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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK GIRL SCOUTS AT DANDELION CAMP ***



Mrs. Vernon turned the flashlight over the ground about them (Frontispiece)

Girl Scouts at Dandelion Camp

Lillian Elizabeth Roy

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CHAPTER ONE—THE DANDELION PATROL

"Dear me, I never saw so many old dandelions in my life!" exclaimed Juliet Lee, as she tugged mightily at a stubborn root.

"Seems to me there are ten new weeds ready to spring up the moment we pull an old one out," grumbled Ruth Bentley, standing up to straighten her aching back.

"Forty-six for me! I'll soon have my hundred roots out for the day!" exulted Elizabeth Lee, Juliet's twin sister. As she spoke, she shook a clod of loose earth from a large dandelion root, and threw the forty-sixth plant into a basket standing beside her.

"You handled that root exactly as an Indian would a scalp before he ties it to his belt," laughed Joan Allison, another girl in the group of four so busily at work weeding a vast expanse of lawn.

"Oh, me! I don't b'lieve we *ever* will earn enough money this way to pay our expenses in a Girls' Camp!" sighed Ruth, watching her companions work while she stood and complained. "Doesn't it seem foolish to waste these lovely summer days in weeding Mrs. Vernon's lawn, when we might be having glorious sport in a Girl Scouts' Troop?"

"We'd never be admitted to a Patrol or Troop if we had to confess failure in pulling up little things like dandelions," ventured Elizabeth, without raising her eyes from her task.

"There you go—preaching, as usual!" retorted Ruth.

"Well, anyway, Mrs. Vernon said it wasn't so much what we did, or where we did it, as long as we always did the *best* we could; so I'm trying my best on these unfriendly weeds," added Elizabeth, generally called Betty, for short.

"Pooh! Mrs. Vernon is an old preacher, too, and you copy her in everything just because you haven't any mind of your own!" scorned Ruth, her face looking quite ugly for such a pretty girl.

Juliet, known familiarly as Julie, glanced over at her sister to see if Ruth's rude words hurt. Seeing Betty as happy-faced as ever, she exchanged glances with Joan, who understood Ruth better than the girl understood herself.

To change the trend of the conversation, Joan now asked: "Has any one thought of a name for our club?"

"Yes, I proposed lots of them but Verny seemed to think they were meaningless. I suppose she prefers a Latin or Greek name," Ruth jeered.

"Oh, not at all! She left it entirely to us to choose a name, but she thought we ought to select one that would fit," hastily explained Joan.

"I've got one—guess what?" exclaimed Betty, sitting back, and hugging her knees as she smiled questioningly at her friends.

The other girls puckered their brows and guessed all sorts of names, some so ridiculous that a merry chorus of laughter pealed across the glen; but finally, Betty held up a hand in warning and shouted:

"Halt! Halt! if you keep on this way, we'll never finish the weeds."

"Give up, then!" responded her companions.

"Dandelion Troopy!" exulted Betty.

"Troopy—why that 'y' at the end?" queried Joan.

"'Cause we can't be a regular 'Troop,' you know, while we have only four members—Verny said the Scout Manual says so. As most infant ideas end with a 'y,' I suggest that we end that way."

"Oh, Betty! I'm sure you don't want us to end there when we've but just begun," laughed Julie.

Betty was about to explain her meaning when Ruth interrupted. "Good gracious! Haven't we had enough of dandelions in this horrid job without reminding us forever of the work by calling ourselves by that name?"

"Well, I was thinking how pretty the name would look if Verny prints it on a board sign and paints yellow dandelions all about the words," explained Betty, in an apologetic tone.

"It *would* look nice," added Joan, picking up a blossom and studying it carefully.

"You know dandelions really are lovely! And they smell sweet, too. But they grow so freely, everywhere, that folks think they are weeds. Now they'd be considered wonderful if they were hard to cultivate," said Betty, seriously.

"I fail to see beauty in the old things!" scorned Ruth.

"You fail to see beauty in lots of things, Ruth, and that's where you lose the best part of living," said a sweet voice from the pathway that skirted the lawn.

"Oh, Verny! When did you get back?" cried three of the girls. Ruth turned away her face and curled her lips rebelliously.

"Oh, some time ago, but I went indoors to see if the banker had his money ready for my scouts," replied Mrs. Vernon, paying no attention to Ruth's attitude.

"We were just talking of a name, Verny, and Betsy said she thought the name of 'Dandelion' was so appropriate," explained Joan.

"Betty thought a signboard with the name and a wreath of the flowers painted on it would be awfully sweet," added Julie, eagerly.

"And I say 'Toad-stool Camp' with a lot of fungus plants painted about it would be more appropriate for this Troop's name!" sneered Ruth, wheeling around to face Mrs. Vernon. "We're sick of the sight of dandelions."

Understanding Ruth's shortcomings so well, the girls paid no attention to this remark, but Mrs. Vernon said: "I came out to see if you were almost through with to-day's work."

"Seems as if we were awfully slow this afternoon, Verny, but we'll dig all the faster now for having you here to boss us," said Julie.

"It's all because I stopped them to talk about a name," admitted Betty.

"Well, we were glad of the recess," laughed Joan.

"Come, come, then—let's make up for lost time!" called Julie, falling to with a zeal never before demonstrated by her.

The other girls turned and also began digging furiously, in order to complete the number of roots they were supposed to sell at one time. Not a word was spoken for a few moments, but Ruth groaned about her backache, and sat up every few seconds to look at her dirt-smearred fingernails. Mrs. Vernon had to hide a smile and when she could control her voice, said:

"I'll be going back to Vernon's Bank, girls, but as soon as you are ready to cash in for the roots, go to the side porch. Then wash up in the lavatory and meet me on the front verandah, where we'll have something cool to drink for such warm laborers."

"Um-m! I know what! You always do treat us the best!" cried Joan.

"With such an incentive before us, I shouldn't wonder but we'll be there before you are ready," added Julie, smacking her lips.

Mrs. Vernon laughed, then walked back to the house, and the girls dug and dug, without wasting any more time to grumble or talk. Even Ruth forgot her annoyances in the anticipation of having something good to eat and a cooling drink the moment she was through with her hundred weeds.

As usual, Betty completed her task before any of her companions, and Ruth said querulously: "I don't see how you ever do it! Here I've worked as hard as any one but I only have sixty roots."

"I'll help you finish up so's we can get to the house," Betty offered generously. And Ruth accepted her help without thinking to thank her.

"I know why Ruth always falls behind," commented Joan. "Betty may be a 'prude' and a 'preacher' in Ruth's eyes, but she sure does persist in anything. I haven't heard her complain of, or shirk, a single thing since we began this Scout plan. Ruth sits and worries over everything before it happens, so she really makes her work hard from the moment she ever starts it."

"That's good logic, Joan," returned Julie. "Besides all that, I have watched Betty work, and she seems to *like* it! Haven't you ever noticed how fast and well you can do anything that you love to do?"

"You don't suppose I *love* to root out dandelions, do you?" demanded Betty, laughingly.

"Not exactly, but you try to see all the good points in them and that makes you overlook the horrid things," said Julie.

"Well, I wish Betty would show me the good points in a pan of potatoes," said Joan. "I have to peel the 'taters every day, and *I hate it!* Many a time I have tried to fool myself into believing I like them—but I just can't!"

The girls laughed heartily, and Julie added: "Next time you have to peel them, begin to sing or speak a piece—that works like magic, because it turns your thoughts to other things."

"There now! Ruth's hundred are ready, too!" said Betty, tossing the last few roots into the basket.

Mr. Vernon was paymaster, and always contrived to have bright new coins on hand with which to pay his laborers. To-day he counted out the correct wage for each girl, and then said:

"That lawn must be almost cleaned up, eh?"

"Oh, Mr. Vernon! It's most discouraging!" cried Ruth.

"Yes—why?" asked Mr. Vernon, quizzically.

"Because we root out a place one day, and the next the young ones sprout up again."

"That looks as if you girls may bankrupt me before this contract is completed, eh?" laughed he.

"Come, girls! Don't waste your time in there with Uncle Verny when you might be sipping cool lemonade out here!" called Mrs. Vernon from the front of the house.

So the four girls hastily washed away all signs of earth from hands and faces, and joined their "Captain" on the verandah. Here they found waiting great wicker easy-chairs, and a table spread with goodies. In a few moments unpleasant work and dandelions were forgotten in the delectable pastime of eating fresh cake and drinking lemonade.

"What do *you* think of the name 'Dandelion Troop,' Verny?" asked Julie, when the first attack on the cake had subsided.

"I think it is most appropriate at present, but how will you feel about that name next year—or the next?"

"Now that's what I say! We'll grow so tired of it," added Ruth.

"But we don't think so!" argued Julie.

"Besides, we ought never to weary of the humble things that really start us in life. If dandelions mean our start to a real Scout Troop, we ought to be grateful and honor the weed," giggled Joan.

Then an animated discussion followed between the girls for and against the name, but finally the champions of "Dandelion" came forth the victors, and thereafter they wished to be known as "The Dandelion Troop."

"I suppose you girls know that we can't organize a regular Patrol until we have eight or more girls," said Mrs. Vernon, after the mimic christening of a dandelion with Betty as sponsor for the name took place.

"We know that, but you told us that the Handbook said we might be a club from any school or Y. W. C. A., and meet regularly until we had secured our needed number," added Joan, anxiously.

"Yes, that is true, but I think we had better continue with our little club as we are now, and study the ways and laws of the Scouts, before we try to increase our number to eight. You see, you had already planned to earn money for camping this summer before the Girl Scout Drive began; then you became enthusiastic over that.

"If I am to be your Captain, I, too, must study the plans, principles, and objects of the Organization, or I would be a poor Captain to guide you."

“Does that mean we can’t call ourselves Girl Scouts, or anything else, until you’ve done training?” demanded Ruth.

“By no means! Dandelion Patrol can go right along and obey the laws of the Scouts, and perfect itself for admission to the Organization as soon as we prove we know enough to claim our membership,” explained Mrs. Vernon.

“But we won’t have to give up our camp idea for that, will we?” asked Joan, anxiously.

“No,” laughed Mrs. Vernon, while the other girls sighed in relief.

While the four girls are trudging homeward, you may like to hear how they came to be weeding Vernon’s lawn, and why they were so keen about starting a Girls’ Scout Patrol.

Julie and Betty were about thirteen years old, and were very popular with their friends. Their sister, May, who was about seventeen, kept house for the family, as the mother had been dead for several years. Besides May, there were Daddy Lee, John, the brother, who was twelve, and Eliza, the maid-of-all-work, who had been a fixture in the household since May was a baby.

Ruth Bentley was about fourteen, but she was an only child. Every whim was law to her doting mother and father, so it was small wonder that the girl was spoiled in many ways. But not past salvation, as you shall see. She had a lovely home quite near the Vernons’ place, with servants to do the work and wait upon her; thus indolence became one of her evil tendencies. When Ruth heard the Lee girls propose the forming of a Scout Patrol, she, too, yearned to become a member. Hence she had to weed dandelions for a test the same as the other girls did, but not without complaints and rebellion on her part. Mrs. Vernon paid no attention to her fault-finding, for she knew that if the girl persevered there would be less danger of her failing in other tests when the Patrol began on more interesting but more difficult tasks.

Joan Allison was also thirteen years of age, and a more sensible little person you would have difficulty in finding. She had three brothers younger than herself, but her parents could not afford a maid, so Joan helped with the house-work, while the boys did the chores about the place.

The Vernons’ house, on the outskirts of the town, was the handsomest place in the township. There were acres of woodland and meadows at the back, and a velvety lawn that sloped from the front of the house down to the stream that was the boundary line of the estate.

The Vernons had had a son who enlisted in the Aviation Service at the beginning of the War in Europe, but he had met death soon after his initial flight on the battle lines. Mr. and Mrs. Vernon had always taken an interest in the children living in their neighborhood, but after Myles’ death they tried to forget their loss by closer companionship with the young people in the small town.

Mrs. Vernon had heard of and seen the splendid work done by Girl Scouts, and she decided to train a group to join the Organization. Thus it came about that the four girls who were anxious, also, to become Scouts, were the first members in the Dandelion Patrol to be started by Mrs. Vernon.

To try out their patience and powers of endurance, as well as to have them earn money for their simple camp-equipment, Mrs. Vernon suggested that they weed dandelions at a rate of twenty cents a hundred. This test taught the girls to appreciate the value expressed in a dime—for it meant just that much service rendered.

School would soon close for the summer, and the girls hoped by that time to have enough money earned and saved to buy the second-hand tent and camp-outfit a friend of May’s had offered for sale. Every dollar added to the camp-fund gave the girls dreams of the mountains where canoeing, hiking, fishing and living in the open would constitute one long season of delight.

Mrs. Vernon listened to their plans and preparations, but she was too wise to discourage them by saying it would take longer than two weeks at the rate of income they were receiving to earn sufficient capital to outfit a camp. She encouraged them in doing whatever work came for them to do—be it dandelion roots or drying dishes—and explained how Perseverance and Persistence always rewarded one.

CHAPTER TWO—AN UNEXPECTED PROPOSITION

Julie and Betty dropped their coins into the bank at home that was jointly kept for their savings, then they hurried out to the kitchen to see what kind of dessert May was preparing.

Eliza was busy with the finishing touches of the dinner when the twins ran in; and being the nominal head of the family since the mother was gone, she ordered the children around.

“Here, Betty—mash them pertaters whiles I strain the squash, will yuh?” said she.

“Shall I add the butter and cream, ‘Liza?” asked Betty, eagerly taking up the patent masher because it was considered great fun to watch the tiny squirms of mealy potato run through the

sieve.

"Julie kin get the butter an' cream—yuh jest hurry and do the mashin'. I'm gettin' late with th' dinner ennyway," replied Eliza, turning her attention to the roast in the oven.

Julie started for the jug of cream, but stopped at May's side and asked: "How far is it from here to the Adirondacks, Maysy—I mean, how much does it cost to get there?"

"It's a good ways, and I've heard it costs a lot of money, but I don't know exactly how much. Why?"

"Oh, nothing much—I just wanted to know, that's all," returned Julie, as she took up the jug to carry it back to Betty.

"We want to figure out how much more money we'll have to earn, Maysy, before we can start for that camp. That's why Jule asked," explained Betty, conscientious even in little things like this.

"Hoh! why you girls will have to weed Vernon's lawn all summer before you can raise money enough to pay carfare to the Adirondacks!" laughed John, who now scuffled into the kitchen to see if he could find anything good to eat before dinner was served.

"We didn't ask your opinion! You're only a child, so how would you know about carfares," retorted Julie, condescendingly.

"Oh, really! Is that so! Well, let me tell you, I know a heap more about it than you dream of, 'cause I'm planning to go to Chimney Point Camp myself this summer—so!" exclaimed John, feeling highly gratified when he saw the looks of consternation on his sisters' faces. But he forgot to reckon with Eliza.

Eliza was a trifle more than six feet in height, and buxom as well. She had powerful hands and feet and when she snapped her mouth shut as a signal of disapproval, the children knew better than to argue.

Now Eliza plunked the soup-pot down upon the range and wheeled to face John. Her broad hands went to their habitual rest upon her ample hips, and she inquired in a high falsetto voice:

"John Lee! Does your father know what you'se just said?"

"Not yet, but he will t'night, 'Liza; the Y. M. C. A. director of our gym is coming to see him about it," replied John, without the bravado he had expressed towards his sisters.

"Then lem'me tell you this much, sonny! Ef your father asks me fer an opinion—and I s'pose he will, seein' how I has brung you all up—I'll come out an' tell him it ain't fair fer him t' let you take money to go to camp this summer, an' make th' girls set to work to earn their'n. An' that's onny fair to all!"

"Oh, I am not going to spend moneya, 'Liza—I'm goin' to help wash dishes in camp to pay for my board," hastily added John.

"Wash dishes! Huh!" snorted Eliza disdainfully. "I'd hate t' hev to eat from them dishes!" Then as an afterthought struck her humorously, she added: "But men-folks don't know th' diffrunce—they eat what's set before them, whether dishes are clean or dirty!"

May laughed appreciatively and said: "Which goes to show how much 'Liza appraises John's ability to wash dishes."

"Er anything else, that I knows of," murmured Eliza, winking at May. "Don't we have t' look after his neck and ears every day afore he goes to school?"

Julie joined May in the laugh at John's expense, and he rushed out of the kitchen, slamming the door behind him. But Betty turned to Eliza and said:

"'Liza, John's getting to be too big a boy for us to tease like that. I think we hurt his feelings just now."

"Betsy, if John's too big for teasin' then he's big enough to 'tend to his own wardrobe and appearance. Now I wonder what he would look like in ten days ef I didn' keep after him all the time?"

Betty said no more but she had finished mashing the potatoes and so she ran out, planning how she could please John in order to compensate him for the teasing from Eliza.

Julie had been hanging about, thinking she could scrape the bowl clean when her sister had finished whipping the cream for the Snow Pudding. But May had other plans. When the cream had stiffened into a peak of snow-like froth, the bowl was carried to the refrigerator and there placed upon the ice.

With a regretful sigh, Julie watched, then ran out after Betty. John and Betty were in the sitting-

room asking Mr. Lee about railroad fares and camp-life. So Julie was just in time to hear his reply.

Having figured roughly on a scrap of paper, Mr. Lee told his questioners about how much it would cost to reach the Adirondacks. John whistled in surprise, and Betty looked at Julie in chagrin.

"My goodness, Betty! It will take us all summer to earn that much money."

"I guess we'll have to find some mountains nearer home, then," ventured Betty, wistfully.

"I wonder what Ruth will do when she hears we can't earn enough money for fares," added Julie.

The following day after school, the four girls met again on Vernon's lawn and exchanged items of news with each other. But the most discouraging of all was the telling of the cost of carfare to the Adirondacks.

They stood with baskets hanging from their arms, and weeding tools idle, while faces expressed the disappointment at hearing Betty's story. Finally Ruth said:

"Then there's no use breaking our backs over this old lawn. I'll not dig dandelions if it isn't going to get us anywhere."

"Oh, I didn't mean to make you feel that way, when I told you about the fares," expostulated Betty. "I only wanted you to know we'd have to find some other camp-place to go to, nearer home."

"Anyway, girls, don't let's quit work just now, because we found out about the cost of traveling. Let's keep right on and who knows! we may wind up in the Alps this summer—carfares, steamers for ocean voyages, and everything included—paid for and presented to us by an unknown uncle from a far country!" laughed Joan.

"Let me tell you something, too!" added Betty. "Let's try to keep up our spirits while weeding this afternoon, by talking over what we will do when we reach the mountains. I'd rather pretend we were in the Adirondacks, or the Rockies, than over in Europe. But we can picture ourselves in the mountains, *somewhere*, like Sarah Crewe did you know, about her father and home, even while she had to live in the attic!"

The girls laughed at Betty's optimism, but she took the laugh in good part; then she began weeding and at the same time began a fine oration on the beauties of the mountains and the wonders of Nature.

Soon the other girls were weeding, too, and vied with one another in thinking of some wonderful camp sports or plan they could talk about. Soon, to Ruth's great amazement, each girl had rooted out the required number of dandelions for the day.

"Now then, didn't I tell you we could work better if we thought of pleasant things and plans?" exulted Betty.

"We certainly did our stint this afternoon without the usual complaints and delays," admitted Joan. "Let's root some more."

The rest of the afternoon passed quickly, and by the time the girls carried their baskets of weeds to Mrs. Vernon to be paid for, they found they had earned twice as much money, for they had each rooted out 200 plants instead of their usual 100.

As they sat on the cool verandah enjoying ice-cream and cakes, they told their hostess how it was they had weeded so many dandelions. Then they told her about their discouragement when they had heard how expensive a trip it would be to go to camp in the Adirondacks. But in reply to all their talking, Mrs. Vernon smiled and nodded her head.

They began to say "good-by" for the day, when Mrs. Vernon said: "I'll have pleasant news for you to-morrow."

"Oh, can't we be told just a word about it now?" cried Ruth.

"Is it about a camp in the mountains?" added Joan.

But Mrs. Vernon shook her head in mild reproof of their curiosity, and refused to be beguiled into sharing her secret.

The Dandelion Girls, as they now styled themselves, lost no time after school was dismissed, the next afternoon, in running to the Vernon's house. They found Mrs. Vernon on the side porch waiting for them.

"Before you begin work to-day, I thought I would mention a little idea I had last night after you left. It is not *the* secret but it has some connection with it.

"When Mr. Vernon came home last night, he told me he had heard of a fine tent for sale very cheap. There are several cot-beds and four lockers to go with it. He secured an option on it until he could ascertain what your decision might be about the purchase.

"As it is such a bargain, I would advise our buying it; then we can erect it on the rear lawn, and your tools and other chattels can be kept in the lockers. It would also provide us with a clubroom all our own while here, and when we go away to the mountains we will have a tent all ready to take with us."

"Oh, I think that is lovely!" cried Julie, clapping her hands.

"It is so good of Uncle Verny and you—and we thank you a thousand times!" exclaimed Betty, thinking of gratitude before she gave a thought to the fun they might have in the tent.

"Well, it will make us feel as if we were preparing for a camp-life this summer, even though we may not be able to really afford it," sighed Ruth, despondently.

"Heigh there! Cheer up, can't you? Don't be a gloom just when Verny tells us something so fine!" called Joan, reprovingly.

"But we don't even know the price! Maybe it will take all the savings we have had on hand for our camping purposes," argued Ruth.

"That's so," admitted Julie and Joan, but Betty said:

"How much will it cost us, Verny?"

"Well, as I am going to enjoy this outfit as much as any one of you girls, I am going to pay my share of the costs—exactly one-fifth of the total, girls."

Ruth smiled unpleasantly at this reply, as if to say: "And you with all your money only doing what we girls each are doing!"

Mrs. Vernon saw the smile and understood the miscomprehension that caused it, but she also knew that Ruth would soon overcome all such erroneous methods of thinking and feeling if she but continued interesting herself in the Scout work and ideals.

"How much will the total cost be, Verny?" asked Julie.

Mrs. Vernon took out a slip of paper and read aloud the items that went with the tent, then concluded by mentioning the cash sum asked for the entire outfit.

"Why, it sounds awfully cheap!" exclaimed Betty.

"I think it is, girls, that is why I advise you to take it."

"What under the sun do we want of an ax, a saw, and all that carpenter's outfit? Why not let the man keep them and deduct the sum from the cost of the outfit?" asked Ruth.

"Because, my dear, a good ax, and other tools, are as necessary in camp-work and life as the tent itself. At present, tools are very expensive, and these are of the best quality steel, Uncle Verny says."

"Well, buy them if you want to, but don't expect *me* to wear water blisters on my hands by handling an ax or spade. Not when *I* go to camp!" retorted Ruth.

Little attention was paid to this rudeness, as Ruth's friends knew enough of the laws of the scouts to ignore such shortcomings in others, but to try, instead, to nourish that which was worthy of perpetuation in thought and deed.

"Having our own tent where we can rest when we like makes it seem as if the mountains were much nearer us than so far off as the Adirondacks really are," said Betty, happily.

"It may turn out that this camp will be all we shall have for this year," commented Ruth.

"I don't see why you should say that!" demanded Joan, impatiently.

"Because we'll spend our money on this old thing and then have to weed and weed all the rest of the summer to earn the carfares."

"It won't figure up any differently in the end, 'cause we'd have to have some kind of a tent, wouldn't we?" asked Julie.

"We might be able to borrow some—or buy them on the installment plan. I even might tease father to lend us the money to buy new ones when we are ready to go," replied Ruth.

"It isn't one of our rules to borrow or go in debt. We each want to demonstrate independence as we go along. Buying on credit, or with borrowed capital, is a very undesirable method of doing business," said Mrs. Vernon, gravely.

"But paying back for a tent next fall, instead of next week, isn't as bad as you seem to think," insisted Ruth.

"All the same, we girls are going to buy for cash, and never borrow trouble, if we can help it!" declared Julie, sensibly.

"Then it is settled, is it? We take the tent?" said Mrs. Vernon.

"Of course! Even Ruth must admit that it is a bargain," returned the three girls in a chorus.

"I don't know the least thing about costs of camping, and there seems so little hope of my ever participating in such joys!" retorted Ruth. But they all knew she was well pleased with the purchase.

That afternoon they went to work with a zeal hitherto unfelt, for they had a keen sense of proprietorship in something worth-while. Mrs. Vernon felt happy, too, over the way the girls voted to pay cash as they went, for she knew it meant individual freedom for each; and Ruth would soon be made to understand the meaning of "obligations" if she associated with three such practical girls.

The moment the weeding was done for the afternoon, four eager girls assembled to hear about the "great secret." Mrs. Vernon began by saying:

"Now I don't want you girls to be disappointed in what *I* consider my fine secret, but I really think it is the only way out for this summer."

Ruth sniffed audibly and sat with lifted eyebrows, as if to suggest: "Didn't I tell you that tent would be all you got this year for your money!"

But Mrs. Vernon continued her preamble without hesitation.

"Even should you girls earn ten times the amount of money you are now receiving each afternoon, you would still lack enough to pay carfares to the Adirondacks, or the White Mountains. And as we agreed from the beginning never to borrow money for our scout work, such a long trip seems out of the question at present.

"Last night I sat puzzling over this situation, when a splendid idea flashed into my mind. I remembered a campsite in the mountains not so far from here, that will give us all the delights of the Adirondacks without the costs. A motor truck can carry our outfits instead of our shipping them by freight, and we can go there in my car, whenever we are ready to start.

"If we decide on such a plan, we could prepare to leave home the week following the closing of school. I think it will take us at least that long to get everything ready, you know."

"Oh, how wonderful!" breathed Betty, joyfully.

"Our dreams come true!" sighed Joan and Julie.

But Ruth, as usual, could not accept any proposition, no matter how pleasant, without argument. So she said: "How do we know this campsite is where we might wish to spend a summer?"

"Mrs. Lee and I spent a summer there when we were girls, and your own mother cried because she had to go with her parents to the farm in the Catskills, instead of camping with her schoolmates. Perhaps your mother will describe the beauties of this place to you, so you will feel sure it is desirable enough for you," said Mrs. Vernon, calmly, but with a faint suggestion of sarcasm in her tone.

Ruth had the grace to keep silence after that, and Mrs. Vernon said: "I'm not going to say more about the idea, but you shall judge for yourselves when I take you there in the auto on Saturday."

"Dear me. I feel so excited that I'm sure I won't be able to sleep all week!" exclaimed Julie, jumping up and dancing around.

"I feel as if there were wheels whirring around inside of me," added Joan.

The others laughed, and Mrs. Vernon admitted: "That is the way I felt when it was agreed that I might join my friends for camp-life that summer."

"It will be so lovely to camp in the same place that mother dear did when she was a little girl," said Betty, her voice trembling slightly as she thought of the one now absent from sight, but not in spirit.

"I don't know but what I'd rather try out the first summer in camp with no other scout girls to watch and comment about our mistakes," confessed Joan. "If we start alone this year, we will feel like experienced scouts by next summer."

"I agree with you there, Joan," said Julie.

"Then we are pleased with my plan to ride out and inspect the old campsite on Saturday, eh?" ventured Mrs. Vernon.

"Yes, indeed!" chorused four voices; even Ruth agreed with her friends about this week-end outing.

By Saturday the girls had paid for the tent and outfit bought of the man, and had nineteen dollars left for expenses at a camp that summer. They were at Headquarters (they named the tent on the back-lawn "Dandelion Headquarters") an hour before the time decided upon for the early start to the mountains. But it was as Julie said:

"Better too early than too late!"

Mrs. Vernon was giving last instructions about packing a luncheon to take with them, then she came out and joined her Patrol.

"What do you think, Verny? Eliza said she would bake us a crockful of ginger-snaps and cookies every week this summer, and send them to camp for us, because we would not be home to eat."

"How are you going to get them? I asked mother about the campsite and she said it was three or four miles from any village," said Ruth, this being the first inkling she had given that she had inquired about the camp.

"Why Rural Delivery will leave it for us, Daddy said," replied Julie.

"And my mother said I could make fudge to sell to my family and friends. She would give me the sugar and chocolate. Father ordered two pounds then and there—so that makes a dollar more than I shall have earned before next week," said Joan.

"I can make good fudge, too. I'll ask May if I may sell it!" exclaimed Julie.

"Our waitress left last night, and mother said she would pay me a quarter a night if I would wash the dishes. But I hate doing dishes. The greasy water gets all over your hands and then they smell so!" said Ruth, not willing to be left out of this working-community.

"Did you do them?" eagerly asked the girls.

"Of course not! I didn't want to feel all warm and sticky for the rest of the evening. Besides, I manicured my nails so nicely just before dinner."

"Dear me! I wish your mother would let me do them—for a quarter a night!" sighed Betty, anxiously.

"Even if she did, would you give *that* money to the Patrol?" wondered Ruth, doubtfully.

"Sure! Aren't we all earning for the general good?"

"Well, I'll ask mother if she'll let you do them," replied Ruth, magnanimously. She actually felt that she was bestowing a favor on Betty by allowing her to wash her dishes and donate the earnings to the camp-fund.

CHAPTER THREE—THE OLD CAMPSITE

Early Saturday morning the chauffeur brought the car over to the tent, and Mrs. Vernon told the girls to jump in while she sent Jim for the lunch-baskets. She got in the front seat, as she proposed driving the car.

When all was ready, the merry party started off with Mr. Vernon wishing them a good time. They were soon outside of town limits, and skimming over a good hard country road. Then Mrs. Vernon drove slower and spoke of the place they were bound for.

"Of course you know, girls, that it is not necessary for you to select this site if you do not like it. I am merely driving you there because it seems to meet with our present needs for a camp-life. We still have other places we can investigate, as there is a pyramid of catalogues on the table in the tent."

"But every one of those camping places will cost us so much money to reach, and that won't leave us anything for board," said Joan.

"Father told us last night that he always wanted to get a crowd of the boys to go with him to that camp you all made when you were girls. But his chums wanted to go so far away that they never got anywhere to camp in the end," said Betty.

"Yes, and he said he wished he could have his boyhood over again. Then he'd spend his vacations in camp even if it was near home," added Julie.

Mrs. Vernon smiled. "I remember how jealous a few of the boys were when they heard us talk of the fun we had in camp. Betty's mother was so sorry for them that she invited them to visit the camp now and then. Betty takes after her mother for having a great heart."

"Maybe we can invite our folks to visit us, too," said Julie, eagerly.

"So we can—if they will come and bring supplies," said Ruth.

Every one laughed at this suggestion, and Ruth added: "Well, we can't afford to pay for visitors, can we? I won't be surprised to find that we shall have to break camp and return home in a month's time, just for lack of funds to go on with the experiment."

"We won't do even that if we have to chop cord wood to pay our way," laughed Mrs. Vernon.

"Are there big trees on the mountain, Verny?" asked Betty.

"We girls thought it a great forest in those days. To us it seemed as if the trees were giants—but we had not seen the Redwoods of California then," Mrs. Vernon chuckled as she spoke.

"What do you call it now?" asked Joan.

"This ridge has no individual name that I know of, but the range is an extension of those known by the name of Blue Mountains. The place I have in mind is one of the prettiest spots on this particular spur of hills. You will find forest trees, streams, pools for bathing, softest moss for carpets, flowers for study, wild woodland paths for hikes—in fact everything to rejoice a nature-lover's heart."

"Dear me, can't you speed up a little?" asked Julie.

"No, don't, Verny—we'll land in jail if you go faster!" exclaimed Ruth.

"Let's call this spur 'Verny's Mountain,' shall we, girls?" suggested Betty.

"Yes, let's!" abetted Joan.

The automobile rolled smoothly and swiftly along, and after the first excitement had abated somewhat, the girls begged their Captain to tell them how she had found the place and what they did at camp when she was a girl.

"I think it was that one summer in camp that made me eager to give every girl an opportunity to enjoy a like experience. But we went there under far different auspices than you girls are now doing. We had to convince our parents that we would not be murdered by tramps, or starved, or made ill by sleeping out-of-doors in the woods.

"Then, too, we had to load our outfit on a farm-wagon and climb in on top of it so that one trip would do all the moving, as horses were scarce for pleasure-trips, but were needed for farm-work in those days.

"I can remember the shock we girls created with the village people, when it was whispered around that we proposed a camp-life that summer, instead of sitting home to do tatting and bleaching the linen. It was all right for boys to have a camp for fun—but for girls, never!

"However we six girls were of the new era for women, and we wanted to do the things our brothers and their schoolmates did. They could go camping and fishing and hiking so why couldn't we? What difference did skirts and pig-tails make in vacation-time? So we won over our parents' consent to let us try it for a week.

"But we stayed a month, and then a second month until we made the whole summer of it. And, girls, we brought home more knitted socks and crochet trimming and tatting, with an abundance of good health and experience thrown in, than all the rest of the girls in the village could show together.

"Even the parson, who had visited our mothers to dissuade them from allowing us this unheard-of freedom of camp-life, had to admit that he had been prejudiced by members of his congregation."

"Just like a story-book, Verny! Do tell us what you did when you first got to camp?" cried Julie.

"Well, it was lucky for us girls that my brother Ted drove the farm-wagon for us. When we reached the steep road that ran up over the mountain, we had to leave the horses and wagon and carry our outfit to the site we had selected.

"Then Ted showed us how to build a fireplace, an oven, and a pot-hanger. He also helped us ditch all about the tent so the rain-water would drain away, and he constructed a latrine for camp.

"He promised to drive up on Sunday to see how we were faring, and bring a few of his chums with him, if they could get off from the farm-work. So we gladly said good-bye to him, and felt, at last, much like Susan Anthony must have felt when she realized her first victory in the fight over bondage for women."

"And didn't you have any guardian or grown-up to help take care of you?" wondered Ruth.

"The school-teacher planned to stay with us for a month, but she could not come for the first few days; and we feared we might be kept home unless we started before our folks repented, so we went alone on the day agreed upon.

"But, girls, I will confess, every one of us felt frightened that first night; for an owl hooted over our heads, and queer noises echoed all around us, so that we thought of all the dangers the foolish villagers had said would befall us."

The car now went through a thriving village which Mrs. Vernon said was Freedom, the last settlement they would see this side of the campsite. With the announcement that they were now nearing "Verny's Mountain," the four girls were silent; but they watched eagerly for the woodcutters' road that Mrs. Vernon said would be the place where they would leave the automobile and climb to the plateau.

The further they went, the wilder and more mountainous seemed the country; finally Mrs. Vernon drove the car up a rutty, rocky road until the trail seemed to rise sheer up the rugged side of the mountain.

"Here's where we have to get out and walk, girls."

And glad they were, too, to jump out and stretch themselves after the long drive. They stood and gazed rapturously around at the wildness and grandeur of the place, and all four admitted that no one could tell the difference between Verny's Mountain and the Adirondacks.

"We'll take turns in carrying the hampers, girls," said Mrs. Vernon, lifting the well-laden baskets from the automobile.

They began climbing the side of the mountain by following the old woodcutters' path, until they reached a large, grassy plateau. Back of this flat a ledge rose quite sheer, in great masses of bed-rock. Mosses and lichen clung to the niches of this rocky wall, which was at least forty feet high, making it most picturesque.

"What a wonderful view of the valley we get from this plateau!" exclaimed Joan.

"Is this where you camped, Verny?" eagerly asked Julie.

"No, but this is where we danced and shouted and played like any wild mountain habitants," laughed Mrs. Vernon, the joys of that girlhood summer lighting her eyes. "And here is where you girls can play scout games and dances, or sit to dream of home and far-away friends."

"The scout games we'll enjoy here, but dreams of home—never! We'll have to go back there soon enough," declared Joan, causing the others to laugh merrily.

"Well, come on, girls. Our campsite lies just there beyond that cluster of giant pines that rear their heads high above the surrounding forest trees," said Mrs. Vernon, leading the way across the plateau.

The sound of falling water became plainer as they went, and soon, between the trunks of the trees skirting the plateau, the girls spied a beautiful waterfall. It tumbled from one great boulder to another, until it splashed into a basin worn deep in the farthest end of the plateau; thence it sought the easiest way to reach the valley, making many sparkling pools and musical waterfalls in its descent.

"How perfectly lovely!" breathed Betty, standing with clasped hands and a gaze that was riveted on the falls.

"You had plenty of water for cooking and bathing, didn't you?" said practical Julie.

"Yes, and that was one reason we chose this spot for our camp. You see this high rocky wall made a fine wind-shield from the north, and where could one find a more convenient gymnasium than that flat? The pines and waterfall over here provided shelter and supply. So we built our hut against the wall under those trees."

"Hut? You never told us you built a hut," exclaimed Joan.

"No, because I have no idea of finding it here. I suppose the logs have rotted away years ago," returned Mrs. Vernon.

"We might build another one, Verny, 'cause I see plenty of down-timber," suggested Betty.

"And it will be great sport to play carpenter," added Joan.

Mrs. Vernon forced a way through the tangle of briars and bushes that had grown up since that long-ago, and the scouts followed directly after her.

"Girls, here is the pool where we used to swim—isn't it lovely?"

The girls stood still, admiring the clear water and the reflection of green trees in the pool; then the Captain turned and began breaking down slender twigs and bending aside green berry-bushes, as she eagerly blazed a trail towards the wall.

Here, not fifty feet from the pool, was glimpsed the old frame and timbers of a log cabin. A mass of vines and moss almost hid the hut from view, so that one would unconsciously pass it by, thinking it but the trunk of a cluster of old trees against the wall.



A mass of vines and moss almost hid the hut from view

"Oh, we must have built well to have had it survive all these years, girls!" cried Mrs. Vernon, joyfully, as she stood and looked at the handiwork of her friends of years long gone.

"Verny, this is the way we girls will build, too. We will erect a hut alongside this, and show it to our children many years from now," said Betty, fervently.

"I don't see why we can't use this hut, too," said Julie.

"The frame and floor beams are solid enough," added Joan, examining the posts.

"It will need a roof and some new side-logs—that is all," Ruth said, taking a lively interest in the camp-plan.

"Yes, we can easily repair it, and then you girls can build your own hut as an annex to this hotel," said Mrs. Vernon, still smiling with satisfaction at the discovery of the cabin.

"Dear me! I wish we had brought our camp outfit to-day and could stay to begin work," complained Joan.

"I'm crazy to start, too," admitted Julie.

"But we have to have those tools, and some others besides. I shall ask Uncle Verny to sell us some of his extra ones. He has several hammers, screw-drivers, and other implements he can spare," said Mrs. Vernon.

"Now what can we look at?" inquired Ruth, quickly wearying of one thing. This was one of the weak tendencies Mrs. Vernon hoped to cure that summer.

"You can bring the hampers over to the pool, if you like, and when we are through planning here, we will join you and have our picnic."

"Why, I don't want to carry them alone! Can't we all go now and do it?"

"I want to snoop about here a little more," said Julie.

"And I want to figure out how many tree-trunks we'll have to drag over here before we can have a cabin as good as this one," called Joan, as she measured the length of logs with a hair-ribbon.

"Mercy! Aren't any of you going to eat before you finish that nonsense?" Ruth asked plaintively.

Mrs. Vernon smiled. Then she turned to Joan and said: "If you girls will really promise to build and finish a hut, I will ask Uncle Verny to loan us the farm-horse to haul the timbers. You girls could never drag them, you know. But Hepsy is accustomed to hauling and heavy work, so we need have no fear of straining her."

"Just the thing! Hepsy forever!" shouted Joan, throwing her hat in the air for a salute.

"Can you remember all the things we still need this summer, Verny?" asked Julie, anxiously.

"We'll jot down everything as we remember it, then we can compare lists when we go to order the things," said Mrs. Vernon.

"Won't the girls at school look green with envy when we tell them we are going to have a strange girl camp with us this summer?" laughed Julie, as a thought struck her.

"Who is she?" gasped the other girls in surprise.

"Ho! did I get you on that?" teased Julie.

"This is the first hint we've had of it," complained Joan.

"Why no! Verny suggested the plan herself—didn't you, Verny?"

But Mrs. Vernon shook her head doubtfully, while Julie shouted with delight at their mystification. Then, eager to share her fun, she cried laughingly: "Hepsy, the dear old girl!"

Of course when one is happy and gay it takes but little to cause loud and long merriment, and so it was in this instance. They laughed uproariously at the joke, and decided then and there to tease the other girls at school who were so anxious to join a Patrol, but would not weed the dandelions to earn money for a camp.

As weeding had been the best test of endurance and patience Mrs. Vernon could think of at the time, she had felt rather relieved to find that only four responded to the initiation invitation. In doing things according to the Handbook for Captains, she felt she would find four girls sufficient material to practice upon for the first season.

When the luncheon was unpacked and spread out, Mrs. Vernon smiled continuously at the happy chatter of the four girls, and the thousand-and-one plans they made for the camp that summer. Then all sat down to enjoy the feast, for nothing had ever tasted so good to them before, and then—did Verny say it was time to start for home?

"Oh, no! It can't be late, Verny!" exclaimed Ruth.

"Why, we've only been here half a minute, Verny," added Joan.

The Captain glanced at her wrist watch. "We have been here more than two hours, girls, and it is a two hour drive back, you know."

"Dear, dear! the only comfort I have in leaving now is the hope of being here for all summer in another week!" cried Betty.

"Then you have decided to choose this site?" ventured the Captain.

"I thought you knew it! Of course this is what we want," admitted Ruth, frankly. And Mrs. Vernon mentally gave her a credit-mark for forgetting self enough to speak her opinion honestly.

The drive back was much longer than going, even though the girls planned and plotted how to earn more money with which to buy everything they craved for that camp. It was to be a wonder-camp.

"I can add a dollar and seventy-five cents to the fund now," announced Ruth, calmly.

"A dollar and s-e-v-e-n-t-y—five cents!" gasped the girls.

"Then I'll have another dollar and a half before next Friday—if I keep on washing those nasty dishes every night!"

"R-rruth!" squealed Betty, throwing her arms about her friend's neck.

"Ruth Bentley!" cried Joan.

"I cannot believe my ears!" added Julie, in a whisper.

Mrs. Vernon never said a word, but she did a lot of silent praying—thanking Him for this break in the clouds of human will and selfishness that the girl had always displayed hitherto.

Ruth felt embarrassed at so much fussing, and felt a deep gratitude to the Captain for not adding to her self-consciousness. The moment she could free herself from Betty's loving embrace, she said, recklessly:

"I told mother I'd rather give up camping than do those dishes any more, but now that I've seen the place, I'll scrub the kitchen floor if she wants me to."

A great laugh relieved every one's feelings at this statement from Ruth, and the merry party reached the Vernon home feeling very much at peace with the world in general.

CHAPTER FOUR—BEGINNING THEIR CAMP LIFE

The next few days were so filled with the final work to finish the scholastic year, and closing of school, that every one of the girls was kept busy, and had little time to think of camp.

Once Thursday came, however, the only exciting thing remained to be done was Commencement on Friday; so the four girls met at Dandelion Tent to plan for the camp.

"We ought to have our folks give us a great send-off, like they did with the regiments that mustered from the town families," said Julie.

"If they'll only give us all I asked for, we will be satisfied," laughed Joan.

"What did you do?" instantly said three voices.

"First, I told mother what we would have to have for camp, then I got mother to visit your folks and tell them what we really ought to have to make life comfortable in the wild woods."

"Oh, oh! That's why Eliza told us she would fix us up with some jams and other food-stuff," laughed Julie.

"And mother asked me did we want any furniture or china?" added Ruth.

"What did you say?" asked Julie.

"I told her we'd rather she donated the price of china or furniture this time, and let us invest it as we found need."

The girls laughed and Mrs. Vernon ran out of the side door, saying: "I'm missing all the fun! Do tell me what it is about?"

Then Julie told her what Ruth had replied to her mother's question, and the Captain laughed also. "I see Ruth is developing a wonderfully keen sense of finance."

"You'll say so when you see this scrap of paper, Verny," said Ruth, taking a crumpled oblong of tinted paper from her middy blouse and passing it over to the Captain.

Mrs. Vernon looked at it in surprise, and gasped: "Why, of all things!"

"The price of china and furniture that mother figured we would smash or damage," explained Ruth.

"Girls, it's a check for twenty-five dollars from Mrs. Bentley. We'll have to vote her a letter of thanks at once."

"Hurrah! Now, all ready for three cheers for Mrs. Bentley!" shouted Julie, jumping upon the camp-stool and waving her hat.

Instantly the girls began a loud hurrah, but the folding chair suddenly shut up, with Julie frantically trying to balance herself. Before a second hurrah could have been given, Julie was sprawling across the camp table right on top of the hats, pans and what-not that had been accumulated to take to camp. Such a clatter of tins and wild screams of laughter that filled that tent!

Finally Julie emerged from the wreckage and stood up, tentatively feeling of her bones and head and body. "Am I all in one piece, girls?" she asked, trying to appear anxious.

"You are, but my hat isn't!" retorted Joan, holding up a crushed straw sailor with the brim severed from the crown.

"I'll have to work and buy you another," said Julie.

"Please don't! I despise sailors and had to wear this one because mother said I would need no new summer hat if I was in camp," hastily explained Joan.

"Come, girls, we must indite that letter to Ruth's mother now. Sit down quietly and suggest something fine," interpolated Mrs. Vernon.

So the letter was composed and given to Ruth to deliver, then the last plans for leaving home were perfected, and the Patrol separated for the day.

Saturday found the girls again at Vernon's place, eager to hear what day they were to start for camp. Everything that they had on their lists had been provided, and now the only thing to do was to say good-by and leave. This the girls felt could not be accomplished any too soon for their peace and comfort.

"Why, Verny, if we don't get away in a day or so, those seven girls who are possessed to join us will steal us and hold us as hostages until you agree to take them in our Troop," said Julie.

"Patience! They'll have to wait now, and learn the lesson you girls have finished before they can join this Patrol. Why, I wonder if you realize how high you have climbed on the rungs of the ladder of Scout Ideals during these past few weeks?" said Mrs. Vernon.

"I can't see any change," said Joan.

"What! don't you think your friends here have improved any whatsoever since we decided to begin a Troop?"

"Oh—the girls have—a little, but I haven't!"

"You have, too, but you don't see it yet. Wait."

"All the same, Verny, tell us when we *can* start?" begged Julie.

"Well, Mr. Vernon sails for his European trip on Monday, so I see nothing to keep us home after that. Can you all be ready to go on Tuesday morning?"

"You know we can—why ask?" laughed Julie.

"Maybe you'd prefer us to start Monday afternoon after you come home from the steamer," suggested Ruth.

Mrs. Vernon laughed. "Hardly as soon as that."

When Tuesday arrived, however, the girls found many little things to delay them, so it was past nine o'clock before they met at the old headquarters, but the tent had disappeared.

"Here we are, Verny, bag and baggage!" shouted Julie, as they tramped up the side-steps of the porch.

"And some of our folks are coming over in a few minutes to see us off. I suspect they have various advices to whisper to you, as well as leave with us some forgotten parting words," said Joan.

"Eliza's going to give us a parting pie," added Betty, so innocently that every one laughed.

"Well, the visitor that we invited to camp with us for the summer is hitched up and waiting to start," Mrs. Vernon informed the girls, as she pointed towards the barns, where a horse was seen going down the back road.

"Why, Hepsy's hooked up to a buckboard? What for?" asked Ruth.

"We won't need it this summer, so Uncle Verny suggested that Hepsy take it along for us to use if we had to go to the stores at Freedom, or should we want to go away on a picnic."

"Say—that's a great idea! I never thought of it," said Julie.

"Which proves that you have no monopoly on great ideas," retorted Joan.

Then the automobile drove up to the steps and was soon followed by a heavy rumbling auto-truck that was used for heavy cartage at Mr. Vernon's factory. He had sent it down for the newly-fledged Scout Troop to make use of to carry tents, boxes and what not to Verny's Mountain.

The advance line of family members now came straggling up the road to watch their girls depart. Before the truck started, the other friends arrived, so there was quite a crowd to wish them good-by and good-luck as they climbed into the car and wildly waved hats and hands.

The ride seemed very short that morning, for so much had to be talked over, and the village of Freedom was reached before they could realize it. Then began the ascent up the woodroad to the plateau. Here the car halted, and the chauffeur assisted the driver of the truck in transferring the boxes and baggage to the buckboard Hepsy had brought thus far.

"We'll have to stable Hepsy somewhere, girls," suggested Julie, as she stood and watched the men work.

"Yes, we ought to make that our first concern, for Hepsy may not appreciate outdoor life as we do—especially if it rains."

"We'll build her a hut," promised Ruth, eagerly.

"And let her sit out under a tree for the four weeks it will take us to erect it?" laughed Joan.

The girls were too eager to reach their campsite to wait any longer for the men to complete the baggage transfer, so they informed the Captain:

"We'll take our suitcases and start up, Verny!"

Mrs. Vernon readily agreed to this, so they started off and were soon out of sight. Once they had reached the old cabin, Julie said:

"Let's get out of these city clothes and get into our scout camp-uniforms."

This met with general approval, and soon the girls were gleefully comparing notes about each other's appearance. But this was interrupted when shouts and crackling of brush was heard. Then poor Hepsy was seen snorting and pulling to bring the loaded buckboard up to the plateau.

"Gee! That's some haul—that grade!" complained Jim, as he mopped his hot brow and stood looking back at the steep road.

"And Hepsy's so soft from no recent work!" added Mrs. Vernon, as she reached his side. Jim was too easy with the horses for their own good, so she said what she did to let him know his sympathy was misplaced.

Hepsy began nibbling at the luscious grass that grew near her feet, and Mrs. Vernon laughingly added: "Poor thing! She must be almost dead to be able to start right in and eat like that."

The luggage was taken to the hut and then Jim went back for a second load. The back seat of the buckboard had been removed so the camp outfit could be easily piled upon the floor of the vehicle. But it did not hold very much, hence it was necessary to make several trips.

When all was carted up to the campsite, Mrs. Vernon said: "Now, Jim, remember to bring the oats once a week for Hepsy, and any other things I write for. See that all mail is forwarded to Freedom, where we can get it."

Jim promised to see that everything was done as requested, then he, too, left. When the last chugs from the automobile truck and the car died away, Mrs. Vernon turned to the girls.

"Well, scouts, here we are for a whole summer of delights!"

"Hip, hip—" began Julie, and the others joined in.

"Don't you think the hut has grown smaller since we were here last?" asked Betty, wonderingly.

"That is because you were picturing the place on a much grander scale after you got home than it actually is. It is your thought that has to dwindle again to take in the proportion of the hut as it is," replied the Captain, amused at Betty's experience.

"I thought the very same thing, but I hated to say anything that sounded like criticism," admitted Joan.

"Tell the truth, girls, I think that hut is tiny, but it looked big enough the other day," laughed Julie.

"Then we must build ours larger than this," said Mrs. Vernon, turning to look over the stock of things needing shelter.

"It looks like an awful heap of stuff, doesn't it?" asked Ruth.

"Yes, but we needed everything, so we had to bring them."

"What shall we do first, Verny?" asked Betty.

"Better pitch the tent first of all, and arrange the cots, then we can work as long as we like, without worrying about having to make our beds."

The girls quickly unrolled the large canvas tent they had purchased, but when it came to erecting it, they found it a much more difficult task than they had anticipated. Jim and the gardener had helped pitch it the first time, but now they were absent.

However, after many failures, the tent was up, albeit it looked wobbly and one-sided. The cots were next opened and placed under the canvas, and the lockers were dragged to their right places.

"Where's the crex rug Verny said we could bring for the ground inside the tent?" called Julie, thrusting her head from the opening of the canvas. But she forgot Ruth had placed a pole directly in front of the entrance to hold up the flap temporarily.

"Ouch! Who left that tree-trunk right in the way?" cried Julie, as she bumped her head smartly.

"That's the porter standing at the door of our hotel!" retorted Joan, laughing as she saw Julie scowling.

"Well, where's the crex rug, anyway?" demanded Julie.

"Come to think of it—Jim threw it out when he unloaded the truck, and then he must have forgotten to pick it up again," said Mrs. Vernon.

"We'll have to use grass for carpet to-night, then," said Julie.

"Unless you run down and drag it up," ventured Ruth.

"That's what we brought Hepsy for, girls. Who'll drive her down and bring back the rug?" called Mrs. Vernon from the hut.

All four were anxious to drive and enjoy the fun, so Julie jumped on the front seat and the others sat dangling their feet from the back of the buckboard. The Captain stood smiling and watching as they went, thinking to herself, "What a good time they will have in camp!"

When the amateur truckman returned, Ruth called out: "Guess what, Verny? We found the seat of the buckboard in the bushes, too. Wasn't it fortunate we went for the rug?"

"We might have hunted all over the camp for that seat when we want to go for a drive, and never have thought of it being left down there," added Julie.

When the girls ran over to see what next to do, they found the Captain eyeing a board about sixteen inches in length. She was calculating aloud and wondering if it would fit.

"Fit where? What is it for?" asked Joan.

"You'll soon find out. Now you girls can unpack the hamper and get luncheon ready—I'm hungry," replied Mrs. Vernon.

She knew this would meet with great approval, and soon they were busy unpacking the ready-made lunch, and placing it on a large flat rock.

"Ruth! quick—brush that awful bug from the butter!" shrieked Julie, as she stood with both her hands filled with dishes.

"Oh—oh! I can't! It's an awful looking creature!" cried Ruth, running away from the rock where the luncheon was spread.

"Joan—come here! What's that beast on the butter—see?" called Julie, trying to set the tier of dishes down on the grass.

"It's only a young dragon-fly—don't you know one when you see it?" laughed Joan, shooing the insect away.

"I've seen them flying in the sunshine, but never on the butter-dish," said Julie, picking up the dishes again and placing them on the cloth.

Mrs. Vernon had started for the rock-table when she heard the shouting, but now she laughed heartily. "Joan, where did you study insect-life that you know so much about one of the common members?"

"Wasn't it a dragon-fly, Verny?"

"Not at all. I should think every one of you girls could tell a dragon-fly, because we have them about our gardens at home."

"What was it, then?" asked Joan.

"I'm going to send to Scout Headquarters for a book on Insect Life, and have you study the different ones you find while in camp. Then you'll become acquainted with them and never forget again. The same with flowers and trees—I must send for books that you can refer to and teach yourselves all you need to know about these things that every good scout knows."

"Oh, come on and let's eat. Every ant and bug in the land will get there before us, and we'll have to eat leavings," said Julie, whipping a hornet from the jelly dish.

So with all kinds of insects for guests, the girls ate their first lunch at camp. They were so hungry that stale bread would have tasted good, but given the delicious things prepared by the Vernons' cook, it was small wonder they all felt uncomfortably full when they left the rock-table.

CHAPTER FIVE—RUTH MEETS WITH DIFFICULTIES

Immediately after luncheon, the girls left the flat table-rock and ran off in quest of fun. They had ignored the remains of the meal, and the dishes were left to attract all the ants and flies within a radius of the odor of the food.

Mrs. Vernon had gone to the buckboard to unpack the chest that held the tools, and was engaged in sorting the nails she thought would be needed to repair the old hut. When she turned to see if the girls were almost through with the task of clearing away the dishes, she found them eagerly investigating the camp grounds.

"How I'd like to have a swim in this pool," called Joan, standing beside the mirror-like water.

"Oh, no; we can take a dip any time. Let's go for a hike up the mountainside. I want to explore," cried Ruth.

"Why not wait until to-morrow morning for adventuring—I want to see if there are any fish in this trout brook," said Betty.

Julie was out of hearing, but she was busy over some quest of her own, and she had shirked work as well as the others.

"Girls, is it possible that you are seeking for a kind fairy who might live in the woods, or are you just waiting for some one to happen along and offer services to you?" asked Mrs. Vernon.

"What do you mean?" inquired Joan, puzzled at the words.

"And what are *you* looking for, Verny?" asked Betty, seeing the Captain going about examining various spots, then glance up at the trees overhead, or shade her eyes to gaze at the sky.

"Finding a suitable place for the cook-stove," said she.

"Cook-stove! Why, we didn't bring any!" replied four girls.

"Oh, yes we did—I'll show you a fine one to-morrow."

"Are we to have running water in our bedrooms, too?" laughed Joan.

"You can, if you are willing to do the plumbing," retorted Mrs. Vernon.

But evidently she found just the place she sought for; and now the girls were deeply interested in watching her build a camp-stove. "You see, I need a place where the smoke will not be driven into our tents, and also where the wind will act as a blower up the chimney and not a quencher of the fire.

"Julie, you can bring me some smooth flat stones for an oven, and Joan can find me a peck of small stones for a lining. Then Betty can cut a good strong young sapling about an inch through, cut off the twigs and leave a clean pole about five feet long; and Ruth can cut two shorter ones with crotches made by two limbs. The crotched limbs can be about three inches long and the poles cut to four feet high. Sharpen the ends to a point so we can drive them into the ground."

Each girl went to do the bidding of their Captain, and when they returned they found a pit had been scooped out of the sheltered nook at the base of a huge rock. This pit was lined with smooth small stones, and the flat oven-stones firmly fixed at the back. Then the two notched poles were planted one on each side of the fireplace, and the long pole placed across the top, the ends fitting securely into the notches.

"To-night we shall have hot soup for supper, girls, and there will be plenty of hot water to wash dishes in."

"Hadn't we better heat some water now for the dishes?" asked Julie.

"Oh—haven't you cleared away the lunch table and washed the dishes?" asked Mrs. Vernon, seemingly surprised.

"Not yet—there wasn't any hot water," said Ruth.

"Then we must heat some at once, for no good scout will postpone clearing away food and dishes after he has had a bountiful meal. It shows a lack of appreciation and gratitude to the Provider when one is slack about cheerfully doing his part," said the Captain.

So Joan was sent for a pail of water, and the other girls were told to remove all signs of food from the rock and bring the dishes to the kitchen.

"Where is the kitchen?" giggled Ruth.

"For to-day, we will have it *below* the pool in which we wish to bathe. Then the brook can carry away the dish-water without having it seep into the ground and find its way to mingle with the pool."

The pail of water was hung upon the cross-pole, and fire was laid and lit in the fire-pit. The girls watched very closely as the Captain slowly placed the dry leaves, then the dried twigs, and lastly the dry wood that would burn quickly and start other wood burning in the stove.

While the water was heating, Mrs. Vernon showed the girls how to hitch and unhitch Hepsy. If

either one needed to do it, she would understand just where all the pieces of harness fitted in. Hepsy was now given a drink and some oats, and turned out to graze about the plateau.

With five pairs of hands, the clearing away of the dishes did not take long. As they worked, the Captain planned the carpentry work.

"Don't you think we ought to repair the old hut first?" asked she. "You see, we need some sort of protection for our dry groceries and other things."

"Well, we can do that to-day, and begin on Hepsy's shed in the morning," suggested Julie.

"I doubt if we can complete all the work to be done on the old place in this afternoon's few hours," returned Mrs. Vernon.

"It doesn't look as if it would take more than two hours at most," argued Joan.

"We'll begin now and then you can find out for yourselves," the Captain said in reply.

All the tools they had brought were now unpacked and placed ready for use. Mrs. Vernon then said: "Now we must weed up all the stubble and wild-growth that has filled the interior of the hut. We may find the floor beams good enough to use again when the undergrowth is cleared away."

"Why not let's build the roof first?" asked Ruth.

"Because you have no flooring down, and every nail or tool you drop while working on the roof will have to be sought for in the rank growth."

The girls saw the logic of that, so they began pulling and working on the material that had to be eliminated before further work could be attended to.

"Why, this is as bad as weeding dandelions," grumbled Ruth.

"Say, Ruth, dandelions were easy in comparison," laughed Joan, standing up to wipe the perspiration from her face.

"Well, all I can say is, if this is the sort of fun the Girl Scouts rave about, I don't want any more of it!" declared Ruth, throwing down her weeding fork and stepping over the beam to get out of the hut.

The other girls stopped work and looked impatiently at her, but Mrs. Vernon said: "Perhaps you'd like to work at some other task. There are many things to be done before we can settle down in camp and enjoy our leisure."

"All right! Give me any old thing but that weeding!"

"Here's the ax—see those trees growing so closely together over there?"

Ruth took the ax and signified by a nod that she saw the clump referred to.

"Start to cut down several of them, but do not chop too low or too high from the base. I mean, you ought to cut about eighteen inches above ground. When you have chopped through nearly half of the trunk, call me and I will show you what next to do."

"Hurrah! Now I'm going to do something different! I'm sorry for you poor girls with nothing but weeds to work on," called Ruth gaily, swinging the ax as she moved away.

The three girls watched for a few moments, but she had not yet reached the clump of trees before they were again working hard. The Captain was occupied in removing some boards from the packing cases already emptied of bedding and other things, so no one noticed Ruth.

She held the ax up over her head as she had seen others do, and brought it down with a swing. But it caught in the high bushes beside her and was yanked from her hands.

"Well! to think a little thing like that birch bush could do that!" exclaimed Ruth to herself.

She picked up the ax and took a fresh start. This time she changed her position so the birch could not interfere again. The ax came down, but so wide was its swing, and Ruth had not allowed for any leeway in her stiff pose, hence the muscles in her arms were wrenched and her back suddenly turned with the force of the blow.

"O-oh" exclaimed she, dropping the ax and rubbing the flesh of her upper arms.

She glanced over at her companions to see if they had seen the awkward work she was making of the chopping, but they were laughing merrily as they worked inside the hut. Mrs. Vernon was not to be seen so the girl's pride was spared. She picked up the ax again and looked at it carefully.

"What is there about you that hurt me like that?"

But the inanimate ax did not answer, and Ruth could not tell. So she lifted it again, slowly this time, and then made sure that no obstructions were in the way.

She paid so much attention to the ax that she scarcely looked where the blow might fall, consequently the blade came down almost on a vertical line with the tree-trunk. It glanced off and sank into the soft soil beside the tree, with Ruth holding fast to the handle. So unexpected was this aim and the downward continuation of the ax until it sank into the ground, that Ruth was fairly pulled over and fell upon her face in the vines and bushes.

"You mean old thing! You can stick there as long as you like—I'll never put a finger on you again!" cried the ax-scout, as she got up and felt of the scratches on her face.

"What's the matter, Ruth?" called Mrs. Vernon, seeing the girl slowly returning to camp without the ax.

"That tool is too heavy for me to use. Have you a hatchet or something else to cut with?"

"The ax is the only thing that ought to be used on a small tree; the saw is for thicker trunks, but you can't manage it, either, if you can't handle the ax."

"Well, what else is there I can do instead of chopping down forests?" asked Ruth, trying to cover her shortcomings with a laugh.

"Did you bring back the ax? It's a very good one, you know."

"I thought perhaps one of the other girls would want to change work soon, so I left it by the tree."

"If one of the others should feel like quitting the work they were given to complete first, then they can take the ax from its place in the tool-chest. Better bring it to me now, Ruth."

As no other alternative was open, she went back to the tree and kicked viciously at the ax. But the blade was still securely embedded in the ground and that made the handle as resistant as an upright post. So all Ruth got for her kick was a suddenly turned toe that felt lame for days afterwards.

"Oh, o-oh! *how* I hate camping! I'm going home and tell every one I know what a horrid thing this Girl Scout business is! All hard work and—everything! No fun, no rest—just lame backs and broken bones!" Ruth fairly screamed to herself as she sat down and removed the sneaker from the foot that had tried to crack the ax-handle of hickory.

The Captain heard the crying and hurried over to inquire into the cause of it. Ruth was weeping by this time, so sorry did she feel for herself, and her ill-treatment.

"What ever has happened, Ruth, in this perfectly safe spot?"

"O-oo! I must have stubbed my toe! Oooo-h, I'm afraid it's broken!" wailed the girl.

Mrs. Vernon saw the ax with its head deep in the ground but she did not dream how Ruth had "stubbed" her toe. She sat down and wiggled the injured member tenderly, then said:

"Oh, no, it's not broken, only hurt by the collision. It will be all right in a little while," the Captain replied cheerfully.

But Ruth did not want cheerfulness—she wanted to be told she had to remain as quiet as possible and have others wait on her.

"Pick up the ax and I'll help you walk over—you can lean upon my arm if you think your toe will feel easier," suggested Mrs. Vernon.

"I don't believe I can walk," breathed Ruth, fearfully.

"Oh, yes, you can. The foot is all right, it is only the toe that feels lame for a short time—just as it would have done at home if you ran into a piece of furniture."

Reaching camp again, Ruth was about to drop the ax on the grass, when the Captain said: "The tool-chest is over on the buckboard, Ruth."

The girl clinched her teeth in anger, but the ax was taken to its right place and left in the box whence she had taken it.

One after another of the girls looked up and felt surprised to find Ruth sitting on a box holding her foot. Then Julie called out:

"Good gracious! Ruth done chopping that tree so soon?"

"No, she and the ax had an argument," laughed Mrs. Vernon.

Ruth glanced at the Captain out of the corners of her eyes, and wondered: "Did she see me kick that old thing?"

"Oh! Well, then, come over and get busy here again," said Joan, beckoning to Ruth.

"That won't make your toe hurt, Ruth. You can remain in one spot and weed," added Mrs. Vernon.

Not having any other excuse at the moment, Ruth limped to the hut and slowly began the old work, but she rebelled inwardly.

After an hour's hard work the clearing was done, and the girls threw themselves down to rest. The Captain was ready for this recess.

"I made a jugful of lemonade, girls, and it is as cold as if we had ice water in it. Just taste!"

"Oh, glory! Just what I was wishing for," sighed Julie.

The others quickly agreed with that exclamation, and tested the drink. The mingled sounds of approval made the Captain smile. After a short rest, Joan said:

"What next? I'm ready to start work again."

"Dear me! Haven't we done enough for this afternoon? I want to enjoy a *little* bit of the time here," complained Ruth.

"I'm having a fine time! I like this sort of thing," said Joan.

"You can do exactly as you like, girls; if you want to do any more work on the hut, well and good; if you prefer to rest or do anything else, there is no one to stop you. But it is plain to be seen that the hut cannot be repaired completely this afternoon, eh?" said Mrs. Vernon, with a smile.

"I should say not! If we finish it by to-morrow night we will be clever workers," replied Julie.

"I'm going back to work on it, anyway," came from Betty.

"You always were the easy mark for every one," Ruth said scornfully, tossing her head.

Betty flushed, but Julie defended her. "She isn't an easy mark at all! But she may be too sympathetic for hard-hearted or lazy folks who always play on her generosity!"

"I don't believe the scout handbook says that members of the scout organization must criticize or say unpleasant things to others," commented Mrs. Vernon.

That silenced every one, and soon all four girls were at work again, removing the dead wood of the flooring. When this was done, Mrs. Vernon examined it carefully.

"It isn't as bad as I thought it would be. The tangle of briars and brush, and the decayed outer layer of the beams, made it look as if it all must be removed."

Once they became interested in repairing the floor as it should be done, the girls wanted to continue and complete it, but the wise Captain called a halt, and said:

"Twilight will soon creep up to compel us to stop work; before that comes we want to have everything ready for the night."

So when darkness fell the camp was ready and waiting for it. A fine fire reflected light fitfully about its radius, and lanterns were lighted for use in case the campers wished to go about. Hepsy had been fed and bedded for the night, and the tent was in readiness for its tenants.

Supper had been prepared and disposed of, and the dishes washed and cleared away before darkness invited every one to sit down and listen to the Captain's stories of girlhood days in this very spot. But she had rather a drowsy audience that night. Four girls were so tired out with healthy exercise and the mountain air that the fire gave them a feeling of peace and rest.

Not a demur was heard when Mrs. Vernon suggested bed, and the hard cots must have felt like a nest of feathers to the newly-fledged scouts, for soon every one was fast asleep.

CHAPTER SIX—FIRST LESSONS IN SCOUT WORK

A loud drumming on a tin pan roused the would-be scouts in the morning, and each girl tumbled out of her cot feeling as if she had slept on roses. The invigorating air and the benefit of sleeping out-of-doors began to be felt. Then the odor of cooking was wafted in through the tent opening, and Joan ran to look out.

"Oh!" sniffed she, "Verny's up and dressed and has something *awfully* good cooking for breakfast!"

"Um-m—I should say she has!" added Julie, running over to join Joan at the tent door.

"What is it, Verny?" called a chorus of girls, and as the Captain turned to reply she saw four tousled heads crowded out of the opening.

"Can't tell secrets until you've washed and dressed!" laughed Mrs. Vernon.

It was not long, therefore, before the hungry campers joined her about the fire and wanted to know what smelled so good. The Captain was adding a pinch of salt to the "something" in the pot, so she did not look up, but said hastily:

"Will some one watch that toast—it seems to be scorching."

"Did you ever! Making toast on a stone!" laughed Julie, trying to turn over the slices with a stick.

"But the stone's as hot as any stove-lid," commented Betty, as she saw the smoke rise from the crumbs that burned on the rock.

"Is that cereal standing off on that other stone?" now inquired Ruth.

"Yes, but who'd a thought a stone would ever be used for an oven?" laughed Joan, stirring the cereal with a long spoon.

"The oven won't retain heat long after the stone is removed from the embers. Better be ready to serve yourselves as soon as I say 'ready,'" said Mrs. Vernon, as she removed the pot that had given forth such appetizing odors from the fire, and stood it upon a heated rock.

"Now—all ready!" laughed she, and every girl made a dash for the cereal.

"Here—let me dish it up and pass it along. The whole mess will be in the fire if we all struggle to be first," added Joan.

The cereal disappeared like snow in July, and then four eager girls were asking for the next course.

"This food, fit for the gods, is composed of the leavings of supper last night. But you girls will never dream that it goes by a homely name," said Mrs. Vernon, as she ladled a goodly portion upon each plate which was thrust out under her nose.

"What *is* it called?" asked Ruth, tasting a bit that fell upon the edge of her plate.

"It smells heavenly, Verny!" sighed Julie, rolling her eyes skyward.

Every one laughed, for Julie always was extravagant in her language.

"In boarding-houses the guests object every time it is served, but we have the great advantage over city boarders whose hash is made merely with chopped meat and eggs and milk! We have Nature's appetizer to season our dish, so that it becomes nectar and ambrosia in this camp," explained the Captain, smilingly.

The hash went the way of the cereal, and the girls looked anxiously in the pot to see if there could be a second helping.

"Oh, thanks to our lucky stars and Verny, she made a lot of it!" called Julie, waving a spoon at her comrades.

"But where is the toast? Verny—the toast is gone!" shouted Joan, gazing fearfully under the stones to see if it could have slipped from the oven-rock.

"Ha! that's my secret! Eat the hash, girls, and I will tell you where the toast is."

It needed no second invitation to finish all signs of hash, then Ruth demanded to know where the toast was hidden.

The Captain ran over to Ruth and touched the spot where the stomach is located. "You've had your share of toast and it is in there!" laughed Mrs. Vernon.

"We haven't! We only had hash!" retorted Ruth, wonderingly.

"The hash was made of toast and other things. I only had about a spoonful of corned beef left from last night. But toast, when broken into bits, will taste so like meat that few people know the difference. That's how I managed to cook a second helping."

"As long as it was not wasted I don't care much whether I ate the toast in hash or had it with tea," said Julie.

"But I can eat more breakfast," commented Joan.

"'Enough is as good as a feast,' and I'm sure you girls must admit you've had enough to sustain you until noon," said Mrs. Vernon.

"Oh, certainly!" agreed Joan, "making the best of a famine is my especial virtue."

This started a laugh, and merry words were exchanged while the dishes were cleared away and the camp was left in good order.

"Now shall we start in to finish the hut, Verny?" asked Betty.

"I thought I'd like to read aloud from the handbook, 'Scouting for Girls,' and see how many of the laws and customs you girls know."

"You'll find us in the A-B-C-class, I'm afraid," said Joan.

"Then the sooner you are promoted out of it the better," declared Mrs. Vernon, seating herself on a stump and opening the manual.

"First question: 'How do you start a Patrol?'" asked the Captain.

"Oh, we know that, Verny, 'cause we had to learn it by heart in order to advise those girls who wanted to join, you see," chorused the girls.

"Well, then, are we a Patrol now?" asked Mrs. Vernon.

"In the real sense, we are not, as there are only four members at present; but we are *going* to be one, aren't we?" said Julie.

"Yes, but until we have eight girls we are not anything on record. However, we can form our club and then enlist new members to increase the number to the required total.

"Next it says: 'The Scout Captain who has studied the plan, principles and object of the organization, explains the laws and obligations of members to those who wish to form a troop.' I must now take down your names and addresses in a book, and decide what day or at what time we wish to hold our regular meetings.

"It says here that fifteen minutes must be spent on knot-tying and three-quarters of an hour on recreation. So I will now teach you the art of tying knots. Following this lesson, we will take forty-five minutes for recreation."

But the fifteen minutes merged into twenty, and still the novitiates begged to be allowed to "try just one more knot."

"Now I am going to read the Girl Scout Laws from the book, but there will be no comments, please, until I give the signal," said the Captain, having taken away the rope for knots, and seated herself upon it to keep the girls from experimenting.

"1—If a Scout says "on my honor it is so," that means that what she says is as true as if she had taken a most solemn oath.

"2—A Girl Scout is loyal to the President, to her country, and to her officers; to her father, to her mother, and to her employers. She remains true to them through thick and thin. In the face of the greatest difficulties and calamities her loyalty must remain untarnished.

"3—A Girl Scout's duty is to be useful and to help others. She is to do her duty before anything else even if she gives up her own pleasure, safety, or comfort. When in doubt as to which of two things to do she must think: "Which is my duty?" which means "Which is the best for other people?" and then do that at once. She must be prepared at any time to save life or help the injured. She should do at least one good turn to some one every day.

"4—A Girl Scout is a Friend to all, and a sister to every other Girl Scout. Thus, if a Scout meets another Scout, even though a stranger to her, she may speak to her and help her in any way she can, either to carry out the duty she is then doing, or by giving her food, or as far as possible anything she may want. Like Kim, a Scout should be a "Little friend to all the world.

"5—A Scout is courteous; that is, she is polite to all. She must not take any reward for being helpful or courteous.

"6—A Scout keeps herself pure in thought, word and deed.

"7—A Scout is a friend to animals; she should save them as far as possible from pain, and should not kill even the smallest unnecessarily. They are all God's creatures.

"8—A Scout obeys orders under all circumstances; when she gets an order she must obey it cheerfully and readily, not in a slow, sullen manner. Scouts never grumble, whine nor howl.

"9—A Scout is cheerful under all circumstances. Scouts never grumble at hardships, nor whine at each other, nor frown when put out. A Scout goes about with a smile and singing. It cheers her and cheers other people, especially in time of danger.

"10—A Scout is thrifty; this means that a Scout avoids all useless waste of every kind; she is

careful about saving every penny she can put into the bank so that she may have a surplus in time of need. She sees that food is not wasted, and that her clothing is cared for properly. The Girl Scout does not waste time. She realizes that time is the most precious thing any one of us has. The Girl Scout's time is spent either in useful occupation or in wholesome recreation, and she tries to balance these two harmoniously.'

"Now girls, have you any comments to make, for I have read the ten commandments of the Girl Scout organization, and will hear any testimony now?" said Mrs. Vernon, laughingly.

"I haven't any comments to make on the reading, but I would like to remind the illustrious Captain that she forgot a very important part of the program this morning," said Julie, seriously, albeit there was a twinkle in her eyes.

"Speak now or forever after hold your peace!" declared Mrs. Vernon, with a magisterial air.

Every one laughed, but Julie obeyed the command: "You said we would give fifteen minutes to knot-tying and forty-five to recreation. Now I wish to ask Your Honor, is this Scout Reading to be considered as recreation?"

The Captain smiled, and after a few moments' pause said: "I am guilty of theft. But I plead extenuating circumstances. I forgot what I said about recreation, and was so over-anxious to have my infant Patrol grounded in the first lessons of scout duties that I stole time from the hour. Who is there here just enough to sentence me?"

"We have no jury, but in lieu of a speaker, allow me to speak for myself: your zeal shall be your excuse, but hereafter see that you do not commit the same offense," spoke Julie, with a judicial air.

The Captain and girls laughed heartily, and thus ended the first reading of Scout Laws. Mrs. Vernon closed the book and got up from the knotty seat of rope, and asked the girls if they had thought of any form of recreation.

"We still have to be informed by the Court if the time stolen from our forty-five minutes must be returned or deducted?" countered Julie.

"The Court thinks you should have the full time given you for any useful recreation—not for foolishness," said Mrs. Vernon.

"Well, would the Court adjudge a good hike to be useful?" demanded Joan.

"The Court most certainly would, and will even offer to accompany the jury, or whatever body you call yourselves."

"Then it's us for a hike, girls!" cried Joan.

The suggestion met with favor, and soon the newly-made Scouts were climbing the steep grade of the mountainside. It was more than an hour before voices were again heard, and Hepsy whinnied as if to ask "What sort of scouts are you, anyway, to listen to a law read about animals and how to treat them, and then go away without giving me my breakfast?"

The moment the girls heard the appeal from the mare, they understood and ran pell-mell to get Hepsy the oats. When she saw they were measuring out her breakfast, she craned her neck as far as it would stretch, and pawed the ground impatiently.

Mrs. Vernon held her head with both hands and cried as if in despair: "Merciful goodness! What sort of a Captain am I to forget our faithful old scout Hepsy?"

"Will Hepsy get sick now, Verny?" asked Betty, worried.

"No, but she is so famished she may eat me up if I venture near her with a pail of water! That is all that might happen."

"If she does, there will be a second result, too. Hepsy'll sure have an awful case of indigestion after dining!" retorted Julie, causing the others to laugh.

Hepsy was given a long drink and then left to enjoy her oats. While the animal was feeding, Julie said: "How about the hut?"

"I hope we can finish it to-day, Verny," added Joan.

"You can try at least. Every bit done helps, you know," replied the Captain.

The old flooring had been scraped clean and the cross-sections that were too badly decayed were removed. Then the boards taken from the packing cases were fitted in and nailed down securely. By one o'clock the partly new floor was finished and cleaned up.

Dinner was suggested before continuing the work, and the campers talked about roofing the hut while they prepared the meal.

"Now that the floor is finished, two of us ought to begin to carry in our stock, while the others work on the roof. That will save our groceries from the moisture or dampness in the ground, you see," said Mrs. Vernon.

"But we all want to work on the roof—it will be fun," declared Julie.

"In that case, we shall have to draw lots. And after half of the groceries are moved in by two girls, the others will have to take their turn while the first two enjoy the roof," suggested the Captain.

"And you—what do you want to do?" asked Ruth.

"I am going to hunt around for any down timbers that we can use for siding the hut where the old logs have fallen away and rotted on the ground. I will leave you scouts to work on the roof after your own plans."

"Oh, but tell us what to use before you go?" cried Betty.

"You'll find a roll of tar paper over there with the supplies. This you must measure off and cut the required size. Be sure to have it long enough to turn under the eaves and over at the top."

"How do we nail it down?" asked Joan.

"Lay the strips lengthwise, from ridgepole to eaves, and fasten down each strip on the old boards. But, girls, do be careful not to break through those openings in the roof, nor crumble in at any decayed places!"

"All right—I guess we can remember that much all right," said Julie, eager to begin.

So Mrs. Vernon left them to see how far they would use their intelligence in doing this work, while she began seeking along the woodland road for down tree-trunks of movable length and weight.

She found plenty of timber such as she wanted for the sides of the old hut, and also to start work on the new one, but she did not return to camp until four o'clock. When she did, she found two of the girls fast asleep on the grass, while the other two were in the pool splashing about.

She went quietly over to the hut, and, to her surprise, found the roof as neatly finished as if done by an experienced hand. The edges were turned under and fastened with nails, and the seams lapped just as they should be. In fact, she was delighted with the workmanship.

Then, too, the boxes of groceries and other goods were neatly stacked in one corner, so less room was used for storage and more left for personal use.

"Now I wonder which one of the girls thought this out? It is so natural for young folks to shove the boxes in and leave them standing about anywhere. But this proves to me that one of my scouts has a good head for management of affairs."

The girls swimming about in the pool now caught sight of the Captain, and scrambled out of the water. They were soon dressed and ran over to receive Mrs. Vernon's compliments on the work done. The two sleeping ones also sat up, rubbed their eyes, and laughed.

"When did you get back, Verny?" yawned Ruth.

"Just now; but, girls, I have seen the hut, and you surely have done fine work!" exclaimed the Captain, turning to admire the roof again.

While her head was turned, four girls exchanged knowing winks, but their faces were as serious as ever when Mrs. Vernon's eyes searched theirs keenly.

"We thought you'd be pleased, Verny. But what kept you so long?" said Julie.

"I found enough wood for a new hut, and then I sat down on a log and sketched a working plan for the sections of the building you propose erecting.

"You see this rocky wall that rises back of the old hut?" the Captain pointed to the lines she had drawn on the paper. "Well, we will use that for a back wall against which our new hut can brace itself. The wall of the old hut can supply one side of the new building, and we can extend the roof on the same lines as the old one, along over the new hut."

"Oh, yes, that's a fine idea!" cried Joan.

"And that will save us hauling the wood and building up one whole side, won't it?" asked Betty.

"Yes, but it also makes a two-room house of the two huts, see?" and Mrs. Vernon displayed another plan she had drawn on paper.

"I think I like it better than having two separate huts, Verny," said Julie.

"And we can use the wood we might have built into the one side of the hut for a shed for Hepsy.

Can't we go right on extending the house and build the lean-to to the end of the new hut, just as we plan hooking the new addition on to the old hut?" asked Joan.

The original way in which the description was worded caused a general laugh, but Joan never worried about laughter when it was in fun. She always said, "Well, if it gives any one any satisfaction to laugh at me, I'm glad to accommodate them so cheaply. It doesn't hurt one."

"Joan's idea is good, and we will follow it as soon as we finish the frame of the new hut," said Mrs. Vernon.

"We were thinking of moving your cot-bed into the old hut, Verny, but then we decided to wait and see if you would like it," now suggested Betty.

"You see, we were a bit crowded last night in the tent, and we thought you would like some privacy of your own. Being in the old hut might appeal to your sentimentality," added Julie.

Another laugh rang out, but this time at Mrs. Vernon's expense. She sighed and posed as a sentimental maiden might, and simpered her thanks for the scouts' forethought. Then they laughed again.

"Now all joking aside, girls! I appreciate your thought and will gladly move my hotel-suite to the hut. At least I shall be near the crackers and prunes if I feel hungry at night," declared Mrs. Vernon.

She then called the girls to assist her in moving her effects from the tent to the hut, and as they went back and forth the Captain could not refrain from again voicing her gratification at the manner in which the scouts finished their first carpentry work.

"If you were fully-fledged scouts of record, you surely would be awarded a badge."

Behind her back, as she said this, the Captain's four carpenters again exchanged smiles and knowing winks.

CHAPTER SEVEN—HEPSY JOINS THE SCOUTS' UNION

The next morning, after breakfast dishes were cleared away, the Captain said: "Now we will give a few minutes to reading our Scout Handbook, and then practice some new knots. After that we can choose our recreation."

"I don't want to waste any more time on recreation until our new hut is built," declared Joan.

"Neither do any one of us, Verny," added Julie.

"Well, if that is the general wish, we can work on the hut and call it recreation, you know," answered Mrs. Vernon.

The moment the knots and reading were finished, they all ran over to the tool-chest to select whatever implements they might need. Mrs. Vernon handed out a spade and a pick, but no one took advantage of them.

"What are they for?" asked Ruth.

"We will have to divide the work as we did yesterday. Two can dig the cellar while two haul timbers for the hut."

"Dig cellar! You haven't any cellar under yours," returned Joan, amazed.

"But we have! Do you suppose those timbers and flooring would have lasted as long as this if we hadn't excavated a pit under them. The hole may have filled up with leaves and dried wood material, but all the earth was cleaned out by digging a cellar at least three feet deep. This gave ventilation and kept our things from mildewing."

"Why don't we all dig foundations, then, and finish it so much the sooner?" asked Julie.

"You'll find it isn't the easiest work to stoop over with a pick or spade and move earth that is filled with heavy stones. Your backs will ache in a short time, and you'll grow tired of the task. Then I propose exchanging those weary ones for two fresh diggers," explained the Captain. "Turn and turn about keeps one from feeling any monotony in the work."

"All right—send Ruth and Joan off for the first haul of logs," replied Julie, resignedly.

"But I'd rather dig, Julie, and let you two go for wood," declared Ruth.

"Ha, ha, ha! You're so contradictory! That's just what I hoped you'd say! 'Cause I'd lots rather drive Hepsy down the hill and hitch her up to the logs she's got to haul!" exclaimed Julie, exultantly.

Ruth said nothing but took the spade and started for the newly staked out cellar of the hut. Joan scowled and followed, but she wanted to join Julie in hauling the logs. Betty understood and ran up to exchange work with her.

"I'd be a poor scout if I didn't dig alongside Ruth when it's my job!" returned Joan, when Betty said she would exchange.

"But we all will have to dig and take turns, so what difference will it make, Joan dear, if I dig now or later?" argued Betty.

"Don't you really care whether you work with Ruth or Julie?" asked Joan, skeptically, because she liked to be with Julie.

"It's all the same to me, as long as we build the house," returned Betty, taking the pick and thrusting a hook into Joan's willing hands.

"What's this for?" wondered she.

"Verny says we have to use it to move the timber."

"Great! Well, as long as you don't mind, Betty, I'll run away and find Julie."

"I can't budge a spadeful of this hard ground, Betty," complained Ruth, as her companion joined her.

"Oh, not in that way, Ruth. You'll have to remove all the roots and weeds first, and that will help break up the hardened soil, you know; 'cause the brush-roots run down real deep, you see."

"But I just hate weeding, Betty; can't I dig it up without doing that extra work?"

"You tried just now and said it was awfully hard! I am going to weed mine first, and then dig it up."

So saying, wise Betty weeded a patch and then used the pick with which to break up the ground. This done, she took the spade and, to Ruth's great surprise, the loosened earth came up readily. The energetic young scout had made good progress in this work before Mrs. Vernon came over to inspect the task.

Ruth raised no further objections when she saw how easy the digging was for Betty; so she weeded, too, and followed her chum's example. Soon she found the work was not nearly as hard as she had thought it would be. But that is because she had not stopped to complain or think how hard it was *going* to be—she forgot all this in watching and working as Betty did.

Julie and Joan followed Mrs. Vernon as she led Hepsy down the slope to the spot where the cut timbers were piled up. Here she showed the girls how to attach the chain and tackle to a log, and then to hook the chain to Hepsy's harness.

The strong horse willingly started up the hill and dragged the long log up to the site where the hut was to be. One girl drove Hepsy carefully to avoid ruts and snags which might catch the log and thus yank Hepsy up suddenly and perhaps injure her. The other girl had to follow in the wake of the log to see that it did not roll or twist out of the pathway, causing a ruthless tearing at bushes and flowers along the way.

The two girls who were digging found it quite tiresome to lean over so constantly. When they stood erect to stretch their back muscles, their bones felt as if they would crack. Ruth complained of her aches long before the Captain joined them.

Then Mrs. Vernon said: "Ah! I think I was wise in telling you girls to take turns about. Now I will signal for the two timber-jacks to exchange work with you."

When the two girls hauling timber responded to the call, they seemed right glad to exchange labor with the excavators.

"You'll find this digging a pit is simply awful, girls!" exclaimed Ruth, pretending she could not straighten her backbone.

"It can't be a patch on the job we've been doing!" cried Joan, looking at her hands with pity in her eyes.

"That's right! When you've had to steer or roll a log a mile long, you'll have something to say about hard work!" added Julie.

"One would think, after hearing you girls, that you were too soft and delicate to proceed further in your scout tests," said Mrs. Vernon seriously. That stopped all complaints instantly.

But Ruth could not help adding: "Girl scouts never work like this in camp—I'm sure of it."

"Girl scouts would never call *this* hard work! They'd laugh at any one for hinting at such a thing.

And you'll do the same thing before the summer's over," said Mrs. Vernon.

"Ah well! Let's prepare for the end of the summer, girls," sighed Julie, ludicrously.

"Come on, Ruth—take the reins from Julie and let's start," said Betty, taking the hook and starting down the road.

"By the time you two girls get back here, Betty, we'll show you how you should dig a cellar," retorted Julie. "Why, you only managed to dig up a square yard in all this time. You should have had half of the pit finished."

Betty and Ruth smiled at each other and nodded their heads wisely, then ran off to help Hepsy with the logs. Mrs. Vernon smiled also as she saw that each couple would soon learn that nothing is easy until one learns how to do it right. Then, when that time comes, it generally happens that one is forced to go higher to a new task. And so on, eternally, for this is progress and growth.

By the time the horn sounded for another change of work, both diggers and haulers were glad to exchange back again. Mrs. Vernon was busy about dinner, for she said such hard labor deserved hearty meals. And the girls agreed absolutely with her on that statement.

"I say! I'll never find fault with your digging again, Betsy," said Julie meekly, as she displayed about eighteen inches square of dug-out cellar, and a row of water-blisters on her hand.

Betty laughed at her sister, but the work continued until the cellar was dug deep enough and a mass of timbers was waiting to be used. As they stood admiring their morning's work, Betty said:

"I think Hepsy is the best scout of all."

"Why?" asked the other girls.

"Just see how she worked! She hauled and hauled, and never asked to exchange for an easier job. And all the time she worked she never complained once of an aching back or tired muscles. Yet I am sure she wanted to kick mightily now and then."

A roar of laughter greeted her last words, and Betty guilelessly asked: "Now what have I said—what is the matter with you girls?"

The call to dinner quickly changed the current of their thoughts, however, and once seated about the stone table, they fell to with a will never manifested for plain cookery at home.

"We ought to be able to lay the floor logs and get the corner posts up this afternoon," suggested Joan.

"I was going to propose a hike downhill in the opposite direction from the one we took yesterday," said the Captain. "Then, when we return, a good swim will refresh us all for supper."

"Oh, yes, we've worked enough for one day," said Ruth.

When the scouts were ready to start for the hike, Mrs. Vernon showed them a note-book. "I'm going to have you take down notes on the flowers, trees, or birds we find on these hikes. This will prove very desirable practice when you are admitted as a Troop."

They started off, while Hepsy stood leisurely nosing at her dinner of oats. This reminded Julie of the funny saying by Betty just before dinner, and she now repeated it to the Captain.

"I meant, you know, Verny, that Hepsy must have had stiff joints from all that hauling yet she never kicked once to straighten out the kinks," explained Betty, when Julie finished.

"I doubt whether Hepsy felt as tired as you think she did. You must remember that her spine is almost parallel with the ground over which she has to pull her loads, and having four legs on which to balance herself, makes it easier than only having two. The chain and tackle also simplified the work for Hepsy, but we can't say as much of the hauling an Indian Squaw has to do.

"Why, the poor squaws do all the lifting and moving of their camps, through forests, over rough land, and even carrying their papooses in the bargain. They, too, drag their burdens in a sort of 'cradle' that is hitched to their waists by means of two leather traces."

"Oh, the poor creatures!" exclaimed ever-ready, sympathetic Betty.

"I'm thankful I'm not an Indian female!" declared Julie, with such earnestness that the others laughed.

After the usual scout reading from the Handbook the next morning, the girls hurried to work because they were anxious to see their hut built and finished. The ardor of accomplishment was beginning to fill their souls.

That day the cross-beams of the floor were laid and securely fastened at the corners. Then the

other logs were sawed and notched for the corner-posts. It was impossible to split the timber for rafters, so the Captain advised the use of smaller tree-trunks for this purpose.

"What shall we do to keep out the rain or wild animals?" asked Ruth, seeing that no windows had been provided for the old hut.

"We can hang up water-proof canvas in the windows if it rains, but I have an idea for a door that I want to work on to-morrow," replied the Captain.

The carpentry now went steadily on, and without friction, as each one was anxious to see a finished hut. They were tremendously interested in their work, too, and that always makes a task easy.

Mrs. Vernon superintended everything, and demonstrated a wonderful knowledge of woodcraft. Then, whenever the carpenters were cheerfully working without her help, she turned to her own plans. These had occasioned curious comment from the four girls, because they could not see what could be built with a lot of short boards which had been taken from the boxes.

"You'll see when I'm through," replied the Captain to all their questions.

The scouts worked so industriously that the new side walls were completed, and they were eager to begin work on the roof. The hut was much longer than the old one, but its width was the same, as it used the end wall of the old hut for one side of its own.

The meeting of the two front walls of the huts, however, had been a problem. The scouts could not figure out how to nail any boards or logs to a corner post already used for that purpose. But Julie thought out a scheme.

"We'll leave that meeting place in front, for the door. Then we'll use a post for the other side of our door, and begin *there* with the wall."

This was hailed as a fine idea, so they tried it. But the door-lintel was not as secure as it might be, and the girls dodged in and out to avoid having it come down upon their heads should it topple. They had no doubt but that it *would* fall in sooner or later.

"We're all ready for a roof, Verny, and don't know where to find any wood for rafters or ridgepole," said Joan, when the Captain walked over to pass judgment upon the structure.

"That's a dangerous looking lintel, girls."

"Best we could do with what we had," replied Ruth.

"The material is all right, but the construction is careless. Now I have finished my door, but I wouldn't dare swing it from that frame," continued the Captain.

"Oh, were you building a door of those boards?" asked the girls.

"Yes, and I feel quite proud of it, too. Come and see it."

The door was made of boards all the same lengths and thickness but of different widths. So Mrs. Vernon had grouped them to have all the wide boards at top and bottom of the door, and the others graduating in widths until a narrow center one was reached. This made a pretty effect.

They were all securely fastened to a frame made of rough planks, but this frame would be on the inside so it would not be seen. "We can hang a drapery, or some vines on this back to hide the unsightly frame," said the Captain.

Heavy leather hinges were secured to the back edge of the door, and a latch and handle made of some sheet iron, were bent and cut to fit.

"How did you ever do that without a blacksmith?" asked Joan.

"I played my own blacksmith while you were on your hike this morning. I heated an old piece of wagon-tire and hammered it flat, then heated it red-hot and cut it with tools I found in the box."

"All right, Verny! You shall take the prize this time," Julie commended heartily.

"But that doesn't give us a roof or rafters," said Ruth.

"I have them all ready for you. I remembered them to-day when I inspected your work," said Mrs. Vernon, leading the way down to the buckboard.

"Help me lift the seats off," ordered the Captain.

This was done, and the curious girls then saw Mrs. Vernon pry out some small wooden wedges and lo! a board came from the floor of the buckboard. But stay! It was not *from* the floor, but one of the extra boards that had been laid down to form a double flooring.

Several boards were thus removed, and then it was found that the original floor of the buckboard

was as good as ever.

"Why did you have another floor laid?" asked Julie.

"Jim suggested that we might need a few boards for see-saws, or some other fun, so he fitted these down over the real bottom of the buckboard. I forgot about them until I found your need of just such boards for your roof."

"They're not very thick or heavy," said Joan, doubtfully.

"You don't want them heavy for a roof. The lighter the better, as long as they are steady and secure."

The boards were carried up to the new hut, and found to be several inches too long for the roof.

"That's an error on the right side, if there can be such a 'bull,'" said Mrs. Vernon. "For now you can have overhanging eaves instead of having the roof come flush with the sides."

"We haven't half enough of these boards for a roof, if we propose covering it with tar-paper as we did the old hut," said Julie.

"We only need enough to form bases for us to nail the laths to. You will find a large bundle of laths in the material Jim sent out by the Freedom delivery-wagon. The laths are easy to nail down and then the paper goes over that, you know."

So the roof was finally completed, but it was not as neat and exact as the work on the old roof, so Mrs. Vernon wondered! The week had gone by and the next day would be Sunday, but the scouts grumbled at the forced vacation.

"Dear me! I was sure we would be through building and ready to play by this time," complained Joan.

"I think you have accomplished wonders this week. I thought it would take us two weeks, at least, to build this new hut," said Mrs. Vernon.

"If we hadn't had such glorious weather perhaps it might have taken us that long," said Betty. "But the wood was all dry, and we had no delays in any way."

"I think the door is the best-looking thing about the whole place," said Julie, with head on one side, admiring the craftsman's work.

"That commendation makes me yearn to try other ideas," laughed the Captain.

"Maybe you are thinking of building a cobblestone chimney in our house," laughed Julie.

"Why didn't we think of it in time! We could have had one as easy as anything!" exclaimed Mrs. Vernon.

"Are you joking?" asked the girls.

"No, but now we must see where we could have it. I am afraid we will have to lean it up in the corner against the stone-wall at the back of the hut."

The girls laughed at this, for now they were sure Mrs. Vernon was only fooling them.

CHAPTER EIGHT—SUNDAY VISITORS

Sunday morning was so fine that the scouts declared it was too bad they couldn't finish the hut, as they felt so full of energy. Mrs. Vernon laughed, and said: "Bottle it up for Monday."

"But there isn't anything we can do on a day like this," said Ruth, plaintively.

"Oh, yes, there is. Girl scouts can hike, visit, or do any of the recreations suitable for Sunday. It does not say that we must sit down and pull long faces," replied Joan.

"Well, what would you do, Verny?" Ruth asked of the Captain.

"First of all I would eat my breakfast and hasten to clear away all signs of it from camp."

"Second the motion!" laughed Julie.

"Oh, pshaw! Of course we will do that, but *you* know what I mean—after breakfast," Ruth retorted.

"If we want something quiet to do, we might sketch that signboard on a sheet of paper. I brought heavy paper and pencils. But should we want to go for a long walk, we can do the designing any time. Then there is our Scout Handbook to read—I really want you to become familiar with the

rules and customs of the scouts," said the Captain, seriously.

"Suppose we have you read first of all, then go for a walk, and then if we are tired we can sit down and plan that sign," suggested Julie.

So immediately after the breakfast things were cleared away, the group sat down beside the waterfall and Mrs. Vernon read.

"On page 9 of the Handbook you will find this important information—it follows directly after the tenth law of Girl Scouts:

"'Self-Improvement'

"'A Great Law of Life.'

"'One of the most fundamental laws of life is that, in the natural course of things, the influence of women over men is vastly greater than that of men over one another.

"'This is what gives to girls and women a peculiar power and responsibility, for no Girl Scout or other honorable woman—whether young or old—could use her influence as a woman excepting to strengthen the characters and to support the honor of the men and boys with whom she comes in contact.

"'This great law is nothing to make a girl feel proud or superior to men; but, on the contrary, the understanding of it should make her humble and watchful to be faithful to her trust.

"'Be prepared, therefore, to do a true woman's full duty to her men by never allowing the desire for admiration to rule your actions, words, or thoughts. Our country needs women who are prepared.

"'Prepared for what?

"'To do their duty.'"

Mrs. Vernon paused here and looked at the girls. "I did not read the full text on that article, because I want you each to buy a Handbook and study it yourself. I find there are so many fine thoughts expressed in this book that I doubt whether it is wise of me to read them aloud to you while your minds are filled with the novelty of camp-life. It may not have the lasting impression it should."

"What comes next, Verny—anything about what scouts do on Sunday?" inquired Joan.

The Captain smiled as it was evident that the girls were more concerned in doing what they were told scouts might do on Sundays, than they were in hearing about the ideals and aspirations of the scout order.

"I now have to turn back to page four, where it says: 'It is not meant that Girl Scouts should play or work on Sunday, but that they may take walks where they can carry on a study of plants and animals.' This is all it says regarding Sunday occupation. So I suppose the organizers deemed it wisest to leave it to the discretion of the Captains and scouts in each individual group," commented Mrs. Vernon.

"If that is all the book declares we have to do, then we are at liberty to obey the rule and yet have lots of ways of passing the day," said Joan.

"I should say that reading rules and lessons from the Handbook was considered work," hinted Ruth.

"Then we won't have any more of that kind of work," laughed the Captain, closing the book emphatically.

"Good gracious, Ruth! Reading isn't work—particularly if the reading matter is wholesome as Girl Scout lessons must be. I should as soon say that listening to the preacher at church is not considered Sunday business, just because he lectures on certain interesting subjects connected with the Scriptures," argued Julie.

"Oh, really, you make a 'mountain out of a mole-hill,' Julie, every time I open my mouth," retorted Ruth, impatiently.

But the Captain interrupted this conversation before it gathered any added criticism, by saying: "I want to make a note for a bit of work to be attended to first thing in the morning, and then we will start for a nice walk.

"I find there are a great many wide crevices between the logs of the hut, where rain and insects can enter; especially is this so at the back wall where the timbers rest against the rocky side of the cliff.

"To obviate this discrepancy in building with uneven logs, we can fill in the chinks with clay.

When that hardens it will act like a solid cement between the logs.

"I prowled about yesterday and found a place down on the bank of the stream, where the clay was of the kind we need to use. We will bring some of it up to camp to-morrow, and after mixing it with water and sand, fill in the cracks in the walls. As it is now, should there be a heavy rain that would wash the water down over the cliff, the floods will pour in through the chinks of the log wall that is built against the rocks and run over the floor of your house."

"We'll attend to that first thing, as you say, Verny; but let's hurry up, now, and get started for our walk," Joan said.

After they had been walking for an hour or more, trying to name the various birds they saw, or tell about the peculiarities of woodland plants they found, Mrs. Vernon thought they had better start back for camp.

"It is only half an hour to our usual dinner-hour, and it will take us that long to reach camp. Before we have our Sunday dinner cooked it will be an hour later than our usual time on week-days."

"At least we will be fashionable, then," laughed Julie. "Every one has dinner an hour later on Sundays—that's why the men always complain."

"It isn't because of style, Julie, but you know the men-folks never *will* get up on Sunday mornings, and that sets back all the work. 'Liza says she's going to strike altogether about cooking Sunday dinners unless every one will get up just as they do on week-days," explained Betty, conscientiously.

Her long harangue was greeted with appreciative laughter, but Betty looked from one to the other questioningly. Julie ran over and gave her a hug, and cried: "Her was a dear little lamb, so her was!"

They were quite near camp when Joan happened to remember that she had forgotten to place the water-cress in the pan of water to keep it fresh.

"Too late to cry over it now," said Julie. "It will be so wilted that we'll have to throw it away."

"That leaves us without a salad as we had expected," Ruth complained.

"Why didn't *you* put it in water, then! You manage to find fault with everything that goes wrong, but I notice that you seldom do anything yourself!" snapped Joan.

"Girls! I hear people talking—the sound comes from our camp-grounds!" exclaimed Mrs. Vernon, stopping to hold up a hand for silence.

Every one stopped short and listened. Sure enough—there was a mingling of many voices.

"Some one from Freedom using our camp?" wondered Ruth.

"More likely a regiment of visitors!" said Joan.

"That's just about it! All our families and relatives unto the third and fourth generation thereof," laughed Julie.

"Perhaps they came for dinner!" gasped Mrs. Vernon, her sense of hospitality having a chill when she thought of the dinner for five only.

"If they didn't bring their own dinners, they'll have to sit and watch us eat ours," declared Ruth.

The hikers hastened to reach camp after this, and the first glance caused them to catch hold of each other for support. There, in possession of their sacred precincts, was such a crowd of family and friends that it seemed there could be little room for the real owners.

"Did you ever! I think they might, at least, have asked if they would be welcome!" cried Ruth, with annoyance.

"They must have missed us a lot," laughed Julie.

The visitors now spied the scouts, and John gave a shout. "Hello! Did we surprise you? This was my idea, girls!"

"I thought so! It's just like you," retorted Julie.

But every one was glad to see every one else, even if the surprise party was a genuine one for the campers. Hand-shakings and family embraces took at least ten minutes before hosts and guests began to think of other things.

"Had you only sent word, we might have prepared dinner," began Mrs. Vernon in apology.

"Oh, we took care of all that," laughed Eliza, who was in charge of the camp-fire, with John, and

Joan's brothers, to help.

This attracted the Captain's eyes to her stove. There, on the stone-oven stood several large kettles, and others hung on the pole over the fire.

The sight was such a relief that Mrs. Vernon's knees weakened and she sat down on the table-rock to collect herself. The visitors all laughed at her expression, and the girl scouts brightened suddenly.

"Well, you certainly showed some sense!" exclaimed Joan.

Every one laughed again. And Betty said in excuse: "You see we ran low for dinners this week 'cause we used so much time in building our house. Did you see it?"

A loud chorus of approval and admiration came from the relatives who felt a great pride in the achievements of their girls. But the mothers looked anxiously at the daughters when they heard Betty speak of scarcity in the larder. Still the girl scouts showed no symptoms of starvation. They looked fine and must have added a pound each to their weight.

"I rather thought such would be the case, with your camp so far from a store, so we brought a stock of food for this week," said Mrs. Bentley.

"Now that is great, mother, because we can take that much more time in building a stable for Hepsy," cried Ruth, with real gratitude shining in her eyes.

"Hepsy! Have you got that old nag here?" laughed John.

"What did you bring her for?" wondered May.

"To do the chores in camp," retorted Julie, laughingly.

"What would we have done without her?" sighed Joan, as she remembered the hauling of the logs.

Then the girls explained how they constructed the hut and what part Hepsy played in the work. They enlarged on the picnics and drives they were going to have, with Hepsy to furnish the motive power.

The boys listened to the first part of the talk, but not being one of the party that expected to have the fine outings, they lost interest and ran off to see if dinner was ready.

John came racing back, crying aloud so all could hear: "'Liza says you're all to sit down on the grass and hold your plates while's she passes the soup-kettle and serves you!"

"Where are the dishes?" asked the girls of Mrs. Vernon, as John spoke.

"They must have brought them. I see May and your father over there, carrying a wash-basket," whispered Mrs. Vernon.

So it was. And as each visitor was handed a soup-plate, the advice was given out at the same time: "You've got to use the same plate and spoon for every other course, so don't look for clean dishes hereafter."

The boys helped Eliza serve the soup, and when all were engaged in eating, one of the visitors remarked: "We saw quantities of wild strawberries down by the mountain-road as we walked by."

"Whereabouts? We'll pick them to-morrow for dinner," said Joan, eagerly.

The locality was carefully described, and the girls noted it for future investigation. There was so much laughing and talking after this that many of the young people forgot what they had for dinner. However, Eliza had provided enough for all, and the scouts were relieved of any responsibility thereby.

"We're not going to spend the afternoon," May said to the scouts after dinner, "we just thought to surprise you and have dinner, then start for home again."

Mrs. Allison added, as May finished speaking, "Yes, and we mothers felt sure you would be homesick after one week of camping. But I think we were the only ones feeling lonely. You seem to have had plenty to do to keep you from wanting to come back."

"Don't worry about our feeling forlorn or homesick, mother. If we can break away from here when September comes, we'll be satisfied," replied Joan.

Then Mr. Lee stood up on a stump and shouted: "Folks, it's about time to start back to the conventional ways of living. But before we go we ought to thank our hostesses for this good time. I only wish I was a girl scout with a summer in camp before me!"

Every one clapped and, at a signal, gave three cheers for the Captain and her scouts. Then dishes were collected in the big basket, kettles stacked up in the hamper, and the visitors started down

the road.

Eliza drew Mrs. Vernon aside and whispered: "You'll find a lot of stuff I brought for cookin' this week. We got a peck of onions from a farmer, so I measured out half for youse. I found I could spare a large measure of pertaters, too, and you'll find them with th' onions.

"I made a cake fer Sunday's supper fer you-all, and the jar of cookies I promised every week. Seein' as how there ain't no way fer a butcher to reach you, I packed up the roast lamb left from yesterday, and a slice of steak ready to be fried."

"Oh, Eliza! what a wonderful fairy you are! Now we will have enough meat and bones to last a week. I won't waste a morsel!" Mrs. Vernon promised.

The scouts had accompanied their visitors down the road, so Mrs. Vernon now walked with Eliza, a short distance behind the crowd. As they went, the maid laughingly explained:

"That was why I insisted on servin' the dinner. Mis' Bentley and Mis' Allison wanted to help, but I knew they wouldn't be careful of left-overs like I would. And glad I am I did!

"Why do you know, Mis' Vernon, there's enough salad dressin' left in a bowl in the store-room hut to last a week. An' soup, too, fer supper to-night fer all of you. Sandwiches—my! you kin eat sandwiches for three days' runnin'. Every speck of good cake what wasn't teched, I put carefully in the tin cracker-box, and many a snack the girls kin have between meals by that cake."

"Eliza, I will tell the girls all you just told me, and I know they will be delighted. I will thank you now, for them, as they will be busy saying good-by to every one after we join them."

"That's all right, Mis' Vernon. Don't bother about thanks, 'cause it is my bis'ness to look after them girls' meals, anyway."

But Mrs. Vernon thought how few maids of the present day thought as Eliza did. Would it not be to their own interests to consider their "business" a little more and thus win the gratitude and appreciation of the family?

The visitors had come out in large jitneys hired for the afternoon, and when every one was crowded in and the two heavy autos were about to start, Mrs. Vernon exclaimed:

"The next time you visit us, it will be at our invitation and expense. We will cook the dinner for the next picnic!"

And Julie shouted in addition to the invitation: "Yes, but we'll only invite you in installments—not such a crowd at one time."

CHAPTER NINE—THE CABINET MAKERS

When the last cloud of dust told the scout girls that their friends had disappeared down the road, they turned to the Captain. Julie evidently had an idea she wished to express.

"Now that we have time, let's find that strawberry field and gather some for supper. It is allowable on Sunday, isn't it?"

"If it's for use and not for pleasure, it is right," said the Captain.

"Well, one can't exactly say it is for use, as one can do without berries; but they will taste mighty good with 'Liza's cake, you know," laughed Joan.

"And we can honestly say they are not for pleasure," added Betty.

"They are for gustatory pleasures," teased Mrs. Vernon.

"Girls! Seeing our Captain is so particular, suppose we exempt her from any obligation she fears we might incur by picking berries on Sunday. I say, we will gather the fruit on our own responsibility but she shall not eat of that forbidden fruit, either," declared Julie, but at this point she was interrupted by Mrs. Vernon.

"Oh, no, indeed! As your guardian and Captain, I cannot have you eat berries on Sunday unless I, too, participate!"

With this form of banter they passed the time until the clearing in the woods was found where the berries grew in thick profusion.

"Oh, my! what a lot of them!" exclaimed the girls, as they jumped the deep ditch and fell to picking the luscious fruit.

"U-mm! VERNY, you never tasted anything so delicious!" called Julie to the Captain who was seeking a safe spot to cross to the berry-patch.

After a silent time during which every one seemed hard at work, Mrs. Vernon stood up and called out: "How many quarts have you ready for supper, girls?"

Julie also stood up and laughed: "I am not sure how many quarts I can hold, but there is still room for some more."

"We haven't any other holder to put the fruit in—that's why I am eating mine," said Ruth, in self-defense.

"You'll not be able to say that in another few minutes. Now begin to pick and save the berries until I come again," said the Captain, going over to a clump of white birches.

"I know what: she's going to strip some bark and make cornucopias for us to use," explained Joan, as she saw Mrs. Vernon tear strips from the trees.

And that is just what she did. Each girl was given a deep cornucopia and soon the holders were full of berries. As each one had eaten plentifully of the fruit, as well, they were ready to start up the road again.

"Girls, we can gather berries to eat every day and still have plenty to can," said the Captain, as they neared the camp.

"To can! how could we can any out here in the woods?"

"I'll show you. To-morrow when the man comes from Freedom for our Tuesday order, I will tell him to bring us a box of fruit jars. Then we will experiment on the berries. Wild fruit always is much sweeter than the cultivated kind."

"I've been wondering what we can give our visitors for a dinner, should we try to cook for them without asking for supplies from home?" ventured Betty, who had been rather silent during the walk to camp.

"I believe we can find enough good things right in the woods to give them, without falling back upon any store-food at all," replied Mrs. Vernon.

The girls looked amazed, and Ruth said laughingly: "Then they'll have to eat grass!"

"You wait and see! When I explain my menu you will be gratified, I think," said the Captain.

It was found that Eliza had left enough soup in a pan so that, with heating, it was sufficient for supper. That, with the cake and berries, quite satisfied the girls. Then seated about the embers of the night-fire, they planned for work on the morrow.

Monday morning, as soon as the usual work was finished, the campers began to mix the clay cement for the walls. Filling up the crevices kept them busy till noon, and then they were eager to get through with the dinner and start on something new.

"Now that your new abode is finished, I wonder how you would like to fill it with furniture," suggested Mrs. Vernon.

"Furniture! We haven't any here, and I doubt if our folks can spare anything they might have," Joan replied.

"I meant for you to make it," responded the Captain.

"Make it—what of, boxes like those in the magazine?" said Julie, laughingly.

"You *almost* guessed my plan! If you come with me, girls, I'll show you what I mean."

Amazed but curious, the scouts followed Mrs. Vernon to the place where various boxes and barrels still waited to be used. These were examined and sorted by the Captain, then each girl was given one to carry up to the plateau beside the camp-ground.

"Seems to me I remember reading about that Box Furniture, once," said Joan, dropping her burden upon the ground.

"We'll see if we can remember well enough to apply it now," replied the Captain. "First I'll take this barrel. I'll saw it halfway through the center, like this."

Mrs. Vernon then sawed and sawed until half the staves, where she had carefully drawn a pencil-line about the center of them, fell from one side and left the other halves attached to one head end.

"See it now!" exclaimed she, standing the barrel on end. "That half where the staves are left will be the curved back of my easy-chair."

The barrel-head which she had removed carefully from the end, that now was the top back of the chair, was secured upon the sawed staves to the center of the barrel and fastened to the back to make a seat. Then the remaining hoops were fastened securely to hold the bottom from

spreading.

"Now girls, if we had material to cushion it and pad the back, don't you think it would be comfortable?" said Mrs. Vernon.

The girls laughed appreciatively, and declared it was fine! Then Julie had an inspiration.

"Verny, I've got just the upholstery goods for the cushions!"

The captain smiled for she wondered if this scout had thought of the same material she had planned to use later.

"What is it?" demanded the other girls.

"We'll take the burlap bag that came with Hepsy's oats, die it with some vegetable or wood dye, and stuff it with excelsior that came packed about the pans."

"Oh, Julie! How did you ever think of it?" cried Betty, admiringly.

"Just what I would have said, had you not found it out first!" declared Mrs. Vernon.

"But I don't know where to find any dyes," admitted the scout.

"I'll tell you of some later. Now I wonder if you girls want to use the large barrel and copy my chair. Yours will be larger, however, as my chair was only a half-barrel size, you know."

Being only too anxious to copy Verny's chair, the four girls began work with a will. They took turns in sawing through the staves, even as they had been advised to do in building the hut, and this spared their muscles feeling lame or tired from the movement of the arm while sawing the hard wood.

"I'll leave you now to finish the chair, while I hunt along the mountain trail to find certain dye materials," said the Captain, as the work on the chair progressed finely.

But the barrel-chair was finished before Mrs. Vernon returned. "I couldn't find a thing that would do. I hunted most thoroughly, too. You see, it is too early for walnuts—if they were ripe we could stain the wood and burlaps a fine brown. Then I looked for different wild plants that will dye things, but there were none."

"Verny, Eliza colors our Easter eggs with onion peel. I see you have a lot of onions in the store-room, but I am not sure they will color burlap," said Betty.

"Just the thing, Betty! How wonderful of you to remember it. We will boil the skins until the water is a deep brown-orange and then we will try it on the burlap."

The onions had to be peeled, and this was not a pleasant task, as eyes began to weep and the girls had to sniffle as they skinned the onions, but they were determined to finish their upholstery work as long as they had started it.

The onion peels were placed over a fire to simmer slowly and the girls then went to work on the excelsior filling for the cushions. Meantime, Mrs. Vernon cut the burlap the required sizes to fit the seats of the chairs, and also cut oval panels for the backs.

Well, the onion peel dyed the material a soft ochre color, and was tried on the barrel-wood too. But it failed to stain that. The cushions were tacked down with small tacks, and the chairs looked most inviting to the manufacturers.



The cushions were tacked down with small tacks

Each scout took a turn in trying the chairs, and each pronounced them most luxurious, but Mrs. Vernon withheld such high praise as "luxury," saying instead "They're hard as rocks!"

"Now what can we build?" asked Ruth, showing intense interest in this form of occupation.

Mrs. Vernon laughed. "Do you want to begin something else?"

"Might as well, Verny. The hut has to be furnished now, as long as you have launched us along that line," Julie replied, laughingly.

"A table is easy to build, but you have to cut down the material for the legs."

"Where do table-legs grow—we'll cut them down," returned Joan, comically.

"Wherever you find small birch-trees growing thickly together, you can cut one out. Never chop down a tree that stands alone, as it will mean shelter and shade in time to come. But a small tree can always be spared, if there are several growing in a group. The others will fare better for the thinning out."

"How many shall we cut?" now asked Betty.

"Bring four, each one about two inches in diameter. We will use the thickest end of each trunk for legs, the middle sections for chair-backs, and the smallest ends for arms."

Provided with the ax, hatchet, and woodsman knife, the scouts started on their quest. After they had gone, Mrs. Vernon detached one side of a packing-case and removed any nails left in the wood. As this section of the case had reinforced pieces along the outer edges, it would be a strong table-top.

The rest of the day was used in building the table, and a queer looking object was the result. It was a cross between a stool and a four-legged pedestal. It was rather wobbly, too, as Ruth had sawed one leg shorter than those made by her three scout companions.

"It might tip over, Ruth, if a visitor leans upon it," said Mrs. Vernon.

"We'll keep a stone under that leg. It won't joggle if it's boosted up," explained Ruth.

"But the stone may slip out, or should one wish to move the table about, the stone will have to be carried about too."

"Goodness me, Verny! What can I do? I can't stretch it!" cried Ruth, distractedly.

Every one laughed, but the Captain said: "No, it won't stretch, but can't one of you scouts suggest a remedy?"

When they realized that they all were called upon to share the responsibility of the tilting table, they puckered their foreheads and put on their thinking-caps.

"I know! We'll tack a little end of the wood to the bottom of the leg," called Joan, excitedly.

Ruth cast a scornful look at Joan, as much as to say: "I'd like to see any one sticking a block under that leg!"

"Verny, we might take the leg off and saw a new one," suggested Betty.

"We could, and I suppose that would be the only correct way to do it, but I am thinking of another and easier way," replied the Captain.

"Oh! I guess I know! How will it do to saw all three legs off so they will be the same length as Ruth's short one?" exclaimed Julie, slapping her knee.

Mrs. Vernon smiled for that was what she wanted the scouts to discover. At the same time, she was deeply interested in the fact that Julie always seemed to catch her thoughts and express them exactly as she might have done. This showed her that Julie was very mental, and was open to every good and helpful suggestion from thought-waves.

That evening the Captain said: "It feels as if we might have rain soon. I hope it doesn't come before Wednesday, as I am conscious of neglecting an important work."

"What is it?" cried four anxious voices.

"Hepsy's shed. You see we were going to build her stable as soon as we completed the house, but we began our furniture instead. Hepsy had enjoyed the fresh air and fine pasturage on the plateau this last week, but she dislikes the rain."

"Oh, dear! I forgot all about her shed," cried Betty.

"So did we. If she only had complained now and then! But she went about her business so quietly!" sighed Joan.

"Verny, if it rains we must invite Hepsy into our hut! If we neglected to build her shed because of our fine furniture, then she must be admitted to the palace itself!" said Ruth, decidedly.

"That's what we will, Verny! Hepsy won't hurt the hut."

And the Captain secretly exulted to find that Ruth was fast forgetting self in feeling responsibility for others—even a horse; while the other scouts thought nothing of their work unless it was put to some good use.

But it did not rain that night, nor in the morning, although the sky was gray and overcast. Hepsy had a shed all built before the first drops fell late that afternoon; there were several liberal ventilation crevices between the logs of the sidewalls, however.

The floor of the shed had been laid *à la corduroy* style—as so many boggy roads are built upon in the west. The logs in this case were placed side by side in a bed of clay, and when the girls pressed down firmly upon the flooring, the clay oozed up between the joints and hardened there. In a few days the floor would be as solid as a rock and could be washed off with broom and water.

Hepsy had more than enough dry leaves for a bedding that first night, as the scouts thought she might take cold if she slept on the damp floor. Mrs. Vernon smiled, but said nothing as she knew the heap of leaves would keep Hepsy from cutting the soft clay with her hoofs. When the flooring was hard and dry nothing could hurt it.

Supper that night was rather a gloomy affair as everything was wet, and the fire would not burn. So they gathered in the hut and ate cold food. This started a discussion on fireplaces.

"You said maybe there was a chance of building a chimney," ventured Joan.

"Yes, but we have been doing so much, I forgot about it," confessed the Captain.

"A fireplace would feel great on a night like this," said Julie.

"Verny, if clay will harden in chinks of the walls, and make a solid flooring, why won't it hold stones together in a chimney?" now asked Ruth, eagerly.

"It will, if we can find stones that will fit properly. I wouldn't attempt to do the mason work with round cobble-stones such as are used in most chimneys in bungalow houses."

"Did you mean it when you said a chimney might be built if we leaned it against the rocky wall back of the rear wall of the hut?" asked Joan.

"No, I was only fooling when I spoke of leaning it—because a chimney has to be most accurately constructed or it will smoke one out of the place."

"Let's build the chimney to-morrow!" begged Ruth, eagerly.

"Oh, my dears! We haven't done anything but build—build—build since we've been here. There

are so many other things I want you to do that a chimney can wait.”

“If we agree to do what other things you want us to, why can’t we use the forty-five minutes of recreation that is ours each day to build the chimney?” persisted Ruth.

Mrs. Vernon laughed. But the eager faces of the girls showed her they were in earnest. Besides, what difference did it make in the end whether she was teaching them to build a stone chimney or how to mend a pair of stockings? If it was true work and done with the right motive back of it, it was progressive.

So she finally said: “All right, you may have two hours a day for chimney work, and the rest we will devote to my pursuits.”

“Hurrah! we ought to finish the chimney in three days!” exclaimed Julie.

Thus the second week passed quickly away. The little stone chimney was finished and presented a very artistic addition to the room. But it became so much smaller as it rose higher, that at the top it was only large enough for a tiny opening for the escape of smoke. Unfortunately, this caused the fireplace to smoke dreadfully when a fire was started, but once the bed of embers was well started, an additional bit of wood judiciously used did not cause every one to choke and run from the room.

In one of the hikes, the scouts had found a wild grapevine, but it had been severed from the root, and hung from the tree-trunk without leaves or fruit. It was more than an inch thick, so Mrs. Vernon had the girls carefully cut it down and carry it back to camp.

“The graceful curves of this twisted vine will make the prettiest chair imaginable, with back, arms and legs entwined, and holding up the seat of boards. Smaller bits of the gnarled vine will make flower-brackets, rustic hanging-baskets, and also a cord by which to suspend the signboard of Dandelion Camp,” remarked the Captain.

“If we only had a Turkish rug for the floor, our hut would look wonderful!” sighed Joan, admiring the latest additions.

“Why cry for the moon when you can have the sun?” laughed Mrs. Vernon.

“What do you mean? Did you bring a rug?” asked Joan, quickly.

“Oh, we forgot that crex mat, didn’t we? Do you suppose it is still down in the bushes?” asked Betty, anxiously.

“I quite forgot it myself, girls. But that was not what I meant just now. The moment Joan mentioned a rug, I thought of something I read about in the Handbook. We ought to weave a mat of grass or willows for that palace.”

“If we only could! It would be so in keeping,” said Betty, softly, that her voice would not interrupt the others who were loudly acclaiming this idea from the Captain.

“I wish to goodness Sunday were a week away so we could finish up all the fine plans we have started,” sighed Ruth.

“Well, Ruth, only *our* folks are coming out this Sunday, you know, and we needn’t mind them much. If it wasn’t that we needed ‘Liza’s cake and bread and other things, we could have postponed the call for a week,” said Betty, condolingly.

As usual, Betty’s candor made them laugh, and Mrs. Vernon said: “Yes, I fear our invitation had an awfully big string to it this week.”

CHAPTER TEN—A FOURTH OF JULY OUTING

Saturday night the scouts and Mrs. Vernon planned the dinner for the next day.

“We’ll use some of those onions, and cut potatoes into dice to add to them; then I’ll take a small can of tomatoes, some rice and a bit of bacon, and make a good chowder of the whole. If we only had a few of the little fish Joan caught the other day, they would give it a fine flavor,” suggested the Captain.

“You said we might open a jar of our strawberry preserve, Verny,” reminded Julie.

“Yes, but not for a course; it is too precious for anything but dessert.”

“After the chowder, what can we have?” asked Ruth.

“We’ll boil that artichoke root we dug up this morning. When that is seasoned it tastes just like salsify. If Eliza doesn’t bring any meat, we can run along the mountain-path and cut one of the beefsteak mushrooms I showed you yesterday. I doubt if your folks will be able to tell the

difference between it and a tenderloin steak," the Captain said, chuckling.

"My, won't they be surprised when they see all we have learned in two weeks!" exclaimed Betty, proudly.

"I hope it doesn't rain to-morrow," ventured Julie.

"Yes, 'cause we've got to have Eliza's supplies!" added her twin sister.

"Can you think of anything else that's novel, Verny, for dinner?" asked Joan.

"We can cut enough dandelion leaves in the morning to have a salad"; Mrs. Vernon glanced doubtfully at Ruth as she spoke.

Ruth caught the look and laughed: "Are you afraid I am going to boil over because you mentioned dandelions?"

"Well, I didn't know how you might take it?"

"I'll confess; I'd just as soon call the camp 'dandelion' as anything else, for now I appreciate what that digging did for us."

"I'm so glad, Ruthy; now I can paint that sign. Do you know girls why I refused to hang out the sign you wanted? It was because we were not unanimous in the selection of a name. As Ruth's objection is removed I will have the sign ready for next Sunday when the Allison and Bentleys visit us."

"Did you save that fine ash board you selected the very first day we came here?" asked Ruth.

"Yes, and to-morrow I'll show it to you—ready to burn."

"Burn?" came from four girls.

"Yes; I am going to etch the name 'Dandelion Camp' in the wood with a red-hot poker, and sketch the dandelions about the name in pyrography, also. Then we can tint the flowers and leaves. You haven't any idea how soft and beautiful the burnt tones blend with yellow and green paints."

"It sounds fascinating—I wish I could do it," said Joan.

"You each may practice and when you can handle the iron well enough, you might try to do little things like book-ends or wall-brackets."

"We got as far on the bill-of-fare as dandelion salad, Verny, and then switched off on something new—as usual," laughed Julie.

"That was the end of my menu, as far as I could provide any," returned the Captain.

Sunday morning it was decided to go for the beefsteak mushrooms and cook them for dinner, even if Eliza brought meat. In that case, they would keep the meat for dinners the following days and give the visitors a treat by having tenderloin steak (?).

Ruth proved her statement that she had outgrown her dislike of dandelions by offering to cut enough plants for the salad. When she returned to camp she had a fine mess of young leaves, and after washing them clean, left them in cold water until wanted.

Joan and Julie had offered to get up early and go for berries. Mrs. Vernon was dubious about berry-picking being in order for scouts on Sunday, when there was enough dessert already on hand.

"But why not? It is wholesome study of nature's own fruit, you know," argued Joan.

"Verny, we really must have a dessert for those who do not like preserves, you know. Otherwise father will eat the whole jar of our strawberry preserves," added Julie.

So the two girls prevailed over the Captain's mild scruples and hurried down the road to the strawberry field. Before the Lee family arrived, everything was done and ready for their reception.

Eliza, as anticipated, had smuggled a host of good things into the sally, and when Mr. Lee and May were listening to all that the scouts had accomplished during the week, she transferred the larder hidden in the harness box of the sally to the camp-larder in the old hut.

As they sat down to dinner, John began showing symptoms of disapproval of his soup (chowder, the scouts called it), and carefully placed his dish upon the rock before him.

"The chowder smells delicious, girls," said May, as the aroma rose to her nose.

"It's just as good as it smells, too," said Julie.

"Is every one served now, Julie?" called Joan, who was waitress for the day.

"Yes, and all anxious to begin—hurry and sit down," Julie replied.

Joan took her plate and sat down nearest the board from which she had to serve the dinner. John waited smiling knowingly as he sat and watched the others.

Mr. Lee was the first to take a spoonful of chowder. He frowned for a moment, then took a second taste. His mouth puckered and he looked questioningly at Eliza as if to ask her what was wrong with it.

May had already taken her spoonful and immediately cried: "For goodness sake! Who cooked this chowder?"

"Verny—why?" hastily asked the girls.

"Why? Well just taste it!"

Every one had had a good mouthful by this time and every one looked at the Captain reproachfully.

"Really! I'm sure I didn't salt this chowder as heavily as this! I tasted it just before you arrived and it was delicious," exclaimed Mrs. Vernon in self-justification.

Joan now looked dreadfully concerned. She tasted the soup and then made a wry face. But she was not going to have any one falsely accused, so she spoke up:

"Verny, you know when you told me to salt something-or-other, I thought you meant chowder; so I put in as much as I felt it needed. Maybe I misunderstood you."

"Oh, Joan! I called to you and said *not* to salt the chowder because I saw you seasoning everything you could find!"

Joan looked so woe-begone that every one laughed, and Betty said regretfully: "It's too bad, Joan, 'cause the chowder was cheap so it was to be the filler, you know. Now we won't have enough dinner without eating our preserves."

That made every one scream with merriment, and the salty soup was passed by without further reproach. While waiting for the steaks (?) John cleared his throat as a signal, and said:

"You won't see *me* here again this summer."

"Why not?" queried his sisters.

"'Cause I'm going to camp on Wednesday—Daddy fixed it with the Master at our gym."

"Going to wash dishes?" teased Julie, winking at Eliza.

"Nope! But I'm going to keep the grounds clean. I have to pick up papers and see that nothing is littered around. Every time I leave trash about, I get fined, so I'll have to be awake."

"What splendid practice that will be for you, Johnny. When you come back home, you ought to have the habit so strong that Eliza won't have to run after you at every step," declared Julie.

"I know John will make a fine scout for that work," added Betty.

Being a regular boy, John wouldn't thank Betty for her kind words but he mentally decided that she was a bear!

The beefsteak mushrooms were a great success and no one could tell what they were eating. Boiled potatoes, artichokes, dandelion salad with Eliza's French dressing, and a gravy of browned flour, made a fine dinner to go with the steak. Then followed the berries and generous slices of fresh layer cake brought from home. When dinner was over, John frowned and said: "Is this all we get?"

"All! my goodness, isn't it enough?" demanded Julie.

"Not for Sunday's dinner. I bet we'll have a regular feast at *our* camp, all right!"

"You couldn't have such cake if you baked for ages!" retorted Julie.

"Cake—pooh! Fellers don't want cake. We want man's dinners," bragged the boy.

"I noticed you ate every crumb, just the same!"

"That's 'cause I am hungry and had to."

"Seein' es how yuh despise my cake, I'll see you don't have to eat none of it whiles you are at camp," said Eliza, at this point of the altercation between brother and sister.

John gasped, for he had already boasted to his boy-chums who were going to camp with him that *he* could have cakes and lots of goodies sent to him every week!

That afternoon the visitors were escorted about the woods; every beautiful nook and dell was duly admired, and when it came time for good-bys both sides felt that they had had a fine visit.

"We'll look forward to coming again *when* it is our turn," observed Mr. Lee, as he climbed into the surrey.

"We'll be looking as anxiously for you as you will for us," Betty replied.

May grinned, for she understood why they would be welcomed. But Ruth said hurriedly: "S-sh! My mother's coming next and she won't let your family outdo her in bringing goodies. May, do tell her all you brought to-day."

Every one laughed at that frank confidence, and the Lees drove away feeling happy and proud of the way their girls were improving under the scout life.

As they trudged back up the hill, Joan said: "Is any one expected for the Fourth?"

"Not that I know of—I forgot the Fourth comes this week," Mrs. Vernon replied.

"What can we do, Verny? We haven't any fire-works," said Betty.

"We'll have to think out a suitable plan with which to celebrate the National Birthday."

That evening about the camp-fire, it was discussed and finally voted upon to go for a long outing on the Fourth.

"But where? We don't want to go down into civilization, you know," said Ruth.

"Can't we pack up a dinner and go away off somewhere?" suggested Joan.

"We can drive Hepsy and ride in the buckboard," added Julie.

"Hepsy hasn't had much exercise lately, and she's getting too lazy; it will do her good to thin down somewhat," laughingly said Mrs. Vernon.

"Verny, did you ever hear of Bluebeard's Cave, 'way back on this mountain?" asked Julie, glancing slyly at her companions.

"I have, but how did you hear of it?"

"Now you've got to tell her!" exclaimed Betty, while Joan and Ruth tried to hush her.

"What does this mean—what is there to tell, scouts?" asked Mrs. Vernon, seriously.

"Oh, it isn't anything—much. Only a little joke we had on you a long time ago," began Joan, stammeringly.

"Better tell me all about it and end it," advised Mrs. Vernon, not a little surprised, for she wondered if the girls had ever tried to find the cave, which she knew to be dangerous without a grown person or a lantern to guide them.

"Do you remember the day we built the roof on the hut?" asked Julie, giggling.

"Yes, it was the neatest work you ever did—before or since."

"But we didn't do it!" exclaimed Ruth, also giggling.

"You didn't! Then who did!" gasped the Captain, amazed.

The girls laughed merrily. This was just the sort of a surprise they had looked for. They never thought of the danger in the cave that had worried the Captain, so there was no reason why they should not laugh and enjoy the joke.

Mrs. Vernon saw immediately that there was no ground for her fear, so she managed to laugh too. "What is the joke, girls?"

"You had no sooner gone, that day, when a young woodsman came across the plateau. He lives way back on the last crest," began Joan, eagerly, but Julie interpolated with: "In winter he traps fur-bearing animals and sells the pelts. He was out hunting that day. He had a gun in his hands and a loaded revolver in his belt."

"He asked us if we weren't afraid to camp here alone," added Betty.

"And we laughed at him. We told him you were always with us, so we were not alone."

"He then said, we ought to have a big dog to keep away tramps, but we said he was the first

stranger we ever saw about. Then we showed him our hut and the roof we had to make. But he laughed."

"Yes, he laughed, because he said we were doing it wrong. Then he leaned the gun against a tree and showed us how to roof the place properly," said Ruth.

"He told us always to place a gun with the barrel aiming up or down. Never to lean it sideways or lay it on the ground. He told us how many hunters are accidentally killed through carelessness in handling their firearms," explained Betty.

"He said he wanted to see you and tell you something, so he waited around, but finally he had to go. We made each other promise not to tell you that day as we wanted you to think we did the fine roof," concluded Julie, laughing merrily.

"Do you know what he wanted to see me for?" asked Mrs. Vernon, finding an entirely different cause for concern, since she heard this story.

"Nothing, I guess, unless he wanted to get orders for a fur coat next winter," said Joan, smiling as if to invite a laugh at her wit.

"Oh, no, Joan. He didn't look like that at all," said Betty, reprovingly.

"I think he wanted to tell Verny where there might be dangerous places in the mountains, 'cause he warned us not to stray away alone at any time; but we don't need him for that, 'cause we don't wander off, like he does," added Julie.

"And he told you about Bluebeard's Cave, eh? What did he say about it?"

"We asked him if there were any wonderful places in this mountain that we could visit some day. He told us of a place known as 'Bluebeard's Cave' that was about twelve miles away, but he said we ought to make a day's trip of it, 'cause it was so fine," explained Joan.

"We'll consider going there some day, but I do wish this young man had waited to talk with me," murmured the Captain.

The days preceding the Fourth, the scouts completed a rustic book-shelf, several original ornaments such as no one could possibly name, and having woven a small grass rug, they felt that the hut was better than any king's castle.

The morning of the Fourth was cloudless and the scouts were up earlier than usual. It had been decided upon, before going to bed the night before, that the trip to Bluebeard's Cave would be an interesting outing if the party got away in time to have a full day for the outing.

Hepsy was feeling most frisky because she had had so little exercise the past week; two of the girls led her to the buckboard and hitched her securely, while the other two slid the adjustable rear seat into the grooves meant for it along the sides of the vehicle. As they did so, Joan noticed the edge of one groove seemed splintered.

Mrs. Vernon and the scouts had packed the hamper with a good luncheon, and now the Captain placed the basket in front of the three girls who took possession of the back seat. The other scout sat on the front seat beside the driver.

Hepsy jogged along at her own sweet will, and all the chirruping and switching of the reins failed to bring forth one added bit of speed.

"I think Hepsy's awful mean to go so slow! We'll *never* get there at this rate," complained Ruth.

"And after the royal way we have treated her, too! Why, one'd think the old nag was tired to death!" added Joan.

"I wish we had tied a feed bag to her nose—then she'd show some speed," laughed Julie.

"Maybe the climb is too steep for her. I know I wouldn't want to pull five folks and a wagon up this grade," said Betty.

"Oh, pshaw! If Hepsy thinks this is steep what will she do when we come to the last mountain climb," asked Mrs. Vernon, exasperated with urging the horse onwards.

Julie laughed as she said, "She'll let the buckboard run backwards on that hill."

"Serve her right if we pull her over on her haunches and drag her down with us," added Joan.

With such complaints and banter, the scouts reached a steep ascent. Hepsy brought the party to the foot of the hill and then stopped. All the urging and switching failed to make her move a foot.

"Girls, you'll have to get out and walk up—Hepsy used to play this trick on us long ago, but she has forgotten it during the last few years; or perhaps, she hadn't the occasion to use it until today," laughed Mrs. Vernon.

The scouts joined in the laugh, but jumped out to see if Hepsy would start. The wise old horse turned her head, and finding several of her passengers were out of the buckboard, continued on up the grade.

When they came to the level again, the horse would stop long enough to allow the passengers to get back on the seat. But they had to jump out again when Hepsy reached the next grade.

This amused the scouts tremendously; they laughed and enjoyed the way the wise old animal balked about pulling them up the hills. But Mrs. Vernon had an idea.

"Girls, the next grade we come to, you three jump out and wait for Hepsy to start on her way, then instantly climb up on the tailboard and sit there. We'll see if she minds the extra weight, or if she is just whimsical."

So Hepsy halted as usual when she came to the next grade and the scouts did as the Captain suggested. They sat on the back of the buckboard floor, swinging their feet and laughing wildly at the way the horse jogged on up the hill, believing that they were walking.

Having reached the top, Hepsy waited, as was her custom, for the girls to climb in, but they merely crept over the back of the seat and then shouted: "Gid'dap!"

Perhaps it was this pulling and scrambling that moved the seat from the splintered groove, or perhaps it had not been securely slid into place when the two girls adjusted it. No one knew it had worked its way out of the slot and now was merely sitting on top of the side-rails; but the combined weight of the three girls held it firmly while the buckboard ran over level ground.

So elated were the scouts over the success of their hoax that they determined to repeat the trick at the next ascent. They sang and shouted with exuberant spirits, so that Mrs. Vernon had to hold her ears with both hands, while Betty drove.

But Hepsy became annoyed at such unseemly hilarity, and switched her tail impatiently several times. Still the scouts kept on laughing and shouting, so Hepsy expressed her irritation in starting to run.

The added speed only made the scouts laugh and shout louder, and Hepsy ran faster. As this was exactly what they all had wanted for an hour past, the girlish voices rang merrily over the hills and came back in mad echoes.

Now Hepsy determined she would not stand for such nonsense, but there was the steepest ascent of all just ahead. It was the last, but longest, on the mountainside.

Hepsy's run turned into a gallop that rocked the vehicle from side to side, so that Betty could not control the animal. Mrs. Vernon hastily took the reins and tried to soothe the horse, but it seemed as if Hepsy said: "No, you laughed at the way I was fooled, so now I will have my turn!"

The three girls on the rear seat had to cling to each other to avoid being rolled out of the buckboard; still they never dreamed that much of the swaying was due to the seat being free from the clutch of the grooves.

Just ahead, Mrs. Vernon saw a huge flat boulder which would prove an awful jolt unless Hepsy could be guided so as to avoid it. The Captain tugged with all her strength on the left rein, but the stubborn horse kept straight on.

Suddenly the front wheel struck the rock and the vehicle went up on one side and down on the other. With the mighty lurch, the seat toppled over, and the three occupants were shot into the bushes and grass growing beside the woodland path. The hamper rolled off afterward and stood upside down in the road.

Once over the obstacle, however, the buckboard righted itself again, and Hepsy kept galloping on as if her life depended upon it. All the shouting and yanking at the reins, that the Captain was capable of, had no effect on the animal.

She climbed the ascent in a galloping pace, and never stopped until the pathway ended in front of the Cave. Then she stood heaving and breathing as if every gasp would be her last.

Mrs. Vernon and Betty jumped and looked with fear and trembling at what had happened to the three scouts so unceremoniously tipped into the woods.

At the foot of the steep climb, the three girls were seen struggling to carry the hamper up to the Cave. But they were laughing so they could not lift the heavy basket.

The Captain made a megaphone of her hands and shouted: "Never mind! Leave the hamper. We can have dinner down there."

Thankfully then, the scouts placed the hamper in the ferns beside the road, and climbed up to the height where the others stood.

"I never saw such an old fraud in my life!" exclaimed Mrs. Vernon, when the girls came within

hearing of her voice.

"Are you all right, girls?" asked Betty, anxiously.

"Yes, but weak from laughing," shouted Joan.

"Oh, if I ever get a chance to pay Hepsy back!" threatened Ruth, angrily.

"Verny? I'd give my hat if we could only have had a movie taken of this whole episode," added Julie, still giggling.

"I shall never accuse Hepsy of being a silly beast again," said Mrs. Vernon, once she was satisfied there were no bruises or other injuries to the girls.

CHAPTER ELEVEN—IN BLUEBEARD'S CAVE

The buckboard was drawn out of the path and left beside the cave; then Hepsy was unhitched and tethered to a tree with enough rope to allow her to graze. But she kept turning her head to look quizzically at the scouts, as much as to say:

"Huh! you thought you had played a trick on me, but I managed to turn the tables, after all!"

"Verny, Hepsy's got a wicked gleam in her eyes, just as if she dumped us out on purpose," laughed Julie, slapping the horse on the shoulder.

Mrs. Vernon was too busy unpacking a pasteboard box to reply, so the scouts stood about her asking questions about the package.

"I brought a number of thick candles and a box of matches. Each one of you girls must carry a candle, while I go first and carry the electric flashlight," explained Mrs. Vernon.

"How exciting!" cried Joan, trying to light her candle.

"Just like explorers in an unknown jungle," added Julie.

"Caves, I should say, Jule," corrected Ruth, laughingly.

"Well, are we all ready?" now asked the Captain, seeing that each scout had the candle lighted.

"All ready for the great adventure," laughed Julie.

In the first lap of the exploration nothing unusual occurred as the footpath ran over smooth stone and sand, while the vaulted ceiling and sidewalls were far enough away to make the cave seem really larger than it was.

"It doesn't make one feel very spooky," said Ruth.

"Let's wait until we get in where the water drips and the queer formations hang from the roof. That is where the hunter said the weirdness of the place impressed you," explained Julie.

They continued deeper into the mountainside, and the air felt cooler, while the domed tunnel grew perceptibly smaller. The girls were silent now, being very careful to follow closely behind the Captain.

"I think it is quite spooky enough for me," whispered Betty, taking hold of Mrs. Vernon's skirt.

"If you feel this way, now, what will you do when we get away in!" laughed Julie.

The laugh echoed madly and hurled its sounds back again at the scouts, and the entire party stopped suddenly with fright.

"Oh! It was only an echo of Julie's laugh," sighed the Captain, in relief.

"But what a horrible maniac's cry it was!" gasped Joan.

Betty was shivering with nervousness, when Julie again laughed, to hear the echoes come back.

"*Please* don't do that!" cried Ruth, closing her ears, and at the same time dropping the candle.

Its light was extinguished, and the candle must have rolled into some crevice, for it could not be found, even though the flashlight and other candles were used to hunt for it.

"You'll have to creep close beside me," said Julie, linking Ruth's arm through hers.

The cave now narrowed down so that they had to stoop to go on. About fifty feet further, the tunnel forked. Two separate tubes ran at diagonal lines with each other.

"Which shall we take first?" asked Joan, comparing the two openings.

"My mother told me to take this one," counted Julie, her finger pointing to each tunnel alternating on each word she spoke. It was the right-hand opening that was on the last count.

Mrs. Vernon laughed. "Well, we will go this way and see why your 'mother told you to take this one.'"

The scouts laughed, too, but the echoes failed to ring back as repeatedly as in the front tunnel.

"That means we are near the end of this tube," said Joan.

"I'm glad of it! I don't like to be away in here," admitted Betty.

"The roof is coming down to bump our heads, Verny," said Julie, who was now leading.

"Then we must soon retrace our steps and take the other tube, as this was the short one that leads nowhere. The other must be the tube that leads to the stalactite cave," said Mrs. Vernon.

The scouts proceeded a few feet further but the aperture was becoming too small to follow comfortably, and the Captain said:

"Well, we may as well turn around, girls."

As she spoke a low moan seemed to come from the ground, and the girls huddled close to the Captain.

"What was it, Verny?" whispered Julie, fearfully.

Mrs. Vernon gravely turned her flashlight over the walls and ceiling of the rocky tunnel, then moved it slowly over the ground about them.

Just when the scouts began to feel courageous again, thinking the sound was some other form of hallucination in the cave, the light fell upon a form doubled up against the side of the rocky wall.

The scouts saw it about the same time the Captain did, and four high-pitched, excited young voices screamed fearfully, causing the tunnel behind them to echo with ear-splitting yells of terror. Even Mrs. Vernon shivered at the uncanny sight and sounds.

Betty and Ruth had hidden their faces in the Captain's skirt, as if this would defend them from danger. But Julie and Joan stood their ground beside the Captain, trying to peer in advance of their position to see what the form could be.

"Is he drunk?" whispered Joan.

"Maybe he is murdered," ventured Julie, causing the others to shiver again.

"No—he moaned, so he is not dead. I must find out what is the matter," replied the Captain, bracing herself for the unpleasant task.

"Oh, Verny! Please don't!" wailed Betty.

"He may be hoaxing us like Hepsy did—better call to him and tell him we haven't a jewel or a cent with us," cried Ruth.

But the form remained inanimate. Not another sound was heard other than the cries and talking of the scouts.

Mrs. Vernon went over slowly, keeping the electric light directly upon the form. The two other girls held their candles so that the footpath showed distinctly, as they walked beside the Captain. Ruth and Betty clung to each other where they had been left standing.

"Here! Get up!" ordered Mrs. Vernon, pushing the body gently with her foot.

But there was no sound or motion from the form.

The coat had been removed, but the undergarments looked like good ones, so Mrs. Vernon stooped down the better to see. The right arm was so bent upwards that it covered the face, and it seemed as if the man was sleeping that way.

"Wake up! Do you hear me?" called the Captain, again.

The fearful quiet was the only effect of the second demand, so then Mrs. Vernon carefully removed the arm from the face.

"Oh!" shrieked Julie and Joan, falling back suddenly, and even the Captain cried with horror.

"Help! Help!" screamed Ruth, not sure of what was happening to her friends.

But the movement of the arm must have caused an instance of consciousness in the man, as he made another faint sound like a sigh or a moan.

"Girls, something has happened to this man, and we have to use our scout-sense to try and carry him out to the air," said Mrs. Vernon, turning to the girls.

"Oh, dear me! I'm afraid to go any nearer. He may die if we move him," said Joan, fearfully.

"He'll surely die if left here alone. It may be days or even weeks before any party again visits this Cave," said Mrs. Vernon, emphatically.

"How terrible! We just can't let him die, then," admitted Julie.

"Do we have to help you?" wailed Ruth, from the rear.

"Betty and you will have to carry the lights, while we three try to carry him," answered the Captain.

"If only we had a blanket!" sighed Julie.

"It would have been so easy to make a stretcher, then," added Joan.

"We'll have to contrive one from my skirt, girls. I have a full skirt on, and the pleats at the belt can quickly be ripped out."

Even as she spoke, Mrs. Vernon slipped off the plaid skirt and began pulling at the belt. But it was well-sewed and would not give way.

"Here, let me chew open some of the stitches," said Joan.

"No, no! I have an idea—let me burn the threads with the candle-flame," called Julie.

"Good! Now touch it right there," said the Captain, as she held the belt over the flame.

In a few moments, the scorched and smoking skirt belt gave way to the strength of the pull Mrs. Vernon used on it, and once the stitching began, it easily ripped across the entire width.

"That scorching also reminds me, girls! I've heard said that smoking wool will revive a fainting person. We will try it as soon as we have him out of this smothering place," said the Captain.

An impromptu stretcher was then contrived of the skirt, and the three bearers lifted the unconscious man upon it. They managed to carry the form over to the spot where Betty and Ruth held the lights, but the moment Ruth saw the gash on the head, and the blood trickling from it, she screamed and clung to Betty.

"Don't, Ruth—don't hang on to me like that!" wailed Betty. "I'm going to faint, if you don't let go of me!"

"Betty Lee! You'd better not!" cried Julie, desperately.

"We haven't time to hold you up and try to revive you," added Joan.

"Children, start ahead and show us the way, or we'll all be taken to Court to testify why we let this man die," ordered the Captain, hoping by such awe-inspiring words to make Betty and Ruth see the necessity of self-control.

Ruth managed to take the extra candle from Betty's shaking hand, and say: "Come on, Betty, we'll both be in jail for murder if we don't."

As this was Ruth's interpretation of Court, and it seemed to have the desired effect, Mrs. Vernon thought best not to correct her. The two frightened girls led the way with the lights and the three bearers of the still unconscious form followed.

Finally they reached the open, and the man was placed upon the grass near the Cave entrance. "If he doesn't regain his senses in a few moments, we will have to try that burnt wool," said Mrs. Vernon, watching the patient very closely, while the scouts bathed his head with the water they had brought in a bottle.

But the fresh air seemed to have the hoped-for effect, for the man heaved a deep sigh and slowly opened his eyes. At first he merely stared right up at the green foliage of the trees, but as his strength came back, he tried to see who was bathing his forehead.

"Do you feel better, now?" inquired Mrs. Vernon, softly.

The man tried to speak but couldn't, so Julie whispered: "Maybe he's been in there for days, and needs food."

"Some of you girls run and bring the hamper up," said Mrs. Vernon, but the patient had heard.

"No—all right," he managed to gasp.

After what seemed an eternity to the scouts, the man had survived far enough to sit up and lean against the front seat of the buckboard which the girls had removed and carried over.

"I fear you have had a bad accident," said the Captain. "Do you know what happened to you in the Cave? Maybe you fell from a shelf of rock."

"No—tramps did it."

The girls cried out, but the Captain gave them a severe look that quieted them at once. Then she held the cup of water for the man to sip, and he freshened up visibly.

"Girls, all four of you go for the hamper, as we must eat our dinner up here. You can take turns in carrying it, you know," said the Captain.

The scouts preferred to hover about and hear about the tramps, but Mrs. Vernon's word was law, so they started down the hill. On the way, Ruth said, complainingly:

"We ought to hitch that lazy old horse to the buckboard and make her pull the load up the hill."

"She'd balk halfway up, Ruth, and make us pull *her* up the rest of the way," retorted Julie, laughingly.

Mrs. Vernon fanned the cut and bruised face, and wished the man could tell who he was. As if in answer to her thoughts, he whispered: "Did you find my card-case in the coat pocket?"

"No, the tramps who maltreated you so, stole everything."

The man was not yet aware that he was in his shirt-sleeves, but now he glanced at himself and frowned.

"I beg your pardon, but you see my appearance is unavoidable," murmured he, while a flush rose to his pale face.

"Oh, don't think of form just now—let us help you back to a normal state as soon as possible," replied Mrs. Vernon, earnestly.

"I am a stranger in these parts, having left the train that goes to New York, because I heard there were some marvelous caves of stalactite formation in this mountain. I was told to find a young hunter on top of this crest who would guide me," whispered he.

"But I must have missed my way, as I found myself at the Cave itself, before I even found the trail that goes to the hunter's cabin. I had a grip which I left outside, and taking my flashlight out of it, I started in alone." The speaker rested a few moments, then continued: "As I reached the branch where the two tunnels fork, I heard voices. So I hailed, thinking it might be the hunter escorting a party through the Cave. Then suddenly the voices were silenced.

"That should have warned me that all was not right, but I hurried on, hoping to meet some one. Instead I suddenly was struck directly in the face with a sharp rock. The blow staggered me, but I leaned against the wall, until two hard-looking villains crept along the tunnel thinking I was unconscious.

"One of them had on stripes, so I judged they were escaped convicts. I fought them off, but the blows from a cudgel and the loss of blood from the gash made by the rock, weakened me so that I remember no more until I opened my eyes and found you bending over me."

"How horrible! But how grateful we are that we visited the Caves to-day. What day was it that you went in there?"

"Let me think: I left the train at the Junction on the evening of July third, and stopped at a country inn for the night. Early on the Fourth I climbed the mountains, and visited the Cave. What day is it now?"

"Why this is the Fourth still! You must have been attacked but a short time before we found you. It is now noon," exclaimed Mrs. Vernon, showing her dread of lurking rascals by calling to the girls to hasten up the hill.

"Thank heavens! Then we may catch them before they get out of the country," said the man.

"My name is Mrs. Vernon, and I am camping in these woods with my girl scouts. But I should dread having them go about alone after this."

"My name is Mr. Gilroy, and I certainly feel greatly obliged to your scouts and to you, Madame, for your aid."

"If only we were not so far from camp, or such a long ride to Freedom. You could have medical attention there, and notify the police of this assault."

"My dear Madame! I, too, have been an enthusiastic camper and can help myself better than the physicians can. Give me a few hours' rest, and I will be as well as ever," said Mr. Gilroy.

The scouts now came puffing up with the hamper, registering many threats against Hepsy for her untimely trick. As they came over and stood beside the Captain, she introduced them to Mr. Gilroy. They were delighted to find him so far recovered, and they said so in girlish words and expressions.

The scouts displayed as hearty an appetite as if nothing unusual had happened, but Mrs. Vernon was too concerned over the news of some tramps being at large to enjoy her dinner; she put two and two together and decided that this was what the young hunter wished to warn her about.

Mr. Gilroy seemed to like the eager attendance on him shown by the girls, but he ate sparingly of all the many goodies they urged upon him.

When the dinner was over, Mrs. Vernon said: "We must leave the hamper hidden somewhere, girls, and call back for it another day. The back seat we must leave here, also."

"Why?" asked the scouts, wonderingly.

"Because we must contrive some sort of couch on the floor of the buckboard for Mr. Gilroy; you girls will sit on either side, or at the back of the buckboard. I can manage to crowd in one extra scout on the front seat. As Ruth is the slenderest one, I think it had better be she and Betty for the front seat, while Joan and Julie mount guard over their patient."

The girls seemed to think the plan a good one, so the hamper and extra seat were soon hidden inside the Cave.

CHAPTER TWELVE—AN UNPLEASANT SURPRISE

When dinner was cleared away, Mrs. Vernon and the scouts gathered young spruce tips from the trees growing so profusely near the Cave. These were woven into a soft springy mattress on the floor of the buckboard, by placing a row of tips where the head would be. The next row of tips was so placed that the stems ran under the soft resisting tops of the former row. So on, row after row was woven, until the floor of the vehicle was covered.

Mr. Gilroy was then helped up and partly carried over to the spruce-bed. He had been preparing for this ordeal, and managed to get up on the buckboard, but then he sank back in a half-faint. The scouts were at hand, however, with water and a paper fan.

The return trip took more than two hours, and when the trail was followed that led direct to the camp Hepsy jogged along without urging and without balking.

Joan and Julie sat on either side of their patient, with their feet dangling from the rear. Mrs. Vernon drove Hepsy very carefully, and the animal seemed to sense that she must step circumspectly. Not a boulder or rut did she cause the vehicle to encounter.

"For which we are duly grateful to tricky old Hepsy," declared Julie, as they neared the camp.

The scouts entertained Mr. Gilroy on this ride down the mountainside, so that he smiled and almost forgot he was a patient. In fact, the scouts forgot he was a stranger, so pleasant was this middle-aged man of forty-five, with his fine face and gray hair.

On the last hundred yards to the Camp, Hepsy pricked up her ears.

"She smells oats for supper, and a good bed," laughed Joan.

"I'm awfully glad we had Hepsy with us to bring back this couch for Mr. Gilroy," said Betty.

"Yes, and we're all glad there is such a nice hut ready to receive Mr. Gilroy. All we will have to do will be to carry the spruce tips from here to the cabin and make the bed," added Julie.

Then they told Mr. Gilroy all about the hut and the rugs and the wonderful furniture, that had taken more than two weeks to build. They were still laughing over the perfect work done on the roof by the young hunter, when Hepsy pulled the vehicle up on the plateau near the huts and stopped.

"Our camp is under those pines, right beside the tumbling waters," explained Ruth, pointing out the spot to the tired-looking eyes of the man.

"Well, I've enjoyed the ride, dear young ladies, but I am greatly relieved to be here," sighed Mr. Gilroy.

"Verny, can't you make Hepsy bring the buckboard over to the hut so Mr. Gilroy won't have to walk?" said Joan.

"I was just going to suggest it. I will lead her by the head, so she won't balk, but you girls remain seated and see that our guest does not roll off."

Ruth and Betty followed behind, and the Captain led the horse carefully over the grass until the camp was reached. All that was now necessary was for the man to wait until the spruce bed was removed from the wagon to the hut.

"You girls run and make room in the hut so we can lay the bed on the floor. Move the furniture against the walls," said the Captain.

Julie and Joan, being foremost, ran over to begin the work while Mrs. Vernon unhitched Hepsy to take her to the shed. Ruth and Betty were about to push the buckboard under the trees when a heart-rending cry came from the hut.

The Captain thought instantly of the tramps, and held her heart as she ran to help. Ruth and Betty left the wagon where it was and started after Mrs. Vernon. Even Mr. Gilroy, forgetting his weakness, slid from the buckboard and crept along in wake of the others.

"Oh, Verny! Our lovely, lovely hut! Oh, oh!" wailed Joan.

"Everything ruined! Who could have done it!" cried Julie, stamping her foot furiously.

When the others crowded about the door, they beheld a scene indeed! Mr. Gilroy sank upon the grapevine seat just outside the door, and panted forth:

"Those rascally vandals! They did it!"

"Oh, oh! everything gone or broken! But why did they do it? It won't help them any!" wailed Ruth.

The table and chairs had disappeared completely, and bits of grapevine and ends of boards scattered everywhere, testified to the cataclysm that struck the inside of the hut. The pictures were torn from the walls, and the flowers were tossed, with their holders, into the grass near the hut. The willow and grass mats were in strips, some of them showing where the demons had tried to set fire to them, but they were too green to burn readily.

Suddenly Mrs. Vernon gasped and said: "The annex, girls!"

She feared that the tramps might be hidden there. But the girls thought she meant the food-stock, so they ran pell-mell out of the new hut into the old one, Mrs. Vernon trying to hold them back.

The scouts found the food-stuff had been taken, too. This was too much for them! They fairly screamed with rage. Mrs. Vernon had all she could do to calm their hysterical anger.

"I'll kill them if I get sight of them!" screamed Ruth, with clenched hands, jumping up and down.

"Oh, if we only had that hunter's gun!" added Joan.

"And shoot each other—no thank you!" declared Julie, in so matter-of-fact a tone that it did more to stop the howling than anything else. Even Mr. Gilroy felt like smiling, in spite of the troubles these innocent scouts had had thrust upon them.

"Verny, don't you suppose those poor convicts have gone without food for so long that they had to take ours!" ventured Betty, kindly.

"Oh, oh! how *can* you pity them, Betty Lee!" cried Joan.

"Betty, if you don't swear to avenge this outrage, I'll spank you good and hard—so there!" threatened Julie, her eyes gleaming dangerously as she leaned towards poor Betty.

"I can't swear, Julie, but I am sorry for two terribly wicked men who don't know better than to hurt Mr. Gilroy and then ruin our lovely home. The food I s'pose they needed," explained Betty, with more spirit than she had ever expressed in her life.

The scouts were so amazed at Betty's self-defense that unconsciously they pardoned her charity towards the vagabonds.

"Besides, Verny, they couldn't have carried the boxes very far, you know, when it took Hepsy and all of *us* to carry them in," added Betty.

"And the furniture was awfully heavy, too," said Ruth.

"And too clumsy for them to handle well," Betty added, but she had best have left that unsaid, as Julie's wrath exploded.

"How can you call the furniture clumsy? They were just as handsome as anything I ever saw!"

But no one abetted this statement, so she modified her words. "Well, not *very* clumsy—only

heavy, maybe.”

Mr. Gilroy had been thinking very quickly during this conversation, and now he called to the Captain. They all ran over to him to see if he was all right.

“Oh, yes, I feel all right; but I was wondering if you can find it possible to have Hepsy drive on down to that village you mention?”

“To Freedom? What for?” asked Julie, surprised.

“Because I have a theory about this vandalism, and the sooner the police hear of it, the better for the safety of all,” replied Mr. Gilroy.

“Do you think you can stand the extra journey?” now asked Mrs. Vernon.

“I feel so strong and improved since I see what the rascals did here that I really will be better off if we go to the village than if I remained here chafing against the delay of catching them.”

Mrs. Vernon knew that an unsettled mental condition was worse than actual healthy fatigue, so she agreed to drive on down to Freedom. “But it will be too late for us to return to-night!”

“Oh, you must not think of it! In fact, you must not camp here again until the convicts are taken,” hastily replied Mr. Gilroy.

“I suppose we can find a good farm-house where we can board for a time,” suggested Mrs. Vernon.

“We’ll ask the grocery man who comes up for our orders,” added Julie.

By the time Hepsy was hitched again to the buckboard, the scouts had packed some things in suitcases to take with them. Mr. Gilroy refused to recline on the spruce bed again, so he sat up between the two girls.

Hepsy was inclined to balk when she found she was wanted to drive down to Freedom; but Mrs. Vernon was most emphatic with a persuasive hickory stick, so that Hepsy decided that “discretion was the better part of stubbornness.”

Once warmed up to the going, Hepsy kept on traveling at a great rate, so that the village of Freedom was seen in less than an hour’s time after leaving the camp. While Mrs. Vernon asked the keeper of the general store about hotel accommodations for all, Mr. Gilroy went to the telephone and called up the police station at Junction.

The scouts had not heard the first part of his conversation, as they were interested in hearing about rooms for the night, but when the store-keeper held up a hand for silence, they heard Mr. Gilroy say excitedly:

“Is that so! Well, I really believe I can get them for you. My name is Chester Gilroy, and my home is in New York State, but the young ladies are Girl Scouts. The Captain’s name is Mrs. Vernon, of Elmertown—the other side of this ridge, you know. And the scouts are Juliette and Elizabeth Lee, Ruth Bentley and Joan Allison.”

The scouts exchanged glances with Mrs. Vernon, but they had no clue to the conversation at the other end of the wire.

“What’s that?” asked Mr. Gilroy. “Oh—yes! They lost all their food-stuff, furniture, and other things from camp, so they are compelled to stay at Freedom until the rascals are caught.”

After saying “good-by” Mr. Gilroy hung up the receiver and came over to the group waiting to hear what was to be done.

The excitement and tiresome trip, followed by the sudden relaxation and satisfaction he experienced now, caused the man’s head to whirl, so that he dropped into a wooden chair for a time.

As he sat there recovering himself, he quickly planned. Then he looked up at the store-keeper.

“Mr. Grocer, I can show you an express order on a bank at Junction from my home bank in New York State. I want you to take it—not to cash, but just to prove to you that I mean business.”

The scouts looked perplexed, and the store-keeper said: “What sort of business do you want to transact?”

“I want you to act as a constable for me—or get a real one, if there is one, at once. Then I want you to collect as large a posse of men as you can, and begin and search that mountainside thoroughly. Begin at an outside circle and narrow down as you reach the camp-huts. We’ve got to get those escaped convicts and hand them over to the police before we can feel safe.” The canny grocer shook his head dubiously.

"If the men of Freedom round up and land two dangerous criminals, think of the story the newspapers will tell about it. Why, Freedom will be on the map in big headlines!" Mr. Gilroy was beguiling.

When Mr. Gilroy concluded, the store-keeper said: "How much do yuh kalkerlate on spendin', mister?"

"How many men can you get to go on this quest?" Mr. Gilroy countered.

"Wall—there air loungers hangin' about th' post office, in that store over thar, an' there be young fellers what'll want to chase the convicts fer fun, an' others what will do it fer the dollars. I kin raise 'bout forty er fifty, I rickon."

"Fine work! I'll pay them \$2 for every half-day they are out, with extra money for meals and night work. But the bosses will get double the money. I'll pay you a dollar for every man you sign up."

"Signed up—what fer?" asked the suspicious grocer.

"To contract to hunt these criminals. You see, we've got to do the thing business-like, and once they start out they might work a whole day or two, and be entitled to honest pay. But others who never moved may come in at pay-time and claim money for nothing. I've got to have the signatures of my men so that I know who I am paying, see?"

The old grocer felt satisfied with the explanation, and said: "I know the constabule pritty well, and he'll 'tend to the posse if I divide even. He knows the best men to send on a job like this. I'll be satisfied with half, if I get my picksher in a New York news-paper. I allers wanted to do that afore I die!"

Mrs. Vernon could not refrain from smiling at such a desire and ideal, but the scouts laughed outright. Mr. Gilroy said: "Youth laughs because it does not believe in death."

"When do ye want 'em to start?" queried the grocer eagerly.

"As soon as you can possibly get them off. Those convicts may escape from the mountainside in another twenty-four hours."

"I'll git Lem on the telephone now, and start him off. He's our constabule, ye know, and a lively one, tew."

Soon after this, Lemuel Saunders called to see Mr. Gilroy. "Ef yuh will step over to my office, I've got a line o' men waitin' to sign up."

The scouts wanted to watch the rest of this exciting plan, so Mrs. Vernon accompanied them to the constable's room behind the Post-Office General Store.

Mr. Gilroy hastily wrote upon a sheet of fool's-cap paper, then handed it to Mr. Saunders to be signed by the applicants. A long line filed in, and, signing, went out again. To each man one dollar was paid in advance for a meal, and advice given as to taking guns, clubs and other weapons with them.

The spirit of adventure, added to a good financial return, had attracted every one in the village, so that wives and mothers had packed up hearty lunches, and seen to it that the hunters were provided with firearms or cudgels for defense.

Scarcely a man or grown boy could be found in town who had not agreed to go out and hunt the felons for Mr. Gilroy. Before sundown that evening the village was left without a man in it. But here and there on the great mountainside twinkling lights could be seen, as the posse moved carefully upwards towards the camp.

The following morning found Mr. Gilroy feeling rested and eager to follow the villagers in their search for the outlaws. But the doctor who had sewed up the gash in his head advised the patient to rest all that day.

The girls made a great fuss over their sick guest—or at least they insisted upon calling him sick in spite of his protests to the contrary—and promised the physician that they would take every precaution to keep Mr. Gilroy quiet.

But they had no idea of how their promise was to be tested. They were soon to know, however.

On the first train that stopped at Freedom came the Chief of Police and a number of his officers from Junction, to capture the two escaped convicts. They went straight to Mr. Gilroy to learn all the facts from him, and having taken down his statement they spoke of securing horses, or a car, to take them up the mountainside.

"I hired all the horses and vehicles to be had in Freedom," explained Mr. Gilroy, "but I will gladly turn over the auto to you, providing you take me with you on this trip."

"Why! You can't leave this porch, Mr. Gilroy," exclaimed Julie.

"The doctor said we were to keep you very quiet," added Joan.

"But that was more than an hour ago; I am quite recovered now, my dears," laughed Mr. Gilroy.

"That makes no difference with us—we were ordered to see that you kept quiet," declared Ruth.

"I can keep just as quiet while riding in the car with the Chief as if I sat on this chair," argued Mr. Gilroy.

"Impossible! The excitement of the chase will give you a fever," said Julie, emphatically.

"Why, they are two poor convicts who are most likely in chains by this time. Our posse has captured them long before this, and all I have to do is to pay off my men," explained the stubborn patient.

"Well, you'll find they are not quite tame, or as easy to secure, as you fancy," ventured the Chief. "One of those rascals is a member of that gang that tried to bomb New York City recently. And the other one is a leader of a group of 'Reds' that the secret police rounded up lately. Both, being aliens, were kept in jail until they could be deported. But they managed to make their escape."

"How did you get the orders to capture them?" asked Mr. Gilroy.

"Why, the Police Chiefs all over the country were sent secret communications with descriptions and photographs of the fellows; just the other day, a young man who lives with his granny on this mountain, said he had seen two evil-looking tramps somewhat resembling the pictures. So we quickly planned to start a round-up when we heard from you. Then last night I got a message over the wire that two suspects were trailed as far as Junction or its vicinity, and we were to look carefully to see if any disguised strangers were hanging about our town."

"Well, well! This is certainly interesting, but now I am more determined than ever to go with you when you start. Are we waiting for anything?" said Mr. Gilroy.

"Nothing except the consent of your nurses," laughed the Chief.

The four girls looked obdurate, and Mr. Gilroy began to smile, then he turned to the Chief.

"You feel reasonably sure that I will be taking no risks in accompanying you back to the campsite?"

"Oh, certainly! Those two outlaws will never hang about a spot where so many people are liable to stop."

"Well, then, is there any objection to my four nurses going with me to see that I keep quiet to-day?"

"Oh, Mr. Gilroy! How splendid that will be!" cried Julie,

"Oh, yes! Do let us go, Chief!" exclaimed Joan, eagerly.

But at this moment Mrs. Vernon came out on the piazza. She overheard the last words and instantly shook her head in disapproval.

"But why not, Verny? The Chief says the ground is perfectly safe about our camp!" pleaded Julie.

"Why, not a mother in the land would ever allow her girls to join the Scout Organization if they thought I was a sample of a Captain—the very idea! to let you girls run right into such a hotbed of danger!" Mrs. Vernon glanced scornfully at Mr. Gilroy as if to dare him to say another word.

But he smiled in return and said: "Just step inside for a moment, Mrs. Vernon,—I have a word to speak to you."

Wonderingly, the Captain followed him indoors, and whatever he whispered must have had a wonderful power, for a radical change took place in Mrs. Vernon's opinions before she joined the girls again.

"Mr. Gilroy has convinced me that it is to our *advantage* to go back to the huts, but still I refuse to go unless the Chief can assure me that we will not be anywhere near those outlaws, or run any risk by returning to camp," said she.

"As far as that is concerned, I told Mr. Gilroy that the two rascals were too experienced to stay near the camp, but were most likely over the mountain by this time, making tracks for some out-of-the-way place where they could hide again for a few days."

"Maybe they will go back to Bluebeard's Cave, now that they got our food and other necessities," suggested Joan.

"I only hope they do," laughed the Chief. "For in that case we will smoke them out with sulphur."

After many misgivings as to the wisdom of this trip, and fearing the condemnation of all the

parents of the girls, as well as the disapproval of the Girl Scouts Organization should they ever hear of the escapade, Mrs. Vernon followed her charges to the car.

By the time the police and the scout party arrived at the campsite, the village posse were far past that spot and were beating the woods up on the mountainside. The Chief went carefully over every visible sign of the destruction in the camp, but shook his head smilingly after he had concluded his investigation.

"I don't believe the rascals stole the furniture, you know, Mr. Gilroy, as it would hamper them too much in their get-away and it would be of no earthly value to any one but these scouts. Neither do I believe that they carried off much food. Only enough to last them for the present. But they doubtless made a caché of it somewhere, believing that the scouts would be too timid ever to return to this camp, and then they could take up their quarters here. If they were left unmolested, they could move back the furniture and food later."

"That's what I thought, too," agreed Mr. Gilroy. "And by depriving the girls of food and camp-beds, they were sure of driving them away from here at once."

"Exactly. Now, I should propose to the scouts that they thrash the bushes near here to see if the villagers have not passed over the hidden stores or pieces of furniture. Of course they ought to have beaten the woods too well to miss anything, but one never can tell as, in their zeal, they are hunting *men*, not food," said the Chief.

"We will search if you are quite sure it is safe for us to do so. If the hunters who sought first missed the chairs or table, why couldn't they pass over a recumbent form of a man?" said Mrs. Vernon.

"Oh, I do not think the tables or chairs are left standing intact. And the food-stuffs will not be in boxes, either; but small installments of it probably will be found here and there under the leaves, in hollows, or hidden under roots of trees."

"Well, Chief, you leave two of your best men here with us for protection, and then go as far as you like over the mountain-top," agreed Mr. Gilroy.

So two big fighting men were detailed to remain behind with the camp-party, and the rest of the police started in different directions to hunt out the desperadoes.

After the police were out of sight, Joan said: "I wish we could find our food-stuff and furniture before a rain-storm comes."

Mrs. Vernon laughed. "If the grapevine could withstand the snows and rains of many years before we found it, now that it is turned into furniture for us it will surely not suffer from a slight storm."

"Well, I am not thinking of storms, but of hunger. Let's go to work and hunt, then we can stay on in camp—if we find the food," said Julie.

So in short order every one was beating the bushes and leaves as if in search of diamonds. The policemen had given the girls a "safety zone" in which to work, while they themselves wandered further afield.

Not long after they began seeking, Mrs. Vernon found a cooking-pot under a bush. Then Joan found some groceries. In all sorts of out-of-the-way holes and nooks, well-covered from curious eyes, different articles were found, but the greater part of the food-stuff was still to be regained, when the Captain told her girls to rest for a short time and eat some of the crackers Ruth had found.

A dish-pan of water was brought from the spring and the scouts sat down to eat and drink, while reviewing the thrilling adventures of the past two days.

"I still must say that I am dubious about the reception this present undertaking will receive, when it is known that I am so weak-minded as to give in to four coaxing girls and Mr. Gilroy, who has a wonderful plan for you girls to win a lot of money—but in a manner that is ninety-nine chances against one to its success."

"Oh, VERNY! Do tell us what it is!" exclaimed Julie.

"Is that what he whispered to you that made you change your mind?" asked Ruth.

"Yes, I was foolish enough to believe that it was possible, but now that I am here I see that it is not! I wish to goodness we were back safe at Freedom!"

CHAPTER THIRTEEN—THE CAPTURE

A pleased signal from the detective now caused the happy scouts to race down the trail as if a wild grizzly was after them. Joan and Julie reached him first, and there they saw the nice little caché of food-stock that every man in Freedom had passed by while thrashing the bushes for the

fugitives.

"Of all things! How did they get the time to do it so neatly?" asked Mrs. Vernon, seeing the logs and leaves and stones scattered over the boxes and tins of camp-food.

"They are experienced wanderers, I suppose, and most likely often had to hide their firearms and food from the secret police in Europe," returned the detective, beginning to drag out the packages and boxes.

"I can't understand how those men from Freedom, beating over this very ground, should pass by such a clue to the rascals. You see they can't live very long without food, so here we have them, while they may still be at large on the mountains," continued the policeman.

The girls were only too glad to carry their campstock back to the small hut and there left it in the custody of Mr. Gilroy, while they sought still further for blankets or bedding.

The Chief soon came down the trail and stopped at the camp long enough to hear about the recovery of the stolen food. Then, hearing that the detective was still out hunting for the bedding, he left the scouts to cook some supper.

As they worked to settle the camp again, Mr. Gilroy sat in the sun thinking. Suddenly he exclaimed, "I have it!"

"What?" cried four voices as they ran over to see if he had caught the vandals with his idea.

"The true story of this entire plot. Now, it is this way:

"Those blackguards saw your party drive Hepsy up the trail going to the Cave. Maybe they hid and heard you talk about the place. And they knew that if you explored the Caves you must find me and doubtless would endeavor to help me.

"They counted on that work taking you much longer than it actually did—for they know nothing about scouts and how they have to understand 'First Aid.' But they raced down the trail as fast as they could go, hoping to get away from this region before their new atrocity was published.

"Then they reached your camp and found the food-stuff and the other things. To prevent you from remaining at camp again it would be necessary to deprive you of food and furniture. So they carried everything off and hid it in the bushes where you wouldn't find it so easily. The food they covered, for that they wanted for themselves, in case they had to hide for a long time.

"They figured that it would take you some time to carry me down the hillside, and much longer to go on to Freedom. By that time they could be miles away over the mountain-top.

"But you upset most of their calculations by unexpectedly appearing on the scene with me, and then going right on down the trail. If we had passed a night here, or even delayed a few hours until darkness fell, perhaps we would never again have seen the day."

"Oh! You make me shiver, Mr. Gilroy," exclaimed Ruth.

"Don't shiver over a theory, Ruth! That's all it is, for Mr. Gilroy said so before he told his story," laughed Julie.

"Julie, you're right! Mr. Gilroy ought to have more sense than to theorize in such a fear-inspiring way," added Joan, trying to be jocular but feeling creepy.

"I beg your pardon, scouts—I am at fault, I see," said Mr. Gilroy, politely.

"I say, don't let's waste time theorizing and scolding each other, but do let us see that a nice supper is ready for the police when they come up the hill," said Betty.

"As usual, our Welfare Member is right," laughed Mrs. Vernon, patting Betty on the head.

But the two detectives failed to come back, and Mr. Gilroy began worrying about them. He thought it foolish for two men to go away like that, while the rascals were still at large.

Then Mrs. Vernon expressed an opinion. "Mr. Gilroy, I will make a motion that you be made to go to bed in the old hut. The spruce tips are made up in there, and you have had a wearing day. We should feel guilty if we had to telegraph a death notice to your friends in New York State."

"I second the motion!" exclaimed Julie.

"Motion made and seconded that our friend Mr. Gilroy be made to go to bed at once—without his supper," laughed Joan.

"Don't take a vote, scouts—I promise to be good!" cried Mr. Gilroy, holding up a hand in protest of the unanimous vote about to follow.

"Then say 'nighty-night' and go at once," added the Captain.

"I suppose I must even though the sun has not yet set, but what is one poor man to do with five domineering scouts about him?" sighed he, in mock obedience.

Having given their guest some supper and then shown him to his room and seen that the candle was safely stuck in an empty bottle, the scouts said good-night and returned to the fire, where the Captain still sat thinking.

"Girls, I want you all to sit in the new hut with me, if you don't mind," whispered Mrs. Vernon.

"Why—are you frightened, Verny?" asked Julie, while the others looked apprehensively about.

"I feel that it is all so open out here, and the two detectives never came back. In the hut we will have log walls, at least."

"Come on—hurry up, girls," cried Ruth, running over towards the door.

"If only we had some revolvers," said Julie.

"If only I had had more sense than to give in to your coaxing! I might have known this was no place for us," snapped Mrs. Vernon, angry with herself.

When the campers were seated upon the boards they had placed across the damaged seats, Betty asked timidly:

"Verny, are we going to bed to-night?"

"You scouts will, but I will sit up all night."

"Then we shall too, Verny. Not that we want to disobey you, but you must not ask us to do anything you would not do yourself," said Julie.

"But you will grow drowsy later on, girls, and I want you to have as much rest as possible," explained Mrs. Vernon.

"I'm sleepy now, Verny; if I only had a pillow I could be off in dreamland in a moment," confessed Betty.

"Here—lean your head against my shoulder, Betsy," said Julie, placing an arm about her sister.

But the dreams suddenly disappeared when a stealthy creeping of footsteps seemed to come from the doorway of the old hut. Every one gazed spell-bound at the open door, and Mrs. Vernon could just summon courage enough to say quite loudly:

"Is that you, Chief? Mr. Gilroy is in the small hut!"

She knew the sound of her voice would break the spell of fear that held them all. Then Mr. Gilroy's voice came back:

"S-sh! It is me—myself!"

"What's the matter?" anxiously whispered five voices.

The very actions of Mr. Gilroy now filled the scouts with fear, for he leaned over and in such a low whisper as to be hardly distinguishable, said: "Some one's behind the wall of this hut."

It was well that at this moment a muffled curse sounded from the wall at the back of the hut, where it was built up to meet the rocky ledge of the mountainside. The scouts instantly felt their courage revive when they knew where to look for the danger.

A hoarse whisper was now plainly heard through the chinks of the wall where the clay had been plastered in.

"Agh! now you must mek a noise aut get us pinched in agin!" The voice was guttural and spoke with a strong foreign accent.

"But dis foot is crusht allreaty. I can't stant it anudder minute. I'm better off in jail dan widdout a foot!"

Mr. Gilroy now placed his mouth close to Julie's ear and whispered: "You and Joan take the flashlight and creep out of here as noiselessly as possible. Run for your lives down the trail and give the signal the police determined upon. Here is a whistle. Blow it three times with but a moment's interval between—then, if it is not answered, blow again. Keep this up until you get an answer."

"Supposing the two policemen are not down that trail?" asked Julie, as softly as could be.

"They will be—because now we know they are not killed. We have the two fugitives in behind that wall, and I want to keep them there until the police get here," said Mr. Gilroy.

Julie and Joan then crept away, and Mrs. Vernon heard Mr. Gilroy's voice close at her ear explaining where they went.

"You see, the convicts cannot get out of there without our seeing them. In that case I will use my automatic revolver," added Mr. Gilroy.

"Oh! I didn't know you had one," sighed the Captain in great relief.

"Yes, and I was about to say that you and the two girls had better creep out and get under the heap of spruce tips that is piled in the old hut, while I sit here and guard the wall," Mr. Gilroy returned.

Ruth and Betty refused to leave him, however, so the four sat and waited in the darkness.

After a long interval of absolute silence, a shrill whistle was heard down the trail. Then a voice behind the wall said: "D'ye t'ink enny one's got a clue?"

"Try to see thu dat crack in de wall—see ef yuh kin see any light in dat room?"

"Not a flicker—black as pitch out dere."

"Dat shows dey's gone, 'cause no woman'll sit in de dark widda coupla o' convicks loose in de woods," harshly laughed one.

"I wisht you'se coul' help lift me foot outen dis hole what's eatin' me heart out," groaned the man who evidently had injured his foot.

"S-she! Dere goes dat whistle agin. Mebbe dem cops is comin' back dis way."

"Ef dey come back, it's ours fer keepin' mum agin. We cain't git away, yuh know, wid my foot lame. An' dey'll never tink of lookin' behin' dis wall fer us ef we kin shet up an' stan' it."

"No, but we woulde'n' have t'ought of it ourself ef it hadn't ben fer dat crookit chimbly. It war so easy to climb dat an' slide down here behin' de wall," chuckled the other one.

Mr. Gilroy gently touched the scouts to keep silence, and all four listened with nerves a-tension.

"Wisht we onny hed a gun—den we coul' put up a fight ef any one gits on to dis hidin' place," said one of the voices, after a silence that had followed another shrill whistle in the woods.

"Dem cops is havin' fun widda whistle. But dey kin whistle fer all we care." A chuckle expressed the satisfaction the man felt.

Then an answering signal whistled close to the hut, and one of the prisoners said to his pal: "Gee! Dey's closer'n I t'ought. Keep mum, now, en don't groan enny when dey's in hearin'."

Another whistle from the trail echoed to the hut, and Mr. Gilroy got up and ran out. He met two of the returning policemen just outside, and drew them away so that he could tell them of the discovery without being overheard by the convicts; for he had learned how the slightest sound echoed in the forest silences.

The men quickly planned how they could catch the convicts, but how should they force them out from behind the wall of the hut?

"We'll have to chop down the log wall," said one.

"It will take all night and before we get it down our men may have crept out and escaped," said the other.

"We'll have to wait for the Chief and his companion to join us, so that two of us can sit on the roof and guard the hole where these men crept through to get in back there," said Mr. Gilroy.

A dancing flashlight seen through the forest trees along the lower trail now told the three anxious men that the girls had found the Chief and his men and were returning.

Soon the Chief was in an earnest conference with his men and Mr. Gilroy, while the two scouts crept in to whisper a plan to the Captain.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN—THE REWARD FOR COURAGE

While the Chief drew his men away from the hut so they might talk and plan without danger of being heard by the convicts, Julie and Joan whispered their plan to the admiring Captain.

"We'll start a blazing fire in the chimney, because everything is laid ready for one, and soon the smoke will choke up the hut and fill the empty place back of the wall, just as it always did when we had a fire for fun," said Julie.

"Wasn't it lucky that we built the chimney as we did! If it was straight and correct, it wouldn't smoke, and then that hollow place behind the wall would never fill with smoke," whispered Betty, excitedly.

"S-sh! For goodness sake don't whisper so loud—they'll hear us and know what we are planning to do!" warned Joan, placing her hand over Betty's mouth.

"But we won't hint to those rascals that we are only smoking them out—we will pretend we are going to burn down the hut," now announced Julie, highly pleased with her plan.

"How?" asked Betty.

"This way—now listen and keep your wits about you—all of you, and reply wisely," whispered Julie, going over to the fireplace to speak so the men behind the wall could plainly hear her.

"Scouts, the Chief and his men are outside loading their guns to open a fight on these two men hidden behind this wall, but that means there will be an awful fight. Now, I have a much better plan; I am going to pour gasoline all over this wall and then light it. It won't take long to burn these logs down; but it will give these convicts a chance to give themselves up."

Julie paused a moment, then called out loudly:

"Say, you two fugitives! Come out from there quietly and we won't drive you forth."

But not a sound was heard from behind the wall. After a few moments, Julie added: "All right! We'll have to burn down the hut. I'm sorry, but we've got to get you, or give up camping here."

The scouts were intensely interested in this farce, but Julie meant business. She turned to the Captain and said: "Make the scouts leave the hut before I pour this gasoline all over the log wall. If they remain here with lighted candles, the fumes of the gasoline will cause an explosion."

Julie grinned at the girls and placed a finger on her lips as a signal for absolute silence; then she continued:

"That's right, Captain; now you take that can of gasoline that stands by the door, and pour it all over those logs while I soak these—then run outside. I will wait, and the moment you are out I will throw a lighted taper at the wall. Instantly the flames will eat up the bark and begin to burn through. By that time those two men will be glad to crawl out and give themselves up."

Julie pointed at a pail of water that stood by the door, so the Captain picked it up. Then the scout began arranging the paper and kindlings in the fireplace. These she lit with a match, and when she found they were beginning to burn, she called out:

"Now! Let us throw the gasoline all over the wall! Ready!"

As Julie gave the word, Mrs. Vernon tossed the water over as much wall surface as possible, then ran from the hut. The smoke now began to pour from the fireplace and filled the room. The scouts had to remain outside to keep from choking. Julie was the last to leave, but she smiled with satisfaction when she saw the dense smoke quickly filling the hut. Then she closed the door.

"Have you enough wood on the fire to last this trick out?" asked Mrs. Vernon, anxiously.

"Piles of it! That's why it is smoking so furiously," replied Julie.

"Only a tiny spiral of smoke can be seen coming from the top of the chimney, so most of it must be escaping from the fireplace into the room," announced Joan.

Suddenly the scouts heard some one back of the hut wall cough. Then another louder cough. Soon two were coughing and strangling desperately, and the Captain patted Julie on the back approvingly.

Then a guttural voice tried to be heard: "Vee gif up—onny safe us from dis fire!"

Julie held Betty, who was going to shout back that they would be saved. No one replied to the cry, and the two voices shrieked and screamed, "Help! Help—dis house iss on fire—vee burn to dedt!"

Julie was about to answer, when the Chief and Mr. Gilroy ran up. The latter caught Mrs. Vernon's look, but the former cried excitedly: "How did the hut catch fire?"

He seemed terribly upset about it and wanted to know if the convicts had set fire to the logs. Mrs. Vernon began to explain, while Julie scrambled up on the roof of Hepsy's shed and carefully made her way along the framework until she reached the chimney, where she held fast and called down to the men behind the wall.

"Come out and give yourselves up, or roast where you are."

When the Chief heard the scout's command, he smiled and ordered his men up on the roof to help. Then he followed Julie, and stood beside her with cocked revolver aiming at the rocky wall.

The other policemen climbed up, too, and the Chief said to Julie:

"You'd better get down and join your friends now. We can handle the rascals better if you are out of the way."

"But you won't have to use revolvers, 'cause they are unarmed," said Julie, anxiously.

"How do you know that?"

"We heard them whispering. Besides, one man has a crushed foot, and we scouts don't believe in hurting *anything* that is helpless—even a convict who has made lots of trouble for us."

"All right, little girl; I'll put my gun away, but we ought to have *one* to show, so the rascals won't try to overpower us."

"I guess they are so full of smoke and fear that they won't be able to fight. Cowards always give up easy, you know," said Julie, creeping down from the roof of the hut, back to Hepsy's shed.

As Julie had said, the two convicts crawled up from behind the wall, looking the sorriest mortals ever one saw. Their eyes were red and watery from the smoke so that they could hardly see, and they coughed every other second. One limped most painfully, and had to be helped by his pal. Then, just as they stood up on the roof to hold up their hands in defeat, the other one broke through the tar paper roof and stuck fast between the rafters.

"Oh, there goes our roof!" cried Betty plaintively.

"Never mind, Betty dear! You can hire men to put on fifty roofs now, with the reward you scouts will get," exclaimed Mr. Gilroy.

"Reward! What reward?" asked five amazed voices.

Mr. Gilroy laughed delightedly. "The Chief told me that one reason his men and all the men in Freedom were so eager to hunt these convicts, was the hope of the cash reward offered. The State has offered \$500 a head for the capture, dead or alive, of these outlaws and aliens. You scouts have captured the men!"

"W-h-y! I can't believe it! How did we do it?" exclaimed Betty.

"Oh—Julie caught them, didn't she?" cried Joan.

"Not alone, Jo. You all helped, and the Captain poured the gasoline, you know, and took the risk of being blown to bits!" laughed Julie, excitedly, as she twisted her fingers nervously.

"When the Chief told me of the rewards, I said: 'Then the girls ought to have it, no matter who *catches* the convicts, for they apprehended them and turned in the news of their whereabouts.'"

"Oh, but we didn't, Mr. Gilroy. You did that yourself," Ruth corrected the gentleman.

"I only took the blows from the prisoners—you did the rest. But I never dreamed that you would capture them, too. I might have known that girl scouts are capable of doing anything."

The moment handcuffs were on the convicts, they were placed in custody of the officer. Then the Chief blew his signal so the hunters on the mountainside would know the men were taken.

He congratulated Julie and her friends on having won the much coveted reward, and then said to Mrs. Vernon: "I suppose you will hear from the Government offices in a few days. Meantime, I will need the names and addresses of the members of Dandelion Camp, to enter the report on my records."

The scattered men who had been hunting through the forests now straggled into camp, all eager to hear by whom and how the convicts had been caught. When they learned that a few girls did the work, they looked disgusted.

But one of the officers laughed heartily as he said: "Why didn't we think of that hiding-place!"

"Wall, I kin say I'm glad th' gals got it! They lost all the camp furniture and grub, an' has to go home now!" added Lem Saunders, the constable.

"Oh, we forgot to tell you! The food and some furniture was found hidden down the trail in the bushes," exclaimed Joan.

"But ye haint be agoin' to stay out here any more, air yeh?" asked Lemuel, wondering at such a risk.

"Of course! We are safer now than we were before we went to Bluebeard's Cave, you know," laughed Julie.

"Now we know where those convicts will be, but for two weeks past they were at large and we never knew it. *That* was when there was cause to fear for us—being in a lonesome camp," added

Mrs. Vernon.

"Yeh," agreed Lemuel. "But what one don't know never hurts one, ye know!"

"That reminds me!" exclaimed the Captain, holding up a hand for attention. "Do any of you men know a young hunter and trapper from up the mountain?"

"D'ye mean Ole Granny Dunstan's boy?" asked Lemuel.

"I only know he lives up the mountain somewhere, and makes his living through selling pelts. I don't even know his name," said Mrs. Vernon.

"That's him! Ole Granny Dunstan's son," returned Lemuel.

"Is he with you to-night?" continued the Captain.

"Nah! He's gone to Washerton most ten days ago. They writ him a note sayin' they was holdin' a French paper fer him," explained a young man who was standing on the outer line of the posse.

"He fit so hard in France, yeh know, that th' Frenchys done sent him a fine paper tellin' folks about him. I've hear'n said folks over thar nicknamed him an 'ace,'" said another man.

"Then he must have been an aviator!" exclaimed Mrs. Vernon.

"Yeh! he can fly in one of them machines—but we don't keep any in Freedom, so we never seed him ride one," said Lemuel.

"Well, gentlemen, I thank you for this information. But should you see him when he returns from Washington, tell him we want him to stop in and see us—at Dandelion Camp."

The Chief had ordered his men to accompany the convicts to the village, so Mr. Gilroy offered the car to them. He was going to stay at camp with the scouts, he said.

"But we left our suitcases at the hotel, and Hepsy is at the stable in Freedom!" declared the Captain.

"We'll all have to go back, then, and come up in the morning," added Julie.

So the convicts were tied to horses and two of the officers whose mounts had been chosen for this need sat in the car with the scouts. But they didn't mind being crowded when the two policemen began telling stories of the narrow escapes they had had in the past while catching criminals.

As the cavalcade entered Freedom, Mrs. Vernon said: "After all those blood-curdling stories, I doubt if my scouts will sleep."

It was past midnight when the hunting party returned to Freedom, and only goodness knows what time it was when all the hunters had finished telling the citizens how the convicts were captured by a few girl scouts.

Long after the scouts had retired Mrs. Vernon heard them whispering to each other. Finally she called out:

"Why don't you girls go to sleep?"

"We can't, Verny; we're thinking of that reward," said Joan.

"And we've spent most of it already!" laughed Julie.

"You'll have plenty of time to plan about it, girls, for the Government—like most large bodies—moves very slowly. It may be next summer before you get the check," said the Captain.

"Never mind; it will be ready for the Adirondacks, then."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN—A FURNITURE SHOWER

News of the raid on Dandelion Camp traveled swiftly, so that the head of police in Elmertown heard of the posse and the reward offered to capture the convicts.

He was going down the street after hearing the story and, meeting Mr. Allison, stopped him.

"I suppose the scouts came home this afternoon," he said.

"The scouts! Why, no—why should they?" asked Mr. Allison.

"Is it possible that you have not heard?"

"Heard—heard what? Has anything terrible happened?" cried the frightened father.

Now, the policeman knew that no one in Elmertown had heard the story, but he liked to create an effect, so he explained carefully, "Why, two convicts got away from State's prison and were hiding on that mountain where your girls are camping."

"Good heavens! What happened?"

"Nothing more than their camp was broken up. All the food-stuff and furniture are gone. The men stole everything and what they could not carry away, they broke to bits."

"Why—how awful! Where were the scouts when this happened?" asked Mr. Allison, trembling with apprehension.

"Oh, it seems they went to Bluebeard's Cave to celebrate the Fourth, and there they found an unconscious man who had been beaten almost to death by the rascals who, after robbing him, took him way back in the Cave and left him there. But the scouts discovered him, and saved his life."

"Well, now! that is something like it," said the father proudly.

"But it didn't spare their camp. When they got back they found everything gone, so they kept right on to Freedom and are staying at Mrs. Munson's hotel."

"Why there—they should have come home," said Mr. Allison.

"They couldn't, I s'pose. You see, they would have to be on hand to swear to warrants and everything. We police do things up according to law, you know."

"Maybe they'll be home to-day," ventured Mr. Allison.

"Like as not. Well, so long!"

Mr. Allison thanked the officer and hurried to his office. He rang up the Bentley's house and found Ruth's father at home.

"Say, Bentley, I just met the cop on our beat and he tells me the scouts had an awful time! Two escaped prisoners were hiding on the mountains, and smashed up the camp. Every bit of food and all the furniture broken to bits. The girls saved a man that the outlaws had beaten to a jelly."

"Good heavens! Were any of the scouts hurt in the fight?"

"No, but I guess they were pretty well frightened,—eh?"

"I should say so! What are we going to do about it—go out and bring them home?" said Mr. Bentley.

"Oh, the cop told me they were now at a hotel in Freedom, as they had to be on hand to testify to certain things. I suppose they will be home to-morrow."

"Let me hear from you if you hear anything new, will you?" asked Mr. Bentley.

"Yes, and you do the same," replied Mr. Allison.

Hardly had both men hung up the receivers before the telephone bell at the Lee house tinkled. May answered the call. Two men were trying to get her. One said to the other: "Get off of this wire—it's busy."

Then the other replied: "I called the number first—I heard you come in—Now get off, I have to tell this party a very important story."

"Ho! that sounds like Allison's voice—is it you?"

"Yes,—is this Bentley?" asked the other voice.

"Ha, ha, ha! I was just going to tell the Lees about the robbers and the camp. But you can tell them, if you like."

"All right—hang up and I'll tell them," said Mr. Bentley.

Now, May had heard this conversation and when the men spoke of robbers and camp she trembled with fear. By the time Mr. Bentley had told his story, she was so weak that she had to sit down. Finally she managed to get in a word, so she asked:

"But where are the girls? Did anything happen to them?"

"Oh, they are all right! They're stopping at the Freedom Hotel until the police can get all their testimony."

"Thank goodness. The furniture can quickly be replaced, but the girls' lives cannot. Now we will have to plan to refurnish their huts," said May.

"Refurnish—why! Won't you insist upon their coming home now?" asked Mr. Bentley.

"Why should they come home now, just after they cleared the pests out of their vicinity? Of course not!"

"Well, I suppose you are right in one way. But Allison and I expected they would come home tomorrow."

"Poor girls! They were having such a wonderful time in camp, too! I guess I will get Mrs. Vernon's sister to take me to Freedom in the morning to see if there is anything we can do."

"May, I think that is a fine idea. And when you see them give them our love and say that we will do anything they say. If they plan to go on with the camp—all right and well. We will stock them up again."

"All right, Mr. Bentley, I'll call you up when I get back and tell you all they say. Meantime, let Mr. Allison know that I intend running out to see them, will you?"

"Yes, I'll call him up at once, May. Good-by."

So it happened that Mrs. Vernon's sister-in-law and May went to Freedom in the automobile the day following the Fourth, but found the town almost deserted. Mrs. Munson told them how the scouts led the way up the mountainside when the police arrived, and they weren't expected back that day.

After sitting around and waiting until afternoon, May and Mrs. Vernon's sister decided to go back. But they left notes with Mrs. Munson for the scouts, as soon as they should return.

That evening May telephoned the Bentleys. After telling the little she knew about the case, she asked them to come over and discuss a plan she had thought of. Then the Allison's were asked to run over and meet the others in planning a relief-party for the scouts.

That evening the whole plan was approved and worked out. May said that the sister-in-law had promised to send the factory truck to the house on Saturday at noon, so they need not worry about transporting the donations to the camp. As that was the only hitch in the entire plan, once it was removed every one was delighted.

That Saturday morning the local papers were full of the story of how a few girl scouts found and captured two desperate outlaws. The story was so highly embellished that several of the conservative parents in the town thought it was dreadful to allow girls to go off in the woods without a dog or a big brother. What the big brother would have done that the scouts didn't accomplish is hard to say.

But most of the girls who had been so anxious to be scouts and spend the summer in camp, now gnashed their teeth in envy. Here were four girls who had to dig dandelions to earn the money to go away on, now having the most wonderful time! They had their names in the paper, and every one said what brave scouts they were! And, most of all, they were going to have ONE THOUSAND DOLLARS from the Government as a reward. "Oh, why did we have to sit at home all summer while these scouts were getting all the fun?" they wailed.

The three families of the Dandelion Camp Scouts felt very proud of their girls when they read the account in the papers, and they felt all the more eager to go to camp with the donations of furniture, and show the girls how much they appreciated their courage and cleverness in capturing the rascals.

At one o'clock on Saturday the driver pulled his truck up in front of the Lee homestead. Just inside the picket fence stood two cane-seated chairs. The fact that hind-legs were missing was not apparent to a casual observer, but that is why they had been in the loft for several years.

The moment the truck was seen to stop, May and her father ran from the house, carrying paper bundles piled high in their arms. Eliza followed with a brass banquet lamp minus a globe. Handing this to the driver, she hurried back for odds and ends of dishes and pans. May made a second trip for some pictures in broken frames—also a washtub and old tools that had been found in the loft.

The second stop was made at the Bentley's house. Their donation consisted of a table with three legs; a small wash-stand bureau with bottomless drawers; an old-fashioned towel-rack and a rocker with a very lame back; in fact, the back might be called crippled and helpless. But then they added a goodly stock of groceries.

At the Allison's house the driver took on a kitchen table with one drop-leaf gone and the other hanging by one hinge. A small family album-stand from the parlor of long ago. An old hair-cloth sofa with broken springs and the filling most gone; a straw mattress and a spiral spring that had not been used for years, so the Allison's thought it might as well go to the camp as to be left in the

attic. Foodstuff was the last but not least of this donation.

When the truck reached the Vernons' house, where the sister-in-law was waiting, many cumbersome and heavy items were added to the collection. By this time the jitney party had been picked up one after another, and now all arrived at the Vernons' house for the last passenger.

The truck and jitney then started for Dandelion Camp, the happy givers picturing how delighted the scouts would be to receive the shower of furniture.

At Freedom the surprise party found their girls had gone back to camp, and the injured man with them. Lemuel Saunders was such a personage in the public eye since the man-hunt on the mountain that he could be seen strutting up and down Main Street, telling people all about the Great Deed. Thus it was that the families from Elmertown heard the tale first-hand—with all its trimmings.

As the truck started up the trail for the camp Mr. Bentley turned to Mr. Lee and Mr. Allison and said: "According to Lemuel, he did the whole trick. If our girls played so little a part in the capture, why should they have had the reward?"

But further conversation was rendered impossible by the deep ruts worn in the trail by the many wagons that had recently traveled the road. People from Freedom and other villages nearby wanted to see the girl scouts who had shown so much sense as to trap two convicts.

Finally the truck halted, and the jitney traveled on a few hundred feet in advance before it, too, had to stop. Each member of the party then took a piece of furniture and, carrying the load, started for camp.

The scouts were busy trying to put their camp in order again, when Mrs. Vernon called out, "Some one's coming up the trail."

Ruth ran out to see who it could be, and then exclaimed: "Why, it's Daddy! He's carrying an old table."

A few yards behind Mr. Bentley came Mr. Allison with the legless chairs. And then followed the chauffeur, staggering under a canopy of the husk-mattress. A line of visitors came behind him, each burdened with some piece of old furniture.

The scouts stood speechless at the top of the slope, but gradually the truth about this "moving brigade" dawned upon Mrs. Vernon. She turned instantly to the girls, and said: "Be very grateful, for your people have gone to a great deal of trouble to refurnish your camp."

Mr. Bentley was only too thankful to drop his burden when he reached the scouts; Ruth caught hold of his hand, laughing merrily as she said: "Oh, can you ever stand up straight again, Daddy?"

"I doubt it," returned he, holding the small of his back.

Then the others came up and deposited their donations beside the kitchen-table. As each one sighed and wiped streaming faces, the scouts declared they were the finest families on earth.

"You certainly are very self-sacrificing to bring all this furniture to camp," added Mrs. Vernon.

"We would have been cold-blooded folks if we hadn't, after hearing how all the rustic furniture was destroyed," said May.

"But we got it all back!" exclaimed Julie, joyously.

"Got it back! I thought those rascals smashed it up," said Mr. Allison.

"No—they just hid it behind bushes and trees; only the grass mats and little ornaments were broken up," explained Joan.

"Dear me! Do you mean to say that we brought this load of odds and ends all this way for nothing?" cried Mrs. Bentley.

"Of course not! Now we can entertain company over-night, you see. With that mattress and spring we can have two people," declared Julie, looking at her companions for credit of this idea.

"That's so! And we can furnish a regular bedroom with the chairs and table—and banquet lamp," added Joan.

"But we will have to pin a notice on those chairs so no one will use them," ventured Betty, doubtfully, looking at the legless objects.

Every one laughed, and Ruth added: "We'll build new legs on to them."

"You'll have to build another hut to hold the furniture," now said Mr. Gilroy.

This attracted all attention to the stranger, and Mrs. Vernon suddenly flushed crimson, and said:

"Oh! What a poor scout hostess I make. I quite forgot to introduce our guest, Mr. Gilroy." Then the usual ceremony took place, midst the laughter of every one, for Mrs. Vernon was considered to be very particular about social customs.

"Now that all this furniture is here, what shall we do with it?" asked Joan.

"It won't stand dew and weather like our rustic pieces, you know," added Ruth.

"If you scouts will help move the 'shower,' we might pile it back of Hepsy's shed and cover it with a canvas until you have built a hotel," laughed May.

So, with merriment and strenuous labor, the furniture was neatly stacked up beside the shed until it could be better arranged.

Then every one sat down to listen to the story of the capture of the convicts. As all the scouts wished to tell the tale at the same time so that no one understood, the visitors quickly voted that Mrs. Vernon be the speaker. This was acceptable to the girls, and the Captain began.

She was a good story-teller, and the scenes were graphically described until she reached the part where the Chief stood on the roof of the hut, commanding the fugitives to come out. To make the recital more impressive, the Captain threw out her arm, which was supposed to hold the revolver, when quite unexpectedly the chair she sat in collapsed, and she found herself on the grass.

For a second every one held his or her breath, then laughed heartily at Mrs. Vernon's surprised expression. Julie jumped up from the stump where she had been sitting and ran over to explain.

"Oh, I am so sorry, Verny! I forgot to tell you that the fore leg of this rustic seat was loose. I tied it on with string to make it look right, but I didn't think any one would use it."

"Good gracious, Jule! Did you think our camp wanted ornamental furniture?" demanded Joan, thinking thereby to give a strong hint to the friends who showered useless articles upon them that day.

This statement caused rather a silence in the visitors, until May said: "I hope you won't find much trouble in repairing the pieces *we* brought for you."

"Oh, we will make some sort of use of them," replied Julie, frankly, as sisters will. "We can pull the old stuffing out of that sofa, you know, and use it for bedding for Hepsy, when we run short of dried leaves or grass."

Every eye turned to look at the old sofa, and Mr. Gilroy had great difficulty in keeping his face straight. Finally the erstwhile owner of the sofa said: "Horses don't like hair for bedding."

Julie retorted: "Because it makes them dream of what all the tails and manes come to when they die!"

This caused a laugh, and Joan added: "Anyway, a horse in camp—'specially a scout horse—can't be choosers about bedding. They are glad to get what is to be had."

Mr. Lee laughingly replied to this: "I'm glad I'm not a scout horse."

Mrs. Vernon now turned to her sister-in-law and said: "I'm curious to hear what donations you found to bring out?"

"Oh, Pete told me there was a loft full of furniture over the old stables. So I rummaged and found all I could manage."

"That reminds me, Mrs. Ormsby! We have not added your gifts to these because we could not carry them up the slope. They were too heavy," explained Mr. Lee.

"My goodness me! More stuff?" exclaimed Ruth.

"Yes, but I think you will be pleased with my donations," said Mrs. Ormsby, apologetically. "I heard how you had to manage with this poor camp-fire, so I brought a kitchen stove that was stored in the loft. I also—" but the lady got no further at that time.

The scouts laughed so that some of them doubled over and rocked back and forth. Even Mrs. Vernon had to laugh at her relative's pity.

"Oh, oh! This is the funniest thing I ever heard!" said she. "Why, my dear Kate, don't you know that half the sport of camping is trying to do without modern equipment? Every camper tries to use wood-material only for home, furniture and outfit. What would the founders of the girls' scouts say if they heard we cooked our camp meals on a kitchen range in the woods!"

"Do you really mean that you do not want it?" asked Mrs. Ormsby.

"Of course not! We have a fine fireplace and oven, so the stove and stove-pipe may as well go back on the truck."

"Maybe you will scorn the walnut bed I brought as a great surprise? I heard there was a spring and mattress, so I had the bed brought from the loft and moved here on the truck with the other things. But it is so massive and heavy, no one could carry the head and foot boards up the hill. We thought Hepsy could do that," explained Mrs. Ormsby, dubiously to be sure, after the reception her other gift had received.

Mrs. Vernon now laughed as heartily as the scouts had done just before this. "Oh! That awful bedstead that always took an acre lot to hold it! Where could we put it up? Our huts will never hold one section of it."

"I have a brilliant idea, Mrs. Vernon," now said Mr. Gilroy. "Suppose we put up the bed down there in some secluded nook and then with the spring and mattress I can have a wonderful suite of my own for a few nights."

"There! I knew that bed would prove useful!" declared Mrs. Ormsby, sending a look of thanks to Mr. Gilroy.

"Maybe Mr. Gilroy would like the stove, too, to dry out the dampness from the ground where he camps," suggested Julie.

Every one laughed excepting Betty; she took the idea as literal, and said: "That might be a good plan for us—to use it in front of the fireplace. You see, we can't burn wood there 'cause it smokes so, but the stove-pipe can be run right up the flues so all the smoke from the stove will manage to get up where it ought to go."

Another shout of laughter greeted this original proposition, and Mrs. Vernon finally gasped: "If the stove goes in the hut, we will have to stay out!"

"Then I suppose the stove has to go back?" Mrs. Ormsby wanted to know.

"We can sell it in Freedom, I have no doubt, and put the proceeds in the bank for the Adirondack Camp," replied Mrs. Vernon.

"Oh, say, Verny! That's what we can do with all this furniture, can't we?" cried Julie, eagerly.

But her vivacious suggestion seemed to meet with another strange silence. Finally Mrs. Vernon broke the embarrassment by saying: "We ought to get dinner, as it is long past the hour."

And Mr. Lee said: "I suppose the food-stock we brought to replenish the larder will be scorned."

"Oh, no indeed, Daddy! We *need* things to eat!" said Betty.

As they all sat in a circle on the grass, eating and laughing, Eliza made a bold suggestion.

"Now, I sez we folks seem to be foolish over some things. One of 'em is, we hoard ole furniture and odds and ends that even a Dandelion laughs at! We pays rent fer jes' sech useless trash that we never wants to use agin. Every house-cleanin' time we moves and cleans the rubbish what collects moths, an' finally, affer years of savin', we throws it out."

She paused to see what effect this statement had on her audience, and seeing it was politely received, she took another huge bite from the sandwich she held, and, while chewing vigorously, concluded her speech.

"Now, this is what I sez: 'Let's go home and clear out all the rubbish that clutters our attics, an' give it to the poor, or sell it to a rummitch sale such as I hears tell of in Elmertown.'"

"I second that valuable motion!" laughed Mr. Lee.

And the men voted unanimously on the plan, but the ladies were not so easily persuaded. Mrs. Ormsby quickly added: "All opposed to the motion, say 'Nay.'"

But the scouts and Mrs. Vernon shouted hilariously to drown opposition. There were two or three faint "nays," so the motion was carried, and the men declared that they would see to it that it was fulfilled.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN—A VISIT TO GRANNY DUNSTAN'S CABIN

Mr. Gilroy's "suite of rooms" was put in order by the men before they went back to Elmertown, and not only the walnut bed helped furnish the chamber, but several other pieces of furniture were carried back from the stack beside the shed, and placed to add a look of comfort to the "room."

When all was done and the visitors were ready to leave, the scouts declared they would accompany their relatives down the slope and pass judgment on the "suite" to be occupied by their guest.

"It may be healthy to sleep out under the trees like this, but I prefer a plaster ceiling," laughed Mr. Lee, waving his hand at the open woods that was to be Mr. Gilroy's chamber.

"That's because you never tried Nature's ceiling. Once you sleep out in the open, you will never want to try indoors again," replied Mr. Gilroy.

"I'd better not try it, then. I have to remain at home and see that some one provides the 'pot-boiler,'" returned Mr. Lee.

The visitors climbed into the jitney and said good-by, and the scouts turned to go up the hill again, when Mrs. Vernon remarked: "Now that you have a boarder to look after, you must pay more attention to your cookery. Mr. Gilroy must not regret having accepted our invitation to camp with us for a few days."

"But our invitation had 'a string' to it, Verny," added Julie laughingly.

"That's true—I said I would take 'pot luck' and teach the scouts many camping tricks to boot!" declared Mr. Gilroy.

Sunday morning at breakfast Mrs. Vernon said she was very anxious to meet young Dunstan, for he might have met her son in the Aviation Service. Then she had to tell Mr. Gilroy about it.

"I thought I would like to drive down to Freedom later in the day, Mrs. Vernon, and see if there was any mail for me. It was to be forwarded from Junction, you know. If you would care to go and ask about Dunstan, we might make a little party of it," suggested Mr. Gilroy.

"Yes, Verny, let's!" exclaimed the scouts.

"I am willing, as there seems little else one can do," added Mrs. Vernon.

So Hepsy was hitched to the buckboard and the campers climbed in. As they started down the trail, Ruth remarked: "We ought to be thankful the posse found our hamper and seat in the Cave, and brought it back to camp."

"Yes, or we'd have to ride on the floor of the buckboard," added Joan.

"We'd have more room there than on this seat," retorted Julie, who was clinging to the iron rail.

"We can take turns walking if we are too crowded," suggested Mr. Gilroy, who shared the back seat with two scouts.

"We'll have to do that, anyway, when Hepsy comes to a hill," laughed Mrs. Vernon.

So with light banter the party rode to Freedom; there they were received like heroes, for every inhabitant of Freedom had clipped the papers and saved the items that mentioned the capture of the convicts. While Mr. Gilroy went with Lemuel to get his letters, Mrs. Vernon asked if young Dunstan had been heard from.

"Not yet, but sometimes he takes the Crest Trail to hum. In that case, he nary comes nigh Freedom," replied an old native.

"Where does the Crest Trail start?" asked Mrs. Vernon.

"Wall, that's the way Mr. Gilroy went from Junction. It runs along the top affer one gits halfway up from Junction."

As this description was not very accurate, the Captain decided to trust to Mr. Gilroy's ability to lead them there. So she made a proposition to Mr. Gilroy. The girls did not hear what it was, so they knew nothing of the outing planned for the morrow.

"I think it will be fine, Captain, and I will see the man who has charge of the stable," returned Mr. Gilroy, in a low voice.

Soon after this Mr. Gilroy went down the main street and turned in at the livery stable. He was not gone long, however, and when he returned, he nodded satisfactorily to Mrs. Vernon.

That night Mrs. Vernon said to the scouts: "You must all go to bed early, as we have a jaunt planned for you to-morrow. Breakfast must be out of the way quite early, as we hope to start from camp about eight o'clock."

"Where are we going, Verny?" asked Ruth.

"I heard Verny asking about Dunstan's Cabin, and I bet she plans for us to walk there," quickly added Julie.

Mrs. Vernon smiled at this added proof of Julie's mental alertness, but she shook her head as she said: "Not a walk, but a ride."

"A drive, you mean," corrected Joan.

"No—just what I said. There will be horses from Freedom brought to camp before eight tomorrow, if it is clear," explained Mrs. Vernon.

"Good gracious! I haven't any habit!" exclaimed Ruth.

"We will ride in the bloomers we wear at camp," said the Captain.

"I never knew there were enough saddles in Freedom for all of us," laughed Julie.

"That is what I went to find out," said Mr. Gilroy. "The man, Mark, who has charge of the stable, told me he could hire some from the farmers round about. He is going to bring up the horses in the morning and take them back in the evening."

"What will he do meantime, to kill time here?" asked Joan.

"He said he would make some bird-boxes for you, and nail them up in various trees, so you can entice the birds to nest here."

But the scouts had not yet studied bird-life, so they were not aware that the nesting period was past. They delighted in the news that they were to have bird-houses, however.

When Mr. Gilroy took up his flashlight to go down to his "Royal Suite," as the scouts called the walnut bedstead, Joan said: "Shall we escort you down the trail?"

"Oh, no! I can find the bed, all right. It is such a huge affair that I would have to be blind not to see it in the dark."

The scouts were soon in bed after this, and honestly tried to go to sleep, but the new adventure planned for the morrow kept them awake. After telling each other what they would wear and how well they could ride horses, one after the other quieted down, and, last of all, Mrs. Vernon was able to sleep.

It was past eight when Mark was seen coming up the trail leading a line of horses, saddled and ready to ride. Stopping at the Royal Suite, he waited for Mr. Gilroy to get upon the largest horse. Then they continued to the camp.

The girls had breakfast out of the way, and were anxiously waiting for the horses, so Mark had quite an audience as he rode up on the plateau.

The scouts seldom had opportunity to ride a horse when at home, and now they commented on the different animals. Julie instantly said: "I choose the brown one—he is so shiny."

"Seems to me they look awfully tall," whispered Betty.

"They be the usual size, miss," said Mark, who overheard.

"Maybe they won't seem so high when we get up," added Joan.

Mrs. Vernon laughed. "That is always the first thought of an amateur rider—how high up the saddle seems!"

Mr. Gilroy assisted the Captain to mount, then he helped the girls up. Mark had an extra horse, and now he said: "I brung my own hoss ez I figgered I'd best lead the way as fur as Crest Trail. After that it's easy going and you can't miss Dunstan's Cabin."

"All right, Mark—lead on," said Mr. Gilroy.

"As the hosses is all safe fer ridin', the scouts needen' fear 'em. They ain't colts ner air they skittish," said Mark.

Mr. Gilroy smiled, for he surmised as much. The mounts, in fact, seemed aged enough to be pensioned for the rest of their lives.

As Mark led the way up the trail, he described Granny Dunstan and her abode. "She's most a hunerd years old, an' she's allus lived in that cabin. This boy is her great-gran'son, but his folks lives in a town some forty mile away. He come to stop wid' Granny when she got so old, an' he likes the woods life."

"But he enlisted, you say, to fight the Germans," said Mrs. Vernon, eagerly.

"Yeh! He keeps up to th' times, an' hes books and papers up thar. When the *Lusertani* was sunk he got reel mad, an' come down to Freedom an' wanted to git a crowd of young uns up to go and shoot the Huns. But they didnen' want to go so fur from hum. Then he got his dander up an' says: 'I'll jine myself, then. You'll hear of me some day!' And off he goes. Some folks said he oughter have stayed wid his Granny, so a few of us druv up to ask her about it. Golly! she mos' made us deaf with her shoutin' at our bein' slackers, cuz she said her boy was the onny true Yank in Freedom!"

"She made us feel mighty small when she shouts out: 'Yuh call yer town Freedom! Bah—it ain't

nothin' but a handful of cowards. It oughter be called "Slack town." We got away pritty soon after that, an' folks ain't so anxious to visit Granny as onct they was."

This explanation gave the scout party a good idea of the old woman they were about to visit, and Mrs. Vernon said:

"Do you think we should have told her we wanted to call?"

"Oh, no! she don't mind strangers. She goes about her chores jes th' same ez ef no one was there," said Mark.

The seven horses padded softly up the grassy trail, and when they reached the cross-trail near the top of the mountain Mark reined in his mount.

"Now, yeh foller that trail to the crest an' then turn t' th' left. Foller the road clear on till yeh come to the Cabin."

Mark waited and watched until the last horse had disappeared on top of the mountain, then he rode back to camp to wait. The scouts continued on the trail, passing noisy streams that ran madly over rocks or fell over cliffs. The birds and flowers were many-hued and beautiful, so that every step of the way was enjoyable. Mr. Gilroy rode in front, and the Captain at the rear of the line.

After a ride of about three miles along the Crest, Mr. Gilroy stopped his horse and looked at a tiny cabin half-hidden under vines and giant trees. It sat back from the trail about twenty feet, and might have been passed by unless one was looking for it.

"Isn't that lovely?" Joan said.

"Yes, in summer; but think how dreadful it would be in winter," added Julie.

"She doesn't live here all winter, does she?" asked Ruth.

"Yes; Mark says she won't leave the place, although her granddaughter—the aviator's mother, you know—begged her to move down to her home," explained Mrs. Vernon.

"The roof's as green as the grass," now said Betty.

"It's moss on the old shingles," said Mrs. Vernon.

"Mark told me that folks at Freedom say the old lady has a heap of money hidden away in this old cabin, and no one knows where except her great-grandson, who will be the heir," said Mr. Gilroy.

"But that is all conjecture, Mr. Gilroy, as no one has ever heard a word about it from Granny or her boy," added Mrs. Vernon.

"I think it is idle gossip, for how could the old dame make the gold up here? It would take all she could earn with her herbs to pay for her living," admitted Mr. Gilroy.

"Does she sell herbs?" asked the scouts, eagerly.

"Mark said she is the greatest Nature physician ever found around here. If the medical men can't cure a sickness, they send for Granny Dunstan, and she gives the patients a drink of simples and they recover quickly.

"She used to sell these remedies all over the countryside, but of late years she doesn't come down to the towns like she used to. Her boy sells his pelts instead, so that is why the people said she had gold enough."

"I'm glad you told us this, Mr. Gilroy," said Mrs. Vernon, "as I should like the scouts to learn from the aged woman how she gathers and prepares the tea and balms."

The riders dismounted and tied their horses to trees, then followed Mr. Gilroy across the grass to the cabin. The door stood open but not a sound was heard from within.

"Just look at this construction!" cried Julie. "She's used stones, logs and everything in the walls."

"And the growing trees were used for corner-posts of the house," added Mrs. Vernon, examining the odd structure.

Mr. Gilroy rapped politely on the door, but no one replied. Again he rapped louder, and a shrill bark sounded from a distance back in the woods.

"I guess she's out in her garden," said Mr. Gilroy.

"I heard a funny grunt from the little shed at the back of this room," whispered Julie.

"Let's go around the corner of the cabin and see if she is back there," suggested Mrs. Vernon.

So they followed Mr. Gilroy, and all had to laugh when they found the grunt came from a sow with a litter of little pigs. She was queen of the shed that leaned against the cabin, so the scouts watched her with interest for a time, then turned to follow after Mr. Gilroy and the Captain.

But the sow grunted excitedly when the little ones ran after the visitors. They thought there would be something to eat, and having never seen strangers before they knew no fear of them. The angry grunting of the old mother hog made the dog bark again from the woodland, and soon after a bent-over form could be seen coming from the woods.

A hound bounded before her, barking shrilly at the trespassers, until the old woman shouted: "Be quiet, Bill!"

Instantly the dog dropped behind his mistress, and Mr. Gilroy lifted his hat as he greeted the aged dame.

Mrs. Vernon went forward also, and said: "We came to see you, Mrs. Dunstan; I heard your boy was an aviator in France, and I felt an interest in meeting and talking with you and him. My boy was one, too, but he was shot down."

This was an opportune introduction, as nothing melted the old lady's scorn and indifference to visitors like the interest one took in aviation.

"Now, this be a real treat! Them folks at Freedom won't dare to come and see me since we went to war!" declared the centenarian in a strong voice.

Granny Dunstan squinted keenly at the visitors to make sure they were truthful, and, finding they seemed earnest, she led the way to the cabin.

"I rickon we better sit outside; the cabin's too small to hold more'n three of us," announced Granny, as she turned to address her visitors.

Her criss-crossed wrinkled face seemed to roll up with that grin, showing shrivelled toothless gums. Yet the aged face was attractive, with a subtle kind of wholesomeness seldom seen in old people. Mrs. Vernon said, later, that it must be the result of living alone with Nature and her children for so many years.

"You said you had a boy what was aviator in France?" questioned Granny, the moment the scouts had seated themselves.

"Yes, and when I heard your boy had been over, I was anxious to meet you both," said Mrs. Vernon.

"Wall, my boy's got a cross from France, an' now he's ben sent for to go to Washin'ton and meet some big folks what's here visitin' from France. I tell you, John's a right smart soljer!"

The proud old dame wagged her head briskly as she gazed from one to the other of her hearers. Then she suddenly changed the conversation.

"Yeh hed a long, long ride from Freedom, didn't yeh?"

Mrs. Vernon explained that they were camping and had only traveled from the plateau that morning.

"Oh, ye'es must be the gals John tole me about one day—he said thar war some tramps loose on the hill and he wisht yuh knew it so yuh could keep a dog to warn 'em off. In fack, he wuz agoin' to git yuh one, but he had to leave so quick-like."

Granny was very entertaining, and before the scouts left, she had shown them many of her preparations, witch-hazel being one of her remedies. She treated them to drinks of birch-beer, and gave them vials of winter-green flavoring, and peppermint oil, to be used in candy-making.

"I'd like to bring my girls up again, Granny, to have them learn more of your art of chemistry. The proof that you have found the secret of living long and well is evident in your strength and power to enjoy life as you do," said Mrs. Vernon, as they said good-by.

"An' I'll tell John about you havin' a boy over thar, an' he'll be sure to come and see yuh," said the old lady.

"I'll be so happy to become acquainted with him. Who knows, but he may have known my son and can tell me something of his life there. We have never been able to learn much," said Mrs. Vernon, pathetically.

Granny Dunstan placed a bony hand gently on her visitor's arm and looked volumes with her bright little eyes. Then and there, age, position, and all earthly claims disappeared, and the scouts were given a wonderful sight in beholding a perfect spiritual communion between two entirely different humans.

On the ride back to camp, Mr. Gilroy said: "Well, I wouldn't have missed that visit for anything."

"If 'imitation is the sincerest flattery' then we are flattering Granny Dunstan, for we are going there again to learn the things she knows," said Mrs. Vernon.

The scouts found that Mark had erected several bird-houses, and as they stood watching him line up his horses again, to lead them back to Freedom, they plied him with questions about Granny Dunstan.

"Mark, does she keep all those pigs for meat in winter?" asked Ruth.

"No, she fatten's 'em en sells 'em fer groceries en' other needs. Her pork fetches more'n enny other round th' country."

"How do you account for that, Mark?" asked Mrs. Vernon.

"Cuz it is such sweet and clean meat. Them pigs fatten up on acorns and nuts. And that makes the finest tastin' flesh, yuh know."

After Mark left camp, the girls still talked of the old lady and her wonderful knowledge of woodcraft. Mr. Gilroy and Mrs. Vernon stood at a short distance, conversing in low tones. Finally they came over and joined the scouts.

Mr. Gilroy said: "I want to thank you scouts for all you have done for me, not only in saving my life, but in entertaining me later."

Julie looked anxiously up at him and said, "You sound just as if you were going to leave."

Mrs. Vernon and he laughed: "To tell the truth, I am."

"There—I knew it! It's that old walnut bed!" cried Ruth.

"Oh, no," laughed Mr. Gilroy. "It is because I must keep important appointments at home. You see, I merely got off at Junction when I heard of the Cave, and here I've been ever since."

"You had as good a time here, as elsewhere, haven't you?" demanded Julie.

"Better than I've had in years, but now I must go on. But I want to make a proposition to which your Captain agrees.

"Next summer, as soon as school closes, I want you girls to visit my place in the Adirondacks. The reward of money you will receive will pay all expenses for fares and outfits, and I will try to be as fine a host as you were hostesses. Will you?"

"You said you were from New York?" argued Joan.

"So I am—when I am at home. But I spend most of the year in my Adirondack camp. You see, I am an ardent Boy Scout admirer, and every summer I have a crowd of boys camp in the mountains with me. As I have several thousand acres there, we won't interfere with you girls. In fact, I have just been telling your Captain that I am going to write to Headquarters and offer my place to the Girl Scouts for any number of camps they may see fit to start. I can make it very comfortable for them, as my workmen have cut good roads through the woods and many trails are worn over the surrounding mountains. If you'll agree to establish a flourishing Troop by next spring, I will agree to give you the time of your life."

When Mr. Gilroy finished, the scouts were too delighted to speak for a time. Then Julie sprang forward, and threw her arms about his waist. She hugged him so unexpectedly, but withal so tightly, that he gasped for breath. Every one laughed, as it expressed their sentiments exactly.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN—NEW MEMBERS

"Well, our friend is off! Now what can we do?" wailed Ruth, as the scouts sat disconsolately about the fire.

"I wish we could camp in the Adirondacks this summer! We still have August, you know," said Joan.

"Mr. Gilroy particularly mentioned *next* season, and besides, you have to become a registered Troop, before you can accept his invitation," hinted Mrs. Vernon.

"I should think we ought to hurry up and begin, then," suggested Julie.

"How can we? Those girls in Elmertown will all be away for their vacations, and how can we find them?" grumbled Ruth.

"Mr. Gilroy said he had given orders in Freedom that any time we wanted to take a trip about the country, we were to have the automobile he rented that day for the hunt. He said that this would be his present to you this summer because he would not be here personally to take you about,"

said Mrs. Vernon.

"What did you say—did you refuse or accept?" asked Ruth.

"At first I said I didn't think he ought to pay for the drives, but he silenced me with a look, and said: 'I have already paid for ten drives in advance—so they must be used up.'"

"Hurrah! Then we can go for one to-morrow, can't we?" cried Joan.

"I have been planning where to go if we take a drive to-morrow," answered Mrs. Vernon.

"Why can't we go to Elmertown, first of all, and find out about the new members. I don't want to postpone that until it is too late to teach them anything. You see, we must get on in scoutdom, so we can visit Mr. Gilroy's place next year," said Julie.

"That's what I wanted to suggest, Julie—that we drive home and find out about new members," responded Mrs. Vernon.

So the grocer's order-man was told that afternoon to have the chauffeur bring his car up to the crossing of the trail with the woodland road the next morning, where his passengers would be waiting for him.

The following day was fair, so the scouts hurried with the camp-work and then ran down the trail to wait for the car. They were soon on the road to Elmertown, enjoying the smooth running of the car over the fine road; after the rough mountain trails, and Hepsy's uncertain going, it was a luxury.

Many stops were made in Elmertown, but of all the girls' homes visited only five were available to join the scouts. Many were away on visits, and a few were not allowed to consider joining a camp where escaped convicts were caught behind the walls!

This last excuse caused such merriment from the scouts that severe mothers wondered what there could be to laugh at in dangers such as they ran while camping in the woods.

The five girls who were so eager to join the scouts, had the willing consent and co-operation from their mothers. So Mrs. Vernon felt it was much better to take girls whose parents appreciated the benefit of the scout work, rather than to have girls whose mothers were waiting to criticise or discourage their children in the undertaking.

When the five had been finally decided upon, the Captain notified them that the car would call for them that day week, and they were to be ready to return to camp.

"It will take you a week to prepare, girls, for you must write to New York and secure a handbook for each, and not only read it, but study the first rules in the book. We have been doing that since we went to camp, so now you will have to catch up," said Mrs. Vernon.

"And rest assured we will give you some awful initiation tests before you become full-fledged members!" threatened Julie.

The scouts and the "would-bes" laughed at this, for they knew the tests would be funny ones that would amuse every one.

"Only pack sensible things, girls. Middy blouses, a pair of khaki bloomers and a pair of blue serge ones. You'll need a serge dress, too, and a heavy sweater. If you have a light-weight sweater, also, so much the better," advised Mrs. Vernon.

The elated scouts-to-be eagerly promised everything, and then watched the car drive away. But they felt no envy or regret for they would be traveling the same road a week hence.

"Verny, maybe we ought to be glad we've got all the extra furniture now," ventured Betty, as they climbed the familiar trail and passed by the Royal Suite.

"That's so, Verny. We can let the new members furnish their hut with the stuff," said Joan.

"Only they haven't any hut," Ruth added.

"They will have to build one, like we did, to pass a test in carpentry," remarked Julie.

"I think Betty's suggestion better than the one Ruth made last night—that we chop up the furniture for kindlings," now spoke the Captain.

"Well, I didn't really mean that, you know! I only said it when I had to go and collect damp wood for the fire," admitted Ruth.

That evening as the scouts sat about the camp-fire, Mrs. Vernon remarked: "I wonder if you girls realize how much you have already improved in this one month of camp-life?"

They then began to compare notes.

"Julie isn't nearly as impulsive as she used to be," said Betty.

"But she still has enough left to find fault with," laughed the Captain.

"And Betty isn't so preachy as she was when we weeded dandelions on your lawn," commented Ruth.

"Betty is beginning to have more confidence, too," added Julie, gazing at her twin in a speculative way.

"What about me—how have I improved?" eagerly asked Joan, looking from one to the other of her companions.

"You—oh, Joan, you are hopeless!" laughed Julie, whereupon Joan fell upon her and they had a rough-and-tumble time on the grass.

"Thus endeth every serious lesson I try to teach," laughed Mrs. Vernon, when the contestants came back to the fire.

"I say, scouts: can any one see the improvement in Verny?" now called Julie, in rebuttal of the Captain's last words.

But the girls refused to testify, and then a new subject was introduced. "I am sure I heard thunder just then."

"I thought I saw a flash a little time ago," added Joan.

"Maybe we had better get our things in under cover, then, and be ready to go to bed if it rains," suggested the Captain.

Consequently a mad scurrying took place and the scouts were cozily housed when the rain came down.

The next morning Mrs. Vernon said: "I have been waiting for spare time to give you scouts a few lessons in first aid, but now that we expect new members in the Patrol, it may be just as well to wait for them. Many can learn as easily as a few individuals."

"Still, that need not keep us from having a few tests," replied Joan, who looked for some fun in this practice.

"True; and if you have a little lesson now, you ought to be able to help the new members when they come in," added Mrs. Vernon.

"All right—let's begin," said Julie.

"My first question will be: What would you do for first-aid in case of accident?"

Julie giggled: "I'd take mighty good care not to have one! I call that genuine first-aid."

The others laughed, and Mrs. Vernon said: "You are right of course, Julie, but that is not what I mean. Because there are many people who meet with accidents, who need aid at once. And there are nine-tenths of the people who know nothing about rendering help properly. However, during the last ten years, due a great deal to scout work, I believe, the schools are taking up this work and teaching children just what to do."

"We never had it in our school," said Betty.

"Maybe the town is too small to pay an instructor, but all city schools teach first-aid, I'm sure," replied the Captain. "Now, girls, let us be serious in this lesson."

"Drop your skirts and practice in your bloomers, as you can move about easier that way."

The scouts did as they were told, and then Mrs. Vernon said: "We'll try Betty first, as she is the lightest of you girls."

"Now let us pretend Betty went in swimming and was taken suddenly with cramps. She sank. One of you saw her disappear and called on the others for help. You ran to the water's edge and saw some one swim to shore with her; no one but you scouts knew how to revive her, so you went right to work to save her life."

"Now, Betty, stretch out on the grass just as you would if you had been dragged in from the water in an unconscious state," advised Mrs. Vernon, helping Betty to repose as she should.

The three scouts watching, giggled as this sort of work was fun. When Betty was in the right position, Mrs. Vernon called:

"Now scouts, loosen her clothing as quick as possible—because every second counts with her life."

"If she has on corsets, unhook them immediately that respiration may not be retarded. If she has

on a skirt with tight belt, or other close-fitting garments that prevents circulation, undo them at once, or even cut it open if it can be accomplished in no other way. Now she ought to breathe. Tell me, can she draw her breath easily?"

"Can she! She's breathing so hard that I'm afraid she'll explode unless she has a chance to laugh!" retorted Julie.

The scouts all laughed, but Mrs. Vernon remained serious, as she knew it would never do to give Julie encouragement.

"Now then, empty her lungs of water by laying her, breast downwards, and holding her up by the middle. Julie and Joan do that."

Betty was very ticklish, and the moment Julie took hold of her sides, she squirmed and giggled. Julie tried to be severe.

"Teacher, this drowned scout won't let me get a good grip on her side. I fear she will have to expire unless she rolls over at once."

Even Mrs. Vernon had to laugh at Julie, and Betty said: "Well, I'll roll over, if you'll make Julie stop tickling me."

Obliging little Betty then rolled over face downwards, but in a second she was up on her feet, squealing and shaking herself. Every one was surprised, and Julie said aggrievedly:

"Now what's the matter?"

"Oh, I saw a nasty fat spider running in the grass right under my nose! I wish some one else would drown for me, Verny."

The girls laughed, and Julie added: "It's bad enough to have you get cramps and drown without inviting us to follow suit!"

"Here, Betty, get down in this short grass where there will be no plump little spiders," advised the Captain.

Betty complied, and then the two aids again took their places beside her.

"Now we will begin again. Take Betty by the middle, girls, and allow her head to hang down for a few moments to take the water out of her lungs."

This lesson was done well, then Mrs. Vernon said:

"Now turn the patient face downward on her breast and give artificial respiration."

"Explain, Verny—that long word is too much for me," said Julie.

"You press the lower ribs down and forward towards the head, then release. Repeat this action twelve times to every minute."

Now Julie and Joan worked with a will, and Betty found herself revived far enough to object to their energetic treatment. She had had five respirations administered, and her first-aids were giving the sixth, when Betty kicked out with her heels and tripped Joan over upon her face.

"My! This dead one came to mighty quick, Verny. We must be powerful good treaters," laughed Julie.

"Scouts, I am sure Betty is well along the road to recovery, so we can go on to the next lesson," laughed Mrs. Vernon.

"The next thing to do, is to place heated bottles of water at Betty's feet, and rub her arms and legs briskly, but be sure to always rub towards the heart," said the Captain.

"Must I have more treatment?" asked Betty, plaintively.

"Sure! You're not all alive yet," laughed Ruth.

Julie and Joan began rubbing as they had been told, but Betty suddenly sat up and said: "Last night you said I was becoming more self-confident! All right, now I am so confident that you two girls are each going to get a big kick, that you'd better get out of my way—quick!"

"Scouts, don't give up," called Mrs. Vernon, laughingly. "Betty is doing fine, so you must not stop such treatment."

"Then you come here and take my place," said Joan, who dodged the kick too often for comfort's sake.

"But she must be put in a warm bed, and give her hot drinks, you know. With plenty of fresh air, I trust she will be as well as ever," said Mrs. Vernon.

But Betty had managed to kick both her nurses and that ended the lesson.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN—THE SCOUTS MEET JOHN DUNSTAN

The following day while the scouts were washing the dinner dishes, a young man came across the plateau. He was dressed in nice clothes and wore a straw sailor hat. As he neared the camp, he lifted his hat and smiled.

“Why—it’s the hunter!” cried Julie, dropping the dish-mop and drying her hands on her apron.

“So it is—where is Verny!” added Joan.

“Didn’t you know me, ladies?” asked the visitor.

“You looked so different the other day in your hunting clothes,” said Julie, smiling graciously.

Ruth and Betty had gone to find the Captain, and now they came back with her.

“This is John Dunstan, Verny,” said Betty, simply.

The young man was invited to sit down with them, and being a genuine son of Nature, he felt quite at ease anywhere, so he began to chat with Mrs. Vernon.



He sat down and began to chat with Mrs. Vernon

“Granny told me about the scouts calling on her,” said he, showing how much he appreciated the visit.

“Yes, and we are going again, as we enjoyed our first one so much,” said the Captain.

“She says you had a son in the aviation field ‘over there,’” continued John.

“Yes, and I do so want to talk with you about that; but first, let me ask you if you knew of those convicts being at large in the woods the last time you were here to help the scouts finish the roof?”

“That was why I wanted to see you,” said John. “I had reason to *believe* that two tramps were somewhere about this mountain, and I feared they might start for the village. If they did, they would come across this camp, and I didn’t like to think they might annoy the scouts.”

“You didn’t know they were convicts, then?” said Julie.

“If I had, do you suppose I would have allowed you girls to win the honor of catching them? I would have taken them myself.”

“How could you—all alone?” said Joan.

"The same way I rounded up five Huns when they shot down my plane on their side of the battle-line. I managed to get them, too, and marched them across No Man's Land at night, and brought them in prisoners to our Captain."

"Oh, oh! tell us all about it?" entreated the girls.

"Some other time, scouts, but now I want to answer this lady's questions," said John, laughingly.

"Only tell us this much—is that what you got the medal for?" begged Julie.

"That, and one other trick I turned," said John, without any sign of self-importance.

"My boy enlisted before the United States entered the war," began Mrs. Vernon. "Because we had no air service, he entered the Royal Flying Corps in Canada. He was with them until we declared war on Germany, then he wanted to fight under his own Flag. It was in his first battle as an American Flyer that he was shot down."

"I was with the Royal Flying Corps, too, at first. But I didn't get your name, Captain, so I really do not know the name of your son," said John.

"Oh, don't you know my name—it is Vernon; and my boy's name was Myles Vernon. He was a Lieutenant in the Lafayette Escadrille."

"Why—Mrs. Vernon! Myles and I were flying and fighting together when he was shot down! That is the very battle I was just telling of, when I bluffed the Germans into such fear that they gave up and marched across to the American lines as my prisoners."

"Oh, oh, really! How happy I am to find some one who saw him at the last. Do tell me all you know, my boy, for we had very little information to console us."

John then told how bravely Myles fought and how he had shot down three planes of the enemy before they got him.

"I saw his plane burst into flames but he managed to get into his parachute and cut loose. Then as he dropped nearer the earth, a machine gun riddled the parachute and he fell.

"I know he met death instantaneously, for I fell very near the same place, and saw his body immediately afterwards. I was handed the personal effects he had with him, and had charge of them while I spoke to the interpreter who took down the name and address. Then I had to give them over to their authorities.

"Mrs. Vernon, I saw the Germans place his body on a bier and carry it away to a house removed from the line of battle. And some weeks later, I visited the lovely little farm where he is buried. It is cared for by a mother who lost three sons for France, and now she takes the greatest joy in caring for the flowers she has planted on American Boys' graves.

"I can tell you of many valiant battles Myles Vernon fought, before he was killed in that one. I saw several of these fights myself, and my friends told me of others—when they heard Myles was gone."

"Oh, I am so happy to hear this. I feel as if you are the direct answer to prayers. Long have I desired to hear about my boy from some one who knew the facts!" cried Mrs. Vernon, with eyes streaming.

"But were you not injured when your plane fell that day?" asked Julie, eagerly.

"By some strange freak, the wings caught in a giant tree and stuck there. The upper branches were broken and hung down from the impact, but the lower boughs and trunk stood up firmly beneath the terrific jar. I was so shaken up that they thought my neck was broken, and I pretended to be a great deal worse than I was, because I believed I could find a way to escape.

"They left me with the doctor and a few nurses, and when it was learned that I was partly recovered I had to help them. It was the freedom accorded any one who assists in looking after the sick prisoners that opened a way for my escape."

The scouts were so anxious to hear all about his experiences that he entertained them the greater part of the afternoon. When he finally stood up to go home, he was begged to come again very soon.

"I will tell Granny that you expect to come up and call on her again?" said he, shaking hands with Mrs. Vernon.

"Yes, but be sure and come down to see us soon, won't you?" said she.

John left, and Mrs. Vernon excused herself for a time. She went in the old hut, and Julie leaned over to whisper: "Now she'll go and cry herself to pieces!"

"No, Julie, I think she is going to pray out her thanks to God for His mercy in sending her such

glorious news of her boy," returned Betty, gently.

And Betty was right. For when the Captain returned to the scouts, her face was shining with a radiance that seldom was seen on her face.

"Girls, where shall we have the new members build their hut?" asked she, as if nothing had ever caused her to think of aught but the scouts and their work.

"Why not move Hepsy's shed along and have them use that site for their house?" suggested Joan.

After much planning and arguing, it was decided that the new members could choose their own site and choice of building. "They may prefer to live in a tent—for all we know," said Ruth.

The four scouts worked hard all that week to present as fine a camp as could be found to the new members, and when the five girls drove up in the car to taste the joys of a scout camp, they were duly impressed with the order and neatness of everything about the camp.

How these nine girls formed a Troop of splendid Girl Scouts, how they won badges for prowess in many tests and trials, and how they were the envy of all the school-girls in Elmertown, is too long a tale to tell here.

But this much can be said: The reward for the \$1000 was paid over to the scouts, and the Captain placed it in the Bank of Freedom, to the account of "Girls of Dandelion Patrol." That was the beginning of their savings to pay expenses of a Camp in the Adirondacks the following season.

And how they finally went to the much-longed-for camp where Mr. Gilroy welcomed them for a whole summer's visit, is told in the second volume of the Girl Scouts Mountain series, called "Dandelion Troop in the Adirondacks."

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