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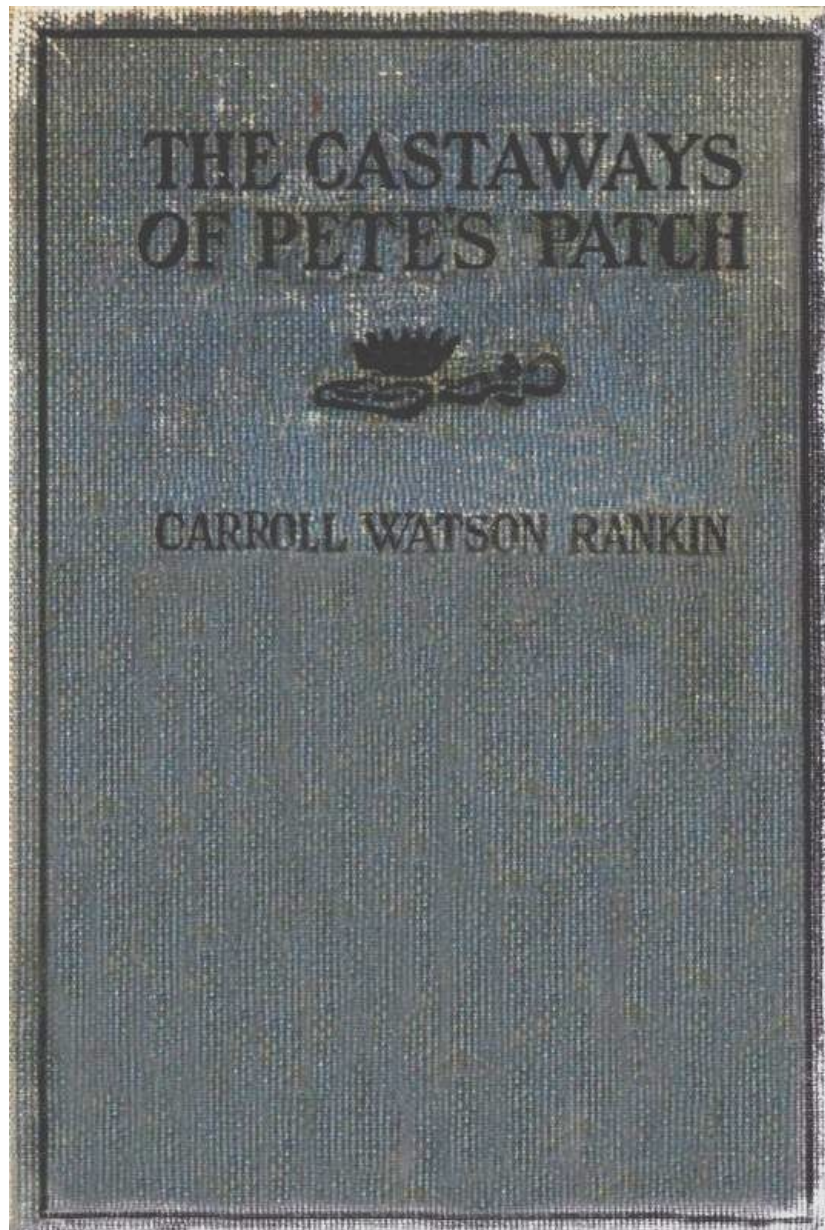
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE CASTAWAYS OF PETE'S PATCH ***



THE CASTAWAYS OF PETE'S PATCH

by
Carroll Watson Rankin

Illustrated by
ADA C. WILLIAMSON

Frontispiece and jacket illustrations
by MIRIAM SELSS

How many girls have wished to spend a summer in a real camp on the shores of a lake, with soft grass, kind to bare feet, comfortable camp beds of fragrant balsam tips and plenty of real adventure.

Here are our friends of the Dandelion Cottage marooned on a point of land. Indian boys, a castaway sailor lad, and many other happenings fill this book full of delight for the girls, who, having read the earlier volumes of the series, will be glad to meet again these cheery little lassies of the justly famous Dandelion Cottage Series.



IT SEEMED TO MABEL THAT SHE COULD
DETECT A SOUND OF BREATHING

Dandelion Series

[i]

THE CASTAWAYS OF PETE'S PATCH

(A Sequel to The Adopting of Rosa Marie)

BY

CARROLL WATSON RANKIN

Author of "Dandelion Cottage," "The Girls of
Gardenville," etc.

With Illustrations by
ADA C. WILLIAMSON



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[ii]

TO
ERNEST AND BERWICK
AND ALL OTHER GOOD CAMPERS

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THE PERSONS OF THE STORY

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BETTIE TUCKER JEANIE MAPES MARJORY VALE MABEL BENNETT	Once of Dandelion Cottage, now of Pete's Patch.
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HENRIETTA BEDFORD: Their Chum.

MR. BLACK: A Childless but Fatherly Man.

MRS. CRANE: His Warm-hearted Sister.

DAVE GURNEAU: A Good and Bad Half-breed.

MAHJIGEEZIGOQUA: An Old Acquaintance.

MR. WILLIAM SAUNDERS: Mr. Black's Right-hand.

MISS BLOSSOM: A Timely Visitor.

ROSA MARIE: A Very Young Old Friend.

TERRIBLE TIM: Always to the Point.

BILLY BLUE-EYES: The Most Cast-away of all the Cast-aways.

A Number of Parents and Other Necessary Grown-ups.

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INTRODUCTION

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WHEN the biggest lake there is chooses to go on one of her very best rampages, even the bravest of mariners make as speedily as possible for safe harbors. At midnight, therefore, following a certain blustery day in early summer, it was not strange that the huge, storm-tossed lake appeared, for as far as eye could reach, absolutely deserted.

Somewhere, however, on that fearfully tumultuous sea, one direly threatened craft was still abroad, and, what is a greater marvel, still afloat. At best, the ancient yawl was but a poor excuse for a ship; now, at her worst, she was little more than a raft. Driven before the wind, tossed here and there by the buffeting waves, she carried a solitary passenger and only a little one at that.

Indeed, he wasn't at all the kind of sailor that one would *expect* to find sailing dangerous seas all alone at midnight, for the solitary mariner, adrift in all that wilderness of tumbling water, was a twelve-year-old boy.

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There was no sail to the little boat—that had been torn away in the furious gale—but a short, stumpy mast remained. To that the boy, happily unconscious of his plight, was firmly but rather clumsily bound by means of many folds of stout fish-net wrapped tightly about his slender body.

Also about his waist hung a battered life-preserver.

The lad had been fastened there by other hands than his own, for most of the knots were out of his reach. The little chap's head hung forward; his eyes were closed; he no longer heard the roar of the sea or felt the cold or suffered from hunger; but in spite of this merciful oblivion, he still had a life to lose—and was in very grave danger of losing it.

It isn't fair, of course, to leave a really attractive little lad in a plight like this; with darkness and an angry sea all about him; with, seemingly no possible help at hand, since the nearest coast was still many miles distant and supposedly uninhabited.

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Yet, in this truly terrible predicament, this poor boy—strange little hero of a girls' story—must remain until you've learned just how a certain "Whale" (you must admit that it isn't usual to find whales near fresh water) contributed to his rescue.

To discover exactly how it all happened we must go way back to the very beginning; and the beginning of it all was Bettie.

THE CASTAWAYS OF PETE'S PATCH

[1]

CHAPTER I An Innocent Plan

"THIS," said Bettie Tucker, one morning, with approving glances at the offerings heaped about her, "is certainly a pretty fine world. I'm glad I stayed in it, even if I haven't feet enough for eleven pairs of pink bed socks."

For an alarming number of weeks, Bettie's friends had feared that this most lovable of little girls might *not* remain in it; but now that all danger was past, she was able to sit for long hours by the window that afforded the best view of the Tuckers' front gate.

Ordinarily it was not much of a gate. So many little Tuckers had climbed upon it and tumbled off that it had grown shaky as to hinges and bald as to paint; though, if one used rope enough, it was still useful as a barrier between the world and the adventuresome Tucker babies.

[2]

But now this gate—or rather this gateway—had become a most interesting spot. Through it, at delightfully frequent intervals, came baskets, boxes, and bundles. Most of them contained offerings, more or less enjoyable, for convalescent Bettie; for all the members of Doctor Tucker's church loved the gentle, kindly, absent-minded clergyman. Now that a member of his household was recovering from a serious illness, it seemed, as Doctor Bennett, the family physician said, as if the parish were bent on making her ill again by sending her more things to eat than any one small Bettie-girl could possibly hold. Everything from soup to dessert flowed in at that gate, for Lakeville was a kindly town and everybody knew that overworked Mrs. Tucker had quite enough to do without the extra work of preparing dainty food.

Moreover, to add very seriously to Bettie's danger from promiscuous donations, Doctor Bennett's own warm-hearted but decidedly inexperienced young daughter Mabel was laboriously cooking things out of a large number of cook-books to carry triumphantly or despondently, according to her degree of success, to her very dearest friend Bettie.

[3]

"This," explained Mabel, one morning, displaying a dull purple, most uninviting object that quivered uncannily when one shook the bowl, "is 'Ambrosial Delight.'"

"Where—where did you get it?" asked Bettie, eying the strange mixture distrustfully.

"Out of an advertising cook-book that somebody left on our doorstep. It said 'Ambrosial Delight' under the picture, but someway the pudding looks—different."

"What makes it such a very queer color?" demanded interested Bettie.

"Grape juice and eggs," explained Mabel, tenderly clasping her handiwork to her breast. "You see, according to the picture, it ought to be in even purple and yellow stripes and standing up in a stiff para—parachute—those things in Egypt—"

"Pyramid. Go on," assisted Bettie, accustomed to Mabel's difficulties of speech.

[4]

"Pyramid, but someway the custard part and the jelly part all ran together and sat down. But it tastes a lot better than it looks."

"Bettie mustn't eat anything more for two hours," interposed Mrs. Tucker. "She's just had a big piece of strawberry shortcake. I'll set this pudding in the ice-box—that'll harden the jelly."

"I'm ever so much obliged," beamed Bettie, suspecting that Mabel would have enjoyed seeing

her eat the "Ambrosial Delight." "It's nice of you to cook things for me."

"Even if they do turn out wrong most every time," supplemented Mabel. "Yes, I think it is nice, because I sort of hate to cook anyway, and everybody in our house just hates to have me. I'm so untidy, they say. I always have to do it when Bridget isn't looking and it makes me nervous to have to hurry. Can you think of anything else you'd like me to make?" continued this martyr. "Because I'd *do* it, if I had to get up before daylight."

"I don't know of anything unless somebody invents a dish that will go right straight to my knees. They wobble. I feel as if I'd like to run a mile, but by the time I've tottered to the gate I'm glad it isn't more than a dozen steps. There's your father coming—I'm going to ask him why my knees wobble so awfully." [5]

Impulsive Mabel, at this news, instinctively scrambled under the bed. Then, remembering that she had really been pretty good all day, she sheepishly crawled out, to Bettie's amusement, to greet her surprised father.

"I'm on my way home," said she.

"So I notice," returned Doctor Bennett, his mouth stern, his eyes twinkling. "Don't let me detain you."

"I want to know," demanded Bettie, "why I haven't any knees?"

"I think," replied Doctor Bennett, "that we ought to get you outdoors a great deal more than we do. You're not getting air enough. Where's your jacket? I'll take you for a drive this minute—I'm going to South Lakeville by the shore road to see a patient. Think you're good for a buggy ride?" [6]

"I'm sure of it," laughed Bettie, "but I'm afraid my bones will scratch all the varnish off your nice bright buggy. I've twice as many ribs as I used to have—perhaps my knees have turned into ribs!"

Bettie returned an hour later; none the worse for her drive and hungry enough to eat even Mabel's unsightly pudding, after finishing a large bowl of broth.

"It tastes fine," she confided to Doctor Bennett, who had insisted on carrying the slender invalid upstairs, "if you eat it with your eyes shut. My! I'm hungry as a bear—wasn't it lucky that mother had my lunch ready?"

"I guess you'll have to have another ride to-morrow," laughed the pleased doctor. "Fresh air is all the medicine you need—you ought to *live* outdoors."

There was danger, however, of Bettie's getting more fresh air than any one little maid could ever hope to breathe, for, the next morning, there was an item in Lakeville's daily paper that brought curious and almost instantaneous results. The paragraph read: [7]

"Miss Bettie Tucker, who has been seriously ill for several weeks, enjoyed her first outing yesterday."

It wasn't a very big item, Bettie thought, for so momentous an event, but it was quite large enough for kind-hearted Lakeville. Immediately, everybody with anything one *could* ride in wanted to take Bettie driving. Mr. Black placed his automobile at her disposal. Henrietta Bedford's grandmother, Mrs. Slater, laid her horses, the grandest of her carriages, and her only coachman at Bettie's bedroom-slippered feet; Jean and Marjory laboriously collected sufficient money to hire a sad old horse, more or less attached to a dilapidated cab, from the very cheapest livery stable for a whole expensive hour. Nearly all the members of Doctor Tucker's congregation took turns inviting Bettie to ride in anything from a buckboard to an omnibus. Even Julius Muhlhauser, the milkman, insisted on carrying her, in his flaming scarlet cart, over three-fourths of his milk-route, one morning. [8]

"That," laughed Bettie, after the milkman had delivered her safely at her own door, "was something different. It isn't everybody who has a chance to drive down the milky way."

"Are you hungry?" asked her mother, meeting her at the door, with a bowl of broth.

"Not so very," returned Bettie, nevertheless accepting the broth and eating it eagerly. "I drank a whole pint of the milk-wagon milk."

Next, all Bettie's friends began to invite the little girl to visit them. She had to spend whole days or pieces of days with Jean, with Marjory, with Henrietta, with Mabel (who nursed her so devotedly that she almost suffered a relapse), and with Mrs. Crane and Mr. Black. But, as yet, she had not returned to her old footing with her comrades; she was not yet sufficiently strong for the old rough-and-tumble play, the happy-go-lucky hours in Dandelion Cottage. She was a new variety of Bettie, a fragile Bettie, to be handled with the utmost tenderness. [9]

Mr. Black and his stout sister, Mrs. Crane, than whom Bettie had no stauncher friends, had swung the largest and most gorgeous hammock that Lakeville could furnish, under their trees for her—they were only sorry that she couldn't use *two* hammocks.

"Peter," said Mrs. Crane (they were sitting on the porch to keep an eye on Bettie, who, in spite of the gorgeousness of her swaying couch, had fallen asleep), "that child ought to stay outdoors all the time. That rectory is a stuffy place, crowded up against the church and right in the smoke

of two factories. As soon as she's strong enough to stand it, she ought to go camping—some place on the lake shore where the air is pure."

"Of course she ought," agreed Mr. Black, heartily. "It's the best tonic in the world for growing children—there's nothing like it in bottles."

"Isn't there any way we could manage it? If we only had a camp—"

"We'll have one," promised Mr. Black, promptly.

"But we haven't any land—"

"Yes, we have; a lot of it. About four years ago I bought forty acres from an Indian, forty more from his brother, and then, just to be obliging, forty more from his friend, all for a few dollars an acre. Afterwards somebody suggested that it was all the same forty, but it wasn't; I looked it up to see. It's seventeen miles from here on the shore of the biggest and wettest lake there is, with the cleanest, sweetest air that ever was made. Just the finest spot in the world for a camp—I saw it once.

"When? Oh, six or seven years ago. I tell you what, Sarah! Suppose we take a run up there in the automobile and have a look at it. There used to be a road—it's probably there yet."

"Why couldn't we make a picnic of it and take Bettie and the girls?" asked good Mrs. Crane, instantly falling in with her brother's plan. "Seventeen miles is no distance at all for the car—I'm sure Bettie could stand it because she could get a nap there as well as at home."

"We could," agreed Mr. Black, "and I guess there'd be room for Henrietta, too—she'll want to go."

"I always did enjoy a picnic," confessed Mrs. Crane, a little sheepishly. "I guess I haven't quite grown up, in some ways."

"I like 'em myself," owned Mr. Black. "Besides, I've been thinking for some time that I'd like a look at that land—haven't seen it since I bought it. This is Monday, isn't it? Suppose we go there day after to-morrow if the weather stays right—that'll give us a day to cook in. We'll ask the girls to-night."

So, in this commonplace fashion, was planned the picnic that proved utterly unlike any picnic that this good, elderly couple had ever attended; for this particular outing behaved in a most extraordinary way. Mr. Black supposed that this innocent excursion was his, that it belonged to him, that it was subservient to his will; instead of which—but you shall hear what happened.

CHAPTER II

The Troubled Whale

MR. BLACK, his fine dark eyes sparkling with pleasure; his crisp hair, plentifully sprinkled with white, standing upright from his broad, benevolent brow, looked with approval at his party as he packed his merry guests very carefully into his big touring car.

Jean, who was tall and not particularly wide for her fourteen and a half years, was attractive because of the serene loveliness of her expression; one knew at a glance that she was a *good* child. One guessed, just as quickly, that Henrietta was sometimes naughty, for an impish light danced in her long-lashed black eyes and there was a mischievous dimple in the dusky crimson of her cheek. Next to Jean in height and age, she seemed older and yet less responsible—one couldn't be quite sure of spirited Henrietta Bedford.

Marjory, two years younger, was both short and narrow for her age; and so very fair that one had to guess at her eyebrows. But she, too, was a pretty child, for her small features were pleasing and her pale golden hair was quite wonderful. Like Henrietta, she was quick and graceful in all her movements.

Bettie, also between twelve and thirteen, was now mostly eyes; big, velvety brown ones that played pranks with one's heart-strings; particularly with those of Mr. Black and Mrs. Crane. She had lost all her short, curly brown hair during her illness; it was now coming in, shorter and curlier than ever.

Mabel, the youngest of the group, was also the broadest. But her undeniable plumpness did not detract from her looks. One couldn't help liking her honest brown eyes, the wholesome red and white of her rounded countenance, her sturdy, childlike figure, and the rich bronze of her abundant—and frequently untidy—hair.

Mrs. Crane, brown as to skin, black as to eyes, stout, elderly, and warm-hearted, was very like her brother, except that she sometimes worried. Mr. Black never did.

Finally all these good people, with a coat or sweater for each girl, with two big hampers of food from Mr. Black's home, with several baskets of picnic lunch from the other houses, were stowed away in the capacious car. Mr. Black called his automobile the "Whale," because once, for a few

weeks, it had been driven by Jonah Higginsworth, who, however, was so frequently cast forth by this modern whale, owing to dangerously reckless driving, that Mr. Black had been obliged to discharge him.

"We are seven," said Mr. Black, taking the chauffeur's seat. "I'm going to drive this car myself; they say the road's a bit rough—isn't used much. Seven's a good number."

"Eight's better," retorted Henrietta, diving into a silk bag and dragging forth a queer bundle of mottled fur.

"What's that?" demanded Mr. Black. "I didn't invite anybody like that to *my* picnic."

"Just a kitten," explained Henrietta, waving him for all to see. "I adopted him yesterday, but nobody in our house likes him, so I have to *wear* him—he's very tame."

"He looks," laughed Bettie, "just like the pudding Mabel made for me two weeks ago; purple, yellow, and white, all jumbled together—let's name him Ambrosial Delight." [15]

"No," objected Henrietta, "he's already named Anthony Fitz-Hubert."

"Because he has fits?" asked Marjory.

"He *doesn't*. Just see how calm he is."

Doctor Bennett, Doctor Tucker, Marjory's Aunty Jane, and all the mothers stood on the sidewalk to see the merry party started on its way. Henrietta's dignified little grandmother sat in her carriage.

"Don't worry if we're late," said Mr. Black, turning to this trusting assemblage and not guessing how very late he was going to be. "The other end of our road may prove a trifle heavy; the day's so fine that we're not going to hurry, anyhow. Good-by till you see us again—we'll take the very best care of all your precious girls. Good-by, good-by—"

"Just where are you going?" shrieked Aunty Jane, a moment too late.

For the picnic, kitten and all, was already spinning joyously away; and never was there a happier party. At first the inviting road was all that road should be, for constant use kept it in excellent condition. After the first two miles, however, the going was only fair, as it was necessary to proceed rather slowly because spring rains had uncovered big boulders that it seemed best to avoid. Also there were chickens—never had the Whale's way been so beset by loitering hens. When these had finally been left behind, the Whale came to a pleasant stretch of country road partly overgrown with short, fragrant grass. [16]

"If it's all like this," said Mrs. Crane, sniffing contentedly, "it won't take long to travel seventeen miles."

Unfortunately, it wasn't like that for any great distance. Soon the Whale was panting laboriously up a long, stony hill; down which a foolish little creek that had strayed from its proper bed was meandering aimlessly but with most disastrous results. It had made deep, jagged, treacherous furrows that had to be skilfully avoided; so it took considerable time to climb the damaged hill. After that, the road was sandy. [17]

The sand in northern Michigan seems sandier than any other sand. Mr. Black was certain that it was at least a mile deep along that dreadful road, skirted by a dreary stretch of small poplars. But far ahead, this dauntless man could see the beckoning green of lofty trees—he fixed hopeful eyes on that and coaxed the groaning Whale to nobler efforts. Where the sand was deepest, everybody but Bettie and Mr. Black got out and walked—or waded along the dusty roadside; and sometimes they pushed the Whale when that weary leviathan threatened to stick. At length, however, the dusty car lurched heavily into the grateful shade of a fine forest road, carpeted smoothly with pine needles and the decaying leaves of oak, maple, and elm trees, whose branches, green and lovely with spring foliage, met overhead.

"Oh," breathed Bettie, lying back luxuriously among her cushions, "isn't this just beautiful!"

"Let's go slowly," pleaded Mrs. Crane. "It's years since I've seen such woods. I declare! I'd like to stay right here." [18]

"I guess the mosquitoes 'd be glad to have you," said Mr. Black. "Are all those girls aboard? They won't need to do any walking as long as this lasts—it was *made* for the Whale!"

Unfortunately, the beautifully smooth ground stretched before them for only a few precious moments, though the forest itself grew wilder and more interesting at every turn of the wheels. After a time, the road began to dip steadily downward. Presently the Whale was sliding over clay, pushing through deep, clinging mire, splashing through puddles of stagnant water, or bumping over stretches of half-submerged corduroy.

"Peter," said Mrs. Crane, rather nervously, when her patient, elderly brother had climbed out for the fourth time to pull long ropes of tangled weeds out of the wheels, "don't you think we'd better give up and turn back? It's getting worse and worse."

"No," returned Mr. Black, "I don't. I started out to look at that land and I'm going to find it. Besides, Timothy Burbank drove over this road this spring and he says it's open all the way to [19]

Barclay's Point—my place is a mile this side of Barclay's."

"But Timothy rode in a buckboard."

"He said he guessed the Whale could make it and I've no reason to doubt his word. Anyhow, we're going on—we're so muddy now that a little more won't hurt us; and there's one comfort; there are no steep precipices on this road for us to tumble from."

It was fortunate, too, that Mr. Black carried a hatchet, because several times it became necessary to chop fallen trees—luckily they were small ones—out of the road; and once it was necessary to repair a broken bridge; but the girls, who helped with that, thoroughly enjoyed the task. Occasionally, the Whale was obliged to ford a certain small river that crossed the road an astonishing number of times. Also, with increasing frequency, Mr. Black was obliged to crawl under the car to see what was the matter with the machinery; but, on the whole, the Whale behaved surprisingly well. [20]

Presently the road which, up to that moment, had stretched mainly toward the north, turned sharply toward the east.

"Ah!" breathed Mr. Black, with a deep sigh of satisfaction. "Timothy says our place is just three miles from this turn. Does anybody want to go back *now*?"

Nobody did, so the Whale pushed on; and, wonder of wonders! For a whole delightful mile the road was good, alluringly good. The big car fairly pranced with pleasure, and all the passengers settled back comfortably against the cushions. But after that one deceiving mile! Never was there a more discouraging stretch of road—if it *were* road. Sunken boulders, slime-covered water, deep black mud, rotting corduroy, jutting logs, weed-grown swamp. The Whale's passengers were jounced and jolted, spattered and scratched. Low-growing branches slapped their faces and reached maliciously for unguarded tresses. Altogether, this final two miles of wilderness surpassed all the rest—suppose there were no bottom to that mud! Even Henrietta was too frightened for speech. [21]

Finally the Whale, with a last despairing gasp that died away to an alarming silence, refused to go a single inch farther.

"It's all out for everybody," said Mr. Black, who now looked as concerned as the others. "Something's given out—it's not surprising."

"But," objected Mrs. Crane, "how are we to get home?"

"Hush, woman," returned Mr. Black, whimsically, "folks on their way *to* a picnic don't talk about going home. Let's get there first."

"Why!" cried light-footed Marjory, who had darted ahead and back again with her news, "we're out of that swamp, anyway. This road goes right uphill and it's sandy."

"Good!" exclaimed Mr. Black. "That means that we're almost there. Come back, Marjory, and get your share of the load; everybody must carry something. Bettie, can you walk half a mile if you're helped over the rough places?" [23]

"A whole mile if I have to—I'm not tired."

"The air," remarked Jean, sniffing curiously, when the party had reached the top of the brief ascent, "smells different. My! Isn't it good! I feel it way down inside of me."

"It's the lake," explained Mr. Black. "In less than ten minutes you're going to see something."

The prediction proved true. In a very few moments the road branched, the right fork led them north, then swerved again toward the east, the forest stopped with a suddenness that was startling, and the picnic found itself in a wide, grassy clearing at the very edge of the big, blue lake. The bigness and the blueness were dazzling. The curved beach stretched like a broad golden ribbon in either direction.

"This," said Mr. Black, "is the place."

"Oh, Peter!" cried Mrs. Crane, dropping her end of the heaviest hamper. "How much of it is ours?"

"Every scrap. All that you can see." [23]

"What! Down to that rocky point?"

"Yes, and up the other way to that other rocky point—a whole mile of shore line."

"And the island off that little projection—is *that* ours?"

"Every inch of it."

"Why, Peter!"

"Fine, isn't it? We own a river, too—there's the mouth of it down the shore. What do you think of it all, Sarah?"

"Peter, it's—it's heaven!"

"And uninhabited," declared Mr. Black, supposing that he was speaking the exact truth, "except for our seven selves."

There was, however, an eighth inhabitant; and a human one at that. But for the time being no one suspected it.

CHAPTER III

A Predicament

[24]

"PETER," queried Mrs. Crane, "what time is it? I'm starved."

Mr. Black looked at his watch, at first expectantly, then ruefully.

"The thing's stopped," said he, shaking it. "I dropped it out a couple of times when I was under the Whale, and once it struck a boulder. It stopped at half-past twelve."

"An hour ago?"

"It *might* be two hours—or even three! Girls, did you bring a watch—any of you?"

"I did," said Henrietta, "but I wound it to practise by without setting it, so it's probably wrong—it usually is. It says quarter to nine!"

"It certainly *is* wrong. I *know* it's dinner time—or worse. Sarah——"

"Build a fire, Peter—there's plenty of wood on the beach. I brought a coffee pot and you'll find a box of matches in it. Jean, spread the cloth that's in one of those hampers—the ground's nice and smooth right there at your feet. You'll find wooden plates and tin cups under the cloth. Marjory, you can fish for the sugar and cream and the salad. Mabel, you—no, I'll cut the bread myself; you can pick up bits of wood for the fire."

[25]

"There are two big apple pies and some cheese in my basket," said Jean, "and—yes, a bag of cookies!"

"Here are my sandwiches," said Henrietta. "Just loads of them; and a big veal loaf—— Oh! It smells so good!"

"Aunt Jane sent a huge crock of beans and some cold ham," said Marjory, "and here's a jar of something—pickles, I guess."

"There's a box of things," said Mr. Black, "fruit, cookies, crackers, sardines, peanut butter, and a thing or two in cans still aboard the Whale, but I guess, with all this good home cooking, we won't need it just yet—anyway, I'd rather look at the lake than go after it."

"Can't I take off my shoes and wade out for the coffee water?" pleaded Mabel. "I love to wade."

"Of course you can," replied Mrs. Crane. "Here's the pail—I'll take the doughnuts out of it."

[26]

"What's this?" asked Mr. Black, holding up a flat, heavy parcel.

"A piece of bacon—I thought we might need bacon and eggs in addition to our salad—I brought a flat pan to fry them in. And here are salt and pepper."

"Well!" laughed Mr. Black, as parcel after parcel came out of the tightly packed hampers, "I guess we'll have to set up a grocery store and sell stuff to the squirrels—we can't possibly eat all this at *one* meal."

"Don't be too sure," warned Bettie. "I'm pretty hungry. Mother put in a can of cocoa and a little saucepan to cook it in—and here's a pint of milk."

"We'll make the cocoa and coffee," decided Mrs. Crane, "and eat the sandwiches and other ready-made things. We won't bother to do any other cooking; and, I must say, I'm glad we don't need to. I *never* was so hungry."

Everybody it seemed was on the verge of starvation. The Whale's passengers ate and ate and ate. Even Ambrosial Delight, the three-colored cat, drank milk as if he had always lived on the lake shore and dined from wooden plates. After dinner, every one, except Bettie, who was compelled by solicitous Mrs. Crane to curl up with the kitten under a tree for a nap, went exploring.

[27]

That was great fun, for exploring is interesting, anyway, even if you haven't anything bigger to explore than your own back yard. But when you have a whole wilderness, with a little of every kind of landscape there is dotted about, here and there; and always so unexpectedly that you don't know what you're coming to next, exploring becomes just the very jolliest pursuit there is.

In the first place, there was the large, grassy clearing where they had eaten dinner. This place was almost circular in shape and as big, Bettie said, as a whole city block. In it were a few scattered trees; but, for the greater part, it was open and almost perfectly level. On one side was the lake; the other three sides were walled in by most attractive forest.

[28]

A number of little trails led from the clearing into the woods. Each one, they found, pointed toward some definite object. One, for instance, carried them to a tiny spring of clear, gurgling water. Another led them to what was evidently a good fishing spot on the river. A third brought them to a tiny unsuspected lake, dotted with lily pads.

"This," said quick-eyed Marjory, pointing northwestward, when the explorers had returned for the third time to the sunny clearing, "is the widest trail of all."

"For my part," said Mr. Black, "I don't know why there should be any trails here at all. No one has lived here for four years. Sometimes fishermen come here in gasoline launches for a few days in the spring, or hunters for a week or two in the fall, but never in sufficient numbers to make as marked a trail as this—we must certainly investigate *this* one."

This wider trail led them for perhaps a hundred feet through a dense thicket of shrubbery; then, with a suddenness that was startling, the explorers found themselves in another clearing, about half the size of the first. In it stood a curious structure with a rounded top. It was built of bent strips of wood, covered with large sheets of rough birch bark, bound in place with willow withes, and sewed in spots with buckskin thongs. It was blackened with age and smoke. [29]

"It looks," said Henrietta, "like the top half of a big balloon. And mercy! How horrible it smells."

"What *is* it?" asked Mabel. "Is it a bear's den? Ugh! I hope Mr. Bear isn't home."

"It's a birch-bark wigwam," replied Mr. Black, "and somebody has occupied it recently. See the bed in the corner?"

Sure enough, there *was* a bed—some balsam boughs covered with a dingy blanket and some rags that had once been a quilt. On an upturned box was a burlap bag containing potatoes and a few perfectly sound onions. A deer-skin was stretched to dry against one rounded side of the wigwam and just opposite the doorway of the queer hut were a number of blackened stones, evidently a rude fireplace. Hanging against a convenient tree-trunk were some sooty and most uninviting cooking utensils; a camp kettle, a frying-pan, a lard pail or two, a big iron pot, a long-handled spoon. [30]

"It isn't a great while," said Mr. Black, frowning perplexedly, "since these things were used. But who, I'd like to know, used them?"

"Wild Indians," offered Marjory, glancing fearfully over her shoulder.

"Pirates," shuddered Mabel.

"A wild man of the jungle," suggested imaginative Henrietta.

"Perhaps you're all partly right," admitted Mr. Black. "I believe these things belong to a filthy half-breed, trapping game out of season. If *I* catch him at it, it will be some time before he has a chance to try it again. Perhaps he'll come back this afternoon. Now, girls, let's go back to the lake—this place certainly does smell 'injun-y'—there's no other smell quite like it."

"Can't we all go in wading?" demanded Mabel. "The water's pretty cold, but it's nice—makes your toes all pink." [31]

"Of course you can. There isn't any danger, because the water is shallow for a long, long distance; and the sand is as hard and clean as the very cleanest thing you can think of."

"Marble!" cried Mabel.

"Aunty Jane's house!" shouted Marjory.

"Yes," laughed Mr. Black, "even as clean as that. Now, away with you all. But keep within hearing distance. I'm going to rest awhile under this pleasant tree."

"And I," murmured Mrs. Crane, drowsily, "am going to take a nap under *this* tree—I can't stay awake a moment longer."

Presently Bettie, the kitten, and Mrs. Crane were all sound asleep; and, from Mr. Black's leafy shelter, a sound closely resembling gentle snores proved most interesting to a puzzled chipmunk, who had a pantry in that tree. The chipmunk even perched on Mr. Black's toe to listen; but the good, weary gentleman slumbered unheedingly.

Jean, Marjory, Mabel, and Henrietta were having a glorious time in the rippling blue lake. When they were tired of splashing about to scare the abundant minnows, they built wonderful castles in the sand. Mabel's were square and solid, like Mabel herself; Jean's were lofty with aspiring towers and turrets, and Henrietta's were honeycombed with fearsome dungeons. Marjory built long streets of tiny, modern, and excessively neat dwellings. [32]

After that, they discovered that the beach near the river's mouth was strewn with pebbles of every hue known to pebbles. There were agates, bits of glittering quartz and granite, and many brown, green, or yellow stones threaded prettily with a network of white. They wanted to gather them all to carry back to Bettie, but contented themselves with about a bushel—all that their four skirts would hold. But they found to their surprise that they were anchored to the ground; that it wasn't possible to rise with the heavy burden. As for carrying the glittering hoard, that was

clearly impossible, too; so they heaped their treasure on the sand and ran to look at the river where it joined the lake.

[33]

Never was there a more companionable river. At the mouth it was only a yard wide and just deep enough to cover one's ankles. A little way up, it spread out as wide as a street, but there it barely covered one's toes. Farther up, there were big, moss-covered stones and the water grew perceptibly deeper—up to one's knees. Still further, and the river grew wide and deep and darkly mysterious, where great trees cast brown and green shadows over the russet surface.

"Ugh!" shuddered Henrietta, at this point, "let's go back—I like it better where it's narrow."

"So do I," agreed Jean. "If there *were* crocodiles in this part of the country, that's where they'd live."

"Let's build a bridge across the narrowest place," proposed Marjory.

All about were stones and driftwood. The girls built a beautiful bridge and sat afterwards on the beach to admire their handiwork; but very soon the quiet water stealthily washed the sand away from the foundation stones and in a little while the river's mouth was twice as wide as it had been before the bridge, now floating lakeward, was built.

[34]

"I could stay here forever," said Henrietta, "there are so many things to do—nice, foolish things, like sand-castles, bridges that float away, and stones that look like diamonds when they're wet and like just stones when they're dry. I'd like to *live* here."

"So would I," agreed Jean.

"Wouldn't it be nice," asked Marjory, "if we *could* come here to camp?"

"We're here now," returned matter-of-fact Mabel. "Let's pretend we really *are* camping."

"Look at the lake!" exclaimed Jean, suddenly. "It isn't blue any more—it's all gray and silver."

"And all the ripples are gone," observed Henrietta. "See how flat and smooth it is and how *lazy* it is along the edges. And the sand is turning pink!"

"Hush!" warned quick-eared Marjory. "I think Mr. Black's calling us—yes, he's waving the tablecloth!"

[35]

After they had picked their way rather painfully over the bed of sharp pebbles, the barefooted girls ran gaily along the hard, smooth beach—they were surprised to find themselves so far from their foot-gear.

"Mr. Black seems excited," remarked Jean. "I wonder if anything has happened."

"Perhaps," said Henrietta, soberly, "it's time to go home."

"It *can't* be," protested Mabel. "We've only just come—anyway, it seems so."

"That," explained Jean, sagely, "is because this is the very nicest spot that ever grew."

"Hurry!" shouted Mr. Black; "don't wait to put on your shoes—just bring them along."

CHAPTER IV

A Night Out

[36]

"**J**EAN," queried Mr. Black, when the four rather disheveled youngsters had scrambled up the bank, "have you girls seen anything of a boat?"

"No," replied Jean.

"Have you been on the shore all the time?"

"Every minute."

"I didn't *see* a boat," offered Henrietta, "but about half an hour ago—or perhaps an hour—I heard something that made a noise like this: 'chug-chug, chuggity-chug, chug-chug-chuggity-chug'"—Henrietta gave a very fair imitation of a naphtha launch.

"I heard it, too," admitted Margery.

"That was the boat," said Mr. Black, scanning the forsaken lake anxiously. "It's Hillitt's fish-tug and it goes down to Lakeville at sundown every day when the weather's fair. The tug runs to Bear Bay. I expected to go home on that boat; but, unfortunately, I went to sleep and didn't wake up in time to signal her."

[37]

"She was very far out," volunteered Jean. "You couldn't have seen her from here—I looked in every direction when I heard that noise, but I couldn't see what was making it."

"*I* thought," confessed Marjory, "that it was some sort of an animal breathing queerly—I didn't exactly like it."

"Evidently," said Mr. Black, "that boat stayed a long way from shore—sound carries a great distance over water. Anyway, that eases my conscience a little. I ought not to have fallen asleep, but I didn't suspect that it was so late. You see, girls, our time is all off. Goodness only knows how long it took us to get here; and I'm sure I don't know whether it was one, two, or three when we ate our dinner. Now, what do you think that big, golden sun's doing—over there behind those trees?"

"I think," said Henrietta, eying it, sagely, "that it's either going down or coming up. And I *know* it can't be time for it to come up." [38]

"And it can't possibly be time," protested Mabel, "for it to go down."

"I fear it is," said Mr. Black. "I ought never to have taken that nap."

"Peter," demanded Mrs. Crane, suddenly joining the group, "how are we ever going to get home?"

"Sarah," replied Mr. Black, with one of his sweet, whimsical smiles, "I'm blest if I know."

"But, Peter, it's too far to walk; and the Whale——"

"But, Sarah, I fully intended to go home by boat. I was told that that boat passed here every day. Well, it has passed, hasn't it?"

"Yes," admitted Mrs. Crane, dryly, "it *passed* all right."

"When the Whale broke down," continued Mr. Black, soothingly, "I said to myself, 'Never mind, old chap, there's Hillitt's launch—we'll hail that and ride home.'"

"And when you assured us that you knew of a safe and easy way to get home, you were depending on that boat!" [39]

"Sarah, don't rebuke me. I was. But, having committed that fatal error, I'm willing to atone for it. Hi there, girls! We'll all have to work for our living for the next hour or so. You see, good people, we'll probably have to stay here all night unless somebody sees our fire on the shore. Jean, I'm going to take you and Henrietta to the Whale so you can help me rob him of his lanterns and cushions. Sarah, I want you and the girls to take this hatchet, my knife, the bread-knife, and anything else that is sharp, and cut as many balsam boughs as you can from that grove of evergreens over there—I want a whole wagon load. Bettie, you can sit here on this log and fill these two hamper-covers with chips—we'll need a lot of firewood."

Presently Mr. Black and his two companions were back with all the comforts that could be stripped from the Whale. Dropping them near the baskets of wood and the growing pile of evergreen boughs, he went down to the beach, to select several tall poles from the half-buried driftwood that past storms had heaped behind the numerous big logs framing the upper edge of the beach. [40]

Having dug holes with a sharp stick, Mr. Black planted the poles in an upright position; and the sand, fortunately, held them firmly. More poles were fastened securely across the top; luckily Jean remembered seeing a tangle of buckskin thongs hanging in the birch-bark wigwam; Mr. Black appropriated those. Along the beach were many odd lengths of lumber cast up by a long series of storms; these, too, were tied to the poles or securely braced against them; for the castaways had no nails.

The tablecloth—fortunately a generous one as to size—was fastened on top for a roof. This curious shack, when completed, was six feet wide by about seventeen feet long. Three sides were inclosed, but the fourth, the long side facing the south, was left open.

"We'll build a fire outside," said Mr. Black, "to keep our toes warm."

The entire floor space inside the shack was covered with balsam boughs. Mr. Black showed the girls how to make them stand upright like a forest of tiny trees—the twigs were about fourteen inches long. [41]

"It'll be almost like a mattress and springs," assured he, "when you have it finished. The Whale has provided three light dust-covers and three fairly heavy robes—we'll use those for bedding."

"But," objected Marjory, who was not at all sure that she was going to like the queer bed that Mr. Black was making, "we haven't any pillows."

"I guess," teased Mr. Black, "you'll have to use your shoes—campers always do."

"The woods are full of pillows," assured Bettie, who was helping with the balsam twigs. "There's running pine on the ground under the trees, a lot of nice green moss on the logs, all sorts of big, soft ferns; and whole bushels of leaves on the trees."

"That's right," commented Mr. Black. "Suppose you girls gather about seven pillows—good big ones because the stuff will pack down—off the nearest pillow-tree; and I'll see if I can't find another wide board or two." [42]

"Where," asked thoughtful Jean, "do all the pieces of lumber come from?"

"There's a sawmill at Big Bear Harbor, some fifteen miles north of here. I suppose a good many

boards get lost through careless handling. None of this is first-class lumber, however. This plank, you see, is full of knot-holes. This one is hemlock and has two long splits in it."

"I guess there's a shingle-mill somewhere, too," said Bettie. "Mabel picked up a whole basketful of pieces of brand-new shingles."

"Sarah," said Mr. Black, turning to his sister, who still seemed rather stunned at the idea of spending a night in the woods, "you'd better fix some supper for us before it gets too dark. Now that we have a house to live in, we must have regular meals."

"What's that lean-to at the side for?" asked Mrs. Crane, pointing to the row of boards that rested against one end of the shack, forming a triangular space about four feet wide by six feet long. [43]

"For me and the provisions," explained Mr. Black. "I never *did* like sleeping seven in a bed. And, in case it should rain, we must keep our food dry."

"It's lucky," said Mrs. Crane, touching a match to the neat fire that she had laid, "that we all brought more of everything to eat than we needed. And I'm glad I brought my old gray shawl; it's as warm as a blanket."

"If it turns cold," said Mr. Black, "we'll build a big fire just outside the open end of our house. But I think it's going to be a comfortably warm night— There, I've got that plank fastened at last and our palatial home is finished. And bless me! Here comes the pillow brigade with all its petticoats turned into pillow-cases; and the brigade all giggling. They're certainly a happy lot, Sarah."

"Mine's for Mr. Black," shouted Mabel.

"Mine's for Mrs. Crane," shrieked Marjory.

"And mine," said extravagant Henrietta, dropping to her knees before Bettie, and proffering her lace-trimmed burden, "is for the Lady Bettina, with the devotion of her humblest slave." [44]

"I guess," said Mr. Black, eying the roof of his house, ruefully, "that we'll have to eat without a tablecloth. Sarah, how's that supper?"

"Just about ready," said Mrs. Crane, stirring the cocoa with a long, clean stick. "The water will boil in a moment or two and Jean is cutting the bread."

The sun, red and glorious at the last, had gone down; but, while the campers, seated in a circle about the two dish-towels that Mrs. Crane had spread for a cloth, were eating their ample and delicious meal, the sky was so wonderful and the lake so marvelous with its calm surface touched lightly to burnished copper, that the castaways all but forgot that they were castaways, until Mr. Black brought them back to earth.

"There's only one thing that troubles me," said he, "and that's the mothers and grandmothers and Auntie Janes that we left in Lakeville." [45]

"Yes," agreed Mrs. Crane, pouring a second cup of cocoa for Bettie, "they're sure to worry. No matter how far we've gone in the Whale, we've always been home by bedtime."

"And I can't recall," said Mr. Black, running his fingers through his thick, iron-gray hair, "that I told a single soul exactly where I was going."

"And none of the rest of us *knew*," retorted his sister. "I've said, a great many times, that your fondness for surprising us would get us into trouble some day, and it *has*."

"But it's pretty *nice* trouble," offered Bettie, the peacemaker. "Of course all our grown-ups will worry, because grown-ups always do, anyway. But I'm sure they'll remember that you've never lost any of us yet, or starved us, or let us freeze."

"Granny will think," assured Henrietta, giggling at the thought, "that we're staying at a hotel, waiting for repairs on the Whale. She *always* thinks of hotels as a safe refuge for the homeless— she couldn't imagine a spot *without* a convenient hotel." [46]

"Well, if nothing rescues us to-night," promised Mr. Black, "I'll walk to Barclay's Point at six to-morrow morning and hail that fish-boat. It leaves Lakeville six times a week at daybreak."

Their meal ended, the castaways sat in a circle about the big driftwood fire that Mr. Black built on the beach. Even Ambrosial Delight enjoyed the unusual evening. He ran round and round the group, just at the edge of the darkness, chasing nocturnal insects or the shadows cast by the flickering firelight; and once, greatly to his own surprise and to the campers' amusement, he leaped from a jutting log into the smooth, glassy lake. After that surprising experience, he was willing to lie cuddled in Henrietta's lap.

When it became evident that nobody could stay awake any longer, Mrs. Crane tucked all her little charges—even to the kitten—away for the night.

"I'm so sleepy," yawned Mabel, "that I could sleep on cobblestones." [47]

"We'll leave a big place for you, Mrs. Crane," promised Jean, thoughtfully, "and we'll remember not to lean too hard against the walls."

"Ugh!" exclaimed Marjory, "isn't it queer without sheets!"

"This bed feels good to *me*," murmured Bettie, drowsily.

"Not a word more from anybody," said Mr. Black, who had donned his fur automobile coat and was crawling like a big shaggy bear into his triangular den. "It's time all honest people were asleep."

"I just wish," murmured Mrs. Crane, stretching herself luxuriously upon her fragrant balsam bed, "that all those mothers could see how safe and comfortable we are. They'll surely worry."

"They surely will," agreed Mr. Black, drowsily, "for it's an unheard-of thing, in Lakeville, for a picnic to stay out all night. It's a calamity, but it can't be helped."

And then, never guessing that to a certain about-to-be-shipwrecked boy their going home at the proper time would have proved a far greater calamity, the castaways closed their eyes. [48]

CHAPTER V

The Missing Whale

[49]

UNFORTUNATELY, the three mothers, Henrietta's grandmother, and Aunty Jane could not look into that queer chicken-coop of a house to see their precious chickens sleeping the sound, sweet sleep that life in the open induces.

Still, the evening was so very fine that no one was surprised because of the prolonged outing—that is, at first. But when nine o'clock came and the Whale failed to appear, Mrs. Slater, Henrietta's grandmother, telephoned to Mr. Black's unresponsive house, and then to Jean's mother, Mrs. Mapes. Mrs. Mapes obligingly ran in to ask Marjory's Aunty Jane if anything had been seen of the delayed Whale; and then both ladies scurried to the rectory to ask Doctor Tucker if *he* knew the whereabouts of the Whale—or the Whale's passengers. Of course he didn't; so he and Mrs. Tucker went with the inquiring pair to Doctor Bennett's to ask if Mabel had returned. Naturally, she hadn't, so, joined by Mabel's now mildly anxious parents, they all went—just like persons in a moving-picture show, Doctor Bennett said afterwards—to Mrs. Slater's house to ask what *she* thought about it. They found her anxiously watching the clock. [50]

Mrs. Slater promptly sent Simmons, the butler, to order her carriage, in which the entire party, somewhat crowded it is true, was speedily transported to Mr. Black's home, where they found Martin waiting in the lighted garage.

"Where," asked Doctor Bennett, "is your master?"

"Sure," returned Martin, pulling politely at a long lock of sandy hair, "that's what *I'd* like to know. 'Tis a lonely evenin' I'm spendin' without even a horse for company."

"Does his automobile ever break down?" queried Aunty Jane, a thin woman with very sharp eyes and other features to match.

"It never has, mum; but most of 'em does, sooner or later. Still, Mr. Black is always careful—he'd be likely to choose a safe spot to break down in." [51]

"He said," offered Doctor Tucker, "that he was going to look at some land of his—where is his land?"

"Sure," returned Martin, with a gesture that included the entire horizon, "he has land anywhere you'd want to look—he owns a pile of rale estate, they say. When annybody wants a little money, he just sells his land, back taxes and all, to that aisy-going man. *He* don't know where his land is; it's iv'rywhere. But wheriver he's gone he can't starve, for Mrs. Crane and Bridget cooked all day yesterday; and he can't freeze because there's three big robes and a fur coat."

"But what can be keeping him?" asked Mrs. Tucker. "He knows that Bettie ought to be in bed by nine."

"Most like it's a busted tire—'tis time wan was givin' out. If he wasn't smart enough to put the new one on—and belike he isn't, him not bein' used to the job—why, there he is, laid out in the road."

"But all our girls are with him," protested Mrs. Bennett. "There's seven in the party. Our five children—"

"The more the merrier," consoled Martin, comfortably. "Even if two or three was spilled overboard, there'd be four left to spread the tale. Depind on it, ladies—and your Riverince—they're safe somewhere, or we'd hear the bad news. That's the kind that travels fastest."

"I think Martin is right," agreed Doctor Tucker, mildly. "I'm quite sure that they're all safe, *somewhere*; at some farm, perhaps, where there's no telephone. Even if those girls were alone they'd manage to make themselves comfortable somehow—just remember what they did to Dandelion Cottage." [52]

"They're smart enough," agreed Mrs. Mapes, "and they are all resourceful. And Mrs. Crane is with them. If they haven't all plunged over some embankment——"

"Not Mr. Black, mum," assured Martin. "He's that careful and slow that I'm ashamed to be seen ridin' with him. Why, mum, whin I'm in the Whale I feel just like a baby in a go-cart." [53]

Their fears somewhat allayed by optimistic Martin, the parents and guardians of the castaways, after waiting hopefully until midnight, finally dispersed and went to bed, for there was really nothing else to do; but the passengers of the missing Whale spent a far happier and more peaceful night than did their anxious relatives; for the castaways, at least, knew that they were alive and unharmed.

The morning sun was shining brightly when Ambrosial Delight, who had escaped at dawn, chased a frightened chipmunk into Mr. Black's triangular den and roused that recumbent gentleman from the soundest sleep he had had in years.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed the surprised man, sitting up under his bias roof, "the stars were shining when I looked out last! It must be seven or eight o'clock. Hi there, Sarah! Jean! Girls! Has that fish-boat gone up the lake?"

"Yes, yes, Bridget," murmured Mrs. Crane, sleepily. "We'll have creamed shrimps and——" [54]

"Sarah!" shouted Mr. Black, "wake up! You've made me miss that boat again."

So Mrs. Crane woke up, and presently the girls, with sleepy eyes and tousled heads, crawled out, one by one, to blink in the dazzling sunshine.

"Run down to the lake," advised Mr. Black, "and wash your faces—that'll wake you up."

So the girls waded out and washed in the finest basin in the world, made friends with a courageous squirrel who was also bathing his face, and combed their tangled locks with Henrietta's side-combs.

"If you hadn't brought these," observed Jean, "we'd have been in a fine fix."

"Anyhow," giggled Marjory, wiggling her pink toes, delightedly, "there's water enough."

"Bettie," cried Mrs. Crane, from the bank, "come out of that lake! You're a sick girl——"

"I'm not, either," contradicted Bettie, indignantly. "I feel just fine."

"I'm glad to hear it," returned motherly Mrs. Crane, "but I don't want you to take any risks. You've been in long enough." [55]

"All right," agreed Bettie, regretfully. "I'll come out, just to be good, but I don't want to one bit."

"Isn't this just heaven!" breathed Jean, ecstatically, extending her arms as if she would embrace the whole beautiful universe. "Look at that water—pearl-gray, with pink and gold sparkles all spangled over the top! It's a different color every time you look at it. I love it."

"So do I," said Bettie, from the beach. "I wish I were a fish and could *live* in it."

"But then," objected Henrietta, "you couldn't *see* it—I'd rather be a sea-gull."

"She's making puns," groaned Marjory. "Hurry up with that comb, Mabel; it's my turn next."

"Hi there!" called Mr. Black; "who's setting the table for breakfast?"

As the tablecloth was still serving as a roof, Mr. Black found a couple of clean boards that served very nicely in its stead. This was not difficult, since all the driftwood was most beautifully clean. So, too, was the sand. Even the soil under the trees, being free from clay, was clean, dry, and pleasant. One could sit on the ground without fear of dampness, dirt, or snakes. It was *pleasant* ground. [56]

"This place," said Mrs. Crane, who was boiling the coffee water, "is absolutely dust-proof, I believe. I'd like to live here all the time, if only to breathe this air."

"Let's stay," pleaded Bettie. "I don't want to go home."

"Neither do I," said Mabel.

"Nor I," said Henrietta.

"Nor I," echoed Marjory, who had finally succeeded in braiding her long, fair hair.

"I guess," said Mr. Black, "we'll *have* to stay for awhile, whether we want to or not. But, if we don't turn up to-day, they'll begin to hunt for us."

"Oh," groaned Henrietta, "I *hope* not."

"Peter," said Mrs. Crane, "we didn't meet a single soul on that road after we took the turn-off just out of Lakeville." [57]

"I don't wonder," returned Mr. Black. "Nobody that could possibly travel by any other road would ever think of taking that one. I suspect that it hasn't been used very much since Randall

stopped lumbering at Barclay's Point, six years ago. But, never fear, they'll find us all right—we're only seventeen miles from Lakeville."

"But *such* miles," breathed Mrs. Crane. "Nobody 'd think of trying that road—they'd think we had more sense."

"Perhaps we should have had—perhaps I ought to have doubted Timothy. Anyway, we left tracks. If they look for us at all thoroughly, they'll surely find those."

"That Timothy man," suggested Jean. "Wouldn't *he* know?"

"Ye—es," admitted Mr. Black, "but when I asked him about that road he was just boarding a train for Boston. But don't worry. We're not half as lost as we might be. In fact, *we* know exactly where we are."

The castaways had barely finished breakfast when sharp-eyed Marjory spied a small, dark object on the water, not far from Barclay's Point. [58]

"That wasn't there yesterday," said she, pointing it out to the others.

"It's moving!" cried Jean.

"Perhaps it's more driftwood for our house," suggested Bettie.

"Or a bear coming to eat us," offered Mabel.

"It's long and slim with a bump at one end," explained Marjory. "Something like a dead tree with one branch sticking up. Just a log, perhaps, but——"

"Anyway," interrupted Jean, "it's coming this way and coming *fast*."

CHAPTER VI

The Coming of Dave

THE castaways, forgetting that there were dishes to be washed, stood in an eager row on the bank above the beach. The floating object continued to approach. Soon they could see why it moved; the blade of a broad paddle gleamed in the sunlight.

"It's a boat!" cried Marjory.

"A canoe," announced Mr. Black. "See, one end is low, the other fairly out of the water. Let's stand behind these bushes, girls—the shack is so far back that the man in the canoe won't notice it if he doesn't see the tablecloth. I'll take it down, I guess. You see, there's just a chance that that fellow might not land if he saw people here—and we need him in our business. We'll be quiet, too. He seems to be making for this little bay."

The boat and its occupant were an even shade of dark brown, but the paddle gleamed golden in the sunshine. The canoe, skilfully propelled by a practised hand, shot rapidly toward the strip of sand at the very feet of the almost breathless watchers and, in a very few seconds more, was safely beached. A snarling, stealthy dog leaped ashore and began to sniff suspiciously at the sand; but his owner, fortunately, paid no attention to him. The paddler proved to be an Indian half-breed, bareheaded and clad only in shirt and trousers. His clothes were old and greasy, his bare brown feet far from clean. He flung from the canoe a fish-net, two dead muskrats, and, although it was out of season, a small saddle of venison. He spread the net on the sand to dry, threw the venison upon his shoulder, and climbed the bank. [60]

Mr. Black, stepping from the sheltering bush, met him when he reached the top.

"Good-morning," said he.

The startled Indian almost dropped his burden.

"Goo'-morn'," he grunted, surlily.

"Why!" exclaimed Mr. Black, closely scrutinizing the half-breed's not very prepossessing countenance, "I think I've met you before. You're Dave Gurneau, the man I bought this land from." [61]

"Yass, I guess, mebbe-so," returned Dave. "You ol' Pete Black, I t'ank so?"

"Yes," admitted the gentleman, "I'm old Pete Black. But what are *you* doing here? I thought I bought this land with the understanding that you were to vacate it—leave it—get off of it? How long have you lived here?"

The culprit wriggled his toes in the sand.

"Ever since Ah'm sell heem," returned Dave, whose small black eyes were shifty.

"Well!" gasped Mr. Black, "that's nerve for you—stayed right here, did you?"

"Yass, Ah'm stay hon dose plass. Me, I must sell dese lan' to you so I can buy proveesion enough for leeve hon heem—som' leetle onion, som' patate, som' flour—"

"You—you sold me the land so you could live on it!"

"Yass—Ah'm got to buy proveesion sometam'. You good, easy man, Ah'm tole."

"He means easy mark," breathed Mrs. Crane.

[62]

"Well, I'll be—switched," declared Mr. Black, endeavoring to frown at guilty Dave; but, meeting Bettie's dancing eyes, he laughed instead.

"Dave," said he, "you're an unprecedented rascal. You've caught my fish, picked my berries, killed my game; but I'll forgive you if you'll do an errand for me. Do you think you could walk to Lakeville?"

"Sure t'ing," replied Dave, whose shifty eyes had traveled speculatively from one to another of the group. "Ah'm walk dere plantee tam'. Got to sleep two-t'ree hour, den go."

"Very well," returned Mr. Black; "I'd *rather* you'd start at once, but if you need sleep, you'd better get it now than on the way. I'll write Saunders (Saunders was Mr. Black's trusted secretary) to send a launch or a wagon for us and horses for the automobile."

"Peter," queried Mrs. Crane, wistfully, "do we *have* to go home? You know we talked of coming here to camp, anyway. Now that we're here, why can't we stay? I suppose it's a crazy scheme; but that road is too rough to travel over very often, and you know I never did like the water—I'm always seasick. Saunders could send us all the things we need—tents and everything else. And all the parents would be willing—they were all in favor of a camping trip *sometime*. We'd write and explain—"

[63]

"Oh, *do* stay," cried Jean.

"Oh, *do*," implored Bettie, flinging her arms about Mr. Black's neck.

"*Please do*," begged Henrietta, impulsively seizing a hand.

"Oh, do, do, *do*," shrieked Marjory, seizing the other hand.

"I'll wash all the dishes," promised Mabel, throwing her arms about Mr. Black's stout waist, "and everybody knows that that's a job I hate."

"I'll get fat," promised Bettie.

Now, Mr. Black was ever a warm-hearted and obliging man, with a wonderful love for children in general—his own little dark-eyed daughter had died in infancy—and for Bettie in particular. Even if the plan did seem a bit wild and venturesome (and Mr. Black himself was something of an adventurer, in the best sense of that word), it was not easy to say no with all those clinging arms about him, those eager, pleading young faces upturned expectantly to his. Moreover, few persons, Mr. Black least of all, were able to resist the appeal in Bettie's big, black, always rather pathetic eyes. And already, best argument of all, the slender little maid seemed to be improving under these new conditions.

[64]

"Well," capitulated Mr. Black, "it will take Dave some hours to get to Lakeville, and it may take considerable time for Saunders to find a boat or horses to come up here—we'll have to leave all that part of it to his discretion. It may be to-morrow morning before we are rescued. Now, I'll agree to this. We'll send him a list of everything we need. If we are still desirous of staying when the things come, and if there's nothing in my mail to call me to town, we'll stay. If we're tired of it, we'll just cart the stuff home again. We'll each make out a list—"

[65]

"On what, I'd like to know?" interrupted Mrs. Crane. "I've used all the wrapping paper to start fires."

Mr. Black, shaking off the clinging children, searched in the pockets of his clothes.

"Nothing doing," said he. "The only scrap of paper I can spare is already covered with memoranda."

Dave, who had been silently waiting, laughed appreciatively. It was an unexpectedly pleasant sound, too; for the half-breed's voice was soft and deep.

"Lots of paper on top of som' tree," he said. "Ah br-r-reeng som'."

"I can see leaves," laughed Henrietta, squinting upward, "but no pages."

"He means birch bark," explained quick-witted Marjory. "See, he's cutting big squares of it."

When the squares were peeled into many thin sheets (the girls thought that great sport) Mr. Black distributed them among the other castaways.

[66]

"Here are two pencils," said he. "I'll use my fountain pen."

"And I always have pencils in my bag," said Mrs. Crane. "I'll tend to the provisions, Peter, if you'll look out for the other things. Be sure, girls, to ask for extra shoes and stockings; you'll need those and something warm to sleep in."

Noting that one more pencil was needed, Dave began to fumble in an apparently bottomless pocket. From the depths he finally produced a grimy, greasy stub, which he offered to pencil-less Marjory.

But Marjory, fastidious little maid that she was, drew back from it, loathingly, and declined.

Gentle-mannered Jean, promptly surmising that Dave's feelings might be hurt, handed her own clean, long pencil to Marjory and accepted Dave's offering, with a sweet-voiced "thank you."

From that moment, Dave was Jean's abject slave; and, if the proofs of his devotion were not always welcome, they at least proved numerous. [67]

CHAPTER VII

Delivered by Dave

[68]

BY this time, of course, the mothers, Aunty Jane, the solitary grandmother, and even the fathers, were decidedly alarmed; for morning disclosed the disquieting fact that the Whale was still missing.

Mrs. Slater thought that somebody ought to call up the police; Mrs. Tucker suggested sending the militia forth on horseback to scour the surrounding country. Aunty Jane advised ringing the fire bell.

"All nonsense," blustered Doctor Bennett, more worried than he was willing to admit; but, since all the alarmed ladies, singly and collectively, had appealed to him for advice, it was necessary of course to appear as unconcerned as possible. "All nonsense, I say. If Mr. Black has had an accident with his car he probably doesn't care to have the fact advertised. Nor do we want the whole town worrying about our children. Be reasonable. There isn't a road in the country that crosses a railroad track; there isn't an inch of road anywhere about that skirts any dangerous declivity. The Whale *might* get stuck in some swamp or stalled in the sand or lose a tire or run short of gasoline. In any of those cases, they'd take refuge *somewhere*, while waiting for repairs. Folks with automobiles often get held up for a night. There's just one thing for us to do. That is, to wait. Go home, everybody, and *wait*." [69]

So, only partly relieved of their fears, though frequently upheld by encouraging Doctor Bennett, these good people waited throughout the long, dreary day.

To return to the castaways, it required nearly every minute of the two hours that Dave spent in slumber to prepare those lists and various letters, for they all needed a great deal of revising.

Henrietta's was the last note to be finished, because that ingenious maid added a miraculous number of postscripts. All the other missives were tied together with a stout string; when Henrietta, who had seized hers at the last moment to add a request for marshmallows, discovered that Dave, with the large packet inside his shirt, was already making for the path out of the clearing. [70]

Henrietta flew after him with the note, which was addressed very clearly to Mrs. Slater. Dave laughed, thrust the note lightly into the pocket of his shirt, and vanished—Dave had a curious way of melting, with surprising suddenness, from one's sight.

"He'll lose that," declared Henrietta, returning to the group sheltered under a big pine tree—the June sun was bright in the clearing. "I wish it were tied up with the others."

It was fortunate, however, that it was not; for the Indian proved an erratic postman.

It took Dave less time than Mr. Black had supposed it would to reach Lakeville—and a Lakeville friend, dwelling on the outskirts of the town. This hospitable friend considered it necessary to refresh his visitor with the contents of a large, flat bottle. [71]

Now, Dave was very easily affected by strong drink. After he had parted from his generous host, he remembered hazily that he had something to deliver to somebody—he cherished a dim recollection of a flying, girlish figure, a bright, youthful countenance, and a letter. That was it, a letter. He groped in his trousers pockets. Nothing there. In his loose belt. Nothing there. In the pocket of his dingy shirt. Yes, there it was.

Clutching it firmly, the staggering Indian searched the sky above him with bleared but inquiring eyes.

"What ye lookin' for?" asked Pat Mulligan, the policeman.

"Pos'—pos' office," replied Dave, with a wide, friendly smile. "Let—letters s'mail."

"Give it here," said Pat, "I'm goin' right there myself."

With that, he escorted trusting Dave to the village lockup. This safely accomplished, he studied

the address on the birch-bark note.

"Sure," observed Pat, "there's no stamp on this. 'Twas plainly meant to be delivered by hand. On the Avenoo, is it? I'm knowin' the house—I'll take it there." [72]

Which the good-natured officer did, to the great relief of Mrs. Slater, who, in spite of Doctor Bennett's assurances, was almost wild, by this time, with anxiety.

"Dear Granny," extravagant Henrietta had written. "I'm a wild Indian in the loveliest woods in the world. We're all safe and comfortable and we're going to stay *forever*, so send me a nightie and a toothbrush, some stockings, my tennis shoes, my oldest dress, some underwear; and, if you love me, a clean towel—a fuzzy one. Affectionately, Henrietta.

"P.S.—I'd like a pillow-case, *if* you please. And a sheet.

"P.S.—Oh, yes—I need my hairbrush and my bathing suit.

"P.S.—And a lot of things to eat; bread, pie, cake, cookies, fruit, and fish-hooks.

"P.S.—Please can I have a red bandanna handkerchief and a button to sew on my petticoat. Also, a pair of shoe strings. [73]

"P.S.—Peanuts and everything else you can think of to eat and wear.

"P.S.—Please send the bundle to Mr. Black's office to Mr. Saunders.

"P.S.—A can of condensed milk for Anthony Fitz-Hubert, if they *do* call the poor dear 'Ambrosial Delight.'

"P.S.—A whole bushel of marshmallows for *me*. I love you."

Mrs. Slater, a bright old lady with sparkling black eyes, not unlike Henrietta's own, read this letter with very evident enjoyment. Then she went to the telephone.

"Is this Doctor Tucker?" she asked. "Have you heard from Bettie? Oh, haven't you? Well, I have—that is, from Henrietta. They are safe and comfortable; and, I should judge from Henrietta's note, uproariously happy. If you'll call up the Bennetts and Marjory's Aunt Jane, I'll tell Mrs. Mapes. Then I'll drive round, presently, and let you see the note—no, she didn't mention the Whale—I fancy your girls will want as many things as Henrietta does. Don't forget to tell the others—good-by." [74]

This, of course, relieved the anxious minds of the parents; and Doctor Bennett was thoughtful enough to inform Martin that the party was safe.

At ten o'clock the next morning, Dave was given an opportunity to appear before Judge Wilson and tell his story. The delayed notes came to light, and by noon were properly distributed, whereupon there was a grand scurrying in several households; and in Mr. Black's office as well.

"What," asked puzzled Mrs. Bennett, running into Mrs. Tucker's conveniently near house, "did Bettie ask for? This is every word Mabel wrote."

Mrs. Bennett drew a scrap of bark from her blouse. Mrs. Tucker laughed when she read it.

"Dear Mother:" wrote Mabel. "Please send about a thousand bananas. We are going to stay here."

All around this was an elaborate border of drawings—attempts at squirrels. Mabel had left no room for further writing. [75]

"I hope," Mrs. Tucker said, eying the drawings, apprehensively, "that that place isn't infested with rats."

"They're *rabbits*," explained Mrs. Bennett, with conviction. "Mabel has quite a talent for drawing. But I wish she'd *written* a little more."

"She probably needs all the articles that Bettie asks for," said Mrs. Tucker. "Bettie says she's feeling fine. I suppose they found an empty farmhouse and took possession of it."

"Yes," agreed Mrs. Bennett, "I can just *see* them moving into those empty rooms and making them as homelike as possible."

It was a good thing, perhaps, that Mrs. Bennett *couldn't* see the house that her daughter was living in; for it certainly wasn't much of a house, even with the extra touches that Mr. Black was adding at that very moment. But of course it was better than none. The good lady, re-enforced by Bettie's really useful list, went home to hunt up as many as she could locate of Mabel's scattered belongings; for Mabel, ever the untidiest of mortals, kept her wardrobe in the unlikeliest of places. [76]

Poor Mr. Saunders certainly had his hands full collecting all the things for which Mr. Black and his good sister had asked—these hospitable souls were bent on providing their guests with every possible comfort. It was not easy, either, to find a boatman willing or able to go so far—the distance was greater by water than by land.

When all else was packed in Captain Berry's gasoline launch, Mr. Saunders paid Dave's fine

and secured his release from the jail, for Mr. Black had written that Dave was to ride with the motley cargo. This cargo was all aboard, even to Mabel's bananas, but it was the morning of the following day before the boat was able to start, because Captain Berry, the launch-man, had discovered at dusk that his gasoline barrel was empty. By that time Dave was missing. But dauntless Mr. Saunders employed Mulligan, the policeman, to find him; and Dave, very much the worse for the liquid portion of his breakfast, was finally loaded, with his snarling dog, aboard the launch. Dave, it was only too plainly evident, was unable to resist the temptations of town life.

[77]

At last, however, to the great relief of Mr. Saunders, the launch was started on its way. "I feel," said the weary bachelor, turning away from the wharf, "just like the father of a whole orphan asylum."

CHAPTER VIII

The Pangs of Hunger

[78]

BY this time, the castaways were on the brink of starvation. They had feasted all the first day, and, with the prospect of more provisions coming, had eaten all they could hold on the second; that was no small amount, for the fresh air had quickened all their appetites. On the third they ate about all there was left for breakfast.

"We might as well," said Mrs. Crane, "for the boat or the wagon will surely be here by noon, or, at worst, by night."

But, thanks to unreliable Dave, the castaways' calculations were all wrong. Not a crumb arrived that day. For their noon meal, they drank some very weak cocoa, some broken crackers, and some crusts that Mabel had left at breakfast time. Mabel always left her crusts; though now that she had nothing else to eat, they tasted, as Mabel said, almost as good as cake.

"This won't do," said Mr. Black, putting his share of the fragments on Bettie's wooden plate. "I'm going to rob that Indian's wigwam and we'll have a real meal just as soon as we can cook it."

[79]

"If we were toads," offered Mabel, disconsolately eying her empty plate, "we could eat toadstools. I saw a lot of awfully queer ones along the road that leads to Barclay's Point."

"Toadstools?" questioned Mr. Black, pausing in his flight. "What were they like?"

"Very pointed at the top," returned Mabel. "Some of them were shaped just like big, smooth eggs and some were spread out flat like a parasol."

"What color were they?"

"Gray—sort of silvery. One of the big ones was all wet on the edges with shoeblacking—all drippy."

"Inky mushrooms!" exclaimed Mr. Black and Mrs. Crane, in one breath.

"Sarah," continued Mr. Black, "you go with Mabel and look at those 'toadstools' while I burglarize Dave's wigwam. Then we'll have a meal even if it doesn't happen to be mealtime."

[80]

"I guess," mourned Bettie, "we fed too many scraps to the squirrels."

The toadstools proved to be a very fine variety of "inky" mushrooms (long afterwards Jean learned that the proper name for this mushroom was *coprinus atramentarius*). They grew in generous clusters and it was great fun to gather the queer, slippery objects and pack them carefully in Mrs. Crane's basket, which was soon filled. Mr. Black returned with a number of potatoes, a saucepan, part of the Indian's venison, some salt, and a little flour.

"That," explained Mr. Black, "is to thicken the gravy. Here, Jean, hand me that frying-pan for my venison cutlets. Marjory, you may run to the beach with these potatoes and wash them. Take this saucepan with you and scour that, too—use sand. I'll build a good fire and get a pail of water. Here come the mushroom gatherers. What luck, Sarah? Phew! You *have* made a haul!"

"Are they really good to eat?" queried Bettie, distrustfully.

[81]

"One of the very best kinds that grow."

"And you're sure that these are that kind?"

"Perfectly sure. Sarah and I used to gather them when we were children, didn't we, Sarah? I'm glad there's a tiny corner of butter left to fry them in."

By the middle of the afternoon, this curiously acquired meal was ready; and, although the potatoes were plain boiled with their jackets on and the gravy was pretty lumpy, it all tasted very good indeed to the hungry castaways.

"I guess," said Mabel, taking most of the credit for the mushrooms to herself, "that I just about saved your lives."

"Or poisoned us," remarked Marjory, who wasn't quite sure that she liked mushrooms. "I'm

glad, anyway, that we've enough meat and potatoes and gravy left for another meal."

"That venison," said Mr. Black, beaming at his satisfied family, "was certainly good."

"Mr. Black," queried Henrietta, her black eyes twinkling saucily, "didn't I hear you say that you were going to have Dave arrested for getting game out of season? What happens to people that *eat* it out of season?" [82]

"They get arrested, imprisoned, and fined," said Mr. Black, "provided the game warden catches them. I'm glad you asked that question, Henrietta. Girls, you are not to mention this venison in town or to any chance visitor that may come this way. And don't point out that wigwam to any stranger—there are too many evidences of Dave's crimes about the place. Besides, they're on my property—they *might* hold me responsible."

"Particularly if they caught you with the bones on your plate," remarked Mrs. Crane, dryly. "And, in any case, you stole that venison."

"Dave owes me a lot more than this for rent," returned Mr. Black. "But we won't have to break any game laws if Saunders sends the fishing tackle I ordered. There are three good meals a day swimming about in our own river."

"What," asked Bettie, "is that net for—the one that Dave left on the beach? Why can't you fish with that?" [83]

"By Jove!" exclaimed Mr. Black, "that *is* fishing tackle. But that's against the law, too. It's to stretch across the river for trout; but that form of sport isn't permitted. Still——"

"Peter, you *wouldn't!*" protested Mrs. Crane.

"Sarah, I *would*—if it were necessary to keep us from hunger. But if I ever do—girls, *whatever* I do, you must remember about that game warden."

"We will," promised Henrietta.

"We will," chorused the others.

And when the time came, they did; but you shall hear about that after awhile.

The castaways were up bright and early the next morning. For one thing the mosquitoes troubled them; hitherto the light breeze blowing across their camp ground had kept these pests away; but the night had been unusually still and the tantalizing insects had discovered the sleeping campers. For another thing, everybody wanted to be up and as much dressed as possible when the boat or the wagon should come. This uncertainty as to whether relief would arrive by land or approach by water added very considerably to the excitement. It wasn't possible for the girls to do much of anything except to run by turns to the spot whence one could look down the road and to that other spot from which one could view the lake. Unfortunately there was no one spot that commanded both these avenues of approach. [84]

Just at noon, a shrill screech from Marjory, prancing precariously on the edge of the bank, announced that relief was in sight.

"A ship—a ship!" shrieked keen-sighted Marjory.

"Where away?" demanded Mr. Black.

"There she blows!" quoted Marjory, employing the only other nautical term she could call to mind and pointing with an extended forefinger.

"That's not a whale—that's a boat," scoffed Henrietta, who had traveled. "It's whales that blow."

"I don't care," returned Marjory. "And boats do too, when they have whistles. Anyhow, I saw it first—— Look out, Mabel!" [85]

But the frail edge of the bank had already crumbled under weighty Mabel, who, unexpectedly, shot downward to the beach. No harm was done, however, for the sand was clean and soft.

"Mabel," laughed Mr. Black, "you'll have my whole hundred-and-twenty acres in the lake if you don't stop tumbling off the edge of my property. This isn't the first time you've taken a large slice off the landscape."

"It's about the ninth," admitted Mabel, scrambling back to the grassy top. "I'm always forgetting how easily it breaks away."

"That's because it sticks out a little over the top," explained sage Jean. "In very stormy weather the waves wash against the bank and scoop it out."

"I suppose that *is* our boat," said Mr. Black, rubbing his chin, "and I hope my razor's on it—I must look like a pirate by this time, or a tramp."

Coatless Mr. Black, without his daily shave and with his broken suspenders mended with odd bits of twine, certainly did look rather unlike his usually neat self. [86]

"That boat isn't coming very fast," complained Marjory.

"It's a very clear day," explained Mrs. Crane, "so you can see a long distance. That boat is probably several miles away."

In spite of their impatience, the boat remained several miles away for a long, long time.

"If that *is* a boat," said Mr. Black, "it's the very slowest one on Lake Superior."

"Perhaps," suggested Jean, "it's going the other way."

But the boat was neither going nor coming. The engine had balked; and Captain Berry, for it really *was* Captain Berry, was waiting, as he had often waited before, for his defective electrical apparatus to get good and ready to work.

CHAPTER IX

An Exciting Afternoon

[87]

IT was three o'clock before the speck on the water began to show signs of life.

"Hurrah!" cried Bettie, who spent much time lying on her stomach on the beach with her heels in the air, since she was not permitted to use them recklessly for walking purposes. "I hear something 'chugging.' Listen, everybody."

"I do believe it's really coming," announced Marjory, who was perched on a fallen pine tree, whose upturned root rested edgewise on the bank while its trunk, firmly upheld by the stout stubs of its broken branches, extended far out over the shallow water. Light-footed Marjory delighted in running the length of that log, or in perching at its outer end. Henrietta enjoyed it, too. Sometimes all the girls sat on it in a giggling row, with their feet dangling over the water.

"Yes," said Mr. Black, rolling up his sleeves (there would be plenty of work for all hands when the boat should arrive), "that craft is certainly headed this way."

[88]

"By the way," said Mr. Black, with a comprehensive glance that swept the entire group, "how many of you would like to go home when that boat goes back?"

"Not I," cried Bettie.

"Not I," echoed Jean.

"Nor I," said Marjory.

"I'm going to stay forever," declared Henrietta.

"As for me," said Mabel, "I feel as if I'd only just got here!"

"You don't look it," said Henrietta; "there's a suspiciously dark ring about your neck, your wrists are black, and you're fairly bursting out between your buttons."

"Well," retorted Mabel, "there isn't much use in taking a bath when you haven't any soap or towels or clean clothes. You just wait till my—gracious!"

"What's the matter?" asked Jean; for over Mabel's plump and not over-clean countenance had spread a look of blank dismay.

[89]

"I never asked for a thing but bananas," groaned the youngest member of Mr. Black's flock.

"You can string the skins and wear those," suggested Henrietta, wickedly, for she delighted in teasing Mabel. "You've seen pictures of Fiji Islanders, haven't you? Well, no doubt you'll come to that."

"Never mind," soothed Jean, the peacemaker. "Mother always sends a lot more of everything than anybody needs; so perhaps I'll be able to lend you a thing or two. I'd do anything to stay."

"How is it with you, Sarah?" asked Mr. Black. "Do *you* want to go home?"

"Peter," replied Mrs. Crane, "this *is* home."

"I'm beginning to think," said Mr. Black, "that we were all born wild Indians. I don't want to go home myself; and I hope that Saunders won't send any news that will make me feel that I ought to. How about you, Ambrosial Delight? Do *you* like the woods, little cat?"

[90]

The frisky kitten, always responsive to attention, scrambled up Mr. Black's leg, leaped to his broad shoulder, and began running in a circle round and round Mr. Black's neck.

"He says," interpreted Henrietta, "that he wouldn't go home for the best cow's milk in the country."

At last the boat, headed straight for the shore, was so near that the campers could see that every available inch of the craft was filled with boxes, bundles, and baskets. The excited little girls pranced so recklessly on the edge of the bank that a lot more of it crumbled and rolled to the beach, a youngster or two with it. Mabel, anxious to obtain a closer view of the boat's cargo,

as Captain Berry dropped anchor, rushed recklessly toward the end of the long, prostrate pine.

"Oh!" shrieked Marjory, "you're shaking the whole log! Oh! Oh! Don't touch *me*!"

But Marjory's admonition came too late. Plump, clumsy Mabel, feeling the need of some other support than the log afforded, flung her arms about her slender comrade. There was another alarmed shriek from Marjory, two wildly scrambling figures clutching at empty air—and a prodigious splash. The water at this point was just knee deep; enough of it, fortunately, to break the girls' fall and not enough to drown them.

[91]

Dave and his dog plunged overboard from the launch and waded rapidly to the rescue. That is, Dave waded and Onota swam. Mr. Black, too, waded hurriedly to the spot where Mabel, on all-fours, was endeavoring to stand upright and where Marjory was thrashing about like a frenzied trout.

Dave seized one, Mr. Black the other, and, in another moment the girls were safe on their feet, gasping, sputtering, and trying to wipe their wet faces on their wetter skirts.

"It's a good thing," said Mr. Black, leading his half of the rescued victims ashore, "that your dry clothes are in sight."

"I only hope they are," breathed Mabel. "I didn't *ask* for any."

As there was no dock, the launch could not be taken very close to shore, so her cargo was carefully unloaded by Captain Berry into one of the three small boats that he was towing. Dave, already so wet that a little more moisture did not matter, pushed this smaller craft ashore. The boat's nose was drawn up on a strip of wet sand, perhaps three feet across. Next to this came about twenty feet of dry, white sand. After that a sand bank eight feet high led by a steep path to the grassy plateau above.

[92]

"All hands unload," shouted Mr. Black, seizing some of the lighter parcels and tossing them up to Mrs. Crane, who carried them back a few yards from the edge and piled them under a tree. The girls grabbed baskets and bundles, too, and scrambled up the steep bank with them and scurried down again for more. Mabel and Marjory worked also, which was better than sitting still in wet clothes; and Dave, Captain Berry, and Mr. Black toiled up the bank with the heavier articles. When the first boat load was cared for, the little craft was rowed back to the launch for another cargo—it made four trips.

[93]

Two of the small boats that Captain Berry had towed behind the launch were pulled high on the beach, with oars and oar-locks laid carefully inside. The girls were delighted when they learned that they were to be left at the camp.

Some of the baskets and bundles were addressed to the little girls and you may be certain that it wasn't long before those eager children had the wrappings torn from their many parcels.

"Hey!" shrieked Mabel, prancing heavily on one foot and waving aloft a pair of stockings and a freshly laundered petticoat, "they *did* send my clothes, and my bananas, too. Now I can dress up."

Everybody laughed, because, if ever a human being looked in need of clean garments, Mabel did. Her tumble into the lake, followed by sundry other tumbles up and down the sand bank, had certainly not improved the appearance of Mabel's pink gingham frock.

"I've two clean dresses, too," added Mabel, after another excursion into her basket, "and a cake of soap."

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At sight of the soap, the girls fairly shrieked with mirth.

"For goodness' sake," advised Marjory, "go use it."

Mr. Black found the hammer he had sent for (fortunately Saunders had marked the outside of all the parcels that he had packed, so that one could be reasonably certain as to the nature of the contents) and knocked the covers off all the boxes in order to ascertain if everything he had ordered had been sent. When he and Mrs. Crane were satisfied as to this matter, they told Captain Berry that everything was all right.

"But," suggested Mrs. Crane, "hadn't he better come back in about a week to see if we need anything? And there's the Whale——"

"We can send Dave to town again if we find we need provisions. And Saunders writes that he couldn't tell from Dave's directions how to reach us with horses and would await further orders concerning the car. Now that I have tools I can build a temporary shelter over the Whale."

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"I'll have to be starting homeward pretty soon," said Captain Berry, who had been casting anxious glances at the sky. "Those clouds are traveling pretty fast and there's considerable ripple on the water. There'll be something doing before morning."

"Rain?" asked Mrs. Crane, anxiously.

"Wind," said the Captain, "but there may be rain, too."

"If that's the case, we'd better get those tents up at once," said Mr. Black, "and then we shan't care if it does rain. We have five tents and plenty of blankets."

"Well," offered Captain Berry, "if you've five tents to put up, I guess I'd better help you; but you mustn't keep me too long."

Fortunately, poles and stakes came with the tents and the ground in the grassy clearing was level. Soon, with valuable assistance from Dave, a large octagonal tent of gaily striped canvas was in place.

"This," said Mr. Black, viewing it with satisfaction, "is our dining-room."

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Next, the three men hurriedly put up a large, straight-walled sleeping tent that looked very clean and new.

"This," said Mr. Black, wiping the perspiration from his brow, "is for you five girls—you'll have room for your bed and space enough to dress in."

Of the remaining tents, one was for Mrs. Crane, another for Mr. Black, and the third was for the provisions. As soon as the tents were up, and good Captain Berry was chug-chugging away as fast as he could in his very much lightened launch, there was plenty of work for all hands to do. Provisions were placed under cover, fresh balsam beds were arranged in the three sleeping tents—Dave brought the boughs and made the beds—and the girls stored their bundles of clothing in their big bedroom.

In addition to garments for their charges, the three mothers, Marjory's Aunty Jane, and Henrietta's grandmother had sent large baskets of delightful things to eat. Mrs. Slater had sent two roasted chickens, some bread, a huge frosted cake, and some oranges; besides all the things for which Henrietta had asked. Mrs. Mapes had dispatched bread, doughnuts, and three gigantic apple pies. Mrs. Bennett's contributions were some fine home-made rolls, a large veal loaf, a big box of cookies, besides a huge basket of bananas for her daughter Mabel. Aunty Jane had sent four kinds of pickles, four kinds of jelly, four kinds of jam, and a large beefsteak. Mrs. Tucker had added a large jar of baked beans, a generous salad, and two big pans of gingerbread.

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"I guess," said Mrs. Crane, almost overwhelmed with these contributions to her pantry, "we won't have to use the flour, the yeast cakes, and the tin oven I sent for, just yet awhile."

"Nor the potatoes, canned things, and other provisions that *I* ordered," said Mr. Black. "We're certainly bountifully supplied with food."

"We'll have a ready-made supper to-night," promised Mrs. Crane.

"If you'll wait half an hour," said Mr. Black, "we'll have a table to eat it on. Now that I have nails and a saw, we can have real furniture."

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Dave and Mr. Black made not only a table but four benches, each long enough to hold four persons. The table had to have a hole in the center to accommodate the tent pole; but Mr. Black managed that. Then he fastened two lamps with reflectors to the pole, Mrs. Crane spread a big sheet of white oil-cloth over the table, and the dining-room was complete.

Jean begged a number of wooden boxes from which the contents had been removed. "We can put our extra clothes in them," said she, "and keep our toilet articles on top. I'm so glad to have a hairbrush that I feel as if I ought to frame it."

"Anything more to build?" asked Mr. Black.

"I'd like a cupboard for my dishes," said Mrs. Crane, who was setting the attractive table. "But you needn't make it to-night. It's a good thing the plates came—our wooden ones wouldn't have stood another washing. And I'm glad to have a dishpan."

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"Wasn't the lake big enough?"

"It wasn't in the right place. Where's Dave? He seems to think he belongs to us. Hadn't we better give him some supper?"

"Yes. If you'll put something on a plate I'll carry it to him—he's gone to his wigwam. I want to tell him that we took his venison and potatoes. Here, that's enough—I can't carry *three* plates."

CHAPTER X

A Stormy Night

[100]

EVERY one had been too busy to think about the weather. But, when supper was on the table, Mrs. Crane noticed that Jean's dark hair had been blown about her face, that Henrietta's, too, was flying about in loose locks, and that the loose canvas at the doorway of the big tent was flapping noisily.

"Look at the lake!" cried Marjory. "It's all mussed up and queer, like something *boiling*. I hope Captain Berry got home safely."

"The wind is in his favor and he has had sufficient time. But that's a pretty angry sea—I guess Dave and I had better pull those boats to the top of the bank, after supper. We're going to have

some waves that *are* waves before morning."

The lake, at that hour, however, was not so rough as it was threatening. Its surface was of a dark, dull slate-color, marked with long lines of deep blue and blackish purple. Some hidden force seemed to be lifting it from underneath as if, as Marjory said, it were boiling, or at least getting ready to boil. The sun had dropped behind the distant hills without leaving the usual rose-pink afterglow. Overhead, dark clouds were scurrying toward the southwest; but as yet the waves had not gathered sufficient strength to be very noisy. The air was colder; and that, too, seemed filled with hidden threats and half-whispered warnings.

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"I'm thankful," said Mr. Black, carving more roasted chicken for Bettie, who said that all fowls *should* have had eight legs apiece, "that we have good, sound tents to sleep in to-night and that Captain Berry knew how to put them up so they'd stay. After we've pulled the boat up, Dave and I will see if any of the ropes need tightening. There is one thing that everybody must remember. If it rains, you must not touch the canvas—that makes it leak."

It was too windy for a fire on the beach that night, so the castaways, in their warm sweaters, sat round the dining-room table, and, by the light of the big lamps enjoyed the magazines that Mr. Saunders had thoughtfully included. They were particularly interested in the advertisements of tents, boats, and other camp-y things.

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Just as Bettie was certain that her eyes would not stay open a single moment longer, there was a loud crash near at hand.

"Now what?" cried startled Mrs. Crane, who was hemming some of the queer dish-toweling that inexperienced Mr. Saunders had been obliged to select, "is that? Not thunder, I hope."

"Our late residence, I suspect," returned Mr. Black. "It's a good thing we moved out when we did—I guess I'd better rescue that tablecloth."

By this time the waves were running high and dashing savagely against the bank. Usually the hurrying clouds obscured the moon; but, whenever it gleamed forth for a moment, it showed a foaming, furious sea—their calm, beautiful, softly tinted lake was gone.

"I'm glad," shuddered Bettie, "that I'm not out there in a boat."

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"I hope," said Jean, "that nobody is. A little boat would be smashed to bits."

"Wouldn't it be dreadful," suggested Henrietta, "if a ship were wrecked right down there on the beach? Anyway, I guess we'd find it pretty exciting."

"Or the ship would," offered Marjory.

"Let's hope *hard*," said Bettie, "that all the ships and sailors are in snug, safe harbors—When I go to bed to-night I'm going to make a little prayer about it."

But, in spite of Bettie's little prayer, if, indeed, she remembered to make it, there were several ships abroad that night; and a passenger on one of the smallest and least significant was probably, at that very moment, sailing into this story; but many other things happened before he was unceremoniously tumbled into the tale; and you must have them in their turn.

All night long the heavy surf pounded and thundered on the beach. All night long the wind howled and shrieked. But the castaways, snug in their strong new tents and their warm, red blankets, slept through all the turmoil.

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They were obliged, next morning, to forego the pleasure of washing their faces in the lake; but the river, with some help from the bright new dishpan, served as well. Dave's ice-cold spring provided them with excellent drinking water.

"This storm," said Mr. Black, arranging a temporary shelter for the fire, "will bring us plenty of driftwood. We can have benches under the trees and an extra table or two—I expect to get thin, building things."

"Well, it won't hurt you," returned Mrs. Crane. "You can begin by building that fire—I'm ready to cook."

Previously to this time, the days had been warm and comparatively quiet; but to-day it was decidedly cold. The wind, sweeping through the clearing, carried off all the bits of paper and string that the eager girls had torn from their parcels the night before and thoughtlessly scattered about. It was necessary to fasten things down to keep them from swirling out of sight. The big waves still thundered in and their white spray dashed high above the edge of the battered bank.

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But, for all that, it proved a delightful day, because the clear air was wonderfully bracing, the campers were really camping, and one could escape the buffeting of the wind and the continuous roar of the waves by taking long walks in the sheltered trails and roads.

"This," said Mr. Black, when the morning's work was done, "would be a good time to walk to Barclay's Point to see the waves. These are just tiny wavelets beside what we'll see over there—they'll be perfectly terrific on the north side of that peninsula. I *was* going to fish in the river with those nice angleworms that Saunders sent; but I can take you there first and do my fishing afterwards."

There were two ways of getting to Barclay's Point. In ordinary weather, one walked up the beach. In stormy weather, there was a very roundabout way by the road and a more direct route by a woody trail that wasn't exactly visible—one *felt* rather than saw it. Some persons have an instinct for following trails. Jean had it, Marjory had it to a lesser degree; but Mabel and Henrietta were without it; while Dave, Indian that he was, could see trails where none existed for any one else. Since Jean possessed the trail-instinct, she walked ahead, while Mr. Black, in order to keep Mabel and Henrietta from straying from the path, marched behind. Mrs. Crane remained in camp with Bettie, who was not yet permitted to take long walks. [106]

To reach Barclay's, one crossed the river twice. The first crossing was easy, for there was a rude bridge built of heavy timber. But the second was a different matter. Nature had provided a bridge by conveniently dropping a huge tree across the stream, which was wide and about three feet deep at this point. The log—the branches had long ago been chopped away—was very wide at one end but tapered somewhat toward the other. When the water was low, there was room for a canoe to pass under this log. Jean walked steadily across it, Marjory flitted over it like a bird, Henrietta, with fancy steps that would have been impossible for the others even on solid ground, danced across; but Mabel, wavering and wabbling, had to be assisted by Mr. Black, who stretched forth a helping hand the moment she began to falter. [107]

"I guess," declared Mabel, indignantly, "that old tree was a slippery elm."

"No," returned Mr. Black, "it was pine, and a big fellow at that. It's been here for many years."

"How can you tell?" queried Henrietta.

"See that birch tree growing from the upper side of its root? That birch has had time to grow from a seed into a good-sized tree since some mighty tornado or some unusual freshet uprooted this great pine—pine does not rot as quickly as some of the harder woods."

"I see one reason why it fell," asserted Jean. "There's water bubbling out down there, under the root."

"So there is," said Mr. Black. "I'm glad I brought my cup—that's a spring. We'll have a drink." [108]

So everybody drank some of the clear, cold water before proceeding to Barclay's.

There was no sign of civilization at Barclay's Point; just a long, rocky promontory that ran out into the lake and, in fair weather, furnished a fine place to fish from. Its north coast was particularly rough and jagged. Here, as Mr. Black had prophesied, the waves, roaring and booming like ceaseless artillery, struck with tremendous force against the rocks and dashed to prodigious heights—a grand and unforgettable sight.

But Mabel's sweater was not unforgettable. She had taken it off because she was too warm after the steep climb to the spot from which the waves presented the finest spectacle (nobody wanted to get *too* close to all that mountain of water) and anchored the garment firmly to the ground by means of a heavy stone. She returned to camp without missing it—she had something more exciting to think of, for Henrietta had mentioned that one of the contributions from her grandmother was a large box of candy. [109]

"We'll have some," promised Henrietta, "as soon as we get back to camp."

Naturally Mabel, who was inordinately fond of sweet things and who had had no candy for a week, forgot all about her gray sweater, so near the color of the rocks that nobody else noticed it. But, notwithstanding the discomfort she endured without it, she was glad afterwards that she *had* forgotten it.

CHAPTER XI

Dry Clothes for Five

INSPIRED by the prospect of candy, Mabel was eager for the campward trail. This trail was wide and clearly marked near Barclay's, so Mabel ran gaily ahead; but the others followed closely at her heels—it was too windy for much lingering on that exposed shore.

Mabel, with just one thought in her head, started heedlessly to run across the log that spanned the river. If a squirrel hadn't started at the same moment from the other end, Mabel might have rushed safely across. But, startled by the sudden, affrighted chattering of the surprised squirrel, Mabel stopped, staggered, swayed, and began to clutch wildly for support. She found it in the scarlet necktie of Henrietta's blouse.

Henrietta, clutched by the throat, as it were, seized Mabel with one hand and Marjory with the other in order to sustain her own suddenly disturbed balance. For a moment, all three swayed uncertainly. Then, there was a mighty splash. All three were gone! [111]

The disturbed river bottom sent up bubbles of mud, a hand, a foot, then a bedraggled hair ribbon. Mr. Black, followed by courageous Jean, plunged to the rescue. In a moment, they had all three of the struggling, half-strangled girls on their feet. As the river bottom was of the softest of mud, no one was hurt; but the rescuers as well as the rescued were completely drenched.

"Now, see here, Mabel," said Mr. Black, wiping that subdued young person's dripping countenance with his own wet handkerchief, "you'll have this whole camp drowned if you don't look out. After this, you're to stick to solid earth. I'm in earnest about this, Mabel. You're not to attempt to cross this log again, unless I'm with you."

"You were here *this* time," complained the dripping culprit.

"It's a good thing I was. Jean would have had a fine time fishing the three of you out of that mud. Now, we'll just wade across here where it isn't so deep—we can't get any wetter than we are—and race home before we begin to feel cold." [112]

They raced as well as they could, in clinging garments and water-soaked shoes; but they presented a curious sight as they trailed into the clearing. Mrs. Crane and Bettie advanced eagerly to greet them.

"Company!" warned Bettie, running ahead. "Two young men that drove up in a buckboard to spend the day fishing in our river—Mr. Saunders sent some letters by them. Thought I'd tell you so you could prink a little, Henrietta—my goodness! What's happened?"

"I've been fishing in the river myself," explained Mr. Black, "and this is what I caught—three very much speckled trout."

"My land!" exclaimed Mrs. Crane. "What an awful mess!"

"It's just mud," said Marjory. "A few of us landed head first in several inches of it. It was Mabel, of course, that pulled us in—she fell off the big log on the trail to Barclay's." [113]

"Well, you're certainly a sight," laughed Bettie, turning back with her friends. "I don't know which of you looks worst."

"They *all* do," groaned Mrs. Crane. "And here was I just telling those two young men that we had with us as pretty a lot of children as they'd find in the state!"

The young men, seated on one of the benches, looked at the "pretty lot of children." Then, throwing back their heads, they laughed uproariously.

"We knew there were fish in the river," said one of the visitors, "but we hadn't been told about your mermaids."

"I've caught two lots this spring," said Mr. Black, "but this is my largest—and, I hope, my last—haul. This sort of fishing is hard on my limited wardrobe."

"Dear me," said Mrs. Crane, "these shivering scarecrows must get out of their wet garments at once. Here, Jean, you and Henrietta may dress in my tent—I'll bring your clothes. And, girls, throw all your wet garments outside—don't drop them on the blankets." [114]

The visitors declined an invitation to dinner, as they had brought an ample lunch; but before departing they helped Mrs. Crane stretch a long clothesline between two trees in the clearing.

"These things *should* be washed," said Mrs. Crane, fastening the garments to the line with all the safety pins the camp afforded, "but we can't use the lake just now and it's a little too far to a place that is just the right depth in the river."

"Perhaps," suggested Bettie, helpfully, "most of the mud will brush off when the things are dry."

"The sand will, anyway. I hope those girls can find enough clothes to put on."

"They have the ones they came in," said Bettie, "and Jean's bundle was extra large."

The active castaways, clothed in dry garments, spent a busy if not particularly exciting afternoon exploring the trails that led from the clearing. They gathered flowers, mushrooms, firewood, birch bark, moss, ferns, and even a few wild strawberries. Dave, who was mysterious in his comings and goings, taught them how to make willow whistles and promised to show them some day how to catch chipmunks. [115]

"I think," said Jean, when the campers had assembled for supper, "that this camp should have a name. We might call it 'Camp Comfort.'"

"Everybody that *has* a camp," objected Mr. Black, "calls it that. Let's have something truly poetic."

"We might," suggested Henrietta, "name it the Black Basin."

"That," demurred Bettie, "seems awfully pirate-y. Bob has a book about pirates that used to hide in a cave called the 'Black Basin'—I'd be afraid to go to bed nights in a Black Basin."

"Perhaps," offered Henrietta, "'The Crane's Cove' would sound safer."

"That doesn't work right," protested Marjory, wiggling her small pink tongue comically. "I'd always be saying 'Crane's Cove.'" [116]

"Besides," said Jean, "that isn't romantic enough. We want something like 'Lover's Leap,' or 'Breezy Bluff,' or 'River's Rest.'"

Just then Dave approached with an offering for Jean—he had already given her his best willow whistle and a partridge wing. This time it was a fine speckled trout, bigger than any that Mr. Black had been able to hook.

"Where'd you catch him?" asked Mr. Black.

Dave shrugged his shoulders and replied evasively: "Pretty goo' fishin' groun' here at 'Pete's Patch.'"

"Where's Pete's Patch?" demanded Mr. Black, suspiciously.

"Right here," replied Dave, with a gesture that included Mr. Black's entire property. "He name after you—Ah name heem maself."

"That's nerve for you," breathed Henrietta.

"Pete's Patch!" murmured Mr. Black, who seemed decidedly taken aback. "Pete's Patch!"

Then the surprised gentleman caught Bettie's dancing eye and suddenly choked.

[117]

"What a lovely name," teased impish Henrietta. "So romantic! So poetic! I'm glad I came to Pete's Patch—I think I'll have to write some verses about it—something like this, for instance:

"If a trout or two you'd catch,
Or of mushrooms like a batch—
If a taste of heaven you'd snatch,
Hie away unto Pete's Patch."

"That's pretty bad," laughed Bettie, "but it goes pretty well with the name."

Of course the name stuck. Mr. Black tried a number of times to think of a more suitable or finer sounding name for his beautiful lakeside camp, but Dave's title was there to stay, so the amused castaways had to make the best of "Pete's Patch."

"Never mind, Peter," Mrs. Crane would say, "it's a nice place, anyway; and the name goes very well with our birch-bark stationery."

CHAPTER XII

[118]

Mabel's Astonishing Discovery

THE campers rose the next morning without suspecting that a very strange thing was about to happen; or that Mabel, who was still in disgrace because of her habit of half drowning her trusting companions, was, on that never-to-be-forgotten day, as they say in books, to cover herself with glory—instead of mud.

The inhabitants of Pete's Patch rose to find the sun shining, the wind gone, the lake settled back in its proper place.

"The sea began to subside before I turned in last night," said Mr. Black. "It's as gentle as a lamb to-day."

"Look at the shore!" cried Marjory. "It's different. The beach that was sandy before the storm is all pebbly now; and down there where the cobblestones were it's all beautiful, smooth sand."

"And look," supplemented Jean, "at the mouth of that surprising river. It's a lot wider than it was when we came."

[119]

"Some time to-day," said Mr. Black, "I want to go to the little cove about halfway between here and Barclay's Point. That seems to be the spot that catches everything that is cast up by the sea. I need some thin boards for your cupboard, Sarah. I noticed the other day that the sharp cleft in the rocks back of that cove was filled with boards."

"That's an awfully interesting spot," said Jean. "If sailors threw bottles overboard with letters in them, that's where you'd find them—everything washes in at that spot."

"Or," said Henrietta, "if the captain lashed his only daughter to the mast and threw her overboard, that's where she'd land."

"Oh, I *hope* not," breathed tender-hearted Bettie.

"So do I," laughed Henrietta, with an impish glance at Mr. Black. "Think of being wrecked on the reef of Pete's Patch!"

"Norman's Woe certainly sounds better," agreed Mr. Black, "but let us hope that no one got wrecked *any* place. Now I must take a look at the Whale—I'm wondering how she weathered the storm."

[120]

"It's my turn to wash dishes," announced Jean.

"And mine to wipe," said Henrietta.

"Then Bettie and I will do the beds," said Marjory, quickly.

Mabel, left out in the cold, scowled darkly for a moment. Then she sat up very stiffly indeed.

"I shall go all by myself and pick up two big baskets of driftwood," said she.

"To-morrow morning," offered sympathetic Jean, "you're invited to do dishes with me, Mabel."

"And beds with me," added impish Henrietta.

"And to wash potatoes with me," teased Marjory.

"Why not let me do *all* the work?" queried Mabel, huffily. "But I *will* do dishes with you, Jean. I know *you* meant to be polite."

Presently Mabel, with two of the big baskets that had come with the provisions, slid down the sand bank to the beach. It was certainly a fine morning. Within two minutes, sturdy Mabel had forgotten that the others were paired off and that she was the odd one. [121]

"The sky is blue, blue, blue," sang Mabel, marching up the smooth, hard beach; "the water is blue, blue, blue with golden sparkles; and the air is warm enough and cool enough and clean, clean, cle—ow!"

A leisurely wave had crept in and made a playful dash for Mabel's heedless feet.

"You got me that time," beamed friendly Mabel. "I guess you wanted to remind me that I was out after wood. All right, Mr. Lake, I'll walk closer to the bank. My! What nice little blocks for our fire. I *love* to find things."

Soon both baskets were filled; but by this time Mabel was well out of sight of the camp, having passed two of the little rocky points that extended into the lake, north of Pete's Patch.

"I wish I had a hundred baskets to fill," sighed Mabel. "I guess I'll leave these right here and go a little farther; it's such a nice day and I *love* to go adventuring. Oh! I know what I'll do; I'll go to Barclay's Point after my sweater—I hope it hasn't blown away." [122]

So Mabel, with a definite object in view, started at a brisker pace toward Barclay's. Presently she reached the cove mentioned by Mr. Black as a catch-all for floating timber. The water was deeper at this place and a strong current carried quantities of driftwood to this wide, bowl-shaped cove. In severe storms, some of it was tossed high among the rocks and gnarled roots in a ravine-like cleft at the back. Nearer the water, many great logs, partially embedded in the sand, caught and held the lighter material tossed in by the waves.

"Oh!" cried Mabel, "I wish I had a *million* baskets! I know what I'll do. I'll just toss a lot of those go-in-a-basket pieces into a big pile way up there where the waves can't get them."

Gathering up the edges of her skirt, sturdy Mabel filled it with the clean, if not particularly dry, bits of wood, worn satin-smooth and white by long buffetings against graveled shores. [123]

"I'll throw them behind that log," decided Mabel, toiling inland with her heavy burden. "They'll be perfectly safe up there—My! But they're pretty heavy. I guess there's room back of that big log for a whole wag—wow! ow!"

Mabel's final syllable was a curious, startled sound. While not precisely a gasp, a shriek, or a shout, it was a queer combination of all three.

Mabel was startled, and with good reason. The space behind the log was already occupied; and by something that looked human.

The surprised little girl saw first a pair of water-soaked shoes attached to two very thin, boyish legs in black stockings. Beyond the stockings was a gray mass of tangled fish-net wound about something bulky and white that Mabel concluded was a life-preserver. Beyond that, an extended arm was partly buried in the sand. A thin, white hand was firmly closed over a sharply projecting point of rock. Very close against the huge log, so close as to be almost under it, was a shining, golden ball, the back of a boy's close-cropped head. [124]

For a long moment Mabel, who had unconsciously dropped her load on her own toes, stood still and gazed questioningly at her unexpected find. Then the astonished little adventurer climbed over the wood she had dropped, bent down, and, with one finger, touched the boy's stocking, gingerly.

"If—if he'd been here very long," she said, sagely, "his stockings would have been faded. Things fade pretty fast on the lake shore. Perhaps if I poke him he'll wake up."

Mabel prodded the unfaded legs very gently with a pointed stick. There was no response.

"I guess he's dead," she sighed. "But I s'pose I ought to feel his pulse to find out for sure—ugh! I sort of hate to—suppose he *is* dead!"

But, bravely overcoming her distaste for this obvious duty, Mabel laid a trembling finger on the slim white hand. It was not as cold and clammy as she had feared to find it. Mabel touched it again, this time with several fingers. Yes, the hand was actually a little bit warm. [125]

As she bent closer to the golden head, it seemed to



THE SPACE BEHIND THE LOG WAS ALREADY OCCUPIED

Mabel that she could detect a sound of breathing, rather heavy breathing, Mabel thought; a little like Mrs. Crane's, when that good lady snored.

Mabel crouched patiently near the prostrate lad and listened. The labored breathing certainly came from that recumbent boy.

"But," argued Mabel, "if he's only taking a nap, why is he all tangled up in that net? And there's that life-preserver. He's been wrecked and tossed up, I believe. And he's still all wet underneath. Perhaps I ought to wake him up—he ought not to sleep in such wet clothes."

So Mabel grasped her discovery very firmly by one thin shoulder and shook him quite vigorously; but he still slept. Then, clutching him by both shoulders, she succeeded in dragging the heavy sleeper a few inches from the log; but he seemed rather too firmly anchored to his resting-place for this method to work successfully. Still, she had gained something, for now one ear and a bit of one cheek were visible. They were not white like the extended hand, but darkly red and very hot to the touch.

"Boy!" called Mabel. "Why don't you wake up? Don't you know that you're not drowned? Wake up, I say! Whoo! Whoo! *Whoo!*"

But the boy, in spite of what should have proved alarming sounds, made, as they were, in his very ear, still slumbered on in a strange, baffling fashion; and Mabel, after watching him in a puzzled way for several moments

longer, found a broad shingle, which she balanced neatly on the boy's unconscious head.

"That'll keep the sun off," said she, "while I'm gone for help."

[126]

CHAPTER XIII

Breaking the News

[127]

"I WONDER," said Marjory, who, perched on the edge of the bank, was shaking the sand from a dried bathing suit, "what's happened to Mabel. She's running down the beach like mad. And calling! I guess she wants somebody."

"If *you'd* keep quiet," suggested Henrietta, "perhaps you could hear what she says."

"It's 'Mr. Bla-a-a-a-ack!'" mimicked Marjory.

Mabel was breathless by the time she reached the foot of the steep sand bank, just below the camp.

"Oh," she panted. "Mr. Black—get him, quick. And, Jean, *you* come. And, Mrs. Crane—scissors! I *must* have scissors. Phew!"

"Be quiet a moment," advised motherly Mrs. Crane, from the bank. "Sit right down where you are and rest till you get your breath. Marjory, you're the quickest—you run for Mr. Black; he's just started for the wigwam to see if he can find Dave. Jean, I'll trust *you* with my scissors; but I'm going to tie them to you with a piece of string. There! Now we'll go down to Mabel."

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"Now," said Mrs. Crane, when that stout lady had made a careful descent of the sandy bank, "tell us exactly what's happened, Mabel."

"It's a boy!" panted Mabel, "and he isn't dead."

"Most boys aren't," encouraged Bettie, who had a large number of lively brothers. "Go on, Mabel."

"I found him on the beach."

"Well," scoffed Henrietta, "I guess a boy on a beach isn't anything so wonderful."

"How did he get there?" queried Mrs. Crane.

"Washed up, I guess. I thought he was drowned. He's *most* dead."

"Where? Where?" shrieked Henrietta, with sudden interest.

"Where? Where?" echoed Bettie.

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Just then Marjory flung herself breathlessly over the edge of the bank with Mr. Black, also

short of breath, close at her heels.

"What's it all about?" demanded Mr. Black. "Has Mabel fallen in again?"

"Get the bread-knife, somebody," ordered Mabel, now sufficiently recovered to scramble to her feet, "and follow me."

"I have a knife," said Mr. Black, displaying as bloodthirsty a bit of cutlery as one would want to see. "Saunders thought I might need a hunting knife. If you've caught a deer I'll skin him for you."

"I guess," laughed Bettie, "she doesn't want her game *skinned*. She's found a boy."

Presently the procession, headed proudly by Mabel, who now felt very important indeed and would allow none of her impatient followers to pass her, was marching up the beach. She was, however, too breathless for speed.

"Couldn't you go a *little* faster?" pleaded Marjory.

"No, I couldn't," panted Mabel. "And, if you run ahead of me, you won't know where to turn off—so there." [130]

"Tell us more about it," begged Henrietta. "I've always been crazy to rescue a shipwrecked crew!"

"No," said Mabel, "I want my breath to walk with."

Fortunately, the beach was smooth and hard; the excited campers soon reached the cove. Mabel, thoughtfully pausing long enough for Mrs. Crane and Bettie to catch up, led them to the big, half-buried log.

"There!" said she, pointing to what was behind it. "That's the boy."

Bettie, Marjory, and Henrietta peered eagerly over the log. Jean, Mrs. Crane, and Mr. Black hurried behind it. Mr. Black whipped out his knife, dropped to his knees, and began to cut at the mesh of the stout net. After a moment Jean assisted with the scissors.

Mrs. Crane patted the boy's hand and laid her own motherly palm against his cheek.

"Poor lamb! Poor lamb!" she murmured.

Presently the lad was freed from the net and the life-preserver and gently lifted from the wet wreckage to the warm, dry sand. His eyes were closed, his breathing jerky and strange, his whole countenance deeply flushed. Big tears rolled down Mabel's cheeks as she looked at the limp, pathetic figure. [131]

"That boy," said Mrs. Crane, "is terribly ill with a fever. Goodness only knows how long he's been imprisoned here, chilled and shivering, before this fever came on."

"Or just when the waves flung him behind that log," said Mr. Black. "It might have been early last night, any time yesterday, or even during the previous night. He was lashed to something with that net—yes, here it is; a piece of rotten pole as thick as my arm—possibly a mast or part of a raft. But what concerns us just now is what we're to do for him."

"He's certainly a sick boy," agreed Mrs. Crane, "and there's nobody but us to help him."

"Mabel," said Mr. Black, "you'd better take off his shoes—he'll be lighter without them. Sarah, you'd better hurry back to camp and fix a bed for him in your tent. Jean, you go with her, build a fire, and put some water on to boil—a little hot broth might help. If you other girls will boost him a little, when I say the word, I think I can carry him." [132]

The girls boosted. Mr. Black, with the long, thin boy hanging limply over his shoulder, started toward camp. Mabel, a wet shoe dangling from each hand, plodded after.

"Isn't it exciting?" breathed bright-eyed Henrietta, falling into line. "A boy right out of the skies."

"I guess you mean right out of the lake," corrected Marjory. "I hope he'll wake up pretty soon—I'm dying to know how he got behind that log."

"Perhaps it was a good thing," said Bettie, "that the log was there. The end of that pole swung under the log and held him right there, or the waves might have carried him out again or hurled him against the rocks—ugh!"

"His father," declared Henrietta, dreamily, "was the captain of a gallant ship. When the vessel was about to sink he said: 'Men! Save yourselves. As for me, I perish with her.' Then he lashed his only son to the mast of the sinking ship——" [133]

"What for?" demanded practical Marjory.

"I guess maybe he didn't," amended Henrietta, reflectively. "He made a raft out of one of the hatches and tied him to that with the only thing he had at hand—a fish-net."

"But first," added Marjory, "he fastened a life-preserver about him."

"If I could run the way I used to," said thoughtful little Betty (this was the longest walk she had taken since her arrival at Pete's Patch), "I'd rush ahead and help Mrs. Crane with that bed. As it is, I'm willing to help with one of the baskets we're coming to—I guess Mabel's forgotten all about them."

"I'll help Mrs. Crane," promised nimble-footed Marjory, "if you and Henrietta will bring the wood—they may need it for the fire that Jean is to build."

Mr. Black undressed the thin, still-unconscious lad, wrapped him in a warm blanket (his feet, Mrs. Crane said, were like lumps of ice), and tucked him into bed. [134]

"If we were in town," declared Mrs. Crane, "I'd send for the doctor."

"Just what I'm going to do, as soon as Dave turns up. I'll go to his wigwam now—perhaps he's back. Too bad there isn't any medicine——"

"But there is," said Mrs. Crane. "Mrs. Tucker sent a bottle to Bettie to be used in case her fever should return. She sent a tonic, too, but neither bottle has been opened. If you think it's safe——"

"Good for Mrs. Tucker! Give that boy a dose of the fever medicine—he certainly needs that. Now for Dave—I'd like to get him started for Lakeville at once."

Dave, however, was not to be found. His ways were strange and mysterious; he had an inconvenient habit of disappearing without warning for hours at a stretch. No one would see him go. He would set out, ostensibly for his wigwam; but if Mr. Black followed him to that habitation, as he sometimes did, no sign would he find of Dave. This time, the canoe was gone, also, and, of course, Dave's dog. [135]

"He hasn't shown up," said Mr. Black, returning from the wigwam. "I suppose he rose at daybreak and took to the lake; for his canoe isn't in the river. And here I am *paying* him to bring water and wood for us and help with the boats."

"Paying him!" gasped Mrs. Crane, "when he lived on your land for four years without paying rent? *Peter!*"

"Well," returned Mr. Black, "it's only a dollar a day. Perhaps that isn't enough—I'll raise his wages!"

"But that poor boy——"

"We'll just have to wait until Dave gets back, I suppose. But you can dose the boy with Bettie's fever medicine—not the tonic—and perhaps we can pull him through."

"Anyway, we'll try," assured Mrs. Crane.

CHAPTER XIV

A Missing Messenger

[136]

IT was Thursday when Mabel discovered the boy. Friday morning Dave was still missing and the lad was still unconscious.

"He must have been a pretty tough little chap to start with," declared Mrs. Crane, when all the members of her always-hungry family had been bountifully served with steaming breakfast food, "or he never would have lasted as long as this with such a fever. I wish Dave was here. He ought to have a doctor; and, if the boy's people live in Lakeville, they'll surely want to know that he's alive."

"We've been talking about that," said Jean, "and we don't think he *is* a Lakeville boy."

"You see," explained Marjory, "he must be about twelve or thirteen years old—somewhere between Mabel's age and Henrietta's. If he'd been in school one or another of us would have seen him—we're scattered all over, you know." [137]

"And I," said Henrietta, "am scattered about in *all* the grades, because I'm so smart and so stupid in spots."

"But perhaps," suggested Mr. Black, "this illness has altered his appearance."

"It couldn't change his hair," asserted Mabel. "It's a very queer color."

"Yes," agreed Mrs. Crane, "it's a most unusual shade—very bright and glistening like ruddy gold. There's a tinge of copper to it and yet it's golden. If only Dave were here——"

"I could walk to Lakeville myself," began Mr. Black, reflectively, "but——"

"But you're not going to," protested his sister. "We can't stay here without a man. Besides, if anything happened to you on the way down, where should *we* be?"

"At Pete's Patch, I suspect," twinkled Mr. Black. "Suppose you give that boy some hot sponge baths—that may help a little."

"But, goodness!" objected Mabel, "he must be perfectly soaked with water—his clothes were drenched." [138]

"Still," said Mr. Black, "baths are beneficial to fever patients."

"I've been putting mild mustard plasters on his chest," confessed anxious Mrs. Crane. "I didn't like his breathing—it sounded too much like pneumonia yesterday; but it's a bit better to-day. And I'll try those baths."

"I haven't much faith in your mustard plasters," asserted Mr. Black, teasingly. "You're too tender-hearted to make one strong enough to do any good."

"I'm not," retorted Mrs. Crane; "but there's no sense in blistering folks."

"I'm glad there's a really sick person in this camp," said Bettie, "because now, perhaps, I can persuade you to believe that I'm most as well as ever. I had two long walks yesterday and I feel just fine to-day."

"Did you sleep well?" queried Mrs. Crane, anxiously. "I declare, with all this excitement, I forgot to ask you."

"Only five minutes," said Bettie, in a sorrowful tone. "I shut my eyes at eight o'clock last night and when I opened them it was only five minutes after eight." [139]

"Last night?" pursued Mrs. Crane, anxiously.

"No, this morning," replied Bettie, demurely, "but the clock *said* five minutes, and it didn't *seem* like any more than that."

Among the many things that Mrs. Crane had ordered from town was a truly alarming alarm clock. Although it went off faithfully and with astonishing vigor at seven every morning, no one ever heard it after the first day except Mrs. Crane. The campers, never very early risers, grew lazier every day—and fatter! Mabel, always exceedingly plump, was now so rotund that Mrs. Crane was obliged to tie loops of twine in all her buttonholes. Bettie's cheeks and the calves of her legs were certainly rounding into new and pleasing curves. Tall Jean was casting a wider shadow, shapely Henrietta had punched two new holes in her tight leather belt; and it was now possible to pinch the hitherto unpinchable Marjory. Their complexions, too, had undergone curious changes. Mabel had gained a generous sprinkling of very fine, very dark freckles. Marjory's blue-white skin was dotted with a limited number of very large, pale tan-colored freckles. Henrietta was tinged a rich even brown, except where a fine red glowed in her dark cheeks. Most of the time Jean was a brilliant scarlet; for her tender skin burned easily and her nose, as Bettie said, was disreputably ragged, for it peeled every day or two. So did the edges of her ears. As for Bettie, her yellowish pallor was gone and a fine, rose-colored flush now tinged her lips and her cheeks. Her big, dark eyes were brighter and merrier than the girls had ever seen them. [140]

"Another ten days in camp," asserted Mr. Black, pinching Bettie's firm cheek, "and you'll all be wearing Mrs. Crane's clothes. Your own mothers won't know you by the time we're ready to go home."

"They won't want to," laughed Marjory, "if we all gain as Mabel has. Look at her back!"

It was really a shockingly untidy back, because bits of Mabel and Mabel's underwear stuck out between the loops. [141]

"She drinks so much water," complained Henrietta, "that my arm just aches from filling her cup."

"Put the pail beside her," suggested Mr. Black. "Water's the one thing that can't give out."

"That reminds me," said Mrs. Crane, "we'll need a lot of things by the time Dave goes to town again. My list is growing bigger every minute."

"Like Mabel," breathed Marjory, teasingly.

"Well," sighed Mabel—and the sigh burst two of her loops—"I shall ask for a very wide sailor-jumper to pull on over my head. The knots in those loops are pretty bumpy. If I were to sneeze, they'd *all* go, I guess."

Mrs. Crane, of course, appropriated most of the care of the newest castaway. But the willing girls helped in many ways.

"They are my feet," said slow-moving, stiff-jointed Mrs. Crane. "They bring me everything I need and save me hundreds of steps every day. They're all as good as gold, Peter." [142]

"They're *better*," declared Mr. Black. "I wish they all belonged to *me*—anyway, we'll enjoy 'em while we can."

Sometimes one or another of the girls was permitted to sit beside the sleeping boy for half an hour, while Mrs. Crane busied herself with the camp cooking—no one else, the good lady was

certain, could plan the meals; but nursing proved rather an uninteresting task, because there was really nothing that one could do. The girls found cooking rather more to their taste and were able to relieve Mrs. Crane of many of her culinary burdens. Jean, however, was the only one who could fry the fine brook trout that Mr. Black sometimes caught in the attractive river.

"They're all right after they're cooked," shuddered Marjory, that afternoon, when Mr. Black brought in a pretty string of fish, cleaned and ready to fry, "but I *couldn't* touch a raw one—ugh!"

"Neither could I," said Henrietta, "but Anthony Fitz-Hubert could—see, he's just crazy for one this minute." [143]

"Here's one with his name on it," said Mr. Black, presenting the little cat with a small specimen. "That one is under-sized, so it wouldn't do for *us* to be caught with it; but they couldn't arrest or fine Anthony, because he's too active and too poor. How would you girls like to try fishing?"

"We'd like it," responded Henrietta. "Once, when I was very small, I went fishing in Scotland, in a little rushing river; and once, in France, a little peasant boy let me hold his rod for a few minutes."

"Well," promised Mr. Black, "some day I'll take you all fishing. After you've caught a trout or two you won't mind handling them. But just now I can't afford to be reckless with the bait—we'll get a bigger supply next time."

"I've heard it said," laughed Mrs. Crane, "that there's a stingy streak in everybody, if you know just where to look for it; we've found yours, Peter; it's fish-worms."

"Well, they're mighty scarce in this part of the country. I dug for nearly an hour along the river bank and found only one. I'll send word to Martin, next time, and have him dig a pailful in our garden." [144]

"He'll dig up everything else, too," sighed Mrs. Crane, "but never mind. But that reminds me of Dave. Marjory, I wish you and Henrietta would see if that rascal has slipped in by some back way to his wigwam. I declare I never thought that I'd *want* to set eyes on that homely half-breed, but I'd give a dollar, this very minute, to see him."

Mrs. Crane, however, was not called on to part with her dollar. The messengers returned without Dave.

"Not a single sign of him," said Henrietta, "and we called until all the little squirrels sat up and scolded us for making such a noise."

"He's out for venison, I fear," said Mr. Black, who was counting his seven precious fish-worms. "He has no regard whatever for the game laws. I shall give him a good talking to when he returns."

"You'd better wait," suggested Mrs. Crane, "until after he's been to Lakeville." [145]

"You'd better wait," laughed saucy Henrietta, "until you see him."

"Anyway," said Mr. Black, "we must all remember to stand between Dave and the game warden, if that officer ever visits Pete's Patch."

"No really respectable game warden," laughed Henrietta, "would ever visit a camp with a name like that."

"That's a nice name," championed Mabel. "It's plain and sensible like Mr. Black. I *like* things that are plain and sort of—homely."

At this, everybody (including Mr. Black, who might easily have been much homelier than he was) laughed merrily; for Mabel, cheerful little blunderer, usually managed to give a queer twist to her compliments.

"Anyhow," said Mabel, rather huffily, "I *meant* to be polite."

"You *were*," assured Mr. Black, patting the hunched shoulder, "because it's our meaning that counts; and we all know that you meant well."

"I wonder," queried Jean, "if Dave does?" [146]

"I fear," returned Mr. Black, "that the workings of that rascal's mind would be pretty hard to follow—let's see if his boat is in sight."

But it wasn't, so Mr. Black got the wood and the water that he was paying Dave to bring and arranged the evening bonfire.

And the sick boy, in spite of the young campers' impatience to learn his story, still slept. Mrs. Crane, by this time, was almost sure that he would never waken.

Doctor Dave

AT daybreak the next morning the barking of a dog wakened the sleeping camp. Mr. Black pulled on his clothes and went sleepily down to the water's edge, where Onota, Dave's yellow dog, was running madly about, uttering excited yelps.

"Heem glad for got home," explained Dave, who had beached his canoe and was gathering up its contents.

"What have you got?" asked Mr. Black.

Dave displayed a small doe, not yet skinned.

"Dose bigges' one—som' beeg buck, Ah'm t'ink—she ees bus' up ma trap," Dave complained, "so Ah'm snare dose li'le doe. He ees good meat, all right."

"Dave, you scalawag, you ought to be in jail. I'll wager there isn't a game law that you haven't broken."

"He ees mos' all for you," assured Dave, ingratiatingly. "You got fine dinner off heem ver' soon—I skeep heem for you, bam-bye. She's good meat, dose young-lady deer." [148]

"I *ought* to tell the game warden on you. Don't you *know* that you're breaking game laws?"

"Ah'm t'ink maybe Ah'm crack dose law som'," admitted Dave; "but me, Ah mus' eat li'le deer meat som' tam', halso dose *partridge*, maybe som' duck, too."

"Well," warned Mr. Black, helplessly, "don't expect me to help you out if you get caught. And now, Dave, I wish you'd stay right here for awhile; I've got a job for you. I want you to go to Lakeville to-day—we've a sick boy up there and we need a doctor."

"Seeck boy?" queried Dave. "W'ere you got her from? W'at she ees seeck on herself wit'?"

Mr. Black explained.

"Dat's all right," Dave said. "Bad cold on her long (lung). Ah cook you som't'ing w'at feex her pooty good."

"No, no," protested Mr. Black, "we want a doctor and a lot of other things. You *must* go to Lakeville. I'll—yes, I'll give you two dollars." [149]

"Maybe Ah go behind dinner," promised Dave, uncertainly. "Ah mus' sleep, me, for two-t'ree hour—Ah'm chase dose deer hall night. Tell dose Jean, dose *Bettee*, dose Mabelle, and dose Henriette, eef he ees com' roun' pooty soon, Ah show heem how to skeep dose deer."

Notwithstanding the fact that his medical services had been declined, Dave began almost at once to search for herbs, dig for roots, and gather certain pungent leaves and twigs. These he covered carefully with water and placed over a slow fire in a most repulsive saucepan. By half-past eight o'clock, by which time the castaways were eating breakfast, Dave had obtained about half a pint of a queer-smelling, most unattractive-looking, greenish-black fluid. He carried this strange brew carefully to the clearing, peered cautiously into Mrs. Crane's unguarded tent, entered noiselessly, and dropped the flap. Then, kneeling beside the helpless lad, the half-breed raised him gently and poured the contents of his blackened tin cup, a little at a time, down the boy's throat. This accomplished successfully, Dave, much pleased with himself, emerged just in time to meet startled Mrs. Crane, returning to look at her charge. [150]

"Dave," she shrieked, noting the empty, not over-clean cup, "what *have* you done?"

"Das all right, Mees Crane," assured Dave. "Dose boy, she swallow good. Ev'rybody wait fi—seex hour. Dose boy sweat lak' horse bam-bye—wake up weak like babee—open hees eye. Maybe she's dead then, maybe she's get well. You geeve her queek som' brot'—bouillon—w'at you call heem—soup, hey?—behin' dos beeg sweat. For mak' her strong, dose seeck boy."

"Dave," moaned Mrs. Crane, who had seized the cup and was smelling it, "you've surely killed that poor child!"

"Nong, nong," protested Dave. "Dose ees ver' goo' medicine—Ah'm got her off ma gran'modder."

"Well," growled Mr. Black, finding it difficult to be stern, with five amused little girls giggling at his back. "If you get any more medicine off your grandmother I'll throw you into the lake." [151]

"Hee ees been dead long tam'—dose gran'modder."

"Took her own medicine, I suppose," said Mr. Black. "Was she French or Indian?"

"Ojibway; som' squaw—som' Injun lady; ma fadaire, he French, from Canadaw—speak no Englise. Ma modder Injun, sam' lak ma gran'modder; he mak' dose medicine, too. Bot' dead, dose fadaire, dose modder."

"No wonder," breathed Henrietta.

"Mees *Bettee*," said Dave, turning to go, "you breeng dose odder girl—Ah show you how to

skeen som' deer. Maybe Ah'm geeve you dose tail. Dose liver—vaire fine meat, dose liver—ees for Jean."

At this the girls found it hard not to laugh outright, because, as they very well knew, Jean heartily disliked liver of any kind. But gentle-mannered Jean, who was always careful not to hurt any other person's feelings, managed to say, prettily:

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"Thank you, Dave; you're very good to me."

"You pooty nice girl," returned Dave. "Ah mak' som' med'cine for dose sunburn hon your face."

"Thank you," faltered Jean, "but I—but I *like* to be sunburned. I'll be such a fine color after I've lost *all* my skin."

"Dear me," groaned Mrs. Crane, when the girls had trooped away at Dave's heels, "I was almost sure, this morning, that that boy was better. I put my hand on his forehead very early—when Dave's dog barked, and it felt cool and even a little damp—as if the fever had left him for just a moment or two. And now Dave has probably finished him. That boy must have had a fine constitution to start with or that fever would have ended him yesterday. That horrible medicine on top of everything else he's gone through—"

"Well," returned Mr. Black, "we won't gain anything by worrying about it. We'll get Dave started after a real doctor as soon as possible—I'll write a note to Doctor Bennett, so he can bring the proper medicines with him. Make out your list and put the girls at theirs as soon as they return—I'll go after them presently. That rascal said he'd start 'behind dinner.'"

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It was considerably "behind" the noon meal when Dave was ready to begin his long walk; but at last, with a little food tied in a soiled red handkerchief that dangled from a stick resting on his shoulder, he departed. Although Dave never looked particularly clean, although he was not especially handsome, there were moments when, because of his picturesqueness, he decidedly pleased the eye. Now, with the touch of dangling scarlet at his back, all the rest of him except his rather long black hair an even, woodsy brown, Dave and the landscape, harmoniously combined, made a truly attractive picture. But not for long. The leaves at the edge of the grassy clearing closed suddenly behind him; the castaways could not discover his trail; but Dave must have guessed that they were trying to find it, for his laugh, always an unexpectedly musical sound, floated back to the searchers.

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"I hope," said Jean, "that he won't be gone as long *this* time. Mrs. Crane is almost as worried about this boy as she was about Rosa Marie with the measles—perhaps more, because she had the doctor to help her then."

"Dave helped her this time," said Marjory.

"I hope he'll hurry, too," returned Henrietta. "It seems a *year* since I ate the last crumb of candy out of my box."

"And we can't make any," mourned Marjory, "because the sugar's all but gone."

"There's only a little butter," added Bettie, "and less than half a loaf of rye bread; but luckily we've plenty of flour and cornmeal. Biscuits and johnny-cake help a lot."

"It's a good thing," said Mabel, "that Mrs. Crane thought of sending for that old tin oven. I'd hate to be obliged to go hungry with the kind of appetite I've got *now*. I believe I could eat raw potatoes this minute."

"You won't have to," assured Jean. "There's plenty of oatmeal and rice and a lot of things in packages. Oh, yes, and *beans*—a great big bag of dried ones."

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"Wouldn't it be nice," suggested Bettie, "to surprise Mr. Black and Mrs. Crane with baked beans for supper!"

"But they'd see us cooking them," objected Jean.

"We could build a stone oven, the way Dave showed us, on the beach," said practical Bettie. "Of course, if we used the tin one here in the clearing, they'd see what we were doing. Marjory, you're so small they won't notice you, so you slip into the provision tent and get the beans. How many? Why—I don't know."

"Seven hundred," said Henrietta, promptly. "A hundred apiece—Anthony prefers fish-tails."

"I guess," protested Marjory, "I'm not going to *count* those beans—they come in *pounds*, not dozens."

"They swell a lot," said Bettie. "I think that about four cupfuls would be enough—bring them down in one of those round pudding pans—we'll bake 'em in that."

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"It seems to me," said Jean, when Marjory had successfully captured the beans, "that we ought to wash them. But we haven't any colander—one of those things with holes in it."

"Never mind," said Henrietta, "we'll use the lake—it's big enough, anyway. I'll wade in with the beans—"

"I guess not," retorted Mabel. "Your feet and beans all in together!"

"That's so," agreed Henrietta. "Well, we'll dig out a basin in the hard clean sand and wash them in that."

The basin grew larger than the girls meant to make it, and the slippery white beans, turned loose in this little pond, proved remarkably elusive. But finally the last one was captured and placed in a pan of water with a pinch of salt; the pan was placed in the oven that the girls had built, and a fire was started under it.

"They'll be surprised, won't they?" giggled the happy conspirators, far from suspecting that they themselves were to be the surprised persons; for this was their first experience with cooking dried beans, and of course, since they couldn't consult Mrs. Crane without betraying the secret, there was no one to ask for very necessary instructions.

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CHAPTER XVI

A Valuable Insect

[158]

MRS. CRANE remained very near her sleeping charge all that day. She didn't see, she said, how anybody *could* survive the dreadful dose that Dave had poured down the unconscious lad's throat.

At four that afternoon one of Dave's predictions came true. Great beads of perspiration broke out on the boy's forehead; and soon the voluminous nightgown in which Mrs. Crane had arrayed the patient was wet through, for he was indeed "sweating like a horse."

Remembering Dave's advice concerning broth, yet decidedly fearful of following advice from so doubtful a source, the anxious nurse searched her cupboard for the little jar of beef extract that had been ordered for Bettie (by this time Bettie was clamoring for—and getting—more substantial food) and made a small bowlful of strong *bouillon*. But first, careful Mrs. Crane wrapped her patient in a warm blanket.

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When she returned with the broth, intending to force it by spoonfuls into the lad's mouth, she realised that a great change had taken place in her patient. The fever flush was gone from his cheeks, leaving him pale and clammy; but now, for the first time since his arrival in Pete's Patch his eyes were open. They were big and very, very blue.

"Well," greeted Mrs. Crane, "this is something like! Awake, are you? Don't be frightened, poor lamb—you're as safe here as if you were in your own bed. Open your mouth, there's a good boy. It's some time since you've had a Christian meal."

After the first few spoonfuls, the boy's eyes closed wearily; but he still opened his mouth obediently, just like a young robin, his pleased nurse said afterwards.

"That's all," announced Mrs. Crane, giving him the last spoonful. "Now go to sleep if you want to."

Apparently he did want to, for that is what he did. Mrs. Crane stole softly from the tent.

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"Girls," said she, to the little group in the shade of the biggest tree, "I want you to be very quiet whenever you come near the tents—tell the others when they come back. I believe that boy has taken a change for the better—he's lost his fever and he's sleeping like a baby."

"Was it Dave's awful medicine?" queried Bettie.

"I don't know," returned Mrs. Crane. "Your bottle probably helped. I don't suppose we'll *ever* know just what effect Dave's potion had; but *something* has certainly brought about a change in that poor child. Anyway, remember not to make a noise near my tent."

"My!" giggled Marjory, when Mrs. Crane had returned to her charge, "she never even *looked* toward the beach. I was *so* afraid she'd notice the smoke from that fire and ask what Jean and Mabel were doing."

"So was I," said Henrietta, who was endeavoring to weave a basket from some long, fragrant grass that she had discovered in a marsh near the river, "but she doesn't think of anything but that boy."

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"What's Mr. Black doing all this time?" asked Bettie, who was lying at full length on the ground with her head in Marjory's lap.

"Fishing with his two and a half worms," replied Henrietta.

"There he comes now," said Marjory, "but what in the world ails him?"

No wonder she asked, for stout Mr. Black, hatless and coatless, his thick, iron-gray hair standing upright, his oft-mended suspenders broken once more and dangling from his waist, was dashing madly about the further end of the clearing. Now with arms aloft, now with fingers gripping the sod, this usually sedate and dignified gentleman was behaving in a most remarkable manner.

"Goodness!" gasped Henrietta. "He must be doing an Indian war-dance!"

"He's pounding the ground with his hat," said Marjory.

"Now he's trying to fly—mercy! He's tripped right over a stump!" exclaimed Henrietta. "Let's go and see what he's doing." [162]

Just then Jean and Mabel clambered up the bank from the beach. On seeing the others fleeing hurriedly in Mr. Black's direction, they, too, scurried after.

"He got away," panted Mr. Black, ruefully, as he picked himself up from the grass plot.

"What?" inquired Marjory, "a squirrel? a rabbit? a beaver?"

"No," returned Mr. Black, rather sheepishly, wiping his perspiring brow, "a grasshopper. But I must have that beast. Girls, I'll give you a dollar apiece for every grasshopper you can catch within the next ten minutes. You see, I accidentally caught one—the thing was down my neck—put it on my hook, and in two seconds it was snatched off by the biggest trout I've seen in six years! Yes, siree! He was a yard long! I'd pay *two* dollars for another grasshopper this minute; for I can't catch the pesky things."

"Easy money," laughed Henrietta. "Come on, girls. Let's see who'll get the two dollars."

In another moment all five were hurling themselves recklessly about the sunny clearing, wherever a grasshopper jumped. To an unenlightened observer, it must have seemed as if they, too, were doing an Indian war-dance; certainly they alarmed the grasshoppers. [163]

"Oh," gasped Bettie, after five minutes of this strenuous exercise, "I can't try any longer—my poor old legs are all gone."

So tired Bettie nestled comfortably against Mr. Black, who, with his broad back against a stump, was resting as peacefully as the thought of that big, uncaught trout would permit. But the other four still chased grasshoppers.

Suddenly, a big, bewildered insect hopped right into Bettie's lap; and, in a moment, Bettie's quick, slender fingers had closed over as fine a grasshopper as fisherman would wish to see.

"I've got him—I've got him!" she shrieked. "He's right in my hand."

Mr. Black placed the captive in his pocket match-safe. Then gravely extracting a two-dollar bill from his trousers pocket, he dropped it in Bettie's lap. [164]

"Oh, *no*," breathed Bettie. "Not when you're so good to me—I'd catch a million grasshoppers for you for nothing, if I only could."

"If you don't keep it," declared Mr. Black, closing her fingers over the bill, "I'll let that precious insect fly away."

"Well," sighed Bettie, stuffing the money down her neck, "I'll sit here with my mouth open and let grasshoppers fly in until I catch a *truly* two dollars' worth."

"Well," laughed Mr. Black, rising with difficulty, "bring all you catch down that left-hand trail to the second bend in the river—that's where I saw that whale."

But there was no need of a second grasshopper; for before another was captured, Mr. Black, beaming with pleasure, rushed to the clearing to display his trout. Although the big fish lacked almost two feet of being a yard long, he was a fine specimen.

"And Bettie's grasshopper," said Mr. Black, readjusting it on his hook, "is still as good as new, so I'm going back for another fish—with one more, plus the three I caught this morning, we'll have enough for supper." [165]

"My goodness!" gasped Jean. "Our surprise—nobody's watching the fire!"

With one accord, the five cooks rushed to the beach.

"The fire's out," said Jean. "We'll have to build it again."

When all the rest of the supper was on the table, including Mr. Black's satisfactory catch of trout, nicely fried by Jean, Marjory slipped quietly away to extract the surprise from the oven. She was not entirely satisfied with its appearance; but, at any rate, the dish was good and hot. She succeeded in getting it safely up the sand bank and into the octagonal tent, where she placed it triumphantly beside the trout.

"Why!" exclaimed Mrs. Crane, whose patient was still sleeping, "what have we here?"

"A surprise," beamed Mabel.

"Boston baked beans," explained Bettie.

"Now, that," said Mr. Black, "is a real treat. There's nothing better than beans for camp fare." [166]

But when the beans were served they rattled, as they touched the plates, like rain on a tin roof. Instead of being smooth and nicely filled out, each bean was shriveled and as hard as a pebble.

"Dear me," mourned Bettie, who had taken the first mouthful, "those are dreadful beans—I can't bite them."

"But," said puzzled Jean, "they cooked for hours."

"Did you soak them first?" asked Mrs. Crane.

"No," replied Jean.

"Didn't you boil them?"

"No, we didn't do that, either. Just baked 'em."

"Dear, dear," laughed Mrs. Crane. "No wonder they're hard. You should have soaked them all night, boiled them for an hour, and *then* baked them. And I think, my dears, that you forgot the pork, the molasses, and the salt—beans need a great deal of salt. But it was nice and thoughtful of you good little girls to go to all that trouble." [167]

"We wanted it to be a lovely surprise," mourned Mabel.

"Well," teased Mr. Black, "it's certainly more of a surprise than you meant it to be, therefore more of a success, because we are *all* surprised."

"Cheer up," said Mrs. Crane, touched by the downcast countenances of the disappointed cooks. "We'll feed the surprise to the squirrels. After supper—you see there's plenty this time *without* the surprise—we'll put some more beans to soak; and to-morrow we'll cook them the other way. Anyway, I'm very glad you thought of cooking those beans—I'd forgotten that we had them."

At this the seven gloomy faces brightened. And the beans were not wasted; for the kind squirrels carried away every one.

CHAPTER XVII

The Game Warden's Visit

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THE boy was really better; but very, very weak. Every time he opened an eye, that next day, solicitous Mrs. Crane was ready with a bowl of broth. Once he did not fall asleep immediately but followed her with big, questioning blue eyes as she moved about the tent. He remained awake for twenty minutes that time and even moved his hands slightly.

"You've been real sick," explained Mrs. Crane, sociably, her soft dark eyes very kind and encouraging. "You're pretty weak yet, but you're twice the boy you were yesterday. Could you eat more broth?"

For an instant something that looked like a genuine smile flickered across the boy's lips; and his eyes, Mrs. Crane said afterwards, almost twinkled. Then, in a very thin, weak voice, he said: "Please."

After that he again fell into a long, deep sleep. But now his prolonged slumbers were no longer terrifying, for his breathing was natural, his fever entirely gone. [169]

"*Can't* we see him next time his eyes are open?" pleaded Mabel, waylaying Mrs. Crane in the provision tent, "and *couldn't* I be the first one? I found him, you know, so he's really mostly mine."

"Ye—es," replied Mrs. Crane, pondering this matter. "I guess it's only fair that you should be the first. If you'll stay where you can see the door of my tent, I'll wave a towel when the time comes. But it won't be right away, for he's just gone to sleep again."

"That boat ought to get here to-day," said Mr. Black, who had been expectantly gazing from time to time at the lake, "but I suppose that rascal Dave stopped all along the way to set traps."

Mr. Black was quite right. Dave *had* stopped to set traps. But first of all, with characteristic stealth, the conscienceless half-breed had begun his journey with a comfortable nap. For almost two hours, within five minutes' walk of Pete's Patch, Dave had slumbered, with no thought of anything but his own comfort. After that, he attended leisurely to the numerous traps along his almost invisible trail. Fortunately—or he might *never* have reached his destination, he found only a solitary muskrat. The big rat was still living. Dave eyed him reflectively. [170]

"Goo'-by, li'le son," said Dave, liberating the bright-eyed prisoner. "You ees more bodder dan you ees wort', to-day. An' w'at for Ah'm eat moskrat! Me, Ah'm go for eat dose bifsteak, dose pork shop, dose baked bean hon top of Lakeveele. Go home, you son of a moskrat—Ah catch you som' more nex' veek."

The limping rat splashed into the river, and Dave, after one half-regretful glance at the eddying water, at last started briskly along the trail that led to Lakeville.

He spent the night with his cousin on the outskirts of the town, who refreshed him so generously that faithless Dave didn't know, next morning, whether he was headed toward

Lakeville or toward camp. So he slept all that day and the next; while his good friend Mabel, at Pete's Patch, made brave efforts to save him from threatened disaster.

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Mabel and all the other girls knew that Dave had every reason to fear the game warden. The youthful castaways, who were not very clear as to the duties of game wardens in general, considered them the natural enemies of all hunters and fishermen. Dave had once shown the girls a battered, yellowed newspaper containing a full-length picture of a brawny, khaki-clad game warden arresting a lawless sportsman. The half-breed had said, half laughingly, half seriously:

"Eef you ees see dose man som' tam', Mees Mabelle, Mees Bettée, don't you go for tole her som't'ing about Dave Burneau, or maybe, me, Ah'm got maself lock up for sure. Or maybe Ah'm go for pay feefty dollar fine."

The idea of a fifty-dollar fine had probably tickled Dave, who, at that poverty-stricken moment would have found it impossible to pay even fifty cents.

But the girls had been deeply impressed. They saw clearly that a visit from the game warden would result disastrously to Dave, whom the youngsters liked, in spite of his many irregularities; for the ignorant half-breed was always good to them in his own peculiar way. And then, too, Mr. Black had said that Dave was to be protected from all chance visitors.

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Very soon after the arrival of the nails, Mr. Black had built a rain-proof shed to shelter the disabled "Whale." As it was possible to reach this spot without tumbling into either the lake or the river, Mabel often strolled that way to look for berries, flowers, mushrooms, or mosses—she was apt to return with specimens of all four jumbled untidily together in the skirt of her dress.

This fine morning, Mrs. Crane having suggested that a few mushrooms would add flavor and bulk to the noon meal, Mabel and Henrietta, with the praiseworthy intention of gathering a bushel or two, walked along the swampy, woody road that led to Lakeville.

It was not often that Mabel and Henrietta paired off together, for Henrietta was the oldest, Mabel the youngest of the five girls. But in some ways pretty, black-eyed Henrietta was more thoughtless, less responsible than Jean, Marjory, or Bettie. After the death of her young mother, various relatives, including an inexperienced father and a too-indulgent grandmother, had done their best to spoil attractive Henrietta. They hadn't exactly succeeded; but the unrestrained little girl, naturally impulsive, naturally a bit daring, and always very high-spirited, was apt to act first and do her thinking afterwards. As for Mabel—why, Mabel simply *plunged* into trouble. Still, it seemed safe enough to send this pair forth for mushrooms; so, with a basket between them, a smiling sky overhead, they set forth merrily.

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"It's funny about mushrooms," observed Mabel. "You can gather all there are and the next day you find just as many more. But when you pick berries that's the last of them for a whole year."

"I wish," returned Henrietta, "it were just the other way."

"So do I," agreed Mabel, her mouth full of big, red wintergreen berries.

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"It never is," sighed Henrietta, sentimentally. "Every time there's a storm, the sea brings in millions of cobblestones and only one agate. I *love* to hunt for agates."

"If they came in like cobblestones," said practical Mabel, "you wouldn't have the fun of hunting — Why! There's something coming down the road. See! That way—toward Lakeville."

"A man on horseback!" exclaimed Henrietta. "Let's hide—"

"What for?" demanded Mabel, bravely.

"His clothes!" breathed Henrietta, in an agonized whisper, as she dragged Mabel backward. "Can't you *see*? It's the game warden—I know him by his leggings. Just like that picture. Hurry, Mabel—he's after Dave!"

"Oh! do you *think* so?" gasped Mabel, paralyzed with horror. "And all that venison hanging near Dave's wigwam! And all those partridge feathers on Mr. Black's land! They might arrest him, too! And us! Oh, Henrietta! What'll we do?"

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"Run," urged Henrietta, tugging at Mabel's dress.

"But—but I can't!" gasped Mabel, helplessly. "And, anyway, it's too late—he's looking right this way. But, oh! We mustn't let him go anywhere near Pete's Patch."

"Sh!" breathed Henrietta, warningly; but with a quick, decisive nod that seemed vaguely reassuring. "Stop looking scared."

The rider, having cautiously and more or less successfully skirted a bad bit of swamp, caught sight of the girls and checked his travel-stained horse.

"Is this the way," he asked, politely, "to Barclay's Point?"

Henrietta's forefinger promptly pointed toward the north—directly toward the concealed Point.

"Just keep going," she advised. "It's quite a long way, but you're headed right for Barclay's."

"Yes," assisted Mabel, after a closer scrutiny of the telltale leggings, "you just keep going."

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"I'm looking," explained the man, "for Mr. Black. He's at Barclay's Point, isn't he?"

"Sometimes," replied Henrietta, truthfully.

"How's the fishing up there?"

"I haven't fished," returned Henrietta, shortly. The game warden, it was plain, would get no incriminating information from Henrietta.

"This road, you say, leads to the Point?"

"Ye—es," faltered Mabel; "yes, if—"

"Never mind the 'if,'" hissed Henrietta, into Mabel's surprised ear. "Yes," she added aloud, and very convincingly, "it *does* lead to the Point. But you'd better hurry, or Mr. Black may be starting out for some other place."

"I'd hate to miss him," said the man, touching his hat. "Thank you, young ladies. I'll go at once—perhaps I'll see you later."

Mabel and Henrietta eyed each other in discreet silence until the sound of hoofbeats had gradually died away.

"We've been bad," breathed Mabel.

"It was necessary," sighed Henrietta. "Goodness knows, I'd *rather* be good. And that road *does* lead to Barclay's Point." [177]

"Yes—if you're smart enough to find the turn off."

"That's why I told him to hurry—if he rides fast, he'll *never* see it."

"Nobody would," agreed Mabel. "Where does this road go, anyway?"

"Seventeen miles to an old lumber camp—Dave told me. There's another camp, not so far, but it has a 'blind turn-off'—you'd *never* find it if you didn't know just exactly where to look. Even then you'd *think* you were wrong. I guess it'll take him all day to find Pete's Patch. Anyhow, I hope so."

"Shall we tell the others?"

"N—no," decided Henrietta, contemplatively. "By the time he's reached the end of that swampy road without coming to anything he'll be too tired and discouraged to *want* to arrest anybody. He'll just make tracks for home. But when Dave comes we'll tell him to hide his venison."

"And," said Mabel, not knowing the depths of Dave's depravity, "he'll surely be here soon—he'll hurry right back with my father." [178]

"Why, that's so," laughed Henrietta. "Your father *is* coming. Well, he won't know you—he'll think you're some relative of Dave's, and prescribe soap. But let's get those mushrooms. If that man comes back he mustn't find us here—he *might* ask questions we couldn't answer. And I think we'd better roll a log across the turn-off to Pete's Patch and throw a little old brush against it so it won't show."

CHAPTER XVIII

The Boy's Name

AN hour later, with a splendid lot of glistening mushrooms, Mabel and Henrietta returned to camp. As they neared the clearing, Mrs. Crane could be seen in the doorway of her tent, frantically waving a large towel.

"Oh," cried Mabel, quickening her pace, "the boy's awake! She wants *me*—I'm to be first—I'm to be—"

"If you plunge in that way," admonished Henrietta, running lightly beside Mabel, "you'll scare him to death. Do stop long enough to wash your face—he'll think you're a murderous young squaw coming with another dose of Dave's medicine."

Five minutes later, when Mabel, very red and very shining from a hasty application of laundry soap and cold water, looked in at the tent door, a pair of big, bright blue eyes smiled at her from the low, balsam bed.

"Hello!" said the boy, "are you the kid they call Mabel? They tell me you picked me up on the beach, along with some driftwood, when I was drowned." [180]

"Yes," admitted Mabel, bashfully. "And I guess you *were* drowned, too—almost. I'm glad you've come to, at last. When are you going to get up?"

"I tried to just now, but my head's made of lead—it won't come up."

"I guess your neck's weak—Bettie's was. What's your name?"

The laughter and the light suddenly faded from the boy's eyes.

"I don't know," said the boy, blankly. "I—it's queer, isn't it? That lady with the broth asked me once before, I think—"

"I asked you yesterday," corroborated Mrs. Crane. "But don't worry, my dear. You've been very ill and your mind is as weak as your body, no doubt. They'll both be stronger in a few days. All you need to remember is that we are your friends."

"And your real name doesn't matter, anyway," added Mabel, noting the troubled expression that still clouded the boy's countenance. "I'm going to call you Billy Blue-eyes—I used to know a goat—"

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The boy's expressive face suddenly brightened, the blue eyes actually twinkled with fun.

"The very thing," cried Mrs. Crane. "We'll call him Billy Blue-eyes. I told him this morning that, when he came out of the lake, he must have brought some of the color with him. His eyes are certainly blue. Shall we call you Billy?"

"Sounds all right to me," agreed the boy; "but—but I *hope* I wasn't that goat."

"You weren't," assured Mabel, earnestly. "I liked him, but he butted so many people that Grandma Pike—he belonged to her—had to have him chloroformed and stuffed. The stuffed-animal man wanted him. They didn't have any real glass goat eyes to put in him so they used blue glass marbles. But how did you get in the lake—or out of it, Mr. Billy?"

Again the boy looked troubled.

"I don't know," said he, after a long pause.

"Don't ask any more questions," warned Mrs. Crane. "There'll be plenty of time for that later. Mr. Black sent a notice to the Lakeville paper, by Dave, so his folks'll know he's alive—we described him as well as we could. I even measured him with my tape-measure. He isn't as wide as he ought to be for his length, poor lamb."

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"He'll get fat on camp fare," promised Mabel. "Look at me!"

Billy Blue-eyes looked and the troubled expression gave way to one of amusement.

"Phew!" said he, "I'd better not be fed so often—I guess I'll wait awhile for that broth—I've only one suit of clothes, the broth lady says. If I outgrow that—"

"You can borrow mine," laughed Mabel. "My gray sweater would fit you splendidly."

"He'll need it, too," said Mrs. Crane, "when he sits up to-morrow. That is, I *think* I'll let him sit up to-morrow—he hasn't had a scrap of fever for quite awhile."

"Perhaps," suggested Mabel, "Dave's medicine really did cure him. Did you taste it, Billy?"

"Once," said Billy, "but I don't know when, I drank something like red-hot coals, flavored with tobacco and vinegar and ink—was that it?"

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"Yes," laughed Mabel, "that must have been it."

"There's a queer taste in my mouth yet," declared the boy. "It's all puckered up—like choke-cherries."

"I guess you'd better run along, Mabel," advised Mrs. Crane, noting that the boy's eyes, in spite of his best efforts, were closing wearily. "He doesn't stay awake very long at a time."

"Good-by," said Mabel, cheerfully.

"Come again," breathed the boy, sleepily.

Of course Mabel felt very important indeed when the other youthful castaways, waiting impatiently just outside the tent, seized her and wanted to know all about it.

"He's awfully thin," said Mabel, condescending finally to answer some of the eager little girls' questions. "And his eyes are perfectly huge and sort of twinkly. And blue; yes, bluer than Marjory's. I think we're going to like him; but he can't remember his own name."

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"Can't remember his own name!" exclaimed Henrietta. "Perhaps he doesn't *want* to. Perhaps he's an escaped convict trying to hide from the police. Perhaps he's a burglar—"

"He isn't either," snorted Mabel, indignantly. "Do you s'pose I'd rescue anybody like that? Besides, you can tell. He *wants* to remember and can't."

"But what," demanded sympathetic Bettie, "will that poor child do for a name? Are we to call him 'that boy' forever? And shout 'Say, Boy' when we want him?"

"Of course not," said Henrietta, promptly. "We'll name him ourselves. Vincent de Manville Holmes would be nice—or Neptune something, because he came out of the sea."

"That was Venus," corrected Jean.

"Oh, well," amended Henrietta, cheerfully, "Ulysses might be better. Still, I always did like Reginald. Or Percival—Percival Orlando de Courcy."

"You go home," blurted indignant Mabel, no longer able to listen in triumphant silence. "His name's Billy. He's my boy and I named him; and that's enough." [185]

"What?" demanded Marjory. "Just Billy?"

"Billy Blue-eyes."

"My!" teased Marjory. "Just like a paper doll!"

"Never mind," soothed tactful Jean, "I think Billy's a beautiful name."

"For a goat," scoffed Henrietta.

There's no knowing what would have happened if Mr. Black, gently shooing a strange object before him, had not appeared just then, from the woods back of the clearing.

"Hi there, girls," he shouted, "I'm bringing you a pet!"

At that the girls, all differences forgotten, raced toward Mr. Black.

"Stop! Stop!" he shouted. "You'll scare him away. Stand where you are. That's right. Now, Marjory, you run for the clothesline—we'll try to get a noose about his neck."

"Goodness!" gasped Henrietta, backing away as the pet waddled toward her; "what is it? It looks just like a bad dream." [186]

"I know," laughed Jean. "It's a porcupine. Just see how his quills stick out—Mercy! Look out, Bettie!"

"Ouch!" squealed short-skirted Bettie, as the clumsy beast hurtled past her. "My legs!"

"Why!" cried Mabel, "there's quills in your stockings!"

"In *me*, too," giggled Bettie. "I guess nobody'll pet *that* pet very much."

"Perhaps we don't want him," said Mr. Black, rather apologetically; "but I thought you might enjoy studying a porcupine at close quarters."

"Not *too* close," laughed Bettie, rubbing her shin.

"They're easily tamed," said Mr. Black, "and they'll eat most anything. I found this one on the river bank. He seemed willing enough to run, but it took quite a while to get him going in the right direction."

Mr. Black succeeded presently in getting a noose fastened about the porcupine's neck. Then, because there happened to be a convenient tree at that point, the other end of the rope was made fast to a sturdy maple near the path that led to the beach. [187]

"We'll name *him* Percival Orlando de Courcy," declared Henrietta.

"No," said Mr. Black, "this is Terrible Tim, the watchdog. Stationed at this point, he'll keep all intruders at bay."

Terrible Tim, however, looked the mildest of beasts by this time, for with quills lowered, he was cowering bashfully among the shrubbery.

CHAPTER XIX

A Belated Traveler

A BRILLIANT moon had aided Dave in the latter portion of his journey to Lakeville. The following night, a similarly illumined sky was of great assistance to another solitary wayfarer, for the man in leather leggings, misdirected that morning by Mabel and Henrietta, was laboriously making his way back toward Pete's Patch. Before he had *quite* reached the end of the unspeakable road over which the girls had sent him, he had met a camping fisherman who had given him explicit directions for finding Mr. Black's land.

At ten o'clock that night, having at last reached Barclay's Point, he urged his patient horse along the beach until he came to the embers of a dying camp fire, and noted, on the bank above, a number of white tents gleaming like ghosts in the moonlight. Tying his weary steed to a convenient log, the man, very stiff and sore from his long ride, clambered up the sand bank, only to fall prone at the top over a strange and most alarmingly prickly object that stood directly in his path. [189]

Rising with considerable difficulty and separating himself as speedily as possible from Terrible Tim, who was emitting queer, frightened grunts, the surprised traveler moved cautiously along the path, shouting, in a voice that quavered persistently in spite of his manly efforts to control it:

"Mr. Black! Oh, Mr. Bla—ack!"

Mr. Black, only half awake, sat up to listen. The call came again.

"Oh, Mr. Bla-a-a-ack!"

The owner of the name, wrapped in a blanket, thrust an inquiring head from the doorway of his tent.

"What's all the row about?" he demanded.

"Oo!" groaned Henrietta, who had wakened at the first call, "it's that game warden! He'll never spare us *now*."

Keen-eared Marjory, too, was sitting up to listen; and, at Mr. Black's reply, Jean and Bettie opened their eyes.

"Wake up," commanded Henrietta, in a terrifying whisper, as she pummeled Mabel mercilessly. "Wake up, wake up—the game warden's here." [190]

The response to this was so surprising that Henrietta, whose teeth were already chattering with fright, almost tumbled over.

"Who—oop!" shouted Mabel, doubling up her sturdy fists and hitting out, first with one, then another. "Who—oop! Who—oop! Who—oop!"

"Mabel! For goodness' sake, what do you think you're doing!" gasped Henrietta. "Oh, my poor chin!"

"Mabel! Stop pounding my ribs!" shrieked Bettie. "You can't sleep next to *me* again."

"I—I killed him," breathed Mabel, subsiding with a deep, satisfied sigh. "Oh, is it breakfast time?"

"What did you kill?" demanded Henrietta, rubbing her chin.

"The father-bear—Bettie was running away with his cubs. What's the matter with everybody?"

"The game warden," whispered Henrietta. "He's outside with Mr. Black—arresting him, I guess. But listen—they're talking." [191]

"What!" Mr. Black was exclaiming, excitedly. "Two girls? Two of *my* girls sent you—why, Saunders! You must be dreaming!"

"Saunders!" gasped Henrietta.

"Saunders!" echoed Mabel. "Why! Saunders is the man in Mr. Black's office. I've never seen him, but I've heard a lot about him."

"Girls!" called Mr. Black, "are you awake?"

"Yes," shrieked all five.

"Here's a hungry man. Could one of you roll up in a blanket and find him something to eat?"

"Sure!" shrieked all five.

Then, of course, there followed a lively scramble for shoes and blankets and, in another moment, the five girls, looking like so many disheveled little squaws, were out in the moonlight.

"There's some cold johnny-cake," said Jean, rather doubtfully, "and some mushroom soup that I could warm up." [192]

"And beans," added Marjory, stalking after her towards the camp cupboard. "I'll get the dishes."

"Girls," said Mr. Black, "this is Mr. Saunders—Mr. William Saunders—of Lakeville. Saunders, which of these young women did you see this morning?"

"Well, really," stammered the visitor, glancing from one to another of the blanketed maidens, "I couldn't say."

"Mabel and me," mumbled Henrietta, half-heartedly.

"And you sent him——"

"We thought," explained Mabel, balancing unsteadily on the only foot for which she had been able to find a shoe, "that he was the game warden."

"Game warden!" gasped Mr. Black. "Do you mean to say that you *meant* to send him seventeen miles from Barclay's?"

The guilty little girls accomplished the difficult feat of nodding and hanging their heads at the same time. [193]

"In all that mud!" groaned Saunders, "and on that awful saddle!"

"We," faltered Henrietta, whose red blanket was most becoming to her sparkling brunette countenance, "we didn't want the game warden to find out about Dave."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Mr. Black. "That reminds me. Dave is in Lakeville, Saunders is here—he brought up an important paper for me to sign. With Saunders gone, Dave won't know what to do about the doctor. He *may* start back."

"Not if there's anything drinkable left in Lakeville," assured Saunders. "I know mighty well where I'll find him. But I *can't* go back to-night—I'm not accustomed to riding, and I've been on that poor old nag all day."

"I'll fix a bed for you in my tent," said Mr. Black. "There's plenty of room."

"I'm awfully sorry for what we did," mumbled Henrietta, contritely, "but we *did* mistake you for that dreadful game warden."

"That looks," said Saunders, with mock severity, "as if you'd been breaking the game laws." [194]

"It's that rascal Dave," explained Mr. Black. "He has damaged them all; but please don't mention it in town."

Mr. Saunders was fed and escorted to bed; but before he had had time to unlace his shoes, there were wild shrieks from the girls' tent. Mabel, the first to plunge in, had collided with a horribly prickly object that grunted like a frightened pig and scratched like a thousand needles. Then, as girl after girl rubbed against Terrible Tim, who had somehow escaped and was calmly eating their tallow candle, a chorus of shrieks rang forth. This outcry, of course, sent Mr. Black flying to the rescue. And Mrs. Crane, roused at last and puzzled by the presence of Mr. Saunders, joined the relief party.

"It's Terrible Tim!" shrieked Marjory. "He's in all our beds!"

"We'll let him go," declared Mr. Black. "He's too troublesome a pet."

"No, no, no!" shrieked the alarmed girls. "He'll get in here again." [195]

"And I'm sure," said Mrs. Crane, "that he isn't wanted in *my* tent."

"Well," agreed Mr. Black, "I guess it *is* wiser to tie him up than to attempt to chase him away—perhaps he's forgotten the way home."

So Terrible Tim, cowering in a corner and quite as frightened as his victims, was fastened to his clothesline and driven to his tree. It was days, however, before the girls' blankets were free from the irritating porcupine quills that Timothy had shed so generously.

In the morning Mr. Saunders, still stiff and sore from his long ride, was safely started on his way to Lakeville; but, during his brief stay, he had made friends with all the girls and even conversed for a few moments with Billy Blue-eyes, who was greatly taken with the pleasant young man.

"You see," explained Saunders, with a twinkle in his shrewd gray eye as he glanced toward Mabel and Henrietta, "I want to make such a good impression that I'll be recognized a mile away *next* time." [196]

"Well," complained Mabel, "you might have *said* you weren't that game warden."

At that, lame as he was, Saunders threw back his head and roared.

When Saunders, bountifully supplied with lists and instructions, had departed, Mrs. Crane told the girls that Billy was clamoring for visitors.

"I guess," said she, "we'll let Jean and Bettie in first—they're the quietest."

The boy was now visibly gaining in strength; also he seemed sufficiently cheerful and contented until Bettie, forgetting that she was not to trouble him with questions, asked if he lived in Lakeville.

"Where's that?" queried the boy.

"About fifteen miles from here," returned Bettie. "You could see it on a clear day if it wasn't for Sugar Loaf and a lot of other scenery in the way."

"What's Sugar Loaf—sounds like a candy shop?"

"A very high hill right on the edge of the lake. Lakeville is a town around several corners in a little bay. Where *did* you come from?" [197]

The boy's eyes clouded. "I don't know," said he. "When I wake up in the night I *almost* remember things—my bed, for instance, belongs over there—but there's always a piece of everything gone. I—it bothers me. I guess you think I'm pretty queer."

"Don't worry," soothed Jean. "You're not strong yet. You'll be all right when you're well."

"Think so?" demanded Billy, brightening. "Then I'll eat all the broth Mrs.—some kind of a bird—brings me."

"She's making some now," said Bettie, "from a piece of Dave's venison. We'll have all sorts of good things to eat as soon as Mr. Saunders gets to town. He said he'd travel as fast as he *could*—I guess he's pretty lame."

"But," groaned Jean, "he can't possibly get anything here before to-morrow and I'm just starved for pie."

"Pie!" laughed the boy. "I'd like a piece myself. Why, when I lived in—in— Now wouldn't that make you tired! I can *see* a table with pie on it and a whole pitcher full of cream; but, if you offered me a thousand dollars I couldn't tell you where to find that table! Pshaw! It makes me so mad when things float off like that that I want to—cry." [198]

Whereupon Jean, noting that big tears blurred the blue eyes, began hastily to tell how Terrible Tim had devoured one of Mabel's shoes, left carelessly within his reach; and presently the lad was again smiling.

CHAPTER XX

A Surprise Party

[199]

THE following afternoon, all the castaways except Billy, who, however, was sitting up in bed, crouched in a row on the bank to watch two slowly approaching objects.

"Surely we never asked for *two* boat-loads of food," remarked puzzled Bettie.

"Or medicine," added Mrs. Crane.

"Or books," said Jean.

"Or clothes," supplemented Henrietta.

"Perhaps," suggested Mr. Black, "the other boat isn't coming here."

"But it *is*," asserted far-sighted Marjory. "It's headed right this way. And the bigger one is Captain Berry's launch, I *know*."

Twenty minutes later the boat that was *not* Captain Berry's dropped anchor in the little bay.

"It's people!" Marjory exclaimed, as the smaller launch swung about. "It looks like a picnic." [200]

"Dear me," said alarmed Mrs. Crane, "I hope they've brought their own lunch—we couldn't give them much. And I feel like hiding in the woods—we're terribly in need of starch and flatirons."

"They're *waving*," cried Bettie. "I do believe they're visitors for us. Oh, I guess they want a boat."

Mr. Black, who had hastened to the launch with one of the small boats, was first to recognize the passengers. Jean, who followed with the second boat (by this time all the girls had learned to row in the shallow, usually calm little bay), was second.

"Mercy!" exclaimed astonished Jean, almost catching a crab, "it's most of our parents and Aunt Jane—I do hope they're not going to take us home!"

Presently the visitors were safely landed. Doctor and Mrs. Bennett, Doctor and Mrs. Tucker, Mrs. Mapes, Henrietta's grandmother, Mrs. Slater, and Marjory's Aunt Jane.

"Where's that dreadful boy?" demanded Aunt Jane, the moment she was on shore. "Are you sure he hasn't something catching? I haven't known a moment's peace since I knew that you'd sent for the doctor; for Marjory's never had *anything*. Are you sure it isn't smallpox? Those lumber camps up the lake—"

"Dear me," said Mrs. Crane, "didn't we write that the boy was more than half drowned? I'm *sure* I said so."

"It was that Indian—that unspeakably filthy Indian," returned Aunt Jane. "He said the boy had a fever. I went to the jail—to the *jail*, Mrs. Crane—to talk to that—that beast."

"Who—Dave?"

"I suppose so. From what little I could understand, I gathered that that boy had some malignant illness—typhoid, diphtheria, scarlet fever, smallpox—"

"Mr. Black," interposed Doctor Bennett, "I did all I could to keep these women home, but they *would* come."

"I don't blame them," beamed Mr. Black, hospitably. "They wanted to see their girls. We're glad to see you all." [202]

Aunt Jane, the neatest housekeeper in Lakeville, cast disapproving glances in every direction as Mr. Black led the way to the campground. Everybody else was busy exclaiming over Bettie.

"Are you sure you *are* Bettie?" demanded Mrs. Tucker, with delighted eyes. "Why, you're *fat*—Doctor Bennett, she hasn't been fat since she was three years old. And brown! And look at the red in her cheeks! And her lips!"

"I've certainly lost my patient," laughed Doctor Bennett. "But Mabel seems to be all here."

"Just look at my long Jean's brown arms," cried pleased Mrs. Mapes, vainly endeavoring to span the rounded forearm. "Bigger than mine!"

"That's muscle," laughed Jean. "Rowing and climbing trees are great for your muscle—but hard on your clothes."

"Ugh!" shuddered Aunty Jane, sniffing disgustedly. "How horrible everything smells! Bacon, onions, fish—just like that filthy Indian!" [203]

"All camps smell camp-y," explained Doctor Bennett. "*You'll* smell camp-y after a day in the woods. But where's that boy? Until I've seen him, these anxious mothers won't be satisfied that he hasn't something contagious."

Mrs. Mapes, Doctor and Mrs. Tucker, and the Bennetts were delighted with Pete's Patch and went quite wild over the scenery; but it was clear to everybody that Henrietta's decidedly aristocratic little grandmother and Marjory's overwhelmingly neat Aunty Jane had never been intended by nature for camp life. Mrs. Slater, to be sure, enjoyed the fine sky, the wonderful expanse of blue water, the beautiful golden-brown river, and the deep, cool forest. She liked all these in a quiet, understanding way; but one could see, although the tactful gentlewoman was most polite about it all, that the lowly balsam beds, the rough benches, the careless attire of the castaways had proved rather shocking to a lady accustomed always to luxurious ways of living. As for Aunty Jane, she liked nothing and did not hesitate to denounce camp life and all pertaining to it, Terrible Tim included. [204]

"Marjory!" she had exclaimed, at first sight of her usually spotless niece, "your dress is a perfect sight! Go this instant and put on a clean one."

"Why!" returned surprised Marjory, "this is my clean one—I washed it yesterday."

"*Washed* it!" gasped Aunty Jane. "Well, you couldn't have used much water."

"Only the whole lake," returned Marjory, meekly. "But we haven't any flatirons, so we just pull things somewhere near the right shape and dry them on the bushes. It's lovely fun to wash—we go right in with our clothes."

"Do you *cook* in those filthy pans?" next demanded Aunty Jane, inspecting the fruit of the large pine that served, as Mr. Black punned merrily, as a "pan-tree."

"They're clean *inside*," defended Jean. "That's smoke from the camp fire."

"I wash the *outside* of my saucepans," sniffed Aunty Jane, with blighting emphasis. "Also my frying-pans." [205]

"It isn't considered proper in camp," returned Mr. Black, whose eyes were twinkling wickedly; "but if you'd like a little missionary work, Miss Jane, there's the dishcloth."

"Dishcloth!" gasped Aunty Jane, disdainfully, eyeing the fairly clean rag drying in the sun. "I wouldn't scrub my coal bin with a cloth the color of that."

"I wouldn't scrub mine with *anything*," laughed Mrs. Bennett; "but never mind, Aunty Jane, our girls seem to be thriving in spite of torn dresses and unscoured pans. This life is doing them a world of good."

"Good!" sniffed Aunty Jane. "Why! The place must be fairly swarming with germs. I shouldn't *think* of permitting Marjory to remain here—I shall take her home with me to-night."

This was lightning from a clear sky. For a moment nobody said a word. Then there was a chorus of protests.

"No, no!" shrieked Bettie, hurling herself upon Aunty Jane. "She can't go." [206]

"Oh, *please*, Aunty Jane," cried Jean. "We can't spare her—she's our telescope and our ears."

"Oh, *no*," stormed Mabel, "we *must* keep her. *She* likes it here—and look at her face—all brown ___"

"With dirt," snapped Auntie Jane. "It'll take me a month to get that child clean—and a year to scour off those disgusting freckles."

Marjory groaned. The prospect was certainly dismal.

"Never mind," counseled impish Henrietta, whispering in Marjory's ear. "You can run away—I'll help you. You can easily hide in the bushes so she can't find you when the time comes—there's forty good places to hide in—let's find one now."

"No," moaned Marjory, "I *can't* do that—I wouldn't dare to. And it won't do a mite of good to tease. If she says a thing she sticks to it—it's all over for poor me."

When things went wrong, Bettie cried easily, Henrietta wept copiously, and Mabel wailed uproariously; but Marjory, restrained little soul that she was, was seldom known to shed tears. But now several large specimens began to roll down Marjory's cheeks, and presently, to Mr. Black's dismay, the little girl was sobbing bitterly, with her head against Jean's flat but motherly bosom.

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Both Mr. Black and Mrs. Crane pleaded with Aunt Jane. All the parents reasoned with her. Even Mrs. Slater, who was no camper herself, implored Miss Higgins to change her mind. But that was a thing that the poor lady never *could* do. Some people *can't* change their minds—Aunt Jane couldn't. Even when she wanted to she couldn't.

"Perhaps she'll be more amiable after dinner," suggested gentle Doctor Tucker, whose mild eyes were shining at the prospect of catching a trout with the hook that Mr. Black was baiting for him. "Many persons are."

But the splendid noon dinner that hungry Aunt Jane had expected to devour was still nearly a mile from shore in Captain Berry's launch, and the other launch-man couldn't go after it; because, having incautiously ventured too near shore, he was now engaged in half-hearted attempts to dislodge his stranded craft from a troublesome sand bar. He declined all offers of assistance, saying that Captain Berry, whose engine would surely work *sometime*, could easily tow him into deeper water—*he* wasn't goin' to work hisself to death for nobody, no, not he.

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As nobody wanted to row a mile or more and then back again with a load of heavy baskets, nobody did; so Mrs. Crane did the best she could with what she had; but the camp-cooked dinner did not appeal to Aunt Jane, who refused to eat venison that Dave had touched and had no appetite for plain beans, boiled potatoes, and cindery johnny-cake. Altogether, poor Aunt Jane, who was never *very* pleasant, was in her unhappiest mood.

"You see," apologized Mrs. Crane, "our provisions are pretty low; we haven't a very large supply of cups and plates, and of course you haven't been here long enough to acquire an appetite for camp fare. Let me give you a piece of this trout, Miss Higgins."

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"No, thank you," was Aunt Jane's frigid reply. "I never eat fish."

"These beans," assured Mrs. Slater, politely, "are very nice indeed."

"And I'm sure," said Doctor Bennett, "this is excellent coffee, even if I *do* have to drink from a cocoa can."

But Aunt Jane scorned them both.

"Tell us," urged Mr. Black, "about that boy of ours. What do you think of him?"

"Why," replied the merry doctor, "the lad's all right, considering what he's been through. But, judging from his extreme thinness, being shipwrecked is only a small part of his unhappy experience."

"What *do* you mean?" demanded Mrs. Mapes, uneasily.

"No, my dear woman—*all* my dear women," Doctor Bennett hastened to add, "he hasn't had smallpox. But I *do* know that he was a sick boy *before* he was shipwrecked, because his body shows that he has lost more flesh than a boy *could* lose in so short a time."

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"Yes," corroborated Mrs. Crane, "he was *very* thin when we found him."

"Tuberculosis!" breathed Aunt Jane.

"Nothing of the kind," declared the doctor.

"But he was dreadfully thin," asserted Mabel. "His legs——"

"Never mind his legs," said Doctor Bennett. "It's his head that troubles us now. His body is mending with every moment; but there's something seriously wrong with his memory——"

"A dangerous lunatic!" gasped excitable Aunt Jane, half rising from her seat.

"No, no!" shouted the exasperated doctor, who didn't like Aunt Jane. "Nothing of the sort. Merely a very pitiable boy who has been extremely ill, probably with pneumonia. A boy who is naturally very bright, in all ways but the one. A boy with an excellent constitution or this last experience would have finished him. The best thing we can possibly do for him is to keep him right here, build up his strength in this splendid air, and then, when he's entirely well, take him to a specialist—I'm wiser about bodies than brains."

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"Could I make him a pudding?" demanded Mabel, unexpectedly.

"No," roared the doctor. "We want him to get *well*."

"As for me," said Henrietta, "I shan't be able to sleep nights until I know that boy's real name."

"Take my word for it," warned Aunt Jane, "he isn't worth saving. He'll prove either a thief or a tramp; or perhaps both. I wouldn't *think* of taking in a stranger like that."

Mabel was about to retort indignantly, and, it is to be feared, impolitely; for this candid child was sometimes too candid; when Henrietta whispered in her ear:

"Wouldn't it be terrible if he proved to be just like Aunt Jane!"

This thought was so appalling, in spite of its impossibility, that for ten seconds Mabel sat in silence, with her eyes fairly bulging.

"Henrietta," she breathed finally, "weren't—weren't you just fooling?"

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"Listen!" warned Henrietta.

"I'd rather be deceived fifty times," Mrs. Crane was saying, "than let even a tramp go hungry; but that's an honest lad or I never saw one. It's quite possible that he's poor, but that's no crime."

CHAPTER XXI

[213]

Dave Makes Himself Useful

SHOUTS from the lake now claimed the campers' attention. Captain Berry's obstinate engine had suddenly decided to work and was now making up for lost time by refusing to stop. The captain, as near shore as he dared approach, was spinning round and round in circles. Each time he neared the land he shouted lustily.

"He wants something," interpreted Mr. Black, rising from the table. "Marjory—where is Marjory with her sharp ears?"

"Crying in our tent," replied Mabel, with a vindictive glance toward Aunt Jane. "If she wasn't a *good* child, she'd climb a tree and stay there until some folks——"

"There, there," squelched Doctor Bennett, "we mustn't criticise our elders. Let's see what that crazy boat is doing."

"She's stopped," said Mr. Black, "and Dave's swimming ashore—after the boats, I guess. Let's help him."

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Presently all sorts of boxes, bundles, and baskets were safely landed; all the campers and most of the visitors helping the good work along. Even Marjory, her face swollen and disfigured from much weeping, assisted a little.

"Hullo!" cried Dave, catching sight of the sorrowful countenance. "W'at you ees cry for, li'le gal?"

Tactful Jean, seeing that Marjory was unable to speak, replied for her.

"Her aunt—she hasn't any mother, you know—is going to take her home. She doesn't want to go; but she can't help herself."

"Dat's too bad," sympathized Dave. "W'ich of dose ees hees aunt?"

Jean pointed out Aunt Jane—a middle-aged, unattractive lady, who sat bolt upright when everybody else loafed in comfortable, camp-y attitudes.

"Yas, Ah'm see dose old gal biffore," admitted disrespectful Dave, eying Aunt Jane's stiff, unconscious back reflectively. "Ah'm not lak' dose kind of lady ver' moch—she ees tole me for take som' *bat*!"

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Even Marjory smiled forlornly at the idea of Dave's taking a bath. But smiles did not last long that day. In spite of all the good things that came in baskets and bundles, in spite of a big box of candy that Saunders had included for Mabel and Henrietta, and inscribed "With the Game Warden's Compliments," the sympathetic little girls were very unhappy at the thought of losing Marjory. They had *always* played together; and now they were absolutely certain that they *couldn't* have good times during the rest of their stay with no Marjory to help enjoy them. As for Marjory, that small maiden was shedding so many tears that Mabel feared there would soon be nothing left of her unhappy little friend. And by afternoon even the grown-ups were thoroughly vexed by Aunt Jane's obstinacy.

"Oh, we all know," said Mrs. Bennett to Mrs. Tucker, who sat under a tree, letting down a skirt for Bettie, "that Aunt Jane *means* well; she'd work her fingers to the bone for Marjory; but a *real* mother wouldn't be a—a——"

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"Vinegar cruet," supplied Doctor Bennett.

"She has completely spoiled the day," declared Mrs. Tucker, "for all those children; and we *meant* to give them a pleasant surprise."

"Poor Aunt Jane *couldn't* be a pleasant surprise," protested Mrs. Bennett, "but we mustn't blame her—*she* didn't pick out her unfortunate disposition. We'll just have to be extra cheerful ourselves this afternoon to make up for her unpleasantness."

But no one succeeded in being "extra cheerful," when there was so much gloom to dispel; to the children, especially, the day seemed absolutely spoiled in spite of much unexpected and rather amusing sympathy from Dave, who plainly considered going home with Aunt Jane an

unmixed calamity.

"I guess," said Jean, shrewdly, "that Dave *likes* to have us here."

"And why not?" demanded Henrietta. "We give him all sorts of good things to eat and Mr. Black pays him besides, for all the work he doesn't do. He's just bought himself a nice new blanket and a fine big quilt—I noticed them on the beach. Why! Something's happening. Let's see what it is." [217]

Dave, with a large bundle on his shoulder, was crossing the clearing, in the direction of his wigwam. Aunty Jane, pointing at the bundle and scolding loudly, was scurrying after him. Mrs. Bennett and Mrs. Mapes were scurrying after *her*. Mrs. Slater, under a tree with Mrs. Tucker, seemed greatly amused; for this bright old lady possessed a strong sense of humor.

"What *is* it, Granny?" demanded Henrietta, pausing at sight of the dainty little grandmother's smiling countenance. "Is she trying again to make Dave take a bath?"

"No, Honey," laughed Mrs. Slater. "She thinks she recognizes that quilt—she missed one off her clothesline several nights ago."

Dave, seeing that Aunty Jane was not to be shaken off, stopped, untied his bundle, separated the quilt from the other articles, and offered it to the pursuing lady. [218]

"Yas," grinned Dave, "Ah'm t'ink dose queelt she ees yours, maybe. She's grow on som' clothesline jus' biffore de back part of dose house of madame hon Lakeveele. Me, Ah'm need som' more queelt—som' tam' Ah'm got company. Mus' feex noddair bed, Ah'm t'ink."

"Well," replied Aunty Jane, tartly, as she reached for the quilt, "you'd better think again. Give it to me this instant."

Then, catching a whiff of the aroma that was ever a part of Dave, Aunty Jane fairly hurled the restored comforter at the grinning thief.

"For goodness' sake!" she gasped. "*Take* it, you filthy Indian. There isn't water enough in Lake Superior to get the smell out of anything you've touched."

"Yas," returned Dave, blandly accepting the quilt, "Ah'm sleep hon dose queelt hall de way from Lakeveele. Night biffore, halso. Ah'm moch obliged for dose present, madame. Dose ver' good queelt, Ah'm t'ink." [219]

"A great deal too good for you, you filthy beast."

Dave's ill-kept teeth still gleamed in his wide, amiable smile; but his narrowed black eyes suddenly glittered in a cold, snaky way that started an unpleasant chill down Aunty Jane's spine.

"That wicked Indian," she said afterwards, "thanked me and looked as if he'd like to murder me, all in the same breath."

"Indians," mused Doctor Tucker, "are said to be revengeful."

Perhaps, with so many little girls sorrowful on Marjory's account, the sky hadn't the heart to keep on smiling. At any rate, a full hour earlier than the visitors had expected to leave, their launch-man was pointing pessimistically toward gathering clouds—no one else had noticed them.

"If you folks want to get home before it rains," said he, "you'd better be climbing aboard—less'n you want to stay here all night."

"Mercy!" cried Aunty Jane, springing to her feet, "I wouldn't stay for a million dollars." [220]

Mrs. Slater was too polite to *say* that she wouldn't either; but she, too, rose rather hastily to look about for scattered belongings.

Dave assisted everybody with wonderful alacrity. He was here, there, and everywhere. The girls assisted, too—perhaps that was why it took so long to find all Marjory's widely dispersed garments. They were still at this task after most of the mothers had climbed aboard the launch. Marjory, by this time fairly helpless with grief, sat on a log and wept; while Aunty Jane, on her knees under a nearby tree, attempted to roll the accumulated garments into a neat bundle.

Somehow—nobody knew exactly how—Terrible Tim, the porcupine, made his presence felt just at this busy moment. One instant the object in Aunty Jane's grasp was an innocent bundle of clothing. The next, the horrified lady was clutching an astonished and most dreadfully prickly porcupine; for Timothy, propelled by some mysterious force, had landed squarely in her arms. [221]

Instantly the air was rent with shrieks. No one noticed the extra shriek or two that Marjory added to the chorus as a dark, sinewy arm shot forth and suddenly grasped her. No one saw lithe Dave draw the frightened, dazed little girl into the thicket, toss her across his shoulder, and flee, by a roundabout trail that no civilized foot could have found, toward his own wigwam.

"Be still," commanded Dave, clapping his hand gently but effectually over Marjory's mouth. "Don't be scare—Ah'm good frien' to you, li'le gal. Now ron, ron fast hon your own leg."

Astonishment prevented further desire to shriek, for, near the doorway of Dave's wigwam and washing a grimy pan with a grimier rag, stood a dark but decidedly attractive young woman. And

down in the dirt at her feet, as Marjory had seen her many times previously, groveled the Dandelion Cottage baby, the unforgettable Rosa Marie.

Marjory, at sight of the funny little Indian baby that Mabel had once adopted, almost forgot her own troubles. [222]

"Ma sistaire," explained Dave, pointing toward the woman. "Hees name ees Mahjigeezigoqua. Can you say dose name?"

"Mar-gee-gee-ze-go-qua," repeated Marjory, correctly making the first g soft, the second hard. "But how did you get them here? We didn't see them leave the boat."

"Ah'm pack dem wit' dose proveesion," laughed Dave. "Ah'm poot dose two hon shore behin' som' point, w'ile all dose peop' ees too busy for look at Dave. Ma sistaire ees come for pick som' berry. Hey, you know dose kid? W'y you no talk, Rosa Marie? Here ees som' frien' for you."

Then Dave spoke rapidly in some strange tongue to his sister, concluding in his broken English, as he turned to go:

"Now Ah'm go for help dose ol' Aunt hon top dose boat. You stay here."

Nevertheless, conscientious Marjory started to follow him; but Rosa Marie's mother, stepping quickly into the narrow pathway, gently but unmistakably detained her. [223]

"You talk som' leetle t'ing to Rosa Marie—she ees remembaire you, ees eet not, Rosa? See, how he ees grow som' hon herself, dose so fat Rosa."

So Marjory, seeing no way of immediate escape with the attractive young Indian woman firmly blocking the pathway, renewed her acquaintance with Rosa Marie, who apparently was as stolid and as unemotional as ever.

"Hees fadaire lak' dat," explained Mahjigeezigoqua. "He t'ink hon hees inside honly. No talk, no mak' som' smile hon her face, dose man."

If Rosa Marie *did* any thinking, it is certain that the process went on "inside only," for if ever there was a wooden little Indian it was Rosa Marie. But by dint of hard work, Marjory finally extracted a smile. Then Rosa Marie, groping under her brief skirts, produced the very dirtiest and most disreputable doll that Marjory had ever beheld.

"Ma-bel," said Rosa Marie. "Ma-bel."

"She ees name for Mees Mabel," explained the Indian baby's mother. [224]

"Mabel ought to feel flattered," giggled Marjory. "I'll tell her about her namesake. But mercy! I must go back—"

"Wait," said Dave's sister, lightly clasping her slender brown fingers about Marjory's wrist. "Ah show you how to catch som' chipmunk."

And Marjory, realizing that she was a prisoner, stayed where she was.

CHAPTER XXII

A Twisted Conscience

[225]

BY the time Dave returned, Aunty Jane had been separated from Terrible Tim and a large number of loose quills. All the others had embarked, but Aunty Jane, breathing dire threats, still lingered to look for Marjory.

"Are you sure," asked Henrietta, sincerely, "that she didn't go aboard with that last boat-load? I don't think she was here when poor Timothy tumbled out of that tree."

"*Did* he tumble?" snapped Aunty Jane. "*I* think he jumped."

At this moment, Dave—the only person who knew exactly how Terrible Tim happened to land where he did—joined in the search for Marjory.

"Ah'm smell pooty good," asserted crafty Dave, crawling about on all-fours and making an elaborate pretense of sniffing at the sand, "and Ah'm sure dose gal ees mak' som' track for dose boat." [226]

"Hi there!" shouted Mr. Black, from the beach. "Captain says he can't wait a moment longer—other boat's halfway home by now. Or are you going to stay with us, Miss Higgins? There's plenty of room."

"No, I'm *not*," snapped Aunty Jane, fleeing down the bank. "With your dirty Indians and your flying beasts this is no place for a decent woman."

It is said that one disagreeable person in camp can spoil the very pleasantest party, and the saying must be true, for with Aunty Jane at Pete's Patch nothing had seemed quite right—the

luster was gone from everything—even the sky. But, as Captain Berry's delayed launch began the determined chug-chugging that soon carried the little boat into deeper water, everybody on shore breathed a sigh of relief; and overhead, as Henrietta pointed out, laughingly, a tiny patch of gold glimmered among the clouds.

"They say," mused Mr. Black, "that living close to Nature brings out all your traits more strongly." [227]

"Yes, Peter," laughed Mrs. Crane, "I've noticed that you're lazier here than you were in town."

"I was thinking," returned Mr. Black, with dignity, "that folks with sharp tongues and twisted tempers ought never to venture into the woods."

Aunty Jane was a good mile from shore before Dave turned, with his wickedest grin, toward the castaways.

"Come wit' me," he invited. "Ah'm fool dose aunt lady, Ah'm t'ink."

"What do you mean?" demanded Mr. Black.

"Come wit' me," repeated Dave, with the most complacent of smiles. "Ah'm show you som' deer in a trap—Ah'm snare heem just now."

Of course Mr. Black and the girls wanted to see so unusual a sight as a trapped deer; but when they discovered that the deer was a dear, their own beloved Marjory, their astonishment was great. And of course they were no less surprised to see Rosa Marie and Mahjigeezigoqua, her almost unspellable mother. [228]

"Marjory!" gasped Jean. "We thought you were on the boat!"

"Marjory," panted Mabel. "All your clothes *are* on that boat."

"These aren't," returned Marjory, indicating what she had on. "And my skin isn't—I can wear that, if I have to."

"Granny brought me loads of things," assured Henrietta. "I guess you won't need to come down to skin."

"Marjory," demanded Mr. Black, rather severely for so mild a man, "do you mean to say that you were naughty enough to deliberately hide from Aunty Jane?"

Marjory colored, but remained silent. It occurred to her suddenly that telling the truth would seem a good deal like disloyalty to Dave—Dave, who had been her friend. As Marjory was not in the habit of fibbing, she didn't know what to say.

"Eef dose gal won't ron away on herself," explained Dave, promptly exonerating Marjory from all blame, "me, Ah'm mus' ron away wit' heem. Ah'm pull heem into de bush and ron, ron lak' de dev' (devil). Hey, li'le gal; Ah'm good frien' to you, hey? An' now dose aunt, w'at smell too strong wit' hees nose, ees gone two-t'ree mile, Ah'm t'ink." [229]

"Dave," queried Mr. Black, shaking his head soberly, "is there any way of discovering what you *do* think? Are you all rascal or are you part angel—with the angel part very much disguised? I can't make you out."

But this was too deep for Dave.

"Ah'm t'ink," replied Dave, replying to only the first part of Mr. Black's question, "dat dose poor li'le Margy ees don't want to go home wit' hees aunt. Me, Ah'm not care for go home wit' dose aunt maself."

At this the delighted girls shrieked with mirth, for the idea of Aunty Jane taking Dave home with her would have amused even Dave's solemn dog. Mr. Black, however, still frowned slightly, for Dave puzzled him.

"Dave," said he, "you're altogether too full of tricks. I suppose you don't know what courtesy toward a woman means; but you've certainly been ruder than you should have been to poor Miss Higgins. You'll have to go to Lakeville to-night and tell that poor woman that Marjory is safe—perhaps I'd better write her a note so she won't blame Marjory." [230]

"Ah'm go right off," agreed Dave, cheerfully. "Maybe Ah'm find som' more queelt on hees line."

"Dave, you incorrigible rascal," stormed Mr. Black, "you let that lady's clothesline alone. Steal one off *my* line, if you must have a quilt—I'm better able to spare it."

"Ah'm good frien' to *you*," protested Dave, earnestly, with the outstretched hand of good-fellowship. "You shake hon dat?"

"I hope you are," returned Mr. Black, shaking the proffered hand. "But, Dave, your conscience is like that river—no one could possibly map its windings. And after this, my man, you must be a good friend to my *friends*, as well as to me. Now let's go back to camp and see what our Billy boy is doing." [231]

Dave, evidently somewhat troubled, for he still had an unconfessed misdeed on his mind, followed the castaways back to the clearing. They found Mrs. Crane sitting disconsolately on the

bench outside her tent.

"That boy's so blue," she confided, advancing to meet them, "that I'm staying outside to give him a chance to cry. I guess he thought the doctor was going to cure him right off and he's terribly disappointed."

"Couldn't we tell him about Dave and Aunty Jane?" queried Bettie. "That ought to cheer anybody—just think, Mrs. Crane, Dave hid Marjory in his wigwam, with Rosa Marie and her mother."

"Rosa Marie! And didn't Marjory go on the boat?"

"No, Marjory's back there with Mabel and Rosa Marie—she's Dave's niece."

"Dave's niece! Well, well——"

"I guess Dave doesn't like Aunty Jane," interrupted Henrietta. "I can't be sure—it was all so exciting just then—but I *think* Dave slid down the trunk of one of those big trees just after Terrible Tim landed between Aunty Jane and that bundle." [232]

"She might have been badly hurt," said Mrs. Crane, indignantly. "Dave, come here a moment—I want to talk to you. Did you drop that porcupine into Miss Higgins' lap?"

"Eef som' porkypine ees go for drop," returned Dave, whimsically, "eet ees good dat he ees land on som' sof' plass. Som' tam', Ah'm tole, she's rain cat an' dog; som' tam' she's rain porkypine. W'at for? Me, Ah'm can't tole you. De sky she ees made dose way."

"Well," warned Mrs. Crane, "you'd better see to it, Dave, that it doesn't rain any more porcupines—I don't like such tricks."

"Ah'm not please nobody," sighed Dave, dolefully, "w'en Ah'm try all day to help all dose body."

"But, Dave," remonstrated Mrs. Crane, "you do so many wrong things. You stole that quilt from Miss Higgins' line, didn't you?"

"Yas," replied Dave. "Dose blanket, too."

"Dave, you poor benighted creature! Don't you know it's wrong to steal?" [233]

"Yas," admitted incorrigible Dave, with an unmistakable twinkle in his eye. "Ah'm t'ink so, w'en som'body ees eat up all dose venison of me. She's very bad for stole all dose meat—Me, Ah'm have no dinnaire, me. Halso, Ah'm got no suppaire, Ah'm *soppose*. Mus' break som' more game law——"

"Dave!" cried Mrs. Crane, contritely. "You sit right down at that table and I'll give you the best meal you ever ate."

"But," mourned the wily half-breed, seating himself, nevertheless, "Rosa Marie, ma sistaire, too, mus' dose two starve?"

"Why—why, no!" gasped Mrs. Crane. "I'll fix something for them, too."

"Som' day," promised Dave, sincerely, "Ah'm geeve you som' good fat moskrat."

Too polite to say so, Mrs. Crane hoped fervently that Dave would forget that promise; she was quite certain that she wouldn't enjoy eating a "good fat muskrat," or even a very thin one.

CHAPTER XXIII

Billy's Memory

WHILE Mrs. Crane was supplying Dave with a bountiful meal, the girls were telling Billy about Rosa Marie, Marjory, Aunty Jane, the porcupine—in short, all the news of that eventful day. Billy, with brightening eyes, was certainly enjoying it all, particularly the part about Terrible Tim. [234]

"Once," began Billy, reminiscently, "when I was a kid I saw——"

But what Billy had seen could only be guessed, for the brightness slipped from his eyes and he pulled the corner of his blanket over his face.

"I can't remember a blamed thing," he mumbled, with a catch in his throat.

"Cheer up," teased Henrietta, gently. "Nobody 'd *want* to remember anything that looks like Terrible Tim. But when you see him, you'll probably remember what you were going to say. Did they tell you that you're to come outside to-morrow and lie in a hammock with soft-boiled eggs? Oh, I mean you're to *eat* the eggs. Aren't you glad?" [235]

"I like eggs," said the boy, uncovering one eye. "Chicken, too, and roast beef."

"Perhaps Dave will get you a partridge—Doctor Bennett said you could eat that. Did you ever

eat partridge?"

"Yes," returned Billy.

"Where?" demanded Bettie and Henrietta, with one voice.

"At—at—oh, it's gone!" wailed Billy, "when I had it right at the end of my tongue."

"Don't worry," soothed motherly Jean. "You're a *lot* better than you were yesterday. We can all see that."

"Think so? Well, maybe I am. Is that—yes, it *is* milk toast. Tastes just like food. *Sure* I'm ready for another bite."

"It's the good sweet cream those people brought," said Mrs. Crane.

"I hope," murmured Billy, between bites, "they'll come often."

"I don't," protested Mabel. "Visitors are a nuisance—they stir things up too much." [236]

"Her mother scrubbed her," laughed Henrietta, "and brushed a lot of sand out of her hair—didn't you hear terrible wails? But Mabel was glad to see her mother, just the same."

The threatening clouds that had so alarmed the two launch-men passed harmlessly over Pete's Patch; and the next day proved so fine that Billy was moved to a hammock under the trees, where the overlapping leaves of huge maples formed a most attractive roof. The change agreed with him; fortified with fresh eggs and fresh air he grew stronger with astonishing rapidity; a rapidity that proved alarming to Mrs. Crane; for, like Bettie, this new invalid was no sooner on his feet than he made tracks for the alluring lake.

"If I had a bathing suit," said Billy, when Mrs. Crane had, for the fourth time, forbidden him to wade in the lake, "I'd go in *swimming*—then you couldn't pull me out so easily."

"But, Billy—"

"All right, I'll be good," promised Billy, "but that's a mighty fine bunch of water—say, couldn't you *make* some swimming tights for a chap?" [237]

"When you're strong enough to swim," agreed Mrs. Crane.

Physically, young Billy improved by leaps and bounds; but the stronger he grew, the more he worried over his strange lapses of memory.

"Sometimes I dream things," complained Billy, one day. "And when I wake up I wonder how much of it is true. Last night I thought I was falling down, down out of an airship and I called 'Mother, mother! I can't find my umbrella.'"

"Have you a mother?" asked Jean, quickly.

"I don't know. But I think so—I dream of some person who says: 'Now don't do that, Lad—Lad ___'"

"Laddie," supplied Bettie, promptly.

"Laddie!" shouted the boy. "That's it—it didn't get away *that* time."

"Sometimes," said Laddie-Billy, another day, "when Dave comes into sight, I *almost* call him by another name; but the name doesn't quite come—I think I've known somebody—in a boat, perhaps—that looked like him." [238]

There were many things, fortunately, that the boy had not forgotten. He handled his knife and fork properly, ate his soup daintily, and proved later that he had once been able to row a boat; though at first, of course, his strength had been unequal to very strenuous efforts with the oars. In spite of his unhappy experience with the lake, he seemed, strangely enough, to be exceedingly fond of the water and to feel not the slightest fear of it. Mrs. Crane, indeed, would have been glad to find him more cowardly; for, long before the purposely delayed bathing suit was ready, Billy had gone in swimming in his only clothes. Also, it was next to impossible to keep him out of the boats.

Time proved, too, that the water-loving castaway was a bright lad. He could read and write very readily in English, knew a little French, and was rather clever at figures. Often, when glancing through the advertising pages of magazines, his expressive face would light up and Laddie-Billy (as the girls now called him to please Mabel) would exclaim, joyfully: "I've seen *that* picture before." [239]

But the things that the curiously afflicted boy *wanted* to remember refused obstinately to come; and this grieved him sorely.

"I suppose," said Billy, one balmy evening, when all the youngsters were roasting potatoes between two glowing logs, "I'm really well enough to go home, but—but where *is* my home?"

"You needn't worry about that," assured Mrs. Crane. "We're more than willing to keep you right here—as long as you don't tumble out of those boats."

"Yes," added Mr. Black, heartily, "we really need a boy to help us when Dave is busy breaking

the game laws. I'm only afraid that Saunders will come along some day with an answer to that advertisement. You're well worth keeping, my lad."

"I'm glad of that," smiled Billy, cheered by these kindly assurances. "I'll try to be, anyway."

"We *all* like you," declared Mabel, "even if you *are* getting fat." [240]

"Am I?" queried Laddie-Billy, anxiously. "Gracious! If I do, these clothes—can it be that I'll come to wearing a blue plaid bathing suit *all* the time?"

For Mrs. Crane, for want of other material, was slowly converting her biggest and most gorgeous gingham apron into a decidedly queer bathing costume for her lively charge.

"The bagginess," Mrs. Crane explained, when the castaway suggested mildly that part of the cloth might be saved for other purposes, "will fill up with air and keep you from sinking."

And naughty Henrietta had added, under her breath: "Behold Billy Blue-eyes, the Human Balloon."

CHAPTER XXIV

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A Mutual Friend

DURING the blissful summer that Jean, Bettie, Mabel, and Marjory had spent in Dandelion Cottage, and before the coming of Henrietta, the little girls had frequently found themselves in need of real money for their make-believe housekeeping. In order to procure the needed funds, they had rented a room to a charming young woman named Miss Blossom.

Miss Blossom's father, an organ tuner by profession, visited many towns in the course of a year. In July, while the castaways were still in camp, some portion of the Presbyterian organ in Lakeville went wrong; and skilful Mr. Blossom, summoned to that town to repair it, was accompanied by his very pleasant daughter. Of course the very first thing she did was to ask for her young friends.

"We've only three days to spend here," said she, "but I *should* like to see those darling girls—I've thought of them so many, many times." [242]

"Suppose," said Mrs. Bennett, to whom Miss Blossom had appealed, "you go to Mr. Saunders—he may be sending things up."

"Mr. William Saunders?" queried the young woman, with interest. "Oh—I met him when I was here last summer. Thank you—I'll get father to take me to his office this noon."

So that is how it happened that the ever-useful Saunders, who had been commissioned to supply Laddie-Billy with a wardrobe, loaded Miss Blossom aboard Captain Berry's launch that very afternoon. And then, feeling certain that the pleasant and very pretty young woman would be lonely with no one but the captain for company, Mr. Saunders added himself to the load.

The castaways, always eager for the arrival of parcels from home, were all on the beach to welcome the unexpected visitors. Even Billy, who declared that he had never felt better in his life, was part of the sunburnt group. [243]

"I know," lamented Billy, "that those clothes'll be too small—I've grown a foot since Mr. Black measured me three days ago."

"Oh, not a whole foot," protested Mrs. Crane, eying her patient with pride. "But I do think you're a credit to my nursing."

"It isn't everybody," beamed Billy, "that has such a fine nurse—shall I help with that boat, Mr. Black?"

"No, Dave'll take her out."

"Why!" cried Marjory, "there are *people* getting into Captain Berry's skiff."

"I think," said Jean, a moment later, "that the man is Mr. Saunders; but I don't know the lady—I can't see her face."

"She looks young," said Marjory, with a sigh of relief. "Too young to be Aunty Jane. Just at first—Ugh! I was scared—Oh! It's—"

"Why!" cried Billy, springing suddenly to his feet and rushing straight toward the landing place, "it's Miss Blossom!"

"Miss Blossom!" gasped Jean, gazing in open-eyed amazement at the others. [244]

"Miss Blossom!" echoed Mabel.

"Miss Blossom!" breathed Bettie. "Oh! Look at Billy! It really *is* Miss Blossom, and he knows her!"

It certainly looked as if Billy, the unknown castaway, had found a friend; for, not waiting for the boat to land, he had rushed into the water (it was shallow, you remember, for a long distance) and had seized the surprised young woman in a bearlike hug.

"Miss Blossom! Miss Blossom!" he cried, hopefully. "What *is* my name?"

"Why, my dear Laddie," returned the overwhelmed (and almost overturned) young woman, "what does all this mean? Never before was I so warmly greeted by any young man. Is this—Oh, I *see*. You're the sick and shipwrecked boy that Mr. Saunders—but *you're* not sick!"

"Not any more," gasped excited Billy, still with an arm about Miss Blossom, as if fearful she might escape. "But I can't remember anything. Tell me, quick—where did I come from?—who am I? I know *you*. I pumped the organ for you—a big church—you played—Oh, tell me, *tell* me." [245]

"Wait," pleaded Miss Blossom, "until we're on shore—you'll surely tip us over."

"All right," agreed Billy, reluctantly. But so great was his eagerness to get his friend ashore that he got behind the boat and pushed.

"Now," demanded excited Billy, the moment Miss Blossom was out of the boat, "what's the rest of my name? Laddie—Laddie *what?*"

"I don't know," confessed Miss Blossom, coloring with chagrin. "Honestly I don't, Laddie. You see, so many boys have pumped organs for us that I don't always remember even their *first* names."

"But," panted Billy, with a catch in his throat, "surely you'll remember the name of the town?"

"No—o," faltered Miss Blossom, "I'm afraid I don't. I remember your face and your very bright hair—I can *see* that bright head bobbing up and down in the light of a stained glass window—but I *don't* know which town or even which state I saw you in. But don't worry, Laddie-boy. My father has a list of all the organs he has ever mended. Now, it must be some time within the last two years that you pumped for us; and it is probable that we stayed with that particular organ for a number of days, else I wouldn't have had time to learn that you were 'Laddie'—I usually call the organ-pumper 'Boy.' Now, when I've looked at father's list, I'll pick out all the *long* jobs, discover what towns they were in, and perhaps Mr. Saunders, here, will write a notice to insert in the papers that are published in those towns. Don't worry. One of them will certainly be your town. And here are all my precious girls patiently waiting to be hugged!" [246]

Miss Blossom proved a most delightful visitor. The girls wanted to keep her, Mrs. Crane urged her to stay; but Miss Blossom declared that she owed it to Laddie-Billy to get back to Lakeville as speedily as possible. Captain Berry, also, would remain for only two hours; but everybody visited fast and furiously for that precious interval of time—it went all too quickly. [247]

"I'm quite sure," declared Miss Blossom, at parting, "that father's list will help."

"Let me know," pleaded Billy, who had donned his becoming new clothes without delay and happily found them sufficiently large, "if you find anything."

"I surely will," promised Miss Blossom.

Three days later, Mr. Saunders, this time on horseback, rode into camp.

"I'm commissioned," he explained, "to say a certain word in Billy's hearing. Where is he?"

"Getting washed for dinner," replied Henrietta, flourishing the bread-knife toward the river.

"Don't mention my errand," said Saunders. "I'll spring it on Billy when we're all at table—I've invited myself to dinner."

"We'll let everybody get seated before we call Billy," agreed Henrietta. "And I'll warn the girls. You might tie your horse behind those bushes and perhaps he won't know you're here until you speak." [248]

Sure enough, hungry Billy plunged to his place without observing the visitor; but when the plates were filled, Mr. Saunders suddenly leaned forward, looked at Billy, and remarked casually: "The last time I was in Pittsburg——"

"Pittsburg!" gasped Billy, with widening eyes. "Were you ever in Pittsburg?"

"No," admitted Saunders, rather sheepishly. "Were you?"

"Yes!" yelled Billy, joyously waving his slice of bread. "Two-twenty-four Jefferson Street, Pittsburg, Pennsylvania; population three hundred and twenty-one thousand. *Sure!* I was *born* there! That's where I *live*."

"But how," queried Henrietta, strong in all matters geographical, "could a person set sail from Pittsburg and be wrecked at Pete's Patch, Upper Michigan?"

"He couldn't," replied Mr. Black.

"Nevertheless," said Saunders, "I've sent notices to all the Pittsburg papers—what's that street number again?" [249]

"I—I don't know," stammered Billy. "It's gone again. I guess it's easier to think when you're not trying to."

"Jefferson Street," supplied Marjory, who had remembered.

Billy nodded. "Yes," said he, "that sounds right. But how did you guess Pittsburg, Mr. Saunders?"

"In Mr. Blossom's note-book there was an item, under the heading 'Pittsburg,' that read: 'Paid Laddie one dollar.'"

"Wonder where it went?" said the boy, turning his empty pockets inside out.

"By this time to-morrow," promised Saunders, "all Pittsburg will know that a Pittsburg boy name Laddie, wrecked on Lake Superior, is alive and well in—or near—Lakeville."

"Lost:" murmured Laddie, "a brindle pup; answers to the name of Billy. Well, I'm awfully obliged, Mr. Saunders; and my folks—I wonder if my folks *want* to find me? Do you s'pose they do?" [250]

"I'm sure of it," declared Mrs. Crane. "But if they don't, *I'll* keep you."

"Nobody'd ever think," sniffed Mabel, overcome with emotion, "that *I'd* found that boy—everybody adopting him all the time."

"You found Rosa Marie, too, didn't you?" teased Billy. "Well, I refuse to be a twin sister to Rosa Marie."

"Who," asked Saunders, "is Rosa Marie?"

"She's a relative," remarked Mr. Black, dryly, "that Dave imported for the express purpose of eating our berries. Dave, it seems, not only lives here himself but entertains his relatives at our expense."

"And Peter encourages Dave in all his iniquity," added Mrs. Crane.

"And," laughed Bettie, "Mrs. Crane cooks for Dave and all his visitors."

"Well," admitted Mrs. Crane, "they'd either starve or steal if I didn't."

"Dave," said Marjory, who had learned much of the Gurneau family history from the friendly Indian, "has nine brothers and seven sisters—his mother had seventeen children." [251]

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Mr. Black, "do they *all* live here at times?"

"No," laughed Marjory. "Most of them are in Canada."

"Dear me," breathed Mrs. Crane, fervently, "I hope they'll stay there."

CHAPTER XXV

A Captured Fisherman

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NOW that there was hope of learning more about Billy Blue-eyes, the young campers found it hard to wait patiently for possible tidings from Pittsburg. They were all restless and excited; Laddie in particular could settle down to nothing.

"We'll all go fishing," declared Mr. Black. "That'll keep Billy's mind off his troubles. Dave says he knows a trail that will lead us to the finest fishing spot in the country; so we'll take a lunch and stay all day."

"Laddie," queried Mrs. Crane, anxiously, "are you strong enough for such a long trip?"

"Sure," asserted her fidgety patient, "I could pull in a *whale*."

"Then," declared Mrs. Crane, "I'll get Mahjigeezigoqua to wash the dishes and make the beds, and I'll go, too. I don't care if I do get rheumatism—I haven't been fishing for *years*. And that young woman loves to do things for us." [253]

"No wonder," said Jean, "after all you did for Rosa Marie last winter."

"Put on your very oldest shoes," ordered Mr. Black. "You're to wade the river—Dave says it's shallow all the way down, except in a few spots where we can follow a trail along the bank. He's cutting poles for everybody."

For perhaps half an hour, sure-footed Dave, carrying the lunch in a bag on his back, led the fishing party through thickets that Mr. Black had supposed impenetrable, to come out at last on the river bank. It was their own many-curved river, but so wildly beautiful at this seldom visited spot that even quiet Mrs. Crane exclaimed loudly. Then, their hooks baited, they waded into the shallow, winding stream, and fished.

"Go *down* dose stream," commanded Dave. "Bam-bye she's take you back to Pete's Patch."

"Here, Bettie," said Mr. Black, "I'll show you how to cast your hook—Phew! Here's a fish for you already—must have been ready for breakfast!"

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Sure enough, a wriggling, silvery trout dangled from Mr. Black's pole.

"There's something running away with my line," complained inexperienced Jean, a little frightened by this uncanny sensation. "It feels as big as a rabbit!"

"Pull it in," commanded Mr. Black, "you've got a bite."

So she had, but the fish that had felt "as big as a rabbit" proved so tiny that Mr. Black put him back to grow; and the apparently unconcerned little trout made a dart for Marjory's hook. He seemed so determined to be caught by *somebody*—it didn't matter who—that Dave dug a little pool in the sand for him.

"Stay dere," ordered Dave, "till dose beeg brodder of you ees have som' chance for got caught."

"I don't think I want to fish," said tender-hearted Jean. "I'd rather *look*. Every time I take a step I see a new picture—I'd like to keep all my eyes for the scenery."

"So would I," declared Bettie, pulling in her line. "Let's just dawdle along together somewhere out of reach of Mabel's hook—Goodness! Look at Henrietta putting on her own bait!"

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"I did it, too," bragged Marjory. "I couldn't wait for Dave—it's *such* fun to see a trout dart out from under the bank and grab your worm and run away with it."

"You must give a little jerk," instructed Mr. Black. "Just like that."

"Just like this," added Mabel. But Mabel's fish proved to be a log, so amid much laughter, Dave provided her with a fresh hook.

For several wonderful hours, the happy castaways waded and fished. Never in all their wanderings had they encountered anything as beautiful as the overhanging trees, the fern-fringed banks, the softly gurgling water. And never had fish seemed more willing to bite. Even Dave was surprised at their voracity. In spite of Mrs. Crane's heavy floundering, in spite of the number of times that Mabel slipped from slimy stones to land "kersplash" on her sturdy back, in spite of the delighted shrieks that came from Marjory and Henrietta at every bite, the hungry fish flocked to the feast of angleworms.

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"Dose worms she's taste lak' pie to dose feesh," explained Dave.

"I'd like it better," grumbled Mabel, whose hook was continually catching in the trees, "if there wasn't so much underbrush overhead."

"That's certainly a queer place," laughed Billy, stringing his eleventh trout on the branch provided by Dave, "for *underbrush*. Here, I'll pull it out for you."

The wonderfully happy morning passed all too quickly—there should be some way of prolonging summer mornings in a trout stream. They had eaten their wholesome lunch, and Mr. Black, his fine dark eyes aglow with eagerness, his thick, almost-white hair standing up all over his head, had fished in a dozen perfectly marvelous holes that Dave had pointed out, when the castaways reached in their wanderings a point crossed by a broken-down bridge. One end was still in place; the other sagged until it was partly submerged. Seated on the dry end of this flimsy structure, fish-pole in hand, was a stout, placid man, whose mild, serene blue eyes invited confidence.

Sociable Mr. Black, still aglow with the joy of his unusual luck and glad of a chance to display his splendid catch, proudly disclosed the contents of his basket—also of the basket that Dave carried.

Billy, too, and the girls flocked nearer to display *their* respective catches. It was certainly a fine showing. Mr. Black, however, had the lion's share.

"How many did you say?" drawled the comfortable stranger, seemingly only mildly interested in the count. His apparent indifference, indeed, proved quite galling to Mr. Black, who had introduced himself and his party.

"Seventy-two for mine," beamed Mr. Black. "For once we'll have all the trout we can eat."

"Well, Mr. Black," returned the man, in his leisurely, indifferent way, "I'm sorry for you; but I guess you'll have to ride to Lakeville in my buckboard to-night. I'm the game warden; and fifty

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SEATED ON THE DRY END WAS A STOUT, PLACID
MAN

fish is the limit."

"The game warden!" gasped Mabel.

"The game warden!" gasped Henrietta.

"The game warden!" gasped all the others.

"The penalty," drawled the leisurely officer, "is either imprisonment or a fine—seein' it's you, you'll probably have to pay a fine."

"I *will!*" exclaimed Mr. Black. "What's that about a limit? I didn't know—"

"New law," explained the man, lazily. "And some of these here trout that your kids have caught are undersized; they ain't seven inches—'nother new law; you'll have to pay for those, too."

"Why, the limit is *six* inches."

"Used to be, ain't any more," returned the placid person, fumbling in his pocket for a battered copy of the game laws. "See, here's what it says."

"I guess you're right," admitted Mr. Black, scanning the pages.

"I'm real sorry," stated the game warden for the second time. "But you see, Mr. Black, I've got to arrest *somebody* this week or they'll think I'm not earning my salary. And I guess you can stand it lots better'n some." [259]

"Well," said Mr. Black, "I certainly supposed I was a law-abiding citizen; but I'm willing to pay the piper—it isn't often that I dance to such a merry tune. Those fish are worth any fine that I shall have to pay. I'll go down with you to-night if you'll tell me where to meet you; but I'm going to eat my share of those fish first—I assure you of that!"

Mabel, who had edged closer to the game warden, now relieved her mind.

"Say," she queried, "you won't put him in jail, will you?"

"Not if he's able to pay his fine," smiled the stout officer.

"Where," she next demanded, severely, "are your leggings?"

"Leggings!" exclaimed the puzzled man. "Why! They don't make any big enough to go round my fatted calves."

"I don't believe you *are* the game warden," declared Mabel. "You're just pretending."

The complacent officer, however, proved his right to the title by showing certain documents to Mr. Black. But, as Mabel leaned closer to inspect them, too, her weight upon the rotten log on which the bulky game warden sat proved too much for the time-worn timber. Down it crashed, taking Mabel and the astonished officer with it. [260]

Fortunately, the water at this point was sufficiently deep to break their fall, for the river bottom near the bridge was of solid sandstone, and therefore pretty hard. Dave plunged in after Mabel, but permitted the gasping game warden to flounder out by himself. By way of atonement, Mr. Black invited the victim to supper and later loaned him some dry clothing. After this accident, the campers, somewhat subdued but fully alive to the wonderful charm of the day, proceeded toward home. It was five o'clock when the castaways, hungry but otherwise none the worse for their long day in the river, finally reached Pete's Patch; for the point in the pretty stream that was only three-quarters of a mile away by land was almost a day's journey by water, owing to the numerous twists and turns of the winding river that was so like Dave's queer conscience. [261]

"Say, M'sieu Black," said Dave, lingering after the others had turned toward camp, and speaking in a dreadful whisper very close to Mr. Black's ear. "Ah'm good frien' to you. Eet ees ver' bad, Ah'm tole (here Dave's black eye glittered humorously), to broke dose game law; but eef you ees weesh for hide you'self, me, Ah'm show you som' pooty good plass. Dose game ward' hunt for feefty year biffore she ees fin' dose ol' Pete Black. Hey, Pete? You lak for hide on yourself?"

"Thank you, Dave," returned Mr. Black, "but I guess I'd better take my medicine like a man—a man doesn't hide."

His first plan failing, Dave kindly offered to set the game warden hopelessly astray, to steal his horse, and finally, as a last resort, to murder the unsuspecting officer in a variety of ingenious ways. But Mr. Black declined all these kindly offers and finally convinced Dave that he didn't mind going to Lakeville, with a good fish supper inside of him. [262]

The castaways found Mr. Saunders in possession of the camp at Pete's Patch. He had whittled a shingle doll for Rosa Marie, who sat in rapt devotion at his feet.

"She hasn't taken her eyes off me since I arrived, three hours ago," declared Saunders, rising to hand some papers to Mr. Black. "She's immensely taken with either my auburn hair or my new tan shoes—I don't know which. I didn't know, Mr. Black, what you wanted done about this insurance matter, so I brought the letters to you."

"Mighty glad to see you," returned Mr. Black, "for I'm going to town to-night. You'll have to

stay here till I get back and be a father to my family. I'm under arrest for breaking the game laws—but wait till you see what I broke 'em with. Those fish——"

"Any news from Pittsburg?" interrupted Mrs. Crane.

"Not a word. But I've brought letters for all those girls. Their mothers, aunts, and so forth want to know how they're going to get them ready to go away to school next fall if you keep them in the woods all summer. They want to make clothes for them."

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"It isn't polite," giggled lively Henrietta, "to answer letters the moment you get them. And anyhow, who wants clothes?"

"There's just one thing that we do want," said Mrs. Crane, "and that's news for our Billy-boy. He's so uneasy that he can't rest. In fact, we're *all* uneasy—in a state of suspense——"

"Well," returned Mr. Black, "worrying won't hurry matters, so you'd better amuse yourselves with other things—perhaps Saunders will help."

Saunders *did* help; nevertheless, it was hard to wait; for by this time Laddie-Billy was quite certain that he was a friendless waif, a homeless orphan, or, at best, a hopelessly lost youngster with only half a mind.

"I'd rather be dead," mourned Billy, bitterly, "than a blithering idiot."

CHAPTER XXVI

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In Fairyland

MR. BLACK, hearing nothing from Billy's people and knowing that Saunders was an able guard for his precious family, remained away for three days; for he found a number of matters in Lakeville that claimed his attention. He paid his fine cheerfully, and declared ever afterwards that the day's sport was worth all that it had cost him.

Mr. Saunders proved a most delightful companion, in spite of his misfit clothing; for the tall, slender young man had borrowed stout Mr. Black's camping costume. Wherever he went he was followed by devoted Billy and the no less devoted girls. Dave liked him, too. Even Rosa Marie waddled at his heels and grunted happily when he condescended to pat her black head or her fat brown hands. It may have been his undeniably red hair that charmed Rosa Marie, but it was his voice that pleased the girls; for he proved a decidedly eloquent person. He told them the most wonderful of fairy tales, recited miles and miles of nonsense rhymes and several yards, as Bettie said, of real poetry.

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But the fairy tales pleased them most because there were so many spots near Pete's Patch that seemed just like little bits of Fairyland; and sometimes Saunders' tales were cleverly fitted to these suitable surroundings. Before the three days were over, the girls were living in a veritable land of enchantment and went about with such dreamy eyes that Mrs. Crane was certain that they were all bewitched.

On the last forenoon of the useful young man's visit, Mabel, pursuing a startled brown rabbit, happened to stumble into the very heart of Fairyland. The rabbit led her out of Pete's Patch, through thicket and marsh, to an unsuspected bayou—a little bay that had once been part of the lively river but was now merely a quiet pond. Mabel found herself on the very muddy edge of a wide circular basin that was bigger than it looked. The banks were a tangled, seemingly impenetrable mass of green foliage, showing occasionally the vivid pink of a late wild rose or the dazzling white of Queen Anne's lace and meadow-sweet. More inviting than all were quantities of strange water flowers of shining white that spangled the glinting surface of the pond. These were new to Mabel and all hers for the gathering.

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"Oh!" gasped the little girl, quite overcome with the surprising beauty of this hitherto undiscovered treasure, "I guess I've found the Witch's Pool where the pale Princess was turned into a—Oh! I *must* get those flowers for Mrs. Crane; she'd *love* 'em."

A long, partly submerged log extended toward the center of the pond. Mabel very cautiously at first, then with more confidence, trusted her weight to this. If she could reach just one of those elusive flowers——

Suddenly there was a horrible "giving way" under her feet. She clutched wildly at unsubstantial air; there was a wild shriek followed by a violent splash. Millions of golden bubbles floated to the surface.

For a long moment that was all that the brown rabbit, safe among the ferns, could see. Then, a dozen feet away from the broken log, a queer green object, a most unpleasant-looking object, caught at the slimy branches of a water-logged, barkless tree that had stood in the pool for goodness only knows how many years; and, freeing one wet hand, wiped a veil of emerald slime from its mouth and eyes. The green object was Mabel; and tumbling right into Fairyland was not an entirely pleasant process.

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Fortunately, a few short stumps of branches still remained firmly attached to the upright

trunk. The plump "Princess" was able, happily, to find a firm foothold on one of these. Then, with her knees under water, her arms clasped about the slippery tree trunk, she stood more or less securely anchored in the treacherous pool, looking not unlike a green marble statue in the center of a fountain. Fortunately the water was not at all cold. Fortunately, too, it harbored none of the horrible things that Mabel imagined might be lurking beneath its verdant surface. It was because of her fear of possible—or rather impossible—alligators, snakes, and hippopotami that the little girl's voice proved unusually feeble when she attempted to shout for the help that she so sorely needed. At any rate, no one responded.

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Although the wonderfully tinted bayou was a lovely spot to look at, with its green and golden browns in the sunlight, its deep sepia tones in the shadows, and its marvelous reflections of objects along the edge, poor Mabel found it hard to be compelled to gaze at it for so long a time. After the first half-hour, even with blue king-fishers and many-hued dragon-flies darting down after water bugs, or lightly skimming the jeweled surface, it seemed a lonely place. As for the frostlike blossoms that had lured her into the pool Mabel no longer admired them; and she hated the brown rabbit.

When noon arrived without bringing always hungry Mabel back to Pete's Patch—never before had she missed a meal—the other campers began to grow alarmed. By two o'clock the entire camp was scouring forest, lakeshore, and river banks for Mabel or traces of Mabel. Mr. Saunders had even loaded Mr. Black's gun and was firing it, at intervals, thus providing Mabel with a new cause for alarm, since she didn't know that the gun was pointed toward the open lake. Laddie was searching the rocks at Barclay's Point, Jean and Henrietta were examining the roads that Mabel sometimes explored for mushrooms, Dave and Marjory were following all the more or less familiar trails.

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"She's fallen in, somewhere," declared Mrs. Crane, pale with anxiety, "and is drowned. Nothing else would have kept her away from lunch."

"And she can't get near water *without* falling in," agreed Bettie. "But, so far, she's always gotten out again."

Sometimes the hateful brown rabbit, safe on dry land, bobbed up to look at Mabel. Sometimes a saucy squirrel ran along an overhanging branch to scold loudly at the little girl. Once a big mud-hen waded into sight, then, suddenly discovering the discouraged "Princess," fled with an alarmed—and alarming squawk.

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"I suppose," groaned Mabel, "I'm missing a million things. Most likely Mr. Black is back with splendid news for Billy—I'm sure he'll turn out to be somebody perfectly grand, like a young duke or the only son of a mayor. Or Mr. Saunders is telling that loveliest-of-all fairy tale that he promised to save for the very last. And I *know* they'll eat every crumb of those splendid huckleberry pies that Mrs. Crane was making when I left camp. And, oh! What'll I do when it gets dark?"

But Mabel, happily, was spared this last horror. At three o'clock Mahjigeezigoqua, Rosa Marie's really beautiful mother, parted the branches that fringed the pool and peered at the strange object upright in the water.

"Oh!" cried weary Mabel, in sudden excitement, "do come and get me—a rope, a boat, anything ___"

"Can you hol' on som' more?" demanded the young woman, testing the ground with a cautious foot.

"Yes, yes," cried Mabel, almost letting go in her joy. "Only please save me soon—I'm awfully tired of this place—I've been here for *years*."

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"Ah'll breeng ma brodder," promised the dusky beauty, slipping noiselessly away.

It seemed another year before Dave finally came, bounding like a deer through the thicket, with his sister at his heels. Dave plunged in—he had learned by this time exactly how to rescue Mabel from all sorts of watery graves—and soon that relieved young person was safe on some very black, oozy mud that, ordinarily, wouldn't have seemed so pleasant underfoot.

There was great rejoicing when this frequently cast away castaway, still well besmeared with green slime, was escorted by Dave and his pretty sister to Pete's Patch.

"Geeve her som' bat' hon de lake," advised Dave, before disappearing in search of certain herbs for which he had found a use.

Mrs. Crane, feeling that Mabel had been sufficiently punished for her thoughtlessness without being scolded, hastily prepared a hot meal—after all, she *had* saved Mabel's share of the pie. Then, while Mrs. Crane was setting a place for her, the culprit, escorted to the lake by Jean and Henrietta, was thoroughly scrubbed, rubbed dry, and hustled into clean clothing.

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"Hurry!" cried Mrs. Crane, "or the stew will get cold again."

Just as Mabel was opening her mouth for the first delicious bite, a brown, sinewy hand deftly placed a dingy tin cup at her lips, her head was unexpectedly twitched backward, and before Mabel could realize what was happening, Dave had poured a generous dose of his evil-smelling herb tea down her unresisting throat.

"Ah'm learn dose good trick off ma gran'modder," explained Dave, evidently much elated at his success. "Ma gran'modder ver' smart ol' squaw."

"I wish," choked Mabel, crimson with indignation, "your horrid old grandmother 'd never been *born*."

"Som' tam'," smiled Dave, sympathetically, "Ah'm used for weesh dat, too. But dose medicine ees ver' good—mak' you feel all bully hon top your inside, bam-bye. Maybe you lak' som' more, hey?" [273]

"You go home!" snapped Mabel. "I'll taste that stuff for a *year*."

Dave chuckled as he slipped away. And, however dreadful it looked and smelled and tasted, the medicine at any rate did no harm; for Mabel awoke next morning none the worse for either the prolonged soaking, Dave's unpalatable remedy, or even an unusually large portion of Mrs. Crane's famous pie.

CHAPTER XXVII

A Visitor for Laddie

THE campers had barely finished breakfast when Captain Berry's launch chug-chugged into the little harbor; and the girls, still at the table, were laughing so heartily over one of Mr. Saunders' amusing tales that they had no suspicion of the launch's presence, at that unusual hour, until Mr. Black's hearty "Hi there, folks! Isn't anybody up?" made them all jump. [274]

"Oh," breathed Mabel, evidently much relieved. "They didn't put him in prison, after all."

"I guess I'd better be getting into my own clothes," said Saunders. "I'll be going back with Captain Berry, I suppose. I'd *much* rather stay."

"There's no need for you to hurry," returned Mrs. Crane. "Captain Berry always stops for quite awhile; so finish your breakfast in peace."

Mr. Black, now plainly visible from the open door of the dining tent, was coming up the path from the beach. Behind him walked another person—a small woman in widow's garb. Her thin, white face wore an anxious, strained expression; her blue eyes beamed with eager expectancy, her hands twitched. [275]

As the pair approached all the campers regarded them wonderingly. Suddenly Billy's cup dropped with a crash. In another moment he had leaped over the bench and was racing down the pathway.

"Mother!" he cried. "Mother! It's my mother!"

The little woman, laughing and crying together, was seized by this big whirlwind of a boy and hugged until she gasped for mercy.

"Oh, Laddie Lombard!" she cried. "I—I'm so glad—Oh, do let me cry just a minute! I thought—oh, *Laddie*!"

Saunders, with a delicacy that still further endeared him to the adoring girls, silently reached forth a long arm and dropped the tent flap. Mr. Black, his kindly face beaming with sympathy, pushed his way in; Laddie, rather close to tears himself, led his weeping mother to a bench under the trees. [276]

"Her name," explained Mr. Black, seating himself at the breakfast table between Bettie and Jean, "is Mrs. Tracy Lombard. She wasn't in Pittsburg; but a friend of hers saw the notice in the paper and telegraphed her, and she came as fast as she could."

"Of *course* she did," breathed Mrs. Crane. "But how did the boy—"

"Billy—Laddie, I mean—wasn't well this spring. It happened that he was coming down with typhoid; but his mother didn't know that—thought it was overwork in school. Hoping to benefit him by a change of climate, Mrs. Lombard, always rather fussy, I imagine, over this one precious infant, started West with him, over the Canadian Pacific route. She had relatives in Seattle or Portland—I've forgotten which. But that part of it doesn't matter.

"The second day after leaving Pittsburg, Laddie became so alarmingly ill that Mrs. Lombard was glad to accept the invitation of a fellow-traveler, a motherly, middle-aged woman, who lived in a small village on the north shore of Lake Superior." [277]

"In Canada?" queried Marjory.

"Yes," returned Mr. Black. "In, as nearly as I could make out from Mrs. Lombard's description, a very quiet little place across the lake from Pete's Patch, if not exactly opposite. But so far away that one wouldn't expect small boats to make the journey. In that village, however, Laddie was seriously ill; because, by this time, he had pneumonia in addition to typhoid. For weeks he was a very sick boy. Then, when he began to mend, his mother



"MOTHER!" HE CRIED. "MOTHER! IT'S MY MOTHER!"

found it difficult to hold him down, headstrong little rascal that he was, with no father to control him—his father died when Laddie was two years old, and I guess the boy has had his own way most of the time."

"He isn't a bit spoiled," defended Mrs. Crane. "But go on with your story."

"Long before he was well enough to walk he was begging to be taken on the water—he was always crazy about the water, his mother says; perhaps because most of his ancestors were sailors. On pleasant days—our spring was unusually mild, you remember—they allowed him to sit on the sunny veranda of Mrs. Brown's cottage, from which the lake, only two hundred feet distant, was plainly visible. At first they merely rolled him up in a blanket; but for the last three days of his sojourn in that place he had worn his clothes, shoes and all, since it galled his proud young spirit to be considered an invalid in the sight of the villagers.

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"One day, during the half-hour or so that Mrs. Lombard was busy changing her dress, straightening her son's room, and so forth, Laddie disappeared."

"Before he could walk?" demanded Mrs. Crane.

"No, he was able to go from room to room by that time. You've noticed, haven't you, how quickly he recovers, once he is started? Well, as soon as he was better he disappeared."

"Where did he go?" asked Bettie. The girls, of course, were all nearly breathless with interest—no tale told by Saunders had held them so closely.

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"Nobody knows," returned Mr. Black. "Probably nobody ever *will* know precisely what happened. However, there was a sociable half-breed fisherman, sort of a half-witted chap, who had leaned over the fence almost daily to talk to the boy. The theory is that he asked Laddie to go out in his boat. The landing was only a short distance away and almost directly in front of Mrs. Brown's house; but, owing to jutting rocks at the east side of the little bay, one could easily embark and very speedily get entirely out of sight of any of the houses. Now, the chances are that Laddie, or any other boy, invited by Indian Charlie to go out for a brief sail, would have considered it rather smart to accept the invitation. Would have thought it a good joke on his mother, perhaps—the best of boys make such mistakes, sometimes.

"Anyway, Laddie disappeared, and several days later Indian Charlie was found drowned near a rocky point several miles from the village; pieces of timber that *might* have been part of his boat were picked up after the storm—that same storm that brought Laddie to us. Moreover, another fisherman remembered noticing a boy with very bright hair in Charlie's boat, which he happened to pass that afternoon a mile or two down the shore. The wind was pretty fresh that day, and by night it was blowing a gale.

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"Mrs. Lombard was forced to conclude, when no further word was heard of Laddie, that her boy had shared poor Charlie's fate—several far more seaworthy boats were wrecked that night and more than one unfortunate sailor lost his life. But Mrs. Lombard is now blaming herself for giving up hope so easily, though she did offer a reward, through the Canadian papers, for the finding of Laddie's body; and afterwards the Canadian shore was searched quite thoroughly. It didn't occur to anybody that Laddie, probably lashed to the mast by Indian Charlie, probably ill again and possibly delirious, as a result of exposure to wind and waves, could have been carried across Lake Superior in so frail a craft as that poor half-breed's boat. But the wind was in the right direction. How long the boat held together we shall never know.

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"Mrs. Lombard learned afterwards that Indian Charlie was considered far too reckless in his handling of sailboats, and that he hadn't any better judgment than to take a sick boy out to sea if the boy showed the faintest inclination to go—and you know how wild that Billy-boy is about the water. Bless me, Sarah! That poor woman wouldn't wait for any breakfast—"

"I'll make some fresh coffee this minute," said Mrs. Crane, "but do save the rest of the story until I get back."

"There isn't any more," returned Mr. Black, taking a drink of water, "except that Mrs. Lombard reached town at four o'clock this morning, routed me out at half-past—the advertisement read 'apply to Peter Black'—and we came here as fast as gasoline could bring us."

"Then *you* didn't have any breakfast, either," guessed Mrs. Crane, shrewdly.

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"I suspect I didn't," admitted Mr. Black.

And then Laddie Billy Blue-eyes, otherwise William Tracy Lombard, introduced his pretty little blond mother to all the campers.

"I'm remembering things so fast," said he, "that it makes me dizzy. Mother seems to be the missing link that connects me with Pittsburg and everything else. You know I always said that Dave reminded me of somebody? Well, when mother spoke of Indian Charlie, I *knew*. For a moment I could feel a boat heave up and down; and in a flash I saw a dark face something like Dave's, and some rather long, very black hair, also like Dave's. I could see the face *two* ways. Once it was laughing, over a fence top. Then it was all twisted up with fright—bending over me and scared blue. And while the face looked like that, there were hands fumbling about my waist —"

"As if," queried Bettie, "somebody were tying a life-preserver——"

"Yes, yes," declared Laddie. "And that dreadful face said things in a dreadful voice; but I couldn't hear—everything whirled and roared. Sometimes there was a horrible going-down feeling. Perhaps, after all, I just dreamed all that, but—but I *think* it happened." [283]

"And you don't remember getting into any boat?" asked Mrs. Lombard.

"No, I don't," replied Laddie, whose always responsive eyes twinkled suddenly. "But if it were poor Charlie's fault, it wouldn't be polite to remember; if it were mine, I'd rather forget it; but I really don't remember one thing about those days in Canada, except that face like Dave's."

"No wonder," said Mrs. Lombard. "You were delirious when we took you off the train and so hazy when you were sitting up that you didn't know whether you were in Oregon or Pittsburg. You'd been *terribly* sick. The doctor said that your splendid constitution was all that saved you. And to think that you survived that storm——"

"Pooh!" scoffed Billy, "that boat probably lasted till I was tossed up on this shore. And anyhow, a bath does a fellow good. See how husky Mabel is—she's forever taking 'em. Say! That girl would fall into an ink bottle, if you left it uncorked—she just naturally tumbles into things." [284]

CHAPTER XXVIII

Breaking Camp

"GIRLS," said Mr. Black, when he had finished his delayed breakfast, "I have a very sorrowful confession to make. I've got to lose you." [285]

"Oh, *no*," protested Mrs. Crane, "not so soon."

"I don't like it myself, Sarah, but all those mothers, grandmothers, and Auntie Janes came and sat around my office and reminded me that their precious girls were all going away to school, told me that the school was *almost* picked out—they've narrowed down to four—and dragged from me a promise that I just hated to make. As far as I can discover, they've bought all the cloth in Lakeville, engaged all the dressmakers, and are in a fever to try things on. And I promised——"

"To send us all home?" guessed Bettie.

"Yes. A lot of men are coming this afternoon with a tug and a big flat scow to take the Whale home—I suspect she'll have to go to the factory for repairs. There'll be room on the scow for us and all our belongings besides. But cheer up. We won't need to start until along toward night." [286]

"So this is our last day," mourned Jean.

"Dear me," sighed Bettie, "we'll *never* have so splendid a time again."

"We'll come again next summer," promised Mr. Black, "unless you get so young-ladyfied at your boarding school that you won't *want* to camp."

"You just wait and see," said Marjory.

"No danger," declared Henrietta.

"But," mourned Mabel, "we won't have any Billy Blue-eyes."

"Perhaps I'll get wrecked again," consoled Laddie, "and you can pick me up some more. But you'll forget all about me before next summer."

"I will not," contradicted Mabel. "I'm going to write to you."

"That's good," declared Laddie; "let's *all* write to each other."

"Mrs. Lombard," offered Bettie, rather shyly, "we've always wondered who Laddie would turn out to be. When he asked for a toothbrush we were quite sure that he was a young duke, or a prince, or—or——" [287]

"No," laughed Mrs. Lombard, "he isn't even a youthful millionaire. He's just a plain boy. We have enough to live on, to be sure; but after awhile Billy will have to work like any other man for his living. I hope you're not disappointed."

"No," said Mabel, magnanimously, "we'd like him, just the same, even if he were just a coal-

heaver."

That last day was spent in visiting all the spots that were dear to the young campers and in showing many of them to Mrs. Lombard, who proved a very pleasant little woman, even if she did cling rather tightly to Laddie when he suggested going out in the boat for a pail of water.

"Well," laughed Billy, "I can just as easily *walk* out, if you consider that safer; but it's rather drier to go by boat."

Dave, of course, had to hear all about Billy Blue-eyes' experience.

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"Ah'm have som' brudder Charlie wan tam'," remarked Dave, thoughtfully. "Ah'm scare for go out on som' boat wit' dose fellow maself, w'en Ah'm leeve hon Canadaw."

"Do you think he *was* your brother?" pursued Laddie.

"Ah don't know," returned Dave, who evidently was not greatly concerned by the news of a possible relative's death. "Me, Ah'm got eight-nine brodder som' plass. Not moch good hon herself, dose brodder, hey?"

But when Dave learned that the campers were about to depart for Lakeville he was far more distressed.

"Me, Ah'm find eet lonesom' widout dose Jean, dose Margy, dose Mabelle, dose petite *Bettee*, dose good Mees Crane, dose good Pete Black, dose fine *Bil/ee*—maybe dose good dinnaire, too."

Even numerous gifts of food, clothing, and cooking utensils; even the bestowal of Terrible Tim and Anthony Fitz-Hubert (the kitten was now so wild that only the half-breed could catch him) did not serve to raise Dave's drooping spirits. Although he assisted in breaking camp, it was easy to see that he hated the task. He sighed heavily as each tent fell.

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The campers, already looking far ahead, as happy children always do, toward new scenes and new experiences, trooped merrily aboard the big scow just at sunset that evening, eager for the picnic supper that was to be eaten on the deck of the safe, clumsy craft; eager, too, though they did not realize it, for a sight of home.

The evening was peaceful, the pale lake calm and softly tinted like a big shining opal. The homeward trip, with so much to relate at the end of it to the dear home people, promised so much enjoyment that no actual tears were shed as the tug began slowly to move her heavy burden seaward. Still, the backward glances were sufficiently regretful; for Pete's Patch was not a spot to be lightly deserted, and never had the place seemed more beautiful than it appeared now from the slowly departing boat.

Dave stood alone on the bank, for his sister was already eagerly examining the ample store of provisions left for their use. For as long as they could see him, the girls waved to the solitary watcher. But long after that Dave strained his eyes after the boat that was carrying away the dearest friends that he had ever known.

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"Ah'm lak' dose peop'," said Dave, with a catch in his throat, as he turned away at last. "Ver' moch, Ah'm lak' dose good peop'. Me, Ah'm good frien' to hall dose; until Ah'm go for die hon maself."

At nine o'clock that night the castaways landed safely in Lakeville, and the picnic that had lasted for weeks instead of hours and proved so much more than a mere picnic was at an end.

THE END

Transcriber's Notes:

- Page 140, "sprinling" changed to "sprinkling" (a generous sprinkling)
- Page 141, "beween" changed "between" (stuck out between the loops)
- Page 171, "half-breed" changed to "half-breed" (The half-breed had)
- Page 199, "is" changed to "it" (But it *is*)
- Page 238, "Ofter" changed "Often" (Often, when glancing)
- Page 241, "namd" changed to "named" (young woman named Miss)

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE CASTAWAYS OF PETE'S PATCH ***

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