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\*\*\* START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK NATALIE: A GARDEN SCOUT \*\*\*



Natalie begins her planting. (*Page 110*)

## **NATALIE:**

### ***A Garden Scout***

By LILLIAN ELIZABETH ROY

AUTHOR OF

"Janet: A Stock-Farm Scout," "Norma: A Flower Scout," "The Blue Birds Series," "The Five



Endorsed by and Published with the Approval of  
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### **An Open Letter From the Author**

DEAR GIRLS EVERYWHERE:

Perhaps you will like these country life books better for knowing that the incidents told in them actually happened to me in my girlhood days. I did not live on a farm such as Natalie's, however, nor was my father a farmer. He liked to "putter" around the acre of ground after business hours, simply because he enjoyed such recreation. I was generally at his heels, and whenever a fruit-tree was being grafted, or a swarm of bees hived, you could always find me there, too, getting in Daddy's way. If I was not in the garden, or at the barnyard, I would be shadowing my brothers who were my seniors. Scouts were unheard of in those days, but we hiked, camped, fished and did all the enjoyable stunts which you Scouts now do.

I have not the space here to tell you of some of the hair-raising "dares" my brothers tempted me to accomplish, but I will have to write them for you to read, some time. However, the stunts and the following results would never be termed ladylike, nor were they graceful. Freckles, tan, and tattered dresses were the bane of my mother's life, and the inglorious title of "tomboy" failed to curb my delight in the freedom of country life. But, dear girls, I stored away a fund of health and experiences that I can now draw upon without bankrupting myself.

A keen desire, which I hope to realize soon, is to have a place like Green Hill, where you girls can come and camp for as long a time as you like. Then we can sit about the campfire and talk about the fun and frolics the out-of-door life gives us. Many a laughable experience will I then tell you. Until that time, dear girls, believe me to be an ardent admirer of and staunch worker for the Girl Scouts.

Sincerely,  
LILLIAN ELIZABETH ROY.

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## Natalie: A Garden Scout

### CHAPTER I—NATALIE SOLVES A PROBLEM

7

"Here comes Natalie Averill, girls!" exclaimed Janet Wardell, as a slender, pale-faced girl of fifteen came slowly down the walk from the schoolhouse door.

"My! Doesn't she look awful?" said Frances Lowden.

"Poor Nat! I should say she did!" agreed Norma Evaston sympathetically.

"She looks as if the end of the world had come for her," remarked Belle Barlow, the fourth girl in this group of chums.

"Not only the end of the world, but 'the end of her rope,' too," added Janet, in a low tone so that no one else might hear.

"If it's true—what mother heard yesterday—the end of Nat's rope has come," hinted Norma knowingly.

8

"What is it?" asked the girls anxiously.

"Nothing new for poor Natalie to suffer from, I hope," said Helene Wardell, Janet's younger sister and not a member of the clique of five girls, although she often walked to and from school with her sister.

"Well," replied Norma, aware of her important news, "it is about the worst thing that can happen to a girl after she has lost mother and father. Mrs. James confided to mother last night that there isn't a cent for poor Nat. The lawyer said that Mr. Averill kept up appearances but he had no capital. He must have spent all the money he made since Natalie's mother died four years ago."

"How perfectly dreadful for Nat!" cried Janet.

"After the luxurious manner of life she has had, too," added Belle.

"S-sh! Not so loud, girls; she will hear us," warned Helene, the tender-hearted.

9

"Did Mrs. James tell your mother what they would do?" whispered Frances anxiously.

"She said she would stay on with Natalie for a time, without salary, as she has learned to love her so. You know she has been her companion for four years! And Rachel declares *she* won't go even if the world turns upside down," returned Norma.

"Just like good old Rachel," declared Belle.

"But they can't live in New York without a cent of money, you know," said Janet, with deep concern. "Folks have to pay rent and have something to eat, wherever they are."

But there was no opportunity to discuss more of Natalie's problems then, as the girl came up and joined her friends. Her whole carriage denoted utter discouragement, and her face was drawn into lines of anguish.

"Hello, Nat dear! What made you stay in after school?" asked Janet cheerily, placing an arm about the girl's shoulders.

"I had to tell Miss Mason that I would not finish the term at school," returned Natalie in a quivering voice.

10

"No! Why not?" asked several voices.

"Why, I expect to leave the city very soon."

"Where to?" chorused her companions anxiously.

"Oh, girls! I hate to think of it, it is so awful after all I had hoped to do and be, for Daddy's sake!" cried the girl, hiding her face in her hands.

Instantly four girls closed in about her and each one had a loving and sympathetic word of encouragement to say to her. In a few moments, Natalie dried her eyes and tried to smile.

"Janet will think it is wonderful, because she always *did* like a farm," said she. "But the only choice in life now given me, is to move away to an outlandish farm up State, and leave all my

friends and favorite pastimes behind. When I think of having to live all my days on a barren bit of land, I wish I were dead!"

11

Janet tried to change the subject. "What did Miss Mason say when you told her you would not complete the year here?"

"Oh, you know what a faddist she is over that Girl Scout organization! Well, she talked to me of nothing but my splendid opportunities of opening a Country Camp on the farm and renting out the woodland to girls who would be glad to use it."

"But, Natalie, is it your own farm?" asked Janet and Norma.

"Why, of course! Didn't I tell you about it?" cried the girl impatiently.

"No, we thought it was someone else's farm—Mrs. James', or Mr. Marvin's, perhaps," explained Belle, gently.

"It used to be my great-grandmother's place. Mother was born there, but raised in the city. When grandmother died, Aunt stayed on there until she, too, died. Then it descended to mother, who leased it to a man for ten years. I have never even seen the horrid place, but I know it is a mile from anywhere on the map. Mr. Marvin says it is fine, and *he* wants me to go and live there."

12

"It sounds all right, Nat, if the house is habitable," remarked Janet, the practical girl of the group.

"I told Mr. Marvin to sell it for me, but he says I would be foolish to do that. He says I can live on it for some years and then sell it when I grow up and get more for it than if I sold it in its present condition. He says I could spend my summers there and try to grow strong and happy again, and in a few years he could ask a far better price for the property than would be advisable now. I reminded him of all the families who wanted homes, but he said the cost of building was so high that few sensible investors would consider buying an old house that needed remodelling. So there I am!"

"How big a house is it, Nat?" asked Janet, as a thought flashed through her mind.

"Mr. Marvin motored over there a few weeks ago, but I refused to go with him. Jimmy went, however, and has been raving over the place, ever since. I just had to tell her to keep quiet about it, or I'd run away from her."

13

Helene laughed softly: "But that isn't telling us how large a house you have on the farm!"

"What difference would it make?" retorted Natalie plaintively. "The very size of the barracks is a thorn in my side. It is a two-story affair, with long rambling wings. Jimmy says it is pure Colonial—whatever that means—and declares it is an ideal home."

"Then, for goodness' sake, Nat, why are you so glum? Any other girl would jump out of her skin for joy if she were left such a wonderful inheritance," rebuked Norma gently.

"Can't you girls understand? It isn't the house or farm I abhor so much as the isolation I shall have to live in. That splendid auto-tour I planned for the five of us is now out of the question. Even the apartment Daddy and I were so happy in, is too expensive for my income. If I can manage to keep any of my parents' lovely furnishings, I shall be more than lucky."

Her hearers were silenced by her pathetic complaint, but their teacher, Miss Mason, now came from the front door of the school and smiled invitingly at them. She was a great favorite with all the girls of her class, and these five in particular. She came straight over and stood with a hand affectionately resting on Natalie's shoulder as she spoke.

14

"Have you heard of Natalie's good fortune, girls?" asked she cheerfully.

"I thought it was fine, but Nat says I don't understand," said Janet eagerly.

"I don't believe Natalie can comprehend the fullness of the cup of opportunity that is handed her, until she sees the place with her own eyes. It is often difficult to visualize the possibilities in an idea from another's description. If you girls want to have a little outing on Saturday, I shall be delighted to drive you to Green Hill Farm in my brother's car. He has a seven passenger machine, you know, and will not be home to use it, this week-end," said Miss Mason graciously.

"Oh, Nat! Won't that be fine?" exclaimed several girlish voices eagerly.

15

"It will be a lovely trip, Miss Mason, and I'm sure we will all enjoy it," grudged Natalie.

"Maybe we can tuck Mrs. James in, somewhere, so she can play major-domo for us when we arrive at the farm," added Miss Mason.

"Maybe," admitted Natalie. "That is, if she cares to go again."

"This is Thursday, so we have to-morrow to make our final plans. If all is well, we can start out Saturday morning about ten," ventured Miss Mason, leaving no room for argument.

"I'll ask Jimmy when I go home, and let you know what she says," said Natalie.

"Where are you girls going now?" asked Miss Mason, with seeming guilelessness, but with intent aforethought.

"Why, Helene and I are going home, and Nat was invited to stay for dinner and spend the evening," replied Janet. "Norma and Francie are coming over after dinner, and bring Ned Foster and his cousin. They have a motion-picture camera, you know, Miss Mason, and it is such fun

16

taking moving pictures of each other.”

“That will be fine! Natalie will enjoy seeing herself as a screen star, won’t you, Nat dear?” laughingly replied the teacher.

“Oh, I don’t know, Miss Mason! Nothing is worth while any more. I just wish I were dead!” sighed the girl.

“No you don’t, Honey! It is just morbid sorrow that’s fastened itself in your heart. The moment you change your entire present state of mind for a more harmonious one, you will feel like a new being. Now run along with your chums and have a real—r-e-e-l—happy time.” Miss Mason’s joyous nature was contagious, and smiles appeared where intense feelings had drawn faces awry. So it was with Natalie: as Miss Mason turned to go down the street, she stood smiling after her, with a lighter heart than she had carried for many days.

The five girls walked arm-in-arm along the city street regardless of inconvenienced pedestrians who had to give way for them. But four of the girls vied with each other in cheering Natalie into a happy mood, for they felt so sorry for her. 17

The five schoolmates had known each other for more than five years, and being very near an age and in the same class in school, naturally became intimates. Janet Wardell lived a few blocks from Belle Barlow and Norma Evaston; and Frances Lowden and her brothers boarded at a Family Apartment Hotel, two blocks west of Norma’s home. Natalie Averill, supposedly the wealthiest girl in school, lived on Riverside Drive, in one of the modern apartment houses.

A few years previous to the opening of this story, Natalie’s mother passed away, and Mr. Averill devoted all his love and spare time to his motherless daughter. She was past the age when so much attention could spoil her disposition, but since her father’s death it was all the harder for her to live without such love and pampering. Even the funds that used to provide everything she asked for had vanished, and henceforth she must go without the things that had made her life so pleasant for a few years. 18

Mrs. James, lovingly called “Jimmy” by Natalie, had accepted the position of companion and mother to the little girl, when Mr. Marvin explained the situation. As Mr. Marvin was one of Mr. Averill’s closest friends, as well as being his attorney, his recommendation of Mrs. James was sufficient.

As for Mrs. James, a lady in birth and training, she knew Mr. Marvin would never offer her the home and charge of anyone that was not her equal in life. Being penniless was no disgrace, but she had found it most unpleasant when she met her old-time friends and could not feel free to accept invitations because of her limited circumstances.

This lovely home with every luxury, and her freedom in time and ways, made the position an attractive one for her. So she had held the reins of government very successfully since Mrs. Averill’s passing, and Mr. Averill’s appreciation of it was shown in his last words. 19

From perfect health and happy hours with his little daughter, Mr. Averill had suddenly been taken with acute indigestion and in an hour was gone. It was all so unexpected and helpless, that Natalie had not grasped the meaning of it until the day of the funeral. Then she gave way to hysterics and daily became more morbid and despondent.

Mr. Marvin had confided to Mrs. Mason that, in spite of there being so much ready money on hand whenever it was asked for in Mr. Averill’s lifetime, there was nothing left for Natalie’s future. When the funeral expenses were paid not a dollar would be on hand for rent, or food, or clothing. There were some rare and expensive paintings, antiques, and rugs, but they would be the only things that could be turned into ready money.

The lawyer had not given a thought to the farm in the Westchester Hills that had belonged to Mrs. Averill’s mother, as it had always been mentioned in an apologetic manner. So, naturally, Mr. Marvin believed it to be a tiny patch of poor land with a cottage of some kind on it. 20

Consequently he was all the more surprised when he opened the deed of the place, and found it was located a few miles west of White Plains, and a mile east of the Hudson Division of the New York Central Railroad. As he read down the printed page of the legal paper and found there were thirty acres of good land,—ten tillable, ten woodland, and ten pasturage,—with a substantial dwelling and some out-houses on it, he heaved a deep sigh of relief.

He telephoned Mrs. James at once, and explained the finding of the deed and what it meant for Natalie’s future. He also invited the chaperone and Natalie to go out with him and inspect the property that he might get an idea of the rent he should ask for it—or what price to value it in case he could find a purchaser.

Natalie would not go when the time came, so she knew not what the place looked like. It was enough for her that her dear mother had never wanted to live there and Daddy hardly ever mentioned it. Mr. Marvin could rent or sell it as he liked—but she would not take an interest in it. 21

To her utter disgust, Natalie found both Mrs. James and Mr. Marvin so delighted with the old farm that neither spoke of a sale, or of renting it. It seemed to be a settled fact that Natalie and her chaperone would move out and live there for the summer.

When the girl heard the verdict, she stormed away from the room and fled to the refuge she had always sought when she had been thwarted in anything in the past. That was Rachel’s big brown arms. Rachel had been housekeeper, cook, and nurse, alternately, in the Averill family. And the kind-hearted old colored mammy never failed “her li’l’ chile.”

But this time, when Natalie wept tears of misery over the idea of going to live on a farm, Rachel explained how much better that would be than to be adopted by a stranger, or have to live in a cheap boarding-school somewhere in the country.

22

Natalie had not dreamed of such an alternative, and as her old confidante described the hardships of being a poor scholar in a cheap boarding-school, or a handy-help in form of an adopted child in a working family, her tears vanished and a feeling of dread of such experiences caused her to consider the farm with a better grace. But it was not with enthusiasm or cheerfulness that she told her school friends her plans for the future.

So Miss Mason left the girls to enjoy the evening, while she hurried across town until she reached the address on Riverside Drive, where she hoped to find Mrs. James at home.

## CHAPTER II—A SECRET CONCLAVE

23

"Good-afternoon, Mrs. James," said Miss Mason cheerily, as she entered the hall of the apartment belonging to the Averills.

"To what happy circumstance do I owe this unexpected call?" asked Mrs. James, taking the teacher's hand in warm welcome.

"It was quite unpremeditated, and consequently I am unprepared with an answer," laughed Miss Mason. "But I can confess to being one of those objectionable persons that always want to run other people's affairs for them. I just left the five girls at the corner of Broadway, and hearing that Natalie would not be home this afternoon, I took advantage of that knowledge to run in and have a talk with you."

"I am very glad you did, as I have thought of asking your advice about a step Mr. Marvin advises me to take for the child."

24

"Perhaps that is the very business I came on. I want to help you run your affairs, you see, so I am here to offer my experiences in certain lines, and then I will try to encourage Natalie to look at a country life with different eyes than she has stubbornly used, recently," explained Miss Mason.

"Is it about the farm proposition?" asked Mrs. James.

"Yes, I left the girls talking it over, but Natalie seems to think she is giving up all that is worth living for, by going to live at Green Hill Farm."

"Yes, that is her attitude, exactly! Whereas Mr. Marvin says she ought to be the most grateful girl alive to find she has a lovely home ready-made to go into, instead of moving to a shabby school life where she will have to earn part of her expenses by waiting on table or doing chores," explained Mrs. James.

"Just so. And because I heard of the poor child's destitution, I am here to suggest several pleasant and wholesome plans by which she can not only live without cost to herself this summer on the farm, but also make enough money to pay your and her own way in the city next winter. Perhaps you are not interested in such suggestions?" ventured Miss Mason.

25

"Interested? My dear friend, you come like a blessing from heaven with this news. The only great obstacle to our going to the farm at once was the lack of money to stay there, with Rachel, all summer. No matter where one lives, one has to eat and abide. And eating costs money, and an abode needs furniture. The old house is empty and has to be completely furnished before we can move out there," explained Mrs. James.

"Well, then, listen to my idea. It has been tried out so successfully before, that I am not afraid to advise you to experiment for this season, anyway. It is this:

"You know what an enthusiastic member of the Girl Scouts' organization I am? Last year I offered my services free to a camp of girls who wanted to spend the summer away in the woods but had no place to go to without its costing a great deal, and no one would attend them in a camp which would be within their means. Then I happened in and saw how hungry these seven girls were for an outdoor life, so I offered them a corner of the woods on my brother's old farm down in Jersey. Some day I will tell you the story of our summer down there. It is worth hearing."

26

Miss Mason laughed to herself as she stopped for a moment to review mentally that experience. Then she proceeded.

"Now this is my idea: Natalie and the other four girls have been talking of joining the Girl Scouts ever since last fall, when I returned from camp. But they are like so many other well-meaning girls—they never quite reach the point where they act!

"My seven girls who spent the summer in camp with me last year are begging me to take them this year again. I have agreed to do so if we can find a good camp-site not so far from home as the Jersey farm was. I wish to be nearer a railroad than last year, too. We were more than nine miles from any store, or trolley, so it was most inconvenient to get any supplies.

27

"If Green Hill Farm is anything like what Natalie described it to me, after school this afternoon, I would rent some of that woodland in a minute. She said the stream ran through the farm at one

corner where the woodland watered ten acres. If Mr. Marvin will rent me enough of that land for a camp for my Girl Scouts it will bring in instant returns, and you will not have cause to regret it.

"By having my girls on the ground, I can rouse the interest of Natalie and her friends (if they visit her this summer), and in that way they will want to join my girls. We now have a Troop in process of organization, with the required eight members—a new Scout has joined since last year. These girls are about the same age as our five schoolmates, so there would be no disparity in years. I have been elected as Captain of the Patrol, but we have not yet chosen a Corporal for this year, as our meetings have been very irregular since school examinations began.

28

"These Girl Scouts became interested last spring, but not one of them attends my school, so I see little of them excepting when they call on me, or I attend one of their gatherings. Now that we are started on founding a Troop, we shall have weekly meetings and all the rest of the programme."

Miss Mason waited to hear if Mrs. James had anything to say about her suggestion, and the latter asked: "Do you think these seven—or eight—Scouts are on the same social plane as Natalie and her friends?"

"Yes, I do, or I would never have suggested their coming into contact with our five girls. They are not wealthy girls, and each one will have to support herself in a short time, but they are fine,—morally, mentally, and spiritually. A few of them are not perfect physically, and that is why I wish to give them another long summer out in the open. It is the best thing a young girl can do to build up her strength and health."

29

"That is a great relief—to hear they are good girls. I have been very careful of my girl's associations, you know, and now that her father is not present to protect her, I will have to use more precaution and better judgment than ever. This is one of the main reasons I have for urging her to live out of the city for a time."

"My Girl Scouts can be of great assistance to Natalie, if she will show a genuine interest in us. For instance, one of the members of my newly-fledged Patrol lived on a farm all her life before she moved to New York two years ago. She knows everything necessary for light gardening and barnyard stock. If you had any idea of planting the vegetable garden, or keeping chickens, Alice Hastings can show you how to do it."

"I had not thought so far as that—gardening and poultry—but there is a splendid lucrative business for a girl, I should say!" declared Mrs. James.

"Of course!" agreed Miss Mason. "And with a little care and good selection, a garden can be made to keep a houseful of people. Rachel is a good cook, and you are a thorough housekeeper, so what is there to interfere with Natalie having a few good boarders stay at the house during the summer?"

30

"That was my idea, when I first saw the farm. I told Mr. Marvin that we could ask very good prices and fill the spare-rooms, if Natalie would consent to it. We will need some money for repairs and necessary furniture for the extra chambers, but that is all. We have our housekeeping things, and quantities of linen for all purposes, besides bedroom furniture for five good rooms. I figure that the amount realized on the sale of the Oriental rugs and draperies, the pictures and antiques, would pay for all extras we may need, and give us capital with which to launch a boarding-house for the summer," explained Mrs. James.

"If you could find a number of girls of Natalie's own age to spend the summer with you, would you not feel more at ease about the responsibility of the undertaking?"

31

"Oh, of course! I am perfectly at home with girls, you know. And they would not demand such attention as adult guests, either," said Mrs. James.

"True! Then why not offer to chaperone a number of paying girls of Natalie's age for the season? There are so many parents who would like their girls to benefit by a summer in the country, but neither mother nor father can leave home, so the girl has to remain also, because of no suitable guardian to chaperone her!" declared Miss Mason.

"I'm sure your idea is practical. And I will speak to Mr. Marvin about it. If only Natalie would think favorably of the farm plan." Mrs. James sighed as she thought of the protests and tears she had to contend with whenever the subject was broached to Natalie.

"I'll tell you what I proposed to the girls just before I left them, then I must run along. I invited them to go out and see Green Hill Farm on Saturday. I said I would get my brother's car and motor out, so they could judge of the place,—whether it would make a pleasant home for the season or not."

32

"How very kind of you, Miss Mason!" exclaimed Mrs. James. "Mr. Marvin's automobile is too small to carry more than three of us, and then we are squeezed close together. He said he wanted an extra seat added, but everything is so backward this year, the company would not promise to deliver the car at all, if a seat had to be attached. Now this invitation of taking Natalie with her friends is far better than driving her over there alone. It will seem much more desirable to her if her chums praise the farm and house."

"That was my idea! And while they are roaming about the place, you and I might look over the chambers and other rooms indoors, and average up what might be the income from a number of paying girls," added Miss Mason.

"What a fairy-godmother you are, Miss Mason!" declared the elder woman. "Natalie always said

you were a dear, but I find you a most valuable adviser, too.”

“Mrs. James, who would not move heaven and earth to help a poor little child like Natalie, in her loss and forlorn state? Were it not for you being with her, I think she would have followed her father from sheer lack of interest in life. That is often the case, you know.”

“Yes, I know; but I am sure we have passed the worst phase in her sad experience, and will now turn our backs on the morbid sorrow and face the gladsome light,” said Mrs. James.

“That is one reason she ought to be in the country—where she is free from all memories and can find a new interest in life. But young companions are necessary, too, to suggest daily fun and work to each other.”

“Did the girls seem pleased with your proposal to take them to the farm on Saturday?” asked Mrs. James, anxiously.

“Oh yes, indeed! They were all delighted, so I left them with a date for ten o’clock in the morning. The girls can assemble here and I will call promptly with the car. Now I must really be going.” Miss Mason rose as she spoke, and held out her hand to her hostess.

“All I can say is, you’ll be laying up treasures in heaven for yourself if you give your summer vacation to girls who need the outing. Their gratitude and love will be a crown in the future, that you may well be proud of.”

“I will enjoy myself, too, never fear!” laughed the teacher.

“I wish there were more like you, then!”

“Perhaps we had best not speak to Natalie of our talk this afternoon,” ventured Miss Mason.

“No, I won’t mention your call. And we will let all other things work out naturally,—even the plan of taking girls to board this summer. We will wait and see if Natalie has any plans of her own,” returned Mrs. James.

So the teacher said good-by and left. Both women felt happy and confident that Natalie’s problems were being solved after this confidential chat. And when Natalie came home late that evening she was gayer than she had been for many weeks.

“What do you think, Jimmy!” cried she, as she ran in to kiss Mrs. James.

“I’m thinking it is something good, Honey,” returned the lady.

“Why, Helene’s and Janet’s mother said to-night that if I went to Green Hill Farm to stay this summer she would like to send them with me to *board!* Isn’t that interesting—to get an income out of my friends that way, while they feel that it will be a great favor on your part if the girls can come!”

“I should be very glad to take care of them, Natalie, if you think you would like to have them live with us this season,” replied Mrs. James, wisely refraining from mentioning a word about her talk with Miss Mason.

“And the moment Frances heard of the idea, she said she would coax and *coax* until her mother said she could come, too! That started Norma, naturally! And Belle declared that she would never stay home alone in New York if we all were having fun on the farm. In the end, Jimmy, all five girls were ready to leave home to-night, and start for the farm!” Natalie laughed merrily at remembrance of the eagerness of her friends to go and live on the farm. And Mrs. James was made happy at hearing that care-free laugh,—the first one the girl had given since her father was taken away.

“When Mrs. Wardell heard that I didn’t want to go to the farm, she said I was ‘cutting off my nose to spite my face.’ And she said I wouldn’t act so set against it if I would use a little wisdom and common sense in my thinking over the whole affair. Then Mr. Wardell told me what wonderful times every one has in the summer on a good farm. He said that any Westchester farm in that locality was most desirable. So I need not feel that I was going to live on a poverty-stricken patch of land, because I would be, most likely, within arm’s reach (metaphorically speaking, he said) of plenty of millionaires who loved quiet country life, and found it in the Westchester Hills. So now I am as curious to see my only home as you could want me to be.”

“I’m thankful for it,” sighed Mrs. James. “And I’m thankful to the Wardells for changing your opinions about Green Hill.”

### CHAPTER III—GREEN HILL FARM

Saturday morning Miss Mason drove her brother’s car up to the curb before the elegant apartment house where Natalie lived, and motioned the door-man to come out.

“Please telephone to the Averills’ apartment and say Miss Mason is waiting in the car. Let me know if they are ready.”

The uniformed attendant bowed politely and hurried in to obey the order. In a few moments Miss Mason heard a happy voice calling from the window in one of the upper apartments. She leaned



out and tried to look up, but all she could see was a fluttering of several handkerchiefs waved from several hands.

Then the porter came out and smilingly said: "Mrs. James says they will be right down, Miss."

"Thank you," was Miss Mason's reply, and she sat back to wait. But she had not very long for that, as a bevy of merry girls hurried out of the front door and ran across the walk. 39

"Oh, Miss Mason! Isn't it a glorious day?" called Janet.

"Couldn't be finer if we had ordered it for our trip!" added Belle joyously.

"And what do you think, Miss Mason?" cried Natalie, as happy as the others. "Jimmy had Rachel pack us a lovely picnic lunch so we could spend some time at the farm this noon. Won't it be fun?"

"Indeed it will—especially if that famous cook of yours prepared the goodies, Natalie," laughed Miss Mason.

"Jimmy will be down with us in a minute, Miss Mason," added Natalie; "she just stopped to telephone Mr. Marvin that we were all going to motor out to the farm. Maybe he can come out, too, and join us there."

"That will be splendid, as he can explain matters we may not understand," returned Miss Mason. 40

"I'm sure there's nothing to understand about a farm," ventured Natalie, laughingly.

"You say that because you never lived on one. But once you do, you will find out that the soil on your garden will have a great deal to do with the success of your vegetables. Even flowers need certain grades of soil before they grow to perfection. If you have a pasture lot on the farm, the quality of the grass will control the grade and amount of milk from the cows; it will prove valuable, or otherwise, to your horses, to the sheep, or other stock. Even the chickens that scratch over the field will show results in the good or poor soil they feed in."

"Why! How very interesting!" exclaimed Janet, wonderingly.

"But that need not bother us, Miss Mason, as vegetables and stock will not come into our lives," laughed Natalie.

Mrs. James had come out of the house and now she heard what Natalie said. "My dear child, one of the main reasons for our going to live on the farm is to offset the high cost of living in the city. By raising our own vegetables and eggs and chickens, we can live for one-tenth of the cost in the city." 41

"But, Jimmy, not one of us knows a thing about farming!" chuckled Natalie, amused at the very idea.

"Perhaps you don't know anything, but I do, Natalie." Mrs. James spoke gently. "I spent a few years of my early married life on a lovely farm near Philadelphia, dear, and there is not very much that I did not learn while there. To make a success of the investment, I found I had to take hold, personally, and not only supervise the work, but know *how* to do it, and to *do* it if occasion demanded it of me."

"Now it will just come in fine for Nat, won't it?" declared Janet, enthusiastically. Mrs. James and the teacher laughed appreciatively at the remark.

"Do tell us, Jimmy,—did Mr. Marvin say he would try to meet us at Green Hill?" asked Natalie, as the car started.

"Yes, he said he would try to get an old friend to accompany him. He was not sure that she could get away, but he proposed trying to coax her to do so." 42

"Is it an old friend of his?" asked Natalie.

"Yes, a friend of many years' standing," replied Mrs. James, smiling down at her idle hands.

"Do you know her?" continued Natalie, seeing the smile.

"Oh yes,—very well indeed!"

"Do I know her, too?"

"Yes, you know her."

"Maybe we all know her,—do we?" asked Janet suddenly.

"Yes,—you all know her," laughed Mrs. James.

"Who can it be?" exclaimed several voices, but Janet tossed her head and smiled knowingly at Mrs. James. The latter placed a finger on her lips for secrecy, and Janet nodded.

Many guesses were given but no one thought of the right name, and Mrs. James refused to divulge the secret. Then so many interesting sights were seen, as they drove swiftly along the Boulevard that runs through the Bronx Parkway and northwards through the pretty country section of Westchester, that the old friend who was to join them later at Green Hill Farm was eclipsed. 43

After a pleasant drive of less than an hour, Miss Mason turned off the Central Avenue road and followed a cross-country road that ran through the village where the farmers of that part of the country did their shopping and got their mail.

"If this is a village, where are the stores?" asked Natalie.

"I see it!" exclaimed Mrs. James.

"Oh, I see a little house with a few brooms standing on the front stoop. A sign swinging over the door says 'Post Office,'—but you don't mean to say that is our only shop?" laughed Natalie, as she jeered at the general country store.

"That is the 'Emporium' for Green Hill," said Mrs. James.

"No wonder, then, that we'll have to raise our own food and other necessities," retorted Natalie humorously.

The girls laughed, for truly the small store had amused them. New York stores were so different!

A mile further on, Mrs. James called to Miss Mason: "We are almost there now. It is the first house on the right-hand side of the road. You can see the towering trees of the front lawn from here."

Instantly every pair of eyes looked eagerly down the road and saw the fine big trees mentioned by Mrs. James. In a few minutes more the car was near enough to permit everyone to glimpse the house.

"Jimmy was right! It is an old peach of a place!" declared Natalie delightedly, as she took in the picture at a glance.

"Oh!" exclaimed Miss Mason. "What a treasure, Natalie! Genuine old Colonial, Mrs. James. I shouldn't wonder if it stood when Washington led his army across this land to reach Dobb's Ferry. Even the old hand-made shingles are still siding the house."

"Yes, I heard it was a Revolutionary relic that was as well preserved as any house around here. You see the fine old front entrance? With its half-moon window over the door and the hood for protection from storms? Even the old stoop and the two seats flanking the door, on each side, are the old ones."

"Dear me! To think this gem has been Natalie's right along, and no one knew of it!" cried Belle, who loved antiques and vowed she was going to be a collector some day.

"Not that alone, Belle, but think how Nat balked at coming here to spend this summer!" laughed Janet.

"Well, but—I hadn't an idea of what it was like," said Natalie apologetically.

"The Law that is the basis of all national laws, says 'Ignorance of the Law is no excuse for a criminal,'" quoted Miss Mason, smiling at Natalie.

"But, now, once I've seen it, I will confess I like it," Natalie admitted.

Miss Mason now drove the car through the gate which Norma had opened, and the automobile drew up to the side door where a long piazza ran the length of the wing. The moment the car stopped the girls sprang out in haste, to run about and see the place. But Natalie stood still on the lowest step of the piazza and gazed in at an open door.

"Someone's here!" whispered she to her friends.

Before anyone could reply, a buxom form filled the doorway and a wide grin almost cleft Rachel's face in half. She held out both hands to Natalie, and her expression signified a welcome to her "Honey-Chile."

"Why! Rachie! How did *you* get here? I left you at home!" exclaimed Natalie, not certain whether it was flesh and blood she saw, or a phantom.

"Diden I come by a short cut, Honey, an' wa'n't it a good joke on you-all to beat you to dis fahm!" laughed Rachel, delighting in the mystery.

"Oh, now I know! It was Rachel who is our friend, eh?" shouted Natalie, clapping her hands.

"Shore! Mr. Marwin done brung me in his speeder by d' Hudson Riber Turnpike. We turned offen d' main road afore we come t' Dobb's Ferry. Jus' d' udder side f'om Yonkers. Dat's how we come so quick," explained Rachel.

"Where is he? I want to thank him, Rachel!" cried Natalie, gratitude uppermost in her thought just then.

"You won't have far to go to find me," laughed a genial voice, and everyone turned to see Mr. Marvin standing behind them.

Then followed a visit indoors, with Mr. Marvin acting as guide from attic to cellar, and his party stringing out behind. Some loitered in a room, and then ran to catch up with the main guard. Or some lingered to admire a view or interesting object in the house, and hurried after the others later, for fear of missing something worth while.

The main hall ran from front to rear of the house, cutting it in half. On one side of the wide hallway was a "front parlor," and back of it the back-parlor, or "settin'-room," as the farmers called it. Across the hall was the dining-room and pantry, and leading from the pantry was the kitchen. These rooms were so spacious that Janet laughingly remarked: "Our entire apartment would go in one room."

"Look at the wonderful fireplaces!" exclaimed Belle.

"My! One can throw a log three feet long on the fire and not strike either side of the chimney," added Frances.

"Girls! Just see the funny little cupboards built in on each side of the chimney-facing," called Norma, opening one of the panels that fitted snugly to the bricks.

Everyone called attention to a different discovery. Janet laughed at the small wavy-glass window panes, that twisted the scene outdoors into grotesque views. Natalie marvelled at the great dark beams overhead that were not only hand-hewn from the timber, but also hand-planed. Mr. Marvin drew attention to the wooden pegs used in the corners of these beams, and the crude nails that a Colonial blacksmith had beaten into a form that could be used by the home-builder of the house.

"It is all so wonderful, Natalie, it seems like a dream!" exclaimed Miss Mason, delighted beyond words.

"Look at the heavy planks in the floors!" said Belle.

"Yes, even the wood in the floors is hand-sawn and smoothed down by hand and sandpaper. These floors will *never* wear out," said Mr. Marvin.

"Such a room ought to have sand on the floor instead of carpet. Picture this old house furnished, attic to parlor, in strictly old-time style, low wooden beds, high-boys, clothes-presses, and patchwork quilts adorning the foot of the beds; in the front hall, a small stand to hold the hand-dipped candles and sticks; a few braided mats in the 'company room' and in the hall, but not in the other rooms; and sand,—glistening white sand,—sprinkled over these floors every few days, and then washed out when the dust demands it."

As Miss Mason pictured the scene of the interior after the old Revolutionary period, everyone saw how lovely such a plan would be. When they followed Mr. Marvin up-stairs and saw the extensive view from the landing of the stairs, Mrs. James said: "Here we must have a seat, so one can sit and study the lovely, peaceful scene that stretches away over the hills."

The second floor had been divided into six rooms, with ample closet space in each. A modern bathroom had been installed a few years before by the tenant who had agreed to make all improvements and repairs at his own expense.

"Why! These bedrooms have electric lights in them!" exclaimed Natalie, thus drawing attention to the drop-lights.

"I didn't see any down-stairs," said Mrs. James.

"Did anyone think to look for them?" asked Miss Mason.

"No, we were all trying to see your old homestead with hand-dipped candles. The light they gave us was so dim we had no way of seeing the electric lights," laughed Natalie.

"I'm going down-stairs this minute, and assure myself if there are any," declared Miss Mason.

"No one would have them up-stairs and not have them on the first floor," said Mr. Marvin.

While the others went to the attic to revel in a real old-time spot, Miss Mason went down to the first-floor rooms to hunt for electricity. To her astonishment she found how cleverly the late tenant had arranged it. That he had a keen appreciation of the house was evident in many ways, but in none so plainly as in the lighting.

On top of each old-fashioned wooden mantel that crowned the fireplaces, at the end of each mantel-board shelf, Miss Mason found the plug for an electric fixture sunken on a level with the wood of the shelf. And on each side of the door opposite the fireplace, she found that the old-fashioned candlestick fixtures that had been admired as genuine Colonial bits, had been wired and were ready for a bulb. Also she discovered that a wall-plug was cleverly set in the high base-boards on either side of the room. From these one could run the wire for a table lamp, or a floor lamp, as preferred.

She hastened up-stairs to tell the others about it, but when she reached the second floor, such shouts of delight came from the attic, she could not resist the curiosity to go up.

"Miss Mason! Miss Mason!" shouted Natalie, the moment she saw the teacher's head appear above the stairway. "Just see what we found!"

"The very old pieces that Natalie's grandmother used!" added Belle, pulling Miss Mason across the floor.

"Isn't it all like a fairy tale, Miss Mason?" laughed Janet, eagerly clasping her hands in her excitement.

Mrs. James and Mr. Marvin were dragging great heavy pieces of mahogany from under the eaves, and the several objects already brought to view were being dusted, duly examined and admired by the young girls.

Miss Mason saw one fine old high-boy and another old low-boy. The foot-boards of three mahogany beds were already out on the floor, and the two discoverers were working hard to pull out the other sections of the beds. Miss Mason immediately went to work to bring to light some old rush-bottomed chairs which were so covered with cobwebs and dust that one could scarcely see them under the dark eaves.

When lack of breath caused the three eager workers to desist and rest for a short time, an

inventory was made. Natalie joyously called out the items while Mr. Marvin wrote them down.

"Two low-boys; three high-boys; one side-board; five dining-room chairs with haircloth covered seats; one round extension table; nine odd chairs with rush-bottoms; four wash-stands of mahogany, with basin-holes and under-shelf for ewer of water; four complete mahogany fourposter beds, with rope webbing for springs; one damaged four-poster bed; box of old candlesticks, and snuffers, etc."

54

"To think that this wonderful old collection of Colonial furniture was here all these years and the tenants never took them, or used them!" exclaimed Janet.

"That goes to show how honest they were," added Norma.

"The finding of this old family furniture certainly is opportune," remarked Mr. Marvin. "With these pieces as a start, you can add to the collection from time to time. I should advise you to keep only such pieces from the city home, Natalie, as will harmonize with old Colonial things. Also retain any intimate objects, but sell all the rest that is only suitable for New York apartments."

As they all went down-stairs again, Miss Mason remembered the electric fixtures in the rooms on the first floor.

When she told of the admirable manner in which the wires had been run to bring out the best results, in keeping with the type of room, Mrs. James was surprised.

55

"I would never have thought a farmer had enough educated judgment to do it. It only proves how we *mis*-judge them by considering a farmer an ignorant individual who does nothing but grub on his farm."

"Mos' time you-all come down f'om dat garret. I done call an' *call*, 'til my lungs bust open. My goodness! dat fine lunch mos' spiled, now!" Rachel stood at the foot of the old stairs, glowering up at the delinquents who had never heard a sound from her while they were in the attic.

"Oh, Rachel! We found the loveliest things up in the attic! Just think, Rachie, my very own great-grandmother's mahogany furniture was tucked away under the dark eaves, and Jimmy found it!" cried Natalie, catching hold of Rachel's fat hands and shaking them excitedly.

"Is dat so, Honey?" gasped Rachel, forgetting all about the luncheon and the tardy guests.

"Uh-huh! And we are going to keep everything in the old house strictly Colonial, so it will look like a picture," said Natalie, leading the way to the side verandah where the luncheon had been spread upon newspaper.

56

Everyone was hungry and Rachel's viands were always tempting, so full justice was done the sandwiches and other good things provided. Rachel bustled about with importance, as she waited on her "chillun" and insisted upon Mr. Marvin having a third cup of tea. Had she but known the truth—he never took tea in the city, but dearly liked strong black coffee after a meal.

"Now you-all kin clar out and see th' fahm whiles I do up the leavin's f'om lunch. Run down an' see d' riber an' what fine woods we got acrost d' paster-lot. You'll fin' plenty to see an' keep you busy 'til I finishes cleanin' up," said Rachel.

Miss Mason was intensely interested in the woods that formed a boundary of the property along the riverside for a long stretch. Mrs. James understood her interest, but no one else had been taken into the teacher's confidence. She wished to see possibilities before she spoke of the Patrol of Girl Scouts who were looking for a camp-site.

57

However, she found everything so desirable that she soon engaged Mr. Marvin in a talk that ended with her having rented a section of woodland for the summer, at a nominal price. She was to give Natalie and her friends certain lessons in scouting and take them on the hikes with the Scouts when they all studied birds, beasts, and other Nature-lore, as part of the consideration.

It was past three o'clock before the inspectors were ready to start back home. Rachel had been sitting on the door-step of the spacious kitchen for a long time before she spied them coming across the fields from the stream.

"Ef you-all 'specks to get back home in time fer dinner, we's got to get a hustle on, 's all I say!" grumbled she.

"Hoh! Rachel wants to attend Meetin' to-night, and she hates being late!" laughed Natalie teasingly.

58

"Mr. Marvin will get her home all right, long before we are half-way there," said Mrs. James soothingly.

"Seein's this comin' Sunday'll be my las' at chu'ch fer a hull summer, yuh can't wonder I wants to be on time at choir practice t'-night," remarked Rachel apologetically to Mr. Marvin.

"Of course not! I'll agree to have you back in the city in a jiffy! And now that I think of it, Rachel,—why should you bother to prepare dinner for us to-day? Let me take the girls out somewhere for one night, and you will have time to get to church early in order to say good-by to all your friends!"

As that was all Rachel wished,—to show the importance of herself and her family who owned such a fine country-place, and brag about it to her bosom friends,—she smiled serenely and sat down in the roadster driven by the lawyer.

The others stood and smiled, too, as they watched Mr. Marvin drive away, and then turned to get into Miss Mason's car to start back to the city.

## CHAPTER IV—GIRL SCOUT FARMERETTES

59

Mrs. James sent word to the storekeeper at the Corners, directing him to hire help and send them to Green Hill Farm to clean up the house thoroughly. Also to see that a man mowed the lawns and cleaned up the barns and yards.

Then came the work of selecting the things Natalie wished to keep, and packing them ready to ship to Green Hill. The other furnishings in the apartment would not be sold until after the girl was out. Mr. Marvin said there was no need to cause her any unnecessary heartache.

The second week in June, Mr. Marvin sent word to Mrs. James that the house was ready for occupancy whenever she wished to move out there. Not only was the old furniture placed in the respective rooms, but the pieces that had been shipped from the apartment in New York were also arranged for the time being. The only things to be moved were the trunks and the cases containing the dishes and bric-à-brac which Natalie would keep.

60

Mrs. James read the letter to Natalie at the breakfast table and said: "The sooner we can get away from here, dear, the better for all. Mr. Marvin can then save a whole month's rent for you, as the owner agreed to cancel the lease when Mr. Marvin explained the circumstances. If we remain to the end of this month, it will take an extra week to dispose of what remains here, and that will necessitate another month's rent if it goes over the first of July."

"Oh, I'll be only too glad to get away from the home where every room and object speaks of dear Daddy!" cried Natalie. "Green Hill is so lovely at this time of the year that I feel as if I could look forward there to meeting Daddy and mother again without feeling any grief at the parting now."

"Then let us say we will start in a day or two!" exclaimed Mrs. James eagerly.

"But what about school, Jimmy? Exams will not come off until the third week, and I don't want to miss any."

61

"Natalie, maybe we can arrange some way with Miss Mason by which you can take yours without being in school," said Mrs. James.

"I'll see her to-morrow, Jimmy, and if she says I may do it that way, I'll go with you at once."

"If she can't make such an exception in your case, Natalie, we may be able to arrange so you can commute to the city for the few last weeks of school."

The next noon Natalie hurried home with the good news that the Principal had been interviewed and had granted Natalie permission to take her examinations all at one time during the next few days of school, as her average for the year had been so splendid. The fact that she maintained a high standard all year through in her classes showed that she would not fail now in her yearly examinations.

"Oh, but this is good news, dear!" exclaimed Mrs. James joyously.

62

"Yes, isn't it? If it wasn't for Miss Mason taking the time and interest in me that she does, the Principal would never have listened to my request. It seems rather wonderful to have a teacher who is a real friend, too!"

"We're grateful, no matter through what channel the good came; but I, too, think Miss Mason a good friend to have," remarked Mrs. James.

"She said something to me, as I left this noon, about your telling me of her Scout camp. She laughed and said I would be surprised and—perhaps—annoyed. If it was the latter feeling, I was to consider she owed me a debt that she would try to pay as soon as possible. It sounded so amusing, coming from her to me, who owes her all obligations for what she has done for me, that I am keen to hear what you have to explain."

Mrs. James smiled. "I am sure you will be pleased, Natalie. Miss Mason rented a section of the woodland that runs along the river bank at Green Hill for a camp for her Girl Scout Patrol she told us of. They all expect to go there on the first of July."

63

"Oh, goody! Isn't that just scrumptious!" cried Natalie delightedly.

"I thought you would like it, but Miss Mason was not so sure that you would welcome her Scouts. The girls are all good girls, but they have not had the money or social advantages that you and your friends have. I told Miss Mason that the sooner all such fol-de-rol was dispelled in a girl's mind the better. And these eight sensible young girls will help dispel the nonsense."

"That's right, Jimmy! Since I find myself thrown on the mercy of the world, I begin to see how unfounded is one's faith in money or position. One day it is yours and the next it is gone!"

"Rather precocious views for so young a maid, Natalie," said Mrs. James, smiling indulgently at her protégée.

Natalie sighed. "Is it not true?"

“True, of course, but you have not proven it to be so yet. You speak from hearsay and from book knowledge. You have not had to make the sorry experience your own yet.”

64

“Why, Jimmy! Don’t you call my losses the test?” said Natalie, offended that Mrs. James should consider her limited condition anything less than a calamity.

The lady laughed. “Child, you have a lovely home and land free and clear of debt. It is worth at *least* ten thousand dollars right now. With judicious handling it will be worth four times that sum in a few years. You have Rachel and me to live with you and love and cherish you—as well as protect you. You have Mr. Marvin to take all charge of your business interests, and last, but not least—you have four loyal young friends who stick to you whether you have money or not. This is far from being thrown on the cold mercy of the world!”

Natalie thought deeply over this but she said nothing.

“Well, let’s get busy packing, Jimmy! I want to get away this week, if we can.”

“Are you not going back for the afternoon session of school?” asked Mrs. James, surprised.

65

“Didn’t I tell you I was free now? I do not have to return except for exams. The classes are only reviewing the last term’s work now, so I do not have to report for that.”

“Oh, how nice! Then we will get to work at once.”

By afternoon of Wednesday, all baggage was out of the apartment, and the three occupants were prepared to leave early in the morning. Mr. Marvin had been notified and he said the key for Green Hill house was at the general store. Mrs. Tompkins would give it to them. Mr. Tompkins had followed his wife’s advice and stocked up the kitchen and pantry with whatever groceries Rachel would need to begin with.

“Isn’t that thoughtful of the Tompkins, Natalie?” said Mrs. James gratefully.

“Yes, I feel that we will be good friends—the Tompkins and us.”

Natalie had informed her schoolmates that she was to go on the nine o’clock local in the morning, and so wished them all good-by that night.

66

“It isn’t really ‘good-by,’ Nat, because we will all see you again so soon,” giggled Norma.

Belle sent Norma a warning glance and explained hastily: “Yes, it is only a few weeks before we will be up on the farm with you.”

“Try to fix it, girls, so you can all join me on the farm as soon as school closes,” said Natalie.

“That will be fine!” declared a chorus of voices.

So repeated good-bys were said and Natalie wondered why the girls thought it all so funny! The next morning as Mrs. James and Natalie stood in line at Grand Central Station to buy their tickets, four laughing girls pounced upon Natalie, and as many girlish voices said: “Didn’t you suspect? How could you believe we would let you go away without sending you off in a royal manner?”

Natalie laughed joyously. “But it isn’t to the North Pole, girls! And it is only a few weeks before you will be there.”

67

“Never mind! If it is only for a few days, we would see that the railroad company was duly impressed with your importance because of your friends who escort you to the train,” laughed Janet.

Mrs. James had purchased the tickets by this time, and they all started to find Rachel, who was waiting with the baggage. Then they hunted up the particular gate that gave way to the platform of the train they wanted, and passed through in a grand procession.

Rachel was last to pass, and as she tried to force the unwieldy bags through without allowing for the narrow brass rails, she got them stuck. A porter sprang forward to assist her, but she scorned him.

“Whad foh yoh try t’ show off *now*? Ef yoh had any sence in yoh haid, yoh’d seen I cud have used help befoh dis! Clar out, now, and don’ show yoh kinky monkey-face heah ag’in!”

As she puffed out the angry words, Rachel struggled with the baggage, and finally shot through with the release of the knobby portmanteau that held her precious property. The gate-keeper laughed quietly at the discomfiture of the porter who was inordinately proud of his new uniform and brass-corded cap. To be termed a “monkey-face” by an old mammy was past endurance!

68

The incident caused a merry laugh with the group of girls, and Natalie said: “There, Rachel! I told you to let us carry one or two of your bags,—you were too laden for anything!”

“Da’s all right, Honey! I ain’t lettin’ yoh lug yohse’f to pieces fer me; but dat pickaninny what’s dressed up like a hand organ monkey makes his livin’ by fetchin’ an’ carryin’; so he oughta know his bis’nis, er someone’s got to teach him it.”

As Natalie reached the platform of the train, she stood still to bid her chums good-by again. Suddenly she remembered what had occurred the night before.

“Oh, is that why you laughed when I said it need not be a long good-by?”

“Surely! we had it all planned to come and see you off, and give you consolation in some tangible form because you would be deprived of our gracious company for two weeks,” giggled Belle,

69

holding out a ribbon-bowed box.

"What's that for?" demanded Natalie, trying to act impatient because the girls spent their money on her. But her acting was very poorly done.

"And I thought you would need some farming implements at Green Hill, so I managed to secure these for you," added Janet laughingly.

She held out a long package that defied guessing as to its contents, so Natalie took it and laughed merrily with the others.

"And I brought your favorite nourishment, Nat. One of mother's 'chocolate' layercakes," said Norma.

"Oh, my goodness! How shall I carry it without mashing the icing?" exclaimed Natalie, managing, however, to place the square box upon her arm where it was carefully balanced.

"And I, Nat," said Frances, "feared you would lack fruit on the farm, and so I tried to start you with a supply from the New York orchards." 70

It takes little to make a merry heart laugh, and at each silly schoolgirl speech made with the gift Natalie laughed so heartily that it was contagious.

"All aboard!" called the conductor, consulting his timepiece and waving Mrs. James into the coach.

"Good-by! Good-by!" shouted five girls, and Natalie was bundled into the train and found herself watching the girls as the train receded from the station.

After she was seated and had tested the box of candies Belle had given her, Natalie saw Mrs. James deeply interested in a paper-covered book.

"What's the name of it?" asked she, handing the candy-box across the aisle to Rachel.

"Looks like candy," replied Rachel, thinking the girl was speaking to her.

Natalie laughed. "I meant the book, Rachie," explained she.

Mrs. James looked up with a half absentminded manner. "What did you say about the book, dear?" 71

"I asked you what it was. Who wrote it?"

"Oh, it is the new book 'Scouting for Girls,' that Miss Mason gave me last night. It is certainly very interesting, Natalie."

"Is that the Scout Girls' Manual?" said Natalie, surprised at the thickness of it.

"Yes, and ever so good! It is filled, from cover to cover, with wonderful information. I never dreamed so much could be found in Nature that is so absorbing to read about or study."

"I wonder why Miss Mason did not give me a copy?" was Natalie's rejoinder.

"She spoke of it. She said she would send it by one of the girls this morning. Didn't you get it?" asked Mrs. James.

"I wonder if it is in that box?"

As she spoke, Natalie began undoing the cord that wrapped the long box, and having removed the paper and then the box-cover, she found not only the Manual inside, but a hand-trowel and a weeder. 72

"Of all things!" laughed she, as she held out the box to show Mrs. James. "A shovel and a rake for my garden."

Then it was Mrs. James' turn to laugh. "That is not a shovel, nor is the other a rake, Natalie."

"Oh, isn't it? What is it, then?"

"The trowel is used when you wish to dig shallow holes, or loose-earth trenches. The so-called rake is a weeder that you can use about delicate roots, or in forcing deep roots to let go and come up. Both are very necessary for a farmer to use about his house-garden."

"Well, if I ever have occasion to use them, I shall remember Janet."

"Then you will be remembering her every day this summer, I think," laughed Mrs. James. "Weeds are the pest of a farmer's existence."

Natalie was soon absorbed in her Scout book also, and Rachel was the only one of the trio who could tell about the scenery they passed as the train sped on to the nearest station to the secluded little village near the farm. 73

As the three travellers left the train and stood on the old platform of the country station, Natalie gazed about.

"My goodness! What a desert for isolation. Not a human being in sight, and no sign of a house or barn. Nothing but glaring sign-boards telling us where to stop in New York for a dollar per night—private bath extra!" exclaimed she.

Mrs. James laughed. It was true, but it sounded funny the way Natalie spoke.

"We ain't got to walk, has we, Mis' James?" asked Rachel plaintively.

"I don't see anything else to do, Rachel. Do you?"

"Not yet, but mebbe someone'll come along. I'd jes' as soon ride behin' a mule es not. Th' misery in my spine is *that* bad sence I've be'n packin' and movin' so hard all week."

"A mule would be welcomed, but there is none," laughed Natalie.

"Isn't the landscape beautiful?" said Mrs. James, gazing about with admiring eyes.

"As long as it is all that is beautiful to look at at this station, I must agree with you, Jimmy," teased Natalie.

But both of them now saw Rachel staring down at the dusty road that ran past the platform, and when she dropped her bags and started along the road, acting in a strange manner, Mrs. James whispered nervously to Natalie.

"What can be the matter, Natalie? Can anything have made her brain turn?"

Rachel kept on going, however, bending over and staring at the dust in the middle of the road. Natalie was dumbfounded at such queer behavior, and was about to call to the colored mammy, when Rachel suddenly stopped, straightened up and shouted at something hidden from the eyes of the two who were waiting with the bags.

"Heigh dere! Come back foh us, yoh hackman!" was the echo that was wafted back to the station and the patient waiters.

Both of them laughed heartily. And Natalie said: "That was what she was doing! Obeying Scout instructions the first thing, and 'tracking a horse' in the wilds of this land."



"Maybe that is the cab Mr. Marvin ordered to meet us."

"Maybe that is the cab Mr. Marvin ordered to meet us. He said we must not be discouraged if it turned out to be a 'one-horse chaise' instead of a taxi," remarked Mrs. James, highly amused at the experience.

Natalie made a vicious slap at a green bottle-fly that had annoyed her ever since she alighted from the train. Now she laughed and said: "Not a one-horse chaise, Jimmy, but 'one horse-fly' is here to meet us."

It was such an opportune play on words that they both laughed merrily. Rachel was now found to be arguing with a man seated in an antique vehicle. He seemed to enjoy the conversation immensely, for he was comfortably stretched out with his feet up over the dashboard and his arms resting along the top of the back of his seat.

"Let's go over and add our persuasions to Rachel's," said Natalie, picking up her luggage and starting away.

When they drew near enough to hear the conversation between Rachel and the man, the former was saying: "Yuh don't know what I kin do to yoh! Do yuh want to see my pow'ful arm?"

The driver sat up at that and looked at the doubled up thickness of that member of Rachel's anatomy. Then he said: "But I always gits that much a head fer such a long trip."

"What's the matter here?" demanded Natalie, coming up to join in the argument.



"Chile, dis highway robber wants to take fifty cents a haid fer takin' us acrost to Green Hill Fahm. Why, it ain't no furdur'n f'om heah t' dere, an' I tells him it is stealin'. In Noo York sech profiteers gits what's comin' t' 'em."

Mrs. James interpolated at this. "Fifty cents each is not too much, Rachel. But he must take the luggage as well."

The colored woman retreated at that, and cabby chuckled. "How much baggage?"

"Three suit-cases and these bags and hat-boxes."

"I don't see no suit-cases," mumbled he.

"You would, if you had been at the station where you belong. The station-man took the checks and turned the bags over to us before going away to enjoy himself until the next train comes in," retorted Natalie, impatiently. 77

"All right; I'll wait fer yuh 'til yuh git back," agreed the driver, preparing to take things easy again.

"See here," said Mrs. James, sternly. "Are you Amity Ketchum?"

"Yes'um,—at your service."

"Then you're the man our lawyer engaged to meet the train and drive us to Green Hill. Now stop your arguing and get those suit-cases, then take us to our home."

Mrs. James' erstwhile good-nature turned like the proverbial worm and she became very imperious. So much so, that lazy Amity chirruped to his horse and went back for the baggage. When he returned and stopped beside the ladies, Mrs. James got in and sat on the back seat that was adjustable to meet demands. Natalie got in and sat beside her, and Rachel laboriously climbed up and dropped into the vacant seat beside the driver. The entire vehicle cracked when her ponderous weight fell upon the old bench, and Amity scowled threateningly at her black, shiny face. 78

"I gotta stop at Tompkins' fer some groceries," grumbled Amity, with scant ceremony in his tones.

There was silence for the time it took to reach the "Emporium" at the Corners, but when the proprietor hurried out to welcome the city people, the latter smiled and felt better for his friendliness. Amity had gone inside to get his order filled, and then came out with arms laden with packages.

Mrs. Tompkins followed her customer out to the steps, and was introduced by her husband to the three strangers. She was very pleasant and told Mrs. James to call upon her for anything she needed or wanted done. After thanking the gracious woman, Mrs. James was about to ask her advice on an important matter, but the hackman gave his horse a cut with the hickory stick, and almost dislocated his passengers' necks with the lurch given the vehicle. 79

The two storekeepers were left standing on the steps watching the buckboard pass out of sight. Mrs. James was angry, but said nothing more. She knew how Rachel's temper was instantly kindled when anyone dared to offend a member of her revered family, and she understood just what Amity would get if he was not more considerate towards them.

Having driven little less than a mile along the good highway, Amity suddenly turned off into a rough, badly-kept country road. Mrs. James looked anxiously back, and on each side, then said: "Mr. Ketchum, this is not the road to Green Hill Farm. You should have kept right on that other road."

"I know it!" retorted Amity. "I'm going this way so's to leave these vittles at my house fer dinner."

"Is your house far out on this road?" queried Mrs. James, after an unusually hard bump of the vehicle over a deep rut.

"Not so fer. I'll turn down th' next lane, and then to the right, and there's my place. There's a back road what runs from my farm to your woodland. I kin go that way and drive you up to your barn by a wood-cutter's road," explained Amity. 80

"Well, I hope you won't find any worse roads than this is, when we turn into that lane," was Mrs. James' reply. But the words were disconnected because of the incessant bouncing of the buckboard along the dried mud and over large stones imbedded in it.

Rachel had to cling with both hands to the small iron handle at the side of the board seat, but she fared better than the two in the back seat, as she was too heavy to be easily moved; and the driver's seat was stationary, whereas the second seat slid dangerously up and down the shallow grooves into which its side-feet fitted loosely. The side on which Rachel sat sagged at least ten inches lower than on Mrs. James' side, and the latter found it necessary to balance herself on her left hip to retain any sort of seat whatever.

They had travelled a mile of this sort of roadway when Cherub, the horse, of his own accord, turned in at a gap in the old rail fence and approached a carelessly-kept farm and dilapidated house. This private road was far worse than the one they just left, but Mrs. James and her companions expressed no impatience over it. 81

Then they came to what might have been a very picturesque stream, had the banks on both sides

been kept in order. The only visible bridge over this water was composed of enough loose planks to give passageway for wagons or cattle. These old planks were not secured in any way, and moved threateningly when anything came in contact with them.

On both sides of this crude bridge the rains had washed out the dirt from under the planks, so that deep ruts formed. And just before reaching this rut, on the side of approach by the vehicle, was a huge boulder that thrust up its jagged head from the very middle of the rough roadway.

Amity had known of this obstruction in the road for a long time, but he was too lazy to remove this menace. He had always managed to guide the horse so that the wheels just managed to clear the rock. Sometimes, with a heavy load on the buckboard, the flooring would scrape along the top of the stone, but a little nerve-racking thing like that never phased Amity. 82

This time, however, Cherub was in a great hurry to get his feed, which he was sure would be awaiting him in the barn, so he failed to respond to the usual hard yank on the reins. The consequence was, one fore-wheel struck sharply in the middle of the boulder, and brought the buckboard to an unexpected stop. The awful strain on the old rotten harness when Cherub pulled and the vehicle was held up, caused the frayed rope mendings to part and the eager horse hurried forward, leaving his unwelcome drag behind.

Of course, the violent halt sent the occupants of the buckboard suddenly forward, so that Mrs. James unceremoniously struck Amity in the back and caused him to lose his breath. Had he not had his feet braced against the foot-rail in front, he would have fallen forward. Rachel, not having used the foot-rail and not expecting any catapulting, went headlong over the old dashboard. As the board was meant for a screen from water and mud and not as a support for such a heavy body as Rachel's, it splintered and let her sag down between the empty shafts, her head resting on the whiffle-tree and her heels wildly kicking close to Natalie's head. 83

The two other passengers were too frightened to notice that Rachel had on her hand-knitted, gayly striped stockings, brought years ago from "Norf Car'liny" and only worn on rare occasions; and Amity was too anxious to coax Cherub back and save himself any effort by going for him, to think of assisting Rachel to extricate herself from the broken-in dashboard.

Natalie and Mrs. James jumped out and, after heroically lifting and pulling, managed to bring Rachel right-side-up once more. The moment she learned what had happened, and saw the driver waiting for Cherub to return, she shook a doughty fist at him and scolded well.

So impressive were her speech and actions that Amity considered "discretion to be the better part of valor" this time, and jumped out to catch Cherub and bring him back to his job. While the hackman was away, Rachel turned to Mrs. James and spoke. 84

"Ef yoh-all pays dat good-fer-nuttin' one cent affer my mishap, den I goes straight back t' Noo York an' gits d' law on him to mek him pay me fer playin' such tricks on defenseless women."

"He didn't do it on purpose, Rachel. It was an accident," explained Mrs. James, hoping to placate Rachel before Amity came back with the horse.

"Ah don' care—akserdent er no akserdent, I ain't goin' foh to have no fool-man like him dumpin' me down between dem shafts what is fit onny fer a mule! Now yoh heah me? Don' yoh go foh to pay him nuttin' fer dis trip!" retorted Rachel with ire.

Natalie laughed unrestrainedly at the funny scene, but the driver was again crossing the bridge, leading the balky Cherub, so she managed to cover her face to hide her amusement. While Amity tried to tie up the damaged portions of the harness so that the trip might be completed, Rachel came over and glared down at him. 85

"Say, yoh pore mis'able chunk of cotton-haid! Don' yoh know I kin kerleck damages f'om yoh foh whad happened t' me on dis premises of yourn?"

Amity looked up and returned her glare. "Say, you old black mammy, don't you know I kin make you pay handsome fer smashin' my buckboard? Even the harness would have held if you hadn't been so heavy as to make Cherub break away from the load."

That was too much for Rachel. She straightened up with family pride and planted her hands on her ample hips as she declared: "See heah, ig'nant clod-hoppeh! Don' yoh go an' fool yohse'f wid t'inkin' I'se as easy-goin' as dat harness ob yourn—'cus I ain't! I'm an out-an'-out Noo Yorker, I am, an' yoh kin ast Mis' James! I made one on dem fresh conductors in Noo York pay me fohty dollahs onct, when he started his trolley an' dumped me down flat in th' road an' druv away a-laffin at me. An' I wasn't damaged half as much dat time, as you done." 86

Amity had finished tying up the harness and was backing Cherub into the shafts as he listened to this warning. He now half-closed his squinty eyes and switched the quid of chewing tobacco from one cheek to the other before he replied to Rachel. Then he drawled out tantalizingly: "You big blackberry, you! Puttin' on such airs about what you did to car-conductors! But I ain't no easy mark like 'em,—see?"

Rachel gasped at his insolence and turned to Mrs. James for succor. Words failed her.

"Amity Ketchum," commanded Mrs. James sternly, "drive us to our destination without further delay, or any more words!"

This gave Rachel courage to add: "Da's whad I say, too! Whad'he wanta bring us all outen our way, anyway, when we hired him to drive us t' Green Hill Fahm, an' da's all!"

"Ef someone here don't make her shet up sassin' me so I'll dump all your baggidge out an' you 87

kin all walk to Green Hill, es far es I care!" threatened Amity, standing up defiantly and refusing to get into the buckboard and start on the way.

Natalie turned to see how far the main road might be, and Mrs. James glanced fearfully at the number of heavy suit-cases and bags to be delivered at the farmhouse, but Rachel was the one to call his dare.

"Ef yoh hain't in dat seat an' drivin' dat bony nag along in jus' two secunts,—den yoh go haid-fust down in dat water—unnerstan' me?" She rolled up her loose sleeves and showed a pair of powerful arms that looked like business.

Amity was a thin little man, and this Amazon apparently meant what she said, for she came for him with dire purpose expressed in her face. So he jumped into the buckboard and started the horse across the bridge without waiting for Rachel to get in.

Mrs. James rapped him on the shoulder to stop, and Natalie called to Rachel to hurry and get in, but Amity seemed unable to make Cherub halt and Rachel tossed her head and scorned to ask the man to let her ride. To Natalie's coaxings, she shouted back: "Don' worry, Honey! Rachel ain't goin' t' contaminate herse'f by sittin' nex' to sech white trash."

But the road was bad and walking was irksome for Rachel who was accustomed to stone walks and trolleys in the city when she felt tired. She had to jump mud-puddles that reached across the road, or plough through the sandy deep when the way ran alongside a sand-pit and sand lay heavy on the road.

Finally Amity drove up the hill that ascended from the river, and stopped beside the piazza steps. The driver felt that he had finished a hard day's work, and now sat back resting, allowing the ladies to get down as best they could.

Mrs. James took her purse from the hand-bag to pay for the trip, when Rachel puffed up beside them. She saw the luggage still in the vehicle, and turned to order Amity.

"Carry dat baggidge t' th' doah, yoh lazy-bones!"

"I was hired to drive three passengers to Green Hill. I done it, an' that's all I have to do!" retorted he.

"Mis' James, don' yoh dare pay him a cent till he min's what I tell him," commanded Rachel, stern because she was on her own soil at last.

Amity remembered he had not been paid, so he grumblingly transferred the bags from the buckboard to the steps, then held out his hand for his payment. "Dollar an' a half," said he.

"Mis' James, don't you go an' pay him no moh den one dollah, I tells yoh! He cain't make me pay nottin' cuz he made me walk half th' way. Dat don't stan' in any United States Co'ht, no-how!" shrilled Rachel, furiously.

Mrs. James had opened her purse and hesitated between two fires—"to pay, or not to pay" the full price asked.

"Don't fergit my dashboard is smashed, an' I ain't sayin' a word 'bout payin' fer dat!" snapped Amity. "An' don' yoh fergit my se'f respeck an' modesty what was smashed when yoh made me stan' on m' haid in dose shaffs! I shore will git Mr. Marwin to sue yoh, ef yoh don't go 'long 'bout yoh bis'nis!" exclaimed Rachel.

Mrs. James placed a dollar bill on the front seat, and turned to Natalie and said: "Open the side-door, dear, so we can go in."

Amity got up in the buckboard, took the dollar and drove away without saying another word. Rachel waited and watched him drive to the front gate, where he turned to call back to her: "When you want a job in a circus as a giant huckleberry, come to me fer references. 'I'll tell th' worl' what a fighter you are!"

And Rachel shouted back at him: "Yoh got th' fust an' last cent outen dis fam'ly foh joy-ridin'! I'm goin' to start a hack-line an' put yoh outen bis'nis, ef I has t' take all m' life-insuhance money to do it, I am. I got a nephew what'll be glad t' he'p me do a good turn to th' country, as puttin' yoh back whar yoh b'long!" Then she turned to her companions for their approval.

## CHAPTER V—INVESTIGATING GREEN HILL FARM

As Rachel labored breathlessly with the baggage, she failed to notice any changes in the appearance of the house or grounds, but Natalie saw an improvement.

"What has been done, Jimmy, to make everything look so trim and nice?"

"I hadn't really noticed, Natalie, but now that you draw attention to the fact, I see they have trimmed the box-hedges along all the paths, and the grass has been mowed. Even the shade-trees have been pruned and cleaned out. How well it looks."

"Laws'ee, Mis' James! Ef dey hain't gone an' nailed a brass knock on dis doah!" exclaimed Rachel, dropping her burdens on the mat and staring up at the quaint old knocker that had been

fastened to the Colonial door since their last visit.

When the door was thrown open, Natalie had a glimpse of the inside—now furnished and most attractive. She followed Mrs. James and Rachel indoors and clapped her hands in pleasure.

“How perfectly lovely, Jimmy! Who would have dreamed that the dusty old place would look like this with a few pieces of furniture and a good clean-up of the rooms.”

“I swan!” breathed Rachel, in admiration, as she noted the braided rag rugs on the hall floor, the Colonial mirror on the wall, and the hall-table with drop-leaves flanked on either side by two straight backed rush-bottom chairs.

“It’s almos’ as fine as dem ole manor houses in Norf Car’liny. I ust to be nuss-maid in one on ‘em befoh I come Norf,” was her final appraisal of the inside of the house.

Every nook and corner had been scoured until the entire house smelled of cleanliness. Then the antique furniture that had been discovered in the attic had been cleaned and polished until no one would have said they were the same old objects.

93

Mr. Marvin had selected enough braided and carpet-rag rugs for the floors as would look artistic without covering up much of the fine old oak-flooring of great wide boards. Simple cottage draperies hung at the old-fashioned windows, and the personal effects belonging to Natalie were so arranged as to give the entire interior a homey look. It was a cheerful home for a forlorn little orphan, and she felt the atmosphere of the place instantly.

Rachel had gone directly to the kitchen after she left the others in the hall, and now she was heard exclaiming delightedly: “Oh, Mis’ James—an’ Honey darlin’! Come right out to my place an’ see how fine I am!”

They hurried out through the pantry and were surprised to find what a great improvement had been made in the large kitchen, with plenty of white enamel paint, new porcelain sink and table, and a fine modern range. Even the chairs and cupboards were glistening white, and white dotted swiss sash curtains hung at the four large windows.

94

“Ain’t it jus’ too gran’ fer anythin’!” giggled Rachel, as pleased as a child with a new toy.

“It certainly is! We will all want to live in the kitchen, I fear, Rachel,” said Mrs. James.

“Who ever straightened up dis house fer us, suttinly knew her bis’nis!” declared Rachel. “Jus’ look at my closets—not one thing outen place. Pans, pots, an’ dishes—jus’ whar I’d ‘a’ put them myse’f.”

Natalie was too curious to inspect the up-stairs, now, to remain longer in the kitchen, so she ran away, followed by Mrs. James. Rachel was too engrossed with the idea of preparing a luncheon on the nice kitchen range to bother about up-stairs.

On the wide landing of the main stairs Mr. Marvin had had made a cushioned window-seat, so that one could sit and look out over the kitchen gardens and beyond the fields, to the woodland that bordered the stream at the extreme end of the farm. Past the woodland on the farther side of the river rose a pretty green hill, similar to the one the house stood upon.

95

“Isn’t this view just glorious?” cried Natalie, as she dropped upon the seat and gazed enrapt at the scene.

After resting for some time in the window-seat, the young owner sighed and started up the rest of the stairs to the chamber floor. Here she inspected the various rooms with the old four-posted beds and high-boys, then came to a large, low-ceiled corner-room that had a similar view as had from the landing, of the side and back sections of the farm, with the woodland and stream beyond.

“Oh, how darling!” cried Natalie, seeing that all her favorite furnishings were arranged here. “This must be mine.”

“It is, dear. Mr. Marvin said he wanted you to have the best room with all your beloved objects around you. Here you can read, or sew, or plan for your estate,” said Mrs. James smiling gently at the pleased girl.

While Natalie rocked in the comfortable sewing-chair that she remembered her mother had preferred to all others, Rachel was heard coming to the foot of the stairs. She called authoritatively, “You-all hurry right down to dis fine lunch what I got ready! Dat range bakes like Ole Ned—an’ I got jus’ de fines’ pop-overs you eveh saw’d!”

96

“Um! That sounds tempting, Jimmy! Let’s run,” laughed Natalie.

While the two sat down at the round mahogany table that would easily seat ten, Rachel stood in the pantry door with her hands folded over her expansive figure. She smiled indulgently when Mrs. James praised the brown disks of hot bread just from the oven, and then went back to the kitchen.

The afternoon was spent in walking about the farm and planning various wonderful things: the vegetable gardens; the place where Miss Mason proposed having her camp for the Girl Scouts; selecting the best pasture if Mr. Marvin would consent to their having a cow. Then the out-buildings had to be examined in order to ascertain if they were in good enough order to house a cow, and a pig, and chickens.

97

It was evening before Natalie dreamed it, and they turned toward the house with appetites that

made them as ravenous as any half-starved tramp. But Rachel was ready for them, and Natalie ate a supper such as she had not enjoyed in years. Mrs. James watched with pleasure, for the air and change had already worked a great good in the girl.

The sun was setting over the woodland when Natalie came from the dining-room. She sat down on the step of the side piazza to admire the scene, when Mrs. James joined her, carrying two books.

"Oh, I wondered where those Scout books were," remarked Natalie, taking one from her friend. "Are you going to read yours now?"

"Yes, and I thought you would like to, too. We can sit and enjoy the cool of the evening, and discuss anything in the book that you do not understand."

After reading eagerly for some time, Natalie said: "I see here in the section of the book that is devoted to forming a Patrol or Troop, that each Patrol has a Leader, and also a Corporal to assist her. These offices are held through votes cast by the Scouts, and each one of these officers holds her position until another election." 98

"But there can be no Patrol until there are eight girls banded together to form one. How could we five girls expect to start a unit when we haven't enough girls to begin with?"

"Miss Mason suggested that, after she opens the camp on the river land, you girls might attend one of the meetings of her Scouts and, if you like the work, join her Patrol until you have enough members with you to branch out and organize one of your own. This will not only give you girls a good beginning in the work, but also help her girls to charter a Troop."

"When will this be, Jimmy, if Miss Mason's girls can't get away before July 1st?"

Mrs. James laughed. "I'm sure I don't know, dear. Miss Mason will be better able to tell us that important point." 99

"Well, at least I have the book that I can read and find out what Girl Scouts are supposed to do. Then I will be able to go right along when we do join Miss Mason's girls."

"That's a good ambition, Natalie, and let the future take care of itself. You only have to take one step at a time, you know, and no human being ever lives more than one moment at a time. But how many of us plan for the future and worry about to-morrow or next week! People would stop worrying and hoarding if they understood the only right way to think and live."

Natalie smiled, for she knew Mrs. James desired to help humanity stop its worries. So she said nothing but continued her reading of the Manual. When she reached page 60, Section VII, and began reading about the tests for Girl Scouts, she exclaimed: "Oh, now I see what I can do!"

Mrs. James looked up from her copy and waited to hear.

"I can learn and recite to you the Scout Promise and the Scout Laws, as is requested in this section. I can acquaint myself with the Scout Salute, and when to use it. I can memorize the Scout Slogan and the Motto, and learn how respect to our Flag is expressed. All these other things I can study and know, so that I can stand up before Miss Mason's girls and answer any questions on this section that are asked me." 100

"Yes, Natalie, and you can also practice making knots, as mentioned here; learn the Scout exercises in every way; become proficient in making a fire, cook decent food, make a bed properly, demonstrate your sewing, and all the other things requested of a Scout for the tests," added Mrs. James.

The two readers became so interested in the books that they failed to notice how dim the light was growing, until Rachel came to the side door and exclaimed at seeing them with noses buried in "Scouting for Girls."

"Laws'ee! Ef dem books tell you-all to spile yoh eyes like-a-dis, den I ain't got no use foh 'em. Come right along in, now, and set by a lamp an' read—ef yoh gotta finish de hull book in one night!" 101

Mrs. James looked up, laughed, and placed a hand over Natalie's page. "Rachel is quite right! Here we are trying to read by twilight that would forbid anyone with common sense to attempt such a thing."

"I've reached a thrilling place in the book, Jimmy! Can't I just finish this chapter?" begged Natalie.

"Certainly, but not out here. Let us go indoors and use the table-light."

Rachel had gone in and the lights were switched on, so Natalie ran in to enjoy the engrossing page.

"What is the chapter you are so interested in, dear?" asked Mrs. James, as they settled down in cozy comfort to continue their reading.

"Oh, this chapter called 'Woodcraft.' It is so wonderful to one who never dreamed of such things being in the woods!"

"My! But you must have read very quickly to have reached the thirteenth section already. I have only read up to the ninth," returned Mrs. James. 102

Natalie laughed. "To tell the truth, Jimmy, I skipped some of the chapters that looked dry and

educational. I saw the pictures of these mushrooms, and the little creatures of the wood, and I glanced at the opening words of the chapter. After that, I kept right on, and couldn't stop."

Mrs. James smiled and shook her head. "That is a bad habit to form—skipping things that *seem* dry and hard to do."

Natalie heard the gentle rebuke but smiled as she read the woodcraft chapter to its end. Then, instead of repenting of the habit of "skipping," she turned the pages of the book and read where she found another interesting chapter. This happened to be Section XVI on a Girl Scout's Garden. She read this part way through and then had a brilliant idea.

"Jimmy! Janet Wardell says I ought to start a vegetable garden at once, and not only raise enough for us all to live on this summer, but have some to send to the city to sell to my friends."

103

"I spoke to Rachel about that plan, Natalie, and she is of the same opinion: we really ought to garden and thus save cost of living."

"You know, Jimmy, that Janet is crazy over the war-garden she had for two years, and she told me it was the most fun! Digging and seeding down the soil, and weeding or harvesting was as much fun as playing croquet or tennis,—and a lot more remunerative. But then Janet always was ambitious. We all say she should have been a boy instead of a girl—with her go-a-headness."

"I don't see why a boy should be accredited with all the ambitions, and energy, or activity of young folks!" protested Mrs. James. "Girls are just as able to carry on a successful career as a boy,—and that is one thing the Girl Scouts will teach the world in general,—there is no difference in the Mind, and the ambitions and work that that Mind produces, whether it be in boy or girl. So I'm glad Janet is so positive a force with you four girls: she will urge you to accomplish more than you would, if left to your own indolent devices."

104

"I'll grant you that, Jimmy, but let's talk about the possibilities of a garden, without losing any more time. Do you think we might start in at once? To-morrow, say?"

"Of course we can! In fact, I wrote our next-door neighbor, Mr. Ames, to bring his plough and horse in the morning and turn over the soil so we could see what its condition is."

"Goody! Then I will start right in and raise vegetables and by the time the girls come down, I ought to have some greens growing up to show them!" cried Natalie.

Mrs. James laughed. "I'm not so sure that seeds will grow so quickly as to show green tops in two weeks. You must remember that ploughing, cleaning out stones and old weeds, then raking and fertilizing the soil, will take several days. By the time the seeds are planted it will have taken a week. In ten days more, we shall have the girls with us. So our vegetables will be wonders if they pop up in ten days' time."

105

"Well—anyway—I can point out all that has been done in that time, and explain why the greens do not show themselves," argued Natalie.

Mrs. James nodded, smilingly, to keep Natalie's ambition alive. It was the first time in all the time she had known the girl that she had found her eagerly planning anything that was really constructive and beneficial to everyone. And especially would it prove beneficial to herself, for working in the open air, and digging in the ground, would be the best tonics she could have. And the slender, undersized, morbid girl needed just such tonic.

So Mrs. James laid aside her book and devoted the rest of the evening to the plans for a fine truck garden.

In half an hour the two had sketched a rough diagram for the garden, following the picture given in the Scout book. "All around the outside of the rows of vegetables, I want to plant flowers, so it will be artistic as well as useful," said Natalie.

106

"If I were you, dear, I'd stick to the vegetables in the large garden, and plant flowers in the roundel and small beds about the house, where the color and perfume will reach us as we sit indoors or on the piazzas," suggested Mrs. James.

"But the vegetable garden will look so plain and ugly with nothing but bean poles and brush for peas," complained Natalie.

"Not so, Natalie. When the blossoms on the bean-vines wave in the breeze, and the gorgeous orange flowers bloom on the pumpkin and melon vines, or the peas send you their sweet scent, you will be glad you did as I suggest. Besides, we will need so many flowers about the house that it will take all the time and money we have to spare to take care of those beds."

So Natalie was persuaded to try out Mrs. James' ideas.

"How long will it take us to get the seeds to plant in our vegetable garden, Jimmy?" asked she later.

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"I can telephone my order in to the seed store in the morning, and they can mail the package at once. We ought to have it in two days, at least," answered Mrs. James.

"That will be time enough, won't it? Because we have to plough and rake the beds first. Oh, I do hope that farmer won't forget to come in the morning," sighed Natalie, running to the door to look out at the night sky and see if there was any indication of rain for the morrow.

"The sky is clear and the stars are shining like beacons," exclaimed she, turning to Mrs. James.

That lady smiled for she understood why Natalie had gone to investigate the weather signals.

"Perhaps we ought to go to bed early, Natalie, so we can be up when Farmer Ames arrives," hinted she.

"Why, what time do you think he will be here?"

"Farmers generally begin work at five, but he may not arrive until after his chores are attended to. I suppose we may look for him about seven o'clock."

"Seven o'clock! Mercy, Jimmy, we won't be awake then," cried Natalie, surprised at such hours.

"Oh yes, we will, because everyone in the country goes to bed at nine and rises at five. We must begin the same habit."

"Oh, oh! How outlandish! Why, we never *think* of bed in the city until eleven,—and later if we go to the theatre, you know."

"That's why everyone has pasty complexions and has to resort to rouge. If folks would keep decent hours they'd be healthier and deprive the doctors and druggists of an income. We will begin to live in the country as country people do, and then we will show city folks what we gain by such living," replied Mrs. James, mildly but firmly.

So they prepared to retire that first night on Green Hill Farm, when the hands on the old grandfather's clock pointed to eight-forty-five. Even Rachel laughed as she started up-stairs back of her young mistress, and after saying good-night, added: "Ef I onny could grow roses in m' cheeks like-as-how you-all kin! But dey woulden show, nohow, on my black face!"

She laughed heartily at her joke and went to the small room over the kitchen, still shaking with laughter.

## CHAPTER VI—NATALIE BEGINS HER PLANTING

The singing of the birds, nested in the old red maple tree that overshadowed the house on the side where Natalie's room was, roused her from the most restful sleep she had had in months. No vibration of electricity such as one constantly hears and feels in the city, no shouting of folks in the streets, no milkman with his reckless banging of cans, no steamboat's shrieks and wails such as one hears when living on the Drive, disturbed the peace and quietude of the night in the country.

"Oh my! I hope I haven't overslept," thought Natalie, as she sat up, wide awake. She looked at the clock on the table and could scarcely believe it was but five minutes of five.

"Why, it feels like eight to me!" she said to herself, as she sprang from bed and ran to sniff the delightful fresh air that gently waved the curtains in and out of the opened windows.

"I'm going to surprise Jimmy! I'll be dressed and out in the garden before she wakes up," giggled the girl, hastily catching up her bath-towel and soap, and running stealthily along the hall to the bathroom.

But her plans were not realized, because Mrs. James was up and down-stairs before Natalie ever heard the birds sing. She sat on the piazza sorting some bulbs and roots she had brought from the city in her trunk.

After Natalie was dressed, she tiptoed to Mrs. James' door and turned the knob very quietly so the sleeper should not awake. But she found the bed empty and the room vacated.

Down-stairs she flew, and saw the side door open. She also got a whiff of muffins, and knew Rachel was up and preparing an early breakfast. Out of the door she went, and stood still when she found Mrs. James working on queer-looking roots.

"When did you get up?" asked she, taken aback.

"Oh, about quarter to five. When did you?" laughed Mrs. James.

"I woke ten minutes later, but I wanted to s'prise you in bed. I went in and found the room empty," explained Natalie. "What sort of vegetables are those roots?"

"These are dahlia roots, and they will look fine at the fence-line, over there, that divides the field from our driveway. Do you see these dried sticks that come from each root? Those are last year's plant-stalks. We leave them on during the winter months, so the roots won't sprout until you plant them. Now I will cut them down quite close to the root before I put them in the ground."

As she spoke, Mrs. James trimmed down the old stalks to within an inch of the root, then gathered up her apronful of bulbs and roots and stood ready to go down the steps.

"Do you wish to help, Natty? You can bring the spade and digging fork that Rachel placed outside the cellar door for me."

Natalie ran for the tools and hurried after Mrs. James to the narrow flower bed that ran alongside the picket fence. A ten-inch grass-border separated this flower bed from the side door driveway, making the place for flowers quite secure from wheeltracks or unwary horses' hoofs.

The dahlia roots were planted so that the tip edge of the old stalks barely showed above the soil.

Then the bulbs were planted: lily bulbs, Egyptian iris, Nile Grass, and other plants which will come up every year after once being planted.

"There now! That is done and they are on the road to beautifying our grounds," sighed Mrs. James, standing up and stretching her arm muscles.

"After all I've said, you were the first one to plant, anyway," complained Natalie.

"Not in the vegetable garden! And flowers are not much account when one has to eat and live," laughed Mrs. James.

A voice calling from the kitchen door, now diverted attention from the roots and bulbs. "I got dem muffins on de table an' nice cereal ready to dish up," announced Rachel.

"And we're ready for it, too!" declared Natalie.

During the morning meal, Mrs. James and her protégée talked of nothing but gardening, and the prospects of an early crop. To anyone experienced in farming, their confidence in harvesting vegetables within a fortnight would have been highly amusing. But no one was present to reflect as much as a smile on their ardor, so the planning went on.

It was not quite seven when Farmer Ames drove in at the side gate and passed the house. Natalie ran out to greet him and to make sure he had brought the plough in the farm wagon.

"Good-morning, Mr. Ames. How long will it be before you start the ploughing?" called Natalie, as the horse was stopped opposite the side door.

"Good-mornin', miss. Is Mis' James to home this mornin'?" asked the be-whiskered farmer, nodding an acknowledgment of Natalie's greeting.

"Here I am, Mr. Ames. Both of us are ready to help in the gardening in whatever way you suggest," said Mrs. James, appearing on the porch.

"Thar ain't much to be helped, yit, but soon's I git Bob ploughin', you'se kin go over the sile and pick out any big stones that might turn up. Ef they ain't taken out they will spile the growin' of the plants by keepin' out light and heat."

Natalie exchanged looks with her companion. Neither one had ever thought of such a possibility.

"What shall I use for them—a rake?" asked Natalie.

"Rake—Nuthin'! all its teeth would crack off ef you tried to drag a big rock with it. Nop—one has to use plain old hands to pick up rocks and carry them to the side of the field."

"Maybe we'd better wear gloves, Jimmy," suggested Natalie in a whisper.

"Yes, indeed! I'm glad we brought some rubber gloves with us in case of need in the house. I never dreamed of using them for this," returned Mrs. James.

She turned and went indoors for the gloves while Farmer Ames drove on to the barns. Natalie followed the wagon, because she felt she could not afford to lose a moment away from this valuable ally in the new plan of work.

"Mr. Ames, as soon as our garden is ploughed, can it be seeded?" asked she, when the farmer began to unhitch the horse.

"That depends. Ef your sile is rich and fertile, then you'se kin plant as soon as it is smoothed out. First the rocks must come out, then the ground is broken up fine, and last you must rake, over and over, until the earth is smooth as a table."

"What plants ought I to choose first? You see it is so late in the season, I fear my garden will be backward," said Natalie.

"Nah—don't worry 'bout that, sis," remarked the farmer. "Becus we had a cold wet spring and the ground never got warm enough fer seeds until ten days ago. Why, I didn't even waste my time and money tryin' out any seeds till last week. I will gain more in the end because the sun-rays are warm enough this month to show results in my planting. Ef I hed seeded all my vegetables in that cold spell in May they would hev laid dormant and, mebbe, rotted. So you don't need to worry about its bein' late this year. Some years that is true—we kin seed in early May, but not this time."

"I'm so glad for that! Now I can race with other farmers around here and see who gets the best crops," laughed Natalie.

"What'cha goin' to plant down?" asked Mr. Ames, curious to hear how this city girl would begin.

"Oh, I was going to leave that to your judgment," returned she naïvely.

"Ha, ha, ha!" was the farmer's return to this answer. Then he added: "Wall now, I kin give you some young tomater plants and cabbiges an' cauliflower slips. Them is allus hard to seed so I plants mine in a hot-bed in winter and raises enough to sell to the countryside fer plantin' in the spring. I got some few dozen left what you are welcome to, ef you want 'em."

"Oh, fine! I certainly do want them," exclaimed Natalie. "Can I go to your house, now, and get them?"

"Better leave 'em planted 'til you wants to put 'em in your garden. They will wilt away ef you leave 'em out of sile fer a day er night. Besides, this stonin' work will keep you busy to-day."



Mrs. James now joined them, and handed Natalie a pair of rubber gloves. Farmer Ames stared at them in surprise for he had never seen anyone wear gloves while gardening—at least, not in Greenville.

As he drove Bob and the plough to the garden-space, Natalie and Mrs. James followed, talking eagerly of the plants promised them by the farmer. 119

“Mr. Ames, you forgot to tell me what seeds to plant first?” Natalie reminded him, as he rolled up his shirt sleeves, preparatory to steering the plough.

“Well, that is a matter of chice. Some likes to seed their radishes fust, an’ some get their lettuce in fust. Now I does it this way: lettuce grows so mighty fast that I figgers I lose time ef I put it down fust and let the other vegetables wait. So I drops in my beets, radishes, beans, peas, and sech like, an’ last of all I gets in the lettuce seed. I gen’ally uses my early plants from the hot-bed fer the fust crop in my truck-garden. I got some little beet plants, and a handful of radish plants what was weeded out of the over-crowded beds, that you may as well use now, and seed down the others you want. My man is going over all the beds to-day, and I will hev him save what you kin use in your garden.”

“Oh, how good you are! I never knew strangers in the country would act like your own family!” exclaimed Natalie. “In the city everyone thinks of getting the most out of you for what they have, that you might need.” 120

Both the adults laughed at this precocious denunciation of city dealers. Old Bob now began to plod along the edge of the garden-space with his master behind guiding the plough. Natalie walked beside the farmer and watched eagerly as the soil curled over and over when the blade of the plough cut it through and pushed it upwards.

Farmer Ames was feeling quite at home, now that he was working the ground, and he began to converse freely with his young companion.

“Yeh know, don’cha, thet the man what lived here fer ten years, er more, was what we call a gentleman farmer. He went at things after the rules given in some books from the Agricultural Department from Washerton, D. C. He even hed a feller come out from thar and make a test of the sile. The upshot of it all was, he got a pile of stuff from Noo York—powders, fertilizers, and such, an’ doctored the hull farm until we gaped at him. 121

“But, we all hed to confess that he raised the finest pertaters, and corn, and other truck of anyone fer many a mile around. I allus did say I’d foller his example, but somehow, thar’s so much work waitin’ to be done on a farm, that one never gits time to sit down to writin’. So I postponed it every year.”

“Why, this is awfully interesting, Mr. Ames. I never knew who the tenant was, but he must have had a good sensible education on how to run a farm, or he wouldn’t have known about these fertilizers.”

“Yeh, we-all ust to grin at him for fuddling about on the sile before he’d seed anythin’—but golly! he got crops like-as-how we never saw raised before.”

“I could try the same methods,” said Natalie musingly.

“He worked over the sile every year, and never planted the same crops in the same places. He called it a sort of rotary process, and he tol’ me my crops would double ef I did it.” 122

“Did he mix in the doctorings every year, too?” asked Natalie.

“Sure! That’s why he sent little boxes of dirt to Washerton—to find out just what to use in certain qualities of sile.”

“Then I ought to do it, too, hadn’t I?” asked she.

“Not this year, ’cause he said the last year he did it, that now he could skip a year or two. But you’ve gotta mix in good fertilizer before you plant. Then you’s e kin laff at all us old foggy farmers what stick to old-fashioned ways.”

Farmer Ames laughed heartily as if to encourage his young student, and to show how she might laugh after harvesting. Natalie gazed at him with a fascinated manner, for his lower lip had such a peculiar way of being sucked in under his upper teeth when he laughed. Not until Mrs. James explained this, by saying that Farmer Ames had no lower teeth, did she lose interest in this mannerism.

“I know all about the tools a farmer has to use in his work, Mr. Ames,” bragged Natalie. 123

“Oh, do yeh? Wall then, you kin get the rake and hoe, and fix up the sile where the plough is done turned it up.”

Natalie remembered the paragraph in “Scouting for Girls” and asked: “Shall I bring the spade, too?”

Just then, Mr. Ames stubbed his toe against a large stone that had been turned out of its bed. He grumbled forth: “Better git a pickaxe and crowbar.”

“My book didn’t mention crowbars and pickaxes, Mr. Ames, so I don’t know what they are,” ventured Natalie modestly.

“Every farmer has to have a pick and crow on hand in case he wants to dig fence-post holes, er move a rock—like the one I just hit.”

"Oh! But our fences are all made."

"So are the rocks! But they ain't moved. Better go over the ploughed dirt and find 'em, then git them outen the garden."

Natalie began to hunt for stones, and as she found any, to carry them over to the fence where she threw them over in the adjoining field. This was not very exciting pastime, and her back began to ache horribly. 124

Mrs. James, who had lingered behind, now joined Natalie and exclaimed in surprise, "Why, I thought you said the old tenant was so particular with his garden? He should have removed all these stones, then."

"This section was used fer pertaters an' corn every other year, an' some stones is good to drain the sile fer them sort of greens. But fer small truck like you'se plan to plant here, the stones has to get out."

Mrs. James assisted Natalie in throwing out stones which turned up under the plough-blade, and when that section of the garden was finished, Mr. Ames mopped his warm brow and looked back over his work with satisfaction.

"Ef you'se want to plant corn over in that unused spot alongside the field, it will be a fine place to use. It is not been used fer years fer truck."

"It looks awfully weedy. Maybe things won't grow there," ventured Natalie. 125

"Hoh, them's only top-weeds what can be yanked out. The sile itself is good as any hereabouts."

"Well, then, Mr. Ames," said Mrs. James, "you'd better plough that section, too, for the corn or potatoes."

So the rough part of the ground by the fence-line was ploughed up, but the quantity of stones found in the soil was appalling to Natalie. Mr. Ames chuckled at her expression.

"Don't worry about seein' so many, 'cuz you only has to pick out one stone at a time, you know. Ef you does this one at a time, widdout thinkin' of how many there seem to be afore your eyes, you soon git them all out an' away."

"I see Mr. Ames is a good moralizer," smiled Mrs. James.

He nodded his head, and then suggested that he visit the barnyard to see if any old compost was left about by the former tenant. If so, it would be a good time to dig it under in the ploughed soil.

"Oh, I want to go with Mr. Ames, Jimmy, to see just what compost he considers good," exclaimed Natalie, dancing away. 126

Mrs. James watched her go and smiled. The tonic of being in the country and working on the farm was beginning to tell already. Before she resumed her task of picking up stones, however, the clarion voice of Rachel came from the kitchen porch.

"Hey, Mis' James! I'se got lunch all ready to eat!"

As the lady was well-nigh starved because of the early breakfast and the work in the earth, she sighed in relief. Now she would have a spell in which to rest and gain courage to go on with the stoning. This showed that it was not interesting to Mrs. James, but she was determined to carry it through.

Natalie ran indoors soon after Mrs. James and went to the dining-room where the luncheon was served. She was so eager to tell what Farmer Ames told her that she hardly saw that Rachel had prepared her favorite dessert—berry tarts.

"Jimmy, Mr. Ames knows more about farming and soil than books! He says a mixed compost from the stables and barnyard makes the best of all fertilizers." 127

"His logic sounds plausible, Natty, but we haven't any such compost to use, and perhaps never will have if we wish to use it from our own barns," said Mrs. James regretfully.

"But Mr. Ames said he could sell us some of that grade compost, if we needed any. He says he does not believe our soil needs fertilizing this year, as it is so rich already."

"That is splendid news, as it will save us much time in seeding, too," returned Mrs. James.

"I wanted to show him that I knew something about composts, so I told him about what I read in the book for Scouts last night:—that one could use a commercial fertilizer if one had no barnyard manure available. He looked at me amazed, and I explained that many farmers used four-parts bone-dust to one part muriate of potash and mixed it well. This would fertilize a square rod of land. I felt awfully proud of myself as I spoke, but he soon made me feel humble again, by saying, 'Do you spread it out on top of the ground after the seed is in, Miss Natalie, or do you put it under the sile to het up the roots?'" 128

Mrs. James laughed and asked, "What could you say?"

"That's just it—I didn't know, Jimmy; so I made a guess at it. I replied: 'Why, I mix it very carefully all through the soil'—and Jimmy! I struck it right first time!" laughed she.

Mr. Ames had finished his dinner (so he called it) long before Natalie and her chaperone, and when they started to leave the house they found that he was hard at work removing the rest of the stones from the ploughed ground.

"Oh, I'm so glad of that, Jimmy!" cried Natalie, as she watched the farmer at work.

"Well, to tell the truth, Natalie, I'm not sorry to find that job taken from us," laughed Mrs. James. "I found it most tiresome and with no encouragement from the stones."

"Let's do something else, Jimmy, and let Mr. Ames finish the stone-work," suggested Natalie, quickly. Just then Rachel came out on the back steps of the kitchen porch. 129

"Mis' James, Farmeh Ames say foh you-all to drive ole Bob back to his house en' fetch a load of compos' what he says is back of his barns. His man knows about it. Den you kin brung along dem leetle plants what is weeded out of his garden and keep 'em down cellar fer to-night."

Natalie felt elated at this novel suggestion of work, thereby freeing them both from the irksome task of stoning the garden. And Mrs. James laughed as she pictured herself driving the farm-wagon on the county road where an endless stream of automobiles constantly passed.

But she was courageous, and soon the two were gayly chattering, as Bob stumbled and stamped along the macadam road. Above the clatter of loose wheels and rattling boards in the floor of the old wagon, the merry laughter of Natalie could be heard by the autoists, as they passed the "turn-out" from Green Hill Farm.

Having reached the Ames's farm and found the handy-man who would load up the barnyard compost in the wagon for them, Natalie asked him many questions that had been interesting her. 130

## CHAPTER VII—NATALIE LEARNS SEVERAL SECRETS 131

Natalie made good use of her eyes while Farmer Ames's man gave her the vegetable slips, and when she got back home the first question she asked Mr. Ames was: "Why can't I buy a few of your asparagus slips? I love asparagus and you have a fine bed of it."

"I'd give yer some slips, and welcome, but it don't grow that way," replied he. "First you've got to hev jest the right quality of sand and loam mixed in kerrect proportions, and then yer seed it down. The fust season of asparagrass it ain't no good fer cuttin'; the secunt year it turns out a few baby stalks, but the third year it comes along with a fine crop—ef you've taken good care of it through the winter cold, and shaded the young plants from summer's sun-heat the fust two years." 132

"Oh, I never dreamed there was so much trouble to just raising asparagus!" exclaimed Natalie. "How long does it take in the spring, Mr. Ames, before the plant produces the ripe vegetable?"

Mr. Ames turned and stared at Natalie to see if she was joking, but finding she was really in earnest, he laughingly replied: "Asparagrass doesn't ripen like termaters er beans,—when the young stalk shoots up from the sile, yer cut it off. It is the tip that is best, fer that holds the heart of the plant. Ef you let it keep on growin' it will shoot up into a high plant with the seed in its cup. But we cut it before it grows up."

"Oh dear! Then I can't raise it for three years, can I?" said she complainingly.

"It don't look that way," remarked the farmer.

Mrs. James and Natalie had returned with the farm-wagon loaded with compost late in the afternoon, and Farmer Ames stopped work soon after their return to Green Hill Farm.

"I've gotta look after my own stock and truck now, but I'll be back to-morrer mornin' an' help spread out the fertilizer so's the ground will be ready in another day er two." 133

"I don't know what we would have done without you, Mr. Ames," said Natalie, standing on the carriage step near the side drive.

"Well, es long es you diden have to do without me, what's the use tryin' to figger out what you would have done," laughed he, as he gathered up the reins.

"That's splendid logic, Mr. Ames," laughed Mrs. James, pleased at his reply.

"I allus says we waste more time crossin' bridges what never was excep' in our imagination, than it would take to go miles round-about 'em."

After this last original proverb, he started the horse along his way.

Directly after the evening meal, Mrs. James took her Scout manual and sat down on the piazza to study the chapter on gardening. Natalie saw what she was doing and ran in to get her book, also. 134

"Jimmy, it doesn't say one ought to have a trowel and pick for garden work. Mr. Ames said we should always have them on hand in case of need. I can see how much easier it would have been to clear the ground of the stones had we had the pick instead of having had to use the digging-fork," said Natalie.

"I think so, too. And the hand-trowel will be very useful when we transplant the small plants. I don't see how one can get along well without it, or without a short hand-rake. But I wanted to read what it says about making the garden beds. That is why I began reading it to-night."

"It says the bed should be three feet wide by twelve long," read Natalie.

"Yes, I see; but I have found three feet of soil to be uncomfortably wide to reach over when you wish to weed or dig about the plants. If the vegetables are bush-beans it is almost impossible to work in the middle of the bed without rubbing against the outside plants and breaking off branches. I should certainly plan to have my gardens but two feet wide, with a foot-path fifteen inches wide between every bed.

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"Of course, where land is limited and costly, one cannot afford a wide foot-path; but we can, and it will make the weeding much easier. A ten or twelve-inch foot-path is almost too narrow to move about on without damaging the plants along its edge."

"Is our garden composed of clay, Jimmy, like it says in the next paragraph?" asked Natalie anxiously.

"Oh, no! Let me read what it says: 'The bed should be dug out to a depth of two feet, and if the soil is clay, six inches deeper than two feet. In the latter case you will have to fill in the bottom with broken stones, or cinders, or gravel, for good drainage. The best soil is a mixture of one-half sandy loam, one-fourth leaf-mould, or muck that has been exposed all winter (to rot for this purpose), and then mix this thoroughly before filling it in the beds. Sprinkle wood-ashes over the beds next, and rake them well in the ground before you plant anything. This is to sweeten the soil. Lime may be used for the same purpose; but in either case, get advice as to the amount needed for the soil in question.'

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"That is plain enough. The soil on different farms differs as much as the people do, so that a careful analysis is needed to produce good crops," explained Mrs. James.

"I suppose there are soils that need next to no potash, and other soil that needs no ashes, or other chemical treatments," ventured Natalie.

"Exactly! So you see, if one added an extra chemical where enough of such was already in evidence, it would injure the tender plant as it sprouted," added Mrs. James.

"Jimmy, Mr. Ames told me to-day that good old leaf-mould was the finest of *all* composts. But where can we get any, now?" asked Natalie.

"I have no doubt we can find enough down on the river banks to cover your garden beds this year. Then in the fall we can rake up the leaves and allow them to rot through the winter for next season," said Mrs. James.

"Oh, I forgot all about the woodland down by the stream! I'll run down there in the morning to see if I can find any rotted leaves," said Natalie eagerly.

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"Natalie, you should also hunt up some long boards in the barn, or cellar, to use when we plant the seeds," advised Mrs. James.

"Boards—what for?"

"Well, if we have the soil all smooth and fine for planting, our feet will trample down the ground wherever we walk. We must do our seeding by leaning over the bed and work down from each side of the two-foot wide space. By placing a board on the foot-path between the beds, we can stand on it and keep the soil from becoming packed."

"I should think it would do the path good to be packed down good and hard."

"So it will, but the board will do that in an even manner. Our shoes will cut in and cause the packing to be done in an uneven way," explained Mrs. James.

"I suppose we will have to fill some baskets with any leaf-mould we may find in the woodland. But how can we carry them up to the gardens?" Natalie now said.

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"Maybe Mr. Ames can suggest a way to do that better than our carrying the heavy loads."

"Well, I'd willingly carry it, just to have the benefit of it on my garden. The vegetables will grow like anything,—Mr. Ames says they will," responded Natalie.

After a few moments of silence, she turned again to Mrs. James and asked: "Why did you just say that we might rake up the leaves in the fall and put them aside for the winter? Don't you know we won't be here when the leaves fall?"

"I'm not so sure of that, Natalie," returned Mrs. James. "I have been thinking matters out very carefully, and from present indications there will be a great scarcity of apartments, or rooms, to be had in New York this year. The rents will be outrageous for us to pay, and as long as we are so comfortably housed here, why try to earn the necessary income for high rents? The distance to the station is not long, and you can easily commute to the city to attend school in September. When winter weather really sets in, we can take a trunk and board in New York until spring. That will overcome all financial worries about leases and rents."

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"Oh, I never thought of that! But the girls wouldn't stay with me after September, I'm afraid," exclaimed Natalie.

"We won't have to plan or worry about that now," laughed Mrs. James. "Maybe the girls will be so much in love with farm-life, they will beg their parents to permit them to remain longer than September! In that case, you will have no loneliness, I'm sure."

"No, that's so; and I suppose it is really up to me to make them so happy here that they will *want* to remain," admitted Natalie.

"I haven't suggested this possibility to Mr. Marvin, as yet, but I know he will be tremendously

relieved to hear of it, as he is wondering what can be done in the fall, with our income so limited.”

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“Well, let’s talk about it the first time he comes out to see us. I am perfectly contented to remain here, if it is best for all.”

After this digression, both amateur farmers turned their attention to the scouting manual again.

“It states here, Jimmy, that one must be careful not to allow the garden soil to run over boundaries, and spread out upon the foot-paths. This can be avoided by using a low length of fence made of a thin board about six inches high, or the beds can be walled in with field-stone which looks very artistic as well as useful. The plan of walling in the beds also helps to retain the moisture in the ground where the roots can drink it as needed.”

“I’ll make a note of that, Natalie, as it sounds practical,” said Mrs. James, writing down the idea on a paper.

“And it also suggests that the garden beds be built up from the pathway for about two or three inches, making a tiny terrace of each bed and sinking the foot-path below the bed. By so doing, any excessive moisture is drained out from the soil, so the roots are not kept too wet,” read Natalie.

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“Yes, I knew that before, and we certainly will follow that suggestion when we spread out our beds.”

“Well, when we get as far as that in the work, our seeds ought to arrive,” remarked Natalie, yawning behind her hand.

Mrs. James smiled at the yawn for it was not yet eight o’clock, and the previous evening Natalie had grumbled about retiring as early as nine. But she said nothing about the yawn.

“Don’t hold up the delivery of the seeds on the ground that we must finish all the garden beds first,” laughed the lady.

“Mercy no! I am as anxious to see the seeds as I am to plant the tiny green shoots that Mr. Ames promised to give us.” Then after another mighty yawn that almost dislocated her jaw, Natalie added: “Jimmy, I want to get up very early in the morning to plant those slips we got to-day. Mr. Ames says I must give them several hours in the ground before the sun is up, so they won’t wilt and die. So I think I will go up to bed—if you don’t mind?”

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“By all means, Natalie. And I will follow, shortly. I just want to enter a few notes on our work in this diary, then I will retire, also; I think we can work better at dawn if we get our full quota of sleep during the night.”

The next day was given to breaking up the clods of earth and raking out the smaller stones to clear the garden beds. The compost was well-mixed with the soil by Farmer Ames, while Mrs. James and Natalie went down to the woodland by the river and found certain places where leaf-mould was plentiful. It was as fine as gunpowder, and of an exceptionally rich quality. That morning, Mr. Ames had arrived, driving Bob and an old buckboard. When it was proposed that someone go for the leaf-mould, Natalie instantly suggested that they drive Bob to the woodland so the baskets could be placed on the buckboard and carried to the garden that way. This would save time and great exertion on the part of someone to carry them from the river to the beds.

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Now the containers were lifted up and placed securely on the back and front platforms of the buckboard and the two hard-working companions gladly sat down on the seat and started Bob up the grass-grown road.

Soon they were helping to spread out the leaf-mould on the soil, and while they worked, Natalie asked: “Mr. Ames, how comes it that no one ever went to the river bank to get this rich mould?”

“Well, that woodland and the river banks belongs to this farm, so no one else would trespass on it. And the man who ran this farm had ideas of his own about fertilizer. He placed no faith in Nature’s work, but kep’ on buyin’ and experimentin’ with stuff what came from Noo York.”

Mr. Ames stood up while delivering this explanation, then he added, winking wisely at Natalie:

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“But he didn’t spile yer farm, fer all his foolin’ wid Noo York stuff instead of goin’ to Nature fer her goods.”

His hearers laughed and Mrs. James remarked: “No, I should say not. And you said yourself that he managed to get the best results of any farmer round here.”

When the leaf-mould was well spread over three garden beds, Mr. Ames made a suggestion.

“Now you two women-folk kin use my tape-line to measure off three beds as wide as yuh want ’em, while I goes down to the woods with Bob and brings up some more mould fer the other beds. When the marking is done, you kin begin to plant them termater plants I brought this mornin’. I left ’em in the cellar whar it was cool and damp.”

This was encouraging, for it began to sound as if the garden was really a fact. Before the seeds or slips were in the ground, something might happen to change the plan, thought Natalie. So Mrs. James and she eagerly measured out the first few beds, and about the time Mr. Ames was ready to drive up his installment of leaf-mould, they were ready to get the cabbage and tomato plants.

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Before sundown that day, three beds were on the way to producing their vegetables. One bed was planted with tomatoes and one with cabbages, the third was used for beets and radishes—

plants which had been kept in the cellar from the evening before.

"To-morrer we will git the other beds done and you'se kin seed 'em down wid all you'se wants to raise," said Mr. Ames, as he mounted the old buckboard and prepared to drive home.

"Oh, Mr. Ames!" called Natalie anxiously. "Do you have anyone who drives to the Corners to-night, or in the morning, so they might get our seeds from the mail?"

"I'm goin' in m'se'f t'-night. Yeh see, Si Tompkins has sort of a country-club meetin' at his store every week on this night, an' I hain't never missed one!" bragged Farmer Ames.

"What do you do at the meetings?" asked Natalie wonderingly.

"Oh, mos' everything. Lately it has be'n all about the damp cold season, an' how we are goin' to get our truck goin' ef this weather keeps up. Some of th' farmers exchange advice on matters. Then when the weather ain't bad, we talks about polerticks. That old League of Nations kept us fuming fer th' longest time! But now that it's dead, we let it bury itself."

Both Natalie and Mrs. James laughed appreciatively at his explanation, and the former added: "Well, if you will only bring our seeds, if they have arrived, I won't dispute your rights to argue on politics."

"That I will, and gladly," returned the farmer as he drove away.

Natalie turned to Mrs. James and asked whimsically: "Did Mr. Ames mean he would gladly argue politics with us, or gladly bring the seeds back?"

"He meant both, I'm sure," laughed Mrs. James.

But he did not appear again that evening, and Natalie wondered why not. Mrs. James laughingly replied: "Because he, most likely, is the speaker for the night's meeting at the store."

Although this was said jokingly, it was exactly what occurred and detained the farmer from driving home until after ten. As the farm-house was dark at that time, he decided to take the package of seeds home and deliver them in the morning when he put in his appearance for work.

The farmerettes were ready for him, when he finally drove in at the side gate. Natalie watched eagerly as he got out of the vehicle—she wondered if he had the seeds.

"I got th' seeds, ladies, but I be'n thinkin' about them pertater seeds what my brother told me about las' night when we druv home from Tompkins' Corners. Yuh hain't got no pertaters figgered on yet, have yeh?"

"Laws no! I forgot all about potatoes," exclaimed Natalie, using Rachel's favorite exclamation when amazed.

"Well—no harm done," returned Mr. Ames. "My brother has a reputation fer growin' th' best pertater seed in the state, an' he says he kin spare yuh about a peck, ef yuh let him know at once. I allus gits mine of him, an' my crops never fail."

"A peck! Why, Mr. Ames—a peck of seed will plant that whole field!" cried Natalie, nodding to the big buckwheat field that adjoined her farm.

It was the farmer's turn to look amazed now. He glanced from the speaker to Mrs. James and back again. Mrs. James laughed and said: "Did you think potato seed looked like our other seeds?"

"Of course,—doesn't it?"

Then Farmer Ames threw back his head and gave vent to a loud guffaw. His Adam's apple jumped up and down in his throat as he gasped for breath, and his under lip came near being drawn out of sight in the suction caused by his gasp.

"Wall, ef that don't beat the Irish!" exclaimed he, when he could speak again. "Mebbe we'll have a few other surprises to give Miss Natalie afore she is done farmin'."

"I haven't a doubt of it!" retorted she. "But just now you might explain about potato seed."

"How much seed would you have ordered for a patch of ground about six beds' size?" asked Mr. Ames instead of answering her request.

"About a pint,—maybe half a pint would be enough."

Rachel had heard the farmer's loud laughter and having learned the cause of it, she decided to spare her little mistress any further ridicule. So she got an old potato from the basket and, having washed it carefully, went to the door.

"Oh, Natty! Ah say, Mis' Natty! Come right heah, Honey."

Natalie turned and smilingly nodded at Rachel; then excused herself to Mr. Ames and ran up the steps of the kitchen porch.

"See heah, Chile! Don' you go an' show your ig'nance about farmin' in front of dat country-man. Now watch me, Honey, an' den go back an' play yoh knew it all dis time! Let Mis'r Ames think yuh was funnin' him."

Rachel then took the large potato and showed it to Natalie. "See dem leetle dimples in diffrent places on its skin? Well,—dem is called 'eyes,' and when a pertater gits ole, dem eyes begins to sprout. Every sprout will make a pertater vine, so farmers call dem eyes 'pertater seeds'—see?"

"Really! Why, Rachel, how interesting!" cried Natalie, taking the potato and studying the eyes.

"Yep! An' what's more, you'se kin cut a pertater what has f'om two to six eyes a-growin', into pieces so one big pertater will plant as many vines as pieces you cut outen him."

"This potato has five big eyes, Rachel," said Natalie, counting carefully.

"An' bein' a great big pertater, I kin cut five pieces—watch me."

Rachel then deftly cut the five sections and handed them to Natalie. "But it isn't bestes to cut so many slices, cuz the sap leaks out and that loses a lot of de power to grow a sturdy plant, Natty. When pertaters is plentiful, we gen'ally cuts 'em in half—an' the skin pectecks the sap from runnin' away. Ef we wants to use all dese five pieces, we has to put 'em in the hot sunshine fer an hour er two, to dry up de cut skin. Dat keeps in de juice when de slice is in de ground. And de juice is what feeds de sprout until it grows above de ground."

"Rachel, you are a brick! Now I can go back to Mr. Ames and show off all I know!" laughed Natalie joyously, as she ran from the kitchen and joined Mrs. James and the farmer again.

But there was no opportunity for her to display her knowledge, as Mrs. James had an invitation ready for her. "Mr. Ames says he would like to have us drive with him to his brother's farm and see a model little place. We can bring back the potato seed and, at the same time, get lots of good advice and ideas about running our farm this summer."

In a few minutes more the three were crowded in upon the seat of the buckboard and Rachel stood in the kitchen doorway watching them drive off. Their gay laughter echoed back to her as she returned to the sink to finish the dishes, and she smiled as she murmured to herself: "Ef dis summer out on a farm don' make dat chile oveh inter a new bein', den my name ain't 'Rachel!'"

## CHAPTER VIII—MISS MASON'S PATROL ARRIVES

The drive from Green Hill Farm to Mr. Ames's brother's farm was enlivened for Mrs. James and Natalie by the driver's gossip about the neighboring farmers whose places they passed. One farmer made a speciality of raising poultry, another tried to raise flowers, but his greenhouses were not arranged well, and his plants generally froze in cold weather. Still another farmer planned to raise nothing but market-truck, but he kept postponing the attempt and thus never amounted to anything.

All these various plans gave Natalie food for thought, and she had many schemes outlined in her head by the time Mr. Ames drove in at his brother's farm-gate.

The house and front gardens were as neat as wax, and one could see from the road that the farm itself was well cared for. Mr. Ames spoke the truth when he bragged of it as being a model farm.

Mrs. Ames came to the side door at the sound of wheels crunching the gravel, and smiled a welcome at her brother-in-law.

"I brung the leddies I tol' you about," explained Mr. Ames, as he jumped out and turned to help Mrs. James and Natalie.

After introductions were over, Mrs. Ames remarked: "I'll go call my husband. He's at the barns tryin' to coax a few little pigs from the mother."

"Oh, oh! Are they tiny little pigs!" cried Natalie excitedly.

"Yes,—not much bigger'n a kitten."

"Oh dear! Can't I see them?" asked she anxiously.

Everyone laughed. "Of course you can," returned Mrs. Ames.

"We will all go and see them," added Mrs. James. "I like to see little creatures, too."

So they all walked down the box-edged path-way to the neat out-buildings where Mr. Ames was struggling with two squirming little pink pigs that were determined to run away.

Natalie stood and watched while the battle for supremacy continued, and finally she offered to help hold them. But this was not necessary, as the farmer managed to get them in the pen especially built for the larger pigs of the litter.

"They've got to be weaned and give the lean ones a chance to grow better," explained the farmer, mopping his brow after the struggle had ended.

Natalie was so interested in the barnyard cattle, that the host escorted her about and showed her many amusing and instructive things. Mrs. James enjoyed this visit, also. The modern chicken-houses and duck-yards were admired; the pig-pens, with their clean runs and concrete pools for the pigs to bathe in, were inspected by an astonished Natalie who believed pigs to be filthy animals; and all the other devices for the cleanliness and comfort of the stock were commended; and then they all went back to the house.

Mrs. Ames had hurriedly prepared refreshments, although it was not more than ten o'clock. Ice-cold butter-milk, home-made sponge cake, and fruit, was a tempting sight. Natalie was thirsty

after the visit to the barns, and the cold drink proved most refreshing.

While Mrs. Ames played hostess and showed her visitors her flower gardens, the two farmers went to the seed-house and sorted the potato seed Natalie wanted for her own garden. Then several tiny plants were added to this bag,—slips that had been weeded out that morning, and thrown out as superfluous in the Ames's gardens. These could be transplanted at once by Natalie, and would go on growing, thus giving time for the seeds to sprout.

Natalie enjoyed the flowers and the stock-yard, but she was interested in vegetables, and now she was anxious to get home and plant the potato seed and other slips that had been donated. Hence, the three visitors were soon on their way back to Green Hill.

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"Mr. Ames," began Natalie, as they drove away, "your brother said I could save time in growing the corn if I would soak the kernels in lukewarm water for several hours. He says the soil is quite warm enough now for me to do this, so the swollen corn will not get a chill when it is dropped in the hill."

"Yeh, I know that, too. I was goin' to suggest it," returned Mr. Ames.

"He said the lukewarm water would start the corn swelling better, and by the time Natalie wanted to plant it the water would be cold and the kernel would be the same temperature. The soil would be about the same heat, so we would not be running any risk of failure in hastening the seed," added Mrs. James.

"Yeh—ye kin do that," agreed the farmer.

"Another thing your brother said—that I thought good, is this: when we plant slips, such as beets, cauliflower, and other vegetables in a garden bed, to keep the seeds of such kinds apart from the plant beds; then when the seeds sprout they won't confuse us with the older plants," said Natalie.

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"Mr. Ames," now said Mrs. James, "your brother says he always plants his corn in a rich sandy soil with a mixture of gravel in it, to act as a drain. The more sunshine it gets, the sweeter it tastes, he said."

Mr. Ames glanced at the speaker with a pitying look. "Diden yuh know that afore he tole you?" was all he said.

Natalie nudged Mrs. James and giggled. But the lady was not silenced by the farmer's remark. She was enthusiastic about all she had learned and had to debate it with someone.

"He said that he seldom used a compost made of cow-manure, unless it was seasoned with other lighter fertilizer, as it was so heavy it kept all air from permeating to the roots. *But* he added that it formed a splendid foundation for other mixtures to be added to it."

"Well, diden I say that same thing to yuh?" demanded Mr. Ames.

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"Yes, but it is more satisfactory to hear your advice seconded. Now we *know* you were right in your suggestions," said Mrs. James guilelessly.

"Right here, I wanta tell yuh-all that I brung my brother up in his farmin' knowledge. And what he knows he learned from me when I was votin' an' he was onny in knickers!" was Farmer Ames's scornful reply.

The rest of that day was spent in planting potato seed, Rachel helping, so that the cut sections need not be dried out. At sundown Mr. Ames went for his horse and buckboard, saying,

"Wall, to-morrer yuh won't need me, Mis' James. Everything is goin' on as fine as kin be, an' you'se know all about th' seeds."

"Oh dear, Mr. Ames!" cried Natalie, in distress, "we will feel as if we are at sea without a rudder."

The remark pleased the farmer, for he was proud of his experience and loved to have others admit it. So he said: "Well, ef I git time I might run in at noon when I drives to the store fer mail and house-goods."

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"Please do! We will need you by that time, I am sure," replied Natalie.

But the seeds and corn and other vegetable products were planted without further mistakes or delay. Each day saw the work advance and by the time the city school closed the garden was well on its way to producing edibles for that season.

The tiny lettuce slips that Mr. Ames's brother had given Natalie were growing up fresh and green; the radishes showed three to four sturdy little leaves, evidence that tiny red balls were forming under the ground. The cabbages and cauliflowers began to present funny little button-like heads above the soil; and the seeds were showing slender little spears of green where the soft earth was cleft by their protruding points. The tomato vines and other plants started from slips that had been weeded out from the Ames's farms were doing well; so that Natalie felt a righteous pride in her garden.





The garden was well on its way to producing edibles for that season.

A letter from Miss Mason came the last Friday of school:

DEAR NATALIE:

Almost before you will have time to digest the contents of this letter we will have descended upon Green Hill Farm. The Girl Scouts in my Patrol packed and shipped the tents and other camping outfit, by express, the first of the week. I wrote the man at the Corner Store to hold them until we called there for them. If Mrs. James, and Rachel and you, have nothing better to do on Sunday, we will be pleased to have you come to our camp and dine with us. We hope to have everything in order and be ready for guests by Sunday noon, as we will arrive at Greenville about noon on Saturday. Until then, I will wish you all rest and peace, as you will need to draw heavily upon the reserve fund of it after we arrive. My Girl Scouts are an active, energetic patrol, and few of them ever stop to sit down or sleep while in camp.

Lovingly your teacher,  
ANNA MASON.

“Jimmy, Miss Mason says her girls will be here Saturday—that’s to-morrow. But I haven’t heard a word from the other girls about when they will arrive! If only they could come up and be with us all on Sunday. Don’t you suppose we could telephone Janet and let her arrange it?” asked Natalie anxiously, after reading the letter from Miss Mason.

“Perhaps the girls are planning to pack up and get away from the city for all summer when they do come here. In that case, I don’t see how they could manage to get away on Saturday. But we can telephone and find out,” returned Mrs. James.

So Janet was called over the ‘phone, and Natalie heard to her great delight that Janet was coming Saturday evening even though other girls in the group would not leave the city until the middle of the following week.

That afternoon at sundown Natalie inspected her garden critically, trying to judge it from another’s point of view. When she returned to the house she sat down on the piazza beside Mrs. James and sighed.

“I suppose everyone will laugh at my garden. The seeds aren’t big yet,—only the lettuce and other things that I transplanted from the Ames’s farms. Do you think they really will grow up, Jimmy?”

“Of course they will. Does the sun shine or do we succeed in growing *anything* from the ground?” laughed Mrs. James.

“But this is different. I am not an experienced farmer and maybe the vegetables won’t grow for me.”

“The poor little seeds never stop to wonder whether you are a farmer or not. They have no partiality. It is their business to grow and bring forth results, so they get busy and attend to their business the moment they are planted. But all things take time to develop,—so with seeds. They do not give you a full-grown head of lettuce or cauliflower in a night.”

This encouraged Natalie so much that she went to sleep with the assurance that her garden would thrive just as well as any farmer's in the county.

At noon on Saturday Natalie heard the laughter and confused talking of many girls. She ran to the side porch and saw Tompkins' large spring-wagon approaching the house. Seated in the back of the wagon was a bevy of happy girls, and Miss Mason sat beside the driver. 164

"Here comes the Patrol, Jimmy!" shouted Natalie, eagerly beckoning to Mrs. James, who was in the living-room.

The wagon drove in the side gate and Si Tompkins halted his horses while Miss Mason called to Natalie:

"Want to jump in and go with us down to the woodland?"

"Run along, Natalie, and I will come down later," said Mrs. James, smiling a welcome at the merry party in the wagon.

In a few moments Natalie was up beside the teacher, and the wagon moved on down the hill to the river land.

Introductions were not given until the girls had jumped out of the wagon and stood about Miss Mason waiting for orders. Then Natalie found the Girl Scout Patrol consisted of nine happy, bright, intelligent girls, who felt very grateful to her for the privilege extended them to camp in her woodland that summer. 165

The camping outfit had been packed in the front end of the wagon, and when it was all removed, the girls started immediately to pitch their tents and do other necessary work for an extended camping-time.

Natalie watched with interest and saw that these girls knew exactly what to do. Miss Mason selected a site where a cold water spring bubbled up under a huge rock and formed a small pool. The overflow ran down the woodland bank into the stream. Quite close to this spring the Patrol would camp, using the water for all needs, and being far enough away from it to keep camp debris from being blown, or thrown, into the pool.

"Girls," called Miss Mason to her Scouts, "we will use this nice level spot up on the slight elevation for the tents. Here we have natural drainage away from our spring, and there is no possibility of the river seeping up into the ground under the tents. Even the hill back of us will not drain down upon our site, as there is that shallow valley between our knoll and the further hill." 166

So the tents were raised where the Patrol Leader designated, and here they found all the advantages so desired by a group of campers: plenty of sunshine part of the day, breezes whenever the wind blew across the hills, privacy because of the surrounding woods, plenty of dry wood for camp-fires, water from the spring, and the stream farther down to bathe and swim in.

Natalie watched the girls trench about each tent, and she also saw that each tent was placed about twenty-five feet from the next one. There were four tents in all,—two large ones for the girls and a smaller one for Miss Mason, while a tiny one was for a pantry.

While five girls were engaged in completing the tent arrangements, Miss Mason and the other girls in the Patrol sought a suitable spot for the latrine. Here they began to dig a trench and build a shelter. Natalie went with them and learned that a latrine must be away from the water-supply and in the opposite direction from which the prevailing winds blew toward camp. Miss Mason was most particular about this work. 167

"That trench is not deep enough, Amy," said she to one Scout who was leaving the work. "Every trench must be at least two feet deep, one wide, and four feet long. Your pit is only a foot deep, and you have not excavated the dirt from either end. Dig it out clean and pile it alongside so it can be thrown in again to cover over any waste. This latrine is for summer use—not for a week-end camp, you know."

When the tents were up and ready for use, Miss Mason called the Girl Scouts together.

"Now, girls, let us decide at once what shall be the tasks assigned to each Scout for the coming week. We will have a similar gathering every Saturday afternoon while at camp, and exchange duties so that every Scout in turn will have the pleasure of doing certain duties for a week all summer through.

"First, we will choose a Corporal to assist me for the summer. We may vote for a new Corporal, or allow Helen Marshall to hold her post. Here are nine slips of paper to vote upon. Each girl can cast a vote for Helen, or for another girl in the Patrol, and no one shall know who writes the vote. Sign no name to the paper, but we will soon know what the general wish of the group is." 168

Eight girls voted for Helen to continue in the Patrol as Corporal, and it turned out that Helen herself voted for Mary Howe as Corporal.

"Well, Helen is our Corporal still. Now, girls, form ranks so we can designate to each one the duties of the week."

The eight girls formed in two rows, four in each row, with Helen at the front with the Leader. Then Miss Mason began: "Mary, you shall be camp cook for the first week. Amy is water-scout. Mildred, you are camp-cleaner,—you have all the baggage and tents to look after. Lillian will look after the pantry and dishwashing. Peggy must take full charge of the wood and fire. Elizabeth will 169

be the baker for this week; Alice will see that the camp-grounds and latrine are kept clean and in order; and Dorothy will have to be shopper and table-worker. Helen, of course, is responsible for all work being done properly, and I must supervise the Patrol and advise each one on any problem. Now, are there any questions to ask about the duties assigned?"

Each Scout knew what was expected of her, so there were no remarks at the time. Miss Mason resumed her talk, to Natalie's great delight.

"The fire-maker will immediately build a luncheon fire, and the cook will begin preparations for the midday meal, as we are hungry and will lunch before planning further tasks."

"Miss Mason, where shall I find any food for luncheon?" now asked the camp cook of the Leader.

"In the soap box that the storekeeper placed with the luggage. We have everything there necessary to keep us in food over Sunday. The edibles must be kept under shelter, girls, so reserve the small tent for our pantry for a few days."

The wood-gatherer ran away to collect such fire-wood as was needed for a slight fire to cook luncheon, the table-scout selected a flat place to spread out the table-cloth, and soon everyone in the Patrol was working industriously. Natalie had nothing to do, and Miss Mason came over to her and entertained.

"Well, Natalie, in the life you've led since you left New York, have you any reason to regret coming to Green Hill Farm?"

"I should say not! Why, Miss Mason, these two weeks have simply flown by,—I have had so much to do, and have had so much fun doing it," exclaimed Natalie enthusiastically.

Miss Mason smiled. "If you continue improving in looks and health as you have in two weeks, Natalie, no one will ever accuse you of being delicate, or pessimistic. I should say you can compete with Janet for health and vivacity now."

"Did you know Janet is coming this afternoon?" asked Natalie eagerly.

"Yes, she told me the other day that she was ready to run away from the city the moment school closed. She would have started from home last night, but the expressman had not called for her trunk and she had not left out anything to use in case the trunk did not arrive here on time. So they are checking it on her ticket to insure its arrival to-day."

"I'll be so glad to see Janet,—she always inspires me with a desire to do more than I want to when I am left to myself," remarked Natalie.

"That is the effect of her natural energy and activity," added Miss Mason.

"I was thinking, as I watched you call a meeting of the Scouts, what a corking assistant Janet would make in a Scout Troop. I don't know what name you give her in a Troop, but in this Patrol you called her a Corporal," said Natalie.

"In a Troop she would be called a Lieutenant, but she would have to be eighteen years of age, or over, and Janet is not that. So she would have to be a Corporal for a time."

"Miss Mason, if we five girls want to form a Patrol, can we do so and choose Janet for our Corporal?" asked Natalie.

"If you had eight girls to form a Patrol you could do so, but until you had that number you would have to enlist with an already-formed Patrol. You five girls might join us for a time and, perhaps, secure enough girls living at Greenville to complete the necessary number to start a second Patrol. We have not applied at Headquarters yet for a Charter to form a Troop, but we hope to do so this year, if you girls can found another Patrol and make our membership claim two individual Patrols. I saw a number of girls of your age on our way from the station to Green Hill. I am sure those girls would hail an invitation to join a Scout Patrol."

"Maybe they would, but I never thought of any girls in Greenville, Miss Mason. I rather thought they would be too busy with home work, or their own pleasures, to bother about Scouts."

"There is where you wrong them. Not a girl in the country but would love to join such an organization. They can always find enough time to do the necessary requirements of a good Scout, and the pleasure and benefit they get out of a Troop more than repays them for the time used. I expect to interest all the girls of a membership age around Greenville before we return to the city this fall."

"I'll talk it over with Jimmy, Miss Mason, and see what she thinks of this idea. I believe the Ames girl would join us, if we told her about the plan," said Natalie.

"And once the Ames girl was a Scout, she would tell her friends and they all would want to join us,—see?"

"Yes, if they thought it was going to be any fun."

At this point in the discussion the cook came up and asked Miss Mason to show her certain matters in connection with the soup-kettle. Natalie laughed at the girl's anxious expression. But when Miss Mason invited her to come, too, and tell them what was wrong with the pot, Natalie hastened to say she would have to go back to the house and get ready to go to the station for Janet!

Mrs. James and Natalie had engaged Amity to call for them and drive them to the station to meet Janet, and when the expected visitor arrived there was a great display of delight on Natalie's part. All the way from the train to the farm the two girls were eagerly exchanging personal experiences since they had parted in the city.

"Say, Nat," began Janet, when a lull in confidences gave her time to remember other things, "Mr. Marvin told Dad that you had started a vegetable garden all by yourself! Is that so?"

Natalie smiled joyously. "Yes, and this morning I found my first tiny green spears above ground, Janet! It is lettuce!"

Janet laughed. "You are the last one on earth that I expected to take to truck-farming."

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"But it is the most fun, Janet! I wouldn't get half as much entertainment out of travelling or motoring as I am having from my garden."

The moment the girls arrived at the house, therefore, Natalie insisted upon Janet's going to her garden to see the tiny greens that were the result of the seed-planting.

"Why, look at the fine things growing in those other beds!" exclaimed Janet, allowing her gaze to wander from the place where the almost imperceptible green was showing above the ground.

"Oh yes,—those are tomatoes, potatoes, radishes, cabbages, and other things. But these particular beds are my very own work, so I feel a great joy in them."

"Aren't the others yours, too?" asked Janet.

"Yes, but the plants were given me by Farmer Ames. He threw some out of his own gardens because they were too crowded for the best results. I planted them, but I did not *raise* them from seeds. My baby plants here are all my very own!"

Janet laughed. She understood just how Natalie felt. It was the result of all her own endeavor—these tiny seedlings.

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"Well," said she, after admiring the garden beds to Natalie's utmost expectations, "I can't see what there is left for me to do, if you have succeeded in your farming so soon."

"I have been thinking of something for you to do, Janet. We've got all those barn buildings, but they are empty. If only you could keep chickens and a pig,—wouldn't that be great?" said Natalie eagerly.

Janet laughed aloud. "Turn me into a stock farmer? I never thought of it, but now that you present the idea, it surely sounds fascinating. Can't you see me currying the horses, and milking cows, or chasing a pig around the farm?"

"I am in earnest, Jan! You can easily keep chickens and sell eggs. As for a pig—why, Mr. Ames's brother wants to sell a few of a litter he has at his farm. They are the cutest little things I ever saw. You'll want to own one when you see them."

Janet laughed again, as Natalie's suggestion was so foreign to anything she had thought of. Not that it was unacceptable, however. The more she thought of the plan, the more it appealed to her as being worth while trying out.

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That evening Mrs. James sat with the two girls talking over the plan of keeping chickens and other farmyard stock.

"I can manage the initial investment all right, from my allowance that I have saved up, but how do I know that the poor creatures will not die or get sick under my management?" said Janet laughingly.

"We've got Mr. Ames near at hand, if a chicken gets the pip,—that is what they get more than anything else, I've learned," said Natalie.

Both her hearers laughed hilariously at her remark, and Janet finally said: "Well, I just think I'll experiment for fun! Where can I buy some chickens?"

"Oh, any farmer will sell you a hen," returned Natalie.

"But I want more than one hen," said Janet.

"You'll have to raise them yourself, just as I am raising vegetables from seeds. You get a hen, put some eggs in a nest and make her sit upon them. In three weeks you'll have all the young chicks you want to start with," explained Natalie.

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"It's too bad to-morrow is Sunday, or I'd go over to Farmer Ames in the morning and see about hens and a pig," said Janet regretfully.

"We're all invited to go to the Scout camp to spend the day to-morrow. But you and I will start for Ames's early Monday," replied Natalie eagerly.

So it was decided, after several hours' serious talk, that Janet should venture to raise chickens and keep a pig.

The next day was very pleasant, and being Sunday, Mrs. James permitted the two girls to sleep an hour longer than was the daily custom. When they were through with breakfast, and had

visited the gardens to see if any fresh spears of green had made an appearance since the previous evening, they all started for the Scout camp.

"Yoh-all go on ahead, an' I'll be along affer-while. I'se goin' to tote along a pan of hot biskits fer the club," said Rachel.

"All right, then we'll warn the cook that she need not worry about Scout bread for dinner," laughed Mrs. James.

Janet was curious to visit the camp and see what a lot of Girl Scouts did with themselves. Natalie had told her about Miss Mason's proposal to interest some of the Greenville girls, that, with the five who would live on the farm that summer, they might organize a second Patrol, and the two Patrols could then apply for a Troop charter.

The Sunday visit proved to be very interesting and satisfactory, for both girls saw how much the Scouts could do that they had never dreamed of before. The Sunday dinner that was prepared and served by these girls was delicious, and everything in camp was conducted according to Scout rules. When Mrs. James and her two charges were ready to start for the house, both Natalie and Janet were enthused with the ambition to launch a campaign for a second Patrol without delay.



The dinner that was prepared and served by these girls was delicious.

On the walk back home Natalie said: "We ought to write the girls to get a Scout book for themselves, and then come to Green Hill as soon as possible. We need them to go around and talk up the Scout idea with girls about here."

"I wish to goodness Helene was old enough to be a Girl Scout. That would give us six girls, instead of five," said Janet.

"Helene can be a Scoutlet—because she is under twelve—but I am not sure that that would count in our Patrol," said Mrs. James.

That night a letter was written to each of the three girls remaining in New York, telling them to go straightway to Headquarters and secure a copy of "Scouting for Girls," the handbook that is necessary for a Scout to read and apply. Also the three girls were urged to pack up and come to the farm without losing any more valuable time. But no mention was made of the reason why this request was urged.

Natalie was up an hour before breakfast on Monday and hurried to her garden to see what had grown since the day before. To her great surprise and joy, she found the corn had sprung up an inch above ground since she had visited her beloved gardens the day previous. So excited was she that she raced back to the house, shouting as soon as she came within call:

"Jimmy! Jimmy! My corn's all up! Way up, so'se you can see the blades!"

Rachel hurried out of the door to learn what had happened, and when she heard the corn had sprouted and caused all the commotion, she laughed and shook her fat form in amusement.

Mrs. James and Janet were most sympathetic, and hurried with Natalie to the bed. Sure enough! The green blades were bravely holding up their pointed green heads as if to bless their young planter.

"That's because yesterday was such a hot day, and the night was damp and dewy," remarked Mrs. James.

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By this time Natalie had gone to her other vegetable beds, and now called out: "Oh, oh! The beets and beans are up, too!"

To the great delight of the farmerette, it was found that all the shoots had now broken through the soil and tiny green heads were showing in neat rows wherever Natalie had planted seeds. This was very encouraging, and the three returned to the house for breakfast in an exalted frame of mind.

"I don't s'pose there is anything more I can do to-day to hurry them along, is there?" Natalie wondered aloud, as they finished breakfast and were discussing the wonders of a vegetable garden.

Mrs. James laughed. "No, I should advise you to start out as Janet and you planned, to interest girls in a Scout Patrol to-day. By permitting the vegetables to grow unwatched, they will surprise you the more. Perhaps the corn found courage to come out of the ground when it heard you were not around to annoy it. Had we been about the place yesterday, instead of at camp, the corn may never have dared come out of hiding."

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Natalie glanced at the speaker to see if she was in earnest, but Janet laughed merrily at the words.

"Well," ventured Natalie, "as we ought really to find enough girls to fill our quota for a Patrol, I think we will visit some of the families to-day, and then attend to our farm work later."

"How shall we manage to get around to the different houses, Nat, if they are so far apart?" asked Janet.

"I'm going to sit on the steps and watch for Mr. Ames to go by. When he comes in sight I shall ask him to drive us to the Corners. He will stop at Tompkins' for an hour, most likely, and by that time we can be ready to come back. I want to call on Nancy Sherman and Hester Tompkins. They are both about our age. On our way back from the store, we will ask Mr. Ames to tell us when he can drive us to his brother's farm to buy the pig. He may say we can go this afternoon, and if he does, we'll go!"

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"We'll buy the pig, all right, but we'll also get the Ames girl to say whether she wants to be a Girl Scout with us," laughed Janet, admiring Natalie's clever plan.

"Janet," remarked Mrs. James, "don't you see a great improvement in Natalie's ambitions? In the city she never gave a thought to planning anything. Now she is all plans for the future."

"Yes, I see Nat blossoming out into a regular organizer," laughed Janet. "If I don't watch out she will usurp my throne. I was always the leader in the crowd of girls at school, but Nat is fast getting ahead of me."

The very idea of Natalie advancing ahead of Janet made the girl laugh. But it pleased her, too, to hear her friends praise her. She knew, as well as anyone, that she was lazy and procrastinating in the city. But now she was eager to do things and to do them at once!

While she sat on the side piazza waiting for Mr. Ames, she watched the robins alight on the trees beyond the fence that divided the lawn from the field. They called to others, and chirruped at a great rate, as they fluttered in and out among the green branches.

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"What do you suppose makes them gather in *those* trees? They have been there all day yesterday and to-day. Can they be building community nests?" wondered Natalie aloud to Mrs. James.

"I rather think they are after the cherries. The fruit seems to have ripened quickly these last two days, and robins are very fond of ripe cherries."

"Whose cherry trees are they, Jimmy?"

"I don't know, Natty, but the field is said to belong to this farm, so I am going to ask Mr. Ames if the cherries are on our property. You see, they grow on the line with the fence, so I cannot tell what the land-law says about them."

Mr. Ames was now seen driving leisurely along the dusty road, and the three who were awaiting him walked down to the gate and stood under the great elm tree watching his approach.

"Good-mornin'," called he, when within hearing.

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"Good-morning," chorused the waiting group.

"I be'n thinkin' sence yistiddy, when I druv past them churry trees, there, that you'se oughter pick 'em right off! Ef you don't the durned robins'll spile all the fruit fer youh," announced the farmer, not waiting to draw up to the gate.

"Oh, we wanted to ask you if the trees belonged to us," returned Mrs. James.

"Why, sure! Who else kin claim 'em?" said he.

"They stand on the fence-line, so we were not sure," explained Natalie, showing off her newly-acquired land-learning.

"It ain't that they're standin' on the survey line, but that the last farmer here used them trees fer fence-posts to nail the wire on. That saved him three hull chestnut posts, see?"

"Oh, I see!" returned Mrs. James. "But how far off the line is his fence? Are the trees inside or outside the wire fence?"

"Well, as fur as I remember now, he ran the fence about a foot this side the line-path. Your proppity ackchully goes out a foot furdur on the road, but runnin' the wire where he did, he managed to get the use outen all them trees what grow along the road. He saved 'most fifteen dollars in posts by doin' that."

Mrs. James studied the situation for a few moments and then said: "When was the wire fence stretched on this line?"

"Why, lemme see!" and Farmer Ames shoved his hat over one ear while he scratched his head for the necessary intelligence to beam forth. "That was the last year, before one, that he lived here."

"Then the fence has stood on that line about three years?" persisted Mrs. James.

"Yeh, about that."

"Well, then, I'll tell Mr. Marvin to order you to change it. When you get time you can plan to put up posts on the *right* property line and remove the old wire fence."

Natalie and Janet wondered why anyone should bother over such a little matter, but Mr. Ames understood, and smiled.

"I reckon you knows somethin' about proppity law, eh?"

"I know this much—that if that fence is allowed to stand without protest for a certain time the land becomes public property, and Natalie would have a lawsuit on her hands if she ever sold it or wished to claim it again. The fence should never have been placed back from the line, even if it saved fifteen dollars. Those three cherry trees are worth ten times that sum, and once they become public property we can never regain rights in them."

Thus the two girls learned a bit of amazing real estate law while they stood by the wagon. When Mrs. James concluded, Natalie told Mr. Ames they wished to go to the store, so he gladly made room for them on the seat beside him.

Janet and Natalie had no difficulty in enlisting Nancy Sherman and Hester Tompkins in a proposed membership of the new Patrol, and these two girls promised to interest Mabel Holmes and Sue Harper. So there were already four girls, each about fourteen years old.

"I'm sure Dorothy Ames will join right off, 'cause she knows a girl at White Plains who is a Scout, and Dot wanted to start something like it here. But we didn't know how to begin," explained Nancy Sherman.

When Mr. Ames was ready to drive home, his two companions were ready also. Soon after they had left the Corners Natalie spoke of their desire to visit his brother's to buy a pig.

Janet instantly added: "And I want some chickens, too. Must I have a hen set on eggs to raise them?"

"You kin do as you like about that! I kin sell you'se some young chicks cheap, and you kin raise 'em. Then you kin buy a settin' hen and raise a brood that way, too. An' you'se kin keep some old fowl fer layin' aigs to use in the cookin'."

"Dear me, how much would all that cost me?" worried Janet.

"Wall, the aigs fer settin' ain't more'n other kinds. Th' old hen'll cost yuh about two dollars. Layin' hens cost about one-fifty each, an' a good rooster'll cost near abouts two-fifty. The leetle chicks won't cost no more'n twenty-five cents each."

"Oh, that is fine! I can do that, all right!" cried Janet delightedly.

"How much will the pig cost her?" asked Natalie.

"Not much. When my brother has such a big litter as this one is, I've known him to give away a few of the little porkers before they cost him anything fer feed."

Natalie and Janet exchanged looks! Plainly they said: "Oh, if only those pigs haven't cost him anything for feed!"

"How about keepin' right on to my brother's farm, now?" asked Mr. Ames, as they drew near the Green Hill house.

"That will be all right! We'll just let Jimmy know," replied Natalie delightedly.

Farmer Ames was a kindly soul, but he had a keen sense of business as well. When he heard the two girls talk of buying a pig and chickens, he wished to close the bargain without delay for his brother and himself. If they had time to think it over, they might change their minds, and he would lose a sale. So he proposed that they go right on then and conclude the business.

"How about paying for them, now, Mr. Ames?" asked Janet. "I have to write home for my money, and that will take a few days."

"Oh, don't let that worry you any. Let my brother do the worryin' about his pay," laughed Mr. Ames jokingly.

Mrs. James consented to their going to the stock-farm then and there, but reminded the girls that the chicken-coops and pig-pens were not ready to receive any living creatures yet.

"Oh, we'll fix all that when we get back," called Janet as they drove away.

Janet found the stock-farm so interesting that she almost forgot the real cause of their visit—the enlisting of Dorothy in the new Patrol. The little pink pigs were so alluring in their antics that Janet decided to buy the three which had been separated from the mother and had been weaned.

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The price asked seemed ridiculously cheap, compared to what butchers in the city charged for a pound of pork. So the three pigs were placed in a small box and the top was slatted down to keep the lively little things in bounds.

When this thrilling business matter had been concluded, Natalie told Dorothy about the new Patrol they wished to launch. They had no trouble whatever in gaining Dorothy's eager consent to become a member, as she had long wanted to be a Scout. So the two girls started homeward about noontime, feeling that they had accomplished a wonderful day's business in many ways.

"We'll jest stop at my house to let you choose some hens an' chicks, an' I'll deliver 'em in the mornin', when I drive by."

"Why can't we take them along with us to-night?" asked Janet.

"Cuz it is hard work to ketch hens in the daytime whiles they are scratchin' around. But onct they go to roost at night, it is easy to get hold of 'em without excitin' 'em too much."

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Natalie and Janet gazed at the various chickens they found about the place, and Natalie whispered to her companion when the farmer was not near by:

"Janet, choose the biggest ones you see, because Mr. Ames said they were all the same price. Some of these are awfully small while some are great heavy hens. You won't be taking advantage of him, you know, if he said we could take any we liked."

"That's so! I might take those big white hens with the yellow legs," replied Janet.

"Yes, they're nice-looking, too. Those dappled ones are not a bit picturesque; nor are those smaller hens with red-brown plumage. The white ones will look so nice walking around our lawn."

So Janet selected six of the largest white hens she could find in the entire flock of several hundred chickens. Mr. Ames remonstrated in vain that she had better take Rhode Island Reds, or some of the guinea hens instead. She *wanted* the big white ones.

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"And we'll take that lovely rooster with the wonderful tail," added Janet, selecting one with marvellous hues in his cock-plumes when the sun changed its colors to variegated beauty.

"He ain't no good fer a rooster, Miss," said Mr. Ames.

Natalie whispered advice again. "Janet, I believe he wants to keep him for himself. Don't let him do it."

"Mr. Ames, I'll take the one with those pretty feathers, or I won't buy any!" declared Janet firmly.

"Oh, all right, Miss. I don't care what you choose as long as you want them. But I'm tellin' you-all, them hens is old and that rooster is sickly," explained Mr. Ames, in a tone that said plainly: "I wash my hands of all your future complaints."

"Now how about the young chicks you told us about? Can I buy some of them?" asked Janet, when hens and rooster were noted on a paper.

"Yeh; come with me and I'll show you the kind you'd best get to start with. They're about three to four weeks old and kin scratch fer themselves and eat whatever they find. You kin let them run wild, and they'll get stronger that way."

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Then the chicks were selected and Mr. Ames found a hen that was wanting to set on a nest of eggs. So he picked up the hen and put her in a feed-bag. Both Natalie and Janet cried in fear lest she smother before they reached home.

"Nah, she's ust to such ways. I'll set her when we git over to Green Hill, and you gals kin pick out the eggs and slip 'em under her to-night when it is dark. Then she won't bother you."

All this was very interesting to the two girls who had never heard a word about raising chickens, or setting hens, before. So Mr. Ames drove them home in high spirits. The crate holding the pigs was left by the kitchen steps, and the hen placed in the coop on some china eggs, until Janet could select other eggs.

On his way past the house again, Mr. Ames called to Mrs. James: "Them churries oughter be picked soon. Ef you want me and my man to do it, we kin come this afternoon, likely."

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Rachel overheard and said: "Mis' James, pickin' ox-hearts is fun fer gals. Dem trees is jus' bustin' wid fruit a-waitin' a lot of young gals' hands to pick 'em. Ef I wuz you, Honey, I'd give Mr. Ames an answer in th' mawnin'. One night moh won't hurt the fruit, nohow."

The farmer sent an angry glance at Rachel, but she met it with effrontery. When Mrs. James said, "I think I will wait until to-morrow before deciding," Rachel grinned at the discomfited man.

He drove away without loss of time, and merely said: "I'll bring them chickens over to-morrer."

The moment he was out of hearing, Rachel said eagerly: "Why, Mis' James, them Girl Scouts down at camp'll give their haids to climb them trees and pick cherries on shares fer you. Charity begins to home, so let our gals get the benefit, says I!"

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"Oh yes, Jimmy! Then Janet and I can help them, too. It will be heaps of fun, I think. We have a good ladder in the barn, and another shorter one in the cellar, so some of us can pick the outside boughs while the others climb up and do the inside branches," planned Natalie.

Mrs. James studied the blue sky seriously. Then said: "I suppose we ought to pick them at once, then, while the weather is good. Once a rain sets in, cherries will rot. The birds, too, are ruining the ripe fruit with their pickings, so we ought to begin work immediately after luncheon."

"I'll tell you, then!" exclaimed Natalie. "While you and Rachel get the luncheon out, Janet and I will hurry to camp and ask Miss Mason if her girls want to do the work."

"I'm sure they will be crazy to do it," added Janet.

So the two friends ran down to the woodland camp where a bevy of merry Girl Scouts were just finishing their dinner. Natalie told what brought her there, and added: "We ought to be able to pick all the cherries before sundown, don't you think so, Miss Mason?"

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"Why, yes, if so many of us work. But we might break down the branches if we all climb in the trees," said she.

"Some of us will use ladders, and some climb the trees. There are three, you know, so we can plan to be on different boughs to pick," explained Natalie.

The Scouts donned their overalls which they generally used in outdoor work about camp, and started back with Natalie. At the house they were told that the fruit was to be gathered on shares, and each girl could sell her cherries to Mrs. James, or keep them, as she chose. Then the pickers were given baskets, or pails, and sent to the trees, where Natalie and Janet joined them after luncheon.

The step-ladder found in the attic was brought down and placed under the tree with the low boughs. One girl mounted this and began to pick from its top step. The long ladder from the barn was placed against another tree so that the topmost branches could be reached by careful work, and a short ladder was put against the lower boughs.

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Natalie eagerly climbed up in the branches of one of the trees and began to pick quickly. She had a two-quart tin pail that was hung over a short branch near her hands, and as she began to pick the cherries, she sang or called to her companions. Rachel smiled approvingly as she heard her "Honey-Chile" so happy, then she turned to go back to her kitchen and start a big supper for so many Girl Scouts that night.

After a time, Janet called to Natalie: "Say, aren't a lot of the cherries bad from the pecking the birds gave them?"

"Yes, and it's a shame, too! I pick what seems to be a luscious cherry, and when it is in my hand, it turns out to have a great rotted spot on the other side," added one of the Scouts.

"If the birds would only keep at the same cherry and finish it, instead of flying from one to another and taking a nip out of each," said Natalie.

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"Well, you see, they bite the ripe spot out of the cherry, and then fly to another good ripe mouthful. It is easier that way than trying to turn their heads around the cherry to eat the opposite side," laughed Janet.

"Girls!" now shouted Natalie, making a quick dash at something about her head. "Do these horrid little yellow-jackets annoy you, too?"

"They are after the decayed cherries," called a Scout.

"They are not yellow-jackets, are they? I thought they were hornets," said another Scout.

"They're both—there is a hornet, now—buzzing about my ear!" cried Janet.

At that very moment, a sharp scream from Natalie caused every girl to turn her head and see what had happened. In another moment a crash of branches and a flash of a body falling down through the leaves made several of the Scouts cry out in fright.

Natalie had been picking the cherries from the topmost branches, as she liked to sit up high and pelt the stones from the fruit she ate, down at the girls' heads, to tease them. The hornets had a small nest in the top of the tree, but Natalie was not aware of that. As she called and laughed at her friends, the hornets began to grow excited, and when they found the annoyance failed to go away but came ever nearer their nest, they buzzed about and threatened in angry terms. Still Natalie paid no attention to what they said to her. She thought they wanted to feed on the rotten fruit, whereas they merely wished her to go and leave them in peace.

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At last the disturbance was too much for one of the old hornets. He flew in circles about her head and scolded until his exasperation took form in the offensive. Natalie's neck was a very advantageous spot and she could not see him when he lit on her collar and quickly crept up to the soft smooth skin in the nape of the neck.

Without further warning he drove in his dagger-point and Natalie screamed with pain. Forgetting that she was up in a tree, and must cling fast to the boughs, she suddenly put both hands to her neck. The natural result was, she fell down so quickly that her friends could not get to her assistance in time to do a thing.

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Smaller twigs and branches had given way with her weight and she would have fallen to the ground, had not a friendly bough caught her under the arms and suspended her momentarily.

Then the smaller bough that grew from the friendly one snapped short off under the girl's weight, and the sharp up-thrusting section left on the tree ran right through the suspender-straps at the back of her overalls. There she hung, like a toy doll on a Christmas Tree,—her feet dangling and her head and hands helplessly held out to be taken down by some kind friend.

The terrifying scream brought Rachel running from the kitchen and Mrs. James up from the cellar, where she had gone to hunt for more containers for the cherries. When Rachel saw what had happened she wrung her fat hands in agony.

"Oh, m' Honey! My li'l' chile—hang on t' dat limb fer all you'se wuth!" yelled she. Then she rushed over the grass to the rescue,—but Natalie dangled just out of reach above her head.

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Janet slid down the rough trunk of the cherry-tree the moment she heard her friend shriek. Her thin stockings hung in strips when she reached the ground, and her legs were skinned from knees to ankles, but she felt no pain, as she was so excited over the outcome of this accident.

"Quick! Someone get that step-ladder we had here!" cried she, jumping up and down in her fear that Natalie would let go and fall; yet she was too excited to run for the ladder herself.

Rachel instantly comprehended and jumped across the intervening space between the two trees and caught a firm hold of the lower part of the step-ladder. She never stopped to see if anyone was on the top step. But one of the Scouts had been standing on it with her form hidden in the foliage of the tree. As Rachel whirled the ladder out from under her, the Scout was left in mid-air, instinctively clutching the branches to save herself.

The other Scouts had descended the trees by this time, and some ran over to help save Natalie, while others stopped under the tree where the new accident threatened to take place.

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"Help! Help!" yelled the girl who was dangling from a bough.

Miss Mason had been measuring the cherries impartially, half for the individual pickers and half for Mrs. James, when the first accident happened. She was out of the house and crossing the grass when the second scream reached her ears. She saw an old hemp hammock hanging from a clothes pole on the drying-place, and had a sudden idea.

The hammock was snatched and carried over to the tree where the Scout hung. "Here, girls! Spread it out quickly! We will have a life-saving net and win a reward for our presence of mind!" ordered the teacher.

The Scouts instantly obeyed and the net was spread even as May wailed: "I have to let go! My hands won't hold on longer!"

"All right! Drop!" commanded Miss Mason. "We'll save you."

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May yelled and let go. She was caught in the meshes of the old hammock, but the hemp was so rotten that in another moment it separated and let May down on the grass. However, it had answered its purpose, for the time, and had broken her fall.

While this "first-aid" was being given, Rachel ran, in great excitement, back to assist Natalie. She had hastily placed the extra-high step-ladder under the tree and, without taking time to see that the braces that hold back and front sections firmly apart were *not* taut, she began to mount the steps to reach her "Honey."

Half-way up, the now overbalanced ladder started to sway uncertainly, and Rachel gasped as she wildly tried to clutch something to steady herself. Natalie's feet were the only available things in sight.

"Ough! Mis' James! Heigh, down dere—someone grab hol' on dis ladder!" shouted Rachel, her eyes almost popping from her head.

"Wait! Hold on, Rachel!" called a chorus of voices below.

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The ladder was still quaking uncertainly when Rachel lost courage and began to descend precipitously, without stopping to find a sure footing on the steps. Consequently, she missed the second step from the bottom and sat down unceremoniously in a bushel of ripe ox-hearts.

"Umph!" was the grunt that was forced from her lungs, but the Scouts all howled with dismay when they saw the result to their patient cherry picking.

Janet did not stop to see what was occurring to Rachel. The moment she saw the mammy come down, she ran up the steps and steadied herself by holding to the bough from which Natalie still swung. Miss Mason managed to hold the bottom of the ladder until Janet had guided her friend's feet to the top step. Then the strain on the suspenders was loosened and it was easy to unbuckle the straps at the back of the overalls.

In a few more moments, Natalie was helped down the ladder and once more stood on *terra firma*. But such a funny sight was presented her when she breathed in safety once more, that she momentarily forgot the hornet sting and laughed wildly.

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Mrs. James had called several of the Scouts to help her in pulling Rachel up out of the bushel basket upon her feet again. This muscular deed was accomplished just as Natalie stepped down on the ground. But Rachel's percale bungalo-gown was a sight!

The luscious ripe cherries were mashed all over her skirt, and half of the fruit in the basket was crushed as if done by a fruit-press. Rachel was torn between two fires—that of humble apology to the scout-pickers for spoiling their "fruits of labor" and concern over Natalie who was holding

her hand over the back of her neck. Mother-instinct that was so deeply rooted in Rachel, although she had never had a child of her own, won the day and she ran over to Natalie to ascertain the extent of the troublesome sting.

“Oh, mah pore Honey! Mah sweet li’l’ chile—did dem nasty bees sting yoh?” Rachel cried, enfolding Natalie in her capacious embrace. Then she added, “Now jus’ you-all wait a minit, chillun, an’ I’ll soon git dat stinger out.”

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Consequently she made a soft paste of mud and water, and slapped a handful of it on Natalie’s neck. Then she tied a towel over it to keep it in place.

“Now, Honey, yoh jus’ sit heah wid yoh haid down in front, so’s dat mud won’t run down yoh back,” advised she.

Natalie obeyed, albeit the mud did ooze in trickles down her back and fill up at her belt in a dried lump.

The pain of the sting was soon over, and Natalie tried to gather some more cherries, but she kept away from the top of the tree where the hornets still buzzed angrily about. The other Scouts also kept a safe distance from that nest.

By sundown all the cherries were picked, and the quantity evenly divided into shares. Each girl had made a pile of the fruit she gathered, and so no Scout felt that another was benefiting by her work. But when all was measured out, it was found that the girls had picked about the same quantities, with but little variation.

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That evening while enjoying Rachel’s bountiful supper, the Scout girls were told about the new Patrol that Janet and Natalie were hoping to start. That was a very engrossing subject and no one gave a thought to things outside, until it was time for the Scouts to return to camp. Then a plaintive squealing came from a crate placed on the piazza, and Janet suddenly remembered the pigs.

“Oh, horrors! Will little pigs die if they have been left without a thing to eat for a day?” wailed she, as she clasped her hands in shocked concern.

Everyone laughed at her, and Mrs. James said: “Not if you attend to them at once. But they will have to live in the crate overnight, as nothing can be done about housing them now.”

So Rachel mixed a dish of warm milk and corn meal for the wailing squealers, and soon hushed their clamorings. Janet felt guilty of gross neglect on the first night of her business investment, but Natalie tried to condole with her by saying:

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“Well, cherries, and pigs, and new Scouts can’t all be gathered in one day, you know.”

This created such a laugh at the quaint combination of the triple interests, that Janet felt relieved in mind. After the Scouts had gone back to camp, Natalie reminded Janet of the eggs they were to give the hen for setting.

“We’ll do that now,” said Janet anxiously.

So the two girls went to the pantry without asking advice of Rachel or Mrs. James, and counted out twelve eggs. These were carefully carried to the hen-coop and after many wild squawkings from the hen, and concerned action by the two farmerettes, seven of the twelve eggs remained unbroken and were placed under the future mother of a family.

“My! I wouldn’t want to experience a skirmish with a hen very often,” said Janet, counting the scratches on her hands and arms after they reëntered the kitchen.

“Neither would I,” agreed Natalie, holding her hands and wrists under the cold water faucet to let the cooling flood wash away the signs of battle with the hen’s sharp bill.

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“Well, she’s got seven sound eggs to hatch, anyway. When we get time to spare, we will put a few other eggs under her, so we can have the full dozen chicks as Mr. Ames advised.”

“I never knew it was such a simple matter to raise chicks, did you?” remarked Natalie, as she wiped her hands on the kitchen towel.

“No, and when you think of all the money we pay for roast chicken in New York, it makes you want to live always on a farm, doesn’t it?” added Janet.

But neither girl knew that many store eggs were not suitable for hatching chicks. They had not examined the yolks as chicken farmers do, to see if the egg was fertilized. So they had placed two suitable eggs, and five unfertilized eggs, under the hen. When but two chicks would result from that experiment, what a disappointment there would be. Janet would be sure to declare that stock-raising wasn’t such an easy business, after all!

## CHAPTER X—TRIALS OF A FARMER’S LIFE

213

Mr. Ames brought the chickens and hens early in the morning, and so interested was Natalie in Janet’s stock-investment that the vegetable gardens were quite forgotten for a few days. Sunday she had spent at camp with the Girl Scouts; Monday she and Janet had gone to the Corners and

enlisted girls to join them in a new Patrol, and in the afternoon they had picked cherries; then on Tuesday the chickens came, and some sort of a house had to be built for the pigs, as well as for the hens. So three days had passed by and she had not had time to inspect her gardens.

Farmer Ames acted huffy because the cherries had all been gathered when he drove up to the kitchen door in the morning. So he merely delivered the crate containing the hens and young chicks, and having handed Rachel the basket of eggs for the setting hen, drove away again.

214

"Dear me! I wanted to ask him how big a pen to build for three pigs!" sighed Janet, when she heard he had gone.

"No 'count why he hes to tell yuh that! I rickon anyone like me, what's borned and brought up on a farm in Norf Car'liny, kin help dat way, better'n an ole grumpy farmer in Noo York state," announced Rachel.

"All right, Rach, I'll be thankful of your advice," replied Janet, gazing down at the squirming pigs.

So Natalie and Janet occupied themselves most industriously in the building of a pig-pen for the little porkers, and in mending the old hen-house and chicken run. A separate coop was found where the setting hen might brood quietly on the eggs, and the young chicks were given their freedom of the place, because Rachel said they would grow much faster if they could run about and scratch.

215

But this advice had dire results, as Natalie learned, too late.

By sundown the pigs were nicely housed, and the old hens and rooster found comfortable roosts in a remodelled hen-house. The young chicks clustered together in the chicken yard and were driven inside the house by the persuasive "s-sh's" and waving hands of the concerned farmerettes.

These important matters disposed of for the day and Rachel not having announced supper, Natalie said: "Come with me to see my garden. I haven't had a moment's time to visit it lately."

"I suppose the lettuce is large enough to pull, now," laughed Janet teasingly.

"No, but I shouldn't be surprised if the radishes that were transplanted from Ames's garden were big enough to use."

The two girls went arm-in-arm down the pathway and when they reached the old box hedge that divided the vegetable beds from the back lawns, they stood for a moment listening to the echo of merry laughter coming from the woodland down by the river.

216

Then Natalie came to the first garden bed.

"Oh, oh! Look,—Janet! What has happened to my beans?" cried she shrilly, as she stood gazing in horror at what she saw.

Janet gazed, too. The tiny green things that had looked so fresh and pert a few days before were out of the ground in many places, and the soil was unevenly scattered in small heaps. From this havoc, Natalie quickly looked over at the lettuce bed.

"Oh, oh! How dreadful! Look at that garden bed! Why, all the lettuce is cropped off close to the ground. *What* could have done it, Janet?" her eyes filled with tears and her voice threatened an imminent howl.

"Goodness me, Nat! I don't know what has happened!" said Janet, deeply concerned for her friend.

The two then hastily visited the other beds, and found the radishes and potato plants undisturbed, but the corn was dug up in spots and the remaining blades half-eaten.

217

Without a thought for the tender green still remaining, Natalie suddenly collapsed upon the corn hills and gave vent to a heart-breaking cry. Once the flood-gates were down, she wept and wailed and would not be comforted. Finally Janet ran to the house and summoned relief.

Mrs. James and Rachel hurried after her to soothe the crying damsel in the corn field; but Rachel understood what had taken place in that garden, even as she raced past the half-destroyed vegetable beds.

She knelt down beside Natalie and tried to pacify her by endearing terms, but the amateur farmer was too sorry for herself to pay any attention to Rachel. All she could gasp forth was: "If I ever find out who did this, I'll kill them!"

Rachel sent Mrs. James a knowing look, and nodded toward the barnyard. Thus the lady gathered that the hens and chicks had feasted on the tender greens and had dug up the soft rich soil in seeking for earthworms when they had been turned loose that day.

218

Darkness slowly crept up from the river banks and the four finally turned to go in to supper. As they reached the box hedge, Rachel remembered the boiling potatoes that were almost cooked when she was summoned hastily by Janet.

"Oh, laws! I betcher they am all black as cinders by this time!" cried she, making a leap to escape over the hedge and reach the kitchen in a hurry.

A dense smoke was seen issuing from the open door of the kitchen, and Rachel's three followers forgot their recent troubles in this new disaster.

Just as they reached the steps of the back porch, Rachel rushed the smoking pot out of the door

and ran with it to the grass beside the board-walk.

"Dere ain't no smell on eart' ner unner de eart' to beat dis smell o' burnin' pertaters!" growled Rachel angrily, as she planked the blackened cooking pot down upon the ground.

"Oh my! The kitchen is full of smoke!" exclaimed Janet, who had poked her head in at the open door. 219

"Did you'se 'speck it to be sweet an' free as hebben?" snapped Rachel scornfully.

Mrs. James said nothing but quickly drew the two girls aside to the other door to permit Rachel to calm her perturbed nerves. Then Natalie remembered her beloved garden.

"Jimmy, who could have been so mean as to do that?"

"Of course, I wasn't present, Natalie, dear. But I have heard that crows love to dig up corn kernels in a newly-planted field, so that farmers have to use scarecrows to keep them off. Maybe some sort of a bird found the toothsome greens and called to all the family to hurry and feast while there was time."

Natalie pondered this idea for a time, but it never occurred to her to lay the trouble at the heels of the chickens. But she determined to lose no time in dressing up the most frightful scarecrow that was conceivable.

After the unscorched remainder of the supper was served, Rachel came to the dining-room to make a suggestion. 220

"Ef we-all git up earlier than us'al to-morrer mornin' we kin git all dem rooted-up plants back in the groun' afore sun-up. Mebbe it will rain to-morrer, then no harm'll come of diggin' up all dem roots."

The mere possibility of rain made Natalie jump up from the table and, quickly excusing herself, run out on the porch to study the heavens.

"Not a star out, and the sky looks awfully cloudy," cried she hopefully, as she returned.

"Then we'll all get up at dawn and begin work in making amends in the garden," said Mrs. James consolingly.

The little plants were replanted early in the morning and certain spots where the soil had been scratched away were smoothed out again, so that only a close observer would have seen that there were places here and there where no vegetables grew.

About seven o'clock a fine drizzle began, and Natalie welcomed it with sparkling eyes. "*Now* the roots can have time to get freshened again before a hot sun comes to dry things up." 221

A letter came that morning telling Natalie that Norma, Frances, and Belle would soon be ready to leave the city. By counting from the date of the letter, it was found that they would be at Greenville that very day on the noon train. Probably the letter had been delayed in coming, or had been overlooked in some way.

"We had better send word to Amity, by Mr. Ames, that he is to meet the train they come on," suggested Mrs. James.

But the girls watched for Mr. Ames in vain that morning, and noon hour came and still no word had been sent to Amity. Janet was out feeding the pigs when she heard a shout from the road. She looked up wonderingly and saw the three girls tramping along in the rain and mud, trying to manage suit-cases and umbrellas at the same time, as they jumped puddles or avoided a stretch of mud.

She ran to the house and called Natalie. In another moment, both girls were out on the side-piazza waiting to take the luggage from the bespattered girls. 222

"My goodness me! Why don't you move nearer the railroad station, Nat?" complained Norma.

"That horrid hackman wouldn't give us a lift, although he was sitting at Tompkins' store toasting his feet at a stove," added Belle, angrily.

"At a stove! In summer?" cried Natalie, wonderingly.

"Yes, but there was no fire in the thing. He was tilted back in a wooden chair telling stories to some farmers, and his old horse was standing out in the rain, patiently waiting for a bag of oats," said Frances.

Mrs. James joined the group now, and overheard the last words of complaint. "I don't see why he could not drive you here, as long as he was not engaged."

"That's exactly what Belle asked him, but he said: 'Can't you see I *am* engaged? I must not interrupt this talk on polerticks. It's mos' votin' time and we-all has to get facks afore we cast a ballot,'" laughed Norma imitating Amity. 223

"Did you entice him with extra pay?" asked Janet laughingly.

"What was the good? He just ignored us, so we had to walk the rest of the way here," Frances said. "But I made up my mind to one thing: If that is the way the only cab-man of Greenville treats his trade, I'll cut him out of it all, if I can manage to have *my* way."

They were all in the living-room now, and had removed muddy overshoes and wet coats and hats. Rachel was hastily brewing some hot tea to make everyone feel more cheerful, so the girls sat

and talked.

Natalie instantly asked Frances what she meant.

"Well, Daddy and mother are going out to Colorado for the summer, and the machine will be put up in a garage, or I will have it out here to use. Now I've been thinking over all Nat said about each one of us earning some money this summer, and I couldn't think of a single thing I could do. But that cranky old hackman gave me a cue: I'll use the car out here for the people who wish to travel back and forth, or take a drive to certain places. I ought to be able to save quite a sum before fall," explained Frances eagerly.

224

"Frans, that will be fine! We will be your best customers," laughed Janet, while the other girls all approved the plan.

"That seems like Frances' golden opportunity, but Norma and I haven't found a thing to do, yet," added Belle.

"You will, never fear. Janet found her vocation the first day she was here," laughed Natalie.

Then Janet had to tell about her stock-raising, and her friends laughed heartily when they heard about the first night the piggies arrived at their new home.

"The chickens are doing fine! I had to keep them shut up in the yard to-day to get them thoroughly acquainted with their surroundings, so they won't run away," said Janet, but she did not say that they were kept locked up for fear they might wander over to the garden again and create more trouble.

225

"I should think you would have a cow and sell milk," suggested Belle laughingly.

"Cows cost a lot of money. I priced one of Ames's and when I heard the sum, I lost interest in milk," replied Janet, causing the girls to laugh at her explanation.

"But I am going to buy some ducks as soon as my new allowance is due. There is plenty of water for them to swim in and ducks look so rural, don't you know," added she.

"But they are difficult to raise, Janet," said Mrs. James.

"Why? If you let them swim about and give them enough feed, what more can they want?"

"I don't know, but they take certain spells of sickness quicker than any other fowl and, in a day or two, the whole flock droops and dies off. Geese are much easier to rear and bring better prices in the market, too."

"Oh, then I'll have geese. But I've heard they chase one, if they don't like you," said Janet.

226

"They wouldn't chase you if you fed them; and should they take it into their geese-heads to run anyone else out of the yard, it will be a warning for others to keep away."

The drizzle stopped after luncheon, so that the girls put on raincoats and oil-skin caps and started to visit the Scout camp. On the way, they visited Natalie's garden and extolled her work and patience that had brought forth such results.

Natalie beamed like a full moon at the deserved praise and explained how wonderful the vegetables were before the dastardly birds dug everything up.

"Yes, Nat, I know," remarked Belle. "It's almost like the wonderful fish one just missed catching, isn't it?"

Everyone laughed at this, even Natalie joining in at her own expense. "Well, I don't care! They *would* have been much better if they had not been interfered with," said she.

After leaving the garden, Natalie opened the subject of the Scout Patrol that would be an offshoot of Miss Mason's first Patrol. This would give both Patrols the opportunity to launch the Troop.

227

"Fine! How soon can we begin?" said Belle.

"Well talk it over with Miss Mason this afternoon. I haven't had time, yet, to tell her about the Greenville girls who agreed to join us, as Janet and I have had *so* much to do since then," explained Natalie.

The girls were now near enough to the woodland to hear the sound of singing. Mrs. James held up a hand for silence and they stood and listened. It sounded very wonderful from the hillside where they were to hear the blending of soprano and alto voices in the national anthem "Our America." There was a martial impetus in the singing that spoke well for the patriotism of the Girl Scouts.

"What does Miss Mason call her Patrol, Nat?" asked Norma, as they resumed their way to the river.

"Now that you speak of it, Norma, I must confess that I never asked. Isn't it funny that I never thought of it?" said Natalie.

228

"But we will ask now, and find out. Of course we will have to use the same name if Miss Mason has already chosen one for a Troop," said Janet.

The visitors reached the camp site and found the Scouts holding a council meeting. They had just finished the patriotic song and Miss Mason was opening the meeting by an address. The unexpected guests were invited to sit down on a huge log and hear the Leader's speech.

"The members of this Patrol know the reason for this council, but I will explain to the newcomers, too," said Miss Mason, turning to Mrs. James and the girls.

"We have decided to send to Headquarters in New York to ask to be enrolled as a Troop, now that we have had more than a year's experience with the organization. Because you girls wish to start another Patrol and unite with our Troop, we think it urgent to be registered and chartered by the National Headquarters, and be able to own a flag and choose a title and crest for our use."

229

The visiting girls exchanged glances with each other, as the question just asked Natalie was about to be answered now. Miss Mason did not see their looks and proceeded with her explanation.

"We chose a name when first we started our Patrol but we have never registered it, and there was a question whether we would care to change it after a time. We called ourselves the 'Solomon's Seal Patrol' as having so much meaning to the name. We think that the reflected glory of Solomon's wisdom is better than none. So we have decided, now, to christen our Troop by that name. We will vote on this later. At present I wish to mention a few other points.

"I am now about to speak of a new Patrol, or new members, so it is fortunate that our visitors arrived in time to hear all I have to say.

"I suppose every girl present has a manual: 'Scouting for Girls'?" Everyone nodded in the affirmative, and Miss Mason continued:

230

"Then you will read on page 44, that every girl who wishes to enroll as a Scout must be at least ten years old and must have attended meetings for a month, during which time she will have passed her Tenderfoot Test. During the first month she is known as a Candidate. When she knows the meaning of the Promise and the Laws, and is sure she understands the meaning of the oath she is about to take, and comprehends the meaning of 'Honor,' she is eligible to be a Tenderfoot.

"My Girl Scouts passed the Tenderfoot class last year, and then took the Second Class Test, which was also passed successfully by them. We are all ready to pass the First Class Scout Test, except that each girl must present a Tenderfoot who has been trained by the candidate. This is our opportunity, as you girls all wish to be Scouts, and my girls can train you, thus giving them the privilege of being First Class Scouts.

"I was going to speak of other things, but since our visitors' arrival, I wish Mrs. James to tell us how many girls she knows on whom we can count for the new Patrol." Miss Mason turned to Mrs. James and waited.

231

"Natalie knows more about the matter than I, Miss Mason, as she and Janet went about the Corners securing the candidates. Let her tell us about it," replied Mrs. James.

Natalie was called upon to address the audience and so she got up and spoke. "Janet and I called on Nancy Sherman and Hester Tompkins and secured their promise to join our Patrol as soon as we were ready for them. Then we went to Dorothy Ames's house and got her interested. With these girls"—Natalie waved her hand at the four girls sitting on the log,—“we will have eight applicants. Janet has a younger sister Helene, who is not twelve yet, so we are not sure whether we want her to belong to our Patrol. All of us girls are over twelve and it is more fun when girls are nearer an age. I've been thinking that Helene might start a Brownie Troop, a younger Patrol than ours. We might allow them to join us, later on.”

232

As Natalie sat down, the girls of Solomon's Seal Patrol showed their delight at the progress made in the enlisting, and Miss Mason commended the two who had visited the girls of Four Corners and had interested them in the proposed plan.

"Mrs. James, have you thought of a Leader and Corporal for Natalie's new Patrol?" asked Miss Mason.

"I fear I am not well enough versed in scouting to take such a responsibility upon myself. I would prefer having you do it," responded Mrs. James.

"I'd rather not be any officer, Miss Mason," exclaimed Natalie, "because they always have to work while the others have a good time. I'll just be an every-day Scout."

The girls laughed, as there was more reason than rhyme in the statement. But Miss Mason said: "There's always one girl in a group who has the knack of directing her companions. Such a girl ought to be an officer."

"Then, for goodness' sake, choose Janet for our manager," exclaimed Natalie. "She always runs us and everything concerned with us."

233

The Scouts laughed, and Miss Mason nodded her head. "I always thought as much, but you will confess, Natalie, that she makes a pretty good general, eh?"

Janet blushed with pleasure at the teacher's praise, and Natalie smiled: "Oh, *pretty* good!" Then she grinned at her friend.

"Janet, will you act as Patrol Leader for your new Scouts?" asked Miss Mason, turning again to Janet.

"I will, if Natalie will be my Corporal," returned Janet.

"Seeing that there are only two members in our Patrol as yet, I can't see how I can get out of being either one or the other," laughed Natalie.

"Oh, but we will have more members shortly, and this office of Corporal must be considered as binding until a new election," explained Janet.

"Well then, Jan, if you can bear up under the arduous duties of a Patrol Leader, I reckon I can survive the work of acting as your Corporal," retorted Natalie. 234

"All right. Then we'll enroll our Tenderfoot Scouts in a Patrol before the next official meeting here, and begin training them in the path that they should follow," agreed irrepressible Janet.

After this, many subjects that interest Girl Scouts were taken up and discussed, and the girls from Green Hill Farmhouse were more deeply impressed with the wonders of scouting than they had dreamed possible. Each girl determined to do everything possible to learn as much that summer as those Girl Scouts of Solomon's Seal knew.

## CHAPTER XI—NORMA AND FRANCES LAUNCH THEMSELVES 235

Frances lost no time in putting her idea for business into operation, so she wrote her father that night, asking him to let her have the automobile at Green Hill Farm for the summer instead of storing it with some big garage company. She did not say that she wished to start a service route to earn money, but she did say that there was a fine barn on the farm where the car could be kept, and it would give them all such pleasure to be able to drive about the lovely country in Westchester.

No one was shown this letter, but Frances insisted upon walking to the Corners with it that night, to get it out on the first early morning mail to New York.

"Let's all walk to the store with Frans," suggested Janet, jumping up to show her readiness to go. 236

"That will give me the chance to get some slips that Mrs. Tompkins promised us the other day," added Natalie.

"And we can introduce Norma, Belle, and Frances to Nancy Sherman and Hester Tompkins," added Janet.

So the girls hastily arranged their hair and started out, with Mrs. James to escort them. The country road was very alluring in the twilight, but there were no gorgeous colors from a flaring sunset that evening, as the grey overcast sky had continued all day.

They tramped along the foot-path that ran beside the road and Norma said jokingly: "When we hiked this from the station we never dreamed we would be retracing our steps so soon."

"It seems almost as if we had been at Green Hill a month, doesn't it?" said Frances.

Just at this moment Janet gave a sudden gasp. "Oh me, oh my! I must run right back home, girls!"

"What for? What's happened?" asked four anxious voices. 237

"Oh, *oh*, OH! It isn't what's happened,—it's what I forgot to do!"

"But what? Can't you confide in us?" urged Natalie.

"I forgot all about those pesky chickens. I never fed them to-night, nor did I give them fresh water. I've got to do it before it is too late."

Everyone laughed, but Mrs. James said: "You're too late already, Janet. Chickens go to roost before twilight. You will not get them to eat or drink to-night."

"Dear me! Then they will grow so thin I'll never be able to enter them in a County Fair!" said Janet whimsically.

"You never hinted that that was your ambition," laughed Natalie. "You started out to do a thriving business with eggs and broilers."

"I can do that, too, can't I? But there is nothing to prevent me from trying for a cash prize in some Poultry Show this fall, either," explained Janet.

"If I start a business of any kind, you won't find me neglecting it like that!" bragged Norma. 238

"Wait until you start one—then talk!" retorted Janet.

"How are your vegetables growing to-night, Nat?" said Belle teasingly. "Almost ready to ship to Washington Market?"

"Instead of laughing at Janet, or my investments, why don't you do something yourselves?" demanded Natalie scornfully.

"We would love to, but what is there left for us to do?" returned Norma.

"Surely you don't think vegetables and stock-raising compose all the industries in the world, do you?" laughed Mrs. James.

"No, not in a city; but on a farm, what else can one do?" asked Belle.

"Well, I always thought there was a wonderful opportunity for some ambitious girl to raise



flowers and send in bouquets to the city every morning," suggested Mrs. James.

"Bouquets! Who to?" asked Belle.

The other girls were listening attentively, for they had never thought of such a possibility before.

"Mr. Marvin said the flowers he cut back of the house, the day he came up here, brightened his office for many a day. I am convinced that many hard-working business men downtown would lean back in their swivel chairs and smile at a handful of homely country flowers on their desks, if they but had them. Think of the scores of troubled, rushing men in the financial districts of New York, who would stop a minute in their mad race for success to think of their boyhood home, should a rose give forth its perfume on his desk? Think of the peaceful rural picture a few flowers in a glass on the desk might bring to a jaded man who never takes time to dream of his old home."

Mrs. James' words created a vision that was most effective with the girls. After a few moments of silence, Norma said softly: "I'd love to do just that thing, Mrs. James."

"But you haven't any flowers to start with," said Belle.

"Why can't I start some just as Nat did her vegetables, if I go right at it now?" demanded Norma.

"Norma, Mrs. Tompkins promised me some petunia plants, and asters, and sweet-peas, and other slips, if I wanted to use them in the flower gardens. I really didn't want them but I hated to refuse her, as she is so fond of flowers she thinks everyone else must be, also. Now, this is your opportunity!" said Mrs. James.

"You take the plants and slips she offers, and by judicious praise you will urge her to talk about her gardens. In this way, you can find out more about raising flowers than if you had a book on the subject. I never saw such gorgeous blossoms as she has," said Natalie eagerly.

"When she finds she has a really interested florist who intends doing the work properly, she may give Norma more slips than Natalie could draw from her," suggested Frances.

"At any rate, we need plenty of flowers around the place to make it look attractive, and Norma's plan will beautify the grounds as well as give her her profession," said Mrs. James.

When they arrived at the Corners Frances mailed her letter; and Norma, with Mrs. James, stopped in to see Mrs. Tompkins and her flower gardens; but the other girls went to Nancy Sherman's house to plan about the Patrol meetings.

Mrs. Tompkins was delighted to have visitors who were interested in flowers, and when Norma was ready to join the girls to go home, she carried a huge market basket filled with all sorts of plants,—from a delicate lily to a briar-rose.

As they trudged along the dark road, Norma said: "I suppose it will be too dark when we get home to plant the flowers to-night, Mrs. James?"

"Oh yes; but you can get up before the sun in the morning and have the planting done before the heat of the day," said Mrs. James.

"Mrs. Tompkins told me to place inverted flower-pots over all the young plants during the middle of the day, until they began to perk up their heads. That would show they had taken new root in the soil to which they had been transplanted. But the rose-bush and lily I must plant in a sheltered spot and shade them with a screen for a week or more. They would always freshen up at night but would droop during the day unless I did this," explained Norma.

"I wonder how long it will be before those little things have flowers?" said Belle.

"Mrs. Tompkins told me that they would bud in two weeks at least. I mean, the portulaca and heliotrope and other old-fashioned plants she dug up for me. You see, they were already started in her garden, and this transplanting will only set them back a few days, she said."

"Then you can begin to figure on an income in a month's time, at the very latest," teased Belle.

Norma made no reply to this laughing remark, but she was determined to show Belle that perseverance and persistence were great things that made for success.

It was past nine when the girls reached Green Hill Farm. As they entered the side gate they heard strange sounds coming from the barnyard. Everyone glanced at Janet to inquire the cause of the sounds.

"It sounds just like those piggies. What can they be squealing for at this hour?" said Mrs. James.

Janet looked guilty, but she said nothing. However, as soon as they reached the side piazza, she hurried on past the kitchen door and made for the barn.

Rachel heard the arrival and came out on the piazza. "Mis' James, dem pigs ain't kep' still all night. I guv 'em some hot mush at six o'clock 'cause Janet fergot to feed 'em. But I ain't goin' to be no nuss-gal to any porkers when I'se got my house-wuk to look after. Ef I wuz goin' to raise hogs, I'd raise 'em, but I ain't goin' to do it fer no one else, nohow."

Everyone laughed appreciatively, and Mrs. James added: "Janet told us she had forgotten the chickens to-night. But I told her there was no use in her returning home, then, as fowl went to roost with the sun, and would not want to be bothered again. I was not aware the pigs had been forgotten, too."

"Wall, I kin tell her what ails 'em, but I jes' thought I'd let her try to fin' it out herself. Mebbe

she'll take a little interest in her business if she is left to do the wuk!" declared Rachel.

"What makes them squeal, Rachel? You can tell us, can't you?" coaxed Natalie.

"Well den, dey ain't got no beddin' to sleep on, an' t' dish wid water is be'n upsot all evenin', so dey ain't got no drinkin' water. Young pigs drink an orful lot of water an' dey has to have good beddin' to sleep on, or dey'll squeal."

After this explanation, the other girls were eager to go to the pig-pen and see what Janet was doing for the comfort of her investment. Natalie ran indoors and got an electric flashlight, and they all started for the barnyard, Rachel bringing up the rear.

Poor Janet was ready to scream, when they found her trying to hush the pigs. She would try to catch first one, then another to see if anything had happened to them, but they kept her jumping around the pen without her fingers ever touching their little pink hides. 245

After Mrs. James explained the cause of their rioting, Janet crawled over the closely-fitted laths that fenced them in; and all the girls started for the barn to find some fresh straw for a bed. Water had been given them, and the avidity with which they drank it showed how thirsty they had been.

When the bed was made up in the little house, the three weary little fellows ran in and were soon curled up to sleep. Then the girls followed Rachel back to the house, Janet listening very humbly to her discourse on "Cruelty to Domestic Animals."

Early in the morning Norma was up, and without disturbing anyone, slipped down-stairs and started to work on the flower beds. She had listened so earnestly to Mrs. Tompkins' advice about digging and fertilizing the soil, that she had finished the narrow beds that edged the house before the other girls came down.

"Why, Norma, you certainly are industrious," said Mrs. James, when she saw all that had been accomplished. 246

"Isn't it fun, Mrs. James! I never dreamed how nice it is to be a farmer. But I never want to be anything else, now."

Belle laughed, for she was too dignified and superior to ever think of farm-work. Natalie watched Norma rake over the roundel that was the center of the turn-around in the drive from the road, and then remarked: "Where did you find the compost, Norma?"

Norma looked up and smiled. "Mrs. Tompkins told me how to mix the fertilizer found in a barnyard, and so I did. But I found some in a box over there by the vegetable gardens and I used some of that, too."

"If I didn't have to go and look after my vegetable gardens, Norma, I'd help you plant the flowers," said Natalie. "But duty calls me, so I must obey."

"I'll help Norma plant the slips," offered Janet.

"Your duty is calling you with a louder voice than Natalie's ever could," laughed Belle, holding up a finger to attract attention to the pig-pen. 247

The girls laughed, and Janet sighed. "I suppose it will be pigs, pigs, pigs all summer, whenever I have anything else I wish to do. Even that old hen misbehaves, and gets off the nest every time I examine the eggs to see if they are being pecked."

Natalie had started for her garden by this time, but when she reached the low dividing fence at the end of the grass plat back of the kitchen, she screamed furiously and ran for her precious vegetables.

The other girls turned and ran over to see what had happened. Natalie was shooing the young chicks away from her tender green sprouts, but she dared not tramp upon her beds, so the broilers ran a few feet away and then stood eyeing her. They, seemingly, were but waiting for her to go away so they could resume their breakfast.

"That's because Janet forgot to feed them last night for supper. Now all my young beets are eaten off the top! How can we ever raise anything to eat or sell, if her old pesky chickens keep this up!" wailed Natalie, examining the beets. 248

"They only managed to get a few of them, Nat! Thank your stars you got here when you did," remarked Belle.

"I just bet it was those same horrid birds that destroyed my garden before! I never saw a crow after that, and I thought I had frightened them away with the scarecrow. But now, I'm sure it was the broilers!" declared Natalie.

"What a lot of satisfaction it will be to pick their bones," suggested Frances. That made them all laugh and put Natalie in a better humor. Janet was wise enough to remain at her work with the pigs and chickens, and not venture near Natalie that morning.

At breakfast Natalie opened the subject. "Janet, you've got to keep those chickens in a yard. If they get into my garden again, I'm going to wring their necks and stew them for dinner!" 249

"Wait until they have a little more to them than skin and bone," laughed Janet.

"They'll make soup—if nothing more," snapped Natalie.

"I was about to say, Janet, that you might get some wire-netting at the Corners, such as is used

for runways for chickens," suggested Mrs. James.

"How much will it cost? I can't spend more than my allowance, you know," answered Janet.

"I have a letter here, in reply to one I wrote Mr. Marvin, saying I was to use my own good judgment about the out-buildings. I wrote him that we ought to repair the coops and pens, as well as the barns, as soon as possible. And he says we can get whatever material we need for slight repairs at the Corners. He opened an account for us with Si Tompkins and this wire can be charged to that."

"But I don't see why you should pay for my chicken run, Mrs. James?" said Janet.

"We are going to repair it, anyway, whether you keep chickens in it, or someone else does it. If you are willing to help with the work to be done on it, we will consider it squared on the cost of the wire-netting and nails," explained Mrs. James. 250

"I'll go to the Corners right after breakfast and get the wire. Maybe I can find someone to drive me home again, so I won't have to carry the awkward roll," said Janet eagerly.

Norma was too busy with her flowers to join the other girls after breakfast, and Natalie said she saw some weeds growing up in her garden beds so she would have to get after them. Janet and Belle and Frances, therefore, started for the store, planning to help carry the roll of wire back home.

Mrs. James assisted Rachel with the housework as it was cleaning-day, and so everyone was engaged when an automobile stopped in front of the house.

Norma Evaston was carefully patting down the soil about a geranium plant when a shadow fell across it. She glanced up, and started in surprise when she saw Mr. Lowden smiling down at her. 251

"Good-morning, Norma. I thought to find Frances here, too, so I crept up the walk to surprise her," said he.

"Oh, how did you get here? There isn't a train until eleven," returned Norma wonderingly.

"We came in the machine. Mrs. Lowden and I are going to leave it here for you to use this summer, so we thought it best to drive out and go back later by the train."

"Why, Mr. Lowden! Frans only mailed that letter last night! How could you have received it already and driven here?" Norma puckered her brow as she tried to figure out what time the letter could have arrived in the city that morning, if it left Greenville at six o'clock.

"What letter?" It was now Mr. Lowden's turn to be surprised.

"Oh, didn't you know Frances wanted the car to use all summer as an investment?" asked Norma innocently. 252

"As an investment! What do you mean?"

"Yes, and we think it will be great fun, too," returned Norma eagerly. "You see, I am going in for flowers to sell to tired homesick financiers downtown in New York. One sniff of a sprig of heliotrope or the cheerful nod of a pink standing in a glass of water on his desk will refresh one so that he will start out like a new man!"

"Nat is raising vegetables. She has all the greens up above the ground already, but those hungry chickens ate off a number of her best ones, so that makes them look a bit messy just now. However, they will soon recover and grow as good as ever. The household will buy all its vegetables from her, and Solomon's Seal Patrol expect to buy theirs from her, too."

"Janet went in for stock-farming. She only has a few pigs and the chickens as yet, but there are plenty of other things to get, as her allowance comes due. She is now planning to buy some guinea-hens, a flock of geese, some bees for honey, a few pigeons so we can have squabs, and other stock as time rolls by. 253

"But Frances chose to go into the service business. She is going to run an auto-bus from the station to the different destinations, and when we girls wish to take a pleasure-ride in the country, we all expect to pay a just price for the use of the car. By fall, Frans ought to have saved quite a sum of money, don't you think so?"

Norma had talked so fast that Mr. Lowden could not have said a word had he wanted to; but he listened with face growing redder and redder, and when Norma concluded her amazing explanation he burst out laughing loud and long. His wife heard the mirth as she sat in the car waiting to learn if he had found the right place. Now she jumped out of the tonneau and ran over.

Norma sat back on her feet gazing up at the breathless man, when Mrs. Lowden joined the two. He tried to sober down enough to explain, but he spoke in gasps.

"Natalie raises vegetables for Solomon; Janet has turned stock-broker—her stock breaks down all of Natalie's greens. Norma here is the philanthropist of the crowd,—she is about to raise flowers for heart-sick financiers. But our Frances is the Shylock of the party. She is going to charge fees for the use of an automobile that costs her nothing! What do you think of your daughter, now, Mabel?" And he laughed again, so heartily that Rachel came out to see who was with Norma. 254

Mrs. James soon followed Rachel, and the Lowdens were welcomed by the hostess. Norma could not stop her work long enough to sit down on the piazza and visit, but she sent this advice after Mr. Lowden as he was about to mount the porch-steps:

"Janet went to the Corners for chicken-wire and you can do the girls a great favor by going for them with the car. Belle and Frances went with Jan, to take turns carrying the roll. But I guess it is going to be awfully heavy for them!"

Mr. Lowden then excused himself for a time, and left his wife with Mrs. James. He soon had the car speeding along the road that went to the Corners, and Norma felt she had done her friends a good turn. But she never dreamed that Frances had not mentioned the automobile as a money-maker for that summer. 255

When the machine came back with the girls and their roll of wire-netting, Frances looked disconsolate. Norma was wondering whether her father had refused her the car for business purposes, and so she stopped planting long enough to join the party on the piazza.

"What do you think, Norma? Dad says I have to be sixteen before I can have a license to drive a jitney. If I drive without one, that old lazy Amity Parsons will arrest me. And if I use someone else's license, I can be heavily fined. That explodes all my ambition!" exclaimed Frances woefully.

But Janet came to the rescue, as usual. "Say, Mr. Lowden, Frans can drive the car without a license if she has someone in the seat beside her who *does* have a regular license."

"Who can I have?" demanded Frances.

"Well, I don't know! I haven't thought of that, yet!" admitted Janet. 256

"I can drive a car, so there is no excuse why I should not be able to secure one," said Mrs. James thoughtfully.

"The main point is—we've got the car here to use for the summer, and the other points can be covered as we reach them," remarked Janet.

Mr. Lowden laughed again, for all this business ambition was highly amusing to him. But he had no objections to the automobile remaining at Green Hill Farm during his absence in the west, and the girls all breathed easier when they heard his verdict.

"Well, you can argue out the question about a jitney license, but I must go back to my flowers," said Norma, getting up from the steps and starting for the roundel.

"And I must start work on that chicken-fencing. If it is to be done before nightfall, I must ask help, too," said Janet, beckoning Belle to help her carry the roll of wire.

Mr. and Mrs. Lowden were invited to stay to dinner but they declined with regrets, as they were to be back in New York soon after noon. Then Frances said: "I'll have to drive you to the station to catch the only train that stops at Greenville this afternoon, and how will I get back if I haven't a license?" 257

"I'll accompany you, Frances, and later we will have to plan a way out of the difficulty," said Mrs. James.

Good-bys were said, and the girls stood on the piazza waiting to see the car start off, when Rachel came out. "Hey, Mis' James! I got it! Jes' hol' up a minit, will yuh?"

She hurried down the walk and ran out of the gate to lay her plan before the owners of the automobile.

"Yuh all knows my nephew Sam in Noo York? Well, he got a shover's license las' spring cuz he figgered on drivin' somebody's car this summer in the country. But we all know what a easy-goin' darky he is, too!

"He didn't have ambichun enough to hunt out a place, so he jes' waited fer a plum to drap in his mout'. Ef he is in Noo York, he'll be at dis address, sure! Ef I tells him to come out heah, widdout fail, to run dat car, he'll come quick as lightnin'. Ef us gives him room an' board, he oughter be glad fer the chants. Den no one kin pester Mis' Francie 'bout license, er nuttin. An' Sam kin make hisself useful to me by bringin' in coal an' wood fer t' kitchen fire, an' doin' odd jobs about t' place." 258

This information seemed to suit Mr. Lowden exactly, and he turned to Rachel to say: "I'll find him, Rachel, never fear—if he is to be found in the city. Look for him in the next day or two."

Then saying good-by again, they drove away.

## CHAPTER XII—GRIT INVITES HIMSELF TO GREEN HILL 259

The vegetables, animals, and flowers might have experienced gross neglect during the next few days, after the automobile arrived, had it not been for Mrs. James' insistence that "duty came before pleasure." Even so, Natalie spent no time weeding the beds but gave the "farmer's curse" ample opportunity to thrive luxuriantly.

The third day after the Lowdens had promised to hunt up Sam and send him to Green Hill Farm, a most unique post-card came for Rachel. It had the picture of the Woolworth Building on one side, and the information that this was a "gift card" given to those who visited the tower. On the side with the address, Sam printed with lead-pencil, "Deer ant: wurd cam fer me to be shoffer at

yur place. Money O. K. comin rite away. sam.”

This elaborate epistle was displayed by Rachel with so much family pride that the girls had hard work to keep straight faces. But they knew how hurt Rachel would be if she thought the writing was illiterate, so they said nothing.

“If that card was mailed yesterday, as the postmark shows it was, Sam ought to be here to-day,” said Mrs. James.

“Yes, but he won’t get here in time to drive us to Ames’s farm for the guinea-hens,” said Natalie.

“As that will be my last act of law-breaking, I’ll drive,” announced Frances.

Therefore, the girls hurried away in the car. They had not gone more than half the distance to Dorothy Ames’s home, when Natalie saw a dog following the machine.

“Go home, old fellow!” called she, waving her hat to drive him back.

But the dog stood momentarily still and wagged his stumpy tail, then galloped after the car again, to make up for lost time.

“Girls, what shall we do with that dog?” cried Natalie in distress. “If he follows us much further he may get lost.”

Frances stopped the car and called the dog to her. He stood with front paws on the running-board and looked up at her with happy eyes.

“He’s a fine Collie, girls. Look at his head and the lines of his body. Someone get out and look at the collar for the owner’s name,” said Frances, leaning over to study the dog.

Belle got out and having examined the collar, remarked: “No name on it. It’s just a plain leather affair with a frayed rope-end still attached to the ring.”

The dog gave a short friendly yelp at Belle and wagged his tail rapidly, as a token of good fellowship.

“Let him run after us if he wants to, then we will take him back with us when we return,” suggested Janet.

“We’d better have him jump inside the car, then, so he won’t stray while our attentions are turned,” ventured Norma.

So the dog was given room in the tonneau where he stood and watched over the side of the machine as they flew along the road.

Arrived at Dorothy Ames’s farm, he waited until the door was opened, then he leaped out and pranced about the girls.

“That’s some dog you girls got there!” declared Mr. Ames, as he came forward to welcome his visitors.

“Yes, he must belong to someone living near Green Hill. He ran after our car as we turned from the state road into this road,” explained Natalie.

“I ain’t never seen him about afore. I knows every dog fer ten mile around Greenville, and there hain’t no farmer that kin afford a’ animal like that,” returned Mr. Ames.

“Why—is he a good one?” wondered Janet.

“Got every point a prize-winnin’ Collie ought to have. I wish he was my dog! I’d win a blue ribbon on him,” said Mr. Ames, as he examined the dog critically.

“Then someone will worry until he is home again,” said Norma concernedly.

The dog seemed not to worry, however, for he yawned and followed the girls about as if he had known them since puppyhood. Mr. Ames told the girls that the dog must be about two years old, and certainly showed he had been accustomed to a good living.

The guinea-hens were selected, several pigeons ordered to be delivered in a few days when the house would be ready, and a number of young goslings spoken for. Janet was not going to lose time planning for a stock-farm business and not act, it seemed.

“If you gals are going to take the dog back the way he came, you’d better not try to take the crate with the hens, too. I’ll leave them on my way to the Corners,” advised Mr. Ames.

The business matters settled, Frances spoke of her new line of work. “If you folks ever want to rent a car for a trip, or when you want to go to the station, just call me on the ’phone and I’ll come for you. I am starting a jitney-line and am always on hand for my clients.”

Mr. Ames laughed and said: “Sort of runnin’ opposition to Amity, eh?”

“Well, not opposition, exactly, as Amity is never about to attend to business. But I intend running the car faithfully, as anyone who is in the public service should do,” said Frances.

“What about a license?” questioned the farmer wisely.

“Oh, that’s taken care of. My chauffeur, Sam White, is going to drive the machine, while I act as conductor.”

Mr. Ames laughed again, heartier than ever, and Dorothy smiled sympathetically at Frances. Then she said: “I wish I had something to do besides churning butter and working on the farm.”

"Well, Dorothy, just you stick to us Girl Scouts and we'll find you some desirable field of labor," said Janet encouragingly.

Soon after this the girls started homeward, the dog jumping in without being invited and sitting up in the place provided him before. The girls patted him and said he was a clever fellow. That started his tail wagging violently and his tongue panting with pleasure.

At Green Hill, Mrs. James watched the girls stop at the side piazza, and then, to her surprise, she saw the dog jump out of the car. He stood waiting for his companions to alight and then he sprang up the steps and wagged his tail at her.

"What a fine dog," said Mrs. James, patting his head. "Whose is he?"

"We don't know, Jimmy. He just followed us after we left the state road. Mr. Ames says he doesn't belong to anyone around here, 'cause he knows every dog in the county," answered Natalie.

"He must have lost his way, then. Maybe he was with a party of autoists who passed that way. They will surely come back to hunt for him, so we had better hang a large sign out on the tree by the front gate," said Mrs. James.

"That's a good plan," assented Natalie. "I'll run in and get a cardboard box and print the sign."

"Don't describe the dog,—just say we found a strayed canine," advised Janet.

"If no one comes for him, we may as well keep him until we determine what to do about it," added Natalie.

"We must find a name for him, too. What do you suppose he was called?" asked Mrs. James.

"If we knew that, we might have a clue to his owners," laughed Janet.

"The best way to name him is this way," suggested Natalie. "Let each one write a name on a slip of paper and fold it up. Rachel shall deal out the votes and the last one out of the box shall be his name. How is that?"

"Good! Run and get the paper, Nat," laughed Janet.

So in a few moments six slips of paper were cut and handed out. The pencil was passed around and everyone wrote her choice of a name for the dog. Rachel was called out to collect the votes in an old hat, and when they were well shaken she removed them, one by one, until the last one was taken up.



Mrs. James leaned over to see who was coming in.

She opened it slowly and spelled out carefully: "G-r-i-t."

"Ho, *Grit*, that is my choice!" shouted Natalie, clapping her hands. As if the dog was pleased with his name, he jumped around madly and barked shrilly.

"He seems to like his name," said Janet, laughing at the way the animal tried to lick Natalie's face.

"Maybe it sounds something like his real one," suggested Mrs. James.

"Wall, whatever it is, I says he oughter have a pan of water to drink. Affer all dis excitement he needs refreshin'," remarked Rachel, going to the kitchen and calling the dog to follow her.

He went obediently, and just as the girls began to plan the sign, and what to write thereon, the gate clicked. Mrs. James leaned over the piazza rail to see who was coming in, and saw a short, fat, colored youth of about eighteen, approaching.

"It must be Sam,—Rachel's nephew," whispered Mrs. James.

The expected chauffeur saw the party on the piazza and removed his cap politely, but his face expressed trouble, and he sighed as he stopped at the foot of the steps.

"You are Sam, aren't you?" began Mrs. James.

"Yas'm, an' I would huv be'n here long ago, as I writ, but I lost my bes' friend and be'n huntin' him fer more'n an hour." Again Sam sighed heavily and his eyes were moist.

"Oh, what a pity!" exclaimed Mrs. James. "How did it happen, Sam?"

"Wall, yuh see, Ma'am, I brung him on the baggidge car tied to a rope, an' when we got off at the Statchun he was that glad to see the green grass and fresh air that he galavanted 'round like a crazy thing. He tuk it inter his head to chase a bird what flied low along the road, and I luffed as I follered after him. But I lost sight of him, down the road, until I got to the Corners. I diden know what way to take there, so I went the most travelled one.

"That's where I made my mistake. I should hev asked the storekeeper the way to Green Hill. I whistled and called fer a mile, er more, but Grip never showed up. Then I got afraid he was really lost. I turned back and asked the man at the Corners ef he saw'd a dog run by, an' he said, 'Yeh, the mutt was chasin' down the road to Green Hill Farm.'

"I got mad at him fer callin' Grip a mutt, but I hurried along the road he pointed out. I kep' on goin' and callin', an' went right by this place widdout knowin' it. When I came to a farm owned by a man called Ames—a mile down the road,—he tol' me I was too far. So I come back again. But I hain't seen no sound of Grip sence." A heavy sigh escaped Sam and he drew his sleeve across his wet eyes.

Perhaps the sound of the voice reached Grit—or Grip—in the kitchen, or perhaps his canine instinct told him his master was there,—whatever it was, he came bounding out of the house and leaped upon Sam with such force that the little fellow was rolled over backward upon the soft grass.

Grip pawed and rolled over again in his joy at seeing his master again, and the girls stood and shouted aloud with amusement at the scene. When Grip's violent expression of welcome had somewhat quieted down, Mrs. James said:

"This certainly is a good ending to our adventure."

Then she proceeded to tell Sam how the girls found Grip on the road, and how fortunate it was that no other tourists had taken him in.

Rachel heard a familiar voice and now came hurrying from her kitchen. "Wall, of all things! Ef it ain't Sambo! How'de, my son?" exclaimed she, enfolding the little man in her capacious arms.

"You talk as ef you hadn't looked fer me?" grinned Sam, endeavoring to free himself from the close embrace.

"I'm that glad to see yoh, Chile! I felt sort o' fearsome 'bout leavin' yoh all alone in a wicked city widdout me near to advise yoh dis summer," returned Rachel, beaming joyously upon her kin.

Sam laughed, and then the story of Grip was told in a most graphic manner, the girls interrupting to add some forgotten item.

"Laws'ee! Ain't dat a plain case o' Providence fer us? An' to think how Natalie called the dawg Grit, too!"

"Now that all this excitement is ended, suppose you business girls go and attend to your work," suggested Mrs. James. "While you were away I walked over to the vegetable garden and was horrified to find so many weeds growing taller than the plants we are trying to coax along. And Janet's investment has escaped from the pen and given Rachel and me the race of our lives. After half an hour's heated chase we captured the pigs, but the chickens are still at large, scratching Norma's flower slips out of the ground. I have shouted at them, and driven them away repeatedly, but I see they are back there again."

No more needed to be said then, and in a minute's time three excited girls were wildly racing to their various places of work to repair the damages made in their investments.

Then Sam was shown his room in the attic, where he could unpack his fabrikoid suit-case and don his farm-clothes. It was plainly evident that he liked the idea of living in the country and driving a car when called upon, and Mrs. James considered the girls were most fortunate to have Rachel's own relative—to say nothing of the dog—on the place that summer.

Mr. Ames drove by before noon and left the crate with the guinea-hens and pigeons, and Janet eagerly began work on a separate coop for the hens. Sam offered to help build the pigeon-coop on the gable end of the carriage-house, where the birds could alight without molestation.

But the story of Janet's stock-farm and how she succeeded is told in another book and can be given no extra room in this story. Suffice it to say, she certainly had troubles of her own in trying to raise a barnyard full of different domestic animals; and had it not been for Sam's ever-willing help in catching the runaways or repairing the demolished fences, the result would not have been

quite so good.

That evening, as they all sat on the side steps of the piazza watching the far-reaching fingers of red that shot up from the western sky, Belle spoke plaintively:

"I feel like a laggard, with you girls all working so hard at some business. Nat with her garden, Janet with the barnyard, Norma with the flowers, and Frans with her jitney—what is there for me to do? I hate dirt and animals, and I haven't any car,—so what *is* left for me?" she sighed.

"Why don't you turn your attention to Scout study?" asked Natalie, feeling that they had neglected Solomon's Seal Camp lately.

"I don't want that kind of work,—I want a real business, like you girls have,—but what is there to do?"

"You'll just have to pray and wait for an answer," suggested Norma, the devout one of the group.

"Is that what you did before the flowers came your way from Mrs. Tompkins?" asked Belle.

"No, but you see, I always pray and hope for an answer, so I don't have to lose time when something comes to me. It is always coming at the right moment, so I never have to ask especially for any one thing," explained Norma seriously.

Belle laughed softly. "I wish you'd do it for me, Norma."

"Why, Belle! You know how to ask for yourself! You'll get it all the sooner if you stop laughing and try my plan," rebuked Norma.

The talk suddenly changed at this point, and no one thought more of Norma's advice to Belle. But the latter was duly impressed by Norma's faith, and determined to try secretly a prayer or two in her own behalf. So that evening after she had retired, she earnestly asked that a way might be shown her to occupy herself that summer even as her friends were doing.

The following morning Sam suggested that the car meet the three daily trains from the city, to carry any passengers to their destinations. As it took but a short time to drive to the station and back, this plan was agreed upon. Frances would act as conductor of the fares and direct Sam the way to go when taking a passenger home.

On the morning trip they would bring back the mail and any orders that might be needed for the house or the Scout camp. In the afternoon the trip would be made for passenger service only, and at evening the mail would be brought back, or any purchases needed at Tompkins' store.

The initial trip was made that morning at nine-thirty, the girls wishing Frances all success in her new venture. As the car disappeared down the road Natalie hurried to her garden to go to work on the weeding.

Janet went to the farmyard to begin building some sort of shelter for a calf she purposed buying from Mr. Ames. And Norma began to plant seeds in her flower beds. Mrs. James went in to help Rachel, and Belle was left alone on the porch to plan various things to interest herself, also.

As she rocked nervously, trying to think of something agreeable to do, she heard Natalie cry loudly from the garden. She sprang from the porch and ran down the path to render any help possible to the friend in distress, and saw Natalie jumping up and down, with skirts held high and close about her form.

"Oh, oh! Belle,—bring a rock! Get a gun—anything—quick!" yelled Natalie.

"What for—what's the matter?" shouted Belle, looking anxiously about for a stone or a big stick.

"A snake! A great big snake ran out of the ground and tried to get me!" screamed Natalie, still jumping up and down.

Belle caught up a heavy stone and tried to carry it quickly to her friend, but she had to drop it after running a short distance, as it was too heavy for her. Then she found a smaller stone and ran with that to demolish utterly the awful thing!

"Where is it? Where did it go?" cried Belle excitedly, as she reached the vegetable beds.

"Oh, oh—it came out of that hole in the corn-hill, and ran that way!" gasped Natalie, breathless with her violent exercise.

"Out of that hole! Why, that is only as big as my small finger! How could a great snake come from there?"

"All the same it did! Oh, *oh*, OH! Look, Belle! There it is,—under that corn-spear!" shouted Natalie, bending and pointing at the terrifying (?) object.

Belle had to look hard to be able to detect the little frightened snake. There, curled up under the tiny spear of green, was a young grass snake about three inches long. It held up its pretty striped head and watched fearfully for the huge rock to fall upon its innocent body.

Belle stood upright and gave vent to a loud laugh. "Oh, Nat! That is only a dear little worker in your garden. Why would you kill a creature that will gobble up your troubles?"

"What do you mean?" demanded Natalie, ashamed of her groundless fears.

"Why, I've read in school that grass snakes, garter snakes, and even black snakes, are the farmers' best friends. They eat cut-worms, clean off all grubs from plants, and even keep out moles, beetles, and other pests, that ruin vegetables."



Natalie bravely turned her back upon the grass snake at this and wagged her head prophetically: "All the same, where a young snake like that can be found there must be a big parent, too."

"Doubtless, but the parent snake can kill off ten times as many pests as a baby snake, so don't go and kill it when it hurries to your cornfield to catch a field-mouse," laughed Belle.

As Belle started back for the rocking-chair to continue her mental planning, she saw Frances' car approach swiftly from the Corners.

"Oh, goody! She has a passenger!" shouted Belle to Norma as she ran past the flower beds.

Norma dropped her trowel and fork and raced after Belle to the gate to watch the private jitney go past. But Sam stopped in front of the gate and Frances beckoned to the girls.

As Belle ran out to see what was wanted of them, a well-dressed lady, seated in the tonneau, smiled and said:

"I alighted at Greenville by mistake. I was directed to a country place beyond White Plains, where I hear I can buy some antiques. I am in the business in New York, but I haven't time now to wait for another train and go on to visit this lady. Your young friend here thought the one named Belle might possibly undertake this commission for me, as she was at liberty to sell her time. Which of you is Belle?"

Belle immediately signified that she was the one, and the lady continued: "I believe you know something of antique furniture and china?"

"Something—because I started a little collection of my own at home. I have read many books to be had at the Library on the subject and can tell a Wedgewood jug or bowl or a Staffordshire plate, as readily as anyone. I also know the different Colonial period furniture when I see any."

"Splendid! Then you can act as my agent up here, if you will. I must get back to keep an appointment in New York at two o'clock, but you can hunt up this old farmhouse for me that is somewhere west of Pleasantville, on a road that is described accurately on this map," said the stranger, as she unfolded a paper and glanced at it to see that it was the right one. This was handed to Belle, and the lady continued:

"If you find anything there—or at any place in this section of the country—such as brasses, dishes, furniture, or pictures, telephone me at my business address and I will make an appointment to meet you wherever it is. Will you consider it?"

"I should like nothing better, if you think I can do it for you," returned Belle, delighted at the prospect.

"I think you can, and for this service I will pay you for the time you actually give to the pursuit. Also I will pay for the hire of the car, as I explained to this young lady here.

"If you can possibly find time to go to this house to-day, it will please me greatly, as I want information about the four-poster canopied bed I hear is there for sale. Telephone me full particulars after you come back, will you?"

Belle agreed eagerly to the proposition, and the lady then mentioned the salary she would pay, by the hour, for this service of Belle's. Also Frances mentioned her charge for the use of the car, which was agreed to without demur.

"Now I wish your man would drive me to the railway station at the nearest point where a train can be taken without losing more time. I do not care which town it is, as long as I can get back to the city before two o'clock."

Belle was left standing speechless on the footpath as the car drove rapidly away, and Norma smiled happily. "Did you pray as I told you to, Belle?" asked she.

"Uh-huh!" was all the reply Norma got, but she understood Belle's ways and ran back to her flowers without another word. Belle walked slowly toward the house to get her hat and handbag so as to start on the new venture as soon as Frances returned from the White Plains railroad station.

## CHAPTER XIII—BELLE'S CHOICE OF A PROFESSION

Solomon's Seal Patrol invited the Tenderfoot members to their camp on the afternoon before the Fourth of July to begin their lessons in scouting. Frances agreed to notify the three Greenville girls of the invitation and then call for them at the time appointed.

Because of the afternoon to be spent at the camp, Natalie planned to give her entire morning to the garden. There had been enough rainfall at intervals, during the time she had first started her garden, to keep the plants sufficiently moist, but for several days, now, the sun had baked the soil and there had been no sign of a cloud in the sky.

At breakfast that Saturday morning Natalie spoke of it. "Jimmy, my garden is as dry as a lime-kiln. What had I better do about it?"

"You might try sprinkling it with a hose. I see there is a hydrant right near the box-hedge—for

that very purpose, I guess.”

“I never thought of that! But I will need a hose,” said Natalie.

“I saw one in the cellar, Nat, when I was nosing about for some old flower-pots to cover my transplanted flowers,” now remarked Norma.

“Then I’ll get it out right after breakfast, and see if it will screw onto the hydrant.”

Norma went with Natalie as she went down the outside cellar-steps to the partitioned corner where the hose had been seen. It was wound on an old wooden rack that could be carried up to the grass-plot and turned to unwind the long piece of rubber.

“Isn’t it great to discover this all ready for us?” said Natalie delightedly.

“With a brass cap on one end to screw it to the hydrant, too,” added Norma.

The other girls gathered around to watch the two gardeners manipulate the hose, and when it had been carefully unwound Natalie dragged one end over to the hedge to try and screw the cap to the hydrant. 285

This was soon accomplished, and Norma then straightened out the length of rubber to allow the water to flow through it more readily when Natalie should turn the faucet. As the unexpected advent of a garden hose was a cause for celebration, the four girls called to Mrs. James to come out and watch the sprinkler work.

Rachel felt that she must be on the spot also, so she hurried out, wiping her wet hands on her apron as she came.

“All ready, Nat,—turn on the water!” called Norma, as she picked up the end with the sprinkler on it.

Natalie turned the brass faucet and instantly the flow of water swelled the hose out, but there were many punctures in its length, and one serious crack, so that the water spurted up through the holes and made graceful fountains. There was enough force of water, however, to cause a fine shower of water to come from the sprinkler, until suddenly, without warning, a sound as of a muffled explosion came, and quite near the sprinkler the rubber burst and shot forth a stream of water. 286

“Wait a minit, Honey—I’ll run an’ git a piece of mendin’ tape what I foun’ in my kitchen closet,” called Rachel, hurrying up the stoop-steps and disappearing through the doorway.

The girls tried to stop the undesired spurt of water by placing their hands over the crack and on other holes in the length of the tube. Then Rachel appeared with the bicycle tape, and was just coming down the steps when Natalie called to her.

Norma still held the sprinkler in her hand and now turned to see what Rachel had; in so doing, she unconsciously turned the end of the hose also, so that instantly all the girls trying to stop the leakage were thoroughly sprinkled.

Such a screaming and shouting ensued that Norma instantly turned to see what had happened. This time the water drenched Mrs. James, who fled precipitately for the house.

Rachel was haw-hawing loudly at the funny scene when Norma turned to explain the accident to the girls. Without warning, the shower now fell upon Rachel, who had approached within its radius. 287

But the latter was not as docile about being soaked as were the girls. She dashed forward, caught the hose from Norma’s hands and threw it upon the grass.

“Turn dat water off at d’ hydran’, Natalie Av’rill!” shouted the irate woman.

Natalie had been laughing immoderately at the outcome of the experiment with the hose, but she quickly obeyed Rachel’s order and turned off the water.

“You thought it was awfully funny, Rachie, until you got a soaking yourself,” called Natalie, still giggling.

“Me! I wa’n’t mad, a’tall! I jes’ wants to mend dis pipe, an’ one cain’t do nuthin’ wid water flyin’ through it at such a rate. Now I kin wrap dis tape aroun’ it an’ fix it, so’s you kin water your gardens,” explained Rachel loftily.

After this incident the hose was mended and Natalie soon had her young vegetables well watered and left to the mercy of the sun that day. No one at Green Hill Farm knew enough to advise her not to water the plants while the sun was shining upon them, and Natalie fondly fancied she had done a good thing. 288

Norma sprinkled her flowers well when Natalie had done with the hose, but the flower beds were sheltered from the noonday sun, so they did not fare as badly as did the vegetables.

Sam was in the barnyard helping Janet construct a new shed for the calf which she wanted to buy the next week, and he was not so well versed in farm-lore, so Natalie never understood why all her tender seedlings should wilt so quickly and seem to dry away before the afternoon heat.

The tomato plants, that had been transplanted from Mr. Ames’s farm, had grown wonderfully well, and were large enough to warrant Natalie’s starting the frames which would be needed when the red fruit appeared on the vines. So she planned how to make the best kind of square frame for them, as she loosened the soil about the potato plants that morning. 289

Her thoughts were so filled with the vision of the lath frames that she failed to see something crawling on a tiny leaf of the potato vine where she was hoeing. When her eye was attracted to the movement, she gave a slight shudder and screamed.

"Wat's d' matter now?" called Rachel from the kitchen steps.

"Ooh! A horrid bug on one of my dear little potato vines!" cried Natalie, standing still to watch the crawling beetle.

Rachel hurried over to the garden. "Da's onny a tater-bug, Honey. Ain't chew ever hear tell of tater-bugs? Ef you'se let 'em go, dey will eat up all your taters in no time."

As she explained, Rachel took the Colorado beetle between her fat thumb and forefinger and soon crushed it. Natalie shivered as she watched the remains flung away, but Rachel meant business and had no time for dainty shudderings.

In a few minutes she had turned over other tiny leaves and revealed many bugs eating away at the juicy food. These were quickly caught and killed, but a few of them managed to get away by flying up out of Rachel's reach.

Natalie stood by and watched, and when Rachel said: "Now you'se kin go on wid dis job. Ebery vine has to be hunted on and dem tater-bugs killed off."

"Rachie, I just can't crush them the way you do!" complained Natalie.

Rachel looked at the girl for a moment, then said: "Neber mind dis way, Honey. I'll git Sam to fix you up a tin can on a stick. You kin have some kerosene in it and brush dese pests into t' can by using a short stick. Dey can't fly away, when once dey fall in dat kerosene."

"But Rachel, isn't there a way to keep the horrid pests away from my garden?" asked Natalie anxiously.

"Yeh—we'se will have to squirt Paris Green or hellebore on the leaves, I rickon," returned Rachel thoughtfully.

"Then tell Frances to buy some next time she drives past Si Tompkins' store," said Natalie, turning her back on the potato-beds and starting work on the bean-plants.

The weeding had all been finished, and most of the potato-vines had been cleaned of the beetles, before the noonday meal was announced to the busy workers. They were half famished, as was usual nowadays, and hastened to the house to wash and clean up before appearing in the dining-room.

Frances drove to the Corners and not only got the powder for Natalie's plants, but also got the two girls who were to attend the Scout meeting that day. Having left them at the house, she drove on to Ames's farm for Dorothy.

Mr. Ames came out of the corn-house when he saw the car and walked over to speak to Frances. Dorothy was almost ready, so while there were a few minutes to fill, Frances told the farmer about Natalie's potato-bugs and the powder she bought.

"Tell her to use it when the leaves are damp with dew in the mornin'—it has better results that time. Ef she squirts it on dry, an' the leaves are dry, too, the eggs won't die. It is the wet paste made on the leaves when the powder melts in the dew that chokes off the young so they can't breathe."

"I'll tell her what you say," replied Frances thankfully.

"An' warn her to keep an eye open fer cutworms, too, 'cause they will appear about these times, when beans an' young vines are becomin' hearty. I've hed many a fine plant of cabbitch chopped down through the stem, jus' as it was goin' to head."

Natalie was given these advices and felt that she was being well looked after, with two interested farmers at hand to keep her right.

The afternoon at Solomon's Seal Patrol Camp was spent in interesting ways. Miss Mason first read the principles of the Girl Scouts, then repeated the motto. Most of the girls knew the slogan, which they gave in unison, and then said the pledge aloud.

Miss Mason then read the letter from National Headquarters which was a reply to her application for a Troop registration. The members of the first Patrol had heard its news—that they might begin their ceremonies as a Troop, because the application had been filed and accepted, and the registration would soon reach them.

The new Patrol heard this with delight, and the fact that they were going to be actual members of a Troop made them feel that they had become more important to the public than ever, in the last few minutes.

The new Scouts were put through several tests that afternoon, and were then permitted to watch the Scouts of Patrol No. 1 do many thrilling First Aid demonstrations. The afternoon ended with refreshments, all prepared and served by the girls. The cakes, wild berries and lemonade tasted delicious as the girls sat under the great oak tree and chatted.

On the homeward walk, Nancy Sherman said to Natalie: "There are a few more girls at the Corners who are crazy to join the Scouts this summer. But I told them I thought our Patrol was full. Was that right?"

"Who are the girls—and how old are they, Nancy?"

"Oh, most of them are about thirteen or fourteen, but one girl is past fifteen. There are six, in all, and they say that they know some more girls who will join when they hear of it."

"Why can't they start Patrol No. 3, and belong to this same Troop," suggested Janet.

"That's just what I was thinking," said Natalie.

Then Mrs. James spoke. "Nancy, you invite all these girls to our farm some day and we will entertain them. After we have shown them what we can do in Scout work we will accept them as candidates, if they consent to become *our* Tenderfoot Scouts. In this way, girls, you all can win the needed test to enroll as a First Class Scout when the time is at hand."

This was an excellent idea, and the girls felt greatly encouraged at the hope of being able to take the examinations as First Class Scouts, of Patrol No. 2, of Solomon's Seal Troop. 295

Nancy was entrusted with the invitation to the girls, and warned to keep secrecy about the plan to secure the approval as First Class Scouts on their Tenderfoot training.

Sam and the car were nowhere in sight when the girls reached the house, but Rachel came out and explained.

"A telerphone call come f'om Noo York f'om dat antique woman, sayin' fer Belle t' git dat ol' chest of drawers oveh by Tarrytown road, right now. It war to be expressed at onct to her shop in Noo York, what Belle had an address of, so I had Sam go along to git it an' fetch it back so's we coul' pack an' ship it right off."

"Oh, Rachel! He need not have done that! I made all arrangements with a man near there to get the chest to the railroad station and express it to the city. I was only awaiting orders," exclaimed Belle, annoyed at the way her well-laid plans were upset.

"I wuz thinkin', Honey, dat mebbe dat man would cost somethin' to do t' wuk, an' Sam ain't doin' nuthin' whiles he's waitin' fer orders. So yuh oughta get dat money foh yo'se'f." 296

Belle had not thought of this, and now she saw that Sam and Rachel were planning for her benefit. But Frances said: "How is he ever going to carry the chest if it is a big affair?"

"It isn't, Frans," said Belle. "It is a low-boy that will easily go in the tonneau, and no harm come to the car."

"Then I think Sam's plan was good. It saved you time and expense," said Mrs. James.

"Yes, and I must share the charges the man would have asked me, with Sam," said Belle.

This pleased Rachel immensely,—that her kin should be commended and given a share in the profits. She felt amply repaid for all the solicitude she had felt about the order.

The Solomon's Seal Tenderfoot Scouts had to walk home that day to the Corners, as Sam was not expected back in time to drive them home. The Green Hill girls accompanied their fellow-members to the gate and watched them depart. 297

That evening Sam told Belle that he would build her a strong crate from some old wood found in the barn, and the chest could be taken to White Plains station early Monday. This plan would save time, and also the cost of crating and expressage if done at Tarrytown. So the chauffeur was highly commended for the suggestion and told to do it as soon as he could.

The experiences of Belle that summer in hunting antiques in the Westchester Hill farms were most interesting, but no room can be spared in this book for the telling of her adventures. So that must wait for a volume on her exploits.

As the next day was Sunday, Natalie did not do any garden work, but Janet had to attend to her farmyard stock the same as on week-days. She grumbled a great deal over the cares and endless work of a stock-farmer, but the girls noticed that she was daily planning to add to her troubles by buying additions.

The girls were seated under the large sugar maple on the side lawn, waiting for Janet to finish her feeding of the pigs and chickens, when a siren was heard. Natalie jumped up and saw a car approaching along the road. A party of ladies were with the man who drove the machine. 298

"Oh, I do believe it is Mr. Marvin, girls!" called Natalie.

"What!" cried Mrs. James in consternation. "Just look at us all—in our old clothes!"

But the automobile was already at the gate, and the girls found to their delight that he had brought out their mothers.

It seemed like ages since they had seen each other. The girls talked eagerly of all that had happened since they came to Green Hill. Norma showed her flower beds, which really were looking good. And Belle told about her antique collecting. Frances displayed with pride the sum of money already earned with her private jitney, and Janet took the greatest satisfaction in escorting her younger sister Helene and the ladies to the barnyard to see her stock. Natalie, last of all, showed her gardens, which looked as neat as a row of pins.

Mr. Marvin complimented the girls on all their work, and then spoke of the roses in Natalie's cheeks and the difference in her general physical looks. 299

"I suppose you are going to stay to dinner, aren't you?" ventured Natalie cautiously.

"No; we are invited to dine with some friends quite near Green Hill Farm, but we thought we ought to stop in and see you before we go on to our hostess's place," said Mr. Marvin.

"I never knew you people were acquainted with anyone around here," said Janet, wonderingly, to her mother.

"We are, however. A young lady we know well in the city is summering in Greenville, and we came to visit her and her family."

Neither of the girls dreamed that Mrs. Wardell was referring to Miss Mason and her Troop, so they kept guessing who the acquaintance might be. Finally Mr. Marvin laughed and told the secret.

Natalie laughed, too, and said: "Well, we certainly were thick-witted that time. We might have known it was Miss Mason's camp."

Mr. Marvin could not take his eyes from Natalie, she was so different from the girl he had always known in the city. As she told of the adventures she and the girls had with their "professions" and the funny experiences with the old garden hose, her face was so alive with healthy interest and her eyes sparkled with such fun, that everyone saw the benefit the country life had been to her.

Later, as they all started for Solomon's Seal Camp, Mr. Marvin confided to Mrs. James: "She is so changed that I do not dread her return to the city again. She hasn't spoken one morbid word, nor seemed pessimistic once, since I've been here."

"She isn't, either," admitted Mrs. James. "Ever since she started work on that garden she has mentioned nothing that has happened in the past to cause her sorrow. I sometimes wonder if she has forgotten it all."

"Let's hope so. These mournful remembrances never do anyone the slightest good. Don't revive them in her memory."

## CHAPTER XIV—VISITORS AND WELCOME ORDERS

That afternoon at the Scout Camp taught the city visitors many things about the outdoor life that now interested their girls. Then when it was time for Mr. Marvin to drive home, he suddenly remembered something most important.

"How could it have slipped my mind?" said he, as he took several folded papers from his breast pocket.

He adjusted his glasses and read: "Miss Norma Evaston, Floriculturist, Green Hill, Greenville, New York."

This long paper was handed to Norma who opened it with much curiosity. She glanced at it and then exclaimed in surprise,

"Oh, splendid! What does it mean?"

"Well, I'll tell you. I told a few friends of your idea of keeping their office desks refreshed with old-fashioned flowers during the summer, and each one signified a desire to be placed on your customer list. So, you see, when the plants blossom, many of us will expect bouquets."

And then Mr. Marvin handed Belle a paper. She almost forgot her dignity in her joy.

"Mr. Marvin authorizes me to find him an old Colonial secretaire with diamond-paned glass in the upper doors, and the old urn and balls crowning the top. I'm sure I know just where to get such an one!"

"I want a mahogany one, Belle, and I am not particular about the cost, either. The condition of it will govern the price," explained the lawyer.

Janet frowned over the paper which Mr. Marvin now gave her. "What's the matter with your order, Janet?" asked Helene.

"Why, here I have orders for fresh eggs and broilers every week, and the horrid old hens won't lay a single egg. Three of them insist upon setting, and I can't keep them away from the nests that have China decoy eggs in them. The silly old things just set on them and chuckle with satisfaction. If I shoo them away, they make the *most* fuss!"

Everyone laughed at Janet's trials, but Mr. Marvin said, "That order stands good for all season, Janet. When your hens do begin to lay, you'll have to ship the eggs by the car-load."

"How about an order for me?" called Natalie, seeing a paper in Mr. Marvin's hand.

"Last but not least," laughed he. "We have all voted to turn vegetarians after this, just to order your crops, Natalie. Here is an order for our winter potatoes, all the sweet corn you have left to sell, and other fresh things."

Natalie laughed and opened her paper. She laughed still louder as she read the orders given her to fill at some future date.

Then the city visitors said good-by. As Mr. Marvin started the engine, he called back over his shoulder: "A month from to-day I am coming out with a truck for deliveries."

The girls laughed and waved their hands at him, and soon the car was out of sight. Then they sat down to discuss the marvellous opportunity given them by Mr. Marvin.

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After a time, Sam sauntered up to the side piazza and waited for an opportunity to speak to Mrs. James. Seeing him anxiously awaiting his chance, she smiled.

"What rests so heavily on your conscience, Sam?"

"I jus' walked down Miss Natalie's garden path to have a look at her wegetables, an' I see dem brush peas is 'way up. She oughta get her brush to-morrer, sure, er she'll have trouble makin' t' vines cling. Ef she says t' word, I'll go an' cut down some good brush in t' woodland afore she gets up in t' mornin' an' have it ready to use when she comes out."

"Oh, Sam! Will you, please? I didn't know those peas needed anything to hold to. I wasn't sure whether I planted the dwarf peas first, or the climbing variety," exclaimed Natalie.

"That ain't all, either, Miss Nat," added Sam seriously. "I saw you got lima beans planted in one bed, an' no poles on hand fer 'em. Did you order any bean poles f'om Ames?"

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"Bean poles! Why, no!" returned Natalie.

The girls laughed at her surprise, but Sam continued:

"How did you 'speckt the vines to clim'?"

"I never knew they did climb! I thought they just naturally grew and branched out and bore beans," explained Natalie, to the great amusement of Mrs. James and the girls.

"Well, den, I'd better hunt up some decent poles, too, in t' woods, eh?" asked Sam.

"Would you have to cut down any good trees?"

"I'd choose any what looked sickly, er maybe some dead young trees. Don't worry 'bout me choppin' down any fine ones."

"Say, Nat, I think it will be fun for us all to go with Sam in the morning before breakfast, and help cut the brush and bean poles," suggested Janet.

"I'm willin'," said Sam, smiling at the girls.

So the five girls went with Sam at sunrise the next morning, and by breakfast-time, Natalie had sufficient poles and brush at her garden beds to help all the peas and beans she could find room for that year.

306

The stock-grower and florist, and even the antiquarian, took such an interest in sticking the brush into the garden for the peas and helping the tendrils cling to their new support, that they left their own tasks undone.

Sam had driven Frances in the car to the store after breakfast, so he was not around when the girls planted the bean poles. He had not pointed out the particular bed where the limas were growing, as he thought, of course, that Natalie knew. But she had not followed Mrs. James' advice given a few weeks before, when the seed was sown—to register each bed with the ticket of the vegetable that was planted there. Now she had to depend on her own memory to determine which of the different plants were beans.

The three other girls carried the poles where she directed, and carefully walked on the boards Natalie laid down for their feet, to keep the beds from being trodden while they dug holes and firmly placed a seven-foot pole in each hill of beans.

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"There now, don't they look business-like?" exulted Natalie, as she surveyed with pride the rows of bean poles.

Sam stopped the automobile near the side porch just after Natalie made this remark, and seeing the girls still at the garden, he hurried there to see if he could help them in any way.

"All done, Sam! Aren't the poles nice?" exclaimed Natalie.

"Yeh, Miss Natalie, the poles is nice enough, but you ain't got 'em planted in the lima-bean garden," said Sam slowly, so as to break the news gently.

"What?" cried three girls in one voice.

"Nah. Them green plants is dwarf string-beans, and t' lima beans is on the other side."

"Oh goodness' sake!" wailed Natalie, sitting down plump on the radish bed. "All that work done for nothing?"

Norma and Belle frowned at the poles, but Janet laughed. "If this isn't the funniest thing, yet!" she exclaimed.

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The greater part of the morning had passed before the error made in the garden had been corrected. Natalie was so tired by the time she reached the house that she dropped wearily upon the steps and sighed.

Mrs. James came out upon the piazza when she saw her approaching the house, and at the sigh she said: "What's wrong?"

"Oh, that horrid old garden is *such* a care! I wish to goodness I had chosen stock-raising instead. Then I could have had the pleasure of watching the little things run about and show their gratitude when one feeds them. But lifeless old seeds and expressionless vegetables are such uninteresting things to work for!"

Mrs. James understood that something had gone awry, so she wisely remarked: "Oh, I don't know! Janet seems to have as much trouble with her stock as anyone has with other work."

"Well, she doesn't have to dig holes and plant bean poles for her pigs to climb up on!"

Mrs. James barely kept from laughing outright at the funny excuse given. But she replied: "Janet had a dreadful time just now, trying to catch two of the little pigs that escaped and started to run down the road."

"No,—really!" exclaimed Natalie, sitting up with great animation. "Where is she now?"

"Trying to repair the fence that they broke down. They are growing so big and strong that the rickety enclosure she made at first will never keep them in, now."

"I just hope they get away and give her a chase all the way to the Corners!" cried Natalie.

"Why should you wish such hard luck for poor Janet?" asked Mrs. James, laughingly.

"Because she laughed at my bean poles and refused to help us dig them up again."

"Dig them up again! Did you bury them?"

Then Natalie found she had made an admission that would have to be explained.

"No, not buried them, but we mistook the plants. It was such an easy thing to do—to believe the string-beans were limas, you know."

"Oh! Then you never followed my advice about tagging the different beds."

But Natalie did not reply.

The following morning, Janet asked Frances to inquire if there was a package for her at the post-office, as it should have arrived several days before.

"Is it a big package?" asked Frances.

"No, it's a book that I ordered from the city. It's all about raising things. Not that I need to find out about chickens and pigs, but I expect to buy that calf from Mr. Ames, and Belle saw some sheep in a pasture up in the Hills the other day, when she was hunting for antiques. I am wondering if they are difficult to raise. That is why I want the book."

The book arrived that morning, and Janet straightway applied herself to studying its pages, in order to learn what other farmyard animals she could keep that would not give her too much trouble, and repay her for the expense incurred.

The result of that reading was to rouse Janet's growing ambition to fever-heat. She determined upon a plan by which she could borrow the capital from her father and buy her stock without further loss of time. But her experiences are told in the volume following this one, called "Janet: a Stock-Farm Scout."

Natalie's garden beds began to look most flourishing, for every seed had sprouted and the transplanted greens were growing like wildfire. She began to figure ahead to find how soon she might gather crops, but she kept this vision a secret, as she knew the girls would tease if they heard of it.

The very impressive paper that conveyed the rights of Solomon's Seal Troop to take its place in the Girl Scout Organization arrived that week, also, so that Natalie realized that great things were already growing out of her coming to Green Hill Farm that summer. But how they multiplied and developed thrilling experiences will be narrated in the second volume of this Girl Scout Country Life Series.

THE END

\*\*\* END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK NATALIE: A GARDEN SCOUT \*\*\*

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