls had joined her in saluting their brother organization, as with one accord they gave the Pioneer cheer.

In quick response to a signal from their leader, the Scouts came to a halt, and as one man each Scout's hand went up to his forehead in the salute of three ringers held upright. This was followed by another cheer, a rousing one this time, as each boy shouted lustily:

"Ready! Ready! Scout! Scout! Scout!
Good turn daily! Shout! Shout! Shout!"

The boys now fell into step again, and in a few moments had entered the little wicker gate where they broke ranks as they were cordially welcomed by the Governor's lady and Dame Brewster. For a short space following pandemonium reigned, as the boys tried to answer the many queries propounded by the girls, each Pioneer, spying some one favorite boy, singled him out with merry jest to answer as to the why and wherefore of the unlooked for surprise.

Nathalie felt somewhat embarrassed and stood apart from the girls, not having met any of the Scouts of the town. Perhaps she was a little scornful, for in the city she had been wont to pass a khaki uniform with scant approval, considering these emulators of chivalrous knights mere boys. Not understanding the aims or purposes of the organization they had failed to attract her.

But as she stood watching these tall, well-developed lads with heads held high, squared shoulders, and with the ruddy glow of an active life in the open on their bright faces, she reluctantly admitted that they were interesting to look at, at least.

"Ah, Miss Nathalie, I see you have forgotten me!" spoke a voice at the girl's elbow. She turned quickly to see the laughing brown eyes of Fred Tyson. Fred's face was flushed with embarrassment as he felt somewhat timorous as to this city girl's greeting, since he had last seen her walking away from him with flushed cheeks and angry mien as he teasingly taunted, "Scare-babies! Scare-babies!"

But Nathalie had forgotten all about that trivial incident—perhaps because she had a brother and knew the moods of boys and how they delighted to tease and hark at the girls—and she dimpled with cordiality as she returned his greeting.

She was soon sparkling with merriment as Fred told of the fun they had in rigging up, and the sensation they created as they marched through Main Street. By this time the explanations from the boys were over, and the secret of the cheer fire was revealed. It had been made by the Scouts at the suggestion of Dr. Homer, who was much interested in the Pioneers and had planned the two surprises to give a little more tone to the celebration and fun to the girls.

The girls now clamored that they were hungry, and at an intimation from Mrs. Morrow the Scouts were invited to repair to one of the side rooms in the hall, where their Mayflower Feast was to be held.

The invitation was accepted by Fred for the patrol, and the party of merry-makers filed noisily into the hall. When the boys saw the Stars and Stripes, and the yards of red, white, and blue bunting hanging in graceful folds from the walls of the room, they broke into patriotic song. "Red, White, and Blue" was first sung in compliment to the Girl Pioneers' colors, and was quickly succeeded by the "Battle Cry of Freedom," and "The Star-Spangled Banner," in recognition of the starry emblem that symbolizes—more than any design that floats to the wind—the uplift of mankind, Liberty, and Union!

A cheery fire of pine knots blazed a greeting from the hearth, while two long boards supported on trestles and covered with a shining damask cloth, represented the table of Pioneer days. Odd bits of old-time ware, such as silver porringers, queer-shaped jugs, or blackjacks, a number of wooden bowls, a high-standing salt-cellar, and a pewter tankard, were distributed about the table. But it

was the flowers that lay in bunches here and there—and all May ones, too, from the clusters of white snowballs, lilacs, pink and yellow azaleas, to the big bowls filled with sprigs of arbutus—that held Nathalie's eyes.

But flags, antiques, and flowers soon became things of the past, as the girls brought forth their lunch-baskets; each one had vied with the other to bring some choice edible and with the help of the modern knights, who declared that they had come for that purpose, the table was loaded with goodies.

Just before the feast was served, Will Ditmas, a fair counterpart of William Brewster, the ruling elder of Plymouth, suddenly stood up and, after much throat-clearing, announced in a droning voice that if those present were willing, for the furtherance of sobriety and seemly behavior, he would read a few rules from "A Pretty Little Pocket Book."

After stonily staring over a pair of goggles at a few irrepressible gigglers the would-be Elder read: "Speak not until spoken to; break not thy bread, nor bite into a whole slice; take not salt unless with a clean knife, and throw no bones under the table."

Those who were trying to keep their faces straight wavered in the attempt and joined the irrepressible Tike in a few hysterical titters as he continued: "Hold not thy fork upright, but sloping, lay it down at the right hand of the plate, with the end of the blade on the table plate, and look not earnestly at any person that is eating."

This last was the final straw for the Tike, and she giggled so unrestrainedly that she threatened hysteria, and Helen had to whack her on the back so that she could get her breathing apparatus in working order again. This ebullition was like a match to fire, and all those who had been smothering their mirth now broke forth into loud laughter, which threatened to become clamorous had not Mrs. Morrow held up her restraining finger.

The signal was too well known not to be obeyed, and the too mirthful ones were recalled to themselves. Then, too, they were all hungry; so forgetting the old-time admonitions of their forebears, they were soon occupied satisfying their hunger.

After the left-over goodies had been gathered into baskets to be delivered to a poor family, and the place was set in order again, the chivalrous knights and the emulating Pioneers swarmed merrily into the dance hall, where they held high court to the light fantastic as Mrs. Morrow, the one-piece orchestra, rattled off ragtime harmony for round and square dances.

Nathalie by this time had met a number of the Scouts, and to her surprise found that some of them danced as well as, and in some cases better than her boy friends in the city. The would-be Elder, who had droned the rules from the pocket book, proved not only a good dancer, but most companionable, and finding that Nathalie was sadly ignorant as to the aims and purposes of the Scout organization, he set forth to enlighten her.

He took off his Scout badge, pointed out the eagle, and the stars and shield, explaining that it was a trefoil badge and represented the three points in the Scout oath. The curl-up at the end of the scroll was a reminder to each Scout that the corners of his mouth should always be turned up in a smile of cheerfulness. The knot in the loop was a "conscience pricker," as he expressed it, that a Scout was pledged to do some one a good turn every day.

The next dance was Fred Tyson's, and when it ended they seated themselves in a corner of the hall to cool off, and as Nathalie fanned herself with a much bedraggled handkerchief, they hit upon a topic that proved most entertaining, and that was—college. Fred stated that he expected to go to Dartmouth in the fall and was therefore looking forward to it with much pleasure.

Nathalie, with sparkling eyes, told how she had dreamed and longed to go to college, and then the golden lights in her eyes shadowed as she said that since the death of her father she had decided to stop dreaming about what was impossible for her, and to do something worth while, so she had become a Pioneer.

"But don't you think it worth while to go to college?" was Fred's puzzled query, "for surely there is nothing that will help a girl more in life than to have—what is it—the higher education?"

"Yes, I know," assented his companion, "that is all right, but when one finds that they can't have a thing—no matter how big or grand it is, or how much they want it—if it is impossible, it ceases to be worth while; that is, why spend time lamenting, or thinking about something that can't be accomplished?"

"Why, you are a regular little philosopher!" laughed Fred. But Nathalie was not heeding, for suddenly looking across the room she perceived that the dancers had retired from the floor, all but the Pioneers, who were standing in two lines in the center of the room facing one another as if about to dance the Virginia Reel.

"Oh, what are they going to do?" she cried, but before her companion could answer Helen came running up.

"Come on, Nathalie, we are going to dance the Pioneer dance. It's lots of fun."

"But I don't know it," objected the girl. "I am not going to make a show of myself before all these boys."

"Oh, but you won't," urged Helen, "for you can be my partner, and I will tell you as we go along; and then it's awfully simple, for we just go through the motions of pioneer handcraft—"

"Pioneer handcraft?" echoed Nathalie more puzzled than before.

"Yes, don't you remember what Mrs. Morrow told us about the handcrafts of the Pioneer women? Well, she made up this dance to make these crafts definite. Oh, come, it is easy!" In a moment, Nathalie's objection being overruled, she bade Fred good-by and was hurried by her partner to join one of the two lines on the floor.

Only a few explanations were necessary, and Nathalie, who was quick to learn, joined her voice to the girlish ones singing:

"Singing, ringing thro' the air
Comes the song of Molly fair.
Milking, milking Crumple Horn
Down in the barn at early dawn."

As the song ended, the closed right hand of every Girl Pioneer was held out in front, elbow bent upward. Then came three movements up and down in imitation of the act of churning. This was done three times, as in chorus came:

"Churning, turning, see it splash,
This way, that way, with a dash."

As the next two lines rang out:

"Skimming skimming foamy white,
Making the butter golden bright,"

the motions were changed to those of skimming milk, repeated three times as in the previous movement, the girls emphasizing the end of each movement by stamping the feet, using first one and then the other. They ended this last motion by each girl placing her hands on her hips and tripping in line with the others lightly down the room in time with the music and then back to place.

A second of time, and each dancer was making the motion of holding a baby in her encircled arms, and while swaying to and fro these words were softly crooned:

"Golden slumber kiss your eyes,
Smiles awake you when you rise.
Sleep pretty wantons, do not cry,
And I will sing a lullabye."

Another moment, and the arms had fallen, each girl faced her opposite partner, and then linking hands together they were rocking a cradle as they joyously warbled:

"Baby is a sailor boy, swing, cradle, swing;
Sailing is the sailor's joy, swing, cradle, swing."

Now the girls were waltzing gaily down the room and back again to place, where this time they formed in rows of three in each line. A crash of chords from the piano, and each girl stepped forward with outstretched left hand, and made the motion of taking something with the right hand from the closed left, and casting it on the ground, as they repeated clearly and loudly:

"Good flax and good hemp to have of her own,
In May, a good housewife will see that it is sown.
And afterwards trim it to serve in a need,
The fimble to spin, the card from her reel."

Yes, they were sowing hemp as their great-grand-mothers had done hundreds of years ago—a sign of a thrifty housewife. Now came three claps of the hand and again the girls swung into two facing lines. Each performer now lightly put forward the right foot, poised on the ball of the left one, while making the motion as of moving the treadle of a spinning-wheel, as with lifted hands she twisted the flax, stopping every moment to moisten one finger in an imaginary cup fastened to the distaff.



"Polly Green, her reel," announced Helen.

"Polly Green, her reel," announced Helen as leader of the dance, and then came the old-fashioned couplet softly hummed:

"Count your threads right,
If you reel in the night
When I am far away."

Before Nathalie could decide whether the couplet meant only to count your threads at night while Polly was far away, the dancers had swung into place and were going through the minuet. With slow and stately measure they moved, ending each turn with the dipping, sweeping curtsy that has made that dance so graceful a reminder of the festivities of early days.

Now they are singing:

"Twice a year deplumed may they be
In spryngen tyme and harvest tyme,"

as with swift motion each girl pretended to grab up something with her left hand while the right flew up and down with noiseless regularity—plucking a goose for dinner.

The next instant every alternate girl had put her hand over her mouth in the form of a horn and was calling loudly, "Ho, Molly Gray! Hi, Crumple Horn!" This call had barely ceased its musical reverberation when each fair dancer caught up the hem of her apron and, bending forward, with well-simulated deftness was gathering or picking up something from the ground which was quickly thrust into her apron. Another flash of white arms, and each girl had caught up the hem of her neighbor's gown and with a pretended switch was driving her forward while merrily singing:

"Driving in twilight the waiting cows home,
With arms full-laden with hemlock boughs,
To be traced on a broom ere the coming day
From its eastern chamber should dance away."

As the songs and motions ended, the girls filed into line and marched around the room as if carrying muskets, that is, women's muskets, brooms.

Once more in row, each girl pretended she was holding a card with one hand, while drawing another card softly, but swiftly across the first. This was done with a deft, catchy motion as the girls sing-songed:

"Niddy-noddy, niddy-noddy
Two heads on one body."

"Now we are imitating the motions of carding wool," Helen whispered softly to Nathalie. "Niddy-noddy means the old-fashioned hand-reel used in the days when there were no machines."

The Pioneers had finished carding wool and were dancing the Virginia Reel, spinning each other around with the vigor and vim of young hearts as a prelude to the next dance. In this they simulated sewing, taking their stitches with a precision and handiness that rivalled the little maids of Puritan days. With a posture as of holding a wooden frame, while in and out the needle flew, each damsel repeated slowly, with quaint precision:

"Lola Standish is my name.
Lord, guide my heart that I may do thy will,
And fill my Hands with such convenient skill
As will conduce to Virtue void of shame,
And I will give the Glory to thy name."

Only a space of time and the samplers were dropped, and each girl grew strangely still, with bent head and listening ears. With eyes flaming in a fixed stare she poised an imaginary fowling-piece on her shoulder. They stood for a moment in this pose as each one present grasped the idea that they were doing the deed that many a Pioneer woman had bravely done in those early days, in the absence of husband keeping guard over the home from the relentless ravages of the red man!

CHAPTER VIII—THE MOTTO, "I CAN"

A few days after the Pilgrim Rally, as Nathalie lay in the hammock dreaming day dreams as she was wont to do, her mother came and seated herself in a low chair near by.

Nathalie turned, and then with a quick movement sat up as she asked anxiously, "Oh, Mother, has anything happened?"

"I should say 'anything' has happened," ejaculated Dick, who was lounging near, ignoring his mother's gesture to be silent, "for your mother has been chief cook and bottle-washer all day!"

Nathalie, who had been off on a Pioneer demonstration most of the day, showed her dismay as she exclaimed, "Oh, where is Ophelia?"

Mrs. Page's worry lines deepened as she answered, "Oh, she is ill. She has been complaining for

some days, and when she begged to be allowed to go home this morning I did not have the heart to refuse her. Poor thing! she looked the embodiment of woe!"

"But isn't she coming back?" inquired alarmed Nathalie. 127

"Not for several days," was the answer, as Mrs. Page leaned wearily back in her chair.

"But can't we get some one to help us?" demanded her daughter insistently.

"Dorothy went to the colored settlement, but could not get any one. Colored people don't like to work in warm weather, and I don't blame them," her mother added in an undertone, "for standing over a fire in this heat is terrible."

"Oh, what shall we do?" thought Nathalie ruefully, as she saw a pile of unwashed dishes confronting her. But a cheery "Hello?" caused her to look up to see her friend, with dust-brush in hand, cleaning the window shutters of the neighboring house. With gripping force she suddenly realized how useful Helen was, and the numerous things she managed to do to help her mother, notwithstanding the many hours she was compelled to spend at the stenography school.

Nathalie twisted about in the hammock; somehow it did not seem as comfortable as it did before her mother had come. Her sky visions had departed, and in their place had come the thought that she ought to help her mother. Oh, but dish-washing was degrading, such greasy work. She glanced down at her slim, white hands as if they would aid her in this argument with self.

"Oh, why do people have to do the very things they hate?" she questioned rebelliously as she arose from her comfortable position and with a long-drawn sigh started to enter the house. 128

"You have dropped your book!" exclaimed her mother as she stooped and picked up the Pioneer manual that had fallen from Nathalie's lap and handed it to her.

"Thank you," returned the girl and then, with a pang of regret as she noted her mother's weary eyes, she bent and kissed her.

"Oh, I'm so sorry you had to work so hard!" she cried impulsively. "Isn't there something I can do to help?" She almost wished her mother would say no.

"Not now," replied her mother with a brighter expression than she had worn, "but perhaps you can help me later—when I get dinner."

"All right," returned her daughter with forced cheerfulness. As she entered the hall her eyes were caught by the word "Pioneer" in big, black letters on the manual. Reminded by the name that flaunted itself so determinedly before her, she remembered that she was a Pioneer, that she had taken vows upon herself, and that in order to keep these vows she should do the very things, perhaps, that she hated to do. This new thought jarred her uncomfortably as she hurried up to her room and began to make herself cool and comfortable after a rather strenuous morning spent in trying her hand at the many new interests that had come to her as a Pioneer. 129

But somehow she was haunted, as it were, by the thought that she was not making a good beginning as a Pioneer; oh, yes, being a Pioneer did not mean all play, or even doing the things that were interesting, or that one liked to do, those were the Director's words that morning. The more one gives up or overcomes in order to do and accomplish the demands made upon her as a Pioneer, the greater the victory. She picked up the manual from the bureau and began to turn its leaves aimlessly, and then she halted, for two very small words held her eyes, "I can!" why, that was the Pioneer motto—the one Lillie Bell had mentioned when she told of the picked chicken. She would read the laws!

"A Girl Pioneer is trustworthy." Oh, Nathalie was sure she was that. "Helpful," her conscience pricked sharply. Was she helpful if she didn't try and do all she could to help her mother? "O dear," she ruminated, "I am shying at the first 'overcome.'" She remembered that Mrs. Morrow had said all the disagreeable things that one didn't want to do, but did in the end, were "overcomes."

"Kind—" she heaved a sigh, well, she was afraid she hadn't been very kind the other day when she had answered Lucille so sharply, but she was trying, and the hasty retort would slip out; she would have to put a button on her lips as her mother often told her. 130

"Reverent," her religion taught her that. "Happy," not always, for how could one be happy when life had been full of disappointments? Her eyes saddened as she thought of Dick, who was so patiently waiting for something to turn up, so that he could have the operation on his knee. Poor fellow! she had felt like crying the other day when she heard him telling how he had written to a law firm in the city in the hope that he could get some copying to do so that he could earn some money.

"Happiness does not always mean having what we want; it is being contented with what we have," that was another of Mrs. Morrow's interpretations of the Pioneer laws. "Cheerful," here Nathalie broke into a laugh, quite sure she was always cheerful when she had the things she wanted. "There!" she cried aloud, "I am not going to read any more of those laws, for if I am to—" she stooped, for the manual had fallen to the floor. As she picked it up she again encountered the words, "I can."

"I can!" she repeated once or twice mechanically. Then her face lighted, as if the meaning of the words had suddenly flashed themselves clear of the thoughts that had been revolving in her mind.

"But what can I do?" she continued doubtfully.

"You can wash the dishes for your mother in the morning so that she can read her morning paper," some one seemed to whisper. She started. "And you can get up and get breakfast the way Helen does when her mother is not feeling well," this time the some one spoke very loudly.

"Oh, but I can't cook, nobody would eat my breakfast," she thought, still holding back.

"But if you are a Pioneer you should learn to do these things." She frowned as if to brush aside an unpleasant thought.

"Yes, I suppose I can do these things," she reluctantly admitted after a moment's thought. "O dear—I have been lamenting that I had no purpose in life, that I was just drifting. I cried the other day because Mother said my talents were gilt-edged. 'Yes, I Can,'" suddenly broke from her. "I'm going to begin right now, too; I'll show Mother that I am not a gilt-edge drifter. I'll learn to cook—oh, I'll just make myself do those horrible, horrible things—I'll show you, Miss I Can, so there!" She hastily wiped away the tears that would come, and then, as was her wont after a mental conflict, she began to sing. A few moments later she was down in the kitchen hustling about, seeing what there was for dinner.

A steak, oh, yes, she knew how to broil that—and potatoes—oh, they were easy! The next minute she had seated herself before the kitchen table, and as she peeled the potatoes she sang with unwonted animation:

"We stick to work until it's done
We're Pioneers, Girl Pioneers.
We never from our duty run,
We're Pioneers, Girl Pioneers.
We learn to cook, to sew, to mend
To sweep, to dust, to clean, to tend,
And always willing hands to lend."

As she paused to think how she could manage the next vegetable, Mrs. Page entered, showing amazement as she saw what her daughter was doing, for full well she knew that Nathalie disliked anything in the way of housework.

"Why, Nathalie!" she exclaimed, "you need not do that. I will get dinner; there is not so much to do, for Felia made some pies yesterday, and with a steak, thank goodness! there will not be much to cook."

"Now, see here, Mumsie," cried the new housewife, flourishing her knife menacingly at her mother, "I am chief of this ranch. You have lamented that I was just a gilt-edged doll, now I'm going to show you I'm not. I'm a Pioneer, and I'm going to learn everything useful. Now be off!" As her mother protested there ensued a little wrestling-match in which the girl came off victor, and Mrs. Page, subdued into meekness, retired to the veranda, somewhat relieved to think she could rest awhile.

As Nathalie snuggled down to sleep that night—she was so tired she could hardly keep her eyes open—she felt supremely happy, for she had cooked dinner all by herself. To be sure Dick had growled and claimed the steak was burnt, and Lucille had volunteered the information that Felia never mashed her potatoes that way, but it made no difference to the happy Blue Robin—as Dick had called her—for she was pleased to think that for once in her life she had helped. Of course, Mother had laughed at her blunders, but it was in the old happy way that she used to do when Papa had been with them.

Next morning Nathalie awoke with a start, she smiled drowsily at some passing remembrance of the day before, and then turned over for a beauty nap. Suddenly she sat up with eyes keen and alert; if she was to be maid of all work that day she must get at her job. In fifteen minutes she was creeping stealthily down the kitchen stairs with her shoes in her hands, so as not to awaken her mother.

Oh! the fire was out; that was a difficulty she had not taken into calculation. For a moment she was tempted to crawl up those stairs and leave the fire to the next one who discovered it. Oh, but that would not do at all. She didn't know how to make a fire, but the words "I can," made her close her mouth determinedly, and in a few moments clouds of rising smoke attested that she was learning. But alas, the smoke soon drifted into space, and the blaze disappeared in a mass of black paper!

Nathalie's tears came at this; oh, why would not that wood catch fire? Tried to the soul, she went to the window and gazed through a mist of tears at the dew sparkling on bush and grass. A low, sweet whistling caused her to look up to see Helen, as fresh as a new-blown rose, throwing open the shutters of her room.

Nathalie pursed up her lips and then broke into a "Tru-al-lee!"

Helen glanced down quickly, her eyes lighted, and then came a quick Bob White call that sounded much like "More wet! More wet!" In another instant she was down on the porch calling merrily to her friend, "Oh, Nathalie, how are you this morning?"

Nathalie dimpled cheerily. "Oh, fine!" making a dab at her eyes, "but at my wits' end trying to make a fire. Will you tell me why it will insist upon going out? It is maddening! I have lighted it six times."

"What, you making a fire?" said Helen, and then, "Just wait a moment and I will come over and see what is wrong."

Under Helen's nimble fingers the brown paper was taken out, the fire-pot filled with loosely wrapped newspaper, small sticks laid crisscross, a few larger ones on top, and then a match applied. Like magic the tiny blue flame sputtered, caught hold of an edge of paper, and then in a few moments a blazing fire was seething and swirling. Nathalie, in exuberant joy, seized her friend and the two girls waltzed merrily around the kitchen.

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Of course Nathalie knew how to make toast, but when Helen showed her how to hold it over the coals until it was a golden-brown, butter it while hot, and then cut off the scraggly edges and a rim of crust, she realized that toast-making was indeed a domestic science. Scrambled eggs came next, simple, but deliciously done, as her friend showed her. Then came putting the coffee in the percolator with the water heated beneath by the tiny alcohol lamp, thus drawing from the beverage the most nutritious qualities, Helen declared, without injuring one's digestion.

But the grape-fruit—that was another new thing learned—was prepared the way Helen said a trained nurse had taught her, one time when her mother was ill. It was cut in half, the pulp dug out with a spoon into a cup or saucer, and after the pith had been removed, chopped finely, returned to shell, and then sugared and put on the ice. But perhaps the best part of helping Mother that morning was when, after striking the Japanese gong eight bells, Nathalie arrayed herself in Felia's freshly laundered cap and apron and stationed herself back of her mother's chair to serve breakfast.

How pleased and surprised her mother was! Dick "Blue Robined" her again, while Lucille patronizingly exclaimed, "Oh, Nathalie, you make a swell maid—and how smart you are getting!"

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Just before dinner, Helen appeared again, and taught her how to make soup from a few boiled bones and a chunk of meat, a few left-over tomatoes, and a bit of onion and seasoning. She taught her to broil a steak,—this time without a burnt speck—how to make white sauce for some left-over fish, how to scrape new potatoes economically, and the right way to cook peas. Then came a delicious dessert of stale pieces of cake and canned peaches, laid in layers with beaten cream, and topped off with little white pigs, as Nathalie called the tiny bits of egg froth floating on its surface. Truly, it was a dinner fit for a king!

After dinner her sensitive soul rebelled at the pile of greasy dishes, but the task grew lighter when Helen showed her how to make the water hot and soapy, using a lot of dried bits of soap that Nathalie was going to throw away, by sewing them in cheese-cloth bags. She washed the glasses and silver first, then the china, and then—oh, horrors—the pots! But when the new Pioneer saw how her friend put them on to boil, thus doing away with so much grease, it was a revelation. And when the dish-towels were washed and hung out in the sun to sweeten, and the sink was scrubbed with a brush and a cleansing soap, Nathalie was again forced to admit that she had mastered another household science.

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Oh, no, it wasn't all plain sailing—the world isn't run that way—and the new Pioneer's back, eyes, and feet made themselves forcibly known before she went to bed that night. Many a time she had had to grit her teeth, summon Miss I Can to her side, and with forced determination go on with the job; but after all, she declared, as she turned out the light, "I have helped Mother!" and then sleep claimed the tired girl.

When Saturday morning came, however, and no Felia made her appearance according to promise, Nathalie's face grew somber, and she could not help going to the door every few minutes to see if she were not in sight, for she had planned to go on a bird-hike that morning with the Pioneers to learn bird-calls. As the clock struck nine she dropped her broom—she was sweeping the kitchen—and rushed to her room. Here she wept copiously for a while in her clothes closet with her head buried in the skirts of her dresses, so no one could hear, and then she heard her mother calling her.

She dried her eyes guiltily, scrubbed her face to brush away all trace of tears, and then answered blithely, "Here I am, Mumsie, I'm coming right down to finish the kitchen." When she came tearing down the stairs she found the kitchen swept and garnished, and lo! there stood Mother with big, surprised eyes pointing to Lucille, who, as she caught sight of her cousin, bobbed her head and dropped a curtsy, crying, "Sure, ma'am, it's a new job I'm afther takin' on meself, but do yez see the loikes of it for the claneness?"

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Nathalie gave one bewildered stare, and then a merry peal of laughter broke from her, seconded with a minor note from her mother, and with a bass accompaniment added by Dick, as he entered and sensed the situation. Yes, Miss I Can must have caught Lucille in her meshes, too, for that young lady, generally so dainty in her labor preferences, had condescended to sweep the kitchen.

"Well," she explained apologetically, "I was jealous of the praise bestowed upon Nathalie, and thought I'd show you folks that people can do things even if they are not Blue Robins."

"Oh, Lucille, you aren't a Blue Robin, you're a duck of a dear," bubbled Nathalie as she hugged her cousin rapturously. "It was just lovely of you. But Mother, did you know what she was doing?"

"No, I did not," rejoined Mrs. Page; "I thought it was you working all by yourself and came in to help, as I knew you wanted to go on the hike. But before you go, dear," she added anxiously, "I want you to go down to Felia's and see how she is. If she is not coming back by Monday you will have to hunt around for a washerwoman; the clothes can't go another week."

An hour later, Nathalie, delighted to think she could take a day off with a clear conscience, hurried in the direction of Ophelia's little gray shanty; but to her surprise, as she came near the door she heard a loud wailing and the confused hum of several voices.

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As she entered the stuffy parlor hung with gay colored prints and dingy-looking chromos, she found Ophelia seated in a rocking chair with her face buried in a gingham apron, wailing and crying hysterically. Pushing her way through the crowd of sympathizing friends, Nathalie grabbed the arm of a colored woman who stood by Felia's side crying, "Oh, please, won't you tell me what's the matter?"

"Sure, Miss," respectfully answered the woman, wiping a tear from her eye. "It's little Rosy, she's lost—we can't find her—ah, honey, don't take on so!" she ended, turning towards the grieving mother and giving her a caressing pat on the shoulder. "Surely some one will find her."

Nathalie now stepped to Felia's side and pulled her gently by the sleeve, determined to get some definite information about black Rosebud, as Dick called the little pickaninny who had often come to the house with her mother, and who, being a bright child, had become a prime favorite. "Ophelia, please tell me about your trouble!" insisted the girl. "Is Rosy surely lost?"

"She lost sure nuff, Missy, down at de bottom of de pond," quavered Felia's mother dismally, an aged negress standing by the side of her daughter, as she rolled up her eyes until the whites looked like saucers on a shelf. "I'se gwine to tell you de trufe—dat chile is drowned. Oh, I see her face a-shinin' in de water—"

Her horrible prognostication as to Rosy's woeful fate was terminated by her daughter's renewed wails of anguish, as she again began to rock herself to and fro with redoubled force.

"Oh," thought Nathalie, frowning angrily in the direction of the old mammy, "I do wish she would stop." Then she cried, "Oh, Felia, don't cry so—I am sure she will be found—perhaps she is at one of the neighbors' houses, you know she is fond of visiting."

There was such sympathetic concern in the girl's voice that Felia desisted from her lamentations long enough to cry, "Oh, Miss Natty, she done go and get lost—she ain't nowhere hereabouts!" Then in answer to further questioning she said that the child had been seen just before dark picking posies over in a meadow with several children, but when bedtime came she could not be found.

"Has any one looked for her?" demanded Nathalie, turning towards the group of colored women as poor Felia went back to her apron wailing pitifully, "I'se gwine promise yo', Lord, if yo' bring my baby back, I'll never get mad with her again. I'll promise sure—" but the rest of Felia's prayer was lost as the women crowded around Nathalie and eagerly explained that Dan Washington, Paul Jones, and Abe Smith had searched the town for her. They had been up all night, but when morning came had to return to their jobs, and there was no one looking for her at that time.

"Oh, I'm so sorry, Felia!" sympathized Nathalie again to the weeping mother. Then, after asking if the town authorities had been notified, she decided to hasten home, knowing that she could not get any one to promise to work for her at that time.

"Oh, it is too bad!" she lamented as she hurried down Main Street. "It does seem as if some one ought to be searching for her now, why the poor child may be injured or something!" Her too vivid imagination pictured her, not down at the bottom of the pond, as mammy had done, but crying piteously of fear and hunger in some lonely place. "I suppose the police in this town will take some hours to get on to the job, as Dick says." She suddenly paused and her eyes shone with a bright light. She wrinkled her brow thoughtfully a moment as if going over something in her mind, and then with the glad cry, "Oh, I know we can do it—it will be just the thing!" She broke into a run as if her sudden inspiration would escape her if she did not hurry.

With good speed she soon reached the house, hurriedly told her mother what had befallen Rosy and the condition she had found things in at the negro settlement, and then, telling her she would be back in a few moments, she flew post-haste across the road to Mrs. Morrow's house. Here the Pioneers with eager, expectant faces were all talking animatedly, their brown uniforms, red ties, and broad-brimmed hats suggestive of the good time in store for them.

"Oh, here she comes!" sang out Helen, as she spied Nathalie hastening up the path towards the veranda. "Why, where have you been? We began to think you were not coming."

"I had to go on an errand for Mother!" Then with glowing eyes she told them of the visit to the colored settlement and about the lost Rosy, the grief of her mother, and how there was no one looking for the child. "Oh, girls," she ended in a quiver of excitement, "let's give up the bird-hike for to-day, and see if we cannot find little Rosy!"

CHAPTER IX—SEARCHING FOR ROSY

An oppressive silence followed, while each girl looked blankly at her neighbor. The new Pioneer's face flushed, and her eager, excited eyes shadowed, as she quickly realized that in her eagerness to follow the law of kindness she had been too officious. She stood in dismayed embarrassment, the chill of an unpleasant surprise benumbed her. With a faint hope she turned her eyes appealingly towards Helen, surely her level head and kind heart would prompt her to second her. Helen caught the look and smiled faintly.

Edith, who was always the first one to either second or down a proposition, broke the silence by

exclaiming in an aggrieved tone, "Why, the idea, Nathalie Page! we can't give up the bird-hike, we've all brought our lunches!"

"I should say not," interposed Lillie Bell with flashing eyes. "Why, it would take the whole morning, and there could be no hike for to-day, and next week I can't go, I—"

"Oh, they have probably found the child by this time!" ventured Barbara North, to Nathalie's surprise, as she had always found her of a kindly nature. 144

"Well, I for *one* don't think it is our place to look for the child, anyway," asserted Jessie, decisively. "Let the men of the town do it. There are three policemen hanging around all day with nothing to do."

Nathalie's cheeks had lost their pink bloom; her face stiffened as she retorted coolly, "Well, just as you please, I see I have made a mistake." She nerved herself. "I thought kindness was one of the laws of the organization, and it seemed to me that our pleasure was to take a secondary place when we had an opportunity to do a kind act. If you had seen the poor mother sobbing—"

"Oh, fiddle!" ejaculated Lillie, "those colored people are all emotion; their sobs don't count for much. I agree with Jessie that the townspeople should send out a search party, and I for one refuse to give up the hike. Who's on my side?" she ended abruptly, turning and facing the group.

"I!" and "I!" shouted several voices at once in answer.

Nathalie backed towards the edge of the veranda. "I seem to be in the minority," she said with assumed indifference, although her heart was beating in double-quick time, for something had whispered, "They are very rude, I would resign immediately." But this suggestion was bravely silenced by the thought, "No, I will not be as small as that, I will show I do not care." 145

"There must be some one who thinks as I do," she ended resolutely, wishing that she could run from this affront to her sensitiveness.

"I am with you, Nathalie!" suddenly cried Helen, walking towards her friend and putting her arm around her.

Grace looked at the bevy of girls who had bunched together, then at the faces of her two friends. In a faint voice she asserted lamely, "And I, Nathalie, I didn't stop to think—"

"And, Nathalie, you can count me on your side!" broke in a voice at this moment. The girls, alert at the prospect of a division in the group, turned quickly to see Mrs. Morrow place herself by the side of Nathalie, taking her hand as she did so and giving it a cordial squeeze.

Nathalie's color came racing back and her heart leaped with joy. Ah, then she had not been too officious, after all! She turned to see the girls standing in embarrassed silence with shamed eyes and uncertain mien. But Lillie, who was generally the spokesman of the group when Helen was on the opposite side, cried somewhat pertly, "Why, Mrs. Morrow, do you think it is our place to go and hunt for that colored child? I should think it was the duty of the townspeople to look after those things." 146

"That is not the question," replied the Director coldly. "As Nathalie said, kindness is one of the basic laws of the organization. We should be poor Pioneers indeed if we saw a man drowning and then stood and argued as to whether it was our place to save him or not. Nathalie, I commend you not only for your kind suggestion, but for having the real pioneer courage in maintaining what you believed to be right. You have shown yourself a true Blue Robin and I am proud of you. Now, girls, we will put it to a vote. Those of you who want to go on the hike, up with their hands." Not a hand was raised.

Mrs. Morrow's face brightened as she cried laughingly, "Now who wants to join a search-party with Nathalie as captain, and see if they can find little Rosebud?"

Every hand flew up, and there was a general cry of, "I do! I do!"

"Well, girls," said Mrs. Morrow kindly, as her eyes traveled from face to face, "I see you have repented of the error of your way. Let Nathalie's example inspire you!"

"Oh, I guess we just didn't stop to think!" broke forth Barbara, with shamed eyes.

"Well, when one has made up her mind to do a thing she would be a saint to give it up without a fuss," remarked Lillie. "Of course, Nathalie was all right, but she had had time to think it all out and we hadn't!" 147

"A good explanation, Lillie," answered Mrs. Morrow, "but I hope you have all learned a lesson. Now, Nathalie, make your suggestions and we'll get to work."

The new Pioneer had already divided the girls into two sections, with Helen as one leader, and Lillie Bell as the other. It did hurt a little to give Lillie the first place after she had spoken as she had, but Nathalie realized her worth, and then, too, she did not want to show any resentment. "You see," she explained, "I am only a dummy captain, for I am not as familiar with the town as the rest of you are, and there will be no time lost in making false moves."

"That is a very sensible decision, Nathalie," nodded Mrs. Morrow, "but the question is where to look first!"

"Suppose we go down to the settlement, make a survey, and get our bearings?" voiced Helen.

"Good, Helen, that is just the thing!" acquiesced the Director, as the girls at her suggestion hurriedly deposited their lunch-boxes in the hall, while Nathalie ran over to tell her mother her

plans.

In a few moments the would-be searchers started, each girl equipped with her staff, while the two leaders triumphantly displayed their whistles, which they claimed would be of great help if any of the party got lost and their voices did not carry.

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It did not take long to reach Felia's shanty, and as Nathalie ran in to tell her that the Pioneers were going to hunt for Rosy, the rest of the party gazed with quick, alert eyes first in one direction and then in the other.

"I should not be surprised if the child had wandered away looking for flowers," remarked Mrs. Morrow, suddenly remembering what Nathalie had said the child was doing when she was last seen.

"But where would she be apt to go?" inquired Nathalie, who had returned in time to hear Mrs. Morrow's remark.

"Why, to the woods!" retorted Helen quickly, and her eyes lighted in sudden thought as they dwelt on a green belt of woodland that loomed against the sky on the opposite side of the road.

"Don't you think she might have strayed down the hill?" questioned Nathalie, pointing to a pond shimmering in the sun at the bottom of a knoll near-by. "Poor Mammy is quite sure she is drowned and lies at the bottom of the pond."

"Well, I'll tell you what we can do," spoke up Lillie, "I'll take my squad and search down by the pond, and Helen and the rest of you can go over to the woods; somehow I'm with Mammy, for all children love to paddle in the water."

Lillie's suggestion was a timely one, and as she, Grace, Jessie, and a few Orioles disappeared over the slope of the hill, Helen and Nathalie, as the advance guard, hurried across the road and into the cool recesses of the woods. As they hastened onward every girl's eyes were alert, watchfully peering behind every bush and tree as they stumbled over gnarled roots and broken stumps in their efforts to reach some shaded nook, or lichen-covered rock dimly seen in the shadows of the trees.

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Helen proved an efficient leader and did not hesitate to keep her followers busy, as she sent first one and then the other to look here or there, determined not to miss a nook or spot where the child might be hidden. Every now and then some of the party would give a bird call, or Helen's whistle would reverberate sharply through the swaying pines.

But Mrs. Morrow, whose strength began to waver, finally suggested to Nathalie and Edith, who had been acting as her body-guard, that they rest for a few minutes. Spying a decayed tree-trunk that had fallen across the damp, spongy earth a few feet away, they seated themselves upon it.

"Oh, I'm really tired!" exclaimed Mrs. Morrow, for she had proved as indefatigable as the girls in searching, thinking, she declared, of her own two kiddies safe in the garden at home.

Nathalie, impressed by the solemn stillness about her, slowly fanned herself with her hat, while Edith made frantic dabs at her red face, from which beady drops were oozing. "Oh, I should just love to stay here all day," she cried, sniffing the air, redolent with the odors of pine, spicy balsam, silver birch, and many other trees that loomed darkly in the mysterious retreats of the forest.

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"Hark!" cried Mrs. Morrow, suddenly putting up her hand for silence as she peered up at the green boughs above her. "Taweel-ab, taweel-ab, twil-ab, twil-ab!" came in a succession of weird, sweet trills.

"Wheew, whoit, wheew, whoit!" imitated the Sport with quick readiness.

"It is a hermit thrush!" explained Mrs. Morrow softly, and her hand clutched Nathalie's as she pointed to a brown bird that was scudding swiftly over the fern a few feet away.

"Oh, isn't it a dear?" whispered delighted Nathalie, for to her this coming, as she called it, into the very heart of nature was a new experience. She half regretted at times that they had been compelled to forego the bird-hike, as she was so anxious to get in touch with the feathered songsters of the wood and field. Then, too, suppose the searching-party should fail of its purpose, she would feel that she had been the means of leading them on a wild-goose chase!

As her eyes roamed here and there in the hope that she might see the brown thrush again, she started, stared a moment, and then springing to her feet dashed across to the clump of ferns where the bird had been flying.

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"I have found a clew!" she cried triumphantly a moment later, as she returned and held up her hand. Between her thumb and forefinger was a bit of red, which she was waving gleefully as she came towards them. As the Sport and Mrs. Morrow hurried to her side they saw a loop of red ribbon still with the knot in it by which it had evidently been recently tied to some object.

"It is Rosy's hair-ribbon!" cried Nathalie. "I found it clinging to one of the ferns."

"Oh, are you sure?" burst from Mrs. Morrow, her eyes eager with hope as she bent over the little scarlet knot.

"Indeed I am sure," answered the delighted girl, "for it is the very ribbon I found in my work basket and tied on Rosy's funny little topknot the day she was at our house. See, here is the very cut in the edge—that is the reason it was of no use to me—but Rosy was as happy as a lark over it. Oh, isn't this too lovely, for now I know the child is somewhere near!"

With renewed hope they set forth again on the hunt, Nathalie running ahead and calling "Tru-al-lee!" as loud as she could—it was the only bird call she knew—to get in touch with the advance guard and tell them the good news.

In answer to her Blue Robin call, in a few moments a Bob White whistle was heard, rather faint, but there was no mistake as to that quick, clear note. The Sport, a few yards behind, immediately responded by giving a similar call, and then as they stood waiting to ascertain from what direction the whistle had come, there sounded a sudden, sharp snap of the underbrush near, and Kitty Corwin's face emerged into view. "Hurrah, girls!" she shouted jubilantly, "we have found her!"

"Oh, where? Where?" came in an instant from three throats as Kitty leaned against a tree and panted.

"Down in a ravine, huddled close against a rock, asleep. Helen did not want to waken her until Nathalie came, for fear she would be frightened at the strange faces. Come on, quick!" she exclaimed excitedly, turning and darting back the way she had come with light, fleet steps.

But the belated ones needed no urging, especially Nathalie, who dashed ahead without regard to time or place, with a haste that left no doubt as to her joy that her searching party had been a success. Overhanging branches and dried twigs that blocked her way were ruthlessly brushed aside, or run against, scratching and bruising her unmercifully as she discovered later, but it made no difference to the happy girl.

It seemed but a moment when she emerged into a clearing, and close at the heels of Kitty climbed down into a small ravine. It had evidently been at one time the road-bed of a brook, but was now filled with scraggy stones, dried underbrush, and fallen logs.

As Nathalie saw the little motionless figure cuddled in a heap against the rock, her heart leaped with misgiving. "Oh, is she dead?" she asked Helen, who stood guard by the side of the rock, every now and then brushing away a gnat or a fly that descended with a loud buzz on the smeared black face, which lay partly exposed to view as it rested on a mite of an arm.

"Oh, no," assured Helen, "she is all right, only asleep. I suppose she wandered about for some time in the darkness and was tired out, poor little tot!"

The little one looked so pathetically small as she lay there, just a heap of bones, black skin, and woolly hair, with the tears still glistening on the black lashes, that Nathalie's heart was stirred with pity.

Mrs. Morrow now came forward and quickly felt her pulse, crying as she did so, "Oh, you poor little black baby! Yes, she is all right!" she nodded assuringly, "but Helen, what is the matter with her leg?" Her sharp glance noted that it lay rather limply on the ground.

"I am not sure," said Helen with bent brows as she touched it softly, "but I am afraid it is broken. That is why I waited for you and Nathalie, I did not like to move her for fear of hurting her."

"But we shall have to," returned Mrs. Morrow as she finished examining the injured limb, "for it is broken, and we must get her home as soon as possible, for it will have to be set."

As Helen and Mrs. Morrow attempted to take hold of the child to lift her on the stretcher the girls had made, she opened her eyes wide into the strange faces bending over her. Then she closed them quickly, and as the little black face wrinkled in fear she let forth such a howl of absolute despair that the girls were all on the verge of joining with her in their keen sympathy.

"Oh, Rosy," cried Nathalie springing hastily forward and taking the child's hand softly in hers, "see, it is Mrs. Page's little girl. Don't you remember when you called me that—Mrs. Page's little girl?" She repeated softly as she saw the child had stopped her crying and was staring up at her. But the black eyes closed again and the little form shivered as a prolonged howl answered the questioner.

But Nathalie, who loved children, lifted up the little head with its pigtailed and laid it against her breast as she tried again. "There dearie, don't you want to go in the choo-choo cars to see Mamma?"

These words had the desired effect, and the howl was arrested as two big black eyes stared with awakening interest while Nathalie caught hold of the stretcher and choo-chooed it back and forth. "Come, Rosy!" she cried in a third attempt, "and we will go in the choo-choo cars to see Mamma, and—oh, yes, the little rag-dollie I made for you, don't you remember what a lovely time we had?"

The black eyes opened wide, stood still for a wee second, and then twinkled into a smile as their owner cried, "Oh, yes, I knows youse; youse de Story Lady!"

"Yes, I'm the Story Lady," quickly answered Nathalie, her face breaking into a smile; then as Rosy smiled back, "but how did you get here, Rosebud, so far away from home?"

The little face screwed into a knot as she whimpered, "Oh, I got lost, Story Lady. I picked daisies in de lot, and den Jacob he showed me de blue flowers he got in de wood. So I runned to de wood, and oh, I got a lot!" Her eyes gleamed with joy as she held up a few withered violets still clutched in her tiny hand. "And den it grew all dark," she moaned, "and I couldn't fin' de road, and I fell and hurt my leg. Oh, I'se so hungry!" she ended piteously.

But when she saw so many eyes watching her, she covered her tiny face with her hand, shyly peeping out from between her fingers.

The girls all laughed merrily at her coquettishness, but their laughter became almost a howl as the little black eyes began to play peek-a-boo at them, and then danced in unison with their laughter, as if enjoying the sensation she had created.

But time was precious, and so with the promise of candy and a story from Nathalie the little one was lifted from the ground and carefully placed in the stretcher, and the Pioneer search party, weary, and warm, but jubilantly happy at their success, started for home. 156

"Some one of you girls ought to run ahead and get the doctor!" exclaimed Mrs. Morrow as the rescuers plodded carefully but slowly up the ravine with their burden, "for the child needs attention at once. I don't wonder she cries!" For, alas! the little one had begun to whimper softly, although Nathalie was still playing choo-choo car as hard as she could, so as to divert her mind from the pain and hunger pangs that had now begun to assert themselves more forcibly.

"I will go!" cried Edith quickly, and then at a nod of assent from their Director she disappeared in the shadowy gloom of the trees like a small whirlwind. Barbara and Kitty were then despatched to hurry and tell Rosebud's mother that the lost was found.

As they reached the edge of the woods, Mrs. Morrow thought she heard the throb of an automobile engine, and as it was followed in a moment by the toot of a horn, she begged Nathalie to hurry to the road, just a few feet beyond in the opening. "It sounds like the doctor's car—perhaps he will take little Rosy home—for, O dear, she is suffering so!"

Nathalie softly unfastened the little hands that were clinging to hers, and with a few bounds reached the road where, sure enough, she saw a few yards ahead an automobile that had just passed. 157

Yes, it was the doctor! Nathalie thought she recognized his car, and with mad haste tore after it, shouting to the full extent of her lungs, "Doctor! Doctor!"

The occupant of the car, who evidently was not driving at a very high rate of speed, heard her shouts and in a moment brought his car to a standstill. As he turned about and stared at the oncoming figure of Nathalie, who, red-faced and bedraggled was speeding towards him, he looked slightly surprised.

"Oh, Doctor," began the girl. She paused, for the gentleman who was looking at her with such a puzzled expression, coupled with slight indignation at being stopped in this way, was a strange young man!

Nathalie halted abruptly as she discovered her error, feeling as if her face would burst from the heat of her unwonted exercise and the fact that she had been tagging in this tomboy style, after a strange man.

"Oh—I'm so sorry," she panted apologetically, "but Mrs. Morrow thought she heard an automobile, she was sure it was the doctor—"

"Mrs. Morrow!" exclaimed the young man, "why, is she anywhere about?" He jumped from his car as he spoke and came towards her.

"Oh, yes," cried the girl, with a gleam of hope that if this young man knew their Director there was a chance for Rosy. "We have been looking for a little colored girl who was lost—oh, I mean the Pioneers—we have been searching in the woods," she explained confusedly, the blood surging furiously into her cheeks under the keen gray eyes that were looking so searchingly down at her. "Oh, can't you help us?" she burst off appealingly. "Mrs. Morrow wants to get her home as soon as she can, for she has a broken leg." 158

"A broken leg?" echoed the young man, "why, of course I will help you," he continued heartily. "Where is Mrs. Morrow? And—oh, I see—" the gray eyes gleamed pleasantly, "you are Blue Robin, the little girl who lives across the way from us. I am Mrs. Morrow's brother, Jack Homer!"

CHAPTER X—NATHALIE AS THE STORY LADY 159

Nathalie's color flamed again as she heard that "little girl," and she drew herself up in momentary indignation. Oh, this was evidently the Dr. Homer whom she had heard the girls talk so much about, and who had been giving them lessons in First Aid to the Injured. But who could have told him she was a little girl?

This affront to her dignity was forgotten, however, as she quickly remembered the need of getting little Rosy home. "Mrs. Morrow is in the woods—oh, there she is now!" she cried hastily, as she pointed to the Director, who, with the Pioneers and their burden, had halted on the edge of the woods and stood waiting for her. As Mrs. Morrow perceived her brother she quickly beckoned to him.

A few steps, and Dr. Homer was at his sister's side, listening to her hurried recital of the preceding events and her anxiously expressed wish that Rosy could be seen to as soon as possible.

"Why, if it isn't little Rosebud!" said the doctor jovially as he turned from his sister and looked down at the helpless mite of humanity, lying so patient and still in the stretcher. 160

The child smiled shyly, and Nathalie, perceiving that he knew her, gave a sigh of relief, for she felt that now everything would soon be all right.

It did not take the doctor long to lift Rosy tenderly into the car and to make her comfortable with her little black head on Mrs. Morrow's lap. As he was about to jump in himself an "I want my Story Lady! I want my Story Lady!" came in a loud wail from the little patient, for Rosy's face had knotted up again as she pushed away Mrs. Morrow's detaining hand and tried to lift her head in search of Nathalie.

Nathalie hastened to the side of the car crying, "Oh, Rosy, it's all right. I'm going home to your mamma. I will be there almost as soon as you—"

"Why, Nathalie, get in with us," exclaimed Mrs. Morrow, "there is room on the front seat with the doctor. Oh, I beg your pardon, Nathalie, perhaps you have not met my brother. Jack, this is Miss Page, our new Pioneer, and oh, Jack; if it had not been for her I don't know when poor little Rosy would have been found!"

"I am most pleased to meet you, Miss Page," smiled the doctor with undue emphasis on the Miss. Then, as he noted Nathalie's stiff little bow, he continued apologetically, with a humorous twinkle in his eye, "I have heard so much about Blue Robin, that somehow I thought she was a little girl."

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Nathalie smiled pleasantly, instantly recognizing that this frank-eyed young man was doing his best to atone for his mistake of a few minutes ago. But she must not keep him waiting, and a moment later she sprang into the car. Although it was but a short ride to Felia's house, there was time enough for the doctor to chat pleasantly with the young girl, so by the time they had reached their destination Nathalie understood why Dr. Homer was such a favorite with the Pioneers.

Fortunately, Edith had caught Dr. Morrow just as he was about to set out to call on a patient, so he soon arrived. In a short time he and Dr. Homer had set the broken limb and made the child comfortable, who, with a smile of content, received a bowl of bread and milk from Mammy, whose black face was wreathed in smiles again as she saw that the little one was not lying down at the bottom of the pond.

A half-hour later a group of girls straggled wearily along the main street of the village, animatedly discussing first one and then another detail of the morning's hunt. As they were all tired, it was unanimously decided to postpone the bird hike to another day.

When this decision was reached, Nathalie's bright face clouded as she exclaimed contritely, "Oh, girls, I'm awfully sorry I broke up the hike, but I was so anxious to find Rosy."

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"Well, I for one am glad we gave it up," asserted Kitty Corwin, "for girls, it paid for the disappointment to see that poor mother's joy when she saw her child."

"And the old black mammy—huh—she is a regular plantation coon," chimed in Edith; "did you hear her shout 'Praise de Lord! Hallelujah!?' Oh, but how her eyes did shine!"

"She was a black sunbeam, all right," observed Helen, "and it's all owing to Nathalie!" putting her arm about her friend and giving her an enthusiastic squeeze; "she ought to have a white star."

"A white star," ejaculated Nathalie, "what does that mean?"

"Why, it means that you should receive a badge of merit, but as a Pioneer can't receive a badge until she is a first-class member, Mrs. Morrow gives white stars instead to the girls who deserve badges but are not yet old enough to receive them," explained Helen. "We keep our stars and then sew them on a big United States flag we are making for our new Pioneer room."

"Oh, I should be pleased to have one!" cried Nathalie, "but it gives me more pleasure to know that you do not think I spoiled your fun, and have been so nice about it. I should just hate to have you think me officious!"

"But we didn't think that, Nathalie," assured Lillie quickly. "In fact, I guess we just didn't think at all, we were so intent on having our own selfish ways. We are all friends of yours, and as Pioneers and personally," she spoke warmly, "we are glad you won the victory over our naughty, wicked selves."

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Several days later, Nathalie, who was still the maid of all work, stood washing the breakfast dishes. Somehow, helping Mother seemed to have lost its charm. She felt as if she and Miss I Can were not as good friends as they were at the beginning of her kitchen campaign. O dear, she did wish Rosy would get better so Felia could come back. She sighed heavily, and then hastily wiped away a stray tear that was meandering down her cheek—she had heard a step on the back stoop.

"Hello, Blue Robin!" was Helen's cheery greeting as she entered,—she usually came in by the back door in the morning—then she stopped, for Nathalie's usually smiling face wore such a look of woe that she exclaimed anxiously, "Oh, Nathalie, what is the matter?"

But her only answer was a stifled sob as the girl flung herself into a chair by the kitchen table, and dropping her head on her elbow gave way to the pent up flood that had been gathering for the last few days. Helen stood a moment, uncertain what to say or do, dreading that some great calamity had overtaken the family. Then she stepped to her friend's side and lifting her head encircled her with her arm caressingly. "Now," she cried, softly patting the brown head, "tell friend Helen all about it."

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Nathalie's tears flowed unrestrainedly for a moment and then, feeling somewhat better for the

overflow, and a little ashamed of useless tears as she always called them, she withdrew from the friendly shelter and sat up. "Oh, it's just nothing at all, Helen," she cried in a choked voice, "only that I'm a great baby—and then—I'm tired"—her voice quavered. "I'm tired of washing dishes and sweeping—" a snuffle—"all the time."

"Of course you are tired, who wouldn't be, Nat, with all the wonderful things you've done this last week?" sympathized Helen; "considering, too, that it's all new to you. Why, Mother says you are going to make a splendid Pioneer."

"Oh, did she?" asked Nathalie, her eyes brightening. "It makes one feel good to be praised, I have felt so discouraged," with an intake of her breath, "for I've tried so hard to do everything I could, and then Mother, why she hasn't said one word of praise since the first day. Everybody just takes it all—all the work I do—just as if it was nothing, and things drag so. Of course I don't expect to be praised all the time," she hastened to add, "but oh, I don't seem to feel as happy about working as I did at first."

"Oh, well, you're tired," replied Helen condolingly. "I know just how you feel, for I used to feel the same way when I first began to help Mother around the house. You see the enthusiasm and the glory have all gone out of it."

"The enthusiasm and the glory?" repeated Nathalie in puzzled inquiry.

"Yes, the novelty of doing something new is the enthusiasm that put you on the job; and the praise you got for doing it—which made you feel as if you were awfully good—that's the glory. But when things get stale and people stop saying how smart you are and so on, why then it will be just plain duty all through. You know, the frosting always comes first before we get to the cake."

"Oh, I suppose that has something to do with it," responded Nathalie alertly, "when one comes to think of it. So from now on it will be just plain duty, won't it?" with a quiver of her chin, for somehow the prospect was not an enjoyable one at that moment.

"Yes, that's about the size of it," was the practical answer. "But if you keep right on doing what you ought to, you'll get something better than the sugary stuff. Just keep Miss I Can for your friend, and then after a time you will find that you like to do the very things that at first seemed so hard. Experience, Mother says, brings knowledge, and knowledge puts you in the end where you want to be."

"I wish it would," exclaimed Nathalie, her eyes flashing with sudden hope, "for oh, Helen, I do so want to know things, that is the useful arts, for I am so eager to learn how to make money the way you are doing! You know I have told you all about Dick, Helen," she lowered her voice, "I think it is just that, seeing the poor fellow striving to earn a little money so he can be made well again, that makes me so down-hearted, for I feel that I am not doing a thing to help him."

"But you are helping him, and your mother, too, Nathalie," said Helen. "By the very work you are doing you are helping your mother to save money, that ought to be something to comfort you."

"Oh, but it's mean kind of work," emphasized Nathalie, "and then, too, it's only saving a mite; and it will take so much money for Dick's operation."

"Now, see here, Nathalie," exclaimed her friend, "let's figure this thing out." Taking a pencil and pad that always hung by the table with Nathalie's list of edibles to be served at each meal, she drew a chair up to the table and began to figure just how much Nathalie was saving her mother by doing the work herself.

Nathalie bent over her shoulder and watched eagerly as she saw the line of figures jotted down by Helen. Then she, too, put on her thinking-cap and in a few minutes the two girls had figured out quite a sum that Nathalie was actually saving in dollars and cents each week she did the work.

As Nathalie realized this fact, demonstrated so clearly by her friend, her eyes sparkled, and clapping her hands she cried, "Oh, Helen, I'm going to get Mother to let me do the work all the time—of course, as you say, the washing will have to be done out—but oh, I shall feel—"

"Now, Nathalie, don't go off at a tangent; stop and consider before you make this suggestion to your mother. You must think just what it will cost you, that is, count what it will mean to suffer aches in your back and feet, to have fire-scorched cheeks,—they say cooking ruins the complexion,—red, sloppy hands, and all the rest of the penalties imposed on one for doing housework. If you put your hand to the plow, you know, once started you can't look back."

"Oh, yes, I know, Helen, it will be terrible to have to do these things, but if it will help me to earn money, even the teeniest bit, now that I know that it is to be done without the glory perhaps it won't be so hard. Oh, I know Miss I Can will help me!" Nathalie smiled through the mist that would blur her eyes, "for I must help Dick."

"Yes," returned her friend, "if you feel that way, determined to help Dick, go ahead; for that will serve as the glory, that is, the incentive will help you through lots of hard things."

Nathalie looked up at her friend's grave face with wonder-lit eyes. "Oh, Helen," she said solemnly, "do you know you are going to be a great woman? You are awfully wise for a girl of your age!"

Helen interrupted her with a merry laugh. "Oh, no, I'm not going to be a great woman at all. I should love to be—that is my ambition,—but one's ambitions are not apt to materialize the way

one expects them to, you know. But I'll tell you, Nathalie," her face sobered, "I have a very wise mother—she tells me these things. And then as I go about I find from experience that what she has said comes true."

"Yes, Helen, you will be great," nodded Nathalie sagely. "Perhaps you will not go about blowing a trumpet to let people know you are one of the world's great ones, but you will be all the same, even if you never do a thing but live in this sleepy town and become a stenographer."

"Well, it looks that way," laughed Helen, "from the pile of typing that awaits me. Yes, I am, as you say, in a fair way to become a stenographer, but Ye Stars! if I do not become an expert one, I'll—well I'll go hang myself, as the boys say, for I must succeed!"

"Oh, are you really going, friend comforter?" laughed Nathalie, as Helen rose to go. "Yes, you are that, for you have given me lots of comfort this morning; you put new life in me when the cause was almost lost. On the strength of your calculations I'm going to lay my plans before Mother, and then I'm going to get some books and trinkets and go to see Rosy."

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"Oh, yes, how is she?" inquired Helen interestedly. "I was thinking about her the other day."

"She is getting along nicely, but it is awfully hard for the little thing to lie there most of the time alone. I was down to see her yesterday and told her some stories, and I promised to come again to-day."

"I wish I could help you! But see here, Nathalie, speak to Grace and Lillie about the story-telling; perhaps they will help you at that. Grace is a lady with plenty of leisure to waste, and Lillie Bell dotes on yarns."

"I did ask Lillie, but she said she was no good telling stories to children, and Grace—why, she said she was busy getting her clothes ready for the summer."

"There's Kitty. Ah, I expect to see her this afternoon. I'll ask her to lend you a hand, but I must go, so good-by and good luck to you, Story Lady!"

"Oh, Mother, you are just a dear!" cried Nathalie a little later, as she was about to set forth to see Rosy. Her mother had come down from the attic with a couple of old picture-books, and handed them to her to give to the little invalid.

"Gloriana! won't they make her eyes shine!" exclaimed Nathalie as she tucked them under her arm, picked up the basket of goodies she had prepared, and hurried down the walk. As she knocked at the door of the gray shanty she heard Rosy whimpering softly. "Poor kiddie," she thought, with a wave of pity. Receiving no answer she pushed open the door, which was partly ajar, and entered. On the bed lay the little form with its head buried in a pillow, emitting a series of feeble whines.

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"Good morning!" said the smiling visitor as she touched the half-buried shoulder.

At the sound of her voice the child's woolly head rolled over, and a smile of welcome radiated her tear-stained face.

"How is it that you are all alone?" asked Nathalie, taking out an orange from the basket; "where are Mother and Mammy?"

"Mamma went to de town, and Mammy—she's doin' de wash," and then her eyes expanded with joy as she spied the orange.

The orange was soon demolished, and then, as Nathalie started to show her the two picture-books, she realized that Miss I Can confronted her again, for a sticky mouth and hands revealed the fact that she had an unpleasant task to perform. For a moment she hesitated, but quickly overcoming her disinclination, she plunged in, got a basin of water, and finding no wash-cloth, dipped her own dainty handkerchief in it, and amid sundry squeals and protests gave the little face and hands a good scrubbing.

This performed, the picture-books were brought forth and she was soon busy explaining the pictures to the pleased little girl. But this diversion she soon tired of and then came the cry, "Oh, Story Lady, won't yo' please tell me er story?"

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"Why, I don't think I know any now—" Nathalie had meant to look up a fairy book so as to be prepared, but the pleading look in the black eyes upturned to hers won its way and she said, "All right, I'll see what I know? How would 'The Babes in the Woods' do?"

As this title was mentioned, a cry of protest came from the child, "No, I don't want to hear about de woods. I'se afraid of de woods."

"Of course you don't, you poor little chickie," answered Nathalie contritely, and then her face lightened up as a streak of sunshine at that moment glancing in the window proved an inspiration. So she began to tell about Sunshine Polly, who had been told that if she could get some sunshine in her heart she would always be happy, and how she forthwith set out for this golden country, and after many adventures found it. Indeed it proved to be a most beautiful place, with a king, very round and bright, and a lot of sunshine fairies flying all about throwing some of their sunny treasure into the eyes of every one they saw.

By the bright eyes watching her, Nathalie knew that she had made a good selection this time, and the story progressed. She told how Polly got the sunbeams, with a breathing spell every now and then to think up some more, and the cries, "Oh, dat's a lubly story! Oh, I likes dat story!" But at last Polly returned from the land of sunshine with a crown of sunbeams on her head and a big

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bundle of it in her heart.

Nathalie smiled as she finished, for it seemed as if she too, had been to the sunshine land and had put some of it into Rosy's little heart. "Ah, now I will get a chance to slip away," she thought, picking up her basket as a prelude to her departure.

But Rosy, surmising by her movement that she contemplated leaving, began to wail plaintively, begging her so hard to tell just one more "lubly story." As Nathalie stood, trying her best to think of another story, she heard a slight noise, and looked up to see three little black faces with big shiny eyes staring at her from over the ledge of the window.

The girl broke into a merry laugh, for really it was funny to see those three round faces—like a row of flower-pot saucers on a shelf. "Why, how did you get there?" she cried and then again burst into laughter. The laughter proved contagious, for the three little pickaninnies immediately joined in her merriment, and then, evidently thinking this was an invitation to come in, one after the other slid over the sill and trotted up to the bed, to the great delight of Rosy. Here they climbed up, sitting on the edge with their naked black feet hanging down, looking for all the world like monkeys' claws as they swung them to and fro, anxiously waiting for the story to begin.



"Why, how did you get there?"

"Oh, what shall I tell them?" worried Nathalie, but in a flash she remembered, and was soon in the mysteries of that beloved of all fairy tales, "Jack and the Bean Stalk." The interested glow in four pairs of eyes was inspiring, and amply repaid her for the time that she had so reluctantly given the little hearers.

The tale was soon ended, and again Nathalie sprang to her feet, feeling that now she must go, for there was that dessert she had to make for dinner. She gathered up her basket and had just turned to say good-by to her audience of four, when she saw Dr. Morrow, who was standing by the door, smiling down at her with his kindly eyes.

"Oh, were you there all the time?" she asked in dismay. The doctor nodded as he said, "Yes, Blue Robin, I have enjoyed your story very much. You had such an appreciative audience," smiling at the little black faces, "that I was reluctant to disturb their bliss. Our little friend Rosy has well named you, 'The Story Lady.'"

He turned towards his patient, and then with a kindly word for each of her little friends, he began to inquire as to how Rosy was. As Felia at this moment entered the room, Nathalie waved a good-by to Rosy, and surrounded by the three pickaninnies, each one eager to carry her basket, hurried out of the room and into the sunshine she had been telling about. The many comments made by her body-guard of three, showed how eager they were for the joys of story-land—a rare treat to them. Realizing how much can be taught a child through story-telling, as she had found when she was a child, Nathalie fell to thinking. By the time she reached home she had planned a story club—oh, it would be just the thing—if the Pioneers would agree to it. They could take turns, only an hour once or twice a week, in telling stories to these new friends of hers, and who knows, if the class grew they might eventually do a great deal of good? Still somewhat timid of taking the initiative, she planned to lay it before Helen and let the suggestion come from her.

Nathalie was trilling softly to herself little snatches of song, for somehow on that bright June day

she felt very happy. She had started, as she told Helen, on a new career. Of course her mother had objected at first to her taking Felia's place, but when she found that Nathalie was determined, she had consented, feeling that perhaps it would not harm her for a while. And then, too, she would learn many things she needed to know, and this was her opportunity to learn them. So Nathalie had won her consent, and with the help of Dorothy, who had been pressed into service, and the few things she allowed her mother to do, she had found her work slip along more easily than she had anticipated, and the thought that she was earning a mite towards a great object, as Helen said, had proved the glory.

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And so she sang away, doing the week's stint of darning, as the stocking drill at the Pilgrim Rally had helped her wonderfully, and now she was quite assured that her mother did not have to do her work over.

As she glanced up from her work to watch a tiny humming bird that was flitting among the leaves of the honeysuckle trellis, she heard the throb of an engine, and looked up to see Dr. Morrow's car coming up the road. To her surprise, instead of running his car in through his gate to the garage, he brought it to a standstill in front of their house, alighted, and a moment later was coming briskly up the path.

His cheery greeting broke in upon her surprise as he cried, "Well, Blue Robin, so you are at home!" O dear! every one seemed to be calling her that nowadays, the girl thought a little ruefully.

"Good morning," she cried; then her face paled apprehensively. "Oh, have you come about Dick—do you think his knee is worse?" she faltered, suddenly remembering that her brother had complained quite a little the last three days with the pain in his knee.

"No, I have not come about Dick," was the reassuring answer. "I have come to see you on important business. Dick is doing as well as can be until he is operated on."

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Nathalie sighed, and then said, "Oh, Doctor, I do wish you would explain to me about Dick's operation! Mother told me a little, but you see I don't know much about these things."

The doctor raised his eyebrows in pretended surprise and then he said in a serious tone, "I should say not. Such things as operations are not for little Blue Robins. They are supposed to trill little tru-al-lee songs, or tell fairy tales to children, as I hear some of them have been doing lately."

The girl's eyes grew bright. "Oh, we are all doing it. Has Mrs. Morrow told you about the Pioneer Story Club we have formed? Helen suggested it, in a way." Nathalie was modest, for the suggestion had really come from herself, and also the planning with the aid of Helen's wise head. "We go down to the colored settlement," she continued, "every Saturday morning and take turns in telling stories to the little children. Don't you think it a fine idea?" She spoke animatedly.

"Indeed I do, but now for the business."

"Oh—but please tell me about the operation first!" Nathalie was afraid the doctor intended to put her off. "Tell me, will Dick really be good and strong again after he has the operation?"

The doctor gazed at her a moment with serious eyes and then said slowly, "Yes, Miss Nathalie, I believe that if your brother could have that operation he would be just as well as if this unfortunate accident had not happened."

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"But what makes the operation necessary, and what would you do to him?" she insistently demanded.

"Well, I am not going to tell you exactly what we would do to him. We shall not make hash of him —"

"Oh, Doctor!" exclaimed Nathalie with a shiver.

"But we will remove an unhealthy bone in his leg and replace it with a new one. I saw an infected finger joint removed the other day and replaced with a joint taken from one of the patient's toes."

"Oh, Doctor Morrow," cried the distressed girl, "you are kidding, as the boys say."

The doctor shook his head. "No, some years ago I might have been indulging in a yarn, but surgery has made great strides these last few decades, and cripples nowadays may be restored to health and strength by transplanting entire bones with their joint surfaces. This discovery was announced a short time ago by an eminent surgeon before the Philadelphia Academy of Surgery. Tests were made on dogs first, and the results were so satisfactory that the same methods have since been applied to the human body with like results.

"Hitherto bone transplantation had been attended with great stiffness and lack of power in the members treated, but now an infected hip joint may be removed in the same way, and replaced by healthy bones, and the functions work properly. But, young lady, I came here not to deliver a lecture on the transplantation of bones, but to ask you to do something for me."

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"Do something for you? Oh, Doctor, I should just love to!" Surprise and pleasure caused Nathalie's eyes to light expectantly. And then, "Do tell me what it is; perhaps it is something I can't do!" she said doubtfully.

"Oh, you can do it all right," asserted the doctor confidently. "Remember the old adage, 'Where there's a will, there's a way.'" His eyes twinkled humorously as he watched the girl's face. "But let's get at the beginning of things. The other day as I was hastening to my little African friend, Rosy, I heard some one talking to her. I stood still, for it was some one telling the fairy tale of Jack and the Bean Stalk.

"Now when I was a wee laddie," continued the doctor, "that fairy tale was the star one to me, so I plead guilty, I was tempted and listened. And then when I discovered that the Story Lady, as Rosy says, was a sometime friend of mine, I found that old tale doubly interesting. A few days ago, when talking to a patient, I happened to relate this little incident in connection with something else I was telling, and then my troubles began."

The doctor pretended dismay. "That lady has a crippled child who rarely goes out, never meets children of her own age, but is compelled a good part of the time to lie on a couch suffering more or less pain. This little girl was injured in an accident which her mother, poor creature, believes was her fault."

"Oh, how dreadfully she must suffer!" burst from Nathalie involuntarily.

"Yes, I sometimes think the poor mother suffers more than the child. Now this mother, from a mistaken idea, believes it best to keep her child secluded, thinking that the comments of strangers would hurt the child's feelings and cause more suffering. So you see what a miserable life the little one leads. Well, I must cut my tale short—" taking out his watch and glancing at it; "perhaps it was something I said, I don't know, but this lady asked me if I thought the young lady who was so good at story-telling would be willing to come and amuse her child with stories. You see I was in for it, but all I could do was to say I would ask her," the doctor's eyes sobered, "for I believe that this Story Lady girl is not only a worth while girl—is that the way my wife puts it when she lectures you?" the doctor's face had wrinkled into a smile again, "but that she has one of the kindest hearts in the world."

"Oh, Doctor, Mrs. Morrow never lectures," answered Nathalie enthusiastically; "she just talks to us in the sweetest way; we just love to hear her. But, Doctor, why did you not tell the lady I would be only too glad to tell her little girl stories, but if she suffers so much it might tire her." This was all said in one breath.

"Not so fast, Blue Robin. No, I did not tell her you would, for I did not know how it would strike you," rejoined the doctor gravely. "I only told her what you could do."

"Oh," exclaimed his companion; "well then, please tell her the first time you see her that I shall be delighted to do all I can for her little girl."

"When I see her—well, I'm going to see her now." The doctor looked down at Nathalie keenly. "If you are willing to give this pleasure suppose you begin to-day?"

"To-day—you mean now—this morning?" exclaimed surprised Nathalie.

The doctor nodded gravely.

"Why, well, yes, I suppose I could go this morning." Nathalie wrinkled her brows; she was wondering about dinner. "All right," she said in a moment, "I'll tell Mother and get my hat!" She started for the door.

"Just wait a moment!" commanded the doctor suddenly, taking Nathalie by the arm and peering down into her face with intent eyes. "I forgot something, for amusing this little girl means that you will have to promise two things."

"What are they?" asked the girl curiously.

"The first one is that you will have to promise—as a Girl Pioneer—" the doctor's eyes gleamed again "not to betray to a living soul that you are telling stories to this child; there is a reason."

"Oh, that is easy," nodded Nathalie; "that is, if you except Mamma, for I always tell everything to her."

"Well, we'll trust Mrs. Page as to secrecy, and the next thing—this is a big promise, for it will not be so easy to keep—is that when you go to this lady's house you will consent to be blindfolded." The doctor looked relieved.

"Blindfolded?" repeated puzzled Nathalie. "Why, do you mean that I will have to have my eyes covered up so I can't see?"

Dr. Morrow nodded, his keen eyes watching the girl's face intently.

There was a pause. "Am I to go with you?" inquired Nathalie. The doctor's gray head jerked again.

"Why, yes, I'm willing to be blinded—as long as you're with me to lead me about—but what a strange idea!"

"Yes, it is a strange idea, and I tried to reason the lady out of it. I even refused at first—and again yesterday—to ask you to do this ridiculous thing, but after thinking it over I have ventured. You know, there is the little girl to be considered, and you will?"

"Of course I will!" was the quick reply. "It is a funny thing to do, makes me think of the heroine of some detective tale. Blindfolded! Oh, it will be fun, a real adventure, I do wish I could tell Helen about it, I know she won't tell."

"No, not yet," said the doctor, "just wait and see what happens. I'll predict that after you tell one or two of your exciting tales the blindfold act will be out of it. Now get your hat."

It was a glorious morning and Nathalie, in a merry chat with the doctor as they glided down one street and up another, forgot to wonder where they were going. But when they suddenly slowed up on a lonely road, the doctor peered cautiously about and then with a flourish drew forth a big black handkerchief, she remembered. She did indeed feel somewhat queer as the doctor laughingly tied the black cap, as he called it, over her eyes, and then, after seeing that it was not pressing too tightly, started his car again.

This time the car went so swiftly that Nathalie caught her breath. O dear, she was beginning to feel nervous. "It really seems as if you were kidnaping me!" she cried, with an attempt at merriment.

"So I am," replied the doctor glumly. Evidently this blindfolding business was not to his liking.

As the car came to a standstill the doctor cried, "Now, Blue Robin, we are about to perform the first act in our little drama, so get up your nerve."

"I hope you won't let me fall!" exclaimed Nathalie cheerily. "I don't want to break my nose or anything just yet."

What a weird feeling it gave her to be led along a stone walk, then up a few steps guided by her companion's strong arm, then evidently into a hall, as Nathalie surmised by the polished floor covered with heavy rugs. After being led stumblingly up the stairway—which she thought would never come to an end—they crept slowly along for some distance; she could not tell whether it was a hall or a room, and felt very trembly as she afterwards told her mother, and she was brought to a sudden halt by hearing, "Oh, Mamma, here she is!"

The voice did not belong to a small child and Nathalie, surprised, stood still in embarrassed silence wondering what was coming next.

"Oh, Doctor, how kind you are!" cried another voice. "I had given you up, how obstinate you must think me!" The voice faltered, and then Nathalie felt a soft touch on her arm as it continued, "Oh, it was very kind of you to consent to come and entertain my daughter, and to be obliged to come this way, too. I feel guilty; I know how unpleasant it must be to have something over your eyes."

"Well, don't worry over that now," was the doctor's terse admonition. "I have complied with your requests—on second thought, and my young girl friend has been most kind in agreeing to your wishes, for the present at least. Later, I hope, you will change your mind about these blinders."

"Please don't scold," cried the voice again, "I know it is foolish of me. I will lead you to a chair!" the owner of the voice exclaimed as the girl gropingly put out her hand as if afraid of falling. Then the same soft touch led the blinded one across the room. "No, you are not going to fall; there you are all right now," she said, as Nathalie with a sense of relief sank back in a chair.

"Now," continued the voice, "I am going to be your eyes and tell you what is before you."

"That will be very nice," interposed embarrassed Nathalie, feeling somewhat foolish at having to sit in this queer way before people. She was at a loss what to say, but had time to collect herself as the lady went on talking rapidly. She described the room with its hangings, the pictures on the wall, told where the doors and windows were, and—"Oh, here is the couch—" she hesitated slightly, "and on it is my daughter, her name is—"

"Oh, Mamma, if you don't want the young lady to know my name, tell her I'm the Princess in the Tower!" exclaimed the same sweet voice that had called out when Nathalie first entered the room.

"That will be just the thing, 'the Princess in the Tower,'" laughed the lady lightly. "Now, Princess, I am going to leave you to entertain Miss—"

"Nathalie Page," interposed the girl quickly, who, reassured by the laughing tone of the young girl on the couch, had begun to recover from the awkwardness of her plight. Somehow the situation appealed to the girl's imagination and she began to enjoy it. "Oh, I ought to be the one in the tower," she merrily asserted, "for I feel as if I were a prisoner with this funny thing over my eyes."

"It is too bad," cried her companion sympathetically, "but you know it is a whim of Mamma's. You see," she explained, "I had an accident when I was a child, and it has made me deformed—" there was a pathetic note in her voice. "Mamma is so sensitive, she is afraid that if people see me they will make unkind remarks."

"Oh, how could any one be unkind?" exclaimed horrified Nathalie.

"Well, they are sometimes. I used to be sensitive myself, too, but I'm getting used to it. I tell Mamma if I don't mind she ought not to. Yes," she ended sadly, "I am indeed a prisoner shut up in these big gray walls."

"How hard it must be!" answered Nathalie. "But do you never go out?"

"Sometimes I go in the garden. I used to drive, but the people in this town are so curious; they stare so. I believe they are worse than in the city, where I suppose people are used to all kinds of

strange sights. But there, I'm doing all the talking, please tell me about yourself! I'm so glad to know some one who comes from New York. The doctor told me you were a New Yorker; he told me, too, that you were very clever, and that you told stories beautifully."

"Nonsense," exclaimed Nathalie. "The doctor is a dear, but he natters me; I am not clever, I wish I were. I studied hard at school and am ready to enter college this fall, and as I am only sixteen people think it very clever for a girl to accomplish, but I don't see why a girl can't do it as well as a boy. But now I'm not going to have a chance to show people whether I am really clever or not," and then she briefly told about her disappointment in having to give up college.

"But what are you going to do if you do not go to college? Please tell me!" said the princess, as Nathalie hesitated. "I just love the sound of your voice!" burst from the girl impulsively.

Nathalie laughed at this extravagant praise, wondering for a moment if the young girl were not making fun of her. Loath to believe that she could be so rude, however, she went on and told of her city life, her schoolmates, about Dick's accident, and how they came to settle in Westport, and then she stopped. She had been on the verge of telling about the Pioneers when she recollected that the doctor had said she was to tell the child stories. "Oh, I must stop talking—I was to tell you stories—what will your mother think of me?"

"That is all right," promptly returned the girl, "you are here to entertain me; that's what she told the doctor, and if I would rather have you talk than tell stories, it will be as I say."

"Are you sure of that?" questioned conscience-stricken Nathalie. "The doctor told me I was to tell you stories."

"Of course he did, but because he said a thing doesn't make it so; Mamma told him that, I guess, but you are really to do as I say."

There was a note of decision in the girl's voice, which was an intimation that she was used to having her own way. Nathalie somehow felt awkward and uncertain as to what course to pursue, and became suddenly silent, inwardly racking her brains, trying to think of some story that would please a young girl of about the age she judged her companion to be.

"Oh, aren't you going to tell me about the Girl Pioneers?" was the question that suddenly interrupted Nathalie's train of thought.

"The Girl Pioneers!" echoed Nathalie, wondering how her companion came to know about that organization.

"I want to tell you a secret," the princess whispered at that moment. Nathalie felt a slim hand touch her with a clinging pressure on the arm. "Do you know the doctor and I are great friends, we have lots of jolly talks together. Oh, I just love to hear his step; don't tell, but sometimes I make believe I'm suffering terribly so Mamma will send for him!"

"But you shouldn't do that!" cried Nathalie, rather shocked at the idea of simulating pain, suddenly remembering a story she had heard of a young girl who had finally come to suffer from the very disease she had feigned.

"Oh, what difference does it make as long as it brings him?" retorted the princess. "You see he tells me of the outside world, and makes me laugh when I have pain, for I do have lots of it sometimes. One day when I was having an awful time with my back he almost made me forget the pain by telling me some of the funny things that have happened to the Boy Scouts and to the Girl Pioneers.

"He told me all about you, too, how you sprained your foot and about your brother Dick, and about your finding the blue robin's nest in the old cedar. He said you were pretty, too. I like pretty people. I wish you didn't have that horrible thing on your eyes, I want to see them. Mother said I would have been pretty, too, if I had not had this terrible hump—oh," she cried abruptly, "I was not to tell you anything about myself, for I'm a horrible thing to look at now."

"Oh, no, you can't be," exclaimed Nathalie involuntarily, for by this time the sweet girlish voice and soft clinging hand had stirred her imagination, and the pictures presented had made the make-believe princess a most beautiful creature.

"Oh, but I am," persisted the girl in a resigned voice. "But then, do tell me about the Pioneers!" Then noting Nathalie's reluctance, she called out in a high, shrill voice, "Mamma, come here, I want you!"

"What is it, darling?" answered her mother coming hastily from the adjoining room, where she had been conversing with the doctor. "What does my princess want?" remembering the rôle the girl had assumed.

"The princess wants to be obeyed," answered that personage imperiously. "Miss Page refuses to talk about herself or to tell me anything, because she says you ordered her to tell me only stories."

Nathalie's face reddened under her black mask, "Oh, no," she interposed swiftly, "I did not say it that way. I said the doctor had asked me to come here and tell you stories, but then I supposed you were a little girl."

"No, I am not a little girl," replied the princess, "I am fourteen."

"Miss Page, if you do not mind I shall be glad if you will do as Ni—as—the princess desires," said her mother pleadingly. "She is an invalid, you know, and, I am afraid, sadly spoiled."

"Very well," rejoined Nathalie briefly, feeling somewhat relieved to think she could talk about the Pioneers and not to have to think up a story. Yet it did seem strange to ask her to come there and tell stories and then ask her not to do so.

"Now that you have permission, please go right ahead and tell me everything you know about the Pioneers!"

"That will be delightfully easy, I can assure you," exclaimed Nathalie. "Although I am a new Pioneer, I am beginning to be very enthusiastic. I can't tell you much about the hikes for I have never been on a long hike yet. We were going on a bird hike the other day—" then she remembered the search party and its results, and in a few words told about Rosebud and the morning spent in searching for her.

"Oh, that was just fine of you," cried the princess as Nathalie came to the part where the Pioneers had acted as if they did not want to hunt for the little girl. "And those girls! I think they were very selfish, but go on and tell me some more about the Pioneers!"

Nathalie, thus pressed, told of the Pilgrim Rally, the coming of the Boy Scouts, the Pioneer dance, and then lastly how she had accepted Miss I Can, the motto of the organization, as a very dear friend, and how she was trying to live up to it. The girl could not account for the feeling that made her sacrifice her usual reserve in regard to her inner life, and tell this make-believe princess about what she was trying to do. In thinking it over when by herself, she concluded that perhaps it was the lesson in this little motto that she had intuitively felt might help the little prisoner in the tower.

"Oh, I wish you would get up a story club for me!" exclaimed the blood royal, as Nathalie finally ended her Pioneer recital by telling about the story club the girls had formed to tell stories to the little children in the colored settlement.

"Wouldn't it be just lovely! And they would all be real live girls, too, not story-book people, for oh, Miss Page, I get so tired of book folks! I want to meet just real every-day girls. That is why I coaxed my mother to get the doctor to have you come here and tell me stories, but don't say another word about telling me stories," she lowered her voice, "for that was just a trick to get Mother to consent. When I want a thing I just keep plaguing her and then she lets me have my way."

"Oh, but you ought to tell your mother everything," exclaimed her new friend, somewhat repelled by this frank admission of deceit. "I always tell my mother everything, why I could not sleep at night if I thought I had deceived her."

"Everything is fair in love and war, that's what my governess used to say, but she was a horrid thing," the princess confessed candidly; "I just hated her. She had a beau and I used to steal his letters and pretend I had read them, just for the fun of seeing her get in a rage. But go on, and tell me more about those girls."

The last word had barely left her lips when a shriek, shrill and terrifying, rang through the room. Nathalie jumped up in a spasm of terror, but before she could ascertain what it was, another one, even shriller and more prolonged than the first one, as it seemed to the frightened girl, sounded right in her very ear. Her heart leaped to her throat, a stifled cry escaped her as she dropped back in her chair cowering with fear. Then came another cry, followed by weird, demoniacal laughter. Nathalie put her hands up to her face determined to tear off her bandage, for that blood-curdling shriek, that hideous laugh, she had heard before—and then she remembered—oh, she was in the house of the Mystic!

CHAPTER XII—THE WILD FLOWER HIKE

"Oh, it's the crazy man!" came with a flash into Nathalie's mind. What should she do? If she could only take off that horrible bandage from her eyes!

"Oh, don't be frightened!" exclaimed the princess with a merry laugh as she saw her companion cower in her chair. "It's only Jimmie! Jimmie, stop that racket!" she continued with a loud clap of her hands. But Jimmie, whoever he was, only replied with another agonizing shriek. This time the princess called angrily, "Mamma, come and make Jimmie stop his shrieking. Miss Page is awfully frightened!"

Nathalie, as she heard the foregoing explanation, and realized that it was not an insane person screaming, gave a hysterical gasp and turned her head in the direction of the shrieks, but alas! her blinders, like a black wall, barred her vision.

A few hurried steps, a scuffle evidently, accompanied by the loud flapping of wings, and then a jumble of French, Spanish, and English, jabbered in defiant rage, revealed that Jimmie was a cockatoo!



“Oh, don’t be frightened!” exclaimed the princess, with a merry laugh.

But Jimmie, determined not to be worsted in his fight to be heard, with much loudness and clearness of note now broke into “In the Sweet Bye and Bye.” This sudden transition from the terrestrial to the celestial proved too much for Jimmie’s audience, and peals of laughter rang out, in which Nathalie’s treble and the doctor’s deeper note mingled with the cockatoo’s song. Jimmie, thinking he was winning an encore, started in with “Taffy was a Welshman, Taffy was a thief—” but this time he was summarily thrust from the room by an attendant—amid jabbering protests.

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The doctor now reminded Nathalie that they must be going, as he had an important case on hand; he had waited for her, he explained, knowing that she would be unable to manage alone with her blinders, as he called the handkerchief.

As Nathalie rose to go the princess seized her hand, crying, “No, you shall not go. You have only been here a few moments!” Notwithstanding her mother’s admonition that the doctor must not be detained, the invalid persisted in clutching her new friend’s hand in a vise-like grip, much to her embarrassment. Finding, however, that she was not to have her way, the princess broke forth into a low whimpering.

Nathalie stood still, and then feeling ashamed that a girl of her age should act the part of a child of five, endeavored to persuade her to let her go, promising to come again soon. She met with no success, and driven desperate by the command, “Come, Nathalie, we must go!” she roughly pulled her hand away. Whereupon, the whimpering cries of the princess degenerated into shrieks of rage, so prolonged and shrill that Nathalie, with a thrill of surprise, immediately recognized from whom Jimmie had learned his shrieks.

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As the car sped swiftly along in the direction of home, after the black handkerchief had been relegated to the doctor’s pocket again, Nathalie suddenly reddened furiously, looked queer for a moment, and then burst into stifled laughter, much to the doctor’s amusement, who was gravely watching her.

“Hello!” he cried at length, “what’s up?” after his companion had made one or two ineffectual efforts to control her risibility.

But at last she sobered, and with the tears still in her eyes told how she and Grace had been sent by Mrs. Morrow a short time before—to deliver a letter to Mrs. Van Vorst, and how when they were waiting in the reception room they had heard those same terrible shrieks and frenzied laughter that Jimmie had emitted that morning, and, thinking that it was an insane person, they had run for their lives.

“O dear,” she gasped hysterically, “what a joke on Grace and me! To think of our running away when it was only a cockatoo! Oh, what sillies we were!”

“I agree with you,” returned the doctor so solemnly that the girl flushed and looked at him quickly with shamed eyes, but his humorous twinkle did not agree with his blunt assurance, so Nathalie’s self-esteem suffered no wound.

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“You know where you were then to-day?” questioned the doctor slowly after a pause.

“Oh, yes, at the house of the Mystic!”

“The house of the Mystic?” with some astonishment.

“Oh, that is the name the girls have given Mrs. Van Vorst because she acts so queerly. She has been very disagreeable to the Pioneers, they claim, refusing to let them drill on the lawn in the rear of her house. The girls say she hates young people, and then she always dresses so queerly in gray, too. She has shrouded herself in mystery by shutting herself up in that big gray house behind those walls. Edith Whiton insists that there is an insane person in the house and that he

chased her the day of the Pilgrim Rally.”

“An insane person! There is no insane person in the house. That is nonsense, and should not be repeated!” exclaimed the doctor in an annoyed tone.

“Yes, I know, but the girls believe Edith, and so did I until to-day. But Grace and I have never told a soul what we heard, only Mrs. Morrow. But, oh, Doctor,” she cried impulsively, “can’t I tell Grace about the cockatoo? I will tell her not to tell a living soul,” she ended earnestly.

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“No,” returned the doctor decidedly, “Miss Grace is all right, but she might let it out in her sleep. No, you wait, and some time you girls can have the best laugh ever, as my kiddies say.”

So the story of Nathalie’s visit to the princess in the tower was buried deep within her heart, although it came very near being unearthed several times when she was in the company of Grace or Helen, for really, it was hard to keep it a secret when it was such a good joke.

Saturday, the day of the wild-flower hike, was warm and sunshiny, with the balminess of summer in its gently wafting breezes. Every one present was filled with the anticipation that they were going to have a “dandy time.”

“Are we all here?” questioned Mrs. Morrow, as she stood on the veranda steps, craning her neck from one side to the other in the endeavor to see that her bird groups were all there. In her natty khaki suit, with its red-banded sombrero and red tie, she looked as jaunty and young as the Bluebirds, Bob Whites, and Orioles, who, with admiring eyes, watched her as they stood lined up on the path with knapsacks, staffs, and all the paraphernalia needed for the hike.

The several bird calls attested that the band were all on hand, and then they filed up on the veranda before their Director as lunch-baskets were opened for inspection, so that she could see that each one had been properly prepared and was in a “relishy condition,” as Helen explained to Nathalie.

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In a few moments the inspection was over and the girls tripped merrily down the walk and out of the gate, making such a hubbub with the clatter of their tongues that the doctor, as he came hurriedly up the path, teasingly put his fingers in his ears in intimation that they were making undue clamor.

The Flower of the Family’s knapsack bulged with a package of Aunt Jemima’s Pancake Flour, suggestive of the flapjacks to be, while the Editor-in-chief, with a reporter-like air, carried a large note-book under her arm so as to feature the affair in the forthcoming “Pioneer.” The Encyclopedia was lumbered with two musty volumes on flower lore, she explained, so as to be able to give all desired information on the various specimens that were to be gathered by the hikers.

The Pot-Boiler’s knapsack was not only stuffed with several mysterious-looking packages, but was glaringly conspicuous, that young lady, true to her name, having pasted a paper advertisement of an iron pot on its cover. The Sport carried a few garden implements: a small shovel, a rake, and a hoe, with which to burrow in the ground for those specimens that grew in a brook or in the mossy hollows in the woods. The Tike, as the privileged fag, carried a basket to fill with wild-flowers to be distributed to the shut-ins of the town hospital on their return.

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Each Pioneer, besides her lunch-box, carried a self-made note-book—Nathalie had spent several hours making hers—with a pencil attached for her flower specimens, data, and so forth. Nathalie felt a bit disappointed that she had not been able to buy a uniform, although Helen had said that it made no difference, for she noticed to her dismay that she was the only Pioneer minus that very desirable accessory, dear to the heart of every hiker.

The girls had gone but half a block when a sudden cry of pleasure rippled through the line. Then, as one Pioneer, the girls gave their call in welcome to Dr. Homer, who, as Mrs. Morrow explained, was to take the place usually occupied by her husband, when the Pioneers were on a long hike.

The doctor responded by giving the Boy Scout salute as he stood a moment with raised hat. When the girls filed by, to Nathalie’s surprise he stepped to her side and asked, as he smiled in recognition, “May I have the pleasure of hiking with you?”

Nathalie’s cheeks bloomed pink at the remembrance of their last meeting, but her eyes brightened as she nodded an assent. Perhaps some of the girls felt a little envious as they saw whom the doctor had selected for the favor of his company, as he was a great favorite and had always proved a delightful companion. But they quickly stifled any feeling that jarred, as each one remembered that she had had her turn, and that now it was Nathalie’s opportunity to have this pleasure as the new Pioneer.

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And Nathalie’s turn added a zest and enjoyment to her first hike that was long remembered, for through Dr. Homer’s kindness in imparting to her many stray bits of knowledge she was able to hide her greenness in wood-lore, bird-lore, and many of the activities in which the other Pioneers were so proficient.

The Pioneers had barely reached the open when the Sport and one of the Orioles were despatched by the Director to blaze a trail. In order to give this advance corps a chance to get ahead, the rest of the company rested on the road, sitting down on the grass, or on some decayed tree trunk, while others practiced wall-scaling, among them Nathalie and the doctor, the latter acting as their instructor.

This scaling feat meant stepping carefully upon the ledge of a stone wall that skirted the road,

and then springing down as quickly and lightly as possible, so as not to dislodge stray stones and bring them rattling after one. This forerunner of other feats to come led the doctor to tell how a Scout practiced wall-scaling; sometimes by standing on the shoulders of another Scout, and then climbing a high wooden fence, which was claimed by many to be a more difficult performance than scaling a stone wall. This, of course, proved an incentive for the girls to do their best, especially Nathalie, who as a city-bred girl did not want to prove a laggard.

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A few minutes later, as they resumed their tramp, Nathalie's face grew radiant as she suddenly spied a tree near with a penknife notch on the bark. "Oh, girls, here is the trail! Go this way!" she cried excitedly, pointing as she spoke to the notched sign of a twig bent at the end, making it look somewhat like the point of a broken arrow. As she was coming to be a zealous student of the bent-twig signs, the trail-blazing system invented for the Pioneers, she explained a number of these bent-twig signs to the doctor, who was deeply interested and not only told of the many signs used by the Scouts, but showed her the trees that were the easiest to cut.

Chatting, laughing, and singing—for the girls vied with the birds in their joyousness that summer morning—making bird calls, alternating with notch-making and flower-gathering made the time pass swiftly. The new Pioneer was amazed when Dr. Homer pulled out his watch and looking at his pedometer said that they had walked four miles, and that in a short time they would hit the wood trail, where they were to camp for dinner.

Nathalie's flower-box was soon full of specimens that she had gathered from the roadside and the meadow where her lesson in wall-scaling came in handy. Perhaps this wild flower hunt proved but a small part of her pleasure, for as she strolled along the doctor proved most companionable as he coached her in hike knowledge.

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Never walk over anything you can go around, he had told her, and never step on anything you can step over, for every time you step on anything you lift the weight of your body, which makes more to carry when tramping. He also made her laugh heartily when he insisted upon examining the footwear of the hikers, expounding as he did so upon the foolishness of damsels in general, who would insist upon wearing shoes either too big or too small for them. The small shoes, he said, crowded the feet, and the big ones added extra weight, and made them road-weary before the tramp was half over.

He also told her about the weather signs; a low cloud moving swiftly indicated coolness; hard-edged clouds, wind; rolled or jagged clouds, strong wind; and a mackerel sky, a whole day of fair weather. Nathalie, perhaps to show this young man with the smiling gray eyes who looked at you so fearlessly that she, too, did know just a tiny bit about weather signs, sang softly:

"Hark to the East Wind's song from the sea,
Blowing the misty clouds o'er lea;
Shaking the sheaves of golden grain
With the patter of the rain;
Giving the earth a cooling drink,
Washing the flow'rs a brighter pink.

Hark to the West Wind's song of cheer
Bringing blue sky and weather clear;
Driving away the clouds so gray
Filling the earth with sunlight's ray;
Cheering the hearts of those who mourn,
Filling the dark with golden dawn."

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When the little lecture had ended she had learned that when a slack rope tightens, when smoke beats down, when the sun is red in the morning, or when there is a yellowish or greenish sunset it means rain; how to tell which way the wind blows by pulling blades of grass and then letting the wind blow them, or to suck your thumb and let the wind blow around it, the cool side telling the tale.

To be sure, they were all simple things to learn, but they were the essentials of life, as the doctor said, who had a most jolly manner of giving his stray bits of information, all the while making so much sport, as he ambled on, that Nathalie was sure she would remember everything he had told her.

When the girls reached the wood with its cool, damp shade, moss-grown paths, and running brooklet, they set to work with renewed vigor to hunt for specimens. The Sport, notwithstanding the fun the girls had made of her garden implements, found that they were in great demand. For a time she was the star hiker, as first one and another pleaded, "Oh, Edith, just let me have that rake a minute!" or, "Oh, I see the dandiest little blue flower here in this crevice!" and so on.

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When they finally grew tired of flower-hunting they pushed their way to a level space in the open on the edge of the woods, where knapsacks, frying-pans, pots, and all such camping utensils were hastily thrown on the grass, and the girls hied themselves to the spring to wash their heated cheeks and rearrange their tangled tresses. Some, more venturesome than the others, took off their shoes and stockings and waded in the brook's cooling flow, while the older ones, summoned by a series of bird calls, hurried back to camp to prepare dinner.

To their delight, as the girls returned from the spring, they found that Dr. Homer had built an Indian "wickiup," that is a dome-shaped wigwam, by sticking in the ground in a circle a number of limber poles. The ones the doctor had used were willow wands, but almost any kind of a bough would do, he claimed. He then showed the girls how he had bent the tops of each pair of

opposites or poles forward until they met. The ends were then interlocked and tied firmly. Over this impromptu wigwam—for it had been made with no tool but his strong penknife—he had thrown a blanket shawl.

The girls were all much interested in the Indian wigwam for this was the simplest way of making a tent, and they examined it eagerly. They were especially interested when the doctor told them that one time when he had lost his trail up in the Maine woods, he had made a dome-shaped wigwam and had rested in its shelter, high and dry, during a severe storm.

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When the novelty of the wigwam had worn off, every girl declared herself famished for something to eat, and the dinner committee hustled about picking up small dry twigs, which were placed in a heap, lightly, so as to draw the air. These were then covered with the heavier sticks until the desired height for a campfire was reached. Several fires were to be started, as no time was to be wasted in cooking the edibles.

When all was in readiness, there was a general call for Nathalie, who, as the new Pioneer, was to take her first lesson in lighting a fire with only one match. Every Pioneer, of course, was eager to show her how to do this feat, but Mrs. Morrow silenced the clamor by assigning the task to Helen.

“Oh, Mrs. Morrow—I think—” Nathalie stopped, a sudden roguish expression flittered over her face, and then she meekly followed Helen to the wood-pile and stood silent as she watched that young lady scratch her match, hold it in the hollow of her hand, and then, with a soft puff, kneel, and apply it to a twig.

The twig was obstinate, however, and Helen’s one match attempt was a decided failure. The Sport now offered her services as instructor, but Nathalie, feeling sorry for Helen, who with a crestfallen air had retired to the ranks of onlookers, cried, “Oh, no, Mrs. Morrow, can’t I try by myself?”

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As the Director nodded an assent, while the doctor laughingly declared she would have beginner’s luck, Nathalie took her match, examined it carefully, and then scratched it on the box. A tiny blue flame quivered in the air, which she carefully sheltered with her hand as she knelt before the heap of twigs, and blew, oh, so softly. It must have been a magic blow, for as she bent down and held it to the smallest twig she could find, almost a wisp of straw, it spread itself to the air, caught the twig in its flame, and in another moment drifting spurts of smoke showed that Nathalie had lighted the fire with one match!

The doctor whistled softly as he saw that Nathalie had succeeded, but before she could regain an upright position, the Pioneers had broken forth into loud clapping, somewhat to her confusion as she stood with the blackened match still in her hand.

Should she tell, she pondered, as her glance swept from face to face of the applauding girls; then as she saw the amused look in the doctor’s eyes, as he stood with folded arms leaning against a tree watching her, she gave a little laugh. She opened her lips to speak, but when the clapping continued, as if each Pioneer was bent on seeing who could clap the loudest, she raised her hand as she had seen Mrs. Morrow and Helen do sometimes.

This appeal had the desired effect, and as the clapping dwindled, Nathalie, with a nervous laugh, cried, “Girls, please don’t clap me any more, for I do not deserve it. This is not the first time I have lighted a fire with a single match. A few summers ago I camped up in the Maine woods. The second day at camp some one upset a pail of water on the box with our match supply, and as only one dry box was left, and it was some miles to the nearest settlement, we were compelled to economize, and were allowed only one match to light a fire. I was going to tell you,” she gave a little ripple of laughter, “but you were all so anxious to show me I did not want to spoil your fun, and then as I have not attempted the feat since that summer, I did not know whether I could do it again or not.”

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A circle of stones was now placed around the fires so as to prevent them from spreading in case of a strong wind, and then the lunch-boxes were opened. It was not long before the savory fumes of frying frankfurters, boiling cocoa, and flapjacks signified that a camp dinner was in progress.

The girls found a level rock on which they spread a cloth and small board, and then the bread was cut and buttered in a way that showed that they were experts at the task. Nathalie made the cocoa, counting noses as she put in a teaspoonful of cocoa to every cup of boiling water, letting it boil three minutes by the watch of the doctor, who had kindly offered to help his little hike-mate, as he called her.

The hikers now seated themselves around the fires—for there were three—and then something happened that held Nathalie with reverent awe for she saw Mrs. Morrow’s face sober with a sweet seriousness, as she gave the signal for silence. Every head was quickly lowered in response to this signal, and then a timid voice—it belonged to the Flower—broke the reverent stillness by softly chanting a blessing to the Giver of all good.

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Each girl had brought her own tin cup, plate, knife and fork, lump of sugar, and napkin. Pats of butter were now distributed, followed by the molasses jug, so as to be ready for the flapjacks that were now browning to a turn. The “Ohs!” and “Ahs!” of delight that burst forth as the cakes found their way around the circle amply repaid the baker for her reddened face and hard labor over the burning fagots.

Of course there had to be mishaps; the first piece of bacon to grease the griddle dropped into the fire instead of the pan, and a number of cakes turned out failures and had to be consigned to the

waste-heap. But it was a regular hike spread, and meant lots and lots of fun, especially when the pancake contest was started.

This was something new to Nathalie, and she quite enjoyed it as she watched one girl after the other take her turn in making a flapjack. She first poured the batter on the griddle in just the right quantity, and then skillfully tossed it high in air as she turned it, so that it would land in just the right place on the pan and finish to just the right shade of brown. 210

All the party, even the doctor, tried their hands at this feat, all but the new Pioneer, who shrank back, afraid to venture as she knew that expertness came only with many trials. But the girls were persistent and so good-natured in trying to show her that she felt a little ashamed, especially when Mrs. Morrow, who was jotting down the names of the experts for merit badges, repeated softly, "I can!"

Nathalie immediately sprang up, and although feeling that she would make a perfect goose of herself at this new trial, took the little pitcher, poured out the batter, and then with a quaking heart watched it darken. Ah, she slipped the turner under, and was just about to give it the magic toss when her hand slipped, and batter and turner fell into the flames.

She was so disgusted with this dismal attempt that she would have liked to disappear to parts unknown if the doctor had not cried, "Ah, just one more trial, I know you will get it this time!" To her unutterable astonishment the doctor's prediction came true, and she really tossed a flapjack with such success that her hike-mate declared it was "the best ever," and begged permission to eat it in memory of the plucky deed.

Of course Grace, Louise, and Helen each won a badge, as was discovered when the contest was over. But even feasting has its limitations on a warm day in June, and as the edibles disappeared the hike spread came to an end. The Tike and one of the Bob Whites were now despatched to the spring for some water, while the rest of the hikers—all but Mrs. Morrow, who was escorted to the wigwam for a siesta—flew hither and thither, filling the pots with water to boil off the grease, rubbing the griddle with sand, and so on. 211

As Nathalie and the doctor were jabbing the knives in the dirt to clean them, Helen came running up crying, "Oh, what do you suppose the water-carriers are up to? They have been gone an awfully long time and we have not a drop of water to wash the dishes?"

"I will go and see!" exclaimed the doctor, jumping up hastily, but he had not gone more than a few steps when a shrill scream broke the brooding silence of the woods. In another instant pots, pans, and dishes were flung broadcast as every one made a wild rush in the direction of the spring, headed by the doctor. As the doctor reached the spring, however, and saw that the screams did not issue from that quarter he turned, and with a few flying leaps reached the scene of disaster, some distance down the stream.

The girls started to run after him, but in a moment his loud laughter brought them to a standstill, for surely it could not be anything very serious or he would not be indulging in such levity! Helen and the Sport, however, who had rushed steadily on, were not far behind the doctor, and as they swung around the bend of the trees, they beheld a diminutive figure, sputtering and gasping, with rivulets of water trickling from bedraggled garments and locks, being assisted up the bank by the doctor's strong arm! 212

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The sorry-looking object proved to be the Tike, who between sobs and shivery shakes explained, as the party surrounded her, that tempted by the mirror-like surface of a dark pool in the middle of the brook she had stooped to see if she could see her face in it. Unfortunately, her knee slipped on a loose stone, and she had tumbled in.

With much laughter and merriment the girls made a stretcher, tumbled the somewhat subdued fag into it, and then set off for the wigwam, where Miss Carol was speedily disrobed and her clothes hung out to dry, as the girls merrily sang, "on a hickory limb!"

Bundled up in wraps after a few drops of stimulant had been administered to prevent her taking cold, which made her drowsy, she was left to the ministrations of the dream fairies, while the girls hurried off to wash the dishes and finish cleaning up. While this was being performed, the doctor showed Nathalie how to throw dirt or water on the fires—all but one, which was left for a cheer fire—so as to be sure that they were all out. The girls, he said, had learned a lesson last summer when they left a fire smoldering when they struck camp. It soon burst into a blaze and if it hadn't been for a party of Scouts who had been off for a tramp the woods would have been on fire. 214

Camp duties done, the cheer fire blazed a welcome and the girls hastily circled around it, and were soon busily engaged in packing the roots of their wild flowers with clay, wrapping them in big leaves and tying them securely with sweet grasses or string. They were then placed in the Tike's basket to delight the heart of some shut-in, whose only outing was from the window.

When this task was completed the flower specimens were laid in rows, and then Helen as leader, gave the names of her specimens; each girl having a like specimen laid it carefully between a

sheet of blotting paper to remove the moisture, and then pressed it deftly in her note-book, where it was fastened with gummed paper across the stems and thick parts of the plant. Under each flower was now written its botanical name, its common name, the date of finding it, its habitat, and any other data that could be obtained from the Encyclopedia, who, with flower books spread before her, was kept busy supplying all the needed information.

Each odd specimen was passed around for inspection, and then the lucky finder jubilantly placed it on record, while others wrote additional information as to the insects that visit it, whether it is a pollen-bearer, if it slept at night, or closed in the sun. The doctor supplemented Barbara's book lore by stray bits of knowledge that he had picked up from actual experience in his many scout rambles. The girls were only too pleased to listen, being particularly interested in his account of the evolution of color in flowers.

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When the time came for telling cheer fire stories, Mrs. Morrow suggested that they should be flower stories, stipulating, however, that the legends told should be about the specimens that had been found in that day's hike.

With this, the doctor, who was lying on the grass by the side of Nathalie, pulled off his hat which she had decorated with a dandelion wreath, and waving it high so every one could see it in its yellow glory, said he would start the wheel of yarns by telling about the maiden with the fluffy cobweb hair.

As he said "hair," Lillie Bell rose, and in ready imitation of the renowned Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm tragically intoned:

"Robaire! Robaire!
Let down your hair!"

The girls burst into peals of laughter, for even in the sleepy town of Westport every one had seen the beloved Rebecca, and keenly appreciated Lillie's timely pose.

"But this slim bit of a girl," smiled the doctor, "didn't let down her yellow tresses, they just flew with the wind, until Shawondassee—this is an Indian legend—the South Wind saw her. Instead of seeking this witching maiden, whom he admired so deeply, he was lulled to sleep by the fragrance of the summer flowers and forgot all about her. The next day he again spied his yellow charmer away off among the grasses of the meadows, but after lazily wishing she would come to him he snoozed off again. To his horror, the next day he found that the maiden's tresses were gone, and that in her place stood an old woman who looked as if Jack Frost had sprinkled her with his silver dust.

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"'Ah,' sighed Shawondassee, 'my brother the North Wind has done this wrong.' So he hurriedly arose and blew his horn loud and fierce to the whitened figure standing so forlornly out in the fields. But alas, as his soft breezes whistled gently about the old woman, her snow-white hair fell to the ground, and then she, too, soon disappeared, leaving nothing but a few upright stems and a bunch of withered leaves. She was the dandelion, whose petals turn to fluffy hair when touched by the North Wind. This yellow maiden is said to be a symbol of the sun, and has been named Dandelion because it is claimed that its petals resemble a lion's tooth."

The common little field flower seemed to have gained in interest after the legend, and was examined with greater curiosity, while the Scribe hurriedly wrote the legend on a stray page of her copy-pad to feature it in the "Pioneer."

217

Lillie Bell, who had gathered a number of wild forget-me-nots, told a pathetic German legend about that sweetheart flower, while Helen explained that the marigold, instead of being such a common plant, was in reality the bride of the sun. It was once a maiden named Caltha, who, in reward for her faithfulness to the sun, was finally lost in his golden rays, and on the spot where she used to stand and gaze at her fiery lover the marigold grew.

Nathalie, who had been deeply interested in the legends, experienced somewhat of a shock when Mrs. Morrow suddenly said, "Now, Nathalie, are we not to hear a flower legend, or some kind of a story from you?"

"Oh, I am a poor hand at story-telling," the girl speedily answered.

"Hear! hear! this is treason!" called Helen loudly, "for a Pioneer who has won fame as a Story Lady!"

"Oh, that is different," pleaded her friend in mild despair, "those were only children's stories."

"To be able to tell stories to children, Nathalie, and to keep their attention," spoke Mrs. Morrow, "shows ability, and if we have so gifted a Pioneer I think it is our due to hear from her."

"And then, Nathalie," urged Grace, "every Pioneer has to know how to tell stories, and this is a good time to make a beginning."

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"Well, I see I am doomed, notwithstanding my protests," said the girl after a short pause. "I will try to tell one if you will let me put on my thinking-cap for a moment." As permission was accorded to this request, Nathalie turned and glanced helplessly at the doctor, as if she might find inspiration in his merry eyes, Helen laughingly declared.

Nathalie blushed as the doctor shook his head and said, "No, hike-mate, I am at your service in everything but a story, for I ran dry when I told mine. Then I know you have nerve and brains enough to do your own thinking."

"Oh, I know one!" the girl suddenly cried as her face lighted, and then closing her eyes for a

moment, as if to invoke the aid of some unknown muse, she said, "I read it in a newspaper the other day. It is about a flower, but I will let you guess its name."

"It was in the spring," she continued slowly, "and old Peboan sat alone in his ragged tepee. His hair fell about his time-worn face like glistening icicles as he shivered in his fur robes; oh, so cold, so weak and hungry, for he had had no food for days. As he bent over to blow upon the smoldering embers that glowed at his feet, he besought the Great Spirit to come to his aid.

"As he thus prayed and lamented a handsome young girl stepped within the tent. Her eyes were as blue as the summer sky and were filled with a liquid light, while her golden hair floated gracefully with the wind. Her cheeks were like apple blossoms and her gown was made of sweet grasses and green leaves. In her arms she carried twigs of the pussy-willow. Going softly to the old man, she cried in a voice as sweet as the brook's gentle flow, 'Peboan, what can I do for thee?'"

"The old man raised his head as he heard the maiden's sweet voice, and as he saw her in her spring glory he cried bitterly, 'I am hungry and cold. I have lost my power over nature, for the streams have refused to stand still for me. My mantle disappears from the earth as rapidly as I cover it, and the flowers are peeping from their brown beds, although I have bidden them sleep.'

"'Peboan,' replied the maiden, 'I am Seguin, the summer manitou; the flowers are obeying me, for I have bidden them arise. The leaves are budding on the trees, the pussies are out in all their furry finery, for I, Seguin, now possess the earth. The snow and ice have disappeared, for they have obeyed my voice, and your power is gone. All nature pays me homage, for I am the Queen of the earth, the Goddess of spring!'"

"'Peboan, you are the winter manitou, and the Great Spirit calls you! Now go!' As Seguin said these words she gently waved her wand over the old man's head as it sank between his shoulders.

"The winter manitou made no reply, but drew his furs closer about his shivering form, and then, as he heard the song of the spring birds, and the rustling of the leaves in the sunshine, he sank to the ground.

"As a ray of the warm sun filtered through the top of the tepee and fell upon the old man, who lay exhausted on the earth; Seguin again raised her wand, and the winter manitou disappeared. His furs had turned to dancing leaves; his tepee to a tall tree. Then Seguin stooped, and gathering a handful of the leaves from the tree she breathed on them—very softly—and then threw them on the earth. They immediately stood upright, each holding forth a tiny pink flower, gay with a delicate perfume.

"'Grow and blossom,' cried the spring maiden softly, 'and bloom a welcome to the hearts of those who are depressed by winter's gales, for you are a token that Peboan, the winter manitou is gone. You are the first flower that comes in the spring.' Now what is the name of it?" ended Nathalie abruptly.

"Snowdrop!" called Helen quickly. Nathalie shook her head.

"Violet!" timidly ventured some one.

"Violet?" the Sport repeated scornfully. "Who ever heard of a pink violet? Nathalie said this flower was pink."

Mrs. Morrow broke the sudden silence that followed the Sport's remark by saying softly, "I think it is the arbutus!"

"That's it!" cried Nathalie, and then to her bewilderment every one began to clap again. As the clapping continued, the girls meanwhile, watching her with sparkling eyes, Nathalie turned and whispered to the doctor, "Why, what are they clapping for?"

But before he could reply the Sport shouted, "Hurrah for the Story Lady!"

The cry was repeated again and again to Nathalie's confusion. In a moment, however, her wits asserted themselves, and springing to her feet, with a low sweeping courtesy she cried, "Thank you, fellow Pioneers, I am glad you liked my first cheer-fire story!"

The clapping now subsided, and after several had expressed their admiration by saying that the story was the "best ever," Mrs. Morrow started a floral conundrum, which proved a thriller, the doctor claimed, as he sat with humorous eyes and watched the girls, who all sat up and took notice, as one after the other called out the name of a flower in answer to the questions propounded by their Director.

When the questions had all been answered, it was discovered that the names of the star actors in this little floral drama, the color of their eyes, hair, and so on, as well as the musical instrument played by the lover, the words of his proposal, the wedding, and even the time and place of the honeymoon, had all been answered by the names of flowers.

Lillie Bell, at Mrs. Morrow's request, took her mandolin, and after thrumming it softly broke into a quaint low strain of melody, while Louise sang in her sweet little soprano voice, "All in a Garden Fair," "Fortune My Foe," and "Nymphs and Shepherds," each number being one of a group of old English songs dating as far back as 1555. After receiving an encore, Louise favored them with "Polly Willis," and "Golden Slumber Kiss Your Eyes," two more popular ballads of the seventeenth century.

These old-time songs were a surprise for Mrs. Morrow, who had often been heard to remark that

it was a pity, as they were Pioneers, that they did not know some of the songs that used to be sung in those days, instead of ragtime songs. But ragtime was not altogether displaced, for in a few minutes the girls were singing "The Sweet Little Girl with the Quaint Squeegie," "Dry yo' Eyes," and "My Little Dream Girl," with a verve and gusto that made the woods resound to the ring of their girlish voices.

By this time cramped limbs and the joyousness of life asserted themselves, and every one began to feel that they wanted to run, leap, and jump, so at the doctor's suggestion they played the Scout game of "Stalking." The doctor was the deer, not hiding, but standing and moving a little now and then as he liked, while the girls vied with one another in trying to touch him without being seen.

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The doctor did his part so well that he was duly tantalizing, the Pioneers declared, as they watched him with strained eyes, being unable to catch him napping. When the doctor called "Time," the game ended by all the girls coming to a halt on the spot where they were standing when the call sounded, the girl nearest the deer winning the game.

Prisoner's Base was then started; the goals were marked off, the players divided into two sections, one stationed in each goal, and then the fun began. A girl would advance towards the opposite goal, and then run back into safety, while one of her mates came to her rescue by chasing her pursuer, who, in turn, was rescued by one of her own mates. The rushing about gave health, glowing cheeks and sparkling eyes attesting that muscles, limbs, and blood were being exercised to a good purpose. But after the doctor had again defeated them by never getting caught, the game was abandoned, the girls all vowing he was magic-limbed, for he was so quick and agile on his feet.

After a short time spent in practicing bird calls, as it was nearing the time to return home the hikers gathered up their belongings, packed their knapsacks, and with staffs in hand started out on the homeward hike. They all declared that they were not a bit fatigued by the day's activities, and jested merrily one with another, or happily sang snatches of songs as they wended their way back to town.

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By the time they had reached the cross-roads their spirits had subsided somewhat, all but the Sport's, who teasingly whisked off Barbara's hat and the next instant was whizzing down the road with it clutched in her hand.

Barbara, notwithstanding her weighty nickname of the Encyclopedia, was agile, and lost no time in flying after her, urged to speed by the girls. Although inclined to poke fun sometimes at Barbara for her absent-mindedness and love of books, the girls were her firm friends. They loved her for her kindly heart and sincere efforts to help others.

There was a shout of victory when it was seen that the Encyclopedia had captured her head-gear, and they were all clapping vociferously when an automobile rounded the bend in the road. The car turned out to be the doctor's, whose chauffeur had promised to meet him near the cross-roads as he had to be in his office by five that afternoon.

The doctor quickly assisted Mrs. Morrow into the car as she had decided to ride, and then stood and waited while the Pioneers—two of whom had been invited to join their Director—urged Kitty with her iron pot, and the Flower with her griddle to accept the invitation.

The girls finally consented, and with many waves of the hands to the pedestrians, and a loud honk, honk, the car glided down the road and out of sight.

225

Helen, Nathalie, and Edith, as they lived near one another, bade their mates good-by, and, as they had decided to take a short cut home, turned down a side path. As they strolled slowly along a road running by a low stone wall hedging a pasture, where a brook twisted like a silver cord in the undulating grass, Edith asked her companions if they did not want to walk to the Bluff, where they would have a fine view of the bay in the distance.

"Oh, yes," assented Helen, "it is a lovely view, Nathalie, and will only be a step out of the way if we go by the brook."

Nathalie, although feeling somewhat tired, was anxious to visit the Bluff, and a minute later the three girls climbed the stone barricade and were keeping pace with the brook's windings as it leaped boisterously over a bed of stones, or crept lingeringly, with murmuring ripples, between grass-fringed banks.

Presently they wandered into the shade of the trees, where, to Nathalie's surprise, she found the old brook bed. Instead of being earth and stones, however, it was green and flower-starred, overshadowed by weeping willows and silver birches, their interlaced tops bending low as if seeking their old-time friend with its murmuring song.

Lulled by the mossy dell and the fragrance of the woodland posies, the girls loitered, and did not realize that the afternoon was waning until they reached the Bluff. They raced to the top, where Nathalie's joy at being the fleetest was forgotten, as with stilled eyes she gazed upon the fertile strip of valley below, its green specked by tiny white cottages and washed by the waters of the bay that shone in the glow of the setting sun like a sheet of brass.

226

The air was becoming chilled by the mist that was hovering in the distance, and they turned and quickly made their way back to the road. Whereupon, Edith insisted that they take the summit road, leading over a small hill at one end of the town, which she declared would save time.

Her companions assented, and in a short space they were pantingly trudging up the slope, and

then, beginning to realize how tired they were, they sat down on a rock near the edge of the summit to rest. Lured by the changing colors of the afterglow they grew silent, awed, perhaps, by the calm that hushes all nature when the light of day is fading into the misty shadows of twilight.

Nathalie had turned from the mountains of pink foam that floated up from the golden west, and was gazing down at the town, where little twinkling lights were beginning to peep here and there between the tree-tops, when Edith suddenly cried, "Oh, look at that smoke!" pointing to a street just below the slope where black columns of smoke were rushing upward.

227

"Some one must be making a big bonfire," answered Helen inertly, as her eyes followed the direction of Edith's finger.

"Why, Helen, that is not a bonfire," was the Sport's quick retort. "Oh, I saw a flame shoot up!" she added excitedly.

"So did I!" exclaimed Nathalie, springing on her feet. "And oh, there's another."

"Why, the church is on fire!" shouted Edith. "There—don't you see—the flames are coming out of the back!"

The girls with dazed eyes and beating hearts looked at the old Methodist church, set back from a tree mantled road, within a few feet of a white cottage, the parsonage, that nested like some white bird in the shelter of the waving boughs of the trees.

"Oh, girls," wailed the Sport, as she turned abruptly and gazed at them with an awe-struck countenance; "it is the church—and the new organ—they were to finish it to-day!" She wrung her hands frantically.

Her companions made no reply, their eyes were glued on the columns of smoke that hurtled in dense masses up into the air.

"I don't believe any one knows about it!" exclaimed Helen. "Oh, what shall we do? It will be of no use to shout 'Fire!' we are too far away."

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"Oh, I know what we can do," cried Edith heatedly. "We can run to the fire-house and give the alarm!"

But Helen had already started forward, and Nathalie followed blindly, not even knowing where the fire-house was. Edith, like the flash of a flame, shot ahead of the two girls, and the next instant was tearing like some wild thing down the hill. In a few moments she had turned up a road and was speeding in the direction of a red house with a funny little cupola that loomed up above the small cottages surrounding it.

"Fire!" yelled the Sport, as she tore frantically along. Helen took up the cry, but Nathalie, although she tried to follow her example, only succeeded in making a hoarse sound that died away almost as soon as it left her whitened lips.

As her breath began to come in gasps she was half tempted to stop and let the other two girls give the alarm. But something told her that would not be the act of a Pioneer, and she struggled on until she arrived in front of the old ramshackle building with the red cupola which looked as if it had once done service as a barn.

"Oh, there is no one here!" panted Helen as she beat frenziedly with her two hands on the big wooden door. "It is barred inside."

But the Sport, like a whirlwind, had flown around to the rear of the building, and the next moment was crawling through a window she had found unfastened. It took but a moment's time to speed across the floor, give the bar a pull, and fling wide the door.



The rope had broken in her grasp.

“We must ring the bell,” gasped Helen, as she glanced up at an old rope that dangled in the center of the fire-house from a big bell which hung motionless in the small tower above their heads.

The three girls sprang for the rope, but the Sport was the quickest and caught the dangling rope in her hands. Summoning all her strength she gave it a hard pull. The next instant, as the loud clang of the bell rang out, the girls heard a sudden imprecation, and looked hastily down to see the Sport with a rueful countenance sitting on the floor—the rope had broken in her grasp!

CHAPTER XIV—OVERCOMES

The girls gazed in wide-eyed surprise at their prostrate companion, and then, as they saw that she was not hurt, their sense of humor broke bounds, and they burst into merry peals of laughter, for she did look so comical sitting there with that “Where—am—I?” sort of look on her face.

But the Sport was too excited to mind bumps or laughter as she jumped up and peered above her head. “The rope has broken!” she exclaimed irritably. “Oh, if I could only get hold of that broken end up there,” her eyes leaped quickly around the barn, “I could ring the bell again. Oh, there’s a ladder!” With an alert spring she had grabbed it and then began to drag it under the tower.

The girls by this time had recovered from their unwonted merriment, and, feeling somewhat ashamed of leaving the Sport to work unaided, rushed to her assistance. They soon had the ladder resting against a broad beam that ran across the barn directly under the tower where the broken piece of rope still swung.

Up the ladder climbed Edith, high to the top, but alas, she was just a few inches short of touching the swaying rope, which she now perceived was fastened to a chain that hung from the bell.

“Oh, what will you do?” cried Helen, as the two girls stretched their necks almost off their shoulders to see if there was not some way out of the difficulty.

“I know what I will do,” exclaimed the Sport suddenly. “I will climb up on the beam, walk a few steps, and then I can reach it.”

“You will fall!” exclaimed Nathalie in nervous fear.

“Oh, no, she won’t,” called out Helen hastily. “You don’t know Edith; that’s an easy feat for her, for she’s a regular acrobat. But, Edith, be careful!” she finished, with sudden anxiety, as she saw the girl climb up on the beam and then lift herself upright.

Nathalie, with her breath held, watched Edith for a moment, and then as she saw her reach out to catch the dangling rope, she closed her eyes, thrilled in every nerve with silent terror for fear she would miss her footing.

But she didn’t, for when Nathalie opened her eyes just for a hurried peep, she saw Edith with the

rope in her hand. The next instant she had bent to her task and a loud "Clang! Clang!" rang sharply out.

"One, two, three!" a moment's pause, then, "One, two, three!" Twice this was repeated as the girls stood waiting below with their eyes fixed on the ringer's every movement; Helen, fearful that she would become reckless and reach too far, while Nathalie obeyed an impulse she could not define and just watched in nervous tension. 232

Ah, she had dropped her arms and was looking down at the girls. "What are you standing there for, ninnies?" she emphasized with a stamp of her foot that sent a shiver of horror through Nathalie's wildly beating heart. "Why don't you go and get the engine out?"

"Oh, so we can," rejoined Helen quickly. "I never thought! Come, you help me!" catching Nathalie by the arm.

Nathalie turned and followed Helen, who had swiftly run to the fire-engine, a newly painted affair, a box on wheels, standing in the rear of the fire-house. With an alert spring she was close at Helen's heels, and in a moment more had grabbed one of the two ropes tied to the front axle. Helen, who stood with the other rope in her hand, now cried, "Quick, let's run it out to the road!"

It rolled easily, and the two girls were just about to wheel it through the open door, when a man in a red shirt, leather hat, and his trousers tucked into his rubber boots dashed hurriedly up to them.

"Where's the fire?" he panted. With heated face and eyes bulging excitement he seized the rope from Nathalie's hand, and the next minute, with Helen's help, had run the engine out into the road. 233

"The Methodist church is on fire!" yelled the Sport from her high perch on the beam, but there was no need to say more, for several other men had arrived, all in red shirts and firemen's helmets, while others were seen racing from all directions towards the fire-house. In a few moments' time a crowd had collected, each one bent in lending a hand, and all shouting with full vocal power as if they thought—so it seemed to Nathalie—their shouts would put out the fire.

In the midst of this clamorous din, another rubber-booted individual appeared, not only in fireman's regalia, but with a big brass trumpet. On this he blew a mighty blast, and then with much gesticulation bellowed his orders to the men.

A final order from the chief, as the man with the trumpet proved to be, and the six or eight men holding the ropes of the engine started at breakneck speed down the hill. They were followed by a crowd of shouting men, women, hooting boys, and crying children, each one frenzied with excitement and with the avowed purpose of being first at the fire.

The girls, for by this time Edith had descended from her perilous perch, stood silent and watched the engine whiz down the slope leading to the town, the red-shirted firemen in front of it shouting angrily in their endeavors to stop the rear men from pushing it down on their heels too rapidly. 234

But Edith, who was never still two minutes if there was anything going on, with a wild, "Hoopla, I'm going to see the fire!" started in the wake of the hooting mob, running at a speed that soon made her one of the rank and file that went plunging down the hill.

Helen's eyes followed the flying figure, and then, with a "Come on, don't let the Sport outdo us!" she was racing after her. Nathalie, bewildered by this strange and novel experience that had leaped into her life, stood still, uncertain what to do. She felt a sudden abhorrence of mingling with the fire-crazed crowd that surged before her. Brought up to keep away from these spectacular affairs of the city, she felt she would be transgressing all laws of decorum if she followed her friends. But the impulse to do as the other Pioneers did spurred her on, and with a quick leap forward she cast all conventionalities to the wind, and started on a dead run to catch up with Helen.

The girls were too quick for her and she arrived in front of the church only to make one more of a densely packed crowd of fire-seekers standing opposite the burning building, wild-eyed and weirdly pale from the reflection of the flaming tongues of red, which darted upward with a licking greediness that made the wooden building crack and snap under their devouring greed.

Spying Edith a few feet away, she hastily pushed through the jam of people to her side, only to hear her scream frantically, "Look out, Nathalie!" But the warning came too late, for a shower of water had already struck her in the back with terrific force, almost bowling her over. Ugh! it was running down her back with such icy spray that she screamed aloud, and then shrank back as jeering laughter from those standing by greeted her mishap. 235

But their merriment was short-lived, as the water deluge came again and Nathalie saw the contortions that shot from face to face of her neighbors as with shrill cries they tried to dodge to one side in their frantic endeavors to escape. In the midst of the confusion some one suddenly bellowed, "Run for your lives, the hose has burst!"

There were more shouts of dismay from the crowd of struggling, fighting figures, and then they had scattered. Edith by this time had grabbed Nathalie by the hand and in a moment or so she was safe on a neighboring porch.

"O dear, what will they do?" lamented Edith. "That hose is the only one in town!" For a few moments it looked as if not only the church but the parsonage and the adjacent buildings were to fall victims to the blazing flames that swept upward and outward with shooting jets between tall columns of black rolling smoke.

"They are going to form a bucket brigade!" shouted Edith suddenly into Nathalie's ear. The words had barely passed her lips when she dropped her companion's cold fingers, and was racing with a crowd of men, women, and boys towards a pond a short distance away.

Nathalie stood still and gazed with suppressed excitement at this new development of the fire-crazed people. It seemed to her as if every one in Westport must have owned a bucket from the number of people that sped—as if magic swept—towards the pond, where a long line of human beings, with a deftness and quickness that amazed her, were already passing buckets from one to the other and then on to the firemen who formed a line across the road in front of the church.

Each fireman would grab a bucket, pass it on to his mate, who in turn passed it on to the next one, and so on, until its contents had been splashed on the seething flames. Then just as quickly it was shoved by way of another line back to the pond to be filled again and once more hurried on its journey of rescue.

"Come, get busy!" some one suddenly yelled at this crisis. "They are forming another line at the pump!" Nathalie swung about to see Fred Tyson holding out to her an empty bucket. The unexpectedness of this new demand upon her overwrought nerves tempted her to scurry to parts unknown, as she backed away from Fred with the startled exclamation, "O dear, no!"

Fred, realizing how she felt, looked down at her with a reassuring smile as he answered, "Come, you must help; you are a Pioneer—it will be a fine experience for you!" Nathalie, without a word, grabbed the bucket and in another second was running swiftly by the side of this new friend as he guided her to the pump.

An hour later Nathalie appeared at the corner of the street leading to her home. Weary, bedraggled, sooted from head to foot, and with gleaming beads of perspiration running over her face, she was still jubilant. She had been to a real fire, and, what is more, had helped to put it out. For the buckets had done their work, and although the church stood a framework of glowing embers, the parsonage and other buildings had been saved.

She was so glad when she saw she was nearing her home, that, as she informed Fred, who had accompanied her, she felt like dancing a jig on her head from sheer joy, although she was not only tired to the verge of distraction, but faint from hunger.

"Oh, and there's Mother! I guess she's been almost worried to death," she exclaimed as she spied her mother standing on the veranda anxiously peering down the path.

"Well, I guess she has been almost worried to death!" exclaimed a voice, as a white-robed figure stepped out from the shadows of the trees on the lawn.

It was Lucille. "If it hadn't been for me, Nathalie Page," she emphasized with upheld finger, "your mother would have been down to the fire herself. She was sure you were the first one burned to death. Why, you ought to be ashamed of yourself, Nathalie Page!" she averred indignantly.

But there was no need to lecture Nathalie further, for her heart had been thumping violently in nervous dread all the way home, and she was already scurrying up the walk to the stoop. "Oh, Mother," she panted, "did you think something dreadful had happened to me?"

"Well, I was quite nervous about you for a time," replied her mother rather cheerily for one who had been almost worried to death, as she put her arm around the tired girl. "Lucille obligingly started to look for you, and met Dr. Homer, who said you were all right, helping put the fire out as a bucket maiden. But, my dear, you are all wet, and hungry, too, I'll warrant."

"You just believe I am," cried Nathalie. "But, oh, Mother, I have had such an adventurous day! Do let me have something to eat, for I'm just about starved, but, O dear, where's Fred Tyson; he came home with me?"

Fred was all right, having the cosiest of chats with Lucille—whom all men adored from youth to old age—as they walked up the path to the veranda. Would he come in and have supper? Why, he guessed he would, for he hadn't had a mouthful since noon.

"By the Lord Harry, is that you, Blue Robin?" spoke a voice from the couch as Nathalie ushered Fred into the hall. "Gee, but you are as black as a colored 'pusson,'" quoth Dick, as he rose from the couch and hobbled towards her.

It was a most exciting supper, eagerly devoured by Fred and Nathalie, as between bites, with glowing eyes, each one told of her or his experience. Nathalie told of the ringing of the fire bell, the exploits of the Sport, and how she did duty at the pump.

"Oh, Mother, it has just been a regular red-letter day!" she cried at length, "and I'm never again going to despise Edith Whiton for being sporty, for if it hadn't been for her, I just believe the whole town would have burned down!"

The second day after the fire was a Pioneer Rally day, a Camp Fund day it had been called, for it was at this meeting that the Pioneers were to decide upon the entertainments they proposed having in order to raise the money to pay the cost of two or three weeks at camp that summer. One or two affairs had been held during the winter and spring, so that a small nucleus had been banked, but if this was not increased the hearts of the Pioneers would be "wrung with woe," as the Sport had put it.

After the usual formalities of the Rally were over, Mrs. Morrow called the names of those who for some meritorious act or word were to receive badges of merit. To Nathalie's astonishment her

name was called, and at a shove from Helen the dazed girl went forward, and received three white stars, one for suggesting the search-party and sticking to her colors in the face of discouragement, another for telling stories to Rosy, and the last for planning and getting up the Story Club. She received the stars, Mrs. Morrow explained, as badges of merit were not given until a Pioneer had passed all tests and was a member of the first order.

The Sport received two badges—being a first class Pioneer—one for winning a contest in wigwagging, and another for ringing the bell for the church fire. Helen was also the recipient of a badge for her planning and excellent supervision of the Flower hike, while the Scribe received one for her skill in editing the “Pioneer,” which had come to be a journal not only of news, but of information.

“And now,” cried their Director, as she finished distributing the badges, “I am going to talk about the Camping Fund. As you all know, we must have one or two entertainments to raise money for that purpose. Several ideas have been submitted in compliance with my request for suggestions from the girls, but unfortunately, while a number are very good, only a few will suit our purpose. There is one, however, that is both patriotic and colonial, but it would require a large lawn and I am at a loss what to say about it. I think you all understand that the Pioneer who suggests the best entertainment, although her name is to be kept secret until the end of the season, is to receive some kind of a reward.”

“Could we not ask Mrs. Van Vorst again if she would let us have her grounds?” ventured Louise Gaynor somewhat timidly, realizing that the lady in question was not in favor with the Pioneers because of her rather eccentric ways.

“Well, I should say not!” broke in Edith. “She has refused two or three times already, and if there is an insane person there—” She stopped abruptly, rebuked by a warning look from Mrs. Morrow.

“No, I do not think I would bother Mrs. Van Vorst again,” said that lady. “But suppose I name a committee to see if they cannot scour the town and find a lawn.” Helen, Louise, and Nathalie were then named to perform this duty.

During this discussion Nathalie’s eyes had sparkled with suppressed emotion as she remembered her visit to the gray house, accompanied by an overwhelming desire to tell what she knew. Oh, wouldn’t it create a sensation? But she had given her word, and like the Spartan boy, although desire was gnawing at her vitals, she kept still and smiled in evident ease.

“There is another entertainment that has been suggested,” continued the Director. “It is an excellent idea for it will put you all to work thinking. It is to be called Pioneer Stunts, which means that each one of you is to be responsible for a recitation, a tableau, a song, a playlet, in fact anything that is colonial or pioneer in character. Each Pioneer is to work out her own idea, and all ideas are to be kept secret until after the performance, when a vote will be taken as to the best stunt—that is, the best idea, and the stunt acted the best—and then the name of the author will be revealed.”

The girls received this notice with applause, and each one immediately began to suggest one thing and another until warned by Mrs. Morrow again that the ideas were to remain secrets. After some further discussion it was decided to have the Pioneer Stunts the first part of June, at Seton Hall, Mrs. Morrow suggesting that the girls make it a Rose party and serve ice-cream and strawberries on the lawn.

Nathalie came home very enthusiastic about the Pioneer Stunt entertainment, and immediately set to work to jot down the idea that had come to her at the Rally. In the midst of writing her mother joined her and sat down to sew.

“Oh, Mother,” exclaimed the girl happily, “I’m awfully busy.”

“And working very hard, I see,” interposed Mrs. Page, smiling at her daughter’s animated face, as she patted the sunburned arm resting on the table.

“Yes,” replied Nathalie, “I have an awful lot to do.” And then she told about the entertainment, and what she was planning. With a long drawn sigh she cried, “Oh, Mumsie, I’m learning a terrible lot of useful things.”

“I see you are,” assented her mother, “and I am proud of you.”

“Oh, but they have not been a bit easy!” The girl’s face grew grave. “Sometimes I have thought I would have to give right up, but I haven’t,” she added with an emphatic little nod. And then for the first time she told her mother about the motto, “I Can,” and what a great help she had found it.

“Yes, Daughter, every little thing Miss I Can has helped you to do has been an overcome.”

“Indeed they have been overcomes,” assented the girl with another emphatic shake of her brown head. “Washing dishes—oh, how I used to hate that job—now I don’t mind it so much; cooking, telling stories to Rosy, going to the fire, yes, and even getting up the Story Club. I have just braced up, and then the first thing I knew, presto! the job was done!”

“Yes, they have all been overcomes,” repeated Nathalie, “but it will be all right if I only manage to earn—” She paused abruptly, suddenly remembering, as she saw the lines of worry about her mother’s mouth, that she and Dick had pledged themselves not to talk about his operation, or to hint that they were trying to save in any way for it. They had both been troubled when they realized that when an anxiety was mentioned her mother’s face lost its happy look and she became sad and worried.

"Yes," added Mrs. Page, not noticing Nathalie's sudden pause, "I have been watching you for some time grappling with these try-outs that have come into your life, but I have said nothing, for I wanted to see if you or they would conquer."

"Oh, you dear Mumsie," cried Nathalie joyously, jumping up and giving her mother a good hug. "Do you know, I felt dreadfully the other day to think you had not said one word of praise; not that I want to be praised all the time, but still a word now and then comes in handy, you know; makes one feel so goody-goody." This was said laughingly.

Nathalie could not help feeling encouraged after this comforting talk with her mother; she felt as if she had conquered the whole world, that there was nothing she could not overcome. But the next morning such a big overcome, or try-out, as her mother had expressed it, appeared, that it sufficed to lessen the glory of her former victories.

Lucille was ill; she had retired to her bed with a fit of indigestion, and the planning for the Pioneer Stunt, the survey work that Nathalie and her committee were to do, all had to be laid aside as she was instituted head nurse in her cousin's room.

"Oh, Mother," she moaned dolefully, as she kissed her mother good-night, "Lucille has been dreadfully cross; nothing pleases her. It has been, 'Oh, Nathalie, don't let that wind blow on me! Didn't I tell you I don't like rice pudding! Oh, you're the slowest poke!' Oh, Mother—" there was a lump in the girl's throat, "if I hadn't felt so humiliated at being spoken to in that way, I just believe I would have given her a good shaking."

"Never mind, Nathalie," replied Mrs. Page consolingly, "just remember it is another overcome and have patience. She will soon be herself again, you know she has been terribly upset, as she expected to spend a few days with her friend and she is disappointed."

"Of course, no one ever had a disappointment but Lucille!" exclaimed Nathalie irritably.

"Nathalie!" reproved her mother, with a quick glance at the girl.

"Oh, well, it's so, Mumsie," replied her daughter with the tears very near the surface, and then with another kiss she hurried to her bed.

"Have you got your Stunt written?" inquired Helen a few days later from her window as Nathalie sat writing on the veranda. She held her hand up and flourished a couple of typewritten pages as she spoke.

"No, I'm discouraged," Nathalie lowered her voice. "Lucille has been ill, and I have been kept awfully busy waiting on her. Then when I finally managed to get time to go to the library to get some dates, I lost the whole thing."

"What—the idea?"

"Yes, the idea, and everything. I had been in the library some time and had just finished. I did not discover my loss until I was almost home, so I hurried back, but the librarian knew nothing about it. I hunted until I was distracted, and then I came home; so that is the end of that. This morning I am trying to think up another one."

"Couldn't you remember it?" questioned Helen concernedly.

"No, I tried to, but I've been so busy it has just flown away."

"Well, you are a lucky girl to have brains enough to have more than one idea in your head to write up. You should have seen the Sport; she was over here last night, the picture of unadulterated woe, for she could not even scare up one idea. She hung around trying to get some suggestions from me, but I just told her she would have to do her own work. She's the best ever when it comes to anything in the way of sports, or any activity, but she will not use her brains. She has a few, at least."

"If she would spend more time reading instead of—" Nathalie stopped with slightly reddened face, for here was another overcome to win. She was thoughtless at times, never having been disciplined, and so, without meaning any harm, she was apt to express her opinion too freely about the people around her. "Oh, well," she ended lamely, "she is a good Sport; if it hadn't been for her the other night the town would have burned down."

"That's true," laughed Helen good-naturedly, and then with a wave of her typewritten pages she disappeared from the window, as Nathalie turned and with a dimpling face greeted Dr. Morrow, who had just driven up to visit Lucille.

"You haven't come to see me this time," she suggested archly.

"Oh, it's half and half this time, Blue Robin, for I have come to ask—oh, it is a message from the princess." The doctor lowered his voice cautiously as he noted Dick at the other end of the veranda. "She wants to know if you will make her another visit."

Nathalie's bright face sobered and an embarrassed silence followed as she vainly tried to think of something that would excuse her from the unpleasantness of having her eyes blindfolded again.

"Why, yes, I would like to go, only you see I am very busy just now, helping Mother and doing Pioneer work, and—"

"Yes, I see," interrupted the doctor somewhat coldly, with a keen glance at Nathalie's downcast face. "Then I will tell her you are busy."

"Oh, don't say that," cried the girl in desperation. "It sounds—well—tell her I will come some time later." She felt the blood rush to her face.

"Oh, I'll manage to make her understand somehow," answered the doctor. Nathalie sensed a note of disappointment in his voice, and then without further parley he hurried up the stairs to Lucille.

"Mother," questioned Nathalie a few minutes later, for she had confided to her all about the adventure at the gray house, "do you think I ought to visit the princess again?" She then told what had transpired between her and the doctor.

"You must be your own judge, Nathalie," replied Mrs. Page slowly. "I agree with you that it is a foolish thing for the child's mother to ask you to visit her in this way, but perhaps she may be induced to change her mind. But, after all, Nathalie, it is a small thing to overcome"—Mrs. Page emphasized the word—"when you can give the little girl so much pleasure by going."

"O dear!" thought Nathalie, as she stood waiting for the doctor to come down-stairs a moment or so later, "it does seem that since I have become a Pioneer I am just overcoming things all the time. Funny, but these things never troubled me before." "Oh, Doctor," she exclaimed eagerly, as that gentleman's genial face appeared in the doorway, "I have changed my mind, and if you like I will go with you to see the princess."

An hour later Nathalie was greeted with a cry of delight from her new friend, who clapped her hands and called, "Oh, Mother, she has come!" Nathalie, imprisoned behind the muffler, rejoiced at heart to think she had won another overcome.

"How do you do?" spoke Mrs. Van Vorst's low voice, and then the girl's hand was taken in a cordial clasp. "It is so good of you to come; oh, if you could only realize the joy you have brought into my child's life, and mine, too!" she added quickly.

"I am very glad," replied Nathalie simply, as Mrs. Van Vorst led her to a seat by the couch.

"Here, sit by me—no, not on that chair," commanded her Royal Highness. Nathalie felt a tug at her skirt, she was jerked suddenly down, and then two arms were thrown around her neck. A hand touched her face, softly at first, and then with a loud, "There, you are not going to sit with that horrid thing on your face again, I just hate it!" there came a sudden wrench, something gave way, the blinders were on the floor, and Nathalie was looking at the face of the princess with free, untrammelled eyes!

CHAPTER XV—A CHAPTER OF SURPRISES

Nathalie gave a gasp of relief. Oh, it was good to be rid of that horrible black handkerchief! Then her blinders faded into the past as she became aware of the eyes that were gazing into hers, blue ones with violet shadows, fringed by long black lashes!

The eyes were set in the face of a girl about fourteen, that had, notwithstanding the pain-tired mouth with its lines of petulance, a winsome sweetness about it which partly atoned for a jagged crimson scar running across one end of the forehead, partly hidden by short, curly hair which was boyishly parted on one side.

But the blue eyes were gleeful just at this moment, as if their owner was proud of her deftness in slipping off the handkerchief. She clapped her hands and cried, "Oh, aren't you glad to get rid of that horrid black thing?"

Raising herself on her elbow she drew Nathalie's face down to hers and whispered, "Don't say a word to Mother, but it was all arranged—the doctor and I managed it—let Mother think it was an accident." Before Nathalie could remonstrate the princess called out with a merry trill in her voice, "Oh, Mother! come quick, Miss Page's blinders have fallen off!"

Nathalie flushed in embarrassed silence as she heard Mrs. Van Vorst's step hurrying to the couch. O dear, what should she do? It certainly was awkward to have to deceive her. Oh, if the doctor would—but as she turned around to face the lady in question she saw that the doctor was not there.

"The doctor has gone, he had an important call to make," spoke Mrs. Van Vorst hurriedly, as she came towards the girls and saw Nathalie's look of distress. "But never mind, Miss Page, it is all right," she cried reassuringly. "It was a shame to keep you muffled up like that—just for a whim—but if you could understand!" She looked down at Nathalie apologetically.

"I should say it was a whim," broke in the princess, "and it just serves you right, too, for making her do it. Now Miss Page will go away and tell every one what a horrible-looking thing I am, and it will be all your fault because you are so afraid any one will see me, just as if I was a monster of some sort! Oh, Nathalie—can't I call you Nathalie?—the doctor told me your name, and then you know you are not so much older than I am."

"I'm sixteen," answered Nathalie readily, glad to turn the conversation from the blinders, for she saw that Mrs. Van Vorst was greatly perturbed.

"Oh, Nita, don't talk that way to Mother," cried Mrs. Van Vorst in a pained voice. "You know, dear, I only did what I thought was right, and it was to save you, people talk so!"

"I don't care if they do," broke in Nita angrily. "I have as much right in this world as they have, even if I am ugly-looking with this scar and hump, they needn't look at me!"

Nathalie started, for as the girl spoke she deliberately threw off a soft white shawl that had been thrown about her shoulders. With a sudden feeling of deep pity Nathalie recognized that the princess was a hump-back!

"Oh, you won't hate me now, will you?" pleaded Nita suddenly, as she saw Nathalie's start of surprise, "just because I'm humped like a camel." She caught the girl's hand in hers and clung to it with piteous appeal in her blue eyes.

"Oh, no," returned shocked Nathalie. "Why, I think you are lovely, even if you are—" But the word was left unsaid, as Nathalie, with sudden impulse, stooped forward and kissed the red lips.

Before she could raise herself, frightened at her own boldness, two arms were flung around her neck and Nathalie was squeezed so hard that she thought she would smother. "Oh, I just love you!" said Nita's stifled voice from her shoulder, "and I'm going to keep you with me all the time. Oh, Mother," she wailed beseechingly, lifting her head, but still keeping Nathalie a prisoner, "won't you buy her?"

"Buy her!" repeated her mother, who during this affectionate outburst had stood silently by, a pleased smile struggling with an expression of dismay at the girl's rudeness. "Why, Nita, she is not a horse to be bought and sold."

"Well, I wish she was then," said the child, for she was but that, dropping her arms from Nathalie's neck and lying back with sudden exhaustion.

"Oh, she is going to faint," cried dismayed Nathalie, while the mother rushed to the dresser for the smelling salts. But when she attempted to hold the bottle to Nita's nose, she pushed her mother's hand away crying, "Take that horrid thing away, and get out of the room; I want Nathalie to myself!"

And the Mystic, the woman always shrouded in gray, who looked at her neighbors with a cold, formal stare of aversion, meekly obeyed. She went softly out of the room and closed the door after her in obedience to her daughter's sharp cry, "Do you hear? Shut the door!"

Something within Nathalie burst its bounds, she could not sit there another minute and hear the girl talk like that to her mother. "Oh, don't speak to your mother like that, she is so good to you!" the girl's voice trembled.

"How do you know she is good?" retorted Nita, after a short pause of surprise at this merited rebuke.

"Why—why—because her face shows it," stammered Nathalie, "and then, why she is your mother, and if I should talk to my mother like that, why—I should expect her to die then and there."

"Why?" persisted the voice.

"Because it would hurt her so,—" Nathalie labored, she hated to preach—"to think I could be so disrespectful to her, and ill-bred."

"Well, your mother isn't my mother; your mother didn't shut you up in a dark room so that you tried to get away."

"Nita!" came in a pain-stricken voice, "don't talk that way!"

Nathalie turned to see Mrs. Van Vorst standing in the doorway, her face drawn and lined. "I was coming in to ask—oh, Miss Page, will you come in here a moment? I should like to speak to you."

Nathalie arose quickly, her heart overflowing with pity for this poor mother who was only too surely paying the penalty of neglect and anger. "Oh, Mrs. Van Vorst," she cried hastily, "do not mind your daughter, she doesn't mean to hurt you, she—I think she is just spoiled, you know."

By this time Nathalie had followed Mrs. Van Vorst into the adjoining room, a sun-parlor, whose glass windows looked down upon a terraced garden, green with trees and gorgeous with multicolored flowers, surrounded by low rolling hillocks or mounds.

Nita, as Nathalie left the room, began to vent her displeasure in shrill, angry shrieks, but her mother, with set, rigid lips, closed the door softly, and then turning towards Nathalie began to speak, brokenly, between deep-drawn breaths.

"Oh, I have been foolish—I am afraid—in letting you come to see Nita, but oh, it is so hard for her, shut up in this house, with only me and the servants. So when the doctor was telling us about you, Nita pleaded so to have you come, and I foolishly yielded. But oh, Miss Page, do not, I beg of you, repeat what you have seen or heard, don't mind what Nita says about me, it is not true; as you said she does not mean all she says." The tears were rolling down Mrs. Van Vorst's face.

"Oh, Mrs. Van Vorst," exclaimed Nathalie, tears misting in her eyes in sympathy with the lady's grief, "I know how you feel, but it is all right. I think you are both lovely, I am sure I have nothing to tell; of course, I know that your daughter does not mean what she says, she's just spoiled." A sudden thought came to the girl. "Don't you think if you were to let her see people—that is girls of her own age—that she would be better? Oh, I am sure she would," broke from the girl impetuously, "and it would make her so happy!"

"Do you really think so?" inquired Mrs. Van Vorst with a note of hope in her voice. "Would it not

hurt her when people said rude things about her?"

"But no one would say rude things about her," persisted Nathalie determinedly. "Every one would love her—she's a dear, so sweet-looking—and then she would soon get over her spoiled ways; she would learn by seeing that other girls act differently." Nathalie felt that she had spoken incoherently, but oh, it did seem such a shame!

"I don't know about that," replied Mrs. Van Vorst, her face hardening again to the same impenetrable mask that had puzzled Nathalie the first time she met her. "Well, we will not discuss it now—we'll see how things turn out—only, Miss Page," she grew stiff and formal, although a note in her voice betrayed that she was battling with her emotion, "I should like to ask you again to keep silent a little longer, not to tell—how foolish I was—" she broke off suddenly, and then she added, "of course, you have a right to tell; but let me explain that what Nita says is not true, she likes to tease me into getting her way. Sit down—oh—she has fallen asleep." Mrs. Van Vorst opened the door softly and then closed it. "She always does when she cries that way." 257

"Yes, I have been foolish," she reiterated, "but I am not a criminal, and it is not altogether pride, because I have a deformed child, that makes me keep her secluded. It is because I want to save her, I would give my life for her happiness, but I can't—" there was a hopeless wail to her voice. "That is my punishment!" And then, as if reminded of what she wanted to tell Nathalie, she continued more calmly, "It is true that I shut Nita in a dark room. I punished her—she has always had those temper spells—I never knew what to do with her. Some one told me I was too easy with her, so I put her in the room and when she stopped crying I thought she had fallen asleep, but oh, she tried to get out, she said some one was chasing her, and climbed out on the shed and fell off the roof! She broke—her back!" Mrs. Van Vorst buried her face in her hands, but although no sounds came, Nathalie could see the convulsive shivers that shook her frame.

The girl was dumb. What could she say? It was awful! Oh, but if she didn't say something she would be boo-hooing herself in a minute. "But that was not your fault," she cried with sudden inspiration. "It was right for you to punish her. Oh, Mrs. Van Vorst, I should consider it just an accident that you could not help."

Mrs. Van Vorst lifted her face and gazed at the girl with wide, appealing eyes. "Oh, do you think that? If I could be led to believe I was not to blame! For years I have suffered the tortures of hell, doing penance." 258

"Yes, and making yourself and your daughter miserable!" Nathalie spoke boldly, she couldn't help it, the words came of themselves as it seemed to her. "But, Mrs. Van Vorst, look at it in another way, perhaps I should not speak this way to you, for I am just a girl, but I feel so sorry for you, and Nita, it does seem such a shame to shut her off from all pleasure just because an unfortunate thing happened. Why, Mrs. Morrow says we should regard trouble like clouds that we can't blow away unless we fill the atmosphere with sunshine." Nathalie came to a sudden stop, afraid she had gone beyond her depth. But in a moment she added, "Oh, if you would just think of it as an accident! Try to make Nita happy, and then you will be happy, and forget all about it!"

Mrs. Van Vorst's eyes grew moist as she cried impulsively, "Oh, you are a dear girl to talk to me this way. I shall always remember it, always. Yes, you are right, I have been miserable and have been making my poor child so. Oh, I have been wrong!"

Before Nathalie could answer, Nita's voice was heard shrilly crying, "Mother, I want Nathalie!"

"I am coming," cried the girl, hurrying into the room and up to the couch. "Did you have a nice little nap?" she asked cheerily, as she patted the girl's hand that lay inertly on the coverlid. 259

"Oh, I just dropped off, I always get so tired when I cry."

"But why do you cry then?" questioned practical Nathalie.

"Why—oh, I cried because Mamma took you away from me, and now you will be going soon, and I won't have had time to talk to you at all."

"Oh, yes you will," replied her companion, glancing at the clock. "It is only eleven, I sha'n't go for another hour, so start right in and talk."

"But I don't want to talk," came the contrary answer. "I want to hear you talk. Please tell me about the Girl Pioneers. Did you go on the wild-flower hike?"

"Oh, yes!" was the answer; and then Nathalie's tongue flew as she told about the hike, the different things they did, how she had learned to blaze a trail, what a delightful companion Dr. Homer had proved, how she lighted the fire with only one match, about the Tike's escapade, and the flower legends.

"Oh, but the fire, I must tell you about the fire and the bucket brigade!" she cried, and then followed that exciting story with all its climaxes, and what fun it had proved, although, as the girl confessed, she had been tempted to run away several times.

"I just wish I could have seen it all!" exclaimed Nita regretfully, as Nathalie paused for a rest. "I should have liked to go on that flower hike, and the flower legends, can't you tell them to me? I just love flowers!" 260

"Why yes, perhaps I can," nodded the Story Lady. And then in a moment she was animatedly telling about the Forget-me-not lover, the Dandelion legend, and then last of all about the spring goddess who brought the arbutus.

"What are you going to do next?" inquired her listener as Nathalie's flower stories ended.

"We are all busy now getting up entertainments; that is, we are thinking up ideas for the Pioneer Stunts. You know, we are anxious to make money for our Camp Fund, and—"

"Camp Fund! what is that?" inquired the girl interestedly.

"Why, the Pioneers, that is the Bluebirds, the Bob Whites, and the Orioles, are going camping this summer, probably in August, or as soon as we can raise the money. There are sixteen Pioneers going. Oh, I am sure we shall have a dandy time! We are to sleep in tents, but there will be a house or something for the dining room and kitchen, that is, if we can get them."

"Where are you going to get the tents to sleep in?"

"Helen and I are to make our own tent, Fred Tyson is going to help us. It will take an awfully long time, we are to begin next week. The other tents, well, some of the girls have their own and then we shall borrow one or two. Of course, you know, each girl will have to pay her expenses to camp and back, but all the other expenses are expected to come out of the Fund, so you see we shall have a lot of work to do. We are to charge admission to the Pioneer Stunts." And then Nathalie told of the novel way they were to get ideas, and how each girl was to keep her idea a secret until after the vote had been taken as to the best Stunt the night of the performance.

"Have you got your idea yet?" inquired Nita eagerly. "Oh, I just bet your idea will be the best one of all!"

"Oh, no," answered Nathalie modestly, "far from it! I am awfully worried for fear it will be a terrible failure." And then she told how she had lost her idea and was writing up another one.

"Well, after you have the Stunts, what are you going to have?" demanded Nita eagerly.

"We want to have a flag drill, that is, if we can get the ground for it, as we want to have it in the open. Oh, it will be the loveliest thing! The girls are to be Daughters of Liberty and carry banners, the little flags used by the different States and soldiers before and during the revolution, before we had the Stars and Stripes. Oh, did I tell you that all of our entertainments have to be either colonial or patriotic, that is, something that happened in or belonged to the early days of the nation, when all the people were pioneers, or the children of pioneers?"

"When are you going to have the flag drill? Oh, how I should like to see it!"

"I have rattled on so fast I forgot to say that—why—we are not sure about that, for, you see, we have got to get a lawn, or grounds that would be suitable." Her face reddened, for she suddenly remembered that it was Mrs. Van Vorst's lawn that the girls had wanted, and that she had refused to let them have it.

"You see," she explained awkwardly, "we want a place where the people can see us, and then we want to have booths decorated with our colors—they are Red, White, and Blue, you know—so we can sell ice-cream. Each table is to be named after one of the thirteen States; but there, I don't believe we can have it."

"Mamma, come here quick," called Nita imperiously, sitting up and peering into the sun parlor where her mother was seated sewing, "I want you to hear about the Flag Drill, and oh, Mother, won't you let me see it? Oh, please, Mother, I can go all muffled up, no one will see me," pleaded the girlish voice pathetically.

Mrs. Van Vorst bent over and softly stroked the golden head as she cried, "Now dear, don't get excited! Mother will do all she can for you."

"You tell *her* about it!" broke from Nita hurriedly, as she pulled at Nathalie's gown. Then falling back on the couch she exclaimed with determination, "But I'm going to see it, Mother, yes I am!"

Somewhat hesitatingly Nathalie began, but in a moment, perceiving that her listener was much interested, she launched forth and told about the Flag Drill in all its details.

"And you are going to use the money you make for your Camping Fund?" inquired Nita's mother as Nathalie finished.

Nathalie nodded, "That is, if we can get the right place to hold it—oh—" she flushed again and then grew suddenly silent.

"Did not one of the Pioneers ask me if I would let them have my lawn in the rear of the house?"

Before embarrassed Nathalie could answer, Nita interposed excitedly, "Our lawn? Oh, let them have it, Mamma, let them have it, and then I can see it from the window, and no one will see me, oh, say yes, Mamma!"

Nathalie's eyes looked dismay as she heard Nita's wailing request. Of course Mrs. Van Vorst would refuse, but suppose she should think that she had urged Nita to ask her?

"Why, I suppose they could," answered Mrs. Van Vorst slowly. "Then, as you say, you could see it from the window, Nita; yes the Pioneers can have it!"

"Oh, do you really mean it?" exclaimed Nathalie, almost as excited as Nita. "The girls will be just crazy with joy—and—oh, isn't it funny? I was one of a committee of three to find a place, and—"

"Well, you will not have to look any further," replied Mrs. Van Vorst. "If my lawn suits, take it, child. I am sure I am only too glad to do anything for the brave girl who has been so kind to my Nita as to come here and make her happy."

"That is lovely of you," rejoined the Pioneer, her eyes glowing, "and can we have it this month, the fourteenth? That is Flag Day, you know, and we wanted to have it then."

"Have it whenever you like, my dear. I will tell Peter to have the grass mowed, and if he can help you in any way in arranging the tables or anything, I shall be delighted to let you have his services."

"Oh, that will be the delightfulest thing!" The girl's face radiated sunshine. "It seems just too lovely to be true!"

But the surprise Nathalie held in store for the Pioneers was almost forgotten in the surprise that awaited her when after saying good-bye to Nita, Mrs. Van Vorst met her at the foot of the staircase and asked if she would not come into the reception-room a minute.

"I wanted to speak to you on a little matter of business," the lady explained somewhat hesitatingly. Nathalie, wondering what terrible thing she had done or said, followed her silently into the room, where she again spied her Chinese friend, the mandarin, grinning at her from the cabinet.

"I have been thinking it over, Miss Page—"

"O dear," thought poor Nathalie, "she is going to change her mind about the drill!"

"And I wanted to know—of course this is a business proposition—" she paused. "You have given so much pleasure to Nita, I thought perhaps you might be willing to come regularly every day, say for a couple of hours."

"Oh, Mrs. Van Vorst," cried relieved Nathalie, "that would be just fine! I should be only too glad, but you know, I have things to do for Mother, we haven't any maid at present."

"But would it not pay you to give up these things, or let some one else do them? It would only be two hours in the morning," there was a persuasive note in her voice, "and of course I would pay you enough to make it worth your while, and oh, I would give anything to bring joy into—"

She stopped, for there was something in the girl's wide opened eyes that made her hesitate.

"Oh, I would not like to take money just for talking to Nita—that would hardly be fair—" Nathalie floundered desperately, for something brought Dick and his operation to her mind, and she did want so badly to earn money. She caught her breath sharply, opened her mouth, and then said, "Why, I don't know, I will see what Mother says and let you know."

"That will be just the thing," was the reply. "You can drop me a note as soon as you decide, for Nita will be anxious, and then we will want to fix the days and times. If you can make up your mind to do this for me, Miss Page, I shall feel so indebted to you!"

As Nathalie flew post-haste towards home she heard the chug of an automobile and looked up in time to see Dr. Morrow sweep past in his car. But he, too, had eyes, and a moment later had backed his car and was asking Nathalie if she would like a ride home. The girl was only too pleased to accept, as she was fairly brimming over with impatience to tell some one her two surprises. They had not gone far before the story was out, and the doctor had heard everything.

"Well now, I call that luck," declared the doctor, "and of course you said you would accept Mrs. Van Vorst's offer?"

"Why, no," answered the girl hesitatingly, "I should love to do it, but I don't know that I ought to take money for it."

"And why not?" queried Dr. Morrow with some surprise. "Isn't money as much to you as to other people?"

"Oh, yes," laughed honest Nathalie; "of course I would like the money, I am just dying to earn money for Dick." The girl stopped with frightened eyes; oh, what was she going to tell? "But then it doesn't seem exactly right to take money just for talking, and I don't know how Mother would feel about it, she might feel badly." Nathalie choked, and her eyes filled with tears as she remembered how hard it was for her mother to think of even Dick earning money when he was so helpless.

"You haven't got to if you don't want to, little Blue Robin," declared her friend, who perhaps suspected how things were. "But I tell you what, friend Nathalie—" emphatically—"if I had a nice little voice like a certain Robin I know, with big brown eyes, and knew how to use those big eyes and that sweet little tru-al-lee of a voice by telling people stories, or talking to them—it's all the same—well, I'd waste no time in accepting that offer. And then, too, see what pleasure it would bring Nita and her mother, too, for that matter. Of course, I'm a man and look at things from a commercial point of view; ah, here we are!" And then with a cheery farewell the doctor helped the girl out of the car and Nathalie walked slowly up the path.

To Nathalie's surprise, her mother thought as the doctor did about the matter. She was not hurt at all, but overjoyed to think that Nathalie was clever enough to earn money that way.

"Why, Nathalie," she mused, pleasantly, "you can do lots of things with the money you earn. It probably won't be much, but it will give you pin-money, and a few necessities. Perhaps it will pay your way to camp!"

"Now, Mumsie," laughed the girl with a trill of glee in her voice, "remember about counting your chicks before they're hatched!"

She turned and ran swiftly up-stairs, and after imparting her good news to Dick, she sat down and penned her note to Mrs. Van Vorst, all her doubts and fears at rest. And she knew what she would do with the money, it came like a flash into her mind as she looked up and saw Dick plodding through an official-looking document.

After the note was mailed, there were just a few minutes left to run over and tell Mrs. Morrow what had transpired in regard to the lawn for the Flag Drill, and to announce, with joy shining in every feature, that they could have the drill on the fourteenth. Then came a few minutes at Helen's, where the news was also told, two surprises, Nathalie declared, after she had unburdened herself to that young lady of the many things she had been bottling up for the last few weeks.

But Nathalie's day of surprises was to bear more fruit, for about five o'clock the postman delivered a package by parcel post, a big box that had a very mysterious look about it. "I don't see what it can be?" she soliloquized, as she looked at the address. And then, "Oh, Mother, do you know where the scissors are?" as she found that her fingers were too unsteady with haste to untie the string.

Dick, however, after hearing her excited outcry, had whipped out a penknife. There was a zip, the string was off, the box slipped out of the paper, and then the girl, with radiant, mystified eyes, was looking down at a Pioneer uniform, a jaunty little affair, with its red tie and red-banded hat to complete the outfit.

"Don't stand there and gape at it any longer, Nathalie," imperiously voiced Dick, with an odd gleam in his eyes. "Look at the card and see who sent it!"

CHAPTER XVI—PIONEER STUNTS

An exclamation escaped dazed Nathalie; and then a search was started, resulting at last in finding the card in one of the pockets of the skirt. Another cry issued from the finder as she read:

"To Nathalie, my faithful little nurse and helper.
"LUCILLE."

"O dear!" said the girl with a shamed glance into the faces surrounding her, "I will never again say that Lucille is cross—oh, she is a duck of a dear! It is the very thing I want, too. Now I shall not be the only Pioneer without a uniform. I must run and tell Helen!" In another moment she was racing with mad speed across the lawn, the uniform bulging out of the half-opened box in her arms.

In a short space she came speeding back, crying, "Oh, Mother, where is Lucille? I must go and thank her this very minute!"

"Up in her room, I think," spoke up Dick, but Nathalie was already half-way up the stairs.

"Lucille, it was just too lovely of you to think of me this way!" cried the girl rapturously; and then before Lucille realized what was going to happen, she was receiving a hug that threatened to demolish her entirely. "There, Nathalie Page," she cried, "that's more than enough; please leave just a wee bit of me, I'll take your thanks for granted."

"No, you won't!" persisted Nathalie with another hug. "I'm here to give them to you in person." She loosened her hold so her cousin could breathe and then began to kiss her softly on the cheek. "Oh, but, Lucille, it was lovely of you to think of it," she ended as she finally freed her cousin, who ruefully began to twist up a few stray locks that had been pulled down in the hugging process.

"Oh, pshaw, I don't want any thanks," Lucille responded as she finished tucking up her hair. "As long as you are pleased, it's all right."

"But I'm serious, Lucille, for you have heaped coals of fire on my head, I'll have to 'fess that I was not a bit pleasant about waiting on you, because, you see, I had so much to see to with the Pioneer Stunts, the work, and everything, and then—"

"And then," mimicked Lucille with a mischievous glint in her eyes, "I'm an awful cross patient; is that it? But it's all right, Nat, turn about is fair play, and if you had felt as badly as I did those few days, to miss it all, the anticipated good times at Bessie's, well, you would have been cross, too."

"Oh, I know it, and I was worse than you were, for I should have possessed my soul in patience, but it was perfectly dear of you to give me the uniform, and then to be so nice about it."

"Well, I'm glad I'm nice," teased her cousin, "but run along, child, for I have about forty-seven letters to get off by this mail."

And Nathalie, with a heart brimful of joy at the many surprises of the day, was very glad to hurry away and talk matters over with her mother.

"What shall I talk to Nita about?" she lamented the next morning as she flew hither and thither, getting her work done in a jiffy so that she could reach the gray house by ten-thirty, the hour set for the talk with the princess, as Nathalie delighted to call her.

"Mother, can't you suggest something?" she asked dolefully as she stooped to kiss her mother good-by. "I do feel that it will not be right for me to take money for just chattering nonsense, and Nita won't let me tell her stories."

"Well, it does seem as if it was undue extravagance, but still, if Mrs. Van Vorst thinks you are worth paying in order to help make her child's life more enjoyable, it seems to me I should not worry about it."

"Yes, I know, but if I could only tell her stories," rejoined the girl, "perhaps I could help her more, for I could make my stories instructive, about nature, history, or—"

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"That is true," was the answer. And then, as if reminded by the word history, she said, "Why not tell her stories about the Pioneer women? You say she is so interested in the Girl Pioneers. In that way you could teach her American history."

"Oh, Mumsie, you are a dear," cried elated Nathalie. "That is just the thing, how stupid I was not to think of it! I will stop at the library on my way home this afternoon. What a help it will be to me, too, for we are going to have a fagot party, sort of a good-by to Louise Gaynor. Gloriana! I won't have any reading to do for that, for I'll be posted from my talks with Nita." Then she was off down the walk on her "way to business," as she laughingly told her mother.

"Oh, tell me all about the Pioneer Stunts!" exclaimed the princess as Nathalie settled herself for a cozy chat after her cheery greeting to her new pupil. Nita's eyes were sparkling expectantly, and the anticipated chat with her new friend had brought a tinge of color to her usually pale face.

"We have not had that as yet; it is to take place to-morrow night—oh, I'll tell you all about it," was the reply. And then, as Mrs. Van Vorst entered the room with a pleasant good morning, Nathalie demanded, "Do you not want me to tell stories to Nita?"

"That is for Nita to decide," was the careless rejoinder. "I have asked you here to please my daughter, and if she wants you here just to talk, why, talk away."

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"But I feel as if I ought to instruct her in some way," demurred Nathalie.

"Do not worry," returned Mrs. Van Vorst. "You will be worth all you earn if you only succeed in making Nita happy for two hours, and give her something to look forward to when you are not here. Of course, if you could get something informative in once in a while, it would do good, no doubt."

"I don't want any stories," interrupted Miss Nita petulantly. "Miss Stitt used to tell me stories by the yard and I have hated them ever since."

Nathalie made no reply; she was thinking how she could slip in a bit of information without Nita's realizing it. "Oh, I will tell you about the flag drill!" she cried with sudden thought.

"Yes, do," acquiesced Nita, readily falling into the trap. "I want to know just everything about it."

"Well, you shall," promptly returned her delighted teacher, and forthwith she set to define the meaning of the word liberty. "You know, Nita, when the Pilgrims and Puritans settled America they came here to build homes where they could have liberty of conscience, speech, and action. Of course, you know all about how these first little settlements grew, until there were thirteen of them that bade fair to become very populous and wealthy. Well, the King of England, fearing perhaps that they would grow into a great nation and take power from him, began to deprive them of some of their rights and privileges."

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"The people for a time submitted, but as his tyranny increased they began to feel greatly depressed, for it looked as if the liberty that they had been enjoying in the new land was going to be taken away from them, and that they were going to be chained like slaves."

"Now the first scene in the flag drill represents liberty—as the Goddess of course—lamenting that if she can live only at the price of slavery, she would rather die. So we see her walking up and down the platform repeating in great agitation the famous words of Patrick Henry, 'Give me Liberty, or give me death!'"

"Just at this moment music is heard, and the Daughters of Liberty enter—"

"The Daughters of Liberty—who are they?"

"Why, don't you know that when King George tried to impose the Stamp Act on the colonists they rebelled, and there was a great time. Bands of men were organized all over the country, who called themselves the Sons of Liberty, and refused to accept the Stamp Act, and—"

"Oh, yes, I know all that," cried Nita impatiently, "but what did they have to do with these girls who are to be in the Flag Drill?"

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"Just you wait and you'll see," replied Nathalie somewhat abashed by this practical question. "Well, these little patriotic bands acted like a whirlwind of fire, spreading patriotism—the determination not to submit to the king's tyranny—all over the land, so that King George was defeated for a time at least."

"Oh, yes, I know all about him," was the reply, "Miss Stitt just doted on history, and she drilled me in American history until I just hated it."

"In 1776," continued the Story Lady, "seventeen young girls met in Providence at the house of Deacon Bowen, and formed themselves into one of these Liberty Bands, only you see they were just girls like you and me. They were very industrious and spun all day making homespun clothes,

for they had resolved that they would not wear any more clothes that had been manufactured in England.

"It is claimed that the clothes worn by the first president of Brown University in Providence, and the graduating class, too, on Commencement Day were garments made by these girls. These young girls not only vowed that they would not drink tea, because you see, it all had to come from the mother country, but they would have nothing to do with any young men who were not as patriotic as they were, and who were not willing to follow their example. These bands of girls were formed all through the colonies and became known as 'The Daughters of Liberty.'" 277

"Oh, now I know, but do hurry and tell me what they did to the Goddess of Liberty!"

"Well, in our Flag Drill music is heard; then the Daughters of Liberty appear on the platform,—there are to be thirteen of them, to represent the thirteen states,—all carrying banners."

"What kind of banners?" burst from Nathalie's auditor impatiently.

"All kinds," was the answer. "You know, the first flag used in this country was the English one, with the red cross of St. George; that was the flag carried by the *Mayflower*. After a while it was used only for special occasions, for the Red Ensign of Great Britain took its place. But as time wore on, each little State came to have its own flag or banner, so that when the Revolution came these State banners became known as liberty banners."

"Some of them were very quaint and grotesque, with strange emblems and designs—some had rattlesnakes or pine-trees—and queer inscriptions. A flag from South Carolina had a silver crescent on it; another from New York had a beaver; troops from Rhode Island floated a white ensign with a blue anchor; while the New England flag bore a pine tree. But to go back to the Daughters; as they march on the platform they form a half-circle before the Goddess, who has retired to her throne, a chair draped with red. In her hand she carries a green branch,—no, don't ask me why, for you will know when you hear the girls sing the 'Liberty Tree.'" 278

"When they finish singing, each girl in turn steps before the Goddess and tells the story of her flag, until a story has been told about each of the thirteen flags. Of course, there were a number of these liberty banners, but we use only thirteen of them."

"There! I said I would not tell you any more today, and I'm not going to. Oh, did I tell you that I told Mrs. Morrow about your mother consenting to let us have your lawn? She is perfectly delighted, and at the next Rally the scribe will write a note to your mother for the Pioneers, thanking her for her offer."

And then—Nathalie could not remember what started the conversation in this channel—she was telling about her brother Dick and his operation, while Nita listened with big sympathetic eyes, for somehow she was very much interested in this invalid brother of Nathalie's.

"You see, it is this way," rattled on Nathalie. "Dick must have the operation as soon as possible—and—as it happens—well, you know Mother's income is limited since Father died and we have had to retrench a great deal. Then to make matters worse, just at the present time some bonds that Mother owns are not paying any interest and we feel dreadfully about it, all on account of Dick. So we are all trying to be as economical as possible; Dorothy and I have a little bank, and every odd nickel we can scare up we drop it in, and oh! the money your mother is going to give me for talking to you, why, that's going in the bank, too! Dorothy and I sometimes wish that some magic fairy would come along and turn those stray cents and nickels into gold dollars, but there, I should think your head would ache, my tongue has galloped so hard and fast." She paused, and with a merry laugh cried, "I should not wonder if after a while your mother paid me not to come and talk to you, for you will get so tired of me." 279

"Indeed I won't!" asserted the princess stoutly as she threw up her arms. There was a mutual hug and then Nathalie was off, for she had to get dinner and it would take her at least ten minutes to walk home.

A week later Nathalie was flying out of the gate of the big gray house with something tightly clasped in her hand. It had been a week of hard work, for O dear, she had grown tired of talking, and then too, she had spent some little time in the library hunting up pioneer women. She had been overjoyed that morning when Mrs. Van Vorst, who had been secretly acquainted with the scheme of telling about these women founders of the nation presented her with a new book from a New York publisher that gave a number of interesting details about these dames of early times. She and Nita had spent the two hours that morning reading about the New Amsterdam vrouws. She laughed slyly as she hurried along to think how adroitly she had managed in such a short time to tell her pupil not only about the Pilgrim and Puritan dames, but other interesting historical events of those early days. 280

As the girl ran swiftly up on the porch and spied her mother reading a few feet away, she burst out with, "Oh, Mother, what do you think Mrs. Van Vorst gave me for teach—talking, rather, to Nita for the week? And I'm to have the same every week. Oh, Mumsie, just guess!"

Mrs. Page's eyes smiled into Nathalie's joyous ones as she said, "I'm not a good guesser, I'm afraid, Daughter, but I'll venture—five dollars?"

"Five dollars!" repeated the girl disdainfully. "Oh, Mother, guess again, it's more than that," she added encouragingly.

"Well, I'll have to give it up," replied her mother after a short pause, with a regretful shake of her head. "I told you I was not a good guesser."

"Ten dollars!" burst from happy Nathalie. "Just think, a dollar an hour, two dollars a day, and ten dollars for the week! And, Mother, it's all to be put away for Dick!"

The night of the entertainment arrived, and promised to be a howling success, as Grace declared, who, with Nathalie, had been detailed to act as an usher. They had been kept pretty busy seating the guests, who had appeared in multicolored gowns, and gay flowered hats, with here and there a dress coat of masculine gender which gave quite an air of festivity to the occasion. 281

The program was opened by Lillie Bell. Attired in a very quaint colonial gown, she tripped along the platform, and with well-simulated blushes and much demureness of manner made an old-time curtsy. After being greeted with an ovation from her many friends, she bashfully sidled up to a rather puzzling-looking instrument on the platform, on which many eyes had been focussed ever since the raising of the curtain, and seated herself before it.

Upon this old-time spinet she played such ravishing strains of melody that the hearts of her audience were captivated, and she was encored again and again. Louise Gaynor, a dear little colonial dame, now appeared, and in her tru-al-lee voice—as the girls often called it—sang some old English ballads, "Annie Laurie," "Robin Adair" and several of similar character, whose celebrity had grown with the years.

The second Stunt was the renowned race for the Forefathers' Rock, Kitty Corwin as Mary Chilton, and Fred Tyson as the slow-footed John Alden. A spinning contest followed, the fair spinners being colonial dames from Plymouth town, New Amsterdam, Boston, and Jamestown. The fair maiden of Plymouth, Priscilla, spun with such deftness and skill that she not only won the plaudits of those assembled, but the prize. As she gracefully bowed her acknowledgment to her friends' loud clapping, she backed hastily off the platform. Alas, she backed into John Alden, who at this opportune moment had appeared on the stage, with such terrific force that she almost bowled him over. John, however, to prove that he was not as slow as the name he had gained, adroitly caught the falling maiden in his arms and then led the blushing damsel, Jessie Ford, forward as his captured prize. 282

Barbara Worth proved quite a heroine in her single-act comedy on Pioneer craft, the plucking of a live goose. Mistress Goose, however, not understanding her part of silent acquiescence, being a twentieth-century goose and not a pioneer one, mutinied, and as Barbara came to the end of the couplet,

"Twice a year depluméd may they be,
In spryngen tyme and harvest tyme,"

she escaped from her captor's clutch and with a loud, "Quack! quack!" of disapproval flew across the stage.

Barbara, dumb with fright for fear the goose would fly down among the spectators, gave chase, and then ensued a regular "movie" as amid loud calls urging her on in the race, and protestations voiced by the goose in a clamorous quacking, she chased it about the platform. Just as Barbara was about to capture her prey she tripped on a rug and measured her five feet two on the floor. But Barbara was game, Fred Tyson declared to Nathalie as they watched her, and jumping to her feet she soon captured her featherless fowl, which, after being shown in its deplumed condition, was borne from the scene of its torments by the victor. 283

The curtain now rose on "The First American Wash Day," a little playlet representing the women of the Pilgrim colony, with arms bared to the elbows, rubbing and scrubbing in tubs of foamy soap-suds, washing clothes, for the noble sires of our nation.

Nathalie gave a quick start and her eyes leaped wide open as she convulsively clutched Grace by the arm, and then she grew strangely still as she watched the actors on the stage. The scene was a distinctive one, as the children of the *Mayflower* ran hither and thither gathering boughs, make-believe sweet-smelling juniper, to place under the tripod from which kettles of water were suspended over a small fire that simulated a cheery blaze.

As these pioneer mothers washed, and then wrung out their clothes, slashing them about in true washer woman's fashion, some one in the rear of the stage recited in a loud, clear voice:

"There did the Pilgrim fathers
With matchlock and ax well swung
Keep guard o'er the smoking kettles
That propped on the crotches hung.
For the earliest act of the heroes
Whose fame has a world-wide sway,
Was to fashion a crane for a kettle
And order a washing-day."

"Pioneer Mothers of America."
By HAND W. GREEN. 284

The applause of the spectators testified to the merit of the performance, and as the curtain dropped, Nathalie, whose eyes were ashine with a strange fire, hastened out into the hall. "Oh, it was mean of her! It is the same as stealing, she knew she had no right to use it!" were the thoughts that flashed at white heat through her brain, for the playlet that had just been enacted was the one she had lost in the library!

And the one who had passed it off as her own, the one who had been the head performer, and

who had recited the verses, was Edith Whiton!

On rushed Nathalie straight towards the dressing room, determined to tell Edith just what she thought of her, but the sight of a crowd of girls of which Edith was the central figure brought her to a standstill. "Of course, Edith, we all recognized you!" "It was a clever Stunt." "Well, you have shown you are a Pioneer, all right!" Many similar pæans of praise came to Nathalie's ears.

The girl stood still, inwardly raging with indignation, almost ready to cry with the strife between her outraged sense of right, and a commonplace little monitor who whispered, "It would be mean to accuse Edith of a sneaking act in the very midst of her glorification. And then, too," continued the whisperer, "you are not really sure that Edith has not some excuse to offer; there was no name on your paper." Nathalie swallowed hard, then her muscles relaxed, and the hard angry gleam disappeared from her eyes. Well, Edith might be mean and small, but she at least would be above her, she would say nothing!

With a certain pride that she had risen above doing what she would undoubtedly have regretted afterwards, Nathalie hurried into the dressing-room. A few minutes later as the curtain rose it displayed in its completed form the second idea that she had spent so much time in planning.

Around the hearthstone in a Dutch kitchen sat a *huys-moeder*, busily undressing her two little kinderkins while she sang the crooning nursery rhyme:^[1]

"Trip attroup attronjes,
De vaarken in de boojes,
De koejes in de klaver,
De paarden in de haver,
De kalver in de lang gras,
De eenjes in de water plas,
So grootmyn klein poppetje was."
"Colonial Days in Old New York."
EARLE.

Through a window in the back of the cozy kitchen a blanketed squaw was seen dandling her swaddled papoose in her arms, as she peered hungrily in at the glowing fire, and watched the *huys-moeder* fill the warming pan with coals, thrust it between the sheets of the little trundle-bed, and then give her babies some mulled cider to drink.

The tiny figures in their *cosyntjes*, or nightcaps with long capes, had just crawled into bed when "tap-toes" sounded, and the honest mynheer and his good vrouw hastened to cover the still glowing embers with ashes for the fire of the morrow. The Dutch curfew had sounded, which meant that all good simple folk must hie to bed.

This fireside scene in old New York won its merited applause, and Nathalie, who had been the Dutch mother, Mrs. Morrow's kiddies, the kinderkins, and Fred Tyson, the mynheer, were called before the curtain to receive the plaudits of their friends.

As Nathalie was hurrying from the dressing-room, glad that she was through her long-anticipated Stunt, and doubly glad that it had been a success, her name was called. She turned to see Helen, who, with an anxious face, was peering from the adjoining dressing room.

"Oh, has anything gone wrong?" demanded Nathalie hastening to the door.

"I should say!" exclaimed Helen with woebegone countenance, "I have left my gun at home, and I must have it. Oh, I can't imagine how I could have been so careless! Can't you get some one to go and get it for me? Tell them to hurry, for my scene goes on in ten minutes."

"Oh, I'm so sorry," sympathized Nathalie, "tell me where to find it, quick, and I'll get some one."

"It is in the hall just behind the rack! Do hurry, Nat, I'm just about wild!"

Nathalie darted away; but alas, she could not find any one who could go at that moment, every one had some important duty to perform just then and there. Even the Scouts, who were always so ready to help the girls, were missing. "Oh, it is too bad!" bemoaned the girl. Presently her eyes lighted and in another instant she had flown up the stairs, seized her long cloak in the dressing-room, and then sped down the steps into the garden, and out into the street.

Ten minutes, that meant she would have to run every step of the way to get that gun there in time. So with the lightness of a bird she darted down one street, up another, and then—her heart gave a great leap as she came to the long, lonely stretch of road skirting the cemetery of the old Presbyterian church. But on she flew, hardly daring to cast her eyes towards the tall tombstones that gleamed at her with ghostly whiteness from the ghoulis shadows cast by the waving branches of the trees above them.

No, she was not afraid of ghosts, but she suddenly remembered a story she had heard as a little child, of a young girl who had been waylaid and killed by a man in a cemetery one dark night. Fiddle! she was not going to be afraid of a mere story, so with a snatch of melody on her lips she kept bravely on and soon left behind her the marble records of the dead. It did not take but a minute to ring the bell, tell Helen's aunt what she wanted, then grab the gun and start off on her return journey.

Oh, she did hate to have to go by that old graveyard, she would take the other way around; but no, that would take twice the time and she must hurry! So nerving up her courage she ran on with the firm determination to play soldier, and level her musket if any one assailed her.

As she neared the cemetery her breath gave out, and instead of running by this danger post she had to walk every step. Determined not to look in the direction of these ghostly reminders of the past, she pushed resolutely on. She had almost reached the end of the long fence when the sudden snap of a twig, followed by a rustling noise caused her heart to pause in its beating. A scream escaped her quivering lips, for there in the bright radiance that fell like a silver veil over all objects she saw the figure of a man rise from one of the tombstones near the fence and come towards her!

[1]

“From your throne on my knee,
The pigs in the bean-patch see,
The cows in the clover meet,
The horses in the oat field eat.
The ducks in the water pass
The calves scamper through the grass.
They love the baby on my knee
And none there are as sweet as she.”

CHAPTER XVII—LIBERTY BANNERS

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Nathalie’s eyes dilated with terror, and her heart pounded with such leaping beats that it almost choked her. She attempted to run, but alas, her limbs seemed tied with ropes, and then she remembered the gun!

Just an instant and she had raised it, and with trembling hands was pointing it at the enemy, who by this time had lightly vaulted the wooden fence and was coming towards her. Nathalie’s hand was feeling for the trigger when, “Oh, don’t shoot!” cried a voice in serio-comic tone, “I surrender!” Up went two hands in pretended subjugation.

The girl gasped, dropped the gun, and then broke into hysterical laughter as she cried, “Oh—is—that you?”

“Yes, it is I; Fred Tyson in the flesh!” rejoined the supposed murderer coolly, as with a stride he was at her side and, stooping picked up the gun.

The reaction was so great that for a moment Nathalie feared she was going to cry, but controlling herself by a strong effort she exclaimed, “Oh, I was sure you were a tramp,” with a nervous giggle, “or a murderer intent on killing me, and then hiding my body in the thicket yonder.” She shuddered.

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“Great guns!” Fred exclaimed as he looked the gun over. “It is lucky this thing didn’t go off. By the Lord Harry, how did you come to be carrying it?”

Nathalie, with a long breath of relief that all was well after her fright, then told Fred how she came to be near the graveyard at that time. Then suddenly remembering that she had not a minute to lose, she cried hurriedly, “Oh, let us go on. I am afraid I am too late!”

“You’re all hunky,” returned Fred calmly. “You have plenty of time, for I overheard Mrs. Morrow tell Helen to postpone her Stunt until one of the last.”

“But how did you come to be here, may I ask?” queried Nathalie as they turned to walk up.

“Oh, I was in the next room and heard Helen tell you to go and get something at her house. I started out to offer my services, but some one buttonholed me for the next Stunt; I had forgotten I was in it. As soon as it was over I hurried out to find you, but you had skipped. I rushed after you, missed you, and then remembering that you would return this way as it is the shortest, sat down on one of the tombstones to wait for you. But you’re the stuff, all right, Nathalie Page, you ought to have a medal for bravery.”



Up went two hands in pretended subjugation.

He suddenly pointed the gun and then pulled the trigger.

Nathalie gave a shrill scream in a spasm of apprehension, and jumped to one side. "Oh, please, don't do that, it might be loaded, you know!"

Fred threw his head back and burst into a hearty laugh. "Oh, ho, I see you are not as nervy as I thought," there was a mischievous glint in his merry black eyes. And then as if ashamed of torturing the nerve-racked girl he cried soothingly, "Don't you fret, Miss Blue Robin; there isn't any guess with me, I don't take chances. I saw it wasn't loaded when I first picked it up, but come, let's hurry!"

"Please don't tell any one I was afraid!" pleaded Nathalie, as they hastened on under the swaying branches of the trees that cast weird, fanciful designs on the moon-mantled path. "They will think me an awful coward and tease me unmercifully."

Fred assured her that he would keep mum, and added that she was not a coward, but a very brave girl. Then, in response to a challenge to race him to the Hall, they were off, Nathalie by this time having regained her usual poise and nerve. She won the race, for Fred, desiring to be gallant, dropped back a space or two just at the right time, and thus allowed his partner to be the victor in this race of two blocks.

The gun was quickly delivered to Helen and then they hurried into the hall in time to see the portraits of Henry Hudson, Edward Winslow, William Penn, Governor Stuyvesant, and Captain Kidd and Henry Morgan, two pirates of pioneer fame. These colonial portraits were produced by their representatives standing behind a large wooden frame that had been made by the Scouts, gilded by the Pioneers, and then placed in front of a dark curtain.

Helen's Stunt proved to be a canvas background on which was painted a log cabin. At the door of this pioneer home stood Helen with a baby clinging to her skirts, pointing a gun at a skulking savage just disappearing beyond a very fair representation of a clump of trees. This picture of a mother of the wilderness was loudly encored, as it was significant of the hardy courage displayed by the women of those early days.

The last Stunt showed the Pioneers in line, each one with a big red letter pinned to the skirt of her uniform; the combination making the word "Pioneer Women." Giving bird-calls, building miniature log-cabins, making camp fires, jumping, throwing the lifeline, as well as making the motions of rowing and swimming, these and many other activities of the organization were performed. The girls ended by falling into line again and singing a farewell Pioneer song.

Mrs. Morrow now came forward, and after thanking the audience for their kind attention and aid in helping make the affair a success by buying tickets and by their presence, she announced that there would be another entertainment, a Flag Drill, to take place on the fourteenth of that month. It would be held in the rear of the home of Mrs. Van Vorst, that lady having kindly offered her lawn for the affair.

The faces of the Pioneers, with the exception of Nathalie's and Helen's, expressed unbounded surprise as they heard this announcement. As Fred Tyson and two other Scouts passed slips of paper so that each one present could write her or his opinion as to the best Stunt of the evening,

there was a merry clack of tongues as each girl queried how and when this wonderful thing had come to pass.

Lillie Bell, who had been watching Nathalie, suddenly leaned forward crying, "Nathalie Page, I just believe that you know all about it!" Nathalie did her best to look bland and innocent when this accusation was hurled at her, but the query was as a match to fire, and instantly Nathalie was surrounded by a bevy of girls, all eagerly demanding that she tell them how it came about.

"O dear, how should I know?" she demanded with seeming indignation.

"There, I told you she knew," declared the Sport, who at that moment joined the group. "Her face betrays her! And then she is on the committee."

Nathalie turned and flashed at Edith angrily, "Well, if I do know I am not going to tell. If you want any information go and ask Mrs. Morrow." Then feeling that things were growing desperate and that she might reveal what she had striven so hard to keep a secret, she broke from her tormentors and hurried into the hall.

Seeing Helen at that moment she dashed up to her, and grabbing her by the arm cried, "Helen, the girls are tormenting me to tell them about the lawn party; oh, do keep them from asking me again, for I am in mortal terror that I may tell something that should not be told just yet."

"All right," soothed her friend, "don't you bother about the girls finding out, I'll see to them. But here's Fred, he wants you to vote. By the way, have you heard that the Sport's Stunt has so far the greatest number of votes, and—"

But Helen had been carried off by one of the Scouts, and Nathalie turned to find Fred at her side eagerly demanding her vote.

"Why don't you vote for 'The First American Wash-Day'?" demanded the young man as he saw Nathalie hesitate and swing her pencil, lost in abstraction. "It will win, I think, and it was a good Stunt, too; well acted out. Edith deserves credit."

"Do you think so?" flashed Nathalie. She colored angrily. "I do not agree with you. I think—" She stopped, compressed her lips, and then added coolly, "I shall vote for Helen, for I consider her Stunt the best one of the evening." She wrote the name of the Stunt hurriedly, signed her name, and then handed the card to Fred, who was regarding her with a puzzled expression on his face.

He took the card and turned to go, but seeing that the floor had been cleared for dancing he stopped, and swinging about asked Nathalie if he could have the next dance. Nathalie assented, although she did not feel in the mood for dancing just at that moment.

"You won't mind waiting a moment, will you?" asked Fred. "I have got to turn in my cards. Then I see this is a square dance, and I want a waltz with you. Are you angry with me?" he asked wonderingly as he saw that Nathalie's eyes still gleamed fire and that her cheeks were bright red.

The girl looked up at him absently and then, suddenly comprehending that she was acting rather rudely towards this new friend, cried laughing, "Angry with you? Indeed, no! I *am angry* with—some one," she added bitterly, her glance suddenly falling on Edith. "But there, return your cards and then we will dance."

Five minutes later as Fred swung his partner lightly up and down the hall to waltz time, Nathalie forgot all the unpleasant jars of the evening in the enjoyment of the moment. But later, as they hurried out on the veranda for a breath of fresh air, she remembered how rudely she had acted and felt as if she ought to make some kind of an explanation to Fred for her seeming rudeness. Then it suddenly came to her that perhaps he might think she was jealous of Edith. Oh, no, she was not jealous—she was willing Edith should win the highest number of votes, only it did seem a bit hard to have to give all the glory up to some one else, when it rightfully belonged to her, and then Edith *had been* mean about it.

"Please don't think I didn't want Edith to win," she burst forth as they seated themselves in a cozy corner where she could see the dancers in the hall. "Only—you see it is this way, I—"

But before she could finish, the Tike came rushing up all of a whirl crying, "Oh, Nathalie, your Stunt won! I'm awfully glad!" And she danced up and down in her delight at Nathalie's success.

"Oh, 'The First American Wash-Day' was Edith's Stunt," Nathalie hastened to explain, resolved that she would be a martyr to her wounded pride with a good grace.

"That didn't win the highest vote, but your Stunt did," retorted Carol jubilantly; "the one with the old Dutchwoman putting the kiddies to bed. And that Dutch lullaby—oh, Nathalie, where did you learn it?"

Before Nathalie could answer Carol had skipped away, leaving the girl with a strange expression on her face as she stared at Fred with mystified eyes. "Do you suppose I really won it?" she demanded after a pause. "I thought you said Edith's Stunt was the winner."

"So I heard," was Fred's reply. "But then, Miss Nathalie, I am awfully glad your Stunt won. It was a peach, I thought myself, but I heard—"

"Oh, I don't care about that," cried Nathalie. There was a quiver to her voice. "I don't deserve it; oh, I have been awfully mean, and yet I have been calling Edith mean—" She stopped abruptly. How queerly it had turned out!

Catching a rather strange look in her companion's eyes she exclaimed, "Oh, indeed I was willing

that Edith should win—I don't care a snap about it myself—only, you see it was this way." She floundered for a moment and then with a sudden catch in her breath leaned towards Fred crying, "If I tell you something, will you swear never to reveal it?" Fred's face brightened; he was delighted to think Nathalie considered him worthy of her confidence, and lost no time in assuring her of this fact. But the girl was thinking of only one thing, and that was that she was going to break her silence in regard to Edith and unburden herself of what had been causing her a good deal of discomfort all the evening. Nathalie talked rapidly and in a few minutes Fred was in possession of the facts about "The First American Wash-Day," and how it had come about that although the idea was Nathalie's, Edith had won the glory of it without the work.

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"Say, but you're game!" declared Fred admiringly, as Nathalie finished her story. "It was a fine thing for you not to tell; I don't blame you for feeling mean about it. But the Sport had no right to use it—"

"Well, never mind now," cried Nathalie, "it is all over with and I am glad I didn't tell any one but you, and you won't break your word, will you? The word of a Scout, you know," added the girl archly.

Fred laughingly assured her that his word as a gentleman was sufficient and as binding as that of a Scout. Then as they discussed the Scout oath, its pledges, and so forth, Dr. Homer appeared and asked his little hike-mate if he might have the pleasure of a dance with her.

Nathalie smilingly assured him she would be most happy and then with a good-by to Fred, the quaint little figure in its queer Dutch cap and flowered gown followed the doctor into the hall.

The long anticipated fourteenth of June had arrived, and the level stretch of green grass with its circling hillocks in the rear of the gray house was ablaze with color. Beneath a high arch festooned with the red, white, and blue—the Pioneers' color again—stood a number of merry girls, each one gowned in white with a scarlet sash, and a red liberty cap, and holding in her hand a flag or small banner.

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Every eye as well as tongue was on duty, as each girl triumphantly displayed her flag to her comrades, proudly claiming that it was an exact copy of one of the liberty banners used by the colonies preceding or during the Revolution.

"Hurrah for the Concord flag," cried Kitty Corwin, as she hoisted up a small maroon banner inscribed with the motto, "Conquer or Die." "This is one of the oldest flags in America, for it was the one carried when the 'embattled farmers fired the shot heard round the world'"—she twirled it high in air—"on the 19th of April, 1775, at the first battle of the Revolution!"

"Oh, but your flag hasn't the romance that mine has," said Edith, ostentatiously waving a crimson flag fringed at the ends, and with a cord and tassel. "This is the Eutaw flag and was made by Miss Jane Elliot. Col. William Washington—he was a relative or something of little Georgie—when stationed at Charleston, South Carolina, fell in love with Miss Jane. One night, after spending the evening with his lady love, as he bade her good night, she said she hoped to hear good news of his flag and fortune. Whereupon the poor colonel was forced to confess that his corps had no flag. Upon hearing this the young lady pulled down one of the portières, cut it to the right size, fringed it at the ends, stuck it on a curtain pole, and then presented it to her gallant lover, telling him to make it his standard. Of course after that it brought good luck and won a great victory at Cowpens, January, 1781, and another at Eutaw Springs the following September. Forty years later the flag was presented by the hands that made it to the Washington Light Infantry of Charleston, for the fair Jane married the colonel, all right."

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"Well, don't you girls boast too much," declared Jessie, "for if it hadn't been for my flag there wouldn't have been any banners of liberty to make you patriotic." And Jessie held up a white flag barred with the scarlet cross of St. George, the flag dear to Merrie Old England as the flag of the people, and beloved by the colonists as the ensign that floated from the little ship *Mayflower*.

As if to supplement Jessie's declaration, an Oriole gayly flaunted the Red Ensign of Great Britain with its canton quartered by the cross of St. George and St. Andrew. "This is the flag that followed Jessie's and was necessarily adopted by the colonists as the flag of the mother country. It was called the Union flag—the two crosses signifying the union of Scotland and England, when King James of Scotland became king—and remained in use in America until the beginning of the Revolution."

Grace, who had been impatiently waiting to float her flag, now cried, "Away with your old Johnnie Bull flags! Mine is worth a hundred of those old English rags, for it was the first distinctively American flag used by the Colonies, 'The Pine Tree Flag of New England.'"

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"But it has the red cross on the white canton just the same," ventured Jessie, "and it is red, too."

"Of course it has the cross on it," quickly retorted Grace, "for at that time the Colonies still belonged to England; but if you look, my lady, you'll see that pine in the first quarter of the canton, and that is American all through, every pine on it. It meant that the colonists, although they were English, had a right to representation in the mother country and to a symbol of their own."

"Well," persisted Jessie, in whose veins flowed a goodly supply of English blood, "your scrubby old pine was such a poor representation of that noble tree that Charles II asked what it represented—and was told it was an oak."

"Come, Jessie," laughed Helen, "that story is a back number. Every one can guess without much effort that the man who told that yarn to the king was a New Englander. He wanted to gain favor with Charles and bluffed him a bit, trying to make out it was a model of the royal oak in which his majesty took refuge after the battle of Worcester."

"Oh, stop discussing the merits of that old pine and look at my banner," sang out Louise Gaynor, shaking her flag furiously to and fro so as to get the attention of the girls. "This flag is the Crescent flag and stands for the bravest of the brave. Now listen, and you will all understand what true heroism means."

The girls, impressed by the Flower's declaration, grew silent, and gazed curiously at a red banner with a white crescent in the upper corner near the staff. "This flag was designed by Col. Moultrie of the Second Carolina Infantry in 1775. During the siege of Charleston when the flag was shot down, Sergeant William Jasper at the peril of his life recovered it, and held it in place on the parapet until another staff was found. In 1779, at the assault on Savannah, it was again shot from its holdings. Two lieutenants sprang forward and held it in position until they were killed by the enemy's bullets. Jasper again sprang forward and held the colors up until he, too, was riddled with bullets, and fell into a ditch. As he was dying he seized the flag in his hands and cried, 'Tell Mrs. Elliot'—she was the wife of one of the majors—'that I lost my life supporting the colors she gave our regiment.'"

Barbara, who was usually so placid and mild, now grew quite intense as she pointed to her flag, the Cambridge flag, claiming that it was the first flag on this side of the water to float the red and white bars. It signified, she said, that although the colonists were willing to return to the rule of the English, they were a body of armed men fighting for just and equal rights with their brothers who had crossed the sea to whip them into submission. "But they didn't," ended Barbara with triumphant eyes. "And this flag, also known as the Union flag—meaning that the colonists stood as a man in their desire for the right—was displayed by Washington in his camp at Cambridge, January 2nd, 1776."

"Now let me have a chance," pleaded Nathalie, who had been impatiently waiting to show her design for some time. "My flag has a story, too." She held up as high as she could a white flag with a rattlesnake in the center. It bore in black letters the name, "The Culpeper Minute Men of Virginia," the snaky slogan, "Don't Tread On Me," and the famous words of its commander, Patrick Henry, "Liberty or Death!"

"Do you see that rattlesnake?" continued Miss Nathalie, as she brought her flag to a standstill and pointed to the snaky emblem. "That has a story—"

"Pooh," interposed Edith, who was jealously guarding her declaration that her flag was the most beautiful because it had a story. "I don't see any story about that snaky old thing. Ugh, I never could understand why so many flags had that design."

"I will tell you why," declared Nathalie, "because I have looked it up, and—"

"But you are not the only one who has looked up flags," chimed Jessie, "for my eyes were just about ruined trying to get a merit badge for proficiency in flag history—"

"And for deftness and skill in making our flags," broke in a Pioneer from the Bob White group.

"I beg your pardon, girls, I know you are all very wise on the subject of flags this morning," rejoined Nathalie good-naturedly, "but do you know why the rattlesnake was chosen as an ensign?"

She waited a moment, but as no one seemed to know she went on. "The rattlesnake is to be found only in America; my authority is Benjamin Franklin. It is the wisest of the snake family, therefore a symbol of wisdom. Its bright, lidless eyes never close, this signifies vigilance. It never attacks without giving due notice, which meant that the American colonies were on the square. Each rattle is perfect, while at the same time it is so firmly attached to its fellows that it cannot be separated without incurring the ruin of all; each colony was a complete unit in itself, and yet it could not stand unless it had the support of the others. As it ages, the rattles increase in numbers, which meant that it was the fervent desire of the people that the colonies should increase in numbers with the years."

As Nathalie finished her little lecture, Helen, with a sudden movement, shouldered her flag like a musket, and parting the group of girls, marched jubilantly down the center, crying, "Oh, girls, you have had the floor long enough to tell of the beauties and glories of your paltry banners, but let me tell you, not a flag has won the honors and glories that mine has. Hurrah, girls, for Old Glory!" she ended with a triumphant wave of the Stars and Stripes above their heads.

As if inspired by the sight of the cheery banner so gallantly flung to the breezes by their comrade, the girls with one accord broke into the flag cheer:

"Hear! hear; hear Girl Pioneer!
For flag so dear give a cheer!
For the bars that are white and red,
And stars on blue overhead
We honor thee with a cheer!
Hurrah! Hurrah! Girl Pioneer!"

Before the echo of the cheer had died in the distance Nathalie cried, "Oh, girls, the first signal!" Immediately these little patriotic Daughters of that which every one holds dear fell into line, and

with flags upheld fastened their eyes on a small platform that had been erected in the center of the lawn draped with the national colors, where the Goddess of Liberty had just appeared. Holding up a green branch in her hand she began to walk agitatedly up and down the stage, pausing abruptly every moment or so to peer to the right or left, as if watching for some one.

Suddenly she halted, and with the dramatic gestures of Lillie Bell—for it was she—cried in mournful tone, “‘Is life so dear, or peace so sweet as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course others may take, but as for me, give me liberty, or give me death!’”

As the tragic intonation of her voice ceased, the band—composed, by the way, of a number of Scouts—burst forth with that old melody, “The Wearing of the Green.” This was another signal, and the girls waiting under the arch began to march slowly towards the stage, while the Goddess in feigned mystification moved quickly from side to side with her hand held to her ear, as if trying to ascertain whence came this martial tune.

But on came the Daughters of Liberty with flashes of white and red, and with banners of many designs and devices. They presented such a brilliant showing that the audience seated in rows on the circling mounds broke into loud applause, which burst into enthusiastic cheers of greeting, as in the bright glare of the sunlight they perceived Old Glory floating far above the heads of the banner bearers as they proudly marched across the green.

When the Goddess perceived this procession of fair damsels she stood apparently in a maze for a moment, and then slowly retreated backward until she stood on the scarlet draped dais with its throne. As the thirteen maids of freedom filed slowly on the platform, forming a half circle before the Goddess, the band struck into that old-time air, “The Liberty Tree,” and a second later every Daughter had chimed in and was singing:

“In a chariot of light from the regions of day
The Goddess of Liberty came;
Ten thousand celestials directed the way,
And hither conducted the dame.
A fair budding branch from the gardens above,
Where millions and millions agree
She brought in her hand as a pledge of her love,
And the plant she named Liberty Tree.”

CHAPTER XVIII—THE PRINCESS MAKES TWO MORE FRIENDS

“And the plant she named Liberty Tree,” sang Nita blithely up in the window of the sun parlor, where she sat with her mother and her old Scotch nurse, Ellen, watching the brilliant scene being enacted down on the lawn.

As the last verse ended—and there were four—Helen stepped before the Goddess, and after saluting told in a few words how the brave pioneers had brought to this land a tiny spark which had flamed into the sacred fire of Liberty. As time wore on, trampled by the sons of Tyranny, it was in danger of being stamped out, when the daughters of these pioneers fled to its aid in their great fight for the right, and by their bravery and heroic self-denial had revived the sacred fire. The ensigns now floating before her were the signals of their success in making this land, “The Land of the Free and Home of the Brave!”

An expression of regret flitted across Nita’s face as she realized that she could not hear the words Helen was speaking, but in a moment, remembering, she cried, “But I have them, Mamma, for Nathalie not only taught me the words of the songs, but wrote down for me the speeches of the girls. Ah, Helen is telling the Goddess how the Pilgrims came to this land and planted the Liberty Tree. Of course they did not really plant it, you know, only in their hearts, for they were determined to have liberty of conscience, speech, and action.”

“Oh, and there’s another daughter speaking to the Goddess. See, she carries the flag that came over in the *Mayflower* with the Pilgrims.” Then Miss Nita, finding she had an appreciative audience in her mother and Ellen, rattled on, highly pleased to think she was giving them such good entertainment. She repeated the words of each fair daughter as she displayed her trophy of liberty, and could clap as enthusiastically as the spectators watching from the hillocks in the distance. Mrs. Van Vorst, as she heard her daughter’s words and witnessed her joy, entering with as much zest and spirit into the patriotic little drill as the Pioneers smiled in attune with the invalid, showing more enjoyment than she had done for years.

“There’s the flag of Bunker Hill; it is just like the Pine Tree flag, only it is blue instead of red,” exclaimed Nita. “And, oh, Mother, see, there’s the real Liberty Flag with its pine tree, and motto, ‘An Appeal to Heaven.’ Look quick! that’s the Markoe flag! See, it is yellow and has thirteen stripes of blue and silver. Nathalie said this flag was the first one on land to float stripes, and that it was the flag carried by the Philadelphia Troop of Light Horse when they escorted Washington to New York. And that crimson silk flag is the Casimir flag; it belonged to Count Casimir. He was the son of Pulaski, who perished in a dungeon for advocating the cause of liberty. The Count came to America and organized a corps of cavalry at Baltimore, and when the Moravian nuns

heard of it they presented him with that flag. But, oh, Mother, the poor Count died after all; he was shot at the siege of Savannah in 1779."

Ellen, the old Scotch nurse who adored her invalid charge, and who had always taken care of her from the time she was a wee tot, was deeply stirred as she saw how Nita entered into the new life that had suddenly been opened up to her, and her face fairly beamed with gratified pride as she heard her repeat the songs and speeches of the girls in the playlet.

When the last speech ended, the strains of Yankee Doodle were heard, and presently a Scout in the uniform of a Continental soldier appeared on the platform carrying a draped flag. After saluting the mother of Freedom he planted his pole in the center of the circle of Liberty maidens, and the next instant each one had caught up one of the red, blue, and white streamers that hung from it, and were swinging gayly around, singing "The Red, White, and Blue."

This song was followed by the "Battle Cry of Freedom," and then the soldier, saluting the Goddess again in a short speech, said he desired to present to her an emblem, the outgrowth of the labors of the Sons and Daughters of Liberty. The ensign that stands for everything that is just, true, and progressive, the symbol of the sovereignty of Civilization, the banner that had been unfurled in more movements for the protection, the liberty, and the elevation of mankind, than any ensign that ripples to the four winds of Heaven.

Oh, no, the little company up in the window didn't hear all these words from the lips of the soldier, but from Nita as she read them softly from her paper. But they did see the signal given by the soldier, and clapped with joy when each fair daughter pulled her streamer, the red drapings fell from the pole, and Old Glory stood revealed. And as the colors swayed softly in the gentle breeze they joined with patriotic fervor as the girls and audience broke into "The Star Spangled Banner!"

The Flag Drill was over, and the girls, breaking ranks, were soon scattered here and there over the lawn in groups, as they stood receiving the congratulations of their friends on the success of the entertainment. It was but a moment or so, however, and the girls had all rushed back to duty, and each one with a scout was serving ice-cream and cake to the buyers at the gayly festooned tables under the trees.

Nathalie, nerve and bone tired, was wishing that she could sit down if only for a moment, when her eyes suddenly grew bright with thought, and the next second she had darted across the grass crying, "Oh, Grace, don't you think it would be nice if we could take some cream and cake up to Nita and her mother?"

"Nita?" repeated that young lady, who had never heard the name before. "Why, what do you mean?"

Nathalie started. "Oh, why, to be sure, I forgot to tell you about her, but Mrs. Morrow thought best to—"

Nathalie broke off in despair as she realized that Grace knew nothing about the princess in the tower and the many other happenings at the gray house, only that its owner had consented to allow the girls to use her lawn.

"Why, you know Nita is Mrs. Van Vorst's daughter; she was the one who got her mother to let us have the lawn. She's just lovely, I have been going to see her every day for—"

At this moment Ellen, her face glowing with pleasure, touched Nathalie on the arm as she cried, "Oh, Miss Nathalie, Mrs. Van Vorst has sent me to ask you to come up and see Miss Nita, and to bring two of your friends with you!"

Nathalie stared a moment as if not comprehending what Ellen had said, and then, "Oh, Ellen, do you mean that Mrs. Van Vorst wants me to come up to see Miss Nita and to—"

"Yes, that is just what I mean, Miss," rejoined Ellen, evidently enjoying Nathalie's amazement. "Miss Nita wants to meet some of your Pioneer friends. Bless the child, Miss Nathalie, but you and your friends have brought real sunshine straight to the heart of my bairn. Bless you for it!"

Nathalie smiled and nodded as she answered, "All right, Ellen, I'll be right up!" Then, as the old nurse disappeared among the throngs on the lawn Nathalie turned to Grace, who was standing in open-mouthed astonishment at this sudden turn in the day's doings.

"Oh, Grace, will you go with me? Didn't I tell you Nita was lovely?" Then seizing the girl by the arm she swept her across the grass to where Helen was standing talking to her brother.

"Helen," she panted, "I want you to come with me to see Nita. Mrs. Van Vorst has sent for me to come up and says for me to bring two of my friends. Will you come?"

"Come!" exclaimed Helen, "of course I will. I have been on the point of expiring with curiosity ever since you told me of your adventure at the gray house."

"Adventure?" repeated Grace. "Oh, Nathalie, you have not told me about it!" in an aggrieved tone.

"But I'm going to! Oh, but I must hurry and get the cream ready or it will be too late!" She started to run, but after a few steps turned back, and waving her hand at the girls, called, "Helen, you tell her while I am getting the tray."

"But I'm coming to help you," replied that young woman. "You come, too," she added, catching Grace by the arm. But to her surprise Grace pulled away from her with the exclamation, "Oh,

Helen! I wouldn't go in that house for a mint of money! Why didn't you know? No, I'm not to tell," she ended mysteriously, "but you go," she added, "that is if you are not afraid."

"Afraid?" echoed her companion in amazement, "why should I be afraid, surely you don't think any one could harm us as long as Nathalie has been there and come away safely?"

"I don't know," hesitated Grace, "I!—"

"Oh, girls, I have the tray all ready, but you will have to help me carry it. Do come on, for I do not want to keep Mrs. Van Vorst waiting too long!" Nathalie was back again.

"Grace says she is afraid to go," explained Helen.

"Afraid!" repeated Nathalie bewildered. "What are you afraid of?" she demanded abruptly turning towards her friend.

"Why Nathalie, don't you remember that day we—"

Nathalie continued to gaze at her blankly, and then her face broke into a smile as she remembered the day she and Grace had run away from the gray house afraid of the crazy man.

"Oh, Grace," she cried with merry laughter, "that was the best joke on you and me, for, O dear, why, Grace, it wasn't any crazy man at all, it was only a cockatoo!"

The long kept secret that had troubled Nathalie so much at first was out at last, and she and Helen, who had been told about that when her friend's silence was first broken as far as she was concerned, broke into prolonged laughter at the richness of the joke.

"A cockatoo?" exclaimed Grace incredulously, and then annoyed at the girls' merriment she added crossly, "Oh, I do wish you would explain what is so funny, I think it real mean of you both to laugh that way!"

"Yes, it is mean," added Nathalie, stifling her laughter as she saw the irate expression on her friend's face. "But, Grace, it was funny. I would have told you all about it before—that is how I found out—only I had sworn not to tell. But if you will promise not to reveal what I am going to tell you—honor bright—" this in answer to the girl's nod of assent, "I will tell you the mystery of the gray house!"

It was not long now before Grace heard the long story of how Nathalie had come to go to the house, how she had found out about the cockatoo, the star part she had played with the princess, and the many other happenings that had taken place within the last few weeks.

"But is the poor thing such a terrible monster?" demanded Grace in ready sympathy.

"A monster?" ejaculated Nathalie in amazement. "Who said she was a monster?"

"Why, don't you remember? Edith—"

"Now, see here," exclaimed Nathalie stamping her feet angrily, "don't tell me another word of what the Sport says. I am just beginning to hate that girl, she is always saying and doing things she has no—" She stopped suddenly as it came to her in a conscience-stricken flash that Pioneers were never to say evil of any one.

Helen, seeing the strange expression in her eyes and noticing how her color was coming and going in flashes, cried, "Oh, Nathalie, what is it?"

"It is nothing," replied the girl quickly in a choked voice, "I just stopped—because—well, I remembered that one of the Pioneer laws is not to speak evil of any one. I'm going to keep mum after this, but that girl," her eyes shadowed again, "does provoke me so!"

"Oh, Nathalie, you are a dear girl," exclaimed Helen, putting her arm around her friend and giving her a hug. "I wish we were all as careful about keeping the Pioneer laws as you, but gracious, child, don't repent with such dire woe, for none of us are saints, and the Sport is trying, the Lord knows. But explain to Grace about your friend."

"No," said Nathalie determinedly. "I am not going to say another thing, only that Nita is not a monster, only a humpback, and—but there, if you want to know about her, come and see her."

"Well," spoke up Helen, "if we are going to see the Princess in the tower—how fairylike that sounds—we had better go. And then, as seeing is believing, we'll go and tell the Sport all about it, and stop that funny little tongue of hers that creates so much trouble at times."

"Oh, that will be just the thing; Helen, you are a dear!" cried Nathalie. Then the three girls hurried to the ice-cream table for the tray. Hastily taking it they pushed their way through the crowd, coming and going about the tables, to the porch, where Ellen relieved them of their burden and then conducted them to the sun parlor, where Mrs. Van Vorst and Nita sat waiting to receive them.

"Oh, Mrs. Van Vorst," cried Nathalie as she greeted that lady and her daughter, "it was lovely of you to allow me to bring my two friends to meet Nita. This is Miss Helen Dame," she continued drawing Helen to her, "and this is another Pioneer friend, Miss Grace Tyson."

"I am very glad to meet you, Mrs. Van Vorst," broke in Helen, "for I feel that we are very much indebted to you for allowing us to use your lawn."

"Yes," chimed Grace, as she shook the lady's hand, "we all feel that you have given us a lovely afternoon."

"I think the indebtedness is on my side," smiled the lady, looking down with pleased eyes at the two girls, as they stood glancing shyly at her, their white dresses and red caps making them appear unusually pretty. "But let me make you acquainted with my daughter," she added, leading them to where Nita sat, her blue eyes almost black with the excitement of meeting these two new Pioneers, while her cheeks, usually so pale, were flushed with a delicate pinkness.

After the general hand-shaking was over and the little party had gathered closer to the window to admire the gay-colored flags that fluttered, one from each table, showing with unusual vividness between the green foliage and light dresses of strollers across the lawn, Nathalie asked Nita how she had liked the drill.

"Oh, Nathalie," rejoined the princess enthusiastically, "it was just the prettiest sight, and I told Ellen and Mamma every flag story, didn't I?" Then suddenly remembering the two strangers, she relapsed into a shy silence and crouched back in the friendly shelter of her chair as if with the sudden thought of her deformity and the fear that the girls would see it.

But Grace and Helen were not thinking of the "awful hump" as Nathalie had defined it, but of the pale sweet face with the lovely violet eyes that were shining like bright stars.

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"I am awfully glad you liked it," said Helen, suddenly recalled to her duties as the leader of one of the groups. "We tried to make it look as festive as we could with Uncle Sam's old liberty banners, but if it had not been for the lawn we should not have been able to have the drill."

"You are all very kind to thank me so prettily," said Mrs. Van Vorst, "but, as I said, I think you have given me and my little daughter more pleasure than we have given you. The poor child sees so little of life, as we are so secluded here behind these high walls."

In a few moments, as Nita's shyness began to wear off, the little group was chatting in the most friendly way, talking over the incidents of the drill, the Pioneers telling about the nice little sum they had made for their camp expenses, while they all ate their cream and cake. Ellen, like a good soul that she was, had hastened out to the lawn and brought enough of those delicacies to provide for the whole group.

Helen's remark about the Camping Fund started a new subject of conversation and opened the way for Nita to ask many questions about this summer dream of the Pioneers. "Oh," she declared at length, "I just wish you could come up to Eagle Lake and camp on its shores. We have a bungalow up there, you know, and it is just a glorious place. But it gets so lonely after a while, with nothing but the birds and squirrels to talk to. Oh," she ended suddenly with a little sigh, "if I was only well and strong, then I would be a Pioneer, too."

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"Oh, but you—" interrupted Nathalie, and then she paused. She was going to say "why you can be," but the quick remembrance of the hump and the delicate face of the girl caused her to halt. With quick readiness she changed to, "Oh, but you would enjoy seeing one of our cheer fires; they are an inspiration for all kinds of dreams with the burning logs and glowing embers."

"You ought to see the fagot party we are going to have Monday night," chimed in Grace. "It is to be a burning send-off to one of the girls who is going South to live for a while."

"A fagot party?" exclaimed Nita with interested eyes. "Oh, do tell all about it; it sounds, well it sounds fagoty. What do you do?"

"Why, we use small fagots tied into bundles," explained Helen, "that is, after we have started a good blazing fire. Each girl has her fagot bundle and as soon as one burns up she throws hers on —"

"Oh, but you haven't told the best part," broke in Grace. "While each girl's fagot bundle is burning she tells a story, which has to be ended by the time her fagots are burned."

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"Does she have to stop on the very second?" questioned Nita.

"Yes, she begins as soon as she throws her bundle on the blaze, and keeps on talking until it is all burned up and falls to a shower of fiery sparks. But of course she has to keep a sharp look out on the burning fagots, so as to end her tale with a good climax as the fagots fall," explained Helen.

"Where are you going to have it?" questioned Nita, a shade of disappointment on her face as she thought how she would like to see this fagot party.

"We haven't found a place yet," answered Grace, who was one of the committee, "but we are working hard to have it down in Deacon Ditmas's lot, near the cross-roads."

"Why can't you have it on our lawn?" exclaimed Nita timidly, turning appealing eyes towards her mother. "Oh, Mother, do say they can have it here, and then I can see it."

The girls were so amazed at this sudden and unexpected proposition that they all remained silent, Nathalie in a spasm of dread for fear that Mrs. Van Vorst would think that the Pioneers were a great nuisance being thrust upon her hospitality in this abrupt manner. But she was quickly undeceived as the lady rejoined hastily, "Why, I should be most pleased to let the Pioneers have the lawn for the fagot party. It would give Nita great pleasure, I am sure."

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"That will be just lovely!" cried her daughter, clapping her hands delightedly. "And you will take it, won't you?" she coaxed pleadingly, suddenly stopping her demonstrations as if realizing that her plan might not be pleasing to the girls.

"I think it would be dandy," answered Grace. "What do you girls think?" turning towards them as she spoke.

"Why, I think it would be fine," added Helen, "and—"

"But oh, Mrs. Van Vorst, it will destroy the grass on the lawn," spoke up Nathalie doubtfully, "for our cheer fires always leave a blackened burnt place on the ground."

"That will not make any difference," was the prompt rejoinder from that lady. "Peter can rake it off and if necessary he can resod it. I shall only be delighted if you young girls can use it, and the favor will all be on my side—" her voice trembled slightly—"for it will give my little daughter so much pleasure."

"Oh, Nita! you are walking, you will fall and hurt yourself!" exclaimed Nathalie excitedly, as she entered that young lady's room the Monday after the Flag Drill, and found her walking about with a coolness and ease that she had never before seen her display.

Nita broke into merry laughter at the look of dismay on her friend's face. "Of course I'm walking, the doctor says I can, so there!" There was a triumphant toss of her head at Nathalie.

"But you have never walked, that is not much since I have known you!" cried the puzzled girl.

"And you thought I never could," replied the little lady independently. "Well, you are wrong. I used to walk when I felt able, sometimes quite a little. Then a crank of a doctor frightened Mamma to death by telling her I should always lie on my back or side, and for years I have been nailed like a mast to a ship on that couch. But Dr. Morrow says if I have the strength I should walk, and that my strength will come gradually. Oh, who knows what I can do? Walk off this old hump, I hope!"

"Oh, you dear thing!" cried Nathalie, rushing to her friend and giving her a squeeze. "Isn't that just the loveliest thing? What nice times we can have after a while if you can walk, and Dr. Morrow, I always knew he was a dear!"

"There, don't squeeze me to bits, but tell me all the things that have happened since the Flag Drill, and oh, Nathalie, your friends are dears. The one you call Grace is sweet, and the other one, why, she isn't so pretty, but she looks a good sort."

"She is something more than a 'good sort,'" answered Nathalie swiftly, "she is a gem, she is so clever and sensible, and, oh, what a friend she has proved to me! She has a wonderful way of helping you over the hard places. But there, I will tell you what Grace said about you, she said you were a sweet little cherub—and—"

"Just arrived from angel land I suppose, with wings all sprouting," ventured Nita sarcastically. "Well, she ought to see me when I'm mad. Cherub indeed! What did the other one say?"

Nathalie hesitated; her face flushed, "Oh—why, she thought you were a dear, but said you were a bit spoiled."

Nita looked surprised for a minute; then her eyes flashed as she cried with a defiant lift of her head. "Well, I guess if Miss Sensible had a hump to carry about that could never be taken off, no matter how it hurt, and had to be shut up behind walls with nothing to see or any one to talk to, she'd be spoiled, too!" There was a quiver of the chin as the red lips closed tightly in the effort not to cry.

"Oh, you poor little thing, I should not have told you that, for really, Helen thought you were lovely!" Nathalie regretted with all her heart the impulse that had prompted her to tell the truth to Nita. It seemed unkind but it was really spoken in the hope of doing her little friend good.

But Nita pushed her away, "Oh, don't pet me!" as Nathalie attempted to caress her, "I was only teasing. Yes, I know I'm spoiled, but there, do tell me the news, for your face shows that you are just dying to tell me something worth the hearing."

"Well, yes, I have *some* news—that's slang, but O dear, it does mean so much sometimes," laughed Nathalie as she and Nita seated themselves on the couch. "Saturday we had a Pioneer Rally. Judge Benson, a friend of Dr. Morrow's from the city, gave us a talk on self-government. He explained the difference between natural, spiritual, and civic law. He also explained the meaning of an ordinance, told us how justice was administered in the different courts, and how self-government, or the reform system is having its try-out in some of the prisons to-day. He says it bids fair to make criminals—men hardened in sin and crime—respectable members of a community."

"Self-government?" queried mystified Nita, "why, the Pioneers are not citizens or criminals; you don't have to be governed!"

"Yes, we do," asserted Nathalie stoutly, "and so does everybody. Civic, natural, and spiritual laws are all right, but back of those laws is the law of self-government, that is the something within each one of us that makes us what we want to be, that makes us control ourselves even when we are babies, when we get slapped for being naughty. If there was no self-government in the world—for it is the government of self when we make ourselves obey the laws of God and man, when we cease evil and do the right—why, if there was no self-government we would all be savages without law and order."

"Judge Benson told us how self-government came to be used in the schools and prisons. Of course, as I said, we all have to govern ourselves in a measure, but it is the applying of this self-government in a new way that has done so much good."

"A very good man, he said, took some waifs from the poor settlements in New York to the country and tried to better them physically and morally by teaching them to be good. But of course, they

would do wicked things and have to be punished, and he became very much discouraged because the punishments didn't seem to do them any permanent good. So he thought for a long time and then he formed a Junior Republic, made all the boys and girls citizens, and then told them to appoint their own officials, that is, their own lawyers, judges, officers, and so on. Then when any of them did wrong they were haled into court and tried by their own comrades. Of course, they all became so interested in this new system of punishing—for you see, they all had a part in it—that they became wonderfully good. You see, the boys and girls had to learn to control themselves, for of course, they not only wanted to stand high in the court and be lawyers and judges themselves, but they did not like to be corrected and called down—that's what the judge said—by their own comrades. This venture at making boys and girls learn to control themselves not only taught them self-denial, self-repression, self-development, and the difference between right and wrong, and their duty to themselves as well as to their companions, but it was the means of introducing the same system into the public schools, and in time into the prisons.”

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“Yes, but I don't understand how it interests you girls.”

“Why, Mrs. Morrow read so much about self-government and the good it did that she introduced it into the Pioneer organization, and it has worked wonderfully well there, Mrs. Morrow claims. Instead of a court we have a senate, which is composed of two girls from each bird group, elected by the girls. The Pioneers also elected a president, that's Helen, and a vice-president, she's an Oriole girl and quite clever, too. Jessie Ford is the secretary, and Mrs. Morrow is the Advisory Judge and has the power to veto any ruling of the president, but she never has as yet.

“So you see what it does for the Pioneers, for if any member of the organization breaks a law or does anything wrong she is brought before the Senate. Every Pioneer served with an indictment to appear before the Senate has, of course, the right to choose one of the girls as a counsel, and when there are two girls implicated they both choose counsel. Then after the witnesses are all heard the lawyers sum up, and the case goes to the Senate, who act as a jury and vote by ballot. The case can be appealed to the Advisory Judge; or an offender, by asking or showing contrition, can have her sentence lightened. You don't know what fun it is, and then it helps to make us govern ourselves and teaches us law, too, in a small way, of course.”

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“Well, I wish they'd try to punish that hateful Sport for using your idea, and to think she got all the credit for it! Why—”

“No, she didn't,” laughed Nathalie with an odd little gleam in her eye, “for she was tried before the Senate Saturday.”

“Oh, Nathalie, you don't mean it! Oh, I'm so glad!” cried Nita clapping her hands delightedly. “I do hope she got her deserts, the deceitful thing!”

“Well, I am afraid she got all that was coming to her, as Dick said.” Nathalie's bright face sobered. “Nita, I was awfully sorry for her. It was so humiliating to have to face that Senate, oh, the girls just hate to be brought before it. I had to tell as a witness, about losing the Stunt, the librarian told of helping me get data and then helping me to look for it, and then how she saw Edith pick it up as it fell from under a book on the table.”

“Do tell me what they did to her!” Nita bent forward in curious excitement as she spoke.

“Poor thing! she had all her stars and badges of merit taken from her. Just think, she will have to begin all over again to win them! At first it was voted that she would have to go back and be a third-class Pioneer again, but I was so sorry that I pleaded for clemency, and so the sentence was lightened.

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“You see, there is an awful lot of good in Edith, and I am never again going to say anything against her, she has been punished enough. And oh, Nita, Dorothy at the Rally received her third-class badge, and I received my badge for a second-class Pioneer. I'm going to work awfully hard while at camp, so as to qualify as a first-class Pioneer. But there, it is getting late and we shall have to stop talking and take up our reading on the 'Pioneer Women of America.'”

Nita nodded, and in a few moments the two girls were busily engaged; Nita listening with the keenest attention while Nathalie read about the Dutch women who came from Holland and settled New York, little dreaming as she read that this lesson was to culminate in an event of the utmost importance to the Girl Pioneers of Westport.

CHAPTER XIX—THE FAGOT PARTY

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“Oh, Mother, isn't it just beautiful?” exclaimed the princess the night of the fagot party, as she watched the flames leap and dance down on the lawn.

“Yes; it is very suggestive, too,” answered Mrs. Van Vorst, “for it makes one think of the witches in Macbeth, as they stood around the cauldron watching their queer concoction 'boil and bubble.'”

“O dear!” was Nita's wail again, “it is lovely to see the fire and the girls, but I do want to hear the stories they tell.”

“Perhaps Nathalie will come up later,” suggested her mother, “and tell you some of the thrillers.

Is that what she calls them?"

"There, they have stopped the witches' dance and are forming a circle. Oh, one of the girls has thrown on a bundle of fagots! Yes, it's that friend of Nathalie's, Miss Sensible. Oh, Mother," cried the little shut-in with a woeful countenance, "I am sure I could walk down there." She stood up as she spoke and began to walk restlessly up and down the room.

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"Oh, Nita, be careful!" pleaded her mother. "You do not want to overdo your walking, and you have been on your feet a good deal to-day." Notwithstanding Mrs. Van Vorst's protest there was a note of hope in her voice that betrayed that she had at last begun to see things as Nathalie had predicted, that she had made a mistake in housing her daughter behind high walls, and that the mingling with girls of her own age might bring new life to her.

"Ah, there's Grace," went on the voice at the window. "She's the other girl who came with Nathalie. Oh, she's throwing on her fagots!" The girl turned from the window as she perceived that Ellen had entered the room and was telling her mother that some one desired to see her in the library.

As Mrs. Van Vorst arose to leave the room Nita demurred, "Oh, Mother, I don't want to be left here alone."

"I will return as soon as possible, Nita, dear," was the reply; "Ellen will stay with you. You can tell her about the fagot party," she added hastily as she saw the cloud on the girl's face. With a backward glance, as she hurried from the room, she saw that her suggestion had been followed and that Ellen had drawn her chair close to Nita's, and was eagerly listening as her daughter related the incidents leading up to the demonstration down on the lawn.

Indeed it was not long before the faithful nurse, always interested in anything to brighten the life of her young charge, was watching the Pioneers and their doings as keenly as Nita, while wishing with her that they could hear the stories the girls were telling.

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Suddenly Nita, who had been unusually silent for some time, drew Ellen's head down to hers, and began to whisper softly in her ear.

"Oh, Ellen, will you?" she coaxed pleadingly, as she finished her whispering of something that had brought a protest from the good woman. Ellen looked dubious for a minute or so, and then the persuasive pleader had her way, for Ellen had given her assent and Nita was clapping her hands happily, as she thought of the fun in store for her later in the evening.

Meanwhile, the girls on the lawn with tense expectancy kept their eyes on Nathalie, who arose, walked towards the flaming pyre, and with a quick toss landed another bundle of fagots on the leaping flames.

"Oh, Nathalie, you will have to hurry," called Grace excitedly, as her friend scurried back to her seat. "One of your fagots is already ablaze."

Nathalie needed no warning for she had already plunged into her tale, and in short, concise sentences—she had practiced with Helen—was describing in graphic tone a colonial wedding, the going away of the bridal pair, the building of a log hut in the wilderness, the departure of the young husband, and the loneliness of the young bride. She paused a moment and drew a long breath as if to gather her forces for the coming ordeal.

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Then with her eyes fastened in a rigid stare on the twirling glare from the flames—so as to bring her story to a proper climax when the fiery fagots fell apart—she went on and told of the face of a redskin suddenly being thrust into a window of the little cabin, of a shriek of terror, of cruel, fiendish laughter, of the fair bride being carried on the back of a tall savage, and of the final arrival at an Indian encampment, where a paint-bedaubed warrior with flaunting head-gear tried to induce the wailing bride to become his squaw.

Nathalie's eyes, big in the flaming redness of the firelight, were riveted on the seething flames as if she saw in the twist and curl of their darting tongues the enactment of the story she was telling. The girls all bent forward eagerly, for the fagots were getting ready to burst apart as she told of the imprisonment of the bride, the making of a big bonfire, the tying of the bride to the stake, the lighting of the underbrush at her feet, and the whirling flames as they leaped up and greedily licked the terror-stricken face.

But Nathalie, like a photo-play screen, had transported her listeners to a sun-baked plain, where a white man was galloping in mad speed. A fagot had leaped from its fellows. "Oh, Nathalie, hurry!" whispered Grace, wringing her hands nervously. Ah, but Nathalie was on time, and as the fagots gave a loud snap and fell into a shower of twinkling lights the horseman came galloping into the street of the Indian encampment with a troop of soldiers close at his heels, and leaped into the fiery embers and cut—There was a loud clapping followed by cries of applause, for there was no need to tell what happened after that leap into the fire, every one knew.

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"Now, Lillie, it is your turn!" shouted several voices as Nathalie, exhausted by her strenuous race between words and flames, sank back somewhat exhausted against her friend's shoulder.

Lillie Bell, in response to her name, seized a bundle of fagots, and with a few flourishes, which she declared to be an incantation for success, threw it on the blazing pile. In a moment she was back in her seat and had started her tale of romance.

"When Washington Irving's headless horseman was the terror of the Hudson, a party of young girls, who were wandering in the fields one moonlight night, was chased by a huge and airy phantom to the banks of the river. In order to escape their foe two of the girls darted into an

empty boat fastened near the bank and rowed out into the stream. The phantom, a strange and weird object, pursued, swimming rapidly in the wake of the canoe.

"Suddenly, to the horror of the girls crouched up against a rock on shore they saw, in a broad band of moonlight shining on the water, that the phantom was the headless one. Even as they gazed it had reached the boat, and with one sweep of its mighty arm had grabbed one of the girls from her sister's clutch, and was swimming swiftly back to land. 335

"The girl in the boat rowed quickly back, only to see, with her companions on shore, the phantom disappear into the woods. With phenomenal courage she flew after the headless one, screaming with all her strength. But alas, her speed and screams were of no avail, for she ran after the phantom only to see it dash into an uninhabited mansion that stood in a park thick with the gloom of forest trees.

"Horror-stricken, the girls hastened home and parties were sent in pursuit of the stolen girl, but no trace of her was found, although the empty mansion, dark with the forest gloom was searched from attic to cellar.

"Time passed, and the maiden returned not to her home, nor was any trace of her ever discovered, although every effort possible had been made. At last her sister, loved by a young farmer, refused to marry him unless he would visit the haunted mansion at midnight, to see if possibly he could obtain any clue to her sister's whereabouts, it being generally believed that she had been murdered in the house and that her ghost haunted the abode.

"Determined to win the girl, the young farmer with his revolver and a few tapers secreted himself in the cellar of the house one day, just before twilight. He was resolved to solve the mystery of the girl's disappearance and the reason why the house at night was filled with a peculiar, bluish light, said to be the candle borne by the headless one in his midnight tour of the premises. 336

"Just before midnight the farmer hastened to the upper floor and hid in a closet, where, with quaking limbs and wildly beating heart he awaited the magic hour. Unfortunately, weary with waiting, he fell asleep, but was soon awakened by a peculiar, creeping sensation along his spine. He crouched against the door holding it ajar with one hand and the pistol in the other.

"All at once there was the swish of a garment against the door. He scratched a match, lit his taper, and glared forth into the darkness. Again he heard that swish. It was in the hall. Stealthily he tiptoed to the hall door, opened it with trembling hand, and stepped forth into dense blackness, when—"

"Oh, Lillie, hurry!" screamed the Sport. "Your logs will fall in a minute!"

A strange smile flitted over Lillie's face, but her voice went thrillingly on. "When something huge and hairy spread over him like a net, benumbing every nerve and muscle. He struggled, and finally succeeded in getting free of the unknown thing and sprang for the door leading to the open. He would get out of that house. No, he would lose Kitty, he could not live without her! He turned—ah, what was that weird flash at the top of the staircase? He heard the swish again—this time very near—it was some one coming down the stairs! He crouched against the wall and peered up; the rattling of a chain sounded on his ears; again came that weird glare, and he saw—" the fagots fell with a loud sputter, throwing forth a shower of fiery sparks. Lillie remained silent a moment, each girl held her breath in paralyzed terror, and then, as the last fagot dropped a shapeless heap on the grass, Lillie cried with tragic emphasis, "Girls, I leave you to guess what he saw!" 337

A second of space, Lillie's eyes shown in a mocking smile as she glanced around the circle, and then, the smile froze on her lips, her eyes dilated wildly, and she jumped to her feet crying in frenzied horror, "What is that?" pointing as she spoke to a clump of trees on the lawn. Another second and she had turned, and with an unearthly shriek was flying across the lawn towards the house!

The girls, whose nerves had been wrought up to the highest pitch by Lillie's weird tale, remained dumb, thinking as they saw her strange actions that it was a new thriller, and were uncertain whether to laugh or cry, as they stared at her flying figure.

Jessie, who always disliked Lillie's tragic tales, with a half laugh sprang to her feet crying, "Well, if she isn't the limit!" Her glance had followed Lillie's to the clump of trees with a curious stare; the stare became fixed; she uttered a wild scream, and the next moment she, too, was rushing in mad terror across the lawn in the wake of the story-teller! 338

As the girls saw her glance and heard her cry, terror struck each one like an electric shock, and the next second every girl present had broken into a wild cry, and without waiting to see what was the cause of the rush over the lawn, was speeding, helter-skelter towards the house!

Nathalie had run with the others, and then, swayed by some unknown impulse, she had halted and glanced back in the direction she had seen Lillie and Jessie look. She gave a low cry, started to flee again, and then stood suddenly still, and with panting breath gazed again at the clump of trees. She caught her breath, for under the swaying boughs stood a weird, white object pointing a long white finger at her!

What was it? Could it be a Boy Scout trying to frighten them? She bent forward with intent eyes, for as the white figure swayed slightly there was something curiously familiar in its movements. The next instant Nathalie had turned, and as if shot from a catapult was speeding towards the white figure that still stood, uncannily waving its arms to and fro in the moonlight.



With an unearthly shriek was flying across the lawn.

“Oh, Nita!” burst from the girl, “how did you come here?” Before the white figure could answer, Ellen was seen running swiftly towards them.

“Oh, Miss Nita,” she wailed, “what a scare you have given me! Oh, you naughty girl, you promised that you would not leave the lower porch!”

“Well,” flashed the girl, “I changed my mind!” Then seizing Nathalie, who was still staring at her with big, frightened eyes, she began to laugh hysterically. “Oh, wasn’t it funny, Nathalie? Did you see how she ran? What a joke, when she was trying to scare the girls—and was scared herself—O dear, it is so funny!”

But Nathalie, with a sober face was staring down at the grass. “Oh, Nita,” she exclaimed with a sudden fear, “the grass is wet, and, Ellen, she will take cold! Oh, how did she get here? Mrs. Van Vorst will be so displeased!”

But at that instant Mrs. Van Vorst came running down the path followed by Mrs. Morrow. “Oh, Nita! Nita!” she wailed, “how could you be so foolish, you will surely take your death! Ellen, how did it happen?”

“Sure, there’s no harm done,” broke in Peter’s voice at this critical moment. “I have her chair and we’ll soon get her in, marm. Sure, I saw her stealing across the lawn all alone by herself, and I hurried after the chair, thinking she would be tired before she had gone far.”

“Thank you, Peter,” cried Nita’s mother, “you are so good and considerate. O dear, I hope she won’t take cold! It was such an imprudent thing for her to do, but Ellen, how did it happen?” There was a note of condemnation in the lady’s voice.

But before Ellen could answer, Nita, whom Peter had wrapped and placed in her chair, cried, “Now, Mamma, don’t blame Ellen. It was all my fault. I sent her to get my shawl and then I stole down here. I just wanted to hear some of the stories. But when I got here that girl—the Pioneers called her Lillie—was telling a story. She was trying to scare the girls, and then—oh, Mother, it was so funny to see her run—why, I thought I would scare her, and when she looked up, just as she had worked the girls all to a fever, I waved my arm and pointed my finger at her. Oh, Mother, if you could have heard her shriek!” Nita was again in hysterical laughter.

By this time she had her audience laughing with her, especially Peter and Ellen, who thought their young mistress had been most brilliant in outwitting them, and in frightening the young lady who had been trying so hard to frighten her companions.

“O dear,” exclaimed Mrs. Morrow, who proved to be the lady who was visiting with Mrs. Van Vorst when Nita stole down to the lower porch, “I am ashamed of my Pioneers; they are supposed to be very brave, but to-night’s performance does not appear as if they were. Nathalie, how was it you did not run with the others?”

“I did,” confessed Nathalie frankly, “but something brought me to a halt and I turned and looked back. O dear, but Nita did look terrible waving her white arms to and fro! And then it came to me that there was something familiar about the figure, I stared a moment, and then I knew! But, Mrs. Morrow, hadn’t I better look for the girls? Please do not blame them, I am sure you would have run, too, if you could have seen Nita in that sheet, pointing her finger at you.”

Then Nathalie was off, running swiftly over the lawn, peering first on one side and then the other as she gave a Bob White whistle, then a Tru-al-lee, ending with the shout, "Girls! Girls! where are you?" then the Bob White whistle again.

Her cry was heard, and one by one the Pioneers sheepishly crawled from their places of safety and joined Nathalie on the lawn. They listened with shamed faces as she told them who and what it was that had caused their sudden departure. They were reluctant to show themselves at first, especially when they learned that Mrs. Morrow was there and had heard all about their foolish flight. But with a bit of coaxing on Nathalie's part they returned, and in a few minutes were again in their cheer-fire circle, with two additional guests, Mrs. Van Vorst and Nita, besides Mrs. Morrow, who had thought when the girls first began to tell their stories to slip in and thank Mrs. Van Vorst for her kindness, with the result that she had been a witness to their lack of bravery, as she termed it.

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The rest of the evening passed quickly after one or two had told their thrillers, to the great satisfaction of Nita, who enjoyed them immensely. After the stories were told, there was a marshmallow roast, which was entered into with zest, and then came the burning send-off to Louise Gaynor, who, when her name was called, came shyly forward to receive an enormous pie, from which hung streamers of gay colored ribbons, each streamer being tied to a keepsake from one of the Pioneers.

Mrs. Morrow now expressed the regret of the Pioneers at losing so good a comrade and friend, with the added wish that she would always remember them with love, and the assurance that they would carry her on their hearts with devout wishes for her health and happiness. The streamers were pulled one by one and the loving gifts were brought forth as a tribute to the sweetest songster of the band.

The last streamer brought to light a Round Robin letter, which Louise faithfully promised not to open until the dates set, as for each day in the year of absence she would find a few words of cheer and love from her comrades, the Girl Pioneers of America.

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After a few songs from the girls, Louise sang one or two of her old English songs, Lillie accompanying her on the mandolin, and then Mrs. Morrow, in a neat little speech, commended Nathalie for her courage in holding her ground when the others had taken to flight. As she ended there was a moment's silence and then each and every girl was shouting as loud as she could:

"Hear! hear! a brave Pioneer!
Three cheers for Nathalie dear!"

This cheer was most embarrassing to Nathalie, who wiggled uneasily with flushed cheeks as she tried to make the girls hear that she was not brave at all. But her protests were drowned by the merry voices, as after three cheers they broke into their Pioneer song of good-by to Louise. This was followed by the song that every Pioneer loves to sing and that was:

"We're Pioneers, Girl Pioneers!
We're Pioneers, Girl Pioneers!
We will be brave, and kind and true;
We're Pioneers, Girl Pioneers!
Hear! Hear! Hear!
Girl Pioneer!
Come, give a cheer!
Girl Pi-o-neer!!!"

One bright morning two weeks after the fagot party, Helen with wondering surprise mingled with pleasure read the following:

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"Madame Van Vorst presents her compliments to Mistress Helen Dame, and begs the pleasure of her company on the afternoon of the sixth of July, at a *Kraeg*, to meet her daughter, Mistress Anita Van Vorst, in the celebration of the two hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the building of the Van Vorst homestead. Mistress Helen is requested to appear in the costume of a 'goede vrouw' of Mana-ha-ta."

"A *Kraeg*—what does that mean?" queried the girl, as with puzzled brows she eyed the tiny picture of the "Homestead" surmounting the invitation, with the dates, 1664-1914. "Ah, Nathalie will know!" The next moment the girl was hurrying across the lawn to her neighbor's veranda, where she had spied her cosily ensconced in the hammock screened from observant eyes by a bower of green leaves.

Nathalie looked up as she heard her step and trilled a soft tru-al-lee in recognition, as Helen gave the brownish envelope in her hand a flourish.

"I knew you would be wanting to know what that meant." Nathalie smiled happily at her friend as she pointed to the envelope.

"I understand the invitation all right," was the quick retort, "and congratulate you on your success in winning the madame to your views that it was a shame to allow little Anita to bloom behind those high walls. But—can you tell me what kind of a thing a *Kraeg* is?"

"It means a Dutch house-warming! But there, I am not going to tell you any more, wait until the sixth."

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"In the costume of a goede vrouw of Mana-ha-ta," read Helen slowly. "May I deign to ask your Dutch Majesty to explain what this means?"

"You may," nodded the occupant of the hammock, "for her Dutch Majesty has spent many weary hours with Miss Anita studying just that part of the program. You see, we want to have the real Dutch atmosphere of the early period, so we decided to have each girl impersonate some woman pioneer, and then tell who she was and what she did."

"Well, I don't imagine that the girls will care to get themselves up like those old Dutch vrouws, as they were so terribly stolid and uninteresting."

"Oh, Helen," exclaimed Nathalie sitting suddenly up in the hammock, "those Dutch vrouws were anything but uninteresting. Nita and I have read all about them in a book Mrs. Van Vorst bought for us in New York, it has just been published and is very interesting. As a matter of fact, the women who settled New York were the most efficient, the most industrious, and the most capable of any of the early pioneer women of that period."

"I did not know that," said Helen, raising her eyebrows; "I thought they were just stolid Dutch peasant women with little ability to do anything but knit, tend the cows, and so on."

"A great many people seem to have that idea," returned her friend, "but the Dutch housewives were not mere stoical drudges. Holland at that time, you know, was the only country that gave as good an education to her girls as to her boys. They were not only educated to fill responsible positions, but to have a love for literature as well as for painting, music, and the arts. So these Dutch peasants, as you call them, were better educated, better protected by the laws of the colony, and held more important positions than any of their Southern or Northern sisters."

"It is claimed," she went on, warming to her subject, "that the Dutch housewife was the manufacturer of the day, producing under her own roof nearly all the necessities for the family use. Besides being proficient in the art of cooking, she made perfumes from the flowers in her garden, planted, gathered, dried, and brewed the hops. She culled simples and herbs for medicine, thus becoming the physician of the household. She taught her maids to card and weave wool for clothes; she spun the fine thread of the flax, grown in her yard, for the linen, knit the socks, oh, I could not begin to tell you her many industries!

"But besides all that," continued the girl, "the goede vrouws had such good sense and judgment, and such a fine eye for commercial values that they not only owned real estate, but oftentimes carried on their own business. The burgomasters of the town paid great deference to the Dutch women's shrewdness, judgment, and independence, so that they exerted no little influence in the state affairs of New Amsterdam."

"Well, I never!" laughed Helen teasingly. "If you haven't become a regular schoolma'am since you have been teaching the princess. Pray, how much am I to pay you per word?"

Nathalie laughed merrily. "Yes, isn't it funny? I started reading about the Pioneer women to get Nita interested in something that would be instructive as well as entertaining. And lo, she has not only become absorbed in anything that pertains to the pioneers, but in many other historical subjects as well. As for me, why, I have learned a great deal, too, and that is how, when Mrs. Van Vorst said she would like to entertain the Pioneers in return for amusing Nita by the drill and the fagot party, we decided to have a *Kraeg*."

"How will the girls know what characters they are to take, what they did, and so on?"

"Oh, Mrs. Morrow and I arranged all that. Notices were sent—you'll get yours—telling the girls that all information would be furnished by Annetje Jans—that's I—gratis. I will arrange with each girl as to her character and so on. Oh, there's Grace! I'll warrant you she has her notice and is in a hurry for news. But, Helen, here is the book that tells all about these Dutch women. I wish you would take it and look it over, for I know I shall need lots of help."

CHAPTER XX—THE DUTCH KRAEG

The sixth of July had arrived, and little Miss New York was fidgeting nervously in her chair—draped with the Star Spangled Banner and the flaunting colors of the Dutch Republic—placed in line with the hostess and the receiving party of the day. She was a rather startling Miss New York, arrayed as a Goddess of Liberty—she had claimed she was too modern to be a vrouw—with her chair as well as her small person hung with placards of well-known places, streets, and buildings of the metropolis.

By her side stood Madame New Amsterdam—Mrs. Van Vorst—whose multitudinous skirts stood out from her figure with such amplitude that she resembled the quaint little green pincushion that dangled from her waist. Her neat white cap was tied under her chin with formal stiffness, while a large silk apron completed a make-up that transformed the slender, dignified Mrs. Van Vorst into a typical Dutch matron. She too, like her daughter, was hung with tiny white signs from bodice to skirt, which excited curiosity if not admiration.

"Oh, Mother, I do wish they would hurry and come!" cried Miss New York impatiently, craning her neck to see if some one had not yet appeared on the broad stairway leading to the main sitting-room. "Oh, somebody's coming!" and the little lady, with the weight of a city on her shoulders, drew back as she clapped her hands with delight.

"Ah, here comes the Governor's lady," exclaimed Madame New Amsterdam as Madame Stuyvesant—Mrs. Morrow—announced her coming by stopping on the threshold of the low-ceiled room, and bowed with such stately formality that Miss New York's eyes suddenly stilled, as she stiffened with similar dignity to receive the first guest.

The Governor's lady was followed by Annetje Jans, her comely little person looking like a blooming Dutch posy, arrayed in a bright green petticoat and a blue waistcoat with yellow sleeves. The brown eyes, ready smile, and brilliant cheeks of Miss Nathalie made her a fitting representative of the little lady who formed so large a part of the history of New Amsterdam, coming over in 1630 in the ship *Endracht* with her husband and three children from Holland. After the death of her husband, who left her a *bouwerie* (farm) of sixty acres, a good part of New York, she married Dominie Bogardus, thus becoming with her wealth and influence a dominant character in the colony.

Annetje came a few steps forward, and then bobbed such a low curtsy that the wings of her lace cap flapped out like the sails of a windmill in a greeting to her hostesses. But in a second her old-time pose was forgotten, as her eyes fell on the much "be-signed" person of the lady of the house, and she flew to her aid, declaring that she was losing some of her signs. 350

"This will never do," she commented as she hurriedly pinned the sign "Bouwerie" in its place. "Oh, and here's another old place that's gone astray!" poking "Der Halle" on a straight line with its neighbor, "De claver Waytie."

"Will you please inform me why New Amsterdam is thus placarded?" It was the voice of the Governor's lady, who was curiously watching this adjustment of signs.

"Why, these signs are the Dutch names of the different localities and streets as named in the days of New Amsterdam," explained Annetje quickly. "See. Broad street means Broad way; *Kloch-Hoeck* was the site of the first village, as it was all covered with bits of clam and oyster shells, the word means Shell Point. *De claver Waytie* was a hill leading to a spring covered with grass, where the young maidens used to bleach their linen. The path they wore up the hill came to be known as *Maadje-Paatje*, Maiden Lane. *Der Halle* was the name of a tavern near a big tree on the corner of Broad and Wall Street. It took the arms of six men to go round *der groot* tree. 351

"Here is *Cowfoot Hill*, the old cow-path up the hill, *Canoe Place*, where the Indians used to tie their canoes, and *Catiemuts* is the hill where the Indians had built their castle. *Collect* means a dear little lake near-by, yes, and here's the Boston Highway, here's the *Stadt-Huys*, the town hall. *Graft* was a ditch crossed by a bridge; *De Smits Vlye* was an old blacksmith shop near the ferry to Long Island. *Vlacke* was the grazing ground for the cows, now the City Hall Park. *De Schaape Waytie* was the sheep pasture—"

"Annetje Jans," exclaimed Madame Van Stuyvesant at this point, with a solemn face, "do you expect me to remember all those Dutch names? Verily, child, you have improved your time and twisted your tongue." But Annetje was off, for at that moment she spied another arrival, one of the Orioles, and as the sprightly dominie's widow was to act as mistress of ceremonies, she was soon by her side, as she stood hesitatingly in the doorway.

"How do you do, *Mutter*. Oh, but you do look fine!" cried Nathalie as her keen eyes noted the broad appearing figure with hair pushed straight back under a close fitting cap, short petticoat and gown displaying her wooden sabots. The *mutter* was knitting industriously, like a typical Dutch vrouw, as she talked to Annetje and told of the woes that attended the getting up of her make-up. 352

Annetje now led the new arrival to the line waiting to welcome her. "Allow me to present to you Catalina de Trice, the *mutter* of New York, having been the first woman to land on that famous little isle."

"Yes," added the *mutter* with a stiff little bow to the grand Dutch dames receiving her with stately courtesy, "I came over in the first ship, the *Unity*, sent by the West India Company to the settlement, and I have the added distinction," another quaint bob, "of being the mother of the first white child born in New Amsterdam, Sara Rapelje."

Catalina had no time to continue her family history for Annetje had hurried her to Miss New York, a little lady in whom all the Pioneers were greatly interested. She was next shown a table in the rear of Nita, holding a ship encrusted with silver frosting to represent snow, and bearing the words, "*Half-Moon*." On the deck of this famous craft was the miniature figure of a man, which Nathalie explained, was intended for the discoverer who had named the river Hudson after himself. Back of the ship were small sized rocks with the sign, "Great Rocks of Wiehocken," which Annetje declared needed no explanation.

A few feet away was a large windmill guarded by a demure little serving-maid who was no other than Carol. With her flower-blue eyes and corn-colored hair hanging in two braids from under her cute little cap she was a miniature Dutch vrouw. Catalina was now invited to pull one of a number of gay-colored streamers that flew with the windmill as it buzzed rapidly around. 353

To the girl's surprise, as she gave a quick pull to a ribbon, a card dropped from one of the sails. It was painted with a gaudy red tulip with an appropriate verse on Holland's national posy. Catalina, on being told to keep it, pinned it to her bodice, and then hurried with Annetje to receive the guests standing at the door, the two girls being the oldest representatives of the Dutch colony.

The new comer proved to be Tryntje Jonas, alias Barbara Worth. She was made known to the

hostess as the mother of Annetje, and as the first nurse and woman doctor in the settlement. Her skirt was of true linsey-woolsey, from which hung an immense pincushion. With her glasses and her knitting-bag on her arm she looked duly professional as she paid her respects to the Dutch vrouw with stately dignity.

A sweeping curtsy and Madame Kiersted, Annetje's daughter, otherwise Grace Tyson, was telling with pride of the part she had played as Indian interpreter, when the officials of the town were making a treaty with the Indians. She was well-versed in the Algonquin language, she explained, as she had played with little Indian children from the time she was a wee lassie.

She told, too, how she had signed a petition and presented it to the councillors, begging that the good vrouws be permitted to hold a market day. This petition was granted, and market day was held thenceforth on Saturdays, when the dames of the colony were permitted to offer their wares for sale on the Strand near her home. Furthermore, the Madame stated she had a shed built in her back yard, so that the Indian squaws could make brooms and string wampum, which they, too, sold on market day. From a little bag she now produced a wampum belt, explaining that it was made of twisted periwinkle shells strung on hemp. A blue clam-shell was also brought forth, which had been punctured with holes and which was called *sewant*; these two shells at that time constituting the currency of the colony.

But the Indian's friend had gone and in her place stood a *grande dame*, the famous Madame Van Cortland, generally known in the olden days as "the maker of a stone street." Madame, when inquiry was made, said she had been born in Holland, but came to the *dorp* to marry her lover, Captain Oloff Van Cortland. "We lived in a very grand house for those times, for it was made of glazed brick and had a sloping roof with a gable turned towards the street, after the manner of the 'Patria,'" she added with pompous gravity. "There were steps leading to the roof, too, so when it rained or snowed the water could run into a hogshead in the yard instead of on my neighbor's sidewalk or head. The house was furnished in a grand style, all the furniture came from Holland, and in front of it was a little stoop with two side benches and a door with an enormous brass knocker."

"But the stone street, Madame?" inquired Madame New Amsterdam, who seemed greatly interested in these little stories of the people and doings of the city whose name she bore.

"Cobbles," corrected Dame Van Cortland. "You see, it was this way. My husband, the captain, resigned from the militia and went into the brewing business. He built a brewery on Brower Street near the Fort, one of the first lanes made by the settlers. But alas," sighed Madame ruefully, "when my husband's brewery wagons made their way over the lane they raised so much dust and dirt that I begged my better half to pave it with stones. He laughed at me, as was his wont, and the dust and dirt grew thicker on the lane. Driven desperate, I now marshaled my servants to the lane, and we laid it with small, round cobblestones. I won my way as well as fame, for the little stone street was the first of its kind in the *dorp*, and was regarded with much curiosity by the burghers."

Annetje, now spying two more comers, flew to welcome them and the *grande dame* of Manhattan Isle was forgotten, as an ancient little lady appeared with silver curls peeping from beneath a cap of rare old lace, a rustling silk crossed with a kerchief, and a chatelaine hanging from her girdle. She bowed with quaint grace before the ladies, as Madame Killiaen Van Rensselaer, otherwise known as, "The Lady of the Thimble."

"Yes," spoke the little old lady, who by the way was a Bob White, and who had studied her part with due diligence, "I was the first woman to wear a gold thimble. I was seated at my work one day with an ivory thimble, big and cumbersome, on my fingers, the kind 'tis claimed the tailors use. A young friend of mine to whom I had rendered some slight service was at work in his shop just across the lane. He spied my thimble, and, being a goldsmith, then and there vowed that on my birthday I should receive a gift. 'Tis needless to say that this vow was fulfilled, for the young man presented me with a gold thimble on that day, which he had made with the wish that I would wear his finger-hat as a covering to a diligent and beautiful finger."

A comely Dutch matron with bright eyes and ruddy cheeks was now bowing in sprightly manner before the hostess. By her pose she was immediately recognized as Lillie Bell, who indeed was just the one to personate the fair and bewitching "Lady of Petticoat Lane," alias Polly Spratt, Polly Prevoorst, and Polly Alexander. The fair Polly was the recognized social leader of New York in the days when coasting down *Flattenbarack Hill*, or skating on the *Collect* with a party of lads and lassies as merry as herself gained her the name of a hoyden. Always the bonniest, the merriest lass at a wedding or dance, the acknowledged leader of her set, counting her suitors by the score, it was not to be wondered when she became a matron at seventeen. As a widow of twenty-six she assumed control of her husband's business, building a row of offices in front of her house. She, too, built a stone street, Marketfield Lane, thus inciting her neighbors to do the same. Hence, the brick walks that now came into fashion called *Strookes*.

The keeper of a shop, the maker of a stone lane, the owner of a wonderful coach, Madame's fame as a beauty and a social leader, added to her shrewdness, her ingenuity, and sprightly intelligence, won her an influence in the more weighty matters of the town, gaining her the title of "My Lady of Petticoat Lane." Undoubtedly it also won her another husband, as when the *pinter* flower was in bloom, pretty Polly married Mr. James Alexander, one of the most distinguished gentlemen of the times.

But on they came, the Pioneer Girls, as Dutch matrons or maidens, impersonating those famous pioneer women, who not only were the bone and sinew of old New York, but who were the

progenitors of some of its most distinguished men in the days that followed. Katrina de Brough, who lived in a fine stone house on Hanover Square, was a most suitable example of the housewife of the day. Her days were spent in planting her garden, culling her simples, distilling her medicines, and many other well-known crafts of the times.

Judith Varleth had gained the name of the "witch maiden," having been arrested and imprisoned in Hartford, Connecticut, when quite a young girl. Whether her beauty or her Dutch tongue brought this dire calamity upon her is not known, but the witch maiden was duly released and returned to her home by her brother, and in a few years disposed of her unfortunate name by marrying a gallant gentleman by the name of Col. Nicholas Bayard.

Margaret Hardenbroeck not only won a husband, Captain Patrus de Vries, a wealthy ship-owner, but won fame as well. On the death of her husband she continued his business, and established a line of ships, the first packet line that crossed the Atlantic. Her ability as a business woman evidently won her not only fame, but a husband, for she soon married again, a Mr. Frederick Phillipse, and in later days became the owner of the Phillipse Manor, so well known during the days of the Revolution.

Cornelia Lubbetse became Mrs. Johannes de Beyster, while her daughter Marie, the wife of three husbands, became known as the wealthiest woman in the settlement. She was also noted for her industry, filling a great *kos* (chest) with beautiful linen tied in packages with colored tape and marked by herself at the time of her first marriage. She also carried on a thrifty business trading with ships between New Amsterdam, Connecticut, and Virginia, as well as being the mother of "The Lady of Petticoat Lane," who married a younger brother of her third husband.

Anna Stuyvesant, Rachel Hartjers, and Madame Van Corlear were all in due turn presented to the hostess, as well as Grietje Janssen, who was known in the old days as a double-tongued woman, having won fame as being the gossip of the burgh.

But the merry chatter and low-pitched laughter of these would-be historic maidens was suddenly stilled, as a strange, grotesque figure was seen in the doorway gazing at the assembled company with an odd little smile on its bedaubed face.

A murmur of surprise and astonishment caused eyes and mouths to open in curious wonder, as Annetje, although as bewildered as her neighbors, made her way to the door to welcome the unknown intruder.

As Nathalie approached the uncouth, blanketed savage it emitted a strange sound; some claimed it was a grunt, while others said it was a groan. The girl stared a moment in startled inquiry and then a smile parted her lips, which was quickly repressed as in a quick glance she noted the eyes heavily underlined with black paint, the brown dyed skin, the red patched cheeks much besmeared with grease, and the black snake-like strings of hair that straggled from beneath a derby hat, several sizes too small for the head.

As the redskin strode with measured gait to the ladies, the painted lips opened, and an excellent imitation of an Indian warwhoop broke forth with startling intensity. Little Miss New York jumped nervously, Madame New Amsterdam started back in surprise, but Mrs. Morrow and Nathalie burst into laughter as they both cried, "Why—it's Edith!"

Yes, it was the Sport, who seeing she was the sensation of the moment took off her derby hat and with a low bow to hostesses, in guttural tone exclaimed, "No, me no Edith, me Indian squaw from Mana-ha-ta!"

This unexpected announcement created no little astonishment, and the girls flocked around her with exclamations of wonder and surprise. As they began to ply her with questions she cried triumphantly, "Ah, girls, I fooled you that time, for I guess you had all forgotten about the Indian women of Manhattan, who always wore their husband's hats."

"Oh, girls," cried Nathalie quickly, "the joke is on me, for I had forgotten, as Edith says, all about these Indian squaws."

"Edith, it was clever of you to remember," now interposed the Governor's lady, "and your get-up too, is very good." She gazed with keen eyes at the girl's deerskin robe, fringed at the sides, with its embroidered bodice, and the rows of colored beads that decorated her neck and her brown bedaubed arms. "But Edith," she continued, "can't you tell us something about these squaws?"

The girl looked somewhat dismayed for a moment; perhaps the sudden recollection of the last time she had faced her companions, the shame she had felt, and the punishment that had been meted out to her, caused the flush that showed even beneath her paint and grease.

"Why—I—oh, I don't think there is much to tell," she faltered. But encouraged by a nod from Mrs. Morrow she continued, "Lillie Bell lent me Washington Irving's History of New York. It tells how Peter Minuit purchased the island from the Indians—the Dutch people called them Wilden—and where the bargain was made. It was close to a little block house inside a palisade of red cedars very near the traders' hut in a place called *Capsey*, the place of safe landing. Washington Irving claimed that the name, 'Manhattan,' came from a tribe of Indians whose squaws always wore their husband's hats, but I never knew that Indians wore hats, so I suppose it is just one of his jokes."

There was a general laugh at Edith's sally, and then the girls broke into loud applause. Perhaps they, too, were doing a little thinking and were anxious to show Edith that the deeds of the past were forgotten in her well-doing.

Annetje, after marshaling her forces, now led the girls through the quaint Dutch room to show them the many relics of past days. The wide-throated fireplace with its gay-colored tiles—still in a state of good preservation—with their queer scriptural figures, each picture with the number of the text in the Bible that told its story, awakened great interest.

Mahogany tables, queer little sideboards, and curiously carved chairs next claimed their attention, while the *slaap-bauck*, a funny little closet built in the side walls of the room, its shelf covered with a mattress, and with folding doors to open at night for a guest bed, won special favor.

A flowered tabby cloth, a foot-warmer, and an old chest called a *kos*, and which Nathalie declared was similar to the one that the industrious Marie de Peyster had filled with linen, was regarded with much awe. A nutwood case, a wardrobe called a *kasten*—filled with old Dutch costumes, grimy and moth-eaten—divided honors with a beautiful old cupboard with glass doors, displaying rare old blue and white Delft, said to have come from Holland years and years ago.

But curios pall in time, and so the girls were not at all reluctant to follow their hostesses into the quaint old kitchen, gayly decorated with the orange and blue of the Dutch Republic. Here, many exclamations of admiration escaped them when they saw the long table in the center of the room, with its bloom of hyacinths, gillyflowers, narcissus, daffodils, and tulips, all reminders of the little beau-pots that adorned the window sills, or peeped from the flower patches in front of the gable-roofed houses in the days of the first settlers.

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Embowered in this floral display was a huge silver bowl hung with tiny silver spoons. This was the caudle dish, the inseparable accompaniment of feast gatherings or when the *kinder* were christened. From the hot, spicy odor that emanated from this relic of Dutch festivity the girls knew it held something good.

But there was no more time to admire, for it was now discovered that a flower was tied with daintily colored ribbon to the back of each chair. Recognizing that they were intended for place-cards, the girls flew hurriedly around the table trying to find the flower that matched the one on the cards they had received from the windmill.

Mrs. Van Vorst, typifying the first Dutch settlement in the New World, now cordially welcomed her guests with a few appropriate words. She was followed by Nita, who, standing on the platform of her chair, recited a greeting in Dutch—a little thing that Nathalie had taught her—with quaint precision, while her eyes twinkled humorously.

The edibles were now served, the little serving-maid being Carol assisted by Peter attired as a herdsman in low-heeled shoes, brass buckles, gray stockings, and with a twisted cow's horn hanging from his shoulder.

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Roasted oysters served with hot split biscuits tempered with butter were the first course. Then came salmon à la Hollandaise and patriotic crabs, so called because the settlers declared that they were the color of the flag of the Prince of Orange. Frankfurters now appeared, so deliciously prepared that the Pioneers barely recognized their hike stand-by, served with carrots and turnips garnished with parsley. Green salad now followed with the caudle served from the silver bowl, each girl ladling this particular Dutch dainty, piping hot, into her own china cup.

The goodies were jellies, custards, *oly krecks*—sometimes called doughnuts because of the tiny nut in the center—krullers, *izer-cookies*, or waffles, syllabubs, and many other toothsome sweets. All of these viands were greatly enjoyed, not only because they were of Dutch renown, but because they were eaten, as their Director declared in memory of the *goede vrouwen* who helped their *goede* men to lay the first stones of the great city of New York.

Every one was at their merriest when Annetje Jans, who had suddenly grown unduly restive, arose in her chair and holding her caudle cup high proposed a toast to Madame New Amsterdam, Mrs. Van Vorst, their hostess!

Immediately glasses were touched to the lady so honored, who in return proposed a like honor for Madame Stuyvesant, Mrs. Morrow, the Director of the Girl Pioneers of America. Little Miss New York was now honored, who, as she bowed in response to the loud clapping that followed her name, passed the honor on to her friend, Miss Nathalie Page, in Dutch, Madame Annetje Jans.

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There was more applause in appreciation of Nita's tribute, although her voice was low and tremulous with timidity at speaking before so many. But when Nathalie rose on her feet to reply, the clapping grew so vociferous that the color deepened her cheeks to a more vivid pink.

But she stood her ground, and as the teasing girls wearied of clapping she spoke. There was a slight tremor in her voice, but she went steadily on, and after expressing in the name of the Pioneers the great pleasure it had given them to meet the daughter of their hostess, voiced their desires in asking Miss Nita to join with them in their endeavors to imitate the sterling qualities of the early pioneer women, and to become a Girl Pioneer of America!

As Nathalie sank back in her seat glad to think the ordeal—to her—of the day was over, there was a moment's silence, and then every Pioneer was doing her best to second this invitation to the daughter of their hostess by making as loud a demonstration as possible.

Nita, as she heard this invitation, grew white, speechless with surprise, but only for a moment, as the next second, with joy shining in her eyes, she leaned over crying in a tense whisper, "Oh, Mother, tell them yes! Tell them yes!"

But Mrs. Van Vorst had already risen to her feet, eyes smiling but tear dimmed as she gazed down at the bright expectant faces upturned to hers. For a moment she stood, and then in a voice broken by emotion and pleasure thanked the Pioneers for an invitation that she knew had been prompted by kindness and that she appreciated more than she could express. Her little daughter, as they all knew, was a shut-in. She would be delighted to become one of a band of girls who had proved so worthy of the name they bore, but, her face saddened, would she not prove a burden to them, for would it not require too much patience to bear with one who perhaps had been over indulged on account of her misfortune?

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At this juncture Madame Stuyvesant stepped to her side crying, "Oh, Mrs. Van Vorst, your little shut-in is just the one I want my girls to be with, so that by the patience they will acquire in her companionship they will become more gentle and considerate to others. And as for Miss Nita, the mingling with healthy, active girls of her own age and the exercise and aid she will derive from the sports, and industries—taken lightly of course—I am sure will brighten her life in many ways."

A few more words from Helen, Lillie, and one or two of the older girls, and Mrs. Van Vorst's consent was won, and Nita with bright, happy eyes was clapping her hands very softly under the Starry Banner that fell in folds across her chair.

Each girl in turn was then toasted, under the name of the pioneer she impersonated, being required in response to tell something about herself, as to who and what part she had played in the days of New Amsterdam. When the name of Mrs. Polly Prevoorst was called, Lillie Bell stood up, and had just begun with her usual dramatic gestures and intonations to relate some little incident in the life of that noted lady, when a shrill falsetto voice shrieked, "Pretty Polly! Pretty Polly! Polly want a cobble?"

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There was a sudden turning and twisting of heads and necks at this unlooked for interruption, to see who was making sport of the fair lady, but before the speaker could be seen, with a quick flutter of wings Mr. Jimmie landed in the middle of the table. Surprise caused the girls to exclaim and then laugh, as they watched the new guest cocking his head from side to side as he winked at them with his red-rimmed eyes.

All at once his head stopped its restless motion, as with a quick glance he seemed suddenly to spy Lillie Bell, who was still standing, waiting for a chance to deliver her little speech. The girls ceased to giggle and with observant eyes wondered what was going to happen. They did not have to wait long for Jimmie, with another flash of his wings, screeched shrilly, "Polly! Poor Polly! Polly want a petticoat—Polly—want a petticoat?"

But Jimmie's concern for the "Lady of Petticoat Lane" was drowned in shouts of laughter, while Lillie Bell with a reddened, embarrassed face sat down. Thus Jimmie became the beau of the afternoon, as each girl vainly tried to coax him with a sweetie to notice her, but Jimmie disdained their advances and, flying to the shoulder of Nathalie, evinced his partiality for that young lady by chattering noisily, "Hell Nat! Ah—Blue Robin, pretty Blue Robin!" And then a shrill Tru-al-lee, tru-al-lee! rang through the room.

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But this effort to do the wise thing ended Jimmie's performance, for suddenly noting the applause that greeted him, he set up such a hideous shrieking, interspersed with fiendish laughter, that he was promptly seized by Peter and carried from public sight to muse on his sins in the privacy of his cage.

When Lillie's tormentor disappeared she was able to act the part of the fair Polly and relate the incident she had striven so vainly to tell. As she finished, finding that all the notables had been duly honored, the girls again turned to the rather novel menus that they had found in front of their plates.

These were post-card holders, rather dainty little affairs of flowered silk that had contained post-cards, one for each course that had been served. One was a quaint little picture of New Amsterdam. Another was a well-known building or landmark of old New York, while others portraits of famous Dutch painters or authors, each one with an appropriate inscription either in Dutch or English.

These cards had excited many comments of admiration, and as the girls' attention was drawn to them again Edith suddenly exclaimed, "Oh, girls, why see, my post-card holder has a tiny white envelope in it!" As she began to tear it open each girl turned eagerly to hers and with renewed interest began to inspect it again, while Mrs. Van Vorst and Nita with smiling eyes watched the little by-play that was being enacted.

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By this time Nathalie had read the contents of her envelope and with eyes all alight was crying, "Oh, girls! my envelope contains an invitation from Mrs. Van Vorst as a Pioneer to camp—"

"At Eagle Lake!" broke in a chorus from the girls as they excitedly flourished the bits of white paper to and fro while watching Nathalie intently.

Nathalie was too dazed to speak, but in a moment, as she realized that each girl present had been honored with a similar invitation, she bent forward and began to talk to Helen in low, hurried tones. When she finished she was on her feet crying in tremulous voice, "Oh, Mrs. Van Vorst—this seems too good to be true—O dear, how are we to thank you for your kindness, it is too much for us to accept!"

But her hostess was ready with a reply, as with brightening eyes she answered, "Girls, the invitations you have read I repeat, I want you Girl Pioneers to spend the three weeks of your camp life at Eagle Lake. I have a bungalow there and expect to leave for the Lake next week, and shall be pleased to welcome you there whenever you think best to come.

"The Lake is very beautiful, surrounded by woods and within two or three miles of a town. Of course, I have not accommodations for you all, but I have an empty bungalow near mine, and a little log cabin that was once a summer house, so that with a few tents I think you will find ample accommodations for your three bird groups. And girls—" she spoke earnestly, "I do not want you to thank me, for your thanks will be the acceptance of this invitation and coming up to the Lake and having a merry time. I am sure I stand ready, and my daughter Nita, to help you towards that end."

As Mrs. Van Vorst finished Helen arose, and on behalf of the Pioneers thanked her for her kind invitation. "Indeed, Mrs. Van Vorst," she continued, "we shall be most pleased to camp at Eagle Lake—if our Director is willing—and I hope that we shall be able to show you that we are worthy the kindness you have seen fit to extend to us. Now, girls—"

"Girl Pi-o-neers! Now give a cheer!
For our hostess so kind and dear!
Girl Pi-o-neers! again we cheer,
This time for Miss Nita, the dear!"

As the cheering ceased Mrs. Van Vorst stood again, and in a few words declared she felt impelled to say that the Pioneers should be very proud of a young lady in their group who had so ably helped her in the arrangements and the getting up of the afternoon's festivity. She would mention no names—Nathalie's face was a full-blown rose—as they all knew to whom she referred, but she would like it known that the invitation to the Lake had been given not only to furnish pleasure to the Pioneers, but in appreciation of the great kindness, sympathy, and aid that had been given to her daughter and herself by that same Pioneer, a kindness that she would always remember.

The girls, laughing and talking about the pleasure of the *Kraeg*, of the joys and the future held in store for them at camp, now returned to the sitting room. Here they were greeted with another surprise in the shape of a huge, unwieldy figure in baggy knee-breeches, full skirted coat, wide-brimmed hat and long white beard and locks, whom Mrs. Van Vorst presented as Father Knickerbocker, although several declared that he was the exact counterpart of the famous pictures of Rip Van Winkle.

Whomever he personated was a matter of indifference to the girls as long as his identity was concealed, which was ably done behind a red-checked mask, through the eye-holes of which two eyes glinted humorously in merry jest or pleasantry as he joined the girls in a game of quoits or a game of nine-pins which Peter had arranged on an old billiard table.

As Nathalie and Helen were doing their best to beat this strange antagonist, and at the same time to provoke him to speech—as he would persist in playing he was deaf and dumb—Peter led in an old darkey who, with fiddle in hand, was soon squeaking away to the delight of the girls. In a few moments old-time melodies were heard, and they went flying over the floor in waltz, schottische, polka, and in many of the long-forgotten dances.

When the dancing began the mysterious guest was seen to edge towards the door, but Nathalie and Helen were too quick for him, and in a moment he was surrounded by a bevy of girls, each one begging him to dance the Virginia reel with her. Even these many honors failed to loosen the strings of his tongue, but Nathalie did not despair.

Presently, as he had made this young lady his honored choice in the dance, she was led up and down the room, or twirled about like a pin-wheel. That he was nimble of foot was soon perceived as they all spun round like a merry-go-round.

Suddenly Annetje was seen to whisper to her neighbor. The whisper spread like a whirlwind, and all eyes were soon fastened on the whirling Father as he chasséed to the right and left of the merry girls. Suddenly there was a stampede to his side, and the next minute he was surrounded by a cordon of slim young hands, while one of his assailants made a spring towards him. Just another moment, and nose, beard, and locks were on the floor, while his tormentors laughed and danced merrily around their prisoner, a good friend who had eased many of their aches and pains, for it was no other but Dr. Morrow!

Four weeks later Nathalie stood on the veranda with her arms around her mother. "Oh, Mumsie," she wailed, "I hate to go and leave you!" She winked hard, she was determined not to get lachrymose. "I just wish I wasn't going, it does seem so mean to leave you here in this heat."

"But, Daughter, I have Dick with me, and it is lovely and cool here on the veranda. We shall not mind it at all, and then you know the nights are generally comfortable in August," Mrs. Page ended with a cheery smile.

"Mumsie, you're a dear—" rejoined Nathalie with another suppressed snuffle. "You're just trying

to make the best of it, but—”

“There is no but about it,” answered her mother quickly, “for I am afraid I am very selfish, but I shall have to confess that there has been so much going on these last days, well, I shall enjoy the rest and quiet. Felia is here, too, and I shall have nothing to do but to be—”

“Jolly!” broke in Dick at this moment, who for some mysterious reason seemed unusually jubilant. He had received a letter a few days before; Nathalie had caught him reading it, but he had slipped it hurriedly into his pocket as he saw her, declaring in answer to her questioning that it was nothing, but nevertheless, ever since that day he had seemed more like his old self.

Did they really want to get rid of her? Was Mamma in earnest? How much more cheerful she had seemed the last few days! These thoughts flashed in quick succession through Nathalie’s brain. Somewhat puzzled, but disarmed of her fears by these signs of cheer from her loved ones, the girl bestowed a final kiss all round, notwithstanding Dick’s protests, who declared that he had been slobbered over about fifty times already. Then she flew down the path and into the automobile, where Mrs. Morrow, the kiddies, and the doctor were waiting to drive her to the depot.

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Seventeen happy girls, their hearts pulsating with joyful anticipation, boarded the train at the New Jersey Central that August morning. Notwithstanding the fact that the day was intensely warm, their tongues, hands, and feet kept up a ceaseless activity as they disposed of their bags, valises, and the impedimenta that they had found it impossible to squeeze into their trunks, for it was rather tight packing when there were two girls to a trunk.

Lillie Bell carried her mandolin, the Scribe her book for reporting the many happenings that were to be, while Barbara was burdened with several books on bird, flower, and wood lore, for camp was the place to study nature. With tennis-rackets and golf-bags it certainly seemed as if those seventeen girls and their belongings were going to fill the car.

Mrs. Morrow, who had a great dislike of annoying people, began to look worried, but suddenly catching sight of the faces of several of the passengers, all looking so smiling, so in sympathy with this young life and its overflow of exuberance, as if they were enjoying the clamor and bustle as much as the girls themselves, her face relaxed. She broke into a smile of relief, although shaking her head at two of the girls who were making the greatest noise.

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They finally settled in their seats, but as hands and feet became more quiet, alas, it seemed as if the clack of their tongues grew greater! They fell to discussing their plans for the camp, the sports they would have, and a thousand and one things that occupied their minds at the present moment.

But even tongues need a rest, and the girls at last quieted down and began to read, each one having provided herself with some book to while away the hours. After a time, however, they all seemed to tire of reading, and growing restive had just started an argument as to the respective merits of their books, when the train dashed into a little wooden station and the conductor yelled, “Eagle Lake!”

Bags, knapsacks, rackets, and all camping impedimenta were hastily gathered up, and a few minutes later the merry girls were crowding into an old-fashioned stage that Mrs. Van Vorst had hired for the occasion, giving due honor to the doctor and his wife by sending her own automobile for them.

It was a delightful ride to the lake, and thoroughly enjoyed by the girls, who evinced their pleasure by being unusually silent. Eyes were keenly alert, however, noting the rolling patches of green meadows with their grazing cows, the rippling brook meandering from a hill near by, and the somber foliage of a long range of low foothills in the distance crowned with a misty haze. But the silence was broken when some one spied a reddish gray chipmunk scurrying across the road in frantic terror as he saw the many faces bearing down upon him, and heard their hurried exclamations of eager delight at this, the girls’ first glimpse of one of the green forest people of Eagle Lake.

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It was not long before the sheen of silver water glimmered in the distance, bordered with somber foliage, and then hearts beat quicker and voices grew louder in excited hubbub as in a minute or so they could see the cupola of Mrs. Van Vorst’s cottage against the green of its shores.

After a joyous welcome from Mrs. Van Vorst and Nita, seconded by Peter and Ellen, who all stood awaiting them on the large veranda, the girls ran riot. With swift steps they hurried—after first inspecting Mrs. Van Vorst’s bungalow, so suggestive of luxury and cozy cheer—to the smaller bungalow, where the Morrrows were to abide, with its big living-room abloom with golden-rod. This was to be used as an assembly room for the Pioneer Rallies. Then they hastened to the little wooden shack, which they dubbed the Grub House, as it was here that the camp cooking was to be done.

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After duly admiring the boat-house, which they all declared would make a lovely place for a dance, they were conducted by Peter to the loft above, where he stood silently enjoying their delight as they exclaimed over this unexpected surprise. It had been turned into a good sized bedroom with two bureaus, a center-table, a few odd chairs, and four little white cots, looking so restful that the Sport declared she wanted to go to bed that very second.

But their rhapsodies came to an abrupt end as Lillie Bell suddenly spied the Lake from one of the windows. In a moment the girls were crowding about her, gazing in hushed silence at the silver sheet of water—three miles round Peter informed them—with its enticing little inlets, or coves,

and tiny islands running like a series of stepping-stones through the center.

The Sport had caught sight of several newly painted boats and canoes that bobbed cheerily at her, moored to the pier below, and a moment later the girls were off like a cavalcade of young Indians to inspect them, for did they not all have to be named on the morrow, when a general christening of all camp tents, boats, and so on was to take place?

But there were other things to claim a share of their hearts' joy they found, as Carol, who made the seventeenth camper, suddenly saw a large tent on the edge of the woods to which they all made a mad rush. Here they found the doctor and his wife, who said it was an army tent that had been loaned, put up, and furnished by that good lady, Mrs. Van Vorst. Lifting the flap the girls peeped in to see four more tiny cots, a little book-case made from soap-boxes by Peter, and the usual camp furniture staring at them invitingly. 379

A tiny log cabin was also inspected—Peter said it had once been a summer-house—which contained two cots. But time was limited, and Dr. Morrow—who was for the time being captain of the working squad—began to issue his orders. All baggage and camp equipment had arrived the day before and the girls were soon busily engaged in putting up tents. It meant lots of work, but each one was at her cheeriest best as she overhauled canvases, measured spaces, dug pole-holes, sewed on rings for tape, tied ropes, and performed the various odd jobs necessary to have the camp city in shape before night.

As Mrs. Van Vorst had generously provided so many sleeping accommodations, there were only three tents to be erected, an old canvas tent which the doctor had loaned, an Indian tepee belonging to the brother of one of the Orioles, and a natty little affair made of heavy cotton sheeting. It is needless to say that this was the pride of Helen's and Nathalie's hearts, the tent they had wrestled with through many toilsome hours on the rear lawn, with Fred Tyson doing duty as a master tent-maker. 380

When the tents were erected with openings to the East, in a row by the water, backed by a belt of woodland, whose pungent odors added a zest to the girls' ideals of the camp life, Nathalie and Helen hurried to their tent to unpack. The big packing-box which had served as a trunk for two was hastily turned on its narrowest side, with open side to the tent, and then with hammer and nails converted into a combination arrangement of book-case and dresser, the top having a piece of white shelf oilcloth tacked on it.

Here pincushions, hair-pin trays, brushes, and various toilet articles, with cologne, lotion, and medicine bottles—the last in case of need—were hastily bestowed. On the upper shelf books were stored—for the story hour—while the other shelves were quickly filled with all sorts of knick-knacks, things they just had to have, even in the wilderness, as Helen had affirmed.

Two ropes, one on each side of the tent, were fastened up so that each girl could have a handy place to dispose of superfluous articles of wearing apparel. There was also a smaller one near the soap-box with its little tin pitcher and bowl, to serve as a towel-rack. After hanging a mirror for mutual use and tacking on the floor between the cots a pink and blue cotton rug—Mrs. Page's idea and gift—they started on the beds. These were real camping affairs, and would ordinarily have meant hard labor, but Peter, who had been let into the secret before he left Westport, had already cut eight logs, four to a bed frame, one on each side of the tent, and had brought the dry evergreen boughs. 381

With the boughs the girls filled the frames, and after stuffing two ticking bags with dry leaves and grass, they placed them on the beds, and covered them with rubber sheets and blankets. They were then made up with sheets and double blankets, and then after throwing a number of sofa pillows about—to be used at night for pillows—the tent-makers were ready to hold an impromptu reception to their Pioneer friends.

Nathalie now played the part of town crier and rushed hither and thither inviting the guests to their camp nest in the woods. The girls quickly gathered and, after due examination, expressed by cries of praise their admiration of the handiness and deftness displayed by the two girls, and the first tent feast was held. To be sure, it was only crackers and fruit left from the girls' lunch-boxes, but they filled the bill, so that when the bugle sounded its clarion blast, as Lillie expressed it, the pangs of hunger being appeased, the girls all hastened with joyful steps to Mrs. Morrow's bungalow to hold their first Pioneer Rally.

Mrs. Morrow, as presiding officer, in a short space of time was able to despatch considerable camp business, the girls having had so many discussions that their plans were matured and no time was lost in needless talk. It was quickly settled to name the camp "Laff-a-Lot," to govern it as a city, with the girls as citizens with power to elect their own officials, which meant a mayor, a board of aldermen, a justice of the court as well as a clerk and an attorney in case of need, and the squads. 382

Mrs. Morrow was immediately chosen mayor, and the squads elected. There was the Coast Squad, composed of two Pioneers whose duty it was to sound the bugle for taps at six, for a dip in the Lake at quarter past, the call for breakfast at seven and the succeeding meals, for bathing drill at eleven, and all other calls required by camp regulations. This squad was also to see that the coast was kept clear of débris, that the bathers observed all rules, and was to give the alarm and act in command of the rescue committee in times of danger.

The Tent Squad was to see that the girls kept their tents in regulation order,—each girl to make her own bed and so on,—and that all sanitary rules were carried out according to schedule.

The Grub Squad meant two cooks, a chief and an assistant, and two helpers or waitresses. Each girl, of course, was required to bring her own plate, cup, saucer, bowl, knife, and fork, and see that they were washed, dried, and placed on the shelf, as well as to wash her own drying-towel.

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The Rally Squad was composed of one person—considered the most important member of camp—to act as officer of the day by planning with the mayor the day's program, reporting this at breakfast, and seeing that all notices, as well as the schedule for the day's events, were duly written on the bulletin each morning.

The Board of Aldermen was made up of the first member of each Squad. All officials, with the exception of the mayor and court officers, were to serve for three days only, and the members of all squads were to be chosen according to their qualifications for the work as determined by the number of merit badges.

As soon as the Rally was over, the girls made a rush for the Lake, as every one was wild to go on its gleaming surface that shone under the rays of the dipping sun like a silver shield, burnished with the golden red of the West.

But Helen, who declared it was too late to enjoy that pleasure as it was so near supper time, was rudely interrupted by Lillie Bell, who had been peering with intent eyes across the water. Suddenly she gave a low cry and pointed to a solitary figure on the opposite bank dragging a row-boat from the water.

Instantly all eyes were riveted in that direction as each girl vainly tried to decide whether the figure belonged to a man or a woman. "Oh, I know!" screamed the Sport frantically after a short stare opposite. "Girls, yes, it's a Scout! See he has on a khaki suit, and his staff, oh, where do you suppose he could have come from!" she said, looking up at the girls with delighted inquiry in her sparkling eyes.

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CHAPTER XXII—CAMP LAFF-A-LOT

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"O fiddle!" exclaimed Lillie squelchingly. "You have got scouts on the brain! Where would a scout come from up here in these wilds?"

But Edith was not to be gainsaid and had flown post-haste up to the Morrows' bungalow to reappear a few moments later with a field glass. Raising it she began to yell triumphantly, "There, girls—I'm right—it is a scout! a real scout!" In a moment she was surrounded by a bevy of girls, each one begging for the loan of the glasses, but Edith was whimsical, and refusing to comply handed the glasses to Helen, who, after a calm survey of the bank on the other side of the Lake, declared that Edith was right and that it was a scout.

"Oh, do you think—" exclaimed some one. But no one stopped to think, for at that moment the clear notes of the bugle announced supper, driving all thoughts of scouts from the heads of the famished girls as with a cheer of delight they made a swift rush for cup, plate, saucer, and headed for the dining-room.

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It was a tired lot of girls who, with sharpened appetites but dismayed faces, gazed at the slim array of eatables that confronted them at this, their first camp meal. Nathalie made a wry face, but as she heard Helen's reminder that every one was to be satisfied even if she ate tacks, she smiled in attempted contentment and started in on mush.

But tacks were not to be on the menu that night, for Peter suddenly appeared, and with his best bow presented a big platter of cold chicken with Mrs. Van Vorst's compliments. Everything now went as merrily as a wedding feast. Really, it was surprising how that chicken lasted, for the girls had attacked it with grim determination. Nathalie half suspected that Peter had a secret supply hidden under the table, for every one had all she wanted and still there was more.

Supper was soon over and, then after each girl had washed her own table-ware and laid it in its place, they hied themselves down to the water's edge. Here, in sweaters and caps—as the air was chilly—they listened to the crooning melodies of nature, and watched for life on the opposite shore—reminded again of that scout—and talked, well, just the things that a lot of happy girls would discuss with the prospect of three glorious weeks in the open before them.

A trill of song from a hermit thrush in the woods near-by stirred the hearts of the music-lovers and soon the campers were singing, "Suwanee River," to Lillie's thrumming accompaniment on the mandolin. Then came "Tenting on the Old Camp Ground," "Oh, My Darling Clementine," and a host of songs familiar and dear to the heart of youth.

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As they ended the last line of "Bring Back My Bonnie to Me," every one suddenly sat up and took notice, while an impetuous one called out, "Oh, what was that?"

"Some one is mocking us!" added another listener.

"Oh, nonsense," laughed Helen, whose ear for music was not keen, "that's an echo!"

But it proved to be no echo, for as the girls started in again to sing they found that if they stopped suddenly, the voices, which they now recognized as coming from the other shore, would continue with the song. This created no end of laughter among the girls, and their surprise and

amusement increased as they recognized that their friends on the other side of the Lake laughed when they laughed, as if in mockery.

"I'll tell you what we'll do," suggested Kitty, "let's give the Pioneer yell and see if they answer." This was no sooner suggested than it was done, but not a sound was heard, no, not even an echo in reply.

"Well, they can't be scouts," said an Oriole, "or they would answer in some way."

"Let's sing, 'We're Pioneers,' and then they'll know who we are, anyway," some one proposed, a little more cheerily.

This proposition met with favor, and the girls were soon singing with a zest and verve that deserved a reward, but as before a dead silence greeted their efforts.

The campers felt inconsolable, for some of them had already begun to dream of the fun they would have if there were some jolly scouts about, especially if they proved as chivalrous and as manly as the scouts at Westport. As the girls discussed ways and means of making these strange neighbors reveal who they were, suddenly from the other shore came in stentorian tones, evidently through a megaphone, "Be prepared!" This startling announcement was immediately followed by a chorus of male voices singing with hearty gusto, "Zing-a-Zing! Bom! Bom!" to the accompaniment of a loud sound, as if every one was pounding on a tin pan.

The girls sat stunned with surprise for a moment and then Edith cried, "Why, they can't be scouts after all, for that is not the salute used by the Westport Scouts."

"Huh! but that is just what they are—scouts," cried one of the Orioles quickly, "for that is the national salute. My brother has a Scout book and I have seen their call."

"Well, they're not Westport Scouts, that's one sure thing," voiced one of the girls who had been dreaming.

"What difference does that make," cried Lillie, "as long as they are scouts? But don't you think we girls ought to make some return, hadn't we better sing our Pioneer—" But before the girls could answer they heard the scout salute again. As they clapped an encore, the Sport blowing the bugle to add to the demonstration of praise, their neighbors broke into song.

"Oh, it is a song to us, a serenade!" ejaculated one of the girls; and then as each one grew silent they heard:

"Welcome! Welcome! sisters dear,
As we round our fire's cheer
We wish you luck in camp so fine
Sweet with birch and wooded pine.
Pleasure and joy attend each day,
As by the Lake you make your stay!"

"Oh, isn't that just dandy?" "If we could only tell who they were!" But these exclamations came to an end as Nathalie cried, "Girls, let's shout our new call, don't you know the one we made up so as to salute the scouts? Now, ready!" and with a "One! two! three!" the girls' voices rang out over the water as they chorused:

"Ragglety! Pagglety! Rah! Rah! Rah!
You're welcome scouts with a Ha! Ha! Ha!
Comrades and friends, we'll make the woods hum
When you to Camp Laff-a-Lot come.
For your wishes we'll give you three cheers,
Hurrah for Scouts and Girl Pioneers!"

"Why, Nathalie, you changed the words!" cried one or two slow ones as they perceived that the girl had substituted certain words that were more appropriate to the occasion than the ones they had learned.

Nathalie only laughed, and waved her hand for silence as the little company of merry, fun-loving girls listened to the noise their neighbors were making. Certainly it was a medley of sounds, for it appeared as if horns, tin pans, and just about everything capable of making a racket had been called into service in their appreciation of the fair ones' ready reply to their song.

Mrs. Morrow appeared at this moment with the announcement that it was nine o'clock, and according to camp rules all Pioneers were to be in bed by that hour, so the girls sounded a parting cheer and then hurried to their tents. The few who loitered, as if reluctant to leave their friends across the lake, heard an old-time good-night song with one or two variations in words that added to its charms ring out clearly:

"Good-night, campers,
Good-night campers,
Good-night campers,
We're going to leave you now!
Merrily we roll along, roll along, roll along;
Merrily we roll along, o'er the dark blue sea."

A few moments before six the next morning Nathalie opened her eyes, yawned drowsily, and then rolled over to see Helen staring at her from the opposite bed with wide-open eyes.

"Oh, I have had such a delicious sleep," she cried. "I don't believe I wakened from the time I

touched the pillow. Helen, isn't it just too lovely up here in these woods? Did you hear that whippoorwill toot just after we got into bed? And these bough beds, aren't they the coziest—"

"Well, you'll get coziest with a vengeance, Blue Robin," was Helen's terse reply, "if you don't get into your bathing-suit—" Helen ended with a shrill scream as the bugle's blast sounded with startling clearness in the still morning air.

But Nathalie was already half-way into her suit. The last button was caught. "There, I'm ready before you, Miss Poke!" she taunted gleefully, as the second call sounded. The two girls tripped lightly across the open space in front of the tents thickly strewn with pine needles and thus on down to the boathouse pier.

Just a moment and a slim figure was seen leaping through the air, then Nathalie arose like a mermaid from the sea, blowing and puffing the water from her mouth as she floated for a moment on her back and swam gracefully back to the bank. As she reached shallow water she stood up and waved her hand to a group of shivering ones on the bank crying, "Oh, come on, kiddies!

"Sure, it's cold!" she nodded to a faint remonstrance from a timorous one, "but you'll get heated if you'll take the plunge!"

Out from her dip, with the wish that it could have been longer, she hurried to her tent; after a rub came the dressing, the picking up of her clothes, the putting her bed to air, and then the call for breakfast.

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After this meal came the event of the day, the naming of the camp, the tents, and the boats. Camp duties were soon disposed of and then there was a general stampede to Mrs. Morrow's bungalow, where the Sport, as chairman of this committee, stood waving the Stars and Stripes on the roof of the veranda.

A cheer arose a few moments later when its bright colors fluttered gently to and fro in the morning wind from the flag staff that had been hoisted over the Director's abiding-place, and the girls, quickly forming in line, gave the flag salute. The Star Spangled Banner was then sung with a heartiness that found its echo in the woods, the very leaves on the trees seeming to rustle in reverence to the country's honored emblem.

The campers now gathered before Mrs. Van Vorst's bungalow, where, from a high flagstaff erected by Peter, a white flag fluttered gracefully to the breezes, disclosing in red letters the words, "Camp Laff-a-Lot." Beneath this flag curled a smaller one, also white, bearing in blue letters, "The Girl Pioneers of America."

Some one was just about to mount a ladder placed against the flagstaff when Nathalie, with sudden thought, turned and whispered to Mrs. Morrow, who immediately signaled to Helen. Helen nodded as she listened to her Director, and then stepping forward stood before Nita who, with her mother and Ellen, was a joyful spectator of this camp demonstration. A sudden look of delight overspread her face as she heard what Helen had to say, and then after a hurried assent from Mrs. Van Vorst, Nita with the help of Peter had mounted the ladder, holding a bottle of water in her hand.

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A swing of the bottle, a crash of glass, a stream of water trickling down the pole, and Nita in a voice somewhat faint at first, but that grew louder as she caught Nathalie's eye, cried, "Summer camp of the Girl Pioneers of America, I name thee, Camp Laff-a-Lot!" Wild bursts of applause now broke forth, even Ellen and Peter doing their share, the former tearing off her apron and flapping it vigorously, while the latter brandished his hat hilariously, stopping every moment or so to rub the back of his hand across his eyes. "Sure," as he afterwards confessed to Nathalie, "it was enough to make any one weep with joy to see Miss Nita spilling all over with happiness!"

As the Pioneers hastened to the boat-house they saw a diminutive figure standing on the top of its little square cupola. With many flourishes of her bottle Carol—who had been elected to this honor—chimed jubilantly, "Boat-house, in memory of the ship that crossed the unknown sea to carry the founders of this nation to its shores, I now name thee, 'The Mayflower'!"

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And so the naming continued, the little log summer-house being honored by the name of Ann Burras, a pioneer of the Jamestown colony, known as the first white bride in America. The tent loaned by Mrs. Van Vorst was dubbed "The Three Guardian Angels," in appreciation of the services of Ann Drummond, Sarah Cottin, and Mrs. Cheisman, also of the Jamestown company, sometimes known as "The White Apron Brigade," as during the Bacon rebellion they were placed in front of a trench where Bacon's men were digging, to prevent Governor Berkeley from firing on the Fort.

The "Grub House" was to be known as the "Common House," a most appropriate name, the campers declared, as it contained their food and ammunition, just as the little log hut known by that name held the necessities to sustain and defend the lives of the Pilgrims in the Plymouth settlement.

The doctor's army tent was named the "Three Margarets," to honor Margaret Brent of Maryland, the first woman suffragist, Margaret Draper, the first woman to publish a newspaper, and Margaret Duncan, the first of her sex in the new world to engage in mercantile life. Helen and Nathalie's tent was to be known as the "Two Anns," out of respect to Ann Hutchinson, the first club woman, and Ann Bradstreet, the first American poetess.

The boats were quickly honored with the names *Priscilla*, *Mary Chilton*, *Annetje Jans*, and *Polly*

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Prevoorst, while shady retreats, lofty trees, and rocky coves were named anew to do homage to those women who helped their good sires build the foundation of this great Republic, by being faithful, enduring wives and mothers.

At eleven o'clock the girls assembled on the shores of the Lake for a life-saving drill. Forming in line at a given signal, each girl quickly unfastened her red necktie, and turning swiftly to the right tied one end of it in a square knot to her neighbor's. This red life-line was then thrown to the sinker—as the girls dubbed Edith, who was playing the part of the person drowning. She hurriedly grabbed this necktie rope and was drawn ashore by her comrades.

The girls found that this drill not only made them keen and alert, training them to keep cool heads, but helped to give them reliance as well as courage, and—heaps of fun.

The bathers were now lined up for a swimming contest, each girl at the toot of the horn making a wild dash for the water, and swimming out as far as she could to the stake-boat, manned by the doctor, anchored some distance from shore. This contest was to determine not only who could swim, and the best swimmers, but those who had the greatest amount of strength and endurance, who would be able to train others not so competent.

Nathalie, who had spent a number of summers at a seaside resort and therefore was at home in the water, found to her surprise that she, Helen, and Edith were the three best swimmers of the campers. This was as much of a surprise to her as to the Pioneers, for, supposing that she was a swimmer of only average skill, she had never even told that she could swim.

Drills and contests being over, the girls were allowed to do as they liked, and so were soon gambolling about in the water, having the merriest time running races in the more shallow water, ducking one another, or teaching some more timid one to swim or dive.

Nathalie and Helen had rowed out some distance from shore and were practicing diving by jumping from the boat. "Now!" Helen would shout as they stood poised in the center, "One! Two! Three!" The next instant there would be a flash of pointed hands, a sweep of blue bathing-suits—like bluebirds skimming through the air—a splash, and then first one head would appear and then the other, each one blowing and puffing water from her eyes and nose like a porpoise.

"O dear," exclaimed Nathalie suddenly as the two girls sat sunning themselves in the boat, "here comes the Sport. I wonder what she is up to now!"

But it was all in a morning's fun, and the three girls were soon having fine sport as a diving team of three. Tired at last, they settled for a short rest, Helen and Nathalie laughing merrily as they watched Lillie Bell trying to induce Carol to do something more than wet her feet. Suddenly there came a shove, and a second later the two girls went splashing head-foremost into the water!

A few moments and they bobbed up, not at all serenely, as they sputtered and gasped, struggling to eject the water from eyes and noses. Helen, seeing Edith disporting herself some distance away, demanded with flashing eyes, "What did you do that for?" while Nathalie, whose cheeks were sea pink, sputtered between gasps, "Edith, I think you are just as mean as you can be!"

But the Sport was off, waving her hand at them derisively as she swam rapidly towards shore. The girls by this time had righted their cockle-shell, which they found floating right side up with the tide, and after clambering in Helen grabbed the oars, exclaiming wrathfully, "Oh, how I would like to get even with her for that!"

"So would I!" echoed her friend. "It does seem as if the imp himself was in that girl sometimes. But wait, I'll get one on her yet, see if I don't."

Full of the ozone of the forest and animated by that spirit of exploration that always inspires one in a new place, directly after lunch the Pioneers with staffs, knapsacks, and note-books, lined up for an afternoon tramp. To vary the adventure it had been decided to name it a salmagundi hike, which meant a tramp of observation, each girl aiming to see how many things she could observe, birds, animals, flowers, or leaves, in fact, anything that was to be seen in the field or woods.

Nathalie had prepared for the expedition in glad anticipation, being particularly anxious to get in touch with so many things that she lacked of nature's many lores, but when she caught sight of the disappointed face of Nita, who was not, as yet, equal to a hike her spirits sank to zero.

Somehow her conscience would not be downed as it urged her to atone in some way to Nita for the many things that she was forced to be deprived of in her young girlhood. "No, I do not believe it is my place to stay with her," argued Nathalie's naughty self, "for I have already given up a great deal of time and fun in qualifying her to become a Pioneer. And then if I once begin by staying with her she will want me to remain all the time, and I shall never have a bit of fun."

But after a short inward struggle Nathalie pleaded that she was tired, and declared she was going to remain at home and have a good cozy chat with Nita.

The joy that shown on Nita's face at this declaration compensated her for her sacrifice, and she was just trying to think what she could do to make the time pass pleasantly for the girl when a sudden loud shout sounded from the woods. Before the girls could question as to what it was a chorus of boyish voices were heard shouting:

"Ready! Ready! Scout! Scout! Scout!
Good turn daily. Shout! Shout! Shout!"

For one moment the girls stared in dazed amazement, why—oh! that was the salute call of the Westport Scouts! But all thought came to an end a minute later as a troop of boys in brown

suddenly appeared at a bend of the road leading from the woods. As they spied the Pioneers they broke into wild shouts and whistles, energetically waving handkerchiefs, staffs, anything they could muster, while the foremost one, no other than Dr. Homer, twirled his hat over his head hilariously.

In a few moments the scout mystery was solved as the girls stood surrounded by the Eagle Patrol of Westport, every one talking eagerly, some telling how they came to be there, while others were having great sport as they teased the girls about how nicely they had fooled them. It soon developed that the doctor and his wife were in the secret; in fact, Mrs. Morrow said that the doctor had chuckled so when he saw how mystified the girls were when they heard the calls from across the Lake, that she feared he would spring the surprise before it was time.

Yes, the scouts of Westport, who had been thinking of a three weeks' tramp in some place not too far from the city, after hearing how Mrs. Van Vorst had invited the Pioneers to camp at Eagle Lake, had gone to that lady, and after due inquiries had made their plans to camp at the same time as the girls, only on the opposite shore of the Lake.

Finding that the girls were bound for a tramp, the scouts, through Dr. Homer, begged permission to accompany them. The girls quickly gave their assent, and in a short space the hikers set out for a survey of the land, all but Fred Tyson, who lingered at Nathalie's side as if waiting for her to join them.

Seeing, however, that Nathalie made no attempt to follow the others, he asked with puzzled eyes, "What's the matter, Miss Blue Robin, aren't you going to hike?"

Nathalie choked for a moment, then gaining control of her emotions, with an attempt at a smile returned, "Why, no, I'm tired, you know we have been working awfully hard ever since we came—getting the camp in shape—" she had caught a glimpse of Nita's keen eyes—"so I thought I'd just stay at home and rest with Nita. You know, she can't stand a long walk." This was said in a lower tone.

Fred's face showed disappointment, and then he cried boyishly, "Oh, I say, Miss Nathalie, you'll miss all the fun!" Then, as if half suspecting what might be the cause of Nathalie's staying at home, he said, "As for Miss Nita, if she wants to come with us we'll fix it so she won't have to walk a step!"

Putting his fingers to his mouth he emitted a sharp whistle, which two scouts lagging in the rear heard and immediately turned about and retraced their steps. "Here," continued Fred, "you fellows improvise a stretcher to carry Miss Nita so she can hike with us!"

Nita's eyes began to gleam, but Mrs. Van Vorst approaching from the other end of the veranda at this moment, and hearing of the proposed plan of navigation, demurred, thanking the boys most graciously for their kindness, but declining to let Nita go, claiming that it would be too much for her that warm day.

Fred, thus forced to be content, after a lingering look of regret raised his cap and then hurriedly joined the party who were already disappearing in the winding path of the woods.

Nathalie, with an unconscious sigh, turned away. O dear, it did seem mean to have to give up that walk. It had been hard enough to win the first battle over the temptation to go, but this second one had seemed even harder. But immediately seeing that she was a great baby to let a little disappointment mar the pleasure of the beautiful day, she turned with smiling eyes to the princess, and suggested that they have a nice little row to one of the tiny islands in the center of the Lake.

This, Nita was very glad to do, and so with notebooks and pencils, and with the remark that they could have a nice little salmagundi hike all by their lone selves, they started for the boat-house.

And indeed, Nathalie and her little friend spent a most enjoyable afternoon, for, as she afterwards declared to Helen, "It was lovely and cool down on that little island with the green trees and shady coves. And do you know," she continued, "I was so surprised, for Nita is a most observant little person. Why, she knows the names of many of the grasses and wood flowers, and the birds—she knows their names, can tell what birds are nesting in August and any number of interesting things about nature. I am sure she will make a most wonderful little Pioneer, after she becomes acquainted with the girls."

Of course Helen had many things to tell about the salmagundi hike, and the different objects they had seen and noted on their tramp. She had taken notes and Nathalie was invited to take a peep at them some time, Helen suggesting that she might find them of some help later on. The scouts, she said, had been most kind and had told them lots of interesting things, particularly about tracking the footprints of animals.

"Well," declared Nathalie as Helen finished telling of the good times they had had, "I have had two good times, instead of your one, for I had a fine time with Nita, and then I have had the coziest of chats with you, which has proved almost as good as if I had been with you on the hike."

A week had passed, and although the novelty of many of the activities and pleasures of this life in the open had dulled, every moment proved one of joy. Drills, contests, sports, hikes, and various entertainments had merged so evenly, one into the other, that tasks had lost their irksomeness and play had received an added zest.

To be sure, some unfortunate accidents had happened; Grace had cut her hand when opening a can of tomatoes, Carol had been stung by some mysterious insect so severely that even the doctor was puzzled, and one of the Orioles had sprained her ankle. But these mishaps had been received with true camp fortitude—the Pioneer spirit, Helen called it—and had only served as object lessons in the First Aid to the Injured talks given by Dr. Morrow, thus giving Helen and Kitty a chance to display their expertness in the triangular, the four-tailed, and many other kinds of bandages.

Hammers, saws, and hatchets were in great demand one morning—the girls all busy making stilts, some to show their scout friends that they could handle men's tools, while others were qualifying for first-class Pioneers—when Lillie appeared. With woebegone face she reported to Nathalie, who was serving as her assistant on the Grub committee, that there was no milk.

"No milk?" ejaculated the girl. "Why, wasn't the milkman here this morning?"

"Sure," nodded Lillie, "but that Oriole girl—Nannie Plummer—dropped some swill into the milk can. She mistook it for the garbage pail—" Lillie's eyes glinted humorously—"she was so busy expressing her admiration for that Will Hopper, you know the scout with the languishing eyes, as Helen calls them."

Nathalie's face expressed dismay. "Oh, what shall we do?" she almost wailed; "we have got to have milk for that pudding, and—"

"To be sure," laconically returned Lillie, "and you will have to go and get some."

"Get some?" echoed Nathalie faintly; "where?"

"At the farm-house, you know the place—with the red barn—on the road to Boonton."

"But there isn't time for me to walk there and back before dinner," protested the girl somewhat wrathfully, "on this hot day, too!"

"No, but you can take Edith's bicycle, and go and get back in no time."

"Oh, but it is hot!" ejaculated Nathalie, some fifteen minutes later, as with reddened, perspiring face she slowed up her wheel, and spying a mossy bank overlooking a brook meandering beneath a group of willows, jumped to the ground. As she was standing her wheel against a tree, a woman with a reddish handkerchief tied over her head came up the bank. She started when she saw Nathalie, but instantly averting her eyes hurried on down the road in the direction of the farm-house where Nathalie was to get the milk.

The girl had thrown herself on the grassy slope and was fanning vigorously with her hat, when her eyes were arrested by something white lying under an overhanging bush near the brook. Perhaps she would not have stared so intently if she had not thought that she saw it move. Just at that moment a low wailing cry came to her ears.

Assured beyond doubt that the cry came from the bundle, she hurried down the slope, and a moment later was bending over a baby, who, on seeing the wondering face, looked up with innocent appeal in its wide blue eyes.

"Why, you dear," cooed the girl, "how did you come here?" She looked up expecting to see some one to whom the baby belonged, but as there was no one in sight and she saw the little lip quiver pathetically, she gathered it up in her arms and chucking the dimpled chin began to jabber to it in baby language.

"Whom do you belong to, baby?" she questioned aloud, silently wondering if that tramp woman who had come up the bank could have been its mother. But that could hardly be, she pondered, for she looked like an Italian, while the baby was fair with tiny wisps of golden hair straying from beneath its neat white cap.

Reminded finally that the camp's need of milk was urgent, she laid the baby down and ran along the bank first in one direction, and then the other, shouting and calling until her voice was hoarse. O dear, what should she do? She could not leave that dear thing there alone! Ah, she would take it with her to the farm-house, perhaps Mrs. Hansen might know something about it.

Carrying her find with one arm and trundling her wheel with the other hand, she arrived in a short space at her destination. But alas, she met with no satisfaction. Mrs. Hansen declared that in all probability the woman was a gypsy, as there was a settlement of them some miles beyond the town and that she had purposely deserted the baby. She also informed the girl in a most emphatic manner that she could not leave the child there as she had enough of her own to look after.

"But this is a white baby," persisted Nathalie, "see, it is very fair!" showing the little puckered face, for by this time it had begun to whimper quite loudly.

"Poor waif!" exclaimed the farmer's wife, "it is hungry!" Hastily getting a cup of milk she put it to the mouth of the little one, whose fingers closed on it tightly as it drank greedily.

But feeding the baby did not soften Mrs. Hansen's heart, and Nathalie was forced to see that there was nothing else to do but to carry the deserted one to camp with her. But how could she

trundle a wheel, carry a five-quart can of milk, and the baby all at the same time? Poor Nathalie! she was in deep waters!

Mrs. Hansen, however, who was not unkindly, seeing the girl's dilemma called her boy Joe, and giving him the milk and wheel told him to hurry with it to the camp, so that Nathalie would have her arms free to carry her charge.

Some time after the dinner hour Nathalie, tired, hot, hungry, and every muscle aching from weariness, arrived at the camp. She was immediately surrounded by the girls, who besieged her with questions as to the why and wherefore of her tardy appearance. But when their eyes lighted on the blue-eyed cherub, who had been blissfully sleeping the greater part of the girl's three-mile tramp on a sunny road, they went wild with excitement.

Mrs. Morrow presently arrived on the scene and promptly driving Nathalie's tormentors away, handed the infant to Ellen and Nita. Then she made the girl lie down in the hammock to cool off, while Helen and Grace rushed off to get her dinner.

As the girl, between bites, told of her strange adventure, she saw that it was not to prove as disastrous as she feared, for the little stranger had already captivated every member of the camp, even down to Peter, also Rosy, Mrs. Van Vorst's black cook. Indeed, it was petted, hugged, and kissed so many times that Mrs. Morrow, fearing it would be brought to evil by so many caressing hands, then and there made rules as to how each girl should care for it.

They all declared that Nathalie's finding that baby was providential, for one of the Pioneers that very morning had expressed the wish that they could find a baby in one of the farm-houses. They wanted to practice bathing and dressing it, as these were some of the qualifications necessary for a first-class Pioneer.

Although notices were posted in the post-offices of the towns, and also sent to several newspapers, advertising the fact that a baby had been found and was at Camp Laff-a-Lot, no one claimed it. The girls were delighted as they were enamored of their new toy, each one secretly hoping it could remain with them.

The girls had even begun to discuss the project of calling it the Girl Pioneer baby, and were deep in plans to raise money so they could have it taken care of and educated as such, when Mrs. Van Vorst avowed that if no mother appeared to claim it she would adopt it as her own.

This of course took away the girls' hopes of having the little one for their own, as who could deny Mrs. Van Vorst and Nita what they so eagerly desired and what they were so able to do? In the meantime, Miss Camphelia—for so she had been christened—cooed, gurgled, and dimpled with delight at each new mother who bathed and dressed her in silent adoration of the tyrant of the camp.

Nathalie stirred restlessly, jumbled up her pillow, and then flopped over with a sigh. O dear, why couldn't she go to sleep? It was not near time to get up!

"Nathalie Page, what ails you?" came in exasperated tone from the other bed. "You have been wiggling, bouncing, jumping, and sighing like a porpoise for half the night. For pity's sake do go to sleep!"

Nathalie made no reply, assured that if she did she would betray what a baby she was.

"What does ail you anyway?" persisted Helen in a softer tone. "Have you been doing the green-apple act like Carol, and—"

"Oh, it's just Nita," replied the girl dolefully. "You see it is this way, Helen. I told Mrs. Van Vorst that if Nita could mingle with girls about her own age it would do her a world of good." Nathalie sat up in bed and began to hug her knees. "So, you see, I feel responsible in a measure to see that she gets a good time, but dear me, she is just having a horrible time!"

"How do you know?" questioned Helen, "she—"

"Oh, the poor little thing mopes and cries all the time. She won't admit it, but she doesn't want me out of her sight. Really, Helen, I know it is selfish when she is so afflicted—" Nathalie's voice quavered, "but I do want a bit of fun myself sometimes."

"Well, I should say!" was Helen's ejaculation. "But I wouldn't worry over it. She's selfish, that's all, and shouldn't be encouraged. I have noticed that she is terribly offish with the girls, and they are half afraid to be pleasant with her."

"Oh, she does not mean to be offish, as you say," answered Nathalie quickly, "she is shy, and sensitive. I think she imagines the girls do not care for her because she is a humpback. If there was only some way by which she could become better acquainted with the girls, and give them a chance to know her better! She's an awfully bright little thing, and I know she would be a prime favorite, for there's lots of fun in her. She's just pining—well—for love."

"Humph!" came from Helen, "she gets enough of it from her mother and Ellen; they spoil her."

"Yes, I know, but that is what she doesn't want—mother-coddling. What she wants is to come out here and kick around as one of us in a rough and tumble way. Then she would get over her sensitiveness, but somehow I can't seem to manage it."

There was silence for a moment as both girls fell to thinking. All at once Helen bounced up in bed

crying, "There, Nathalie, I have nailed it!"

"Nailed it?" repeated her companion. "Why—"

"Oh, you know what I mean, I mean about Nita. Now listen to Solon the Wise. You get Nita to come and sleep in this tent—"

"Where, on the floor?" inquired Nathalie teasingly.

"You know what I mean—on my cot. I'll take her room. Then you drill her to take her part with the other girls, and so on, just as if she were one of us. In three days I'll come back and take my turn with her, and you take my place. Then in three days again let Lillie take a turn, and so on until the turns have gone the rounds, each girl being her tent-mate for three days. In that way she will become acquainted and have a chance to get in with us."

"Oh, Helen, you are the brightest—but suppose she won't come?"

"Won't be your tent-mate? Why, she worships the ground you walk on! That's one thing that ails her, Nathalie, she's jealous of the girls, because in a way she is outside of it all. Get her into harness like the rest of us and in ten days' time she'll be like another girl, or you can shut me up for a lunatic."

Nathalie, as soon as possible after the morning conference, had a little talk with her Director, and finding that she agreed with Helen, sought Mrs. Van Vorst and laid before her the new plan. Of course she found that she had a number of objections to fight from that lady, but eventually she won, and it was decided that for the rest of the time in camp Nita Van Vorst was to be lost to her mother's bungalow, for to her unbounded joy she was to be one of the girls!

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It was bathing hour, and Nathalie, with bugle in hand, was patrolling the beach, keeping her brain and eyes keenly alert, for some of the girls were careless, and would swim out beyond the raft.

Carol was giving her considerable trouble, for having just mastered the art of swimming she had become very daring, doing her best to "show off" before the girls. Her companions had promised to keep an eye on her, but Nathalie knew that when they were sporting about in the water they were apt to forget their duty.

Her eyes swept from one group to the other. Ah, the Sport was swimming out to the raft! How well she looked in that red cap, and what a beautiful swimmer she was, so free and graceful in her movements! Hearing a sudden cry, as she thought, Nathalie turned and glanced at Carol. Good! she had stopped her antics of pretending she was sinking. Her eyes again wandered to Edith, why where was she? There was her red cap bobbing on the water, what new trick was she up to now? She had thrown up her arms. Oh, was she screaming? Pshaw, she was just fooling as usual, what a plague she was!

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Nathalie strained her eyes, why, yes, she *was* screaming! she had gone down again! Just a moment, and then as Nathalie saw the red cap bob up again and heard another piercing shriek, she realized that Edith was drowning! Nathalie's brain spun like a wheel—what should she do—she glanced helplessly around. Where was Helen?

"Edith is drowning!" she tried to shriek, but her voice sounded faint, as if far away. O God! and then she remembered. Up went her bugle and two loud blasts—the danger signal that some one was drowning—rang sharply over the water.

Just a moment, and then with a sudden swirl through the air, Nathalie had leaped into the water, and with long, swift strokes swam towards the spot where she had seen the red cap go down! Ah, she was almost there! As Edith threw up her arms again with another frenzied scream, for help, Nathalie grabbed her under the shoulders. But Edith, with a hysterical cry, threw her arms around her neck. Oh, she was dragging her down!

Nathalie regained control of herself, and was frantically beating back the clutching arms. She had swung her around; she tried to get a firmer grip, but a nameless fear was pinching her heart. She felt her strength was giving out! Then she heard Helen's voice crying, "Don't lose your hold, Nathalie, we're almost there!"

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Edith was so heavy; Nathalie tried to tighten her grip; she was more quiet now. Oh, could it be? She heard the purling of water and saw, but dimly, something dark moving towards her. Oh, if they would only hurry? Some one had caught hold of Edith and was dragging—

When Nathalie regained her consciousness it was to hear Mrs. Morrow's voice crying, "Poor little Blue Robin!" She opened her eyes to see the doctor bending over her while Mrs. Morrow peeped over his shoulder with a cheery smile. "Edith?" she gasped, making an attempt to rise.

"As snug as a bug in a rug," rejoined the doctor promptly, "and you will be, too, if you will drink this."

Nathalie meekly obeyed. She was so tired, would she ever get rested? But she did, and a few hours later was half sitting up on her cot supported by pillows, surrounded by a group of sober-faced girls all eagerly listening as she told how it came about. "If she hadn't gripped me so hard," she ended as she sank back on the pillows, beginning to feel tired again, "I could have managed." Then suddenly a queer little smile curved her mouth and drawing Helen down to her she whispered softly, "Helen, do you remember the day Edith ducked us when we were off in the boat, and how I declared I would get even?" Her friend nodded gravely. "Well," said Nathalie, still with that queer little smile, "I have got one on her, haven't I?"

415

A cheer fire was in progress, and a noisy one at that. The Pioneers had spent the afternoon and

evening of the previous day over at the camp across the Lake at an entertainment called Scout Day, given in their honor by their friends.

Certainly it had been a most wonderful Scout Day, for there had been scouts saluting the colors, giving calls, making signals, lighting fires, and building shacks, tepees, and miniature log huts. Scouts, too, had engaged in all kinds of drills, contests, and races, such as tilting jousts, hand-wrestling, spear fighting and sham battles. And the games! They were a revelation to the girls in the uniqueness and cleverness of the ideas displayed. They had found, too, that scouts knew how to cook the very things dear to a camper's heart, and sing—well, about every war and camp song known.

The Camp Circus presented the ludicrous side of these knights of chivalry, as they did clown stunts, causing the girls to laugh immoderately. After supper had come a firefly dance, which made strong appeal to the weird and mystic in every girl's nature, as they watched the scouts swing about the blazing light in strange and grotesque evolution.

Perhaps the best was the scouts on the water, when, with a flotilla of row-boats and canoes decorated with the figures of paper animals, and brilliantly aglow with Japanese lights they glided over the water, the motion of the boats making the lights look like fireflies dancing in the air.

The jolly times given by the scouts must be returned! When, how, and where, were the three questions causing no little agitation, when Carol, with a white, frightened face, leaped into their midst crying, "Oh, girls, the baby has a fit!"

On hearing this startling statement some of the girls began to cry, others jumped up and wrung their hands frantically, while a few made a wild dash for Mrs. Van Vorst's bungalow. Helen fortunately kept cool, and, perceiving that a panic would ensue, seized her bugle and blew it quickly.

This halted the stampede, arrested the hysterical ones midway between a sob and a cry, and caused a sudden quiet to fall, as she cried, in a loud clear voice, "Girls, keep perfectly still. Nathalie Page, Edith Whiton, and Lillie Bell, I appoint a committee of three to go and see if Carol's report is so, and whether our services are needed. And please, Pioneers," she called out as the three girls sprang on their feet, "one of you girls come back and let us know how things are progressing, as we shall all be anxious to know."

The next moment the three girls were running swiftly after Carol, who, immediately after delivering her news, had started to run back to the bungalow.

"Now, girls," continued Helen, "let us go on talking. Of course we are all worried, for we just love that baby!" she paused for a second, "but we can't all help. Mrs. Morrow will let us know if we can do anything, so in the meantime, let us go on thinking up ideas."

A cheer greeted this speech as a tribute to their leader's level head and courage, for this was not the first time that she had preserved her poise, and held the scales when unduly weighted on the wrong side.

Yes, it was true, little Camphelia was writhing in convulsions on Mrs. Morrow's lap, while Mrs. Van Vorst bent over her with agitated movements, applying with Ellen's help hot water, and mustard, and such remedies as were available at the moment.

Nathalie touched Mrs. Van Vorst softly on the arm, "Is there anything we girls can do?" Her eyes were big with anxious fear.

"Oh, I don't know," replied that lady distractedly; "if the doctor were only here!"

"Blue Robin, is that you?" asked Mrs. Morrow quickly, as she heard Nathalie's voice. "Oh, we must have help! How unfortunate the doctor had to go to the city to-day! But, Nathalie, can't you send a wireless to Dr. Homer? Tell him to come immediately, for the baby is very ill!"

But Nathalie was already out of the sound of her voice, as with quick, light steps she ran to the girls who, with white distressed faces, awaited her on the veranda. "Mrs. Morrow says to send a wireless to Dr. Homer over at camp," she explained hurriedly, "but I am afraid we won't get him, as the wireless hours are nine, twelve and eight, and it is not eight yet."

"Oh, yes it is," returned Lillie, "five minutes to eight," looking up from her little wrist-watch in its leather bandlet. "I'm sure we shall catch him."

The girls hurried to the boat-house and climbed up to the little cupola, where Dr. Morrow, on first coming to camp, had installed his wireless apparatus. The Pioneers had been somewhat mystified by this procedure, wondering of what use a wireless would be to him up there in those woods. But the doctor had soon demonstrated that it was not only one of the most useful things about camp, but one of the most entertaining.

He had not only been able to discuss with his fellow physician across the lake many professional questions that he came across in his medical books now and then, or letters from his colleague in Westport, who had charge of some of his important cases, but at times had been able to give valuable advice to the younger physician when dealing with some refractory or eccentric scout.

But the doctor had done more than this, for he had gathered the four older girls, Helen, Edith, Lillie, and Nathalie together, and given them lessons in wireless telegraphy, so that they were soon glibly talking about ether waves, spark-coils, condensers, tuners, keys, and so on, in a way that proved his lessons had been well learned. They had, in fact, not only learned the Morse code,

so that they could "listen in" when the doctor was "picking up" an S. O. S. call from some ship in distress, but they had heard many a wireless message from some signal station, or from some out-going or in-coming sea craft.

At first it had seemed quite odd that although their little amateur apparatus could send messages only within a radius of five miles, it was able to receive them from a distance of over a thousand. They became so proficient in this click-clack language that they were soon sending aerograms, or wireless messages, to the camp across the Lake for the doctor. Sometimes, too, they sent messages to their scout friends, a privilege only accorded after the messages had been read by their Director, so as to avoid senseless talk or idle gossip.

As soon as the girls reached the little wooden table holding the wireless, Lillie and Edith instinctively drew back, feeling that as Nathalie was the one who had found the baby she had the prior right to send this call for help. Seating herself, Nathalie quickly adjusted the telephones over her ears and set to work. But to her surprise, as she pressed the wireless key on the detector to close the circuit, she heard no sharp crack, and saw no spark-gap. Again she tried with like result. "Why, what is the matter with it?" she questioned turning towards the girls in some trepidation.

"Let me try," pleaded Lillie. But alas, she met with no better luck than Nathalie, although she tried one experiment after the other. "I think it is the strangest thing," she commented staring helplessly before her; "what can be the matter with the thing anyway?"

But Edith, who had dropped down on her hands and knees to examine the battery under the wooden board, now rose to her feet crying, "There is nothing the matter with the condenser, it must be that the aerial wires are not right!"

As the girl made this announcement there was an ominous silence as they stared with distressed, worried faces at one another. "Oh, what can we do?" lamented Nathalie, "could we—"

"I know what we can do," said Lillie suddenly; "we can row across the Lake to the camp!"

CHAPTER XXIV—THE WIRELESS OPERATOR

"Yes, that is the only thing we can do," said Nathalie quickly, "but suppose the doctor is not there! You know the boys said they were going on a two or three days' tramp this week."

"Well, I'll tell you how we can settle that problem and make sure," replied Lillie, whose mind acted quickly. "Suppose we row over while Edith goes on her wheel to Mrs. Hansen's and telephones to Boonton."

"What, go all that distance alone in the dark?" protested the Sport in an appalled tone, "and then I don't know what doctor to telephone to!"

"What, Edith, do you want us to think that you are really afraid?" laughed Lillie; "you, the girl who has never shown the white feather at any dare? Why, I—"

But Nathalie's cheery voice, like oil on troubled waters, interposed quickly, "Of course she is not afraid, but it is an unpleasant thing to do to ride that distance alone at night. But we can't take chances, and we must have a doctor. And as to the one you telephone to, Edith," she cried, turning to that young lady, whose face had brightened somewhat, "call Dr. McGill, he's the little white-haired doctor who called on Dr. Morrow the other day. He lives at Boonton."

Without another protest Edith turned, and after running back to the cheer fire circle to inform Helen what the girls were going to do, she hurried after her wheel. A few minutes later, with the lantern fastened to the front of it, flickering like a firefly as she sped through the woods, she was on her way to the farm to telephone.

Lillie and Nathalie had hurried down to the boathouse, and in a flash of time had unfastened one of the row boats. Springing quickly in, they were soon out some distance from shore, rowing as rapidly as they could towards the opposite bank. It was a weird night, the sky seemed hung with heavy black curtains, the only light being that from the moon, as at rare intervals she darted swiftly through some opening between the clouds, or betrayed her presence by streaks of foamy silver on the edge of some unusually inky cloud.

But the path across the Lake was a familiar one, and ten minutes later the girls reached the opposite shores. "Why, it looks as if there wasn't a soul about," exclaimed Lillie, as, after drawing in their oars, the two girls stood up in the boat and peered anxiously through the bit of woodland that led to the camp, whose signal lantern glimmered dimly through the foliage of the trees.

"I guess you're right, Nathalie, the boys must be on a tramp," said Lillie after several loud "Hellos!" the only reply to which had been a faint echo from across the Lake.

Putting her fingers to her mouth Lillie emitted several sharp whistles, but still no sign of life! "Huh, it looks as if it was a case of Goldsmith's 'Deserted Village,'" she soliloquized dismally, but Nathalie was busy giving the Pioneer yell. This evoked such a strange medley of echoing sounds that the girls burst out laughing.

Nathalie's face soon sobered, however, as she exclaimed dolefully, "O dear, it does seem as if we

were destined to have bad luck. I wonder if they could have gone to bed!" burst from her in sudden thought.

"If they have, we'll soon rout them out," declared Lillie, jumping on the bank. "Come on, let's drag the boat up and then hike to camp."

After slipping on pine needles, stumbling over gnarled roots and blackened stumps, they finally found the path, devoutly thankful that the moon had at last emerged from behind the clouds. Indeed, as they stepped from the shadows of the woods and stood on the campus—as the scouts called the level space in front of the tents—the moon was shining with a brightness that equalled the day.

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As the girls' eyes traveled from the pots on the top pole suspended over what had once been a camp fire to the rows of tents, whose open flaps revealed that they were tenantless, Lillie uttered a sudden cry of delighted surprise!

The next moment she had shot across the campus, for she had spied a white paper fastened to one of the larger tents, directly under the glare of the lantern above the door.

"Hurrah! we're in luck," she cried, wildly jubilant, pointing to the white paper as Nathalie reached her side. "Read that!" The girl stepped closer and slowly deciphered from the big black letters in charcoal print:

"Have gone to the Scout Council at the rooms of
the Wolf Patrol at Boonton.

"G. A. HOMER, SCOUTMASTER."

"But that does not help us any!" Nathalie said when she finished reading the notice, her face losing its eagerness as she faced her companion.

"Indeed it does, goosie," replied Lillie stoutly, "for the doctor has a wireless. So have the scouts at Boonton, for I heard one of the boys tell of a message one of them had picked up the other night, the night we had that awful thunder storm, don't you remember? So don't say we're not lucky, Nathalie Page, after finding that note. I'll warrant you, though, that some of the scouts did go on a tramp, and that the doctor left that word in case they returned before he did. But let's look for that wireless!"

425

Surmising that the tent with the note pinned on the flap must be Dr. Homer's, the girls hastened in, and by the light from the lantern which Nathalie had taken from the pole by standing on a couple of soap-boxes she had found, it was soon discovered on a roughly-hewn table in a corner of the tent.

This time the wireless key did its work; there was a sharp crack, the amateur wireless operator had clicked off the R. Z., the camp's private call, and then with palpitating heart and expectant eyes sat waiting to see if it had been picked up. Suddenly her face broke into a smile, for as she "listened in," she caught the wireless O. K. G. (go ahead). She went ahead, and in a few moments had made the operator at the Patrol rooms understand that Dr. Homer was wanted. There was a moment's delay, and then the doctor himself was sending a message through the air. It took but a short space of time for Nathalie to click off why he was wanted, and how the girls had come to wire him from the scout camp.

"Now let's make tracks for home," said Lillie as Nathalie hung up the lantern on the pole again. "I am afraid it may rain, for I thought I heard thunder." But she must have been mistaken, for not a cloud disturbed the soft silver haze that guided them across the Lake to Camp Laff-a-Lot.

426

"Dear me," ejaculated Nathalie an hour later as she and Helen were undressing for bed, "what a lot of things have happened in the two weeks we have been at camp! But how glad I am that Dr. Homer got here in time, and that the baby is all right."

"Well, it ought to be, with two doctors on the job," retorted Helen with her usual bluntness. "Isn't that old Dr. McGill jolly?"

"Oh, yes, it was comical to see him look the baby over, and then declare that there was nothing for him to do but to look wise, as Dr. Homer had done all there was to be done. What a chummy confab they had too, after it was all over! He was so pleased to meet Dr. Homer, he said, for he had heard Dr. Morrow speak of him."

"Well, one thing's settled, Miss Blue Robin," remarked Helen decidedly, "and that is that Miss Camphelia is not to have any more sweets. I half suspect that Carol tried to stuff her with a bite of green apple, for she looked frightened to death when she saw that she was ill. Dr. Homer said there had been too much mothering going on. I just knew it would come to this, the way—"

"Stop your scolding, Lady Fuss," laughed Nathalie, "for it seems to me that I saw you trying to stuff the kiddie with a lollipop the other day. But, anyway, the rules have been posted, 'No one to feed, or to handle Miss Camphelia without permission of the head nurse, Miss Ellen Carmichael!' I'm dead for sleep, so good night!"

427

The camp presented an appearance of unusual activity, with flags and bunting rippling in the sunlit air, and girls, scouts, and village guests in a state of restless progression, for it was the Pioneer Sport Day. The girls were in a whirl as they flew hither and thither, seeing that everything was in readiness for the anticipated fun, the visitors curiously prying into the living arrangements of this girls' camp, while the scouts impatiently tramped about, waiting for the

sports to begin.

Ah, there was the bugle call, the signal for a rush down to the shores of the Lake to witness the aquatic feats of the young campers! "A ghostly dive," read Fred Tyson slowly from an imposing little program, hand-printed in red, and tied to a birch-bark cover with sweet-grass. "I'd like to know—" but his query was cut short as the bugle again sounded to announce that the first race was to start.

Fred turned his eyes towards the pier and stared curiously at the little figure in a khaki suit with red tie and hat, standing so proudly erect on a small platform as the Pioneer announcer for the day. Could it be? Yes it was Miss Anita Van Vorst, with her knapsack so adroitly arranged that no one would have suspected she was the little humpback who had once only taken an outing when wheeled in a chair. 428

A sudden scurry from the boat-house of two ghostly figures, a quick rush up the plank leading to the barrel platform,—Peter's diving-tower,—the spectral habiliments suddenly flung away to float with the tide, and two blue-suited forms had sped swiftly downward.

There was a splash, a shower of silvery spray, a few bubbles, and two heads were bobbing about like floating corks. The next minute Kitty and Edith were swimming swiftly back to the pier, Edith in the lead, and Kitty a close second amid the noisy hurrahs from their friends on the bank. Edith, of course, won the blue, and with a wave of her hand as an acknowledgment to the cheering audience darted quickly back to the boat-house.

A tennis match now followed, which proved to be Lillie and Jessie arrayed in tennis-suits seated in wooden tubs with tennis-rackets for paddles, paddling to the goal, an anchored raft some yards from shore. Lillie was the winner this time, and, amid a general laugh received her prize, a dime and pin, with radiant smiles from the bugler on the pier.

A pioneer race was engaged in by two Orioles, one in the costume of a colonial maiden of Plymouth town, while the other closely resembled pictures of that laggard in love, John Alden. The contestants swam to the raft where they attempted in double-quick time to divest themselves of their old-time clothes, the one, of course, who accomplished this feat first having the best chance to win the race. 429

But shoes would stick, strings would knot, and buttons wouldn't unfasten. Nannie Plummer at last was free, and jumped back to the water. But alas, her bonnet still clung to her; no, not to her head, but to one of her feet, causing her audience to shout with merriment at her antics to rid herself of this obstacle, while Johnnie the slow was still making futile endeavors to rid herself of her undesirable trousers.

A Japanese race was applauded perhaps as much for its picturesqueness as for the skill displayed, as two daintily gowned figures,—one in a pink and one in a blue flowered kimono, with flowers and fans coquettishly arranged à la Japanese in their hair—with mincing steps hied themselves down to their boats. Here, each one holding an umbrella in one hand and a palm-leaf fan in the other, they paddled out to the stake boat.

"Gee whiz! I'd like to know how they make those fans work!" exclaimed Teddie Hart in puzzled tone, to the joy of a group of girls near by, who giggled unrestrainedly as they saw that they had succeeded in mystifying their scout friends. Perhaps Peter, if he had minded, could have explained that a flat board to which the fans were nailed did the work. 430

A Silver Race was composed of teams of two, rowing out to the raft and back, each girl holding a silver spoon in her mouth containing an egg. The winners were Nathalie and Edith, who reached shore with their eggs intact, while Lillie Bell and a Bob White raced back to land with streams of yellow dripping from their faces and clothes, the race rules requiring that each racer should return to the shore with what remained of the egg.

The Trail of the Lonesome Pine created yells of laughter, as Helen stepped gingerly along with bare feet on a peeled pine sapling suspended over the shallow water near the shore. It was greased, of course, but the red apple at its end proved an incentive as the girl slipped cautiously towards it. Hurrah, she was almost there! Hadn't she practiced that feat for days? There was a sudden swerve to one side, the supple figure tottered, and then Miss Helen plunged to her fate in the water below. But she only laughed with the spectators as she wrung out her skirts and scurried for the bank, while Barbara began her greasy career.

Surely she had rosin on her feet! No, she didn't, for the next moment she too was clawing the air. She swayed for a minute like a reed in the wind, and then went down, not into the water, but on the pole where she gazed with a bewildered stare in her near-sighted eyes at the jeering little prize that had proved so elusive. 431

The first number of the land sports was a contest in the air, the performers walking on stilts while balancing potatoes on their heads. A tilting joust also took place, and helped to prove that the time the girls had spent in making and walking on the stilts had not been wasted.

The Up Against It Race, turned out to be an obstacle race, one of the obstacles being twelve eggs to be picked up from the ground and placed in a basket. The second obstacle was hailed with deafening shouts, for it was no other than Miss Camphelia sitting on the race-track contentedly sucking a lollipop. She was speedily seized by the contestant and arrayed in a coat and hat, while gazing with wondering eyes at this new red-faced mother. The girl who made the best time as an egg-picker and baby-dresser proved to be an Oriole, and was duly applauded for her speed and deftness.

In the Light that Failed contest the fair racers made a twenty-yard dash carrying lighted candles and pails of water, one in each hand, at the same time. All lights flickered out to be sure, but the one that lasted the longest won the contest for its holder.

A fifty-yard dash won by Edith now followed, while one of the Bob Whites broke the tape at a twenty-five yard dash. In a Ring the Bell competition the girls were divided into teams, the team having the greatest number of girls who threw a bean bag through a barrel-hoop with a bell hung in its center without touching the bell were the jubilant ones.

432

Lillie and Edith now gave an exhibition of wigwagging, using the Myers code, in which nearly all the girls were proficient. Lillie, to her delight, showed the most proficiency, although Edith had generally been considered the greatest expert in this science. An Indian-club drill, and a nail-driving contest not only showed the scouts what their sisters could accomplish in the way of strength, and manual labor, but brought the sports for the day to a close.

By this time pangs of hunger began to assail the jolly campers, and Nita, with a strenuous toot of her horn, made known that a Grub Contest—a hike for supper packages hidden in the woods, among the rocks on the shore, or around the tents—would now take place. With much laughter and jesting the girls lined up opposite the boys, and at three blasts of the bugle they were off, flying in all directions, each one bent on searching some one particular locality that he or she had in mind. The fortunate ones were soon shouting hilariously; in fact even the slow ones were keener than usual in this supper hike, and soon bagged their game and cheered lustily as they returned to camp.

Every one now gathered around the dining-room table—appropriately decorated for the occasion—and was soon dulling appetite with the choice bits found in the packages that had been done up by the Pioneers but hidden by Mrs. Morrow and Mrs. Van Vorst.

433

As they frolicked over the supper it was voted that every one present contribute to the moment's pleasure by telling a story, singing a song, asking a conundrum, and so on. A ball was passed to Helen who immediately told a funny story, and ended by tossing the ball to Nathalie, the rule being that the reciter was to throw the ball to any one he or she chose, which resulted in its being thrown to the more timid or lazy ones, thus causing surprise and laughter.

Nathalie made a rhyme impromptu, then tossed the ball to one of the boys, and so it kept going the rounds, not only bracing the timid or nervous ones, but revealing latent talent that had never been suspected.

Teddy Hart, who had played the knight to the announcer of the day, Miss Anita, spied her laughing at his antics when he was called to the front and mischievously tossed the ball to her. The smile died on the girl's face and she gasped with a start of terror, but in a moment, with a defiant toss of her head, she started in and recited some funny verses so comically that she received an ovation of cheers and claps.

When Nathalie perceived this unexpected turn in the festivity, her heart went pit-a-pat in sympathy with Nita's unexpected ordeal, but when she saw the upward toss of her head and the flash in her eyes, she knew the girl would prove game. Indeed, she had been proving game for the last ten days or more, for Helen's plan of helping her to know the girls had succeeded so well that Nita had lost much of her supersensitiveness in regard to her deformity, by being made to forget it and by the kindness and deference shown her by both girls and boys.

434

The intimacy that had come from tenting with the different Pioneers had not only shown her the need of correcting many of her own faults, but had revealed the good points of her associates. Many of the girls she had secretly vowed to Nathalie she would never care for, she had accepted as the best of friends.

From being deemed an aristocrat of whom the girls stood slightly in awe, thinking her proud and exclusive, she had proved to be most democratic, entirely devoid of the many airs and graces they feared. In fact she had become, as Nathalie said, a favorite with every one, and had nearly as many adorers as Miss Camphelia, who at that moment was having a most beautiful time eating bread and milk in the lap of Ellen, gurgling and winking with baby joy at the gay colors and lights that held her eye.

Supper over, the campers hurried to the cheer fire circle where a tall, uncouth-looking object covered with sheets towered specter-like in the center. Helen, mounting a small platform, announced that the campers had gathered to celebrate the burning of Miss Dummy, who represented the evil spirits that had run riot during their stay at camp.

435

An Oriole girl now came to the fore as chairman of the spirit committee, as it was called, and made known that a thorough investigation had brought to light many evil spirits that had dominated certain members of the camp at intervals, not only hindering the development of character, but causing discomfort and a few heartaches among their mates.

The evil spirits of grouchiness, shiftlessness, dishonesty, and selfishness, in a sense, had been tamed by the Pioneers' laws and the flames from their cheer fire so that they had not caused much havoc, but there were a few evil ones not so familiar, perhaps, that had persisted in doing their evil work. The principal ones, she claimed, were forgetting each one's own particular failing in the fun of ridiculing the faults and eccentricities of her mates, the disloyalty to one's self by not trying to do one's best, a habit of giggling when there was nothing to giggle at, a desire to shirk responsibility by letting the other one do work that was distasteful, and the weakness of letting one's nerves get the better of one on certain occasions instead of getting the better of the

nerves.

Of course this caused much laughter, although each girl recognized her own particular fault, and then and there secretly swore that she would subdue it or die in the attempt.

436

Helen now asked if there was any reason why the evil spirits just mentioned should not be disposed of for good and all. Receiving a shout that evidently meant a big "No!" she pulled a string, the ghostlike garments fell to the ground, and Miss Dummy stood revealed, an effigy arrayed in an old suit belonging to one of the Pioneers, even to the staff and knapsack, surmounting a pile of dried twigs and brush.

"Miss Dummy," solemnly continued Helen, with as straight a face as she could muster as she confronted the ludicrous-looking evil one, who, with hat awry, huge red nose, and goggle-eyes, stared at her with a leer, "I consign to thee those evil spirits that have caused sorrow and heartaches among the members of Camp Laff-a-Lot, to be burned until thou art ashes, and then to be buried at the bottom of the lake to lie there forever!"

As she ended there was a sudden scurry forward as each Pioneer made one of a circle kneeling around Miss Dummy, and in an instant's time had struck her match and applied it to one of the twigs which served as a pedestal for the evil one. As the firewood had been well oiled it caught quickly from the blue sputterings of so many matches, and yellow flames were soon shooting savagely upward to glow like strings of scarlet among the twigs and briars, causing them to snap and crackle hilariously. In a moment darting tongues were licking Miss Dummy's red cheeks with fiery greed and floated upward to circle about in wreaths of white and black smoke.



She dropped the ashes of Miss Dummy into the placid water.

Some of the unduly imaginative girls turned away, declaring that the effigy looked like some one of the girls in that suit in the reddened glare of the flames. But the rest joined hands with the scouts and leaped merrily about the blazing pyre, executing weird and strange gyrations, which they termed a fire dance, as a last farewell to their enemy, who finally, done to the death, tumbled to the ground a fiery mass of scarlet embers. A pail of water soon quenched the last of the spirits, when the ashes were gathered into a big pail and carried in a procession to the shores of the lake.

437

Here Helen, holding the pail carefully in her hand, stepped into a row-boat and was conveyed to the middle of the lake. By the light of the moon just peeping above the horizon she dropped the ashes of Miss Dummy into the placid water, and to the singing of a comic dirge, composed by one of the Orioles, was rowed silently back to shore.

CHAPTER XXV—GOOD-BY TO EAGLE LAKE

438

After Miss Dummy had been disposed of there was a return to the cheer fire circle, where the Sport performed the unusual feat of lighting three fires with one match. The giving out of merit

badges and stars for the work performed during camp life and for the day's sports now took place. These rewards of merit were each accompanied by camp gifts, the work of the girls done afternoons at their "trial by needle" hour, as some of the girls called it, when raffia and bead work, candle making, sewing, and many other crafts had occupied the Pioneers' busy fingers, while some expert read of heroic deeds, or the girls chatted pleasantly of the pleasures that were, or that were to be.

Pioneer and Scout, each in turn, now told of some special good that had come to them from the life in the open, which Mrs. Morrow said would be food for thought on their return to the city. A rhyming contest made no end of merriment, as well as the games of menagerie, gossip, animal, blind man's buff, and others of like character. The scout orchestra now varied the entertainment with a few musical selections which started the girls and boys dancing around the fire again, this time with the graceful swing and motions of the modern dances.

439

But they tired at last, and, some one starting a song, they all fell in and sang to their heart's content one song after the other, rendering the old-remembered one of "Juanita" with undue emphasis, in honor to Miss Anita Van Vorst.

After Dr. Homer, with the assistance of a few scouts, had made a deal of laughter by his comic shadowgraphs, done by a flash-lamp placed in the rear of one of the big tents with the flaps closed, the time came to say good-by. A few protested that it was still early, but when reminded by Mrs. Morrow that they had already been allowed an hour longer than usual and that they would have a lot of work to do in the morning as they were to break camp to return to the city, the protests ended, and the good-nights were said.

The last day was a busy one, any number of camp rules were broken but the squads were lenient—they were still sleepy—so no reports were made, and the work of pulling down tents, packing the camp equipment, and making everything as clean and orderly as possible progressed.

In the midst of this confusion Carol, who had made her last trip to the post-office, came rushing up to Nathalie with a letter. "Oh, it's from Dick!" cried the delighted girl as she tore it open.

440

"Oh, Helen," she exclaimed in a moment to that young lady who was down on her knees packing the big box, "it's the funniest letter. Dick says he's having the time of his life—the jolliest ever—why, where can he be?" stopping to glance at the envelope.

"Why, he must be in New York, or I wonder—yes," she nodded in answer to Helen's inquiry, "he says Mamma is fine—says they have had a glorious three weeks—well, I like that," she grumbled with rueful face, "it looks as if they had not missed me a bit and—" But the sound of voices at this moment caused both of the girls to go to the tent door, to see Miss Carol hurriedly heading a procession of men and women towards the tent. She was screaming excitedly as she came, "Oh, Nathalie, where are you?"

Nathalie, somewhat alarmed by all this appearance of excitement, cried quickly, "Oh, what is it, Carol? What is it?"

"Oh, Nathalie," the girl screamed, "the baby's mother has come!"

"The baby's mother!" echoed the dazed girl with wide eyes. "Why, what does she mean?" turning to Helen, who at that moment had picked up Miss Camphelia, who had just awakened from a nap on one of the cots.

By this time the party of country folk, breathless and somewhat moist from undue haste, with expectancy and delight beaming from every feature, had arrived in front of the tent. Nathalie gave one glance at the many faces, and then with a sudden cry rushed to the defense of what she had come to consider as her own, and the next minute was seated on the cot holding on to Miss Camphelia with a gripping clutch. She stared defiantly at the intruders as they pushed and jostled one another in their haste to enter the tent.

441

But a moment later her arms relaxed, as a faded-looking, worried-faced little woman, with eyes as blue as the sea, and hair like corn-silk, gave an inarticulate cry as she caught sight of the baby on the girl's lap. Dropping on her knees with outstretched arms she cried, "Oh, my baby! My precious baby!"

Well, after that Nathalie could hold out no longer, especially when she saw that the baby's sweet smile and dimpling cheeks were counterparts of those of the woman who claimed her as her own.

Then it was all explained. The child had been stolen by the gypsy woman who, evidently, after a day or so of tramping from house to house begging for money to reach the Gypsy settlement some distance from the neighboring town, had decided to abandon it. Unfortunately the notice that had been sent to be put up in the post-office had failed to reach its destination, and if it had not been for Dr. McGill, the physician who had been summoned by Edith when Camphelia was ill, the baby would never have been found.

442

Dr. McGill had been puzzled by the baby's resemblance to some one he knew, but supposing the little one belonged to some of the ladies at camp he had thought no more about it. Afterwards, however, on accidentally learning from Dr. Homer that it was a lost baby, he had sent the mother to reclaim it.

Of course there were pangs of disappointment to be endured, but, as Nathalie said, no one could be anything but glad to give the baby up after witnessing the mother's joy. After the mother had thanked them all, from Mrs. Van Vorst down to Ellen, for their kindness and the care they had given her baby, hoping that each one of the girls would some day have one of her own to caress

and fondle, they all kissed Camphelia good-by, and the camp baby departed to return to its own home.

After a dirge had been composed by Jessie, who had bloomed into quite a poetess, and any number of farewell letters and wishes had been written for the good luck of the next campers at the Lake, these were buried in the ground under a cairn of stones with a tiny American flag fastened at the top. This was the girls' memorial to the good times they had had, as well as an expression of the sadness they felt on leaving the place where they had spent three such happy weeks.

The sadness of parting with the friends they had made in Mrs. Van Vorst's household—not the least being our friend Jimmie—was somewhat lessened when they learned that their hostess and her daughter were to accompany them to New York to spend a day or so with Mrs. Morrow. 443

Going down in the car, although surrounded by a merry, chattering crowd, Nathalie and Helen became unusually silent. Helen, perhaps, was thinking of the new position she was to enter on her return to Westport, and Nathalie,—well, she could not have told why, but soon she became aware that her thoughts had jumped backward and she was reviewing her first meeting with Helen and the Pioneers.

She half smiled as each one in turn presented herself to her as she first appeared; Barbara, with her queer staring eyes, absent-minded manner, and her frumpish clothes that always made Nathalie think of a five-and-ten-cent store. How often she had been tempted to laugh until she learned of the meanness of Barbara's grandfather, for although he was a rich man Barbara had to scrimp and haggle to get enough to eat, to say nothing of clothes to cover her back. The tears came into her eyes when she realized the kind heart that beat so loyally beneath the despised apparel. After all, what were one's clothes, mere externals necessary of course, but in reality only of face value, for surely they would never gain one an entrance into Heaven. And Helen, what would her life have been in her new home without this neighbor friend—who had taught her to master herself by helping her to overcome the many problems that had confronted her when she had become a Pioneer? 444

Then she smiled again as she thought of Lillie Bell, with her thrillers and dramatic poses. She had learned that they were but the frosting to the solid worth beneath. Indeed, the thrillers in a way had proved an incentive in the telling of her stories to Rosy, the opening wedge into the good things that had followed, meeting Nita, making the money for Dick, Mrs. Van Vorst's asking the Pioneers to Eagle Lake, and so on. Why, when she came to think of it, there was not a girl in her bird group who had not helped her in some way, even Edith, who had taught her to guard her tongue.

And from the Pioneer industries and crafts she had learned to be useful. She thought of the first time she had tried to darn a stocking at the Rally. Yes, and they had helped her to be happy, for they had given her a purpose in life. As for the sports and activities, they had brought her in closer touch with nature, giving her a keener interest in things that had never appealed to her before. And the rules and laws, even the good old-timey women had all done their share in making definite those qualities which she now saw were necessary in order to be a success in life.

She realized, but dimly, perhaps, that she had gotten nearer the hearts of these people of the workaday world, not only Helen, but Edith and Jessie, who were all to be wage-earners that fall, thus opening up to her a new avenue of hopes and desires. Wasn't it strange how she used to dread the thought of having to earn her own living, and now she was worrying as to how she could earn more money to add to what she had earned already for Dick! Then a sudden thought jarred, oh, suppose Mrs. Van Vorst, now that Nita had become so different with her sunburned cheeks and merry ways from what she had been before she met the Pioneers, should not want her any more! Oh, well, if that should be—ah, they were getting into New York! She stooped and had begun to gather up her belongings when some one spoke to her. 445

It was Mrs. Van Vorst, who, with her gracious little smile—how changed she seemed from on that morning when Nathalie had handed her the card in front of the library—said, "Nathalie, Nita and I are going to take a run up to St. Luke's Hospital to visit that sick friend—you know the one I told you about, who just had an operation performed—and Nita wants you to go with us."

"Oh, but Mother will be waiting to see me!" exclaimed the girl blankly. O dear, she didn't want to go, for she was in such a hurry to see her mother and Dick.

"Oh, that will be all right," nodded her friend quickly. "Mrs. Morrow will stop at the door, and you can tell her you will be along in the next train, for we shall not be long at the hospital." 446

Twenty minutes later the three ladies, each with a big bouquet which Nita had insisted upon their taking, were entering a large, bare-looking reception room. "Now, girls," said Mrs. Van Vorst, "I will hurry up in the elevator and see how the patient is, and then perhaps you can both come and see him—her—" Mrs. Van Vorst's face grew strangely red—she turned abruptly and hurried from the room.

It was but a few moments when she was back again, and with a bright little nod cried, "Come, Nathalie, my friend is fine this morning, and very anxious to see visitors, so come along!"

"I wonder why the patient wants to see me," soliloquized the girl in puzzled query. "Isn't Nita coming?" she cried aloud, seeing the girl standing by the window with an odd little smile on her face.

"Oh, yes, later; only one at a time at present," was the quick reply.

Nathalie was still thinking how strange it seemed and how smiling Mrs. Van Vorst appeared, when they came to a halt in front of a door in an upper corridor. "Here we are," said her companion, "now run in and see my friend!" She threw open the door as she spoke.

Nathalie took a step forward, stared a minute with puzzled brows, and then with a loud cry flung herself with outstretched arms upon a figure standing in the center of the room, for it was Dick!

"Oh, how did you get here and—" but the rest was lost, for Dick was hugging her and kissing her in a way that more than astonished the girl, for he had always declared he hated to kiss people. And then he held her off and with shining eyes surveyed the suntanned cheeks of Nathalie approvingly, as he cried, "So you're back, Blue Robin—and—great guns, as fat as a porpoise, too!"

"But what are you doing here?" inquired the still dazed girl slowly—"are you the lady?"

"Lady!" echoed Dick. "I, a lady? Not on your life! What have you got into your head now?" he quizzed teasingly.

"But Mrs. Van Vorst said I was to meet a lady—"

"Oh, she was just bluffing you, that's all," jeered Dick. "She wanted to surprise you, for—" then Nathalie gave a loud scream, for Dick had begun to walk towards the bureau, slowly, to be sure, for his muscles were stiff, but he was straight as an arrow.

"Oh—why, Dick, where is your cane? You'll fall—" and then something must have whispered to the girl,—perhaps it was intuition for in a flash she seemed to know.

"Dick," she gasped, "you've had the operation, and you're all right?" This last was in a tense whisper.

"You bet I am," returned Dick cheerily, "and in good shape, too. The doctor says I can go home in a week."

"But where did you get the money?" asked the girl, her eyes big with wonder.

"From a check sent by Mrs. Van Vorst as a tribute to her little friend and adviser, Nathalie Page," read Dick slowly from a letter which he had suddenly slipped from his pocket. As he glanced down at the girl and saw her staring eyes he flicked the letter before them, laughing as if to recall her to herself. Nathalie blinked, stepped back, and then a sudden light flashed into her eyes, and with a swoop of her hand she snatched the letter from her brother, crying, "Oh, Dick, isn't she just the dearest! Oh, I'm not worth so much money, I—" Then her eyes swept the page before her.

"No, I don't believe you are, Blue Robin," teased Dick smilingly. And then his voice grew more earnest, as he added, "Nathalie Page, you're the blood, all right. You captured her heart on sight, and this is the result." He started to walk slowly towards the bed, but the girl was at his side, for she saw that he was beginning to feel a little tired.

"To be sure," he cried apologetically as he leaned on her a little heavily. "I'm not a speeder just yet, but wait a bit and you'll see me do a twenty-mile dash in no time."

"Yes," explained Dick, after he was resting on the bed again, and Mrs. Van Vorst's kindness had been rehearsed in detail; "Mrs. Van Vorst sent a letter to Mother expressing her love, admiration, and all the rest of it, for you, and then begged to be allowed to give you this surprise. She said we could consider the money a loan and pay it back when we liked."

"Oh, was that the letter that came just before I went away, that you wouldn't tell me about?"

Dick nodded, and then went on, "I was brought here the day after you left for the Lake; operated on the day after, and have had the jolliest time ever since. The nurses here are O. K. I have only been permitted to stand on my feet the last few days, but the doctor says I'll soon be walking all right. But Blue Robin, how goes it with you? I hear you're a great sport since you left."

But Nathalie's thoughts were elsewhere. "Oh, Dick," she exclaimed presently, "when do you think we can pay Mrs. Van Vorst the money back? I have some, you know—" her eyes grew bright—"fifty dollars, in the bank!"

"And I have, well, I guess I have more than that," said the boy proudly, "from the various jobs I did. Oh, Nathalie, did I tell you I wrote a little skit and sold it to 'Life' for fifty dollars?"

"You did?" ejaculated the girl. "Oh, I'm so glad! I always said you could write funny things. Well, that will make—" but at this moment she heard the door open. Oh, it was Mrs. Van Vorst—what should she say to thank her?

But the question faded from her mind as with a cry of delight she sprang into the outstretched arms of her mother.

Well, it seemed as if the three would never get through going over this great joy that had come into their lives! Then, too, they were all anxious to pay back as soon as possible Mrs. Van Vorst's kind loan.

"Well," said Nathalie at length, "I am sure if we all work hard we can do it pretty soon. How much did you say it cost?"

But before Dick could answer Mrs. Page cried, taking a hand of each as she spoke, "It will take

time to be sure, but Mother is going to do her share, for, children, the bonds are all right, I received my interest yesterday, the usual six per cent."

"Oh, isn't that just too lovely!" exclaimed Nathalie. But before she could say more the door opened and Mrs. Van Vorst and Nita entered, Nita all shyness again as she bowed stiffly to Dick, whom she had always been anxious to meet. And then the unexpected happened, for as Nathalie turned to thank her kind benefactor she burst into tears and cried as if her heart would break, to the dismay of every one present. Oh, what a fool she did make of herself, she afterwards confessed with shamed eyes to Helen.

But Mrs. Van Vorst had been a girl herself once, and so she understood just how her young friend felt. She comforted Nathalie so sweetly that the girl fell in love with her over again, her tears dried, and she was soon her happy self.

In a short space the good-bys were said to Dick, and the four ladies hurried to the taxi that was to whirl them to Westport. Of course there was so much to tell and talk over during the journey that it was not until Nathalie was undressing for bed that she heard that as soon as Dick was able he and her mother were to spend two weeks at Eagle Lake with Mrs. Van Vorst. Nathalie received this news with unfeigned joy, for now her mother would have a change, and then she and Dick could see what a lovely place the Lake was.

There had been so many unexpected bits of brightness to make Nathalie happy that day that when she finally got into bed, although she was terribly tired, her brain was in such a whirl she was sure she would never go to sleep. But at last, with a drowsy sigh, she snuggled down on her pillow with the happy thought that she was so glad she had found that nest—of blue birds—and had become—a Girl Pioneer!

THE END

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