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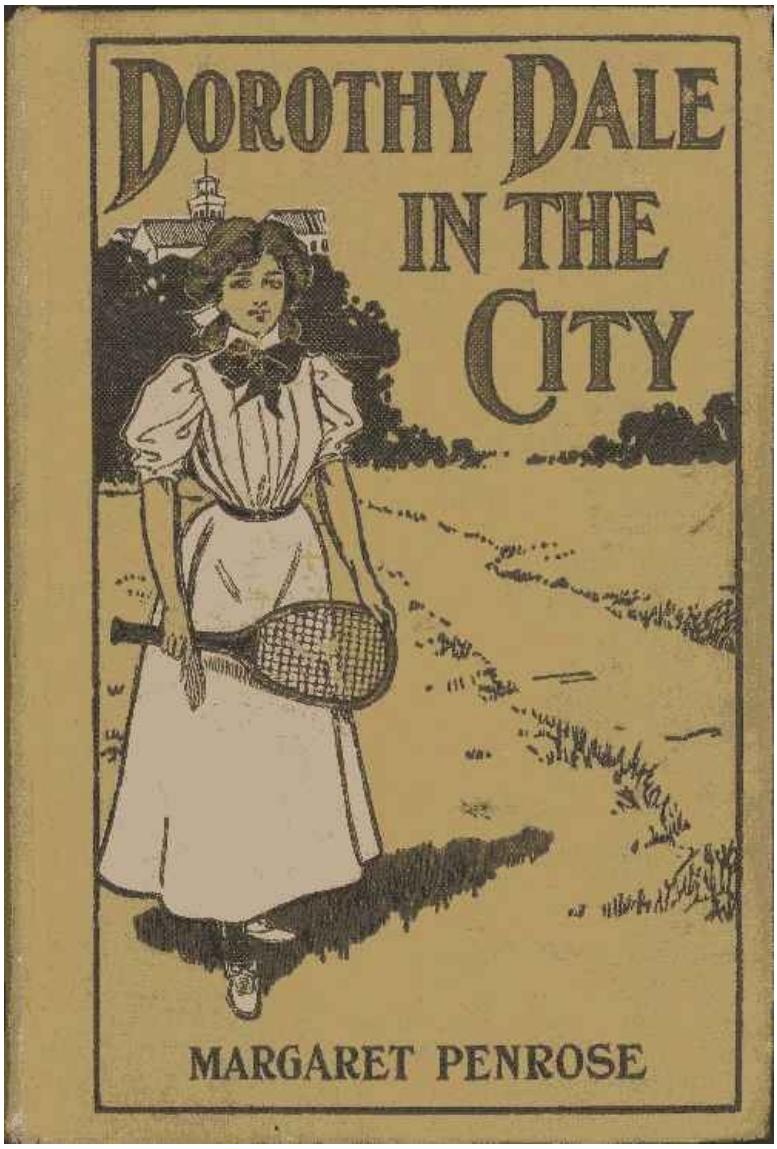

DOROTHY DALE IN THE CITY

BY
MARGARET PENROSE

AUTHOR OF “DOROTHY DALE: A GIRL OF TO-DAY,” “DOROTHY DALE AND HER CHUMS,” “DOROTHY DALE’S CAMPING DAYS,” “THE MOTOR GIRLS,” “THE MOTOR GIRLS THROUGH NEW ENGLAND,” ETC.

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DOROTHY DALE IN THE CITY

CHAPTER I
ALMOST CHRISTMAS

Neither books, papers nor pencils were to be seen in the confused mass of articles, piled high, if not dry, in the rooms of the pupils of Glenwood Hall, who were now packing up to leave the boarding school for the Christmas holidays.

"Going home is so very different from leaving home," remarked Dorothy Dale, as she plunged a knot of unfolded ribbons into the tray of her trunk. "I'm always ashamed to face my things when I unpack."

"Don't," advised Tavia. "I never look at mine until they have been scattered on the floor for a few days. Then they all look like a fire sale," and she wound her tennis shoes inside a perfectly helpless lingerie waist.

[2]

"I don't see why we bring parasols in September to take them back in Christmas snows," went on Dorothy. "I have a mind to give this to Betty," and she raised the flowery canopy over her head.

"Oh, don't!" begged Tavia. "Listen! That's bad luck!"

"Which?" asked Dorothy, "the parasol or Betty?"

"Neither," replied Tavia. "But the fact that I hear Ned's voice. Also the clatter of Cologne's heavy feet. That means the plunge—our very last racket."

"I hope you take the racket out of this room," said Dorothy, "for I have some Christmas cards to get off."

"Let us in!" called a voice on the outer side of the door. "We've got good news."

"Only news?" asked Tavia. "We have lots of that ourselves. Make it something more substantial."

“Hurry!” begged the voice of Edna Black, otherwise known as Ned Ebony. “We’ll be caught!”

Tavia brought herself to her feet from the Turkish mat as if she were on springs. Then she opened the door cautiously.

“What is it?” she demanded. “Is it alive?”

“It was once,” replied Edna, “but it isn’t now.”

The giggling at the door was punctuated with a struggle.

“Oh, let us in!” insisted Cologne, and pushed past Tavia. **[3]**

“Mercy!” exclaimed Dorothy. “Whatever is this?”

The two newcomers were now in a heap on the floor, or rather were in a heap on a feather bed they had dragged into the room with them. Quick to scent fun, Tavia turned the key in the door.

“The old darling!” she murmured. “Where did the naughty girls get you?” and she attempted to caress the feather tick in which Edna and Cologne nestled.

“That’s Miss Mingle’s feather bed!” declared Dorothy. “Wherever did you get it?”

“Mingling with other things getting packed!” replied Edna, “and I haven’t seen a little bundle of the really fluffy-duffy kind since they sent me to grandma’s when I had the measles. Isn’t it lovely?”

“No wonder she sleeps well,” remarked Tavia, trying to push Cologne off the heap. “I could take an eternal rest on this.”

“But why was it out in the hall?” questioned Dorothy. “I know Miss Mingle has a weak hip and has to sleep on a soft bed, always.”

“Her room was being made over, and she wanted to see it all alone before she left. She is going to-morrow,” said Edna.

“And to-night?” asked Dorothy.

“She must have a change,” declared Edna, innocently, “and we thought an ordinary mattress would be—more sanitary.” **[4]**

“You cannot hide her bed in here,” objected Dorothy. “You must take it back.”

“Take back the bed that thou gavest!” sang Tavia, gaily. “How could I part with thee so soon!”

“We did not intend to hide it here, Doro,” said Cologne. “We had no idea of incriminating you. There is a closet in the hall. But just now there are also tittle-tattles in the hall. We are only biding a-wee.”

“Oh, it’s leaking!” exclaimed Edna, as she blew a bunch of feathery down at Dorothy. “What shall we do?”

“Get it back as soon as you can,” advised Dorothy. “Let me peek out!”

Silence fell as Dorothy cautiously put her head out of the door. “No one in sight,” she whispered. “Now is your time.”

Quietly the girls gathered themselves up. Tavia took the end of the bed where the “leak” was. Out in the hall they paused.

“The old feather be—ed!
The de—ar feather be—ed!
The rust-covered be—ed that hung in the hall!”

It was Tavia who sang. Then with one jerk she pushed the bed over the banister! **[5]**

“Oh!” gasped Edna and Cologne, simultaneously.

“Mercy!” came a cry from below. “Whatever is ——”

They heard no more. Inside the room again the girls scampered.

“Right on the very head of Miss Mingle!” whispered Edna, horror-stricken. “Now we are in for it!”

“But she needed it,” said Tavia, in her absurd way of turning a joke into kindness. “I was afraid she wouldn’t find it.”

“Better be afraid she does not find you,” said Dorothy. “Miss Mingle is a dear, but she won’t like leaky feather beds dropped on her.”

“Well, I suppose we will all have to stand for it,” sighed Edna, “though land knows we never intended to decapitate the little music teacher. And she has a weak spine! Tavia Travers, how could you?”

“You saw how simple it was,” replied Tavia, purposely misunderstanding the other. “But do you suppose we have killed her? I don’t hear a sound!”

“Sounds are always smothered in feathers,” said Cologne. “Dorothy, can’t you get the story ready? How did the accident happen?”

“Too busy,” answered Dorothy. “Besides, I warned you.” **[6]**

“Now, Doro! And this the last day!”

“Oh, please!” chimed in the others.

“I absolutely refuse to fix it up,” declared Dorothy. “I begged you to relent, and now——”

“Hush! It came to! I hear it coming further to!” exclaimed Cologne. “Doro, hide me!”

A rush in the outer hall described the approach of more than one girl. In fact there must have been at least five in the dash that banged the door of Number Nineteen.

“Come on!”

“Hide!”

“Face it!”

“Feathers!”

“Mingle!”

Some of the words were evidently intended to mean more. Snow was scattered about from out of door things, rubbers were thrust off hastily, and the girls, delighted with the prospect of a real row, were radiant with a mental steam that threatened every human safety valve.

“Girls, do be quiet!” begged Dorothy, “and tell us what happened to that feather bed.”

“Nothing,” replied Nita, “it happened to Mingle. She is just now busy trying to get the quills out of her throat with a bottle brush. Betty suggested the brush.”

“And the hall looks like a feather foundry,” imparted Genevieve. “Mrs. Pangborn is looking for someone’s scalp.” **[7]**

“There! I hear the court martial summons!” exclaimed Edna. “Tavia! You did it.”

The footfall in the hall this time was decided and not clattery. It betokened the coming of a teacher.

A tap at the door came next. Dorothy scrambled over the excited girls, and finally reached the portal.

“The principal would like to have the young ladies from this room report in the office at once,” said the strident voice of Miss Higley, the English teacher. “She is very much annoyed at the misconduct that appeared to come from Room Nineteen.”

“Yes,” faltered Dorothy, for no one else seemed to know how to find her tongue. “There was—an accident. The girls will go to the office.”

After the teacher left the girls gave full vent to their choking sensations. Tavia rolled off the couch, Edna covered her own head in Dorothy’s best sofa cushion, Cologne drank a glass of water that Tavia intended to drink, and altogether things were brisk in Number Nineteen.

“We might as well have it over with,” Edna said, patting the sofa cushion into shape. “I’ll confess to the finding of the plaguey thing.”

“Come on then,” ordered Dorothy, and the others meekly followed her into the hall. **[8]**

They were but one flight up, and as they looked over the banister they saw below Miss Mingle, Mrs. Pangborn and several others.

“Oh!” gasped Tavia, “they are sprouting pin feathers!”

“Young ladies!” cried Mrs. Pangborn. “What does this mean?”

They trooped down. But before they reached the actual scene of the befeathered hall, a messenger was standing beside Miss Mingle, and the music teacher was reading a telegram.

“I must leave at once!” she said. “Please, Mrs. Pangborn, excuse the young ladies! Come with me to the office! I must arrange everything at once! I have to get the evening train!”

“You must go at once?” queried the head of the

school, in some surprise.

“Yes! yes! instantly! Oh, this is awful!” groaned the music teacher. “Come, please do!” And she hurried off, and Mrs. Pangborn went after her.

“Just luck!” whispered Tavia, as she scampered after the others, who quickly hurried to more comfortable quarters. “But what do you suppose ails Mingle?”

“Maybe someone proposed to her,” suggested Edna, “and she was afraid he might relent.”

But little did Dorothy and her chums think how important the message to the teacher would prove to be to themselves, before the close of the Christmas holidays. [9]

[10]

CHAPTER II
GOING HOME

“Did you ever see anything so dandy?” asked Tavia. “I think we girls should subscribe to the telegraph company. There is nothing like a quick call to get us out of a scrape.”

“Don’t boast, we are not away yet,” returned Dorothy.

“But I would like to see anything stop me now,” argued Tavia. “There’s the trunk and there’s the grip. Now a railroad ticket to Dalton—dear old Dalton! Doro, I wish you were coming to see the snow on Lenty Lane. It makes the place look grand.”

“Lenty Lane was always pretty,” corrected Dorothy. “I have very pleasant remembrances of the place.”

The girls were at the railroad station, waiting for the train that was to take them away from school for the holidays. There were laughter and merry shouts, promises to write, to send cards, and to do no end of “remembering.”

And, while this is going on, and while the girls are so occupied in this that they are not likely to do anything else, I will take just a few moments to tell my new readers something about the characters in this story. [11]

The first book of this series was called “Dorothy Dale; A Girl of To-Day,” and in that, Dorothy, of course, made her bow. She was the daughter of Major Dale, of Dalton, and, though without a mother, she had two loving brothers, Joe and Roger. Besides these she had a very dear friend in Tavia Travers, and Tavia, when she was not doing or saying one thing, was doing or saying another—in brief, Tavia was a character.

In the tale is told how Dorothy learned of the unlawful detention of a poor little girl, and how she and Tavia took Nellie away from a life of misery.

“Dorothy Dale at Glenwood School,” my second volume, told how our heroine made her appearance at boarding school, where she spent so many happy days, and where she still is when the present story opens. And as for Tavia, she

went, too, thanks to the good offices of some of her chum's friends.

Glenwood School was a peculiar place in many ways, and for a time Dorothy was not happy there, owing to the many cliques and mutual jealousies. But the good sense of Dorothy, and some of the madcap pranks of Tavia, worked out to a good end.

There is really a mystery in my third volume— that entitled "Dorothy Dale's Great Secret." It was almost more than Dorothy could bear, at first, especially as it concerned her friend Tavia. For Tavia acted very rashly, to say the least. But Dorothy did not desert her, and how she saved Tavia from herself is fully related. **[12]**

When Dorothy got on the trail of the gypsies, in the fourth book of the series, called "Dorothy Dale and Her Chums," she little dreamed where the matter would end. Startling, and almost weird, were her experiences when she met the strange "Queen," who seemed so sad, and yet who held such power over her wandering people. Here again Dorothy's good sense came to her aid, and she was able to find a way out of her trouble.

One naturally imagined holidays are times of gladness and joy, but in "Dorothy Dale's Queer Holidays," which is the fifth book of this line, her vacation was "queer" indeed. How she and her friends, the boys as well as the girls, solved the mystery of the old "castle", and how they saved an unfortunate man from danger and despair, is fully set forth. And, as a matter of fact, before the adventure in the "castle" came to an end, Dorothy and her friends themselves were very glad to be rescued.

Mistaken identity is the main theme of the sixth volume, called "Dorothy Dale's Camping Days." To be taken for a demented girl, forced to go to a sanitarium, to escape, and to find the same girl for whom she was mistaken, was part of what Dorothy endured. **[13]**

And yet, with all her troubles, which were not small, Dorothy did not regret them at the end, for they were the means of bringing good to many people. The joyous conclusion, when the girl recovered her reason, more than made up for all Dorothy suffered.

Certainly, after all she had gone through, our heroine might be expected to be entitled to some rest. But events crowded thick and fast on Dorothy. On her return to Glenwood, after a vacation, she found two factions in the school.

Just who was on each side, and the part Dorothy played, may be learned by reading the seventh book of this series, called "Dorothy Dale's School Rivals." There was rivalry, none the less bitter because "sweet girl graduates" were the personages involved. But, in the end, all came out well, though at one time it looked as though there would be serious difficulties.

Of course many more characters than Dorothy and Tavia played their parts in the stories. There were Ned and Nat, the sons of Mrs. White, Dorothy's aunt, with whom, after some years spent in Dalton, Dorothy and her father and brothers went to live, in North Birchlands. Tavia **[14]**

was a frequent visitor there, and Tavia and the good-looking boy cousins—well, perhaps you had better find out that part for yourself.

Dorothy was always making friends, and, once she had made them she never lost them. Not that Tavia did not do the same, but she was a girl so fond of doing the unexpected, so ready to cause a laugh, even if at herself, that many persons did not quite know how to take her.

With Dorothy it was different. Her sweet winsomeness was a charm never absent. Yet she could strike fire, too, when the occasion called for it.

And so now, in beginning this new book, we find our friends ready to leave the “Glen”, as they called it; leave the school and the teachers under whose charge they had been for some time.

Leaving Glenwood was, as Dorothy said, very different from going there. One week before Christmas the place was placed in the hands of the house-cleaners, and the pupils were scattered about over the earth.

Dorothy and Tavia were together in the chair car of the train; and Dorothy, having gathered up her mail without opening it as she left the hall, now used her nail file to cut the envelopes, and then proceeded to see what was the news.

“Oh, Tavia!” she exclaimed, as she looked at the lavender paper that indicated a note from her Aunt Winnie, otherwise Mrs. White. “Listen to this. Aunt Winnie has taken a city house. Of course it will be an apartment——” she looked keenly at the missive, “and it will be on Riverside Drive.” **[15]**

“Oh, the double-deckers!” exclaimed Tavia. “I can feel the air smart my cheeks,” and she shifted about expectantly. “Let’s take the auto bus—I always did love that word bus. It seems to mean a London night in a fog.”

“Well, I am sure it will mean good times, and I assure you, Tavia, Aunt Winnie has not forgotten you. You are to come.”

“There is only one Aunt Winnie in the world,” declared Tavia, “and she is the Aunty Winnie of Dorothy Dale.” Tavia was never demonstrative, but just now she squeezed Dorothy’s hand almost white. “How can I manage to get through with Dalton? I have to give home at least three snowstorms.”

“We are getting them right now,” said Dorothy. “I am afraid we will be snowbound when we reach the next stop.”

Wheeling about in her chair, Tavia flattened her face against the window as the train smoke tried to hide the snowflakes from her gaze. Dorothy was still occupied with her mail.

“It does come down,” admitted Tavia, “but that will mean a ride for me in old Daddy Brennen’s sleigh. He calls it a sleigh, but you remember, Doro, it is nothing more than the fence rails he took from Brady’s, buckled on the runners he got from Tim, the ragman. And you cannot have forgotten the rubber boot he once used for a **[16]**

spring.”

“It was a funny rig, sure enough,” answered Dorothy, “but Daddy Brennen has a famous reputation for economy.”

“I hope he does not take it into his head to economize on my spinal cord by going over Evergreen Hill,” replied Tavia. “I tried that once in his rattletrap, and we had to walk over to Jordan, and from there I rode home on a pair of milk cans. But Doro,” she continued, “I cannot get over the sudden taking away of Mingle Dingle. Surely the gods sent that telegram to save me.”

“I hope nothing serious has happened at her home,” Dorothy mused. “I never heard anything about her family.”

“You don’t suppose a little mouse of a thing, like that born music teacher, has any family,” replied Tavia irreverently. “I shall ever after this have a respect for the proverbial feather bed.”

“Here is Stony Junction,” Dorothy remarked, as the trainman let in a gust of wind from the vestibuled door to shout out the name of that station. “Madeline Maher gets off here. There, she is waving to us! We should have spoken to her.”

“Never too late,” declared Tavia, and she actually shouted a good-bye and a merry Christmas almost the full length of the car. Dorothy waved her hand and “blew” a kiss, to which the pretty girl who, with the porter close at her heels, was leaving the train for her home, responded. Chairs swung around simultaneously to allow their occupants a glimpse of the girl who had startled them with her shout. Some of the passengers smiled—especially did one young man, whose bag showed the wear usually given in college sports. He dropped his paper, and, not too rudely, smiled straight at Tavia. **[17]**

“There!” exclaimed she. “See what a good turn does. Just for wishing Maddie a hilarious time I got that smile.”

“Don’t,” cautioned Dorothy, to whom Tavia’s recklessness was ever a source of anxiety. “We have many miles to go yet.”

“‘So much the better,’ as the old Wolfie, in Little Red Riding Hood, said,” Tavia retorted. “I think I shall require a drink of water directly,” and she straightened up as if to make her way to the end of the car, in order to pass the chair of the young man with the scratched-up suitcase.

Dorothy sighed, but at the same time she smiled. Tavia could not be repressed, and Dorothy had given up hope of keeping her subdued. **[18]**

“Come to think of it,” reflected Tavia, “I never had any permanent luck with the drinking water trick. He looks so nice—I might try being sweet and refined,” and she turned away, making the most absurd effort to look the part.

“Getting sense,” commented Dorothy. “We may now expect a snowslide.”

“And have my hero dig me out,” added the irrepressible one. “Wouldn’t that be delicious! There! Look at that! It is coming down in

snowballs!”

“My!” exclaimed Dorothy, “it is awful! I hope the boys do not fail to meet me.”

“Oh, if they didn’t, you would be all right,” said Tavia. “They serve coffee and rolls at North Birchland Station on stormy nights.”

“I declare!” exclaimed Dorothy, “that young man is a friend of Ned’s! I met him last Summer, now I remember.”

“I knew I would have good luck when I played the sweet-girl part,” said Tavia, with unhidden delight. “Go right over and claim him.”

“Nonsense,” replied Dorothy, while a slight blush crept up her forehead into her hair. “We must be more careful than ever. Boys may pretend to like girls who want a good time, but my cousins would never tolerate anything like forwardness.”

“Only where they are the forwarders,” persisted Tavia. “Did not the selfsame Nat, brother to the aforesaid Ned——” **[19]**

As if the young man in front had at the same time remembered Dorothy, he left his seat and crossed the aisle to where the girls sat. His head was uncovered, of course, but his very polite manner and bow amply made up for the usual hat raising.

“Is not this Miss Dale?” he began, simply.

“Yes,” answered Dorothy, “and this Mr. Niles?”

“Same chap,” he admitted, while Tavia was wondering why he had not looked at her. “Perhaps,” she thought, “he will prove too nice.”

“I was just saying to my friend,” faltered Dorothy, “that I hope nothing will prevent Ned and Nat from meeting me. This is quite a storm.”

“But it makes Christmas pretty,” he replied, and now he did deign to look at Tavia. Dorothy, quick to realize his friendliness, immediately introduced the two.

It was Tavia’s turn to blush—a failing she very rarely gave in to. Perhaps some generous impulse prompted the gentleman who occupied the chair ahead to leave it and make his way toward the smoking room. This gave Mr. Niles a chance to sit near the girls.

“We expect a big time at Birchland this holiday,” he said. “Your cousins mentioned you would be with us.” **[20]**

“Yes, they cannot get rid of me,” Dorothy replied, in that peculiar way girls have of saying meaningless things. “I am always anxious to get to the Cedars—to see father and our boys, and Aunt Winnie, of course. I only wish Tavia were coming along,” and she made a desperate attempt to get Tavia into the conversation.

“Home is one of the Christmas tyrannies,” the young man said. “If it were not Christmas some of us might forget all about home.”

Still Tavia said not a single word. She now felt hurt. He need not have imagined she cared for

his preaching, she thought. And besides, his tie needed pressing, and his vest lacked the top button. Perhaps he had good reasons for wanting to get home to his “Ma,” she was secretly arguing.

“You live in Wildwind—not far from the Cedars; do you not?” Dorothy asked.

“I did live there until last Fall,” he replied. “But mother lost her health, and has gone out in the country, away from the lake. We are stopping near Dalton.”

Tavia fairly gasped at the word “Dalton.”

“Then why don’t you go home for Christmas?” she blurted out. **[21]**

“I am going to mother’s place to get her first,” he said. “Then, if she feels well enough, we will come back to the Birchlands.”

“My friend lives at Dalton,” Dorothy exclaimed, casting a look of admiration at the flushing Tavia.

“Indeed?” he replied. “That’s my station. I ride back from there. I am glad to have met someone who knows the place. I was fearful of being snowbound or station-bound, as I scarcely know the locality.”

“I expect to ride in Daddy Brennen’s sleigh,” said Tavia, with an effort. “He is the only one to know on a snowy night at Dalton.”

“Then perhaps you will take pity on a stranger, and introduce him to Daddy and his sleigh,” the youth replied. “Even a bad snowstorm may have its compensations.”

Tavia hated herself for thinking he really was nice. She was not accustomed to being ignored, and did not intend to forget that he had slighted her.

“I almost envy you both,” said Dorothy, good humoredly. “Just see it snow! I can see you under Daddy’s horse blanket.”

“It’s surely a horse blanket,” replied Tavia. “We cannot count on his having a steamer rug.”

“I suppose,” said Mr. Niles, “the sleigh answers all stage-coach purposes out that way?” **[22]**

“As well as freight and express,” returned Dorothy. “Dear old Dalton! I have had some good times out there!”

“Why don’t you come out now, Doro?” asked Tavia, mischievously. “There may be some good times left.”

The gentleman who had vacated the seat taken by Mr. Niles was now coming back. This, of course, was the signal for the latter to leave.

“We are almost at the Birchlands!” he said, “I hope, Miss Dale, that those boy cousins of yours do not get buried in the snow, and leave you in distress. I remember that auto of theirs had a faculty for doing wild things.”

“Oh, yes. We had more than one adventure with the *Fire Bird*. But I do not anticipate any trouble

to-night," said Dorothy. "I heard from Aunt Winnie this morning."

With a word about seeing them before the end of their journey, he took his chair, while Tavia sat perfectly still and silent, for, it seemed to Dorothy, the first time in her life.

"What is it?" she asked. "Don't you feel well, Tavia?"

"I feel like bolting. I have a mind to get off at Bridgeton. Fancy me riding with that angel!"

"I'm sure he is very nice," Dorothy said, in a tone of reproof. "I should think you would be glad to have such pleasant company." [23]

"Tickled to death!" replied Tavia, mockingly.

"I'm sure you will have some adventure," declared Dorothy. "They always begin that way."

"Do they? Well, if I fall in love with him, Doro, I'll telegraph to you," and Tavia helped her friend on with hat and coat, for the Birchlands had already been announced.

[24]

CHAPTER III

"GET A HORSE!"

"Hello there, Coz!" shouted Nat White, as Dorothy stepped from the train. "And there's Tavia—and well! If it isn't Bob Niles!"

"Yes," said Dorothy, postponing further greetings until the train should pull out, and Tavia's last hand-wave be returned. "We met him coming up, and he goes to Dalton."

"Well I'll be jiggered! And he has Tavia for company!" exclaimed the young man, who for years had regarded Tavia as his particular property, as far as solid friendship was concerned.

"And Tavia has already vowed to be mean to him," said Dorothy, as she now pressed her warm cheek against that of her cousin, the latter's being briskly red from the snowy air. "She would scarcely speak to him on the train."

"A bad sign," said Nat, as he helped Dorothy with her bag. "There are the Blakes. May as well ask them up; their machine does not seem to be around."

The pretty little country station was gay with holiday arrivals, and among them were many known to Dorothy and her popular cousin. The Blakes gladly accepted the invitation to ride over in the *Fire Bird*, their auto having somehow missed them. [25]

"You look—lovely," Mabel Blake complimented Dorothy.

"Doesn't she?" chimed in Mabel's brother, at which Dorothy buried her face deeper in her furs. Nat cranked up; and soon the *Fire Bird* was on its way toward the Cedars, the country home of Mrs. Nathaniel White, and her two sons, Nat and Ned. Mrs. White was the only sister of Major Dale, Dorothy's father, and the Dale family,

Dorothy and her brothers, Joe and little Roger, had lately made their home with her.

It lacked but a few days of Christmas, and the snowstorm added much to the beauty of the scene, while the cold was not so severe as to make the weather unpleasant. All sorts of happy remembrances were recalled between the occupants of the automobile, as it bravely made its way through drifts and small banks.

“Oh, there’s old Peter!” exclaimed Dorothy, as a man, his stooped shoulders hidden under a load of evergreens, trudged along.

“And such a heavy burden,” added Mabel. “Couldn’t we give him a lift?”

Nat slowed up a little to give the old man more room in the roadway. “Those Christmas trees are poor company in a machine,” he said. “I have tried them before.” **[26]**

“But it is so hard for him to travel all the way to the village?” pleaded Dorothy. “We could put his trees on back, and he could——”

“Sit with you and Mabel?” and Ted Blake laughed at the idea.

“No, you could do that?” retorted Dorothy, “and Peter could ride with Nat. Please, Nat——”

“Oh, all right, Coz, if it will make you happy. I wish, sometimes, I were lame, halt and old enough—to know.” Whereat he stopped the machine and insisted on old Peter doing as the girls had suggested.

It was no easy matter to get the trees, and the bunches of greens, securely fastened to the back of the auto, but it was finally accomplished. Peter was profuse in his thanks, for the greens had been specially ordered, he said, and he was already late in delivering them.

“Which way do you go?” asked Nat.

“Out to the Squire’s,” replied Peter. “But that road is soft, I wouldn’t ask you take it.”

“Oh, I guess we can make it,” proposed Nat. “The *Fire Bird* is not quite a locomotive.”

“She goes like a bird, sure enough,” affirmed Peter. “But that road is full of ditches.”

“We will try them, at any rate,” insisted Nat, as he turned from the main road to a narrow stretch of white track that cut through woods and farm lands. **[27]**

“If we are fortunate enough not to meet anything,” said Dorothy. “But I have always been afraid of a single road, bound with ditches.”

“Of course,” growled Nat, “there comes Terry with his confounded cows.”

Plowing along, his head down and his whip in hand came Terry, the half-witted boy who, Winter and Summer, drove the cows from their field or barn to the slaughter house. He never raised his head as Nat tooted the horn, and by the time the machine was abreast of the drove of cattle, Nat was obliged to make a quick swerve to avoid striking the animals.

“Oh!” gasped both Dorothy and Mabel. The car lunged, then came to a sudden stop, while the engine still pounded to get ahead.

“Hang the luck!” groaned Nat, vainly trying to start the car, which was plainly stalled.

“I told you,” commented Peter, inappropriately. “This here road——”

“Oh, hang the road!” interrupted Nat. “It was that loon—Terry.”

As the young man spoke Terry passed along as mutely as if nothing had happened.

“I’d like to try that whip on him, to see if I could wake him up,” said Ted, as he leaped out after Nat to see what could be done to get the car back on the road. **[28]**

But it was an impossible task. Pushing, pulling, prying with fence rails—all efforts left the big, red car stuck just where it had floundered.

“I know,” spoke Peter, suddenly. “I’ll get Sanders’s horse.”

“Sanders wouldn’t lend his horse to pull a man out of a ditch,” said Nat. “I’ve asked him before.”

“That’s where you made a mistake,” replied Peter. “I won’t ask him,” and he awkwardly managed to get out of the car, and was soon out on the road and making his way across the snow-covered fields.

“We may be tried for horse-stealing next,” remarked Ted, grimly. “Girls, are you perishing?”

“Not a bit of it,” declared Dorothy. “This snow is warm rather than cold.”

“My face is burning,” insisted Mabel. “But I do hope old Sanders does not set his dogs on us.”

“He’s as deaf as a post,” Ted said. “That’s a blessing—this time, at least.”

“There goes Peter in the barn,” Dorothy remarked. “He has got that far safely, at any rate.”

A strained silence followed this announcement. Yes, Peter had gone into the barn. It seemed night would come before he could possibly secure the old horse, and get to the roadway to give the necessary pull to the stalled *Fire Bird*. They waited, eagerly watching the barn door. Finally it opened. Yes, Peter was coming, leading the horse. **[29]**

“Now!” said Peter, standing with an emergency rope ready, “if only he gets past the house——”

He stopped. The door of the snow-covered cottage opened, and there stood the unapproachable Sanders.

“Oh!” gasped Mabel. “Now we are in for it!”

“Then,” said Dorothy, “let us be ready for it. I’ll prepare the defence,” and before they realized what she was about to do she had selected one of the very choicest Christmas trees, and with it on her fur-covered shoulder, actually started up

the box-wood lined walk to where the much-dreaded Sanders was standing, ready to mete out vengeance on the man who had dared to enter his barn, and take from it his horse.

“Oh Mr. Sanders!” called Dorothy. “Have you that dear little grand-daughter with you? The pretty one we had at the church affair last year?”

“You mean Emily?” he drawled. “Yep, she’s here, but——”

“Then, you wonder why we have taken your horse? And why we were stalled here?” The others could hear her from the roadway. They could see, also, that Sanders had stopped to listen. “Now we want Emily to have a Christmas tree, all her own,” went on Dorothy, “and Peter is good enough to donate it. But our machine—those cars are not like horses,” she almost shouted, as Sanders being deaf, and watching the inexorable Peter leading his horse away, had cause to be aroused from his natural surprise. “After all,” persisted Dorothy, “a horse is the best.” **[30]**

By this time Peter was outside the big gate. Sanders made a move as if to follow, when Dorothy almost dropped the clumsy tree.

“Oh, please take it!” she begged. “I want to see Emily while they are towing the machine out. It’s a lucky thing it happened just here, and that you are kind enough to let us have your horse.”

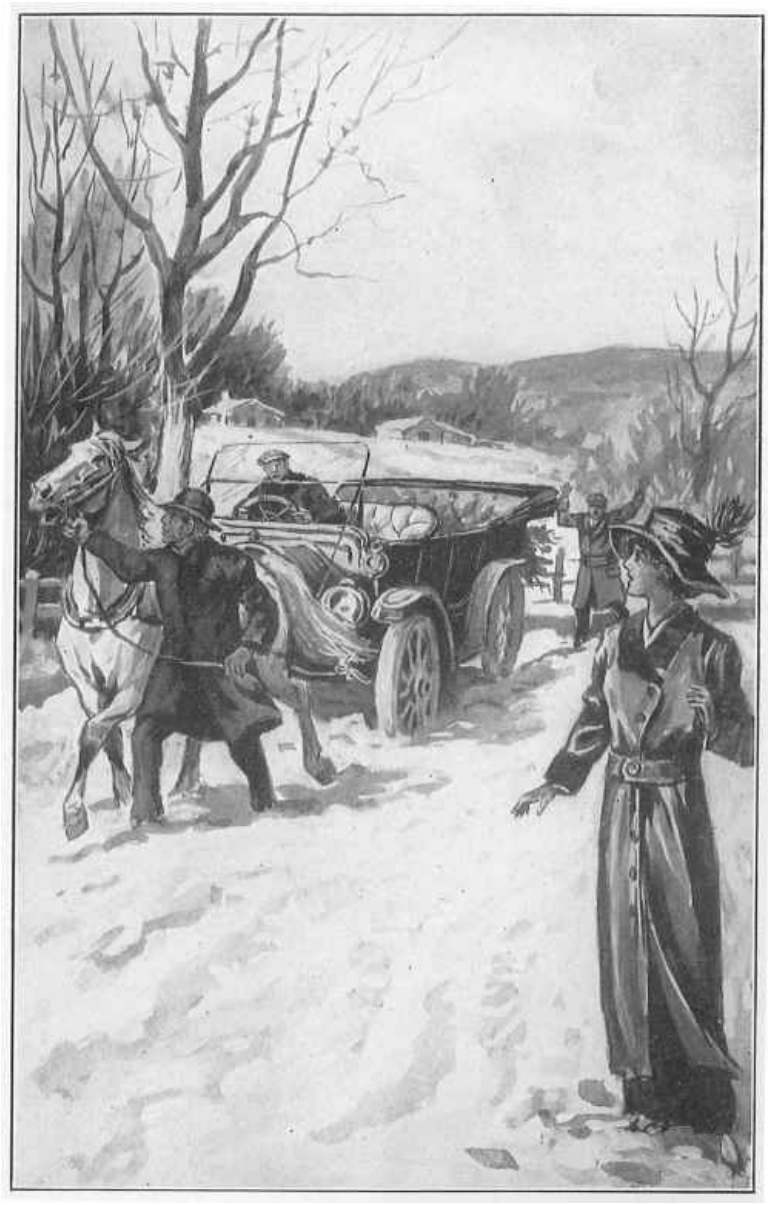
“Well what do you think of that!” exclaimed Ted, in a voice loud enough for those near him to hear. “Of all the clever tricks!”

“Oh, depend on Doro for cleverness,” replied Nat, proudly. “You just do your part, Ted, and make this rope fast.”

Mabel stood looking on in speechless surprise. She saw now that Dorothy and old Sanders were entering the cottage. Dorothy was first, and the man, with the Christmas tree, followed close behind her. The boys with Peter were busy with rope, horse and auto. Soon they had the necessary connection made, with Nat at the wheel, and all were tugging with might and main to get the *Fire Bird* free from the ditch. **[31]**

If there is anything more nerve-racking than such an attempt, it must be some other attempt at a balking auto. Would it move, or would it sink deeper into the mud that lay hidden beneath the newly-fallen snow?

Nat turned the wheel first this way and then that. Ted had his weight pressed against the rear wheel of the machine, while Peter coaxed and led the horse. Suddenly the old horse, as if desperate, gave a jerk and pulled the *Fire Bird* clear out into the roadway!



SUDDENLY THE OLD HORSE, AS IF DESPERATE, GAVE A JERK AND PULLED THE FIRE BIRD CLEAR.

“Hurrah!” yelled Ted, bounding through the snow.

“Great stunt!” corroborated Nat. “Peter, you are all right!”

“Peter did some,” replied the old man, freeing the horse from the rope that held him to the machine; “but that young lady—if she hadn’t kept Sanders busy—we might all have been arrested for horse-stealing.”

“She knew his weak spot,” agreed Nat. “That little Emily seems to be the one weak and soft spot in old Sanders’s life.”

“I had better go up and see what’s going on,” suggested Mabel, as everything seemed about in readiness to start off again. [32]

“Good idea,” assented her brother, “he might be eating her up.”

Mabel rather timidly found her way up to the cottage. It was already dusk, but the light of a dim lamp showed her the way, as it gleamed through a gloomy window, onto the glistening snow.

“Won’t it be perfectly lovely, Emily?” she heard

Doro saying, as she saw her with her arms about a little red-haired girl, both sitting on a sofa, while Sanders attempted to prop the Christmas tree up in a corner, bracing it with a wooden chair. Mabel raised the latch without going through the formality of knocking. As she entered the room, all but Dorothy started in surprise.

“This is my friend,” Dorothy hurried to explain, “it is she who is going to help me trim the tree up for Emily. We will come to-morrow,” and she rose to leave. “Mabel will fetch the doll, Emily. That is, of course, if we can persuade Santa Claus to give us just the kind we want,” she tried to correct.

“A baby dolly—with long hair and a white dress,” Emily ordered. “And I want eyelashes.”

“Perticular,” said Sanders, with a proud look at the child, who, as the boys had said, made up the one tender spot in his life. “If her ma’s cold is better, she is coming up herself.” **[33]**

“Is she sick?” Emily ventured, glad to be able to say something intelligent.

“Yep,” replied the old man, sadly. “She’s been sick a long time. I fetched Emily over this afternoon in the sleigh.”

“Well, we are so much obliged,” remarked Dorothy. “And good-bye, Emily. You’ll have everything ready for Santa Claus; won’t you?”

“I’ve got my parlor set from last year,” said the child, “and mamma says Santa Claus always likes to see the other things, to know we took care of them.”

“Thanks, Sanders,” called Peter, at the window. “The horse is as good as ever. Don’t sell him without giving me a chance. I could do something if I owned a mare like that.”

“All right,” called back Sanders, whose pride was being played upon. “He might be worse. Did you put her in the far stall?”

“Just where I got her. And I tell you, Sanders, even a horse can play at Christmas. Only for him I never could get those trees to town.”

“And only for Peter,” put in Dorothy, “we could not have gotten Emily her tree. Now that’s how a horse can turn Santa Claus. Good-bye, Mr. Sanders, you may expect us before Christmas.”

And then the two girls followed the chuckling Peter back to the *Fire Bird*, where the boys impatiently awaited them, to complete the delayed party bound for home, and for the Christmas holidays. **[34]**

[35]

CHAPTER IV

A REAL BEAUTY BATH

“This is some,” remarked Bob Niles, before he knew what he was talking about. They had just been ensconsed in Daddy Brennen’s sleigh. Tavia was beside him—that is, she was as close beside him as she was beside Daddy Brennen,

but the real fact was, that in this sleigh, no one could be beside anyone else—it was ever a game of toss and catch. But that was not Daddy's fault. He never stopped calling to his horse, or pulling at the reins. It must have been the roads, yet everyone paid taxes in Dalton Township.

"Don't boast," Tavia answered, adjusting herself anew to the last jolt, "this never was a sleigh to boast of, and it seems to be worse than ever now. There!" she gasped, as she almost fell over the low board that outlined the edge, "one more like that, and I will be mixed up with the gutter."

"Perhaps this is a safer place," Bob ventured. "I seem to stay put pretty well. Won't you change with me?"

"No, thanks," Tavia answered, good-humoredly. "When Daddy assigns one to a seat one must keep it." **[36]**

"Nice clean storm," Daddy called back from the front. "I always like a white Christmas."

"Yes," Tavia said, "looks as if this is going to be white enough. But what are you turning into the lane for, Daddy?"

"Promised Neil Blair I'd take his milk in for him. He can't get out much in storms—rheumatism."

"Oh," Tavia ejaculated. Then to Bob: "How we are going to ride with milk cans is more than I can see."

"The more the merrier," Bob replied, laughing. "I never had a better time in my life. This beats a straw ride."

"Oh, we have had them too, with Daddy," she told him. "Doro and our crowd used to have good times when she lived in Dalton."

"No doubt. This is the farmhouse, I guess," Bob added, as the sleigh pulled up to a hill.

"Yes, this is Neil's place," Tavia said. "And there comes Mrs. Blair with a heavy milk can."

"Oh, I must help her with that," offered the young man. "I suppose our driver has to take care of his speedy horse."

Disentangling himself from the heavy blankets, Bob managed to alight in time to take the milk can from the woman, who stood with it at the top of the hill. **[37]**

"Oh, thank you, sir!" she panted. "The cans seem to get heavier, else I am getting lazy. But Neil had such a twinge, from this storm, that I wouldn't let him out."

"And did you do all the milking?" Tavia asked, as Bob managed to place the can in the spot seemingly made for it, beside Daddy.

"Certainly. Oh, how do you do, Tavia? How fine you look; I'm glad to see you home for Christmas," Mrs. Blair assured the girl.

"Thank you. I'm glad to get home."

"Fetchin' company?" with a glance at young Niles.

"No, he's going farther on," and Tavia wondered

why it was so difficult for her to make such a trifling remark.

“Well, I’m glad he came this way, at any rate,” the woman continued. “But Daddy will be goin’ without the other can,” and she turned off again in the direction of the barn.

“Are there more?” Bob asked Tavia, cautiously.

“I’m afraid so,” she replied. “But I guess she can manage them.”

“My mother would disown me if she knew I let her,” Bob asserted, bravely. “This is an experience not in the itinerary,” and he scampered up the hill, and made for the barn after Mrs. Blair.

Tavia could not help but admire him. After all, she thought, a good-looking lad could be useful, if only for carrying milk cans. **[38]**

“And has that young gent gone after the can?” asked Daddy, as if just awaking from some dream.

“Yes,” Tavia replied, rather sharply. “He wouldn’t let Mrs. Blair carry such a heavy thing.”

“Well, she’s used to it,” Daddy declared. At the same time he did disturb himself sufficiently to get out and prepare to put the second can in its place.

A college boy, in a travelling suit, carrying a huge milk can through the snow, Tavia thought rather a novel sight, but Bob showed his training, and managed it admirably.

“I’ll put her in,” offered Daddy, “I didn’t know you went after it.”

“So kind of him,” remarked Mrs. Blair, “but he would have it. Thank you, Daddy, for stopping. Neil’ll make it all right with you.”

Daddy was standing up in the sleigh, the can in his hands, “I think,” he faltered, “I’ll have to set this down by you, Miss Travers,” he decided.

“All right,” Tavia agreed, making room at her feet.

He lifted the can high enough to get it over the back of the seat. It was heavy, and awkward, and he leaned on the rickety seat trying to support himself. The weight was too much for the board, and before Bob could get in to help him, and before Tavia could get herself out of the way, the can tilted and the milk poured from it in a torrent over the head, neck and shoulders of Tavia! **[39]**

“Oh, mercy!” she yelled. “My new furs!”

“Save the milk,” growled Daddy.

“Jump up!” Bob commanded Tavia. “Let it run off if it will.”

But Tavia was either too disgusted, or too surprised, to “jump up.” Instead she sat there, fixing a frozen look at the unfortunate Daddy.

“My milk!” screamed Mrs. Blair. “A whole can full!”

“Was it ordered?” Bob asked, who by this time had gotten Tavia from under the shower.

“No,” she said hesitatingly, “but someone would have took it for Christmas bakin’.”

“Then let us have it,” offered Bob, generously. “If I had kept my seat perhaps it would not have happened.”

“Nonsense,” objected Tavia, “it was entirely Daddy’s fault.”

But Daddy did not hear—he was busy trying to save the dregs in the milk can.

“What’s it worth?” persisted Bob.

“Two dollars,” replied Mrs. Blair, promptly.

Bob put his hand in his pocket and took out two bills. He handed them to the woman. **[40]**

“There,” he said, “it will be partly a Christmas present. I only hope my—friend’s furs will not be ruined.”

“Milk don’t hurt,” Mrs. Blair said, without reason. “Thank you, sir,” she added to Bob. “This is better than ten that’s comin’. And land knows we needed it to-night.”

“I’ve lost time enough,” growled Daddy. “And that robe is spoiled. Next time I carry milk cans I’ll get a freight car.”

“And the next time I take a milk beauty bath,” said Tavia, “I’ll wear old clothes.” But as Bob climbed in again, and Tavia assured him her furs were not injured, she thought of Dorothy’s prediction that she, Tavia, was about to have an adventure when she met Bob Niles.

“I’ll have something to tell Dorothy,” she remarked aloud.

“And I’ll have news for Nat,” slily said Bob.

[41]

CHAPTER V
DOROTHY’S PROTEGE

“Well, what do you think of that!”

“Well, what do you think of this!”

It was Nat who spoke first, and Dorothy who echoed. They were both looking at letters—from Tavia and from Bob.

“I knew Bob would find her interesting,” said Nat, with some irony in his tone.

“And I knew she would finally like him,” said Dorothy, significantly.

“Bob has a way with girls,” went on Nat, “he always takes them slowly—it’s the surest way.”

“But don’t you think Tavia is very pretty? Everyone at school raves about her,” Dorothy declared with unstinted pride, for Tavia’s golden brown hair, and matchless complexion, were ever a source of pride to her chum.

“Of course she’s pretty,” Nat agreed. “Wasn’t it I who discovered her?”

Dorothy laughed, and gave a lock of her cousin’s own brown hair a twist. She, as well as all their mutual friends, knew that Nat and Tavia were the sort of chums who grow up together and cement their friendship with the test of time. **[42]**

“Come to think of it,” she replied, “you always did like red-headed girls.”

“Now there’s Mabel,” he digressed, “Mabel has hair that seems a misfit—she has blue eyes and black hair. Isn’t that an error?”

“Indeed,” replied Dorothy, “that is considered one of the very best combinations. Rare beauty, in fact.”

“Well, I hope she is on time for the Christmas-tree affair out at Sanders’s, whatever shade her hair. I don’t see, Doro, why you insist on going away out there to put things on that tree. Why not ask the Sunday School people to trim it? We gave the tree.”

“Because I promised, Nat,” replied Dorothy, firmly, “and because I just like to do it for little Emily. I got the very doll she ordered, and Aunt Winnie got me a lot of pretty things this morning.”

“Wish momsey would devote her charity to her poor little son,” said the young man, drily. “He is the one who needs it most!”

“Never mind, dear,” and Dorothy put her arms around him, “you shall have a dolly, too.”

“Here’s Ned,” he interrupted, “I wonder if he got my skates sharpened? I asked him, but I’ll wager he forgot.”

The other brother, a few years Nat’s senior, pulled off his furlined coat, and entered the library, where the cousins were chatting. **[43]**

“Getting colder every minute,” he declared. “We had better take the cutter out to Sanders’s—that is, if Doro insists upon going.”

“Of course I do,” Dorothy cried. “I wouldn’t disappoint little Emily for anything. Funny how you boys have suddenly taken a dislike to going out there.”

“Now don’t get peevish,” teased Ned. “We will take you, Coz, if we freeze by the wayside.”

“Did you get my skates?” Nat asked.

“Not done,” the brother replied. “Old Tom is busy enough for ten grinders. Expect we will have a fine race.”

“And I can’t get in shape. Well, I wish I had taken them out to Wakefield’s. He would have had them done days ago. But if we are going to Sanders’s, better get started. I’ll call William to put the cutter up.”

“Here come Ted and Mabel now. They’re sleighing, too,” exclaimed Dorothy. “Won’t we have a jolly party!”

“That’s a neat little cutter,” remarked Ned,

glancing out of the window. “And Mabel does look pretty in a red—what do you call that Scotch cap?”

“Tam o’Shanter,” Dorothy helped out. “Yes, it is very becoming. But Neddie, dear?” and her voice questioned. **[44]**

“Oh, I don’t know,” he replied indifferently. “Mabel was always kind of—witchy. I like that type.”

“And Ted is—so considerate,” Dorothy added with a mock sigh. “I do wonder how Bob and Tavia are getting along?”

“Probably planning suicide by this time—I say planning, you know, not executing. It would be so nice for a boy as good as Bob to be coerced into some wild prank by the wily Tavia.”

“She did not happen, however, to lead you into any,” retorted Dorothy, “and I take it you are a ‘good boy’.”

“Oh, but how hard she tried,” and he feigned regret. “Tavia would have taught me to feed out of her hand, had I not been—so well brought up.”

This bantering occupied the moments between the time Ted’s sleigh glided into view, and its arrival at the door of the Cedars.

“’Lo, ’lo!” exclaimed Mabel, her cheeks matching the scarlet of her Tam o’Shanter.

“Low, low! Sweet and Low!” responded Nat. “Also so low!”

“No—but Milo!” said Ned, with a complimentary look at Mabel. “The Venus mended.”

“’High low,’” went on Ted. “That’s what it is. A high—low and the game! To go out there to-night in this freeze!” **[45]**

“Strange thing,” Dorothy murmured, “how young men freeze up—sort of antagonistic convulsion.”

“Oh, come on,” drawled Ned, “when a girl wills, she will—and there’s an end on it.”

It did not take the girls long to comply—Dorothy was out with Ted, Mabel, Nat and Ned before the boys had a chance to relent.

“Those bundles?” questioned Ted, as Dorothy surrounded herself with the things for Emily.

“Now did you ever!” exclaimed Dorothy. “It seems to me everything is displeasing to-day.”

“No offence, I’m sure,” Ted hastened to correct, “but the fact is—we boys had a sort of good time framed up for this afternoon. Not but what we are delighted to be of service——”

“Why didn’t you say so?” Dorothy asked.

It seemed for the moment that the girls and boys were not to get along in their usual pleasant manner. But the wonderful sleighing, and the delightful afternoon, soon obliterated the threatening difficulties, and a happy, laughing party in each cutter glided over the road, now evenly packed with mid-winter snow.

The small boys along the way occasionally stole a ride on the back runners of the sleighs, or "got a hitch" with sled or bob, thus saving the walk up hill or the jaunt to the ice pond. **[46]**

"Oh, there's Dr. Gray!" Dorothy exclaimed suddenly as a gentleman in fur coat and cap was seen hurrying along. "I wonder why he is walking?"

"For his health, likely," Ted answered. "Doctors know the sort of medicine to take for their own constitutions."

By this time they were abreast of the physician. Dorothy called out to him:

"Where's your horse, Doctor?"

"Laid up," replied the medical man, with a polite greeting. "He slipped yesterday——"

"Going far?" Ted interrupted, drawing his horse up.

"Out to Sanders's," replied the doctor.

"Sanders's!" repeated Dorothy. "That's where we're going. Who's sick?"

"The baby," replied the doctor, "and they asked me to hurry."

"Get in with us," Ted invited, while Dorothy almost gasped. Little Emily sick! She could scarcely believe it.

Dr. Gray gladly accepted the invitation to ride, and the next cutter with Ned, Nat and Mabel, pulled up along side of Ted's.

"You may as well turn back," Dorothy told them. Then she explained that little Emily was sick, and likely would not want her Christmas tree trimmed. **[47]**

"But I'll go along," she said, "I may be able to help, for her mother is sick, even if she is with her."

After all her preparations, it was a great disappointment to think the child could not enjoy the gifts. Dr. Gray told her, however, that Emily was subject to croup, and that perhaps the spell would not last.

At the house they found everything in confusion. Emily's sick mother coughed harder at every attempt she made to help the little one, while Mr. Sanders, the child's grandfather, tried vainly to get water hot on a lukewarm stove.

"Pretty bad, Doc," he said with a groan, "thought she'd choke to death last night."

Without waiting to be directed, Dorothy threw aside her heavy coat, drew off her gloves, and was breaking bits of wood in her hands, to hurry the kettle that, being watched, had absolutely refused to boil.

"You can just put that oil on to heat, Miss Dale," Dr. Gray said, he having bidden the sick woman to keep away from Emily. "We'll rub her up well with warm oil, and see if we can loosen up that congestion."

Emily lay on the uneven sofa, her cheeks

burning, and her breath jerking in struggles and coughs.

Dorothy found a pan and had the oil hot before the doctor was ready to use it. **[48]**

“Quite a nurse,” he said, in that pleasant way the country doctor is accustomed to use. “Glad I happened to meet you.”

“I’m glad, too,” Dorothy replied sincerely. “Never mind, Emily, you will have your Christmas tree, as soon as we get the naughty cold cured,” she told the child.

Emily’s eyes brightened a little. The tree still stood in a corner of the room. Outside, Ted was driving up and down the road in evident impatience, but Dorothy was too busy to notice him.

Soon the hot applications took effect, and Emily breathed more freely and regularly. Then the doctor attended to the other patient—the mother. It was a sad Christmas time, and had a depressing effect even on the young spirits of Dorothy. She tried to speak to Emily, but her eyes wandered around at the almost bare room, and noted its untidy appearance. Dishes were piled up on the table, pans stood upon the floor, papers were littered about. How could people live that way? she wondered.

Mrs. Tripp, Emily’s mother, must be a widow, Dorothy thought, and she knew old Mrs. Sanders had died the Winter before.

The doctor had finished with Mrs. Tripp. He glanced anxiously about him. To whom would he give instructions? Mr. Sanders seemed scarcely capable of giving the sick ones the proper care. **[49]**

Dorothy saw the look of concern on the doctor’s face and she rightly interpreted it.

“If we only could take them to some other place,” she whispered to him. Then she stopped, as a sudden thought seized her.

“Doesn’t Mr. Wolters always make a Christmas gift to the sanitarium?” she asked Dr. Gray.

“Always,” replied the doctor.

“Then why can’t we ask him to have little Emily and her mother taken to the sanitarium? They surely need just such care,” she said quickly.

The doctor slapped one hand on the other, showing that the suggestion had solved the problem. Then he motioned Dorothy out into the room across the small hall. She shivered as she entered it, for it was without stove, or other means of heating.

“If I only had my horse,” he said, “I would go right over to Wolters’s. He would do a great deal for me, and I want that child cared for to-night.”

“I’ll ask Ted to let us take his sleigh,” Dorothy offered, promptly. “He could go with us to the Corners, and then you could drive.”

“And take you?” asked Dr. Gray. “I am sure you young folks have a lot to do this afternoon.”

“No matter about that,” persisted Dorothy. “If I **[50]**

can help, I am only too glad to do it. And Mr. Wolters is on Aunt Winnie's executive board. He might listen to my appeal."

There was neither time nor opportunity for further conversation, so Dorothy hastily got into her things, and soon she was in Ted's sleigh again, huddled close to Dr. Gray in his big, fur coat.

The plan was unfolded to Ted, and he, anxious to get back to his friends, willingly agreed to walk from the Corners, and there turn the cutter over to the charity workers.

"But Dorothy," he objected, "I know they will all claim I should have insisted on your coming back with me. They will say you will kill yourself with charity, and all that sort of thing."

"Then say I will be home within an hour," Dorothy directed, as Ted jumped on the bob that a number of boys were dragging up the hill. "Good-bye, and thank you for the rig."

"One hour, mind," Ted called back. "You can drive Bess, I know."

"Of course," Dorothy shouted. Then Bess was headed for The Briars, the country home of the millionaire Wolters.

"Suppose he has already made his gift," Dorothy demurred, as she wrapped the fur robe closely about her feet, "and says he can't guarantee any more."

"Then I guess he will have to make another," said the doctor. "I would not be responsible for the life of that child out there in that shack." [51]

"If he agrees, how will you get Mrs. Tripp and Emily out to the sanitarium?" Dorothy asked.

"Have to 'phone to Lakeside, and see if we can get the ambulance," he replied. "That's the only way to move them safely."

It seemed to Dorothy that her plan was more complicated than she had imagined it would be, but it was Christmas time, and doing good for others was in the very atmosphere.

"It will be a new kind of Christmas tree," observed the doctor. "But she's a cunning little one—she deserves to be kept alive."

"Indeed she does," Dorothy said, "and I'm glad if I can help any."

"Why I never would have thought of the plan," said the doctor. "I had been thinking all the time we ought to do something, but Wolters's Christmas gift never crossed my mind. Here we are. My, but this is a great place!" he finished. And the next moment Dorothy had jumped out of the cutter and was at the door of Mr. Ferdinand Wolters.

[52]

CHAPTER VI

THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS

Dorothy was scolded. There her own family—father, Joe and Roger, to say nothing of dear

Aunt Winnie, and the cousins Ned and Nat—were waiting for her important advice about a lot of Christmas things, and she had ridden off with Dr. Gray, attending to the gloomy task of having a sick child and her mother placed in a sanitarium.

But she succeeded, and when on the following day she visited Emily and her mother, she found the nurses busy in an outer hall, fixing up the Christmas tree that Mr. Sanders had insisted upon bringing all the way from the farmhouse where Dorothy had left it for little Emily.

The very gifts that Dorothy left unopened out there, when she found the child sick, the nurses were placing on the tree, waiting to surprise Emily when she would open her eyes on the real Christmas day.

And there had been added to these a big surprise indeed, for Mr. Wolters was so pleased with the result of his charity, that he added to the hospital donation a personal check for Mrs. Tripp and her daughter. The check was placed in a tiny feed bag, from which a miniature horse (Emily's pet variety of toy) was to eat his breakfast on Christmas morning. **[53]**

Major Dale did not often interfere with his daughter's affairs, but this time his sister, Mrs. White, had importuned him, declaring that Dorothy would take up charity work altogether if they did not insist upon her taking her proper position in the social world. It must be admitted that the kind old major believed that more pleasure could be gotten out of Dorothy's choice than that of his well-meaning, and fashionable, sister. But Winnie, he reflected, had been a mother to Dorothy for a number of years, and women, after all, knew best about such things.

It was only when Dorothy found the major alone in his little den off his sleeping rooms that the loving daughter stole up to the footstool, and, in her own childish way, told him all about it. He listened with pardonable pride, and then told Dorothy that too much charity is bad for the health of growing girls. The reprimand was so absurd that Dorothy hugged his neck until he reminded her that even the breath of a war veteran has its limitations.

So Emily was left to her surprises, and now, on the afternoon of the night before Christmas, we find Dorothy and Mabel, with Ned, Nat and Ted, busy with the decorations of the Cedars. Step ladders knocked each other down, as the enthusiastic boys tried to shift more than one to exactly the same spot in the long library. Kitchen chairs toppled over just as Dorothy or Mabel jumped to save their slippered feet, and the long strings of evergreens, with which all hands were struggling, made the room a thing of terror for Mrs. White and Major Dale. **[54]**

The scheme was to run the greens in a perfect network across the beamed ceiling, not in the usual "chandelier-corner" fashion, but latticed after the style of the Spanish serenade legend.

At intervals little red paper bells dangled, and a prettier idea for decoration could scarcely be conceived. To say that Dorothy had invented it would not do justice to Mabel, but however that may be, all credit, except stepladder episodes,

was accorded the girls.

“Let me hang the big bell,” begged Ted, “if there is one thing I have longed for all my life it was that—to hang a big ‘belle’.”

He aimed his stepladder for the middle of the room, but Nat held the bell.

“She’s my belle,” insisted Nat, “and she’s not going to be hanged—she’ll be hung first,” and he caressed the paper ornament.

“If you boys do not hurry we will never get done,” Dorothy reminded them. “It’s almost dark now.” **[55]**

“Almost, but not quite,” teased Ted. “Dorothy, between this and dark, there are more things to happen than would fill a hundred stockings. By the way, where do we hang the hose?”

“We don’t,” she replied. “Stockings are picturesque in a kitchen, but absurd in such a bower as this.”

“Right, Coz,” agreed Ned, deliberately sitting down with a wreath of greens about his neck. “Cut out the laundry, ma would not pay my little red chop-suey menu last week, and I may have to wear a kerchief on Yule day.”

“Oh, don’t you think that—sweet!” exulted Mabel, making a true lover’s knot of the end of her long rope of green that Nat had succeeded in intertwining with Dorothy’s ‘cross town line’.

“Delicious,” declared Ned, jumping up and placing his arms about her neck.

“Stop,” she cried. “I meant the bow.”

“Who’s running this show, any way?” asked Ted. “Do you see the time, Frats?”

The mantle clock chimed six. Ned and Nat jumped up, and shook themselves loose from the stickery holly leaves as if they had been so many feathers.

“We must eat,” declared Ned, dramatically, “for to-morrow we die!” **[56]**

“We cannot have tea until everything is finished,” Dorothy objected. “Do you think we girls can clean up this room?”

“Call the maids in,” Ned advised, foolishly, for the housemaids at the Cedars were not expected to clean up after the “festooners.”

Dorothy frowned her reply, and continued to gather up the ends of everything. Mabel did not desert either, but before the girls realized it, the boys had run off—to the dining room where a hasty meal, none the less enjoyable, was ready to be eaten.

“What do you suppose they are up to?” Mabel asked.

“There is something going on when they are in such a hurry. What do you say if we follow them? It is not dark, and they can’t be going far,” answered Dorothy.

Mabel gladly agreed, and, a half hour later, the two girls cautiously made their way along the

white road, almost in the shadow of three jolly youths. Occasionally they could hear the remarks that the boys made.

“They are going to the wedding!” Dorothy exclaimed. “The seven o’clock wedding at Winter’s!”

Mabel did not reply. The boys had turned around, and she clutched Dorothy’s arm nervously. Instinctively both girls slowed their pace. [57]

“They did not see us,” Dorothy whispered, presently. “But they are turning into Sodden’s!”

Sodden’s was the home of one of the boys’ chums—Gus Sodden by name. He was younger than the others, and had the reputation of being the most reckless chap in North Birchland.

“But,” mused Mabel, “the wedding is to be at the haunted house! I should be afraid——”

“Mabel!” Dorothy exclaimed, “you do not mean to say that you believe in ghosts!”

“Oh—no,” breathed Mabel, “but you know the idea is so creepy.”

“That is why,” Dorothy said with a light laugh, “we have to creep along now. Look at Ned. He must feel our presence near.”

The boys now were well along the path to the Sodden home. It was situated far down in a grove, to which led a path through the hemlock trees. These trees were heavy with the snow that they seemed to love, for other sorts of foliage had days before shed the fall that had so gently stolen upon them—like a caress from a white world of love.

“My, it is dark!” demurred Mabel, again.

“Mabel Blake!” accused Dorothy. “I do believe you are a coward!”

It was lonely along the way. Everyone being busy with Christmas at home, left the roads deserted. [58]

“What do you suppose they are going in there for?” Mabel finally whispered.

“We will have to wait and find out,” replied Dorothy. “When one starts out spying on boys she must be prepared for all sorts of surprises.”

“Oh, there comes Gus! Look!” Mabel pointed to a figure making tracks through the snow along the path.

“And—there are the others. It did not take them long to make up. They are—Christmas—Imps. Such make-ups!” Dorothy finished, as she beheld the boys, in something that might have been taken, or mistaken, for stray circus baggage.

Even in their disguise it was easy to recognize the boys. Ned wore a kimono—bright red. On his head was the tall sort of cap that clowns and the old-fashioned school dunce wore. Nat was “cute” in somebody’s short skirt and a shorter jacket. He wore also a worsted cap that was really, in the dim light, almost becoming. Ted matched up Nat, the inference being that they were to be

Christmas attendants on Santa Claus.

The girls stepped safely behind the hedge as the procession passed. The boys seemed too involved in their purpose to talk.

“Now,” said Dorothy, “we may follow. I knew they were up to something big.”

“Aren’t they too funny!” said Mabel, who had almost giggled disastrously as the boys passed. “I thought I would die!” **[59]**

There was no time to spare now, for the boys were walking very quickly, and it was not so easy for the girls to keep up with them and at the same time to keep away from them.

Straight they went for what was locally called the “haunted” house. This was a fine old mansion, with big rooms and broad chimneys, which had once been the home of a family of wealth. But there had been a sad tragedy there, and after that it had been said that ghosts held sway at the place. It had been deserted for two years, but now, with the former owner dead, a niece of the family, fresh from college, had insisted upon being married there, and the house had been accordingly put into shape for the ceremony.

It was to be a fashionable wedding, at the hour of six, and people had kept the station agent busy all day inquiring how to reach the scene of the wedding.

Lights already burned brightly in the rooms, that could be seen to be decorated in holiday style. People fluttered around and through the long French windows; the young folks, boys and girls, being hidden in different quarters, could alike see something of what was going on in the haunted house.

“They’re coming!” Dorothy heard Nat exclaim, just as he ducked in by the big outside chimney. The broad flue was at the extreme end of the house, forming the southern part of the library, just off the wide hall that ran through the middle of the place. Dorothy and Mabel had taken refuge in one of the many odd corners of the big, old fashioned porch, which partly encircled this wing, and commanding a wonderful view of the interior of the house, the halls and library, and long, narrow drawing room. **[60]**

There was a smothered laugh at the corner of the porch where the boys had ducked, and the girls watched in wonder. The latter saw Nat boost Ned up the side of the porch column, and Ted followed nimbly. In tense silence the girls listened to their footsteps cross the porch roof, then as scraping and slipping and much suppressed mirth floated down.

“They’re going down the chimney!” declared Dorothy, in astonishment.

“They surely are!” affirmed Mabel, leaning far over the porch rail.

“But, Doro, what of the fire?”

“They don’t use that chimney. They use the one on the other side of the house, and the one in the kitchen.”

[61]

CHAPTER VII
REAL GHOSTS

"That explains the basket!" exclaimed Dorothy, suddenly.

"How can they do it!" Mabel giggled excitedly.

"They can't," Dorothy replied, calmly, "they'll simply get in a mess—soot and things, you know."

"Let's run. I'm too excited to breathe! I know something dreadful is bound to happen!" And Mabel clutched Dorothy's arm.

"And leave the boys to their fate? No, indeed, we'll see the prank through, since we walked into it," Dorothy said, determinedly.

Mabel laughed nervously, and looked at Dorothy in puzzled impatience. "I always believe in running while there's time," she explained.

Music, sweet and low, floated out on the still, cold air of the night, and the wedding guests, in trailing gowns of silver and lace and soft satins, stood in laughing groups, all eyes turned toward the broad staircase.

"How quiet it's become; everyone has stopped talking," whispered Mabel, in Dorothy's ear. [62]

"How peculiarly they are all staring! But of course it must be exciting just before the bride appears," murmured Dorothy, in answer.

"Oh, there comes the bride!" cried Mabel. "Isn't she sweet!"

"It's a stunt to trail downstairs that way—like a summer breeze. How beautifully gauzy she looks!" sighed Dorothy.

The eyes of the guests were turned half in wonder toward the old chimney place, and half smilingly toward the bride. On came the bride, tall and slender and leaning gracefully on her father's arm, straight toward the tall mantel in the chimney place, which was lavishly banked with palms and flowers, and the minister began reading the ceremony.

"Hey! Let go there!" Ned's muffled voice floated above the heads of the wedding guests, who stood aghast.

"You're stuck all right, old chap," came the consoling voice of Nat in a ghostly whisper.

Sounds of half-smothered, weird laughter—or so the laughter seemed to the guests—filled the air. The bridegroom flushed and looked quickly at his bride, who clung to her father's arm, pale with fright. The minister alone was calm.

As the bridegroom's clear answer: "I will" came to the ears of Dorothy and Mabel out on the porch, a creepy sound issued from the great fireplace. The newly-made husband kissed his bride, and the guests moved back. [63]

Dorothy leaned eagerly forward to catch a glimpse of the radiantly smiling bride. Just then a tall palm wavered, fell to the floor with a

crash, and in falling, carried vases and jars of flowers with it, and the ghostly laughter could be plainly heard by all.

All the tales that had been told of the haunted house came vividly before each guest. There were feminine screams, a confused rush for the hallway, and in two seconds the wedding festivities were in an uproar. The bride sank to the floor, and with white, upturned face, lay unconscious.

The men of the party with one thought jumped to the fireplace, and Ned was dragged, by way of the chimney, into the room. Completely dazed, utterly chagrined, and looking altogether foolish, he sat in a round, high basket, his knees crushed under his chin, the clown's cap rakishly hanging over one ear, his face unrecognizable in its thick coating of cobwebs and soot.

"Oh, we're so sorry," Dorothy's eager young voice broke upon the hushed crowd, as she ran into the room, with Mabel behind her.

Ned stared open-mouthed at the gaily-dressed people. It had happened so suddenly, and was so far from what he had planned, that he could not get himself in hand. **[64]**

"Good gracious!" exclaimed the bride's father, pacing up and down, "can't someone get order out of this chaos?"

The bridegroom was chafing the small white hands of his bride, and the guests stepped away to give her air. The wedding finery lay limp and draggled. Dorothy stifled a moan as she looked. Quickly jumping out of the crowd she left the room. Mabel stood still, uncertain as to what to do. At the long French windows appeared Nat, Ted and Gus, grotesque in their make-ups and trying in vain to appear as serious as the situation demanded.

"Step in here!" commanded the father, and the boys meekly stepped in. A brother of the bride held Ned firmly by the arm. "Now, young scallywags, explain yourselves!"

It was an easy thing for the irate father to demand, but it completely upset the boys. They couldn't explain themselves.

In an awed whisper, Ned ventured an explanation: "We only wanted to keep up the reputation of the house."

"And the basket stuck," eagerly helped out Ted. "We just thought we would whisper mysteriously and—and cough—or something," and Ned tried to free himself from the grip on his arm.

"It was wider than we thought and the basket kept going down——" Nat's voice was hoarse, but he couldn't control his mirth. **[65]**

"The rope slipped some—and the basket stuck ——" Ted's voice was brimming over with apologies.

"Naturally, we would have entered by the front door," politely explained Gus, "had we foreseen this."

"You see it stuck," persisted Ted, apparently unable to remember anything but that awful

fact.

“Then it really wasn’t spooks,” asked a tall, dark-haired girl, as she joined the group.

One by one the guests gingerly returned to the room and stood about, staring in amusement at the boys. The cool, though severe stares of the ladies were harder to bear than any rough treatment that might be accorded them by the men. Against the latter they could defend themselves, but, as Ned suddenly realized, there is no defence for mere man against the amused stare of a lady.

“It certainly could be slated at police headquarters as ‘entering’,” calmly said a stout man, taking in every detail of the boys’ costumes. “Disturbing the peace and several other things.”

“With intent to do malicious mischief,” the man who spoke balanced himself on his heels and swung a chrysanthemum to and fro by the stem.

The minister was walking uneasily about. The bride was on a sofa where she had been lifted to come out of her faint. **[66]**

In a burst of impatience Ted whispered to Mabel, whom, for some reason, he did not appear at all surprised to see there: “Where’s Dorothy?”

Mabel, scared and perplexed, shook her head solemnly. But, as if in answer to the question, Dorothy rushed into the room, her cheeks aglow, her hair flying wildly about, and behind her walked Dr. Gray.

Dr. Gray’s kindly smile beamed on the little bride, and he soon brought her around. Sitting up, she burst into a peal of merry laughter.

“What, pray tell me, are they?” she demanded, pointing at the boys. She was still white, but her eyes danced, and her small white teeth gleamed between red lips.

“My cousins,” bravely answered Dorothy. Everyone laughed, and the boys, in evident relief, shouted.

“You’ve come to my wedding!” exclaimed the bride.

“Kind of ’em; wasn’t it?” said the bridegroom, sneeringly.

“But we’re going now,” quickly replied Dorothy, with great dignity.

“Why?” asked the bride with wide open eyes. “Since you are not really spooky creatures, stay for the dancing.”

“We’re terribly thankful you are not ghosts,” chirped a fluffy bridesmaid. **[67]**

“You see if you had really been spooks,” laughed the bride, “everyone would have shrieked at me that horrible phrase, ‘I told you so,’ because you know I insisted upon being married in this house, just to defy superstition.”

“Just think what you’ve saved us!” said the tall, dark-haired girl.

“Of course if it will be any accommodation,” awkwardly put in Ned, “we’ll dance.” He thought he had said the perfectly polite thing.

“He’s going to dance for us!” cried the tall girl, to the others in the hall, and everyone crowded in.

An hour later, trudging home in the bright moonlight, Dorothy sighed: “Weren’t they wonderful!”

“It was decent of them to let us stay and have such fun,” commented Ned.

“And such eats!” mused Nat. And Nat and Ned, with a strangle hold on each other, waltzed down the road.

Happy, but completely tired, the boys and girls plowed through the snow, homeward bound.

[68]

CHAPTER VIII
THE AFTERMATH

Christmas day, at dusk, the boys were stretched lazily before the huge fire in the grate, when Dorothy jumped up excitedly:

“Boys, here’s Tavia! And I declare, Bob Niles is with her!”

“Good for Bob!” sang out Ned.

“’Rah! ’Rah!” whooped Ted, and all rushed for the door.

Gaily Tavia hugged them all. Bob stood discreetly aside.

“Father was called away, and it was so dreary—I just ran over to see everyone,” gushed Tavia.

“Well, we’re glad to see you,” welcomed Aunt Winnie.

“Oh, Tavia,” whispered Dorothy, “how did you manage to get Bob?”

“Get whom?” Tavia tried to look blank. Dorothy spoiled the blankness by stuffing a large chocolate cream right into Tavia’s mouth before her chum could close it. **[69]**

“Thought you’d find Tavia interesting,” grinned Ned, helping Bob take off his great ulster, at which words the lad addressed flushed to his temples.

“Say, fellows, that yarn about the hose——” began Nat.

“Nat no longer believes in Santa and the stockings,” chimed in Ned, “he hung up all his socks last night and——”

Nat glared at Ned, then calmly proceeded: “About the hose, as I was saying, is nonsense! I own some pretty decent-looking socks, as you’ve noticed—I hung ’em all up and nary a sock remained on the line this morning. Santa stole them!”

“It’s the funniest thing about Nat’s socks,”

explained Dorothy, hastily, “he thought one pair would not hold enough, and so strung them all over the fireplace, and this morning they were gone!”

Ted hummed a dreamy tune, and stared at the beamed ceiling, with a faraway look in his eyes. Nat, with sudden suspicion, grabbed Ted’s leg, and there, sure enough, was one pair of his highly-prized, and highly-colored, socks, snugly covering Ted’s ankles.

A rough and tumble fight followed, and Tavia, with high glee, jumped into it. Finally, breathless and panting, they stopped, and demurely Tavia, for all the world like a prim little girl in Sunday School, sank to a low stool, with Bob at her feet. Nothing could be quieter than Tavia, when Tavia decided on quietness. **[70]**

“We came over in the biggest sleigh we could find,” said Bob, “so that all could take a drive—Mrs. White and Major Dale too, you know.”

“Oh, no, the young folks don’t want an old fellow like me,” protested Major Dale.

“We just do!” Dorothy replied, resting her head against her father’s arm affectionately. “We simply won’t go unless you and Aunt Winnie come.”

“Why, of course, dear, we’ll go,” answered Aunt Winnie, who was never known to stay at home when she could go on a trip. As she spoke she sniffed the air. “What is that smell, boys?”

“Something’s burning,” yawned Ted, indifferently, just as if things burning in one’s home was a commonplace diversion from the daily routine.

Noses tilted, the boys and girls sniffed the air.

Suddenly Bob and Nat sprang to Tavia’s side and quickly beat out, with their fists, a tiny flame that was slowly licking its way along the hem of her woollen dress. With her reckless disregard of consequences, Tavia had joined in the rough and tumble fight with the boys, and, exhausted, had rested too near the grate. A flying spark had ignited the dress, which smouldered, and only the quick work of the boys saved Tavia from possible burns. For once she was subdued. Mrs. White soothed her with motherly compassion. She was always in dread lest Tavia’s reckless spirit would cause the girl needless suffering. **[71]**

“You see,” said Bob, smiling at Tavia, as they piled into the sleigh and he carefully tucked blankets about the girls, “you can’t entirely take care of yourself—some time you’ll rush into the fire, as you did just now.”

For an instant Tavia’s cheeks flamed. He was so masterful! She yearned to slap him, but considering the fire escapade, she couldn’t, quite.

The major was driving, with Dorothy snuggled closely to his side, and Ted curled up on the floor. Nat took care of Aunt Winnie on the next seat and Bob and Tavia were in the rear.

On they sped over snow and ice, the bitter wind sharply cutting their faces, until all glowed and

sparkled at the touch of it.

“Did you hear from the girls?” asked Dorothy, turning to Tavia.

“Just got Christmas cards,” answered Tavia.

“I fared better than that. Cologne wrote a fourteen page letter——”

“All the news that’s worth printing, as it were,” laughed Tavia.

“Underlined, Cologne asked whether I had heard the news about Mingle, and provokingly ended the letter there. I’m still wondering. Her departure at such an opportune moment was a blessing, but we never stopped to think what might have caused it,” said Dorothy, thoughtfully. **[72]**

“Well, whatever it was, it saved us,” contentedly responded Tavia. “By the way, Maddie sent me the cutest card—painted it herself!”

“Who wants to ride across the lake?” demanded Major Dale, slowing up the horses, “that will save us climbing the hill, you know, and the ice is plenty thick enough; don’t you think so, Winnie?”

“Yes, indeed,” Aunt Winnie answered, ready for anything that meant adventure, and as they all chorused their assent joyfully, away they drove over the snow-covered ice.

The horses galloped straight across the lake, up the bank, and then came a smash! The steeds ran into a drift, dumped over the sleigh; and a shivering, laughing mass of humanity lay on the new, white snow.

“Such luck!” cried Tavia, “out of the fire into the snow!”

While Major Dale and the boys righted the overturned sleigh, Bob took care of the ladies.

“You and the girls leave for New York to-morrow, Tavia tells me,” said Bob.

“Yes,” replied Aunt Winnie, with a sigh, “a little pleasure trip, and some business.”

“Business?” cried Dorothy, closely scrutinizing her aunt’s worried face. **[73]**

Quick to scent something that sounded very much like “family matters,” Tavia turned with Bob, and deliberately started pelting with snow the hard-working youths at the sleigh.

“Aw! Quit!” scolded Ted.

“There, you’ve done it! That one landed in my ear! Now, quit it!” Nat stopped working long enough to wipe the wet snow from his face.

But Tavia’s young spirits were not to be squelched by mere words; Bob made the snow balls for Tavia to throw, which she continued to do with unceasing ardor.

“Why, yes, Dorothy,” Aunt Winnie replied, watching Tavia. “I’m afraid there will be quite a bit of business mixed with our New York trip. I’m having some trouble. It’s the agent who has charge of the apartment house I am interested

in—you remember, the man whom I did not like."

"The apartment you've taken for the Winter?" questioned Dorothy, shivering.

"You're cold, dear." Aunt Winnie, too, shivered. "Run over with Tavia and jump around, it's too chilly to stand still like this. How unfortunate we are! The sun will soon dip behind those hilltops, and the air be almost too frosty for comfort."

"Tell me," persisted Dorothy, "what is it that's worrying you, Aunt Winnie? I've noticed it since I came home. I want to be all the assistance I can, you know." [74]

"You couldn't help me, Dorothy, in fact, I do not even know that I am right about the matter. I do not trust the agent, but he had the rent collecting before I took the place, so I allowed him to continue under me. I can only say, Dorothy, that something evidently is wrong. My income is not what it should be."

"Oh, I'm so sorry! But, I'm glad you told me. Wait until we reach New York—we'll solve it," and Dorothy pressed her lips together firmly.

Aunt Winnie laughed. "Don't talk foolishly, dear. It takes a man of wide experience and cunning to deal with any real estate person, I guess; and most of all a New York agent. My dear, let us forget the matter. There, the sleigh seems to be right side up once more."

"Tavia," whispered Dorothy, as she held her friend back, "we're in for it! Aunt Winnie has a mystery on her hands! In New York City! Let us see if you and I and the boys can solve it!"

"Good! We'll certainly do it, if you think it can be done," said Tavia. "Oh, good old New York town! It makes me dizzy just to think of the whirling mass of rushing people and the autos and 'buses, and shops and tea-rooms! Doro, you must promise that you won't drag me into more than ten tea-rooms in one afternoon!"

"I solemnly promise," returned Dorothy, "if you'll promise me to keep out of shops one whole half-hour in each day!" [75]

[76]

CHAPTER IX
JUST DALES

It was three days after Christmas, and what was left of the white crystals was fast becoming brown mud, and the puddles and rivulets of melted snow, very tempting to the small boy, made walking almost impossible for the small boy's elders. The air was soft, and as balmy as the first days of Spring. One almost expected to hear the twittering of a bluebird and the chirp of the robins, but nevertheless a grate fire burned brightly in Dorothy's room, with the windows thrown open admitting the crisp air and sunlight.

"Shall I take my messaline dress, Tavia?" Dorothy asked, holding the garment in mid-air.

"If we go to the opera you'll want it; I packed my

only evening gown, that ancient affair in pink," said Tavia, laughing a bit wistfully.

"You're simply stunning in that dress, Tavia," said Dorothy. "Isn't she, Nat?" she appealed to her cousin.

"That flowery, pinkish one, with the sash?" asked the boy.

"Yes," said Tavia, "the one that I've been wearing so long that if I put it out on the front steps some evening, it would walk off alone to any party or dance in Dalton." **[77]**

"You know," said Nat, looking at Tavia with pride, "when you have that dress on you look like a—er—a well, like pictures I've seen of—red-haired girls," the color mounted Nat's brow and he looked confused. Dorothy smiled as she turned her back and folded the messaline dress, placing it carefully in her trunk. Nat was so clumsy at compliments! But Tavia did not seem to notice the clumsiness, a lovely light leaped to her clear brown eyes, and the wistfulness of a moment before vanished as she laughed.

"I was warned by everyone in school not to buy pink!" declared Tavia.

"So, of course," said Dorothy laughing, "you straightway decided on a pink dress. But, seriously, Tavia, pink is your color, the old idea of auburn locks and greens and browns is completely smashed to nothingness, when you wear pink! Oh dear," continued Dorothy, perplexed, "where shall I pack this wrap? Not another thing will go into my trunk."

"Are you taking two evening wraps?" asked Tavia.

"Surely, one for you and the other for me. You see this is pink too," Dorothy held up a soft, silk-lined cape, with a collar of fur. Quick tears sprang to Tavia's eyes, and impulsively she threw her arms about Dorothy. **[78]**

"Don't strangle Dorothy," objected Nat.

"You always make me so happy, Doro," said Tavia, releasing her chum, who looked happier even than Tavia, her fair face flushed. The hugging Tavia had given had loosened Dorothy's stray wisps of golden hair, that fell about her eyes and ears in a most bewitching way.

"Girls," called Aunt Winnie, from below stairs, "aren't you nearly finished?"

"All finished but Nat's part," answered Dorothy. Then to Nat she said: "Now, cousin, sit hard on this trunk, and perhaps we'll be able to close it."

Nat solemnly perched on the lid of the trunk, but it would not close.

"Something will have to come out," he declared.

"There is nothing, absolutely nothing, in my trunk that I can leave behind," said Dorothy.

"My trunk closed very easily," said Tavia, "I'll get it up from the station and we'll pack the surplus gowns in it," she turned triumphantly to Dorothy. "Too bad I sent it on so early. But we can get it."

“The very thing!” Dorothy laughed. “Run, Nat, and fetch Tavia’s trunk from the station.”

“Dorothy,” called Aunt Winnie again, “we only have a few hours before train time. Your trunk should be ready for the expressman now, dear.” [79]

“Hurry, Nat,” begged Dorothy, “you must get Tavia’s trunk here in two minutes. Coming,” she called down to Aunt Winnie, as she and Tavia rushed down the stairs.

“The trunk won’t close because the gowns won’t fit,” dramatically cried Tavia.

“So the boys have gone for Tavia’s, and we’ll pack things in it,” hurriedly explained Dorothy.

“What is all this about gowns?” asked Major Dale, drawing Dorothy to the arm of the great chair in which he was sitting.

“I’m packing, father, we’re going to leave you for a while,” said Dorothy, nestling close to his broad shoulders.

“But not for very long,” Aunt Winnie said. “You and the boys must arrange so that you can follow in at least one week.”

“Well, it all depends on my rheumatism,” answered the major. “You won’t want an old limpy soldier trying to keep pace with you in New York City. Mrs. Martin, the tried and true, will take fine care of us while you are gone.”

“No, that won’t do,” declared Dorothy, “we know how well cared for you will be under Mrs. Martin’s wing, but we want you with us. In fact,” she glanced hastily at Aunt Winnie, “we may even need you.”

“Perhaps the best way,” said Aunt Winnie, thoughtfully, “would be to send you a telegram when to come, and by that time, you will no doubt be all over this attack of rheumatism.” [80]

“Ned and Nat are as anxious as are you girlies to get there,” replied Major Dale, “so I’ll make a good fight to arrive in New York City.”

“Who is going to tell me stories at bed-time, when Dorothy’s gone?” asked little Roger. “I don’t want Doro to go away, ’cause she’s the best sister that any feller ever had.”

Roger was leaning against the Major’s knee, and Dorothy drew him close to her.

“Sister will have to send you a story in a letter every day. How will that do?” she asked, as she pressed her cheek against his soft hair.

“Aw, no,” pouted Roger, “tell them all to me now, before you go away.”

“I’ll tell you one and then father will tell one; father will tell one about the soldier boys,” murmured Dorothy in Roger’s ear.

“Oh, goody,” Roger clapped his hands; “and Aunt Winnie and Tavia and Ned and Nat and everybody can tell me one story to-night and that will fill up for all the nights while you are away!”

“Dorothy!” screamed Tavia, bursting into the [81]

room in wild excitement, “the boys have gone without my trunk check! They can’t get it!”

“And the gowns will have to be left behind!”

“Never!” laughed Tavia, “I’ll run all the way to the station and catch them!”

“They’ve taken the *Fire Bird*, maybe you’ll meet them coming back.”

Tavia dashed, hatless, from the house. They watched her as she fairly flew along the road, in a short walking skirt, heavy sweater pulled high around her throat, and her red hair gleaming in the sun.

Major Dale had always greatly admired Tavia; he liked her fearless honesty and the sincerity of her affections. Aunt Winnie, too, loved her almost as much as she loved Dorothy.

“I’ve wondered so much,” said Dorothy, “what trouble Miss Mingle is in. She left school so suddenly that last day, and Cologne was so provoking in her letter.”

“An illness, probably,” said Aunt Winnie, kindly.

“It can’t be anything so commonplace as illness,” said Dorothy. “Cologne would have gone into details about illness. The telegram, and her departure, were almost tragic in their suddenness. I feel so selfish when I think of our treatment of that meek little woman. No one ever was interested in her, that I remember. Her great fault was a too-meek spirit. She literally erased herself and her name from the minds of everyone.”

Major Dale and Aunt Winnie listened without much enthusiasm. Aunt Winnie was worried about Dorothy, who showed so little inclination to enter the whirl of society in North Birchland. She had looked forward with much pleasure to presenting her niece to her social world. **[82]**

But Dorothy had little love for the society life of North Birchland. She loved her cousins and her small brothers, and seemed perfectly happy and contented in her home life, and attending to the small charities connected with the town. She seemed to prefer a hospital to a house party, a romp with the boys to a fashionable dance, and she bubbled with glee in the company of Tavia, ignoring the girls of the first families in her neighborhood.

“Your trip to New York, daughter,” began Major Dale, slily smiling at Aunt Winnie, “will be your *debut*, so to speak, in the world.”

Dorothy answered nothing, but continued to smooth away the hair from Roger’s brow.

“What are you thinking of?” her father asked musingly, not having received an answer to his first remark.

“Oh, nothing in particular,” sighed Dorothy, “except that I don’t see why I should make a *debut* anywhere. I don’t want to meet the world, —that is, socially. I want to know people for themselves, not for what they’re worth financially or because of the entertaining they do. I just like to know people—and poorer people best of all. They are interesting and real.” **[83]**

“As are persons of wealth and social position,” answered Aunt Winnie, gently.

“I’m going to be a soldier, like father,” said Joe, “and Dorothy can nurse me when I fall in battle.”

“Me, too,” chirped little Roger, “I want to be a soldier and limp like father!”

“Oh, boys!” cried Dorothy, in horror, “you’ll never, never be trained for war.”

“What’s that?” asked Major Dale. “Don’t you want the boys to receive honor and glory in the army?”

“No,” said Dorothy decidedly, “I’ll never permit it. Of course,” she hastened to add, “if Joe must wear a uniform, he might go to a military school, if that will please him.”

The major scoffed at the idea. Joe straightened his shoulders, and marched about the room, little Roger following in his wake, while the major whistled “Yankee Doodle.”

The sound of the *Fire Bird* was heard coming up the driveway, and in another second Nat, Ned and Ted rushed into the room.

“We can’t have the trunk without the check,” explained Nat, breathlessly, “where is it?” **[84]**

“Tavia discovered the check after you left, and she followed you down to the station,” explained Aunt Winnie.

“We took a short cut back and missed her, of course,” said Nat, dejectedly.

“We won’t have any time to spare,” declared Aunt Winnie, walking to the window, “the train leaves at seven-thirty, and it is after six now,” Dorothy followed her to the window. They both stood still in astonishment.

“Boys!” cried Dorothy, “come quick!”

The boys scrambled to the window. There was Tavia, coming up the drive, serenely seated on top of her trunk, in the back part of a small buggy, enjoying immensely the wind that brushed her hair wildly about her face, while the driver, the stoutest man in North Birchland, occupied the entire front seat.

“I found it,” she cried lightly jumping to the ground, “and this was the only available rig!”

“Never mind,” said Dorothy, “nothing counts but a place to pack the gowns!”

“And catch the train for New York City,” cried Tavia, from the top landing of the first flight of stairs. “Everybody hurry! We have just time enough to catch the train!”

[85]

CHAPTER X

SIXTY MILES AN HOUR

The station at North Birchland was just a brown stone building, and a small platform, surrounded by a garden, like all country town stations. But a

more animated crowd of young people had rarely gathered anywhere. Dorothy, Tavia and Aunt Winnie were noticeable among the crowd, their smart travelling suits and happy smiling faces being good to look upon. Ned, who was to accompany his mother, stood guard over the bags, while they were being checked by the station master. Nat, Ted and Bob, who had come to see them off, pranced about, impatient for the train, and altogether they were making such a racket that an elderly lady picked up her bag and shawls, and quickly searched for a quieter part of the station. It was such a long time since the elderly lady had been young and going on a journey, that she completely forgot all about the way it feels, and how necessary it is to laugh and chatter noisily on such occasions.

Nat looked in Tavia's direction constantly, and at last succeeded in attracting her attention. He appeared so utterly miserable that instinctively Tavia slipped away from the others, and walked with him toward the end of the station. But this did not make Bob any happier. He devoted himself to Dorothy and Aunt Winnie, casting longing glances at Nat and Tavia. Dorothy was charming in a travelling coat of blue, and a small blue hat and veil gracefully tilted on her bright blond hair, a coquettish quill encircling her hat and peeping over her ear. Tavia was dressed in a brown tailored suit, and a lacy dotted brown veil accentuated the pink in her cheeks and the brightness of her eyes. **[86]**

A light far down the track told of the approaching train. Joe and Roger were having an argument as to who saw the gleam first and Major Dale had to come to the rescue and be umpire. As the rumble and roar grew nearer, and the light became bigger, the excitement of the little group became intense. With a great, loud roar and hissing, the train stopped and the coach on which they had engaged berths was just in front of them.

"The *Yellow Flyer*," read Joe, carefully, "is that where you will sleep?" he asked, looking in wonder at the car.

"Yes, indeed, Joey," said Dorothy, kissing him good-bye, "in cunning little beds, hanging from the sides of the coach." **[87]**

Dorothy held out her hand to Bob. "Good-bye," she said. Tavia, just behind Dorothy, glancing quickly up at Bob, blushed as she placed her slim hand in his large brown one.

"You're coming to New York, too, with the boys?" she asked, demurely.

Bob held her hand in his strong grip and it hurt her, as he said very stiffly: "I don't know that I shall." With a toss of her head, Tavia started up the steps of the coach, but Bob following, still held her hand tightly, and she stopped. All the others were on the train. She looked straight into his eyes and said: "We're going to have no end of fun, you know." Bob released her hand. Standing in the vestibule, Tavia turned once more: "Please come," she called to him, then rushed into the train and joined the others.

When the cars pulled out, the last thing Tavia saw was Bob's uncovered head and Nat's waving handkerchief, and she smiled at both very

sweetly. Then they waved their handkerchiefs until darkness swallowed up the little station.

The girls looked about them. A sleeping car! Tavia thrilled with pleasant anticipation. It was all so very luxurious! Aunt Winnie almost immediately discovered an old acquaintance sitting directly opposite. The lady, very foreign in manner and attire, held a tiny white basket under her huge sable muff. She gushed prettily at the unexpected pleasure of having Aunt Winnie for a travelling companion. Tavia thought she must be the most beautiful lady in all the world, and both she and Dorothy found it most disconcerting to be ushered into a sleeping car filled with staring people, and be introduced to so lovely a creature as Aunt Winnie's friend. The beautiful lady whispered mysteriously to Aunt Winnie, and pointed to the hidden basket and instantly a saucy growl came from it. **[88]**

"A dog," gasped Dorothy, "why, they don't permit dogs on a Pullman!"

"Let's get a peep at him," said Tavia, "the little darling, to go travelling just like real people!"

Immediately following the growl, the lady and Aunt Winnie sat in dignified silence, and stared blankly at the entire car.

"They're making believe," whispered Tavia, "pretending there isn't any dog, and that no one heard a growl!"

"I'm simply dying to see the little fellow!" said Dorothy, unaware that the future held an opportunity to see the dog that now reposed in the basket.

"Well, Dorothy," said Tavia, "according to the looks across the aisle 'there ain't no dog,'" Tavia loved an expressive phrase, regardless of grammatical rules. **[89]**

"Did Ned get on?" suddenly asked Dorothy. "I don't see him."

"He's on," answered Tavia, disdainfully, "in the smoker. Didn't you hear him beg our permission?"

After an hour had passed Aunt Winnie came toward them and said:

"Don't you think it best to retire now, girls? You have a strenuous week before you."

Dorothy and Tavia readily agreed, as neither had found much to keep them awake. Many of the passengers had already retired, some of them immediately after the last stop was made. Tavia could not remain quiet, and happy too, where there was no excitement. She preferred to sleep peacefully—and strangely, the Pullman sleeper offered no fun even to an inventive mind like Tavia's.

"Ned might have stayed with us," sighed Dorothy. "Boys are so selfish."

"Wouldn't you like to go into the smoker too?" suggested Tavia.

"What! Tavia Travers, you're simply too awful!" cried Dorothy.

"Oh, just to keep awake. After all, I find I have a yearning to stay up. All in favor of the smoker say 'Aye.'" And a lone "Aye" came from Tavia. [90]

"Besides," said Dorothy, "the porter wouldn't permit it."

"Unless we carried something in our hands that looked like a pipe," mused Tavia.

"We might take Ned some matches," rejoined Dorothy, seeing that the subject offered a little variety.

"When the porter takes down our berths, we'll quietly suggest it, and see how it takes," said Tavia. "Along with feeling like storming the smoker, I'm simply dying for a weeny bit of ice-cream."

"Tavia," said Dorothy, trying to speak severely, "I think you must be having a nightmare, such unreasonable desires!"

"So," yawned Tavia, "I'll have to go to bed hungry, I suppose."

"Do you really want ice-cream as badly as that?"

"I never yearned so much for anything."

Dorothy was rather yearning for ice-cream herself, since it had been suggested, but she knew it was an utter impossibility. The dining car was closed, and how to secure it, Dorothy could not think. However, she called the porter, and, while he was taking down their berths, she and Tavia went over to say good-night to Aunt Winnie and her friend.

"I'll try not to awaken you, girls, when I retire," said Aunt Winnie. "Ned's berth, by a strange coincidence, is the upper one in Mrs. Sanderson's section. Years ago, Mrs. Sanderson and myself occupied the same section in a Pullman for an entire week, and it was the beginning of a delightful friendship." [91]

Mrs. Sanderson told the girls about her present trip, but Tavia was so hungry for the ice-cream, and Dorothy so busy trying to devise some means to procure it, that they missed a very interesting story from the beautiful lady.

Then, returning to their berths, Tavia climbed the ladder, and everything was quiet.

"Dorothy," she whispered, her head dangling over the side of the berth, "peep out and find the porter. I must have ice-cream."

"Why, Tavia?" asked Dorothy.

"Just because," answered Tavia in the most positive way.

Dorothy and Tavia both looked out from behind their curtains. Every other one was drawn tightly, save two, for Aunt Winnie and her friend and Ned, who had come back, were the only passengers still out of their berths. Ned winked at the girls when their heads appeared.

Holding up a warning finger at Ned, who faced them, the girls stole out of their section and crept silently toward the porter. In hurried whispers they consulted him, but the porter [92]

stood firm and unyielding. They could not be served with anything after the dining car closed.

So they then descended to coaxing. Just one girl pleading for ice-cream might have been resisted, but when two sleep-eyed young creatures, begged so pitifully to be served with it at once, the porter threw up his hands and said:

“Ah’ll see if it can be got, but Ah ain’t got no right fo’ to git it tho!”

Soon he reappeared with two plates of ice-cream. Tavia took one plate in both hands hungrily, and Dorothy took the other. When they looked at Aunt Winnie’s back, Ned stared, but Aunt Winnie was too deeply interested in her old friend to care what Ned was staring at.

“Duck!” cautioned Tavia, who was ahead of Dorothy, as she saw Aunt Winnie suddenly turn her head. They slipped into the folds of a nearby curtain, but sprang instantly back into the centre of the aisle. Snoring, deep and musical, sounded directly into their ears from behind the curtain, and even Tavia’s love of adventure quailed at the awful nearness of the sound. One little lurch and they would have landed in the arms of the snoring one!

Just to make the ice-cream taste better, Aunt Winnie again turned partly. Dorothy and Tavia stood still, unable to decide whether it was wise to retreat or advance, Ned solved it for them by rising and waiting for the girls. Aunt Winnie, of course, turned all the way around and discovered the two girls hugging each other, in silent mirth. **[93]**

“Tavia would have cream,” explained Dorothy.

“But it would have tasted so much better had we eaten it without being found out,” said Tavia, woefully.

“Just look at this,” said Ned, “and maybe the flavor of the cream will be good enough,” and he handed the girls a check marked in neat, small print, which the porter had handed him: “Two plates of ice-cream, at 75 cents each, $1.50.”

“How outrageous!” cried Dorothy.

“We’ll return it immediately,” said Tavia, indignantly.

“I paid it,” explained Ned, drily. “You wanted something outside of meal hours, and you might have expected to have the price raised.”

“At that cost each spoonful will taste abominable,” moaned Tavia.

Said Dorothy sagely: “It won’t taste at all if we don’t eat it instantly. It’s all but melted now.”

“Yes, pray eat it,” said the gruff voice of a man behind closed curtains, “so the rest of us can get to sleep.”

Another voice, with a faint suggestion of stifling laughter, said: “I’m in no hurry to sleep, understand; still I engaged the berth for that purpose——” **[94]**

But Dorothy and Tavia had fled, and heard no more comments. Aunt Winnie followed.

“How ridiculous to want ice-cream at such an hour, and in such a place!” she said.

“Old melted stuff,” complained Tavia, “it tastes like the nearest thing to nothing I’ve ever attempted to eat!”

“And, Auntie,” giggled Dorothy, “we paid seventy-five cents per plate! I’m drinking mine; it’s nothing but milk!”

Soon the soft breathing of Aunt Winnie denoted the fact that she had slipped silently into the land of dreams. Dorothy, too, was asleep, and Tavia alone remained wide-awake, listening to the noise of the cars as the train sped over the country. Tavia sighed. She had so much to be thankful for, she was so much happier than she deserved to be, she thought. One fact stood out clearly in her mind. Sometime, somehow, she would show Dorothy how deeply she loved and admired her, above everyone else in the world. After all, a sincere, unselfish love is the best one can give in return for unselfish kindness.

[95] The next thing Tavia knew, although it seemed as if she had only just finished thinking how much she loved Dorothy, a tiny streak of sunlight shone across her face. She sat bolt upright, confused and mystified, in her narrow bed so near the roof. The sleepy mist left her eyes, and with a bound she landed on the edge of her berth, her feet dangling down over the side of it. The train was not moving, and peeping out of the ventilator, she saw that they were in a station, and an endless row of other trains met her gaze.

“Good morning!” she sang out to Dorothy, but the only answer was the echo of her own voice. Some few seconds passed, and Tavia was musing on what hour of the morning it might be, when a perfectly modulated voice said: “Anything yo’-all wants, Miss?”

“Gracious, no! Oh, yes I do. What time is it?” she asked.

“Near on to seven o’clock,” said the porter.

“Thank you,” demurely answered Tavia, and started to dress. All went well until she climbed down the ladder for her shoes and picked up a beautifully-polished, but enormous number eleven! She looked again, Aunt Winnie’s very French heeled kid shoes and Dorothy’s stout walking boots and one of her own shoes were there, but her right shoe was gone!

[96] She held up the number eleven boot and contemplated it severely. To be sure both her feet would have fitted snugly into the one big shoe, but that wasn’t the way Tavia had intended making her *debut* in New York City. She looked down the aisle and saw shoes peeping from under every curtain, and some stood boldly in the aisle. The porter at the end of the car dozed again, and Tavia, the number eleven in hand, started on a still hunt for her own shoe.

She passed several pairs of shoes, but none were hers. At the end of the car, she jumped joyfully on a pair, only to lay them down in disappointment. They were exactly like hers, but her feet had developed somewhat since her baby

days, whereas the owner of these shoes still retained her baby feet, little tiny number one shoes! On she went, bending low over each pair. At last! Tavia dropped the shoe she was carrying beside its mate! At least that was some relief, she would not now have to face the owner in her shoeless condition and return to his outstretched hand his number eleven.

Tavia thought anyone with such a foot would naturally feel embarrassed to be found out. Now for her own. She stooped cautiously, deeply interested in her mission, under the curtain and a heavy hand was laid on her shoulder. She looked up in dazed astonishment into the dark face of the porter. Mercy! did he think she was trying to enter the berth? She realized, instantly, how suspicious her actions must have appeared.

“Please find my shoe!” she commanded, haughtily, “it is not in my berth.”

The porter released her. “Yo’ done leave ’em fo’ me to be polished?” he inquired, respectfully. **[97]**

“No, indeed,” replied Tavia, trying to maintain her haughty air, “it has simply disappeared, and I must have two shoes, you know.”

“O’ course,” solemnly answered the porter.

“Tavia,” called Dorothy’s voice, “what is the trouble?”

“Nothing at all,” calmly answered Tavia, “I’ve lost a shoe; a mere nothing, dear.”

One by one the curtains moved, indicating persons of bulk on the other side, trying to dress within the narrow limits, and the murmur of voices rose higher. Shoes were drawn within the curtains and soon there were none left, and Tavia stood in dismay. Aunt Winnie, Dorothy and Ned and lovely Mrs. Sanderson joined Tavia, others stood attentively and sympathetically looking on while they searched all over the car, dodging under seats, pulling out suit-cases and poking into the most impossible places, in an endeavor to locate Tavia’s lost shoe.

A sharp, sudden bark and Mrs. Sanderson returned in confusion to her section and smothered the protests of her dog. She called Ned to help her put him into his little white basket, at which doggie loudly rebelled. He had had his freedom for an entire night, running up and down the aisle, playing with the good-natured porter.

Doggie played hide-and-seek under the berths and dragged various peculiar-looking black things back and forth in his playful scampering and he did not intend to return to any silk-lined basket after such a wild night of fun! So he barked again, saucy, snappy barks, then he growled fiercely at everyone who came near him. In fact, one of the peculiar-looking black things at that very moment was lying in wait for him, expecting him back to play with it, and just as soon as he could dodge his mistress, doggie expected to rejoin it, reposing in a dark corner of the car. At last he saw his opportunity, and with a mad dash, the terrier ran down the aisle, determination marking every feature, as pretty Mrs. Sanderson started after him, and Ned followed. Tavia sat disconsolately in her seat, **[98]**

wondering what anyone, even the most resourceful, could do with but one shoe!

A sudden howl of mirth from Ned, and an amused, light laugh from Mrs. Sanderson, and, back they came, Ned gingerly holding the little terrier and Mrs. Sanderson triumphantly holding forth Tavia's shoe. By this time every passenger had left the car, and the cleaning corps stood waiting for Aunt Winnie's party to vacate the vehicle.

Tavia put on the shoe, but first she shook the terrier and scolded him. He barked and danced up and down, as though he were the hero of the hour.

"We must get out of here, double-quick," said Ned. **[99]**

"Oh, dear me!" exclaimed Dorothy, "where is everything! I never can grab my belongings together in time to get off a train."

"I'm not half dressed," chirped Tavia, cheerfully, "and they will simply have to stand there with the mops and brooms, until I'm ready."

Aunt Winnie sat patiently waiting. "Do you want to go uptown in the subway or the 'bus," she asked.

"Both!" promptly answered the young people.

[100]

CHAPTER XI

A HOLD-ON IN NEW YORK

"My! Isn't it hard to hang on!" breathed Tavia, clinging to Dorothy, as the subway train swung rapidly around the curves. As usual the morning express was crowded to overflowing, and the "overflowers" were squeezed tightly together on the platforms. Ned held Aunt Winnie by the arm and looked daggers at the complacent New Yorkers who sat behind the morning papers, unable to see any persons who might want their seats.

"Such unbearable air! It always makes me faint," said Aunt Winnie, weakly.

"Let's get out as quickly as possible," said Dorothy, "the top of a 'bus for mine!"

"So this is a subway train," exclaimed Tavia, as she was lurched with much force against an athletic youth, who simply braced himself on his feet, and saved Tavia from falling.

"The agony will be over in a second," exclaimed Ned, as the guard yelled in a most bewildering way, "next stop umphgetoughly!" and another in the middle of the train, screamed in a perfectly unintelligent manner, "next stop fothburgedinskt!" **[101]**

"What did he say?" said Tavia, wonderingly.

"He must have said Forty-second Street," said Aunt Winnie, "that I know is the next stop."

"I would have to ride on indefinitely," said Tavia, "I could never understand such eloquence."

“There,” said Dorothy, readjusting herself, “I expected to be hurled into someone’s lap sooner or later, but I didn’t expect it so soon.”

“You surely landed in his lap,” laughed Tavia, “see how he’s blushing. Why don’t you hang onto Ned, as we are doing.”

“Poor Ned,” said Dorothy, but she, too, grasped a portion of his arm, and like grim death the three women clung to Ned for protection against the merciless swaying of the subway train.

Reaching Forty-second Street, up the steps they dashed with the rest of the madly rushing crowd of people and out into the open street. Tavia tried to keep her mouth closed, because all the cartoons she had ever seen of a country person’s first glimpse of New York pictured them open-mouthed, and staring. She clung to Dorothy and Dorothy hung on Aunt Winnie, who had Ned’s arm in a firm grip.

Such crowds of human beings! Neither Dorothy nor Tavia had ever before seen so many people at one glance! So many people were not in Dalton in an entire year. **[102]**

“This isn’t anything,” said Ned, out of his superior knowledge of a previous trip to New York. “This is only a handful—the business crowd.”

“Oh, let’s stay in front of the Grand Central Terminal,” said Dorothy, “I want to finish counting the taxicabs, I was only up to thirty.”

“I only had time to count five stories in that big hotel building,” cried Tavia, “and I want to count ’em right up into the clouds.”

“They’re not tall buildings,” said Ned, just bursting with information. “Wait until you see the downtown skyscrapers!”

“Ned throws cold water on all our little enthusiasms,” pouted Dorothy.

“Never mind,” said Aunt Winnie, “you and Tavia can come down town to-morrow and spend the day counting people and things.”

Arriving at the corner of Fifth Avenue, and successfully dodging many vehicles, they got safely on the opposite corner just in time to catch a speeding auto ’bus. Up to the roof they climbed.

“Isn’t it too delightful!” sighed Tavia, blissfully.

“We’ll come down town on a ’bus every day,” declared Dorothy.

They passed all the millionaires’ palatial residences in blissful ignorance of whom the palaces sheltered. They didn’t care which rich man occupied one mansion or another, they were happy enough riding on top of a ’bus. **[103]**

Tavia simply gushed when they reached the Drive and a cutting sharp breeze blew across the Hudson river.

“I never imagined New York City had anything so lovely as this; I thought it was all tall buildings and smoky atmosphere and—lights!” declared Tavia.

Along the river all was quiet and luxurious and wonderful. The auto 'bus stopped before a small apartment house—that is, it was small comparatively. The front was entirely latticed glass and white marble. A bell boy rushed forward to relieve them of their bags, another took their wraps and a third respectfully held open the reception hall door. Down this hall, lined on two sides with growing plants, Aunt Winnie's party marched in haughty silence. They were afraid to utter an unseemly word. Tavia's little chin went up into the air—the bell boys were very appalling—but they shouldn't know of the visitors' suburban origin if Tavia could help it. They were assisted on the elevator by a dignified liveried man, and up into the air they shot, landing, breathless, in a perfectly equipped tiny hall. At home, of course, one would call it a tiny hall, but in a New York apartment house it was spacious and roomy.

Still another person, this time a woman, in spotless white, opened the door and into the door Aunt Winnie disappeared, and the others followed, although they were not at all sure it was the proper thing to do. **[104]**

Then Tavia gasped. In her loveliest dreams of a home, she had never dreamed of anything as perfectly beautiful as this. Little bowers of pink and white, melted into other little rooms of gold and green and blue, and then a velvety stretch of something, which Tavia afterward discovered was a hall, led them into a kitchenette.

"Do people eat here?" said the dazed Tavia.

"One must eat, be the furnishings ever so luxurious," sang Ned.

Dorothy rushed immediately to the tiny cupboard, and examined the Mother Goose pattern breakfast dishes, while Tavia gazed critically at the numerous mysterious doors leading hither and thither through the apartment.

They gathered together, finally, in the living room, which faced the river. The heavy draperies subdued the strong sunlight.

Mrs. White sighed the happy sigh that betokens rest, as she sank into a Turkish chair. Dorothy and Tavia were not ready to sit down yet—there was too much to explore. From their high place, there above the crowds, and seemingly in the clouds, they could see something akin to human beings moving about everywhere, even, it seemed, out along the river drive. For a brief time no one spoke; then Ned "proverbially" broke the silence. **[105]**

"Well, Mom," he emitted, "what is it all about? Did you just come into upholstered storage to have new looking glasses? Or is there a system in this insanity?"

Mrs. White smiled indulgently. Ned was beginning to take an interest in things. He must surmise that her trip to New York was not one of mere pleasure.

The girls, unconsciously discreet, had left the room.

"My dear son," said the lady, now in a soft robe,

just rescued from her suit-case, “I am glad to see that you are trying to help me. You know the Court Apartments, the one I hold purposely for you and Nat?” He nodded. “Well, the agent has been acting queerly. In fact, I have reason to question his honesty. He is constantly refusing to make reports. Says that rents have come down, when everyone else says they have gone up. He also declares some of the tenants are in arrears. Now, if we are to have so much trouble with the investment, we shall have to get rid of it.”

The remark was in the note of query. Nat brushed his fingers through his heavy hair. **[106]**

“Well, Mom,” he said impressively, “we must look it over carefully, but I have always heard that New York real estate men—of a certain type—observe the certain and remember the type—are not always to be trusted. I wouldn’t ask better sport than going in for detective work on the half-shell. But say, this is some apartment! I suppose I may have it some evening for a little round-up of my New York friends? You know so many of the fellows seem to blow this way.”

“Of course you may, Ned. I shall be glad to help you.”

“Oh, you couldn’t possibly do that, mother,” he objected. “There is only one way to let boys have a good time and that is to let them have it. If one interferes it’s ‘good-night’,” and he paused to let the pardonable slang take effect.

“Just as you like, of course,” said the mother, without the least hint of offence. “I know I can depend upon you not to—eat the rugs or chairs. They are only hired, you know.”

“Never cared for that sort of food. In fact I don’t even like the feel of some of these,” and he rubbed his hand over the side of a plush chair. “Nothing like the home stuffs, Mom.”

“You are not disappointed?”

“Oh, no, not that. Only trying to remember what home is like. It kind of upsets one’s memory to take a trip and get here. I wonder what the girls are up to? You stay here while I inspect.” **[107]**

Mrs. White was not sorry of the respite. She looked out over the broad drive. It was some years since her husband had taken her to a pretty little apartment in this city. The thought was absorbing. But it was splendid that she had two such fine boys. Yes, she must not complain, for both boys were in many ways like their father, upright to the point of peril, daring to the point of personal risk.

The maid, she who had come in advance from North Birchland, stepped in with the soft tread of the professional nurse to close the doors. Something must be going on in the kitchenette. Well, let the children play, thought Mrs. White.

Suddenly she heard something like a shriek! Even then she did not move. If there were danger to any one in the apartment she would soon know it—the old reliable adage—no news is good news, when someone shrieks.

[108]

CHAPTER XII
HUMAN FREIGHT ON THE DUMMY

Tavia almost fell over Ned. Dorothy grasped the door. The maid ruffled up her nice white apron!

They all scrambled into the living room and there was more, for with them, in fact, in Ned's strong arms, was a child, a boy with blazing cheeks and defiant eyes.

"Look, mother! He came up on the dumb waiter!" said Ned, as soon as he could speak.

"Yes, and I nearly killed him," blurted Tavia. "I thought the place was haunted!"

"On the dumb waiter?" repeated Dorothy.

The maid nodded her head decidedly.

"Why!" ejaculated Mrs. White, sitting up very straight.

"I didn't mean anything," said the boy, reflecting good breeding in choice of language, if not in manner of transportation. "I was just coming up to fly kites."

"But on the dummy!" queried Ned.

"Well, we wouldn't dare come up any other way. This apartment was not rented before and we had to sneak in on the janitor. This is the best lobby for kites," and his eyes danced at the thought. **[109]**

"But where's the kite?" questioned Ned.

"Talent's got it."

"Talent?" repeated Dorothy.

"Yes, he's the other fellow—the smartest fellow around. His real name—" he paused to laugh.

"Is what?" begged Tavia, coming over to the little fellow, with no hidden show of admiration.

"It's too silly, but he didn't choose it," apologized the boy. "It's C-l-a-u-d!"

"That's a pretty name," interposed Mrs. White, feeling obliged to say something agreeable.

"But he can't bear it," declared the boy. "My name is worse. Mother brought it from Rome."

"Catacombs?" suggested Tavia, foolishly.

"No," the lad lowered his voice in disgust. "But it's Raphael."

"That was the name of a great painter," said Mrs. White, again feeling how difficult it was to talk to a small and enterprising New York boy.

"Maybe," admitted the little one, "but I have Raffle from the boys, and that's all right. Means going off all the time."

Everyone laughed. Raffle looked uneasily at the door.

"But where's that kite?" questioned Ned. **[110]**

"Talent was waiting until I got up. Then I was to

pull him up. He has the kites."

"As long as I didn't kill you, Raffle," said Tavia, "I guess we won't have to have you arrested for false entering."

"Dorothy caught the rope just in time," Ned explained, in answer to his mother's look of inquiry. "Tavia was so scared she was going to let it drop."

"We had ordered things," Tavia explained further, "and thought they were coming up. I was just crazy to have something to do with all the machines in the place, so went to get the things. Imagine me seeing something squirm in the dark!"

"But you weren't afraid," said Raffle to Dorothy. "You just hauled me out."

"Your coat got torn," Dorothy remarked to divert attention. "What will your mother say?"

"She will never see it," declared the little fellow. "She goes to rehearsal all day and sings all night. Tillie—she's the girl—she likes me. She won't mind mending it," and he bunched together in his small hand the hole in the short coat.

"I'll tell you," interposed Ned, "they say dark haired people fetch good luck, and you are our first caller. Suppose we get Talent, and bring him up properly, kites and all. Then perhaps, when I get something to eat, you may show me how to fly a kite over the Hudson."

"Bully!" exclaimed Raffle. "I'll get him right away. If John—the janitor—catches him waiting with the kites—" **[111]**

But he was gone with the rest of the sentence.

Ned slapped his knees in glee. Tavia stretched out full length, shoes and all, on the rose-colored divan, Dorothy shook with merry laughter, but Martha, the maid with the ruffled-up apron, turned to the kitchenette to hide her emotion.

"New York is certainly a busy place," said Ned, finally. "We may get a wireless from home on the clothes line. Tavia, I warn you not to hang handkerchiefs on the roof. It's tabooed, for—country girls."

Tavia groaned in disagreement. The fact was she had made her way to the roof before she had explored her own and Dorothy's rooms, and even Ned did not relish the idea of her sight-seeing from that dangerous height. But New York was actually fascinating Tavia. She would likely be looking for "bulls and bears" on Wall Street next, thought Ned.

"Aunty, we are going to have the nicest lunch," interrupted Dorothy. "We all helped Martha; it was hard to find things, and get the right dishes, you know. I guess the last folks who had this apartment must have had a Chinese cook, for everything is put away backwards."

"Yes, the pans were on the top shelves and the cups on the bottom," Tavia agreed. "I took to the pans—I love to climb on those queer ladders that roll along!" **[112]**

“Like silvery moonlight,” Ned helped out, “only the clouds won’t develop.”

“Wouldn’t I give a lot to have had all the boys share this fun,” said Dorothy. Then, realizing the looks that followed the word “boys,” she blushed peach-blow.

A Japanese gong sounded gently in the place called hall.

“There’s the lunch bell,” declared Dorothy. “And isn’t that little Aeolian harp on the sitting room door too sweet!”

“The sitting room is a private room in an apartment,” explained Ned, mischievously, “and it’s a great idea to have an alarm clock on the door.”

“There comes the boy with the kite,” Tavia exclaimed. “I don’t believe I care for lunch.”

“Oh, yes you do, my dear,” objected Mrs. White. “There are two boys and we will have to trust them on the balcony with their kites. The rail is quite high, and they look rather well able to take care of themselves.”

Tavia looked longingly at the boys, who now were making their way to what Dorothy had termed the Dove Cote. Ned insisted upon postponing his lunch until they got their strings both untied and tied again—first from the stick then to the rail. Martha said things would be cold, but Ned was obdurate. **[113]**

At last Mrs. White and her guests were seated at the polished table in the green and white room. She glanced about approvingly, while Martha brought in the dishes.

“I made the pudding,” Dorothy confessed. “I remember our old housekeeper used to make that Brown Betty out of stale cake, and as Martha could get no other kind of cake handy I thought it would do.”

“A cross between pudding, cake and pie,” remarked Tavia, “but mostly sweet gravy. It smells good, however. And I—cleaned the lettuce. If you get any little black bugs—lizards or snails—”

“Oh, Tavia, don’t!” protested Dorothy, who at that moment was in the act of putting a lettuce leaf between her lips.

“But I was only going to say that these reptiles had been properly bathed and are perfectly wholesome. In fact they have been sterilized,” Tavia said, calmly.

“At any rate,” put in Mrs. White, “you all have succeeded in getting a very nice luncheon together. I had no idea you and Dorothy could be so useful. We might have gotten along with one more maid to help Martha. Then we would have had more house room.” **[114]**

“I should think you could get the janitor to do odd jobs,” suggested Tavia, over a mouthful of broiled steak.

“Janitor!” exclaimed Mrs. White. “My dear, you do not know New York janitors! They are a set of aristocrats all by themselves. We will have to

look out that we please the janitor, or we may go without service a day or two just for punishment."

"Then I will have to be awfully nice to ours," went on Tavia, in the way she had of always inviting trouble of one kind if not exactly the kind under discussion. "I saw him. He has the loveliest red cheeks. Looks like a Baldwin apple left over from last year."

A rush through the apartment revealed Ned and the two kite boys.

"Anything left?" asked Ned. "These two youngsters have to wait until two o'clock for a bite to eat, and I thought—"

"Of course," interrupted his mother, pleasantly, as she touched the bell for Martha. "We will set plates for them at once. Glad to have our neighbors so friendly."

The little fellows did not look one bit abashed— **[115]**
another sign of New York, Dorothy noted mentally. Talent, or Tal, as they called him, managed to get on the same chair with Raffle, as they waited for the extra places to be made at the table.

Tavia gazed at them with eyes that showed no wonder. She expected so many things of New York that each surprise seemed to have its own niche in her delighted sentiments.

"You see," said Raffle, "Tillie goes out for a walk about noon time, then mother gets in sometimes at two, and sometimes later. A feller always has to wait for someone."

"Does Tillie take—a baby out?" ventured Dorothy.

"Baby!" repeated the boy. "I'm the baby. She never takes me out," at which assertion the two boys laughed merrily.

"She just takes a complexion walk," Ned helped out.

Martha did not smile very sweetly when told to make two more places at the table, but she did not frown either. In a short time Ned, Raffle and Talent, with Tavia for company, and Dorothy assisting Martha, were left by Mrs. White to their own pleasure, while she excused herself and went off to write some notes. She remembered even then what Ned had said about boys liking to have things to themselves, and was not sorry of the excuse.

But Tavia held to her chair. She knew the **[116]**
strangers would say something interesting, and her "bump" of curiosity was not yet reduced.

"My big brother goes to the university," Raffle said. "But he eats at the Grill. He never has to wait."

"Your brother?" repeated Tavia, as if that was the very remark she had been waiting for.

"Now Tavia," cautioned Ned.

"Now Ned," said Tavia, in a tone of defiance.

"I only wanted to say," continued Ned, "that this

big brother is probably studying law, and he may know a lot about—well, the number of persons in whom one person may be legitimately interested."

The small boys were too much absorbed in their meal to pay attention to such a technical discussion. Tavia only turned her eyes up, then rolled them down quickly, in a sort of scorn, for answer to Ned.

"Now for your pudding," announced Dorothy, who came from the kitchenette with three large dishes of the Brown Betty on a small tray.

"Um-m-m!" breathed the boys, drawing deep breaths so as to fully inhale the delicious aroma.

"What's that?" asked Ned, as the outside door bell rang vigorously.

In reply Martha announced that the janitor wanted to know if anyone had tied a kite to the lobby rail. **[117]**

"The janitor!" exclaimed both small boys in one breath. Then, without further warning, they simultaneously ducked under the table.

[118]

CHAPTER XIII
THE SHOPPING TOUR

"I guess I'll wear my skating cap, the wind blows so on top of those 'buses," remarked Tavia, as she and Dorothy prepared to go downtown to see the shops. It was their second day in New York.

"And I'll wear my fur cap," Dorothy announced, "as that sticks on so well. It is windy to-day."

"Wasn't it too funny about the little boys? I do believe if that janitor had caught them he would have punished them somehow. The idea of their kite dropping around the neck of the old gentleman on the next floor! I should have given anything to see the fun," and Tavia laughed at the thought.

"The poor old gentleman," Dorothy reflected. "To think he was not safe taking the air on his own balcony. I was afraid that Ned would be blamed. Then our apartment would be marked as something dangerous. But Aunt Winnie fixed it all right. Janitors love small change."

"Most people do," Tavia agreed. "I hope we find things cheap in New York. I do want so many odds and ends." **[119]**

"It will be quite an experience for us to go all alone," Dorothy said. "We will have to be careful not to—break any laws."

"Or any bric-a-brac," added Tavia. "Some of those men we saw coming up looked to me like statues. I wonder anyone could enjoy life and be so stiff and statuesque."

"We will see some strange things, I am sure," Dorothy said. "I'm ready. Wait. I guess I'll take my handbag. We may want to carry some little things home."

“And I’ll take your silk bag if you don’t mind,” Tavia spoke. “I did not bring any along.”

So, after accepting all sorts of warnings from Ned and Mrs. White, each declaring that young girls had to be very well behaved, and very careful in such a large city, the two companions started off for their first day’s shopping.

Climbing up the little winding steps to the top of the Fifth Avenue ’bus Tavia dropped her muff. Of course a young fellow, with a fuzzy-wuzzy sort of a hat, caught it—on the hat. Tavia was plainly embarrassed, and Dorothy blushed. But it must be said that the young man with the velvet hat only looked at Tavia once and that was when he handed her muff up to her.

On top of the ’bus, away from the crowd (for they were alone up there), Dorothy and Tavia gave in to the laughter that was stifling them. They knew something would happen and it had, promptly. **[120]**

“Perhaps that is why they wear such broad-brimmed hats,” Dorothy remarked, “to catch things.”

Soon an elderly woman puffed up the steps. She was so done up in furs she could not get her breath outside of them. Tavia and Dorothy took a double seat nearer the front, to allow the lady room near the steps.

“Oh, my! Thank you,” gasped the lady who had a little dog in her muff. “It does do one up so to climb steps!”

The country girls conversed in glances. They had read about dogs on strings, but had never heard of dogs in muffs.

“Lucky that muff did not drop,” Dorothy said, in a whisper. “I fancy the little dog would not like it.”

“I wish it had,” Tavia confessed. “The idea of a woman, who fairly has to crawl, carrying a dog with her.”

Once settled, the woman and the dog no longer interested our young friends. There were the boys on the street corners with their trays of violets; there were the wonderful mansions with so many sets of curtains that one might wonder how daylight ever penetrated; there were the taxicabs floating along like a new species of big bird; then the private auto conveyances—with orchids in hanging glasses! No wonder that Dorothy and Tavia scarcely spoke a word as they rode along. **[121]**

There is only one New York. And perhaps the most interesting part of it is that which shows how real people live there.

“I wonder who’s cooking there now,” misquoted Tavia, as she got a peek into an open door that seemed to lead to nowhere in particular.

“Can you imagine people living in such closed-in quarters?” Dorothy remarked, “I should think they would become—canned.”

“They don’t live there,—they only sleep there,” Tavia disclosed, with a show of pride. “I do not believe a single person along here ever eats a

meal in his or her house. They all go out to hotels."

"But they can't take the babies," said Dorothy. "I often wonder what becomes of the babies after dark, when the parks are not so attractive."

"Do you really suppose that people do live in those vaults?" musingly asked Tavia. "I should think they would smother."

"We can't see the back yards," Dorothy suggested.

"Perhaps New York is like ancient Rome—all walls and back yards."

"But the fountains," exclaimed Tavia, "where are they?" **[122]**

"There are sunken gardens behind those walls, I imagine," explained Dorothy, "and they must be there."

For some moments neither spoke further. The 'bus rattled along and as they neared Thirty-fourth Street stops were made more frequently.

THE 'BUS RATTLED ALONG AS THEY NEARED THIRTY-FOURTH STREET.

"We will get off at the next corner," Dorothy told

Tavia, “I know of one big store up here.”

They climbed down the narrow, winding stairs and with a bound were in the midst of the Fifth Avenue shopping crowd.

Dorothy shivered under her furs. “Where,” she asked, “do all the flowers come from? No one in the country ever sees flowers in the winter, and here they are blooming like spring time.”

“Do you feel peculiar?” demanded Tavia, stopping suddenly.

“Why, no,” answered Dorothy innocently; “do you?”

“I feel just as if I needed a—nosegay,” said Tavia, laughing slily. “We’re not at all as dashing as we might be!”

They purchased from a thinly-clad little boy two bunches of violets, sweetly scented, daintily tasseled—but made of silk!

“The silkiness accounts for the always fresh and blooming violets,” Dorothy said ruefully. “Now, we look just like real New Yorkers.” **[123]**

“Now where is that store?” said Dorothy, looking about with a puzzled air. “I’m sure it was right over there.”

“Isn’t that a store,” said Tavia, “where all those autos and carriages are?”

“Where?” asked Dorothy, still bewildered.

“Where the brown-liveried man is helping ladies out of carriages and things,” Tavia answered.

“Oh,” said Dorothy meekly, “I thought that was a hotel!”

If there was anything in the world more subduedly rich, or more quietly lavish, than the shop that Dorothy and Tavia entered, the girls from the country could not imagine it. The richest and most costly of all things for which the feminine heart yearns, were displayed here. For the first few moments the girls did not talk. They were silent with the wonder of the costliness on every side. Then Tavia said timidly: “Nothing has a price mark on!”

“Hush!” whispered Dorothy, “they don’t have vulgar prices here. They only sell to persons who never ask prices.”

“Oh!” said Tavia, with quick understanding, “however, dare me to ask that wonderful creature with the coiffure, the price of those finger bowls,” murmured Tavia, a yearning entering her soul to possess a priceless article.

“What do you want with finger bowls?” asked Dorothy, mystified. **[124]**

“How do I know? I may yet need a finger bowl,” enigmatically responded Tavia, “maybe to plant a little fern in.” She handled the finger bowl tenderly. Dorothy, too, picked up a tiny brass horse, hammered in exquisite lines. “Isn’t this lovely!” she exclaimed.

“It’s a wonderful piece of work,” admired Tavia, while she clung with intense yearning to the

finger bowl.

“How much are these, please?” Dorothy asked the saleswoman.

The saleswoman carefully brushed back two stray locks that had escaped from their net, and gazing into space said: “Five dollars and Six dollars and ninety-seven cents.” Her attitude was slightly scornful at being asked the very common “how much.”

The scorn was too much for Tavia’s spirit. She lifted her chin: “I’ll take two of each kind, if you please, send them C.O.D.,” and, giving her Riverside Drive address, Tavia, followed by Dorothy, turned and gracefully swayed from the counter, in grand imitation of an elegantly gowned young girl who had just purchased some brass, and had it charged.

“Tavia, how awful!” gasped Dorothy. “Whatever will you do with those things!” **[125]**

“Send them back,” answered Tavia, with great recklessness, her chin still held high.

Dorothy admitted that of course it wasn’t at all possible to back away from such a saleswoman, but she felt quite guilty about something. “We shouldn’t have yielded to our feelings,” she said gently, “it would, at best, have been only momentary humiliation.”

“We’re in the wrong store,” said Tavia, decidedly, “I must see price signs that can be read a block away. This place is too exquisite!”

“Isn’t this the dearest!” Dorothy darted to the handkerchief counter, and picked up a dainty bit of lace.

Tavia gazed at the small lacy thing with rapt attention, cautiously trying to see some hidden mark to indicate the cost, but there was none.

“Something finer than this, please,” queried Tavia, of the saleswoman, “it’s exquisite, Dorothy, but not just what I like, you see.”

Dorothy kept a frightened pair of eyes downcast, as the saleswoman handed Tavia another lace handkerchief saying, with a genial smile: “Eighteen dollars.” Tavia held up the handkerchief critically: “And this one?” she asked, pointing to another.

“Twelve dollars,” replied the saleswoman, all attention. **[126]**

“We must hurry on,” interposed Dorothy, grasping Tavia’s arm in sheer desperation, “there are so many other things, suppose we leave the handkerchiefs until last?”

Critically Tavia fingered the costly bits of lace, as if unable to decide. Then she smiled artlessly at the saleswoman. “It’s hard to say, of course, we’re so rushed for time, but we’ll look at them again.” Together the girls hurried for the street door.

“That was really New York style; wasn’t it?” triumphantly declared Tavia. “Never again will I submit to superior airs when I want to know the price.”

“Hadn’t we better ask someone where stores are that sell goods with price marks on them?” laughingly asked Dorothy.

They followed the crowd toward Broadway and Sixth Avenue. Gaily Tavia tripped along. She never had been happier in all her life. She loved the whirl and the people, and the never-ending air of gaiety. Dorothy liked it all, but it made her a bit weary; the festal air of the crowd did seem so meaningless.

When they reached Sixth Avenue it took but an instant for both girls to pick out the most enticing shop and thither they hurried. It was brilliantly lighted, the gorgeous splendor was Oriental in its beauty, there was no quiet hidden loveliness about this store, it dazzled and charmed and it had price signs! Just nice little white signs, with dull red figures, not at all “screeching” at customers, but most useful to persons of limited means. One could tell with the merest glance just what counter to keep away from. **[127]**

A struggling mass of humanity, mostly women, were packed in tightly about one counter. The girls could not get closer than five feet, but patiently they stood waiting their turn to see what wonderful thing was on sale. It was Tavia’s first bargain rush, and for every elbow that was jammed into her ribs, she stepped on someone’s foot. Dorothy held her head high above the crowd to breathe. At last they reached the counter, and the bargains that all were frantically aiming to reach were saucepans at ten cents each.

“After that struggle, we must get one, just for a memento of the bargain rush,” exclaimed Dorothy, crowding her muff under her arm. Something fell to the floor with a crash at the movement of Dorothy’s arm. Immediately there was great confusion, because, a little woman, flushed and greatly excited had cried out, “My purse! I beg your pardon madam, that is my purse you have!”

The small, excited woman was clinging desperately to the arm of another woman, who towered above the crowd. **[128]**

“Why, that’s Miss Mingle!” cried Tavia to Dorothy.

“Oh, Miss Mingle!” called out Dorothy.

“Girls,” cried the little Glenwood teacher, excitedly, “this woman snatched my purse!”

They were all too excited at the moment to find anything strange in thus meeting with one another.

The big woman calmly surveyed the girls: “She, the blond one, knocked your purse down with her muff, I was goin’ to pick it up, that’s all. It’s under your feet now.”

The woman slowly backed into the crowd.

Dorothy’s eyes opened wide with wonder! The thing that had fallen had certainly made a crash! and the leather end sticking from the cuff of the woman’s fur coat sleeve surely looked like a purse! Dorothy gasped at the horror of it! What

could she do? The woman was moving slowly farther and farther away.

Miss Mingle stooped to the floor in search of the purse. As quick as a flash the woman slipped out of the crowd, as Miss Mingle loosened her hold. Amazed and horrified at the boldness of the theft, Dorothy for one instant stood undecided, then she sprang after the woman and faced her unflinchingly:

"Give me that purse! It's in the cuff of your coat sleeve!" **[129]**

The woman drew herself up indignantly, glared at Dorothy, and would have made an effort to get away, scornfully ignoring the girl who barred her path, when a store detective arrived on the spot.

She, too, was a girl, modestly garbed in black. In a perfectly quiet voice she spoke to the woman.

"These matters can always be settled at our office, madam. Come with me."

"The idea!" screamed the woman. "I never was insulted like this before! How dare you!"

"There is nothing to scream about," said the young detective, in her soft voice, "I've merely asked you to come to the office and talk it over. Isn't that fair?"

"Indeed, I'll submit to nothing of the sort! A hard-working, honest woman like I am!" She made another effort to elude her accusers by a quick movement, but Dorothy kept close to one side and the store detective followed at the other. The woman stared stubbornly at the detective. Disgusted with the performance, Dorothy quietly reached for the protruding purse and held it up.

"Is this yours?" she asked, of Miss Mingle.

"Yes, yes, my dear!" cried Miss Mingle, gratefully accepting the purse, "I'm so thankful! I caught her hand as she slipped the purse away from my arm. How can I thank you, Miss Dale?"

Tavia led the way out of the crowd, and the store detective took charge of the woman, who was an old offender and well known. **[130]**

"Dorothy Dale and Tavia Travers!" joyfully exclaimed Miss Mingle, when the excitement was over. "Where did you come from, and at such an opportune moment?"

"We are as surprised as you," exclaimed Dorothy, "and so glad to have been able to be of assistance!"

"We'll hang the saucepan in the main hall at Glenwood in honor of the bargain rush," said Tavia, waving the parcel above her head.

"Girls, I'm still picking feathers out of my hair!" said Miss Mingle, laughing gaily.

"Don't you love New York?" burst from Tavia's lips. "I'm dreading the very thought of returning to Glenwood and school again!"

But Miss Mingle sighed. "I'm counting the days until my return to Glenwood, my dears. But, you

don’t want to hear anything about that, you’re young and happy, and without care. Come and see us—I’m with my sister, and I would just love to have you.” At mention of her sister, Miss Mingle’s lips involuntarily quivered and she partly turned away. “Do come, girls, this is my address. I’m glad you’re enjoying New York; I wish I could say as much.”

As she said good-bye, Dorothy noticed how much more than ever the thin, haggard face was drawn and lined with anxiety, and the timid dread in her eyes enhanced by the bright red spots that burned in the hollows of her cheeks. **[131]**

“We must call,” said Dorothy, when Miss Mingle had disappeared. “There is some secret burden wearing that little woman to a shred.”

“Her eyes have the look of a haunted creature,” said Tavia, seriously. “We can’t call to-morrow; we have the matinee, you know.”

“Yes, that’s always the way, one must do the pleasant things, and let misery and sorrow take care of themselves,” sighed Dorothy. “Well, we can the following day.”

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CHAPTER XIV
THE DRESS PARADE

“Oh dear,” sighed Dorothy, falling limply into a handsomely upholstered rocker in the comfortable resting-room of the shop, half an hour after they had left Miss Mingle, “I’m completely exhausted!” She carried several parcels, which she dropped listlessly on a nearby couch, on which Tavia was resting.

“How mildly you express it!” cried Tavia, “I’m just simply dead! Don’t the crowds and the lights and confusion tire one, though! I’ll own up, that for just one wee moment to-day, I thought of Dalton, and its peaceful quiet and the blue sky and—those things, you know,” she hastily ended, always afraid of being sentimental.

“I shouldn’t want to think that all my days were destined to be spent in New York. It makes a lovely holiday place, but I like the country,” said Dorothy, as she watched a young girl, shabbily dressed, eating some fruit from a bag.

Tavia watched her too. “At least, the monotony of the country can always be overcome by simple pleasures, but here there is no escape to the peaceful—the temptations are too many. For instance,” Tavia jumped from her restful position, and sat before a writing table, and the shabby young girl who was eating an orange, stopped eating to stare at the schoolgirl. “Who wouldn’t just write to one’s worst enemy, if there was no one else, just to use these darling little desks!” **[133]**

“And the paper is monogramed,” exclaimed Dorothy, regaining an interest in things. “What stunning paper!” She, too, drew up a chair to the dainty mahogany table and grasping a pen said: “We simply must write to someone. This is too alluring to pass by.”

“Here goes one to Ned Ebony,” and Tavia dipped

the pen into the ink and wrote rapidly in a large scrawling hand.

“Mine will be to—Aunt Winnie,” said Dorothy, laughing.

The shabby girl finished her orange, and picking up a small bundle, took one lingering look at the happy young girls at the writing desks and left the resting room.

“Aren’t we the frivolous things,” said Tavia, “writing the most perfect nonsense to our friends merely because we found a dainty writing table!”

“With the most generous supply of writing paper!” said Dorothy. “But the couches and chairs in this room are too tempting to keep me at the writing desk.” Dorothy sealed her letter and again curled up in the spacious rocking chair. **[134]**

“And while we are resting, we can study art,” exclaimed Tavia, gazing at the oil paintings and tapestry that adorned the walls.

A woman, with a grand assortment of large bundles and small children, tried to get them all into her arms at once, preparatory to leaving the resting room, but found it so difficult that she sat down once more and laughed good-naturedly, while the children scrambled about the place, loath to leave such comfortable quarters. Dorothy watched with interest, and wondered how any woman could ever venture out with so many small children clinging to her for protection, to do a day’s shopping. Tavia was more interested in art at that moment.

“Why go to the art museums?” she asked, “we can do that part on our trip right here and now; we only lack catalogues.”

“And we can do nicely without them,” said Dorothy, dragging her wandering attention back to Tavia. “I can enjoy all these pictures without knowing who painted them. We can have just five minutes more in this palatial room, and then we simply must go on.”

And five minutes after the hour, Dorothy persuaded Tavia to leave the ideal spot, and, entering the elevator, they were whirled upward to the dress parade. **[135]**

Roped off from the velvet, carpeted sales floors, numerous statuesque girls paraded about, dressed in garments to charm the eye of all beholders—to lure the very short and stout person into purchasing a garment that looked divine on a willowy six-foot model; or, a wee bit of a lady into thinking that she can no longer exist, unless robed in a cloak of sable. But neither Dorothy nor Tavia cared much for the lure of the gorgeous garments, they were too awed at the moment to yearn for anything. A frail, ethereal creature, with a face of such delicacy and wistfulness, so dainty and graceful, with a little dimpled smile about her lips, passed the country girls and after that the girls could see nothing else in the room. They sat down and just watched her. A trailing robe of black velvet seemed almost too heavy for her slender white shoulders, and a large hat with snow white plume curling over the rim of the hat and

encircling her bare throat, like a serpent, framed her flushed face.

“There,” breathed Tavia, “is the prettiest face I’ve ever dreamed of seeing.”

“She’s more than pretty, she has a soul,” said Dorothy, reverently. “There is something so wistful about her smile and the tired droop of her shoulders. I feel that I could love her!”

“She has put on an ermine wrap over the velvet gown,” said Tavia. Shrinking behind Dorothy she said impulsively: “Dare we speak to her? It must be the most wonderful thing in the world to have a face like that! And to spend all her days just wearing beautiful gowns!” **[136]**

“She wears them so differently from the others here,” declared Dorothy. “She’s strikingly cool, so far beyond her immediate surroundings.”

“I think she must be a princess,” said Tavia, in a solemn voice, “no one else could look like that and stroll about with such an air!”

“I think she is someone who has been wealthy and is now very poor,” said Dorothy, tenderly. “How she must detest being stared at all day long! This work, no doubt, is all she is fitted for, having been reared to do nothing but wear clothes charmingly.”

“She’s changing her hat now,” said Tavia, watching the model as she was arrayed in a different hat. “We might just walk past and smile. I shall always feel unsatisfied if we cannot hear her voice.”

Together they timidly stepped near the wistful-eyed girl with the flushed face.

“You must grow so very tired,” said Dorothy, sympathetically.

A cool stare was the only reply.

“Hurry with the boa, you poky thing,” came from the red, pouting lips of the wistful-eyed girl, ignoring Dorothy and Tavia as though they were part of the building’s masonry. “I ain’t got all day to wait! Gotta show ten more hats before closing. Hurry up there, you girls, you make me mad! Now you hurry, or I’ll report you!” and turning gracefully, she tilted her chin to just the right angle, the shrinking, wistful smile appeared on her lips, the tired droop slipped to her shoulders, all the air of charm covered her like a mantle, and again she started down the strip of carpet, leaving behind her two sadly disillusioned young girls. **[137]**

“Let us go right straight home,” said Dorothy. “One never knows what to believe is real in this hub-bub place.”

“We might have forgiven her anything,” said Tavia, “if she had been wistfully angry, or charmingly bossy; but to think that ethereal creature could turn into just a plain, everyday mortal!”

“The flowers were mostly artificial, the bargain counters mere stopping places for pickpockets, and the most beautiful girl was rude!” cried Dorothy.

“We must be tired; all things can’t be wrong,” said Tavia, philosophically.

“We’ll take a taxi home,” said Dorothy, “Come on.”

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CHAPTER XV
TEA IN A STABLE

“Tavia!” exclaimed Dorothy, the next afternoon, as they prepared to go to a matinee, “this address is Aunt Winnie’s apartment house—the one she invested so much money in.” She handed Tavia Miss Mingle’s card.

“How strange that the teacher should be Aunt Winnie’s tenant, and you never knew it,” cried Tavia, as she arranged a bunch of orchids, real hot-house orchids, that Ned had sent.

“Won’t Aunt Winnie be surprised when she learns that our little Miss Mingle is one of her tenants?” Dorothy said. She was pinning on a huge bunch of roses. Ned had laughed at the girls’ tale of finding everything on the shopping tour to be false, and to prove that there were real things in New York City, had sent them these beautiful flowers to wear to the matinee.

“Indeed,” continued Dorothy, “I’m mighty glad we met Miss Mingle. Aunt Winnie has had just about enough worry over that old apartment house! Miss Mingle, no doubt, will relieve that anxiety to some extent. I do so hope that everything will come out right. But come, dear, don’t look so grave, we must be gay for the show!”

[139]

Ned ran into the room. “Hurry, girls,” he said, bowing low, “the motor is at the door.”

“The car!” screamed the girls in delight, “where did the car come from?”

“Oh, just the magic of New York,” said Ned, with a smile.

“Not the *Fire Bird*?” asked Dorothy, hat pin suspended in mid-air.

“Oh, no, just a car. Maybe you girls like being bumped along on top of the ’bus, but little Neddie likes to have his hand on the wheel himself,” said Ned.

“Running a car in New York,” said Tavia, “is not North Birchland, you know. Maybe we’ll get a worse bump in it than we ever dreamed of on top of the ’bus.”

“Oh, I know something about it,” said Ned confidently, “been downtown twice to-day in the thickest part of the traffic, and I’m back, as you’ll see, if you’ll stop fooling with those flowers long enough to look at me.”

Tavia turned and looked lingeringly at Ned. “To-be-sure,” she drawled, “there’s Ned, Dorothy.”

“I’m really afraid, Ned,” said Dorothy, “the traffic is so awful, you know you aren’t accustomed to driving through such crowds.”

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“If you stand there arguing all afternoon, there

won't be any trouble about getting through the crowd, of course," gently reminded Ned. "It's a limousine and a dandy! Bigger than the *Fire Bird* and a beautiful yellow!"

"Yellow!" cried Tavia in horror. "With my complexion! Couldn't you engage a car to match my hair?"

"And my feathers are green!" exclaimed Dorothy. "Just like a man, engage a car and never ask what shade we prefer!"

Tavia sat down in mock dismay. "Our afternoon is spoiled! No self-respecting person in this town ever rides in a car that doesn't match!"

"Oh, tommyrot," said Ned in deep disgust, listening in all seriousness to the girls' banter. "Who is going to look at us? Never heard of such foolishness!" And he dug his hands into his pockets, and walked gloomily about the room.

"Ned, dear, you're a darling," enthused Dorothy, "you don't really believe we are so imbued with the spirit of New York as to demand that?"

"Ned really has paid us the greatest compliment," said Tavia, complacently, "he believed it was all true, and only geniuses can produce that effect."

Fifteen minutes later, after several near-collisions, Ned drove the yellow car up to the entrance of the theatre, and while he was getting his check from the lobby usher, the girls tripped into the playhouse. **[141]**

They had box seats. With intense interest the girls watched the continuous throng pouring into their places. Few of the passing crowd, however, returned the lavish interest that was centered on them from the first floor box; no one in the vast audience knew or cared that two country girls were having their first glimpse of a New York theatre audience. They saw nothing unusual in the eager, smiling young faces, and as Dorothy said to Tavia, only the striking, unique and frightfully unusual would get more than a passing glance from those that journey through New York town.

But Dorothy and Tavia did not look at the crowd long. It was something to be in a metropolitan theatre, witnessing one of the great successes of the season.

Soon the curtain rolled up on the first act, a beautiful parlor scene, and Tavia gave a gasp.

"Say, it beats when I went on the stage," she whispered to Dorothy, referring to a time already related in detail in "Dorothy Dale's Great Secret."

"Do you wish to go back?" asked Dorothy.

"Never!"

The play went on, and as it was something really worth while, the girls enjoyed it greatly. **[142]**

"Isn't he handsome?" whispered Tavia, referring to the leading man.

"Look out, or you'll fall in love with him," returned Ned, with a grin. "He's one of the girls'

matinee idols, you know."

Between the acts Ned slipped out for a few minutes. He returned with a box of bonbons and chocolates.

"Oh, how nice!" murmured Dorothy and Tavia.

Then came the great scene of the play, and the young folks were all but spellbound. When Vice was exposed and Virtue triumphed Dorothy felt like clapping her hands, and so did the others, and all applauded eagerly.

There was a short, final act. Just before the curtain arose a step sounded in the box and to the girls' astonishment there stood Cologne.

"I've been trying to attract your attention for ever so long," she cried, after embracing and kissing her friends enthusiastically. "I'm spending the day with a chum. It's such a joy to meet you like this!"

"And yesterday we met Miss Mingle," laughed Dorothy. They drew their chairs up close, and told Cologne about the attempted theft.

"I'm so sorry for Miss Mingle," Cologne said, rather guardedly, "it seems a pity that we never tried to know her better. She must have needed our sympathy and friendship so much." **[143]**

"All the time, she has been one of Aunt Winnie's tenants," explained Dorothy. "But of course I did not know that."

"Then she must have told you about it," said Cologne.

"We've heard nothing," said Dorothy, "but we expect to call there to-morrow."

"Then," said Cologne discreetly, "I can say no more."

Soon the last act was over, the orchestra struck up a popular tune, the applause was deafening, and the audience rose to leave the theatre.

"It's all over," said Ned, and then he greeted Cologne and her friend, Helen Roycroft.

"Didn't you like it?" exclaimed Cologne's friend, who was a New York girl. "The critics just rave over it! Everyone must see it before anything else! But I'm hungry; aren't you?" she asked, including all three.

Ned slipped back, but Tavia grasped his arm.

"There's the most wonderful little tea-room just off Fifth Avenue," said Helen Roycroft, with perfect self-possession and calm, "and I should so love to have you enjoy a cup of tea with me."

Tavia murmured in Ned's ear: "Of course you're crazy for a cup of tea."

Ned looked helplessly at Dorothy, and calculated the money in his pockets. Four girls and all hungry! Helen Roycroft, meeting a new man, lost little time in impressing him with the wonderful importance of herself, and together she and Ned led the little party over Thirty-eighth Street to Fifth Avenue, while good-natured Cologne, with Dorothy and Tavia, **[144]**

followed behind.

The tea-room they entered, as Helen explained, was the most popular place in town for people of fashion, for artistic souls, and the moneyed, leisure class.

“Everyone likes to come here,” continued Helen, in a manner that plainly suggested that she loved to show off her city, “mostly because the place was once the stable of a member of the particular four hundred, and as this is as near as most of its patrons will ever come to the four hundred, they make it a rendezvous at this particular hour every afternoon.”

The “stable” still retained its original architecture, beamed ceiling and quaint stalls, painted a modest gray and white, in which were placed little tables to accommodate six persons, lighted with shaded candles. Cushioned benches were built to the sides of the stalls for seats; dainty waitresses, dressed also in demure gray and white, dispensed tea, and crackers and salads.

Hidden somewhere in the dim distance, musicians played soft, low music and the whole effect was so charming that even Ned held his breath and looked around him in wonder. This tea-room was something akin to a woman’s club, where they could entertain their men friends with afternoon tea, in seclusion within the stalls. **[145]**

Helen Roycroft mentioned the name of a well-known actress and, trying hard to keep her enthusiasm within bounds, pointed her out to the party. The actress was seated alone in a stall, dreaming apparently, over a cup of tea. The waitress stood expectantly waiting for the young people to select their stall. When Tavia saw the actress, with whose picture they were all very familiar, she pinched Dorothy hard.

“Surely we never can have such luck as to sit at the same tea table with her,” indicating the matronly actress.

“Should you like to?” asked the New York girl.

And forthwith they were led to the stall. The matronly-looking woman languidly raised blue, heavy-lashed eyes to the gushing young girls who invaded her domain, then put one more lump of sugar in her tea and drank it, and Tavia breathlessly watched!

She was an actress of note, one of the finest in the world, and her pictures had always shown her as tall and slender and beautifully young! The woman Tavia gazed at had the face of the magazine pictures, but she was decidedly matronly; there was neither romance nor tragedy written on the smooth lines of her brow. She was so like, and yet so unlike her pictures, that Tavia fell to studying wherein lay the difference. It was rude, perhaps, but the lady in question, understood the eager brown eyes turned on her, and she smiled. **[146]**

And that smile made everyone begin to talk.

It was quite like a family party. Ned, as the only man present, came in for the lion’s share of attention and it pleased him much. Just a whim of the noted actress perhaps, made her join gaily

in the tea-party, or mayhap, it was a privilege she rarely enjoyed, this love of genuine laughter, and bright, merry talk of the fresh young school girls. And it was a moment in the lives of the girls that was never forgotten.

The voices in the tea-room scarcely rose above a murmur; the music played not a note above a dreamy, floating ripple; and the essence of the freshly-made tea pervaded the air.

At times Tavia could see the actress of the magazines, and again she was just somebody's mother, tired out and drinking tea, like every mother Tavia had ever met. But the most thrilling moment of all was when she said good-bye and asked the girls to call. And best of all, she meant it—Dorothy knew that! There was no mistaking the sincerity of the voice, the kindly light of her eyes, nor the simple words of the invitation to call.

"I must hurry now," she had said, "I'm due at the theatre in another hour; but I want to see you again. I want you to tell me more of your impressions of this great city. I've really enjoyed this cup of tea more than you know, my dears," and she smiled at Tavia and Dorothy. **[147]**

Tavia and Dorothy had really talked so much that Helen Roycroft had little chance to display her fine knowledge of city life. Cologne was well content to sit and listen.

When the actress was gone, Tavia said to Dorothy: "Must we really go? I could stay here drinking tea for a week."

"I never want to see a cup of tea again," declared Ned. "And say," he continued, "next time I'm dragged into a ladies' tea-room, I want an end seat! These stalls were never meant for fellows with knees where mine come!" And he painfully unwound himself from a cramped position.

"Ned does have so much trouble with those knees," explained Dorothy. "He never can have any but an end seat or box-seat at the theatre, because there is no room for his knees elsewhere. Poor boy! How uncomfortable will be your memory of this tea-room!"

"It will be the loveliest memory of my trip," Tavia declared. "We found something real and true!" **[148]**

"I'd give the whole world to be able to stay over," said Cologne, plaintively.

"Just one more cup of tea!" cried Dorothy, "then we'll start for home in the yellow car."

"I'm glad it's dark," said Tavia, mischievously glancing at Ned, "the color combination is such wretched taste!"

"I'm sorry, Cologne," said Dorothy, "that you can't stay and come with us to-morrow to call on Miss Mingle."

Ned was cranking up the car, and the girls for a moment were just a confused mass of muffs and feathers and kisses, then they jumped in, and drove home to the Riverside apartment.

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CHAPTER XVI
A STARTLING DISCOVERY

“How funny!” exclaimed Tavia, as she and Dorothy began to ascend the stairs in the deep, dark hallway of the apartment house that Aunt Winnie owned, and in which Miss Mingle and her sister lived. It was six stories high and had two apartments on each floor. A porter, with the unconcern of long habit, carelessly carried a rosy, cooing baby on his shoulder up the long flights of stairs, his destination being an apartment on the sixth floor. The mother of the child climbed up after him deep in thought, probably as to what to have for dinner that day.

“No, there are no elevators,” explained Dorothy. “This house is one of the early apartments, built before the people knew the necessity for such luxuries as elevators.”

“Luxuries!” said Tavia, stopping to catch her breath, “if elevators are luxuries in a six-story house, I’ll vote for luxuries!”

“Just one more flight,” said Dorothy, “it’s the fifth floor, the left apartment, I believe,” she consulted a card as they paused on a landing. **[150]**

“I don’t wonder now at Miss Mingle looking haggard,” said Tavia, “if she must face this climb every time she comes back. Imagine doing this several times a day!”

“At least, one would get all the necessary exercising, and in wet, cold weather, could have both amusement and exercise, sliding down the banisters and climbing back,” Dorothy said, determined to see the bright side of it.

Tavia slipped in a heap on a step and gasped: “Yes, indeed, I’ll admit there may be advantages in the way of exercise.”

“Courage,” said Dorothy laughing, “we have only ten steps more!”

While Dorothy resolutely dragged Tavia up the last ten steps, Miss Mingle appeared in the hall.

“I heard your cheerful laughter,” she said with a smile, “and I said to sister, prepare the pillows for the girls to fall on, after their awful climb. But I didn’t say,” she added, playfully, “feather pillows to fall on the girls!”

“We really enjoyed the climb,” said Dorothy.

“It was lots of fun,” agreed Tavia.

They entered a room which at first glance seemed a confused jumble of beautiful furniture, magazines, newspapers and books, grocer and butcher and gas bills, and a gentle-faced woman reclining languidly in an easy chair. Her smooth black hair fell gracefully over her ears; she had large gray eyes, whose sweet patience was the most marked characteristic of her face. **[151]**

“My sister, Mrs. Bergham, has been quite ill,” explained Miss Mingle, as she rushed about trying to clear off two chairs for the girls to sit on. Every chair in the room seemed to be littered with what Dorothy thought was a unique collection of various sorts of jars, tea pots, and

cups; and last week's laundry seemed to cover the radiators and tables. The room, however, for all the confusion, was quaint and artistic, and had odd little corners fixed up here and there.

"MY SISTER, MRS. BERGHAM, HAS BEEN QUITE ILL," EXPLAINED MISS MINGLE.

"I'm so ill and I'm afraid I've been quite selfish, demanding so much of sister's time!" Mrs. Bergham said, extending a long white hand to the girls, and with her other removing a scarf from her shoulders, allowing it to drop to the floor. Miss Mingle immediately picked it up, folded it neatly, and laid it on the window seat.

"I've had rather a sad Christmas," she went on. "Sister, it's getting too warm in this room," and, removing a pillow from under her head, she permitted that also to drop to the floor. Miss Mingle stooped and picked it up.

"There, there, dear," said the latter, "I can't let you talk about it. The girls will tell you all about their trip and you'll forget the miserable aches and pains." She puffed and patted the pillows on which her sister was resting. **[152]**

Mrs. Bergham smiled languidly. "It's so fine to be young and strong," she said. "I have two small sons, and it made my Christmas so hard not to have them with me. But I couldn't take

care of them. They are such robust little fellows! Sister decided, and I suppose she's right—she always is—that it would be best for me not to have the care of them while I am so ill." She sighed and smiled patiently at Miss Mingle. "So we sent them away to school. I did so count on having them with me this holiday, but sister thought it would only be a worry; didn't you, dear?"

Miss Mingle hesitated just the fraction of a second, then she answered cheerfully: "Mrs. Bergham is so nervous, and the boys are such lively little crickets, we didn't have them home for Christmas."

"Children are sometimes such perfect cares," declared Tavia, feeling that something should be said.

"Then, too," continued Mrs. Bergham, evidently greatly enjoying the opportunity to talk about herself to the helpless callers, "I've tried hard to add a little to our income. I paint," she arched her straight, black eyebrows slightly. "Everything was going along so beautifully, although it is an expensive apartment to keep up, and I cared nothing for myself, I like to keep a home for my sister, and I worked and worked, and was so worried. Don't you like this apartment? I've grown very fond of it." She talked in a rambling way, but her voice was pleasing and her manner quite tranquil, so that Dorothy wondered how she said so much with apparently little exertion. **[153]**

"The night the telegram came," said Miss Mingle, "I thought she was dying, and I must say," she laughed, "that that alone saved you naughty girls from receiving some horrible punishment." They all laughed at the remembrance of that last night at Glenwood. "But when I got here," continued Miss Mingle, "my sister was much better, and I was so relieved to find her just like her own dear self, when I had expected to find her—very ill—that I forgot everything, even having the boys home, so that sister's fatherless sons had no Santa Claus this year."

Tavia was curious. The furnishings of the room were good, almost elaborate, but the carelessness of it all at first hid the good points. Surely Mrs. Bergham did not keep it up on her painting. Tavia judged that, by the long, slender, almost helpless hand and the whole poise of the woman. And the two little boys at school! Could it be possible, she thought, that Miss Mingle supported the family?

"I'm sorry I am not well enough to arrange to have you meet some of my young friends," said Mrs. Bergham. "We entertain a little, sister and I. I know so many interesting young people. Bohemians, sister calls them!" **[154]**

Miss Mingle was arranging the books on top of a bookcase and they fell with a clatter. If she made any answer, it was lost in the noise.

At the name of "Bohemians" Dorothy brightened. "I've never seen a real, live Bohemian!" she exclaimed, clasping her hands together with ecstasy.

"But we met an actress yesterday," Tavia said,

hesitatingly.

Mrs. Bergham waved her hand in space. “I mean real artists, people who have genius, who are doing wonderful things for the world! We count those among our friends,” she said.

“My!” thought Dorothy, “did Miss Mingle belong to that society? Did she know the geniuses of the world, and yet had never mentioned it to the girls at school?” But Miss Mingle had little to say. She finished arranging the books, and moving swiftly, nervously about, she tried to bring some kind of order out of the confusion in the room.

“Do sit down, sister, this can all wait. I’m sure the girls don’t mind if we are not in perfect order,” said Mrs. Bergham.

Dorothy and Tavia, in one breath, assured the ladies that they didn’t mind a bit, and Tavia even added, with the intention of making Miss Mingle feel at ease, that it was “more home-like.” **[155]**

“I never could sit up perfectly straight nor stay comfortably near anything that was just where it should be,” explained Mrs. Bergham. “My husband loved that streak of disorder that was part of my nature, but sister was always the most precise and careful little creature.” She looked at Miss Mingle with limpid, loving eyes. “Sister was always the greatest girl for taking all the responsibility, she was so hopelessly in love with work in her girlhood! What a lovely time our girlhood was! Isn’t it time for my broth?” she asked, as she glanced at a small watch on her wrist.

“Forgive me, dear,” said Miss Mingle, “I forgot. I’ll prepare it immediately,” and she dropped what she was doing and hurried to the kitchen.

Mrs. Bergham arose and walked to the window seat, resting her elbows on some pillows. She wore a light blue dressing gown, made on simple lines, but so perfectly pretty that Dorothy and Tavia decided at once to make one like it immediately, on reaching home. The light blue shade brought out the clear blue-grey of her eyes, and her heavy dark lashes shaded the soft, white skin. She sighed, and asked the girls to sit with her in the window seat. In her presence Tavia felt very awkward, young and inexperienced, and she sat rather rigidly. Dorothy was more at ease and, too, more critical of their hostess. She listened to the quick, nervous steps of Miss Mingle as she hurried about the kitchen, preparing nourishment for her languid sister.

“There isn’t much view from this window,” said Tavia bluntly, more because she felt ill at ease than because she had expected to see something besides the tall, brown buildings across the street. The buildings were high, no sky could be seen from the window, and the sun did not seem to penetrate the long line of stone buildings across the way. **[156]**

“Oh, there are disadvantages here, I know, but I’m so fond of just this one room. The house is in that part of the city most convenient to everything—that is, everything worth while, of course. So, sister decided it was best to stay here. However, the rent is enormous. It was that

mostly which caused my breakdown. In six months time our rent has been doubled by the landlord. I got ill thinking about it, and I just had to send for sister. Sister's salary isn't so large, and the constant increase in our rent is a burden too great to bear."

"I'd move," said Tavia, promptly.

"But where would we find another place that meets all the requirements as this place does? If sister were always with me, we might come across something suitable some time, but alone, I am of little use in a business manner. Sister is so clever! She can do everything so much better than I. My illness is keeping me at home at present, and as my sister will return to school directly, there is really no time to look about for other quarters." The sufferer said this quite decidedly. **[157]**

"Who raises the rents?" Dorothy tried to ask the question naturally, but a lump seized her throat, and she felt the blood rushing to her cheeks.

"Oh, some agent. Several dozens of persons have bought and sold this house, according to Mr. Akerson, since we moved in." The subject was evidently beginning to bore Mrs. Bergham, for she yawned. "What pretty hair you have, Miss Dale," she exclaimed, "so much like the gold the poets sing about."

Dorothy brushed back the tiny locks that persisted in hanging about her ears, and she smiled shyly.

"Can't you refuse to pay the increases in the rent?" asked Dorothy.

"Oh, these is always some good reason for the increases," answered Mrs. Bergham. "Some new improvements, or some big expense attached to maintaining a studio apartment, in fact, according to Mr. Akerson, the reasons for raising our rent are endless."

Dorothy's eyes met Tavia's in a quick flash, as she noted the name of the agent. **[158]**

Then Miss Mingle came into the room with a neatly-arranged tray for her sister. Mrs. Bergham thanked her and waited patiently while little Miss Mingle drew up a table to the window seat and placed the things on it.

Mrs. Bergham held up a napkin. "I don't want to trouble, dear, but really I've used this napkin several times. Just hand me any kind; I know things haven't been ironed or cared for as they should be, but I don't mind. There, that one is all right. I'm an awful care; am I not?"

Miss Mingle squeezed her hand. "Just get well and be your old, happy self again, that's all I ask." She turned to the girls. "My sister and her boys are all I have in the world to work and live for," she finished.

"I'm really so sorry, sister, that you did not speak about the girls spending their holiday in town. We could have a nice little dinner before you all return to Glenwood," suggested Mrs. Bergham.

"Don't think of it," said Dorothy, shocked at the idea of little Miss Mingle being burdened with **[159]**

the additional care of trying to give a dinner for Tavia and herself. Indeed, it would have been more to Dorothy's mind to have taken Miss Mingle with her, and have her sit in Aunt Winnie's luxurious apartment, and be waited on for just one day, as the little teacher was waiting on her languid sister.

Tavia, too, thought, since the idea of increasing any of Miss Mingle's responsibilities was apt to be brought up, it was the right moment to depart.

Dorothy held Miss Mingle's hand as they were leaving and said: "Mrs. Bergham told us of your difficulty about the rent. I'm so sorry."

"We are absolutely helpless," said Miss Mingle. "We are paying three times what the apartment was originally rented for and there is no logical reason why it should be so. The agent says it's the landlord's commands, and if we don't like it we can move. It seems that this particular landlord is money mad!"

"Oh," cried Dorothy, "something must be done!"

"The only thing that I can think of," said Mrs. Bergham, wiping two tears from her eyes, "is to forget the whole tiresome business. It was horrid of me to say anything at all, but it's so much on our minds that I cannot help talking about it."

"I'm very glad indeed," said Dorothy, "that you did."

"We were not bored by that story," Tavia said, "and we surely are very pleased to have had this pleasure of becoming acquainted with Miss Mingle's sister." **[160]**

In another moment the girls began the weary climb down the four flights of stairs.

Reaching the street Dorothy started off at a mad pace.

"I'm so thoroughly provoked," she said to Tavia, who was a yard behind, "that I must walk quickly or I'll explode."

"Well, I'm disgusted too, Dorothy, but I'll take a chance on exploding, I'm not used to six-day walking races, however much you may be. And incidentally, I must say I should have liked very much to have shaken a certain person until all the languidness was shaken out of her bones!"

"Shaken her!" cried Dorothy, "I should have liked to spank her!"

"If that is an artistic temperament," said Tavia, "I never wish to meet another. Of all the lackadaisical clinging vines; of all the sentimental, selfish people that ever existed!"

"To think of that poor little woman teaching school, and going without ordinary comforts, to help support her sister in ease and relieve her of the responsibility of bringing up her two children!" Dorothy had slackened her pace and the girls walked together, although still swinging along rapidly.

"A person without a temperament would have moved instantly, but that creature stayed on and **[161]**

on, paying every increase, getting the extra money of course from Miss Mingle, just because she was so fond of that one room!" Tavia mimicked Mrs. Bergham's voice and manner.

"Too languid to look for another," said Dorothy, her eyes aglow with indignation. "But, Tavia, there is one thing certain. Dear Aunt Winnie shall now know where the leak in her income is," said Dorothy.

Tavia did not reply, because a sudden idea had leaped to her brain. She listened quietly while Dorothy talked about Aunt Winnie's business affairs, her brain awhirl with the excitement of this thing that had suddenly come to her; come as a means of repaying Dorothy and Aunt Winnie for all their loving kindness to her. To keep the idea tucked away in the innermost regions of her mind, she bit her tongue, so afraid was she that once her lips opened the idea would burst forth. So Dorothy talked on and on and Tavia only listened.

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CHAPTER XVII

TAVIA'S RESOLVE

Tavia was preoccupied at breakfast. Ned slily guessed that she was yearning for a certain someone left behind in Dalton, but Tavia just smiled, and insisted that she was paying strict attention to other matters.

"Then why," demanded Ned, "have you poured maple syrup into your coffee?"

"I didn't!" declared Tavia, but there was little use denying it when she carefully stirred her cup.

Dorothy shook her forefinger at Tavia. "This morning you had your ribbons in your hair, and yet you asked me to find them for you; and then you said you were a 'stupid' when I located them for you—on top of your head."

"But I still deny that I am preoccupied, or dreaming," declared Tavia. "In fact, I'm too wideawake. It hurts to be as fully awake as I am!"

"Look out!" warned Ned, "there, you almost put sugar in your egg cup!"

"Please stop noticing me," said poor Tavia, chagrined at last into pleading with her teasers. "Suppose I admit that I am deeply absorbed?"

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"Don't do anything of the sort," said Aunt Winnie, "just put all the maple syrup in your coffee that you wish; you may like coffee that way, if Ned does not."

It was noticeable to all that Tavia's attention was not given to her immediate surroundings, and while the others were still at breakfast, the girl stole noiselessly to her room, dressed for the street, and quietly opened the door leading into their private hall. She listened, and caught the sound of merry voices from the breakfast room. She tiptoed down the hall, opened the outer door, and reached the elevator in safety. She rang, and it seemed almost an hour before the

car came up. Elevators are such slow things when one is on an errand that must be done in haste!

Tavia watched Mrs. White's door, afraid every moment that Dorothy or Aunt Winnie would pop out. But the elevator did finally arrive, and bidding the boy "good morning" Tavia at last felt safe. To what they would say when they discovered that she had gone out alone through the streets of New York city, Tavia gave only a momentary thought. It could all be explained so nicely when she returned.

She hastened to a corner drug-store, asked permission to use the pay telephone, and entered the booth. Not until then did Tavia know fear! How to telephone, what to say—she couldn't think connectedly. After finding the number, she took off the receiver with more confidence than she really felt. Her heart beat so fast that she thought the girl at the central office would ask what that thumping noise was on the wire! **[164]**

"Hello!" she called, timidly.

A boy's voice at the other end of the line answered.

"I would like to speak with Mr. Akerson, if you please," said Tavia, and felt braver now that she had really started on her adventure.

"Is this Mr. Akerson? No?" Someone had answered, but evidently it was not the right man.

After a long wait another voice floated into Tavia's ear—a woman's voice. Tavia said, becoming impatient: "I simply want to talk with Mr. Akerson. Is that impossible?"

She was assured by the voice at the other end that it was not, but Mr. Akerson was always busy, and must have the name of the party. This was not what Tavia had expected, and for a moment she was confused and felt like hanging up the receiver and running away.

"Well?" asked the young lady.

"Tell him—oh, just tell him, a young lady; he doesn't know me."

"I must have your name, or I cannot call him to the 'phone." **[165]**

"How aggravating!" exclaimed Tavia to the empty air, "I didn't expect I would have to publish my name broadcast." Then she spoke into the receiver:

"I want to see Mr. Akerson on very special, important business that only concerns myself; kindly tell him that, please," she said, with great dignity.

Not a sound came from the other end and Tavia began to wonder whether this would end her mission, when a loud, hearty voice yelled right in her ear:

"Hello-o-o!"

It only startled Tavia. At that moment she couldn't have remembered her own name.

“Hello-o!” called the impatient voice again.

“Might I have an interview with you this morning?” Tavia at last managed to gasp.

“Who is this?” asked the voice in a more gentle tone.

“I’m a young lady who wants a private interview with you,” she answered, trying to be very impressive.

“Why certainly,” said the man’s voice. “When do you wish to see me?” Tavia caught a hint of amusement in the tone, so she answered quickly, trying to throw into her accent the commanding tones of grown-up women: “I must see you immediately, and just as soon as I can get down to your office.”

“Very well,” said the voice, “but won’t you tell me your name?” **[166]**

“Not now,” answered Tavia, still maintaining great dignity of voice, “and please, will you tell me just how to reach your office—and—and, oh, all about getting there. You see, I really don’t know where Nassau Street is.”

The man laughed, and Tavia quickly jotted down the directions and left the telephone a bit perplexed. How amused the man had been! Perhaps it wasn’t customary for young girls to make appointments thus. Tavia quailed, she did so detest doing anything that a born and bred New York girl would not do.

The mere matter of taking a surface car and reaching lower Broadway was a bit nerve-racking, but simple in the extreme. Tavia felt that, for a country girl, she could travel through the city like a veteran. Mr. Akerson had specifically told her not to take the subway, as it might be puzzling, but, finding the office building was not as simple as finding the proper car to get there had been. There were numerous large buildings on the block, and such crowds of heedless men rushing passed her! There were as many people in the middle of the street as there were on the walks. Everyone was in a tremendous hurry, and could not wait for his neighbor.

Lower New York presented to Tavia the most bewildering, impossible place she had ever imagined! In the shopping districts, New York is enchanting, but this section, with its forbidding-looking, sunless, narrow streets, and the wind blowing constantly, piercing and sharp, made Tavia shiver under her furs. Each building seemed equipped with whirling doors that were perpetually in motion, and to enter one of these doors caused Tavia to shrink back and wish heartily that Dorothy or Ned was with her. **[167]**

She stood waiting an opportune moment to slip into the rapidly-swinging doors, and should have turned away in despair of ever entering, when a young man stopped, and holding the circular portal still, with one strong arm, he bowed to Tavia to pass through. She plunged into the compartment and was whirled into a white marble hall directly in front of a row of elevators. Again she read the address of Mr. Akerson. “Room 1409.” Entering an elevator she wondered in a misty, dizzy way how one knew

where to get off to find room Number 1409.

“Eighteenth floor!” yelled the elevator operator, looking askance at Tavia. Then before Tavia could think, he called, “Going down!” and the elevator filled up for the downward trip. Tavia gasped. How stupid she had been! How she wished Dorothy was with her! Then she left the elevator on the ground floor and pulling together all her courage, she asked an important looking man in uniform, how she could reach Room 1409. **[168]**

“Fourteenth floor, to your right,” explained the man, taking the bewildered Tavia by the arm and putting her on an elevator.

“So that’s the system,” thought Tavia, and she could have laughed aloud. And marveling at the perfect simplicity of so many things that at first glance seemed complicated, Tavia found herself at the fourteen floor.

“Room Fourteen Hundred and Nine to your right,” said the elevator boy, without Tavia having asked him anything about it.

“To your right,” sounded simple, but as Tavia surveyed the various halls, running in numerous directions, she grew weary of her first business trip and so tired that she almost lost sight of the reason for the journey. Under the guidance of a flippant young person, Tavia finally located “to the right.”

She opened the door and entered. She fairly rushed into the office because she felt that Mr. Akerson must be tired waiting for her arrival. A small boy sat at a telephone switchboard.

“Who d’yer wanta see?” asked the boy, with utter indifference.

“Mr. Akerson,” said Tavia. **[169]**

The boy telephoned to somewhere, and presently a young girl appeared, and without a word, conducted Tavia through a long suite of offices, with crowds of clerks, desks and bookcases in every conceivable corner. The young miss poked her head into a door and called out:

“Mr. A.”

“A’s not in,” called back another young voice. “Back in half an hour.”

Tavia sat down and looked about her. So this was the way business men kept important appointments! Back in half an hour! It seemed ages since Tavia left Mrs. White’s breakfast room, but the ticking clock on the wall announced that it was just ten-thirty. She must return for lunch, or the family would be frightened. She quietly looked about her, and in one quick glance decided that after all, the various eyes that were looking her way, might be kindly eyes, and with a great deal of courage, for it really takes courage to face a long line of clerks in a business office, Tavia smiled at the entire force. Soon she became interested in the clicking typewriting machines, and the adding apparatus, and forgot all about herself, which seemed the best thing in the world to do. The most comfortable and happy people of all are

those who can become so interested in others that they forget themselves.

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CHAPTER XVIII
DANGEROUS GROUND

"Miss——," began a man with a ruddy face and heavy gray hair, as he stood in front of Tavia, almost an hour later, while a small boy relieved him of his great fur coat and cane. "I don't believe I have your name. I'm Mr. Akerson."

"I'm Octavia Travers," answered Tavia, looking straight into the brown eyes of Mr. Akerson.

"Oh, yes, you are the lady who 'phoned me? Want to see me about something very important; don't you?" he asked, looking at Tavia's fresh young face with open admiration. Instinctively Tavia did not like Mr. Akerson. His brown eyes were large and bold, and his manners too free and easy. As she gazed straight at him she wondered how she, alone, could deal with such a man. But she followed him, nevertheless, into an office marked "*Private*" and the door closed behind them.

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"Wonderful weather; is it not?" he asked, pleasantly. "Such bracing air as this makes us old fellows young," he rubbed his large hands together as he talked. "I suppose you've been skating in the Park, and enjoying the Winter pleasures, as girls do!"

"No, indeed," answered Tavia sedately, "we haven't been skating yet, but we're going to the Park to-morrow." Then she could have bitten off her tongue for saying anything so foolish—for telling this stranger anything about her engagements.

The man did not seem in a hurry to find out her business. She drew herself up and raising her chin, which was always a sign that Tavia was becoming determined, she said:

"I wish to inquire about one of your apartments."

"I understood you to say that it was special business with me," he laughed, and looked keenly at Tavia. "You could have asked any of the clerks about that."

"I thought that I would have to see you personally, of course."

"Oh, no, that was not necessary. My clerks are conversant with the renting of all our places."

Tavia was puzzled. She would not talk to the clerks, she wanted to find out from Mr. Akerson himself. She smiled sweetly.

"I was told," she said, "that in regard to this particular apartment, the Court Apartments, that I could only rent from you."

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The man glanced up quickly, and closing his eyes shrewdly, asked Tavia, lowering his voice:

"Who sent you to me?"

"A friend of mine lives there and she mentioned

your name as being renting agent, and not the company you represent."

Mr. Akerson sat back, evidently very much relieved. He toyed with a letter opener.

"No," he said slowly, "the Court Apartments do not belong to the company, and the clerks could not have given you the information about renting. We do not carry that place on the lists."

For one wild moment Tavia wanted to laugh. This shrewd man, of whom she had felt so much in awe, was calmly telling her just what she wanted to know!

"I wish," said Tavia, "to see about renting an apartment there."

"An apartment just for yourself?" he asked, and he looked so queerly at Tavia that she hesitated.

"No," hastily corrected Tavia, "that is, not alone. I expect to have—someone with me." Which, as Tavia said to herself, was perfectly true, though she hesitated over it.

"Lucky young chap!" murmured the man, and Tavia flushed hotly.

"The rent, please," demanded Tavia, trying to show the man how much he displeased her.

"What can you afford to pay?" he asked. "The rents differ. But, I have no doubt, I could give you an apartment on very reasonable terms." **[173]**

"I couldn't afford to pay over fifty dollars per month," answered Tavia smoothly, which was the price at which the apartments were supposed to be rented.

"I'm willing to shave off a bit," said Mr. Akerson, very generously. "Some of my tenants there are paying one hundred dollars for the same rooms that I'll let you have for eighty dollars per month."

"Eighty dollars!" exclaimed Tavia, "I understood that the rents were only forty and fifty dollars!"

"My dear young lady," said the man soothingly, "in that section! And such beautifully arranged rooms! I ask eighty and one hundred dollars for those apartments, and I get it. But, as I said, if there are any particular rooms that you fancy," the man smiled familiarly at Tavia, "maybe I could come to terms with you."

"I'm sure I am right about the rents being forty and fifty dollars," Tavia insisted.

"Oh, they were that a long time ago; in fact, the last time the apartment changed hands they could be rented for thirty-five dollars. But I built the place up, improved it, made it worth the price, and I can get that amount. Only, if you've set your little heart——"

Tavia jumped up. The man had leaned so far over toward her, that she resented the familiarity implied. She drew herself up to her full height and said coldly: **[174]**

"I do not care to pay more than the regular renting price for the Court Apartments. If you will lease an apartment at fifty dollars, you shall

hear from me again."

"Done!" said the man, "but I can't promise that the rent will go on indefinitely at that figure. You can have it at that rental for three months, but understand, the woman across the hall from you and the family above, are paying one hundred dollars per month."

"I'm sure you're very kind," said Tavia, arranging her fur neck piece, and pulling on her gloves, "I appreciate it very much."

"Don't mention it," said Mr. Akerson, grandly expanding his broad chest, "I always aim to give a lady whatever she wants," and he came nearer to Tavia.

With cool dignity she backed slowly to the door, ignoring Mr. Akerson's outstretched hand.

A quick flush mounted the man's brow, and he bowed Tavia out of his private office.

Once again in the open, she breathed freely.

"What a perfectly horrid man," she murmured. **[175]**
"To think that Mrs. White receives but thirty-five dollars from each apartment and he actually gets eighty and one hundred dollars! Poor Miss Mingle! It must take every penny she earns just to pay the rent! And it takes all Aunt Winnie receives to pay the expenses and taxes of the place! And with the difference Mr. Akerson buys fur coats and things." Tavia's indignation knew no bounds.

On the trip home she thought quickly and clearly.

Arriving there, she was met by an excited family.

"Wherever have you been?" cried Dorothy.

"My dear," gasped Aunt Winnie, "you've given us an awful fright!"

"I was just down to start out on a trip through the hospitals and police stations," said Ned.

"And I've now spoiled the beautiful trip," said Tavia, with a laugh. "It's just delightful to stay away long enough to be missed."

"Yes, I know it is," said Dorothy. "But where have you been?"

"Out," was Tavia's laconic answer.

"Really!" said Ned, with broad sarcasm.

Aunt Winnie smiled. "Don't tell them your secret, Tavia; they only want to find out so that they can tease you about it."

"Anyone who insists on hearing my secret," said **[176]**
Tavia, striking a tragic pose, "does so at his peril!"

Ned decided that it was worth the risk, and rushed at Tavia to wrench the secret bare, but she eluded him skillfully, leaping directly over a couch. Ned was close at her heels, and out into the hall she ran, shutting the door after her, keeping Ned on the other side. In a moment it was opened. Desperate, Tavia sprang to the entrance into the main hall, and Ned followed so closely that they reached the divan in the hall at

the same moment, Tavia sinking exhausted into its depths. She had won, because Ned could do nothing now except stand gallantly by—he could not smother Tavia in pillows in the public hall, and still maintain his dignity—so Tavia's secret remained her own.

Dorothy appeared in the doorway.

"Such perfectly foolish young people!" she scolded. "Come inside this instant! It's a good thing that father will arrive to-night, to balance this frivolous family!"

Tavia sat up astonished. "Major Dale coming to-night? I'm so glad. And Nat and Joe and Roger! Won't that be fine for the skating party?"

Dorothy, too, sank into the comfortable divan.

"Father's rheumatism is all well again, and they will arrive in time for dinner to-night," she said. "The telegram came directly after breakfast."

"Dorothy told me about your visit to Miss Mingle in the apartment house," said Ned, suddenly becoming serious. But Tavia did not want to discuss apartment houses just then, and she jumped lightly to her feet, just as Aunt Winnie opened the door. **[177]**

"There's someone on the 'phone asking for Miss Travers!" she said.

Certainly mysterious things were happening to Tavia that day, thought Dorothy, as she and Ned stood, frankly curious, while Tavia clung to the receiver.

"Hello!" she said, in a trembling voice.

"Yes, this is Miss Travers!"

"No, I do not know your voice."

"Really, I never heard your voice before!"

"Yes, this is Mrs. White's apartment."

"I'm from Dalton, yes, and my name is Travers, but I don't know you."

"Ned? He's here. You want to speak to him?"

She stepped from the telephone and handed the receiver to Ned: "It's a man's voice and he kept laughing, but I'm sure I never met him, and he finally asked for you," she explained.

"How are you, old chum?" sang out Ned, heartily. "Yes, certainly, come right upstairs. Get off at the third floor. The girls will be wild with joy!"

"Who is it?" demanded Dorothy and Tavia, in one voice. **[178]**

"He'll be in the room in a minute," answered Ned, mysteriously.

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CHAPTER XIX

THICK ICE AND THIN

The owner of the voice on the telephone had

appeared in less than a minute in the person of Bob, and before greetings were over the Major, with Nat, Roger and Joe, appeared, and there was a grand reunion.

When the boys took Bob off to see New York, the girls retired.

“Does it really seem possible that a few days ago we were country school girls?” mused Dorothy, as she and Tavia lay wide awake the next morning, waiting for the breakfast bell to ring. Tavia had succeeded in convincing Dorothy that on a holiday trip, one should never get up until two minutes before breakfast was served, and then to scramble madly to reach the table in time. This, Tavia, contended, was the only real way of knowing it was a holiday.

“I feel as much a part of New York City as any of the natives might,” answered Tavia. “And there are such stacks of places we must yet explore.”

“How different we will make Miss Mingle’s days, after we all return to the Glen,” Dorothy said. “We’ll elect her one of our club, the noble little thing!” **[180]**

“I feel like the most selfish of mortals in comparison,” replied Tavia. “Such goodness as hers is not common, I’m sure.”

A jingling of musical bells announced breakfast, and to further impress the fact upon the family, every young person banged on the other one’s bedroom door, and the noise for a few minutes was deafening.

“Now, Tavia, please,” pleaded Dorothy, as she hurriedly dressed, “don’t act so to Bob! You were so contrary last evening!”

“Can’t help it,” declared Tavia. “He inspires contrariness! He’s so easy to tease!”

During the meal Tavia kept perfectly quiet, her eyes modestly downcast, and Dorothy watched her with great misgivings. Tavia was beginning the day entirely too modestly.

Another hour found the whole party on the banks of the lake in Central Park. The ice was in fine condition, and the lake as crowded as every spot in New York always seemed to be.

“Oh, I haven’t forgotten the figure eight,” said Major Dale, with a laugh, as he struck out. Aunt Winnie watched him anxiously because she had less confidence in his recovery than did the major. It was great fun for Roger and Joe to skate with their father.

“Girls,” said Aunt Winnie, as she tried bravely to balance herself, “I’m really not as young as I think I am! I believe I’ll return to the car, bundle up in the fur robes and just watch.” **[181]**

The girls begged her to remain. Nat and Bob, after a long run to the end of the lake, had returned, and Nat grasped Aunt Winnie suddenly. Together they started up the lake, Aunt Winnie skating as gracefully as any of the young girls. Ned was tightening Dorothy’s skates as Bob approached Tavia.

“Weren’t you surprised to see me yesterday?” Bob wanted to know. “You didn’t think I would

come; did you?”

“I’ve been so busy, I don’t know what I really have been thinking,” was Tavia’s non-committal answer.

“But did you?” persisted Bob, anxious to know whether Tavia had thought of him during her holiday. Tavia knew that he was anxious.

“I hardly think I’ve thought much,” she answered, as she did some fancy skating, just eluding Bob and Nat as they tried to catch her.

Dorothy complained to Tavia: “Isn’t it horrid the way people gather around just because two country girls can do a few fancy strokes on the ice!”

“It’s embarrassing to say the least,” replied Tavia, still dizzily whirling about. “I’m glad, aren’t you, that the rules for city park lakes forbid small gatherings on the ice? The guard has broken up each little group that has threatened to intrude on our privacy.” **[182]**

“Let them watch!” said Ned. “We’ll give the city chaps some fine points on how to get over the ice!”

“Most of the girls seem to enjoy just standing still in the cold,” said Bob, with a laugh.

“I know that girl with the bright red skating cap just bought skates because she had a skating cap; she can’t move on the ice,” said Dorothy.

A tall man, with heavy gray hair and a fur overcoat, was skating near by, and he watched Tavia constantly. Dorothy noticed him and wondered at his persistence in keeping near their party. Tavia, however, was too deeply enraptured with her own antics on the ice, to pay attention to the mere onlookers.

Nat and Dorothy challenged Bob and Tavia to a race to the end and back in a given time, and a strong breeze carried them swiftly down the lake. As they disappeared from sight, the tall stranger in the fur coat plainly noticed Mrs. White and the major, who stood watching the young people sail away down the lake.

It was Mr. Akerson.

“For once in my career I’ve made some kind of a mistake,” he muttered to himself. “It was an inspiration to try to meet that pretty red-haired girl again, and by Jove! the knowledge gained was worth the effort! Now which one is she; the niece or the niece’s chum?” he mused as his car sped through the park, for he had soon tired of the ice. **[183]**

“Well,” he said, with a laugh, “the little red-haired lass is not yet through with Mr. Akerson.”

Before his car had reached the park entrance, another car passed him, containing Mrs. White and Major Dale homeward bound, the young people having decided to remain on the ice until lunch.

Tavia had kept Bob just dancing whither her will o’ the wisp mood might lead. Finally it led the whole party up to the man who sold hot coffee and sandwiches.

“This is the first really sensible move Tavia’s made to-day,” commented Nat, as his teeth sank into a sandwich. The steaming coffee trickled down the throats of the party accompanied by various comments, but no one, except Dorothy, noticed a little lad, followed by a yellow dog, who stood hungrily watching the steaming cups. He was the typical urchin of the streets of New York City, who had wandered from goodness knows where among the East side tenements, to bask in the sunlight of Central Park. His hands were dug deep into his ragged trousers, and his dirty little face sank into the collar of a very large coat.

“Is dat orful hot?” he asked with interest, as Dorothy daintily drained her coffee cup. **[184]**

“Are you cold?” she asked, kindly.

“Naw,” he answered, in great disgust, “I ain’t never cold, but the dawg is. Say, lady, could yer guv the dawg a hot drink o’ dat stuff?”

“Dogs can’t drink coffee,” said Dorothy with a smile, “but you must have some.”

The boy slipped behind the dog and smiled wistfully at the coffee urns.

“Naw,” he said, “I don’t want none.” But the hunger in his eyes was not to be denied by his brave little lips, and while Tavia and the boys made merry at the lunch counter, Dorothy quietly ordered coffee and sandwiches for the thin little boy. And he drank, and ate, every bit, insisting on sharing many mouthfuls with the yellow dog.

He stayed with the party, wandering up and down the banks of the lake, until they were ready to depart, and then he followed at a respectful distance as they walked across town to Riverside Drive. He had nothing else to do, and the lady with the fluffy hair was kind and good to look at, and as his whole life was spent on the streets, he carelessly followed along until they reached home. Turning, Dorothy saw him, and something in the little face went straight to her heart. He did not look at all like her own little brothers, there was only the small boy manliness about him that, somehow, reminded her of Joe, and smiling encouragement for him to follow, he did so, until the porter stopped him in the apartment hall.

“It’s all right,” said Dorothy, in a low voice, “he’s with us.” **[185]**

“What are you going to do with him?” asked Tavia, as they piled on the elevator.

“Feed him all the things his little stomach has ever yearned for,” declared Dorothy. “I’ve seen so many of him about the streets, and now I’m going to try and make one happy, for just a day!”

The little thin boy being enthroned in the kitchenette with the yellow dog sprawled out on the floor, Dorothy returned to Tavia and the boys.

“Why did not I see that little boy?” asked Tavia, soberly.

“Because,” said Bob gently, “you were ministering to the enjoyment and success of the

skating party."

"Huh!" said Tavia, in disdain. "Dorothy is the most perfect darling! Who else would have looked about for someone to bestow kindnesses upon? I'm going right out to the little boy and—and help entertain him." And in deep repentance Tavia strode out to the kitchenette, to make up to the thin boy whom she would have passed by if Dorothy had not been kind to him.

Soon the boys stood outside the door listening to Tavia patiently trying to say the very nicest things! [186]

At Ned's suggestion, that a little practice on Tavia's part, in saying nice things, should by no means be interrupted, they rushed to the drawing room, and Dorothy played the piano while the boys sang. Dorothy finally jumped up, with her fingers in her ears, and declared she was becoming deaf, so Nat immediately sat down on the piano stool, and the singing continued.

Aunt Winnie looked in for a moment and begged the bass to try to sing tenor! And even the very boyish major closed his door to shut out the hideous sounds. But nothing disturbed Tavia, who was bent on making up to little Tommy.

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CHAPTER XX
A THICKENED PLOT

"This is becoming a habit," said Dorothy to Tavia, as they climbed the steps of the Fifth Avenue 'bus, homeward bound after a few morning hours spent in the shopping district, the day after the skating party.

"Everybody seems to have the habit too," commented Tavia. "We can shop steadily for two hours, and still not purchase anything. That's what I find so fascinating!"

"To me the charm of shopping lies in being able to buy anything that inspires one at the moment, and then calmly return it the next day. In that way, we can really possess for a few hours almost anything we set our hearts on," said Dorothy gleefully.

"Like returning the brass horses and finger bowls!" said Tavia.

"Not to mention the rows of books and boxes of handkerchiefs," Dorothy opened a box of chocolates as she spoke, and the candy occupied their attention for several minutes.

The 'bus stopped for a man who had hastily crossed the street in front of it. He climbed the steps and sat directly opposite the girls from the country. Tavia was busy with her thoughts and did not see him. Dorothy, however, noticed him, but said nothing to Tavia, because, for one frightened moment, she remembered him as the stranger who had so closely watched Tavia on the lake the morning before. To divert attention she began to talk rapidly. [188]

"I'm so sorry Bob cannot stay after to-morrow morning," she said. At mention of Bob's name

Tavia turned her head toward the sidewalk, and away from the stranger. “Do you recall the first time we met him, Tavia?”

“I don’t recall much about Bob,” said Tavia, diffidently, “I think he is too domineering. He is always preaching to me!”

“He takes a brotherly interest in your welfare,” teased Dorothy, for Bob was the one subject on which Tavia could really be teased. “Ned seems to have lost his place of big brother to Tavia,” she continued, meanwhile casting sidewise glances at the man opposite. He sat staring deliberately at Tavia, and Dorothy was just about to suggest that they leave the ’bus and rid themselves of the man’s distasteful glances, when Tavia glanced across the aisle and recognized the real estate agent!

For some reason that Tavia could not then fathom, she trembled, and quickly jumped up, saying to Dorothy: **[189]**

“Let’s get off here! I’d rather walk the rest of the way; wouldn’t you?”

As Dorothy had been about to suggest that very thing, she looked in surprise from the man to Tavia and saw him raise his hat.

“This is a very fortunate meeting,” said Mr. Akerson to Tavia, “I couldn’t have asked for anything more timely. Mrs. White, your aunt, expects to be at my office in twenty minutes and she expressed a desire, over the telephone, to have you girls meet her there. How strangely things happen! I am so fortunate as to be able to deliver the message, and you will get there almost as soon as she will.” He spoke easily, and with a slight smile about his lips.

“My aunt?” repeated Tavia, mystified, “I haven’t an aunt!”

“Isn’t Mrs. White your aunt,” he asked.

“Mrs. White is my aunt,” interrupted Dorothy. “Who are you please?”

“Mr. Akerson, Mrs. White’s real estate manager. Have I the pleasure of addressing her niece?”

Dorothy assented with a quick nod of her head. “But we were not informed of her visit to your office,” she said quickly.

“Do just as you like,” said Mr. Akerson, coolly, “I get off here. I only thought it lucky to have had the pleasure of carrying out Mrs. White’s wishes. Don’t misunderstand me,” he added, “I did not start out to hunt through the New York shops for you, it was merely a happy coincidence that we met. Mrs. White ’phoned me after you left and merely mentioned that as she was coming down town she wished she could meet you. Well, I’ve an engagement on this block for five minutes, and then I return to meet Mrs. White in my office.” **[190]**

He left the ’bus and the girls just stared!

“How did that man know us?” cried Dorothy, too astounded to think of any answer to her own question.

“I know how he knew me,” said Tavia, grimly.

“But how did he know I knew? Oh, dear me, it’s all knows and knews; what am I trying to say?”

“Can people in New York sense relationship as folk pass by on top of ’buses?” questioned Dorothy, of the dazzling sunlight.

“Why,” queried Tavia, “should Aunt Winnie tell him that she wanted us to meet her at his office?”

“Or how,” demanded Dorothy, “did he happen to be in just this section of the city and jump on our very ’bus?”

“But Mrs. White may even now be waiting for us, anxiously hoping for our arrival,” exclaimed Tavia; “though of course she couldn’t guess he would meet us. It must be a strange chance, as he says.” [191]

“Of course we start down town immediately,” declared Dorothy, “I know the address.”

“Well Dorothy,” said Tavia, mysteriously, “Mr. Akerson may be a shrewd business man, and be playing a skillful game, but I am not one whit afraid to go directly to his office, and see the whole thing through to the end!”

“It’s exactly what I intend to do,” said Dorothy, decidedly. “This, I rather feel, may be our unexpected opportunity to quickly squelch the well-laid plans of this man. But, Tavia, aren’t you just a little bit dubious about going alone? Hadn’t we better return home first?”

“No, we’ll take the next car downtown, and we must work together to lay bare the real facts!” declared Tavia as they ran for a downtown Broadway car.

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CHAPTER XXI

FRIGHT AND COURAGE

With unhesitating steps, Tavia led Dorothy, without any of the confusion of her own first visit, directly to Mr. Akerson’s offices.

The same switchboard operator sat sleepy-eyed at the telephone, and the same young person conducted the girls through the office suite, the only difference was that the hour was near twelve, and most of the desks were empty, as the clerks had left the building for lunch.

The offices seemed strangely quiet, as the girls sat, with their hearts beating wildly, waiting for the door marked “*Private*” to open. When it did, Mr. Akerson came forth with a genial smile.

“I arrived a little ahead of you,” said he, and he led the girls into his private office.

“But where is Mrs. White?” demanded Dorothy.

“Evidently delayed in reaching here,” answered Mr. Akerson, pulling his watch from his pocket. “No doubt she’ll be here directly.”

With this the girls had to be content. Dorothy watched the door, expecting to see Aunt Winnie enter at every sound. [193]

“Well,” said the man, balancing himself on his heels, “and what is the decision in regard to the apartment you wanted?”

Tavia shot a meaning glance in Dorothy’s direction and Dorothy quickly suppressed a start of surprise at the man’s words. She decided instantly that she must watch Tavia’s every glance, if she were to follow the hidden meaning.

“Haven’t decided yet,” carelessly answered Tavia. “Besides, there’s plenty of time.”

“Are you sure it was an apartment you wanted, or”—the man wheeled about his desk chair and arranged himself comfortably before continuing —“was it just a woman’s curiosity?” He smiled broadly at the girls; his look was that of a very kindly disposed gentleman.

“My reasons were just as I stated—I may want an apartment—I liked the arrangement of the Court Apartments, and was seeking information for my own future use,” defiantly replied Tavia.

“Of course, of course,” Mr. Akerson replied. “But why come to me? Couldn’t—er—your friend here have secured the information from—well say, from Mrs. White?”

“Mrs. White, I regret to say, Mr. Akerson,” responded Dorothy, “seems to be ill-informed about her own property.” **[194]**

“Mrs. White has access to my books,” he replied coldly, “whenever she chooses to look them over. Everything is there in black and white.”

“Except your verbal statements to me,” said Tavia, standing up and facing Mr. Akerson. “Your statement that rents used to be thirty-five dollars, and are now one hundred dollars.”

Dorothy guessed instantly whither Tavia was leading.

“And the difference between the thirty-five dollars and the one hundred dollars,” she asked, “goes to whom? Some charitable institution perhaps?”

“Ha! Ha!” laughed Mr. Akerson, “that’s rich! So you,” he turned to Tavia, “took all my nonsense so seriously that you’re convinced I’m a scoundrel.” His teeth gleamed wickedly through his stubby mustache, and Dorothy wished that Aunt Winnie would hurry. She did not like this man.

“By your own statements you’ve convicted yourself,” declared Tavia. “The morning I interviewed you, you did not know me, and told me your prices.”

“You’re wrong; I did know you,” declared the man bluntly. “I knew you to be a friend of Mrs. Bergham’s, that you had listened to a rambling tale of that feeble-minded woman, and came to me expecting to have it confirmed—and, as you know, I fully confirmed it. By the way, Mrs. Bergham moves to-day, but I suppose you are thoroughly conversant with her affairs.” **[195]**

Like a shot the thought came to Dorothy and Tavia, as they exchanged glances, could Mrs. Bergham, who certainly did not seem

dependable, misrepresent matters to gain sympathy for herself? But as quickly came the picture of patient Miss Mingle, and all doubt vanished at once.

“That’s true,” confessed Tavia, “the first inkling of absolute wrong-doing came quite unexpectedly through Mrs. Bergham. I’m sorry, though, that she has been ordered to move on account of it.”

“Mrs. Bergham will not move,” said Dorothy, quietly. “We have sufficient evidence, I should say, Mr. Akerson, to convince even you that your wrong-doings have at last been found out.”

Mr. Akerson jumped to his feet, a sudden rage seeming to possess him.

He sprang to the door and locked it and turned on the girls. Tavia slipped instinctively behind a chair, but Dorothy stood her ground, facing the enraged man with courage and aloofness.

“You can’t frighten me, Mr. Akerson,” she said to him. White with rage the man approached nearer and nearer to Dorothy.

“Just what do you mean?” he asked, and there was that in the cool, and incisive quality of his tones that made both girls feel, if they had not before, that they had rather undertaken too much in coming to the office. **[196]**

There was silence for a moment in the office, a silence that seemed yet to echo to the rasping of the lock in the door, a sound that had a sinister meaning. And yet it seemed to flash to Dorothy that, at the worst, the man could only frighten them—force them, perhaps, to some admission that would make his own case stand out in a better light, if it came to law procedings.

Too late, Dorothy realized, as perhaps did Tavia, that they had been indiscreet, from a legal standpoint, in thus coming into the camp of an enemy, unprotected by a lawyer’s advice.

All sorts of complications might ensue from this hasty proceeding. Yet Dorothy, even in that moment of trouble, realized that she must keep her brain clear for whatever might transpire. Tavia, she felt, might do something reckless—well meant, no doubt, but none the less something that might put a weapon in the hands of the man against whom they hoped to proceed for the sake of Aunt Winnie.

“Just what do you mean?” snapped the man again, and he seemed master of the situation, even though Dorothy thought she detected a gleam of—was it fear? in his eyes. “I am not in the habit of being spoken to in that manner,” he went on.

“I am afraid I shall have to ask you to explain yourself. It is the first time I have ever been accused of wrongdoing.” **[197]**

“I guess it isn’t the first time it has happened, though,” murmured Tavia.

“What’s that?” demanded the man, quickly turning toward her. Even bold Tavia quailed, so menacing did his action seem.

“There always has to be a first time,” she

substituted in louder tones.

“I don’t know whether you are aware of it, or not, young ladies,” the agent proceeded, “but it is rather a dangerous proceeding to make indiscriminate accusations, as you have just done to me.”

“Danger—dangerous?” faltered Dorothy.

“Exactly!” and the sleek fellow smiled in unctuous fashion. “There is such a thing as criminal libel, you know.”

“But we haven’t published anything!” retorted Tavia. “I—I thought a libel had to be published.”

“The publishing of a libel is not necessarily in a newspaper,” retorted Mr. Akerson. “It may be done by word of mouth, as our courts have held in several cases. I warn you to be careful of what you say.”

“He seems to be well up on court matters,” thought Tavia, taking heart. “I guess he isn’t so innocent as he would like to appear.” **[198]**

“I would like to know what you young ladies want here?” the agent blurted out.

“Information,” said Tavia, sharply.

“What for?”

“What is information generally for?” asked Tavia, verbally fencing with the man. “We want to know where we stand.”

“Do you mean you want to find out what sort of apartments they are—whether they are of high class?”

He was assuming a more and more defiant attitude, as he plainly saw that the girls, as he thought, were weakening.

“Something of that sort—yes,” answered Tavia. “You know we want to start right. But then, of course,” and she actually smiled, “we would like to know all the ins and outs. We are not at all business-like—I admit that—and we certainly did not mean to libel you.” Crafty Tavia! Thus, she thought she might minimize any unintentional indiscretion she had committed.

“Mrs. White doesn’t know much about business, either,” she went on. “She would like to, though, wouldn’t she, Dorothy?”

“Oh, yes—yes,” breathed Dorothy, scarcely knowing what she said. She was trying to think of a way out of the dilemma in which she and Tavia found themselves. **[199]**

“I will give Mrs. White any information she may need,” said Mr. Akerson, coldly.

“But about the apartments themselves,” said Tavia. “She wants to know what income they bring in—about the new improvements—the class of tenants—Oh, the thousand and one things that a woman ought to know about her own property.”

“Rather indefinite,” sneered the man.

“I don’t mean to be so,” flashed Tavia. “I want to be very definite—as very definite as it is possible

for you to be," and she looked meaningly at the agent. "We want to know all you can tell us," she went on, and, growing bolder, added: "We want to know why there is not more money coming from those apartments; don't we, Dorothy?" and she moved over nearer to her chum.

"Yes—yes, of course," murmured Dorothy, hardly knowing what she was saying, and hoping Tavia was not going too far.

"More money?" the agent cried.

"Yes," retorted Tavia. "What have you done that you should be entitled to more than the legal rate?"

"I brought those apartments up to their present fitness," he snarled, "and whatever I get over and above the regular rentals, is mine; do you understand that? What do you know about real estate laws? I'll keep you both locked in this office, until I grind out of your heads the silliness that led you to try and trap me. I'll keep you here until——" **[200]**

"You will not," said Dorothy.

"Where did she go?" He suddenly missed Tavia, and Dorothy, turning, saw too that Tavia had disappeared.

"This is nothing but a scheme to get us down here," cried Dorothy, after several moments of anxiety, "Aunt Winnie was never expected, and now Tavia has gone!"

"Oh, no I haven't," cried Tavia, as she stepped from a sound-proof private telephone booth. "I've just been looking about the office. It's an interesting place, and the melodrama of Mr. Akerson I found quite wearisome."

"Also that my private 'phone isn't connected; didn't you?" he said. Suddenly dropping the pose of the villain in a cheap melodrama, he smiled again and rubbing his hands together said, as though there never had been a disagreeable word uttered:

"Seriously, girls, that Bergham woman is out of her head, that's a fact. You must know there is something queer about her."

On that point he certainly had Dorothy and Tavia puzzled. Mrs. Bergham surely was not the kind of a person either Tavia or Dorothy would have selected as a friend, and they looked at the man with hesitation. He followed up the advantage he had gained quickly. **[201]**

"Here's something you young ladies knew nothing about—that woman has hallucinations! It has nearly driven her poor little sister, Miss Mingle, distracted. Why, girls, she tells Miss Mingle such yarns, and the poor little woman believes them and blames me." He looked terribly hurt and misunderstood.

"To show your good faith," demanded Dorothy, "unlock the door. Then we will listen to all you have to say. But, first, I must command you to talk to us with the doors wide open!"

"With pleasure, it was stupid to have locked it at all," he agreed affably. "Now if you'll just come with me to the bookkeeper's department I'll

prove everything to your entire satisfaction, and since Mrs. White has not seen fit to keep her appointment, you may convey the intelligence to her, just where you stand in this matter."

"About the apartment we might wish to rent," said Tavia, serenely, "have you the floor plan, that we might look over it?"

Tavia was just behind Mr. Akerson, and Dorothy brought up the rear.

"I'm not as much interested in the books as in the floor plan," explained Tavia.

"The only one I have is hanging on the wall of my private office," he said slowly, looking Tavia over from head to foot. **[202]**

"If you'll show me the books, so that I can explain matters to my aunt, while Miss Travers is looking over the plan of the apartment she may wish to take," said Dorothy seriously, "we can bring this rather unpleasant call to an end."

"I'm sure I am sorry for any unpleasantness," said Mr. Akerson, "but you'll admit your manner of talking business is just a little crude. No man wants to be almost called a scoundrel and a cheat."

"The books, I hope," Dorothy answered bringing out her words slowly and clearly, "will show where the error lies. By the way, do you collect these rents in person, or do you employ a sub-agent?"

"This, you understand, is not a company matter. It's a little investment of my own, and I take such pride in that house, that I allow no one to interfere with it. Yes, I collect the rents and give my personal attention to all repairing. If I do say it myself, it is the best-cared-for apartments in this city to-day. And I'll tell you this confidently, Miss Dale, five per cent. for collecting doesn't pay me for my time. But I'm interested in the up-building of that house, you understand."

Tavia strolled leisurely back to the private office, while Mr. Akerson went into a smaller office just off the private one, and while he was bending over the combination of the safe, quick as a flash, Dorothy took off the receiver of the desk telephone from the hook, and, in almost a whisper, asked central for their Riverside home number. **[203]**

"Ned," she gasped, when she heard his voice, "quick, don't waste a moment! This is Dorothy. We are in Akerson's office and are frightened! Come downtown at once! I'm afraid we won't be able to hold out much longer! Quick, quick, Ned!" Then she softly put the receiver back and turned just in time to see Mr. Akerson rising from before the safe with a bundle of books in his arms. Dorothy to hide her confusion bent over a blue print that had been hanging on the walls, but all she saw was a confused bunch of white lines drawn on a blue background, and from the outer room came the sound of Tavia's voice, as she and Mr. Akerson went over the pages of the ledger, the alert girl seizing the opportunity to dip into the books as well as look at the floor plans in order to gain more time.

[204]

CHAPTER XXII
CAPTURED BY TWO GIRLS

Dorothy pored over the blue print for a long time. She was growing so nervous that all the little white lines on the paper began dancing about and grinning at her, and Mr. Akerson's voice and Tavia's in the other room became louder and louder. Every footstep as the clerks returned, one by one, from lunch, set her heart palpitating, and she clenched her hands nervously. She feared that Mr. Akerson would in some way evade them, disappear before Ned and the boys could arrive!

Tavia seemed so calm and self-possessed and examined the books so critically that Dorothy marveled at her! Surely Tavia could not understand so complicated a thing as a ledger! Off in the distance, at the end of the suite, Dorothy suddenly saw a familiar brown head, and behind a shaggy white head, and then a pair of great, braid shoulders, and in back of them a modish bonnet framing the dignified face of Aunt Winnie!

"Dorothy," she called, running forward. "Here they are!" **[205]**

Dorothy's interest in the prints ceased instantly, and she sprang after Tavia.

Mr. Akerson's face blanched and he withdrew to his private office.

All the clerks returned discreetly to their work, typewriters clicking merrily, as the family filed down through the offices and into Mr. Akerson's private room. He faced them all until he met the clear eyes of Mrs. White, then he shifted uneasily and requested Bob, who came in last, to close the door.

"What's it all about, Dorothy?" asked Bob in clear, cool tones, as he looked with rather a contemptuous glance at the agent. "Has someone been annoying you?" and he seemed to swell up his splendid muscles under his coat-sleeves—muscles that had been hardened by a healthy, active out-of-door life in camp.

"If there has," continued Bob, as he looked for a place in the paper-littered office to place his hat, "if there has, I'd just like to have a little talk with them—outside," and the lad nodded significantly toward the hall.

"Oh, Bob!" began Dorothy. "You mustn't—that is—Oh, I'm sure it's all a mistake," she said, hastily.

"That's more like it," said Mr. Akerson, and he seemed to smile in relief. Somehow he looked rather apprehensively at Bob, Tavia thought. She, herself, was admiring the lad's manliness. **[206]**

"But you telephoned," Bob continued. "We were quite alarmed over it. You said——"

"Young ladies aren't always responsible for what they say over the 'phone," put in Mr. Akerson, with what he meant to be a genial smile at Bob. "I fancy—er—we men of the world realize that. If Miss Dale has any complaint to make——" he paused suggestively.

“Oh, I don’t know what to do!” cried Dorothy. “There certainly seems to be some need of a complaint, and yet——”

“Doro, dear, have you been trying to straighten out my business for me?” demanded Mrs. White, with a gracious smile.

“Aunt Winne—I don’t exactly know. Tavia here, she——”

“We’re trying the straightening-out process,” put in Tavia. “We had just started after being locked——”

“Careful!” warned the agent. “I cautioned you about libel, you remember, and that snapping shut of the lock on the door was an error, I tell you.”

“Never mind about that part,” broke in Tavia. “Tell us about the business end of it. About the rents, why they have fallen off, and all the rest.” **[207]**

“Have you really been going over the books with him, Dorothy?” asked Mrs. White, in wonder.

“Allow me to tell about matters,” interrupted Akerson. “I think I understand it better.”

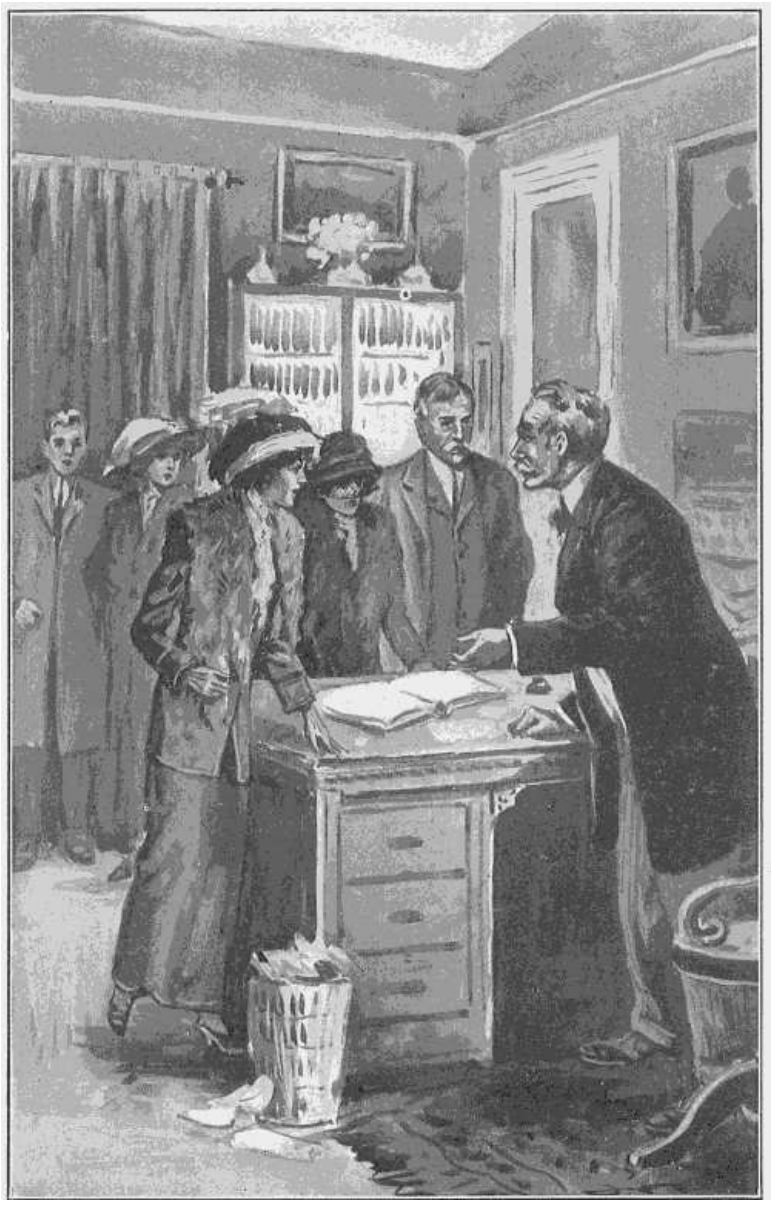
“You ought to,” murmured Tavia.

“I will listen to you, Mr. Akerson,” said Mrs. White, gravely. “You may proceed.”

“As I have just been saying to Miss Dale,” he went on, pointing to the ledgers on his desks, “this matter can be explained in two minutes, if you will just glance over these entries.”

He pushed the books toward Aunt Winnie.

“Don’t look at them, Aunt Winnie,” cried Dorothy. “The entries are false! We have his own words to prove his wrong-doing! His statements to Tavia and Miss Mingle’s word to us are different.”



“DON’T LOOK AT THEM, AUNT WINNIE,” CRIED DOROTHY. “THE ENTRIES ARE FALSE!”

And by a peculiar net of circumstances, which invariably occur when one thread tightens about a guilty man, Miss Mingle at that moment walked into the room! She had come to demand justice from the man who had served removal notice upon herself and her sister, Mrs. Bergham. She held the notice in her hand. Major Dale took it, and tearing it in small pieces, placed it in a waste paper basket.

“He admitted to me, quite freely,” protested Tavia, “that every tenant in the house paid eighty or one hundred dollars for his or her apartment!” **[208]**

Miss Mingle at first could not grasp the meaning of it, but as Dorothy quickly explained that her aunt was the owner of the apartment, it dawned on Miss Mingle just how, after all, the guilty are punished, even though the road to justice be a long and crooked one.

“You never spent a penny on that place,” growled Mr. Akerson, “I spent a good pile of my own money, just to fix it up after my own ideas of a studio apartment.”

“I spent more than half of my income of thirty-five dollars per month from each apartment, for

constant repairs, and when I discussed with you, as you well know, the advisability of advancing the rents a few dollars to cover the outlay, you discouraged it, said it was impossible in that section of the city to ask more than thirty-five dollars," said Mrs. White sternly.

"What these books really show," said Dorothy, "is the enormous amount that is due Aunt Winnie from Mr. Akerson!"

"The tenants are so dissatisfied," explained Miss Mingle, "the constant increases in the rent were so unreasonable! The porter in the house, so we have found, was in league with Mr. Akerson, and kept him informed of everything that happened."

"That's how," said Tavia, with a hysterical laugh, "he knew whom it was we called on at the Court Apartments!" **[209]**

"Easy there," said Bob to Tavia, "don't start laughing that way, or you'll break down, and I'll have to take care of you."

"It's been so awful, Bob," said Tavia, his name slipping naturally from her lips. "We tried to carry it through all alone!"

"Just as soon as you're left to yourselves," he said with a smile, "you begin to get into all sorts of trouble!"

"There is only one thing to say," declared Major Dale, advancing toward Mr. Akerson. "Nat will figure up what you owe to Mrs. White, you will sit down and write out a check for the amount, and that will close further transactions with you!"

Mr. Akerson fingered his check book, and made one last effort to explain:

"Miss Mingle is influenced by her sister, who has hallucinations," but he could say no more, for Major Dale and Bob came toward him threateningly.

"Miss Mingle teaches my daughter in school, and we will hear nothing from you about her family," said Major Dale, decidedly.

"I demand justice!" cried Mr. Akerson, jumping from his seat. **[210]**

"I call this justice," calmly answered the major.

"I shall not be coerced into signing a check and handing it to Mrs. White. I'll take this matter to the proper authorities," the agent fumed, as he walked rapidly to and fro. "It's an injustice. I tell you I'm innocent."

"Then prove your innocence!" answered Major Dale.

The ladies were beginning to show signs of the nervous strain. Miss Mingle and Tavia were almost in hysterics, while Dorothy clung to Mrs. White's arm.

"You do not understand the laws in this State," declared Mr. Akerson. "There is no charge against me. I defy you to prove one!"

"Very well, we will summon one who understands the laws, and decide the matter at

once," said Major Dale; "meanwhile, you ladies leave these disagreeable surroundings."

"After all," said Miss Mingle, as they left the office building, "we won't have the awful bother of moving; will we, dear Mrs. White?" Her voice was full of pleading.

"No, indeed, and as soon as everything is settled, we must try to find an honest agent to care for the place. I am convinced that Mr. Akerson is not honest, in spite of all he said," said Mrs. White.

"My poor sister!" sighed Miss Mingle. "She almost collapsed at the mere thought of having to leave that apartment." [211]

"Never mind," consoled Mrs. White, "everything will be all right now. And you dear girls, how you ever had the courage to face that situation all alone, I cannot understand!"

"Oh, it was nothing!" said Tavia, really believing, since the worst part of it was over, that it had been nothing at all.

"I almost imagine we enjoyed it!" Dorothy exclaimed.

"Oh, nonsense," said Mrs. White, "you are both so nervous, you look as though another week's rest would be needed. You are pale, both of you."

"Well, I don't feel one bit pale," said Tavia, "Still I think I'll lie down, when we get home."

"So will I, but I'm not tired," declared Dorothy.

"They are too young; too high spirited," said Mrs. White to Miss Mingle, as they parted; "they won't admit the awful strain they have been under all day."

An hour later, when the boys and Major Dale returned to the apartment, all was quiet, and they tiptoed about for fear of awakening the girls. Aunt Winnie was waiting for them.

"It's all settled," whispered Major Dale. "We have Akerson under bonds to appear in three days to pay back all money due you." [212]

"And to think that Dorothy and Tavia unraveled the mystery!" sighed Aunt Winnie.

"Hurrah!" said the boys, in a whisper. "Hurrah for the girls!"

Which brought the girls into the room.

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CHAPTER XXIII

PATHOS AND POVERTY

Dorothy roused the next morning with a sense of great relief after the strenuous hours of the previous day. At last they were beginning to accomplish something in the way of straightening out Aunt Winnie's complicated money matters. It was a decided rest to turn her thoughts to the poor boy who had spent a little time in their kitchenette—the boy who just ate what was offered him, and grinned good-

naturedly at the family.

He had evidently considered them all a part of the day's routine, and accepted the food, and the warmth, and kindness with a hardened indifference that made Dorothy curious. He had grudgingly given Dorothy his street and house number. He was so flint-like, and skeptical about rich people helping poor people, his young life had had such varied experience with the settlement workers, that he plainly did not wish to see more of his hostess.

It was an easy matter for Dorothy to just smile and declare she was "going out." Tavia was curled up in numerous pillows, surrounded by magazines and boxes of candy, and the boys were going skating. City ice did not "keep" as did the ice in the country, and the only way to enjoy it while it lasted, as Ned explained, was to spend every moment skating madly. **[214]**

Dorothy read the address, Rivington Street, and wondered as she started forth what this, her first real glimpse into the life of New York City's poor, would reveal. She was a bit tremulous, and anxious to reach the place.

"Where is this number, little boy?" she inquired, of a street urchin.

"Over there," responded a voice buried in the depths of a turned-up collar. "I know you," it said impudently. One glance into the large, heavily-lashed eyes made Dorothy smiled. Here was the very same thin boy upon whom she was going to call.

"Is your mother at home?" she asked.

"Sure," he replied, "so's father." Then he laughed impishly.

"And have you brothers and sisters, too?" said Dorothy.

"Sure." He looked Dorothy over carefully, decided she could keep a secret, and coming close to her he whispered: "We got the mostest big family in de street; nobody's got as many childrens as we got!" Then he stood back proudly.

"I want to see them all," coaxed Dorothy. She hesitated about entering the tenement to which the thin boy led her. It was tall and dirty and a series of odors, unknown to Dorothy's well-brought-up nose, rushed to meet them as the hall door was pushed open. The fire escapes covering the front of the house were used for back yards—ash heaps and garbage, bedding and washes, all hung suspended, threatening to topple over on the heads of the passersby, and the long, dark hall they entered was also littered with garbage cans, and an accumulation of dirty rags and papers and children. **[215]**

Such frowsy-headed, unkempt, ragged little babies! Dorothy's heart went out to them all—she wanted to take each one and wash the little face, and smooth the suspicious, sullen brows. The advent of a well-dressed visitor into the main hall meant the opening of many doors and a wonderfully frank assortment of remarks as to whom the visitor might be. Little Tommy, the thin boy, glad of the opportunity to "show off"

grandly led Dorothy up the stairs, making the most of the trip.

“The other day when I was skatin’ with you in Central Park,” flippantly fell from Tommy’s lips, loud enough for the words to enter bombastically through the open doors, “I come home and said to the family, I sez,—” but what Tommy had said to the family never was known, because the remainder of Tommy’s family having heard in advance of Tommy’s coming, rushed pell-mell to meet them, and with various smudgy fingers stuck into all sizes of mouths, they stared, some through the railings, some over the railing, more from the top step—the “mostest biggest family” exhibited no tendency to hang back. **[216]**

“Come in out of that, you little ones,” said a soft, motherly voice, that sounded clear and sweet in the midst of the tumult of the tenement house, and Dorothy looked quickly in the direction from whence it came and beheld Tommy’s mother. She was small and dark, and in garments of fashion would have been dainty. She seemed little older than Tommy, who was nine, and life in the poorest section of the city, trying to bring up a large family in three rooms, had left no tragic marks on her smooth brow, and when she smiled, she dimpled. Dorothy smiled back instantly, the revelation of this mother was so unexpectedly different from anything Dorothy had imagined.

“They *will* run out in the hall,” the mother explained, apologetically, “and they’re only half-dressed, and it’s so cold that they’ll all be down with sore throats, if they don’t mind me. Now come inside, every one of you!” But not one of the children moved an inch until Dorothy reached the top landing, then they all backed into the room, which at a glance Dorothy was unable at first to name. There was a cot in one corner, a stove, a large table, and sink in another, and one grand easy chair near a window. Regular chairs there were none, but boxes aplenty, and opening from this kitchen-bedroom-living-room was an uncarpeted, evil-looking room, and in the doorway a giant of a man stood, looking in bleary-eyed bewilderment at Dorothy. **[217]**

“You’ll get your rent when I get my pay,” he said, with an ill-natured leer. “So he’s sending you around now? Afraid to come himself after the scare I gave him the last time? D’ye remember the scare I gave him Nellie?” he turned to the little woman.

With a curious love and pride in this great, helpless giant, his wife straightened his necktie, that hung limply about the neck of his blue flannel shirt, and patting his hand said, caressingly:

“Now stop your foolin’, she’s not from the rent-man, she’s a friend of our Tommy’s,—the lady that went skatin’ with Tommy in the Park; don’t you know, James?”

James straightened himself against the panels of the door, and stared down at Dorothy, but his first idea that she was after his week’s pay was evident in his manner.

“You wouldn’t of got it if you did come for it,” he **[218]**

declared, proudly, "'cause it ain't so far behind that you could make me pay it."

"It's only when he's gettin' over a sleepless night," explained Tommy's mother, pathetically, "that he worries so. When he's well," she whispered to Dorothy, "he don't worry about nothin'; but when his money's all gone and he ain't well, the way he frets about me and the children is somethin' awful!" She looked at her husband with wonderful pride and pleasure in possessing so complicated a man.

Dorothy wondered, in a dazed way, what happened when the entire family wished to sit down at the same time. She could count just four suitable seating places, and there were nine members of the family. The smallest member, a wan, blue-lipped baby in arms, had a look on its face of a wise old man.

How and where to begin to help, Dorothy could not think. That the baby was almost starved for proper nourishment and should at once be taken care of, Dorothy realized. Yet such an air of cheerfulness pervaded the whole family, it was hard to believe that any of them was starving. The cheerful poor! Dorothy's heart beat high with hope.

The head of the family made his way to the door opening into the main hall, and taking his hat from a hook, pulled it over his eyes and put his hand on the door knob. The little wife, forgetting all else—that Dorothy was looking on, that her baby was crying, and that something was boiling over on the stove—threw herself into the giant's arms. **[219]**

"Don't go out, James!" she cried, pitifully, "don't go away in the cold. You won't, dearie; I know you won't! Take off your hat, there's a good man. Don't go, there's no work now." As the man opened the door, "don't you know how we love you, James? Stay home to-night, dearie, and rest for to-morrow."

"I'm just goin' down to the steps," replied the man, releasing the woman's arms from about his neck, "I'll be up in a jiffy. I didn't say I was goin' out. Who heard me say a word about goin' out?" he appealed to the numerous children playing about.

"You don't have to," said Tommy, bravely trying to keep his lips from quivering, "you put on a hat; didn't you? And you opened the door; didn't you?" and with such proof positive Tommy stood facing his father, but his lips would quiver in spite of biting them hard with his teeth.

"I'm just goin' down for a breath of air," he explained, as his wife clung desperately to his arm, "just to get the sleep out o' me eyes, and I'll run into the grocer's, and come back with—cakes!" he ended, triumphantly. **[220]**

Dorothy felt awkward and intrusive. This was a family scene that had grown wearisome to the children, who took little interest in it, and the mother of the brood at last fell away, and allowed the man to leave the room. Then Dorothy saw the tragedy of the little woman's life! Glistening tears fell thick and fast, and she hugged her baby tightly to her breast, murmuring softly in its little ears, oblivious to

her surroundings.

"I'll buy you food," said Dorothy, the weary voice of the woman bringing tears to her eyes. "Tommy will come with me and we'll buy everything you need."

Tommy rushed for his hat, and together they started down the stairs. Reaching the steps, Dorothy looked about for some sign of Tommy's father, but he must have been seated on another porch for the breath of air he was after; the only thing on the front steps was Tommy's yellow dog.

"Did you see my father?" said the boy to the dog. The dog jumped about madly, licking Tommy's face and hands and barking short, joyful doggie greetings. "He's seen him, all right," said Tommy.

"Did he go to the grocer's?" he asked of the dog. **[221]**
In answer the dog's ears and tail drooped sadly, and he licked Tommy's hand with less joyfulness.

"No," said little Tommy, "he ain't gone to the grocer's, he's always looking for work now, he says."

"I'll see if I can bring him back," volunteered Dorothy.

The evening crowd on Rivington Street was pouring out of the doorways, bitter cold did not seem to prevent social gatherings on the corners, and the small shops were filled to overflowing with loungers. A mission meeting was in progress on one of the corners, as Dorothy hurried on, and a sweet, girlish voice was exhorting the shivering crowd to repent and mend their ways.

[222]

CHAPTER XXIV
A YOUNG REFORMER

Close in the wake of Tommy's father, now returning, came Dorothy. A large automobile stood before one of the rickety buildings, and Dorothy just caught sight of a great fur coat and gray hair, as the owner of the car came from the building. It was Mr. Akerson! His chauffeur opened the door of the car, touched his cap, and the auto made its way slowly through the street.

"There's the rent collector," she heard a small girl say, as she watched the automobile out of sight. "Ain't he grand!"

Dorothy wondered, with a shudder, how any one could come among these people and take their money from them, for housing them in such quarters!

Tommy's father turned off Rivington Street into **[223]**
a narrow lane, little more than an alley, but it contained tall buildings nevertheless, with the inevitable fire escape decorating the fronts. He paused in front of a pawnbroker's shop, which was some feet below the level of the sidewalk. Dorothy, too, paused, leaning on the iron fence. The man was smiling an irresponsible, foolish smile as he descended the steps to the pawnshop. Dorothy peered down into the badly-

lighted shop, and saw Tommy's father lay an ancient watch chain, the last remaining article of the glory of his young manhood, on the counter.

The clerk behind the counter threw it back in disgust. Again Tommy's father offered it, but the pawnbroker would not take it, for it was evidently not worth space in his cases. The man stumbled up the steps, and Dorothy met him face to face on the top one.

"I need a watch chain," she heard herself saying in desperation, "I'll buy it, please."

"You're the woman as was collecting the rent; eh?" he said.

"Oh, no," said Dorothy, smiling brightly, "I came to see Tommy's mother, and his father. I wanted to know Tommy's family."

"You wanted to help the boy, maybe?" he asked, his attention at last arrested.

"Yes," replied Dorothy, eagerly, "I want to do something. I have money with me now, and I'll buy the chain."

The man suddenly turned and went on ahead. **[224]**
He wasn't a really desperate man, but Dorothy did not know just what state it could be called, he simply seemed unable to think quite clearly, and after walking one block, Dorothy decided he had forgotten her entirely.

"I want to buy the groceries," she said, stepping close to his elbow, "but there will be so many, you'll have to help carry them home to your wife and Tommy."

He stared at her sullenly. "Who told you to buy groceries?" he demanded.

"Your wife said there was nothing to eat in the house," she answered, "and I would love to buy everything you need, just for this once."

"I was just goin' to get 'em, but there was no money. How's a man goin' to help his family, when they takes his money right outer his pockets; tell me that, will you?" he demanded of Dorothy. She shrank as the huge form towered over her, but she answered steadily:

"The children are at home, hungry, waiting for something to eat—the cakes you promised them, you know," she said with a brave smile.

"Well, come along; what are you standin' here for wastin' time when the children are hungry?" he said finally.

Dorothy laughed quietly, and went along at his elbow. Such unreasonable sort of humanity! At least, one thing was certain, he would not escape from her now, since she was convinced that he had really been trying to secure money enough to buy food; if she had to call on the rough-looking element on the street to come to her aid she would help him.

In the grocer's Dorothy found great delight in **[225]**
ordering food for a family, and they left the shop, loaded down with parcels. The grocer's clock chimed out the hour of seven as they left the store.

“Aunt Winnie,” thought Dorothy suddenly, “she’ll be worried ill! I had almost forgotten I had a family of my own to be anxious about. But they’ll have to wait,” she decided, “they, at least, aren’t hungry. They are only worried, and I know I’m safe,” she ended, philosophically.

The yellow dog was in the hall, so were all the evil odors, even some of the babies still played about, evidently knowing no bedtime, until with utter weariness their small limbs refused to move another step. And the dog being there meant that Tommy had gone ahead and was safe at home.

The upper halls were noisy. The hours after supper were being turned into the festive part of the day. At Tommy’s door there were no loud sounds of mirth, and, opening it quietly, Dorothy entered, the man behind. A dim light burned in the room, the mother sat asleep in the old velvet chair, the smaller children curled up in her lap, and she was holding the baby in her arms. Several of the children were stretched crosswise on the kitchen cot, and Dorothy decided the remainder of the family were in the dark room just off the kitchen, and later she discovered that the surplus room of the three-room home was rented out, to help pay the rent.

The children quickly scrambled from the cot and from the mother’s lap, with wild haste to unwrap the paper parcels. There was little use trying judiciously to serve the eatables to such hungry children. It mattered not to Tommy that jelly and condensed milk and butter and cheese were not all supposed to be eaten on one slice of bread. Tommy never before saw these things all at one time, and, as far as Tommy knew, he might never again have the chance to put so many different things on one slice. Oranges and bananas were unknown luxuries in that family, and the little boys eyed them suspiciously, but brave Tommy sampling them first, they picked up courage, and soon there were neither oranges nor bananas, only messy little heaps of peeling. **[226]**

Dorothy was busy instructing the mother how to prepare beef broth, and a nourishing food for the baby, when the clock struck eight.

“Tommy,” said Dorothy, as she busily stirred the baby’s food, “do you know where there is a telephone? I must send a message to Aunt Winnie.”

“Sure,” said the confident Tommy, “I know all about them things. I often seen people ‘telphoning,’” thus Tommy called it. **[227]**

Soon it was agreed that Tommy and his father would go and inform Dorothy’s aunt of her whereabouts, over the wire.

It was an anxious fifteen minutes waiting for their return. The mother let the steak broil to a crisp in her anxiety lest the father slip away from Tommy’s grasp, and Dorothy, listening for the returning footsteps, had visions of again running after Tommy’s father to bring him back to the bosom of his family, and allowed the oatmeal to boil over. But all was serene when the man returned safely with the information that: “some old feller on the wire got excited, and a lot of people all talked at once,” and the

only thing he was sure of was that they demanded the address of his home, which he had given them, not being ashamed, as he proudly bragged, for anyone to know where he lived.

“That was father!” said Dorothy. “What else did he say?”

“Nothin’,” replied the man, “but the old feller was maddern a wet hen!”

“Poor father!” thought Dorothy, as she handed an apple to one of the small boys. “No doubt I’m very foolish to have done this thing. Father will never forgive me for running away and staying until this late hour. I really didn’t think about anything, though. It did seem so important to bring home the things. I can’t bear to think that to-morrow night and the next night and the next, Tommy and his mother will be here, worrying and cold and hungry.” [228]

She served each of the children a steaming dish of oatmeal, floating in milk, and was surprised to find how hungry she was herself. She looked critically at the messy table, the cracked bowls, and tin spoons, and democratic as she knew herself to be, she couldn’t—simply couldn’t—eat on that kitchen-bedroom-living-room table.

The creaking of the steps and a heavy footfall pausing before the door, caused a moment’s hush. A knock on the portal and Tommy flew to open it. On the threshold stood Major Dale, very soldierly and dignified, and he stared into the room through the dim light until he discovered Dorothy. She ran to him and threw her arms about his neck before he could utter a word.

“Dear daddy!” she murmured, so glad to see one of her own people, and she realized in that instant a sense of comfort and ease to know she was well cared for, and had a dear, old dignified father.

“I forgot,” she said, repentantly, “I should have been home hours ago, I know, but you must hear the whole story, before you scold me.”

For Major Dale to ever scold Dorothy was among the impossible things, and to have scolded her in this instance, the furthest thing from his mind. The children stood about gazing at Major Dale in awed silence. [229]

“There are so many, father,” said Dorothy, “to have to live in these close quarters. If they could just be transported to a farm, or some place out in the open!”

“Perhaps they could be,” answered Major Dale, “but first, I must take you home. We’ll discuss the future of Tommy and his family, after you are safely back with Aunt Winnie.”

“Couldn’t James be placed somewhere in the country? I want to know now, before I leave them, perhaps never to see them again,” pleaded Dorothy to her father. “Say that you know some place for James to work that will take the family away from this awful city.”

“We’ll see, daughter,” said the major kindly. “I guess there is some place for him and the little ones.”

“He’s so willin’ to work for us,” explained the mother, “and we’d love to be in the country. We both grew up in a country town, and I’ll go back to-morrow morning. It’s nothin’ but struggling here from one year’s end to the other, and we grow poorer each year.”

“Many a hard day’s work I’ve done on the farm,” said the six-feet-four-husband, “and I’m good for many more. I’ll work at anything that’s steady, and that’ll help me keep a roof over the family.” **[230]**

“I’m so glad to hear you say so!” cried Dorothy, in delight. “I’m sure we will find some work in the country for you, and before many weeks you can leave this place, and find happiness in a busy, country life.”

On the trip uptown, Dorothy asked about the family at home, feeling very much as though she had been away on a long trip and anxious to see them all once again.

“We began to grow worried about an hour before the telephone message came,” her father said, “Aunt Winnie had callers, and the arrangements were to have them all for dinner and we, of course, waited dinner for Dorothy.” He smiled at his daughter fondly. “When you did not appear, the anxiety became intense, and the callers are still at the apartment anxiously awaiting the return of the wanderer.”

“Who are the callers,” queried Dorothy; “do I know them?”

“No, just Aunt Winnie’s friends, but they are waiting to meet you,” said Major Dale.

“Won’t I be glad to get home!” exclaimed Dorothy, clinging to her father’s arm as they left the subway.

“Daughter,” said Major Dale, sternly, “have you really forgotten?” **[231]**

“Forgotten what, father?” asked Dorothy in surprise.

“Forgotten the dinner and dance that is to be given in your honor this evening?” Major Dale could just suppress a smile as he tried to ask the question with great severity.

“Oh, my dear!” cried Dorothy, “I forgot it completely!”

“Well,” he said, “you’ll be late for the dinner, but they are waiting for you to start the dance.”

“You see, father,” exclaimed Dorothy, desperately, “I am not a girl for society! To think I could have forgotten the most important event of our whole holiday! But tell me now, daddy, don’t you think big James and his family would do nicely for old Mr. Hill’s Summer home—they could care for it in the Winter, and take charge of the farm in the Summer?”

“That is just what I thought, but said nothing, because I did not care to raise false hopes in the breast of such a pathetic little woman as Tommy’s mother.”

“Then, before I join the dancers, I can rest easily in my thoughts, that you will take care of Tommy’s future, daddy?” Dorothy asked.

"My daughter can join the party, and cease thinking of little Tommy and the others, because I'll take entire charge of them just as soon as we return to North Birchland." [232]

"I knew it, dear," said Dorothy, as they entered the apartment, and she hugged her father closely. "You'd rather be down on Rivington Street at this moment, seeing the other side of the world, just as I would; wouldn't you, father?"

But her father just pinched her pink cheeks and told her to run along and be a giddy, charming debutante.

[233]

CHAPTER XXV
THE LOVING CUP

"Hurry, hurry!" cried Tavia, hugging Dorothy. "You awful girl! I've been doing everything under the skies to help Aunt Winnie get through the dinner, but I absolutely refuse to carry along the dance! How could you place us all in such a predicament, you angel of mercy! And to leave me to manage those boys in their evening dress! They're too funny for words! Nat positively looks weird in his; he insists on pulling down the tails, he's afraid they don't hang gracefully! And Ned is as stiff and awkward as a small boy at his first party!"

"And Bob?" asked Dorothy, as she arranged a band of gold around her hair.

"Well," said Tavia meditatively, "there might be a more uncomfortable-looking person than Bob is at this moment, but I never hope to see one. Dorothy, I simply can't look his way! He's pathetic, he's all hands, and he's trying to hide the fact, and you never saw anyone having so much trouble! In short, I've been scrupulously evading those very much dressed-up youths. They've been depending entirely on me to push them forward; just at present, with other awkward youths, they are holding up the fireplace in the little side room, casting fugitive glances toward the drawing room, where we're having the dance!" Tavia laughed and pranced about as she talked. [234]

"Why will our boys always act so silly in the evening? I really believe if dances were given in the morning, directly after breakfast, the girls would be dull and listless and the men enchanting," said Dorothy with a laugh, as she stood forth, resplendent in her evening gown of pale blue, ready to make a tardy appearance.

The late arrival of the girl whom all these guests were invited to meet, caused a stir of merriment, which Dorothy met with a certain charm and grace, that was her direct inheritance from Aunt Winnie.

The boys emerged from the side room and looked around the dancing room, sheepishly. Now, in North Birchland and in Dalton, Ned and Nat enjoyed a dance, or a party, even if they did show a decided tendency to hide behind Dorothy and Aunt Winnie. But here in New York they were not gallant enough to hide their misery, and the comfortable back of Aunt Winnie was [235]

not at all at their disposal, and Tavia's back they had given up some hours since as hopeless, which left Dorothy as the last thin straw! And Dorothy was too much of a wisp of straw to hide such broad shoulders as Bob's and Ned's and entirely too short to hide tall Nat! So they clung together in a corner until Tavia separated them, giving each young man a charming girl to pilot over the slippery floor through the maze of a two-step.

Tavia was bubbling over with mirth. All this was as much to her liking—the lovely gowns and the laughter, the easy wit and light chatter.

"Did you notice that big suit-case in the hall?" whispered Tavia, mysteriously to Dorothy.

"Yes, indeed," replied Dorothy. "Are some of these people staying over the week-end?"

"Sh-h-h!" warned Tavia, leading Dorothy to a secluded corner behind a tall palm, "I'm really afraid to say it out loud!"

"This isn't a dark mystery, I hope. Tavia, I'm weary of sudden surprises—tell me at once," demanded Dorothy, laughing at Tavia's very dramatic manner of being securely hidden from view.

With one slender finger, Tavia pointed between the leaves of the palm to the dancing floor.

"Do you see that very picturesque creature in green?" she whispered.

"Yes," said Dorothy breathlessly.

"Well," said Tavia relaxing, "that's her suit-case."

"Who is she?" asked Dorothy, "and why bring her bag here?" **[236]**

"She's a society girl," replied Tavia, peering out between the palm leaves, "and she arrived at four o'clock this afternoon with a maid and a suit-case."

"Auntie said nothing about week-end guests," said Dorothy.

"Of course she didn't, and this isn't a week-end guest, this is a society girl! She couldn't play cards at four, and have dinner at seven, and a dance at eight-thirty, without a suit-case and a maid; could she? How unreasonable you are, Dorothy," exclaimed Tavia, with scorn.

"Did she wear something different for each occasion?" whispered Dorothy.

"Yes," replied Tavia. "Dorothy, doesn't it make you dizzy to think of keeping up an appearance in that way—packing one's suit-case every morning to attend an evening function!"

"And she doesn't seem to be having an awfully good time either," commented Dorothy.

"Everyone is afraid of her—she's too wonderful!" laughed Tavia.

"How perfectly ridiculous!" murmured Dorothy, thinking at that moment of Tommy's mother, dressed in a faded, worn wrapper every hour of

each day throughout all the months of the year.

“And that isn’t all,” declared Tavia. “See that perfectly honest-looking person in purple?” [237]

“Very broad and stout and homely?” asked Dorothy.

“Yes. Well, she appropriated one of our cups!”

“You’re just making these things up!” declared Dorothy, rising to leave the secluded corner.

“Really I’m not,” said Tavia earnestly, “the purple person took a cup!”

“But why should she do so?” Dorothy asked, not quite believing such a thing possible.

“That’s what we don’t know, but Aunt Winnie says it’s possibly just a fad, or a hobby, and not to notice it—but, I’m going to find out.”

“There is so much that is not real, perhaps her royal purple velvet gown is no clue to her wealth,” said Dorothy.

“No, I don’t think her dress is. I’ve decided that she needs the cup for breakfast to-morrow morning. Anyhow, her maid is in the small bedroom, that we’re using for the wraps, and we must question her,” declared Tavia.

“It’s too perfectly horrid to even think such a thing of one of our guests. We must forget the matter,” Dorothy said rather sternly.

“And you who are so anxious to help the poor and needy, forget your own home!” said Tavia reproachfully. “Suppose that poor lady has no cup for her coffee? Won’t it be an act of human kindness to ascertain that?”

“Well, I don’t understand why it should happen,” said Dorothy, perplexed, “but I feel, Tavia, that you are not in earnest.” [238]

Coming out from behind the palm, the girls were just in time to catch a glimpse of Nat, bowing and sliding gracefully away from his partner. Ned had successfully gotten over the slippery floor and stood aimlessly staring into space; and his aimless stare touched Dorothy more than his tears would have done. Bob met Tavia in the slipperiest part of the floor and Tavia, for once in her acquaintance with Bob, did not feel disdainful of his masterly physical strength, for Bob couldn’t manage to cross a waxed floor with as much dexterity as could Tavia and actually touched her elbow for assistance in guiding him wall-ward.

“How much longer does this gaiety continue?” asked Bob.

“I fear you’re a sad failure, Bob,” cried Tavia, as she led him through the hall to the small room at the end of the hall. “You can’t dance, and you won’t sing, and you’re perfectly miserable dressed in civilized, evening clothes. You’re just hopeless, I’m afraid,” Tavia sighed.

Their sudden entrance into the cloakroom surprised the various maids who were yawning and sleepy-eyed. The French maid was the only one who seemed alert, and she was bending attentively over something, with her back [239]

toward the others. Tavia whispered to Bob:

“Saunter carelessly past that maid, and tell me what she’s doing,” Tavia meanwhile diligently looking through a pile of furs and wraps.

“She seems to be fingering a cup,” reported Bob, as he looked at Tavia, questioningly.

“Walk past her again and find out more,” commanded Tavia. To herself she murmured: “Men are so slow, I’d know in an instant what she’s doing with that cup, were it possible for me to peer about; which it isn’t.”

“Haven’t an idea what she’s doing,” reported Bob again, “she’s just holding the cup in her hand.”

“Nonsense,” declared Tavia, “she must be doing something. Go right straight back and stand around until you find out. I can’t pull these furs and wraps about much longer, they’re too heavy!”

When Bob returned again he whispered to Tavia, and Tavia’s straight eyebrows flew up toward her hair with a decidedly “Ah! I told you!” expression.

She rushed to Aunt Winnie and informed her.

“You know,” explained Aunt Winnie, “the cup is the one Miss Mingle’s sister painted and sent to Dorothy the other day. It was such an odd, exquisite pattern I valued it above all my antiques and my pottery!”

“Well, that’s just what’s she doing,” declared Tavia, “she’s copying the pattern or borrowing it.” **[240]**

“It must indeed be unique when one of our guests is driven to such extremes to get a copy of it,” said Aunt Winnie.

The dancers were becoming weary, even the lights and decorations began to show signs of wishing to go out, and most of the guests had bidden the hostesses adieu when the stout person in royal purple calmly approached Aunt Winnie and Dorothy, holding a cup in her hand:

“You’ll pardon the impudence of my maid, I know, she has a mania for peculiar patterns on china, and she copied one on this cup. You don’t mind at all?” she asked sweetly.

“It was painted for my niece by a very feeble lady,” explained Mrs. White. “We value it highly.”

“You should value it highly,” purred the stout person. “So far as I know there are only three cups of that pattern in the world to-day. One is in an English museum, and the other two have been lost. Those two cups would be worth a fortune to the holder, the collectors would pay almost any price for them.” She was plainly an enthusiast on the subject of old china. “But your cup is not original, it is merely a copy, but we knew it instantly. You’ll forgive me, won’t you?” she asked, sweetly.

“Miss Mingle’s sister is the owner of the other two cups, Auntie,” gasped Dorothy, as the stout person in purple departed. “Mrs. Bergham’s **[241]**

husband was an artist and collector, and he left Mrs. Bergham all his pictures and art treasures. I just raved with delight over those two cups, the day we called, and she very amiably sent me an exact duplicate."

"Then there may be a fortune awaiting little Miss Mingle," exclaimed Tavia. "I thought her home was terribly crowded with artistic-looking objects and unusual adornments for folk in moderate circumstances."

"Doubtlessly, the sentimental nature of Mrs. Bergham would not entertain such an idea as disposing of her treasures for mere lucre," said Mrs. White, laughingly.

"Perhaps they do not know their value," reasoned Dorothy, as the guests prepared to leave.

"We'll find out more from the stout person, and bring an art collector to call upon Mrs. Bergham, and thus give those two struggling women some chance to enjoy a little comfort," said Major Dale.

[242]

CHAPTER XXVI
A NEW COLLECTOR

"My poor, dear husband," sighed Mrs. Bergham, "he told me to never part with those two cups, in fact, never to sell anything of his unless I could get his catalogue price. But it was a hard struggle, and I did love everything so much, that —well, I simply did not bother about selling."

"I can hardly believe those old cups can be so valuable," Miss Mingle exclaimed, as she handled them.

"Well," said Dorothy, as she and Mrs. White and Tavia prepared to leave after their short call, "we will have a collector call to place a value on all your antiques, if you wish. Of course, it will be hard to part with them, but when the financial end is considered——"

"My dear," said Mrs. Bergham, with more animation than she had yet shown, "you don't know what it will mean to us to have enough money to go 'round! And to have my little boys with me again, and sister relieved of the awful strain!"

"Wasn't it lovely for the stout guest in purple to kindly borrow the cup!" exclaimed Tavia. [243]

"And for you to follow up the clue," said Mrs. White, "when Dorothy and I were too embarrassed to know what to do!"

"Oh, by the way," continued Mrs. White, "about an agent for this house, I thought—don't be offended dear Mrs. Bergham—but I thought you might like to take charge of this property, with plenty of assistants of course, and to have your commission, the same as paying a real estate agent. Don't say you won't help me! I really need someone right on the premises."

"Certainly," promptly replied Miss Mingle, "sister could take care of it. You see, sister has

lost all confidence in herself and her ability—we have had such troublous times for five years past!”

“This matter was even more serious than I dared say,” exclaimed Mrs. White, referring to the apartment-house trouble. “You know the house originally belonged to my husband’s ancestors, it was one of the old Dutch mansions here in New York, and as the years passed, it was remodeled several times, finally coming to me, with the proviso that it be again remodeled into a good paying apartment house, as an investment for the boys when they are of age. The income, as you know, has barely kept the expenses covered, and I began to fear that my boys would come of age without the money they should have.”

“I did not know that,” exclaimed Dorothy. “So we really saved Nat and Ned from financial disasters; didn’t we?” **[244]**

“Well, we don’t know yet, whether we will ever receive the money Mr. Akerson took,” said Mrs. White, gravely. “But we will know just as soon as we return home. At any rate, a future is assured the boys, now that we have taken the collecting away from Mr. Akerson.”

Arriving home, the girls found Major Dale and the boys anxiously waiting for them.

“Well, we’re safe at last,” cried Ned, “thanks to the courageous efforts of two little girls!”

“We bow before two small thoughtful heads,” said Major Dale, with a laugh, “while we men were trying to think out a way, the girls rushed ahead and beat us!”

“So it’s settled?” said Aunt Winnie, anxiously.

“Every penny,” exclaimed Major Dale.

“When we are of age,” declared Ned, “the girls shall have all their hearts desire; eh, Nat?”

“Yes, because without Dorothy’s and Tavia’s courage and thoughtfulness and quick wits, we boys would have had little to begin life with, in all probability.”

“And girls,” said Aunt Winnie, “the sweetest memories of your trip to New York City will be that you not only had a lovely good time, but helped wherever you saw that help was needed.” **[245]**

“So that,” cried Major Dale, “Dorothy in the city was as happy as everywhere else!”

“Happier, Daddy,” cried his daughter, with her arms around his neck. “Much happier, for I helped someone.”

“As you always do,” murmured Tavia. “I wonder whom you will help next; or what you will do? Dorothy Dale! If only I could have the faculty of falling into things, straightening them out, and making everybody live happier ever after, as you do, I’m sure I would be the happiest person alive.”

“But you do help,” said Dorothy, with a sly look at Bob.

“Indeed she——” began that well-built young man.

“Let’s tell ghost stories!” proposed Tavia suddenly, with an obvious desire to change the topic. “It’s nice of you to say that, Doro,” she went on, “but you know I do make a horrible mess of everything I touch. But I do wonder what you’ll do next?”

And what Dorothy did may be learned by reading the next volume of this series to be called, “Dorothy Dale’s Promise.” In that we will meet her again, and Tavia also, for the two were too close friends now to let ordinary matters separate them.

“Come on, girls!” proposed Bob, a few days later, as he, with the other boys, called at the apartment “We’ve got the best scheme ever!” [246]

“What is it?” asked Tavia suspiciously.

“A sleighing party—a good old-fashioned one, like in the country. We’ll go up to the Bronx, somewhere, have a supper and a dance, and ——”

“We really ought to be packing to go home,” said Dorothy, but not as if she half meant it.

“Fudge!” cried Nat. “You can pack in half an hour.”

“Much you know about it,” declared Tavia.

But the boys prevailed, and that night, with Mrs. White and the major, a merry little party dashed over the white snow, to the accompaniment of jingling bells, and under a silvery moon. And now, for a time, we will take leave of Dorothy Dale.

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- Illustrations, originally on unnumbered pages at random locations, were relocated to relevant paragraphs.
- A few palpable typos were corrected silently. Possibly intentional inconsistent or nonstandard spellings were not changed.

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