

Book Title: The Girl Scouts at Camp Comalong  
Peg of Tamarack Hills

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Language: English

"LOOK, GIRLS! UP ON THE ROCK! THERE'S PEG!" "LOOK, GIRLS! UP ON  
THE ROCK! THERE'S PEG!"

## **The Girl Scouts at Camp Comalong**

**Lillian Garis**

**1921**

### CONTENTS

CHAPTER I—THE ACORN  
CHAPTER II—PETE'S PROLOGUE  
CHAPTER III—SHIPSHAPING  
CHAPTER IV—AN ANGEL UNAWARES  
CHAPTER V—A STOLEN LOOK AROUND  
CHAPTER VI—OPENING DAY  
CHAPTER VII—THE LOVING BANDIT  
CHAPTER VIII—GLOW OF THE CAMPFIRE'S GLEAM  
CHAPTER IX—A DAY WITH THE BOBBIES  
CHAPTER X—MEET BUZZ AND FUSS  
CHAPTER XI—THE FOOD SHOWER  
CHAPTER XII—A RECORD BREAKER  
CHAPTER XIII—DANGER SIGNALS  
CHAPTER XIV—THE ALGONQUIN EPISODE  
CHAPTER XV—A PADDLE, A SWIM AND A SUN DIAL  
CHAPTER XVI—A DARING INTRUDER  
CHAPTER XVII—THE GRANITE STAR CLUE  
CHAPTER XVIII—A CALL IN THE NIGHT  
CHAPTER XIX—SHAG: THE ALARM CLOCK  
CHAPTER XX—THE ROOM OF MYSTERY

CHAPTER XXI—A SURPRISE INDEED

CHAPTER XXII—PEG OF TAMARACK HILLS

## CHAPTER I—THE ACORN

It was Corene's idea. She had just returned from a glorious two weeks spent in a real Girl Scouts' Camp, and the brief time acted like a whiff of something good, and it tasted like more and Corene wanted it.

"Two weeks!" she repeated moodily.

"What can you expect?" queried Louise. "Everyone must have a turn."

"And two weeks make a real vacation for many girls," insisted Cleo.

"Two weeks spent right in one spot—in the ocean, for instance, would seem an awful long time to me," said fun-making Grace.

"Besides all that, you went away to camp early on account of having finished your school work," Cleo reminded her, "and consequently those very two weeks are so much extra. We haven't gone away at all yet."

"I know," agreed the abused one, "and please don't slap me, or do anything like that, girls. I have just been thinking of those wonderful days——" She slid down and thrust her feet out so suddenly and determinedly that she upset a harmless little vase, water, flowers and all, right on the floor of the recreation room.

It was one of the many "last days" of school. The group of girls in the Essveay School made the usual vacation plans, remade them and then amiably agreed to those made by home and mother; but all this in no way affected the present outburst of enthusiasm.

By rare good fortune many of the girls were privileged to spend their summers along the Jersey coast, or in the mountains between New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania, and the intimacy of their school days was thus uninterrupted.

"Then, Corene," returned Cleo, "what do you intend to do about it? You can't hope to go back again to the big camp?"

"Oh, no; I suppose not. But everything will seem so tame," lamented the bobbed-haired girl.

"Tame!" repeated Louise. "You always have a livelier time out in Llynardo than we do at Sea Crest. At least you don't have to change your costume three or four times a day."

"I wouldn't do it," returned Corene. "What's the sense in going away for a good time and spending it amusing other folks?"

"How so, amusing other folks?" repeated Julia.

"Surely no one dresses to amuse herself," retorted the practical Corene. "I like pretty things, and all that, but I hate summer simping. Buddie calls it 'simping,' although he probably means primping."

"When we put on our Scout uniform last year we saved a lot of that," reflected Cleo.

"Which was it, Scout uniform or riding-habit, Cleo? It seems to me you spent a lot of time on horseback," Julia reminded her.

"And I intend to do the same this year as well," declared Cleo. "That's the reason

we are going to the mountains.”

“Same here,” agreed Louise. “We had a good time riding last year, but there were days when the sun was too hot. Now, under the trees in the mountains——” A sudden breeze blew in and sent layers of papers flying about.

“There you are!” commented Corene. “There’s your mountain breeze, girls. No use bothering going any further.”

“Oh, h-h——!” sighed a chorus.

“If it would only stay,” continued Cleo. “What is so hot as a day in June?” she misquoted.

“The first hot day in September, after school opens,” answered Louise, fanning her flushed cheeks with Julia’s latest story. “At any rate, let’s go into classroom and try that science puzzle again. I’m not sure whether I made a bug or a bird for the seven-year locust.”

It was that evening, when these girls as neighbors had gathered on Julia’s porch, that the subject of a summer camp was taken up with added interest.

“I’ve been talking to mother about it,” said Julia, “and she agrees we could have a much healthier and even happier time if we went to the mountains. We might miss the bathing——”

“But we will have the lake—the wonderful, pretty, friendly old Lake Hocomo!” enthused Cleo. “The ocean is lovely, of course, but don’t you think it’s awfully samey?”

“Samey? Oh, you mean similarly,” joked Louise.

“No, she means monotonously,” ventured Grace.

“Or synonymously,” added Corene.

“Say, girls!” asked Cleo, “were we talking about the ocean or false syntax? I’ve sort of strayed off a little. I think I recall, however, that the lake was said to be lovely, and I’m willing to stick to that. Who votes for the lake?”

“I do!”

“I do!”

“I do!” everyone voted for it, so it was agreed again that all would go to the lake, if their folks went with them, of course. And then Corene returned to her story of the wonders of camp life.

“But didn’t you have to wash a lot of horrid dishes?” asked Grace.

“We washed dishes, certainly,” replied the favored one, “but it was fun doing it. We had races at it and prizes, and when one does things that way it’s fun, you know.”

“I’m going to try that with Benny,” declared Grace. “Our folks are again maidless, so Benny and I help. I’ll race Benny and offer my class pin as prize,” she decided.

“Your class pin for Benny? Why, Grace! You dishonor the Essveys. Make it a buckle or a barrette. Either would be just as useful to Benny. He’s sure to win, we all know that, for boys always win at anything they try out,” declared Julia.

“Yes, by dumping dishes in, and dumping them out, and putting them over the gas oven to dry,” retorted Grace. “That’s the way a boy is so sure to win in a dish-washing contest. But never mind that. Tell us, Corey, what do you propose for camp?”

“Make one, build one, run one,” she proposed simply.

“Just like that!” added Cleo, with a chuckle. “Do you mean on paper or in the woods, Corey?”

“In the woods, certainly,” again came the measured reply, and it didn’t measure

very much at that.

“Oh, be a dear and tell us how,” begged Louise, settling herself in the cushions of the porch swing for a real story. “I want to dream about something other than school to-night, and I’d just love it to be camp.”

“A nice, wild, grizzly bear camp,” added Grace. She skidded over to the swing and squirmed in beside Louise.

“There are no bears at Lake Hocomo,” said Cleo, “that is, there are none there now; although to hear dad talk of his boyhood vacations there, one might think the zoo was originally stocked from that region. At any rate, Corey, splutter along with the plan, but don’t make me wash dishes. Leave them to the prize contestants,” with a shot of rose-ball at Grace.

“Very well,” decided Corene, “and this is my idea.” They all settled back comfortably now, for Corene did not usually give out her “ideas” until they had been very carefully formulated. She was the acknowledged leader in athletics among her group, she would rather go to the gym than to a party, she took toe dancing long after her friends gave up the “childish art,” and she had aspirations towards physical culture as a profession, to be adopted by her after she had acquired a thorough knowledge of everything pertaining to it. That was Corene’s way.

“We are all to go to Lake Hocomo this year,” she began in preliminary argument for the camp idea.

“Yes’m,” chirped Julia.

“And we are going to have our own riding club,” suggested Cleo, who would agree to anything that included horseback riding.

“All right, Cleo, that can be arranged, of course,” said Corene. “But it is not a—what do you call it?”

“Fundamental!” offered Louise.

“That’s it. We will decide first on our fundamentals. The very first is a camp. For that we must organize a patrol consisting of eight girls,” said the capable Corene.

“We can have those we had last year, and all of them have been attending Scout meetings this winter,” put in Julia.

“Yes, we won’t have any trouble with our eight, but we may have trouble not making it eighteen,” said Cleo. “We always have a lot of calls from girls who want to come in, you know.”

“Yes, but we must be efficient,” insisted the logical leader. “We couldn’t take in girls and let them call themselves Scouts if they had not gone through all the tests.”

“Of course not,” agreed Louise. She was always apt to agree on limitations. Louise was a bit conservative that way.

“But we may find other girls at the lake who are qualified—who are regular Scouts, you know,” put in Cleo the democrat.

“A patrol should be composed of eight,” insisted Corene, “and when a rule of that kind is decided by the organization we may be sure it is the best. So let it be eight.”

“Remember those famous lines, ‘We Are Seven’?” recalled Cleo. “We may transpose them to ‘We Are Eight’ and I’ll get brother Jerry to put a tune to them. Oh, really, girls, I can see the camp all ready. Shall we have to build it, Corey?”

“If you don’t run over me in the telling I may get something told, bye-and-bye,” complained Corene. “We may have to build our camp if we want one far enough away

from the cottages, and I don't think any other kind is worth while."

"No, of course it isn't," agreed Julia. "We don't want to put up a few curtains in a garage and pay ten dollars to have an artistic sign made for it, then call that combination a camp."

This brought out the rollicking spirits for which the little group was justly famous, and the cushion fight that followed was a spasm of pure mirth. Little girls they were, indeed; although each of them had earned a grammar grade certificate that opened to her the doors of "High," yet the spirit of care-free little-girlishness was still happily theirs, and it was a matter of complete congeniality that bound them together, year after year, from Primary to Grammar, and now from Grammar to High.

"If we are always going to end up with some silly nonsense," said Julia sagely, although she was personally more responsible for pillow tossing than were the others, "I don't see how we will ever get anything planned."

"We don't really have to make plans now," Grace qualified. "All we have to do is just to talk about them."

"That's about all we can do," said Corene, "but we have all voted for a camp, haven't we?"

A shout of enthusiastic assent followed the question.

"Then, just remember you have all promised to do your part toward making and keeping that camp," warned the instigator.

"Do we take guns for big woozy wolves?" asked Grace, growling descriptively.

"And axes to cut down our timber with?" put in Cleo.

"Remember Buddie's sling shot? I'll be sure to take that for hooty owls," added Louise.

"Please don't get the idea that we may shoot things, or injure birds, or do any such cruel things," counselled Corene. "Of course I know you wouldn't hurt a spider, Louise," she hurried to explain, "but I am still so filled with real camp rules I sort of blow them off now and again."

"We will give you plenty of time and opportunity to apply your rules, Corey," said Julia, "and just think, only three days more!"

"Oh, h—h—h!" came the chorus common to every school grade that actually faces the final "three days."

But they were too care-free to even anticipate what the camp prospect might hold for them.

Not all the adventures of the woods are limited to "woozy bears and hooty owls."

Which recalls something of their experiences as told in the other volumes of this series. It was in "The Girl Scout Pioneers, or Winning The First B. C." that this same group of girls went through some interesting Scouting in a Pennsylvania mill town. Two foreign girls, Dagmar and Tessie, "wandered far afield" but were finally brought under the influence of the Scout movement through a most dramatic climax. The second volume, "The Girl Scouts at Bellaire," is the story of the lost orchid. The precious bulb was brought from Central America but lost *en route*, and when Maid Mary, the queer little flower girl, was eventually won over to trust the Scouts, they came upon the priceless orchid as it struggled to grow through the arm of a saw-dust doll.

"The Girl Scouts at Sea Crest" has a very queer girl, Kitty Scuttle, for its heroine. This girl lives on a mysterious island upon which no one is allowed to land. But the Girl

Scouts find a way, and when they do so they also find out how to rescue Kitty and the millionaire child, Royal. This little Peter Panish boy has been hidden on Looney Island by an unscrupulous nurse.

So it happens that the summer opening and for which the girls are planning must indeed be a time replete with adventure, if the reputation of this group of Girl Scouts is to be maintained.

## CHAPTER II—PETE'S PROLOGUE

Into Lake Hocomo a setting sun was emptying its paint pots of every color left over from the day's journey around the world, or the world's journey around the sun; spilling out into the safe waters its blazing hues and sending streams of colored fires adrift into the lake's helpless basin, in the final hour's work of a day full of worlds and worlds of heat and color.

Along the banks of the lake and from many favorably situated cottages, an admiring audience was wont to view "the wonderful sunset," although the season furnished the same sort of spectacle from March to October, varied only in degrees of beauty and more beauty.

The Girl Scouts, they who were already planning a real camp for the summer, were among those seated out on the landing, a pier that extended far enough into the water to give depth for the "steamers" that carried passengers up and down the eight mile stretch of water.

These girls looked at the sunset and made remarks somewhat intelligent, but being just normal girls they could hardly have been expected to "take a fit" over it, as some others were accused of doing.

"There she goes!" exclaimed Grace, irrelevantly. "Just see how she rides!"

The girls turned quickly from their position of facing the lake to that of facing the road that ran parallel, but in spite of their promptness they almost missed seeing a girl dash by on horseback; in fact the blue roan pony she rode looked like some wild black animal of the forest, as it plunged into the grove of thick trees that skirted the lake at this curve; and the rider appeared nothing more than a brown spot on the roan's back as he galloped away.

"I wonder who she can be?" queried Cleo.

"Jealous?" teased Grace, for Cleo was fond of horses and their sports.

"No, indeed," replied the other. "But that girl can ride. I saw her go over the hills this afternoon and her horse stumbled in a hole, but she just hugged him for it. Bare-back, too."

"I think we may all be jealous of her," added Louise. "The old boatman, Pete, told me to-day she is regarded as the original Scout around here."

"Then she better be jealous of us," commented Corene, "for we are going to be the real Scouts now. What's her name?"

"Peg," replied Julia. "I just heard someone say 'there goes Peg.'"

"Nice little name," commented Cleo, "but when Margaret comes she may also claim it. I wonder why this Peg wears that outfit? She looks like a cow-boy girl."

"I haven't seen her close by; she is always going like the wind when I happen to

get a glimpse of her,” followed Julia. “But you may be sure she is someone very interesting. Her mere make-up proclaims that.”

“Proclaims!” taunted Grace. “Has your diploma done that to you, Jule? I would say her make-up gives her away.”

“Gives what away?” challenged Julia.

“The fact that she’s queer.”

“How queer?”

“Very queer.” Grace was not easily conquered.

“Please don’t quarrel over her, girls; she may be nothing of the sort,” intervened Louise. “Any girl fond of horses is apt to look queer.”

This brought Cleo to her feet, but Louise was too quick for her, and the playful race ended in the usual slumping down on a stump, with a heartily sighed “Oh, dear!” from the breathless Louise.

“There’s Pete coming in with the launch now,” remarked Julia, pointing to the graceful little bark that brushed so lightly over the waters toward the dock. “Let’s ask him about Peg.”

“And sit in his launch while he waits for passengers,” suggested Grace. “Come on, Cleo and Weasy!” she called to the racers. “Come over here!”

Quickly the little flock gathered and swooped down upon Pete’s pretty launch. The boatman was not opposed to entertaining attractive passengers, even if they didn’t “go out.” They looked nice in the boat and old Pete had an eye for appearances.

“Oh, say, Pete,” began Grace in her direct way. “Who’s that girl they call Peg?”

“Peg?” repeated the captain. “You mean the gallopin’ girl that scares all the chickens and runs down all the auto-mo-beels?”

“Yes, the one that’s always on horseback,” agreed Grace.

“That’s Peg—hasn’t got no other name as I know of, but they allus calls her ‘Peg of Tamarack Hills,’ ’count o’ the place she lives, over in yon hills.”

“Is she queer?” put in Julia, making sure of another cushion. (What would summer be without cushions?)

“Depends upon what you mean by queer,” returned the boatman, and the girls laughed at the trouble that little word seemed prone to make.

“She’s so fly-away,” ventured Louise.

“Yes, she’s that, all of it,” answered Pete. “But she’s a right smart girl, I’ll tell ye. She does many a good turn for us men who have to stick by our boats. Why, I’ve known the day last winter——”

“Does she stay here all winter?” inquired Cleo.

“Sure does, every day o’ the year finds Peg over in them hills. An’ she rides away to school like a girl in a picture book,” described the man. He was obviously a good friend of Peg’s.

“Who does she live with?” put in Grace.

“An aunt; a nice old lady, too. Miss Ramsdell. She takes care of Peg so far as Peg’ll let her; but looks like more times than enough, Peg takes care of Aunt Carrie. I was goin’ to tell you about last winter,” he resumed. “Wait a minute till I pull up that canvas. There, we’ll have more light now.” He gave a furtive glance about the dock for prospective passengers, and seeing none heading toward his landing he continued:

“We was runnin’ ice boats last winter, when the boys was cuttin’ the ice, and

folks came out from the city with an idea we had airoplanes on runners out here. Well, one day came a sudden thaw and the ice melted quick. The cutters was all down there along the canal, and this lake is mighty deep, you know. Well, without warning nor nauthin', not even a crack to give the fellers a signal, the ice split up, and Marx Hoppler went under before he could get away."

"Oh, was he drowned?" exclaimed Grace.

"He went under so quick—and you can guess what it would be to slide under the ice on this lake. Well, finally," Pete touched the button that lighted his headlight, "we got Marx out, and he just seemed to be froze stiff. It happened Peg was along o' the dock. There was lots of folks gathered 'round in a hurry but no wagons, and would you believe it that little Scout had someone lift Marx on her horse, stiff and dead-like, and she got away down to the doctor's with him before the rest of us realized what she was about!"

"Good Scouting!" exclaimed Corene.

"You betcha!" agreed Pete; "and the doc said it was just in the nick o' time and saved Marx's life. I tell you, folks around here'll stand by Peg, but of course, strangers is apt to be critical," he finished.

"We will have to call on her, we're Scouts too, you know, Pete," said Julia.

"Yes, I know. You look real smart in them natty little suits, too. I like the looks of them first rate," admired Pete. "But as for callin' on Peg, it can't be done."

"Why?" came a chorus.

"She won't have any callers. Her place is barred and locked and pretty near has dynamite planted around it." He chuckled merrily at the idea. "Yes, sir-ree! Peg don't want no one to bother her and she won't allow anyone to do it. Too bad, too, a little girl like her had ought ta have girl friends."

"I knew she was queer," insisted Grace.

"Well, you might call it that——" Pete stopped to take an order for a ride to the other end of the lake, and the girls hopped out to stay ashore.

"There, you see," said Louise, "we can't possibly ask her to join our troop."

"Or *get* her to join it, you mean, Weasy. It seems to me that a girl who can do as big a thing as carry a half frozen man on her horse has a good right to be called the original Scout, and I am going to do all I can to find out more about her," declared Corene.

"Look out for the dynamite," cautioned Julia.

"That makes it more interesting," commented Cleo. "Louise, let's get horses to-morrow and ride over Tamarack Hills?"

"Maybe," replied Louise. "Will you go, Corey?"

"Can't possibly," replied Corene, "and I doubt that you two should. I thought we all agreed to get right down to camp work?"

"Oh, all right," and Cleo's voice hinted an apology for her proposed breaking away from the camp work. "It will be best to get the camp settled before the other temptations tempt us too strongly. But the water, and the woods and the birds! A ride over the hills with Peg would be my idea of real fun, Corey, but you're boss—patrol leader I mean—and I am always willing to obey!"

"Yes—you are!" drawled Grace.

"At any rate, I'm crazy about the camp idea, and I am willing to get it going," insisted Cleo.

“Very well, let’s see you prove it,” retorted Corene, “for the things are in the freight station now, and to-morrow we will have to set about getting them delivered.”

Then the strains of uncertain music that floated down from the Inn announced the call of summer time entertainment at the little hotel.

“Come on up and watch them dance, for a while,” proposed Grace.

And they ran, even up a hill, for running seemed to be as important as breathing itself to those jolly little Scout girls.

### **CHAPTER III—SHIPSHAPING**

Just to show that grown folks, when they are home-grown, appreciate children’s aspirations and often delight in promoting them, the equipment for Camp Comalong when it “camalong” was a big surprise indeed. Parents of the little troop, the “Junior Bobolinks” as they decided to call themselves, united in procuring a regulation outfit for the girls; and the site finally chosen was on a hill overlooking the lake, near enough other camps and especially near to one camp in which was “housed” a club of Normal School young women, secretly pledged to “have an eye” on Camp Comalong.

The girls could scarcely believe that all the freight consignment piled up on the small floor of that office could really be for them. Corene “fell to” immediately and took charge. She ordered the others about as if she were a qualified directress, indeed, and sent each on a different errand somewhere: to get a couple of express men to cart the stuff to the grounds, to get a carpenter to cut some strong tent pegs, to get the hammers, the saws, the hatchets and so many necessary implements that it seemed the Bobolinks were not going to follow out the primitive living system of their namesakes, the little birds that sing as they fly, and seem to need the songs to propel the wings, as each fluttering movement is accompanied by its fluttering song.

But speed was the important issue with the “Bobbies,” so whatever they may have overlooked in the way of real Scout endurance and personal labor for the establishment of the camp, they surely made up for with their enthusiasm and direct energy.

The ownership of a horse and wagon, or of anything that would run (at times) by motor, was all that a man at the lake needed to qualify him as an “expressman,” hence the necessity of looking for more than one of such conveyances to get the equipment out to the woods in time to begin work that day.

“If we leave it all to old Sam it will get there by the end of the week,” reasoned Corene, “and we must get things moving. Louise, ask the grocer if he will take these boxes for us.”

“But why not take one of our cars?” suggested Julia. “You may have ours this morning, I’m sure.”

“No, thank you, Julie. This stuff is rough and scratchy, and there’s no use starting out to damage things. But isn’t it too wonderful? These are real army tents and there’s a——”

“Flagpole!” sang out Cleo. “I should think we might have found a dead tree for that purpose.”

“I believe our family made that contribution,” said Grace. “Mother was afraid we would start out wrong and not have the colors right away, so she ordered a flag and pole.”

“Oh, how lovely!” exclaimed Cleo. “Of course a handsome flag should fly from a proper standard bearer. I never suspected we were going to have such a complete outfit.”

“The flag is at our cottage,” added Grace. “Benny will bring it over as soon as we are ready. It’s a perfect beauty—size six by four.”

“Oh, and we can raise and lower the colors and all that!” enthused Julia. “Now we know how much better fun all this is than just dressing up at some fashionable summer place.”

“Heaps,” agreed Corene. “But I say, girls, we don’t really have to stand around here waiting to see all this put on the wagons——”

“I would never trust those indifferent men to get it sent out to-day if we didn’t just stay here and superintend,” declared Cleo. “I have two promises for two men with light trucks. Let’s see if either will come.”

So the real work began. But it was all so novel, and the woods smelled so of the pines and cedars and larches—no wonder that spot had been given the name Tamarack Hills.

By night fall the camp site had been cleared; the girls raised a pretty crop of blisters in their frantic efforts to get things cut down. The tent pegs were all driven in, Benny and his Boy Scout friends helped with the driving, but the hoisting of the tent was considered too important a task to be left to “such little girls,” so much against the ambition of Corene that piece of work was actually done by a corps of real Scouts—to wit—three very interested fathers, who came to the camp site in the autos that brought them from the early evening train.

For the sake of identification we will call these gentlemen after their daughters, so it was Mr. Cleo who ran the ridge pole under the center of the tent, while Messrs. Julia and Louise, at the signal, raised the tent by lifting the poles and carrying them to their places. It took some little time to get the big canvas house properly adjusted, but it was worth all the trouble.

“Hurrah!” shouted the Bobbies as their headquarters was finally in evidence.

“How can we ever go home and leave it to-night?” bewailed Grace.

“Folks at home are worrying lest you have worked too hard to-day,” declared the man with the big gray car. “You must come along, kiddies.”

“But we didn’t, daddy, really,” protested Corene. “We loafed more than we worked. There was so much to see and so many things to distract us. I’m not one bit tired.”

“Oh, h-h-h!” groaned Louise, almost falling into Cleo’s arms. “She isn’t a bit tired! I’m dead!”

“But Corey is always in such good form,” said Julia. “This is where all her exercising comes in.”

They were gathering up such tools and accessories as could not be left around on the grounds over night, and incidentally gathering up themselves, when the clap-clap-clippity-clap of horse’s hoofs was heard coming over the hills.

The road was narrow, merely a way driven into a road by the campers’ use, and as the car with the Bobbies’ fathers and the newly organized camp troop carefully picked their way out into the broader thoroughfare, Peg, the girl rider, came into sight.

“There she is!” Grace gave the usual announcement, and this time the girls had opportunity for a close-up view of the interesting, original Girl Scout of Tamarack Hills.

She pulled her horse up to allow the cars to pass, and it seemed to the Scouts that she deliberately tossed her head up in a defiant pose that turned her face away from them. But in spite of this they obtained a good view of the rider.

She wore a suit, the origin of which would be at once proclaimed “Western.” The divided skirt was of brown leather with that picturesque fringe slashed in, so markedly popular in pictures of Mexican or Southwestern girl riders, her blouse “matched horribly,” as Cleo put it, for while it was Indian in design, and also carried the slashed fringe, the material was common khaki, well washed out and deplorably faded. It might have been part of a boy’s play suit, for it seemed in no way related either to the girl or to her leather riding skirt.

Her hat was broad brimmed and of tan felt—still another shade of the various browns, and again suggesting another inception. It looked a “whole lot like the Boy Scouts’ hat,” whispered Grace.

Surprising to relate, this girl had neither the popularly featured “bronze, red nor sunny hair,” and it was dark, black actually; nor did it curl the least bit, for what fell over the ears (it was cropped very short) glistened even in the twilight.

All this was observable because in the narrow road the cars were almost stopped, and Peg’s horse nosed right up to Cleo, with a very friendly whinnie.

“Dads might think we are looking for that sort of thing,” whispered the conservative Louise. And if to be camp Scouts should mean “that sort of thing,” her caution, just then, seemed warranted.

## **CHAPTER IV—AN ANGEL UNAWARES**

Between settling the camp and agreeing with one another on details, the “Bobbies” were a busy little band for days after the canvas had been stretched and the ropes pegged down. It seemed so simple to wish for a camp and get it, but now that simplicity assumed complex proportions, and while it was all fascinating to the very point of thrills, yet the details were very exacting.

The tent was just large enough to take in the eight cots and to shelter such equipment as should be protected from the elements; but it now appeared there was so much to be “sheltered” and so many “luxuries” to be provided for, at the suggestion of the girls who had not learned real Scout camping as Corene had done, that the adjuncts in the way of “lean-tos” and annexes being made or proposed to be made by any or all members of the squad, threatened presently to be bigger and more important than the tent itself.

Every girl came daily armed with her Scout books, if for no other purpose than to offset Corene’s objections to “cluttering things up.”

It was first arranged to have a heavy matting put over the sod for flooring, and a rug had been promptly donated, but again the grown-ups had a say, and real flooring was ordered and put on a high foundation, so that there would be less danger of colds from dampness.

If Cleo could be kept from stringing up strips of cretonne “to give color” she might have done something useful; while Julia’s joy in building the stone oven outside, threatened to keep her busy for the entire vacation. Louise ran to “table fixin’s.” She was

responsible for a rustic “sideboard” made from the empty barrels and discarded freight boards, curtained effectively with the water-proof burlap, and gaily flaunting a real wood fern in a red nail keg right in the center of the top shelf. Standing off and viewing these artistic achievements took a lot of time, and incidentally left a lot of more important work unfinished.

“Where are we going to put the food?” demanded dainty Julia. “Not out there for the flies, Weasy!”

“No, certainly not,” said Louise. “I don’t have anything to do with the food. That goes with the kitchen work.”

“And whose work is that?” Corene laid down her hammer to ask.

“Whose?” asked the others.

“Everyone’s,” came back Corene. “We must take turns at that, but we must make arrangements for the ‘eats’ right away. Who has been down to the spring?”

Everyone had.

“Could we hang our butter and meat in pails in the water?” asked Corey. She had seen this done in a real Scout camp.

“We might, but what about the animals?” inquired Cleo.

“Oh, we can get real strong pails and stake them down so that small animals can’t touch the food,” said the leader.

“And have horrid, old scaly snakes sniffing it!” protested Grace.

“We wouldn’t eat the sniffs,” retorted Corene. “At any rate we must have a cool place for food and can’t think of ice. I wonder what the Norms do?”

“Oh, the Normal camp girls,” explained Cleo. “I think they have grub traps set in the spring, but it runs directly past their door.”

“It’s right over by that rock, isn’t it?” asked Corene.

“Yes, there’s a nice little puddley basin in that big stone,” replied Julia.

“Then it’s easy to fix. We can run it right along here,” Corene was drawing a very crooked line in the trampled earth, with her homemade broom handle.

“How can we bring the spring over here?” scoffed Louise. “It goes straight down the other way.”

“We’ll dig a little ditch, of course,” insisted Corene. “Or if we’re too busy to do it, and we probably will be for days to come, we’ll get the boys to make one for us. The earth isn’t rooty here, see, it’s nice and soft,” she poked up a ditch in illustration. “And it will be splendid to have running water at the door for other purposes.”

“Corey, you ought to be a plumber!” roared Grace, precipitating one of those unwarranted outbursts of mirth that always ended work for the time being. The girls were just like that, and they couldn’t seem to help it.

The appearance of a surprised bunny on a stump checked the hilarity, and the inexperienced ones wanted to throw cracker crumbs to the stubby-tailed, long-eared little animal.

“And make a house pet of it!” exclaimed Corene. “Can you imagine that bunny stealing your fudge, Louise? He wouldn’t know it was stealing if you made him ‘to home’ like that.”

“Seems to me,” Louise frowned, “knowledge always makes one snippy. I don’t mean that you are snippy, Corey dear, but to turn away a nice, little, gray bunny, because we know he will come again if we treat him decently. Doesn’t it seem a lot nicer to be

sociable and take the consequences?”

“It does not!” exclaimed Cleo. “Because animals are made to be subject to man, not to be his equal. Here, Master Sammy Littletail, take yourself off. Shoo!” and Cleo tossed a harmless little pine cone after the scurrying bunny.

“Oh, all right. If that’s the way you feel about it I suppose we will have to shoo everything. But just the same, I left a nice square hole in the back of my outdoor buffet, for a bird sanctuary!” Louise confessed naively.

“Someone’s coming!” announced Grace. “Let me straighten my doormat.”

A young woman in camp uniform—the service suit of skirt and blouse—came up from the roadway. She was smiling broadly and sent that greeting on ahead to the Scouts.

“Welcome!” she called out. “We have all been wondering why no Girl Scouts came up to our hills, and now our wonder is answered. Here you are!”

“Yes,” admitted Corene, trying to straighten out a very badly wrinkled blouse. “We are just a junior troop, we organized ourselves, you know,” she finished frankly.

“How could you do that?” questioned the young lady, seating herself on the biggest and flattest camp-stump. It was regarded as a regular seat, of course.

“Oh, we are all Scouts at home, you know, and we understand all the—qualifications,” Corene hesitated at this word, fearful of an accusing glance from someone who might call it a bit big for a junior to use.

“But have you no leader? No director nor counsellor?” queried the stranger.

“I have just come from a big camp,” said the little Corene, a bit uncertainly.

A rather critical look was swept over the Bobbie at that statement.

“Yet you are too young to be a leader,” pressed the tall girl.

“I’m fifteen, but we hadn’t quite finished all our plans yet,” admitted the spokesman.

“We have grown up sisters,” tossed in Grace.

“Do they understand Scouting?” These questions were not asked in any but the most friendly tone. “I am Marge Mackin of Norm Camp, over there, and I have been a Scout leader in the city. I called to say I would be glad to help you in any way——”

“Oh, could you come over to our camp?” asked Julia, impulsively. “We have plenty of room.”

Miss Mackin rippled a girlish laugh. “That’s lovely!” she exclaimed. “I’m sure I never thought of thrusting myself on you this way, but if I can really be of service——”

“Indeed you can,” declared Corene. “We have just gone ahead planning camp and expecting something would turn up to help us out of the director difficulty. Of course, our mothers would have sent an older sister, perhaps changing the force each week, but it is so much better to have a real camp leader. If you can come we have saved a counsellor’s cot,” she finished.

“Have you, really? What wise little girls,” Miss Mackin was glancing around with unhidden admiration.

“Won’t you come in and inspect?” invited Corene.

“How splendid!” enthused the caller, passing in under the tent. “And how very practically ship-shape! You do show you are familiar with real camping. And where did you get such splendid equipment?”

The camp’s history was outlined and its prospects forecast, while Miss Mackin listened approvingly.

“And you really want a resident manager?” she asked finally.

“We do, indeed,” declared the spokesman Corene, who, more than the others, realized the value of the unexpected offer.

“Then suppose I accept, conditionally, of course, and we write our application to headquarters? All being Scouts we might better come under direct authority, don’t you think so?”

“Certainly,” chorused the Bobbies.

“But we won’t have to change our name or anything, will we?” rather anxiously asked Grace.

“Oh, no, even if there is another Bobolink troop your affix of ‘junior’ will, I think, make that all right. Also you may be called the Bobbies, that’s a handy little name for an emergency summer troop. I think I’m just as crazy about all this as you are. I dearly love Scout camping, and try to get our young ladies to adhere to it. But you see, they are not little girls, and cannot always see the fun in good team work.”

Miss Mackin was unmistakably attractive and very girlish herself. She had the smile called “wide,” and it lit up her whole face with rare flashes of dormant humor. The girls knew instantly she would be the very leader for them, and they felt like hugging the prospect.

“Now, it’s all settled!” proclaimed Julia. She had been fighting visions of black nights under that canvas tent with no Yale locks nor other safety contrivances or erstwhile doors, and here was some one actually able and willing to “take charge.”

“We are doing some research work up here,” Miss Mackin explained, “and parts of my days must be given to that. You are so capable I would be in the way, really, if around all the time; but nights——”

“Oh, we would need you every night,” insisted Corene sincerely.

“And in my own tent I am almost crowded out, so the plan seems inspirational,” said Miss Mackin. She was surveying Louise’s sideboard while Louise tried to get behind Grace. The compliment given, however, did not warrant hiding away from it.

“We intend to move in to-morrow afternoon,” said Corene, “if we can get everything moved up here by that time. Could you come to-morrow night?”

“Easily. The girls will be delighted to have my cot for a visitor. I really don’t have a whole cot, but I managed to get room to sleep in it,” she smilingly admitted. “Yet, I hope I have not influenced you to take pity on me,” she hurried to protest.

“You are a real blessing,” said Cleo. She was going to say “angel,” but a look from Grace forbade that extreme.

“We are going exploring this afternoon,” announced Julia, as the visitor prepared to leave.

“Oh, yes! Don’t mind the danger-signs you find stuck around,” said Miss Mackin. “We have seen many of them, but not yet scented any real danger. Good-bye for a while!” she finished. “I’ll be here in time to take charge of the banner-raising.” She hesitated in front of the new flagpole, her eyes alight with admiration for the girls’ spirit of loyalty to their Scout principles. Then Miss Mackin hurried off toward Camp Norm.

## CHAPTER V—A STOLEN LOOK AROUND

It was dawn on Lake Hocomo, and the sun that disappeared behind the hills last night after spilling his colorful paint-pots into the surprised waters, tried to make amends now by softening the deadened mixture into a haze of amethyst mists.

Gray, purple, rosy, and all so velvety, like the essence of color-life itself, the day dawned; welcomed by glad birds from every bush, tree or meadow spot for miles around.

Were the Bobbies up now they might have learned something from their namesake. On a soft patch of velvet grass, jeweled with dew-blessed buttercups, and that tiniest of flowers, the pale blue forget-me-not, the bobolinks fluttered, their song as reckless as the riot of early day, as they paddled along on wingtips to the gay rhythm of rippling, reckless aria; for a happy little songster is the bobolink, shooting up and diving down into the wet grasses for his bath of sweetness, then swaying on the slenderest of stems, not unlike the little girl who stands perched on her springboard in the first joys of water-diving.

It was because this rollicking bird sings as he flies that the vote of the Scouts resulted in his name being chosen, and on the dawn recorded the brown-gray streaked little songster left his meadow for a glimpse of that new camp in the woods. Soon he must go South for his rice feast, for early in summer the birds of his clan descend upon the rice fields and lo——!

The bobolink perched himself on the top of that new flagpole, and perhaps his trilled notes were a co-mingling of praise and good wishes. But the Bobbies were sleeping in their mothers' cottages and dreaming of the first night in camp.

Dick Porter, the night-watchman on the grounds around Tamarack Hills, rubbed his eyes and heaved the sigh of another task completed. Then he took a last look at Camp Comalong, for the Scouts had already stored in the tent goods of value, straightened his shoulders to suit the daytime needs, and sauntered off for his breakfast at the Nipanneck.

Quickly as he turned away from the camp grounds a girl stole down from the highest hilltop. Peg, the mysterious, without hat and in simple skirt and blouse, frightened away the chipmunks and bunnies as she skipped, light as a fawn, over the path invisible to less familiar eyes, then she too stopped in front of that dignified flagpole. She looked up and down the length of it and brushed her hand quizzically over its smooth surface.

"Humph!" she jerked. "Going to have everything first class, I guess."

Cautiously she stepped up to the rustic "sideboard." This brought from her lips no caustic comment, but at once claimed her wrapt attention. She touched the burlap curtain and peeked under it. She gingerly fingered the rustic basket that held a bunch of wild flowers and hid the glass jar of water, she smiled real approval at the wood's fern in the rugged nail-keg that offset the center, and a little sigh escaped Peg as she turned to the tent.

The new wood floor was fragrant as the pines, and as it was raised to make it safe from dampness the two "carpentered" steps with the doormat at top seemed very inviting indeed.

The girl ventured under the canvas and stood as if spellbound.

"Scouts!" she was thinking. "And I was the only Scout here till they came with all

this.”

The cots were still covered with burlap, and the little foot rugs were rolled in a bundle with some of Cleo’s precious cretonnes. Peg just touched all this with her brown fingers, and in a girl’s way smiled at this or frowned at that, as the fancy struck her.

A shrill whistle from the first lake steamer startled Peg as if she had been detected in her stolen inspection, and poking her head out of the tent to make sure the coast was clear, she jumped down the two white steps and made for the path, safe and unseen even by the girls from Camp Norm, who were just starting out for their nature hike. Peg quickly lost herself in the elderbrush lane that wound through the woods leading up to her own bungalow.

A big shaggy collie ran out to meet her. She patted him fondly and he “wagged her” along to the door, where a woman stood waiting. She was related to the girl, that was obvious, for she had the same high toss to her head, and the same snapping black eyes, also the pure white hair showed the original color must have been black to have changed to white so early.

“Peggie, dear, where have you been?” asked the woman. Her voice was low and well-modulated.

“Just down to see the new camp,” replied the girl. “Had your breakfast?”

“No, I waited for you. I do hope, Peggie,” there was a note of entreaty in her words, “that you are not doing anything—risky.”

“Ramrods and toothpicks!” exclaimed the girl. “Anything risky! Why, Carrie, I went down to see the new camp—the Girl Scouts, you know.”

“Oh yes. Those little girls who wear the uniform?”

“Uh—ha: the girls who wear a perpetual smile and several dollars’ worth of necktie,” replied Peg, a bit sarcastically.

“I am sure they look very neat and tidy, and I hope you are going to make friends with them,” ventured Aunt Carrie, vindictively.

“Now, please don’t start pestering me with that sort of thing,” protested the girl. “You know I don’t want to make friends with any girls.”

“You are so foolish, dear, and I fear sometimes you are going to extremes with——”

“Now, Carrie! Don’t be cross, please. Just let me have my way for this one little summer and the time will be up. Then, if you want me to, I’ll curl my hair if I have to sleep on the rolling-pin with the ends wound round it.” She laughed gaily at this prospect.

“Come in to breakfast. Shag has had his and we have such lovely berries. Come along, girlie,” directed the aunt, and she wound an arm over the shoulder that pressed up to her affectionately.

Shag, the big collie, took up his post at the door. The bungalow was unique in type, if bungalows are ever alike, and the pine trees that sheltered and brushed its roof with a sibilant swish, hummed now a pretty tuneless whisper. The place was hidden against a rocky ledge and not until one stood squarely in front of the unpainted log cabin was the building really visible, in its nest of trees and brush.

Some few years before a man with his little daughter and his sister came up to the hills. He stayed at the Tippiturn House while he built this bungalow. Then he took his daughter Peggie and his sister Caroline to the house in the hills, where he lived apart from all the natives and cottagers. This was Horace Ramsdell, Peggie’s father, but few

people had cause to remember the name, for the owner lived aloof from others and made few friends even in the village.

With all this he was a very pleasant man, fond of animals, kind to youngsters and generous in payment for any service. He died suddenly the year before the Scouts found their way into Tamarack Hills, where they crossed the path of Peg, the now fifteen-year-old daughter.

She followed her father's footsteps in living alone, and in the matter of shunning companions, but she could not avoid making friends, as Pete the boatman had already assured the Girl Scouts.

Her queer ways, defiance of dress codes, and above all her fondness for horseback riding, naturally stirred up criticism, but Peg was as oblivious of this as she was of the taunts so often flung at her by school girls, whose companionship she seemed to ignore.

"Fly-away Peg," they called her, and the way she "flew to school" on her blue roan might easily have merited the caption. But to Morton School from Tamarack Hills was a long distance, mostly covered by woodlands, and when others came in autos or by wagon, why shouldn't Peg come on horseback?

She should and she did, with a smile for the Fly-away Peg, and some fruit, winter and summer, for the old janitor who took care of her horse during the school session.

There was something incongruous in her attitude. She was so lively and rollicking with anyone who would not follow up the familiarity, but just as soon as one would threaten to call at her bungalow, or would ask her to call at theirs, Peg seemed to take fright and would scurry off like some woodland thing jealous of its hiding place.

No tradesman ever got past the door of her cabin; not even good old Doctor Rowan was brought inside when once he called to pay a professional visit on Aunt Carrie.

On that occasion the lady, being ill, was very comfortably propped in the big steamer-chair on the porch, Peg declaring she felt better out in the air, and that she preferred sleeping out there when the weather was mild enough.

So Peg of Tamarack Hills was a queer girl in many ways, and the mystery surrounding her home life always served to excite the curiosity of strangers, but had not, as yet, been explained.

Perhaps a half-hour after she entered the bungalow for breakfast she appeared again in the familiar roughrider's outfit, adjusting the leather-fringed skirt over her breeches as she stood in the doorway.

"I'll take Shag if that will make you feel any better, Aunt Carrie," said the girl, pulling her hat firmly on the cropped head. "Also, I'll ride slowly enough to talk to him, and I'll surely be back by noon. Now promise you are not going to worry."

"I can't promise, my dear; but I'll try not to. You are growing up now, Peggie, and summer folks are so critical, you know."

"Toothpicks for summer folks!" retorted the girl scornfully. "We don't owe them anything, Carrie, and if that's all you have got to worry about——"

"I wish it were, dear," sighed the woman, but the girl was hurrying to the log-built barn where "Whirlwind," her blue roan, impatiently awaited her coming.

Then she was off "like a piece of scenery," as Pete put it. But Peggie Ramsdell had no thought of the picturesque effect she created, nor did she care for less friendly criticism that followed in her dust-blown path.

## CHAPTER VI—OPENING DAY

“Everything is ready. Miss Mackin has sent our application to headquarters so that we may go on record, and now all we have to do is——”

Louise interrupted Corene. “I’ve got to move all the dishes for my precious dining-room, and who can spare a car to lug them out?”

“We’ll pick you up and your tin pans on our way out this afternoon,” replied Grace, quite breathless from the excitement. “And I’ve got to press out my uniform for the celebration.”

“Come along, I guess we have everything for this trip,” said Corene, gathering up a few more “odds and ends.” What wouldn’t that camp contain?

“Come along!” repeated Cleo. “I’m so glad we named it that, for I can just fancy we will make that our slogan. ‘Come-a-long,’” she mimicked again, “and don’t spill the eats, whatever you do.”

Out at the fork in the roadway they were met by the rest of the Bobbies, and the camp on this, the opening day, was to receive a full patrol of eight members. Miss Mackin had been made official director, Corene was leader, and the other members were Louise, Grace, Julia, Cleo, Margaret, and Madaline, the last two being visitors, but also regular Scouts in the home troop.

Miss Mackin had already taken up her place in the camp and was now fully responsible, according to the best standards of the general organization; but in spite of that she allowed the girls to make the camp as they thought best, realizing that their plans were affording them a splendid chance to express individuality, and it was their proud boast that Camp Comalong was entirely theirs, from flagpole to the spring ditch, and from tent roof to the pine-needle pillows which Julia insisted should be used.

And they were really moving in!

A little gasp of anticipation sort of choked Cleo as she realized she was going to sleep with that oft-mentioned thin “rag of canvas twixt her and the stars.” She wondered what they would do when it rained, and was glad the good, strong board floor was raised high enough to crawl under should a storm get too furious.

Benny called this the cyclone-cellar, and it was stored with enough furniture which could not be utilized “just now” to give it a rather cyclonic appearance.

The blankets on the eight nicely arranged cots had not been folded just as Corene had directed, so this detail was the first thing attended to now.

“You see,” she explained, “an awful lot depends upon the beds. They are our chief decoration, you might say,” as she proceeded to make each bed very pretty indeed, with a diamond-shaped blanket in gay colors throwing its brilliancy clear up to the brown canvas ceiling.

Bits of waste paper seemed to come from nowhere and settle everywhere, and these kept the Scouts busy, for this was to be a model camp and fit for inspection “always.”

“Now we’ll all go home and take a bathtub bath,” suggested Miss Mackin, “and be back promptly at two-thirty for the flag-raising.”

If anyone doubts girls’ ability to make life ideal in the open, such a one has surely

a limited experience with life's loveliest creatures, for girls are naturally "little animals," and who-ever tried to teach a bunny how to dig its burrow?

At two o'clock Benny rounded up the Boy Scouts, and when these came together they formed quite a company, in which were five fifes, three were tin horns, several drums, a few being homemade and of recent production, besides mouth-organs and other varieties of noise-making instruments. Benny himself, being brother to Grace, was chosen color-bearer, and he started his company off for Tamarack Hills with many compliments following in the wake of the trusty, valiant Boy Scouts.

Friends and relations of the girls had gathered also, and it was a distinguished line of autos that parked down at the foot of the hill when the girls themselves, hiking now and disdaining car-rides, marched along to take formal possession of Camp Comalong.

The inspection came first and everyone took part in it Mothers were enthusiastic and even craved "camps like this" for the whole family. Those fathers who could do so also attended the opening, and manlike talked proudly of their girls being the real thing in the Scout line.

The boys "drummed and fided" madly, and of course drew a crowd.

"After this one afternoon," said Corene to Cleo's mother, "we are going to be strictly Girl Scouts, and we will only have visitors on regular days."

Miss Mackin was conducting one of the visiting school-teachers all over the grounds, for the fame of this girl-made camp had spread beyond its limits. Then the signal was given, and Grace pulled the rope that raised Old Glory over Tamarack Hills!

That moment was reverently solemn.

Every Girl and Boy Scout stood at attention, while the other spectators evinced their respect for the country's glorious emblem. Then the salute was given and the strains of "Star-Spangled Banner" stole out, first timidly, then assuringly, over the hills to the soft accompaniment of the lake's gentle swish against the rocky shore.

The hours that followed were too well-filled with excitement and interest to bear commonplace reporting, but the capable director, Miss Mackin, or "Mackey," as she had already been affectionately dubbed by the Scouts, managed to get the grounds fairly well cleared of visitors in time for supper preparations to be begun before sunset, and presently the girls found themselves alone with their beloved scheme, "Camping in the Woods."

"We will have a cold supper to-night," said Mackey, "and we have two quarts of lovely fresh milk—a donation from the Boy Scouts."

"We might have treated them," said Grace. "They did so much for us, and their music was really splendid!"

"Indeed it was," agreed the director, "and some afternoon we will give them all a treat. But to-night we have to try things out, so we will keep to schedule. I think everything went beautifully, and I want to congratulate you all. My friends from Camp Norm were very much impressed, and envied me my comfortable quarters," she added considerably.

"They don't know the squad," laughed Corene, "and we had on our best behavior to-day. Wait, just wait until things get going."

"We'll get the water," volunteered Cleo, taking the nice, shiny new pail from its peg in the tree closet. There was a row of these tree closets, being small wooden boxes nailed low enough to reach easily, and holding all the kitchen pans and pots. No one

claimed these, and as Corene announced early in the plans, each should take turns, just like the K. P., or Kitchen Police, in military parlance.

Up the hill to the spring now romped Cleo and Grace. It was joyous to begin, really, to start this first meal in camp. Fleet-footed were the happy Scouts on the initial errand, and if Grace stumbled and Cleo tripped it was small wonder, considering their excited state of mind.

They were within a few feet, or bushes, of the spring when they saw a figure leaning over it.

“Look!” whispered Cleo. “It’s Peg!”

“Come on and let’s speak to her,” suggested Grace sociably.

“She might not like it,” demurred Cleo.

“Let’s try, anyhow,” insisted Grace, quickening her pace.

The girl leaning over the spring must have heard the steps, for she jumped up quickly and snatched her hat from the big stone.

“Hello!” called out Grace cheerily. “Did you come down to our camp exercises?”

The brown felt hat was pulled down very suddenly and firmly on the black hair, and for an instant the face under it flashed defiance. The next, a frank smile brought the answer.

“I did not exactly come to them, but I heard from the hill. It seemed—very nice.”

“Oh, it was. I’m sorry you didn’t come,” pressed Grace. “Let us introduce ourselves.” She waved her pail nervously. “This is Cleo and I’m Grace of the Bobolinks. You may call us the Bobbies if you will.”

Peg smiled again and scratched her heavy shoes quite like an embarrassed youth might do. She hesitated quite a while before answering:

“And I’m Peg—you may, if you will” (she pleasantly imitated the voice Grace had used), “just call me Peg,” she finished rather shyly.

It was such an agreeable surprise to find her approachable. Immediately both Scouts fell to talking of their camp prospects, and very naturally asked Peg to call.

“We know you are the original Scout of these hills,” Grace complimented, “and I hope you don’t mind our trespassing.”

“Oh, no,” replied Peg, but the voice was a little guarded. “The hills are big enough for us all,” she added, “and I don’t think you could have found a prettier spot. You can see clear across the lake from your front door,” and she smiled at the classification.

But she did not reply to the invitation. Both girls noticed the omission.

Cleo dipped her pail in the spring pool and brought it out filled. She wanted to rinse the new tin, although Corene had boiled it before bringing it out to camp, but to rinse it would cool it, and now Cleo looked about for a spot to throw the waste water.

“Toss it over this way,” suggested Peg, who was moving away. “There’s a water-cress bed here. Don’t forget to try them when you want a salad,” and before the Scouts could thank her she was racing over the next hill and waving good-bye.

“So we met Peg!” said Cleo, her pail of water spilling over her new sneakers.

“And she’s a dear,” announced Grace emphatically.

Then they carried a newly dipped pail of fresh spring water back to camp, for their first supper under the tamarack trees.

## CHAPTER VII—THE LOVING BANDIT

When the girls went down to the lake with Mackey that evening, they were, somehow, a source of curiosity to those friends not members of the charmed circle of Scouts. To be away from home, living in a tent out in the woods, while even the Boy Scouts had to go back to their family cottage at night, seemed highly exciting. But the Bobbies were now a unit, and under the capable direction of Miss Mackin they started immediately to do things as they are done by units, and not by individuals.

“We will go for a sail this evening,” planned the director. “I see you have all passed in the swimming tests and therefore are permitted to go in canoes.”

“Oh, yes,” Corene replied; “swimming is our chiefest joy, and canoeing on this lake, what we have had of it, is simply ideal.”

“I am sure folks will be curious about us for a while at least,” continued Miss Mackin, “so I have asked Camp Norm to let us take the big canoe this evening, the one we teachers practice in, you know.”

“The big green Pedagogue!” exclaimed Cleo. “Oh, how splendid! I have just longed for a ride in the war canoe,” and she hurried to do her part in clearing away the supper things.

“Cleo,” interfered Corene aside, so that Mackey would not overhear, “you know there is a real Scout way of doing dishes, and——”

“All right, Corey; but let’s do them any way to-night, so that they get done,” replied the little girl in the big gingham apron. “I just want to get down to the lake and out on the water before the sunset fades. Daddy and all the folks will be there——”

“Show-off!” taunted Madaline, the baby of the patrol. “Cleo thinks that canoe-riding is next best to horseback riding,” and she made a juggler’s pass to catch the plate that slipped through her dish-towel.

A half-hour later the Bobolink girls were down at the dock, the center of an admiring party which included some Camp Fire Girls, some girls from the Hikers Club, besides the usual scattering of summer girls, all piling on compliments for the day’s achievement in the opening of Camp Comalong. Miss Mackin wore her regular uniform, which she had with her, fortunately, and all together the patrol made a very creditable showing, as they took their places in the war canoe.

After some instructions from Miss Mackin, who, among other things, insisted upon “good form rather than speed,” they pulled out gracefully, the “Down Paddle” start having been executed by the eight doubles as precisely as if done by a simple stroke.

And wonder of wonders! There was a moving-picture man on shore, grinding his machine as if each grind depended on speed and not upon form, for only in a sudden burst of strong sunset light did the camera operator hope to get a picture of the Girl Scouts on Lake Hocomo.

“In the movies!” breathed Julia, dipping her paddle with such awe as might have been occasioned had some perfume stream sprung up through the many springs beneath the water’s surface. It was sweet, indeed, to be pictured thus, and not a Bobbie among them but felt a little tinge of pride when the boys shouted after them:

“You’ll be in the movies, girls!”

“Queer how much more important we are to-day than we were yesterday,” remarked Cleo analytically.

“Because yesterday we were girls, while to-day we are Scouts,” explained Mackey. “That’s the value of team play, you know. Now we will paddle in to the Point, and see that we make a perfect landing. That’s one thing we have to learn in good canoeing.”

Dip after dip took them gracefully down the lake to where the Point landing jutted out among all sorts of craft, the motor-boating being easily as common at the lakeside as is the “motor-caring” at any inland parkside.

“I hope we don’t jam them,” whispered Grace to Cleo, who was her canoe partner.

“If we have to jam anyone, I hope it’s that ‘streak’—you know, Grace, that queer bug-boat those girls from the hotel always ride in.”

“Why?” asked Grace, leaning closer.

“Because they’re snippy and call us ‘candy kids,’” replied Cleo. “It seems to me they look more like candy themselves, with their taffy hair and peppermint-striped bathing-suits.”

Grace silently agreed, and soon all the paddlers bent their interest and energy on making a perfect landing.

At the director’s signal they stopped paddling some little distance out, then steered past the flock of motor boats into the side of the dock, where as pretty a landing was made as the big Pedagogue ever had to her credit.

Miss Mackin and Corene sprang ashore first, and held the boat while the others quickly and alertly followed.

Again they were the center of an admiring throng, and again the Bobbies felt suffused with a pardonable pride. They were really the first group of Girl Scouts to be seen about the lake, and it was not surprising that they should attract some attention.

Some provisions for the next day were purchased, as the Point was the center of supplies for the colonists, then, after a half hour spent in recreation about the pier, the party embarked again and paddled back toward the camp landing.

The evening “had ripened” as Louise expressed it, and a calm mellowness seemed to settle over everything about the water and its shores.

“Let us try a song,” suggested Miss Mackin. “Who can lead?”

“Weasy!” came the chorus; and presently the newest version of popular songs, adjusted to the Girl Scout needs, with clever words that just fitted the tunes, were “tried” and rather successfully executed. The clear, true voice of Weasy carried along the more uncertain tones of Grace and Cleo, like chips of sound on the crest of a song wave, and once started the “sing” went merrily on until the home dock was finally reached.

A sigh of satisfaction ended the chorus. The Pedagogue was docked and stored for the night, although the interested Benny and his clan crawled under the big canoe “just for sport,” the Bobbies said good-night and turned back to the hills for their first night under the stars.

It was almost dark as they hurried along under the trees, and it was not by accident that each little girl clutched the arm of her companion. They needed the nearness on this first night, at any rate, and Cleo more than once cast a surreptitious glance back over the lake to Chipmunk cottage, where she knew, at that very moment, Daddy was looking campward and thinking of his little girl who had flown from the home nest for the first time.

But she trudged along eager for the big experience, even if conscious of its sentimental cost.

“One lantern will answer for us, I think,” said the director. “Shall we have a campfire and story to-night?”

“Oh, yes, surely!” replied Corene, who managed to frame first the same answer the others attempted.

The two big logs, between which the fire was to be built, were already in place, and it was now time for Julia to shine in her especial department. She undertook to build the stone oven for the cooking purposes, so she also included the responsibility of making place and arrangements for the campfire.

Following the camp manual “no paper nor excelsior nor other artificial means” were to be employed in the fire making, but instead the “punk” wood, gouged from the heart of a dry log, was placed in the “V” of the two big green logs; then the tiny twigs and light material were first piled up so that the “light with one match only” was successfully accomplished, and a merry blaze burst out to greet Julia and cheer her companions, almost before the others realized the fire was really started.

Every member of the little patrol stood looking on—spellbound. What is more inspiring than a campfire in the clearance, with the tent “hard by” and the sheltering trees overlooking?

“Oh, if only we could get the girl Peg, you know, to come down and join us,” sighed Grace.

“Let’s try,” suggested Cleo. “She seemed friendly and it won’t do any harm to try. I’ll go over the hill with you?”

“If Mackey will let us,” followed Grace. The other girls were finding seats on the big logs arranged at a safe distance from the fire, and when the director heard the request of Grace and Cleo, she agreed they might go over the hill to the cabin, if they kept to the path in front of the other camps and came directly back.

It was not yet dark and the two Bobbies started off on a merry chase, as usual. Near the cabin they met Shag, the big collie, and he made friends promptly, perhaps because they wore the same sort of brownish outfit his own mistress was usually dressed in.

“Shall we go right up and knock?” deliberated Cleo. Now that they faced the cabin they faced also its restrictions.

“No,” reflected Grace. “We had better call.”

Suiting the words to action she cupped her hands and “Whoo-hooed” once or twice; then waited.

No answer.

“Call, use her name,” suggested Cleo, leaving the duty to Grace.

“Peg! Peg-gee!” called Grace. “Hey—oh! Peg!” she trilled in a curly sort of call.

Shag seemed restless now and his manner was less confident. He didn’t wag so enthusiastically, but instead sniffed with suspicion.

Finally the cabin door opened and Peg appeared. She hurried down and met the girls where they waited.

“We came to bring you over to our first campfire,” Grace almost spluttered. She was excited and in a hurry to return to camp before the night should overtake them.

“Oh, I really couldn’t go!” protested Peg, but her voice was toned with a hint of

regret.

“You’ve just got to,” said Cleo. “We are bandits and we’re going to kidnap you!” and quite as if the play had not been all planned, each Scout slipped her arm into the arms of Peg and urged her forward.

A ripple of girlish laughter answered the challenge, but Shag didn’t like it and he growled threateningly.

The girls stepped back for a moment, fearing the dog might attempt to interfere, when another figure appeared in the doorway. It was Aunt Carrie, and she very quickly and decidedly ordered Shag to “come here, sir,” which he did, by that time realizing his very natural mistake.

“Really, girls,” said Peg. “I do thank you for being so friendly, but I can’t go.”

“And this our first night on the grounds and you the original Scout!” sulked Cleo. “At any rate it is getting so dark I don’t see how we will dare go back alone.”

“You *are* a bandit,” laughed the stranger, “and I suppose——”

“That you must come,” Grace finished happily. “Hurry, do please! The fire is going high, just see it! And we may miss the story.”

“You stay here then,” ordered Peg rather shyly, “while I get my cape from Aunt Carrie. Shag will be sure to call for me later.”

Grace and Cleo danced a few steps while waiting, but in a very few moments Peg was back with her cape over her arm.

“I can’t tell you how surprised I am,” she admitted. “I so very seldom go calling.”

“But you are a Scout and you wouldn’t be unfriendly,” almost charged Cleo.

“Maybe that’s it,” returned Peg; and arm in arm the trio stumbled back to the campfire, for it was quite impossible to walk without stumbling when retarded by darkness from taking the jumps and jerks necessary to the ordeal.

When they reached Camp Comalong Mackey was just starting her story.

## **CHAPTER VIII—GLOW OF THE CAMPFIRE’S GLEAM**

“And so the mystery of the ‘Pocket In Black Rock’ was finally cleared up,” ended the story teller, as the big smoldering log fell into the blaze and sent up a “fire-works” of spluttering embers.

The Bobbies hugged the line of waists that sat squat in front of the campfire. Peg had been accorded a seat of honor directly in front of the biggest blaze, and it was not possible to escape her sighs and gasps of rapt attention, as the thrills of the story were unwound, and she jumped up now and smiled so frankly into the face of the director that no shadow of doubt remained as to this strange girl’s sincerity.

“I have never had such a lovely time!” she declared with something of the social habit, “and I’m ever—so thankful to you and the girls.”

The Bobbies were all delighted. Somehow this little woods-girl was so picturesque and fitted in the scene so perfectly now, when the blaze lit up her entire form, as she stood outlined against the night—it was hard to imagine she was in any way queer!

But the next moment she had flung her cape over her shoulders, thrust her fingers into her mouth to make shriller the whistle she emitted, and when Shag leaped “into the ring” she said good-night, repeated it to each section of the group, and then was off with

her dog, before the others could offer “to go with her over the hill” or even to ask her to come again.

Her abrupt departure left a sort of “hole in the group.” While she was there the others felt a fascination, that usually accorded to mystery, and perhaps she as much as Miss Mackin’s thrilling story had furnished the evening’s interest. But during all the time she exchanged no word even of comment, and some of the girls suspected that the “kidnapping” perpetrated by Grace and Cleo had been more real than imagined.

“What joy!” enthused Margaret, looking up to see if she could find the stars blinking after having her eyes glare-shot by the fire. “To think we are going to sleep out here in the woods!”

“And we must make our inspection now,” announced the careful director.

“Corene, you are leader; get the lantern, please.”

Willingly the Scout mentioned sprang to obey, when the “plink-plink-plink” of Ukes, and a soft hum of voices stole down to their grounds.

“A serenade!” exclaimed Louise.

“Oh, goody! We will have more campfire!”

Presently the music filled the clearance, and, as suspected, the serenaders were upon the scene.

“The girls from Norm!” cried Julia. “Isn’t this just too lovely!”

Then sang the singers:

“There are girls that make us happy,  
There are girls who make us sad,  
There are girls who never can stop gig’ling  
And they’re girls who make you awful mad!  
But the girls we serenade this evening  
With this ukeleled sing-a-song,  
Are the Bobbies with our stolen Mackey,  
In the lovely new Camp Comalong!”

The tune was borrowed from “Smiles” and the words, though a little rough on the edges, fitted in pretty well. And this was the beginning of the campfire concert. Two ukes and two mandolins, besides a real melodious banjo, composed the orchestra, and the Norms sang everything campy and collegiate, until Mackey declared she would simply have to put her Bobbies to bed.

Regret as real and keen as that usually expressed in a nursery at the same order, answered the summons, but the director was inexorable, and the Norms finally left in a path of complimentary protestations.

The inspection finished (nothing was found out of order on this, the very first night), the little campers presently found themselves in their “bunks.”

Such tittering, giggling and whispering!

Someone’s bed “sagged like a hammock” while another someone’s “humped like a hill.”

“I’m going to try to grow tall,” whispered Louise to Julia, her nearest neighbor. “Do you suppose the pines and tamaracks can stretch one out?” and she thrust her feet beyond the blanket confines.

Julia didn’t care if she shrank, and she whispered that secret; and so it went around from cot to cot until Miss Mackin called a final warning. Then things settled

down at last, and only the trusty lantern that hung behind a screen in a sheltered spot outside the door, stood sentinel over the sleepers.

And they slept. Little gasps and sighs told of girlish dreams, and if Louise kicked her feet down too decidedly perhaps she was trying to grow; also when Julia humped up her knees and spoiled the entire effect of her pretty blanket, perhaps she was trying to shrink.

Then the inevitable happened. As it couldn't be avoided it has to be told, in spite of the usual first night scare banality.

Cleo had just said something unintelligible and Corene answered with an alto groan, when there was a scream! It came from the end cot where Margaret slept.

Every one sat up as if a spring had been touched.

"Oh, mercy, look!" yelled a chorus.

They looked, and between the curtain blazed two immense eyes! Also there was a snorting sound!

"A bear!" cried Madaline. "See how tall he is!"

"Yes, look!" exclaimed Cleo, "his head is in—the trees!"

Miss Mackin's flashlight had slipped from her hand, and it was while she fumbled in the dark for it that this dialogue was snapped off.

"Just wait a minute, and don't get excited," she begged so inadequately that Corene repeated:

"Excited!"

Her light recovered, she quickly turned the flash on the thing that was somehow fixed in the joining of the rear flaps of the tent.

"Oh, h-h-h!" screamed the chorus again.

"Nothing—but—a——" Miss Mackin stopped.

She was not sure just what it was, for an immense animal head was framed in the curtains it had poked itself between.

There was a continued volley of subdued shrieks from everyone until Cleo took aim with her shoe. She proved a first rate shot, for the animal blinked once and promptly withdrew.

"A cow! I heard him chew!" declared the little fat Madaline.

"But he has no horns," argued Julia, trembling still, and trying to talk with a head covered in the blankets.

"It is a cow," declared Miss Mackin. She was on her feet now, and had the tent flaps open. She had taken down the pole light from the front door, and now swung the lantern through the curtains in the rear. "See, there she goes! Poor Bossy just wanted to pay us a call. I didn't know we had any cows around here."

"All right there?" called a man's voice, next.

"The officer!" declared Cleo not without a little squeak of joy. "That's Dick Porter's voice."

"Yes, that's the watchman," agreed Miss Mackin, who had slipped on her heavy robe.

"All right, officer!" she called back. "But please drive the cow away."

"Certainly," came the reply through the night's silence. "That cow has a habit of walking in her sleep," and he laughed so good-naturedly that the Bobbies took the cue and laughed heartily themselves.

The director feared she would not get them quiet again in time to have even a reasonable amount of sleep, for what one didn't think of the other suggested, until night was turned into a medley of utter nonsense, set off by such laughter as can only be enjoyed when she who laughs knows it's against the rules to do so.

"Now, girls, no campfire to-morrow night if you do not stop within five minutes," threatened Miss Mackin in desperation.

"All right, Mackey dear," replied Cleo. "I'll throw my other shoe at the first one that laughs."

Then she yelled again. It was such a sudden outburst no one could question the humor that provoked it.

"Oh, Mackey dear," she gulped between her spasms. "Do you think Bossie swallowed my new shoe?"

"We'll chip in and buy you a new pair if you only will go to sleep, Bobbie dear," begged the distracted director, and this time her appeal bore results.

But over the bend on Tamarack Hill another girl slept fitfully. Peg had broken her resolution to remain alone, and for that one beautiful evening she had been just like the others—a girl among girls!

And how overjoyed Aunt Carrie was! To have Peg run off and spend a happy evening with the Girl Scouts. Upon her return to the cabin no little queen could have received more loving attention.

"Now at last, Peggie dear, you have found friends," the white-haired woman had declared. But Peg shook her bobbed head and refused to promise that she would keep up the friendship so auspiciously begun.

"You know, Carrie dear, I must not bring folks here yet," Peg had protested, "and I shall never accept things nor friendship that I cannot fully return."

So now Peg slept, dreaming of that magic campfire: hearing the story again of the pocket in the big black rock: now she felt Grace grasp her hands in delight and ecstasy with a little squeal of joy, and after it all she was alone again, with Shag sleeping at her door, with Aunt Carrie's faithful night lamp making a little shaded starlight beneath the beam ceiling.

And she had cried a little and laughed a little, but at last it was all over, and now she would take Whirlwind out over the hills in the early morning and forget, if she could, the Bobbies and their magic campfire.

## CHAPTER IX—A DAY WITH THE BOBBIES

A shrill whistle shocked the girls back to consciousness.

“What’s that?” asked Cleo.

“Our ‘get-up’ call,” replied Corene. “Mackey’s whistle. At the big camp we always heard the bugles next.”

Whether woodnymphs were listening in that tent, or whether Corene’s remark provoked an uncanny echo, at that very moment a bugle blast sounded somewhere!

“Another serenade!” exclaimed Julia, settling into her new comfort, quite as if the bugle-blow were permission to defer rising time.

Miss Mackey was already dressed for the ten minute exercise drill. “The girls at Norm have no bugles, so we cannot be indebted to them this time,” she said.

“Maybe it’s friend cow bringing back my shoe,” chuckled Cleo.

Came the uncertain notes of the bugle again:

“We can’t get ’em up—up—up!” it stuttered frantically, unable to return to the first notes to repeat the strain.

The girls shuffled into slippers and bathrobes, the regular drill costumes, and Grace ventured to poke her head outside the tent.

“The boys!” she exclaimed. “There they go scamping off. Just gave us our first call, to tease, of course. Well, I’m glad something got Benny up. I wouldn’t wonder if the bugler blew him out first.”

“They’re gone,” repeated Miss Mackin good-naturedly, “and I suppose they think it was a great joke. Grace, couldn’t we borrow that bugle?”

“I’ll see; I think Clee could blow it; she does so well with a bicycle pump.”

Presently the Bobbies were outside; having reverently raised their colors, they raced off to the “drill field,” a little place cleared of brush and safe from the eyes even of Benny’s bugle squad. There, in bathing suits, they went through the setting up exercises, warranted to do everything in the way of providing health and beauty for Girl Scouts.

From that they raced off to the little cove in the lake, took a dip, which they would loved to have prolonged into a swim had Mackey not blown that police whistle; then back to camp, then washed and dressed and jumped out to their benches set around the new boarded table.

Washing between the trees, where twin cedars or other saplings were used to hold the basin bench, proved novel to those little girls, used to the white enamelled bathrooms at home; but it was fun, even if Julia did spill “every drop of the pitcher full of fresh water” and have to borrow from Margaret; and although Grace found her soap so slippery, it would roll off into the pine needles and when rescued look like a new sort of fuzzy-wuzzy chestnut. Altogether it was fun and frolic, and “good for what ails you,” as Cleo commented, when Madaline took to preaching about the wrongs of civilization.

“It’s all nonsense and mummy says so, for us to want hot and cold water all the time,” she declaimed from her perch on a stump where the towel was clear of the ground. “And this is good for us. Will make——”

“Men of us,” finished Cleo, who always loved to tease chubby, baby Madaline.

Corene had charge of breakfast, Julia was fireman, this picturesque duty

appealing to her imaginative nature, and as she poked the embers in the stone furnace (of her own building) and sang, "Boil and bubble, toil and trouble," she must have imagined the witches in Macbeth were stirring things up with their forked wands.

"Hungry! I'm starved!" declared Margaret. "Can't seem to remember when I ate last. Please send me down that dish of apples."

"Let us adhere to something of our regular table manners, girls," said Miss Mackin from her place at the head of the board. "We don't want the home folk to be blaming us for lost manners, when we go back. I know it does seem like fun to be free from most restrictions, but habits are so easily formed, and we can't blame the home people for wanting us to go back to them better in every way." Miss Mackin never dictated, she just "put things up to the girls" in a very pleasant manner.

Corene was serving the cereal while Julia kept things hot over the picturesque stone furnace.

"If you have enough cooked now we will all eat together, Corey," said the director. "Just bring your coffee pot over here. I'll pour!" She smiled broadly at that use of the social term.

"Let me cook the bacon," begged Cleo. "I've heard daddy talk so often of camp bacon." Her request was granted, and presently the bacon was sizzling from its wire string that ran from one end to the other of the furnace, each end being hooked on the iron poles, little gas pipes set up in the stones, with homemade hooks of tightly wound wire, the entire contrivance representing Julia's idea of a camp "skillet" or "dangling spider."

The bacon broiled very quickly, for the embers had reached a point of concentrated heat, and when Cleo forked her bacon off the wire its aroma might easily have attracted envious comments from the girls at Camp Norm.

"Did anything ever taste so good?" exclaimed Margaret.

"Shall we have baked potatoes for lunch?" asked Madaline, sending her cup down to Louise to have it refilled with milk.

"I'm to cook lunch," replied Cleo, "and you may help, Madie. I know you always did love to bake things. Remember the day you burned the big angel cake?"

Madie remembered, but claimed a broader knowledge of the culinary art now.

The day's programme provided something for every hour, and after breakfast it was to be a swim. The weather was ideal for this, their first experience in the "wide open," so that a swim was eagerly anticipated now.

"Fix your bunks; inspection first, you know," ordered the leader.

How jolly it was! And how worth while to do things this way, which was the right way for this particular occasion?

The beds and their surroundings passed the director's inspection, and then came the swim.

"We are all good swimmers," Julia insisted. "I don't really think we need have Mackey with us, if she should want to do something else."

"Oh, I go with you," replied Mackey. "The water is a matter of particular responsibility, and being good swimmers would not excuse me in case of accident."

"Mother always feels that way and insists on being along with us," added Louise reflectively.

The dock was crowded when they reached the "bathing grounds." They might

have “gone in” at their own beach in the cove, but the rocks around that corner were jagged, and Mackey decided it would be better to take the dives from the regular springboard off the landing.

“I wish we would see Peg,” Grace said to Cleo. “I wonder where she goes in?”

“Never saw her in a bathing suit,” replied Cleo, “but I’m sure she’s a regular fish in the water. We’ll ask her to come with us next time we see her.”

“Do you suppose she works at anything?” Grace asked again.

“Why! How queer that you should think she works?” charged Cleo.

“Well, she does something. She wouldn’t ride away so early every morning just for pleasure; and Benny says he has seen her so often.”

A call to line up for a running dive interrupted the conversation, and presently the Bobbies quite forgot Peg, in their joy of a real swim in Lake Hocomo.

“Lots better than the ocean,” chugged Louise, just coming in from a long pull. “I never could try this stroke in the big waves,” and she dove back again to try the “crawl” in the smooth yet pleasantly warmed waters; for the lake was never very cold at the big open basin that surrounded this point.

“And no tide to worry about,” added Margaret.

However dear was the ocean when at the ocean they tarried, the Scouts had a happy faculty of shifting their affection, and now it was the “wonderful lake!”

Miss Mackin was watching the swimmers and she quickly observed those most proficient.

“Madaline, don’t go outside the float,” she cautioned. “That’s a pretty good swim for a little girl, I think.”

The smallest Bobbie turned to obey when those nearest her saw her give a sudden jerk and then she screamed!

“Oh, something has got me! Quick!”

Miss Mackin only had to put her hand out to reach the frightened child, but Madaline’s face showed pain and the director could not at once seem to assist her.

“My foot! Something’s got my foot!” she cried.

“A crab!” exclaimed Grace, swimming quickly to Madaline’s aid.

“Not in the lake!” protested Cleo.

By this time Miss Mackin had succeeded in freeing the very much frightened little Scout, and she was now leading her ashore. Madaline had drawn her foot between two rocks that came together so closely they formed a very formidable trap, and the only way a victim could get out was to back out of the wider end of the opening. There were rocks only on the lake bottom near shore, and most bathers soon became familiar with their location.

As if that trifling incident opened the way for further “frowns of Fate” the girls in the water presently had reason to scamper.

The criticized blondes, they who ran the “Bug,” that deformed motor boat, now deliberately turned the craft into the line of the swimmers. At first it seemed accidental, but when Grace and Julia turned in another direction and the “Bug” cut after them, they realized that the girls in the hideous striped bathing suits were giving them a chase.

Miss Mackin saw this from ashore and ran along the dock to the end of the pier. She called from there, and the girls in the queer squat boat seemed to take heed, for presently the boat made a complete circle and shot out again into the open lake.

“Come in, girls,” called the director. “Time’s up!”

“Oh, not one more swim?” begged Grace. But Corene said “no,” and everyone realized Corene’s experience with a director qualified her to dictate, so reluctantly they waded in and were soon back in camp, dressing for dinner.

“What do you think of those girls racing after us with their old motor boat?” Louise asked. They were looking rosy and feeling “frisky” after their swim, and the preparations for dinner (they had decided to have the main meal at noon), were aggravating in their appetizing lure.

“I think,” replied Julia, “we will have to look out for those ladies,” she wanted to say something more “descriptive,” but let it go at “ladies.”

“Why look out for them?” pressed Grace. She may have scented danger and “warmed to it,” for Grace had the reputation of daring and courage.

“Well, they didn’t seem to be ‘cutting up’ exactly, and they did steer their old bug-boat straight after us,” reasoned Julia. “Wonder where they stop?”

“I saw them on the grounds of the Fayette the other day,” said Madaline, “and one was in a hammock, with her feet sticking out and you could see her green silk stockings all the way from the corner.”

“Must have terrible long——” The dinner gong interrupted Grace’s sentence, for Corene was hammering her bread knife on the big tin tray with such startling results, that the very birds took fright and left the grounds before gathering the crumbs that might come to them from the table of the Bobbies.

## **CHAPTER X—MEET BUZZ AND FUSS**

“Company!” called Madaline. “Someone is coming down our path.”

“But we don’t own the woods,” replied Grace.

“They are surely coming here,” insisted Cleo.

“And Bobbs! Listen!” exclaimed Louise. “It’s the girls who wear long-legged green silk stockings! Just look!”

The intruders were almost upon them and the order Louise gave seemed entirely uncalled for. Everyone looked! In fact they stared at the two conspicuous blondes, who were recognized as the drivers of the bug-boat, and who seemed rudeness itself to the Scouts.

“Quick! Drop the tent flap, don’t let them snoop!” whispered Cleo to Madaline who was nearest the pull rope.

Madaline picked herself up from her camp stool and with a great show of indifference sauntered into the tent and dropped the curtain as she went. The other girls exchanged glances of satisfaction.

“Good afternoon,” chirped one of the callers. “May we come in?”

“Certainly,” replied Corene. She had risen but did not offer her seat to the strangers.

“What a perfectly dear nook!” exclaimed the shorter girl. Her remark almost gave Louise a spasm of some kind, for she choked, and coughed, and finally ran off to get a drink.

“And do you stay here all the time?” asked the girl with the long black earrings.

“We’re camping,” replied Corene. At the moment everyone wished Mackey had not gone hunting new wild flowers.

“How perfectly lovely!” gasped Number One.

This threatened a spasm to Julia, but she kept her eyes on the sweater she started the year before, and thus offset serious consequences.

“We are at the Fayette,” volunteered Number Two, “and we perfectly hate it.” She dropped down on the grass and propped her useless parasol over her head in an obvious pose. The other followed suit. “I wish we might camp for a while, don’t you, Buzz?”

The name brought Madaline out from the tent with a laugh in her eyes, but she closed the “door” after her, and carefully arranged the curtains.

“Buzz!” she whispered to Cleo.

“Could you possibly take us in?” asked the other caller.

This surprising question almost precipitated something worse than a choking spell all around. After the way those bold girls ran the Scouts out of the lake with their old yellow boat!

“We don’t take boarders,” replied Corene cruelly, grinding out the word “boarders” with vicious satisfaction.

“Oh, we know that. But Fuss meant could we come as Girl Scouts?”

“Girl Scouts!” repeated Cleo, incredulously.

“Why, yes, I think those togs are perfectly stunning and shouldn’t mind at all wearing them,” condescended Fuss. “Can you get those uniforms around here?”

A look akin to disgust crossed the face of Corene. How she longed to “speak the truth for once,” but politeness forbade the experiment.

“You can’t wear the uniform unless you are a Scout, and you can’t be a Scout unless you qualify,” she snapped.

“And what do you do to qualify?”

“Fuss and Buzz” had both seated themselves without invitation, and now their line of questions indicated rather a stay.

Corene sank back and sighed. She picked up her book and toyed with it significantly. But no one replied. There was danger of a general laugh breaking out if someone didn’t say something quickly, so Louise, just coming back from the water pail, offered an excuse.

“All right Louie?” asked Grace. She had never called Louise Louie before.

“Oh, yes, I just choked,” replied Louise, “and went for a drink.”

“A drink!” repeated the Buzzer. “Oh, could we have a lovely, cool drink? We are so warm from walking.”

What could the Bobbies do?

“Certainly,” said Julia. “I’ll fetch it.”

“I’ll help you,” offered Cleo, glad to escape for a moment.

A brand new tin pie pan with two glasses of spring water was fetched. There was no doily, either paper or otherwise, although the usual tray was so covered.

The strangers drank heartily, however, and it seemed now they surely must go. But they didn’t.

“And you couldn’t take us for just a teeny-weeny while?” cooed Fuss.

“Oh, if you only could, we would be so good! We would do all the work—do you have to do all the work?” came another silly question.

“We don’t *have* to but we *choose* to,” snapped Corene again. Her companions seemed to have no pity, for rarely did one of them offer to help her out. Why didn’t Mackey come and rescue them? Each was wondering.

“Do you know that queer girl on the hilltop?” asked Fussy, unexpectedly.

“Who do you mean?” Grace challenged.

“‘Fly-away Peg,’ they call her. She’s so queer, and so—so sort of heathenish,” said Buzzy.

“We are acquainted with Peggie Ramsdell,” replied Grace, glad that she remembered the name, “but we don’t consider her queer.”

“You don’t, really! Then you don’t know her. She is very queer, and if I were you—so young and trusting—I’d keep away from her,” offered the second intruder.

“Why should we do that?” Corene shot the question defiantly.

“Well,” a titter, “she won’t get you any place, that’s all,” went on the informer. “No one will take you up if you tag around with her.”

“We don’t want to be taken up,” flung back Corene. “And I’m afraid you will have to excuse us. It is almost time for class.”

“Class! And do you go to school here, too?”

No one answered, but all had risen. They would take Corene’s cue and go in the tent; if only those rude girls would take themselves off.

“Oh, could we have just one peek in your tent? We are dying to!” came the daring question which was put by both, one tagging the end on the other’s introduction.

This brought out Corene’s “fighting fury,” as the girls were accustomed to characterize her aggressiveness, and now she faced the strangers squarely.

“Aren’t you the two young ladies who tried to run us out of the lake this morning?” she demanded. Her face took on a tone of red she tried hard to keep down.

“Oh, did you mind?” simpered one. “Why, we were only fooling. You were having such a lovely time we thought it would be fun to—to chase you.”

“You did it to show off and it wasn’t funny a bit,” declared Corene, her companions applauding with glances. “We don’t feel like being friendly but we have tried to be polite,” pursued Corene, “but now I guess we had better——”

“Close the interview,” mocked Buzz. “Of course we’ll go. We never intended to stay. We were only trying to have some fun with you,” and her voice fairly hissed her rudeness. “Such babes in the woods! And no mammas! Better call nursie to shoo horrid, big things away. Come along, Toots. They don’t want and evidently won’t take any advice. But if they tag after Fly-away Peg maybe they’ll be sorry they didn’t listen.”

Then they went, their glaring satin skirts—one was gold and the other mahogany—showing through the heavy brush as they wound in and out the path, their twin-made sweaters of bright pink being last to fade from view, over the little rustic bridge that spanned the creek.

The Scouts stood, too surprised to give expression to their feelings.

“Of all the cheek——” began Grace.

“Why didn’t you hit them, Corey? I saw you stoop for a stick,” said Cleo.

“I felt like doing something desperate,” replied Corene. “I never in all my life saw such nerve.”

“Do you think they were really fooling about wanting to come to camp?” queried Julia.

“They would be glad enough to come indeed if they saw any chance,” declared Margaret, promptly.

“Can you imagine Buzz and Fuss in our uniforms?” Grace went into perfect kinks at the idea.

“They would love them,” drawled Julia, imitating the tone of voice used by the strangers.

“And wouldn’t they look cute in the kilties?” mocked Madaline.

“With the green silk stockings and all!” howled Cleo.

Only the approach of Miss Mackin saved the Bobbies from wilder expression of joy—joy that the callers had gone, and joy for the trail of humor they left behind.

Her arms filled with iron weed and late daisies, Mackey looked very pretty as she came along through the soft green setting, so different from the last figures that travelled the same path.

The girls ran to meet her and eagerly told the exciting story.

“You see, I shouldn’t leave you very long,” commented the director when the account was finished. “You are so attractive, even the frivolous stop to admire. And I have a lovely surprise for you.”

They took the flowers from her and “sat her down,” as if she were not really a girl but a queen among them.

“What’s the surprise?” cooed Madaline.

“The Norms are going to start a class in basketry; who wants to join?”

“Oh, baskets, the Indian kind, and the pretty raffia kind, and the——”

“Lunch basket kind,” Julia interrupted Grace. “We will join you, Mackey, won’t we, girls?”

Everyone agreed eagerly, and the first session was arranged to be held at Camp Comalong on the following afternoon.

“I thought after a few days things might get sort of samey,” said Cleo, “but as it looks now I wonder how we are going to get everything in? We must go riding soon, Louise.”

“We surely must, Cleo. Let us keep the next afternoon after to-morrow free for that. I am just longing for a ride through those wonderful, green woods.”

“Maybe we will meet Buzzie and Fussie, and if we do——” threatened Cleo.

“We’ll make them run harder than they did us, with their old buggy-boat in the lake,” finished Louise, well out of hearing of the director.

But a new cause for questions had crossed their wonderful path.

Why did those girls speak with such marked disapproval of Peg, the exclusive neighbor?

## **CHAPTER XI—THE FOOD SHOWER**

As someone had said events were crowding at camp, and it now seemed difficult to keep schedule and not break the “rest rule.” This last obligated the director to see that the girls rested for a time after the noon-day meal. As the Bobbies were such active little animals, and so eager to crowd each moment with an event—big enough to occupy an hour—Mackey had to be very decided in this order for an hour’s rest every afternoon.

It was that particular period that the unwelcome callers had so completely dissipated the day before, so to-day Mackey decided to stay at camp and write up her notes, rather than scour woods for new material. Thus she could keep tabs on that relaxation period.

“We’re so glad to have you, but hope we are not spoiling all your real vacation,” said Louise considerately, when the patrol finished dinner, had cleaned up things and were now out under the trees resting. “Honestly, Mackey, tell us! Didn’t you plan to come and be our guardian angel, or did you just happen along that day?”

The director laughed merrily. It seemed to her girls that she could laugh more heartily than any sort of teacher they had ever come in contact with. Her big brown eyes would roll so comically, and she had a way of tossing her head up in such a frank fit of mirth, that her manner was really an inspiration to those about her.

“Don’t guardies always come that way?” she replied to Louise’s question. “And do you want to ‘sack’ me for someone else? I’m sure anyone at Camp Norm would be glad to try for the place.”

Conservative Louise could not stand that, and she almost upset Mackey and her camp stool in objecting.

“Did the mothers have anything to do with it?” pressed Grace.

“Or headquarters?” went on Julia.

“Well,” evaded Mackey. “I came, I saw and I conquered. So why worry?” and the Bobbies were obliged to be satisfied with that reply.

“Has anyone seen Peg, lately?” was the next question. It came from Cleo.

“Has anybody here seen Kelly,” chirped Grace, falling into the funny old tune. “Kelly with the gre—heen necktie!” she persisted, in spite of a shower of leaves and twigs that struck at her defiant head.

“We can’t call this rest,” remonstrated Mackey. “Julia, I wouldn’t pull up those little roots, you will have mud puddles there if it should rain to-night.”

“Oh, that’s so!” exclaimed Julia. “How will we arrange when the rain comes? What about my fire?”

“We will have to use up some of the dry boxes,” suggested Madaline.

“Or get an oil stove,” proposed Margaret.

“Or we could make a shack—build one over our camp kettle,” added Cleo.

Mackey waited to try out their resources before interfering. Then she said:

“It’s lots of fun to build fires in the rain; that is if you don’t have to dry out too quickly after a long hike. We can always find dry wood inside of the old logs, and by scooping out some shavings we can easily start some of your nice, little cord pieces, that you have stocked under the tent. No, you can’t use artificial wood, boxes nor oil stoves. All that is against the camp system.”

“Then I think,” said Julia, the good housekeeper, “we had better add to our woodpile. We have had such splendid weather, rain must be about due.”

“We can go out wood hunting when the sun goes down, or cools off, late this afternoon,” agreed Mackey. “I think Corene had such a plan already fixed.”

“Indeed I did,” spoke up Corene. “I know what a time we had once at the big camp when the wood pile went low and the storm ran high. Unkink your muscles, girls; there’s a heap of chopping ahead.”

“And do you remember last year at the beach? We were donning our dimities

about this time daily,” recalled Louise, with a well meaning sigh.

“I’m gaining pounds,” announced the willowy Julia. “I was weighed this morning.”

“Have I grown any?” joked Louise, giving one of her inimitable stretches.

“You do all seem to be taking to camp life like squirrels to nuts,” interrupted the director. “I shall have quite a record to my credit if you keep it up.”

Time passed so quickly that the call for their class in basketry seemed almost to overlap the rest hour.

“To make souvenirs!” This was the attraction that roused the Bobbies even from their own joys in camp routine, for now that they were “away from home,” each girl longed to bring back a token to mother, father, sister or brother; and with more than one of them the entire family was promptly put down on the list to receive a handmade souvenir from Camp Comalong.

“Undertake simple things so you will be sure to finish them,” warned Mackey, for girl-like they planned the most attractive articles held out in the display catalogues.

Bags, baskets and little matted trays were finally decided upon, and Miss Freeland, the manual training teacher who stopped at Norm, found an enthusiastic class ready for her dictation.

They sat squat on the ground like Indians when the lesson started, but before its finish the squatters had squirmed and crawled from one position to another, fitting each new attempt with a new move, until at the end there seemed to be a heap of girls all piled around the amiable Miss Freeland.

“Don’t forget we are to receive callers to-day,” warned Mackey. “I think the home folks have been very considerate to leave us alone so long.”

Reluctantly the new task was laid aside, for, as usual, being new, it was also attractive, and at the thought of company everyone stirred around to make things look pretty.

Fresh flowers, straightening the burlap curtains on Louise’s sideboard, arranging the tent with an eye to absolute order—all this was attended to with skill acquired in the short practice, and Miss Mackin had little to fear from the critical eye of any possible visitor.

Honking of auto horns soon warned the Bobbies that their company was coming, and when the honking swelled into a concert, and the concert swelled into a volley, the campers realized they were due to enjoy a surprise.

No less than eight cars were finally driven up, and each carried a capacity load of passengers—the whole company representing a surprise party on the Bobolinks.

“Surprise! Surprise!” called out the visiting girls, quite like the old time gayety, when country folks came to a party and brought the refreshments with them.

So many friends entirely unexpected!

It seemed the home folks had sent out the invitations and managed to corral friends for every single Bobbie, not forgetting Mackey, who was so glad to welcome Molly Burbank, a friend of her high school days.

And the boxes and the bundles!

“A regular picnic!” sang out Louise. “Let’s put everything on the big table.”

“And Helen!” chuckled Cleo. “I am so glad to see you! When did you come back to the lake?”

“Isabel, dear, ducky Izzy!” chirped Grace. “We have been talking about you a lot. Can you stay?”

Then there was Mary, Carol, Annette, and so many other school and home-town friends that for a little time the mothers seemed neglected, but presently Louise was “hanging on her folks” with such enthusiasm she threatened to do damage to something, while Cleo hugged her mother and her big coz Alem, and Grace almost strangled her mother, so that it all looked like a new version of Mother’s Day.

The inspection was punctuated with constant exclamations of wonder and applause, and that the Bobbies would find themselves expected to shoulder added responsibilities when they should return home was very evident.

“If they can do so well in camp we may hope for great things at home,” remarked more than one delighted visitor, but the Scouts shook their heads and refused to promise.

Miss Mackin was arranging “the treat.” She and her friends had taken over all the tasks so that the younger girls might more fully enjoy the company. The long table, with its dainty paper table cover, was arranged with paper plates (for company only), and the bunches of rarest wild flowers Miss Mackin had gathered the day before gave a real festive look to “the board.”

“I know I’m going to have my favorite cake,” crowed Cleo. “Did you ever see such a perfectly scrumbunctious food shower?”

“Never,” agreed Grace, “and I do hope there’s something to keep in my box, for we can’t be sure of our own cooking all the time, you know.”

“Don’t you like it?” defied Corene. She was not willing to have the commissary department thus suspected.

“Oh, yes, Corey, and your codfish made with condensed milk is so—new, and sweetish——”

Corene threw a paper box cover at the head of her tormentor but Miss Mackin did not see the deprecation.

Then the spread was ready, and the company sat down to a camp table laden with home made goodies.

“This is one real joy of the small camp,” Miss Mackin explained. “In the larger camps they do not generally permit the importing of food; but for Comalong it’s a real blessing. You see, we have just been experimenting with our little furnace, and there’s the camp kettle,” she pointed out the inclined pole with its kettle on end, that hung over one of Julia’s furnaces. “And we haven’t tried baking cakes since we came,” she admitted with an explanatory laugh.

“But the pan cakes? Aren’t they all right, Mackey?” asked Cleo. She had “tried” pan cakes once or twice.

“Yes, indeed, Cleo. You did very well with those,” praised the director, “but for real chocolate cake——”

“And fudge cake!” exclaimed Louise.

“And angel cake!” added Grace.

So it went along the table, each Scout acknowledging her particular gift with a special exclamation.

There was so much to talk about. And what a buzz and hum of voices surprised the little wood creatures! Not even the pet bunny ventured out from his hollow stump while all that party talked and talked.

“If only we could have company?” proposed Julia. “I mean overnight company.”

“Perhaps we can,” whispered Cleo.

“Where would they sleep?” Grace queried.

“We have hammocks, and maybe we could make room between the cots, by pushing them up together.”

“Oh, Cleo,” Grace broke out. “How could we make room between the cots unless you mean to put someone on the floor?” and she howled at the idea.

“Of course, I don’t mean that,” protested Cleo, between her cake bites. “I mean to tie two cots together and put blankets between the edges, I mean over the edges. There would be room for Helen in that space.”

“But fancy Izzy sleeping on the rail!” Grace was bound to ridicule the idea.

“At any rate I’m going to ask Mackey!” declared Cleo. “Helen would love to stay, and we would love to have her. We could put hammocks up if it didn’t rain.”

At this juncture Grace was asked to refill the water pail, so she and Madaline raced off to the spring. Both cast furtive glances over the hill to Peg’s cottage, but not even Shag was in sight to indicate life around the log cabin.

“Queer where she keeps herself,” remarked Grace, “but I’m going to fetch her some cake, anyhow.”

“I would too,” agreed Madaline. “She doesn’t seem like a girl who could bake a good cake.”

“No,” added Grace, “but she surely can ride horseback. I just wonder where she goes every day.”

“The girls are going riding to-morrow. Perhaps they’ll find out.”

“Maybe. But aren’t we having a lovely picnic?”

“Wonderful. We’ll have enough cake for all week.”

“I never thought sandwiches could taste so good. I suppose it’s because we haven’t had any homemade bread since we came.”

“And Cleo’s mother brought jam; Cleo hid it in her box back of the cupboard,” said Madaline.

“Hurry, they may want the water; at any rate we can treat them to that,” declared Grace, and the water bearers made all possible haste over the trail back to camp, spilling just enough of the fresh fluid to tickle the spangle-weed along the way.

“They’re going to stay! They’re going to stay!” Cleo ran to meet Grace with the good news, for lovely as camp had seemed with the patrol as its sole occupants, the prospects of company “to stay,” and that the guests should be “Dare-to-do-Izzy” as Isabel was popularly called, and jolly little Helen would could “see a joke half a mile off”; no wonder there was new joy apparent in camp.

“Everyone is going,” chirped Julia, “and I hope they all saw how much we have improved.”

“Your pounds, do you mean, Jule? Maybe they couldn’t see them. You should have pointed them out,” teased Louise.

“Now, Weasy, maybe you think they all saw your inches,” returned Julia.

“There’s mother’s handkerchief, I know she didn’t intend to leave that to me,” and she hurried to the big gray car, with the dainty speck of lace and linen.

“Give them a cheer,” prompted Miss Mackin.

“Hurrah for the home folks,” led Corene.

“Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!” boomed the lusty cheer, until the hills echoed and the lake repeated the hail.

Then the picnic and shower were over, and the Bobbies were so excited they hardly knew whether to show Izzy the spring or Helen the woodpile.

The colors were lowered by Louise and Julia, and then clouds gathering beyond the rim of trees glowered ominously, and that reminded them that they must hurry to gather more wood before the rain would come.

## CHAPTER XII—A RECORD BREAKER

“More showers than those of cakes and cookies,” said Miss Mackin from the depths of her pine needle pillow. “Just hear that!”

Thunder rolled and the rain was finding its way through the trees.

“Whew!” Louise almost whistled. “Just hear the wild roar!”

Like a concrete body the “roar” rolled down the mountain, and with a terrific rip and tear it hit the tent.

“Oh, mercy!” cried Cleo.

“Hold on to your bunks!” cautioned Grace.

This they actually did, for the wind had struck with such cyclonic force it seemed the canvas would be torn from its moorings.

“We have good shelter here,” Miss Mackin assured the anxious ones. “There is no need for alarm.”

If they agreed with her no one said so, for the tent flapped and flapped and tried its best to follow the dare of that wind, until it seemed surely something must give way.

The night light had been brought inside, as Mackey secretly expected a big storm, and now just the faintest glimmer shown from its peg where it hung by the front door.

To accommodate the company, three cots had been run together and the beds arranged crosswise, blankets and cushions covered the rims, so that it was considered possible, if not probable, that four girls could thus sleep on the three beds. Over in a corner Helen and Madaline shared quarters with Margaret, so that any sort of sleep for that night was rather uncertain even before the storm broke loose, and tried to break everything else loose with it.

Another blast and again Isabel called:

“Hold fast!”

Then there was a slam of something!

“What was that?” asked Miss Mackin quickly.

Heads were under blankets now and gave no answer.

“Did anyone fall out of bed?” she asked, a trifle anxiously.

“We’re all right,” came a muffled reply from the “buckboard” party on the crosswise bed.

There was another queer slamming sound!

This brought the director to her feet, and having already pulled on her slippers she quickly proceeded to take inventory and count heads.

With the lantern in hand she made sure each bed was where it might be expected to be, although she did have to pull down blankets to inspect, but when she got over in

the corner to Helen's quarters——

“Where's Madaline?” she asked.

Helen ventured to poke her head from its hiding place and then felt around beside her.

“She isn't—here!” came the surprising reply.

“Where is she? Could she have fallen out?” Miss Mackin gathered the blanket ends to look carefully under the cots, but no Madaline was discovered.

“Oh!” shrieked a chorus, as a terrific gust of wind somehow succeeded in blowing out their only light!

Such confusion as followed!

The girls screamed and howled. Corene begged them to keep quiet, and after a moment or two that seemed like an hour, the wind was again roaring in solo, while the girls at last listened to the entreaties of their director.

“Please be quiet,” she begged. “I turned the lantern suddenly and with the wind it blew out. There, it is lighted again,” and the welcome glow returned. “But where is Madaline?”

Another and more careful survey of the entire tent was made, and could the girls have seen Miss Mackin's face now, they might have guessed how intense was her alarm, for really, the little fat Madaline was nowhere to be found!

Realizing this everyone jumped up and quickly slipped into emergency covering.

“Could she have blown out the door?” asked Cleo.

Miss Mackin had herself wondered at that far-fetched contingency, and she attempted to thrust the lantern between the curtains, but a sheet of rain drove her back into the tent.

“Where can the child be?” she murmured.

“She simply must have blown away!” wailed Corene. “Girls, come along! We must get her. She might blow into the lake!”

Storm and danger were forgotten now, for anxiety was too real to admit of anything merely probable.

Without being directed to do so each little Scout was getting into some clothing, with the khaki storm coats on top and the chin strapped hats crushed firmly on the tousled heads.

“Look under every bed again,” ordered Miss Mackin. It seemed impossible the child could actually have left the tent.

“Not here!” came the melancholy report, as bed clothing and pillows were tossed aside.

There was a moment of such suspense as might have frozen that storm and thus subdued its fury.

“We will have to go out and look for her,” said Miss Mackin. “Button your coats tight and don't leave each other. Each two take a lantern” (these had been quickly lighted and taken from their emergency line), “we must surely find her very near. She can't really have blown away.”

They were down the steps, breathing hard and—yes—praying!

Darling little chubby Madaline! What could have happened to her?

The last girl had scarcely stepped down from the uncertain shelter of the tent when there was a call from within.

“Girls! Girls! Looking for me?”

It was Madaline’s voice and she was in that tent!

“Where have—you been?”

“Oh, Madie, we were almost dead!”

“Madaline, Madaline! We thought you were gone!” The chorus was hysterical.

“Child!” gasped Miss Mackin. “Where were you?” She held her by both shoulders as if fearful she would disappear again.

“Under the tent,” replied Madaline, still gasping for breath. “The little trap door was open, you know, and I got so scared of that awful storm I just dropped down. I never thought you would miss me.”

“And didn’t you hear us?” demanded the excited Grace.

“Couldn’t hear anything but the storm. Wasn’t it dreadful?”

“Not half as bad as you hiding away like that,” Isabel was almost crying. “Why ever did you do it?”

“Why——”

“Never mind, children,” soothed the director. “She didn’t think we would miss her and I suppose she was terrified, but it isn’t wise to drop out of sight, especially at night. Get out of your clothes now. The storm is almost over, and to-morrow you will all have something interesting to write in your journals.”

“I heard something slam,” Corene recalled.

“That was the door. It hit me on the head,” said the innocent Madaline.

“Was it your head that made the bang?” Even in the present excitement Grace could not resist the joke.

But the girls were not sleepy. They declared they didn’t care if they never slept again so long as Madaline was all right, and when they finally did turn into bunks they placed the adventuress safely and snugly in the buckboard, between the two largest girls, Corene and Isabel.

“You won’t drop down any more cracks this time,” declared Corene.

“Wasn’t it awful woozy down there?” asked Julia.

“Not a bit. Just nice and tight and you couldn’t even hear the rain,” said Madaline.

“I hope you didn’t upset my woodpile,” called out Julia.

“And I had a pretty fern growing in a tomato can. I’ll bet you smashed it,” charged Louise.

“Children, dear, try to quiet down,” entreated the director. She could not be severe, for indeed she had been a very badly frightened young woman in the hour just passing.

“Tell us a story?” begged Julia.

“Yes, do, and then maybe we’ll doze off,” bribed Margaret.

“Very well, if you promise to keep quiet and try to get to sleep, I will,” agreed Miss Mackin.

Of course they promised, and she began; but hardly had she warmed up to her subject when a loud calling, shouting and yelling sounded through the slash of the retreating storm.

“What—now!”

“Mackey! Mackey!” came the call.

“The girls from Norm!” exclaimed someone.

“Yes, surely that’s they. What can have happened?” gasped Miss Mackin.

By now the voices were near the tent and it was evident the cries were not fraught with terror, instead there was laughter, shouts and gales of it defying the winds and rain.

“Let us in! Let us in!” cried the victims, and quickly as the tent flap was loosed in came such a looking flock!

“Our tent blew away!” gasped Bubbles, she who so often indulged in that popular song.

“Blew away!”

“Yes, from over our very heads!” The five young women—they were actually five of them—dripped water and laughter in equal proportions, for the rain they brought in with them was now running in healthy little puddles all over the nice, new floor.

There wasn’t much room to stir around without getting the beds wet, but as soon as the Norms could control their unseemingly joy, Miss Mackin tried to find a few spots. This was done by pushing the beds into still more compact quarters, until Corene suggested they stand them on end and sleep standing up.

“Do you mean to tell us your tent is gone?” demanded Miss Mackey, when her third shower—the drenched Norms—squatting down to “rip off some water-soaked garments.”

“We do. Exactly that. It blew away and we didn’t even have time to blow a kiss to it,” declared Bubbles.

“Where are the others?”

“At the bungalow. They ventured in, we hope they’ll get out all right, but we wouldn’t try it. Imagine that prim old couple having such a delightful surprise.”

“I’m so tired I can sleep beautifully on the floor,” declared another of the storm victims. “And please don’t let us demoralize your squad, Mackey. They’ll be all cross babies in the morning.” Their own scare was then recounted and the surprise party made doubly welcome, when everyone insisted they could “get to sleep now,” that there was so much “lovely company around.”

Blankets were easily spared from the cots as the night had not cooled off too suddenly, and the Norms, being all around sportswomen, didn’t find the pine boards and good blankets such a poor sort of bunk after all, so sleep was wooed and won finally.

They must have realized the morning would bring to them some strenuous duties, for what about reclaiming Camp Norm?

## CHAPTER XIII—DANGER SIGNALS

Daylight showed what havoc the storm had wrought. The lake front was strewn with craft washed in by the swelled waters; there were sailboats bottom side up, canvas carried from one end of the lake to the other, rowboats torn from their docks where strong ropes over stronger posts were thought to hold them securely; in fact the storm had been a record-breaker and the new record was one of considerable devastation.

Crowds of curious gathered early, and in general terms business was suspended in favor of sight-seeing. But it was among the campers that the greatest damage had been done, and Camp Norm was not alone in blowing away in the tempest.

Those who sought shelter in Camp Comalong were up and out early, and the Bobbies were not long in following.

"Poor old Norm," sighed Bubbles. "We will now be sure to fall to sub-norm, for never again can we claim to be normal."

A camp untented after a downpour of rain is about as forlorn a sight as can be imagined, and it was such a spectacle as this that confronted the Norms on the bleakish early morning.

Wet! Wetter! Wettest!

The trees still rained; the grass emitted a hissing moisture, the air was as wet as if the rain had anchored in it, and never was there a more unhappy looking crowd than the unroofed campers of Lake Hocomo.

"Weren't we lucky?" said Julia. "Just see how everyone has had something damaged and we never lost a thing but a couple of tree boxes."

"And the curtains off the sideboard," added Grace. "But they were going anyhow, I caught my heel in one yesterday."

Everyone helped everyone get things back where they belonged, and by noon the Norm girls had succeeded in reclaiming the truant canvas and stretching it again over their summer belongings. Many things were irreparably damaged, for even good, strong boxes could not stand the elements when they "elemented" at last night's pace.

But the excitement added zest to their spirit, and hither and thither went the Bobbies like a little band of rescuers, carrying and toting for the victims quite like the workers in more seriously stricken zones.

A holiday was declared in the afternoon, however, and it was then that Cleo, Louise and Julia went for their long, looked forward to ride.

Being assured they had permission from home (it was talked of on the visit with mothers the day before), also assured that a woman instructor would ride with the girls, they left camp directly after dinner, hurried to the home cottages to don their riding togs, and when the sky was bluest, the trees greenest, and everything nicely dried up, the three Scouts, with Mrs. Broadbent the instructor, cantered off through the curling roads of Hocomo.

Getting acquainted with their horses took some little time, but they were gentle animals and seemed to enjoy either trotting or cantering as their little riders willed.

Out on the turnpike road there were so many motors that Mrs. Broadbent suggested they go cross field and come out along the old mining regions.

“Is that where the powder mills are?” asked Cleo.

“Yes, there are some big powder works in this district,” replied the horsewoman. “We had many soldier boys out here doing guard duty a few years ago.”

The girls remembered the remark about dynamite signs, more than one person having warned them that the signs might be found but were really harmless, and when their horses smelled the fresh clover on the slope between two hills, Mrs. Broadbent suggested the riders dismount and rest awhile, allowing the horses to “nose around” and enjoy themselves for a half hour.

“Pep’ expects a treat when he gets up here,” she said, “and Baldy likes this tall grass, he doesn’t have to stoop so low to get it.”

The riders assented gladly. It was delightful to “browse” in such a spot, for the hill afforded a rare view of the lake and surrounding bungalows and tent district.

Freely the three Scouts roamed about, searching for odd flowers and pretty stones, although just how the stones were going to be carried without spoiling riding-habit pockets, was not quite clear. The horsewoman stretched herself in the grass and called orders to the horses, should they wander too far from safety.

Hunting about, Louise found a pretty little mountain bell in between rocks, where it must have expected security, while Cleo and Julia were soon applying their newest botanical knowledge on the Jack-in-pulpit and companion wild orchids.

Glittering bits of stone, the sparkling mica-schist, that looks like pebbly crystals spread on too thick, afforded another line of investigation, and following such a trail into a little ravine, Julia discovered the dynamite sign.

At first she was inclined to heed its warning literally, and with a little squeal she dropped one of her prettiest stones and scraped her riding boot in hurrying away; but Cleo was more daring.

“Just one of those make-believe signs,” she suggested. “Perhaps the boys gathered them from around the old powder works and set them up to scare people away.”

“Maybe the boys have a hidden cave somewhere and the signs are to keep folks away,” Louise amplified the idea so barely outlined by Cleo.

“But we had better not follow the trail,” demurred Julia. “The rocks are awfully rough anyhow, and we will skin our boots to pieces if we try to climb higher.”

All three stood looking at the sign but no one ventured to touch the tin square, which stood on its iron peg firmly planted in the ground and mutely gave forth its “Danger” warning.

Cleo bent over to look all around the little signal.

“There doesn’t seem to be a pipe, or a wire, or anything near it,” she reported. “I can’t see how there can be any danger without something dangerous.”

“Don’t you dare touch it,” warned Julia. “It is certainly planted there for some purpose.”

“Boys, I’m just sure,” insisted Louise. “I’ve often read of their caves in the mountains and how they store things away in them. Boys’ books are packed full of that sort of thing.”

“But real robbers have mountain caves also.” Julia was determined to make a good story out of the plot. “How would you like to run into a genuine bandit, with a black handkerchief over his face and two hideous pistols in his hand?”

“One in each hand, Jule,” corrected Cleo. “That’s the regular way,” and she

stalked forward in the “regulation way,” with two pretty innocent Jack-in-pulpits doing service in lieu of the dangerous bandit weapons.

“Come along, desperadoes, there’s our horses calling us,” Julia proposed.

“I’d just like to kick over that sign,” Cleo whispered to Louise.

“Let’s get that long stick over there and turn it over,” suggested Louise.

“Suppose we blow up the hills,” laughed Cleo. But Louise had already obtained the stick, and although Julia was headed for the waiting horses her two companions were still fascinated by that danger signal.

“Look out!” warned Louise, going a little closer.

“Let me do it, Weasy, if there’s a blow I can run faster than you.”

Both giggled and chuckled, becoming more reckless as they joked. Finally both held the stick and attempted to poke.

Only girls of their charmed age can do a thing like that in the way they did it, for had the innocent tin sign been a perfectly obvious bomb, the Bobbies could not possibly have made greater show and fuss over their attempt to displace it.

“Care—ful!” whispered Cleo, but one thrust of the white birch pole and the sign was uprooted!

As it fell from its peg the girls squealed and jumped, but there it lay, like a sign “keep off the grass” or “please wipe your feet,” and nothing happened.

“I knew it!” snapped Cleo.

“Of course,” insisted Louise. “Just boys’ pranks.”

“But there could be danger further on,” argued Cleo, loathe to give up a perfectly good sensation without even a shiver.

“Yes, there’s Julia calling; come along,” finished Louise.

Racing back they stumbled over another danger sign. It was almost hidden in some underbrush, and without stick or precaution Cleo gaily kicked it over, emitting a triumphant “who—pee” as she did so.

“Guess they grow up here,” she told her companion. “Quite a crop of them.”

“They would be splendid to stick up around the camp ‘eats box,’” suggested Louise. “I wish I had brought one along.”

“Grand idea, and we could put one up in front of our new supply of cake,” Cleo added. “I need something like that to protect mine, for the prize chocolate layer is going down very rapidly.”

There was no time to tell Julia of their adventure. The horses were reclaimed from their pasture, and presently all were mounted again and going on a gentle little trot down the rather steep incline.

Where two paths forked and the road was barely wide enough even to be called single, they drew rein to wait for some other riders whose horses could be heard but not seen through the trees.

Presently a familiar pony pranced around the curve and on it—sat Peg.

“Oh, there’s Peg!” exclaimed all three Scouts.

“Hello, Peg!” they called cheerily. They were, indeed, delighted to meet her on the road.

“Hel—lo!” she answered. There was no joy in her voice, however, although she pulled the blue roan up short—she glanced backward, then the girls saw she was looking for another rider.

Mrs. Broadbent realized the time allowed the Scouts with their horses was almost up, so she urged her little company to hurry along. Rather slowly they obeyed, and the second rider was beside Peg now and it proved to be her aunt, Miss Ramsdell.

“Aunt Carrie on horseback!” said one girl to another. They were naturally surprised to see the rather elderly and white haired woman mounted. But she sat well, and looked well, although her habit was of the full divided skirt pattern, and she sat sidewise as women did twenty years ago.

“Have a nice ride?” Peg called after them when there could be no possibility of more intimate conversation.

“Lovely!” called back the Scouts.

“Why don’t you come around?” shouted Cleo.

“Busy!” floated back the answer.

“She looks it,” Louise remarked, when again they rode slowly, trying to prolong the minutes.

“Doesn’t she? I wonder what keeps her so busy?” This was Julia’s query.

“Well, we can’t spy, that’s a sure thing,” reasoned Cleo, “but I wouldn’t mind knowing what brings her out riding all the time.”

“Perhaps she teaches riding over at some of the millionaire places,” surmised Julia, always prone to be on the safe side.

“Too young,” returned Cleo. “Fancy Weasy teaching someone how to mount!”

“As if I couldn’t!”

“Certainly you could, Weasy, but would you? That’s the question. Peg would be about as patient as a chipmunk at giving instructions. And she seems too practical to go riding so often just for a good time,” reasoned Cleo.

Campers and “bungalowers” still moving and removing to overcome the difficulties thrust upon them by the night’s storm were now tramping along the country road, lugging, it seemed, everything from bedding to ballast, and among the fugitives the riders met a number with whom they were acquainted.

Hailing to these and offering words of sympathy precluded further private conversation, so Peg and her riding proclivities were forgotten for the time.

“I’ll take you to your cottages,” offered Mrs. Broadbent. “These horses will trail along obediently when I lead with Baldy.”

This offer was eagerly accepted, for the plan would eliminate a walk from the riding school, and when all had patted their horses and promised another ride very soon, the afternoon’s particular delight remained only in its joyous memories.

“I would rather ride than do any other single thing,” declared Cleo, watching her pretty horse canter off riderless.

“I love it too,” agreed Louise. “But do you know we have to get back to camp? And I have a suitcase to carry. There’s the car! Goody! We’ll all have a ride back.”

“Rides and more rides,” mused Julia. “I’ll be ready in a jiff.”

In Cozy Colony all three girls claimed their home ties, and the cottages were grouped in one prettily wooded territory, where trees were only sacrificed to make room for a cottage or garage, and where the rustic beauty of the lake resort was otherwise carefully preserved.

In the “jiff” specified by Julia the girls again appeared, their linen riding habits exchanged for fresh Scout uniforms, and while Louise lugged a suitcase Julia carried a

laundry bag, and Cleo was armed with a rather miscellaneous collection of appurtenances.

Five minutes later they were in camp gushing over the wonderful ride.

“And I took a cake over to Peg,” Grace was forced to interrupt to make known.

Then it was that Peg again became the pivot of their interest and speculation.

## CHAPTER XIV—THE ALGONQUIN EPISODE

“We were so surprised to see her aunt along with her,” Julia was recounting. “They seem awfully chummy, don’t they?”

“Yes, it is plain to see they are not—just ordinary folks,” added Cleo. “But even at that I don’t see why she should be so standoffish.”

“I hope she likes my cake. I left it under a turned upside box, put a couple of big stones on it and told Shag not to let anyone touch it,” Grace explained.

“Suppose she wouldn’t care to accept a cake? She said something that night around the campfire, about not accepting things she couldn’t return.” This was Cleo’s contribution.

“If she doesn’t like my cake she can easily return that,” Grace was very emphatic now, “and then perhaps we will desist. No use trying to make friends with folks who insist on snubbing us.”

“But she hasn’t snubbed us yet,” Louise reminded the first speaker.

“Oh, no, I know that. I was only saying if she *didn’t* take the cake.”

“No danger of anyone giving up that lovely mound of sweetness. I wish you saved that, Grace, and gave away the marshmallow; I just love tutti-frutti,” declared Cleo.

“Didn’t you think Peg acted rather queer when she met us?” inquired Louise presently.

“She was surprised, that’s all. We were surprised ourselves to meet her,” explained Julia. “And perhaps too, she fancied we were fixed up and she looked sort of mussy. No one wants to feel that way, you know.”

“That may have been it,” Cleo accepted, but her voice lacked assurance. “And say, Julie, we didn’t tell you we tore down the dynamite sign.”

“Not really!”

“Pos—i—tively!”

“And you didn’t find the danger?”

“Only in the black letters on a piece of red tin. But those signs don’t grow there, although at first we had our suspicions,” Cleo stated facetiously.

“And we also suspect caves and bandits,” Louise knew exactly the effect this would have on Grace, the adventuress.

“Caves! Bandits! Bears and Deadeyed Dicks!” came the prompt string of exclamations from Grace. “Oh, let’s go out there to-morrow and explore!”

“We knew it; but it is interesting, Grace, and we’ll plan our hike for Big Nose Rock if Mackey will agree,” Cleo proposed. “Now we must help Madaline and Margaret gather their souvenirs. It’s too bad they have to go, but we knew when they came it would only be a few days’ visit.”

“Good thing we can keep Isabel and Helen. It’s such fun to have company,”

Louise insisted.

“It was real fun last night,” Grace reminded her companions. “I thought we really would have to prop our beds on end and sleep standing up. Wasn’t it too funny!”

“Not for the poor Norms, although they wouldn’t admit it. Bubbles and Struggles had more kinds of fun than I have ever seen even new school teachers fall into,” said Cleo.

“Such names! Bubbles and Struggles!” repeated Julia.

“About like Fuss and Buzz,” recalled Grace. “By the way, I wonder what has ‘happened’ to those heavenly twins?”

“Wouldn’t wonder but they are calling on other campers,” suggested Louise. “They seem so apt to call.”

This provoked the inevitable mimicry, and if Fuss and Buzz hadn’t inflamed red hot ears at that moment, the old saying must indeed have lost its potency.

The visitors who were leaving, jolly Madaline and capable Margaret, were being helped pack their bags by Corene, who in spite of offers from the other Bobbies still held to the responsibilities of leadership.

It may have been that Corene was anxious to qualify, or it may have been that she really enjoyed the satisfaction she experienced, at any rate it was easy to guess she would be sure to receive “awards” when the camp season would be over, for Corene was almost daily adding to her efficiency laurels.

“If only we could have Elizabeth up here for a week, wouldn’t she show us a thing or two about housekeeping?” Julia remarked, when in spite of protestations the cupboard was being “finished” by Julia although Corene had “commenced” it.

“I can imagine Elizabeth’s joy at baking cake in your stove oven, Julia,” returned Corene.

“She could bake good cake in a camp kettle, I do believe. You know, Corey, Lizbeth is a wizard on bakes.”

“Yes, she’s headed straight for Pratt’s and the youngest of our entire class,” reflected Corene, flicking a bit of paper napkin from the clock shelf. “I do wonder what makes some girls have such a lot of brains?”

“And some girls have a lot of hair, too,” reasoned Julia. “I guess it’s just natural.”

“There comes the steamer Madaline’s sisters are coming on!” exclaimed Corene, as a tooting and blowing announced the arrival of the “Black Hawk.” The captain signalled either for folks to land or for folks to embark, and as the “Hawk” flag now flew from the dock near Camp Comalong he would know passengers there awaited his arrival.

Dropping their work Julia and Corene hurried to join those already waiting to see the visitors off, for the coming and going, the landing and embarking, was ever a source of excitement at the lake. Not that company could be definitely expected always, but just as a letter carrier *may* have good news, so anyone of those many steamers coming up from the depot eight miles away *might* have company for any of the many campers.

Madaline and Margaret were steamed away, amid a wild flutter of waving and good-byes, and back to camp again the Bobbies hurried to prepare for the evening meal.

“We are going to have all the Norms down,” announced Miss Mackey, who had been up in the devastated region all the afternoon. “They simply couldn’t get things dried out, and I insisted they eat with us to-night.”

“Goody!” chirped Grace. “I think company is the best fun of all. Especially

Bubbles and Giggles.”

“Giggles?” queried the director.

“Oh, I mean Struggles. She seems to be always struggling to keep from giggling, so I got her name mixed,” admitted Grace.

“Perhaps we should ask them to stay to-night,” ventured Corene.

“Where would we put them?” demanded Louise, impulsively.

“All bunk on the floor. It’s nice and clean. Lots better than we get on a hike when we sleep like ground hogs in holes,” said Corene.

“We could house them and I proposed it,” said Miss Mackey, “but they wouldn’t hear of it and they are going to sleep in the hotel to-night. They want you all to come over and spend the evening there.”

“Joy!” shouted Isabel. “I just want to see what they do at a mountain hotel in the evenings.”

“Same as they do at the seashore, Izzy, and you know that isn’t particularly exciting,” Cleo reminded her visitor.

“It was last year when the baby choked on the button. Don’t you remember?”

This recalled an incident told of in the “Girl Scouts at Sea Crest,” and its mention was enough to send the girls off into their easily acquired kinks. But even fun has its limitations, and the time was racing toward supper with the Norms, and then to the evening to be spent at Hocomo’s biggest hotel, the Algonquin.

“Glad I fetched a clean white frock this very day,” remarked Louise, and her companions seemed none the less glad that they too had “fatigue uniforms,” a simple white dress used by these Scouts on just such occasions as that they were now dressing for.

The storm had driven more than one camp to seek refuge in the hotel that evening, and arriving there the Bobbies were overjoyed to meet a number of their acquaintances from among the summer colonists.

Dancing was of the desultory order, but what was lacking in vigor was made up in continuity, for it seemed there was never rest, stop, nor intermission to the programme. It was just one long, languid, continuous dance.

Around the edge of the “ball room” the Bobbies danced and capered, not venturing out to take the place possibly claimed by the grown-ups. The so-called ball room was merely the largest room the hotel boasted of, and evidently its festive claims were based upon the faded crepe paper that still clung reluctantly to chandeliers and other conveniently set out points.

But the music was “pretty fair,” as more than one guest agreed, and it was pleasant to be indoors on this cool summer’s evening.

Just after Miss Mackin sent around the whisper that there remained only “a few minutes more,” the Bobolinks were attracted by a rather familiar drawl stealing in from a window opened on the porch.

“Sounds like——”

“It is,” interrupted Cleo. “Here they come!”

“Our dear friends, Buzz and Fuss,” finished Julia. “And please observe!”

This was whispered and actually reached only those ears very close to her, but it seemed as if some magic announcement had been made, for the entrance of those two young women immediately brought a charge of eyes focussed directly at them.

“It may be a masquerade,” hinted Louise in an undertone. “Perhaps we have only seen the first act.”

Their costumes might indeed have answered for a mask, they were so ridiculously extreme. The most brilliant striped satins that suggested clown effects, flowing sashes of colors by no means contrasting, then the hair dressing: such ear puffs, terracing up to a tower on top, “like the jumps to the Essveay fire-escape,” whispered Cleo. Really it was no wonder Buzz and Fuss were late if they had to build that effect all at one sitting.

The young men with them matched up fairly well, considering the handicap young men must dress under; but their flannels and their patent leather shoes, topped off with purple socks and vivid neckties, did all that reasonably could be done to liven up the male attire.

Not a detail was lost on a Bobbie. They sat there fascinated, saving up their laughs for the wild time they would have going back to camp.

The dancers drifted around and the conspicuous ones came close to the row of Girl Scouts. As they did so the blondest blonde caught sight of Grace and recognized her.

“Oh, the babes!” she cooed, loud enough to be overheard. “The Bobbie babes from the woodsy camp.”

This was too much for the Scouts, and only a sudden jumping up to the answer of the beckoning gesture from Miss Mackin, who was waiting for the home hike, saved an actual upheaval. As it was, Grace gagged and squawked audibly, Cleo hummed a foolish tune as she always did to invoke sorrow, Louise danced a few steps automatically, and by that time the buzzers had buzzed along.

But not finally. At the door the Bobbies stood for a few minutes throwing on scarfs and capes, and while they did so along came the unpleasant ones again. Miss Mackin’s attention had been drawn to them by Corene, and she stepped out and stood squarely in front of her little charges like a shield. But that attitude had no deterring effect on the intruders.

“How’s every little thing over in Camp Comalong?” asked one in a voice that attracted unpleasant attention.

No one answered; Miss Mackin shifted her shoulders and sort of urged the girls outside. The Norms were just beyond the door, waiting on the porch.

A taunting, high pitched, audacious laugh followed.

“Take the babies home and put them to bed,” mocked one of the pair. “Too late for little Bobbokins to be out.”

“Of all the rude creatures!” gasped Miss Mackin. “One would think we were acquainted with them.”

“They think we are,” retorted Corene, quite as indignant as the director. “But I guess everyone else knows them, so perhaps their remarks will not seem—so strange to others.”

“They ought not to be allowed to insult guests that way,” stormed Louise. Even her “canned laugh” was lost track of now.

“Did you see those two freaks?” asked Bubbles Norm when the party united on the porch.

“And did you hear them?” added Miss Mackin.

“They are the two blandest creatures,” went on Bubbles. “But I believe their daddy is supposed to be some pumpkins, a magnate of some kind or other.”

“Pity he doesn’t put his daughters in the trust, then,” retorted Cleo. “They need something; maybe it’s that.”

## CHAPTER XV—A PADDLE, A SWIM AND A SUN DIAL

Getting the mail for Camp Comalong was one of the duties that brought joy to the Scouts, for each morning, tent obligations attended to and before the hike, swim or other scheduled activity was entered upon, a group of the girls either rowed in Mud Lark, the boat loaned them by an admiring neighbor, or they paddled off in their bright red canoe, the Flash, down the lake to the Post Office Bend, there to receive their allotment from Uncle Sam’s mailing service.

Usually those girls whose duty it was to raise and lower the colors—when the beautiful flag contributed by Grace’s family would be raised to breeze at morning and lowered into loving hands at sundown—this squad also took care of the mail, on their flag week.

So it happened that to-day Julia and Grace were due to paddle down stream for the mail.

“I think,” began Julia in her meditative way, for Julia was something of a literary aspirant, “that we have very vigorous weather in a place like this. When it storms it storms furiously, and when it’s lovely it’s just perfect, as it is to-day.”

“Uh—huh!” assented Grace, waving frantically at a canoe across the lake in which she recognized a brace of sweaters—one orange, the other jade—worn respectively by Camille and Cynthia, without a doubt.

“Grace, I don’t believe you notice the weather very closely,” came back Julia, disappointed that her discourse should fall upon deaf ears.

“Deed I does, honey. I noticed it plenty the other night, and am not keen on another spell like that. But when we have really good weather I don’t believe in tempting it or spoiling it with flattery. You can’t tell about such things, Julie dear.”

The blonde girl laughed merrily. Who could resist Grace and her unanswerable arguments?

There was a satisfying amount of mail to take back to camp, and among the letters was one addressed to Grace and postmarked “Town.”

“A new friend,” remarked Julia, handing this over to Grace, “or perhaps an invitation to a picnic.”

“No; it’s from Peg,” returned her companion, already scanning the paper in her hand. Her brows were drawn into a serious line and her full red lips puckered as she scrutinized the page.

“Anything wrong?” Julia asked.

“Not wrong, but—here read it——” Grace handed over the letter, and her companion read the lines.

“Well, that’s all right,” said Julia, glancing up. They were seated in the canoe and delaying to read their personal mail. “If she doesn’t want any companions I don’t see why we should force ourselves upon her.”

“But don’t you see, Jule, she says she does appreciate our friendship, but that just now she is not free to follow her own pleasure? Can’t you easily see that the girl is

worried about something and afraid to even have friends?”

“Yet, Gracie, why should we intrude?”

“Because if ever a girl needed friends she does, and I need not remind you of our Scout pledge,” replied Grace. “I don’t usually look for trouble, Bobbs, but I think I see it in that page, and I would like to help Peg to some little bit of summer happiness. You know how much attention we give to making city children happy at Christmas; and here is a girl all alone in a mountain cabin, with no playmates except Shag and her pony Whirlwind, and she says plainly how much she enjoyed our campfire on that one, stingy little night. Now Julie, I couldn’t let her slip out of our entire summer with one campfire and a chocolate cake.”

This was so entirely “Gracious” that Julia laughed outright.

“All right, Buddie; just tell me what to do and I’ll help you any way I can. I believe you are right, of course. Anyone can see that Peg is tugging away with some sort of claim holding her down. Do you think there can be anyone ill, or perhaps sick mentally and hidden in her cabin?”

“Oh, no, I never thought of that. You mean an insane person?”

“They might not be really insane, but you know when a person’s mind becomes unbalanced their folks always hate to have them sent away from home,” explained Julia.

“I don’t believe that’s it. But there is some sort of mystery there. The thing that I resent most is the mean remarks those snippy girls make about her. I just can’t stand it, to hear two such silly things as those Buzzys, say such slurring things about a girl who never seems to trouble anyone, or in any way invite criticism.”

“Yes, it is cowardly. But what can you expect of that type? Didn’t they try hard enough to get us into a dispute the other night?”

“Yes, and I think Mackey was very calm not to say something back to them.”

“That would really have attracted attention. She was wise to ignore them,” declared Julia. “Well, let’s bring the girls their mail and don’t worry about Peg. I can’t imagine there is anything seriously wrong, and, perhaps, if we just agree with her suggestion something will happen to explain it all.”

“Perhaps,” said Grace doubtfully. She dipped her paddle and they started back, but her usually radiant face wore a look of perplexity.

The lake was alive with craft now, many bathers taking to their boats before “going in,” as the swim was popularly termed. Canoes, rowboats, launches and every sort of water vehicle was in evidence, ingenuity outdoing itself in the samples of boyish workmanship displayed.

There was the “Captain Kidd,” a big, flat-bottomed rowboat with sails striped in black and red. This was the property of Benny and his friends, and perhaps attracted as much and more favorable attention than the glistening mahogany “Amerik” that cost its owner a fabulous sum, and was known as a masterpiece in its line.

“There really is a lot more to see on a lake than on the ocean,” remarked Julia, in spite of the inattention of Grace. “I like it so much better up here than down at the shore.”

“I do, too,” agreed Grace, giving a mighty tug to pull the “Flash” up on shore. “But there’s one thing we miss—we can’t come in on a surfboard here. I just love that sport.”

“But we couldn’t canoe on the ocean, either,” Julia qualified.

“Oh, yes, we could. I did—once in a while, and it was simply wonderful. Here are

the girls! They couldn't wait for their mail."

In bathing suits, ready and waiting for Miss Mackin, the Bobbies were now at the swimming pier.

"Mail?" they cried out.

"Bushels," called back Grace.

"But we ought not to open it here," said Julia, hiding Corene's pet letter behind her. "You know the hotels positively refuse to allow anyone to take mail until it is sorted in the office."

"Bunk," declared Isabel, more forcibly than elegantly. "Gueve me that mailsky!"

"Here it is," agreed Grace, "and please wait for us. You got ahead of us in your suits but we will make up for it in the swims. Come along, Julia. Let's try out some of that perfect day stuff you have been preaching about."

And it proved all that had been forecast for it. So ideal were conditions that Miss Mackin agreed to having her girls try out some of the tests for Water Sport Day, an event planned to take place later in the season, and looked forward to with keenest anticipation.

The Norms were with the Bobbies, and together they practiced, and invented stroke variations, eager to show skill in the water sports and to win awards for that line of efficiency.

Isabel proved to be the best long distance "floater" and her weight, which was something more than that of her companions, was credited with the advantage. Grace was more daring than any of the others, and kept the Norms and Miss Mackin busy shouting warnings to her. Louise had a very reliable, even, clean-cut stroke, and could cover a distance and come out "without a puff," as Cleo described her serenity, while Cleo could dash, and sprint, and "get there" on "shorts" perhaps a little more surely than the others could.

So it seemed each might find her particular character in the water comedy, and the morning was not half long enough to put the popular drill through all the paces invented.

Julia and Louise were on shore resting a few moments when the latter caught sight of something particularly striking in the way of a figure, posed on the springboard.

"Look!" she motioned Julia. "It's the Buzzers."

"Sure enough. Wherever do they get their outfits? Imagine, crocodile green?"

"Are they green? Isn't it frogs?" laughed Louise. "At any rate that bathing suit is green enough to include all samples."

The figure thus criticised sprang off the board now, and was lost in the lake for a few moments. Then it reappeared on the surface and made for shore.

"There's the sister," said Grace, who had joined the spectators. "How do you like that geranium? The green would go beautifully with it under glass."

"Not jealous, are we?" questioned Cleo, glancing at the simple jersey suits worn by her companions.

"No, indeed," replied Julia. "I should hate to try to swim under those colors. But who is that they are talking to? Looks like Peg!"

"It is. I thought first it was a boy, she has no cap on and her hair is so slick. I wonder if they really know her?" queried Grace.

"They don't have to know anyone; we ought to understand that. Now, we must pass them on the way up the rock. There's Mackey whistling. Let's go."

"It will look as if we walked by them purposely," Louise hesitated.

“Oh, no it won’t. We have to take that path, besides, why shouldn’t we speak to Peg?” asked Cleo. She did not know Grace had received the letter with its plea for discontinuing the friendly relationship.

“All right, come along. We may as well have it over with. They are sure to say something sarcastic,” Julia raced on ahead, so whatever might be said would not be aimed directly at her.

But for once the inquisitive two did not heed passersby. Neither did Peg appear to see the Scouts, for she and the two flashily dressed ones were talking in such an excited manner, their remarks, in part at least, could be easily overheard.

“Now, remember, we have warned you,” said one, her voice sharp and imperative.

“I have no reason to fear anything of the kind,” Peg retorted. She stood close to the little path leading from the lake to the woodland road, and along this the bathers had to pass to reach the camp grounds. Her suit was dark blue jersey, she wore no socks but looked only a little girl, or even a boy, with her closely cut, straight hair and no bathing cap. As they passed along each Scout was conscious there was a certain strength and individuality so simply outlined in the appearance of the oblivious bather.

“We promised daddy we would speak to you,” said the other girl, she in the geranium outfit, “otherwise we wouldn’t do so. I can tell you we are not anxious to be seen——”

These snatches had been heard piecemeal, as the Scouts came and went past the spot where the conversation was being held, but when it was all put together a short time later the total seemed to imply that these girls were somehow threatening Peg.

“Another reason why I am determined to stand by her,” insisted Grace. She had passed the letter around for inspection and all agreed Peg was trying to hide some real trouble, or perhaps some “living sorrow,” as Corene expressed the possibility.

“But I wouldn’t send her any more cake, if I were you, Grace,” advised Corene. “One doesn’t like to have things forced upon them.”

“I don’t intend to; in fact there isn’t any more nor likely to be, unless we get another food shower. I took a spoon for the crumbs from my box at noon,” Grace loved cake, even the crumby kind.

“Why didn’t you try a straw?” teased Louise. “Or if you had asked me I would have given you a real cookie! I have three left.”

“Do you know, Bobbies,” asked Isabel suddenly, “we are supposed to make a sun dial to-day? And the stake is all ready. See it waiting over there?”

“We do, we do, and I have first shot!” Grace sprang up to outline the circle in which the shaft was to be erected as a sun dial.

“It must be exactly there,” directed Cleo. Grace had it exactly somewhere else.

“We have to try it and the sun is just right now for a life-sized shadow,” insisted Grace. “Here, help me dig the hole, someone. I want to catch the two o’clock sun.”

Miss Mackin, who had been in the tent, came out to oversee this experiment.

Willing hands soon had the shaft erected; then the pegs which were all ready laid out to be driven in at the end of the shadow for every hour, as that hour came around, were arranged in a relative position.

“Do we have to stay up all night to finish it?” asked Helen, innocently.

This brought forth a wild shout.

“The moon doesn’t overlap the sun, Nellie dear,” answered Cleo. “We will probably leave off picket duty when the sun gets behind that hill.”

Peg number two was driven in at exactly two o’clock, and the shadow was so clearly outlined everyone thought this an ideal method of keeping time; but later the shadows were shifty, and only an amount of patience and much running back and forth put the three most important hours of the afternoon in the dial.

“I am going to start again early in the morning,” declared Grace. “I saw a sun dial in a Chicago park, it was made of those queer tiny cabbage flowers, the kind they say keeps the house from getting on fire, and I remember how effective it was.”

“Did they use them to keep the park from getting on fire?” taunted Cleo. But Grace was making sure that nothing unforeseen would happen to the pegs left over from the hours already “pegged in.”

“Won’t have to wind it——” she told the others.

“But I should hate to have to catch the Black Hawk boat by its silent system,” confessed Julia.

## CHAPTER XVI—A DARING INTRUDER

Summer was at its height now, and so popular had the camp idea become that friend after friend just called, or paid visits to the Bobolinks, who in turn were as generous with entertaining as their limited quarters permitted.

Almost every pleasant evening was spent around the campfire, this entertainment never seeming to lose its fascination. Often the resources of Miss Mackin and her friends from Camp Sub Norm, the new camp erected after the storm's devastation, were put to the test for a new story; but the fire kindled enthusiasm, and the glow inspired fancy, so that rarely was an evening closed, and seldom did the embers fall upon an empty hour, or a tale lacking thrill.

The sun dial was now "working," although the sun could not be depended upon always, but it looked picturesque, and if nothing else it served to keep up the girls' sense of observation until not a few even claimed to be able to foretell showers by it, although there was no barometric attachment to the simple, primitive device.

Hikes were becoming more popular as the season advanced, and it was on a glorious August day, when the sky was dyed a deep blue and the sun was registering every hour accurately on the garden clock, that Miss Mackin proposed a long hike with the noon meal in the woods.

"Pack up your troubles in your old kit bag and hike, hike, hike," sang the girls as they prepared their lunches.

But the trouble seemed to be not everyone of them had a "Kit bag" nor even a pretty good imitation of one. But Corene came to the rescue with good stout wrapping paper, which she had providentially tucked away in a dry box.

"I'll glue you up some war-time bags," she offered, "if you make the sandwiches. I know exactly how to cut the bags, and they'll dry in the sun as quickly as you have the grub ready."

So while the others prepared "eats," Corene and Cleo "did the bags," neat little kits they turned out, too, with a good, stout handle of strong twine that might easily be slipped on to a strap and carried knapsack fashion.

"The real joy of it is," whispered Louise, "we are going over the hills where the danger signs grow. Perhaps we'll find the cave, or be held up by bandits, or something thrilling like that."

"Lovely!" exclaimed Julia. "But do let us keep close enough together to go in pairs, at any rate. I should hate to have to do both the cooking and serving for bandits. It's quite bad enough here with the serving taken off my hands."

"All right, Jule. Depend upon it, we'll stick around you," declared Grace. "We don't want to lose our own fireman right in the height of the season."

Miss Mackin was smiling good naturedly. Her hike preparations were complete and she sat out in the fresh, early morning, watching her young charges flutter around like little brown beetles, always in one another's way, yet never seeming to interfere, as they made their sandwiches, divided the hard tack, squeezed out lemons and bottled the juice; for the hike was to be a real picnic with all the trimmings.

"I do hope, girls," said the director, as they were finally ready to start, "that you

are not going gunning for some big, exciting adventure. You see, I know a little about your exploits of previous summers” (she winked knowingly and they wondered how she knew), “and I have such a lovely, lady-like report to turn in,” again that explanatory chuckle, “that it would be really cruel to spoil it now.”

“Don’t you like adventures?” asked Helen, innocently.

“Love them. But there are so many brands on the market, and we don’t, any of us, care for the cheap, trashy kind.”

The Scouts all agreed on this, and when Camp Comalong was securely “put away for the day” they started off with a song that included a little good-bye to the flag that was to act sentinel during their absence.

“Do you think, by any chance, we might get Peg to come along?” Grace asked Cleo.

“We pass by her cottage, we can give a whoo-hoo. It won’t do any harm to ask her.”

“We can say we need a guide. I’ve heard folks say she has guided parties through the mountains. That’s one reason they call her ‘Peg of Tamarack Hills,’ I believe,” said Grace.

They were nearing the turn that wound past the log cabin.

“Are those tamarack trees, Mackey?” Louise asked. She was pointing to the giant green “Christmas trees” that stood in a group near a little settling of water, scarcely large enough to be called a pond but something more sizable than a basin pool.

“Yes, that’s the tamarack,” said the director. “See how it runs to a perfect pyramid, and not like the other greens of that character, this one does lose its green in winter.”

“Sort of molts, I guess,” said Cleo, “for those branches are covered with green pin feathers.”

They stopped for a few minutes to study this tree of the larch family. It would add to their nature knowledge and give at least one item of value to their picnic hike.

“Isn’t it very straight and tall?” observed Isabel. This feature was so obvious the others had not mentioned it.

“Yes, that’s why they make the telephone poles of it, although, I believe, it is not so durable as the tall cedars,” explained Miss Mackin.

“The little tufts are just like rosettes,” commented Julia. She was trying to reach the lowest branch with a long stick.

“Like pom-poms, I think,” added Grace, who was barely looking at the big trees but kept searching past them, to the low log cabin that seemed now like a bird house under the trees, and against the big hills.

Miss Mackin described to the girls the blossom of these trees, told them of the “rosey plummets that shade from pink to purple,” and soon exhausted her personal knowledge to supply their interest; then they journeyed forth again on the next “leg of their hike.”

Grace and Cleo tarried behind the others. They were still on the lookout for Peg.

Giving the familiar woods call they waited a few minutes but received no answer.

“There’s Shag,” said Cleo, “and he’s running around as if someone were talking to him. See, there’s a light dress moving behind the honeysuckle arbor.”

“It can’t be Peg. I’ve never seen her wear a white skirt,” replied Grace. They could easily see the movement of white between the green vined lattice. “And it can’t be

Aunt Carrie—she wouldn't wear white either."

"Just let's go up the walk and see," suggested Cleo daringly. "Someone might be prowling around."

It was only a few steps out of their way, and wild flowers always offered an excuse for leaving the path, so Grace and Cleo had no reason to hesitate.

Shag raced out to meet them as they entered the grounds, but the figure in white darted farther into the heavy shrubbery.

"That you, Peg?" called Cleo.

No answer.

"Come on," whispered Grace, "let's go in farther."

With Shag close to their heels they followed the wild-grown path, and presently came up to the end of it.

"Buzz!" whispered Cleo; for the white skirted one was now forced out of the shrubbery and stood facing the girls who had followed her up.

"Oh, we thought you were—that is we were looking for Peg Ramsdell," stammered Cleo.

"She's not home," snapped the intruder. "I'm Leonore Fairbanks. I don't think you happen to know my name," said the one who had formerly played only silly parts, "and I came here on business." She made this very emphatic. "The dog is so vicious he won't let me go near the door or I might get what I want even though Peg is away."

How evident was her change of manner! Why?

"Shag is trained to take care of the cottage, I believe," ventured Cleo, noticing how faithfully the big collie performed his duty, for while Leonore Fairbanks kept down on the path he was friendly enough, but each time she attempted to put her foot on a step of the porch he growled threateningly.

"We must hurry after our friends," Grace said awkwardly. "We are going on an all-day hike."

"Over to Big Nose?" asked Leonore.

"That way," replied Cleo.

"Then you may meet Peg." The girl's face swiftly changed as evidently her mind was working as swiftly. "Say," she spoke suddenly, "be good sports and don't mention that you've seen me here, will you?"

"Why?" demanded both girls in unison.

"Because you know she's such a crazy kid and does such foolish things really. You can believe me it will be all the better for her if she doesn't go flying off the reel, as she would if she knew I came up here. I came on business for dad, and you know I hate to ask a favor, but it would be best if you didn't mention this. If you are a friend of Peg's I think you might do that much for her."

"We are as friendly as she will let us be," said Cleo frankly. "But we can't really promise anything. We must run. The girls will think we are lost," and giving faithful Shag a parting pat they ran off to overtake the hiking party.

"Isn't that queer?" exclaimed Grace. She had snatched up a bunch of wild flowers for her delay alibi.

"Very suspicious, I should say," returned Cleo. "And of course, if we meet Peg we are bound to tell her."

"I think we should," agreed Grace. "There must be some reason for that girl's

change of manner, and I'm sure it can't be anything that would benefit Peg."

"No, and her name is Leonore Fairbanks," said Cleo. "Rather pretty. There, the girls are waiting for us."

No explanation for the delay seemed necessary and the interrupted hike was presently doing double time over the fragrant by-paths. Of course the tardy ones would tell the story quickly as an opportunity came up.

The top of the hill was reached at last, and from that point the view of the lake and its surroundings lay like a panorama spread out on a silky canvas. It was well worth hiking for, and the Bobbies were breathless in admiration. They scampered from one rock to another, each claiming a superior view until this feature took on the proportions of a new outdoor game.

To the right was a dense evergreen forest; small tiered mountains to the left. They stood in a rocky gorge between this and Big Nose Rock. Presently the whinnying of a horse startled the little sightseers. Then Julia called out from her perch on a big flat stone:

"Look, girls! Up on the rock! There's Peg! What can she be doing away up there?"

All eyes turned to the highest point, and there, like some wild thing of the mountains, stood Peg. She was hatless, and in the usual brown riding outfit. As if the call had reached her, although distance made this impossible, she turned suddenly, threw her head up in a listening attitude, then with a quick move that had in it the impatience of a disappointment, she vanished in the rocks.

"What ever can she be doing away up there?" repeated Isabel.

"Exploring, perhaps," guessed Julia, "but she has to leave her horse so far away. See, there he is."

"And look," again indicated Louise, "there is her aunt over under that tree, reading. She hasn't seen us yet."

"Perhaps we can get them to join our picnic," exclaimed Grace. She was unusually anxious to speak with Peg.

## **CHAPTER XVII—THE GRANITE STAR CLUE**

Sightseeing was forgotten now and general interest centered on Peg and her Aunt Carrie. This lady, as usual, was delighted to meet the Scouts, and talked freely to Miss Mackin of her hope that Peggie should "mingle more" with the campers. Peg, herself, had come down from the rock and out of the ravine, disheveled, untidy and plainly tired.

"You simply must join our picnic," gushed Louise. "It seems like the best of luck that we should have come up here."

Peg smiled and frowned alternately. She noticed her aunt was already under the influence of a sandwich. It was a good fat one, with green lettuce fringe and it came from Cleo's kit.

"I'll be back in a moment. I must attend to Whirlwind," said Peg. The girls saw now she had pockets in that big leather apron, and they bulged out—perhaps with some mountain souvenirs.

Grace attempted to follow Peg, going toward the horse under a big tamarack tree, but the girl was evidently unconscious of this attention, and as she hurried off, Grace,

after a few steps of uncertainty, turned back and flopped down on the edge of the circle of picnic makers.

There was something very charming about Aunt Carrie. Even handling the food betrayed her culture, and her solicitation about another's comfort, all pointed to a knowledge of the little things acquired in good breeding. And she was well cared for in spite of the mountain life; her skin though dark was velvety, her hair like white floss, and only when she removed her gloves for handling the food did her little friends have an opportunity of noticing, besides the care her hands received, that she wore a great opal ring, carved with the beetle, perhaps.

Peg was coming back, and her pockets had been emptied, for the heavy skirt now slinked around her slender form. She held her boyish hat by its chin strap and smiled happily as she fell in with the group.

Yes, her eyes were of the same deep, dark cast, and her skin had that same olive tint, even her gestures showed what a real relation this girl was to the woman in the old-fashioned riding habit.

"You ride a lot, don't you?" said Cleo, carelessly.

"Yes, it's the one thing to do out here," replied Peg. She was trying something from a number of tempting food samples offered her.

"And you enjoy riding, Miss Ramsdell?" said Miss Mackin to the aunt.

"I feel more at home on a horse than I do on my feet," replied the woman. "But you see, I have always been used to horses."

"And not to feet——" flashed Peg.

"Now, my dear, don't tease an old lady. I have hard work enough to keep up with you on foot or in the saddle," replied Aunt Carrie.

Both Cleo and Grace were thinking of the girl Leonore Fairbanks, and both were anxious to mention to Peg her presence at the log cabin. It came about precipitately, however.

Louise was pouring the lemonade and had just served Aunt Carrie. The cup for Peg was filled and being extended when Grace said:

"We saw company at your house as we came along, Peg."

"Company?" She accepted Louise's cup.

"Yes. One of the girls from the hotel. She said she was Leonore Fairbanks."

"Leonore Fairbanks? Where was she?" Peg's voice was a signal of alarm.

"Oh, Shag was on guard," put in Cleo. "She was around by the side porch, but no danger of anyone making herself too much at home with Shag doing picket duty."

Miss Ramsdell lay down her piece of cake. Peg did likewise with her lemonade. Each had exchanged code glances.

"I'll run home and see if—if everything is all right," said the girl, anxiously.

"Auntie, you can follow or stay, I'll be all right. Sorry to leave the picnic," she apologized. And the remarks that followed her did not all reach her ears, for as quickly as even she, the lightfoot, could do it, she was on Whirlwind and galloping away down the hills, leaving after her the chagrined Bobbies.

"Why did you tell her?" whispered Helen to Grace.

"Because she should know," replied the latter, emphatically.

Miss Ramsdell was also leaving.

"Peggie is so temperamental," she apologized. "But the Fairbanks family are not

to be trusted—we have had our own troubles with those girls and their unscrupulous father.”

“But we are so sorry you couldn’t have stayed a little longer,” said Miss Mackin. “I was just hoping our girls were finally going to get acquainted. You see we have so short a time here now, and your place has been an attraction from the first,” she smiled condescendingly at the glowering Scouts.

“Please do not think us rude,” begged Miss Ramsdell. “We are not free to act as we would always choose. Sometimes I doubt the wisdom of my niece’s determination; but she is determined to the point of desperation, and she keeps offsetting my arguments with the hope of an early victory.” “I must go right along after her,” continued the little lady. “If that Leonore should become too aggressive I wouldn’t wonder if Peg would just use some muscle on her,” and she nodded her head insistently.

“We hate to have you go,” murmured Cleo. She was going over to the shady spot where the black mare waited its rider. Miss Ramsdell drew on her gloves while the Scout led her horse up to a stone convenient for mounting.

“We are so grateful and have enjoyed our little picnic so much,” said the woman. “Good-bye, everyone, and perhaps before camp breaks we may be able to offer our own humble hospitality.” With a slight effort she was in the saddle. Yes, it was perfectly evident that Miss Ramsdell was very much at home on her horse.

“A one reel act,” remarked Louise. “I shouldn’t care to keep moving at the pace the Ramsdells run.”

“They surely fear trouble,” said Julia. “What can they be so secretive about?”

“Whatever it is I wouldn’t like to be playing Leonore’s part when Peg meets her,” remarked Grace. “As her aunt said, she would likely use muscle on the intruder,” and Grace demonstrated to the loss of a perfectly good half cup of lemonade that had been, until that moment, in the hand of Julia.

“And was Shag really keeping guard?” questioned Helen, keen on the scent of trouble for someone else.

“He was doing picket duty,” replied Cleo. “It was too funny to see him snoop after Leonore’s heels. And she was almost sweet to us. I fancy she thought we might take her part with Shag.”

“Girls, when you have finished your chow we will take up the trail again,” suggested Miss Mackin. “There are some ores and metallic veins in rocks about here, I believe, and we may make some interesting discoveries.”

“Look out for the dynamite sign,” warned Corene. “I wonder who ever planted those signs about?”

“Where are they?” asked Miss Mackin.

“Over by the Big Nose Rock,” replied Louise. “We saw them the other day when we were riding.”

“And we thought the boys might have a bandits’ cove under the hills,” added Cleo. “Let’s go over that way and explore.”

Eagerly this suggestion was followed—so eagerly Corene and Miss Mackin had difficulty in obliging the girls to get rid of every trace of the picnic, thus conforming to a Scout regulation. But when the paper bags had all been burned up in a carefully arranged little fire, after which every ember and spark were extinguished, then they took up the trail for Big Nose Rock.

They had some difficulty in cutting through from one hill to the next, as very heavy underbrush, especially the iron fibered mountain laurel, hid the rocks and betrayed the hikers' footing; but after a number of minor mishaps all disposed of by the process of exclamation, the Bobbies finally emerged in the little patch of soft green at the foot of the big gray rock.

"I found the first one!" called out Helen. "Here's a dynamite sign!"

"Don't touch it!" cautioned Miss Mackin. "There is a powder mill not far from here and there may be magazines about."

"Magazines!" questioned Corene. They were all inspecting the danger sign half hidden in the grass.

"Yes. You know they sometimes bury explosives under the ground. Then they build a little mound above it and call it a magazine."

"No mounds around here," declared Julia, glancing critically over the flat surface between the hill and the springs.

"But here's something," observed Cleo, who had wandered off a short distance. "Looks like pieces of gray stone." She stooped to pick up a sample and then hesitated. "See how they grow," she remarked, "in a sort of star."

Her companions gathered around to observe the curious formation, and Miss Mackin came closer.

"Those have been arranged that way," she said. "See, someone has placed the little flat stones in the shape of a star. The boys really must have been up here," she concluded.

The girls dropped on their knees and peered closely. Brushing back the grass it was now quite evident that star had been carefully formed, but it was hidden in a little pocket of deep grass, between two slopes that curved up to the rocky hills.

"And see how deep the pieces are buried," commented Corene. She was prying up a sample with a small sharp stick.

"Some sort of clue, surely," insisted Grace. "What kind of stone is it?"

"I wouldn't disturb it," suggested Miss Mackin. "Suppose we just mark the spot so we can find it again, if we want to?"

"Yes, let's put one of the dynamite signs here," exclaimed Helen.

"I wouldn't," interposed clever Cleo. "Perhaps the dynamite people don't know anything about the star clue. We might lead them to it."

"But it's only a stone star," insisted Helen.

"And it didn't grow there," argued Cleo.

"Look!" exclaimed Corene, who was critically examining the tiny strip of stone she had pried loose. "There are some figures or something marked on this."

Everyone now crowded around her to see the characters.

"That is not Indian," declared Miss Mackin. "It looks as if it were burned in with acid."

She was scrutinizing the little flat mosaic-like block. Yes, there seemed to be a mark there, but it might easily have been on the stone before the star idea originated.

"I'm going to keep this piece, at any rate," declared Corene. "Maybe it's a real carved beetle, like the Egyptian Scarabus," she ventured.

"Hardly," replied the director. "Yet it is interesting and yours, Corey, as you dug it up."

“Then I’m going to have one also,” cried Cleo, already on her knees before the broken star.

“Count the pieces,” suggested Louise, “and perhaps we can all have a piece.”

“Very well,” agreed Miss Mackin, “but mark the spot well. It may have some significance.”

The girls were eagerly digging up the little granite pieces. As they turned each over they found it marked with characters similar to that found by Corene.

“I know! I know!” exclaimed Julia. “I’ve read about this sort of marking. See, the straight lines. That’s the rune.”

“Rune!” repeated Grace.

“Yes, don’t you know we read of it in our ancient history? A rune is a sort of alphabet of sixteen characters and all are formed in straight lines.”

“I remember,” spoke up Cleo. “The letters look exactly like our signal code, for wig-wagging. Don’t you know there were pictures of funny clothes-pins and jumping-jacks?”

Not all were exactly clear in their memory of the runes, but each intended to look it up, and Miss Mackin was delighted that her girls had stumbled upon so interesting a discovery. Carefully collecting all the pieces the Bobbies next proceeded to mark the spot secretly, and it was this seemingly trifling detail that eventually led to the finding of the granite star clue.

## **CHAPTER XVIII—A CALL IN THE NIGHT**

Footsore and weary, but satisfied and happy, they finished the day of the carnival hike.

“Let’s all help with supper,” suggested Louise, who was off duty on the K. P. (Kitchen Police) for that day. “Then we can all go down to the dock and see the excursion boat go out.”

“We are not hungry, a bit,” replied Cleo, “but I suppose we must try to eat. Come on, girls, all join in this chorus. It will be lovely on the lake this wonderful evening.”

And so it proved to be. Never had the waters of Hocomo taken on a more gorgeous costume. Velvets, satins and silks, in every rainbow hue, were flung in reckless splendor of draperies over the great, soft surface of the water, by a sunset as prodigious as it was profligate.

Among the parties leaving, one little tribe of excursionists stayed until the very last steamer insisted, with its thrill whistle, that they either come aboard or stay behind indefinitely.

“If only we could stay,” murmured one pale-faced girl. She was standing near the Bobbies, who were watching the city children embark.

“Do you like it up here?” questioned Louise. She felt guilt in the banal query.

“Oh, it’s like—Paradise,” said the wistful one. “But we’ll be glad enough if the firemen in the city turn the hose in the gutter to-morrow to make a lake for us.”

Louise sighed. So many children like this one must stay in the city, she knew. Others equally sad and fully as wistful were reluctantly measuring each step of the little dock and gang-plank. How they hated to go back!

“Oh, girls!” whispered Cleo. “Why don’t we try to do something for a little band of that sort?”

“What?” asked Grace.

“We could lend them our camp,” went on Cleo bravely. “We all have cottages here.”

“So we could, and there are two weeks yet before the general schools open,” sang back Grace. “I would just love to let the most needy of a group like that have two weeks at Comalong.”

“So should I,” declared Louise. “Let’s try to do it.”

“There’s the caretaker; get a name and address from her,” suggested Julia hurriedly.

“Better have Mackey do it,” said Corene, who promptly sidled up to the director with the proposition.

“I don’t know,” demurred Miss Mackin in answer, “but it won’t do any harm to have a name and address.” So she in turn stepped up to the director of the excursion party.

The children, she learned, were from a tenement district, and were not technically sick, but oh, how pitifully near it!

As each little victim passed along, the Bobbies’ determination grew.

They would be happy to surrender their beloved camp for such a human cause as this.

One short hour later, around a friendly little campfire, the plans were made. Everything in the camp and the camp included would be turned over to the city troop (they should all be enrolled as Scouts before taking possession), and for the two weeks before school opened these slum children would come back to Paradise.

“You must realize,” explained Miss Mackin, “this will mean at least the complete sacrifice of your bedding. You may take these blankets, and we will ask headquarters to send us bed covering, but the cots——”

“We will donate them to a mercy camp for next year,” spoke up Julia. “I am sure the home folks will all be perfectly satisfied.”

“And it won’t hurt our lovely flag,” reasoned Louise. “Of course we will turn everything except our personal belongings over to the organization, at any rate.”

“Did you expect to make Comalong a regular summer Scout camp?” asked Miss Mackin.

“Surely,” replied Corene. “We were just experimenting at first, but now we know it will be a real practical camp for any amount of summers.”

“In that case,” proposed Miss Mackin, “we will notify headquarters and have inventory taken at once. Are you perfectly sure you want to give up before the end of the month?”

“Positive,” insisted Louise. “I couldn’t enjoy this a week longer and remember that little wistful, woeful-faced girl, who said she hoped the firemen would be allowed to make a gutter-lake in the city for them to-morrow.”

“Indeed, we couldn’t,” chimed in Corene. “And besides, just think what it will mean to give a real fresh air camp donation?”

“Yes, nothing could be better,” assented the director happily. “And as you all can go to your home cottages it doesn’t seem quite so gigantic a sacrifice.”

“But camp is ideal,” murmured Julia, putting one more small log on the dying embers; just enough to keep mosquitoes away.

“Perfect,” joined in Cleo, her voice dropping or dripping with regret.

“That’s the very reason we want to do this—to put a seal of a perfect summer on it all,” declared Corene, who perhaps more than the others felt a really deep responsibility for that camp; from its very inception at the Essveay School, to its fullest day, that just closed on the carnival hike.

So it was all agreed and settled. Camp Comalong was to be turned over to the city children and their Social Service caretakers, by the end of the week.

Somehow it was a little saddening, however, and it was very evident that the Bobbies did not feel like singing the usual woodland Good Night, as they prepared for their sleep in the big canvas cradle under the stars.

“Dreaming!” minds dimly awoke with that vague idea.

“No, someone is calling,” spoke Isabel, as if anyone had spoken before.

They listened. Came a cautious call:

“Girls! Bobbie! Grace!”

“It’s Peg,” exclaimed a chorus, and with that realization each felt just a little bit guilty that the new ideas of the evening before had so obliterated the troubles of Peg from their Scout consideration.

Bare feet instantly pattered on the bare boards. The night light was reached and turned up and the tent flap “unlocked.”

And there was Peg with her Aunt Carrie!

“Oh, do come in,” begged Miss Mackin, anxiously. “What has happened?”

“Nothing,” replied Peg a trifle cynically, “but we were afraid something might happen to these,” she indicated a box she carried and also an armful of what seemed to be rolled cardboard.

Quickly the girls made the night visitors welcome, and with skill acquired from a similar previous experience, they were now preparing to “double bunk.”

Miss Ramsdell (Aunt Carrie) sighed deeply and sank down with very evident relief.

“I insisted that Peggie come down to you,” she explained. “Ever since we got back from the hills yesterday afternoon, mysterious men have been prowling about our cottages,” she explained.

“Perhaps just to frighten us,” added Peg. “At the same time these papers are so precious I was very glad to bring them down, if we don’t upset you too much?”

“We are simply delighted to have you come,” said Corene, sincerely. “And we never could have induced you to if something like this had not happened.”

“But I wanted to come more than you can ever know,” said the girl with the wonderful black eyes and the glossy crow-black hair. “You see, I was guarding daddy’s treasures. When he went there was no one left but me, and I was to finish his life’s work. I have been trying to do it.” Her voice tapered to a whisper, and no one attempted to intrude upon it.

Finally Aunt Carrie, from her grateful quarters, spoke:

“Tell them, dear, about the patent,” she said.

“Let us make you comfortable first,” suggested Cleo, considerately. “Here, Peg, this is where we keep our treasures. Do you want to put yours in here?”

She opened a very small door in a packing case that was hidden beneath extra blankets and some clothing.

“That’s a splendid hiding place,” replied Peg. “One would think it nothing more than a case of supplies. Yes, if I may, I’ll put my things in there.”

First she lifted in the box, that plainly was heavy; then she placed upon it the roll of stiff paper.

“Oh,” she sighed wearily. “I believe if it had not been for Shag I should have lost these long ago.”

“I thought to-night, however,” added Aunt Carrie, “that faithful Shag was in danger of being shot. That is one reason why I urged Peggie to come down.”

“Yes, I felt that way too,” said the girl. “I heard a sniper’s shot long after anyone would have been out hunting.”

“Where is Shag?” asked Julia.

“Just outside our door here,” replied Peg. “He won’t leave until we do.”

“We are glad to have him also,” said Miss Mackin. “We have not felt the need of a watchman with Officer Porter around, but to-night——”

“We could not have ventured over the hill except for the officer’s escort,” said Aunt Carrie. “It was when we heard his whistle we decided to make a dash.”

“Yes, we have been having quite a night of it,” put in Peg with a girlish laugh. “You should have seen us, like a couple of movie ladies, armed to the teeth and posted behind our strongest door! If we had not been in such serious danger I should have thought it a wonderful joke,” and she laughed lightly at the memory.

“Armed to the teeth!” repeated Grace hopefully.

“Yes, indeed; I had the best and biggest revolver, and auntie held to a shotgun, and when we made sure we were really in danger of being bombed or burgled or something, we just loaded up and stood guard until we heard the officer’s whistle. It seemed ages,” she finished seriously.

“And haven’t you even been to bed?” asked Julia, anxiously.

“Oh, no, indeed. You see, that Leonore began this attack yesterday, after you saw her prowling around,” explained Peg. “Her dad claims a right—a business right to what my dad discovered. That’s why we have had to act so mysterious and live behind bolted doors,” she added. “One glimpse of dad’s drawings would spoil everything for us,” she finished.

“That’s why!” exclaimed Grace; for in the simple statement had been disclosed the mystery of the hermit life of Peg and her Aunt Carrie.

“Yes, my dear brother, Peggie’s father, was confident the machine he invented would bring us great wealth, and besides this he had many land claims about here that he felt would bring valuable ores.”

“And *that’s* why you went to the hills so often,” burst out Louise. “We wondered and wondered.”

“Yes, that’s why,” agreed Peg.

“You don’t think your robbers would follow you down here?” asked Isabel, not fearfully but rather confidently.

“No, we have covered our tracks,” said Peg. “They might see Shag——”

“Bring him in,” begged Cleo, who loved Shag or any other “nice dog” right next to her companions.

“There isn’t really any danger of them following us,” said Peg. “Besides, we will have a couple of extra watchmen in the woods between now and morning. But I know Shag will just love to come in.”

So it happened the Bobbies had a company of three to billet—when finally Miss Mackin succeeded in inducing everyone “to quiet down and wait until morning” for the telling of the real story of Peg’s fight to establish the rights her father had left her to struggle with.

## CHAPTER XIX—SHAG: THE ALARM CLOCK

Daylight was just peeking through the little crack in the tent flap when Grace screamed:

“Oh, my! For goodness’ sake!” she yelled. “Someone, somebody, something, Shag wants to kiss my toesies!”

The self starters sat up and looked around—the other groaned.

Yes, there was Shag trying to make friends with anything that moved, and Grace must have unconsciously moved that foot.

“What do you want, Shag?” she asked.

The big, bushy tail whisked things around rather perilously in the narrow quarters.

“Shag is an early riser,” said Peg, trying to untangle herself from the things that held her on the rim of a cot. “He wants to run off and see what’s going on outdoors.” She patted her dog affectionately, then allowed him to run out, off over the hills to his own quarters.

But the spell was broken. They were awake, those insatiable girls, and ready even now to talk to their visitor.

Grace “whispered,” but the sibilant swish of sounds seemed more resonant than an outspoken address might have.

“Don’t wake Aunt Carrie,” she warned, although *she* was the alarm clock going off at that very moment.

“Don’t wake Mackey,” giggled Louise, after Mackey had thrown a leaky pine needle pillow at her head.

“And just look at Izzy,” begged Cleo. “She’s soundproof—like our music room at school.”

“Go on, Peg. Tell us about it,” implored Julia. “I dreamed of you and your shotgun all night.”

“I didn’t have a shotgun, that was Auntie,” replied Peg. “Mine was a real up-to-date revolver.”

“Oh, do tell us!” begged Helen, sitting up and shaking her spaniel-like mop of hair. It was bobbed, and curly, and altogether very pretty.

“Did you shoot through the door, or was it through the window?” mumbled Cleo, determined to have some shooting in the landscape.

Peg laughed merrily. Then she stretched without warning Corene, and the effect was accidental. When both girls got up from the floor, one from either side of the extension bed, and when it was finally conceded that everyone was awake and therefore the water-fall whispering was no longer necessary, “conversation was resumed,”

according to Grace.

“And we never could have induced you to come, Peg, if something didn’t happen. Yet, from the first we all planned ‘to get you,’” she finished, a tragic note taking care of that final ominous phrase.

“I wanted to come more than you could possibly have wanted me to do so,” said Peg, a trifle seriously. “But you have no idea what a complicated thing it is for a girl to try to do anything really worth while.”

“Oh, yes—we—have!” drawled Julia. “You should see me try to make a fire to cook breakfast on damp mornings.”

“Not that kind of thing, Julia,” warned Grace, fearful that Peg would be diverted from her story.

“And did men really try to break in your cottage?” asked Helen, sensation seething.

“It’s rather a long story,” admitted Peg.

“Go on and tell,” begged Louise. “I don’t think there is anything so comfy and cozy as story telling in bed,” and she gave the blankets a premonitory swish that sent a pair of sneaks flying at her neighbor’s head.

“Of course, we don’t want to intrude—that is, we don’t want to appear curious about your private business,” apologized Cleo, with a painful attempt at politeness.

“I am just too glad to tell someone,” replied Peg. “If you could ever know what it has been to be misjudged by everybody: to have people taunting you and to hear all sorts of foolish things said about you——”

“But people up here admire you—very much,” insisted Grace. “Old Pete, the boatman, told us how you rescued the man from the ice last winter.”

“Oh, that,” replied Peg. “He wasn’t really unconscious, and I had help to get him on Whirlwind. But you know how fine men are. They are generous and good-natured. Not like——”

“Say it, Peg! Not like girls! That is what you are thinking and I just agree with you,” spoke up Julia. “We saw how contemptible those flashy girls were from the very beginning.”

“Because they are the daughters of this man who has been claiming father’s rights,” replied Peg.

Miss Mackin and Aunt Carrie were now talking in an undertone over in their end of the tent, so that the girls were quite free to carry on this disjointed conversation.

“And what happened yesterday after you left the hike picnic?” asked Cleo.

“When I got back to the cottage there was Leonore Fairbanks trying to make friends with Shag. If she could have gotten in the cottage, you see, she hoped to find the drawing and plans for the invention,” explained Peg. “Then parts of the machine also are hidden in our house, and if she could have obtained any single part of that machine the men might have been able to guess at its principle.”

“Oh, that was why you kept folks away from your house, was it?” asked Grace.

“Yes. Daddy charged me to protect all that work of his until I could turn it over to his brother, my Uncle Edward. He has been abroad and I expect to hear any day that his steamer is in New York. What a relief that will be,” she sighed.

“What steamer is he on?” inquired Julia.

“The Tourlander. He was in Egypt when daddy died and could not come until he

finished his business there.”

“The Tourlander is the very steamer my Aunt Marie is on,” said Julia, “and it was sighted yesterday. Daddy had a message; mother told me about it when we went for the mail.”

“Sighted! Oh, Aunt Carrie, did you hear? The Tourlander is coming in! It has been sighted!” Peg exclaimed gleefully.

“Really, my dear!” and that message had an electrical effect on Miss Ramsdell. “If Uncle Edward is coming in we must be stirring. How strange it all seems? That I should sleep in a tent again! I have always loved camping, and since Peggie’s mother died we spent quite a lot of time traveling about. You see,” she explained to everyone, “my brother was a geologist, and at one time was employed by the government to sample ores. That was how he came to be interested in these hills. He insisted there were valuable zinc veins up here. Come, Peggie dear, I feel so anxious now. Won’t it be splendid if your Uncle Edward comes just now when things seem to be so critical?”

“We need him, Auntie mine,” replied the girl, who was partially succeeding in freeing herself from the girls who vainly tried to hold her for a fuller story.

“I’ll tell it all to you, every single bit,” she promised. “But we really must hurry back to the log cabin. Suppose we have been bombarded during the night? Then, what would we do for a house and home?”

“Oh, we haven’t told you we are going to give up camp,” exclaimed Grace. “We really haven’t had a chance to tell you anything, Peg.”

“Not when you insisted that I do all the talking,” replied the other. “But why are you going to desert camp?”

“In the interest of humanity,” said Julia, solemnly. “We are going to give it to some children who need it more than we do.”

“Am I included?” asked Peg. She was almost dressed, and some of the girls were hurrying to be ready before she left for the hills.

“You simply can’t go without breakfast,” insisted Miss Mackin. “We will have coffee ready in less than no time——”

“But here is Shag, back,” interrupted Peg. “What is it, boy? What’s going on up there?”

He wagged his tail and “smiled” and flipped his ears. The big collie tried to lead his young mistress to the outdoors, at least he moved that way himself and gave Peg a most appealing look from his big, soft, brown eyes.

“We’re coming,” Peg answered him. “Girls, it is perfectly delightful for us to be at camp and I have been envying you this joy all summer, but if you will excuse us, we are so anxious to get back to our abandoned home——”

“Are you going to leave your valuables in our safe?” asked Louise.

“I would like to—if it wouldn’t worry you too much——”

“Not the least bit. In fact if you leave them we will feel sure of another call, and that’s a big consideration,” declared Corene.

Peg laughed lightly. It was full bright daylight now, and the odor of dewy softness, the breath of things green, permeated camp and grounds surrounding.

“Don’t you want to be introduced to our bucket-brigade washroom?” asked Louise. “Come along; the line forms on this side,” and she dragged Peg out under the runt oak, where a guest basin, turned upside down, made a safe pedestal for a twittering robin.

He hopped off politely as the girls tip-toed up.

“That’s our Bobbie Robin,” said Louise. “We have him almost trained to eat from a little table Julia erected for him. We place his breakfast there, and what bird wouldn’t eat a fresh cereal even from a tiny table?”

“Here comes our officer!” exclaimed Peg, as a cracking of leaves gave warning of approaching footsteps.

“Good morning!” called out the man in blue. “All safe and sound down here?”

“Perfectly,” replied Peg. “Anything new on the hill?”

“Not just this morning, but we had some trouble last night,” said the officer. “You were right about the prowlers. We found a couple of railroaders hiding behind your barn.”

“Are the horses safe?” This query showed Peg’s new alarm.

“We made sure of that. I put Tim Morgan right in the cosy little room there, and Tim was grateful for the bunk. Also, no one could come near those horses with him on the scene.”

“I must hurry back,” said Peg to Louise. Others of the girls were now moving about.

“No need for worry,” assured the officer. “These railroad men are the sort that walk the tracks, you know. They must have been hired to look over your place, but they’re busy looking out of a very small window about now,” and he waved his stick in the direction of Longleigh, where the little country lock-up was situated.

Aunt Carrie was now out of the tent and ready to go back to the log cabin. She exchanged questions with the night watchman, and presently she was saying her thanks and her good-byes, also promising to return for a real camp meal just as soon as she and Peg could safely leave the cabin.

“If my uncle comes I shall be as free as your Bobbie Robin,” said Peg. “I intend to turn everything over to him; and what a joy that will be!”

“Then you could come down here and help us wind up camp?” asked Cleo eagerly.

“I suppose I could if——”

“You must, my dear,” insisted Miss Ramsdell. “You really must take a holiday.”

“But I am somewhat disappointed,” said Peg, she was looking over the mist-veiled hills. “I hoped to have been able to follow out dear dad’s advice——” She stopped suddenly, then shook herself free from the detaining arms, and promised again to come back to campfire that very night.

“And tell us all about your blockade?” said Helen.

“You mean stockade, Nellie,” said Cleo. “But it is all the same in the glow of the campfire where all good stories get their magic touch.”

“Good-bye!”

“Good-bye!”

And then the guests from the hilltop left.

For a few minutes the Bobbies stood, a little disappointed, but still expectant.

“I should be afraid to go back to that place,” remarked Isabel.

“The officer is going to unlock and search first,” said Cleo. “I wouldn’t mind going along to see the fun.”

“Just imagine those two people standing ready with guns!” exclaimed Julia.

“I wouldn’t care to trust myself with a tempting little gun,” confessed Louise. “I have always thought what a temptation it must be to pull a trigger.”

“Like our Fourth of July pistols; so have I,” admitted Isabel.

“Girls, do you realize it is almost time for colors?” asked Miss Mackin. “Suppose we sing a cheery ‘Good Morning’ to get our brains cleared up from all the excitement?”

Then the birds in tree and bush flew off, jealous of their woodland rights, for the Bobbies really could sing, at least sweetly.

The colors were flying and a scent of coffee floated generously about, when two men on horseback came galloping along and drew rein at the foot of Comalong hill.

“Hey, there, sissy!” called one, rudely. “Do you know where Peg is? The girl from the log cabin?”

“Don’t answer,” warned Miss Mackin quickly. “If they want information, that is not the way to seek it,” and she turned the girls back to the breakfast table where the “K. P.’s” were already busy serving.

The next moment the riders galloped off, and the Scouts suspected correctly that one of the men was Francis Fairbanks.

## CHAPTER XX—THE ROOM OF MYSTERY

How things had changed! The new day stood out independent of its past and future. Peg had actually spent the night in the Bobbies' camp, and her treasure was now hidden in their packing-case safe.

Also, dear Camp Comalong was fading away, or was it looming up large as a proposed Samaritan camp?

Breakfast was not finished when Benny came pumping along on his wheel.

"Folks got word about your aunt, Julia," he began after a very informal greeting, "and I came over to tell you your mother wants you to come home sure, day after to-morrow."

"I'm going to, Ben," replied Julia. "My Aunt Marie is bringing me something from Paris. I'll be on hand to welcome her, never fear," said the blonde girl archly.

"We are going to give up camp, Ben," announced his own sister, Grace. "Won't you have a bun, or something else to eat?" she invited the boy, who stood with hands in pockets, plainly admiring the camp life freedom before him.

"Going to give up?" he almost shouted. "Then can we fellows have it?"

"Oh, Ben, perhaps you boys could have it after the next two weeks, but for that time we are going to sacrifice it for some very needy city children, who only get a breath of real air when they come up on an excursion," explained Grace.

"Oh, a fresh air camp!" Benny's voice fell in disappointment.

"Not just that kind," continued the sister, "but we saw some poor, little pale faces the other day, and we just couldn't stand their longing for a few days in the real country. So we are all going back to our cottages, and going to give up the Comalong for two weeks before school opens."

"Then where would we fellows come in? Two weeks before school——"

"Our schools don't open till later," explained Louise, "and you know, Benny, September is the most beautiful month to camp," she placated.

"Every month is good enough," insisted the boy, "but of course, if you've promised." He was evidently not fired with the same sort of philanthropy that inspired the girls.

"Come on, Benny, try our camp-made Johnny-cake," urged Louise. "Just think, we bake that right on top of that stone oven."

"I don't want to think of it," growled the real boy. "I know what we Boy Scouts could do with this outfit."

"Poor Ben," and Grace threw an arm around the brown-haired little fellow.

"Never mind. I'm coming home and I'll make you as much fudge as every boy in your crowd will want to eat—at one sitting," she qualified.

He was finally induced to sample the Johnny-cake, but when he left there was a defiance in his manner, akin to recklessness.

"I don't care, anyhow," he prevaricated. "We're going to camp up on the hills next week," he flung back, jerking his wheel up in the air to start, as if it had been a pony with its bit too tight.

"A busy day approach—eth," warned Corene. "We must have our trial swim this

morning, you know.”

“Yes, and we have to go for the mail. It’s my turn and yours, Weasy,” said Cleo.

“And I’ve got to go around to all the cottages and give warning we are going to break camp, I suppose,” said Julia. “I know the mothers will be glad to get the news, although they may not admit it.”

“And I’m going to take a run up to Peg’s and see if she is all right,” declared Corene. “Maybe now that she won’t go over the hills looking for that lost claim, she may take time to have a civilized swim with us.”

“She may; but then again she may not,” interposed Cleo. “Don’t you remember she said there was something she was disappointed about not being finished?”

“Yes; we couldn’t get all the story, there were so many interruptions,” said Corene. “But wasn’t she a wonderful girl to work so hard to follow out her father’s ambitions?”

“Yes, like a big, strong boy, she has been going up those hills daily. She didn’t say just what she was looking for, did she?” asked Julia.

“Zinc mine, wasn’t it?” suggested Louise.

“Something about ores,” added Julia. “You know her Aunt Carrie said Mr. Ramsdell used to be a government geologist.”

“Yes,” agreed Louise, vaguely. Geology meant stones, they all knew, and as for the ores—well, it didn’t seem to be gold and to the indifferent ones no other metal seemed to suggest sensational developments just then.

An hour later they were in the lake, trying out their contest stunts. Corene did not succeed in inducing Peg to accompany them, as the excitement around the log cabin was still in evidence. Even the officer sort of “hung ’round,” to “keep an eye on things,” and when Corene made her flying trip up there she found Peg so busy that good sense forbade the Scout delaying her.

The swim over, next came the delivery of all those homemade messages. Hither and thither scouted the Scouts, until lunch time was pointed out by the faithful little sun dial, and that was not a point to be overlooked.

Only two days remained now until the week would be closed. Then would come the excitement of breaking camp.

Miss Mackin had already notified headquarters of the Bobolinks’ determination, and to-day a visitor was expected to take inventory.

It was all delightfully thrilling. In spite of the natural regret that accompanied this sacrifice, there was also that joy of satisfaction that always comes with the doing of a real heroic act. Every girl-Bobbie of them felt it her own personal privilege to invite those city youngsters out to Lake Hocomo, and likewise each felt the elation of “doing a big thing.”

“I wonder when Peg will come back for her valuables?” mused Grace. They were “slicking” up the grounds for the day’s inspection—someone always came by and looked in on pleasant mornings.

As if the expressed thought had ticked off a message, scarcely had Grace uttered it than Peg and Shag came racing over the hills.

“Here she comes!” sang out the impetuous Helen.

“Oh, say, girls!” Peg called on ahead of herself. “Don’t you want to come up and see my cabin?”

“Do we?” The enthusiasm of Cleo’s tone was pure compliment.

“Just wait until we get these papers in the incinerator,” panted Julia. “We will all be off duty then and glad to go up to your cabin.”

Everyone felt that way, which was evinced by the unusual haste made in the slicking-up process.

Peg looked like a different girl! She had discarded the mountaineer’s costume and wore a simple white dress. The effect was startling. All that severity of outline had vanished. Even the slick black hair seemed to turn up just a little—perhaps with the heat or was it from excitement?

The girls were surprised but hid the fact completely. With a word to Miss Mackin—who like the others was hurrying, although her task was to finish a very pretty basket for her mother—they all raced off with Peg and Shag. The big dog was frantic with delight. It was very evident he had taken a real liking to the little Scouts.

“You will have to overlook some things,” warned Peg, as they neared the bungalow, “for although auntie is a crackerjack housekeeper she has me to battle against.”

Awe, the concomitant of enthusiasm, possessed the girls as they stood on the threshold of that mystery house. As Peg ushered them in, however, each expressed surprise.

“What a duck of a room!” cried Grace.

“Isn’t it?” agreed Corene.

They were surveying a very quaintly arranged room, indeed. The low beamed ceilings were of natural rough cedar, the field-stone fireplace stood out like a primitive shrine, and on the floors were the most wonderful Indian rugs.

“We brought those rugs from the West,” Peg explained, noting the girls’ admiration. “But I want to show you—my studio.”

She unlocked a door and ushered the visitors into a very long darkened room. When all were within, she swung the door back, shot a bolt and switched on lights.

“Oh, a shop!” exclaimed Isabel.

“That’s just what it is,” answered Peg. “This was dad’s shop and I have been tinkering here since he left it to me. I miss him dreadfully, for dad and I were great pals,” she said bravely.

“And this is the machinery you have been guarding?” said Louise, just daring to put one finger on a long piece of steel that did not go off following the contact.

“Yes,” said Peg. “You see, even now I would not leave that door unlocked, and we have never kept a servant since dad started this invention. It is a machine for drilling rock; it will pick up certain kinds of minerals and is most valuable because it can be worked without steam power. Dad had not quite finished it, but he was positive of its value, and a single look at the simple mechanism, he warned me, would easily betray its principle to any skilled mechanic. That is why the windows are boarded. See,” she went to a window and raised a shade, “I can get light from those slanted boards,” she explained, “but no one could possibly see into this room. We have a tank that makes our own gas. Daddy was very ingenious,” she finished, coming back to the machine from which she had taken a heavy blanket covering.

The Scouts looked about, bewildered. What could a girl do, really, with iron and steel, and leather belts!

“And how did your father get these parts made?” asked Julia. She knew

something of machinery, as her own father was a manufacturer.

“Dad made the patterns, in wood, you know, then he had them cast in the city. He assembled the parts himself, of course. I have never allowed an eye to rest on this,” she declared, “for to me it is all something sacred. When Uncle Edward comes he will only have to finish the negotiations with the patent office and ship them this model. It is not so big—that is one of its great attractions.” She seemed to fondle the queer-looking machine, which was, as she said, not very large; it could all be put in a crate the size of a packing case.

“And men came last night to break in just to see this?” It was incredible, Louise thought.

“Yes, but there is more than the machine you see,” said Peg. “There are the drawings, and samples of ore and—other things. I have those in your safe you know,” finished Peg.

“It is dear of you to trust us with all this——” began Julia.

“I wanted to do it, you have been so splendid to me,” declared the black-haired girl. “And I must have seemed so—bitter!”

“No, just mysterious, and that made you fascinating,” declared Grace, giving Peg a counterfeit hug.

“But how did you do any of this sort of work?” pressed Corene, still looking at the formidable machine.

“I have a hand drill, and every single day I spend some time just as dad did, collecting specimens. You see, I am looking for zinc.”

“What does it look like?” asked Cleo.

“It is a little, bluish white vein. I have pieces in my box. I’ll show them to you perhaps this evening,” offered Peg.

“And two men called up to the tent just after you left this morning,” remarked Cleo. “They yelled ‘sissy’ and we didn’t answer them.”

“Were they riding?” asked Peg.

“Yes. Two big capitalistic looking gents,” said Corene. She was still fascinated with the ore drill, for Corene had a manual training turn of mind.

“Mr. Fairbanks and his New York partner,” explained Peg. “They came up here with all sorts of threats, if I didn’t let them see dad’s papers. But when I told them the Tourlander was coming in port—as you told me, you know—they didn’t seem quite so—fierce. Big men like Fairbanks are always cowards,” declared Peg, with a pardonable sneer.

“Did they see your guns?” joked Louise, looking about for a possible glimpse of the weapons.

“Didn’t get a chance. I just met them outside the hedge, and they didn’t even leave their horses.”

A long low bench stood under the window with the inverted blind. One by one the girls slid into place on it, like a band of little kindergartners.

“I have always longed to see a real factory,” ventured Cleo. “I should love to hear your buzz, Peg.”

The “manager” stepped over to a small machine and pressed her foot upon it. The buzz promptly responded.

“Oh, let me try it! What will it do?” exclaimed Corene from the admiring group

now surrounding the buzzer.

“It will grind anything. See, it is run by a motor,” explained Peg.

“Wonder would it cut Corene’s hair, nice and even,” teased Cleo. “I’ve heard that very self same tune in barber shops.”

“But where do you get your electricity from?” pressed Julia, the intelligent.

“There are a few poles in the hills and dad had one tapped for his own use,” replied Peg. “You know the big hotel is wired.”

“If we had known it we might have had a pole tapped for Comalong use,” put in Grace, facetiously. “I’ve had an awful time doing my hair at the beach-tree dressing table. Just think what a spot-light would have done for us.”

Corene was grinding the point of her belt buckle on the revolving emery wheel; Cleo was examining some outlines and drawings tacked to a drawing board, while the attention of Louise was riveted upon a line of tools set in graduated order upon a convenient shelf, as neatly placed as the kitchen knives, spoons and ladles in her mother’s orderly pantry at home.

“Peg,” said Corene, trying the buckle’s point in her blouse, “couldn’t we open a little factory here and sharpen knives and forks for the campers? We might fix umbrellas too. I’ve seen the grind men do it at this sort of buzzer.”

Peg laughed happily at the girl’s humor. “You don’t know how good it seems to hear real, human words in this room again,” she said after an emphatic pause. “Auntie has been so afraid of everything that I suppose I’ve inhaled the air of fear, unconsciously.”

“I think Corey’s idea perfectly spiffing,” added Cleo. She was looking for something to sharpen on the wheel.

“You mean spoofing, Cleo,” insisted Grace. “If you will read trash why don’t you do it with a pad and pencil?”

“But all joking aside, girls, can’t you imagine what all this really means? I think Peg is the bravest girl we have ever met,” Corene declared heartily.

“Oh, much,” added Grace, with a side step not indicated in the factory recreational programme. “Can’t we do something to testify to our esteem? You know, the little ‘token of’ business.”

“Kindly keep your skirts away from my wheel,” ordered Corene, still grinding, “or you may get a most unexpected ‘token of’ around the ankles.”

“Your dad was a wonderful draftsman, Peg,” commented Cleo, with her newly trained eye tracing the intricacies of the drawing board. “I never could learn to follow such fine lines and measurements.”

“They wouldn’t look well on your nut-bowl or your candle-sticks, Cleo,” remarked Louise. “Better stick to the school designs; they’re simpler.”

“This is all very lovely, and more absorbing than the mechanical display at the State fair,” put in Julia, “but you know, girls, Peg hasn’t really hired us yet.”

A tap at the door interrupted.

“Peg,” called Miss Ramsdell. “Here’s a message.”

Quickly opening the door, the girl accepted from the aunt the yellow paper, but there was no need to read its simple statement, for the joyous face of Aunt Carrie gave out the good tidings. Still Peg read aloud:

“Arrive to-morrow (Saturday), will go at once to you at Lake Hocomo.

“Edward Ramsdell.”

“Joy! Joy!” Peg cried. “Really coming, oh, girls! Now I can have some fun helping you break camp! Isn’t it splendid!”

“That’s a promise, remember, positively,” insisted Julia, as they prepared to leave. “Bring Miss Ramsdell and Shag. Remember, we expect you pos—i—tive—ly.”

Then the door was locked from the outside, on the precious invention of Peg’s departed father.

## CHAPTER XXI—A SURPRISE INDEED

The girls were deliciously excited. Uncovering the mystery of Peg’s cabin lent no end of possibilities, not the least of which was the hope of having this girl of the hills unite with their own activities at last.

“Will somebody kindly drape that sun dial and hold back on time a little?” asked Corene. “However are we going to cram things into a few meager hours this fateful day?”

“When things crowd to the point of congestion,” declared Julia, “they simply have to be omitted. I move to omit everything omittable.”

“And I tally the motion,” chirped Grace. “It saves time to tally instead of adding to.”

“If you will all kindly line up for chow,” suggested Louise. “I don’t see any nor scent any, but some should be about. There goes the twelve o’clock boat.”

“Comes, you mean,” corrected Isabel. “It’s steaming into our dock.”

“Company, and on moving day!” exclaimed Julia, dancing around in shameless joy. “There comes the old Hawk soaring in, sure enough.”

A couple of toots and a few squawks from the smoke-stack of the Hawk (or thereabouts) and the steamer glided in majestically, unmindful of the coming bump.

“Kids, Kidlets, and Kiddies!” exclaimed Cleo, as through the trees the dock could be seen fairly crawling with youngsters.

Miss Mackin had joined the ranks of the spectators. “Looks like our fresh air camp,” she gasped.

“Allow me to do the honors,” orated Isabel. “That motley throng reminds me of my last birthday party. They’re all broke out in bundles.”

“Wait; they may not be coming here,” interrupted Julia. “Why couldn’t some other camp have company?”

“Because it’s our last day of surprises,” Cleo said, springing to a tree stump for a better view of the dock. “That contingent is headed this way. Let’s prepare.”

But surprise akin to astonishment was the only preparation noticeable. New gasps and exclamations were plentifully in evidence, and the omissions mentioned as within the rules of too full a day were now very definitely settled upon, for even the noon-day meal was falling in arrears.

“Yep, here they come!” announced Julia solemnly.

“And the leader! Can it be a delegation from some orphanage?” asked Helen.

“It can and perhaps is,” remarked Cleo. “They all carry the same shaped bundles. They’re evidently not homemade.”

There could be no mistake now; the parade was marching up Comalong path. Miss Mackin patted her hair and the others made motions at their ear puffs.

“If we only had some grub,” whispered Julia.

“There’s the cakes of wheat if they haven’t grown mossy,” replied Cleo. “We’ll get Corey to toast them.”

“Mossy!” repeated Isabel. “That box has whiskers. I looked at it this morning.”

“Are we right?” came a voice from the advance guard of the procession. “Is this Camp Comalong?”

“Yes,” replied Miss Mackin with a tempered smile.

“Oh, I’m so glad. The boatman was not sure. And the children hoped this was the place; the trees looked so beautifully green.”

The speaker was leader of the influx; a prim, middle-aged woman whose sincerity of soul shown through two sparkling brown eyes. It was very obvious this leader loved her task.

An awkward pause followed her remarks. Even Miss Mackin seemed at a loss for a suitable reply.

“You got our message, didn’t you?” asked the brown-eyed woman, suddenly. Her charges were breaking ranks at all points.

“Why, no,” stammered Mackey. “Was there a message?”

“Oh, you didn’t really! Then you were not expecting us?”

Her voice wailed disappointment. All those eager little children and not expected!

“Messages are uncertain in the camps,” spoke Mackey promptly, getting herself in hand, as it were, and sensing catastrophe unless prompt measures intervened. “But you are welcomed, I’m sure. These are the members of Camp Comalong, the Bobolinks,” with a wave toward her amazed constituents. “We will do all we can to show you around.”

Grace choked on a giggle. Show them around when they were probably famished for food!

“I am so sorry,” murmured the little woman. “You see we heard you were giving up camp and going to turn it over to the needy children. We had planned an excursion, and the beaches are so rough and crowded, we just ventured to take a trip up here. The sail was delightful and—of course we have brought our lunches.”

The sigh of relief that travelled the rounds of the Bobbies amounted to a secret moan of joy.

They had brought their lunches!

Instantly the girls fell to welcoming the excursionists, but the children so quickly melted into the scenery that only by the promptest of efforts were the Bobbies able to reclaim the merest fringe of the disorganized parade. How those children ran and stumbled and fell over friendly bushes!

How they called and shouted! Could there really be hidden in the camp grounds all the treasures now being simultaneously announced?

“Look-it! I’ve got a black-berry!”

“I’ve got a chestnut!” (It was a last year’s acorn.)

“I—found—a—mush—a—room!” This last cry reached the ears of Corene, who quickly set after the mushroom hunters. There should be no sudden deaths from toad-stool poisoning at Camp Comalong.

Cleo and Grace had captured a girl with her chubby little brother. On account of the brother and his chubbiness they were more easily overtaken than the others. Louise

and Isabel were trying to keep a party of four from wading in the spring, while Julia was panic-stricken at the food famine outlook. Miss Mackin talked to the strange leader, who proved to be Miss Rachel Brooks, of the Beacon Mission Settlement.

“I shouldn’t have come upon you this way for the world,” Miss Brooks insisted. “But I have been promising my children a picnic all summer, and they have to work so hard—those little girls. Vacation usually means harder work for such as they, for when school is dismissed the home work begins,” she declared, with a show of indignation.

“That’s quite true,” agreed Miss Mackin, “and I often think it is a pity that our child-labor laws do not include a continuous home survey. But again: what about the tired mothers these little daughters help?”

“True, true; just a circle of trouble for them, no matter how we try to help. So when I heard that a troop of Girl Scouts were going to give up their camp for city children——”

“How did you hear it?”

“At a conference of case workers the other day. You know we meet twice weekly to discuss our problems, and to try to keep our families out of court. I managed to get clothes from the Emergency Committee, so that quite a few children who were promised this trip could come along. But they must eat their lunches now. They are surely famished,” declared Miss Brooks. “Will it be all right for me to take them over to that little knoll, and let them open their boxes?”

“We will be glad to fix our camp table for them,” offered Miss Mackin with qualms of conscience, for were not the Bobbies also starving by now?

“I wouldn’t hear of taking your table; thank you just the same,” replied the stranger. “Besides, you know how they feel about eating in the grass, like gypsies. They have been planning that particular joy for a long time. Sadie!” she called. “Stella! Margie!” She clapped her hands, we might say skillfully, for every clap echoed itself with a resonance peculiar to actual skilled practice.

The girls called rounded up promptly. What a flock there was of them, and how they grazed like strange cattle in new found, verdant pastures!

And it was remarkable how these youngsters clung to their lunch boxes, and gathered flowers or treasures at the same time.

“You see,” Miss Brooks went on, “we have a cooking class. It’s a very small and humble attempt, but the children love it and we made most of our supplies for to-day’s party. At the suggestion of these older girls, I think Stella really proposed it, we made an extra supply and brought a box to—the Girl Scouts, if they will accept it.”

Cleo and Grace were near enough to hear the offer, and that they concealed their joy was due as much to good luck as to good manners, for how dreadfully hungry they really were? What a big day this was growing to be!

“Lovely,” said Miss Mackin archly. “Are you sure you can spare all this?” The girls were offering box after box, and, like flies attracted to the sweeter things, the Bobbies were hemming in.

“Yes’m,” said black-eyed Stella slyly. “And Zenta Nogrow has a big box of nut cookies.”

“Nut cookies!” repeated Corene, unable to comprehend the sudden blessing. “How could you go to all that trouble?”

“’Tweren’t any trouble. A lady from up town brought the nuts. Edna, where is

Zenta?"

"I'll get her," offered Edna, a blonde with skin like a flower in spite of unfavorable environment.

Miss Brooks was clapping her hands again, and the visitors were following "the big girls" over to the little knoll under the pine trees. Julia and Isabel were making the Scouts' table ready, while Louise and Corene went to introduce the spring, and to offer a good supply of extra drinking cups.

Miss Mackin was urging Miss Brooks to take her lunch at the table under the trees.

"You won't think me ungrateful," replied the visitor, "but you see, the children like to have me with them. They will fairly swamp me with questions about the woodland beauties. I would love to have you join us, however," she invited Miss Mackin.

"Then *we* would be without a leader," put in Cleo, swinging a free arm around Miss Mackin.

"Exactly, I understand. How good it is to be beloved," said the serious little woman with the brown eyes, that sparkled latent possibilities.

Healthy hunger was driving all the human animals to food now, and the "drive" included the Bobbies, as well as the children from the Beacon Settlement.

Quickly boxes and little bundles were untied and unwrapped, and even at a distance the excursionists could be seen literally devouring the "basket lunch," only there were really no baskets. True, a little Italian girl carried her food in a handmade straw bag that might be called a basket, while a Russian displayed a quaint braided affair from the Homelands; but boxes and bags, American in make, were mostly in evidence.

At the Scout table the overdue meal was being greatly relished.

"How long are they going to stay?" ventured Grace. The question shot repeaters from all eyes around the festive board, for while the picnic interruption was all right as far as it went, it would never do to have those babes interfere with the evening's programme. That was to feature Peg's story in every last absorbing detail, and they were all eager to hear it.

"Yes," repeated Cleo, looking straight at Miss Mackin. "How long are they going to stay?"

"I don't know," replied Mackey, evasively.

"Didn't they say, the leader I mean?" pressed Louise, losing a choice bit of cookie in her anxiety.

"No, not a mention of it."

"You don't suppose they expect to camp here to-night!" Corene almost gasped.

"You see, it is known our camp is to be given over, and these clever little people have taken first chance. We have got to be good to them," insisted Miss Mackin slyly.

Everyone stopped eating and sat up aggressively.

"But our camp wouldn't hold a picnic, at any rate," spoke Grace pertly.

"Oh, these children would be happy under the trees all day and satisfied to crawl under cover out of storms," Miss Mackin's eyes were dancing now and Cleo caught "their step."

"You're a fraud, Mackey Mackin!" she declared, tossing a bit of cracker at the leader. "You are just trying to scare us out of our big night. Why, only the most urgent business has kept Peg away from us all this time, and as for us—we are compelled to

wait,” this last in tragic tones.

“Just look over at those youngsters rolling down hill,” interrupted Mackey. “If you’ll excuse me, girls, I’ll go over and be polite.”

“Take care you don’t get caught in the avalanche. Just look at the tidal wave!” said Julia.

“Rather keep your eyes on this table,” ordered Corene. “Don’t one of you dare bolt for the hill; not even if a couple of kiddies get caught in the thickets. I know you girls. Here Cleo, carry these things to the kitchen. At least we must leave camp in good order.”

“And the time draweth near,” moaned Louise. “We know now what things will look like when we are gon-n-n-ne!”

“We will be gone for a long, long time!” intoned Julia, and the war time refrain was promptly executed—all of that!

“Here they come! Mercy on us!” exclaimed Grace. “The children are descending from the hillsides!” She grabbed up the food fragments from the table and hurried to hide them in their tin boxes.

“We must tell them how we enjoyed their cakes,” said Corene. “They are after a report, I’m sure.”

“We can’t tell them!” gasped Cleo, “for their settlement-made cookies simply saved our lives.” She moaned and groaned at the thought of the perilous escape.

“They were good!” declared Louise, raising her voice as the strangers came shyly along the little summer-worn path.

“Come and give them a wade,” proposed Julia.

“Wade!” almost shrieked Grace. “They would strike right out for the West shore. As you value their precious lives don’t mention it again, Jule.” And she didn’t.

But there were other joys, many of them for the little party of settlement children. They explored the woods, wondered at the big lake (Miss Brooks would not allow one to enter a boat), then there was a final treat of a good time on the merry-go-round at the Point, and finally the Hawk tooted its whistle for them to go back to the railroad station.

It was not easy to gather them together for the embarkation, but Miss Brooks was so grateful and happy; every Bobolink felt it her special duty to help the children get aboard the old-fashioned steamer.

And it must be admitted there was a secret motive in the alacrity so evident, for the unexpected picnic had somewhat spoiled the afternoon’s plans for the Girl Scouts.

“Let’s go around by the big log cabin and tell Peg all about it,” suggested Isabel. “Then we won’t have to spoil our plans for to-night with the picnic interruption.”

“That’s a good idea!” chortled Grace. “Come right along and talk it out, every word of it. We did enjoy the youngsters, but oh, boy! for that final big story!”

## **CHAPTER XXII—PEG OF TAMARACK HILLS**

The evening was cool and daylight lingered. True to her promise, Peg with Aunt Carrie came again to visit Camp Comalong.

“I have the fire all ready to start,” announced Julia, “but it is too early yet. Girls, do you realize I have been official fireman all summer?”

“But you wouldn’t allow us to interfere, wanted to be fireman, engineer and all

that,” said Cleo.

“Yes, you claimed we would waste matches,” chimed in Corene.

“Do you notice we are all in uniform to-night?” said Louise. “Peg, yours is almost like ours.”

“Yes, I have worn a Scout uniform, since—Girls,” she said suddenly. “I never told you, but I am a Scout myself!”

“You are?” in chorus.

“Yes. I joined in Pittsburg. But when I found myself sort of buried in this mineral work it would be useless for me to talk or even think of Scouting. That was why I didn’t mention it.”

“And I wanted the child, so much, to go in for all your lovely times,” murmured Miss Ramsdell. “But there was no use. She would stick to her work.”

“And just think, after all, I never found the clue I searched for!” Peg’s face now looked more boyish than ever, for it took on that seriously determined look usually foreign to the feminine.

“What was it?” asked Louise.

“Wait, I’ll get my box and show you,” offered Peg; and Cleo went to the “safe” with her to get out the square japanned box. They returned to the council almost immediately. Then Peg took from the box a number of stones.

“See,” she said to her audience, “you asked me what zinc looked like. Here are some pieces.”

The Scouts examined the specimens and passed them from one to another.

“And are they found around here?” asked Miss Mackin.

“Yes; dad found some and I found others. That is what I have been searching for with my little hand-drill. Don’t you remember you saw me on the big rock the day of your picnic?” asked Peg.

“Yes, we thought you were digging gold,” joked Corene. “But I suppose zinc is quite as valuable.”

“Indeed, it is, if we could only find the lost vein,” went on Peg. “The men you have seen prowling around here are hired by Mr. Fairbanks. But if they had discovered the ore on daddy’s claim I should have fought them for it,” declared the plucky girl, emphatically.

She was taking out from the box stone after stone.

“See this,” she said, holding up a flat, gray piece. “This is the clue. See those marks?”

Instantly the same thought flashed through the minds of the Scouts.

The Star Clue!

“We found pieces like that!” gasped Cleo.

“You—found them!”

“Yes, up by the big rock!” Every word spoken now seemed electrically charged. It was Grace who said this.

“Wait! Wait!” begged Corene. “I’ll get ours,” and she dashed into the tent to drag from the “safe” the Scout’s own treasures. Then she laid the granite pieces on Peg’s lap.

“Oh!” almost screamed the girl. “Do you know what this means! Auntie, they have found the lost star!”

Everyone was talking now, and no one seemed to say anything intelligible;

exclamations and sudden bursts of half formed sentences fairly puncturing the calm evening atmosphere. Peg was almost overcome, but being a real girl she was not given to such heroics.

“It all formed the cutest little star,” exclaimed Julia, finally. “We marked the spot so we can’t possibly lose it. We will take you right to it to-morrow morning,” she offered sincerely.

“I don’t know how I shall wait, but I’ll have to, of course,” said Peg. “You see, daddy put that star there the very day he was taken ill, and no matter how he tried to direct me I never could locate it.”

“But your dear father could hardly tell you anything, darling,” said Miss Ramsdell. “He was not with us long after that.”

“However did you come to discover it?” asked Peg, who was piecing together the magic stones that formed the star.

“We were following the danger—dynamite signs,” said Cleo. “Have you seen them?”

“Oh, yes, indeed,” replied the visitor. “They were put there by the Fairbanks men to frighten me off. At first I did steer clear of them, but after kicking a few over and then watching the men plant them, I saw they were perfectly harmless,” declared Peg.

“We did that too, kicked them over, I mean,” said Julia. “And did they do that just to frighten you?”

“That and much more. But was there a sign near the star?”

“No; quite some distance from it,” replied Corene, “and it was just buried in a little soft pocket.”

“That’s just what dad said!” exclaimed Peg. “Don’t you know, auntie? He kept saying ‘by Big Nose in a little green pocket.’”

“Yes? Strange that we should happen to use the same expression,” put in Julia.

“And what does it all mean?” pressed the fascinated Isabel.

“It means that below that mark there is a vein of zinc. It runs from the rock, and dad was ready to bore for it just there,” declared Peg.

The sunset was pouring out its glory and the streams of color cut through the trees to beautify the little council group of Girl Scouts. Aunt Carrie told them of the perseverance of her niece, who had devoted all her girlish energy to fulfilling her father’s cherished plans.

“You see, we came up here to follow out my brother’s ideas,” said the little lady. Julia was now slipping away to light her campfire. “We have traveled a great deal, and followed many trails, but this one discovered in Tamarack Hills offered the biggest prize.”

“And just when everything was brightest, daddy had to go,” put in Peg. “I am sure no one could blame me for seeming queer when I was duty bound to take up his unfinished work.”

“Only the thoughtless could ever have questioned your purpose,” said Miss Mackin. “You see how eager our girls were to get acquainted with you.”

“Yes—*your* girls,” emphasized Peg.

“Those other two fright-freaks were simply jealous,” declared Grace warmly. “They must have been furious that a girl like you could get the best of their big upholstered father.”

Everyone laughed at this description. Mr. Fairbanks really was sort of tufted and overstuffed.

“But I simply cannot believe you have found that vein mark that I have searched months for,” repeated Peg. “I don’t see how I shall ever wait to go up there. And to think Uncle Edward will be here to-morrow.”

“And that you will both stay with us again to-night!” broke in Julia.

“You really couldn’t separate those stone pieces, you know,” said Cleo. “You will need all those queer markings to follow out your clue with.”

“Yes, I could show those selfsame marks on a drawing that stone was marked from. The lines are eaten in with acid,” explained the visitor seriously.

“We thought they were made by acid; that is, Mackey did; don’t you remember, girls?” asked Louise.

The campfire blazed merrily now and the insistence that Peg and her aunt remain overnight finally was agreed to.

“Put the treasures away,” suggested Cleo, “and let us sing ‘Scouts Every One.’ We are going to have such a glorious evening!”

“And yet,” said Miss Ramsdell, “my niece tells me you are giving up camp?”

“Yes, we felt it was so much needed by some city children,” replied Corene, “and we really have had a lovely summer. You see, we all have cottages up here, and can stay till the last boat makes the last trip of the season.”

“Oh, no, we can’t,” corrected Isabel. “We all have to be back September fifteenth in dear old Essveay, you know.”

“Right, Izzy,” said Corene. “I was just trying to fool myself. Here’s Cleo, all ready for her song. Get your uke, Louise.”

Stars flickered and breezes hummed in with the girls’ song; for what in life is half so sweet as the joy of a peaceful campfire?

And the very next day the star pieces were traced in their mysterious markings, the maps and outlines were matched up and the great zinc vein was finally uncovered by trustworthy hands.

All they hoped for was finally fully realized, and Peg’s labors were not in vain.

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About this book:

Original publication data:

Publisher: Cupples & Leon Company, New York

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