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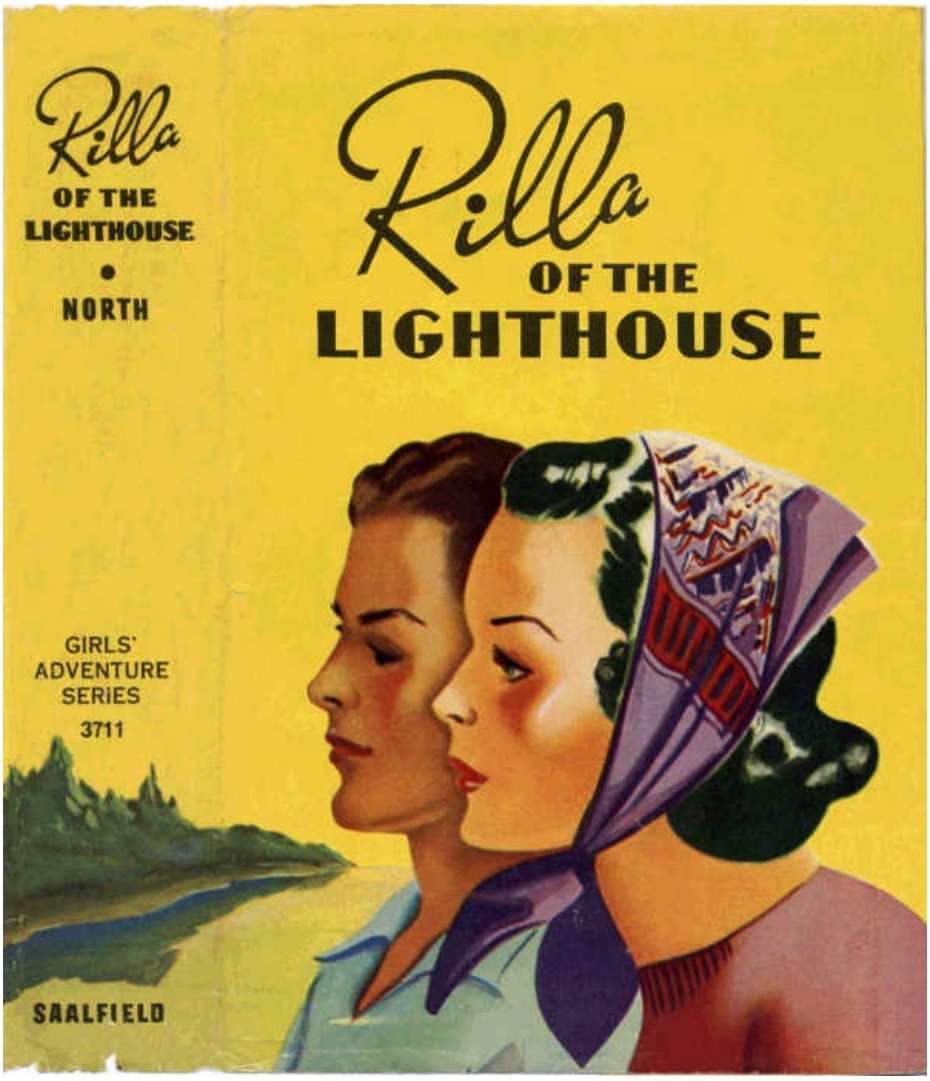

RILLA *of the* LIGHTHOUSE

"Clear out! Go away! We don't want any landlubbers here!"
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RILLA OF THE LIGHTHOUSE

By GRACE MAY NORTH

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RILLA OF THE LIGHTHOUSE

CHAPTER I.
RILLA.

"Here yo', Shags! What yo' got thar, ol' dog? Haul it out! Like it's a treasure from a ship that's gone down. Ahoy, thar, Shagsie! Here comes a crashin' big wave. Whoo! Wa'n't that-un a tarnal whopper? An' yo' lost yer treasure, sure sartin! Sharp ahead now, ol' dog, d'y see it anywhar?"

The wind-blown girl and the big shaggy dog stood side by side on the narrow, pebbly strip of beach and gazed intently at the whirling,

seething water where a breaker of unusual size had crashed high, sending these two for a moment scrambling up the rocks.

Back of them towered an almost perpendicular cliff, on top of which stood the Windy Island Lighthouse, severe in outline, but glaring red and white in color that it might be readily observed in the daytime by pilots who were strangers in those dangerous waters.

Many a shoal there was under the tossing, turbulent waves, unsuspected by the unwary mariner, and, in the heavy fogs that often hung like wet, impenetrable blankets over that part of the New England coast, many a vessel would have crashed to its destruction had it not been for the faithful Captain Ezra Bassett, who had been keeper of the light since Rilla was a baby. **[4]**

The dog's sight must have been keener than that of the girl, for a moment later he dashed away up the narrow strip of beach and began to bark furiously at some object that was tossing on an incoming wave. The girl raced after him, her hazel eyes glowing with excitement, her long brown hair, with a glint of red in it, unfastened, flying back of her.

"'Tain't the same thing, Shagsie!" she shouted to her companion. "'Tain't what yo' was tryin' to fetch ashore down below by the rocks. This-un is more like a box or suthin!"

The eager expression in the girl's big, starlike eyes changed to one of concern and anxiety.

"Shags," she cried, "thar's been a wreck, that's sure sartin, but 'twa'n't hereabouts, 'pears like." She shaded her eyes with one hand, and gazed searchingly out toward the horizon, but in another moment her eager interest returned to the box. "Look, yo' ol' dog. It's ridin' high. We'll get it, yo' see if we don't. Yi-hi! Here she comes. Heave ahead now, Shagsie!" **[5]**

The dog raced around, barking wildly, but the barefooted girl plunged deep into the seething foam, caught a banded box of foreign appearance and held on with all her strength while the undertow tried to drag her treasure away, but the wave receded and the box was left high.

"We got it, ol' Shags. We got it!" she cried triumphantly, tossing back her sun-shimmered hair, for, when she had stooped, it had fallen about her face. This hindered the freedom of her movements, and so, snatching up a wet green ribbon of seaweed, she tied her hair back with it. Another wave was rushing, roaring shoreward. One quick seaward glance told her that it was going to be the biggest one yet.

Could she get the box high enough to be out of reach of that next breaker? How she tugged! But her efforts were fruitless, for with a deafening thud the wave crashed over her, lifting the box to which she still clung and hurling them both farther up the beach.

The girl was drenched but exultant and miraculously unhurt.

"We've got it now, sure sartin, Shags, ol' dog." Flushed and breathless, she sank down on the **[6]**

banded box for a moment to rest, but the dog, sniffing at it, barked his excitement.

“Yo’d like to know what’s in it, would yo’?” queried the laughing girl. “Well, sir, so would I, but like as not we’d better get it into Treasure Cave ’fore we open it, like as not we’d better.”

As the girl spoke she glanced up at the lighthouse, towering above her.

“Grand-dad’s still asleep, I reckon, but ’twa’n’t be long now afore he’s wakin’, so we’d better heave to and hist her.”

Rilla had found a leather handle on one end of the box, and holding fast to this, slowly and with great effort she began dragging it up the rocks and about half an hour later, as a reward for her perseverence, she disappeared with it into a small opening in the cliff, and not a moment too soon, for a stentorian voice, high above her, called, “Rilly gal, where be yo’? Don’ yo’ know as it’s past time for mess?”

“Yeah, Grand-dad. We was just a-comin’,” Which was the truth, for having safely hidden the box in her Treasure Cave, the girl had suddenly thought that she must go at once and prepare her grandfather’s evening meal.

“Shagsie,” she confided, “ol’ dog, we’ll have to wait over till tomorrer to know what’s in it. We’ll come an’ look as soon as its sun-up. Yo-o! How I hope it’s suthin’ wonderful!”

When Muriel Storm entered the kitchen of the small house adjoining the light, her grandfather gazed at her keenly from under his shaggy grey brows. “A severe, unforgiving man,” some folks called him, but he hadn’t looked long at the darling of his heart before his expression changed, softened until those grey eyes that had often struck terror to an offending deckhand shone with a light that was infinitely tender. [7]

“Well, Rilly gal, fust mate of the Lighthouse Craft, I cal’late ye’ve been workin’ purty hard this past hour doin’ nothin’. ’Pears like yer purty het up lookin’.”

The girl made no reply, though she laughed over her shoulder at the old man, who, with his cap pushed back, sat by the stove in his wooden armchair, smoking his corncob pipe in solid comfort.

This was the hour that he liked best, when his gal was cooking his evening meal and chattering to him of this and that—inconsequential things—telling him how the lame pelican that had been away for a week had returned, but not alone, for a beautiful pelican that wasn’t lame at all had been with him, or, when she wasn’t chattering, she was singing meeting-house songs in her sweet untrained voice while she fried the fish and potatoes, but tonight the old captain noted that the girl was unusually silent, that her cheeks were almost feverishly red, and there was a sudden clutching dread in his heart. Just so had the other Rilly, this girl’s mother, looked and acted the day before she ran away and married the young man from the city. The eyes under the shaggy grey brows were hard again, and Rilla, noting in the face of the grand-dad she so loved the expression she dreaded, ran to him,

fork in hand and pressing her cheek against his forehead, she cried:

"Oh, Grand-dad, what set yo' thinkin' o' that? Yo' know I wouldn't be leavin' yo'. I love yo', Grand-dad; I'll allays, allays stay, an' be yer fust mate." **[8]**

"Clear to the end of the v'yage? Take an oath to it, Rilly?"

It might have seemed ludicrous to an onlooker, but there was no one to see as the girl, with an earnest, almost inspired expression on her truly beautiful face, stood up and lifting her hand, seemingly unconscious that it held a fork, said in a voice ringing with sincerity, "I call God to witness that I'll never go away from yo', Grand-dad, without yer permittin' it."

Then there was one of those sudden changes that made Rilla so irresistable. "Grand-dad," she cried, teasingly, as she stooped and looked with laughing eyes directly into the grey ones that were softening again, "I'm only sixteen, come next month, and why 'tis yo' worry so 'bout my marryin', sartin is puzzlin'. I don't even know a boy 'ceptin' Mrs. Sol Dexter's Buddy, and he's not as high as one of the barrels in his ma's store."

"Yer heavin' oil on troubled waters, and the sea's smoothin' down," the old captain said as he drew his chair up to the table and took up his knife and fork preparatory to eating the good supper that Rilla had placed before him. But, instead of beginning, he remarked: "I can't figger out why I keep thinkin' of city fellers this week past. They don't any of 'em come to Tunkett at this time o' the year. That thar summer hotel at the pint is closed as tight as a clam that can't be opened without smashin' it, an' so are the cottages, as the rich folks call them gray shanties they loaf around in every summer, so I figger yer ol' grand-dad must be gettin' hallucinations." **[9]**

When the supper dishes had been washed and put away, Rilla found her grandfather sitting just outside the door smoking his beloved corncob pipe and watching the sunset. She went out and sat on a wooden stool at his feet. Rilla loved to sit quietly with folded hands while the glow was fading in the west and dream dreams. Just as the last flush was paling the old man rose.

"Time to put the light on, Rilly gal," he said.

She heard his heavy steps climbing the spiral stairs. Fainter and fainter they grew, and then, a moment later, just as the first stars glimmered through the dusk, the great light flashed over the sea and began slowly turning, for the lighthouse was on an island one mile from shore, and the waters all about it were illumined. **[10]**

For a moment Rilla saw a fishing boat that was nearly becalmed and would have trouble reaching port that night.

"It's ol' Cap'n Barney, like's not. He's allays late gettin' in."

The girl rose and went indoors. Shags, who had been lying silently at her feet, accompanied her. "Good-night, Grand-dad," she said, standing on tiptoe to kiss the old man, who stood erect in

spite of his many years.

Then almost shyly she added: “Grand-dad, when I come sixteen yer goin’ to tell me all about it, like yo’ promised, aren’t yo’, Grand-dad?”

A grunt, which could hardly be interpreted in the affirmative, was the only reply, and yet neither had it been negative.

Kissing him again, Rilla went to her snug little room over the kitchen, and Shags followed, for he always slept just outside her closed door.

Rilla did not light the kerosene lamp that stood on the small table. The moon was rising and she liked its light best. For a moment she stood at the open window, facing the town, which in the fall and winter was so dark and quiet in the evening, but in summer, when the city people were in their cabins on the point, it was pulsing with life, color and music. Rilla never visited the town in summer. She was then practically a prisoner on the small rocky island. For a long time she stood watching the waves that lifted silvery crests in the moonlight. “I wonder who my dad was,” she thought, as she had many times before. “I wonder why he never came for me, after my girl-mother died.” Forgotten was the box in Treasure Cave. **[11]**

Many had been the moods of Rilla that day, but when she had undressed in the moonlight she knelt, not by the bedside, but facing the window. Looking up toward the peaceful, starry sky, she whispered softly, “God in Heaven, bless my grand-dad, and—and my father—who never came for me. Amen.”

Soon she was asleep, little dreaming that the next day was to bring into her hitherto quiet and uneventful life her first real adventure.

[12]

CHAPTER II.
A GIFT FROM THE SEA.

Sunrise and the memory of the treasure box came at the same time. Rilla was dressed in a twinkling. She did not even stop to peer into the bit of broken mirror which Mrs. Sol Dexter had given her, hoping that with it would go the proverbial seven years of bad luck. Mrs. Sol Dexter kept the general store and postoffice in the fishing village of Tunkett.

She was absolutely honest, was Mrs. Sol, but not inclined to be generous. If the scales tipped one cranberry too many, out came that cranberry! She had never before been known to give anything away, but something which might bring bad luck she had been willing to part with.

It had been a happy day for Rilla, that one, when for the first time she had acquired a real mirror.

It was, of course, after the summer season, or she would not have been in town at all. And on that same day her grand-dad had given her a whole quarter to spend just as she wished and **[13]**

she had asked Mrs. Sol Dexter for two hair ribbons, one to match the sunrise and one like the green in the hollow of a wave just before it turns over when the sun is shining on it.

“Queerest gal, that!” Mrs. Dexter confided to her husband, Cap’n Sol, the next time he came in from one of his sea “v’yages.”

“She must get all them sunset notions from her pa’s side. I recollect hearin’ he was an artist fellow.”

“Wall,” the good-natured man had replied, “if that pore gal gets any comfort out’n ’em, I’m sure sartin glad. She’s little more’n a prisoner most o’ the year over thar on Windy Island. Jest because her ma ran off ’n’ married up wi’ that city feller, ol’ Ezry Bassett is tarnal sartin the same thing’ll happen to Rilly. But I cal’late them thar city fellars, on the whole, ain’t hankerin’ to splice up with lighthouse keepers’ gals nor grand-gals, neither.”

When Rilla had reached home that never-to-be-forgotten day when she had purchased something all by herself and for the very first time, she had slipped up to her room with the broken mirror and she had tied on both of the new hair ribbons, one red and one green. They weren’t the shades that she had really wanted, but they were the prettiest that Mrs. Sol Dexter had in stock. Then she gazed long at her reflection in the mirror. Once—just once—her grand-dad had told her that she was the “splittin’ image” of her mother, who had died when she was only seventeen.

“I’ve allays wished as I had a photygraf of her,” Rilla had thought. “Now I can be lookin’ in the mirror an’ pretendin’ it’s a picture of my mother, only *she’d* be lots sweeter lookin’. Mrs. Sol Dexter said as how the summer folks called *her* beautiful.” **[14]**

There was always a wistful, yearning expression in the hazel eyes of the girl when she thought of her mother.

But all this had happened the autumn before. Bad luck had *not* befallen Rilla—she didn’t even know that a broken mirror was supposed to bring bad luck—and that is probably why it had not done so; for we get, in this world, what we expect very often, and this little lass, who lived so close to nature, was always expecting something wonderful to happen and she found real joy in the simplest things.

The dog, lying just outside the door, lifted a listening ear the moment his little mistress had stepped out of bed and he was eagerly waiting when she softly opened the door.

“Sh! Shagsie, ol’ dog, don’ be barkin’,” the girl cautioned. “Grand-dad’s put the light out an’ he’s gone back to his bunk for ’nother forty winks. You’n I’ll have time to see what’s in the box. Sh-h! Soft now!”

The dog’s intelligent brown eyes were watching the face of his mistress and he seemed to understand that he must be very quiet. If Muriel tiptoed as she went down the curving flight of steps to the kitchen, so too did Shags. As she passed the door of her grand-dad’s bedroom she **[15]**

could hear his even breathing.

It was not unusual for Rilla and Shags to climb to the top of the crags to watch the sunrise, and so, even if her grandfather had awakened, he would have thought nothing of it, but it was not to the highest point of the cliff that the girl went.

Instead, she clambered down what appeared to be a perilous descent, but both she and the dog were as sure-footed as mountain goats, and they were soon standing on the out-jutting ledge in front of a small opening which was the entrance to her Treasure Cave.

Eager as the girl was to learn the secret that the box contained, she did not go in at once, but paused, turning toward the sea. The waves, lifting snowy crests, caught the dawning glory of the sky. Impulsively she stretched her arms out to the sun.

There was something sacred to this untaught girl about the rebirth of each day, and the glory of the sky and sea was reflected in her radiant upturned face. Only for a brief while did the pageantry last, and the world—Rilla's world, all that she knew—was again attired in its everyday garb, sky-blue, sea-green, rock-grey, while over all was the shining sun-gold.

Stooping, for the cave door was too small to be entered by so tall a girl were she standing erect, Rilla disappeared from the ledge and Shags followed her. The cave within was larger than one might suppose, and was lighted by wide crevices here and there in its wall of rocks through which rays of sunlight slanted. The continuous roar of the surf, crashing on the rocks below, was somewhat dulled. **[16]**

Rilla leaped forward with a little cry of joy.

"Shags," she called gleefully, "it's still here! 'Twa'n't a dream-box arter all. I sort o' got to thinkin' in the night it might be." She clapped her hands, for there were moments when Rilla was a very little girl at heart, much younger than her years, and yet at other times, when she was comforting her old grand-dad and soothing away his imaginary fears, she was far older than fifteen.

Shags was now permitted to bark his excitement, which he did, capering in puppy fashion about the banded box of foreign appearance.

The girl looked at it with her head on one side. "How in time are we to get into it, ol' dog?" she inquired as she stooped to examine the box. "'Pears like we'll have to smash it. Here yo', Shags, what's that tag-end yer tuggin' on? Yo-o! It's the answer to the riddle, like's not! That strap's got a buckle on it, an' it's mate's the same. Heave ho! Open she comes. Easy as sailin' down stream." As the girl spoke she lifted the cover of the box and uttered a cry of mingled joy and amazement. **[17]**

"Thunder sakes! Tarnell!" she ejaculated, unconsciously using both of her grandfather's favorite exclamations at once.

"Shagsie, ol' dog, will you be lookin'! There's a mirror inside the cover as hasn't a crack in it.

Yo-o! It comes out. There now, stood up it's as tall as I am." As the girl talked to her interested companion she lifted the mirror-lined cover and placed it against the wall of the cave. Meanwhile the curious dog was dragging something from the box. Rilla leaped forward to rescue whatever it might be. "Lie down, sir, and mind orders," she commanded. "I'm skipper o' this craft." After rescuing the mysterious something which the dog had evidently considered his rightful share of the booty, the girl knelt and examined the contents of the box. She then turned glowing eyes toward her comrade, who had minded her and was watching her intently, his head low on his outstretched paws. "Land a Goshen!" she ejaculated. "Shagsie, ol' dog, what'd yo' think? This here box is full o' riggin's for a fine lady such as comes from the city for the summer, 'pears like, though I've never seen 'em close to."

Awed, and hardly able to believe her eyes, Rilla lifted a truly wonderful garment from the trunk —it was silk—and green, sea-green like the heart of a wave just before its foamy crest curls over in the sun. **[18]**

It was trimmed with silvery, spangly lace.

"It's a dress to wear, 'pears like, though thar's not much to it as yo' could call sleeves, an', yo-o! Shagsie, will yo' look? Here's slipper things! Soft as the moss on the nor'east side o' a rock an' green, wi' silver buckles." Then the girl's excited, merry laughter rang out as she drew forth another treasure. "Don' tell me yo' don' know what this here is, Shagsie," she chuckled. "Maybe yo' think it's a green spider-web, but 'tisn't; no, sir, it's got a heel and a toe to it! That's a stockin', ol' dog. Now, who'd——" She paused and listened intently. Ringing clear above the booming crash of the surf she heard her grand-dad calling. Quickly she ran to the opening.

"Rilly gal, tarnation sakes, whar be you? Never seem to be around mess time lately. The kettle's singin' like a tipsy sailor and 'bout to dance its cap off."

"Comin', Grand-dad," the girl thrust her head out to reply, in a quieter moment, when a wave was receding; then hastily, but with infinite care, she knelt and smoothed the silken folds of the shimmering green gown, replaced the mirror-lined top, strapped it down and then covered the whole with an old sail cloth which had been one of Rilla's former stowed-away treasures. **[19]**

If the girl had been excited the night before, she was much more so this early morning. However, her grand-dad was preoccupied and did not notice the flushed cheeks and eager, glowing eyes of his "fust mate." Silently he ate his quarter of apple pie, gulped down a huge cup of steaming coffee. It was plain to the girl who watched him that he was thinking of something intently.

Rilla was counting the minutes that would have to elapse before she revisited the cave, when her grand-dad pushed his armchair back from the table and arose.

"Rilly gal," he peered over his spectacles at the girl, "I've got to navigate to town this mornin'. Oil and supplies are gettin' tarnicky low, 'pears

like. Equinoxial storms are due in port mos' any day now, so we'll not put the v'yage off any longer. Fust mate, be gettin' into yer sea-goin' togs."

Muriel's heart sank. "Oh, Grand-daddy, do I *have* to go?" The piercing grey eyes under shaggy brows turned toward the girl questioningly. Had he heard aright? Could it be *his* "gal" begging *not* to be taken to town, when usually it was right the other way.

Then he laughed. "What a suspicious ol' sea-dog I am," he ruminated. "Mabbe the gal's rigged up some new fancy notion down in that cave o' her'n." Aloud he said heartily. "All right, fust mate, stay anchored if ye want to. I'm thinkin' thar's nothin' on Windy Island to molest ye. Thar's the gun in the corner if yer needin' it, but Shags, here, will protect ye, won't ye, ol' skipper?" **[20]**

The dog leaped alongside as the old man went down the steep, wet stairs that led to the wharf, near which a dory was floating.

The girl stood in the open door, and with shaded eyes watched the scudding sailboat until, as was his custom, her grand-dad turned to wave to her as he passed the first buoy.

There were many buoys, painted in varying bright colors, that the skipper of each incoming fishing smack might have no trouble in locating his own particular mooring place. On a moonlighted night, when the sailing boats were all in, it was indeed a pretty sight to see the flotilla, some newly painted and others weather-stained, bobbing on the choppy waters of the bay.

Windy Island, though only a quarter of a mile wide, was nearly a mile long, and protected one of the snuggest little harbors to be found along that wild, rugged coast. **[21]**

As soon as the kitchen was shipshape, Muriel raced toward the outer edge of the cliff, calling "Yo-o, come on, Shagsie, ol' dog. We'll cruise back to the cave."

But Rilla did not enter her Treasure Cave again that day, for in another moment, and quite unexpectedly, she was launched upon her very first real adventure.

[22]

CHAPTER III.
A FIRST ADVENTURE.

Muriel did not have to call a second time to her shaggy friend, for up the steep, wet steps from the wharf the dog leaped and lifted intelligent, inquiring eyes. "Don' let's go to the cave fust off, Shagsie." The girl always talked to her four-footed companion as though she were sure that he could understand. "Let's go to that pebbly beach war yo' found suthin' yesterday an' lost it. Mabbe it got washed up shore agin, whatever 'twas. Mabbe now! What say, ol' Shags?"

Knowing that a reply was expected when his mistress stooped and stroked his head, the dog yapped eagerly, then raced alongside of the barefooted girl, who followed an infrequently used trail which ambled along toward the north end of the island, where the beach was wildest.

The shore, however, could not be seen until one was nearly upon it. When it came within the vision of the girl she stood still so suddenly that Shags, having kept on, was several lengths ahead before he was conscious that he was alone.

He turned back inquiringly. “Sh! Keep still!” the girl whispered, her hazel eyes growing darker and wider as she gazed, almost as though she were frightened at something just below on the rocky beach. **[23]**

What she saw was not really fear-inspiring. A youth, dressed in white flannels, who appeared to be but little older than Rilla, was standing with his hands in his pockets gazing at a flat-bottomed, weather-stained sailboat, in which he had evidently just landed and which he had drawn as high as he could up on the shore.

He turned with a start when an angry voice called, “Clear out! Go away! We don’ want any landlubbers here!”

The lad, however, did not seem to be in the least intimidated by this outburst from the rocks above him.

Looking up, he actually smiled. A barefooted girl with red-brown hair blowing in the wind and with a shaggy yellow and white dog at her side was, to his thought, a picture more to be admired than feared.

And, for that matter, Eugene Beavers, himself, was not fear-inspiring. He had clear grey eyes, a keen, thin face, and a firmly rounded chin. Indeed, Gene, as his best friends called him, was not only a good looking lad but one whom young and old trusted unquestioningly.

But with Rilla one thought was uppermost. One of those terrible creatures so dreaded by her grand-dad had dared to land on her very own island. There could be no mistake that he was “city folks,” for no boy living on the coast would have such a pale face nor would he be dressed in white flannels. **[24]**

“If yo’ don’ board yer boat an’ ship off instanter I’ll send Shags at yo’, I will!” Rilla was wrathful because her first command had not been obeyed. At this the lad laughed, not rudely, but with merry good nature. It seemed to him truly humorous that this barefooted, wind-blown girl should be ordering him out to sea. Rilla, however, believed that he was laughing at her. Stamping her foot and pointing at the boy, her eyes flashing, she cried, “Shags, at him, ol’ dog.”

The faithful creature plunged down the rocky trail, growling as fiercely as he could, but as he approached the youth toward whom his mistress was pointing he paused uncertainly. The smiling lad, unafraid, was holding out a welcoming hand. “Come here, good dog,” he said coaxingly.

Shags, being friendly by nature, and not in the

least understanding the present need for ferocity, actually wagged his tail and permitted the strange boy to stroke his head. This was too much for Rilla.

Her grand-dad had said that the dog would protect her, but he hadn't done it. With an angry half sob, she turned and scrambled up the rocks. A second later, when the boy looked up, the girl was not to be seen. Shrugging his shoulders, he turned back to converse with his newly acquired companion. Gene dearly loved dogs and Shags had instinctively recognized in him a friend, but not so Rilla. She was convinced that all boys from the city were enemies, for had not her grand-dad said so time and again? **[25]**

Running to the lighthouse, the girl seized the gun that stood in the corner and raced back again. The next time that Gene Beavers looked up, there she stood with a gun pointed directly at him.

"Now'll yo' take orders?" her voice rang out angrily, her eyes dark with excitement. "Now'll yo' put out to sea?"

The lad looked puzzled and then troubled. For the first time he was conscious that this stormy girl really feared him, and yet he could not get near enough to explain to her why he had landed on Windy Island.

What should he do? What could he do? Rilla said no more, but, while he was hesitating, there was a sudden report and a bullet whizzed over his head. It was evidently merely a choice between which kind of an end to his life he preferred. Pushing the boat into the water in a quiet, rock-sheltered spot, he leaped in and shoved off. **[26]**

However, he had not gone two lengths from shore when he heard the girl shouting lustily: "Come back here, yo' landlubber! Don' yo' know yer boat's sinkin'? Tarnation sakes, what kind o' an old hulk yo' got thar?"

The gun had been thrown down and the girl scrambled down to the edge of the beach. The boat, having left the shelter of the rocks, was caught in the surf. Seizing the oars, Gene let the sail flap as he tried to regain the land. The leak which had driven him to shore in the beginning was causing the boat to rapidly fill with water. Then, to complete his feeling of helplessness, an unusually large breaker was thundering toward him.

"Jump the gunnel, quick, or yo'll flounder!" the girl commanded.

The lad obeyed. Leaping into the swirling water, which was nearly chin deep, he swam toward the shore, and not a moment too soon, for the breaker lifted the boat high and crashed it to splinters on the rocky point.

The boy and the girl stood near each other watching the annihilation of the craft and the angry after-swirl of dark green waters.

Then, turning to his companion, he smiled. "Well, little Miss Storm Maiden," he said, "you have saved my life, I guess, by your quick command, although you really wanted to shoot me, since your dog wouldn't eat me up." **[27]**

“How’d yo’ know my name was Storm?” the truly amazed girl inquired. “I hadn’t tol’ yo’ nothin’.”

“I didn’t know it. Is that your name?”

The girl nodded. “Ye-ah! Muriel Storm, though Grand-dad calls me Rilly.”

“My name,” the boy told her, “is Eugene Beavers, and my friends call me Gene. My home is in New York, but I am visiting your Doctor Winslow in Tunkett. He and my dad are old friends. I’ve been sick and had to leave college right at the beginning of the term, so dad shipped me off down here to——”

Before he could finish his sentence, Muriel, who had been looking at him steadily, exclaimed: “Yer shiverin’ wi’ the cold. The surf’s like ice. Yo’ be gathering driftwood for a fire; make a tarnal whopper, while I get some matches.”

Again the girl scrambled up the trail among the rocks and the dog went with her. For a moment the lad stood gazing out at sea, as he ruminated, an amused twinkle in his eyes:

“And here I thought that Tunkett at this time of the year would be stupid, the summer colony being closed, but I never had an adventure more interesting than this one.” **[28]**

Gene had a goodly pile of driftwood collected when Rilla reappeared on the rocky cliff. Instead of the gun, she was carrying a covered bucket and a thick china cup.

Although her manner of approaching him could not really be called friendly, yet it was not as hostile as her former attitude had been. She held up the cup toward him and filled it with steaming hot tea. “Drink that!” she commanded; then added, “Though likely ’twill mos’ scald yo’.”

How the lad wanted to laugh. Just before he had left the city his sister Helen had dragged him to an afternoon tea (or was it a bazaar?) and there some prettily dressed girls had surrounded him, offering him dainty porcelain cups half filled with fragrant orange pekoe. He was expected to purchase one of them for the sake of the cause. Not wishing to offend any of the fair friends of Helen Beavers, he had purchased them all, and then, when unobserved, he had slipped away to freedom.

Again a maiden—a storm maiden, at that—was offering him tea. The cup wasn’t porcelain and the girl was not effusively gracious to him as those others, who all greatly admired him, had been. This wild island girl was merely trying to warm him up that he need not freeze from his unexpected plunge into the icy surf. There was another point of difference between the two tea parties, Gene thought as he drank the hot, and almost bitter, beverage. His one desire at the other had been to escape, but at this tea party he found himself more interested than he had been in a long time. **[29]**

Gene had several moments alone in which to meditate, for Rilla, having glanced at the sun, had suddenly scrambled up the rocks, and, shading her eyes, had looked long toward the town. Being satisfied that her grand-dad had not left Tunkett, she returned and lighted the dry

wood, which soon snapped and crackled. Then, rising, she put her hands on her hips and unsmilingly gazed at the boy with dark, expressive eyes. After a moment's solemn scrutiny she inquired: "How come yo' to be cruisin' 'round in that ol' leaky hulk? Even a water rat'd had better sense."

There seemed to the lad to be a note of scorn in the girl's voice, and yet she had brought him tea.

Gene lowered the cup and smiled at her. Usually his smile was contagious, it was so genuinely good natured. "I don't blame you in the least for calling me names," he told her. "I just landed in Tunkett yesterday, and not knowing how to pass the time away, I went down to the wharf and asked a small freckle-faced boy if I could hire a boat. He said I could have my pick for a dollar an hour. He was going with me to where his boats were tied, I suppose, but just then some woman in the store called and away he ran. So I took the first boat I came to. I didn't notice that it leaked until I was rounding the island." **[30]**

"That was little Sol—Mis' Dexter's boy—he rents boats to summer folks. He asks a tarnal whoppin' price for 'em, 'pears like."

"Well, his sail will cost me more than one dollar," the lad told her, his eyes twinkling, "for I'll have to pay for the wreck, I suppose." Then he added: "Miss Storm Maiden, why don't you smile? I've been here an hour, I do believe, and although you have looked at me angrily and scornfully and solemnly, you have not as yet smiled at me.

"I can't be smilin' when I know I'm doin' what's agin my grand-dad's orders, but I *tried* to mind him. I tried to ship yo' off'n Windy Island. I sure did." The lad was puzzled. "I'll testify that you tried hard enough, but *why* did you, Storm Maiden? Surely you weren't afraid of me. I don't understand."

Then, in a few words, the girl told of her grand-dad's dislike for "city folks," though she did not tell him what caused that dislike.

"Am I the very first boy you have ever talked with?" the lad asked in amazement. **[31]**

Rilla, still solemn, nodded. "Ye-ah," she said, "an' I'm tarnal sartin I don' know what to do with yo', bein' as yer boat's wrecked. Grand-dad'll be back by noon and it's most that now." A swift glance at the sun had told Rilla the time. "Yo'll have to hide in Treasure Cave, that's what! I can't come to see yo' thar; 'twouldn't be honest to Grand-dad; but I'll let down a basket of grub on a rope. Then, when Cap'n Barney comes in from the fishin' shoals where he goes every day I'll hail him an' tell him to take yo' to town. He don' mind city folks the way Grand-dad does."

As she talked, Rilla led the way along the shore and paused at the foot of the perilous cliff above which towered the lighthouse.

"Thar's a sail cloth in the cave as yo' can wrap up in and keep warm," she said. Then she pointed out the steep trail.

The lad looked at it and secretly wondered if he could make it. Then, turning, he held out his

right hand, his cap in the other, as he said earnestly: “Miss Muriel Storm, I thank you for everything.” Then he started to climb. The girl watched him anxiously. “Steady there!” she cautioned. “Keep an even keel.”

The lad reached the ledge in safety and turned to wave his cap; then, stooping, he entered the cave, and none too soon, for, right at that very moment, a stentorian voice from the top of the cliff called, “Rilly gal, where be ye?” [32]

“Comin’, Grand-dad!” the girl replied. Then she raced along the strip of pebbly beach, the dog at her heels.

Rilla’s heart was pounding with tumultuous excitement. How she wished that she could go to her grandfather and tell him the whole truth, but she did not dare.

[33]

CHAPTER IV.
A SHIPWRECKED MARINER.

Cap’n Ezra Bassett was removing his rubber boots when Rilla entered the room. The tea kettle was singing cheerily on the stove. She had refilled it when she had made tea for Gene.

Again the old man noticed the flushed, excited appearance of the girl. “Rilla gal,” he said as he tugged at one boot, “what in tarnation have you got stowed away in that cave o’ yourn that you’re so plumb interested in? I swan I can’t figger it out. Maybe I’d better take a cruise down that way and be inspectin’ below decks.”

Luckily Rilla’s back was turned as she hurriedly pared potatoes for the frying. If her grand-dad had seen her face at that moment his suspicions would indeed have been aroused. When she did turn with the black iron spider to put upon the stove, she was greatly relieved to see that the old captain was removing his second boot and that he did not mean to carry out his threat to visit the cave.

“Grand-dad,” she began, hoping to lead his thoughts into other channels, “was thar anythin’ new as yo’ heard of in town?” [34]

One might have supposed by his sudden explosive ejaculation that the new channel into which his thoughts had turned was not a pleasant one.

“Ye-ah, by thunder!” he said. “One of those good-for-nothin’ city fellars landed in Tunkett last night, so Mis’ Sol was sayin’, though what he’s doin’ ’round here at this time o’ the year nobody knows. I sure sartin was plaguey glad yo’d stayed anchored here on Windy Island. I don’t want yo’ to run afoul of any city folks—gals neither—with hifalutin’ notions; they’re all a parcel o’——” The old man’s speech was interrupted by a crash. Rilla had dropped a dish, an unheard-of proceeding, for she was as sure-fingered as she was sure-footed usually. Luckily the china was thick and apparently unbreakable.

“The grub’s ready, Grand-dad,” she said, as she poured into his cup the strong, steaming tea. The old man was pleased to note how little interest his “gal” took in the despised city folks, and he beamed across the table at her as he continued: “Sho now, Rilly, here’s some news on a dif’rent tack. Cap’n Barney’s laid up in drydock with rheumatics. Like’s not he won’t be able to navigate that craft o’ his for a week or two.”

The girl’s face paled. “Oh, Grand-dad, I’m that sorry,” she said, but her thought was inquired: “How can that city chap get to the mainland if Cap’n Barney don’ take him?” **[35]**

Rilla had no other intimate friends among the fishermen who would be passing that evening on their homeward way from the Outer Ledge where they went at dawn each day after cod.

Captain Barney she loved next to her grand-dad, for had he not helped bring her up? One of her earliest recollections was of that kindly Irishman holding her on his knee and telling her wonderful tales of fairy folk who lived on that far away and dearly loved Emerald Isle where his boyhood had been spent. Never had the girl wearied of listening to tales of the mermaids who dwelt in caves under the cliffs and of the “Little Folk” who went about among the peat cabins helping the peasants.

“But thar’s nothin’ the loike of thim over here,” old Cap’n Barney would end, with a sigh, “lest be it’s you, Rilly lass.”

When the noon meal was over, Captain Ezra pushed back his chair. “Wall, fust mate, I reckon I’ll cruise down to the shanty for a spell an’ overhaul the kit. Holler if ye need me.” Rilla, with rapidly beating heart, stood in the open door and watched her grand-dad as he slowly descended the steep stairs leading to the little wharf near which bobbed the anchored dory. About twenty feet up the beach was the shanty in which Cap’n Ezra kept his fishing tackle and the supplies for the lighthouse.

It was hard indeed for the girl, who was as honest as old Cap’n Ezra himself, to be doing something of which her grand-dad would disapprove, and yet she couldn’t let a boy starve even if he had come from the city. **[36]**

Quickly she filled a basket with food and tied it firmly to one end of a long rope. Going to the edge of the cliff, back of the lighthouse, she called “Yo-o!”

The boy appeared and stood on the ledge looking up. He waved his cap in greeting and then, catching the swinging basket, he untied it.

Rilla drew up the rope and let down a pail of tea; then she knelt and leaning over as far as she could with safety she called: “Like’s not you’ll have to bunk thar all night. Cap’n Barney didn’t go fishin’ today.”

Then, before Gene could question her concerning some other manner of reaching the mainland, the girl disappeared.

The boy laughed as he re-entered the cave. “Robinson Crusoe’s island was not half as interesting as this one,” he thought as he ate

with a relish the homely fare which the basket contained. He had not realized that he was ravenously hungry. When the feast was over, the lad rose and looked long out at sea, trying to discover the approach of a boat that might be signaled.

He knew that if he did not soon return to Tunkett his host, Doctor Winslow, would become alarmed. Too, he was constantly on the alert for the possible approach of Rilla's grandfather. "What an old ogre he must be," the lad thought, "if his grand-daughter is afraid to tell him of the near presence of a shipwrecked mariner." **[37]**

As the hours slipped by and no boat came within signaling distance, Gene was tempted to walk boldly out from his hiding place and tell the keeper of the light that he wished to be taken to town, but the "storm maiden" had seemed so truly distressed at the mere thought that her grandfather might learn of the presence of a "city boy" on Windy Island that, out of chivalry, he decided to heed her wishes.

Muriel had just replaced the rope in the toolhouse when she heard her grandfather's voice booming from the foot of the steep stairway.

"Ye-ah, Grand-dad, I'm comin'," the girl replied, wondering what was wanted of her. Could he have seen her taking the basket of food to the cave, she questioned. But, since he was still on the lower shore farthest from the cliff, this was not possible. She found the old man busily mending a net which was stretched out on the sand in front of the shanty.

"Rilly gal," he said, smiling up at her, "thar's a tarnation lot o' tears in this ol' net. Have you time, fust mate, to be helpin' with the mendin' of it?" **[38]**

"Indeed I have, Grand-dad. All the time there is till sundown," Muriel replied, almost eagerly. The girl's conscience had been making her very unhappy. It was the first time in the fifteen years they had spent together that Muriel had kept anything from her grandfather. Every little, unimportant thing which had occurred during the almost uneventful days had been talked over with him and the old man would not have believed it possible for his "gal" to have been secretive, and yet, during the three hours that followed while these two sat on low stools mending the many tears in the net, Cap'n Ezra glanced often across at the girl, who, with bent head and flushed cheeks, was working industriously. Never before had he known his "gal" to be so silent. Usually her happy chatter was constant when they were working together. The shaggy grey brows were almost unconsciously contracted and the heart of the old man was troubled. At last, rising, he went around and stood beside his grand-daughter. Placing a hand upon her bent head, he asked kindly, "Fust mate, tell me all about it. Tell your ol' grand-dad what's troublin' yo'. Have yo' run afoul, Rilly gal, of anything that's hurt yo'?"

The hazel eyes that were lifted were clear in their gaze. "No, Grand-dad, not that," she replied. Then, as she said no more, but bent again over her task, the old man, with folded arms, stood, gazing long across the shimmering **[39]**

waters and toward the town. When he spoke there was almost a wistful note in his voice. “Barney’s been tellin’ me that I’m not doin’ right by yo’, Rilly gal,” the old man began. “He was sayin’ that I should be sendin’ yo’ away to school to educate yo’, like other gals. Is that what’s a-troublin’ yo’, fust mate? Are yo’ hankerin’ to leave yer ol’ grand-dad and——”

He could say no more, for the girl, having leaped to her feet, clasped her hands over his mouth. “Grand-dad,” she lovingly rebuked him, “how can yo’ be askin’ that? Didn’t I promise I’d never be leavin’ yo’? I don’t want to go. I’d be skeered, like’s not, all alone in the big world. I want to allays stay anchored here in the safe harbor of yer love, Grand-dad.”

The girl had slipped around and nestled in the arms of the old man, lifting eyes that were brimmed with unshed tears.

There she was held so close, so sheltered, and when at last Cap’n Ezra spoke he said, “I don’t know what set me to thinkin’ of all this, lest ’twas that Barney said that gals had a natural hankerin’ for young folks, an’ I s’pose maybe they have. It’s like pairin’ off a gay little pleasure yacht with an ol’ weather-stained hulk that’s most ready to sink, an’——”

“Oh, Grand-dad, don’t be talkin’ that way,” the girl implored. “Yo’re goin’ to live as long as I do. I couldn’t be livin’ without yo.’” **[40]**

The old man tried to laugh naturally. “What a pair of loons we be,” he said, “trying to sink a ship afore it strikes a shoal, seems like.” He was rebuking himself for having made his “gal” cry.

They were soon busy again at the mending, but, although Rilla tried to chatter as was her wont, the old man often found his thoughts wandering. At last he said, “Most sundown, fust mate. Time for mess, I’m thinkin’.”

All that evening Rilla’s thoughts were with Gene Beavers. She had not found another opportunity to slip away to take food to him and yet the basket she had taken at noon had contained enough for the day.

That night, when she knelt by her open window, her prayer was not only for her grand-dad, and for the father who never came, but also for her old friend, Cap’n Barney, and for her new friend, Gene Beavers.

Her last waking thought was that in the morning she would go to her grand-dad and tell him all that had happened and that never, just never again, would she deceive him. Then with a happier heart she fell asleep.

[41]

CHAPTER V.
A SWIM IN THE NIGHT.

Meanwhile Gene Beavers had seated himself upon the ledge of rocks below the cave and had

waited, now and then glancing up, hoping that the “storm maiden” might appear with a message for him, but the afternoon hours dragged away and she did not come. Then, at last, to his joy, he saw that the fishing boats were, one by one, leaving the Outer Ledge and sailing toward home. Scrambling down the steep cliff trail, the lad ran along the beach and went far out on the rocky point. There he stood eagerly awaiting the approach of the boats, ready, when he believed that he was observed, to signal to them. But, because of the direction of the wind and the lowness of the tide, the fishing boats gave Windy Island a wide berth. One boat did turn on a tack and for a moment seemed to be bearing directly toward the point. Taking off his white coat, Gene waved it frantically, but the lone fisherman was busy with the ropes just then and did not look up. A second later the boat swung about on another tack and Gene realized, with a sinking heart, that he could depend no longer upon the fishermen to take him to the mainland.

[42]

Walking slowly around the island, he stopped suddenly, for he had heard voices not far ahead of him. Quickly he stepped behind a sheltering boulder, and none too soon, for it was at that moment that Cap’n Ezra had risen and had announced that it was nearly sundown and time for the evening meal. From his hiding place Gene observed all that happened. He noted how troubled was the truly beautiful face of his “storm maiden.” Perhaps she was anxious about him. He almost hoped that she was.

The net was put away in the shanty and the old man followed the girl up the steep steps. Some time elapsed before Gene stepped out from his hiding place. Walking out upon the small wharf, the lad stood looking at the dory which was anchored nearby. If only he could borrow that boat, he thought. He could row to town and hire someone to tow it back. But even this he could not do without appealing to Captain Ezra, who, a few moments before, had shouldered the oars and carried them up to the lighthouse.

As the lad stood gazing out over the water of the harbor the afterglow of the sunset faded, the first stars came out and dusk gathered about him. He shivered, for the night air seemed suddenly chill and damp.

[43]

Until then Gene had not been greatly concerned about his mishap, considering it rather in the light of an interesting and novel adventure. His host, Doctor Winslow, luckily, had planned being away all of that day. “When he returns his housekeeper, Miss Brazilla Mullet, will inform him that I did not appear for the mid-day meal, as I had assured her that I would,” Gene thought, “and he will probably be greatly alarmed. It will be easy enough to trace me to the dock where I hired the boat at so early an hour this morning, and as I did not return it, he will naturally think that I have met with disaster. If only I could make the mainland within the next hour I might be able to save mine host much unnecessary anxiety.”

Suddenly a daring plan suggested itself.

The summer before, Gene had won the championship of his athletic club in a two-mile handicap swimming race. It was only one mile to

Tunkett, and, moreover, the wind, blowing gently in from sea, would aid him greatly. Surely he could make it, for, if he wearied, he could float on his back until he was rested. Then another thought came to remind him of his recent illness. Was it not to regain his strength that he had come to Tunkett, having left college at the beginning of the fall term? When he had won that championship he had been in the best of trim. Shrugging his shoulders, Gene Beavers argued no more with himself. There seemed to be no other alternative, and so, pulling off his shoes and socks and throwing them to the beach with his white flannel coat, he went to the end of the small wharf and plunged in. As Rilla had said, the water was icy cold, and the lad struck out vigorously to keep warm. It never would do for him to have a chill.

On and on he swam, now and then lifting his head to assure himself that he was keeping a straight course toward the town wharf, on the end of which were three lights, two red and one white. How glad he was to see them. The long, glimmering reflections stretched toward him and yet they seemed farther away than they had appeared from Windy Island. **[44]**

Gene was nearing the silent, shadowy anchored fleet of fishing boats when he suddenly realized that his strength was failing rapidly. If only he could reach an unoccupied buoy which he saw bobbing not far ahead of him.

For a moment he rested upon his back, but when he tried to turn again that he might swim, he felt too weak to make the effort. Then he was terrorized with the sudden realization that the tide had changed and that he was drifting slowly away from the little fleet and out toward the open sea.

Gene made another herculean effort to turn over and swim, and so great was his determination, he did succeed. Luckily the rising night wind aided him and just then a wave, larger than the others lifted him on its rolling crest and hurled him up on the cask-like buoy, and there he clung. He had little hope of being able to long retain his hold, as his fingers were numb with cold and his arms ached. Too, he felt drowsy, or was it faint? **[45]**

It was at that moment that his “storm maiden” knelt in her open window, and looking toward the starry heavens, asked God to care for her new friend, Gene Beavers.

Meanwhile, as the lad had surmised, Doctor Winslow was searching for his guest.

[46]

CHAPTER VI.
A SEARCHING PARTY.

It was nearing midnight and the huge lamp in the tower above the cliff was mechanically swinging in its great iron frame, hurling its beacon rays far out to sea, slowly, rythmically turning. For a brief moment the Outer Ledge

was revealed, deserted and surf washed, then the almost even roll of waves were illumined, their white crests flashing in the dazzle of light, to be again engulfed in darkness. Slowly the lamp turned toward the town, where the three lanterns, two red and one white, still burned on the end of the wharf to guide a homeward belated fisherman, then the little fleet of fishing boats and the cask-like buoy were for a moment revealed. The summer colony of boarded-up cabins was next illumined; too the low, rambling inn that would not be opened for many months; then again the wide path of light swung out to sea and started once more on its circling sweep that would continue until dawn.

It was the custom of Captain Ezra to waken at midnight to be sure that the mechanism of the lamp was in perfect order. He was just descending the spiral stairway after a visit of inspection when there came an imperative pounding without. **[47]**

Shags, sleeping outside of Rilla's door, heard it and leaped to his feet with an ominous growl.

The girl, startled from slumber, sprang from her bed and dressed quickly. She had often done this before when a crashing thunder storm had awakened her, and she wanted to be on watch with her grand-dad. Her first conscious thought had been that the expected equinoctial storms had come, but when the knocking continued and a man's voice called, "Cap'n Ezra, quick! Open the hatch," a new fear clutched at the heart of the girl.

Perhaps the summons had something to do with Gene Beavers, the lad from the city. She had not been able the evening before to hail him from the top of the cliff, but surely he could have kept warm if he wrapped well in the sail cloth, and there had been food enough in the basket for two days at least.

Muriel was soon hurrying down the short flight of stairs that led from her small room above the kitchen. Her grand-dad had already flung the door wide open and there Rilla saw several longshoremen in slickers and sou'westers, who were carrying lanterns. Doctor Winslow was in the lead, and his white, drawn face plainly told how great his anxiety had been.

"Lem, ol' pal, what's gone wrong?" Captain Ezra inquired. He drew the physician, who had been a friend of his boyhood, into the kitchen, which was still warm, as the fire in the stove had but recently died down and a few embers were burning. **[48]**

"Ez," Doctor Winslow began, when the men had entered and closed the door, "have you seen a young boy, a chap about eighteen, sailing anywhere near Windy Island today? You've heard me speak of Dan Beavers, who was a college mate of mine. Well, this is his son. He came to Tunkett to try to regain his strength after a serious illness. Truth is, he ought not to have attempted to sail a boat alone. I wouldn't have permitted it if I had been at home, but I had several calls to make across the marshes, and when I go there I make a day of it."

The old sea captain was shaking his grizzled head as his friend talked. "No, Lem," he replied

when the other paused. “I reckon yer off’n yer bearin’s, I ain’t sighted a city chap cruisin’ ’round in these waters, not since the colony closed, but, for onct, I wish I had, bein’ as it’s some-un b’longin’ to yo’, mate.”

A cry from Rilla caused them all to turn and look at her as she stood in the open stair door. Running to Doctor Winslow, she caught his hand. “Uncle Lem,” she said, “I know where he is, if it’s a lad named Gene Beavers that yo’re wantin’.”

Then, seeing the inquiring expression on the face of Captain Ezra, she hurried on to explain: “His boat was wrecked, Grand-dad, that’s how he come to be here, but I didn’t dare to tell yo’, yo’re that sot agin city chaps. I didn’t do anythin’ that yo’ wouldn’t want me to, Grand-dad. I didn’t go near the cave where he was, not once in all the afternoon. Yo’ know I didn’t, for I stayed right with yo’ a-mendin’ the net.” **[49]**

“I figger yo’ did the best yo’ could, fust mate,” the old man replied; “I cal’late it’s me that’s bungled matters, makin’ yo’ skeered to come and tell things straight out. But like’s not we’ll find the boy sleepin’ in the cave. Don’t let’s hang out distress signals till we’re sure we’re goin’ to sink.” As he talked he put on his slicker and cap, as the night wind was cold. Then, taking a lighted lantern, Cap’n Ezra, after bidding Rilla to liven up the fire and put the kettle on, opened the door and led the way to the top of the cliff. Making a trumpet of his hands, he shouted: “Ho, there, down below! Yo’re wanted up on deck.”

Then they waited, listening, but the crashing of the surf was all that they heard. One of the younger men who was used to scaling cliffs, however steep, climbed down to the ledge and held his lantern so that the small cave was illumined. After a moment’s scrutiny he called up to the anxious group: “Empty as an ol’ clam shell. Nothin’ in there but a box an’ a sail cloth that’s spread out flat an’ concealin’ nobody.”

When Muriel heard the men returning, she threw open the door and her eager glance scanned the group, hoping to find among them her new friend, Gene Beavers. “He wa’n’t thar, fust mate,” the old sea captain said gloomily, “an’ I figger it’s all my fault for bein’ so tarnal sot agin city chaps. I reckoned, one bein’ a scoundrel, they all was, like’s not.” Then, turning to Doctor Winslow, he added with spirit: “Lem, we won’t give up yit. We’ll throw out a drag net if need be. I’m goin’ along, wherever yo’ cruise to. Rilly gal can tend to the light for a spell. I couldn’t rest easy if I wa’n’t tryin’ to help locate the lad. The heft of this trouble comes from me being so tarnal sot about things.” **[50]**

The physician placed a hand on his friend’s shoulder. “Look here, Ez,” he said, “neither you nor Rilla are to blame. The lad has not used good judgment, but older men than he is have failed in that, now and then. You mustn’t come with us. A heavy fog is rolling in and you might be needed any moment right here at the light. Some ship may send in a distress signal and Rilla is only a little girl, after all, only fifteen, and we mustn’t ask her to assume so serious a responsibility.”

While the physician was talking, the girl whom

he had called “little” was pouring the tea she had made into four heavy cups and one of these she took to Doctor Winslow, saying, “Uncle Lem, drink this, please do, ’fore you go out agin into the wet fog, an’, too, thar’s a cup for each of you.” [51]

The men seemed glad for the warmth of the beverage and then, when the cups had been drained, they started out, calling back that they would swing the red lanterns in a circle three times from the end of the town wharf if Gene Beavers was found that night.

When they were gone, Rilla removed her grandfather’s slicker and he sank down in his armchair and buried his face in his hands.

Muriel stood at his side, her arm about his neck, not knowing what to say.

Reaching up, the old man clasped the girl’s hand in his big brown one as he said: “Rilly gal, I figger yer ma was right, arter all. ‘Dad,’ says she, many’s the time, ‘it’s hate that brings the sorrow an’ trouble to the world an’ it’s love that brings in the happiness.’ Like’s not my little gal’d be livin’ now if I’d tried seein’ things *her* way; if I’d welcomed the man she wanted to marry, ’stead of hatin’ him an’ turnin’ him out. He went, when I tol’ him to, an’ he took my gal. I reckon it’s that same sort o’ hate that’s fetched this trouble to my ol’ messmate, Lem Winslow. I’m done wi’ it, Rilly gal, done wi’ hate, though I figger mos’ likely it’s too late.”

Muriel felt a hot tear splash on her hand. Pressing her fresh young cheek against the leathery one, she implored, “Don’ be talkin’ that way! How’s it too late, Grand-dad? We’ll begin all over, shall we, yo’ an’ me; we’ll begin lovin’ and not hate anyone at all, shall we, Grand-dad?” [52]

The old man did not reply, but he held the girl’s hand in a tighter clasp. Then rising and going to the window, he stood for a moment looking out into the darkness, waiting until the circling light would reveal the dory containing the three men.

“That fog is so tarnal thick, they’re like to lose their bearin’s an’ thar’d be no savin’ ’em if they got drug into the surf at the pint.”

Then, after a moment of intense thought, the old man whirled, his face set with a new determination. “Rilly gal, I’m goin’ to do it,” he cried. “I’d oughtn’t to, but I’ll take the chance.” Then, noting the inquiring expression of the girl’s face, the old man explained: “I’m a-goin’ to hold the big lamp so ’twill shine steady toward town till they get into port. The Outer Ledge’ll have to stay dark for a spell. It’s a big chance. I’d ought not to take it, but, by giggers, I’m goin’ to!” [53]

CHAPTER VII.
THE HEART OF CAP’N EZRA.

Meanwhile the three men in the dory had pushed away from the small wharf on Windy Island and had started rowing into the thick, almost impenetrable blanket of fog, which, having swept in from the sea, had settled down over the inner harbor.

They could hear the melancholy drawn-out wail of the foghorn which was beyond the Outer Ledge. The two longshoremen who were with the doctor rowed toward the faint glimmer of red light, which could hardly be distinguished. In fact, there were times when the lights on the town wharf could not be seen at all, and once, when the roaring of the surf seemed nearer than it should be, they realized with sinking hearts that they had lost their bearings. Then it was that one of them uttered an exclamation of astonishment and alarm. “The big light!” he cried. “What’d ye s’pose has happened to it? Look ye! ’Tisn’t swingin’ like it should be. It’s hittin’ a course straight toward town.”

Doctor Winslow, at the rudder, turned and looked over his shoulder at the looming black mass that was Windy Island. “Ezra is doing it to guide us,” he said, “but he’s taking a big chance.” Then a sudden cry of warning: “Starboard, hard! We almost ran head-on into that old buoy that hasn’t anchored a fishing smack since Jerry Mullet’s boat went to the bottom.” **[54]**

“The big light came jest in the nick o’ time, I swan if it didn’t,” Lute, in the bow, declared, as with a powerful stroke, he turned the dory so that it slipped past the buoy, barely scraping it.

“Straight ahead now. Give the fleet a wide berth,” the doctor called. The men were pulling hard when one of them stopped rowing and listened. “Doc Winslow,” he said, “tarnation take it, if I didn’t hear a ghost right then a-moanin’ in that old hulk of Sam Peters’. Like’s not it’s a warning for us of some kind.”

Being superstitious, the longshoreman was about to pull away harder than before, when the doctor commanded: “Belay there! Hold your oars! That’s not a ghost. There’s someone in that boat. More than likely it’s old Sam himself having one of his periodical spells. He won’t need help if it is, but I can’t pass by without finding out what is wrong. Thank heaven the light is steady, if all’s well on the outer shoals.”

It took but a moment, the fog being illumined, for the dory to draw up alongside of the boat that belonged to the frequently intoxicated fisherman Sam Peters. Not a sound did they hear as they made fast. **[55]**

“I reckon ’twa’n’t nothin’, arter all.” Hank Walley was eager to return to shore. “Like as not ’twa’n’t.”

Doctor Winslow listened intently. He, too, was anxious to reach the home port, knowing that, not until then, would his friend Captain Ezra start the big light swinging on its seaward course; but he lingered one moment. “What ho! Sam there?” he called. But there was no reply. The good doctor was about to give the command “Shove off. Get under way,” when the sharp eyes of the youngest man, Lute, noted a movement of some dark object he had supposed was furled

sail. Instantly he had leaped aboard the smack. Holding his lantern high, he uttered a cry that brought the doctor to his side. “By time!” Lute shouted. “It’s the boy himself, but if he ain’t dead, he’s durn close to it.”

It was indeed Gene Beavers, who, after resting a while on the cask-like buoy, had managed, with almost superhuman effort, to climb aboard the old fishing boat. Then he had lost consciousness; in fact, his breathing was so slight that the words of the longshoreman seemed about to be fulfilled.

The doctor did what he could to revive the lad; then wrapped him in an old sail cloth.

Ten minutes later, Rilla, standing by the side of Captain Ezra at a window in the tower, uttered a glad cry. “They’re swingin’ ’em, Grand-dad. They’re swinging the two red lights! They’ve found him. They’ve found Gene Beavers.” **[56]**

“God be thanked!” the old man said, as he started the big lamp turning on its usual course. The fog had lifted out at sea and he scanned the dark waters anxiously, eagerly. It had been a tremendous chance that he had taken, and none but his Creator knew how constantly he had been praying to the One who rules the sea that all might be well. It was a strange thing for Captain Ezra to pray, but it seemed easier since hate had been banished from his heart. Muriel noticed a new expression in the face of the old man when, the next morning after breakfast, he said to her, beaming over his spectacles: “Put on yer Sunday riggin’s, Rilly gal. You’n me air goin’ to cruise over to Tunkett an’ find out if that city fellar is shipshape an’ sailin’ on even keel.”

The girl went around the table, and stooping, she pressed her warm young cheek against the wrinkled, leathery forehead.

The old man reached for her hand and held it in a firm clasp. Neither spoke, but both knew that, at last, the hatred of many years had left the heart of Captain Ezra.

[57]

CHAPTER VIII.
A SECRET TOLD.

Doctor Winslow was just leaving the room of his patient when he heard a familiar voice in the lower hall. Hurrying down the wide stairway, he saw standing near the door Cap’n Ezra with Muriel at his side.

“How’s the lad comin’?” the keeper of the light asked eagerly, when greetings had been exchanged and the story of the finding of Gene had been told briefly.

“He’ll pull through, I hope and believe,” the doctor replied. “He is sleeping now and since he is so thoroughly exhausted he may sleep for a long time, but when he has recovered enough to sit up, I’ll send over to the island for you, Rilla, if your grand-dad will permit you to come.

Sometimes pleasant companionship does more than medicine to help young people to recuperate."

"I'd like to come," Muriel replied almost shyly, and yet eagerly. Then her hazel eyes were lifted inquiringly. "May I, Grand-dad?"

It was a hard moment for the old man who had been hating city folks for many years, but he hesitated only a second, then he said: "Lem, I sort o' feel as all this has been my fault and if yo' think the boy'll get on even keel quicker if fust mate here is on deck, now and then, yo' can count on it, Rilly gal will come." **[58]**

Doctor Winslow held out his hand. "Thanks, Ezra," he said hastily. "You're more like what you used to be long ago and I'm mighty glad to see it." Then in an earnest tone, he added: "Gene will take the place to Muriel of the older brother that every girl in this world ought to have, some one near her own age to fight her battles, to protect her when the need arises. That's the sort of a friend Gene will be to your little girl, Ezra. I'll give you my word on it, because I know him, as I knew his father before him. A finer man never lived, and like the father is the son."

When Cap'n Ezra and Muriel were again on the main road, the girl said, "Grand-dad, bein' as we're in Tunkett, let's go over and s'prise Uncle Barney."

When Rilla had been a very little girl, at Doctor Winslow's suggestion, she had adopted that good man as an uncle, but when Captain Barney heard her prattling "Uncle Lem" he declared that he wasn't going to be left out of the family circle as far as she was concerned, and from that day the kindly old Irishman had been proud indeed to be called "Uncle Barney" by the little maid who was the idol of his heart.

They found the fisherman sitting in the sun in front of his cabin. He was whittling out a mast for a toy schooner that he was making for Zoeth Wixon, a little crippled boy who lived in the shack about an eighth of a mile farther along on the sand dunes. **[59]**

Captain Barney looked up with a welcoming smile. Indeed his kindly Irish face fairly beamed when he saw who his visitors were. Rising, he limped indoors and brought out his one best chair, a wooden rocker with a gay silk patchwork tidy upon it.

All of the fisherfolk in the neighborhood had put together the Christmas before and had purchased the gift for the old bachelor, who was always doing some little thing to add to their good cheer.

"His house is that empty lookin', with nothin' to set on but boxes and casks," the mother of little Zoeth had said, "an' he's allays whittlin' suthin' to help pass the time away for my little Zo, or tellin' him yarns as gives him suthin' to think about fo' days. I'd like to be gettin' Cap'n Barney a present as would make his place look more homelike."

"So, too, would I," Mrs. Sam Peters had chimed in. "When my ol' man was laid up for two months **[60]**

las' winter, like's not we would have starved if it hadn't been for the fine cod that Cap'n Barney left at our door every day, an' fish bringin' a fancy price then, it bein' none too plenty."

When these women told their plan, it was found that all the families scattered about on the meadows near the sea had some kindness of Cap'n Barney's to tell about, and when the donated nickles and dimes and even quarters were counted, the total sum was sufficient to purchase a rocker in Mis' Sol Dexter's store. True, it had been broken a little, but Sam Peters, having once been ship carpenter, soon repaired it until it looked like new.

As for the patchwork tidy, the little crippled boy himself had been taught by his mother how to make that. Where to get the pretty silk pieces had indeed been a problem, for not one of the fishermen's wives had a bit of silk in her possession. It was then that Mrs. Sol Dexter did an almost unprecedented thing. She told how, the year before, her store would have burned up had it not been that "Cap'n Barney," being there at the time, had leaped right in and had thrown his slicker over the blaze that had started near where the gasoline was kept. "He knew how it might explode any minute," she said when recounting the tale, "but he took the chance." While she talked, Mrs. Sol was actually cutting a piece off the end of each roll of ribbon that she had in stock, and then she cut off lace enough to edge the tidy.

Captain Barney had been greatly pleased with the gift, and although he never sat on it himself, he never ceased admiring the chair and often wished his old mother in Ireland might have it in her cabin. **[61]**

The visitors had not been there long, however, when Captain Ezra said, "Rilly gal, why don't yo' cruise around a spell? Yo'd sort o' like to go over to Wixon's, wouldn't yo' now, and see Lindy and Zoeth?"

The girl was indeed glad to go, for Lindy Wixon was near her own age. As soon as she was out of hearing, Captain Barney looked up from his whittling. "Well, skipper," he inquired, "what's the cargo that yo're wantin' to unload?"

Cap'n Ezra Bassett puffed on his favorite corncob pipe for several thoughtful moments before he answered his friend's question. Then, looking up to be sure that his "gal" was not returning, he uncrossed his legs and leaned forward.

"Barney, mate," he solemnly announced, "I've writ that letter I tol' you I was goin' to, some day. I reckon I've put in, shipshape, all I know about Rilly's father, but I don' want her to have it till arter yo've buried me out at sea. I cal'late that'll be time enough for Rilly to look him up. He's like to take better care of her, when I'm gone, than any one else, bein' as he is her own folks."

Captain Barney bristled. "I dunno as to that," he declared. "'Pears to me that Lem Winslow or mesilf ought to be her guardeen if yo' go to cruisin' the unknown sea ahead of us. How'r we to know her own pa cares a tarnal whoop for her. He hasn't been cruisin' 'round these waters **[62]**

huntin' her up, has he? Never's been known to navigate this way, sence—sence—" He paused. Something in the face of his friend caused him to leave his sentence unfinished. Ezra Bassett arose and looked around both corners of the shack. All that he saw was a stretch of rolling white sand with here and there a clump of coarse, wiry grass or a dwarfed plum bush.

Evidently satisfied that there was no one near enough to hear, he returned and, drawing his old armchair nearer the one occupied by Captain Barney, he said in a low tone: "I reckon 'twa'n't his fault, so to speak. I reckon 'twa'n't." Then, noting the surprised expression in the face of his friend, he continued: "Truth is, he doesn't even know there *is* a little gal; fact was, he never did know it." Then he hurried on to explain. "He'd gone West on business that couldn't wait, 'pears like, an' my gal reckoned as how that would be a mighty good time to come to Windy Island and get me to forgive her and him. They was livin' in New York, but she didn't get farther'n Boston when the little one came. I got a message to go to her at once. I went, but when I got there the doctor said as they both had died. *That* was the message they'd sent on to him, but; arter all, a miracle happened. The baby showed signs of life an'—an' what's more, she lived. I tol' the doctor he needn't send another message to the father. I said as I was the grand-dad, I'd tend to it and take care of the baby till he came."

While the old man talked, he had been studying a clump of wire grass in the sand at his feet. Pausing, he cast a quick glance at his listener, and then, as quickly looked away and out to sea. For the first time in the many years of their long friendship there was an accusing expression in the clear blue eyes of the Irishman. **[63]**

"D'y think yo've acted honest, Ez?" Captain Barney inquired. "Wa'n't it the same as stealin' his gal?"

At that Captain Ezra flared. "Didn't *he* steal *my* gal fust, if it comes to that? Turn about's fair play, ain't it?"

The old Irishman shook his head. "Dunno as 'tis, Ez," he said slowly. "I reckon a person's a heap happier doin' the right thing himself, whether the other fellar does it or not."

Captain Ezra Bassett felt none too comfortable. "Wall," he said, "that's why I wanted to have this talk with yo'. I got to thinkin' lately of what would become of Rilly if I should get a sudden call across the bar, as the meeting-house hymn puts it, without havin' left any word, or made any provisions; so I reckoned I'd tell yo' as how I've writ that letter. I put it in the iron box on the shelf way up top o' the tower where I keep the tools for regulatin' the light." **[64]**

Captain Barney nodded. He knew the shelf well, for he had often helped clean the big lamp or aided in some needed adjustment.

"Where'd yo' reckon he is now—Rilla's dad?" he asked after they had puffed awhile in thoughtful silence.

"Dunno," was the reply. "Never heard sense. I allays suspicioned as how he might have stayed anchored out West, but I *do* know where Rilly

gal can go to find out, if need be, an' I've put the address in the letter." Then the old man rose, looking the picture of rugged health. "Not that I'm expectin' to start in a hurry on the long v'yage for which no charts have been made," he said, "but I sort o' got to thinkin' it's well to be beforehanded, an'——"

He did not finish the sentence, for a breeze, sweeping over the dunes, brought to them, not only the soft, salt tang of the sea, but also the notes of a girlish song. Both men turned to see a picture which rejoiced their hearts. Rilla, swinging her Sunday best hat by its ribbon strings, was skipping toward them over the hard sand, her long red-brown hair blowing about her shoulders, her face radiant as she sang.

Captain Ezra beckoned to her. "Yo-ho, Rilly gal!" **[65]**
he called. "It's mid-morning by the sun and the big lamp's to have a fine polishin' today. I reckon the storms'll come most any time now and the light needs to be its brightest then." Turning to Captain Barney, he said in a low voice: "Keep it dark, mate, 'bout the letter in the box—till I'm gone—then tell her."

When his two best friends had departed, Captain Barney sat long in front of his shack. He wondered what was to come of it all, but only the future could reveal that.

[66]

CHAPTER IX.
A FIRST LETTER.

Muriel had almost forgotten the banded box of foreign appearance which she had in her Treasure Cave. So many things of unusual interest had occurred of late that even so wonderful a box had taken a secondary place in her thoughts.

That afternoon Captain Ezra devoted to polishing the lamp, a task he would not permit Rilla to share, saying that peeling potatoes and the like was her part of the drudgery, and, as he never helped her with that, neither should she help with the lamp.

Muriel did not insist, for she believed that her grand-dad took a great deal of pride in tending to the big light all by himself. "I reckon he'd think he was gettin' old if he had to be helped," the girl soliloquized as she walked along the top of the bluff, the dog at her side.

They descended the trail toward that part of the beach where she had first seen the lad. For a time she stood silently gazing down at the spot where he had been on that never to be forgotten day. Suddenly she laughed aloud. Stooping, she patted the head of her long-haired companion.

"Shagsie, ol' dog," she chuckled gleefully, "yo' **[67]**
wouldn't be eatin' Gene Beavers up even when I tol' yo' to, would yo' now?" Then merrily she added: "I'll tell yo' a secret, ol' dog, if yo' won't be tellin' it." Then she whispered into the long shaggy ear: "I reckon I'm *glad* now that yo'

wouldn't." Then, springing up, she scrambled down the rocks and ran along the narrow pebbly beach, the dog racing and barking at her heels. When they were just below the lighthouse Rilla paused and looked up at the small entrance to her cave.

"Shags," she suggested, "let's take another look at the treasure." Together they slowly ascended the perilously steep cliff where one unused to climbing could barely have found a foothold.

When the cave was reached Rilla uttered a little cry of eagerness, for under one of the straps on the box was a folded bit of paper.

Opening it, she looked at it, her cheeks flushed, her eyes glowing.

Doctor Winslow had tried to teach the girl to read, but, since he was the resident physician in a New York hospital most of the year, he had been able to make but little headway. Each autumn he took from one to two months' vacation, returning to the home of his boyhood for what he called an absolute rest, but the fisherfolk, who loved him, flocked to him for advice and help, and the kind, elderly man welcomed them gladly. Too, he gave to every one who came a bit of optomistic philosophy which did much toward keeping them well and happy during the months of his absence.

Muriel had seated herself upon the closed box and studied the note. Luckily the words were simple and plainly printed. She picked out one here and there that she knew, then suddenly rising she went to a crevice in the rocks and brought forth a Second Reader which the doctor had given her. She knew every word in it, but she could not always recognize the same words if they were out of the book. After an hour's diligent search, comparing the printed words with those in the note, she looked up, her expression joyous, exultant. **[68]**

"Shagsie, ol' dog, I can read it! I can read every word. It's the fust letter as I ever had, an' Gene Beavers, 'twas, as left it for me." Then, as the faithful dog seemed to be interested, the girl slowly read aloud:

> "Dear Storm Maiden:—I am going to try to reach town tonight. I hope to see you again, but if I do not I want you to know how much I like you. I wish girls were all as brave and kind as you are. Thank you and goodbye.
>
> "Your friend,
> "GENE BEAVERS."

When the reading was finished the girl sat for a long time looking out of the small opening at the gleaming blue waters beyond the cliff and her expression grew wistful and almost pensive. For the first time in her fifteen years she was wishing she had "learnin'." Suddenly she sprang up, her face brightening. "Shags," she said, "many's the time Uncle Lem has said 'regrettin' doesn't get you anywhere. It's what you're doin' *now* that counts.' We'll learn to read, Shags, ol' dog! I dunno how, but we're goin' to!" **[69]**

That evening as Rilla sat close to her grand-dad

she wanted to ask him if she might attend the Tunkett school, but he seemed hardly to know that she was there so occupied was he with his own thoughts, and so she decided to await a more opportune time.

The truth was that Captain Ezra could not forget the accusing expression in the Irish blue eyes of his old mate, nor the question, “D’y reckon yo’re actin’ honest, Ez? Hasn’t it been the same as stealin’ his little gal?”

That night, long after Muriel was asleep in her loft room, Captain Ezra sat at the kitchen table trying to compose a letter to the father of Rilla, but each attempt was torn to shreds and many times the old man stealthily crossed the kitchen floor and placed the bits in the stove.

At last he thought, “I reckon Barney’s right, but thar’s no tarnation hurry. I’ve signed articles to tend to this light till I’m a long ways older’n I am tonight.” **[70]**

So thinking, he went to his bed, meaning soon to send the letter to Muriel’s father, but one thing and another occupied his time and the letter remained unwritten.

[71]

CHAPTER X.
THE HOPED FOR MESSAGE.

Each morning when Rilla had finished her task of “swabbing decks,” as Captain Ezra called it, and had put the kitchen and small bedrooms into shipshape (there were no other rooms in the lean-to adjoining the light), she would stand in the open door gazing out across the harbor, waiting, watching for what she barely confessed to herself. But on the third day her anxiety concerning her new friend’s condition overcame her timidity at broaching the subject and after breakfast she ventured: “Grand-dad, will yo’ be cruisin’ to town today?”

The old man shook his head. “No, Rilly gal,” he replied, “I wasn’t plannin’ to. Yo’ don’ need ’nother hair ribbon, do yo’, or——” He had been filling a lantern as he spoke, but suddenly he paused and looked up. “Sho, now, fust mate, are yo’ prognosticatin’ ’bout that city chap?”

He arose and looked out across the water, shading his eyes with his big leathery hand.

“I reckon ’tis mos’ time for Lem to be lettin’ us know how things are comin’. I sartin do hope the young fellar is navigatin’ that frail craft of his into smoother waters. ’Pears like Doctor Lem ought to——” **[72]**

He said no more, for the girl had suddenly clutched his arm as she cried excitedly: “Look yo’, Grand-dad! I’m sure sartin there’s little Sol puttin’ out from the wharf in that Water Rat boat o’ his. Now he’s dippin’ along and scuddin’ right this way.”

“Yo-o! I reckon he has a message for us. More’n

like, Uncle Lem is sendin' him."

The two gazed intently at the small boat, which did indeed seem to be headed directly for Windy Island. Rilla, her heart tripping, unconsciously held tighter to the arm of the old man.

"Pore little girl," he thought, "was she that lonesome for young company?" He sighed and placed a big hand over the slender brown one. He felt the tenseness of the girl's arm. "Grand-dad," she said tremulously, "what if the message is that Gene Beavers has died. I reckon 'twould be all my fault. I'd ought to have brought him right up to the house an' tol' you straight out just what had happened."

Anxiously they watched the oncoming boat. The wind, which had been fitful all the morning, dwindled to the softest breeze, then a calm settled over the harbor and the sail of the Water Rat flapped idly.

"Why don't little Sol row?" Muriel exclaimed impatiently. Then, eagerly, "Grand-dad, may I go out in the dory an' meet him? May I?" **[73]**

"No use to, Rilly gal. The wind's veered an' thar goes Sol now on a tack. Yo' can't be rowin' zigzag all over the harbor." Then, as the boy seemed to be leisurely sailing away from the island, the old man stooped and picked up his lantern.

"Sho, fust mate," he said, "I reckon we're 'way off our bearin's. Little Sol wa'n't headin' this way, 'pears like. Just cruisin' about aimless, like he often does."

The girl also decided that this was the truth, and so she went indoors to procure the week's mending. When she returned to the armchair outside the lighthouse she saw that the Water Rat was scudding over the dancing waves in quite the opposite direction.

Captain Ezra had climbed the tower. Rilla seated herself and soon her fingers flew as she sewed a patch upon a blue denim garment, while her thoughts returned to Gene Beavers. She recalled that he had looked frail, but she had supposed his paleness was due to the fact that he lived in the city. Too, she realized that she had been hoping for days that Doctor Winslow would send a message telling her that Gene Beavers was sitting up and that she might visit him, for, wonder of wonders, her grand-dad had said that she might go.

Looking up from the garment a few moments later, her glance again swept over the gleaming waters of the harbor. The Water Rat was nowhere to be seen. Alarmed, the girl sprang to her feet and ran to the top of the steep flight of steps leading down to the shore. Her anxiety was quickly changed to joy, for clattering up toward her was the freckle-faced boy, and a grin of delight spread over his homely features when he saw her. **[74]**

"Rilly, look't that, will yo'?" he sang out as he held up a silver dollar. "Made it as easy as sailin'. Yo' couldn't guess how, I bet. Could yo' now?"

The girl shook her head and then listened

eagerly, breathlessly, hoping that in reality she did know. Nor was she wrong.

"Well," the boy confided, "that city guy that's up to Doc Winslow's, he 'twas guv it to me, if I'd fetch a note over to Windy Island and hand it to Cap'n Ezra and to no one else, says he."

Rilla's eyes shone like stars. Running to the door at the foot of the spiral stairs that led up to the light, she shouted: "Grand-dad! Yo-o! Are yo' a-comin' down or shall we come up? Little Sol's here an' he's got a message for yo'."

"Sho now, is that so? I snum yo' was right, arter all, in yer calcalations, Rilly gal," the beaming old man said as he descended the circling flight of stairs. "What's in the message that Lem sent? Is the city fellar——" **[75]**

"We dunno," Muriel interrupted. "'Twas Gene Beavers himself as sent the note and he said as it was to be given to no one but just yo'."

The old sea captain was pleased. The boy was square and aboveboard, that was evident. "Wall," he said as he reached the ground, "little Sol, hist up the message."

The small boy thrust his hand in one of his pockets, but drew it empty. "Jumpin' frogs!" he ejaculated. "If I didn't go an' change my jacket arter the city guy give me that letter. I reckon as how I'll have to go back arter it." But suddenly his expression changed and he beamed up at them. "By time, I rec'lect now! I stowed it in here for safe keepin'." As he spoke he removed his cap and took the note from the ragged lining. He handed the envelope to the captain and then started running toward the steps leading to the beach, but the old man recalled him. "Ho, thar, little Sol, lay to a spell. I reckon there may be an answer to go ashore with you."

The boy returned slowly and the girl eagerly watched the captain as he read the message which the note contained. Muriel knew by the expression in her grandfather's face that the old-time struggle was going on in his heart, but it didn't last long.

"Is Gene Beavers a-sittin' up?" the girl asked. **[76]**

"'Pears like he is," Captain Ezra said as he folded the note and placed it in his pocket. "Lem's writ for you to cruise over to town with little Sol and stay a spell."

Muriel's face shone, but, after glancing at the sun, she inquired: "Wouldn't I better wait till arter mid-day? Who'll be fryin' the fish and pertaters for yo', Grand-dad?"

The old man's heart rejoiced, for his "gal" was really thinking of him first, after all, but his hearty laughter pealed out as he replied: "When yo' was a little un who'd yo' s'pose fried cod for the two of us if 'twa'n't me? I was steward o' the lighthouse craft long afore yo' signed articles to sail along as fust mate."

Impulsively the girl threw her arms about the neck of the old man and kissed his leathery cheek. She took this opportunity to whisper into his ear: "Yo're that good to me, Grand-dad! I'll never be leavin' you, never, never, never!"

Instinctively the girl knew what was in the thought of the old man. Little Sol was eager to return to the mainland that he might display to his mother the first silver dollar that he had ever earned and so the happy girl climbed to the little room over the kitchen and put on what her grand-dad called her “Sunday riggin’s.” She hesitated just a moment between the red hair ribbon and the green, then choosing the latter, she peered into the broken bit of mirror to tie it as best she could on her red-brown hair. Then seizing her flower-wreathed hat by its strings, down the stairs she skipped. Shags, sensing the holiday spirit that was in the air, barked joyfully when she appeared and was quite crestfallen when he was told that he must stay and help grand-dad guard the light. [77]

The old man stood at the top of the steps and swung his cap when Muriel, sitting in the stern of the Water Rat, turned at the first buoy and waved to him.

In the heart of Captain Ezra, for the second time in many years, there was a prayer that the One at the helm might guide his “gal” aright.

[78]

CHAPTER XI.
A PARTY FOR TWO.

Brazilla Mullet, the elderly spinster sister of Jabez Mullet, who drove the stage, had been the doctor’s housekeeper for many years. She and her brother occupied the neat little cottage just beyond the hedge, and Jabez, when he was not driving, was gardener for both places.

Half an hour after Gene Beavers had sent the note to Windy Island by little sol from the glassed-in end of Doctor Winslow’s veranda he had been eagerly watching the road.

Miss Brazilla busied herself in the rooms adjoining that she might hear the boy’s slightest movement. Doctor Winslow had cautioned her that Gene, who was restless because of his prolonged inactivity, must not be permitted to leave the couch, where he was comfortably propped to a position that was half reclining by many pillows.

The doctor himself, after having written the note to Captain Ezra, had been suddenly called on an emergency case out at the Life Saving Station on The Point, and that was why Gene had been the one to give instructions concerning the delivery of the message.

“What time is it now, Miss Brazilla?” the boy asked. [79]

“It’s nigh to eleven, Master Gene,” the housekeeper appeared in the doorway to remark, “an’ I’m hopin’ the pore gal will get here in time for a bite with yo’. In all the years I’ve heerd tell about that child she’s never tuk a meal off Windy Island. ’Twill be a reg’lar party for Rilla, that it will—if she’s let to come. I don’t want to be disappointin’, Master Gene, yo’ and

doctor settin' so much store on her comin', but I know Cap'n Ezra purty well and a man more sot in his opinion don't live—not in Tunkett anyhow, an' many's the time I've heerd him say that his gal should never ever set eyes on city folks, if *he* could be helpin' it."

If the elderly spinster, Miss Brazilla, might be said to have a failing it was loquacity, and Gene moved restlessly.

Instantly she was at his side. "There now, dearie," the really kind-hearted woman exclaimed self-rebukingly, "I'd ought to've pushed that couch farther to the starboard side o' this deck." Then she laughed apologetically. "That salt water language will crop out now'n then, try as I may to talk fine, like city folks. There! Is that better? The sun don't shine right into your eyes now like it did. Wall, as I was sayin', if Rilly can come in time to eat with yo', 'twill be a reg'lar party for her an'——"

Poor Gene, realizing that Miss Brazilla was launched again upon another flood of conversation, tried to think of a way to politely interrupt, if an interruption ever can be polite. The word "party" caught his attention. Many a time he had heard his sister Helen say, "It's never a real party unless there's ice cream." Maybe all girls felt that way. **[80]**

The housekeeper was actually turning to leave, having reached a period, and Gene made haste to inquire: "Miss Brazilla, is there any place in Tunkett where we could get some ice cream?"

The amazed spinster shook her head, on which the rather sparse red-grey hairs were drawn back and down with oily smoothness.

"Why, no, Master Gene, not arter the summer colony folks go. When the hot weather's on, Mrs. Sol makes it."

"Telephone her, please, Miss Brazilla, and ask her if she couldn't make some right away now and put strawberries in it. Tell her that she may name her own price."

Miss Mullet lifted her hands in amazement. "Land o' Goshen!" she ejaculated. "Ice cream with strawberries in October."

Then noting that the lad had dropped back among the pillows and closed his eyes as though he were suddenly very weary, the good woman slipped away to do his bidding, strange as it might seem. "Sick folks take notions," she said to herself, "but this is the tarnal queerest I ever heerd of." **[81]**

Half an hour later there was a timid rap on the side door. Miss Brazilla hurried to open it, and, as she had hoped, there stood Muriel Storm.

Gene had fallen into a light slumber, which had greatly refreshed him, and when he awakened he heard Muriel's voice. "Top o' the morning to you, Storm Maiden," he called. "Do hurry! I'm eager to see if you look as I remember you."

But she did not, for the Muriel with her long red-brown hair neatly tied back with a wide green ribbon, which Miss Brazilla had made for her into a truly beautiful butterfly bow, did not look

quite like his memoried picture of that stormy girl who with long hair wind-blown about her shoulders, had ordered him to leave the Lighthouse Island or be devoured by her dog.

Almost shyly the girl, in her neat green gingham dress, paused in the open doorway, hardly knowing what to do. Gene held out a frail white hand. “Won’t you come and shake hands with me?” he asked. “I’m sorry that I can’t come to you, but I have had orders to lie here until mine host decrees otherwise.”

The girl, touched by the boy’s paleness, forgot her embarrassment and went toward him, placing her strong brown hand in the one he had stretched forth to greet her. Then, seating herself in the wicker chair nearest, she said: “I hope yo’re forgivin’ me, Mr. Beavers, for makin’ it so that yo’ had to swim.” **[82]**

“It was I who used poor judgment,” the boy told her. “Don’t feel that you were in the least bit to blame.” Then, smiling up at her in his friendliest fashion, he added: “We are only in our teens, you and I, and that’s not so very grown up. Don’t you think you could call me Gene and permit me to call you Muriel? It’s a beautiful name.”

“’Twas my mother’s.” The boy thought he had never heard that word spoken with greater tenderness. Shyly, the girl was saying: “An’ I’d be that pleased if yo’ would call me the whole of it Thar’s no one as calls me Muriel. Folks here jest call me Rilly.”

“Then I will gladly. Now, Muriel,” the lad leaned on his elbow, “the best way for two people to become acquainted is by asking questions. Won’t you tell me how you pass your time, what books you read, and——”

Gene paused, almost startled by the sudden flush that had crimsoned the cheeks of his guest. When it was too late he tried to prevent her from having to make the admission, but falteringly she made it. “I can’t read books,” she said. Then the resolve of the day before gave her new courage, and lifting her head and looking directly into his eyes with an eager expression, she added: “But I’m goin’ to learn. I don’ know how, but I’m goin’ to.” **[83]**

“Of course you are, Muriel,” was his hearty response. “And if I am laid up long in ‘dry dock for repairs,’ as Mr. Jabez Mullet calls my confinement, perhaps you will let me help you. *I* had to be helped, you know. We all do, just in the beginning.” The lad’s smile was winsome. Then he quickly added: “There are the noon bells from the church tower, and if I’m not mistaken, Miss Brazilla is coming to serve our lunch.”

Muriel sprang up when the housekeeper appeared. “Why, Miss Brazilla, me settin’ here and lettin’ yo’ wait on me! Mayn’t I help somehow? I’m real handy at it.”

“So you are, Rilly. Fetch that little wicker table over here and stand it near the couch. Then draw your chair and set opposite. Yo’re company today, just like a grand young lady, and yo’ve nothin’ to do but eat.”

Muriel went to the far end of the veranda to get

the small wicker table, and when she turned she was amazed to see Miss Brazilla and Gene exchanging nods and smiles. What could it mean, the girl wondered.

The lunch was daintily served and Gene became so interested in his companion's tales of storms and wrecks at sea, simply yet dramatically told, that he ate far more heartily than he would have done alone. Miss Brazilla made no comment, but she was secretly pleased. **[84]**

Having cleared the table, she surprised Muriel by bringing in two dishes heaped with ice cream in which were preserved strawberries.

Gene Beavers was to pay a fabulous price for that out-of-season dessert, but when he saw the glad light dawning in the hazel eyes of his guest he decided it was well worth it.

"I only had ice cream once before," she confessed, "an' that was when Mis' Sol had some left over that was like to melt."

After lunch Muriel told her host that he ought to sleep a while, and, when she assured him that she could stay all afternoon, the truly weary lad consented to rest, while Rilla helped Miss Brazilla in the kitchen.

An hour later when the lad awakened, refreshed, he saw that Muriel was again in the comfortable wicker chair at his side, looking with great interest at the beautifully colored pictures in a large book that she held.

She glanced up glowingly when she heard a movement on the couch. "The readin' in it is about the sea, I reckon, from the pictures of boats and pirates," she told him. **[85]**

"It is indeed," Gene exclaimed with enthusiasm. "That's Treasure Island. If you'll prop me up more I'll read to you, if you wish."

Some time later, when Dr. Winslow returned, he found Gene reading aloud from his favorite book, while Muriel, leaning forward, listened hungrily.

"Well, little Nurse Rilla," the good man exclaimed, "our patient is much better, I can see that at a glance. I'm sorry to hurry you away, but your boatswain Sol is waiting for you down at the gate. Your grand-dad told him to sail you back to Windy Island along about this time, but you're to come again and often."

That night Captain Ezra pushed his armchair back from the table, and while he was lighting his pipe he looked at his "gal," his eyes twinkling. "Rilly," he said, "yo've been gabblin' faster'n chain lightnin' one hour by the clock, an' things are sort o' muddled in my mind. I dunno, for sure sartin, whether it's Billy Bones or Gene Beavers yo've been over to the mainland a visitin'."

"Both of 'em, thanks to yo', dear ol' Grand-dad," Muriel said. Then, kissing him good-night, she went up to her little loft room. But when she was snugly in her bed it was not of Billy Bones that she dreamed.

[86]

CHAPTER XII.
WEE IRISHY CAKES.

Muriel awakened the next morning with a song in her heart that she was soon expressing in clear, sweet notes which told the listener how glad, glad the singer was just to be alive.

Captain Ezra, busying himself near the open kitchen door, sighed softly as he realized that this wordless song was different from the others that Muriel had sung in the mornings that were past as she prepared their simple breakfast.

There had been words to those other songs, sometimes hymns that the lassie had memorized from having often heard them repeated at the meeting-house, whither she had been permitted to go when the summer colony was closed. Then again, there had been times when she had set words of her own to the meeting-house tunes; lilting melodies they were of winging gulls and of the mermaids who lived in the sea. But this morning there was a new and eager joyousness in the girl's singing. For the first time in her fifteen years, the gates of her prison had been flung wide and she had stepped out into a strange world, timidly, perhaps, but soon forgetting herself in her delight at what she had found, a world of books, of young companionship, of adventure and romance. Muriel, even if she were again imprisoned, would never be quite the same. But the newly awakened love in the heart of Captain Ezra had been the key that had opened the door for his "gal," and she was now free to come and go as she wished, because he trusted her. She would not leave him without telling him nor would he detain her if she wished to go. **[87]**

"Top o' the mornin' to you, Grand-dad," she called, when the fish were done to a turn and the potatoes were crispy brown. "I've a mind to be bakin' today," she continued when he was seated at the table. "Some o' those wee Irishy cakes that Uncle Barney taught me how to make, just like his 'auld' mother did. He's allays askin' for 'em when he docks at Windy Island. He's been laid up so long, I cal'late the taste of 'em might be cheerin' him, wouldn't you reckon they might, Grand-dad?"

The young arms were about the old man's neck and her fresh young cheek rested against the forehead that was leathered by exposure to the sun and wind and beating rain.

There was a twinkle in the grey eye that was nearest her.

"I cal-late as 'twould add to ol' Cap'n Barney's cheer if the stewardess herself toted them cookies to his stranded ol' craft on the dunes. Was that what yo' was figgerin' on doin', fust mate?" **[88]**

"If yo'd like to take me, Grand-dad." This very demurely. The old sea captain put down his knife and fork and laughed heartily.

"I reckon a gal who knows how to sail a boat better'n most folks don' need a boatman to

cruise her over to the mainland. Sho now, Rilly! Navigate yer own craft. The embargo's lifted, as the newspapers put it. Come and go when it's to yer likin'. Jest be lettin' me know." Then he added, as though it were an after-thought: "When yo' carry yer cargo o' cakes to town, if I was yo' I'd leave a few at Miss Brazilla's cottage. I reckon yer new friend might be likin' the taste o' suthin' differ'nt."

Muriel's cheeks were rosy. "Grand-dad," she protested, "I wa'n't thinkin' of Gene Beavers, honest I wa'n't! I just reckoned 'twasn't fair for me to be spendin' a whole arternoon wi' a *new* friend when an ol' one who's been lovin' me for years back is laid up in drydock an' needs me even more."

The hazel eyes looked across the table so frankly that the teasing twinkle faded in the grey eyes and an expression of infinite tenderness took its place.

"I reckon I understand, fust mate," the old man said. "Cap'n Barney's got a heart in him as big as the hold in a freight boat, but thar's a powerful lot of loneliness in it, for all that he's allays doin' neighborly things for the folks on the dunes. Barney's been hankerin' for years to be goin' back to his ol' mother, but she keeps writin' him to be stayin' in America, and that she'll come to keep his house as soon as her duty's done, but she don' come, for it's this un' and that un' over thar that's in need of her ministrin'. Some day, I reckon, Barney'll pull up anchor and set sail for his Emerald Isle." **[89]**

"Oh, Grand-dad," Rilla said, with sudden tears in her eyes, "you'n me'll be that lonely if he goes."

During the morning, while Muriel busied herself with making the little "Irishy" cakes, she did not sing, nor was she thinking of Gene Beavers, for all of her thoughts were of her dear friend, old Captain Barney. Somehow she hadn't realized before how lonesome he must be so far away from kith and kin. The fisherfolk living about him on the dunes were not from his country, nor were their interests his interests. They loved him, but could not understand him, for, as Mrs. Sam Peters had said one day to a group of the wives: "How can a body understand a man with grey hair on the top o' his head who believes in the fairies?"

Muriel understood him, and so no wonder was it that they two were the closest of friends.

Long rows of pert looking little cakes with spiral peaks were on the white pine shelf when Cap'n Ezra heard the welcome call for mess.

"Yo, Rilly gal," he exclaimed, "looks like a baker shop for sure sartin. How much a dozen are yo' askin' for yer wares?" **[90]**

"Yo're to have a dozen for the takin', Grand-dad," the girl, flushed from the heat of the stove, told him beamingly. "Yo're share o' 'em is on the table waitin' yer comin'."

"So they be," the old man declared as he caught sight of the plate heaped with little cakes near his place. "Yo' wouldn't be leavin' yer ol' Grand-dad out, would yo', fust mate?"

“Leave yo’ out, Grand-dad?” The questioner seemed amazed that such a suggestion could be made. “Why, if all the folks in all the world were to go somewhar’s else an’ I still had you, I’d be that happy an’ content.”

The girl said this nestled close in the old man’s arms, and over her head he wiped away a tear.

“Thunderation fish-hooks!” he exclaimed gruffly. “What a tarnal lot o’ sentiment, sort of, we two folks do think lately. I reckon your grand-dad’s cruisin’ into his second childhood faster’n a full rigged schooner can sail ahead of a gale.”

Laughingly Muriel skipped to the stove and carried the black iron spider to the table to serve Captain Ezra.

“I reckon it’s better off we are when we are childlike, Grand-dad,” she said. Then with sweet seriousness she added: “You know the Good Book tells that it’s only them that becomes like a child again that can enter the Kingdom of Heaven.” Taking her place opposite the old man, the girl sat for a moment looking out of the open window at the shining waters of the bay. **[91]**

“I reckon it means that we must be trustin’ like a little child is, knowin’ our Father in Heaven *wants* to take care of us. I reckon we’d ought to be like little Zoeth was the day that Mr. Wixon got mad an’ was goin’ to cruise off and leave his fam’ly forever. He was packin’ up his kit, sayin’ hard words all the time, when little cripple Zoeth clumped over to him, and slippin’ that frail hand o’ his into the big one, he said, trustin’ like: ‘Ma says yer goin’ away forever, but I *know* ’tain’t so. Yo’re *my* dad and yer wantin’ to take care o’ me, aren’t yo’, Dad?’

“Yo’ recollect that Mr. Wixon stayed, and, what’s more, Mis’ Wixon, she changed, too. She stopped peckin’ about suthin’ all the time an’ tried to figure out what she could do to make her home happy, an’ she *did* it, Grand-dad. I reckon that little ol’ shack o’ the Wixons is the happiest home on the dunes.” Then, taking up her knife and fork, she added: “I cal’late that’s what the Good Book means, just trustin’ an’ bein’ happy-hearted like a child.”

An hour later Captain Ezra stood at the top of the steep steps leading down the cliff and watched while his “gal” rowed the dory over toward the mainland. **[92]**

The girl looked up at the first buoy and waved to the one she loved most in all the world.

Little Sol was down on the wharf, and with him were several small boys and girls, rather unkempt, rough mannered little creatures, for the wives of the fishermen hadn’t much money to spend and the children were permitted to grow up as untutored as water rats. When Rilla landed they ran to her with arms outstretched. “Rilly, Rilly,” they clamored, “be tellin’ us a story ’bout the mermaid that lived in a cave an——”

“An’ how the tail on her changed to two legs an’ she was married to a prince,” the oldest among them concluded. Many a time Muriel had told them this story.

“I reckon I haven’t time today,” Rilla said with a

quick glance at the sun. Then suddenly she thought of something. In her basket there were two packages. In the larger one there were cakes for Uncle Barney. That could not be touched. But in the smaller one there were cakes which she had planned leaving at the Mullet cottage for Gene. After all, it was hardly fair when he had all the goodies he wished and these raggedy children almost never had anything but fish and potatoes. “I cal’late I have time to be givin’ yo’ each a little cake,” Muriel announced.

Placing her basket on a roll of tarred rope, she opened the smaller package and passed around the crispy little cakes and when she saw the glow in the eyes that looked up at her she was glad of her decision. “Now we’ll be learnin’ the manners,” she laughingly told the children, who gazed at her with wide-eyed wonder. “Each of yo’ be makin’ a bow and say, ‘Thank you, Rilly.’”

[93]

A fine lady had come to Windy Island the summer before to visit the light and with her had been a fairy-like girl of seven. Muriel had been baking cakes that day and had given her one. To her surprise, the child had made the prettiest curtsy and had said, “Thank you, Miss Muriel.”

Whatever strange thing Rilla might ask the children to do they would at least attempt it, and so, holding fast with grimy fingers to the precious cakes, they watched the older girl as she showed them how to curtsy. Then they tried to do likewise, the while they piped out, “Thank yo’, Rilly!”

“Now, dearies, allays do that arter yo’ve been given anythin’ nice,” she bade them. “Ye-ah, Rilly, we-uns will,” was the reply that followed her. But it was rather muffled, for the cakes were being hungrily devoured.

Muriel wished that she could give each child another, but she could not open Uncle Barney’s package, and so, turning to wave goodbye, she left the wharf and set out across the dunes in the direction of the Irishman’s cabin.

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CHAPTER XIII.
NEIGHBORLINESS.

As Muriel neared the shanty on the sand dunes in which lived her dearly beloved friend, Captain Barney, she was conscious of unusual noises issuing therefrom. Surely there was some kind of a commotion going on within the humble dwelling. Separating the sounds as she approached, she recognized one as laughter (none but Linda Wixon laughed like that), then there was the clumping of little Zoeth’s crutches, and his shrill, excited chatter. This was followed by a hammering and a chorus of approving feminine voices.

Muriel hastened her steps. It was impossible to run in the soft sand. “What can be goin’ on in Uncle Barney’s shack?” she wondered. “I reckon

he's givin' a party, though I cal'late that isn't likely, he bein' laid up——" Her thoughts were interrupted by the genial Irishman himself, who appeared around the corner of the shanty carrying an old rusty stovepipe which he had replaced with a new one. Rilla noticed that he was stepping as spryly as ever he had.

"Top o' the mornin' to you, mavourneen," he called. "It's great news I'm after havin'. Me ol' mither as I've been hungerin' for a sight of these tin year past is comin' at last to live here on the dunes, and the heart o' me is singin' a melody like 'The harp that once through Tara's halls the soul of music shed'; but 'twas Tommy Moore said it that way, not your ol' Uncle Barney. That's what poets are for, I reckon, to be puttin' into words for us the joy we can only be feelin'." Then, as they reached the open front door of the shack, Captain Barney called: "Belay there, folks, and be makin' yer best bows to our neighbor from across the water." **[96]**

"Yo-o, Rilly! It's yo' that's come just in time to be tellin' what yo' reckon's the best place to be hangin' the pictures." It was fifteen-year-old Lindy Wixon who skipped forward and caught her friend by the hand as she went on to explain: "I got 'em wi' soap wrappers. I went all over Tunkett collectin'. Every-un was glad, an' more, to give 'em when they heard as Cap'n Barney's ol' mither is comin' at last. We want to purty up the shack so 'twill look homey an' smilin' a welcome to her the minute she steps into the door."

"Oh-h, but they're handsome!" Muriel said, clasping her hands. Zoeth was standing near looking eagerly up into the face of his beloved friend. "Which of 'em do you reckon is purtiest?" he queried; then waited her reply as though it were a matter of great importance.

Muriel gazed long at the three brightly colored prints which had been hung on three sides of the room. "I dunno, honest," she said, "they're all that beautiful, but I sort o' like the one wi' the lighthouse in it best. The surf crashes over those rocks real natural, now don't it?" **[97]**

Zoeth clapped his thin little hands. "That thar's the one I chose, too, Rilly. I knew yo'd choose it."

Sam Peters, who had at one time been a ship carpenter, was busily hammering at one side of the room where a long low window looked out toward the sea. "That thar's a windy-seat my Sam is makin'," his wife explained to Muriel. "They've one up to Judge Lander's where I go Mondays to wash, and when I was tellin' Mis' Lander how we was plannin' to purty up Cap'n Barney's shack, bein' as his ol' mither's comin', she said if we had a couch or a windy-seat she'd be glad to donate some pillas as she had in the attic, an' when she fetched 'em down, if thar wa'n't a beautiful turkey-red couch cover amongst 'em."

The window-seat was fast nearing completion and so the group turned admiring eyes from the pictures to the handiwork of Sam Peters.

"Make way, thar!" his wife was heard to exclaim a moment later from the rear. Everyone turned to see that portly woman approaching, a **[98]**

somewhat faded turkey-red lounge cover dragging one fringed corner, while four pillows of as many different colors were in her arms.

Lindy and Muriel sprang forward to assist her, but Mrs. Sam would permit them to do nothing but hold the pillows, while she herself placed them at what she believed to be fashionable angles.

Then with arms akimbo, she stood back and admired the result.

She was sure that Mrs. Judge Lander herself could not have arranged the pillows with more artistic effect. “We’d ought to *all* of us fix our cabins up that fine,” she announced, “an’ I’m a-goin’ to.”

“That red’s powerful han’some,” Mrs. Jubal Smalley remarked. “Thar’d ought to be a plant settin’ on the window sill, just atop o’ it.”

No one noticed when little Zoeth slipped away, but they all saw him return triumphantly bearing his greatest treasure, a potted geranium which had three scarlet blossoms. With cheeks burning and eyes glowing, the little fellow placed it upon the window sill. “It’s for yer mither to keep,” he said, looking up at the Irishman, who was deeply touched, for well he knew how the little fellow had nursed the plant, which the year before Lindy had rescued from a rubbish heap in the summer colony.

Out of his savings Captain Barney had purchased from Mrs. Sol a table and four straight chairs. **[99]**

When everything was shipshape and Sam Peters was packing away his tools, Captain Barney spoke. “Neighbors,” he began, “in the name of me ol’ mither I want to be thankin’ yo’. It’s a hard life she’s been havin’ in the ol’ country, what wi’ raisin’ tin of her own an’ two that she tuk as were left orphants. Says she, when no one else wanted ’em, ‘I’ll take ’em, the poor darlints. If thar’s allays room for one more, the saints helpin’, we’ll stretch that room so ’twill hold the two of ’em.’ An’ now that the last of ’em is growd, it’s aisy I want her to be takin’ it. She can be drawin’ the rocker as yo’ all gave me up to the open door an’ she kin jest be settin’ an’ rockin’ an’ restin’ an’ lookin’ out at the sea. ’Twill be nigh like Heaven for me ol’ mither, an’ it’s thankin’ ye again I am for all ye’ve been doin’.”

Somebody tried to say something, but it ended in a sincere handshaking, and many eyes were moist. Then Muriel and her dear friend were left alone. With an arm about the girl he loved, the old man stood looking out at sea.

“Rilly gal,” he said at last, “how kind folks are in this world. It’s a pleasant place to be livin’.”

Captain Barney did not realize that the fisher folk about him were but returning a bit of the loving kindness which he had shown to them in their many hours of need. **[100]**

Glancing at the clock, he said briskly: “Nigh two, Rilly gal. Yer Uncle Barney must be gettin’ ready for the three-forty train up to Boston.”

* * * * * * * *

That evening, when Muriel was telling her grandfather all that had happened, she said: “Grand-dad, I dunno why ’tis, but I feel sorto’ as though things are comin’ out different from the way Uncle Barney’s plannin’.”

“I reckon that’s along of the fact that he’s had his heart sot so many times on his old mither’s cruisin’ over the big pond, but suthin’ allays kept her anchored, seemed like, on ’tother side.”

Then, as the old man rose, he looked out toward the darkening east. “Storm’s a-breedin’ at last, Rilly gal. I swan I never knew an equinoxial to hold off so long. I reckon ’twa’n’t git here till ’round about mornin’.” Then he added: “I dunno why ’tis, Rilly gal, but I’m sort o’ dreadin’ the big storm this year.”

The girl shuddered. A cold night wind was rising. “Grand-dad,” she pleaded, “let’s go in an’ be readin’ in the Good Book.”

Every night since the one on which he had cast hate out of his heart the old man had tried to read from the New Testament to Muriel, and though he stumbled over many of the longer words, the girl caught the spirit of it and retold it with her own interpretation. **[101]**

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CHAPTER XIV.
THE STORM.

The expected storm arrived the next day, although not in its usual fury. However, as there was no real need for Muriel or her grandfather to cross the bay, which was wind-lashed into white-capped, choppy waves, they remained in the house.

“Queer the way our reg’lar crasher of a storm is delayin’ this year,” Captain Ezra said on the third night after the rains began. Muriel, who was washing cups at the time, suddenly whirled, and throwing her arms about the old man, regardless of her soapy hands, she cried passionately:

“I’d be glad if they never came, Grand-dad. I don’t know why ’tis, but when the lightning zigzags all aroun’ like a sword of fire, the thunder seems to roar, ‘Some day I’ll crash yer light that’s tryin’ to defy me.’”

The old captain looked truly distressed. “Rilly gal,” he said, “I wish yo’ didn’t take such queer notions. You’re jest like yer mother was before yo’. She used to come singing down from the top o’ the cliff and tell me yarns ’bout what the wind and the waves had been tellin’ her. Lem used to say she’d ought to be sent somewhar’s an’ taught to write stories. That’d be a good channel, he opinioned, to let out the notions that was cooped up in her head, an’ here yo’ are jest like her.” **[103]**

The old man looked so truly distressed that the

girl exclaimed contritely: “Yo’ dear ol’ Grand-dad, if it’s worryin’ yo’, I’ll try to be diff’rent. I might be like Lindy Wixon now. She don’t have any queer notions.

“I asked her once if she wouldn’t like to visit the star that’s so bright in the evenin’, an’ she stared like she thought I was loony, honest she did.” Then, stooping, the girl laughingly peered into the troubled eyes beneath the shaggy grey brows. “How would yo’ like to change gals, Grand-dad? I kin——”

“Belay there, fust mate. That tack’s crazier than the fust.” Then lifting a listening ear, he added: “The wind’s rising. I reckon the big storm is crusin’ this way arter all.” But Captain Ezra was wrong, for, although the wind blew a gale and the leaden clouds were hurled low above the light and the rain now and then fell in wind-driven sheets, changing at times to hail that rattled against the windows, still the tempest that often came in the fall was delayed. Perhaps, indeed, as the captain began to hope, it was not coming at all that year, for, whenever it had passed, it had taken its toll of lives and boats, however faithfully the warning light flashed its beacon rays out through the storm.

There was a week of inclement weather, and **[104]**
Muriel often stood in the warm kitchen looking out across the waters of the bay that were sometimes black under the sudden squalls and sometimes livid green when the sun and rain were struggling together for mastery, but the girl’s thoughts were not of the weather but of what might be happening in Tunkett.

In fancy she looked into the newly adorned cabin where Captain Barney had lived alone for so many years, but, try as she might, she could not picture there the old “mither” he had so yearned to see.

Then in imagination she visited the glassed-in veranda of Doctor Winslow’s home, but it was empty and the windows of the house were covered with heavy wooden blinds.

Shuddering, she turned back into the room to find that the fire in the stove was dying down. It was cold; that was why she was shivering, she decided. Maybe her grand-dad was right. She was becoming too fanciful.

Putting on an armful of dry driftwood, she began to sing as she prepared the evening meal, and her old grandfather, who came down the spiral stairs, having set the light to whirling, felt cheered when he heard the musical voice of his “gal.”

The next morning, to the joy of Muriel, there **[105]**
were only a few vagrant clouds in the sky and the stars were shining when she arose.

It seemed as though never before had there been such a glory in the east as there was when Apollo drove his flaming chariot, the sun, high above the horizon, once more triumphing over Jupiter Pluvius, the God of Rain, but of mythology Muriel, as yet, knew nothing.

What she did know, and it set her heart and voice to singing an anthem of gladness, was that the storm was over and that she might sail to

Tunkett and inquire after her dear friends, the old and the new.

Her grandfather, too, wished to visit the store of Mrs. Sol, for the supply of oil must be replenished. It would never do to let it get below a certain depth in the great tank which contained it, for there might come a storm of unusual length and fury and the light must be kept burning.

Muriel felt more optimistic, for we are all somewhat mercurial for temperament, and it is much easier to believe that all is well when the sun is shining, and yet, is not the sun always shining just behind the clouds that never last?

At the wharf they parted, the old sea captain going at once to the store, while Muriel hastened up the main road toward the home of Dr. Winslow. As she neared it she suddenly stood still and gazed her dismay, hardly able to believe what she saw. “Arter all, ’twa’n’t queer notions,” she said in a low voice. “’Twas true!” And indeed it was. The physician’s blinds were barred over the windows. Doctor Winslow had received word from the hospital in New York over which he presided that if he would shorten his vacation this year it would be greatly appreciated, and as Gene Beavers had gained strength enough to travel, he had accompanied the physician. **[106]**

Miss Brazilla Mullet, from a window of her cottage on the other side of the low evergreen hedge, saw Muriel standing as though stunned and she hurried out with a letter. “Gene Beavers left it for you, Rilly,” she said, “an’ he wanted me to tell you that he’s gettin’ stronger, an’ as soon’s he’s able to travel alone he’s comin’ back, if only for a day, to be tellin’ you goodbye; but like’s not he’s told you all that in the letter.” Then, as the air was nippy with frost, Miss Brazilla hurried indoors again. Rilla placed the letter in the pocket of her coat and walked back to meet her grandfather.

Together they had planned to visit the cabin on the dunes and see Captain Barney, but they did not go, for, when Muriel beheld her grand-dad emerging from the store, she knew by his expression that he, too, had sad news to tell her.

“No need to go to Barney’s, fust mate,” he said. “He’s not there an’ the cabin’s shut up tight’s a clam. ’Pears that when he got to Boston and met the incomin’ steamer the young priest that was comin’ over with his ol’ mither tol’ him as how she’d been all ready to start, an’ then wa’n’t strong enough to make the v’yage. ’Twas best, the priest said, it bein’ stormy all the way, but she’d sent word that she’d come in the spring.” **[107]**

“That’s how it’s been for years,” the girl declared. “But where is Uncle Barney? What did he do?” Rilla’s voice was tremulous and eager.

“He signed articles to sail back on the same boat as steward, an’ he had the young priest write to Mrs. Sol to shut up his cabin but to leave things shipshape as he’d cruise back in the spring and bring his ol’ mither.”

There were tears in the eyes of the girl, and, as she held close to his arm, Captain Ezra felt her tremble. “Grand-dad, we’d better be hurryin’

home," she said. "The sky's cloudin' fast an' it's gettin' colder."

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CHAPTER XV.
THREE MORE GIRLS.

Upon reaching Windy Island that cold, grey, late afternoon, Muriel went at once to her Treasure Cave to procure the primer which her Uncle Lem had given her, and by the aid of which she could read other books and letters containing the simplest words. This she carried to her room above the kitchen adjoining the lighthouse. But it was not until the following morning, when her tasks were finished, that she was able to slip away to decipher the message from Gene. A drizzling rain was keeping them both indoors. The old captain, never content when he was idle, had brought to the warm kitchen a net that he was mending.

"I'm getting strong by the day," the little letter told the girl, "and the hope of seeing you very soon again, Muriel, good friend, helps me more than anything else."

[109]

What would the girls in his home set have thought could they have seen that letter which had been written in the greatest sincerity, for with none of them did Gene have a serious friendship. They knew him merely as the good-looking, always good-natured brother of their favorite, Helen Beavers, with whom they bantered merrily. Gene liked them all well enough, but they wearied him with their constant chatter of tennis tournaments and teas, and their ceaseless laughter. No wonder that his pal, David Davison, had often said that most girls seemed to be afflicted with "giggleitis," but not so Muriel.

As Gene sat alone hour after hour in a hospital, the windows of which looked out across the Hudson, he thought often of the sweet seriousness of the truly beautiful face of his "storm maiden." Those hazel eyes had looked into his very soul, and how thankful he was that he had nothing in that soul that he wished to conceal.

She had laughed, now and then, spontaneously, joyfully, but she was very different from the modern girl who laughed continually because she thought it becoming. He couldn't conceive of Muriel doing anything merely to gain admiration.

"She's a bully good pal, that's what; so is sis; but there aren't many girls like those two," was his conclusion.

Gene had still another month of enforced vacation, as the doctor had declared that he would not permit him to return to college until after the holidays. Under other circumstances the lad would have fretted about this, but as it was he knew that he was actually eager to spend at least the larger part of that month in Tunkett.

But Gene was not left long alone, for on the very first Saturday after his arrival in the New York hospital, his sister Helen and two of her best friends from the boarding school farther up the Hudson appeared unexpectedly to visit him. **[110]**

Gladys Goodsell and Faith Morley were attractive maidens, clad in fashionably tailored suits, with muffs to keep their gloved hands warm, for, in spite of the dazzling brightness of the day, the air was stingingly cold.

"Oh, brother," Helen protested when she was told that as soon as he was stronger he was going back to Tunkett, "what *can* you see in that outlandish village?" Then to her friends she added: "I went down there one week-end with Doctor Winslow, who is an old friend of father's, but I can assure you that I shall never go again, that is, not out of season. Such queer people as I saw! Honestly, I had to pinch myself to be sure that I hadn't stepped into one of Joseph Lincoln's stories, and, as for understanding what the natives said, well, I just couldn't."

"Maybe you didn't try very hard, Sis." This from the lad who was keeping his new friend a secret in his heart.

"Maybe I didn't," was the merry reply, "but if I were going to write a comic story that's where I'd go for my characters and illustrations. Girls, I do wish you might see the clothes worn by the wives of the fishermen. I am sure the dressmaker who made them must have come over in the ark." **[111]**

As Gene listened, lying back among the pillows of his half-reclining-chair, he glanced at the costumes of his fair visitors, then, turning, he looked out toward the Hudson, but it was not the steely blue river that he saw but a girl in a nondescript calico dress with hair wind-blown who was ordering him to leave her island. Looking back at his sister, he said: "You are right, Helen, about the clothes. They are different."

When at last the girls arose, Helen leaned affectionately over her brother's reclining-chair. "I don't know what possesses you to want to go to Tunkett of all places during this coming month." Then, wheedlingly: "We're going to have a series of parties at the school just before the holidays, and then there's to be that annual affair over at West Point. Please reconsider, brother dear. Go down for a week or two if you really think that it will do you good, but I beg of you, do come back for the holiday fun. Now, promise me!"

Gene took the gloved hand of his sister, whom he did indeed love dearly. "I'll promise to consider, sister mine," he said; then added: "But I'm hardly in trim for night frolics just now." **[112]**

Helen noticed how pale and suddenly weary her brother looked and, stooping, she kissed him tenderly on the forehead as she said softly: "Gene, dear, if you are still in Tunkett, I'll come down there and spend Christmas with you. Since mother and father are in Europe, you and I will want to be together."

There was a grateful expression in the lad's eyes and then he closed them, for he found that he

was indeed very tired.

Helen motioned the girls to leave quietly, which they did. What would these three city maidens have thought had they known Gene's real reason for wishing to return to Tunkett, for surely the village itself held little to attract one in the severe months of early winter?

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CHAPTER XVI.
AN EXPECTED SURPRISE.

The weather clerk may have been purposely perplexing during those first days of December, for, after having imprisoned Rilla and her grandfather on Windy Island for two long, inclement weeks, they awakened one morning to find a gleaming blue sky that merged on the far horizon with the deeper turquoise of the ocean.

A fortnight had passed since she had received the letter from Gene, and yet he had not come. Because of the rains, Rilla and her grandfather had not again visited the town. There was oil enough in the tank to last another month, nor was there anyone in Tunkett whom they wished to see.

Of course, there had been no mail, for little Sol had sailed close to the island one day and Rilla, hailing him, had asked him to bring the letters if any should arrive. She was expecting two, one from Gene and one from Uncle Barney, and indeed her kind Uncle Lem now and then wrote to her or sent a picture postcard of some interesting building or park in the great city where he resided ten months out of every year.

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But the heart of Rilla was filled with a joyful anticipation on that first sparkling day after the storms. As soon as her tasks indoors were finished she called to her shaggy playfellow and, donning her crimson tam and sweater-coat, away she raced toward the outer cliff. There she paused and seemed to be watching for someone or something.

A moment later, her eyes gladdened and she leaned forward eagerly. A flock of gleaming white-winged seagulls appeared and Muriel, taking from her pocket a paper bag, opened it and tossed a fragment of bread into the air. Instantly there was a rush of wings and the birds circled and swooped about her, catching the bits of food as they fell. Now and then a piece dropped far down the cliff and two or three birds would dive through the air, each hoping to be the first to obtain it.

When the bag was empty Muriel turned to find Shags lying some distance back of her, his head low on his paws, his limpid brown eyes watching every move that she made.

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Muriel had taught him that he must be very quiet when she was feeding the birds, but when she tossed the crumpled bag out upon the breeze and stood watching it fall into the sea, Shags seemed to know that he need be still no

longer. Leaping to his feet, he joined his mistress and then together they raced along on the top of the cliff to the side of the island nearest the town. Again the girl paused, this time shading her eyes as she gazed out over the dancing blue waters.

"Thar's a sail comin', Shagsie, ol' dog," she said, "but that's nothin' onusual. 'Pears like I'm 'spectin' somethin' to happen every day, when it used to be nothin' ever happened, much, that was different. I cal'late that it's some fisherman late in startin' for the Outer Ledge. Sam Peters, like as not. He's powerful shiftless when it comes to gettin' started."

But, nevertheless, as the girl sauntered around the top of the cliff and toward the light, she glanced often at the sailboat which seemed to be bearing directly toward Windy Island.

At last her expression of hopeful eagerness changed to one of radiant certainty. "Shagsie," she cried exultantly, "it *is* little Sol's boat, arter all. I reckon he's fetchin' some mail. Come on, ol' dog. Let's race to the dock."

The girl and dog ran joyfully along the top of the cliff, but at the top of the steep flight of stairs that led to the beach Rilla paused and looked intently at the boat, which, ahead of a brisk wind, was scudding into port.

"Thar's some-un else in it," she said in a low voice, "and—and, oh-o, Shagsie, it *is* Gene Beavers. He's come!" **[116]**

The passenger in little Sol's sailboat was indeed the lad whom Rilla had expected. When he landed on the small and mossy dock over which the waves often washed he was met by a girl whose beautiful face reminded him of sunrise, so radiant was the expression shining there, but, after little Sol had been paid and told to return promptly at five, the girl's joy at the arrival of her friend changed to alarm when she noted how very pale he was.

"Yo' oughtn't to've made the v'yage yet, I reckon," she said. "Yo' look all tuckered out. Why did Uncle Lem let yo' come so soon? Yo'd ought t' be in bed still, that's whar yo'd ought t' be, Gene Beavers."

"Storm Maiden, stop scolding me! A fine welcome you're giving me. I thought—I hoped that you might be pleased to see me, and now I'm almost afraid that you're going to set your dog on me." This was said teasingly, but it was answered by a reproachful expression in the clear hazel eyes of the girl.

Then, as Captain Ezra, at that moment, appeared at the top of the steep steps, the lad went up two at a time, perhaps with some idea of showing Muriel how strong he really was, but he had overestimated his strength, for when the top was reached the captain's strong arms were all that kept him from falling.

"Boy," the old man said, "what in tarnal creation are yo' cruisin' around for in rough water wi' yer mast broken and yer rudder gone?" **[117]**

The lad looked up from the bench outside of the light to which the captain had led him. "Am I

that much of a wreck?" he asked, smiling whimsically. Then he confessed: "I believe I had overestimated my strength. Lying there all day I had no way of telling how weak I really was. I used to get so tired of doing nothing and I thought if only I could get back here where the salt air is so exhilarating maybe I'd get strong sooner, but I'd better be taking the train back tonight, I'm thinking."

Muriel had gone at once to the kitchen and had a roaring fire in the stove and the kettle on to boil when the old man and the lad entered.

How Gene laughed, a little later, when, having been made comfortable in a high-backed wooden rocker, which had been drawn close to the fire, his "storm maiden" again handed him a thick cup filled with a steaming beverage.

"Muriel," he said, "you and I seem destined to have morning teas together. Do you recall our first one down on the beach when you threatened to shoot me?"

The girl whirled about and put her finger to her lips; then glancing at her grandfather, whose back was toward them, she said in a low voice: "Don' tell that. I don' know what possessed me that day. I reckon I was that angered, bein' as yo' wouldn't take orders." **[118]**

"I'll mind you from now on forever after, Muriel, good friend," the lad began. Then added with sudden seriousness: "I realize from my recent misadventures that I am not possessed of any too sound a judgment."

A happy day they had, although Gene spent nearly all of it in the rocker near the fire.

As the clock chimed the hour of four, the lad arose as he said: "I ought to be getting back to town. I would better take the evening train if ——"

Captain Ezra gently pushed the lad down into the chair. "Tarnation sakes!" he exclaimed. "Do yo' reckon I'd let a friend of Doctor Lem's leave this craft with underpinnin's as shaky as yours are? Not by a long sight! Yo' oughtn't to've come, but, bein' as yo're here yo're goin' to stay a spell."

Then the boy confessed. "But Doctor Winslow does not even know that I came. He was to be gone for a few days and so I—I——"

The old sea captain grunted. "He'll know soon enough. When little Sol comes, give him a message for his ma to wire back to the big city. Tell Doctor Lem that yo're goin' to try Rilla's nursin' for a while." **[119]**

If there was a twinkle in the grey eyes of the old man, there was also a heaviness in his heart.

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CHAPTER XVII.
THE BLUE JEWELS.

Gene Beavers received a night-letter from Doctor Winslow on the following day, and it contained its full quota of words. The sentiment of it was:

> "You scamp, you ought to be well chastised for running away, but, after all, Nurse Rilla may be able to do more for you than your old Uncle Lem, so stay as long as Ezra Bassett will keep you. Learn to tend the light so that you may be of use if the need arises."

"May I?" Gene asked, looking up eagerly from the letter into the face of the old man, who sat near the stove, cap pulled well down over his eyes, smoking hard on his corncob pipe.

There was a struggle going on in the heart of Captain Ezra. Here was one of those city chaps who for years he had hated on general principles settling down in his home, it would seem, to be a boarder for an indefinite length of time. Then another thought presented itself as the captain noticed how frail the lad really was, and he questioned his own heart: "What if 'twas yo're boy needin' some-un to help him get strong, Ezra Bassett? How would yo' want him to be treated? Turned out and let to drift on the rocks, maybe? I snum—No!"

The old man rose and vigorously shook the ashes down from the stove before he replied: "Sure, yo' can be larnin' all thar is to know about the light, I reckon, if 'twould interest yo', son, but Lem knows I'm jealous of that big lamp. I won't even let Rilly gal polish up the lens." **[121]**

The girl, her face flushed from the heat of the stove, where she stood frying fish and potatoes in a big black skillet, laughed over her shoulder as she said: "I reckon Grand-dad loves the lamp better'n he does me, I reckon he does!" Then it was that the expression of infinite tenderness which Gene had noticed before appeared in the eyes of the old man as he replied earnestly: "Thar's nothin' this world holds that I love better'n you, fust mate"; then he added, in another tone, "An', you rascal, you know it."

Gene slept on a cot in the kitchen, and as the days passed his strength rapidly returned. The weather continued sunny and bracing and although it was nearing the holiday season the midwinter blizzards had not arrived.

Muriel had told the lad all about the treasure box in her cave. A week after the arrival of the boy on Windy Island they were climbing about on the cliffs when they found themselves near the small opening to the cave. "Come on in. I'll show yo' the box," Rilla said. **[122]**

Gene, really curious concerning the treasure that had been given up by the sea, went in and watched with interest as the girl lifted the mirror-lined cover of what he recognized to be a water-tight steamer trunk of foreign make.

The sea-green dress, he agreed, was wonderful. "I judge that it is Parisian," he said. Then, as he saw the question in her hazel eyes, he told about the City of Paris, where he had been the summer before. He described the beautiful shops, the lights, the damsels, and the rare and exquisite

fabrics from which their gowns were fashioned.

“I reckon this box belongs to one of those beautiful ladies,” Muriel said at last.

Gene nodded. “I haven’t a doubt about it,” he agreed. “Have you looked through it thoroughly to see if you could find the name of the owner?”

The girl shook her red-brown head. “I cal’lated thar’d been a wreck, for ’twas a high storm as sent this box in. ’Twa’n’t hereabouts, but I reckon it was far out at sea.”

“Undoubtedly you are right, Muriel, but let’s look for some possible clue as to the former owner’s identity.” **[123]**

The lad and the girl, as eager as two children, were on their knees in the soft sand of the cave. The dress had been carefully laid to one side. A small box of exquisite workmanship was found and when the cover was lifted the girl uttered an exclamation of joy, and in the dim light Gene thought her eyes like stars.

No wonder that Muriel was elated, for in that box there was a set of jewels of the most entrancing blue. Never had she seen anything just like it in the sea or in the sky. It seemed to be alive, that color! There was a necklace of them and two lantern-like earrings, a brooch and a ring.

Muriel gazed at them awed by their loveliness, her hands tight clasped. As Gene watched her, he wished that all girls might be as utterly unconscious of self as she was. Not a move did she ever make to attract him. She was as natural in all that she did as were the seagulls that circled over the cliff.

His thoughts were interrupted by Muriel, who looked up with a troubled expression in her eyes. “Gene,” she said, “’tisn’t right for me to keep ’em. They aren’t mine, and I cal’late they’re wurth a power o’ money. Aren’t they?”

The boy nodded. “A fortune, I judge.”

“I’d like to give ’em back to the gal as lost ’em, if I knew who ’twas.” **[124]**

Gene had idly lifted from the jewel case a locket and had opened it. On one side was the portrait of a proud, beautiful girl, and on the other was a picture of himself. He snapped it shut and, replacing it in the box, he rose rather abruptly, saying: “Muriel, let’s finish our search for the owner’s name at some future time. Shall we? You know we started out to dig clams.”

Muriel was rather surprised, but as her patient did seem weary, she replaced the green dress and went with him to the beach below.

Gene wanted time to think.

[125]

CHAPTER XVIII.
MEMORIES.

The next morning Captain Ezra asked Gene if he would like to go to the Outer Ledge and spend the day fishing, as the supply in the barrel was getting low. The lad was glad to go, and, as Muriel had baking to do, she was equally pleased to be alone.

Long, silent hours these were for Gene as he sat with the captain waiting for the coming of the fish that seemed reluctant to be caught in the early morning. Long, thoughtful hours. Now and then the lad even forgot where he was until a wave, larger than the others, rocked the boat and recalled to him his whereabouts. He was living over again a chapter in his past.

It had happened the summer before. His dear mother, who was perfect in every other way, had one obsession (many mothers seemed to have it, he concluded), and that was that she wanted the idol of her heart, her only son, to make a fashionable marriage.

During their last vacation, with his sister Helen, he had joined his parents in Paris, where Mr. Beavers was employed as resident representative of large American interests, he himself having a controlling share. **[126]**

Mrs. Beavers had suggested a jaunt about the continent and had joined a small exclusive party, one of the younger members of it being just the sort of a girl she desired as a comrade for her son.

Marianne Carnot, the descendant of a long line of illustrious French folk, had been educated in London and although she was a dark, sparkling beauty of the French type, she spoke excellent English with a delightful accent which but added to her charm.

Gene’s mother, in her eagerness to interest her son in this girl (for Monsieur Carnot was a diplomat of fabulous wealth), had been truly discouraged, for they had neither of them cared greatly (or so it would seem) to be in each other’s company. When the pleasant journey through Italy, Switzerland and France was ended, Mrs. Beavers could not see that the two most frequently in her thoughts had been greatly impressed with each other.

They had come to the parting of their ways and Gene had never again seen Marianne nor had they corresponded. But the locket! How had Marianne procured the snapshot of him? Then he recalled one day in Rome when she had told him to stand by a famous statue and look his prettiest. He had supposed that a photograph of the statue was what she had really wished to procure, but he had been mistaken, evidently. Could it have been that Marianne had liked him especially? He was sure that this was not true. He also recalled that his mother had assured Mademoiselle Carnot that she ought to spend at least one year in an American boarding school. Evidently the French girl had been voyaging across the great Atlantic when her small steamer trunk had been lost. **[127]**

Did that mean that Marianne had also met with disaster?

He decided that he would write his sister at once and inquire if she knew aught of her friend of

the summer before.

When Gene reached Windy Island that night, upon one thing he had decided. He would tell Muriel the entire story. The next morning an opportunity presented itself. The girl was darning in the sunny kitchen when Gene came in from the shed on the shore where he and Captain Ezra had been cleaning fish and packing it away in the barrel which was kept very cold in a wet hole in the sand.

Muriel looked up with a welcoming smile. Just such a smile was ever awaiting the coming of her grand-dad.

Gene sat upon the broad arm of a chair nearby and twirled his cap. “Muriel, good friend,” he said, “I know to whom your box belongs.”

The girl looked up amazed, not understanding. **[128]**

“Gene, how could yo’? We didn’t find a name or nothin’.”

“Yes, we found something. That is, I did.”

Those hazel eyes were again looking into the very soul of the boy, but he did not flinch. He had done nothing of which he was ashamed.

He slid down into the chair, and leaning forward, looked directly back at her. “I didn’t tell you at once, because I wanted to think it all over. I was so surprised I couldn’t quite understand myself what it could mean, but I do now, in part at least. May I tell you the story?”

The girl nodded and her hands lay idly in her lap, though still holding the sock she had been darning.

Gene told her all from the beginning. He wondered what her first remark would be when he paused. It was: “I reckon yo’re mother wouldn’t wish yo’ to be friends with me, Gene Beavers. I cal’late yo’d better go back to the city soon, to the kind of folks she’d want yo’ to be associatin’ with.”

“Nonsense, Muriel!” The lad had risen, and thrusting his hands deep in his pockets, he stood looking out of the window for a long time, silent, thoughtful.

[129]

CHAPTER XIX.
THE OWNER OF THE BOX.

They did not again visit the box in Treasure Cave. As he had planned, Gene had written a long letter to his sister telling her that he was getting strong and well, describing his interesting life on Windy Island, but Muriel, for some reason, he did not mention.

He ended his epistle by telling his sister about the small steamer trunk which had been cast ashore by a storm and then asked if Helen had heard, lately, from Marianne Carnot. A week passed and no reply was received. Gene,

growing every day more rugged and ruddy, had actually forgotten that his sister had said if he did not return to New York to spend the holidays with her, that she would visit him.

It was a glorious day, about a week before Christmas, and the air was invigoratingly cold. “I’ll race yo’ around the island on the beach,” Muriel called, as she and Gene started out for their customary morning hike when their tasks were finished.

“You won’t beat,” the boy, whose laughing face was beginning to bronze from the sun and wind, shouted that his voice might be heard above the booming of the surf on the rocks near. **[130]**

“Won’t I?” Muriel turned merrily to defy him.

“I snum you won’t!” Gene liked to borrow words from the old sea captain’s lingo now and then. “Nor will I, for that matter,” the lad confessed. “Shags will. Now, one, two, three, go!”

Away they ran. Muriel was quickly in the lead, Shags bounding at her heels, and the lad a close third. When they reached the north end of the island they found that the tide was high, which meant that they had to await the receding of the waves before they could round the point on the sand. Luck was with Muriel, for when she reached the rocks there was a clear wet space ahead of her and around she darted, but Gene was held up while another breaker crashed in, and so, as they neared their final goal, the little wharf on the town side of the island, the girl was in the lead.

Her red-brown hair was blown, her cheeks were flushed, her eyes sparkling, and as she whirled to exult over the lad, he thought he had never seen a more beautiful picture. He caught both of her hands, but his bantering remark died as he stared at the dock back of Muriel, hardly able to believe his eyes.

“My sister Helen has come,” he said in a low voice, “and someone is with her.” Instantly he recognized the someone. It was Marianne Carnot. **[131]**

“I’ll go back to the light,” Muriel told him. “Yo’re sister’ll want to see yo’ alone, an’ she won’t care for the like o’ me.”

Gene leaped to her side when the girl turned away. “Muriel Storm,” he said, and there was a note of ringing sincerity in his voice, “you are a princess compared to most girls. Come with me, please, to greet my sister.”

She went reluctantly. She recalled what he had told her about his mother wishing him to care for this French girl of wealth and family and his sister Helen would probably feel the same way. Perhaps they would not be kind to her. How she wanted to run up to the light to the sheltering arms of her grandfather. But Gene held her hand in a firm clasp until they reached the top of the steps leading to the small wharf; then, releasing her, he went to greet the newcomers, turning at once to introduce Muriel. There was indeed a curling of the lips and a slight if almost imperceptible lifting of the eyebrows, but the “storm maiden” in Muriel had awakened, and it was with a proudly held head that she said:

“Miss Carnot, I’m that glad to be able to return yo’re box, if ’tis yo’r’n.”

“It is indeed mine,” Marianne replied haughtily. “I will bid the man who rowed us over to get it, if you will tell him where it is. Later you shall receive the reward which my father offered for the return of my trunk.” [132]

Muriel, her cheeks burning, was nevertheless about to comply when Gene leaped forward, saying: “I will show the oarsman where the trunk is, Rilla. You need not come.”

Luckily, at that moment the island girl heard her grandfather’s voice booming her name from the door of the light. Gene heard it, too, and he was glad that it offered his “storm maiden” an escape from further humiliation which he was powerless to prevent.

Later, when the trunk had been placed in the boat, and when Marianne was looking through its contents to be sure that nothing had been removed or ruined, Helen took the opportunity of speaking alone with her brother. She was truly glad to note that his health had been restored and she implored him to return with her for the holidays.

“Surely, brother,” Helen said, “you are strong enough now, and since it was to gain your strength that you came, why should you remain any longer? Gladys and Faith told me not to return without you. They both like to dance with you, and Marianne, I know has been eager to see you. She is hurt, I can tell, because you pay her so little attention today.”

Then glancing toward the lighthouse, where Muriel was standing close to her grand-dad, Helen added in a lower voice: “Of course, I know there is nothing serious in this companionship, Gene, but what would our mother say?” [133]

What, indeed!

“Of course I shall be returning soon,” was all that he would say, “as I want to be back at college by the beginning of the winter term.” Gene spent a long, thoughtful hour alone on the cliff when his sister and the proud Marianne were gone. Muriel was busy preparing the noon meal, but she, too, was thoughtful. Her friend was well enough now to return to the city and ought she not urge him to go? Just before the visitors had been rowed over to Tunkett, Helen had ascended the flight of stairs leading to the light, and, taking the hand of the girl who lived there, she had said, almost pleadingly: “Won’t you please advise my brother to come home for the holidays? I can’t stay with him here and it’s going to be so lonely for me with mother and father away. I would go to them, but the vacation at midwinter will be too short.”

There were tears in the eyes that looked at Muriel with the same frank, candid expression that was also her brother’s.

“I reckon he should be goin’,” Muriel had answered. “I cal’late he’s strong enough now, and he’ll be wantin’ to get back to college arter a spell.”

Helen had smiled her gratitude, and pressing [134]

the slim brown hand that she held in her own, that was gloved, she had said hurriedly: “Thank you, Miss Muriel. Please don’t tell brother that I made this request. He might feel that I was interfering.”

Then she had added, “I know *our* mother would wish it.”

Helen, ever considerate and kind, did not mean what Muriel believed that she did. There was a deep crimson flush in the cheeks of the island girl, but just at that moment Marianne had appeared at the top of the stairs to coldly announce that she was ready to depart.

“I’m coming,” Helen had called. Then, because she was too much like her brother not to ring true, she held out her hand again to Muriel and had said most sincerely: “I want to thank you and your grandfather for having done so much toward restoring Gene’s health. Goodbye.”

“I reckon I’ll be glad when they’re all gone,” Muriel thought, the flush again creeping to her cheeks. “If Grand-dad an’ I aren’t good enough to be associated with I cal’late when Gene comes in, I’ll tell him he must be goin’.”

A moment later she heard his clear, merry whistle as he rounded the house. To his surprise, when he entered the kitchen, she did not turn to greet him with her usual friendly smile.

Had those girls made his “storm maiden” self-conscious? was his first almost wrathful thought. Throwing his cap to a chair near, he leaped to the kitchen table, where the girl stood busily stirring a cornmeal mixture for baking. The lad saw the flushed cheeks and at once he understood. Catching her hands, regardless of the spoon, he whirled her about. “Storm Maiden,” he said, “what did Marianne Carnot say that has hurt you?” He felt, as a brother might, he assured himself, a desire to fight the world to defend this girl. The quivering lips smiled just a little. **[135]**

“She didn’t say nothin’,” Then Rilla added: “Gene, I’ve been ponderin’ while yo’ve been out, an’ I reckon yo’d better go back to the city now. I cal’late maybe—maybe——” How she dreaded to hurt him, but she had decided that he must go, but she did not have to finish the sentence.

Gene turned away and took up his cap. “Very well, Muriel,” he said. “I promised to mind every command, and if this is one of them, I’ll go tomorrow.” Captain Ezra secretly rejoiced when he heard that the lad was soon to depart. It was hard for him to share his “gal.” He liked Gene, to be sure, better than he did any boy he had ever known. In fact, he hadn’t supposed “city folk” could be so genuine; willing to clean fish or turn a hand to anything however commonplace. To be sure Doctor Winslow might be called “city folks,” for he had spent most of his time in New York for nearly thirty years, but when all was said, he was really a native of Tunkett.

Muriel tried to laugh and chatter during the meal that followed, but Gene found it hard to do so. He was still feeling rebellious. He was so sure Marianne Carnot had hurt his “storm maiden.” **[136]**

“She should have remained in Europe if she does not approve of American democracy,” his indignant thought was declaring. “But in Muriel she has met her superior,” another thought championed, adding: “I hope the future will prove it and humiliate her snobbishness.”

After Gene’s departure the delayed blizzard arrived with unusual fury. The mountainous waves crashed against the rocks as though determined to undermine the light, high on the cliff above them; but when each fuming, frothing wave had receded the tower, strong and unshaken, stood in the midst of driving hail and wet snow, but its efforts to shine were of little avail, for its great lamp could merely cast a halo of glow and a small circle of light out into the storm.

Woe to the mariners, if any there were, who went too near the Outer Ledge while the blizzard raged.

“Rilly gal, I cal’late yer city friend got away jest in time,” Captain Ezra said on the third day of the blizzard, which had continued with unabated fury. “It’d be tarnal risky navigatin’ tryin’ to cruise him over to Tunkett today, which was when he cal’lated leavin’, wa’n’t it, fust mate?” **[137]**

The old sea captain sat by the stove, smoking. It was warm and cheerful in the kitchen, but with each fresh blast of wind the house shook, while the very island itself seemed to tremble now and then as an unusually large wave crashed over it on the seaward side.

Muriel turned to look out of the window toward the town, but all that she could see was the grey, sleeting, wind-driven rain.

Turning back into the warm kitchen, she took her darning basket and sat near the stove. After a thoughtful moment, she spoke: “I reckon things allays happen for the best,” she began, “though it’s hard for us to see it that way jest at fust; but later on, we do. ’Pears thar’s a plan, Grand-dad, and if so, then thar’s Some-un doin’ the plannin’. If we really believe that, then we won’t be worryin’ and frettin’ about how things’ll turn out; we’ll jest be content, *knowin’* that somehow they’re comin’ out for the best.”

The keen grey eyes of the old man were intently watching the girl, who, all unconscious of his scrutiny, sat with red-brown head bent over her darning.

“I cal’late yo’re right, fust mate,” he said at last. “It makes the v’yage seem a tarnal lot safer if yo’re sure thar’s a skipper in command that’s not goin’ to let yo’ wreck yer craft on the rocks. Like be you’ll sail in purty rough waters sometimes, but I cal’late thar’s allays a beacon light shinin’ clear and steady through the storm o’ life, waitin’ to guide you to a safe harbor if yo’re watchin’ for it and willin’ to be guided.” **[138]**

Then the grey eyes of Captain Ezra began to twinkle. “Rilly gal,” he said, “I reckon Parson Thompkins over to Tunkett’d think we was tryin’ to have a meetin’ without him presidin’ at it.”

The girl smiled across at the old man whom she loved. Then, rolling two socks together, she arose to prepare the noon meal.

The captain tilted back his chair. “The sermon now bein’ concluded,” he announced, “it’s time for the singin’.”

In a clear, sweet voice Muriel sang his favorite of the meeting-house hymns. Peace and joy were within that humble home while the tempest raged without. But that night, when she was snug in her bed in her room over the kitchen, Muriel lay awake for a long time listening to the roar of the storm and the crash of the surf and tried to picture what her friend Gene was doing at that hour.

But his world was not her world and the island girl could not even imagine the gayety into which Helen and Gladys and Faith had lured him that New Year’s Eve.

[139]

CHAPTER XX.
NEW YEAR’S EVE.

The street lights in New York were barely distinguishable because of the storm which raged for many miles north and south along the Atlantic coast.

There were few pedestrians out, although it was still early evening, and but a scattering of closed vehicles. In one of these sat Helen Beavers, Marianne Carnot and Gene. The French girl shivered and drew her costly grey furs closer about her.

“So this is your winter,” she said. “I would like it better in the south where it is always summer.” She shrugged her slim shoulders and tried to peer out of the small, rain-drenched window.

The skidding car was turning into a fashionable side street. Soon they were gliding up the drive of a private residence. They stopped under a wide, sheltering portico and when the door was flung aside Gene leaped to the pavement to help the girls alight.

Brights lights burned within a handsome grey stone house, and a moment later the door was opened to admit them into a festive scene where there was youth and music, laughter and joy.

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It was the home of Faith Morley’s Aunt Louise, and this was one of the parties to attend which the girls had begged Gene to return to the big city.

An hour later when he had danced, first with Faith, his hostess, and then with Helen and Gladys Goodsell, he went in search of Marianne, whom he found talking with a tall, lank youth in military uniform. The proud girl paid scant attention to the newcomer. Gene, knowing that it was his duty, if not his pleasure, to ask each of his sister’s friends to dance with him, waited until there was a pause in their conversation before making the request. The French girl thanked him effusively, of course, but declined, saying that she did not dance the old-fashioned American waltz. Then she turned back to the

young cadet, who, if the truth were known, was boring her exceedingly. Gene excused himself and, seemingly unnoticed, walked away.

The slow, dreamy waltz music was being played by the palm-hidden orchestra and as it was the only dance for which Gene cared, he sought his sister, but was just in time to see her glide away with his pal, David Davison. He did not care to dance with anyone else. He felt too weary to be entertaining and so he slipped across the hall into the dimly lighted library, where a log was burning on the wide hearth, casting its warm glow over the low bookshelves and the statues and beautiful paintings.

He was glad no one was there. He wanted to be alone, to rest, he assured himself. But what he really wished was to remember. **[141]**

He sank down into the big, comfortable chair in front of the fire which had recently been deserted by Mr. Morley. An open book and a magazine lay nearby.

How good it seemed to be away from the noise, if laughter and chatter and music could be called by a name so plebian.

Then he listened to the other sounds as he sank deeper into the soft depths of the chair and relaxed, stretching out before the warmth of the blaze.

How the storm whistled and moaned about the house and down the chimney. Closing his eyes, he tried to picture what the storm would be like about Tunkett. He glanced at the small clock over the mantle. Ten-thirty. The house adjoining the tower would be in darkness, but the great lamp would be swinging. Perhaps the blizzard was keeping Muriel awake, and he wondered what she might be thinking about.

Just then he happened to recall what his sister had said to him that morning, and, knowing Helen, he also knew that she had meant it kindly. Putting her hands on his shoulders, she had looked into his eyes, saying: “Dear brother, you wouldn’t allow yourself to care for someone of whom your mother could not be proud. This friend of yours, Muriel Storm, is a fine girl, I am sure, but she could not associate with your friends, and our mother’s heart would be broken if you really cared for her.” **[142]**

Of course he and Muriel did not care for each other in the way to which Helen had referred. They were just jolly good comrades.’ Why were people always romancing? He was glad that Muriel did not fit into the scene that was being enacted in the brilliantly lighted room across the hall. He liked her best as she was.

At midnight his sister found him and her glance was reproachful at first, but when she saw how truly weary he looked she rebuked herself for having kept him up late so soon after his illness.

She remembered how solicitous Muriel had been that he should not overwork. Was she, Helen, less considerate as a sister than this island girl as a friend?

When they were again in the closed car, Marianne retired into the depth of her furs and

ignored their existence, pretending that she was too weary for conversation, but Helen understood.

Marianne, she knew, wished all boys to think her the most charming girl they had ever met, and though Gene was polite, he had not been devoted.

"Poor brother," Helen thought, as she glanced at his face, pale in spite of its recent tanning. Aloud she said: "Gene, this is the last night that I am going to drag you around to a dance. I know that you ought to just rest, if you are to go back to college next month." [143]

Gene said nothing, but reached for his sister's hand and held it in a loving clasp.

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CHAPTER XXI.
CHRISTMAS IN FEBRUARY.

It was the first week in February before Captain Ezra thought it wise for him to cross the turbulent waters of the bay. It was indeed necessary for him to make the voyage then, as the oil had dropped to what he called "low tide mark," and after that the faithful keeper of the light never delayed longer than necessary before refilling the tank.

The wind had subsided and the sun came out, revealing the island white with drifts of snow, and, too, there was ice on the stairs leading down to the little wharf. The ever-thoughtful Muriel, upon hearing her grand-dad say that he must go down and get the dory out of the boathouse, skipped ahead with a kettle of boiling water, and, after thawing the ice, swept the steps dry that her grand-dad might not slip.

The old man, coming out of the house just then, his fur cap drawn over his ears and his red knitted muffler tied about his neck, looked lovingly at the girl who always seemed to be planning something for his comfort or happiness.

Why, just then, he should have thought of Muriel's father whom he had "robbed," as Barney put it, he could not have told. What that father had lost no one knew better than Captain Ezra. "Ho! Rilly gal, yo've swabbed the decks clean, I snum." Then he added: "Fust mate, I cal'late yo'd better get under cover. It's cold enough to freeze a volcano, 'pears like." [145]

As he spoke, his breath frosted on the nipping air. The girl, rosy cheeked, was without hat or coat, and so, kissing her grand-dad on the tip of his nose (little else was visible) and telling him not to slip, and to be sure to bring her a pocketful of letters, she darted indoors.

She felt radiantly happy that glorious morning, and if she had been familiar with the poems of Robert Browning she would have sung, "God's in His Heaven; all's right with the world!" But, instead, her wordless song reverberated through

the small house until her tasks were finished; then, putting on her leggins, her crimson tam and sweater-coat, and taking a small bag of bread crumbs, she waded through the snow to the cliff to try to find her feathered friends.

She called and waited, soon calling again. Then **[146]**
from out a sheltered cave in a cliff nearby they came, circling about her in the clear, crisp air, uttering their discordant cries, which, however, were music to the ears of the girl, who knew that they were notes of joy and welcome to the friend who fed them through the bitter cold months of winter when fish were scarce and hard to catch.

Muriel did not toss the fragments of bread this time, for she knew if she did so they would sink into the soft depths of snow and be lost; and so she brushed a rock clear and placed the feast upon it. Down the birds swooped, unafraid. It was too cold to remain long out of doors, and moreover Muriel wished to have a nice hot dinner awaiting the coming of her grand-dad.

An appetizing odor of coffee and sizzling bacon greeted the old man when, two hours later, he opened the door and entered the kitchen. The girl, flushed of cheek and eager-eyed, turned to greet him. “Any mail, Grand-dad?” Muriel’s heart was pounding fast when she asked the question.

The old man laughed as he thrust his hand into the deep pocket of his leather coat.

“Mrs. Sol said that if I hadn’t cruised to town today she was of nine minds to hire the lighter to fetch yer mail over. She was feared the floor of her store’d heave in with the weight of it,” he said.

The girl’s excited laughter rang out. “Oh, Grand-dad,” she said, “why does your coat bulge so queer like? I cal’late you’ve fetched somethin’ hid under it.”

She pounced upon him and drew forth the bulgy **[147]**
something, which proved to be a large square package. The wrappings were soon removed and there was the most wonderful book, “Treasure Island,” illustrated in the most beautiful blues and greens and gold. How Muriel loved color.

“Gene sent it,” she said, as she lifted the card with its painted wreath of holly and mistletoe.

But Muriel then had no time to look at the book, as letters were being produced from that great pocket. The girl gasped when she saw them and then she clapped her hands.

“Grand-dad,” she exclaimed, unbelievingly, “are they all for me? I reckon Mis’ Sol did think ’twas a powerful lot o’ mail, bein’ as I never had more’n one and a card before at a time.”

There were four letters from Gene, who had written one each week since he had left Windy Island. He knew his Storm Maiden could not write and so he did not expect answers. What he did not know was that the blizzard had prevented her receiving them as they arrived each week. There was another letter from Ireland and a Christmas card and a parcel from Uncle Lem. There were pretty hair ribbons in

the parcel.

“Christmas in February,” Muriel laughed; then added: “The blizzard sort o’ got the calendar mixed, didn’t it, Grand-dad?”

Muriel took her new treasures up to her room and placed them on the top of her chest of drawers. She sighed as she looked at the letters and longed to know the messages they contained. It would take her until spring, she feared, to decipher them, as she would have to study them word by word with the aid of the Second Reader. [148]

[149]

CHAPTER XXII.
FACING REALITIES.

March came and April followed. Muriel thought that never before had there been so lovely a spring. The returning birds surely sang more wonderful songs than in the springs that were past. The melting snow on the cliffs trickled down, forming sparkling miniature waterfalls. Then, after a warm spell, out of every crevice in the rocks wild flowers blossomed.

The girl, running to the highest peak one glorious morning, flung her arms out toward the sky, letting the wind blow her red-brown hair as it would, and if Gene had seen his Storm Maiden at that moment he would have had a third picture of her that he would never wish to forget.

“Oh, it’s glad I am to be livin’,” she said aloud. “The world is so wonderful and friends are so kind. I’m that happy, so happy.” The birds, her birds, were soon circling about her, for, although there was plenty for them to eat, Muriel fed them just for the joy of it.

“I love every one of yo’,” she told them. “An’ yo’, too, poor ol’ lame pelican,” she called to a larger bird that descended when the flock of white gulls had swooped down to the sea, one of them having sighted a luckless fish that was glinting too near the surface of the water. [150]

Then, scrambling down to her Treasure Cave, the girl brought from its hiding place in a crevice the well-worn Second Reader. Going out on the sun-flooded ledge, she sat for a moment just gazing at the sparkling surf that was crashing far beneath her.

Thrusting her hand into her pocket, she drew forth a letter bearing the New York postmark. It was the last that she had received from Gene, having been left at the lighthouse by little Sol.

Muriel had been in the middle of breadmaking then, but all the hour she had been filled with eager anticipation, for in his last letter Gene had told her that in the spring he was to have a vacation (he had been at college since the beginning of the midwinter term), and that even if he could only spare a day for it, he was going to visit Windy Island.

Muriel, while finishing the baking, had been happily wondering how her comrade would look after his month's confinement at his studies. Perhaps the bronze from the wind and the sun would be worn away and again he would be pale as he was when she had first known him. How she hoped not! She wanted him to keep every bit of the strength he had gained during his month's visit on Windy Island.

Muriel removed the letter, her heart beating rapidly. She was sure that in it he would tell the day of his coming. Soon, very soon, she hoped, as she wished him to see how lovely her rock-ribbed island home was when the wild flowers blossomed. **[151]**

During the past months Muriel had become familiar with many of the simple words that Gene used in writing to her and she had to refer less frequently to the well-worn Second Reader.

With comparative ease she read the few lines: **[152]**

"Dear Friend Muriel:

"I hoped to have good news to tell you today, but, after all, I am not to have my longed-for visit with you. Last night Helen received a cablegram from our father telling us to join them at once in London, and so we are to depart without delay, as Dad has reserved passage for us on the steamship 'The Liverpool,' which leaves its dock tomorrow at dawn.

"Dear good friend, don't forget me! I don't know what this command from our father means. I surely hope that mother is not ill, but, of course, it is a command which Helen and I must obey. I shall write you, however, as soon as I reach the other side of the broad Atlantic.

"Tell your grandfather, please, how grateful I am and ever shall be to him for having permitted me to share his home for that wonderful, never-to-be-forgotten month.

"Muriel, come what may, believe me when I say that next to Helen your friendship is dearer to me than that of any girl whom I know.

"This letter sounds as though I hardly expect to come back to the only country under the sun, but that isn't true. Heaven willing, I'll return when I'm twenty-one, if I have to remain over there until then.

"Goodbye, Storm Maiden, your closer-than-a-brother friend,

"GENE."

The sun was still shining and the waves sparkling, the birds still singing and the flowers blooming when Muriel had deciphered the message in that letter, but the glory of the day was gone for her and there was no echo of song in her heart.

She arose, saddened, and after replacing the Second Reader in its niche, climbed the steep trail up the cliff and returned to the light.

CHAPTER XXIII.
THE STORM.

The wonderful weather continued and, if there was loneliness in the heart of the girl because her friend and comrade seemed to be so far, so very far away, it was unnoticed by the old man who loved her, for whenever he was near, her clear voice rang out its sweetest and her welcoming smile always awaited him.

June came, and Captain Ezra, returning from town about noon on a day that was a-gleaming with blue in sky and sea (as only a day in June can be), produced a letter.

How the girl hoped that it was from her friend across the water, but, instead, it was from Doctor Winslow. In it he stated that he was coming to Tunkett for a week's rest, as he had had a most strenuous winter, and, since he was not as young as he had been, he felt the need now and then of a period of relaxation. He was eager to see his comrade of boyhood days. He recalled the happy, carefree times when, barefooted, they had tramped over the salt meadows, swam together, breasting even the outer breakers, or had fished, talking quietly for hours of their plans for the future, which had proved so unlike.

"Ez, old pal," the doctor had written, "I want [154] especially to talk over with you something which has been much in my thoughts of late, and that is the future of the girl whom you love so dearly and whom, for that matter, we both love.

"You are not as unreasonable now as you formerly were, and so I again shall broach the subject of Muriel's education. As I have said before, I wish to pay her tuition as my share, for am I not her Uncle Lem?

"You and I are advanced in years, Ezra, and we're not always going to be here to protect Muriel. Think how unfitted she now is to face the world with no knowledge whatever of its ways; but more of this later when I come."

Although there was disappointment in the heart of the girl because the letter had not been from Gene, she was indeed glad to hear that she was so soon to see her dear Uncle Lem, as it had been many months since his town house had been boarded up and he had departed for the big city.

"Lem's to put into port next Tuesday," the old man said. "I reckon he's right about the iddication idee. I cal'late yo'd ought to be gittin' some larnin' into that purty head o' yo'rn. Not but that yo're suitin' me to a 'T' jest as yo' are, but Lem knows best, I reckon."

There was a sad note in the voice of the old man [155] and a suspicion of moisture in the grey eyes that looked so lovingly at his "gal." Quickly he turned away to hide them. He had been selfish long enough and life was "tarnel unsartin" at best.

Then he recalled the long-delayed letter that he planned writing to Muriel's own father. He had an address that his daughter had once sent to him, and in the accompanying note she had written: "Dad, a letter sent here will always reach my husband or me. Please write that you have forgiven me, for I do so love you."

That note from Muriel's girl-mother (with the address to which they were to write if they wished to reach her father) was in the iron box hidden in the tower near the great lamp, the very box of which Captain Ezra had told Captain Barney.

"If I should be tuk sudden-like," the old man had said, "I want yo' to go to the tower, get that box, Barney, an' have some-un write to the father o' my gal."

Captain Ezra was thinking of these things as he sat smoking.

"I snum, I'll get that thar letter written next Sunday as sure sartin as I'm keeper of the light," he resolved as he rose to go to bed.

The next day the first intense heat wave of summer swept over Tunkett. The air was depressing. Muriel listlessly went about the tasks of the day. It seemed an effort even to sing, which she always tried to do to make the little home more cheerful. Never, never, should her dear old grand-dad know how lonely and disappointed she was because Gene had not even written to her. It was nearing July and as yet she had not heard of his safe arrival in Liverpool. **[156]**

Boats did go down, now and then, the girl knew; and when she thought of this she asked anxiously: "Grand-dad, thar hasn't been a wreck on the seas anywhar that you've heard of, has thar?"

Captain Ezra shook his head. "No, Rilly, fust mate; and I sure sartin hope thar's none comin'."

The next evening, when the old man came in to supper, he reported that the stifling air seemed, if anything, more hot and breathless, and also that clouds were gathering rapidly. "I reckon we're glad o' that," was his comment. Then as he stood, looking out at the deepening twilight, he continued: "Thar's heat lit'nin' over to the west. Like's not we'll soon have a thunder storm. I sort o' hope we will have one. 'Twill cool off this stiflin' air an——"

The girl turned toward him, her face white.

"Oh, Grand-dad," she implored, and her voice quivered, "I'm hopin' it won't come here with its crashin' an' threatenin'. I allays seem to hear it say, 'Some day I'll get——'" **[157]**

The old man put his hand over the girl's mouth as he said tenderly: "Rilly gal, don't be talkin' that way. What did yo'n I say 'tother day 'bout thar bein' a skipper at the helm as we could trust. Didn't yo'n I agree that his commands was allays for the best, whatever they seemed like to us? I reckon we'd better be rememberin' it."

Then, as he looked thoughtfully out at the storm-threatening sky, he said: "Fust mate, hold fast to

that idee like it was your life preserver."

Muriel clung to her grandfather, sobbing "I will, Grand-dad."

The old man smoothed his "gal's" hair, wondering vaguely at her fear and evident grief. Doctor Lem had said that Rilly had a very unusually active imagination and that they must be patient with her when they could not understand.

To change the girl's thoughts the old man remarked: "I s'pose likely as not Lem landed in Tunkett today."

"I hope so," the girl replied, as she returned to **[158]**
the setting of the table for supper. Captain Ezra puffed on his corncob pipe a moment, then said: "I reckon he'll be over long 'bout tomorrer. I snum I'll be glad to see ol' Lem. We two's been sort o' mates ever since we was young-uns. Lem, even as a boy, was straight as the mast o' a schooner in all his doin's." For a few moments the old man smoked in silent thought. Then aloud: "I reckon Lem's love would be the best port fer my gal to anchor in if—if——" Instantly the girl's arms were around his neck. "Grand-dad," she implored, "don' say it. You're goin' to live's long as I do, an' longer, like's not." Then, as an ominous rumbling of thunder pealed in the distance, Muriel held him closer. "Grand-dad," she said, "it's coming."

The old man looked out of the window at the gathering blackness. Then, loosening her arms, he leaped to his feet. "Rilly gal," he cried, as she still clung, "let me go! The lamp's not turnin'. Somethin's happened to it."

Away he hurried. The girl stood in the little kitchen where he had left her, with hands hard clasped. She heard his rapid steps ascending the spiral stairs. She waited, almost breathless, wondering why the circle of swinging light did not pass the window. There must have been a hitch in the machinery. That, however, was nothing to worry about. It had happened before.

Then came a vivid flash of fire that zigzagged across the sky. A torrent of rain swept over the island.

Flash followed flash with scarcely a second **[159]**
between, and crash on crash of deafening thunder. Then another sound was heard in the midst of the reverberating roar, a sound of splintering glass, of stone hurled upon stone.

Muriel's prophecy had been fulfilled; the storm had wrecked the lamp that for so many years had defied it.

With a terrorized cry the girl leaped to the door of the tower, and, heedless of danger to herself, she climbed the spiral stairway, shouting wildly that her call might be heard above the fury of the storm: "Grand-dad, I'm comin'!" But the rain and wind beat her back; then the terrible reality surged over her. The lamp—the tower, both were gone! They had been hurled to the ground by the storm. Muriel knew no more, for she had swooned.

Hours later she was found by Doctor Lem and several longshoremen who had crossed the

tossing waters of the bay to discover why the light was not throwing its warning beams out into the darkness.

Carefully, tenderly they lifted her. She had been bruised by rocks that had fallen while she lay there, though of this she had not been conscious. Doctor Lem and two of the men had taken her back to town and had waited until she had revived; then, leaving her in the care of the physician's housekeeper, Brazilla Mullet, the men, in the cold, grey dawn, had returned to the island to find the keeper of the light, who had been faithful even unto death.

Muriel had been too dazed to really comprehend what had happened and Doctor Lem thought best to have the burial service at once and not wait until the grand-daughter could attend. **[160]**

"Poor little gal," Brazilla Mullet wiped her eyes on one corner of her apron, "she's lost her best friend, I reckon, but she's got a powerfully good one left in Doctor Lem, though she's little carin' jest now."

The girl, who had been lying so listlessly in the spare room bed, opened dazed eyes and gazed a brief moment at the kind woman, who endeavored to smile though her lips trembled.

"Everythin's like to be fer the best," Miss Brazilla Mullet said. "Doctor Lem's goin' to carry out yer grand-dad's wishes, Rilly. He's goin' to be yer guardeen now an' take yo' back wi' him to the city an' when yer well agin yer goin' to school up thar to be iddicated wi' the best of 'em."

Then the good woman saw that the lips of the girl were moving, though she was not addressing her, and, leaning closer, she heard the words: "Grand-dad, I'm rememberin'. I'm a-holdin' fast to the promise I made yo' like 'twas my life preserver. But, oh, Grand-dad, it's so hard to, so hard to, all alone."

Then for the first time tears came and Muriel sobbed as though she would never stop, but the housekeeper was glad, for tears would bring the relief she needed. **[161]**

And Brazilla Mullet was right. Muriel gradually became stronger, and when the doctor's spring vacation was ended, without once looking over the bay toward Windy Island, the girl went back with him to the city.

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CHAPTER XXIV.
HIGH CLIFF SEMINARY.

The High Cliff Seminary was surely well named, for from the windows of its grey stone turrets one had a sweeping view of the surrounding country with its lovely woodlands, its wide meadow where grain was yellowing or stacked in the sun, with here and there a nestling town, a suburb of the big city that was several miles nearer the sea. Directly beneath were the sheer

cliffs and then the broad, busy Hudson.

On the sun porch, one Saturday afternoon in September, a group of girls was gathered. It was evident that they were all old friends, as indeed they were since they had attended High Cliff Seminary the year previous. Among them were Faith Morley, Gladys Goodsell and Marianne Carnot.

Leaning back in a comfortable cushioned wicker chair, Marianne looked at the other through partly closed eyes.

“Your democracy in America is crude, n’est-ce pas?” she said, shrugging her shoulders and looking toward the far end of the long glassed-in veranda.

There, all alone, stood a girl dressed in dark blue whose red-brown hair was neatly fastened at her neck. With hands idly clasped in front of her, she watched the boats plying up and down the great river, and, oh, the loneliness, the bleak, grey loneliness in the heart of the girl. **[163]**

Without a glance at the curious group at the other end of the sun porch, she soon turned and went within.

“Well, I confess democracy is carried rather far in this particular instance,” the plump, good-natured Gladys Goodsell remarked. “Not that I care greatly. We do not have to associate with her, whoever she is, unless we so desire.”

“Doesn’t anyone know who she is?” Catherine Lambert inquired.

The questioner did not look at the French girl, nor would she have been able to interpret the meaning of the slight sneer that appeared on the dark, handsome face for a fleeting second even if she had seen it.

Marianne had told no one that she had met Muriel the year before on Windy Island, and Muriel herself, though conscious of the presence of Marianne Carnot, was so numbed with grief that she cared little that she was being snubbed.

The coming of that “crude island girl” to this fashionable school had angered Marianne, but the memory of Gene’s very evident preference for Muriel’s companionship had aroused in the heart of the French girl a desire to make the other suffer, but she would bide her time. **[164]**

“Is it true that she cannot speak the English language correctly?” The tone of the questioner was horrified in the extreme.

Faith Morley nodded, adding hastily (because her heart was kind): “But that in itself is not vital, for surely she can learn to speak correctly, but—but of course her family is rather impossible.”

“A lighthouse-keeper’s grand-daughter!” This from Adelaine Stuart, whose family tree was always shown to each new pupil at High Cliff, if she chanced to be one whom Adelaine wished to impress. That her father was imprisoned for having robbed widows and orphans with his wildcat schemes she did not tell.

“But, Faith, you know something of the girl’s

story. Why don't you tell it?" This from Gladys.

Faith hesitated. Would Helen wish her to tell, and yet surely there was nothing in what she knew that ought to be kept secret.

"Well, what I know is not much," Faith confessed. "Muriel Storm is an acquaintance of Gene Beavers and——"

Exclamations of amazement interrupted the speaker.

Conscious of the shock and surprise her statement had caused in the group, Faith hurried on to explain. "You remember Gene had to leave college last fall because of a collapse of some kind." Several nodded. "Well, he then went to Tunkett, a sea-coast town, to recuperate, and while there he met the keeper of the light who was Muriel's grandfather. They did a good deal, Helen told me, to help Gene regain his health." This last, rather defiantly. Faith, unlike the others, was not a snob at heart. **[165]**

Nor, for that matter, was Gladys. "Poor girl," she now put in. "I do feel sorry for her. Anyone who watches her for five minutes can tell that she has a broken heart."

"Why that? What has happened to her?" Adelaine Stuart was curious.

"I wonder if any of you recall that terrible electric storm that we had last June," Faith continued. "I remember how it crashed over New York. Old-timers said there had not been one as severe in twenty years. Well, it was during that storm that the lighthouse was struck by lightning, the old man was instantly killed and the girl hurled beneath the debris. She was unconscious hours later when she was finally rescued. All summer long she has been in a hospital in the city under the care of some physician whose home was formerly in that same sea-coast town. He it is who is sending her here." They saw that the girl about whom they were talking left the veranda, apparently without having noticed them.

Faith went on: "Years ago Doctor Winslow's sister and our Miss Gordon were friends." Miss Gordon was the charming middle-aged woman who presided over High Cliffs. "Then this Muriel Storm not only belongs to a class of fisherfolk, but she is also a charity pupil." Adelaine Stuart tried to show by her tone and expression the pride and scorn which should be exhibited by one possessed of a family tree. **[166]**

"I shall write my mother," she concluded, "and if I am not much mistaken Miss Gordon will consider it greatly to her advantage to at once dismiss that girl."

"I shall do the same," Phyllis Dexter echoed. "We ought not to be forced to breathe the same air with—with——"

"Une bourgeoise," Marianne concluded the sentence for her.

The others did not notice when Faith Morley slipped away. She rebuked herself for not having thought of it before. Surely her dear friend Helen Beavers would wish her to be kind to the

girl whose grandfather had been kind to Gene.

Faith paused outside of a room on the third floor of High Cliff Seminary and listened. Surely someone within was sobbing. Again her loving heart rebuked her. How many, many hours during the last week that the island girl had been in their midst had she sobbed like this and no one had come to comfort her? Muriel was in none of Faith's classes and so she seldom saw her. Nor did she eat with the other pupils in the main dining hall, for, temporarily, she was seated at the right of Miss Gordon at the teachers' table, there being a vacant chair which soon would be occupied by Miss Humphrey, the English teacher, whose leave of absence had not yet expired. **[167]**

The problem of finding a seat for poor Muriel at first had been a hard one for Miss Gordon to solve, for she knew full well how heartless and snobbish were many of the daughters of her wealthy patrons.

When she received a message from Miss Humphrey stating that she would not return for another fortnight, the principal talked the matter over with the faculty and Muriel was then invited to sit with the teachers until the absent one should return. This would give Miss Gordon time to discover if any of the pupils were kindly disposed toward Muriel, and if so, she could then be placed at one of the three long tables in the main dining hall at which the young ladies were seated.

The teachers' table was in a curtained alcove, and so many of the girls were not even aware of the fact that Muriel dined there. Moreover, it had been Doctor Lem's wish that the island girl should receive private instruction, and as Miss Humphrey was the only teacher whose time could be arranged to make this plan possible, Muriel's studies had not as yet begun. **[168]**

Every day Miss Gordon sent for the girl to come to her room at the twilight hour. At first she did this for the sake of Doctor Lem, whose sister had been her dear friend, but after a time she did it gladly, for she found in the soul of this untutored girl much that it would be a joy to awaken and develop.

But, of course, there were many hours every day when Muriel was left alone. Oh, so alone. While the other girls were at their classes she wandered about the extensive, parklike grounds that grew wilder and more beautiful, so Muriel thought, a quarter of a mile down the Hudson and away from the school.

There she found a spot on an overhanging ledge where a young pine tree was clinging, none too securely, to the bank, for after each storm the earth beneath it loosened and a day was coming when that small pine and the ledge on which it stood would be hurled down the steep cliff into the blue waters seething far below.

The cliff on which the light had stood the island girl had thought high, but this was a sheer wall of rock that rose twice as far from the water toward the sky. The little pine had grown very dear to the girl who so loved nature, and often she would sit on the ledge, her cheek pressed against the rough bark, her eyes gazing far up **[169]**

the river, seeing not the boats of all kinds that were plying back and forth, hearing not the discordant sounds of screeching tugs or warning whistles, but picturing in memory the island she so loved and the lighthouse standing as it had for so many, many years, and tears gathered in her eyes as, in a dream, she saw her grandfather again as he had looked on that never-to-be-forgotten day, and then suddenly she would sob and hold her arms out, calling, “Grand-dad! Grand-dad, come and get your Rilly gal!” On one of these occasions she had cried herself weary, and for a moment she had slept on the little overhanging ledge. Her grand-dad seemed to come to her and say so plainly that she heard his voice: “Fust mate, didn’t you’n me agree that we’d trust the Skipper at the helm, knowin’ His guidin’ to be for the best?”

“Yeah, Grand-dad,” she said aloud, sitting up and looking about. Then she rose and drew back, shuddering, for she had been very close to the edge of the overhanging ledge. How easy it would be to fall off and—— The girl turned and ran all the way back to the school. That had been the day before and today she was staying indoors, half afraid to visit the ledge.

She sat up and looked toward the door when she heard a knock. “Come in!” she called, leaping to her feet. Her visitor, she supposed, would be either Miss Gordon or the maid of that corridor. **[170]**

When Muriel saw a strange girl in the hall she felt rebellious, believing that she had called out of unkind curiosity, but Faith held out her right hand as she said graciously: “Miss Storm, I am Faith Morley, one of your schoolmates. I am sorry that I have not been up to see you sooner. Helen Beavers and Gene are dear friends of mine, as perhaps you do not know, and I am convinced that they would wish me to be your friend, too.” Then, feeling that the sentiment could be put in an even more kindly way, she added impulsively: “Truly, I want to be your friend. May I?”

Tears gathered slowly in the clear hazel eyes and the lips that replied quivered: “Thanks, but I dunno why you’d be carin’ for my frien’ship. If you do, though, I’m glad.”

They sat in chairs near each other, and Faith, looking for the first time with eyes that really saw Muriel, decided that she had a most interesting face. There was far more depth of character expressed in it than in many of the pretty doll faces of the pupils at High Cliffs. For one wild second the visitor groped for a subject of conversation that would interest this island girl. Of course she might have gossiped about the other pupils in the school, but Faith had been taught never to talk of persons, but rather of things and events. She now recalled having heard Helen say that Muriel had never been farther inland than Tunkett, while she, Faith, had circled the globe with her parents two years before. Then her eyes fell upon the copy of “Treasure Island,” Muriel’s gift from Gene. **[171]**

“Do you enjoy that book?” the visitor asked.

“I can’t read,” Muriel replied simply, “but I love the sea an’ the life on it. Cap’n Barney often told me tales of sea adventure an’ Gene Beavers read to me out of this book.”

Faith's dark eyes lighted. "Oh, Muriel," she exclaimed, "my father gave me such an interesting book about the sea for my birthday, and I'm reading it now. I'd just love to read it aloud to you if you would enjoy hearing it. Of course it will come in your reading course, in time. Shall I get the book?"

There was real eagerness in Faith's voice, and also in her heart, for she yearned to help this girl who as yet hadn't been given a chance.

Muriel was indeed pleased with the suggestion and so Faith went at once to her room, returning a few moments later with a beautifully illustrated copy of "Two Years Before the Mast."

"Muriel," she announced when she opened the door, this time without knocking, "I wonder if you know how lucky you are. You have the nicest room in the school. This round cupola room with so many windows, and such a sweeping view in three directions, is the one that many of us hope each year will be given to us." **[172]**

Then she laughed. "Honestly, I do not eavesdrop, but I happened to be in the reception room the first day of this term and heard Adelaine Stuart's mother offering to pay extra if her spoiled darling could have it. But Miss Gordon said it had been reserved for you.

"Think of that, young lady. Moreover, you are doubly lucky, for, not only have you the nicest room in the school, but you are invited to spend an hour every evening with the idol of all our hearts, the adorable Miss Gordon."

Muriel smiled at her new friend's enthusiasm. "'Twa'n't last long, though," she replied. "I mean, Miss Gordon's just bein' kind to me now because she knows as I'm lonesome an' she'n Uncle Lem are friends."

Faith looked pityingly at the girl whose shadowed eyes plainly showed that many hours had been spent in tears.

"Muriel," she suggested, "suppose you lie on the window seat. Pile those pillows under your head and try to rest while I read. I'm afraid you are holding yourself too tense these days, as our gym teacher tells us." **[173]**

Muriel did as she was bidden and Faith continued: "Now, take a deep breath and drop down on the pillows with every muscle relaxed. Listen idly while I read until you fall asleep. I really think that restful sleep is what you most need."

Then Faith read for an hour. Muriel was greatly interested, but she was also very weary, and after a time she did fall into the first restful sleep that she had had since she arrived at the school.

Faith drew a cover over her new friend and stole out, but she did not go directly to her own room. Instead she went to the office of Miss Gordon.

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CHAPTER XXV.
MURIEL FINDS A FRIEND.

Miss Gordon looked up from her desk, at which she was writing when, at her request, the door of the office opened. “Oh, good afternoon, Faith, dear,” she said when she saw the little brown maid who stood there, for nut-brown the girl surely was, hair, eyes and skin being dark.

“Can you spare a moment?” Faith asked, not wishing to interrupt, for she knew that her mission could be postponed.

“As many as you wish. Come in and sit down. I know by your eager expression that you have something to ask or to tell. What is it, dear?”

“It’s about Muriel Storm, Miss Gordon, that I wish to speak. I have been with her for the last two hours.”

The principal looked her pleasure. “Oh, Faith,” she said, “I’m so glad if you are taking an interest in poor, heart-broken Muriel. There is wonderful material in that girl and you are the one pupil in the whole school whom I had thought of asking to befriend her, but I decided to wait and see if there were any who would be kind to her without my having asked it as a favor.”

“I, too, think that Muriel is very unusual,” the girl declared warmly. “When I visited her room today I felt at once that yearning one would feel for any helpless thing that was hurt, but soon I became interested in her for herself alone. I never before saw a face that registers emotion more wonderfully, as Miss Burns calls it in our drama class.” **[175]**

“You are right,” Miss Gordon replied. “I soon found that Muriel loved nature passionately, and what do you suppose we have been doing during the evening hour that we have spent together this week? Reading and listening to the great nature poems! And, dear, one night when the girl came to me she said, almost shyly: ‘Miss Gordon, I *heard* a little verse today when I was out with my pine,’ and then she told it. Although crudely worded, that little poem promises much. It described the surf beating on the rocks of her Windy Island home and of a lame pelican which is unable to compete with the more active birds in its struggle for existence, and depends largely on Muriel for its sustenance. She had been thinking of this bird friend, it seemed, and of the nature poems that I had read when this little verse came to her thought.”

“Miss Gordon, do you think that this untaught island girl is really a poet at heart?”

“I think just that. But, dear, Muriel is not untaught. True it is that she cannot speak our language. She knows nothing of science or numbers, but she has been taught high ideals by one of nature’s noblemen, her grandfather. Too, she has been taught the folk-lore of Ireland by another whom she calls Captain Barney, and nature, the winds, sky, storm, birds and sea have taught her much else. There are few girls at High Cliffs who are as well grounded in things **[176]**

worth while as is our Muriel Storm. Now, dear, what is it you wish to say?”

Faith hesitated, then said: “I was thinking that it might be pleasant for Muriel to sit in the dining hall with us.” Then she added, flushing: “Of course, Miss Gordon, it is pleasant for her to be with you, but——”

The older woman placed a hand upon Faith’s as she said: “Dear, I understand, and also I have been waiting for this to happen. I wanted to place her where she would be happy and not unkindly treated. What is your suggestion?”

“I was wondering if Phyllis Dexter, who sits between Gladys Goodsell and me, could not be placed at the long table with her friend Adelaine Stuart. Every day she wishes that she were there, and then Muriel could sit next to me. Gladys will be very kind to her.”

There was a glad light in the eyes of the principal. She touched a button twice in rapid succession and the head waitress soon appeared. The change was ordered and then when the maid had departed Miss Gordon arose. “Dear,” she said, “in fifteen minutes the supper bell will ring. Will you take Muriel with you to the dining hall?” **[177]**

“Oh, thank you, Miss Gordon! I am so glad that I have had this talk with you.”

* * * * * * * *

Muriel was just waking from her siesta on the window seat, feeling wonderfully refreshed, when she heard the bell which meant that she had but fifteen minutes in which to prepare for the evening meal.

Again there came a tap on her door and this time Muriel called eagerly, “Come in.” She was sure that it would be Faith, and impulsively she whirled about, saying: “Will you be forgivin’ me for fallin’ asleep when you was readin’ to me?” Faith caught the outstretched hands as she replied: “Yes, Muriel, if you will grant me a great privilege.”

The island girl did not know that word, and, as usual, her face registered her perplexity. Faith laughed. Then, more seriously: “Dear, I would not hurt your feelings for worlds, but I was wondering if you would like me to help you to speak as we do?” She looked anxiously into the clear hazel eyes and to her joy she saw a glad light dawning there. “Oh, I’d be thankful if you’d care that much.”

“Very well, we’ll begin on the sentence you said a moment ago.” Muriel slowly repeated it correctly after Faith. Then she exclaimed happily: “There’s a rift in the clouds for me an’ the sun’s a-gleamin’ through.” There were sudden tears, but also a shining smile as she added: “’Twill be a long while before I can get the speakin’ right, but I’ll try.” **[178]**

The last bell for supper was pealing through the corridors and Faith, catching the hand of Muriel, hurried her away.

There were groups of girls in twos and threes going down the circling stairway, and although

many of them greeted Faith, none even smiled at her companion, but there were three who swept past with their heads held high. These snobbish girls were Marianne Carnot, Adelaine Stuart and Phyllis Dexter.

But a second later skipping feet were heard back of them and plump, good-natured Gladys Goodsell caught Faith by the arm. “Belovedest friend,” she said, after nodding at Muriel, “where hast thou been this afternoon? Didst forget that we were to play tennis at four?”

Faith turned, truly contrite. “I’ll have to confess that I did forget, Gladys. I am so sorry. Are you very hurt with me?” **[179]**

A jolly laugh rang out at this reply. “Getting angry would take more energy than I have to expend.” Then, more seriously: “I know my friend Faith too well to think that she would neglect an engagement if she recalled it, and, as it happened, Catherine Lambert was pining to have someone play singles, and so I made her happy.”

They had reached the large, pleasant dining hall and saw many girls who were already there standing behind their chairs. Purposely, Faith delayed her companion near a window overlooking the garden of asters. The island girl’s eyes were aglow as she looked out.

“It’s pretty they are,” she said; “the like of ’em I’ve not seen. We had the wild ones but no planted flowers.”

Gladys, who did not in the least understand what was happening, glanced over at Faith, who, in a moment when she could not be observed by Muriel, placed her finger on her lips and nodded, as much as to say, “Do as I do and I’ll explain later.”

Gladys had chummed with Faith and Helen Beavers during the three years they had been at High Cliffs and understood the sign language of her friend almost as well as she did the spoken word. So she knew that something unexpected was about to happen, and that she was to take her cue from Faith.

Although Muriel occupied the seat formerly that of Phyllis Dexter, the change had not pleased that proud girl, who had so wished to be placed next to her particular friend, Adelaine Stuart. Instead she found herself placed between two seniors in whom she was not remotely interested. The truth of the matter was that Miss Gordon had long been observing the three girls, Marianne, Phyllis and Adelaine, and thought it wise to keep them apart whenever it was possible. **[180]**

When Muriel, looking almost happy for the first time since her arrival at High Cliffs, was seated, she felt a compelling gaze and glanced across the room. There she saw Marianne watching her through half-closed lids. There seemed to be in the French girl’s expression a threat that endangered her new-found joy and peace. But Faith, who also had seen, reached under the table and, finding Muriel’s hand, she held it in a close, protecting clasp, and the island girl knew that come what might she would not have to stand alone.

Saturday dawned gloriously bright, for it was Indian summer on the Hudson. The air was soft and balmy, the sunshine hazy and a dreamy little breeze rustled the few yellowing leaves that were still clinging to the trees.

"Just the day for a hike," Faith announced at breakfast. **[181]**

Catherine Lambert, who sat across the table, looked up eagerly and in answer to the speaker's question, "Who wants to go?" she at once replied, "I do."

"Muriel is to be the guest of honor." Faith smiled lovingly at the girl next to her. "Gladys, how about you?"

"I thought we were to practice for the tennis tournament today. There is only a month left, you know."

"That's right. So we were. But, Gladys, if you will go hiking with us today I'll promise to practice tennis every afternoon next week from four to five, my free time, on one condition."

Her friend looked at her inquiringly. "Name it," she said.

"That fifteen minutes each day may be devoted to teaching Muriel our favorite game."

"Agreed. Who knows but that she may be just the champion player for whom we are looking," Gladys good naturedly declared with sincere fervor.

And Catherine chimed in with: "Oh, wouldn't it be great if we could make a player out of Muriel? We haven't anyone on our side as light on her feet or as quick as Marianne Carnot. Just because of that I've actually been afraid that we might lose out on the great day." Then, to the wide-eyed listener, Faith explained: "On Thanksgiving every year we have a tennis tournament. Marianne and her friends are the opponents of Gladys and her chums. Of course, naturally we are eager to win. Now, Muriel, if you are willing, we will train you. Not that we expect you really to bring victory to our side; that would be asking too much, since Marianne Carnot was the champion tennis player in the English boarding school that she attended before she came to America. She has three medals to prove her frequently made boast, and, moreover, we have seen her play." Then, as the surveillant of the dining hall gave the signal, the pupils rose and left. **[182]**

In the lower corridor, near the office of the principal, Faith paused. "Wait a minute," she said softly. "I am going to ask Miss Gordon if we may take our lunch. I do not have to return to the school until three o'clock, just in time for my violin lesson."

The permission was readily granted and then the four girls went to their rooms to dress for the hike.

Muriel was happier than she had supposed she would be ever again, and she actually smiled at her reflection as she donned her sport skirt, sweater and tam.

When she was dressed, Muriel stood gazing idly

from her window.

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CHAPTER XXVI.
MURIEL RECEIVES A LETTER.

When Muriel Storm returned from the hike to the woodlands and found upon her desk a letter from Gene Beavers she did indeed rejoice, and without stopping to remove her hiking apparel, she curled up on her window seat to read the missive, which, as usual, was couched in the simplest words.

The two weeks of tutoring which Muriel had received from Faith had helped her to read with far greater ease. The lad told of his long illness which had resulted from the cold, stormy weather, the rough voyage and the damp, foggy climate of London.

He had seen nothing of the city since his arrival, but even though they were living in one of the fashionable outlying districts, he could hear the distant roar of the traffic, and now he yearned to be back on Windy Island, where only were to be heard the sounds of nature.

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When Gene wrote that letter he knew nothing of the tragedy of the lighthouse, for although Faith had mentioned it in a letter to Helen, his sister had thought best not to sadden him with news that might be a shock to him, for she well knew how greatly he admired the old man who had been keeper of the light.

However, she had been glad to tell him that Muriel Storm was attending the High Cliff Seminary. This did not really surprise him, for often he had heard Doctor Winslow say that, as soon as he could convert the old sea captain to his point of view, he, at his own expense, intended sending the girl, of whom he was fond, to some good boarding school.

Little did Muriel dream that Gene’s proud mother had sent for him that she might get him away from the degrading influence of the fisherfolk with whom he had been staying and about whom she had heard from Marianne’s father, who was a business friend of Mr. Beavers.

Then for months she positively forbade the boy to write to the “island girl,” but at length, when his illness lasted so long, the mother consented to permit Gene to write if he would promise to remain in England until he was twenty-one. By that time he would have forgotten that daughter of the common people, for she, of course, would be unable to travel, and so they would not meet.

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For a long time after the reading of the epistle Muriel sat with the letter lying in her lap as she gazed with unseeing eyes at the busy Hudson. If only she knew how to write! As yet she had never answered one of Gene’s letters, nor had he expected a reply. Of course, Faith, Gladys or

Catherine Lambert, all dear friends, would gladly pen a letter at her dictation, but that would not be quite the same. She wanted to write the very first letter all by herself.

She wondered how long it would be before she could learn.

It was nearing five o'clock when there came a rap-i-tap upon her door, a signal meaning that Faith awaited without.

In reply to Rilla's "Come in!" the door opened.

"Muriel Storm, I do believe that you have been day-dreaming again! Why haven't you removed your hiking togs? I came up to tell you that Miss Widdemere wishes us to gather in the study hall at five-fifteen for the first class of the year in politeness."

The island girl sprang up and hastily began to change her costume. "A class in politeness, is it?" she repeated, in a puzzled tone of voice. "What does one have to be learnin' in that kind of a class?"

Faith sat on the window seat to wait until her friend was ready to accompany her. "Oh, it's a sort of society stunt, so to speak," she explained. "We practice curtsies for grace, make seven different varieties of calls, more or less, are taught what to do with our hands and feet, how to be a hostess and how to be a guest. Oh, yes, and what to do and what not to do if we're ever presented to a queen." Faith was purposely exaggerating. She really believed the class in politeness rather unnecessary, since the young ladies came from homes where they learned from babyhood all that they would need to know. **[186]**

She had forgotten for the moment that Muriel had not had these same home advantages.

"Oh, I wish I didn't have to be goin' to it," the island girl said as she turned away from the mirror, again dressed in her dark blue school uniform. "I'll be that awkward, an' I don't know nothin' about manners." Her voice was so truly distressed and the expression on her face so tragic that Faith sprang up from the window seat and, slipping a protecting arm about her friend, she said: "Dear, I'll ask Miss Widdemere to excuse you today; that is, just let you watch the others, and then, this evening, I'll come up to your room and teach you the curtsy. It would hardly be fair to ask you to begin with the others when many of them practiced during the whole of last year."

Faith had suddenly recalled overhearing a conversation when she was on her way to the cupola room. Adelaine Stuart and the French girl had been just ahead of her and she had distinctly heard the former say: "If it is your desire to humiliate that lighthouse person wait until she has to take the part of hostess in politeness class. That will show her up before the whole school." **[187]**

The rest of the sentence Faith had not heard, as she had passed the two schemers with her head held high, but when she came to think it over she wondered why Marianne Carnot wished to harm Rilla, whom she barely knew.

Faith resolved to stay close to Muriel to protect her, if she could, from whatever humiliation Adelaine and Marianne might be planning, and it was indeed lucky for the island girl that she had so staunch a friend.

Faith was glad to find that the Mistress of the Manners Class was still in her office, and thither she led Muriel.

The young teacher glanced up and bade them enter. Then Faith asked: “Miss Widdemere, have you met our new pupil, Muriel Storm?”

There was a brightening expression in the kind grey eyes back of the large, dark-rimmed glasses. The teacher advanced, her right hand extended.

“No, indeed, and I am most pleased to meet you. A lucky new pupil you are to have the friendship of our Faith.” This with a loving glance at the girl who stood at Muriel’s side.

“Yes, ma’am. Thanks!”

Miss Widdemere’s glance was puzzled, though not unkindly critical. It was not customary for girls from the North to say “ma’am,” but perhaps this new pupil was a Southerner. The teacher was even more perplexed when Faith beckoned to Gladys Goodsell, who stood near awaiting her friend, and said: “Will you take Muriel to the classroom? I wish to speak with Miss Widdemere for a moment.” **[188]**

When the door was closed, in as few words as possible Faith told the tragic story of Muriel’s coming to High Cliffs.

“She has never had an opportunity to learn the ways of social life, Miss Widdemere,” the girl said earnestly, “but when you know her better you will think her very unusual, I am sure.”

Then, as she was eager to create a favorable impression, she added: “Muriel has beautiful fancies and our Miss Gordon believes that she is to be a real poet some day.”

“What a loyal friend your friends have in you, Faith? What is your request?”

It was granted as soon as heard. “Muriel may listen and watch,” the teacher declared, “but we will not ask her to take part until you tell me that you have coached her sufficiently in private.”

Then, as the bell in the corridor was announcing that laggards must make haste, these two went to the study hall, where the pupils were assembled. Some were seated on the desk tops, others standing in groups chatting, but when Miss Widdemere appeared all arose, and facing her, made deep curtsies. Muriel alone remained erect, not knowing what to do. **[189]**

Marianne, gazing across the room through half-closed lids, smiled and nudged her companion.

“She’s as graceful as a hitching post,” Adelaine replied, loud enough to be heard by several who stood near.

Muriel felt their gaze and flushed with embarrassment.

“The young ladies will now arrange their chairs in a large semi-circle, the vacant space in the center to represent a parlor.” Miss Widdemere waited until the confusion was over and the pupils seated before continuing:

“We will now select a hostess and ten guests to attend an afternoon tea. Whom do you name as hostess, Phyllis?” She had turned toward that young girl because she had risen. “I name Muriel Storm,” said Phyllis, who had been well coached by the girls who sat next to her.

Miss Widdemere sent a keen glance in their direction, and she said, rather coldly: “Young ladies, partly because of Muriel Storm’s recent bereavement, we are not expecting her to share in our imaginary social functions for a month at least.”

Marianne Carnot added in an undertone heard only by those about her, “And the other ‘partly’ is that she couldn’t if we did expect it.” **[190]**

Faith eventually was chosen as hostess and Muriel intently watched every move made by her friend. How graceful she was and how gracious! A slip of a Japanese girl, who was the daughter of the chef of the school, appeared dressed in an attractive native costume and played the part of maid for this class. When she was older she, too, would be trained for the sphere that she was to fill.

That evening Faith found her friend both discouraged and homesick.

“It’s out of place I am among you all,” she said. “I’d ruther be back with my seagulls, I’m thinkin’. I’ll never take to bowin’ and goin’ to teas.”

Faith laughed merrily; then shaking a finger at Rilla, prophesied: “The day is coming when you may be asked to be hostess for a lord or an earl or someone like that; then won’t you be glad that you learned how at High Cliff Seminary?”

The idea was so absurd that even Muriel laughed.

“Me hostess at an earl’s tea party? You’re allays sayin’ you have no imagination, but I’m thinkin’ you have some and to spare.”

Laughter brought a better humor, as it always does, and for an hour that evening Muriel permitted her friend to teach her the first positions to be made in the curtsy.

[191]

CHAPTER XXVII. MURIEL BEGINS HER STUDIES.

A fortnight passed and during that time Miss Gordon and Faith had started Muriel’s development in several directions. In fact, the younger of her teachers soon triumphantly announced that not a pupil at High Cliff

Seminary could make a more graceful curtsy than Muriel.

The day before the expected arrival of Miss Humphrey, who was to tutor the island girl, she confided to Faith that she just knew that she could make far greater headway with writing and reading if she might continue practicing them with her best friend than she could with a teacher, however learned, who was strange to her. It was evident to the three girls who were her closest comrades that Muriel dreaded the first hour that she was to spend with Miss Humphrey.

As usual, the island girl seemed almost to foreknow what was going to happen, and when the moment arrived Muriel retreated within herself so entirely that, at the close of a very trying hour, Miss Humphrey went down to the office of Miss Gordon and remarked: “I must confess that I am extremely disappointed in your prodigy. Her English is deplorable. To correct it will take indefinite patience and far more time than I can spare from my legitimate classwork. Is there not some one who could undertake her instruction during the fall term in the fundamentals?” If Miss Gordon was discouraged her voice did not betray it, when, after a thoughtful moment, she replied: “I am sorry that I asked you to undertake the tutoring of the island girl. I hoped that you would see in her the possibilities of an unusual nature that I still contend are there, but it will, as you say, require infinite patience to develop them. Perhaps I had better make some other arrangement, at least until Muriel has caught up with your Junior English class.” **[192]**

There was real relief pictured on the face that was lined before its time. Rising, Miss Humphrey said: “I am indeed glad that we are agreed on this matter and if Muriel Storm is advanced enough at the midwinter term to enter the junior class I will do all that I can to aid her, but this dialect which she now speaks must be overcome, and that means tireless prompting on the part of some constant companion.”

Miss Gordon also arose and said, not unkindly: “Give Doctor Winslow’s protege no more thought until the midwinter term begins.” Then the principal added, with a brightened smile: “I’ll prophesy that Muriel will then be prepared to enter your sophomore class and not your junior.” **[193]**

“Impossible!” Miss Humphrey declared with conviction.

“Wonders never cease!” laughed Miss Gordon, who now wished to end the interview.

“But who will tutor Muriel Storm that she is to make such phenomenal progress?” With her hand on the knob of the open door Miss Humphrey awaited the answer.

“I shall,” Miss Gordon replied.

Joy was in the heart of the island girl when she heard this wonderful news.

“Oh, I’m that glad, Miss Gordon,” she exclaimed the following evening when, just after dinner, she was summoned to the attractive little

apartment in a remote wing of the school to which the principal retired when the tasks of the day were over.

[194] The larger of the two rooms was a library and study in which there was a wide fireplace, and on either side long, vine-hung windows that overlooked the Hudson. Low shelves circled the walls and they were filled with book-friends, actually read and loved by their owner. Here and there were soft-toned copies of famous paintings and a few charming originals in water color. Too, there were ferns growing in the wicker window-boxes and a blossoming plant on a low wicker stand. The comfortable, inviting chairs of the same weave were cushioned with soft hues and a shade on the reading lamp harmonized. The little room just beyond, in which Miss Gordon slept, had disappearing windows on all sides, and at night, when these were opened, only the screens sheltered her from the out-of-doors she so loved. As the principal had prophesied, Muriel, in this congenial atmosphere, blossomed not only rapidly but also beautifully. No one but Faith guessed how her friend was advancing and she did not have to guess. She knew.

Miss Gordon had sent for Faith on the very day that Miss Humphrey had visited the office, and together they had divided the work and the joy of assisting Muriel.

In the beginning the principal had merely planned asking Faith's advice; it had not been her desire to burden the girl, but at once Faith had said: "Oh, Miss Gordon, I have not told you that for the past two weeks I have been instructing Muriel in penmanship and also in reading and spelling. It is a great pleasure to me to aid her, and if you are willing I shall continue our little class."

The principal's sweet face brightened. "Thank you, Faith. If you will tutor Muriel in the fundamentals, I will gladly instruct her in the higher branches."

[195] Then she added, and there was a twinkle in the sweet grey-blue eyes: "Miss Humphrey would never be able to understand it, but I actually enjoy reading poetry to that island girl. She sits on a low stool at my feet and with those liquid hazel eyes she drinks into her very soul the beauty of the thought and the music of the rhythm."

"Miss Gordon," Faith said, "don't let us tell anyone of Muriel's progress. Let's keep it a secret until the midwinter term. I would like to surprise Miss Humphrey—and—and others." Faith was thinking of Marianne, whom she knew wished to humiliate Muriel.

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CHAPTER XXVIII.
A LESSON IN TENNIS.

Faith and Muriel were studying together the next morning, which chanced to be Saturday,

when they heard a hurrying of feet in the corridor and then a merry banging on the door.

“Come in,” Muriel called. The door was flung open and in bounced Gladys Goodsell and Catherine Lambert, wearing tennis shoes and carrying their racquets and balls.

“Top o’ the morning to you,” Gladys sang out.

“The coast is clear!” Catherine announced almost at the same time.

The two, who were seated at a small table strewn with papers and books, looked up inquiringly.

“What coast and how clear?” Faith inquired.

Gladys threw herself down upon the window seat while Catherine perched on the foot of the bed.

“Marianne Carnot and Adelaine Stuart have gone to the city for the day. Think of that! They left on the mail boat at nine o’clock sharp, chaperoned by Miss Widdemere, and are to return at six-thirty P. M. Were we ever in greater luck?”

Still the listeners were puzzled. **[197]**

“Faith Morley, put on your thinking bonnet! Don’t you know that we have been just pining to have an opportunity to instruct Muriel in the beginnings of tennis without being spied upon by our arch-enemy, whatever that may mean. Anyway, it sounds much grander than just enemy.”

“That is true,” Faith replied, “but this morning Muriel and I were planning to study. Can’t we play this afternoon?”

Faith had not told the others that in reality she was trying to instruct the island girl in spelling the simplest words, but Muriel was quite willing that these two dear friends might know, and so she said: “Teacher Faith, I think I’m gettin’ a notion of what you mean about the lesson, and if you’d like to be teachin’ me tennis, I’d love to be learnin’ it.”

“Very well,” Faith said as she arose, glad indeed to join in the outdoor game they all so enjoyed. “I haven’t a thing to do until my violin lesson at three o’clock, although I think I had better practice for an hour before Herr Professor arrives on the scene today. Last Saturday he said, ‘Mees Morley, the practice is less of late, why for?’” Then she added: “Into your sport skirt, Muriel, and if you haven’t tennis shoes I’ll loan you a pair. Fare-thee-well. I’ll be back in a twinkling.”

Faith skipped away to her room to change her dress. Catherine and Gladys announced that they would go ahead to the court and practice until the others joined them. **[198]**

Ten minutes later Faith reappeared, holding a pair of tennis shoes. She found Muriel studying the primer. Rilla looked up with laughter in her hazel eyes. “D-e-a-r,” she announced. “It’s the beginning of a letter. I wonder how long ’twill be before I can be writin’ one that a person could be readin’?”

She was putting a burnt orange tam atop of her red-brown hair as she spoke, and then she slipped on a sweater of the same becoming hue.

“Who are you so eager to write to, anyway?” Faith was curious.

“Oh, it’s several friends I have that I’d like to be writin’ to,” Muriel began; then, chancing to glance at the chart made for her by Faith to aid in correcting the mistakes she so frequently made, she repeated, very slowly and thoughtfully: “I have several friends to whom I wish to write.”

“That’s great!” Faith exclaimed, her face glowing with pleasure. “Think ahead of each word that you say for a few weeks, dear, and soon you will find that it will be hard for you to speak incorrectly.” Then, slipping her arm within that of her friend, she added: “The champion tennis players will now descend to the court.”

Faith chatted gaily as they went down the wide stairs, out through the basement door, crossed the garden, where few flowers were blossoming, as the nights were frosty, and toward the tennis courts. **[199]**

Muriel, however, was silent. She was wondering how long it would be before she could write a letter to Gene unaided.

“Greetings!” Gladys called as Muriel and Faith approached. She waved her racket and then, as the ball, sent with a smash by Catherine, landed in the court just back of her, she whirled with a sudden swift movement, caught it on the first bound and sent it flying back over the net. The island girl stared at her in amazement.

“Why, Gladys, it’s like a top you’re whirling!” she exclaimed. “Is it me that’s expected to learn such antics?”

The other three laughed, and Catherine, catching the ball, walked around the net to join the group.

“We don’t expect you to do such expert playing as that for this tournament,” Faith assured her. “In fact, we do not expect you to take part in any of the actual contest games until next spring, but you might as well begin your training. It’s jolly good fun, if nothing more.”

Muriel sighed audibly and Faith laughed. “Rilla,” she said, and the island girl heard her grand-dad’s pet name for her for the first time since she had arrived at High Cliffs, “have you been worrying for fear we did expect you to play against Marianne Carnot on that fateful day? Indeed not! Catherine Lambert is the only pupil in this school who can even approach Marianne in skill and dexterity. You know the English are great for outdoor sports of all kinds.” **[200]**

“But it’s French Marianne is, I thought.”

“Her father is a Frenchman, but he is connected with English and American shipping interests. It’s a huge concern, I don’t know just what, but I have heard Marianne say that their ships circle the globe. Because of this, Monsieur Carnot resides in England, where his daughter attended

a school, and she takes every opportunity to assure us it was really intended only for the daughters of the lesser nobility, if you know what or who they may be."

"I plead total ignorance," Gladys declared. "I'm glad that I'm an American. My dad made every penny that he possesses, and honestly, too. Grand-dad happened to own vast farmlands which the City of New York wished to possess, and for which it paid a fabulous price, hence the grand-daughter of a farmer is attending High Cliffs with the daughters of the lesser nobility, if any happen to be here."

Catherine Lambert laughed. "Well, since we four are not guilty, let's cease chatting and go to batting."

"Cathy, I believe you are trying to be a poet," Faith remonstrated. "Don't, dear, we'd hate to have our best tennis player take to day-dreaming." **[201]**

"No danger of that! I simply couldn't write a poem if my life depended upon it. Now, let's explain the game. Muriel, here is a racket for you."

Catherine looked over at Faith, who smilingly nodded, and said: "Keep up the good work, Cathy. If you leave out any leading points Gladys and I will supply them."

"Very well, if I am appointed instructress, I will proceed to instruct," Catherine said. Then she added in a tone of mock seriousness: "Miss Storm, before you is a tennis court, the boundaries of which are outlined in white. A net, you will perceive, is stretched across the center, and the opponents stand two on either side. Comprenez vous?" Then, noting the pupil's puzzled expression, she translated: "Do I make it clear?" Muriel nodded.

Catherine continued: "The first player to serve the ball is selected and the game begins. Now, the object of the server is to send the ball over the net in such a manner that it will be difficult for the opponent to reach it before it bounds twice. It may be returned after the first bounce, but not after the second." Then, turning to the others: "Now, shall we begin? Muriel will learn more by actual practice than by any amount of explanation. I will take her for my partner."

"Oh, Catherine, you'll be sorry if you do," Muriel laughingly protested. **[202]**

"No, she won't," Faith returned. "Catherine could win the game singly against any two girls in this school if Marianne were not an opponent."

Then the game began. Gladys served and the ball fell easily within Muriel's reach, but she stood and gazed at it. For a fraction of a second Catherine waited, then realizing that Muriel did not understand that she was expected to return the ball, she leaped to the other side and, zip, it went flying gracefully back over the net. After that it was kept in the air, one volley shot following another in quick succession until Faith had the misfortune to throw it into the net, then they all paused for a breathing spell.

Muriel shook her head. “You might’s well give up the notion of teachin’ me. Such spinnin’ around I never could do.”

Faith laughed. “Don’t be discouraged. We all felt just that way in the beginning. Now, Gladys, let’s sit beneath this juniper tree and let Muriel get some actual practice.”

This they did, and during the next half hour Muriel did some leaping and running that made the observers decide that, when she understood the rules of the game, she would play at least as well as the majority. [203]

“The luncheon bell is ringing,” Faith sang out at last. The players stopped and the others, gazing at Muriel, suddenly realized she was truly beautiful. Her loosened hair clustered in moist ringlets about her flushed face, her orange colored tam was jauntily askew, and her eyes were glowing. “That was great fun,” she said, when the garden door was reached. “Thank you all for tryin’ to teach me.”

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CHAPTER XXIX.
JOY KIERSEY.

That had been the first of many hours of practice on the tennis courts. Running races with Shags and rowing had been the only two outdoor sports Muriel had known. For that reason, perhaps, she thoroughly enjoyed tennis, and how her friends did enjoy watching her.

Every afternoon from four to five o’clock they had the court to themselves, that being the hour when Marianne Carnot was practicing her vocal lessons on the other side of the school. These three friends did not wish Marianne to even suspect that Muriel was being drilled. Not that they had any hope of winning the game, which was but a fortnight away. In fact, it would be unwise to permit so new a player as Muriel to even take part, they decided. Joy Kiersey, who usually played with Catherine Lambert, had been ill, and was not yet strong enough to practice, although she assured the girls that she would not fail them on the day of the tournament.

“We have a strong team,” Faith told Muriel one noon at lunch, “when Joy is with us, but not so strong when she isn’t.” [205]

“I haven’t met Joy Kiersey as yet, have I?” Rilla said this slowly, thoughtfully, and hence more correctly.

Faith was pleased, but made no comment. “No,” she replied. “Joy did not return at the beginning of the term, and although she has been in High Cliffs for a week now, she remains in her room most of the time. We thought that we would call upon her this afternoon during the free period, and I planned asking you to accompany us.”

Muriel shook her head. “Don’t,” she said. Then twinkles appeared in her clear hazel eyes. “I

dunno how to make a call. We haven't had that yet in politeness."

Faith, however, did not smile. "This afternoon, dear, you follow me and do just what I do and then, at least, you will be as correct a guest as I am."

"Miss Gordon said that we might go," Gladys leaned forward to remark, "and Joy is eager to have a real visit with us."

"We haven't had an opportunity since she came to confer about the game." This from Catherine.

"Maybe she'd ruther I didn't come."

Faith looked reproachfully at her friend, then said softly that no one else might hear: "Rilla, you are forgetting our new rule. Think a sentence before you say it." **[206]**

Muriel flashed a bright smile at the speaker, thought a moment, then repeated: "Perhaps your friend, Joy Kiersey, would rather that I did not come."

"Not so, Rilla." Faith was glad to be able to add truly: "Joy asked especially about you. She was watching us yesterday as we returned from the court and she inquired who you were, and what do you suppose she said?"

"I can't guess. Something dreadful, like's not—I mean—I suppose."

"Not a bit of it! Joy asked who the girl was who carried herself as though she were a princess."

Muriel looked blank. "Who was she talking about? If 'twas me, then she was just makin' fun."

"No, dear. Joy wouldn't do that. You don't realize it, of course, but there are times when you carry yourself, shall I say proudly? Or——" Faith hesitated, groping for a word, then laughingly confessed, "I don't know just how to express it."

"As though she had a family tree like Adelaine Stuart," Gladys put in.

Muriel laughed; then said earnestly: "I come from a long line of good, honest New England seafaring folk and I'm proud of it. My grand-dad stood erect, the way I suppose you mean that I do. Summer folk often spoke of it. I remember one man visitin' the light said grand-dad was like a Viking. Queer how I remembered that word all this time. I suppose because I wondered what it meant." **[207]**

"Oh, I know all about Vikings," Gladys boasted. "Listen and you shall hear. Between the eighth and eleventh centuries the coasts of the British Isles were visited by the Norsemen, called Vikings, or sea-rovers, who contributed much to the romantic history of medieval Europe."

"My! What a lot we know," Catherine Lambert teased as she beamed across the table, and Gladys merrily retorted: "Well, why shouldn't I know it today, since I only learned it yesterday. But don't ask me anything about it next week."

Then, as the signal was given, the girls arose and left the dining hall.

Little did Muriel guess that these dear friends had planned the call upon Joy that she might have an actual experience that would fit her for the dreaded class in politeness.

The afternoon tea was a delightful affair. Joy, who seemed to Muriel to be the embodiment of loveliness, welcomed them to her sunny, flower-filled room with a graciousness which at once won the heart of the island girl.

"Miss Joy Kiersey, may I present my friend Miss Muriel Storm?" was the form of introduction chosen. **[208]**

"I am indeed glad to make the acquaintance of so dear a friend of our Faith," was the sincere response as Joy extended her hand and clasped that of the new member of their little clan. "Now, everybody find a place to curl up somewhere and let's chat for half an hour while the kettle boils. Dear Miss Gordon granted a special dispensation today and yonder on the tea table is seen the flame of my alcohol lamp that will soon persuade the tiny teakettle to start its song."

"Oh, what an adorable teakettle that is! I love copper things, don't you, Muriel?" Gladys exclaimed, forgetting for the moment that the island girl might not be familiar with things antique. Faith replied for her friend, then added: "Joy's latest hobby, it is quite evident, is collecting baskets. You have a dozen new ones, I do believe."

Their hostess nodded, and pointing to a large, round and nearly flat basket lying near the hearth: "I found that in Nevada last summer when we were visiting Lake Tahoe. It was made by the Washoe Indians and I think that I prize it most of all, and yet that Washoe water bottle on the mantel is interesting as a curiosity."

After the bottle-shaped basket had been admired Gladys asked: "Did you find people different in the West?" **[209]**

"I like the real Westerner," Joy replied, "but there was one thing that was always like a discord to me, and that was the manner of introduction used by many of them. They say, 'Meet my friend.' It is so harsh and so abrupt. If they would say, 'I would like you to meet my friend,' it would seem more gracious."

Muriel, listening, resolved that she would never use that crude form of introduction.

"Hark!" Catherine Lambert said softly. "I hear a voice calling to us."

Joy uncurled from the big chair which the girls had insisted that she occupy. "Oh, the little copper teakettle is singing." Then to Faith, "Will you pour today, Miss Morley?"

No one looked at Muriel, and as she did in all things as her friends did, the serving of tea and wafers passed without a mishap.

When the bell in the corridor announced the hour of five o'clock Faith rose. "Time to depart," she said. Then to their hostess, "Joy, I am so glad that you are better. We have had a delightful time at your tea party and shall hope

to see you soon in Pickle Pantry."

This was the name that Faith jokingly gave the room that she shared with Gladys, for that maiden being extremely fond of sweet pickles, always had a bottle of them stowed away in most unexpected places. **[210]**

"Girls," Joy said remorsefully, "we haven't made a single plan for the game. However, I'll be at the court tomorrow at four."

As Faith and Muriel ascended the stairs toward the cupola room, whither they were going for a half-hour review of spelling, the former asked: "Isn't Joy a dear?"

"I love her," Muriel said. Then she asked: "Are you sure she is real?"

Faith turned with puzzled eyes. "Real? Do you mean sincere?"

The island girl shook her head. "No, indeed, I know she is that! I mean that she looks like the gold and white fairy folk Uncle Barney used to tell about—and they always disappeared."

Faith smiled. "Joy is our Dresden China girl, and, oh, Muriel, how I do hope she will grow strong. Her mother took her West last year believing the invigorating air of the Rockies would help her; but even now she hasn't the strength that we who love her desire. The world has need of girls like our Joy," she concluded.

Joy Kiersey, to the delight of her friends, appeared at the court next afternoon. Her soft, golden hair was like an aureole of sunshine about her head, for when she began to play she tossed her pale blue tam on a bench, where earlier she had flung her sweater-coat of the same color. **[211]**

Joy and Catherine played singles for a while, the two being the experts of the team. Faith, Gladys and Muriel sat nearby watching with admiring eyes.

Time after time Joy was able to smash a ball over the net in such a manner that it fell dead before Catherine could return it.

"That's our only hope," Faith confided to Muriel, "that play of Joy's! It's a trick that her Harvard brother taught her and, watch as closely as we may, we cannot acquire it. Her brother, it seems, made Joy promise that she would not teach it to the other girls unless it might be in an emergency of some kind."

"If Marianne Carnot and Adelaine Stuart are to play against Joy and Catherine," Muriel said, her eyes glowing with enthusiasm, "they will have to be wonderful players to win."

"You would think so," Gladys chimed in, "but you have never seen Marianne run. She seems to be everywhere at once. It doesn't matter on what part of the court we place a ball, there that French girl is, ready to return it, often with a volley, and her aim is true. However, Joy does excel in the smash stroke, and so, if she is strong enough to play, we may win."

Soon Joy declared that she wanted to rest and watch while the others played. **[212]**

Faith buttoned the girl who had been ill into her blue sweater-coat and then wrapped a soft golden scarf about her, although Joy declared that she did not need it. “You’re warm now,” Faith told her, “but there’s a decided nip in the air today, and we must be careful of our champion.”

At first Muriel was self-conscious, for she knew that Joy’s sweet blue eyes were watching her, not critically but with interest.

Suddenly, however, her attention was attracted by the falling of the ball on the extreme opposite side of the court. Of course Catherine would run for it, Muriel thought, but when she saw that maiden slip, Muriel ran as though her feet were shod with the wings of the wind. Over the net the ball went and Catherine was ready to volley it back when Gladys returned it.

Joy wanted to shout her delight. How she longed to sing out: “Girls, Marianne may be able to run, but Muriel flies!” But, instead she kept very quiet. She saw that the island girl was beginning to forget herself, and she did not wish to say anything that would cause her self-consciousness to return.

Soon Joy realized that she had over-estimated her own strength, for a sense of weariness was creeping over her. She rose, meaning to tell the girls that she had better go to her room, but she fell back on the bench, her face pale. Joy had fainted. Faith, rebuking herself for having permitted the frail girl to play at all, was quickly at her side, as were the others. **[213]**

Joy soon opened her eyes and found her head resting on Faith’s shoulder.

“I’m sorry if I frightened you,” she said. Then with a sigh she concluded: “I guess I’ll have to give up trying to play in the tournament.”

“Never mind, Joy dear. We would far rather have you regain your strength slowly than win all of the tennis honors that could come to us,” Faith assured her.

With the assistance of loving arms, Joy returned to the school and was soon made comfortable in her padded blue silk kimono. Muriel and Gladys brought wood and made a fire on the hearth, while Catherine went kitchenward to fill the copper teakettle with boiling water.

The next day Joy felt as well as she had before, but the girls were unanimous in declaring that she must not play tennis again until spring. Then it was that Joy made a resolution.

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CHAPTER XXX.
JOY’S SECRET.

When Joy realized that she would be unable to play in the tournament, which was the formal closing of the tennis season at High Cliffs, she resolved to teach Muriel the trick which her

brother had taught her which would send a ball over the net with a smash and kill it before it bounced. The island girl knew the rules of the game, it would seem, and how light she was on her feet and how swift! If she could master that trick in one week, there still might be hope of winning. Muriel was sitting at her desk studying spelling early the next morning when there came a tap on her door. She thought it was the maid of that corridor and called, “Come in.” But when she saw the blue and gold apparition standing in the open doorway she sprang to her feet and held out both hands. “Oh, Joy!” she exclaimed. “It is good of you to come to see me. Do you think you’re strong enough to be walkin’ that far?”

[215] The visitor sank down in the big, comfortably upholstered wicker chair near the hearth, where a bed of coals glowed. “I feel all right this morning,” she said, “but after yesterday’s experience I am convinced that I am not strong enough as yet to play in the tournament; and, Muriel, if you will promise not to share the knowledge without my permission, I will teach you the trick that my brother taught me.”

Muriel’s hazel eyes were wide. “But, Joy,” she ejaculated, “why is it me you would be teachin’ when Faith, Catherine and Gladys all play so much better?”

Joy smiled as she replied: “I have two excellent reasons. One is that the other girls are busy with their classes nearly all of each day, while you and I are not. As yet I have not started the regular work. And so you and I could go down to the court at an hour when it would be unoccupied. My other reason is that you are the only one on our side who can run as does our rival, Marianne Carnot.”

Muriel flushed with pleasure. “I’d be that pleased if I could help win the game,” she said. “I’ll gladly try, though I’m not expectin’ to be able to learn the trick.”

[216] “Try is all that any of us can do in this world, it would seem,” Joy said as she arose. “I see that you are studying, and I, too, must get at my French. Madame Van de Heuton is helping me keep up with the class, as Mother plans a visit to the continent next summer if I am strong enough.” Joy hesitated, then continued: “Muriel, would you like to study French with me? The review from the very beginning would do me just worlds of good.” There were sudden tears in the eyes of the island girl. “How kind you all are to be helpin’ me,” she said, adding: “If you think I’ll be needin’ the French, I’ll try.”

“Indeed you will need it, some time.” Then Joy suggested that they go to the court at two, when every other pupil would be occupied indoors. Muriel said that she would. At the door Joy turned, and lifting a finger, slender as a fairy-wand, she whispered, “Mums the word! Don’t even tell Faith, will you?”

Luckily the court was hidden from the school by a group of evergreen trees and so no one observed the two conspirators that afternoon. Patiently Joy explained the play, and Muriel, who was used to quick thought and action in her sailboat, was an apt pupil.

At the end of the first half hour Joy declared that practice was all that the island girl needed to perfect her in the smash stroke. “Meet me every day at this hour,” her instructress said, as they returned to the school by a roundabout path, keeping their rackets well hidden.

With each succeeding day Joy’s pleasure in her pupil increased. She did not have to expend much energy herself, as when the ball fell dead she merely picked it up and tossed it over the net. At first Muriel succeeded only once in a while, but on the fifth day she never failed. [217]

And yet, at the practice hour with the other girls, not once did Rilla betray the fact that she knew the smash stroke. Joy wanted to surprise them on the day of the tournament.

Faith, Gladys and Catherine wondered why Joy seemed to be so excited about the coming game, indeed almost jubilant.

[218]

CHAPTER XXXI.
THE TENNIS GAME.

A glorious autumn day dawned, and great was the excitement at High Cliffs, for many interesting events were to take place before the setting of the sun, foremost among them being the contest for the tennis championship.

Joy had told the three with whom she had expected to play that she wished they would continue their plans and permit Muriel to take her place.

Catherine Lambert had stared in amazement. “Joy,” she exclaimed, “you don’t think that Muriel Storm can play well enough to enter the tournament, do you?” Then added: “Not but that I would be glad indeed to play with Muriel, but since she has had scarcely a month’s practice I merely thought her hardly well enough prepared; and, of course, we don’t want to fail so completely that we will be laughed at by the entire school.”

Joy, for one impulsive moment, was inclined to tell Cathy the whole truth, but her better judgment prevailed, for she thought it very possible that Muriel might become self-conscious when she found herself playing before so many spectators and perhaps forget the trick she had so recently learned. After all it would be better not to praise the island girl’s playing too much, for she might fail. [219]

Joy stood looking out of her open window at the blue Hudson for a long, thoughtful moment before she inquired: “With whom are you planning to play, Catherine?” Her voice showed no trace of the disappointment that she truly felt because Muriel was not to be chosen.

“Jane Wiggins plays very well, indeed,” was the reply. “I watched her for half an hour yesterday while she was practicing on the court. She doesn’t really belong to either side, although she

said that Marianne Carnot had asked her to substitute. She is to sit on a bench nearby and be ready to run into the game if one of the players slips or wrenches her ankle or anything of that sort. When I spoke to Jane she said that she had not really promised Marianne that she would substitute, and that she would much rather play in the game."

Joy smiled. "Oh, course, Cathy dear, you girls are to do the playing, I am not; and you must select whoever you wish, but I had hoped that you would want Muriel to play with you."

"Suppose we place Muriel on the bench to substitute for us. Of course, any player is likely to slip and be out of the game," Gladys suggested.

This was agreed upon and to Joy fell the task of telling Muriel that she had not been chosen. When the others had gone, Joy went to the cupalo room and knocked. Muriel, she found, was already dressed in the short skirt and bloomers which the girls of High Cliffs were permitted to wear for their outdoor sports. **[220]**

"What is it, Joy? What have you to tell me?" Rilla asked, for one glance at the lovely face of their Dresden China girl assured her that something was wrong. It was with a sigh of relief that she heard what had happened.

"Oh, I'm that pleased," she said, "an' I do hope you're not mindin', but I most couldn't sleep last night with worryin' about the games. I was so afraid that our side would lose, and if it did I knew that it would be my fault. Yesterday I happened to be out by the courts and saw Marianne Carnot and Adelaine Stuart practicin', and such playin' as they can do."

Then, peering into the troubled blue eyes of her friend in the same coaxing way that she had often peered under the shaggy grey brows of her grand-dad, she said: "Please forgive me, Joy, for bein' glad about it, since you've tried so hard to teach me the stroke, an' if you're wishin' it, I will sit on the bench and be substitute, but I haven't much hope of our side winnin' since I saw those two play."

With this arrangement Joy had to be content and she went back to her room to dress, not as one of the players, but in her warm all-over coat, since she was just to stand around and watch, for the air was invigoratingly cold. **[221]**

Although the bloomer suits worn by the players all were a light tan, their tams and sweater-coats were of various colors. Many eyes followed the dark, handsome French girl whose chosen hue was that of a cherry. She knew that it was most becoming to her, but since there were no lads about to impress, she cared little what manner of appearance she might be making. However, she did want to win the game by fair means or foul since her opponents were the girls who had befriended Muriel Storm, the one person in the whole world whom she wished to humiliate.

Marianne lifted her finely arched black eyebrows ever so slightly as she glanced across the net to the spot near the evergreens where the five opponents were gathered.

“Have they chosen Muriel Storm for substitute?” she inquired, her voice expressing her mingled surprise and amazement. “They must be courting defeat.”

“But how can she play at all?” This from Adelaine Stuart. “I have never seen her practicing on these courts and surely before she came she had no opportunity to learn.” [222]

Marianne shrugged her shoulders. “Let us rejoice that they have chosen her, although, of course, they may not need a substitute; but if they do, it will mean an easy victory for us.”

“More honor, though, if we had good players to defeat, I should think,” Phyllis Dexter ventured.

But there was no time for further conversation as Miss Widdemere, who was to keep score, had arrived and was calling the names of the first four who were to take their places and select the server.

Five games were to be played and the side winning three out of five would be proclaimed champion.

Although Jane Wiggin was a fairly good player, she had not practiced with Catherine and was greatly handicapped thereby and the opponents easily won the first game. Marianne scarcely noticed when her few admirers among the watchers clapped and shouted. The victory had been too easy to be flattering, she thought.

The next game was played by Gladys and Faith on one side and by two of Marianne’s friends on the other and there was far more enthusiasm among the spectators when Catherine’s side won a victory.

Jane Wiggin, knowing that it was her poor teamwork that had lost the first game, sincerely wished that she had not agreed to play at all; but it was too late to withdraw. Though she did her best and though it was a hard-fought game, Catherine’s side lost. The score stood two games for Marianne and one for Catherine. [223]

Joy made her way among the onlookers and sat on the substitute’s bench next to Muriel. “Oh, if only I had my bloomers on,” she said in a low voice. “I would take Jane’s place even if I had to stay in bed for a week. But in these long skirts I just couldn’t run, so there is no use trying.”

As she spoke, she glanced at the face of her friend and saw that she was intently watching every play being made by Gladys and Faith, who, as before, upheld the honor of their side and again won.

Two games for each side; but, of course, since Jane was to play in the fifth, Catherine’s group had no hope of final victory.

Jane knew this as well as did the others and she was so nervous when she took her place on the court that she could barely hold her racket. It was her turn to serve and she batted so blindly that the ball fell far afield. Then, to the surprise of the onlookers, she burst into tears and ran from the court and toward the school as fast as she could go. For a moment Catherine was panic-stricken; but what was happening?

Muriel had leaped to the court that had been so unexpectedly deserted by Jane and had served the ball without observing the sarcastic smile of her French opponent. Marianne returned the serve with a volley, expecting to see the island girl miss; but, instead, the ball was returned with that smash stroke which had made Joy's playing famous. Marianne did her swiftest running but before she reached the spot the ball had fallen dead and did not bounce. [224]

Amazed, the French girl's brows contracted and, for the next few moments, she did her very best playing; but time after time Muriel smashed the ball over the net. If Marianne was close, then the ball fell back of her; if she was on the outer edge of the court, then the ball just cleared the net.

The spectators crowded near. There was a breathless interest. What could it mean? No one at High Cliffs knew the stroke except Joy Kiersey. Suddenly a light dawned upon Faith. Joy had taught Muriel her trick stroke and that was why she had been so disappointed when Jane Wiggin had been asked to play.

A shout arose from the onlookers and there was a sudden rush toward the island girl and everyone was congratulating her.

Muriel had won the game, and once more Marianne had been defeated by "une burgeoise." [225]

CHAPTER XXXII.
WAINWATER CASTLE.

On the day that Muriel was winning the tennis tournament, Gene Beavers sat in the library of their home on the outskirts of London, thinking "Oh, to be near the Hudson now that Indian summer is there."

It was a glorious morning and the lad was tempted to go for a longer stroll than usual when his sister burst in with, "Oh, Gene, something wonderful has happened! You couldn't guess what, not in a thousand years."

"Well, since I'm not an Egyptian mummy, there isn't much use trying," was the smiling response; but his thought was, "How I wish it were that Muriel Storm has come to England."

"Mother is overjoyed," Helen was saying. "It's the one thing for which she has been longing and yearning ever since we came, and perhaps for that very reason she has wished it into existence. Now can you guess?"

The lad shook his head. "I'm not much good at riddles, Sis," he confessed. "What is it?"

"An invitation!" was the triumphant announcement as Helen brought the hand which had been back of her to the front and held high a white envelope which bore a crest. [226]

Gene sank down in a comfortable armchair, the

interest fading from his face. “Is that all?” he asked. “A stupid bore, I would call it. How you women folk can be so enthusiastic about invitations to receptions and teas is more than I can understand.”

His sister sat on an arm of his chair. “But, Gene,” she said, “you have often wished that you might stroll around in those park-like grounds of the Wainwater estate.”

The lad again assumed an expression of interest. “I’ll agree to that,” he declared. “They are wonderfully alluring. Several times, when I have been out for a stroll, I have gone down the Wainwater Road and have paused at the least-frequented gate in the high hedge to gaze in among the trees, hoping to catch a glimpse of a fawn, and yesterday I saw one drinking from the stream. Such a graceful, beautiful creature, and it looked up at me, not at all afraid.”

“I know that gate,” Helen said. “I stood there a moment only yesterday, but what I especially admired was the picturesque view one gets of the castle-like home which is at least a quarter of a mile back from the road, among the great old trees. I have read about such places, with galleries where ancestral paintings are hung, and I’d just love to see the inside of one.” **[227]**

“You probably will never have the opportunity,” her brother began; but he was interrupted with: “Have you already forgotten this wonderful invitation?” Helen again held up the crested envelope.

“But you haven’t told me to what or by whom you are invited,” the lad replied.

“We, all of us, are invited to Wainwater Castle by the elderly Countess herself, and the invitation was obtained by Monsieur Carnot.” Then, noting the slight frown, she hurried on to explain: “You know, dear, that the Viscount of Wainwater really controls the business, the American interest of which our father represents, but it seems that his honorable lordship, if that is what he is called, is more interested in the arts, and leaves the direction of matters financial to Monsieur Carnot.”

Then, noting that Gene had turned away and was looking rather listlessly out of the window, his sister added: “Brother, dear, doesn’t anything interest you any more? I did so hope that you would be glad to visit this beautiful estate with mother and me. Father and Monsieur Carnot will be unable to attend, and we counted upon you to escort us.”

The lad looked up with a sudden brightening smile. Rising, he slipped an arm about the girl as he said lovingly: “Your brother isn’t much of a social ornament, but he ought to be glad, indeed, that his mother and sister really want his companionship.” The girl looked pityingly into the pale face that had been tanned and ruddy with health on that long ago day when she had visited him on Windy Island. **[228]**

Impulsively, she took both his hands. “Brother,” she said, “it was wrong of mother to make you leave America just when you were well again and all because you were enjoying the friendship of a lighthouse-keeper and his grand-daughter.

Some day I shall tell mother the truth, which is that you and I both hate, *hate*, HATE all this catering to and aping after the English nobility." Then, inconsistently, she added: "Nevertheless, I *am* curious to see the inside of the Wainwater mansion. However, if an English nobleman asks me to marry him, I shall reply that I prefer an American."

This last was called merrily over her shoulder as she left her brother, who, though amused, heartily endorsed her sentiment.

Mrs. Beavers, who had been greatly elated by the invitation which she had received from the Countess of Wainwater, obtained all the information she believed they would require. Being Americans, they, of course, did not know the correct way of addressing an elderly countess and her middle-aged son, the viscount. They had a private rehearsal the evening before the great event, which amused the young people. "Mumsie," Helen said gleefully, "this reminds me of 'The Birds' Christmas Carol,' when those adorable Irish children were drilled in manners before attending a dinner party. Then to give them a proper sense of family pride, didn't their mother say, 'And don't forget that your father was a policeman'?" **[229]**

Mrs. Beavers did not smile. "Helen, dear, it is very important that we know the proper thing to do and say on all occasions," was her only reply.

The next afternoon, as they were being driven to the castle-like Wainwater home, Mrs. Beavers looked admiringly at Helen and Gene. Any mother, even a countess, might be proud of them, she assured herself.

However, being Americans, they did not seem to be as greatly impressed with the fact that they were to visit a peer of the realm as this particular mother might wish.

Helen had been just as elated when she was on the way to see an old historical ruin, and as for Gene Mrs. Beavers glanced at him apprehensively. He did not seem to be even thinking of the honor which had been conferred upon them. Indeed, whenever his mother beheld that far-away, dreamy expression in his eyes, she feared that he was thinking of that "dreadful girl, the lighthouse-keeper's grand-daughter," nor was she wrong. At that moment Gene was wondering what Muriel might be doing and resolved to write her upon his return. **[230]**

Notwithstanding the fact that it was a glorious, golden afternoon in October, the windows of the castle were darkened and the salon within was brilliantly lighted and thronged with fashionably dressed gentry from the countryside and from London when the arrival of the Beavers was announced. The elderly countess, as Gene afterwards said, would be just his ideal of a lovable grandmother if she could be transplanted to a New England fireplace and away from so much grandness.

There was, indeed, an amused twinkle in the sweet gray-blue eyes of the little old lady who, during the first hour, sat enthroned, not being strong enough to stand and receive.

Gene was idly watching the colorful scene about

him, feeling weary indeed and almost stifled with the fragrance of flowers and perfumes, when he felt rather than saw that the countess was watching him. Glancing toward her, he found that he had been right, for she was beckoning to him.

Quickly the lad went to her side, and in her kind, grandmotherly way she said: “Dear boy, you look very tired. Why not go out in the park for a while? Perhaps you will find there my son. He will be glad to meet you. Follow the stream to a cabin.” **[231]**

Gene thanked the dear little old lady for her suggestion and after telling his mother and sister his plan, he went out. He soon forgot the brilliantly lighted salon in his joy at being alone once again with nature. He had been ill so long that as he looked back over the days and months they seemed to stretch behind him illimitably and grey, except where they were made golden by his dreams of Muriel.

Dear, brave, wonderful Muriel! Gene knew now all that had happened; the death of Captain Ezra, the lighthouse-keeper, who had been so kind to him, and about the fashionable boarding school to which Doctor Lem had sent his protege.

The kindly physician had received a note from Gene one day stating that since he never heard from Muriel he would greatly appreciate it if, from time to time, he would write and tell him of the island girl.

It had not been hard for the older man to read between the lines and he had replied at once, telling all that had happened to Muriel.

But only the pleasant part of the letter from Doctor Lem was being recalled by the lad as he followed the fern-tangled banks of a stream that wound its picturesque way deeper and deeper into the wooded park. Suddenly Gene paused. Surely he heard the bird-like notes of a flute. He peered among the trees, but saw no one. Then, as he advanced, the music was hushed and he decided that, perhaps, it had been the song of a hermit thrush. There was a dense growth of evergreen trees just ahead of him. They crowded so close to the edge of the water that the lad paused, thinking that he would better go back, but, noticing a wet, mossy rock near, he stepped out upon it, and, to his delight, saw just beyond the pines the rustic cabin of which the countess had spoken. **[232]**

Eager and interested, the lad half ran up the path, soft with pine needles, and tapped upon the door, wondering if the cabin were deserted. “Come in,” a deep voice called.

Gene opened the door and entered a large, square, rustic room which seemed to be both a hunting lodge and a den. A man whose face seemed too young for its crowning of grey was lounging in a deep, comfortable chair in front of a wide fireplace on which a log was burning. He wore a crimson velvet jacket and he was reading. Other books and magazines were placed on a low table near. Too, there was a flute, the notes of which Gene had heard.

The man smiled a welcome. “American?” he **[233]**

inquired. Gene said that he was. “Good!” motioning to a chair beyond the hearth.

“Lost?” was the next question. “No, sent,” the lad replied, then seated himself and told how he chanced to be there.

“My lady mother must have thought that you and I would like to know each other,” the man said. “You are the son of our American representative?”

“Yes, Eugene Beavers also is the name of my father.”

“Fine man! Then, you’ve been ill?”

“A long time. Breakdown in college.”

“Over-study or over-athletics?” The older man asked this with a quizzical smile.

“Both perhaps. Neglected books while training for the big game, then broke down cramming for midwinter exams.”

“Like London?”

“No, I think it’s beastly.”

The Englishman laughed. “That doesn’t sound American. What place do you like better?”

“Tunkett, Massachusetts.” Then it was the turn of the lad to laugh. “That place, of course, means nothing to you. It isn’t even on the map. Just a fishing hamlet.”

The viscount leaned forward and with the iron tongs moved the position of the log that it might burn faster.

His next remark astonished the lad, who thought he never had met a man he liked better. **[234]**

“Come over here, Gene Beavers, and spend a week with me; or, better still, we might take a hiking trip through Scotland.”

“Honest Injun?” The lad’s face glowed eagerly, boyishly.

“Honest Injun.”

Thus was begun a friendship between the Viscount of Wainwater and Gene Beavers. People marveled at it, for, though many sought the friendship of the viscount, few were permitted to enter the seclusion in which he chose to live.

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CHAPTER XXXIII.
THE POETRY CONTEST.

“Girls, have you heard that Miss Gordon has offered a prize for the best poem written by a student in any of her English literature classes?”

Faith nodded. “I heard, but I haven’t entered. I can’t make two lines rhyme.”

“Nor could I,” Gladys Goodsell said, and laughed over her shoulder at the newcomer, for she was on the hearth rug roasting marshmallows over the fire.

“Who of our clan is going to try for the prize beside myself?” inquired the flushed and excited Joy Kiersey. “Oh, I’d be the happiest, you can’t think how happy, if only I could win it.”

“Why, Joy!” Gladys changed her position that she might divide her attention between the fire and the group of friends. “Why are you so eager to win the prize?”

“Maybe it’s a basket that Joy covets.” This merrily from Faith.

The golden head shook in the negative. “I adore writing poems,” she confessed. “I wrote dozens of them last summer, but, then, the scenery in Colorado and along Lake Tahoe would have inspired a stump to write verse.” **[236]**

A month had passed since the tennis tournament and Joy’s strength had returned to her almost miraculously, and, to the delight of her friends, she was able to join them in their daily tramps across the snowy fields and she had even suggested a coasting party for the first moonlight night.

Too, she had taken her place in the classes and was going ahead of the others, as she always did when she was strong enough to really study.

Catherine Lambert looked up from the mysterious pink thing upon which she was sewing. “It’s a Christmas gift,” was all that she would tell about it.

In fact, all were sitting about the rose-shaded lamp in Muriel’s room that stormy Friday night, sewing upon gifts equally pretty and mysterious. That is, all except Gladys, their youngest, who said that her fingers were thumbs when it came to sewing, and that she would far rather sit on the rug before the fire and roast marshmallows. One by one she placed the delicious golden puffs upon a warm plate, and when there was a goodly heap of them, she arose, saying: “Put away your sewing, girls, and partake of the refreshments for which I have spent the last nickle I will have until my Christmas money comes.”

“Poor Gladys,” laughed Joy, as she perched upon the arm of the chair in which Muriel was seated. The island girl glanced up with a softening light in her eyes as she felt the caress upon her red-brown hair. How close these two had grown in the last month. Not that Muriel’s love for Faith had lessened; in fact, all of these five girls were very dear to each other, and yet between Joy and Muriel, who were so unlike, there was growing a love the strength of which even they hardly knew. Joy, exquisite, dainty and as jubilant as her name suggested, had been surrounded from babyhood with every luxury, while Muriel had known but the bare necessities. **[237]**

“Whose names are entered?” Faith asked, as she put her sewing into a dainty workbag and took one of the marshmallows.

Joy counted them off on her fingers. “Dorothy Daggert first and foremost, and, since she is a

senior and always wins A-1 in everything that she writes, there will be little hope for any of the rest of us. Four others in the senior class have entered, two in the sophomore, and, girls, what do you think? One of them is Marianne Carnot!"

Faith's expression registered astonishment. "You must be mistaken," she said. "Marianne is in my class and she never writes verse, even when we may choose the form for our composition."

Miss Gordon had entered Muriel's name as one competing and it was because of this fact, as yet unknown to either Rilla or Joy, that Marianne Carnot had also entered her name. **[238]**

Miss Gordon looked up brightly one evening a fortnight later when she heard a familiar tap on the door of her little apartment.

"Good evening, Muriel," she said in response to the greeting from the girl who had entered. "I have some news for you. Can you guess what it is?"

"No, Miss Gordon, unless," and the hazel eyes were eager, "Uncle Lem is coming for that long-promised visit."

"Not that," the older woman smiled. "However, I have a letter from Doctor Winslow and in it he assures us both that just as soon as his duties will permit he shall avail himself of our invitation. The news has something to do with your school work."

Muriel had taken her usual seat, a low rocker on the side of the fireplace opposite her teacher. Miss Gordon, looking at the truly beautiful face of the girl, and at the soft crown of hair that was like burnished copper in the glow of the firelight, felt more than ever convinced that Muriel had inherited much from that unknown father.

"Am I to be placed in one of the classes?" There was almost dread in the voice that asked the question.

Miss Gordon laughed. "Your expression, dear, is not complimentary to Miss Humphrey, but, truly, Muriel, she is wonderfully kind beneath her nervous, flustery manner, but it isn't that. I am too selfish to give up teaching you. If you are satisfied with your present tutor, I assure you I am more than pleased with my pupil." **[239]**

Tears sprang to the hazel eyes. The girl leaned forward, her expressive face telling more than words could.

"I'll study that hard and be as little trouble as I can if only you'll keep me just this year out, Miss Gordon." Then she inquired: "Now, may I know the news?"

"It is about the poetry contest that I was thinking when you came in. I have been looking over the poems that have entered and although several are good, I believe that your verses, 'To a Lonely Pelican,' are best; but, of course, as you know, dear, I am not to be the judge."

"Who is, Miss Gordon?" Muriel asked.

"An old friend of mine who is Professor of English in Columbia University. The poems are

to be sent him unsigned and he will decide which reveals the most talent."

[240] She was looking over a dozen neatly written contributions to the contest as she spoke. Taking one from among them, the older woman smiled at the girl. "Muriel," she said, "I am surprised to see how prettily Joy Kiersey can write verse. This plaint of a Washoe Indian maid who yearns for the days when her wigwam home was beside the lake that bears her name, and for the young Indian brave who came to her in a bark canoe across the star-reflecting waters, shows feeling and is artistically done. I believe that it will win second place."

"Oh, Miss Gordon," Muriel's voice was eager, "may I withdraw my poem—if you think it might win?"

The older woman looked up amazed. "Dear," she said, not understanding this unusual request, "may I know your reason?"

"I want Joy to win. She loves to write verse and she said it would please her dad. He thinks it is wonderful because his daughter is talented. He is so plain, just a business man without a bit of the artist in his nature."

Miss Gordon had surmised that a very tender love was binding these two girls each day closer and closer and yet she hardly thought it fair to permit Muriel to make the sacrifice. Joy, she knew, would not wish it.

"Has Marianne Carnot entered a poem yet?" the island girl asked.

[241] Miss Gordon's expression was hard to interpret. "No, and I very much doubt her doing so," she had just said when there came a tap on the door. Muriel answered the summons. A maid stood there with a rolled manuscript. "It's for Miss Gordon," she said. "Mam'selle Carnot asked me to bring it."

A moment later Miss Gordon looked up from the finely written contribution. "Muriel," she announced, "you will not need to withdraw your poem, for this is by far the best. It is marked original, and, though I marvel at it, I may not question the honor of a pupil of High Cliffs. A week from today we will know whose poem has been awarded the prize."

[242]

CHAPTER XXXIV. MARIANNE WINS THE PRIZE.

"I can't understand it in the least, and what's more, I don't believe it's so." This from Catherine Lambert, who sat on a low bench buckling her skates.

The tennis courts had been flooded and the shining blue expanse of ice delighted the girls of High Cliffs, who enjoyed outdoor frolics.

“But, Cathy, Miss Gordon herself made the announcement, and who are we to deny it?” Faith remonstrated. “However, as I said before, I never knew Marianne Carnot to write verse and when one is a natural poet, one scribbles in rhyme all of the time.”

Muriel and Joy were skating toward the bench, their faces flushed beneath their jaunty tams.

“That’s fine sport,” Rilla declared as they glided up. “At least I can stand now, thanks to the patience of all of you girls, but I never will be content until I can do the whirls and figure eights as well as Catherine.”

Laughingly Cathy held out her hands. “Come, I’ll give you a lesson!” **[243]**

But Gladys detained them, saying: “Shall we tell the girls the bad news?”

“Bad news on a day as sparkling as this?” Joy began. Then, as she glanced from one face to another, she exclaimed: “I know what it is! You have heard who has won the poetry contest.”

“Have you really?” This eagerly from Muriel. How she did hope that the prize had been awarded to Joy. But, remembering what Miss Gordon had said, she almost knew the name that she would hear.

“Girls,” Catherine Lambert said emphatically, “I’m just sure that Marianne Carnot is a plagiarist.”

Faith put a warmly gloved hand on the arm of her friend. “That’s a very serious accusation, Cathy. I really do not think that we ought to make it unless we have more evidence than we have at present.”

Catherine whirled about and her dark eyes flashed. “I suppose you’d stand by and see your best friends cheated out of the prize rather than call that snobbish French girl a thief, which she is, of course, if she has copied that poem and presented it as her own.”

“We will have to prove it first, I think,” Faith replied quietly.

But Catherine, who was not at all meek, retorted: “Well, how are we going to prove it? Of course, she is too clever to copy one of Tennyson’s or any other poem with which we are all familiar. Now, I think the way for Miss Gordon to find out the truth of this matter would be to lock Marianne in a classroom and tell her she will have to stay there until she writes another poem of equal merit.” **[244]**

Gladys laughed. “Poor Marianne! She would be in there for the rest of her natural life, I fear. Genius doesn’t work that way. There was a pupil here two years ago who composed music and said the inspiration came to her at the queerest hours. Once she went to the music room at three o’clock in the morning, and poor Miss Humphrey, who slept just above, was terribly frightened. She thought the music room was haunted. Maybe Marianne is the same way. Maybe she has had the one inspiration of her lifetime.”

The dark eyes of Catherine flashed toward

Gladys scornfully. “Since when have you taken to championing Marianne Carnot? Perhaps you would like to be numbered among her friends, and——”

Gladys flushed and was about to retort when Joy laughingly exclaimed: “What a tempest in a teapot we are trying to brew!” Then, more seriously: “If Marianne wins the prize unfairly, her own heart will punish her. Now I suggest that we all take hands and play cartwheel on the ice until the gong rings.”

Half an hour later, flushed and warm, they were trooping back to the school when little Peggy Paterson ran out to meet them, calling: “Muriel Storm, Miss Widdemere wants you to stop at her office before you go to your room. The mail just came.” **[245]**

Muriel’s heart leaped. Would there be a letter from Gene?

* * * * * * * *

There were two letters for Muriel bearing foreign postmarks. One of them was addressed in a writing strange to the girl, and she tore it open, almost with dread, but this was quickly changed to joy, for the letter was from her dear Uncle Barney.

The good priest had written it for him, as he did so want Rilly to know that, Heaven willing, he and his old mother would sail for America in the spring.

“It’s lonely I am for a look at me gal, an’ it’s lonely I am for me cabin down by the sea, an’ it’s lonely me cabin has been this long spell, closed there, a-waitin’ for me,” the letter ran.

The sympathetic young priest who had been scribe had written the letter just as the kindly old Irishman had dictated it, and it sounded so like her beloved Uncle Barney that, for a moment, it was hard for Muriel to keep from crying.

“’Twill be a different place that he’ll be findin’,” she thought, “with the lighthouse but a tumbled down heap of rocks and with grandfather gone. Oh, I’m that glad Uncle Barney’s coming. I’ll ask Uncle Lem to take me to Tunkett just as soon as they are back.” **[246]**

Then Muriel opened the other envelope, which was addressed in a handwriting with which she was familiar, as Gene wrote very often to his “storm maiden.”

> “Dear Rilla,” the lad had written, “such an adventure as I have had! At last the dull grey monotony of living in England has ceased, for I have met the most interesting man, and, for some reason unknown to me, he invites my companionship. I really can’t believe that I interest him, for all I do is listen while he talks so wonderfully about everything that is inside books and out. If there is one corner of this earth that he hasn’t visited, I can’t imagine where it is. Oh, yes, Tunkett! I don’t suppose he has ever been there. In fact, it’s such an out-of-the-way place I don’t suppose anybody ever

would find it unless he happened to be born there, as Uncle Lem was, and I, of course, went to visit him. Did I hear you inquire, 'Who is your new friend?'

"Muriel, I suppose I ought to be greatly impressed with the fact that he is a viscount. People over here treat him as though he were made of a very superior kind of clay, my mother among them, but the viscount himself isn't a bit flattered by the adulation he receives. He calls it 'tommyrot,' and whenever there are social functions at the castle (honest Injun, Rilla, that's what they call the turreted stone pile in which he lives), he retires to his rustic log cabin in the woods, which is so hedged in that strangers could not even guess that it was there unless they happened to stumble on it.

"I wish I could tell you about the man himself and do justice to him, but I simply can't. He has the most boyish face I ever saw crowned with grey hair. He tells me that he is forty-five years old, but he seems nearer my age than any chap of twenty I ever met.

"The first time I met him he suggested a hike through Scotland. It seemed a good deal of an undertaking, for I wasn't very strong (just beginning to take short walks), but every day I grew stronger, and what a week it was.

"The Viscount of Wainwater with a pack on his back was not recognized by anyone. The boy in his nature was very much in evidence that week. He sang as we tramped along the deserted highways and sometimes I knew that he was improvising. Then it was that I made a discovery. He is the Waine Waters whose vagabond poems so often appear in American magazines.

"One night we stopped at an out-of-the-way inn. We had been tramping over a snow-covered moor and, as we sat near the great fireplace where peat was burning, he began to scribble and at last he looked up and asked, 'Shall I read it to you?' I nodded, and, Muriel, that poem was a gem. It was called 'The Moor in Winter,' and told of the quiet trust that is in the heart of all nature, for, although the moor lies covered with snow, it is dreaming of the spring that is to bring back the bird song and the heather.

"I asked Waine (he told me to call him that) for a copy of the poem, and he gave it to me. I had planned sending it to you. I had it a week later when I returned. I took it to the library to show mother, but, finding that Monsieur Carnot and father were there, I turned away. I have never seen it since. I must have dropped it and the maid probably thought it merely a scrap and burned it. I'll ask Waine for another copy some day, but just now, with his countess mother, he has gone away for a fortnight.

"Isn't it about time that you were writing a first letter to your brother-friend,

"Gene Beavers.

"P. S.—I have never mentioned you to

Waine, but if you are willing, I'd like to show him that copy of 'The Lonely Pelican' which Doctor Winslow sent me. Shall I?

"Y. B., F. G."

Scarcely had Muriel finished reading this letter when Joy burst in with, "Rilla, Miss Gordon has called an assembly for two o'clock this afternoon. We are all so excited, for this is only done on very especial occasions. What do you suppose has happened?" **[249]**

"I wonder if it has anything to do with the contest?" Faith said softly, as she and Muriel found unoccupied chairs near their three friends, who were already seated.

"My opinion is that Miss Gordon merely wishes to announce the name of the winner of the prize, and as we would not again be assembled until Monday, except in the dining hall and chapel, she has taken this method of bringing us together." And Joy was right.

Miss Gordon's smile, as she entered with Miss Humphrey and Miss Widdemere, was so pleasant that it at once quieted the fears of the senior girls that something had gone wrong.

"Although only a small group of you are interested in the poetry contest," she began, "I wish you all to hear the three poems that have been pronounced best by a most able judge, who is the Professor of English literature at Columbia.

"The first prize has been awarded to Marianne Carnot, the second to Muriel Storm, and the third to Joy Kiersey." **[250]**

There was a rustle among the girls, all of whom turned to look at the honored three.

Muriel and Joy were not surprised at the announcement that the winner had been Marianne Carnot, but they had not known that a second and third prize had been offered.

They made no whispered comment, however, as Miss Gordon was again speaking. "I am going to ask the three girls, beginning with Joy, then Muriel, and then Marianne, to come to the platform and read aloud the really excellent poems which they have submitted."

Faith noticed that the eyes of this kind principal never left the dark, handsome face of the French girl, and she also noticed that Marianne did not look up even when her name was mentioned.

After all, Faith decided, the meeting had a deeper purpose than that for which it had been called.

Joy, with her flower-like face flushed, read the poem, which she really knew by heart, so sympathetically, and the plaint of the Indian maid so appealed to her listeners, that they wondered how the other two poems could be better.

Muriel's poem, although showing more real talent, was not read as well, and the pupils were still inclined to believe that Joy's should, at least, have had second place. **[251]**

“Now, Marianne.”

Faith and Catherine watched the French girl, and for that matter, so did Miss Gordon and Miss Humphrey, but the winner of the first prize seemed to be in no way disconcerted. She stood up and her dark eyes looked directly into those of Miss Gordon as she took the manuscript.

Everyone had to acknowledge that Marianne read well, but what was she reading? From the very announcement of the title, Muriel had leaned forward, her breath coming in little gasps, her face suddenly pale, her hands clasped tensely.

Marianne, having read her poem through to the end, walked down the aisle between the girls to her former seat, but she could not resist sending a glance of triumph toward Muriel. The clear hazel eyes that looked back at her were scornful and accusing. Marianne quickly seated herself, a deep red flush suffusing her face.

Within her heart was the certainty that Muriel knew, but how could she?

And Muriel did know, for the title of the poem which Marianne had read was “Winter on the Moor.” Muriel left the other girls directly after the meeting and hurried to her own room. She wanted to be alone to think, but this she was not permitted to do. Almost immediately there came a tap on her door and Faith was admitted. With her hands on the shoulders of her friend, she looked deep into the hazel eyes. **[252]**

“Tell me, dear,” she said. “I will keep it a secret if you wish. What is troubling you?”

Muriel turned and taking Gene’s letter from its envelope, she read aloud his description of the viscount and the poem by Waine Waters entitled “The Moor in Winter.”

“The very poem that won the prize for Marianne,” Faith exclaimed. “Her father must have found and sent it to her. What shall you do about it? Marianne will, of course, be expelled when the truth is known. Last year when Miss Gordon enumerated the ideals of High Cliffs, she mentioned plagiarism as being one of the greatest of misdemeanors.”

“I shall not mention it,” was the quiet reply. “Now let us forget it.”

The poetry contest was soon a thing of the past, for everyone was thinking and planning for the Christmas holidays that were but two weeks away.

However, it was noticeable that Marianne Carnot never again chose verse as the form of her compositions. Her classmates were not interested enough to speculate about it, but Miss Gordon and Miss Humphrey believed that some day they would know the truth. **[253]**

CHAPTER XXXV.
MURIEL WRITES A LETTER.

Meanwhile Muriel had a problem of her own to settle. She had been invited to spend the holidays in the homes of her two best friends, and did not know what to do, as she wished to accept both invitations, but that, of course, was impossible. Then it was that the matter was decided for her in a most unexpected and delightful manner. Doctor Winslow had been a frequent Sunday visitor at the school (for was not his protege one of the pupils?) and each time there had been a cozy party in Miss Gordon's charming "den."

The kindly physician had noticed an expression of weariness in the eyes of the older woman as though the responsibility of training so many girls was bearing heavily upon her and he had suddenly decided that what she needed was a complete change of scene; and, as he had often heard Miss Gordon express a desire to visit Tunkett, he offered his home to her and to Muriel for the midwinter vacation, assuring them that he had already communicated with his housekeeper, who lived in a neighboring cottage, and that both Brazilla Mullet and her brother Jabez would look after their every comfort.

Muriel was seated in her low chair on the side of the fireplace opposite Miss Gordon when that little woman, her eyes glowing, her cheeks faintly flushed, read aloud the letter which she had received from the brother of her long-ago classmate. **[254]**

"Oh, Miss Gordon, shall we go? How wonderful it would be," Muriel exclaimed. "You'll just love Tunkett and the dear queer people. Of course they don't seem queer to me, but they surely are different. I can't imagine them living anywhere else but just in Tunkett. I love them all, every one of them, even old Cap'n Sam Peters, I do believe. Grand-dad used to say that Cap'n Sam was too lazy to haul in a cod even when he had him well hooked. Then there's Mrs. Sam Peters and all the other fisherfolk.

"How happy little Zoeth Wixon will be when he sees me! I hope no one will tell him that I'm coming. I want to surprise him and Shags. Oh, Miss Gordon, won't Shags be the happiest dog in all this world when he hears my voice? Nobody knows how lonely I've been for my shaggy comrade, but it made Zoeth so happy to keep him and I couldn't have him here. I must take everyone of them a Christmas present. What fun that will be! Little Zoeth used to call me his 'story-gal' because I told him the tales Uncle Barney had told to me. Oh, I know what I'll do. I'll buy him a book full of pictures of fairies and giants. Zoey is going to the village school this winter and if I choose a book with short words in it and big print, he may be able to read the stories all by himself. **[255]**

"Now what shall I get for Linda Wixon? Something bright and pretty to wear. That's what she was always wishing for," Muriel ended breathlessly.

Miss Gordon leaned back in the shadow and watched the eager face of the girl whose hair was growing coppery in the firelight. Then suddenly Muriel's eyes filled with tears and her lips quivered. "I'm trying not to think how lonely I'll be without Grand-dad," she said, "but

somehow I'd rather go home this first Christmas than anywhere else. I really would." Then she added ruefully: "Miss Gordon, here I am chattering on just as though we were *really* going, and you haven't even said that you like the plan. Would you rather go somewhere else, for, if you would, I can visit Faith or Joy, for they have both invited me."

"I really want to go with you to Tunkett, Muriel," was the earnest reply. "I think it is a beautiful plan. I want to just rest and feel the sweep of the salt wind, and forget, for a time, that I have the responsibility of training sixty-two young ladies in the ways that they should go."

Then, as was their wont, these two who understood each other sat quietly gazing into the fire, dreaming their dreams. To Miss Gordon, who for so many years had had no one to lean upon, it seemed indeed wonderful to find someone at last who wanted to plan for her comfort and happiness, and lonely Muriel felt that she would rather spend this first Christmas since her grand-dad had gone with the simple folk who had known him and loved him. Faith and Joy indeed were disappointed when they heard that their beloved Muriel was not to spend the holidays with them in their New York homes. **[256]**

These girls had planned to share their island friend and many were the surprises they had in store for her, but when they realized how much it meant to Rilla to go to the little fishing village that she called home, they did not let her know of the plans they had made for her pleasure, nor need they be entirely abandoned, merely postponed.

"How I do wish you could both come down to Tunkett for a week-end while I am there," Muriel exclaimed one day when Joy and Faith had dropped into her cupola room for a moment.

"Is there a hotel in the town?" Joy asked eagerly.

How Rilla laughed. "Nothing like the one to which Miss Widdemere took us last week when we were in New York," she said. "However there is an inn very like the one about which you were reading, Faith, in that magazine story. In fact, the fishing village might almost have been Tunkett, I do believe. Perhaps all New England coast towns are much alike." **[257]**

"That settles it," Faith declared. "I've always wanted to really see with my own eyes a village like the one in that story, haven't you, Joy?"

Their Dresden China girl laughingly agreed that the one desire of her life was to visit just such a place, and that, if all went well, they would surprise Muriel by appearing at the inn in Tunkett for at least one week-end of the vacation which was but a fortnight away.

"Oh, what jolly fun that will be," Rilla exclaimed. "Girls, I believe something wonderful is going to happen to me during the Christmas holidays. I feel it, though I can't tell what it is to be."

"I sincerely hope so," Faith said. Then, after a hesitating moment, she asked: "Dear, have you ever wished that you might know who your own father is?"

Muriel's face grew suddenly pale and there were tears in her eyes.

"Why should I want him," she said slowly and in a voice quivering with emotion, "since he did not care for me?"

Faith's arms were about her. "Dear, dear girl," she said, "do forgive me for having spoken of your father. I didn't know. I didn't understand." [258]

"Nor do I understand." Muriel smiled through her tears as she held out a hand to her other dearest friend, who stood silently near, her sweet face expressing tender sympathy. "I know nothing whatever about my father. If Grand-dad knew about him, he never told me. He had promised to tell me all about my girl-mother's marriage when I was eighteen years of age. I am nearly that now, but Grand-dad is not here. I do not believe that anyone else knows. I have often wanted to ask Uncle Barney, but since Grand-dad died I haven't seemed to care. I have felt that if my own father could desert his baby girl, surely he would not want her when she was grown."

How deeply Faith regretted that she had spoken to Muriel of her unknown father, but it was done and could not be helped.

All that day, as Rilla went about her tasks, she could think of nothing else. How she hoped that some day she would find that she had been wronging the man whom her girl-mother had loved.

How wonderful it would be, she thought, to have someone who would be her very own to love her as her grand-dad had loved her. Everyone was kind, but no one could quite take the place in the heart of Muriel of the three for whom she prayed ever since she was a child—the girl-mother who had died, the grand-dad who had sheltered her, and the father who never came. How she loved them all, and how she longed for them. [259]

Why, just then, she should have thought of her brother-friend she could not have told, but she did think of him, and she resolved that just as soon as the lessons for the day were done she would write Gene Beavers that first letter for which he had so long and patiently waited.

* * * * * * * *

Gene Beavers was just leaving the house in which he lived with his parents and sister on the outskirts of London when a maid recalled him to give him the morning mail. She wondered at the sudden brightening of his expression. He glanced at the several envelopes, tossed all but one back upon the hall table unopened, slipped that one into his pocket and again went out. He wanted to read this very first letter from his "storm maiden" by the stream in the Wainwater Woods. He was on his way to spend the day with his boon companion, the viscount. Wonderful days they were that these two spent together, sometimes galloping across country on horseback and at other times hiking, stopping in lovely secluded places to rest, read and dream.

A stranger would not have guessed that the lad had so recently been an invalid, for his face once more was bronzed by the wind and sun, and in [260]

his eagerness to reach his destination, he fairly ran down the deserted highway. Having reached a sheltered spot, he threw himself down upon the bank of the stream, took the letter from his pocket and looked admiringly at the neat and really pretty handwriting. He had known that Muriel did not intend to send him a letter until she could write well and form her sentences correctly, but, even so, he was surprised with the contents of her missive.

"Dear Brother-Friend," he read:

"When I first came here, I felt as one of my white gulls might if after years of winging through the sunlit air, being swept hither and thither and yon by restless winds, of dipping into the surf when it would, it had suddenly found itself in a cage, barred in. But now I am glad that I was caught and kept in a cage, for I have learned much. I have always known how to dream, Brother-Friend, but, oh, the wonder of it, for now I can write my dreams and send them to the far-away place where you are.

"This cannot be a real letter but I did so want to tell you that the cage door is to be open for two long weeks, and that I am going with our dear Miss Gordon, whom you know, to spend the Christmas vacation at Tunkett. How I wish that you were going to be there, as you were last year.

"Do you remember the day we raced with Shags on the sand, and your sister came and Marianne Carnot? How long, long ago that seems.

"The bell calling us to Politeness Class is ringing, and I'll have to say goodbye for now, but I'll write you from Tunkett and tell you how everything and everyone looks. You quite won the heart of Brazilla Mullet. Shall you write to me while I am there?

"Your Sister-Friend,
RILLA OF THE STORMS.

"P. S.—Of course you may show 'The Lonely Pelican' to your new friend if you wish, although it will not interest a real poet, as Miss Gordon tells me that Waine Waters truly is.

"M. S."

Leaping to his feet, Gene continued on his way to the cabin hidden in the depths of the wood, where his comrade, the Viscount of Wainwater, was impatiently awaiting his coming. **[261]**

The older man was growing restless. He seldom remained so long in England, and he was preparing to start on a journey, perhaps to the Nile, and he wanted Gene to be his traveling companion.

[262]

CHAPTER XXXVI.

MURIEL VISITS TUNKETT AGAIN.

Doctor Winslow accompanied Miss Gordon and Muriel to the little coast village of Tunkett. It was twilight when the leisurely train at last stopped at the station and Jabez appeared through the flurry of snow driving the doctor's old horse and two-seated buggy. The side curtains were up and on the back seat the woman and the girl were soon made comfortable.

How Miss Gordon was enjoying every moment of the quaint experience of being suddenly transported from the atmosphere of a fashionable girls' school and from the most modern city in the world to this old-fashioned hamlet which had changed but little in one hundred years.

The wagon jolted along, for the road was full of frozen ruts, and Muriel laughed gleefully as she was thrown against the older woman. She knew that she was laughing to keep from crying, but, oh, how hard it was, how much harder even than she had supposed that it would be, this coming back to Tunkett and no grand-dad there to meet her. But she would lock her grief in her heart, she bravely resolved, and devote the next two weeks to bringing rest and recreation to the dear friend who had devoted so much of her free time during the past months to teaching and helping her.

[263] As they turned into the road, the booming of the breakers could plainly be heard and the penetrating cold, salty wind from the sea reached even the sheltered back seat; but, before Miss Gordon or Muriel could be chilled, they were turning into a driveway, and, with unexpected suddenness, Methuselah stopped at a stepping block near the side veranda.

"Don't have to say whoa to this ol' horse," Jabez boasted. "Allays knows when he's put into the home port and just whar he's to dock without tellin'."

Doctor Winslow laughed as he sprang out and unfastened the side curtains preparatory to assisting Miss Gordon to alight.

"Jabez," he exclaimed, "you and Methuselah belong to a mutual admiration society, don't you?"

"We're fust rate friends, if that's what yer meanin'," the old man declared with a chuckle, "but horses are much the same as humans, I take it; if you like them, why turn about they like you." Then, as the suitcase had been removed, he picked up the reins. "Heave ahead, Methuselah, we'll cruise down to your anchorage."

[264] Miss Gordon laughed. "Does the old horse understand what he means?" "Indeed, he does," the physician assured her; then, as the side door opened letting out into the snowy dusk a welcome flood of light, he called to the thin, neatly dressed woman who appeared there: "Here we are, Brazilla, bag and baggage! Miss

Gordon, this is the sister of Jabez Mullet and the maker of the most famous chowder on the coast."

The housekeeper accepted Miss Gordon's hand, but turned at once to the tall, slender girl who stood in the background smiling at her just a bit wistfully. "Rilla, Rilla Storm, 'tain't you! It can't be! They've gone and made you over into a young lady such as comes here summers to the point."

The housekeeper actually was wiping tears from her eyes with one corner of her immaculate apron. In a moment the girl's arms were about her. "'Tis me, Brazilla. Maybe my clothes are different, but my heart's the same. I couldn't ever change inside." Doctor Winslow had led Miss Gordon into the warm, cheerful living room, and so, for a moment, the two old friends were alone in the entry.

"I dunno what made me cry," Miss Mullet was saying. "You can't guess what it means to me havin' you come for Christmas, Rilla. I sorter wish Gene Beavers was comin', too. It'd be kind of a family gatherin'. But thar, I'm forgettin' the biscuits that's in the oven and me wantin' 'em to be just the crispy brown the way Doctor Lem likes 'em."

For a moment Muriel stood alone in the entrance hall, thinking of all that had happened since she stood there before. Then she heard a sweet voice calling to her. "Yes, Miss Gordon, I'm coming," she replied. **[265]**

Half an hour later all were seated about a festive board and Miss Gordon declared that of such delicious homey cooking she had not partaken since she was a girl.

A kerosene lamp, with a rose-colored shade, hung above the middle of the table and on the snowy cloth were the old-fashioned white dishes with gold borders that had belonged, in the long ago, to the mother of Doctor Lem.

The physician glanced over a flowering rose geranium which adorned the center of the table and smiled at Miss Gordon, who sat opposite, as he exclaimed with sincere appreciation: "You are right, Helen; I have traveled the world over, but nowhere have I found anyone who can cook to please me as can Brazilla Mullet."

That was what Doctor Lem said, but in the silent moment that followed his thoughts added that it was indeed pleasant to see the sweet face of Miss Gordon smiling at him from the other end of the table. The old house had not really been a home to him since his sister and mother had died but a few months apart.

The color in Miss Gordon's checks deepened as she met his gaze, or, perhaps, it was but the reflection from the rose-colored lampshade. **[266]**

"Brazilla, do tell me the news," Muriel was saying. "I'm just sure that something interesting must have happened. Have you seen Shags, and poor little crippled Zoeth lately, and how are Mrs. Sol and little Sol and——"

"One question at a time if you want them answered, Rilla," Doctor Lem smiled at the girl,

who was seated at his right.

“I see little Zoey every day, and Shags, too,” Miss Brazilla replied, “and as for news, I should say there was some. Hasn’t Doctor Lem told you —oh, I guess he wants to surprise you with it,” she concluded as she caught a glance from the physician’s smiling grey eyes which she rightly interpreted.

“You’ll be surprised, all right,” Jabez remarked, “an’ glad, too, like the rest of us was.”

“Oh, Uncle Lem, when am I to know?” The girl turned eager, glowing eyes toward the physician and searched his face, but his expression was inscrutable.

“What has happened? I do believe that it is something about the Wixons.”

Brazilla rose just then to replenish the biscuits, and when she returned she exclaimed beamingly: “Jabe and I have another surprise for you, Rilla, and this one even Doctor Lem don’ know. He’ll be jest as s’prised an’ pleased as you’ll be.” **[267]**

“Oh, goodie!” ejaculated Muriel in little girl fashion. “Then there are two surprises awaiting me. When am I to find them out?”

“Tomorrow, if the weather’s fine, or even if ’tisn’t. I don’t suppose that foul weather could keep you anchored in port when ye’ve friends expectin’ you over on the sand dunes.” This from Jabez.

“I should say not,” the girl retorted. “The wildest tempest that ever raged over this coast couldn’t keep me from going to see Zoey and Shags the first thing tomorrow morning. There’s one thing, though, I’m sort of dreading, and that’s seeing dear old Uncle Barney’s cabin boarded up and looking so lonesome.”

Then, turning to Captain Mullet, she continued: “Jabez, some day soon will you sail Miss Gordon and me over to Windy Island? I want to find my lame pelican if he is there and feed the gulls.”

“Yeah, Rilla, I’ll cruise ye over thar mos’ any time the wind’s right.”

“Don’t take any chances,” Doctor Winslow warned.

He suddenly realized that the two who would be passengers were very precious to him and he did not want to lose them. Then he rebuked himself. It was presumptuous for a man nearing sixty to think that as wonderful a woman as Miss Gordon could care for him. He would put the thought from him and think of her only as a dear friend. **[268]**

Doctor Lem returned to the city that night, but promised to run down again in a few days and if possible remain over Christmas. Miss Gordon and Muriel retired early to the big upper chamber, where a glowing bed of embers on the hearth was sending forth its warmth, but it was long before either of them slept, for each was dreaming dreams as they listened to the intermittent wail of the foghorn, to the distant boom of the surf on the rocks, and to the rush and swish of the snow beating against the windows.

CHAPTER XXXVII.
MURIEL SURPRISED.

Muriel had intended to arise very early the next morning, but so late had she fallen asleep, though she had retired early enough, that it was not until Brazilla came to make a fire on the hearth that the girl awakened.

Miss Gordon, too, opened her eyes, and Muriel, sitting up in bed, exclaimed joyfully: “Oh, what a wonderful day! All out-of-doors is white and sparkling; the sky is so blue and the sunshine so bright.

“Brazilla, would right after breakfast be too soon to start out to find those two surprises?”

“You’ll have to wear my leggins, I’m thinkin’,” Brazilla declared. “The snow’ll be above your shoe-tops easy and more than that at the drifts.”

An hour later Muriel appeared in the doorway of the large sun-flooded living room and Miss Gordon glanced up at her from the book she was reading.

“Why, Muriel, you look stouter than usual,” was her puzzled comment.

“No wonder,” Rilla laughingly confessed. “I do believe that Brazilla has put on me two layers of everything that she could find, including the leggins and her warm red hood. Jack Frost will have a hard time finding a place to nip. Goodbye, Miss Gordon. I’ll be back by noon. I know that you are going to have a wonderful two hours just resting and reading.” Then she was gone.

“I never knew that one could have so many different kinds of emotions at the same time,” Muriel was thinking as she started down the snowy road that led to the sand dunes where stood the scattered homes of her fisherfolk friends.

A queer looking settlement it was, for each squatter had built his cabin facing in whatever direction his particular fancy had suggested. A few had preferred to face the town and others had their front dooryards on the side toward the sea, but as there were from one hundred to two hundred feet of sand dune between each shack no one interfered with his neighbor.

Muriel purposely went a roundabout way to avoid passing the boarded-up cabin of her Uncle Barney. Tears sprang to her eyes as she thought of him. How she longed to see that dear, faithful old man who had been her grand-dad’s closest friend and comrade through many years, but she would have to wait until spring. Even then she doubted if he would be able to bring his old mother, who was very feeble.

She did not even glance in that direction when she reached the sand dunes, but went at once to the cabin of the Wixons.

She whistled the old familiar call. A short, joyous bark was heard in reply, the cabin door opened and out leaped a dog, grown larger, perhaps; her own beloved Shags! If there had been in her heart a fear that he might have forgotten her, it was soon dispelled. The joy expressed in every move that he made told as plainly as words could have done that here was the one person in all the world whom he loved best. Down on the snow the girl knelt, her arms were about her shaggy friend, her face for a moment hidden in the long, silky hair at his neck. Oh, how hard it was not to sob!

“Shagsie! My Shagsie!” the girl cried, but just at that moment the joyous voice of a boy was heard. Looking up, Rilla saw a little lad emerging from the cabin. She sprang to her feet and stared in uncomprehending amazement.

Surely it was Zoeth; but where were his crutches? He was running toward her down the recently shoveled path, his arms held out to her.

“Zoey!” Muriel exclaimed, catching the little fellow and holding him close. “You’re not crippled any more. Darling laddie, what has happened?”

The small boy clapped his hands and hopped up and down. “I wanted to s’prise you. I tol’ Doctor Lem not to tell you. He did it, Rilla! He mended me, an’ he’s been months doin’ it! He’s goin’ to send me to a boys’ school next year, Rilla. Doctor Lem says he’s going to make me into a shipbuilder.” How the lad’s eyes were glowing. “You know how Uncle Barney used to teach me to make little ships and how I’d love to draw pictures of ’em. Well, Doctor Lem looked ’em over once, and that’s how he got the notion of sendin’ me away to a school whar I could learn how to do it right.” **[272]**

In the midst of this joyous chatter, the small boy stopped as though he had suddenly thought of something. “Rilly,” he said, his face eagerly questioning, “you didn’t come along by the sand dunes, did you?”

Muriel gazed down at the snow or out at the ocean, anywhere but ahead where she knew she would have to see the boarded-up cottage toward which Zoeth was fairly dragging her. Shags bounded along at her side barking joyfully.

At last the child could keep quiet no longer. “Why don’t you look, Rilly?” he queried eagerly. “Why don’t you look?”

He had stopped directly in front of the cabin which had been so much in her thoughts, and so Muriel was obliged to lift her eyes. Why, what could it mean? The windows were not boarded up as she had expected to find them. There was smoke coming out of the chimney and a geranium was blossoming on the sun-flooded window sill. For a moment the girl felt rebellious. **[273]**

Was some one else living in Uncle Barney’s house? She was sure that he would not wish it to be occupied until he came, and yet, on second thought, she knew that it could be inhabited only with his consent. Then she looked down at her companion’s glowing face. All at once she read

the meaning of the happy light that she saw in his eyes. “Zoey,” she cried. “Uncle Barney has come back?” At the sound of his name, the door was thrown open and the bronzed old sea captain sprang out and caught the amazed girl in his arms.

“Oh, I’ll just have to cry now,” Rilla sobbed as she clung to him. “I’ve tried so hard not to. I tried to be brave when I saw Shags and Zoey, but, Uncle Barney, how I have wanted you since my grand-dad left me.”

“I know, I know, colleen. Cry all you want to. It’s yer Uncle Barney that understands. It’s me as lost me ol’ mither, an’ so arter all, she niver can come to see the little home I had a-waitin’ for her here by the sea; but, dearie, it’s better off she is in the lovely land she’s gone to.” Then, almost shyly, he added: “But I didn’t come back alone, Rilly. ’Twas me mither’s dyin’ wish that I bring Molly O’Connell to be keepin’ the little cabin for me. Dry yer tears now, mavourneen, and come in an’ meet me Molly, and try to be lovin’ her, too, for yer ol’ Uncle Barney’s sake.” **[274]**

He led the girl into the cabin and called to someone who was busy in the kitchen corner. Muriel decided at once that it would not be hard to love the Irish woman, who, though elderly, was as blooming as a late rose, with her ruddy cheeks and twinkling blue eyes that held in their merry depths eternal youth.

“Molly’s the wife I’ve been waitin’ for ever since she was a gal,” Uncle Barney said as he laid an arm lovingly on the shoulders over which a gay red and yellow plaid shawl was folded.

Then he told how they had been sweethearts when they were lad and lassie in the long, long ago, but that his Molly had married another, and that was why Barney had come to America to live, but he had always been faithful to his first love, and at last they were to be together through the sunset of life. “This little ol’ cabin’s a real home now, Rilly gal,” the old man said, “an’ it’s yer home, too, colleen, if ever yer needin’ it.” **[275]**

* * * * * * * *

An hour later, when Muriel stood in Doctor Lem’s kitchen warming her fingers over the fire in the great old-fashioned stove, she said: “Brazilla, I hardly know which of your two surprises was the most wonderful. To think that dear, brave little Zoey is to have his chance and all because of that kind man, Doctor Winslow. I am sure that Zoeth Wixon will make us all proud of him, but weren’t you surprised when Uncle Barney came home with a wife?”

“I reckon I was. Nothin’ could surprise me more ’less ’twould be Doctor Lem’s comin’ home with a wife; but that’s not likely to happen, though I sure sartin wish it might.”

Just at that moment Muriel thought of something. She had noticed the night before that Doctor Winslow often had looked over the rose geranium at lovely Miss Gordon, and surely in his eyes there had been——

Her thoughts were interrupted with: “Rilly, ’sposin’ yo’ take in the platter o’ fried fish an’

tell Miss Gordon as everything's dished up an' ready."

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CHAPTER XXXVIII. MURIEL VISITS WINDY ISLAND.

Uncle Barney had done a good deal of thinking since he had returned to his cabin in the sand dunes. He was recalling a visit he had received from Captain Ezra Bassett a short time before he set sail for Ireland. It was then that Muriel's grand-dad had told him all that he knew of the girl's own father, and at the end of the story he had said: "If anything happens to me, Barney, like as not Rilla's own dad would be the right one for her to go to. You can allays reach him by writin' to the address that's in the little iron box whar the tools 'r' kept for fixin' the light."

How well Barney remembered that little iron box. It had been on many a sea voyage when Ezra had been in command of the two-masted schooner The Stormy Petrel, and the faithful Irishman had been first mate.

Then, when the older man had settled on Windy Island, Barney had often seen the box in the small closet at the top of the tower where the oil can, tools and cleaning rags were kept.

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What ought he to do about it? he ruminated as he sat near his glowing stove on the day following Muriel's visit and smoked pipe after pipe in thoughtful silence.

Ought he to tell the girl, and yet, now that the tower was but a fallen heap of stones, would it be possible for them to find the little iron box?

"It's colleen herself as shall do the decidin'," he at last determined. Rising, he put on his heavy coat, cap and the scarlet muffler that Molly had knitted for him and telling his good wife that he might not be back until late, he started walking toward the home of Doctor Winslow.

Muriel was out on the veranda sweeping away the light snow that had fallen in the night. "Top o' the morning to you, Uncle Barney," she called as she waved the broom. "Have you come to invite me to take a cruise with you?"

The old man smiled up at her as he ascended the steps, and yet, so well did the girl know him, that she at once sensed that something was troubling him. However, it was in his usual cheerful manner that he replied:

"It's a mind reader that you are, Rilly gal, for 'twas that very thing I was after thinkin'. I cal'lated I'd cruise over to Windy Island, this mornin' and I was hopin' as how you'd like to go along as crew."

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There were sudden tears in the hazel eyes of the girl as she held the old man's warmly mittened hand in a firm clasp.

“Uncle Barney,” she said with a suspicion of a sob in her voice, “I’d rather be goin’ there for the first time with you than with anyone else in all the world, perhaps because my grand-dad loved you just as he would had you been his brother.”

“I know, I know,” the kind-hearted Irishman assured her. Then to hide his own emotion he hurried on to say: “Bundle up warm, Rilly gal, for though ’tis sunny, the air is powerful nippin’. I reckon you’d better be tellin’ your folks as how you may be late comin’ back to sort o’ get ’em out of the notion o’ worryin’. Tell ’em yer ol’ Uncle Barney’ll land you in the home port safe an’ sound along about sunset.”

Although Muriel was surprised to hear that they might remain so long on Windy Island, she made no comment but skipped into the house to put on her wraps and tell Miss Gordon of the planned voyage. Uncle Barney had not said that he wished only Muriel to accompany him, but the girl was sure that the captain had something that he wished to say to her alone. Perhaps her grand-dad had asked him to sometime tell her about the marriage of her girl-mother. How she hoped this might be so. But of her thoughts Muriel said nothing as they tramped together out on the snow-covered wharf near which the captain’s dory was anchored.

It was not until they were sailing in the smoother waters on the sheltered side of the island that Ezra Bassett’s old friend told the girl he had so loved why he had brought her that day to visit the ruined lighthouse. **[279]**

“Uncle Barney,” the girl looked across at him hopefully, eagerly, “won’t you be telling me all that you know about my girl-mother and my father.”

“Well, colleen dearie, thar ain’t much to tell. Your pa, it ’peared like to us as saw him, was a poor artist fellow as came one summer to this here coast to make pictures. Yer ma, darlin’, was jest like yo’ are now; the two of yo’ couldn’t be told apart. That artist fellow met up wi’ her in the store, Mrs. Sol tol’ me, an’ nothin’ would do arter that but he must make a paintin’ of that other Rilla a-settin’ up on the rocks. He was mighty takin’ in his ways, I’ll say that for him, an’ upstandin’, too. I’d a-sworn from the little I saw of him that he’d be a square dealer, but like be I was wrong, for when your grand-dad got wind of him courtin’ his gal, fer that’s what it had come to by the end of the summer, ol’ Ezra tol’ him to clear out. Yo’re ma pleaded pitiful-like, but yo’ know that look yer grand-dad used to get when he was sot, an’ sot hard. That’s the way he looked then. Wall, the next day that artist fellow was gone, but so, too, was the gal ol’ Ezra Bassett had set sech a store by.” The kindly Irishman dreaded telling the rest of the story as it reflected no credit to the honor of the lighthouse-keeper and he was glad indeed to find that the dock had been reached. Nor did the girl question him.

Even Captain Barney did not know how hard it was for Muriel to climb the snow-covered flight of steps that led to the only home her girlhood had ever known, and then, when the top was reached, to see that home lying one rock heaped upon another, the whole jagged mass covered **[280]**

with a sparkling white blanket.

“The little iron box that you were telling me about, Uncle Barney,” Rilla began as she smiled bravely up at her companion, “since it was kept near the lamp, don’t you think that in falling they would lie near each other?”

The old man nodded. “I reckon so,” he replied, “an’ yet thar’s no tellin’. A reg’lar tornado ’twas a-racin’ along the coast that day, and what with the lightnin’ hitting the tower and the wind twistin’ it, things that fell might o’ got purty much scattered about, seems like.”

Going to the old shed at the foot of the steps, the captain procured shovels and a broom and together they began to remove the snow from the rocks that were nearest. **[281]**

“It’s like looking for a needle in a haystack,” the girl declared when they had worked for an hour and had not discovered the great lamp which for so many years had swung its circling light over the darkened sea.

“Seems powerful quare to me whar that big lantern can be,” the old man said at last, as he leaned on the handle of his shovel to rest. “’Pears like it ought’ve fallen on top o’ the heap, bein’ as it was the highest up; but ’tisn’t here, sure sartin.”

Muriel, standing on the uncovered rocks, looked down at him. “Uncle Barney,” she said, “do you suppose that someone has carried the lamp away to sell for old iron?”

The captain shook his head. “No, Rilly gal, I reckon not. It’s government property and no one’d be likely to cart it away.”

At noon they went down to the little beach shed. The Irishman made a fire in the rusty old stove and they sat near, appreciating its warmth while they ate the good lunch that Molly had prepared.

“Oh, Uncle Barney,” the girl exclaimed half an hour later, “it’s me as is goin’ to take the crumbs and left-over bits to the top of the cliff and see if I can coax the seagulls from the caves; that is, if they are there.”

It was well that Brazilla Mullet had insisted that the girl wear her thick woolen leggins, for she had to wade through deep, unbroken drifts of snow to reach the spot where so often she had stood to feed her bird friends; but though she called and called, the gulls that in former winters had appeared from the warm caves in the rocks did not respond; not even the lone pelican which she had hoped would come. **[282]**

Almost sadly the girl was turning away when she chanced to look over the steep cliff and there, half way down, firmly wedged between an outjutting ledge and a small twisted pine, she saw something that sent her leaping back toward the fallen tower.

“Uncle Barney,” she called excitedly. “Come quick! I’ve found it! I’ve found the lamp!”

The old Irishman was soon at her side. Rilla looked up with tears in her eyes as she said: “Poor thing, how forlorn it looks with the glass broken and the sides crushed in.” The old man

held fast to the girl, for she was perilously near the snow-hidden edge of the cliff.

“I reckon we’d better not try to go down to it,” he said, after a moment of silent observation. “Thar’s nothin’ to hold on to till ye get to that ledge an’ it’s plain to see that the box isn’t alongside o’ the lamp. Howsome-ever, it bears out my notion that things was hurled hither and yon when the tower fell so thar’s no tellin’ whar the little box landed.”

Then, drawing the girl back to a place of greater safety, he continued, as he glanced at the sky: “It’s gettin’ toward midafternoon, colleen, an’ those blizzardy lookin’ clouds over on the horizon ar’ spreadin’ fast. I reckon as how we’d better put off huntin’ for the box till arter thar’s been a thaw; then, likie’s not, we’ll find it easy when the snow’s gone.” **[283]**

“All right, Uncle Barney,” the girl replied. “We will do just as you think best, but how I do wish that, just for a moment, I might visit my dear old Treasure Cave. Don’t you suppose that if we went along the beach I might be able to climb up to it? I’ve been there many a time in winter and I know just where my steps are even under the snow.”

The girl’s eyes were so glowingly eager that the old man could not refuse. “Wall, wall, Rilly gal,” he said, “I reckon we’d have time to poke around a while longer if ’twould be pleasin’ to you. The storm’s likely to hold off till nigh dark.”

“Oh, thank you, Uncle Barney.” Muriel caught the old man’s mittened hand and led him along at a merry pace, breaking a path in the snow just ahead of him. At last they reached the very spot where many months before Muriel had stood when she had beheld a city lad for the first time.

“D’ye ever hear from Gene Beavers nowadays?” the captain asked when Rilla recalled to him the incident of which she had been thinking. **[284]**

“Indeed I do, and, oh, Uncle Barney, such wonderful times as Gene is having. He has a new friend in England whom he calls Viscount of Wainwater.”

The old man gazed at his companion in uncomprehending amazement.

“The Viscount of Wainwater is it? Rilly, can I be hearin’ right? Why, gal, he’s as big a man as thar is in all England barrin’ the king himself. He’s what folks call a philanthropist, though thar’s them as calls him an Irish sympathizer; but ’tisn’t the Irish only that he’s benefactin’, but all as are down-trodden. Why, Rilly, he ’twas that bought a whole township over in Connaught and tore down the mud huts and had decent little cabins built for the old folks to be livin’ in. Many’s the time he’s ridden by on that han’some brown horse of his an’ stopped at me mither’s door for a bit of refreshment an’ it was me ol’ mither that couldn’t talk of anything for days but of how foine a gintleman was the Viscount of Wainwater. It’s curious now, ain’t it, that Gene Beavers is arter knowin’ him. It sartin is an honor to be a friend of the viscount.”

As the captain talked, Muriel, surefooted on the rocky paths that she had followed since **[285]**

childhood, led him down to the beach, where the sand had been swept clear of snow by the prevailing winds. They walked around the island and stood just beneath the cave to which Muriel had carried every little treasure that had been given her by her few friends or that had been tossed high on the beach by the sea. The trail looked very steep and slippery to the old man. “Rilla gal,” he said, “I reckon I’ll stay here a bit and he waitin’ for ye while ye do yer explorin’.”

The girl, her cheeks rosy, her eyes glowing, laughed back at him over her shoulder, for she was already half way up the trail.

When Muriel reached the shelving rock in front of her cave she turned and waved to the old man, who stood watching far below, then stooping, she disappeared.

To her amazement, she found that the place was flooded with light. The reason she quickly discerned. Great rocks, hurled from the falling tower, had crashed through the roof of the cave and were piled high on its floor. Eagerly the girl began to search among them for the box.

When fifteen minutes had passed and she did not reappear, the old captain became anxious and climbed to the opening.

“Wall, I’ll be gigger-switched!” he exclaimed, “if here ain’t the door to the closet whar the tools for the big lamp was kept.”

Muriel, with a delighted cry, sprang toward him, but stumbled over some small hard object which had been almost imbedded in crumbled sandstone. **[286]**

It was the long-sought little iron box, but it was locked.

The old man was as excited as the girl. He took the small box which Muriel lifted toward him and examined it. “The lock don’t matter,” he replied. “Thar’s tools in the cabin that’ll open it soon enough. Come now, ’twon’t do to be delayin’ any longer. Can’t ye hear the threatenin’ sound the wind is makin’? It’s moanin’ into the cave here like a graveyard full of ghosts let loose.”

When they were again on the beach the girl saw that the captain was indeed a weather prophet, for the leaden-grey clouds were being hurled toward them by a wind that was momentarily increasing in velocity. Luckily it came from over the sea and the water between the island and Tunkett would still be sheltered.

They were soon in the dory scudding toward the home port, but barely had they landed when the snow began to fall so thick and fast that they could scarcely see each other.

The wind from the sea fairly blew them up the street toward the home of Doctor Winslow. For a moment the old Irishman drew the girl under the shelter of an evergreen tree while he said hurriedly:

“Rilla gal, I reckon ’twould be best if I sent the letter, bein’ as that was yer grand-dad’s wish, an’, like’s not, ye’d better not be mentionin’ it to anyone yet fer a spell, not knowin’——” The old **[287]**

man paused. He did not want to hurt the girl's feelings by saying that after all these years her own father might not care to claim his daughter.

"You are right, Uncle Barney," was the reply. "I'll not say a word, but, oh, how I do, do hope that my own father will love me."

That evening the little iron box was opened, the address found and Molly, who at one time had been a school mistress in Connaught, penned the letter that was sent speeding to its destination on the midnight train.

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CHAPTER XXXIX.
A LETTER FROM GENE.

When Muriel entered the house she found awaiting her a letter from Gene, and strange indeed was the postmark, for with his good friend, the Viscount of Wainwater, the lad was traveling in foreign lands.

There were several sheets of thin paper and these were covered with such fine handwriting that it took the girl much longer than usual to decipher them.

She retired to the doctor's den directly after the evening meal, and having made a fire on the hearth, she curled up in a big, comfortable chair near the reading table, for she felt that she wanted to be alone while she had this visit with the far-away lad who called himself her brother-friend.

The first part of the epistle was devoted to descriptions of their travels and adventures.

Then came some personal news items, the most astonishing of these being that Monsieur Carnot had received a cablegram informing him that Marianne was leaving High Cliffs Seminary at once and would return to France to complete her education. Her reason for this unexpected action was not given.

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Another page was devoted to the viscount. "Sister-friend," Gene had written, "how I do hope that some day you may meet this wonderful man whose conversation is to me more delightful than any book I have ever read, whose considerate thoughtfulness of all whom we meet, especially those who are poor or in trouble, makes him more a nobleman than does his title.

"I have saved until the close of this long, rambling letter a bit of news that will rejoice your heart, even as it did mine. You will recall that you told me that I might show your poem, 'The Lonely Pelican,' to my poet-friend, Wayne, but that you would rather that I did not tell him about yourself, although why you made the request I am sure I cannot guess. Muriel, I don't want you ever to be ashamed of who you are, for though your parents were simple fisherfolk, you are a princess among girls. I am as proud to know you as I am to know the Viscount of Wainwater. This was his comment when he

finished reading your little poem: ‘Gene, I would be glad had I written that. It is a lovely thing.’

“Muriel, some day may I tell him about you; how your little girlhood was spent cradled out there on Windy Island among the wild sea waves, companioned by that splendid old man who was one of nature’s truest noblemen, and with only birds and Shags for playmates? He will better understand your poem. Address your next letter to Cairo, care of the American Consul.” [290]

For a long time Muriel sat curled up in that deep cushioned chair gazing into the fire and dreaming dreams. How strange, how unreal, that she, the daughter of a long line of seafaring people, should be the friend of a lad who was the chosen comrade of a viscount, and yet Gene had spoken truly, no man could be more noble than her own grandfather.

Then came a tap on the closed door and the pleasant voice of Miss Gordon: “Nine o’clock, dear. You know our resolution—to retire at that hour.” Instantly Muriel was on her feet, rebuking herself for having left Miss Gordon alone. Opening the door, she said: “Won’t you come in? It won’t matter, will it, if we stay up a little later this evening? I would like you to read this wonderful letter from Gene Beavers.”

And so it was that Miss Gordon was ensconced in the big comfortable chair and with Muriel on a stool at her feet, the older woman read the letter aloud. “What a privilege it is for your friend Gene to have the companionship of that prince among men. I have often greatly admired the verses of Wayne Waters, and, dear——” The older woman paused and looked thoughtfully into the fire.

As she had hesitated, Muriel glanced up questioningly. “I had thought that I would not tell you,” Miss Gordon continued, “but now I believe that I will. Before we left High Cliffs, Miss Humphrey found a poem in a new magazine, the title of which was ‘The Moor in Winter.’” [291]

“Oh, Miss Gordon, then you have found out about Marianne and——”

“You knew all the time, Muriel, and did not tell me?” The girl bowed her head. “Yes. Gene had written telling me about that poem.” Suddenly looking up, she inquired: “Is that why Marianne is leaving High Cliffs?”

“Yes,” was the reply. “Miss Humphrey is acting principal during my absence and she has expelled the young plagiarist.”

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CHAPTER XL.
JOY AND FAITH VISIT TUNKETT.

The blinding snowstorm which had started the night before, as Muriel and Captain Barney had

returned from Windy Island, increased in fury during the night and even Muriel did not care to battle through the elements the next day to visit the cabins on the dunes. She indeed was curious to see the address to which the letter was to be sent and she looked eagerly out at the storm, wondering how long it would last.

Miss Gordon was so interested in her book that she did not notice Muriel's suppressed excitement. The girl could think of nothing but the letter and its possible reception by the Mr. Storm, who, of course, was her father.

What if this unknown father might prove to be someone for whom she could not care? But she put that thought away from her. Of course she would dearly love the man whom her girl-mother had loved and trusted.

Then she wondered how far the letter would have to travel to reach him and how long a time would elapse before she would have a reply. Would that reply bid her go to another part of America to live? **[293]**

It was midmorning when the girl's revery was interrupted by the ringing of the telephone. Skipping to the doctor's study, she lifted the receiver and upon hearing the voice at the other end her face brightened.

"Oh, Uncle Lem, I'm so glad you were able to get away. Yes, I'll send Jabez right down to the station. You want Brazilla to make a double quantity of clam chowder. Why, Uncle Lem, how hungry you must be. All right, I'll tell her. Good-bye."

"Oh, isn't that the jolliest!" Muriel beamed at Miss Gordon, whose book had been dropped to her lap when she learned that Doctor Winslow was in town. Into the kitchen the girl skipped when Jabez had been notified.

"What can I do to help?" Rilla asked, and Brazilla replied: "Well, maybe you'd better fetch out the best cloth and set the table extra fine. I reckon another log on the hearth would make the dinin'-room more cheerful like. Then thar's a geranium on the south window sill that blossomed this morning. You might put that in the middle."

"Put it in the middle of the fire?" the girl asked merrily. Then she whirled about and kissed the astonished housekeeper on the forehead.

"Oh, Brazilla," she exclaimed, "please don't mind my nonsense. I'm so excited about something that I can't tell yet that I don't know what I am about." **[294]**

"Wall, I should say, Rilly, that suthin' onusual must a-gone to yer head. You don't act at all natural, an' yer cheeks are so red."

Then, anxiously, the good woman added: "You don't feel feverish, do you?"

"No, Brazilla. Honest Injun, I'm all right. Now I'll get busy."

The table was all set, and most attractive it looked when the joyous ringing of sleighbells was heard in the drive.

Muriel waited until she heard a stamping of feet on the front porch, then she threw open the door and uttered a cry of joy, for with the good doctor were her two best friends.

“Oh, Joy! Faith! What a wonderful surprise!” In spite of their snowy garments she hugged them both, then whirling and shaking a finger at the doctor, she accused: “Now I know why you pretended to be so ravenously hungry and ordered a double portion of clam chowder.”

“Guilty!” The doctor kissed his glowing-eyed ward; then, leaving the girls with their hostess, he went into the living-room in search of Miss Gordon. He found her standing by the fireplace.

“Helen,” he said impulsively as he advanced toward her, “you can’t know what it means to me to find you waiting to welcome me by my own hearth-side which for so many years has been deserted and lonely; so lonely, Helen, since mother left.” **[295]**

Just why there were tears in the sweet grey eyes that were lifted to him Miss Gordon could not have told, for the realization had come to them both that this was truly a moment for rejoicing; but all that the little woman said was, “I’ve been lonely, too, Lemuel.”

Just at that moment into the room danced Muriel, leading the two laughing girls, whose heavy wraps had been removed.

The older woman turned to greet them and the physician went to his own room to prepare for his evening meal.

“Isn’t this just like a party?” Rilla exclaimed half an hour later when they were seated about the long table. “Oh, girls, I had been hoping that you would come for a week-end, as you had promised, but how did you happen to be with Uncle Lem?”

“We met Doctor Winslow in the station at New York and when we told him that we were coming to stay at the inn in Tunkett for a few days he declared that we must be your guests in his home, and, of course, we were only too glad to accept.”

Many times during the evening repast the physician’s eyes wandered to the face of his ward. Her cheeks were glowing, almost feverishly, and the light in her eyes was unnatural and her excited chatter, he was sure, was not entirely because of the unexpected arrival of her friends. **[296]**

When they were leaving the table, he drew her aside, saying, “Muriel, I would like to see you in my study.”

The girl excused herself and accompanied him. As soon as the door was closed, the physician turned and placed his cool hand on her cheeks and brow. He said: “Little girl, are you ill or has something happened that is troubling you?”

To his great surprise Muriel threw her arms about his neck and began to sob.

“No, Uncle Lem, nothing troubles me; that is, it doesn’t yet. Uncle Barney has written a letter to my own father to tell him about me, and, oh,

Uncle Lem, what if he should not care for me? Every night since I was little I've prayed for that dear father who never came for me, and I've prayed God to send him to me some time because my girl-mother so loved him; but now that at last he is to know about me I am so afraid that he will not want me."

This, then, had been the real cause of her feverish excitement.

The physician drew Muriel down beside him upon a couch and asked her to tell all that had happened. He had never known about the address in the little iron box, for although he had been a close friend of Ezra Bassett's in their boyhood, the physician had been away much of the time in later years. [297]

"Dear," he said comfortingly, "do not be fearful. The little that I have heard of your artist father leads me to believe that, although evidently poor, he was possessed of high ideals and was very talented. I cannot believe that he has purposely neglected you all of these years. Now dry your tears and go back to your friends with a happy heart and be sure that the tender love you have given your father is now to be returned to you."

When the girl had left him, the physician bent his head on his hands. And so he was to lose Muriel. One by one those who were dear to him had left him and in his old age he was to be alone, for it would be presumptuous on his part to ask so lovely a woman as Miss Gordon to share the little he had to offer. But at that moment he recalled the tears in the grey eyes and the break in the voice that had said, "I, too, have been lonely."

Rising, he thought, "I will go to Helen and ask her if she cares to share my home."

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CHAPTER XLI.
MURIEL HEARS FROM HER FATHER.

Once again it was spring. The trees about High Cliffs Seminary were pale green and pink with unfolding fresh young leaves and in the orchard back of the school the cherry, peach and apple trees were huge bouquets of fragrant bloom, spreading a feast for the bees that hummed cheerily among the flowers. Now and then a meadow lark sent its shaft of song rejoicing through the sunlit morning from somewhere beyond the tennis courts where three girls were playing, with but little animation, however, as the first real spring weather was too warm to be invigorating.

"I wish we knew what has happened to sadden our Rilla," Catherine Lambert said when, the set having been finished, the girls sat on a bench to rest.

"She came back to school after the Christmas

holidays so joyous that I thought some wonderful thing had happened like a romance or——”

“A romance and Muriel not yet eighteen years of age!” This protestingly from Faith. But Catherine, heeding not the interruption, continued: “But that could not have been it, for now she seems very sad. I should think that you two girls who are so intimate with her might ask what has happened. Surely she is troubled about something.” [299]

“I wish I could *truly* say that I have noticed no change in Muriel,” Joy remarked, as she looked meditatively toward the orchard; “but I cannot, for she is changed. She studies harder than ever before, if that can possibly be. Miss Gordon told me that she had never known a pupil at High Cliffs to make such progress.”

“I wonder if Miss Gordon knows what is troubling Muriel? I am sure that she would, if anyone did,” Faith said, but Joy shook her head. “No, Miss Gordon does not know, for last week she asked me to come to her apartment at an hour when Muriel was occupied in the music room and she asked me if I had noticed a change in Rilla, and if so, had I any idea what had occasioned it. I said that we all realized that Muriel seemed sad, but that we did not know the reason. Then Miss Gordon declared that she would write Doctor Winslow, who has been in the South for a month with a patient, and ask him what he thought might be troubling his ward. If this source of possible information fails, Miss Gordon will ask Rilla herself.”

While these three friends were discussing Muriel as they sat out by the tennis court, that maiden was seated alone beneath the little pine tree that had been her comforter in those first lonely days before she had become acquainted at High Cliffs. In her hand she held a letter and there were unshed tears in her eyes. Although her Uncle Barney’s name was signed at the close of the missive, Muriel knew that Molly had penned it for him. [300]

“Dearie,” the girl read, “there’s no news yet, though it does seem like there ought to be. Here ’tis May and the letter we wrote was sent last December. Folks do say, ‘no news is good news,’ but I reckon this time, colleen, ’tisn’t so. If your father was living he’d have sent some sort of an answer. It would be going against nature not to.

“If he hadn’t lost the letter with the address on it, or if we could remember it, we’d write again. ’Twas a name I’d never heard before, nor had Molly. I reckon that old letter got into the stove, somehow, and so there’s no way to write again. Seems like I can never forgive myself if the fault is mine. Your loving Uncle Barney.”

So, after all, the dream ended. Muriel was never to know the father she had loved so long. With a sigh that was half a sob, she arose and walked slowly back toward the school, when she saw one of the younger pupils racing toward her.

“Muriel Storm, you’re wanted in the parlor. There’s someone to see you. It’s a man and he’s elegant looking.” [301]

Muriel’s heart leaped. Could it be that her father had come, after all?

When Muriel appeared in the doorway of the reception room, Miss Gordon rose, as did the man who was at her side.

Advancing with outstretched hands, the principal said: “Dear girl, why didn’t you tell me about it? I wasn’t at all prepared for the message that this gentleman has brought to us.” Then turning to the man, who was gazing with unconcealed interest at the tall, beautiful girl, Miss Gordon added: “Muriel, this is Mr. Templeton of London. He has come at the request of your father, who is not strong enough just now to make the voyage, and, if you desire, you are to return with Mr. Templeton at once. Your passage has been engaged on a steamship leaving Hoboken tomorrow at daybreak.”

The girl gazed from one to the other as though scarcely able to comprehend. Then, slowly, a light dawned in her clear hazel eyes and she said: “My father, my own father, he wants me?”

Mr. Templeton was deeply moved and stepping forward he took both hands of the girl as he said sincerely:

“Indeed, Miss Muriel, he does want you. I never saw a man more affected than he was when he learned that he had a daughter living. He wanted to come to you at once, but he has been ill and his physician advised against the voyage as the sea is none too quiet in the spring. And so I have been sent to accompany you to your father if you will trust me.” **[302]**

The girl’s questioning gaze turned toward Miss Gordon, who smilingly nodded. “It is right, dear, that you should go,” she said. “I have telephoned to Dr. Winslow and he will be here this afternoon. Now you had better go to your room. I will send a maid to help you pack.”

Upon leaving the reception room Muriel had gone at once in search of her best friends and had found them all in Joy’s room.

“We’ve been hunting for you everywhere,” Faith said. “We wanted you to make a fourth on the courts, but you were nowhere about, so we had to play alone.”

Then the speaker paused and gazed intently at the morning glow in the face of her friend. “Why, Muriel,” she exclaimed, “of late you have seemed troubled, but now you are radiant. Tell us what has happened.”

Although every moment was needed for preparing for departure, Muriel paused long enough to tell these, her dearest friends, that at last her own father had been found.

“Rilla, it’s like a chapter in a story-book, isn’t it?” Joy exclaimed. “Don’t you feel strange and unreal?” **[303]**

Muriel laughed. “I suppose that I do, but girls, I haven’t time now to feel anything, for I must pack and be ready to leave for New York on the evening boat. Uncle Lem is going to keep me at the hospital tonight, and I am to meet my escort at Hoboken tomorrow morning before daybreak.”

It had been a whirl of a day and when at last

came the hour for parting with Miss Gordon and the girls who had been such loyal friends, Muriel suddenly realized that, though she was to gain much, she also was losing much.

“I don’t believe anything in the world could take me from you all but just my father,” she said.

“I’ll prophesy that you’ll see us soon,” Miss Gordon said briskly, for she knew the tears were near. Luckily the whistle of the boat at that moment warned the friends that they must go ashore, but they stood on the dock and waved until the small craft was out of sight.

Then it was that Muriel recalled a letter that Miss Widdemere had given her at the last moment. Taking it from her coat pocket, she saw that it was from Gene, who was again in London.

[304]

CHAPTER XLII. MURIEL MEETS HER FATHER.

To the surprised delight of Muriel, both Uncle Barney and little Zoeth were at the boat to bid her goodbye. Doctor Winslow had at once wired the good news to the old man who had been instrumental in finding the girl’s long-lost father and his deeply furrowed, weather-beaten face shone with joy as he held out his arms to Rilla, heeding not at all the jostling throng of voyagers who were eager to board the greater steamer.

“Who is your pa, Rilly gal? What’d the lawyer chap tell yo’ about him?” Muriel shook her head. “I don’t know a bit more about it than you do, Uncle Barney,” she confessed. “My father wished me to form my own opinion when I met him, and so he asked Mr. Templeton to make no attempt to describe him to me. I’m glad really. One never can picture people as they truly are. All that matters to me is that he is my father.”

Then Doctor Lem returned, having attended to the baggage, and they all accompanied Rilla to her stateroom. “Take good care of Shags for me,” were her last words to Zoeth, “and tell him I’ll come back after him as soon as ever I can.” **[305]**

Then Muriel leaned over the rail and waved to her loved ones on the crowded wharf until the huge steamer had swung out into the channel.

The voyage, although of great interest to the girl, who so loved the sea, was uneventful, and in due time England was reached.

“And so this is London,” Muriel said one foggy morning as she glanced out of the window of the conveyance which Mr. Templeton had engaged to take them to their destination. “I am so glad that my father does not live in the city.” Then she inquired: “Is he a farmer, Mr. Templeton?” Rilla recalled that when in Tunkett the young man had seemed to be very poor, but he might have sold paintings enough since then to have bought a farm.

Mr. Templeton's expression was inscrutable. "Why, yes, Miss Muriel; in a way your father might be called a farmer. All kinds of vegetables and stock are raised on his place. But—er—he doesn't wield the pitchfork himself these days. He is rather too prosperous for that."

How glad the girl was when they were out on the open road. The hawthorn hedges were white with bloom and so high that in many places they could not see over them into the parklike grounds they were passing. **[306]**

Suddenly Muriel touched Mr. Templeton's arm and lifted a glowing face. "Hark!" she whispered. "Did you hear it? Over there in the hedgerow. There it is again. Oh, I know him! Miss Gordon has often read the poem.

"'That's the wise thrush. He sings each song
twice over
Lest you think he could never recapture
That first fine, careless rapture.'

"Do you like Browning's poetry, Mr. Templeton?"

"Well, really, Miss Muriel, I've never had much time to read verse; been too busy studying law. But your farmer-father sets quite a store by the poets, he tells me."

"I'm so glad!" was the radiant reply. Then the girl fell to musing. How she hoped that her dear mother knew that at last she was going to the poor artist whom she had so loved.

"How long will it be before we reach the farming district, Mr. Templeton?" The girl was again gazing out of the window at her side. "These homes that we are passing are like the great old castles I have read about in Scott's books and Thackeray's."

"We will soon reach our destination," was the non-committal reply of her companion. Then, leaning forward, he spoke a few words to the man at the wheel. **[307]**

They turned down a side road that narrowed to a winding lane. There the conveyance stopped and Mr. Templeton directed Muriel to a picturesque cabin half hidden among trees, in front of which ran a shallow babbling stream. "Your father awaits you in there," he said.

As one in a dream Muriel crossed the rustic bridge and approached the cabin. It was just the sort of a home that an artist would build, she thought.

Timidly she knocked on the closed door. It was flung open by a man nearing middle age, perhaps, but whose youthful face was radiant with a great joy. Taking both her hands, he gazed at her devouringly. Then, drawing her to him, he crushed her in his arms as he said, his voice tense with emotion: "My Rilla's own little girl, and my girl, too."

[308]

CHAPTER XLIII.

RILLA OF THE LIGHTHOUSE.

It was June, one year since Muriel Storm had arrived in England, and again she was returning to the home of her ancestors, after a long trip to Switzerland, where Gene had visited her and her father. During this year, Muriel had acquired from her father an ease of manner which well fitted her for the position she was to fill.

Invitations to the debut of Lady Muriel were crossing the Atlantic. They were addressed to the four girls at High Cliffs who had befriended her when she was supposed to be only the grand-daughter of a lighthouse-keeper. Others bearing the Wainwater crest were addressed to dwellers in Tunkett—to Doctor Winslow and his lovely wife; to Brazilla Mullet and her brother, Jabez Mullet; to Uncle Barney and his Molly.

In London Mrs. Beavers and Helen received their invitation. There was a flush of pleasure on the elder lady's face as she read the message on the crested card. "Helen," she said, "will wonders never cease? The Viscount of Wainwater has a daughter. Probably she has been away at school all these years and that is why we have not heard of her." Then, as her gaze wandered to a handsome pictured face on a table near, she added: "I am glad now that Gene did not care for Marianne Carnot."

Helen laughed. "Mother, dear," she said, "what a matchmaker you are! It is unfortunate that brother seems to care for Muriel Storm." **[309]**

"Daughter," replied Mrs. Beavers haughtily, "I wish you never again to mention the name of that seafaring girl in my presence. I am so glad that your brother will be home from college in time to attend the debut."

* * * * * * * *

The day of the great event had arrived. Helen and her mother were dressed and waiting for the carriage to convey them to Wainwater Castle. But the elder woman was troubled, for though the boat from America had docked and the train from Liverpool had arrived two hours before, yet Gene had not come. Then she heard his voice in the lower hall, asking, "Where is my mother?"

Catching her outstretched hands, he exclaimed admiringly: "Did ever a chap have so beautiful a mother?" Not waiting for a reply, he added wheedlingly, "Mother, darling, are you as hard-hearted as ever?"

"I am never hard-hearted, son, where you are concerned. What do you mean?"

"Mother mine, I have come to ask your permission to marry the most wonderful girl in this world, whose name is Muriel Storm. Am I right in believing that you really care for my happiness?" **[310]**

"Yes, my son, I care for nothing else; it will be a great disappointment to me to have you marry the daughter of a lighthouse-keeper, but if you are convinced she is the girl you love, I will welcome her for your sake."

“Mother, mother,” he cried, “you will never regret those words!”

Soon after the last guest had arrived at the castle, the orchestra was stilled, and the viscount spoke. “Friends and neighbors, I have invited you here tonight to rejoice with us. I wish to announce the engagement of my daughter to one of the finest lads I have ever known, Gene Beavers. And now it gives me great pleasure to present to you my daughter, the Lady Muriel of Wainwater.”

Mrs. Beavers was scarcely able to believe what she had heard and seen. As one in a trance, she advanced, and Gene leaped to meet her and placed Muriel’s hand in that of his mother. “My boy—I don’t understand—I thought—is this—”

Impulsively the girl held out her other hand as she said in her most winning way: “I want you to love me. I am Rilla of the Lighthouse.”

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- Silently corrected a few typos (but left nonstandard spelling and dialect as is).
- Rearranged front matter to a more-logical streaming order and added a Table of Contents.

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