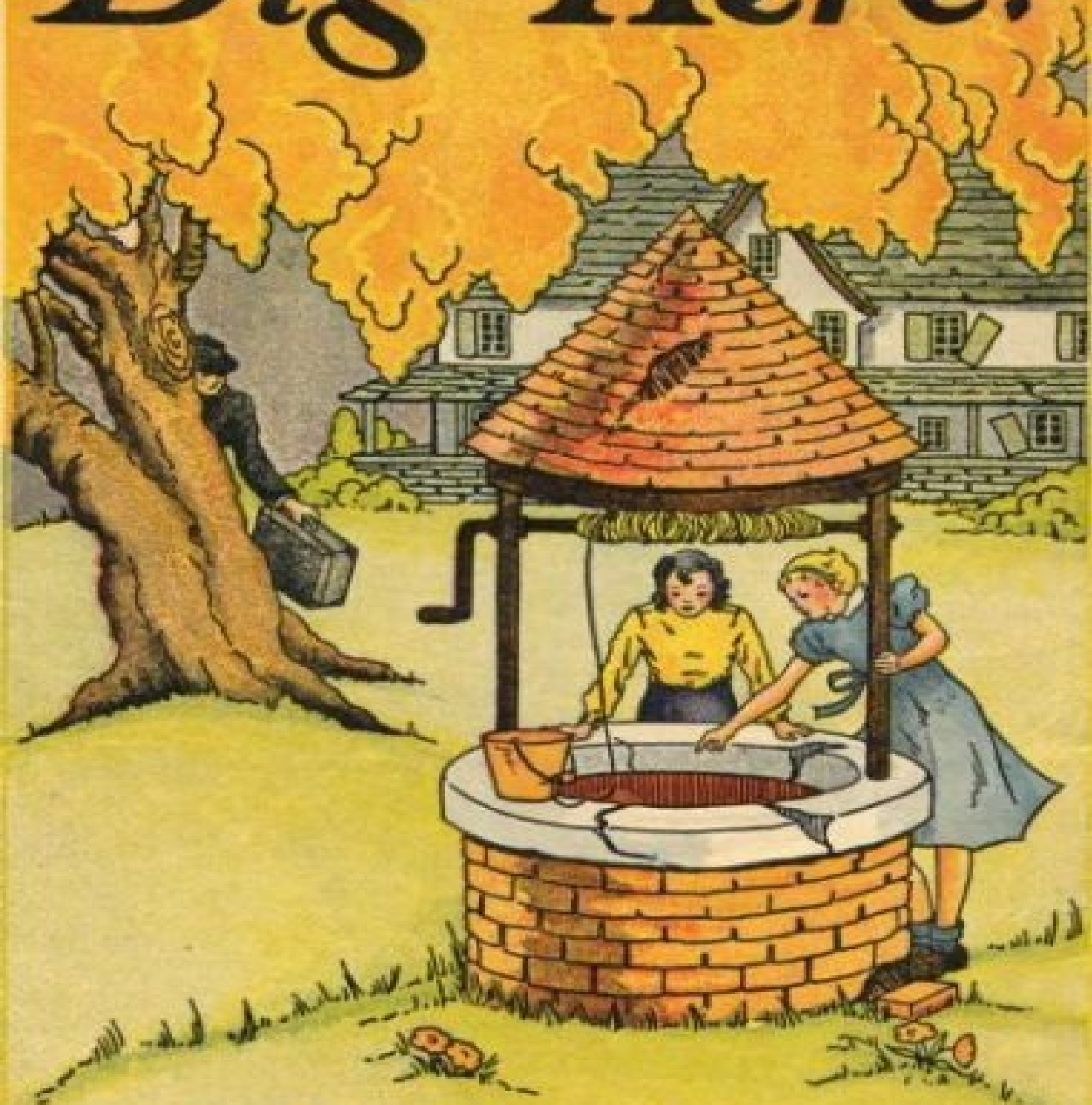


Dig Here!



Gladys Allen

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DIG HERE!

BY GLADYS ALLEN

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CHICAGO

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DIG HERE!

I

Aunt Cal

“BUT this aunt of yours, Sandy, what’s she like?” Eve asked. She was parked on the couch in my room. Hattie May Lewis, my roommate, stood before the mirror, trying to arrange her straight, straw-colored hair into a windblown bob. It was the week before the closing of school for the summer vacation and we were all looking ahead, in one way or another, to what the next three months held in store for us.

“Well,” I considered, “I don’t honestly know much about Aunt Cal except the little Dad has told me. She’s an aunt by marriage, you know. She married my mother’s brother, my Uncle Tom Poole, he was. They went West to live for a time, but after Uncle Tom died she came back to Fishers Haven. She’s lived alone there ever since.”

“Narrow!” ejaculated Hattie May, “and very likely queer besides! You can depend upon it. I know how old women get who live alone in the country.” Saying what she thought about people, whether they were present or not, was part of what Hattie May called her code of speaking the truth.

“Well, perhaps,” I admitted. “But she’s not so very old.” I felt slightly annoyed with Hattie May and wished she would go downstairs. I was anxious for a very special reason to make Aunt Cal seem attractive to the girl on the couch. For though Hattie May had been my roommate this first year at school, it was Eve Fordyce’s opinions on most subjects which had come to matter.

But Hattie May showed no inclination to depart, so I went on. “Perhaps you’d like to hear what Dad says about her,” I suggested. I reached into a pigeon-hole in my desk and took out a thin paper envelope with a foreign stamp. My father is a missionary in China, you see, and that’s why the long vacation didn’t mean to me quite what it did to the other girls. It meant a summer spent with some one of a rather scattered collection of relatives, none of whom I remembered in the least. This summer it was to mean Aunt Cal.

“Oh, yes; let’s hear it.” Eve smiled encouragingly from the cushions. I

suppose she saw how in earnest I was.

“Your Aunt Calliope,” Dad wrote, “is in many ways a remarkable woman and I feel that you cannot but profit by her acquaintance. It is, however, not entirely on your own account that I have suggested this visit. I am hoping that she in turn may reap some benefit from your stay with her. I must confess that the occasional letters which we have had from her within the last few years have reflected a certain melancholy trend of thought which has given me some concern. So I am hoping, my dear daughter, that you will bring her something of your own happy——”

“Well, that’s about all,” I broke off because of that sudden chokiness that comes over me still at times, even though ten whole months have gone by since I said good-bye to Mother and Dad on the dock at Shanghai.

“What’d I tell you!” exclaimed Hattie May triumphantly. “Queer! Queer and brooding! Honest, Sandy, I can’t say I envy you your summer.”

“Oh, I don’t know,” Eve drawled. “I think she sounds rather interesting. And I don’t think she necessarily has to be narrow because she’s lived in a New England village most of her life. As for being queer—well, everybody is a little, aren’t they?”

I threw her a grateful glance. “Maybe you’d like to hear her letter, too,” I said on a sudden impulse. “It just came today. Of course it doesn’t say much,” I added, a little doubtful, on second thought, of the wisdom of revealing Aunt Cal any further with Hattie May in the room.

“I’ll bet it says plenty!” Hattie May swung round. Her small bright eyes fairly pounced on the letter as I pulled it from its envelope. “You can tell a lot by handwriting and—well, reading between the lines.”

“There’s nothing written between the lines,” I said, though I knew, of course, what she was driving at. The letter was written in a straight, angular hand and was very short.

My Dear Niece: I have received your father’s letter and shall be very pleased to welcome you to my home at any time. I live very plain. Your father speaks of your bringing one of your schoolmates with you to keep you company. I don’t suppose two will be much more trouble than one.

Your affectionate aunt,
Calliope Poole

As I finished reading, I saw that Hattie May had sunk into the Morris chair

and was fanning herself violently with a copy of “Queens of the Screen.” Staging mock fainting fits is one of her pet stunts.

“Of course,” I said apologetically, “she didn’t realize quite how that last sentence would sound.”

“Yes, written things often sound quite different than one means them,” agreed Eve comfortably.

Hattie May came to life. “*What* did you say her first name was—I didn’t seem to get it?”

“Calliope,” I repeated. “Dad said her mother was sort of romantic when she was young, read poetry a lot and all that. Calliope was a Muse of poetry, I believe.”

Hattie May giggled. “It does amuse all right,” she said.

I ignored this. I felt that it was now or never with me. That the moment had come to speak of the all important matter with which, ever since the arrival of Aunt Cal’s letter, my heart had been bursting. If by any wild miracle, I could persuade Eve Fordyce to go to Fishers Haven with me, half the battle would be over. I felt that I could bear any number of dour-faced relatives with Eve along. But what would she think of such an invitation? It didn’t promise much for a clever girl like Eve.

I was trying desperately to think how to begin when Eve herself took the words out of my mouth. “Well, darling, who are you going to take along with you on your mission of cheer?”

I plunged. “Why,” I began, “of course Hattie May can’t go because her family expects her home and—well, she wouldn’t care ’bout it anyway. But I thought, maybe—that is, it just occurred to me because of your mother’s being abroad and all—I wondered, that is—of course it won’t be exciting or anything like a regular seashore resort——.”

“Sandra, darling,” Eve’s throaty voice broke into my stumbling attempt, “are you trying to invite me to spend the summer at the home of this estimable woman, your aunt?”

“Of course she is,” said Hattie May. “But if you take my advice——”

Eve smiled her slow smile. “Hattie May,” she said, “I wouldn’t turn down the chance of an adventure like that for anything.”

“Oh, Eve, do you really mean it?” I cried.

“Adventure!” snorted Hattie May. “Well, if you call being buried alive an adventure——”

Eve got lazily to her feet, wrapping her orange coolie coat about her. “I’m going to write to Aunt Margery right away,” she declared. “I’ll tell her about the wonderful air and the simple, wholesome life at Fishers Haven. She’ll eat that

up!”

“Oh, Eve,” I gazed rapturously up at her, “that’s perfectly wonderful of you. And I do hope—oh, I do—that you won’t be sorry!”

“Well, all I’ve got to say,” declared Hattie May stuffily, “is that I wish you both a pleasant summer, but I’m mighty glad I’m not in your shoes!”

II

Fishers Haven

HARBOR STREET, Fishers Haven, runs north and south. On your left, as you walk up it, you can see a line of blue across green meadows and hear the faint roar of the surf. Everything looked washed and clean; the little houses white with green shutters, set in tiny green yards. Eve said it was a picture village out of a scouring powder advertisement.

We were walking up from the bus stop. There was no railroad in Fishers Haven. It seemed good to stretch our legs after the all-day train ride. I was carrying my suitcase, which was pretty heavy, but I didn't mind. The bus driver had directed us: "Turn the corner at the drug store, it's the third house."

There it was! White like the others, with a small front yard, bordered on two sides by a neat hedge. A brick walk led up to a narrow front stoop. Our eyes were lifted anxiously to the door as we mounted the steps. It had, I could not suppress the thought, a very closed look. I lifted the knocker with some trepidation; it seemed like an intrusion to make a noise in so silent a place.

It was a feeble knock, but no sooner had it died away when we heard a window raised above us and a voice called, "Go round to the back and wipe your feet on the mat."

Eve giggled. How I loved her for it!

The grass in the side yard had been freshly mowed and smelled deliciously. "Syringas, too!" Eve inhaled rapturously. "I'm going to sleep out in that lily-of-the-valley bed," she whispered, "and pretend I'm a dryad!"

"Hush! Here she is."

A small woman in a big white apron was standing on the back porch. Her eyes were dark and very bright, and her nose had a kind of pinched-in look as if she were smelling of something. Her expression was—well, speculative.

"So here you are!" she said, holding out a bony, work-worn hand. "I guess you're Sandra. You've got the Hutton nose."

"Have I?" I laughed. And, moved by an impulse for which I was quite unable

to account, I stooped and kissed her where her hair was parted flatly on her forehead. "This is my best friend, Eve Fordyce," I said before she had recovered from her surprise at my salutation.

Eve smiled devastatingly. "Pleased to meet you," said my relative.

"It was awfully sweet of you to let me come along with Sandy," Eve said. "I hope we aren't going to be a lot of bother."

"Well, I guess everybody's a bother when it comes to that," returned Aunt Cal not too ungraciously. "It's a good deal of bother to live anyway, what with three meals a day winter and summer."

"Do you know I've often thought of that very thing myself," agreed Eve. "If it wasn't for eating, what loads of spare time we'd have to do a lot of extra exciting things."

Aunt Cal looked as if precisely this view of the matter had not occurred to her before. But all she said was, "Come in, supper's on the stove."

The kitchen was small and painfully neat; the same scrubbed look was everywhere. We washed our hands at the sink at Aunt Cal's direction, as supper, she said, had already stood about as long as it could, and sat down at a blue and white oilcloth covered table. It was a good supper, though plain, as Aunt Cal had warned me. Baked beans, bread and butter, tea and applesauce. Eve and I chattered about our trip, while Aunt Cal drank strong tea and said little.

It was nearly dark by the time we had finished eating everything that was on the table. The noisily ticking alarm clock on the kitchen shelf said ten minutes past eight. "I expect you'll want to go to bed early after your long trip," Aunt Cal remarked as she began to clear the table. She took one of the shining glass lamps from the shelf and, though it wasn't yet dark enough to light it, led the way upstairs.

"This is the spare room," she said with some pride, throwing open a door at the end of the short passage. It was not large, but its prim, cool order presented so pleasant a contrast to the clutter of departure that we had left behind us that morning that we both heaved an involuntary sigh of relief. "Oh, it's lovely," Eve breathed. "And that bed looks big enough for six giants."

A faint look of dismay flitted across our hostess' countenance at the suggested picture. "I guess it'll hold two your size," she said dryly. And added, "Breakfast's at seven sharp. Goodnight."

As the door closed, I sank weakly upon the bed. "I feel somehow," I said, "as if there'd been a death in the family."

Eve laughed. And the familiar ring of it made the strange room seem less strange. "Oh, Evey darling," I cried, "I'm so glad you're here. Promise you won't go and walk out on me now."

“Heavens, no! Why should I? I think Aunt Cal is a treasure—only she doesn’t know it. I’m going to pretend she’s my aunt too. She’s so different from Aunt Margery, and I think a variety in relations is very broadening. The thing we’ve got to do, Sandy, is to make her glad we’re here.”

“I suppose so,” I said. It was like Eve to look at things that way. Well, maybe I’d feel more optimistic in the morning, I thought. I found the key to my suitcase and went to unpack.

“Bother this lock!” I exclaimed after a few minutes of fumbling. “The key just won’t go in!”

Eve, who had already finished emptying her bag while I had been struggling, came over to help me. “Why, Sandy,” she said, “this can’t be the key, it’s too large.”

“Well, it’s the key I locked it with this morning,” I retorted impatiently. “My trunk key is flat and I haven’t any other.”

Eve shook her head puzzled. “You’d better look through your handbag anyway,” she said. “This simply can’t be the key.”

Just to satisfy her, I dumped the contents of my bag on the blue and white counterpane of the bed. There was the key to my trunk, half a bar of nut fudge wrapped in tin foil and bearing unmistakable evidences of having been sat on, my address book in which all the girls had written their summer addresses just last night, a vanity case, two rubber bands, a stub of a pencil, and a handkerchief. That was all.

“You see,” I said, “it’s just got to be the key. It can’t be anything else.”

“Then,” said Eve most surprisingly, “this isn’t your suitcase!”

“What!” I wheeled about and looked at the case on the chair. It was black and had once been shiny. It surely looked like mine, scratches and all. But wait—what was that gouge in the fabric near the hinge? I didn’t remember that.

Then Eve did a funny thing. She leant over and sniffed it. “Tobacco!” she exclaimed.

I went to sniff too; the odor was unmistakable. I took the case up and felt its weight again. “I remember thinking it was awfully heavy on the way from the station,” I mused. I was looking the case over more carefully now and the more I looked, the more unfamiliar it became. Could it be possible that Eve was right and that somehow or other I’d contrived to walk off with somebody else’s baggage? I could not understand it.

“But how could it have happened?” I cried. “I had it with me all the way on the train and in the station in Boston and on the bus after we left Berkshire Plains.”

Eve had dropped onto an old sea chest which stood under the window. She

seemed to be thinking deeply. Finally her face lighted up. "I've got it!" she cried. "'Member that little, bow-legged man in the funny clothes who stopped the bus out in the country quite a while after we left Berkshire Plains? It wasn't even at a crossroads and I said, 'How convenient!' or something."

I nodded. I did remember the man. He had taken a seat just in front of us and, having nothing better to do, I had observed him rather particularly.

Eve was going on. "He had a suitcase, a black one like this. He must have placed it in the aisle next yours and when you got out—don't you see—you simply picked up his instead of yours."

"Of all the imbecile performances!" I cried.

Eve grinned impishly. "Oh, you can laugh!" I stormed. "But I'd like to have you tell me what I'm going to do now?"

"Wonder what's in it?" Eve's curiosity, I've frequently told her, will get her into trouble some day. She had taken up the case and was shaking it gently. "Not quite heavy enough for a bootlegger's," she mused, "still pretty full of something."

"What does it matter!" I snapped. "I'm not in the least interested in what stringy little men are carrying about the country. What I'm interested in is what has become of my second best nightie and my Japanese kimono and my toothbrush."

"Oh, well, there's no use worrying about 'em now," Eve said practically. Her finger was toying with the catch of the intruding baggage. Suddenly there was a snap and it sprang open. The case wasn't even locked!

I watched Eve lift the lid gingerly as if she expected something to spring out at her. Maintaining my pose of indifference, I did not move. But of course I could not help seeing when the lid fell back, revealing a pile of men's clothing with a folded newspaper on top. The paper fluttered to the floor as Eve poked the clothes aside. "There might be an address," she remarked.

Underneath the clothes, we discovered a collection of small jars and bottles. "Harry's Hair Restorer," Eve read. "And what's this—'Harry's Scalp Salve,' 'Harry's Magic Lotion for Baldness.'" She giggled. Then meeting my disapproving eyes, she said: "All right, Sandy, you're right of course, I am a snoop. But I did think we ought to look for a name or something to go on."

"Aren't there any letters?" I asked.

"Don't see any." She was putting the bottles back. "I guess we'll just have to take it back to the bus station in the morning and see what they can do for us. But don't worry, darling, you'll surely get your things back. They wouldn't do 'Harry' any good, you know!"

"But what about Aunt Cal?" I inquired anxiously. "Shall we tell her, d'you

think?”

“I don’t see why not. After all, everyone makes mistakes.”

“Ye-es,” I agreed doubtfully, “I suppose so.” I was thinking of that speculative look in my relative’s sharp eyes and I was quite certain that not even in the most unguarded moment of her life would she have done anything so stupid as to appropriate baggage which did not belong to her.

It was quite dark before we had finished discussing what had happened and were at last ready to settle down for the night. Eve was already in bed when I blew out the light and went to open the window.

I poked my head through the dotted Swiss curtain into the cool sweet night. The only light spot anywhere was the strip of sandy road beyond the fence. “Tomorrow,” I thought, “we’ll explore that road and all the others. We’ll go down to the beach and see how cold the water is and——”

“What *are* you looking at?” Eve called impatiently.

I turned and came toward the bed. “There’s a man creeping along the grass on the other side of the hedge!” I said.

“Creeping?”

“Creeping is what I said!”

“Oh, dear,” Eve sighed. “I just can’t bother with any more mysteries tonight.” She snuggled deeper into her pillow. “Do come to bed. No doubt he’s—just—catching fireflies—or—or—hunting bird’s nests—or something——”

Her voice trailed off into nothingness. And without another word, I climbed into bed and pulled the covers close about me.

III

Craven House

WHEN I opened my eyes to a roomful of sunlight and sea breezes, Eve was gone. My watch had stopped. What with one thing and another, I had forgotten to wind it. But I knew by the look of things that the morning would never see seven o'clock again!

Stealing downstairs a quarter of an hour later, I beheld Eve seated at the kitchen table consuming food. No one else was in sight except a large gray cat folded up comfortably by the stove.

"Where is she?" I whispered, poking my head cautiously through the doorway.

"Gone to market," Eve said, resugaring her oatmeal. "I told her you had a basketball wrist and the doctor said you needed lots of sleep."

"Oh, Eve!" I ventured toward the stove and helped myself to oatmeal. The gray cat rose and began twining himself about my feet. "I didn't see any cat last night," I remarked.

"He comes and goes, Aunt Cal told me. I asked her, by the way, if I might call her that and she said she didn't mind."

Eve continued to talk as I ate. "I told her about the suitcases getting mixed," she remarked presently.

"You did!" I regarded her admiringly. I had been worrying about this ever since I woke up, wondering how I was going to make my mistake sound plausible. "What did she say?" I demanded anxiously.

Eve grinned. "Oh, just that she could not possibly understand such carelessness and not knowing one's own baggage and so forth and so on."

I nodded gloomily. I was off to a bad start with Aunt Cal, there was no doubt of that. First this suitcase business and then oversleeping.

"She left word," Eve continued, "that in case you rose in time, you were to take the suitcase over to the bus station and make inquiries of the driver when the morning bus gets in."

“What time will that be?” As I spoke, I glanced at the clock and was horrified to see that it was long past eight.

“About nine. It only makes two trips a day so we’d better be starting soon or we’ll be late.”

Fishers Haven in the morning light was somewhat more prosaic than in the golden glow of the evening before. Just a straggling little village with a sprinkling of comfortable homes and a half dozen stores or so, it made no pretensions to the importance of a seaside resort. But Eve did not seem to find it prosaic. She was interested in everything from the list of sundaes in the drug store window to the funny little cupola-like balconies on top of some of the older houses, built so that the wives of fishermen could look out to sea and watch for the return of their men.

“Just think how thrilling when they saw a sail,” I said.

“But pretty tragic too if it didn’t turn out to be the right one,” Eve returned. “And the next day maybe the same.”

We reached the bus stop ahead of time and sat down on the wooden platform to wait. Shortly after nine, the bus rolled in. To my relief, I saw that the driver was the same one who had brought us over from Berkshire Plains the afternoon before. A detached person in leggings, he listened to my tale without emotion. “So,” he broke into the middle of my story, “you think this guy with spectacles took yours?”

I nodded meekly.

“Well, he’ll likely turn it in at Company Headquarters over in Millport. Better inquire there.” He was turning away when Eve spoke up. “You didn’t, by any chance,” she inquired, “happen to notice where the spectacled gentleman got off, did you?”

The driver paused and looked at her. “Well, say, now you speak of it,” he said, “I do remember. Little chap, wasn’t he, with big specs and a straw hat? Carried a suitcase too. I recollect now—he got off at Beecham Corners, next stop up the line. Maybe stopped at the Inn there.”

“Then I think the best thing for us to do would be to ride over there and inquire,” Eve said.

The driver nodded and hurried away. But he was back shortly, and five minutes later we were rolling inland. The sandy road gave place to an uneven dirt one and the smell of the sea to the mingled odors of dust and gasoline, with now and then a whiff of clover fields or flowering wayside bush. Not until we had embarked had either of us considered how we were to get back. I fondly hoped that, in case we had to walk, I would not have a case full of bottles to carry at any rate.

It proved to be quite a short ride, however, and in less than ten minutes we were climbing down at a country crossroads. When the driver had spoken of The Inn, my imagination had pictured a thriving hostelry—cars drawn up at the door under a porte cochère, tables on a terrace, etc. It was with somewhat of a shock, therefore, as the bus rolled away that I perceived that there was neither a car nor a human being in sight. There were four houses, to be sure, but the nearest of these was boarded up and the others looked as if they might have been permanently abandoned.

“Quite a metropolis,” remarked Eve cheerfully. “Wonder which is the Inn?”

I picked up “Harry’s” luggage and trudged after her up one of the crossroads. In the yard of one of the houses, I perceived a woman digging dandelion greens. The sight cheered me greatly.

Over the wall, Eve inquired the way to the Inn. The woman rose from her stooping posture and surveyed us with some curiosity. “I ’spect you mean Trap’s place,” she said. “It’s the big house over on the other corner. But I wouldn’t recommend the rooms and they say the meals——”

“Oh, we weren’t thinking of stopping,” Eve assured her hastily. “It’s just—just an errand.”

From behind a damaged screen door, voices issued as we approached the side door of “Trap’s place.” Entering, we found ourselves in a narrow store. A woman sat behind the counter adding a column of figures on a brown paper bag. In the rear two men were smoking. A hurried glance told me that neither resembled the gentleman we sought.

Eve advanced to the counter and stated our errand.

“I guess likely it’s that Mr. Bangs you want,” the woman said when she had finished. I was aware as she eyed us of the same lively curiosity which had animated the dandelion digger. “He come in last night,” she went on. “I didn’t hear him say nothin’ ’bout no suitcase. Real estate’s his line, he said. He was makin’ inquiries about the old Craven House up Old Beecham way and I seen him start off in that direction this mornin’, though it’s the first I heard the place was for sale and what anybody’d want an old rattletrap like that for——”

This was rather of a facer; after we’d come all this way to find our bird flown. The woman must have seen the disappointment in our faces, for she added, “If you walked up there right away, maybe you could catch him. He ain’t been gone more’n half an hour.”

“Is it—far?” I asked weakly with a hostile glance at Mr. Bangs’ baggage on the floor at my feet.

“Not more’n ten minutes’ walk. You can leave the case here if you want.”

This seemed an inspired suggestion. And so without further delay, we set off

in the direction the woman indicated. The road branched off the regular motor highway and climbed casually upward, between uneven stone walls and dusty foliage. "I never expected," Eve remarked, "to spend the first day of my vacation trailing a barber!"

"Mrs. Trap said he was in the real estate line."

"I know. But don't forget the bottles of hair tonic."

"I'm not likely to, if I have to lug them about the country much more."

We walked for perhaps ten minutes without appearing to be getting anywhere in particular. But as we neared the brow of the hill, we spied above the trees at a distance back from the road the gray roof of a house. "This must be the place, don't you think?" Eve said. "It doesn't look as if anybody lived here."

It certainly didn't! The big front yard was a perfect jungle of coarse grass and overgrown bushes and a generally deserted and gone-to-seed air hung about the whole place. But as we paused there a moment in the dusty road surveying it, there drifted out to us a wave of delicate perfume—the scent of flowering rose bushes in the sun—which was like a gesture of welcome.

Plain but substantial and built to last, as the early settlers were wont to build them, Craven House stood staunchly waiting for what fate held in store for it. The blinds were closed and the weatherbeaten shingles showed more than one gap where the wind and weather had made headway.

Suddenly there came over me that curious feeling one has at times of having been there before. "What's the matter," Eve inquired. "You look as if you expected to see a ghost or something!"

"Oh, nothing," I returned hastily. "Come on, let's go in. Is the gate locked?"

But Eve had not stopped to discover. Already as I spoke she was halfway over the wall. I followed her, dropping down into a thicket on the other side that fairly reached to my waist. I pointed silently to a dingy sign nailed to a tree. "No Trespassing," it said.

"Oh, never mind," said Eve lightly. "We've got to find the elusive Mr. Bangs, haven't we?"

"But where is he? I don't see him anywhere about. Maybe this isn't the place after all," I added, stooping to detach a rose branch from my stocking.

"It's the place all right," Eve returned. "Look, here's a letterbox on the gatepost!" CRAVEN, I read the faded lettering. I wondered how many years it was since the mail carrier had left a letter there.

But Eve was now forging impatiently ahead. We crossed the yard and made our way through a forest of bushes around the corner of the house. In the rear, the ground sloped gradually down to what had once evidently been a quite elaborate garden. The outlines of paths and flower beds were still discernible.

And half hidden among the bushes, I caught sight of a stone urn and of a blackened stone figure on a pedestal. And in the middle of it all, was the leaf-filled bowl of a fountain. The scent of honeysuckle mingled with that of the roses. How sweet it was, but sad too!

Suddenly I felt Eve gripping my elbow. "There he is!" she whispered. "Look! There on the other side of that stone thing—creeping on the ground!" She gave a stifled giggle. "Seems to be one of the quaint customs of the country!"

Creeping! Yes, she was right, I saw him now. A small, intent, bent-over figure of a man, on his hands and knees in the tall grass.

"He seems very busy," I murmured. "Perhaps we ought not to interrupt him."

"Nonsense, you want your suitcase, don't you?"

Mr. Bangs did not see us approaching. He was, as I have said, very much absorbed. But it was not until we were nearly upon him that we saw that the thing over which he was bending so intently was a tape measure. For a full minute, I should say, we stood and watched him. His lips were moving as if he were making calculations.

Then without warning, he jumped to his feet, dusting his hands on his trousers. It was then that he saw us.

Well, of course nobody likes to find that he has been watched when he thought he was alone. Still I did not think that this alone was enough to account for the convulsion of anger which darkened his face. His knobby Adam's apple began to work up and down in a really frightful manner, and for a moment I thought he was going to choke.

It was Eve's velvety voice that broke the rather appalling silence. "I'm afraid we startled you, Mr. Bangs," she said easily.

A sort of cackling gurgle issued from the man's throat, which presently formed itself into words. "Ain't you seen the sign on the post?" he snapped, "where't says 'No trespassin'?' This here's private property."

"I know," returned Eve gently. "And we'd never have thought of coming in if we hadn't been looking for you. It's about the suitcase, you know—the one we took by mistake."

At these words, I was relieved to see the convulsive twitching of the man's face subside somewhat. "So," he snarled, "you're the party that run off with my baggage! Well, what you done with it?"

"It's down at the Inn," I answered. "It's rather heavy to lug around and besides I'm tired."

"Well, I ain't ast you to lug it, have I?" he retorted. "'Twas your own doin'. Say, what's your game anyway?" he added suspiciously. "I could have you arrested, I s'pose you know, for 'propriatin' goods that don't belong to you."

“Could you?” inquired Eve, sniffing at a white tea rose. “But of course you wouldn’t since you’ve got it back all safe. By the way, where is ours?”

He glared at her for a moment as if he could not at all make her out. Then with a shrug he turned away. “It’s standin’ in the hall down to Trap’s,” he said over his shoulder. “And the next time you go travelin’ round the country without a nurse, I advise you to look sharp and see whose bags ’tis you’re grabbin’.”

“We certainly will,” returned Eve cheerfully. “It has taught us a lesson, I’m sure. And thank you so much, Mr. Bangs. We’re awfully sorry to have put you to all this inconvenience—without your hair tonic and all!”

Though the last words were uttered in a half whisper, instantly the man’s right hand shot upward to his head. And it was then that I noticed for the first time that the hair that covered it was thin and graying. But his only answer was another shrug and a grunt as he walked away.

It seemed the moment for us to depart. Looking back, I saw that Mr. Bangs had again fallen on his knees in front of the stone figure.

As we turned back toward the house, I noticed that the back door stood ajar. The real estate agent had evidently been taking a look around before entering into his mysterious calculations in the garden. “Let’s take a peek inside,” I suggested. “He’ll never see us.”

“All right,” Eve agreed. “I’ll bet there are plenty of perfectly good family spooks living there!”

“Ghosts,” I retorted, “are out of date.”

The door led directly into a big old-fashioned kitchen. The air smelled damp and more than a little stuffy. One look around was enough for me. “Oh, it’s just an ordinary old place,” I said. “Let’s not go in after all. We must get back in time for dinner, you know.”

“Nonsense, we’ve got loads of time,” Eve said. “Come on, I want to see what the front part is like. I adore old houses, they’re so full of atmosphere!”

“Nasty dank atmosphere, I call it!” I followed reluctantly as she led the way into the hall. It was a big wide hall, running the full length of the house, and I could well imagine that with the doors wide open and the sunshine and fresh air pouring in, it might have been attractive. But it was anything but that now, and I shivered in spite of myself as our feet echoed on the bare boards. Why in the world had I ever suggested coming in here!

“This must be the parlor,” Eve was saying with her hand on a door at the right of the hall.

“Oh, never mind if it is,” I urged. “Don’t let’s bother now.”

“It’s now or never, I suspect,” Eve returned coolly. “What’s the matter with you, Sandy, haven’t you got any curiosity?”

“I don’t like old houses when nobody lives in ’em,” I confessed. “They give me the creeps.”

Eve seemed to think this funny, and the sound of her laughter echoed back from the wide stairway. It was uncanny—as if somebody else had laughed. And now she was opening the door and stepping across the threshold into the room which she had correctly guessed was the parlor.

It was a wide, bare room. The windows were shuttered and at only one place, where some of the slats of the blind had been broken, did any light come in. This was just enough for us to see by, though in truth there was little to see. An old horsehair sofa and chairs, a low carved cabinet in front of a broad fireplace, and above the fireplace, a gilt and white mantle. The wallpaper showing a pattern of faded rosebuds was warped and ragged in many places.

“I guess probably people have had lots of good times in this room!” Eve murmured dreamily.

“A good place for a funeral, if you ask me!” I retorted crossly. “Oh, do let’s get out, I don’t like the place a bit.”

“Oh, all right,” she said, turning toward the door. “Though I should love to take a look around upstairs,” she added with a glance toward the stairway. “I think it’s a love——”

The sentence was never finished. A sound suddenly broke in upon the stillness. It came from the direction of the kitchen. A sound like the closing of a door. As we stood there in the middle of the hall, hardly realizing what was happening, it was followed immediately by another more ominous one—the unmistakable click of a key as it turned in a lock.

Then Eve was speeding down the hall. Across the kitchen, and pounding on the closed door. “Mr. Bangs!” she called. “Oh, I say, wait—wait!”

But there was no answer and no sound from without. Our jailer’s retreating footsteps were already deadened in the thick grass outside!

IV

Prisoners

EVE looked at me and I looked at Eve. “The front windows,” I whispered. “Maybe——” I raced back down the hall as I spoke, back to the big front parlor. The only place from which the outside world was visible was the broken front blind I have mentioned. I applied my eyes to the hole. But what I saw only made my heart sink several fathoms deeper: it was the round-shouldered back of Mr. Bangs already making good progress down the road. “He’s g-gone!” I faltered, my voice ragged.

Eve didn’t answer for a minute. I guessed she was getting hold of herself. “I disliked that man the moment I set eyes on him,” she said at last.

“But wh-what,” I demanded weakly, “are we going to do?”

“Get out, of course. There’s always some way, a cellar window or something.”

“But suppose there isn’t? S’pose they’re all nailed fast like these? Suppose we have to—to spend the night here!”

Eve did not seem to have heard me. She was now hurrying back down the hall to the cellar door. I listened with my heart in my throat—if that was locked too! Then with a scraping noise, I heard it open.

I didn’t really like the idea of the cellar at all and I liked it even less as I watched Eve’s figure disappear into the cobwebby dimness. But I had no mind to stand waiting alone in that awful empty house. So gathering what shreds of courage I possessed, I plunged down after her. It was worse even than I had imagined. The floor was dirt under our feet and the dampness which hung about the upstairs seemed intensified a hundredfold. I was sure it would choke me in a minute.

But Eve was pushing ahead. I could just make out the outline of two smudgy windows above what was probably a coal bin. But they were miles above our heads and looked as if they had not been open for years.

We made a tour of the rest of the cellar. I was clutching Eve’s hand now, half paralyzed with fright, I might as well admit. Once a cobweb brushed against my

face and I screamed. In a particularly dark corner where Eve climbed onto a barrel to examine a nearby window, I distinctly heard a rat scurry away into the shadows. “Oh, do let’s go back!” I cried at last with a shudder. “I’m positive there’s no way out down here.”

Eve was still tugging at the window. “Nailed fast,” she announced. “This place is sure burglar proof!”

All the rest of them were the same. Finally we went back upstairs. Eve had a smudge across one cheek. At any other time I would have laughed. “Well,” she said quite cheerfully, “there are still the upstairs’ windows.”

“Eve,” I said, “have you thought of this? No one knows we’re in this house. Not even Mr. Bangs. What I mean is that when they start looking for us, they’ll never think of looking here!” Already I was imagining searching parties and headlines in the newspapers. There would be descriptions of our appearance: “Eve Fordyce, brown eyes, short wavy hair, when last seen was wearing a blue cotton skirt and white slipover blouse; Sandra Hutton, green eyes, lightish hair, wearing faded gingham dress——”

“Mrs. Trapp or whatever her name is knows we came up here,” Eve was saying. “And Mr. Bangs saw us outside.”

“You can’t depend on him for any help,” I declared emphatically. “Oh, Eve, do you think they’ll broadcast us among the missing persons on the radio?”

“Of course not! Oh, do cheer up, Sandy. Think what an adventure we’ll have to tell the girls about next fall. Why, it’ll go over big. Especially,” she added calmly, “if we spend the night here.”

This view of the situation did not serve to cheer me in the slightest degree. I was not concerned with the dim and distant fall but with what was going to happen to us right now. The thought of the night coming on, of the darkness catching us there in that big echoing house already sent shivers running up and down my spine. “Oh, dear, why did we ever come in at all?” I wailed. “It serves me right for being so snoopy.”

“It was more my fault than yours,” Eve declared consolingly. “At least it was my fault that we stayed so long. Now I’m going to take a look round upstairs. Very likely they weren’t so particular about fastening those windows.”

But even if we did find one unfastened, how were we going to get down to the ground? As I remembered the spacious lines on which the house was built, I felt that escape that way was hopeless from the outset. Still there was nothing else to do so I again followed Eve, this time up the broad curving stairway.

We found ourselves in a square hall from the rear end of which ran a narrow passage. At our right was a large bedroom, containing a big double bed, minus mattress or coverings. Instead of springs, there were wooden slats. “Fancy

sleeping on those!” said Eve.

“We may come to it!” I returned miserably.

The blinds were closed as they had been below, and the two windows in the bedroom were nailed fast. The windows in the other rooms—there were five in all—were the same. Whoever had been assigned the task of closing up the old Craven House had made a thorough job of it.

We returned finally to the large front room. I slumped down on a wooden rocker by the window. My legs felt extraordinarily weak and if I had been fasting for a week, I could not have been hungrier. I was amazed to see by my wrist watch that it was only a little after two. I had thought it hours later.

Eve had gone back to the window. I watched her dismally as she fussed with the fastening. “I’m going to look for a hammer,” she announced presently.

“Hammer?” I repeated dully as if I were unfamiliar with the implement.

She nodded. “You’ve noticed of course the difference between these windows and the ones downstairs?”

“I noticed that they’re all nailed down— isn’t that enough?”

“Yes, but the ones below are nailed from the outside but these are done from within. Consequently the nails are all in plain sight.”

“You mean——” I jumped up. She was right. “How clever of you to notice that,” I exclaimed. “But do you think we can ever get ’em out—they look awfully deep in and they’re rusty besides?”

“I’m going to try anyway,” she returned. “Let’s go downstairs and take a look for some tools.”

For the first time since I had heard that back door close, I felt a faint glimmer of hope. In a little room off the kitchen filled with all manner of household odds and ends, we found a tool box and in it a hammer, brown and rusty with disuse, but still a hammer.

Well, it was exactly a quarter of three when Eve set to work on those nails. It was five minutes past before the first one even budged. And it was nearly four before we got the second one out. Then followed a long struggle with the window itself. “I’ll bet those old Cravens never did have any fresh air,” I panted. “No wonder they’re all dead——” I was pounding the sash with my fist in an effort to loosen it.

“How d’you know they’re all dead? Here, let me have another try.” Eve pushed me aside.

At last with a groan of protest, it moved—an inch, two. I reached through and unfastened the blinds and the sweet warm air rushed in. My, how good it smelled!

The window opened onto the gently sloping tin roof of a narrow side porch.

After we had succeeded in raising it far enough, we climbed through. It was not at all clear to either of us what we were going to do next. But anything, we felt, was better than staying cooped up in that house any longer.

Making our way cautiously to the edge of the roof, we saw that it was, as I had anticipated, a goodish drop to the ground. Moreover, there were no adjacent tree branches or any of those convenient trellises that are always so handy in the story books.

We sat down with our feet braced against the gutter to consider the situation. “Marooned on a tin roof!” giggled Eve. The spirits of both of us had risen enormously with our escape from the house. Some one was bound to pass along the road sooner or later, we decided. And though the house stood a considerable distance back from it, still our lung power was good.

The road to Old Beecham, however, was off the main artery of travel and so far as we could see from our perch, there was simply no sign of life anywhere. “I can’t think,” I said, “why anyone should want to build a house way off here, unless he was a hermit or something. I tell you, Eve,” I added with conviction, “those Cravens were a queer lot!”

“Oh, I don’t know,” Eve returned musingly. “It’s awfully peaceful and sort of—well, self sufficient. And I shouldn’t wonder if, when the leaves are off the trees, you could get a glimpse of the sea off there somewhere.”

“Um—maybe.” I was wondering what Aunt Cal was thinking by now. Any remaining shred of character which I might have still possessed in her eyes, must quite have vanished by this time. And if we did not get home that night—well with a woman like Aunt Cal, I just couldn’t imagine what would happen. It was within the realm of possibility that she might send us both packing after such an escapade!

V

John Doe, Esquire

THE minutes ticked into an hour and still no one passed. The sun was already behind the house and a little breeze was rustling the tall grass and bushes below us. I shall never smell syringas again without thinking of those hours on that tin roof. For it was nearly two full hours before we saw anyone!

Then at last we heard, not the hum of a motor for which we had been listening, but the slow rattle of wheels. It was a farm wagon, coming from the direction of Old Beecham, and it was drawn by a team of horses and driven by a boy in overalls and a blue shirt. His head was bare and we could hear him singing lustily to himself as he drove.

At our first frantic shout, however, he turned his head and gazed up at the house. We both stood up and began to wave wildly.

“Whoa-o.” We could hear the boy’s voice as he brought the horses to a stop. The sound brought cheer to our hearts. Another minute and he was vaulting over the stone wall and coming toward us. His brown face only a shade lighter than the shock of hair above it was expressionless. “Anything the matter?” he drawled as he came within earshot.

“Well, you don’t think we’re sitting on this roof for pleasure, do you?” Eve giggled.

“I haven’t thought anything about it,” retorted the boy. “But from the yell you let out just now, I judged somebody was being murdered.”

“We had to make you hear,” Eve explained sweetly. “We’ve been sitting here for two hours!”

“Why don’t you try sitting somewhere else then if you’re tired of it?”

“Better view of the scenery from here,” she told him. “By the way, you don’t happen to have a ladder in that wagon of yours, do you?”

“What do you think I am—the hook and ladder company?”

“Well, I just thought I’d ask.”

I felt that we weren’t getting anywhere. “Look here Mr—er——”

“Doe,” the boy supplied glibly. “John Doe.”

Eve giggled.

“Well, Mr. Doe,” I continued, “to put the case briefly, what we want most just now is to get down from this roof.”

“Why don’t you go back the way you came then?” he inquired. “You didn’t drop down from the skies, I suppose!”

“It’s just awfully clever of you to think of that,” Eve put in. “The only trouble with your plan is that the doors of the house happen to be locked on the outside. You see, the real estate agent locked us in.”

“Real estate agent?” the boy repeated. At last there was real astonishment in his tone. “I never heard that this house was for sale.”

“Never mind that now,” Eve urged impatiently. “The point is that we’re locked in or out—whichever way you look at it—and, to be perfectly frank with you, there are other places where we’d rather spend the night!”

“So if you could borrow a ladder from somewhere,” I put in meekly.

“Or get the key from a gentleman by the name of Bangs down at Trap’s place at the Corners,” Eve added, “we’d be just eternally grateful.”

The boy did not reply immediately. He seemed to be considering the situation with an eye on the drain pipe. “Oh, well,” he said at last with a shrug, “I suppose I’ll have to go get a ladder.”

“The days of chivalry are past!” Eve sighed as we watched our unwilling rescuer-to-be climb back into his wagon, turn and drive up the road in the direction from which he had come.

“What can you expect from overalls,” I said. “Be thankful if he remembers to come back at all.”

But I did him an injustice, it appeared, for less than ten minutes later the wagon reappeared, this time loaded with a tall ladder.

The boy made no remark as he came dragging the ladder across the yard and proceeded to prop it firmly against the edge of the roof. “There,” he said finally when he was satisfied that it was steady.

We descended one at a time. The boy watched us coldly. His opinion of girls who got themselves locked in empty houses and marooned on tin roofs was apparent. “I don’t know how we can *ever* thank you!” Eve exclaimed as she felt that her feet were on firm earth again.

“It was perfectly swell of you to take all this trouble,” I added appreciatively.

“A good deed every day, that’s my motto,” drawled the boy.

“Just a splendid young knight errant,” I added. For just the barest second I thought the corners of his rather uncompromising mouth twitched. But he quickly controlled them, and lifting the ladder down, began to drag it back

across the grass.

“Oh, let me help!” Eve ran after him and seized the other end. Together they carried it as far as the wall. “I’ll just leave it here and pick it up in the morning when I go to work,” the boy remarked. Then with a nod in our direction, he again vaulted over the wall. We watched him climb into his seat and gather up the reins. “Well, so long,” he said.

Eve stood beside the wagon and gazed rapturously up at him. “Good-bye,” she said. “I suppose we shall never see you again but I shall always treasure your memory.”

“You talk a lot of nonsense, don’t you?” he remarked.

“Nonsense? Me? By the way, you aren’t going far with that wagon, I suppose?”

“I’m going home,” he stated stolidly. “And you’d better do the same if you’ve got any.”

“That’s just the point,” Eve exclaimed brightly. “I was wondering if by any chance—that is, we’re not so very heavy—you see, we’re late for supper as it is.”

“Well, get in,” he said ungraciously.

We needed no urging, which was fortunate. With more speed than grace we climbed into the rear of the wagon and in another minute were rattling down the road toward Beecham Corners.

Conversation was difficult. Only as we approached the crossroads I managed to make myself heard, “Oh, my suitcase!” I cried. “I can’t go home without my suitcase.”

The horses were pulled up sharply. “What’s the matter now?” inquired the boy.

I left Eve to make explanations. I was out of the wagon in one leap and flying up the road toward Trap’s. I found the case in the front hall just as Mr. Bangs had said. Nobody was about so I just took it and went out. Panting, I returned to the wagon.

“Mr. Doe’s going almost to Fishers Haven; isn’t that luck?” Eve said as she reached down to give me a hand. “He says we can ride as far as he goes. Or at least,” she added, twinkling, “he didn’t say we couldn’t.”

It was dusk when we saw the white houses of Fishers Haven ahead of us. At a spreading farmhouse on the outskirts, our equipage came to a stop. “This is where I live,” the boy said.

We climbed stiffly to the ground. “I suppose,” said Eve, smiling up at the boy, “that you have no idea who we are?”

It was now our turn to be surprised. “Sure. You’re the girls who are staying at

Mrs. Poole's."

"But how in the world did you know?" she demanded. "We only came last night."

"Fellow who lives next door is a kind of friend of mine," he vouchsafed shortly. "Tells me all his troubles."

"But," giggled Eve, "we're not one of his troubles, are we? At least not yet!"

The boy made no reply to this but gathered up his reins preparatory to turning into the drive.

I remembered suddenly the dark figure I had seen creeping along the hedge last night. "What kind of troubles has your friend?" I called hastily.

"Oh, cat troubles mostly." The words drifted back as the wagon rattled away.

"Did he say 'cat'?" I asked.

"Sounded like it," said Eve.

VI

A Piece of Paper

AUNT CAL listened to our story without interruption at supper that night. Only at my first mention of the old Craven House, I fancied I saw an odd expression flit across her face. But her only comment, when we had finished, was the dry remark that the next time we felt moved to go poking about empty houses, we'd better make sure that the key was on the inside.

Following Eve upstairs that night, I found her standing in the middle of the room, scowling over a scrap of paper. "Is this anything of yours, Sandy?" she asked.

I peered at it over her shoulder. It was a soiled and dog-eared piece of notepaper which had been folded twice. Scrawled across the middle, I read: "Circe south 13-6, 90 degrees W. 7 dig here."

"I never saw it before. Where did you find it, Eve?" I said, looking at it curiously.

"Saw it lurking under the bed as I came into the room," she explained. "It doesn't seem like Aunt Cal to leave pieces of old letters about."

"What do you think it is?" I asked, still staring at the strange inscription. "A ship's log maybe? Circe sounds like the name of a ship."

"Perhaps. But 'dig here'—what about that? That's not exactly nautical, is it?" Eve returned musingly. Suddenly she lifted the paper to her face and sniffed at it. "Harry's Hair Restorer!" she exclaimed.

"What!" I sniffed too. She was right. The scent of Mr. Bangs' lotions when we had opened his suitcase had permeated everything. It was unmistakable. "Then—then," I stammered, "this letter, or whatever it is, must be his. Must have fallen out when we opened the suitcase!"

"Looks like it. And the wind probably blew it under the bed when you opened the window. That's why we didn't notice it before."

"I wonder if it's anything important," I mused. "What do you make of it, Eve?"

Eve sat on the sea chest, her eyes round and big. “Sandy,” she said slowly, “if I read it in a story book, I would think of just one thing!”

“You mean—treasure?” I asked in a half whisper.

She nodded. “But of course in real life,” she went on hurriedly, “well, you know yourself, Sandy, real life is different, however much you try to make yourself believe otherwise.”

“Yes,” I admitted, “I know it is. But—look here!” I shot bolt upright on the bed with the suddenness of the thought that had come to me. “What do you suppose that man was doing in that garden today?”

“Why,” said Eve, “he was measuring, surveying or something, I suppose.”

“Surveyors don’t crawl on their knees,” I said. “And besides, he hadn’t any instruments, only a tape measure.”

Eve looked at me solemnly. “What are you driving at?” she asked.

“Well, this paper is his, isn’t it? And it’s got measurements on it. And he was measuring. It sounds crazy, of course, still——”

“But he didn’t have the paper; it was here under the bed!”

“Yes, I know. But he might have had it in his head, mightn’t he—the numbers, I mean?”

“You don’t mean you actually think, Sandy, that that man was looking for buried treasure?” Eve’s voice had fallen to a whisper, too, now.

“I don’t know what to think,” I returned.

“He certainly was annoyed when he saw us watching him!” Eve said thoughtfully.

“Annoyed is putting it mildly,” I said. “I thought he was going to strangle!”

Eve nodded. “Do you know,” she said, “I felt there was something very odd about him from the first. Take his hair, for one thing——”

“Somebody has taken it, or most of it!” I giggled. “He certainly isn’t much of an advertisement for his old lotions!”

“Not today. But he was yesterday when we saw him on the bus, don’t you remember?”

“Why, that’s so! I do remember he had thick brown hair that stuck out all around under his hat. I noticed it particularly, it didn’t seem to go with his face somehow. You don’t think it could have been——”

“A wig, of course!” Eve cried. “That settles it! That man is up to some funny business, you can depend upon it. Of course he wasn’t expecting to see anybody out there in the garden today. I dare say he’d found the wig hot and had taken it off and laid it in the grass or hung it on a branch or something!”

“Still, whatever he’s up to,” I said thoughtfully, “I suppose we’ll have to return his property to him. We can mail it to him in care of Trap’s Inn, I

suppose.”

“All right. You’ll find an envelope in that top drawer.”

When I turned with the envelope, Eve was jotting down something in her diary. “No harm keeping a copy of those figures,” she remarked. “Just as a matter of curiosity, you know.”

We mailed the letter to Mr. Bangs next morning. We hoped that we would receive some acknowledgment of its receipt, something which might shed some further light on the mystery. But the days went by and nothing came.

Of course, a man who wears a wig may or may not be a villain. As Eve pointed out, he may have worn it for professional purposes solely. If he was a vendor of hair lotions, then the wig was a kind of advertisement. But even so, I argued, it was deceitful and misleading and I felt that our first impression of the man was abundantly justified.

We spoke frequently of making another trip to the old house to try to find out for ourselves what he was up to. But fear of incurring Aunt Cal’s disapproval held us back. It would be extremely difficult to explain to my severe-minded relative what had taken us there. To discuss anything so fantastic as buried treasure with Aunt Cal seemed out of the question.

Meanwhile our life at Fishers Haven flowed along serenely. We found that Aunt Cal was not hard to get along with, once you adapted yourself to her ways. She had lived so long alone that she couldn’t help being rather set in her habits, Eve said. Indeed it was due mostly to Eve’s tact and diplomacy that things went so smoothly. Eve had had some experience in visiting relatives and, though she admitted that none of them was in the least like my aunt, still, as she said, when you go to stay in somebody else’s house, you just have to make up your mind to doing things differently than when you are in your own home.

We began to feel quite at home too in the village, at the stores where Aunt Cal “traded” and at the post office where we went for the mail each morning and at any other odd moment when time hung too heavily on our hands. We explored the shore for miles and, covering our bathing suits modestly with coats in deference to Aunt Cal’s propinities, walked to the beach for a swim nearly every day.

It was one afternoon when we returned rather late from one of these expeditions that we found the kitchen door locked. The key was under the mat where Aunt Cal—with what Eve called a painful lack of imagination—always placed it if she went out while we were away. We let ourselves in and found a note on the kitchen table addressed to me.

“Have gone to Old Beecham to see a sick friend who has just sent for me. Rose Blossom is driving me out. May have to spend the night. If I am not back by nine, put Adam in the kitchen, lock up and go to bed.

Hastily,
Aunt Cal.”

“Hurrah!” I cried, seizing the startled Adam from his cushion and beginning to waltz with him about the kitchen.

“You don’t,” remarked Eve, “seem so awfully depressed at the news of Aunt Cal’s suffering friend!”

“I wasn’t thinking of her at all,” I confessed. “I was wondering if we couldn’t make a Welsh rarebit for supper. I’m fed up with beans and fried potatoes.” For some reason Aunt Cal’s note had filled me with a strange exhilaration. The thought of being on our own, if only for a few hours, was exciting. “Why, we won’t even have to wash the dishes if we don’t want to! And we can sit up as late as we please.”

The odor of toasting cheese is delectable at all times. Never have I known it so delicious as it was that night. Adam, too, seemed to find the atmosphere of the kitchen particularly attractive for, even after he had finished his supper of fried fish, he lingered, purring and twining himself about my feet.

“He wants some of the rarebit, I guess,” Eve said, dropping a morsel onto his plate.

Somewhat to my disappointment, Eve elected to wash the dishes as usual. “Better cover up all guilty tracks,” she laughed.

But we soon had them out of the way and after everything was in order again, we went out into the soft, sweet smelling dusk, the cat at our heels. There is a little bench under the locust tree where we had formed the habit of sitting in the evening and watching Adam at his capers. For, while in the daytime, he is staid and dignified in the extreme, in the evening he loosens up considerably and, given a toad or a grasshopper, will cavort with mild abandon up and down the garden path and beds. But we were always cautioned by Aunt Cal to keep our eyes on him and be sure that he did not stray beyond the hedge into her neighbor’s domain.

Tonight the rarebit or something seemed to have made him unusually lively. He darted about quite wildly and even in one moment of abandon so far forgot his years as to chase his tail. “It’s because Aunt Cal’s away,” I said. “I know just how he feels.”

Eve was lying on her back, trying to find Jupiter. “I wish we could think of

something exciting to do,” I said.

“You might try chasing your tail,” she murmured. “I think stars are exciting.”

“Of course, if you start thinking about them,” I agreed. “Still, you can look at them most any time.”

“You hardly ever see so many as there are tonight. See, there’s the Little Dipper!”

It was while I was trying to see the Little Dipper that Adam saw his chance. I think very likely the sly thing had been waiting for just that moment when both our heads should be lifted to the sky.

“Where’s Adam?” Eve asked presently, coming back to earth.

“He was here just a moment ago.” I got up. “Adam, Adam!” I called.

Then suddenly, almost like an echo—but not quite—from the other side of the hedge I heard a voice. “Caliph, Caliph!” it said.

I stopped short. In the darkness of the adjoining yard, I saw the figure of Aunt Cal’s neighbor, a short plump gentleman of seafaring aspect who went in the village by the title of Captain Trout but whom Aunt Cal herself referred to with some asperity as “that man next door.” “Caliph, Caliph!” he called again.

“I didn’t know he had a cat,” whispered Eve at my side. Then just in front of us we saw Adam scurrying toward the hedge. In a second he was through it and bounding across the yard toward the summoning voice. “He thinks he’s calling him,” I said. “I guess I’d better go after him.”

I negotiated the hedge with only a scratch or two on my legs and flew after the runaway. “Adam,” I called. “Come back here, you bad cat!”

But even as I spoke the words, I saw the round figure beyond me stoop and gather the cat in his arms. “Caliph, you rascal,” he scolded, “where have you been keeping yourself?” He did not appear to see Eve or me at all but just went on stroking and scolding the cat by turns.

Finally Eve cleared her throat. “I think,” she said politely, “you’ve got the wrong cat, haven’t you? That’s our Adam, you know.”

At the words, the man’s head jerked up. “What,” he snapped, “are you talking about?”

“About Adam, our cat,” said Eve coolly. “It’s long past his bedtime.”

There was quite a pause after this during which the Captain went on stroking the cat. “You see,” I put in at last out of sheer embarrassment, “he had Welsh rarebit for supper and it sort of went to his head——”

But I never finished the sentence. With a sudden soldierly swing, the figure in front of us turned round and, still bearing the cat in his arms, marched toward the back door of his house.

VII

Caliph

Too surprised to move, we stood and watched him. Then I caught Eve by the hand. “Why, we can’t let him carry off Adam like that!” I cried. “What will Aunt Cal say? Why, it’s highway robbery—stealing our cat before our eyes!”

“I don’t think he’ll invite us in,” Eve observed with something suspiciously like a giggle. “Seems sort of a crusty old bird.”

“But we can’t stand here and do nothing!” I was starting forward when I saw that the back door of the house had opened from within. For a moment another figure stood there, etched against the light. Then the Captain entered and the door closed.

“Well,” I cried, “I’m not going to stand for that! Eve, maybe—maybe they’re vivisectionists or something—going to cut his poor little insides out!”

At this gruesome suggestion, however, Eve only laughed again. “How you do let your imagination run on, Sandy!”

“Just the same, are you going to let that man steal my aunt’s cat?” I demanded. “You know what ‘store she sets by Adam.’”

“Well, I’m thinking,” said Eve. “I think perhaps there’s some misunderstanding.”

“Misunderstanding!” I scoffed. “I tell you that man’s nothing but a common thief. Probably knows Aunt Cal’s away and thinks he can get away with it. But I guess he’ll find he’s mistaken!” With that I advanced boldly toward the house.

There was a light in the kitchen window and I could hear movements inside as I crossed the little porch and knocked loudly on the door. Eve was in the shadow just behind. After a minute the door opened and the figure I had seen there before stood in the light of an oil lamp which was burning in a wall bracket behind him.

“What do you want?” It was not a gruff voice like Captain Trout’s, but clear and a little chilly. Moreover there was something distinctly familiar about it. But I did not stop to place it. Instead, I stepped boldly across the threshold and faced

the owner squarely. He turned and the light fell on his face. It was John Doe.

But I did not let my momentary astonishment distract me from my purpose. “We’ve come for our cat,” I stated.

Looking beyond the boy, I saw the Captain in the act of pouring out a saucer of milk. “He’s had his supper,” I said. “And besides he likes his milk warmed.”

“I guess I know what he likes,” snapped the Captain, setting the saucer of milk down on the floor beside the stove.

I took an indignant step forward. But Eve’s restraining hand was on my arm. “Wait a minute, Sandy,” she urged. “If Captain Trout wants to give Adam a little refreshment, surely there’s no harm in that. I’m going outside to have a little chat with Mr. Doe. You’d better come along.”

I hesitated, looking from the ruddy face of the Captain, bent solicitously over the cat, to the impassive one of John Doe where he stood like a sentinel guarding the door. Suddenly the whole situation became funny. “Eve,” I said, “doesn’t he remind you of Horatius at the Bridge or something!”

But Eve was saying something to him in a low appealing voice and the next moment, somewhat to my surprise, we were all three standing together on the little back porch with the door closed behind us. “Now,” said Eve, “please, Mr. Doe, do tell us what all this cat business is about?”

“Oh, don’t call me that,” said the boy impatiently. “You know it isn’t my name.”

“Naturally,” returned Eve, “but since it’s the name you gave us——”

“Oh, I was just kidding. My name’s Michael Gilpatrick.”

“What an awfully nice name,” Eve smiled. She seated herself on one of the built-in benches at the end of the porch. “Now,” she said, “we can talk. Tell us about the cat.”

Michael Gilpatrick leaned against the post. “Well,” he said, “I suppose I might as well. But I don’t want you to think I’m taking sides in the matter. Of course I’m a friend of the Captain, still I can see that there’s something to be said on both sides.”

“Okay,” said Eve. “Having stated your position, please proceed. You must remember that we’re all in the dark. We never had the slightest inkling that there was any mystery surrounding Adam until tonight. Of course we knew that Aunt Cal and the Captain weren’t exactly on cordial terms.”

“And that the Captain had a habit of creeping along hedges after dark,” I put in.

Michael’s straight mouth twitched a little, but he quickly regained his solemnity. “Well,” he began, “it’s quite a long story. Goes back to the winter before last.”

“Adam must have been something of a kitten then,” Eve suggested.

Michael nodded. “It was about Christmas time, I think, that Captain Trout bought this little house and settled down here with his invalid wife.”

“Why, I didn’t know——” I began, but Eve whispered, “Hush!”

“They got this kitten—a kitten, that is,” he went on. “It came to them on Christmas Day and Mrs. Trout made a big fuss over it. They called it Caliph.”

“What a flight of fancy!” I murmured.

“That’s what they named it,” said Michael stolidly.

“Well, go on.”

“Some time in February, one cold night when the thermometer was below zero, the cat disappeared.”

“You didn’t tell us this was a sob story,” I put in, feeling for my handkerchief.

“Hush, Sandy,” said Eve. “How did he happen to disappear?” she asked.

“I don’t know—he just vanished, the way cats do.”

“Night life and all that?” I queried.

The boy ignored my frivolity. “The next day Mrs. Trout was ill and the Captain was so occupied with nursing her that he didn’t think very much about the cat’s absence. But later, when he began to look about and make inquiries, he couldn’t find any trace of him.”

“And so a year went by,” I prompted, “and still no trace of the missing child!”

“Well, it wasn’t quite a year. It was the next fall, October, I believe. Mrs. Trout had died that summer and the Captain was living here alone. One day he saw Caliph across the hedge. He was following your aunt, Mrs. Poole, about the garden.”

“How,” I demanded, “did he know it was Caliph? A cat grows a lot in—let me see—eight months, wasn’t it?”

“He thought it was Caliph,” continued Michael, “and he went over and told Mrs. Poole so. But she said it was her cat Adam. She said she’d found him starving on the street the week before and had brought him home. Then Captain Trout explained about his cat, Caliph, running away last February and all. But it was no use. Mrs. Poole remained—er—unconvinced.”

“Naturally,” I exclaimed. “Why, the world’s practically full of Maltese cats and to tell one from another after it’s had eight months to grow in—why, I don’t blame Aunt Cal in the least.”

Michael regarded me gravely. “Well,” he said, “I’m just giving you the facts as I learned them. Of course, the whole thing is rather silly,” he added, “but you see the Captain was attached to Caliph on account of his wife and all, and should know his own cat.”

“Of course,” said Eve. “He didn’t have seven toes or anything like that?” she suggested hopefully.

“Not that I know of.”

“But look here!” I fairly bounced off my seat with the force of the idea that had come to me. “Why don’t they simply put it to the test. Get together, I mean, and each call the cat in turn. If he answers to Adam—why, then he’s ours, I mean Aunt Cal’s. But if he comes to Captain Trout——”

Michael shook his head. “No good,” he said. “As a matter of fact, the cat answers to any old name you happen to call him!”

VIII

A Scalp Lock

I CONFESS I felt a little flat when Michael Gilpatrick said that. I had been so sure for the moment that I had hit on a brilliant solution of the problem that now I was inclined to wash my hands of so stupid a cat once and for all. But I remembered that Aunt Cal had particularly entrusted him to our care. "What," I asked, "are we going to say to my aunt when she comes home and finds no Adam? She's just as much attached to him as Captain Trout is to—to Caliph. Why, she might come back any minute now."

As I spoke, I glanced over toward the house where it stood dark and silent beyond the hedge. Suddenly I saw something that made me jump up and grab Eve's arm. "Why," I cried, "I do believe she's back already! Look! There's a light upstairs in that window at the end!"

"What!" Eve and Michael were at my side. For a minute, as we all stood there, everything was in darkness. Then there came again the faint flicker of light that I had seen at the upper window. "Looks like a flashlight," said Michael. "Or maybe a candle."

"But why should Aunt Cal be going around the house with a candle? There are plenty of lamps and they're always filled."

No one answered. The light was moving from window to window now. "Sandy," said Eve, faintly, "I don't believe it's Aunt Cal at all!"

"It looks to me," remarked Michael, "as if there was somebody in the house that didn't want to be seen."

"You mean a burglar?" I cried. "Oh, Eve, we left the back door wide open. And there's the silver in the dining room chest——"

"Guess I'd better have a look," remarked Michael abruptly, starting down the steps.

"Oh, do you think you'd better?" asked Eve anxiously. "S'pose he has a gun or something!"

Michael did not say "Pooh!" but the set of his shoulders suggested the word as

he strode toward the hedge. He cleared it with one leap and disappeared from sight in the direction of Aunt Cal's back door.

"Come on," I said, trying to sound cool and collected. "I'm not afraid!"

"Of course not," agreed Eve, giving me her hand.

We reached the path where we had been sitting just a few moments before. The mysterious light had disappeared, there was no sound anywhere.

Cautiously we advanced. "There's a lamp on the shelf just inside the kitchen door," I stated half-heartedly. "And the matches are just beside it. It would only take a minute to light it."

Eve did not answer. Suddenly she stopped and I felt her hand tighten in mine. "Listen! What's that?"

From somewhere inside the house a vague clatter reached us—a shuffling noise—the thud of something falling. Then, quite close at hand, came the scud and scurry of running feet! Immediately after we heard the beat of quick panting breaths and two flying figures hurtled past us into the night!

With one accord, we turned and followed them. But they had vanished into the blackness of the lower garden almost before we knew it. Back of the garden is a steep bank, ending in a muddy ditch. If they'd gone down that, it looked like a pretty sure spill for both of them. The thought sent us hurrying on. We reached the stone wall which forms the lower border of Aunt Cal's property. Eve shouted frantically into the darkness, "Michael, where are you?"

There was no answer. I climbed gingerly onto the wall. I thought of the muddy ditch at the bottom of the bank and I had a vision of Michael lying there wounded and bleeding. "Michael," I called, "are you down there?"

Then to our infinite relief, a faint voice answered, "Coming!"

Presently we heard him thrashing his way upward. Finally he stumbled out from the bushes below where we stood. Even in the darkness, we could see that his clothes were a wreck. And there was a dark patch on his forehead—though this subsequently turned out to be mud. "Oh, you're hurt!" Eve cried.

"Well, not fatally!" he panted as he reached the wall and sank down upon it. "But the rascal got away, worse luck! If I hadn't caught my foot in a branch down there, I'd have had him. As it is, all I got is this!" He held up a fuzzy-looking object.

We peered at it. "What in the world——?"

"Big Injun scalp lock!" chuckled Michael.

Eve put out her hand and touched it gingerly. "You mean—he wore a wig!"

"Looks like it. I grabbed at his hair just as I fell. When it came off in my hand, I thought I must be seeing things!"

Abruptly Eve leaned over and sniffed at the wig. "Harry's Hair Restorer!" she

announced.

Michael looked at her in amazement. “Mean to say you know the gentleman? Perhaps he wasn’t a burglar after all?”

“If he wasn’t,” answered Eve slowly, “then I don’t know what he was doing in our house! Unless—unless he came after the letter!”

“But we sent it back to him,” I cried.

“I know, but maybe he didn’t get it. Maybe he didn’t go back to Trap’s—don’t you see? But he wanted the letter and when he didn’t find it in his suitcase, he—he came after it.”

Michael got up from the wall. “Well, I guess I’ll be getting on,” he said stiffly. “Of course, if I’d known you were acquainted with the fellow——”

“But we’re not—not really. Oh, wait a minute, please!” Eve put out her hand to hold him back. “If you’ll just give us a chance we’ll tell you all about it. In fact, I think it’s time we told somebody.”

Back at the house after we had helped Michael remove some of the mud from his person, we told him the story; first of Mr. Bangs’ activities in the garden of Craven House and then of the piece of paper with the odd inscription, which we had found.

Michael listened without comment. But when we had finished he said, “I felt there was something suspicious about that real estate agent when you first mentioned him. I happen to know that Craven House isn’t for sale and isn’t likely to be and I couldn’t imagine why anyone should be up there measuring the ground. And now this wig and this letter business makes it look queerer than ever.”

“What d’you think it’s all about anyway?” Eve asked.

Michael shook his head thoughtfully. “It looks as if he was after something. Something that’s hidden—or he thinks is hidden at Craven House. I wonder ——” He paused and gazed meditatively into space. “Suppose we take a look around here,” he suggested at last, “to see if there’s anything missing.”

“That’s so,” I said, “I hadn’t thought of that.”

Eve took up the lamp and together we made a tour of the house. Upstairs we found that every dresser drawer had been rummaged and, in many cases, the contents scattered on the floor. Eve’s empty traveling bag and my suitcase were lying open in our room. But aside from this and the chairs he had overturned in his flight through the lower part of the house, the intruder seemed to have done no damage. And so far as we could discover, nothing was missing.

Back in the kitchen, we returned to the discussion of what was to be done. Michael, now that we had furnished a mystery for him to solve, had entirely dropped his standoffish attitude. He agreed with us that the only way to find out

what the mysterious Mr. Bangs was after was to keep our own counsel for the present. Michael was anxious to take a look at the exact spot where we had found him at work in the garden, and we finally arranged to meet him there the next day after his work at the farm was over and to bring with us a copy of the letter.

It was not until after Michael had gone and Eve and I had restored everything to its accustomed order that I remembered Adam. But the house beyond the hedge was dark; Captain Trout had evidently retired. The cat problem, we decided, would just have to wait.

IX

Daisy June and the Blue Emerald

I WAS awakened early next morning by the clatter of a heavy wagon on the road in front of the house. Stealing to the window in order not to awaken Eve, I was just in time to catch sight of a familiar, blue-shirted figure in the driver's seat. Michael! What was he doing in this part of town so early in the morning?

When I went downstairs I found the explanation. Eve was still asleep and, pleased to have got the start of her for once, I resolved to have breakfast on the table by the time she came down. I unlocked the kitchen door and went out to bring in the milk which is left in a pail every morning. Beside the pail I found a paste-board box. As I stooped to pick it up I saw there were holes pierced in the top. And when I lifted it—it mewed!

A cat! I pulled off the lid. No, a kitten—a plump gray one with china-blue eyes and a white spot in its forehead. The mew changed to a noisy purr as I lifted it.

“What are you doing?” Eve, looking very nice in a fresh blue linen dress, was standing in the doorway. In my absorption I had forgotten all about breakfast. Then Eve saw the kitten. “Oh, the darling! Where did you find it, Sandy?”

I pointed to the box and told her about Michael. “I suppose the idea is,” I said, “that one cat is as good as another. But I doubt very much if Aunt Cal will even give it house room!”

“Well, it was nice of him to think of it anyway!” Eve returned, cuddling the kitten. “I wonder if it's hungry?”

Aunt Cal returned at ten o'clock. Eve was just taking a loaf of gingerbread from the oven when I heard the car. Miss Rose Blossom was at the wheel, there was no mistaking her broad figure. She was beaming at Aunt Cal as she handed down her bag.

“She's coming!” I whispered, tiptoeing back into the kitchen. “What shall we do with Daisy June?” I glanced a little wildly toward Adam's cushion by the stove where the kitten slept.

Before Eve could even answer, a firm step sounded outside. Aunt Cal stood in the doorway. “Well,” she inquired, “how have you been getting on?”

I stood in front of the stove. “Splendid——” I began and then, fearing I sounded too enthusiastic, I changed hastily to “All right.”

“How is your friend?” Eve asked, inserting a knife around the gingerbread.

“A little better. Her sister came over from Millport this morning, so I felt that I could leave. Mercy, child, I didn’t know you could bake!”

“Well, of course, it isn’t as good as yours,” Eve began modestly.

Aunt Cal picked up her bag and started for the stairs. It was this moment that Daisy June took to wake from her nap. With a sinking heart, I felt her between my ankles. Aunt Cal stopped dead in the middle of the room. “Where,” she inquired in a very stuffy voice, “did that come from? And where is Adam?”

I swallowed. “Adam’s visiting—visiting Captain Trout,” I said.

My relative’s face became stonier than before. “Take that cat out of the house!” she ordered.

I took a deep breath and counted ten. Then picking up Daisy June, I retreated to the side yard. Eve joined me there presently, carrying the box of carpet rags we were sewing for Aunt Cal. “Eve,” I asked solemnly, “what is to become of her?”

“I don’t know,” she said. “But I can’t believe that anything so adorable wasn’t brought into the world for a purpose.”

We didn’t get much sewing done that morning for practically every time we picked up a strip of cloth Daisy June was dangling on the end of it and as fast as Eve wound the balls, the kitten unwound them. When we went in for dinner, we left her sleeping peacefully in the box. She at any rate had no misgivings about the future.

“I see somebody has been trampling the petunia bed,” remarked Aunt Cal, dishing out lamb stew and dumplings. “But I suppose it’s no more than is to be expected when one leaves things to take care of themselves!”

It was Eve who persuaded my aunt to go upstairs after dinner for a rest. “After being up all night,” she urged, “it’s the only sensible thing to do.” And though Aunt Cal declared stoutly that she did not hold with naps in the daytime, she finally yielded.

After we had finished the dishes Eve carried out a saucer of milk for Daisy June. To our dismay the kitten was gone. There was her bed of carpet rags, still matted where her soft form had lain, but no sign of its late occupant. We searched every corner of the yard, calling softly so that Aunt Cal would not hear. But neither the yard nor garden yielded any trace of her.

Could she have got through the hedge, I wondered? I went to look. And there

she was, big as life, sauntering up the path toward the Captain's back door. I beckoned to Eve. "Look," I whispered, "for all the world as if she was about to drop in on a friend for tea or something!"

I was about to pop through the hedge after her when the back door of the house opened and the owner himself emerged. He was jauntily dressed in immaculate white trousers and a nautical blue jacket. I wondered how he managed, living alone as he did, always to look so spick and span. He was descending the steps when he met the kitten. "Bless my boots!" The words floated across the quiet air. "Now where in blazes did you come from?"

Daisy June's answer was to leap up the intervening step and begin her accustomed twining movement about the Captain's ankle. I hurried forward. "Oh, I'm so sorry," I began, "we do have such trouble with our cats!"

Daisy June continued to twine like a boa constrictor. The Captain retreated and abruptly sat down in the big rocker which occupied the center of the porch. Without hesitation the kitten jumped into his lap. I thought for a second that he was going to push her down, but instead he asked abruptly, "How's your aunt this morning? Much upset, was she?"

I collected my thoughts. "Oh, you mean about Adam," I was beginning, when Eve came up behind me. "Aunt Cal wouldn't allow herself to be upset by so little a thing as that," she said with one of her dazzling smiles. "She's much too—a—strong-minded."

The Captain appeared as surprised as I was to hear this. "Well, well, well," he said, "I want to know!" Mechanically, it seemed, his hand went out to stroke the kitten's back and, thus encouraged, she reached up one fat paw for the large gold chain that spanned his waistcoat. "Hi, there, look at that now! Caliph allus used to go after that chain when he was a kitten. Well," he added, "I'm glad to hear your aunt wasn't upset. Old Judd Craven allus did say she was the only sensible one in the family!"

"Judd Craven?" I repeated. "Who was he?"

"What? What's that? Mean to say you ain't never heard of Cap'n Judd? Why, he was related to you in a sort of way."

"Related to me? But how? Do you mean that he was related to Aunt Cal?"

"Mercy me, yes. He was her uncle. Cal's mother was Susan Craven. Cap'n Judd used to set great store by Cal when she was a young one, used to bring her things every time he come back from a voyage."

Eve dropped down on the step. "Do tell us about Captain Judd," she begged. "You see, we were up at the place they call Craven House the other day, so we're interested. Did he build it?"

The Captain shook his head. "No, it was an old house—dates back to the early

settlers. Cap'n Judd bought it and made it over. It was one of the show places of the countryside in his day. He fixed it up for his wife, Emily, who wanted to live inland out of sight of the sea. Emily hated the sea. Besides that, Judd had a kind of notion he wanted to go in for farming. It was the dream of his life to found a landed estate like the ones he'd seen in England—handed down from father to son like. But—well, it didn't work out. Carter didn't take to farming; he was a restless chap, wanted to see the world."

"Carter was his son?" I prompted.

"Aye, Carter was his only child."

"It sounds quite like a story out of a book," Eve commented.

The Captain chuckled. "Yeah, it would make good reading, I calculate, if all the facts of Judd's career was set down. A lively old bird he was, full of funny ideas, allus getting himself talked about. Not in a bad way, you understand, just odd—doing things different from the run of folks."

"Was it he who set up those statues and vases and things in the garden?" I asked.

"Aye, that was one of the things. Those statues made a great stir. Folks round here had never heard tell of statues in a garden. They used to drive from all around just to see 'em."

"But where in the world did he get them?" asked Eve. "They look awfully old."

"Uh-huh, they was meant to. Judd said he got 'em from a Greek temple, but I guess more likely he picked them up in a second-hand shop in Athens. Judd allus was one for a joke. There was one he called Mercury and one Diana."

"Diana—Mercury," Eve repeated thoughtfully. "There wasn't—wasn't one called Circe, was there?"

I held my breath. The Captain began to fill his pipe. "Circe? Well now, there might have been at that; I can't rightly tell all the names he gave 'em."

"Tell me," Eve demanded, leaning forward with sudden eagerness, "did Captain Craven leave any—any money—or valuables or anything?"

Captain Trout shook his head. "I guess Carter got most of the money before the old man died. Judd used to say in his later days that all he had in the world was the place. That and the blue emerald," he added, with a chuckle.

"The blue emerald?" I cried. "But how could an emerald be blue? I thought they were green."

"That's what I never could figger out myself," the Captain answered. "I never saw it myself. Some said it was give him by a Rajah in India 'count of some service he done him. But the Cap'n allus was pretty mysterious about it—liked to keep folks guessing. Me, I didn't take much stock in that Rajah chap. But

most folks used to eat up the whole story.”

“Did anyone ever see the emerald?”

“Never heard as they did. But then I was away for years. After the Cap’n retired and built his house, I didn’t see him very often. But every now and then when I’d come home, I’d hear talk about the blue emerald and every time it was wo’th a little more. It sure had the villagers mesmerized.”

“And Captain Judd’s son?” I asked hesitantly. “What became of him?”

The Captain puffed on his pipe and absently put down his hand to stroke the kitten’s back. “Carter disappeared about a year after his father’s death,” he said. “I ain’t heard tell of him since.”

“He didn’t,” inquired Eve, “take the blue emerald with him, did he?”

“Some said so,” Captain Trout answered. “But I reckon no one rightly knows. But the house—that rightly belongs to your aunt, I was told.”

“To Aunt Cal!” I cried in astonishment.

“Aye. Judd promised her she should have it. But the will, they say, was never found. Some say Carter didn’t want it should be, that he was jealous of Cal for bein’ in the old man’s good graces. But that’s just gossip, I reckon.”

“I think Captain Judd must have been a very interesting person,” declared Eve. “I wish I’d known him.”

“Aye, he was a fine chap. Great loss to the community, his death was.”

“Thank you very much for telling us about him,” I said. I felt that we ought to go back before Aunt Cal came downstairs. I got up, looking doubtfully at the sleeping kitten. It seemed a pity to disturb her.

The Captain appeared to read my thoughts. “Better let her sleep,” he said. “You can stop by for her later—if you want.”

As he uttered these words, I was conscious that another figure had joined our group. Adam had come out of the open kitchen door. He stood for a moment surveying us, advanced to the Captain, sniffed gingerly at the object in his lap; then, without a word—as it were—turned and walked down the steps.

“Caliph,” called the Captain, “where you going?” But only a wave of the tail answered him.

When we got back to our house, a half emptied saucer of fish was on the back porch and Caliph, alias Adam, was asleep on his cushion by the stove.

“I feel,” I giggled, “a little dizzy with all this cat business!”

“To say nothing,” added Eve, “of blue emeralds!”

X

Where Is Circe?

MICHAEL was waiting for us at The Corners at five that afternoon. He had left the horses tied there in order not to attract attention to our visit to Craven House. "Haven't seen anything more of Bangs, have you?" was his first question.

Eve shook her head.

"Well, he's left Trap's," Michael said. "I went in there just now and inquired for him. They said he departed the day after he came and they don't know anything about him. Didn't leave any address or say where he was going."

"Then he never got his letter back," I said. "It must be at the Inn now."

"No, it isn't, I've got it in my pocket. I just told old man Trap that a friend of mine had mailed a letter to him and that, as long as they didn't know where he was, I thought this person would like to have it back. So he just handed it out without a word and here it is."

"Oh, I'm glad you got it," exclaimed Eve. "For after what Captain Trout told us this afternoon, I can't help thinking maybe it is important."

"So you've been talking to the Captain?" Michael queried.

"Yes, you see it was Daisy June's doing," Eve began.

"The kitten you left on our doorstep this morning," I put in. "That was a marvelous idea of yours, Michael!"

"Say, did it work?" he demanded eagerly. "Did your aunt really take to it?"

"Aunt Cal? Not on your life! It was Captain Trout. We left Daisy June asleep on his knee with every appearance of being settled for life. And when Adam saw her, he just walked out—came back to us!"

Michael threw back his head and roared. We went on to tell him what Captain Trout had told about Judd Craven and the blue emerald. He nodded, "I guess everybody around here has heard of old Captain Judd," he said.

"But Aunt Cal has never mentioned him to us," I said. "Though I did fancy she looked sort of funny the other day when we told her about being locked in the old house. I expect maybe she knows it well."

“Wills make a lot of trouble, don’t they?” I went on. “Whether one makes one or doesn’t, it seems to be always the same. Bad feeling of some kind.”

Michael grinned at this. “Well, what would you do about it?” he inquired.

“Oh, I don’t know. I guess maybe it’s better not to have anything to leave when you die. Then your relatives and friends will go on loving you.”

“Yeah, or forget you entirely,” he retorted cynically.

We had been climbing the hill as we talked and had come once more to the tumbling stone wall which bordered the Craven property. We climbed over it and made our way through the tall grass and bushes to the spot where we had found Mr. Bangs and his measuring tape two weeks before. The grass was considerably trampled around the stone figure but, at first glance, that was the only sign that anybody had been near the spot.

Michael dropped on his knees and at once set to work examining the ground. Presently he took a tape measure from his pocket and began measuring. “You look,” remarked Eve, “quite like Mr. Bangs himself, except that you’ve got more hair on your head.”

Michael paid no attention. He measured thirteen feet and six inches south from the statue. Then, turning west at a right angle, counted off another seven feet. “There,” he exclaimed at last, “that ought to be the spot, if any!”

We were kneeling beside him now, all three of us, bent eagerly over the matted grass. Suddenly Michael’s finger dug into the earth and he lifted bodily forth a big square of ragged turf. “Why!” I stammered, “how queer!”

“Golly!” cried Eve. “He’s dug here already! We—we’re too late!”

“You mean he fitted the turf back like that to cover his tracks?” I cried with rising indignation.

“Looks like it,” returned Michael, gazing down at the newly disturbed earth. “Naturally he didn’t want to leave traces of his operations for anyone to see. Especially after you two came spying on him.”

“The old villain! What right has he got to Captain Judd’s treasure, I’d like to know!”

Michael looked up with his quizzical grin. “Did you really expect to find treasure buried here?” he asked.

“W-well,” I stammered, somewhat embarrassed by the amusement in his gray eyes. “After what Captain Trout told us—I mean about the blue emerald and all _____”

“Oh, that!” returned Michael scornfully. “That story sounds pretty fishy to me.”

“But there must have been something here,” put in Eve. “Or else Mr. Bangs wouldn’t have been carrying around those measurements and all.”

“If you didn’t believe there was anything, why did you bother to come up here and look?” I demanded a little hotly.

“Well,” he returned slowly, “I was curious to know what the fellow was up to for one thing. Then,” he grinned again, “I knew you girls wouldn’t sleep nights till you’d had a look.”

“Oh, is that so!” I retorted haughtily. “Of course, we’re just a couple of weak, credulous females——”

Michael paid no heed to my ill temper. He had drawn the letter out of his pocket and was studying it. “I’d give a lot,” he remarked, “to know who wrote this!”

“What I can’t understand,” mused Eve, “is this: why, if Mr. Bangs found what he was after, was he so anxious to get the letter back? Anxious enough, in fact, to break into Aunt Cal’s house last night to look for it?”

Michael shot her an approving glance. “That’s just the point that has me guessing,” he said. “It rather looks to me as if the fellow’s excavations didn’t prove successful after all.”

“But he had the measurements right—we’ve proved that, haven’t we?”

Michael nodded. He seemed to be thinking deeply.

Suddenly Eve got up and wandered over to the blackened stone figure. She stood with her back to us for several minutes, examining it. At last she turned around. “Suppose,” she said slowly, looking down to where Michael and I were sitting, our backs propped against the bowl of the fountain, “suppose this isn’t the statue of Circe after all!”

“What!” Michael was on his feet like a flash. “I say,” he cried, “that’s an idea! Maybe the old fellow got the wrong statue!”

“You see,” went on Eve, “Captain Trout told us there were several statues which Captain Judd brought home from his travels. He said there was one of Diana and one of Mercury. And this statue, even though it is so dingy and weatherbeaten, looks to me a lot more like Mercury than anyone else. Look, you can see the places where the wings were broken off on his back.”

“Gee, Eve, you’re dead right!” Michael cried appreciatively. “Pretty dumb of me not to notice that myself!” It was the first time that Michael had addressed either of us directly by our first names. I felt that it was a tribute to Eve’s intelligence.

“We simply took it for granted that it was the right statue,” Eve continued. “And, of course, our friend Bangs couldn’t be expected to know a great deal about mythology. I suppose one statue looks pretty much like another to a fellow like him.”

“Then the thing to do,” I burst in excitedly, “is to find the right one—the

missing Circe! She surely must be somewhere around.”

The garden, as I have said, was so overgrown with weeds, tall grass, rambling rosebushes and every other variety of shrub that the space around the fountain where Mr. Bangs had made his measurements was practically the only clear spot in sight. But we now set to work to make a thorough search of the entire place. But though we combed it from one end to the other, startling toads from their lairs and stirring up swarms of mosquitoes, we found not the slightest trace of any other statue.

We were so absorbed in our search that none of us had noticed the swiftly darkening sky till Eve exclaimed suddenly, “Goodness, it’s going to rain.”

“Sure is,” Michael agreed, emerging from a thicket of blackberry bushes, with a scratch across one cheek. “Guess Circe’ll have to stay wherever she’s hiding for tonight. I’ll run on ahead and get the wagon and meet you.”

The drops were already beginning to fall before we reached him. “Better get in behind,” he ordered, “and put this blanket over your heads.”

It was pouring by the time we reached Fishers Haven. Michael did not let us out at the farmhouse as he had done before but drove on to Aunt Cal’s gate. There was no time for any further plans that night. We just called out our thanks and made a dash for the house. But I was sure that Michael would not be satisfied until he had fathomed the mystery of the old garden, whatever it was. For my own part, I was determined to go back and continue the search at the earliest possible moment.

XI

Hamish on the Job

THE morning mail brought a letter from Hattie May. Eve was busy spreading carpet rags on the tin roof of the porch outside our bedroom window. We had forgotten and left them in the side yard and, as it had rained practically the entire night, the results can be imagined. Our only hope now was that the warm sun would dry them before Aunt Cal discovered what had happened.

“Eve,” I called, “here’s a letter from Hattie May. What do you think it says!”

Eve poked her head in at the window. “I think the colors are really going to be improved,” she said. “The fading has made them softer, sort of artistic looking.”

“Maybe,” I agreed, “though I doubt if Aunt Cal will appreciate the effect! But don’t you want to know what Hattie May says? Aren’t you at all curious?”

“Nothing sensible, I’ll be bound. What’s she up to now?”

“She’s coming here!”

“What! Not to Fishers Haven?”

“Yup. She wants to help us solve the mystery, she says.”

Eve climbed into the room. “Sandy,” she demanded sternly, “what have you been writing her?”

“Why, nothing. I thought she ought to know that our vacation wasn’t promising to be as dull as she had prophesied, so I just mentioned a thing or two—guardedly, of course.”

“Too guardedly, I guess,” Eve retorted. “She probably thinks there’s a lot more to it than there is!”

“But isn’t there?” I asked. “I mean to say, we don’t know yet what there is to it!”

“Sandy, you know perfectly well that Hattie May can’t keep even the tiniest secret five minutes.”

“Well, she’s coming anyway and it’s too late to head her off. And that isn’t all,” I giggled. “She’s bringing Hamish with her—or rather he’s bringing her. Seems he’s got a car.”

“Not—not that boy with the sticky-out ears! Not actually!” Eve dropped onto the sea chest, consternation in every line of her face.

“Yup, they’re driving up from Mason’s Cove, wherever that is. It appears their family is spending the summer there. They’re going to stay at a hotel or inn or whatever there is, Hattie May says. She says her parents consented because she told them my father was a missionary, so they’re sure we’re respectable.” I gave another giggle.

Eve groaned. “No doubt their parents are only too pleased to lose sight of Hamish for a while,” she remarked.

“Oh,” I returned lightly, “I can imagine worse boys than Hamish.”

“Well, I haven’t your imagination,” Eve returned feelingly. “When did you say they were coming?”

“Well, the letter says tomorrow. But as it isn’t dated and the postmark is blurred, it might be they’ll be here today.”

“Today! Well you’d better go down and break the news to your aunt!”

“But I don’t see why that’s necessary—they won’t bother her.”

“Don’t be too sure,” returned Eve darkly.

Aunt Cal departed soon after dinner that day to attend the weekly meeting of the Ladies’ Civic Betterment Society. The carpet rags were all dry and Eve and I determined to get a lot of sewing done on them to make up for our carelessness in leaving them out in the rain. Eve thought that, once they were sewed and wound into balls, Aunt Cal might not notice the change in color which many of the pieces had undergone.

We established ourselves in the shade of the side yard. Adam came and stretched himself in the sun nearby. He had shown no desire to leave the premises since Daisy June had taken up her residence next door and had manifested considerable irritation that morning when the kitten had pounced at his tail from underneath the hedge.

We were discussing what we now termed The Craven House Mystery as we did much of the time when we were alone. We could not decide what we ought to do with the old letter which Michael had returned to us. “Well, whatever you do, don’t show it to Hamish or Hattie May,” Eve was saying. And it was just at that moment that I looked up and saw a green roadster drawing up at the gate. I knew at once by the frantic waving of the girl beside the driver that it was Hattie May. “There they are!” I cried, jumping to my feet. “Come on, Eve!”

“Oh, Sandy, darling, it seems perfect months since I saw you!” Hattie May threw herself upon me in her usual effusive manner. Her brother, climbing out of the other side of the car, was peering around with small bright eyes behind thick glasses, as if he fairly expected some mysterious phenomenon to develop right

there before his eyes!

“I say,” he demanded without the formality of greeting, “have you seen the fellow who wears a wig again?”

“Oh, yes, do tell us all the latest developments!” Hattie May cried. “I can hardly wait to hear.”

“Mr. Bangs has left town,” replied Eve coldly. “And nothing more has happened. I’m really afraid you’re going to be disappointed, Hattie May, if you think anything is going to. I’m afraid Sandy has given you a wrong impression—this isn’t like a mystery thriller, you know!”

“But my dear,” my roommate exclaimed, “surely there is some treasure buried in that old garden. What else *could* that cryptic message mean? Tell me, haven’t you found a thing?”

Well, I guess we both saw that there was nothing for it but to tell them everything. If we didn’t, Hattie May would begin to imagine all sorts of startling things that weren’t so, and might even end in blurting out something and getting us in bad with Aunt Cal.

So we all repaired to the side yard and sat down on the grass. And while Eve went inside for cold tea and cookies, I told Hattie May and her brother briefly just how far we had got—or hadn’t got, rather—in unravelling the mystery and how we had gone about it.

Hattie May, as was to be expected, kept interrupting and asking all sorts of foolish questions. Hamish said nothing at all but his eyes were very bright and eager as he listened. When I had finished, he got up. “Well,” he said, “I guess I’d better go right out there and have a look round.”

I suppressed a giggle. The pride of Scotland Yard, called in as a last resort, to solve a baffling crime, couldn’t have spoken with more importance! “But gracious, Hamish,” I exclaimed, “there’s nothing to see!”

“Just let me have a look at that letter,” he continued, “so’s I’ll get the measurements straight.”

Eve came out with the refreshments. “Hamish,” I said, with I fear, a trace of sarcasm, “is going right out to dig up the treasure!”

“He’ll have to wait for me,” declared his sister. “I’m going to have some tea first.”

Hamish’s eyes lighted on the cookies. “Oh, well,” he said and sat down.

It ended finally in our producing the letter and then all piling into the car and driving out to Craven House. Neither Eve nor I was willing to let Hattie May and, her brother go without us. But I did wish that Michael were along, somehow it seemed his affair as much as ours.

Hattie May went into ecstasies over the house and, most of all, over the

garden. “My *dear*,” she cried, “I think it is absolutely the most romantic place. Can’t you just see that old miser bringing his gold and jewels out here on a dark night——”

“But he wasn’t a miser,” I protested. “And he didn’t have any gold.”

“Nonsense, you needn’t tell me,” she retorted. “He buried something, didn’t he?”

“Well, we don’t actually know——” I began, but Hattie May had disappeared after Hamish into a thick growth of underbrush.

For my own part, the old garden had never appeared so thoroughly unattractive as it did today. It was very hot in the mid-afternoon sun and heavy with the scent of overgrown vegetation. I sat down on the edge of the fountain and tried to imagine what it had been like in the old days, the days when Captain Judd had taken such pride in it and folks had driven from all around in their buggies to see the funny statues he had brought from over the sea. I tried to see it with the paths and flower beds that were now almost entirely lost to view. I wondered what the Captain’s wife had been like, the woman called Emily, who hated the sea. Had she loved the flowers and tended them as Aunt Cal would have done?

Then I fell to thinking of Aunt Cal and wondering what she would have done to the place had it fallen to her. I could fancy how she would have enjoyed scrubbing and painting the house and putting it in order again. And the garden— I smiled to myself when I thought of my indomitable relative coming to grips with that garden.

Meanwhile the others were wandering about, poking into every niche and corner for some trace of the missing statue. I believe Hattie May had expected to discover it almost at once and I could see that she was considerably crestfallen when she at last returned to join me at the fountain. “It’s very baffling!” she sighed, wiping her burning face. “If we could only find the pedestal where the thing stood, that would be enough.”

Hamish did not give up easily. But at last we persuaded him to abandon his efforts for the time being, for as Eve pointed out there was really no fear that Mr. Bangs would get ahead of us so long as the Circe was missing.

“Unless,” said Hamish astutely, “he has taken it away on purpose!”

“You don’t mean you think he has stolen the statue?” cried his sister. “Why should he do that?”

“To keep anyone else from finding the treasure of course, stupid. It looks to me as if we were up against a very clever crook!”

I giggled. “Oh, don’t be absurd,” I said. “Mr. Bangs doesn’t know we’re interested in his search—why should he? And if he knew where Circe was, he’d

go ahead and dig and find out what there was to find.”

Hamish however clung to his theory. It was the only explanation, he said, for the absence of the statue. As we were packing ourselves into the car for the return trip the rattle of a wagon sounded up the road and Michael drove into view. Eve called to him and at the mention of his name, Hattie May was out of the car with a bounce.

“Oh,” she cried, “I’ve been wanting so much to meet you! Ever since I heard how you chased that desperate villain the other night! I think you were absolutely the bravest thing!”

Michael’s face assumed its stoniest aspect. I feared that he and Hattie May were not going to get along. “We’ve been looking about the garden again,” Eve said hurriedly to fill up the awkward pause. “But we didn’t find anything.”

Michael nodded. “Guess there’s nothing to find,” he remarked noncommittally. With that he gathered up the reins and drove on.

“Well, I must say he’s a queer acting boy!” Hattie May exploded.

“You shouldn’t have gushed over him,” Eve said. “He doesn’t like that sort of thing.”

The car was bumping down the road now. We passed Michael on the way, but he didn’t look around. Hattie May and her brother engaged rooms at Wildwood Lodge, a quiet little inn on the shore road. That and the big Seaside Hotel farther down the beach were the only accommodations Fishers Haven offered to summer guests.

Eve and I were late for supper. Aunt Cal was pouring her second cup of tea when we came in. We told her about the arrivals and added casually that we’d been for a drive in Hamish’s car.

“A boy of that age has no business with a car,” Aunt Cal stated severely. “First thing you know you’ll be in one of those accidents the papers are full of. In my day young folks didn’t go careering around the country!”

As if he realized that his reputation was at stake, Hamish himself reappeared directly after supper. We heard the already familiar honk of his horn as we were finishing the dishes and a moment later, his bespectacled face appeared at the screen door. “Is your aunt in?” he demanded. “I’ve brought her a little present.”

“She’s in the garden,” I answered. “Just a minute and I’ll take you out.”

But he did not wait for me to take off my apron. “I’ll find her,” he called and was striding down the path. Eve giggled. “I warned you,” she said, “how things would be if that boy came to town.”

I wasn’t present at the meeting of my relative and Hamish. By the time we reached the spot where Aunt Cal and Adam were sitting, the moment for introductions had passed. Hamish had just pulled a queer looking package out of

his side pocket and was proffering it to my aunt. “Here’s a little gadget I picked up on my way down today,” he remarked. “I said to myself as soon as I saw it that it was a thing any good house-keeper’d like to own.”

Aunt Cal, apparently stunned by the quick movement of events, took the parcel without a word and began unwrapping it. “It’s a combination mousetrap and insect sprayer,” Hamish explained. “A new invention, just on the market.”

“Dear me,” said Aunt Cal, turning it over. “You don’t say. Much obliged, I’m sure.”

“Glad you like it,” returned Hamish complacently. “Thought you would. What a handsome cat!” He stooped to give Adam’s back a rub.

But Adam—perhaps resenting the mousetrap—got up and with a backward swish of his tail, started up the path.

“Here, kitty, kitty!” Hamish pulled a length of twine from his pocket and began dangling it before the cat’s nose. As he did so a piece of paper fluttered to the ground, unseen by him as he walked away.

I recognized it instantly and stooped to grab it. But Aunt Cal was nearest and reached it first. Papers scattered about her garden were not to be endured even for a second. She was about to crumple it in her hand when her eyes fell on the handwriting. In an instant I saw her face change. She was staring hard at the paper and the hand which held it was shaking. “Wh-what is this?” she demanded in a hard strained voice.

XII

Over the Banister

WHEN Aunt Cal saw that letter and I watched that funny, almost frightened look pass over her face, I knew of course that there was nothing for it but to tell her everything. But I never am good in a crisis and this time was no exception. Aunt Cal had picked up the paper, as I have said, and now sat staring at it just exactly as if she were seeing a ghost. "What is this?" she demanded again, and this time I knew that somebody had to answer.

"It's a paper we found in that suitcase," I began. "I mean it dropped out when we opened it to look for an address and found all those bottles and afterward it got under the bed somehow but as we had returned it by this time—though of course we could tell by the smell where it had come from——"

"My dear Sandra," Aunt Cal had regained some of her composure in the face of my stumbling recital, "I am sure that I find myself quite unable to follow you."

"Perhaps I'd better tell it," Eve put in quietly. Whereupon she gave Aunt Cal the facts as they had happened in a few words, including the evening visit of the mysterious Mr. Bangs on the night when Aunt Cal had been absent in Old Beecham. Eve made no mention, however, of what Captain Trout had told us of Aunt Cal's own connection with the Cravens, nor of the blue emerald. But she did tell about our search for the missing statue.

When she had finished I waited breathlessly for what Aunt Cal would say. Would she be very angry with us for keeping all this from her? But I was to realize anew that evening that it was part of my aunt's code of life to conceal her emotions. And her only comment when Eve had ended her recital was, "So that explains the condition of my bureau drawers."

"But we put everything back just——" I was protesting when a look from Eve silenced me.

"We expected to tell you all about everything," she said, "just as soon as we found out something definite. You see we—we were afraid you wouldn't like to

have us go out there at all if you knew—about Mr. Bangs being a housebreaker and all.”

“You are quite correct in that,” returned my aunt severely. “After all I am responsible for your safety.”

“But of course now,” I put in anxiously, “now that he has left, it is different—I mean it can’t do any harm just to go out and—and look around, I mean——”

“I doubt if your investigations will lead you anywhere,” she returned frostily. “And now if you have quite finished with your extraordinary revelations, I think I will go in. Here in the country as you know”—she looked pointedly at Hamish—“we are accustomed to retire early.”

Well so much for Aunt Cal’s connection with the mystery, I thought, as we sat in silence and watched her spare, uncompromising figure with Adam closely at heel disappear inside the kitchen door. Hamish, who had kept silence for a longer period than I would have deemed possible, now let out an explosive “Whew!” And added gloomily, “And she went and left my present behind!” It was true; the combination mousetrap and insect sprayer still lay in its wrappings on the bench. But the letter was gone!

“Never mind, Hamish,” I said consolingly. “I think Aunt Cal really was upset you know, though she didn’t show it. I’m sure nothing but great stress of mind would have made her forget your lovely present!”

“Well, maybe,” he returned. “I suppose I’d better be going. Glad I made a copy of that letter though!”

So Hamish had copied the “cryptic message” too. Well, there were plenty of copies going around. Eve had one, and now Hamish, and I would not have been surprised if Michael—for all his seeming indifference—had one too. Besides that, Mr. Bangs apparently had the measurements in his head, as he had proved. At this rate, all Fishers Haven might soon be in the secret of the whereabouts of Captain Judd’s treasure.

“Eve,” I said, after we had locked the back door and gone up to bed, “do you think Aunt Cal will do anything?”

Eve shook her head slowly. “I can’t make her out,” she said. “I’m as sure as anything that she recognized the handwriting on that paper but that’s absolutely all I am sure of. If Hamish thought he had pulled a coup, he jolly well must have been disappointed.”

“What?” I demanded. “You mean Hamish dropped that letter on purpose?”

“Why of course he did,” returned Eve. “He wanted Aunt Cal to see it; he thought he’d find out something.”

“But,” I protested indignantly, “didn’t we practically swear both him and Hattie May to secrecy before we showed it to them!”

“They agreed not to say anything. They didn’t agree not to drop things around apparently by accident.”

“That Hamish!” I cried; “somebody ought to—to sit on him so hard—well hard enough to make him yell.”

“I warned you there’d be trouble,” said Eve, “just as soon as Hattie May put her nose into this business.”

I was just ready for bed when I found that I had left my wristwatch downstairs on the kitchen shelf. Slipping into my bathrobe, I was about to steal down after it when I was surprised to see a light coming from the front room below stairs. Had Aunt Cal gone down again, I wondered—or was this another evening visitor?

For a second I hesitated there on the top step. If it was Aunt Cal I’d better not go down, but if it was somebody else—Mr. Bangs perhaps, returned to make another search for his missing property——. The thought sent me creeping forward. My slippered feet didn’t make a sound on the carpeted stairs. Over the banister I now had a clear view into the lighted room below, and there, seated at the old-fashioned secretary in the corner, was Aunt Cal. The desk was open and spread with papers—letters by the look. And I had no doubt that Mr. Bangs’ mysterious document was among them.

As quietly as I had descended, I stole back to our room and told Eve what I had seen. “I think she’s comparing the handwriting with some she’s got, don’t you?”

“Perhaps,” Eve agreed. “I do hope she isn’t awfully upset by it all,” she added. “If I thought we’d been the means of worrying her or anything, I’d be sorry we ever found that letter, Sandy. I really would.”

“Yes—of course,” I agreed. “Still we weren’t really responsible for finding it—it isn’t as if we had meant to take it. And anyhow maybe some good will come of it; you can’t tell.”

“If you mean finding treasure,” Eve shook her head. “No, I’m inclined to agree with Michael about that. Don’t forget,” she added wisely, “that we’re living in the twentieth century!”

“No-o, I won’t,” I said with a sigh. “Very likely you’re right, Eve—very likely we’d better just drop the whole thing, forget about it entirely. Still—there’s the letter! People don’t write down measurements, do they, unless there’s something to measure?”

“Or unless they want to fool somebody!”

“Fool somebody?” Oh, that was a disconcerting thought! But fool who? Mr. Bangs, or Aunt Cal—or us? No, the last two possibilities were absurd. For our own possession of the letter had been purely accidental, as, for the matter of that, was Aunt Cal’s. The more I thought of it in the light of Eve’s rather startling

suggestion, the more confused I became. And it was perhaps no wonder that, falling asleep at last, I should dream that Daisy June's eyes had turned into blue emeralds but that, when I put out my hand to take them, it was Adam's green ones which I found coldly regarding me.

XIII

Harry's Hair Restorer

AUNT CAL was as brisk and decisive as ever next morning. She made no mention of last evening's occurrences, but she startled us by proposing a plan. "How would you like to have a picnic for your two friends this afternoon?" she asked. "I'm told the young people often go to the beach and cook their supper over an open fire, though I must say it has always seemed to me a most unsatisfactory way of preparing a meal."

"Oh, a beach picnic!" I cried. "What a perfectly swell idea!"

"And you'll come too, Aunt Cal?" Eve begged.

Aunt Cal shook her head. "I'm obliged to go into Millport this afternoon on some business," she said. "But I shall be able to help you with your preparations this morning if you think favorably of my suggestion."

"Bet your life we do!" I jumped up and gave her a hug. "Oh, Aunt Cal, you are a darling after all—I mean," I amended hastily, "after all the trouble and worry we've caused you. I'll go call up Hattie May right away!"

"Yes, you'd better," Eve agreed, "before that Hamish goes off on some wild goose chase or other. When a boy imagines he's been endowed by a beneficent providence with the mental equipment of a Sherlock Holmes, you can't tell what he may do!"

I returned from the drug store to find Eve stirring a cake and Aunt Cal making salad. "They're coming," I announced, "at least Hattie May is. Hamish has gone off somewhere but she said he'd promised to be back for lunch."

"Well, I only hope you won't set yourselves afire," said Aunt Cal with a sigh. "Or catch your death o' cold sitting around in those awful bathing suits!"

"Hattie May says we can dress in the Wildwood Inn pavilion," I said. "And don't forget we'll have Hamish on hand in case of accidents!"

Eve was putting the finishing touches to the chocolate cake some time later. As she stood surveying its satiny perfection, she said slowly, "I do wish Michael Gilpatrick could taste that. I'd like to show him that a mere girl is good for

something! Besides, I hate to think of Hamish practically gobbling up the whole thing as he's sure to do if he doesn't have a competitor to prevent him."

"Well you don't need to worry," I said. "Because I invited Michael to come too."

"What! You did!" Eve was surprised.

"Yes. I thought we might as well ask him. I got hold of him at the farm in Old Beecham where he works. He didn't go into ecstasies over the idea but he said he was planning to go for a swim this afternoon anyway, as it's Saturday half holiday, so I guess maybe he'll show up. I only hope he and Hattie May won't come to blows."

As soon as our rather hurried dinner was over, Aunt Cal, arrayed in her second best black silk, departed for Millport. Although she reiterated her warnings against fire and drowning, I felt somehow that her mind was preoccupied. Indeed she had been vaguely different all day. She seemed in a way softened, and yet more determined. Was that old letter responsible for the change and was it that which was taking her to Millport?

Hattie May and Hamish were waiting on the beach when we got there that afternoon. Hamish wanted to know at once whether Aunt Cal had said anything more about the letter. I told him shortly that she had not. I felt that he deserved a snubbing for what he had done last evening but, as often happens, the people whom you most wish to snub are the very ones who are impervious to such tactics.

Michael was late in arriving. Hattie May said that for her part it didn't matter whether he came or not as she'd never met a ruder boy. I thought it a good moment to put in a word of warning. "Michael is different from most boys," I said. "He doesn't like to be made a fuss about."

"Why, I just said I thought he was brave in grappling with that burglar," Hattie May retorted indignantly. "Though now that I come to think it over, I quite see that there was probably no danger at all and that he was just trying to show off."

"Show off!" This indignantly from Eve. "I tell you Michael's not that kind."

"Oh, you needn't tell me," retorted Hattie May. "I guess I know all about boys."

When at last Michael's tall figure came sauntering down the beach, Hattie May greeted him with a chilly nod. "We thought probably it was milking time and you wouldn't be able to get away," she said casually.

Michael grinned. Apparently he had decided that Hattie May was not to be taken seriously. "Oh, no," he said, "we don't milk till seven. Guess you've never lived on a farm."

"No," said Hattie May, "I must admit I've never had that pleasure. None of

my family are farmers!”

This did not seem to be a very auspicious beginning for our picnic. Eve threw herself into the breach. “Do let’s get into the water,” she urged, “before it gets any later.”

Michael, as one might have guessed, proved to be by far the best swimmer of us all, though Eve was a good second. Hattie May’s efforts were punctuated by blood curdling screams and calls for somebody to “save her”; but as no one paid the slightest attention, she soon gave up and returned to land. Hamish, too, after paddling about rather blindly without his spectacles, sat down on the sand where, replacing his glasses on his dripping countenance, he began making entries in a notebook.

“What is it, Hamish?” I inquired. “Your diary or memoirs or something?”

He shook his head absently. “No, just bringin’ my notes on the Craven case up to date.”

I raised myself on my elbow and looked at him. Was he just a rather overgrown little boy playing at being detective? Or had he really found out something of importance? Suddenly he fixed me with his thick lenses. “I know what you think,” he said astutely. “You think I’m one of those playboy detecitifs like in the books!”

“Oh, no, indeed,” I assured him hastily. “Of course I don’t think anything of the kind!”

“Yes, you do,” he stated. “But I’m not, I’m different. I figure things out. I’m smart. I got ideas.”

“I’m sure you have,” I murmured, and waited for what I hoped was coming. But Hamish just went on writing. At any rate he was keeping his own counsel in the approved manner of the perfect sleuth.

The day was perfection and, as I lay there on the warm sand and gazed out over the blue bay with its flecks of white where it met the sea, the question of why someone had written something in an old letter grew suddenly unimportant in the face of that bigger wonder of earth and sea and sky. Then I fell to remembering another blue bay on the other side of the world across which I had sailed away from Mother and Dad nearly a year ago.

“Sandy’s being homesick!” Eve’s mellow voice broke into my thoughts.

I sat up. “No such thing!” I declared stoutly. “I was just thinking that a blue emerald couldn’t hold a candle to the color of that water out there!”

I caught a glint of appreciation in Michael’s eyes as he stood with the shallow water swirling about his ankles. But Hamish said, “Guess you wouldn’t talk like that if you should see it once! Chap I talked to this morning said it was as big as a quarter!”

“What!” exclaimed Hattie May. “Why, Hamish, you never told me!”

“Had this chap seen the blue emerald?” Eve inquired.

“Well, no, not exactly. But he’d heard his folks talk about it when he was a youngster.”

“So far as I can discover,” said Eve, “no one ever did see the thing.”

“I suppose you’ll be saying next that Captain Judd himself never saw it,” remarked Hattie May. “I suppose he was maybe blind when he buried it!” she added with heavy sarcasm.

“We don’t know that he did bury it,” I remarked. I glanced at Michael for confirmation, but he only shrugged and grinned and said he was going up to dress.

“Wait,” I said, “I’m going to take some pictures first.” Some impulse—for which I was later to thank my lucky stars—had moved me to bring along my kodak. I took several groups and Eve took some more with me in them. Then I finished off the film with some snaps of a fleet of little yachts that were just entering the harbor. Michael said it was the annual cruise of a Boston yacht club and that they came into the harbor every year at this time.

“I used to get a great kick out of them when I was a youngster and first started coming here,” he said. “I was sure I’d be a skipper when I grew up.”

“Why,” exclaimed Eve, “I thought you were a native of Fishers Haven, Michael. Weren’t you born here?”

“Oh, no, my home’s in Connecticut. My folks used to come here for summer vacations. So this summer when I had to get some work, I came up and got me a job on Cousin Al’s farm.”

After we had dressed we all set to work on preparations for supper. The boys built an oven in the sand while we collected firewood. Then we buried potatoes to bake and sharpened long sticks for roasting bacon over the coals. Eve and Hattie May and I made coffee and spread the table.

“Why didn’t your aunt come to the picnic?” Hamish asked unexpectedly, while we all sat about waiting for the potatoes to get done.

“Oh, picnics aren’t in her line I guess,” I said.

“Don’t you suppose she *ever* went to one—when she was a girl, I mean?” asked Hattie May.

“Don’t know, I’m sure,” I found it hard somehow to think of Aunt Cal as a girl at all.

“Well, I’ll bet that old salt next door has been to plenty of ’em,” said Hamish. “I’ll bet he hasn’t missed much that went on, picnics or anything else!”

Michael chuckled. “You should hear the sea yarns he can tell when he gets going!”

“By the way,” continued Hamish casually, “I picked up a little present for him when I was over in Millport this morning, something practical and yet fancy.”

“A present for Captain Trout!” We all gazed with curiosity as Hamish proceeded to extract from the pocket of his jacket an oblong package.

“Hamish,” giggled Eve, “is the world’s great gift giver. He just showers tokens of esteem about among his acquaintances. He hasn’t given me anything yet but I’m living in hopes. By the way, when did you get acquainted with the Captain, Hamish—you only came yesterday?”

“Well,” he returned, “of course I’m not exactly acquainted with him. But I noticed him walkin’ round his garden last night. And so when I came across this—this present that I got—I thought right away that that was just what this sailor fellow needed. Even if I don’t know him, I think we all ought to help each other all we can.”

“Hamish,” I murmured feelingly, “I never dreamed what deep springs of unselfishness were—er—slumbering——” I dabbed at my eye as the smoke from the fire was drifting my way.

“Springs don’t slumber!” put in Eve.

“Well, open it up and do let’s see what fool contraption you’ve bought now!” demanded Hattie May impatiently.

“’Tisn’t either.” Hamish pulled off the string of the package. “You see, I noticed as soon as I saw this fellow Trout that he was goin’ bald. So naturally when I ran into a fellow peddlin’ hair tonic——”

“Hair tonic!” came in a chorus from Eve and me.

“Yup.” Hamish held up a large black bottle. Somehow I knew what the label would say before I read it—“Harry’s Hair Restorer”!

“Hamish,” I demanded tensely, “where did you get it?”

“Why, I just been tellin’ you, on the street in Millport. A fellow was peddlin’ it—said it was his own secret formula that he’d used for twenty years. And, boy, you oughta seen his hair!”

“Golly!” said Michael, swallowing half a sandwich at a gulp. “Can you beat that?”

“Well, what’s eatin’ you?” Hamish’s gaze traveled from him to Eve’s face and mine. “You all look ’sif I’d committed a crime or sumpin! I guess the stuff isn’t poison and anyhow nobody’s going to drink it. The way I figure with a head like Trout’s, anything he can do—even if it only grows him a couple of hairs—is better than leavin’ things go the way they are!”

“Look here,” asked Michael. “This fellow you bought the stuff of, is he still in Millport?”

“How do I know? I didn’t ask him where he was going. Say, what’s all the

excitement anyway?”

“The excitement is,” I said, “that our Mr. Bangs, in addition to carrying cryptic documents in his suitcase, also carried a cargo of hair tonic which I guess we forgot to tell you about—bottles labeled ‘Harry’s Hair Restorer’ and so forth.”

“Sufferin’ sunfish! You don’t mean it? Then this guy is the very same villain that’s been diggin’ up that garden and that broke into your aunt’s house the other night!”

“Looks like it,” said Michael. “He must have got himself another wig somewhere.”

“And me talkin’ to him face to face!” moaned Hamish. “Just the very man I was lookin’ for! And me falling for that yarn of his that he’d lost all his hair from jungle fever when he was twenty-one and how this restorer had brought it all back in ninety days! Golly, I could go kick myself into the ocean—him and his old hair tonic!”

He took out the cork from the bottle and sniffed it disgustedly. “Uh! Smells like glue and kerosene!”

“Let me smell,” said Hattie May.

The bottle was passed from one to the other and we all made faces in turn. As I handed it back to Hamish, he seized it violently and, rising, with a savage gesture, flung it into the sea. It fell far out in the green water with a plump. “I’m goin’ to get even with that fellow,” he declared dramatically, “if it’s the very last act of my life—even if it takes me ten years!”

“Poor Captain Trout,” Eve murmured, “destined to a hairless old age!”

Hamish glared at her. “I say,” he demanded, “when do we start eatin’?”

Michael bent over the oven. “The potatoes are done,” he announced.

While we ate, we continued to discuss the case of Mr. Bangs. What sort of a man was this? One day appearing as a real estate agent, another as a burglar and a third, as a street peddler! And if he had failed to find what he was after in the old garden, why was he still hanging about? Were the wigs he wore intended merely as an advertisement of his wares or were they worn for disguise?

As we talked the sun dropped lower and the slanting rays turned the blue-green water to rose and gold and crimson. The waves grew quiet under its gilded touch. At their moorings, the little yachts rocked gently with furled sails. For a moment our chatter subsided. It was Hamish’s falsetto voice that broke the spell.

“Say, isn’t it about time we got started home? Isn’t anything more to eat, is there?”

“One sandwich left,” I said.

He shook his head. “Haven’t got time.”

“Time?” Hattie May cried. “Hamish Farragut Lewis what are you going to do now?”

“Oh, nuthin’,” he muttered. “Just thought it was getting pretty late and if I was goin’ to drive the girls home—on account of their aunt bein’ so particular and all _____”

His sister eyed him suspiciously. Apparently this explanation of his haste did not altogether satisfy her. However, we began to pack up the things. Michael extinguished the last remnants of the fire and Hamish went to get his car.

We walked up to the Inn with Hattie May. Hamish was waiting to drive us home. Michael refused a lift, saying he had to see a fellow in the village.

“Now you come right straight back, Hamish,” Hattie May ordered. “If you don’t, I’m going to write to Mother first thing in the morning.”

Hamish’s mutterings were unintelligible as he bent over the starter.

XIV

Sunday

LITTLE did I think that night as I snuggled into my pillow, trying to find a comfortable spot for my sunburned shoulder, what momentous events the coming week held in store.

Sunday was quiet enough, however. Eve and I both overslept but this, Aunt Cal supposed, was no more than was to be expected after our “dissipation.” She had apparently forgotten that the dissipation had been her own suggestion. Indeed her Sunday morning severity seemed to have quite erased all traces of that softened mood I had imagined I detected yesterday.

Sunday at Aunt Cal’s had its own particular ritual. Breakfast was half an hour later, a concession to the day of rest. Or perhaps to keep us from getting too hungry for the cold dinner which followed church.

I enjoyed going to the service in the little white meeting house with its faintly musty smell, which reminded me somehow of things I had never known but which seemed curiously a part of me nevertheless. Eve said it was my New England ancestry coming out. Eve likes to dwell on the fact that her own ancestors were among the pioneers who made tracks into the western wilderness and it is to this fact that she attributes her own love of change and adventure. Though, as I pointed out to her, both our family trees probably had their roots in the same soil—so where was the difference really? It is a subject we never tire of discussing, that of ancestry and the chances of life which made us what we are!

We were talking about it that morning as we got ready for church, taking Aunt Cal as an example of what the past in the shape of tradition and custom could do for one. Aunt Cal had never spoken of her family or forbears but I felt practically certain that her direct ancestral line included a Scotch Covenanter, a Puritan preacher and one of the judges who sentenced the Salem witches to be burned!

Hattie May was at church in ruffled organdy and a floppy hat with Hamish, looking very much like a rebellious little boy in his stiff white collar. I guessed that his sister had him well in hand for the time at least.

As we walked home in the bright midday sun, one on either side of Aunt Cal, I felt as if I were taking part in a scene which had happened over and over again. Perhaps not so long ago, Aunt Cal had walked like this with her mother on Sunday morning.

As we approached Captain Trout's cottage, the Captain himself, dressed immaculately as usual, rounded the corner of the house. "Good morning, ladies!" he swept off his blue visored cap, revealing the shining expanse of his bald head. "A beautiful day!"

We smiled at him but Aunt Cal's only response was a stiff inclination of the head. As she was about to sweep on, however, a light-footed gray form darted from behind the hedge, made a wild spring into the air and landed clinging on the fringe of Aunt Cal's sash.

"That miserable cat!" cried the Captain, darting spryly through the gate. But Eve had the kitten first and was gently detaching her sharp little claws. The Captain's apologies were almost abject.

"Oh, no damage, I think." Aunt Cal, unbending a little, was smiling in spite of herself. "She seems a very lively kitten."

"Madam, I assure you my life is quite dizzy with keeping up with her. After—er—my other one—. But you know how it is—these young things!" He smiled expansively upon Eve and me. "For all their wild ways, they do help to keep us young!"

To this outburst Aunt Cal's only response was a murmured word that she must be getting on. But Eve and I lingered to watch Daisy June who was now half way up a telegraph pole. "Captain Trout," asked Eve unexpectedly, "did you ever happen to know a man by the name of Bangs? Harry Bangs, I think he is—a barber or something?"

The Captain shook his head. "Can't say that I have. I've met some queer barbers in different quarters of the globe but I don't recall any by that name. Is the gentleman a friend of yours?"

"Oh, no," returned Eve hastily. "Not at all. We—just heard of him. And no doubt that isn't his real name anyway!"

"Sandy," said Eve that afternoon. We were in our room supposed to be writing letters. But I had finished mine and Eve said she didn't believe in making the Sabbath a day of work. "Sandy, I wish we could take just one more look for that Circe. I'm not half satisfied yet that she isn't somewhere about."

"I know," I agreed, "I feel that way too. And if you can think of any plausible excuse to give Aunt Cal for our going out there again—you see, now that she knows about things, she's pretty sure to keep here eye on us from now on."

Eve nodded. "Don't I know it! But I've been wondering if we couldn't go out

and make a call on that friend of hers in Old Beecham. Mrs. Viner, you know, the one who was sick. Don't you think we might take her out—oh, some soup or something? Or just drop in on her to cheer her up?"

"Maybe she don't want to be cheered up," I said. "Maybe she enjoys being gloomy like Aunt Cal!"

"Just the same I'm going to suggest it," returned Eve. "'Twon't do any harm to try."

"Well you'd better wait till tomorrow anyway," I said. "I don't think she's in a very auspicious mood today. I guess maybe her trip to Millport yesterday had a bad effect on her."

I was making the bed next morning when Eve came racing up the stairs. "I've done it!" she said, her eyes dancing. "I asked her wouldn't she like to have us go out and inquire about Mrs. Viner as it was such a lovely cool morning and we'd enjoy the trip."

"Well?"

"Well, she was a little surprised. Guess she suspects some hidden motive but she did admit that she'd like to know how Mrs. V. is getting along. So she finally agreed and said she'd send her a bottle of dandelion wine. She lives in the big stone house next the feed store and we're not to stay more than ten minutes and not to talk any nonsense."

"The shorter, the better for me," I said. "Invalids give me the jitters! Make me feel sorta creepy like."

"Sandy, I'm ashamed of you! And you a missionary's daughter!"

"What's that got to do with it? Besides you can't pretend that your own—er—motives are purely hu—what d'you call it?"

"Humanitarian, you mean. Well, what if they're not! I guess," she added sagely, "hardly anybody's are when you come right down to it!"

"You don't know my father," I said.

"Well, I said hardly anybody. Anyway don't let's stand here arguing. I guess you can stand a ten minute call."

"But what shall we talk about?" I persisted.

"Oh anything—ships or shoes or sealing wax," she returned lightly. "Personally I've always found shoes a good subject when hard pressed. Middle-aged people are practically certain to have foot troubles and they just dote on telling you about the kind of shoes they wear and where they got 'em and what a lot they had to pay!"

I giggled. "But if Mrs. Viner's in bed she won't be wearing shoes."

"Oh, I guess she isn't a permanent invalid. I guess it'll work out all right. Now do hurry and get ready so we can catch the nine-thirty bus. Aunt Cal's wrapping

up the dandelion wine.”

XV

Tracks in the Dust

TWENTY minutes later we set forth. But we had not reached the corner of Harbor Street before we ran into Hattie May. She was walking fast and her face was red. "Why, Hattie May," I cried, "what is the matter? Your dress is wrong side out!"

Hattie May looked vaguely down at the blue print frock she wore. "Well, it's no wonder!" she panted. "I dressed in such a hurry——"

"But what *is* the matter?" Eve demanded. "Is it a fire or something?"

"It—it's Hamish," she cried, still struggling with her breath. "He—he's gone!"

"Gone? Gone where?"

"How do I know? If I knew, I wouldn't be running round the streets like this, would I?"

"Well do sit down on this horse block," Eve suggested, "and tell us what's happened."

Hattie sank gratefully down. "Well, all day yesterday," she began, "Hamish acted queer!"

"How d'you mean queer?" I inquired.

"Well as if he had something on his mind or—or was planning something. I kept my eye on him all day because I was suspicious that he was up to something. I didn't let him out of my sight a single minute."

"Poor Hamish!" I murmured.

She turned on me sharply. "Well I've got to look after him, haven't I? I promised mother. You don't know what crazy things Hamish can do!"

"All right," Eve soothed. "Go on, tell us what happened."

"Well we went for a little ride after supper. I thought maybe that would get him calmed down. But he wouldn't go far, said he was sleepy and was going to turn in early. But of course I see now that that was just a blind—a trick to get me out of the way. If I'd had any sense, I'd have suspected it at the time. Oh, I've been such a fool!" The last word came out with something suspiciously like a sob.

“But I don’t see as you were to blame, Hattie May,” I said. “Do get on and tell us the rest.”

“Why, that’s all! I went into his room this morning to call him for breakfast and he simply wasn’t there! His—his bed hadn’t been slept in at all!” she wailed.

“Gracious,” I exclaimed, “you mean he’d been gone all night!”

Hattie May nodded, her lips quivering ominously. “I—I w-went to the place where he keeps his car and the man said he’d come back at half past nine last night and taken it out again and—and they haven’t seen him since. And now—oh, I don’t know what to do!”

“Why I wouldn’t be so upset, Hattie May,” Eve Said quietly. “I’m quite sure Hamish is able to take care of himself, even if he does do queer things. He’s not a bit stupid, you know. Tell me, haven’t you any notion where he could have gone—didn’t he drop a hint even?”

“No. The only thing I can think of is that he went over to Millport to try to get trace of that terrible villain who sold him the hair tonic. Ever since he found out who he was at the picnic Saturday, he’s been funny, like I told you.”

“Yes,” I said, “I remember he said he was going to get even with him.”

“Hamish’s like that,” said his sister. “He can’t bear to have anyone put anything over on him. I guess maybe he’s got one of those superior complexions or whatever you call it.”

“I don’t think his complexion is anything remarkable,” said Eve with a giggle. Then she added seriously, “But honest, Hattie May, if he’s just gone to Millport, I don’t think there’s anything to worry about.”

“Of course not,” I agreed. “Maybe he had a breakdown—I dare say he’ll turn up any minute.”

“If it was a breakdown, he could have phoned me, couldn’t he? I tell you he’s got mixed up with that awful barber creature somehow. You can’t tell what may have happened with a man like that—a man that wears a wig and—and digs up gardens! How do we know,” she went on wildly, “what he dug that hole for—how do we know he wasn’t burying a b-bloody weapon or—or one of his victims!”

“Oh, for heavens sake, pull yourself together, Hattie May,” I said with some severity. I knew by experience that the best way to treat Hattie May when she began to get hysterical was to scold. If you tried sympathy and kind words, she just got worse.

“Yes,” chimed in Eve, “there’s simply no sense in your going on like this. Nothing has happened to Hamish. I’d be willing to bet my best embroidered slip on it. The thing for you to do is to come along with us right now to Old Beecham to call on a friend of Aunt Cal’s. And by the time you get back, you’ll very likely

find Hamish eating his dinner at the Inn—see if you don't." Hattie May wiped her eyes on her dress skirt. "I c-can't go c-calling in this dress," she whimpered. "The s-seams all show! I'd be the laughingstock of Millport."

"Oh, nobody's going to notice it," I said. "All you have to do is to act as if it was something new from Fifth Avenue! Come on, we'll miss the bus if we don't hurry."

She got up uncertainly. "You don't think we ought to go to the Police Station," she faltered, "and report Hamish's disappearance?"

"I don't believe there is any," I said. "Anyway there'll be time enough to find out if Hamish isn't back by dinner time."

"I feel all in," said Hattie May as we hurried her down the street. "It's the shock, I suppose. You can't think how I felt when I opened Hamish's door and saw his bed all smooth and empty. It was just like a murder story. You know, when the valet goes to call his master and finds——"

"Oh, cut it, Hattie May," Eve ordered. "There's the bus—we'd better run!"

Fortunately for us the bus was late in leaving, owing to the fact that one of the passengers was having an argument with the butcher across the street. We continued to cheer Hattie May during the short ride to The Corners. We decided that if Hamish wasn't back when we returned, we would get hold of Michael. He would know what to do and that would be better than going to the police, because we did not want publicity.

"Perhaps you're right," Hattie May agreed tearfully. "I'd hate to have anything get into the papers, mother'd be sure to hear of it."

"Oh, it won't come to that," I returned with considerable more confidence than I felt. For I realized as his sister had said that with a boy like Hamish you never could tell what he might do. And I could well imagine that Mr. Harry Bangs was not one to allow a boy of fifteen with big ears and a nose for other people's business to interfere with his plans.

As the bus rolled away and we started on foot up the hill toward Old Beecham, we told Hattie May of our plan to stop at Craven House on the way back and take another look for the missing statue. Hattie May said she didn't think she ought to waste time hunting for lost goddesses when her own brother was missing.

"She wasn't a goddess," I corrected, more for the sake of making talk than anything else. "She was an enchantress who turned the companions of Ulysses into swine by the wave of her wand."

"Well, she must have been a very disagreeable person," returned Hattie May. "I'm sure I don't see why anyone should want a statue of her about!"

As we came abreast of the old house, Hattie May said she'd got to sit down

and rest for a minute. The road was deserted as usual. Beyond the wall the old house seemed asleep. “To think that we almost spent a night there,” I mused.

“I’ll bet you’d have seen a ghost if you had,” said Hattie May. “I can’t think whatever induced you to go inside in the first place.”

“That was Eve’s curiosity,” I said. “Without curiosity, you know, Hattie May, you never get anywhere.”

Eve said nothing. She was gazing intently at the road in front of where we sat. “I didn’t know cars came out this way much,” she remarked at last.

“They don’t,” I said. “That day on the roof we didn’t see a single one. Michael said there was a better road the other side of the hill.”

“But look at those tracks there in the dust,” Eve said. “It looks as if two or three cars had been out here recently.”

Hattie May was on her feet in a flash. “You’re dead right!” she cried. “A car has turned around right in front of this house—see the double tracks!”

She was right. There were marks of tires going in both directions clearly discernible in the dry dust of the road.

“Maybe Hamish came out here!” Hattie May cried. “Maybe he went inside the house and—and—” she cast terrified eyes beyond the wall.

“Hush, Hattie May, don’t be ridiculous. There aren’t any such things as ghosts as you very well know. Besides,” I added illogically, “no one ever heard of one’s harming a person.”

“But people die of fright,” Hattie May went on wildly. “Or—or they fall in a swoon. I’m sure I should if I saw one and Hamish is a year younger than me. Oh, Eve, would you dare to—to just go up to the house and—listen?”

“Of course I would,” Eve assured her. “What is there to be afraid of? I’d go inside only the door is locked of course. But honestly, I don’t believe those tracks mean a thing—somebody just drove up, discovered he was on the wrong road and turned around, that’s all.”

But Hattie May shook her head. “No. I feel that something has happened,” she declared solemnly. “I’m as sure as anything that those marks were made by Hamish’s car. And,” she flung up her head with a heroic gesture, “it’s my duty not to leave this place till I’ve found out—found out what there is to know!”

XVI

The Rescue

WE climbed over the wall and made our way through the tall grass to the rear of the house. Eve, as good as her word, walked up to the back door and knocked. Not, she said, that she expected any answer but just to satisfy Hattie May.

But Hattie May did not seem at all reassured by the silence that answered us. “If Hamish is swooned of—or d-dead,” she cried, “of course he won’t hear! What we’ve got to do is to break down that door! Or——” she glanced helplessly around—“or get inside somehow. I just know Hamish is somewhere about this place!”

I saw that she was on the verge of becoming hysterical again. “Nonsense,” I said, “if Hamish was here, we’d have seen his car, wouldn’t we?”

“I can’t help it, I’ve got to get inside,” she repeated, her voice getting more and more raspy and high-pitched. “I guess if your only brother was lying——” she paused. Eve who had stopped knocking, now had her hand on the latch. To our utter amazement it turned in her hand and the door swung inward. Unlocked! What did that mean?

Well to Hattie May it meant just one thing—a confirmation of her worst fears. She rushed inside. “Hamish!” she cried at the top of her lungs. “Hamish, where are you?” Her voice went echoing through the big kitchen and the wide hall beyond. But no other sound answered it. “Hamish! Hamish, where are you?”

I was still standing just within the doorway. In truth I had little desire to enter the house again. Suddenly Eve who had not moved from the threshold, caught me by the elbow. “Listen!” she said, “I thought I heard something!”

She had swung round and was gazing out toward the garden. And as we stood there there came to our ears, faint and far away, something which sounded like a muffled cry. Hattie May turned back. “What is it?” she asked. “What’s the matter?”

“We thought we heard something outside,” I said. “Listen, there it is again!” Was it my imagination or was it a cry for help!

“Oh, it’s him—it’s Hamish!” In one dash Hattie May was through the doorway and running wildly down the grass grown path toward the garden. “Hamish! Hamish!” she called. And as we sped after her, we heard the answer again. And this time there was no mistake—“Help, help!” came the cry!

Through the weeds and brambles we streaked, stumbling over dead branches, scratching faces and clothes—on and on in the direction of that cry. Hattie May was in the lead. Once she tripped and fell and Eve and I had to pull her up. We came to the end of the garden. Beyond the underbrush was so dense that we could see nothing ahead. But Hattie May raced on blindly; her hair streaming about her face, her thin dress torn; while a trickle of blood from a scratch across her nose added to the general wildness of her aspect.

“Help, help, help!” The cry was quite near now. We came to a straggling line of stones where a wall had once been. On the other side we made out the traces of what seemed to be the foundation of an old house. The cries appeared to come from a spot in the undergrowth just beyond this. Hattie May plowed on, Eve was at her heels. “Hamish! Where are you?”

“Here I am!” It was Hamish’s voice, there was no mistaking it—but oddly muffled.

Suddenly ahead of me I saw Eve pause almost like an animal who scents danger. “Wait!” she cried.

But Hattie May did not heed. “Hamish,” she repeated frantically, “where are you!” As she spoke I saw Eve reach out and grab her dress skirt. And she was just in time. A second later, coming up with them, I saw that they were standing on the very edge of a yawning hole. A rotted board half covered it but the board was broken and showed new splinters as if some heavy object had but recently fallen through.

“It’s a well!” Hattie May cried, dropping to her knees and peering into the blackness below. “Oh, Hamish, are you down there--are you drowned?”

“Get a rope,” came back the voice. “I’m perishin’! Get a rope and a man quick!”

“Oh, Hamish, are you drowned?” repeated Hattie May wildly.

“Of course he isn’t drowned,” Eve said calmly. “A drowned person doesn’t scream like that. It’s a dry well, don’t you understand?”

“A dry well!”

“We’ve got to get a man and a rope right away,” Eve went on practically. “I think we’d better go up to the farm where Michael works, it can’t be far.”

Hattie May regained some slight semblance of sanity at this suggestion. “You two go,” she ordered. “I’ll stay here by Hamish. And oh, do hurry, you can’t tell what awful things are down that well—snakes and terrible toads! It must be a

mile deep, at least it looks it.”

“I’ll stay with Hattie May,” I said. “You go find Michael, Eve.”

So Eve flew away. Hattie May put her face to the hole—while I took fast hold on what remained of her dress—and called down cheering words to the prisoner. “Eve’s gone for Michael,” she shouted. “He works up the road. What? What’s that you said?” She lifted her face from the hole. “Sandy, did you hear that?”

I shook my head.

“He says,” said Hattie May incredibly, “that Michael is in jail!”

I stared at her. “You must have misunderstood,” I said.

“That’s what it sounded like. You don’t suppose,” a new terror was dawning in her eyes, “that being down there all this time has—has affected Hamish’s mind?”

“I think you misunderstood him,” I repeated soothingly. “Perhaps he said for Michael to bring a pail.”

“A pail! Oh, then there must be water in the well after all! He’s probably caught pneumonia!” She put her head back to the hole. “Oh, Hamish, are you very wet?”

“He says he’s dry as a bone!” she sat up. “He says he’s got to have a drink right away!”

“Well, I guess he’ll just have to wait,” I said.

But Hattie May’s eyes had lighted on something—a bottle on the ground where Eve had left it. It was the dandelion wine for Mrs. Viner. She pounced on it. “I’m going to drop this down!” she exclaimed.

“You’re crazy, Hattie May!” I protested. “The bottle will be sure to break or hit him on the head. Besides,” I added weakly, “very likely he doesn’t like dandelion wine—many don’t.”

“How can you talk like that, Sandy, at such a moment! I guess if your brother was perishing of thirst and you had some drink to give him—I guess you wouldn’t hesitate!”

“Well,” I said resignedly, “if you crack his skull, I don’t think it will help matters any.” But she wasn’t listening. She was leaning again over the jagged aperture, the bottle in her hand. I took another strangle hold on the back of her skirt and held my peace.

The bottle disappeared into the void. Just as it did so, I heard the sound of voices behind me. Michael Gilpatrick was running toward us and behind him was a man in blue overalls, carrying a bundle of rope. Panting in the rear, came Eve.

“Oh, Michael, I’m glad you’re not—I’m glad you came!” I cried. He gave me barely a nod. I had never seen him look so solemn. “How’d he get down there?”

he asked going quickly to the hole and peering down.

“We don’t know—we heard him shouting.”

“Oh, do hurry,” urged Hattie May. “He says he’s perishing.”

The man, whom Michael called Jo, had now come up, and, without any more words, the two set to work. We waited breathlessly, Hattie May clinging hard to my wrist, Eve still panting on the ground at our feet. There was an endless wait after they let down the rope while they waited for Hamish to make it fast. Finally came the call to go ahead, and they began to haul. Inch by inch, tugging singly and together. The muscles in Michael’s arms stood out brown and hard; perspiration streamed from his face; even the burly Jo was gasping.

At the moment when her brother’s head appeared above the hole, Hattie May let out a frightful scream. I don’t know whether it was just the reaction or the sight of his straw-colored hair and face plastered with mud. But she continued to scream until the rescue was completed and Hamish himself, blinking and tottering on unsteady feet, stood before us. “Shut up!” he said.

His sister threw herself upon him. “Oh, Hamish, you look awful—are you hurt?”

Michael put out a hand to unfasten the rope about his waist. “He’s okay, aren’t you, Hamish?” he said, gently pushing Hattie May aside.

“An’ fer the love of Mike, how’d you manage to fall down there?” Jo demanded, curiously surveying him.

Hamish didn’t answer. He was peering at Michael through near-sighted eyes—his glasses were gone. “How’d you get out?” he demanded suddenly.

A deeper flush poured over Michael’s hot face. But he only shrugged. “How long have you been down there?” he asked in his turn.

“All night,” Hamish told him. “And, boy, it was some night, believe me!”

“It must have been ghastly,” returned Michael. “How in the world did it happen?”

But Hamish announced that he couldn’t say another word till he’d had a drink. “Didn’t you get the bottle I threw down?” his sister demanded. His only answer was a look!

XVII

Caught!

BACK at the house we heard the whole story. The man Jo had gone back to work but Michael still lingered. Hamish had taken a long drink of Craven House well water in bold defiance of Hattie May's warning that it was practically sure to be full of deadly germs; his attitude being, I think, that after what he'd been through a germ more or less was of trifling moment. He was seated on an old wooden bench at the back door. Hattie May had wiped some of the mud from his face but it still had a grayish unhealthy cast.

"How in the world did you happen to go way out there?" It was Michael who got the story going.

"It was on account of those cops," Hamish said. "I was tryin' to get to the place where I'd parked my car 'thout runnin' into 'em. You see after they got you——"

"Were you in the house too?" Michael interrupted.

Hamish shook his head. "No, I was outside but I heard most everything that went on. I got here 'bout ten o'clock last night. You see I had kind of a hunch that that Bangs fellow wasn't through with the place, after me runnin' into him in Millport selling that hair tonic. I said to myself, 'He's still on the trail of sumpin or I miss my guess.'"

"Yeah." Michael nodded understandingly. "Go on."

"Well I parked my car up the road in that little lane that runs through somebody's orchard. Then I came back here to the house. I hid out in the bushes there to sort of reconnoiter and I hadn't been there more'n a few minutes when sure enough along comes a car. It stopped down the road a bit and after a while I spied a man comin' through the bushes, making for the back door. I recognized him even though it was dark—it was Bangs."

"Oh, Hamish, weren't you scared to death?" cried Hattie May.

"Scared of what?" inquired her brother. "There was I lyin' low behind a bush—he hadn't seen me."

“Oh, go on,” I urged, “what happened then?”

“Well he unlocks the door, goes inside and locks it after him. ‘All right, mister,’ I says to myself, ‘that’s all I wanted to know. Now I’ll just buzz over to Millport and get a cop and you can do some explaining!’”

Michael grinned wryly. “But you didn’t have to!” he put in.

“Gosh no! I hadn’t any more than got to the front wall creepin’ along so’s not to make a sound when, boy, ’long comes another car. I guess you know who that was,” he looked at Michael. “It stopped down the road about where the first one had, near as I could judge. Bye and bye I heard voices. I picked me a bush close by the house and lay down again. The voices got nearer. One of the fellows had a flash and I saw they were cops, two of ’em.”

“Oh, Hamish, what did you do then?”

“Do? I just lay low and listened. I could hear every word they said. One of ’em went to the back door and one to the front. Pretty soon I heard the back door crash in—that was the husky one did that,” again he looked at Michael and again, surprisingly, Michael nodded confirmation.

“Well so they got in and I could hear them walkin’ round through the house. Say, get me another drink.”

Michael brought the water. “Oh, do go on,” Hattie May said impatiently. “What did the villain do when they got him?”

Hamish finished the glass of water before he replied. “They didn’t get him at all,” he said dramatically. “They got Michael instead! Can you imagine that?”

“Michael!” All of us turned upon the other boy as if expecting him to deny this astounding statement. But he only nodded gravely. “But—but I don’t understand,” Eve cried, “what were you doing in the house?”

Michael gave a shrug. “Oh, it’s just a mess,” he said gloomily. “The worst I ever got into, I guess. You see I had the same sort of hunch as Hamish. After he told of seeing Bangs in Millport, I suspected right away that he was still hanging around for a reason and that that reason was somehow connected with this place. I thought if he did any more digging, he’d probably do it at night. So I rode out here last night on my bicycle and climbed into that upstairs window that you girls left unlocked.”

“Oh, wasn’t it awfully spooky!” I cried.

Michael gave a wry laugh. “No, it was quite peaceful—for a while. I poked around some with my flash to make sure the house was empty and then sat down by the window to wait in case Mr. Bangs should turn up. Well, everything might have been all right if it hadn’t been for the fool idea I’d had—” he hesitated, looking rather sheepish. “Well, you see, I’d had the brilliant idea of trying to disguise myself.”

“Disguise yourself!” Eve cried. “But how?”

“Well I had that wig I’d pulled off Bangs that night I chased him—I suppose it was that that gave me the idea. I thought it would prevent anyone’s recognizing me in case I was seen coming in here. So I fixed myself up with this wig and a straw hat and an old suit of Al’s. I found an old pair of spectacles around the house too.”

I giggled. “You must have looked rather like Bangs himself!”

“That’s just the dickens of it—I did! Too much so—enough at least to fool the police!”

“You don’t mean they took you for that villain—not actually?” cried Hattie May incredulously.

“They sure did!”

“But what did they want him for?” I asked. “Was it the hair tonic?”

“Oh, no, nothing like that. It seems he picked up a car somewhere in Millport Saturday afternoon, drove it out here last night and hid it in the woods up the road. Then he came here to the house to pass the night.”

“You mean he stole a car—Oh, Michael, how terrible!” cried Eve.

“Well, it was bad luck for me, at any rate!”

“But surely you can prove that you didn’t take it,” I put in. “Surely it will be easy enough to clear yourself!”

“Well, I haven’t convinced ’em yet,” returned Michael sombrely. “You see it was this way. Seems somebody saw Bangs take the car around five o’clock that afternoon and turned in a report to the police. Said the thief had thick bushy hair and wore horn-rimmed glasses. The cops traced the car out this way somehow—they didn’t inform me how—and found it hidden in the woods. Then they came on to the house, broke in, and found me hiding in the hall closet, wearing a wig and spectacles. That’s all there is to it.”

“But didn’t you tell them?” I protested.

“Why, naturally! But it didn’t get me anywhere. They just laughed at me. Wanted to know what I was doing in the house and so forth. I told them about Bangs and that he was in the house too because I’d heard him come in just before. That was when I got into the closet. They pretended to make a search of the house but they didn’t find him. They didn’t expect to—they thought I was spoofing them.”

“Yeah and where was he—that’s what I’d like to know?” Hamish spoke for the first time since Michael had begun his story.

“I haven’t any idea—I suppose he was hiding somewhere.”

Hattie May gave a startled glance toward the open kitchen door as if she half expected the form of Mr. Bangs to emerge at any moment.

“Of course he’s had plenty of time to make a getaway now,” Michael went on. “He’s had all night.”

“But when they found you, did they—did you——?” I began hesitatingly.

“Yeah they took me over to the Millport jail,” returned Michael stoically. “I phoned Al, my cousin, and he came over about midnight and got me out. But I’ve got to go to court on Thursday when the case comes up.”

“To c-court?” Eve’s eyes were harrowed. “But can’t anything be done—your folks at home——?”

Michael shook his head, his lips were set. “I’m not going to tell them,” he stated. “I’ll take what’s coming to me.”

“But they can’t convict you of something you never did,” I broke in. “Why, it’s all too absurd!”

“Well, I don’t know. You see it’s going to be sort of hard to explain what I was doing in an empty house in the middle of the night. And if Bangs has left the country——” he shrugged.

“Wouldn’t it do some good if we were all to go over to Millport and tell the— the judge or whoever it is, that you were with us Saturday afternoon on the beach?” Eve asked.

Michael shook his head positively. “I wouldn’t have you get mixed up in it for anything,” he said. “Besides they would simply think you were my friends trying to help me out of a tight hole. They’d only have your word that I was with you, you see.”

Eve digested this. It was rather a new idea, I suppose, that her word might not be good for much in a court of law.

Michael got up. “Well I’ve got to be getting back to work,” he said. “How do you feel, Hamish? All right?”

“I’m awful hungry!” said Hamish.

“Poor Hamish!” Eve cried. “Here we’ve been sitting talking while you were starving to death! And after that awful night!”

“Well it was kind of messy down there,” Hamish said. “It was lucky the bally old well was half filled up or I might have been a goner. You see I landed on a lot of leaves and old junk that had been thrown down there to get rid of it, I s’pose. So I just made myself as comfortable as I could and waited for daylight. I figured that somebody’d be along lookin’ for me soon as it got light. But it was kind of tiresome waitin’.”

“Tiresome! I think you had pretty good nerve!” I said. We all got up. “Hope my car’s all right,” Hamish said, “I guess I’ll get me one of those Turkish baths up at the hotel after I’ve had dinner.”

XVIII

Dig Here!

WE tried to sew carpet rags that afternoon but it was rather a farce. So much had happened that morning that it seemed impossible to settle down to anything so prosaic. We kept talking of Michael and his awful predicament, and racking our brains to think of some way of helping him. Eve was inclined to blame Hamish for his part in the affair, for not coming forward when he saw Michael being taken into custody and vouching for his identity. But I pointed out that Hamish himself would have had some explaining to do and would probably have only made matters worse by trying to account for Michael's presence in the house.

We had of course told Aunt Cal the whole story but, though she had been rather decent about the dandelion wine, she had not displayed very much sympathy either for Michael or Hamish. Her attitude was that they had got no more than they deserved for meddling in things that didn't concern them. I felt that Aunt Cal was being rather unjust for after all Michael had only been seeking to aid the cause of justice.

Beyond the hedge I caught sight of Captain Trout's bald head gleaming in the sun. He waved a pruning knife at us and I said, "Let's go over and tell him about Michael. Perhaps he'll be able to think of something to do."

The Captain greeted us cordially and invited us to take seats on his back porch. "We thought you ought to know," Eve said, "about the trouble that Michael is in."

"Michael in trouble?" The Captain's astonishment was evident. "Dear me! Bless my boots! The finest boy in the world!"

This was comforting to hear at least. The Captain listened as we gave him an outline of the story. "Bless my boots!" he exclaimed again when we had finished. "Why those police are asses! What do they mean not believing the boy's story—don't they know he's a Gilpatrick?"

"They don't seem to consider it important," I said. "And Michael declares he won't go to his family for help."

The Captain nodded understandingly. “That’s like him,” he said. “His mother would be upset and his grandfather, too, I expect. A grandson of Jason Gilpatrick accused of stealing—why it’s absurd!”

“Isn’t Michael’s father living?” I asked.

Captain Trout shook his head. “Killed in the war,” he said shortly. He seemed to be thinking deeply. “Well,” he said at last, “I’ll have to see what can be done—I’ll have to tell those guardians of the law a thing or two!”

Well at least we had done what we could for Michael; though, as we talked it over, we wondered if the Captain’s sputtering protestations would really have any effect in a court of law. What Michael needed was proof and that, alas, he didn’t have.

At last I flung down the blue calico strip I was sewing to another of black and white check. “I hate the very sight of these miserable rags!” I exclaimed. “Let’s go somewhere and do something quick before I chuck them all in the brook!”

Eve laughed. “We might go down to the Inn and inquire about Hamish,” she suggested. “After his frightful experience he may be in a state of collapse.”

We found Hattie May on the veranda at Wildwood Lodge, waiting, she told us, for Hamish to come out of the barber shop of the hotel next door. “I sent him to get a shampoo,” she said, “his hair was such a mess.”

“How is he feeling?” I inquired. “Fully recovered, I hope.”

“Oh, yes, he’s all right—physically, that is!”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, I just mean that he’s still acting kind of preoccupied.”

“It’s the shock,” Eve said. “Really you can’t be surprised.”

Hattie May shook her head. “There’s something he wants to do,” she said, “but he won’t tell me what it is. But he’s determined to go back to that terrible place again right away!”

“What! Go back to Craven House? Gracious, I should think he’d never want to see the place again!”

“I know. But he insists there’s something he’s got to see about. He says he was so hungry this morning that he couldn’t attend to it. That’s why I’m watching the door of the hotel, to be sure he doesn’t get away again without me!”

We sat down to wait. And it was not long before we saw the figure of Hamish emerge from the hotel. He cast a furtive glance in the direction of the Lodge and then, in response to his sister’s frantic summons, came slowly down the steps toward us. “What kept you so long?” Hattie May inquired sharply.

“Oh, I thought I’d have the whole works while I was about it,” he said. “Turkish bath, shampoo, oil treatment, face steamin’ and manicure!”

“Heavens, no wonder you look like a boiled rabbit!”

Hamish took out his watch. "Well, I got to be gettin' along," he said with an attempt at casualness. "So long, I'll be seein' you."

As her brother's form disappeared around the corner of the building, Hattie May got up. "Come on," she whispered, and tiptoed down the steps. In single file we passed around the veranda and, keeping well under cover of the various barns and garages in the rear, came presently to the main road, just across which are the row of tin garages in one of which Hamish kept his car. He was just unlocking the door when he looked around and saw us. "What's the big idea?" he inquired ungraciously.

"The idea," answered his sister, "is that we're going along. You don't think for a minute that I'm going to let you go out to that place alone again?"

Hamish's answer was unintelligible and he was still muttering to himself as he got into his seat. However he waited, though unwillingly, while the rest of us disposed ourselves—his sister beside him, Eve and I in the rumble. For my own part, I had little desire to take part in the expedition. If Hamish hadn't had enough of Craven House, I had. Besides I wondered what Aunt Cal was going to think of more "meddling" on our part.

Hamish maintained an injured silence during the greater part of the drive. And to my inquiry as to whether he had heard anything more from Michael, he shook his head and replied shortly, "Been sleepin'."

The day was hot and as we left the freshness of the sea behind, the heat increased by the minute. So we came again within the shadow of the old house. The sweetness of the honeysuckle was almost overpowering. I felt a sudden aversion to the place. All its air of romantic mystery had departed. I hated it because it had given shelter to that villain and ensnared Michael and yes, because it had brought disappointment and disillusion to Aunt Cal. "I think I'll just wait in the car," I said.

"Oh, Sandy, what for?" Eve cried. And Hattie May added, "Haven't got cold feet have you?"

This of course was too absurd to answer. Nevertheless it compelled me to get reluctantly out of the car and follow the others over the wall. Hamish was in the lead but with Hattie May panting closely at his heels. He vouchsafed no explanation as to where he was headed or what his purpose was. And for my own part I didn't care much. I was sick of the whole subject of buried treasure and wished heartily at that moment that we had never opened Mr. Bangs' smelly old suitcase. It had been just like Pandora's box, I reflected bitterly, for nothing but trouble had come out of it.

But if it was treasure that Hamish was intent upon, at least he was seeking it in a new spot. For he passed rapidly through the garden and plunged into the

underbrush beyond. “Well,” I said determinedly, “I’m not going to get myself all scratched and bitten up again. I’ll wait here by the fountain and if any of you fall down any wells, don’t expect me to do anything about it.”

“All right,” said Hattie May. “But I’ve got to keep Hamish in sight.” And Eve added, “I guess I’d better go along to look after Hattie May.”

So they left me and I heard their voices die away in the distance. I took out my handkerchief and mopped my hot face. I wished that the fountain were playing so that I could have stuck my head into its cooling spray. By and by I heard the others returning. Hattie May’s voice was high-pitched and excited but that was nothing unusual.

Hamish was in the lead, he was carrying something under one arm. I looked at Eve and saw that she too was excited. “Well I see you’re all here,” I remarked.

Hamish walked to the bowl of the fountain and set down the thing he was carrying. “What is it?” I asked. And then, “Why, it’s a statue! Where did you get it?”

“Hamish’s found it!” Hattie May cried. “He’s found the Circe!”

“The Circe!” In truth I had almost forgotten about the missing statue. “Why—where in the world——?”

“It was at the bottom of that awful well!” Hattie May cried.

“I brought it up with me when they hauled me up this morning,” Hamish explained, taking off his glasses to wipe them. “I guess you were all too excited to notice it. It was pretty heavy so I just dropped it in the grass and left it. Bein’ without my spectacles, I couldn’t be sure what it was. You see when Hattie May dropped that bottle down it hit on a stone and broke to smithereens. This was the stone, that’s how I happened to find it.”

Hattie May threw me a triumphant look. “Don’t you think it’s the Circe, Sandy?” Eve asked. “You see the arms are broken off but one of them is lifted just as if it might have been holding a wand.”

It was true. The little figure was smaller than the other one in the garden and it was so blackened by age that the features were hardly discernible. But there was no doubt that it was a woman’s figure and that one arm had been upraised. In spite of myself, I felt a queer shivery thrill as I gazed at it. “But where did it come from?” I demanded eagerly. “Where did it stand?”

“That,” said Eve, “is just what we’ve got to find out. There simply must be a pedestal somewhere that we’ve overlooked. It certainly was never set up down by that old well, nobody would put a statue in a vacant lot.”

“And when we find where she stood,” put in Hamish, “then we’ll know where to dig!”

Almost with one accord we all got up again and set out on another tour of the

garden. We had already raked it pretty thoroughly but this time we had something definite to urge us on. We had discovered the enchantress, there remained only to discover her resting place.

Back and forth we wandered, poking at every tangle of bushes and clump of thick grass, kicking at every fallen tree branch. In his zeal, Hamish even began turning up the slabs of stone which had once formed a walk as if he expected to find some clue tucked away with the horrid white crawly things underneath.

Discouraged at last, I came back to the fountain. After all, I told myself, I didn't really believe in the buried treasure. Michael didn't, I knew, and I was pretty sure he was right. Still I did wish we could find where the statue had stood just—well just for the satisfaction of knowing. But though Hamish and the others were still plunging madly about, the search seemed as hopeless as it had from the first. Indeed the discovery of the statue had really helped matters little.

Where would one put a Circe, I wondered? A small, graceful figure like that? On a pedestal of course—but where? Somewhere where she would not be overlooked, I thought—some conspicuous place——

And then, in a flash of inspiration, my eyes turned to the center of the fountain. In imagination I saw her there—lithe, poised, with arm upraised! And from that vanished wand, I was suddenly sure, had come the jets of water which had played in the sunshine of those bygone summers!

“Eve! Hamish!” I cried excitedly. Picking up the statue, I stepped across the leaf-filled bowl. I reached up and set it there in the middle. “Look!” I shouted, “It fits—fits perfectly!”

“It sure does!” I swung around to see Michael Gilpatrick advancing toward me. In our absorption none of us had heard the approach of his wagon. In a minute the others came running at the sound of my excited summons.

“Oh, Sandy,” Eve cried, “how clever of you! How did you happen to think of it?”

“My aunt!” There was a grudging admiration in Hamish's voice as he gazed at the upright figure. “It sure looks as if that was the place all right. I was just thinkin' of having a look at the fountain myself——”

Eve gave him a scathing glance. “But look here!” cried Hattie May. “If that's the right place where are we going to dig? We can't dig up the fountain!”

“We won't have to, silly,” said her brother. “It's thirteen and a half feet south of it that we've got to measure.” He pulled a tape line from his pocket as he spoke. “There's a shovel hidden under that lilac bush by the road,” he said to Michael. “I brought it with me last night.”

“Preparedness is your motto!” laughed Michael. For the moment he seemed to have forgotten or thrown aside the trouble that was hanging over him.

By the time he had brought the shovel, Hamish had located the spot to his satisfaction. It turned out to be directly under a pink rosebush whose bushes hung thickly to the ground. But Hamish was not to be daunted by a few thorns.

“I wonder how deep down it’ll be!” breathed Hattie May as Hamish’s shovel began to scratch at the hard turf. “I’m glad you came along, Michael, in case it’s very deep.”

“Michael doesn’t believe there’s anything there,” I said.

“Not any buried treasure? Well, I’d like to know what all those measurements mean then and why?”

Michael didn’t answer. There was a whimsical smile on his tanned face as he stood watching Hamish clumsily manipulating the heavy shovel. After a few shovelful of dirt had been piled in a heap on the grass with little to show for the effort except the steadily mounting color of Hamish’s face and the steam on his glasses, Michael offered, “Like me to take a hand?”

And still with that whimsical smile Michael set to work. And now the earth began to fly to some effect and the hole, which before had seemed to fill up almost as fast as the earth came out, now began to grow quite sizable. Hattie May stood at the very edge and watched each shovelful as it came out. I thought, “She’s going to be awfully let down if we don’t find anything.”

Five minutes went by—ten. Michael was breathing hard now, perspiration streaming down his face. “Better let me take it now,” Hamish said but the other shook his head.

Deeper and deeper. Finally Michael stopped to wipe his face. “If I was going to bury a blue emerald,” he remarked with a grin, “or even a green one, I wouldn’t bother to go much deeper than that!”

Hamish knelt down and thrust one of his lately manicured hands deep into the hole. “Feel anything?” his sister asked hopefully.

He shook his head. “It’s a washout,” he said disgustedly. “I don’t believe there ever was any bally old treasure!”

“Sure you got the measurements right?” Michael inquired with faint irony. The difference between his attitude and Hamish’s was that Hamish was in deadly earnest, while with Michael it was almost as if he was playing a game.

So perhaps it was only fair that it should be Hamish who was wielding the shovel when it finally did strike something. We all heard the impact. Hattie May screamed and began to jump up and down. Hamish dropped the shovel and dived, almost literally head first into the hole. “There goes his shampoo, too!” I thought.

“There—there’s something!” he gasped. “Some—something hard——!”

I giggled, I couldn’t help it. It was partly nervous excitement and partly the

sense which had been with me all along of the ridiculousness of the whole proceeding. “That,” I said, “will be the iron bound chest full of doubloons and pieces of eight, no doubt!”

No one paid any attention to me. Hamish was groping desperately with his fingers. “I c-can’t—seem—to—get hold——!” he panted.

“Let me have a try?” Michael put in quietly. Reluctantly Hamish moved a little and, kneeling down in his turn, Michael thrust one bare brown arm into the hole. A minute later he was holding up a small, dirt-encased object. As he shook off the clinging earth, we saw an oblong tin box like a tobacco tin. I stared dazedly at it—“Royal Plug” I read.

Hamish seized the box from Michael’s hand. He shook it. It rattled! Hattie May screamed again. “It’s the emerald—the blue emerald!”

Hamish was prying at the lid with fumbling awkward fingers. His sister snatched at it impatiently. “It would take you a week to get that cover off!” she cried.

But the cover stuck obstinately. Michael took out his jackknife. “Perhaps this will do it,” he offered.

XIX

The Treasure

HAMISH took off his spectacles and wiped them carefully as if he hoped by so doing to see something different from the object which was lying in Michael's open palm. The object at which the rest of us were also incredulously staring. It was just a key—a long old-fashioned rusty key!

"Is—is that all?" Hattie May's voice at last broke the silence; it seemed to come from the region of her shoes. For answer Michael took up the tobacco tin and turned it upside down. "B-but there must be something else," she faltered. "Something else buried—the treasure—the blue emerald!"

With a shrug Michael again picked up the shovel and set to work anew on the hole. But though he dug steadily for as much as five minutes, he turned up nothing more.

"It's just a washout like I said!" Hamish stated gloomily. He glared at Eve and me, he seemed to hold us responsible.

I had picked up the key and was examining it. "I suppose," I said, "it's the key to something."

"That's right," chimed in Hattie May with a fresh accession of hope. "Nobody would take the trouble to bury a key unless it was to something pretty important. Maybe to the box that holds the treasure or—or to a locked room—or something. I'll bet that's it—the treasure's hidden in the house!"

"I don't think there are any locked rooms in the house," remarked Eve. "Sandy and I went over it pretty thoroughly that first day and we didn't find any."

"But there must be something!" Hattie May turned and strode toward the back door.

"Well I've got to be getting on," Michael said. "I wish you luck with your blue emerald!"

"Michael Gilpatrick," Hattie May turned about and faced him, "I don't believe you'd take the trouble to pick up that treasure if it was right before your eyes!"

All you care about is cows and—and crops and plowing and grubby things like that!”

Michael’s ringing laugh answered her as he strode away. “You can’t really blame him,” said Eve, “for not being so awfully keen about this when he’s got that other thing hanging over him! I’d be worried too.”

Hattie May and Hamish had disappeared inside the house but they were back in five minutes. “Every door in the place is wide open,” Hattie May declared in disgust, “and the key doesn’t fit a single lock.”

“Well I think the best thing for us to do now is to go home,” I said. Somewhat to my surprise Hamish agreed with my suggestion at once. I had not expected him to give up the search so easily.

Our own orderly garden was cool and refreshing that night after the sticky heat of the day. We joined Aunt Cal and Adam there after we had finished the dishes. Under cover of the darkness I took my courage in my hands. “Aunt Cal,” I asked, “did you ever hear that Captain Judd Craven had—well anything valuable hidden away? Any—well any treasure or anything?”

At the word “treasure” I could fairly feel Aunt Cal beside me stiffen. “Treasure!” she ejaculated scornfully. “What has put such an idea into your head?”

“Well that paper we found, in the first place,” I returned, “the one with the measurements on it, you know. And then this afternoon we dug up an old key out there in the garden at Craven House. It was in a tobacco tin just as if someone had hidden it on purpose.”

Aunt Cal made a noise that sounded like “pish!” “So that’s what you’ve been up to,” she said caustically. “I must confess that I’m considerably surprised that girls of your age and upbringing should find nothing better to do with your time! Buried treasure indeed!”

“But you see, Aunt Cal,” Eve came to my defense, “it did seem as if those directions must mean something, especially after that fellow, that Mr. Bangs, wanted them so badly that he came to the house here to look for them. So then this morning when Hamish found the missing statue of Circe down that old well and this afternoon when Sandy discovered where she used to stand, why we just had to find out what there was to it, don’t you see? And then when we dug up the key, why we just naturally couldn’t help wondering what it was the key of.”

Aunt Cal shook her head sadly. “I knew a man who wasted the best years of his life in the search for treasure!” she said.

“You mean Captain Craven’s son?” I asked timidly, my heart beginning to beat a little faster for I felt that I was on delicate ground.

She nodded solemnly. “Carter Craven went to the South Seas on a hunt for

buried gold when he was eighteen. It wrecked his life and broke his father's heart!"

"Oh!" I had never heard Aunt Cal speak like that before!

"He—he didn't find anything?" Eve asked slowly.

I could feel the flash in Aunt Cal's eyes though I could not see it. "Of course he didn't. He was the victim of a pack of adventurers! He was gone six years. And when he came back," her voice broke, "he was like an old man! So—so changed!"

"Oh, Aunt Cal, how terrible!" I cried. "What did it?"

"His health was ruined for one thing—the life he'd led, the climate, the companionships. And what was worse, his moral fibre was gone! He had no desire to work, to settle down to earn an honest living. His head was full of schemes, get-rich-quick schemes. He drifted from one to another. Nothing that he undertook ever amounted to anything." She broke off suddenly and her voice softened ever so little. "I am telling you all this," she added, "so that you may understand what the lure of gold can do to a human being."

We were silent for a long time after she had finished speaking. If the truth be told I was feeling rather small. Also I was experiencing a new understanding of Aunt Cal. For the first time I had had a glimpse of the real person behind the mask of severity she habitually wore. It was Eve who finally ventured to put one more question. "And Carter Craven," she asked, "when he went away the last time, was it for something like that?"

"I believe so," Aunt Cal returned shortly. "I was told it was a gold mine, though I was not here at the time."

"And no one has heard of him since?"

She nodded. "I went into Millport yesterday to see the lawyer who has charge of the estate, to tell him about this man Bangs. I feel that if we could get hold of him, he might be able to tell us something. But now that he is wanted by the police, no doubt he will have left the neighborhood for good." She sighed.

I sighed too. "I do wish they could find him before Wednesday," I said. "Then perhaps the police would believe Michael's story. If they don't——" I broke off, conscious that Aunt Cal was not listening. She seemed utterly absorbed in her own thoughts.

Didn't she care, I thought, that the good name of a perfectly innocent boy was about to be dragged in the dust! As the minutes went by and still she said nothing, all my newly aroused sympathy vanished. If she was so indifferent to the troubles of others, she didn't deserve anybody's sympathy. I grew so indignant, sitting there in the darkness, that I finally could stand it no longer and said I guessed I'd go to bed.

“All she cares about,” I sputtered five minutes, later as I pulled off my shoes and flung them into the corner, “is that stuffy old house with its messy old garden and its defunct fountain and—and all of its moldy old memories!”

“You’re wrong, Sandy,” Eve said. “I think the thing she cares most about is Carter—his memory, I mean. I don’t think she’ll ever be happy till that is cleared.”

I stopped with one stocking half off and looked at Eve. “What in the world makes you think that?” I inquired.

“Don’t you remember what Captain Trout hinted to us, that some people thought Carter had destroyed his father’s will?”

“Oh,” I said, light beginning to dawn, “you think that is what’s eating Aunt Cal?”

“I’m sure of it. It isn’t the house, it’s the thought that he would do such a thing—don’t you see?”

“But didn’t she say he was just a rotter anyway?”

“Yes, but that was after he’d been away. Before perhaps he was different. Perhaps she cared about him, Sandy. I don’t mean in a sentimental way necessarily. But maybe she was fond of him—they were cousins, you know. Perhaps they played together when they were children, went to school together—And it’s worse to have people you’re fond of, people you’ve trusted, let you down than anything, isn’t it?”

“Yes, I see,” I said. I regarded Eve thoughtfully. It was not the first time that she had astonished me by reading the motives and desires that were shut up inside of people. Indeed as I thought about it, I found this new view of Aunt Cal so interesting that Michael and his troubles were, I’m ashamed to say, entirely forgotten for the time being.

As I lay and watched the sea breeze flutter the muslin curtain, my imagination was busy with the girl who had been Aunt Cal and the boy who had been Carter Craven. I played with the idea that there had been a romance between them. As for my uncle, Tom Poole, well I just left him out of the picture.

The morning, however, brought me back to reality. It was Tuesday. Tomorrow Michael would have to go to court. And nothing at all was being done about it!

“If I could just be there,” Eve said soberly, “I’m sure I could make that old judge listen to reason!”

“Aunt Cal,” I said, “would pass on at the suggestion—a niece of hers in a police court!”

“I suppose so!” Eve sighed.

The morning’s mail brought an envelope addressed to me. It was from Millport, from the photographer where Hamish had taken my film to be

developed. I called to Aunt Cal to come and look as I spread out the prints on the kitchen table.

“Look here we are in our bathing suits!” I said teasingly. For dear Aunt Cal went bathing in the days when girls wore ample costumes with full skirts trimmed with white braid and little puff sleeves and collars buttoned around their precious throats. We had come upon the picture of her in one in an old album, so I knew.

Aunt Cal took up the picture and scanned it stoically. But instead of the comment of disapproval I had expected, she only said, “I see you got the sail boats in too.”

“Yes, aren’t they pretty?”

She nodded. Then she said a funny thing. “Your young farmer friend shows up pretty good.”

“Michael, yes that’s him on the end.”

“Um. Didn’t you say it was Saturday that this car he’s in trouble about was stolen?” she continued still more unexpectedly.

“Yes,” I said, “Saturday afternoon about half past five. Why do you ask, Aunt Cal?”

She turned back to the sink where she was cleaning beets for dinner. “Well,” she said, “you’ve got this picture, haven’t you, with this boy in it? And you took it Saturday afternoon. If he wants—what is it they call it—an alibi——”

“Yes of course,” I agreed. “But we can’t prove that it was taken Saturday afternoon, don’t you see?”

“Oh, I say, but we can!” Eve fairly bounced out of her chair. “Oh, Sandy, don’t you see?”

I shook my head.

“Why the yachts! They came in Saturday afternoon, anybody in Fishers Haven would swear to that! And Michael said, don’t you remember, that they only came into this harbor once a year!”

I gazed at Eve and then at Aunt Cal. And the mounting excitement I felt was not only at the discovery that perhaps we had found a way to save Michael but also at the fact that it was Aunt Cal who had pointed it out to us!

XX

We Seek Legal Advice

“OH, Sandy, what luck that you took that picture!” Eve cried. “Shall we take it to Michael right away or shall we wait till tomorrow and present it as evidence when the case comes up in court?” She looked doubtfully at Aunt Cal.

As I had expected Aunt Cal said she couldn't have us poking around a police court and it was finally decided that we should all take the noon bus to Millport and see the lawyer whom Aunt Cal had visited on Saturday.

“Gracious, I haven't been so excited in my whole life before!” Eve said. “Oh, Sandy, if we can only save Michael, won't it be wonderful! I can't decide what dress I'd better put on—what do you think?” She stood contemplating the row in her closet.

“Well, I don't think it'll matter a whole lot,” I returned, “as long as it's clean and whole.” I had seldom seen Eve so excited as she was that morning.

“Oh, but we want to make a good impression, you never can tell when a little thing like clothes will turn the balance!”

At last we were ready; Aunt Cal in her second best silk, Eve and I in something far less impressive, but feeling frightfully important just the same. We gulped down a glassful of milk each before we started, too excited to eat anything. Aunt Cal locked Adam in the kitchen, more from long habit, I think, than because she any longer feared he would be enticed away.

The ride to Millport seemed interminable. It was a quarter to two when we rolled into the dusty, car-lined main street of the town.

But luck was with us. Mr. Templeton, the lawyer, was in, a portly man in shiny black who greeted Aunt Cal cordially and motioned us to chairs. Aunt Cal inquired whether there was any news of the man Bangs.

“Nothing yet I'm afraid,” the lawyer said. “But we may get hold of the fellow yet.”

“The girls have another matter they wish to discuss with you if you can spare them a moment,” Aunt Cal then said in her precise manner.

“Spare the time!” I thought. “He’d jolly well better!”

“Certainly,” Mr. Templeton beamed kindly upon us. “Anything I can do——”

It was Eve who told the story, of course. I would surely have made a botch of it. When she had finished she took out the photograph and laid it on the desk.

He examined it, nodding once or twice, while I fumed and twisted inwardly. “Well,” he said at last, “I think perhaps the best thing we can do is to go over and have a talk with the officer who has charge of the case. Perhaps the young ladies will accompany me?” He looked inquiringly at Aunt Cal.

She nodded her assent. “I will wait here,” she said. “The girls can go.”

“What about young Gilpatrick?” the lawyer inquired as we set forth. “Any way of getting hold of him if we should want him?”

“Oh, Michael would be at the farm where he works until five o’clock,” Eve told him. “It’s at Old Beecham, Seaman is the name, I think.”

The rest of the events of that perfectly thrilling afternoon will always be slightly confused in my memory. What actually did happen is so mixed with my doubts and fears of what might. Would the august authority which was the Law stoop to consider our plea at all and, if it did, would it admit anything so trifling as a snapshot taken by myself as evidence?

I shall never forget the moment when the red-faced policeman bent scowling over the picture; then handed it to one of his colleagues to examine. Nor the moment when Mr. Templeton, tiptoeing in in order not to interrupt the conference that was going on, whispered that he’d got hold of Michael by telephone and that he’d be here in a short while.

Most of all I shall never forget the moment when Michael himself entered the room. He was breathing fast after his hurried bicycle ride. He did not know what he was wanted for of course but his mouth had that same set look it had had when he had told us he’d never go to his family for help. When he caught sight of Eve and me, his astonishment for a moment wiped out every other expression. But in answer to Eve’s encouraging smile, he gave only a curt nod and turned toward the desk. “You sent for me, sir?” he said.

“Yeah,” drawled the officer. “Wanted to have another talk with you ’bout what you did last Saturday afternoon.”

Michael’s lips closed harder; he didn’t answer.

“Let’s see, you told us yesterday, that you didn’t come to Millport that day.”

“Yes.”

“Where were you, then, Saturday afternoon?”

Michael scowled. “Just where I told you—on Fishers Haven Beach.”

“How long did you stay there?”

“From a little bit after four till just about seven.”

“Are you in this picture?”

Michael started as the policeman tossed the print across the desk. He picked it up and looked at it. “Yes,” he said, “there on the end.”

“When was this picture taken?”

Michael stared for a second; then in a flash he got it! “Why you can see for yourself,” he said, a new note in his voice. “It was taken the day these yachts came in—last Saturday afternoon. They come into the harbor the second Saturday in July every year. Here, you can see where the last of them is just coming inside the breakwater!”

The other nodded. But the man beside the desk spoke suddenly: “How do we know this here picture wasn’t taken Sunday morning when the boats went out?” he inquired.

Michael laughed at him; it was his old light-hearted, ringing laugh. “Well, you ought to know, sir,” he said, “that you can’t face inland and have the sun in your face on Fishers Haven Beach in the morning! The yachts leave early; the sun would have been behind us instead of in our faces. Besides the position of the sails in the picture shows which way the boats were moving. If they’d been going out——”

“All right,” the officer interrupted. “That’s all. Charge dismissed.”

“Oh,” Eve cried, “and he won’t have to go to court tomorrow!”

“That’s right,” the officer said with something that approached a smile. He turned to Mr. Templeton and the two conferred together. I caught the name of Bangs.

Michael came toward us; he was actually embarrassed. But the familiar quirky smile played about his lately solemn countenance. He had come from the farm just as he was and didn’t even wear a coat over his turned-in blue shirt. “I thought I told you,” he said with the pretense of a scowl, “that I didn’t want you mixed up in this!”

“Are you angry with us?” Eve asked demurely.

“Furious! And besides, I never am any good at saying thank you!”

“Then don’t,” retorted Eve. “Anyway it was all Aunt Cal’s doing. She was the one who first saw what the picture might do for you.”

XXI

A Closed Door

“I THINK it was just poisonous of you not to let us know!” Hattie May pouted. “I’d just have adored going to a police station!”

“But there wasn’t time, Hattie May,” I protested. “We just had to rush off to catch the bus as soon as we thought of it.”

“That’s just an excuse,” she declared. “You could have phoned me and I’d have come right away. I’ll bet I could have managed those policemen!”

“But they didn’t need any managing! All we had to do was to show ’em the picture.”

Hamish, who had been lounging on the porch rail, gazing gloomily into space, sighed heavily. “Well,” he said, “I guess me and Hattie May might as well go back home. We don’t seem to be much use round here.”

“Nonsense, Hamish,” I said. “You ought to be rejoicing that Michael doesn’t have to go to court, instead of grouching around.”

“Of course I’m glad he got off,” Hamish returned with dignity. “But, considerin’ everything, I don’t think you ought to have taken an important step like that without consulting me.”

I began to feel annoyed. “Well,” I sputtered, “you weren’t so awfully anxious to help Michael the night he was arrested. Why didn’t you talk then?”

Hamish looked more grieved than he had before. “Girls don’t understand ’bout such things,” he said. “If I’d popped out of those bushes when they were taking Michael away, they’d simply have taken me along too and asked questions later!”

“Well, don’t let’s argue,” Eve said soothingly. “Michael’s free—that’s the main thing!”

Hamish did not answer. He drew a small square package from his pocket and eyed it sardonically. “Just money thrown away!” he muttered.

“What’s that?” Eve asked dimpling. “A present for me!”

“No it isn’t. It’s a little contraption I picked up for Michael—thought it would

help him while away the long hours of his—er—incarceration!”

“Hamish Lewis,” I cried, “how can you talk in that cold-blooded, outrageous, unfeeling, mean manner?”

“Well you don’t need to get excited, he isn’t going, is he? But the way things were day before yesterday, it certainly looked as if he was.”

“What is it?” Eve broke in. “Do show me.”

Hamish opened the package and shook out onto his palm several small brass rings looped together. “It’s a puzzle,” he explained. “The thing is to get all the rings onto this big one.”

“Very appropriate for a man in jail!” Hattie May giggled.

Hamish glared at her and returned the puzzle to its box. “No one,” he said, “ever appreciates anything I try to do!”

“Oh, come, Hamish, do cheer up,” Eve urged. “I’m sure there are loads of people who would just eat that puzzle up, so to speak. Folks with spare time on their hands like—” her glance strayed to the house beyond the hedge—“like Captain Trout for instance.”

Hamish brightened visibly. “Do you really think he’d like it?” he said. “But I scarcely know the old bird! Wouldn’t he think it kind of funny if I went over and just said, ‘By the way here’s a present for you’?”

We all laughed. “What about the hair tonic?” I asked. “You were going to give him that.”

Hamish scowled. “That was different,” he said shortly, “entirely a different matter!”

“I tell you,” Eve said jumping up. “Let’s all go over and make him a call. We ought to tell him about Michael’s case being dismissed; perhaps he hasn’t heard. Then Hamish can show him the puzzle and if he warms to it——”

Hattie May was still pouting as we made our way around by the front gate to the Captain’s back door. To my surprise the door was closed, though the cloud of smoke which was issuing from the chimney seemed to indicate that the Captain was at home and doing some cooking.

Hamish was just about to knock when Eve caught his arm. “Listen!” she whispered.

From behind the door came the sound of voices. One of them, slightly nasal, I recognized as the Captain’s. The other was low-pitched and gruff. “He’s got company,” I whispered. “Maybe we’d better not bother him just now.”

Hamish looked disappointed. And we were still hesitating when the door was flung violently open and the Captain himself burst out. “Hot as blazes in there, Biscuits!” he sputtered. “Need some air——” He stopped short as he became aware of our presence. “Well, well, well, bless my boots!” With that he turned

and closed the door behind him with a slam and advanced to the middle of the porch, where he stood gazing at the street.

But the door had not closed before I had had a fleeting glimpse of a figure bent over the stove—a short thickset figure in a sailor’s trousers and a sleeveless shirt.

“Something smells awfully good,” Eve said by way of relieving the embarrassment which seemed to have seized us all. “We came over to tell you about Michael,” she added. “His case has been dismissed.”

“You don’t say—well, that’s fine!” The Captain motioned us to seats and began fumbling for his pipe. “Glad you dropped in; tell me all about it.”

While we told the story for the second time that morning, I was conscious that the Captain’s eyes strayed every now and then toward the closed door as if he were fearful that it might open. All the time we talked the clatter of pans and the sound of sizzling fat reached us and once I distinctly heard a raucous cough.

It was after a particularly loud crash as if some large tin receptacle had fallen to the floor that the Captain remarked with a nervous chuckle, “Got me a new cook. He thinks he’s in a ship’s galley, I guess! Ha, ha!”

“It must be awfully hot cooking on a day like this,” Hattie May remarked guilelessly. “I should think he’d want the door open.”

The Captain shook his head positively. “Not a bit of it. He likes it hot—used to it. Tropics, you know; the hotter, the better! Why, would you believe it, I actually had to go up attic last night and bring him down a winter blanket? Said he had a chill!”

“Really!” exclaimed Hattie May. “The poor fellow!”

It was at this moment that the Captain’s fear was realized. The door did open but it was only a crack, just enough to let out a strong odor of frying grease borne on a cloud of smoke and, with it, the form of Daisy June, her tail erect and her fur on end.

“Jumpin’ Jericho!” exploded the Captain jumping to his feet. But before he could reach the door, it had slammed again, while the kitten streaked across the grass and disappeared under a bush.

“I’m afraid we’re keeping you from your dinner,” Eve said, rising.

“Not a bit of it,” the Captain assured her. But as if to give denial to his assertion, at that moment a ship’s gong was heard booming loudly from within. Mechanically we all got to our feet. “Aunt Cal’s awfully annoyed with us when we don’t come to dinner on time,” Eve went on conversationally. “I really think you ought to go in, Captain.”

“Well, well, that’s too bad!” The Captain’s polite protestations followed us as we descended the steps and marched, in single file, to the front gate. No one

spoke till we had reached Aunt Cal's side porch. We seated ourselves in a row on the top step. It was Hattie May who broke the silence. "Another mystery!" she exclaimed. "I guess Hamish and I'll stay the week out anyway."

"Fat chance," said Hamish, "of finding out anything with that door kept shut! And the Captain guarding it like a bally old sea dog or sumpin."

"I dare say," I said lightly, "that there's really no mystery at all. Perhaps the Captain simply considered that the seafaring gentleman from the tropics wasn't fit company for what he calls 'young ladies'."

Hattie May shook her head emphatically. "Nonsense! He was jumpy as a rabbit! There's more to it than that."

"It did all seem a little—queer," Eve mused. "What do you think, Hamish?"

Hamish looked appeased at this deference to his opinion. "Well if you want to know what I think," he stated significantly, "I think he's hiding someone!"

"Do you mean—Bangs?" I breathed. And we all stared at Hamish's round solemn face.

"That's what he calls himself!" he answered.

"Hamish, for Pete's sake, what are you driving at?" his sister burst out. "If you've got anything to tell why on earth don't you tell it? You're not in the secret service yet, you know! Stop acting like a 'G' man."

"Oh, all right, all right—make fun of me! Treat me 'sif I was Buddie, the Boy Detective, if you want to!" He got up stiffly and started down the path toward his car.

"Hamish," called Eve softly, "please don't go yet. What are we going to do about this—this criminal next door? I'm scared stiff!"

He turned about and regarded her suspiciously. But the sincerity in her brown eyes apparently reassured him. "Well," he said, coming back and reseating himself, "if you want my advice—I think the place oughta be watched."

"If the man the Captain's hiding really is Bangs," Eve said thoughtfully, "then I think we ought to tell Aunt Cal. She's very anxious to have a talk with him."

"Oh, no, you mustn't do that—not yet!" Hamish returned quickly.

"But why not?" I protested.

"Oh, gosh, don't you see!" Hamish's impatience with the female intellect was apparent. "Don't you see that Bangs—or whatever his name is—is the only person who can lead us to that treasure—or whatever he's after at Craven House? If he's arrested, the game's up."

"Hamish is perfectly right," agreed Hattie May in mounting excitement. "What we've got to do is to watch!"

"But why should the Captain be hiding the man if it is Bangs?" I demanded. "It makes him guilty too in a way—what is it they call it—an accessory!"

“You can depend upon it,” returned Hamish profoundly, “he has his reasons.”

Aunt Cal opened the door. “Dinner’s ready,” she said.

Hattie May and Hamish got up. “Keep your eye on the place as much as you can,” Hamish said in a whisper. “I’ll be round as soon as it gets dark.”

“You mean you’re going to watch the house all night?” Eve asked.

“Sure. But don’t say anything to your aunt yet. Not until tomorrow anyway. Promise?”

“We-ll, all right,” Eve agreed reluctantly. “We promise.”

XXII

The Escape

I HAD looked forward to a swim that afternoon but Hamish's request that we keep an eye on the house next door forced us reluctantly to abandon the plan. Hamish might be a bit theatrical at times but there was no denying the fact that the Captain had a strange visitor and that, for whatever reason, he had appeared most unwilling to make us acquainted with the gentleman. So there did seem some sense in the idea that we keep our eyes peeled for what went on in our neighbor's domain.

But as the long afternoon wore away, it seemed evident that nothing at all was going on. The smoke had long since died away from the chimney and, though the back door still remained fast closed, there was no sign of activity within.

I had been, I will confess, a little surprised that Eve had given Hamish her promise to say nothing to Aunt Cal about the mysterious guest next door. For Eve, though she could never be called in the least goody goody, has nevertheless rather strict ideas about honor and all that. She knew that the police were searching for Bangs and yet she was keeping silent.

"Eve," I said at last. She had given up the pretense of sewing and was lying in the fragrant shadow of the syringa bush, her eyes on the drifting foamy clouds. "Eve, why did you agree not to tell Aunt Cal?"

"Why," she frowned a little, "I only agreed to keep it dark till tomorrow."

"But why did you agree at all?" I insisted. "It wasn't because of that buried treasure stuff—because he might lead us to that?"

"No, it wasn't that."

"Then what was it?" I demanded caught by something evasive in her tone. "What was the reason?"

"Oh, well, I suppose I might as well tell you! You heard what Hamish said, didn't you, about Bangs—that his real name might be something else?"

"Of course, but what of it? Suppose his name is Jones or Brown, what's that got to do with it?"

“Hasn’t it ever occurred to you, Sandy,” she said slowly, “that it’s rather strange that this man has the key to Craven House and—well, that he knows his way about inside it so well that he was able to hide from the police the night they searched for him? Doesn’t that strike you as rather peculiar?”

“Eve, what are you driving at?” I cried.

“Well, suppose—just suppose—that Bangs, instead of being someone who could give Aunt Cal news of Carter Craven, suppose he was—was Carter himself!”

“Carter Craven! Oh, Eve, it couldn’t be! Why, he’s supposed to be dead, isn’t he? And—oh, besides—why this man is just a little sawed-off, bald headed rascal!”

“Well, you’ve got to remember that Carter was nothing more than a good-for-nothing—Aunt Cal practically said so.”

“He might be a good-for-nothing,” I retorted, “but that doesn’t make him a common thief. Besides,” I added firmly, “I don’t believe Aunt Cal could ever have been fond of a man with bowlegs!”

“What have his legs got to do with it, I’d like to know?”

“Well you know what I mean—he just isn’t the type to be Carter Craven!” And yet as I uttered the words a horrible doubt had begun to assail me. Suppose Eve was right, suppose this skulking vendor of fake hair lotions should turn out to be the long missing son of Craven House, well where did that put us? So far as we were concerned, of course, it didn’t really matter except that it made everything seem rather sordid. But Aunt Cal, how would she feel to find her own cousin facing a charge for petty thievery? Was that why Eve had promised to keep still?

“You want him to escape then?” I demanded. “On account of Aunt Cal?”

“Well wouldn’t it be the best thing that could happen?” she returned. “It isn’t of course as if they hadn’t recovered the car.”

“But the treasure—that letter—those measurements? If he goes—we’ll never know.”

She shrugged. “What does that matter compared with Aunt Cal’s pride? As things are she can think of Carter as having died peacefully in some foreign country. Of course there’s the little matter of the will—still nothing ever has been proved. Whereas this crime of stealing—everyone would know if Carter was charged with that!”

I sighed. I felt terribly disillusioned. “I don’t believe he is Carter!” I repeated stubbornly. “Carter was an adventurer—wild, restless, perhaps—but big in his way like the old Captain, his father.”

“In short a kind of romantic, story book hero!” retorted Eve cruelly, “wavy

raven locks and fiery piercing eye and all that!”

“And straight legs!” I added. “Well, we’ll wait and see!”

After supper Miss Rose Blossom appeared to discuss Civic Betterment plans with Aunt Cal and the two were closeted in the front parlor for the rest of the evening. Things could not have turned out better for us. Just as dusk was beginning to fall we heard a low whistle from the bushes by the front fence and going out, found Hamish crouched behind them. “Where is she?” he whispered.

“In the parlor with the windows shut so you don’t need to whisper,” I said. “And by the way, if it’s not too much to ask, I’d like to know what you expect to do in case this—this creature next door does try to escape?”

“I’ll follow him of course,” he said still speaking in a guarded undertone as if he imagined there was some hidden listener behind the next bush. “If he’s who I think he won’t be leaving these parts till he’s got hold of what he’s after!”

“You mean you’d follow him if he went out to Craven House tonight?” I demanded. “Does Hattie May know?”

“Never mind Hattie May,” he retorted shortly. “I’ve got to see this thing through and I’m not going to have any interference from girls, d’you hear?”

Eve giggled. “Well do try to keep away from wells and things, won’t you? And I do hope you won’t catch your death of cold out here in the damp yard.”

“I’ve got my raincoat,” he said. “Now all you’ve got to do is to scam—see—and keep your mouths shut!”

“Absolutely,” Eve said. “Good luck—see you in the morning!”

It did seem funny going to bed with Hamish hiding out there in the bushes. Would he really stick it out, I wondered? Sometimes there seemed more to Hamish than appeared on the surface. Eve poked back the curtains after she had blown out the light. “See anything of him?” I asked.

“Not even a shadow! Wonder what Aunt Cal would think if she knew that the house was guarded!”

Darkness and quiet descended then. Soon Eve’s even breathing told me that she was asleep. For awhile I lay wondering some more about Captain Trout’s visitor, coming finally to the common-sense view that he was just what the Captain himself had stated—a ship’s cook, perhaps temporarily out of a job. Having reached this conclusion, I fell comfortably asleep.

The next thing I was conscious of was a footstep in the hall outside the bedroom door. My first startled thought was of the cook. Then I heard the steps descending the stairs, soft but firm. Aunt Cal, of course. But the dark square of the window told me that it couldn’t be morning yet—why was she going downstairs in the middle of the night? What prompted her?

I was wide awake at once. What had happened? Had I missed something? I

slipped out of bed and to the open bedroom door. The reflection of a light was on the wall, coming from the hall below. I stole to the top of the stairs. I could hear the key turning in the front door—something very special must be up, I thought. I couldn't just stand there and listen, I'd got to know.

I flew back to the bedroom, got into my dressing gown and slippers. Eve had not stirred. A minute later I was following Aunt Cal out onto the narrow front stoop. She had set the lamp down on the little stand in the hall and the light from it streamed out. She turned and saw me as I started down the steps. "What is the matter?" I whispered.

Instead of the rebuke I had looked for, she said indignantly, "There's a tramp asleep behind the hedge! I don't know what this town is coming to!"

"B-but how do you know?" I stammered. "I mean maybe you just imagined it—the shadows, you know—and—and all——"

"Sandra, you'd better go back to bed," she returned severely. "I do not require any advice or assistance."

"No, of course not," I returned hastily. "I just meant that things are deceptive at night. And even if it is a tramp," I went on desperately, "wouldn't it be better to wait till morning? At least it would be safer."

She was not listening to me. She had now advanced firmly halfway across the little front yard toward the hedge. "Why on earth couldn't Hamish have stayed out of sight?" I thought, "and what had moved my aunt to look out of the window in the middle of the night anyway!"

Aunt Cal reached the hedge and peered over it. "Come out of there," she ordered loudly, "or I shall have you arrested for trespassing."

There was no answer. She advanced along the hedge, she was approaching the clump of bushes where we had last seen Hamish. I held my breath. If only I could do something to prevent the revelation that was impending! I wished Eve were there, she might have had an inspiration.

Aunt Cal had reached the bushes. She had picked up a stick and now began poking at them fiercely. "Come out of there!" she repeated. "Or I shall call the police!"

All of a sudden my eyes, which had been vainly trying to pierce the shadows, were attracted upward. In the house beyond the hedge a light had winked on. It was in the little upper window facing our way. Aunt Cal saw it too for she paused momentarily in her poking.

And while our attention was thus distracted, a figure hurtled from between the bushes and the hedge and plunged headlong through the latter and on across Captain Trout's back yard, a rubber coat flapping about its ankles as it ran. "There! What'd I tell you!" Aunt Cal exclaimed. "The miserable loafer!"

We watched the figure disappear into the darkness. “Tomorrow,” said my aunt, “I shall make a complaint. Come, you must go back to bed at once, you’ll catch your death on this wet grass.”

“Yes, Aunt Cal,” I said meekly, and followed her back into the house. And without further ado I presently found myself back in my own room again with the door, by special admonition of Aunt Cal, locked on the inside.

But the light in Captain Trout’s upstairs window still winked across the grass and now and then, I could see it blink as if a figure stepped between it and the window. Perhaps the cook had had another chill, I thought with an inward chuckle, and had demanded still more blankets! Well anyway Hamish had got safely away. Then, suddenly as it had come, the light winked out.

“What’re you looking at?” Eve stirred sleepily.

“Nothing,” I began and stopped. Someone was coming out of the house next door—a short figure in white duck trousers, dark coat and visored cap. The Captain? Where on earth could he be going at this ungodly hour?

Eve was beside me, I could hear her catch her breath. “It’s him!” she said.

“You mean the Captain?” I asked, puzzled at her intensity.

“Of course not. Can’t you see the way he walks and—and his legs!”

“You mean it’s the cook all toggged up like that?”

“Disguised of course. We might have expected something like this. I suppose Hamish is asleep by now.”

“No,” I said, “I don’t think so. The last I saw him he was hoofing it across Captain Trout’s back yard in the general direction of the sea.” And I told her what had happened.

“Why on earth didn’t you wake me?” she said when I had finished. “To think I should have missed it all! Do you think Aunt Cal suspects anything?”

“I don’t think so. Where d’you suppose he’s going, Eve—the cook, I mean?”

“Back to sea, very likely.”

“Then that’ll be the end—of everything. And we’ll never know who he was or what he wanted!”

Eve yawned. “Well that’s apt to be the way things peter out in real life, you know,” she said. “The villains just walk out of the picture.”

“And the noble man hunter takes to his heels!” I sighed.

XXIII

A Belated Visit

HATTIE MAY came over early next morning. She was in a frightful temper and declared she was going to take the next train back to Mason's Cove and leave Hamish to his fate.

"What's he done now?" I inquired. "No more run-ins with the police, I hope?"

"So far as I'm concerned," she stated, "he could languish in a foul dungeon before I would lift a finger to extrapate him!"

"Extricate, I expect you mean," I said. "But what has he done?"

She flung herself into Aunt Cal's rocker on the back porch and began to rock violently. "He locked me in my room, that's what he did!"

"Locked you in your room? But whatever for?"

"You'll have to ask him that! It was last night. As soon as I was convinced he actually meant to carry out his crazy plan of watching that house, I told him he shouldn't go one step without me."

"Yes, well? I suppose he didn't take to the notion?"

"My dear, he just shut up like a clam. And all during supper I couldn't get a single solitary civil word out of him. It made me awfully embarrassed, sitting at the table with the other people all chatting away and him acting like that! Never once opening his mouth except to shovel in food."

"Disgusting!" I agreed.

"Well right after supper I went upstairs to get me a heavy sweater because I knew if I'd got to sit up all night out in your yard I'd need it. Well I was rummaging in the closet when I heard the door close very softly and locked from the outside! Can you imagine! The ingrate had followed me upstairs, waited till my back was turned and then turned the key."

"But how did you get out?" I asked, stifling a desire to giggle. "Did the ingrate return?"

"I suppose he must have," she answered indifferently. "The door was unlocked this morning. He didn't appear at breakfast so I suppose he's asleep."

“I know how you must feel, Hattie May,” said Eve sympathetically. “But I suppose Hamish felt that what he had to do was a man’s job——”

“Man’s job!” she interrupted, with a scornful snort.

“Well he felt that girls around would sort of gum things up. He sent us packing in pretty short order.”

“Then he came?” she asked with curiosity. “Did anything happen?”

I told her about Aunt Cal’s interruption of the vigil and then about the departure of the mysterious stranger from the house next door.

“My goodness,” she exclaimed when I had finished. “Then there is something to it. The man’s a crook or he wouldn’t sneak off like that in the dead of night. I certainly am glad Hamish wasn’t there to see him, though. Why he might have been trailing the man yet, he might even have followed him onto a ship and gone to sea!”

“Well, you know persistence is a fine quality,” I remarked.

“Oh, yes, it’s all very well for you to stand up for him but you didn’t spend the night under lock and key. I kept waking up and thinking what I would do if there was a fire, and I thought how Hamish would feel when he gazed at my charred body!”

“Oh, well, there wasn’t any fire and you spent a comfortable night in bed instead of on the damp ground,” Eve said soothingly.

Hattie May seemed to be thinking. “I do think it’s a crime that a man like that should be allowed to escape,” she said at last. “I wonder if Hamish knows about it?”

“Well, since you’re not on speaking terms with him,” I giggled, “I don’t see how you’re going to find out. Besides if you’re leaving on the afternoon train ——”

“Oh, I suppose I’d better stick around,” Hattie May said. “We can’t be sure that the fellow has gone back to sea and—there’s the key!”

But for all Hattie May’s sticking around, no more was seen of Captain Trout’s mysterious visitor. Aunt Cal reported to the local constable that a tramp attempted to pass the night in her yard and the following evening we saw a uniformed figure peering over our hedge just after dusk. But apparently discouraged by his failure to round up anything more criminal than Daisy June chasing fireflies, he soon abandoned the pursuit and retired—we guessed—along with other respectable citizens to the shelter of his own roof.

So much for the tramp! As for Captain Trout—whom Hattie May now dubbed our perfidious neighbor—nothing much was to be got out of him. A guarded reference on Eve’s part to his late guest elicited merely the statement that he, the Captain, couldn’t stomach so much fried food and had sent the fellow packing.

It was one day after dinner, the following week, that Aunt Cal, who had spent the morning baking, said she had made a little spice cake for Mrs. Viner. "I was expecting to take it out to her this afternoon," she remarked, "but Rose has called a meeting of the Civic Betterment to see about those folks burning rubbish in the lot beyond the millpond. Of course the cake will keep——"

"Oh, do let us take it out, Aunt Cal?" I begged. "We'd just love to."

"I don't know about that," she shook her head doubtfully. "After what happened to my dandelion wine——"

"Oh, please don't hold that up against us," Eve pleaded. "You must admit the circumstances that time were unusual. Hamish isn't likely to fall into another well—at least I hope not!"

No one can resist Eve for long. And so in the end, Aunt Cal packed the cake in a basket and entrusted it to our keeping. "Tell Mrs. Viner I'll be out to see her in a few days," she said. "That is, if you see her!" she added dryly.

I took the basket. "Aunt Cal," I said, "this day will vindicate our reputation, you can depend upon it!" I blew a kiss toward her as I opened the door.

"Well, if you take my advice," she sent a parting shot after us, "you won't make any stops on the way."

We decided to walk down the shore road and call for Hattie May. She had been so disappointed at our failure to take her to Millport on Michael's affair that we were anxious not to seem to slight her again. "But I'm not at all sure she'll be good for the invalid," Eve remarked. "She's quite as likely as not to tell her she's looking poorly or start talking about some lovely funeral she went to!"

We found her alone. "I've just finished a letter to Mother," she said, "and I guess Hamish'll be hearing from Dad before long!"

"You don't mean he's still acting strangely?"

"My dear, I scarcely see him at all except at meals and he won't tell me a solitary thing!"

We caught the two o'clock bus from the square and at a little before three were opening the gate of the big stone house which Aunt Cal had described to us. Somewhat to my relief, we found the invalid much improved and sitting out in the sun. She welcomed us cordially and I guessed that she was pleased enough to have some one new to talk to. We chattered on, telling her about school, about Hamish's fall into the well and about our discovery of the statue of Circe at the bottom of it.

"Dear me," she exclaimed, "what a terrible experience for the poor boy. I wonder that he retained his reason, I'm sure I shouldn't have!"

"I'm not a bit sure that he has," Hattie May said feelingly, "at least not all of it. The way he acts!"

We laughed and Mrs. Viner said, "I remember so well when the old Captain—as we used to call him—first set up those statues in his garden. My, what a lot of talk it made!"

"You knew Aunt Cal when she was a girl, I suppose?" I said.

"Oh, dear, yes, we went to school together. At the old district school that was torn down when they put the state road through."

"Did you know my uncle, Tom Poole, too?" I asked.

"Yes. Cal and Tom were married the year before the old Captain died. When she came back from the West, I hoped I would have her for a neighbor but—well, things turned out differently," she added discreetly.

We talked on till suddenly Eve jumped up. "We were cautioned the other time we started to call on you not to stay more than ten minutes," she said, "and not to talk any nonsense. I'm afraid we've broken both rules."

"The idea!" Mrs. Viner laughed. "You mustn't take your Aunt too seriously."

"But we really must go now," I agreed. "You see our reputation is at stake today. Aunt Cal doesn't really trust us out of her sight any more."

"Cal's bark is a lot worse than her bite," Mrs. Viner returned. "And you're to tell her from me that I'm feeling much better for your visit."

A short distance beyond Mrs. Viner's gate, Eve stopped suddenly. "If there was any other way to go home," she said, "I'd be in favor of taking it."

"Well there isn't," I retorted. "And if you find that old house so enticing that you can't even walk by it, it's just too bad! For my part I wouldn't care if I never saw it again."

"Just the same let's—well, let's rest a minute," she said. "Here on the wall."

"Rest? Gracious we've just started!"

Eve sat down. "I just happened to think," she said carelessly, "that it's about time for Michael to come along."

"Huh!" I retorted. "I'll bet you've been planning to wait for him all the afternoon. I think you're a shameless hussy!"

Hattie May giggled. "I don't see why we shouldn't wait for him," she said. "If he has his wagon he'll give us a lift."

"Yes, and if he's on his bicycle, he'll wave his hand and go sailing by. And we'll miss the bus!"

We were still arguing when the faint rattle of a wagon fell on our ears and a moment later, Michael's blue shirt and brown head appeared above the brow of the hill. "Hello," he called as he drew alongside of us, "waiting for some one?"

"Just resting," Eve told him with a twinkle.

"Don't want a lift then?" he grinned.

"Well perhaps we might—what d'you think, girls?"

But Hattie May was already in the front seat and Eve and I climbed into the rear as we had done that first day when we had fairly to beg for a ride.

“Anything new in the mystery line?” Michael inquired with a slap of the reins.

“Well,” said Eve between jolts, “your friend Captain Trout has been harboring a visitor—a kind of cooking recluse, if you know what I mean. But he left in the dead of night arrayed in white trousers and a visored cap.”

Michael did not seem greatly impressed by these revelations. “The Captain knows a lot of seafaring birds,” he said. “Very likely the fellow blew in between sailings.”

“Then you don’t think it was Bangs?” I asked.

“How should I know. But there’s something else you might be interested in—somebody’s been digging up that old garden again.”

XXIV

It Fits!

AT these words my heart sank. “There goes all our good resolutions and promises!” I thought. For of course I knew that we’d never go straight home now!

“Digging up the garden!” cried Eve. “How d’you know?”

“I saw it this morning when I stopped to have a look for my flashlight which I mislaid the night I was—ah—pinched! The door was locked, and I couldn’t get into the house. On my way out I noticed that somebody’d been at work in the garden in a new place.”

“Then that creature hasn’t left the country at all,” Hattie May cried. “It’s just as I suspected, he’s still after the treasure!”

We were approaching the house. “Want to stop and have a look?” Michael inquired teasingly. “Might pick up a clue—collar button or whatnot! Don’t you think?”

“Oh, no, I don’t think we’d better,” I began hurriedly, though I knew as I said it that it was useless.

“Of course we must stop,” Hattie May declared. “Hamish would never forgive me if I neglected a single clue!”

“We-ll,” said Eve doubtfully, “I don’t suppose it would really do any harm just to run in for a minute. So long as we don’t have to catch the bus,” she glanced doubtfully at me.

I shrugged. “Do just as you like,” I said, “but don’t expect me to explain things to Aunt Cal!”

“Leave Aunt Cal to me!” Eve laughed lightly and began to climb down from the wagon. Without enthusiasm I followed her and once more found myself making my way over the wall, across the yard toward the tangled garden. It was getting to be a habit, I reflected. It almost seemed as if some unknown force kept drawing us back to the old house and its secrets.

Michael pointed out the place where a new hole had been dug nearby where

we had discovered the first one, and apparently hastily filled in again. Could it be that Bangs had returned?

“You’d hardly think he’d dare hang around,” Eve said thoughtfully.

“It just shows how badly he wants that treasure,” Hattie May cried. “He’s willing to take any risk.”

“Wish I could think of a way to get my flashlight,” Michael said, glancing toward the house. “I think I’ll just have a try at those cellar windows on a chance,” he added. “Be right back.”

“They’re all nailed fast,” Eve called after him. But he strode on.

We sat down on the edge of the fountain. The statue of Circe still lay where we had left it, reclining in the leaf strewn bowl. Hattie May began poking with a stick in the newly filled hole. Several minutes went by and Michael did not return. “He must have got in after all,” Eve said, glancing a little apprehensively I thought, toward the thick growth of bushes that obscured our view of the rear of the house.

As she spoke our attention was caught by the sound of a car coming up the hill. Automobiles passed that way so seldom that we all jumped up instinctively. To our surprise it appeared to be slowing down in front of the house. Then suddenly I recognized Miss Blossom’s little coupe and saw that lady’s ample bulk at the wheel. A woman beside her was leaning over and peering out.

I groaned as I looked. “Aunt Cal! If that isn’t just our luck!”

Hattie May giggled. “Look, the fat lady is waving!”

“Come on,” Eve started for the wall. “I’ll explain everything satisfactorily to Aunt Cal.”

We climbed back over the wall. Miss Blossom beamed upon us. “We’re out joy riding,” she explained. “I told Cal she needed a little relaxation from her responsibilities. We’ve been doing forty miles an hour before we struck the hill!”

“We thought,” Aunt Cal remarked pointedly, “that we might meet you coming home!”

“Oh,” I said confusedly, “we are—I mean we’re going on directly—we’re just waiting for Michael.”

But Aunt Cal did not seem to be listening to my halting excuses. Instead, I saw that her eyes—and her thoughts with them, I guessed—had strayed beyond me toward the house dreaming there in the soft sunset light.

“My, how sweet it smells!” exclaimed Miss Blossom. “I wonder if those tea roses are still blooming? Do you remember them, Cal? They were the sweetest ones I ever knew! What d’you say we take a peek around?”

Aunt Cal seemed to come back with a start. “Get out if you wish, Rose,” she said. “I hardly think I care to do so.”

“Oh, come on,” Miss Blossom urged. “Stretch your legs a little.” She began, as she spoke, lowering her massive bulk onto the running board. We gave her a hand over the wall, though she was surprisingly agile for one of her size. The tall grass fell away before her as at the advance of a steam roller. “My,” she exclaimed, “what a jungle!” She turned again, “Come on, Cal,” she urged.

Aunt Cal seemed to hesitate. And then I saw that she, too, was getting out of the car. We came, all five of us, back to the garden. Michael was still absent. Miss Blossom sank panting on the edge of the fountain. “My land! It’s just a crime to let a place run down like this!” she commented. “Member the time we went wading in this fountain, Cal?”

But Aunt Cal, if she remembered, did not say so. She was standing erect, gazing about her. And it was not so much sorrow at the sight of the neglect and decay that I read in her face as regret for something that is past and gone forever.

Suddenly Michael came advancing toward us. “Hullo, there,” Miss Blossom called. “Is the house unlocked? Could we go inside?”

To my amazement Michael nodded. “Yes,” he said, “it’s unlocked.”

“But I thought you said,” Eve began and then stopped.

“Good!” said Miss Blossom. “Then we can take a look around.”

“Oh, no, Rose!” Aunt Cal spoke up sharply. “Not inside!”

“But why not?” returned the other matter-of-factly. “If the agent’s so careless as to leave the place unlocked, he couldn’t object to our going in. I’d just love to see how the old place looks—I hear it’s just about as Carter left it.”

“It isn’t much to see,” Michael remarked. “Just a musty old place.”

“Michael Gilpatrick,” Miss Blossom demanded accusingly, “is there some reason why you don’t want us to go in. Out with it—what mischief have you been up to?”

Michael’s brown face reddened at the memory of last Saturday night. “I only went after my flashlight,” he said a trifle lamely. “I left it somewhere around _____”

Miss Blossom jumped up spryly. “Well, anyway, I’m going in,” she declared. “Come on, Cal, don’t be sentimental!”

I got up too. I found myself suddenly sharing Miss Blossom’s curiosity. Eve and Hattie May followed us and, as we reached the door, I saw Aunt Cal and Michael reluctantly bringing up the rear. Aunt Cal wore a strange expression as if some inner force were compelling her against her will.

Miss Blossom pushed open the door and advanced into the kitchen. “My,” she snorted, “what a stuffy place! What this house needs is a good airing and”—she glanced sharply around—“a good scrubbing with strong soap and plenty of elbow grease. Look at that range, Cal!”

But Aunt Cal did not look at the range. She was staring ahead at the open door and at the wide hall beyond it. It was as if she expected to see someone advancing out of the shadows.

Then Hattie May's high-pitched voice broke in. "Listen," she said, "what's that noise!"

"I don't hear anything," I said. "And I guess you don't either, it's just your imagination."

"But I did, I tell you. There! There it is again!"

For an instant we all stood listening. And sure enough, there was something, a gentle tapping noise coming from far down the hall. "My land, the place is haunted!" Miss Blossom giggled nervously. "Oh, girls, I'm scared!"

Eve looked at Michael. "Do you know what it is?" she demanded.

He shook his head. "No, but I think it's time I found out!" He walked toward the open hall door as he spoke.

To my amazement, Aunt Cal hurried after him. She was just behind him as he put out his hand for the handle of the parlor door. "Be careful, Cal!" Miss Blossom called in a whisper. "I wouldn't——"

Aunt Cal paid no heed. And as Michael opened the door she advanced with him across the threshold. From where we stood in the middle of the hall we heard a startled exclamation. Then suddenly, like a breath of fresh air, came Michael's clear ringing voice breaking from surprise into laughter. "Hamish! What on earth——?"

We all crowded forward. In the middle of the shuttered parlor stood Hamish, looking very much like a small boy caught stealing jam. His face was flushed, his shirt ruffled and I noticed a filigree of cobweb clinging to his hair. "Just a little private investigating I been doin'," he offered the explanation sullenly as we all clustered wonderingly about him. "But of course," he added petulantly, "I can't get anywhere with a lot of folks bustin' in on me!"

"Hamish Lewis, what are you doing in this house?" Hattie May demanded shrilly. "Look at your shirt and that tear in your trousers!"

Hamish regarded his sister coldly. "All a girl thinks about is clothes," he muttered.

I was scarcely listening to this interchange. Ever since I had entered the room I had been conscious of something which had not been there before. This was a curious odor, a heavy, sweet aromatic smell. A smell which reminded me of the East and vaguely, too, of something else, that awakened a hazy memory.

"Mercy, what smells so funny!" Miss Blossom was sniffing the air.

"Guess you mean that jar that got spilled." Hamish, still with a highly injured air, pointed to where a small bronze jar lay overturned in front of the fireplace. "I

moved that cabinet a little,” he added, “and that jar fell out and spilled. It had that funny smelling stuff inside.”

Aunt Cal went over to where the jar lay and, stooping, began gathering up the scattering of dried brown particles and stuffing them back. “It’s the jar of myrrh,” she murmured, “that Uncle Judd brought back from Arabia.”

It was then that I suddenly found myself saying a thing for which I was totally unable to account. The words seemed to come out of themselves, almost as if another person had spoken them. “The cabinet,” I said, “doesn’t belong there anyway.” And I added inconsequentially, “It’s right in the way of the cupboard.”

“Cupboard?” Eve looked at me strangely. And Hattie May said, “I don’t see any cupboard. What on earth are you talking about?”

“The cupboard there by the fireplace,” I insisted.

“Sandy,” said Eve anxiously, “what’s the matter with you? There isn’t any cupboard. You can see that.”

“Yes there is,” I returned positively. “It’s where they kept the china duck.”

Of course they were all staring at me now as if they thought I had become light-headed. “It’s very close in here,” I heard Miss Blossom murmur. “Don’t any of these windows open?” And Eve asked, “Do you feel all right, Sandy?”

Then Aunt Cal said a surprising thing. “I do seem to recall a cupboard there at the right of the fireplace,” she said slowly. “I had forgotten it entirely,” she looked at me oddly. “I can’t think how you knew,” she added.

Hamish, saying nothing, now walked over to the fireplace and began feeling along the pink rosebud wallpaper which edged it. Suddenly he began to tear at it. “Sufferin’ sunfish! I b’lieve you’re right, Sandy! I believe there is a cupboard there—see, there’s the edge of the door! And me lookin’ in the chimney!”

“Looking for what?” Eve demanded. But Hamish did not answer her. He was too busy tearing away strip after strip of the rosebuds. We all gathered around to watch. Nobody seemed to care at all that the wallpaper was being ruined.

As for me, my heart was beating strangely as the outline of the cupboard came into view. Inch by inch it was revealed. But how had I known?

At last the paper was all off and we were gazing at a good sized door set in the wall about four feet above the floor. There was no handle or knob, that had evidently been removed when the paper was put on. Hamish took out his knife and thrust it into the keyhole. “Locked,” he announced.

“Well don’t that just beat all!” Miss Blossom cried. “How long do you calculate it’s been covered up, Cal?”

Aunt Cal shook her head. “It must have been done after Uncle Judd died,” she said. “I remember hearing that Carter had some of the rooms papered before he went away.”

Miss Blossom nodded. "Like as not the paper hanger did it himself without consulting anybody. If it was that Jed Button from Millport I wouldn't put it past him! I remember the time he did ma's room——"

But no one seemed to be listening to Miss Blossom. We were all intent on watching Michael as he tinkered with the lock. "Guess it's no use botherin' with it," Hamish remarked. "I guess it's getting pretty late." He took out his watch.

Michael looked at him suspiciously and went on tinkering. Then suddenly Eve gave a gasp. "Why," she cried, "the key! Where's the key? The one we found in the tobacco tin?"

"Why of course," almost screamed Hattie May. "Why didn't we think of it before? Hamish, you're the one who took it! Where is it?" Then accusingly, "You've been keeping it back on purpose, you wanted to wait till we were gone!"

To this accusation Hamish's only answer was a shrug and a sigh as he plunged his hand into his trousers' pocket and drew out the key. With a grin Michael took it and thrust it into the keyhole. There was a click and Hattie May gave another scream. "It fits!" she cried. "It fits!"

But the lock was rusty and the key refused to turn. "Needs oiling," Michael remarked.

"There's an oil can in my car," Miss Blossom suggested. "We've just got to get this cupboard open before we go! Like as not we'll find the family skeleton in it or something!" she added with a laughing glance toward Aunt Cal. Aunt Cal did not say a word.

XXV

Gopher

I DON'T know what I expected when I heard that key turn in the lock and knew that Hamish had at last succeeded in opening the door of the hidden cupboard. I felt as I had ever since entering the room, breathless and strangely excited. Of course Miss Rose's remark about the family skeleton had been just a joke. I did not expect to hear the rattle of bones as the door swung outward and see a cadaverous figure tumble onto the floor. But still I did expect something.

The door squeaked protestingly on its hinges as Hamish pulled it wide. The room was utterly silent as we all gazed blankly on three wide vacant shelves. Empty!

The silence was broken by a scream. It was Hattie May again. "Look!" she cried. "It's m-moving—the bottom—look!"

She was right. Slowly before our fascinated eyes, the board which formed the base of the cupboard was lifting like the lid of a box. Slowly from under it there was emerging—not a bony grinning skull—but a face of flesh and blood. A head, nearly bald and a lined, leathery face in which little beady eyes gleamed with mingled astonishment and fury.

Hamish seemed to be the only one of us sufficiently in possession of his senses to speak. "Well," he said triumphantly, "got you at last, didn't I—you double-crossin' rat!"

Then came Aunt Cal's voice. "Gopher!" she cried, her tone odd and uncontrolled.

The man did not answer. He was engaged in raising himself stiffly out of the hole. He was dressed in sailor trousers and a sleeveless shirt. As the bottom of the cupboard fell back into place he turned and glared at Hamish. "So you're the guy that's been playin' them smart tricks!" he snarled.

"If you mean locking you in the cellar," Hamish returned, "I figured you'd be some annoyed. But the next time you peddle fake hair tonic——"

"It's a good tonic," snapped the little man. "I made it myself in Brazil from a

native receipt.”

“Yeah, but you had to get yourself a supply of wigs to make folks fall for it!”

This exchange of repartee was interrupted by Michael. “Look here,” he demanded, “what are you hiding in this house for? What are you after?”

The man turned on him sourly. “What business is that of yours?”

“It’s my business!” Aunt Cal’s voice had regained its customary authority. She had dropped onto one of the straight horsehair covered chairs and was regarding the man with a strange tense look. “Where,” she demanded, “is Carter Craven?”

Mr. Bangs—for of course it was he—seemed to notice her for the first time. And there was recognition in his glance as he answered more respectfully than he had yet spoken.

“Craven’s gone. Died in the Argentine last winter.”

There was a moment’s silence and then Aunt Cal asked tremulously, “You were with him when he died?”

The other nodded. “And that reminds me,” he said, “he sent you a message, said I was to come back and give it to you myself. Or if you wasn’t here to get your address and mail it to you.” He began feeling in the pocket of his trousers, presently bringing out a dog-eared bill folder from which he extracted a dirty envelope.

“And why have you not given me this before?” Aunt Cal inquired as she took the letter from the man’s hand.

He shrugged. “All in good time. I says to myself I’ll just take a look round first and get the lay of the land like.”

Hamish eyed him fiercely. “So you opened the letter,” he accused “and took out the part you thought interesting—the sheet that had those measurements on it!”

Mr. Bangs shook his head. “Naw, Mr. Detective, you got me wrong. I never opened the letter. I found that there paper—since you’re so interested—with Carter Craven’s things after he died.”

“And that’s where you got the key to the house too, I suppose,” Michael put in.

“Right, Buddy.”

“Anyway,” Hamish persisted, “you thought you were going to dig up a neat little fortune out there in the garden, didn’t you? Well, you jolly well got fooled!” He turned to the cupboard and drew out the key. “If you’d dug in the right place—which you didn’t ’cause you were too stupid—that was all you’d have found.”

Mechanically the man’s clawlike fingers reached out and took the key. His glance strayed from it to Michael’s honest gray eyes. “Say,” he asked

wonderingly, “is this on the level?”

“That’s right,” Michael told him. “That’s all we found.”

“I suppose,” Hattie May spoke up pertly, “you expected to dig up the blue emerald didn’t you?”

“What’s that?” He turned and looked at her. “No, sister,” he said slowly, “I had all I wanted of the Blue Emerald!”

“What, you found it? You——”

The man nodded grimly. “Yeah, sister, we found the Blue Emerald—me and Carter together. It was there just where the map said.”

“What map?” demanded Hamish.

Mr. Bangs shrugged. “Say, what is this?” he demanded truculently. “A third degree or sunthin’?”

Aunt Cal, still clutching the unopened envelope close to her side, spoke again unexpectedly. “The Blue Emerald was the gold mine I suppose, the one Carter went to find after his father died?”

Mr. Bangs nodded. “Yeah, he found the map among the old man’s papers. He put all he had or could borrow into her but”—he shrugged again—“he might as well have thrown the money over the ship’s rail and it would have saved us both a good sight of sufferin’.”

“A mine!” Hattie May said wonderingly. “The Blue Emerald was the name of a gold mine! But—then—what *were* you after? Why were you digging up the garden?”

For a minute it seemed as if he were not going to answer. But Eve spoke up quietly, “You were measuring the ground the very first day we came here.”

“Well what if I was?” he snapped. “I figured a man don’t set down measurements on paper unless they mean somethin’.”

“Carter’s mind was always running on buried treasure,” Miss Blossom, seated comfortably on the old sofa behind him, put in. “It was kind of an obsession as you might say. I calculate he buried that key hoping to fool somebody the way he’d been fooled so often.”

“But that doesn’t explain about the cupboard,” I cried. “If it was just a—a joke, why did he have the cupboard covered up?”

Mr. Bangs honored me with a glance. Then turning to the spot from which he had so recently emerged, he lifted up the false bottom again and began fumbling about below. At last he drew out a long dusty brown envelope, tied with red cord. “Reckon that’s the answer,” he said tossing it across to Aunt Cal. “Guess Carter didn’t want that will to be found till he was good and ready. He figured on comin’ back a rich man!” He laughed hoarsely.

“If that wasn’t just like him!” Miss Blossom exclaimed. “I always said he

never destroyed that will!”

Aunt Cal was untying the envelope with unsteady fingers. Inside was a sealed one. “Yes,” she said, “it is Uncle Judd’s will!”

“And Craven House is yours at last,” Miss Blossom gave a vast sigh of satisfaction. “I always knew you’d get it some day but I was afraid it might come too late for you to enjoy it. Dear me, if these children hadn’t found that key and all——”

Hattie May, too excited to remember her manners, burst in here. “But I don’t understand yet! I mean how Mr. Bangs—or whatever his name is—how he happened to come popping out just at the moment Hamish opened the door? Why, it was exactly like a jack-in-the-box!”

This characterization of his appearance in our midst seemed to tickle Mr. Bangs for he grinned for the first time. “Yeah,” he agreed, “reckon it did give you kind of a surprise. I’d been a-poundin’ on that trap door for quite a spell after this smart detective guy locked the cellar door on me.”

“Hamish dotes on locking doors on people,” his sister remarked. “It’s one of his pet tricks!”

“The cupboard must open into that underground passage that Uncle Judd had walled up years ago,” Aunt Cal remarked thoughtfully.

The man nodded. “Yeah, I remembered hearin’ talk of it. I poked around and found the entrance to it under the cellar stairs, and this here ladder between the floors. But it was dark as a ship’s hold down there and I couldn’t get the trap door open. Then you opened the cupboard and let in some light through the crack and I see where she was hooked down. I reckoned I could manage this smart guy here without much trouble—I didn’t figure on runnin’ into a whole tea party!” he finished with a cackle.

“I suppose that was the passage you were hiding in the night the cops searched the house for you?” Michael remarked.

The man shot him a sardonic glance but did not answer.

Aunt Cal got up. “I really think, Rose,” she said, “we should be starting for home. It’s growing dark and we’ve had quite enough excitement for one day.” She turned to the sailor and fixed him with a stern glance. “I sincerely trust, Gopher,” she said, “that you will not leave the neighborhood until I’ve had a further talk with you. I—I naturally wish to hear more details of my cousin’s last days.”

The man did not answer for a moment. But there was an insistence in Aunt Cal’s tone that was not to be disregarded. Perhaps he thought that, since the game was up in any case, his best chance lay in compliance. “Okay,” he said with another lift of his bony shoulders. “I’ll hang round for a spell.”

As Miss Blossom's little car rolled away down the hill, no one spoke for a time. Eve and I were in the rear seat. Hattie May had gone with Hamish in his car. It was with some difficulty that we had succeeded in prying the latter loose from the man whom he considered his lawful prisoner. What was the use, he insisted, of pulling off a capture if you had to turn the fellow loose again?

But Aunt Cal's wishes of course had prevailed and Hamish, still grumbling, had been obliged to depart and leave the villain, as he dubbed him, to his own devices.

As we turned into the main highway at The Corners, Miss Rose settled back. "Well, it does beat all," she said, "the mysterious ways Providence does work. To think of that rascal Carter sealing up that old cupboard with the will in it and going off to the ends of the earth!"

"No, Rose, not a rascal," Aunt Cal returned, "you mustn't think of him like that. It was just a—a kind of prank. He never meant to keep the house from me for long, he says so in this note. You see I—I was away out West at the time he left. I think it was just as Gopher said, he wanted to come back a rich man——"

"And make you sorry you'd married Tom Poole instead of him," put in Miss Rose calmly. "That was just like him, always believing that money was all that counted even in a love affair."

"He says," said Aunt Cal softly, "that he hopes I will forgive him everything. I believe he realized—at the end—the mistakes he'd made."

Miss Rose nodded. "Yes, Carter wasn't a bad fellow at heart," she said.

"And Mr. Bangs?" Eve asked hesitantly, "you knew him before, Aunt Cal?"

"Oh, yes. His real name is Gopher—Harry Gopher. He shipped as cook with Uncle Judd for years and used often to be around town between voyages. Uncle always said he was a rascal but he had a fondness for him too. I shall have to see what can be done for him."

XXVI

The Unveiling

A MONTH had gone by. August was already drifting into September. School loomed ahead but we hardly gave it a thought. Each day as it came along was too absorbing, for Eve and I agreed that the business of making an old house come to life again was about the most thrilling experience in the world.

Yes, Aunt Cal had really moved into Craven House. After much deliberation and lengthy conferences with her lawyer, she had at last yielded to the combined persuasion of Miss Blossom, Mrs. Viner, Eve and myself and decided to give up the little cottage in Fishers Haven and make the old place she had loved as a child her permanent home. So the first of August had seen us established. Painters, plumbers and paper hangers had overrun the place. Miss Blossom had closed her own house in the village for the time being in order to help get things going. And from the day when she and Aunt Cal had gone to work with broom and scrub brush, all the latter's doubts and misgivings seemed magically to disappear. It was as if, with the vanquishing of dust and cobwebs, something equally oppressive had vanished from Aunt Cal's mind. Her figure seemed actually to grow more erect and her eyes to grow brighter.

Today we were waiting for Michael to come. He'd formed the habit of stopping on his way down from the farm. Sometimes it was his advice Aunt Cal wanted about grading the lawn or the laying out of paths or flowerbeds. Sometimes he was needed to bolster up the flagging energies of our man of all work. For Gopher, though freed of the charge hanging over him through the intervention of Mr. Templeton and Captain Trout, did not take kindly to the job with which Aunt Cal had provided him. "Tillin' the soil" he stated was out of his line as, I strongly suspected, was labor of any sort. But with Aunt Cal's sharp eyes never long withdrawn and the knowledge that but for her he would now be sojourning in a far less pleasant place, he kept grimly at it. I used to feel sorry for him sometimes as I saw him stop to wipe his seamed, weatherbeaten face and gaze sadly down the road. And some fine morning, I felt sure, when the wind

blew from the sea, Aunt Cal would come out to give directions for the day's work and he just wouldn't be there.

"Well, here's your letter at last!" Eve came up the newly graveled path. She'd been to town with Miss Rose to do some errands and get the mail. My heart gave the little leap that it always does at the sight of the thin paper envelope, bearing the Chinese stamp. Aunt Cal came out to listen as I read it aloud:

"My dear daughter:

Your account of your adventures at Craven House gave us quite as much of a thrill as they must have given you. I am immensely pleased that Calliope has decided to move into the old place. I remember it well. Your mother and I stopped there with you when you were three years old, and your curious recollection of the cupboard by the fireplace undoubtedly dates from that visit.

Your mother had come down for a last visit with your grandmother Poole before we sailed for the East. It was just after your Aunt Cal had married and gone West to live. We stopped for a call on Captain Judd Craven, a fine old man of the best seafaring traditions. We were grieved to get the news of his death the following year.

I recall the big front parlor and the jar of some sort of incense on the cabinet. Very likely you got a good whiff of it, one that your sensitive nerves of smell have never forgotten. The associative power of odors is well known, and so the cupboard and particularly the china duck which you say it contained became associated in your mind with the strange new smell. Thus when you smelled it again, even after the lapse of thirteen years, the particular brain cells into which the memory had been packed away released the recollection. I have heard of many similar instances, but few which have led to so dramatic a development as in your case."

"Well, well, that does beat all!" exclaimed Aunt Cal. "And to think of your being only three at the time!"

"I think it's perfectly weird!" said Eve.

"Not weird at all," I said. "Just perfectly normal and scientific as Dad explains. And I must say I'm glad to have it established that I'm not subject to trances or—what was it—cataleptic fits as Hamish so darkly hinted!"

"There's Michael, and in a clean shirt too, if my eyes do not deceive me! Let's go tell him about it, he'll be frightfully interested."

Hurriedly skimming through the rest of my letter—leaving the real reading of it till bedtime—I followed Eve across the yard. Aunt Cal went inside again to superintend the cutting of the cake, leaving the big front door wide open as it stood most of the time nowadays. This was against all the conventions of Old Beecham, but Aunt Cal was too busy just now to give much thought to the conventions.

Today we had been working from early dawn, getting ready for our first social event. It was to be—somewhat to Aunt Cal’s dismay—a garden party.

We found Michael standing in the middle of the garden, surveying the arrangements. “Well,” inquired Eve, “is your Majesty pleased?”

He grinned at her. “Say,” he said, “am I going to be the only man at this party?”

“No, don’t worry. Captain Trout’s coming and perhaps Mr. Templeton and Hattie May wrote that she and Hamish would drive down if she could possibly manage it. But listen to the explanation Sandy’s just had of her vision the day we discovered the cupboard!”

“I object to having it called a vision!” I said. “It was just a memory—coming out.”

When I had finished reading him what Father had written, Michael said, “That’s mighty interesting! And what a piece of luck that you happened to make that visit here when you were a kid.”

“I suppose it wouldn’t have mattered really,” I said. “Aunt Cal has never told us just what Carter Craven said in that note he sent her but I think he must have told her where the will was, at least he gave her a clue.”

“Yes,” put in Eve, “but how do we know that Gopher would ever have given her the note at all if we hadn’t cornered him like a rat in a hole. Just like it to slip his mind—he’s got about the slipperiest mind I ever had the pleasure to deal with.”

“He hasn’t done so badly with this garden though,” Michael observed.

“Would you ever have believed it could look so lovely!” Eve asked.

“Yes. You can do most anything with land if you put enough time and patience into it, providing of course the soil’s fairly good. Next year, I hope it will look even better.”

“In the spring!” Eve said, her eyes shining a little. “Oh, I do hope I shall see it in the spring when the daffodils and tulips first come up!”

“And I’ll probably be grubbing for exams about that time!” Michael said. “But maybe I can get away for a week-end. I’d like to see how those bulbs come up.”

“And us and Circe?” Eve asked teasingly. “Shan’t you want to see us?”

“I hope the frost next winter doesn’t crack that new arm I made for her,” he answered, ignoring the question and looking across to where, above the clean bowl of the fountain, the restored statue stood, veiled today in white cheesecloth.

Miss Rose drove up just then with Mrs. Viner and we hurried out to greet our first guest. “My, how pretty everything looks!” she murmured as we escorted her to a seat. “Seems ’sif that golden glow there by the wall sort of lights up the whole place! And how that larkspur by the fountain has come on! What pride Emily Craven used to take in her larkspur.”

“Next year,” remarked Aunt Cal, coming up, “I shall have asters and mignonette in that bed too.”

“There comes a car up the hill,” I cried. “Maybe it’s Hattie May and Hamish!”

“No,” Michael shook his head. “It’s Captain Trout in Fishers Haven’s one and only taxicab.”

Just behind came a string of other cars, bearing the members of the Ladies Civic Betterment Society.

Miss Rose in a large flowered muslin, which made her look for all the world like a mammoth piece of upholstery, moved among the guests, banishing all vestige of stiffness with her good natured small talk and banter.

“Bless my boots, what a transformation!” exclaimed Captain Trout. “How delighted the old Cap’n would be if he could see it!” he added, turning to Aunt Cal.

“Yes,” she agreed simply, “I think he would approve of what we have done.”

“How is Daisy June getting along?” I asked. “Do you think she misses us any?”

“Well, now I can’t say that I’ve noticed her a-pinin’,” he chuckled. “She’s still able to take a running jump at my back when I ain’t looking.”

“Adam loves it here,” I said. “You ought to see him walk down the hall, waving his tail, as if he were the lost heir restored to his patrimony.”

“Yeah, that’s like him—Caliph always did put on airs!” The Captain chuckled at his own wit.

Gopher dressed in his borrowed white trousers appeared awkwardly carrying a tray. “Hi, Biscuits, what you got here?” Captain Trout demanded.

The sailor set down the cups of raspberry sherbet with an apologetic grin. “Say, Skipper,” he whispered hoarsely, “like to have me stir you up a batch of flapjacks ’fore you go?”

“No, no, certainly not!” Captain Trout took one of the pink filled glasses and passed it to Mrs. Viner. He helped himself to another.

At last came the moment when the sun touched the top of the fountain—the moment I had been waiting for. At a nod from Aunt Cal, Michael disappeared

into the house. A moment later I got his signal from the cellar window. Everybody stopped talking as I advanced to the fountain and, reaching up, pulled the cord which held the veil about the statue.

At the same instant, Michael turned the tap in the cellar and the water gushed forth in a myriad sparkling rainbow streams. Everybody clapped! It was exactly as if the delicate figure of the Enchantress poised there had really waved her wand and performed a miracle!

A belated car came puffing up the hill, a green roadster covered with dust. From the seat Hattie May waved frantically. Eve flew down the path, I after her. Hamish peered out at the group about the fountain. "Say," he demanded, "we ain't too late for the refreshments are we?"

"No, indeed, there's lots left," I told him laughing.

"We had a blow-out of course," Hattie May said as she climbed out. "My how pretty everything looks!"

As we came up the path Hamish caught sight of Gopher collecting plates. "My aunt!" he exclaimed, "Mean to say you let that fellow go round loose?"

"Oh," giggled Eve. "he's quite tame now really—just like the garden. You'd be surprised!"

Eve came out with a heaping tray. "Hasn't anything more queer been happenin', I suppose?" Hamish inquired hopefully between mouthfuls.

"No, I'm afraid not," I answered. "No more mysteries—except of course what became of the china duck. And I'm afraid that'll never be solved."

Hamish set down his empty plate regretfully. "By the way," he remarked, "I brought along a few little souvenirs I picked up on the way. They're out in the car."

"More gifts! Oh, Hamish!"

After the other guests had departed Hamish distributed his presents. There was a vanity case for Aunt Cal whose countenance to date has been innocent of make-up; shell-covered workboxes for Eve and me; a combination pocket knife and can opener for Michael and a huge heart-shaped box of chocolates for Miss Rose.

"Oh, you cruel boy," Miss Rose cried, "to tempt me so!" She selected a plump one before passing the box.

As Aunt Cal turned to walk with Mr. Templeton to his car Hattie May whispered quite loudly, "I must say, Sandy, that your aunt has changed. Why she's like a different person almost."

"Hush!" I warned, "It's all Circe's doing! Magic, you know!"

"I guess more likely it's two living Circes that have done the trick," said Miss Rose slyly, selecting another chocolate.

“Oh, you mean you and—and Gopher?” Eve inquired mischievously.

Miss Rose giggled. “Fancy me on a fountain! No, it’s a fact, Cal told me so herself, that she’d never have had the gumption to go ahead with everything if it hadn’t been for you girls. She said she wanted Sandra to have a place to come to that she’d feel was a real home.”

“Oh, Miss Rose,” I cried, “did she really say that?”

Aunt Cal came back down the path, Adam at her heels. “Well now that that’s over,” she said, “we’ll be able to settle down to normal living again! Michael thinks I should put that south pasture into potatoes next year. What do you think, Rose?”

“Farmer Gilpatrick advises!” Eve twinkled at him.

“Well?” he inquired challengingly, “what’s the matter with that? Suppose I should turn into a farmer, what then?”

“Why, then,” she returned, “you’ll buy a farm next to ours—next to Craven House I mean—and make it the very finest, most scientific, up-to-date farm in the whole countryside.”

“Well, you might do worse,” Hamish remarked solemnly. “I read the other day where a fellow was out plowin’ up a field and what d’you s’pose he turned up? An old gold piece, yes sir! And come to find out when he dug down there was a whole lot of ’em buried where some early settler fellow had hid ’em when the Indians was comin’. What d’you think of that!”

“That settles it!” laughed Michael. “I shall become a farmer.”

THE END

Transcriber's Note

Some presumed printers' errors have been corrected, including normalizing punctuation.

The following specific corrections have been made:

XII. OVER THE BANNISTER => XII. OVER THE BANISTER {Table of Contents}
also carred a cargo of hair tonic => also carried a cargo of hair tonic {P.129}
“We won't half to, silly,” => “We won't have to, silly,” {P. 172}

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