



Patsy Carroll
under
Southern Skies

Grace Gordon

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Something suddenly shot out from the table end.



*Patsy Carroll
Under
Southern Skies*

*By
Grace Gordon*

*Illustrated by
R. Emmet Owen*

*New York
Cupples & Leon Company*

PATSY CARROLL SERIES

BY GRACE GORDON

PATSY CARROLL AT WILDERNESS LODGE

PATSY CARROLL UNDER SOUTHERN SKIES

Other Volumes in Preparation

CUPPLES & LEON COMPANY, New York

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Patsy Carroll Under Southern Skies

CHAPTER I

TIME TO GO WAYFARING AGAIN

“Oh, dear!” loudly sighed Patsy Carroll.

The regretful exclamation was accompanied by the energetic banging of Patsy’s French grammar upon the table.

“Stay there, tiresome old thing!” she emphasized. “I’ve had enough of you for one evening.”

“What’s the matter, Patsy?”

Beatrice Forbes raised mildly inquiring eyes from the theme she was industriously engaged in writing.

“Lots of things. I hate French verbs. The crazy old irregular ones most of all. They start out one thing and by the time you get to the future tense they’re something entirely different.”

“Is that all?” smiled Beatrice. “You ought to be used to them by this time.”

“That’s only one of my troubles,” frowned Patsy. “There are others a great deal worse. One of them is this Easter vacation business. I thought we’d surely have three weeks. It’s always been so at Yardley until this year. Two weeks is no vacation worth mentioning.”

“Well, that’s plenty of time to go home in and stay at home and see the folks for a while, isn’t it?” asked Beatrice.

“But we didn’t intend going *home*,” protested Patsy.

“Didn’t intend going home?” repeated Beatrice wonderingly. “*What* are you talking about, Patsy Carroll? *I* certainly expect to go home for Easter.”

“You only think you do,” Patsy assured, her troubled face relaxing into a mischievous grin. “Maybe you will, though. I don’t know. It depends upon what kind of scheme my gigantic brain can think up.

“It’s like this, Bee,” she continued, noting her friend’s expression of mystification. “Father and I made a peach of a plan. Excuse my slang, but ‘peach of a plan’ just expresses it. Well, when I was at home over Christmas, Father promised me that the Wayfarers should join him and Aunt Martha at Palm Beach

for the Easter vacation. He bought some land down in Florida last fall. Orange groves and all that, you know. This land isn't so very far from Palm Beach. He was going down there right after Christmas, but a lot of business prevented him from going. He's down there now, though, and——”

“You've been keeping all this a dead secret from your little chums,” finished Beatrice with pretended reproach.

“Of course I have,” calmly asserted Patsy. “That was to be part of the fun. I meant to spring a fine surprise on you girls. Your mother knows all about it. So does Mrs. Perry. I went around and asked them if you and Mab and Nellie could go while I was at home during the Christmas holidays. Aunt Martha liked my plan, too. Now we'll have to give it up and go somewhere nearer home. We'd hardly get settled at Palm Beach when we'd have to come right home again. One more week's vacation would make a lot of difference. And we can't have it! It's simply too mean for anything!”

“It would be wonderful to go to Palm Beach,” mused Beatrice. “It would be to me, anyway. You know I've never traveled as you have, Patsy. Going to the Adirondacks last summer was my first real trip away from home. Going to Florida would seem like going to fairy land.”

Readers of “PATSY CARROLL AT WILDERNESS LODGE,” are already well acquainted, not only with Patsy Carroll and Beatrice Forbes, but also with their chums, Mabel and Eleanor Perry. In this story was narrated the adventures of the four young girls, who, chaperoned by Patsy's stately aunt, Miss Martha Carroll, spent a summer together in the Adirondacks.

Wilderness Lodge, the luxurious “camp” leased by Mr. Carroll for the summer, had formerly belonged to an eccentric old man, Ebenezer Wellington. Having died intestate the previous spring, his property and money had passed into the hands of Rupert Grandin, his worthless nephew, leaving his foster-daughter, Cecil Vane, penniless.

Hardly were the Wayfarers, as the four girls had named themselves, established at the Lodge when its owner decided, for reasons of his own, to oust them from his property. A chance meeting between Beatrice and Cecil Vane revealed the knowledge that the latter had been defrauded of her rights and was firm in the belief that her late uncle had made a will in her favor, which was tucked away in some corner of the Lodge.

The long-continued hunt for the missing will and the strange circumstances which attended the finding of it furnished the Wayfarers with a new kind of

excitement, quite apart from other memorable incidents and adventures which crowded the summer.

In the end, Cecil came into her own, and the Wayfarers returned to Morton, their home town, to make ready to enter Yardley, a preparatory school, in which Mabel, Eleanor and Patsy were to put in another year of study before entering college.

When Beatrice Forbes had joined the chums on the eventful vacation in the mountains, she had fully expected on her return to Morton to become a teacher in one of the grade schools. Fortune, however, had smiled kindly on her. Her great-aunt, whom her mother had visited that summer for the first time, had exhibited a lively interest in the great-niece whom she had never seen.

Learning from Mrs. Forbes, Beatrice's longing ambition to obtain a college education, she had privately decided to accompany Beatrice's mother to the latter's home when her visit was ended, and thus view her ambitious young relative at close range.

This she had done. She had found Beatrice quite up to her expectations. She had also met Patsy Carroll and promptly fallen into the toils of that most fascinating young person. Patsy had privately advanced Beatrice's cause to so great an extent that it was not long until Beatrice was making joyful preparations to accompany Mabel, Eleanor and Patsy to Yardley, as a result of her aunt's generosity.

So it was that the congenial quartette of Wayfarers had settled down together at Yardley for a year of conscientious study. It now lacked but ten days until the beginning of the Easter vacation and, as usual, energetic Patsy was deeply concerned in the problem of how to make the best of only two weeks' recreation when she had fondly looked forward to three.

"It wouldn't do us a bit of good to ask for an extra week," mourned Patsy. "Three girls I know have tried it and been snubbed for their pains. What we must do is to get together and plan some sort of outing that won't take us so far away from here. Of course we can't be sure of anything unless Aunt Martha approves. She'll be disappointed about not going to Palm Beach. She just loves to travel around with the Wayfarers, only she won't say so right out. Come on, Bee. Let's go and see the girls. Now that the great secret has all flattened out, like a punctured tire on my good old car, I might as well tell Mab and Nellie the sad tale."

"You go, Patsy. I must finish this theme." Beatrice cast a guilty glance at the

half-finished work on the table. "I must hand it in at first recitation to-morrow and it's a long way from being finished."

"Oh, bother your theme! You can finish it later. It's only eight o'clock. We'll stay just a few minutes."

"Hello, Perry children!" greeted Patsy, when five minutes afterward she and Beatrice broke in upon their chums, who roomed on the floor above Patsy and Beatrice.

"Hello, yourself," amiably responded Mabel, as she ushered them into the room. "Of course you can't read or you would have seen the 'Busy' sign on the door."

"Pleasure before business," retorted Patsy. "Kindly ask us to sit down, but not on your bed. I want a chair with a back to it. It's strictly necessary to my comfort."

"Help yourself."

This from Eleanor who had laid aside her book and come forward.

"What's on your mind, Patsy?" asked Mabel curiously. "Something's happened. I can tell that by the way you look."

"I have a heavy load on my mind," declared Patsy with deep impressiveness.

Dramatically striking her forehead, she cried, "Ouch! That hurt!" giggled and dropped down into a nearby chair.

"You almost knocked it off," chuckled Beatrice, seating herself on the edge of Mabel's bed. "The load, I mean."

"I did not. I almost knocked my forehead off. The load is still there. Now to get rid of it."

Whereupon Patsy plunged into the subject of the great secret.

"And Mother said we could go?" asked Eleanor eagerly when Patsy had finished speaking.

"Certainly, but the powers that be, here at Yardley, say you can't," reminded Patsy. "Palm Beach is not for us this Easter. I'm so disgusted over this vacation business!"

"It's a shame!" exclaimed Mabel. "I don't want to go any place else. Why can't we go there, anyway? It would take us two or three days to go and the

same length of time to come back. We'd have a week there. That would be better than nothing."

"I suppose it would," concurred Patsy rather reluctantly. "It's only that I hate being torn up by the roots and hustled back here just the very minute I'm getting used to things at the Beach. There is so much to see there. Besides, I'm simply crazy to go to the Everglades. Father promised that he'd hire a real Indian guide, to take us there on an expedition."

"Let's write to our people and tell them to write to the registrar, asking if we can't have that extra week," proposed Eleanor eagerly. "If your Aunt Martha, our mother and Bee's mother would all write to her, it might do some good."

"We can try it. I doubt whether it will help much," Patsy said gloomily. "Miss Osgood is so awfully strict, you know. It's our only chance and a slim one. I'm going straight to my room and write to Aunt Martha. Bee can write to her mother as soon as she finishes a theme she's toiling over. You'd better write to-night, too. The sooner we find out the best or the worst, the sooner we'll know what to do about Easter. If we can only have two weeks, Aunt Martha may want to do the Beach anyway. If she doesn't—well, we'll have to think up some place nearer Yardley to go to. I'm determined to have some kind of trip, if it's only to Old Point Comfort. The Wayfarers have been cooped up all winter. It's time they went wayfaring again."



CHAPTER II

A HARD-HEARTED REGISTRAR

“If I were a registrar, I’d not be so horrid as Miss Osgood,” wrathfully exclaimed Patsy Carroll.

Four days had passed since the Wayfarers had despatched their letters to their home allies. The quartette were emerging from Yardley Hall as Patsy flung forth her disgruntled opinion of Miss Osgood.

They had been summoned to the registrar’s office after classes that afternoon, there to be stiffly informed by Miss Osgood that she saw no convincing reason for granting them the privilege of an extra week’s vacation.

“You wish this extra week merely on account of a pleasure trip you have planned,” she had coldly pointed out. “I have been besieged by a dozen others with similar requests, none of which I have granted. I have replied to the letters which I have received from Miss Carroll, Mrs. Forbes and Mrs. Perry, stating that it is impossible to make any exception in favor of you girls. I sent for you to come here merely to impress upon you that I shall expect you to return to Yardley, from your Easter vacation, *on time*. Any delay on your part will constitute a direct defiance of my wishes. Kindly remember this and govern yourselves accordingly.”

Such was the chilly ultimatum that had aroused Patsy’s ire.

“It’s too mean for anything,” she sputtered, as the four started across the campus. “Aunt Martha says in the letter I received from her this morning that unless we can have the extra week’s vacation it’s not worth while making the trip to Palm Beach. We can’t have it, so that settles our grand Florida expedition. If we could go down there in summer it wouldn’t matter so much about losing this trip. But we can’t. It’s too hot down there in summer time for comfort. We’ll never have a chance to go there until we are graduated from college. We’ll be old ladies then and have to go around in wheel chairs,” she ended ruefully.

“Oh, that’s only four years off. We may still be able to totter about with canes,” giggled Eleanor. “Of course, we’ll have snow-white hair and wrinkles, but then, never mind. We can sit and do embroidery or tatting and talk of the happy past when we were young and——”

“Stop making fun of me, Nellie,” ordered Patsy severely. Nevertheless she echoed Eleanor’s giggle.

“Let’s hustle for the dormitory,” suggested practical Beatrice. “This wind is altogether too frisky to suit me. I’ve had to hang onto my hat every second since we left the Hall.”

“It’s blowing harder every minute,” panted Mabel, as a fresh gust swept whistling across the campus, caught the four girls and roughly endeavored to jerk them off their feet.

“It’s going to snow, I guess. It’s too cold for rain,” remarked Patsy, squinting up at the sky. “Easter comes awfully early this year, doesn’t it? I can’t remember when it’s ever before been in March. That’s another reason why it would be fine to spend it at Palm Beach. The weather there would be perfect.”

“Oh, well, what’s the use in thinking about it,” said Eleanor. “We might as well make the best of things and plan something else.”

“I’m going to write to Auntie the minute I get to my room,” announced Patsy, “and ask her where she thinks it would be nice for us to go for Easter. I’d like it to be near the ocean, though; Old Point Comfort, Cape May, Atlantic City, or some beach resort.”

“I hate to give up the Palm Beach plan. Still, wherever we go, well be together,” reminded Mabel. “You can’t down a strong combination like the Wayfarers.”

It being but a short walk from Yardley Hall to the large dormitory where the students of Yardley lived, the four girls were soon running up the broad stone steps, glad to reach shelter from the wind’s ungentle tactics.

As a preparatory school, Yardley was famed for its excellence. It registered, however, but a limited number of pupils. These lived in one large dormitory, there being no campus houses for their accommodation.

Yardley had been at one time a select boarding school for girls. Later it had become a preparatory school to college, and had earned the reputation of being one of the best of its kind.

As the high school course which the Wayfarers had completed was not sufficiently advanced to carry them into college without additional preparation, they had, after much discussion, chosen to enter Yardley. A year of study there would fit them for entrance into any college which they might select as their

Alma Mater.

The fact that Yardley occupied a somewhat isolated position of its own, the nearest town, Alden, being five miles away, did not trouble the Wayfarers. Being true Nature lovers they were never at a loss for amusement during their leisure hours. They found far greater pleasure in tramping the steep hills which rose behind Yardley than making decorous little trips to Alden in Patsy's car.

Though friendly with their classmates, the Wayfarers nevertheless hung together loyally. They were, as Patsy often declared, "a close corporation" and quite sufficient unto themselves.

As the little band entered the dormitory that blustering afternoon, they were feeling keenly the disappointment so recently meted out to them. It was decidedly hard to put away the rosy visions of Palm Beach that each girl had conjured up in her own mind.

"Come on up to our room, girls, and we'll make chocolate," proposed Patsy. "It will probably take away our appetites for dinner, but who cares? I don't believe I'd have much appetite, anyhow. I'm all upset about this vacation business."

Seated about the writing table which Patsy had cleared for the occasion, the Wayfarers were presently sipping hot chocolate and devouring sweet crackers to the accompaniment of a mournful discussion of the situation.

As a result none of them had any enthusiasm for either dinner or study that evening. Dinner over they gathered once more in Patsy's room, still too full of their recent disappointment to banish it from conversation.

"We can't make a single plan until we know what Aunt Martha wants to do," asserted Patsy with a sigh. "Oh, I forgot to write to her before dinner! I must do it now. Excuse me, Perry children. Bee will amuse you. Bee, entertain the young ladies. I'm going to be busy for a little while."

"We must go," declared Eleanor, rising. "It's half-past eight. I really ought to study a little bit. Mab, you've a whole page in Spanish to translate. You'd better come along."

"All right. Just listen to the wind!" Mabel held up her hand. "How it shrieks and whistles and wails! The banshees are out, sailing around in the air to-night, I imagine."

"I'm glad we're not out, sailing around the campus," commented Beatrice.

“We’d certainly sail. We couldn’t keep our feet on the ground. We’d be blown about like leaves.”

“I think I’d like to go out and fight with the wind,” announced valiant Patsy. “As soon as I write my letter I’m going to take it out to the mail box.”

“Good-bye, then. I may never see you again,” laughed Eleanor, her hand on the door. “You’ll be blown into the next county if you venture out to-night.”

“Then I’ll turn around and let the wind blow me back again,” retorted Patsy, undismayed by Eleanor’s warning.

The two Perrys having bade their chums good night and departed for their own room, Patsy settled down to the writing of her letter. Though her fountain pen fled over the paper at rapid speed, it was half-past nine when she committed the product of her industry to an envelope.

“There!” she said, as she finished writing the address and affixed a stamp. “I’m going to put on my fur coat and go out to the mail box with this.”

“Why don’t you mail it in the morning?” Beatrice advised. “I wouldn’t go out in that wind if I were you.”

“But you’re not Patsy Carroll,” laughed Patsy. “You’re ever so much nicer than she is, but not half so reckless.”

“All right,” smiled Beatrice. “Go ahead and be whisked into the next county. I’ll send a search party after you in the morning.”

“Farewell, farewell!” declaimed Patsy, as she dived into a closet for her fur coat. “I sha’n’t wear a hat. The wind can’t rip off my auburn locks no matter how hard it may try.”

Once out of the dormitory, Patsy had not gone six yards before she realized that Eleanor’s prediction was likely to be fulfilled. The gale swept her along as if a great hand were at her back, forcing her relentlessly forward.

“It’s going to be worse coming back,” she muttered, when at last she had reached the mail box and dropped her letter into it. “I’m certainly going to have a real fight with this rough old wind.”

Turning, she started defiantly toward the dormitory, forging stolidly along in the teeth of the blast.

Crossing the campus diagonally she was over half way to the dormitory when of a sudden she cried out in alarm. At the shadowed rear of the building she had

glimpsed something calculated to inspire fear. Rising from the structure was a thick cloud, unmistakably smoke. As she hurried on, her heart pounding wildly, she saw that which fully confirmed her fears. A long yellow tongue of flame pierced the smoke cloud and shot high above it. The dormitory was on fire!



CHAPTER III

NO LOSS WITHOUT GAIN

The few rods that lay between Patsy and the dormitory seemed miles. Flinging open the massive front door at last, she bounded into the corridor. To her dismay, no sounds of excited voices or running feet were to be heard. She could not even smell smoke.

Stopping only long enough to peer into the big living room which was deserted of occupants, she dashed down the long corridor to the heavy double doors leading into the dining room. As she swung one of them open and darted through, a strong smell of burning wood assailed her nostrils.

Instantly she turned and fled back to the corridor. Under the stairs hung a large gong. Next second it was clanging out its harsh command to fire drill. Like every other modern institution of learning, Yardley had its fire drill in which every person in the dormitory was obliged to take part.

“We—can’t—go—that—way,” declared the matron in a choking voice.

Patsy’s next act was to dart to the telephone. Though her voice quivered with excitement, as she asked Central to turn in the fire alarm, her head was clear and her mind in good working order. She hoped her classmates would show no signs of panic.

Soon the steady tramp, tramp of feet announced that the fire drill was in progress. Down the stairs and into the main corridor filed a procession of girls, some fully dressed, others with long coats thrown on over half-fitted negligees. Though a buzz of voices filled the air, the girls lined up on each side of the corridor in orderly fashion to await further developments.

By this time the matron, Mrs. Ainslee, had gained the corridor and had promptly taken charge of the situation.

“The back of the dormitory is on fire!” were Patsy’s first words to the matron. “I saw it from the campus. I had gone out to mail a letter. I rang the gong and turned in an alarm to Central. It’s very serious on account of the way the wind’s blowing. If the Alden Hose Company doesn’t get here quick the fire will spread so fast that nothing can stop it. I think we ought to get together all the buckets we can and fight it until the fire engines get here.”

“A good plan,” approved Mrs. Ainslee. “Girls,” she called out in a clear, resonant voice, “the rear of the dormitory is on fire. First I’m going to call the roll to be sure you are all here. Next I need twenty-four girls, eight to each floor, to go after the fire buckets. I will ask the first twelve on each side at this end of the lines to go. Stop at the second floor bath room and fill up the buckets. We may be unable to get to the kitchen faucets. As soon as the buckets are filled report here for duty. The rest of you will wait until these girls have started upstairs, then file out of the house and onto the lawn.”

Turning to Patsy she said: “Stay here with me, Miss Carroll. I need you for another purpose.”

With this she hurried to her office on the same floor, returning with her register. The roll called and everyone responding, she directed her attention to the bucket brigade. They were soon started in good order for the stairs. As soon as the last girl had set foot on the stairs, the two lines began to move toward the door. Following, Mrs. Ainslee watched them safely outside, then returned to where Patsy stood waiting.

“You and I will investigate the fire and see what can be done,” she said briefly, and started down the corridor toward the dining room. In spite of the heavy doors the smoke had now become noticeable even in the corridor. Throwing open one of the double doors, a dense cloud of smoke poured over both women, causing them to draw back in a hurry, eyes and throats smarting.

“We—can’t—go—that—way,” declared the matron in a choking voice, as she swung the door shut. “We’ll have to fight the fire from the outside. I’m afraid we can’t do much. It seems to have gained a good deal of headway in a very short time. I am going to ask you to stand in the corridor, Miss Carroll, while I go outside. As the girls come downstairs with the buckets, count them. Send them out doors and to the rear of the dormitory. I shall be there to tell them what to do. When the last one is safely out, then join me.”

Left briefly to herself, Patsy wondered what her chums thought of her in her new position as assistant fire chief. She had seen them in the line, but had had no chance to exchange a word with them. She knew Beatrice to be one of the bucket brigade, and so waited impatiently for her return.

“Oh, Patsy, it’s terrible!” Beatrice called down to her chum, as she began the descent of the lower flight of stairs, bucket in hand. “I got this bucket at the end of the hall near a window. I looked out and saw the back of the dormitory. It’s a mass of flames! Unless the fire company comes soon the whole place will go

and we'll lose all our clothes and belongings. I managed to snatch my handbag and yours from the chiffonier. One of the girls outside is keeping them for me."

"You dear, thoughtful thing!"

Bee had now reached the foot of the stairs. Setting down the heavy bucket, she paused just long enough to return the hug Patsy gave her. Then she picked up her bucket and hurried on.

One by one the bucket brigade appeared, only to disappear out the front door. Patsy kept careful watch until the twenty-fourth girl had vanished. By this time the smoke in the corridor was steadily growing more dense. She doubted if the brigade would be able to return for a second supply of water. It was high time for her to be moving on, she decided.

As she ran down the front steps of the dormitory and around the corner of the building toward its rear, she could well understand why the corridor had begun to fill with smoke. The rear of the dormitory was now wrapped in flames.

Lined up as close to the fiercely blazing structure as they dared stand, the members of the brigade were rapidly passing their buckets on to half a dozen girls who, under Mrs. Ainslee's direction, were valiantly throwing the contents of the buckets on the flames.

The burning section of the dormitory was much lower than the main part of the building, being only two stories high. It might as well have been four stories for all the impression that the amateur fire fighters could make on the flames. Endeavoring to dash the water upon the conflagration from a safe distance, a large portion of it fell on the ground.

While they toiled desperately at their hopeless task, the welcome clanging of bells and the chug-chug of motors announced the arrival of the Alden Hose Company on the scene.

With thankful hearts, the bucket brigade promptly vacated their posts to make way for the firemen, who soon had a hose connected with the nearest water main and playing vigorously upon the flames.

Despite their gallant efforts, the wind was against them and the fire had gained too much headway prior to their arrival to be easily quenched.

None of the Yardley girls ever forgot that night. Drawn up in a body at one side of the campus they watched in terrified fascination the conflict raging between fire and water.

It was between half-past nine and ten o'clock when Patsy discovered the fire. It was after one in the morning when water finally reduced the fire to a state of inactivity. At least two-thirds of the dormitory had been demolished, leaving only the charred rafters. The front part was still intact, due to the unceasing toil of the gallant fire fighters. They would stick to their posts until there remained no further possibility of the fire taking on a new lease of life.

Over in Yardley Hall a weary company of homeless girls were endeavoring to make themselves comfortable for the rest of the night. Aside from money and small valuables, which the majority had had forethought enough to hastily snatch up when the gong had sounded, everything belonging to them had gone up in smoke.

The pecuniary side of their losses was not troubling them. There was hardly a girl at Yardley who had not come from a home of affluence. The discomfort they were temporarily obliged to endure was another matter. There was also much wild conjecturing going on among the castaways as to what effect the disaster would have upon the school's routine of study.

Lounging wearily on a long oak bench in the corridor, the Wayfarers were discussing the situation amid frequent yawns.

"I guess we'll just have to stay here until morning," Patsy was ruefully informing her chums. "It's after two now and we've no other place to go. I'm awfully sleepy, too, but this bench is no place to sleep."

"Some of the girls have stretched out on the benches in the class-rooms," declared Mabel. "We might as well do the same. Where do you suppose we're going to eat breakfast? I'm hungry now."

"We're going to eat it in Alden," announced Patsy positively. "The minute daylight comes we'll hop into my car and drive to the village. I'm hungry, too. Wish it was morning now."

"This is going to make a big difference in our Easter vacation," reflectively remarked Beatrice. "We'll probably be allowed to go home to-morrow. With the dormitory gone there's no other place for us to stay until it's rebuilt. Of course it will be, and it won't take very long to do it. It isn't as though it had been burned to the ground. The frame work's there and the front of it is all right."

"How long do you suppose it will take to rebuild it?" asked Patsy eagerly. Bee's remarks had set her to thinking.

"Oh, five or six weeks," hazarded Beatrice. "A gang of skilled workmen can

rebuild it very quickly.”

“Five or six weeks,” mused Patsy.

Of a sudden she straightened up from her lounging attitude, her gray eyes very bright.

“Girls,” she said impressively, “do you know what this means to us? It means Palm Beach after all. Miss Osgood has been foiled by fire. Doesn’t that sound exactly like a movie title? Anyway, there’s no loss without some gain. It’s not very pleasant to be driven from home in the middle of the night and have all one’s clothes vanish into smoke. I’m sorry it happened, of course. But since it *did* happen, it certainly didn’t happen for the worst, so far as the Wayfarers are concerned.”

CHAPTER IV

GLORIOUS NEWS

Beatrice's prediction that the night's disaster would hasten by several days the beginning of a prolonged Easter vacation proved accurate. The day following the fire was a busy one for all who had suffered from the dire calamity. At a meeting held in the chapel at two o'clock on the following afternoon, Miss Osgood announced that a six weeks' leave of absence would be granted the pupils of Yardley. Those who were sufficiently provided with clothing and funds to go to their homes at once were requested to repair to her office immediately after the meeting. Those who were not were requested to meet her there at four o'clock to discuss ways and means.

As it happened, the Wayfarers were not only ready to go home, but wildly impatient to go. Early that morning they had driven to Alden in Patsy's car to purchase the few things needful for the journey. Luckily for them they had been fully dressed when the fire alarm had sounded. Beatrice, Mabel and Eleanor had wisely donned hats and coats before leaving their rooms. Patsy had put on her fur coat when she had gone out to mail a letter. She was therefore minus a hat only. An hour's shopping in the village provided the four girls with handkerchiefs, gloves and the few other articles which they required.

Four o'clock that afternoon saw them at the railway station at Alden, waiting for the four-thirty west-bound train which would land them in Morton shortly after ten o'clock that evening. Patsy had already sent her aunt a lengthy telegram, informing Miss Carroll of the fire and that the four girls would arrive in Morton that night.

Though the journey home was not a long one, it seemed interminable to the travelers. Patsy was burning to impart the glorious news to her aunt. She was very sure that Aunt Martha would reconsider her decision not to go to Palm Beach as soon as she had been informed of the new turn in the girls' affairs.

"Morton at last!" sighed Mabel thankfully, when at five minutes to ten that evening the scattered lights of the city's suburbs began to spring up in the darkness. "Our train is exactly on time."

"I hope Auntie will meet us," Patsy said. "Maybe your mother will be there, too, Perry children; and yours, Bee. I told Auntie in my telegram to send them

word. I guess they'll be there, all right enough."

"It seems queer not to have any luggage, doesn't it?" remarked Eleanor.

The four girls had now begun putting on their coats, preparatory to leaving the train, which was gradually slowing down as it neared the station.

"We're lucky to be here ourselves," returned Bee seriously. "If that fire had started at dead of night it would have been a good deal worse for us."

When the train pulled into the station, however, the Wayfarers were doomed to disappointment. No friendly faces greeted their sight as they stepped from the train.

"Auntie didn't get my telegram! I just know she didn't!" Patsy cried out disappointedly. "If she's read about the fire in the evening papers, I can imagine how worried she must be by this time. It's probably the fault of the operator at Alden. He looked like a sleepy old stupid. We'd better take a taxi, children. The sooner we get home the better it will be for our worried folks."

Hailing a taxicab the Wayfarers were soon driving through the quiet streets of the little city toward the beautiful suburb in which they lived. Beatrice was the first to alight in front of the Forbes' unpretentious home. Promising to run over to see Patsy the first thing the next morning, she said "good night" and hurried up the walk.

"Coming in, girls?" asked Patsy as the taxicab finally stopped in front of the high, ornamental iron fence which enclosed the beautiful grounds of the Carroll estate.

"Not to-night. We must hustle into our own house and surprise Mother," returned Eleanor.

"Good-night, then. See you in the morning. I'll pay the driver."

Patsy hopped nimbly out of the taxicab, handed the driver his fare with an additional coin for good measure, then swung open the big gate and raced up the driveway to the house.

Three sharp, successive rings of the electric bell had a potent effect upon a stately, white-haired matron who sat in the living room, making a half-hearted attempt to read. Miss Martha Carroll sprang to her feet as the sound fell upon her ears and started for the hall at a most undignified pace. There was but one person who rang the Carrolls' bell in that fashion.

Long before the maid had time to reach the door Miss Martha had opened it and thrown her arms about the merry-faced, auburn-haired girl on the threshold.

“Patsy Carroll, you bad child!” she exclaimed as she gathered her niece closer to her. “Why didn’t you telegraph me that you were all right and coming home?”

“But I did, Auntie,” protested Patsy, as she energetically hugged her relieved relative. “I telegraphed this morning. I knew you hadn’t received the telegram the minute I got into the station. In it I asked you to meet me.”

“I never received it. Of course it will be delivered *to-morrow*,” emphasized Miss Martha disgustedly. “I sent one to you directly after I read the account of the fire in the evening paper. My nerves have been keyed up to a high pitch, waiting for a reply to it.”

“Poor, dear Auntie,” cooed Patsy. “It’s a shame. Never mind. I’m home now, so everything’s lovely again. Let’s go into the living room and I’ll tell you all about the fire and how I happened to come home to-night. Bee and Mab and Nellie came home with me. They’ll be over to see you in the morning.”

“Are you hungry, Patsy?” was her aunt’s solicitous question as the two walked slowly into the living room, arms twined about each other’s waists.

“No, Auntie. We had dinner on the train. I’m just crazy to talk. I’ve some glorious news to tell you. Let’s sit on the davenport and have a grand old talking bee.”

“To know you are safe is sufficiently good news,” tenderly rejoiced Miss Martha. “Really, Patricia, I am still trembling from the shock I received when I opened the newspaper and saw the headline, ‘Fire Sweeps Away Dormitory at Yardley.’”

“Well, it didn’t sweep me away,” laughed Patsy, snuggling into the circle of her aunt’s arm. The two had now seated themselves on the big leather davenport. “Part of the dormitory is still there. We lost all our stuff except the clothing we were wearing when the fire broke out.”

“What started it?” questioned Miss Martha rather severely. “The paper didn’t state the cause. A dormitory like the one at Yardley ought to be fireproof. I am sorry that I did not visit Yardley before allowing you to enter the school. I should certainly never countenance your living in a place that in any way looked like a fire-trap.”

“The fire started in the basement. The regular janitor was sick and a new one

took his place. They say it was through his carelessness that it started. He was seen to go into the basement smoking a pipe. Something he'd been forbidden to do. Of course, no one can be really sure that it was his fault, though. I was the one who gave the alarm."

Patsy went on to recount the incidents of the eventful night.

"Not a single girl acted scared or panicky," she proudly boasted. "We'd had fire drill so often that we knew just what to do when the fire really came. But I haven't told you the glorious news yet. We're going to have *six weeks'* vacation. Just think of it, Aunt Martha! Isn't that perfectly gorgeous? Now we can go to Palm Beach, can't we?"

"So that is the glorious news," commented Miss Carroll.

For an instant she silently surveyed Patsy, a half-smile touching her firm lips.

"What is it, Auntie?"

Patsy was not slow to read peculiar significance in both tone and smile. Something unusual was in the wind.

"Would you care very much if we didn't go to Palm Beach?" was Miss Martha's enigmatic question.

"Of course I should," Patsy cried out, her bright face clouding over. "You're not going to say that we can't! You mustn't! I've set my heart on the Florida trip. All the way home I've been planning for it."

"I received a letter from your father this morning," pursued Miss Carroll, ignoring Patsy's protest. "I also received another from Miss Osgood in which she refused my request for the extra week of vacation. I had written your father several days ago regarding the making of arrangements for us to go to Palm Beach. You can read for yourself what he has to say."

Rising, Miss Martha went over to a small mahogany writing desk. Opening it she took a letter from one of the pigeon holes.

"Here is Robert's letter," she said. Handing it to her niece she reseated herself beside the latter.

Very eagerly Patsy took it from its envelope and read:

“DEAR MARTHA:

“Your letter came to me this morning and I would be quick to reserve rooms for yourself and the girls at one of the Palm Beach hotels, except that I have a better plan. How would you like to spend three weeks in a real southern mansion? There is such a house on the estate I recently bought.

“It is a curiously beautiful house, built after the Spanish style of architecture, with an inner court and many balconies. The agent from whom I purchased it informs me that it was formerly the property of an elderly Spaniard, Manuel de Fereda. After his death, several months ago, the property descended to his granddaughter, who was anxious to sell it.

“It is completely furnished, much in the fashion of houses I saw when in Mexico. The girls will rave over it and I am very anxious that they shall spend their holiday in it. It is not many miles from Palm Beach and I have found a good Indian guide who will take us on the Everglades expedition which Patsy has set her mind on making.

“Of course, if you prefer Palm Beach for the girls, then so be it. If you come to Las Golondrinas (The Swallows), that is the name of the old house, you will not need to bring so many trunks, as you will see very little of society, except when you make an occasional trip to the Beach. I can secure a good car for your use while here which Patsy can drive to her heart’s content.

“Let me know at once what you think of my plan. If you decide immediately to take it up, wire me and I will be on the lookout for you. I believe you will enjoy this little adventure as much as I shall. I know now what Patsy will say. As the girls are to have only three weeks’ vacation, better arrange to start as soon as possible.

“Affectionately,

“ROBERT.”

“Aunt Martha, the Wayfarers are the luckiest girls in the whole world,” was Patsy’s solemn assertion as she looked up from the letter. “First they go through a fire and come out as safely as can be. Next they get six weeks’ vacation. After that, Daddy plays good fairy, and finds them a wonderful palace in the land of flowers. All they have to do is to hurry up and take possession. *When* are we going to start for Florida?”

“As soon as we can make ready,” was the prompt reply. “Since your father seems very anxious for us to take this trip, I feel that we ought not disappoint him. I dare say we may find this old house he describes somewhat interesting.”

This calm statement filled Patsy with inward amusement. She knew it to be an indirect admission that her aunt was as anxious as she to carry out the plan her father had made for them.

“We won’t need a lot of new gowns,” argued Patsy. “We all have evening frocks and plenty of wash dresses from last summer. We can wear our corduroy suits and high boots to tramp around in. We ought to have some of those Palm Beach hats the stores are showing, and new white shoes, and a few other things. It isn’t as if we were going to stay at a large hotel. We’ll be away from society and living outdoors most of the time. This is Friday. I think we ought to start south not later than next Wednesday morning. We can’t afford to use up more than one of our precious weeks in getting ready and going down to Las—Las——What’s the name of our new home?”

Patsy hastily consulted her father’s letter.

“Las Gol-on-drinas,” she pronounced slowly. “I suppose that’s not the way to pronounce it. I’ll have to ask Mab about it. She’s taking Spanish this year. It’s very necessary to know how to say the name of our new southern home,” she added with a chuckle. “Won’t the girls be surprised when they hear about this splendid plan of Father’s? Have you spoken to Mrs. Perry about it yet, Auntie?”

“No, my dear. You must remember that I received Miss Osgood’s letter, refusing my request at the same time that I received your father’s letter. They arrived in the first mail this morning. I intended writing Robert this evening, explaining that it would be impossible for us to go to Florida. Then I read about the fire in the paper and it completely upset my nerves. I will call on the Perrys to-morrow morning to talk things over. We must also call on Mrs. Forbes.”

“Bee isn’t sure that her mother will let her accept another trip from us,” confided Patsy. “That’s the only thing I worried about after I knew we were to have the six weeks’ vacation. She said she was sure her mother wouldn’t feel right about letting us pay her expenses at a fashionable resort like Palm Beach. But it’s all different now. Mrs. Forbes can’t very well refuse to let Bee accept an invitation to a house party, can she? You must make her see it in that light, Aunt Martha, or she won’t let Bee go with us. She’s awfully proud, you know. We simply must have Bee along. I wouldn’t care much about the trip if she had to stay at home.”

“Beatrice will go with us,” assured Miss Martha in a tone that indicated the intention to have her own way in the matter. Patsy knew from long experience that her dignified aunt was a person not to be easily overruled, and rejoiced accordingly.

“I told Bee that I knew you could fix things beautifully with her mother,” she declared happily. “We’re going to have a wonderful time in that quaint old house. Wouldn’t it be great if it were haunted, or had some kind of a mystery about it? I’ve read lots of queer stories about those old southern mansions.”

“Now, Patsy,” Miss Martha made an attempt at looking extremely severe, “once and for all you may put such foolish notions out of your head. That affair of the missing will at Wilderness Lodge was, of course, quite remarkable. Nevertheless, it was very annoying in many respects.”

Miss Martha had not forgotten her enforced hike over hill and dale on the memorable afternoon when John, the rascally chauffeur, had set her down in an unfamiliar territory and left her to return to the Lodge as best she might.

“We are going down South for recreation. Bear that in mind,” she continued. “The majority of these tales about haunted houses down there originate with the negroes, who are very ignorant and superstitious. There is no such thing as a *haunted* house. I have never yet met a person who had actually *seen* a ghost. Undoubtedly we shall hear a number of such silly tales while we are in Florida. I am told that the natives are very fond of relating such yarns. You girls may listen to them if you like, but you must not take them seriously. You are not apt ever again to run into another mystery like that of Wilderness Lodge.”

CHAPTER V

THE LAND OF FLOWERS

“No wonder the Spaniards named this beautiful land ‘Florida!’” rapturously exclaimed Beatrice Forbes. “I never dreamed it *could* be quite so wonderful as this.”

“I suppose when first they saw it, they must have felt about it as we do now,” returned Eleanor. “According to history they landed here on Easter Sunday. We’re seeing Florida at about the same time of year as they first saw it. It’s almost as wonderful to us as it was to them. Not quite, of course, because they underwent all sorts of hardships before they landed here. So they must have thought it like Heaven.”

Exactly one week had elapsed since the Wayfarers had arrived in Morton with the pleasing prospect ahead of them of a six weeks’ vacation. Three days of hurried preparation had followed. Then had come the long, rather tiresome railway journey to Florida. They had arrived at Palm Beach late in the afternoon of the sixth day, had been met by Mr. Carroll and had spent the night at one of Palm Beach’s most fashionable hotels.

Weary from the long railway trip, the travelers had resisted the lure of a water fête, to be given that evening on Lake Worth, and retired early.

“I can secure a boat, if you girls are anxious to take in the fête,” Mr. Carroll had informed his flock at dinner that evening. “This fête will be nothing very remarkable, however. Later on, I understand, a big Venetian fête is to be given. Why not wait and go to that? We can easily run up to the Beach in the car from Las Golondrinas. I would suggest going to bed in good season to-night. Then we can make an early start in the morning for our new home.”

This program being approved by all, the Wayfarers had dutifully settled down early for the night. It was now a little after ten o’clock on the following morning and the big touring car, driven by Mr. Carroll, was bowling due south over a palm-lined country road, toward its objective, Las Golondrinas.

It was a particularly balmy morning, even for southern Florida, where a perpetual state of fine weather may be expected to hold sway during the winter months. Southward under tall palms, past villa after villa, embowered in

gorgeously colored, flowering vines, the touring car glided with its load of enthusiastic beauty-worshippers.

Seated between Miss Martha and Eleanor in the tonneau of the machine, Beatrice was perhaps the most ardent worshipper of them all. Love of Nature was almost a religion with her. She was a true child of the great outdoors.

“It’s so beautiful it makes me feel almost like crying,” she confided to her companions as she drew in a deep breath of the exquisitely scented morning air. “It’s so different from the Adirondacks. Up there I felt exhilarated; as though I’d like to stand up and sing an anthem to the mountains. But all this fragrance and color and sunlight and warm, sweet air makes me feel—well—sentimental,” finished Bee rather timidly.

“It seems more like an enchanted land out of a fairy-tale than a real one,” mused Eleanor. “No wonder the birds begin to fly south the minute it grows chilly up north. They know what’s waiting for them down here.”

“That’s more than we know,” smiled Beatrice, her brown eyes dreamy. “We’re explorers, once more, setting foot in a strange, new country. Something perfectly amazing may be waiting for us just around the corner.”

“I hope it won’t be a horrid big snake,” shuddered practical Mabel, who sat opposite the trio on one of the small seats. “There are plenty of poisonous snakes down here, you know. Moccasins and diamond-back rattlers, coral snakes and a good many other varieties that aren’t poisonous, but horrible, just the same.”

“Why break the spell by mentioning anything so disagreeable as snakes, Mab?” asked Eleanor reproachfully. “I’d forgotten that there were such hateful, wriggly things. How do you happen to be so well up on the snakology of Florida?”

“There’s no such word as snakology,” retorted Mabel. “You mean *herpetology*.”

“Snakology’s a fine word, even if old Noah Webster did forget to put it in the dictionary,” laughed Eleanor. “Isn’t it, Miss Martha?”

“I can’t say that I specially admire any word pertaining to snakes,” dryly answered Miss Carroll. “While we are on the subject, however, I may as well say that nothing can induce me to go on any wild expeditions into these swamps down here. I daresay these jungles are full of poisonous snakes. I greatly doubt the advisability of allowing you girls to trail around in such dangerous places.”

“Oh, we’ll be all right with a real Indian guide to show us the way,” declared Beatrice confidently. “White Heron is the name of our Indian guide. Mr. Carroll was telling me about him last night. He is a Seminole and a great hunter.”

“I have no confidence in Indians,” disparaged Miss Martha. “I sincerely hope Robert is not mistaken in this one. I shall have to see him for myself in order to judge whether he is a fit person to act as guide on this foolhardy expedition that Patsy is so set on making.”

This dampening assertion warned the trio of girls that it was high time to discuss something else. They remembered Patsy’s difficulties of the previous summer in wringing a reluctant permission from Miss Martha to go camping in the mountains. Now it seemed she had again posted herself on the wrong side of the fence. It therefore behooved them to drop the subject where it stood, leaving the winning over of Miss Martha to wily Patsy and her father.

Seated beside her father, who, knowing the road to Las Golondrinas, was driving the car, Patsy was keeping up a running fire of delighted exclamation over the tropical beauty of the country through which they were passing.

“I’m so glad you bought this splendid place, Dad,” she rattled along in her quick, eager fashion. “After I’m through college maybe we can come down to Florida and spend a whole winter.”

“I had that idea in mind when I bought it,” returned her father. “It will take considerable time to put Las Golondrinas in good condition again. Old Fereda let it run down. There are some fine orange groves on the estate, but they need attention. The house is in good condition. It’s one of those old-timers and solidly built. The grounds were in bad shape, though. I’ve had a gang of darkies working on them ever since I bought the place. They’re a lazy lot. Still they’ve done quite a little toward getting the lawns smooth again and thinning the trees and shrubs.”

“Who was this Manuel de Fereda, anyway?” questioned Patsy curiously. “I know he was Spanish and died, and that’s all.”

“I know very little about him, my dear. Mr. Haynes, the agent who sold me the property, had never seen him. In fact, had never heard of him until Fereda’s granddaughter put the place in his hands for sale. She told Haynes that her grandfather was crazy. Haynes said she seemed very anxious to get rid of the property and get away from it.”

“There’s just enough about the whole thing to arouse one’s curiosity,” sighed

Patsy. "I'd love to know more about this queer, crazy old Spaniard. Maybe we'll meet some people living near the estate who will be able to tell us more about him."

"Oh, you'll probably run across someone who knows the history of the Feredas," lightly assured her father. "Neither the old mammy I engaged as cook, nor the two maids can help you out, though. They come from Miami and know no one in the vicinity. I'm still hunting for a good, trustworthy man for general work. We shall need one while we're here, to run errands, see to the horses and make himself useful."

"You must have worked awfully hard to get things ready for us, Dad."

Patsy slipped an affectionately grateful hand into her father's arm.

"I could have done better if I had known from the start that you were really coming," he returned. "I had to hustle around considerably. At least you're here now and your aunt can be depended upon to do the rest. I hope she will get along nicely with her darkie help. They're usually as hard to manage as a lot of unruly children."

"Oh, she will," predicted Patsy. "She always makes everybody except Patsy do as she says. Patsy likes to have her own way, you know."

"So I've understood," smiled Mr. Carroll. "Patsy usually gets it, too, I'm sorry to say."

"You're not a bit sorry and you know it," flatly contradicted Patsy. "You'd hate to have me for a daughter if I were a meek, quiet Patsy who never had an opinion of her own."

"I can't imagine such a thing," laughed her father. "I'm so used to being bullied by a certain self-willed young person that I rather like it."

"You're a dear," gaily approved Patsy. "I don't ever really bully you, you know. I just tell you what you have to do and then you go and do it. That's not bullying, is it?"

"Not in our family," satirically assured Mr. Carroll.

Whereupon they both laughed.

Meanwhile, as they continued to talk in the half-jesting, intimate fashion of two persons who thoroughly understand each other, the big black car ate up the miles that lay between Palm Beach and Las Golondrinas. As the party drew

nearer their destination the highly ornamental villas which had lined both sides of the road began to grow fewer and farther apart. They saw less of color and riotous bloom and more of the vivid but monotonous green of the tropics.

They turned at last from the main highway and due east into a white sandy road which ran through a natural park of stately green pines. Under the shadow of the pines the car continued for a mile or so, then broke out into the open and the sunlight again.

“Oh, look!”

Half rising in the seat, Patsy pointed. Ahead of them and dazzlingly blue in the morning sunshine lay the sea.

“How near is our new home to the ocean, Dad?” she asked eagerly.

“There it is yonder.”

Taking a hand briefly from the wheel, Mr. Carroll indicated a point some distance ahead and to the right where the red-tiled roof of a house showed in patches among the wealth of surrounding greenery.

“Why, it’s only a little way from the sea!” Patsy cried out. “Not more than half a mile, I should judge.”

“About three quarters,” corrected her father. “The bathing beach is excellent and there’s an old boathouse, too.”

“Are there any boats?” was the quick question.

“A couple of dinghys. Both leaky. I gave them to one of my black fellows. Old Fereda was evidently not a sea dog. The boathouse was full of odds and ends of rubbish. I had it cleared up and repainted inside and out. It will make you a good bath house. It’s a trim looking little shack now.”

Presently rounding a curve in the white, ribbon-like road, the travelers found themselves again riding southward. To their left, picturesque masses of jungle sloped down to the ocean below.

Soon to their right, however, a high iron fence appeared, running parallel with the road. It formed the eastern boundary of Las Golondrinas. Behind it lay the estate itself, stretching levelly toward the red-roofed house in the distance. Long neglected by its former owner, the once carefully kept lawns and hedges had put forth rank, jungle-like growth. Broad-fronded palms and palmettos drooped graceful leaves over seemingly impenetrable thickets of tangled green. Bush and

hedge, once carefully pruned, now flung forth riotous untamed masses of gorgeous bloom.

“It looks more like a wilderness than a private estate,” was Patsy’s opinion as her quick eyes roved from point to point in passing.

“It looked a good deal more like a jungle a few weeks ago,” returned Mr. Carroll. “Wait until you pass the gates; then you’ll begin to notice a difference. The improvements my black boys have made don’t show from the road.”

For a distance of half a mile, the car continued on the sandy highway. At last Mr. Carroll brought it to a stop before the tall, wrought-iron gates of the main entrance to the estate. Springing from the automobile, he went forward to open them.

“Every man his own gate-opener,” he called out jovially. “Drive ahead, Patsy girl.”

Patsy had already slipped into the driver’s seat, hands on the wheel. Immediately her father called out, she drove the machine slowly forward and through the now wide-open gateway.

“Do let me drive the rest of the way, Dad,” she implored as Mr. Carroll regained the car.

“All right. Follow this trail wherever it goes and you’ll finally bring up at the house,” was the good-humored injunction.

By “trail” Mr. Carroll meant the drive, which, flanked by hedges of perfumed oleander, wound through the grounds, describing a sweeping curve as it approached the quaint, grayish-white building that had for generations sheltered the Feredas. A little beyond the house and to its rear, they glimpsed rank upon rank of orange trees, on which golden fruit and creamy blossoms hung together amongst the glossy green of foliage.

A light land breeze, freighted with the fragrance of many flowers, blew softly upon the Wayfarers. Its scented sweetness filled them with fresh delight and appreciation of their new home.

Patsy brought the car to a stop on the drive, directly in front of an arched doorway, situated at the center of the facade. Before the travelers had time to step out of the automobile the massive double doors were swung open by a stout, turbaned mammy, the true southern type of negro, fast vanishing from the latter day, modernized South. Her fat, black face radiant with good will, she showed

two rows of strong white teeth in a broad smile. Beside her stood two young colored girls who stared rather shyly at the newcomers.

“I done see yoh comin’, Massa Carroll!” she exclaimed. “I see yoh way down de road. So I done tell Celia an’ Em’ly here, y’all come along now, right smart, an’ show Massa Carroll’s folks yoh got some manners.’”

“Thank you, Mammy Luce,” gallantly responded Mr. Carroll, his blue eyes twinkling with amusement. Whereupon he gravely presented the gratified old servant to his “folks.” A courtesy which she acknowledged with an even greater display of teeth and many bobbing bows.

Headed by Mr. Carroll, the travelers stepped over the threshold of Las Golondrinas and into the coolness of a short stone passageway which ended in the patio or square stone court, common to houses of Spanish architecture.

In the center of the court a fountain sent up graceful sprays of water, which fell sparkling into the ancient stone bowl built to receive the silvery deluge. Above the court on three sides ranged the inevitable balconies. Looking far upward one glimpsed, through the square opening, a patch of blue sunlit sky.

“Welcome to Las Golondrinas, girls! It’s rather different from anything you’ve ever seen before, now isn’t it?”

Mr. Carroll addressed the question to his flock in general, who had stopped in the center of the court to take stock of their new environment.

“It’s positively romantic!” declared Patsy fervently. “I feel as though I’d stepped into the middle of an old Spanish tale. I’m sure Las Golondrinas must have a wonderful history of its own. When you stop to remember how many different Feredas have lived here, you can’t help feeling that a lot of interesting, perhaps tragic things may have happened to them. I only wish I knew more about them.”

“Let the poor dead and gone Feredas rest in peace, Patsy,” laughingly admonished Eleanor. “We came down here to enjoy ourselves, not to dig up the tragic history of a lot of Spanish Dons and Donnas.”

“A very sensible remark, Eleanor,” broke in Miss Martha emphatically. “There is no reason that I can see why you, Patsy, should immediately jump to the conclusion that this old house has a tragic history. It’s pure nonsense, and I don’t approve of your filling your head with such ideas. I dare say the history of these Feredas contains nothing either startling or tragic. Don’t let such ridiculous notions influence you to spend what ought to be a pleasant period of relaxation

in trying to conjure up a mystery that never existed.”

“Now, Auntie, you know perfectly well that if we happened to stumble upon something simply amazing in this curious old house, you’d be just as excited over it as any of us,” gaily declared Patsy.

“Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof,” loftily quoted Miss Martha, refusing to commit herself. “It will take something very amazing indeed to impress me.”



CHAPTER VI

THE BEGINNING OF ADVENTURE

“The time has come, O Wayfarers, to think of many things,” gaily declaimed Patsy, bursting into the somber, high-ceilinged, dark-paneled sitting-room where Miss Martha, Beatrice, Mabel and Eleanor sat around a massive mahogany table, busily engaged in writing letters.

“Go away, Patsy,” laughingly admonished Mabel, pen suspended in mid-air over her note paper. “You’re a disturber. You’ve made me forget what I was going to write next. If you won’t be a letter-writer, don’t be a nuisance.”

“I can’t be what I never have been and could never possibly become,” retorted Patsy. “I’ll promise to keep quiet, though, if you’ll all hustle and finish your letters. I’m dying to go over to the orange groves and it’s no fun going alone. Any old person will do for company.”

“Then we *won’t* do,” emphasized Beatrice. “We are very distinguished persons who don’t belong in the ‘any old’ class.”

“Glad you told me,” chuckled Patsy. “I’ll give you ten minutes to wind up your letters. If you’re not done then—well—I’ll give you ten more. I am always considerate. I’m going to leave you now, but I shall return. I’ll come buzzing around again, like a pestiferous fly, in exactly ten minutes by my wrist watch. I’m only going as far as the gallery to pay my respects to the dead and gone Feredas.”

With this announcement Patsy turned and strolled from the room. The gallery to which she referred was in the nature of a short corridor, extending between the second-floor sitting-room and ending at the corridor on which were situated sleeping rooms which the Wayfarers occupied. It had evidently served as a picture gallery for several generations of Feredas. Its walls were lined with a heterogeneous collection of oil paintings, largely landscape and studies in still life. At least half of one side of it, however, was devoted strictly to portraits. It was before this particular section that Patsy halted.

Two days had elapsed since the Wayfarers had made port at Las Golondrinas. On the evening of their arrival, a storm had come up, bursting over the old house in all its tropical fury. Following it, rain had set in and for two days had

continued to fall in a steady, discouraging downpour that made out-door excursions impossible for the time being.

Now, on the third morning since their arrival, the sun again shone gloriously, in skies of cerulean blue, and the air was heavy with the sweetness of rain-washed blossoms. It was an ideal morning to spend out of doors, and Patsy was impatient to start on an exploring tour of the estate.

During the two days in which the Wayfarers had been kept indoors by the rain, they had become thoroughly acquainted with the old house. They had wandered about it from cellar to roof, marveling at its utter unlikeness to any other house in which they had ever set foot. Its somber, spacious rooms with their highly polished floors and queer, elaborately carved, foreign-looking furniture of a by-gone period, evoked volleys of wondering comment and speculation. The cool patio with its silver-spraying fountain, the long windows opening out onto picturesque balconies and the dim stone corridors, all held for them the very acme of romance. It was like being set down in a world which they had known only in fiction.

Each girl had found some one particular object on which to fix her special admiration. Eleanor went into ecstasies over a huge, carved-leather chest that stood in the sitting-room. Beatrice was enthusiastic over a heavy mahogany book-case filled with old Spanish volumes, bound in boards and parchment. She loudly deplored her inability to read Spanish and announced her intention of tackling the fascinating volumes with the aid of a Spanish-English dictionary which Mabel had brought along. Mabel was vastly impressed by a high, frowning old desk with many drawers and pigeon-holes. She was perfectly sure, she declared, that it must contain a secret drawer, and in consequence spent the great part of an afternoon in an unavailing hunt for it.

Patsy found unending delight in the portrait section of the picture gallery. The dark-eyed, tight-lipped men and women who stared down at her from the wall filled her with an intense curiosity regarding who they were and how long it had been since they had lived and played their parts in the history of the Feredas.

Undoubtedly they were all Feredas. Of unmistakably Spanish cast of countenance, they bore a decided family resemblance to one another. The difference in the style of dress worn by the pictured folk proclaimed them to be of many generations. How far removed from the present day, she did not know. She was of the opinion that some of them must have lived at least two hundred years ago. She was very sure that one portrait, that of a man, must have been

painted even earlier than that.

It was this portrait in particular which most fascinated her. Hung in the center of the section and framed in tarnished gilt, it depicted the full length figure of a Spanish cavalier. Patsy thought he might easily have been one of the intrepid, Latin adventurers who accompanied Ponce de Leon on his unsuccessful quest into Florida for the fabled Fountain of Youth.

As a gallant of long ago, the man in the picture instantly arrested her attention. The thin, sinister face above the high Spanish ruff repelled her, however. The bright, bird-like eyes, the long, aquiline nose and the narrow lips, touched with a mocking smile, combined to make a countenance of such intense cruelty as filled her with a curious sense of terror. It was as if the sharp, black eyes followed her, as she moved along from picture to picture. There was a peculiar, life-like quality about the painting which gave her the uncomfortable feeling that the sinister cavalier might step down from the canvas at any moment.

Nevertheless she could not refrain from stopping to look at him every time she passed through the corridor. She was convinced that he must have been the first Fereda who landed in the New World and that he had a record which might well match his malevolently smiling face. It piqued her not a little to reflect, that, who he was and what he had been would in all probability ever remain a mystery to her.

Strolling into the corridor that morning to study again the provoking object of her curiosity, Patsy wondered how the granddaughter of old Manuel de Fereda could ever have been content to turn over the contents of Las Golondrinas to strangers. She wondered what had become of her. She was undoubtedly the only one who knew the identity of the painted cavalier. Patsy decided that she would ask her father to write Mr. Haynes, the agent, from whom he had purchased the property, asking him for Eulalie Fereda's address. Once she had obtained it, Patsy fully intended to write to the Spanish girl for information concerning the painted cavalier.

Wrapped in meditation, she did not hear Beatrice's light approaching footsteps until her friend had traversed half of the corridor.

"Oh, Bee!" she hailed, as the latter paused beside her. "I'm going to try to get Eulalie Fereda's address from Mr. Haynes, and then write her about this picture. It seems queer that she allowed all these portraits of her family to be sold with the house, now doesn't it? I certainly shouldn't care to see the pictures of my respected ancestors pass into the hands of strangers."

“Perhaps she’d lived here so long with her grandfather that she’d grown tired of him and all the rest of the Fereda tribe,” hazarded Bee. “Imagine how lonely it would be for a young girl in this gloomy old house. It is gloomy, you know. We don’t mind it because there are a crowd of us. It all seems just quaint and romantic to us.”

“All except Auntie,” reminded Patsy, smiling. “She says that the whole house ought to be done over from top to bottom and that she intends to come down here next fall and see to it herself. I think she only half means it, though. She likes it the way it is, just as much as we do, but she won’t admit it. Aunt Martha has a real love for the romantic, but she tries hard not to let any one know it.”

“The furniture in this house must be really valuable,” Bee said seriously. “Most of it is antique. Goodness knows how old that desk in the sitting-room is; and that carved-leather chest and the book-case. Why, those books alone must be worth a good deal. A book collector would rave over them. I wish I knew something about rare volumes and first editions. If I were your father I’d send for an expert and have the collection valued.”

“I’ll tell him about it,” nodded Patsy. “Only he won’t bother to do it while we’re here. He’s more interested in having the grounds put in order than anything else. He says the orange groves are not worth much because they’ve been neglected for so long. With care, he thinks they’ll do better next year. We’ve come down here too late for the real fruit season, you know. We should have been here in January or February for that. Anyway, he didn’t buy this place as a money-making venture. He thought it would be a nice winter home for us.”

“I’m lucky to have the chance to see it,” congratulated Beatrice. “If ever I become a writer, I shall put Las Golondrinas into a story. That’s a pretty name; Las Golondrinas.”

“Isn’t it, though. I suppose it was named on account of the tree swallows,” mused Patsy. “Dad says there are flocks of them here. They have blue backs and white breasts. I’m sure I saw some this morning. Oh, dear! I wish the girls would hurry. I want to start out and see the sights. Come on. Let’s remind them that time is flying.”

Catching Bee by the hand, Patsy pulled her, a willing captive, toward the sitting-room.

“Time’s up and more than up!” she announced, poking her auburn head into the big room.

“I’m ready,” responded Eleanor, rising from her chair.

“So am I—in another minute.”

Hastily addressing an envelope to her mother, Mabel tucked her letter into it, sealed and stamped it.

“There!” she ejaculated as she laid it on the little pile of letters which represented the fruits of the morning’s labor. “That’s off my mind.”

“What about you, Auntie?” questioned Patsy, noting that her dignified relative was still engaged in letter-writing. “Don’t you want to join the explorers?”

“You girls can get along very well without me,” placidly returned Miss Carroll. “I am not through with my writing. Besides, I don’t feel inclined to go exploring this morning. I warn all of you to be careful where you set foot. This old place may be infested with snakes.”

“Oh, we’ll be careful. We’ll each carry a good stout stick,” assured Beatrice. “That’s the way tourists do in the tropics, you know. On some of the South Sea Islands, I’ve read that tourists always carry what they call ‘snake sticks’ when they go calling. At night the coolies go ahead of a calling party and beat the long grass aside.”

“Very fine, Bee. I hereby appoint you chief grass-beater of the realm,” teased Mabel.

“I decline the high office,” retorted Bee. “Every Wayfarer will have to do her own bit of trail beating. As I am *very* brave, I don’t mind walking ahead, though.”

“I will walk with you, Bee,” graciously offered Patsy. “Woe be to the wriggly, jiggly sarpint that crosses our path.”

In this light strain the four girls left Miss Martha to her writing and sallied forth from the coolness of the old house into the bright sunlight.

“Where shall we go first?” queried Patsy, as they paused on the drive in front of the house. “Shall we get acquainted with our numerous acres of front yard, or shall we make a bee-line for the orange groves?”

“Let’s do the groves first,” suggested Eleanor. “I’m awfully anxious to get close to real orange trees with real oranges growing on them.”

“Come on, then.”

Seizing Beatrice by the arm, Patsy piloted her around a corner of the house,

Mabel and Eleanor following.

Crossing a comparatively smooth bit of lawn, at the rear of the house, the Wayfarers halted by common consent before proceeding further. Between them and the orange groves lay a wide stretch of ground, fairly overrun with tangled bush and vine. Magnificent live oak, cedar and palmetto trees, spread their noble branches over thickets of bright bloom and living green. It was extremely picturesque, but “very snaky,” as Mabel declared with a little shudder.

“There’s a darkie over yonder, clipping away that thicket!” Eleanor pointed to where an ancient, bare-footed, overalled African, wearing a huge, tattered straw hat, was industriously cutting away at a thick patch of sprawling green growth.

“Hey, there, Uncle!” called out undignified Patsy. “Come here a minute, please.”

The old man straightened up at the hail and looked rather blankly about him. Catching sight of the group of white-clad girls, he ambled slowly toward them through the long grass.

“Mornin’, young ladies,” he saluted, pulling off his ragged headgear and disclosing a thick crop of snow-white wool. “Ah reckon mebber yoh wants Uncle Jemmy t’ tell yoh suthin’?”

“Yes, we do, Uncle,” beamed Patsy. “We wish you’d show us a path to the orange groves, if there is one. We’d like to have some good, stout sticks, too, in case we see any snakes. Aren’t you afraid to walk around in that jungle in your bare feet?”

“Laws, Missie, I’ve used toh it, I is. Th’ ain’t no snaikes round heah what mounts toh much. I done see a big black snaike this mornin’, but that fella ain’t out toh do me no damage. He am a useful snaike, he am.”

“We’ll be just as well satisfied not to meet his snakeship, even if he is so useful,” muttered Eleanor in Patsy’s ear.

“Ef yoh all young ladies’ll come along now, I’ve gwine toh show yoh the way toh git toh the orange groves,” continued Uncle Jemmy. “There am a path ovah heah.”

So saying, the old man took the lead and trotted along the clipped lawn where it skirted the high grass for a distance of perhaps twenty yards. The girls followed him, single file, every pair of bright eyes intent on trying to catch a glimpse of the path.

Pausing at last, Uncle Jemmy proceeded to lop off several low-growing branches from a nearby tree. These he deftly stripped clear of twigs and foliage and, trimming them smooth with a huge, sharp-bladed pocket knife, presented one to each of the four explorers.

“Heah am yoh snaike sticks, young ladies,” he declared, showing a vast expanse of white teeth in a genial grin. “Now I’s e gwine to take yoh a little funder an’ yoh’ll see de path.”

A few steps and they came abreast of a giant oak tree and here the path began, a narrow trail, but beaten hard by the passing of countless feet.

“Yoh jes’ follow de path whereber he goes and yoh-all gwine come af’er while toh de groves,” he directed.

“Thank you, Uncle Jemmy.” Patsy nodded radiant thanks. Seized by a sudden thought she asked: “Do you live around here?”

“No, Missie. I comes from Tampa, I does. Soon’s I git through this job foh Massa Carroll I gwine toh git right back toh Tampa again. It am de bes’ place fo’ Uncle Jemmy.”

“Oh!” Patsy’s face fell. Then she tried again. “Do any of these boys working with you live around here?”

“No, Missie. They done come from Miami. We am all strangahs heah.”

“I see. Thank you ever so much for helping us.”

With a kindly nod to the old man, Patsy turned to her chums who had stood listening in silence to the questions she had asked.

“Are you ready for the great adventure?” she queried. “Come along, then. One, two, three and away we go, Indian fashion!”

Bidding a smiling good-bye to Uncle Jemmy, who had now turned to go, the three girls filed into the trail behind their energetic leader. And thus the Wayfarers started off on what really was the beginning of a greater adventure than they dreamed.



CHAPTER VII

THE COTTAGE IN THE PALM GROVE

Greatly to their relief, the Wayfarers were not called upon to do battle with their stout snake sticks. For a quarter of a mile they followed the narrow path. It wound in and out of the tall, coarse grass and around wide-spreading trees and ragged clumps of bushes. At length they reached the point for which they had been aiming.

“It’s simply splendiferous!” exclaimed Eleanor, as the quartette halted well inside the first grove to breathe in the fragrance of orange blossoms and feast their eyes on the beauty of the tropical scene spread out before them.

“Why, it isn’t just an orange grove!” Beatrice cried out. “Look, girls! There are *lemons* on that tree over yonder!”

“Yes, and see the tangerines!” Patsy pointed out. “Those stiff, funny bushes there have kumquats on them. And I do believe—yes, sir—that ragged old tree there is a banana tree. This is what I call a mixed-up old grove. I supposed oranges grew in one grove and lemons in another, etc., etc.”

“I guess we don’t know very much about it,” laughed Eleanor. “We’ll have to get busy and learn what’s what and why. Let’s walk on through this grove and see what’s in the next one. There seems to be a pretty good path down through it.”

Amid many admiring exclamations, the Wayfarers strolled on, seeing new wonders with every step they took. The brown, woody litter which covered the ground under the trees was plentifully starred with the white of fallen blossoms. To quote Mabel, “Why, we’re actually walking on flowers!”

Late in the season as it was they found considerable fruit growing within easy reach of their hands. Eager to avail themselves of the pleasure of “actually picking oranges from the trees,” the girls gathered a modest quantity of oranges and tangerines.

Warned by Mr. Carroll always to be on the watch for spiders, scorpions and wood-ticks before sitting down on the ground, Beatrice and Patsy energetically swept a place clear with a huge fallen palmetto leaf, and the four seated themselves on the dry, clean-swept space to enjoy their spoils.

All of them had yet to become adepts in the art of out-door orange eating as it is done in Florida. In consequence, they had a very delightful but exceedingly messy feast. Picking oranges at random also resulted in their finding some of the fruit sour enough to set their teeth on edge. These they promptly flung from them and went on to others more palatable.

“No more oranges for me this morning,” finally declared Eleanor, pitching the half-eaten one in her hand across the grove. “I’m soaked in juice from head to foot. Look at my skirt.”

“I’ve had enough.” Bee sprang to her feet, drying her hands on her handkerchief. “We ought to pick a few oranges to take to Miss Martha.”

“Let’s get them when we come back,” proposed Patsy. “What’s the use in lugging them around with us. I want to walk all the way through these groves to the end of the estate. Dad says it’s not more than a mile from the house to the west end of Las Golondrinas.”

“All right. Lead on, my dear Miss Carroll,” agreed Bee with a low bow. “Be sure you know where you’re going, though.”

“I know just as much about where I’m going as you do,” merrily flung back Patsy over her shoulder.

Headed by their intrepid leader, the little procession once more took the trail, wandering happily along under the scented sweetness of the orange trees. Overhead, bright-plumaged birds flew about among the gently stirring foliage. Huge golden and black butterflies fluttered past them. Among the white and gold of blossom, bees hummed a deep, steady song as they pursued their endless task of honey-gathering.

On and on they went, passing through one grove after another until they glimpsed ahead the high, wrought-iron fence which shut in the estate on all four sides. Reaching it, they could look through to a small grassy open space beyond. Behind it rose a natural grove of tall palms. Set down fairly in the middle of the grove was a squat, weather-stained cottage of grayish stone.

“Oh, see that funny little house!” was Mabel’s interested exclamation. “I wonder whom it belongs to!”

“Let’s go over and pay it a visit,” instantly proposed Patsy. “Perhaps someone lives there who can tell us about old Manuel Fereda and Eulalie, his granddaughter. It doesn’t look as though darkies lived there. Their houses are mostly tumble-down wooden shacks. Still it may be deserted. Anyway, we might

as well go over and take a look at it.”

“How are we going to get out of here?” asked Eleanor. “I don’t see a gate.”

“There must be one somewhere along the west end,” declared Bee. “Let’s start here and follow the fence. Maybe we’ll come to one.”

“We’d better walk north through the grove then. There’s no path close to the fence and that grass is too high and jungly looking to suit me,” demurred Eleanor.

Traveling northward through the grove, their eyes fixed on the fence in the hope of spying a gate, the explorers walked some distance, but saw no sign of one. Finally retracing their steps to their starting point, they headed south and eventually discovered, not a gate, but a gap in the fence where the lower part of several iron palings had been broken away, leaving an aperture large enough for a man to crawl through.

“This means us,” called Patsy and ran toward it.

Energetically beating down the grass under it with the stick she carried, she stooped and scrambled through to the other side, emitting a little whoop of triumph as she stood erect.

One by one her three companions followed suit until the four girls were standing on the grassy clearing, which, a few rods farther on, merged levelly into the grove of palms surrounding the low stone cottage.

From the point at which they now halted they could obtain only a side view of it among the trees.

“Judging from the big cobweb on one of those windows, I should say no one lives there,” commented Eleanor.

“It *does* look deserted. Let’s go around to the front of it. Then we can tell more about it,” suggested Patsy.

Crossing the grassy space, the quartette entered the shady grove. A few steps brought them abreast of the front of the cottage.

“The door’s wide open! I wonder——”

Patsy broke off abruptly, her gray eyes focussing themselves upon the open doorway. In it had suddenly appeared a woman, so tall that her head missed but a little of touching the top of the rather low aperture. For an instant she stood there, motionless, staring or rather glaring at her uninvited visitors out of a pair

of wild black eyes. The Wayfarers were staring equally hard at her, fascinated by this strange apparition.

What they saw was a fierce, swarthy countenance, broad and deeply lined. The woman's massive head was crowned by a mop of snow-white hair that stood out in a brush above her terrifying features. A beak-like nose, a mouth that was merely a hard line set above a long, pointed chin, gave her the exact look of the proverbial old witch. Over the shoulders of a shapeless, grayish dress, which fell in straight ugly folds to her feet, she wore a bright scarlet shawl. It merely accentuated the witch-like effect.

In sinister silence she took the one stone step to the ground and began to move slowly forward toward the group of girls, a deep scowl drawing her bushy white brows together until they met.

"She's crazy!" came from Mabel, in a terrified whisper. "Let's run."

"I will *not*," muttered Patsy. "I'm going to speak to her."

Stepping boldly forward to meet the advancing figure, Patsy smiled winningly, and said: "Good-morning."

"What you want?" demanded a harsh voice.

Ignoring Patsy's polite salutation, the fearsome old woman continued to advance, halting within four or five feet of the group of girls.

"Oh, we were just taking a walk," Patsy brightly assured. "We saw this cottage and thought we'd like to see who lived here. We——"

"Where you live?" sharply cut in the woman.

"We are staying at Las Golondrinas. My father owns the property now. I am Patricia Carroll and these three girls are my chums," amiably explained Patsy. "We are anxious to find someone who can tell us something about the Feredas. We are looking for——"

"You will never find!" was the shrieking interruption. "It is not for you, white-faced thieves! *Madre de Dios!* Old Camillo has hidden it too well. Away with you! Go, and return no more!"

This tempestuous invitation to begone was accompanied by a wild waving of the woman's long arms. The gold hoop rings in her ears shook and swayed as she wagged a menacing head at the intruders.

"Just a minute and we will go."

Undismayed by the unexpected burst of fury on the part of the disagreeable old woman, Patsy stood her ground unflinchingly. There was an angry sparkle in her gray eyes, however, and her voice quivered with resentment as she continued hotly:

“I want you distinctly to understand that we are *not* thieves, even though we happen to be trespassers. When we saw this cottage we thought it might belong to some one who had lived here a long time and had been well acquainted with Manuel Fereda and his granddaughter, Eulalie——”

“Eulalie! Ah-h! *Ingrata!* May she never rest! May the spirit of old Camillo give her no peace!”

Here the strange, fierce old creature broke into a torrent of Spanish, her voice gathering shrillness with every word. She appeared to have forgotten the presence of the Wayfarers and directed her tirade at the absent Eulalie, who was evidently very much in her bad graces.

“Come on. Let her rave. She surely is crazy. She may try to hurt us,” murmured Eleanor in Patsy’s ear.

“All right. Come on, girls.”

Tucking her arm in Eleanor’s, Patsy turned abruptly away from the ancient belligerent who was still waving her arms and sputtering unintelligibly.

Without a word the quartette hurried out of the palm grove, across the grassy space and made safe port on their own territory, through the gap in the fence. This accomplished, curiosity impelled each girl to peer through the palings for a last glimpse at the tempestuous cottager.

She had not been too busy anathematizing the unlucky Eulalie to be unaware of the hasty retreat of her unwelcome visitors. She had now stopped flapping her arms and was bending far forward, her fierce old eyes directed to where the Wayfarers had taken prudent refuge. Noting that they were watching her, she shook a fist savagely at them, threw up both arms menacingly as though imploring some unseen force to visit vengeance upon them, and bolted for the cottage.



CHAPTER VIII

PATSY SCENTS A MYSTERY

“Now *who* do you suppose *she* is?” broke from Bee, as the old woman disappeared.

“Ask me something easier,” shrugged Patsy. “She’s a regular old witch, isn’t she? Dad must know who she is. Funny he never said anything about her to us. Suppose we trot back to the house and watch for him. He promised, you know, at breakfast, to be back from Palm Beach in time for luncheon so as to take us down to the boathouse this afternoon. He had a business appointment with a man at the Beach. That’s why he hurried away so fast this morning.”

Suiting the action to the word, the Wayfarers started back through the orange groves, discussing with animation the little adventure with which they had recently met.

“That woman was Spanish, of course,” declared Beatrice. “Could you understand her, Mab, when she trailed off into Spanish, all of a sudden? She said ‘*ingrata*.’ I caught that much. What does it mean?”

“It means ‘the ungrateful one,’” Mabel answered. “I couldn’t understand much of what she said. I caught the words, ‘Camillo, Manuel, Eulalie,’ and something about a spirit torturing somebody—Eulalie, I suppose she meant. ‘*Madre de Dios*’ means ‘Mother of God,’ or ‘Holy Mother.’ It’s a very common form of expression among the Mexicans. I believe this woman is a Mexican.”

“We know who Eulalie is. By Manuel she must have meant the Manuel Fereda who died just a little while ago,” said Bee reflectively. “But who in the world is or was old Camillo? And what did he hide? What made her call us ‘white-faced thieves’? What is it that we’ll never find? Will somebody please answer these simple questions?”

“Answer them yourself,” challenged Patsy gaily. “We’ll be delighted to have you do it. You know you are fond of puzzling things out.”

“It sounds—well——” Bee laughed, hesitated, then added: “Mysterious.”

“Exactly,” warmly concurred Patsy. “We’ve actually stumbled upon something mysterious the very first thing. I knew, all the time, that we were

going to find something queer about this old place.”

“I don’t think there’s anything very mysterious about a tousel-headed old crazy woman,” sniffed Mabel. “She certainly didn’t act like a sane person. Maybe she had delusions or something of the sort.”

“Perhaps *her* name is Camillo,” suggested Bee, her mind still occupied with trying to figure out to whom the name belonged.

“No.” Mabel shook her head. “Camillo is a *man’s* name, not a woman’s. She might have meant her husband or her brother. Goodness knows whom she meant. I tell you, she’s a lunatic and that’s all there is to it. If we hadn’t been armed with four big sticks she might have laid hands on us.”

“Well, Uncle Jemmy’s snake sticks were some protection, anyhow,” laughed Eleanor. “I’m going to keep mine and lug it around with me wherever I go. I may——”

A wild shriek from Mabel left the sentence unfinished. Walking a pace or two ahead of the others, Mabel had almost stumbled upon a huge black snake, coiled in a sunny spot between the trees. Quite as much startled as she, the big, harmless reptile uncoiled his shining black folds in a hurry and slid for cover.

“Oh!” she gasped. “Did you see him? He was a whopper! And I almost stepped on him! He might have bitten me.”

“Black snakes don’t bite, you goose,” reassured intrepid Patsy. “He was probably more scared at the yell you gave than you were to see him. He must be the same one Uncle Jemmy saw this morning.”

“Maybe he’s been raised a pet,” giggled Eleanor. “We may get to know him well enough to speak to when we fall over him coiled up on various parts of the estate. If you ever get really well acquainted with him, Mab, you can apologize to him for yelling in his ears.”

“First find his ears,” jeered Mabel, who had sufficiently recovered from the scare to retaliate.

“Our second adventure,” commented Beatrice. “Wonder what the next will be.”

“Nothing more weird or exciting than luncheon, I guess,” said Patsy. “There! We forgot to pick those oranges we were going to take to Auntie.”

“Let’s go back and get them,” proposed Eleanor.

“Oh, never mind. I dare say there are plenty of oranges at the house,” returned Patsy. “Auntie won’t mind. We’ll go down to the grove to-morrow and pick a whole basketful for her.”

By this time the Wayfarers were nearing the house. Rounding a corner of the building they spied Mr. Carroll some distance down the drive. He was sitting in his car engaged in conversation with a white man who stood beside it. Both men were too far away from the girls for them to be able to make out plainly the stranger’s features. They could tell little about him save that he was tall, slim, dark and roughly dressed.

“That must be the new man,” instantly surmised Patsy.

Pausing, she shaded her eyes with one hand, to shut out the glaring sunlight, and stared curiously at the stranger.

“Can’t tell much about him,” she remarked. “There; he’s started down the drive. Now we’ll find out from Dad who he is.”

The stranger, having turned away, Mr. Carroll had started the car and was coming slowly up the drive. Sighting the group of white-clad girls he waved to them.

“Hello, children!” he saluted, as he stopped the car within a few feet of them. “Where have you been spending the morning? Want to ride up to the house?”

“No, thank you,” was the answering chorus, as the girls gathered about the automobile.

“We’ve been exploring, Dad,” informed Patsy. “Is that the new man? I mean the one you were just talking to.”

“Yes. I met him at the gate. He had been up to the house looking for me. His name is Crespo; Carlos Crespo. He’s a Mexican. He tells me he used to work for old Fereda. That he was practically brought up on the estate.”

“Then he’s the very man we want!” exclaimed Beatrice eagerly. “He’ll be able to tell us about the Feredas.”

“I doubt your getting much information from him,” returned Mr. Carroll. “He seems to be a taciturn fellow. To tell you the truth, I wasn’t very favorably impressed by him. He acted sulky, it seemed to me. I’m going to give him a trial, because it’s so hard to get a white man for the job. I can’t afford to let this one slip without giving him a chance. If I find him balky, and ungracious to your aunt and you girls, I’ll let him go. He says he knows nothing about automobiles,

but a great deal about horses.”

“Oh, well, we don’t want him as chauffeur, anyway,” declared Patsy. “You and I can do all the driving. He’ll be handy when we go on our trip into the jungle. He can attend to the horses. Very likely, when he gets used to us, he’ll be fairly amiable. He can’t be any more snippy and disobliging than John was last summer while we were at Wilderness Lodge. He was positively *hateful* to us. Of course, that was all on account of his loyalty to that horrid Rupert Grandin. If this Carlos man proves honest and dependable, we sha’n’t mind if he sulks at first. He’ll probably get over it as he comes to know us better. We had an adventure this morning, Dad.”

Patsy straightway left the subject of the new man and plunged into a colorful account of their meeting with the strange old woman.

“Do you know who she is, Mr. Carroll? Did you ever see her?” questioned Mabel eagerly.

“No.” Mr. Carroll shook his head. “She must be the woman one of my colored boys was trying to tell me about the other day. He described the cottage you’ve just mentioned and said a ‘voodoo’ woman lived there who was ‘a heap sight crazy.’ He claimed he saw her out in her yard late one night ‘making spells.’ I didn’t pay much attention to him, for these darkies are full of superstitions and weird yarns.”

“We’ll ask Carlos about her,” decided Patsy. “That makes two things we’re going to quiz him about; the ‘voodoo’ lady and the Feredas. When is he to begin working for you, Dad?”

“He’ll be back this afternoon. I’m going to set him to work at clearing up the stable. It’s a regular rubbish shack. I’ll give him a gang of black boys to help him. I’m anxious to have it put in trim as soon as possible. To-morrow I must go over to the stock farm and see about getting some horses for our use while here. I’ll take Carlos with me and then we’ll see how much he knows about horses.”

“We’d better be moving along. We promised Miss Martha to be back in plenty of time for luncheon,” reminded Mabel.

“I’ll see you girls at the house,” Mr. Carroll said. “I’m going to take the car to the garage. We’ll hardly need it this afternoon. The Wayfarers are such famous hikers, they’ll scorn riding to the beach,” he slyly added.

“Of course we are famous hikers. Certainly we intend to walk to the beach,” sturdily concurred Patsy.

“Scatter then, and give me the road,” playfully ordered her father.

Moving briskly out of the way of the big machine, the chums followed it up the drive at a leisurely pace.

“Well have to change our gowns before luncheon.”

Eleanor ruefully inspected her crumpled white linen skirt, plentifully stained with orange juice.

The others agreeing, they quickened their pace and reaching the house hurriedly ascended to their rooms to make the desired change. As usual Mabel and Eleanor were rooming together. Patsy and Bee shared a large airy room next to that occupied by the two Perry girls. Miss Martha roomed in lonely state in a huge, high-ceilinged chamber across the corridor from the rooms of her flock.

“I don’t care whether or not this Carlos man acts sulky,” confided Patsy to Bee when the two girls were by themselves in their own room. “I’m going to beam on him like a real Cheshire cat. He’ll be so impressed by my vast amiability that he’ll be telling me all about the Feredas before you can say Jack Robinson. I’m awfully interested in this queer family and I simply must satisfy my curiosity. Do you really believe, Bee, that there *is* a mystery about them?”

“I don’t know whether there’s any mystery about the Feredas themselves,” Bee said slowly. “That old woman may or may not be crazy. I was watching her closely all the time we stood there. At first she was just suspicious of us as being strangers. It was your saying that we were living at Las Golondrinas and that your father owned the property that made her so furious. She had some strong reason of her own for being so upset at hearing that.”

“Maybe she used to be a servant in the Fereda family and on that account can’t bear to see strangers living here in their place,” Patsy hazarded.

“I thought of that, too. It would account for her tirade against Eulalie. I believe there’s more to it than that, though, else why should she call us thieves and go on as she did?”

Bee reflectively repeated the question she had earlier propounded.

“That’s precisely what we are going to find out,” Patsy said with determination.

“But you know what your aunt said,” Bee dubiously reminded.

“Don’t you worry about Auntie,” smiled Patsy. “When we tell her at luncheon

about our adventure she'll probably say we had no business to trespass. You let me do the talking. I sha'n't mention the word 'mystery.' I'll just innocently ask her what she thinks the old witch woman could have meant. She'll be interested, even if she pretends that she isn't. Last summer, at Wilderness Lodge, she was as anxious as we for the missing will to be found. If there is truly a mystery about Las Golondrinas, Aunt Martha will soon be on the trail of it with the Wayfarers. Take my word for it."



CHAPTER IX

THE WOOD NYMPH

Invited by guileful Patsy at luncheon that day to advance an opinion regarding the “witch woman” of the morning’s adventure, Miss Martha said precisely what her niece had prophesied she would say. She added something, however, which Patsy had not anticipated.

“You girls should have known better than trespass on private property,” she rebuked. “As for that woman, I should say she was mentally unbalanced. Don’t any of you go near that cottage again. I will not have you risking your lives in the vicinity of a lunatic. You had best make inquiry about her, Robert,” she continued, turning to her brother.

“I intend to,” was the reply. “This new man, Crespo, may know her history. Very likely she is one of those queer but harmless characters that one happens on occasionally down here. I hardly think there is any cause for alarm, Martha. Still, it will be just as well for the girls to steer clear of her.”

“I know I don’t want to go near her again,” Mabel said with a slight shudder. “She was positively savage.”

“One call is enough for me, thank you,” smiled Eleanor.

Patsy and Beatrice exchanged significant glances but said nothing. Each knew the other’s thought. Both had a valiant hankering to try their luck at a second interview with the witch woman. Unfortunately for them, Miss Martha’s stern mandate forbade further venturesome investigation.

Patsy’s carefully prepared question concerning the strange old woman Miss Martha replied to with a touch of impatience:

“My dear child, you can hardly expect me to be able to find meaning in the ravings of a lunatic. I have only one thing to say on the subject. I have said it before and I repeat it. You are all to keep away from that cottage.”

This emphatic repetition put a quietus to Patsy’s hopes of awakening her aunt’s interest in what she and Bee had already decided was a real mystery. Miss Martha’s one thought on the subject seemed to be that the society of an insane woman should be shunned rather than courted.

“My little scheme turned out all wrong,” Patsy admitted ruefully to Beatrice, as the two strolled into the patio after luncheon and seated themselves on the edge of the fountain’s time-worn stone basin. “I wanted to go to that cottage again, too.”

“So did I,” confessed Bee. “I was sure your aunt would say we mustn’t.”

“I’m going to make Dad take us there some day,” planned resourceful Patsy. “He’ll be willing to, I know. Then Auntie can’t say a word.”

“Hey, there!” suddenly called a gay voice from the balcony.

Both Bee and Patsy cast a quick glance upward to see Mabel leaning over the balcony rail.

“Are we going to the beach, or not?” she inquired. “If we are, you’d better leave off languishing beside the fountain and hurry up. We ought to start before sunset, you know,” she added satirically.

“It’s only one-thirty by my little watch,” calmly informed Patsy. “It’s a long time yet until sunset, Mabsie. Didn’t you know that?”

“What about taking our bathing suits?” demanded Mabel, ignoring Patsy’s playful thrust.

“Just as you like. If you and Nellie want to go bathing, then so do we.”

“I’d rather not,” returned Mabel. “I’d rather just poke around down on the beach and in the boat house. I think it would be more fun to get up early tomorrow morning and go bathing.”

“Those are golden words, my child,” grinned Patsy. “I was of the same mind, but too polite to say so. We can prow around the boat house this afternoon and find out what we need to take down there in the way of bathing comforts. Dad says we’ll have to add the final touches ourselves. We’ll be up in a minute, Mabsie.”

“All right.”

Mabel promptly disappeared from the balcony. Patsy and Bee rose. Leaving the patio they went upstairs to their room.

A few minutes later the Wayfarers and Mr. Carroll were swinging down the oleander drive toward the highway. Miss Martha had declined to join the expedition. Following the highway north for about an eighth of a mile, they turned at last into a narrow white road hedged in by vermilion hibiscus growing

rank and wild for lack of care. The road was shaded for some distance by double rows of palms, which had been planted on each side. Presently it entered the stretch of jungle lying above the beach and continued almost straight ahead through the bit of wilderness.

“Some of the Feredas must have liked to go bathing or they never would have had this dandy road cut through to the beach,” was Beatrice’s opinion, as the party came at last to the end of the tropical road and out onto the warm white sands.

The beach itself curved inward like a new moon to meet the jungle which surrounded it on three sides. At the left, near the water’s edge, stood the once dilapidated boat house. It now looked very trim in its new coat of white paint.

The jungle road ended almost at the middle of the new moon. Emerging from it and walking a few steps across the sands, the Wayfarers paused, by common consent, to gaze admiringly out on the glorious expanse of dazzlingly blue sea that lay only the breadth of the curving beach beyond them.

“This is the nicest bathing beach I ever saw!” exclaimed Patsy. “The beauty of it is that it’s our very own. We’re sole proprietors of this bit of sand and sea.”

“It’s the first one *I* ever saw,” laughed Bee. “You must remember that I never saw the Atlantic Ocean until I came down here. It seems thrilling to be so near to it.”

“Wait until to-morrow morning and I’ll give you a good salt-water ducking,” promised Patsy. “Won’t that be nice and thrilling?”

“Try it if you dare,” challenged Bee, “and see who gets the ducking.”

“I’m sorry now that we didn’t bring our bathing suits along,” lamented Eleanor. “I’d love to have a swim in that nice blue water. It looks fairly shallow, too.”

“At most of these lonely beaches along the coast, I imagine the water must be too deep for safety. This place looks safe enough,” agreed Mabel enthusiastically.

“We can’t tell much about it until we try it out for ourselves,” returned Patsy. “Sometimes shallows stop all of a sudden and you get into very deep water before you know it. I found that out once when we were spending the summer at Wildwood. Our cottage was quite a way up the beach. I started to wade into the surf one morning, and all at once I felt myself going down, down, down. I had

sense enough to strike out and swim, or I wouldn't be here now."

"I don't believe the water is very deep here."

Mr. Carroll now broke into the conversation. He had been silently listening to his charges, an amused smile touching his firm lips.

"You mustn't venture too far out, though," he cautioned. "Remember, there are no guards about to keep tabs on you. Besides, the mists down here often creep up very suddenly over the sea. If you happened to venture too far out and were caught in one, your chance of regaining the shore would be slim. I can't always be depended upon to be on hand to look out for you, so you'll have to be good children and not run any needless risks."

"We'll be as good as gold and as careful as can be," lightly promised Patsy. "Now take us over to the boat house. We'd like to see how it looks inside."

Conducted by Mr. Carroll to the trim little house, the Wayfarers found it as completely renovated inside as out. Mr. Carroll had gone to considerable pains to transform the former boat house into a comfortable bath house. Wooden benches had been built along two sides of it. Plenty of towel racks and hooks on which to hang clothing were in evidence. A good-sized mirror had been hung on one of the end walls. There was also a tall rack designed to hold wet bathing suits and numerous other minor details had been added in the way of conveniences for bathers.

"Why, it's all ready for us!" exulted Patsy. "You've thought of almost everything we'd need, Dad. You're a dear."

"I had it fixed up as nearly like the one we had at Wildwood as I could recall," returned her father. "You girls will have to add the finishing touches. Sorry there isn't a shower bath. I intend to put one in later when I have time to see to the piping for it."

"Oh, we can get along beautifully without it," Patsy assured. "It's ever so much nicer than I thought it would be. You've done wonders to get it ready for us on such short notice."

The other three girls were quick to concur with Patsy in this opinion.

"Here's the key." Mr. Carroll handed it to his daughter. "I now declare you Chief Custodian of the Bath!"

"I accept the high office. May I be ever faithful to my trust," declaimed Patsy merrily as she took the proffered key, a small brass affair on a ring.

“The first thing we ought to do is to sit down and make a list of the things we will have to bring from the house,” suggested practical Beatrice. “I brought along a little memorandum pad and a pencil.”

Extracting them from the breast pocket of her white middie blouse, Bee offered them to Patsy.

“You may do the writing, Bee.” Patsy declined the proffered pad and pencil. “I’ll tell you what we’ll have to have. Any valuable suggestions from the illustrious Perry sisters will be respectfully received.”

“While this important consultation is in full swing, I believe I’ll take a walk up the beach,” announced Mr. Carroll. “My black boys tell me there’s an old fisherman living not far above here who owns several boats. I’m anxious to get in touch with him and, if possible, arrange a fishing trip for us while we’re here.”

“Go ahead, Dad. You have my permission,” saucily replied Patsy. “After we’ve made our list, we’ll lock up the bath house and play around on the beach until you come back.”

The list having been finally completed, to the Wayfarers’ mutual satisfaction, the quartette left the bath house. Up and down the white stretch of beach they strolled for a little, enjoying the fresh sea breeze. Finally they seated themselves on the warm sands to talk and watch the incoming tide, interestedly trying to calculate how long it would be before they would have to move further back to escape its slow but steady advance.

“It’s coming nearer and nearer,” remarked Bee, as she fascinatedly watched the endless succession of waves break on the sand, each a trifle higher up the beach than the preceding one.

“I move that we move.”

Eleanor rose, shaking the sand from her white linen skirt. Patsy and Beatrice also got to their feet.

“I hate to move. I’m so comfy.”

Stretched at full length in the sand, Mabel made no attempt to follow her companions’ example.

“Stay where you are then and get your feet wet,” laughed Eleanor. “There’s a good-sized wave heading straight for you now.”

This information caused Mabel hastily to draw up her feet. Next moment she

was standing erect beside Eleanor.

“Dad ought to be back before long.”

Patsy stood gazing up the beach in the direction Mr. Carroll had taken.

“Oh, look!”

The sudden ringing cry issued from Beatrice’s lips. Her back to the sea, she had been dreamily staring into the green depths of the jungle. Now she was pointing excitedly toward a tangled thicket of briar bushes and flowering vines.

“Where? I don’t see anything! What is it, Bee?” instantly went up from Mabel.

“She’s gone.” Bee’s arm dropped to her side. “We scared her away. She ducked and ran.”

“Who ducked and ran? What are you talking about, Bee?”

It was Patsy who now impatiently put these questions.

“A wood nymph,” smiled Beatrice. “I was looking at that thicket up there and all of a sudden I saw her. She stood between two bushes watching us. Such a pretty little thing, with big black eyes and long black hair hanging about her face. I had just caught a glimpse of her when I called out to you. The minute she knew I’d seen her she turned and ran off through the green. I saw her black head bobbing in and out among the bushes; then I lost sight of her.”

“You certainly saw more than we did,” Patsy said ruefully. “I didn’t see anyone. Was she—well—a white person, Bee?”

“Oh, yes. As white as you or I, and about as tall as Mab, I think,” replied Beatrice. “She had a beautiful little face. She was wearing a faded brown dress or apron. I couldn’t tell which. It startled me to see her there, all of a sudden. She looked so wild and shy and pretty. Exactly like a wood nymph. I couldn’t help calling out.”

“Too bad we missed seeing her,” deplored Eleanor. “Maybe we’ll run across her some other day. She must live in this vicinity or she wouldn’t have been roaming around in the jungle. She certainly can’t be afraid of snakes. I wouldn’t care to go dashing recklessly through that wilderness.”

“That’s only because you’re not used to the idea,” declared Patsy. “By the time we’ve been here a couple of weeks, we’ll probably go tramping around in that bit of jungle without being in the least afraid of snakes.”

“Never,” was Mabel’s discouraging ultimatum.

The appearance of Mr. Carroll some distance up the beach diverted the minds of the quartette from the shy little apparition Beatrice had seen. With one accord the four set off on the run to meet him.

Nor had the Wayfarers the remotest idea that, from a concealing thicket of living green, a few yards above the spot where they had been standing, a pair of bright, black eyes wistfully and wonderingly watched them as they scampered across the sands toward Mr. Carroll.



CHAPTER X

GETTING ACQUAINTED WITH OLD OCEAN

“Isn’t there a road to this beach wide enough for the automobile to run on?” Miss Martha inquired of her brother at breakfast the next morning, in a tone of long-suffering patience.

“None that I know of,” was the discouraging reply. “That stretch of jungle above the beach extends for miles along the coast. The only road to the sea in this vicinity is the one cut through the woods by old Fereda. It’s hardly more than a path. Too bad you don’t ride, Martha. You could make it easily on horseback.”

“Never,” was the firm assertion. “I wouldn’t trust myself to the best behaved horse that ever lived. I suppose I shall have to resign myself to walking.”

“You needn’t go with us, if you’d rather not, Auntie,” broke in Patsy. “Dad says it’s perfectly safe for us to go alone. We’re on our own property all the way to the beach, you know.”

“That is not the point,” calmly disagreed Miss Carroll. “I feel it my duty to accompany you whenever your father is unable to do so. I dare say the sea breeze will benefit me. I merely dislike the idea of this tramp through the brush and weeds.”

“Oh, the road’s as smooth as can be,” hastily assured Beatrice. “It’s only narrow, that’s all. It’s really a beautiful walk, Miss Martha. I am sure you will like it.”

“I doubt it,” was the pessimistic response. “Nevertheless I shall go.”

Half an hour after breakfast a luggage-laden procession set off beachwards. Miss Martha brought up the rear with Mabel, eye-glasses firmly astride her nose, a book in one hand, her white parasol held over her head at a dignified angle. Beatrice and Eleanor walked just ahead, while Patsy buoyantly led the van, calling continually back over her shoulder to her companions with every fresh feature of interest her bright eyes picked up along the way.

“I must say the walking is better than I had expected to find it,” was Miss Carroll’s grudging opinion as the party at length emerged from the woods onto

the sands. "Walking, as an exercise, has never appealed to me, however."

"If you walk down to the beach and back with us every day, Auntie, you'll soon become a champion walker," Patsy said lightly.

"I have no such ambition," was her aunt's dry answer. "Further, I don't intend to come down here every day. On occasions when Robert is busy, and I do not feel inclined to take this walk, you will have to forego sea-bathing."

"Come on over and see the bath house, Auntie."

Patsy slipped an arm through that of her apparently disobliging relative. She was well aware of the fact that her aunt's bark was worse than her bite.

Escorted by Patsy to the little bath house, Miss Martha critically inspected its interior and set upon it her seal of placid approval. For a half hour the four girls busied themselves with unpacking and arranging the various articles they had brought with them as final furnishing touches. This done to their mutual satisfaction, they gleefully began preparations for their swim. In an incredibly short time they had donned their bathing suits and were ready for their morning dip.

"My first appearance as a deep sea swimmer," proudly announced Bee, making a low bow to Patsy.

"You look sweet, Bee. That dark red suit is awfully becoming," praised Eleanor. "Pull your cap down well over your head. Salt water makes one's hair so horrid and sticky."

"Come on! The water's fine! Hurrah for old Ocean!"

Patsy held out an inviting hand to Beatrice. Attired in a sleeveless suit of white flannel, with pale blue trimmings, one auburn curl escaping from under her white rubber cap, her gray eyes dancing, cheeks pink with excitement, Patsy was the embodiment of girlish prettiness and radiant health.

The Wayfarers made a charming picture as they caught hands and ran down the beach and into the water four abreast. There was a pleasant light in Miss Martha's blue eyes as she stood watching them and heard the concerted shout of glee that arose as they struck the water and Patsy immediately proceeded to administer the ducking she had promised Beatrice.

Being a very sturdy young person, Bee had a will of her own. In consequence a battle royal ensued in the water, punctuated by shouts of laughter. It ended by both combatants losing their footing and sitting down violently in the water, to

the great joy of Mabel and Eleanor, who seized the opportunity to fall upon Patsy and Bee and duck them thoroughly on their own account. Whereupon a good-natured, free-for-all combat waged.

Their first exuberance subsiding the bathers settled themselves to enjoy their swim in the buoyant salt water. Accustomed from childhood to sea-bathing, Patsy was an expert swimmer. Bee, who had learned to swim in fresh water, did fairly well, however. Mabel and Eleanor were indifferent swimmers. To quote Mabel: "We can swim and that's about all."

Having watched her flock make a noisy acquaintance with old Ocean, Miss Martha retired to a spot on the sands shaded by the overhanging palms where beach and jungle met. Seating herself on the clean, warm sand, she opened the novel she had brought with her and devoted herself to its pages.

Oblivious for the time being to the merry voices of her charges, she was finally startled by a piercing shriek of pain. As a result of going bathing bare-footed, one Wayfarer, at least, had met with disaster. Eleanor had had the misfortune to run afoul of a most ungracious crab, which had promptly shown displeasure of the intrusion by taking hold and pinching.

By the time Miss Martha had dropped parasol and book to rush to the water's edge, Eleanor had won free of her tormentor and was limping for land.

"What's the matter, Eleanor?" Miss Carroll cried out concernedly.

"A horrid crab pinched my foot," was the doleful response. "I thought it would never let go. I was wading near the shore and stepped on it. My, but my foot hurts!"

Emerging from the shallows, Eleanor dropped down on the sand and began tenderly nursing her injured foot.

"You should have worn bathing slippers and stockings," was the doubtful consolation. "They not only look well but are also a protection."

"But this is a private beach and it's ever so much more fun not to wear them, Miss Martha. I'm not really hurt much. My foot feels all right now," Eleanor hastily assured. "It hardly pains me at all."

"Oh, I sha'n't insist on your wearing them," Miss Martha smiled grimly at Eleanor's miraculous recovery. "I merely expressed my opinion."

By this time, Mabel, who had been some distance away from her sister when the latter cried out, now appeared beside her.

“What happened to you, Nellie?” she asked. “I heard you yell and came as fast as I could.”

“Oh, a hateful old crab pinched my foot. It wasn’t anything. I was silly to make a fuss about it. I frightened Miss Martha and I’ve spoiled Bee’s and Patsy’s sport. They’d started to race as far as that upper curve of the beach. Now they’re coming back.”

“It’s just as well.” Miss Martha consulted her wrist watch. “You girls have been in the water over an hour. That is long enough for your first day’s bathing.”

Patsy and Bee presently arriving on the scene with solicitous inquiries, they were promptly informed of Eleanor’s mishap by the sufferer herself.

“Poor ’ittle Nellie! Did a nasty, naughty old crab nip her tootsey-ootsey?” deplored Patsy. “Show Patsy that wicked crabby an’ her’ll kill him wight down dead.”

“Oh, stop, you goose,” giggled Eleanor. “You make me feel as though I were about three years old.”

“That’s the way she appreciates my sympathy,” grinned Patsy. “Never mind, Nellie. I forgive you, even if you did interrupt the grand race. Bee was gaining on me, anyway. She might possibly have beaten me. Want to try it over again, Bee?”

“Not to-day, Patsy,” objected her aunt. “You’ve been in the water long enough. By the time you girls are ready to go back to the house it will be nearly noon. I ordered luncheon at one o’clock, as usual. It will be one before we reach the house.”

“All right, Auntie. We’ll postpone the great race until to-morrow.”

As she spoke, Patsy began energetically to wring the salt water from the skirt of her bathing suit, preparatory to retiring into the bath house.

Her companions following Patsy’s example, Miss Carroll strolled back to the spot where she had left book and parasol. The white parasol lay precisely where she had cast it aside in her hurried dash to Eleanor’s rescue. The book——Miss Martha stared down at the sand in sheer amazement. The red, cloth-bound volume she had been reading had disappeared as utterly as though the earth had suddenly opened and swallowed it.

CHAPTER XI

A TIMID CALLER

“My book! Where is it?”

Miss Martha continued to stare severely at the spot where her book had so lately lain.

“I saw you sitting there reading it,” affirmed Eleanor positively. “I remember looking up toward you just before that cranky old crab nipped my foot.”

“Certainly I was reading it. I laid it down beside my parasol. It never walked away by itself. Someone stole it. This is very unpleasant. I don’t like it at all. It simply goes to show that I was right in not allowing you girls to come down here alone. Some unknown person has evidently been hidden back there in those woods watching us.”

Miss Martha shook a dramatic finger toward the jungle.

“Oh!” Bee gave a quick, startled gasp. “I wonder——”

“What is it, Beatrice? Tell me instantly,” commanded Miss Carroll.

“Why—nothing—only——” Bee hesitated. “Yesterday when we were down here,” she continued, “I saw a—a young girl standing back in a thicket watching us. She might be the one——”

“She might indeed,” grimly concurred Miss Martha. “I haven’t the least doubt but that she appropriated it. I have been told that the negroes down here are a thieving lot. Strange she didn’t take my parasol.”

“But this girl I saw was as white as Patsy or I,” protested Bee. “She was so pretty. I don’t believe——”

“I would far rather lay the loss of my book to her than to some prowling tramp,” retorted Miss Martha.

“A person who would take an ordinary cloth-bound book and not an expensive white silk parasol can’t be a very desperate character,” surmised Patsy gaily. “I guess there’s really nothing to worry about. Perhaps this wood nymph of Bee’s is fond of reading.”

“I am not inclined to pass over the incident so lightly,” disagreed her aunt. “I

shall insist on Robert's finding out who this girl is and all about her."

Some further discussion of the affair ensued during which Miss Carroll again repeated her stern injunction: "You must never come down here to bathe unless either my brother or I are with you. It strikes me that this community is entirely too full of thieves and lunatics for comfort."

"I'm pretty sure that it was our wood nymph who made off with Aunt Martha's book," confided Patsy to Bee as they finally started for the bath house. "I have a scheme of my own that I'm going to carry out. If it works—well, just watch me to-morrow and see. I'm not going to tell you about it now, so don't ask me."

"All right, keep it to yourself. I'd rather not hear it, anyway," amiably responded Bee. "It will be more fun just to watch your mysterious movements and——"

"Bee," interrupted Patsy, "things *are* really a little mysterious, aren't they? First we run across that queer, terrible old woman who talks in riddles about Eulalie and Camillo and our being thieves, etc. Then you see a wood nymph, and next day Auntie's book vanishes into thin air. We simply must find someone who can tell us something about who's who at Las Golondrinas. The minute I get back to the house I'm going to hunt up Dad's new man, Carlos, and quiz him. He must certainly know a little about things around here."

It being after one o'clock when the party returned to the house, luncheon immediately claimed Patsy's attention. Inquiry of her father as to where she might find Carlos resulted in the disappointing information that he had ridden out to the stock farm early that morning and would not return until late in the evening.

Mr. Carroll appeared somewhat concerned over his sister's account of the sudden disappearance of her book. Informed of the young girl Beatrice had spied watching the Wayfarers from the bushes on the previous day, a light of sudden recollection leaped into his eyes.

"Was the girl you saw a black-eyed, elfish-looking youngster with long black hair hanging about her face?" he asked Beatrice.

"Yes," nodded Beatrice. "You must have seen her, too," she added with quick interest.

"Where did you see her, Dad?" demanded Patsy excitedly.

“Uncle Jemmy and I surprised her the other day in the orange grove nearest to the lower end of the estate. She was sitting under a palmetto tree, singing to herself. She had a wreath of white flowers on her head and looked for all the world like a mischievous wood sprite.” Mr. Carroll smiled reminiscently. “The moment she caught sight of us she jumped up from the ground and was off like the wind through the grove. I haven’t the least idea where she went. I asked old Jemmy about her, but he’d never seen her before. He’s not familiar with this part of the country, you know.”

“As I remarked this morning to the girls, there seem to be altogether too many queer persons in this vicinity for comfort,” Miss Martha commented in a displeased tone. “Have you made inquiry yet, Robert, of your new man regarding that demented old woman?”

“No; I forgot all about her,” Mr. Carroll admitted rather sheepishly. “I’ll make it a point to do so to-morrow.”

“You might inquire about this girl at the same time,” pursued his sister. “It is very necessary that we should know exactly who these persons are and what we may expect from them.”

“This little girl may be the daughter of one of the fishermen. There are a few families of fisher-folk living in shacks farther up the beach. I noticed half a dozen bare-footed youngsters playing on the sands when I called on old Nathan, the fisherman, yesterday.”

“It is unfortunate that this property of yours happens to be so isolated,” deplored Miss Carroll. “Our only neighbors are, apparently, fisher-folk, one lunatic and a few negroes.”

“Never mind, Auntie. The Wayfarers are sufficient unto themselves,” consoled Patsy. “We can get along beautifully without neighbors.”

“If you feel uneasy about staying here, Martha, then I’ll make arrangements for you and the girls at one of the Beach hotels,” offered Mr. Carroll solicitously.

“I’m not in the least uneasy,” calmly assured Miss Martha. “I rather enjoy the novelty of this old place. Certainly I would not care to leave it now, since you have gone to so much trouble to get it ready for us. I merely wish to be sure that we shall not be annoyed by irresponsible or dangerous characters. The very fact that we have no near neighbors of our own class makes it necessary for us to protect ourselves against unpleasant intruders.”

The Wayfarers had awaited Miss Carroll’s reply to her brother’s offer with

bated breath. When it came, each girlish face expressed unmistakable relief. The charm of Las Golondrinas had taken hold of them. Patsy, in particular, felt that to be torn away from it now and returned to the artificiality of hotel life would be a cross indeed. She was anxious to discover if the old house really held a mystery.

“I hardly believe you will be,” responded Mr. Carroll. “A few days and I shall have my affairs arranged so as to be with you on most of your jaunts. Then we shall be able to find out a good deal more about Las Golondrinas and its environments than I’ve had time, thus far, to look into.”

“I hope so, I’m sure,” Miss Martha replied in a tone which implied anything but hope.

“How would you like to drive to Palm Beach this afternoon, stop at the Cocoanut Grove for tea and later take dinner at one of the hotels?” proposed Mr. Carroll, with diplomatic intent to change the subject.

This proposal met with instant enthusiastic response from the girls. Even Miss Carroll graciously admitted that it would be pleasant.

Luncheon over, the Wayfarers promptly scurried upstairs to decide the momentous questions of gowns. To go to Palm Beach merely for an afternoon and evening’s outing was an entirely different matter from going there for the remainder of their vacation. Tea in the Cocoanut Grove promised to be interesting.

When, at three o’clock that afternoon, the automobile sped down the oleander drive laden with its freight of daintily gowned girls, Miss Martha’s equanimity had quite returned. Seated in the tonneau between Mabel and Eleanor, she looked very stately and imposing in a smart frock of heavy wistaria silk, a plumed hat to match setting off to perfection her thick snowy hair and patrician features.

Bee was wearing her best gown, a becoming affair of pale pink taffeta which had been fashioned by her mother’s clever fingers. Mabel had chosen a dainty little dress of pale green jersey silk, embroidered with white daisies. Eleanor wore a fluffy blue chiffon creation, while Patsy was radiantly pretty in white net over white taffeta.

That the Wayfarers presented a charming appearance in their delicately-hued finery at least one spectator to their departure could testify. As the car swept through the gateway and onto the white public road, from behind a flower-laden bush situated just inside the gates, a black-haired, bare-footed girl emerged and

peered wistfully through the iron palings after the fast vanishing automobile.

When it had entirely disappeared from view, the elfish little watcher turned and threw herself face downward in the tangled grass and began a low disconsolate wailing, her thin shoulders shaking with convulsive sobs. There she continued to lie, beating the long grass with two small brown clenched hands.

Her emotion having finally spent itself she slowly dragged herself to her feet, tossed her long heavy black hair out of her eyes, and sped like a fawn across the lawn. Coming at last to a clump of low growing bushes, she dived in under them and reappeared, holding something in her hand. Then she was off again, this time toward the house. Slipping through the oleander hedge with the ease of a wood sprite, she made final port at the entrance to the patio.

The doors stood open. Like a shadow she flitted through the doorway and into the patio beyond. On a rustic seat near the fountain, she laid the object which she carried in one thin brown hand. Then she turned and ran in the direction from which she had come like a timid, hunted young animal.



CHAPTER XII

INTERVIEWING CARLOS

Strolling into the patio with Eleanor next morning, Miss Martha Carroll was treated to a surprise. Passing one of the rustic seats set at intervals about the patio, her eyes chanced to come to rest on an astonishingly familiar object. It was nothing more nor less than a fat, red-covered volume lying on the seat before which she had paused in sheer amazement.

“Why—where——” she stammered, adjusting her eye-glasses and staring hard at the gilt-lettered title, “The Interrupted Quest,” which conspicuously adorned the book’s front cover.

“This is really amazing!” she exclaimed, addressing Eleanor, who had halted beside her.

“What is it, Miss Martha?”

Eleanor looked wonderingly curious. She had not the remotest idea of the cause of Miss Martha’s agitation.

“*This* is the book that disappeared from the beach yesterday morning,” emphasized Miss Carroll. “*How*, I should like to know, does it happen to be here?”

“Why!” Eleanor’s blue eyes grew round with surprise. “That’s queer, isn’t it?”

“Too queer by far,” was the displeased answer.

“Oh, look!”

Eleanor had picked up the book from the seat. As she raised it, a slip of paper fluttered to the stone floor of the patio. Stooping, she gathered it in. Written on it in pencil was the single word: “Gracias.”

“It’s meant for ‘gracious,’ I guess,” puzzled Eleanor, “only it isn’t spelled correctly. I really believe it must have been that queer girl Bee saw who took the book. She’s honest, at least. She returned it. But why in the world did she write ‘gracious’ on that slip of paper? Here come the girls. May I tell them, Miss Martha?”

“Of course.”

Miss Carroll had seated herself on the bench, a decided frown between her brows. She did not in the least relish this latest performance on the part of the elflike stranger. The unexpected return of the book indicated that the odd little prowler was evidently, as Eleanor said, honest. Yet the fact remained that she *was* a prowler, which annoyed Miss Martha considerably.

“The lost is found!” Eleanor called triumphantly across the patio to the approaching trio of girls. “What do you think of this?”

She held up the book for them to see.

“Why, it *is* Auntie’s lost book, isn’t it? Where did it come from, Nellie?”

Patsy’s face registered a mystified surprise which was also reflected on the features of her companions.

“We found it lying on that seat,” explained Eleanor. “This slip of paper was tucked into it.”

Patsy took the bit of paper which Eleanor proffered. Mabel and Bee eagerly peered at it over her shoulder as she held it up and inspected the one word written on it. Her brows contracted in a puzzled frown.

“Humph!” she ejaculated. “I don’t see—”

“I do,” interrupted Mabel with a little laugh. “That word ‘*gracias*’ is Spanish for ‘thank you.’”

“Then my wood nymph is *Spanish!*” Bee cried out. “It was she who took the book. The whole thing is as plain as daylight. She only borrowed it over night to *read*. Miss Martha’s pretty white parasol didn’t interest her at all. It was the book that took her eye. And why? Because she wanted to read it, of course.”

“Go ahead, Sherlock,” teased Patsy. “What next?”

“Well——” Bee laughed and looked slightly confused. “We know, too, that she is honest, or——”

“That’s just what I said,” interposed Eleanor.

“Really, Beatrice, I can hardly imagine a wild-looking girl such as you have described as having literary tastes,” broke in Miss Martha drily. “It is far more reasonable to assume that the bright color of my book caught her eye. She may have thought it a picture book. Finding out that it was not, some strange impulse of her own caused her to return it. Her methods seem to me decidedly primitive. Why doesn’t she come out and show herself openly, instead of dodging about

under cover like a young savage?”

“She is probably just awfully shy,” staunchly defended Patsy. “She can’t really be quite a savage. She wrote ‘thank you’ on that bit of paper. That proves two things. She knows how to write and is not too ignorant to be polite.”

“I don’t consider prowling about in the bushes and spying upon strangers marked indications of politeness,” was Miss Carroll’s satirical return. “I can’t say I relish the prospect of having this young imp bob up at us unexpectedly at every turn we make.”

The Wayfarers giggled in unison at this remark. Miss Martha did not resent their mirth. She even smiled a little herself, a fact which Patsy shrewdly noted. It informed her that her aunt was not seriously prejudiced against the will-o’-the-wisp little stranger. Like everything else at Las Golondrinas, this new feature of mystery made strong appeal to Patsy. She was inwardly resolved eventually to hunt down the elusive, black-eyed sprite and make her acquaintance.

With this idea in mind she now made energetic announcement:

“I’m going to interview Carlos this minute and learn a few things about the natives. Anybody who wants to come along has my gracious permission. If nobody wants to, then I’m going just the same. He’s down at the stable this morning. Dad said so.”

“I’ll go,” accepted Bee. “I have almost as much curiosity as you.”

“I don’t feel like going out in the hot sun,” Eleanor said. “It’s so nice and cool here in the patio. I have no curiosity.”

“You mean energy,” corrected Bee.

“I have neither,” beamed Eleanor, “so just run along without me. You can tell me all about what Carlos said when you come back. I’ll be right here waiting for you.”

“You may wait a long while,” jeered Mabel. “I’m not so lazy as you. I’m going with the girls and practice my Spanish on Carlos.”

“I hope he’ll survive it,” retaliated Eleanor.

“You should worry. *Adios.*”

Mabel waved a derisive farewell to her sister as she turned to follow Patsy and Bee, who had already started for the main exit to the patio, which opened onto the driveway.

Arm in arm, the trio followed the drive, coming at last to the stable, a rambling stone structure situated at some distance below the house.

“There’s Carlos now! He looks like a cowboy, doesn’t he?”

Patsy had spied her father’s new man standing in front of the stable engaged in lighting a cigarette. Attired in an open-necked flannel shirt, brown corduroy trousers and a weather-stained sombrero, the Mexican presented a rather picturesque appearance, or so the Wayfarers thought.

Immediately he caught sight of the three girls, the man’s dark features grew lowering. He made a move as though to enter the stable door, then stood still, regarding his advancing visitors with sullen indifference.

“You speak to him, Mab,” urged Patsy in an undertone. “Say something to him in Spanish.”

“Oh, I can’t,” demurred Mabel. “What shall I say?”

“Say ‘good-day’ in Spanish,” prompted Patsy. “Go ahead.”

Raising her voice, Mabel called out politely: “*Buenos dias, señor.*”

The man made no effort to doff his sombrero in response to this hail. Neither did he leave off smoking his cigarette.

“I spik English,” he announced in a sulky tone that suggested affront rather than appreciation of being thus addressed in his native tongue.

“So much the better for us then.”

Patsy now became spokesman. There was a gleam of lively resentment in her gray eyes, born of the man’s ungracious behavior.

For an instant the two regarded each other steadily. Something in the girl’s resolute, unflinching gaze caused the man’s small black eyes to waver. He glimpsed in that direct glance the same determined will he had already discovered the “Señor Carroll” possessed.

As if unwillingly impelled to break the silence he mumbled sulkily: “What do you desire?”

“To ask you a few questions,” tersely returned Patsy. “My father tells me that you used to work for Mr. Fereda, the old Spanish gentleman who once owned this estate. So you must know something of the Feredas, and also of the few persons who live in this vicinity.”

Patsy's former intent to be affable had completely vanished. Decidedly miffed by the man's too evident surliness, she spoke almost imperiously.

"Las Golondrinas covers much ground. I know a little; not much," was the evasive answer.

"I am sure you must know something of the queer old woman who lives in a little cottage outside the estate, and just beyond the orange groves," Patsy coolly challenged. "Who is she and how long has she lived there?"

"Ah, yes, I know."

Carlos blew a cloud of cigarette smoke into the air and indifferently watched it drift away.

"She is Rosita," he shrugged. "Always she has lived there. As children she and old Manuel played together. Her father was the servant of his father, Enrico Fereda. Rosita is the widow for many years."

Three pairs of alert ears avidly picked up the name "Enrico." Here it seemed was still another member of the Fereda family.

"Is she crazy?"

It was Mabel who now tactlessly interposed with this blunt question.

It had an electrical effect upon Carlos. His attitude of bored indifference left him. His lax shoulders straightened with an angry jerk. His black eyes narrowed in sinister fashion.

"You spik of my grandmother, *señorita!*" he rebuked, drawing himself up with an air of offended dignity.

"I beg your pardon," Mabel said hastily, her color rising.

In spite of her embarrassment she was seized with an irresistible desire to laugh. Realizing that laughter was imminent, she turned to Patsy with: "I'm going back to the house. I'll see you later," and ingloriously retired from the scene, leaving Patsy and Bee to conduct the remainder of the interview.

"Why the *señorita* so spik of my grandmother? You have seen her?"

Carlos threw away his cigarette and appeared for the first time to take an interest in things. Bee thought she detected a faint note of concern in his voice. She had been watching him closely and had already decided that he knew a great deal more about Las Golondrinas and its environments than he pretended to know.

“We saw your grandmother’s cottage the other day from the orange groves. We walked over to it. Your grandmother came out of the cottage and asked us who we were. When we told her and tried to ask her some questions about the Fereda family, she screamed and raved at us and ordered us to go away and not come back. She behaved and talked very much like a crazy person.”

It was Bee who purposely made this somewhat full explanation. She had a curious conviction that her recital of old Rosita’s wild outburst was a piece of news to Carlos, and that it did not please him.

“Rosita is not *loco*,” Carlos shook his head in sullen contradiction. “What you want know ’bout the family de Fereda? Why you want know?”

As Patsy’s original intention had been to quiz Carlos about the Feredas, she now hailed the opportunity. The identity of Rosita having been established and her sanity vouched for by her grandson, at least, Patsy was eager to go on to the Feredas themselves. Carlos appeared, too, to be thawing out a trifle. She had, at least, aroused his curiosity.

“We would like to know the history of the Feredas because we think it would be interesting. We know by the portraits in the picture gallery that they were a very old family,” she began eagerly. “Do you know anything about those portraits? Have you ever been in the gallery?”

“I have been; remember nothing,” was the discouraging response. “Of the history this family know nothing.”

Carlos’ face had resumed its mask of indifference. Only his black eyes held a curiously alert expression which watchful Bee did not fail to note.

Patsy looked her disappointment. She had hoped to extract from Carlos some information not only about the Feredas but also concerning the portrait which so greatly interested her. Failing, she next bethought herself of the mysterious wood nymph.

“The other day my father saw a pretty young girl with black eyes and long black hair in our orange groves,” she began afresh. “My friend, Miss Forbes,” Patsy indicated Bee, “also saw her in the woods near our bathing beach. Can you tell me who she is? She certainly must live not far from here.”

A swift flash of anger flitted across the Mexican’s face. It was gone almost instantly.

“I have not seen,” he denied. “Now I go. I have the work to do.”

Wheeling abruptly he started off across the grass, almost on the run, and was soon lost to view among the trees.



CHAPTER XIII

TWO LETTERS

“Did you ever try to talk to a more aggravating person?” Patsy cried out vexedly to Bee. “Does he know anything, or doesn’t he?”

“He knows a good deal, but he won’t tell it,” returned Bee shrewdly. “For one thing he knows who our wood nymph is. He looked awfully black when you mentioned her. I wonder why?”

“She may be a relative,” surmised Patsy. “She’s Spanish or Mexican, I’m sure.”

“I hadn’t thought of that. You’re a better deducer than I,” laughed Bee.

“Thank you, thank you!” Patsy bowed exaggerated gratitude.

“If this Rosita is really Carlos’ grandmother, as he says she is, she certainly never told him about our going to the cottage that day,” declared Beatrice. “He pretended to be indifferent, but he was surprised. I read it in his eyes. Now why didn’t she tell him?”

“I give it up. I give the whole thing up. Every time we try to find out anything about these Feredas we bump up against a lot of questions that we can’t answer,” sighed Patsy. “We might better forget the whole thing and just enjoy ourselves.”

“Let’s go back to the house,” proposed Beatrice, “and tell that faithless Mab what we think of her for beating it off in such a hurry.”

“She knew she was going to laugh. I could hardly keep my face straight. Carlos straightened up and looked so injured. I don’t see, though, why he should call his grandmother Rosita. I never called *my* grandmother, Priscilla, I’m sure, even in my ignorant infancy,” giggled Patsy.

“It would have sounded rather disrespectful,” agreed Bee, echoing the giggle. “I can’t say much for Carlos’ manners. He never raised his hat to us at all, but stood there and blew smoke right in our faces.”

“Dad would be awfully cross if he knew that. I’m not going to tell him. He’s had so much trouble hiring a man for this place. He’d go to Carlos and reprimand him and Carlos would leave and——Oh, what’s the use? We won’t

bother with Carlos again, anyway. He'd never tell us anything. I'm going to write a letter to-day to Eulalie Fereda and have Mr. Haynes, the agent, forward it. I simply must learn the history of that dark, wicked-looking cavalier in the picture gallery. Of course she may not answer it, but then, she may. It's worth trying, anyway."

Entering the patio and finding it deserted, Bee and Patsy passed through it and on up stairs in search of Mabel. They finally found her in the big, somber sitting room, engaged in her favorite occupation of hunting for the secret drawer which she stoutly insisted the quaint walnut desk contained. This idea having become firmly fixed in her mind she derived signal amusement in searching for the mythical secret drawer.

"Is she crazy?" jeered Patsy, pointing to Mabel, who was kneeling before the massive piece of furniture, her exploring fingers carefully going over every inch of the elaborately carved solid front of the desk.

"Oh, so you've come back!" Mabel sprang to her feet, laughing. "I had to run away," she apologized. "I felt so silly. I didn't want to laugh in his very face. How was I to know that the witch woman was Carlos' grandmother? Did you find out anything?"

"No." Bee shook her head. "Carlos will never set the world on fire as an information bureau. According to his own statements, he sees nothing, knows nothing and remembers nothing. He is a positive clam!"

"I'm going to write to Eulalie *now*, while it's on my mind," announced Patsy. "Bee, you may play around with Mab while I'm writing. You may both hunt for the secret drawer. When I finish my letter, I'll read it to you. Then I'm going to write another. When that's done we are all going down to the beach. A great scheme is seething in my fertile brain. Where's Nellie?"

"In our room, overhauling her trunk," informed Mabel. "We can't go to the beach without Miss Martha, and she said she wouldn't go to-day."

"Leave that to me," retorted Patsy. "I know what I'm doing, even if you don't."

For the next half-hour, comparative quiet reigned in the big room, broken only by an occasional remark or giggle from Bee and Mabel as they pursued their fruitless search.

"There!" cried Patsy at last as she signed her name to the letter she had just finished writing.

“Listen to this:

“DEAR MISS FEREDA:

“I have heard of you from Mr. Haynes, the agent, from whom my father, Robert Carroll, purchased Las Golondrinas. My aunt, my father, three of my friends and myself are at present spending a few weeks’ vacation at Las Golondrinas. We are greatly interested in the portrait gallery and should appreciate it if you would tell us something of the large portrait of the Spanish cavalier which hangs in the center of the gallery. He is a most romantic-looking person and must surely have an interesting history. We are very curious about him.

“We have wondered that you did not reserve the collection of family portraits before selling the estate. If you would like to have them they are at your disposal. My father and I both feel that you have first right to them.

“Las Golondrinas is an ideal place in which to spend a vacation. We are quite in love with this quaint old house and its furnishings. Would you object to telling us when the house was built and how many generations of Feredas have lived in it? Judging from the many antiques it contained and its general plan, it must be very old indeed.

“We are sorry not to have met you personally and hope some day to have that pleasure. I understand that you are a young girl of about my own age. No doubt we should find that we had many interests in common. It would be a pleasure to have you visit me while we are here and meet my father, my aunt and my friends. Could you not arrange to pay us a visit?

“I shall hope to hear from you and that we may become better acquainted in the near future.

“Yours sincerely,

“PATRICIA CARROLL.’

“How is that for a nice, polite letter to Eulalie?” Patsy inquired. “Any criticisms? If so, out with them now. If not, into an envelope it goes and on its way to the last of the Feredas, wherever she may happen to be. I’m not really counting much on an answer. I haven’t the least idea in the world what sort of girl this Eulalie is. Anyway it will do no harm to write her. If she should answer and we became acquainted and she paid us a visit, it would be splendid.”

“I think it’s a nice letter,” praised Mabel. “Go ahead and send it, Patsy.”

“I am sure she’ll like it,” approved Bee. “It’s thoughtful in your father to offer her the collection of portraits.”

“It seems funny to me that she didn’t reserve them. Maybe she didn’t want them. She might have grown tired of seeing them every day for so many years,” speculated Mabel. “They aren’t a particularly cheerful-looking lot of ladies and gentlemen. They all look so cold and stern and tragic.”

“Auntie says they gave her the horrors,” chuckled Patsy. “When I told her that Dad said I could write to Eulalie and ask her if she wanted the collection, Auntie said: ‘A very sensible idea. She is welcome to them. If she doesn’t want them I shall have the gallery cleared out before we come down here next season.’”

“If Eulalie doesn’t want them, what will become of them?” Bee asked thoughtfully. “Would your father sell them? Suppose you were to find that some of them had been painted by famous artists? Then they’d be very valuable.”

“I don’t know what Dad would do in that case. He spoke of having an art collector come down here and look them over, you know. Of course, if Eulalie sends for them, that’s the end of it. If she doesn’t, Auntie will have them taken down. I know one thing. She hates the sight of them. Now I must write another letter. I hope I sha’n’t be disturbed while I’m writing it.”

Patsy beamed on her chums with owlish significance.

“Isn’t she snippy?” sniffed Mabel. “Come on, Bee, we’ve got to find that secret drawer. I hope we sha’n’t be disturbed while we’re hunting for it.”

Patsy merely grinned amiably at this thrust and settled herself to the writing of her letter. A little smile curved her red lips as the pen fled over the paper.

For ten minutes she continued to write, then called out:

“Come here, children, and sign this letter.”

“Never put your signature to a paper until you know what it’s all about,” Bee warned Mabel.

“Oh, you needn’t be so cautious. I was going to let you see what I wrote. Here!”

Patsy handed the letter to Bee.

Heads together, Mabel and Bee proceeded to read that which made them smile.

“DEAR WOOD NYMPH,” the letter said. “Why won’t you come and play with us, instead of hiding away in the thickets? We are just four young girls like yourself, so you need not be afraid of us. We found the red book in the patio, so we know that you must have paid us a call yesterday while we were away from Las Golondrinas.

“Why don’t you come and see us when we are at home? We’d love to have you. The next time you see us at the bathing-beach please come out of the woods and show us that you are not a tricky sprite but a real live girl like ourselves.

“We are placing this note in a book which we are sure you will like to read. We are going to leave the book on the sands just where you found the red book. After you have read it, won’t you bring it straight to us and get acquainted?

“Your friends,

“THE WAYFARERS.”

Below “The Wayfarers” Patsy had signed her own name, allowing sufficient space on the page for the names of her friends.

“That’s sweet in you, Patsy,” lauded Mabel. “Give me your pen. I’ll sign my name in a hurry.”

Mabel promptly affixed her name to the letter, Beatrice following suit.

“We must get Nellie to sign it, too. You and Bee take it to her, Mab,” Patsy requested. “I’m going to ask Auntie if we can’t walk down to the beach, for once, without an escort. It’s not as if we were going bathing. We’ll just leave the book and come straight back. We won’t be in any danger.”

“Where’s the book?” inquired Bee.

“In my room. I’m going to put the letter in that book we read on the train when we were coming down here. You remember. It was ‘The Oriole.’ It’s such a pretty story and not too grown-up for our wood nymph. I’ll meet you girls in the patio.”

While Bee and Mabel went to inform Eleanor of the proposed expedition and obtain her signature to the letter, Patsy took upon herself the delicate task of interviewing her aunt.

She found Miss Martha on one of the balconies which overlooked the patio, a

bit of embroidery in her hands, a book open on one knee. Miss Carroll had triumphantly mastered the difficult art of reading and embroidering at the same time.

Having come to the belief that it was really the girls' wood nymph who had taken and subsequently returned her book, Miss Martha was now inclined to lay less stress on the incident. Her theory of tramps having been shaken, she demurred a little, then gave a somewhat reluctant consent to Patsy's plea.

"You may go this once, but be sure you keep together and don't loiter down there at the beach. I can't say I specially approve of your trying to make friends with this young heathen. Once you come to know her you may find her very troublesome. However, you may be able to help her in some way. Your motive is good. That's really the only reason I can give for allowing you to carry out your plan. Be sure you come back in time for luncheon."

"You're as good as gold, Auntie, dear." Patsy tumultuously embraced Miss Martha.

"Really, Patsy, you fairly pull one to pieces," grumbled Miss Carroll, grabbing ineffectually for embroidery and book as she emerged from that bear-like embrace.

"You like it, though." Patsy deftly garnered book and embroidery from the balcony floor and restored them to Miss Carroll's lap. Dropping a kiss on her aunt's snowy hair she light-heartedly left the balcony to go to her own room for the book which was to play an important part in her kindly little plan.

Hastily securing the book, Patsy set her broad-brimmed Panama on her auburn head at a rakish angle and dashed from the room in her usual whirlwind fashion, banging the door behind her.

A few steps and she had entered the picture gallery through which she intended to pass on her way to the stairs. As she entered it a faint sound assailed her ears. She could not place in her own mind the nature of the sound, yet it startled her, simply because it had proceeded from the very center of the gallery.

An unbidden impulse caused her to direct her eyes toward the portrait cavalier. She caught her breath sharply. A curious chill crept up and down her spine. Was she dreaming, or had the man in the picture actually moved? With a little gasp of terror Patsy fled for the stairs and clattered down them, feeling as though the sinister cavalier was directly at her heels.



CHAPTER XIV

A REAL ADVENTURE

“What on earth is the matter?”

Seated on a bench beside Mabel and Eleanor, Bee sprang up in alarm as Patsy fairly tore into the patio and dropped limply upon another seat.

“Oh, girls, the picture!” she exclaimed. “That cavalier! He *moved*! I’m sure he did! It gave me the creeps! I was hustling through the gallery and I heard a faint, queer noise. I can’t describe it. It seemed to come right from the middle of the gallery. I looked toward that picture and it moved, or else the cavalier moved. I don’t know which.”

“You just thought you saw something move,” soothed Bee, sitting down beside her chum and patting her hand. “It was probably the way the light happened to strike on the picture that made it seem so. As for a queer sound! Every sound echoes and re-echoes in these old corridors. We heard you bang your door clear down here. You must have heard an echo of that bang in the gallery.”

“I’m a goose, I guess.” Patsy sheepishly ducked her head. “I never thought of the light falling like that on the picture. That’s what I saw, I suppose.”

“What has happened, Patsy?” called a dignified but anxious voice from the balcony. Miss Martha stood leaning over the rail looking down concernedly at her niece.

“Nothing, Auntie, dear. I heard a queer noise in the gallery and it startled me. Bee says it was only the echo from the bang I gave my door. I’m all right,” Patsy sturdily insisted, rising from the seat and blowing a gay little kiss to her aunt.

“*I heard* you bang your door,” was the significant response. “When you come back from your walk you must take one of those capsules that Dr. Hilliard prescribed for my nerves.”

“All right,” Patsy dutifully agreed. “Good-bye, Auntie. We’re going now.”

“Good-bye. Remember to be back by one o’clock.”

The three other girls calling a blithe good-bye to Miss Carroll, the quartette

left the patio with an alacrity that betokened their eagerness for the proposed walk.

“I didn’t care to tell her about thinking I saw the picture move,” confessed Patsy. “As it is I’m in for swallowing one of those fat nerve capsules that Auntie always keeps on hand. I need it about as much as a bird needs a hat. We’ll have to walk fairly fast to get to the beach and back by luncheon time, girls. We’ll lay the book on the sand, then watch from the bath house windows to see what happens.”

“I hope our wood nymph comes along and finds it to-day,” commented Mabel. “Still she might not go near the beach for several days. After all, there’s only a chance that she’ll see it and pick it up.”

“I have an idea she goes to the beach every day,” said Beatrice. “She may be as curious about us as we are about her. She may be so shy, though, that she won’t come near us, even if she does read our note.”

Thus discussing the object of their little scheme, the Wayfarers forged ahead at a swinging pace. Soon they had left the highway and were on the narrow, white, palm-lined road to the beach, talking busily as they went. Once in the jungle four pairs of eyes kept up an alert watch on both sides of the road in the hope of spying the elusive wood nymph.

She caught her breath sharply, ... had the man in the picture actually moved?

They came at last to the beach, however, without having seen any signs of their quarry. After they had gone through the little ceremony of placing the book on the spot on the sands from which the other book had disappeared, they went over to the bath house and, entering, eagerly watched from one of its windows.

After lingering there for half an hour, during which period the fateful book remained exactly where it had been laid, they gave up the vigil for that day and reluctantly started on the homeward hike.

“Of course we couldn’t really expect anything would happen just because we wanted it to,” declared Eleanor.

“Of course not,” her chums concurred. In her heart, however, each girl had been secretly hoping that something *would* happen.

The following morning saw the Wayfarers again on the sands. This time, however, they had come down to the beach for a swim, Miss Martha dutifully accompanying them.

Almost the first object which met their gaze when they reached the sands was the book. It still lay exactly where Patsy had deposited it, the white edge of the letter showing above the book's blue binding.

"She hasn't been here!" Patsy cried out disappointedly. "I guess our plan isn't going to amount to much after all."

"Oh, don't be discouraged," smiled Eleanor. "Give her time."

"Let's forget all about it," suggested Bee. "Nothing ever happens when one's awfully anxious for it to happen. It generally happens after one has stopped thinking about it and gone on to something else. It's a glorious morning for a swim. Let's hurry into our bathing suits and take advantage of it."

This wise view of the matter appealing to the disappointed authors of the little plot, the four girls betook themselves to the bath house to get ready for their morning dip in the ocean.

Having now become mildly interested in Patsy's scheme to catch a wood nymph, Miss Martha took pains to further it by establishing herself on the sands at a point on the far side of the bath house. From there she could neither see the spot where the book lay, nor could anyone who might chance to approach it see her. This maneuver was not lost on her charges, who agreed with Patsy's gleeful assertion that Auntie was just as anxious for "something to happen" as they were.

Soon engrossed in the fun of splashing and swimming about in the sun-warmed salt water, the Wayfarers forgot everything that did not pertain to the enjoyment of the moment.

True, on first entering the surf Patsy cast an occasional glance beachward. Bee's merry challenge, "I'll race you again to-day as far as the bend and back," was the last touch needed to drive all thought of the mysterious wood nymph from Patsy's mind.

Sturdy Bee proved herself no mean antagonist. When Patsy finally arrived at the starting point only a yard ahead of her chum, she was ready to throw herself down on the sands and rest after her strenuous swim. Bee, however, showed no sign of fatigue.

"You beat me, but only by a yard. To-morrow I'll beat you." Bee stood over Patsy, flushed and laughing.

"I don't doubt it." Patsy glanced admiringly up at her chum. "You're a

stronger swimmer than I, Bee. With a little more practice you'll be a wonder. Here I am resting. You look ready to start out all over again."

"I'm not a bit tired," Bee said with a little air of pride. "I'll prove it by swimming out there where Mabel and Nellie are."

Stretched full length in the sand, Patsy lazily sat up and watched her chum as Bee waded out in the surf, reached swimming depth and struck out for a point not far ahead where Mabel and Eleanor were placidly swimming about.

Indolently content to remain inactive, Patsy continued to watch her three friends for a little, then lay down again, one arm thrown across her eyes to shut out the sun.

While she lay there, enjoying the luxury of thinking about nothing in particular, tardy recollection of the blue book suddenly crossed her brain. It impelled her to sit up again with a jerk and cast a quick glance toward the object of her thoughts.

Next instant a bare-footed figure in a white bathing suit flashed across the sands toward the jungle on a wild run. In that one glance Patsy had seen more than the blue book. She had seen a slim young girl, her small, beautiful face framed in masses of midnight black hair, flit suddenly out of the jungle, eagerly snatch up the book and dart off with it.

First sight of the strange girl and Patsy's original intention to await developments flew to the winds. Obeying a mad impulse to pursue the vanishing wood nymph, Patsy plunged into the jungle after her, crying out loudly: "Wait a minute! I want to talk to you."

At sound of the clear, high voice the black-haired girl ahead halted briefly. Through the open screen of green, Patsy could see her quite plainly. She was looking over her shoulder at her pursuer as though undetermined whether to stand her ground or continue her flight.

"Don't be afraid," Patsy called out encouragingly. "Please don't run away."

As she spoke she started quickly forward. Her eyes fixed on the girl, her runaway feet plunged themselves into a mass of tangled green vines. With a sharp, "Oh!" she pitched headlong into a thicket of low-growing bushes.

As she scrambled to her feet she became aware of a loud, metallic buzzing in her ears. Then she felt herself being jerked out of the thicket by a pair of strong arms and hauled to a bit of dear space beyond.

“Stay where you are, *señorita*,” commanded a warning, imperative voice. “Move not, I entreat you!”

Bewildered by the suddenness with which things had happened, Patsy stood perfectly still, her eyes following the movements of a lithe figure, darting this way and that, as though in search of something.

Still in a daze she heard the voice that had addressed her utter a low murmur of satisfaction, as its owner stooped and picked up a dead branch from under a huge live oak. Two little brown hands played like lightning over the thick branch, ripping off the clinging dead twigs. Next the denuded branch was thwacked vigorously against the parent oak.

“It is strong enough,” announced a calm voice. “Now we shall see.”

Fascinated, Patsy watched breathlessly. She now understood the situation. Her headlong crash into the thicket had stirred up a drowsy rattler. The prompt action of her little wood nymph had saved her from being bitten by the snake. Now the girl intended to hunt it down and kill it. She looked so small and slender. It seemed too dangerous a task for her to undertake.

“Oh, please let it alone! It might bite you!” Patsy found herself faltering out. “A rattle-snake’s bite is deadly.”

“I have killed many. I am not afraid. Always one must kill the snake. It is the sign of the enemy. One kills; so one conquers. *Comprende?*”

The girl shook back her black hair, her red lips parting in a smile that lighted her somber face into sunshine. Patsy thought it quite the prettiest thing she had ever seen.

Very cautiously the intrepid little hunter began to circle the thicket, poking her impromptu weapon into it with every step she took.

“Ah!”

She uttered a shout of triumph as the sinister, buzzing sound Patsy had so lately heard began again.

Having located her quarry, the girl proceeded to dispatch it with the fearlessness of those long used to the wilds. Her weapon firmly grasped in determined hands she rained a fury of strong, steady blows upon the rattler. Finally they ceased. Giving his snakeship a final contemptuous prod with the branch, she called across the thicket to Patsy:

“Come. You wish to see. He is a very large one. Of a length of eight feet, *quisas*. Wait; I will lay him straight on the earth.”

Approaching, Patsy shuddered as her rescuer obligingly poked the dead reptile from the spot where it had made its last stand. She shuddered again as a small brown hand grasped the still twitching tail and straightened the snake out.

“It is the diamond back,” the girl calmly informed. “See.” She pointed with the branch, which she still held, to the diamond-shaped markings on the snake’s back. “He carried the death in his sting. So we shall bury the head, for the sting of a dead snake such as this is safer covered.”

“It’s horrible!” shivered Patsy. “It was coiled up in the thicket. I must have disturbed it when I fell. I don’t see how I escaped being bitten.”

“He was resting at the edge of the thicket, *señorita*,” corrected the girl. “Always such as he keep near the edge so that it becomes for them thus easy to strike the small creatures they hunt. So you missed him and he sang the song of death. I heard that song and came. He had eaten not long ago, I believe, and was lazy. So he did not try to go away. Now he is dead. So if the enemy comes to me, I must conquer. This is a true saying.”



CHAPTER XV

DOLORES

A sudden silence fell upon the two girls as the picturesque little stranger made this solemn announcement. Now that the excitement was over the wood nymph began to show signs of returning shyness.

Fearing that she might turn and run away, Patsy stretched forth a slim white hand and said winningly:

“I can’t begin to tell you how grateful I am for what you did. You were very brave, I think. I’m ever so glad to know you. Can’t we be friends?”

The girl hesitated, a wistful look in her large dark eyes. Very slowly she put her small brown hand into Patsy’s extended one.

“I will give you the hand because already I like you,” she said. “I cannot be your friend because I am too poor. Always I must wear the old ugly dress. Always I must go with the feet bare.”

“That has nothing to do with our being friends,” was Patsy’s gentle assurance. “I’m bare-footed, too.” She laughed and thrust forward one pink, bare foot. “Just look at my bathing suit. It was wet when I started after you. Falling down didn’t improve it.”

“Ah, but your feet are bare because you wish it,” reminded the girl sadly. “Never I wish the bare feet, but always it must be. I have seen you the other day in the automobile. You and your friends I saw. *Mi madre* you were most wonderful! You were *linda; hermosa!*”

The girl clasped her brown hands in a fervent gesture as she relapsed into Spanish by way of emphasizing her ardent admiration.

“I was behind the hedge and saw you go,” she continued apologetically. “With me was the red book, I would to bring it back. Was it wrong to take it for one day? I desired it much.”

“You were very welcome to it,” smiled Patsy. “We found it in the patio with your thank you. Did you read it?”

“Si; but not all. It was long, with such hard words. *No comprendia* all. It told

of the *amor*. That is the love, you know. Yet *amor* is the more sweet word. It is the Spanish. You must know that I am Spanish, but I speak the English quite well, though for a long time I have spoken it little.”

“I should say you did speak it well!” emphasized Patsy.

As it happened, Patsy was already decidedly amazed at this fact. Though the girl’s phraseology was a trifle clumsy at times, in the main her English was grammatical. To Patsy she was a bewildering combination of childish frankness, sturdy independence, shy humility and quaint charm. Above all, there hung over her that curious air of mystery which wholly fascinated Patsy.

“You have said you desire to be to me the friend. So I shall tell you why I speak the English,” pursued the wood nymph in a sudden burst of confidence. “First, we must bury the head of this,” she pointed to the dead snake, “then I will show you the place under the tree where we may sit for a little.”

“I’d love to,” eagerly responded Patsy.

Completely wrapped up in the adventure, impetuous Patsy had entirely forgotten the passing of time. The effect her disappearance would have on her friends had not yet occurred to her. Her mind was centered on her new acquaintance, who was now busily engaged in digging a hole in the soft earth with a sharp stone she had picked up.

“It is done,” she announced, when the crushed, ugly head of the reptile was hidden from view and the earth pounded down over it. “Come now. I will show you. Follow me and fear not. We shall not see another such snake, I believe.”

Following her lively companion for a few yards of comparatively easy going, the two came to a wide-spreading palmetto under which was a space clear of vines and bushes. Only the short green grass grew luxuriantly there.

“This place I love. I have myself made it free of the vines and weeds. Here I love to lie and look up through the trees at the sky. Sit you down and we will talk.”

Only too willing to “talk,” Patsy obeyed with alacrity. The wood nymph seated herself beside Patsy, endeavoring to cover her bare feet and limbs with her faded brown cotton skirt. Slim hands clasped about her knees, she stared solemnly at the white-clad girl beside her.

“I am Dolores,” she began. “That means the sadness. I have lived here long, but before that I lived with my father in Miami. My mother I never knew. I was

the little baby when she died. So I went to a school and learned English. Now I have seventeen years, but in Miami, when I was of an age of twelve years, my father, who did the work every day of the *carpintero*, became very sick. So he died, but before he died he wrote the letter to his friend who came for me and brought me here. So never more I went to school but had always the hard work to do.”

“You poor little thing!” exclaimed Patsy, her ready sympathies touched by the wistfulness of the girl’s tones as she related her sad little story. “Where do you live now, and why do you have to work so hard?”

“These things I cannot tell you. It is forbidden.” The girl mournfully shook her head. “So it is true also that I cannot be your friend. But if you will come here sometimes, I will see you,” she added, her lovely, somber features brightening.

“Of course I will, and bring my friends with me. They are dandy girls, ever so much nicer than I. My name is Patricia Carroll, but everyone calls me ‘Patsy.’ Why can’t you come to Las Golondrinas to see us?”

“It is forbidden. *Never* I can go there again. I am sorry.”

The brightness faded from the stranger’s beautiful face, leaving it more melancholy than before.

Patsy looked briefly baffled, then tried again with:

“Come down to the beach with me now and meet them and my aunt.” Sudden remembrance of Miss Martha caused her to exclaim: “Good gracious! I wonder what time it is! None of my friends knows where I went. They’ll be terribly worried.”

Patsy sprang to her feet in dismay. She wondered if she had really been away from the beach so very long. She was of the rueful conviction that she had.

“I would go, but I am afraid. If she saw me she would be angry and shut me up for many days. So she has said.”

This was even more amazing to Patsy. She longed to ask this strange girl all sorts of questions. Courtesy forbade her to do so. She also had a vague idea that it would be of no use. Fear of the person she had referred to as “she” had evidently tied the wood nymph’s tongue.

“I’d love to have you come with me,” Patsy said warmly. “But I wouldn’t want you to do anything that might bring trouble upon yourself. Is it right that

you should obey this—this person?”

“No; never it is right!” The answer came in bitter, resentful tones. “Often I think to run away from here, never to return. Only I have the no place to go. I am truly the poor one. Dolores!” She made a little despairing gesture. “*Si*, it is the true name for me.”

“Then if you feel that it is not right to obey a person who is treating you unjustly, don’t do it,” was Patsy’s bold counsel. “I wish you would tell me your trouble. Perhaps I could help you. Won’t you trust me and tell me about it?”

“I am afraid,” was the mournful repetition. “Not afraid of you. Oh, never that! Already I have for you the *amor*. You are *simpatica*. I would to go to the sands with you now and meet your friends. I cannot. I will show you the way to the road. So you can walk more quickly to the sands. I will try to come to this place to-morrow at this time and wait for you.”

“May I bring the girls with me?” petitioned Patsy. “My chum, Beatrice, saw you in the thicket the first time we came to the beach. She is longing to know you.”

“Beatrice; it is the pretty name. She is perhaps that one with the true face and the brown curls. I saw her look at me that day. She is not so pretty as you; yet she is pretty. So, also, are those other two girls who look alike and still not alike.”

“They are sisters; Mabel and Eleanor,” informed Patsy. “At home, away up North, they live next door to me. When I come here to-morrow I will tell you more about myself. I must go now. You haven’t said yet whether I might bring my chums with me to-morrow.”

“I wish it,” was the brief consent. “Now I will show you the way.”

It was not as far as Patsy had thought to the sandy road. Guided by Dolores, who knew her ground thoroughly, Patsy found jungle travel easy, even in her bare feet. The two girls finally came out on the road about an eighth of a mile above the beach.

“Thank you ever so much for showing me the way.”

Patsy paused in the middle of the road, her hand extended. Impulsively she leaned forward and lightly kissed Dolores.

The vivid color in the girl’s cheeks deepened at the unexpected caress. A mist sprang to her glorious dark eyes. She caught Patsy’s hand in both her own.

Bending, she touched her lips to it. “Oh, you are most *simpatica!*” she murmured, then turned and darted away, leaving Patsy standing in the middle of the white, sandy road, looking tenderly after the lithe, fleeing form until a tangle of green hid it entirely from her view.



CHAPTER XVI

NOTHING OR SOMETHING?

Meanwhile, down on the sands, three anxious-eyed girls were holding counsel with an equally disturbed matron.

“When did you see Patsy last?” Miss Martha was inquiring in lively alarm.

“She was lying in the sand when I started to swim out to Mab and Nellie,” replied Bee. “When I got to them, Mab began splashing water on me and we had a busy time for a few minutes just teasing each other. Then I looked toward the beach. I was going to call out to Patsy to come on in, but she wasn’t there. I supposed, of course, she’d gone up to the bath house to take off her bathing suit and dress again. She had said she was tired.”

“How long ago was that?” Miss Martha asked huskily.

“An hour, I’m afraid; perhaps longer,” faltered Bee. “We’ve looked all along the beach and called to her. We looked in the bath house first before we told you, Miss Martha. We hated to frighten you. We kept expecting she’d come back. We thought maybe she was hiding from us just for fun and would pounce out on us all of a sudden.”

“You should have told me at once, Beatrice.”

Worry over her niece’s strange disappearance lent undue sternness to Miss Carroll’s voice.

“I—I—am—sorry.”

Bee was now on the verge of tears.

“So am I,” was the grim concurrence. “At all events, Patsy must be found and immediately. I shall not wait for you girls to change your bathing suits. I shall walk back to the house at once. You are to go into the bath house and stay there until my brother comes for you. He will bring men with him who will search the woods behind the beach.”

“Won’t you let me try again along the edge of jungle, Miss Martha,” pleaded Bee. “I won’t go far into it. I’ll just skirt it and keep calling out——”

“Who-oo!” suddenly supplemented a clear, high voice.

It had an electrical effect upon the dismayed group. Out from the jungle and onto the beach darted a small, bare-footed, white-clad figure and straight into the midst of a most relieved company.

“Patricia Carroll, *where* have you been?” demanded Miss Martha sternly. “No; don’t try to smooth things over by hugging me. I am *very* angry with you for disobeying me.”

Nevertheless, Miss Martha made only a feeble attempt to disengage herself from Patsy’s coaxing arms.

“Now, Auntie, don’t be cross. A Patsy in hand is worth two in the jungle,” saucily paraphrased the unabashed culprit. “I’ve been as safe as safe could be. I’ve really had a wonderful time. I was so interested I forgot that very likely you might miss me and be a little worried.”

“*A little worried!*”

Miss Martha raised two plump hands in a despairing gesture.

“Why, yes. I——”

“Do you know how long you’ve been gone?” was the severe question. “Long enough to set us all nearly distracted wondering what had become of you. Really, Patsy, I think you’ve behaved very inconsiderately.”

“I’m sorry, dearest Auntie; truly I am. I didn’t mean to be gone so long. I saw her and before I knew it I was following her as fast as I could run. She came out of the jungle after the book.”

“Saw her? Do you mean our——” Mabel began excitedly.

“Wood nymph,” Patsy finished triumphantly. “I surely do. I not only *saw* her. I talked with her.”

“I might have known it,” came disapprovingly from Miss Carroll. “I should have set my foot down firmly in the first place about this girl. I thought you too sensible by far to race off into a snake-infested jungle, bare-footed, at that, after this young savage. I see I was mistaken.”

“She’s not a savage, Aunt Martha.” Patsy rallied to defense of her new friend. “She’s a perfect darling. She’s Spanish, but she speaks really good English in such a quaint, pretty way. She likes me and I like her, and we’re friends. We’ve shaken hands on that.”

“What is her name, Patsy, and where does she live?” eagerly asked Eleanor.

“Her name is Dolores. I don’t know where she lives,” confessed Patsy. “I asked her but she wouldn’t tell me. She said it was forbidden. I asked her to come to Las Golondrinas to see us, but she said that was forbidden, too. She read your book, Auntie. I told you she wasn’t ignorant.”

“What did she say about the ‘Oriole’?” interposed Bee, before Miss Carroll could frame an adequate reply to Patsy’s astounding announcement.

“I——Why, the idea! I forgot to ask her,” stammered Patsy. “I saw her pick up the book and run away with it. I started after her. Then I fell almost on that horrible snake and——”

“Snake!” went up in shocked unison from four throats.

“Why, yes.” Patsy colored, then grinned boyishly. “I was going to tell you about it in a minute. I caught my foot in some vines and pitched into the bushes. I stirred up a rattler. It began to sing and Dolores ran to me and dragged me away from the place before it had time to bite me. Then she killed it. It was as thick as my wrist and eight feet long. She said it was a diamond——”

“I must say you have very peculiar ideas of safety,” interrupted her aunt.

Despite the dry satire of her tones, Miss Martha was feeling rather sick over Patsy’s near disaster. In consequence, she was inclined toward tardy appreciation of the “young savage.”

“This girl,” she continued in a dignified but decidedly mollified voice. “I feel that we ought to do something for her. You say she insists that it is forbidden her to come to Las Golondrinas. Did she explain why?”

“No. I wanted awfully to ask her, but I felt sure that she wouldn’t tell me a thing. There’s a mystery connected with her. I know there is.”

“Nonsense!” Miss Martha showed instant annoyance at this theory. “I dare say her parents have merely forbidden her to trespass upon the property of strangers. I have been told that these persons known down South as ‘poor whites’ still feel very resentful toward Northerners on account of the Civil War. The old folks have handed down this hatred to the younger generations. This girl’s parents have no doubt learned that we are from the North.”

“But such people as these poor whites are Americans with American ancestors. Dolores is Spanish. Besides, her father and mother are dead. She said so.”

Patsy went on to repeat the meager account Dolores had given of herself,

ending with the girl's allusion to the mysterious "she" of whom she appeared to stand in such lively dread.

"Very unsatisfactory," commented her aunt when Patsy had finished her narration. "Understand, Patsy, I am grateful to this girl for the service she did you. As for the girl herself——"

Miss Martha's pause was eloquent of doubt.

"She's perfectly sweet," insisted Patsy with some warmth.

"Nevertheless, you know nothing of her beyond what she has chosen to tell you," firmly maintained Miss Carroll. "I don't approve of her dodging about in the woods like a wild young animal. For all you know this 'she' may have been put to a great deal of uneasiness by the girl's will-o'-the-wisp behavior. She may be so headstrong and disobedient as to require the adoption of strong measures."

"She's not that sort of girl," Patsy again defended. "She's gentle and dear and lovable. When she smiles her face lights up just beautifully. Mostly, though, she's terribly sober. Her voice is so soft and sweet. Only it makes one feel like crying."

"Hmm!" The ejaculation was slightly skeptical. "She seems to have completely turned your head, Patricia. I suppose you will give me no peace until I have seen her for myself. I am a fairly good judge of character, however. It will not take me long to decide whether she is a proper person for you to cultivate."

"Then come with me into the woods to-morrow," eagerly challenged Patsy. "I promised to meet her there, at a certain place, and bring the girls. I'm not the least bit afraid you won't like Dolores. I know that you will."

"What! flounder through that jungle and risk snake bite? No, indeed! Furthermore, I forbid you girls to do so."

"Then we can't see her!" Patsy cried out disappointedly. "I told you she said she was afraid to meet us on the beach. Listen, dearest and bestest Auntie. As we go back over the road to the house, I'll show you the place where Dolores wants us to meet her. It's only a little way off the road and easy to reach. There isn't the least bit of danger from snakes. There's a kind of natural aisle between the trees that leads to it. Dolores brought me back over it, so I know what I'm talking about."

"You may point it out to me as we go back to the house," was the nearest approach to consent which Miss Carroll would give. "Now all of you must hurry

to the bath house and make up for lost time. It will be at least two o'clock before we reach home. I will wait for you here. Don't stop to talk, but hurry."

Once in the bath house, however, the Wayfarers' tongues wagged incessantly as they speedily prepared for the homeward hike.

Very naturally the conversation centered on Dolores, of whom Patsy continued to hold forth in glowing terms.

"Wait until Aunt Martha sees her," she confidently predicted. "She can't help liking our wood nymph. She was a tiny bit peeved when I said that I knew there was a mystery about Dolores. There is, too. I'm sure of it. She's not headstrong or disobedient, but she is terribly unhappy. The person she lives with, that horrible 'she,' I suppose, must be awfully hateful to her."

"Do you think we could find out for ourselves where she lives?" Bee asked earnestly. "Then we might be able to help her. She may need help very badly. Your father said that she might be the daughter of a fisherman."

"We'll try to find out." Patsy spoke with quick decision. "Day after to-morrow we'll make Dad take us to where those fisher folks live. Maybe we'll find her there. Don't say a word about it when you meet her to-morrow. We'll just keep it dark and do a little sleuthing of our own."

Her companions agreeing with Patsy that this would be an excellent plan, the quartette rapidly finished dressing, locked the door of the bath house behind them and joined Miss Carroll on the beach.

"There's the place where we are to meet Dolores, Auntie," informed Patsy when the party reached the point on the road where she had left her new friend. "It's right beyond those oaks. You can see for yourself that the walking is good."

"It isn't quite so bad as I had expected," Miss Martha grudgingly admitted. "Since you are so determined to introduce this girl to me, I may as well resign myself to taking this walk with you to-morrow."

This being as good as a promise, wily Patsy accepted it as such and said no more on the subject. Added discussion of it might result in a change of mind on her aunt's part.

Reaching the house, however, a most unpleasant surprise lay in wait for the party. To see Mammy Luce standing in the entrance to the patio was not an unusual sight. To see her stationed there, however, her bulky form swathed in an ancient linen duster, a shapeless black hat, decorated with a depressed-looking

ostrich plume jammed down upon her gray wool, was another matter. More, in one hand was a section of a turkey red tablecloth, tied together at the four corners and bulging with her personal belongings. In the other hand she held a green cotton umbrella which she raised in a kind of fantastic salute as the Wayfarers approached the entrance.

“I’se gwine away fum here, I is,” she rumbled. “I ain’t gwine stay in no house where sperrits come sneakin’ aroun’. I done seen one this mawnin’.”

“What does this mean, Mammy Luce?” Miss Martha took majestic command of the situation. “You have no right to leave me like this without giving notice. Now tell me exactly what the trouble is.”

“I done tell yoh a’ready, Missis. I done seen a sperrit. I wuz bakin’ a cake, I wuz, in de kitchen. I done looks up from de oben an’ I seen a long, tall, ole white sperrit a-sneakin’ for de back stairs. I near fell daid, I did. When I come to, I wuz shakin’ like a leaf. So I jes’ put mah traps togedder quick an’ now I’se gwine. I’se been awaitin’ to tell yoh an ax yoh fer mah wages.”

“There are no such things as ‘spirits,’ Mammy Luce,” Miss Carroll informed the frightened servant. “You only thought you saw one.”

Alarmed at the prospect of losing an excellent cook, Miss Martha proceeded to do her utmost to convince the old woman that her visitant, provided she really had seen an apparition, was not supernatural.

“I seen it. I ain’t blind. I seen it,” Mammy Luce doggedly reiterated. “Yoh cain’t tell this niggah it wuzn’t no sperrit, ’cause it wuz.”

“Much more likely it was one of the maids who dressed up in a sheet on purpose to frighten you,” was Miss Martha’s practical view of the matter. “Where are Celia and Emily?”

“Em’ly she am upstaihs somewhar. She don’t know nuffin’ ’bout it, an’ this am Celia’s day off. Dey am good girls an’ don’t go for to skair ole Mammy Luce. ’Sides, this yeah sperrit wuz ’bout seben foot high. It wuzn’t no *pusson*. It ain’t no use talkin’, Mis’ Carroll, ’cause I’se gwine ter git out fore dat sperrit gits after this niggah. It ain’t no fun to be daid an’ I ain’t gwine to be it.”

Further argument on the part of not only Miss Martha but the girls as well proved futile. Mammy Luce had but one thought. That thought was to put distance between herself and Las Golondrinas. The substantial increase of wages Miss Carroll felt impelled to offer her did not interest the superstitious old woman.

“I jes’ want what’s a comin’ to muh an’ git out,” she declared with finality. “I’se gwine ober yander ’bout three mile toh see mah brudder. He’ll hitch up his ole yaller mule an’ tote ole Luce toh the station.”

“Go upstairs, Patsy, to my room and bring me my handbag. It is in the tray of my trunk. Here is the key.”

From the white crocheted bag swinging from one arm, Miss Carroll took a small brass key which she handed to Patsy.

As she passed through the patio and thence on upstairs, recollection of the curious impression she had received that morning in walking through the portrait gallery came back to Patsy.

She had been absolutely sure at the moment that the pictured cavalier had moved. Mammy Luce, it seemed, was equally sure that she had seen a “sperrit.” The question that now obtruded itself in Patsy’s mind was, had she and Mammy Luce seen *nothing*, or had both of them really seen *something*?



CHAPTER XVII

PUZZLING OVER THE PUZZLE

Now minus a cook, it remained to the Wayfarers to prepare their own luncheon. Not stopping to bewail their cookless state, the four girls, under the direction of Miss Martha, attacked the task with the utmost good humor.

Miss Carroll, however, was not so optimistically inclined. Mammy Luce's sudden departure had deprived her of a skilled cook, whom she could not easily replace. She was thankful that the panic had not extended to the maids. Providentially, Celia was absent for the day. According to Mammy Luce, Emily was still in ignorance of the "sperrit's" visitation. She had eaten her noonday meal and gone back to her upstairs work before Mammy Luce had seen the dread apparition.

In the midst of preparations for the belated luncheon, she appeared in the kitchen, broom and duster in hand, her black eyes round with curiosity at the unusual sight which met them.

In as casual a tone as she could muster, Miss Carroll informed the girl that Mammy Luce had left Las Golondrinas. This news appeared not to surprise Emily so much as had the sight of the "young ladies an' the Missis aworkin' in de kitchen."

"Huh!" was her scornful ejaculation. "I guess ole Luce done got skairt 'bout dat ere ghos'. Carlos wuz tellin' her 'bout it t'other day. That Spanish fellah in the queer duds up thar in the pitcher gallery done walk aroun' this house. He go fer to say he's seen it. He am a liar. They ain't no sech things 's ghos'es, I says, but Luce, she says they is. She wuz 'fraid she'd see it."

"Certainly there are no such things as ghosts, Emily," Miss Martha made haste to agree. "I am glad to find you so sensible on the subject. Since you have mentioned it, I might as well say that it was this ghost idea which caused Mammy Luce to leave us."

Miss Martha diplomatically avoided making a direct explanation of the affair. Once Emily learned Mammy Luce had insisted that she had actually *seen* a ghost, she might not remain firm in her conviction that there were "no sech things."

“I hope Celia has no such foolish ideas about ghosts as Mammy Luce,” Miss Carroll continued inquiringly.

“Celie, she’s ’bout half an’ half. She says as thar might be or mightn’t. Only she says she ain’t gwine to git skairt ’less she sees one. Celie’n me, we don’t take no stock in that good-fer-nuffin’ Carlos. He am a sorehead, he am. Ef it’s ’greeable, Mis’ Carroll, I reckon I ain’t sech a bad cook. Leastways, I don’ mind tryin’. Ef yoh likes mah cookin’ mebbe I can git mah sister t’ come an’ do mah work.”

This was joyful news indeed. Needless to mention, Miss Carroll was not slow to take good-natured Emily at her word.

“I shall be very glad to have you try, Emily,” she said. “If you can get along with the cooking it will save us the trouble of sending to Miami for another cook. Where does your sister live? Perhaps she wouldn’t care to come here for so short a time.”

“She lives home with mah mudder, Mis’ Carroll. Jes’ a little ways from Miami. She am only fifteen, but she am right smaht. I done gwine t’ write her t’night,” assured Emily, showing her white teeth in a wide grin.

“Do so, Emily. To have your sister come here will simplify matters wonderfully.”

Miss Martha looked her relief at this unexpected solution of the domestic problem.

With the deft assistance of Emily, the luncheon which the Wayfarers had busied themselves in preparing was soon on the dining-room table. It consisted of bread and butter, bacon, an omelet, and a salad, composed of tomatoes, green sweet peppers and lettuce, with French dressing. The fateful cake which Mammy Luce was removing from the oven when she saw the “sperrit” now figured as dessert along with oranges which Patsy had painstakingly sliced and sugared.

Previous to Emily’s disappearance, the preparation of luncheon had been accompanied by much talk and laughter on the part of the Wayfarers. Presently seated at table, they had considerably less to say. Emily’s revelation concerning Carlos had set them all to wondering and speculating.

“It strikes me that this Carlos has very little good sense,” Miss Martha criticized the moment Emily had left the dining-room. “He should have known better than tell such a tale to old Mammy Luce. I shall speak to your father about him, Patsy.”

“When we asked him about the portrait gallery he said he didn’t know a thing,” Patsy replied with a puzzled frown. “Do you suppose he really told Mammy Luce about the picture and the ghost? If he did, that proves he wasn’t telling us the truth. Now why should he lie to us?”

“Very likely to get rid of answering your questions,” responded her aunt. “Undoubtedly he knew better than to tell you girls such a silly story. He knew you would refer to it to your father and that Robert would be displeased. I believe Emily, of course. As to Mammy Luce, I don’t know. It is exactly the sort of foolish yarn that I warned you we were likely to hear down South. I am sorry that it should have cost us our cook.”

The tale of the ghostly cavalier was not disturbing Miss Carroll in the least. The loss of a cook was of far greater importance to her.

The Wayfarers, however, were more impressed by Mammy Luce’s ghost than they dared allow Miss Carroll to guess. During luncheon four pairs of bright eyes continually exchanged significant glances. They were burning to talk things over among themselves.

Miss Carroll’s announcement that she intended to take a nap directly after luncheon gave them the longed-for opportunity. Patsy’s demure invitation, “Come on into Bee’s and my room, Perry children,” held untold meaning.

“Girls,” began Patsy solemnly, the instant the door of the room closed behind the quartette, “there’s something queer about this old house. There’s something queer about that picture. Carlos knows more than he pretended to know. I wouldn’t feel so—well, so funny about it if I hadn’t thought I saw that cavalier in the picture move. It gives me the shivers. Do you suppose there is—Oh, there simply can’t be a *ghost* in this house!”

“Of course there isn’t,” smiled Bee. “Brace up, Patsy. You’re just nervous over that picture business this morning. I think perhaps Carlos told Mammy Luce that story just to be malicious and scare her. He looks like that sort of person. Maybe he dislikes us as much as his grandmother appeared to, and just because we live in the house that belonged to his former employer.”

“If that’s the case, he may have told the yarn to Mammy Luce on purpose to get her to leave, and so inconvenience us,” suggested Eleanor. “He may have thought she’d leave in a hurry without telling us why she was going.”

“Let’s begin at the beginning and see what we know,” proposed Bee. “First, there’s crazy old Rosita who called us thieves and said we’d never find

something or other that Camillo, whoever he is or was, had hidden. Second, there's Carlos, who turned out to be the grandson of Rosita, who said she was not crazy but pretended to know nothing else about anything here. Third, there's Mammy Luce, who went off and left us because she saw, or thought she saw, a ghost. Fourth, there's Emily, who said Carlos told Mammy Luce that the ghost of the cavalier in the picture gallery walked about this house. Fifth, there's Patsy, who heard an odd noise in the gallery and saw, or thought she saw, the cavalier picture move. Put it all together. Does it mean something or nothing?"

"No one except Carlos can answer that question. The whole thing, except Patsy's scare, centers on him," declared Mabel.

"I'm going to have a private talk with Dad," announced Patsy. "I'm going to ask him not to speak to Carlos about the ghost story, but to let him alone and see what happens next. If he really has a grudge against us he'll be sure to do something else to bother us. We'll be on the watch and in that way we'll catch him at it. Then maybe Dad can make him tell what he wouldn't tell us."

"But what about your aunt, Patsy?" conscientiously reminded Eleanor. "She's going to ask your father to speak to Carlos, you know."

"I'll see Dad first and explain things. I'll ask him to tell Auntie, when she mentions Carlos to him, that he thinks it would be a good idea to let Carlos alone for the present and watch him. It is a good idea, and I know Dad will agree with me. I'd say so to Auntie myself if I were sure she wouldn't mind. She would, though, because she's not in sympathy with us when it comes to mysteries."

"If any more queer things happen, Miss Martha will have to admit that there is a mystery hanging over Las Golondrinas," Bee predicted. "I forgot to add Dolores to the list. She's another mystery."

"She surely is, but she doesn't belong to the Carlos puzzle," returned Patsy. "Never mind, give us time and we'll put all the pieces of all the puzzles together. We're determined to do it. That's half the battle."

"We may even find the secret drawer," supplemented Mabel hopefully.

This remark was received with derisive chuckles. Her companions had come to regard the mythical secret drawer as a huge joke.

"Laugh at me if you want to. When I find it, then it will be *my* turn to laugh at *you*," Mabel emphasized.

"*When* you do, we'll stand in line and let you laugh at us," jeered Eleanor.

“I’ll remember that,” retorted her sister. “I’m going to the sitting-room now to patiently pursue my indefatigable investigations. Ahem! ‘Never despair’ is my motto.”

“‘Sleep, sweetly sleep,’ is going to be mine,” yawned Eleanor. “I’m going to take a nap.”

“I’d *like* to go down to the orange groves.” Patsy beamed significantly upon Beatrice. “I’m not supposed to trail around this vast tract of terrestrial territory alone. If some one will kindly volunteer——”

“I’ll take pity on you,” laughed Bee. “Come on. While we’re about it we might as well lug a basket along and fill it with oranges. ‘Try to be useful as well as ornamental.’ That’s *my* motto.”

“Mine is: ‘Be thankful for small favors,’” retaliated Patsy with an impish grin. “Allow me to escort you to the kitchen for the basket. Good-bye, Perry children. We’ll see you later.”

Patsy offered her arm to Bee with an extravagant flourish and the two girls left the room laughing. Mabel promptly made a bee-line for the sitting-room, while Eleanor went to her own room for her nap.

Bee and Patsy spent an enjoyable but uneventful hour in the orange groves, returning with their basket piled high with luscious fruit. Mindful of her intent to have first audience with her father on his return that afternoon, Patsy posted herself on a balcony overlooking the drive to watch for him.

When, at five o’clock, he drove the car up the drive, he was met halfway to the house by his daughter who imperiously demanded a ride to the garage.

Informed of all that had recently occurred and the course of action Patsy had laid out for him, Mr. Carroll looked decidedly grave.

“I’m sorry to hear this of Carlos,” he said. “So far as work goes, he’s an excellent man. I’m going to adopt your suggestion, Patsy, to say nothing to him at present about this ghost business. I’ll explain to your Aunt Martha so that she’ll be satisfied to let matters stand as they are. Of course, if he continues to stir up trouble among the maids or my black boys by frightening them with ridiculous yarns about ghosts, then I shall feel obliged to come down on him for it.”

“Have you asked him yet about either old Rosita or Dolores?”

Having related to her father all she knew of both, Patsy now referred to them

by name.

“Yes.” Mr. Carroll smiled. “I described them to him this morning and inquired about them. He had nothing to say beyond that this Rosita was his grandmother and not insane. He swears that he never saw this girl Dolores.”

“I don’t believe him,” Patsy said with a vigorous shake of her auburn head. “She has lived in this neighborhood several years. She told me so. He was brought up here. He must have seen her often. He’s a Spanish-speaking Mexican and she’s Spanish. He must certainly know who she is. Why he should deny knowing her I can’t imagine. Just the same, it’s something I intend to find out, if only for my own satisfaction.”



CHAPTER XVIII

SOMETHING!

“There’s to be a Venetian fête on Lake Worth on Thursday evening. Would you like to attend it?”

Mr. Carroll made this announcement at the breakfast table one Monday morning to an interested group of listeners. A week had elapsed since the eventful morning on which Patsy had made the acquaintance of Dolores and the Wayfarers had returned from the beach in time to witness the departure of ghost-ridden Mammy Luce.

On the following morning they had gone, accompanied by Miss Carroll, to keep tryst with their wood nymph at the spot she had designated. As Patsy had predicted, her chums immediately succumbed to the charm of the little Spanish girl.

Even Miss Martha had no fault to find with her so far as behavior went. She found the young girl neither ill-bred nor uncouth. Instead, Dolores exhibited toward stately Miss Carroll a shy deference that would have impressed in her favor a far more critical judge.

What Miss Martha did not quite like, however, was Dolores’ wistful but absolutely firm refusal to reveal where she lived or with whom she lived.

“I would to answer and thus please you,” she had sadly said, lifting bright, brave eyes to meet squarely those of her dignified questioner. “I would to make you the visit to Las Golondrinas and thus be made so happy. I cannot. It is forbidden.”

At the conclusion of the interview they had left her standing under the fringed green of the palmettos, hands crossed over her breast, dark eyes eloquent with longing. Before they parted from her, however, Patsy obtained her reluctant promise to come to them on the beach for a few minutes, at least, whenever she chanced to see the Wayfarers bathing there.

Two mornings afterward she had kept her word. With her she had brought the blue book, voicing eager praise of the “very sweet story” and her thanks for the “*simpatica*” letter. Though the Wayfarers had pressed her to stay, she remained with them but a few moments. During that time she had cast frequent timid

glances toward the jungle as though in lively fear of something or someone known to herself alone.

Unable to withstand Patsy's coaxing plea of: "Come again to-morrow morning and I'll have another nice story book here for you," she had paid them a brief call on the next day. Since that time she had not again appeared on the beach at their bathing hour, and the Wayfarers did considerable wondering as to what had become of her.

The past three days having, therefore, been particularly uneventful beyond the healthy pleasures of outdoors, the four girls now hailed Mr. Carroll's proposal with acclamation.

"What is a Venetian fête?" inquired Bee. "It's held on the water. I know that much. What do we have to do? Do we dress in fancy costumes?"

"Only the boats dress up in fancy costumes at Venetian fêtes, Bee," informed Patsy, laughing. "We wear our best bib and tucker, of course, and sail around in a motor launch or some kind of boat that's all decorated with Chinese lanterns, colored lights, etc. Am I right, Dad?"

"Right-o," smiled Mr. Carroll. "As it happens, your fairy bark awaits you. I've engaged a power boat for the evening. Had a hard time getting hold of it, too. We'll run the car down to the beach during the afternoon of Thursday. I'll have the lanterns and festoonings aboard the launch and you girls can spend the time before dinner decorating it. How will that suit you?"

The loud babble of appreciation that arose caused Mr. Carroll playfully to put his hands over his ears.

"My, what a noisy crowd!" he exclaimed.

"We're only trying to express our all-around joyfulness," Patsy defended. "You wouldn't have liked it a bit if we had just said primly, 'How nice!' We believe in noise and lots of it."

"So I've noticed," was the pertinent retort. "Well, I'm glad you're pleased. You'll have to excuse me now. I've an engagement with a man at ten at the Ponciana. I must be hiking."

"Really, Robert, I haven't had a chance to utter a sound since you told us about the fête," came plaintively from Miss Martha, though her eyes twinkled. As a matter of fact she had purposely kept silent, allowing the Wayfarers to bubble forth their jubilation uninterrupted. "Do you consider this boat you've

engaged perfectly safe? I hope you know how to run it.”

“Oh, I sha’n’t run it. The man from whom I rented it will be on hand to do that. It’s absolutely safe, so don’t worry, Martha, but make up your mind to enjoy yourself.”

With this assurance, Mr. Carroll hastily departed. After he had gone the others lingered at table, further to discuss the prospective pleasure in store for them.

“I wish we could take Dolores with us,” Patsy said generously. “She’d love the fête. If only we could coax her to go she could wear one of my gowns. Maybe she’ll be at the beach this morning. If she is, I’m going to tease her good and hard to go with us. You wouldn’t mind, would you, Auntie?”

“No. Invite her if you choose. I don’t doubt she would behave as well as the rest of you,” Miss Carroll placidly opined. “If she should accept (I doubt it), you must make her understand, Patsy, that she will have to appear in one of your gowns, not to mention pumps and hose. We shall probably meet a number of persons we know at Palm Beach.”

“Oh, that part of it will be all right,” Patsy answered with the supreme confidence of one who can remove mountains. “It’s whether she’ll promise to go that’s bothering me.”

Greatly to the disappointment of the Wayfarers, Dolores did not appear on the beach that morning. Nor did they see any signs of her on the next day or the next. Thursday morning did not bring her to the sands.

On the way back to the house from the beach the party even went so far as to visit the spot in the jungle which Dolores had claimed as her own special nook. But she was not there. Though the girls called out her name repeatedly in their fresh young voices, only the twitter of the birds and the sighing of the light breeze among the leaves answered them. Dolores had evidently forsaken her forest haunt for a time at least.

“Very likely that horrible ‘she’ is keeping Dolores in and making her work,” grumbled Patsy to Bee when the party finally returned to the road and started for the house. “You know, Dolores told me that she had had to do very hard work ever since she came here to live after her father died. It’s too bad Dad has been so busy lately. We can’t go to see those fisher folks until he can find time to go with us. I do wish Auntie would allow us to go there by ourselves. We could walk straight up the beach and never come to a bit of harm.”

“Well, she won’t, so we might as well be resigned,” replied Bee ruefully.

“She’s right, of course. My mother would feel the same about it; so would Mrs. Perry.”

“I know it. I’m not complaining of Aunt Martha. She’s as good as gold. She’s been perfectly angelic about Dolores. Auntie isn’t the least tiny bit snobbish. She and Dad are alike in that.”

Returned to the house before noon the Wayfarers lunched early. Luncheon over, they dutifully obeyed Miss Carroll’s mandate to retire to their rooms for a brief siesta before dressing for the fête. Mr. Carroll’s parting injunction to them that morning had been:

“I’ll have the car at the door at three-thirty sharp. Be ready to hop into it, girls. The earlier we arrive at Palm Beach, the more time you’ll have before dinner to decorate the launch.”

Three-thirty not only found the car on the drive at the entrance to the patio, it also saw Miss Martha being helped into it by her brother. She was followed by the Wayfarers, all looking their best in their smart summer finery. The four girls were in exuberant spirits as one after another they skipped nimbly into the automobile. The Venetian fête promised to be an item of pleasant variation on their program of enjoyment.

The drive to Palm Beach was, as always, a delightful one. Coming at last to the famous shell road the car followed it for a short distance. Presently the yachting party arrived at the point on the lagoon where their boat was docked.

Boarding it in a flutter of happy anticipation, the Wayfarers temporarily hid the glory of their dainty frocks under substantial gingham pinafores which they had purposely brought along.

Then the engrossing occupation of dressing-up their boat began. What seemed to the girls an unlimited supply of gay Chinese lanterns and bright-hued bunting had been brought aboard for them to dispose as they fancied. Fore and aft the enthusiastic toilers strung the lanterns, and hung the bunting in graceful festoons, until the trim craft blossomed into a rainbow of color.

“I can hardly wait for it to get dark!” exclaimed Mabel. “With all these lanterns glowing and those strings of little electric lights winking all colors, our boat’s going to be simply gorgeous.”

“I hope we’ll have some simply gorgeous eats for dinner,” was Patsy’s unaesthetic but heartfelt yearning. “I’m terribly hungry. I hope, too, that we sha’n’t bump against a lot of people Auntie and I know the minute we walk into

the hotel. I want to gobble my dinner in a hurry and get back here before dark so as to see everything that goes on.”

Patsy’s fervent hopes met with a realization that pleased her not a little. The “eats,” which consisted in an elaborate course dinner, were quite “gorgeous” enough to evoke her pronounced approval. More, the diners encountered none they knew among the endless succession of people strolling in and out of the vast dining-room. Neither in the imposing foyer of the great hotel, on the veranda or under the colonnade did they spy a single familiar face. It was as though they had stepped into a world of easy-going strangers, all bent on extracting the same amount of pleasure out of life as themselves.

Dinner eaten they lingered for a while on one of the hotel’s many verandas which overlooked magnificent gardens, aglow with fragrant tropical blooms.

Just before dark they drove again to the lagoon and were presently aboard their launch, watching with eager eyes the beauty of the scene. Everywhere the scented dusk was pierced by winking, multi-colored lights. They dotted the wall of the lagoon and sprang up from hundreds of craft, large and small, which plied the lake’s placid waters.

From off shore came the singing overtones of violins, proceeding from an orchestra stationed under the colonnade of a not far distant hotel. Now and then their ears caught the tinkle of mandolins mingled with care-free voices raised in song. Across the still waters occasional shouts rose above the harmony of sound, as gay occupants of boats hailed passing craft and were hailed in return.

As it grew darker, rockets began to hiss skyward, lighting up the lagoon into greater beauty and revealing white-clad groups of spectators sauntering along the shell road or resting on the sea wall.

With the ascent of the first rocket, boat after boat rushed off across the water to join the rapidly forming carnival procession which would, when completely formed, circle the lake. Presently came a fan-fare of trumpets, a burst of music from many bands playing in unison, and the procession started on its way around the lake, gliding along like a huge, glowing serpent.

The Wayfarers thought it great fun to be an actual part of that fairy-like pageant. As the majority of the occupants of other boats were lifting up their voices in song, the four girls sang, too. Patsy’s clear, high soprano voice led off in a boat song with which her companions were familiar. After that they sang everything they could remember from “Sailing” to “Auld Lang Syne.”

Later, when the boats began dropping out of line, their launch also left the procession and scudded farther out on the lake to a point from where its lively passengers could obtain a more satisfying view of the gorgeous spectacle.

There they lingered for some time, well content to breathe in the flower-perfumed night air, listen to the frequent bursts of harmonious sound that drifted to their ears, and watch the firefly boats as they darted here and there on the bosom of fair Lake Worth.

It was well toward eleven o'clock when the launch docked at her pier and the voyagers went ashore to where their automobile awaited them. Followed a short drive to one of the great hotels, where the party stopped for a late supper, then took the homeward road through the balmy darkness of the tropical night.

Midnight came and went and one o'clock drew on before a happy but sleepy company made port at Las Golondrinas.

"Go straight to bed, girls," commanded Miss Martha as she marshalled the small procession of drowsy revelers down the echoing corridors to their rooms. "Don't sit up to talk. You can do that to-morrow morning."

"I don't want to talk. I want to sleep," assured Eleanor with a yawn. "If Mab tries to talk to me after I'm in bed, I'll rise in my might and put her out of the room."

"See that *you* don't talk to *me*," warned Mabel. "If you do, *you* may find yourself wandering around in the corridor until morning."

"Glad we're of the same mind," giggled Eleanor. "Our chances for sleep seem to be good."

"Don't worry about *me*, Aunt Martha," Patsy declared, as, her arm in Bee's, the two girls halted at the door of their room. "You won't hear a sound from Bee or me after we've put out our light. Here's my very nicest good-night kiss, dear. We've all had a wonderful evening and we're ready to subside until morning without a murmur."

Shut in their room, Patsy and Bee beamed sleepily at each other and went about their preparations for bed in commendable silence, broken now and then by a soft exchange of remarks pertaining to the evening's entertainment.

Lights out shortly became the order of things with them. Almost as soon as their heads touched the pillow they were off and away to dreamland.

There comes sometimes to a peaceful dreamer a curious sense of impending danger which breaks through the curtain of slumber and arouses the sleep-drugged faculties to alert wakefulness.

Just how long she had slept, Patsy had no definite idea. She knew only that she was sitting up in bed, broad awake, her horrified eyes staring at something tall and white which stood in the center of the moonlight-flooded room.

She tried to cry out, but her voice was gone. She could only gaze, half paralyzed with terror, at the fearsome white shape. For a moment it remained there, a shapeless, immovable thing of dread.

Suddenly, it raised a long, white-swathed arm in a menacing gesture toward the trembling girl in the big four-poster bed. It took one sliding step forward.

Patsy succeeded in uttering a desperate, choking sound, intended for a shout. One groping hand reached over and found Bee.

The dread apparition came no nearer the bed than the length of that one sliding step. It halted briefly, turned, then glided to the half-opened door and vanished into the corridor.

CHAPTER XIX

PATSY'S SCHEME

“Bee, wake up! Oh, please wake up!”

Patsy had not only regained her voice, but the use of her arms as well. Hands on Bee's shoulders, she now shook her companion gently in an effort to waken her.

“What—y-e-s,” Bee mumbled, then opened her eyes.

In the moonlight she could see Patsy quite clearly as her chum sat crouched at her side. Blinking wonderingly up at Patsy, Bee began dimly to realize that something unusual must have happened.

“What is it, Patsy? Are you sick?” she anxiously questioned, sitting up in bed with apprehensive energy.

“No; I'm not sick. I'm scared. I saw it, Bee. I woke up all of a sudden and saw it standing in the middle of the room.”

“Saw what?”

“The ghost; Mammy Luce's 'sperrit,’” Patsy returned solemnly.

“You've been dreaming, Patsy, dear.” Beatrice dropped a reassuring arm about Patsy's shoulders.

“No, Bee. I wasn't dreaming. I was as wide awake as I am now when I saw it. I tell you it woke me from a sound sleep. It didn't make a sound. Just the same it woke me. I wish now that I'd been brave enough to climb out of bed and follow it. But I wasn't. It frightened me so I couldn't move or speak.”

“What was it? What did you see?”

Bee had now become convinced that Patsy had not been dreaming.

“I saw a figure standing right there,” Patsy pointed. “I can't tell you what it looked like except that it was just an enormous white shape. I tried to call you, but I couldn't. I did manage to sit up in bed. It raised a long, white arm and started toward me. Then I tried again and made a sort of sound and reached out to you. It didn't come any nearer. It turned and went out the door. It must have come in that way, for the door stood half open. It was closed when we went to

bed. You remember that. Now I believe that Mammy Luce saw what I saw. No wonder it frightened her. It frightened me, too, and I don't believe in ghosts."

"Well," Bee drew a long, sighing breath, "whatever you and Mammy Luce saw was not a *ghost*. Make up your mind to that. It was a real, live person *playing* ghost. You and I, Patsy, must find out who it is and why the person is doing it. This ghost business has begun, all of a sudden. Nothing of the kind appeared when we first came here. There's a motive behind it that we've got to discover."

"What can it be?" wondered Patsy. Her brief terror had now given place to curiosity. "Someone might be trying to play a practical joke on us. But who? Not the maids or Dad's black boys or——" Patsy stopped. "Bee, do you suppose it could be—*Carlos*?" she asked with a little gasp. "The figure looked too tall and broad to be *him*."

"Still it might be." Bee had avidly seized upon Patsy's sudden inspiration. "Draped in a sheet, he'd look ever so much taller and bigger. It was he who told Mammy Luce about the ghost, you know."

"But why should Carlos want to do such a despicable thing? We've never done him an injury. Why, we never even *spoke* to him except on that one morning when we tried to get him to tell us about Las Golondrinas."

"We can't possibly know *yet* what his object may be. We may be doing him a wrong by suspecting him. Just the same, he's the only person we have any reason to suspect."

"He might have done it to get even with us because Mab asked him if Rosita was crazy. I've always heard that Latins are very vengeful."

Racking her agile brain for a motive, Patsy now advanced this theory.

"Let's go back a little farther," replied Bee. "Carlos is old Rosita's grandson. Rosita must hate us or she wouldn't have called us names and treated us as she did. Granted, *she* hates us. Maybe Carlos hates us, too. We know he doesn't like us. He showed us that much and very plainly."

Bee paused, mentally trying to fit Patsy's theory to her own.

"There's more to it than spite because Mab asked Carlos whether Rosita was crazy," she continued reflectively. "Now I believe I begin to see. Neither Carlos nor Rosita wants us to live here. Why wouldn't that account for this ghost affair? Carlos might have done it to scare us, believing we wouldn't stay in a haunted

house. He frightened Mammy Luce out of here. I'm sure if Emily or Celia had seen——”

Bee's low-toned discourse was suddenly interrupted by a wild shriek of mortal terror from somewhere below stairs. It floated up to the two girls through the half-open door, echoing and re-echoing through the corridors. It was followed by a succession of shrieks, each rising a trifle higher than the preceding one.

“Come on.”

Leaping out of bed, Bee snatched her kimono from a nearby chair, slipped her arms into it and darted, bare-footed, from the room.

Patsy was only an instant behind her. As the two dashed madly along the corridor and downstairs, the sound of opening doors and alarmed voices was heard. That eerie, piercing scream could hardly have failed to rouse the entire household. By the time three frightened women and one considerably startled man had reached their doors and opened them, Patsy and Bee were out of sight.

Straight for the servants' quarters at the rear of the house the valiant runners headed. Their mad dash received a most unexpected check. A door suddenly opened. A figure bounced into the narrow hallway just in time to collide violently with the advancing duo. A new succession of frenzied yells rent the air, accompanied by a resounding thump as rescuers and rescued went down in a heap.

“Oh, lawsy, lawsy!” moaned a voice. “Oh, please, Massa ghos', I ain't done nothin'.”

A prostrate form swathed in a brilliant pink calico night gown writhed on the floor. Above it, Bee and Patsy, now on their feet, stood clinging to each other, speechless with laughter.

“Get—up—Celia!” gasped Patsy. “We—we—aren't—ghosts. Oh, Bee!”

Patsy went off into another fit of laughter.

Somewhat calmed by the sound of a familiar voice, Celia raised her head. In the pale light shed by a bracket lamp she now recognized “Missie Patsy.” Very slowly, and a trifle sheepishly, she scrambled to her feet.

By this time Mr. Carroll, Miss Martha, Mab and Eleanor had reached the scene of action.

“What on earth is the matter, Celia?” demanded Mr. Carroll. “Was that you we

heard screaming? What's happened to you?"

"I done gwine t' tell yoh in a minute."

Overcome by the awful realization that she was not suitably clothed for the occasion, Celia made a wild dive into her room and banged the door.

Meanwhile the door of the next room had opened just enough to allow a chocolate-colored head to peer forth.

"Celie she done see the ghos'," explained Emily. "I jes' lock myself in so I done be safe. It am gone now."

"Naturally. No self-respecting ghost could stand such a racket as I heard," dryly declared Mr. Carroll. "Now tell me about this so-called ghost. What does Celia think she saw?"

"I done *seen* it!"

Celia now reappeared, wrapped from chin to toes in the ample folds of a striped summer blanket. Not being the proud possessor of a kimono, she had chosen the blanket as most highly suitable to her present needs.

"I was dreaming nice as anything', 'bout a gran' ball I was gittin' ready foah," she blurted forth. "Suddin' like I wakes up 'case I done feel suthin' cold on my face. It war an ole cold dead hand and a whoppin' big white ghos' was bendin' over me. I lets out a yell, 'case I was skairt to die an' it jes' laffs terrible like an' floats right out the doah. I'm gwine away from heah the minute it gits daylight. I ain't gwine to live no moah in this place. I reckon I know now what was ailin' Mammy Luce. She done seen it, too, same's me."

Celia having thus put two and two together and announced her departure, it became Miss Martha's task to endeavor to soothe and cajole the badly-scared maid to reconsider her decision. Her efforts were not a success. Neither did the added coaxing of the Wayfarers have any effect. Celia remained firm in her resolve. Emily, however, was made of firmer stuff. She stoutly reiterated her disbelief in "ghos'es" and, much to Miss Martha's relief, declared her intent to "stick it out, 'case no ghos' ain't gwine to git me."

In the end, a much disturbed party, consisting of five women and one man, repaired to the sitting-room for a consultation.

During the excitement both Beatrice and Patsy had deemed it wise to say nothing, while in the presence of the maids, of what Patsy herself had seen.

As they were about to go upstairs, Patsy whispered to Bee: "Don't say a word about—well, you know. I'll tell you why, later."

"Robert," began Miss Martha severely, when the little company had settled themselves in the sitting-room, "I insist now on your speaking to that Carlos man of yours about this ghost story he told Mammy Luce. Someone is evidently trying to play practical jokes upon the servants. I believe he knows something about it. It may be he who is doing it."

"That can't be. Only yesterday morning Carlos asked me for two days off. His brother, in Miami, died and he felt it his duty to go there to console the family and attend the funeral. So you see he had nothing to do with to-night's affair. It's more likely one of my black boys has done a little ghost walking just to be funny. You notice that no one except the servants has been visited by apparitions."

"There is no telling how soon the rest of us may be startled half out of our senses," acidly reminded Miss Martha. "You had better hire a guard to patrol the grounds around the house at night. He ought to be able to catch this scamp who has frightened the servants."

"I'll do it," promised Mr. Carroll. "I'll have a plain clothes man from Palm Beach up here to-morrow evening. He'll stay here, too, until we catch the rascal who is causing all this commotion."

"And will you speak to Carlos?" persisted Miss Carroll. "I am more suspicious of him than of your blacks."

"As soon as he comes back," reassured her brother.

The serious part of the discussion having come to an end, Mabel and Eleanor hurled a volley of eager questions at Bee and Patsy concerning what had happened before they reached the hallway. Patsy therewith proceeded to convulse her hearers with a description of Bee's and her own untimely collision with Celia. Mabel giggled herself almost hysterical and had to be playfully shaken into sobriety by Eleanor, who declared that the ghost walk had gone to Mab's head.

The will to sleep overcoming their dread of living midnight visitants in ghostly garments, the ways and means committee adjourned in favor of rest. As a last word, Miss Martha cautioned the Wayfarers to lock their doors, which had hitherto been allowed to remain unlocked.

"I don't know whether it was exactly fair not to tell Auntie about my seeing

the ghost,” was Patsy’s first remark to Bee after they had regained their room. “It’s like this, Bee. I’ve thought of a plan I’d like to try. I have an idea the ghost will come back and I’m going to be ready for it. If Auntie knew that I’d actually seen it, she’d probably have our bed moved into her room. Mab and Nellie’s room is almost across the corridor from hers, you know. We’re farther away, so she’d worry if she knew what we know. I’m going to tell her sometime, of course, but not now. Will you stand by me, Bee, and help me catch the ghost?”

“I will,” vowed Beatrice, too much carried away by the scheme to reflect that she and Patsy were perhaps pitting themselves against a dangerous opponent. “Do you believe, Patsy, that Carlos really has gone away?”

“No; I don’t. I think Carlos is the ghost,” calmly asserted Patsy. “Furthermore, he knows a way to get into this house that we don’t. All the men in Florida sent to guard Las Golondrinas won’t catch him. When Dad spoke of getting a guard, I had half a mind to speak up about seeing the ghost. Then I decided not to. I wanted to see what we could do by ourselves.”

“What *are* we going to do? You said you had a plan.”

“I have. I’m going to lasso the ghost,” Patsy announced with a boyish grin. “I learned to handle a lariat when I was out West three years ago visiting Pauline Barry. One of the cowboys on her father’s ranch taught me the way to do it. There’s a coil of light, thin, tough rope in the stable. I saw it the other day. That’s going to be my lariat. I’ll smuggle it up here and practice with it. This is such a big room I can swing it easily in here.”

“I don’t see how you can carry out that plan,” was Bee’s doubting answer. “How can you possibly know when the ghost is going to appear? Besides, you mayn’t have time, perhaps, or a chance to do any lassoing.”

“That’s the only hard part of it. You and I will have to take turns sitting up and watching, Bee. Suppose we go to bed at eleven o’clock, as we usually do. Well, from eleven until two I’ll sit up and watch. From two until five it will be your turn. After five no ghost will be silly enough to walk. I’ll take the part of the night when it’s more likely to appear, because I know how to swing the lariat. If it appears during your watch——Let me see. I guess I’d better teach you how to lasso. No; that won’t do. It takes a long time to learn the trick. You’d be apt to miss the ghost. Then we’d never catch it.”

“I think we’d both better sit up until a little after two for a few nights,” proposed Bee. “If we’re sleepy the next day we can take a nap. It was just about two this morning when the ghost came. If Carlos *is* the ghost, he may appear to

your aunt or Mab and Nellie another time and not come near us. If he's trying to scare us away from here, that's what he'd be apt to do."

"He may have wandered into their rooms, too, for all we know, only they didn't happen to wake up and see him," surmised Patsy. "There's only a bare chance that anything will come of it, but it will be exciting to try out our plan for a few nights while it's bright moonlight. Our scheme wouldn't work during the dark of the moon. Now while the moon's full you can see for yourself how light it makes this room. Then, too, a big white ghost is an easy mark," finished Patsy with a giggle.

"All right, Patsy. I pledge myself to become a valiant ghost catcher," laughed Bee. "Now let's go bye-bye or we'll never be able to sit up to-morrow night. The only thing that bothers me is not telling your aunt."

Bee had begun to feel a belated twinge of conscience.

"It bothers me, too," admitted Patsy, "but I'm going to stifle my conscience for a few days. If nothing remarkable happens, then we'll go to Auntie and confess and let her scold us as much as she pleases."



CHAPTER XX

THE WAY THE SCHEME WORKED OUT

The next morning witnessed the departure of Celia, bag and baggage. Aside from that one item of interest, nothing occurred that day to disturb the peace of the household of Las Golondrinas. With Emily now installed as cook and a very good cook, at that, the loss of Celia's services was not so vital, particularly as Emily's sister, Jennie, had promised her services the following week.

What signally worried and annoyed Miss Martha, however, was Mr. Carroll's regretful announcement at dinner that evening to the effect that he would not be able to obtain the services of a guard for at least three days. An unusually large number of private details had rendered headquarters short of men used for such duty, he explained.

"I'm sorry, Martha, but it can't be helped," he consoled. "I'd turn the job over to one of my black boys, but it wouldn't be advisable. If one of them has really been playing ghost, depend upon it, the others know it. Result, the ghost wouldn't appear. He'd be warned to lie low. I'll stay up myself to-night and watch, if you feel in the least afraid. Say the word and I'll stand guard."

"Certainly not," promptly vetoed his sister. "I'm not *afraid*. I merely wish this disagreeable foolishness stopped. We will lock our doors and barricade them, if necessary. As for the windows opening onto the patio, I hardly know what to do. It's not healthful to sleep with closed windows. They are so high from the floor of the patio, a ghost, or rather this idiotic person who is playing ghost, would find it hard work to climb up to them. We may as well leave them open."

"We can set rows of tinware on the inner edge of the window sills in such a way that a touch would upset the whole business. If anyone tries to climb in a window, all the pots and pans will fall into the room with a grand crash and wake us up," proposed Mabel. "Besides, the ghost won't linger after such a rattle and bang."

"A good idea," approved Miss Carroll solemnly.

Eleanor, Bee and Patsy received it with laughter in which Mr. Carroll joined.

"We'd better make a raid on the kitchen and select our tinware," said Eleanor gaily. "I'm proud to have such a resourceful sister. There's nothing like getting

ready for his ghostship.”

“I don’t imagine you’ll be troubled to-night by spectral intruders,” Mr. Carroll said seriously. “Such a thing is hardly likely to occur two nights in succession.”

“Emily’s not afraid, that’s certain,” declared Beatrice. “She’s going to sleep all alone downstairs to-night. She says she’s ‘not gwine to git skairt of no ghos’.”

“I told her she might sleep in that little room at the end of the portrait gallery, but she said she preferred her own room,” commented Miss Martha. “I am agreeably surprised to find her not in the least cowardly or superstitious. It’s fortunate for us.”

“She told me she was going to lock her door and her windows and sleep with a club and a big bottle of ammonia beside her bed,” informed Patsy. “If the ghost comes she’s going to give him a warm reception.”

“We all seem to be planning for the ghost’s welfare,” chuckled Mabel. “Poor ghost. If he knows when he’s well off he’ll stay away from here to-night.”

Much open discussion of the spectral visitor had served to rob the idea of its original horror. Instead of a serious menace to tranquillity the ghost was rapidly becoming a joke.

“We’ve done a little secret preparing of our own,” boasted Patsy in a whisper to Bee as they strolled out of the dining room, arms twined about each other’s waists.

True to her determination, Patsy had slipped down to the stable that morning, commandeered the desired coil of rope and successfully smuggled it into her room. That afternoon, while Mabel and Eleanor were taking a walk about the grounds with Miss Carroll, the two conspirators locked their door and proceeded to test out the most important feature of their plan.

Patsy found the thin, tough rope admirable for her purpose. The sleeping room, spacious and square, also lent itself to her plan. The bed being in one corner left ample room for a free casting of the lariat. With the quaint mahogany center table moved back against the wall, she had a clear field.

For an hour Bee patiently allowed herself to be lassoed, moving from point to point, thereby to test Patsy’s skill. She soon discovered that her chum was an adept at the art. Wonderfully quick of movement and sure of aim, Patsy never failed to land the noose over her head, letting it drop below her shoulders and drawing it taut about her arms with almost incredible swiftness. At the

conclusion of the practice both agreed that the ghost's chances were small against "Lariat Patsy," as Bee laughingly nicknamed her.

Despite their numerous jests concerning the ghost, the Wayfarers' hearts beat a trifle faster that night as they went to their rooms. Earlier in the evening the kitchen had been raided and amid much mirthful comment a goodly supply of tin and agate ware had been selected and carried upstairs for window decorations.

Patsy and Bee took part in these preparations merely, as Patsy confided to her chum, "for the looks of things." Both considered their own private scheme as much more likely to bear fruit.

On retiring to their room for the night the door was dutifully locked. For half an hour the two sat talking with the lamps burning, waiting for the house to grow absolutely quiet. At ten minutes to twelve, Patsy brought forth the lariat from its hiding place in her trunk. Next, both girls slipped out of their white frocks only to don dark gowns which would not betray their presence in the room to the nocturnal intruder they were planning to receive.

"Shall I put out the lights?" whispered Bee.

"Yes. Then stand in that space opposite the door and see if I can rope you," breathed Patsy.

Quickly Bee extinguished the two oil bracket lamps and a large oil lamp that stood on a pedestal in a corner. Into the room the moonlight poured whitely, lighting it fairly well except in the corners.

"All ready?" softly questioned Patsy, moving back toward the end of the room farthest from the door.

"Yes," came the sibilant whisper.

An instant and Patsy had made a successful cast.

"It works splendidly," she softly exulted. "Let's try it again."

A few more trials of her prowess and she was satisfied to recoil the rope and sit down on the bed beside Bee.

"It's time to unlock the door, Bee," she murmured as the chime of midnight rang faintly on their ears from a tall clock at the end of the corridor.

"All right."

Bee rose, tiptoed softly to the door and turned the key. Stealing back across the room she took up her position of vigilance a few feet from Patsy, seating

herself upon a little low stool.

Patsy had posted herself on the edge of her trunk, lariat coiled, ready to spring into action at a moments notice. Over the house now hung the uncanny silence of midnight, so tense in its stillness that the two watchers could hear each other breathe.

For the first half hour neither experienced any Special discomfort. By the time that one o'clock had come and gone, both were beginning to feel the strain of sitting absolutely still in one position.

The distant note of the half hour found them weary, but holding their ground. Patsy was worse off than Bee. Bee could relax, at least a little, while she had to sit on the extreme edge of her trunk, constantly on the alert. Should their expected visitor enter the room, she must act with the swiftness of lightning or all their patient watching would have been in vain.

As she sat there it suddenly occurred to her how horrified her aunt would be, could she know what was going on only a few yards from where she slumbered so peacefully. Patsy could not resist giving a soft little chuckle.

“What is it?” whispered Bee.

“Nothing. Tell you to-morrow. I guess we can go to bed soon.”

“I guess so. It’s almost two o’clock.”

Silence again descended. The clock chimed three-quarters of the hour. Its plaintive voice ceased and the hush deepened until it seemed to Patsy almost too profound for endurance. And then it was broken by a sound, as of a door being softly opened.

Bee’s heart nearly skipped a beat as she listened. Patsy felt the cold chills race up and down her spine. Two pairs of eyes were now fastened in strained attention on the door. Was it opening? Yes, it surely was; slowly, very slowly. It was open at last! A huge white shape stood poised on the threshold. It moved forward with infinite caution. It had halted now, exactly on the spot where Bee had lately stood while Patsy tried out her prowess with the lariat.

Over in the corner Patsy was gathering herself together for the fateful cast. Up from the trunk she now shot like a steel spring. Through the air with a faint swishing sound the lariat sped. She pulled it taut to an accompaniment of the most blood-curdling shrieks she had ever heard. Next instant she felt herself being jerked violently forward.

“Bee!” she shouted desperately. “Take hold. I’m going!”

Bee sprang for the rope and missed it. Patsy shot past her across the room, headed for the door. Stubbornly clinging to the rope, she was bumped violently against the door casing, dragged through the doorway and on into the corridor.

As she shot down the stone passageway she was dimly conscious of doors opening along it and voices crying out in alarm. On she went, propelled by that sinister, terrible force ahead. Now she had bumped around another corner and was entering the picture gallery. At the ends and in the center of it bracket lamps burned dimly.

She could see the enormous white shape. It had paused in the center of the gallery. The relentless force had slackened. The rope now lay in loose coils along the gallery. And then something happened which nearly took Patsy’s breath.

Even in that faint light she saw the picture of the cavalier move forward. The huge white shape leaped straight to meet it. The rope began to move along the floor again. Patsy braced herself and tightened her grasp on the end she still held. Wonder of wonders! The apparition had disappeared.

Patsy heard an oddly familiar sound. Next she realized that the savage jerking of the rope had not begun again. As she stood staring at it, still clutching it tightly, there began again those same awful shrieks, mingled with snarls such as a cornered wild beast might utter.

In the midst of them she was suddenly surrounded by a frantic little group of persons. She heard her father saying: “Thank God, she’s safe!” She felt consciousness slipping from her like a cloak.

“The rope—hold the rope,” she mumbled, and pitched forward into a pair of extended arms.



CHAPTER XXI

THE GHOST

When Patsy came to herself she was still in the picture gallery. She was leaning against Miss Martha, who was engaged in holding smelling salts to her niece's nose. To her right clustered Bee, Mabel and Eleanor, anxious, horror-filled faces fixed upon her. Back of them stood Emily, her black eyes rolling, her chocolate-colored features seeming almost pale in the brighter light the lamps now gave.

As Patsy's gray eyes roved dully from one face to another, she became again alive to sounds which had assailed her ears at the moment when consciousness had briefly fled. She was still hearing those demoniac shrieks, mingled with savage snarls. Now there was something vaguely familiar about them. But what? Patsy could not think.

"What—is it?" she stammered. "Where—is—it?"

She had begun to realize that the horror she glimpsed in her companions' faces had to do with those same shrieks rather than her own momentary swoon.

"It's behind this picture."

It was her father's voice that grimly answered her. He stood at one side of the tarnished gilt frame, examining a rope. The rope appeared to spring from halfway down the frame, between the canvas and the frame itself. It ended in loose coils, which lay upon the floor of the gallery.

Patsy stared at the picture, from behind which rose the tumult of horrid sound. For an instant she listened intently.

"Why—why—I know *who* it is! It's old *Rosita*. I'm *sure* that's her voice."

"So the girls here think," replied her father. "Bee tells me *you* lassoed her."

Mr. Carroll's tones conveyed active disapproval of his daughter's foolhardy exploit.

"I—I——" began Patsy, then became silent.

"Well, this is not the time to discuss that side of the affair," her father continued. "There's a secret room or cubby-hole, I don't know which, behind the

picture. Rosita is in there and can't get out. You attended to her arms, I judge. That's the reason for those frenzied howls. Undoubtedly she's insane. You've had a very narrow escape."

"How could she get behind the picture without the use of her arms?" broke in Bee. "There's a secret lever to the picture, of course."

"She may have been able to work it with her foot," surmised Mr. Carroll. "Again, she may have purposely left the door open. There may be another way out of the place besides this one. She can't take it as long as the rope holds. When the door closed, the rope caught. It's tough, but then, the door must have closed with a good deal of force or it could never have shut on the rope. She's trying to break it and can't. That's why she's in such a rage. We've got her, but we must act quickly. I hate to leave you folks alone here. Still, I must go for help. I can bring half a dozen of my black boys here in twenty minutes. If I could be sure she'd stay as she is now until I came back——"

Mr. Carroll paused, uncertain where his strongest duty lay.

"I will go for the help, *señor*," suddenly announced a soft voice.

Absorbed in contemplation of the problem which confronted them, no one of the little company had heard the noiseless approach down the gallery of a black-haired, bare-footed girl. She had come within a few feet of the group when her musical tones fell upon their amazed ears.

"*Dolores!*" exclaimed Patsy and sprang forward with extended hands. "How came *you* here?"

Immediately Mab, Bee and Nellie gathered around the girl with little astonished cries.

"Soon I will tell all. Now is the hurry."

Turning to Mr. Carroll, whose fine face mirrored his astonishment at this sudden new addition to the night's eventful happenings, she said earnestly:

"I stood in the shadow and heard your speech, *señor*. There is but one way into the secret place. It is there." She pointed to the picture. "I bid you watch it well. She is most strong. She has the madness. Thus her strength is greater than that of three men. If you have the firearm, *señor*, I entreat you, go for it, and also send these you love to the safe room. Should she break the rope of which you have spoken she will come forth from behind the picture and kill. Now I will go and return soon with the men. You may trust me, for I will bring them. Have no

fear for me, for I shall be safe.”

Without waiting for a response from Mr. Carroll, Dolores turned and darted up the gallery. An instant and she had disappeared into the adjoining corridor.

“Dolores is right,” declared Mr. Carroll. “Martha, take our girls and Emily into your room. Lock the door and stay there until I come for you. I don’t like the idea of this child, Dolores, going off into the night alone, but she went before I could stop her.”

“Oh, Dad, why can’t we stay here with you?” burst disappointedly from Patsy.

Patsy had quite recovered from her momentary mishap and was now anxious to see the exciting affair through to the end.

“That’s why.”

Mr. Carroll made a stern gesture toward the picture. From behind it now issued a fresh succession of hair-raising screams interspersed with furious repetitions of the name, “Dolores.” It was evident that Rosita had heard Dolores’ voice and, demented though she was, recognized it.

“Come with us this instant, Patsy. You have already run more than enough risks to-night.”

Miss Martha’s intonation was such as to indicate that she, too, was yet to be reckoned with.

“We’re in for it,” breathed Bee to Patsy as the two girls followed Miss Carroll, and the Perry girls out of the gallery and into the corridor which led to Miss Martha’s room. Emily, however, had declared herself as “daid sleepy” and asked permission to return to her own room instead of accepting the refuge of Miss Carroll’s.

“I don’t care,” Patsy returned in a defiant whisper. “Our plan worked. We caught the ghost. And that’s not all. What about Dolores? Did you ever bump up against anything so amazing? Now we know who the mysterious ‘she’ is. No wonder poor Dolores was afraid of her.”

Now arrived at Miss Carroll’s door, the chums had no time for further confidences. Miss Martha hustled them inside the room, hastily closed the door and turned the key.

That worthy but highly displeased woman’s next act was to sink into an easy chair and in the voice of a stern judge order Bee and Patsy to take chairs

opposite her own.

“Now, Patsy, will you kindly tell me why I was not taken into your confidence regarding yours and Beatrice’s presumptuous plans? Do you realize that both of you might have been killed? What possessed you to do such a thing? I *know* that you are far more to blame than Beatrice, even though she insisted to me that she was equally concerned in your scheme. She merely followed your lead.”

“I’m to blame. I planned the whole thing,” Patsy frankly confessed. “I don’t know how much Bee has told you, but this is the story from beginning to end.”

Without endeavoring to spare herself in the least, Patsy began with an account of the fearsome apparition she had seen on the previous night and went bravely on to the moment when she had seen old Rosita disappear behind the picture.

“I shall never trust either of you again,” was Miss Carroll’s succinct condemnation when Patsy had finished.

“But, Auntie——”

“Don’t Auntie me,” retorted Miss Martha. “The thought of what might have happened to you both makes me fairly sick. I sha’n’t recover from the shock for a week. The best thing we can do is to pack up and go to Palm Beach. I’ve had enough of this house of horrors. Who knows what may happen next. Just listen to that!”

Briefly silent, the imprisoned lunatic had again begun to send forth long, piercing screams. For a little, painful quiet settled down on the occupants of Miss Carroll’s room. At last Eleanor spoke.

“I don’t believe anything else that’s bad will happen here, Miss Martha.”

Eleanor had come nobly forward to Patsy’s aid. Standing behind Miss Carroll’s chair, she laid a gentle hand on the irate matron’s plump shoulder. Eleanor could usually be depended upon to pour oil on troubled waters.

“Nothing further of an unpleasant nature will have *time* to happen here,” was the significant response.

“But nothing *bad* has really happened,” persisted Eleanor. “Patsy captured the ghost, who turned out to be old Rosita. Pretty soon she’ll be taken away where she can’t harm anyone. If Patsy and Bee hadn’t been awake and on the watch to-night she might have slipped in and murdered them and us.”

“Not with our doors locked and the keys in them,” calmly refuted Miss

Carroll. "True, Patsy and Beatrice might have been murdered. *They* disobeyed me and left *their* door *unlocked*."

This emphatic thrust had its effect on the culprits. They blushed deeply and looked exceedingly uncomfortable.

"Well, she might have gone slipping about the house in the daytime and pounced upon some of us." Mabel now rallied to the defense. "Didn't Mammy Luce see her cross the kitchen and disappear up the back stairs right in the middle of the day? That proves she came here in the daytime too. By those yells we just heard you can imagine how much of a chance we would have had if we'd happened to meet her roaming around the house."

Patsy took heart at this brilliant effort on her behalf.

"That's why I saw the cavalier picture move the other day," she said eagerly. "Rosita had just disappeared behind it. That's another proof she came here in the daytime."

"Hmph! Here is something else I seem to have missed hearing," satirically commented Miss Carroll.

"I would have told you *that*, truly I would have, Auntie, but I didn't want to worry you. I thought I must have been mistaken about it at the time and so didn't say anything. It was the day we found the book in the patio and you asked me what was the matter," Patsy explained very humbly.

Something in the two pleading gray eyes fixed so penitently upon her, moved Miss Martha to relent a trifle. She considered herself a great deal harder-hearted than she really was.

"My dear, you and Beatrice did very wrong to conceal these things and attempt to take matters into your own hands. You are two extremely rash venturesome young girls. You are altogether too fond of leaping first and looking afterward. I must say that——"

"They're coming!" Mabel suddenly held up her hand in a listening gesture.

Even through the closed door the tramp of heavy footsteps and the deep bass of masculine voices came distinctly to the ears of the attentive listeners. Shut in as they were, they could glean by sound alone an idea of what was transpiring in the gallery.

Soon, above the growing hum of voices, came a crashing, splintering sound, accompanied by the most ear-piercing shrieks they had yet heard. A babble of

shouts arose, above which that high, piercing wail held its own. Again the tramping of feet began. The frenzied wailing grew even higher. The footsteps began to die out; the cries grew fainter and yet fainter. An almost painful silence suddenly settled down over the house.



CHAPTER XXII

THE RETURN OF DOLORES

It was shattered by a gentle knock at Miss Carroll's door. Light as was the rapping, it caused the occupants of the room to start nervously.

"It's Dad."

Patsy ran to the door, turned the key and opened it.

It was not Mr. Carroll, however, who had rapped. Instead a shy little figure stood in the corridor. Patsy promptly reached out and hauled the newcomer into the room with two affectionate arms.

"Dolores, you brave little thing!" she cried out admiringly. "You went all the way in the dark alone for help. Come over here, dear, and sit down by Auntie. You must be all tired out."

Patsy led Dolores to a deep chair beside Miss Martha and pushed her gently into it. The girl leaned wearily back in it. For a moment she sat thus, eyes closed, her long black lashes sweeping her tanned cheeks. Then she opened her eyes, looked straight up at Miss Martha and smiled.

"It is the heaven," she said solemnly.

"You poor, dear child."

Miss Martha reached over and took one of the girl's small, brown hands in both her own. The Wayfarers had gathered about Dolores looking down at her with loving, friendly faces. She was, to use her own expression, so "*simpatica*." Their girlish affections went out to her.

"There is much to tell," she said, straightening up in her chair, her soft eyes roving from face to face.

"We'd love to hear it if you aren't too tired to tell us," assured Patsy eagerly. "Where is my father, Dolores? Did he go with the men who took Rosita away?"

"Yes. First the *señor* showed me the way here. He gave me the message. He will take Rosita away in the automobile. So it may be long before he returns. With him went three black men and Carlos."

"Carlos!" went up the astonished cry.

“Yes. You must know it was for Carlos I went as well as the others. I had said to him many times that Rosita was mad. He would not believe. It was Carlos who brought me to the house of Rosita when my father had the death. Rosita had always for me the hate and abused me much. Carlos cared not. Perhaps he had for me the hate, too. I believe it.

“I have not come to the beach to have the talk with you because of Rosita. She watched me too much of late,” Dolores went on. “She had the hate for you because you came to Las Golondrinas. She was afraid I would see you and tell you she had the hate. She was mad, but yet most cunning.”

“But why did she hate us, Dolores?” questioned Bee.

The Wayfarers had now drawn up chairs and seated themselves in a half circle, facing the little Spanish girl.

“Soon I will tell you. First I must tell you that two days ago Carlos went away. Then Rosita shut me in the cellar. Ah, I knew she had the wickedness planned! All the day I heard her above me, speaking, speaking to herself. Sometimes she laughed and shouted most loud. Then I could hear her words. She cried out often of Las Golondrinas and Eulalie and old Manuel. So I knew what was in her mind.”

“Then perhaps *you* can tell us who Camillo is or was!” exclaimed Patsy. “You seem to know a good deal about the Feredas.”

“How knew you *his* name?” Dolores turned startled eyes on Patsy.

Briefly Patsy related the Wayfarers’ one conversation with Rosita.

“I never knew.” Dolores shook her black head. “*Comprendo mucho.*”

Unconsciously she had dropped into Spanish.

“We don’t understand,” smiled Mabel.

“Ah, but you shall soon know. Now I must speak again of myself. In the cellar I remained until this night. But on the night before this, Rosita went away. She came not back. This night late came Carlos home. I cried out to him and so he released me. He was very tired and would sleep. So he slept and I came here, because I had the fear that Rosita was hiding in the secret place to do you the harm. She had known of it long. Yet she knew not that I knew it, too. It was Eulalie who showed me, once when I came here to see her. We were friends. Rosita was the nurse of Eulalie in her childhood. Eulalie was *simpatica*, but she was most unhappy. Her grandfather was the cross, terrible old one. He, too, had

the madness. He was *loco*.”

Dolores nodded emphatic conviction of her belief that Manuel de Fereda had been insane.

“It was the midnight when I came here,” she resumed. “I lay in the long grass to listen, but heard nothing. So my thought was that Rosita might be far away and not in the house. I wished it to be thus, for I had the shame to knock on the doors late and say, ‘Beware of Rosita who is mad.’ I knew that in the daylight I should do that and tell you all before harm came. So I lay still and watched the house where all was dark and quiet. Then I heard the voice of Rosita as I have heard it never before. I knew not what had come to her, but I wished to see and give you the help such as I could give.”

“But how did you get into the house, Dolores?” questioned Patsy. “All the doors were locked.”

“I climbed the vines, which grow upward to the small balcony on the western side,” Dolores said simply. “The window stood open and thus I came in the time to help.”

“You certainly did, little wood nymph,” declared Patsy affectionately. “What happened when you came back with the men? We’re crazy to know.”

“The *señor* asked Carlos of the secret door. Was it the true door, or but the canvas? Carlos knew not. Of the door he knew from Rosita, but not the secret. Never had he passed through it. But I knew that it was the true door with strong wood behind the canvas. So the picture door must be shattered by blows. Thus was loosed the rope which had shut in the door and held Rosita fast so that she could move but a little. It was the surprise when I saw her wrapped in the white sheets. On the floor I saw her long black cloak. I understood all.”

Dolores’ sweeping gesture indicated her complete comprehension of a situation which still baffled her audience not a little.

“How did they get her out of this cubby-hole?” inquired Miss Carroll interestedly.

Fortunately for Patsy, the arrival of Dolores had turned her aunt’s attention temporarily from her reckless niece’s transgressions. Practical Miss Martha was of the private opinion that she had been living through a night of adventure far stranger than fiction. The thought gave her an undeniable thrill.

“She herself leaped out like the wild beast,” Dolores answered. “She sprang at

Carlos, but he was ready. The wise *señor* had said she would do this, because the mad turn fiercest against those they love. The *señor* and the black men caught her and the *señor* wound the rope round and round her body. Then they carried her down the stairs and held her fast, while the *señor* went for the automobile. The *señor* said she must go to the police station at Miami. Carlos was sad for Rosita had loved him much. He had not believed she was mad.”

“I don’t see how he could *help* knowing it!” cried Patsy. “Why, we thought her crazy the first time we ever saw her! Mabel asked Carlos about her. It made him angry. I guess he knew it then, but wouldn’t admit it. I’m sure he must have told Rosita about us. That must have been one reason why she forbade you to come near us. Please tell us, Dolores, why she hated us. You promised you would.”

“It was because of the treasure of Las Golondrinas.” Dolores lifted solemn eyes to Patsy.



CHAPTER XXIII

THE MEMENTO

“The *treasure!*” rose in an incredulous chorus.

“Do you mean that there’s a treasure hidden somewhere about Las Golondrinas?” almost shouted Patsy.

“It is truth,” the girl affirmed. “All his life old Manuel sought but never found. He had the despair, so he was most cruel to Eulalie, *pobrecita*. How she hated that treasure!”

“Now we know what Rosita meant that day,” put in Bee. “When she said old Camillo had hidden it well. Was Camillo a Fereda?”

“*Si; el caballero Camillo de Fereda,*” nodded Dolores, then laughed. “Always I think of Camillo in Spanish,” she apologized. “I would say in English: ‘Yes, the gentleman, Camillo de Fereda.’ He lived long long ago. He was *el caballero* of the painting this night destroyed. I am glad he is gone. He had the wicked face. He *was* wicked; the pirate and the murderer. Eulalie has told me of him.”

“Then he must have been one of those Spanish buccaneers who sailed the seas and attacked English ships about the time when Ponce de Leon landed here in Florida,” declared Beatrice.

“But that was away back in fifteen something or other,” objected Eleanor. “Las Golondrinas hasn’t been the home of the Feredas nearly so long as that. In those days there was nothing here but swamps and wilderness. Do you happen to know just how old this house is, Dolores?”

“Eulalie has said that many, many Feredas have lived here,” Dolores replied. “All knew of the treasure but could not find. It was the secret which passed from the father to the son. Manuel knew it, but he would never tell Eulalie because she was not the son. She knew only from him that there was the treasure for which old Manuel always searched. She had not the belief in it.”

“Then how did Rosita come to learn of it?” interrupted Bee quickly.

“I heard her tell Carlos that long ago she spied upon Manuel. Once, while he wandered in the woods looking for the treasure, she followed him all the day. He lay down under the trees to sleep. While he slept she crept to him and took from

his pocket the letter and the small paper. What was written on the small paper she could not understand, for it was not the Spanish. The letter was the Spanish. For the many long words she could not read it well. So she put them again in Manuel's pocket. But she swore to Carlos that old Camillo wrote the letter and that he wrote of the treasure which he had hidden."

"Did you tell Eulalie what Rosita said?" pursued Bee with lawyer-like persistence.

"I dared not. I had the fear she might question Manuel. Then he would have had the great anger against Rosita. Then Rosita would have killed me. When Eulalie was the small child, Rosita was the nurse and lived in Las Golondrinas. It was then that she followed Manuel and read the letter. When Eulalie had the age of fourteen years, Manuel sent Rosita away to the cottage to live. Soon after I came here."

"Rosita couldn't have liked Eulalie very well. When we asked her about Eulalie that day she raved and shrieked '*ingrata*' and goodness knows what else," related Mabel. "I can understand enough Spanish to know that she was down on Eulalie."

"She had the anger because Eulalie wished Las Golondrinas to be sold. While Manuel lived Rosita dared not look here for the treasure. When he died she was glad. She wished Eulalie to let her come here again to live. Eulalie was weary of this place of sorrow. She cared not that she was the Fereda. So she sold Las Golondrinas to the *señor*, your father."

Dolores inclined her head toward Patsy.

"Now I begin to see why Rosita had no use for us," smiled Patsy. "She must have had a fine time hunting the treasure before we came down here and spoiled sport."

"It is truth," concurred Dolores. "All the day and often in the night she searched everywhere. She had the keys to this house. She came here much while it was empty. It was then, I believe, that the greatest madness fell upon her. She knew nothing that Eulalie had sold Las Golondrinas to the *señor* until he came here to live. I remember how angry she was. Still she watched and went to the house when the *señor* was not there."

"I have no doubt she was tucked away somewhere in the grounds watching when we arrived," frowned Miss Martha. "We have had a narrow escape."

"She saw you," instantly affirmed Dolores. "It was the surprise. She thought

the *señor* would live here alone. Then fell the rain and for two days she went not out of the cottage. I, also, went not out until the sunshine returned. Then I ran away into the woods. So you came to the cottage and I never knew.”

“It’s strange she never said a word to you about it,” mused Beatrice.

“Ah, no! She spoke to me but little; only the harsh words. It was to Carlos she would talk, but not before me. Now I understand why she was in the great rage when I returned to the cottage on that morning when you had been there. You had spoken of these Feredas and Eulalie. She was afraid you had come here to hunt for the treasure. She wished to frighten you away.”

“Our theory was not as wild as it might have been, Patsy,” smiled Bee.

“I suppose Carlos was hunting for the treasure, too, and so helped along this lunatic’s plans to play ghost. She could never have thought out the idea herself. I shall have Carlos arrested and locked up as a dangerous character,” announced Miss Carroll with stern determination.

“Carlos has no belief in the treasure.” Dolores paused uncertainly. “I will tell you the truth. Carlos will not return. He will slip away from the *señor* at Miami. So he called out to me in Spanish when he went away with Rosita. He had no plans with Rosita to play the ghost. She only had that thought.”

“Then why did he allow her to do so?” asked Miss Carroll severely. “He knew it. He warned our cook to beware of a ghost that walked here.”

“Carlos hates the *Americanos*. Once he was to marry the Mexican *señorita*. She left him and married the *Americano*. Now he hates them all. Thus he was glad to have Rosita make the trouble. He believed it was for the sake of him more than the treasure. She told him this. She was mad, but cunning. She deceived him. He is most stupid and easy to deceive. He did not believe she would harm anyone. He thought she had the malice; not the madness. Now he knows, because she sprang at him.”

“Well, I must say it’s the most preposterous affair all around that I’ve ever heard of,” sharply opined Miss Carroll. “To come to Florida for a vacation and be picked out as victims by a vengeful Mexican and a lunatic! It’s simply appalling.”

“Oh, look!”

Patsy had risen and was pointing toward a window.

“What is it?” burst simultaneously from Bee, Mabel and Eleanor. Miss Martha

was sitting bolt upright in her chair as though preparing to face the worst.

Dolores, alone, did not stir. She lay back in her chair, eyes closed. Her strenuous watch on the house, her brave run for help through the darkness and the fact that she had never before in her life talked so much at one time, had combined to reduce her to a state of utter exhaustion. All in a minute she had dropped fast asleep. She had not even heard Patsy cry out.

“Why—did you ever! See! It’s *daylight!*”

Patsy’s voice had risen to a little wondering squeal on the last word.

Daylight it surely was. Through the windows the soft rays of dawn were stealing, heralding the fact that day was breaking upon a company of persons who had been too much occupied to notice the flight of time.

“Look at that child!” Miss Martha dramatically indicated the slumbering wood nymph. “I should have put her to bed the instant she stepped into this room, instead of allowing her to tell that long story. I am ashamed of my lack of judgment.”

“She wanted to tell it, and we wanted to hear it,” Patsy said. “It’s been a weird night, hasn’t it?”

“Weird, yes; altogether too weird. Go to bed every one of you, and *lock your doors!*”

“Where will Dolores sleep, Auntie? She can’t go home. She hasn’t any home now. She’ll have to stay with us. Won’t that be fine?” exulted Patsy.

“Dolores will remain here with me. We’ll discuss her future later. This is certainly not the time to discuss it. Good night, or, rather, good morning. Off to bed, all of you.”

Miss Martha fairly shooed her flock out of the room. They departed with laughter, their cheerful voices echoing through a corridor lately filled with sounds of an entirely different nature.

“Enter without fear, my dear Miss Forbes,” salaamed Patsy, bowing Bee into the room in which had been staged the first act of the night’s drama. “The ghost is forever laid.”

Laughing, Bee stepped over the threshold. The laugh suddenly trailed into a gasp. At the precise spot where Patsy had lassoed Rosita lay a sinister memento of the mad “ghost.” It was a long, sharp, two-edged knife.



CHAPTER XXIV

THE SECRET DRAWER

Instead of a one o'clock luncheon that day the Wayfarers sat down to a one o'clock breakfast. It was noon before they awoke from the sound sleep they were so much in need of after their all-night vigil.

That day there was a new face at the breakfast table. It was a vividly beautiful face lighted by a pair of soulful, dark eyes. Dolores, the wood nymph, had been transformed over night into Dolores, the young woman. Dressed in one of Patsy's white morning frocks, her heavy black hair rolled into a graceful knot at the nape of her neck, Dolores bore small resemblance to the ragged, bare-footed waif of the night before.

Now those small bare feet which had sped so swiftly through the darkness for help were for the first time in years covered by slippers and stockings. Though Dolores was too shy to say it this one particular feature of the transformation seemed to her the most wonderful of all. "To go always with the feet bare" had been her greatest cross.

Seated between Bee and Patsy at table her gaze wandered questioningly from one to another of the Wayfarers, as though unable to credit the evidence of her own eyes. She could hardly believe that she was in the midst of reality. It all seemed like a dear dream from which she would soon awaken, only to find again the old life of poverty, harsh words and blows.

Naturally, the Wayfarers had a good deal to say. They were still brimming over with the excitement of the night's events, the final touch of melodrama having been furnished by the finding of the knife on the floor of Patsy's and Bee's room.

Recovered from the momentary shock sight of the murderous weapon had given them, the finders had agreed that there was no use in exhibiting it to the others just then and stirring up fresh excitement.

Patsy reserved it as a breakfast surprise. She created not a little commotion when she produced it at the table for her companions' inspection, coolly announcing that Rosita had left her a keepsake. The weapon went the round of the table to the tune of much horrified exclamation, as its formidable, razor-like

double edge was shudderingly noted.

“I can’t imagine why your father hasn’t returned, Patsy,” remarked Miss Carroll for the fifth time since they had sat down to breakfast. “I am beginning to feel very uneasy over his continued absence.”

“I don’t believe we’ll see him until evening,” returned Patsy. “It must have been daylight before he got through with Rosita’s case. He had two business engagements in Miami to-day. Don’t you remember? He mentioned them to us at dinner last night?”

“I had forgotten that,” admitted Miss Carroll. “It’s hardly to be wondered at. I wish he would come home. I am all at sea about what we ought to do. Now that this horrible lunatic has been removed from here and her villainous grandson has decamped, it is just possible we may have a little peace and quiet. Do you think this rascal Carlos meant what he said to you, Dolores?”

“Yes, Señora Martha. He will never return,” Dolores assured. “He will sell the cottage which old Manuel gave to Rosita and never come here more. I am glad. Now I shall go myself soon to Miami and find the work to do. I am strong and not afraid of the work.”

“My dear child, you will do nothing of the sort,” contradicted Miss Carroll. “You will stay with us for the present.”

“And when we go north, Dolores, you’re going too,” broke in Patsy. “You haven’t any folks now, except us, so you’ve just got to be good and hang around with the crowd.”

“It is too much,” Dolores protested. “I will stay for a little because you wish it. I wish it, also,” she added with shy honesty. “Soon I must go away. I am not the burden.”

“Of course you aren’t. You don’t look a bit like a burden,” gaily retorted Patsy. “Let’s not talk about your going away. Let’s talk about the treasure of Las Golondrinas. Do you suppose there really *is* a treasure?”

“*Quien sabe?*” shrugged Dolores.

“That means literally, ‘Who knows?’” translated Mabel, smiling at Dolores. “But *you* really mean, ‘I doubt it.’”

“I have little belief,” confessed Dolores. “Many Feredas have searched but never found. Perhaps, then, there is none to find.”

“I wish we knew something of its history,” sighed Bee. “What do you suppose old Manuel did with the letter and the paper that Rosita took from him while he was asleep?”

“Very likely he put them in the secret drawer,” chuckled Eleanor, casting a teasing glance at Mabel.

“Well, he might have,” stoutly defended Mabel. “I guess I’ll have another try at the old desk this afternoon. If there’s a treasure in this house we must do our best to find it.”

“You girls had best stay quietly indoors to-day.” admonished Miss Carroll. “None of you are half rested from last night.”

“Señora Martha, I have the wish to go to the cottage,” requested Dolores timidly. “I have there the few things which were my father’s. I desire them. When I have them I will go to that cottage no more.”

“My dear, you must feel that you are free to go and come as you choose,” returned Miss Carroll, “except that I would prefer, while you are here with us, that you let me know beforehand where you intend to go. I wish you to feel that I have the same interest in you that I have in Patsy’s friends, Bee, Mabel and Eleanor. If you were to go away without telling anyone where you were going we would be uneasy until you returned.”

“I *desire* to give the obedience to you, Señora Martha! It will be most beautiful,” Dolores made fervent response.

“I wish others felt the same about it,” commented Miss Carroll pointedly, yet with a smile, as she rose from the table.

Patsy merely laughed, though she colored slightly at the roundabout rebuke.

“It’s too late for regrets, Auntie,” she declared. “I promise to do better in future. May Bee and I go to the cottage with Dolores?”

Miss Martha, having demurred a little, finally gave a reluctant consent. Patsy and Bee ran upstairs for their hats. Having gone hatless for years, Dolores had declined Patsy’s offer of one of her own.

Presently the three girls left the house and took the path to the orange groves through which they must pass in order to reach old Rosita’s cottage.

Coming at last to the cottage, they saw that the door stood wide open. The two Wayfarers experienced a sense of dread as they followed Dolores across the

stone threshold into a big, cheerless room which occupied the greater part of the ground floor. Both had an uncomfortable feeling that Rosita might suddenly appear and pounce upon them. They were surprised to find extreme neatness where they had expected to view disorder. The floor was immaculately clean and the few pieces of old-fashioned furniture stood stiffly in place.

“I had an idea we’d find everything upside down,” Patsy remarked. “Rosita was a good housekeeper even if she was crazy.”

“Ah, but it was I who must do the work,” sighed Dolores. “All must be clean save the windows. These Rosita purposely kept dark with the cobwebs so that strangers might not see into the room. Of herself she did nothing, yet she made me to do all. She was indeed mad for long. Always she feared strangers, but none ever came. It is past. I am glad. Wait here for me. I must go up the stairs to the place where I slept. There I have the few things I wish to take away.”

With this Dolores disappeared up a short staircase which opened into the rear wall of the room and led to a loft. As there was nothing in the ugly bare-walled room to attract their interest, Bee and Patsy presently sat down on a wooden bench outside the house to await Dolores’ return.

She soon appeared, carrying an antiquated canvas telescope which she proudly assured them had belonged to her father.

“When we return to Las Golondrinas I will show you the picture of my father,” she promised. “He was the good man and loved me much. Now we shall leave this place. I have the hope never to enter it again.”

Dolores raised her hand in a solemn gesture toward the sky.

“The God in the Heaven heard me pray,” she said, then reverently crossed herself. “He has given me the freedom.”

The trio were rather silent on the walk back to Las Golondrinas. Dolores’ thoughts were upon the great change that had come to her. Patsy and Bee had been deeply impressed by her little act of reverence and divine faith toward the Almighty. In consequence, they, too, were absorbed in thought.

Accompanying Dolores to the room which Miss Martha had that day given the little girl for her own, they watched her unpack the satchel and showed kindly interest in the few keepsakes she possessed, which had belonged to her father. Viewing the faded photograph of the latter, they could trace in Dolores’ beautiful face a distinct likeness to the handsome photographed features.

“Old Rosita could teach us a lesson in neatness,” Patsy said to Bee as they entered their own room. “Emily was so busy, I told her we’d fix up our room today. We might as well move the table back to the center of the room. The ghost won’t walk ever again.”

“Come on, then. I’ll help you.”

Tossing her hat on the bed, Bee crossed the room and took hold with both hands of one end of the heavy mahogany center table. As she stood waiting for Patsy to come to her, her hands played absently along the table’s edge.

“Coming in a minute,” called Patsy, who had stopped to retie her white buckskin Oxford.

“Oh!”

Bee gave a sharp little scream. She had felt the wood move under her straying fingers. Something suddenly shot out from the table end. Sheer surprise caused her to take a stumbling backward step.

“Patsy, look here!” she cried out shrilly.

Instantly Patsy left off tying her shoelace and obeyed the call in a hurry. What she saw was sufficiently amazing to warrant her haste.

While Mabel had spent long hours of patient search for a secret drawer in the old desk, Bee had come upon one unawares.



CHAPTER XXV

WHAT THE SECRET DRAWER HELD

The secret drawer, which Bee's straying fingers had unwittingly released from its hiding place, projected about six inches from the table end. It measured perhaps eight inches across and two in depth. When closed its front formed one of the carved oblong designs which repeated itself at intervals of two inches apart on the overhanging mahogany strips constituting the two ends of the table. The oblong which masked the secret drawer was the last to the left on the end on which Bee had taken hold when about to move the table back to its original place.

These facts relative to the secret drawer were, for the time being, lost on the two girls. Heads together, they were wonderingly examining a square, thin little book, bound in stained sheepskin, which Bee had snatched from the drawer.

"The Private and Personal Diary of one Sir John Holden, Passenger on His Majesty's Ship *Dragon*," Bee was reading aloud from the book's first page. The words were inscribed in faded ink in a fine running hand.

"Why, this is a *real* diary!" she exclaimed. "It was kept by an *Englishman*! It must be awfully old!"

"Turn over to the next page," eagerly commanded Patsy, "and let's see what it's all about."

Holding the book in both hands, Bee let go of it with her right and started to turn the first leaf. As she did so a folded paper slid from the back of the book to the floor.

Patsy made a quick dive for it and picked it up with: "It's a letter, I guess. Shall we look at it first or go on with the diary?"

"Let's not look at either, just yet. Let's call the folks in here and read the diary and the letter when we're all together," proposed Bee generously. "It will be more fun. They'll be awfully surprised to see the secret drawer; Mab especially."

"All right," amiably agreed Patsy. "You go for Mab, Eleanor and Dolores. I'll see if Auntie has had her nap and is awake. If she's sleeping I won't disturb her. We may find nothing very interesting, after all, in this old diary. Anyhow we can

show it to her afterward.”

Carefully laying letter and diary on the table from which both had emanated, the two Wayfarers sped from the room on their respective errands.

Patsy returned first and without her aunt. Finding Miss Martha sleeping peacefully, she had foreborne to disturb her.

When Beatrice presently appeared in company with the three others, they found Patsy busily examining the secret drawer which still stood open.

“You were on the wrong trail, Mab,” she laughingly greeted. “Bee beat you to it after all.”

“So I hear. Lets see your wonderful find.”

The newcomers crowded about the drawer, exclaiming over it, girl fashion. They were also duly impressed by the sheepskin book and the letter which, Patsy informed them, had been tucked away in the drawer. Mabel, however, was more interested in the drawer itself.

“It takes up exactly the same amount of space as one of those oblongs,” she cried out, as her observing eyes traveled the length of the table end. Having spent so much time on the antiquated desk she was naturally much interested in the mechanics of the secret drawer Bee had discovered.

“Never mind the drawer now, Mab. You can play with it later. We’ll leave it open. If we were to shut it, very likely we couldn’t open it again.”

This from Patsy, who was impatiently longing to start a reading of the old diary.

“Be seated, ladies,” she merrily ordered. “Miss Patricia Carroll has kindly consented to read you a few interesting excerpts from the diary of one Sir John Holden. Goodness knows who he was. We’ll know more about him after we’ve read what he’s written about himself.”

“I thought you told us you two hadn’t read the diary,” playfully accused Eleanor. “You seem to know all about it.”

“We read only the first page,” Bee explained. “We didn’t go on with it because we wanted you girls to be in on it, too. There’s nothing stingy about us.”

“So I observe. We are nothing if not appreciative.”

“This was the room of old Manuel,” irrelevantly remarked Dolores. She had been silently listening to the girls’ lively chatter, her great dark eyes roving

curiously about the spacious room.

“It *was!*” Bee exclaimed. “That’s interesting to know. It explains why Rosita paid us those two midnight visits. She may have thought Manuel de Fereda had found the treasure and tucked it away in his room. Are you sure this was *his* room, Dolores?”

“*Si.*” Dolores wagged an emphatic head. “Once Eulalie showed it to me. We came only to the door. Still I remember. It was truly his room.”

“Then Manuel must have put this book in the drawer,” declared Patsy. “Well, let’s find out what an English passenger on ‘His Majesty’s Ship *Dragon*’ had to do with the Feredas.”

Her companions having drawn up chairs and seated themselves in a half circle, Patsy picked up the little sheepskin book and eagerly turned to the second page.

“‘August the fifth,’” she began, then gave a little amazed gasp. “Girls,” she said in awed tones, “this date is ‘*sixteen* hundred and eighteen!’”

A murmur of surprise ascended at this announcement.

“Go on, Patsy,” urged Bee. “What happened on August the fifth, sixteen hundred and eighteen?”

“‘One hour after sunrise,’” Patsy resumed, “‘we weighed anchor and blessed by a fair wind we set sail from the port of Southampton, bound for Virginia, His Most Gracious Majesty’s colony in the New World, which, by the aid and mercy of God, we hope to reach in safety and before many weeks have elapsed. It is now evening and the good wind still continues to fill the *Dragon*’s sails. I shall retire at once as the events of the day have been somewhat fatiguing.’”

“That’s all for August the fifth,” she said. “The next is August the tenth, so it’s really a journal instead of a diary.”

“This John Holden probably intended to keep a diary and then didn’t,” surmised Bee.

“How funny!” ejaculated Patsy. “That’s almost exactly what he’s written. Listen:

“‘My original intention consisted in the resolve to chronicle faithfully the events of each day. I am deeply regretful that divers matters have completely engaged my attention which have thus caused it to be impossible for me to

perform this duty which I laid upon myself. Thus far the Almighty hath indeed favored us. We were for a day becalmed, but since that time we have encountered exceptionally favoring winds, which have steadily furthered us on our course. If Providence wills a continuation of this remarkably fine weather we shall accomplish the voyage sooner, perhaps, than we had the temerity to hope.”

“He certainly used a lot of words to express himself,” smiled Eleanor.

“Long words and lots of them were the fashion in those days,” commented Bee. “Go on, Patsy.”

“August the twelfth. The fine weather still prevails. We are inspired to believe that God is with us. Among the hundred and ten males on board our good ship, not one now suffereth the slightest indisposition. During the first three days of the voyage a small number were afflicted with the malady of seasickness, which is grievously unpleasant in that it is attended by extreme nausea of the stomach. Fortunately this annoying complaint is always of short duration. All those thus distressed have recovered and appear to be in better health than ever. I trust that this felicitous state of affairs may continue.

“August the twentieth: This day a sad accident occurred. By some dire mischance one of our crew, a faithful fellow but one whose clumsiness I have frequently noted, fell overboard. Immediately our captain bestirred himself to accomplish his rescue, but in vain. Being a poor swimmer, the unfortunate fellow was unable to sustain himself above the waves until succor came, and thus perished in the sea before our very eyes. I trust that this distressing event is not a forerunner of greater disaster. The crew, who are inclined somewhat toward silly superstition, appear to regard it as an ill omen.

“August the twenty-ninth: Our favoring winds have ceased to blow. This day we have made no progress worth recording. As I gazed out over the vast expanse of ocean this evening, during the setting of the sun, I was reminded of the words of the beloved Apostle John: “And I saw a sea of glass mingled with fire.” We should give thanks devoutly, inasmuch as while we are thus irritatingly becalmed, such a condition is to be preferred to foul weather and heavy seas.

“September the fourth: After five days of such feeble progress as maketh the heart sick, we are speeding forward once more under billowing sails. On board ship all are in excellent spirits at this welcome dispensation of divine Providence. We now entertain high hopes of reaching our destination ere the coming of the dreaded equinoctial gales which are well able to send the stoutest ship to the bottom of the sea.

“I fear these tempests far more than the possibility that we may be attacked by the Spanish. We are, I believe, well prepared to meet the Spanish villains and worst them, should they appear against us. We have on board the *Dragon* no mean defense in the way of cannon, powder, some hundred rounds of great artillery and divers small armament. All this, of course, being vitally necessary, inasmuch as among us we are possessed of enough in the way of gold, silver and precious stones to excite the greed of these inhuman cut-throats should they get wind of our coming.”

“This is getting wildly interesting!” exclaimed Bee. “At last we have with us a *treasure*. I believe it must be the treasure of Las Golondrinas, else why would old Manuel have kept this diary hidden away?”

“But this ship, the *Dragon*, was bound for Virginia, not Florida,” reminded Mabel. “I don’t see much connection between this John Holden’s diary and Las Golondrinas. Besides, there couldn’t have been such a place as Las Golondrinas at the time he made this voyage.”

“Stop interrupting me and maybe we’ll find out something more about things,” laughingly rebuked Patsy. “The next entry is as follows:

“September the fifteenth: Until yesterday all progressed with such remarkable serenity that I had nothing of import to inscribe upon the pages of this book. Last evening at sunset we encountered a small Spanish galleon which villainously opened fire upon us, killing two of our crew and slightly wounding four others. Our master gunner immediately retaliated with a fierceness of fire which presently caused our enemy to abandon the attack and sail away with all speed. When the retreating galleon had become but a distant speck on the wide sea we gathered on deck and offered our profound thanks to God for his mercy in thus preserving us from our enemies. May He continue thus to bestow his favor upon us.

“September the sixteenth: This day we committed to the depths of the ocean the bodies of the two poor fellows, slain by the dastardly Spanish. We buried them with such honors and reverence as befitted the brave death which they had suffered. I have hopes that those who received wounds will quickly recover. Our hearts are exceedingly heavy over the loss of two excellent men, both having ever been sober, industrious, God-fearing fellows.

“September the twentieth: According to the reckonings, which, for my own satisfaction, I have computed privately with the utmost carefulness, we are still many hundred miles from land. Since morning the wind hath risen to a

considerable strength and velocity. The sky to-night presents a lowering aspect, thus causing us to entertain dark misgivings. The sea is becoming tumultuous and the height of the waves is greater than at any time since we embarked upon this voyage. I fear that we shall yet taste the fury of the equinoctial gales. I believe to-day's change but heralds the commencement of this trial. We must be of stout heart and ready arm, placing our trust in the Almighty who hath thus far so abundantly safeguarded us.

“September the thirtieth: We have fallen upon evil days. I sadly mistrust that it will be long ere our eyes behold the goodly colony of Virginia. On the night of September the twenty-first the storm, which I had rightly predicted, burst fiercely upon us. Against the fury of the blast and the seas which rose mountain-high to engulf us, the *Dragon* prevailed only by a miracle wrought by Providence.

“For three days we labored in the teeth of the tempest, which ripped bare certain of our masts and flung us far off our course. Since then the wind hath continued to blow with exceeding roughness, and the waves yet remain of unpleasant height. Day upon day hath seen our ship tossed about like a cork on the waters.

“My private computations lead me to entertain the dismaying apprehension that we must be very far south of Virginia. Ere long I fear we shall see the coast of that debatable land, Florida, which harboreth the inhuman Spaniard. Should this misfortune encompass us we shall find ourselves hard put to escape falling into their clutches, for their pirate ships continually scour the southern waters in quest of rich booty.

“October the fourth: This morning we sighted land and were concerned altogether as to what should be our course of action. A fairly stiff breeze drove us steadily toward shore until we could plainly distinguish white sands and a profuseness of tropical vegetation that accordeth well with the faithful description of Florida made public by that gallant knight, Sir Walter Raleigh, whom His Majesty hath so illy recompensed for his great services. The warmth of the atmosphere also tended to confirm our judgment.

“Whereas our good ship had suffered hard buffeting by wind and sea, we took counsel together and were of one mind that we should proceed toward shore and drop anchor until we could encompass such labor as was needful to render the ship seaworthy once more. For we were desirous of turning the *Dragon* about in order to pursue a course due north which would, after many

days, bring us to Virginia. And we weighed carefully the peril in which we stood that we might at any hour be attacked by hostile galleons and mayhap find ourselves overwhelmed and delivered into the cruel and merciless hands of the Spaniard. Yet we knew that we had no choice save to incur this hazard. Now it draweth toward sunset. This day we have labored diligently and accomplished much. Neither have we been molested.”

“The next entry is so dim I can hardly make it out,” Patsy announced. “It looks as though it might have been written in pencil. I didn’t know there were any lead pencils as early as 1618.”

“There were, though,” Bee affirmed. “I remember reading in a magazine awhile ago that the first lead pencils were made in fifteen hundred and something. I can’t recall the exact date.”

“Well, I’m sure this was written in pencil,” returned Patsy. “Don’t be impatient if I stumble a little in reading the entry for it’s awfully dim.”

“Do go on,” implored Eleanor. “We’re keyed up to a high pitch of suspense to hear what happened next.”

““October the fifth,”” Patsy obediently resumed. ““This morning at sunrise we were attacked by a Spanish galleon which inflicted sore injuries to our good ship. Yet we rendered such sturdy account of ourselves as to force our enemy to draw off and speed away, I doubted not in order to bring other galleons against us. All that which we accomplished yesterday hath been undone by the divers volleys of shots which the enemy hurled against us.

““The galleon having been put to flight we again took counsel. Rather than permit the passing of such valuables as each of us possessed into the greedy fingers of the Spaniard, we made haste to place all together in a strong chest. Each man attended to the gathering of his gold, silver and jewels into a small bag, his name being written upon paper and placed within the bag on top of his wealth. These bags we placed in the seaman’s chest together with a fine gold service which His Majesty had entrusted to our captain, to be delivered to a certain knight in Virginia.

““When all was done the weight of the box was so great six men could scarcely bear it to the ship’s boat. To me was intrusted the command of these men, who were ordered to row to shore and there bury the box in the earth against the time when we might be able to return for it. This we did and found for the treasure a secure hiding place and buried it at the true sign of the *Dragon*, which was also His Majesty’s ship, sunk this day, so that we could not mistake it

on our return. Our interest was then to proceed speedily to the ship, for we had agreed to weigh anchor and sail away, crippled though we were.

“Yet while we floundered our way back to the shore, through well-nigh impassable green growths, infested with loathsome serpents which we slaughtered in numbers, we heard shots and knew that disaster had come upon our ship. So we made haste to gain the shore, but bethought ourselves to hide at the edge of the jungle rather than show ourselves before we had learned the cause of the firing. And we saw a mighty Spanish galleon bearing down on the *Dragon* and knowing that we could do nothing were compelled to lie where we were and watch the unequal fight between our gallant ship and the great, high-built galleon.

“But the *Dragon* fought on until her masts were beaten overboard and all her tackle cut asunder and her upper work altogether razed, until, in effect, she evened with the water, nothing of her being left overhead either for flight or defense.

“Then our captain, who well knew what torture awaited those on board the *Dragon* when the Spaniard should set foot upon her, must surely have ordered the master gunner to split and sink the ship. This I believe, because suddenly on board the *Dragon* a terrific explosion took place and she broke in two and sank with all her crew and passengers.

“Then those of us who survived because of our errand on shore took counsel among ourselves and there seemed naught to be done save to go deeper into the jungle and hide ourselves until such time as we might be safe to come forth and trust ourselves to the mercy of the sea in our frail boat. For we had bethought ourselves when we landed to carry our boat across the sands and conceal it in the bushes. We were convinced that of the two the sea was possessed of more mercy than the Spaniard.

“So we lay for a little and watched the galleon which went not away but hovered near where our ill-fated ship had disappeared beneath the waters. Presently we saw that which gave us sore alarm. We observed the putting down of a boat from the galleon’s side, and we counted ten men, all stoutly armed, who quickly betook themselves over the side and manned this boat as soon as it rode the waters. Then we were of the belief that this galleon had been lurking in the waters behind a small but thickly wooded tongue of land to the north of us, this tongue of land forming one end of a curve in the sands which in shape bore the likeness to a new moon.

“We doubted not that the first galleon which we had worsted was in complicity with this second. We were convinced that both these had stolen upon us in the night. Whereas the first had been driven off by us, but with dear loss to ourselves. Those on board the second galleon must surely have observed our plight and thus bided their hour to attack us and complete our destruction. And while they thus waited it is certain they must in some manner have become aware of the lowering of the strong box into our boat and this same boat putting off to shore.

“And we knew that we were undone and must seek such refuge as we might find in the jungle. Thereupon we set off in great haste, this time paying no heed to the disgusting serpents which frequently wriggled under our feet and hissed their displeasure of us, though by miracle we were stung by none of them.

“Thus we continued to struggle deeper into the jungle with as much speed as we could, and we marveled that we had not yet heard our pursuers behind us. For we were determined to push ever forward until we discovered a fitting place of concealment in the hope that there we might escape being hunted out by them. We were resolved, should they discover us, to fight to the death, for we were well armed.

“And after much painful wandering we came into a ravine and found a natural cavern the mouth of which was so overhung with broad-leaved green vines and obscured by bushes as to deceive us at first that aught of a cave was there. And we were overjoyed at this unexpected gain, for we reckoned that even as it had deceived us so it might deceive the Spaniard. Whereupon we severed with exceeding care enough of the vines as would permit us room to pass into the cavern and crept therein, one after another. And by good fortune one of the men had with him a bit of wax candle which we lighted by means of a flint and steel. And we were relieved to find the cave dry and free from scorpions and serpents.

“It is now well past midday and still we are undiscovered. Having naught else to do I have taken my book, which never leaveth my person, and inscribed these facts therein by such dim light as filtereth through a little between our sheltering curtain of vines. If, by the grace of God, I survive this trial I shall ever regard this record as of higher interest than those which I have on divers occasions previous to this derived pleasure in inscribing herein. Should we escape the Spaniard we shall be still in an evil case to procure food, and defend ourselves against wild beasts and savages. These last we have not yet seen, yet I doubt not their presence in this untamed wilderness which now encompasseth us. We are

resolved to be of steady courage and good cheer. Our faith reposeth in the Almighty who holdeth us in the hollow of His hand and who will deal with us as He deemeth best. We hold——”

Patsy suddenly stopped reading.

“That’s all!” she exclaimed disappointedly. “It breaks off at ‘We hold’ with a long scrawl of the ‘d’ as though Sir John Holden had been suddenly interrupted.”

“It’s wonderful!” Bee drew a long breath. “While Patsy was reading that last entry I imagined I could see those poor men fleeing for their lives through the jungle. The queer part of it is that it must be *true*. It’s almost as though this Sir John Holden, who lived three hundred years ago, had suddenly come back and spoken to us.”

“Do you suppose the Spaniards found their hiding place and killed them?” asked Eleanor. “Do let me look at the ending of that last entry, Patsy.”

Patsy handed the open book to Eleanor. Peering over her shoulder, Bee, Dolores and Mabel scrutinized it with her. For a time a lively discussion went on among the five girls concerning the book and the amazing narrative it contained. Its abrupt ending pointed to disaster to the fugitive Englishmen.

“I believe the strong box these men buried was the treasure that old Manuel Fereda spent his life hunting for,” finally asserted Bee. “According to description, the place where they went ashore corresponds to the new moon curve of our bathing beach. Don’t you remember how the north end of the curve runs out to a point? The beach goes deep in above there in another shorter curve that makes a natural harbor. I noticed it the other day when we had the race. We swam just a little way past that point.”

“I remember it now,” Patsy looked up, an almost startled expression in her eyes. “It doesn’t seem possible that all this I’ve been reading about ever happened on the very shore we’ve been using for a bathing beach. If it did happen there, then they buried the treasure somewhere in the woods back of it. How did Manuel come by this journal? That’s what I’d like to know.”

“This journal has been handed down from one generation of Feredas to another,” returned Bee promptly. “What about Camillo de Fereda, the portrait cavalier? Judging from his costume in the picture he must have lived at about the same time as this journal was written. Eulalie told Dolores that he was a pirate and a murderer. He might have been on the very galleon that fought the *Dragon*. He might have been among the Spaniards who went ashore after Sir John and his

men. Maybe the Spaniards found them and killed them all and brought back this book to the galleon. I've been trying to figure it out and that's the way I think it was."

"It sounds very plausible," agreed Patsy, much impressed. "Isn't it maddening to find out this much only to realize that we'll never know the rest? If there's a treasure no wonder the Feredas could never find it. All Sir John says about it is that they buried it at the true sign of the *Dragon*. Now what did he mean by that?"

"Well never know, nor will anyone else. If there's really a treasure buried in the woods behind the beach it will probably stay there forever," predicted Mabel.

"I guess it will," agreed Patsy. "I know we'll never hunt for it. I can imagine Auntie's face if I proposed digging up those woods to find it. I wonder what she'll say about this journal? It's a treasure in itself. It really belongs to you, Bee. You found it."

"Yes; but in your room," reminded Beatrice.

Nevertheless she looked rather wistfully at the little sheepskin-covered book. It was indeed a treasure worth having.

"I'll offer it to Auntie, Bee," Patsy replied, noting the wistful look in Bee's eyes. "We ought to consider her first. If she doesn't care for it, it's yours."

"Oh, no, *you* keep it," protested Bee. "I couldn't accept it, really."

"We'll settle that later. Oh, I forgot! We haven't looked at the folded paper yet that fell out of the book."

Patsy turned to the table and picked up the forgotten paper.

"It's a letter," she informed. Then her face clouded. "It's written in Spanish," she added disgustedly. "You can read it, Mab, I suppose."

"Patsy, *querida*, give me the letter," eagerly begged Dolores, who as usual had played the silent but always avidly interested listener. "I would read it for you."

"Why, that's so! I forgot all about your being Spanish, Dolores," smiled Patsy.

"Let Dolores read it," urged Mabel. "She can make a much better translation of it than I."

"Go ahead, Dolores," Patsy handed her the letter. Eleanor and Bee also echoed the request.

Shyly delighted at being thus importuned by the girls she so greatly loved and admired, Dolores took the letter and scanned it with knitted brows:

“*Mi querido hijo,*” she read aloud. “That means, ‘My dear son.’ I will not read more of this in the Spanish, but try to tell you of it in the English as I read it in my own language. This it says:

“It is long since I have written to you. I have waited for you to come to me, but you have not come. I grow old and but last month I received the wound in the side from an accursed English captain whose ship we set upon and captured. But he paid dearly for this outrage to my person. We put him and all on board to the torture.

“But my wound heals not and promises yet to prove my death. Therefore I charge you to continue to search for the treasure which the accursed English brought ashore and buried on the morning when my galleon fought them and caused their destruction. You know well how we hunted down those who concealed the treasure and put them to torture. Stubborn pigs that they were, they perished, unconfessed.

“Since that time I have searched long and frequently for this box which I doubt not to be filled with gold. I have wasted many hours over the stupid book, but understand not at all. Neither dare I give it to any who have knowledge of English lest the secret hiding place of the treasure thus become known to him who reads.

“Therefore I charge you to come to me soon in order that I may deliver this book into your hands with such instructions as I have for you. For I am unable to come to you. When I shall have passed out of this life and into the eternal darkness, as I must surely do, since I have no belief in life after death, cease not to search for the treasure. From His Majesty I have received full title to the portion of land we marked off for our own. Thus it becomes yours when I have finished with it. Delay not, but come speedily if you would see your father once more.

“DON CAMILLO DE FEREDA.”

“It’s the one thing we needed to complete our case.”

It was Bee who shattered the hush that had fallen upon the group.

“Yes. We know now that Don Camillo de Fereda *was* really a pirate. That he commanded the galleon that finished the *Dragon*. We know what happened to Sir John Holden and his men and how the book came into the possession of the Feredas,” enumerated Patsy. “The letter and the book have been handed down from generation to generation because none of the Feredas ever found the treasure of Las Golondrinas.”

“That was because of the wickedness of Don Camillo de Fereda,” asserted Dolores. “It was not intended that either he or any of this family should find.

Because of it old Manuel died bitter and without faith. To Rosita it brought the madness. I believe that it has the curse laid upon it.”



CHAPTER XXVI

“THE TRUE SIGN OF THE ‘DRAGON’”

The story of the treasure of Las Golondrinas was not to be thus easily dismissed from the minds of the Wayfarers. Quite the contrary, it became paramount as a topic of conversation. The journal of the unfortunate Englishman, Sir John Holden, and the letter written by Don Camillo de Fereda were duly exhibited to and read by Miss Martha and Mr. Carroll.

Though both were considerably impressed by the girls' find neither was in sympathy with Patsy's half-jesting, half-earnest assertion: "It would be fun to poke around in the woods a little and hunt for the treasure, if we had the least bit of an idea what 'the sign of the *Dragon*' was."

Miss Carroll had promptly vetoed the "poking around in the woods" plan, appealing to Mr. Carroll to support her in prohibiting such a proceeding. He had been equally ready on his own account, however, to decry Patsy's proposal.

"Don't allow this treasure story to take hold on your minds," he had discouraged. "It's highly interesting, of course, but that's all. You're not apt to discover a treasure that generations of Feredas failed to locate. They knew the ground thoroughly and failed. You know nothing of that jungle behind the beach."

With no one save Bee as an ally, Patsy's ambition saw no prospect of realization. Still the treasure story remained uppermost in her mind. It haunted her, particularly during the morning excursions to and from the bathing beach. The portion of jungle through which the white, sandy beach-road ran became invested with new interest. Its green depths concealed a treasure, once the treasure of the Dragon, now the treasure of Las Golondrinas.

"Do you suppose this part of the coast has changed very much since 1618?" Patsy reflectively questioned one morning, as she and Bee lay on the warm sands sunning themselves after a long swim.

"I don't know." Bee was gazing absently seaward. "You're thinking about the treasure, of course," she added with a smile.

"Yes," Patsy admitted. "Too bad Sir John wasn't captain of the *Dragon*. He'd have kept a log instead of a journal, and in it he would have set down the ship's

exact position. How far it was from shore, I mean, and all that.”

“I have an idea that the *Dragon* anchored quite a way below this part of the beach,” declared Beatrice, “and not so very far from land. It’s just as Sir John said, the beach along here curves a little like a new moon. The upper end of the curve runs farther out into the water than the lower end. Above the upper end is the little bay where the galleons must have anchored in the night. You know how deep the water is there. If the *Dragon* had been directly opposite this curve, those on board would have probably sighted the galleons and the captain would have tried to get away when the first one attacked him. They’d been fixing up the ship all that day, you know.”

“Yes, that’s so,” nodded Patsy. “But where do you think the men landed who went ashore in the row-boat?”

“That’s hard to guess,” returned Bee. “If the ship were anchored down there, they might have rowed in a straight line to land without being seen by the Spaniards. If the beach was then just as it is now, right along here would have been a better place for them to land than down there. Maybe the Spaniards had a lookout posted in the woods watching them.”

“If they had, it’s funny that Don Camillo didn’t send some of his men to follow them right then, instead of waiting until after the attack,” argued Patsy.

“I suppose he thought he had those poor Englishmen just where he wanted them,” replied Bee. “He knew that they couldn’t escape him. He thought, perhaps, that it would be easy to make them confess where they’d buried the box. You know history says that the Spanish adventurers who first came over here made a practice of torturing the Indians to find out where they kept their gold. Sir John and his men knew they’d be killed by Don Camillo even if they confessed, so they preferred to die by torture rather than tell the secret.”

“It’s horrible to think of, isn’t it?” shuddered Patsy. “I’m glad we were born three hundred years later than those dangerous times. No one’s life was safe then. Say, Bee,” Patsy sat up with sudden energy. “I’m going to ask Auntie if we can’t walk a little way down the beach this morning. If she says ‘yes’ we’ll change our bathing suits and ask Dolores to go with us. I’m anxious to see how it looks down there at that lower end of the curve. Come on.”

Springing to her feet, Patsy raced across the sands to where her aunt and Dolores were quietly sitting, each absorbed in a book. Dolores’ fondness for Nature did not include any desire whatever for a close acquaintance with the ocean. No amount of persuasion on the part of the Wayfarers could induce her to

go bathing with them.

“Auntie, dear,” began Patsy in coaxing tones, as she and Bee came to a pause before the two on the sands, “do you care if we change our bathing suits and go for a little walk down the beach? We want you to go with us, Dolores. We won’t go far, Aunt Martha, and will be back in just a little while.”

“Very well.” Miss Carroll looked up placidly from her reading. “I trust you, Dolores, to keep these two reckless girls out of mischief,” she added, turning to her companion.

Dolores laid her book aside and rose in instant acquiescence to Patsy’s plea.

“Surely, I will go with you, Patsy, *querida*,” she said in her soft voice. “Have no fear, Señora Martha, that I shall not keep the very stern eyes upon these two,” she mischievously assured Miss Carroll.

“Wait a minute till I see if Mab and Nellie want to go,” Patsy said. Running down to the water’s edge, she called out her invitation to the Perry girls, who were industriously practising a new swimming stroke which Mr. Carroll had taught them on the previous day.

“No, we don’t want to go,” declined Mabel. “We’re just beginning to get this stroke down fine. Go away, Patsy Carroll.”

“Come along, Bee. The Perry children don’t appreciate us,” Patsy commented satirically.

A little later, Bee and Patsy emerged from the bath house, ready for their walk. Accompanied by Dolores the trio started off down the beach.

“We’ve been quite a little way up the beach, Dolores, but we’ve never gone a dozen yards down it,” remarked Patsy, as they strolled along in the sunshine. “We’re going as far as that point down there and maybe farther. We want to see how it looks on the other side of it. We were talking about the *Dragon* this morning and——”

“I beg of you, Patsy, *querida*, think no more of that horrible treasure.” Dolores had stopped short, her dark eyes full of distress. “It is forbidden by the *señora* that you should walk in the jungle. I have given the promise to keep the care of you. So must I——”

“Come along, goosie, dear.” Patsy laid gentle hold on Dolores’ arm. “We’re not going into the jungle to hunt for the stupid old treasure. We just want to go a little way and see things. Bee and I have an idea that the men from the *Dragon*

might have touched shore on the other side of the point when they rowed to land. We only want to see how it looks there.”

“It is not so different from this,” Dolores declared, “except that beyond the point is the small inlet.”

“Is that so?” Bee remarked in surprise. “I supposed that beyond the point was only a little bay. The beach is narrow at the point on account of the woods coming down so close to the water. That’s the way it is with the upper end of the curve, you know. Can we walk around the point and along the shore of the inlet for a little way without actually getting into the jungle?”

“Si,” returned Dolores, “but not very far.”

“Then let’s go as far as we dare,” proposed intrepid Patsy. “You lead the way, Dolores.”

Presently arriving at the place where the beach itself was merely a strip of sand extending out into the water, the three girls rounded the point and walked along the sandy shore of the inlet.

They had gone only a few steps when Bee stopped short and pointed out to sea.

“The *Dragon* might have been anchored right over there, Patsy,” she asserted. “This would have been a splendid place for the men in the row-boat to land.”

“Maybe they did land here, and struck off into the jungle, right there, where the inlet begins,” surmised Patsy. “Let’s follow the shore of the inlet. It’s almost as wide as this bit of beach and doesn’t look snaky. As long as we don’t get into the jungly part of the jungle we’re safe enough.”

“I think it will be all right for us to go up it a few rods if we stick to the shore,” decided Bee. “It looks so pretty up there under those trees that hang over the water. Truly, Dolores, we’re not thinking about the treasure now. It certainly wasn’t buried along the shore of the inlet. Why, the journal never mentioned an inlet. You go ahead and we’ll follow. You know the ground.”

Reassured by Bee’s words, Dolores first hunted about for a good-sized snake stick, then reluctantly took the lead. The trio soon reached the mouth of the inlet and continued up one side of it for a short distance. The farther they went the narrower grew the sandy shore, lying even with the jungle itself. Over the inlet hung a kind of white haze, appearing to rise from the water.

“We’re in the jungle and yet not in it,” cheerfully commented Patsy. “How

misty that water looks.”

She had hardly spoken when Bee uttered a sharp exclamatory “Oh!”

Walking ahead, Dolores had come upon a noisy puff adder curled up on the shore. While it puffed its resentment at being disturbed, she deftly caught it up on the end of the stick and tossed it, hissing, into the water.

“It is not harmful,” she explained, “yet I have the sorrow to see it, because it is the snake, and all snakes are the sign of evil. Now we should perhaps turn back. You have seen——”

Her low, musical voice suddenly trailed off into a horrified gasp. Simultaneously three pairs of eyes had glimpsed a terrifying something rising up through the mist from the inlet’s quiet waters. As it continued to rise they caught a fleeting impression of a grotesque, flat, wrinkled head, composed chiefly of a heavy upper lip from which depended a long trail of green. In its flipper-like arms the ugly monster held a grayish object, clasped close to its vast, shapeless body.

“It is an evil thing!” shrieked Dolores. Panic-stricken, she reverted to her old wood nymph tactics and bolted straight into the jungle, Patsy and Beatrice following wildly after.

“Dolores!” at last screamed Bee in desperation. “Wait for us!”

The shrill appeal checked the badly scared wood nymph’s headlong flight long enough for Bee and Patsy to come up with her. Breathless though she was, Bee’s brief terror had apparently taken wing. She was now smiling broadly.

“We’re a set of geese!” she exclaimed. “Do you know what our horrible monster is? I do. It’s nothing but a meek, harmless manatee!”

“What, then, is a manatee?” inquired Dolores, in tones that indicated doubt that so terrible a monster as she had just seen could possibly be harmless.

“Oh, it’s an animal something like a seal, only a lot larger, that lives in the sea. It eats nothing but plants and grass and is as harmless as a kitten. I’ve seen pictures of manatees, but never saw a real one before,” explained Bee. “The minute after we started to run, I guessed what it was we’d seen. They live in lagoons and the mouths of rivers that run into the sea and inlets like this. The poor thing was holding up its baby manatee for us to see and we never stopped to admire it!”

“Let’s go back and look at it,” said Patsy. “We’ve got to get out of this jungle

as soon as ever we can. We'll have to go back the way we came, I suppose. Auntie will be awfully cross with me for this. She'll blame me for the whole business."

"From here it is not so far to the jungle road," informed Dolores. "I know the little path to it. That will be best for us to take, I believe."

"All right," acquiesced Bee, "only do let's stop and rest a little first. That wild run of ours took most of my breath. There's a nice, clean place under that big tree. A five-minutes' stop there won't do us any harm."

Pausing only to break off a leafy branch from a stunted sapling, Bee walked over to the spot she had designated and energetically swept it, a precautionary measure against lurking wood-ticks and scorpions. Then she dropped down on the dry ground with a little sigh of relief.

Dolores seated herself beside Bee. Patsy, however, made no move to sit down. Instead, she stopped half way to the tree and gazed about her with alert, interested eyes.

"Look at that dandy big rock!" she exclaimed, pointing to a huge boulder a little to the left of where she was standing. "I can climb up on it as easy as anything. It will be a fine perch. No snakes or scorpions or horrid old wood-ticks can get me up there."

The rock on which Patsy proposed to perch was perhaps five feet high and correspondingly thick through. It measured at least eight feet across. One end of it tapered down to a blunt point, thereby furnishing Patsy an easy means of reaching its rather flat top.

"Hurray!" was her jubilant exclamation when a moment later she stood on top of the boulder and waved a triumphant hand to her companions. "The world is mine!"

Patsy made an elaborate bow, first to the right, then to the left. Her eyes coming to rest on the pointed end of the boulder she called out:

"What does this end of the rock make you think of?"

"It reminds me of a rock," jibed Bee. "I can't see that it looks like anything else."

"That's because you're not up here," retorted Patsy. "Standing on the top, looking down, this end is like an alligator's head. No it isn't, either. It's more like the head of a queer, prehistoric monster. Why, girls!" Patsy's voice suddenly

rose to an excited squeal. “Come up here, quick! I want to *show* you something!”

Quite in the dark regarding the cause of Patsy’s agitation, Bee and Dolores lost no time, however, in scrambling up on the boulder.

“Look!” Patsy pointed a shaking finger downward. “Can’t you see it? Don’t you know what it’s like?”

“It does look a little like one of those prehistoric monster’s heads,” agreed Bee.

“It looks like more than that. It looks like a *dragon*’s head. Now I know what Sir John Holden meant when he wrote, ‘And we buried the treasure at the true sign of the Dragon, which was also His Majesty’s ship sunk this day.’ He and his men came here with the box and found this rock. He must have climbed to the top of it to take an observation. He must have seen the queer resemblance of this end of the rock to a dragon’s head. He thought it would be a good thing to bury the box near it, because then they couldn’t mistake the place if they came back again. I truly believe that somewhere in the ground around this rock and close to it is the treasure of Las Golondrinas!”



CHAPTER XXVII

THE TREASURE OF LAS GOLONDRINAS

Two mornings after Patsy's amazing discovery of what she believed to be the place where Sir John Holden had buried the treasure box, an interested but not entirely credulous delegation set out for the jungle.

It consisted of the Wayfarers, Dolores, Mr. and Miss Carroll, Uncle Jemmy and two negro laborers. These last were laden with picks and shovels. It had taken lengthy and insistent pleading on Patsy's part to bring about this much-desired state of affairs.

Despite the fact that she had been soundly taken to task by her aunt and her father for disobedience of orders, her reiterated plea was: "You may scold me as much as you like, Dad, if only you'll send somebody to dig up the earth around Dragon Rock." Thus Patsy had named the big boulder. She was firmly convinced that her theory concerning the location of the treasure would prove correct, if investigated thoroughly.

Demurring at first, the fascination of treasure hunting had finally laid sufficient hold on Mr. Carroll to the point of consenting to humor Patsy's belief. Hence the party that, guided by Dolores, was now on its way to Dragon Rock.

To the Wayfarers it was the great hour of their young lives. They regarded the expedition as the very height of adventure. Miss Martha was also rather stirred up over it, though she maintained her usual lofty attitude of pretending she was not. Dolores was solemnly superstitious lest evil might overtake the whole party. Mr. Carroll was frankly sceptical. As for the darkies, they had no inkling of what it was all about. Neither were they in the least concerned. Sufficient that Massa Carroll "wanted dem woods dug up."

Finally arrived at Dragon Rock, Patsy constituted herself master of ceremonies, gravely escorting her father to the top of the boulder to show him the dragon's head. Mabel and Eleanor also clambered up to see and were duly impressed. Miss Martha, however, had too much dignity for rock climbing.

"Look!" Patsy pointed a shaking finger downward. "Can't you see it?"

"Well, Patsy, I guess the boys might as well start digging," was Mr. Carroll's opinion after a brief inspection of the ground around the boulder. "Better stand

well back, all of you. I'm going to have a circular ditch dug around the rock, say about four feet wide and four deep. If there is really a box buried there, it is probably buried close to the rock. That's the theory I'm going to proceed on."

With this, Mr. Carroll left her and went over to where Uncle Jemmy and his two assistants stood leaning on their picks, indolently awaiting his orders. Instructing them as to the width and depth of the ditch he purposed they should dig, he set them to work and stood watching them for a moment, a half-amused smile on his face.

"We never thought we'd ever go treasure-hunting, did we, Martha?" he remarked as he joined the interested group of spectators, drawn up a little to the left of the rock. "It takes me back to the days when we were youngsters and read dozens of treasure stories and wondered if we should ever be lucky enough to stumble upon a real treasure."

"Judging from appearances, I should say our ideas haven't changed much," dryly returned his sister. "We are as deep in the mud as Patsy is in the mire."

"What are you going to do with this great treasure, when we find it, Patsy?" humorously questioned her father.

"Give half of it to Dolores, and then we'll divide the other half among us," returned Patsy.

This immediately evoked a chorus of laughing approval on the part of everyone save Dolores, who protested stoutly against any such division.

Meanwhile the three darkies had proceeded stolidly with their task. The loose sandy soil made digging comparatively easy and before long a shallow ditch circled the rock. As they continued to work at deepening it, conversation among the watchers died out and a curious hush fell upon the group, broken only by the forest sounds around them and the dull grating of pick and shovel coming in contact with the sand.

Patsy, however, could not resist going over to the ditch from time to time for a close-up view of it. She was beginning to feel a keen sense of disappointment. It looked as though her wonderful treasure theory was about to tumble down.

"I guess I was away off on my sign of the Dragon," she ruefully admitted, as she returned to her friends after a gloomy inspection of the sandy ditch. "Where Uncle Jemmy's digging, he's got down at least three feet and there's not a sign of _____"

Patsy did not finish. A sudden hail from Uncle Jemmy of: "Ah reckon, Massa Carroll, dey am suthin' heah 'sides dirt!" caused her to dash back to the ditch. Immediately the others hurried after her to the spot.

Standing in the ditch the old man was tapping lightly with his shovel on a partially uncovered oblong of wood that appeared to form the top of a box or casket. As nearly as could be seen it was about three feet long and eighteen inches wide.

"Oh, Uncle Jemmy, do please hurry and dig it out!" implored Patsy, almost tumbling into the ditch in her excitement. "It's the treasure box! It truly is! I was right after all about the sign of the Dragon!"

"Move back, girls," ordered Mr. Carroll. "Give Jemmy room to get at the thing. This certainly dashes me."

Amid a babble of excited comment, the party moved back from the opening, breathlessly watching Uncle Jemmy as he loosened the earth around the box. It was so tightly packed as to suggest the labor of purposeful hands. It needed but a little more effort on the part of the old man to reveal what was undoubtedly a seaman's chest, belonging to a remote period.

Next instant Mr. Carroll had stepped into the ditch beside the old man and was bending over the old chest. Above, a circle of eager faces peered down at him. The other two darkies had also dropped shovels and rushed to the scene, mouths agape with curiosity, eyes wildly rolling.

Grasping one end of the chest with both hands, Mr. Carroll received a surprise. The lid of the chest moved under his hands. A concerted murmur came from above as he lifted it free. Then the murmur welled to a united shout. What the watchers had expected to see, none of them had been prepared to state. What they really saw was something entirely different from any idea each might have formed of the lost treasure of Las Golondrinas.

Following the shout that had ascended, came an instant of silence. It was Patsy who first spoke.

"Lift the box out of there, Dad," she said in a rather unsteady tone. "Let us have it up where we can get a good look at the wonderful treasure."

Suddenly she burst into a peal of high, clear laughter which went the rounds of the amazed treasure-seekers. Amid almost hysterical mirth the chest was raised from its resting place.

“It’s ready to fall to pieces,” commented Mr. Carroll, as he carefully set the box on the ground. “It’s made of good tough wood or it wouldn’t have held together all these years. Well, Patsy, what do you think of your treasure now?”

“Not much, except that Sir John Holden never put that stuff in there. It tells its own story, though.”

Kneeling beside the chest she reached into it and fished up a rudely fashioned tomahawk, the blade of which was merely a sharp stone.

“This, and this,” she again reached down and added a long, wicked-looking arrow-head to the tomahawk, “tell me that the people who really found the treasure were the Indians. Don’t you remember that Sir John wrote in the journal that he didn’t doubt that there were Indians lurking about in this jungle? They were watching when Sir John and his men buried the treasure. After they’d gone, the Indians came here and dug it up.”

“It seems queer that they didn’t just throw the chest away instead of burying it again with those queer weapons in it,” declared Mabel.

The Wayfarers were now down on their knees in a little circle about the chest, interestedly lifting and inspecting the few articles it still contained. There was another tomahawk, a murderous-looking mace and a number of stone arrow-heads of various sizes. This, then, was the treasure of Las Golondrinas. For it, one Fereda had taken many lives, and because of it, his descendants had wasted long years of bitter, unavailing search.

“It strikes me that the Indians of three hundred years ago liked to play jokes,” was Mr. Carroll’s opinion. “That seems to be about the only explanation of this stuff being here in the box. They took the treasure and decided to leave a grim message for the other fellows if they ever came back for their valuables. It was their way of saying ‘Stung!’ I guess.”

“We’ve all been *stung*,” giggled Patsy.

“Too bad it wasn’t that wicked old Camillo instead of nice harmless people like us,” said Bee.

“And we were going to give Dolores half of it,” mourned Patsy. “Now we’ve nothing to give her except a war-club and a couple of old tomahawks which she certainly won’t have any use for.”

This raised a laugh in which even Dolores joined. She had looked unduly solemn since the beginning of the expedition. Now for the first time her sober

face lighted into its wonderful radiant beauty.

“For this I am glad,” she declared earnestly. “To find in this box gold and jewels would have been the sorrow, because such treasure cost some lives. So it was surely evil. Now we know all and thus Las Golondrinas which was always the unlucky place becomes the lucky. So shall good fortune stay here now, for always.

“I have read in the books the stories of the princesses who, because they were good and lovely, broke the wicked spells of the bad ones. So is *querida* Patsy, the dear princess, who because she would not give up seeking the treasure, broke the spell and made all good again here. There is now no more of mystery, so there will be no more of the unhappiness. *Querida* princess, I kiss your hand.”

Carried away by her own fanciful comparisons, Dolores caught Patsy’s hand and kissed it.

“You’re the sweetest old dear alive.” Patsy wound her arms about Dolores. “Since you will have it that I am a princess, I’ll add a little more to the tale. Princess Patsy freed a wood nymph from a wicked witch. Then the wood nymph was so grateful to the princess that she promised never to go away from her. She said, ‘I will go to the far North with you and the Señora Martha and the Señor Carroll and live in your house and become your very own sister.’ Isn’t that what she said, Dolores?”

A flood of color rushed to Dolores’ cheeks. Her great dark eyes grew misty. For a moment she stood silent, fighting for self-control. Then she raised her eyes timidly to Miss Martha’s dignified countenance. It was a smiling face now and very tender. Next her glance wandered to Mr. Carroll as though in question. What she saw in his face was also reassuring.

“Isn’t that what she said, Dolores?” repeated Patsy encouragingly.

“Si,” was the soft answer.

And thus the future of Dolores the wood nymph was settled, thereby proving that for her at least the era of good fortune had begun.

“Dad,” began Patsy that evening at dinner, “when are we going on that expedition into the Everglades? We’ve only two more weeks’ vacation, you know.”

“We can go next week, if you like,” amiably responded her father.

“I was in hopes you had forgotten all about that, Patsy,” complained her aunt.

“Haven’t you had enough excitement? Why not settle down quietly for the rest of the time we are to be here? I can’t say I enjoy the prospect of such a jaunt.”

“Why, Auntie!” Patsy stared across the table at Miss Martha in beaming amazement. “Are *you* really going with us? I thought you said——”

“So I did,” cut off her aunt, “but I have changed my mind. I’ve discovered that I can walk around in a jungle as well as the rest of you. In fact, I prefer it to staying alone in this house. I shall never feel easy until that hobgoblin collection of portraits is cleared out of the gallery and the whole place renovated.”

“That reminds me, Eulalie never answered our letter,” commented Beatrice.

“Well, we don’t care now. We solved all the mysteries of Las Golondrinas for ourselves,” asserted Patsy. “We know all about the painted cavalier, we captured the ghost, found a secret door, a secret drawer and the treasure of Las Golondrinas. We’ve got the journal of Sir John Holden. It’s a perfect jewel in itself, and I’ve found a foster-sister. Can you beat it?”

She cast a roguish glance at her aunt as she perpetrated this slangy offense.

“Our vacation’s almost over, but we’ve another one coming next summer,” she continued. “We’re five Wayfarers now, and we’ll wayfare into strange lands and find new and curious things. The Wayfarers can’t be like other people, you know. They just have to do startling things and live in startling places. They’ve proved that twice—and oh, joy! Summer’s coming. When it does come and the Wayfarers take the road again, who knows what wonderful things may happen to them?”

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