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at the End of the Trail, by
Margaret Vandercook**

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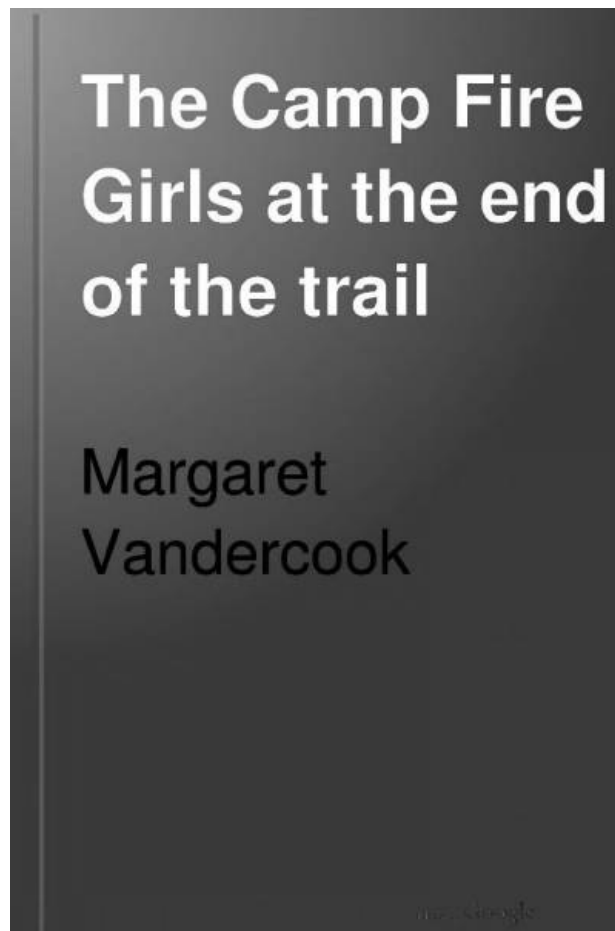
Author: Margaret Vandercook

Release date: February 26, 2013 [EBook #42206]

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Stephen Hutcheson and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at <http://www.pgdp.net> (This book was produced from scanned images of public domain material from the Google Print project.)

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE CAMP FIRE GIRLS AT THE END OF THE TRAIL ***



**THE
CAMP FIRE GIRLS
AT THE END OF**

THE TRAIL

BY
MARGARET VANDERCOOK
Author of "The Ranch Girls" Series,
"The Red Cross Girls" Series, etc.

ILLUSTRATED

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THE JOHN C. WINSTON CO.
PUBLISHERS

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at the End of the Trail

CHAPTER I

A STRANGE BACKGROUND

The castle had been built before the first known palace in Europe. It was fashioned centuries ago inside the walls of a stone cliff with two taller cliffs rising on either side. Beyond was a break between, allowing a narrow entrance to the cliff dwelling from the outside. In front there was a small plateau of rock ending in a precipice, which descended with a drop of a hundred feet to a new ledge, and then came another still deeper fall.

That afternoon a group of four persons were inside the ancient cliff dwelling. One of them—a young girl in an odd costume which was partly modern and yet suggesting an older race—had climbed to the crest of the ruins and stood, with her hand above her eyes, gazing about her.

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Another girl, in a chamber below, was sitting upon a comfortable camp stool which she had undoubtedly brought with her, she was hammering industriously with a small steel hammer, and now and then stopped to work with her chisel at a solid stone wall. Evidently she believed some extraordinary treasure was embedded inside, since she never glanced away from her labors.

On the bottom floor historic influences had not kept the two remaining girls from the cheering occupation of preparing tea. The wood must have been brought from the country behind the cliffs, for a camp fire was burning in the old stone chamber, with a large kettle of water simmering above it.

One of the two girls—tall and foreign in appearance, with large dark eyes and thick dark hair parted in the middle over a low brow—left her task now and then. She would then walk twenty yards or more toward a figure lying quietly in the sunshine. In spite of the warmth this figure was wrapped in a great blanket which allowed only a fair head and thin face to show forth.

If no attention was vouchsafed her, she would quietly return to her occupation. But, by and by, without speaking, she came and spread a small cloth on a flat surface of rock. Then she unpacked an Indian basket stored with things for making tea. Immediately afterwards, putting her fingers to her lips, she summoned the other girls to join her.

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In response Alice Ashton rose up at once and carefully stored away her precious bits of stone and her hammer and chisel into the bag she carried for the purpose. Then she climbed down the jagged but secure steps cut into the face of the rock so many years ago.

But Peggy Webster, at the summit of the cliff dwelling, refused to descend in any such

sensible fashion.

Instead, she began to slide over the face of the rock, losing and then regaining her foothold. Below the others watched her half fascinated and half annoyed.

"Peggy!" one of the girls called warningly.

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For Vera Lageloff had seen her safely reach a flat surface about ten feet from the plateau below. She had walked out to the edge of it and there stood poised for a moment with her back to the sun. Her pose was as virile and graceful as that of a young boy.

Then, before the watchers exactly realized her purpose, she had crouched and sprung from the ledge. For the instant she was in the air she was a figure of bronze and crimson. The moment had struck the earth, she was merely Peggy Webster, in a khaki Camp Fire costume with a red band about her black hair and a little out of breath from her plunge.

"There I have been wondering if I could accomplish that feat ever since I arrived in this stone age country," she announced penitently, appearing more ashamed of her performance than proud.

"Well, as long as you are gratified and still alive, Peggy, I only request that you never make the same attempt again," Betty Graham returned, her color returning swiftly, now that her momentary nervousness had passed. For she had come away from her task of guarding the fire just in time to behold the other girl's act.

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"Really, since we came West, Peggy dear, I am becoming more and more convinced that the Fates never intended you for a feminine person," she went on. "There is never any guessing what reckless thing you may do next. I am afraid an accident may happen to you."

While she was speaking, Bettina Graham had taken her seat on the ground and had begun pouring the hot water into a tea-kettle of generous size.

Peggy now dropped down beside her.

"Don't say I am masculine, please, Bettina; I do so hate a masculine woman. Your last remark was only a more polite way of expressing the same unpleasant idea. Why don't you say instead that I am 'Seraphita?' She is Balzac's charming character—half girl, half boy, neither and both. When I am in favor with Tante she has a way of declaring me another Seraphita."

"Besides your sudden plunge might have frightened Billy," Vera Lageloff interrupted, not realizing how her speech betrayed the interest usually uppermost in her mind.

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The figure, still wrapped in the blanket, was at present sitting up, looking from one girl to the other in a quietly disinterested fashion.

"Oh, no, I am never worried over Peggy when she is attempting athletic feats," he announced. "She will never do herself serious harm in that way. What I fear for her, what I know will hurt her some day, are the experiences about which she is so scornful at present. You see she is

perfectly convinced that she will never care for any human being outside her family and a few friends. So nothing and no one can ever harm her."

Billy Webster accepted the cup of tea and a comfortable number of sandwiches which Vera now offered him.

"Don't be absurd, Billy," Peggy challenged, her face reddening in spite of her efforts to appear undisturbed. "As far as you are concerned you will look ever so much better as soon as you cease behaving like an invalid. I do believe you are in better health than you wish us to think you are."

"Perhaps I am; really I don't exactly know," Billy returned dispassionately, as if he were speaking of some one else. He was holding his cup and gazing over its rim. "I do enjoy having so little asked of me. It has never happened before, as I have always been expected to do the things I dislike. Now, I would far rather be half ill than to have to shoot and fish and do the kind of things Dan and the other fellows out here like to do. Besides, I really tried to make myself ill, so that father would have to consent to my coming West."

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Billy made this announcement without embarrassment, but not as if he cared whether or not it were believed.

It was his sister, Peggy, who flushed uncomfortably as she always did over her brother's oddities. To her truthful mind and straightforward nature his peculiarities were impossible to understand.

But Billy did not look as if his words had been altogether true. In spite of his sister's speech, he was far more fragile than he had been when she had said farewell to him at their farm in New Hampshire a few months before. She had then started west to join her aunt, Mrs. Burton, and become a member of the Sunrise Hill Camp Fire club in Arizona.

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At this instant and without being observed, Vera shook her head at Peggy.

If no one else understood Billy Webster's vagaries, the Russian girl with whom he had so deep a friendship apparently did, or if not she usually had an excuse for him.

But Peggy suddenly remembered that her brother was not supposed to know how ill he had been.

Then, almost at the same time, an interruption followed in the form of an extraordinary sound, or combination of sounds. First there was the long-drawn-out wail of annoyance and protest made by a small western burro; then an intermingling of faint shrieks of fear with gay laughter.

Peggy and Bettina both ran forward to the narrow opening between the two cliff walls. Then they beheld an extremely pretty, rather plump woman, with rose-colored cheeks and grey in her brown hair, riding astride a burro. The burro was being led by another woman of the same age, extraordinarily like and yet unlike

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the other one. The woman on foot was more slender and paler, her hair was darker and not grey, and her eyes a deeper blue.

"Peggy, darling, for goodness sake help me get your mother off this beast," she called out as soon as the two girls were inside the defile, "I have had to drag both the animal and Mollie Webster every inch of the way. See, Mollie, I told you that our camp was not far from this old cliff dwelling which the girls and I discovered and adopted the other day. You might easily have walked here."

"So I might and would have, Polly O'Neill Burton, had I dreamed that you were going to make this wretched animal actually trot with me across a stone wilderness."

During her protest, with some difficulty, Mrs. Webster was being persuaded to dismount from her burro by Peggy and Bettina. But she seemed not to have acquired the art of making the proper beginning, for her too long and too full skirt kept getting twisted around her.

"Better wear a proper Camp Fire costume, especially adapted for a Camp Fire guardian at the Grand Canyon of Arizona, Mollie," Mrs. Burton suggested, going forward and leaving the girls to find some place to fasten the burro, when finally her beloved twin sister had made the descent to earth in safety.

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Mrs. Burton's costume was in fact charming and so simple that one would not easily have known how expensive it was. She wore tan-colored, high kid boots, wrinkling above the foot like mousquetaire gloves, a khaki-colored broadcloth coat and a short skirt with trousers of the same material beneath. Her hat was of French felt, a little deeper shade of brown, and trimmed with a soft red scarf.

"Billy, you look like an Indian chief with that blanket wrapped about you, provided one does not look too carefully on the inside," she announced. "Hope the tea isn't all gone; your mother needs some refreshment, although I don't care for any."

Then walking over to the edge of the cliff Mrs. Burton stood looking down, with a curious sensation of fascination and fear.

A moment later Mrs. Webster sat down beside her son, giving a suppressed sigh of relief. Billy seemed so much better, although he had been at the new Sunrise Camp but little over a week.

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A short time before the Sunrise Hill Camp Fire party, who had been for several months living in a group of tents on the borders of the Painted Desert, had moved on to the neighborhood of the Grand Canyon. They were now in camp not far from the famous Angel Trail.

But before they were fairly settled a letter had arrived from Mrs. Webster saying that she would like to join the Camp Fire party and wished to bring along her two sons, Dan and Billy Webster.

There was no possibility of declining to welcome the newcomers, for it was Billy's serious illness which had made a western trip necessary and forced his father's consent to their joining his

aunt's camping party.

However, the campers were extraordinarily well pleased and particularly Polly Burton. For if her beloved Mollie were with her, surely her difficulties as Camp Fire guardian were over. She and Mollie were so unlike they were complements to each other.

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"Fact is when we are together, Mollie mine, we have all the virtues and leave none to be desired," Polly O'Neill, who was now Mrs. Richard Burton, had more than once announced to her twin sister.

And Mollie had laughed as she always did, accepting the speech as only one of her gifted sister's absurdities. For, in spite of her Polly's genius, her opinions never made much impression upon Mrs. Webster.

Nevertheless, perhaps on this point she was not altogether wrong. Already, since Mrs. Webster's coming, the group of Camp Fire girls unconsciously were under the spell of its truth. There were some to whom Mollie Webster represented the influences which they needed and desired. She was far more motherly than her sister and loved to fuss and worry over each girl's health and appetite. Yet, in her gentler fashion, she was really more exacting than Mrs. Burton, as such apparently yielding natures often are.

Already Alice Ashton and Vera Lageloff felt more closely drawn to Mrs. Webster—Vera, because she was Billy's mother and had been her friend before she met Mrs. Burton.

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With Alice Ashton the circumstances were different. For one thing, Alice felt that her Aunt Mollie took her more seriously and had a real respect for her intellectual interests and abilities. She could not always be perfectly certain that the other Camp Fire guardian was not sometimes a little amused by her ambitions.

Vera and Alice were both engaged in serving Mrs. Webster with tea. A moment later Bettina and Peggy walked over and stood on either side of Mrs. Burton.

"To what on earth, Tante, did you expect us to hitch that wretched beast?" Bettina demanded. "Peggy did finally manage to tie him to a cliff but it required an extraordinary amount of talent."

Laughing, Mrs. Burton slipped one hand inside Peggy's and the other in Bettina's.

"Sorry, children, but I could not persuade Mollie to come with me in any other way and I did want her to see this wonderful view. You know how she hates walking, but perhaps we may get her into better habits while she is in the West with us. Look down there. The distance is tremendous, isn't it? and yet this is only one of the smaller canyons—not the Grand Canyon. The roaring of the water sounds as far beneath as if it were the River Styx. But don't get so close to the edge, Bettina. I thought looking down great heights made you feel uncomfortable."

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"Some one jumped or fell over this cliff the other day," Peggy announced. "Ralph Marshall told me that the man had been a guest at the hotel

where he is staying.”

Mrs. Burton shivered, drawing back in her usual impressionable fashion.

“Don’t tell us any gruesome details, please, Peggy dear. Remember it is the wonder and beauty of nature we must think of, and not its terribleness.”

Afterwards the woman and two girls were silent for a little while, each pursuing her own train of thought and each admiring in her fashion the marvelous spectacle before them.

It was as if a sunset had been inverted and its colors dropped down inside the cliffs, using the stones for clouds to hold the lights. Farther down, the walls of earth grew dark and finally a black stream ran between them.

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A little later Mrs. Webster called to her sister and the two girls to join her. They then returned at once to the rest of the group and for half an hour sat there laughing and talking. For their background they had one of the most ancient dwellings of the human race ever found upon the earth, and their foreground was a portion of one of the great wonders of the world.

Nevertheless the Camp Fire party talked chiefly of their own affairs. After all, human beings are seldom vitally interested for long in anything save themselves and their own kind.

But, by and by, Mrs. Burton arose.

“Please hurry, everybody, we must get back to camp as soon as possible,” she suggested. “We forget that now September is here the days are getting shorter. I for one have not the courage to be lost in this part of the world. Moreover I have something to tell you when we reach camp which may surprise you.”

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CHAPTER II

WHITE ROSES

The new camping site was by far the most beautiful the Sunrise Camp Fire club had ever occupied, even bearing in mind all its former history.

With wagons and their burros the girls, Mrs. Burton, and their guide had followed a trail leading from the old site near the Painted Desert to the new. They had preferred the long trek, although the nearby railroad would have covered the distance in a few hours.

Yet in this part of the country how easy it is to forget modern civilization if one will, since half a century ago the Grand Canyon itself was still unexplored.

Here their tents were pitched in a portion of the world’s garden, while only a short distance away was the most gigantic wonder in stone.

In less than three-quarters of an hour the little party of seven, who had been drinking tea,

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arrived at their present home, involuntarily stopping a few yards from the tents for the purpose of enjoying the picture before them. They had come through half a mile of pine forest after leaving the neighborhood of the cliffs and now found themselves encircled by pines on all sides. In only a few places was there a clearing through which one could get a vista of the far horizon, but in one of these clearings the new Sunrise camp had pitched their white tents.

In front of the tents the grass was soft and thick and of a deep bluish green. To the left a miniature hill was broken by a narrow fissure down which a tiny, clear stream trickled into a small lake below that was only a little larger than a big circular mirror. As a matter of course the pool had been christened the "Wishing Well." The name is indeed time honored, but then wishing is perhaps the oldest and at the same time the youngest occupation in the world.

A few scrub trees and bushes grew along the ground between the pines, yet the air was altogether filled with the pine tang and fragrance. In many nearby places there were the brilliant early autumn flowers of the western plateaus.

As a beacon light to the home-comers, as well as for domestic reasons, a large fire was burning at a safe distance from the tents. Through the trees the sunset colors turned the scene to rose and gold.

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For the moment there chanced to be no one in sight save Marie Papin, Mrs. Burton's maid, and Mr. Jefferson Simpson, the Camp Fire guide.

So near the fire were they standing and so absorbed in their conversation that, although they must have noticed the return of the little party, neither turned to speak to any one of them.

In the reflection of the firelight the two figures made an interesting and not an ordinary picture. The contrast between them was striking. For once Marie had discarded her conventional maid's costume of black and was wearing a white muslin dress as only a French woman can wear white, changing it from simplicity to coquetry.

Moreover, the rough-and-ready outdoor costume, ordinarily adhered to by Mr. Simpson, had been set aside for a conventional attire, or possibly this was his impression. Yet Mr. Simpson did not appear conventional.

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As they reached their own tents Polly Burton nodded significantly to Peggy and Bettina. Then she waited outside when they disappeared inside.

"I wonder if Tante's surprise, which we were to hear on our return, had anything to do with Marie and Mr. Simpson?" Peggy demanded, as she began changing her costume for the more ceremonial one worn at dinner. She was looking reflective and at the same time a little annoyed—an expression characteristic of Peggy Webster under some conditions. She did not enjoy romantic problems.

Bettina laughed. She knew that Peggy had an

instinctive prejudice against the romantic in any and all its forms. Not only Bettina, but Peggy's family and many of her friends often wondered why Peggy should be so different in this from other girls. Moreover, how would she ever meet her own romance when her hour came, if she had so intense a shyness at its very suggestion among other people?

A number of times Bettina had been aware that their Camp Fire guide felt more than an ordinary interest in Marie. Yet the thought of an affair between the young French woman with her ideas of life and the big uncultured miner had seemed impossible. They were farther apart than the two poles, since, in the end, the poles being reached bear many resemblances. If Mr. Simpson had been rich, there might have been another story. However, some theory had to be worked out to explain Mr. Simpson's wish to continue as the Sunrise Camp Fire guide.

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True, he was a soldier of fortune who, according to his own story, had played many parts. However, each member of the Camp Fire club appreciated his superiority to the task he had undertaken of being their courier, guide, man of all work, doing a hundred and one tasks for a group of something less than a dozen women. Even if he had fallen upon evil days and accepted the work as a temporary occupation or amusement—for he appeared to consider his tasks more amusing than laborious—there were many other more dignified and lucrative occupations in which he could have engaged.

So Bettina reflected, as she followed Peggy's example in getting dressed.

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They had not finished when a slim figure slipped in to their tent uninvited.

Her expression was slightly apologetic as she seated herself upon the edge of a cot, drawing one foot up under her and flinging her hat aside, as a girl frequently does when beginning a confidence.

However, the newcomer was not a girl. Instead she was the Camp Fire guardian and hostess of the Sunrise club in Arizona at the present time, and also in their recent camping experience upon the edge of the Painted Desert, Mrs. Richard Burton, the famous actress, known to the public as Polly O'Neill Burton.

"Sorry my surprise for this evening has not developed, or rather that it has developed in an unexpected fashion," she began, speaking enigmatically and shrugging her shoulders, half chagrined and half pleased.

"Perhaps you girls know from experience that I am more nervous over playing chaperon than any other Camp Fire guardian duty. But I must confess I never expected to be troubled by Marie! She and I have traveled together for years without Marie's having a single love affair so far as I have been told. And then appears Mr. Simpson, the last person to be suspected in the light of a lover."

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Mrs. Burton's lips twitched and her eyes shone with an amused light.

"I like Mr. Simpson very much. Really I am

afraid Marie is not good enough for him as she is behaving so absurdly," she ended inconclusively.

"Tante, what are you talking about? Certainly you never betray your point at the beginning of a story as so many people do," Peggy demanded, still frowning, but approaching nearer the lady on the cot.

Mrs. Burton laughed.

"Sorry, Peg, but, perhaps, remembering your prejudice against love affairs, I forbore to tell you several days ago that Marie and Mr. Simpson became engaged on the last night of our journey to camp. You may recall that Mr. Simpson took a number of you girls out for a walk after we had pitched tents for the night and after Marie had me safely stored away in bed. I was surprised at the time at her wishing to go with you, as Marie and outdoor exercise are not enamored of each other. Then Marie came in late, after you girls had gone to bed, and told me her news. We were planning to have a party tonight and announce the engagement. I sent hundreds of miles for a cake and white roses," Mrs. Burton concluded mournfully.

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Bettina Graham was twisting her yellow-brown hair into a single braid about her small head—a difficult performance before a six-inch hand mirror which she held in one hand while twisting with the other.

Nevertheless she stopped.

"Well," she inquired, "didn't the roses arrive?"

Mrs. Burton nodded. "Oh yes, but Marie has broken her engagement. Mr. Simpson confided to me that he thinks it is on account of his new clothes. He insists that Marie thought he would look like one of her Broadway heroes as soon as he discarded his western outfit. Assuredly he does not. Funny that he gave me this information quite good-naturedly, with an amused twinkle in his eyes! Of course Marie declared this untrue. She now announces that she could not make up her mind to leave me; besides life in the West could never satisfy her. She believes she must have been unduly influenced by the September moon at the time of her acceptance of Mr. Simpson." Mrs. Burton shook her head in reflection. "The laws of attraction between human beings are perhaps the strangest of all laws. Remember my oracular speech, children; you may find it useful."

[30]

At this moment she got up stiffly, as persons do after sitting in an awkward position for any length of time.

Peggy had continued frowning.

"How silly Marie is! I do think she has behaved abominably. I simply can't understand how people can be so 'changy' about serious matters," Peggy concluded, her cheeks again coloring with annoyance.

Remembering her own uncertainties on this same subject and concerning the acceptance of the husband whom she now adored, Mrs. Burton suddenly felt less vexed with Marie than she had a few moments before.

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"All people are not alike, Peggy dear, for which we should be thankful. Anyhow there are at least two widely different varieties, the 'Sentimental Tommies' and the 'Grizels' of this world. One had a good many minds inside of one mind and they all have to be pleased. Then there are fortunate people like you and Grizel dear, who have only one beautiful clear mind to make up without doubts and backslidings.

"Now I must depart to get ready for dinner. At least we have the consolation of the cake and the roses. Mr. Simpson insists that he will appear at his engagement party, even if there is no engagement and no bride. But Marie, of course, has retired in tears."

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CHAPTER III

A NEW DAWN

Very rarely did Polly Burton arise early in the morning. This excellent habit she had never liked as a girl and, of course, later on her stage life had made the custom well nigh impossible. Now, however, within the past few months of outdoor camping, she had changed and become that very doubtful early bird, or early worm, for one never can be sure which one may be—the winner of the morning prize or the victim.

However, the coming of daylight in this extraordinary land of hills and deserts, of giant cliffs and fairy gardens, was worth a serious effort.

At any rate this was Mrs. Burton's impression. Frequently she used to slip out of her tent before any one else had awakened and watch the dawn above the blue San Francisco peaks spread itself slowly over the entire horizon. Afterwards she sometimes returned to bed and to sleep, or else read until the Camp Fire girls were in evidence.

This morning it was a little before six o'clock when, getting into her clothes, she slipped out of doors. Quiet had to be preserved for, now that Mrs. Webster had arrived, she was sleeping in her sister's tent, while another smaller tent had been put up not far off which Dan and Billy Webster were occupying together. Now, that Billy was so much better, his brother was able to look after him at night. Moreover their mother, after her siege of nursing, required the rest.

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For two reasons, therefore, Mrs. Burton departed without making the least disturbance. First, she wished her sister to continue sleeping, second, she did not wish her own plan interfered with. One never could be sure when Mollie would not take a stand against what she might consider an unnecessary eccentricity.

Mrs. Burton's desire was to see the sun rise above one of the canyons and to see it alone. Not the Grand Canyon itself; one still had a day's journey down a precipitous trail from the Sunrise Hill camp for the best view of this amazing spectacle. She intended visiting one of the lesser canyons which was within reasonable walking distance.

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The pine forest was as gloomy and quiet as a dim old cathedral when Polly Burton started swiftly through it toward the neighborhood of the cliffs of the day before.

There was a mist at the top of the trees hiding the first shafts of daylight. No other living human being was about. Only in one of the trees a screech owl, still under the impression that it was night, continued his curious wailing.

Mrs. Burton was not frightened, but naturally she was a little nervous and keenly alive to every sight and sound. Always enjoying new emotions and new impressions; now the early morning walk alone in so strange a place was unlike any past experience she could recall.

Not many miles away stood a fashionable hotel filled with tourists, who had come to Arizona to see the Grand Canyon. Yet here in the forest one appeared to be in a primeval world. Not so different could these forests have been in the prehistoric days of the cliff dwellers, whose ancient homes were in the nearby cliffs.

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Following the trail Polly Burton kept glancing from one side of the path to the other. Ridiculous, of course, but all through dinner the evening before Dan Webster had been regaling the girls with stories of the deer and bear supposed to live in the adjacent woods.

Yet, in spite of her unfaith, there was always enough of the spirit of the adventurer in Mrs. Burton, left over from the one-time Polly O'Neill, to hope for the unexpected.

Once in a place where the trees grew thicker than elsewhere, she half believed she saw a big, brown figure go lumbering off on all fours in the opposite direction. Nevertheless, without being interrupted in any way, she finally arrived at the ledge of cliffs where she had spent the afternoon before.

Now, instead of stopping at the same place, she walked slowly along, carefully guarding each step. The morning light was a dull grey—the color of deep shadows. Slowly the sky was growing warmer and breaking into light, coloring the thick mist in the ravine below until it resembled a mammoth, iridescent soap bubble.

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Then the mist began to separate and to float upward like an army of ghostly figures.

The effect was fascinating—even thrilling—and yet it was eery. To an imaginative person many fantastic ideas would have presented themselves. It was as if the spirits of evil persons having been enchained to do penance for their sins in the world below, and now, having expiated their misdeeds, were allowed to float upward. Sometimes they moved in pairs, gradually drifting apart as they reached the higher air. Now and then a more lonely ghost, appearing as if wrapped about in a cloak of silver mist, would pursue his upward flight alone.

Mrs. Burton felt more than repaid for her trip, yet regretted that she had not brought one of the girls with her. Bettina would perhaps have enjoyed the spectacle most. The Camp Fire

guardian was beginning to understand Bettina Graham better than she had in their past Camp Fire experience. But her desire was not purely unselfish, for she was nervous.

The scene was almost too beautiful and mysterious to be witnessed by oneself. Besides, in the past few months she had grown so accustomed to being in the society of the Sunrise Hill Camp Fire girls that she was almost uncomfortable any great length of time without them.

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Now it would have been pleasant to have heard Bettina's pretty fancies, or to have had Peggy dispel the mists by a practical suggestion, or to have listened to Alice's or Ellen's scientific explanation of clouds, or to have beheld Sally and Gerry giggling irresponsibly over something which had nothing to do with mists or ghosts or canyons.

Yet Mrs. Burton lingered until the dawn had fully come and all the sky was rose crimson. Then, glancing at her watch, she started toward camp.

In another half hour the girls would be up and preparing breakfast. As no one knew where she had disappeared it was possible that her Sister Mollie might become uneasy.

Once in the woods again she walked more hurriedly, not only because she feared being late, but for another more absurd reason. Unexpectedly Mrs. Burton had the sensation of being followed.

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She did not see any one or anything, and was not even sure that she heard distinctly. Nevertheless her impression was vivid.

Twice she stopped and waited; once she called aloud; the second time, very like the one-time Polly O'Neill, she stamped her foot, crying out:

"If any one is playing a prank on me, please understand that I am weary of it."

There was no answer. However, afterwards she had no longer the sensation of being pursued.

At camp Sally Ashton and Gerry Williams were busy preparing breakfast. Camp life was at least eventful when these two girls were at work.

Really, once stirred out of her slothfulness, Sally Ashton, who was essentially feminine, was an extraordinarily good cook. However, she required several persons to wait upon her while she was at work.

This morning, in honor of Mrs. Webster, she was making a new cornmeal bread from a recipe which the Indian girl, Dawapa, had taught her.

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She had Dan Webster engaged in assisting her. Dan not only brought fresh wood for her fire every few moments, but in between his pilgrimages watched with anxiety the cakes slowly browning in the hot ashes. Sally was never content unless she had at least one man or boy engaged in her active service. As a matter of fact if one were about she did not find this difficult to accomplish.

She waved a plump little hand toward their

guardian when Mrs. Burton strolled into camp. Over the great pan of bacon she was frying Gerry Williams threw her a kiss.

There was no one else about. A little tired from her walk, Mrs. Burton sat down a short distance from the fire, for the warmth was pleasant, and, embracing her knees, began rocking slowly back and forward just as Polly O'Neill had always done when she wished to work out a problem.

Mrs. Burton was again considering her group of Camp Fire girls. How pretty Sally looked! Her hair lay in soft brown curls over her white forehead. She did not tan as the other girls. At the moment her big brown eyes were shining with an animation she did not always show. She was wearing a big apron over her Camp Fire dress.

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Deliciously domestic Sally appeared to be working out-of-doors! For, although Sally did belong to the type of women whom we choose to call especially feminine, she had gone far beyond the history of the primitive woman. Sally's idea was to enslave, certainly not to be enslaved.

In appearance she and Gerry Williams were a complete contrast, although having many tastes in common.

Since the trouble between Gerry Williams and Bettina Graham, Gerry and the Camp Fire guardian had not continued such devoted friends. Until then, except for her niece, Peggy Webster, Gerry had undoubtedly been Mrs. Burton's favorite among her group of girls.

But Gerry's effort to force Bettina to remain behind in the Indian's house, in order to place her in a false position during their last camping experience, had appeared not only mischievous but malicious. Mrs. Burton wondered if she had been right in bringing a girl of Gerry's training and tastes to live with girls who had been brought up so differently. She still said nothing to any one of them concerning Gerry's history, but she had one talk with the girl herself. Afterwards Gerry apologised, both to Bettina and to her and appeared to repent her behavior.

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Now, in spite of the fact that Mrs. Burton could not trust her as she had at the beginning of their friendship, nevertheless Gerry's prettiness and affectionate manners never failed to appeal to her. She returned the kiss light-heartedly.

A few moments later the other Camp Fire girls appeared.

Peggy took away her aunt's coat and hat, since Marie had not been seen since the night before. She was no longer sleeping in Mrs. Burton's tent, but in a tent with several of the girls.

Alice Ashton reported to Mrs. Burton that Marie had not yet lifted her head from the pillow, so overcome did she appear to be, either from relief or regret at the loss of Mr. Simpson.

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Breakfast was about ready to serve before Mrs. Webster and Billy finally came out to join the others. They were an odd contrast—the mother and son—suggesting the homely but immortal comparison of the hen with the ugly duckling.

Mrs. Webster—who had once been Molly O’Neill—had cheeks round and soft and rosy as a girl’s. Her blue eyes were filled with the sweetness of a loving and unquestioning nature. She was well past her youth and yet, in spite of her comfortable plumpness and the few grey hairs among the black ones, to the persons who loved her she seemed to grow prettier and sweeter as she grew older. Certainly her own family adored her.

But Billy Webster, her son, was a delicate boy with fair hair and large blue eyes. His expression was difficult to understand until one came to know that Billy questioned everything, but, having decided for himself acted, whenever it was possible, solely upon his own judgment.

When Dan Webster started forward to join his mother and offer his morning greeting, one felt better satisfied. For, except that he was big and strong and virile, he was exactly like her, both in appearance and apparently in character.

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The Sunrise Hill Camp Fire girls were in the habit of beginning each day with some little ceremony appropriate to their outdoor life and the spirit of their Camp Fire. Each member had her appointed time, for a morning ceremony. Today chanced to be Mrs. Burton’s.

When everybody had assembled she walked toward a clearing and stood with her face to the east and her back against a group of pine trees with a growth of underbrush between.

“I am sorry all of you were not with me this morning at daylight. To have recited my verse then would have been more appropriate,” she began.

However, what she recited was not so important, since always Mrs. Burton’s audiences heard her with thrilling interest. For one reason, the voice of the great actress was so beautiful and appealing. Like the great Sara Bernhardt she would have been able to stir her hearers both to laughter and tears by a mere recital of the alphabet, could she have spoken as Bernhardt did in a language unfamiliar to her listeners.

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“This verse is a part of the Indian New Fire ceremony and seemed to me appropriate to our morning camp fire,” she explained.

Some vivid, charming quality appeared to be born anew in Polly O’Neill Burton each time she faced an audience, no matter how small and unimportant. This love of her work was perhaps the surest expression of her genius.

She now lifted her head, the color coming swiftly to her face, and pointing to the sun and then toward their own fire she spoke in a beautiful resonant voice:

“All people awake, open your eyes, arise,
Become children of light, vigorous, active,
sprightly;
Hasten clouds from the four world quarters,
Come snow in plenty, that water may abound
when summer appears,
Come ice and cover the fields, that after
planting they may yield abundantly,
Let all hearts be glad.”

The last words sounded like an invocation to happiness. However, it was Mrs. Burton who started forward, saying unexpectedly:

“Dan, there is some one watching us. I was under the impression I was being followed in my walk this morning. Why, I cannot understand! Will you find out who it is?”

Then, without replying, Dan went quickly forward into the nearby woods.

CHAPTER IV

A NEW GIRL

There was an instant of waiting, then a little cry quickly suppressed. Soon after Dan could be heard returning.

But when he appeared he was half leading, half carrying, a girl of about fifteen or sixteen who did not look like a formidable intruder. She was small and her face was pale; at the moment her lips were pressed tightly together. Yet, in spite of her effort at self-control, her eyes were full of tears, either of anger, embarrassment or pain.



“WHEN HE APPEARED HE WAS HALF LEADING, HALF CARRYING, A GIRL WHO DID NOT LOOK LIKE A FORMIDABLE INTRUDER.”

Yet, although Dan was resolutely holding her to the duty of facing the Camp Fire party, he was perfectly gentle. It would have been impossible for him to be otherwise.

Immediately Mrs. Burton walked forward. There was something about the girl that attracted her. She was not pretty; her features were too irregular; she had a long nose a little crooked, a wide mouth, and her chin was too sharply pointed for the breadth of her brow. But her eyes were a fascinating grey-green with extremely dark brows and lashes, and her hair was reddish brown.

“I am sorry,” the Camp Fire guardian began quickly. “Dan and I must both have been mistaken in thinking you the person we were seeking. But you must forgive my nephew, the fault was mine. I was under the impression that some one was spying upon us, and who, for some absurd reason, was not willing to be discovered.”

The girl shook her head. “You were not

mistaken. I have been watching you—or trying to—since early this morning. And I hate your having discovered me.”

She spoke quietly in a soft but at the same time throaty voice, as if she were a little hoarse.

Polly Burton was puzzled and yet it was stupid of her to have been. It was true that here in the West in the past few months, living outdoors with her group of Camp Fire girls, she had honestly forgotten a number of facts about herself.

“I don’t understand.”

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But at this instant, murmuring something or other in apology, Dan Webster moved a few steps aside.

The girl turned her head.

“Don’t let go your hold on me,” she said almost angrily.

Again Dan held out his arm and this time the girl clutched it.

Dan’s face was crimson; he felt the whole situation to be extraordinarily awkward. He was not quick either in thought or action and undoubtedly he was confused by the words and the behavior of the girl who had been his prisoner a few moments before. Now she held on to him as if she dared not let go. He could feel her hand trembling on his arm and indeed her whole body was shaking.

Then Dan gave an inward sigh of relief, seeing that his mother was approaching them.

“You have hurt yourself, haven’t you, child?” she began in a sensible comfortable fashion. “I presume you were merely curious about my sister and our Camp Fire proceedings. I know the information has gone out over the neighborhood that we wished to be left to ourselves. You understand my sister has to see so many people when she is playing that she has let it be known she wishes to meet nobody here. If you have been trying to see her without being observed, she must remember a time, which does not seem so long ago to me, when she was only a stage-struck girl herself. There, take my arm and let Dan help you to my tent.”

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The girl had looked unhappy at the beginning of Mrs. Webster’s speech, but before the close she laughed a little uncertainly.

“I am afraid *that is* true,” she returned. “In any case I owe you an apology, Mrs. Burton.” She had dropped the lids over her eyes to hide her chagrin, but she went on honestly. “I suppose I am a stage-struck girl, although I do not like hearing myself called one. But I did come over here this morning at daylight for a look at your camp. Of course I never dreamed of seeing you. But when you started for your walk I did go along near you, as I did not suppose you would either see or hear me. But it was wonderful just to be so near you!”

In the meantime Peggy Webster had slipped forward and now stood alongside her aunt.

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“Don’t be hateful, Tante,” she whispered

warningly, knowing from experience that her aunt's good nature was not always to be relied upon under trying circumstances. Moreover she had forgotten, as ninety-nine people out of a hundred do, when they arrive at distinction, how she had felt toward famous persons in her own youth.

But on this occasion Peggy need not have been uneasy.

The new girl was evidently of gentle breeding in spite of the shabbiness of her attire and the fact that she was rather more plain than good looking.

"Nonsense, child, it is oftentimes distinctly disagreeable to be near me, as my Camp Fire girls may tell you. But come and have breakfast with us, if you really have been prowling about since daylight as I have. I am dreadfully hungry."

She started away with Peggy, expecting the others to follow. Either Mrs. Burton had not heard her sister's speech, or else believed that her beloved Mollie was only fussing over the newcomer's health as she did over everybody's.

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"Thank you, I would rather not be troublesome," the new girl answered.

At this she let go Dan's arm and took a step forward. But the pain of walking alone was too great for her self-control.

As people always did in disaster she turned to Mrs. Webster.

"I fear I have hurt myself and it is so stupid of me. Really I don't know what to do. You see I did not want to be discovered and when I heard some one coming after me I started to run. I must have tripped and fallen over a stump in the underbrush. As soon as I got up I was a prisoner."

She flashed a peculiar glance at Dan Webster; but whether she was angry or amused over his discomfiture it was difficult to decide. Yet Dan looked wretched enough to satisfy the most teasing desire for revenge. He had the sweetest and most chivalrous temper in the world. No one ever remembered Dan's deliberately hurting any one in his life. Now he undoubtedly felt as if he had caused a perfectly innocent girl to do herself a painful injury and had afterwards treated her with unpardonable rudeness. But it was not difficult to make Dan Webster feel himself in the wrong, both his sister Peggy, and his twin brother, frequently taking advantage of this trait of his character.

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"You are not a prisoner in any sense," Mrs. Webster replied, speaking more coldly, and appreciating Dan's embarrassment. "But if you are hurt we shall be glad to do what we can for you and some one will drive you back to your home."

More humbly the girl then took hold of Mrs. Webster's proffered arm, and still holding on to Dan, started toward Mrs. Webster's tent not many yards away.

In a curious fashion Dan felt that, in spite of her

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pretense of anger, the girl by his side felt a reliance upon him. And for some reason he could not explain he was interested in her. She was not half so pretty as many of the Camp Fire girls—Sally Ashton and Gerry Williams for instance. Yet there was something fascinating in her grey-green eyes, in her long nose with that funny twist at the end of it, and in the uncertainty of her behavior.

Naturally Dan thought it ridiculous of the strange girl to have been hiding about in their neighborhood for the very ordinary pleasure of beholding his famous aunt.

Dan did not take Mrs. Burton or her fame as an actress seriously. Indeed, unconsciously he had inherited some of his father's old prejudice against women in any kind of public life. He was fond of his aunt, but not as Peggy was, or even his brother, Billy. For, although Billy did not bestow much affection upon any human being, except his mother and Vera Lageloff, he admired Mrs. Burton, was proud of her success, and was really more influenced by her opinion than any one's else.

The new girl walked with difficulty, but Dan could not help admiring her pluck. Ordinarily her skin was sallow but it was an odd greenish-white at present.

Outside his mother's tent Dan departed to find Ellen Deal.

Since the arrival of the Sunrise Camp Fire girls in Arizona, Ellen Deal had had but few opportunities for the display of her usefulness as a trained nurse. She had not graduated in nursing, since a breakdown in health had prevented her from finishing the last year of training. But she was older than the other Camp Fire girls and had come West with them because of Dr. Sylvia Wharton's request made to her half sister and always her beloved friend, Polly O'Neill, or Mrs. Richard Burton.

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The call to the sick, however, with Ellen was like the call to arms with a soldier.

Fifteen minutes later, when Dan was finishing a belated breakfast, Ellen reappeared and sat down beside him. The next moment he saw the new girl come out of his mother's tent with her assistance and drop down on a cushion outside.

"Nothing serious the matter, as far as I can tell," Ellen announced in the business-like manner which seems to be considered professional. "Nevertheless I would like to have a doctor if one can be found over at the hotel or anywhere nearby. Our unexpected visitor has bruised and strained her knee and it may be worse than I think."

"Dan won't you take your victim, or our victim, her breakfast," Mrs. Burton suggested, smiling and yet looking sympathetic. Having finished her own breakfast she and Peggy had arranged a breakfast tray for their uninvited guest.

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"Sit here, Dan," his mother announced a few moments later on his arrival before her tent. Then she hurried away to her own meal.

Dan sat silently watching the new girl.

She was evidently trying to show self-control. Yet it seemed impossible for her to choke the breakfast down, in spite of the fact that Sally had made new corn bread especially for her. Her lips kept twitching and finally the tears ran unchecked down her face.

"I am sorry you are in such pain," Dan said gently, and there was something very attractive in his gentleness, combined as it was with his beauty and strength. "I'll find a doctor for you in a little while."

To his surprise his companion again turned upon him angrily.

"I am not crying because I am in pain. I am not quite so ridiculous." Then her nose twitched in a funny fashion and she added with the hoarse note in her voice which was so unusual, "I am crying because I am such a—such a fool."

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In spite of his wish to be sympathetic, Dan laughed.

"Oh, that is a common enough experience."

But the girl shook her head.

"No," she answered quietly, "there are a good many foolish people in the world, I know, but there are degrees. It seems to me I am the most hopeless kind." She turned her eyes full upon Dan and curiously he was reminded of certain pools in his own New Hampshire woods on a soft grey day.

"My name is Marta Clark. I meant to tell you before. My brother and I are here living in a tent not far away from your camp—a few miles I believe. My brother broke down in health and we had to come out here because of him. He is still very ill and I have been taking care of him. If I can't even hobble about for a few days I don't know what is to become of us. Besides he has not the faintest idea where I am. I realized he would not allow me to prowl about trying to see Mrs. Burton if he knew, although he and I had talked of her being here. We had seen her act once and adored her."

"Oh, you'll find some one able to look after him for a few days well enough," Dan replied, not viewing the matter as seriously as his new acquaintance did.

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Again the girl flashed what seemed to be an angry glance toward him.

"I don't enjoy your forcing me to confess the fact," she went on, "but my brother and I are desperately poor—far too poor to hire any one to take care of us, even for a few days. He was working and taking care of me, and when his illness came we had almost nothing. He was only a reporter on a paper and I was at school."

"Nevertheless," said Dan firmly, "I am sure we shall manage in some way to have you cared for until you are all right again."

The girl's face cleared, and Dan noticed that she had a rather care-worn look which her words had just explained.

"I don't know why I should feel it when we are utter strangers, but you do look as if you could

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make things happen the way they should. I suppose it is because you are strong and patient. I am neither of those things."

But they could not go on talking because, at this moment, the Camp Fire guardian was coming toward them.

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CHAPTER V

THE PATIENT

"But it is awfully kind of you, Ellen."

Ellen Deal shook her head.

"No," she answered. "I shall like it. Since I came out West with you and the Camp Fire girls, Mrs. Burton, I have been feeling that perhaps I was here under false pretenses. You see I am older than the other girls, and came partly because Dr. Sylvia told me I might be useful to you. Except for showing you a few first aid remedies I have not been useful at all. I don't feel that I am a particularly agreeable companion, so I add nothing to the pleasure of the Camp Fire in that way."

"Nonsense," the Camp Fire guardian responded. Nevertheless a slight pang of self-reproach assailed her. Had she allowed Ellen Deal to feel that she was of less interest to the Camp Fire group than the other girls? It was true that Ellen was older, that she was midway between the age of a Camp Fire girl and a possible guardian. But, more than this, she seemed to have one of the hard and matter-of-fact natures it is always difficult to reach. Romance, the dreams and desires that are a part of nearly every life, hardly appeared to touch Ellen; or if they did at least she gave no sign. In their months together amid perhaps as beautiful and extraordinary scenery as there is anywhere in the world, Ellen had showed no enthusiasm; in her life with the Camp Fire girls, no especial affection except, perhaps, in friendship with Alice Ashton.

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"However, she was looking in a great deal better health," Mrs. Burton reflected, and the present moment was scarcely the time for introspection by either of them.

"Just the same it is good of you, Ellen, besides not another one of us would be equal to the task. But if it is too much for you, you must let us know. Peggy is going with you now and I'll drive over in the morning to see how you are getting on."

"Thank you," Ellen replied gratefully. Yet she would like to have said so much more—to have told Mrs. Burton how greatly she appreciated her kindness in allowing her, an entire stranger, to be one of her group of Camp Fire girls and also her guest for the past three months. However, words never came easily to her, for she was not one of the fortunate persons who can make themselves charming by the simple gift of expression, which may or may not be sincere.

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Then she went away to pack her bag with a few necessary articles for the work ahead of her.

It was to Ellen Deal that Dan Webster had first confided the difficult position of their unexpected guest. Immediately Ellen had suggested that she go with the new girl to her camp and there see what should be done. Besides the fact of her brother's illness, the girl herself would require looking after for a few days, if not for a longer time.

Later Mrs. Webster and Mrs. Burton had given a more or less enforced consents since, under the circumstances, there seemed nothing else to be done.

"Ellen certainly looks competent," Polly decided at this moment, watching her move away. Her figure was small and neat, suggesting a great deal of reserve strength; her sandy hair had grown a shade brighter in tone from her months in the sunshine and her always bright color, brighter. It was a pity that she appeared so severe and critical.

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This, also, was Marta Clark's impression, riding beside Ellen, Dan and Peggy occupying the front seat of the wagon which the Camp Fire party ordinarily used for carrying provisions.

Naturally Marta felt under deep obligations to the strange young woman beside her, yet she would like to have been able to prepare her for certain revelations ahead.

Ellen looked so scrupulously tidy. Then Marta knew the Camp Fire ideals and training which Ellen had added to her nursing ones. And her own housekeeping left so much to be desired. In fact Marta realized that she was careless, and her brother equally so. How would Miss Deal survive for even a few days with them, in spite of her spirit of self-sacrifice? Certainly Marta hated to accept so great a favor as the care of herself and her brother must represent. Yet, she too appreciated the fact that there seemed nothing else to be done.

The ride did not occupy half an hour, Marta naturally directing the way.

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Nevertheless it was nearly ten o'clock in the morning before the little party reached the new camp.

Two tents were situated in a small clearing at the foot of a rocky hill. Near them was the remains of a camp fire and not far away a litter of old papers and tin cans. In front of one tent there was an invalid's chair and also a cot. Yet neither of them were occupied.

"I wonder where Rob can be," Marta said, trying to conceal her evident nervousness from the three strangers.

She need scarcely have asked the question. The moment the wagon stopped, a tall, abnormally thin young fellow came quickly toward them, evidently having heard their approach from some distance off. He was breathless and the color was burning crimson on his high cheek bones. He looked like Marta except that he was handsomer, for his features were more regular, although the brother and sister had nearly the

same coloring.

He bowed politely enough to the strangers in the little party. But afterwards, something, perhaps his own illness and weakness, seemed to destroy his self-control.

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“Where have you been, Marta? What has happened? I have been searching for you ever since six o’clock. I wakened to find you gone, and after waiting an hour for you to come back I thought, or rather I could not think, what had become of you. You are considerate not to have left me a message.”

There was an angry sarcasm in the young man’s voice and manner which was extraordinarily out of place under the circumstances. Dan felt so sorry for the girl with them, that he would like to have settled with her brother, except for the apparent fact of his illness. But a high temper was evidently a family characteristic. Dan recalled Marta’s mentioning that she and her brother were from Kentucky.

But, even while he was speaking, the young fellow had to grasp hold of the wagon for support.

Marta was trying to explain to him, when Ellen Deal climbed quietly out.

“You are not strong enough to be on your feet any longer; you must have been walking about for several hours, when you know you are not expected to take any exercise,” she said authoritatively. Then, without the least hesitation or embarrassment, she took the perfectly strange young man by the elbow and led him to his chair. He accompanied her without a protest.

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Afterwards, while Dan and Peggy were helping Marta to alight from the wagon, Ellen tried to make him understand what had occurred.

Secretly Rob Clark was both ashamed and amused by the situation—ashamed of his own exhibition of temper, for he was good-natured on most occasions. But also he was amused by the strange young woman’s immediate command of him. However he really was too weak to protest and, after discovering his sister’s injury, grateful to the newcomer beyond his present strength to express.

A short time after Ellen was in complete command, both of the situation and her two patients.

Marta was stretched on the cot in front of the tent and her brother had not been allowed to move from his chair.

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With Peggy’s and Dan’s aid a fresh fire had been built and beef tea fed the invalid, who confessed to having had no breakfast because of his anxiety. Also the confusion inside the tent had been a little straightened out, although Dan and Peggy were obliged to leave when they might still have been useful.

However, they, too, were under Ellen’s command. She insisted that they drive over to the big hotel not far away in order to secure the advice of a physician. He was to be asked to

come at once.

And seeing them depart, promising to return next day, Marta was not sure whether she was sorry or glad of the results of her own impertinence and the accident due to it. These months alone with her brother had been very depressing. They had no friends in the West and now, perhaps, if she behaved herself, the Camp Fire girls might be kind to her.

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CHAPTER VI

A WAGER

Peggy Webster was standing alone, smoothing the shaggy coat of one of the pair of mules hitched to their wagon. Her brother had gone into the hotel nearby to find a physician for their new acquaintance.

Peggy was not wearing her Camp Fire dress. She was under the impression that it made her more conspicuous in coming to a fashionable hotel, such as this one. The guests might or might not understand the reason for her unusual costume.

However, being Peggy, characteristically her toilet was of the simplest and most convenient kind. She had on a short, tan-colored corduroy skirt and jacket, a cream silk blouse and a corduroy hat. She also wore riding boots of brown leather, finding them more convenient than ordinary shoes.

Yet, in spite of her simplicity, perhaps because of it, she made a charming figure. She was of medium height and slender, with broad shoulders and narrow hips; although Peggy was sixteen, she still suggested in the carriage of her head and body the vitality and grace of a boy rather than a girl. It was difficult to analyze this quality of the girl's which, however, people recognized at once. It may have come from a certain independence of spirit—a love of outdoor things—a straightforwardness and an avoidance of the emotions which most girls enjoy. Yet none of these qualities are essentially boyish, since ninety-nine boys out of a hundred may not possess them, but the description is used for want of a better one.

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From the three months of living outdoors Peggy's olive skin was a deeper tone and her color more brilliant. In her Camp Fire costume she sometimes wore her hair loose; but on occasions like this, it was braided and fastened close about her small head. In looking close at Peggy, what one was forced to admire in her most was the clearness and beauty of her dark eyes, which stared straight into yours with a perfect faith that the ideals of every human being were as clear and sincere as her own. Another charm was the unconsciously proud tilt of her short, straight nose and chin.

Glancing up to see if her brother had finished his errand, Peggy saw an immaculate figure coming toward her over the carefully tended grounds of the hotel.

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She waved a friendly hand toward him, the young man returning her greeting more languidly.

"Gotten up regardless, aren't you Ralph?" Peggy remarked good-naturedly, as Ralph Marshall joined her.

She did not dislike him as Bettina Graham did; indeed Peggy rarely disliked any one. And Ralph had been coming to their place in New Hampshire for a portion of his holidays for several years. He was ordinarily sweet-tempered and obliging and his affectations and lack of interest in serious matters only amused Peggy, if she happened to think of them at all, while they made Bettina angry.

"Oh, I am showing the West how the thing ought to be done," he answered with equal good temper, surveying himself with a not unpleasant vanity. For Ralph was extraordinarily good looking—rather too much so to be desirable in a man, according to some ideas. In spite of the fact that it was morning, Ralph was wearing a tennis costume of such amazing perfection that he suggested a magazine advertisement.

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"I thought you would soon get tired of roughing it on Mr. Gardener's ranch," Peggy went on. "After a while, Ralph, you will have surveyed all human occupations and found none of them worth the effort of pursuing, won't you?"

Ralph laughed. "I say, Peggy, that is unworthy of you. Such severity should have come from Bettina Graham. Why can't you think I left the Gardener ranch in order to be nearer the Camp Fire girls, even if you are not enthusiastic over my society? By the way, Terry Benton and Howard Brent are here with me for a few weeks. They both felt a holiday was due them, and naturally, as I was so near, I wished to see the Grand Canyon."

Peggy nodded. "I am glad Howard Brent is with you, I like him."

This also was characteristic of Peggy Webster. Most girls would not have been willing to be so straightforward in expressing an interest. But really it did not occur to Peggy that she should not state her liking for Howard Brent as freely as if he had been a girl; and, of course, there was no reason why she should not.

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However, Ralph felt slightly annoyed. He was accustomed to being both admired and flattered by his girl acquaintances. Even Bettina Graham's dislike of him was more agreeable than Peggy's good-natured indifference.

Moreover, Peggy's expression had at this instant changed, as she went quickly forward to greet the two young men who were advancing toward them.

"It is awfully good luck to have you so near our camp again; I hope you will both come over to see us," Ralph heard her say the moment after she had shaken hands with the newcomers. She had not suggested a visit to him.

Howard Brent and Terry Benton in a lesser degree were types of men whom Peggy might have been expected to admire.

Howard Brent was the son of an Arizona ranchman and was himself one. He was a big, strong, fearless fellow of about twenty; having spent most of his life outdoors, he was nearly as dark in appearance as Peggy herself and almost as straightforward. Terry, of course, was an Irishman and, although he also lived outdoors, he had the Irish subtleties and the ability to laugh at himself, which Peggy could not at this time of her life understand.

A short time after, while the little group of four were continuing to talk, Dan Webster came out from the hotel. Ralph Marshall introduced him to his two friends and straightway they fell into a discussion of future plans.

Dan was younger than the other men and had never been west before. But he had spent his life in the New Hampshire woods and was devoted to outdoor sports. Moreover, he was tremendously grateful and enthusiastic over the suggestion of his two new acquaintances, that he join them in the hunting and tramping expeditions which they were then planning.

He knew Ralph Marshall, of course, and they were friendly enough, but had no particular liking for each other.

"You are not going to join in these strenuous enterprises, are you, Ralph?" Peggy asked as she and Dan were about to climb back into their wagon to return to their own camp.

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"Why not?" Ralph demanded, flushing a little, not so much from Peggy's tone, which had been nothing but friendly, but from the attitude which he suspected in the other three men.

"Oh, for no reason at all," Peggy returned quickly, "only that I thought you liked other amusements better. You know I don't think a great deal of trying to destroy things, although so long as I like to eat what Dan kills I suppose I can't criticise his hunting."

In her first speech Peggy had had no idea of hurting Ralph's feelings, or even his self-esteem, which is what people are apt to hurt in us. Therefore, appreciating the fact that he seemed a little uncomfortable, she had attempted to change the subject. Moreover, in saying good-bye she gave her hand last to Ralph, looking at him with an appeal for forgiveness for her unconscious awkwardness. Under the circumstances she found it impossible to apologise openly.

Ralph Marshall had not Peggy's generosity of nature. He said good-bye with perfect politeness, but the girl still felt that he was chagrined.

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"Bully girl, isn't she? As good a sport I should think as the best kind of a fellow!" Howard Brent exclaimed after Dan and Peggy had driven off.

For a moment Terry Benton whistled softly before replying. Then, being an Irishman, he was a little enigmatic.

"They are made differently, aren't they, girls? We men may be cut after the same pattern, but sometimes I believe no two girls are alike. Personally I like the old-fashioned types better.

Peggy Webster would be the best kind of a comrade I expect, but somehow I suppose, being Irish, I could stand for a little more sentiment than she possesses."

In point of fact Terry was then thinking of Sally Ashton, by whom, since their first meeting, he had been strongly attracted. But there was no distinction in this, as Sally attracted most men. She also made most of them believe that she was filled with exquisite, womanly emotions, when, in reality she had not half the hidden depth of feeling that Peggy's finer and more sincere nature concealed.

Ralph Marshall had been listening to his two friends, without entering into the conversation, but he now shrugged his shoulders.

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"Oh you and Benton are both wrong, Brent; girls are all alike. It is only that they are better actresses than men are and can appear to be different. I'll bet Peggy Webster is as sentimental and as vain as most of them. I'll wager I can prove it to you. She is an only girl and has lived surrounded by an adoring family. I don't suppose she has ever had any man pay her the least attention. If she had she would be like all the rest."

Terry Benton laughed. "Friend Ralph is a trifle annoyed, isn't he? Hasn't Mistress Peggy been sufficiently impressed? Anyhow, Marshall, you can be pretty sure she will never change her temperament for either of us."

Ralph shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, I don't know. I'll bet you a hundred I could make her like me if I tried hard enough."

"Taken," Terry Benton replied quickly.

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Until this moment Howard Brent had been silent during the conversation which his own words had innocently provoked. However, his face had crimsoned and he was now looking rather angry.

"You men are a couple of—oh, you know well enough what I would like to call you without my saying the word," he added. "But, in any case, kindly don't consider me a third in this transaction. It is rather hard luck to have had to stay and hear this much of your conversation." He turned angrily away.

Terry Benton followed him.

"Oh, don't take a joke so seriously, Howard. Marshall is ridiculous about himself, although he is a fine enough chap in some ways. I only took up that proposition of his because I thought it would be a good thing for him to lose. He needs to be taken down by a Peggy or two."

Although the two men were walking away, it was still possible for Ralph Marshall to overhear what they were saying. He felt fairly uncomfortable.

He had spoken at first without any particular realization of the significance of his words and without any direct intention of involving himself in a wager, which certainly appeared objectionable upon the face of it. Then, as often happens, the situation had gotten beyond him.

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He wished now that he had never mentioned Peggy. It was bad form for men to discuss a girl with other men, and certainly it was a good deal worse form to have made so absurd a bet concerning one. It was Benton's own fault. He should not have taken him up so quickly; he should have understood that he had spoken without thinking.

Nevertheless Ralph was not sure that he would not still like to prove to Terry that he could make good.

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CHAPTER VII

A STUDY IN TEMPERAMENTS

"But, Vera, you must not continue waiting on Billy in this fashion; he is ever so much better and perfectly able to look after himself."

Mrs. Webster had just walked across from where she had been sitting with her sister sewing, to a particularly beautiful spot where Vera Lageloff and Billy Webster had been spending the afternoon together. It had been cool during the morning but, with the coming of the afternoon, the sun had shone clearly and warmly.

Vera and Billy had chosen a place near the foot of the hill, down which ran the stream of water that supplied the camp, and near the tiny lake which the Camp Fire girls had conventionally named their wishing well.

Here, in spite of the warm weather, they had built a small camp fire, for there was a quantity of wood from the pine trees nearby.

They had been together for an hour or so, and Mrs. Webster had just observed Vera make the third trip to their group of tents and then return to Billy.

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She was standing now with her arms filled with papers and magazines, which she had just secured.

Vera laughed. "Oh, Billy hates to move, and I don't," she replied a little apologetically.

But Billy, who should have been the apologetic one, did not appear so in the least.

He was sitting on an Indian blanket which had been spread by Vera before their small fire, smiling placidly at his mother and friend.

"Don't you think people ought to be allowed to do what they like, Mother?"

Billy did not ask this question in a humorous fashion, as one might suppose under the circumstances, but quite seriously. However, Billy nearly always appeared serious, and yet one never could be sure what spirit hid itself behind his large, abstracted blue eyes.

Mrs. Webster sighed as she sat down beside him. Billy was the least satisfying of her three children and she made no pretense of understanding him. Yet his illness and his

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physical need of her brought him nearer to her than any one in the world.

"I think people ought to do what they like only when they can be perfectly fair to others at the same time," she answered gently.

This time Billy smiled. "If one is wanting a thing very hard for oneself, it is not always easy to remember other people; although, of course, it is right," he agreed unexpectedly. "Still I don't believe I am doing Vera any serious injustice. She does a great deal more of the Camp Fire work than any of the other girls, and yet none of you realize it. The difference between us is that I do realize what she does for me."

Vera had also taken a place on the ground with her two companions and Billy now reached over and took hold of her hand.

There was nothing sentimental or emotional in the unusual friendship between the boy and girl, although their devotion to each other was so apparent, and neither ever made the least effort at concealing it. But it was the kind of affection that sometimes exists, even if but rarely, between a brother and sister, and only when the sister is older and the brother unusual.

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Vera's hand was the larger of the two, or at least it appeared so, because the palm was broad and the fingers long and capable. It was the hand of a person whose ancestors had worked with their hands, while Billy's hand was extraordinarily thin and delicate, with blue veins and long tapering fingers. Vera continued to hold it in hers as unconsciously as a mother might have done.

"Oh, don't worry about me, please, Mrs. Webster?" she protested smiling. "What I most want is some day to be able to do some kind of work that is worth while. Billy is quite right; I do like work, although I don't call the little things I do for him by any such name."

Mollie Webster studied the two friends more closely than they appreciated. Although fond of Vera she could not help, motherlike, being slightly jealous of the friendship between Vera and her son. She accepted the fact of Vera's better understanding of him; or if not understanding, at least her complete sympathy.

"I don't believe I was worrying about you, Vera; I must be truthful," Mrs. Webster continued. "You see, mothers are pretty selfish, so it was Billy I was actually thinking of. I don't feel worried over your future; you'll be sure to turn out all right, if you have the proper opportunities. But I don't know what will become of Billy. You see, dear you are so—so—"

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"Lazy," Billy drawled, good humoredly, finishing his mother's sentence. "Say the dreadful word; I don't mind."

Mrs. Webster shook her head. "I know you don't worry over your future, and that is the worst of it. You don't ever try to think of what you wish to do. Dan has already decided to be a scientific farmer, as his father is, and will study agriculture at college. But you, you won't ever talk of what you would like to do. You know you won't even exert yourself enough at the present

time to get as strong as you should. If you would only walk about more. You might have ridden this afternoon with the others. Dan and Sally both said they would come back with you as soon as you wished, or if Vera had gone with you, she would have seen to you."

Mrs. Mollie Webster's tone was plaintive. She was apt to be plaintive in talking to Billy; it was so difficult to make him do what she wished. It was not that he opposed her, only that he did not seem to be convinced, or even aroused, by other people's opinions of him.

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He now remained placidly staring up at the sky.

"Don't you think it foolish to worry over the future when one may not have any future?" He asked this question in his usual impersonal way, and then added, as if he were surprised at his own sudden conviction, "Do you know I believe I might have a good deal of energy if anything ever strikes me as important enough to make me exert myself."

Vera laughed. "I wonder what that will ever be? But I wouldn't worry, if I were you, Mrs. Webster. Billy will be a great writer, some day. He has such queer ideas and is so original."

Billy drew away his hand.

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"Don't be tiresome and conventional, Vera, like everybody else," he remarked pettishly, like the spoiled boy he was. "I have told you a dozen times, whenever you mention that idea of yours to me, that I don't want to write. It must require a dreadful lot of work. Predict that future for Bettina Graham; she yearns after authorship. I would rather talk than write any day; it is so much easier."

Mrs. Webster flushed and looked annoyed, but Vera paid no attention to Billy's protests. She seldom did.

However, their conversation was interrupted by several Camp Fire members who rode up and dismounted by the side of Mrs. Burton who had stopped her reading and gotten up to greet them.

The girls had been away for the past two hours, leaving no one in camp save the group of four and Marie, who was busy in one of the tents.

Mr. Simpson had gone with them more as chaperon than guide. He rode in first, attired in his rusty outfit, and looking much more himself than on his first and last essay into the realms of fashion. Not once since the evening of Marie's refusal of him had he been seen in his "store clothes."

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He was followed by Bettina Graham and Howard Brent, and behind them came Sally Ashton and Terry Benton. Later, Alice and Gerry returned leading their burros and talking to the two young men beside them, who had come over with the others from the hotel for the ride. They were both acquaintances of Howard Brent's.

"Where are Peggy and Ralph Marshall?" Mrs. Burton inquired of Bettina five minutes later, seeing that they were the only two members of the riding party who had so far failed to appear.

The young men were to stay for supper and the girls had returned early in order to make the necessary preparations for them. They had been promised a particularly superior feast as an evidence of the Camp Fire prowess.

Bettina frowned. "I don't know why Ralph and Peggy did not keep up with the rest of us. Mr. Simpson insisted that we should all ride as close together as we conveniently could. But they kept dropping behind and getting off their ponies to look at views. I don't understand Peggy's intimacy with Ralph Marshall for the past few days. I did not think she liked him much better than I did until just lately. Howard Brent is ten times nicer and likes her ever so much, but she will have nothing to do with him. He has to accept my poor society as a substitute and he gets dreadfully bored with me. I know so little about outdoor things compared to Peggy."

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Bettina's tones were distinctly aggrieved. She and Peggy were such devoted friends that she was annoyed at Peggy's sudden friendship with a person whom she thought so ordinary and uninteresting, as she considered Ralph.

"He and Peggy are about as unlike as two people ever were in this world," she added crossly.

"Oh, Ralph is nice enough, 'Tall Princess;' you never were altogether fair in your estimate of him. Some people in this world must be frivolous, and Ralph has never been up against a difficulty, or in fact against anything that might develop his character," Mrs. Burton answered.

Polly Burton put her arm across Bettina's slender shoulders, giving her a slight squeeze. She was recalling how she used to feel as a girl when Bettina's mother's—then Betty Ashton—developed an interest in people, whom she—then Polly O'Neill—never felt worthy of her.

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"Besides Peggy may do Ralph good," she continued. "Peggy is fine, and Ralph—well, Ralph is not fine, Bettina, although I do not dislike him as you do. I suppose they will be along in a few minutes. Peggy would not like to shirk her share of the work tonight. If anything has happened, however, I think it may be Peggy who will have to look after Ralph."

Bettina then went away to take off her riding clothes and get into her ceremonial Camp Fire dress. Mrs. Burton continued watching for Peggy's return. She carefully avoided coming in contact with her sister, hoping that Mrs. Webster would not observe Peggy's absence, as the camp was now more or less in an uproar with the girls' effort to get dinner and their guests to render assistance, which usually consisted in getting in the way.

Polly tried not to be uneasy, as she thoroughly believed in Peggy's ability to take care of herself and other people as well. However, when nearly an hour passed and she and Ralph had not appeared, she began to grow uncomfortable.

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About an eighth of a mile away there was a shelter among the trees where Mr. Simpson looked after the camp burros and provisions.

Thinking to ask him what should be done in order to find the wayfarers, Mrs. Burton slipped

apart from the others and started along a narrow path through the woods.

But a few yards along the way she heard Peggy's and Ralph's voices and waited for them to come up to her.

They were walking in single file and also leading their burros.

Peggy was in front. When Mrs. Burton caught sight of her, Peggy's eyes were shining and her cheeks glowing with color after a fashion they had when she was especially happy or excited.

She passed the bridle of her burro to Ralph.

"Take him to Mr. Simpson along with your's, won't you, Ralph, please, and then come on to camp?" she asked.

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Then she slid her arm into her aunt's.

"Don't be cross, Tante; you look dreadfully severe," she murmured, rubbing her cheek against Mrs. Burton's shoulder in a funny, boyish way she had had ever since she was a tiny girl. "I know we are late, but Ralph and I have had an adventure since the others left. We did not intend to be so long in returning."

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CHAPTER VIII

POSSIBILITIES

"It really was exciting for a few moments, Billy. I do wish you had been with us; you would have known better what to do and say to the men!" Peggy Webster exclaimed.

Sitting bolt upright, Billy Webster was actually looking animated—his eyes and color bright with a peculiar transparency.

"It may be exciting for them before the matter is settled," he replied. "Funny for you and Marshall to have run into a place of that character, when I thought we were living out in the wilderness. Please tell me exactly what happened, Peg?"

Peggy chanced to be sitting alone beside her brother about five minutes after her return to camp, Ralph Marshall not yet having come back from his errand. Mrs. Webster and Vera had both departed to help with dinner, suggesting that Peggy remain and rest after her long ride, as they would attend to her share of the work.

Peggy sat with her shoulders hunched up and, leaning forward, talked quickly.

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"Odd, wasn't it? Ralph and I had dropped behind the others and were talking. We had ridden away from the neighborhood of the canyons through the pine woods. Then, quite suddenly, we came upon a group of tents. You see we had gotten off the road and in some places had gone single file in between the trees."

"I don't wonder they were surprised at your turning up," Billy commented.

"Surprised!" Peggy's tone was reflective. "I think that is putting the case pretty mildly, Billy. The men were extremely angry at our riding calmly into what they doubtless believed their secret hiding place. Their tents were in a little hollow, with hills and trees around them. The men were sitting before the fire smoking, when I came upon them. As I chanced to be in front, one of them jumped up, said something ugly, and then grabbed my bridle."

Billy Webster frowned. "Were you frightened, Peggy?"

The girl had dropped back on the ground and was now lying with her hands clasped under her head.

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"No, I don't think so; I was too amazed. Besides, Ralph Marshall rode up almost at once and explained that we had lost our way. The trouble now is, I am so curious. The men were very rough and were undoubtedly in hiding or they would never have behaved so strangely. Yet surely we are past the days in the West when stage coaches and trains used to be held up, aren't we? Besides, these men had women and children with them."

Some one was at this instant coming toward them and Billy glanced around. It was odd how much animation, even determination, had lately come into his ordinarily listless face and manner.

"I'll ride over tomorrow and find out who the men are and why they are hiding so near here," he announced as calmly as if such an action had been a daily proceeding on his part. "Marshall, you'll tell me how to get there?" he added, for Ralph, during the moment, had joined them.

He now gazed down with unconscious condescension at the younger boy.

"Oh, I don't think this group of fellows exactly in your line of business, Billy. If I had not said I would not, I should like to report their hiding place to the nearest sheriff. But, as long as your sister was with me, we simply had to slide out of an uncomfortable situation as easily as we could. I must say she did not mind so much as I did."

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Ralph now looked upon Peggy with an expression no girl or woman could fail to enjoy. It was veiled, of course, and only revealed a reasonable degree of admiration, yet there was nothing excessive and certainly nothing sentimental in it. For Ralph had the wisdom which belongs to the people who know how to make themselves agreeable. He understood something of the temperament of the person he was trying to win. From the first he had known that he must appear to be simple and genuine with Peggy Webster in order to cultivate her intimate friendship and affection.

However, Ralph was sincere. He had admired the calm manner in which Peggy had accepted a disagreeable situation. The type of girl, with whom he usually preferred spending his time, would probably have been both frightened and cross, and would doubtless have blamed him for getting her into an awkward position.

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But Peggy had been perfectly reasonable.

Indeed, it never seemed to have occurred to her to pretend that she was not equally responsible for their straying off from the others, because she had wished it as much as he had. But, then, Peggy Webster apparently never pretended anything! She was too straightforward to be considered attractive by the men who wish for greater subtleties in their girl friends, as Ralph believed he did.

Nevertheless, it was agreeable to ride quietly back to camp, discussing their recent experience as one would have discussed it with another fellow, simply from the standpoint of curiosity.

The men they had come upon so unexpectedly had looked like an ugly group. However, they had realized that their encounter with them had been an accident, and they had not been particularly rude to Peggy. It would be difficult for any one to be, Ralph decided, as he sat down beside her.

Peggy had gotten halfway up and her dark hair was tumbled about her flushed face. She had not thought to go away and dress as the other girls had, although her costume was dusty from her ride. She had not even a proper share of vanity and self-consciousness.

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Nevertheless, Peggy was genuinely pleased at Ralph's coming directly to her and Billy and taking his place beside them without stopping to talk with any one else.

In the last few days she had found herself liking Ralph very much. In a way this was odd, for she had known him for some time without caring much about him in one way or the other. However, then Ralph had never paid her any particular attention; only recently had he seemed to like being with her more than with any of the other girls. Peggy honestly thought the other Camp Fire girls far more attractive than she could ever be.

Then Ralph did not seem to her nothing but a society fellow, although this was what Bettina Graham insisted. At least he played a good game of tennis, for Peggy had been over to his hotel on two mornings to play with him.

"If we dance this evening, won't you save most of your dances for me?" Ralph leaned over to murmur in a low voice, so that their other companion could not hear.

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And Billy did not overhear, although he arose at this moment and stood staring with a queer, understanding look in his blue eyes at his sister and her friend. "I suppose it won't hurt Peg a great deal to wake up," he whispered to himself. "Anyhow, it would do no good for me to interfere."

But Ralph this time had made a mistake, for Peggy's dark eyes were gazing at him humorously.

"Don't be absurd, Ralph," she returned as good-naturedly and in as matter-of-fact a tone as if she had been talking to one of her brothers. "You know perfectly that I don't dance very well; certainly not half so well as Bettina, and as you never ask me to dance with you more than once on most evenings, I don't understand your

sudden change of heart. Really you don't have to be good to me on account of our adventure, because I enjoyed it. Suppose you get Sally or Gerry to amuse you now. I must help a little with dinner."

Then Peggy and Billy walked off together leaving Ralph to pull himself up and, feeling a little aggrieved, to follow Peggy's advice.

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The Camp Fire table was made of long pine planks set on four logs sawed smooth and to a proper height.

The somewhat informal table was covered with a beautiful damask cloth which the Camp Fire guardian had brought West with her for just such festival occasions. In the center and filled with wild flowers was the great bowl of Indian pottery which she had purchased from old Nampu in her hut near the Painted Desert.

Although it was not yet dark a big camp fire was burning, made bright with pine cones and branches of pine. In the sombre old trees surrounding the open space were a dozen or more golden lanterns. Before dinner could be finished the early darkness would have descended, so the lanterns were merely a preparation for this event.

The girls kept rushing from the kitchen tent and the camp fire with great platters of corn and of freshly baked corn bread and roasted potatoes. At one end of the table was a baked ham and at the other a big dish of broiled chicken. The ham had been secured from the hotel, but if Marie Pepin had not yet learned to enjoy a camping existence, she was true to her French blood and was a wonderful outdoor cook. Marie alone could broil chicken in a perfect fashion above an open camp fire.

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Everybody was by this time more than ready for dinner yet they were kept waiting for Dan Webster's return.

Shortly after his return from the ride Dan had disappeared, saying that he would be back in a short time. At least he had made this statement to Mrs. Burton, for no one else had discussed his intentions with him. And she it was who kept urging that they wait dinner a moment or so longer.

This was most unlike the ordinarily impatient Mrs. Burton; moreover it was a Sunrise Camp Fire rule that meals should wait on no one. However, this rule was not intended as a disagreeable one to punish the offender, but only to protect the guiltless. For, if one were unavoidably late, it was a simple enough matter to find oneself something to eat, and far more comfortable than the sensation of having kept everyone else waiting.

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However, just as dinner was served without him Dan Webster drove into camp and the mystery was explained. Seated beside him was the girl who had been an unexpected visitor a few mornings before.

She was using a crutch and Dan had to help her across to a seat beside Mrs. Burton and then took his place on her other side.

Marta Clark was wearing a little grey-green dress, evidently her best, although it was both shabby and old-fashioned. In it she looked tiny and pale; nevertheless, both Mrs. Burton and Dan felt the girl's charm.

Her eyes seemed to have lights behind them as they shone so oddly, and her lips were a deep red.

"It is awfully good of you to have me here," she whispered quietly to Mrs. Burton. "You see, I have been living in a tent with my brother for a whole year and this is the first time I have had a meal with any one else."

She slipped one hand over and touched Mrs. Burton's.

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"Of course, I know you think it stupid and absurd of me, but you can't guess what it means to me to be sitting so close beside you. I feel as if I must be dreaming. I have so wanted to know a great actress."

Polly Burton gave the girl's hand a little friendly pressure in return.

"Then you must wake up," she said firmly. "You see the girls in my Camp Fire group don't think of me as an actress, but only as a more or less successful Camp Fire guardian. I don't like stage-struck girls, even if I was one myself once upon a time, as my sister reminded me. Besides, why should you care, child, anything about me or my work. I really don't see why it should matter to you whether I am an actress or a—well let us say a sewing woman. I should probably have been as unsuccessful at that as any one could be."

Mrs. Burton laughed and Marta made no reply. Instead she was wise enough to change the subject immediately.

"In any case you have been wonderfully kind. I am sure I don't know why, but sometimes it seems as if the wrong things in this life are rewarded, such as my coming here uninvited to see you. I wonder if it was selfish tonight to leave Miss Deal to look after my brother."

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As some one had at that moment distracted Mrs. Burton's attention by speaking to her from the other end of the table, Marta turned to Dan.

"You have been kindest of all," she remarked with the sudden gentleness she used as unexpectedly as her sudden flares of temper.

Both amused Dan. He had seen the new girl more frequently than any of the other members of their Camp Fire as, for the past few days he had driven one or two of them over each day to call upon Marta and her brother, or more especially upon Ellen Deal. The visits were naturally not always to the two comparative strangers, but to find out if Ellen were happy and comfortable in her self-appointed task of caring for two invalids unknown to her until a short time before.

After dinner, feeling responsible for their guest, Dan sat beside her while the others danced. But, by and by, Sally Ashton, who did not enjoy having Dan completely absorbed by any one

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else, came and asked him to dance with her. And Marta insisted that he should.

She was not alone, however, for in a short time Peggy joined her. For some reason Peggy had decided not to dance a single time during the evening. She was not sure of her own reasons, but gave the excuse that she was tired.

She was glad now to have the opportunity of remaining with their guest. For, several times during the evening, Howard Brent had seated himself beside her as if he had something of importance on his mind which he wished to confide. And then he had gotten up and gone away without saying it. Peggy did not wish him to make the attempt again. She was not in a mood for confidences and really rejoiced when, at ten o'clock, all of their guests started for home.

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CHAPTER IX

AN ADVENTURE

"Very well, Vera, if you won't go with me, I will go alone," Billy Webster announced. "It is not too far for you to go back by yourself."

The two of them were riding slowly away from the Sunrise camp on the following day.

Vera looked distressed.

"It isn't fair of you, Billy, to put me in this position. You know someone ought to be with you. Won't you let me at least return and tell your mother what we intend doing," Vera argued. But she continued riding even as she protested. She was just a little behind Billy and he now turned to look at her.

"Come on then, dear. You are not responsible, and whatever happens the blame is mine. But nothing is going to happen or I would not have you with me. So what is the use of worrying mother? What Peggy told me yesterday interests me and I mean to find out more about what those men are planning to do. No one thinks it extraordinary or tries to prevent Dan from going out to hunt any kind of wild beasts he is lucky enough to discover. But, because I happen to be interested in hunting out human beings, my family is always interfering. I haven't the least intention of hunting them with a gun."

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Billy smiled half seriously and half humorously and then turned his face away.

But Vera Lageloff and the other people who knew him intimately always understood what this expression meant. Billy had made up his mind; and nothing short of physical force would compel him to stop doing what he had determined upon.

Moreover, Vera rarely opposed him. However unformed his purposes and ideals, however he might appear to other people only as an obstinate and ill-balanced boy, he was Vera's knight. She, at least, believed in him.

She knew that all his thoughts and all his ideals for the future were bound up in his desire to make life easier for the people whom he did not believe were having a fair deal. Of course, Billy was a youthful and rather ignorant socialist, but for those reasons he was perhaps the more enthusiastic.

Certainly his own family did not understand him and knew but little of what was going on inside his mind; but this was not their fault so much as Billy's. He was sensitive to ridicule, like many dreamers, and, moreover, he never felt that he had the strength for argument. It was easier for him to do the thing he wished and take the consequences, rather than argue and explain. It was enough if Vera and a few other friends realized that his laziness was in part physical delicacy, and that he only acted when he thought the result worth while.

In a way it was odd that Mr. and Mrs. Webster should have had so queer a son and not strange that they should not understand him. Billy was one of the persons whom no one ever fully understands and who never fully understands himself, because he was intended to travel by a different route than the most of us. There was a streak of genius in the O'Neill family. Polly O'Neill, now Mrs. Burton, was never like other people, besides possessing a great gift as an actress. Perhaps Billy was only odd without her genius, but the future alone could answer this question.

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To Vera he now appeared a young Sir Galahad riding in front of her. The boy's hat was off, his fair hair curling over his white forehead, he was pale and thin from his recent illness. But it was a fact that Billy usually had strength for the things he wished to do.

Naturally, Billy Webster had not developed his socialistic ideas alone. Unknown to his parents there had been a laborer on his father's place, who had once been a school teacher in Russia and because of his views had been compelled to leave. He had been accustomed to come often to Vera's father's house, and when Billy was present to talk for hours on his revolutionary propaganda. Moreover, Billy also had a teacher at the High School who, although saner than the Russian, also wished to make the world over according to his own plan. Besides, as Billy was not strong enough to be outdoors so much as the rest of his family, he had spent many quiet hours in reading books on social questions.

"How do you expect to find your way to the place, Billy?" Vera asked, after five or ten minutes' more of riding in silence.

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Again the boy turned his head, laughing cheerfully.

"Sure I don't know, but I pumped Peggy as much as I could this morning without actually having my plan found out. Besides, I am trusting somewhat to luck. I meant to get some information out of Marshall when he reached camp this morning, but he and Peg went off somewhere to talk. Queer, their being intimate friends all of a sudden, Vera, don't you think? I agree with Bettina Graham, I never knew two people so unlike. And I don't know whether I admire Marshall."

Vera frowned. She cared for Peggy more perhaps than for any of the other Camp Fire girls and she also had been a little surprised at her recent behavior. Yet she answered sensibly:

"It isn't important, you know, Billy, whether you like Ralph Marshall or not, so long as Peggy does. You know you have said a hundred times you did not think outsiders had a right to interfere with friendships. And Peggy's pretty clever! If she likes Ralph there must be more to him than the rest of us can see. She don't like many people."

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Billy nodded. "Yes, that is why I am puzzled. One does not expect nonsense from Peg. And Ralph is rather inclined toward it with most girls. Still you are right, Vera, and I feel a little snubbed—like the fellow always does who is told to practice what he preaches."

"I didn't mean to be disagreeable."

Billy laughed back. "No, you never do and you never are. But, come, let's cross the road here. We must manage to get lost in the right place—just as Ralph and Peggy did. But do you know, Vera, something already tells me that I am not going to be happy this afternoon? Fact is, I am abominably hungry and we can't have been riding an hour."

"Let's stop, then, and rest for a little while," the girl suggested. She had been afraid that her companion might grow overtired, as he had taken no long ride before. "You see, I had an idea that we might both develop an appetite, as lunch is so early, so I brought along lots of sandwiches."

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Billy uttered a boyish whoop of delight which had nothing visionary or unselfish in it.

"Trump!" he declared getting off his pony almost at once and then turning to help Vera.

They were in the pine woods, so it was easy enough to find an agreeable resting place under the trees.

In the most natural fashion, after Vera sat down, Billy stretched himself out resting his head in her lap. It was the same as if she had been Peggy, except that he honestly believed she cared for him more than his sister did.

Then he deliberately stuffed himself with sandwiches and talked, as Billy adored doing when he could find a sympathetic audience.

"I just want to find out what those fellows are in hiding for, Vera—not for any special reason," he insisted. "You see, it gets a little dull, just lying around all day in the sun. I like scenery, but I like it as a background. I am afraid I want a little—a little more—"

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"Excitement," Vera finished the sentence.

Three-quarters of an hour later Billy Webster had discovered the secret camp.

He and Vera were riding quietly when they came to the circle of hills which Peggy had described. Stopping their ponies they heard the sound of low voices before seeing any one.



"THEY HEARD THE SOUND OF LOW VOICES BEFORE
SEEING ANY ONE."

Dismounting, Billy asked Vera to wait until his return.

It seemed best that she should allow him to go on his adventure alone, and yet she watched his slender, boyish figure disappear, feeling wretchedly uneasy.

What absurd reason had Billy for wishing to take part in some trouble which assuredly was no affair of his? If anything happened to him, Vera knew that she would always blame herself.

But Billy was entirely unalarmed and, although he was supposed to be timid, he was not even nervous.

He walked straight ahead with his hands in his pockets and a friendly, curious expression in his big, clear eyes.

Billy could not fully explain the reasons for his interest. The excuses he had made of being bored, of wishing to help if the men were in trouble, or if possible to prevent trouble if it were brewing, these were merely somewhat impudent inventions of his. For, after all, what could he do in any case?

The fact of the matter was that Billy simply had been seized by an overwhelming desire to find out what was taking place, and was more inclined than he should have been to yield to his

own wishes.

Just as they had been doing the afternoon before, the men were again sitting about a smouldering camp fire, smoking and talking.

Without being observed Billy walked quietly up to them.

The next instant one of the men swung round and cursed him.

Without the least show of fear or anger the boy waited until the fellow had tired himself out. Then, instead of running away, as they plainly wished him to do, he walked a few steps nearer the group.

"I am tired; would you mind my sitting here with you a while?" he asked in a matter-of-fact voice. He seemed so friendly and so totally unafraid that the men must have been favorably impressed. In any case, as no one answered at once, he dropped to the ground between two of the roughest of the group.

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Billy had already observed that the men were not of the character Peggy and Ralph suspected them of being.

One of the men now laughed and, leaning over, thrust his evil smelling pipe at the delicate boy. And Billy, who had never smoked a single whiff of anything in his life, took the pipe gravely, put it to his lips drawing in the smoke with several hard puffs. It made him feel slightly ill, yet he never flinched. When he gave it back the man appeared more friendly.

A little later Billy asked two or three simple questions and some one answered him, afterwards they went on talking as if he were not there.

Certainly the boy had some quality which made certain types of people trust him.

Fifteen minutes passed. Resting in a hiding place they had chosen, Vera grew more and more uneasy. If nothing had happened to prevent, why had Billy not returned? If he were all right certainly it was selfish of him not to care for her anxiety and dullness.

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But, then, Billy was selfish about little things and Vera recognized the fact. One had to accept this fault in him, feeling there were other characteristics which made one willing to endure it. In big matters the girl believed he had wonderful stores of unselfishness.

Half an hour afterwards Billy came strolling toward her as nonchalantly as he had gone away. Only his eyes were brighter and his expression less boyish.

"We must hurry to get back to camp before dark," he said, without apologizing for the delay. "I'll tell you what I found out while we are riding home; but, of course, I understand I have your promise, Vera, never to repeat anything I tell you—no matter what takes place."

Vera nodded silently. She was accustomed to Billy's confidences and did not take them all seriously, and this one did not appear as especially important.

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"The men have been working on the railroad out here and have gone on a strike. The railroad has refused to come to terms, but they don't seem to be planning to go away. They are not exactly in hiding, only they want to be left alone until they decide what they are going to do next."

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CHAPTER X

A GOOD SAMARITAN

Ellen Deal came out into the September sunshine with a breakfast tray in her hand. The tray chanced to be a flat pine board, but it was covered with a neat little paper napkin. And, although the china on it was rough and failed to match, the aroma of the coffee, the fragrance of the freshly broiled bacon, made one indifferent to details.

The tall young man, who had been lying back in a steamer chair mournfully reading a torn newspaper several days old, suddenly straightened up and smiled.

The instant after he had taken the tray from Ellen's hands his face clouded.

"Isn't your breakfast all right?" she asked, a little furrow appearing in her forehead. Ellen's expression was nearly always serious, but it was even more so now. Although it was so early in the morning and she had been cooking, she looked exquisitely neat in a fresh white blouse, a dark khaki skirt and one of her big hospital aprons. Her sandy-colored hair, a little redder from the past week's outdoors, was drawn English fashion into a kind of bun at the back of her head. But, although Ellen tried to be prim, and although she could control her face, she had rebellious hair. One knows the kind—it would break out into little ripples on her forehead and at the back of her neck. And her skin, where it was not exposed, had the peculiar whiteness and beauty that belongs to her type of coloring.

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The young man in the chair laughed at her question.

"My breakfast is perhaps the most perfect thing that ever happened, or at least that has happened to me in many a day," he answered. "You see I have been living under my Sister Marta's ministrations for a year, and Marta thinks herself above cooking. She prefers to follow the fine arts. Truth of the matter is the child has never been taught anything and has never had the right kind of feminine influence. You see, my mother and father died when Marta was a little girl and she and I have spent our lives in boarding houses. I don't mean to criticise her; the child has made a terrible struggle to take care of me, and it has been awfully hard on her, staying out here in the wilds with a hopeless stick of a brother. You can't imagine what it means—her discovery of the Camp Fire girls and your kindness. As for you, Miss Deal; well, I haven't words to express my gratitude. It positively takes away my appetite for breakfast because I feel under such obligation to you."

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Ellen flushed uncomfortably. Her companion was a Southerner and talked easily and charmingly. He might say he did not know how to express his gratitude, but this was not true, for few hours passed in the day without his showing it in one way or another.

However, Ellen had not the gift of self-expression, and cordiality from another seemed to freeze her up. It was this trait of her character which had made Mrs. Burton not care for her much at first, and which kept her from greater intimacy with the girls, except Alice Ashton, who was not unlike her.

Now, instead of appearing gracious, she looked annoyed.

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"I have asked you several times not to mention gratitude," she returned, staring ahead and turning undeniably red. "If I must tell you the truth, I like it better here than at our own camp. That is, I like being useful—not your camp itself—there is no comparison."

This time her companion showed embarrassment.

"Naturally there is no comparison. My sister's and my arrangements are of the simplest and I have no doubt Mrs. Burton's camp leaves nothing to be desired. That is one of the causes of my gratitude. I am afraid we have not been able to make you comfortable, though there is little doubt of what you have done for us."

Robert Clark glanced around his own quarters. Even outdoors there was a pleasanter sense of order and comfort. An outdoor camp can be made the most disorderly place in the world.

This morning the fire was burning in the right place so that the smoke blew away from the two tents—not toward them. There was no litter of paper and of cans; no broken sticks cluttering the ground. The wood was neatly piled; the very earth itself appeared to have been swept.

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"I wish you would eat your breakfast," Ellen replied curtly.

Then she watched her companion so carefully there was no mistaking her interest, even if her manners were somewhat abrupt.

However, her companion was not in the slightest degree offended. In some way he seemed to understand Ellen's curtness and her domineering attitude. Perhaps, if she had cared more for herself she would have tried to make herself more agreeable.

"Of course I'll go back as soon as Marta is strong enough to take proper care of you," she announced a few moments later as she arose to take away the empty breakfast dishes. "I know my being here makes the place more crowded, but I really would like to stay a few days longer and let Marta have a good time. She is better now and can get about after a fashion, and the Camp Fire girls want her to go on a few of their excursions. Mrs. Burton has taken a fancy to her, I think."

"Then Marta will be in a seventh heaven. Only, I hope Mrs. Burton will get the nonsense out of

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her head that she wishes to be an actress. I am afraid, however, just the sight of her may have the opposite effect. You see, Marta and I used to plan to set the world on fire. Most youthful persons do, I was to be a great author and she a great actress. You see what our plans have come to."

The young man's tone was utterly despondent.

"I see nothing at all except that you are ill and have come out to Arizona to get well. You have been here a year and I presume you are already better." There was not the least trace of sympathy in Ellen's tone.

"As for being a great author, you seem to write all day as it is; so I don't see how your illness interferes. I don't suppose you were becoming famous as a newspaper reporter."

Rob Clark sat upright, his whole face changing, both in color and expression.

"Miss Ellen Deal, you are the best tonic as well as the best nurse I have ever run across. I believe I would have a fighting chance in more ways than one if you were going to stay in my neighborhood until I do get well."

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He had spoken spontaneously and without thinking beforehand. Of course there had been no serious meaning in his words.

But Ellen continued to stand holding the tray and looking at him.

"I am seriously considering staying with you, if you will allow me," she answered so unexpectedly, that her companion could only stare at her incredulously. "In the last few days I have decided that there is no reason why you should not recover if the right care is taken of you. But I doubt Marta's ability. She is too untrained and too undisciplined. I am glad she is to come into our Camp Fire circle, where she ought to learn a great deal that will be valuable for her. But it will take some time."

Robert Clark reached up and took the tray away from Ellen.

"Please sit down again for a moment," he asked, pointing to the camp chair she had just occupied.

"What you have just said does me more good than you imagine. My sister and I haven't many friends; we have always been poor, and an ancestry that has not made good in the last generation does not count for much nowadays—not even in the South. Then, you are very kind to try to brace me up; but a fellow is a quitter who breaks down in his early twenties and has to live on the money a few friends and relations furnish him and his sister. So you see, even if I would give my right hand to have you remain with us until you get really tired, why we just can't afford it. A nurse like you, Miss Deal, is a luxury no man is rich enough to deserve."

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Although Ellen had sat down as her companion requested, she did not seem to be paying much attention to his words. But, at the last sentence, she frowned.

"Don't be absurd. Of course, I know you can't

afford the expense of a trained nurse or you would have had one. You haven't even a cook, and a cook may be more important than a nurse in your present condition. But I know how to cook as well as nurse. I have known ever since I was a little girl. New England girls are brought up sensibly. And I am not a trained nurse. At least I am not a graduate. I have simply been staying out here in the West as a guest of Mrs. Burton until I got over a slight breakdown. There was nothing the matter with me but being tired, and I feel splendid now."

Ellen stopped a moment and seemed to be thinking deeply.

"I don't see why you can't let me stay here for a while with you and your sister without paying me. I have accepted Mrs. Burton's hospitality when I didn't even know her. I thought I might be useful in case any of the Camp Fire girls were ill, but they keep perfectly well. I think I am tired being idle, and I have money enough to pay my share of expenses with you. They cannot be much."

Ellen was tactless.

Robert Clark was a Southerner and shrank from a discussion of money matters at all times. Ellen's speech had touched him where his nerves were raw.

"Thank you, very much, but your suggestion is entirely out of the question," he answered coldly. He had a sensitive, well-bred face, made more so by illness. Now his manner showed a hauteur of which he was wholly unconscious.

Ellen felt strangely ill at ease. She had a sensation of shrinking, of shriveling up, inside her. Then, to her intense anger, her eyes filled with tears. She hated herself for having hurt her companion and she hated him for having hurt her. But, most of all, she was horribly ashamed of her own tactlessness—her fashion of making people dislike her when she had intended being kind.

"I am sorry," she said a little huskily in spite of her efforts to speak calmly, "I did not mean to force myself upon you and your sister. Of course you will be happier alone, and I am sure you will soon be stronger."

What the young man would have answered could not be known, for just then Marta came out of her tent. She still limped a little but was not using a crutch.

Her eccentric, somewhat irregular face was radiant, and she was wearing her same best grey-green dress.

"When do you think the Camp Fire party will come for me, Miss Deal? You are an angel to stay here and let me go on this expedition with them. I am so happy I would like to dance with one leg, even if the other is slightly out of commission. But what is the matter, Rob; why are you looking so grouchy?"

Marta had come up close to the older girl and her brother and now surveyed him severely.

"Don't mind Rob, if he is having a tantrum, Miss

Deal. He does now and then, though I must say he has a better disposition than I have. If I were you I would just go away and leave him for a little while. When he gets lonely he is sure to behave better. Come with me, won't you, and let us see if the Camp Fire party is nearly here."

Ellen and Marta moved a few steps away. They had not gone far before they heard the old Camp Fire call.

"Wo-he-lo for work, wo-he-lo for health, wo-he-lo for love."

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CHAPTER XI

THE CANYON

"There is a song in the canyon below me,
And a song in the pines overhead,—
As the sun creeps down from the snow-line
And startles the deer from its bed;
With mountains of green all around me,
And mountains of white up above,
And mountains of blue in the distance,
I follow the trail that I love."

When the verse ceased and Peggy had turned around, there was a little burst of applause.

The little poem she had just recited was so perfectly descriptive of the scene surrounding the Camp Fire party at this moment that it was almost as if it had been created for the place and the occasion.

They had come part of the way down one of the easier trails leading to the Grand Canyon and had reached a broad, flat rock like a table-land. On it there was a growth of scrub pine; way below the deep, subdued roar of the Colorado River and beyond the blue, snow-topped hills.

Peggy was standing at the edge of the plateau of rock looking down the trail which descended lower into the canyon, when the lines of the song had occurred to her and she had spoken them aloud.

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She was one of a group of half a dozen or more persons near enough to hear what she was saying while the others were not far away in the background.

"That is charming, Peggy," Gerry declared when the applause ended. "I do envy your being able to remember a thing so delightfully appropriate. I never can at the right moment. But it isn't like you, Peggy, to be reciting poetry; one might have expected it of Bettina. I believe you are in love."

She spoke good-naturedly but with a little teasing inflection that only Gerry had at her command among the Camp Fire girls.

However, Peggy laughed and shrugged her shoulders.

"Of course I am in love. I am in love with the whole world and I never have been half so much so before in my life. Who wouldn't be in such a

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place on such a day and in such society?"

Peggy made a slight grimace and bowed to her assembled friends, but by accident her gaze rested last on Ralph Marshall's eyes and she flushed a little.

"Who of you is going a portion of the way down the trail with Ralph and me before lunch?" she asked. "Mother says she is willing if we don't go far and are depressingly careful. I have promised not to put one foot before the other without taking thought."

"Oh, your mother will trust you to me. I have asked her consent," Ralph protested.

Gerry and Sally both giggled. Ralph's speech had been made in good faith and without the least idea of a double meaning, but they were apt to be silly and sentimental on subjects they had better not have been considering while they were Camp Fire girls.

Fortunately, Peggy did not even see the point in their sudden amusement. She was waiting to have some one except Ralph Marshall reply to her question.

"I do wish you would not go, Peggy. The rest of us are satisfied with this view of the canyon for today, at least. We did not plan to go further down," Bettina Graham protested, looking anxious. "I would go with you if I dared, but you know how I hate looking down great distances."

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Peggy laughed. "Oh, you are not to come, 'Tall Princess.' We would not have you along for a great deal. Remember what a time we had with you on a much less difficult trail. But I thought some one of the others—" She turned toward Sally and Alice Ashton and their companions, Terry Benton and Howard Brent.

Terry shook his head, but for some unknown reason appeared a little uncomfortable.

"Not today, Miss Peggy. Under the circumstances I don't feel I ought to make the third."

But Peggy paid no attention to Terry Benton's refusal, because almost immediately Howard Brent interrupted him.

"I am coming along," he announced brusquely.

Peggy waved her hand.

"Good-bye; I ought to be safe with two escorts."

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Then, with Ralph Marshall in front and Howard Brent behind, the three started down the second trail.

From the fat plateau of rock a second trail descended to another ledge below. The first trail had been gentle and the Camp Fire party had come down to their present resting place without difficulty. But the second trail was a steeper and more dangerous kind.

It was cut into the side of the rock and filled with loose stones and gravel. After the first turn, the rocks on the one side rose up almost perpendicularly and descended with equal abruptness on the other.

There were other trails deeper and deeper, down toward the bottom of the canyon, but these Peggy had promised not to attempt. However, they would have taken too long a time to follow and would have required the service of a guide.

But this particular strata of rocks was still in what is known as the limestone formation. Now and then blocks of blood red showed through the scrubby patches of underbrush, and then there would be a line of grey sandstone, so that the red and grey looked like alternating ribbons.

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Twenty feet below the starting place the little party of three stopped to wave to the group above them. They had previously come down through the white wall of stone which now rose like a mountain of snow above them.

Bettina, from her place up above, could not see Peggy's face, but for two or three moments after they started down again she could see her figure.

Peggy moved with swift and certain grace. She seemed as totally unafraid and as sure of herself as her two companions. Indeed, she appeared rather more so, for there are persons with whom the art of climbing is a natural gift, and others who are extraordinarily awkward.

Ralph Marshall was in front although it was an unfortunate place for him. The rocky path was deeper than he had expected, and the stones under his feet slipped more uncertainly. The experience of descending so steep a precipice was a new and not altogether a pleasant experience. Ralph had not dreamed that one could be expected to walk down the face of a rock, but that was apparently what the three of them had set about doing.

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Yet neither Peggy nor Howard Brent made any complaint.

Now and then Ralph could hear Peggy laugh as she slipped and regained her balance.

But he had no disposition to laugh. Once or twice he thought of asking Howard Brent to exchange places with him and lead the way. They had not planned to follow this second trail for any great distance, but only to come down a short way until they discovered a possible resting place where the view of the lower walls of rock and the river would be finer.

Yet Ralph hesitated to speak to Howard Brent. They were not friendly. Indeed, Howard had avoided his society as much as possible ever since the unfortunate conversation he had held with Terry Benton in reference to Peggy. Moreover, Ralph knew that Howard was also scornful of him in other ways. He was so strong and efficient himself in outdoor matters that he considered the Eastern man almost effeminate. It was true Ralph could dance and play tennis, but he was not athletic, because he never had been fond of really strenuous sports. They had always appeared too much like work.

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Ralph now felt that he would rather come to grief than confess his nervousness to the other man. Peggy, he would not have minded. She was never disagreeable when people did not enjoy

exactly the same things she did.

Indeed, Ralph was becoming convinced that Peggy Webster was one of the finest girls he had ever known. He had set about trying to be particularly friendly with her because of his wager. But, if he had not succeeded in making Peggy like him by his attentions to her, he had certainly succeeded in making himself fond of Peggy. He had no sentimental ideas about her, as he had about many girls with whom he indulged in mild flirtations. For one thing Peggy seemed too young; for another, she was too boyish and too frank in her acceptance of his comradeship.

Personally, Ralph considered that so far he had lost his wager. Peggy Webster did not care for him in the way he had announced he could influence her to care. But he had never again mentioned the matter of his bet with Terry Benton, not feeling proud of it. However, he had still continued to devote himself to Peggy, and ostensibly for the reason he had given his two companions about ten days before.

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But, now, sliding down among the rocks, Ralph's thought was undeniably fixed upon himself. He was hoping to get out of an uncomfortable position without loss to his own dignity. He would like to have gone back to their original resting place and rejoined the rest of the Camp Fire party without descending another yard deeper into the rocky bed of the earth. But the thing was impossible and he made the best of it. Ralph Marshall was lazy, but he was not a coward. Moreover, there was no spot where one could stop and turn back. His hope lay ahead. Once they reached a flat place, he meant to suggest returning.

Two or three times Ralph felt dizzy. He had not dreamed of such weakness in himself and would not give way to it.

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Then he felt the dizziness coming on again. This time he did not care. There—just a few feet beyond—their trail widened and a ledge of rock jutted out over the precipice on their left side.

Here, at least, was a spot large enough to rest upon and to get one's breath.

Peggy Webster was perhaps only three feet behind Ralph when he made his discovery.

He walked on to the ledge of rock, beckoning her to follow. As the flattened surface was so small, he was forced to go close to the edge in order to make room for her.

And Peggy did follow him. She was standing only a few inches away when the rock Ralph was on crumbled.

His reaching out and seizing her as he fell was not cowardly—it was only instinctive.

He went over backwards, but she was facing him and was able to keep her footing an instant longer.

However, it was only an instant because, as Howard Brent saw them, Ralph and Peggy appeared to slip over the side of the precipice together.

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Howard was a few yards further back, yet in the briefest possible time he had dropped flat on his hands and knees and crawled out on the crumbling ledge.

There had been no outcry except Ralph's first exclamation of horror. But, how far down they had fallen, Howard Brent could not discover until he, too, was able to look over the side of the cliff.

Then he discovered that Peggy was only a few feet below, and that Ralph Marshall was just beneath her. But Ralph had released his clutch—it was Peggy Webster who was clinging tenaciously to him. She had managed to get one hand inside his coat, so that she was holding Ralph suspended as if he had been a wooden image.

This would not have been possible except for the fact that Peggy's other arm was wound about a small tree, growing upright among the rocks as serenely as if it had been planted in the earth.

As the girl slid down, this tree had been directly in her way, so that it was intuitive to seize hold on it. The strange fact was that Ralph Marshall had not made the same effort as he went past. But the truth was, the back of Ralph's head had struck a heavy stone as he went over and he had almost at once lost consciousness. Yet his weight was not altogether held up by Peggy. Fortunately, a rock jutting out from below gave a kind of resting place. But Peggy had to keep his body in position. When she let go Ralph must fall face forward.

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And Peggy could not hold on much longer.

Howard Brent realized that he must do something at once. Yet what was he to do?

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CHAPTER XII

THE MAN FROM ABOVE

There are times when circumstances act in one's favor with surprising quickness.

Howard Brent had scarcely a moment of wondering whether it were humanly possible that he could trust himself to crawl downward over the crumbling rock and reach his companions. By this method he might rescue Peggy, but not Ralph. He could not, of course, pull them both up together, the moment Peggy released her hold Ralph had no chance.

Howard simply did not consider the saving of Ralph first.

But he did turn his head to look up the trail for help, and he did call out as loudly as possible. They were not so far down, that some one of the Camp Fire party might not hear him. The chance was a slim one, yet every desperate chance must be taken.

Howard was greatly surprised when his call was immediately answered.

The next instant there appeared above him the wise grey head of a small burro, with a long-legged man seated on his back. But, best of all, the burro had a rope thrown carelessly about his neck.

The man and the burro did look as if they represented a special act of Providence, but the reason for their sudden appearance was a very simple one indeed.

Mrs. Burton had not known of Peggy's and Ralph's intention to go on farther down the trail, until five or ten minutes after their disappearance with Howard Brent, when Bettina came to her and mentioned the fact. Mrs. Burton had been occupied with other things and, after the safe arrival of the Camp Fire party on this plateau of rock where they were to spend the day, had gone away from the others and laid down for a few minutes.

Indeed, her eyes were closed and she was half asleep when Bettina found her. But Bettina was too uneasy not to confide in her at once.

Mrs. Burton immediately shared Bettina's anxiety. If Mrs. Webster had given her consent, it was because she knew nothing of the dangers of the rocky trails and Peggy had clouded her judgment.

But she did not go to her sister. It was Mrs. Burton's idea, as it had always been Polly O'Neill's, that Mollie should be spared whenever possible. So she found one of their guides and sent him on down the trail after the wanderers as quickly as he could be started.

The burro was to save Peggy the fatigue and danger of the ascent, and the rope was merely a safeguard in case one of the two young men should slip.

The guide was down by Howard Brent and had his rope coiled like a lasso in an incredibly short time. He had been a ranchman and the art was entirely familiar to him.

A moment later it was safely around Ralph's body and Peggy was able to let go, while the two men drew Ralph up to safety.

It was curious but it seemed more difficult for Peggy to hold on after her burden had been taken from her, than it had been before. It happens this way in life with other burdens. She was so stiff and so tired that her own volition was gone.

But, something, a something that is oftentimes stronger than one's will—an inherited instinct—made her continue her clutch on the small tree.

It was only a brief time. For with the rope now about his own waist, Howard Brent soon after crawled down to her. Holding her in one arm he climbed with the other using his feet as well and assisted by the guide from above.



"WITH THE ROPE NOW ABOUT HIS OWN WAIST, HOWARD BRENT CRAWLED DOWN TO HER."

The two men had simply laid Ralph aside in a crevice of rock above the trail, as soon as his rescue had been effected.

He was still unconscious when Peggy reached safety.

She did not feel frightened about herself—only incredibly tired. But Ralph's face frightened her.

Peggy had never seen any one unconscious before—the whiteness and the drawn look of the nose and mouth were startling.

She went over to him at once.

"Ralph," she said, shaking him gently.

Then she turned to Howard Brent.

"Is Ralph dead?" she asked quietly, yet with a queer note in her voice.

Howard stared at her.

"Oh, Lord, no," he returned, not with much show of feeling. "There is nothing the matter with Ralph except that he bumped his head as he went over. He will be all right in a little while. He was a good deal of a chump to have gone so near the edge of the cliff and more of a chump to have dragged you along with him."

Peggy did not answer. She knew, of course, that Ralph had not intended any harm should befall

her, but it was not worth while arguing the point then.

Instead, she managed to seat herself in a half upright position, but so she could get Ralph's head in her lap.

"Ralph," she kept repeating over and over in a gentle, penetrating voice. She believed her voice would somehow reach her companion's consciousness. She had the control and the sense of having braced herself to meet an emergency, which was characteristic of Peggy Webster. But there was no doubting the depth of her feeling; nor of how much affection she felt for her friend.

It was there in her face, as well, and Ralph saw it when he first opened his eyes. Howard Brent was also a witness. If Ralph had wished proof that he had won his wager and had made Peggy Webster care for him by a few weeks of careless attention, his proof was undeniable.

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Yet Ralph had no thought except gratitude and admiration. Peggy Webster was the clearest-eyed, the bravest, and the truest girl he had ever known in his life. Ralph remembered his own instinctive clutch after her and would have given five years of his life to wipe out the memory.

But Peggy was perfectly sensible and matter of fact by this time.

In her pocket she had the usual first aid Camp Fire necessities. Ralph's head was only cut and not deeply, as far as one could see. She merely bandaged it until they could reach the flat tableland above. There they would find water and whatever else was required.

In spite of his protest Ralph was made to ride the burro, with the guide ahead leading them both, and Howard assisted Peggy.

It was a sorry little party and not impressive. If Peggy had not been so tired she would have been amused at the spectacle they presented, after only about a half an hour's exploration of the Grand Canyon.

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But she really did wish to make as light of the situation as possible.

"Please don't say a great deal about how stupid Ralph and I were, Mr. Brent. That is, let us agree not to tell any more than we positively must. If mother and my aunt learn that I pitched over a cliff they will be so wretched over what might have happened to me—and did not—that it will spoil their pleasure, and perhaps everybody's. I am awfully grateful to you," she ended shyly; "of course, we would both have come to grief without you."

"No; the guide would have looked after you, and I was of no value without him," Howard Brent returned brusquely. He was in a bad temper and, although he did not wish to vent it upon Peggy, he found it almost impossible to conceal his anger.

He never had thought much of Ralph Marshall and he thought considerably less of him at present. That a girl like Peggy Webster should waste her affection upon him was annoying

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under any circumstances. But that she should do so under the particular conditions which he had heard being arranged by Ralph and Terry Benton was unendurable.

Yet Howard had not altogether made up his mind. He thought Peggy should be told of their wager and yet had not finally decided to tell her himself.

It was on the tip of his tongue to tell her at once, but here was of course neither the time nor the place. She was such a plucky little person and looked so used up, although insisting that she was perfectly fit. Howard had suggested that he carry her a part of the way, but Peggy had only laughed at him.

Nevertheless, the young man felt perfectly capable of doing it and he probably was. He was four or five years older than Peggy Webster and really had believed, ever since their first meeting, that he would like her for a friend. He had no sister of his own, but if he had had one, Howard Brent felt that he would have been proud to have her like Peggy.

In the last ten days he had been made wretchedly uncomfortable by her innocent straightforwardness in accepting Ralph Marshall's attentions. Therefore, as he considered the confession must be made, he might as well meet the situation. Later in the day when Peggy had rested, Howard at length concluded he must tell her himself. There was no one else for the unpleasant task.

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But during their walk up the trail Howard did but very little talking and Peggy was grateful. She did wish to appear as self-controlled and as indifferent to her experience as she could, before rejoining her mother and friends. Bettina and her aunt might be angry as well as alarmed, for she should not have insisted upon going down the second trail against Bettina's advice and her aunt's knowledge.

Nevertheless, there was considerable excitement when the three adventurers returned. And, because of the injury to his head, all day Howard Brent had to see Ralph being made more or less a hero of by the Camp Fire girls.

Peggy was more exhausted from her experience than she had realized and remained a great part of time quietly seated by her mother.

Mrs. Webster was not entirely comfortable because she had left Billy at camp with only Marie for a companion. But he had insisted that he did not wish to join the Camp Fire expedition and would not allow even Vera to stay behind with him.

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About four o'clock the entire party started back for camp. They wished to arrive in time for an early dinner and Marta Clark had first to be taken home.

Marta, as well as Peggy Webster, felt that she had not had so satisfactory a day as she had dreamed of. In the first place, Mrs. Burton had been so absorbed in the day's arrangements that she had paid but little attention to her outside guests.

Then, Dan Webster had not been so agreeable as Marta expected him to be. Perhaps she had no right to have taken his interest a little for granted. His past kindness must have been due to sympathy caused by her accident, for Dan was undeniably one of the physically strong people to whom weakness made an appeal. Now, as she was a great deal better, she no longer required his physical assistance. So today he devoted the most of his time and attention to Sally Ashton. Sally, declaring that the grandeur and coldness of the great stone cliffs made her lonely and afraid, had appealed to Dan to be with her whenever he could. So, as Marta had made no such appeal, she was neglected.

However it was arranged for them that Dan should drive Marta home in one of the small carriages and that Peggy was to accompany them.

By his own request Howard Brent was allowed to make the fourth and to sit by Peggy.

"After dinner, tonight, when you have rested I should like to speak to you alone a few minutes," Howard asked unexpectedly, just before their arrival at Sunrise camp. "Mrs. Burton said I might stay on until bedtime."

CHAPTER XIII

DISILLUSION

For an hour before dinner Peggy remained alone in her tent, Bettina having seen that she was comfortable, had then gone away.

She was annoyed at finding herself so stiff and sore and for some reason so oddly depressed. For Peggy was not as accustomed to depression as most girls, being too fond of outdoor life and not given to introspection. But it was natural enough that the nervous shock, as well as the physical strain of her recent experience, should tell on her more as the hours passed than at the beginning.

Ralph and Terry Benton had gone home at once to their hotel on the return of the Camp Fire party to camp.

Through dinner Peggy sat quietly between her mother and Dan, not talking very much.

From the other end of the table Howard Brent watched her furtively whenever he had the opportunity. He was not happy over what he was intending to do, although from his point of view it was the only fair thing. Peggy ought not to be deceived by a pretense of friendship into giving her own sincere affection in return.

Several times the young man had thought of confiding in Bettina Graham and asking her to undertake the task of enlightening Peggy in his stead. Bettina, Howard realized, did not like Ralph Marshall any better than he did. But, afterwards, he had put this thought away from him, feeling that, as an actual witness to the wager between Ralph and Terry, his telling of

the story would be more convincing.

As soon as they had gotten up from the table Peggy joined their only outside guest that evening. Together they walked away from the others.

But they did not go very far, as it was almost dark and turning a good deal cooler.

Peggy had put on a golden yellow sweater and, with her hair so closely bound about her head and her hands in her pockets, she had again the slightly boyish appearance characteristic of her.

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But Howard Brent did not see this. To him she looked very young and sweet and ardent, with a lack both of vanity and self-consciousness which set her apart from a good many girls, but only made her more attractive to him.

"Can't we find a place and sit down? You can't be feeling fit enough for much of a walk," Howard suggested.

At first Peggy shook her head, declaring she was all right, but later they went to a favorite spot near the foot of the hill and not far from the small lake. This was a favorite Camp Fire place, since it was near enough to have the rest of the Camp Fire party in sight and yet far enough away for confidences.

Peggy was not particularly interested in what Howard Brent had to say to her. He had seemed to be in the act of confiding something or other whenever they had met recently. But she had not considered deeply what the confidence could be, and really since he had asked her to give him a few minutes alone, she had not thought of the matter at all. She was much too tired.

But Peggy was always friendly and willing to listen when her friends wished to talk to her.

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She sat now on an overturned log with Howard Brent on the ground beside her and facing her.

There was not much light except from the big camp fire many yards off. The pine trees and the hill made a rather gloomy background, and the stars were just struggling to show through the dusk.

"That was a pretty close shave you had this afternoon, Miss Peggy," Howard began. It was awkward—this beginning of an awkward conversation, but as well one way as another.

Peggy nodded. "Let's don't talk about it tonight, if you don't mind. It is silly, I know, but the more I think about the accident the more nervous I become. Why, I seem to be more afraid now than I actually was when I was hanging over that wretched precipice. I suppose, I was too paralyzed with terror then to realize what had happened. I just kept thinking that I was going to hold on to that tree and to Ralph, and that even if I died I wouldn't let go. But now I keep having a vision of Ralph and myself sliding down forever and ever, with nothing to stop us. It would have been pretty awful, wouldn't it?"

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Peggy tried to laugh but the effort was faint-hearted.

Howard Brent frowned.

"It would have been about the most horrible thing I can imagine," he answered gravely and with just the right amount of steadying sympathy in his voice. "As far as you are concerned I simply refuse to think of it. And, even though I don't like Marshall, there isn't any human being I dislike enough to care to contemplate such a fate overtaking him."

Peggy's lips parted and she flushed a little.

"Why don't you like Ralph?" she asked quietly, but without any show of anger. "I have seen that you did not like him and I have been wondering about it lately. You see, Bettina Graham feels the same way and usually I have great respect for Bettina's judgment. But I think she is mistaken about Ralph. You see, I have known him for several years, but not very intimately. He has been coming to our place in New Hampshire for a part of his holidays whenever he has liked, as his father and mine are great friends. Ralph and I have always been friendly enough, but he has never paid any particular attention to me until lately. I suppose I always seemed pretty young to him and a kind of tomboy. I really am one, you know, even if I am nearly grown. So, now, it seems awfully good of him to be interested in me, and I like him very much. That is why I think it is funny you and Bettina don't like him. I know he wasn't a good student at college and can't make up his mind what kind of work he wishes to undertake. But there is time enough for him to find out later on."

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"Marshall is a cad," Howard Brent interrupted. He had not intended to speak so abruptly, nor to show so much anger, but Peggy's defense annoyed him.

However, she did not contradict him, nor reveal any of the petulance at being overruled, which most people would have expressed.

Instead, she looked at her companion with the clear, level glance he was beginning to know fairly well.

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"That is a pretty hard thing to say about a human being, Mr. Brent. Sometimes I think it is perhaps the cruelest thing anybody can ever say about another," she repeated slowly. "You see it really means everything. A man or a woman who is a cad is capable of almost any dishonor. And, worst of all, a cad does not even know when he is dishonorable."

"Yes," Howard Brent repeated. "I expect that is a pretty good definition of a cad. You may not think Marshall so bad as all that, but unfortunately I do." He stopped a moment, his skin tanned from the Arizona winds and suns reddening faintly.

No matter how valiantly he had approached the moment of his confidence to Peggy Webster, the actual telling was to be no more agreeable than he had conceived it.

At this instant he hesitated.

"I think you owe it to Ralph to tell me why you think he is a cad," she declared.

Peggy's hands were clasped quietly in her lap and she was leaning forward, looking with

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earnestness at her companion. But she did not appear disturbed. She was sorry that he had so unfortunate a point of view about Ralph, but she did not feel in the least danger of being convinced by his opinion. For Peggy's points of view were her own.

"Oh, it is pretty hard to tell," Howard went on, "and you may not think I ought to tell you. Somehow it does seem impertinent of me to dare speak of it. But I just can't stand your being influenced by Ralph Marshall's attentions to you. The truth is about ten days or two weeks ago I overheard him making a bet with Terry Benton. He insisted that he could influence you to care for him as easily and in the same way that other girls do by paying you attention. He bet Benton a hundred dollars."

Howard Brent's face stiffened. The thing sounded even uglier in the telling than when it had occurred, and he had not intended that it should.

But Peggy merely stared at him incredulously.

"It must have been a joke!" she exclaimed.

Howard Brent shook his head.

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"Well, even if it were a joke, it strikes me as being of a not very well-bred kind. I didn't know how you might feel concerning it, but I felt that you ought to know. If you wish to continue friends with Marshall, now that you know, why of course it is not my affair. Perhaps girls are all alike!" Howard concluded.

Peggy was still looking at him, surprised, but not overwhelmed and apparently not entirely convinced.

"Somehow making a bet of that kind sounds so stupid," she argued—not so much with her companion as with the impressions struggling for first place in her own mind. "It isn't that I doubt what you have told me, Mr. Brent, only that I think you have made a mistake. Why should Ralph care enough one way or the other whether I like him? I am not a very important person."

Howard Brent got up. "If you would like confirmation of my story you can speak to Terry Benton," he announced, looking decidedly angry. "Personally, I am sorry I spoke to you of it."

But Peggy had also gotten up and now put her hand on her companion's arm.

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"No; you are not sorry," she returned. "Of course, I don't want to speak of what you have told me to Terry Benton. But I would like to ask Ralph. Will you tell him to come over to see me in the morning, if he is well enough."

And Peggy walked back with Howard Brent to say good night to her mother and aunt, serenely talking of other things.

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CHAPTER XIV

FACING THE MUSIC

Early the next morning Ralph Marshall walked over to the Sunrise Camp.

Without any comment or explanation Howard Brent had delivered, at the breakfast table an hour before, the message entrusted to him.

Except for a slight headache Ralph had entirely recovered from his injury, but he was fearful that Peggy had suffered more than she had confessed and, added to the fact that she had sent for him, was his own desire to know how she was.

For the time being the unfortunate conversation he had held with Terry Benton had entirely passed out of Ralph's mind. He did think of it occasionally and he was ashamed of it. If Terry had ever reopened the subject, Ralph intended cutting him short by saying that the discussion had been a mistake, and that he had made a fool of himself. But, as Terry did not speak, Ralph had preferred to let the affair drop, not having sufficient courage to plunge boldly into the revival of what he wished to forget.

This morning he was really only interested in finding out that Peggy was all right, and he was deeply and profoundly grateful to her. It seemed almost impossible that any girl could have shown so much nerve and strength. If, in times past, he had liked girls better who were less athletic, whose muscles were less hard, who were altogether more "feminine" according to his preconceived ideas, Ralph had humor enough to realize that his ideal should have changed since the day before.

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Peggy Webster had rested and was busy with her share of the morning Camp Fire work when Ralph came into camp. Her greeting of him was entirely cordial and friendly. There was nothing in her manner which might indicate any difference in her attitude from the evening before. She was interested to know that he had slept soundly and that his head was not troubling him. He had seen the hotel doctor who had advised him to pay no further attention to a slight wound which would quickly heal of itself.

It was also Peggy who proposed that they take a walk together after she had finished her tasks. Half an hour later they started off in apparently perfect accord.

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Peggy had insisted, both to her mother and aunt, as well as to Ralph Marshall, that she had almost forgotten any discomfort she may have suffered the previous evening and was certainly not too tired for a walk. Indeed, she believed that, getting away from camp and so much talk of a disaster that had almost happened, would be good for her.

Therefore, Ralph Marshall was naturally unprepared for what inevitably followed.

It was not that Peggy was acting to deceive him or any one else. She had almost tragically little ability for playing any part that was not essentially straightforward and truthful. But, after she had gone to bed, in thinking over what Howard Brent had told her, Peggy had become more convinced than ever that he had in some way made a mistake. She simply did not believe that Ralph Marshall could have made a wager in

regard to winning her friendship. Whatever weaknesses of character he might possess, he had always been well bred.

Perhaps Peggy had old-fashioned ideas. There was a kind of simplicity about her which made her seem younger than she actually was. But she had gotten some of these ideas from her father, who had the old-time courtesy and respect for women, in spite of the fact that he belonged to the new generation. Peggy knew that he felt a man should never talk of a woman with other men in any way that would reflect upon her, however little he might respect or like the woman.

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Just for a moment it flashed through Peggy's mind to reflect how angry her father would be, if he ever learned that two young men had actually made a bet concerning her—and one through which her dignity and self-respect must suffer. Then she put the thought away from her as unworthy of consideration.

During the first part of their walk, Peggy made no reference to the reason she had had for having asked Ralph to come over to see her so soon after their farewell the evening before. Indeed, she had almost forgotten the reason herself, although always the consciousness of it was lurking at the back of her brain.

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But she and Ralph enjoyed walking together. There never was a lovelier place than among these tall pine forests with the trails cut between the trees, and leading into unexpected and open vistas.

Ralph had a charming voice and, when he and Peggy were walking in single file and not talking, he sang for her amusement. He seemed to have been to every light opera that had been produced in the last five years, and knew at least one or two songs from each of them. As Peggy lived in the country and had heard but few, she was greatly entertained.

It was Ralph who finally suggested that they rest.

But it was Peggy who chose the somewhat extraordinary place.

There was a particularly large pine tree at the edge of an open space. It had long branches which swung out, like comfortable hammocks, not far above the ground.

Peggy climbed into one of them and sat with her feet curled up under her in an odd fashion, with her back resting against the trunk of the tree.

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Ralph sat nearer the end so that his weight bore the branch down almost to the ground.

"Peggy, you look like a tree nymph, or an elf, or whatever wood spirit is supposed to inhabit a tree. I am not well up on tree-ology, or anything else," Ralph said good humoredly. "But you are so dark and your eyes and hair and skin are so brown. Besides somehow you have an altogether, outdoor look about you."

Peggy laughed. "Do you mean that for a compliment, Ralph? Because, of course, I understand that translated your speech simply

means I am tanned until I look like an Indian, or something else not completely civilised."

Then Peggy's expression changed and she actually flushed scarlet.

"There is something I want to ask you, Ralph, though now that I have the chance I had much rather not. You see, I realize that it isn't true, but I owe it to you to be able to tell Howard Brent so. You didn't make a bet with Terry Benton about me, did you? You didn't say you would win my friendship by being attentive to me, just for the sake of a wager? My friendship really isn't valuable enough, and in any case you could have had it without taking that much trouble."

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Because Ralph did not answer at once, Peggy bent over toward him from her higher place.

"I'm sorry, Ralph; naturally you are angry with me; but I didn't believe the story for a minute."

Ralph returned the girl's look steadily. The expression of his face had never been stronger. His old expression of laughing good nature and plastic content with himself and circumstances at least temporarily disappeared.

"It is true though, Peggy," he answered, "although I would give a good deal to be able to tell you it was not."

In spite of his reply, Peggy continued to look puzzled.

"But I can't understand any reason," she protested.

Ralph shook his head. "Of course you can't, and there isn't any. In an idiotic moment I simply said a very stupid thing to Terry Benton without realizing just how ugly and ill-mannered it was. Ever since I have been trying my best to forget I ever said it. You are the one person in the world whom I would rather not have brought into such a discussion, and to find that out is a part of my punishment. I wonder if you can believe, Peggy, how sorry and ashamed I am, and have been ever since I made a foolish wager which I regretted the moment after I had gotten into it. You are such a clean, straightforward person, Peggy, I don't suppose you can even imagine how a human being can do an ugly thing and yet not be altogether horrid."

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Ralph was talking like a boy, forgetting that he was a number of years older than his companion.

But Peggy's eyes had changed their expression and were no longer puzzled.

"I might, be willing to accept your point of view, Ralph, if, after you had made the wager in which I was to be a victim to your vanity, you had paid no attention to me. But I can't forget that it was afterwards you began being agreeable to me, asking me to take walks and to dance with you. If you did not care about winning your wager, why did you not continue to politely ignore me, as you had always done? Well you were successful enough, because I did like you very much until now."

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Peggy's cheeks were scarlet and yet she could

be nothing but truthful.

"I have a dreadful temper and I am so angry with you now, I feel as if I never wish to see or speak to you again. Please let me go back to camp alone."

Ralph shook his head.

"No, I won't do that," he answered quietly, "but I will not trouble you along the way—not even by asking your forgiveness. Some day, perhaps, I may be able to prove to you how truly sorry I am. Now I can't even pretend that I have any more right to your friendship."

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CHAPTER XV

EXPIATION

A few days later the Camp Fire guardian drove over to the hotel nearby, accompanied only by Mr. Jefferson Simpson.

Bettina had offered to go with her, but she had announced that she preferred going alone.

This was curious because the one thing Mrs. Burton had made a point of, ever since the arrival of her Camp Fire party in Arizona, was that she be allowed to remain as inconspicuous as possible. And, if she wished nobody to find out who she was, she had certainly to remain in obscurity.

To appear at a fashionable hotel filled with Eastern tourists was to proclaim her identity, since the greater number of them would assuredly be familiar with her appearance, knowing her by reputation if not having actually seen her act.

But Mrs. Burton was too worried to consider small, personal annoyances. Then she had a fashion of acting suddenly, having no very great patience with the things that displeased her.

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For the last few days the atmosphere of the Sunrise camp had not been an agreeable one. However, the trouble was not with the Camp Fire girls, they being only incidental; the difficulty was a family one, which is of all varieties the most trying. And Mrs. Burton had been away from her own family so much of the time that she had almost forgotten how wrought up one can become over comparatively small matters, when they affect one's own people.

In the first place, for several days Peggy Webster had been entirely unlike herself, without giving the least reason for her sudden change from her natural buoyancy to a condition of gravity and depression.

More annoying, she insisted that she was not depressed. When Mrs. Burton and Bettina frankly told her that they did not believe her assertion; nevertheless she would take neither one of them into her confidence.

Afterwards when Mrs. Burton insisted that Peggy was not well and must have suffered from

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her fall and so should see a doctor, Peggy flatly declined to see one. However, Peggy's refusal did not affect her aunt.

One of the errands which brought her to the hotel was to call upon the hotel physician and make an appointment with him to come over to their camp.

Personally, Mrs. Burton was hurt by Peggy's behavior. She cared for Peggy more than for anybody in the world, except her husband and sister and perhaps her beloved girlhood friend, Betty Graham.

If anything troubled Peggy, either mentally or physically, her aunt did not understand why she would not confide in her. Ordinarily they understood each other perfectly, so that even when they disagreed and had small fallings out, their estrangements never lasted more than an hour or so.

But the expression in her niece's face had recently troubled Polly Burton. She could not endure the thought of Peggy being ill or unhappy. If there was anything in the world that Peggy desired, which she could possibly obtain for her, she would have traveled to the end of the world to secure it. And this Peggy knew. Nevertheless she had been going about camp for the last few days doing her ordinary tasks, walking and driving with the other girls, but always with an expression that was not Peggy's.

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Instead of her usual, frank, clear look of happiness and good comradeship, she had a hurt, almost an abashed expression, as if life had somehow suddenly made her feel less sure of its justice and sincerity.

Yet, there was no trouble between Peggy and any one of the Camp Fire girls. Besides being more generally popular than any other member of the group, Bettina had made every effort to discover if a difficulty had arisen and could find no trace of one.

Over the other family matter which was disturbing both her mother and aunt, Peggy could not be worrying, because she had scolded and laughed at both of them, insisting that they were making too much of nothing.

Billy's affairs were always involved in more or less mystery, and Billy adored mystery. The fact that he was disappearing every day and refusing to tell any one where he went, or what he was doing, did not make any particular impression upon his sister. Peggy really believed that Billy on most occasions behaved in this fashion in order to create an excitement of which he could be the center.

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However, this time at least, his mother and aunt were under a different impression. Mrs. Webster was nearly sick with annoyance and anxiety over Billy's obstinacy and what she considered his reckless behavior.

After being an invalid for several months and refusing to exert himself in order to regain his strength, he had suddenly announced that he was entirely well and able to do whatever he wished. At present this consisted on going away from Sunrise camp early each morning and often

not returning until bedtime. When he did come in he was usually exhausted, but he must have recovered during the night, since he was able to start out again next day.

Nevertheless, Billy looked very frail and young, and whatever his mother may have felt, Mrs. Burton had wished a number of times lately that he was small enough to lock up in a dark bedroom, like a wilful small boy.

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She did not happen to possess a dark bedroom at camp, but then facts never interfered with the sweep of Mrs. Burton's imagination.

She had talked to Billy a number of times, begging and commanding him not to continue to worry his mother and at least to tell her where he was spending his time. But, although Billy was very sweet and apologetic, begging them both not to be uncomfortable over him, and saying that he would certainly tell what he was doing if he could, he did not take anybody into his confidence, nor did he cease to make daily disappearances.

Even Vera Lageloff was not told of his plans, and if she had any suspicion, she must have been pledged to silence, since she never mentioned it.

Today, as Mr. Simpson stopped her carriage in front of the great hotel, Mrs. Burton had about reached the conclusion that she was not so unhappy over having no children of her own, as she had always believed herself to be. However, if she was going to take her nephews and niece so seriously, after all what was she being spared?

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So far as Peggy was concerned she was unhappy over her, but not angry. No one could be seriously angry for long with Peggy. But, with Billy, Mrs. Burton's point of view was a totally different one. He was too young to be a law unto himself, if there was ever an age when one had the right to be. Personally she had no idea of enduring his obstinate attitude, or being responsible for what he might be doing.

There was one person whose authority Billy would be obliged to respect, and that was his father's. Mrs. Burton had not mentioned her intention to her sister, but she was now on her way to telegraph him. Would he come to them, or was Billy to be sent home?

In spite of her absorption in family affairs she was annoyed, as she approached the hotel, to find the front veranda crowded with tourists.

If only she could make way through them without being observed!

Certainly Polly Burton appreciated the fact that she was neither a very beautiful or impressive person to behold, and that, except for her reputation as a celebrated actress, she would never be annoyed with undue observation. But one had to take into consideration the fact that one's face had appeared on billboards in nearly every large city in the country and that people were not blind and also possessed memories. Moreover, although Mrs. Burton was not herself aware of it, the power of her personality and great gift were evident in her appearance. If one looked at her closely she would hold your

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interest and attention as no statuesquely beautiful person ever could.

Mrs. Burton was dressed quietly in a brown cloth suit, such as any traveler would have worn. Nevertheless she saw people staring and heard them whispering to one another as she walked up on the porch.

The next instant a young man came toward her. It was Ralph Marshall.

"Is there anything I can do for you, Mrs. Burton?" he inquired.

Polly nodded emphatically.

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"Yes; do get me out of this crowd and into a quiet place where I can attend to some things I have come here for, before anybody speaks to me," she urged. "I have so much on my mind at present that if I am asked to behave like a distinguished character should, even for an instant, I am sure to disgrace myself and my profession."

The next moment she and Ralph had found a small, deserted parlor toward the back of the hotel.

"Is there anything more I can do to be of service?" he inquired.

Mrs. Burton looked relieved.

"Why, yes, Ralph, there are several things, if you are not too busy to give me some of your time," she returned.

Ralph shook his head. "No; I am not busy," he answered, with an inflection the older woman did not notice.

"Then will you find the hotel physician for me. Peggy isn't well and I wish him to come over to see her at the camp."

For a moment Ralph Marshall hesitated and seemed about to say something, but instead turned and walked slowly out of the room. At the door, however, he paused.

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"I'll find out and be back in a few moments," he returned.

He remained away longer, but Mrs. Burton was hardly aware of it. She was thinking too deeply. Now, that she had arrived at the door of her decision and was ready to open it, she had half an idea of turning back.

To telegraph her brother-in-law that Billy was being difficult to handle meant the end of Billy's stay in the West. And, like a good many other persons with tempers, Mrs. Burton was ridiculously tender hearted.

Billy greatly needed the change of climate and the life outdoors he had been leading. He was too frail and was lately growing into a tall, delicate reed of a boy, as unlike the ordinary boy as it was possible for one of them to be.

But, with all his obstinacies and peculiarities Polly Burton knew that she was more interested in him than she was in Dan, who was more satisfactory in every way and never troublesome.

Then suddenly, sitting alone here in the small hotel parlor, she recalled a circumstance of her own life. For an entire year she had made a secret of her own acts, indeed of her own whereabouts, hiding the knowledge from her friends and from her family, excepting only her mother, in order that she might accomplish her desire without criticism.

She had wanted to learn to act and had felt that she could go through the discipline she needed with a better courage if she had neither assistance nor advice. And she had been right.

Now could it be possible that at the present time Billy was being obstinate and secretive for some reason which he felt was justifiable? In all probability he was mistaken; but, even so, had one not better allow him a little more liberty? Billy had done a number of extraordinary things in his life and also a number of wrong ones; but to explain them he always had some queer theory of his own which he had seriously worked out. He did not act impulsively and he was as clean and as spiritually gallant as a seraph.

Nevertheless, Mrs. Burton had not reached a decision when Ralph Marshall re-entered the room. For there was always her Sister Mollie's peace of mind to be considered, and the danger that Billy with his absurd ideas might get himself into real trouble.

"The doctor will be here to speak to you in about five minutes, Mrs. Burton, if you can wait so long," Ralph reported, taking a chair near her.

He looked so unlike his usual self that, for the first time since their meeting, his companion's attention was arrested.

Ordinarily Ralph Marshall had a debonair air of self-satisfaction and happiness, as if he were pleased with himself and with the world's pleasure in him—at least his own world, for few of us ever think far beyond it. He was not disagreeable or half so inane as this idea suggests. For the facts were that Ralph Marshall was handsome, charming, and extremely rich. He had always had everything he wished without making the least effort to obtain it. People had always seemed to like him, and girls and women had undeniably spoiled him. So it was not extraordinary that he had a fairly amiable opinion of himself.

However, today Ralph's face wore another expression; instead of appearing pleased he looked extremely out of sorts with himself, and with everything and everybody.

"Is Peggy very ill?" he asked, endeavoring to speak with careless politeness, but finding himself coloring as he put the conventional question.

Mrs. Burton shook her head.

"No; Peggy says there is nothing the matter, and perhaps she is right. It is only that I am absurdly uneasy when there is the least change in her. Recently she has not looked very well and has not been so agreeable as she ordinarily is. There does not seem anything else I think of as an explanation, except that she is ill."

Ralph did not flush a second time, but instead had an unexpected sense of well being. At least he had been right in his estimate of Peggy Webster. Whatever he might be himself she was the real thing. Evidently not a word of betrayal of him and his treatment of her had passed her lips. Peggy knew that he valued Mrs. Burton's and her mother's friendship, and that he would have been placed in an uncomfortable position with his own family, if they had ceased their friendly attitude toward him.

"What is the matter with you, Ralph?" Mrs. Burton inquired unexpectedly.

This was his opportunity, nevertheless Ralph evaded it.

"Oh, I have had a disagreeable letter from the governor," he answered. "Every once and a while father gets down on me and writes that he will cast me off with the proverbial penny, if I don't find out what kind of work I want to do and start at it. Sometimes it isn't an easy job to be the only son of a self-made man. When a man thinks he has made himself he is apt to think he can make everybody else do his way."

"Do you hate the thought of work so much, Ralph?" Mrs. Burton queried.

She did not speak in a disagreeable fashion, merely in a questioning one.

And Ralph Marshall found himself fascinated, watching the color and warmth in her face.

"Do you know I am awfully sorry for people who feel in that way. I don't suppose you can realize this while you are young, but, as one grows older, doing one's work is half the joy of living. Still, I don't mean to preach. I believe the girls say, the fact that I don't is my chief value as a Camp Fire guardian."

"I wish you would preach to me," Ralph answered, "or at least let me talk to you. Because a fellow does not say anything, you need not think he does not realize what a wonderful person you are! It must be great to be famous and to know you have done it all yourself. As for me, it isn't that I hate work. I don't know anything about it. The difficulty is getting down to finding out what I want to do."

Polly Burton nodded, just as Polly O'Neill would have done, with a quick look of understanding.

"Sometimes it is hard luck being born rich, Ralph. But I wouldn't let it be too much for me, if I were you. Start at anything that comes your way and afterwards you'll find the right thing. Do you mind my quoting something to you? You see it is my business to repeat what other people write."

Ralph did not seem to think acquiescence on his part necessary.

This was the first conversation he had ever held alone with Mrs. Burton and he was entirely under the spell of her personal charm. And yet it seemed extraordinary to him that so great a personage could be so simple and unaffected.

Mrs. Burton also took his agreement for granted, for she went on:

"I learned the verse for Billy's and Dan's delectation, but I am trying it first on you. I don't suppose you have read an extraordinary but uncomfortable book called 'The Spoon River Anthology?'"

Mrs. Burton naturally made no effort at recitation, which, under the circumstances, would have been ridiculous. She merely repeated the verse as any one else would have done, except that it was impossible for her to change the beautiful quality of her voice.

"My boy, wherever you are,
Work for your soul's sake,
That all the clay of you, all the dross of you,
May yield to the fire of you,
Till the fire is nothing but light!
Nothing but light!"

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To his amazement Ralph Marshall felt tears in his eyes.

"Mrs. Burton, I want to tell you something," he announced as unexpectedly to himself as to her.

Then, without attempting in any way to exonerate himself, Ralph Marshall told the story of his wager and the effort he had made to win Peggy's liking, in order to gratify his own vanity.

"It is a nice sensation to find you are a cad, Mrs. Burton, and that the girl you have more respect and more liking for than any other you have ever known thinks so too. Besides, I have recently been informed of the fact by Howard Brent and, as I happened to agree with his judgment of me, I couldn't very well argue the question with him to my own satisfaction."

"No," Mrs. Burton replied, "you couldn't well argue a fact."

She was extremely angry with Ralph herself as he told his story.

She would have been scornful in any case, but that he should have chosen Peggy as his game was a little more than her spirit could endure.

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But a few moments later she was really sorry for her companion.

Ralph attempted no apology, or excused himself by extenuating circumstances.

"Oh well, Ralph, you need not look as if you had committed all the crimes in the calendar. All of us fall from grace now and then; only, if I were you, I wouldn't chose this kind again."

Mrs. Burton had risen from her chair.

"I can't wait for that tiresome doctor any longer. I think I want to send a telegram, although I am actually not yet sure."

Her lips twitched with a slightly whimsical grimace at herself. But Ralph Marshall had scarcely noticed her words or her expression.

"Do you think there is anything I can do to make up in any way, Mrs. Burton?" he asked. "Of course, I don't expect Peggy to have faith in me or care for my friendship again. But I would like to be of some service to one of you, principally for my own self-respect," he added. "But, of

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course, there is nothing I can do. I am not much good because Peggy actually saved me from falling the other day, when it should have been the other way round."

Mn. Burton was thinking quickly, as she usually did.

"There is a favor you can do for me, Ralph; I have just thought of it," she answered. "I know I can trust you to keep what you find out a secret, and Peggy will appreciate it as well. Don't allow yourself to think that, because you were capable of doing one ugly thing, you are capable of continuing to do them. That impression has ruined many a human being.

"My extremely trying nephew, Billy Webster, has lately turned himself into a mystery. I think his mother and I have the right to know where he goes each day and what he is doing. He refuses to tell us. If you will find out and not speak of it, except to me, I don't think it will be playing unfair with Billy, and it may save us all a good deal. But I'll try to have a talk with the young man tonight, to persuade him to confide in me. In any case will you come over to camp early in the morning, Ralph? I won't telegraph—at least I won't telegraph today. I'll leave a message at the desk for the doctor."

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But, at this instant, the hotel physician entered the room.

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CHAPTER XVI

THE PINE, NOT THE OLIVE

Peggy Webster had her arms filled with pine branches when she met Ralph Marshall coming toward Sunrise camp the following day.

She had gone a short distance into the woods for some light twigs for the camp fire, as the supply had gotten low.

She was walking with her head thrown back to keep the pine needles from touching her face, although their fragrance always thrilled her. They were so spicy, so woodsy, so redolent of a fine sweetness that had no cloying element in it. Surely the pine was a wise choice for the Camp Fire emblem. If a girl can grow into a woman keeping the same kind of spiritual fragrance that the pine tree sheds as a physical one, she has no reason to fear that her value may ever fail.

Peggy had not seen Ralph since the afternoon of his uncomfortable confession and she had not made up her mind just how she should meet him. So now her eyes widened and her lips parted a little; she was already flushed from the exertion of her work and the weight of the burden she carried.

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But Peggy spoke naturally enough, as she would have done to any acquaintance, although the past sensation of pleasure she had felt at any chance meeting with Ralph had gone.

Ralph came forward and quietly extended his hands for pine branches and, in spite of the fact

that Peggy hesitated, he took the greater number of them from her. A few of the twigs broke and fell on the ground.

"I came over to camp this morning because Mrs. Burton asked me to come, Peggy; otherwise I would not have intruded upon you," he declared.

The girl shook her head.

"I have not the faintest desire to keep you away from Sunrise camp, Ralph. Indeed, I would be sorry if you let me interfere with your actions in any way. The other girls like you a great deal and I am sure would miss seeing you."

Ralph did not answer. He had noticed that Peggy had said "other girls," but also that she had spoken without a pretense of wishing to impress him with the knowledge of her disfavor or her change of attitude toward him. She had spoken with perfectly unconscious sincerity and Ralph Marshall appreciated that, for once in his life at least, he had known a girl who said what she meant. Peggy's expression "other girls" had really been a slip on her part, as she had not intended bringing herself into the situation in any way.

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At camp they parted, Peggy going to announce to her aunt that Ralph wished to see her. And a few moments later Mrs. Burton appeared.

Ralph had been talking to Gerry and Sally, while he was forced to wait, and as they were determinedly planning an excursion in which he was to take part that afternoon, he had to be rescued by Mrs. Burton.

It was never possible to talk with any privacy in the immediate neighborhood of the camp. The girls were constantly going in and out of their tents, rebuilding the camp fire, or doing any one of a hundred things in connection with their work or entertainment. This morning Mrs. Webster was also sewing in front of the fire, with Dan coming back and forth to talk to her.

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Ralph Marshall did not see Billy Webster, but, as he had rather a fashion of remaining alone, this did not mean that he had actually vanished from camp.

"Suppose we walk in the direction of the cliffs, Ralph," Mrs. Burton suggested and then, almost as soon as they had started, she added:

"Yes, Billy has gone; he left before breakfast this morning so there could be no chance of a family argument. Dan says he slipped out of their tent without his knowing when he departed. And this, after I had expended an hour of precious eloquence upon the young man last night, sitting up with him when everybody else had gone to bed, and I was abominably sleepy."

Mrs. Burton shrugged her shoulders, expressing amusement and chagrin, as well as anxiety.

"I am afraid I haven't the slightest influence with him; but, then, no one else has—or perhaps I don't know. I asked Vera if she thought she could influence him and she assured me she could not. She says my sister is mistaken in thinking that she influences Billy; he has always influenced her, although she is older and

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infinitely more sensible. But, Ralph, I only tell you this about Billy, because I want you to know something of the character of the boy you may have to deal with, if you succeed in doing what I ask of you. I know you have never noticed Billy particularly; few people do at first when Dan is around. Dan is so much better looking and more agreeable. But Billy is the stronger character of the two, strange as it seems to all of us. But whether for good or the other thing," Mrs. Burton smiled a little ruefully, "I suppose if we live long enough we may find out. No gentleman could have been more courteous to me than my nephew was last night, or more utterly unmoved by my efforts at persuasion or command.

"There is just one thing we have to rely on in order to save Billy from what may turn into a real difficulty. Vera Lageloff has confided in me that she and Billy one afternoon discovered a group of objectionable men. I don't know anything about them, except that they were on a strike or something of the kind, and that you and Peggy had met them by accident a short time before. But Billy has a passion for the unfortunate. He had only to hear that people are up in arms against something or some one and he is always in the midst of them.

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"It was curious, but whenever the laborers on my brother-in-law's place had any kind of grievance, they first put the matter up to Billy before taking it to his father. And you know Mr. Webster well enough to understand that he is the most just of men."

Mrs. Burton had been walking slowly along but she now stopped and frowned, facing her companion.

"I don't know why but I am frightened. I am afraid Billy is mixing himself up in some difficulty in which he has not the slightest concern, or the least reason for taking part in. And Vera is under the same impression, else she would never have told me what she did. She says Billy made her promise not to speak of their excursion, and she hated breaking her word to him. But she, too, is nervous about him and thinks we ought to find out what he is doing. Of course, we may both be on the wrong track. The boy may be off amusing himself somewhere in a perfectly simple fashion. But if you will only find out, Ralph, I shall be everlastingly grateful. I am pretty fond of Billy, though I don't understand him and he certainly annoys me."

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Ralph smiled in an entirely efficient and satisfying manner.

"Oh, I expect you take the young man too seriously, Mrs. Burton. All boys have cranks of one kind or another, though I must confess Billy's do not seem to be the ordinary kind. Don't worry any more; I'll find him for you and bring him home by the ear. Oh, I don't mean literally; only from what you have told me I expect the youth takes himself too seriously. He has been ill so much he is probably more or less spoiled. I think the influence of an older fellow may do him good. I am accustomed to taking kinks out of the younger boys at college now and then, when they suffer from swell heads."

Ralph spoke in a condescending, elderly brother tone which amused Mrs. Burton, although she

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showed no sign of it. Instead, she gave a little sigh of relief.

"But please be careful, won't you, Ralph," she added. "Billy isn't like other people and he does have to be treated a little differently. Oh, I know you men don't think this of each other, and Billy's father will not consider the idea for a moment. But I think if he had talked to Billy more frankly, and asked him to wait a while before he decided so many questions for himself, the boy would not be so difficult.

"Let's go back now, Ralph, as we have talked over the situation and said as much as there is to say. I don't suppose you can do anything immediately; but, if, within the next few days you make any kind of discovery, suppose you let me know first. I really am worried over Billy's realizing I have tried to spy upon him. I should have been dreadfully angry with any one who had done the same thing to me when I was his unreasonable age."

"Oh, I don't think Billy will have anything to complain of," Ralph replied, as if Billy's attitude held not the slightest interest for him. "And I don't think I need be forever tracing the young person either—not if he has fallen in with the group Peggy and I met.

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"Fortunately, I know where they can be found if they have not disappeared from their camping place. But what there can be in those fellows to interest a youngster, I can't see.

"I wonder if your man will lend me a burro? I walked over from my hotel, and I think I'll start out on the trail at once."

Ralph was really interested in his quest. There was an agreeable element of mystery in it as well as knight errantry. Besides, an older fellow is seldom averse to making a younger one feel small, when he happens to think it good for him. Moreover, Ralph had been considerably out of sorts with himself for several days and it is always pleasanter to dwell on another's shortcomings.

As soon as Mr. Simpson had allowed him the use of one of the camp ponies for the day, Ralph started off at a leisurely pace.

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After all, it was rather good fun to have something definite to do, instead of idling all one's time. And if one was accomplishing a favor for either Mrs. Burton or Peggy Webster, why all the more was the effort worth while. Billy Webster really played a very small part in Ralph Marshall's thoughts.

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CHAPTER XVII

THE PASSIONATE PILGRIM

Ralph Marshall's pilgrimage was in vain. When he reached the place where the men had been in hiding, every trace of them had disappeared. He might have thought that he had made a mistake in the spot, except that there were marks on the

ground where the camp fire had been, and he clearly remembered the circle of small hills.

After remaining in the neighborhood for half an hour or more and seeing no human being, Ralph knew that his task was not to be so easily accomplished. But he had no inclination to return and loiter about his hotel. Even failure was better than boredom, and the last few days had been intensely dull. Ralph was weary of sightseeing and seldom took an interest in viewing things alone. He was no longer friendly with Terry Benton and Howard Brent, whose expressed opinions of him had not been flattering. And, in spite of Peggy's generosity, he felt himself cut off from the companionship of the Camp Fire girls.

Perhaps Ralph did not realize it, but the fact was that he did not care for the society of the other girls, now that Peggy's was denied him.

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Moreover, even if it were but slight, an ambition had been stirred in him by Mrs. Burton. Actually he wanted to succeed in what she had asked him to do. Rarely in his life had he been stirred by this emotion, except perhaps by the desire to win a game of tennis, or be elected to some special college fraternity.

Getting on his burro again, Ralph started off in another direction. He knew that he was traveling toward the line of railroad and supposed he would find more signs of life there. Certainly he could not discover less. It was also possible that he might run across some one who would have known of the dissatisfied men and might at least offer a suggestion as to what had become of them.

Of course, in finding the strikers one would not necessarily obtain information of Billy Webster's proceedings. But, so long as one was under the impression that he might be spending his time in their society, they must first be hunted out. Afterwards, if Billy were not with them, then one could pursue some other idea.

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After reaching the railroad line, Ralph jogged along on the road that ran alongside of it.

The road had been cut through somewhat more open country, nevertheless he met no one in passing. At present it was past noon, but, although Ralph was usually fond of his own comfort, it had not yet occurred to him that his prospect for food was a very poor one.

Then, half an hour later, when he was not in the least expecting to reach any such place, Ralph came upon a railroad station. There was a small frame building beside a platform and near it a typical western grocery store, which means that it held a great many other things beside groceries.

Ralph was feeling tired and a little hungry. If he was to continue riding about the country all day in this vague fashion, it would be as well to secure food for himself when he could. There was never yet a country store without cheese and crackers.

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Ralph tied his pony to the hitching post and strolled up to the door of the store. The door was partly open and he could see a man inside who

was probably a customer, as he did not appear to be the proprietor, and was talking with some one.

Ralph walked in and the man stopped talking. He was smoking a short pipe and looked curiously at the newcomer. Ralph's appearance was a surprise. He looked so exactly like the old-fashioned western phrase which described the Eastern youth as a "tenderfoot." Ralph's riding costume was too new, too clean and too fashionable ever to have seen real service. But he knew how to make himself acceptable to most people.

He bowed a curt but friendly nod to the other man as he moved up toward the counter.

"I am a stranger in this part of the country," he announced, "and I have been riding all morning. I wonder if you can let me eat a little something here?"

The grocery keeper was friendly enough and began shoving out the various supplies that the newcomer had asked for, conscious of the fact that he was a good customer.

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Then Ralph climbed up on a stool and began eating his lunch and drinking ginger ale out of the glass bottle. He was enjoying himself a good deal more than he had at many a fashionable luncheon served at an expensive hotel.

By and by he turned to the other man who had not left the store.

"I wonder if you would have a bite with me?" he suggested. "I never did like having to eat alone."

The man hesitated and then came forward.

"Don't care if I do," he answered in a somewhat surly fashion, but Ralph observed that he ate hungrily, and they had to have the supplies renewed a second time.

When they had finished they both strolled out of the store together and, without any discussion of the matter, sat down beside each other on the railroad platform. Each man looked as if he had no other interest or occupation in life except just to wait until a train passed by.

"There isn't much excitement in this neighborhood, is there?" Ralph finally said.

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His companion stared straight ahead of him.

"Oh, you can't sometimes always tell just by the outside looks of things."

Ralph hesitated a moment.

"Been any fun lately?" he inquired.

The man shook his head.

"Not much; nothing except some fellows been trying to blow up the track out this way. I'm on the lookout for them for the railroad, as I'm one of the company's men."

"Who are they and what is the matter?" Ralph asked, trying to show no especial interest beyond a perfectly natural one.

But his companion showed no sign of wishing to

be secretive.

"Don't know," he returned. "If I did, I'd have had them out of mischief before this. There has been a gang of strikers hanging around somewhere in this neighborhood—no one knows the exact place. But there is no reason for suspecting them, except that they are down on the company. Funny, I've been watching around here for several days and haven't even run across anybody to talk to before! At least no one but a boy who looked like he ought to be home with his mother."

Ralph laughed.

"A kind of a tenderfoot like I am?"

The other man grinned.

"Oh, he was a good deal younger than you. We have so many travelers from the East out in this neighborhood now, that we have forgotten to call 'em 'tenderfeet.' This boy was a kid—a real kid—tall and sick looking, with light hair and blue eyes and nice manners."

Ralph nodded.

"Funny, what was he doing around here? There is no hotel very near, is there?"

The older man shook his head.

"Not for several miles back. The boy said he was out here for his health and kind of liked to stay by himself. He said he would keep his eyes open for me. But he was a dreamy kind of kid. I don't believe he would know trouble if he saw it."

Ralph whistled.

"I don't believe he would. Seen him lately?"

"This morning early."

"Think he'll come back this way?"

The man had refilled his pipe and was smoking.

"How'd I know?" he returned. "I ain't seen him any time, except one or two mornings."

The man then got up and stretched himself.

"Well, so long; I can't waste any more time around here, much as I'd like to stay and talk. I've got to get up and down the track a piece. I wish you would keep an eye open on your way back."

"Certainly," Ralph answered, "only I'm not going back just yet. I am kind of tired and I thought I'd sit here awhile and rest."

The two men nodded and the older one walked away.

Ralph waited for two hours. Then, as the man in the grocery store was beginning to look suspicious, he got up and strolled about. In the meantime the station master had reappeared, after having spent some time at his own midday meal.

Ralph tried to give him the impression that he was expecting some one on the next train.

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But between four and five o'clock his patience gave out. It was either this, or he had lost all hope of Billy Webster's returning the way he had evidently gone, not only this morning, but on several others.

Ralph then made up his mind to ask Mrs. Burton to allow him to remain all night at Sunrise camp.

The wanderer should not disappear the next day without his seeing him go.

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CHAPTER XVIII

AN APPEAL

It was not particularly difficult as Billy had not the faintest suspicion that he was under surveillance. As he had planned beforehand in his own mind, Ralph followed him a few moments after his departure from camp a little after daylight the next day.

Both rode burros—the small, sure-footed ponies, which are used almost entirely in the western states where difficult climbing is to be accomplished. And, except for the pair of mules which were sometimes hitched to their provision wagon, the Sunrise Camp Fire party had no other steeds.

If any were required for their longer excursions they were rented from the hotel stables.

This morning Billy got ready his own burro and Mrs. Burton had asked Mr. Simpson to have Ralph's waiting in case he wished it.

The order was an extraordinary one, yet Mr. Simpson, being one of the wisest of men, had asked no questions.

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Naturally he had been aware of Billy's daily disappearances, but as nothing was told him concerning them, he had appeared comfortably blind.

Now the morning was slightly misty, as many of the early fall mornings are apt to be in the neighborhood of the greatest canyon in the world.

But the mist was colored like an opal as the sun sifted its warm light slowly through.

Ralph did not attempt to keep the younger boy in sight. Only now and then he would send his pony a little more swiftly forward for a fleeting glimpse of him. He was, of course, afraid that Billy would hear him, or that he might suddenly turn around and see him.

It was not necessary that he constantly watch the other rider at the beginning of their travels, as he had a fairly good impression of the route the younger boy would take.

Ralph had been a little bored at getting up so early in the morning, as his outdoor bed had been extremely comfortable. He had slept not far away from Billy's and Dan's own tent, declining the offer of Dan's cot which he had

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generously insisted upon his taking. Therefore, his bed had been a mattress of balsam and a pair of heavy Indian blankets.

As a matter of fact this was the first morning which Ralph Marshall had honored by arising early since his coming to Arizona. Now, quite apart from his interest in Billy Webster's mysterious behavior and his own desire to be of service, Ralph felt repaid for his effort.

"The great point was to get started at a thing," he argued with himself. "After that the doing of it wasn't half bad." It occurred to Ralph that this might be true of more important issues than the present one.

There was a possibility that Billy had only a desire to spend his days in freedom and adventure. But, if this were true, no one would have had a reasonable right to interfere with him. Now, in spite of the fact that Ralph suggested this idea to himself, he was not convinced by it.

The tiresome journey of the day before Ralph was not required to repeat. There was a more direct route to the track and from there to the small railroad station.

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But, once arriving along the more open road which ran beside it, Ralph was forced to keep farther behind.

However, this was unimportant if he could manage to arrange to have Billy in sight when he reached the station. After that, he did not know what direction the boy would take, as he might continue down the track or else strike across the country.

Half a mile from the little railroad station Ralph Marshall's saddle girth suddenly broke. As the burro he was riding was so small in comparison with his own height, Ralph's legs almost reached the ground on either side of his mount. There was, therefore, no danger in connection with his mishap, only there was a short delay. However, the time consumed was not a matter of five minutes, required for pulling the leather straps together and rebuckling them in a fresh place.

Ralph was not seriously concerned, although having remounted he did ride on more rapidly than he had since starting out. But, for some reason he did not again come in sight of Billy Webster. Arriving at the railroad station there was still no sign of Billy.

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This was puzzling. The pursuer stopped for reflection. His acquaintance of the day before was not in evidence, but there was a chance that the station master, who, at present, was in his small box, or else the keeper of the shop, would have seen Billy go by and noticed what route he had followed.

Both men declared that no boy had been seen by either of them during the entire morning.

Ralph Marshall argued the question. One or the other of them must have seen the boy, since undoubtedly a boy had passed by. But, although argument did not shake their testimony, it did make the men angry so that he was finally obliged to desist.

Then, undoubtedly in his own phraseology, Ralph felt himself up against it. He simply did not know what to do next. He must follow Billy, but one cannot well follow without knowing the plan or the direction of one's leader.

In this life it is the first failures which are most difficult to endure. Ralph Marshall had made so few efforts of any kind in his existence, that he was profoundly disturbed by this small one.

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Moreover, Ralph was at last becoming affected by Mrs. Burton's obvious nervousness. Perhaps a successful culmination of his quest was not so unimportant as he had previously conceived it. He had wished to accomplish what he had set out to do, because Mrs. Burton was uneasy and because he was anxious to do her a favor. Incidentally he was not averse to doing one for Peggy, should conditions develop in that way. But the question of Billy's own welfare he had never taken seriously. Therefore, it was curious that he should find himself suddenly growing uncomfortable over the boy.

Well, as one must inevitably go somewhere in this world—either forward or backward—Ralph appreciated that he could not remain indefinitely at an entirely uninteresting and apparently uneventful railroad station.

So, following an impulse—not a purpose, or even an idea—he rode away from the station and into the country.

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He continued riding the greater part of the day, feeling as absurd as any foolish follower of Don Quixote's bent upon an impossible quest.

Nevertheless, Ralph did not give up. He was tired and bored and hungry, and frequently had to get off his pony in order to allow it to rest. He found food for his burro and a little for himself at a small ranch house, but only now and then did he come in contact with a human being.

Most of the country through which he traveled was pine forest. It was ridiculous to imagine that Billy Webster could have any interest or any purpose in this unfamiliar and comparatively uninhabited region. Yet Ralph could not make up his mind to return to Sunrise camp bringing back with him no Billy, no information—nothing but a confession of failure.

An hour before twilight, however, Ralph was forced to start for camp.

He carried a compass with him; indeed he had been using one ever since his arrival in Arizona, and had been wise enough to watch the route he had followed with great care. For the latter part of the afternoon he had been traveling in a homeward direction. But now, of course, he must push straight on without further loitering.

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To spend the night in the woods was entirely feasible, but without covering it would not be agreeable and nothing would be accomplished by it.

Sometimes it appears as if one must give up a desire in this world in order to accomplish it.

Certainly Ralph Marshall surrendered all thought of discovering Billy—at least on this

particular day. He would try again, however, on the next day and on as many days as were necessary.

The early dusk had fallen. Ralph was walking along, leading his burro and fearing that he had overtaxed its strength, although these small ponies are supposed to be able to survive almost any test of endurance.

Then, quite unexpectedly, he heard noises. They were unmistakably human noises. Tying his burro to a nearby tree, Ralph walked cautiously toward them.

He had not, however, in any way associated the noises with the success of his own quest. For, temporarily at least, he had forgotten Billy, or rather he believed that the boy must by this time have returned to Sunrise camp.

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The fact which made him most curious was, that at the present moment he was not far away from the spot where he and Peggy Webster had accidentally discovered the unknown group of men some little time before. These were the men who were apparently the strikers on the railroad.

If these were the same men whom he now overheard, Ralph was not anxious to thrust himself into their society against their wishes.

Nevertheless he was amazed when he finally saw them. Yet the men were the ones he had expected them to be.

The amazement was due to Billy Webster.

Billy was with them! But not only was he with them. In spite of his long legs he had been lifted high in the air and was seated on the shoulders of two of the biggest and strongest of the men. And Billy was making a speech!

From his hiding place Ralph could catch a glimpse of the boy's white face in the half dusk. He could also overhear what Billy was saying.

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"I tell you men it won't do," he argued persuasively. "You know they are on the look out for you. Haven't I been all up and down the track for days getting reports for you? You say your strike has failed and other men are at work at your old jobs, but I can't see how it will help you or your cause to try wrecking the track, or doing any kind of mischief. Please don't." His voice had a high sweetness.

He had leaned over from the men's shoulders and spoke like a child asking a favor. Yet the older men were listening to him with serious faces.

Ralph could not believe what he actually saw and heard.

"You've got to win some day, if you'll only have patience; we have all agreed on that fact," Billy continued, still in his sweet boy's voice. "Of course it may take a long time, but it is the biggest fight on earth, to win justice for the poor; so you know everybody has got to have a lot of patience. If you are going to do wrong things because you think the rich have done wrong to you, I can't see how you are any better than they are. And I wouldn't trust you any more

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than I do them, once you get the same power."

It was occurring to Ralph Marshall, as he stood absorbedly listening to the youthful speaker, that Billy Webster was discussing in a simple, school-boy fashion certain of the biggest social problems of the day.

But what most impressed him was not what Billy said—almost any clever, visionary boy might have read the views he expressed and repeated them parrot fashion. The extraordinary thing was the way the men listened.

Actually, by some strange gift of nature, Billy was a leader among them—an influence they respected, even if they would not follow it.

"You made a mistake with that ugly piece of work you did the other night," he went on pleadingly, "but no one was hurt and you have not been found out. Promise me you'll never do a job like that again?"

Then Billy slid down to the ground again.

Afterwards Ralph Marshall could see that he went about from one of the men to the other, talking, and that in most cases the men shook their heads. But he could not hear either what Billy said, or his companion answered, when they were speaking directly to each other. It was due to the fact that Billy had been addressing the group and that he had been lifted up in the air, that had made his words audible to Ralph.

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Whatever conclusion was finally reached Ralph eventually realized that the younger boy was intending to leave for home. For he solemnly went about and shook hands with each of the men, as if he were a personal friend. And, although some of them received the attention awkwardly, none of them refused it.

A little later Billy passed Ralph without observing him. He mounted his pony and began riding slowly toward Sunrise camp.

In about five minutes Ralph followed, but he allowed about twenty to elapse before he rode up alongside the younger boy.

When he did and Billy discovered his identity, he nodded in his impersonal but friendly fashion.

"Have you been on the lookout for me?" he inquired. "I had half an idea Tante would try to discover what I was doing, when I refused to tell her.

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"She isn't accustomed not to having her own way. Well, I am glad you did not run across me today. After this, perhaps, it won't make much difference if I do give up my daily disappearances and remain at camp. I don't think I can have any more influence as I have said all I have to say."

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CHAPTER XIX

THE ARREST

Three days later Billy Webster was arrested.

Ralph Marshall was spending the afternoon at Sunrise camp when the officers arrived. With them came the man with whom he had once held a conversation concerning Billy—evidently the man who had thrown suspicion upon him.

It was about three o'clock and by chance the entire Camp Fire party was at home.

Billy, in his favorite fashion, was lying out in the sunshine on an Indian blanket, while his mother sat on one side of him, sewing, and Vera Lageloff on the other, reading to them both. They had built themselves a second camp fire in order to be a little apart from the rest of the group and not disturb any one by their reading.

For Mrs. Burton was half reclining in a big chair outside her tent, looking over a collection of manuscripts of new plays which had recently been sent to her by her husband. One of them he had chosen to appear in the next season, but he wished her opinion before finally deciding upon it.

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As usual, Peggy Webster was close beside her aunt, but, in order not to interrupt, Peggy was engaged in weaving an Indian basket of sweet smelling prairie grasses. Ellen Deal was not far away but, although she held a book in her hand, she was not reading.

The day before, she had returned from her voluntary work of caring for the two invalids. But she did not yet seem to feel entirely at home in her former surroundings and, although she had endeavored to conceal the fact, Mrs. Burton and Peggy had both observed it.

The other girls were engaged in various occupations and Dan was having a nap.

Fortunately Ralph Marshall and Sally Ashton had walked a few yards along the path which led into Sunrise camp. They were first to observe the police and the man who accompanied them, before any member of the camp fire realized their errand.

Ralph had an immediate premonition of their intention, although he failed to appreciate its full seriousness.

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The man whom he had seen before spoke first.

"We've come to arrest the kid," he announced. "No wonder you were interested to hear all I had to say about him. I was green. I didn't get on to the fact that you knew him. But, then, I was a long way from guessing he was mixed up with this bunch of railroad strikers."

Apparently the man did not intend being impertinent, but was merely stating the case as he recognized it.

Nevertheless Ralph felt both angry and impotent.

"How do you know 'the kid,' as you call him, had anything to do with the strikers," he inquired. "And if he did, what is that to you?"

The man shook his head.

"Nothing, maybe, except that we want to find out just how deep he was in the trouble. There were some rails torn up out of the track last night a few miles from here and a freight train went over. Lucky it was a freight, but the engineer was pretty badly hurt. We've got a straight tip that two or three of the strikers did the work. And we have been hearing that this boy, who is staying out here in a camp with a lot of relations and girls, has been loafing around with these same men, getting news for them and watching what was going on in places they couldn't show themselves."

"Nonsense," Ralph returned. He was thinking quickly.

"Will you give me the chance to go and tell the boy's people what you have come for?" he asked. "You see his mother is with him now and there is no telling what effect your appearance on such an errand will have on her."

The older of the two police officers nodded, with an expression of relief. Evidently he had no taste for the task ahead of him.

This afternoon Sunrise camp looked like an idyl. The tents stood in white outline against the dark background of pine trees. In the central space before the tents a big camp fire was burning and seated about it were three or four girls in their Camp Fire costumes.

The two other groups were not far away.

Ralph went directly to Mrs. Burton. He was sorry that Peggy Webster was so near that she would be obliged to overhear him, but he dared not delay.

Under the circumstances it was well that he had given a detailed account to Mrs. Burton of his discovery of Billy and exactly what he had overheard him saying.

Billy was not aware of this fact because his aunt had never mentioned it to him. Ralph had not had any conversation with him since their return to camp together a few evenings before.

Since then, so far as any one knew, Billy had not been away for an hour.

So, in a measure Mrs. Burton was prepared for the disagreeable news Ralph brought her. In any case she was usually at her best in real difficulties; it was the smaller ones that found her unprepared.

Now she turned at once to Peggy.

"Come, dear, we must explain to your mother," she remarked quietly, "don't be frightened. Billy has done nothing wrong, though he may be compelled to prove the fact."

Sally had dropped behind before Ralph delivered his message, but he accompanied the two women across the few yards of ground that separated them from Mrs. Webster.

It was curious, but none of them thought of Billy's being particularly frightened, and yet he was a delicate, high-strung boy, not yet sixteen.

Billy was not frightened. As soon as he

understood what his aunt was saying to his mother, he got up and came over to her.

"Don't be worried, dearest," he whispered patting her shoulder softly. "I haven't done anything wrong—I give you my word of honor—not even anything wrong as you and father look at it. Of course, you'll think I have been pretty headstrong and foolish and have gotten myself into a scrape. But I didn't see it that way. I thought I could persuade the men to keep out of trouble. Well, I didn't succeed, but I did not know I had not until now. The men promised me to be sensible."

He put his arm around her and then turned—not to his aunt or his sister, but to Vera.

"You'll make mother understand the way I felt, won't you? I didn't confide in you because I didn't want to get you into my difficulty."

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Then he saw the two police officers approaching, with the railroad detective.

Billy smiled at them, although his face was pretty white.

"You are making a mistake in this. I had a perfect right to give the strikers all the information I ever gave them. As for any trouble you have had along the road I knew nothing about it until this minute. And I doubt if you can prove the strikers were mixed up in it anyway. Still I know there is no use in my talking to you. I'll have to tell my story to persons higher in authority. I'll be ready to go along with you in a few moments."

And in ten minutes Billy had gone with them, carrying a little bag packed with a few of his belongings.

He looked very slender and young as he walked away beside the heavy, older men. But his head was up and his shoulders squared.

If he had a lump in his throat and his body shook with nervousness, he never confessed the fact.

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Instead, just before he was out of sight, he turned and waved his hand gallantly to the group of his Camp Fire friends.

Mrs. Webster had gone to her tent. But the girls and Mrs. Burton received his farewell in tears. Ralph Marshall felt that he would like to have relieved himself of his own emotion by using language which was not permitted at Sunrise camp.

Before he was to return to his hotel, however, in order to attend to some business for Mrs. Burton, in connection with Billy's arrest, Peggy Webster came to him.

"I just wanted to thank you," she said quietly.

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"I JUST WANTED TO THANK YOU,' SHE SAID."

But she held out her hand and, as Ralph took it, he felt the clasp had its old, warm friendliness.

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CHAPTER XX

THE GRAND CANYON

"I would give a great deal to be going down into the Grand Canyon with you today, Miss Ellen."

Ellen Deal looked closely at her companion.

"I don't think you ought to wish for anything these days, because so much that is good has already come to you."

She spoke seriously and was very much in earnest; nevertheless her companion laughed.

The young man and woman were standing together at the summit of a cliff. Thousands of feet below them lay the bottom of the Grand Canyon, through which the Colorado River runs for a distance of two hundred and seventeen miles, with a world of adamant and of radiant color lying between the surface of the earth and this part of its interior.

Near them were a dozen or more other persons getting ready for the descent into the canyon.

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"You are perfectly right, as you are apt to be, Miss Ellen Deal," Robert Clark returned. "Fate has been kind to me recently—kinder than I deserve. It is wonderful that Mrs. Burton's husband is to put on my new play. I sent it to him before Marta and I had met any of her Camp Fire party. But I suppose she did bring me good luck in this as in another thing, because it was hearing that the famous Polly O'Neill Burton was in this neighborhood, which inspired me to offer my play to her husband."

Ellen Deal nodded vigorously, the already bright color in her face growing brighter.

"Mrs. Burton says she likes your play immensely. She read the manuscript about two weeks ago. And, of course, I am sorry you can't go down into the canyon with us. It is only my unfortunate way of expressing myself. What I really meant was that I am glad you are so much better and have had such good fortune with your writing. I don't feel nearly so worried about you. We shall be going away from here after a little, but I feel sure now that you are going to get well."

"And you won't stay on with Marta and me when I have explained to you that I can now afford to pay you for the care you will give us? I know it isn't much to offer, but I told you exactly what Mr. Burton had given me as an advance royalty on my play. Living simply, as we do out here, it ought to last some time. Besides, who knows what may happen, now my luck has turned? Queer, isn't it, how bad fortune often brings good? If I had kept on at my newspaper job it might have been a good many years before I had the opportunity to write a play. Besides, through being ill, haven't I come to knowing you."

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Ellen Deal blushed furiously and unbecomingly, as she already had too much color to make any more desirable. She was one of the persons who have not the faintest idea how to receive a compliment gracefully. A compliment made her even more curt and severe in her manner than usual. And Robert Clark had a Southerner's graceful fashion of being complimentary to women in the most charming and apparently sincere way.

"I told you I would not stay with you at any price when you no longer need me. You were very much afraid of my offering you charity when I volunteered to nurse you until you were stronger. Now, that you do not require the services of a nurse, it seems you are offering charity to me. It is totally unnecessary. Mrs. Burton has asked me to continue to remain for a time longer with the Camp Fire party."

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Then, unexpectedly, Ellen Deal's eyes filled with tears.

How utterly ungracious and unattractive her speech sounded! Nevertheless she greatly wished Mr. Clark and his sister to remember her with pleasure, when they were so soon to be separated and probably would not meet again.

But Robert Clark did not appear to be either angry or hurt.

Instead, he continued looking at the young woman beside him with a kind of grave

tenderness.

"Has it never occurred to you, Ellen, that I may need and want you for other reasons; that I may wish to care for you more than I wish you to care for me? But I have no right to speak of this to you now—not until I am absolutely well."

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He held out his thin, somewhat scholarly hand and Ellen Deal put her own capable, executive one into it. She did not understand all her companion's speech implied, and yet she had a flooding sense of happiness.

"A happy day to you; I must go now and wish Mrs. Burton good luck. You are wonderfully kind to have included Marta in your excursion into the canyon. And I have enjoyed my ride with you this far. Good-bye."

The Camp Fire party had this morning driven along a wonderful roadway which is built beside the brink of the canyon for a number of miles. They had finished an early luncheon at an odd road house imitating the Spanish style and furnished with Spanish furniture.

At the present moment Mrs. Burton was standing on the great porch of this hotel talking to several of the Grand Canyon guides and entirely surrounded by members of her Camp Fire party. The others were not far away, but outside in the hotel grounds.

Billy Webster was standing alongside his aunt looking perfectly well and cheerful. Two weeks had passed since his arrest, but three days only had been required for securing his release.

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Mrs. Burton had, of course, immediately obtained the interest and the services of several influential men, who promised to get her nephew out of his difficulty as quickly as possible.

Then Billy's own story had been perfectly straightforward. He did not deny his acquaintance with the strikers, but he did assert that his effort with them had been against their employing violence. There was, also, Ralph Marshall's testimony that his story was true. Also, there was Billy's youth and his family's prominence to help him. Whatever the reason or combination of reasons, the boy's case was dismissed after three days although there was still the possibility that he might be called as a witness at the trial of the suspected men.

However, Billy had apparently borne his experience without much suffering in mind or body. He had not looked so well or animated, as he did today, since his arrival in Arizona. He had also managed to make peace with his family for his escapade, which was more important. However, Mrs. Burton insisted that he never be allowed to get very far out of her own or her sister's sight while they were in Arizona, so they need have no further shocks through Billy's proceedings.

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The entire Camp Fire party, excepting Mrs. Webster and Marie, who had wisely remained at camp, was to descend on mule back down one of the Grand Canyon trails to a plateau above the Colorado River. The trail was one of the easiest, nevertheless it required thirty-six hours and they

were therefore to spend the night at a camp midway down the incline.

Ralph Marshall, Terry Benton and Howard Brent also were members of the expedition and Robert Clark had taken the drive, but was not strong enough to go all the way down the trail.

There is an appalling grandeur and an almost indescribable beauty in a descent into the Grand Canyon. And the spectacle affects persons very differently, according to their temperaments. To some the gigantic awfulness of this huge and mysterious world of stone is more impressive than its beauty or its majesty. To others it appears as a divine monument of God, revealing the mystery of creation rather than inspiring terror.

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But whatever the effect on the Camp Fire party of the scene about them, as they traveled slowly and carefully down the steep path, getting deeper and deeper into the center of the earth, they were more silent and self-absorbed than ever before. Even Sally Ashton and Gerry Williams forgot to chatter, or else were too much occupied with their efforts not to come to grief, as the riding was extremely difficult.

About sundown the rude little houses built on a rocky plateau which were to be their shelter for the night appeared as havens of refuge to each of the travelers.

As soon as they could dismount, everybody disappeared inside the houses to rest, leaving only Peggy Webster and Ralph Marshall outside in company with the guides who were looking after the mules. Peggy walked over to the edge of the cliff and stood there looking down, and Ralph waited a moment in order to be able to speak to her.

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"I have never been able to forgive myself, Peggy, for clutching at you the afternoon I tumbled over one of these cliffs," a voice said unexpectedly at the girl's elbow. "I do many things I ought not, but I hate to think of adding cowardice to my weaknesses."

Ralph Marshall's face was so troubled that Peggy involuntarily slipped her arm inside his. Of course, one never forgets an unkindness; it is hardly possible, but she had in a measure forgiven Ralph for his once careless attitude toward her. Moreover, at present it made one feel safer and happier to have the touch of something human near one, while beholding so much of nature in an unfriendly mood.

"Don't be absurd, Ralph; your reaching out was involuntary. Besides, you hardly touched me. Anyone would have done what you did without thinking. There was no time, and I would not have fallen as you hardly touched me, except that the ground also gave way under my feet."

"You are a good sport, Peggy, but it scarcely needs me to tell you so."

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Peggy turned toward her companion with one of her clearest and most straightforward expressions.

"I like to hear you say so though, Ralph," she answered.

Then, in order to change the young man's train of thought, she stared at the great mountains of color up above them and then at the deeper one at their feet.

"Do you suppose life is as wonderful and as beautiful a journey, Ralph, as the climb through this canyon?"

Ralph returned her gaze steadily.

"I think it will be for you, Peggy, I wish I were as certain for myself. But we shall be reaching the end of the trail into the canyon tomorrow. May I wish we may be good friends to the end of a longer trail?"

Peggy had only time to answer, "yes," when Mrs. Burton, coming to the door, called her into their little lodging for the night.

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