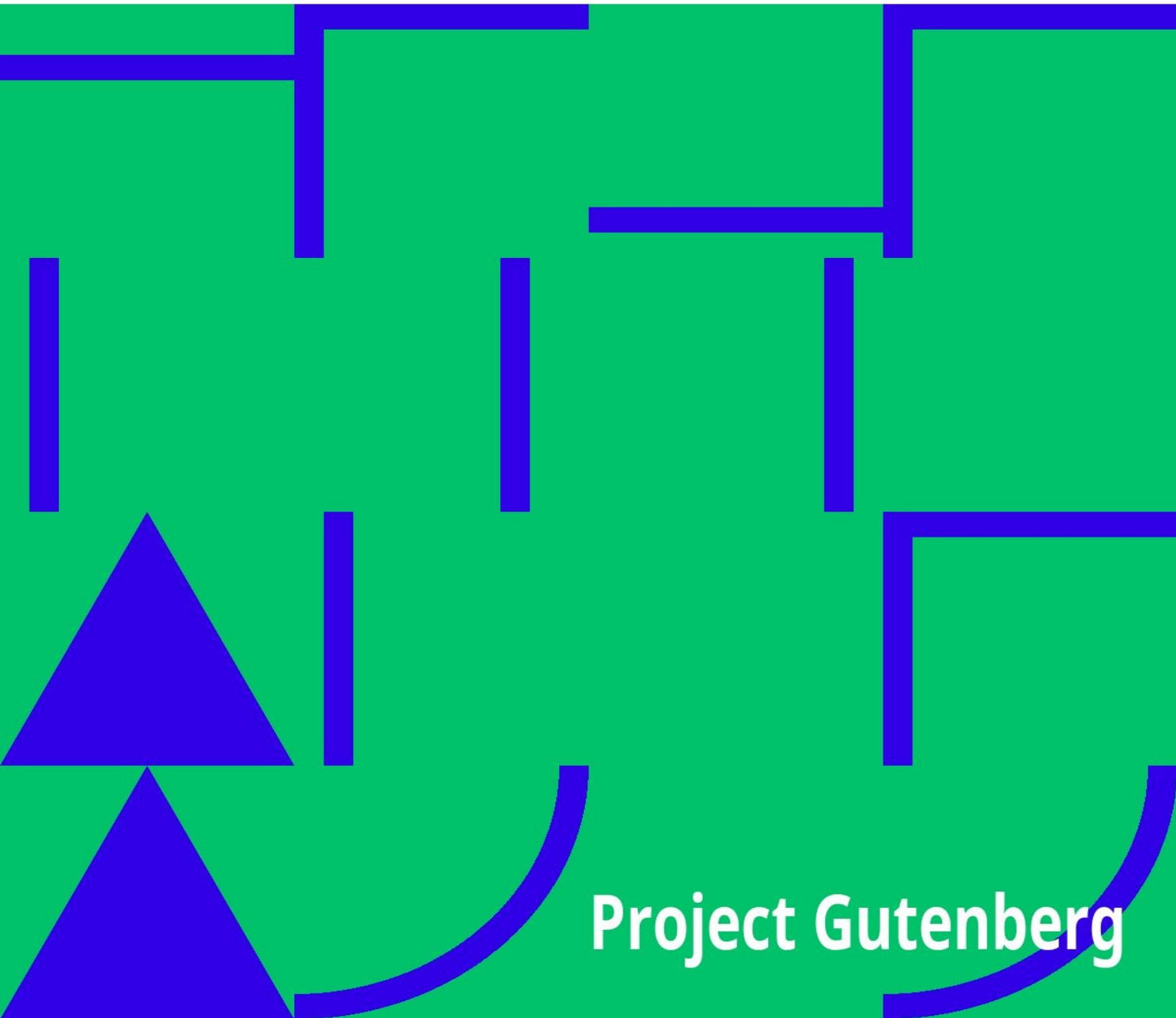
Dorothy at Oak Knowe

Evelyn Raymond



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DOROTHY

AT OAK KNOWE

BY

EVELYN RAYMOND

NEW YORK

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THE

DOROTHY BOOKS

By EVELYN RAYMOND

These stories of an American girl by an American author have made “Dorothy” a household synonym for all that is fascinating. Truth and realism are stamped on every page. The interest never flags, and is ofttimes intense. No more happy choice can be made for gift books, so sure are they to win approval and please not only the young in years, but also “grown-ups” who are young in heart and spirit.

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Dorothy at Oak Knowe
Dorothy’s Triumph
Dorothy’s Tour

“EVER RIDE IN AN OX-CART”?

“EVER RIDE IN AN OX-CART”?

Dorothy at Oak Knowe.

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DOROTHY AT OAK KNOWE

CHAPTER I

ON THE ROAD TO OAK KNOWE

“This way for the Queen!”

“Here you are for the Duke of Connaught! Right this way!”

“Want the Metropole, Miss?”

“Room there, stupid! She’s from the States—any fool could see that! I’m from your hotel, little lady, the American. Your luggage, Miss, allow me?”

If Dorothy’s hands hadn’t been too full, she would have clapped them over her ears, to drown the cries of the hackmen who swarmed about her as she stepped from the train at the railway station in Toronto. As it was, she clung desperately to her bag and shawlstrap, which the man from the American hotel seemed bound to seize, whether or no.

But her heart sank and it was a forlorn little girl, indeed, who looked anxiously around seeking some face on which might be a smile of welcome. But nobody paid any attention to her, except the obstreperous hackmen, and in a sudden fright she let fall the tears she had so bravely kept back until then. It had been a long and lonely journey, but she had been assured that she would be promptly met and cared for when it ended. Now, amid all the throng of travelers and those who awaited them, not one was looking for a “dark haired girl in navy blue” and the tears fell faster as she cried aloud:

“Oh! what shall I do! What shall I do!”

Even the hackmen had forsaken her in pursuit of other, more promising patrons. The short autumn day was at its close and in the growing darkness her fright increased and her usual common sense left her. But, as she spoke, a hand was laid upon her shoulder and a rather gruff voice demanded:

“Why, little stranger, what’s a-troublin’ ye?”

Dorothy winked her tears away and looked up into the face of an old man, whose gray beard swept his breast while his head was entirely bald. He wore a long blue smock, carried an ox-goad in one hand and a canvas bag in the other. He looked as kind as he was homely and Dorothy answered quickly:

“I’m lost, I guess. Or forgotten, and that’s just as bad! I—I—”

“Lost? Right here in this town? Well, that couldn’t hardly be. Though I own it’s a biggish place. But if you be, I’ll see to it that you get found again, immediate. First start—who be ye?”

“I’m Dorothy Calvert, from Baltimore. I came to the Oak Knowe School for Girls. Somebody was to meet me. Nobody has and—and—I don’t know what to do.”

John Gilpin whistled and exclaimed:

“No! Never! I saw at a glance you was no Cannuck! The little maids we raise in our Province have redder cheeks ’an yours. An’ we don’t let ’em go traversin’ round the universe without their mothers or leastways nurses to look after ’em. But bless my soul, you’ve fell into safe hands. I know old Oak Knowe well. No better school in the whole Empire nor that. Moresomever, there’s been some miscarry betwixt your folks and the Lady Principal or she’d never let you come to this pass. But my road lies same as yours. I’ll just step-an’-fetch my oxen and head ’em straight for home. We’ll get to the School in next to no time. Leastways, betwixt now and bedding-bell—they ring it about half-past nine.”

“Is it so far? Why, it must be hours till then!”

At the cheerful sound of this old teamster’s voice Dorothy forgot her fear. She didn’t stop to reflect that she should have waited quietly in the station till somebody called for her, nor that she might have telephoned to her teachers to announce her arrival. All she realized was that here was a friend in need and that he was a quaintly interesting person.

“’Tis a matter of some miles, lassie, and my old oxen are no electric tram. Slow and sure’s their motto and what’s an hour, more or less, in a little girl’s lifetime? You got a box?”

Dorothy glanced at the rug and magazine, tightly strapped together, and at the

handbag she had set down upon the platform and replied:

“No, Mr.—I don’t know your name yet—I haven’t now. I had one, but I ate the lunch out of it and tossed it from the car window.”

The old man stared as if she had spoken nonsense, but informed her:

“Gilpin’s my name. John Gilpin; but my dame says I’m no descendant of him that took that famous ride as is in the story books. I’m too slow, Dame says. But is all your clothes in that satchel?”

It was Dorothy’s turn to stare and to laugh.

“Oh! no, indeed! They’re in my trunk. Here is my check. Number 70777. I put that down in my little notebook, though it’s easy to remember.”

“Humph! I’ve heard that in the States they call a box a ‘trunk,’ same’s if it was an elephant. Well, give me the check. I’ll just step-an’-fetch it and we’ll be jogging.”

Mr. Gilpin took the check and lumbered away, dragging one leg stiffly as if he could not bend the knee, while Dorothy’s spirits rose as she watched him. After all, this was a real adventure; and when it was over and she was safe at her fine school, she could write all about it to the friends at home. Thinking about them, she forgot how long John Gilpin tarried and roused from her reverie with a start when his hearty voice, guiding his oxen, came around the corner of the station.

“Here we be, lassie! Ever ride in an ox-cart? Ever see a neater yoke o’ cattle? That’s an unco big box for a small maid to own and hefty, to boot. Step right in, for it’s gathering clouds, I see, and we can’t have that tidy dress of yours get spoiled while it’s new.”

It was easy to “step in” to the low-hung vehicle and Dorothy nestled against her new friend on his spring-seat forward; all the back part of the wagon being filled with empty barrels and her own trunk.

It had been some sort of holiday in the city and the streets were gay with flags and bunting, causing Dorothy to exclaim:

“Why, it’s just like Halifax, that time Earl Grey was coming! It’s just as English as that was—even more so, for I don’t see Old Glory anywhere, and there I did.”

Old John turned his bare, bald head toward her and demanded:

“What do you know about Halifax? Or the Governor General? I thought you was United States.”

“So I am, so I am! But people may travel once in a while, mayn’t they? I can tell you lots about Halifax, even though I was there but a little while. That was on a vacation journey and it was delight-ful!”

Then, finding the farmer so interested, Dorothy eagerly recited the story of her “Travels” and their happy ending at her rightful home at Deerhurst and in the love of her Great-Aunt Betty.

“Sounds like a story book, now don’t it! And to think after all that the old lady should be willin’ to despatch you up here to our Province, just to get a mite of education. Should ha’ thought there be institooshuns of learning nigher hand ’an Oak Knowe, where she could ha’ clapped eyes on ye, now and again. She—”

“Oh! don’t misjudge my darling aunt! She hated to have me come as badly as I hated to leave her; but, though I’ve never been really ill, she fancied that this climate would make me very, very strong. Besides, the minister who founded Oak Knowe—he was a bishop, I believe—was one of her girlhood friends, and so she chose it for that, too. Anyway, to her who has traveled so much, Canada and Maryland seem but a little way apart.”

“That’s right, lassie. That’s right. Be loyal to your friends, whether they be right or wrong. An’ talk about travel, there beant many corners of this earth that I haven’t took a glance at. I’ve not always been a farmer, though you mightn’t think it now.”

They had passed out of the city streets into the open country, the oxen swaying and pacing sedately along, as if it mattered nothing how late they might reach home. To pass the time, Dorothy asked the old man to talk about his own travels, and he promptly answered:

“In course, and obleeged for anybody to care to listen. Dame has heard my yarns so often, she scoffs ’em; but I’ve seen a power o’ things in my day, a power o’ things. I was born in Lunnon, raised in Glasgo’, run away to Liverpool and shipped afore the mast. From sailor I turned soldier under Chinese Gordon—Ah! the man he wus! Miner, constable, me Lord’s butler, then his cook, and now, at

the fag end of my days, settled down to be my Dame's right-hand-man. She was a likely widow, coming from England to take up land here, and I met her aboard ship, last time I crossed seas. Didn't take us long to strike a bargain. She needed a man to till her farm; I needed a good woman to mend me and do for me, for I was that tired of rovin'—my hearties! We get along well. We get along prime. I do the talking and her does the thinking. She's that uncommon thing—a silent woman. Like to hear how I come nigh-hand to death along of a devil fish? Want to feel your hair rise on end and your arms get reg'lar goose-fleshy? Makes me nigh get that way myself, every time I recall—Whist! If that ain't thunder I'm a-dreamin', sure! Thunder this season of the year! Now that's fair ridic'lous. But mentionin' devil fish, yon comes one them red go-devils, Dame calls 'em, as squawkin', blazing-eyed automobeelyers—comin' this minute. No marvel natur' gets topsy-turvy with them wild things ramsaging round. But, quick, lassie! Do your young eyes see something or somebody lying beyond in the middle of the road?"

The old man checked his garrulous tongue to rise and peer into the darkness, while Dorothy sprang to her feet beside him, straining her own eyes to follow his pointing finger.

"There is, there is! Looks like a man or boy or bicycle or something and that horrid car is coming right toward it! Make 'em stop! Holloa! Loud, loud, for they don't see him! they'll run over him—he'll be killed!"

But still the gay occupants of the car observed nothing; till at last a fiercer shriek from Dorothy sounded above their laughter and instantly hushed it, while the driver of the machine looked curiously at the cart which the wise oxen, perceiving their own danger, had drawn out of harm on the roadside. But the stop had been too late. Though the motor was swerved aside, it had already collided with the objects in its path, and it was in a terrified silence that the merrymakers descended from it.

But even old John had been quicker than they and was now bending above the lad crushed beneath the forward wheels of this hated "go-devil."

"Oh! my poor lad! Oh! my sunny Robin!" he groaned: then in a fury of anger at the great machine, tried his strength to lift it from its victim.

Fortunately there were several men in the party, and the car well equipped

against mischance, and so it was swiftly forced away, while the farmer again stooped over the motionless lad beneath and tenderly raised him in his arms. For a moment the group gathered about the pair believed that the boy was dead; then a low moan from his white lips mingled with the lamentations of John Gilpin and brought relief to everyone.

Again came flashes of lightning and the growls of thunder, and the owner of the car exclaimed:

“Lay the boy in the motor and we’ll get him to a hospital at once. Maybe he isn’t so badly hurt as seems. Pile up the cushions, somebody, and give him to me, old man. I’m stronger than you and better used to sick folks. Doctor Winston is my name.”

“The more shame to you then for what you’ve done this night!” hotly retorted old John, clasping his burden the closer and moving slowly toward his own humble cart.

“Idiot! Don’t put him in that shaky wagon. Delay may cost his life. Hospital’s the place and the car is swiftest!” cried another of the gentlemen, indignantly. “Of course we’ll see to it that he has the best of care with no expense spared.”

As if he had not heard, old John still moved away, quietly ordering Dorothy:

“Undo that shawl of yours. Roll them barrels out of the wagon. Take off your jacket and make a piller of it. Spread the shawl out and cover him with part of it whilst I lay him down. Poor little Robin! The ‘only son of his mother and she was a widow.’”

Dorothy was glad to obey this strange old man who had been so genial and was now so stern, and it relieved her distress to be doing something to help. But as she tried to roll the barrels out, a hand fell on her arm and the doctor said:

“I’ll do that, Miss. They’re too heavy for you. I wish you persuade your grandfather to trust me with this poor boy. It would be so much better.”

“He isn’t my grandfather. I don’t know him—I mean he was taking me—”

But her words fell upon deaf ears, apparently. Having sent the empty barrels flying where they would, the doctor had now taken the pile of cushions somebody had brought him and arranged them on the wagon bottom. Next he

calmly relieved John Gilpin of the injured boy and laid him gently down. Shaking out Dorothy's thick steamer rug, her "shawl," he carefully covered Robin and, sitting down beside him, ordered:

"Drive on, farmer! Chauffeur, follow with the car. Lady Jane, the medicine case. To the nearest house at once."

There was no resisting the firm authority of the physician and John Gilpin climbed meekly to his seat and at his urgent "gee-ho" the oxen started onward at a steady gait. But despite his anxiety there was a satisfaction in their owner's mind that the "nearest house" would be his own and that it would be his capable "Dame" who would care for Robin and not a hospital nurse.

Meanwhile Dorothy seemed forgotten both by the people who had returned to their car and Mr. Gilpin; so, fearing that she would be left alone by the roadside, she sprang upon the end of the cart and sat there, her feet dangling over its edge.

Now, indeed, her adventure was proving anything but amusing. What would Aunt Betty think of her heedless action? Or her dear guardian, Seth Winters, the "learned Blacksmith," wisest of men, whom the reader of this series will recall in "Dorothy's Schooling." Would she ever reach Oak Knowe, and how would this escapade be regarded there?

Into her troubled thoughts now broke a sound of pain, that drove everything save pity from her mind. The rain was now falling fast and drenching her new clothes, but her anxiety was only that the injured boy should not get wet and she was glad that her rug was so thick and warm. It had been a parting gift from her "House-Boat" guests and held almost sacred as a memento of their happy trip together.

But now the oxen were turning into a lane. She could dimly see the hedgerows on either side, that now and then the lightning flashes showed more plainly; and, after a time, something big and white seemed to block their way. A moment more and the white obstruction proved to be a cottage with a lamp shining through its window. Then a door opened and a woman's voice called cheerily:

"Welcome home, my man! You're late the night. Met you up with any trouble? Didn't the apples sell well?"

"More trouble than you dream, Dame, and I've fetched it for you to share. Light

the bedroom to once. ’Tis the dead—or dyin’—is here.”

Without a word the woman turned away, moving heavily because of her great size, and an inner door opened, showing a comfortable bed, its covers already invitingly spread back. Lighting more candles the dame stood quietly aside, waiting her unexpected guest.

The doctor brought the boy in, still wrapped in the rug and, tossing that to the floor, gently laid him down. John followed close behind, announcing:

“’Tis Robin, Dame, our bonny Robin of the Glen. The heart of the mother will break. He—”

“Help here. Hot water, please. More light. An old sheet for bandages. Don’t dally. Undress him, Lady Jane.”

“But, doctor, I’m afraid!” objected that lady who, partly from curiosity, partly to avoid the rain, had followed the physician into the house.

Indeed, all the motoring party had now swarmed into the kitchen, intending to be quiet yet really chattering noisily, and some of them sniffing covetously the odors from a great pot of soup, steaming away on the stove. But nobody was quite ready to respond to the doctor’s appeals for help, even Mrs. Gilpin being confused and stupid before these strangers who had taken possession of her home.

As for old John, he could simply stand and stare at the unconscious lad on the bed, too dazed and grieved to be of any use whatever.

Not so Dorothy, who had entered with the rest and who noticed Dr. Winston’s impatience—who knew that a hospital was where his patient should be and not this ill-equipped cottage. Throwing off her dripping jacket, she cried:

“I’ll help.”

A teakettle was singing beside the soup-pot on the stove and a dishpan was hanging near. To empty the kettle into the pan and to carry it to the chair beside the bed was an instant’s task. Then, seizing the upper sheet and using her teeth for scissors, she swiftly tore it into strips; and by this time the dame had regained her own presence of mind.

Without troubling to ask who Dorothy was or how she came to be there, she now took charge of things, saying:

“You’ll find clean towels in that chest of drawers. Fetch the doctor a pile. Shears are yon in that work-basket. You’re spry on your feet as I can’t be, but I do know how to take the clothes off this poor Robin. My, what’s this he clenches so tight in hand? One of them telegraph letters ’tis his errand to deliver. All over the countryside the laddie rode on his wheel to earn the bit money would pay his mother’s rent. Brave, bonny lad that he was!”

Gently releasing the telegram from his fingers, Mrs. Gilpin held it up for the doctor to see.

“For Oak Knowe. Open it, little girl, and read if it’s important.”

She obeyed, but her voice trembled as she read. It was the belated message that announced her own coming and the hour of her arrival. It explained why she had not been met at the station, but she felt both shocked and guilty as she exclaimed:

“Oh! it is my fault! It’s all my fault that he is killed! Just about me it happened! What shall I do—what shall I do?”

“Stop that sort of talk and see how your dead boy stares at you! Look well, Robin, you see a real live Yankee girl!”

CHAPTER II

UNFORTUNATE BEGINNINGS

Even the most cultured Lady Principals do not enjoy being roused from their slumbers, an hour after midnight, by the tooting of a motor car beneath their bedroom windows. It was annoying to have to dress again and descend to a dimly-lighted reception room to receive a new pupil who had missed a train, on the route, and misdirected her telegram. Nor was there anything prepossessing about this especial girl, whose clothes steamed with moisture and whose travel-soiled cheeks were streaked by raindrops and tears. So it was small wonder that Dorothy's reception by Miss Muriel Tross-Kingdon was decidedly cool and crisp.

"This is really unprecedented, Miss Calvert. I cannot understand how any young lady, whose friends consider her intelligent enough to travel alone, could have made such stupid blunders, as you have. At the point where you knew you were to change trains, why did you not keep watch and inquire for direction?"

"Well, you see there was a military parade and the soldiers looked so queer in their red uniforms and their funny little caps on the sides of their heads that—that—that I forgot. I mean the timetable told the right hour, course, but the first train was behind and so—and so—"

It was a very lame excuse and Dolly knew it. But it was the truth and as such she gave it.

Miss Tross-Kingdon made no reply. Inwardly she was commenting upon Dorothy's pronunciation of certain words, which was wholly at fault according to English custom, and realizing that here was the first fault to be corrected in her new pupil.

Dorothy's heart sank. Uncle Seth's last advice to her had been:

"Whenever you feel blue, just wave your flag of high courage and march ahead. Don't stop to think! March, march, march—toward the better time that will

surely come."

But that high-courage flag hung limply now and she felt she could never again wave it at all. But, fortunately, the Lady Principal now rose to terminate the interview. Touching an electric bell for the maid on night duty, she said:

"It is very late and you are tired. Dawkins will show you to your cubicle and assist you in undressing. You may omit your bath, to-night, and are allowed an extra hour of sleep in the morning. Where are your suit case and hand bag?"

Dorothy rose, as the lady did, but a fresh feeling of guilt made her eyes fall as she murmured:

"I—don't—know."

"Don't know!" echoed the Lady Principal, in amazement. Then directing Dawkins to supply what was needed, she returned to her interrupted repose, while Dorothy wearily followed the stern-faced maid; being cautioned, meanwhile:

"Do not dare to make a noise and arouse the young ladies."

Yet arrived at the cubicle, or small division of the great dormitory which had been assigned her, Dorothy realized that Dawkins was kinder than she looked. For presently she was being undressed, her face and hands sponged with cool water, and herself reclothed with the freshest of gowns. Then she was bodily lifted into the dainty little bed as if she were a baby.

This unexpected gentleness touched her heart and, flinging her arms about the maid's neck, she sobbed:

"Oh! do be good to me! I am so desolate!"

"Whist, child! We must no be wakin' the troublesome girls around. And sure the lonesomeness'll pass, like the dew afore sun, once you get a good sleep and meet up with your mates. Good night, child, and sleep well."

Then, since there was nobody to witness her unusual demonstration, maid Dawkins stooped and kissed the tired eyes of her new charge, and went quietly away.

But there had been one observer of this caress. Peeping from her own

compartment stood a girl whose keen eyes had noticed everything, and who felt she could scarcely wait until morning to spread the news. Creeping back to her own bed, she lay long awake, thinking the matter over. For this schoolgirl, who rejoiced in the title of the Honorable Gwendolyn Borst-Kennard, had a deal of curiosity that was wholly roused now.

“Never saw old Dawkins kiss anybody. Dawkins, of all creatures! Never knew a new girl come at this time of night—and she certainly was new. And she hadn’t any clothes, I know, because that was one of the school hampers Dawkins had. Must be somebody very poor. I wonder who! Maybe—for goodness sake! Maybe she’s some relation to old Dawk! Else why should she kiss her? Humph! I thought this was a school for young ladies, not for the poor relations of servants. There’s one thing certain, mamma will never allow me to remain where there are paupers. Never in this world. Neither would Lord Christopher let Marjorie. No, indeed. So will Miss Tross-Kingdon find out. Why! one charity pupil at Oak Knowe would ruin it! Anyhow, I mean to hurry round in the morning and warn all my set against noticing the beggar and what our set does surely goes. Mamma gets odd notions about things, sometimes, like saying I must sleep in this old dormitory instead of having a private room, and that I have silly feelings about rank. Wanted the Lady Principal to make me more democratic: but even she couldn’t wish me to sleep among paupers. Heigho! I wish it was morning! But I’ll take a nap now and that will pass the time.”

Exhausted by the long journey she had taken, and by the startling events of the night, unconscious Dorothy slept calmly on, little dreaming of Gwendolyn’s fancies about her; nor did she wake till long after all her dormitory mates had dressed and gone below to breakfast. When she did arouse it was to wonder about this strange place in which she found herself and at an elfish-looking child perched on the foot of her little bed, staring at her with wide eyes and keen impatience, and who greeted her first movement with the exclamation:

“Well, old sleepy-head, I thought you never would wake up! Who are you, anyway, and what makes you stay in cubicle so long after breakfast? Won’t you catch a lecture, though! I wouldn’t be in your shoes for a sovereign!”

“Don’t believe you could be in them. You’re so small they fall off,” answered Dorothy laughing.

“No, they wouldn’t. I tie them on. If I wanted to. Who are you? When you

come? How dare you stay in bed so?”

Dolly laughed again. She had fallen asleep convinced that she could never laugh again, so tired and homesick had she been. But now, refreshed by rest and with the sunlight streaming through the windows, the world seemed a very different place. Besides, there was something so winning about this inquisitive little maid, that the stranger’s heart was comforted that she had found a friend already.

“Well, dearie, I suppose I dare because Miss Tross-Kingdon—”

“Did she say you could? Isn’t that odd! She’s my aunt. I haven’t any folks ’cept her, I’m a norphan. I’m Millikins-Pillikins, my brother Hugh calls me; and the girls, too. But I’m not, really. I’m Grace Adelaide Victoria Tross-Kingdon. That’s my truly name. Nobody could call me all that, could they? Wouldn’t be time. Auntie Princie calls me just plain ‘darling’ or ‘dear.’ I’m a Minim. I don’t have to do lessons and things. I’m in the ‘kindy.’ Auntie Princie doesn’t approve of a kindergarten in this School for Young Ladies; but it’s a speriment the Board of Directioners wanted to try. Them’s the gentlemen auntie has to mind. Fancy! My great big grown-up Auntie Prin having to mind them, same’s I have to mind her! My Lord Bishop, he’s the head Directioner, but he’s the jolliest! I just love him! He knew my papa and mamma before they got drowned in the sea. My brother Hugh lives with the Bishop and writes things for him. They call him a seckeratary. He gets money for doing it. Think of that! Sometimes he gives me pennies and even six-pences. Sometimes—not often. You see he wants to earn enough to buy a cottage for him and me. I’m to be the lady of it—the mistress! Fancy! But Auntie Princie says I have lots to learn before then. I will have to make his bread, ’cause he won’t have money enough to keep me and a cook, too. I’ll have to have a housemaid to help me, but you know housemaids never do the cooking. But say, girl, you haven’t told me your name yet?”

Dorothy sat up in bed and drew the child toward her:

“My dear, you haven’t given me a chance yet, you’ve been so busy telling me who you are. But I’ve enjoyed it and I thank you for coming to wake me up. Now I must get up and dress. Maybe you will show me to the bathroom, though I don’t like to go about in this way.”

“That’s a school nightie you’ve got on. Where’s your bath robe?”

“In my trunk.”

“Where’s your trunk?”

“I suppose it’s at John Gilpin’s house. That is, if he didn’t throw it out of the cart with the empty barrels.”

“Why did he throw out the barrels?”

“To make a place for Robin to lie on.”

“What Robin?”

“The messenger boy who was hurt. He was bringing my telegram and he fainted and fell and the motor car—but I mustn’t stop now to talk. I must get dressed.”

“Couldn’t you talk without stopping? I could.”

“I believe you, child. Will you show me?”

“Of course—if you’ll tell the rest. Wait. If you want a robe I’ll get Gwendolyn’s. It’s right yonder.”

So it happened that the first act of the supposed charity pupil was to borrow a garment of the very girl who had so misjudged her, and who entered the dormitory just as Dorothy was leaving it for the lavatory.

Curiosity had sent Gwendolyn and Laura Griswold, her chum and “shadow,” back to this apartment at this unusual hour, but at sight of Dorothy disappearing toward the bath wearing Gwendolyn’s robe, its owner forgot her curiosity in indignation. Stopping short, midway the great room, she clasped her hands in a tragic manner and demanded of Laura:

“Did you ever in your life see anything so cool as that? The impudent girl! How dare she? I wonder what else she’s taken! And that mischievous little Pill with her. That child’s the nuisance of this school. Even if she is Lady Principal’s niece, she shouldn’t be given the liberty she has. But I’ll report.”

“Yes, indeed, I’d report!” echoed Laura. “First, have to sleep in the school things; then help herself to yours. It’s simply outrageous. Why not go right away? It’s recess and Miss Tross-Kingdon has no class.”

“She has worse. The Bishop’s in the reception-room, and Dr. Winston, too. They were all talking very fast and I wanted to stop and listen. But I didn’t quite dare,

for she was facing the door and might see me. But I did hear the Bishop say that if she was a Calvert she could hardly fail to be all right. She came of good stock —none better. I wondered who he meant; but Lady Principal saw me looking in and asked me if 'I wished anything?' Hateful woman! She has the most disagreeable manners!"

"Never mind. Anyway, let's go tell her!" advised Laura, and the pair departed.

However, the electric bell rang just then, announcing that recess was over and the telling had to be postponed to a better season. A few moments later a maid came to say that as soon as Dorothy was ready the Lady Principal would receive her in the west parlor. But she might stop in the breakfast-room on the way, where a dish of cereal and a bowl of hot milk was awaiting her. The maid added to the "Little Pill":

"As for you, Miss Grace, the Minims are ready for their calisthenics and your teacher wants you."

"But I don't want her. I want to go with Dolly."

"You're too big a girl for dolls, Miss Grace, and quite big enough to obey orders."

Grace's sharp little face darkened and she made a mocking grimace to the maid, retorting:

"You don't know anything, Dora Bond! You don't know that the Dolly I play with is this new girl. I shall go with her. I hate them exercises. They make my back ache. I'm excused to-day, anyhow. I heard Auntie Princie tell a lady how I wasn't a bit strong and that she had to indulge me a lot. I shall do as I please. I shall go where I like. I shall, so, old Bondy! So there!"

Dorothy was surprised by the unpleasant expression which had settled on the little girl's face, but said nothing. Following Bond's direction, she hurried through a long hall to a sunshiny breakfast-room and the simple meal prepared for her. She hastily drank the milk, but had no appetite for the cereal. Her heart was in a flutter of anxiety about the coming interview with Miss Tross-Kingdon. She had at once disliked and feared that lady, on the night before, and felt that her present appearance, in a rain-spotted frock and with her hair so hastily brushed, must only add to the sternness of this unknown Lady Principal.

However, the clinging hand of Millikins-Pillikins gave a little comfort. She didn’t feel quite so lonely and timid with the child beside her and, as she made her graceful curtsey at the open door, all her fear vanished and she became once more the self-possessed Dorothy of old. For, rising and crossing the room to meet her was her acquaintance of the night, who had brought her to Oak Knowe in his own car from John Gilpin’s cottage.

With extended hands he grasped hers and, turning to Miss Muriel, remarked:

“Any time you need a nurse, madam, just call upon this little lady. She was the best helper I had last night. Quick and quiet and intelligent. She must train herself for that vocation when she is older.”

The color flew to Dorothy’s cheeks and she flashed him a grateful smile, for the kind words that so soothed her homesick heart.

The other gentleman in the room did not rise, but held out a beckoning hand and, with another curtsey to Doctor Winston, Dorothy excused herself to him and obeyed the summons. This other was a venerable man with a queer-shaped cap upon his white head and wearing knee breeches and gaiters, which made the young American remember some pictures of old Continental statesmen.

“So this is my old friend Betty Calvert’s child, is it? Well, well! You’re as like her as possible—yet only her great-niece. Ha, hum! Little lady, you carry me straight back to the days of my boyhood, when my parents came from England—strangers to your Baltimore. But we were not strangers for long. There’s a distant blood relation between our house and yours and we youngsters found in beautiful Bellevieu a second home. So you must remember that, since your aunt has done me the honor to send you away up here to this school of mine—of ours, I should say—you have come to another home just as I did then. Dear little Betty! What a mischief she was! Are you mischievous, too, I wonder?”

Then he turned to the Lady Principal, warning her:

“Look out for this little miss, Miss Tross-Kingdon! She looks as meek as a lamb, just now, but blood will tell and she’ll bear watching, I believe.”

The dear old man had drawn Dorothy close to his side and was smiling upon her in a manner to win the heart of any girl and to cure her of her homesickness—at least for the time being. When he released her, he rose to depart, resuming for a

moment the business talk with the Lady Principal, which Dorothy's entrance had interrupted. Both she and the doctor also arose and stood respectfully waiting till the Bishop disappeared. Then said Dr. Winston:

"You'll like to hear about your boy patient, I suppose, Miss Calvert. Well, I think he's all right, or will be as soon as his bones and bruises mend. What I suspect is that the brave lad is about half-starved—or was. He's in danger of being overfed now, since he has fallen into Dame Gilpin's hands."

"Half-starved, sir? How dreadful!" cried Dorothy, while Miss Tross-Kingdon exclaimed: "Can that be possible!"

"Quite possible, indeed. His mother is a widow and very frail, old John tells me. Her husband was a carpenter who worked in town and was trying to pay for the little place he'd bought out here in the suburbs, hoping the open-air life might cure her. She'd gone into chicken and flower culture, thinking she could help in the payment. They were proud of Robin, the 'brightest, merriest, best boy in the Glen,' John claims, and had somehow got a second-hand bicycle for him to ride into school for the 'grand eddication' they wanted he should have. Then the father died and Robin got a position as messenger boy. Every cent he earned he gave his mother and she took in sewing. They ate just as little as they could and the result has been disastrous. A growing boy can't work all day and half the night, sometimes, on a diet of bread and water. So last night he fainted on his trip and fell off his wheel in the middle of the road. Then I came speeding along toward home and smashed them both up. But it's an ill wind that blows nobody good and the lad's accident may turn out his blessing. Dorothy and I and the Dame have mended a collar bone and a couple of ribs and my ambitious young 'Mercury' is laid up for repairs. John 'step-and-fetched' the mother, Mrs. Locke, and she, too, will get some rest and nourishment. She's worrying a good deal, but has no need. Plucky little Robin will soon be chirping again, 'fine as silk.' Maybe, after school hours, Miss Tross-Kingdon will permit me to take Dorothy with me in the car to visit her patient. May I, Madam?"

The Lady Principal did not look pleased. The Bishop's and the doctor's treatment of the new pupil had really softened her heart toward the girl, but she was a stickler for "rules" and "discipline," and remembered that this was not the day on which her "young ladies" were allowed to pay visits.

"Thank you, Doctor Winston, but I am obliged to decline the invitation for to-

day. She has entered Oak Knowe some time after the opening of term and must pass examination, that I may understand for which Form she is best fitted. Nor have I yet been advised of such houses as her guardians desire her to visit. Commonly, the young ladies of Oak Knowe do not consort with laborers and messenger boys. But I thank you for your courtesy toward her; and, as that is the bell for my class in Greek, I must beg you to excuse me and I wish you good morning, Dr. Winston. Come, Miss Calvert, I will have your examination begin at once. Make your obeisance to the doctor."

Dolly's heart sank. Why should she be made to feel so guilty and insignificant? Still, as she turned to follow the teacher, she obediently saluted the physician and, glancing up into his face, saw—was it possible that he winked?

Though she felt as she were going to be tried for her life, this sight so surprised her, that she giggled hysterically and thus irreverently followed the haughty instructress out of the room. So doing, she added one more to the list of misdemeanors that lady had already placed against her account.

CHAPTER III

PEERS AND COMMONS

Along the hall down which Dorothy followed the Lady Principal were many doors opening into small class rooms. Each class was under its especial teacher, its number being limited to ten students. It was the policy of the school that by this division better instruction could be given each pupil, and Dorothy wondered to which of these groups—if any—she would be assigned. Another hall and other class rooms joined the first and longer one, at a right angle, and here Miss Muriel paused, directing:

“Proceed down this corridor till you reach the parlor at its end. There you will find Miss Hexam awaiting you. She will test your scholarship and report to me. Do not fail to answer her questions promptly and distinctly. I observe that you do not enunciate well. You slur some of your words and clip the endings from your participles. To say ‘hopin’’ or ‘runnin’’ is execrable. Also, there is no such word as ‘daown’ or ‘araoun’.’”

Dorothy’s temper rose. She had done nothing right, it seemed, since she had arrived at this “school for criticism,” as she termed it, and now said pertly:

“I reckon that’s the Southern way of talking. I noticed that the Bishop didn’t bother about his ‘gs’ and he had the same twang that all do down home. He must have lived there a right smart time when he was little.”

“Many things are permissible in a cultured old gentleman which are not in an ignorant and forward girl. You came here for your own improvement. I shall see that you attain it; or, if you fail in this after a reasonable trial, you cannot be retained. That rule is plainly stated in our circular. I will bid you good morning until I send for you.”

Poor Dorothy fairly withered under this sternness that she felt was unjust, but she felt, also, that she had been impertinent, and running after Miss Muriel, as she moved away, she caught the lady’s sleeve, imploring:

“Please don’t think I’m all bad, Miss Tross-Kingdon! I’ve been heedless and saucy, but I didn’t mean it—not for badness. Please wait and try me and I *will* ‘improve,’ as you said. Please, please! It would break Aunt Betty’s heart if she thought I wasn’t good and—and I’m so unhappy! Please forgive me.”

The dark eyes, lifted so appealingly, filled with tears which their owner bravely restrained, and the Lady Principal was touched by this self-control. Also, under all her sternness, she was just.

“Certainly, Dorothy, your apology is sufficient. Now go at once to Miss Hexam and do yourself credit. If you have studied music, another person will examine you in that.”

Impulsively Dorothy caught the lady’s hand and kissed it; and, fortunately, did not observe that dainty person wipe off the caress with her handkerchief.

Then summoning her courage, the new pupil hurried to the end parlor and entered it as she had been taught. But the “den of inquisition,” as some of the girls had named it, proved anything but that to Dorothy.

“The Inquisitor” was a lovely, white-haired woman, clothed in soft white wool, and smiling so gently toward the trembling girl that all fear instantly left her.

“So this is Dorothy Calvert, our little maid from Dixie. You’ll find a wide difference between your Southland and our Province, but I hope you’ll find the change a pleasant one. Take this chair before the fire. You’ll find it comfortable. I love these autumn days, when a blazing log can keep us warm. It’s so fragrant and cheerful and far more romantic than a coil of steam pipe. Have a biscuit, dear?”

Miss Hexam motioned to a low wicker chair, which some girls had declared a “chair of torture,” but which suited Dorothy exactly, for it was own mate to her own little reading chair “at home.” Almost she could have kissed it for its likeness, but was allowed no time for foolishness. The homely little treat of the simple crackers banished all shyness and the dreaded “exam” proved really but a social visit, the girl not dreaming that under this friendly talk was a careful probing of her own character and attainments. Nor did she understand just then how greatly her answers pleased the gentle “Inquisitor.”

“You want me to ‘begin at the beginning’? Why, that’s a long way back, when I

was a mere midget. A baby only a year and a half old. Papa and mamma died away out west, but, of course, I didn't know that then. I didn't know anything, I reckon, except how to make Mother Martha trouble. My father was Aunt Betty's nephew and she didn't like his marrying mamma. I don't know why; only Ephraim says 'Miss Betty was allays full o' notions same's a aig's full o' meat.' Ephy's Aunt Betty's 'boy,' about as old as she is—something over eighty. Nobody knows just auntie's real age, except Ephraim and Dinah. They've lived with her always and treat her now just as if she were a child. It's too funny for words, sometimes, to hear the three of them argue over some thing or trifle. She'll let them go a certain length; then all at once she'll put on her dignity and they fairly begin to tremble. She's mistress then and they're her servants, but I do believe either one would die to prolong her life. Dinah says: ''Pears lak death an' dyin' nebah gwine come nigh my Miss Betty Calvert.' And she's just right. Everybody thinks my darling aunt is the sweetest, most wonderful woman in the world. But I beg your pardon. I didn't mean to talk so much and hinder your examination."

"Oh! that is all right. I love to hear your story that you've left off at its beginning. You're only a 'baby' so far, you know."

"Well, if you like. When my father died, my mother felt that she would die, too, and she couldn't bear to leave me alone. So she just sent me to Aunt Betty. But she felt, auntie did, that she couldn't be bothered with a 'squalling baby,' nor could she cast me off, really. 'Cause she was my real great-aunt and my nearest relation and was rich enough to do what she liked in a money way. Besides, she wanted me to be raised real sensible. So she picked out a splendid couple she knew and had me left on their doorstep. She had pinned to my clothes that my name was 'Dorothy C.' Their name began with 'C,' too, so they guessed I was meant for them to keep, because they hadn't any other child. What a lot I'm talking! Do you want to hear any more? Won't the Lady Principal be angry if I don't get examined?"

"I will make that all right, Dorothy, and I am greatly interested. It's 'like a story out of a book,' as the Minims say. Go on, please."

"Well, these dear people took care of me till I was a real big girl. I love them dearly. He was a postman and he walked too much. So he had to lose his position with lameness and he's never gotten over it, though he's better now. He has a position in a sanitarium for other lame folks and Mother Martha is the

housekeeper, or matron, there. Uncle Seth Winters, who knows so much that he is called the ‘Learned Blacksmith,’ is my guardian. He and Aunt Betty have been dearest friends ever since they were little. They call each other cousin, though they’re no kin at all, any more than he’s my uncle. He was my first teacher at his ‘school in the woods,’ but felt I ought to go to a school for girls. So I went to the Rhinelander Academy and he stayed at his smithy on the mountain, near Mother Martha’s little farm and Aunt Betty’s big one, and one vacation auntie told me who I was and took me home to live with her; and she liked Oak Knowe because the Bishop is her lifelong friend. She has had my name on the list waiting for a vacancy for a long, long time; so it’s a terrible pity I should have been horrid, and offended the Lady Principal.”

“Let us hope she is not seriously offended, dear, nor have you told me what the offense is. But bear in mind, Dorothy, that she is at the head of a great and famous institution and must strictly live up to its standards and keep her pupils to their duty. But she is absolutely just, as you will learn in time.

“I feel like hearing music, to-day, but get very little. All our practice rooms are sound-deadened. Do you play at all, on any instrument, or sing?”

“A little of both, when I’m at home. Not well in either, though Aunt Betty loves my violin and my little songs. If I had it here, I would try for you, if you’d like. But it’s in my trunk, my ‘box,’ Mr. Gilpin called it.”

Miss Hexam smiled and, opening a little secretary, took out an old Cremona, explaining:

“This was my brother’s, who died when I was young. He was a master of it, had many pupils. I allow few to touch it, but I’d be pleased to have you, if you would like.”

“Would you? May I?” asked Dorothy, handling it reverently for its sacredness to this loving old sister. And, after she had tuned it, as reverently for its own sake. It was a rare old instrument of sweetest tone and almost unconsciously Dorothy tried one theme after another upon it while Miss Hexam leaned back in her chair listening and motionless.

Into that playing the young musician put all the love and homesickness of her own heart. It seemed as if she were back at Deerhurst, with the Great Danes lying on the rug at her feet and dear Aunt Betty resting before the fire. Then,

when memory threatened to bring the tears she was determined should not fall, she stopped, laid the violin silently upon the table and slipped out of the room, leaving Miss Hexam still motionless in her chair.

But she would have been surprised had she looked back into the “inquisition chamber” a few moments later to see the “inquisitor” arouse, seize a sheet of paper and rapidly write a few lines upon it. But the few lines were important. They gave a synopsis of Dorothy’s scholarship and accomplishments, and unerringly assigned her to “Form IVb, class of Miss Aldrich.”

The “terrible exam” was over and Dorothy hadn’t known a thing about it!

Outside that little parlor another surprise awaited her. A crowd of girls was racing madly down the hall, the foremost looking backward as she ran and roughly colliding with Dorothy; with the result that both fell; while the others, following in such speed, were unable to check in time to prevent their tumbling over the first pair. Then such shrieks of laughter rang out that the teachers in the nearby classrooms came to their doors in haste.

Even they were obliged to smile over the heap of girls and the tangle of legs and arms as the fallen ones strove to extricate themselves. They were all in gymnasium-costume and were bound for a side door of the building which led by a short cut to the gymnasium in the Annex.

This was Dorothy’s introduction to the “Commons,” the largest and wildest “set” in the great school. They were all daughters of good families but of no “rank” or titles; and there was an abiding opposition among them to the “Peers,” the smaller “set” of aristocrats to which the Honorable Gwendolyn Borst-Kennard and Lady Marjorie Lancaster belonged. Mostly the “Commons” were a rollicking company, going to the extreme limits of behavior where any fun promised to follow, yet mostly keeping just safely within rules. Their escapades kept the faculty in considerable anxiety as to what they would do next, yet their very gayety was the life of Oak Knowe and even the Lady Principal was secretly fonder of them than of the more dignified “Peers.”

As they now scrambled to their feet, she who had run against Dorothy heartily apologized, yet paused half-way in that apology to stare and remark:

“Why, heigho, there! I thought you were a Minim, you’re so little. But I fancy you’re a newcomer whom I don’t know. Please explain; are you ‘Peer’ or ‘Lower

House’?”

Dorothy laughed:

“‘Lower House,’ I thought when you knocked me down, whatever that may be.”

“It means—is your father an Earl? or your mother a Duchess? Have you an Honorable amongst you? You hold your curly head as if you might have all three!”

All the girls had now gathered about the stranger whom their leader was so unceremoniously quizzing and were eagerly inspecting her, but somehow Dorothy did not resent the scrutiny. There were big girls and little ones, fat girls and thin ones, plain and pretty, but each so good-natured looking and so friendly in her curiosity that Dolly’s own spirits rose in response to their liveliness.

“No, indeed! I’m just a plain American girl and prouder of that than of any title in the world. You see, all of *us* are queens in our own right!” answered the newcomer, promptly.

“Well, come on then; you belong to us and we all belong to the queen. Queen, what shall we call you? Where do you hail from?”

“My home is in Baltimore, and my name is Dorothy Calvert.”

“Then you must be a sort of ‘Peer’ after all. I hate history, but I remember about that, for Lord Baltimore and Calvert are the same thing, I fancy. I’m sorry. I hoped you belonged to our ‘set’ and weren’t an aristocrat.”

“But I’m not, I’m not!” protested Dorothy. “I do belong to you, I want to because you look so friendly and I need friends dreadfully. I’m so lonely, or I was. I’ve just come, you know.”

“Have you been ‘inquisitioned’ yet?”

“I don’t understand.”

The questioner explained, and Dorothy exclaimed:

“Oh! I think that’s cruel! Miss Hexam is perfectly lovely!”

“So do we think, course, and she doesn’t mind the nickname. It was first given

her by a silly Seventh Form girl who thought she was all ready for the University yet failed to pass even a Fifth Form exam. I guess you'll not be put to study to-day, so best come over to the gym with us. What stunts can you do?"

"None. But I've told you my name and you haven't told yours. Thank you, though, for asking me. I'm so glad to go."

"Oh! you poor little lonesome Queen Baltimore! I'm Winifred Christie; this freckle face is Fannie Dimock; Annie Dow wears that blue bow in her hair; Florita Sheraton is the fat one; Ernesta Smith the thin; Bessie Walters—well, no need to point out Bessie. She's the nimblest girl in the gym. We here extend the freedom of the Lower House; and all in favor of grabbing this Yankee into our set before the other set catches her, say—Aye!"

"Aye—aye—aye!" endorsed the motion and Dorothy clapped her hands over her ears, to keep out the ear-splitting shouts. How these girls dared make such an uproar amazed her; but she did not yet know that in the "long recess," now passing, much liberty was permitted and that a noise which did not interfere with study hours was not reprimanded.

"It's the overflow of natural spirits and inevitable in the young," was one of the Bishop's beliefs, and not even the Lady Principal disputed his authority.

"Come on, Queenie, and be put through your paces!" cried Winifred, throwing her arm around Dorothy's shoulders and forcibly racing her out of doors and across the lawn toward the gymnasium.

But arrived there only one or two of the group attempted any exercise. The rest settled around Dorothy, whom the athletic Winifred had tossed upward upon the back of the wooden horse, and, with her arms folded upon the newcomer's knees, this leader of the "Commons" proceeded to cross-question her victim.

“It’s the cast-iron rule of our set to find out everything about anybody we receive into it. Begin at the date of your birth and proceed in a seemly manner until you come up to date. Where were you born? What sort of baby were you—good, bad, or indifferent? Begin!”

Entering into the spirit of the thing Dorothy gave her simple life history in a few sentences. But when the questions came as to the events of the last few days her face grew serious and her voice faltered.

“Why did I come to Oak Knowe alone? Because there was nobody to come with me. That is, Dinah or Ephraim, who might have come, couldn’t be trusted to go back alone. My dearest girl friend, Molly Breckenridge, had been enrolled here and we expected to come together, but the Judge’s health suddenly broke down and he was ordered to California and couldn’t part with her. Uncle Seth wasn’t well. He’s my guardian and Aunt Betty’s friend. She’s my great aunt who takes care of me but she wouldn’t leave Uncle Seth, even if he’s not our kin at all, though we call him so. Jim Barlow is tutoring in a boys’ school and; well, Aunt Betty said I could perfectly well and safely travel alone. I was put into the conductor’s care when I started from Baltimore and he passed me along to the next one, and they’ve all been splendid to me. There’d have been no mistakes if I hadn’t been careless myself. But I was. I missed a train I should have taken and didn’t send the telegram I ought at the right time and there was nobody at the station to meet me and—and—”

“The idea! A girl like you, traveling all the way from Baltimore to Toronto without a maid or any grown-up to take care of her! That’s the strangest thing I ever heard. Weren’t you just awfully scared all the time?” asked Florita Sheraton, amazed. “An English girl would have been in a blue funk every minute of the time.”

“I don’t know anything about a blue or other colored funk, but every well-bred American girl can take care of herself if she chooses. If she ‘loses her head’ she gets into trouble right away. I lost mine last night and went riding off at dark with a strange old man, who said he’d bring me here, instead of stepping into the telegraph office and wiring the Lady Principal. Then all I’d have had to do

would be to wait for her to send for me, and after all it wasn't the old man who brought me, it was Dr. Winston in his motor. He called here this morning and asked me to ride back with him and see Robin, but Miss Tross-Kingdon wouldn't let me."

"Course she wouldn't. She never lets anybody do anything she wants to, if she can help it. Hateful old thing!" remarked Bessie Walters; at which the others laughed and Annie Dow inquired, "Who is Robin?"

Dorothy told the story of last night, her new acquaintances listening intently, and Winifred commenting:

"If you aren't the very luckiest girl in the world! Why I never had an adventure in my life, yet I'm ages older than you."

At this a shout of derision rose, and Fannie Dimock exclaimed:

"Don't believe that, Queen Baltimore. There's scarcely a day passes that she isn't in some scrape or other. Why, last term, she was in disgrace so often I really believed she wouldn't be allowed to come back."

"Oh! little things like that don't count. But—" she stopped speaking so abruptly and such an earnest expression settled on her face that a mate remarked:

"Look! There's something brewing this minute! Look out, Win, what you do! Don't mix any of us up in your schemes. I don't want any more extras so soon again;" then explained to Dorothy that "extras" were some difficult lessons any culprit was obliged to learn.

Just then came the bell for mid-day luncheon, and all the Commons except Winifred answered the summons promptly. But she lingered behind, detaining Dorothy till the others were out of hearing, and then suggested something to her which made her clap her hands in delight. For the secret thus imparted seemed the simplest thing possible and one in which, to Dolly's ignorance of Oak Knowe rules, was entirely right.

Arm in arm, the new friends entered the dining-room and Winifred marched Dorothy steadily forward to a seat at her own table, just opposite that occupied by some of the other "set," with the Honorable Gwendolyn among them. Dolly glanced across and nodded, but that titled young person returned the nod with a

stare so intent and contemptuous that the color flashed to the stranger’s face and her eyes fell as if she were in guilt. Yet she couldn’t guess why, nor why she should be relieved when there arose a sudden diversion outside the doorway toward which everybody turned their eyes.

CHAPTER IV

THE GILPINS HAVE A PARTY

The young ladies of Oak Knowe went out for their afternoon exercise for the half hour before supper. Those who had been long at the school were allowed to roam about the spacious grounds without a teacher, but newcomers, or those who wished to go further afield, were always attended by one.

Most of Winifred's motherless life had been passed at Oak Knowe, even few of her vacations elsewhere. Her father was a very wealthy man, of large affairs which carried him often from the Province, to England or countries further away, so that his home was seldom opened. But to compensate his daughter for this state of things he had arranged with the authorities that her school life should be made as homelike as possible. She had her own private room with a tiny parlor and private bath adjoining. She was allowed to entertain her schoolmates there as she would have done in her father's house; always, of course, within the limits set by the faculty.

But Winifred cared little for all this unusual luxury. She rarely asked for any money "banked" with the Lady Principal beyond the twenty-five cents a week which any pupil might spend; and she liked the common parlor far better than her own richly furnished one. Nothing hurt her feelings more than to have her mates refer to her wealth or to treat her differently from the poorest pupil.

But there were times when she enjoyed her privileges to the utmost, and that first day of Dorothy's life at Oak Knowe was one such. Not having been "in disgrace" for a week at least she confidently asked permission to entertain the newcomer in her rooms, "Just we two by ourselves. She's lonely and I like her. Please, Miss Tross-Kingdon."

"You'll be quiet, Winifred, and keep out of mischief?" asked the Lady Principal, with more gentleness than ordinary. It was natural that she should feel great interest in the girl she had almost reared and whose own power for good or ill Winifred herself could not yet comprehend.

“Ah, now, Miss Muriel, you know I will! Why, surely, I’ve been as good for a whole week as if I were a kindergarten Minim. You should trust me more. I read the other day that people are just what you think they are. So, whatever you want me to be, please just think I *am* and I’ll be it!” and the audacious creature actually dabbed a kiss on the Lady Principal’s own cheek.

“Wheedler! Well, I’ll try to fancy you’re a saint, but I’m not so fanciful about this Dorothy Calvert. She’s a pretty little thing and my Grace made friends with her at once and the Bishop says she is of good blood. That counts, of course, but she seems to me a little headstrong and very stupid. I don’t yet understand how Miss Hexam came to put her into so high a Form. However, I know that she is very homesick, as all new pupils are, so you may entertain her if you wish. A maid shall send you in a tray and you are excused from school supper; but see to it, Winifred, that you use your influence aright. The more favored a person is in this world the more that individual should watch her own actions.”

Winifred thanked the teacher and backed out of the room as if in the presence of royalty itself. This action in itself was offensive to the teacher but was one she could hardly criticise; nor did she guess that, once out of sight, the “wheedler” should first stamp her foot and exclaim:

“I’m sick to death of hearing about my ‘influence’ and being an ‘individual.’ Makes me feel like a spider, that time the German count came to visit Father and called his attention to ‘that individual crawling down the wall.’ He meant ‘one, a solitary thing.’ But I’m no ‘solitary’ just because Father has a little money. I often wish he hadn’t a pound, especially when some of the ‘Peers’ try to make me believe he is at least a ‘Sir’.”

Then hurrying to Dorothy she danced about in delight at her success.

“Yes, she says you may come, and she’s sure to send us in a fine supper. Miss Muriel Tross-Kingdon never does a thing by halves, not even a lecture on ‘individual influence.’ Queen Baltimore, aren’t you glad you’re poor?”

“Neither glad nor sorry, Winifred, because I’m neither rich nor poor. Anyway neither of us can help being just as we are, I reckon.”

“Come on, though, and hurry up. ‘If it were done, when ’tis done, then ’twere well it were done quickly,’” quoted Winifred, whose class reading just then was “Macbeth”; and seizing the smaller girl whirled merrily down the hall.

Five minutes later, with hats and jackets on, they joined the other pupils out of doors. To Dorothy it seemed the beautiful grounds were alive with all sorts and conditions of girls, pacing rapidly up and down, “sprinting” to warm themselves against the chill of the coming evening, playing tennis for the brief half-hour, or racing one another from point to point. There were girls so many and so various, from Seventh Form young ladies to the wee little Minims, that Dolly wondered if she would ever know them all or feel herself a member of the great company.

But Winifred gave her little time to gaze about her.

“Oh! don’t bother with them now. Our way is that lower gate, and it’s a good bit of a distance, I hope you’re a good walker.”

“Pretty good, I reckon,” answered Dolly falling into step with the taller girl and hurrying forward at even a swifter pace.

“But, begging your pardon, that’s no way. We Canadians learn pedestrianism—whew! what a long word!—just as we learn our letters. Begin very slowly at first. Then when your muscles are limbered, walk faster—and faster—and faster! Till it seems as if your legs swing up and down of their own accord, just like machines. It’s wonderful then how little you tire and how far you can go. Slack up a bit and I’ll show you.”

Absorbed in this new lesson Dorothy scarcely noticed when they left Oak Knowe limits and struck out along a country lane, with hedgerows at either side; nor when having climbed a stile they set out across a plowed field, till her feet grew heavy with the soil they gathered.

“Oh! dear! What mud! Why do you walk in it, Winifred?”

“It’s the shortest road. Here’s a stone. Stop a bit and scrape it off—as I do. See?” answered the other, calmly illustrating her advice.

“But I don’t like it. My shoes will be ruined!” wailed Dolly who was always finical about “dirt.”

“Humph! Haven’t you another pair? But they ought to be—such flimsy-wimpsy affairs! Look at mine. A bit of mud more or less can’t hurt them and it’s the boot-boy’s business to clean them.”

The English girl held forth a good sized foot clad in a still larger shoe of

calfskin, which though soiled with the clay had not absorbed much of its moisture: while the finer affairs of Dorothy's were already wet through, making her uncomfortable.

"I couldn't walk in such heavy boots. And it's raining again. It rained last night. Does it rain every day in Canada? We ought to go back. Do let's, and try this some other time. I reckon this will finish my new suit, entirely."

Winifred put her arms akimbo and stared at her new friend. Then burst into a hearty laugh over Dorothy's disgusted face.

"Ha, ha, ha! And 'I reckon,' little southerner, that you'll be a more sensible girl after you've lived up here a while. The idea of turning back because it rains! absurd! Why, it's fine, just fine! The Lady Principal will overhaul your fair-weather-clothes and see that you get some fit to stand anything. This homespun suit of mine couldn't get wet through if it tried! But I shan't stand here, in the middle of a plowed field, and let it try. Come on. Its the States against the Province! Who'll win?"

"I will! For old Maryland and the President!" cried Dorothy, and valiantly strode forward again.

"For our Province and the King!" shouted the Canadian; and after that neither spoke, till the long walk ended before the cottage door of old John Gilpin and his dame. There Winifred gave a smart tap to the panel and holding her hand toward Dorothy, cried:

"Quits, Queen Baltimore! We'll call it even and I'll never doubt your pluck again. But you certainly must get some decent clothes—if I have to buy them myself!"

Then the door opened and there stood old John, peering from the lamp-lighted room into the twilight without. After a second he recognized Dorothy and drew her in, exclaiming joyfully:

"Why, Dame, 'tis our little lass herself! Her of the night last spent and the helping hand! Step ben, step ben, and t'other miss with ye. You're surely welcome as the flowers in spring."

Mrs. Gilpin came ponderously forward, a smile on her big but comely face, and

silently greeted both visitors, while her more nimble husband promptly “step-an’-fetched” the best chairs in the room and placed them before the fire.

“Dry yourselves, lassies, whilst I tell the Robin you’ve come to see him. He’ll be that proud, poor laddie, to have Oak Knowe young ladies pay him that honor! and he’s mending fine, mending fine, doctor says. The mother—”

He disappeared within that inner chamber still talking and as happy now as he had seemed sorrowful when Dorothy parted from him on the night before. Then he had anticipated nothing less than death for the boy he loved, despite the doctor’s assurance to the contrary. He came back leading a woman by the hand, as protectingly as if she had been a child, and introduced her as:

“The bit mother hersel’! Look at her well. Isn’t she the very sight and image of Robin, the lad? And mind how she’s pickin’ up already. Just one day of good victuals and Dame’s cossetting and the pink’s streamin’ back to her cheeks. Please the good Lord they’ll never get that thin again whilst I have my ox-team to haul with and the Dame’s good land to till. I’ll just step-an’-fetch the rocker out—”

At that point in his remarks the Dame laid a hand on his shoulder, saying:

“That’ll do, John Gilpin. Just brew a cup of tea. I’ll tell the lad.”

Winifred was amused at this wifely reprimand, but no offense seemed meant nor taken. The farmer stopped talking and deftly made the tea from the boiling kettle, added a couple of plates to the waiting supper table, and drew from the oven a mighty dish of baked beans that might have been cooked in Yankee-land, and flanked this by a Yorkshire pudding.

“Oh! how nice that smells!” cried Dorothy, springing up to add the knives and forks from the dresser; while Winifred clapped her hands in a pretended ecstasy and sniffed the savory odors, admitting: “I’m as hungry as hungry! And this beats any supper I asked for at Oak Knowe. I hope they’ll want us to stay!”

Her frankness made timid little Mrs. Locke smile as she had not been able to do since she had known of Robin’s accident, and smiling was good for her. Indeed, the whole atmosphere of this simple, comfortable home was good for her, and the high spirits of these three young people delightful to her care-burdened heart.

For, presently, it was the three—not least of these her idol, her Robin! Dorothy had followed the Dame into the boy's room and Winifred had promptly followed her; and because he was the sunny-hearted lad which the farmer had claimed him to be, he put all thought of his own pain or trouble out of mind, and laughed with the two girls at their awkward attempts at feeding him from the tray on the stand beside the bed. Having to lie flat upon his back he could still use one arm and could have fed himself fairly well. But this his visitors would not allow; and he was obliged to submit when Winifred, playfully struggling with Dolly for "My time now!" thrust a spoon into his ear instead of his mouth.

The truth was that under the girl's assumed indifference to the fact that she was breaking rules by "visiting without permission" lay a feeling of guilt. "Double guilt" she knew, because she had imposed upon Dorothy's ignorance by stating that during "exercise hour" any long resident pupil was free to go where she chose. This was true, but only in a measure. What was not true was that so distant a point as John Gilpin's cottage should be chosen, much less entered without permission.

But curiosity had been too strong for her and she had resented, on Dorothy's account, the refusal of Dr. Winston's invitation in the morning. Besides, she argued with her own conscience:

"We're excused from school supper and free to entertain each other in my room till chapel. What difference does it make, and who will know? To-morrow, I'll go and 'fess to Miss Muriel and if she is displeased I'll take my punishment, whatever it is, without a word. Anyhow, Dolly can't be punished for what she doesn't know is wrong."

So, feeling that she "was in for it, anyway" Winifred's mood grew reckless and she "let herself go" to a positive hilarity.

Dorothy watched and listened in surprise but soon caught her schoolmate's spirit, and jested and laughed as merrily as she. Even Robin tried to match their funny remarks with odd stories of his own and after a little time, when he had eaten as much as they could make him, began to sing a long rigmarole, of innumerable verses, that began with the same words and ended midway each verse, only to resume. It was all something about the king and the queen and the "hull r'yal famblely" which Dorothy promptly capped with an improved version of Yankee Doodle.

Whereupon, the absurd jumble and discord of the two contrasting tunes proved too much for old John's gravity. Springing up from his chair in the outer room he seized his fiddle from its shelf and scraped away on a tune of his own. For his fiddle was his great delight and his one resort at times when his wife silenced his voluble tongue.

The old fiddle was sadly out of tune and Dorothy couldn't endure that. Running to him she begged him:

"Oh! do stop that, please, please! Here, let me take and get it into shape. You make me cringe, you squawk so!"

"You fix it? you, lassie! Well, if that don't beat the Dutch! What else do they l'arn children over in the States? Leave 'em to go sky-larkin' round the country in railway carriages all by themsel's, and how to help doctors set broken bones, and how to fiddle a tune—Stars an' Garters! What next? Here, child, take her and make her hum!"

Presently, the preliminary squeaks and discords, incident to "tuning up," were over and Dorothy began a simple melody that made all her hearers quietly listen. One after another the familiar things which Aunt Betty and her guardian loved best came into her mind; and remembering the beloved scenes where she had last played them, her feeling of homesickness and longing made her render them so movingly that soon the little widow was crying and Robin's sensitive face showed signs of his own tears following hers.

The tempting supper had remained untouched thus far. But now the sight of his guests' emotion, and a warning huskiness in his own throat, brought John Gilpin to his feet.

"This isn't no mournin' party, little miss, and you quit, you quit that right square off. Understand? Something lively's more to this occasion than all that solemcholy 'Old Lang Synin',' or 'Wearin' Awa'' business. Touch us off a 'Highland Fling,' and if that t'other girl, was gigglin' so a few minutes gone, 'll do me the honor"—here the old fellow bowed low to Winifred—"I'll show you how the figger should be danced. I can cut a pigeon-wing yet, with the supplest."

Away rolled the table into the further corner of the room: even the Dame merely moving her own chair aside. For she had watched the widow's face and grieved to see it growing sad again, where a little while before it had been cheerful.

Dorothy understood, and swiftly changed from the “Land O’ the Leal” to the gay dance melody demanded. Then laughter came back, for it was so funny to see the farmer’s exaggerated flourish as he bowed again to Winifred and gallantly led her to the middle of the kitchen floor, now cleared for action.

Then followed the merriest jig that ever was danced in that old cottage, or many another. The cuts and the capers, the flings and pigeon-wings that bald-headed John Gilpin displayed were little short of marvelous. Forgotten was the dragging foot that now soared as high as the other, while perspiration streamed from his wrinkled face, flushed to an apoplectic crimson by this violent exercise.

Winifred was no whit behind. Away flung her jacket and then her hat. Off flew the farmer’s smock, always worn for a coat and to protect the homespun suit beneath. The pace grew mad and madder, following the movement of the old fiddle which Dorothy played to its swiftest. Robin’s blue eyes grew big with wonder and he whistled his liveliest, to keep up with the wild antics he could see in the outer room.

Nobody heard a knock upon the door, repeated until patience ceased, and then it softly opened. A full moment the visitor waited there, gazing upon this orgy of motion; then with an ultra flourish of her skirts Winifred faced about and beheld —the Lady Principal!

CHAPTER V

THE FRIGHT OF MILLIKINS-PILLIKINS

For another moment there was utter silence in the cottage. Even the Dame's calmness forsook her, the absurd performance of her bald-headed husband making her ashamed of him. She had seen the Lady Principal passing along the road beyond the lane but had never met her so closely, and she felt that the mistress of Oak Knowe was high above common mortals.

However, as the flush died out of Miss Tross-Kingdon's face Mrs. Gilpin's ordinary manner returned and she advanced in welcome.

"You do us proud, madam, by this call. Pray come in and be seated."

"Yes, yes, do!" cried John, interrupting. "I'll just step-an'-fetch the arm-chair out o' Robin's room. 'Twas carried there for his mother to rest in. She—"

The mortified old fellow was vainly trying to put back the smock he had so recklessly discarded and without which he never felt fully dressed. He hated a coat and wore one only on Sundays, at church. But his frantic efforts to don this garment but added to his own discomfiture, for he slipped it on backwards, the buttons behind, grimacing fiercely at his failure to fasten them.

One glance toward him set all the young folks laughing, he looked so comical, and even the dignified caller was forced to smile.

"Don't see what's so terrible funny as to send ye all into a tee-hee's-nest! but if so be *you* do, why giggle away and get shut of it!" testily cried the poor old man. To have been caught "making a fool of himself" was a "bitter pill" for him to swallow; having always prided himself upon his correct deportment.

It was, as usual, the portly Dame who came to his relief, reminding:

"There, husband, that will do."

Then she quietly drew the smock over his head and slipped it back in proper

guise. With this upon him his composure returned, and he apologized to Miss Tross-Kingdon as any gentleman might have done.

“Sorry to have kep’ you standing so long, lady, but I’ll step-an’-fetch—”

However he was spared that necessity. Dorothy had heard and understood that the best chair in the house must be placed at the caller’s service and had as promptly brought it. For a moment Miss Tross-Kingdon still stood as if she would decline, till, seeing the disappointment on her host’s face, she accepted it with:

“Thank you. My errand could easily have been done without so troubling you. I came to see if you have any more of that variety of apples that you sent us last time. The *chef* declares they are the finest yet. Have you?”

“Yes, lady, I’ve got a few bar’ls left. Leastwise, my Dame has. She can speak for hersel’, if so be she wants to part with ’em. I heard her say she meant to keep ’em for our own winter use. But—”

“That will do, John. Bring a pan from the further bin and show Miss Tross-Kingdon. Maybe she’ll like them just as well.”

“All right, wife. I’ll step-an’-fetch ’em to oncet.”

So this obedient husband went out, his lame foot once more dragging heavily behind him, and he managing as he departed to pass by Dorothy and firmly clutch her sleeve, as he hoarsely whispered:

“Did you ever see the beat! In your mortal ’arthly life, did ye? Well, I’m ashamed to the marrer of my bones to be caught cavortin’ round like the donkey I was. Come on down suller with me and I’ll get the apples. But carry ’em back—I shan’t. Not this night. That woman—lady, I mean—has got eyes like gimlets and the less she bores ’em into old John Gilpin the better he’ll like it. Worst is, what’ll dame think? She won’t say much. She’s a rare silent woman, dame is, but she can do a power of thinking. Oh! hum!”

So it happened that Dorothy returned to the kitchen, fairly staggering under the weight of the biggest pan of apples that the farmer could find. Mrs. Gilpin took them from her and showed them to the Lady Principal, who was inwardly disappointed at the failure of her visit. But the business was speedily concluded

and, rising, she bade Mrs. Gilpin good evening. The only notice she bestowed upon her runaway pupils was to offer:

“If your visit is ended, young ladies, you may return to Oak Knowe in my carriage.”

Dorothy did not yet know how serious an offense she had committed and merely thought that the Lady Principal was “stiffer” even than usual; not once speaking again until the school was reached. Then, as she moved away ignoring Winifred entirely, she bade Dorothy:

“Go to your dormitory, take a warm bath, and dress yourself freshly all through. Your luggage has been unpacked and arranged in your wardrobe. Put on one of your wool gowns for the evening, and come to Assembly Hall. We are to have a lecture and concert, beginning at eight. Punctual attendance required.”

“She acts and looks as if we had done something dreadful, but I can’t guess what,” said Dorothy, perplexed.

“Lucky for you that you can’t! Your ignorance of school rules may save you this time, but it can’t save me. One of the hardest things about it is, that you and I will be prohibited each other’s ‘society’ for nobody knows how long. I’m a wild black sheep, who’s led a little lamb—that’s you—astray. It was fun—*was* fun, mind you, but—but it’s all over for Winifred!”

“Win, you darling, what do you mean?” demanded Dolly, throwing her arms about her new friend’s neck in great distress.

“I mean exactly what I say. I’m an old offender, I’ve been there before and ought to know better. I did like you so! Well, never mind! The milk is spilled and no use crying about it!”

Dorothy was surprised to see tears suddenly fill Winifred’s eyes and to feel her clinging arms gently loosened. Under all her affected indifference, the girl was evidently suffering, but as evidently resented having sympathy shown her; so the new pupil made no further comment, but asked:

“Do we have supper before that lecture? and should I dress before the supper?”

“Huh! There’ll be no supper for you nor me this night! And I’m just ravenous hungry! Why was I such a fool as to dance that jig instead of eating that pudding

and beans? Yorkshire pudding's just delicious, if it's made right, and the Dame's looked better even than our *chef's*. If one could only look ahead in this world, how wise one would be, 'specially in the matter of suppers! Well, good-by, Queenie, with aching heart from you I part; when shall we meet again? Ah! me! When?"

With a gesture of despair, half-comical, half-serious, the older girl dashed down the corridor and Dorothy turned slowly toward her own little room. There she found her luggage unpacked, her frocks and shoes neatly arranged in the wardrobe, underclothing in the small bureau, her toilet things on the tiny dressing table, and the fresh suit she had been asked to put on spread out upon the bed.

It was all very cosy and comfortable, or would have been if she hadn't been so hungry. However, she had hardly begun undressing before Dawkins appeared with a small tray of sandwiches and milk, explaining:

"Supper's long past, Miss Dorothy, but the Principal bade me bring this. Also, if there's time before lecture, you are to go to her private parlor to speak with her. I'll help you and 'twill make the time seem shorter."

"Thank you, Dawkins, that's sweet and kind of you; but—but I don't feel any great hurry about dressing. Maybe Miss Tross-Kingdon'll be better-natured—I mean not so cross—Oh! dear, you know what I mean, don't you, dear Dawkins?"

"Sure, lassie, I know you have a deal more fear of the Lady Principal 'an you need. She's that just kind of a person one can always trust."

"I reckon I don't like 'just' people. I like 'em real plain *kind*. I—I don't like to be found fault with."

"Few folks do so like; especially them as deserves it. But you will love Miss Muriel better 'an anybody at Oak Knowe afore the year's out. Only them that has lived with her knows her. I do know. A better woman never trod shoe leather, and so you'll find. Now, you've no time to waste."

Nor was any wasted, though Dorothy would gladly have postponed the Principal's further acquaintance till another day. She found the lady waiting and herself welcomed by a gracious word and smile. Motioning to a low seat beside

her own chair, Miss Muriel began:

“You are looking vastly improved, Dorothy, since you’ve taken off your rain-soaked clothes. I hope you haven’t taken cold. Have you felt any chill?”

“Thank you, Miss Tross-Kingdon, none at all. Winifred says I will soon get used to rain, and she doesn’t mind it in the least. She says she likes it.”

The Lady Principal’s expression altered to one of sadness rather than anger, at the mention of the other girl, but she did not criticise her in words.

“My dear little Dorothy, I sent for you to explain some things about Oak Knowe which you do not understand. We try to make our rules as few and lenient as possible, but such as do exist we rigidly enforce. Where there are three hundred resident and day pupils gathered under one roof, there is need for regular discipline, and, in general, we have little trouble. What we do have sometimes comes from ignorance, as in your case to-night. Your taking so long a walk without a chaperon, and paying a social visit without permission, was a direct trespass upon our authority. So, to prevent any future mistakes, I have prepared you a list of what you may and may not do. Keep this little notebook by you until you have grown familiar with Oak Knowe life. Also, you will find copies of our regulations posted in several places upon the walls.

“And now that we have finished ‘business’ for the present, let us talk of something pleasanter. Tell me about that ‘Aunt Betty’ of yours, whom our good Bishop lauds so highly.”

Vastly relieved that the dreaded “scolding” had been so mild and Miss Tross-Kingdon so really kind, Dorothy eagerly obeyed, and was delighted to see a real interest in this wonderful aunt showing in the teacher’s face.

But her enthusiastic description of Mrs. Calvert was rudely interrupted by a childish scream and little Millikins-Pillikins flying wildly into the room, to spring into Miss Muriel’s lap and hide her face on the lady’s shoulder, begging:

“Don’t you let him! Don’t you let him! Oh! Auntie, don’t you!”

“Why, darling, what is this? What sent you out of bed, just in your nightgown? What has frightened you?”

“The debbil!”

“Grace! What wicked word is that you speak?”

“It was, *it was!* I seen him! He come—set on my feet—an’—an’—Oh! Auntie Prin, you hold me close. ’Cause he was a talkin’ debbil. He come to cotch me—he said it, yes he did.”

Miss Tross-Kingdon was as perplexed as horrified. That little Grace, her orphan niece and the dearest thing in life to her, should speak like this and be in such a state was most amazing.

For a few seconds she did hold the little one “close” and in silence, tenderly stroking the small body and folding her own light shawl about it, and gradually its trembling ceased, the shuddering sobs grew fainter and fewer and the exhausted little maid fell fast asleep. Just then the clock on the mantel chimed for eight and Miss Muriel’s place was in assembly, on the platform with the famous lecturer who had come to do her great school honor. She must go and at once.

Dorothy, watching, saw the struggle in the aunt’s mind depicted on her face. With a tender clasp of the little one she put her own desire aside and turned to duty; and the girl’s own heart warmed to the stately woman as she had not believed it ever could.

Dawkins had prophesied: “You’ll love Miss Muriel, once you know her,” but Dorothy had not believed her. Yet here it was coming true already!

“Dorothy, will you please ring for a maid to look after Grace? Wake up, darling, Auntie Prin must go.”

The child roused as her aunt spoke, but when she attempted to put her down and rise, the frantic screams broke out afresh, nor would she submit to be lifted by the maid who promptly came. Miss Muriel’s bell was not one to be neglected!

“No, no, no! I shan’t—I won’t—the deb—”

“Not that word, sweetheart, never again!” warned the Lady Principal, laying her finger on Grace’s lips. “Go nicely now with Dora, and make no trouble.”

“No, no, no!” still screamed Grace: her flushed face and feverish appearance sending fresh alarm to her aunt’s heart.

“Why, look here, Millikins! I’m Dorothy. The ‘sleepy-head’ you came to wake up this morning. Won’t you go with *me*, dear? If Auntie Prin says ‘yes,’ I’ll take you back to bed, and if you’ll show me where.”

Millikins looked long and steadily at Dolly’s appealing arms, then slowly crept into them.

“Pretty! Millikins’ll go with pretty Dorothy!”

So they went away, indeed a “pretty” sight to the anxious aunt. Dorothy’s white gown and scarlet ribbons transformed her from the rain-and-mud-bespattered girl of a few hours before, while her loving interest in the frightened child banished all fear and homesickness from her own mobile face.

Little Grace’s room was a small one opening off from Miss Muriel’s, and as soon as the lecture was over and she was free, she took Dr. Winston with her to see the child. Her dark little face was still very flushed, but she was asleep, Dorothy also. The girl had drawn a chair close to the child’s cot and sat there with an arm protectingly thrown over her charge: and now a fresh anxiety rose in the Lady Principal’s heart.

“Oh! Doctor, what if it should be something contagious? I don’t see why I didn’t think of that before. Besides, I sacrificed Miss Calvert’s opportunity to hear the lecture for Grace’s sake. How could I have been so thoughtless!”

“Well, Madam, I suppose because you are human as well as a schoolma’am, and love for your niece stronger than training. But don’t distress yourself. I doubt if this is anything more than a fit of indigestion. That would account, also, for the imaginary visit of a goblin, which terrified the little one. However, it might be well to isolate Miss Dorothy for a day or so, in case anything serious develops.”

By that time Dorothy was awake and sat up listening to this conversation; and when the doctor explained to her that this isolation meant that she must live quite apart from the schoolmates she so desired to know, she was bitterly disappointed.

“I haven’t been here more than twenty-four hours, yet it seems as if more unpleasant things have happened than could anywhere else in a lifetime,” she complained to Dawkins, who had come to arrange another cot for her to use and to bring the needed articles from her own little cubicle.

“Ah, lassie! When you’ve lived as long as me you’ll learn ’t a ‘lifetime’ is a goodish long spell: and if so be you can’t mix with your mates for a little few days, more’s the blessing that’s yours, alongside as you’ll be of the Lady Principal. Now, say your prayers and hop into this fine bed I’ve fixed for you, and off to Noddle Island quick as wink. Good night and sleep well.”

Surely our Dorothy had the gift of winning hearts, and other Oak Knowe girls with whom Dawkins exchanged scant speech would have been astonished by the kindly gossip with this newcomer. Also, the maid’s belief that Dorothy’s intercourse with the Lady Principal would be delightful was well founded. Miss Muriel was grateful to her pupil for her patience with troublesome Grace, and regretful that her isolation from her mates had come about in just this wise.

However, Dr. Winston had been right. Millikins-Pillikins had been allowed the run of the house and, like most children, found its kitchen its most attractive place. There her sharp tongue and amusing capers furnished amusement for the servants, who rewarded her with all sorts of “treats” and sweetmeats. The result was natural, but what was not so natural was her persistent declaration that she had been visited by an evil spirit.

“I did so see him, Auntie Princie! He had big whitey eyes, and his head was all red—”

“No more, darling. Say no more. Just play with your blocks. See what sort of house you can build, or—”

“Auntie Prin, I do *hate* blocks! And you don’t believe me. Did Millikins ever tell you a wrong story in her whole life?”

“No, darling, not to my knowledge. I’m proud to know you are a very truthful little girl. But even such can *dream* queer things. Ask Dorothy to play for you and me. You know this is the last day she’ll be shut up here and I’d like to hear some music.”

Dorothy laid down her book and went to fetch her violin, but the self-willed Grace would have none of that. Stamping her foot, she imperiously cried:

“No, no, no! She shall come with me and seek that old debbil. She shall so. He had hornses and his face—”

“Grace Adelaide Tross-Kingdon! if you disobey me again by mentioning that subject, I shall send for the Bishop and brother Hugh and see what they can do with you. Do you want to be disgraced before them?”

The little girl pondered that question seriously. She could not understand why telling the truth should disgrace anybody. She loved the Bishop and fairly idolized her big brother Hugh. Her Aunt Muriel was more angry with the child than ever before in her short life and Millikins fully realized this fact.

“I’m sorry, Auntie Prin. I’m sorrier than ever was. I hate them two should think I was bad and I wish—I wish you wouldn’t not for to tell ’em. I isn’t bad, you only think so. ’Cause it’s the truthiest truth, I *did* see him. He had—”

Miss Tross-Kingdon held up a warning hand and her face was sterner than any pupil had ever seen it. Such would have quailed before it, but Millikins-Pillikins quailed not at all. Rising from the carpet, where she had been sitting, she planted her sturdy legs apart, folded her arms behind her and unflinchingly regarded her aunt. The midget’s defiant attitude made Dorothy turn her head to hide a smile, while the little girl reiterated:

“I did see him. I have to tell the truth all times. You said so and I have to mind. I did see that debbil. He lives in this house. When my brother Hugh comes, he shall go with me to hunt which room he lives in, and the Bishop shall preach at him the goodest and hardest he can. This isn’t no badness, dear, angry Auntie Prin; it is the truthiest truth and when you see him, too, you’ll believe it. If Hugh would come—”

Miss Tross-Kingdon leaned back in her chair and threw out her hand in a gesture of despair. What made her darling so incorrigible?

“Oh! I wish he would come, I certainly wish he would! This thing is beyond me or anything in my experience. I almost begin to believe that Bible days have returned and you are possessed of the evil spirit.”

Millikins-Pillikins returned to her play in supreme indifference. She knew what she knew. Couldn’t a body believe one’s own eyes? Didn’t the *chef* often say that “Seeing is believing,” when the scullery maid stole the raisins and he found them in her pocket? She couldn’t help Auntie Prin being stupid; and—

“Oh, oh, oh! Hughie’s come! Hughie’s come! Oh! you darling brother boy, let’s

go and seek that debbil!”

The youth who entered and into whose arms his little sister had sprung, held her away from him and gasped. Then answered merrily:

“That gentleman doesn’t belong in good society, kiddie. It’s not good form even to mention him. I’d rather go the other way.”

Then he set her gently down and turned to acknowledge his aunt’s introduction to Dorothy. He was well used to meeting the Oak Knowe girls, but wondered a little at finding one at this hour in the Lady Principal’s private parlor. As he opened his lips to address some courteous remark to her, a shriek of utter terror rang through the house and a housemaid burst unceremoniously in, white and almost breathless, yet managing to say:

“Oh! Ma’am, I’m leavin’—I’m leavin’ the now! Sure, ’tis a haunted house and Satan hisself dwells in it!”

CHAPTER VI

AT THE FALL OF THE MAIDEN'S BATH

There had, indeed, been strange happenings at Oak Knowe. Beginning on that first day of Dorothy's life there, with the crash outside the dining-room door. That had been caused by the tripping and falling with a loaded tray of one of the best waitresses employed. Afterward it was discovered that a wire had been stretched across the doorway, low down near to the floor, and not easily noticeable in the dim passage. Who had done this thing?

Miss Tross-Kingdon paid scant attention to the incident, apparently, although she caused a very thorough investigation to be secretly made. Nothing came of it.

Matters went so wrong in the servants' quarters that they became demoralized and several threatened to leave. Thefts from one and another were frequent; yet as often the missing article was found in some unusual place where, as Dawkins declared:

"Nobody but a crazy person would ha' puttin' it."

One morning the *chef's* spotless marble molding-board was found decorated by a death's-head and bones, done in red paint, and his angry accusations of his fellow-workers brought the Lady Principal to the kitchen to restore peace. But peace did not last long. The head laundress, who personally "did up" the finest pieces in "the wash," found her pile of them deluged with blueing, so that her work had to be done all over again. These were but samples of the strange happenings; and though most of the servants had been so long at Oak Knowe that they considered it their real home, some of the most loyal to its interests felt they couldn't endure this state of things much longer.

Then had come the fright of little Grace, followed by that of the housemaid, whom no arguments could calm, and who rushed out of Miss Muriel's parlor as she rushed into it, departing that hour for good and all and to spread far and near ill reports of the great school.

However, after that day nothing further happened. At a secret meeting of the faculty it was decided to take no outward notice of these disturbances, but to keep silent watch until such a time as the culprit, or culprits, should betray themselves.

“He or she is bound to do so, after a time. There’s always a hitch somewhere in such mischievous schemes and nothing worse than mortal hands has performed this ‘witch work,’” said the Bishop calmly, though vexed that such foolishness could be found at his beloved Oak Knowe.

Then for many days the disturbances ceased.

Dorothy fell into the daily life of the school with all her heart, making friends with her mates in her own Form and even with some of the older girls. Best of all, she had lost all fear of the Lady Principal, whose heart she had won by her devotion to little Millikins. She even begged forgiveness for Winifred, against whom the teacher still felt some resentment; saying to Dolly:

“It isn’t what she did—in itself—so much as her broken trust. She has been with me so long, she has been taught so constantly, that I feel indignant at her deception. Anything but deception, Dorothy. Remember that a treacherous person is more to be feared than an openly wicked one.”

“But, dear Miss Muriel, Winifred will never cheat again. Never, I know. She won’t go off bounds a step now, even though her ‘restriction’s’ taken off. And she keeps away from me till she makes me feel dreadfully. Says she doesn’t want to ‘contaminate’ and get me into trouble again. Please let her go nutting this afternoon with Miss Aldrich’s class.”

“Very well. She may go.”

“One thing more, Miss Tross-Kingdon. When may I, may we, go to see Robin?”

The lady smiled. A sudden memory of the scene upon which she had entered that rainy evening of her first visit to the cottage amused her, and she answered graciously:

“Probably on Saturday, if you wish. Though I am still doubtful whether your guardians would approve.”

“I can answer for them, dear Miss Muriel. They are just the kind that would like

me to go. Some of Aunt Betty's dearest friends are very poor. She finds them honester and more generous than the rich ones. As for darling Uncle Seth, he learned to be a regular blacksmith, just so he could live among them on 'even terms,' he said. Yet he's the wisest, best man in all the world."

In the Lady Principal's private opinion he was also the most eccentric; but she did not dash Dorothy's enthusiasm further than to say:

"To me it seems wisest to content one's self with the station in which one has been born. To step aside from the normal path in life—"

Foreseeing a "lecture," Dorothy interrupted:

"Beg pardon, Miss Muriel, but there's Win yonder this minute, walking with her head down as if she were worrying. She thought her father was coming home next week and he isn't, and she's so disappointed. She's reading his letter over again. She said, when I asked her why she was so blue, that it didn't seem like home here any longer with you offended, and he wasn't coming, and she had no real home anywhere. Oh! you needn't be afraid of darling Win doing anything crooked again. Do love her and take her back into your trust, and may I go now to tell her she can go nutting and about Saturday, and may I hurry up?"

Without waiting an instant longer, Dorothy took permission for granted and ran out of the house. In reality, she had grieved far more over Winifred's punishment, by being kept on bounds and denied some other privileges, than that lively young person had herself.

Winifred was ashamed, but she wasn't unhappy. Only now this letter of her father's, and the longing to see him, had sobered her greatly. Yet she was ready enough for the next amusement that might offer and looked up eagerly as Dorothy ran towards her across the lawn, crying:

"Don't look so forlorn, Win! We can go—you can go—"

"They can go!" finished the other, her mood quickly changing at sight of Dorothy's beaming face. "Where can they go, how can they go, when can they go, Teacher?"

"Nutting, with Miss Aldrich's class. On their feet. With baskets and bags and the boot-boy with poles to thresh the trees and carry the nuts! and on Saturday to old

John’s cottage to hear the Robin sing!”

“Oh! do you mean it? Do you? Then I know I’m all right with Miss Muriel again and I must go and thank her.”

Away hurried the impulsive girl and in the Lady Principal’s room was presently an interview that was delightful to both. For in her heart, beneath a cold manner, Miss Tross-Kingdon kept a warm love for this wild pupil of hers; and was as ready to believe in Winifred’s promises as the girl was to make them.

The late autumn day was uncommonly fine. Not only Miss Aldrich, but most of the other teachers, were to take their classes to a distant forest on their annual nutting excursion, from which, this year, Winifred had felt she would be excluded. Miss Aldrich was not her own class director, but the girls in it were her especial friends and belonged to her gymnasium class. They were all “Commons,” except Marjorie Lancaster, a gentle little “Peer,” whom haughty Gwendolyn kept well reminded of her rank.

“I don’t like your being so chummy with those girls, and, worst of all, with that Dorothy Calvert. She’s a pert sort of girl, with no manner at all. Why, Marjorie, I’ve seen her leaning against the Bishop just as if he were a post! *The Bishop*, mind you!”

“Well, if he wanted her to, what harm, Gwen? Somebody said he knew her people over in the States and that’s why she was sent away up here to his school. I like her ever so much. She’s so full of fun and so willing to help a girl, any girl, with her lessons. She learns so easy and I’m so stupid!” protested Marjorie, who was, indeed, more noted for her failures than her successes at recitations.

“But I don’t like it. If you must have an intimate, why not choose her from ‘our set’?”

“The ‘Commons’ are lots jollier. They’re not all the time thinking about their clothes, or who’s higher ranked than another. I’m thankful I belong with the Aldrich ten. We have splendid times.”

Gwendolyn sighed. She found it very difficult to keep many of her “set” up to their duty as peers of the realm. “Class distinction” fell from her nimble tongue a dozen times a day in reprimands to other “Peers” who would hobnob with untitled schoolmates despite all she could do; and now to preserve Marjorie from

mingling too much with the “Commons,” she declared:

“Well, if you won’t come with us, I shall go with you. My director will let me. She always does let me do about as I like. She’s lots more agreeable than the Lady Principal, who ought to appreciate what I try to do for the good of the school. When I told her how Florita Sheraton had complained she just couldn’t get enough to eat here, she was cross as two sticks and said: ‘Gwendolyn, if you are a real Honorable, you’ll not descend to tale-bearing!’ Hateful thing. And she comes of a titled family, too, somebody said. Yes, I’m sure my teacher will let me.”

“Even a worm will turn,” and mild little Marjorie murmured under her breath:

“I wish she wouldn’t! But, of course, she will, ’cause it’s the easiest way to get along. Yet you’ll spoil sport—sure!”

But the Honorable Gwendolyn Borst-Kennard was already moving away to announce her intention to her greatly relieved director. For it was usually the case, that wherever this young aristocrat went, trouble followed; for, like the ‘twelfth juryman,’ she never could understand why the ‘eleven contrary ones’ didn’t agree with *him*.

Nobody stayed at Oak Knowe, that day, who was able to join this outing: and when nearly three hundred girls take the road, they are a goodly sight worth seeing. Each had been provided with her own little parcel of lunch packed in the small basket that was to be carried home full of nuts, and each carried a stout alpenstock, such as the experienced teachers had found a help on their pupils’ long walks.

“A walk that is less than five miles long is no walk at all for healthy girls,” had been Dr. Winston’s remark; adding, for the Lady Principal’s ear alone: “That’ll take the kinks out of them and they’ll give you less trouble, skylarking. Teach them the art of walking and let them go!”

To escape Gwendolyn, Marjorie had hurried to the fore of her “Ten” and slipped her arm into Winifred’s, who had expected Dorothy instead. But she couldn’t refuse Marjorie’s pleading:

“Don’t look like you didn’t want me, Winnie dear. Gwen is bound so to take care of me and I don’t need her care. I don’t see any difference between you

‘Commons’ and we ‘Peers’ except that you’re nicer.”

“Why, of course, I want you, Marjorie. Can you see Dorothy Calvert anywhere behind? It’s so narrow here and the hedge so thick I can’t look back.”

From her outer place and lower height Marjorie could stoop and peer around the curve, and gleefully cried:

“Of all things! The girls have paired off so as to leave Gwen and Dolly together at the very end! Another class is so close behind they can’t change very well and I wonder what Gwendolyn will do!”

“I’m sorry for Dolly, but she’ll get on. Gwen has pretended not to see her so many times that Dorothy can hardly put up with it. Under all her good nature she has a hot temper. You’d ought to have seen her pitch into one of the scullery boys for tormenting a cat. And she said once that she’d make Gwendolyn like her yet or know the reason why. Now’s her chance to try it! It’s all that silly imagination of Gwen’s that makes her act so. Made up her mind that Dolly is a ‘charity’ girl, when anybody with common sense would know better. There are some at Oak Knowe, course: we all know that, for it’s one of the Bishop’s notions he must give any girl an education who wants it and can’t pay for it. But I don’t know which ones are; do you?”

“No, indeed! And if I did, I’d never let them know I knew.”

“Of course you wouldn’t. No gentlewoman would, except that stuck-up Gwen. Her mother, Lady Jane’s so different. She’s almost as jolly and simple as her brother, Dr. Winston. But her Honorable young daughter just makes me tired! Peek again. What are they doing now?”

“The ‘Peer’ is walking like a soldier on parade, stiff as can be, thumping her alpenstock up and down plumpety-plump, hard as nails. But Dorothy seems to be chattering away like a good one!”

Winifred stooped and peered between the bobbing rows of girls and branches of trees and caught Dorothy’s eye, to whom she beckoned: “Forward!” But Dorothy smilingly signaled “No!”

“Well, *one* of that pair is happy, but it isn’t Lady Jane’s daughter! I fancy we’d best leave them to ‘fight it out on that line,’” decided Winifred, facing about

again. “I know Queen Baltimore will down Honorable England at the end.”

Despite her own stiffness, Dorothy’s continued chatter at last began to interest Gwendolyn, and the perfect good nature with which she accepted the marked coldness of the haughty girl to make her ashamed. Also, she was surprised to see how the girl from the States enjoyed the novelty of everything Canadian. The wild flowers especially interested her, and Gwendolyn was compelled to admire the stranger’s love and knowledge of growing things.

With more decency than she had hitherto shown, she finally asked:

“However did you come to know so much botany, Miss Calvert?”

“Why, my Uncle Seth, the Blacksmith, taught me; he lived in the woods and loved them to that degree—my heart! he would no sooner hurt a plant than a person! He was that way. Some people are, who make friends of little things. And he was so happy, always, in his smithy under the Great Tree, which people from all the countryside came to see, it was so monstrous big. Oh! I wish you could see dear Uncle Seth, sitting at the smithy door, reading or talking to the blacksmith inside at the anvil, a man who worked for him and adored him.”

The Honorable Gwendolyn stiffened again, and walked along in freezing silence. She would have joined some other girl ahead, but none invited her, and she was too proud to beg for a place beside those who should have felt it an honor to have her. Besides, pride kept her to her place in the rear.

“Huh! I’ll show this Yankee farrier’s niece that I am above caring who is near me. But it’s horrid to be forced into such a position and I wish I hadn’t come. Goodness! how her tongue runs! And now what freak sets her ‘Oh-ing!’ and ‘Ah-ing!’ that style?” ran Gwendolyn’s thoughts, and she showed her annoyance by asking:

“Miss Calvert, will you oblige me by not screaming quite so loud? It’s wretched form and gets on my nerves, for I’m not used to that sort of thing.”

“Neither am I!” laughed Dorothy; “but you see, I never saw anything so lovely as that glimpse before. I couldn’t help crying out—we came upon it so suddenly. Do see yonder!”

Her finger pointed westward, then was promptly drawn back, as she admitted:

“Pointing is ‘bad form,’ too, I’ve been taught. But do look—do look! It’s just like fairyland!”

Gwendolyn did look, though rather against her will, and paused, as charmed as Dorothy, but in a quieter fashion. She was a considerable artist and her gift in painting her one great talent. Oddly enough, too, she cared less for the praise of others than for the delight of handling her brush.

Beyond, a sudden break in the thick wood revealed a tumbling waterfall, descending from a cliff by almost regular steps into a sunlit pool below. Bordering it on both sides were trees of gorgeous coloring and mountain ashes laden with their brilliant berries; while a shimmering vapor rose from the pool beneath, half veiling the little cascade, foaming white upon the rocks.

For a moment Gwendolyn regarded the scene in silence but with shining eyes and parted lips. Then she exclaimed:

“The very spot we’ve searched for so often and never found! ‘The Maiden’s Bath,’ it’s called. I’ve heard about it so much. The story is that there was an Indian girl so lovely and pure that it was thought a mortal sin for mortal eyes to look upon her. She had devoted herself to the service of the Great Spirit and, to reward her, He formed this beautiful Bath for her use alone, hid it so deep in the heart of the forest that no one could find it but she. There was but one trail which led to it and—we’ve found it, we’ve found it! Hurry up! Come.”

Dorothy stared. Here seemed a new Gwendolyn, whose tongue ran quite as rapidly as her own had ever done, and whose haughty face was now transformed by eager delight. As the young artist ran forward toward the spot, Dolly noticed that no other girl was in sight. They two had turned a little aside from the smoother path which the rest had taken, Dorothy following the lure of some new wild flower and Gwendolyn stiffly following her. Only a minute before the chatter and laughter of many girls had filled the air; now, save for their own footsteps on the fallen leaves, there was no sound.

“I wonder where the rest are! Did you see which way they went, Gwendolyn?”

“No. I didn’t notice. But they’re just around the next turn, I fancy. Oh! to think I’ve found the Bath at last. I must make a little sketch of it and come back as soon as I can with my color box. How the studio girls will envy me! Every time we’ve been in these woods we’ve searched for it and now to come upon it all at

once, never dreaming, makes me proud! But—*don't you tell*. I'd begun something else for next exhibition, but I shall drop that and do this. I'll get leave to do it in my recreation hours in some empty class room, and bring it out as a surprise. I wish I'd found it alone. I wish nobody knew it but me. It must be kept a secret—so don't you dare to tell. Come on."

"Huh! I reckon if you'll stick to facts, it was I—not you—who found it. I don't see why I should keep it secret. It doesn't belong to either of us, it belongs to the whole world. I wish everybody who loves beauty could enjoy it," answered Dorothy, warmly.

"Well, go tell then, tattle-tale! You might know a common girl like you would be hateful to her betters, if she got a chance!" retorted Gwendolyn, angrily.

It rose to Dorothy's lips to respond: "Tattle-tale and mischief-maker is what all the girls know *you* are!" but she kept the hard words back, "counting ten" vigorously, and also listening for some sound of her now invisible schoolmates. She wasn't a timid girl, but the silence of this deep forest startled her, nor looking around could she discover by what path they had come to this place.

Then Gwendolyn was hurrying forward, carrying the pocket-pad and pencil without which she went nowhere, and careless of everything but to get her sketch. So Dorothy followed, forgetting her resentment in watching her companion. To see Gwen's head turning this way, then that, squinting her eyes and holding her pencil before them, measuring distance thus and seeking the "right light," interested the watcher for the time.

Finally, the artist had secured a point which suited her and, seating herself, rapidly drew a picture of one view. She worked so deftly and confidently, that Dorothy's only feeling now was one of admiration.

Then a new position was sought and another sketch made, but Gwen permitted no talk between them.

"I can't work and talk, too; please be still, can't you?" she asked, looking up from her work.

And again the real earnestness of the girl she disliked made Dorothy obedient, again rising to follow while Gwen chose another view still, high up near the top of the wonderful cascade. Her face had grown pink and animated and her eyes

glowed with enthusiasm.

“I shall paint that misty-veil with a glaze of ultramarine. There should be an underwash of madder, and maybe terre verte. Oh! if I can only make it look one atom as I see it! We must come here again and again, you and I, Miss Calvert, and you must—you simply *must* keep the secret of our finding till after I’ve exhibited my picture.”

“All right. How long will it be before we can go find the others? you know we can’t gather any nuts right here. I don’t see a single nut tree.”

“I don’t know how long I shall be, and why care about nuts while we can have—this?” returned Gwen, indifferently.

“Very well, I guess I’ll take a nap. Seems terrible close in this shut-in nook and my walk has made me sleepy. I reckon I’ll take a nap. Wake me up when you get through.”

So saying, Dorothy curled down upon a mass of mighty ferns, laid her head on her arm and went to sleep. For how long she never knew, but her awakening was sudden and startling. She had been roused from a dream of Bellevieu, her Baltimore home, and of dear Aunt Betty feeding her pets, the Great Danes.

Brushing the slumber from her eyes, she gazed about her, wondering for an instant, where she was. Then—that frantic shriek again:

“Help! Help! I’m dr—”

The cry died in a gurgle and Dorothy sprang to her feet in terror. She had warned Gwendolyn not to take that high seat so close to that slippery rock, from beneath which the cascade began its downward flow.

“If you fall, it will be straight into the pool. Do be careful, Gwen, how you move.”

But the warning had been useless—Gwendolyn was already in the pool.

CHAPTER VII

ALL HALLOW EVE FESTIVITIES

“I’m going to choose Queen Bess! I’ve made a lovely ruff, stands away up above my head. And Mrs. Archibald, the matron, has bought me four yards of chintz that might be brocade—if it was!” said Florita Sheraton, from the gymnasium floor, hugging her arms for warmth.

“Four yards! That’ll never go around you, Fatty!” declared Fanny Dimock, with playful frankness.

“Well, it’ll have to go as far as it may, then. It cost twenty cents. That left five only for the white and gilt paper for my ruff and crown.”

“Was Queen Elizabeth fat?” asked Dorothy, from her now favorite perch upon the high wooden horse.

“What does that matter, whether she were or not? The plot is to act like a Queen when once you get her clothes on,” observed Winifred, judicially. “I wonder if you can do that, Flo. Or if it needs another yard of cloth to make you real stately—she ought to have a train, oughtn’t she—I might lend you another sixpence. If Miss Muriel would let me.”

“Don’t ask for it, Win. You’ve done so splendidly ever since—”

“That time I didn’t! Well, I’d rather not ask for it. Twenty-five cents was the limit she set.”

“Wants to stimulate our ingenuity, maybe, to see how well we can dress on twenty-five cents a week!” laughed Ernesta Smith, who had no ingenuity at all. “If it weren’t for Dolly here, I’d have to give it up, but she’s fixed me a lovely, spooky rig that’ll just make you all goose-fleshy.”

“What is it? Tell,” begged the others, but Ernesta shook her head. “No, indeedy! It’s the chance of my life to create an impression and I shan’t spoil it beforehand. It’ll be all the more stunning because I’m such a bean-pole. Dorothy says that

Florrie and I must walk together in the parade."

"Oh! I hope it will be a grand success!" cried Winifred, seizing Bessie Walters and going through a lively calisthenic exercise with her. "We've always wanted to have a Hallowe'en Party, but the faculty have never before said yes. It's all Dorothy's doings that we have it now."

A shadow fell over Dolly's bright face. It was quite true that she had suggested this little festivity to the good Bishop. She had told him other things as well which hurt him to hear and made him the more willing to consent to any bit of gayety she might propose. She had said:

"There is somebody in this school that doesn't like me. Yes, dear Bishop, it's true; though I don't know who and I've tried to be friendly to everybody. That is to all I know. The high-up Form girls don't appear to see me at all, though they're friendly enough with lots of the other younger ones. I heard Edna Ross-Ross saying to another that all the strange, horrid things that had happened at Oak Knowe this autumn began with my coming. She'd been told that I was a charity scholar, belonging to one of the servants. She didn't object to charity girls, so long as she knew they were of *good* family, but she drew the line at *servants'* families. She said that Gwendolyn had heard you, yourself, tell Miss Tross-Kingdon that I was mischievous and she must look out for me."

"My dear, my dear! Surely no fair-minded girl could have so misunderstood me, even admitting that I did say that—which I fail to remember. As to that silly notion about the 'haunting' business, Betty Calvert's niece should be able to laugh at that. Absurd, absurd! Now tell me again what your fancy is about this Hallowe'en Party."

"Why, sir, things can't be done without folks do them, can they?"

"That's a poser; but I'll grant your premises. Proceed with the argument," answered the old gentleman, merrily.

"Well, I thought, somehow, that if everybody was allowed to dress in character and wear some sort of a mask, the one who had played such pranks and frightened Grace and the maids might be found out. If anybody in this house owns such a mask as that horrid one and is mean enough to scare little girls, he or she wouldn't lose so good a chance of scaring a lot more. Don't you think so? And—and—there's something else I ought to tell, but am afraid. Miss Muriel

gets so stern every time the thing is mentioned that I put it off and off. I can tell you though, if you wish."

"Certainly, I wish you would."

The gentleman's face had grown as serious now, and almost as stern, as the Lady Principal's at similar times; and Dorothy gave a sigh to bolster her own courage as she gravely announced:

"When I took out my white shoes to wear them last evening, there was a skull and cross-bones on each one, done with red paint: and the tube of vermilion had been taken from my own oil color box. Now—what do you think of that?"

Her listener pursed his lips in a silent whistle, which indicated great amazement in a man like him, but he said nothing. Only, for a moment he drew the girl to him and looked searchingly into her brown eyes. But they looked back at him with a clear, straightforward gaze that pleased him and made him exclaim:

"Well, little Betty—whom you always seem to me—we're in a scrape worthy of old Bellevieu. We've got to get out of it, somehow. You try your scheme of playing masked detective first. If you fail in proving our innocence and some other youngster's roguery, I'll tackle the matter myself. For this nonsense is hurtful to Oak Knowe. That I am compelled to admit. 'Behold how great a matter a little fire kindleth.' A miserable rumor started has wide-spread effect. I could preach you a sermon on that topic, but I won't. Run along back to your mates and try it. Just whisper 'Hallowe'en Party' to any one of them and see if every girl at Oak Knowe doesn't know beforehand that after chapel, to-night, the Lady Principal will announce this intended event. Now, good day, my dear 'Betty,' and for the present, to oblige me, just put those decorated shoes out of sight."

This talk had been two days before: and with the Lady Principal's announcement of the affair had been coupled the decision:

"Those of you young ladies that have no costume suitable may expend their week's allowance in material for one. Of course, this restricts the expense to utmost simplicity. No one may run in debt, nor borrow more than suggestions from her neighbors. Under these conditions I hope you will have the happy time you anticipate."

So they were dismissed in gay spirits, to gather in groups everywhere to discuss costumes and the possibility of evolving a fetching one at the modest cost of a quarter dollar. By the afternoon following, most of the preparations had been made. Some of the maids had lent a hand to the sewing and the good-natured matron had planned and purchased and cut till her arms ached. But she had entered into the spirit of the occasion as heartily as any girl of them all; and the sixth and seventh Form students, who rather fancied themselves too grown-up for such frivolity, had willingly helped the preparations of the lower school pupils.

Only one who might have enjoyed the fun was out of it. Gwendolyn was in the hospital, in the furthest west wing: for the time being a nervous and physical wreck from her experience at the Maiden's Bath. Even yet nobody dared speak to her of that terrible time, for it made her so hysterical; and for some reason she shrank from Dorothy's visits of inquiry and sympathy more than from any other's. But this seemed ungrateful to Lady Jane, her mother, now in residence at the school to care for and be near her daughter. She determined this "nonsense" must be overcome and had especially begged Dolly to come to the sick room, dressed for the party, and to relate in detail all that had happened on that dreadful day.

So Dorothy had slipped away from her mates, to oblige Lady Jane, but dreading to meet the girl she had saved, yet who still seemed to dislike her. She wore her gipsy costume of scarlet, a little costume that she had worn at home at a similar party, and a dainty scarlet mask would be added later on. She looked so graceful and winsome, as she tapped at the door, that Lady Jane exclaimed as she admitted her:

"Why, you darling! What a picture you have made of yourself! I must give you a good kiss—two of them! One for myself and Gwen and one for the Aunt Betty you love."

Then the lady led her in to the low chair beside Gwen's bed, with a tenderness so motherly that Dorothy lost all feeling of awkwardness with the sick girl.

"Now, my child, I must hear every detail of that afternoon. My darling daughter is really much better. I want her to get over this dread of what is past, and safely so. I'm sure your story of the matter will help her to think of it calmly."

She waited for Dorothy to begin, and at last she did, making as light of the affair as of an ordinary playground happening.

“Why, it wasn’t anything. Really, it wasn’t, except that Gwen took such a cold and grieved so because other folks had to find where the hidden cascade was. She just got so eager with her drawing that she didn’t notice how close she got to the edge of the rock. If I had stayed awake, instead of going to sleep, I should have seen and caught her before she slipped. I can’t forgive myself for that.”

The Lady Jane shook a protesting head.

“That was no fault in you, Dorothy. Go on.”

“When I waked up, she was in the water, and she didn’t understand how to get out. She couldn’t swim, you know, but I can. So, course, I just jumped in and caught her. There was a big branch bent down low and I caught hold of that. She caught hold of me, but not both my arms, and so—so—I could pull us both out.”

Dorothy did not add that her arm had been so strained she could not yet use it without pain.

“Oh! thank God for you, my dear!” cried the mother, laying her hand upon Gwendolyn’s shoulder, who had turned toward the wall and lay with her face hidden. “And after that? Somebody said you stripped off your own jacket and wrapped it around her.”

“It wasn’t as nice as hers, but you see she was cold, and I thought she wouldn’t mind for once. I borrowed her bathrobe once and she didn’t like it, and now she’d borrowed my jacket and didn’t like that, I suppose.”

“Like it! Doubtless it helped to save her life, too, or her from pneumonia. Oh! if you hadn’t been there! If—” sobbed the mother.

“But there wasn’t any ‘if,’ Lady Jane; ’cause if I hadn’t seen the falls and made her see them, too, she wouldn’t have been near hand. If she’d gone with the girl she wanted to, nothing at all would have happened. Some way it got mixed up so she had to walk with me and that’s all. Only once we got out of the water onto the ground, I started yelling, and I must have done it terrible loud. Else Mr. Hugh wouldn’t have heard me and followed my yells. He’d gone long past us, hunting with his gun, and he heard me and came hurrying to where the sound was. So he

just put his coat around her and made her get up and walk. He had to speak to her real cross before she would, she was so dazed and mis'able. But she did at last, and he knew all those woods by heart. And the directions of them, which way was north, or south, or all ways.

"It was a right smart road he took for roughness, so that sometimes we girls stumbled and fell, but he wouldn't stop. He kept telling us that, and saying: 'Only a little further now!' though it did seem to the end of the world. And by and by we came out of the woods to a level road, and after a time to a little farmhouse. Mr. Hugh made the farmer hitch up his horse mighty quick and wrap us in blankets and drove us home—fast as fast. And, that's all. I'm sorry Gwendolyn took such a cold and I hope when she gets well she'll forgive me for going to sleep that time. And, please, Lady Jane, may I go now? Some of the girls are waiting for me, 'cause they want me in the parade."

"Surely, my dear: and thank you for telling me so long a story. I wanted it at first hands and I wanted Gwendolyn to hear it, too. Good night and a happy, happy evening. It's really your own party, I hear; begged by yourself from the Bishop for your schoolmates' pleasure. I trust the lion's share of that pleasure may be your own."

As Dorothy left the room, with her graceful farewell curtsey, the girl on the bed turned back toward her mother and lifted a tear-wet face.

"Why, Gwen, dearest, surely she didn't make you nervous again, did she? She described your accident so simply and in such a matter of course way. She seemed to blame the whole matter on herself; first her discovery of the waterfall, then her falling asleep. She is a brave, unselfish girl. Hoping you 'would forgive' her—for saving your life!"

"Oh, mother, don't! You can't guess how that hurts me. 'Forgive her'! Can she ever in this world forgive me!" And again the invalid's face was hidden in the covers, while her body shook with sobs; that convinced Lady Jane that nobody, not even her anxious self, knew how seriously ill her daughter was.

"My child, my child, don't grieve so! It is all past and gone. I made a mistake in forcing you to meet the companion of your disaster and hearing the story from her, but please do forget it for my sake. You are well—or soon will be; and the sooner you gain some strength, you'll be as happy as ever."

“I shall never be happy again—never. I want to go away from here. I never want to see Oak Knowe again!” wailed Gwendolyn with fresh tears.

“Go away? Why, darling, you have always been happier here than in any other place. At home you complain of your brothers, and you think my home rules harder than the Lady Principal’s. Besides, I’ve just settled the boys at school and with you here, I felt free to make all my plans for a winter abroad. Don’t be nonsensical. Don’t spoil everything by foolishness concerning an accident that ended so well. I don’t understand you, dearest, I certainly do not.”

Assembly Hall had been cleared for the entertainment. Most of the chairs had been removed, only a row of them being left around the walls for the benefit of the invited guests. These were the friends and patrons of the school from the near by city and from the country houses round about.

Conspicuous among these was old John Gilpin in his Sunday suit, his long beard brushed till each hair hung smooth and separate, his bald head polished till it shone, and himself the most ill at ease of all the company. Beside him sat the little widow, Robin’s mother; without whom, John had declared, he would “not stir hand nor hoof” toward any such frivolity, and the good Dame abetting him in the matter. She had said:

“No, Mrs. Locke, no more he shall. I can’t go, it’s bread-settin’ night, and with my being so unwieldy and awkward like—I’d ruther by far stay home. Robin will be all right. The dear lad’s become the very apple of my eye and I e’enamost dread his gettin’ well enough to go to work again. A bit of nonsense, like this of Dorothy’s gettin’-up, ’ll do you more good nor medicine. I’ve said my say and leave it said. If John could go in his clean smock, he’d be all right, even to face that Lady Principal that caught him cavortin’ like a silly calf. But ’twould be an obligement to me if you’d go along and keep him in countenance.”

Of course, Mrs. Locke could do no less for a neighbor who had so befriended her and Robin: so here she was, looking as much the lady in her cheap black gown as any richer woman there. Also, so absorbed she was in keeping old John from trying to “cut and run,” or doing anything else that would have mortified his wife.

The Lady Principal had herself hesitated somewhat before the cottagers were invited, fearing their presence would be offensive to more aristocratic guests, but

the good Bishop had heartily endorsed Dorothy's plea for them and she accepted his decision.

In any case, she need not have feared. For suddenly there sounded from the distance the wailing of a violin, so weird and suggestive of uncanny things, that all talking ceased and all eyes turned toward the wide entrance doors, through which the masqueraders must come. Everything within the great room had been arranged with due attention to "effect." In its center a great "witches' caldron" hung suspended from three poles, and a lantern hung above it, where the bobbing for apples would take place. Dishes of salt, witch-cakes of meal, jack-o'-lanterns dimly lighted, odors of brimstone, daubs of phosphorus here and there—in fact, everything that the imaginations of the maskers could conceive, or reading suggest as fit for Hallowe'en, had been prepared.

The doleful music drew nearer and nearer and as the lights in the Hall went out, leaving only the pale glimmer of the lanterns, even the most indifferent guests felt a little thrill run through their nerves. Then the doors slowly opened and there came through them a ghostly company that seemed endless. From head to foot each "ghost" was draped in white, even the extended hand which held a lighted taper was gloved in white, and the whole procession moved slowly to the dirge which the unseen musicians played.

After a circuit of the great room, they began a curious dance which, in reality, was a calisthenic movement familiar to the everyday life of these young actors, but, as now performed, seemed weird and nerve-trying even to themselves. Its effect upon others was even more powerful and upon John Gilpin, to send him into a shivering fit that alarmed Mrs. Locke.

"Why, Mr. Gilpin, what's the matter? Are you ill?"

"Seems if—seems if—my last hour's come! Needn't tell me—them's—just—just plain schoolgirls! They—they're spooks right out the graveyard, sure as preachin' and I wish—I hadn't come! And there's no end of 'em! And it means—somethin' terr'ble! I wish—do you suppose—Ain't there a winder some'ers nigh? Is this Hall high up? Could I—could I climb out it?"

The poor little widow was growing very nervous herself. Her companion's positive terror was infecting her and she felt that if this were her promised "fun" she'd had quite enough of it, and would be as glad as he to desert the gathering.

Suddenly the movement changed. The slowly circling ghosts fell into step with the altered music, which, still a wailing minor, grew fast and faster, until with a crash its mad measure ended. At that instant, and before the lights were turned on, came another most peculiar sound. It was like the patter of small hoofs, the “ih-ih-ihing” of some terrified beast; and all ears were strained to listen while through those open doors came bounding and leaping, as if to escape its own self —What?

From her perch on Dr. Winston’s knees, Miss Millikins-Pillikins identified it as:

“The debbil! The debbil!”

Old John sprang to his feet and shrieked, while, as if attracted by his cry, the horrible object made straight for him and with one vicious thrust of its dreadful head knocked him down.

CHAPTER VIII

PEER AND COMMONER

The lights flashed out. The ghostly wrappings fell from the figures which had been halted by the sudden apparition that had selected poor John Gilpin as its victim, though, in knocking him down it had knocked common sense back into his head. For as he lay sprawled on the floor the thrusts of that demoniac head continued and now, instead of frightening, angered him. For there was something familiar in the action of his assailant. Recovering his breath, he sat up and seized the horns that were prodding his Sunday suit, and yelled:

“Quit that, Baal, you old rascal! Dressin’ up like the Old Boy, be ye? Well, you never could ha’ picked out a closer fit! But I’ll strip ye bare—you cantankerous old goat, you Baal!”

Away flew the mask of the evil spirit which some ingenious hand had fastened to the animal’s head, and up rose such a shout of laughter as made the great room ring. The recent “ghosts” swarmed about the pair, still in masks and costumes, and a lively chase of Baal followed.

The goat had broken away from the irate old man, as soon as might be, and John had risen stiffly to his feet. But his bashfulness was past. Also, his lameness was again forgotten, as one masquerader after another whirled about him, catching his coat skirts or his arm and laughingly daring him:

“Guess who I am!”

He didn’t even try, but entered into the fun with as great zest as any youngster present, and it must be admitted, making a greater noise than any. Around and around the great hall sped the goat, somebody having mischievously closed the doors to prevent its escape; and across and about chased the merrymakers, tossing off their masks to see and careless now who guessed their identity.

“Baal!” “Baal here!” “Who owns him? Where did he come from?” “What makes him so slippery? I wonder if he’s been greased!”

At last answered the farmer:

“I guess I could tell you who owns him, but I’d better not. I don’t want to get nobody into trouble, much as he deserves it.”

“‘He?’ Is it a ‘he’ then and not one of the girls?” demanded Winifred.

But he did not inform her, merely asking when it would be time to bob for apples.

“Because I know they’re prime. They come out Dame’s choisest bar’l. Grew on a tree she’ll let nobody touch, not even me.”

“Apples! Apples! My turn first!” cried Florita Sheraton, stooping her fat body above the “caldron” into which some of the fruit had been tossed. But she failed, of course, her frantic efforts to plant her white teeth in any one of the apples resulting only in the wetting of her paper crown and ruff, as well as the ripping of her hastily made “robe.” Then the others crowded around the great kettle, good naturedly pushing first comers aside while but a few succeeded in obtaining a prize. Old John was one of these; so gay and lively that the audience found him the most amusing feature of the entertainment.

Till finally Mrs. Locke gained courage to cross to his side and whisper something in his ear; at which he looked, abashed and with a furtive glance in the direction of the Lady Principal, he murmured:

“Right you be. I ’low I’ve forgot myself and I’m afraid she’d blush to see me so cuttin’ up again. And too, I clean forgot that bag! I’ll step-an’-fetch it right away.”

With his disappearance half the noise and nonsense ended, but more than satisfaction greeted his return, with Jack, the boot-boy, in close attendance. The latter bore in each hand a jug of freshly made sweet cider but his expression was not a happy one, and he kept a watchful eye upon the old man he followed. The latter carried two baskets; one heavy with well cracked nuts, the other as light with its heap of white popped corn. Bowing low to the Lady Principal he remarked:

“With your permission, Ma’am;” then set the articles down beside the “caldron,” clapping his hands to attract the schoolgirls’ attention and bid them gather

around his “treat” to enjoy it. Then, stumbling over a fallen mask, he sternly ordered Jack:

“Get to work and clear these things up, and don’t you forget to save Baal’s, for, likely, ’twill be needed again.”

At which the boot-boy’s face turned crimson, though that might have come from stooping.

Nobody waited a second invitation to enjoy the good things that John’s thoughtfulness had provided; but, sitting on the floor around his baskets, they made him act the host in dispensing fair portions to all, a maid having quickly brought plates, nutpicks and cups for their service.

After the feast followed games and dances galore, till the hour grew late for schoolgirls, and the Bishop begged:

“Before we part, my children, please give us a little music. A song from the Minims, a bit from the Sevenths on the piano, and a violin melody from our girl from the South. For it is she, really, who is responsible for this delightful party. Now she has coaxed us into trying it once, I propose that we make Hallowe’en an annual junketing affair, and—All in favor of so doing say ‘Aye.’”

After which the “Ayes” and hand claps were so deafening, that the good man bowed his head as if before a storm. Then the room quieted and the music followed; but when it came to Dorothy’s turn she was nowhere to be seen. Girlish cries for “Queenie!” “Miss Dixie!” “Dolly! Dolly Doodles!” “Miss Calvert to the front!” failed to bring her.

“Gone to ‘step-an’-fetch’ her fiddle—or Mr. Gilpin’s, maybe!” suggested Winifred, with a mischievous glance at the old man who sat on the floor in the midst of the girls, gay now as any of them and still urging them to take “just a han’ful more” of the nuts he had been at such pains to crack for them.

But neither Dorothy nor “fiddle” appeared; and the festivities came to a close without her.

“Queer where Queenie went to!” said Florita, walking along the hall toward her dormitory, “and as queer, too, where that goat came from.”

“Seemed to be an old acquaintance of the farmer’s, didn’t it? He called it ‘Baal,’

as if that was its name; and wasn't it too funny for words? to see him chasing after it, catching it and letting it slip away so, till Jack caught it and led it away. From the way he acted I believe *he* was the one who owns it and rigged it up so," said Ernesta, beside her.

"Well, no matter. I'm so sleepy I can hardly keep my eyes open! But what a glorious time we've had; and what a mess Assembly Hall is in."

"Who cares? We're had the fun and now Jack and the scullery boy will have to put it in order for us. Matron'll see to that. Good night."

They parted, each entering her own cubicle and each wondering somewhat why Dorothy did not come to hers. Commonly she was the most prompt of all in retiring and this was long past the usual hour. Could they have seen her at that moment their surprise would have been even greater.

Long before, while the feast was at its height, the girl had quietly slipped away.

Despite the fun she had so heartily enjoyed, thoughts of the visit to Gwendolyn's sick room, which she had made just before it, kept coming into her mind: and her thoughts running thus:

"Gwen was ill, she really was, although Lady Jane seemed to think her only whimsical. She looked so unhappy and maybe partly because she couldn't be in this first Hallowe'en party. It was too bad. I felt as if she must come and when I said so to Winnie she just laughed and answered: 'Serves her right. Gwendolyn has always felt herself the top of the heap, that nothing could go on just right if she didn't boss the job. Now she'll find out that a little "Commoner" like you can do what no "Peer" ever did. Don't go worrying over that girl, Queen Baltimore. A lesson or two like this will do her good. She'd be as nice as anybody if it wasn't for her wretched stuck-up-ness. Miss Muriel says it's no harm to be proud if it's pride of the right sort. But pride of rank—Huh! How can anybody help where they're born or who their parents are? Don't you be silly, too, Dorothy Calvert, and pity somebody who'd resent the pity. I never knew a girl like you. You make me provoked. Never have a really, truly good time because you happen to know of somebody else that isn't having it. I say again: If the Honorable Gwendolyn Borst-Kennard feels bad because she isn't in this racket I'm downright glad of it. She has spoiled lots of good times for other girls and 'turn about's fair play.'"

“Now, Winnie dear, your ‘bark is worse than your bite’ if I can quote maxims, too. In your heart, down deep, you’re just as sorry for poor Gwen as I am. Only you won’t admit it.”

“Well, if you think so, all right. You’re a stubborn little thing and once you take a notion into your brain nobody can take it out. ‘Where are you going, my pretty maid? I’m going a studying, sir, she said;’” and tossing an airy kiss in Dorothy’s direction, ran swiftly away.

Yet events proved that, as Winifred had argued, Dorothy’s opinion did not alter. Neither could she be sorry for anyone without trying to help them in some way.

The simple country treat of nuts, popped corn, and cider had proved enjoyable to other schoolmates—why shouldn’t it to Gwendolyn? She’d try it, anyway. So, unnoticed by those around her, Dolly heaped her own plate with the good things, placing a tumbler of cider in the middle and hurried away, or rather glided away, so gently she moved until she reached the doorway. There she ran as swiftly down the long hall toward the west wing and Gwendolyn’s room in it.

Tapping at the door Lady Jane soon opened it, but with finger on lip requesting silence. But she smiled as she recognized who stood there and at the plate of goodies Dorothy had brought. Then she gently drew her in, nodding toward the cot where her daughter seemed asleep.

She was not, however, but had been lying still, thinking of many things and among them her present visitor. She was not surprised to see her and this time was not pained. It seemed to the imaginative invalid that her own thoughts had compelled Dorothy to come, in response to them.

“I’m awake, Mamma. You needn’t keep so quiet.”

“Are you, dearest? Well, that’s good; for here has come our little maid with something tempting for your appetite. A share of the Hallowe’en treat, is it, Dorothy?”

“Yes, Lady Jane, and it’s something different from what we often have. The farmer, Mr. Gilpin, brought it for us girls and I couldn’t bear—I mean I thought Gwendolyn should have—might like, her share, even if—if *I* brought it. I’m sorry the plate is a cracked one, but you see there were so many needed and the maids brought what they could find handiest, I suppose. But—the glass of cider

is all right. That's from the regular table and—and it's really very sweet and nice."

Now that she had come poor Dorothy wished that she hadn't. Lady Jane seemed pleased enough and had promptly turned on a stronger light which clearly showed the face of the girl on the bed. She could talk readily enough to the mother but whenever she glanced toward Gwendolyn her tongue faltered and hesitated woefully. It seemed as if the sick girl's eyes were still hard and forbidding and their steady stare made her uncomfortable. So she did not speak to the invalid and was promptly retreating when Gwendolyn suddenly asked, yet with apparent effort:

"Mamma, will you please go away for a few minutes? I've—I've got to speak to Dorothy—alone."

"Why, certainly, dearest, if you think you're strong enough. But wouldn't you better wait another day? Wouldn't I be able to talk for you?"

"No, no. Oh! no, no. Nobody but I can—Please go—go quick!"

"'Stand not upon the order of your going but go at once!'" quoted Lady Jane, jestingly.

But she failed to make her daughter smile and went away, warning:

"Don't talk of that accident again to-night, girls."

"That's exactly what I must talk about, Mamma, but you mustn't care."

Lady Jane's heart was anxious as she closed the door behind her and she would have been amazed had she heard Gwendolyn's exclamation:

"I've been a wicked girl! Oh, Dorothy! I've been so mean to you! And all the time you show me kindness. Are you trying to 'heap coals' on my head?"

"'Heap coals?'" echoed Dolly, at first not comprehending; then she laughed. "I couldn't do that. I have none to 'heap' and I'd be horrid if I tried. What do you mean?"

"It began the night you came. I made up things about you in my mind and then told them to our 'set' for facts. I'd—I'd had trouble with the 'set' because they would not remember about—about keeping ourselves apart from those who

hadn’t titles. I felt we ought to remember; that if our England had made ‘classes’ we ought to help her, loyally. That was the first feeling, way down deep. Then—then I don’t get liked as I want to be, because I can’t help knowing things about other girls and if they break the rules I felt I ought to tell the teachers. Somehow, even they don’t like that; for the Lady Principal about as plain as called me ‘tale-bearer.’ I hate—oh! I do hate to tell you all this! But I can’t help it. Something inside me makes me, but I’m so miserable!”

She looked the fact she stated and Dorothy’s sympathy was won, so that she begged:

“Don’t do it, then. Just get well and—and carry no more tales and you’ll be happy right away.”

“It’s easy to talk—for you, maybe. For me, I’d almost rather die than own I’ve been at fault—if it wasn’t for that horrid, sick sort of feeling inside me.”

In spite of herself the listener laughed, for Gwendolyn had laid her hands upon her stomach as if locating the seat of her misery. She asked merrily:

“Is it there we keep our consciences? I never knew before and am glad to find out.”

But Gwendolyn didn’t laugh. She was an odd sort of girl, and always desperately earnest in whatever she undertook. She had made up her mind she must confess to the “Commoner” the things she had done against her; she was sincerely sorry for them now, but she couldn’t make that confession gracefully. She caught her breath as if before a plunge into cold water and then blurted out:

“I told ‘our set’ that you were Dawkins’s niece! I said you were a disgrace to the school and one of us would have to leave it. But Mamma wouldn’t take *me* and I couldn’t make *you* go. I got mad and jealous. Everybody liked you, except the girls I’d influenced. The Bishop petted you—he never notices me. Miss Tross-Kingdon treats you almost as lovingly as she does Millikins-Pillikins. All the servants smile on you and nobody is afraid of you as everybody is of me. Dawkins, and sometimes even Mamma, accuses me of a ‘sharp tongue’ that makes enemies. But, somehow, I can’t help it. And the worst is—one can’t get back the things one has said and done, no matter how she tries. Then you went and saved my life!”

At this, the strange girl covered her face and began to cry, while Dorothy stared at her, too surprised to speak. Until the tears changed to sobs and Gwendolyn shook with the stress of her emotion. Then, fearing serious results, Dorothy forgot everything except that here was someone in distress which she must soothe. Down on her knees she went, flung her arms around the shaking shoulders, and pleaded:

“Well, you poor dear, can’t you be glad of that? Even if you can never like me isn’t it good to be alive? Aren’t you grateful that somebody who could swim, even poor I, was at the pool to help you out of it that day? Forget it, do forget it, and get well and happy right away. I’ll keep away from you as far as I can and you must forgive me for coming here again just now.”

“Forgive you? Forgive you! Oh! Dorothy Calvert, can you, will you ever forgive me? After all my meanness to you, could you make yourself like me just a little?”

Gwendolyn’s own arms had now closed in eager entreaty about the girl she had injured. Her pride was humbled at last and completely. But there was no need of further speech between them. They clung together in their suddenly awakened affection, at peace and so happy that neither felt it possible they had ever been at odds.

When, at last, Dorothy drew back and rose, Gwen still clung to her hand, and penitently said:

“But that isn’t all. There’s a lot more to tell that, maybe, will make you despise me worse than ever. I’ve done—”

“No matter what, dearest. You’ve talked quite enough for to-night and Dorothy should be in bed. Bid one another good night, my dears, and meet again to-morrow;” interrupted Lady Jane, who had quietly returned.

So Dorothy departed, and with a happier heart than she had had since her coming to Oak Knowe; for now there was nobody there with whom she was at discord.

But—was there not?

Gayly tripping down the long corridor, humming a merry air and hoping that she

hadn’t yet broken the retiring-rule, she stopped short on the way. Something or somebody was far ahead of her, moving with utmost caution against noise, yet himself, or itself, making a peculiar rat-a-tat-tat upon the polished boards.

Instantly Dorothy hushed her light song and slackened her steps. The passage was dimly lighted for it was rarely used, leading as it did to the distant servants’ quarters and ending in a great drying-room above the laundry. Even this drying-room was almost given up to the storage of trunks and other things, the laundry itself being more convenient for all its requirements.

Rumors came back to her of the burglaries which the kitchen-folk had declared had been frequent of late, none more serious than the loss of a dinner provided and the strange rifling of safes and cupboard. Such had happened weeks before, then apparently ceased; but they had begun again of late; with added rumors of strange noises heard at night, and in the quieter hours of the day.

The faculty had tried to keep these fresh rumors from the pupils’ ears, but they had leaked out. Yet no real investigation had been made. It was a busy household, both above and below stairs; and as is usual, what is “everybody’s business is nobody’s” and things were left to run their course.

But now, was the burglar real? And had Dorothy come suddenly upon his track? If she only could find out!

Without fear of consequences to herself and forgetful of that retiring-rule she tip-toed noiselessly in the wake of whatever was in advance, and so came at last to the door of the drying-room. It stood ajar and whatever had preceded her passed beyond it as the girl came to it.

She also entered, curiosity setting every nerve a-tingle, yet she still unafraid. Stepping behind the open door she waited what next, and trying to accustom her eyes to the absolute darkness of the place. The long row of windows on the outer wall were covered by wooden shutters, as she had noticed from the ground, and with them closed the only light which could enter came through a small scuttle, or skylight in the center of the ceiling.

From her retreat behind the door she listened breathlessly. The rat-a-tat-tat had died away in the distance, whither she now dared not follow because of the darkness; and presently she heard a noise like the slipping of boards in a cattle shed.

Then footsteps returning, swiftly and softly, as of one in bare or stockinged feet. There was a rush past her, the door to which she clung was snatched from her and shut with a bang. This sound went through her with a thrill, and vividly there arose the memory of a night long past when she had been imprisoned in an empty barn, by the wild freak of an old acquaintance of the mountain, and half-witted Peter Piper for sole companion. Then swiftly she felt her way back along the door till her hand was on its lock—which she could not move. Here was a situation suitable, indeed, for any Hallowe’en!

CHAPTER IX

THE NIGHT THAT FOLLOWED

It was long past the hour when, on ordinary nights, Oak Knowe would have been in darkness, relieved only by a glimmer here and there, at the head of some stairway, and in absolute stillness.

But the Hallowe'en party had made everything give way and the servants were up late, putting the great Assembly Hall into the spotless order required for the routine of the next day.

Nut shells and scattered pop corn, apple-skins that had been tossed over the merrymakers' shoulders to see what initial might be formed, broken masks that had been discarded, fragments of the flimsy costumes, splashes of spilled cider, scattered crumbs and misplaced furniture, made Dawkins and her aids lift hands in dismay as, armed with brooms and scrubbing brushes they came to "clear up."

"Clear up, indeed! Never was such a mess as this since ever I set foot at Oak Knowe. After the sweepin' the scrubbin'; and after the scrubbin' the polishin', and the chair fetchin' and—my heart! 'Tis the dear bit lassie she is, but may I be further afore Dorothy Dixie gets up another Hallowe'en prank!" grumbled Dawkins, yet with a tender smile on her lips, remembering the thousand and one trifles which the willing girl had done for her.

For Dawkins was growing old. Under her maid's cap the hair was thin and gray, and stooping to pick up things the girls had carelessly thrown down was no longer an easy task.

The rules against carelessness were stringent enough and fairly well obeyed, yet among three hundred lively girls some rules were bound to be ignored. But from the first, as soon as she understood them, Dorothy had been obedient to all these rules; and it was Dawkins's pride, when showing visitors through the building to point to Dolly's cubicle as a model. Here was never an article left out of place; because not only school regulations but real affection for the maid, who had

been her first friend at Oak Knowe, made Dorothy “take care.”

Then busy at their tasks, the workers talked of the evening’s events and laughingly recalled the incident of the goat, which they had witnessed from the upper gallery; a place prepared for them by the good Bishop’s orders, that nobody at his great school should be prohibited from enjoying a sight of the pupils’ frequent entertainments.

“But sure, ’tis that lad, Jack, which frets me as one not belongin’ to Oak Knowe,” said Dora, with conviction.

“Not belonging? Why, woman alive, he’s been here longer nor yourself. ’Twas his mother that’s gone, was cook here before the *chef* and pity for his orphaned state the reason he’s stayed since. But I own ye, he’s not been bettered by his summers off, when the school’s not keepin’ and him let work for any farmer round. I note he’s a bit more prankish an’ disobliging, every fall when he comes back. For some curious reason—I can’t dream what—he’s been terrible chummy with Miss Gwendolyn. Don’t that beat all?” said Dawkins whirling her brush.

“I don’t know—I don’t really know as ’tis. He’s forever drawing pictures round of every created thing, and she’s come across him doin’ it. She’s that crazy for drawing herself that she’s likely took an int’rest in him. I heard her puttin’ notions in his head, once, tellin’ him how ’t some the greatest painters ever lived had been born just peasants like him.”

“Huh! Was that what made him so top-lofty and up-steppin’? When I told him he didn’t half clean the young ladies’ shoes, tossin’ his head like the simpleton he is, and saucin’ back as how he wouldn’t be a boot-boy all his life. I’d find out one these days whom I’d been tongue-lashin’ so long and’d be ashamed to look him in the face. Huh!” added another maid.

“Well, why bother with such as him, when we’ve all this to finish, and me to go yet to my dormitory to see if all’s right with my young ladies,” answered Dawkins and silence fell, till the task was done and the great room in the perfect order required for the morning.

Then away to her task above hurried good Dawkins and coming to Dorothy’s cubicle found its bed still untouched and its light brightly burning. The maid stared and gasped. What did this mean? Had harm befallen her favorite?

Then she smiled at her own fears. Of course, Dorothy was in the room with little Grace, where the cot once prepared for her still remained because the child had so begged; in “hopes I’ll be sick some more and Dolly’ll come again.” So Dawkins turned off the light and hurried to her reclining chair in the outer hall, where she usually spent the hours of her watch.

But no sooner had she settled herself there than all her uneasiness returned. Twisting and turning on her cushions she fretted:

“I don’t see what’s got into this chair, the night! Seems if I can’t get a comfortable spot in it anywhere. Maybe, it’s ’cause I’m extra tired. Hallowe’en pranks are fun for the time but there’s a deal hard work goes along with ’em. Or any other company fixings, for that matter. I wonder was the little Grace scared again, by that ridic’lous goat? Is that why Dorothy went with her? Where’d the beast come from, anyway? And who invited it to the masquerade? Not the good Bishop, I’ll be bound. Now, what does make me so uneasy! Sure there’s nought wrong with dear little Dixie. How could there be under this safe roof?”

But the longer Dawkins pondered the matter the more restless she grew; till, at last, she felt she must satisfy her mind, even at the cost of disturbing the Lady Principal; and a moment later tapped at her door, asking softly:

“Are you awake, Miss Muriel? It’s Dawkins.”

“Yes, Dawkins, come in. I’ve not been able to sleep yet. I suppose the evening’s care and excitement has tired me too much. What is it you want? Anything wrong in the dormitory?”

“Well, not to say wrong—or so I hope. I just stepped here to ask is Miss Dorothy Calvert staying the night?”

“Staying with Grace? No, indeed, the child has been asleep for hours: perfectly satisfied now that I and so many others have seen the apparition she had, and so proved her the truthful little creature she’d always been.”

That seemed a very long answer to impatient Dawkins and she clipped it short by asking:

“Then, Ma’am, where do you suppose she is?”

“What? Do you mean that she isn’t in her own place?”

“No, Ma’am, nor sign of her; and it’s terr’ble strange, ’pears to me. I don’t like the look of it, Ma’am, I do not.”

“Pooh! don’t make a mystery out of it, my good woman!” replied Miss Tross-Kingdon, yet with a curious flutter in her usually stern voice. Then she considered the matter for a moment, finally directing:

“Go to the hospital wing and ask if she’s there with Gwendolyn. She’s been so sorry for the girl and I noticed her slipping out of Assembly with a plate full of the things Mr. Gilpin brought. I don’t remember her coming back, but she was certainly absent when her violin was asked for. Doubtless, you’ll find her there, but be careful not to rouse any of the young ladies. Then come back and report.”

Dawkins tip-toed away, glad that she had told her anxiety to her mistress. But she was back from her errand before it seemed possible she could be, her face white and her limbs trembling with fear of—she knew not what!

“If it was any girl but her, Ma’am! That keeps the rules better nor any other here!”

“Hush, good Dawkins. She’s all right somewhere, as we shall soon discover. We’ll go below and look in all the rooms, in case she might be ill, or locked in some of them.”

“Yes, yes, Ma’am, we’ll look. Ill she might really be after all them nuts an’ trash, but locked in she can’t be, since never a lock is turned in this whole house. Sure the Bishop wouldn’t so permit, seeing that if it fired any time them that was locked up could not so easy get out. And me the last one down, to leave all in the good order you like.”

“Step softly still, Dawkins. It would take very little to start a panic among our many girls should they hear that anything was amiss.”

Each took a candle from the rack in the hall and by the soft light of these began their search below, not daring to flash on the electric lights whose brilliance might possibly arouse the sleepers in the house. Dawkins observed that the Lady Principal, walking ahead, was shaking, either with cold or nervousness, and, as for herself, her teeth were fairly chattering.

Of course their search proved useless. Nowhere in any of those first floor rooms

was any trace of the missing girl. Even closets were examined while Dawkins peered behind the furniture and curtains, her heart growing heavier each moment.

Neither mistress nor maid spoke now, though the former led the way upwards again and silently inspected the dormitories on each floor. Also, she looked into each private room of the older and wealthier pupils, but the result was the same—Dorothy had as completely disappeared as if she had been bodily swallowed up.

Then the aid of the other maids and, even of a few teachers was secured, although that the school work might go on regularly the next day, not many of these latter were disturbed.

At daybreak, when the servants began to gather in the great kitchen, each to begin his daily tasks, the Lady Principal surprised them by her appearance among them. In the briefest and quietest manner possible she told them what had happened and begged their help in the search.

But she was unprepared for the result. A housemaid threw up her hands in wild excitement, crying: "'Tis ten long years I've served Oak Knowe but my day is past! Her that went some syne was the wise one. I'll not tarry longer to risk the health o' me soul in a house that's haunted by imps!"

"Nor me! Him that's snatched off to his wicked place the sweet, purty gell, of the willin' word an' friendly smile, 'll no long spare such as me! A fine collectin' ground for the Evil One is so big a school as this. I'm leavin' the dustin' to such as can do it, but I'm off, Ma'am, and better times for ye, I'm sure!" cried another superstitious creature.

This was plain mutiny. For a moment the lady's heart sank at the prospect before her, for the panic would spread if not instantly quelled, and there were three hundred hungry girls awaiting breakfast—and breakfast but one feature of the case. Should these servants leave, to spread their untrue tales, new ones would be almost impossible to obtain. Then, summoning her authority, she demanded:

"Silence and attention from all of you. I shall telephone for the constabulary, and any person who leaves Oak Knowe before Miss Calvert is found will leave it for the lock-up. The housemaids are excused from ordinary duties and are to assist the *chef* in preparing breakfast. The rest of you, who have retained your common

sense, are to spread yourselves about the house and grounds, and through every outbuilding till some one of you shall find the girl you all have loved. Leave before then? I am ashamed of your hard hearts."

With stately dignity the mistress left the kitchen and a much subdued force of helpers behind her. That threat of "the constabulary" was an argument not to be defied.

"Worst of it is, she meant it. Lady Principal never says a thing she doesn't mean. So—Well, I suppose I'll have to stay, then, for who wants to get took up? But it's hard on a workin' woman 't she can't do as she likes," muttered the first deserter and set about her duties. Also, as did she so did the others.

Meanwhile how had the night passed with the imprisoned Dorothy? At first with greater anger than fear; anger against the unknown person who had shut that door upon her. Then she thought:

"But of course he didn't know, whoever it was. I'm sure it was a man or boy, afraid, maybe, to make a noise account of its being late. Yet what a fix I'm in! Nobody will know or come to let me out till Dawkins goes her rounds and that'll be very, very late, on account of her clearing up the mess we made down in Assembly. My! what a fine time we had! And how perfectly grand that Gwendolyn and I should be friends at last. She kissed me. Gwendolyn Borst-Kennard kissed me! It's worth even being shut up here alone, behind that spring-locked door, just to be friends. I'm so sleepy. I wish I could find something to put around me and I'd lie right down on this floor and take a nap till somebody lets me out."

Then she remembered that once she had heard Dawkins telling another maid that there were "plenty more blankets in the old drying-room if her 'beds' needed 'em;" and maybe she could find some if she tried.

"This is the very darkest place could ever be, seems if! ouch! that hurt!" said the prisoner aloud, to bolster her own courage, and as she stumbled against a trunk that bruised her ankle. "I'll take more care."

So she did: reasoning that people generally piled things against a wall, that is, in such a place, for greater convenience. With outstretched hands she felt her way and at last was rewarded by finding the blankets she sought. Here, too, were folded several cots, that were needed at times, like Commencement, when many

strangers were at Oak Knowe. But she didn't trouble to set up one of these, even if she could have done so in that gloom. But a blanket she could manage, and beside the cots she could feel a heap of them. In a very few minutes she had pulled down several of these and spread them on the floor; and a little later had wrapped them about her and was sound asleep—"as a bug in a rug, like Dawkins says," her last, untroubled thought. So, though a prisoner, for many hours she slumbered peacefully.

Down in the breakfast-room matters went on as usual. Or if many of the girls and a few of the pupils seemed unduly sleepy, that was natural enough, considering the frivolities and late hours of the night before.

Even the Lady Principal, sitting calmly in her accustomed place, looked very pale and tired; and Winifred, observing this, whispered to her neighbor:

"I don't believe we'll get another party very soon. Just look at Miss Tross-Kingdon. She's as white as a ghost and so nervous she can hardly sit still. I never saw her that way before. The way she keeps glancing toward the doors, half-scared every time she hears a noise, is queer. I wonder if she's expecting somebody!"

"Likely somebody's late and she's waiting to say: 'Miss'—whoever it is—'your excuse, please?' I wonder who 'twill be! and say, look at the Aldrich ten—can you see Dorothy?"

Winifred glanced around and answered, with real surprise: "Why, she's absent! If it were I nobody'd be astonished, 'cause I always have the same excuse: 'Overslept.' But Dolly? Oh! I hope she isn't sick!"

And immediately the meal was over, Winifred hurried to the Lady Principal and asked:

"Please, Miss Muriel, can you tell me, is Dorothy Calvert ill?"

"Excuse me, Winifred, I am extremely busy," returned Miss Tross-Kingdon, and hurried away as if she were afraid of being questioned further.

Naturally, Winifred was surprised, for despite her sternness the Lady Principal was invariably courteous; and putting "two and two together" she decided that Dorothy was in trouble of some sort and began a systematic inquiry of all she

met concerning her. But nobody had seen the girl or knew anything about her; yet the questioner's anxiety promptly influenced others and by the time school session was called there was a wide-spread belief that some dreadful thing had befallen the southerner, and small attention was paid to lessons.

It was not until the middle of the morning that Jack-boot-boy appeared in the kitchen, from his room in an outside building, where the men servants slept. He was greeted by reproofs for his tardiness and the news of Dorothy's disappearance.

"Lost? Lost, you say? How can she be right here in this house? Why, I saw her around all evening. It was her own party, wasn't it? or hers was the first notion of it. Huh! That's the queerest! S'pose the faculty'll offer a reward? Jiminy cricket! Wish they would! I bet I'd find her. Why, sir, I'd make a first rate detective, I would. I've been readin' up on that thing an' I don't know but it would pay me better'n paintin', even if I am a 'born artist,' as Miss Gwendolyn says."

"Born nincompoop! That's what you are, and the all-conceitedest lazybones 't ever trod shoe leather! Dragging out of bed this time o' day, and not a shoe cleaned—in my dormitory, anyway!" retorted Dawkins, in disgust.

"Huh! old woman, what's the matter with you? And why ain't you *in* bed, 'stead of out of it? I thought all you night-owls went to bed when the rest of us got up. You need sleep, you do, for I never knowed you crosser'n you be now—which is sayin' consid'able!"

Dawkins was cross, there was no denying that, for her nerves were sadly shaken by her fears for the girl she had learned to love so dearly.

"You get about your business, boy, at once; without tarryin' to pass remarks upon your betters;" and she made a vicious dash toward him as if to strike him. He knew this was only pretence, and sidled toward her, mockingly, then, as she raised her hand again—this time with more decision—he cowered aside and made a rush out of the kitchen.

"Well, that's odd! The first time I ever knew that boy to turn down his breakfast!" remarked the *chef*, pointing to a heaped up plate at the back of the range. "Well, I shan't keep it any longer. He'll have the better appetite for dinner, ha, ha!"

Jack’s unusual indifference to good food was due to a sound he had overheard. It came from somewhere above and passed unnoticed by all but him, but set him running to a distant stairway which led from “the old laundry” to the drying-loft above: and a sigh of satisfaction escaped him as he saw that the door of this was shut.

“Lucky for me, that is! I was afraid they’d been looking here for that Calvert girl, but they haven’t, ’cause the lock ain’t broke and the key’s in my pocket,” said he, in a habit he had of talking to himself.

The noise beyond the door increased, and worried him, and he hurriedly sought the key where he usually carried it. The door could be, and had been, closed by a spring, but it needed that key to open it, as he had boastingly remembered. Unhappy lad! In not one of his many and ragged pockets could that key now be found! While in the great room beyond the noise grew loud, and louder, with each passing second and surely would soon be heard by all the house. Under the circumstances nobody would hesitate to break that hateful lock to learn the racket’s cause; yet what would happen to him when this was discovered?

What, indeed! Yet, strangely enough, in all his trepidation there was no thought of Dorothy.

CHAPTER X

OPEN CONFESSION IS GOOD FOR THE SOUL

A housemaid, passing through the disused “old laundry” on the ground floor, as a short-cut toward the newer one in a detached building, heard a strange noise in the drying-room overhead, and paused to listen. This was unusual. In ordinary the loft was never entered, nowadays, except by some slippered maid, or Michael with a trunk.

Setting down her basket of soiled linen she put her hands on her hips and stood motionless, intently listening. Dorothy? Could it be Dorothy? Impossible! No living girl could make all that racket; yet—was that a scream? Was it laughter—terror—wild animal—or what?

Away she sped; her nimble feet pausing not an instant on the way, no matter with whom she collided nor whom her excited face frightened, and still breathlessly running came into the great Assembly Hall. There Miss Tross-Kingdon had, by the advice of the Bishop, gathered the whole school; to tell them as quietly as she could of Dorothy’s disappearance and to cross-examine them as to what anyone could remember about her on the evening before.

For the sorrowful fact could no longer be hidden—Dorothy Calvert was gone and could not be found.

On the faces of those three hundred girls was consternation and grief; in their young hearts a memory of the “spookish” things which had happened of late, but that had not before disturbed them; and now, at the excited entrance of the maid, a shiver ran over the whole company. Here was news! Nothing less could explain this unceremonious disturbance. Even Miss Muriel’s face turned paler than it had been, could that have been possible and without a word she waited for the maid to speak.

“Oh! Lady Principal! Let somebody come! The drying-loft! screams—boards dragging—or trunks—or murder doing—maybe! Let somebody go quick—

Michael—a man—men—Somebody quick!”

Exhausted by her own excitement, the maid sank upon the nearest chair, her hand on her heart, and herself unable to add another word. Miss Tross-Kingdon rose, trembling so that she could hardly walk, and made her way out of the room. In an instant every assembled schoolgirl was on her feet, speeding toward the far west wing and the great loft, dreading yet eager to see what would there be revealed.

Still anxious on his own account, but from a far different cause, and still listening at the closed door with wonder at what seemed going on behind it, was Jack, the boot-boy. At the approach of the excited girls, he lifted his ear from the keyhole and looked behind him, to find himself trapped, as it were, at this end of the narrow passage by the multitude which swarmed about him, feverishly demanding:

“Boy, what is it? What is it? Is Dorothy in there? Is Dorothy found?”

“Is Dorothy—”

Poor Jack! This was the worst yet! At full comprehension of what that question meant, even he turned pale and his lips stuttered:

“I—I—dunno—I—Jiminy cricket!”

He must get out of that! He must—he must! Before that door was opened he must escape!

Frantically he tried to force his way backward through the crowd which penned him in, but could make little progress; even that being suddenly cut off by a strong hand laid on his shoulder and the *chef* forcing into his hand a stout crowbar, and ordering:

“Help to break her down!” at the same instant Michael, the porter, pressing to his side armed with an ax. “Now, all together!” cried he, and whether or no, Jack was compelled to aid in the work of breaking in.

But it was short work, indeed, and the crowd surged through the opening in terror of what they might behold—only to have that terror changed into shouts of hilarious delight.

For there was Dorothy! not one whit the worse for her brief imprisonment and happily unconscious of the anxiety which that had caused to others. And there was Baal, the goat! Careering about the place, dragging behind him a board to which he had been tied and was unable to dislodge. The room was fairly lighted now by the sun streaming through the skylight, and Baal had been having a glorious time chasing Dorothy about the great room, from spot to spot, gleefully trying to butt her with his horns, leaping over piles of empty trunks, and in general making such a ridiculous—if sometimes dangerous—spectacle of himself, that Dorothy, also, had had a merry time.

“Oh! you darling, you darling!” “Dolly Doodles, how came you here!” “Why did you do it? You’ve scared us all almost to death!” “The Bishop has gone into town to start detectives on your track!” “The Lady Principal—Here she is now! you’ve made her positively ill, and as for Dawkins, they say she had completely collapsed and lies on her chair moaning all the time.”

“Oh, oh! How dreadful! And how sorry I am! I never dreamed; oh! dear Miss Muriel, do believe me—listen, listen!”

The lady sat down on a trunk and drew the girl to her. Her only feeling now was one of intensest gratitude, but she remembered how all the others had shared her anxiety and bade her recovered pupil tell the story so that all might hear. It was very simple, as has been seen, and needs no repetition here, ending with the heartfelt declaration:

“That cures me of playing detective ever again! I was so anxious to stop all that silly talk about evil spirits and after all the only such around Oak Knowe was Baal!”

“But how Baal, and why? And most of all how came he here in the house?” demanded Miss Tross-Kingdon, looking from one to another; until her eye was arrested by the expression of Jack, the boot-boy’s face. That was so funny she smiled, seeing it, and asked him:

“Can’t you explain this, Jack?”

“Uh—er—Ah! Wull—wull, yes, Ma’am, I allow ’t I might. I mean ’t I can. Er—sho!—Course, I’ll have to. Wull—wull—You see, Miss Lady Principal, how as last summer, after school was took in, I hired myself out to work for old John Gilpin an’ he had a goat. Dame didn’t hanker for it no great; said it et up things

an’ got into places where ’twarn’t wanted and she adwised him, that is to say she told him, how ’t he must get rid of it. He got rid of it onto me. I hadn’t got nobody belongin’ and we’ve been first rate friends, Baal and me.”

This was evidenced by the quietude of the animal, now lying at the boot-boy’s feet in affectionate confidence, and refreshing itself with a nap, after its hilarious exercise.

“Strange that we didn’t know he was on our grounds, for I did not. Where have you kept him, Jack, and how?”

The lad flushed and fidgetted but dared not refuse to reply. He had been too long under the authority of Miss Tross-Kingdon for that, to whose good offices his mother had left him when she died.

“Wull—Wull—”

“Kindly stop ‘wulling’ and reply. It is nearly lunch time and Dorothy has had no breakfast.”

“Yes, Miss Muriel, please but I have. When I waked up after I’d slept so long it was real light, so I went poking around to see if I could find another door that would open, or any way out; and I came to a queer place away yonder at the end; and I heard the funniest noise—‘ih-ih-ih—Ah-umph!’ something like that. Then I knew it was the goat, that I’d heard pat-pat-pattering along the hall last night and that I’d followed. And I guessed it was Jack, instead of a burglar, who’d rushed past me and locked me in. I was mighty glad to see anybody, even a goat, and I opened the gate to the place and Baal jumped out. He was tied to that board —he’d pulled it off the gate, and was as glad to see me as I was him. That little sort of cupboard, or cubby-hole, had lots of excelsior in it; I guess it had come around crockery or something, and that was where Baal slept. There was a tin box there, too, and I opened it. I was glad enough then! For it was half full of cakes and apples and a lemon pie, that you call a ‘Christchurch’ up here in Canada; and before I knew it Baal had his nose in the box, like he was used to eating out of it, and I had to slap his nose to make him let me have a share. So I’m not hungry and all I care is that I have made you all so worried.”

But already that was almost forgotten, though Miss Muriel’s curiosity was not yet satisfied.

“Jack, are you in the habit of keeping that animal here, in this room?”

“Yes—yes, Ma’am; times I am. Other times he stays in the old shed down by the brook. Most of the men knew I had him; Michael did, anyhow. He never said nothing again’ it;” answered the boy, defiantly, trying to shift responsibility to the old porter, the most trusted servant of the house.

“No, I cannot imagine Michael meddling with you and your foolishness; and for a lad who’s lived so long at a great school, I wonder to hear such bad grammar from your lips. How did you get Baal into this room without being detected in it?”

“Why, Ma’am, that was easy as preachin’. That back end, outside steps, what leads up from the ground for carrying up wet clothes, it used to be. He comes up that way, for goats can climb any place. Leastwise, Baal can, and the door’s never locked no more, ’cause I lost the key;” answered Jack, who was now the center of attention and proud of the fact.

“Very well, Jack. That will do. Kindly see to it that Baal is permanently removed from Oak Knowe, and—” She paused for a moment, as if about to add more, then quietly moved away, with Dorothy beside her and all her now happy flock following.

Never before had the laughter and chatter of her girls sounded so musical in her ears, nor her own heart been lighter than now, in its rebound from her recent anxiety. She wasn’t pleased with Jack, the boot-boy; decidedly she was not pleased. She had not been since his return from his summer’s work, for he had not improved either in industry or behavior. She had not liked the strange interest which Gwendolyn had taken in his slight gift for drawing, which that enthusiastic young artist called “remarkable,” but which this more experienced instructor knew would never amount to anything.

Yet that was a matter which could wait. Meanwhile, here was a broken day, with everybody still so excited that lessons would be merely wasted effort; so, after she had sent Dorothy to put on her ordinary school dress, she informed the various classes that no more work was required that day and that after lunch there would be half-holiday for all her pupils.

“Hurrah! Hurrah! Three cheers for Dolly and may she soon get lost again!” shouted Winifred, and, for once, was not rebuked because of unladylike

manners.

Left to himself, Jack regarded his beloved Baal, in keen distress.

“Said you’d got to go, did she? Well, if you go I do, too. Anyhow I’m sick to death of cleaning nasty girls’, or nasty shoes o’ a lot o’ girls—ary way you put it. Boot-boy, Baal! Think o’ that. If that ain’t a re—restrick-erated life for a artist, like Miss Gwen says I am; or uther a dectective gentleman—I’d like to know. No, sir, Baal! We’ll quit an’ we’ll do it to once. Maybe they won’t feel sorry when they find me gone an’ my place empty to the table! Maybe them girls that laughed when that old schoolmarm was a pitchin’ into me afore all them giggling creatures, maybe they won’t feel bad, a-lookin’ at that hull row of shoes outside cubicle doors waiting to be cleaned and not one touched toward it! Huh! It’ll do all them ’ristocratics good to have to clean ’em themselves. All but Miss Gwendolyn. She’s the likeliest one of the hull three hundred. I hate—I kinder hate to leave her. ‘Artists has kindred souls,’ she said once when she was showin’ me how to draw that skull. Who can tell? I might get to be more famouser’n her, smart as she is; an’ I might grow up, and her too, and I might come to her house—or is it a turreted castle?—an’ I might take my fa—famousness an’ offer it to her to marry me! And then, when her folks couldn’t hardly believe that I was I, and her old boot-boy, maybe they’d say ‘Yes, take her, my son! I’m proud to welcome into our ’ristocraticy one that has riz from a boot-boy to our rank!’ Many a story-book tells o’ such doings, an’ what’s in them ought to be true. Good for ’t I can buy ’em cheap. The Bishop caught me reading one once and preached me a reg’lar sermon about it. Said that such kind of literatoor had ruined many a simple fellow and would me if I kep’ on. But even Bishops don’t know everything, though I allow he’s a grand old man. I kind of sorter hate to leave Oak Knowe on his account, he takes such an int’rest in me. But he’ll get over it. He’ll have to, for we’re going, Baal an’ me, out of this house where we’re wastin’ our sweetness on the desert air. My jiminy cricket! If a boy that can paint pictures and recite poetry like I can, can’t rise above shoe-cleanin’ and get on in this world—I’d like to know the reason why! Come, Baal! I’ll strap my clothes in a bundle, shake the dust of old Oak Knowe offen me, and hie away to seek my fortune—and your’n.”

Nobody interfering, Jack proceeded to put this plan into action; but it was curious that, as he reached the limits of Oak Knowe grounds, he turned and looked back on the big, many-windowed house, and at the throngs of happy girls

who were at “recreation” on the well-kept lawns. A sort of sob rose in his throat and there was a strange sinking in his stomach that made him most uncomfortable. He couldn’t tell that this was “homesickness,” and he tried to forget it in bitterness against those whom he was deserting.

“They don’t care, none of ’em! Not a single mite does anyone of them ’ristocratics care what becomes of—of poor Jack, the boot-boy! Come on, Baal! If we don’t start our seekin’ pretty quick—Why jiminy cricket I shall be snivellin’!”

Saying this, the self-exiled lad gripped the goat’s leading strap and set out at a furious pace down the long road toward the distant city. He had a dime novel in one pocket, an English sixpence in another—And what was this?

“My soul! If there ain’t the key to that old door they broke in to see what was racketing round so! I wonder if I ought to take it back? Baal, what say? That cubby of our’n wasn’t so bad. You know, Baal, I wouldn’t like to be a thief—not a reg’lar thief that’d steal a key. Course I wouldn’t. Anyhow, I’ve left, I’ve quit. I’m seekin’ my fortune—understand? Whew! The wind’s risin’. I allow there’s going to be a storm. I wish—Old Dawkins used to say: ‘Better take two thoughts to a thing!’ an’ maybe, maybe, if I’d ha’ waited a spell afore—I mean I wouldn’t ha’ started fortune-seekin’ till to-morrow and the storm over. Anyhow, I’ve really started, though! And if things don’t happen to my mind, I can show ’em what an honest boy I am by takin’ back that key. Come on, Baal, do come on! What in creation makes you drag so on that strap and keep lookin’ back? Come on, I say!”

Then, both helping and hindering one another, the lad and his pet passed out of sight and for many a day were seen no more in that locality.

Yet the strange events of that memorable day were not all over. At study hour, that evening, came another surprise—a visit to her mates of the invalid Gwendolyn. From some of them she received only a silent nod of welcome; but Laura, Marjorie, and Dorothy sprang to meet her with one accord, and Winifred followed Dorothy’s example after a second’s hesitation.

“Oh, Gwen! How glad we are to have you back! Are you sure you’re quite strong enough to come?” questioned Marjorie, while less judicious Laura exclaimed:

“But you can’t guess what you’ve missed! We’ve had the greatest scare ever was in this school! You’d ought to have come down sooner. What do you think it was that happened? Guess—quick—right away! Or I can’t wait to tell! I’ll tell anyhow! Dorothy was lost and everybody feared she had been killed! Yes, Gwen, lost all the long night through and had to sleep with the goat and—”

Gwendolyn’s face was pale from her confinement in the sick room but it grew paler now, and catching Dorothy’s hand she cried out:

“Oh! what if I had been too late!”

Nobody understood her, not even Dorothy herself, who merely guessed that Gwen was referring to their interview of the night before; but she didn’t know this proud girl fully, nor the peculiar nature of that pride which, once aroused, compelled her to do what she most shrank from. As Dorothy pushed a chair forward, Gwendolyn shook her head.

“Thank you, but not yet. I’ve got something to say—that all of you must hear.”

Of course, everybody was astonished by this speech and every eye turned toward the young “Peer” who was about to prove herself of noble “rank” as never in all her life before.

Dorothy began to suspect what might be coming and by a silent clasp of Gwendolyn’s waist and a protesting shake of her head tried to prevent her saying more.

But Gwendolyn as silently put aside the appealing arm and folding her own arms stood rigidly erect. It wouldn’t have been the real Gwen if she hadn’t assumed this rather dramatic pose, which she had mentally rehearsed many times that day. Also, she had chosen this quiet hour and place as the most effective for her purpose, and she had almost coerced Lady Jane into letting her come.

“Schoolmates and friends, I want to confess to you the meanest things that ever were done at dear Oak Knowe. From the moment she came here I disliked Dorothy Calvert and was jealous of her. In less than a week she had won Miss Muriel’s heart as well as that of almost everybody else. I thought I could drive her out of the school, if I made the rest of you hate her, too. I’d begun to teach the boot-boy to draw, having once seen him attempting it. I painted him a death’s head for a copy, and gave him my pocket-money to buy a mask of the Evil One.”

“Oh! Gwendolyn how dared you? You horrid, wicked girl!” cried gentle Marjorie, moved from her gentleness for once.

“Well, I’ll say this much in justice to myself. That thing went further than I meant, which was only to have him put pictures of it around in different places. He’d told me about keeping a goat in the old drying-room, and of course he couldn’t always keep it still. The kitchen folks put the pictures and the goat’s noises together and declared the house was haunted. I told the maids that they might lay that all to the new scholar from the States, and a lot of them believed me.”

Even loyal Laura now shrank aside from her paragon, simply horrified. She had helped to spread the rumor that Dorothy was a niece of Dawkins, but she had done no worse than that. It had been left to Jack-boot-boy to finish the contemptible acts. He got phosphorus from the laboratory, paint from any convenient color box, and his first success as a terrifier had been in the case of Millikins-Pillikins, at whose bed he had appeared—with the results that have been told. He it had been who had frightened the maid into leaving, and had spread consternation in the kitchen.

“And in all these things he did, I helped him. I planned some of them but he always went ahead and thought worse ones out. Yet nobody, except the simpletons below stairs, believed it was Dorothy who had ‘bewitched’ the house,” concluded that part of Gwendolyn’s confession.

Yet still she stood there, firmly facing the contempt on the faces of her schoolmates, knowing that that was less hard to bear than her own self-reproach had been. And presently she went on:

“Then came that affair at the Maiden’s Bath. Dorothy Calvert, whom I still hated, saved my life—while she might have lost her own. What I have suffered since, knowing this and how bravely she had borne all my hatefulness and had sacrificed herself for me—You must guess that. I can’t tell it. But last night I made myself beg her pardon in private as I now beg it before you all. May I yet have the chance to do to her as she has done to me! Dorothy Calvert—will you forgive me?”

CHAPTER XI

WHAT CAME WITH THE SNOW AND ICE

After that memorable week of Hallowe’en, affairs at Oak Knowe settled into their ordinary smooth running. That week had brought to all the school a surfeit of excitement so that all were glad of quiet and peace.

“The classes have never made such even, rapid progress before, in all the years I’ve been here;” said the Lady Principal to the good Bishop. “Things are almost ominously quiet and I almost dread to have Christmas time approach. All the young ladies get more interested then in gift-preparing and anticipations of vacations at home than in school routine. I hate to have that interrupted so soon again.”

The Bishop laughed.

“My dear Miss Muriel, you take life too seriously. Upheavals are good for us. Our lives would grow stagnant without them.”

“Beg pardon, but I can’t fancy affairs at Oak Knowe ever being stagnant! Nor do I see, as you seem to, any fine results from the happenings of Hallow week. One of the ill results is—I cannot find a competent boot-boy. That makes you smile again, but I assure you it is no trifle in a large establishment like this, with it the rule that every pupil must walk the muddy road each day. The maids will do the work, of course, but they grumble. I do wish the ground would freeze or some good boy offer his services.”

A rattling of the window panes and a sound of rising wind sent the Bishop to the window:

“Well, Miss Tross-Kingdon, one of your wishes is already coming true. There’s a blizzard coming—surely. Flakes are already falling and I’m glad the double sashes are in place on this north side the building, and that Michael has seen to having the toboggan slide put in order. I prophesy that within a few days all the young folks will be tobogganing at a glorious rate. That’s one of the things I’m

thankful for—having been born in Canada where I could slide with the best!”

He turned about and the lady smiled at his boyish enthusiasm. He was a man who never felt old, despite his venerable white head, but as he moved again toward the fire and Dorothy entered the room a shadow crossed his face. He had sent for her because within his pocket lay a letter he knew she ought to have, yet greatly disliked to give her. All the mail matter coming to the Oak Knowe girls passed first through their instructors’ hands, though it was a rare occasion when such was not promptly delivered.

This letter the Bishop had read as usual, but it had not pleased him. It was signed by one James Barlow, evidently a very old friend of Dorothy’s, and was written with a boyish assumption of authority that was most objectionable, the Bishop thought. It stated that Mr. Seth Winters was very ill and that Mrs. Calvert was breaking down from grief and anxiety concerning him; and that, in the writer’s opinion, Dorothy’s duty lay at home and not in getting an education away up there in Canada. “Anybody who really wishes to learn can do that anywhere,” was the conclusion of this rather stilted epistle.

Now when his favorite came in, happy and eager to greet him, he suddenly decided that he would keep that letter to himself for a time, until he had written to some other of the girl’s friends and found out more about the matter.

“Did you send for me, dear Bishop?”

“Well, yes, little girl, I did. There was something I wanted to talk to you about, but I’ve changed my mind and decided to put it off for the present;” he answered with a kindly smile that was less bright than usual. So that the sensitive girl was alarmed and asked:

“Is it something that I’ve done but ought not?”

“Bless your bonny face, no, indeed. No, Miss Betty the second, I have no fault to find with you. Rather I am greatly delighted by all your reports. Just look out of window a minute—what do you see?”

Dorothy still wondered why she had been summoned, but looked out as she had been bidden.

“Why, it’s snowing! My, how fast, and how all of a sudden! When we were out

for exercise the sun was shining bright."

"The sun is always shining, dear child, even though clouds of trouble often obscure it. Always remember that, little Dorothy, no matter what happens."

Then he dropped what the schoolgirls called his "preachy manner" and asked:

"How do you like tobogganing?"

"Why—why, of course I don't know. I've never even seen a toboggan, except in pictures. They looked lovely."

"Lovely? I should say, but the real thing far lovelier. Miss Tross-Kingdon, here, knows my opinion of tobogganing. The finest sport there is and one that you unfortunate southerners cannot enjoy in your native land. Up here we have everything delightful, ha, ha! But you'll have to be equipped for the fun right away. Will you see to it, Miss Muriel, that Dorothy has a toboggan rig provided? For Michael will have the slides ready, you may be sure. He was born a deal further north even than this and snow-and-ice is his native element. Why, the honest old fellow can show several prizes he won, in his younger days, for skating, ice-boating, tobogganing, and the like. I always feel safe when Michael is on hand at the slide to look after his 'young leddies.'

"Now, I must go. I have a service in town, to-night, and if I don't hurry I'll be caught in this blizzard. You run along, 'Betty' and spread the news of the grand times coming."

With a gentle pat of the little hand he held he thus dismissed her, and inspired by his talk of the—to her—novel sport, she ran happily away, forgetful already of anything more serious.

"Oh! girls! the Bishop says we'll soon have tobogganing!" she cried, joining a group gathered about a great wood fire in the library.

"Oh! goody! I was looking at my new suit this very morning. Mother's had such a pretty one made for me, a blanket suit of baby blue with everything to match—mittens and cap and all! I'm just wild to wear it!" answered Fanny Dimock, running to the window to peer out.

"To-morrow's half-holiday. Let's all go help Michael to get the slides ready!"

“Of course—if the storm will let us out! Oh glorious!” said Ernesta Smith flying to Fanny’s side, and trying to see through the great flakes, fast packing against the pane and hiding the view without.

But this only increased the gayety within. Electric lights flashed out, girl after girl ran to fetch her own coasting suit and to spread it before the eyes of her mates.

“Oh! aren’t they the sweetest things!” exclaimed the delighted Dorothy; “the very prettiest clothes I ever saw!”

Indeed they did make a fine show of color, heaped here and there, their soft, thick texture assuring perfect protection from cold. Reds and greens, pinks and blues, and snowy white; some fresh from the makers’ hands, some showing the hard wear of former winters; yet all made after the Oak Knowe pattern. A roomy pair of pantaloons, to draw over the ordinary clothing from the waist down, ended in stocking-shaped feet, fitted for warm wool overshoes. The tunic fell below the knees and ended above in a pointed hood, and mittens were made fast to the sleeves.

“Lovely, but isn’t it terribly clumsy?” asked Dorothy, more closely examining one costume.

“Let’s show her! Let’s have an Indian dance! Hurry up, everybody, and dress!”

In a jiffy every girl who owned a costume got into it and the place was transformed. For somebody flew to the piano and struck up a lively waltz, and away went the girls, catching one another for partner—no matter who—whirling and circling, twisting bodies about, arms overhead, as in a regular calisthenic figure—till Dorothy was amazed. For what looked so thick and clumsy was too soft and yielding to hinder grace.

In the midst of the mirth, the portieres were lifted and Gwendolyn came in. It was unfortunate that just then the music ended with a crash and that the whirling circles paused. For it looked as if her coming had stopped the fun, though this was far from true.

Ever since that day of her open confession her schoolmates had regarded her with greater respect than ever before. Most of them realized how hard that confession had been for so haughty a girl, and except for her own manner, many

would have shown her marked affection.

When she had ceased speaking on that day an awkward silence followed. If she had expected hand-claps or applause she failed to get either. The listeners were too surprised to know what to do, and there was just as much pride in the young "Peer's" bearing as of old. After a moment of waiting she had stalked away and all chance for applause was gone.

But she had returned to her regular classes the next morning and mixed with the girls at recreation more familiarly than she had formerly done; yet still that stiffness remained.

For half-minute, Gwendolyn hesitated just within the entrance, then forced herself to advance toward the fireplace and stand there warming herself.

"It's getting very cold," she remarked by way of breaking the unpleasant silence.

"Yes, isn't it!" returned Winifred; adding under her breath: "Inside this room, anyway."

"We're warm enough, dressed up like this," said Marjorie, pleasantly. "Dorothy says that the Bishop thinks we'll have tobogganing in a day or two, if the snow holds. She's never seen a toboggan nor how we dress for the sport, and we brought in our togs to show her. She thinks they look too clumsy for words, so we've just been showing her that we can move as easily in them as without them. But—my! It's made us so warm!"

Gwendolyn turned toward Dorothy with a smile intended to be cordial, and asked:

"Is that so, indeed? Then I suppose you'll have to get a rig like ours if you want to try the slide."

"Yes, I suppose so. The Bishop asked the Lady Principal to get me one, but I don't suppose she can right away. Nobody could go shopping in such weather, and I suppose they have to be bought in town."

"The blankets are bought there, but usually the suits are made at home before we come; or else by the matron and some of the maids here. I—"

A look of keener interest had come into her face, but she said nothing further and

a moment later went out again.

As the portieres fell together behind her, Winifred threw up her hands in comic despair.

“Whatever is the matter with that girl? or with *me*—or *you*—or *you*!” pointing to one and another around her. “She wants to be friendly—and so do we! But there’s something wrong and I don’t know what.”

“I do,” said a sweet-faced “Seventher,” who had been quietly studying during all this noise. “Poor Gwendolyn is sorry but isn’t one bit humble. She’s absolutely just and has done what she believed right. But it hasn’t helped her much. She’s fully as proud as she ever was, and the only way we can help her is by loving her. We’ve *got* to love her or she’ll grow harder than ever.”

“You can’t make love as you’d make a—a pin-cushion!” returned Florita Sheraton, holding up, to illustrate, a Christmas gift she was embroidering.

Dorothy listened to this talk, her own heart upbraiding her for her failure to “love” Gwen. She liked her greatly and admired her courage more.

“Win, let’s you and me try and see if that is true, what Florita says. Maybe love can be ‘made’ after all;” she whispered to her friend.

“Huh! That’ll be a harder job than algebra! I shall fail in both.”

“I reckon I shall, too, but we can try—all the same. That won’t hurt either one of us and I’m awfully sorry for her, she must be so lonesome.”

“‘Pity is akin to love!’ You’ve taken the first step in your climb toward Gwen’s top-lofty heart!” quoted Winifred. “Climb away and I’ll boost you as well as I can. I—”

“Miss Dorothy Calvert, the Lady Principal would like to see you in her own parlor;” said a maid, appearing at the door.

“What now? You seem to be greatly in demand, to-day, by the powers that be, I hope it isn’t a lecture the Bishop passed on to her to deliver,” said Florita as Dorothy rose to obey.

But whatever fear Dolly felt of any such matter was banished by her first glance into her teacher’s face. Miss Muriel had never looked kinder nor better pleased

than then, as, holding up a pair of beautiful white blankets she said:

“How will these do for the toboggan suit the Bishop wished me to get for you?”

“Oh! Miss Muriel! Are those for me and so soon? Why, it’s only an hour ago, or not much more, since he spoke of it, and how could anybody go to town and back in that little while, in such a storm?”

“That wasn’t necessary. These were in the house. Do you like them?”

“Like them! They’re the softest, thickest, prettiest things! I never saw any so fine, even at Aunt Betty’s Bellevieu. Do you think I ought to have them? Wouldn’t cheaper ones answer for messing around in the snow?”

“The question of expense is all right, dear, and we’re fortunate to have the material on hand. Mrs. Archibald will be here, directly, to take your measurements. Ah! here she is now.”

This was something delightfully different from any “lecture,” and even Miss Muriel talked more and in higher spirits than usual; till Dorothy asked:

“Do you love tobogganing, too, Miss Tross-Kingdon?”

“No, my dear, I’m afraid of it. My heart is rather weak and the swift motion is bad for it. But I love to see others happy and some things have happened, to-day, which have greatly pleased me. But you must talk sliding with Mrs. Archibald. Dignified as she is, she’ll show you what a true Canadian can do, give her a bit of ice and a hill.”

The matron laughed and nodded.

“May the day be long before I tire of my nation’s sport! I’m even worse than Michael, who’s almost daft on the subject.”

Then she grew busy with her measurings and clippings, declaring: “It just makes me feel bad to put scissors into such splendid blankets as these. You’ll be as proud as Punch, when I dress you out in the handsomest costume ever shot down Oak Knowe slide!”

“Oh! I wish Aunt Betty could see it, too. She does so love nice things!”

When Mrs. Archibald and her willing helpers had completed her task and Dolly

was arrayed in her snow-suit she made, indeed, “the picture” which Dawkins called her.

For the weather proved what the Bishop had foretold. The snow fell deep and heavy, “just right for packing,” Michael said, on the great wooden slide whose further end rose to a dizzy height and from whose lower one a second timbered “hill” rose and descended.

If the toboggan was in good working order, the momentum gained in the descent of the first would carry the toboggans up and over the second; and nothing could have been in finer condition than these on that next Saturday morning when the sport was to begin. The depression between the two slides was over a small lake, or pond, now solidly frozen and covered with snow; except in spots where the ice had been cut for filling the Oak Knowe ice-houses. Into one of these holes Michael and his force had plunged a long hose pipe, and a pump had been contrived to throw water upward over the slide.

On the night before men had been stationed on the slide, at intervals, to distribute this water over the whole incline, the intense cold causing it to freeze the instant it fell; and so well they understood their business they had soon rendered it a perfectly smooth slide of ice from top to bottom. A little hand-railed stairway, for the ascent of the tobogganers, was built into the timbers of the toboggan, or incline, itself; and it was by this that they climbed back to the top after each descent, dragging their toboggans behind them. At the further side of the lake, close to its bank, great blazing fires were built, where the merry makers could warm themselves, or rest on the benches placed around.

Large as some of the toboggans were they were also light and easily carried, some capable of holding a half-dozen girls—“packed close.” Yet some sleds could seat but two, and these were the handsomest of all. They belonged to the girls who had grown proficient in the sport and able to take care of themselves; while some man of the household always acted as guide on the larger sleds and for the younger pupils.

When Dorothy came out of the great building, that Saturday holiday, she thought the whole scene was truly fairyland. The evergreens were loaded to the ground with their burden of snow, the wide lawns were dazzlingly bright, and the sun shone brilliantly.

“Who’re you going to slide with, Dolly? On Michael’s sled? I guess the Lady Principal will say so, because you’re so new to it. Will you be afraid?”

“Why should I be afraid? I used to slide down the mountain side when I lived at Skyrie. What makes you laugh, Winifred? This won’t be very different, will it?”

“Wait till you try it! It’s perfectly glorious but it isn’t just the same as sliding down a hill, where a body can stop and step off any time. You can’t step off a toboggan, unless you want to get killed.”

Dorothy was frightened and surprised, and quickly asked:

“How can anybody call that ‘sport’ which is as dangerous as that? What do you mean? I reckon I won’t go. I’ll just watch you.”

It was Winifred’s turn to stare, but she was also disappointed.

“Oh! you little ‘Fraid-Cat,’ I thought you were never afraid of anything. That’s why I liked you. One why—and there are other whys—but don’t you back out in this. Don’t you dare. When you’ve got that be-a-u-tiful rig and a be-a-u-tiful toboggan to match. I’d hate to blush for you, Queen Baltimore!”

“I have no toboggan, Winnie, dear. You know that. I was wondering who’d take me on theirs—if—if I try it at all.”

Winifred rushed to the other side of the porch and came flying back, carrying over her head a toboggan, so light and finely polished that it shone; also a lovely cushion of pink and white dragged from one hand. This fitted the flat bottom of the sled and was held in place, when used, by silver catches. The whole toboggan was of this one polished board, curving upward in front according to the most approved form, pink tassels floating from its corners that pink silk cords held in their place. Across this curving front was stenciled in pink: “Dorothy Calvert.”

“There, girlie, what do you say to that? Isn’t it marked plainly enough? Didn’t you know about it before? Why all we girls have been just wild with envy of you, ever since we saw it among the others.”

Dorothy almost caught her breath. It certainly was a beauty, that toboggan! But how came she to have it?

“What do you mean, Winifred Christie? Do you suppose the Bishop has had it made, or bought it, for me? Looks as if it had cost a lot. And Aunt Betty has lost so much money she can’t afford to pay for extra things—not very high ones—”

“Quit borrowing trouble, Queenie! Who cares where it came from or how much it cost? Here it is with your own name on it and if you’re too big a goose to use it, I shall just borrow it myself. So there you are. There isn’t a girl here but wouldn’t be glad to have first ride on it. Am I invited?” and Winifred poked a saucy face under her friend’s hood.

“Am I?” asked Florita Sheraton, coaxingly throwing her arms around Dolly.

“Oh! get away, Flo! You’re too big! You’d split the thing in two!” said Ernesta, pulling away her chum’s arms. “Just look at me, Dolly Doodles! Just see how nice and thin I am! Why I’m a feather’s weight to Flo, and I’m one of the best tobogganers at Oak Knowe. Sure. Ask Mrs. Archibald herself, for here she comes all ready for her share of the fun!”

“Yes, yes, lassie, you’re a fair one at the sport now and give some promise o’ winning the cup yet!” answered the matron, joining the girls and looking as fit and full of life as any of them.

“Hear! Hear! Hurrah for ’Nesta! Three cheers for the champion cup winner!”

“And three times three for the girl Dolly chooses to share her first slide on the new toboggan!” cried somebody, while a dozen laughing faces were thrust forward and as many hands tapped on the breasts of the pleaders, signifying: “Choose me!”

The Bishop was already on hand, looking almost a giant in his mufflers, and as full of glee as the youngest there. The lady Principal, in her furs, had also joined the group, for though she did not try the slides, she loved to watch the enjoyment of the others, from a warm seat beside the bonfire.

While Dorothy hesitated in her choice, looking from one to another of the merry, pleading faces about her, Gwendolyn Borst-Kennard stood a little apart, watching with keen interest the little scene before her, while the elder members of the group also exchanged some interested glances.

“Count us! Count us! That’s fair! Begin: ‘Intry, mintry, outry, corn; wire, brier,

apple, thorn. Roly, poly, dimble-dee;—O—U—T spells Out goes SHE!’”

Over and over, they laughingly repeated the nonsense-jingle, each girl whom the final “she” designated stepping meekly back with pretended chagrin, while the “counting out” went on without her. The game promised to be so long that the matron begged:

“Do settle it soon, young ladies! We’re wasting precious time.”

Dorothy laughed and still undecided, happened to glance toward Gwendolyn, who had made no appeal for preference, and called out:

“Gwen, dear, will you give me my first lesson? I choose Gwendolyn!”

It was good to see the flush of happiness steal into Gwen’s face and to see the smile she flashed toward Dorothy. Stepping forward she said:

“Thank you, dear. I do appreciate this in you, and you needn’t be afraid. The Lady Principal knows I can manage a toboggan fairly well, and this of yours seems to be an exact copy of my own that I’ve used so long.”

Other cheers followed this and in a moment the whole party had spread over the white grounds leading to the great slide, the good Bishop following more slowly with the other “grown-ups,” and softly clapping his mittened hands.

“Good! Fine! I like that. Dorothy has ignorantly done the one right thing. If she could only guess the secret which lies under all how thankful she would be that she made this choice and no other.”

CHAPTER XII

JOHN GILPIN JOINS THE SPORT

Old Michael stood on the wide platform at the top of the slide, his face aglow with eagerness, and his whole manner altered to boyish gayety. His great toboggan was perched on the angle of the incline, like a bird poised for flight, while he was bidding his company to: “Get on, ladies! Get on and let’s be off!”

Behind and around him were the other men employees of Oak Knowe, and every one of them, except the *chef*, enthusiastic over the coming sport. But he, unhappy mortal, preferred the warmth of his kitchen fire to this shivery pastime and had only entered into it to escape the gibing tongues of the other servants. Yet in point of costume he could “hold his head up with the best”; and the fact that he could, in this respect even outshine his comrades was some compensation for his cold-pinched toes.

The platform was crowded with toboggans and girls; the air rang with jest and laughter; with girlish squeals of pretended fear; and cries of: “Don’t crowd!” or: “Sit close, sit close!”

“Sit close” they did; the blanketed legs of each tobogganer pressed forward on either side of the girl in front, and all hands clasping the small rod that ran along the sides of the toboggan.

The slide had been built wide enough for two of the sleds abreast, and one side was usually left to the smaller ones of the experienced girls, who could be trusted to safely manage their own light craft.

To Michael and the matron was always accorded the honor of first slide on the right while the “best singles” coasted alongside on the left. That morning, by tacit consent, the new “Dorothy Calvert” was poised beside the big “Oak Knowe” and the Honorable Gwendolyn Borst-Kennard was a proud and happy girl, indeed, as she took her place upon it as guide and protector of ignorant Dorothy.

“She chose me of her own accord! I do believe she begins to really love me. Oh! it’s so nice to be just free and happy with her as the others are!” thought Gwen, as she took her own place and directed her mate just how to sit and act. Adding a final:

“Don’t you be one bit afraid. I never had an accident sliding and I’ve always done it every winter since I can remember. We’re off! Bow your head a little and —keep—your—mouth—shut!”

There wasn’t time! Dorothy felt a little quiver run through the thing on which she sat and a wild rush through icy air! That was all! They had reached the bottom of the first slide and began to fly upward over the other before she realized a thing. Gwen hadn’t even finished her directions before they had “arrived!”

The Southerner was too amazed, for a second, to even step off the toboggan, but Gwendolyn caught her up, gave her a hearty kiss and hug, and demanded:

“Well! Here we are! How do you like it! We’ve beat! We’ve beat!”

Dorothy rubbed her eyes. So they had, for at that instant the big Oak Knowe fetched up beside them, and its occupants stepped or tumbled off, throwing up their hands and cheering:

“Three cheers for the Dorothy Calvert! Queen of the Slide for all This Year!”

And liveliest among the cheerers was the once so dignified young “Peer,” the Honorable Gwen. Dorothy looking into her beaming face and hearing her happy voice could scarce believe this to be the same girl she had hitherto known. But she had scant time to think for here they came, thick and fast, toboggan after toboggan, Seventh Form girls and Minims, teachers and pupils, the Bishop and the *chef*, maids and men-servants, the matron and old Michael—all in high spirits, all apparently talking at once and so many demanding of “Miss Dixie” how she liked it, that she could answer nobody.

Then the Bishop pushed back her tasseled hood and smiled into her shining eyes:

“Well little ‘Betty the Second,’ can you beat that down at old Baltimore? What do you think now? Isn’t it fine—fine? Doesn’t it make you feel you’re a bird of the air? Ah! it’s grand—grand. Just tell me you like it and I’ll let you go.”

“I—Yes—I reckon I do! I hadn’t time to think. We hadn’t started, and we were here.”

“Up we go. Try her again!” cried one, and the climb back to the top promptly began, the men carrying the heavier sleds, the girls their lighter ones, Gwendolyn and Dorothy their own between them. Then the fun all over again; the jests at awkward starts, the cheers at skillful ones, the laughter and good will, till all felt the exhilaration of the moment and every care was forgotten.

Many a slide was taken and now Dorothy could answer when asked did she like it:

“It’s just grand, as the Bishop said. At first I could hardly breathe and I was dizzy. Now I do as Gwen tells me and I love it! I should like to stay out here all day!”

“Wait till dinner-time! Then you’ll be ready enough to go in. Tobogganing is the hungriest work—or play—there can possibly be!” said Gwendolyn, pirouetting about on the ice as gracefully as on a waxed floor, the merriest, happiest girl in all that throng. Not only Dorothy but many another observed her with surprise. This was a new Gwen, not the stand-offish sort of creature who had once so haughtily scorned all their fun. She had always tobogganed, every year that she had been in that school, but she had never enjoyed it like this; and again as the Bishop regarded her, he nodded his head in satisfaction and said to the matron:

“I told you so. I knew it. Do a kindness to somebody and it will return to yourself in happiness a thousand fold.”

“Thanks, dear Bishop! I’ll try to remember,” merrily answered she; noticing that Gwendolyn had drawn near enough to hear, and taking this little preachment to herself to prevent Gwendolyn’s doing so. She was so pleased by sight of the girl’s present happiness that she wished nothing to cloud it, and believing herself discussed would certainly offend proud, sensitive Gwen.

Almost two hours had passed, and a few were beginning to tire of the really arduous sport, with its upward climb, so out of proportion to the swift descent; when suddenly fresh shouts of laughter rang out from the high platform and those ascending made haste to join the others at the top.

There stood old John Gilpin and Robin, the latter’s young bones now sound and

strong again, and himself much the better for his sojourn at the cottage with his enforced rest and abundance of good food.

“Well, well! How be ye all? Hearty, you look, and reg’lar circus pictures in them warm duds! Good day to your Reverence, Bishop, and I hope I see you in good health. My humble respects, your Reverence, and I thought as how I’d just step up and ask your Reverence might my lad here and me have a try on your slide. I thought—why, sir, the talk on’t has spread way into town a’ready, sir, and there’ll be more beggars nor me seekin’ use on’t, your Reverence—”

The prelate’s hearty laughter rang out on the frosty air, a sound delightful to hear, so full it was of genial humanity, and he grasped the hand of the old teamster as warmly as he would that of a far wealthier man.

“Man to man, John, we’re all in the same boat to-day. Drop the formality and welcome to the sport. But what sort of sled is this, man? Looks rather rough, doesn’t it? Sure you could manage it on this steep incline?”

John bridled and Robin looked disappointed. Expectations of the toboggan-slide’s being made ready had filled his head, and he and the old man had toiled for hours to make the sled at which the Bishop looked so doubtfully.

“Well, your Reverence—I mean—you without the Reverence—” here the Bishop smiled and Robin giggled, thereby causing his host to turn about with a frown. “You see, sir, Robin’s always been hearin’ about your toboggan up here to Oak Knowe and’s been just plumb crazy—”

At this point the shy lad pulled John’s coat, silently begging him to leave him out of the talk; but the farmer had been annoyed by Robin’s ill-timed giggle, and testily inquired:

“Well, sir, ain’t that so? Didn’t you pester the life clean out o’ me till I said I’d try? Hey?”

“Y-yes,” meekly assented the boy; then catching a glimpse of Dorothy and Winifred and their beckoning nods he slipped away to them. To him Dorothy proudly exhibited her beautiful toboggan, explaining its fine construction with a glibness that fitted an “old tobogganer” better than this beginner at the sport. Gwen’s face beamed again, listening to her, as if she felt a more personal pride in the sled than even Dorothy herself. She even unbent so far from her pride of

rank as to suggest:

“If you’ll let me borrow it and he’d like to go, I’ll take Robin down once, to show him how smoothly it runs.”

Robin’s eyes sparkled. He wasn’t shy with girls, but only when he felt himself made too conspicuous by his host’s talk.

“Would you? Could she? May she?” he cried, teetering about on his ragged shoes in an ecstasy of delight.

Dolly laughed and clapped her hands.

“Verily, she should, would, can, and may! laddie boy. But where’s your jacket? I mean your other one? It’s so cold, you’ll freeze in that thin one.”

By the color which came to the lad’s cheek Dolly realized that she had asked a “leading question,” but Robin’s dismay lasted only an instant; then he laughed merrily at the “good joke,” and answered:

“Well, you see, Miss Dorothy, my ‘other one’ is at some tailor’s shop in town. I haven’t had a chance yet to choose one, let alone pay for it! But what matter? ’Tisn’t winter all the year and who wears top-coats in summer? Did she really mean it?”

Gwendolyn proved that she “really meant it” by pushing the “Dorothy Calvert” into position and nodding to him that she was ready.

“All right! Let her go!” he responded to her silent invitation and away they went, as ill-matched a pair as might have been found. But he had a boy’s fearlessness and love of adventure; and even on that swift descent his gay whistling floated back to those above.

Meanwhile, John Gilpin was explaining with considerable pride, yet thankful that the Bishop was out of hearing on his own downward-speeding toboggan:

“You see, lassie, how’t Robin was dead set to come. Said he knew so good a man as his Reverence wouldn’t say ‘No’ to us, and just kept teasin’ at me till we stepped-an’-fetched a lot of staves come off a hogshead. So I fastened ’em together on the insides—See? And we’ve shaved an’ shaved, an’ glass-scraped ’em on ’tother till they’ll never hurt no slide ’t ever was iced. The Bishop

seemed terr'ble afraid I'd rough up his track with it, but it's a poor track that water won't freeze smooth again; so if we do happen to scratch it a mite, I'll step-an'-fetch a few buckets o' water and fix it up again. And say, girlie, where's that Jack, boot-boy? And Baal? I ain't seen hide nor hair of ary one this long spell, an' I allow I kind of sorter miss 'em. He used to give the dame the fidgets with his yarns of what he's goin to be an' do, time comes, but me an' him got on fairly well—fairly. As for that goat, he was the amusingest little creatur' 't ever jumped a fence, even if we did fight most of the time. Hah, hum! I've noticed more'n once that the folks or things you quarrel with are the ones you miss most, once they're gone."

"We haven't seen Jack since that time he locked me in the drying-room. He ran away, I reckon, and took Baal with him. And it's just like you say: nobody liked him much, and he was always in disgrace with somebody, but I heard the Lady Principal say, only yesterday, that she actually believed she missed that worthless boot-boy more than any other servant who might have left."

"Well, now, Dorothy, don't that beat all? That book-l'arned lady just agreein' with me! I often tell Dame 't I know more'n she thinks I do, but all she'll answer to that is: 'John, that'll do.' A rare silent woman is my Dame but a powerful thinker. Hello! Here they come back again. Robin! Robin! Look-a-here! You didn't bamboozle me into makin' our sled and climbin' this height just to leave me go for a passel o' silly girls! No, siree! You come and slide with me right to once. I set out to go a-tobogganin' an' I'm goin'. So none of your backslidin' now!"

"All right, Mr. Gilpin, here am I! And I do hope it won't be any true *back* sliding we shall do on this thing. You'd ought to have put a little handrail on the sides like I told you there always was; but—"

"But that'll do, Robin. In my young days knee-high boys didn't know more'n their elders. That'll do!"

The old farmer's imitation of his wife's manner seemed very funny to all the young folks, but his anxiety was evident, as he glanced from his own hand-made "toboggan" to the professional ones of the others. Upon his was not even the slight rod to hold on by and the least jar might send him off upon the ice. Peering down, it seemed to him that glazed descent was a straight road to a pit of perdition and his old heart sank within him.

But—He had set out to go tobogganing and go he would, if he perished doing it. Dame had besought him with real tears not to risk his old bones in such a foolhardy sport, and he had loftily assured her that “what his Reverence can do I can do. Me and him was born in the same year, I’ve heard my mother tell, and it’s a pity if I can’t ekal him!”

Moreover, there were all these youngsters makin’ eyes at him, plumb ready to laugh, and thinkin’ he’d back out. Back out? He? John Gilpin? Never!

“Come on, Robin! Let’s start!”

Gwendolyn and Dorothy were also ready to “start” upon what they intended should be their last descent of that morning. Alas! it proved to be! Five seconds later such a scream of terror rent the air that the hearts of all who heard it chilled in horror.

CHAPTER XIII

A BAD DAY FOR JOHN GILPIN

What had happened!

Those who were sliding down that icy incline could not stop to see, and those who were on the ground below covered their eyes that they might not. Yet opened them again to stare helplessly at the dangling figure of a girl outside that terrible slide. For in a moment, when the clutching fingers must unclose, the poor child must drop to destruction. That was inevitable.

Then they saw it was Dorothy, who hung thus, suspended between life and death. Dorothy in her white and pink, the daintiest darling of them all, who had so enjoyed her first—and last!—day at this sport.

Fresh shudders ran through the onlookers as they realized this and the Lady Principal sank down in a faint. Then another groan escaped them—the merest possibility of hope.

Behold! The girl did not fall! Another's small hand reached over the low side of the toboggan and clutched the blanket-covered shoulder of the imperiled child. Another hand! the other shoulder, and hope grew stronger. Someone had caught the falling Dorothy—she and her would-be-rescuer were now moving—moving—slowly downward along the very edge—one swaying perilously with the motion, the other wholly unseen save for those outstretched hands, with their death-fast grip upon the snowy wool.

Down—down! And faster now! Till the hands of the tallest watchers could reach and clasp the feet, then the whole precious little body of "Miss Dixie," their favorite from the Southland.

But even then, as strong arms drew her into their safe shelter, the small hands which had supported her to safety clung still so tight that only the Bishop's could loose their clasp.

“Gwendolyn! You brave, sweet girl! Let go—let go. It’s all right now—Dorothy did not fall—You saved her life. Look up, my daughter. Don’t faint now when all is over. Look up, you noble child, and hear me tell you: Dorothy is safe and it is you who saved her life. At the risk of your own you saved her life.”

Clasped close in his fatherly arms, Gwendolyn shuddered but obeyed and looked up into the Bishop’s face.

“Say that again. Please. Say that again—very slow—if it’s the—the truth.”

“SOMEONE HAD CAUGHT THE FALLING GIRL.”

“SOMEONE HAD CAUGHT THE FALLING GIRL.”

Dorothy at Oak Knowe.

“Gwendolyn, I tell you now, in the presence of God and these witnesses, it has been your precious privilege to save a human life, by your swift thought and determined action you have saved the life of Dorothy Calvert, and God bless you for it.”

“Then we are quits!”

For another moment after she had said those words she still rested quietly where she was, then slowly rose and looked about her.

Dorothy had been in the greater peril of the two, yet more unconscious of it. She had not seen how high above the ground she hung, nor how directly beneath was the lake with the thinly frozen spots whence the thicker ice had been cut for the ice-houses; nor how there were heaped up rocks bordering the water, left as nature had designed to beautify the scene.

She was the quickest to recover her great fright and she was wholly unhurt. Her really greater wonder was that poor Miss Muriel should happen to faint away just then.

“I’m glad she did, though, if it won’t make her ill, ’cause then she didn’t see me dangling, like I must have, and get scared for that. Likely she stayed out doors too long. She isn’t very strong and it’s mighty cold, I think.”

So they hurried her indoors, Gwendolyn with her, yet neither of them allowed to discuss the affair until they were both warmly dressed in ordinary clothes and set down to a cute little lunch table, “all for your two selves,” Nora explained: “And to eat all these warm things and drink hot coffee—as much of it as you like. It was Miss Muriel herself who said that!”

This was a treat indeed. Coffee at any meal was kept for a special treat, but to have unlimited portions of it was what Dolly called “a step beyond.”

Curious glances, but smiling and tender, came often their way, from other tables in the room, yet the sport, and happily ended hazard of the morning had given to every girl a fine appetite, so that, for once, knives and forks were more busily employed than tongues.

Neither did the two heroines of the recent tragic episode feel much like speech. Now that it was all over and they could think about it more clearly their hearts were filled with the solemnity of what had happened; and Gwendolyn said all that was needed for both, when once laying her hand on Dorothy's she whispered:

"You saved my life—the Bishop says that I saved yours. After that we're even and we must love each other all our lives."

"Oh! we must, we must! And I do, I shall!" returned Dorothy, with tears rising.

Then this festive little lunch dispatched, they were captured by their schoolmates and led triumphantly into the cheerful library, the scene of all their confabs, and Winifred demanded:

"Now, in the name of all the Oak Knowe girls, I demand a detailed history of what happened. Begin at the beginning and don't either of you dare to skip a single moment of the time from where you started down the old toboggan alongside of John Gilpin and that boy. I fancy if the tale were properly told his ride would outdo that of his namesake of old times. Dorothy Calvert, begin."

"Why, dear, I don't know what to say, except that, as you say, we started. My lovely toboggan went beautifully, as it had all the time, but theirs didn't act right. I believe that the old man was scared so that he couldn't do a thing except meddle with Robin, who doesn't know much more about sliding than I do, or did. He—"

"I saw he was getting on the wrong side, right behind you two, as we shot past on ours," interrupted Serena Huntington, "and we both called out: 'steer! steer right!' but I suppose they didn't hear or understand. We were so far down then that I don't know."

"Gwen, dear, you tell the rest," begged Dorothy, cuddling up to the girl she now so dearly loved.

It wasn't often that Gwendolyn was called to the front like this, but she found it very pleasant; so readily took up the tale where Dorothy left it, "at the very beginning" as "Dixie" laughingly declared.

"It seems as if there was nothing to tell—it was all so quick—it just happened!

Half way down, it must have been, the farmer's sled hit ours. That scared me, too, and I called, just as Serena had, and as everybody on the slide was doing as they passed: 'Steer right!' I guess that only confused the poor old man, for he kept bobbing into us and that hindered our getting away from him ourselves.

"Next I knew, Dolly was off the sled and over the edge of the slide, clinging to it for her life. I knew she couldn't hold on long and so I rolled off and grabbed her. Then we began to slide and I knew somebody was trying to help by pushing us downward toward the bottom. I don't know who that was. I don't know anything clearly. It was all like a flash—I guessed we would be killed—I shut my eyes and—that's all."

To break the too suggestive silence which followed with its hint of a different, sorrowful ending, Florita Sheraton exclaimed:

"I know who did that pushing! It was our little Robin Adair, or whatever his name is. Fact. That home-made toboggan of his came to grief. The old man has told me. He's out in the kitchen now warming up his bruises. You see, there wasn't anything to hang on by, on the sides. He had scorned Robin's advice to nail something on and he nearly ground his fingers off holding on by the flat bottom. It went so swift—his fingers ached so—he yanked them out from under—Robin screeched—they ran into you—they both tumbled off—Robin lodged against you but John Gilpin rode to the bottom—thus wise!"

Florita illustrated by rolling one hand over and under the other; and thus, in fact, had John Gilpin taken his first toboggan slide.

Laughter showed that the tension of excitement which had held these schoolgirls all that day had yielded to ordinary feelings, and now most of them went away for study or practicing, leaving Dorothy and Gwendolyn alone. After a moment, they also left the library, bound kitchenwards, to visit old John and see if Robin were still thereabouts.

"I wish there were something I could do for that boy," said Gwen. "I feel so grateful to him for helping us and he looked so poor. Do you suppose, Dolly, if Mamma offered him money for that new coat he jested about, that he would be offended."

"Of course, Gwen, I don't know about *him*. You never can tell about other folks, but Uncle Seth thinks it's a mighty safe rule 'to put yourself in his place'; and if

I were in Robin's I'd be 'mad as a hatter' to have money offered me for doing a little thing like that. Wouldn't you?"

"Why, yes, Dorothy, of course I would. The idea! But I'm rich, or my people are, which is the same thing. But he's poor. His feelings may not, cannot, be the same as our sort have."

"Why can't they? I don't like to have you think that way. You ought not. Gwen you must not. For that will make us break friendship square off. I'm not poor Dawkins's niece, though I might be much worse off than that, but once I was 'poor' like Robin. I was a deserted baby, adopted by a poor letter carrier. Now, what do you think of that? Can't I have nice feelings same as you? And am I a bit better—in myself—because in reality I belonged to a rich old family, than I was when I washed dishes in Mother Martha's kitchen? Tell me that, before we go one step further."

Dorothy had stopped short in the hall and faced about, anxiously studying the face of this "Peer," who had now become so dear to her.

Gwendolyn's face was a puzzle; as, for a time, the old opinions and the new struggled within her. But the struggle was brief. Her pride, her justice, and now her love, won the victory.

"No, you darling, brave little thing, you are not. Whatever you are you were born such, and I love you, I love you. If I'd only been born in the States I'd have had no silly notions."

"Don't you believe that, Gwen. Aunt Betty says that human nature is the same all the world over. You'd have been just as much of a snob if you'd been 'raised in ol' Ferginny' as you are here. Oh! my! I didn't mean that. I meant—You must understand what I mean!"

A flush of mortification at her too plain speaking made Dorothy hide her face, but her hands were swiftly pulled down and a kiss left in their place.

"Don't you fret, Queenie! It's taken lots of Mamma's plain speaking to keep me half-way decent to others less rich than I, and I'm afraid it'll take lots of yours, too, to put the finishing touches to that lesson. Come on. We love each other now, and love puts everything right. Come on. Let's find that Robin and see what we can do for him without hurting his feelings."

“Oh! yes, come, let’s hurry! But first to the Lady Principal. Maybe we can help them both. Won’t that be fine?”

But they were not to help Robin just then. A groan from the servants’ parlor, a pleasant room opening from the kitchen, arrested their attention and made them pause to listen. Punctuated by other sounds, a querulous voice was complaining:

“Seems if there warn’t a hull spot left on my old body that ain’t bruised sore as a bile. Why, sir, when I fell off that blamed sled we’d tinkered up”—groan—“I didn’t know anything. Just slid—an’ slid—an’ rolled over and over, never realizin’ which side of me was topmost till I fetched up—kerwhack! to the very bottom. Seemed as if I’d fell out o’ the sky into the bottomless pit. Oh! dear!”

Dawkins’s voice it was that answered him, both pitying and teasing him in the same breath:

“I’m sure it’s sorry I am, Mr. Gilpin, for what’s befell; but for a man that’s lived in a tobogganing country ever since he was born, you begun rather late in life to learn the sport. Why—”

“Ain’t no older’n the Bishop! Can’t one man do same’s t’other, I’d like to know, Mis’ Dawkins?”

“Seems not;” laughed the maid. “But, here, take this cup of hot spearmint tea. ’Twill warm your old bones and help ’em to mend; an’ next time you start playin’ children’s game—why don’t! And for goodness’ sake, John, quit groanin’! Takin’ on like that don’t help any and I tell you fair and square I’ve had about all the strain put on my nerves, to-day, ’t I can bear. What was your bit of a roll down that smooth ice compared to what our girls went through?”

“Has you got any nuts in your pockets? Has you?” broke in Millikins-Pillikins, who had been a patient listener to the confab between the farmer and the nurse till she could wait no longer. Never had the old man come to Oak Knowe without some dainty for the little girl and she expected such now.

“No, sissy, I haven’t. I dunno as I’ve got a pocket left. I dunno nothing, except—except—What’ll SHE say when I go home all lamed up like this! Oh! hum! Seems if I was possessed to ha’ done it, and so she thought. But ’twas Robin’s fault. If Robin hadn’t beset me so I’d never thought of it. Leastwise, not to go the length I did. If I’d—But there! What’s the use? But one thing’s sure. I’ll get shut

of that boy, see if I don't. He's well now an' why should I go to harboring *reptiles* in my buzzum? Tell me that if ye can! *Reptiles.* That's what he was, a-teasin' an' misleadin' a poor old man into destruction. Huh! I'll make it warm for him—trust John Gilpin for that!"

Dawkins had long since departed, unable to bear the old man's lamentations, and leaving the cup, or pot, of hot tea on the table beside him. But little Grace couldn't tear herself away. She lingered, first hoping for the nuts she craved, and later in wonder about the "*reptile*" he said was in his bosom. There were big books full of pictures in the library, that Auntie Prin sometimes let her see. She loved to have them opened on the rug and lie down beside them to study them. She knew what "reptiles" were. That was the very one of all the Natural History books with the blue bindings that she liked best, it was so delightfully crawly and sent such funny little thrills all through her. If a picture could do that what might not the real thing do!

"Show it to me, please, Mr. Gilpin. I never saw a reptile in all my whole life long! Never!"

The farmer had paid scant attention to her chatter; indeed, he scarcely heard it, his mind being wholly engrossed now with what his dame would say to him, on his return home; and in his absent-mindedness he reached out for the drink good Dawkins had left him and put the pot to his lips taking a great draught.

An instant later the pot flew out of his hand and he sprang to his feet, clutching frantically at his bosom and yelling as if he were stung. For the contents of the pot were boiling hot and he had scalded his throat most painfully.

But wide-eyed little Grace did not understand his wild action, as, still clutching his shirt front, he hurled the pot far from him. Of course, the "reptile" was biting! That must be why he screeched so, and now all her desire for a personal acquaintance with such a creature vanished. She must get as far away from it as possible before it appeared on the surface of his smock and, darting doorward, was just in time to receive the pot and what was left in it upon her curly head. Down she dropped as if she had been shot, and Dorothy entering was just in time to see her fall. The scene apparently explained itself. The angry face of the old man, his arm still rigid, in the gesture of hurling, the fallen child and the broken pot—who could guess that it was horror at his uncalculated deed which kept him in that pose?

Not Dorothy, who caught up little Grace and turned a furious face upon poor John, crying out in fierce contempt:

“Oh! you horrible old man! First you tried to kill me and now you have killed her!”

CHAPTER XIV

EXPLANATIONS ARE IN ORDER

Dorothy ran straight to the Lady Principal's room, too horrified by what she imagined was the case to pause on the way and too excited to feel the heavy burden she carried.

Nobody met her to stop her or inquire what had happened. Gwendolyn had been called to join her mother and had seen nothing of the incident, and Dorothy burst into the pretty parlor—only to find it empty. Laying Millikins down on the couch she started to find help, but was promptly called back by the child herself.

"Where you going, Dolly Doodles? What you carry me for, running so?"

"Why—why—darling—can you *speak*? Are you *alive*? Oh! you dear—you dear! I thought you were killed!" cried the relieved girl kneeling beside the couch and hugging the astonished little one.

"Why for can't I speak, Dorothy? Why for can't I be alive? The 'reptile' didn't bite me, it bited *him*. That's why he hollered so and flung things. See, Dolly, I'm all wet with smelly stuff like 'meddy' some kind, that Dawkins made him. And what you think? Soon's he started drinking it the 'reptile' must not have liked it and must have bited him to make him stop—'Ou-u-c-ch!' Just like that he said it, an' course I runned, an' the tea-pot flew, an' I fell down, and you come, grabbed me and said things, and—and—But the reptile didn't get Gracie, did it? No it didn't, 'cause I runned like anything, and 'cause you come, and—Say, Dolly! I guess I'd rather see 'em in the book. I guess I don't want to get acquainted with no live ones like I thought I did. No, sir!"

"What in the world do you mean, Baby? Whatever are you talking about? Oh! you mischief, you gave poor Dolly such a fright when you fell down like that!"

"Why, Dolly Doodles, how funny! I fall down lots of times. Some days I fall down two-ten-five times, and sometimes I'd cry, but Auntie Prin don't like that. She'll say right off: 'There, Millikins, I wouldn't bother to do that. You haven't

hurt the floor any.’ So course I stop. ’Cause if I had hurted the floor she’d let me cry a lot. She said so, once. Mr. Gilpin didn’t have a single nut in his pockets. He said so. And he talked awful funny! Not as if to me at all, so must ha’ been to the ‘reptile’ in his ‘buzzum.’ Do ‘reptiles’ buzz, Dolly, same as sting-bees do? And wouldn’t you rather carry nuts in your pockets for such nice little girls as me, than crawly things inside your smock to bite you? I think a smock’s the funniest kind of clothes, and Mr. Gilpin’s the funniest kind of man inside ’em. Don’t you?”

“If either one can match you for funniness, you midget, I’ll lose my guess. Seems if this had been the ‘funniest’ kind of day ever was. But I’ll give you up till you get ready to explain your ‘reptile’ talk. Changing the subject, did you get a slide to-day?”

“Yes, lots of them. What do think? I didn’t have anybody give me a nice new toboggan with my name on it, like you had; so the Bishop he told Auntie Prin that he’d look out for me this year same’s he did last year. I hadn’t grown so much bigger, he thought. Course he’s terrible big and I’m terrible little, so all he does is tuck me inside his great toboggan coat. Buttons it right around me—this way—so I never could slip out, could I? And I don’t have to hold on at all he holds on for me and Auntie’s not afraid, that way. Don’t you think it was terrible nice for Gwendolyn to give you your things?”

“What things, dear? Gwen has given me nothing that I know of. Is this another mystery of yours?”

“It isn’t not no mystery, I don’t know what them are, except when girls like you get lost right in their own houses and don’t get found again right soon. But I know ‘secrets.’ Secrets are what the one you have ’em about don’t get told. That was a secret about your things, Gwen said. You didn’t get told, did you?”

“I have a suspicion that I’m being told now,” answered Dorothy, soberly. “Suppose you finish the telling, dear, while we are airing the subject. What are the things you’re talking about?”

“Why, aren’t you stupid, Dolly? About the be-a-u-tiful blankets were made into your suit. Auntie said they were the handsomest ever was. Lady Jane had bought ’em to have new things made for Gwen, ’cause Lady Jane’s going far away across the ocean and she wanted to provide every single thing Gwen might want.

In case anything happened to Gwen’s old one.

“So Gwen said, no, she didn’t need ’em and you did. She guessed your folks hadn’t much money, she’d overheard the Bishop say so. That’s the way she knows everything is ’cause she always ‘overhears.’ I told Auntie Prin that I thought that was terrible nice, and I’d like to learn overhearing; and she sauced me back the funniest! My! she did! Said if she ever caught me overhearing I’d be put to bed with nothing but bread and water to eat, until I forgot the art. Just like that she said it! Seems if overhearing is badness. She does so want Gwendolyn to be really noble. Auntie Prin thinks it noble for Gwen to give up her blankets and to have that be-a-u-tiful toboggan bought for you with your name on it. You aren’t real poor, are you, Dolly? Not like the beggar folks come ‘tramping’ by and has ‘victuals’ given to them? Bishop says all little girls must be good to the poor. That’s when he wants me to put my pennies in my Mite Box for the little heathen. I don’t so much care about the heathen and Hugh—”

But Dorothy suddenly put the child down, knowing that once started upon the theme of “Brother Hugh” the little sister’s talk was endless. And she was deeply troubled.

She had altogether forgotten John Gilpin and the accusation she had hurled at him. Nothing now remained in her mind but thoughts of Gwendolyn’s rich gifts and indignation against her. Why had she done it? As a sort of payment for Dorothy’s assistance at the Maiden’s Bath?

Meeting Miss Muriel in the hall she cried:

“Oh! my dear lady, I am in such trouble! May I talk to you a moment?”

“Certainly, Dorothy. Come this way. Surely there can be nothing further have happened to you, to-day.”

Safe in the shelter and privacy of a small classroom, Dorothy told her story into wise and loving ears; and to be comforted at once.

“You are all wrong, Dorothy. I am sure that there was no such thought as payment for any deed of yours in poor Gwendolyn’s mind. You have been invariably kind to her in every way possible; and until this chance came she had found none in which to show you that she realized this and loved you for it. Why, my dear, if you could have seen her happiness when I told her it was a

beautiful thing for her to do, you would certainly have understood her and been glad to give her the chance she was glad to take. It is often harder to accept favors than to bestow them. It takes more grace. Now, dear, let's call that 'ghost laid,' as Dawkins says. Hunt up Gwen, tell her how grateful you are to her for her rich, unselfish gifts, and—do it with a real Dorothy face; not with any hint of offended pride—which is not natural to it! And go at once, then drop the subject and forget it. We were all so thankful that you chose her this morning without knowing."

Back came the smiles as Miss Muriel hoped to see them, and away sped Dorothy to put the good advice in practice; and five minutes later Gwendolyn was the happiest girl at Oak Knowe, because her gifts had been ascribed to real affection only.

"Now, Gwen, that we've settled *that*, let's go and see what we can do for Robin. Heigho, Winifred! you're just in time to aid a worthy cause—Come on to Lady Principal!"

"Exactly whither I was bound!" waving a letter overhead. "Going a-begging, my dears, if you please!" she returned, clasping Gwen's waist on one side to walk three abreast. A trivial action in itself but delightful to the "Peer," showing that this free-spoken "Commoner" no longer regarded her as "stand-offish" but "just one of the crowd."

"Begging for what, Win?"

"That's a secret!"

"Pooh! You might as well tell. Secrets always get found out. I've just discovered one—by way of chattering Millikins-Pillikins. Guess it."

"I couldn't, Dolly, I'm too full of my own. As for that child's talk—but half of it has sense."

"So I thought, too, listening to her. But *half did* have sense and that is—Who do you think gave me my beautiful toboggan things?"

"Why, your Aunt Betty, I suppose, since she does everything else for you," answered Winifred promptly. "Anyhow, don't waste time on guesses—Tell!"

Then she glanced up into Gwendolyn's face and saw how happy it was, and

hastily added:

“No, you needn’t tell, after all, I know. It was Gwen, here, the big-hearted dear old thing! She’s the only girl at Oak Knowe who’s rich enough and generous enough to do such a splendid thing.”

“Good for you, Win, you guessed right at once!” answered Dolly trying to clap her hands but unable to loosen them from her comrades’ clasp. “Now for yours!”

“Wait till we get to the ‘audience chamber’! Come on.”

But even yet they were hindered. In the distance, down at the end of the hall, Dorothy caught sight of Mr. Gilpin, evidently just departing from the house. A more dejected figure could scarcely be imagined, nor a more ludicrous one, as he limped toward the entrance, hands on hips and himself bent forward forlornly. Below his rough top-coat which he had discarded on his arrival, hung the tatters of his smock that had been worn to ribbons by his roll down the slide.

Nobody knew what had become of his own old beaver hat, but a light colored derby, which the *chef* had loaned him, sat rakishly over one ear, in size too small for the whole top of his bald head.

“Looks as if he had two foreheads!” said Winifred, who couldn’t help laughing at his comical appearance, with part of his baldness showing at front and back of the borrowed hat.

Dorothy laughed, too, yet felt a guilty regret at the way she had spoken to him. She had accused him of “trying to kill her” as well as Gwen and little Grace; but he “kill anything”? Wicked, even to say that.

“There goes John Gilpin, and, girls, I must speak to him. Come—I can’t let him go that way!”

As his “good foot” crossed the threshold Dorothy’s hand was on his shoulder and her voice begging:

“Oh! please, Mr. Gilpin! Do forgive that horrible thing I said! I didn’t know, I didn’t understand, I didn’t mean it—I thought—it looked—Do come back just a minute and let me explain.”

The old fellow turned and gazed into her pleading eyes, but at first scarcely

heard her.

“Why, ’tis the little maid! hersel’ that was cryin’ that night on the big railway platform. The night that Robin lad was anigh kilt. Something’s mixed up in me head. What’s it, lassie, you want?”

“I want your forgiveness, Mr. Gilpin. When I saw Gracie on the floor and the broken pot beside her I thought—you’d—you’d tried—and account of your sled hitting Gwen and me—Do come in and rest. You’re worse hurt than anybody thought, I’m afraid. There, there, that’s right. Come back and rest till the team goes into town for the Saturday night’s supplies. It always goes you know, and Michael will get the driver to drop you at your own door. I’m sure he will.”

Obediently, he allowed her to lead him back into the hall and to seat him on the settle beside the radiator. The warmth of that and the comfort of three sympathetic girls soon restored his wandering wits and he was as ready to talk as they to listen.

“You do forgive, don’t you, dear old John?”

“Sure, lassie, there’s nought about forgiveness, uther side. It was a bit misunderstandin’ was all. The wee woman a-pleadin’ for treats out of pocket, and me thinkin’ hard o’ Robin, for coaxin’ an old man to make a fool of hissel’. Me feeling that minute as if ’twas all his fault and thinking I’d cherished a snake, a reptile, in my buzzum, and sayin’ it out loud, likes I have a bad habit of doing.

“Silly I was, not remembering how’t a child takes all things literal. Ha, ha, ha! To think it! When I scalded mysel’ with the hot tea the bairnie should fancy I yelled at a sarpent’s bite! Sure, I could split my sides a-laughin’ but for the hurt I gave her. How is she doin’, lass? I’ve waited this long spell for someone to pass by and give me the word, but nobody has. Leastwise, them that passes has no mind for old John in his dumps.”

“Why, Mr. Gilpin, she wasn’t hurt at all; and it’s just as you said. She thought you had a real snake in your clothes and it had bitten you. She’s all right now, right as can be; and so will you be as soon as you get home and into your wife’s good care. She—”

“Ah, my Dorothy! ’Tis she I dread. Not a word’ll she say, like enough, but the look she will give to my silly face—Hmm. She’s a rare silent woman is my

Dame, but she can do a power o' thinkin'."

"Yes, she can, and the first thing she'll think is how glad she is to have her husband back again, safe and sound."

"Aye, but Dorothy, hark ye! I'm safe, I'll grant ye that; but—sound? 'Tis different letters spells that word. Sound? I'll no' be that for weeks to come!" and the poor fellow, who certainly had been badly bruised and lucky to have escaped broken bones, sighed profoundly.

Winifred had an inspiration.

"Speaking of Robins, suppose we write her a round-robin letter? Right here and now, on the back of this letter of Father's? It's a grand good letter for me and we'll write so nicely of you, Mr. John, that it'll be a good one for her, too."

"Will ye? A real letter explainin' about the accident, when the lassie's toboggan got in our way and we got that mixed 'twas nigh the death of the lot? Dame'd be proud enough to get that letter. Sure, I believe 'twould set her thinkin' of other things, and she'll be liker to overlook my foolishness."

They all laughed at the crafty manner in which he shipped his responsibility for the accident from his shoulders to theirs; but Winifred plumped herself down on the settle beside him and, using it for a desk, concocted an amusing story of the whole day's happenings. The other girls had less of the gift of writing, but each added a few words and signed her name with a flourish. Altogether it was a wonderful document, so the farmer thought, as Winifred tore that half-sheet from her father's letter, folded it in a fantastic way and gave it him.

Indeed, he was so pleased with it and so anxious to get it into his wife's hands that, after turning it over and about, in admiration of the "true lover's knot" into which Win had folded it, he rose to go away. All his stiffness was forgotten, he almost neglected to drag his lame foot, he firmly declined to stay for supper or any ride with the Oak Knowe team, so completely had the kindness of the three girls cured him.

"A letter for the Dame! Sure she'll be the proud woman the night, and maybe she'll think I'd more sense after all. I don't mind she'd ary letter come before since we was married. Good night, young ladies. Tell the bit woman 't next time there'll be nuts in me pockets, all right, and no fear for her o' more snakes.

Good-by.”

They watched him down the path, fairly strutting in his pride over the note which a mere whim on Winifred’s part had suggested, and Dorothy exclaimed:

“What a dear, simple old soul he is! That a tiny thing like that could make so happy. I believe he was more delighted with that half-sheet of your paper than you are with your father’s other half.”

Winifred caught the others about the waist and whirled them indoors again, first gleefully kissing her father’s bit of writing and asking:

“Think so? Then he’s the gladdest person in the world, to-night. Oh—ee!”

“Well, Win, you can be glad without squeezing the breath out of a body, can’t you? Heigho, Robin! Where’d you come from?” said Dolly, as the boy came suddenly upon them from a side hall.

“Why, from the kitchen. The folks there made me eat a lot of good stuff and a woman—I guess it was the housekeeper—she made me put on some of the men’s clothes while she took my knickers and mended them. I’d torn them all to flinders on that slide, or old botched up sled, and she said I was a sight. I was, too. She was awful kind. She made me tell all about Mother and my getting hurt and everything. But she said I ought to go right away and find Mr. Gilpin and get friends with him again. Isn’t it funny? He blames *me* for all that happened and for teasing him to make that wretched sled, yet, sir, if you’ll believe me he was the one spoke of it first. True! Said he’d never had a toboggan ride in all his life, long as that was, because he hadn’t anybody to go with him. But ‘he’d admire’ to have just one before he died—”

“He had it, didn’t he?” laughed Winifred.

“He had a hard time getting Mrs. Gilpin’s consent. She treats him as if he were a little boy, worse’n Mother does me, but he doesn’t get mad at all. He thinks she’s the most wonderful woman in the world, but I must find him and put myself right with him before we go home and tackle her. He’ll need my help then more’n he did makin’ that beastly sled! It was awful—really awful—the way he went rolling down that icy slide, but to save my life I can’t help laughing when I think of it. Can you?”

At the lad’s absurd movements, as he now pictured John’s remarkable “ride” they all laughed; but suddenly Dorothy demanded:

“You sit right down yonder on that settle and wait for me. You can’t find Mr. Gilpin, now, he’s far on the road home. But there’s something I must ask Miss Tross-Kingdon—”

“No! You don’t ask Miss Tross-Kingdon one single thing till I’ve had my ask first, Dorothy Calvert! Here I’m nearly crazy, trying to hold in my secret, and—”

“I claim my chance too! I’ve a petition of my own if you please and let the first to arrive win!” shouted Gwendolyn, speeding after the other two toward the “audience chamber.”

Thus deserted, Robin laughed and curled up on the bench to wait; while the Lady Principal’s sanctum was boisterously invaded by three petitioners, forgetful of the required decorum, and each trying to forestall the others, with her:

“Oh! Miss Muriel, may I—?” “Please, Miss Tross-Kingdon, my father’s—”

“Hear me first, dear Lady Principal, before he gets away. Can—”

But the Lady Principal merely clapped her hands over her ears and ordered:

“One at a time. Count twenty.”

CHAPTER XV

MRS. JARLEY ENTERTAINS

“I’ve counted! And I beg pardon for rushing in here like that. But I was afraid the others had favors to ask and I wanted to get mine in first!” said Gwendolyn, after the brief pause Miss Tross-Kingdon had suggested.

“Oh! you sweet, unselfish thing!” mocked Winifred, “your favor can’t be half as fine as mine—”

“Nor mine! Oh! do please let me speak first, for fear he gets away!” begged Dorothy, eagerly.

“First come first served, Dolly, please!” coaxed Gwendolyn and the teacher nodded to her to speak.

“Mine’s for next Saturday. Mrs. Jarley’s Wax Works are to be in town and Mamma says if you’ll allow I may invite the whole school to go. She’ll have big sleighs sent out for us and will let us have supper at the hotel where she stops. May we go?”

“Wait a moment, Gwendolyn. Did you say the ‘whole school’?”

Each year Lady Jane had allowed her daughter to entertain her schoolmates in some such manner but the number had, heretofore, been limited to “Peers” only. Such a wholesale invitation as this required some explanation.

Gwendolyn’s eyes fell and her cheek flushed, while the other girls listened in wondering delight for her answer, which came after some hesitation. But came frankly at last in the girl’s own manner.

“I’m ashamed now of the silly notions I used to have. I wanted to do something which would prove that I am; so instead of picking out a few of what we called ‘our set’ I want every girl at Oak Knowe to join us. You’ll understand, of course, that there will be no expense to anybody. It’s Mamma’s farewell treat to us girls, before she goes abroad. May she and I give it?”

“Indeed, you may, Gwendolyn, if the Bishop approves. With the understanding that no lessons are neglected. The winter is about over. Spring exams are near, and ‘Honors’ or even ‘Distinction’ will not be won without hard work.”

“Thank you, Miss Muriel. May I go now and ask the Bishop, then tell the girls?”

“Certainly,” and there was an expression of greater pleasure on the lady’s face than on that of Gwendolyn’s even.

Winifred executed what she called a “war dance” as Gwen disappeared, crying:

“That’s what I call a wholesale burying of the hatchet! That ‘Honorable’ young woman is distinguishing herself. Don’t you think so, Miss Muriel?”

“I am pleased. I am very pleased. Gwendolyn has surely dropped her foolishness and I’m proud of her. It’s so much safer for anyone to be normal, without fads or fancies—”

“Oh! come now, you dear Schoolma’am! Never mind the pretty talk just this minute, ’cause I can’t wait to tell you—Father’s coming—my Father is coming and a proper good time with him! If you’ll only remember I wasn’t saucy then—A girl you’d raised to hand, like me, couldn’t really be saucy, could she? And—and please just wait a minute. Please let me talk first. Because *I* can’t ask *everybody*, but my darling Father means just as well as Lady Jane. His invite is only for a dozen—round baker’s dozen, to take a trip in his car to Montreal and visit the Ice Palace! Think of that! The beautiful Ice Palace that I’ve never seen in all my life. If you’ll say ‘yes,’ if you’ll be the picker out of ’em, besides yourself and Miss Hexam and Dawkins—Oh! dear! You three grown-ups take off three from my dozen-thirteen! But there’ll be ten left, any way, and please say yes and how many days we may be gone and—Oh! I love you, Miss Muriel, you know I do!”

The lady Principal calmly loosened Winifred’s clasping arms, and smilingly looked into the sparkling, pleading eyes before her. Who could be stern with the whimsical child she had cared for during so many years, and under whose apparently saucy manner, lay a deep love and respect? She did not enlighten the pleader on the fact that this was no new thing she had just heard; nor that there had been written communications passing between Mr. Christie and the Bishop with consent already won. But she put her answer off by saying:

“We’ll see about it, Winifred: and I’m glad there was nobody save Dorothy here to see you so misbehave! But if we go, and if the selection is left to me, I may not please you; for I should choose those whose record for good conduct is highest and whose preparation for exams is most complete.”

Winifred wrinkled her brows. Of course she, as hostess couldn’t be counted either out or in, but she knew without telling that but few of her own class-ten would be allowed to go. They were the jolliest “ten” at Oak Knowe and oftener in disgrace about lessons than free from it.

“Oh! dear! I do wish we’d dreamed this treat was coming! I’d have forced the ‘Aldriches’ to study as hard as they played—if—if I had to do it at the point of my mahl-stick. I guess it’ll be a lesson to them.”

“I trust it will, dear, but Dorothy has waited all this time. Three little maids with three little wishes, regular fairy-tale like, and two of them granted already. What’s yours, Dorothy?”

Since listening to the others’ requests, her own seemed very simple, almost foolish; but she answered promptly:

“I want to get you a boot-boy.”

Winifred laughed.

“Hey, Dolly! To switch off from a private-car-ice-palace-trip into a boot-boy’s jacket is funny enough. Who’s the candidate you’re electioneering for?”

Miss Muriel hushed Winifred’s nonsense which had gone far enough and was due, she knew, to the girl’s wild delight over her father’s promised visit.

“If you could find a good one for me, Dorothy, you would certainly be doing me a favor, not I one for you. Whom do you mean?”

“Robin Locke, Miss Tross-Kingdon. He’s so very poor.”

“Poverty isn’t always a recommendation for usefulness. Is he old enough? Is it that lad who came with Mr. Gilpin?”

“Yes, Miss Muriel. He’s just the loveliest boy I’ve seen in Canada—”

“The *only* one, except Jack!” interrupted Winifred.

“It was because of me and my carelessness he got hurt and broke himself. He was carrying my telegram that I ought to have sent long before and he was so starved he fell off his bicycle and always ever since I’ve wished I could help him some way and he’d have such a nice home here and he wouldn’t bring in goats, and his mother could do things to help and I thought maybe he could do the shoes and other things would be easier than what he did and could be a golf-boy for the Bishop when the time comes and it’s pretty near and—”

“There, Dorothy, take your breath, and put a comma or two into your sentences. Then we’ll talk about this project of yours. Where’s Robin now?”

“Right out on the settle this minute waiting—if he hasn’t gone away—May I—”

“Yes, honey, step-an’-fetch him!” laughed Winifred again, “he’s used to that sort of talk.”

Away flashed Dorothy and now, at a really serious rebuke from the Lady Principal, Winifred sobered her lively spirits to be an interested witness of the coming interview, as Dorothy came speeding back, literally dragging the shy Robin behind her.

But, as before, the presence of other young folks and Miss Muriel’s first question put him at his ease.

“Robin, are you willing to work rather hard, in a good home, for your mother and to provide one for her, too?”

“Why, of course, Ma’am. That’s what I was a-doin’ when I fell off. Goody! Wouldn’t I? Did you ever see my mother, lady?”

“Yes, Robin, at our Hallowe’en Party,” answered Miss Tross-Kingdon, smiling into the beautiful, animated face of this loyal son.

“You’d like her, Ma’am, you couldn’t help it. She’s ‘the sweetest thing in the garden,’ Father used to say, and he knew. She feels bad now, thinking we’ve been so long at the farmer’s ’cause she don’t see how ’t we ever can pay them. And the doctor, too. Oh! Ma’am, did you hear tell of such a place? Do you think I could get it?”

“Yes, lad, I did hear of just such, for Dorothy told me. It’s right here at Oak Knowe. The work is to pick up row after row of girls’ shoes, standing over night

outside their bedroom doors and to blacken them, or whiten them, as the case might be, and to have them punctually back in place, in time for their owners to put on. Cleaning boots isn't such a difficult task as it is a tedious one. The maids complain that it's more tiresome than scrubbing, and a boy I knew grew very careless about his work. If I asked you and your mother to come here to live, would you get tired? Or would she dislike to help care for the linen mending? Of course, you would be paid a fair wage as well as she. What do you think?"

What Robin thought was evident: for away he ran to Dorothy's side and catching her hand kissed it over and over.

"Oh! you dear, good girl! It was you who helped the doctor set my bones, it was you who let me slide on your new toboggan, and it's you who've 'spoke for me' to this lady. Oh! I do thank you. And now I'm not afraid to go back and see Mr. Gilpin. He was so vexed with me because he thought—May I go now, Ma'am? and when do you want us, Mother and me?"

"To-morrow morning, at daybreak. Will you be here?"

"Will I not? Oh! good-by. I must go quick! and tell my Mother that she needn't worry any more. Oh! how glad I am!"

With a bow toward Miss Tross-Kingdon and a gay wave of his hand toward the girls, he vanished from the room, fairly running down the corridor and whistling as he went. The rules of Oak Knowe had yet all to be learned but it certainly was a cheerful "noise in halls" to which they listened now.

"And that's another 'link' in life, such as Uncle Seth was always watching for. If I hadn't delayed that telegram and he hadn't fallen down and—everything else that happened—Robin would never have had such a lovely chance," said Dorothy proudly.

"That's a dangerous doctrine, Dorothy. It's fine to see the 'links' you speak of, but not at all fine to do evil that good may come. I'd rather have you believe that this same good might have come to the lad without your own first mistake. But it's time for studying Sunday lessons and you must go."

"Catch me studying 'links' for things, Dolly, if it gets a body lectured. Dear Lady Principal does so love to cap her kindnesses with 'a few remarks.' There's a soft side and a hard side to that woman, and a middle sort of schoolma'amy side

between. She can’t help it, poor thing, and mostly her soft side was in front just now.

“Think of it! Wax Works and Ice Palaces all in one term! I do just hope Mrs. Jarley’ll have a lot of real blood-curdling ‘figgers’ to look at and not all miminy-piminy ones. Well, good night, honey, I’m off to be as good as gold.”

Every pupil at Oak Knowe, in the week that followed, tried to be “as good as gold,” for a pleasure such as Lady Jane proposed to give the school was as welcome to the highest Form as to the lowest Minims, and the result was that none was left out of the party—not one.

It was all perfectly arranged, even the weather conspiring to further the good time, with a beautifully clear day and the air turned mild, with a promise of the coming spring. The snow was beginning to waste, yet the sleighing held fine and the city stables had been ransacked to obtain the most gorgeous outfits with the safest drivers.

Thirty handsome sleighs with their floating plumes and luxurious robes, drawn by thirty spans of beautiful horses was the alluring procession which entered Oak Knowe grounds on the eventful Saturday; and three hundred happy girls, each in her best attire piled into them. Yes, and one small boy! For who could bear to leave behind that one last child of the great family? And a boy who in but a week’s time had learned to clean shoes so well and promptly?

So clad in his new suit, of the school’s uniform, “Such as all we men folks wear”—as he had proudly explained to his mother when he first appeared in this before her—and with a warm top-coat and cap to match, the happy youngster rode in the leading sleigh in which sat Lady Jane herself.

Of how those happy young folks took possession of the exhibition hall, that had been reserved for them; and smiled or shuddered over the lifelike images of famous men and women; and finally tore themselves away from the glib tongue of the exhibitor and his fascinating show—all this any schoolgirl reader can picture for herself.

Then of the dinner at the great hotel, in a beautiful room also reserved that they might indulge their appetites as hunger craved without fear or observation of other guests: the slow drive about the city, and the swift drive home—with not one whit of the gayety dimmed by any untoward accident.

“Oh! it’s been a perfect success! Nothing has happened that should not, and I believe that I’ve been the happiest girl of all! But such a crowd of them. Better count your flock, Miss Tross-Kingdon, maybe, and see if any are missing;” said Lady Jane as she stepped down at the Oak Knowe door.

“I don’t see how there could be, under your care, my Lady, but I’ll call a mental roll.”

So she did. But the roll was not perfect. Two were missing. Why?

CHAPTER XVI

A PERPLEXING PROBLEM OF LIFE

Miss Tross-Kingdon entered Miss Hexam's room, looking so disturbed that the latter asked:

"Why, Muriel, what is the matter?"

They two were of kin and called each other by their first names.

"Matter enough, Wilda. I'm worried and angry. And to think it should happen while the Bishop is away on that trip of his to the States!"

"Tell me," urged the gentle little woman, pushing a chair forward into which the Lady Principal wearily dropped.

"It's that Dorothy Calvert. She's lost herself again!"

"She has a knack of doing that! But she'll be found."

"Maybe. Worst is she's taken another with her. Robin, the new boot-boy."

Miss Hexam laughed:

"Well, I admit that is the greater loss just now! Girls are plentiful enough at Oak Knowe but boot-boys are scarce. And this Robin was a paragon, wasn't he? Also, I thought Dorothy was away up toward the 'good conduct medal,' as well as 'distinction' in music. I don't see why she should do so foolish a thing as you say and lessen her chances for the prize."

"Wilda, you don't understand how serious it is. It was one thing to have it happen in this house but it's night now and she away in a strange city. I declare I almost wish she'd never come at all."

For a moment Miss Hexam said no more. She knew that Miss Muriel loved the missing girl with sincere affection and was extremely proud of her great progress in her studies. All the school had readily conceded that in her own Form Dorothy

stood highest, and would certainly win the “honors” of that Form. When the Principal had rested quietly a while longer she asked:

“Now tell me all about it, Muriel.”

“Nobody missed her, but, she did not come home with the rest. I’ve ’phoned to the police to look for for her and the boy, but it’s a disgrace to the school to have to do such a thing. Besides, Robin’s mother is half wild about him and declares she must walk into town to seek him.”

“You’re foolish, the pair of you. Stop and reason. Robin is thoroughly familiar with the city and suburbs, from his messenger-boy experience. Dorothy is blessed with a fair share of common sense. If they wandered away somewhere, they’ll soon wander back again when they realize what they have done. I’m sorry you stirred up the police and they should be warned to keep the matter quiet.”

“Oh! they have been,” answered the weary Lady Principal. “It does seem, lately, that every good time we allow the girls ends in disaster.”

“Never mind. You go to bed. You’ve done all you can till morning.”

Miss Muriel did go away but only to spend the night in watching along with Lady Jane in the library, the latter deeply regretting that she had ever suggested this outing and, like the Lady Principal, both sorry and angry over its ending.

Dorothy had ridden to the exhibition in the very last sleigh of all, as Robin had in the first, and when they all left the hotel after dinner he had lingered beside her while she waited for the other teams to drive on and her own to come up.

This took a long time, there was so much ado in settling so many girls to the satisfaction of all; and looking backward he saw that there would still be a delay of several moments.

“I say, Dorothy, come on. I want to show you where we used to live before my father died. We’ll be back in plenty time. It’s the dearest little house, with only two rooms in it; but after we left it nobody lived there and it’s all gone to pieces. Makes me feel bad but I’d like to show you. Just down that block and around a side street. Come on. What’s the use standing here?”

“Sure we can be back in time, Robin?”

“Certain. Cross my heart. I’m telling you the truth. It’s only a step or so.”

“Well, then, let’s hurry.”

Hurry they did, he whistling as usual, until they came to a narrow alley that had used to be open but had now been closed by a great pile of lumber, impossible for them to climb.

“Oh! pshaw! Somebody must be going to build here. But never mind. Our house was right yonder, we can go another way.”

His interest as well as hers in exploring “new places,” made them forget everything else; and when, at last, they came to Robin’s old home a full half-hour had passed.

It was, indeed, a sorry place. Broken windows, hanging doors and shutters, chimney fallen, and doorstep gone. Nobody occupied it now except, possibly, a passing tramp or the street gamin who had destroyed it.

“My! I’m glad my Mother can’t see it now. She never has since we moved down to our cottage in the glen. It would break her dear heart, for my father built it when they were first married. That was the kitchen, that the bedroom—Hark! What’s that?”

“Sounded like a cat.”

“Didn’t to me. Cats are squealier’n that was. I wonder if anybody or thing is in there now. If I had time I’d go and see.”

“Robin, wouldn’t you be afraid?”

“Afraid? Afraid to go into my own house, that was, that my father built with his own hands? Huh! What do you take me for? I’d as soon go in there as eat my din—Hello! There certainly—”

They put their heads close to the paneless window and listened intently. That was a human groan. That was a curious patter of small hoofs—Dorothy had heard just such a sound before. That surely was a most familiar wail:

“Oh, Baal! My jiminy cricket!”

“Jiminy cricket yourself, Jack-boot-boy! What you doing in my house? I’m

living in yours—I mean I'm boot-boy now. How are you?" cried Robin, through the window.

"Who'm you? Have you got anything to eat? Quick! Have you?"

The voice which put the question was surely Jack's but oddly weak and tremulous. Dorothy answered:

"Not here, Jack, course. Are you hungry?"

"Starvin'! Starvin'! I ain't touched food nor drink this two days. Oh! Have you?"

Daylight was already fading and street lights flashing out but this by-way of the town had no such break to the darkness. Robin was over the rickety threshold in an instant and Dorothy quickly followed. Neither had now any thought save for the boy within and his suffering.

They found him lying on a pile of old rags or pieces of discarded burlap which he had picked up on the streets, or that some former lodger in the room had gathered. Beside him was Baal, bleating piteously, as if he, too, were starving. The reason for this was evident when Robin stumbled over a rope by which the animal was fastened to the window sash; else he might have strolled abroad and foraged for himself.

But if Robin fell he was up in a second and with the instincts of a city bred boy knew just what to do and how to do it.

"Got any money, Dorothy?"

"Yes. Twenty-five cents, my week's allowance."

"I've got ten. Mother said I might keep that much out of my week's wages. Give it here. I'll be back in a minute."

He was gone and Dorothy dropped down on the dusty floor beside Jack and asked his story. He told it readily enough, as far as willingness went, but his speech lagged for once and from sheer lack of strength.

"I left—seeking my fortune. It warn't so easy as I thought it would be. I've hired for odd jobs, held horses, run arrants, helped 'round taverns, but didn't get no place for steady. Trouble was, folks don't take no great to Baal. They'd put with him a spell, treat him real decent till he'd up and butt somebody over—then his

dough was cooked. The worse he was used the better I liked him, though I'd ha' sold him for money if I could, I've been hungry so much the time. And that right here, Dorothy, *in a town full o' victuals*! Just chock full. See 'em in the winders, see 'em in the markets, on wagons—and every created place, but not a speck for me. But I got along, I'd ha' made out, if I hadn't et somethin' made me dretful sick. It was somethin' in a can I picked up out a garbage pail, some sort o' fish I guess, and I've been terr'ble ever since. What'd he go for? Why don't he come back?"

"I don't know. I reckon he went for food. How did you keep warm in here, if this is where you lived?"

"Didn't keep warm. How could I? I ain't been warm, not real clean through, since the last night I slep' in my nice bed at Oak Knowe."

"Why didn't you come back? Or go to the railway stations? They are always heated, I reckon."

"Did. Turned me out. Lemme stay a spell but then turned me out. Said I better go to the poorhouse but—won't that boy never come!"

"He's coming now, Jack," she answered and was almost as glad as he of the fact.

Robin came whistling in, good cheer in the very sound.

"Here you are neighbor! Candle and matches—two cents. Pint of milk—three. Drink it down while I light up!"

Jack grabbed the milk bottle with both hands and drained it; then fell back again with a groan.

"'T hurts my stummick! Hurts my stummick awful!"

"Never mind. I'll turn Baal loose and let him find something outside. A likely supper of tin cans and old shoes'll set him up to a T. Scoot, Baal!"

The goat was glad enough to go, apparently, yet in a moment came bleating back to his master. Dorothy thought that was pathetic but Robin declared it disgusting.

"Clear out, you old heathen, and hunt your supper—"

"Oh! don't be cruel to the loving creature, Robin! Suppose he should get lost?"

begged Dorothy.

“Lost? You can’t lose Baal, don’t you fret. Look-a-here, boy! here’s a sandwich! Come from the best place in town. I know it. Give the biggest slice for the least money. Can’t tell me anything about that, for I’ve been nigh starved myself too often in this same old town. What? You don’t want it? Can’t eat it? Then what do you want?”

Provoked that his efforts to please Jack failed so fully, Robin whistled again, but not at all merrily this time; for he had at last begun to think of his own predicament and Dorothy’s. Here they were stranded in town, Oak Knowe so far away, night fast falling and, doubtless, a stern reprimand due—should they ever reach that happy haven again.

“Robin, I do believe he is sick. Real, terrible sick. It wasn’t just starving ailed him. Do you s’pose we could get a doctor to him?”

“To this shanty? No, I don’t. But if he’s sick, there’s hospitals. Slathers of ’em. Hurray! There’s the one that Dr. Winston is head of. There’s an emergency ward there and free ones—and it’s the very checker!”

Jack had ceased moaning and lay very still. So still that they were both frightened and Dolly asked:

“How can we get him there, if they would take him in? He’s terrible heavy to carry.”

Even dimly seen by the light of the flickering candle struck on the floor, Dorothy thought the pose of superiority Robin now affected the funniest thing, and was not offended when he answered with lofty scorn:

“Carry him? I should say not. We couldn’t and we won’t. I’ll just step to the corner and ring up an ambulance. I know the name. You stay here. I’ll meet it when it comes and don’t get scared when the gong clangs to get out of the way.”

Dorothy’s own life in a southern city returned to her now and she remembered some of its advantages which Robin had spoken of. So she was not at all frightened when she heard the ambulance come into the street beyond the alley, which was too narrow for it to enter, nor when two men in hospital uniforms appeared at the door of the room. They had lanterns and a stretcher and at once

placed poor Jack upon it and hurried away.

They needed not to ask questions for Robin had followed them and was glibly explaining all he knew of the “case” and the rest which he had guessed.

“Ate spoiled fish out of a garbage can, did he? So you think it’s ptomaine poisoning, do you Doctor Jack-o’-my-thumb? Well, I shouldn’t be surprised if your diagnosis is correct. Steady now, mate, this is a—Hello! What’s that?”

“That” proved to be Baal, returned to inquire what was being done to his master by prodding the orderly’s legs with his horns, so that the stretcher nearly fell out of his hand.

Baal got his answer by way of a vicious kick which landed him out of reach and permitted the men to carry their burden quickly away. Left behind, the pair of young Samaritans stared for an instant at one another, dismayed at their own delay.

It was Dorothy who came to a decision:

“We’ve done as bad as we could and as good. Seems awful queer how it all happened. Now we must go home. Can we get a carriage anywhere and would it take us back without any money to pay it? Would Miss Tross-Kingdon pay it, do you think? The Bishop would but he’s gone traveling.”

Leaving their candle still flickering on the floor they anxiously left the shanty; and it may be stated here, for the guidance of other careless ones that there was an item in the next morning’s paper stating that a certain “old rookery had been burned down during the night; origin of fire unknown; a benefit to the city for it had long been infested by hoboes and tramps.” To which of these classes poor Jack belonged it did not state; but either one was a far call to the “great artist” he had said he would become.

There were cabs in plenty to be seen and, probably, to be hired; but they did not summon one. A vision of Miss Tross-Kingdon’s face at its sternest rose before Dorothy and she dared not venture on the lady’s generosity. Another thought came, a far happier one:

“I’ll tell you! Let’s follow Jack. Maybe Dr. Winston would be there or somebody would know about us—if we told—and would telephone to Oak Knowe what

trouble we're in. For it is trouble now, Robin Locke, and you needn't say it isn't. You're scared almost to death and so am I. I wish—I wish I'd never heard of a Wax Works, so there!"

Robin stopped and turned her face up to the light of a street lamp they were passing and saw tears in her eyes. That was the oddest thing for her to cry—right here in this familiar city where were railway stations plenty in which they might wait till morning and somebody came. But, softened as her tears made him, he couldn't yet quite forget that he was the man of the party.

"It's an awful long ways to that Hospital, and I've got five cents left. We can go in anywhere and I can 'phone for myself. No need to bother any doctors or nurses."

Opposition to her wishes dried her tears.

"Well, I am going to Dr. Winston's hospital. I'd like you to go with me and show me the way but if you won't the policemen I meet will do it. I'm going right now."

That conquered this small Canadian gentleman, and he answered:

"All right. I'll show you. Only don't you dare to be crying when you get there."

She wasn't. It proved a long walk but help loomed at the end of it and the youngsters scarcely felt fatigue in the prospect of this. Also, the help proved to be just what they most desired. For there was Dr. Winston himself, making his night visit to a very ill patient and almost ready to depart in his car which stood waiting at the door.

Dorothy remembered how little gentlewomen should conduct themselves when paying visits; so after inquiring of the white-clad orderly who admitted her if Dr. Winston was there, and being told that he was, she took her empty purse from her pocket and sent up her card. She would have written Robin's name below hers if she had had a pencil or—had thought about it.

The tiny card was placed upon a little silver salver and borne away with all the dignity possible; but there was more amazement than dignity in the good doctor's reception of it. Another moment he was below, buttoning his top-coat as he came and demanding with a smile that was rather anxious:

“To what am I indebted for the pleasure of this visit, Miss Dorothy Calvert?”

But the tears were still too near the girl’s eyes for her to meet jest with jest. She could only hold out her arms, like the lonely, frightened child she was and he promptly clasped her in his own.

Then “tinkle, tinkle, tinkle,” ran a little bell in the Oak Knowe library and over the telephone wire rang the doctor’s hearty voice.

“Be at rest, Miss Muriel. Your runaways are found and I’ll motor them home in a jiffy!”

This was so joyful a message that Lady Jane and the Lady Principal promptly fell upon one another’s neck and wept a few womanly tears. Then Miss Tross-Kingdon released herself, exclaiming:

“Oh! those dreadful police. Why did I violate the privacy of Oak Knowe by setting them to search? I must recall the order right away—if I can!”

Self-blame doesn’t tend toward anybody’s good nature and the head of Oak Knowe School for Young Ladies had been sorely tried. Also, her offense had come from the very girl she trusted most and was, therefore, the more difficult to forgive. So clothing herself in all her dignity, she was simply the Lady Principal and nothing more, when for a second time the quiet of her domain was broken by the honk-honk of an automobile, the door opened and Dorothy and Robin walked in. The doctor had laughingly declared that he couldn’t enter with them—he was afraid! But though it was really only lack of time that prevented him so doing, their own spirits were now so low that they caught the infection of his remark—if not his spirit—and visibly trembled.

This was a sign of guilt and caught Miss Muriel’s eye at once.

“What is the explanation of this, Dorothy? Robin?”

Dorothy had been pondering that explanation on the swift ride home. Dr. Winston had called them the Good Samaritans and seemed pleased with them. Maybe Miss Muriel would think so, too.

“We stayed to see—we had to be what he said. Good little Samaritans—”

“Humph! If that is some new game you have invented, please never to play it again. Your duty—”

“Why, Lady Principal, you wouldn’t have us ‘pass by on the other side,’ would you? To-morrow’s lesson—”

But there was no softening in Miss Muriel’s eye, and indignant Robin flashed out:

“Well—well—you needn’t blame *her*. You needn’t blame a *girl*—when it was all my fault! I coaxed her or she wouldn’t ha’ done it!”

This was such a manly, loyal reversion of the old story of Adam and Eve that Lady Jane laughed and would have clapped her hands in pride of her small compatriot. But she refrained and chose the wiser course of slipping away unseen.

“Robin! you forget yourself! I have given you a home here but I have not given you license to be insolent or disobedient. You have been both. Your mother is somewhere on the road to town, looking for you.”

But it happened she was not. Dr. Winston had espied a lone woman dragging herself citywards and had stopped to give her a lift. Then, learning who she was and her errand, had promptly turned about and conveyed her also home; so she was back in their own rooms almost as soon as her boy was and able to soothe his wrath as only mothers can.

But upon poor Dorothy fell the full force of her teacher’s indignation.

“Dorothy, I would not have believed it possible for you so willfully to disappoint me. Go to your dormitory and to bed at once. You cannot go off bounds again till Easter holidays. Good night.”

Dorothy obeyed in silence. She could think of many things to say but she could not say them. Even to anxious Dawkins who would have welcomed her warmly and ministered loving comfort she could only say:

“Good night. It’s such a mixed up world. It was good to help Jack, the doctor said; and it was wrong, Miss Tross-Kingdon said; and—and—I’m so tired! Oh! if I could only see Aunt Betty!”

With that last homesick cry, she laid her head on her pillow, and being a perfectly healthy girl—fell fast asleep.

CHAPTER XVII

COMMENCEMENT; AND CONCLUSION

Dorothy in disgrace! That seemed an incredible thing to her schoolmates, who had hitherto believed “Dixie” to be the one great favorite of all.

However, she could never speak of the matter to anybody, except the Bishop when he came home from his southern journey and the news he had to bring her was so far more important and saddening that a short confinement “on bounds” seemed actually trivial. For Uncle Seth was dead. The dear guardian and wise counselor would greet her no more. At first her grief seemed unbearable; but the good Bishop took her into his own home for a little time and she came back to Oak Knowe somewhat comforted for her loss.

Besides she had had a little talk with Miss Tross-Kingdon, and there was again sweet peace and confidence between them. Miss Muriel now helped the girl in her work, inciting her ambition and keeping her so well employed that she had little time to sit and grieve.

Indeed, the spirit of ambition was in everyone’s heart. Easter holidays were past, spring exams proved fairly satisfactory with much yet to be accomplished before Commencement came. So the weeks fairly flew, the outdoor recreations changing with the seasons, and Dorothy learning the games of cricket and golf, which were new to her and which she described in her letters home as “adorably fascinating and English.” Tennis and basket-ball were not so new. She had played these at the Rhinelander Academy, the first private school she had ever attended; but for even these familiar sports she spared little time.

“It does seem as if the minutes weren’t half as long as they were in the winter, Winifred! There’s so much, so much I want to finish and the time so short. Why, it’s the middle of June already, and Commencement on the twenty-first. Only six days for us to be together, dear!” cried Dorothy in the music room with her violin on her lap, and her friend whirling about on the piano stool.

They were “programmed” for a duet, the most difficult they had ever undertaken, and were resting for the moment from their practicing while Dorothy’s thoughts ran back over the year that was past.

“Such a lot of things have happened. So many bad ones that have turned out good. Maybe, the best of all was Jack-boot-boy’s running away and our finding him. It gave Robin and me a rather unhappy time, but it’s turned out fine for him, because as he says: ‘It’s knocked the nonsense out of me.’”

“The Dame will let no more creep in. Old John told me how it was. Soon as Dr. Winston told him where Jack was, at that hospital, he said to his wife: ‘I’m going to see him.’ Then that ‘rare silent woman’ spoke her mind. ‘Husband, that’ll do. I’ll ride yon, on the cart, to fetch him home here to our cottage. The doctor says he’s well enough to leave that place. I’ll get him bound out to me till he’s twenty-one. Then I’ll let him go to ‘seek’ that ‘fortune’ he yearns for, with a new suit of clothes on his back and a hundred dollars in his pocket. That’s the law and I’ve took him in hand.”

“So he’s settled and done for, for a long time to come. It’s just fine for him, they’ll treat him like a son—Baal can live his days out in a pen—and Jack will grow up better fitted for his own station in life, as you Canadians say. Down in the States we believe that folks make their own ‘stations’; don’t find them hanging around their necks when they are born. Why I know a boy who was—”

“There, Dolly Doodles! Don’t get started on that subject. I know him by heart. One remarkable creature named James Barlow, who couldn’t spell till you taught him and now has aspirations toward a college professorship. By the letters he writes, I should judge him to be a horrible prig. I wish I could see him once. I’d make him bow his lofty head; you’d find out!”

Dorothy pulled a letter from her pocket and tossed it into her friend’s hands.

“You’ll soon have a chance. Read that.”

“Oh! may I?”

But the reading was brief and an expression of great disappointment came to Winifred’s face.

“Oh, Dorothy! How horrid!”

“Yes, dear. I felt so, too, at first. Now all I feel is a wish to be through so I can hurry home to dear Aunt Betty who must need me dreadfully, or she’d never disappoint us like this.”

“It was such a beautiful plan. We should have had such a lovely time. Ah! here comes Gwen. Girl, what do you think? Mrs. Calvert isn’t well enough to come to Canada, after all, and Dorothy has got to go home. When it’s all fixed, too. Father’s freed himself from business for three delightful months, and we three, with her were to go jaunting about all over the country in his private car, and Dorothy to learn that Canada beats the States all to pieces.”

Gwendolyn shared the disappointment. That trio had been dubbed by their mates as the “Inseparables” and the love between them all was now deep and sincere.

“Read it aloud, Gwen. Maybe there’s a chance yet, that I overlooked. I was so mad I couldn’t half see that upstart’s writing—not after the first few words. He doesn’t mince matters, does he?”

The letter ran thus:

> “DEAR DOROTHY:
>
> “Mrs. Calvert will not be able to come to Canada to meet you. She is not ill in bed but she needs you here. Dinah is taking care of her now, and Ephraim and I have decided that it is best for us two to come to Oak Knowe to fetch you home. Of course, you could come alone, as you went, but I’m at leisure now, and have laid aside enough from my year’s earnings to pay the expenses of us all; and Ephraim wants to go for you. He says ‘it ain’ fitten fo’ no young lady lak my li’l Miss to go trabbelin’ erbout de country widout her own serbant-boy to take care ob her. Mah Miss Betty was clean bewitchted, erlowin’ hit in de fust place, but she’s laid up an’ ole Eph, he ain’ gwine hab no mo’ such foolishness.’
>
> “Those are his own words and lately—Well, I don’t like to go against that old man’s wishes. So he and I will be on hand by the twenty-first of June and I expect can get put up somewhere, though I’m ignorant as to what they do with negroes in Canada.
>
> “Faithfully,

“Negroes! Negroes? Why, is that Ephraim a negro?”

“Yes, indeed. As black as ink, almost, with the finest white head—of wool! Not quite so thick and curly as your ‘barristers’ wear, but handsome, I think. It represents so many, many years of faithful service. That dear old man has taken care of Aunt Betty ever since she was a child, and does so still. Nobody knows his real age, but it’s one proof of his devotion to her that he’ll take this long journey just because he remembers what’s ‘fitten,’ even if she has grown careless about it. You see, it’s Uncle Seth’s death that must have changed her so,” said Dorothy, musingly, with her eyes on the floor.

The other two exchanged pitying glances, and it rose to Winifred’s lips to say:

“But she let you come alone in the fall and he wasn’t dead then;” but she refrained. She knew, for Dolly had told her, that all that winter Dorothy’s home letters had not seemed quite the same as they had used, during other separations from her aunt; and that many of them had been written for Mrs. Calvert by various friends of the old lady’s, “just to oblige.” Never before had the sprightly Mrs. Betty shrunk from writing her own letters; and, indeed, had done so often enough during the early winter to prevent Dorothy’s suspicion of anything amiss.

“Auntie dear, is so old, you know girls, that of course she does need me. Besides she’s been all over the world and seen everything, so there’s really ‘nothing new under the sun’ for her. That’s why this junketing around we’d planned so finely, doesn’t appeal to her as it does to us,” said Dorothy, at last, lifting her violin to her shoulder and rising to her feet. “Shall we try it again, Win? And, Gwen, dear, have you finished your picture yet for the exhibition?”

“Just finished, Dolly. And I forgot my errand here. Miss Muriel sent me to tell you girls that the dressmaker was in the sewing-room, giving last fittings to our frocks. She wants us to go there right after practice hour, for we must not lose our turn. I wanted to wear that beautiful one Mamma sent me from Paris but ‘No’ was the word. ‘There will be no change in our custom. Each girl will wear a plain white lawn Commencement frock, untrimmed, and with no decoration except a sash of each Form’s colors.’ So there we are, same old six-pences, and dowds I think, every one of us.”

But when those few days intervening had passed and great Oak Knowe was

alight with its hundreds of daintily robed girls, there was not a single “dowd” among them; nor one, whether unknown “charity” scholar or otherwise who felt envy of any difference between themselves or others.

“What a glorious day! What crowds are here and coming. Assembly and all the rooms near it will be packed closer than ever! Oh! I’m so happy I can’t keep still! No more lessons, no more early-to-bed-and-rise business for three delightful months! There’s father! There he is—right in the front row of guests’ seats. Right amongst the ‘Peers,’ where he belongs by right!” cried Winifred, turning Dorothy’s head around that she might see the object of her own great excitement. “See, see! He’s looking our way. He’s discovered us! And he’s awfully disappointed about you. He never forgave Miss Tross-Kingdon that she wouldn’t let you take that Ice Palace trip with us, just because you’d broken a few rules. But never you mind, darling. Though this is the end of Oak Knowe for us together, it isn’t the end of the world—nor time. Father shall bring me to you, he shall, indeed! Just think how it would help my education to visit the States! But, hark! The bugle is blowing—fall into line!”

From their peep-hole in the hall Dorothy, also, could see the guests taking seats; and clutching Winifred’s sleeve, whispered:

“Look! Look! Away there at the back of Assembly, close to the door—that’s Jim! That’s Ephy! Oh! isn’t it good to see them? For no matter now, I’m not without my own home folks any more than the rest of you. After banquet I’ll introduce you if I get a chance.”

Then they fell into the line of white clad girls, and to the strains of a march played by the Seventh Form graduates, three hundred bright faced maidens—large and small—filed to their places in Assembly for their last appearance all together.

It was a Commencement like multitudes of others; with the usual eager interest in guessing who’d be prize winners. The most highly valued prize of each year at Oak Knowe was the gold medal for improvement in conduct. Who would get it? Looking back the “Inseparables” could think of nobody who’d shown marked advance along that line; Winifred remarking, complacently:

“I think we’re all about as good as can be, anyway. ’Cause we’re not allowed to be anything else.”

“I know who’s improved most, though. I hope—Oh! I hope she’ll get it!”

And when the announcement was made she did! Said the Bishop, who conferred the diplomas and prizes:

“The Improvement Gold Medal, the highest honor our faculty can bestow, is this year awarded to—” Here the speaker paused just long enough to whet the curiosity of those eager girls—“To the Honorable Gwendolyn Borst-Kennard. Will she kindly advance and receive it?”

Never was “honor girl” more deeply moved, surprised, and grateful than this once so haughty “Peer,” now humble at heart as the meekest “Charity” present, and never such deafening cheers and hand-claps greeted the recipient of that coveted prize.

Other lesser prizes followed: to Winifred’s surprise, she had gained “Distinction” in physical culture; Florita in mathematics; and a new “Distinction” was announced for that year—“To Miss Dorothy Calvert for uniform courtesy,” and one that she valued less: a gold star for advancement in music.

“Two prizes, Dolly Doodles! You ought to should give poor Gracie one, you should. ’Tis not nice for one girl to have two, but my Auntie Prin, she couldn’t help it. She told the Bishop you’d always been a beautiful behaver, an’ she must. Now, it’s all over, and I’m glad. I’m so tired and hungry. Come to banquet.”

After all it was the same as most Commencements the world over, with its joys and its anticipations. What of the latter’s realization? In Dorothy’s case at least the telling thereof is not for this time or place; but all is duly related in a new story and a new volume which tells of “Dorothy’s Triumph.” But there was that year one innovation at the banquet, that farewell feast of all the school together. For the company was but just seated when there stalked majestically into the great hall an old negro in livery.

Pulling his forelock respectfully toward the Bishop, bowing and scraping his foot as his Miss Betty had long ago taught him, he marched straight to his Miss Dorothy’s chair and took his stand behind it. He took no notice when turning her head she flashed a rather frightened smile in his direction, nor did either of them speak. But she glanced over to the head of the table and received an approving nod from her beloved Bishop; whose own heart felt a thrill of happy memory as he beheld this scene. So, away back in boyhood’s days, in the dining-room at

beautiful Bellevieu, had this same white-headed “boy” served those he had loved and lost.

To him it was pathetic; to other observers, a novelty and curiosity; but to Dorothy and Ephraim themselves, after that first minute, a mere matter of course. Looking over that great table, the girl’s face grew thoughtful. She had come among all these a stranger; she was leaving them a friend with everyone. The days that were coming might be happy, might be sorry; yet she was not alone. Old Ephraim stood behind her, faithful to the end; and out in the hall waited James Barlow, also faithful and full of the courage of young life and great ambition. No, she was not alone, whatever came or had come; and, after all, it was sweet to be going back to the familiar places and the familiar friends. So, the banquet at its end, by a nod from the Bishop, she drew her violin from under the table and rising in her place played sweetly and joyfully that forever well loved melody of “Home, Sweet Home.”

One by one, or in groups, the company melted away. Each to her new life of joy or sorrow or as general, both intermingled.

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