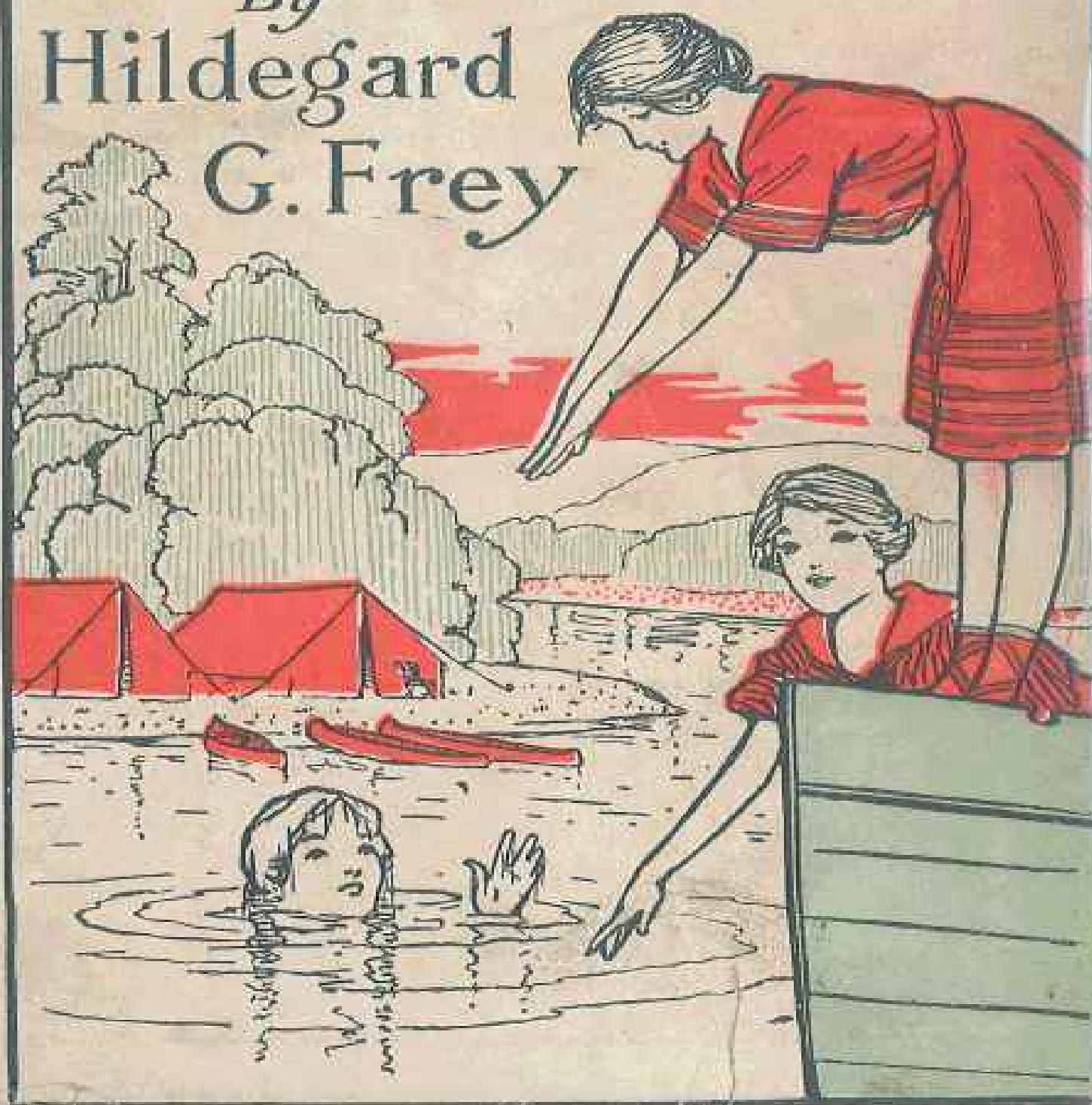


The Campfire Girls

SOLVE A MYSTERY

By
Hildegard
G. Frey



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Mystery; Or, The Christmas Adventure at Carver House**

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE CAMP
FIRE GIRLS SOLVE A MYSTERY; OR, THE CHRISTMAS
ADVENTURE AT CARVER HOUSE ***

The Camp Fire Girls Solve a Mystery

or, THE CHRISTMAS ADVENTURE at CARVER HOUSE

By HILDEGARD G. FREY

AUTHOR OF
THE CAMP FIRE GIRLS SERIES



A. L. BURT COMPANY
Publishers New York

THE
CAMP FIRE GIRLS SERIES

A Series of Stories for Camp Fire Girls Endorsed by the Officials of the Camp Fire
Girls Organization

By HILDEGARD G. FREY

The Camp Fire Girls in the Maine Woods
or, The Winnebago's Go Camping

The Camp Fire Girls at School
or, The Wohelo Weavers

The Camp Fire Girls at Onoway House
or, The Magic Garden

The Camp Fire Girls Go Motoring
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The Camp Fire Girls' Larks and Pranks
or, The House of the Open Door

The Camp Fire Girls on Ellen's Isle
or, the Trail of the Seven Cedars

The Camp Fire Girls on the Open Road
or, Glorify Work

The Camp Fire Girls Do Their Bit
or, Over The Top With the Winnebago's

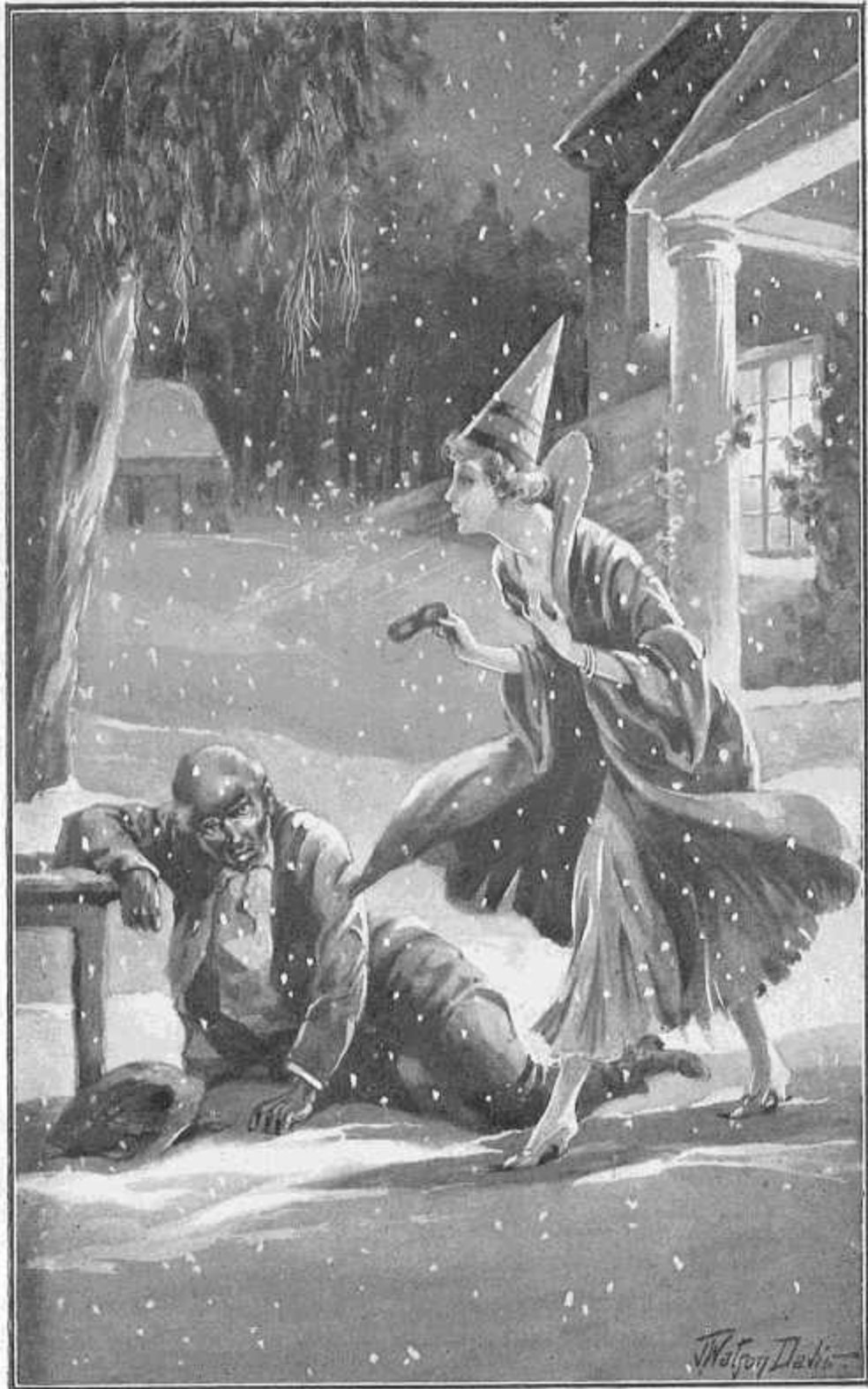
The Camp Fire Girls Solve a Mystery
or, The Christmas Adventures at Carver
House

The Camp Fire Girls at Camp Keewaydin
or, Down Paddles

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THE CAMP FIRE GIRLS SOLVE A MYSTERY



The old man swayed, clutched at the empty air, and fell heavily in the snow at her feet.

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THE CAMP FIRE GIRLS
SOLVE A MYSTERY

CHAPTER I

THE EMPTY HOUSE

Katherine Adams stepped from the train at Oakwood, glanced expectantly up and down the station platform, hesitated a moment, and then, picking out a conspicuous spot under a glaring arc light, deposited her suitcase on the ground with a thump, mounted guard beside it and patiently waited for Nyoda to find her in the surging crowd.

It was two days before Christmas, and travel was heavy. It seemed as though the entire population of Oakland was either coming home, departing, or rushing madly up and down before the panting train in search of friends and relatives. Katherine was engulfed in a tidal wave of rapturous greetings that rolled over her from every side, as a coachful of soldiers, home for Christmas, were met and surrounded by the waiting lines of townspeople.

Katherine stood still, absorbed in watching the various reunions taking place around her, while the tidal wave gradually subsided, receding in the direction of Main Street. The principal stream had already flowed past her and the crowd was rapidly thinning out when Katherine woke to the realization that she was still unclaimed. There was no sign of Nyoda. The expectant smile faded from Katherine's face and in its place there came a look of puzzled wonder. What had happened? Why wasn't Nyoda there to meet her? Was there some mistake? Wasn't this Oakwood? Had she gotten off at the wrong station, she thought in sudden panic. No, there was the sign beside the door of the green boarded station; its gilded letters gleamed down reassuringly at her. Katherine

stood on one foot and pondered. Was this the day she was supposed to come? What day was it, anyway? The thick pad calendar beside the ticket seller's window inside the station proclaimed it to be the twenty-third. All right so far; she hadn't mixed up the date, then. She had written Nyoda that she would come on the twenty-third, on the five-forty-five train. The train had been on time. Where was Nyoda?

Katherine was assailed by a sudden doubt. Had she mailed that letter? Yes, she was certain of that. She had run out to the mail box at ten o'clock at night especially to mail it. What had gone wrong? Why wasn't there someone to meet her?

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She looked around at the walls as if expecting them to answer, and her roving eye caught sight of the lettering on a glass door opposite. The telephone! Goose! Why hadn't she thought of that before? Of course there was some mistake responsible for Nyoda's not meeting her, but in a moment that would be all straightened out.

She sprang across to the booth and picked up the directory hanging beside the telephone. Then a queer, bewildered look came into her eyes and she stood still with the book hanging uncertainly from her fingers. She had forgotten Nyoda's name! She twisted her brows into a pucker and made a frantic effort to recall it. No use; it was a fruitless endeavor. Where that name used to be in her mind there was now a blank space, empty and echoless as the original void. It was *too* ridiculous! Katherine gave a little stamp of vexation. It was not the first time a name had popped out of her mind at a critical moment. And sometimes—O horror! it didn't come back again for days. Was there ever anything so utterly absurd as the plight in which she now found herself? She knew Nyoda's name as well as her own. M. M. It certainly began with an M.

After nearly an hour's exasperated wracking of her brains she gave it up in disgust and stalked out of the station. Not for worlds would she have confided to anyone her plight.

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“People will think you’re an escaped lunatic,” she told herself in terrified wrath. “They might put you in an asylum, and it would serve you right if they did. You aren’t fit to be out without a guardian. After this you’ll have to have your destination written out on a label tied to your ankle, like a trunk.”

She had one recollection to guide her. The house Nyoda lived in stood on top of a hill. The name of Carver House and the address on Oak Street had faded along with Nyoda’s name. “I’ll walk until I come to a house on the top of a hill,” she decided, “and find it that way. There can’t be many houses on hills in this town, it seems to be all in a valley. Come along, Katherine, what you haven’t got in your head you’ll have to have in your heels.”

No one, seeing the tall, clever looking girl stepping briskly out of the station and turning up Main Street with a businesslike tread, would have guessed that she was a stranger in a strange town and hadn’t any idea where she was going. There was such an air of confidence and capability about Katherine that people would have been more likely to ask her to help them out of their difficulties than to suspect that she needed help herself.

Certainly, Nyoda’s house wouldn’t be hard to find. Oakwood lay in a valley, curled up among its sheltering hills like a kitten in a heap of leaves. To be on a hill Nyoda must be on the outskirts of the town. She inquired of a passing youngster what part of Oakwood was on a hill and got the information that Main Street ran up hill at the end.

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She set out blithely in the direction he pointed, enjoying the walk through the crisp, icy air. A light fall of snow, white as swan’s down, covered the ground and the roofs, and sparkled in the light of the street lamps in myriads of tiny twinkles. Not many people were abroad, for it was the supper hour in Oakland. A Christmas stillness hovered over the peaceful little

town, as though it lay hushed and breathless in anticipation of the coming of the Holy Babe. Low in the eastern sky burned the brilliant evening star, bright as that other Star in the East which guided the shepherds on that far-off Christmas night. Katherine felt the spell of it and gradually her hasty steps became slower and at times she stood still and looked upon the quiet scene with a feeling of awe and reverence. "Why, it might be Bethlehem!" she said to herself. "It's so still and white, and there's the star in the east, too!" Almost unconsciously she began to repeat under her breath:

"O little town of Bethlehem,
How still we see thee lie,
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by."

[8]

"Only it isn't quite true about the deep and dreamless sleep," she qualified, her literal-mindedness getting the upper hand of her poetic feeling, "because they're all inside eating supper." The thought of supper made Katherine suddenly realize that she was ravenously hungry. She had had nothing to eat since an early lunch on the train. "I hope I get there before supper's over," she thought, and quickened her pace again. Not that she wouldn't get something anyhow, she reflected, but somehow the idea of coming in just as supper was ready, and sitting down to a table covered with steaming dishes seized her fancy and warmed her through with a pleasant glow of expectation.

"Nearly there!" she said to herself cheerfully. "Here's where Main Street starts to go uphill." The houses had gradually become farther and farther apart as she went on, until now she was walking along between wide, open spaces, gleaming white in the starlight, with only an occasional low cottage to break the landscape. The walk was steeply uphill now, and looking back Katherine saw Oakwood curled in its sheltering valley, and again she thought of a sleek, well fed kitten lying

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warm and comfortable and drowsy, at peace with all the world.

“There aren’t any poor people here, I guess,” she thought to herself. “All the houses look so prosperous. There probably aren’t any hungry children crying for bread. I’m the only hungry person in this whole town, I believe. My, but I *am* hungry! I could eat a whole house right now, and a barn for dessert! Thank goodness, there’s the top of the hill in sight, and that must be Nyoda’s house.” A great dark bulk towered before her at the top of the steep incline, its irregular outlines standing sharply defined against the luminous sky. Katherine charged up the remainder of the hill at top speed, slipping and falling in the icy path several times in her eagerness, but finally landing intact, though flushed and panting, upon its slippery summit, and stood still to behold this wonderful house that Nyoda lived in, whose charms had been the theme of many an enthusiastic letter from the Winnebagos during the previous summer. It loomed large and silent before her, its frost covered window panes shining whitely in the starlight with a faint, ghostly glimmer. No gleam of light came from any of the doors or windows. The house was still and dark as a tomb. Katherine stood wide-eyed with disappointment and perplexity. Nyoda was not at home.

She clutched at a straw. Nyoda had gone to meet her and missed her; that was it. But at the same time she felt a doubt rising in her mind which rapidly grew into a certainty. This was not Nyoda’s house before which she stood on this lonely hilltop. It was some other house and it was absolutely empty. Not only was it untenanted, but it had the look of a house that has stood so for years. Even the soft, sparkling mantle of snow that lay upon it could not hide the sagging porch, the broken steps, the broken-down fence, the general air of decay which surrounded the place.

Katherine emitted a cluck of chagrin. She was puffing like an engine from her dash up the hill, she was tired out, she was ravenously hungry, she was unutterably cross at herself. She scowled at the dark house with its spectral, frosty windows, and made another frantic effort to recall Nyoda's name, only to be confronted with that baffling blank where the name once had been.

With a growing feeling of helplessness she stood on one foot in the snow in the pose which she always assumed when thinking deeply, and considered what she should do next. Should she keep on walking and climbing all the hills until she finally came to the right one; should she go all the way back to the station and sit there until the name came back to her, or should she walk boldly up to one of the hospitable looking doors she had passed, confide her plight and ask to be taken in for the night? Katherine was trying to decide between the first two, leaving the third as the extreme alternative in case she neither found the right hill nor succeeded in remembering Nyoda's name before bedtime, when suddenly something occurred which sent a chill of ice into her blood and left her standing petrified in her one-legged pose, like a frozen stork. From the dark and empty house before her came the sound of a song, ringing clear and distinct through the frosty air. It was the voice of a woman, or a girl. Beginning softly, the tone swelled out in volume till it seemed to Katherine's ears to fill the whole house and to come pouring out of all the doors and windows. Then it subsided until it came very faintly, like the merest ghost of a song. Katherine felt the hair rising on her head; she gave an odd little dry gasp. Wild terror assailed her and she would have fled, but fear chained her limbs and she could not move hand or foot. She stood riveted to the spot, staring fascinated at the dark, untenanted house, which stared back at her with frost veiled, inscrutable eyes; and all the while from somewhere in its mysterious depths came the voice, now louder, now fainter, but always distinctly heard.

A sudden thought struck Katherine. Was she already a victim of starvation, and was this the delirium which starving people went into? They generally heard beautiful voices singing. No, that wasn't possible—she couldn't be starving yet. She was tremendously hungry, but there was still a fairly safe margin between her and the last stages. Somehow the thought of hunger, and the idea of food, commonplace, familiar victuals which it connoted, dissipated the supernatural atmosphere of the place, and Katherine shook off her terror. The blood stopped pounding in her ears; her heart began to beat naturally again; her limbs lost their paralysis.

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“Goose!” she said to herself scornfully. “Flying into a panic at the sound of a voice singing and thinking it's ghosts! I'm ashamed of you, Katherine Adams! Where's your 'spicuity? Vacant houses don't sing by themselves. When empty houses start singing they aren't empty. Besides, no ghost could sing like that. A voice like that means lungs, and ghosts don't have lungs. Anybody that's got breath to sing can probably talk and tell me where the next hill is. I'm going up and ask her.”

She passed through an opening in the tumble-down fence, in which there was no longer any gate, and went up the uneven, irregular brick walk and up the broken steps, treading carefully upon each one and half expecting them to go down under her weight. They creaked and trembled, but they held her and she went on over the sagging porch to the door, which lay in deep shadow at the one side. She felt about for a bell or knocker, and then she discovered that the door stood open. She could hear the voice plainly, singing somewhere in the house. Failing to find a doorbell she rapped loudly with her knuckles on the door casing. To her nervous ears the sound seemed to echo inside the house like thunder, but there was no pause in the singing, no sound of footsteps coming to the door.

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She rapped again. Still no sign from within. A sportive north wind, racing up the hill, paused at the top to whirl about in a mad frolic, and Katherine shivered from head to foot. She felt chilled through, and fairly ached to get inside a house; anywhere to be in out of the cold. She rapped a third time. Still the voice sang on as before, paying no heed to the knock. Katherine grew desperate. Her teeth were chattering in her head and her feet were going numb.

“Of course she can’t hear me knock when she’s singing,” thought Katherine. “The sound of her own voice fills her ears. I’m going in and find her. I’ll apologize for walking in on her so unceremoniously, but it’s the only thing to do. I’ve got to get in out of the cold pretty soon.”

Acting upon her resolution she stepped through the open door into the hall inside and tried to fix the direction from which the voice was coming. She looked in vain for a glimmer of light under a door to guide her to the mysterious dweller in this strange establishment. The house was apparently as dark on the inside as it looked from without. Katherine opened her handbag and fumbled for her electric flash. In a moment a tiny circle of light was boring valiantly into the gloom. By its gleam Katherine saw that she stood in a long hall. Upon her left was a succession of doors, all closed; upon her right a staircase curved upward into the blackness above. Idly she turned her flashlight on the staircase and noticed that the post was of beautifully carved mahogany. The polish was gone, but it must have been handsome once, must have been—Katherine gave a great start and nearly dropped her flashlight. Her eyes, traveling up the mahogany stair rail, encountered those of a man who was leaning over the banister half way up. His face, in the light of her flash, was white as a sheet, and he seemed to be staring not so much at her as at the door behind her, through which she at that moment discovered the voice to be proceeding.

Katherine recovered from her surprise and remembered her manners. This man must live here. She must explain quickly, or he would take her for a burglar, coming in that way and looking around with a flashlight. Katherine suddenly felt apprehensive. Suppose he wouldn't believe her story? It was one thing to go into a house in search of a voice that wouldn't come to the door; it was another thing to find a man inside.

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She cleared her throat and wet her lips. "Excuse me for coming in like this—" she began. She got no farther with her apologies. At the sound of her voice the man gave a startled jump, backed away from the banister, ran down the stairs two steps at a time and disappeared through the front door, leaving Katherine standing in the empty hall, open-mouthed with astonishment.

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CHAPTER II

THE PRINCESS SYLVIA

Katherine did not know whether she was more astonished or relieved at the sudden flight of the man on the stairs. "I suppose I do look pretty wild," she reflected, "but I didn't suppose my appearance was enough to make a man run on sight. Well anyhow, he isn't going to trouble me, and that's some comfort. Now to find the singer."

There was an open transom over the door before which Katherine stood and she perceived that the voice came through this. With hand raised to knock on the door panel she paused in admiration. The song that floated through the transom had such a gay swing, such an irresistible lilt, that it set her head awl and her blood racing madly through her veins in a wild May dance. It was as though Spring herself, intoxicated with May dew and brimming over with all the joy of all the world, were singing. Like golden drops from a sunlit fountain the gay, glad notes showered down on her:

*"Hark, hark, the lark at heaven's gate sings,
And Phoebus 'gins arise
His steeds to water at those springs
On chaliced flower that lies;
And winking Mary buds begin
To ope their golden eyes,
With everything that pretty been,
My lady sweet arise!"*

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The voice fell silent, and Katherine came back to herself and knocked on the door.

“Come in, my dear Duchess,” called a merry voice from behind the door. There was no mistaking the note of glad welcome.

Katherine turned the knob and opened the door. Only darkness greeted her eyes.

“Where are you?” she asked.

From somewhere in the room came a sudden exclamation of surprise.

“Who is it?” demanded the voice which had bidden her enter. “You are not my lady-in-waiting, the Duchess.”

“I’m afraid I’m not,” said Katherine, considerably puzzled at the salutation she had received. She stood still inside the door trying to locate her mysterious hostess in the darkness. Her flashlight lay in her hand, useless, its battery burned out.

“I’m looking for another house on another hill,” she began hurriedly, speaking into the darkness and feeling as though she had slipped into the Arabian Nights, “and I got the wrong hill and now I’m so mixed up I don’t know where to go. I heard you singing and came in to ask if you could tell me where the other hill is. I knocked before I came in,” she added hastily, “but you didn’t come to the door, so I took the liberty of walking in. I beg your pardon for coming right in that way, but I was so cold——”

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“You are welcome in our lodge,” interrupted the invisible voice with lofty graciousness. “Do you not know where you have come?” it continued, in a tone which indicated there was a delicious surprise in store. “This is the royal hunting lodge, and I am the Princess Sylvia!”

“Oh-h-h!” said Katherine, too much astonished to say another word. She did not know how to act when introduced to a

princess.

“Is there anything I can do for your majesty?” she asked politely, remembering that the other had mentioned a lady-in-waiting that she seemed to be expecting.

“Light the lights!” commanded the voice imperiously.

Katherine took a step forward uncertainly. “Where—” she began.

“On the table beside you!” continued the voice.

Katherine put out her hand and came in contact with the edge of a table, and after groping for a moment found a box of matches. She struck one and by its flare saw an oil lamp standing on the table beside the matches. She lit it and looked around the room curiously. She could not see the owner of the voice at first. The room was large and shadowy and contained very little furniture. A bare pine table on which the lamp stood; a couple of kitchen chairs; a cot bed next to the wall; a small stove; a rocking chair and a sewing machine; these were the objects which the lamp illuminated. The other end of the room lay in deep shadow. It was from this shadow that the voice now issued again.

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“Bring the lamp and come here,” it commanded.

Katherine picked up the lamp from the table and advanced toward the shadowy corner of the room. The darkness fled before her as she advanced and the corner sprang into light. She saw that the corner was a bay, with three long windows, in which stood a couch. On the couch was a mountain whose slopes consisted of vari-colored piecework, and from whose peak there issued, like an eruption of golden lava, a tangle of bright yellow curls which framed about a pair of big, shining eyes. The eyes were set in a face, of course—they had to be—but the face was so white and emaciated as to be entirely

inconspicuous, so Katherine's first impression consisted entirely of hair and eyes. The eyes were dark brown, a strange combination with the fair hair, and sparkled with a hundred little dancing lights, as the girl on the couch—for it was a girl apparently about fourteen years old—looked up at Katherine with a roguish smile.

“You must be Her Grace, the Marchioness St. Denis,” she said with an air of stately courtesy, “of whose presence in our realm we have been informed. I trust Your Grace is not over fatigued. You will pardon the informality of our life here,” she continued, her brown eyes traveling around the room and resting somewhat regretfully on the shabby furnishings. “We take up our residence in the Winter Palace for state occasions,” she went on, “but for our daily life we prefer the simplicity of our Hunting Lodge. We are less hampered by formal etiquette here.”

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Katherine stared in perplexity. Winter Palace? Hunting Lodge? Her Grace the Marchioness? What was this strange child talking about? Her feeling of having wakened in the midst of a fairy tale deepened.

“You can see the Winter Palace from the window here, when there isn't any frost on it,” proceeded the “princess,” setting up a volcanic disturbance inside the patchwork mountain by turning herself inside of it, and she pointed toward one of the bay windows with a thin white hand. “It's on top of a high hill and at night it twinkles.”

It came over Katherine in a flash that possibly it was Nyoda's house that this queer child meant by the “Winter Palace.” A big house set on a high hill——

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A rippling laugh caused her to look down hastily, and there was the girl on the couch fairy convulsed with laughter.

“It’s been such fun!” she exclaimed, demolishing the mountain by throwing the quilt aside with a sudden movement of her arms and disclosing a slender little body wrapped in a grayish woolen dressing gown. “I never had anybody from outside to play it with before. I get tired playing it alone so much, and Aunt Aggie is mostly always too busy to play it with me. Besides,” she said with a regretful sigh, “she has no imagination, and she forgets most of the really important things. Oh, it was wonderful when you said, ‘Is there anything I can do for you, Your Majesty?’ It was just as real as real!” She laughed with delight at the remembrance.

Katherine, as much startled by the swift change in her little hostess as she had been at her strange manner of speech in the beginning, was still uncertain what to say. “Is it a game?” she asked finally.

The girl nodded and began to explain, talking as though to an old friend.

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“You see,” she began, “not being able to walk, it’s so hard to find anything really thrilling to do.”

“You are lame?” asked Katherine with quick sympathy. It had just come over her that while the slender arms had been waving incessantly in animated gestures as the voice chattered gaily on, the limbs under the dressing gown had not moved.

The girl nodded in reply to Katherine’s question. “Crippled,” she explained. “I was following a horse down the middle of the street trying to figure out which leg came after which when I slipped and fell and hurt my spine, and I have never walked since.”

“Oh-h!” said Katherine with a shudder of distress.

“And so,” continued the girl, “to pass away the time while Aunt Aggie was working I began to pretend that I was a

princess and lived in a palace with my indulgent father, the king, and had a grand court and a great train of attendants—all dukes and duchesses and counts and things, and a royal grand duchess for my lady-in-waiting. That one is Aunt Aggie, of course, and it's great fun to pretend she's the duchess."

"My dear Duchess," she cried, giving an animated sample of her make believe, "what do you say to having our cousin, the Crown Prince, in to tea!' Then Aunt Aggie always forgets and says, 'Let's see, which one is the Crown Prince, now?' It's *very* disconcerting, the way the Grand Duchess forgets her royal relations!" She giggled infectiously and Katherine smiled too.

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"What is your real name, Princess Sylvia?" she asked.

"Sylvia Deane," replied the girl. "Only the princess part is made up. My name is S-s-ylvia-a."

Her teeth began to chatter on the last words and she drew the quilt up around her tightly. Katherine suddenly felt cold, too. Then she became conscious for the first time that there was no heat in the room. In the first contrast to the biting wind outside the place had seemed warm, and with her heavy fur-collared winter coat she had not felt chilly. She glanced at the stove. It was black and lifeless.

"The f-f-fire's g-g-gone o-u-t," chattered Sylvia, huddling under the quilt as a fierce blast rattled the panes in the bay windows. Katherine felt hot with indignation at the thought of the invalid left all alone in the cold room.

"Where is your—lady-in-waiting?" she asked, a trifle sharply.

"Aunt Aggie's gone to the city," replied Sylvia. "She went at six o'clock this morning and she was going to back at noon. She hasn't come yet, and I'm so cold and——"

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She checked herself suddenly and held her head up very stiffly.

Katherine turned abruptly and made for the stove. It was a small old-fashioned cook stove, the kind that Katherine had been familiar with in her childhood on the farm. Beside it in a box were several lumps of coal and some kindling. She stripped off her gloves and set to work building a fire. When the stove had begun to radiate heat she lifted Sylvia, quilt and all, into the rocking chair and drew it up in front of the fire.

“And now, if you’ll tell me where things are I’ll prepare your Majesty’s supper,” she said playfully.

“Thank you, but I’m not hungry,” replied Sylvia.

“I don’t see how you can help being,” said Katherine wonderingly. “Or have you had something to eat since your aunt went away?” she added.

“No,” replied Sylvia.

“Then you must be famished,” said Katherine decidedly, “and I’m going to get you something.”

She moved toward a cupboard on the wall over in a corner of the room where she conjectured the supplies must be kept. The cupboard had leaded glass doors, she noticed, and the framework was of mahogany to match the woodwork of the room. It had probably been designed as a curio cabinet by the builder of the house.

“Never mind, I don’t want anything to eat,” said Sylvia again, in a tone which was both commanding and pleading.

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“You must,” said Katherine firmly, with her hand on the cut glass knob of the cupboard door. “You’re cold because you’re hungry.”

She opened the door and investigated the inside. There were some cheap china dishes and some pots and pans, but no sign of food. She glanced swiftly around the room, but nowhere else were there any supplies. Then Katherine understood. Her intuition was slow, but finally it came to her why Sylvia did not want to admit that she was hungry. There was nothing to eat in the house. There was a pinched, blue look about Sylvia's face that Katherine had seen before, in the settlement where she had worked with Miss Fairlee. She recognized the hunger look.

Sylvia met her eye with an attempt at lofty unconcern. "Our royal larder," she remarked, valiantly struggling to maintain her royal dignity, "is exhausted at present. I must speak to my steward about it."

Then her air of lofty composure forsook her all at once, and with a little wailing cry of "Aunt Aggie!" she put her head down on the arm of the chair and wept, pulling the quilt over her face so that Katherine could not see her cry.

Katherine was beside her in an instant, seeking to comfort her, and struggling with an unwonted desire to cry herself. The thought of the brave little spirit, shut up alone here in the dark and cold, hungry and anxious, singing like a lark to keep down her loneliness and anxiety, and welcoming her chance guest with the gracious air of a princess, moved Katherine as nothing had ever done before.

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"Tell me all about it," she said, cuddling the golden head close.

Sylvia struggled manfully to regain her composure, and sat up and dashed the tears away with an impatient hand. "How dare you cry, and you a princess?" she said aloud to herself scornfully, with a flash of her brown eyes, and Katherine caught a glimpse of an indomitable spirit that no hardship could bow down.

“’Twas but a momentary weakness,” she said to Katherine, with a return of her royal manner. Katherine felt like saluting.

“We’ve been having a hard time since Uncle Joe died,” began Sylvia. “He was sick a long time and it took all the money he had saved. Then Aunt Aggie got sick after he died and isn’t strong enough yet to do hard work. She makes shirts. There’s a shop here that lets her take work home. You see, she can’t leave me.” Here Sylvia gave an impatient poke at her useless limbs. “We came here from Millvale, where we used to live, a month ago. We couldn’t find any place to live, so Aunt Aggie got permission from the town to come and live in here until we could find a place. Nobody seems to own this house, that is, nobody knows who owns it, it’s been empty so long. Aunt Aggie sold all her furniture to pay her debts except her sewing machine and the few things we have here. Aunt Aggie makes shirts, but her eyes gave out this week and she couldn’t do anything, so there wasn’t any pay. Aunt Aggie got credit for a while at the store, but yesterday they refused her, so we played that we would keep a fast to-day in honor of our pious grandfather, the king, who always used to fast for three days before Christmas. Aunt Aggie only had enough money to go to the city and get glasses from somebody there that would make them for nothing for her, so she could go on sewing. She went on the earliest train this morning and expected to get back by noon. I can’t think what’s keeping her so late.”

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Katherine looked at her watch. It was half past seven. She wondered if the shops were still open so that she could go out and buy groceries. She began to draw on her gloves.

“Don’t go away,” pleaded Sylvia, catching hold of her hand in alarm. “Stay here till she comes. Oh, why doesn’t she come? I know something’s happened to her. She’s never left me alone so long before. Oh, what will I do if she doesn’t come back?”

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Fear seized her with icy hands and her face worked pitifully. “Aunt Aggie! Aunt Aggie!” she cried aloud in terror.

Katherine soothed her as best she could, mentioning all the possible things that could have occurred to delay her in the rush of holiday travel. Sylvia looked reassured after a bit and Katherine was just on the point of running out to get some supper for her when there was a sound of feet on the creaking steps outside.

“Here she comes now,” said Sylvia with a great sigh of relief.

The footsteps crossed the porch and then stopped. Instead of the sound of the front door opening as they expected there came a heavy knock.

“How queer,” said Sylvia, “she never knocks. There’s no one to let her in.”

Katherine hastened out to the hall door. A man stood outside. “Does Mrs. Deane live in this house?” he asked.

“Yes,” said Katherine.

“I’m Mr. Grossman, the man she works for,” he said. Katherine admitted him. “The girl, is she here?” he asked. Katherine brought him into the room. Sylvia looked up inquiringly.

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Without greeting or preamble he blurted out, “Your aunty, she’s been hurt. Somebody just telephoned me from such a hospital in the city. She was run over by a taxicab and her collarbone broke and her head hurt. She’s now by the hospital. She tells them to tell me and I should let you know.”

He stopped talking and whirled his hat around in his hand as though ill at ease.

Sylvia sank back in her chair, dead white, her eyes staring at him with a curiously intent gaze, as though trying to comprehend the size of the calamity which had befallen her.

Tingling with pity, Katherine looked into Sylvia's anguished eyes, and in the stress of emotion she suddenly remembered Nyoda's name. Sheridan. Sheridan. Mrs. Andrew Sheridan. Carver House. 241 Oak Street. How could she ever have forgotten it?

"What's going to become of me?" cried Sylvia in a terrified voice.

Mr. Grossman shifted his weight from one foot to the other and scratched his head reflectively. Then he shrugged his shoulders helplessly. He was a Russian Jew, living with his numerous family in a few small rooms over his shop, and what to do with this lame girl who knew not a soul in town was too much of a problem for him. To his evident relief Katherine came to the rescue. "I will take care of her," she said briefly. She opened her handbag and fished for pencil and paper. "Go out and telephone this person," she directed, after scribbling for a minute, "and give her the message written down there."

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Mr. Grossman departed, much relieved at being freed from all responsibility regarding Sylvia, and Katherine sat down beside her little princess and endeavored to soothe her distress of mind regarding her aunt. Finally the warmth of the stove made her drowsy and she fell into a doze with her head on Katherine's shoulder.

Half an hour later the long blast of an automobile horn woke the echoes in front of the house. Sylvia half-awakened and murmured sleepily, "Here come the king's huntsmen."

Katherine slipped out through the front door and flung herself upon a fur-coated figure that was coming up the walk, followed by a man.

"*Nyoda!*"

“Katherine! What in the world are you doing here?”

Katherine explained briefly how she came there.

“But I never received your letter!” cried Nyoda in astonishment. “I thought you were coming to-morrow with the other girls. Poor Katherine, to come all alone and then not find anybody to meet you! I’m so sorry! But it wouldn’t be you, Katherine,” she finished with a laugh, “if everything went smoothly. Now tell me the important thing your message said you wanted to tell me.”

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Katherine spoke earnestly for a few minutes, at the end of which Nyoda nodded emphatically. “Certainly!” she said heartily.

A minute later Katherine gently roused the sleeping princess. “What is it, my dear Duchess?” asked Sylvia drowsily.

“Come, Your Majesty,” said Katherine, beginning to wrap the quilt around her, “make ready for your journey. We leave at once for the Winter Palace!”

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CHAPTER III

THE SHUTTERED WINDOW

“Nyoda, isn’t there a secret passage in this house somewhere?” asked Sahwah eagerly, pausing with the nutcracker held open in her hand. “There generally was one in these old houses, you know.”

Christmas dinner was just drawing to a close in the big, holly hung dining room at Carver House, and the merry group of young folks who composed Nyoda’s Christmas house party, too languid after their strenuous attack upon the turkey and plum pudding to rise from their chairs, lingered around the table to hear Nyoda tell stories of Carver House, while the ruddy glow from the big log in the fireplace, dispelled the gloom of the failing winter afternoon.

It was a jolly party that gathered around the historical old mahogany dining table, which had witnessed so many other festivities in the one hundred and fifty years of its existence. At the head sat Sherry, Nyoda’s soldier husband, still pale and thin from his long illness; and with a long jagged scar showing through the closely cropped hair on one side of his head. He had never returned to duty after the wreck in which he had so nearly lost his life. While he was still in the military hospital to which he had been removed from the little emergency hospital at St. Margaret’s where the sharp battle for life had been fought and won, there came that day when the last shot was fired, and when he was ready to leave the hospital he came home to Carver House to stay.

Opposite him, at the foot of the table, sat Nyoda, girlish and enthusiastic as ever, with only an occasional sober light in her twinkling eyes to tell of the trying year she had passed through. Along both sides of the table between them were ranged five of the Winnebagos—Katherine, Sahwah, Migwan, Hinpoha and Gladys, and in among them, “like weeds among the posies,” as the captain laughingly put it, were Slim and the captain, Slim filled to the bursting point as usual, and looking more than ever like an overgrown cherub. Across from these two sat a third youth, so slender and fine featured as to seem almost frail in comparison with Slim’s overflowing stoutness. This was Justice Dalrymple, Katherine’s “Perfesser,” now engaged in his experimental work at Washington, whence Nyoda had invited him up for her Christmas house party as a surprise for Katherine.

Agony and Oh-Pshaw, whom Nyoda had also invited to come over to the house party, were spending the holidays with an aunt in New York and could not come, much to Sahwah’s disappointment, who had not seen them since the summer before. Veronica was ill at her uncle’s home and also could not be with them.

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Enthroned beside Katherine in a great carved armchair that had come over from England with the first Carvers, sat Sylvia Deane, looking very much like a story book princess. With their customary open-heartedness, the Winnebagos had already made her feel as though she were an old friend of theirs. The romantic way in which Katherine had found her appealed to their imaginations and added to their interest in her. Beside that, there was a fascinating something about her dark eyes and light hair that kept drawing their eyes to her face as though it were a magnet. There was so much animation in her voice when she talked that the most commonplace thing she said seemed extremely diverting. Her eyes had a way of suddenly lighting up as though a lamp had been kindled inside of her, and when she talked about other

people her voice would take on a perfect mimicry of their intonations and expressions.

She showed not the slightest embarrassment at being thus transplanted into a strange household, so much more splendid than anything she was accustomed to. She was entirely at her ease in the great house, and acted as though she had been used to luxurious surroundings all her life. Katherine was secretly surprised to find her so completely unabashed. She herself was still prone to make ridiculous blunders in the presence of strangers, and was still ill at ease when anyone looked critically at her.

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They were all surprised to learn that Sylvia was eighteen years old, instead of fourteen as they had all thought when they first saw her. Her slender, childlike form, and her short, curly hair made her look much younger than she really was.

The animated talk that had accompanied the first part of the dinner gradually died away, as a sense of repleteness and languor succeeded to eager appetites, and conversation had begun to lag, when Sahwah stirred it into life again by asking if there was not a secret passage in Carver House. A ripple of interest went around the table, and all the girls and boys began to sit up and take notice.

“Haven’t you had enough adventures yet to satisfy you?” asked Sherry quizzically. “Aren’t you content with fishing a lieutenant out of the Devil’s Punch Bowl the last time you were here, that you must begin again looking for excitement? By the way, where is this young Allison?”

“Still across,” replied Sahwah. “His last letter said he would be there for six months yet. He’s going on into Germany. He isn’t a lieutenant any more. He’s a captain.”

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“Captain Allison?” asked Justice. “Captain Robert Allison? You don’t mean to say that you know Bob Allison?”

“Does she know Captain Allison!” echoed Hinpoha. “Who sent her that spiked helmet, and that piece of marble from Rheims Cathedral and that French flag with the bullet holes in it, to say nothing of that package of French chocolates? But, of course, you didn’t know,” she added, remembering that Justice had only met Sahwah the day before.

“Do you know Captain Allison?” asked Sahwah.

“Best friend I had in college,” replied Justice. “He was dreaming of flying machines then. Bob Allison, the fellow you pulled out of the water! It seems that all my friends, as well as my family, are going to get mixed up with you girls. It seems like fate.”

“Wherever the Winnebagos come there’s sure to be something doing,” said the captain. “I wonder what the next thing will be. What’s this about secret passages now?”

“With so much paneling,” continued Sahwah, “it seems as if there must be a hollow panel somewhere that would slide back and reveal a passage behind it. Isn’t there one, Nyoda?”

“There may be one, for all I know,” replied Nyoda, “but I have never found it if there is. I have never looked for any such thing. It takes all my time,” she proclaimed with a comic-tragic air, “to keep all the open passages in this place clean, without looking for any more behind panels.”

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“Do you care if we try to find one?” asked Sahwah eagerly. “I just feel it in my bones that there is one somewhere.”

“Search all you like,” replied Nyoda, with an amused laugh.

“O goody!” exclaimed Sahwah. “Let’s begin right away.”

She rose from the table and the rest followed, much taken up with this new quest, and the search began immediately.

Upstairs and downstairs they tapped, peered, pried and investigated, but without success. One by one they abandoned the quest and drifted into the library where Nyoda and Sherry and Sylvia sat in a close group before the fire; Sherry smoking, Nyoda reading aloud, and Sylvia watching the images in the fire. Sahwah and the captain were the last to give up, but finally they, too, drifted in and joined the ranks of the unsuccessful hunters.

Nyoda paused in her reading and looked up with a smile as Sahwah and the captain came in.

“What have you to report, my darling scouts?” she asked gravely.

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“Nothing,” replied the captain, rather sheepishly.

Sahwah rubbed her fingers tenderly. “There are *miles* of oak paneling in this house,” she remarked wearily, “and I’ve rapped on every inch of it with my knuckles, until they’re just *pulp*, but not one of those panels sounded hollow.”

“Poor child!” said Nyoda sympathetically.

“You should have done the way the captain did,” said Slim. “He used his head to knock with instead of his knuckles; it’s harder.”

A scuffle seemed imminent, and was only averted by Sahwah’s next remark. “Nyoda,” she asked, “where does that door at the head of the stairs lead to, the one that is locked? It was locked last summer when we were here, too.”

“That,” replied Nyoda, “is the room Uncle Jasper used as his study. I’ve been using it as a sort of store room for furniture. There were a number of pieces in the house that didn’t quite fit in with the rest of the furniture and I set them in there until I could make up my mind what to do with them. I didn’t want

to dispose of them without consulting Sherry, and as he has been away from home ever since we have lived here until just now, we have never had time to go over the stuff together. As the room looks cluttered with those odd pieces in there I have kept it locked.”

“Your uncle’s study!” exclaimed Sahwah. “Oh, I wonder if there wouldn’t be a concealed door in there! It seems such a likely place. Would you care *very* much if we went and looked there?”

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Nyoda laughed at Sahwah’s eagerness in her quest. “You’re a true Winnebago,” she said fondly. “Never leave a stone unturned when you’re looking for anything. I might as well say yes now as later, because I know you will never rest until you have investigated that room. You’re worse than Bluebeard’s wife. I have no objections to your going in if you’ll excuse the disorderly look of the place and the dust that has undoubtedly collected by this time. I’ll get you the key.”

With the prospect of a fresh field for investigation the others revived their interest in the search and followed Nyoda eagerly as she led the way upstairs and unlocked the closed door at the head. A faint, musty odor greeted their nostrils, the close atmosphere of a room which has been shut up, although the moonlight flooding the place through the long windows gave it an almost airy appearance. Nyoda found the electric light button and presently the room was brilliantly lighted from the chandelier. The Winnebagos trooped in and looked curiously about them at the queer old desks and tables and cabinets that stood about. Sahwah’s attention was immediately drawn to the window at the far end of the room. She knew it was a window because it was framed in a mahogany casement like the other windows in the house, but instead of a pane of glass there was a dark, opaque space inside the casement. Sahwah ran over to it at once, and a little exclamation of astonishment escaped her as she examined it.

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On the inside of the glass—if there was a pane of glass there—was a heavy black iron shutter fastened to the casement with great screws.

“What did you put up this shutter for, Nyoda?” asked Sahwah wonderingly.

The others all came crowding over then to exclaim over the iron shutter.

“I didn’t put it up,” replied Nyoda. “It was there when I came here.”

“But what’s it for?” persisted Sahwah. “Is the window behind it broken?”

“No, it doesn’t seem to be,” replied Nyoda. “I looked at it from the outside.”

“Then what can it be for?” repeated Sahwah.

“I don’t know, I can’t imagine,” replied Nyoda. A note of wonder was creeping into her voice. “To tell the truth,” she said, “I never thought anything about it. I noticed that there was an iron shutter over that window when we first came here, but I was too much taken up with Sherry’s going away then even to wonder about it. The room has been closed up ever since and I had forgotten all about it. It *does* seem a queer thing, now that you call my attention to it. But Uncle Jasper did so many eccentric things, I’m not surprised at anything he might have done. We’ll take the shutter off in the morning and see if we can discover any reason for having it there.

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“Now, aren’t you going to hunt for the secret passage after I’ve opened the door for you?” she said quizzically. “There’s still an hour or so before bedtime; long enough for all of you to complete the destruction of your knuckles.”

Again the house resounded with the tapping of knuckles against hardwood paneling, until it sounded as though an army of giant woodpeckers were at work, but the eager searchers continued to bruise their long suffering knuckles in vain. The paneling in Uncle Jasper's study was as solid as the Great Wall of China.

CHAPTER IV

AN INTERVIEW WITH HERCULES

Among the furniture stored in the study was one piece which Nyoda had pounced upon with an exclamation of joy the night before when she opened the room to please the Winnebagos. That was an invalid's wheel chair.

“Just the thing for Sylvia!” she exclaimed delightedly. “She can get around the house by herself in this. It's a good thing you got curious about this room, Sahwah dear; I'm afraid I wouldn't have thought of opening it until spring. I remember now, Uncle Jasper had a paralytic stroke some months before he died which left him lame, and he went about in a wheel chair during his last days. This certainly comes in handy now.”

The morning after Sahwah had discovered the iron shutter Sylvia was set in the wheel chair and rolled into the study, and the rest came flocking up to watch Sherry and the boys remove the shutter. It was no easy job, taking that shutter off, for the screws had rusted in so that it was almost impossible to turn them. Nyoda gave an exclamation of dismay at the holes left in the mahogany casement. The Winnebagos were too much absorbed in the window which was revealed by the removal of the shutter to pay any attention to the damaged casement. Unlike the other windows in the room, which were of clear glass, this one was composed of tiny leaded panes in colors. It was so dirty on the outside that it was impossible to see what it really was like. Sahwah hastened out and got cleaning rags and washed it inside and out, standing on the roof of the side porch to get at it on the outside, because it did

not open. When it was clean, and the bright sun shone through it, the beauty of the window struck them dumb.

The leaded panes were wrought into a design of climbing roses, growing over a little arched gateway, the rich red and green tints of the flowers and leaves glowing splendid in the mellow light that streamed through it.

After a moment of breathless silence the Winnebagos found their voices and broke into admiring cries. Hinpoha promptly went into raptures.

“Why, you can almost *smell* those roses, they’re so natural! Oh, the darling archway! Did you ever see anything so beautiful? Don’t you just *long* to go through it? O why did your uncle ever have that horrible old shutter put over it?”

“Maybe he was afraid it would get broken,” suggested Gladys.

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“But why would he put the shutter on the inside?” asked Sahwah shrewdly. “There would be more danger of the window’s getting broken from the outside than from the inside, I should think.”

“There wouldn’t be with Slim around,” said the captain, and prudently barricaded himself behind a bookcase in the corner. Slim gave him a withering glance, but did not deign to follow him and open an attack. He could not have squeezed in behind the bookcase, so he ignored the thrust.

“I wonder why he didn’t put shutters on the other windows also,” said Katherine.

“Mercy, I’m glad he didn’t!” said Nyoda with a shiver, eyeing the ugly screw holes in the smooth mahogany casement with housewifely horror at such marring of beauty. “One set of holes like that is enough. Isn’t it just like a man, though, to

put screws into that woodwork! It's time a woman owned this house. A few more generations of eccentric bachelors and the place would be ruined."

"But," said Sahwah musingly, "didn't you tell us once that this house was the pride of your uncle's heart, and he never would let any children in for fear they would scratch the floors and furniture?"

"That's so, too," replied Nyoda. "Uncle Jasper was so fond of this house that it was a byword among the relations. He loved it as though it were his own child. How he ever allowed anyone to put screws into that mahogany casement is a mystery."

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"Don't you think," said Sahwah shrewdly, "that there must have been some great and important reason for putting up that shutter? A reason that made him forget all about the holes he was making in the woodwork?"

A little thrill went through the group; all at once they seemed to feel that they were standing in the shadow of some mystery.

"What kind of a man was your uncle Jasper?" asked Sahwah.

"He was a queer, silent man," replied Nyoda, sitting down on the edge of a table and rubbing her forehead to aid her recollection. "He was an author—wrote historical works. I confess I don't know a great deal about him. I only saw him twice; once when I was a very little girl and once a few years ago. He never corresponded with any of his relations and never visited them nor had them come to visit him. Most everybody was afraid of him; he was so grim and stern looking. He couldn't have been very sociable here either, for none of the people of Oakwood seemed to have been in the habit of calling on him. None of those that called on me had ever been inside the house before. The old man didn't mix with the neighbors, they said. He seldom went outside the

house. No one seems to know much about him. Of course,” she added, “living up here on the hill he was sort of by himself; there are no near neighbors.”

“Maybe he put up that shutter for protection,” suggested Hinpoha.

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“With all the other windows in the house unshuttered?” asked the captain derisively. “A lot of protection that would be! Besides, do you think the neighbors were in the habit of shooting pop guns at him?”

“Well, can you think of any other reason?” retorted Hinpoha.

“Why don’t you ask old Hercules?” suggested Sahwah. “He might know.”

“To be sure!” cried Nyoda, springing down from the table. “Why didn’t I think of Hercules before? Of course he’d know. He was with Uncle Jasper all his life. I’ll call him in and ask him and we’ll have the mystery cleared up in a jiffy. Will one of you boys go out and bring him in?”

The captain and Justice sprang up simultaneously in answer to her request and raced for the stable. In a few minutes they were back, bringing old Hercules with them. Hercules had a somewhat forlorn air about him like that of a dog without a master. Nyoda said he was grieving for Uncle Jasper; Sherry said it was the goat he was mourning for. At any rate, he was a pathetic figure as he hobbled painfully up the stairs one step at a time on his shaky, stiff old limbs. His eyes brightened a bit as he saw the door into Uncle Jasper’s study standing open, and he looked around the room with an affectionate gaze as the boys piloted him in. Nyoda saw his eyes rest on the window from which the shutter had been removed, and it seemed to her that he gave a start and gazed through the window apprehensively.

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“Hercules,” said Nyoda briskly, “we’ve just taken this ugly old shutter off that stained glass window, and we’re curious to know why it was put up. It seems such a pity to have put those great screws into that mahogany casement. Why did Uncle Jasper put it up?”

Hercules scratched his head and shifted his corn cob pipe to the other side of his mouth. “Dat shutter’s bin up a good many years, Mis’ ’Lizabeth,” he quavered.

“I see it has, from the way the screws were rusted in,” replied Nyoda. “But why was it put up?”

“Dat shutter’s bin dere twenty-five years,” reiterated the old man solemnly, still looking at it in a half-fascinated, half-apprehensive way.

“Yes, yes,” said Nyoda, trying to control her impatience. “But *why* has it been there all this time? Why did Uncle Jasper put it up?”

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Hercules scratched his head again, and replaced his pipe in its original position. “I disremember, Mis’ ’Lizabeth,” he said deprecatingly. “It’s bin so long since. My memry’s bin powerful bad lately, Mis’ ’Lizabeth. Seems like I caint remember hardly anything. It’s de mizry, Mis’ ’Lizabeth; it’s settled in my memry.” He carefully avoided her eyes.

“Please try to remember!” said Nyoda, trying hard to hold on to her patience, but morally certain that Hercules was trying to sidestep her questions. “Think, now. Twenty-five years ago Uncle Jasper put up an iron shutter to cover the most beautiful window in Carver House. Why did he do it?”

Nyoda turned so that she looked right into his face, and her compelling black eyes held his shifty gaze steady. There was something strangely magnetic about Nyoda’s eyes. People could avoid answering her questions as long as they did not

look into her eyes, but once let her catch your gaze, and things she wanted to know had a habit of coming out of their own accord. Hercules seemed to be on the point of speaking; he cleared his throat nervously and shifted the pipe once more. Nyoda cast a triumphant glance at Sherry. In that instant Hercules shifted his gaze from her face and met another pair of eyes, eyes that seemed to look at him accusingly, and sent a chill running down his spine. These were none other than the eyes of Uncle Jasper, who, hanging in his frame on the study wall, seemed to be looking straight at him, in the way that eyes in pictures have. When Nyoda glanced back at Hercules he was staring uneasily at Uncle Jasper's picture and there was a guilty look about him as if he had been caught in a misdemeanor.

“I ’clare, I cain’t remember nothin’ ’bout why dat shutter was put up, Mis’ ’Lizabeth,” he said earnestly. “Come to think on it now, Marse Jasper ain’t never *told* me why he want it put up,” he continued triumphantly. “He just say, ‘Herc’les, put up dat shutter,’ and he ain’t ever say why. I axed him, ‘Marse Jasper, what for you puttin’ up dat shutter over dat window?’ and he say, ‘Herc’les, you put up dat shutter and mind your business. I ain’t tellin’ *why* I wants it put up; I jest wants it put up, dat’s all.’ No’m, Mis’ ’Lizabeth, I’s often wondered myself about dat shutter, but I never found out nothin’.”

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He glanced up at Uncle Jasper's picture as though expecting some token of approval from the stern, grim face.

Nyoda saw it was no use trying to get anything out of Hercules. Either he really did not know anything, or he would not tell.

“You may go, Hercules,” she said. “That’s all we wanted of you.”

Hercules looked unaccountably relieved and started for the door. Half way across the room he turned and looked long

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through the clear panel of glass underneath the archway of the gate in the stained glass window. He stood still, seemingly lost in reverie, and quite oblivious to the group about him. Finally his lips began to move, and he began to mutter to himself, and Sahwah's sharp ears caught the sound of the words.

“Dey’s tings,” muttered the old man, “dat folks don’t *want* ter look at, and dey’s tings dey *dassent* look at!”

Still lost in reverie he shuffled out of the room and hobbled painfully downstairs.

CHAPTER V

THE FIRST LINK

“What did old Hercules mean?” asked Sahwah in astonishment. “He said, ‘Dey’s some tings folks don’t want ter look at, and dey’s tings dey dassent look at!’”

“I can’t imagine,” said Nyoda, thoroughly mystified. “But there’s one thing sure, and that is, Uncle Jasper had some very potent reason for putting that shutter over that window, and I more than half believe Hercules knows what it was. Hercules’ explanations always become very fluent when he is not telling the truth. If he really hadn’t known anything about it he probably would have said so simply, in about three words, and without any hesitation. The elaborate details he went into to convince me that he knew nothing about it sounds suspicious to me.

“But I don’t believe the exclamation he made when he went out was intended to deceive me. I think it was the involuntary utterance of what was in his thoughts. He seemed to be thinking aloud, and was quite unconscious of our presence.

“But what a queer thing to say—‘Dey’s tings people *dassent* look at!’ I wonder what it was that Uncle Jasper dared not look at? Was it something he saw through this window? What is there to be seen out of this window, anyway?” She moved over in front of the window with the others crowding after her to see, too.

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Uncle Jasper’s study was at the back of the house and the windows looked out upon the wide open meadow which

stretched behind Carver Hill, between the town and the woods. The front of Carver House looked out over the town. Nearly half a mile to the east of Carver Hill another hill rose sharply from the town's edge. Upon its top stood another old-fashioned dwelling. This hill, crowned with its red brick mansion, was framed in the arch of the gateway in the window like an artist's picture, with nothing between to obstruct the view. A beautiful picture it was, certainly, and one which could not possibly have any connection with Hercules' muttered words.

"Who lives in that house?" asked Sahwah.

"I don't know," said Nyoda. "It's way up on the Main Street Hill. I'm not acquainted with the people in that end of town."

Sherry got out his binoculars and took a look through the window. "Nothing but an old house on a hill," he reported, and handed the binoculars to Sylvia, that she might take a look through them.

"Why," said Sylvia after peering intently through the glasses for a minute, "it's the house Aunt Aggie and I live in! What did that old house have to do with your Uncle Jasper?" she asked wondering. "It's been empty for many, many years."

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"Oh, wouldn't it be wonderful if there was a romance in your Uncle Jasper's life?" exclaimed Hinpoha eagerly. "A blighted romance. He never married, did he?"

"No, he never married," replied Nyoda.

"Then I'm sure it's a blighted romance!" said Hinpoha enthusiastically. "I just know that some deep tragedy darkened the sun of his life and left him shrouded in gloom forever after!"

Even Nyoda smiled at Hinpoha's sentimental language, and the rest could not help laughing out loud.

"You sound like Lady Imogen, in 'The Lost Heiress,'" said Katherine derisively.

"Well, I don't care, you'll have to admit that there are some very romantic possibilities, anyway," said Hinpoha stoutly.

"Yes, and some very prosaic ones, too," retorted Katherine. "Uncle Jasper probably never married because he was a born bachelor, and preferred to live alone."

"O Katherine, why are you always taking the joy out of life?" wailed Hinpoha. "It's lots more fun to think romantic things about people than dull, stupid, everyday things."

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"I think so too," said Sahwah, unexpectedly coming to the defense of Hinpoha. "I've been thinking a lot about old Mr. Carver, living alone here all those years, and I've wondered if there wasn't some reason for it. Certainly something happened that made him put that shutter up, that's clear."

"Well, whatever motive the old man may have had for putting it up, we'll probably never find it out," said Sherry, gathering up the screws and screwdriver, "inasmuch as he's dead and it's no use asking Hercules anything; so we might as well stop puzzling over it. I'll hunt up something to fill in those screw holes with, Elizabeth, and polish them over." Sherry, in his matter-of-fact way, had already dismissed the matter from his mind as not worth bothering over.

Not so Nyoda and the Winnebagos. The merest hint of a possible mystery connected with the shutter set them on fire with curiosity and desire to penetrate into its depths.

"I wonder," said Nyoda musingly, eyeing the massive desk before her with a speculative glance, "if Uncle Jasper left any

record of the repairs and improvements which he made to the house while he was the owner. The item of the shutter might be mentioned, with the reason for putting it up.”

“It might,” agreed the Winnebagos.

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Nyoda looked around at the litter of odd pieces of furniture crowding the room. “Sherry,” she said briskly, “make up your mind this minute whether you want any of that old stuff, because I’m going to clear it out of here and sell it.”

“A lot of good it would do me to make up my mind to want any of it, if you’ve made up your mind to sell it,” said Sherry in a comically plaintive tone.

“All right,” responded Nyoda tranquilly, “I knew you didn’t want any of it. Boys, will you help Sherry carry out those two tables and that high desk and the chiffonier—all the oak furniture. I’m not keeping anything but the mahogany. Set it out in the hall; I’ll have the furniture man come and get it tomorrow.”

“There, now the room looks as it did when Uncle Jasper inhabited it,” she remarked when the extra pieces had been cleared out.

“It certainly was a pleasant room; I don’t see how Uncle Jasper could have maintained such a gloomy disposition as he did, working all day in a room like this. The very sight of that open field out there makes me want to run and shout—and that window! Oh, who could look at it all day long and be crusty and sour?”

“But he had the shutter over the window,” Sahwah reminded her.

“Yes, he did, the poor man!” said Nyoda in a tone of pity. She whisked about the room, straightening out rugs and wiping

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the dust from the furniture, and soon announced that she was ready to begin investigations. She looked carefully through the desk first, through old account books and files of papers and bills, but came upon nothing that touched upon repairs made to the house. There was a long bookcase running the entire length of one wall, and she tackled this next, while the Winnebagos sat around expectantly and Sylvia looked on from her chair, which she could move herself from place to place, to her infinite delight.

The boys had gone downstairs with Sherry to hear reminiscences from “across.” All three boys worshipped Sherry like a god. To have been “across,” to have seen actual fighting, to have been cited for bravery, and finally to have been shipwrecked, were experiences for which the younger boys would have given their ears, and they treated Sherry with a deferential respect that actually embarrassed him at times.

Nyoda opened the bookcase and began taking out the books that crowded the shelves, opening them one by one and examining their contents. Most of them were works on history, some of them Uncle Jasper’s own; great solid looking volumes with fine print and dingy leather bindings. Ancient history, nearly all of them, and nowhere among them anything so modern as to concern Carver House.

“What a collection of dry-as-dust works to have for your most intimate reading matter!” exclaimed Nyoda, making a wry face at the books. “Not a single book of verse, not a single romance or book of fiction, not the ghost of a love story! There are plenty of them downstairs in the library, that belonged to Uncle Jasper’s father and mother, who must have had quite a lively taste in reading, judging from the books down there; but Hercules told me that Uncle Jasper hadn’t opened the cases down there for twenty-five years. He never read anything but this ancient stuff up here.

“He did write one book that had some life in it, though,” she continued musingly. “That was a story of the life of Elizabeth Carver, his great grandmother, the one whose portrait hangs downstairs over the harp in the drawing-room. He’s got all her various love affairs in it, and it’s anything but dry. I sat up a whole night reading it the time I came across it in the library down below. But from the date of its publishing, Uncle Jasper must have been a very young man when he wrote it, probably before the ancient history spider bit him.”

“And before the shutter went up,” added Sahwah.

“Well,” said Nyoda, after she had peeped into nearly every book in the bookcase, “there doesn’t seem to be anything here more modern than the Fall of Rome, and that’s still several seasons behind the affairs of Carver House. Hello, what’s this?” she suddenly exclaimed, holding up a book she had just picked up, one that had fallen down behind the others on the shelf.

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It was a fat, ledger-like volume heavily bound in calfskin. There was no title printed on the back of it and Nyoda opened the cover. Two truly terrifying figures greeted her eyes, drawn in India ink on the yellowed page; figures of two pirates with fiercely bristling mustachios, and brandishing scimitars half as large as themselves. Nyoda quite jumped, their attitude was so menacing. Under one was printed in red ink, “Tad the Terror,” and under the other “Jasper the Feend.” Underneath the two figures was printed in sprawling capitals:

DIERY OF JASPER M. CARVER, ESQUIRE

Nyoda gave a little shriek of laughter and held it up for the Winnebagos to see. “It must be Uncle Jasper’s Diary when he was a boy,” she said. “His youthful idea of a man is a rather bloodthirsty one, according to the portrait, I must say. I suppose ‘Jasper the Feend’ is supposed to be Uncle Jasper.

His mustachios bristle more fiercely than the other's, and his scimitar is longer, so without doubt he was the artist."

Her eyes ran down the pages following, glancing at the lines of writing, which, having apparently been done in India ink, were still black, although the page on which they were written was yellow with age. As she read, her eyes began to sparkle with interest and enjoyment.

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"O girls," she exclaimed, "this is the best thing I've read in ages. Sherry and the boys must see it. I have to go and get lunch started now, but all of you come together after lunch and I'll read it out loud to you."

"We'll all help," said Migwan, "and then we'll get through faster," and the Winnebagos hurried downstairs in Nyoda's wake.

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CHAPTER VI

UNCLE JASPER'S DIARY

After lunch the Winnebagos and the boys gathered around Nyoda in Uncle Jasper's study to hear her read aloud from "The Diery of Jasper M. Carver, Esqwire." She held the book up that all might see the portraits of the fearsome pirates, and then turned over to the next page, where the sprawly, uneven writing began, and started to read.

"October 7, 1870. Confined to the house through bad behavior while father and mother have gone to the fair. I wasn't lonesome though because I had company. A boy ran into the yard chasing a cat and saw me sticking my head out of the upstairs window and blew a bean shooter at me and hit me on the chin and I hit him with an apple core and then he dared me to come out and lick him but I couldn't go out of the house so I dared him to climb up the porch post and come in the window. He came and I licked him. He is a new boy in town and his name is Sydney Phillips, but he wants to be called Tad. He lives up on Harrison Hill. We are going to be pirates when we grow up. I am going to be Jasper the Feend and he is going to be Tad the Terror. We swore eternul frendship and wrote our names in blood on the attic window sill."

"Oh, how delicious!" cried Sahwah at the end of the first entry. "Your uncle must have been lots of fun when he was young. What crazy things boys are, anyway! To start out by fighting each other and end up by swearing eternal friendship! Go on, Nyoda, what did they do next?"

Nyoda proceeded.

“November 10, 1870. Tad and I made a great discovery this afternoon. There is a secret passage in this house. It is——”

The concerted shriek of triumph that went up from the Winnebagos forced Nyoda to pause.

“I told you there was!” shouted Sahwah above the rest. “Please hurry and read where it is, I can’t wait another minute!”

Nyoda turned the page and then paused. “The next page is torn out,” she said, holding the book up so they could all see the ragged strip of paper left hanging in the binding, where the page had been torn out.

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“Oh, what a shame!” The wail rose on every side.

“Maybe it tells later,” said Sahwah hopefully. “Go on, Nyoda.” The dairy continued on a page numbered six.

“January 4, 1871. Tad and I played pirat to-day. We made a pirat’s den in the secret passage. We are going to hide our chests of money there, all pieces of eight. We haven’t any pieces of eight yet just some red, white and blue dollars we found in the desk drawer in the library. Tad thinks maybe they are patriotick curency they used in the Revolushun”

Nyoda had to wait a minute until Sherry had got done laughing, and then she proceeded:

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“February 19, 1871. I am in durrance vile, being locked in my room for a week with nothing to eat but bread and water because I shut Patricia up in the secret passage and went away and forgot all about her because there was a

fire. I remembered and let her out as soon as I got home but she had fainted, being a silly girl and afraid of the dark, and she couldn't scream because we tied a handkerchief over her mouth when we kidnapped her, being pirates. So now I am in durance vile and cannot see any of my family, not even Tad. But he stands behind the hedge and shoots pieces of candy through my window with the bean shooter and lightens my durance vile which is what a sworn friend has to do when their names are written in blood on the attic window sill."

Thus the entries in the scrawling, boyish hand covered page after page, recounting the adventurous and oftentimes seamy career of the two youthful pirates, through all of which the two stood up for each other staunchly, and never, never gave each other away, because they were "sworn friends till death us do part," and their names were "written in blood on the attic window sill."

The entries became farther apart after a while, and the spelling improved until finally there came this announcement:

"Tad and I can't be pirates any longer. We are going to college next week."

There the India ink ceased and also the illustrations. After that came page after page of neat entries in faded but still legible blue ink, telling of the progress through college of the two boys; chronicles of the joys, the troubles, the triumphs and the escapades of the two friends, still so inseparable that their names have become a byword among the students and they go by the nickname of David and Jonathan. When one of them gets into trouble the other one still does "what a sworn friend has to do when their names are written in blood on the attic window sill." The Winnebagos listened with shining eyes while Nyoda read the tale of this remarkable friendship.

The dates of the entries moved forward by months; records of scrapes became fewer and fewer; David and Jonathan had outgrown their colthood and were beginning to win honors with brain and brawn. Then came the record of their graduation and return to Oakwood; of “Tad the Terror” becoming a doctor, of the marriage of Jasper’s sister Patricia to a sea captain; the death of his father and the passing of Carver House into his possession.

Later came the account of a delightful year spent abroad with Tad Phillips, of mountain climbing in the Alps; of browsing among rare old art treasures in France and Italy; of gay larks in Paris. It was always he and Tad, he and Tad; still as loyal to each other as in the days when they wrote their names in blood on the attic window sill.

After the entry which chronicled Jasper’s return to Oakland and settling down in Carver House with his mother, and his enthusiastic adoption of literature as a profession, came an item which made the Winnebagos sit up and listen. It was:

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“June 3, 1885. I have had a new window put into my study on the side which faces toward’s Tad’s house on Harrisburg Hill. I had the young Italian artist, Pusini, who has lately come to New York, come and set the glass for me. It is a representation of a charming scene I came across in Italy—an arched gateway covered over with climbing roses. The window is arranged so that through the arch of the gateway I can look directly at Tad’s house. It gives me inspiration in my work.”

“What a beautiful idea!” said Hinpoha, carried away completely by the great love of Jasper Carver for his friend, so simply expressed in his diary.

“So that was Tad’s house, that we are living in!” said Sylvia excitedly. “I wonder where he is now.”

“Go on reading, Nyoda,” said Sahwah, consumed with interest in the tale. “See if he says anything about the shutter.” Nyoda passed on to the next entry.

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“June 27, 1885. Went to the Academy of Music in Philadelphia to hear Sylvia Warrington sing. She is the new singer from the South that has created such a furore. The Virginia Nightingale, they call her. What a God-gifted woman she is! There never was such a voice as hers. She sang ‘Hark, hark, the lark,’ and the whole house rose to its feet. She was Spring incarnate. Sylvia Warrington! The name itself is music. I cannot forget her. She is like a lark singing in the desert at dawning.”

A vague remembrance leaped up for an instant in Katherine’s mind and died as it came.

Nyoda read on through pages that recorded Uncle Jasper’s meeting with Sylvia Warrington; his great and growing love for her; his persistent wooing, her consenting to marry him; his wild happiness, which found vent in page after page of rapturous plans for the future. Then came the announcement of Tad’s return from a period of study abroad, and Uncle Jasper’s proud presentation of his bride-to-be. After that Tad’s name appeared in connection with every occasion, still the faithful David to his beloved Jonathan.

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Then, almost without warning, the great friendship ran on the rocks and was shattered. For Tad no sooner saw Sylvia Warrington than he too, fell madly in love with her. A brief and bitter entry told how she finally broke her engagement to Uncle Jasper and married Tad, and how Uncle Jasper, beside himself with grief and disappointment, turned against his friend and hated him with the undying hate that is born of jealousy. With heavy strokes of the pen that cut the paper he wrote down his determination to have no more friends and to live to himself thereafter. Then, in a shaky hand in marked contrast to the fierce strokes just above, he wrote: “But Sylvia

—I love her still. I can't help it." That shaky handwriting stood as a mute testimonial to his heart's torment, and Nyoda, reading it after all these years, felt a sympathetic spasm of pain pass through her own heart at the sight of that wavering entry.

"It's just like a story in a book!" exclaimed Hinpoha, furtively drying her eyes, which had overflowed during the reading of the last page. "The beautiful lady, and the rival lovers, and the disappointed one never marrying. Oh, it's too romantic for anything! Oh, *please* hurry and read what comes next."

Nyoda turned the page and read the brief entry:

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"I have taken up the study of ancient history as a serious pursuit. In it I hope to find forgetfulness."

The eyes of the Winnebagos traveled to the bookcase, and now they knew why there was nothing there but dull old books in heavy bindings, and why Uncle Jasper Carver hated love stories.

The next entry had them all sitting up again.

"I have had Hercules fasten an iron shutter over the window in my study—the one through which I can see Tad's house when I sit at my desk. I cannot bear to look at anything that reminds me of him."

"There!" shouted all the Winnebagos at once. "*That* was the reason for putting up the iron shutter! The mystery is solved!"

"Poor Uncle Jasper!" said Nyoda pityingly. "What a Spartan he was! How thoroughly he set about removing every memory of Tad from his mind! Think of covering up that beautiful pane of glass because he couldn't bear to look through it at the house of his friend!" She finished reading the entry:

“Hercules demurred at covering up the window—he admired it more than anything else in the house—so to give him a satisfactory reason for doing so I told him the devil would come in through that gateway some day and I was putting up the shutter to keep him out. There’s one thing sure; Hercules will never take that shutter down as long as he lives—he’s scared nearly into a Chinaman.”

“So that’s why Hercules threw such a fit when we took the shutter off!” said Sherry. “He thought that now the devil would come in and get him. Poor, superstitious old nigger!”

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“I wonder if Tad and Sylvia went to live in the house on Harrisburg Hill,” said Sahwah curiously. “He doesn’t say whether they did or not.”

“Oh, I wonder if they did!” cried Sylvia, with eager interest. “To think I’ve been living in the same house they lived in—if they *did* live there,” she added. “But how strange it seems to hear them call that place Harrisburg Hill. It is called Main Street Hill now.”

“I wonder what Tad and Sylvia did after they were married,” said Hinpoha, with romantic curiosity. “Did they stay in Oakwood, or did they go away? Is there any more, Nyoda?”

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Nyoda was already glancing down the next page, which was written over with lines in blacker ink, and broader and heavier strokes of the pen, which seemed somehow to express grim satisfaction on the part of Uncle Jasper. Grim satisfaction Uncle Jasper must indeed have felt when he wrote those lines, for misfortune had overtaken the one who had caused his own anguish of heart. The entry told how Tad had become staff physician at one of the large army posts in the west. There was an epidemic of typhoid and quite a few of the men were ill at once, all requiring the same kind of medicine. Through carelessness in making up a certain medicine he put in a deadly poison instead of the harmless ingredient he intended

to put in, and a dozen men died of the dose. There was a tremendous stir about the matter, and the newspapers all over the country were full of it. He was court-martialed, and though he was acquitted, the mistake being entirely accidental, the matter had gained such publicity that his career as a doctor was ruined. He left the army and fled out of the country, taking Sylvia with him. Some months later the papers brought the announcement of both their deaths from yellow fever in Cuba. Again the handwriting began to waver on the last sentence. "She is dead." In those three little words the Winnebagos seemed to hear the echo of the breaking of a strong man's heart. There were no more entries.

"Isn't it perfectly *thrilling!*" gulped Hinpoha, with eyes overflowing again. "It's better than any book I ever read! And to think we never suspected there was anything like that connected with your Uncle Jasper! There, now, Katherine Adams, what did I tell you? You said he was a born bachelor, and just look at the romance he had!"

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"He certainly did," said Katherine, in a tone of surrender.

"That must be why the house we lived in was shut up so long," said Sylvia musingly. "The man that said we could live in it said that old Mrs. Phillips had moved away many years ago and had never come back, and although people knew she was dead, no one had ever come to live in the house, and nobody in Oakwood knew who owned it. The man said he had heard from older people in the town that Mrs. Phillips had had a son who was away from home all the time after he was grown up and who had gotten into some kind of trouble—he couldn't remember what it was. This must have been it! How queer it is, that I should first come to live in Tad's house, and then stay in the house of his friend! I never dreamed, when I heard that man telling Aunt Aggie about the almost forgotten people that used to live in the old house, that I should ever hear of them again. Things have turned out to be *so*

interesting since I came to stay in the Winter Palace!” she finished up with sparkling eyes.

Darkness had fallen by the time Nyoda had finished reading Uncle Jasper’s Diary, and she jumped up with a little exclamation as the clock on the mantel-piece chimed six. The other hours had struck unnoticed. “Mercy!” she cried, “it’s time dinner was on the table, and here we haven’t even begun to get it! I forgot all about dinner, thinking about poor Uncle Jasper.”

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All the rest had forgotten about dinner, too, and the Winnebagos could not get their minds off the tale they had just heard read. “Poor Uncle Jasper!” they all said, looking up at his picture, and to their pitying eyes his face was no longer grim and stern, but only pathetic.

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CHAPTER VII

SYLVIA'S STORY

“Katherine Adams, whatever has happened to you?” asked Gladys suddenly, meeting her under the bright light in the hall that evening after dinner.

“Why?” asked Katherine, looking startled. “Is there any soot on my face?”

“No,” replied Gladys with a peal of laughter, “I didn’t mean anything like that. I meant that you look different from the way you used to look, that’s all. You’ve changed since the days when I first knew you. What have you done to yourself in the last year? You’re the same old Katherine, of course, but you’re different, somehow. I noticed it when you first came to Brownell last fall, but I’ve been too busy to give it much thought. But since we’ve been here I’ve been watching you and I can’t help noticing the difference. Now stand right there under that light and let me look at you.”

Katherine laughed good humoredly and stood still dutifully while Gladys inspected her with appraising eyes that took in all the little improvements in Katherine’s appearance. She was heavier than she used to be; some of her angles were softened into curves. She now stood erect, with her head up and her shoulders thrown back, which made her look several inches taller. Her hair no longer hung about her face in stringy wisps; the loose ends were curled becomingly around her temples and ears and held in place with invisible hairpins. She wore a trim worsted dress of an odd shade of blue, which was just the right shade to go with her dull blonde hair and with the dark

brown of her neat shoes. Her knuckles were no longer red and rough; her fingernails were manicured; the sagging spectacles of the old days had given way to intellectual looking nose glasses with narrow tortoise shell rims.

“Well, what’s the verdict?” asked Katherine, smiling broadly at Gladys.

“You’re wonderful!” said Gladys enthusiastically. “You’re actually stunning! Whoever told you to get that particular shade of blue to bring out the color of your hair?”

“Nobody told me,” answered Katherine. “I bought it because it was a bargain.” But there was a knowing twinkle in her eyes which gave her dead away, and Gladys, seeing it, knew that Katherine had at last achieved that pride of appearance which she had struggled so long to instill into her.

“However did you do it?” she murmured.

“It was your eleven Rules of Neatness that did it,” replied Katherine, laughing, “or was it seven? I forget. But I did do just the things you told me to do, and it worked. There is no longer any danger of my coming apart in public! What a trial I used to be to you, though!” she said, flushing a little at the recollection. “How you ever put up with me I don’t know. How *did* you stand it, anyway?”

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“Because we loved you, sweet child,” replied Gladys fondly, “and because we all believed the motto, ‘While there’s life, there’s hope.’ We knew you would be a paragon of neatness some day as soon as you got around to it. You never *could* think of more than one thing at a time, Katherine dear!”

“O my, O my, look at them hugging each other!” exclaimed a teasing voice from above. Looking up they saw Justice Dalrymple leaning over the banisters at the head of the stairs. “You never do that to me,” he continued in a plaintive tone.

Katherine and Gladys merely laughed at him and walked on, arm in arm, and Justice came down the stairs wringing mock tears out of his handkerchief and singing mournfully,

“Forsaken, forsa-ken,
Forsa-a-a-ken a-m I,
Like the bones at a banquet
All men pass me-e-e by!”

“Do behave yourself, Justice,” said Katherine with mock severity. “If you disgrace me I’ll never get you invited anywhere again. Why can’t you be good like the other two boys?”

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“‘Cause I’m a Junebug,” warbled Justice, to the tune of “I’m a Pilgrim,”

“‘Cause I’m a Junebug,
And I’m a beetul,
And I can’t be no
Rhinoscerairus,
’Cause I’m a Junebug,
And I’m a beetul,
I can’t be no,
Rhinoscerairus!”

He advanced into the drawing room, where Katherine now stood alone, and drew out the last syllable of his absurd song into a long bleating wail that sent her into convulsions of laughter till the tears rolled down her cheeks.

“Tears, idle tears——”

began Justice, picking up a vase from the table and holding it under her eyes, and then he stopped, as if struck by a sudden recollection. “I said that to you once before,” he said, “don’t you remember? The first time we really got acquainted with

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each other. You were standing by the stove, weeping into the apple sauce.”

“It was pudding,” Katherine corrected him, with a little shamefaced laugh at the remembrance, “huckleberry pudding. And I streaked it all over my face and you nearly died laughing.”

“Well, you laughed too,” Justice defended himself, “and that’s how we got to be friends.”

“That seems ages ago,” said Katherine, “and yet it’s only a little over a year. What a year that was!”

Both stopped their bantering and looked at each other with sober eyes, each thinking of what the trying year at Spencer had been to them. Justice’s eyes traveled over Katherine, and he, too, noticed that she was much better looking than when he first knew her. Katherine noticed the admiration dawning in his eyes and divined his thoughts. After Gladys’s spontaneous outburst of approval she knew beyond any doubt that her appearance no longer offended the artistic eye. The knowledge gave her a new confidence in herself, and a thrill of pleasure that she had never experienced before went through her like an electric shock. At last people had ceased to look upon her as a cross between a circus and a lunatic asylum, she told herself exultingly.

“Well, what are you thinking about?” she asked finally, as Justice continued silent.

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“I was just thinking,” replied Justice gravely, “about the difference in plumage that different climates bring about.”

“Whatever made you think about birds?” asked Katherine wonderingly. “You jump from one subject to another like a flea. I don’t see how you can keep your mind on your work long enough to invent anything. By the way, how is that

thingummy of yours going? You're as mum as an oyster about it."

"Pretty well," replied Justice. "I'm hampered though, by not having the right kind of help, and not being able to get some of the things I need."

Katherine looked at him scrutinizingly. He looked tired and rather worn. The nonsensical boy had vanished and a man stood in his place, a man with a heavy responsibility on his shoulders. Justice had that way of changing all in an instant from a boy to a man. At times he would go frolicking about the house till you would have sworn he was not a day older than Slim and the Captain; an instant later he was all gravity, and looked every day of his twenty-six years.

Katherine always stood in awe of him whenever that change took place. He seemed so old and wise and experienced then that she felt hopelessly ignorant and childish beside him. She liked him best when he seemed like the other boys.

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"What do you think of my Winnebagos?" she asked him, leading him away from the subject of his work. He always got old looking when he talked about it.

"Greatest bunch of girls I ever saw," he replied heartily. "Never came across such an accomplished lot in all my life. Each one's more fun than the next. Hinpoha's a beauty, and Gladys is a dainty fairy, and Sahwah looks like a brown thrush, and Migwan's a regular Madonna. And, say—would you mind telling me how you do it, anyway?"

"Do what?"

"Stick together like that. I thought girls always squabbled among themselves. I never thought they could do things together the way you girls do."

“Camp Fire Girls can do things together!” Katherine informed him with emphasis. “You boys think you’re the only ones that know anything about teamwork. Teamwork is our first motto.”

“I guess it must be,” admitted Justice. “You certainly are a team.”

The rest of the “team” came in then, Sahwah and Gladys and Hinpoha, all three arm in arm, and Migwan behind them, pushing Sylvia in her rolling chair. They settled in a circle before the fireplace, and the talk soon drifted around to Uncle Jasper and his blighted romance. Indeed, Hinpoha had done nothing but talk about it all during dinner. Sylvia, too, was completely taken up with it.

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“I love Sylvia Warrington!” she exclaimed fervently. “I am going to have her for my Beloved. I’m glad she had black hair. I adore black hair. And I’m *so* glad my name is Sylvia, too. I’ve been pretending that she was my aunt, and that I was named after her. I’ve been pretending, too, that she taught me to sing, ‘Hark, hark, the lark!’ Now, when I sing it I always think of her. Wasn’t it beautiful, what Uncle Jasper said about her? ‘She is like a lark, singing in the desert at dawning!’ Oh, I can see it all, the desert, and the sun coming up, and the lark soaring up and singing. I just can’t *breathe*, it’s so beautiful. And my Beloved is like that!”

A radiant dream light came into her eyes, and she seemed suddenly to have traveled far away from the group by the fire and to be wandering in some far-off land.

“Sylvia is a beautiful name,” said Katherine. “For whom are you called? Was your mother’s name Sylvia?” It was the first time any of them had spoken of Sylvia’s mother, who they knew must be dead.

Sylvia's eyes lost their dreaminess and she looked up with a merry smile.

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"I made it up myself," she said. "I don't know what my first real name was, but when Aunt Aggie got me she named me Aggie, after herself. But Aggie is such a hopelessly unimaginative sort of name. It doesn't make you think of a thing when you say it. You might just as well be named 'Empty' as 'Aggie.' Then once we lived in the same house with a lady who sang, and she used to sing, 'Who is Sylvia?' It was the most *tuneful* name I'd ever heard, and I wondered and wondered who Sylvia was. But I guess the lady never found out, because she kept right on singing, 'Who is Sylvia?' So one day I said to myself, 'I'll be Sylvia!' Don't you think it's a *fragrant* name? When I say it I can see festoons of pink rosebuds tied with baby ribbon. I made people call me Sylvia, and that's been my name ever since."

"Oh, you funny child!" said Nyoda, joining in the general laugh at Sylvia's tale of her name.

"But Sylvia," said Sahwah wonderingly, "you said you didn't know what your *first* real name was before you came to live with your aunt. Didn't your aunt know it?"

"No," replied Sylvia. "You see," she continued, "Aunt Aggie isn't my real aunt. She adopted me when I was a baby."

"Oh-h!" said the Winnebagos in surprise.

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"But why do you call her 'aunt'?" asked Sahwah. "Why don't you call her 'mother'?"

"She never would have it," replied Sylvia. "She always taught me to call her Aunt Aggie. I don't know why."

Sylvia moved restlessly in her chair, and from the folds of the loose dressing gown which she wore a picture tumbled out.

Katherine picked it up and laid it back on her lap. It was a small colored poster sketch of a red haired girl in a golf cape, which had evidently been the cover design of a magazine some years ago.

“Why are you so fond of that poster, Sylvia?” asked Katherine curiously. “You brought it along with you when you came here, and you keep it with you all the time.”

Sylvia’s tone when she answered was half humorous and half wistful. “That’s my mother,” she said.

“Your mother!” exclaimed Katherine, incredulously.

“Oh, not my really real mother,” Sylvia continued quickly. “I never saw a picture of her. But Aunt Aggie said my mother had red hair and was most uncommonly good looking, so I found a picture of a beautiful lady with red hair and called it my mother. It’s better than nothing.” The Winnebagos nodded silently and no one spoke for a moment.

Then Katherine asked gently, “What else do you know about mother?”

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Sylvia sat up and related the tale told her hundreds of times by Aunt Aggie, in answer to her eager questioning about her mother. Unconsciously she used Aunt Aggie’s expressions and gestures as she told it.

“‘Me an’ Joe was coming on the steam cars from Butler to Philadelphia, and in back of us sat a young couple with a baby about a month old. The girl—she wasn’t nothing but a girl even though she was a married woman—was most uncommon good looking. She had bright red hair and big grey eyes, and she wore a golf cape. Her husband was a big, red faced feller, homely but real honest lookin’. They weren’t either of them twenty years old. Farmers, I could tell from their talk, and as well as I could make out, the name on their

bag was Mitchell. Well, well, along between Waterloo and Poland there suddenly come a terrible bump, and then a smash and a crash, and the next thing I was layin' under the seat and Joe was trying to pull me out. When I did finally get out the car was a-layin' over on its side all smashed to bits. Somehow or other when Joe dug me out from under the seat I had ahold of the little baby that had been in the seat in back of me. The young man and woman were under the wreck. They were both killed, but the baby never had a scratch.

“Nobody ever found out who the red headed woman and the man were, because they were all burned up in the wreck, and all their luggage.

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“I had taken care of the baby, thinkin' I'd keep her until her people were found, but they were never heard from, so I decided to keep her for my own. That baby was you, Sylvia.”

“So that's all I know about my mother and father,” finished Sylvia with a sigh. “But I can think up the most *dazzling* things about them!”

“Sylvia,” said Katherine, “who was the man I saw on the stairs of your house the night I came in and found you?”

Sylvia looked at her in wonder. “What man?”

“When I came into the hall there was a man leaning over the banisters about half way up the stairs. When I came in he ran down the stairs and out of the front door.”

“I can't imagine,” said Sylvia. “No man ever came to the house to see us. I didn't hear anybody come in that day.”

“But the front door stood open when I came up on the porch,” said Katherine. “That hadn't been standing open all day, had it?”

“No,” replied Sylvia, “for Aunt Aggie was always careful about closing it when she went out.”

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“Then he must have opened it,” said Katherine.

“How queer!” said Sylvia. “What do you suppose he could have been doing there? He never knocked on the inside door.”

“Possibly he thought the house was empty, and went in to get out of the cold,” concluded Katherine. “Then he heard you singing, and it scared him. He looked frightened out of his wits when I saw him. When I came in he just ran for his life.” Katherine laughed as she remembered her own dismay at seeing the man and thinking that he was the owner of the house, when he was only a stray visitor himself and worse frightened than she. Here she had prepared such an elaborate apology in her mind, and he was nothing but a tramp! The humor of it struck her forcibly, now that it was all in the past, and she laughed over it most of the evening.

About nine o’clock Hercules came shuffling in, suffering from a bad cold, and asked Nyoda to give him something for it. While Nyoda went upstairs to the medicine chest Sahwah craftily asked the old man, “Hercules, did you ever hear of there being a secret passage in this house?”

Hercules gave a visible start. “Whyfor you ask dat?” he demanded.

“Oh, for no special reason,” said Sahwah casually. “I just thought maybe there was one and that you might know about it. There always is one in these old houses, you know.”

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“Well, dere ain’t in dis!” answered the old man vehemently, and at the same time looking relieved. “Marse Jasper he always useter say to me, ‘Herc’les,’ he useter say, ‘dere’s one good thing about dis house, and dat is it ain’t cluttered up wif no secrut passidges.’ Secrut passidges am powerful unlucky,

Mis' Sahwah. Onct I knew a man dat lived in a house dat had a secrut passidge an' one night de ole debbil got in th'u dat secrut passidge an' run off wif him! Don' you go huntin' no secrut passidges, Mis' Sahwah, if you knows what's good fer you. Dey suttinly am powerful unlucky!"

Nyoda came down stairs and bore Hercules off to the kitchen, and the Winnebagos and the boys had their laugh out behind his back. "How *can* he tell such fibs in such a truthful sounding way!" remarked Justice. "If I didn't know about that passage from Uncle Jasper's diary I'd be inclined to believe every word he said. But I bet the old sinner knows all about it, just as Uncle Jasper did. Even if he doesn't, how can he invent such convincing speeches on the part of Uncle Jasper out of the empty air? He's the most engaging old fibber I ever came across."

Nyoda came back and bore Sylvia off to bed and then she returned to the library. "Sherry," she said thoughtfully, leaning her chin in her hand, "Dr. Crosby was here this morning to return those binoculars he borrowed the other day, and I talked to him about Sylvia. He said he had once been called in to treat her for tonsilitis when she lived in Millvale, and had examined her spine at the time. He said it was a splintered vertebra and it could be fixed by grafting in a piece of bone. They're doing wonders now that way. He said Dr. Gilbert, the famous specialist, could perform an operation that would cure her. He hadn't had a chance to talk it over with Sylvia's aunt because he had been called away suddenly and when he returned to town the Deane's were gone. He had no idea what had become of them. He only made a hasty examination, but he is positive she can be cured. I know the Deane's can't afford to pay for such an operation, but Dr. Crosby said he was sure he could persuade Dr. Gilbert to perform it free, in his clinic. I told Dr. Crosby to bring Dr. Gilbert to Oakwood as soon as he could. He said he thought it would be possible soon. I thought as long as we are going to keep Sylvia in our

care until her aunt is well again we might as well have her fixed up in the meantime. I would like to have the operation over before her aunt knows anything about it, say the first week of the new year. What do you think?"

"Whew!" whistled Sherry, looking at his wife in astonishment. The rapidity with which Nyoda got a project under way was a nine days' wonder to Sherry, who usually spent more time in deliberating a course of action than she did in carrying it out. "Go ahead!" was all he could say.

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The Winnebagos gave long exclamations of joy. It had never occurred to them that anything could be done for Sylvia.

"Does she know it?" asked Hinpoha.

"Not yet," replied Nyoda. "I thought we would keep it for a birthday surprise. Her birthday is the twenty-ninth. I'll have Dr. Gilbert come that day and let him tell her himself. Don't anybody mention it to her until then."

"We won't," promised the Winnebagos, and trooped off to bed, heavy with their delicious secret.

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CHAPTER VIII

THE FOOTPRINTS ON THE STAIRS

The Winnebagos woke bright and early the next morning, eager to begin the search for the secret passage again, but whatever plans they had formed were driven entirely out of their minds by the appearance of the footprints on the stairs. Nyoda discovered them first when she raised the curtains on the stair landing on her way down to bring in the morning paper.

The day before, in anticipation of the coming of the men from the second hand store to remove the discarded furniture from Uncle Jasper's study, she had improvised a runner to cover the front stairs to keep them from being scratched. The stretch from the upstairs to the landing she had covered with a strip of rag carpet, and from the landing down she had used a length of white canvas. The landing itself was still bare, as she had not yet found the old rug she intended laying there.

Now, as she came downstairs, she noticed, on the strip of white canvas that covered the bottom half of the stairs, three dark red footprints. On the white background they stood out with startling distinctness. They began on the third step from the top and appeared on every other step from then on to the bottom. All three were the prints of a right foot. No heel marks were visible, only the upper half of the foot. From the direction which they pointed they were made by a person descending the stairs, and from their size that person was a man.

Nyoda's first thought that Sherry had cut his foot and had gone downstairs, leaving a bloody trail on her stair runner, and full of concern she immediately sought him. But her search revealed him down in the basement, coaxing up the furnace, and there was nothing the matter with his feet. The Captain was with him and he likewise disclaimed a cut foot. The two of them had come down the back stairs. Nyoda hurried back upstairs. Justice and Slim were in the upper hall when she came up, just in the act of coming down.

"Good morning!" they both called out in cheery greeting.

"Which one of you has the cut foot?" she asked.

"Cut foot? Not I," said Justice.

"Nor I," said Slim. "Did somebody cut his foot?"

"Look," said Nyoda, pointing to the marks on the lower steps.

"It must have been your husband, or the Captain," said Justice. "It wasn't either of us."

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"It wasn't either of them," replied Nyoda. "I asked them. They're down in the basement fussing with the furnace."

"It's the print of a foot with a shoe on," said Justice, examining the marks.

"Somebody must have gotten into the house last night!" exclaimed Nyoda in a startled tone. "Sherry," she called, "come up here!"

Sherry came up from the basement on the run, for he recognized something out of the ordinary in his wife's tone, and the Captain came hard on his heels. The girls came running down from above to see what the commotion was

about, and the whole household stood staring at the mysterious footprints in startled bewilderment.

“Burglars!” cried Hinpoha with a little shriek.

“Oh, my silverware!” exclaimed Nyoda in a stricken tone, and raced into the dining room. She pulled open the sideboard drawers with trembling hands, expecting to find them ransacked, but nothing was amiss. Every piece was still in its place. Neither had the sterling silver candlesticks on top of the sideboard been disturbed. A thorough search through the house revealed nothing missing. Various gold bracelets and watches lay in plain sight on dressers, and Hinpoha’s gold mesh bag hung on the back of a chair beside her bed. Sherry reported no money gone.

Nothing stolen! Who had entered the house then, if not a burglar? The thing had resolved itself into a mystery, and everyone looked at his neighbor with puzzled eyes. Breakfast was completely forgotten.

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“What gets me,” said Sherry, “is where those footprints started from. By the way they point, the man was going downstairs, but they begin in the middle of the stairway. Clearly he didn’t start at the top. Do you suppose he came in through the landing window?”

He examined the triple window on the landing closely, but soon looked around with a puzzled expression on his face.

“The windows are all fastened from the inside,” he reported, “and there’s no sign of their having been tampered with. It doesn’t look as though anyone could have come in this way.” He examined all the rest of the windows on the first floor, and found them all latched and their latches undisturbed. The doors, too, were locked from the inside. The cellar windows had a heavy screening over them on the outside which could

not be removed without being destroyed, and this screening was everywhere intact.

“He must have come in through one of the upstairs windows after all,” said Nyoda. “There were about a dozen open in the various bedrooms. The window in the room Hinpoha and Gladys sleep in is directly over the front porch.”

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Hinpoha and Gladys gave a simultaneous shriek at the thought of the mysterious intruder coming through their room while they lay sleeping.

“But if he came down from upstairs, why aren’t the footprints *all* the way down, instead of beginning in the middle?” insisted Katherine. “He *couldn’t* have come down from upstairs; he *must* have come in through this window on the landing,” she said decidedly, going up to the window and looking it over sharply for any sign of having been opened, and, by shaking the wooden framework of the little square panes vigorously, as if she would shake the truth out of it by force.

The window, however, still yielded no sign of having been opened, and the sill outside bore no marks of an instrument. The mystery grew deeper. How could those footprints have started under the landing window if the feet that made them did not enter by that window?

“Maybe he did come from upstairs after all,” said Sahwah, whose lively brain had been working hard on the puzzle, “but his foot didn’t begin to bleed until he was half way down. Maybe he hurt it on the landing.”

“Sat down to trim his toe-nails and cut his toe off, probably,” suggested Justice, and the girls giggled hysterically.

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Striking an attitude in imitation of a story book detective, Justice began to address the group. “Gentlemen of the jury,”

he began, “we have here a mystery which has baffled the brightest minds in the country, but unraveling it has been the merest child’s play to a great detective like myself. Here are the facts in the case. A man goes down a stairway. The first half of his descent is shrouded in oblivion; half way down he begins to leave bloody footprints. There is only one answer, gentlemen; the one which occurred to me immediately. It is this: Upon reaching the landing the mysterious descender suddenly remembers that it is the day on which he annually trims his toe-nails. Being a very methodical man, as I can detect by the way his feet point when he goes downstairs, he sits down and does it then and there. But the knife slips and he cuts off his toe, after which he makes bloody footprints on the rest of the stairs.”

“Justice Dalrymple, you awful boy!” exclaimed Katherine, and then she laughed with the rest at his absurd explanation of the mystery.

“Well, can you think up any argument that disproves my theory?” he retorted calmly.

“I can,” replied the Captain. “If your theory was correct we’d have found the toe lying on the stairs.”

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The girls shrieked and covered their ears with their hands. The Captain chuckled wickedly, but said no more.

“I can think up another argument,” said Sahwah. “Your man went barefoot after he cut his toe off, but this one had his shoe on.”

“So he did!” admitted Justice. “Now you’ve ‘done upsot my whole theory!’”

“But how could his foot bleed through his shoe?” asked Katherine skeptically.

“The sole must have been cut through,” said Justice. “He probably wore a rubber-soled shoe, like a sneaker, and stepped on some broken glass that went right through the sole into his foot. I did the same thing myself once. It bled through, all right.”

“But what did he step on?” asked Nyoda, puzzled. “There isn’t any sign of broken glass around.”

“I give it up,” said Sherry, who could make nothing from the facts before him and had no imagination to help him supply missing details. “The man undoubtedly got in through the upstairs window and out the same way. He was a burglar, only he got scared away before he could steal anything. Some noise in the house, probably.”

“He must have heard Slim snoring, and thought it was a bombing plane coming after him,” said Justice, and then dodged nimbly as Slim made a pass at his head with a menacing hand.

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“Whatever he did to his foot fixed him,” said Sherry. “He called it a day when that happened and went off without making a haul. Probably had a pal outside in a machine.”

“Nyoda,” said Sahwah, struck with a sudden thought, “do you think it could have been Hercules? He might have come in for something in the night.”

“Of course!” exclaimed Nyoda. “Why didn’t I think of that before? Hercules has a key to the back door. How idiotic of me not to have guessed before that it was Hercules. Here we stand looking at these footprints like Robinson Crusoe looking at Friday’s, and talking about burglars, and wracking our brains wondering where he came in, and it must have been Hercules all the while. He cut his foot and came in to get something for it, or he came in to get something more for his cold and cut his foot after he got in. Poor old Hercules! He

wouldn't even wake us up to get help. I'll go right out and find out what happened to him."

She started for the back door, but before she had reached the kitchen there was a stamping of feet on the back doorstep, a tapping on the door, and then Hercules opened it himself and came in, as was his custom.

"Mawnin', Mis' 'Lizbeth," he quavered genially, smiling a broad, toothless smile at the sight of her. "Mighty nippy dis mawnin'." He shivered and stamped his feet on the floor, edging over toward the stove.

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Nyoda looked down at his feet hastily and instantly realized that it was not he who had left the print on the stairs. The loose, flapping felt slippers which Hercules invariably wore, bursting out on all sides, would have left a mark twice the size of the mysterious footprints. Nobody knew just how big Hercules' feet were. He owned to wearing a size twelve, at which Sherry openly scoffed.

"I'll bet a size fifteen could hurt him," he declared.

The rest also saw at a glance that there was no possibility of Hercules having made the footprints.

Hercules, unconscious of the charged atmosphere of the house, looked around for the breakfast which should be set out for him on the end of the kitchen table at this hour.

"You-all overslep'?" he inquired good-temperedly of Nyoda.

"No, we didn't," replied Nyoda. "We've had a little excitement this morning and forgot all about breakfast. Somebody got into the house last night."

"Burglars?" asked Hercules anxiously. "Did anything get stole?"

“No,” replied Nyoda, “nothing was stolen, but the burglar left some bloody footprints on the stair runner. We thought at first it might have been you, coming to get something for your cold, but I see now that it is impossible for you to have left the footprints. You didn’t come into the house last night, did you?” she finished.

“No’m,” answered Hercules with simple directness. “I done slep’ like a top, Miss’ ’Lizabeth. Took dat hot drink you-all gave me to take, an’ never woke up till de sun starts shinin’ dis mawnin’. Feelin’ better now. Cold gittin’ well. Feelin’ mighty hungry.” His eye traveled speculatively toward the stove.

There was absolutely no doubt about his telling the truth. When Hercules was trying to conceal something his language was much more eloquent and flowery.

“Your breakfast will be ready before long,” said Nyoda kindly. Then, as Hercules hobbled toward the stove she asked solicitously, “Have you a sore foot, Hercules?”

“No’m,” replied Hercules, “but the mizry in my knees is powerful bad dis mawnin’, Mis’ ’Lizabeth. Seems like my old jints is gittin’ plumb rusted.” He launched into a detailed description of the various pains caused by his “mizry,” until Nyoda sought refuge in the front part of the house. She had heard the tale many times before.

Pretty soon Hercules hobbled in and took a look at the footprints on the stairs.

“Powerful sing’ler,” he said, scratching his head in a puzzled way.

Sherry went on to explain all the details for the old man’s benefit. “We thought at first he must have come in through the window on the stair landing, but that hadn’t been touched, so

we decided he must have come in through one of the upstairs windows. It seems queer, though, that the footprints should have begun under the stair landing, doesn't it?"

"What's the matter, Hercules, are you sick?" asked Nyoda, looking at the old man in alarm. For Hercules' eyes were rolling wildly in his head and his legs threatened to collapse under him. He sat heavily down on a chair and began to rock to and fro, muttering to himself in a terrified way. Straining their ears to catch his words, they heard him say:

"Debbil's a-comin', debbil's a-comin', debbil's a-comin' after old Herc'les for takin' dat shutter down. Debbil done lef' his footprint fer a warnin' fer old Herc'les."

He seemed beside himself with fright. Nyoda and Sherry looked at each other in perplexity.

"What's the matter with him?" asked Nyoda, in a tone of concern.

"Superstitious," replied Sherry reassuringly. "Most negroes believe the devil is walking around on two legs, waiting to grab them from behind every fence. You remember Uncle Jasper mentioned in his diary that he told Jasper if he ever took that shutter down the devil would come in through the window and get him. Now he thinks it's happened. Don't be alarmed at him. Get him his breakfast, and that'll give him something else to think about."

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The Winnebagos hastened to set out his breakfast on the table, but he ate scarcely anything, and still trembled when he went back to his rooms in the coach house.

"Funny old codger!" commented Sherry, looking after him. "He's chuck full of superstition. If he throws many more such fits, I suppose I'll have to nail up the old shutter again to keep him from dying of fright."

“You’ll do no such thing!” replied Nyoda. “I’ll have no more holes in that casement. Hercules will be all right again in a day or two. By that time he’ll have a new bogie.

“Now everybody come to breakfast, and forget all about this miserable business.”

CHAPTER IX

THE TRIALS OF AN EXPLORER

“Oh, tell me again about the time you went camping, and the people thought you were drowning,” begged Sylvia.

Hinpoha drew up a footstool under her feet, and sank back into a cushioned chair with a long sigh of contentment. All day long she had been helping the others search for the secret passage, upstairs and downstairs, and back upstairs again, until she dropped, panting and exhausted, into a chair beside Sylvia in the library and declared she couldn't stand up another minute. The others never thought of stopping.

“But you aren't fat,” she retorted when Sahwah protested against her dropping out. “You can run up and downstairs like a spider; no wonder you aren't tired. I'm completely inside.”

“You're what?”

“Completely inside. Classical English for 'all in.' 'All in' is slang, and we can't use slang in Nyoda's house, you know.”

Sahwah snorted and returned to the search, which was now centered in Uncle Jasper's study.

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“Now tell me about your getting rescued,” said Sylvia.

“We were spending the week-end at Sylvan Lake,” recounted Hinpoha, “and there were campers all around. Sahwah and I wanted to get an honor for upsetting a canoe and righting it again, so we put on our skirts and middies over our bathing suits and paddled out into deep water. Nyoda was watching us

from the shore. We were going to take the complete test—upset the canoe, undress in deep water, right the canoe and paddle back to shore. We got out where the water was over our heads and upset the canoe with a fine splash. We were just coming up and beginning to pull off our middies, when we heard a yell from the shore. Two young men from one of the cottages were tearing down to the beach like mad, throwing their coats into space as they ran.

“‘Hold on, girls, we’ll save you,’ they shouted across the water, and jumped in and swam out toward us.

“‘O look what’s coming!’ giggled Sahwah.

“‘Oh, won’t they be surprised when they see us right the canoe!’ I sputtered as well as I could for laughing. ‘Come on, hurry up!’

“‘What a shame to spoil their chance of being heroes,’ said Sahwah. ‘They may never have another chance. Let’s let them tow us in.’ Sahwah went down under water and did dead man’s float and it looked as though she had gone under. I followed her. But I laughed right out loud under water and made the bubbles go up in a spout and had to go up for air. The two fellows were almost up to us. Sahwah threw up her hand and waved it wildly, and I began to laugh again.

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“‘Keep still and be saved like a lady!’ Sahwah hissed, and I straightened out my face just in time. The two fellows took hold of us and towed us to shore. People were lined up all along, watching, and they cheered and made a big fuss over those two fellows. We could see Nyoda and Migwan and Gladys running away with their handkerchiefs stuffed into their mouths. We lay on the beach awhile, looking awfully limp and scared and after a while we let somebody help us to our cottage, and you should have heard the hilarity after we were alone! We laughed for two hours without stopping. Nyoda insisted that we go and express our grateful thanks to the two young men for saving our lives, and we managed to keep our faces straight long enough to do it, but the strain was awful.”

“Oh, what fun!” cried Sylvia, laughing until the tears came, and then with an irresistible burst of longing she exclaimed, “Oh, if I could only do things like other girls!”

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“You *are* going to do things like other girls!” said Hinpoha in the tone of one who knows a delightful secret. “You’re going to walk again; Nyoda said the doctor said so.”

Sylvia’s face went dead white for an instant, and then lighted up with that wonderful inner radiance that made her seem like a glowing lamp.

“Am I?” she gasped faintly, catching hold of Hinpoha’s arm with tense fingers.

“You certainly are,” said Hinpoha, in a convincing tone. “Nyoda said you could be cured. The specialist is coming in a day or two to arrange the operation. O dear, now I’ve told it!” she exclaimed. “We were going to save it for a birthday surprise.”

“Oh-h-h-h!” breathed Sylvia, and sank back in her chair unable to say another word. Her eyes burned like stars. To walk again! Not to be a burden to Aunt Aggie! The sudden joy that surged through her nearly suffocated her. To walk! Perhaps to dance! The desire to dance had always been so strong in her that it sometimes seemed to her that she must die if she couldn’t dance. All the joy that was coming to her whirled before her eyes in a wild kaleidoscope of shifting images.

“Then I can be a Camp Fire Girl!”

“You’re going to be a Winnebago!”

“Oh-h-h!”

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“You can go camping with us!”

“Oh-h-h!”

“You will be a singer, and go on the stage, maybe!”

“Oh-h-h-h-h-h!”

“Maybe you’ll even——” Hinpoha’s sentence was suddenly interrupted by a mighty uproar from the basement. First came a crash that rocked the house, followed by a series of lesser thumps and crashes, mingled with the racket of breaking glass. The Winnebagos, rushing out into the hall from Uncle

Jasper's study, were brushed aside by Sherry and Justice and the Captain, tearing down the attic stairs. Sherry snatched up his revolver from his dresser and went down the stairs three at a time, with the boys close at his heels.

"The burglars are in the basement!" came from the frightened lips of the girls as they crept fearfully down the stairs. All felt that the mystery of the footprints on the stairs was about to be cleared up.

Sherry opened the cellar door and paused at the top. "Who's down there?" he called, in a voice of thunder.

From somewhere below came a dismal wail. "Throw me a plank, somebody, I'm drowning. There's a tidal wave down here!"

"It's Slim!" cried Nyoda, recognizing his voice. "What's the matter?" she called.

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She and Sherry raced down the cellar stairs, with the Winnebagos and the two boys streaming after.

They found Slim lying on the floor of the fruit cellar, nearly drowned in a pool of vinegar which was gushing over him from the wreck of a two-hundred-gallon barrel lying beside him. Around him and on top of him lay the debris of a shelf of canned fruit.

Sherry and the boys rescued him and finally succeeded in convincing him that he was not fatally injured. The stream of vinegar was diverted into a nearby drain, and Slim told his tale of woe.

He had been down in the cellar looking for the secret passage. There was a place in the stone wall that sounded hollow when he struck it with a hammer, and he went around to see what was on the other side of that wall. It was the fruit cellar. While

he was poking around in it a big stone suddenly fell down out of the wall and smashed in the head of the barrel, which tipped over almost on top of him, and nearly drowned him in vinegar, while the jars of fruit came down all around him.

“That loose stone in the wall!” exclaimed Sherry. “I forgot to warn you boys about it when you were sounding the walls with hammers. It’s a mighty good thing it fell on the barrel and not on you.”

He and Nyoda turned cold at the thought of what might have happened.

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But the sight of Slim, dripping with vinegar and covered with canned peaches, drove all thoughts of tragedy out of their minds, and the cellar resounded with peals of helpless laughter for the next twenty minutes. Justice tried to sweep up the broken glass, but sank weakly into a bin of potatoes and went from one convulsion into another, until the Captain finally poured a dipper of water over him to calm him down.

“O dear,” gasped Justice, mopping his face with the end of a potato bag, “if Uncle Jasper could only have seen what he started with that diary of his, it would have jolted him clean out of his melancholy!”

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CHAPTER X

THE SECRET PASSAGE

“Oh, tell Aunt Aggie I think the Winter Palace is the most wonderful place in the whole world!” cried Sylvia enthusiastically. “Tell her that the ladies-in-waiting are the dearest that ever lived, and the three court jesters are the funniest. Tell her I’m so happy I feel as though I were going to burst! And be *sure* and tell her that I’m going to get well!”

Sylvia had not been able to conceal her rapture for a minute after Hinpoha had told her the news the day before. They all knew she knew it, and when they saw her rapture they did not scold Hinpoha for letting the cat out of the bag before the time set. To have given her those two extra days of happiness was worth the sacrifice of their surprise. All morning she had filled the house with her song and chattered happily of the time when she would go camping with the Winnebagos.

“We’ve made more plans than we can carry out in a hundred years!” she told Nyoda gleefully. “Oh, *please* live that long, so you can help us do all we’ve planned.” Nyoda smiled back into the starry eyes, and promised faithfully to live forever, if need be, to accommodate her.

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“I’ll give Aunt Aggie all your messages,” she said now, stopping in the act of drawing on her gloves to pat the shining head.

“You’re *so* good to go and see Aunt Aggie!”

Nyoda patted her on the head again and then started cityward with her big box of delicacies for Mrs. Deane. With her went Migwan and Gladys and Hinpoha, who wanted to do some shopping in the city.

Sahwah and Katherine refused to give up their search for the passage even for one afternoon. Sahwah had an idea that possibly there was a secret door in the back of one of the built-in bookcases in the library, and had Nyoda's permission to take out all the books and look. Justice and Slim and the Captain had promised to help take out the books. Sylvia was wheeled into the library where she could watch the proceedings, and the work of removing the books began. Sherry looked on for a while and then went out to tinker with the car.

Section by section they took the books from the cases and examined the wall behind them, but it was apparently solid. Sahwah and the Captain worked faithfully, taking out the books and replacing them, but Katherine would stop to read, and Slim soon fell asleep with his head against the seat of a chair. Justice spied Slim after a while and began to throw magazines at him. Slim wakened with an indignant grunt and returned the volley and then the two engaged in a good-natured wrestling bout.

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"I know a new trick," said Justice. "It's for handling a fellow twice your size. A Japanese fellow down in Washington taught it to me. Let me practice it on you, will you? You're the first one I've seen since I learned it who was so much heavier than I."

Slim consented amiably enough and Justice proceeded with a series of operations that rolled his big antagonist around on the floor like a meal sack.

"Don't make so much noise, boys!" commanded Katherine, putting a warning finger to her lips. "Don't you see that

Sylvia has fallen asleep? Go on out into the hall and do your wrestling tricks out there.”

Slim and Justice removed themselves to the hall and continued their wrestling, and the Captain abandoned the books to watch them and cheer them on.

“Bet you can’t back him all the way up the stairway!” said the Captain, as Justice forced Slim up the first step.

“Bet I can!” replied Justice, and then began a terrific struggle, science against bulk. Slim fought every inch of the way, but, nevertheless, went up steadily, step by step. Sahwah and Katherine, drawn by the Captain’s admiring exclamations at Justice’s feat, also abandoned the books and came out to watch.

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Justice got Slim as far as the landing, and there Slim got his arms wound around the stair post and anchored himself effectively. One step above the landing was as far as Justice could get him. Justice leaned over him and tried another trick to break his grip on the post and the two were see-sawing back and forth when suddenly the Captain gave a yell that made Justice loosen his hold on Slim and ask in a scared voice, “What’s the matter?”

“The landing!” gasped the Captain. “Look at the landing!”

Justice looked, and the others looked, and they all stood speechless with amazement, for the stair landing was doing something that they had never in all their born days seen a stair landing do before. It was sliding out of its place, sliding out over the bottom flight of stairs as smoothly and silently as though on oiled wheels. The five stood still and blinked stupidly at the phenomenon, unable to believe their eyes. The landing came out until there was a gap of about two feet between it and the wall, and then noiselessly came to a stop.

In the opening thus made they could see the top of an iron ladder set upright against the wall below.

Sahwah rallied her stunned senses first. “The secret passage!” she cried triumphantly.

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“Daggers and dirks!” exclaimed the Captain.

“What made it open up?” asked Katherine curiously. “Where is the spring that works it?”

Justice and the Captain shook their heads.

“The post!” exclaimed Slim, mopping the perspiration from his brow. “I was pulling at it for dear life when all of a sudden something clicked inside of it. Then the Captain yelled that the stair landing was coming out. The spring that works it is in the landing post!”

Slim reached out and tugged away at the post again, but nothing happened. Then he got hold of the carved head and began to twist it and it turned under his hands. There was a click, faint, but audible to the eagerly listening ears, and the landing began to slide smoothly back into place. In a moment the opening was closed, and the landing was apparently a solid piece of carpentry.

“Whoever invented that was a genius!” exclaimed Justice in admiration. “And all the while we were trying to find a secret passage through the walls by tapping on the panels! If it hadn’t been for Slim we could have spent all the rest of our lives looking for it and never would have found it, for we never in all the wide world would have thought of twisting the head of that stair post. Slim, you weren’t born in vain after all.”

“See if you can make it open up again,” said Sahwah.

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Slim twisted the head of the post, and presently there came the now familiar click and the floor slid out with uncanny quietness.

“Let’s go down!” said the Captain, going to the edge of the opening and looking in.

“What’s down there?” asked Katherine.

“Nothing but space,” replied the Captain, straining his eyes to peer into the darkness, “at least that’s all I can see from here. Give me your flashlight, Slim, I’m going down.”

Slim handed him his pocket flash and the Captain began to descend the ladder. He counted twelve rungs before he felt solid footing under him. He found himself in a tiny room about six feet square, whose walls and floor were of stone. The top was open to allow the passage of the ladder. The Captain figured out that he was standing level with the floor of the basement and that the space above the opening at the top of the little room was the space under the stairway. There was a door in the outside wall, next to the ladder.

“What’s down there?” asked Sahwah from above.

“Just a little place with a door in it,” replied the Captain, retracing his steps up the ladder.

“The passage isn’t inside the house at all,” he reported when he reached the top. “It’s *outside*. There’s a door down there that probably opens into it. I’m going to get my coat and see where the passage leads to.”

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“We’ll all go with you,” said Sahwah, and it was she who went down the ladder first when the expedition started.

The Captain came next, carrying a lantern he had found in the kitchen. At the bottom of the ladder he lit the lantern. The first

thing its light fell upon was a broken glass jar, lying in a corner, and from it there extended across the floor a bright red stream. Sahwah recoiled when she saw it, but the Captain stooped over and streaked his finger through it.

“Paint!” he exclaimed. “Red paint.”

“Oh!” said Sahwah. “It looked just like blood. Why—that’s what must have made the footprints on the stairs! The man must have stepped in this paint! He came in through this passage!”

The other three had come down by that time, and they all looked at each other in dumb astonishment. How clear it all was now! The footprints beginning under the stair landing—the mystery connected with the entrance of the intruder—they all fitted together perfectly.

“The paint’s still sticky,” said the Captain, examining his finger, which had a bright red daub on the end. “It must have been spilled there quite recently.”

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“The burglar must have spilled it himself,” said Katherine.

“But how on earth would a burglar know about this secret entrance?” marveled Sahwah.

The others were not prepared to answer.

“Maybe Hercules told somebody,” said Justice.

“But Hercules doesn’t seem to know about it himself,” said Katherine.

“He *says* he doesn’t, but I’ll bet he does, just the same,” said Justice.

“Hercules wouldn’t tell any burglar about this way of getting into the house!” Sahwah defended stoutly. “He’s as true as

steel. If anybody told the burglar it was somebody beside Hercules.”

“Maybe the burglar discovered the other end of the passage himself, by accident, just as we did this end,” said Slim.

“Come on,” said the Captain impatiently, “let’s go and see where that other end is.”

“Wait a minute, what’s this,” said Justice, spying a long rope of twisted copper wire hanging down close beside the ladder. This rope came through the opening above them; that was as far as their eyes could follow it. Its beginning was somewhere up in the space under the stairs.

“Pull it and see what happens,” said Slim.

“I bet it works the slide opening from below here,” said Justice. He gave it a vigorous pull and they heard the same click that had followed the twisting of the stair post. In a moment the light that had come down through the opening vanished, and they knew that the landing had gone back into position. Another pull at the rope and it opened up again.

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“Pretty slick,” commented Justice. “It works two ways, both coming and going. A fellow on the inside could get out, and a fellow on the outside could get in, without the people in the house knowing anything about it.”

“Are you coming now?” asked the Captain. “I’m going to start.”

He opened the door in the outer wall as he spoke. It swung inward, crowding them in the narrow space in which they stood. A rush of cold air greeted them. The Captain held the lantern in front of him and peered out into the darkness.

“There are some steps down,” he said.

He stepped over the threshold and led the way. Six steps down brought them to the floor of a rock-lined passage, a natural tunnel through the hill.

“Carver Hill must be a regular stone quarry,” said Justice. “All the cellar walls of Carver House are made of slabs of stone like this, and so is the foundation.”

“There are big stones cropping out all over the hill,” said the Captain. “It’s a regular granite monument. What a jolly tunnel this is!”

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“And what a gorgeous way of escape!” remarked Justice admiringly.

“But what need would there be of an underground way of escape?” asked Katherine wonderingly. “What were the people escaping from?”

“This house was built in the days of the Colonies,” replied Justice sagely, “and the Carvers were patriots. That probably put them in a pretty tight position once in a while. No doubt they concealed American soldiers in their home at times. This passage was probably built as a means of entrance and escape when things got too hot up above. British troops may have been quartered in the house, or watching the outside. What a peach of a way this was to evade them!” he exclaimed in a burst of admiration.

“I wish I’d lived in those times,” he went on, with envy in his tone. “They didn’t keep fellows out of the army on account of their throats then. What fun a soldier must have had, getting in and out of this house, right under the nose of the British! Suppose they suspected he was in the house and came in to search for him? He’d just turn the post on the stairs, and click! the landing would slide open and down the ladder he’d go and out through this passage. The enemy would never discover where he went in a million years.”

“Come on, let’s see where this passage comes out,” urged the Captain, and started ahead with the lantern.

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The passage sloped steeply downward, with frequent turns and twists.

“We’re going down the hill,” said the Captain.

“Whoever heard of going down the *inside* of a hill,” said Sahwah.

“It’s like going through that passage under Niagara Falls,” said Slim, “only it’s not quite so wet.”

After another sharp turn and a steep drop they came out in a good-sized chamber whose walls, floor and ceiling were all of rock.

“It’s a cave!” shouted the Captain, and his voice echoed and re-echoed weirdly, until the place seemed to be filled with dozens of voices. A cold draught played upon them from somewhere, and, although they all had on sweaters and caps, they shivered in the chilly atmosphere. There was no glimmer of light anywhere to indicate an opening to the outside.

The light of the lantern fell upon a wooden bench and a rough table, both painted bright red. On the table stood two tall bottles, thickly covered with dust, and between them was a grinning human skull with two cross bones behind it. Katherine and Sahwah involuntarily jumped and shrieked when they saw it.

“Somebody died down here!” gasped Sahwah.

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“Nonsense!” said Justice. “It was Uncle Jasper playing pirate. See, there’s his chest over there.”

Against the rocky wall stood a large wooden chest, likewise painted bright red, with a huge black skull and cross bones done on its lid.

“That must be Uncle Jasper’s ‘Dead Man’s Chest,’ that he mentions in his diary,” said Sahwah. “Of course, this is the pirates’ den where he and Tad played.”

The five looked around them with interest at this playroom of the two boys of long ago, its treasures living on after they were both dead and gone. Truly the den was a place to inspire terror in the heart of a luckless captive. Skulls and cross bones were painted all over the rocky walls, grinning reflections of the one on the table. Sahwah and Katherine clung to each other and peered nervously over each other’s shoulders into the darkness beyond the radius of the lantern light.

“What a peach of a pirate’s cave!” exclaimed the Captain enthusiastically. “Captain Kidd himself couldn’t have had a better one. It seems as if any minute we’ll hear a voice muttering, ‘Pieces of eight, pieces of eight.’” He picked up one of the bottles from the table and set it down again with a resounding bang.

“‘Fifteen men on a dead man’s chest,
Yo! ho! ho! And a bottle of rum!’”

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he shouted in a fierce voice which the echoes gave back from all around. “This must have been the life!”

“Those must have been the bottles from which they drank the molasses and water that they used for rum,” said Katherine. “What fun it must have been!”

“I wish I’d known Uncle Jasper Carver when he was a boy,” sighed the Captain. “He must have been no end of a chap, and Tad, too.”

“Let’s have a look at what’s in the chest,” said Justice.

He raised up the heavy oak lid and the Captain held the lantern down while they all crowded around to see. One by one he lifted out the pirates’ treasures and held them up; wooden swords, several tomahawks, a white flag with a skull and cross bones done on it in India ink, a stuffed alligator, a ship’s compass, a section of a hawser, a heavy iron chain, deeply rusted, a pocket telescope, a brass dagger, a pair of bows and a number of real flint-headed arrows, and a box of loose arrow heads which the Captain seized eagerly.

“Glory! what wouldn’t I have given for a bunch of real Indian arrow heads when I was a kid,” he said enviously.

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“They look like Delawares,” said Justice knowingly, pawing them over.

“How can you tell?” asked the Captain.

Justice explained the characteristics of the dreaded weapon of the Lenni-Lenape.

Slim and the Captain could not dispute him because they didn’t know anything about arrow heads, so they listened to him in respectful silence.

“They must have had fun, those two,” sighed the Captain enviously. “I thought *I* had fun when I was a kid, but Uncle Jasper Carver had it all over me with this cave and secret passage of his.”

Slim and Justice echoed his envious sigh. In their minds’ eye they too had traveled back with Uncle Jasper to his lively boyhood and saw a panorama of delightful plays passing in review, with the secret passage and the pirate’s cave as the background.

The last thing that came out of the chest was a flat stone on which had been carved the names "JASPER THE FEEND" and "TAD THE TERROR," bracketed together at both ends and surmounted by a wobbly skull and cross bones, under which was carved the legend, "FRENDS TIL DETH." When Sahwah saw it she could not keep back the tears at the thought of this wonderful boyish friendship which had endured through thick and thin, and then had ended so bitterly. To Sahwah the breaking up of a friendship was the most awful thing that could happen. There were tears in Katherine's eyes, too, and the three boys looked very solemn as the stone was laid back in the chest.

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"Now let's go and see where the passage leads on to," said the Captain, when the treasures of the two youthful pirates had been replaced in the chest. At a point opposite to the passage by which they had entered the cave another passage opened, or rather, a continuation of the first one, for the cave was merely a widening out of this subterranean tunnel.

"This way out," said the Captain, lighting the way with his lantern.

"Why, there's a door here!" exclaimed the Captain, when they had gone some thirty or forty feet into the passage.

The door was just like the one beside the ladder in Carver House; tremendously heavy, bound in brass and studded thickly with nails. It had been painted over with bright red paint, but here and there the paint had chipped off, showing the metal underneath. It was set into a doorway of brick and mortar. Over the knob was a curious latch, the like of which they had never seen. To their joy it snapped back without great difficulty and they got the door open.

Several stone steps down, and then they saw they were in a cellar passage.

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“The passage comes out in another house!” said the Captain. “I wonder whose?”

“It must be that old empty brick cottage that stands at the foot of the hill,” said Sahwah, who knew the lay of the land from the previous summer. “We often used to poke around in it and wonder who had lived in it. In the old days it must have been a place of safety for the American soldiers. It’s at the back of the hill, toward the woods. The soldiers probably escaped through the woods.”

“Let’s go on into the cellar proper and up into the house,” said the Captain, eager to continue his exploration.

But what he proposed was impossible, for they discovered that the end of the passage was blocked by a huge stone that had fallen out of the wall. It filled up the space from the floor to the low ceiling, all but a few inches at the top and a few inches at the one side, where an irregularity in its contour did not fit against the straight side of the wall. A very faint light from the cellar showed through these crevices, and a cold draught of air played like a thin stream down the backs of their necks.

“There doesn’t seem to be any way of getting out around that rock,” said the Captain. “Can you see any way?”

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They all looked diligently for some way to get over, or around it, or through it, and soon admitted that it was impossible.

“How on earth did that fellow ever get in from this end?” asked Justice in perplexity. “There isn’t a ghost of a show of getting through.”

“He *couldn’t* have,” said Katherine decidedly, “unless he really *was* the devil, as Hercules believed.”

“Or unless the stone fell after he was in,” suggested the Captain.

“But if he came in this way and went out again, how does it happen that the door here was fastened on the other side?” asked Sahwah.

“I give it up,” said Justice. “I don’t believe he came in this way.”

“Maybe he didn’t come in through the secret passage at all,” said Slim. “Maybe he *did* come in through the upstairs window, as we thought at first.”

“But how about the paint?” objected Sahwah. “He stepped into it and tracked it down the stairway. He *must* have come in through this way.”

Just then Katherine reached up to brush her hair out of her eyes, and her cold hand brushed Slim’s neck. He jumped convulsively, lost his footing, and pitched over against the door, which went shut with a bang. He was up again immediately, and stretched out his hand to open the door, but it resisted his attempt.

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“I guess she’s stuck,” he remarked. Justice and the Captain both lent a hand, but not a bit would the door budge. They gave it up after a few minutes, and stared at each other in perplexity.

“The door’s locked!” said Justice in a voice of consternation.

“The lock must have snapped over from the jar when the door banged,” said Sahwah.

“I don’t see how it could,” said Justice skeptically.

“Oh, yes, it could,” replied Sahwah. “The same thing happened to me once with our back screen door at home. It slammed on my skirt one day, when I was going out, and the latch latched itself, and there I was, caught like a mouse in a trap. I couldn’t pull my skirt loose and I couldn’t unlatch the door from the outside. There was nobody at home and I had to stand there a long while before someone came and set me free. Latches *do* latch themselves sometimes, and that’s what this one has done now!”

“Well, we’re caught like mice in a trap, too,” said Justice gloomily. “With the passage blocked at this end, and the door locked, how are we going to get out of here?”

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“Break the door down,” suggested Sahwah.

“Easier said than done,” replied the Captain. “What are we going to break it down with? You can’t knock down a door like that with your bare hands.”

Nevertheless they tried it, pounding frantically with their fists, and kicking the solid panel furiously.

“No use, we can’t break it down,” said Slim crossly, nursing his aching hand. “My knuckles are smashed and my toes are smashed, but there’s never a dent in the door. You’d think the old thing would be rotten down here in this hole, but it’s so covered with paint that it’s waterproof. It isn’t wet enough to rot it,” he finished unhappily, scowling at the piles of dust at his feet.

“We’ll have to call until somebody hears us and comes down,” said Sahwah.

“Nobody’ll ever hear us down here,” said Justice. “We’re on the lonesome side of the hill, remember!”

Nevertheless they did shout at the tops of their lungs, and called again and again until their ears ached with the racket their voices made in the closed-in little place, and their throats ached with the strain.

“Nobody can hear us!”

The disheartening realization came to them all at last.

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“Do you suppose we’ll have to stay down here until we starve to death?” asked Sahwah in an awe-stricken voice, after a terrified hush had reigned for several minutes.

“We’ll freeze to death before we starve,” said Justice pessimistically, shivering until his teeth chattered.

“Nonsense!” said Katherine severely. “We’ll get out somehow. Sherry and Nyoda will find the stair landing open and will come after us,” she finished, and the rest shouted aloud, so great was their relief at the thought.

Then Justice struck them cold again with his next words. “No, they won’t find it open, because I closed it several times, but I left it closed. They’ll never find that spring in a million years.”

A groan of disappointment went up at his words and their hearts sank like lead.

“We’ll get out somehow,” repeated Katherine determinedly, after a minute. “We were shut up in a cave once before, and we got out all right.”

“Yes, but that time Slim and I were on the outside, not on the inside *with* you,” the Captain reminded her.

“Yes, and that time it wasn’t so cold,” said Sahwah, vainly trying to stop shivering, “and we had eaten so many

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strawberries that we could have lasted for days. I'm hungry already."

"So'm I," said Slim decidedly. "I've been hungry for an hour."

"You're always hungry," said Justice impatiently. "I guess you'll last as long as the rest of us, though."

"Stop talking about 'lasting,'" said Katherine with a shudder of something besides cold. "You give me the creeps."

"If we only had something to break the door down with!" sighed Justice. "It would take a battering ram, though," he finished hopelessly.

"Too bad Hercules' old goat isn't down here with us," said Sahwah with a sudden reminiscent giggle. "He could have smashed the door down in no time with his forehead."

"But he *isn't* here, and we are," remarked Slim gloomily.

"I wish now I'd waked Sylvia up and shown her the stair landing opening," sighed Katherine regretfully. "She was so sound asleep, though, I couldn't bear to waken her. If she only knew about it she could send Sherry after us!" Oh, the tragedy bound up in that little word "if"!

Then to add to their troubles the lantern began to burn out with a series of pale flashes, and Slim was so agitated about it that he dropped the biggest electric flashlight on the floor and put it out of commission. Katherine's small pocket flash had burned out some time before. That left only two small flashlights.

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"Put them out," directed Justice, "so they'll last. We can flash them when we need a light."

It was much worse, being there in the darkness. Sahwah and Katherine clung to each other convulsively and the boys instinctively moved nearer together. Conversation dropped off after a while and it seemed as if the silence of the tomb hovered over them. No sound came from any direction.

During another one of these silences, following a desperate outburst of shouting, a sound burst through the uncanny stillness. It was a slight sound, but to their strained nerves it was as startling as a cannon shot. It was merely a faint pat, pat, pat, coming from somewhere. They could not tell the direction, it was so far off.

“It’s footsteps!” said Sahwah, starting up wildly.

“No, it’s only water dropping,” said Justice, cupping his hand over his ear in an attempt to locate the direction of the sound. “I wonder where it can be.”

He flashed the light and looked for the dropping water, but failed to find it. He turned the light out again. Then in the darkness the sound seemed clearer than before—pat, pat, pat, pat.

“It’s getting louder,” said Katherine.

“It *is* footsteps!” cried Sahwah positively. “They’re coming nearer! Listen!”

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The tapping noise increased until it became without a doubt the sound of a footfall drawing nearer along the passage on the other side of the cave.

“It’s Sherry looking for us; he’s found the passage!” shrieked Sahwah, “or maybe it’s Hercules!”

“Yell, everybody!” commanded Justice, “and let him know where we are.”

They set up a perfectly ear-splitting shout, and as the echoes died away they heard the snap of the lock on the other side of the door. Slim, who was nearest, flung himself upon the door handle and in another instant the door yielded under his hand and swung inward.

“Sherry!” they shouted, and crowded out into the passage, all talking at once.

“Sherry! Sherry! Where are you?” Sahwah called, suddenly aware that no one had answered them. Justice and the Captain sprang their flashlights and looked about them in astonishment. There was no one in the passage beside themselves.

Who had unfastened the latch and let them out?

Sahwah and Katherine suddenly gripped each other in terror, while the cold chills ran down their spines. The same thought of a supernatural agency had come into the mind of each. Then they both laughed at the absurdity of it.

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“It couldn’t have been a ghost,” declared Katherine flatly. “Ghosts don’t make any noise when they walk.”

As fast as they could they ran back through the passage to the door in the cellar wall, jerked the cable that opened the trap, and came out through the landing just as Nyoda, arriving home, was taking off her furs at the foot of the stairs. They never forgot her petrified expression when she saw them coming up through the floor.

“We thought it must be nearly midnight!” said Sahwah in amazement, when they found out that they had never even been missed. They had only been gone from the house for two hours.

Sherry came in presently and was as dumbfounded as Nyoda when he saw the opening in the landing and heard the tale of the Winnebagos and the boys.

“We thought you had found the passage and were coming to let us out,” said Sahwah, “but it must have been Hercules, after all!”

“But Hercules was with me all afternoon, helping me overhaul the motor of the car,” said Sherry. “I just left him now.”

“Then—who—unlocked the—door?” cried the five in a bewildered way.

“Thunder!” suddenly shouted Justice. “It was the same man that made the footprints on the stairs! He got in through that secret passage, and what’s more, he’s down there yet!”

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CHAPTER XI

A CURE FOR RHEUMATISM

All wrought up over the idea of the strange midnight visitor still lurking down in the passage, Nyoda made Sherry and the boys arm themselves and search the tunnel and the cave thoroughly, but they found no sign of anyone hidden down there.

“It must have been a ghost that unlatched the door, after all,” said Justice. “Most likely the ghost of the fellow that put the latch on. He’s probably detailed to look after all the latches he put on doors!—goes around with the ghost of an oil can and keeps them from squeaking. Yesterday must have been the date on his monthly tour of inspection. No, it couldn’t have been a spook anyhow,” he contradicted himself. “There’s the can of paint and the footprint on the stairs. Ghosts don’t leave footprints. That was real paint. He’s a live spook, all right.”

“But where is he now?” asked Nyoda nervously. “I’m afraid to open a table drawer, for fear he’ll step out. Does he fold up like an accordion, I wonder, or turn into smoke like the Imp in the Bottle? I declare, I’m getting curious to see him. I’m sorry now I made you barricade the door down there beside the ladder; I’ve half a notion to sit on the stairs all night and see if he won’t appear.”

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“I know an easier way than that,” said Justice gravely. “Just grease the stairs and then come when you hear him fall. It’ll save you the trouble of sitting up.”

“You might recommend that method to the cat, instead of her watching beside the mousehole,” replied Nyoda, laughing.

Then she heard a familiar fumbling at the back door. “Here comes Hercules,” she said hastily. “Quick, close up the landing. Don’t anybody mention finding the secret passage to him, or he’ll make life miserable for me from now on, worrying for fear his old friend, the devil, will come in and carry us all off. Come, get away from the stairway, and don’t act as if anything unusual had happened.

“What is it, Hercules?” she asked, as the old man shuffled into the kitchen. “Is your cold worse?”

“I was jest goin’ to ask yer could I have some coffee,” said the old man in a plaintive voice. “I got the mizry so bad it’s jest tearin’ me ter pieces, an’ when it gits like dat it don’ seem like anything’ll help it ’xcept drinkin’ hot coffee.”

Nyoda smiled at this novel cure for rheumatism, but she replied heartily, “Why, certainly you may have some coffee, Hercules. Just sit down there at the kitchen table and I’ll get you a cup. There’s some left in the pot; it’ll only take a minute to warm it up.”

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She heated the coffee and motioned Hercules to a seat at the kitchen table, but he took the steaming cup and edged toward the door.

“I’ll jest take it out an’ drink it gradual,” he said. “Never seems ter help de mizry none ’less I drink it gradual an’ keep my feet in hot water de while. Tanks, Mist’ Sher’dan, I don’ need no help. I kin git along by myself.”

Hercules shuffled out to the barn with his cup of hot coffee and Nyoda waited until he was out of earshot before she laughed aloud.

“That man certainly is a character!” she exclaimed. “Whoever heard of curing rheumatism by drinking coffee ‘gradual’ and holding your feet in water? I never know what queer notion he’s going to have next. I put a pot of bright red geraniums in his room once to brighten it up and he promptly brought it back, because, ‘Jewraniums am powerful unlucky, Mis’ ’Lizbeth. I was plantin’ jewraniums dat day de goat got killed.’ Poor old Hercules, he does miss that goat so! He was simply inconsolable at first, and finally I resigned myself to a life of misery and told him to go and get himself another goat, but he wouldn’t do it. Nothing could take the place of that fiendish old animal in his affections. I believe he’ll mourn for him all the rest of his life.”

“Let’s invite him in for Sylvia’s birthday party to-morrow night,” suggested Migwan. “That’ll cheer him up and make him forget all about his ‘mizry’ for a while. Let’s find a masquerade costume for him, too, so he can be one of us.”

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Nyoda smiled brightly at Migwan. “Thoughtful child!” she said fondly. “Always thinking of someone else’s pleasure. Certainly we’ll ask Hercules to the party.”

“Now, all you menfolk clear out of this kitchen, or we won’t get any dinner to-night!”

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CHAPTER XII

THE SPIRIT OF A PRINCESS

“O Nyoda, it *can't* be true!”

Sahwah's anguished wail cut across the stricken silence of the room.

The eminent surgeon had just made his examination of Sylvia and pronounced the verdict that had sent all their rosy air castles tumbling about their ears: “Nothing can be done. An operation would be useless. It is not a case of a splintered vertebra which could be patched. The nerves which control the limbs are paralyzed. She will never walk again.”

The last five words fell upon their ears like the tolling of a sorrowful bell. “She will never walk again.” Stunned by the unexpected verdict the Winnebagos stood mutely about Sylvia in anguished sympathy.

She lay motionless on the sofa, a white-faced, pitiful little ghost of a princess; her glad animation gone, her radiance extinguished, her song stricken upon her lips.

“O why did you tell me?” she wailed. “Why did you tell me I could be cured, when I never can? Why didn't you leave me as I was? I was happy then, because I had never hoped to get well. But since you told me I've been planning so——” Her voice broke off and she lay back in silent misery.

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“Now I can never be a Camp Fire Girl!” she cried a moment later, her grief breaking out afresh. “I can never go camping! I can never help Aunt Aggie!” All the joyful bubbles her fancy

had blown in the last two days burst one by one before her eyes, each stabbing her with a fresh pang. “I’ll never be any use in the world; I wish I were dead!” she cried wildly, her rising grief culminating in an outburst of black despair.

“Oh, yes, you can too be a Camp Fire Girl,” said Nyoda soothingly. “You can do lots of things the other girls can do—and some they can’t. There isn’t any part of the Law you can’t fulfill. You can Seek Beauty, and Give Service, and Pursue Knowledge, and Be Trustworthy, and Hold on to Health, and Glorify Work, and Be Happy! Campfire isn’t just a matter of hikes and meetings. It’s a spirit that lives inside of you and makes life one long series of Joyous Ventures. You can kindle the Torch in your invalid’s chair as well as you could out in the big, busy world, and pass it on to others.”

“How can I?” asked Sylvia wonderingly.

“In many ways,” answered Nyoda, “but chiefly by being happy yourself. Even if you never did anything else but be happy, you would be doing a useful piece of work in the world. Just sing as gayly as you used to, and everyone who hears you will be brighter and happier for your song. If you cannot do great deeds yourself, you may inspire others to do them. What does it matter who does things, as long as they are done? If you have encouraged someone else to do something big and fine, all on account of your happy spirit, it is just as well as if you had done the thing yourself. Did you ever hear the line,

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‘All service ranks the same with God,’?

“Sylvia, dear, you have the power to make people glad with your song. That is the way you will pass on the Torch. You already have your symbol; you chose it when you began to hero-worship Sylvia Warrington, and loved her because she was like a lark singing in the desert at dawning. That is the symbol you have taken for yourself—the lark that sings in the

desert. Little Lark-that-sings-in-the-Desert, you will kindle the Torch with your song! Instead of being a Guide Torchbearer, or a Torchbearer in Craftsmanship, you will become a Torchbearer in Happiness!”

With these words of hope and encouragement Nyoda left her sorrowful little princess to the quiet rest which she needed after the fatiguing examination by the surgeon. Going into Hinpoha’s room she found her lying face downward on the bed in an agony of remorse, her red curls tumbled about her shoulders.

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“I told her, I told her,” she cried out to Nyoda with burning self-condemnation. “I couldn’t keep my mouth shut till the proper time; I had to go and tell her two days ahead. If I’d only waited till we were sure she would never have had her heart set on it so. Oh, I’ll never forgive myself.” She beat on the pillow with her clenched fist and writhed under the lash of her self scorn. For once she was not in tears; her misery was far deeper than that. “I didn’t mean to tell her that day, Nyoda, I knew you’d asked us to keep it a secret, but it just slipped out before I thought.”

“Hinpoha, dear,” said Nyoda, sitting down on the bed beside her and speaking seriously, “will it always be like this with you? Will everything slip out ‘before you thought’? Will you never learn to think before you speak? Will you be forever like a sieve? Must we always hesitate to speak a private matter out in front of you, because we know it will be all over the town an hour later? Are you going to be the only one of the Winnebagos who can’t keep a secret?”

Hinpoha’s heart came near to breaking. Those were the severest words Nyoda had ever spoken to her. Yet Nyoda did not say them severely. Her tone was gentle, and her hand stroked the dishevelled red curls as she spoke; but what she said pierced Hinpoha’s heart like a knife. A vision of herself came up as she must seem to others—a rattle brained creature

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who couldn't keep anything to herself if her life depended upon it. How the others must despise her! Now she despised herself! Above all, how Nyoda must despise her—Nyoda, who always said the right thing at the right time, and whose tongue never got her into trouble! Nyoda might have nothing more to do with such a tattle tale! In her anguish she groaned aloud.

“Don't you see,” went on Nyoda earnestly, “what suffering you bring upon yourself as well as upon other people by just not thinking? You could escape all that if you acquired a little discretion.”

“Oh, I'll never tell anything again!” Hinpoha cried vehemently. “I'll keep my lips tight shut, I'll sew them shut. I won't be like a sieve. You can tell all the secrets in front of me you like, they'll be safe. Oh, don't say you'll never tell me any more secrets!” she said pleadingly. “Just try me and see!”

“Certainly I'll keep on telling you secrets,” said Nyoda, “because I believe they really will be safe after this.” She saw the depth of woe into which Hinpoha had been plunged and knew that the bitter experience had taught her a lesson in discretion she would not soon forget. Poor impulsive, short-sighted Hinpoha! How her tongue was forever tripping her up, and what agonies of remorse she suffered afterward!

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Hinpoha uncovered one eye and saw Nyoda looking at her with the same loving, friendly glance as always, and cast herself impulsively upon her shoulder. “You'll see how discreet I can be!” she murmured humbly.

Nyoda smiled down at her and held her close for a minute.

“Listen!” she said. From the room where Sylvia lay there came the sound of a song. It began falteringly at first and choked off several times, but went bravely on, gaining in power, until the merry notes filled the house. The indomitable

little spirit had fought its battle with gloom and come out victorious.

“The spirit of a princess!” Nyoda exclaimed admiringly. “Sylvia is of the true blood royal; she knows that the thoroughbred never whimpers; it is only the low born who cry out when hurt.”

“Gee, listen to that!” exclaimed Slim, sitting in the library with Sherry and the other two boys, when Sylvia’s song rang through the house, brave and clear. The four looked at each other, and the eyes of each held a tribute for the brave little singer. Sherry stood up and saluted, as though in the presence of a superior officer.

“She ought to have a Distinguished Valor Cross,” he said, “for conspicuous bravery under fire.”

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“Pluckiest little kid I ever saw!” declared Slim feelingly, and then blew a violent blast on his nose.

“Sing a cheer!” called Sahwah, and the Winnebagos lined up in the hall outside Sylvia’s door and sang to her with a vigor that made the windows rattle:

“Oh, Sylvia, here’s to you,
Our hearts will e’er be true,
We will never find your equal
Though we search the whole world through!”

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CHAPTER XIII

THE MASQUERADE

“I don’t suppose we’ll have the party now,” observed Gladys, after Sylvia had fallen asleep. “It’s a shame. We were going to have such a big time to-night.”

“Indeed, we *will* have the party anyhow!” said Nyoda emphatically. “We’ll outdo ourselves to make Sylvia have a hilarious time to-night. The time to laugh the loudest is when you feel the saddest. Gladys, will you engineer the candy making? You have your masquerade costume ready, haven’t you? The rest of you will have to hurry to get yours fixed, it’s three o’clock already. There are numerous chests of old clothes up in the attic; you may take anything you like from them. And that reminds me, I must go and bring out my old Navajo blanket for—” “Goodness!” she said, stopping herself just in time, “I almost told who is going to wear it. Now everybody be good and don’t ask me any questions. I have to bring it down and air it before it can be worn because it’s packed away in mothballs.”

She ran lightly up the stairs, chanting:

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“There was an old chief of the Navajo,
Fell over the wigwam and broke his toe,
And now he is gone where the good Injuns go,
And his blanket is done up in cam-pho-o-or!”

She trailed out the last word into such a mournful wail that the Winnebagos shrieked with laughter.

A few minutes later she came down the stairs with a mystified face. "The blanket's gone!" she announced. "Stolen. I had it in the lower drawer of the linen closet off the hall upstairs, all wrapped up in tar paper. The tar paper's there in the drawer, folded up, with the mothballs lying on top of it, and the blanket is gone. Did any of you take it out to wear to-night?" she asked, looking relieved at the thought.

No one had taken it, however. Slim was the only one who wanted to be an Indian, and he was waiting for Nyoda to fetch the blanket for him. Without a doubt it had been stolen. So the midnight visitor had been a thief after all! But why did he take a blanket and nothing else? It was a valuable blanket, but the silverware and jewelry in the house were worth a great deal more. The mystery reared its head again. What manner of man was this strange visitor?

"My mother always used to keep her silver wrapped in the blankets in a clothes closet," said Gladys, "and burglars broke into our house and found it all. The policeman that papa reported it to said that was a common place for people to hide valuables and burglars usually searched through blankets. This burglar must have been looking for valuables in the blanket, and got scared away before he looked anywhere else, but took the blanket because it was such a good one."

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"That must have been it," said Nyoda. "I've heard of cases before where valuables were stolen from their hiding places in blankets and bedding. Well, we were lucky to get away as we did.

"Slim, you'll have to be something beside an Indian chief, for I haven't another Navajo blanket. It's too bad, too, because you had the real bow and arrows, but cheer up, we'll find something else. The trouble is, though," she mourned, "we haven't much of anything that will fit you. The blanket would have solved the problem so nicely."

“Let him wear the mothballs,” suggested Justice. “He can be an African chief instead of an Indian. A nice string of mothballs would be all——”

Slim threw a sofa cushion at him and Justice subsided.

The stolen blanket remained the chief topic of conversation until late in the afternoon, when Katherine made a discovery which furnished a new theme. She was up in the attic, hunting something from which to concoct a masquerade suit, and while rummaging through a trunk came upon a photograph underneath a pile of clothes. It was the picture of a young girl dressed in the fashion of a bygone day, with a tremendously long, full skirt bunched up into an elaborate “polonaise.” Above a pair of softly curved shoulders smiled a face of such witching beauty that Katherine forgot all about the trunk and its contents and gazed spellbound at the photograph. In the lower right hand corner was written in a beautiful, even hand, “*To Jasper, from Sylvia.*”

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Katherine flew downstairs to show her find to the others.

“O how beautiful!” they cried, one after another, as they gazed at the picture of the girl Uncle Jasper could not forget. The small, piquant face, in its frame of dark hair, looked up at them from the picture with a winning, friendly smile, and looking at it the Winnebagos began to feel the charm of the living Sylvia Warrington, and to fall in love with her even as Uncle Jasper had done.

“Take it up to Sylvia,” said Migwan. “She’ll be delighted to see a picture of her Beloved.”

Sylvia gazed with rapt fondness at the beautiful young face. “Isn’t—she—lovely?” she said in a hushed voice. “She looks as though she would be sorry about my being lame, if she knew. May I keep her with me all the time, Nyoda? She’s such a comfort!”

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“Certainly, you may keep the picture with you,” said Nyoda, rejoicing that a new interest had come up just at this time, and left her hugging the photograph to her bosom.

Right after supper Nyoda shooed all the rest upstairs to their rooms while she arrayed Sylvia for the party. In her endeavor to cheer and divert her she gathered materials with a lavish hand and dressed her like a real fairy tale princess, in a beautiful white satin dress, and a gold chain with a diamond locket, and bracelets, and a coronet on her fine-spun golden hair. The armchair she made into a throne, covered with a purple velvet portière; and she spread a square of gilt tapestry over the footstool.

The effect, when Sylvia was seated upon the throne, was so gorgeously royal that Nyoda felt a sudden awe stealing over her, and she could hardly believe it was the work of her own hands. Sylvia seemed indeed a real princess.

“We have on the robes of state to-night,” said Sylvia, with a half hearted return to her once loved game, “for our royal father, the king, is coming to pay us a visit with all his court.”

Nyoda made her a sweeping curtsey and hurried upstairs to dress herself. The costumes of all the rest were kept a secret from one another, and no one was to unmask until the stroke of eleven. She heard stifled giggles and exclamations coming through the doors of all the rooms as she proceeded down the hall.

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Crash! went something in one of the rooms and Nyoda paused to investigate. There stood Slim before a mirror, hopelessly entangled in a sheet which he was trying to drape around himself. A wild sweep of his hand had smashed the electric light bulb at the side of the mirror, and sent the globe flying across the room to shatter itself on the floor.

“Wait a minute, I’ll help you,” said Nyoda, coming forward laughing.

Slim emerged from the sheet very red in the face, deeply abashed at the damage he had done.

“I was only trying to grab ahold of the other end,” he explained ruefully, “like this—” He flung out the other hand in a gesture of illustration, and smash went the globe on the other side of the mirror.

Nyoda laughed at his horror-stricken countenance, and soothed his embarrassment while she pinned him into the sheet and pulled over his head the pillow case which was to act as mask.

“Just as if you could disguise Slim by masking him!” she thought mirthfully as she worked. “The more you try to cover him up the worse you give him away. It’s like trying to disguise an elephant.”

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She got him finished, and as a precaution against further accidents bade him sit still in the chair where she placed him until the dinner gong sounded downstairs; then she hastened on toward her own room.

“Oh, I forgot about Hercules!” she suddenly exclaimed aloud. “I promised to get something for him.”

“Migwan’s gone down to fix him up,” said a voice from one of the rooms in answer to her exclamation. “She found a costume for him this afternoon, and she’s down in the kitchen now, getting him ready.”

Nyoda breathed a sigh of gratitude for Migwan’s habitual thoughtfulness, and went in to don her own costume.

Down in the kitchen Migwan was getting Hercules into the suit she had picked out for him from the trunkfull of masquerade costumes she had found up in the attic. It was a long monkish habit with a cowl, made of coarse brown stuff, and it covered him from head to foot. The mask was made of the same material as the suit, and hung down at least a foot below his grizzly beard.

“Sure nobody ain’t goin’ ter recognize me?” Hercules asked anxiously.

Migwan’s prediction that an invitation to the party would cheer him up had been fulfilled from the first. Hercules was so tickled that he forgot his misery entirely. He was in as much of a flutter as a young girl getting ready for her first ball; he had been in the house half a dozen times that day anxiously inquiring if the party were surely going to be, and if there would be a suit for him.

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Migwan put in the last essential pin, and then stepped back to survey the result of her efforts. “If you keep your feet underneath the gown, not a soul will know you,” she assured him. She had thoughtfully provided a pair of gloves, so that even if he did put out his hands their color could not betray him.

“Of course, you must not talk,” she warned him further.

“Course not, course not,” he agreed. “When’s all dese here mask comin’ off?” he continued.

“When the clock strikes eleven we’ll all unmask,” explained Migwan, “and then the Princess is going to give the prize to the one that had the best costume.”

“An’ dey’s nobody ’xcept me an’ you knows I’m wearin’ dis suit?” he inquired for the third time.

Migwan reassured him, and with a final injunction not to show himself in the front part of the house until he heard the dinner gong, she sped up the back stairs to her own belated masking.

She had barely finished when the sound of the gong rose through the house, and the stairway was filled with a grotesquely garbed throng making its way, with stifled exclamations and smothered bursts of laughter, into the long drawing room where the Princess sat. Migwan clapped on her mask and sped down after them, getting there just as the fun commenced. She spied Hercules standing in the corner behind the Princess's throne, maintaining a religious silence and keeping his feet carefully out of sight. She kept away from him, fearing that he would forget himself and speak to her, entirely forgetting that he could not recognize her under her disguise.

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Sylvia shrieked with amusement at the grotesque figures circling around her. It was the very first masque party she had ever seen, and she could not get over the wonder of it. Nyoda smiled mistily behind her mask as she watched her. How lonely that valiant little spirit must have been all these years, shut away from the frolics of youth; lonely in spite of the brave make believe with which she passed away the time! And now the years stretched out before her in endless sameness; the poor little princess would never leave her throne.

Sherry and Justice and the Captain kept Nyoda guessing as to which one was which, but she soon picked out the one she knew must be Hercules, and watched him in amusement. She had rather fancied that he would turn out to be the clown of the party, but he sat still most of the time and kept his eyes on the Princess. He seemed utterly fascinated by the glitter of her costume. Even the Punch and Judy show going on in the other

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end of the room failed to hold his attention, although the rest of the spectators were in convulsions of mirth.

The Princess called on Punch and Judy to do their stunt over and over again until they were too hoarse to utter another sound. Migwan, who had been Judy, fled to the kitchen for a drink of water to relieve her aching throat. She took the opportunity to slip off the hot mask for a moment and get a breath of fresh air. She was almost suffocated behind the mask.

Then, while she stood there cooling off, she remembered the big pan of candy Gladys had set outdoors to harden, and hastened out to bring it in. Someone was walking across the yard, and as Migwan looked up, startled, the light which streamed out of the kitchen door fell full upon the black face of Hercules. Migwan stood still, clutching the pan of candy mechanically, her eyes wide open with surprise. Hercules stood still too, and stood staring at her with an expression of dismay. He no longer had the monk's costume on.

“How did you get out here?” Migwan asked curiously. “You're inside—at the party.”

Hercules laughed nervously, and Migwan noticed that his jaw was trembling.

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“What's the matter, Hercules?” she asked. “What's happened?”

“Now, missy, missy—” began Hercules, and Migwan could hear his teeth chatter, while his eyes began to roll strangely in his head.

“What's the matter, are you sick?” asked Migwan in alarm.

“Yes'm, dat's it, dat's it,” chattered Hercules, finding his voice. “I'm awful sick. I had to come outside.”

“But I left you sitting in there a minute ago with your suit on,” said Migwan wonderingly, “and you didn’t come out after me. Did you go out of the front door?”

“Yes’m, dat’s it,” said Hercules hastily. “I come out de front doah an’ roun’ dat way.”

A sudden impulse made Migwan look down the drive, covered with a light fall of snow and gleaming white in the glare of the street light.

“But there aren’t any footprints in the snow,” she said in surprise. “Your footprints are coming from the barn.” A nameless uneasiness filled her. What was Hercules doing out here?

“Yes’m,” repeated Hercules vacuously, “I came from de barn.”

Migwan stared at him in surprise. Was he out of his mind?

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“Hercules,” she began severely, but never finished the sentence, for the old man swayed, clutched at the empty air, and fell heavily in the snow at her feet.

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CHAPTER XIV

AN UNINVITED GUEST

Migwan ran into the house and burst breathlessly in upon the merry-makers.

“Nyoda!” she cried in a frightened voice, “Hercules is—” Then she stopped as though she had seen a ghost, for there sat Hercules in his monk’s costume, just as he had been all evening!

“What’s the matter?” asked Nyoda in alarm, seeing her pale face and staring eyes.

Migwan clutched her convulsively. “There’s a man outside,” she panted, “that looks just like Hercules, and when I spoke to him he fell down on the ground!”

In an instant all was pandemonium. Everybody rushed for the kitchen door and ran out into the yard, where the figure of a man lay dark upon the snow. Sherry tore off his mask and flung it away, and bending over the prostrate man turned his flashlight full on his face.

“It *is* Hercules!” he exclaimed in astonishment.

“Is he dead?” faltered Migwan.

“No, he’s breathing, but he’s unconscious,” said Sherry. “It’s his heart, I suppose. He’s been having spells with it lately. Run into the house, somebody, and get that leather covered flask in the medicine chest.”

Justice raced in for the flask and Sherry raised Hercules' head from the ground and poured some of the brandy between his lips. In a few minutes the old man began to stir and mutter, and Nyoda, holding his wrist, felt his pulse come up. They carried him to his room in the stable and laid him down on his bed, and Nyoda found the heart drops which Hercules had been taking for some time.

“But where is the one I thought was Hercules—the one with the monk's suit on?” cried Migwan, after the first fright about Hercules had subsided.

Sherry and the boys looked at one another dumfounded. None of them had known, as Migwan did, that the brown robe and cowl presumably covered Hercules. They looked about for the brown figure that had moved so unobtrusively amongst them that evening. It had vanished.

“He's gone!” shouted Sherry excitedly. “There's something queer going on here.”

The monk was certainly not in the house any longer, and there were no footprints in the snow outside the house.

“Did he fly away?” asked Sherry in perplexity.

Justice jumped up with a great exclamation. “The secret passage!” he shouted, “he's gone down the secret passage!”

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They flew back inside the house to the stair landing, half expecting to find it standing open, but it was closed and looked perfectly natural. Sherry grasped the post, the landing slid out and the four went down the ladder. Justice gave a triumphant exclamation when he reached the bottom. “The barricades are taken down! He did come this way!”

They hurried through the door into the passage, half expecting to see a figure flying along ahead of them, but the passage

was empty and no sound of a footfall broke the silence. They searched the place thoroughly, but nowhere did they find their man hidden. Behind the chest in the cave, however, Justice pounced upon something with a shout. It was the long brown costume that had been worn by the monk at the party.

CHAPTER XV

HERCULES' STORY

When Sherry and the boys returned from their fruitless chase Hercules had regained consciousness, and was telling Nyoda in a shaking voice that he felt better, but he was still too weak to sit up.

“Mah time’s come, Mis’ ’Lizabeth,” he said mournfully. “I’s e a goner.”

“Nonsense,” said Nyoda brightly. “You’ll be up and around in the morning. The doctor that gave you this medicine said you’d have these spells once in a while, but the heart drops would always bring you round all right.”

“I’s e a-goin’ dis time,” he repeated. “I’s e had a token. Dreamed about runnin’ water las’ night, an’ dat’s a sure sign. *Ain’t* no surer sign den dat anywhere, Mis’ ’Lizabeth.”

“Nonsense,” said Nyoda again. “You shouldn’t believe in signs. Tell us what happened to-night and that’ll make you feel better.”

“Mis’ ’Lizabeth,” said the old man solemnly, “I’s e goin’ ter tell de whole thing. I wasn’t goin’ ter say nothin’ a-tall, but gon’ ter die, like I am, I’s e skeered ter go an’ not tell you-all.”

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He took a sip from the tumbler at his hand and cleared his throat.

“Mis’ ’Lizabeth,” he began, “dat weren’t no burglar dat git inter de house dat night. You jus’ lissen till I tell you de whole

bizness. Dat day you-all find dem footprints on de stairs I mos' had a fit, 'case I knowed somebody'd got in th'u de secrut passidge."

"But you said you didn't know anything about a secret passage," said Nyoda, in surprise.

"Mis' 'Lizabeth," said Hercules deprecatingly, evidently urged on to open confession by the knowledge that death had him by the coat tail, "I *said* dat, but it weren't true. Ole Marse Jasper, he say once if I ever tell about dat secrut passidge de debbel'd come in th'u it an' carry me off, an' I'se bin skeered even ter say secrut passidge.

"Dere weren't nobody livin' dat knew about dat secrut passidge, an' when I sees dem footprints I reckons it mus' be de debbel himself. But yestidday I sees a man hangin' roun' behin' de barn, an' I axs him what he wants, an' he sticks up two fingers an' makes a sign dat I uster know yeahs ago. I looks at de man agin, an' I says, 'Foh de Lawd, am de dead come ter life?' 'Case it's Marse Jasper's ole frien', Tad Phillips."

A sharp exclamation of astonishment went around the circle of listeners.

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"He's an ole man, an' his hair's nearly white, but I see it were Marse Tad, all right.

"I hearn you-all was dead,' I says ter him, but Marse Tad, he say no, people all thought he's dead an' he let 'em think so, 'case he cain't never meet up wif his ole frien's no more. You see, Mis' 'Lizabeth," he threw in an explanation, "Marsh Tad he gave some sick folks poison instead of medicine, an' dey die, an' he go 'way, outen de country, an' bimeby de papers say he's dead an' his wife's dead. But dey ain't; it's a mistake, but he don' tell nobody, an' bimeby he come back, him an' his wife. Dey take another name, an' dey goes to a town whar

nobody knows 'em. Bimeby a baby girl gits born an' his wife she dies.

“Marse Tad he ain't never bin himself since he gave dem folks dat poison; he cain't fergit it a-tall. It pester him so he cain't work, an' he cain't sleep, an' he cain't never laugh no more. He give up bein' a doctor 'case he say he cain't trust himself no more. He get so low in his mind when his wife die dat he think he'll die too, an' he sends de baby away to some folks dat wants one.

“But he don't die; he jest worry along, but he's powerful low in his mind all de time. He think all de time 'bout dem people he poisoned. Fin'ly he say he'll go 'way agin; he'll go back ter South America. But before he goes, he gits ter thinkin' he'd like ter see his chile once. He fin's out dat de people he sent her to ain't never got her; dat she's with somebody else, in a place called Millvale, in dis very state. He go to Millvale, an' he look in th'u de winder, an' he see her. She's the livin' image of his dead wife, light hair an' dark eyes an' all.

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“He never let her know he's her father, 'case he feel so terrible 'bout dem folks he poisoned dat he thinks he ain't no good, a-tall, an' mustn't speak to her. But he's so wild to see her dat he hang aroun' in dat town, workin' odd jobs, an' at night lookin' in de window where she sits.

“Den suddenly de folks she's wif up an' move away, an' he cain't see her no more. He jest cain't stand it. He finds out dat dey come here to Oakwood, an' he comes too. But he don't know which house she live in and he cain't find her. He gets to wanderin' around, and one night he comes to de ole big house he uster live in, way up on Main Street Hill. It's all dark and tumble down, and he thinks he'll just go in once and look around. He goes in, and inside he hears a voice singin'. It sounds jest like his wife's voice. She were a beautiful singer, Mis' 'Lizbeth—de Virginia nightingale, folks uster call her. He stands dere in dat dark, empty house, lissenin' ter dat

voice and he thinks it's his wife's sperrit singin' ter him. She's singin' a song she uster sing when she were young, somethin' about larks."

Katherine made a convulsive movement, and her heart began to pound strangely.

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"Den he say a lady come in de front door and he gits scairt and runs out."

Katherine's head began to whirl, and she kept silence with an effort.

"He stand around outside for a while and bimeby an autermobile comes along and de folks carries a girl out of de house and takes her away. He sees de girl when dey's bringin' her out, and he knows she's his. He watches where dat autermobile goes and it comes here."

The old man paused for a minute and looked around at the group at his bedside, all hanging spellbound upon his words.

"Mis' 'Lizabeth," he said dramatically, "little Missy Sylvia am Tad Phillips' little girl!"

When the sensation caused by his surprising story had subsided, Hercules continued:

"He jest have ter see her before he go 'way, and he remember about de secrut passidge th'u de hill dat he and Marse Jasper uster play in. He come th'u in de night an get inter de house, but he cain't find her. He see dere's people sleepin' in all de spare rooms dat uster be empty, and he cain't go lookin' round. He left dem footprints on de stairs, Mis' 'Lizabeth; it ain't blood; it's paint. Dey's a ole jar of paint down dere in de passidge, and he knocks it over and it breaks and he steps inter de paint."

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“But Hercules,” interrupted Sherry, “how did he get into the passage from the outside? The way is blocked.”

“Dere’s another way ter git out,” replied Hercules, “before you come to de doah down dere. I disremember jest how it is, but it comes up th’u de floah of dat little summerhouse down de hillside. De boys fixed it up after de other way was blocked.

“When I find Marse Tad out behind de barn he’s feelin’ sick, and I brought him in and put him in my bed.”

A light flashed through Nyoda’s mind. “Was that what you wanted the hot coffee for yesterday?” she asked.

“Yessum,” replied Hercules meekly. Then he continued:

“Marse Tad he wanter see little missy so bad I promise ter help him. When you-all gives me dat invite to de party and says I gotter wear a mask I fixes it up wif Marse Tad to put on de maskrade suit after I get it and go in and see little missy. While he’s inside I stays outside. Den all of a sudden out come Missy Camphor Girl and sees me and screeches dat she jest left me inside. I got so scairt I jest nat’chly collapsed. Dat’s all.”

“Your friend Tad ran out through the secret passage and disappeared,” said Sherry.

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“He’s gone on de train by dis time,” said Hercules, his voice getting weak again. “He was goin’ on de ten-ten. He’s goin’ ter sail Noo Year’s Day.”

“Whew!” whistled Sherry. “What a drama has been going on right under our very noses, and we knowing nothing about it! Sylvia the child of Uncle Jasper’s old friend! And by what a narrow chance we came upon her!”

Into this excitement came Migwan, who had been in the house with Sylvia.

“Sylvia’s sick,” she said in a troubled voice to Nyoda. “Her head is hot and her hands are like ice, and she’s been coughing hard for the last half hour. She couldn’t hold her head up for another minute, and I put her to bed.”

“I was afraid she was going to be sick,” said Nyoda. “She been coughing off and on all day long, and her cheeks were so bright to-night, it seemed to me she looked feverish. I’m afraid the excitement of the party was too much for her. Don’t anyone breathe a word of what Hercules has told us just now, she must be kept quiet.”

They all promised.

In the moment when they stood looking at Hercules and waiting for Nyoda to start back to the house, Slim suddenly thought of something.

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“If it wasn’t a thief that came in, why did he take your blanket?” he asked.

Hercules answered, addressing himself to Nyoda. “Marse Tad didn’t take dat blanket, Mis’ ’Lizbeth. *I* took dat blanket. But I didn’t steal it. I jest borried it. Borried it to wrap around Marse Tad. I couldn’t ask you-all fer one, ’case you-all knew I had plenty, and I was skeered you’d be gettin’ ’spicious. I saw you-all puttin’ dat ole blanket away in dat drawer a long time ago, and I thought you-all never used it and would never know if it was gone fer a day. It ain’t hurt a might, Mis’ ’Lizbeth, dere it is, over in de corner. How’s you-all know it was gone?” he asked, in comical amazement.

Nyoda explained, and soothed his agitation about the blanket in a few words.

The strain of telling his story had worn him out and he lay back and began to gasp feebly.

“Everybody go back to the house,” commanded Nyoda, “and let Hercules rest.”

“I’se a-goin’ dis time,” murmured the old man. “I’se goin’ ter Abram’s bosom. Swing low, sweet chariot, comin’ fer to carry me home!”

“Nonsense!” said Nyoda, “you’ll be all right in the morning,” but she called Sherry back and asked him to stay with Hercules the rest of the night.

Then she went back to the house and found Sylvia burning with fever and too hoarse to speak. She applied the usual remedies for a hard cold and rose from bed to see how she was every hour throughout the night. Morning brought no improvement, however, and with a worried look on her face Nyoda went downstairs and telephoned the doctor.

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CHAPTER XVI

A LETTER

Sylvia's illness increased during the day; her fever rose rapidly and the coughing spells grew more violent and more frequent. Nyoda turned Hercules over to Sherry and Justice and gave Sylvia her whole attention. No whisper of the exciting news that rocked the family was allowed to come to her ears for fear of its effect upon the fever.

"Bronchitis," the doctor had said whom Nyoda had hastily summoned, "watch out for pneumonia."

The Winnebagos roamed the house, anxious and excited, talking in low tones about the amazing turn of events, and listening eagerly for Nyoda to come out of the sick room. Slim and the Captain shifted uneasily from one chair to another until Katherine begged them to go out and take a long walk.

"You make me nervous, trying so hard to keep quiet," she said to Slim.

The boys went out.

Migwan made some lemon jelly for Hercules and Sahwah carried it out to him.

"Does he still believe he's dying?" asked Katherine when Sahwah returned to the house.

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"He's surer than ever," replied Sahwah. "He's making the arrangements for his funeral. He's sorry now that he didn't

join the Knights of Pythias when he had the chance so he could have had a band.”

“Is he really as sick as that?” asked Hinpoha in a scared voice.

“Sherry says he isn’t,” said Sahwah, “but Hercules insists that he won’t live till morning. Sherry’s getting sort of anxious about him himself, Justice told me outside the barn. Sherry said that Hercules believed so firmly in signs he’d just naturally worry himself to death before long, if he didn’t stop thinking about the ‘token’ he’d had. People do that sometimes. Hercules’ heart *is* bad and believing that his end was near might bring on a fatal spell.”

“Can’t we do something to make him stop thinking about it?” asked Migwan. “Remember the Dark of the Moon Society, Sahwah, that you got up to bring Katherine out of a fit of the blues that time up on Ellen’s Isle?”

“We can’t do anything like that now, though,” said Sahwah. “The foolish things we do wouldn’t have any effect upon him at all.”

“I guess you’re right,” said Migwan with a sigh, after various things had been suggested and immediately abandoned. “But I wish we could do something to rouse him from the dumps he’s fallen into,” she added with a sigh. “It seems as though we Winnebagos ought to be equal to the emergency.”

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“You might read something to him,” said Katherine desperately, after several minutes of hard thinking had sprouted no ideas. “Read him ‘The Hound of the Baskervilles.’ That will gently divert his thoughts. It’s absolutely the biggest thriller that was ever written. Judge Dalrymple bought it on the train once, when he was going from Milwaukee to some little town in Wisconsin, and he got so absorbed in it that he never came to until the train pulled into St. Paul, hundreds of miles beyond his stop. You might

read him one chapter a day and he won't think of dying before he knows how it is coming out. It'll be a sort of Arabian Nights performance."

"Where will I get the book?" asked Migwan.

"I saw it in one of the cases in the library," replied Katherine. "It must have belonged to Mr. Carver's housekeeper, for I'm sure he never owned such a book."

"All right," said Migwan, "let's take it out and tell Justice to read it to Hercules."

Katherine found the book on the library shelf and opened it to a picture she wanted the girls to see. As she turned the pages a letter fell out and dropped to the floor. She stopped to pick it up, and could not help reading the address. It was addressed to Mr. Jasper Carver, Esquire, and had never been opened.

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"Here's a letter for Uncle Jasper that must have come after he died," said Katherine, "for it hasn't been opened." Nyoda came into the room just then, and she handed it to her.

Nyoda looked at the date. "April 12, 1917," she read. "That's the very day Uncle Jasper died. This letter must have come while he lay dead in the house here, and in the confusion somebody put it into that book, where it has stayed all this while. I opened all the other letters that came after his death and took care of the matters they concerned. I hope this isn't a bill—the creditor will think we are poor business people not to reply." She reached for the letter opener and slit the envelope.

Inside was a letter, not a bill, written in a cramped, shaky hand upon coarse notepaper. It was dated from a small town in New York State. Nyoda carried it over to the window and read it:

“Mr. Jasper Carver, Esq.,

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Oakwood, Pa.

Dear Sir:

I take the liberty of writing to you, for you are the only one I can find a trace of who was a friend of the late Dr. Sidney Phillips. I found a card with your name and address on the floor of his room after he left the army post at Ft. Andrews, and to you I am committing the task of clearing his name from a disgrace which has unjustly been fastened upon it. He is dead, and the wrong can never be righted to him, but for the sake of his friends and relatives his memory must not remain dishonored.

This letter is at once an explanation and a confession. I was a Captain of Infantry at Ft. Andrews when Dr. Phillips came there as army surgeon. There was another officer there, a sneaking, underhand sort of chap with whom I was having constant trouble. Upon one occasion he committed a grave breach of military discipline, but managed to throw the blame upon me and I was deprived of my captain's commission and reduced to the ranks, besides doing time in the guard house.

I brooded upon my wrong until I was ready to murder the man who had brought it upon me. At the time of the typhoid epidemic, matters were in bad shape at Ft. Andrews. That was before the days of Red Cross nurses, and many of the boys had to turn in and nurse their comrades. I was detailed to help Dr. Phillips. The man who had ruined me was down with the fever. Ever since I had been reduced to the ranks he had taunted me openly with my disgrace and even as he lay in bed he made insulting remarks when I brought him his medicine. Finally in a mad rage I decided to be revenged upon him once and forever. I put a deadly poison into the dose Dr.

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Phillips had just mixed for him, slipping it in while the doctor was out of the room for a moment. I thought the dose was intended for him alone, but to my horror it was given to a dozen men, and they all died.

The whole country became stirred up about it, and such abuse was hurled at Dr. Phillips as no man ever suffered before. It was supposed that he had carelessly mistaken the poison for another harmless ingredient. I dared not confess that it was I who had done it, for in my case it would mean trial for first degree murder, while with the doctor it was simply a case of accident, and would blow over in time.

The doctor left the Post, a broken-down, ruined man, and died of yellow fever in Cuba not long after.

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I have kept the secret for twenty-five years, suffering tortures of conscience, but not brave enough to confess. Now, however, I am in the last stages of a fatal disease and cannot live a week longer. By the time this reaches you I shall be gone. Take this confession and publish it to the world, that tardy justice may be done the memory of Dr. Phillips. He was innocent of the whole thing. May God forgive me!

GEORGE INGRAM.”

The confession was witnessed by two doctors whose signatures appeared under his.

“He didn’t do it! Tad didn’t do it!”

The amazed cry rang through the library, as the Winnebagos and Nyoda clutched each other convulsively.

“We must bring him back!” said Nyoda, and ran out to the barn to Sherry with the letter in her hand.

An hour later Sherry and Hercules sat drinking strong, hot coffee at the kitchen table while Nyoda hastily packed traveling bags for them. Hercules had forgotten all about dying. When he heard the news in the letter he sprang from bed and began dressing with greater speed than he had ever done in his life. The train for New York went in two hours and he and Sherry must catch it if they hoped to reach the steamer before she sailed. There was no way of reaching Tad by telegraph. They did not know what name he was going under, nor the name of the boat on which he was to sail. The only thing they could do was rush to New York, find out which boat was sailing for South America on the first, go on board and search for Tad. Only Hercules would be able to identify him. Hercules rose to the occasion.

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“We certainly gave Hercules something to make him forget his superstition,” said Katherine, sitting down on the sink to collect her thoughts after the meteoric flight of the two men from the house.

“We certainly did,” said Migwan, trembling with excitement.

A racking cough sounded through the house. “Sh, Sylvia’s worse,” said Migwan, putting her fingers to her lips. “Don’t anybody go near her, or she’ll notice how excited you are. How on earth does Nyoda manage to keep so calm when she’s with her?”

“If Sylvia should get pneumonia—” began Sahwah, and then chocked over the dreadful possibility.

“If they only bring Mr. Phillips back in time,” said Katherine, as if echoing the thing that lay in Sahwah’s thoughts.

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“Don’t say such dreadful things,” said Hinpoha, with starting tears.

“Maybe they won’t be able to find him at all,” said Katherine dubiously.

“They *must*, they *must*,” said Sahwah, with dry lips.

“They *must*,” echoed the others, and hardly daring to think, they entered upon the trying period of waiting.

CHAPTER XVII

WAITING

“How is Sylvia?” Katherine’s voice was husky with anxiety.

Nyoda looked grave over the tray she was carrying down to the kitchen. “No better yet; a little worse this morning, if anything. Her fever has gone up one degree during the night and she is coughing more than ever.”

“Is it going to be pneumonia?” asked Katherine steadily, her eyes searching Nyoda’s face.

“Not if I can help it,” replied Nyoda, in a tone of grim determination, the light of battle sparkling in her eyes. Nevertheless, there was a note of worry in her voice that struck cold fear into Katherine’s heart, stoutly optimistic as she was. What if Sylvia should die before her father came back? The other Winnebagos, clustering around Nyoda to hear the latest news from Sylvia’s bedside, stood hushed and solemn. Nyoda set the tray down on the table and leaned wearily against the door, her eyes heavy from lack of sleep. Instantly Migwan was at her side, all solicitude.

“Go, lie down and sleep awhile, Nyoda,” she urged. “You’ve been up nearly all night. I can look after Sylvia for a few hours—I know how. Go to bed now and we’ll bring some breakfast up to you, and then you can go to sleep.” Putting her arm around Nyoda she led her upstairs and tucked her into bed, smoothing the covers over her with gentle, motherly hands, while the girls below prepared a dainty breakfast tray.

“Nice—child!” murmured Nyoda, from the depths of her pillow. “Nice—old—Migwan! Always—taking—care—of—someone!” Her voice trailed off in a tired whisper, and by the time the breakfast tray arrived she was sound asleep.

Sylvia also slept most of the time that Migwan watched beside her, a fitful slumber broken by many coughing spells and intervals of difficult breathing. Never had Sylvia seemed so beautiful and so princesslike to Migwan as when she lay there sleeping in the big four-poster bed, her shining curls spread out on the pillow and her fever-flushed cheeks glowing like roses. Lying there so still, with her delicate little white hand resting on top of the coverlet, she brought to Migwan’s mind Goethe’s description of the beautiful, dead Mignon, in whom the vivid tints of life had been counterfeited by skillful hands. To Migwan’s lively imagination it seemed that Sylvia was another Mignon, this child of lofty birth and breeding also cast by accident among humble surroundings, and singing her way into the hearts of people. Would it be with her as it had been with Mignon; would she never be reunited in life with her own people? The resemblance between the two lives struck Migwan as a prophecy and her heart chilled with the conviction that Sylvia was going to die. Tears stole down her cheek as she saw, in her mind’s eye, the father coming in just too late, and their beautiful, radiant Sylvia lying cold and still, her joyful song forever hushed.

Migwan’s melancholy mood lasted all morning, even after Nyoda came back and sent her out of the sick-room, and she sat staring into the library fire in gloomy silence, quite unlike her busy, cheery self. The day crept by on leaden feet. The hands of the clock seemed to be suffering from paralysis; they stayed so long in one spot. Ordinarily clock hands at Carver House went whirling around their dials like pinwheels, and the chimes were continually striking the hour. Now each separate minute seemed to have brought its knitting and come to stay.

“No word from Sherry and Hercules yet!” sighed Sahwah impatiently, as the whistles blew half past eleven.

“Give them a chance,” said Katherine, her voice proceeding in muffled tones from the depths of the music cabinet, which, in order to pass away the time, she had undertaken to set to rights.

“They’ve had plenty of chance by this time to get down on board the boat,” returned Sahwah, getting up from her chair and pacing restlessly up and down the room. Sahwah was not equipped by nature to bear suspense calmly; under the stress of inaction she threatened to fly to pieces.

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Katherine looked up with a faint smile from the heaps of sheet music lying on the floor around her.

“Come and help me sort this music,” she advised mildly, “it’ll settle your mind somewhat, besides giving me a lift. I’m afraid I’ve bitten off more than I can chew. This is one grand mess of pieces without covers and covers without pieces. You might get all the covers in order for me.”

Sahwah gazed without enthusiasm upon the littered floor. “Sort music—ugh!” she said, with a grimace and a disgusted shrug of her shoulders. She picked her way to the other end of the library and stood staring restlessly out of the window.

It was a dreary, dull day. The Christmas snow had vanished in a thaw, and a chilly rain beat against the window panes with a dismal, melancholy sound. The three boys fidgeted from one end of the house to the other, but could not get up enough steam to go out for a hike. Slim and the Captain drummed chopsticks on the piano, and Justice tried to keep up with them on the harp, until Migwan ordered them to be quiet so Sylvia could sleep, after which they sat in preternatural silence before the library fire, listlessly turning over the pages of magazines which they did not even pretend to read. The

atmosphere of the house got so on everybody's nerves that the snapping of a log in the fireplace almost caused a panic.

The clock struck twelve, and Migwan, rousing herself from her preoccupation, went out into the kitchen to prepare lunch, aided by Gladys and Hinpoha, while Sahwah continued to pace the floor and Katherine went on nervously fitting covers to pieces and pieces to covers, her ear ever on the alert for the sound of the telephone bell. Justice and Slim and the Captain, grown weary of their own company, trooped out into the kitchen after the girls, declaring *they* were going to get lunch, and it was not long before the inevitable reaction had set in, and pent-up spirits began to find vent in irrepressible hilarity.

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Protests were useless. In vain Migwan flourished her big iron spoon and ordered them out. Justice calmly took her apron and cap away from her and announced that *he* was going to be Chief Cook. Tying the apron around him wrong side out, and setting the cap backward on his head, he held the spoon aloft like a Roman short-sword, and striking an attitude in imitation of Spartacus addressing the Gladiators, he declaimed feelingly:

“Ye call me *Chef*, and ye do well to call him *Chef*
Who for seven long years has camped in summertime,
And made his coffee out of rain when there was no spring
water handy,
And mixed his biscuits in the wash-basin,
Because the baking-pan no longer was.

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But I was not always thus, an unhired butcher,
A savage *Chef* of still more savage menus——”

The teakettle suddenly boiled over with a loud hissing and sizzling, and the impassioned orator jumped as though he had been shot; then, collecting himself, he rushed over and picked

the kettle from the stove and stood holding it in his hand, uncertain what to do with it.

“Set it down on the back of the stove!” commanded Migwan. “A great cook you are! Even Slim would know enough to do that!”

“Thanks for the implied compliment,” said Slim stiffly.

“Slim ought to be Chief Cook,” said the Captain. “He’s fat. Chief cooks are always fat.”

“Right you are!” cried Justice, taking off the apron and tying it around Slim as far as it would go.

“But I can’t cook!” protested Slim.

“That doesn’t make any difference,” replied Justice. “You look the part, and that’s all that’s needed. Looks are everything, these days.”

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He perched the cap rakishly on top of Slim’s head and stood off a little distance to eye the effect critically.

“Nobody could tell the difference between you and the Chef of the Waldorf,” was his verdict.

Indeed, Slim, with his full moon face shining out under the cap, and the apron tied around his extensive waistline, looked just like the pictured cooks in the spaghetti advertisements.

“Isn’t he the perfect Chef, though?” continued Justice admiringly. “He must have been born with an iron spoon in his hand, instead of a gold one in his mouth.” Then, turning to Slim and bowing low before him, he chanted solemnly, “Go forth, go forth, Lars Porsena, go forth, beloved of heaven! All the other cooks will drown themselves in their soup kettles in despair when they see you coming. All hail the Chief Cook!”

“But I can’t cook!” repeated Slim helplessly.

“You don’t have to,” Justice reassured him. “Chief Cooks don’t have to cook; they just direct the others. Behold, we stand ready to obey your lightest command.”

“All right,” said Slim, “suppose you pare the potatoes.”

“Ask me anything but that!” Justice begged him. “I never get the eyes cut out, and then when they’re on my plate they look up at me reproachfully, like this——”

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Justice screwed up his face and rolled his eyes into a grimace that convulsed the girls.

“No, you pare the potatoes, Slim,” he continued. “The Chief Cook always pares the potatoes himself. It’s too delicate a job to entrust to a subordinate.”

Slim had his mouth open to protest, and Sahwah and Katherine, who had just wandered out into the kitchen, were in a gale of merriment over Slim’s costume, when the doorbell rang and a messengerboy passed in a telegram.

They all pressed around eagerly while Katherine read it. It was from Sherry:

“South America boat sailed yesterday. Dr. Phillips gone. Can get no clue. Coming home to-night.”

A long, tragic “Oh-h-h!” from Hinpoha broke the stricken silence which had fallen on the group at the reading of the message.

“Tough luck,” said the Captain feelingly, and Justice repeated, “Tough luck,” like an echo.

The Winnebagos glanced uncertainly toward the stairway and looked at each other inquiringly.

“Somebody go up and call Nyoda,” said Katherine.

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Just at that moment the door of Sylvia’s room opened and Nyoda came running downstairs with light, swift footsteps, her face wreathed in smiles.

“Sylvia’s better,” she called, before she was halfway down. “The fever left her while she was sleeping, and her temperature is normal. The danger of pneumonia is over. I’m so relieved.” She skipped down the last of the stairs like a young girl.

Then she caught sight of the telegram in Katherine’s hand, and sensed the atmosphere of depression that prevailed in the lower hall. She knew the truth before a word was spoken, and composed herself to meet it.

“They were too late?” she said quietly, as she joined the group, and held out her hand for the bit of yellow paper.

“Poor Sylvia!” she exclaimed huskily. “She would soon be well enough to hear the news—and now there is nothing to tell her. If we had only found that letter a day sooner!”

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CHAPTER XVIII

KATHERINE GOES TO THE CITY

“Does anyone want to go in to the city this afternoon?” asked Nyoda, as they rose from luncheon. It had been a rather silent, dispirited meal, and quickly gotten over with. “I had planned to go in and take a few things to Mrs. Deane to-day, but now it will be impossible for me to get away. Sylvia has been fretting about her aunt and I think someone ought to go.”

“I’ll go,” said Katherine readily, her spirits rising at this prospect of action. The suspense of the morning, ending in such a disappointment, had begun to react upon her in a fit of the blues. Sahwah and Hinpoha, with Slim and the Captain, had planned during luncheon to go roller-skating that afternoon, but as Katherine could not roller-skate the plan held no attraction for her. Justice had promised Sherry that he would go over the lighting system on his car while he was away and was planning to spend the whole afternoon in the garage; Migwan was going to sit with Sylvia to give Nyoda a chance to rest; and Gladys had a sore throat which made her disinclined to talk. Taking it by and large, Katherine had anticipated a rather dismal afternoon, a prospect which was pleasantly altered by Nyoda’s request.

“You can make the two o’clock train if you start immediately,” continued Nyoda, “and the five-fifteen will bring you back in time for dinner. I have the things for Mrs. Deane all ready.”

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Katherine rose with alacrity and put on her hat and coat. “Any errands while I am in town?” she asked, hunting for her

umbrella in the stair closet.

“None that I can think of,” replied Nyoda, after wrinkling her brow for a moment, “unless you want to stop at the jeweller’s and get my watch. It’s been there for several weeks, being regulated.”

“All right,” said Katherine, writing down the name of the jeweller in her memorandum book. “You’ll notice I’m not trusting my memory this time,” she remarked laughingly.

“I’ll take the five-fifteen train back,” she called over her shoulder as she went out of the front door.

“Be careful how you hold that package!” Nyoda called warningly after her. “There’s a glass of jelly in it that’ll upset!”

Gingerly holding the package by the string, Katherine picked her way through the rapidly widening puddles on the sidewalks to the station. By some miracle of good luck the package was still right side up when she arrived at the hospital, and she breathed an audible sigh of relief when it was at last safely out of her hands.

She found Mrs. Deane a frail, kindly-faced woman, bearing her discomfort cheerfully, but, nevertheless, lonesome in this strange hospital ward and very grateful for any attention shown her. Katherine began, as she described it, to “express her sympathy quietly and in a ladylike manner,” and ended up by delivering her famous “Wimmen’s Rights” speech for the benefit of the whole ward. She finally escaped, after her sixth encore, and fetched up breathless on the sidewalk, only to discover that she had left her umbrella behind, and before she retrieved it she had to give her speech all over again, for the benefit of an old lady who had been asleep during the first performance.

There still being three-quarters of an hour before train time after she had called at the jewellers for Nyoda's watch, Katherine dropped into a smart little tea-room to while away the intervening moments with a cup of tea and a dish of her favorite shrimp salad. As she nibbled leisurely at a dainty round of brown bread and idly watched the throngs coming and going at the tables around her, a shrill cry of delight suddenly rang out above the hum of voices and the clatter of dishes.

“Katherine! Katherine Adams!”

Katherine looked up to see an animated little figure in a beaver coat and fur hat coming toward her through the crowd.

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“Katherine Adams!” repeated the voice, “don't you know me?”

“Why—Veronica! Veronica Lehar!” gasped Katherine in amazement. “What are you doing here? I thought you were in New York.” She caught the little brown-gloved hands in her own big ones and squeezed them until Veronica winced.

“Katherine! Dear old K! How I've missed you!” Veronica cried rapturously, and drawing her hands from Katherine's grip she flung her arms impulsively around her neck, regardless of the curious stares of the onlookers.

“Let them stare!” she murmured stoutly, seeing Katherine's face flush with embarrassment as she encountered the quizzical gaze of a keen-eyed young man at the next table. “If they hadn't seen their beloved K for nearly two years they'd want to hug her, too.”

She released Katherine after a final squeeze, and stood staring at her with a puzzled expression on her vivacious face.

“What’s the matter?” asked Katherine wonderingly. “Have I got something on wrong-side before?”

“That’s just what *is* the matter,” replied Veronica, her bewilderment also manifesting itself in her tone. “You *haven’t* anything on wrong-side before. You don’t look natural. What has happened to you?”

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“Nothing,” replied Katherine, laughing, “and—everything. I’ve just learned that clothes *do* matter, after all.”

“Why, Katherine Adams, you’re perfectly stunning!” exclaimed Veronica in sincere admiration. “That shade of blue in your dress—it was simply *made* for you.”

“I just happened to get it by accident,” said Katherine deprecatingly, almost sheepishly, yet thrilled through and through with pleasure at Veronica’s words of appreciation. It was no small triumph to be admired by Veronica, whose highly artistic nature made her extremely critical of people’s appearance.

“How I used to make your artistic eye water!” said Katherine laughingly. “It’s a wonder you stood me as well as you did.”

“It was not I who had to ‘stand’ you, but you who had to ‘stand’ me,” said Veronica seriously. “In spite of your loose ends you were—what do you call it? ‘all wool and a yard wide,’ but I was the original prune.” Veronica, while a perfect master of literary English, still faltered deliciously over slang phrases.

Katherine, as usual, steered away from the subject of Veronica’s former attitude toward her. When a thing was over and done with, Katherine argued, there was no use of dragging it out into the light again.

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“You haven’t told me yet how you happen to be here in this tea-room this afternoon,” she said, by way of changing the subject, “when you told us, over your own signature, that you would have to stay in New York all this week. What do you mean,” she finished with mock gravity, “by deceiving us so?”

“I have to play at a concert here in town to-night,” explained Veronica. “It will be necessary for me to be back at the Conservatory to-morrow, and am returning by a late train to-night. I didn’t know about it when I wrote to Nyoda, or I should have insisted on her coming in for the concert and bringing all the girls along. It’s an emergency case; I’m just filling in on the program in place of a ’cello soloist who was taken suddenly ill with influenza. The concert managers sent a hurry call to Martini last night, asking him to send over the first student who happened to be handy, and as I happened to be taking a lesson from Martini at the time, I was the lucky one. I just came over this afternoon.”

Veronica modestly suppressed the fact that it had been the great Martini himself who had been urgently requested to play at the concert, but having a previous engagement, had chosen her, out of the whole Conservatory, to play in his stead.

“My aunt is here with me,” continued Veronica. “She’s over at that table in the far corner behind that palm. I suppose she is wondering what has become of me by this time. When I saw you over here I just jumped up and ran off without a word of explanation. She’s probably eaten up my nut rolls by this time, too; they were just being served when I rushed away. Come on over and see her.”

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Katherine followed Veronica through the crowded room to the far corner, where, at a little table beneath a softly shaded wall lamp Veronica’s aunt, Mrs. Lehar, sat placidly sipping tea and eating cakes. She did not recognize Katherine at first, never having seen her otherwise than with clothes awry and hair tumbling down over her eyes, and Katherine was secretly

amused at the gentle lady's look of astonishment upon being told who it was.

"She did eat my rolls, after all," said Veronica to Katherine. "I knew she would. But I'm glad she did; I am in far too exalted a mood for nut rolls now. Nothing but nectar and ambrosia will do to celebrate our meeting. Look and see if there's any nectar and ambrosia on your menu card, will you, Katherine dear? There doesn't seem to be any on mine."

"None here, either," reported Katherine, after gravely reading her card through.

"Then let's compromise on lobster croquettes," said Veronica. "I never eat them ordinarily, but I feel as though I could eat a dozen to celebrate this occasion."

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"Be careful what you eat, now," warned her aunt. "It would be rather awkward if you were to be taken with an attack of acute indigestion just when you are due to appear on the platform."

"Never fear!" laughed Veronica. "I am so transported over meeting Katherine that nothing could give me indigestion now. What an inspiration I shall have to play to-night!"

Then, taking Katherine's hand, she said coaxingly, "You will come and hear me play, won't you?"

"I'm afraid I can't," replied Katherine regretfully. "I'm due to go back on the five-fifteen train."

"O, but you *must* come!" cried Veronica pleadingly. "I'll be so miserable if you don't that I sha'n't be able to play at all. You wouldn't want me to spoil the concert on your account, would you, Katherine dear? There is a later train you can go home on just as well, isn't there?"

“There is one at ten-forty-five,” replied Katherine, consulting the time-table which she carried in her hand bag.

“You can hear me play, and make that train, too,” said Veronica eagerly. “My numbers come in the early part of the program, all but one. If you went out after I had played my first group you could make your train beautifully. Do telephone Nyoda that you are going to stay over, and have her send somebody down to meet you at the later train. That Justice person——” she said mischievously, finishing with an expressive movement of her eyebrows.

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Katherine finally yielded to her pleading, and telephoned Nyoda that she was going to stay in town until the ten-forty-five, which so delighted Veronica that she ordered another croquette all the way around to celebrate the happy circumstance.

“*Do* be careful, dear,” warned her aunt a second time. “Those croquettes are distressingly rich. What *would* happen if you were to be taken ill to-night?”

Veronica smiled serenely. “I’m not going to be taken ill to-night, aunty dear,” she replied. “I’m going to be like Katherine, who can eat forty lobster croquettes without getting sick.”

“Remember the mixtures we used to cook up in the House of the Open Door?” she asked, turning to Katherine. “They were lots worse than lobster croquettes, if the plain truth were known. You wouldn’t worry at all, aunty, dear, if you knew what we used to eat at those spreads without damaging ourselves!”

Katherine was completely carried away by Veronica’s vivaciousness and temperamental whimsies. If she had admired the fiery little Hungarian in the days of the House of the Open Door, she was now absolutely enslaved by her. To

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plain, matter-of-fact Katherine, Veronica, with her artistic temperament, was a creature from another world, inspiring a certain amount of awed wonder, as well as admiring affection.

“What are you going to play at the concert to-night?” Katherine asked respectfully.

Veronica’s eyes began to glow, and she pushed aside her plate, leaving the second croquette to grow cold while she spoke animatedly upon the subject that lay ever nearest her heart.

“I’m going to play a cycle from Nágár, a Roumanian Gypsy composer,” she replied. “One of the pieces is the most wonderful thing; it’s called ‘The Whirlwind.’ It fairly carries you away with its rush and movement, until you want to fly, and shout, and go sailing away on the wings of the wind. Another one is named ‘Fata Morgana.’ You know that’s what people call the mirage that we can see out on the steppes—the open plains—of Hungary.”

“Yes?” murmured Katherine in a tone of eager interest. She loved to hear Veronica tell tales of her homeland.

“Many a time I have seen it,” continued Veronica, her eyes sparkling with a dreamy, far-off light, “a beautiful city standing out clear and fair against the horizon; and have gone forth to find it, only to see it vanish into the hot, quivering air, and to find myself lost out on the wide, lonely steppe.”

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Katherine listened, fascinated, while Veronica told stories of the curious mirage that lured and mocked the dwellers on the lonely steppes of her native land, and so deep was her absorption that she absent-mindedly ate up Veronica’s croquette while she listened, to the infinite amusement of Mrs. Lehar.

“Aren’t you going to play any of your own compositions?” asked Katherine, when Veronica had finished talking about

the Nágár cycle.

“Not as a regular number,” replied Veronica, taking up her fork to finish her croquette, and deciding that she must already have eaten it, since her plate was empty. “If, by any chance, I should be encored, I shall play a little piece of my own that I have named ‘Fire Dreams,’ and dedicated to the Winnebagos. I wrote it one night after a ceremonial meeting out in the woods where we danced around the fire and then sat down in a circle to watch it burn itself away to embers. We all told our dreams for the future that night, don’t you remember? I have woven everything together in my piece—the tall pines towering up to the sky; the stars peering through the branches; the wind fiddling through the leaves, and the river lapping on the stones below; with the firelight waving and flickering, and coaxing us to tell our dreams. I love to play it, because it brings back that scene so vividly; that and all the other beautiful times we had around the camp fire.”

Katherine gazed at Veronica in speechless admiration. With absolutely no musical ability herself, it seemed to her that anyone who could compose music was a child of the gods. Veronica smiled back frankly into Katherine’s admiring eyes, and gave her hand a fond squeeze.

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“Now, tell me about Carver House and all the dear people there,” she said, settling herself comfortably in her chair and propping her elbows on the table. “We still have an hour to spare. Aunty won’t mind if we talk about our own affairs, will you, aunty? Now, Katherine, take a long breath and begin.”

The hour was up before Katherine was half way through telling the exciting things that had happened at Carver House in the past week, and with a sigh Veronica rose from the table and drew on her gloves.

“Come,” she said regretfully, “we’ll have to be starting. I have to go over to the hotel first and get my violin, and the

auditorium where I am to play is some distance out.”

As they stepped from the tea-room into the street Katherine paused to buy Veronica a huge bunch of violets at a little stand just inside the entrance of the tall building next door. Not having enough money in her change-purse to pay for them, she took a roll of bills from a bill-fold in her inner pocket, and, taking five dollars from the roll, returned it to its place of safety in the lining of her coat. Lounging against the glass counter beside her was a slender, long-fingered man, whose gaze suddenly became concentrated when the roll of bills made its appearance. Katherine noticed his look of absorbed interest and a little thrill of uneasiness prickled along her spine. She looked sharply at this inquisitive stranger, fixing in her mind the details of his appearance. He wore a long, light-colored overcoat and a visor cap pulled down over his eyes, which were small and dark, and set close together in his thin, sallow face, giving him a peculiar, ratlike expression. Katherine buttoned her coat carefully over the bill-fold and hastily rejoined Veronica and Mrs. Lehar in the street outside, conscious that the man’s eyes were still upon her and that he had followed her out of the shop. To her relief, Mrs. Lehar hailed a taxicab, and in a moment more they were being whirled rapidly away from the scene.

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An hour later Katherine found herself sitting in state in one of the front boxes of a crowded auditorium, impatiently waiting for the soprano soloist to finish a lengthy operatic aria and yield her place to Veronica. The soloist bowed her way out at last, and Veronica, looking like a very slender little child in contrast to the massive singer, tripped out on the stage with her violin under her arm, just as she had always carried it around in the House of the Open Door.

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“She isn’t a bit scared!” was Katherine’s admiring thought.

Nodding brightly to the audience, Veronica laid her bow across the strings with that odd little caressing gesture that

Katherine remembered so well, and began to play her long cycle from memory.

Strange images flitted through Katherine's brain as she listened; the lighted stage faded from sight, and in its place there stretched a wide, grassy plain, shimmering in the sunlight and flecked with racing cloud shadows, far ahead, gleaming clear against the gray-blue horizon, rose the white towers and spires of a fair city, which seemed to call to her in friendly invitation, awakening in her an irresistible longing to travel toward it and behold its wonders at near hand. But ever as she approached it receded into the distance, vanishing at last in the twinkling of an eye, and leaving her alone in the heart of a wild, desolate moor upon which darkness was swiftly falling. She started in affright at the long, eerie cry of a nightbird; the deepening shadows were filled with fearful, unnamable terrors. Her head reeled; the strength went out from her limbs, and with icy hands pressed tightly over her eyes to shut out the menacing shadow-shapes, she sank shuddering to the ground. She was roused by the sound of thunder, and opening her eyes found the lonely moor vanished, and in its place the brightly lighted stage, while the thunder which echoed in her ears resolved itself into a tumult of hand-clapping.

Katherine rubbed her eyes and sat up straight. "What was that piece she just played?" she asked in a whisper.

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"That was the 'Fata Morgana,'" replied Mrs. Lehar.

It was several minutes after ten o'clock when Veronica finished her last encore, and Katherine, glancing at her watch, hastily reached for her coat, and leaving a goodnight message for Veronica with Mrs. Lehar, started from the auditorium.

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CHAPTER XIX

THE FURTHER ADVENTURES OF KATHERINE

The curious spell of the “Fata Morgana” descended upon Katherine again as she emerged from the concert hall and made her way through a poorly lighted side street toward the main avenue where the street cars passed. The long, waving shadows seemed to clutch at her ankles as she walked; strange noises sounded in her ears; the trees that bordered the curb left their places and began to move toward her with a grotesque, circling motion, while the distant glare of light toward which she was traveling began to recede until it was a mere twinkling speck, miles away in the distance. Again her strength forsook her, and with violently trembling hands she grasped an iron fence railing and clung desperately to keep herself from falling. The touch of the cold metal sent a little shock tingling through her; she braced herself and looked steadily at the spectres crowding about her. The trees had gone back into their places; the shadows no longer seemed to be crouching ready to spring at her.

“Silly!” exclaimed Katherine, though her teeth still chattered.

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She let go of the fence and started on; immediately the trees resumed their fantastic circling, and again her knees threatened to double under her. Then she realized that it was not the “Fata Morgana” that held her in thrall, but the extra lobster croquette. The disastrous fate which Mrs. Lehar had predicted would overtake Veronica had befallen her instead—she was in the throes of acute indigestion! O, if only she had not eaten that second croquette! Lobster never agreed with her; she should have known better than to eat it, especially

after she had just eaten shrimp salad. Why hadn't she had the sense to refuse that second one? (Katherine was still unaware that she had eaten, not two, but three of the deadly things, a circumstance which had undoubtedly saved Veronica from a like fate.)

She clung dizzily to the fence for a few moments, and then, feeling somewhat relieved by the cold wind blowing strongly against her face, struck out once more for the carline. A few steps convinced her that she could not make it; the world was whirling around her, and her limbs refused to obey her will. A little farther up the street, where the fence ended, the arched entrance-way into a church offered a resting-place and shelter against the high wind and beating rain. Stumbling up the steps, she sank down on the stone floor, and, pressing her cold hand against her throbbing temples, leaned weakly against the wall of her little sanctuary.

Weariness overcame her and she sank gradually into a doze, from which she wakened with a start at the sound of a steeple clock chiming. Boom! Boom! Boom! The clanging tones echoed through the narrow street. Katherine sat up hastily and stared around her in bewilderment for a moment; then recollected herself and rose cautiously to her feet. To her infinite relief she found that her knees no longer had any inclination to knock together; the feeling of illness had passed. Taking a deep breath, and setting her hat straight on her head, she walked steadily down the steps and out upon the street once more. The clock which had wakened her so rudely was in the steeple just above her and Katherine gave a gasp of dismay when she saw the time. A quarter to eleven! She should be down at the station now, taking the ten-forty-five train back to Oakwood. What had happened? Could she possibly have fallen asleep in that cozy little entrance way? Why had she not heard the clock strike the half hour? How worried Nyoda would be when she did not come in on that ten-forty-five train! she thought in sudden panic. She must

hasten down to the station immediately and telephone Nyoda that she had missed that train, but would come on the next.

Was there another train to-night? she wondered, in fresh panic. Ten-forty-five sounded like the last local. She stopped under a street light for the purpose of consulting her timetable, and then she made a discovery which drove the matter of time-tables out of her head entirely, and brought the weakness back to her knees in full force, namely, the discovery that she no longer carried her handbag. Her heart almost stopped beating, for in that handbag was Nyoda's watch—the little jewelled watch Sherry had given her for an engagement present. Aside from its intrinsic value, which was considerable, Nyoda cherished that watch above all her other possessions.

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She must have left the bag in the entrance-way where she had stopped to rest, Katherine decided, and, forgetting all about the weakness of a half hour ago, she ran swiftly across the street and up the steps of the church. She felt over every inch of the floor in the darkness, but the bag was not there.

Had she brought it with her out of the auditorium? Yes, because she had dropped it in the lobby, and in stooping to pick it up had felt the first touch of that dizziness which had overpowered her so soon afterward. She must have lost it in the street. She retraced her steps back to the concert hall, now dark and deserted, carefully searching all the way. Her search, however, was unavailing; and with a sinking feeling she realized that either someone had picked it up, or else she had been deliberately robbed while she slept; in either event, the bag was gone, and with it Nyoda's watch.

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It seemed to her that she could never go home and tell Nyoda that it was lost; she wished the earth would open up and swallow her where she stood, thus releasing her, at one stroke, from her distressful position. She bitterly reproached herself for having stayed in town that evening,—if she had gone home on the five-fifteen train this wouldn't have happened. Nyoda had given her precious watch into her keeping, trusting her to bring it back safely, and she had betrayed that trust; had proved herself unreliable. Nyoda would never trust her with anything valuable again; would never send her on another errand. True, it was not exactly her fault that she had lost the bag; but if she had not been foolish enough to eat all those lobster croquettes after eating shrimp salad she would not have had any dizzy spell to distract her attention from her responsibility.

For fully five minutes she stood still and called herself every hard name she could think of, and ended up by making an emphatic resolution in regard to the future attitude toward lobster croquettes. In the meantime, she decided, she had better notify the police about the watch. A block ahead of her the green and blue lights of a drug store shone blurred but unmistakable through the misty atmosphere, and she splashed her way toward it, only to find on arriving that the place was closed. She walked several more blocks, searching either for

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an open drug store where she could telephone, or a corner policeman, and finding neither. A street clock pointed to eleven, and from somewhere in the darkness behind her came the subdued tone of the steeple chime.

The rain had stopped now, and it was growing colder; the puddles on the sidewalk began to be filmed over with ice. The wind took on a cutting edge and came sallying forth in great gusts, shrieking along the telephone wires and setting the electric arc lights overhead swaying wildly back and forth, until the rapidly shifting lights and shadows below gave the street the look of a tossing lake. Now billowing out like a sail, now wrapping itself determinedly around her ankles, Katherine's long coat began to make walking a difficult proceeding. Then, without warning, the arc lights suddenly went out, plunging the world into utter blackness. With that, Katherine abandoned her intention of searching for a telephone and decided to get down to her train as fast as she could. With every other step she went crashing through a thin coating of ice into a puddle, for in the darkness it was impossible to see where she was going, and once she tripped over an uneven edge of flagging and went sprawling on her hands and knees. Thereafter, she felt her way, like a blind person, with the point of her umbrella.

It was gradually borne in upon Katherine, as she floundered on through the puddles, that she was not retracing her steps toward the carline, but was proceeding in a new and entirely unknown direction. The store fronts which loomed indistinctly through the darkness were not the same ones she had passed before; surely those others had not been so shabby and disreputable looking. But so intense was the blackness of the night that she could not be sure about anything; she might be on the right track after all. Undoubtedly the next turn would bring her back to the lighted drug store, and from that point she could easily locate herself. No green and blue lights appeared when she turned the next corner, however; as far as

she could see, there was only gloom in the distance. Katherine tried street after street with no better success; they all led endlessly on into darkness. She met no one from whom she dared ask the way; for there was only an occasional passer-by, and he usually looked tipsy. It was evidently a factory district Katherine had wandered into, for all around her were great dark buildings with high chimneys, long, dim warehouses, box cars standing on sidings, silent, gloomy freight sheds; there seemed to be no end of them anywhere; in all directions they stretched out, like Banquo's descendents, apparently to the crack of doom. The nightmare of the "Fata Morgana" had come true, and she was lost in the wilderness of a strange city.

For a long time Katherine had not heard the rumble of a street car, and this phenomenon finally became so noticeable that she realized what must have happened—the traction power had been cut off as well as the lighting current. With that realization her last hope of getting down to the station went glimmering—unless she could get a taxicab. But where was one to find a taxicab in this district? A faint light gleaming in the window of a small shop that crouched between two tall factories lured Katherine on with the hope that here was a telephone, or at least someone about who could tell her the way. She hastened toward it, but her heart turned to water within her when she saw that the lettering on the window pane was Chinese. More than anything else in the whole universe, Katherine feared a Chinaman; she was so afraid of the little yellow men that even in broad daylight she could never go by a Chinese laundry without holding her breath and shuddering. Even the picture of a Chinaman gave her the creeps. When she discovered that she was in a Chinese neighborhood after eleven o'clock at night, with the street lamps all out, a hoarse cry of terror broke involuntarily from her lips, and she began to run blindly, she knew not where, penetrating deeper and deeper into that jungle of factories which flanks the railroad on both sides for miles.

Out of breath finally, she came to a stop, and for a few moments stood gasping, with a hand to her side. Not far ahead of her a light from a building shone across the darkness of the street, and loud sounds of revelry coming from the direction of the light told her that the place was a saloon. She stood still for another moment, trying to get up courage to pass it; decided at last that with Chinamen in the other direction it was the lesser of two evils, and walked on, praying fervently that none of the revellers inside would come out at the moment she was going by. She had hardly gone a few steps when a figure appeared on the lighted sidewalk in front of the place with a suddenness which left no doubt of his having come from within. In the bright glare Katherine recognized the long light coat and visor cap of the man who had stood beside her that evening in the flower shop where she had purchased Veronica's violets, and who had looked with such a covetous eye upon the roll of bills she had taken from her inside coat pocket. The bills were still there, and it seemed to her now that they made a very telltale bulge over her right breast. The man was coming toward her; in a few minutes he would see and recognize her, and then——

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Katherine darted into an alleyway which opened near her, and on through a half-open gate in a low, solid wooden fence, and crouching there behind the fence in the darkness, she waited until the footsteps had gone past,—creak, creak, creakety-creak, with a rhythmic squeaking of shoes. Not until the sound had died away completely did she venture forth from her hiding place, and then she stood perfectly still and looked cautiously about her in every direction before she made a move to proceed. With the knowledge that the danger had passed, her feeling of panic began to leave her, and her native coolness began to assert itself. She took a careful stock of her situation and tried to think up a way to escape from her predicament. That she was hopelessly lost in this wilderness of streets whose names meant nothing to her, even if she had been able to see the sign boards, she realized full well; instinct

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warned her not to betray her situation to anyone she might meet in this neighborhood—providing she met any one, for the wind seemed to have blown all pedestrians off the streets; and the lateness of the hour made it extremely improbable that she would find a telephone. She stood on one leg in the storklike attitude which always indicated deep thought with her, and pondered all the phases of her dilemma with the calm deliberation which invariably came to her in moments of great stress. “The only time Katherine is composed,” Sahwah had said once, “is when she is in a pickle.” And if Katherine was now in the biggest pickle she had ever experienced, by the same token her brain had never worked so coolly and logically before.

“When lost in the woods,” she said to herself, going over in her mind her knowledge of woodcraft, “the first thing to do is to climb a tree and get your bearings. That’s all right for the woods, but there aren’t any trees here to climb. I might climb a telegraph pole,” she thought whimsically, as her eye fell upon one nearby, “and see if I can locate myself. No, that wouldn’t do, either, for the whole city is dark, and I couldn’t see anything if I did get up. So much for rule number one.

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“Now for rule number two. ‘Establish your directions by observing and reading the signs of nature. Moss always grows on the north side of trees.’ Hm. Trees again, and telegraph poles won’t do as substitutes this time. Moss doesn’t grow on the north side of telegraph poles. There isn’t any difference between the north side of a telegraph pole and any other——”

Katherine’s train of thought was suddenly interrupted by her glance resting on the pole in question. One side of it, she could see in the light from the saloon, was glazed with ice where the driving rain had frozen in the chill wind. That wind was now coming from every direction—north, south, east and west—at once, and it was therefore impossible to judge from the whirling gusts which was north; but earlier in the evening,

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when the rain was falling, the wind had blown steadily from the north. Accordingly, the strip of ice on those poles carried the very same message as the moss on the trees in the woods. Katherine exclaimed aloud in delight at her discovery. In a twinkling she had her bearings.

“North, south, east, west,” she said triumphantly, pointing in the four respective directions. “Not a bad piece of scouting, that. What’s the difference, whether it’s moss or ice?—it’s the same principle. Talk about your *pole* stars!

“I believe I know approximately where I am,” she continued, her brain keeping up its logical working. “We turned south from B—— Avenue to go to the Music Hall, I remember hearing Veronica say so; therefore, not yet having come to B—— Avenue in my wanderings, I must still be on the south side of it, and by going due north will come to it eventually. The way is as plain as the nose on your face; just follow the ice on the telegraph poles. I can feel it in places where it’s too dark to see. All aboard for B—— Avenue!”

Katherine set off as fast as she could go through the darkness, whistling in her relief, and confidently keeping her feet pointed toward the north. As if acting upon the principle that the gods help them who help themselves, the street lights came on again just at that moment, showing up the corners and crossings, and making progress very much easier. She had gone some half dozen blocks, and was once more passing the long row of gloomy, windowless warehouses which she remembered having seen before, when it became apparent to her alert senses that she was being followed. For the last two or three blocks she had heard the sound of a footfall behind her, turning the same corners she had turned, taking the same short-cut she had taken through a factory yard, and gradually drawing nearer. “Creak, creak, creakety-creak!” Through the still night air it sounded with startling distinctness; the same squeaking footfall that had passed her ten minutes before,

when she had crouched, with wildly beating heart, behind the fence in the dark alley. Filled with prophetic apprehension, she turned and looked around, and in the light of a street lamp several hundred yards behind her saw the figure that had loomed so large in her fears all evening. It required no second glance to recognize the long, light overcoat and the visor cap drawn low over the eyes. For an instant, Katherine's feeling of alarm held her rooted to the spot, even while she noticed that the man had increased his speed and the distance between them was rapidly lessening; then the power of locomotion came back with a rush and she began to run. Her worst fears were confirmed when she heard the man behind her start to run also.

Katherine doubled her speed and fled like a deer, slipping wildly over the icy sidewalk and expecting every minute to fall down, but by some miracle of good luck managing to retain her balance. Yet, run as she might, she realized that her pursuer was gaining; the footsteps pounding along behind her sounded nearer and nearer every minute. Her long coat, winding about her knees, caused her to slacken speed; her breath began to give out; she developed an agonizing pain in her side. She knew that the race was lost; in a moment more she would be overtaken. She had just summoned breath for a last final spurt when she heard a crash behind her and the sound of a body falling on the sidewalk; she dashed on without slackening speed. The next minute she slipped on a sheet of ice in the middle of a crossing and fell headlong to the ground, just as a taxicab, coming out of the side street, turned the corner. Katherine heard a hoarse shout and the jamming of an emergency brake, then, before she had time to draw breath, the car was on top of her. A blinding light flashed for a moment in her eyes; her ears were filled with a deafening roar; then all of a sudden light and sound both ceased to be.

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Hearing came back first with returning consciousness. The roaring noise no longer sounded in her ears, and from somewhere, a long distance off, came the sound of a voice speaking.

“Can’t you lift the car? She’s pinned underneath the wheels. No, you can’t back up; you’ll run over her head. Don’t you see it’s right behind that left wheel? Got a jack in your tool box? All right. Here—— Now——”

Gradually the weight that was pinning her to the ground was lifted, and she opened her eyes to find herself beside, and no longer under, the quivering monster with the hot breath. Three figures were moving about her in the light of the head-lamps, and now one of them knelt beside her and laid a hand on her head.

“She isn’t killed,” said a voice which sounded strangely familiar in Katherine’s ears, a voice which somehow carried her back to Carver House and the library fire.

Carver House. Nyoda. Nyoda would be worried to death because she did not come home. Poor Nyoda, how sorry she would be about the watch!

Unconsciously Katherine groaned aloud.

“She must be pretty badly hurt,” continued the voice beside her ear. “Help me lift her now and we’ll get her into the car. A hand under her shoulders—so. I’ll take her head. Easy now.”

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Katherine felt herself being lifted from the ground and carried past the glare of the headlamps. Suddenly there came an explosive exclamation from one of the rescuers—the one who had done the talking—and the hand that supported her head trembled violently.

“Good God! It’s *Katherine*.”

Katherine opened her eyes fully and looked up into the dumfounded face of Sherry.

“Fo’ de lan’ sakes!” came an echoing exclamation from beside Sherry, and the black face of Hercules shone out in the light.

“Hello Sherry,” said Katherine, in a voice which sounded strange in her own ears.

“Katherine!” cried Sherry in terrified accents, “are you badly hurt?”

“I d-o-n-’t k-n-o-w,” replied Katherine thickly, through a mouthful of fur from the collar of her coat.

“I guess not,” she resumed, after Sherry had laid her on the back seat of the car. “Nothing cracks when I wiggle it. My nose is skinned,” she supplemented a minute later, “and there’s a comb sticking straight into my head. I guess that’s all.”

“Oh,” breathed Sherry in immeasurable relief. “It’s a miracle you weren’t killed. I thought sure you were. It looked as though both front wheels had gone over you.”

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“One went over my hat and the other over the tail of my coat,” replied Katherine cheerfully. “They just missed me by a hair’s breadth.”

“Are you sure your head isn’t hurt?” Sherry continued anxiously. “You were unconscious when we lifted the car off of you, you know.”

Katherine solemnly felt her head all over. “There *is* a bump there—no; that’s my bump of generosity; it belongs there. Anyway, it doesn’t hurt when I press it, so it must be all right,” she assured him. “I must have fainted, I guess, when

the car came on top of me. It came so suddenly, and it made such a terrible noise. You can't think how awful it was."

"It must have been." A shudder went quivering through Sherry's frame at the thought of it. "I can't get it out of my mind. I thought those wheels went right over you. It's nothing short of a miracle that they went on each side of you instead of over you," he said, repeating the sentiment he had just uttered a moment before. "It all happened so quickly the driver didn't have a chance to turn aside. There was no one in sight one minute, and the next minute we were right on top of you. That driver out there's so scared he can't stand up on his legs yet."

"How did you happen to be in that taxicab?" Katherine inquired curiously.

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"We're on our way home," replied Sherry. "We missed the Pennsylvania out of New York and had to take the Nickel Plate, which meant we had to change from one station to the other here in Philadelphia. We were going across in a taxi."

"So you were too late to catch Dr. Phillips?" said Katherine soberly.

"Yes," replied Sherry gloomily. "The boat had gone yesterday."

"How did Hercules stand the disappointment?" asked Katherine, with quick sympathy.

"He's pretty badly cut up about it," replied Sherry. "He had quite a bad spell with his heart on the train. He says he's had a 'token' that he'll never see Marse Tad, as he calls him, again. I'm afraid he won't, myself. Even I've got a gloomy hunch that fate has the cards stacked against us this time. From Hercules' account, I don't think Dr. Phillips will live to reach South America."

“How unutterably tragic that would be!” sighed Katherine, beginning to feel a load of world-sorrow pressing on her heart. What a dismal business life was, to be sure!

Sherry interrupted her doleful reverie. “But tell me, Katherine, what, in the name of all that’s fantastic, were you doing here in this neighborhood at this time of night?”

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Katherine explained briefly, and in her overwrought state, burst into tears at the mention of the watch.

“And you say there was a footpad actually following you?” asked Sherry in consternation. “You were running away from this man when you fell under the car? Where is he now?”

Katherine shook her head. “I don’t know. He slipped and fell just before I did, and I don’t know what became of him after that.”

Sherry gave a long whistle, and, thrusting his head out of the taxi, gave a look around.

“There’s a man coming up the street now,” he said. “He’s limping badly. Is that the man? He’s probably trying to slip away quietly in the excitement.”

Katherine raised her head and glanced out. “That’s the man,” she exclaimed. “He’s the same one that followed me. Why, he’s coming over here toward us!” she said, in a tone of surprise. “How queer! Is he going to hold us all up, I wonder?”

The man in the light overcoat, limping painfully, crossed the curb and approached the car standing, temporarily disabled, in the middle of the street. Sherry thrust out a belligerent face, at the same time looking, out of the tail of his eye, for his driver and Hercules. Both were out of sight, kneeling on the ground at the other side of the raised engine hood.

The stranger limped up and hesitated before Sherry. Katherine, looking over Sherry's shoulder, noticing with a start of surprise that the man had snow white hair. Although the long, light coat and the visor cap were the same as those she had seen on the man in the flower shop, this was an entirely different man. His blue eyes were mild and pensive; his whole bearing was gentle and retiring, and, standing there with the electric light behind him making a halo of his white hair, he looked like some little, old, melancholy saint.

“The young lady that you just picked up,” said the stranger in a voice mellow with old-fashioned courtesy, raising his cap politely. “I have been following her for some time, trying unsuccessfully to catch up with her. I saw her drop this bag on the street, some two hours ago, and since then have been attempting to restore it to her, but have not been able to reach her. As soon as I saw her drop the bag I picked it up and hurried after her, but she suddenly disappeared like a conjurer's trick. I walked around for some time, looking for her, when all of a sudden the street lights went out, and in the darkness I mistook my way and wandered down into the factory district, where it was not long before I was hopelessly lost. The only place that showed any signs of life was a saloon down on a corner, and, although I have my opinion of those places, sir, I went in and asked the proprietor the way out of the neighborhood. It was not long afterward that I saw this same young lady who had dropped the handbag not far ahead of me in the street, having evidently wandered down there in the darkness just as I had done. I hurried after her, but she became frightened and began to run. I ran, too, thinking to overtake her and explain the reason for my pursuit, but just when I was nearly up to her I slipped and fell on the sidewalk. I must have lain there stunned for several minutes, for when things had become clear again I saw this car standing here and you gentlemen carrying the young lady into it. She is not badly hurt, I trust? Here is the bag I spoke of.”

He spied Katherine looking over Sherry's shoulder at that moment, and held out the handbag, again lifting his cap as he did so.

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At sight of the precious bag Katherine gave a shriek of joy, and seizing it with trembling fingers, looked inside to see if Nyoda's watch was still there. She almost sobbed with relief when her fingers closed upon the little velvet case, from which a faint ticking came to reassure her.

"Then you aren't the man I saw in the flower shop at all!" exclaimed Katherine, covered with confusion. "When I saw your light coat and that cap I was sure it was the same."

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The two men laughed heartily.

"Isn't that just like a woman, though?" said Sherry. "They think that every man walking on the streets at night is a burglar, as a matter of course. It never occurs to them that an honest man could possibly have any business on the street after dark."

"I'm awfully sorry," said Katherine sheepishly, "but I really was frightened to death when you began to run after me. You say you have been following me ever since I dropped the bag? Where did I drop it?"

"Along by that iron fence on —th Street," answered the old man.

"That's where I was taken with the dizzy spell," said Katherine. "I must have dropped it without knowing it when I caught ahold of the fence to steady myself."

"But where did you go right after that?" asked the old man curiously. "You disappeared as suddenly as if the earth had swallowed you. I put up my umbrella for a few minutes to

shield my face from the rain and when I looked out from behind it you were nowhere in sight.”

“That was where I went into the dark doorway of a church, and sat down to wait for the dizzy spell to wear off,” replied Katherine. “I must have fallen asleep, for the first thing I knew a clock was striking a quarter to eleven. When I discovered the bag was gone I ran around like mad looking for it, and the first thing I knew I was lost, and the lights were out, and there I was down in those awful factory yards. I saw you coming out of that saloon and thought you were the man who had watched me take out some bills out of an inner pocket earlier this evening, and hid behind a fence until you had gone by.”

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“But fate evidently intended that our paths should cross again,” resumed the old man, with the faint flicker of a smile on his pensive countenance, “for it was not long before you were just ahead of me again. The lights came on then, and I saw you plainly.”

“And I saw you, and started to run,” finished Katherine, joining in Sherry’s burst of laughter.

Just then Hercules straightened up from the ground and came around the front of the car.

“Kin we have yo’ pocket flasher, Mist’ Sherry?” he asked.

Then his glance fell upon the stranger standing beside the car. His eyes started from their sockets; his jaw dropped, and for a moment he stood as if petrified. Then he gave a great gasp, and with a piercing cry of “Marse Tad!” he sank upon his knees at the old man’s feet.

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CHAPTER XX

THE END OF A PERFECT DAY

“Daggers and dirks!” exclaimed Sherry, weakly sitting down on the car step when it was finally borne in upon him that Katherine’s highwayman was none other than Sylvia’s father, Hercules’ “Marse Tad,” the man for whom he and Hercules had been futilely fine-combing the earth for the last twenty-four hours.

“Am I awake?” he continued, “or is this all an opium dream? First Katherine, whom we thought at home at Carver House, materializes before us out of thin air; then Dr. Phillips, whom we thought on a ship bound for South America. What’s happening here to-night, anyway? Is it witchcraft?”

“O, Marse Tad,” quavered Hercules, still on his knees, “we shore thought you was gone on dat South Ameriky boat. We bin a-lookin’ for you so. Mist’ Sher’dan an’ I bin down to N’Yawk all day.”

“You have been looking for me?” asked Dr. Phillips in surprise.

Hercules, trying to tell the story all at once, became utterly incoherent in his excitement, and Sherry saw that he would have to step in. And so there, in the light from the lamps of the disabled taxicab, with the fitful explosions of the reviving engine drowning out Sherry’s speech every few minutes, Tad Phillips heard the great news that would lift the crushing load of anguish from his heart, and would turn the world once more into a place of laughter, and light, and happiness.

“It was a miracle, my deciding to stay over for the next boat,” he declared solemnly, a few minutes later, after nearly wringing Sherry’s hand off in an effort to express his joy and gratitude. “It was the hand of Providence, sir, nothing less than the hand of Providence. I had fully made up my mind to go on that boat yesterday; then for no reason at all I suddenly decided to wait until next week before sailing.” His voice sank away into a whisper of awe as he repeated, “It was Providence itself, sir, nothing less than the hand of Providence, that made me change my mind about sailing yesterday.”

“You may have been inspired by Providence to change your mind about sailing,” rejoined Sherry, “but if it hadn’t been for Katherine, here, we never would have found you, for it never occurred to us that you were still in Philadelphia. It’s all Katherine’s doing—her losing that handbag.”

“But if I hadn’t eaten those lobster croquettes and gotten sick I wouldn’t have lost the handbag,” said Katherine comically. “It all comes back to the lobster croquettes. Providence and lobster croquettes! What a combination to work miracles!”

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It was a rather dishevelled, but altogether triumphant quartet that arrived at Carver House some few hours later. Katherine’s hair had escaped from its net and hung in straggling wisps over her eyes; her hat had been so completely crushed by its contact with the wheel of the taxi that it was unrecognizable as an article of millinery, and hung, a mere twisted piece of wreckage, in a dejected lump over one ear. Her coat was plastered with dirt from neck to hem, and her gloves were stiff and discolored. One eye was closed in a permanent wink by a black smudge that decorated her forehead and half of her cheek.

Blissfully unconscious of her startling appearance, she burst into the library, where the household were waiting to welcome the returned wanderers.

“O Katherine,” cried all the Winnebagos in chorus when they beheld her, “now you look natural again!”

The tale of Katherine’s adventure, with its astonishing ending, left them all staring and breathless.

“Katherine surely must have been born under a different sign of the Zodiac than those you see in the ordinary almanacs,” said Nyoda. “There is some special influence of planets guiding her that is denied to ordinary mortals.”

“Must be the sign of the Lobster, then,” laughed Katherine, gratefully sipping the hot milk Migwan had brought her, and allowing Justice to draw the hatpins from her hat and remove the battered wreck from her head.

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“How’s Sylvia?” asked Sherry.

“Very much improved,” replied Nyoda, “but her heart is still acting queerly. I don’t know how she is going to stand this excitement.”

Dr. Phillips agreed with her that he must not appear before Sylvia too suddenly, or the shock might be fatal. Impatient as he was for the recognition to take place, he knew that it would have to be brought about with caution. There was too much at stake to make a misstep now. Nyoda must prepare her gradually, first telling her that her father was alive, and letting her recover from the excitement of that announcement before breaking the news that he was actually in the house.

The Winnebagos looked at Dr. Phillips with a surprise which it was difficult to conceal. This mild-eyed, white-haired gentleman was utterly different from the picture they had conjured up of the bold intruder who had so determinedly made his entrance into Carver House. They had expected to see a grim-faced, resolute-looking man, and Hinpoha confided afterward that her mental picture had included a pair

of pistols sticking out of his pockets. The early portrait of “Tad the Terror,” in Uncle Jasper’s diary, had been slightly misleading in regard to his appearance.

Nyoda saw Dr. Phillips’ eyes fixed, with a sorrowful expression, upon the portrait of Uncle Jasper above the library fireplace, and she guessed what bitter pangs the breaking up of that friendship had cost him; guessed also, that he had held no such bitter feeling against Jasper Carver as the master of Carver House had held against him, and understanding the characters of the two men, she saw why it was that Sylvia Warrington had preferred the one to the other.

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Over by the fireplace, Justice was teasing Katherine unmercifully about the lobster croquettes, while behind her back the Captain had taken one of the broken feathers from her hat and was tickling Slim with it, who had fallen asleep in his chair. The clock on the stairway chimed four.

An irrepressible attack of yawning seized the whole party, and with one impulse the Winnebagos began to steal toward the stairway.

“Well,” said Katherine, with a sigh of deep content, as she went wearily up the stairs leaning on Migwan’s shoulder, “well, this is the end of a perfect day!”

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CHAPTER XXI

FATHER AND DAUGHTER

In the morning Sylvia was so much better that Nyoda allowed her to sit up out of bed, and there, sitting beside the wheel chair which was to be the throne of the little princess all her life, she told Sylvia the story of her parentage. For a moment Sylvia sat as if turned to stone; then with a cry of unbelieving ecstasy, she clasped the picture of Sylvia Warrington to her heart.

“My mother!”

Nyoda stole out softly and left the two of them together.

* * * * *

Later on in the afternoon there was a lively bustle of preparation in Sylvia’s room. The great carved armchair that had served as throne on the night of the party had been brought up from the library, and once more covered with its purple velvet draperies. Sylvia, whose romantic fancy had seized eagerly upon the immense dramatic possibilities of the occasion, had insisted upon being arrayed as the princess when her father should come in to see her.

“The king is coming! The king is coming!” she exclaimed every few moments. “Array me in my most splendid robes, for my royal father, the king, is coming!”

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Thrills of excitement, like little needle pricks, ran up and down her spine; her whole being seemed alight with some

wonderful inner radiance, that shone through the flesh and transfigured it with unearthly beauty.

Nyoda brought the fairy-like white dress and draped it about her, playing the rôle of lady-in-waiting with spirit. Every time she passed before Sylvia she bowed low; she made the Winnebagos stand up in a line and pass in the bracelets from hand to hand; she herself brought in the crown on a cushion, and placed it upon Sylvia's head with much ceremony.

“Doesn't she look like a real royal princess, though!” Migwan exclaimed to Hinpoha in the far end of the room. “I feel actually abashed before her, knowing all the while that it's only playing.”

“O, if she could only have been cured!” Hinpoha sighed in answer. “How much jollier it would have been!”

Migwan echoed the sigh. “Life is very strange,” she said musingly. “Things don't always come out the way we want them to.”

“That's so,” said Hinpoha, beginning to see a great many sober possibilities in life which had never before occurred to her.

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An automobile horn sounded outside. “There's Sherry now, bringing Dr. Phillips back from their ride,” said Migwan. “They'll be coming up in a few minutes.”

The horn sounded again.

“The royal trumpeter!” cried Sylvia. “Our royal father, the king, approaches!”

She settled the crown more firmly upon her head, and sat up very straight on her throne. Her cheeks glowed like roses; her

eyes were like great stars. Nyoda watched her keenly for any signs of being overcome with excitement.

From the hall came the sound of footsteps.

“His Majesty, the King,” said Nyoda, throwing open the door with a dramatic flourish.

For a moment Dr. Phillips stood transfixed upon the threshold, overcome by the scene of splendor within.

Then he held out his arms to her, forgetting that she was paralyzed.

“Sylvia—daughter!”

“Father!”

Then the amazing thing happened. Sylvia rose to her feet, stepped from the throne, and ran across the room into her father’s arms.

“It happens sometimes,” explained Dr. Phillips a few moments later, when they had all recovered from their first stupefied amazement. “Some great shock, and the paralyzed nerves wake to life again. That is what has taken place here. She is cured.”

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CHAPTER XXII

ONE MORE TOAST

“To the Christmas Adventure at Carver House!” proposed Katherine, raising on high her glass of fruit punch.

New Year’s dinner was over, and they all stood in their places around the table, drinking toast after toast.

“The Christmas Adventure at Carver House!” echoed the Winnebagos. “The best adventure we’ve had yet. Drink her down!” The toast was drunk with a will.

Sylvia stood beside her father, her face one big sparkle, while a more subdued, but equally rapturous, gleam shone from the doctor’s eye as he gazed on the adored child from whom he need never more be separated. The Captain stood opposite Hinpoha and gave her a long look as he touched her glass, as if he wished to fix every detail of her in his mind against the separation that was coming on the morrow; Slim also had his eyes turned toward Hinpoha as he clicked glasses with Gladys across the table. Justice gave Katherine’s glass a little nudge as he touched it, to attract her attention, for she had her face turned away from him toward Sylvia; Sahwah’s eye had a far-away look as she matched with Migwan. Nyoda and Sherry beamed impartially upon them all, and Hercules smacked his lips over his glass in the corner by himself. Hercules had abandoned his intention of dying, and announced that he was planning to get himself another goat, because life was too uneventful for a man of his vigor without something to fuss over and take up his time.

“And it all happened because Katherine forgot Nyoda’s name!” said Sahwah, setting her glass down.

“I wasn’t born in vain after all!” laughed Katherine, meeting Justice’s eye bent upon her in a close, quizzical scrutiny.

“Which goes to prove,” said Nyoda, “that everything has its use in this world, even our shortcomings. Let’s celebrate that discovery. We have drunk to the memory of Uncle Jasper Carver and to the memory of Sylvia Warrington; we have drunk to the memory of the man who built Carver House with the secret passage; we have one swallow of punch left. Let’s drink one more toast, not to the *memory* of Katherine Adams, but to her *forgettory!*”

And amid a great shout of laughter the last toast was drunk.

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THE END

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Transcriber's Notes

- Silently corrected palpable typos in spelling and punctuation
- Harrison Hill becomes Harrisburg Hill in the course of the narrative; this was not changed
- Adjusted front matter to give a complete list of the series

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