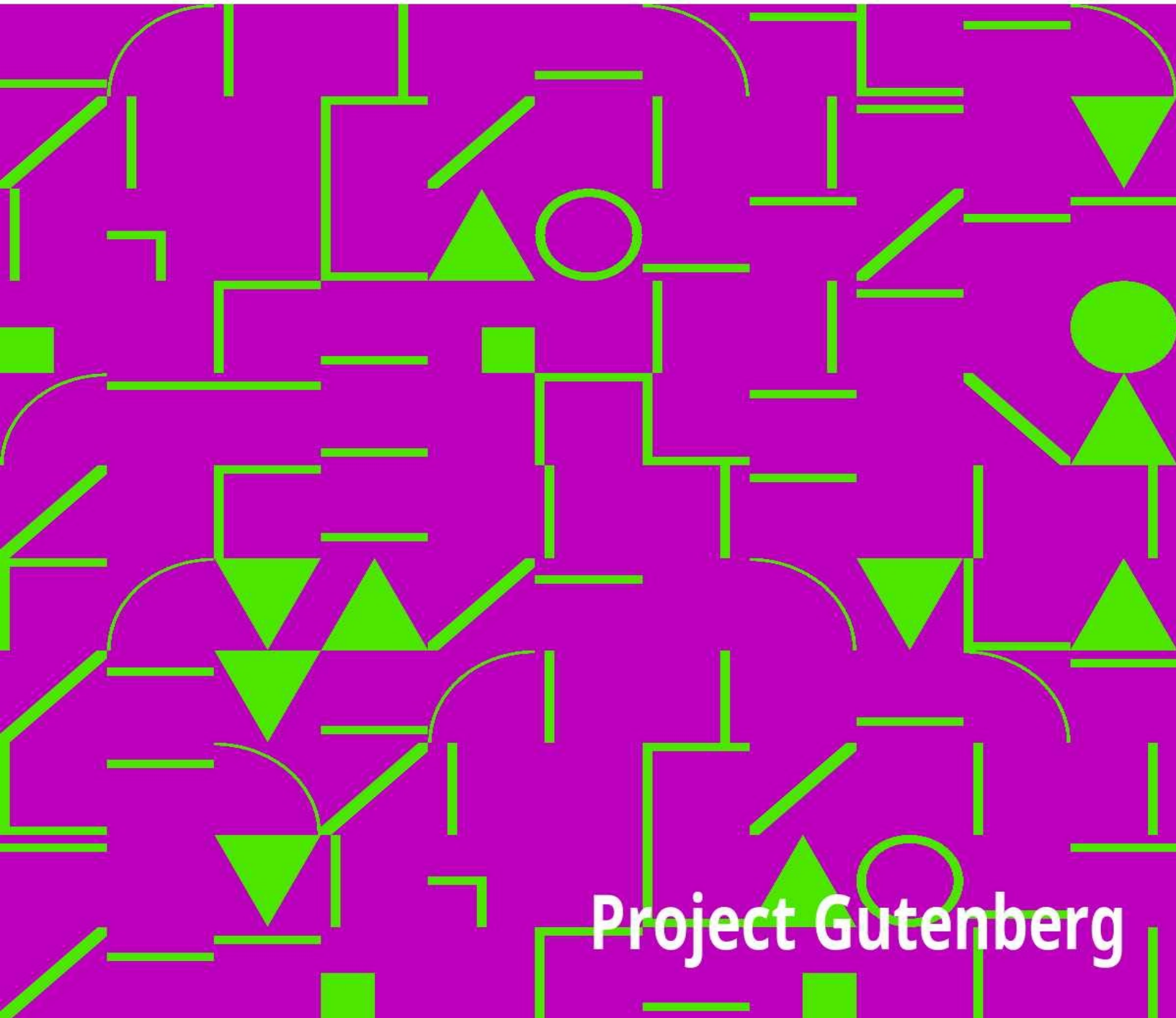
Ruth Fielding on the St. Lawrence; Or, The Queer Old Man of the Thousand Islands

Alice B. Emerson



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THE CAMERAS WHIRRED WHILE THE BARGE PUSHED CLOSE INTO SHORE.
“Ruth Fielding on the St. Lawrence.” Page 80

Ruth Fielding
on the
St. Lawrence

OR

THE QUEER OLD MAN OF THE THOUSAND ISLANDS

BY

ALICE B. EMERSON

AUTHOR OF "RUTH FIELDING OF THE RED MILL," "RUTH FIELDING IN THE GREAT NORTHWEST," "BETTY GORDON SERIES," ETC.

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RUTH FIELDING DOWN IN DIXIE
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RUTH FIELDING IN THE SADDLE
RUTH FIELDING IN THE RED CROSS
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RUTH FIELDING IN THE GREAT NORTHWEST
RUTH FIELDING ON THE ST. LAWRENCE

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BETTY GORDON AT BOARDING SCHOOL
BETTY GORDON AT MOUNTAIN CAMP

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Ruth Fielding on the St. Lawrence

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RUTH FIELDING ON THE ST. LAWRENCE

CHAPTER I

“HERE COMES THE BRIDE”

The sudden joyous pealing of the organ could be heard upon the sidewalk before the stately church. As there was a broad canopy from the door to the curb, with a carpet laid down and motor-cars standing in line, it took no seer to proclaim that a wedding was in progress within.

Idlers halted to wait for the appearance of the wedding party, which was about to come forth. Some of the younger spectators ran up the steps and peered in at the door, for there was only a lame, old, purblind sexton on guard, and he, too, seemed vastly interested in what was going on inside.

One glance down the main aisle of the great edifice revealed a much more elaborate scheme of decoration than usually appears at a church wedding. Its main effect was the intertwining of French and American flags, and as the bridal party turned from the altar the horizon blue uniform of the soldier-bridegroom was a patch of vivid color that could not be mistaken.

The bride in her white gown and veil and wreath made, it may be, even a more prominent picture than did her husband. But that was only to be expected perhaps, for a girl on her wedding day, and in the church, is usually the focus of all eyes.

It must be confessed (even her dearest friends must confess it) there was another reason why she who, only a moment before had been Jennie Stone, quite filled the public eye.

In the first place, Jennie was a well-built girl, and upon her well-built frame there had always been since her childhood days a superabundance of flesh. And getting married had not changed sweet, jolly, funny Jennie Stone in the least! Instead of coming back down the aisle of the church with modestly downcast eyes (which is usually a hypocritical display of emotion), Jennie smiled at her friends and beamed proudly upon the figure in horizon blue at her side.

And she might well be proud of Major Henri Marchand, for he was in the very best sense a soldier and a gentleman, and there gleamed a bit of color on his

breast that had been pinned there by Marshal Foch's own hand. As he was still in active service and had only been given leave to come to America for his bride, this might be considered the last military wedding that the old church was likely to see—perhaps for many years.

The groom's French uniform, and even the olive gray of the best man and two or three other men in the party at the altar, had lent their touch of color to the picture. But it was the bride's attendants, however, that made the party so well worth looking at—especially to the greater number of young women and girls in the pews.

Jennie Stone was a popular girl, and had friends galore. Many of those girl friends had come from a distance to see their beloved "Heavy Stone" (as she had been nicknamed in the old Briarwood Hall days) married to the man she had met in France while she was engaged in those useful and helpful occupations into which so many American girls entered during the war.

Besides, Jennie was the first of the old Briarwood Hall set to be married, and this was bound to be a gala occasion. This was no "weepy" wedding, but a time of joy. And the bridal party coming down the aisle made as brilliant a picture as had ever been seen in the old church.

The maid of honor in pink was as refreshing to look upon as a bouquet of arbutus. She had always been a pretty, winsome girl. Now she was developing into a handsome young woman, as all Ruth Fielding's friends declared. In her present filmy costume with its flowery picture hat the girl of the Red Mill had never looked better.

The young man at her side in the uniform of an American captain with his black curls and dark face, made a splendid foil for Ruth's beauty. Behind him walked his twin sister—as like Tom Cameron as another pea in a pod—and Ann Hicks, both in rose-color, completing a color scheme worthy of the taste of whoever had originated it. For the sheer beauty of the picture, this wedding would long be remembered.

In the very last pew, on the aisle, sat an eager old colored woman—one of those typical "mammies" now so seldom seen—in an old-fashioned bonnet and shawl. She was of a bulbous figure, and her dark face shone with perspiration and delight as she stared at the coming bride and groom.

Jennie saw Mammy Rose (the old woman had been a dependent of the Stone family for years), and had the occasion been much more serious than Jennie thought it, the plump girl would surely have smiled at Mammy Rose.

The old woman bobbed up, making an old-time genuflection. She thrust out a neat, paper-covered parcel which she had held carefully in her capacious lap all through the ceremony.

“Miss Janie—ma blessed baby!” she whispered. “I is suttenly glad to see dis here day! Heaven is a-smilin’ on yo’. And here is one o’ ma birfday cakes yo’ liked so mighty well. Mammy Rose done make it for her chile—de las’ she ever will make yo’ now yo’ is goin’ to foreign paths.”

Another girl than Jennie might have been confused, or even angered, by the interruption of the procession. But Jennie could be nothing if not kind. Her own hands were filled with her bouquet—it was enormous. She stopped, however, before the old woman.

“As thoughtful for me as ever, Mammy Rose, aren’t you?” she said pleasantly. “And you know all my little failings. Henri,” she said to her husband.

But the courtly young Frenchman had quite as great a sense of *noblesse oblige* as his bride. He bowed to the black woman as though she was the highest lady in the land and accepted the parcel, tied clumsily with baby ribbon by the gnarled fingers of Mammy Rose.

They moved on and the smiling, yet tearful, old woman, sank back into her seat. If there was anything needed to make this a perfect occasion, it was this little incident. The bride and groom came out into the smiling sunshine with sunshine in their hearts as well as on their faces.

“I knew,” whispered Helen Cameron to Ann Hicks, who stalked beside her in rather a mannish way, “that Heavy Stone could not even be married without something ridiculous happening.”

“‘Ridiculous’?” repeated the Western girl, with something like a catch in her throat.

“Well, it *might* have been ridiculous,” admitted Helen. “Only, after all, Jennie is real—and so is Major Marchand. You couldn’t feaze him, not even if a bomb had been dropped in the church vestibule.”

They were crowding into the motor-cars then, and merrily the wedding party sped back to the big house on Madison Avenue, which had been garnished for the occasion with the same taste that marked the color-scheme of the bride’s attendants. The canopied steps and walk, the footmen in line to receive the party, and the banked flowers in the reception hall were all impressive.

“My!” whispered the irrepressible Jennie to Henri, “I feel like a prima donna.”

“You are,” was his prompt and earnest agreement.

They trooped in at once to the breakfast table. The spacious room was wreathed with smilax and other vines—even to the great chandelier. The latter was so hidden by the decorations that it seemed overladen, and Tom Cameron, who had a quick eye, mentioned it to Ruth.

“Wonder if those fellows braced that thing with wires? Florists sometimes have more sense of art than common sense.”

“Hush, Tom! *Nothing* can happen to spoil this occasion. Isn’t it wonderful?”

But Tom Cameron looked at her rather gloomily. He shook his head slightly.

“I feel like one of those pictures of the starving children in Armenia. I’m standing on the outside, looking in.”

It is true that Ruth Fielding flushed, but she refused to make reply. A moment later, when Tom realized how the seating of the party had been arranged, his countenance showed even deeper gloom.

As best man Tom was directed to Jennie’s right hand. On the other side of Henri, Ruth was seated, and that placed her across the wide table from Tom Cameron.

The smiling maid of honor was well worth looking at, and Tom Cameron should have been content to focus his eyes upon her whenever he raised them from his plate; but for a particular reason he was not at all pleased.

This particular reason was the seating of another figure in military uniform next to Ruth on her other side. This was a tall, pink-cheeked, well set-up youth looking as though, like Tom, he had seen military service, and with an abundance of light hair above his broad brow. At school Chessleigh Copley had been nicknamed “Lasses” because of that crop of hair.

He entered into conversation with Ruth at once, and he found her so interesting (or she found him so interesting) that Ruth had little attention to give to her *vis-à-vis* across the table.

The latter’s countenance grew heavier and heavier, his dark brows drawing together and his black eyes smouldering.

If anybody noticed this change in Tom’s countenance it was his twin sister, sitting on Ruth’s side of the table. And perhaps she understood her brother’s mood. Now and then her own eyes flashed something besides curiosity along the

table on her side at Ruth and Chess Copley, so evidently lost in each other's companionship.

But it was a gay party. How could it be otherwise with Jennie at the table? And everybody was bound to second the gaiety of the bride. The groom's pride in Jennie was so open, yet so very courteously expressed, that half the girls there envied Jennie her possession of Henri Marchand.

"To think," drawled Ann Hicks, who had come East from Silver Ranch, "that Heavy Stone should grab off such a prize in the matrimonial grab-bag. My!" and she finished with a sigh.

"When does your turn come, Ann?" asked somebody.

"Believe me," said the ranch girl, with emphasis, "I have got to see somebody besides cowpunchers and horse-wranglers before I make such a fatal move."

"You have lost all your imagination," laughed Helen, from across the table.

"I don't know. Maybe I used it all up, back in those old kid days when I ran away to be 'Nita' and played at being 'the abused chee-ild'. Remember?"

"Oh, *don't* we!" cried Helen and some of the other girls.

Something dropped on Tom Cameron's plate. He glanced up, then down again at the object that had fallen. It was a piece of plaster from the ceiling.

Chess Copley likewise shot a glance ceilingward.

There was a wide gap—and growing wider—on his side of the chandelier. A great piece of the heavy plaster was breaking away from the ceiling, and it hung threateningly over his own and Ruth Fielding's head.

"Look out, Ruth!" shouted Tom Cameron, jumping to his feet.

CHAPTER II

A RIFT IN HIS LUTE

Tom Cameron, no matter how desirous he might be of saving Ruth from hurt, could not possibly have got around the table in time. With a snarling, ripping noise the heavy patch of plaster tore away from the ceiling and fell directly upon the spot where the chairs of Ruth and Chess Copley had been placed!

The screams of the startled girls almost drowned the noise of the plaster's fall, but Ruth Fielding did not join in the outcry.

With one movement, it seemed, Copley had risen and kicked his own chair away, seized Ruth about her waist as he did so, and so dragged her out from under the avalanche.

It was all over in a moment, and the two stood, clinging to each other involuntarily, while the dust of the fallen plaster spread around them.

For a moment Ruth Fielding had been in as perilous a situation as she had ever experienced, and her life had been rather full of peril and adventure since, as a girl of twelve, and in the first volume of this series, we met her as "Ruth Fielding of the Red Mill."

At the time just mentioned, the orphaned Ruth had appeared at her great-uncle's mill on the Lumano River, near Cheslow, in one of the New England States, and had been taken in by the miserly old miller rather under protest. But Aunt Alvirah Boggs, who was Uncle Jabez Potter's housekeeper, had loved the child from the very beginning. And in truth the old miller loved Ruth too, only he was slow to admit it.

Ruth's first young friends at the Red Mill were the Cameron twins, and with Helen she had spent her schools days and many of her vacations, at Briarwood Hall, in the North Woods, at the seashore, in the West, in the South, Down East, and in other localities, the narrated adventures of which are to be found in the several volumes of the Ruth Fielding Series.

In the book just preceding this present story, “Ruth Fielding in the Great Northwest,” Helen was likewise with Ruth when she made her famous moving picture, “Brighteyes” in connection with the Alectrion Film Corporation, the president of which, Mr. Hammond, had first encouraged Ruth to turn her entire time and talent to the writing of moving picture scenarios.

The fall before the time of this wedding party in which the girl of the Red Mill was taking part, fortune threw in Ruth’s way a charming young woman, a full-blood Osage Indian, in whom Mr. Hammond saw possibilities of development for screen acting. At least, to use the trite and bombastic moving picture phrase, Wonota, the Indian princess, “photographed like a million dollars.”

The Great War’s abrupt conclusion brought Tom Cameron home just as eager as he had been for two years past to have Ruth agree to his plans for the future. As Ruth saw it (no matter what may have been her secret feeling for Tom) to do as Tom wished would utterly spoil the career on which she had now entered so successfully.

Tom, like most young men in love, considered that a girl’s only career should be a husband and a home. He frankly said that he was prepared, young as he was, to supply both for Ruth.

But their youth, in the first place, was an objection in the very sensible mind of Ruth. It was true, too, that a second objection was the fact that she wanted to live her own life and establish herself in the great career she had got into almost by chance.

And then too Tom himself, since his return from France, had shown little determination to settle himself at work. Being the son of a wealthy merchant and possessing, now that he was of age, a fortune in his own right inherited from his mother’s estate, Tom Cameron, it seemed to Ruth, was just playing with life.

Like many another young fellow so recently from the battlefield, it seemed as if he could not settle to anything. And his sister encouraged him in this attitude. Ruth secretly blamed Helen for this. And therefore her own attitude to Tom had grown more stern.

It was now June—the June following the armistice—the loveliest and most accepted time for a bridal. The ceremony of Jennie Stone’s wedding to Major Henri Marchand had passed off, as we have seen, very smoothly. Even Tom, as best man, had found the ring at the right moment, and nobody had stepped on Jennie’s train.

But this accident at the breakfast table—and an accident that might have resulted fatally for Ruth Fielding—threatened to cause not only excitement but to sober the whole party.

In a moment, however, in spite of the dust rising from the broken plaster, the others saw that Ruth and Chess Copley were both safe. The latter was repeating, over and over and in much anxiety:

“You are all right, Ruth! I’ve got you. You are all right.”

The girl herself was quite breathless. Copley held her in rather a close embrace, and for a much longer time than appeared necessary—to Tom Cameron at least. Tom had got around the table just too late to be of any assistance.

“We see you’ve got her, ’Lasses,” Tom observed, rather tartly. “The close-up is shot. Break away.”

His words started the laughter—and there was much relief expressed in the laughter in which all about the table joined. People are apt to laugh when serious danger is over. But it might have been observed by his friends at another time that Tom Cameron was not usually tart or unkind of speech.

Ruth said nothing, and Chess Copley flushed hotly. Jennie had got up with Henri in the moment of excitement, and now she quickly seized her goblet of grape-juice in which the party had previously toasted the bride and groom, and raised the glass on high.

“Hear! Hear!” cried Ann Hicks. “The bride speaks.”

“This is a good omen,” declared Jennie clinging to Henri’s arm. “Our Ruth was wounded in France and has been in danger on many occasions, as we all know. Never has she more gracefully escaped disaster, nor been aided by a more chivalrous cavalier. Drink! Drink to Ruth Fielding and to Chessleigh Copley! They are two very lucky people, for that ceiling might have cracked their crowns.”

They drank the toast—most of them with much laughter.

“Some orator, Jennie,” commented Helen. “We are just beginning to appreciate you.”

“You will all be sorry that you did not treat me better—especially as a chee-ild,” returned the plump bride, with mock solemnity. “Think! Think how you all used to abuse my—my appetite at Briarwood Hall. It is only Mammy Rose who is kind to me,” and she pointed to the old colored woman’s gift that had a place of

honor before her own plate and that of Major Marchand's.

"Let me give a toast," cried Helen gaily. "Let us drink to Jennie's appetite—long may it wave."

"Goodness me! Don't speak of waves and appetite in the same breath, I beg. Remember we are going directly aboard ship from the house and—and I never was a good sailor. Waves! Ugh!"

The fun went on while the serving people swept up the debris and removed those dishes that had been covered with dust.

Aside, Ruth, taking for the moment little part in the chatter and merriment, for she had received a considerable shock, stood talking with Copley. Ruth had given him her hand again and Chess clung to it rather more warmly—so the watchful Tom thought—than was needful. But the girl felt that she really had a great deal to thank Copley for.

"Jennie in her fun spoke quite truly," Ruth said in a low voice. "You are a friend in need."

"And I hope you consider me a friend indeed, Ruth," rejoined the young fellow.

"I certainly do," agreed the girl of the Red Mill with her customary frank smile.

"I—I am afraid," Chess added, "that I am not considered in that light by all your friends, Ruth. Helen Cameron hasn't spoken to me to-day."

"No? Is it serious?"

"It is serious when a fellow gets turned down—snubbed—and not a word of explanation offered. And, in the words of the old song, we were 'companions once, but strangers now'."

"Oh, don't mind. Helen usually gets over the mollygrubs very quickly."

Chess turned to see the other Cameron twin eyeing him with no great favor.

However, the throng of guests who were invited to the reception began coming in, and for the next two hours the parlors were crowded with the many friends of the plump girl, who, as Helen had said, found this the greatest day of her life, and there was little time for much individual chat, though, it seemed to Tom, Chess Copley kept as close as possible to Ruth's side.

It was after Jennie had gone to put on her traveling dress, and the immediate wedding party, who were to accompany the bridal couple to the dock to see them embark, were hurrying out of the room to put on street clothes that Tom, in a low

voice, demanded of Chess:

“What are you trying to do—put a label on Ruth? Don’t forget she belongs to all of us.”

Chess Copley had not won his commission in the war and wore only a sergeant’s chevrons. But the war was over and he could tell his captain just what he thought of him. And he did.

“Do you know what you are, Tom Cameron?” he drawled, smiling a hard little smile. “You are a regular dog in the manger, and I’m frank to tell you so!”

CHAPTER III

RICE AND OLD SHOES

“It is the greatest day in a girl’s life,” declared Helen Cameron, sitting on the edge of one of the twin beds in the room she and Ruth occupied while they were at the Stone house. She buckled her fingers around her knee to hold one limb crossed over the other—a very mannish and independent position. “I don’t know that I ever envied Heavy before in my life. But she has got something now that we haven’t, Ruth.”

“Cat’s foot!” exclaimed Ann Hicks from her chair. “Who’d want a Frenchman for a husband?”

Ruth laughed. “Not to say that Major Marchand is not a fine fellow, I agree with Ann that I don’t want a husband. Not—right—now!”

“Oh! Very well,” said Helen complacently. “But if you thought you’d never be able to get one——”

“Shucks!” exclaimed Ann. “As though our Ruth couldn’t have all she wants if she wants them.”

“I really wish you would not speak plurally of them, Ann,” cried Ruth, laughing. “You will make me feel like the Queen of the Amazons. They say she keeps a masculine harem—like a bey, or a sultan, or something of that kind.”

“Be serious,” rejoined Helen. “I mean what I say. Jennie’s great day has arrived. And she is the first of all our old bunch that went to Briarwood—and surely of those who went to Ardmore College—to fetter herself to a man for life.”

“Well, I shall never be fettered, even if I am married,” observed Ann. “I’d like to see myself!”

“If the right man comes riding by, Ann, even you will change your mind,” Ruth said softly.

“Then I suppose the right man has never ridden up to the Red Mill and asked for

you?” demanded Helen, with a glance at her chum that was rather piercing.

“Perhaps he has,” said Ruth composedly, “but I wasn’t at home. Aunt Alvirah thinks I am almost never at home. And, girls, as I told you yesterday, I am going soon on another journey.”

“Oh, Ruth, I’ve been thinking of that!” Helen rejoined, with a sudden access of interest and excitement. “To the Thousand Islands! And at the loveliest time of all the year up there.”

“And that is only the truth,” said one of the other bridesmaids. “We spent last summer there.”

“The Copleys always go,” Helen remarked quietly.

“No! Do you mean it?” cried Ruth, showing some surprise. “Well, indeed.”

“So you will see a lot more of ’Lasses Copley,” remarked Ann.

“I shall be glad if Chess Copley is there when and where we make this picture, for I think he is very nice,” was Ruth’s composed reply.

“Oh, he’s nice enough,” agreed Helen, rather grumblingly however. “I’ve got nothing to say against Chess—as a general thing.”

“And you don’t seem to say much for him,” put in the Western girl curiously.

But Helen said nothing further on that topic. Ruth broke in, answering one of the other girls who spoke of the forthcoming picture Ruth was going to make for the Alectrion Corporation.

“Of course our famous Wonota is going to be in the picture. For she is famous already. ‘Brighteyes’ appeared for two successive weeks in one of the big Broadway picture houses and we are making a lot of money out of its distribution.

“But we know Wonota is a find for another very unmistakable reason,” she added.

“What is that?” asked Helen.

“Other producers have begun to make Wonota and her father offers. For Chief Totantora has become interested in the movie business too. Mr. Hammond used Totantora in a picture he made in Oklahoma in the spring; one in which Wonota did not appear. She was off at school at the time. We are going to make of the princess a cultivated and cultured young lady before we get through with her,” and Ruth laughed.

“A Red Indian!” cried somebody.

“That makes no difference,” said Ruth placidly. “She is amenable to white customs, and is really a very smart girl. And she has a lovely disposition.”

“Especially,” put in Helen, who remembered the occasion clearly, “when she wanted to shoot Dakota Joe Fenbrook when he treated her so unkindly in his Wild West show. But, I wanted to shoot him myself,” she added, frankly. “Especially after he tried to hurt Ruth.”

“Never mind him,” said her chum at that. “Joe Fenbrook is in the penitentiary now, and he is not bothering us. But other people are bothering Mr. Hammond about Wonota.”

“How?” asked Helen.

“Why, as I said, there are other picture producers who have seen ‘Brighteyes’ and would like to get the chief and his daughter under contract. They have told Totantora that, as the contract with his daughter was made while she was not of age, it can be broken. Of course, the Indian agent agreed to the contract; but after Totantora returned from Europe, where he had been held a prisoner in Germany during the war, the guardianship of Wonota reverted to her father once more.

“It is rather a complicated matter,” went on Ruth, “and it is giving Mr. Hammond and his lawyers some trouble. There is a man named Bilby, who has been a picture producer in a small way, who seems to have some influence with the head of the Government Bureau of Indian Affairs. He seems to have financial backing, too, and claims to have secured a series of stories in which Wonota might be featured to advantage. And he certainly has offered Totantora and the girl much more money than Mr. Hammond would be willing to risk in a star who may, after all, prove merely a flash in the pan.”

“What do you mean by that?” asked Ann. “I thought she was a sure-fire hit.”

“No amateur screen actress—and that is all Wonota is as yet—is ever a ‘sure-fire hit’, as you call it,” said the practical Ruth. “Many a producer has been badly bitten by tying up a new actor or actress to a long-time contract. Because a girl films well and is successful in one part, is not an assurance that she can learn to be a really great actress before the camera.

“In ‘Brighteyes’ Wonota merely played herself. I was successful in fitting my story to her individuality. But she cannot always play the same part. In this story we are about to do on the St. Lawrence, she will be called upon to delineate a character quite different from that of the heroine of ‘Brighteyes.’”

“Dear me, Ruth,” sighed Helen, “what a business woman you are getting to be. Your career has really begun—and so promisingly. While I can’t do a thing but play the fiddle a little, daub a little at batik, and crochet!”

“And make most delightful fudge!” cried Jennie Stone, just then coming into the room in her traveling dress, fresh from the hands of her maid and Aunt Kate. “How do I look, girls?”

The bride’s appearance drove everything else out of her friends’ minds for the time being. It was two o’clock and the automobiles were at the door. The bridal couple, attended by bridesmaids, the best man, the ushers, and other close friends, departed for the dock amid showers of rice and a bombardment of old shoes which littered Madison Avenue for half a block and kept even the policemen on special duty for the occasion, dodging!

They all trooped aboard the steamship where arrangements had been made to have the passports of the bride and groom examined.

Mr. Stone had done everything well, as he always did. The bridal suite was banked with flowers. Even the orchestra belonging to the ship had been engaged specially to play. A second, though brief, reception was held here.

The ship’s siren sent a stuttering blast into the air that seemed to shake the skyscrapers opposite the dock. The young folks trooped back to the pier. Tom did his best to escort Ruth; but to his amazement and anger Chess Copley pushed in front of him and Ruth took the sergeant’s arm.

Helen came along and grabbed her brother with a fierce little pinch. Her eyes sparkled while his smouldered.

“I guess we are relegated to the second row, Tommy-boy,” she whispered. “I do not see what has got into Ruth.”

“It’s not Ruth. The gall of that ’Lasses!” muttered the slangy Tom.

“So you think he is at fault?” rejoined his sister. “Oh, Tommy-boy! you do not know ‘us girls’—no indeed you do not.”

It was a gay enough party on the dock that watched the big ship back out and being turned in the stream by the fussy tugs. The bride and groom shouted until they were hoarse, and waved their hands and handkerchiefs as long as they could be seen from the dock.

If Helen and Tom Cameron were either, or both, offended by Ruth, they did not show it to the general company. As for the girl of the Red Mill, she enjoyed

herself immensely; and she particularly liked Chess Copley's company.

It was not that she felt any less kindly toward Tom; but Tom had disappointed her. He seemed to have changed greatly during this past winter while she had been so busy with her moving pictures.

Instead of settling down with his father in the offices of the great drygoods house from which Mr. Cameron's fortune had come, Tom, abetted by Helen, had become almost a social butterfly in New York.

But Chess Copley, although no sober-sides, had thrown himself heart and soul into the real estate business and had already made a tidy sum during the six months that had ensued since his discharge from the army.

It was true, Chess was looking forward to taking a vacation at the Thousand Islands with his family. He told Ruth so with enthusiasm, and hoped to see her again at that resort. But Chess, Ruth felt, had earned his vacation, while Tom remained a mere idler.

Chess accompanied the Cheslow young people to the Grand Central Terminal when they left the dock and there bade Ruth good-bye.

"I shall see you in a fortnight at the Thousand Islands," he assured her, and shook hands again. "I shall look forward to it, believe me!"

Tom hung about, gloomy enough, even after they boarded the train. But the girls were gay and chattering when they entered their compartment. Ann Hicks was going home with Helen for a brief visit, although she would be unable to go elsewhere with them during the early part of the summer, owing to previous engagements.

"I am determined to go to the St. Lawrence with you, Ruth," declared Helen. "And I know Tommy-boy is aching to go."

"I thought," said Ruth rather gravely, "that he might really take to business this summer. Doesn't your father need him?"

"Plenty of time for work, Tommy thinks," rejoined Tom's sister gaily.

But Ruth did not smile.

CHAPTER IV

BILBY

The old, shingled Red Mill, which Jabez Potter had revamped each spring with mineral paint, was as brilliant a landmark on the bank of the Lumano River as ever it had been. In fact, it seemed as though Ben, the hired man, had got the red of the shingles and the trim a little redder and the blinds a little greener this last spring than ever they had been before.

Overshadowed by great elms, with the yard grass growing thick and lush right up to the bark of the trees, the surroundings of the mill and farmhouse connected with it (at least, all of those surroundings that could be seen from the Cheslow road), were attractive indeed.

Although the old house seemed quite as it always had been from without, many changes had been made inside since first Ruth Fielding had stepped out of Dr. Davison’s chaise to approach her great-uncle’s habitation.

At that time Ruth had been less than a mote in the eye of Uncle Jabez. She was merely an annoyance to the miller at that time. Since then, however, she had many and many a time proved a blessing to him. Nor did Jabez Potter refuse to acknowledge this—on occasion.

When Ruth began to do over the interior of the old house, however, Uncle Jabez protested. The house and mill had been built a hundred and fifty years before—if not longer ago. It was sacrilege to touch a crooked rafter or a hammered nail of the entire structure.

But Ruth insisted that she be allowed to make her own rooms under the roof more comfortable and modern. Ruth had seen old New England farmhouses rebuilt in the most attractive way one could imagine without disturbing their ancient exterior appearance. She gathered ideas from books and magazines, and then went about replanning the entire inside of the mill farmhouse. But she began the actual rejuvenation of the aspect of the structure in her own rooms, and had had all the work done since her return from the war zone the year

before.

She now had a bedroom, a sitting room, a dressing room and bathroom up under the roof, all in white (Helen said “like a hospital”), and when one opened Ruth’s outer door and stepped into her suite it seemed as though one entered an entirely different house. And if it was a girl who entered—as Wonota, the Osage princess, did on a certain June day soon after Jennie Stone’s marriage—she could not suppress a cry of delight.

Wonota had stayed before at the Red Mill for a time; but then the workmen had not completed Ruth’s new nest. And although Wonota had been born in a wigwam on the plains and had spent her childhood in a log cabin with a turf roof, she could appreciate “pretty things” quite as keenly as any girl of Ruth’s acquaintance.

That was why Ruth—as well as Mr. Hammond of the Alectrion Film Corporation—believed that the Indian girl would in time become a successful screen actress. Wonota, though her skin was copper-colored, liked to dress in up-to-date clothes (and did so) and enjoyed the refinements of civilization as much as any white girl of her age.

“It is so pretty here, Miss Ruth,” she said to her mentor. “May I sleep in the other bed off your sitting room? It is sweet of you. How foolish of people wanting to see on the screen how poor Indians live in their ignorance. I would rather learn to play the part of a very rich New York lady, and have servants and motor-cars and go to the opera and wear a diamond necklace.”

Ruth laughed at her, but good-naturedly.

“All girls are the same, I suppose, under the skin,” she said. “But we each should try to do the things we can do best. Learn to play the parts the director assigns you to the very best of your ability. Doing that will bring you, quicker than anything else, to the point where you can wear diamonds and ride in your own motor-car and go to the opera. What does your father, Chief Totantora, say to your new ideas, Wonota?”

“The chief, my father, says nothing when I talk like that to him. He is too much of an old-fashioned Indian, I fear. He is staying at a country hotel up the road; but he would not sleep in the room they gave him (and then he rolled up in his blanket on the floor) until they agreed to let him take out the sashes from all three windows. He says that white people have white faces because they sleep in stale air.”

“Perhaps he is more than half right,” rejoined Ruth, although she laughed too. “Some white folks even in this age are afraid of the outdoor air as a sleeping tonic, and prefer to drug themselves with shut-in air in their bedrooms.”

“But one can have pretty things and nice things, and still remain in health,” sighed Wonota.

Ruth agreed with this. The girl of the Red Mill tried, too, in every way to encourage the Indian maiden to learn and profit by the better things to be gained by association with the whites.

There were several days to wait before Mr. Hammond was ready to send Mr. Hooley, the director, and the company selected for the making of Ruth’s new picture to the Thousand Islands. Meanwhile Ruth herself had many preparations to make and she could not be all the time with her visitor.

As in that past time when she had visited the Red Mill, Wonota was usually content to sit with Aunt Alvirah and make beadwork while the old woman knitted.

“She’s a contented creeter, my pretty,” the old woman said to Ruth. “Red or white, I never see such a quiet puss. And she jumps and runs to wait on me like you do.

“Oh, my back! and oh, my bones!” exclaimed Aunt Alvirah, rising cautiously with the aid of a cane she now depended upon. “My rheumatism don’t seem any better, and I have had it long enough, seems to me, for it to get better,” she added.

“Poor dear!” said Ruth. “Don’t the new medicine do any good?”

“Lawsy me, child! I’ve drenched myself with doctor’s stuff till I’m ashamed to look a medicine bottle in the face. My worn out old carcass can’t be helped much by any drugs at all. I guess, as my poor old mother used to say, the only sure cure for rheumatics is graveyard mould.”

“Oh, Aunt Alvirah!”

“I don’t say it complainingly,” declared the little old woman, smiling quite cheerfully. “But I tell Jabez Potter he might as well make up his mind to seeing my corner of his hearth empty one of these days. And he’ll miss me, too, cantankerous as he is sometimes.”

But Uncle Jabez was seldom “cantankerous” nowadays when Ruth was at home. To the miller’s mind his great-niece had proved herself to be of the true Potter

blood, although her name was Fielding.

Ruth was a money-maker. He had to wink pretty hard over the fact that she was likewise a money spender! But one girl—and a young one at that—could scarcely be expected (and so the old miller admitted) to combine all the virtues which were worth while in human development.

“Keep a-making of it, Niece Ruth,” Uncle Jabez advised earnestly. “You never can tell when you are going to want more or when your ability to make money is going to stop. I’d sell the Red Mill or give up and never grind another grist for nobody, if I didn’t feel that perhaps by next year I should have to stop, anyway—and another year won’t much matter.”

“You get so little pleasure out of life, Uncle Jabez,” Ruth once said in answer to this statement of the old man.

“Shucks! Don’t you believe it. I don’t know no better fun than watching the corn in the hopper or the stuns go round and round while the meal flour runs out of the spout below, warm and nice-smellin’. The millin’ business is just as pretty a business as there is in the world—when once you git used to the dust. No doubt of it.”

“I can see, Uncle Jabez, that you find it so,” said Ruth, but rather doubtfully.

“Of course it is,” said the old man stoutly. “You get fun out of running about the country and looking at things and seeing how other folks live and work. And that’s all right for you. *You* make money out of it. But what would I get out of gadding about?”

“A broader outlook on life, Uncle Jabez.”

“I don’t want no broader outlook. I don’t need nothing of the kind. Nor does Alviry Boggs, though she’s got to talking a dreadful lot lately about wanting to ride around in an automobile. At her age, too!”

“You should own a car, Uncle Jabez,” urged Ruth.

“Now, stop that! Stop that, Niece Ruth! I won’t hear to no such foolishness. You show me how I can make money riding up and down the Lumano in a pesky motor-car, and maybe I’ll do like Alviry wants me to, and buy one of the contraptions.” “Hullo, now!” added the miller suddenly. “Who might this be?”

Ruth turned to see one of the very motor-cars that Uncle Jabez so scorned (or pretended to) stopping before the wide door of the mill itself.

But as it was the man driving the roadster, rather than the car itself, Uncle Jabez had spoken of, Ruth gave her attention to him. He was a ruddy, tubby little man in a pin-check black and white suit, faced with silk on lapels and pockets—it really gave him a sort of minstrel-like appearance as though he should likewise have had his face corked—and he wore in a puffed maroon scarf a stone that flashed enough for half a dozen ordinary diamonds—whether it really was of the first water or not.

This man hopped out from back of the wheel of the roadster and came briskly up the graveled rise from the road to the door of the mill. He favored Ruth with a side glance and half smile that the girl of the Red Mill thought (she had seen plenty of such men) revealed his character very clearly. But he spoke to Uncle Jabez.

“I say, Pop, is this the place they call the Red Mill?”

“I calkerlate it is,” agreed the miller dryly. “Leastways, it’s the only Red Mill I ever heard tell on.”

“I reckoned I’d got to the right dump,” said the visitor cheerfully. “I understand there’s an Injun girl stopping here? Is that so?”

Uncle Jabez glanced at Ruth and got her permission to speak before he answered:

“I don’t know as it’s any of your business, Mister; but the Princess Wonota, of the Osage Nation, is stopping here just now. What might be your business with her?”

“So she calls herself a ‘princess’ does she?” returned the man, grinning again at Ruth in an offensive way. “Well, I have managed a South Sea Island chief, a pair of Circassian twins, and a bunch of Eskimos, in my time. I guess I know how to act in the presence of Injun royalty. Trot her out.”

“Trot who out?” asked the miller calmly, but with eyes that flashed under his penthouse brows. “Wonota ain’t no horse. Did you think she was?”

“I know what she is,” returned the man promptly. “It’s what she is going to be that interests me. I’m Bilby—Horatio Bilby. Maybe you’ve heard of me?”

“I have,” said Ruth rather sharply.

At once Mr. Bilby’s round, dented, brown hat came off and he bowed profoundly.

“Happy to make your acquaintance, Miss,” he said.

“You haven’t made it yet—near as I can calkerlate,” gruffly said Uncle Jabez. “And it’s mebbe a question if you get much acquainted with Wonota. What’s your business with her, anyway?”

“I’ll show you, old gent,” said Bilby, taking a number of important looking papers from his pocket. “I have come here to get this princess, as you call her. The Indian Department has sent me. She is a ward of the Government, as you perhaps know. It seems she is held under a false form of contract to a moving picture corporation, and Wonota’s friends have applied to the Bureau of Indian Affairs to look into the matter and get at the rights of the business.”

Ruth uttered a cry of amazement; but Uncle Jabez said calmly enough:

“And what have you got to do with it all, Mister—if I may be so curious as to ask?”

“The girl is given into my charge while her affairs are being looked into,” said Mr. Horatio Bilby, with an explanatory flourish which included both the miller and Ruth in its sweeping gesture.

CHAPTER V

TROUBLE IN PROSPECT

Ruth Fielding wished that Mr. Hammond was within reach; but she knew he was already on his way to the Thousand Islands, for which she herself expected to start the next day with Wonota and her father. She had not heard much about this Bilby; but what she had learned—together with what she now saw of him—impressed her not at all in his favor.

In any event she was not willing to accept either Horatio Bilby or his declaration at face value. And she was glad to see that the hardheaded old miller was not much impressed by the man, either.

“I don’t know much about this business, Mister,” said Uncle Jabez, with much calmness. “But it strikes me that you’d better see the girl’s father.”

“What girl’s father?” demanded the visitor, and now he seemed surprised.

“Wonota’s. Chief Totantora is the name he goes by. It strikes me that he ought to have a deal more to say about the girl than any Government department.”

“Why, he’s nothing but a blanket Injun!” ejaculated Bilby, with disgust.

“Mebbe so,” rejoined Uncle Jabez. “But his wearing a blanket (though I never see him with it on; he wears pants and a shirt when he comes here) don’t figger none at all. He still remains the girl’s father.”

“I guess you don’t know, Pop, that these Injuns are all wards of Uncle Sam.”

“Mebbe so,” again observed the miller. “And I have sometimes thought that Uncle Sam ain’t always been any too good to his red relations. However, that isn’t to the point. The girl’s here. She’s sort of in my care while she is here. Unless Chief Totantora shows up and asks to have her handed over to you, I calkerlate you won’t get her.”

“See here, my man!” exclaimed Bilby, at once becoming blusterous, “you’ll get into trouble with the Government if you interfere with me.”

“That doesn’t scare me none,” was the prompt reply of Jabez Potter. “Right now the Government of the United States don’t look so important to me as our local constable. I guess to get possession of the girl you will have to bring an officer with you to certify to all this you say you are. Until you do, I might as well tell you, first as last, that you ain’t got a chance—not a chance!—to even see Wonota.”

Mr. Bilby grew even redder in the face than nature seemed to have intended him to be. And his little greenish-gray eyes sparkled angrily.

“You’ll get into trouble, old man,” he threatened.

“Don’t you let that bother you none,” rejoined the miller. “I’ve had so much trouble in my life that I’m sort of used to it, as you might say. Now, if that is all you got to offer, you might as well get back into that go-cart of yours and drive on.”

Mr. Potter turned on his heel and went back into the mill, beckoning to Ruth to come with him. She did so—for a little way at least; but she soon stopped to peer out and watch the man, Bilby.

When they were, as he thought, out of hearing, he gave vent to several grunts, kicked a pebble across the road, and scowled ferociously. He said something about “these rubes are smarter than they used to be.” He seemed convinced that he could do nothing further in the matter he had come upon. Not at this time, it was quite plain.

He turned and climbed into the roadster. But he did not drive back toward Cheslow; instead he went up the river road, and Ruth Fielding remembered that Wonota’s father was stopping at the country inn which was only three or four miles up that road.

“But nothing can happen because of that, of course,” the girl thought, as she entered the passage that led to the farmhouse from the mill. “Wonota is perfectly safe here, and surely Totantora can take care of himself with that little fat man, or with anybody else!”

She entered the kitchen expecting to find the Indian girl at work with Aunt Alvirah in the old woman’s sunny corner of the great room. The old woman was alone, however.

“Where is Wonota?” Ruth asked.

Before Aunt Alvirah could reply an automobile siren echoed outside of the

house. Aunt Alvirah was smiling and waving at somebody and Ruth hurried to the window to look out.

“Here’s Helen come for you, my pretty, in that beautiful big car of hers,” said Aunt Alvirah. “Isn’t it fine to be rich?”

“Wait till I make a few more pictures, Aunty, and we’ll have a car too. If Uncle Jabez won’t buy one, I’ve made up my mind to get a car if it’s only to take you to drive once in a while.”

“It wouldn’t hurt Jabez Potter to buy a car,” declared the old woman. “She’s coming in Ruthie. Oh, my back! and oh, my bones!” she murmured, as she got up to receive the visitor.

Helen swept into the house gaily. She always had a kiss for the little old woman who thought her, next to Ruth, the finest girl who ever lived.

“You’re always a sight for anyone to look on with pleasure, Helen Cameron,” said Aunt Alvirah. “And you’re mighty smart in that long coat and cap.”

“And do you put on your coat and bonnet, Aunty,” cried Helen, patting her wrinkled cheek. “I’ve come to take you for a spin. And Ruth, too.”

“There’s Wonota,” suggested Ruth.

“Of course. The princess shall join us,” Helen cried merrily. “Where is she? Tell her to leave her everlasting beadwork long enough to ride in the white man’s motor-car.”

“I suppose,” said Ruth, starting for the stairway, “Wonota must be up in her own room.”

“No, no!” Aunt Alvirah called from her bedroom, to which she had hobbled for her cloak and bonnet. “I was just about to tell you, my pretty. Wonota has gone out.”

“Where did she go?” and Ruth suddenly turned back, and with surprise if not exactly with a feeling of alarm.

“She said she would walk up the road to see her father. She is quite fond of her father, I believe,” added Aunt Alvirah, coming back with her wrap and bonnet. “Of course, Indians have family feelings, if they do seem to hide ’em so well.”

“I am sorry she went out alone,” murmured Ruth.

“Pooh! she isn’t a child. And she’ll not lose her way, that’s sure,” laughed Helen. “Anyway, we’ll overtake her and give her a ride. Chief Totantora, too, if he will

deign to step into the white man's car."

Ruth said no more. But after the visit of Bilby to the mill she could not help but feel some little anxiety. She remembered that Dakota Joe, in whose show Wonota had once worked, had tried his best to make trouble for her and Mr. Hammond because of the Osage maiden; and this Bilby was plainly a much shrewder person than the Westerner had been.

She and Helen aided Aunt Alvirah out to the car. It was a heavy, seven passenger machine; but Helen could drive it as well as Tom himself.

"And Tommy-boy," she explained as she tucked the robe about Aunt Alvirah before following Ruth into the front seat, "went to town to-day with father."

"I hope he will really get down to work now," said Ruth softly, as Helen began to manipulate the levers.

"Pooh!" exclaimed Helen carelessly. "Work was made for slaves. And Tom had a hard time over in France. I tell dad he ought not to expect Tommy-boy to really work for a long, long time to come."

"Do you think that is right, Helen?" admonished her chum. "Idleness was never good for anybody."

"It isn't as though Tom was poor. He hasn't got to toil and delve in an old office __"

"You know it isn't that," cried Ruth warmly. "But he should make good use of his time. And your father needs him. He ought to be idle now, not Tom."

"Grandmother Grunt!" laughed Helen. "You're twice as old as Aunt Alvirah right now."

"After what we have been through—after what the world has been through for five years—we all ought to be at work," said Ruth rather severely. "And Tom is no exception."

"Why, I never knew you to be hard on Tommy-boy before!" pouted Tom's sister.

"Perhaps I never had occasion to be hard on him before," Ruth answered. "He is only one of many. Especially many of those who were over there in France. They seem to be so unsettled and—and so careless for the future."

"Regular female Simon Legree, you are, Ruthie Fielding."

"But when Tom first came back he was as eager as he could be to get to business and to begin a business career. And lately, it seems to me, he's had an awful

slump in his ambition. I never saw the like."

"Oh, bother!" muttered Helen, and started the car.

The car shot ahead, and in five minutes they passed the country inn, but saw nothing of either Wonota or the Indian chief. In a cove below the river bank, however, Ruth caught a glimpse of a small motor-boat with two men in it. And backed into a wood's path near the highway was a small motor-car.

Was it the smart roadster Mr. Horatio Bilby had driven to the Red Mill? Ruth could not be sure. But she did not enjoy the ride with Helen and Aunt Alvirah very much for thinking of the possibility of its being Mr. Bilby's car so close to the inn where Chief Totantora was stopping.

CHAPTER VI

AN ABDUCTION

The ride in Helen's car was enjoyable, especially for Aunt Alvirah. How that old lady did smile and (as she herself laughingly said) "gabble" her delight! Being shut inside the house so much, the broader sight of the surrounding country and the now peacefully flowing Lumano River was indeed a treat.

Helen drove up the river and over the Long Bridge, where she halted the car for a time that they might look both up and down the stream. And it was from this point that Ruth again caught a glimpse of the motor-boat she had before spied near the roadside inn.

There was but one man in it now, and the boat was moored to the root of a big tree that overhung the little cove. Not that there was anything astonishing or suspicious in the appearance of the boat. Merely, it was there and seemed to have no particular business there. And the girl of the Red Mill recalled that Mr. Horatio Bilby's motor-car was backed into the bushes near that spot.

Had Mr. Bilby, who had announced that his business in this vicinity was to obtain possession of Wonota, anything to do with the men in the boat? The thought may have been but an idle suggestion in Ruth's mind.

Intuition was strong in Ruth Fielding, however. Somehow, the abandoned car being there near the inn where Totantora was staying and to which Wonota had gone to see her father, and the unidentified motor-boat lurking at the river's edge in the same vicinity, continued to rap an insistent warning at the door of the girl's mind.

"Helen, let's go back," she said suddenly, as her chum was about to let in the clutch again. "Turn around—do."

"What for?" asked Helen wonderingly, yet seeing something in the expression of Ruth's face that made her more than curious.

"I—I feel that everything isn't right with Wonota."

“Wonota!”

Ruth, in low tones, told her chum her fears—told of Bilby’s call at the mill—mentioned the fact that the Indian girl was probably at this time at the roadside inn and that the rival moving picture producer was perhaps there likewise.

“What do you know about that!” gasped Helen. “Is there going to be a real fight for the possession of Wonota, do you think?”

“And for Totantora too, perhaps. For he figures importantly in this picture we are about to make up on the St. Lawrence.”

“Fine!” exclaimed Helen Cameron. “There is going to be something doing besides picture making. Why, Ruth! you couldn’t keep me from going with you to-morrow. And I know Tommy-boy will be crazy to be in it, too.”

Ruth made an appealing gesture as Helen began to back and turn the car.

“Don’t frighten Aunt Alvirah,” she whispered.

Helen was delighted with any prospect for action. It must be confessed that she did not think much about disappointment or trouble accruing to other people in any set of circumstances; she never had been particularly thoughtful for others. But she was brave to the point of recklessness, and she was at once excited regarding the suggested danger to her chum’s plans.

Bilby had already, Ruth understood, offered more money to Wonota and Totantora for their services than Mr. Hammond thought it wise to risk in the venture. And, after all, the temptation of money was great in the minds of the Indians. It might be that Bilby could get them away from Ruth’s care. And then what would the Alectrion Film Corporation do about this next picture that had been planned?

Aunt Alvirah made no complaint as to how or where the car went—as long as it went somewhere. She admitted she liked to travel fast. Having been for so many years crippled by that enemy, rheumatism, she seemed to find some compensation in the speed of Helen’s car.

The inn was several miles away from the Long Bridge; but the road was fairly straight, and as the car went over the ridges they could now and then catch glimpses of the hotel. On the right were cornfields, the dark green blades only six or eight inches high; and scattered over them the omnipresent scarecrows which, in the spring, add at least picturesqueness to the New England landscape.

Above the purring of the motor Aunt Alvirah raised her voice to remark to the

chums on the front seat:

“I don’t see it now—did it fall down?”

“Did what fall down, Aunty?” asked Ruth, who, though troubled as she was by her suspicions, could not ignore the little old woman.

“That scarecrow I see coming up. I thought ’twas a gal picking up stones in that field—the one this side of the hotel. It had a sunbonnet on, and it was just as natural! But it’s gone.”

“I don’t see any scarecrow there,” admitted Ruth, turning to look.

At that moment, however, the car she had seen parked in the bushes wheeled out into the highway ahead of them. It started on past the hotel. There was another figure beside that of the tubby Horatio Bilby on the seat. Ruth recognized Bilby at once.

“Who’s that?” asked Helen, slowing down involuntarily.

“That’s the man I spoke of,” explained Ruth, “I—I wonder who it is that’s with him?”

“A girl!” exclaimed Helen. “Do you suppose he has got Wonota?”

“Wonota—with a sunbonnet on?” cried her chum.

“I bet he’s running away with Wonota!” cried Helen, and started to speed up after the other car.

Ruth laid a quick hand on her chum’s arm.

“Wait! Stop!” she cried. “See what a curiously acting thing that is he has got beside him? Is—It can’t be a girl, Helen!”

“It certainly isn’t a boy,” declared her friend, with exasperation. “He’ll get away from us. That is a fast car he is driving.”

“Wait!” exclaimed Ruth again, and as Helen brought her machine to an abrupt stop Aunt Alvirah was heard saying:

“Now, ain’t that reediculous? Ain’t it reediculous?”

“What is ridiculous?” asked Helen, looking back with a smile at the little old woman while Ruth opened the door and leaped out to the side of the road nearest the river.

“Why, where are your eyes, Helen Cameron?” demanded Aunt Alvirah. “There’s

that scarecrow now. That feller is a-running away with it!”

Helen flashed another look along the road. The figure beside Bilby on the seat had been set upright again. Now the girl saw that it was nothing but a figure. It was no girl at all!

“What under the sun, Ruth—”

But Ruth was not in hearing. She had dashed into the bushes and to the spot where she had previously seen the roadster belonging to Horatio Bilby parked. The bushes were trampled all about. Here and there were bits of torn cloth hanging to the thorns. Yonder was a slipper with rather a high heel. She recognized it as one belonging to Wonota, the Osage girl, and picked it up. The Indian maid was really attempting the fads, as well as the fancies, in apparel of her white sisters!

But what had become of the girl herself? She certainly would not have removed one of her pumps and thrown it away. Like Aunt Alvirah and Helen, Ruth knew that the figure beside Bilby in the car was not the missing Indian girl. He had attempted to use the scarecrow he had stolen from the cornfield across the road to bewilder anybody who might pursue him.

And this very attempt of the rival picture producer to foul his trail impressed Ruth that something serious regarding Wonota and her father was afoot. If the Indian girl had not gone with Bilby, where had she gone? And where was Totantora?

Ruth could not believe that either Wonota or her father would prove faithless to their contract with Mr. Hammond—not intentionally, at least. She hesitated there in the trampled bushes for a moment, wondering if she ought not first to go on to the hotel and make inquiries.

Then she heard something thrashing in the bushes not far away. She started, peering all about, listening. The noise led her to the head of a gully that sloped down toward the river’s edge. It was bush-bestrewn and the way was rough. Ruth plunged down the slant of it, and behind the first clump of brush she came upon a man struggling on the ground.

His ankles and his wrists were lashed, and when the girl turned him over she was amazed to see that he was most cruelly gagged with a piece of stick and a handkerchief.

“Totantora!” she screamed. “What is the matter? Where is Wonota?”

His glaring eyes seemed almost popping from their sockets. His copper-colored face was a mask of demoniacal rage. His dignity as an Indian and his feelings as a father had been outraged. Yet, Ruth was positive that the figure in the roadster beside Horatio Bilby was not Wonota, the chief's daughter.

Her strong and nimble fingers had gone to work almost at once upon the cord that held the Indians wrists. She loosened them in a few moments.

Totantora leaped to his feet, drew a clasp-knife from the pocket of his trousers, snapped it open, and slashed through the cords about his ankles.

"Where is Wonota? What has happened?" Ruth cried.

The Indian slashed the handkerchief that held the gag in place, dragged it out, and cast it away. He made no reply to Ruth's question, but lifting up his head sent a long and quavering cry through the grove—a cry that might have been the war-whoop of his tribe generations before.

However, Ruth knew it was a signal to his daughter that he was free and was in pursuit. If Wonota was where she could hear!

Speaking not at all to the anxious Ruth, Totantora started down the gully to the riverside. The girl followed him, running almost as wildly as did the Indian chief.

Bounding out into the more open grove at the edge of the stream, Totantora uttered another savage yell. Ruth heard, too, the *put*, *put*, *put*, of a motor-boat. When she reached the water the boat she had previously observed was some few yards from the bank. There were two men in it now, and Ruth saw at first glance that Wonota, likewise bound and gagged, lay propped up against the small over-decked part of the launch.

The Indian chief halted not even to kick off his moccasins. He ran to the edge of the bank and, the water being deep, dived on a long slant into the river. He rose almost instantly to the surface, and with a long, swift side-stroke followed after the motor craft, which was now gaining speed.

CHAPTER VII

EXPEDIENCY

Up in the Big North Woods Ruth Fielding had seen loons dive and swim (and of all the feathered tribe, loons are the master divers) and she had wondered at the birds' mastery of the water. But no loon ever seemed more at home in that element than did the Indian chief.

Totantora tore through the water after the escaping motor-boat as though he, too, were propelled by a motor. And his motor was more powerful, in a short race at least, than that driving the launch in which Wonota was held prisoner.

Before the men who had abducted the Osage maiden could get their boat out of the little cove, Totantora reached the stern of it. He rose breast high in the water and clutched the gunwale with one hand. One of the men swung at him with a boathook; but the other picked up his canvas coat and managed to smother the chief's head and face in it for a minute.

Totantora flung himself backward and dragged the canvas coat out of the man's hand. Indeed, he came near to dragging the man himself into the water.

The coat did not retard the Indian much. He grabbed it with both hands, spread it abroad, and then plunged with it under the stern of the motor-boat. At once the propeller ceased turning and the boat lost headway. Totantora had fouled the propeller blades with the canvas jacket, and the abductors could not get away.

The Indian lunged for the gunwale of the boat again. One of the men was now attending to the mechanism. The other beat at Totantora's hands with the boathook.

In a flash the chief let go of the rail with one hand and seized the staff of the implement. One powerful jerk, and he wrenched the boathook from the white man's grasp. The latter fell sprawling into the bottom of the boat. With a display of muscle-power at which Ruth could not but marvel, Totantora raised himself over the gunwale of the boat and scrambled into it.

The second white man turned on him, but the Indian met him stooping, seized him around the waist, and tossed him, seemingly with scarcely an effort, into the water. The other abductor scrambled forward to get out of his reach. The chief bent for a minute over his daughter, and then Ruth saw that the girl was free and that she stood up, unhurt. It was all over so quickly that it left Ruth breathless.

“Miss Ruth! Miss Ruth!” cried the Indian girl. “I am all right. My father, Chief Totantora, would not let these bad white men carry me away a captive.”

Ruth waved her hand to the younger girl. But she watched the white man who was swimming for the shore. She was not afraid of him—any more than the Indian chief was fearful of the other white man perched in the bow of the motor-boat.

The swimmer reached the bank, caught hold of an overhanging bush, and dragged himself out of the river. He was a hang-dog looking sort of fellow, anyway; and in his saturated condition his appearance was not improved. He lay panting for a minute like an expiring fish, and Ruth looked down at him perhaps more contemptuously than she realized.

“Well, who you looking at?” he growled at length.

“I suppose I am looking at one of Mr. Horatio Bilby’s choice assistants,” Ruth returned scornfully.

“Huh? What do you know about Bilby?” demanded the fellow, evidently much surprised.

“I know nothing very good of him, I am sure,” the girl of the Red Mill replied coolly. “And I am quite confident that you are a fit companion for him.”

The fellow sat up and leered at her.

“I ain’t such a mighty fine sight just now, I guess,” he said. “But there are worse than me. I didn’t know there were any white folks interested in this business.”

“You make a perfectly proper distinction,” Ruth told him. “Bilby is not a white man—not in his business ethics I am sure. I want to warn you that those Indians have powerful friends and you would do well to have nothing more to do with them.”

“I get you,” growled the fellow. “But take it from me; that Injun don’t need no friends. He can take care of himself. He’s as strong as a bull.”

“And with a temper you would best not ruffle. I do not know what Bilby’s

scheme was, or how he got you into it. But take my advice and keep out of any further association with Bilby in this matter."

"You don't have to warn me and my partner," said the fellow. "We got enough right now. Is he coming ashore?"

He turned to look at the boat, and then leaped to his feet in some fear. Totantora, by leaning well over the stern of the boat, had dragged the torn coat out of the propeller, and now he was coolly examining the mechanism with the evident idea of starting the boat. The Indian seemed familiar with the driving power of such a craft.

"I think he will bring his daughter ashore," Ruth said composedly. "If I were you I would not cross him further."

"I ain't going to, Miss," said the fellow, now on his feet. "I see Jim is keeping as far away from him as he can. Jim can't swim."

"Go aside somewhere. When they reach the bank I will try to take Totantora and the girl away with me. Do nothing to cross him, for the temper of an Indian is not easily quelled. It just simmers and may break out again at any time."

"Believe me," said the fellow, starting off through the bushes, "I ain't aiming to have another run-in with him. Not with my bare hands. I hope he don't smash the boat, that's all."

"I will do all I can to pacify Totantora," said Ruth, and she really was somewhat anxious on this point, for the grim countenance of the Indian chief threatened further reprisal.

He was busy with the engine for a time; but by and by the regular popping of the exhaust revealed the fact that everything was all right with it. The boat described a circle and came back into the cove and to the place where Ruth stood on the bank.

The second white man, who was younger and looked less like a drowned rat, remained in the bow, staring back in apprehension at the Indian. The moment he could do so, this man leaped ashore.

"Say nothing to him," advised Ruth. "I will try to take them both away. And, as I have warned your companion, have nothing more to do with Bilby or his schemes. These Indians are my friends, and they have other friends who are much more powerful than I am, I can assure you."

"Yes, Miss," said the man, politely enough. "I don't want to mix in with that

redskin. I guess not!”

Wonota stepped ashore and Ruth gave her the shoe she had lost. Her father followed her. He turned as though to set the boat adrift, but Ruth laid her hand upon his wet sleeve.

“Let it alone, Totantora. I hope you will be advised by me. We will go right away from here. Instead of waiting until to-morrow, let us leave here to-night and start for the North.”

Wonota said something to her father in their own tongue, and he looked at Ruth more peacefully.

“White lady is always my friend, I know; and Wonota’s friend,” he observed. “But these bad men tried to steal Wonota.”

“Tell me how it happened,” Ruth put in, hoping to change his trend of thought and determination.

“I will tell you, my friend,” said the Indian girl. “A little fat man came in a car when Chief Totantora and I were walking in the road. He got us to sit down yonder and talk to him. He is one of those who have tried to get Chief Totantora and me to go away from you to make pictures. He offers much money. And while we talked, those other two men crept up behind us and they all seized Chief Totantora and me. We were bound and our mouths closed before we knew how many, or how few, our enemies were. Then my father was left in the wood and I was carried to the boat. I do not know what became of the little fat man.”

“I saw him drive away,” Ruth said. “It made me suspicious. I had already seen and talked with the fat man, whose name is Bilby. Don’t forget that name, Wonota.”

“I will remember,” said the Indian girl, composedly.

“He may make some other attempt to get possession of you. Some attempt by aid of the courts.”

“The white man’s law is very strange,” muttered Totantora.

“But we will get ahead of Bilby before he can do anything else,” Ruth went on. “Miss Cameron’s car is outside in the road. Go to the hotel and change your clothes, Totantora, and I will take both you and Wonota back to the Red Mill. Until we get away for the North I shall not want you out of my sight.”

The Indian shook himself much as a dog might. A lighter expression flickered

over his dark face.

“I shall not suffer cold from a wetting,” he said. “It is nothing. I have nothing at the hotel. We will go now.”

“Come on, then,” rejoined Ruth, promptly. “It is best that we get away before Bilby can learn that his plan to make Wonota a captive miscarried. Hurry!”

She swept them in her earnestness out to the road where Helen and Aunt Alvirah saw them with considerable surprise—particularly because of the saturated condition of the Indian.

“I declare, Ruth!” cried Helen, “you do manage to get into such perfectly lovely rows. What is the matter?”

But Ruth postponed all explanation for a later time. On their way back to the Red Mill she did explain to Helen, however, that she intended to take the two Indians to Cheslow and get a train for Albany that evening.

“I will fool Bilby and whoever is aiding him. We will get away.”

“If you go to-night, so do I!” exclaimed her chum. “You can’t lose me, Ruth Fielding. I can see that we are going to have perfectly scrumptious times before this picture you are going to make is finished.”

“I hope we’ll fool Bilby—leave him behind,” sighed Ruth.

“The worst of it is, we must leave Tommy-boy behind,” said Tom’s twin. “Won’t he be sore when he hears about it!”

CHAPTER VIII

AT CHIPPEWA BAY

Helen pronounced that exodus from the Red Mill “some hustle;” and really it was but a brief time that Ruth allowed for packing, dressing, and getting to Cheslow for the eight-forty-five train, bound north. This was a through train with sleeping cars, and stopped at Cheslow only on special occasions. Ruth determined that this was one of those occasions.

She hustled Ben, the hired man, off to town ahead, and by the good offices of Mercy Curtis a compartment and berth were obtained on that especial train. Mercy kept the wires hot arranging this for her friend.

Meanwhile, Helen rushed home in her car, packed her trunk and bag, had them loaded into the front of the car, and drove up the road again to the Red Mill where she picked up the two Indians and Ruth. Uncle Jabez and Aunt Alvirah were sorry enough to see Ruth go; but this trip promised not to be a long one, for the picture should be made in five or six weeks.

The Cameron’s chauffeur had been instructed by Helen to “burn up the road,” for there was none too much time before the train was due, and he did as he was ordered. Indeed, there were ten minutes to spare when they reached the station platform, and the girls spent that time chatting with Mercy Curtis leaning out of her window of the telegraph office.

“So, you are off on your travels again,” said the lame girl. “I wish I was a butterfly of fashion, too.”

“‘Butterfly,’!” scoffed Helen. “Ruth, at least, is no butterfly. She might be called a busy bee with more truth.”

“Ah-ha, Miss Helen!” returned Mercy, shaking her finger, “you are the improvident grasshopper—no less.”

Helen giggled. “Tom says that that old proverb, ‘Go to the ant, thou sluggard;’ should read: ‘Go to the ant and slug her.’ He does not love work any more than I

do.”

Again Ruth’s expression of countenance was one of disapproval, but she made no comment on Tom. The train thundered toward the station, slowing down as though resenting being stopped in its swift career for even a few moments.

Mr. Curtis, the station master, made a point himself of seeing that the baggage of the party was put into the baggage car. The conductor and porter helped the girls aboard, and they found their sections.

Ruth was determined that Wonota should not get out of her sight again, and the Indian girl was to occupy a berth in the stateroom. Totantora was to have had the berth; but when he saw it made up and noted the cramped and narrow quarters offered him, he shook his head decidedly. He spent the night in the porter’s little room at the end of the car, and the porter, when he found out Totantora was an Indian chief, did not dare object for fear of being scalped!

The party reached Hammond the following afternoon. Here they alighted instead of at Redwood, the more popular station of those wishing to reach the Thousand Islands by way of the electric road to Alexandria Bay. Ruth and her party were going direct to Chippewa Bay, for it was upon some of the more northern of the fourteen hundred or more isles that constitute the “Thousand Islands” that Mr. Hammond had arranged for the film company’s activities at this time.

A big touring car was waiting for the party, for one of the telegrams Ruth had caused to be sent the evening before was to Mr. Hammond, and they were glad to leave the Pullman and get into the open air. Totantora, even, desired to walk to Chippewa Bay, for he was tired of the white man’s means of locomotion. Ruth and Wonota would not hear to this.

“I guess we have eluded Bilby,” said the girl of the Red Mill; “but I shall not feel that Wonota is safe, Totantora, unless you are near her at all times. You must keep watch of your daughter. She is a valuable possession.”

For once Totantora smiled—although it was grimly.

“A squaw did not use to be counted for much in my nation,” he said. “But Wonota is not like the old squaws.”

“Wonota is quite an up-to-date young woman, let me tell you, Mr Totantora,” Helen told him briskly.

The party remained over night at a small hotel at Chippewa Bay; but in the morning Ruth and her companions entered a motor launch and were transported

to an island where the film producing company had been established in several bungalows which Mr. Hammond had rented for the time of their stay.

The water between the small islands was as calm as a mill pond; but the party caught glimpses from the launch of the breadth of the St. Lawrence, its Canadian shore being merely a misty blue line that morning. The rocky and wooded islands were extremely beautiful and as romantic in appearance as the wilderness always is. Now and then a privately owned island, improved by landscape gardening into a modern summer estate, offered contrast to the wilder isles.

The girls spent most of the day in getting settled. No work on the new picture could be done for a couple of days, and Helen, naturally, looked for amusement. There were canoes as well as motor boats, and both the chums were fond of canoeing. Wonota, of course, was mistress of the paddle; and with her the two white girls selected a roomy canoe and set out toward evening on a journey of exploration among the closer islands.

One of the largest islands in the group was in sight—Grenadier Island; but that they learned was beyond the American line. They saw it only from a distance, keeping close to the New York shore as they did on this brief voyage. The tall tamaracks and the other trees crowded some of the islands until they seemed veritable jungles.

Some few, however, were bold and precipitous in the extreme. “Just the sort of place for pirate dens and robber caves,” Helen declared, shivering gleefully.

“What a romantic puss you are,” laughed Ruth.

“Well, those cracks in the rock yonder look so dark and dismal. And there *might* be dark-skinned men with red bandanas bound around their heads, and knives in their belts, along with the rest of the scenery, Ruthie,” complained Helen.

Wonota stared at her. “Do you mean, Miss Helen, that there are cholos—are greasers—in these woods? My geography book that I study shows this country to be far, far from Mexico.”

“Oh, my aunt!” chuckled Helen. “She thinks nobody but Mexicans can wear gay handkerchiefs bound about their noble brows. Wait till you see sure-enough pirates—”

“That is perfect nonsense, Wonota,” said Ruth, warningly. “Helen is only in fun.”

“Ah,” said the practical Indian maid, “I understand English—and American;

only I do not always grasp the—er—humor, do you call it?"

"Good!" applauded Ruth. "Serves you right, Helen, for your silly nonsense."

"The Indians' fun is different," explained Wonota, not wishing to offend the white girl.

"You are a pair of old sober-sides, that is what is the matter," declared Helen gaily. "Oh, Ruth! drive the canoe ashore yonder—on that rocky beach. Did you ever see such ferns?"

They brought the canoe carefully in to the shore, landing on a sloping rock which was moss-grown above the mark of the last flood. Ruth fastened the tow-rope to the staff of a slender sapling. Wonota got out to help Helen gather some of the more delicately fronded ferns. Ruth turned her back upon them and began climbing what seemed to be a path among the boulders and trees.

This was not a very large island, and it was well out from the American shore, but inside the line between the States and Canada. Although the path Ruth followed seemed well defined, she scarcely thought the island was inhabited.

As they had paddled past it in the canoe there had been no sign of man's presence. It had been left in the state of nature, and nothing, it seemed, had been done to change its appearance from the time that the first white man had seen it.

Some rods up the ascent Ruth came to an open place—a table of rock that might really have been a giant's dining-table, so flat and perfectly shaped it was. She could look down upon Helen and Wonota, and they looked up and called to her.

"Look out for the pirates!" shouted Helen, with laughter.

Ruth waved her hand, smiling, and, crossing the rock, parted the brush and stepped out of sight of her friends. Two steps she took through the clinging bushes when a most surprising figure started up before her.

There was plenty of light, even if the sun had gone down. She was not uncertain at all as to the nature of the figure that confronted her—that of a man.

She saw almost instantly that the old man's brown eyes were more like a child's in expression than like an angry man's. He grinned at her, but the grimace was involuntary or meaningless.

"Hush!" he whispered. "Hush!"

Ruth remained both quiet and speechless, looking into his wrinkled old face calmly. She thought he must be a beggar from his clothing, but she could not

imagine him a robber, nor even one of Helen's "pirates." As she said nothing the old man repeated his sibilant warning:

"Hush!"

"I am 'hushing' just as hard as I can," whispered the girl in return, and smiling a little now. "Why must I 'hush'?"

"Hush!" he said again, quite as earnestly. "You are in danger of your life, young woman."

"Not from you, I am sure," she returned. "You would not try to hurt me."

"Hush!" he repeated, looking back over his shoulder into the thicker wood. "They may come at any moment now. And although I am their king, they would kill you. You see, kings aren't as powerful now as they used to be before the war."

"So I understand," agreed Ruth soberly. "But who are you king of—or what?"

"I am King of the Pipes," whispered the old man. "You don't know what that means," he added, scanning her puzzled face. "No. And that's the secret. You cannot be told."

"Oh," murmured Ruth, somewhat amused, yet pitying his evident mental state.

"Hush!" he said again. "You are in danger. Go away from this place at once, and don't come here again. If my courtiers see you—Ha! Off with her head! I shall have to follow the kingly custom. It is not my fault," he added, in the same low tone, shaking his head mournfully. "We kings have to lead our lives, you know."

"It must be a dreadful life, if you have to order people's heads cut off when they have done you no harm," Ruth ventured.

"But my people would not believe that you would do no harm," he explained. "I can see that you are quite harmless. But they have not the intelligence I possess. You understand?"

"Quite," said Ruth. "And I will go right away. Thank you for your kindness."

"That is right, young woman. Go away. And do not return. It is not safe here."

"Can't—can't I do anything for you?"

"Hush!" warned the old man. "No, I do not think you can. I do not care to divide my power with any consort. And, unless you are of noble blood I could not make you Queen of the Pipes. That would never do. Such a mésalliance would never

do. My people would never stand for it—oh, never!”

“I quite understand that,” said Ruth, having difficulty to keep from smiling.

“Now go, young woman,” the man said pompously. “And do not return.”

“I will obey you,” said Ruth soberly. “If you are sure I cannot help you.”

“Hush!” he warned her again, waving his hand. “They are likely to come at any moment. And then—”

The girl backed through the bushes and stepped upon the table-like rock. She would have bade him good-bye, but he hissed after her another sibilant “hush!” and disappeared as mysteriously as he had come.

Ruth descended to the canoe and waited until they were well away from the island before she said a word to the other girls about the queer old man.

CHAPTER IX

A FILM MYSTERY

“I told you there were pirates there,” Helen declared that evening, when she and Ruth were in the room they shared together. Wonota slept in a room adjoining and had already retired.

“I don’t think that poor old man was a pirate,” returned Ruth, smiling a little.

“Didn’t he tell you he was ’king of the pirates’?” demanded Helen.

Ruth laughed outright. “He said he was ’king of the pipes’—whatever that may mean. Poor old fellow!”

“Well, it seems he most certainly had been ‘smoking the pipe’—or do they call it ‘hitting the pipe’?”

“Don’t ask me to aid you with any information on slang,” admonished her friend. “I don’t suppose he is really king of anything except of a country of his dreams—poor fellow.”

“Dear me!” grumbled Helen. “You never will boost romance, Ruth Fielding. Maybe there are pirates on that island.”

“Or pipes,” said Ruth calmly.

“Never mind. When the boys come I am going to shoo them on to that place.”

“What boys?” demanded Ruth in surprise.

“The Copleys arrive to-morrow. And their place is not five miles away from this very spot. We’ll get a motor-boat and go down there to-morrow evening and welcome them. I got a telegram from Tom when I came back from canoeing. I forgot to tell you.”

“Tom!” exclaimed Ruth, and for perhaps the first time in her life she seemed undesirous of hearing about Tom Cameron.

Helen gave her a somewhat puzzled side glance as she found the telegram and

gave it to her chum, who read:

"Vacation begins to-morrow. Will be with you next day. Tom."

Helen giggled. "You can make up your mind that he knows Chess Copley has started for this neck of woods. Tom is becoming Mr. Jealous Jellaby. Did you ever?"

"I am sorry Tom considers it necessary to take a vacation when he has only just begun work with your father, Helen."

"There you go again!" exclaimed her chum. "I don't understand you at all, Ruth Fielding. Tom doesn't have to work."

"It might be better if he did," said Ruth, and refused to discuss the point further that evening.

The next day was just as lovely as that first one. Preparations were under way all over the island Mr. Hammond had rented for the making of the picture which Ruth had written. The continuity was being studied by Mr. Hooley, the director; and the principals had been furnished with their detail.

The ordinary participants in the filming of a picture—the "extras"—seldom know much about the story. They merely appear in certain scenes and do what they are told. As the scenes are not made in sequence these actors of the smaller parts have little idea of the story itself.

Ruth, under the advice of Mr. Hammond, had chosen a certain series of incidents relating to early French-Canadian history, and it began with an allegory of the bringing of the Christian religion to the Indians by the first French priests. This allegory included the landing of the French upon the shore of a rocky island where they were met by the wondering Indians, and Mr. Hooley's assistant had chosen the spot for this scene to be "shot," not far from the place where the company had its headquarters.

Ruth paid little attention to the locations until the moment arrived for the camera work. In fact, after supplying the detailed script she had little to do with the preparation of the picture until the scenes were made. She had never made continuity, as it is called, for that is more or less of a mechanical process and is sure to interfere with the creative faculty of the screen writer.

In the afternoon of this day Helen engaged a motor-boat, and she and Ruth set out for the Copley island, which was some miles away, toward Alexandria Bay. Caretakers and servants had been at work there for some time, it was evident, for

the lawns were neatly shaved, the gardens in full growth, and the family were already comfortably settled in their summer home.

Chess Copley must have been on the watch (could it be possible that he had inside information about this early visit of Helen and Ruth?) for he came running down to the dock before the gardener could reach that point to fasten the boat's line.

"Hurrah!" he shouted. "I was just wondering if we would see you girls to-day; and if you hadn't come I should have got out our launch and tried to find your camp this evening."

"Oh, hullo, Chess," Helen said coolly as she stepped ashore, refusing his assistance. "Where are the girls?"

"There they are—waiting for you on the porch," he said, rather subdued it would seem by her bruskness.

Helen started directly for the wide veranda of the villa-like house that topped the higher part of the island. There were several acres of grounds about the Copley house, for the whole island was cultivated to the water's edge. There was nothing wild left in the appearance of the property, save a few of the tall forest trees that had been allowed to stand and some huge boulders almost covered with climbing vines.

Ruth gave Chess her hand—and he squeezed it warmly. She gave him a frank smile, and Chess seemed comforted.

"Nell's dreadfully tart with a fellow," he grumbled. "She's nothing like she used to be. But you are kind, Ruth."

"You should not wear your heart on your sleeve," she told him briskly, as they followed Helen Cameron toward the veranda.

The two girls from the moving picture camp passed a pleasant evening with their New York friends. The Copley girls always managed to gather, Helen declared, "perfectly splendid house parties;" and they had brought with them several companionable girls and young men.

Music and dancing filled the evening, and it was ten o'clock when the two chums from Cheslow sought their motor-boat and set out for the camp on the Chippewa Bay island. Chess Copley had kept by Ruth's side almost all the evening, and although Helen treated him so cavalierly, she seemed provoked at her chum for paying the young man so much attention.

“I don’t understand what you see in Chess,” she said in a vexed tone to the girl of the Red Mill. “He’s nothing much.”

“He is pleasant, and you used to like him,” said Ruth quietly.

“Humph!” Helen tossed her head. “I found him out. And he’s not to be compared with Tommy-boy.”

“I quite agree with you—that is, considering Tom as a brother,” observed Ruth, and after that refused to be led into further discussion regarding Chess Copley.

It was not often that Ruth and Helen had a disagreement. And this was not really of importance. At least, there was no sign of contention between them in the morning.

To tell the truth, there was so much going on, on this day, that the girls could scarcely have found time to quarrel. The sun was bright and the sky cloudless. It was an ideal day for out-of-door “shots,” and the camera men and Mr. Hooley had the whole company astir betimes.

The few real Indians, besides Wonota and Totantora, in the company, and all those “extras” who were dressed as aborigines, got into their costumes before breakfast. Soon after eight o’clock the company got away in barges, with launches to tow them through the quiet waterways.

In a costume play like this that had been planned, the participants naturally make a very brilliant spectacle wherever they appear. But among the islands of Chippewa Bay there were few spectators at this time save the wild fowl.

“And they,” Helen said, “might be descendants of the very birds who looked on the actual first appearance of the white man in this wilderness. Isn’t it wonderful?”

When Mr. Hooley, megaphone in hand and stationed with the two cameras on one of the decked-over barges, had got his company in position and the action was begun, it was indeed an impressive picture. Of course, a scene is not made off-hand—not even an outdoor pageant like this. The detail must be done over and over again before the cranks of the cameras are turned. It was almost noon before Mr. Hooley dared tell the camera men to “shoot the scene.”

The flag-decorated barge bearing the Frenchmen to the rocky shore moved forward into focus in a stately way, while the Indians gathered in a spectacular group on the sloping shore—tier upon tier of dark faces, wearing nodding feather head-dresses, blankets, deerskin leggings, and other garments of Indian

manufacture—all grouped to make a brilliant spectacle.

Totantora, a commanding figure, and his daughter as *White Fawn,* the demure yet dominant princess of the Hurons, stood forth from the background of the other Indians in a graceful picture. Helen was delighted and could not help shouting to the Osage girl that she was “great”—a remark which elicited a frown from the director and an admonition from Ruth.

Behind the grouped Indians was the greenery of the primeval forest with which this rocky island seemed to be covered. The cameras whirred while the barge containing the actors representing the Frenchmen pushed close into the shore and the whites landed.

A boy carried ashore the great cross, and with him came a soldier bearing the lilies of France, the standard of which he sank into the turf. The detail of costume and armament had been carefully searched out by Ruth herself, and the properties were exact. She was sure that this part of the picture at least could not be criticised but to be praised.

It was three o’clock before the party disembarked and went back to the camp for a delayed lunch. The remainder of the afternoon was devoted to the taking of several “close-ups” and an interior scene that had been built on the island rather than in the city studio of the Alectrion Film Corporation.

The films taken earlier in the day were developed, and that evening after dinner Ruth and Helen joined Mr. Hammond and Mr. Hooley in the projection room to see a “run” of the strip taken at the island where the Frenchmen landed.

“Do you know that that island is the one we landed on ourselves the other evening, Ruth?” Helen remarked, as they took their seats and waited in the darkness for the operator to project the new film.

“Do you mean it? I did not notice. The island where I met that strange old man?”

“The pirate—yes,” giggled Helen. “Only we went ashore at the far end of it.”

“I never thought of it—or of him,” admitted Ruth. “Poor, crazy old fellow—”

The machine began its whirring note and they fell silent. Upon the silver sheet there took shape and actuality the moving barge with its banners and streamers and costumed actors. Then a flash was given of the Indians gathering on the wild shore—wondering, excited, not a little fearful of the strange appearance of the white men. The pageant moved forward to its conclusion—the landing of the strangers and the setting up of the banners and the cross.

But suddenly Ruth shrieked aloud, and Mr. Hammond shouted to the operator to "repeat." The dense underbrush had parted behind the upper tier of Indians and in the aperture thus made appeared a face and part of the figure of a man—a wild face with straggling hair and beard, and the upper part of his body clad in the rags of a shirt.

"What in thunder was that, Hooley?" cried Mr. Hammond. "Somebody butted in. It's spoiled the whole thing. I thought your men warned everybody off that island?"

"I never saw that scarecrow before," declared the director, quite as angrily.

But Ruth squeezed Helen's hand hard.

"The King of the Pipes," she whispered.

CHAPTER X

A SMELL OF SMOKE

The discovery of the face and figure of the old man whom Ruth had once met and spoken with on the island thrust out of the undergrowth and showing through a good part of the length of film that had been made that first day, caused a good deal of disturbance. The King of the Pipes, as he had called himself, was entirely “out of the picture.” His representation on the celluloid could not be removed. And he had been in focus for so many feet of the film that it was utterly impossible to cut it, and thus save the picture.

“It is a wretched piece of business,” Mr. Hammond said to Ruth, as they came from the projection room after seeing the reel run off again and again. “The entire scene will have to be made over. And, aside from that irremediable fault, I consider the work remarkably good. Mr. Hooley may never again be able to get it so good.”

Ruth and Helen had told him about the old crazy man—a hermit, perhaps—and Mr. Hammond had given instructions that before the retaking of the scene was tried the island should be searched for the King of the Pipes.

“Whoever, or whatever, he is,” the producer said, “he’s got to be looked after while we are making this picture. He is likely to burst most unexpectedly into any of the outdoor scenes, and on any location, and break up the show. This is going to cost money, Miss Ruth.”

“I know it, Mr. Hammond. But it never crossed my mind that it was on that very island I had my meeting with the man.”

“When Hooley tries to shoot the picture again we must send somebody up into that island to watch for the old fellow. He’d better be under confinement, anyway, if he’s crazy.”

“The poor old thing.” Ruth sighed. “I don’t think he means any harm—”

“He’s harmed us all right,” grumbled the president of the Alectrion Film

Corporation. “I tell you, a day’s work like this—with such salaries as we pay, and supplies and all—mounts into real money.”

“Oh,” said Ruth, “some of the film can be saved. All that until the Frenchmen land—”

“We won’t dare risk it. In a costume story like this somebody is sure to get his dress, or armor, or something, different next time from what it was to-day. And if we try to save any part of this piece of film the change will show up in the finished picture. Every critical spectator will see the break and will comment upon it. Might as well make up our minds to take the loss; but we must be sure that a similar accident does not occur again.”

“Will Mr. Hooley risk taking the scene over on that island?” asked Ruth thoughtfully.

“Why not? It is a fine location—couldn’t be beat. We’ve got to shoo that old man out of it, that’s all.”

The girl had an idea that if she could meet the queer old man again she might be able to convince him that some other island would serve quite as well for his “kingdom” as that particular isle. At any rate, she hated the thought of his being abused or roughly treated.

Soon after the fiasco in the projection room, Tom Cameron arrived by motor-boat from the town across the bay. Now, Ruth was secretly very glad to see Tom. She always would be glad to see his sunny face, no matter how or when. But she could not approve of his being here at the Thousand Islands at this particular time.

Tom had grown up to be one of those young men who do not know what they want to do in life, and the reaction from the strain of his military life had, as was natural, intensified this tendency to drift. After the time that he had determined to be a soldier, then to go West and hunt Indians and grizzly bears, and then shifted to the desire to be a pirate or a policeman, Tom Cameron had really expressed very little taste for any commercial pursuit.

He had made his mark in his preparatory school and college in several lines of athletics. But a boy in his position would scarcely become a professional baseball player or pull an oar for a living. To tell the truth, Tom had never shown much aptitude for his father’s business. Dry goods did not interest him.

Yet when he had come home after the armistice Ruth thought he was going to buckle right down to business with Mr. Cameron’s firm. There seemed to be a

super-abundant supply of energy in Tom that had to be worked off. And Ruth thought it would be worked off properly under the yoke of business. Besides, Mr. Cameron was getting no younger, and he ought to have the support of his only son in business affairs.

But the last winter, since Ruth and the Cameron twins had returned from the Northwest, things had not gone with Tom quite as the girl of the Red Mill would have chosen.

Yet she felt that it was not really her business to interfere. Indeed, she did not purpose to interfere. If she undertook to advise Tom it would please him only too well—that she knew, of course.

For Tom considered Ruth quite as much his property as Helen—only in a slightly different way. And if Ruth showed in any manner that she considered Tom her property—well, it would be all off, to use one of Helen's favorite expressions.

There was no engagement between Ruth and Tom—not even a tacitly recognized one. In times of stress and need Tom had proved himself to be a very good friend indeed, and Ruth fully appreciated this. But during this past winter he had been somewhat spoiled—or so the girl thought.

In the first place, Helen was determined to make a hero of her handsome brother. Captain Cameron was pushed to the fore by his sister in every possible way and manner. Helen had many gay friends in New York—she had met them through the Stones, for Helen had often been with Jennie when Ruth was elsewhere and more seriously engaged.

Naturally Tom had been one with his sister in gay parties, dances, theater groups, supper crowds, and all the rest. Business had gone by the board with Tom; and before Ruth realized it the young returned soldier had lapsed into a butterfly existence that busy Ruth did not approve. Especially, did she believe, was such an aimless life bad for Tom Cameron.

She met him in the living room of the bungalow, however, with her usual warmth; perhaps "lack of warmth" would be the better expression. For although Ruth was always quietly cordial with most people, she was never "hail fellow, well met" with anybody, unless it was her own, dear, old girl friends of Briarwood Hall.

She resisted, however, making any criticism upon Tom's presence in the moving picture camp. Everybody in the house—and there were several members of the

company there besides Mr. Hammond and the director—greeted Tom Cameron cordially. He was a favorite with them all.

And the minute Totantora heard of Tom's arrival, the Osage chief appeared at the door, standing with glittering eyes fixed on the ex-captain and unmoved expression of countenance while he waited to catch Tom's attention.

"Bless my heart!" cried the rollicking Tom, "here's my old buddy! Totantora, how are you?"

They shook hands, the Indian gravely but with an expression in his eyes that revealed a more than ordinary affection for the young white man. In France and along the Rhine Totantora, the Osage chief, had become the sworn follower of the drygoods merchant's son—a situation to cause remark, if not wonder.

Tom had learned a few words of the Osage tongue and could understand some of Totantora's gutturals. What the chief said seemed at one point to refer to Ruth, who, quite unconscious, was talking with Mr. Hammond across the room. Tom glanced at Ruth's back and shook his head slightly. But he made no audible comment upon what the Indian said.

He did not, indeed, see much of Ruth that night; but in one moment of privacy she said to Tom:

"Do you want to make an early morning excursion—before Lazybones Helen is roused from her rosy slumbers?"

"Bet you!" was Tom's boyish reply.

"Six o'clock, then, at the dock. If you are there first rouse out Willie, the boatman, and offer him a five dollar bill from me to take us through the islands in the *Gem*. That's his boat."

"I'll find him to-night and make sure," said Tom promptly.

"You are a faithful servitor," laughed Ruth, and left him before Tom could take any advantage of her kindness.

The appointment was kept to the letter and minute in the morning. Helen was still asleep when Ruth dressed and stole out of the bungalow. Not many of the people on the island, save the cooks and dining-room employees, were astir. But Tom and the boatman—and the *Gem*—were at the dock in readiness.

Ruth gave Willie his instructions. He was to make a landing at the far end of the island on which the picture had been taken the day before. It was too early for

any of Mr. Hooley's men to be over there looking for the old man whose face had spoiled several hundred feet of good film. Ruth wished, if possible, to first interview the strange man.

She took Tom into her confidence at once about the King of the Pipes. She did not believe the man was so crazy that he ought to be shut up in an asylum. He was merely "queer." And if they could get him off the island and out of the way while the picture was being shot, he might then go back to his hermit life and play at being king all he wished to.

"What a lark!" exclaimed Tom, looking at the matter a good deal as his twin sister did. "And you are constantly falling in with queer characters, Ruth."

"You might better say they are falling in with me, for I am sure I do not intentionally hunt them up," complained Ruth. "And this poor old man has cost us money enough."

"It is too bad," was Tom's comment.

"Worse than that, perhaps Mr. Hooley will never again get as fine an allegorical picture as he did yesterday. They were all in the spirit of the piece when the shot was made."

They arrived at the sloping stone beach and landed as Ruth and the girls had before disembarked. Ruth led Tom up the rough path into the woods beyond the table-rock. The trees stood thick, and the bushes were thorny, but they pushed through to an open space surrounding an old, gnarled, lightning-riven beech. The top of this monarch of the ancient forest had been broken off and the line of its rotted trunk and branches could be marked amid the undergrowth. But the staff of it stood at least thirty feet in height.

"What a spread of shade it must have given in its day," said Tom. "All these other tall trees have grown up since the top broke off."

"Quite so," agreed Ruth. "But where do you suppose that queer old man has his camp?"

They looked all about the island, coming back at last to the riven beech. But they found no mark of human occupancy on the island.

"I smell wood smoke, just the same," Tom declared, sniffing the air. "There is a fire somewhere near."

They saw no smoke, however, nor did they find any cavity in the rocks that seemed to have been occupied by man or used as the rudest kind of camp.

“Maybe he doesn’t live on this island after all,” said Tom. “He could get to half a dozen other islands from here in a light canoe. Or even on a raft.”

“He spoke as though he considered this particular island his kingdom,” rejoined Ruth. “This was the only place he warned me away from—not from the islands in general. I don’t understand it at all, Tom. And I don’t want the men to be unkind to him.”

“Well, it looks to me,” observed her friend, “that if we cannot find him, they will be unable to find him as well. So I wouldn’t worry, Ruth.”

But the girl went back to the Gem and sailed again to the headquarters of the moving picture company not at all satisfied as to the result of their undertaking.

CHAPTER XI

BILBY AGAIN

The work of picture making that day went without a hitch. Mr. Hooley sent several men into the woods above the spot on the shore of the “Kingdom of Pipes,” as Helen insisted upon calling the island where the prologue of the picture was made, and they remained on watch there during the activities of the company below.

When the film was developed and run off in the projection room that evening it was pronounced by all—even by Mr. Hammond—as good in detail as the spoiled reel.

From that point the work went on briskly, for the weather remained perfect for picture taking. Ruth was busy; but she could give some time to enjoyment, too, especially in the evening; and that next evening when Chess Copley appeared in his own motor-boat, the *Lauriette*, she was glad to join a moonlight boating party which ventured as far as Alexandria Bay, where they had supper and danced at the pavilion, returning to the picture camp in the early hours of the morning.

Ruth was Chessleigh’s particular guest on this occasion, and Tom and Helen Cameron went in another launch.

The moonlight upon the islands and the passages of silvery water between them was most beautiful. And Ruth enjoyed herself immensely. That is, she found the occasion enjoyable until they got back to the bungalow and had bidden the Copleys and their party good night. Then the girl of the Red Mill found her roommate rather irritable. Helen pouted and was frankly cross when she spoke.

“I don’t see what you find so interesting in Chess Copley,” she observed, brushing her hair before the glass.

“He is nice I think,” replied Ruth placidly.

“And you just ignore Tommy-boy.”

“I could not very well refuse Chess when he invited me into his launch. I did not know you and Tom were going in the other boat.”

“Well, I wasn’t going with Chess. And I wouldn’t let Tommy tag after you.”

“I wish you wouldn’t be so foolish, Helen,” sighed her chum.

“If you act this way,” declared the rather unreasonable Helen, “you’ll spoil our whole visit at the Thousand Islands.”

“My goodness!” exclaimed Ruth, for once showing exasperation, “you do not talk very sensibly, Helen. I have come here to work, not to play. Please bear that in mind. If you think I spoil your sport I will not join any other evening parties.”

The next evening when the Copley party came over to get acquainted with some of the moving picture people and arrange for a big dance on Saturday night, Ruth was as good as her word, and remained in Mr. Hammond’s office, recasting certain scenes in her story that Mr. Hooley proposed to make next day.

Helen was sure Ruth was “mad” and kept out of the way intentionally. She told Tom so. But she did not choose to relieve Chess Copley’s loneliness when she saw him mooning about.

Whenever Chess tried to speak to Helen in private she ran away from him. Whether it was loyalty to her brother, Tom, or some other reason that made Helen treat Copley so unkindly, the fact remained that Chess was plainly not in Helen’s good books, although she made much of the two Copley girls.

The next day Ruth was quite as busy, for the making of the picture was going ahead rapidly while the good weather lasted. This story she had written was more of a pageant than anything she had yet essayed. The scenes were almost all “on location,” instead of being filmed under a glass roof.

Helen and Tom did not seem to understand that their friend could not go off fishing or sailing or otherwise junketing whenever they would like to have her. But picture making and directors, and especially sunlight, will not wait, and so Ruth tried to tell them.

It was Chess Copley, after all, who seemed to have the better appreciation of Ruth’s situation just at this time. Before a week had passed he was almost always to be found at Ruth’s beck and call; for when she could get away from the work of picture making, Chess turned up as faithfully as the proverbial bad penny.

“You are not a bad penny, however, Chess,” she told him, smiling. “You are a

good scout. Now you may take me out in your motor-boat. If it is too late to fish, we can at least have a run out into the river. How pretty it is to-day!”

“If everybody treated me as nicely as you do, Ruth,” he said, rather soberly, “my head would be turned.”

“Cheer up, Chess,” she said, laughing. “I don’t say the worst is yet to come. Perhaps the best will come to you in time.”

“You say that only to encourage me I fear.”

“I certainly don’t say it to discourage you,” she confessed. “Going around like a faded lily isn’t going to help you a mite—and so I have already told you.”

“Huh! How’s a fellow going to register joy when he feels anything but?”

“You’d make a poor screen actor,” she told him. “See Mr. Grand to-day. He has an ulcerated tooth and is going to the Bay to-night to have it treated. Yet, as the French voyageur, he had to make love to Wonota and Miss Keith, both. Some job!”

“That fellow makes love as easy as falling off a log,” grumbled Chess. “I never saw such a fellow.”

“But the girls flock to see him in any picture. If he were my brother—or husband—I would never know when he was really making love or just registering love. Still actors live in a world of their own. They are not like other people—if they are really good actors.”

Copley’s *Lauriette* shot them half way across the broad St. Lawrence before sunset, and from that point they watched the sun sink in the west and the twilight gather along the Canadian shore and among the islands on the American side.

When Chessleigh was about to start the engine again and head for the camp—and dinner—they suddenly spied a powerful speed boat coming out from the Canadian side. It cleaved the water like the blade of a knife, throwing up a silver wave on either side. And as it passed the *Lauriette* Ruth and her companion could see several men in her cockpit.

“There are those fellows again,” Chess remarked. “Wonder what they are up to? That boat passed our island yesterday evening and the crowd in her then acted to me as though they were drunk.”

“I should think——Why!” exclaimed Ruth suddenly breaking off in what she was first going to say, “one of those men is a Chinaman.”

“So he is,” agreed Chessleigh Copley.

“And that little fat man—see him? Why, Chess! it looks like——”

“Who is it?” asked the young fellow, in surprise at Ruth’s excitement.

“It’s Bilby!” gasped Ruth. “That horrid man! I I hoped we had seen the last of him. And now he’s right here where we are working with Wonota.”

She had said so much that she had to explain fully about Bilby, while they sat and watched the speed boat disappear up the river. Ruth was sure she had made no mistake in her identification of the rival picture producer who had made her so much trouble back at the Red Mill.

“I must tell Mr. Hammond at once,” she concluded. “If Bilby is here, he is here for no good purpose, I can be sure. And if he has a boat like that at his command, we must keep double watch.”

“You think he would try to abduct Wonota again?” queried Chess.

“I would believe that fellow capable of anything,” she returned. “I mean anything that did not call for personal courage on his part.”

“Humph!” murmured Chess thoughtfully. “I wonder what he was doing with the Chinaman in his party. You know, sometimes Chinamen are smuggled across from Canada against the emigration laws of the States.”

He headed the *Lauriette* for the camp then, and they arrived there in a rather serious mood.

CHAPTER XII

THE DANCE AT ALEXANDRIA BAY

“You might have been mistaken, I suppose, Miss Ruth?” suggested Mr. Hammond, the president of the film corporation, sitting at his desk in the room of the main bungalow which he used as an office. “It was growing dark when that speed boat passed you and your friend, was it not?”

“Not out on the river, Mr. Hammond. It was light enough for us to see the men in that boat plainly. Just as sure as one of them was a Chinaman, the short, fat man was Horatio Bilby.”

“It doesn’t seem possible that the fellow would chase away up here after us when he so signally failed down below. My lawyer tells me that he had no real authority from the Bureau of Indian Affairs to secure Wonota’s services, after all.”

“He is a man who would not need much authority to attempt any mean thing,” said the girl hotly.

“That may be true,” admitted Mr. Hammond. “But it seems quite too sensational.” He smiled, adding: “Quite too much like a movie plot, eh?”

“You say yourself that he has obtained the production rights to those ‘Running Deer’ stories that have appeared in the *Gotham Magazine*,” said Ruth, with earnestness. “They are good stories, Mr. Hammond. I have read them.”

“Yes. I believe they are pretty good material for pictures. That is, if they were handled by a practical scenario writer like yourself.”

“It is too bad you did not get them.”

“Well, Bilby was ahead of us there. Somehow, he got backing and bought the picture and dramatic rights to the tales outright. He can find somebody besides Wonota to play *Running Deer*.”

“He seems to have set his heart on our Wonota.”

“Yes. He did make Totantora a whacking good offer. I must admit he did. I could not begin to see such a price for the girl’s services. And on a mere speculation. But I pointed out to Totantora that, after all, a promise is only a promise. He and Wonota have already had considerable hard cash from us,” and Mr. Hammond ended with a laugh.

He was evidently not so much impressed by the possible danger of Bilby’s presence in the Thousand Islands as Ruth could have wished. She determined herself, however, to be sharply on the watch for the reappearance of the coarse little fat man who had so troubled her and the Indians at the Red Mill.

She took Totantora into her confidence, after speaking to Mr. Hammond, although she did not say a word to Wonota. Despite the natural stoicism of the Osage maiden, Ruth did not know but that Wonota might become nervous if she knew the plotting Bilby was near at hand.

The chief listened to Ruth’s warning with a certain savage anger in his look that warned Ruth not to push the suggestion of Bilby’s determination to obtain possession of Wonota too far. The chief was not a patient man, and the possible threat against the safety of his daughter roused in him the instinct of defence.

“Me watch,” he said. “That fat man come here, me chase him away. Yes!”

“Don’t do him any harm, Totantora,” warned Ruth. “But tell Mr. Hammond or me if you see him.”

Nobody saw Bilby immediately, however; and as several days passed Ruth began to wonder if, after all, she had not been mistaken in her identification of the fat man in the boat.

Meanwhile, the making of the picture went on steadily; but something else—and something Helen Cameron at least considered of moment—was planned during this time.

Many other summer residents of the Thousand Islands besides the Copleys had now arrived, and the gaiety of the season was at its height. There was one very large hotel at Alexandria Bay, and it was planned to use its ballroom for a “big war dance,” to quote Helen. It was to be a costume dance, and everybody that appeared on the floor must be dressed in Indian costume.

Wonota helped the chums and the actresses with the Alectrion Film Corporation who attended, in the getting up of their costumes and the staining of their faces and arms. The Osage girl herself wore a beautiful beaded robe, feather-trimmed and brilliantly dyed. It was her “coronation robe” in the picture she was helping

to film. But Mr. Hammond, who likewise attended the dance, allowed the girl to wear this finery, which really was part of the "props" of the company.

Launches were engaged from Chippewa Bay to take most of those from the camp who attended the dance, either as participants in the costume review or as spectators, but Chess Copley arranged to come for his particular friends in the *Lauriette*.

Helen was tempted to refuse to go in the Copley launch; but when she saw Jean and Sara Copley beside their brother, she went aboard with Ruth and Tom. There actually was no friction between the two young men, although Tom usually addressed Chess by that opprobrious nickname, 'Lasses, while Chess retorted by scoffing at all the ex-captain's opinions and advice on any and all subjects.

Really, had she not felt that she was partly the cause of this mild strife, Ruth would have laughed at the two. They were, after all, but grown-up boys.

It was a gay party aboard the *Lauriette*, nevertheless. Even Wonota (whom Ruth was keeping with her) was gay. And she was so pretty in her beautiful costume that when they arrived at the hotel the young men at the dance vied in their attempts to have her for a partner on the floor.

There was a fine band and the dancing floor was smooth. Even Mr. Hammond went on to the floor, having secured a costume, and Mother Paisley, who acted as chaperon for the moving picture girls, was as light as anybody on her feet and the embodiment of grace.

"Actor folk nowadays," the old woman told Ruth once, "are not trained as they once were. I came of circus folk. My people had been circus performers in the old country for generations before my father and mother came over here. My husband was a trapeze performer.

"And working on the bars makes one supple and limber beyond any other form of exercise. Afterward, while still a young girl, I was in the ballet. At least, when one has had my training, one brings to the speaking stage a grace and carriage that can scarcely be secured in any other way.

"As for this moving picture business," she sighed, "I see these poor girls as awkward as heifers—and they are really learning very little. They depend upon the director to tell them how a lady should enter a room, and how to walk. But often the director has never seen a real lady enter a room! Directors of moving pictures are not masters of deportment as our old dancing masters were."

Ruth always listened to strictures upon the moving picture art and gained what

she could from such criticism. And the harshest critics the motion pictures have are the people who work in them. But, after all, Ruth had a vision.

She felt that in spite of all the “great,” “grand,” “magnificent,” “enormous” pictures already advertised upon the billboards, the public was still waiting for a really well made and properly written and acted series of pictures that claimed neither more sensationalism than they possessed, nor were hastily and carelessly made.

Ruth liked to work with Mr. Hammond, and he had been very kind and considerate of her. But she felt that, untrammeled, she would be able to make better pictures than she had made with him. She wanted a free hand, and she felt the insistence of the treasurer’s office at her elbow. Money could be lavished upon anything spectacular—for instance, like this French-Indian picture they were making. But much had to be “speeded up” to save money in other phases of production.

Mr. Hammond, like most of the other moving picture producers, thought only of the audience coming out of the theater with “ohs!” and “ahs!” upon their lips regarding the spectacular features in the film shown. Ruth wanted to go deeper—wanted to make the impression upon the minds and intelligence of the audiences. She felt that the pictures could be something bigger than mere display.

But this is all aside from the fun they had at the costume dance. Ruth and Helen both danced with Mr. Hammond and Mr. Grand and with several others of the moving picture people, as well as with their own friends. Chess got the second dance with Ruth; and then he had the third; and then got the sixth. He might have gone on all the evening coming back to her and begging the favor had Ruth not insisted upon his devoting himself to some of his sisters’ friends.

But, at the same time, Ruth was somewhat piqued because Tom Cameron did not come near her all the first part of the evening. She could not understand what the matter really was with him—why he acted in so offish a manner.

After that sixth dance (and Ruth had danced them all with one partner or another) she sent Chess away from her definitely. She went in search of Tom. The orchestra began playing for the next dance. Ruth looked keenly about the brilliant assembly. She knew Tom’s costume—it was distinctive and could not be mistaken. But she could not mark it at all in the throng.

Two or three men asked her to dance, but she pleaded fatigue and continued to walk about the edge of the ballroom. Finally, in an alcove, sitting at an empty

table, and with no companion, she spied the recreant Tom.

“Why, Tom!” she cried cheerfully, “are you sitting out this dance too? And the music is so pretty.”

“The music is all right,” he agreed.

“Don’t you want to dance?”

“No. I do not want to dance,” he answered sourly.

“Not—not even with me, Tom?” she ventured, smiling rather wistfully at his averted face.

“With nobody. I am waiting for Helen and the rest of you to get enough of this foolishness and go home.”

“Why, Tom! You—you are not ill?” she ventured, putting out a hand to touch his shoulder yet not touching it.

“Not at all, Ruth,” he said, and now he glanced up at her. His look was cold. “Not at all.”

“You are not yourself,” she said, more composedly. “What are you thinking of?”

“I am thinking,” said Tom, looking away again and with the same moodiness, “that I was a fool to leave the army. That was my job. I should have stuck to it. I should have used my commission and father’s influence to stay in the army. But it’s too late now. I guess I had my chance and didn’t know enough to use it.”

He arose abruptly, bowed stiffly, and walked away. If Tom had actually slapped her, Ruth could have felt no more hurt.

CHAPTER XIII

THE KINGDOM OF PIPES

Ruth Fielding at first felt only hurt; then she felt angry. She was no longer the timid, sensitive girl who had faced Jabez Miller when she first came to the Red Mill with a tremulous smile, to be sure, but tears standing thick in her eyes. No, indeed!

The present Ruth Fielding, a young woman of purpose and experience, not only could hide her feelings—especially if they were hurt ones—but possessed a saving sense of humor. And to her mind, just a moment later, Tom Cameron's very military looking shoulders and stride seemed rather funny.

He had hurt her; but then, he had hurt her as a boy might. It was true, perhaps, Tom was not grown up. Ruth considered that she was—very much so!

There he was, daring to complain because his army career had ended so suddenly—wishing that he had remained in uniform. And how would his father and his sister have felt if he had done so!

"He's a great, big booby!" Ruth whispered to herself. Then her smile came back—that wistful, caressing smile—and she shook her head. "But he's Tom, and he always will be. Dear me! isn't he ever going to grow up?"

So she hid her hurt and accepted the first partner thereafter who offered; but it was not Chess. Secretly she knew what the matter with Tom was. And she was too proud to let the ex-captain see that she cared. Nevertheless she was sorry that the party from down the river broke up as they did when the time to go home came.

She found herself in the Copley's launch again, with Chess' sisters and the members of the house party the Copleys were entertaining at their island. This dividing of the clans made it possible for Chess after letting the others out at the Copley dock, to take Ruth to the moving picture island alone.

It was a lovely, soft, moonlight night. The haze over the islands and the passages

between could not be called a fog, but it was almost as shrouding as a fog. When Chess ran the launch outside into the main stream, where the current was broad and swift, the haze lay upon the rippling surface like a blanket.

They were going very swiftly here, for it was with the current. Suddenly Chess shut off the engine. The “plop” of the exhaust ceased. They drifted silently on the bosom of the St. Lawrence.

“I don’t see why I am treated so, Ruth,” Chess suddenly burst out. “Do you know, I’m awfully unhappy?”

“You poor boy!” said Ruth in her warm-hearted way. “I think you are over-sensitive.”

“Of course I am sensitive. I shall always be when I am—am—interested in any person and their treatment of me. It is congenital.”

“Dear, dear!” laughed Ruth. “They have discovered that even incipient congenital idiocy can be cured by the removal of the adenoids. But I don’t suppose such an operation will help you?”

“Oh, don’t tease a fellow,” complained her friend.

He reached for the throttle, then hesitated. Somewhere in the mist ahead was the throb of another engine.

“Who’s this?” muttered Chess.

“Maybe it is Tom—looking for us,” said Ruth, chuckling.

“The gall of him,” exclaimed the heated Copley. Then he made a gesture for silence. A long, quavering “co-ee! co-ee!” came through the mist and from the south.

“From one of the islands,” said Chess quickly.

“What island is that over there?” demanded Ruth, in a whisper. “Isn’t it the one we took the first picture on?”

“It sure is,” agreed the young fellow, but wonderingly.

“The Kingdom of Pipes,” murmured Ruth.

“What’s that?” asked Chessleigh.

Ruth repeated Helen’s name for the rocky island on which Ruth had met the queer old man. “That call came from the island, didn’t it?” she asked.

“I believe it did. What’s going on here?”

“Hush!” begged Ruth. “That launch is coming nearer.”

As she spoke, a moving object appeared in the mist. There was no light upon this strange craft. Chessleigh shuttered his own cockpit lamp instantly.

“Good boy,” acclaimed Ruth. “There is something going on here——”

They heard the call from the island again. There was a low reply from the strange launch—a whistle. Then the launch pushed on and was hidden by the mist again from the curious eyes of Ruth and her companion.

But they knew it had gone close to the island, if it had not really touched there. Its engine was stilled. All they heard for a time was the lapping of the waves.

“I’d like to know what it means,” grumbled Chess.

Ruth agreed. “Let’s wait a while. We may hear or see something more.”

“Won’t see much, I guess,” replied her companion.

“Never mind. Let the boat drift. We’re all right out here in the current, are we not?”

“Guess so. It beats my time,” said her friend. “They say there is a lot of smuggling done along the border.”

“Do you say so?” gasped Ruth, clasping her hands and almost as excited as Helen might have been. “Smugglers! Think of it!”

“And bad eggs they are.”

“Of course there is no danger?”

“Danger of what?” he asked.

“Wouldn’t the smugglers hurt us if we caught them?”

“Don’t know. I’ve got a loaded pistol in the cabin. Guess I’ll get it out,” said Chess.

“I guess you won’t!” Ruth exclaimed. “We’ll go right away from here before we get into a fight!”

“Humph!” grunted Chess. “You don’t suppose they would welcome any spies if they are smugglers, do you?” he asked.

“But what do they smuggle? Diamonds? Precious stones?”

“Don’t know. Maybe. There is a heavy internal revenue tax on diamonds,” Chess said.

“Goodness! wouldn’t Helen like to be here.”

“She’d want to go ashore and take a hand in it,” grinned Copley. “I know her.”

“Yes, Helen is brave,” admitted Ruth.

“Humph! She’s foolish, you mean,” he declared. “Whatever and whoever those fellows are, they would not welcome visitors I fancy.”

Their launch had been drifting by the island, the upper ridge and trees of which they could see quite plainly. Suddenly a breath of wind—the forecast of the breeze that often rises toward daybreak—swooped down upon the river. It split the mist and revealed quite clearly the upper end of the island where Ruth had interviewed the queer old man, and which Copley’s launch had now drifted past.

A light showed suddenly, and for a few moments, close to the water’s edge. It revealed enough for the two in the drifting launch to see several figures outlined in the misty illumination of the light.

There was the bow of the mysterious boat close against the landing place. At least three men were in the boat and on the shore. Ruth could not be sure that either of them was the old man she had spoken with.

But she and Chess Copley saw that they were unloading something from the boat—square, seemingly heavy boxes, yet not so heavy that they could not be passed from hand to hand. One was about all the weight a man might easily lift.

“What do you suppose those boxes are?” whispered Ruth, as the Copley launch drifted into the mist again and the end of the island and the other boat were blotted out of sight.

“Give it up. Provisions—supplies. Maybe they are going to camp there. Lots of people camp out on these smaller islands.”

“The King of the Pipes will have something to say about that,” laughed Ruth. “One thing sure about it,” she added the next moment, as Chess started his engine again. “Those boxes don’t contain diamonds.”

“I should say not!”

“So if we saw smugglers they are smuggling something besides precious stones,” said the girl gaily. “Won’t Helen be interested when I tell her!”

CHAPTER XIV

A DEMAND IS MADE

Helen had gone to bed when Ruth went into their bedroom that morning, and either she was asleep or did not want to speak to her chum. Ruth felt that, after what had gone on at the ball at Alexandria Bay, she had better not wake Helen up to tell her about the strange launch that had landed at the Kingdom of the Pipes.

And in the morning the attitude of both Helen and Tom closed Ruth's lips on all subjects. The twins were plainly offended. Why? Because Ruth had shown ordinary interest in other people besides themselves!

At least, that is how Ruth saw it. She thought it very silly for Helen to be jealous. Tom's jealousy was another matter; but he had brought the situation on himself.

For once Ruth was determined not to give in, as she so often did when Helen showed spleen. Fortunately, Ruth was busy with her picture work, so she had good reason to excuse herself from much association with the Cameron twins during the next two days.

Then something happened to give them all an entirely different topic of thought and conversation. That day had been spent in taking close-ups and scenes under the canvas and glass roof of the make-shift studio that had been built at the camp. The great pageant of historical times along the St. Lawrence was moving swiftly on its way. The scenes of a picture are seldom taken in any sequence at all, but Mr. Hooley had gone so far now that the bulk of the scenes had been filmed; and as they had been run off in the little projection room, both Mr. Hammond and Ruth had expressed their approval of almost every finished length of celluloid.

The work was practically over for the day at four o'clock and the actors in their costumes—especially the Indians, including Wonota and her father—made a brilliant picture as they wandered about the lawns and in and out of the several bungalows on the island.

From the direction of Chippewa Bay appeared a chugging motor-launch that came directly to the dock. It was not one of the hired launches used by the picture company, nor were those in the launch men who had anything to do with Mr. Hammond's corporation.

But when Ruth idly looked into the launch from her seat with Helen and Miss Keith and Mrs. Paisley on the porch of their house, the girl of the Red Mill got up suddenly, uttering an astonished exclamation:

"That horrid man again!"

"Hoity-toity!" exclaimed Mrs. Paisley. "What man deserves such a title as that, Miss Fielding?"

"That Bilby!" exclaimed Ruth. "I just felt it in my bones—like Aunt Alvirah—that that creature would annoy us again."

"Then you are not disappointed," said Helen drily. "Is that the fellow—that big gawk in the blue suit?"

"No, no! I don't know him," said Ruth. "The little fat man tagging after the big fellow."

For two men from the launch had now stepped ashore. In accordance with orders from Mr. Hammond, the visitors were stopped at the head of the dock. Nobody was allowed on the island without invitation or a permit.

"Let me tell you," said the man in blue pompously, "that I am a county officer. You'd better have a care, young fellow."

"Say! I don't care if you are the King of the Yaps," said Willie, the boatman. "I have my orders. This is private property. Stay where you are—right where you are, mind!—till I send for the boss."

"You send for them two Injuns—that is who our business is with," put in Bilby. "That Totantora and Wonota. I want to see them—not that Hammond."

Ruth had run to another house to warn those very individuals to get out of the way and to keep out of sight until Bilby's visit was over. She did not know, of course, who the big man in blue was.

The latter was inclined to be pompous and commanding, even when Mr. Hammond came down to the head of the dock to see him. It was evident that Bilby's money felt warm in the deputy sheriff's pocket, and he was determined to give the little fat man full weight for his cash.

“This here business is something that can be settled without any row, Mr. Hammond—if that’s your name,” said the officer, puffingly.

“It is my name, all right,” returned the president of the Alectrion Corporation. “And I don’t expect any row. What do you want—and that fellow behind you?”

Horatio Bilby grinned rather sheepishly. “Well, you know, Mr. Hammond, all’s fair in love and war.”

“This is certainly not love,” said the moving picture man. “Now, what do you both want?”

“You are ordered to bring two people into court,” said the deputy sheriff, “and show cause why they shouldn’t be handed over to Mr. Bilby pending certain proceedings to break their contract with you.”

“Blunt enough,” admitted Mr. Hammond, but without excitement. “Let’s see: You have a paper of some kind, I suppose, to serve on me?”

“I’ve a summons for you,” said the officer, drawing forth some papers, “and I propose to take the two Indians back to the Bay with me.”

“You can serve me, and I will arrange for my representative to appear for me in your court,” said Hammond. “But Totantora, to whom I suppose you refer, is a citizen of the United States, and you will have to find him to serve him.”

“He’s nothing but an Injun!” squealed Bilby, in wrath.

“Being an Osage Indian, and owning properly surveyed oil lands in Oklahoma, the Government has acknowledged his citizenship,” was the quiet reply. “He certainly is a good American and will doubtless answer to any court demand—if you can serve him legally.”

“You got him hid away somewhere?” demanded the deputy sheriff.

“And the girl, too!” cried Bilby. “I want the girl more than I do the crazy old Indian.”

“You’ll think he’s crazy if he ever sets eyes on you again, Mr. Bilby,” was Mr. Hammond’s warning. “He hasn’t forgotten you.”

Bilby drew back—and he looked frightened, too. “I—I don’t want him right now,” he muttered.

Hammond accepted the summons of the local court, glanced at it, and put it in his pocket.

“I see I have five days’ grace,” he remarked. “All right. I will see that proper representation is made before the court.”

“But we want them Indians,” said the deputy.

“This island is private property. I have hired its use for a certain term. I will allow you on it only under proper legal motion. Have you a search warrant?” Hammond asked the deputy.

“I ain’t got a warrant. I don’t need a warrant for a couple of Indians. They ain’t got any standing in this community. I know Indians all right. You give ’em over.”

“I do not even acknowledge that the two individuals you demand are under my control. At least, I know very well that no United States court can touch the young woman, Wonota, except through her guardian. That guardian is her father. I don’t see him here—do you?”

“You’d better produce him,” threatened the deputy.

“You can’t make me. Go back and get proper authority—if you can,” advised Mr. Hammond. “And don’t come here again—either of you—without proper authority. Willie!”

“On the job,” said the boatman, grinning.

“Don’t let these fellows upon the island again—not even on the dock. Not unless they are armed with a proper warrant.”

He turned his back on the visitors and started toward the nearest bungalow.

“You’ll be sorry for this, Hammond!” shouted Horatio Bilby. “I’ll get you yet, and don’t you forget it.”

“To get me, as you call it, you will have to have both right and might on your side, Bilby. And just now you do not seem to have either,” was the Parthian shot the president of the Alectrion Corporation sent over his shoulder.

Willie hustled the deputy and the fat man back into their launch.

“Go on away from here,” advised Willie. “I know you, Tom Satchett—known you all my life. All you are fit for is to jump a few fishermen and game hunters that break the law. This job is too big for you. You’re up against money and influence, both, this time.”

“I won’t forget you, Willie,” growled the deputy. “You’ll want something of me some time——”

“I want something of you right now,” put in the boatman. “A good reason for punching you. Go on into your boat before I find it.”

So the pair retreated. But Ruth came to Mr. Hammond in some little disturbance.

“What shall we do?” she demanded. “Suppose they take Wonota away before the picture is finished?”

“They won’t. At least, I don’t believe the court will allow it. I will telegraph to a good lawyer and have him come up here and watch proceedings.”

“But, if it should happen, we would be in a bad fix, Mr. Hammond. Mr. Hooley says nobody could double for Wonota.”

“Let’s not cross bridges until we come to them,” returned her friend.

But perhaps Mr. Hammond felt less confidence than he managed to get into his voice and appearance at that moment.

CHAPTER XV

THE YELLOW LADY

There could be no further haste about the making of the picture, “The Long Lane’s Turning.” Although most of the big scenes were already shot, those that remained to do held in them the more poignant action of the piece and must be rehearsed over and over again.

Much time is sometimes spent upon a single scene—a few feet of a reel. Infinite patience, repetition and experimenting go into the making of a pictured story. Infinite detail and a close attention to that detail make the successful picture.

To stage a “big” scene may seem to be a marvelous feat of the director. But in a big scene, with a large number of actors, the latter are divided into groups, each group has its captain, and each individual actor has to follow the lead of his particular captain. The groups are trained and perfected in every little motion before they come into the real scene before the camera.

Thus the allegorical picture that was a prologue to “The Long Lane’s Turning” had been gone over and rehearsed again and again by the principal actors in it, even before the company left New York City.

Now, with all these “big” scenes filmed, the more difficult work of making the individual scenes of action came to the fore. Wonota had to be coached over and over again in her scenes with Mr. Grand and Miss Keith. Both the latter were well-practised screen actors and could register the ordinary gamut of emotions as easily as they ate their breakfast or powdered their noses.

With Wonota, however, it was different. In the first place, she came of a tribe of people in whom it was bred to smother all expression of emotion—even the most poignant. Wonota almost worshiped her father; but did she ever look upon Chief Totantora with a smile of pride or with affection beaming in her eyes?

“Not so you’d notice it,” said Helen, on one occasion. “Ordinarily, as far as her looks go, Totantora might be a stranger to her.”

“Is there any wonder, then,” sighed Ruth, “that we find it so hard to make her register affection for Mr. Grand? And she already should have learned to do that in that first picture we took out West.”

“Maybe that’s the reason,” said Helen wickedly. “If she did not know Mr. Grand’s foibles so well, she might the better show interest in him. Goodness knows he’s handsome enough.”

“Better than that, he can act,” said Ruth thoughtfully. “Not many of these handsome screen heroes can do that. But perhaps if Wonota did not disdain him so much (and she does, secretly) she could play up to him better.”

“Is there much more for her to do?” Helen asked, with renewed interest.

“Several scenes—and some of them most important. Mr. Hooley can not give all his time to her. I am trying to coach her in them. But there is so much going on here at the island——”

“Why not take her away to some other place and just pound it into her?”

“Not to the Kingdom of Pipes!” laughed Ruth suddenly.

“No. Let the old pirate have that place to his heart’s content. But there are other islands.”

“True enough. Fourteen hundred of them.”

“Come on!” exclaimed the energetic Helen. “Let’s get Willie and the *Gem* and go somewhere with Wonota. You’ve all day to hammer at her. Get your continuity and try to get it into Wonota’s head that she is deeply and desperately in love with Grand.”

In spite of Helen’s brusk way of speaking, Ruth decided that her idea might be well worth following. Helen took some knitting and a parasol—and a hamper. Ruth gathered her necessary books and script; and likewise got Wonota. Then they boarded the launch and Willie took them up the river to a tiny islet not far from the Kingdom of Pipes, after all.

“I don’t see anybody moving over there,” Helen remarked, as Willie landed them at the islet selected. She was looking at the island on which Ruth had had her adventure with the King of the Pipes. “It looks deserted enough. We might have gone there just as well as not.”

“I feel as well satisfied to keep away from that queer old fellow,” her chum said.

“Who’s that?” asked Willie, the boatman, overhearing their remarks.

Ruth told him about the strange man, and Willie laughed.

“Oh! That old jigger? Was he the fellow the boss wanted we should shoo off that island? Why didn’t he say so? Old Charley-Horse Pond. We all know him about here.”

“Oh!” cried Helen. “Is he crazy?”

“Not enough to make any difference. Just got a twist in his brain. Calls himself a king, does he? Mebbe he will be a duke or an emperor next time. Or a doctor. Can’t tell. He gets fancies.”

“And of course he is not dangerous?” said Ruth.

“Just about as dangerous as a fly,” drawled Willie. “And not so much. For flies bite—sometimes, and old Charley-Horse Pond ain’t even got teeth to bite with. No, Ma’am!”

“But what are the ‘pipes’ he talks about? Why ‘King of the Pipes’?” demanded the insistent Helen.

“Got me. Never heard of ’em,” declared Willie. “Now, you ladies all right here?”

“All right, Willie,” said Ruth as the *Gem* was backed off the island.

“I’ll come for you at half past three, eh? That’s all right, then,” and the boatman was off.

The three girls, really glad to be away from the crowd and the confusion of the moving picture camp, settled down to several hours of companionship. Helen could be silent if she pleased, and with her knitting and a novel proceeded to curl up under a tamarack tree and bury herself for the time being.

Helen had not, however, forgotten the “inner woman,” as she pronounced it. When lunch time came she opened the covered basket which she had brought in addition to the book and the knitting, and produced sandwiches and cake, besides the wherewithal for the making of a cup of tea over a can of solidified alcohol. They lunched famously.

It was while they were thus engaged, and chatting, that the staccato exhaust of a motor-boat drew their attention to the Island of Pipes. From the other side, a boat was poking around into the passage leading to the American shore.

“My goodness!” exclaimed Helen, “the King of the Pipes isn’t in that boat, is he?”

“Not at all,” Ruth assured her. “I see nobody who looks like him among those

men—”

“All are not men, Miss Ruth,” interrupted Wonota, the keen-eyed.

“What do you mean, Wonota?” gasped Helen, whirling around to gaze again at the passing launch.

But Ruth did not say a word. She had been examining the boat closely. She saw it was the very speedy boat she and Chess Copley had seen out on the wider part of the river several weeks before. The launch was not moving rapidly now, but Ruth was sure that it was a powerful craft.

It was Helen who marked the figure Wonota had spoken of in the boat. It certainly did not appear to be a man.

“Why Ruth! See! That is a woman!”

“A yellow-faced lady,” said Wonota calmly. “I saw her first, Miss Ruth.”

All three of the girls on the island stared after the moving motor-boat. Ruth saw the woman. She was dressed plainly but in modern garments. She did not seem to be one of the summer visitors to the islands. Indeed, her clothing—such as could be seen—pointed to city breeding, but nothing was chosen, it would seem, for wear in such a place as this. She might have been on a ferryboat going from shore to shore of the Hudson!

“She *is* a yellow lady,” Wonota repeated earnestly.

“I should say she was!” exclaimed Helen. “What do you think of her, Ruth?”

“I am sure I do not know what to say,” the girl of the Red Mill answered. “Does she look like a white woman to you, Helen?”

“She is yellow,” reiterated Wonota.

“She certainly is not an Indian,” observed Helen. “What say, Ruth?”

“She surely is not,” agreed her chum.

“A yellow lady,” murmured Wonota again, as the boat drew behind another island and there remained out of sight.

CHAPTER XVI

MAROONED

“I wonder if the boat did come from that island over yonder?” Ruth murmured, after a few moments of thought.

“For goodness’ sake! what are you worrying about?” asked Helen Cameron.

“I’m not worrying at all,” Ruth returned, smiling. “But I am curious.”

“About that yellow lady?”

“About what happens on that island the queer old man lives on.”

“You don’t know that he really lives there,” was the prompt rejoinder.

“That is so. He may not be there now. But—”

“But me no buts, unless you mean to go on,” said Helen, as Ruth hesitated again.

“It does seem queer,” said Ruth thoughtfully. “Other people go there besides the King of the Pipes.”

“Indeed! We all went there when that allegory was staged.”

“And since then,” said Ruth, and proceeded to tell the two girls what she and Chess Copley had seen early one morning.

“Men landing boxes on the island?” cried Helen, while Wonota merely looked puzzled. “There is a camp there, like enough. And those men—and the woman—in the launch might have come from there, of course. When Willie comes back for us, let’s sail around the island and see if we can spy where their tent is set up. For of course there is no house there?”

“Tom and I found no habitation when we went to search for the old man,” admitted Ruth.

“All right. It must be a tent, then,” said her chum with conviction. “We’ll see.”

But as it turned out, they made no such search that day. Indeed, Willie and the

Gem did not return for them. The camp launch was not the first craft that appeared. Ruth was again coaching Wonota after lunch when Helen spied something on the water that caused her to cry out, drawing the other girls' attention.

"Who under the sun is this coming in the canoe?" Helen demanded. "Why! he is making it fairly fly. I never!"

Wonota scarcely glanced in the direction of the distant moving picture camp, and she said composedly:

"It is Chief Totantora. He comes for me."

The Indian in the canoe caused the craft to tear through the water. No such paddling had the two white girls ever seen before. Not a motion was lost on the part of Chief Totantora. Every stroke of his paddle drove the craft on with a speed to make anybody marvel.

"Something has happened!" gasped Ruth, standing up.

"He comes for me," repeated Wonota, still calmly.

"What for?" queried Helen, quite as much disturbed now as her chum.

Before the Indian girl could have answered—had she intended to explain—the canoe came close in to the bank of the island, was swerved dexterously, and Totantora leaped ashore—a feat not at all easy to perform without overturning the canoe. It scarcely rocked.

He stooped and held it from scraping against the rock, and shot up at his daughter several brief sentences in their own tongue. He paid no attention to Ruth, even, although she stepped forward and asked what his errand was.

"I must go, Miss Ruth," said Wonota quickly. "Mr. Hammond has sent him. It was arranged before."

"What was arranged?" demanded Ruth, with some sharpness.

"We are going yonder," she pointed to the hazy shore of Grenadier Island that was in view from where they stood. "It is said by Mr. Hammond that yonder the man with the little green eyes—the fat man—cannot have us taken."

"For goodness' sake!" gasped Helen, "she's talking of that Bilby, isn't she?"

"What does it mean? Has Bilby come again?" cried Ruth, speaking directly to Totantora.

“We go,” said the chief. “Hammond, he say so. Now. They come for me and for Wonota with talking papers from the white man’s court.”

“Then Mr. Hammond’s lawyer could not do all Mr. Hammond expected,” sighed Ruth. “The picture will be ruined.”

“I never heard of such a thing,” cried Helen angrily. “I’d like to know what sort of courts and judges they have up here in these woods?”

But Ruth wanted to know more. She held Wonota back as she would have stepped into the canoe.

“Wait,” she urged. “Tell me more, Totantora. Where are you taking Wonota?”

It was the Indian girl who answered.

“Over on that shore,” said she, pointing again to the Canadian island, “these courts cannot touch us. Mr. Hammond told my father so. We go there to wait until the trouble is over. Mr. Hammond spoke of it before. Totantora is informed.”

“But it means delay and expense,” cried Ruth.

“How mean!” exploded Helen. “I’d like to do something to that Bilby.”

“Have you money—plenty of money?” Ruth demanded of the Indian.

“I have money,” said Wonota, touching the bosom of her blouse. “We do not need much. We shall live quietly there until Mr. Hammond sends for us. We will be faithful to you, Miss Ruth.”

She turned, with more impulsiveness than she usually showed, and kissed the white girl’s cheek.

“You are so good to me!” she cried. “I will not forget all you have taught me. And I will rehearse every day so to be perfect when Mr. Hooley wants me again.”

There was no way to stop her. Indeed, as Mr. Hammond had advised this sudden move, Ruth knew she had no right to interfere. It was evident that an emergency had arisen of which she, herself, knew nothing. In some way the enemy had forced Mr. Hammond’s hand. Totantora and his daughter were in danger of being brought into court after all, and Mr. Hammond did not wish that to come about.

The Indian girl stepped lightly into the canoe and picked up the extra paddle. Her father leaped in after her, pushed the light craft away from the rock, and seized his own paddle. In another moment the canoe shot away from the island

and off toward the broad expanse of the open St. Lawrence.

Helen and Ruth stared after them—then at each other. Naturally it was Helen who first regained her voice and gave expression to her amazement.

“What do you know about that?” she demanded.

“I—I don’t know what to say,” murmured Ruth.

“Oh! I know what to say, all right,” said the disgusted Helen. “It’s no joke.”

Ruth herself admitted it was nothing to laugh about. She saw difficulties in the way of the completion of “The Long Lane’s Turning” of which Helen knew but little—or of which she did not think.

Ruth knew that there were scenes—some of them she had been studying with Wonota this day—that could not be changed nor eliminated. Wonota must be in them. No “double” could be used.

In the first place, the Indian girl’s personality was distinct. It could not easily be matched.

Ruth knew that, even at that time, one of the most popular screen actresses, because of her inability longer to look the child, was using a double for all her “close-ups” when she was forced to play those childish parts that a hungry public of “movie fans” demanded.

Nothing like this would save “The Long Lane’s Turning.” The throne room scene in Paris, which was yet to be photographed, was too delicate a matter to put in the hands of any double. Wonota was herself—even in this picture she was a distinct personality—and she must be shown to the very end of the last reel and the last “fade-out.”

The thoughts caused Ruth to feel very, very sober. Helen looked at her with some appreciation of her chum’s despair; yet she could not appreciate the situation in full.

Suddenly the lighter-minded Helen leaped to her feet from the bank on which she was sitting, and exclaimed:

“My goodness, Ruth! do you realize that we are marooned?”

“Marooned?” was the wondering rejoiner.

“Yes. Just as though we had been put ashore here by a crew of mutineers and deserted—a pair of Robinson Crusoesses!”

“Your English—”

“Bother my English!”

“It would surely bother Mrs. Tellingham—if she could hear it, poor dear.”

“Now, don’t sidetrack me,” remarked Helen. “Don’t you see we are cast away on this desert isle with no means of getting back to the camp unless we swim?”

“Willie will be after us.”

“But, will ’e?” asked the roguish Helen, punning on the boatman’s name.

“Do be sensible—”

“Even good sense will not rescue us,” interrupted Helen. “I’d like to get back to camp and hear all the exciting details. Totantora certainly can say less in a few moments than any person I ever saw. And Wonota is not much better.”

“It does not matter how much they said or how little. The fat is all in the fire, I guess,” groaned Ruth.

“Chirk up! Something is sure to turn up, I suppose. We won’t be left here to starve,” and Helen’s eyes flashed her fun.

“Oh, *you*!” began Ruth, half laughing too. Then she stopped and held up her hand. “What’s that?” she whispered.

The sound was repeated. A long-drawn “co-ee! co-ee!” which drained away into the depths of the forest-covered islands all about them. They were not where they could see a single isle known to be inhabited.

“Who is calling us?” demanded Helen.

“Hush!” commanded Ruth. “That is not for us. I have heard it before. It comes from the King of the Pipes’ island—to be sure it does.”

“He’s calling for help!” gasped Helen.

“He is doing nothing of the kind. It is a signal.” Ruth told Helen swiftly more of that early morning incident she and Chess Copley had observed when they saw the boxes carried ashore from the motor-boat.

“Seems to me,” grumbled Helen, “you have a lot of adventures with ’Lasses Copley, Ruth.”

“Your own fault that you don’t,” returned her chum promptly. “You could have been along. But you don’t like Mr. Copley.”

“What has that to do with it?” rejoined Helen smartly. “I would go adventuring with any boy—even ’Lasses.”

“Don’t call him that,” commanded Ruth.

“Pooh! He likes it. Or he used to.”

“He is a nice fellow,” Ruth declared, with more earnestness than there really seemed to be necessity for.

“I—de-clare!” murmured Helen. “Really! Does the wind sit in that quarter?”

CHAPTER XVII

A DETERMINATION

However the wind might sit and whatever may have been her secret opinion of Ruth Fielding's interest in Chessleigh Copley, Helen suddenly became mute regarding that young man.

But, after a moment, she was not at all mute upon the subject of the King of the Pipes and what might be going on on the island where they believed the queer old man had his headquarters.

"If it should be smugglers over there—only fancy!" sighed Helen ecstatically. "Diamonds and silks and lots of precious things! My, oh, my!"

"Better than pirates?" laughed Ruth.

"Consider!" cried her chum boldly. "I said that island looked like a pirate's den from the start."

"Your fore-sight-hind-sight is wonderful," declared Ruth, shaking her head and making big eyes at her friend.

"Don't laugh—Oh! What's that?"

From over the water, and unmistakably from the rocky island on the summit of which the blasted beech stood—a prominent landmark—came the strange cry, "co-ee! co-ee!" which they had heard before.

"Do you suppose that poor old man is calling for help?" hesitated Ruth.

"Your grandmother's aunt!" ejaculated Helen, in disgust.

"We-ell that is even a more roundabout relationship than that between Aunt Alvirah Boggs and me. Poor old soul, she is nobody's relation, as she often says, but everybody's aunt."

"There goes the signal again, and here comes that boat!" exclaimed Helen suddenly.

“What boat?” demanded Ruth, looking in the direction of the distant Canadian island, toward which the canoe, with Totantora and Wonota in it, had now disappeared.

“Turn around—do!” exclaimed Helen. “This way. That is the same boat we saw going by some time ago. The boat with the yellow lady in it, as Wonota called her.”

“This is very strange,” murmured Ruth.

“But the yellow lady is not with those men now,” said Helen.

“I do not see any woman aboard,” admitted her friend.

The boat—going not so fast now—crossed their line of vision and finally rounded the end of the island on which the two chums believed the queer old man resided. At least, somebody had uttered the strange, shrill cry from that very spot.

“Oh, dear! If we were not marooned here!” grumbled Helen.

“What would you do?”

“If we had a boat—even a canoe—we could follow that motor-launch and see if those pirates make a landing.”

“Pirates!” repeated Ruth.

“Smugglers, then. Your own Chess Copley says they may be smugglers, you know.”

“I wish you would not speak in that way, Helen,” objected Ruth. “He is not my Chess Copley——or anything else.”

“Well, he certainly isn’t mine,” retorted Helen, with more gaiety. “I can’t say I approve of him—and I long since told you why.”

“I believe you are unfair, Helen,” said Ruth seriously.

“Dear me! if you don’t care anything about him, why are you so anxious to have me change my opinion of ’Lasses?”

“For your own sake,” said her friend shortly.

“I wonder! For *my* sake?”

“Yes. Because you are not naturally unfair—and Chess feels it.”

“Oh, he does, does he?” snapped Helen. “I hope he does. Let him feel!”

This heartless observation closed Ruth's lips on the subject. The two girls watched the other island. They did not see the boat again. Nor did they see anybody on the island or hear any other cry from there.

They both began to grow anxious. No boat appeared from the direction of the camp, and it was past the hour now when Willie was to have called for them with the *Gem*. Why didn't he come?

"Of course, Mr. Hammond doesn't expect us to swim home," complained Helen.

"Something must have occurred. Totantora's being sent off so suddenly really worries me. Perhaps Mr. Hammond himself was obliged to leave the camp and perhaps he went in the *Gem*, and Willie cannot return for us until later."

"But where is Tom? Surely he must know all about this sudden trouble."

"What was Tom going to do to-day?" asked Ruth quietly.

"Oh, that's so! I had forgotten," said Tom's sister, in despair. "He was going around to Oak Point with some of the men. That's down the river, beyond Chippewa Point, and they could scarcely get back in the other motor-boat before dark."

"That's the answer, I guess," sighed Ruth.

"Then we are marooned!" ejaculated Helen. "I do think it is too mean—and my goodness! we ate every crumb of lunch."

"The two 'Robinson Crusoesses,' then, may have to go on short rations," but Ruth said it with a smile. "I guess we are not in any real danger of starvation, however."

"Just the same, a joke can easily become serious when one is deserted on a desert island."

"But you were looking for adventure," retorted Ruth.

"Well!"

"Now you have it," said Ruth, but soberly. "And worrying about it will not help us a particle. Might as well be cheerful."

"You are as full of old saws as a carpenter's abandoned tool-chest," said Helen smartly. "Oh! What is this I hear? The smuggler's boat again?"

They did hear a motor, but no boat appeared from the other side of the Kingdom of Pipes. The sound drew nearer. The motor-boat was coming down the river,

through a passage between the island where the girls were and the American side.

“Come on! I don’t care who it is,” cried Helen, starting to run through the bushes. “We’ll hail them and ask them for rescue.”

But when she came in sight of the craft, to Ruth’s surprise Helen did not at once shout. Ruth only saw the bow of the boat coming down stream herself; but suddenly she marked the small name-board with its gilt lettering:

LAURIETTE

“Here’s Chess, I do believe!” she cried.

“Humph!” grumbled Helen.

“Now, Helen Cameron!” gasped Ruth, “are you going to be foolish enough to refuse to be taken off this island by Chessleigh Copley?”

“Didn’t say I was.”

“And don’t be unkind to him!” pleaded Ruth.

“You seem so terribly fond of him that I guess he won’t mind how I treat him.”

“You know better,” Ruth told her admonishingly. “Chess thinks a great deal of you, while you treat him too unkindly for utterance.”

“He’d better not think of me too much,” said Helen scornfully. “His head won’t stand it. Tom says ’Lasses never was strong in the deeper strata of college learning.”

Ruth was not to be drawn into any controversy. She called to the young man when, dressed in flannels and standing at his wheel and engine, he came into view.

“Hurrah! Here’s good luck!” shouted Chess, swerving the bow of the *Lauriette* in toward the island instantly.

“Hurrah! Glad you think it’s good luck,” said Helen sulkily. “I guess you never were marooned.”

“That’s navy blue you’ve got on—not maroon,” said Chess soberly. “Do you suppose I am color-blind?”

“Smarty!”

“Now, children, this is too serious a matter to quarrel over,” admonished Ruth,

but smiling because her chum showed, after all, interest enough in the young man to be “scrappy.” “What do you suppose we have seen, Chess?”

“I’d like to know first of all how you came here without a boat?”

“My goodness, yes!” gasped Helen. “I’d almost forgotten about Wonota and Totantora.”

Ruth shook her head. “I am not likely to forget that,” she said.

She explained to the young man as they got into the launch and he pushed out from the shore about the difficulty that had arisen over the Indians. He was naturally deeply interested in Ruth’s trouble and in the fate of the Indians. But on top of that Helen eagerly told about the speedy launch, the yellow lady, and their suspicions regarding what was going on at the island that they had nicknamed the Kingdom of Pipes.

“I tell you what,” Chess said, quite as eagerly as Helen, “I was coming over to take you all for a sail on the river to-night. Let’s get Tom and just us four keep watch on that island. I believe there is something going on there that ought to be looked into.”

“I—I don’t know that it is our business to look into it,” suggested Ruth, doubtfully.

But for once Helen agreed with Chess, and against Ruth’s better judgment it was determined to come back to this locality after dinner and lurk about the mysterious island in the Copley launch.

CHAPTER XVIII

BILBY'S TRUMP CARD

Naturally, Ruth went in search of Mr. Hammond the moment she landed on the island where the moving picture company was established. But, as she saw that the *Gem* was not at the dock, she scarcely expected to find the president of the company at hand—and in that expectation she was not mistaken.

Mr. Hooley, the director, however, told her what he knew about the occurrence that had started Totantora so madly from the island in the canoe. Bilby and whoever it was that backed him in his enterprise were evidently determined to obtain the services of Wonota, the Osage princess, if it could be brought about.

"Looks to me," said the director, "as though we were going to have some trouble finishing this picture, Miss Fielding."

"We can't finish it without Wonota!" cried the girl.

"You don't think you could rewrite the remaining scenes so that we can keep on to the conclusion?" he asked thoughtfully.

"Why, Mr. Hooley! How about the throne-room scene? Wonota must appear in that. You say yourself that we cannot use anybody in her place."

"How about cutting out that scene? Finish the play on this side of the water. Don't go to France at all."

"Then the picture is spoiled!"

"No picture is spoiled until it goes out of our hands, you know," and Mr. Hooley smiled satirically. "You know how it is in the picture business, Miss Fielding. Some unfortunate producer buys a script or a story. The scenario writer 'saves' the story by his work on the script. Then the continuity man 'saves' it a second time. Then the director 'saves' it after he gets it into his hands. We know that the star performer always 'saves' it again. And then the film cutter and the title writer each 'save' it.

“Most pictures are ‘saved’ in this way by the omniscience of all who work on it so that, when it is finally produced, the writer seldom recognizes more than a glimmer of his original idea in the final product.

“You are much better treated than most picture writers, you know very well. And here you have a chance to ‘save’ your own work,” and Mr. Hooley finished with a laugh.

“It is no laughing matter,” she told him. “I wanted this to be a really big picture. And I do not want to cut out Wonota. Without that throne-room scene it will fall flat.”

“We should have taken it in New York,” grumbled Mr. Hooley. “I felt it at the time. But Mr. Hammond contracted for so many weeks’ use of this island and the time is running out already.”

“And Wonota and Totantora are gone!”

“Exactly.”

“Do you know where they have gone?”

“Haven’t the least idea. But Mr. Hammond knows.”

“He went to town?” asked Ruth thoughtfully.

“He has gone to confer with the lawyers and see if they can get the court to vacate the injunction issued against our use of Wonota. Bilby and the sheriff came again. They had a warrant this time. It called for the production of Wonota. Luckily you had her off the island at the time. They searched every nook and cranny, and meanwhile Totantora got away. They wanted him too.”

“I think that Bilby is too mean for words!”

“Well, I take it that it was his trump card. He must have some powerful influence behind him. But—”

“But what, Mr. Hooley?” asked Ruth eagerly.

“I can see how we might get over the difficulty if the courts will not listen to reason.”

“Oh! Do tell me!”

“We can move the whole company over the Canadian border, and before Bilby can do anything over there we’ll have finished ‘The Long Lane’s Turning.’ That’s the only way I see out of the mess.”

“But think of the expense!”

“Sure! I’m thinking of that all the time,” grumbled Hooley. “And don’t you forget that the boss never allows me to lose sight of it. Your interest in this picture is greater than mine, Miss Fielding; but my job is sort of tangled up in it, too. Mr. Hammond is a good man; but he is a good business man first of all. I am afraid that you will be obliged to make some changes in the remaining scenes so as to overcome the difficulty of losing Wonota.”

“I will not do it!” cried the girl, this time in anger.

“Better read your contract. If you won’t do it, somebody else will have to. You know, we’ve got a man at the studio who could change Hamlet into a slap-stick comedy over night, if the emergency arose.”

“I will not agree to have my picture ruined,” said Ruth, almost in tears.

“That isn’t the way to look at it,” Hooley observed more kindly. “Just see that you save your story yourself instead of letting some other person do it for you. That’s the answer, I fear.”

Ruth had no appetite for dinner that evening, but she was obliged to meet her friends and the actors and actresses who ate at her table with at least an appearance of cheerfulness.

It was impressed upon her mind more deeply than ever before, however, that her arrangement with the Alectrion Film Corporation was not wholly satisfactory. She had learned so much now about the making of a screen picture that often her advice in the directing of the action was accepted with admiration by Mr. Hooley. Mr. Hammond was not afraid to go away and leave the two to film the most important scenes in a script.

And why should she be tied to certain agreements that cramped her? Especially in a case of this kind. For the sake of saving expense Mr. Hammond was likely to insist that the artistic part of “The Long Lane’s Turning” should be sacrificed.

Ruth felt that on her part she would spend twenty-five thousand dollars more (if she had it to spend) in shipping the whole company over the border and making the remainder of the picture in Canada.

“I am going to be in a position some time where I shall have the say as to every detail of the picture,” she told herself. “I want to be my own manager and my own producer. Otherwise I shall never be happy—nor will I ever be sure of making worth-while pictures.”

For Ruth took this career of hers very seriously indeed. Because she did so, perhaps, the fact that Tom Cameron seemed to consider his work so lightly caused Ruth to criticise the young man harshly. That could only be expected.

Tom did not return for dinner. Nor did Mr. Hammond come back to headquarters. Chess Copley was eager to get the girls out in his *Lauriette* again.

“Pooh! it’s nothing much, I guess,” said Helen, seemingly having lost her first interest in the smugglers and the King of the Pipes. “And, anyway, I shall not go unless Tom is with us.”

“Why, Helen!” cried Ruth, “I thought you were so eager.”

“Well, perhaps. If Tom went.”

“But we promised Chess.”

“You promised him. He wants to do it because you are going.”

“Now, Helen, you know—”

“I know just what I am saying. I have no interest in ’Lasses Copley. You have.”

“You are the most exasperating girl!” exclaimed Ruth, in some warmth.

They were in their room freshening their toilets for the evening.

“I don’t seem to suit you any more than Tom does,” said her chum coolly.

“I declare, Helen! you go too far.”

“I shan’t go too far this time—without Tom.” Helen laughed in a provoking way. “You can run along with your Chessleigh if you like. Not me!”

“That is just what I will do,” said Ruth quietly, but with flashing eyes. “I would not insult him by refusing—now. I will tell him you have a headache and cannot come.”

“Do as you like,” was the ungracious reply. “You are crazy about Chess, I guess.”

“I believe you are jealous, Helen Cameron!” cried Ruth, in wonder.

“I don’t know why I should be,” returned Helen lightly. “I’ve no interest in Chess Copley. And I haven’t had since—”

“Since when, I’d like to know?”

“Since I found him out. So now! That’s enough. I am not going. Unless, of

course, Tom returns and wants me to go along with you and Chess."

What more was there to say? Ruth did not wish to disappoint Chessleigh. She felt that Helen Cameron had no reason for treating the young man as she did.

So, as she had done before, and without much interest in the evening sailing party, Ruth left the bungalow to join the waiting Chessleigh at the dock.

CHAPTER XIX

SUSPENSE

Tom and his party in the other motor-boat had not appeared, nor had the *Gem* come back from the town of Chippewa Bay with Mr. Hammond. Why should not Ruth and Chessleigh spy about among the islands for a time?

It was not now moonlight; and there was some haze which gave a smouldering effect to the stars peering through it. But these soft, hazy nights had their own charm and Ruth had come to love them.

Especially on the water. Amid the tamarack-clothed islets the motor-boats crept in and out in a delightful way. To lie on the cushions in the cockpit of the *Lauriette* and bask in the pearly starlight was an experience the girl from Cheslow was not likely to forget.

To-night, when the *Lauriette* got away from the moving picture camp, there were no other boats in sight. Chess dimmed his lights and the craft crept through the narrow passages between the islands, heading up stream.

“My idea,” he said, “is to land at the back of that island—”

“The Kingdom of Pipes?” interrupted Ruth in surprise.

“Yes. Where you say you landed before—twice.”

“Oh!”

“That is, if we see nothing or nobody about.”

“I don’t think we’d better take any great risk—only two of us,” observed Ruth, with her usual caution.

“Of course, we won’t walk right into danger.”

“I should hope not! And just what are we going for, anyway?” and she suddenly laughed.

“Why, I’m curious about those fellows,” said the young man. “And I thought

you were."

"I'm curious about the King of the Pipes. Charley-Horse Pond, Willie calls him."

"Queer old boy, I guess," admitted Chess. "But I want to know more about those chaps who unloaded the boxes."

"What could have been in the boxes? Surely there is no camping party on that island. At least, no pleasure party."

"I fancy not. If you ask me about the boxes, I am puzzled. Yet, I've a glimmer of an idea—Are you sure that was a woman with them to-day in their boat?"

"Wonota called her the yellow lady. And Wonota has good eyes."

"With a yellow face, yes? And we saw a Chinaman in the boat that other time on the river," said Chess quickly.

"Surely she wasn't a Chinese woman? Yet, she might have been."

"Chinese women aren't usually smuggled over the border, I guess," muttered the young fellow. "But Chinese men are."

"Perhaps we should have reported it to the authorities," Ruth suggested.

"Not until we are sure there is really something wrong. I don't want to be laughed at, you know."

But Ruth just then had considered another phase of the matter.

"Oh!" she cried. "There's Bilby! He was in it!"

"In what?"

"In that boat when we first saw it. When we saw the Chinaman, you know, out on the Canadian side of the river. If there is anything wrong about these men—and the King of the Pipes—Bilby is mixed up with them."

"I guess you are right, Ruth. Maybe that fellow is into more queer games than just trying to grab your Osage princess."

"But more than that," said Ruth much worried now, "he may have so many friends on the Canadian side that he can trace Wonota and her father over there on Grenadier Island."

"Better warn Mr. Hammond when he comes back from town," suggested her friend. "That Bilby seems to be universally troublesome. I'll say he is!"

They kept quiet after that, for the outline of the rocky island, with the blasted

beech visible at its summit, came into view. Nothing stirred upon the island, nor was there any other boat in sight.

“Had we better venture ashore?” breathed Ruth, again in doubt.

“Come on. Let’s try it. I’ve got an electric torch in my pocket. We can find our way all over the island with that.”

It was true that the girl of the Red Mill felt some trepidation, but she had confidence in her companion’s muscle and courage if not in his caution. Besides, she was very curious about the queer old man and the doings on his island.

Chess shut off the engine of the *Lauriette* some distance from the island; but first he had gone above the rocky landing, so that the sluggish current between the islands drifted the motor-boat back upon that strand.

He went forward and, with a line in his hand, leaped ashore the moment he could do so, and drew the *Lauriette* in to the rock. Then he passed the line around the very sapling to which Ruth had once fastened the canoe.

“Come on!” he whispered, offering his hand to the girl.

She leaped ashore. They were both wearing canvas, rubber-soled, low shoes which made no noise on the stones. Chess drew forth the electric torch and tried it, turning the spot of light on the ground at their feet. It worked perfectly.

In his right-hand jacket pocket he carried an entirely different article, but he did not mention that fact to Ruth. She would not have gone with him had she known of the presence of the pistol. The possession of firearms would have, to her mind, at once taken the matter out of the realm of mere adventure into that of peril, and Ruth was not seeking such an experience.

She only half believed in the smugglers. She had seen some men in a boat at the island, but she doubted if it meant anything more than a fishing party. Those boxes taken ashore meant nothing much to her, if they did suggest some particularly interesting situation to Chess.

In fact, Copley had not fully taken Ruth into his confidence. He had reason to suspect that whoever might be on this island were law-breakers, and he really had no right to bring Ruth here. Tom Cameron would not have done it.

Copley was serious, however, in his intention of finding out if possible who was on the island; and when they had passed up the rough path to the round table-stone, Ruth had got over her little shivery feeling and was as eager as Chess himself.

They passed carefully through the fringe of brush and reached the open space where the blasted beech tree stood. The faint starlight illumined the space, so that Chess did not need to use the torch in his left hand. There was no tent set up here nor any other mark of human habitation.

Ruth knew that there was scarcely any other place on the island where a camp could be established. Had the people they had seen landing from the speedy launch gone away for good and taken their camp equipment with them?

Suddenly Copley seized her wrist. His touch was cold and betrayed the fact that he was nervous himself.

“Listen!” he whispered, his lips close to Ruth’s ear.

Helen would have immediately been “in a fidget,” and said so. But Ruth could restrain herself pretty well. She nodded so that Copley saw she heard him and was listening. They waited several moments.

“There!” breathed the young fellow again.

“What is it?” Ruth ventured.

“Somebody talking. Listen!”

There was a human voice near by. It sounded close to them, and yet its direction Ruth could not decide upon. There was a hollow, reverberating quality to the sounds that baffled determination as to their origin. But it was a human voice without doubt.

Ruth could not, however, understand a word that was spoken. The tones were first high, then low, never guttural, and possessed a certain sibilant quality. Whether the words spoken were English or not, was likewise a mystery.

Ruth and Chessleigh stood first in one place, then in another, in that circle about the big beech tree. The young man had gone all around the tattered trunk and found no opening. If it was hollow, there was no way of getting into it near the ground, nor was there any ladder by which one might scale the huge trunk to the top.

“That’s no hide-away,” mouthed Chess, his lips close at Ruth’s ear again. “And it seems to me the sound doesn’t come from overhead.”

“More as though it came up from the ground,” returned Ruth, in the same low voice. “Do you suppose we are standing on the roof of a cavern, Chess Copley?”

“It might be,” agreed the young fellow. “But if it is a cavern, where under the

sun is the mouth of it? How do they get in or out? It beats my time!”

Ruth quickly acknowledged that the mystery was beyond her comprehension. The sing-song sounds—for such they seemed to be—went on and on, meaningless for the two listeners, who could not distinguish a single word.

“Think that’s your King of the Pipes?” asked Chessleigh finally.

“I don’t know. If it is, there must be something more the matter with him than Willie says there is. He sounds crazy—that is the way it sounds to me.”

CHAPTER XX

A FAILURE IN CALCULATION

“What shall we do now?” asked Ruth finally, and in a whisper.

“Let’s go down to that place where we saw the boat land the other morning,” returned her companion. “I’d like to look about there a bit.”

“Do you think it is wise?”

“I don’t know about the wisdom of it,” chuckled Chessleigh. “But I do know that I’m not at all satisfied. Some people are here on the island, and I’d like to know where they are.”

“I am afraid we will get into trouble.”

“If it is only that old man——”

“We don’t know that it is. He must be talking to somebody—if that is his voice we hear.”

“Maybe he is only talking to himself. I don’t hear anybody else,” replied the young fellow. “Come on. Let’s see the thing through, now we have started.”

Indeed Ruth wanted to see it through. She was quite as curious as her companion. So she made no further objection.

Pushing through the brush, they climbed carefully down the slope on the outer side of the island. The landing where they had fastened their own boat was on the inner side of the island, while this side fronted the broad expanse of the river.

They could see the hurrying current, glinted here and there by the soft starlight. Everything looked ghostly about them. The dim silvery light made it possible for them to pick their way without stumbling. They made little noise in reaching the shore.

There was a little indention here—a tiny cove. The shore was shelving, and of sand and gravel. Chess pointed silently to the unmistakable marks of a boat’s

bow in several places.

“That boat has been here more than once,” he whispered.

Ruth breathed “Yes,” but said no more.

Up-stream of the cove was a great mass of rock—not one rock, but several huddled together and the cracks between overgrown with brush and vines. Chess brought into use the electric torch again.

He shot the spotlight into the crannies. Was there a path there between two of the big boulders? He drew Ruth’s attention to it with a touch on her arm. She saw that some of the bushes were broken—the vines torn away and dead.

“Somebody has been here,” she murmured.

“Of course. That is what we came to find,” said the young man. “We are on the verge of a discovery, Ruth.”

“I hope we are not on the verge of trouble,” she returned, in the same low tone.

“Don’t have a bit of fear,” he told her, in a louder voice.

He was about to mention the loaded pistol in his pocket; then thought better of it. But he went ahead, venturing into the narrow passage between the two boulders.

The ray of the torch showed the way. It played on the ground at their feet and upon the rocky sides of the passage. Was that an abrupt end to the passage ahead of them, or a sharp turn in it? Chess pressed on, Ruth trying to peer over his shoulder, although to do this she had to stand on tiptoe.

“By jove!” uttered the young man in surprise, “I believe it is a cavern. It’s the entrance to a cave.”

“Then those voices did come from a cavern. Be careful, Chess—do!”

He had reached the turn in the passage. A jutting shelf of rock roofed them over. The young man shut off the lamp and they were in darkness. He thrust forward his head to peer around the corner.

As he did so, without the least warning, something swished through the air and Ruth heard the sound of a dull blow. Chess pitched forward, with a groan of pain, falling to his knees.

Ruth uttered a scream. She did not try to retreat, but seized the young man by the shoulders and dragged him back.

Her brave act saved the young fellow from receiving a second and heavier blow.

A club was being wielded in the hands of a powerful man who had met them in the passage!

Chess was speechless and apparently in a confused state of mind. The electric torch had fallen from his hand. He seemed struggling to get something out of his jacket pocket, but before he could accomplish this a light flashed up in the tunnel ahead.

The same sing-song, chattering voice they had heard so faintly on the summit of the island broke out close at hand. In the red, flickering light of a burning pine torch the frightened girl saw a man in a broad-brimmed hat and loose, flapping upper garment bending over Chess with a club again raised to strike.

“Don’t hurt him! Don’t hit him again!” she cried.

Other voices—all speaking in that strange, sing-song tongue—broke out, and Ruth suddenly realized that these enemies that confronted them were Chinese.

In the red light she saw clearly now, under the round, broad-brimmed hat, the yellow face and slanting eyes of the man. Ruth did not understand it—she could not imagine why these Orientals should be here on the island. But she realized fully that the calculations of Copley and herself had gone astray. They were in peril—serious peril.

The leading Chinaman glared into Ruth’s frightened face and his thin lips curled back from his yellow teeth in a snarl like that of a rabid dog. His very look was enough to turn the girl cold. She trembled, still striving to drag the half-senseless Chessleigh back.

The Chinaman uttered a long, jabbering howl, turning his face over his shoulder as though speaking to those who crowded behind him in the passage. Ruth might still have escaped, but she would not desert her injured companion.

Suddenly there was a stir in the passage and the big Chinaman was thrust aside. Another figure pushed forward—a ragged, bushy-haired figure. It was the King of the Pipes!

“Hush!” he commanded in his old way.

He waved the Chinaman back. He seemed to have some authority, for the burly Chinaman obeyed. The old man thrust his face forward and peered with his wild eyes into Ruth’s countenance.

“Hush!” he whispered. “What did I tell you? I know you, of course. I told you that I could not divide my kingdom with any one. It was quite useless for you to

come here again.

“And see what has come of it,” he added. “The Pipes have seen you. They know your intentions. They will never in this world stand for a divided kingdom. I shall have to cut off your head. Too bad! Too bad!”

He seized Ruth’s wrist. She tried to draw away from him, but he was much more powerful than she had supposed. One quick jerk and she was fairly dragged over the crouching figure of Copley and around the corner of the narrow passage.

The head Chinaman darted forward and seized Chess. He likewise was dragged into the place. Amid the chattering of several high, sing-song voices, and only half seeing what was being done because of the flickering torchlight, Ruth knew that she was being hurried into a tunnel of some size that ran back into the island.

It was rocky all about her—on both sides as well as under foot and overhead. It was a natural tunnel, not one made by man. The figures flitting before her were gnomelike. She saw clearly only the old man who led her, holding her tightly by the arm. She knew that the Chinaman was dragging Chess behind them, as though that unfortunate young man was a sack of potatoes.

This outcome of their innocent adventure was entirely different from anything Ruth had dreamed of. If she did not exactly fear the queer old man who called himself the King of the Pipes, she certainly did fear the men who were with him in this cavern.

CHAPTER XXI

IN THE CHINESE DEN

It was several minutes before Ruth could accustom her sight to the uncertain, flickering flame of the torches with which the cavern was illuminated. There was, too, a small fire on a stone hearth and above it a stone and cement chimney that portrayed ingenuity in its building.

The cavern was a natural one, but man had made of it a not impossible habitation. She felt rugs under her feet as she was drawn along by the King of the Pipes, and when her eyes became accustomed to the half-gloom of the place she saw that there were several low tables and a couch or two, the latter likewise covered with rugs.

Not only had some ingenuity been expended in fitting up the cave, but the furnishings must have occasioned the expenditure of considerable money. It was not at all the sort of place that she would have expected the queer old man to occupy on the lonely island.

She was so much interested in Chessleigh's state, however, that she gave small attention to these other things. When she could break away from the King of the Pipes she flung herself down upon her knees beside the recumbent young man and raised his head in her arms.

Chess had received a hard blow from the Chinaman's club. And he had not uttered a word. The latter fact caused Ruth more alarm than anything else. She feared that he was very badly injured, although he was not insensible.

But there was no blood on his head and face. She passed her hand swiftly over his crown and found an unmistakable lump there, a lump raised by the blow. But, looking more closely into his half open eyes she saw more intelligence in their expression than she expected.

Indeed, as she peered closely at him she distinctly saw him wink his left eye, and this act, with the bright look in his eyes, warned her that Copley was playing

possum.

Having been felled by the blow, and feeling himself out-matched by the Chinamen who had come jabbering to the scene, Chess had displayed much more helplessness than he need have shown. But Ruth decided that he was very wise to do this, and she was much relieved to discover this to be the fact. She did nothing to attract the attention of their captors to his real condition. She moaned over him, and made little pitying sounds as though she thought he had been very seriously hurt by the blow he had received.

The King of the Pipes put his clawlike hand upon her shoulder again.

“Let him alone. He will have to have his head off, of course. No hope for it. But I will try to postpone your decapitation until the thirty-first day of June, which comes when there are two Sundays in the same week. Eh? Isn’t that shrewd? As King of the Pipes I have to show great astuteness. Oh, great astuteness!”

“I am sure you will help us, sire,” murmured Ruth, standing up once more and looking appealingly at the queer old man.

“Well, I will do what I can. But, remember, we kings can’t do what we once could. Seems to me I told you that before. The war did the business for us. And I would not dare suggest taking a consort. The Pipes would never stand for it.”

“Whom do you call ‘the Pipes’?” Ruth asked wonderingly.

“Look about you. See them? Already they are beginning to smoke up again. And it is a dirty smell. I have to go out and roam about the island to get away from it. Dreadful! To give up my throne room to nasty little brass pipes. Ugh!”

While he was speaking the girl stared about her, now better able to see the place and the people in it. There were at least half a dozen men. And all were Chinamen, as far as she could see, although not all were dressed in blouse and loose trousers and wadded slippers—the usual costume of the un-westernized Chinaman.

Two of the men were lying down, and there were tiny lamps sputtering on the low stools, or tables, set close to their heads. They held long-stemmed pipes with small brass bowls, and had begun to smoke something that had a very pungent and disagreeable odor.

Ruth’s mind had begun to clear. She remembered the heavy boxes she and Chess had seen brought ashore, and the Chinaman in the speed launch, and then the yellow-faced woman being taken on this very day toward the American shore.

The whole puzzle began to fit together like a piece of patchwork.

Chinamen; a high-powered boat going back and forth across the St. Lawrence; a hidden cave on this supposedly uninhabited island; the heavy boxes; the smoking of this vile paste which she now saw a third Chinaman dip out of a tiny bowl, on a stick, and drop into his pipe in the form of a “pill.”

Opium!

If these men—and the white men of the speed launch—did any smuggling it was not diamonds they smuggled. It was opium. And they were probably running Chinese across the border as well. Ruth knew that she was in a very serious predicament when she had swiftly thought this out, if she had not realized it before.

What would these evil-looking yellow men do to her—and to poor Chess? The latter, she was relieved to feel, was biding his time. But what chance was likely to arise which would lead to their escape from this cavern?

She looked about the place. Two of the yellow men were between her and the passage through which she and her companion had been dragged. If she wanted to, she could not make a dash for liberty.

She turned again to the bedraggled and ragged-haired old man, curiosity about whom had led to this predicament. The King of the Pipes was watching her with eyes that glittered like a bird’s.

“Hush!” he whispered, moving nearer again. “You cannot escape. The Pipes are very strong and very agile. They would not let you. To tell the truth, they fear so much for my safety that I haven’t the freedom myself that I would sometimes like.”

“Can’t you leave this place?” Ruth asked softly.

“Hush!” he warned her in his usual stealthy way. “Don’t speak of it. Of course a king can do no wrong, and naturally a king can do as he pleases. Otherwise, what is kingship? But it is always well to bow to the peculiarities and the prejudices of one’s subjects. They do not like me to leave the throne-room at certain times. So I do not attempt to do so. When you met me before, my dear, there was nobody on the island but myself. But to-night you see how many are here, and more yet to come.”

“More Chinamen?” she whispered.

“No. Perhaps no more of the Pipes,” and she thought he showed involuntary

disgust of the opium-smokers. “But other subjects of mine who must be catered to. Oh, dear, yes! Being a king is not all it is cracked up to be, I assure you.”

For some reason Ruth felt more alarm because of this last statement of the poor old man than of anything that had gone before. She realized that he, of course, really had no influence with the opium smugglers. But she began to understand that there were other men coming here who might be more savage than the Chinamen.

She remembered that there had been several white men in the launch when she had observed it, and that on one occasion Horatio Bilby had been one of them. Now, Ruth felt not only a great distaste for Bilby, but she feared him exceedingly.

It might be that the red-faced fat man who had so fretted Mr. Hammond and her about Wonota, had only crossed the river in the launch as a passenger. He might have no close connection with the opium smugglers.

But knowing Bilby as she did, Ruth could imagine that he might be mixed up in almost any illegal business that promised large returns in money. If he would attempt to steal the Indian girl, why would he not join hands with opium smugglers and Chinese runners, if he saw a possibility of gain in those industries?

She wished she might talk to Chess and learn just what was working in his mind at that moment. She was quite sure that he was by no means as stunned as he appeared to be.

She approved of his feigning, for as long as these men did not seek to injure her, why should he incur their further notice? He lay on the rug, quite as though he was helpless; but she knew he was alert and was ready, if occasion arose, to show much more agility than the Chinamen or the old King of the Pipes dreamed.

CHAPTER XXII

THE TWINS' ALARM

It was fully an hour after the *Lauriette* had chugged away from the dock at the island where the moving picture company was established that the motor-boat which had been to Oak Point returned with Tom Cameron aboard.

Tom, with the other men who had been exploring and fishing all day, was ravenously hungry, but he went around to the veranda of the chief bungalow where his twin sister and Ruth stayed to see how they were before even going to wash and to see if he could bribe one of the cooks to set out "a cold snack."

Tom found Helen on the porch, alone. At a glance, too, he saw that she was not in a pleasant mood.

"What's gone wrong?" demanded Tom. And with a brother's privilege of being plain-spoken, he added: "You look cross. Go in search of your temper."

"Who says I've lost it?" demanded Helen sharply.

"I Cagliostro—Merlin—wizard that I am," chuckled Tom. "I am still little Brighteyes, and I can see just as far into a spruce plank as the next one."

"Well, I am mad, if you want to know," sniffed Helen.

"Where's Ruth?"

"She's whom I am mad at," declared the girl, nodding.

"I don't believe it," said Tom soothingly. "We could not really be mad at Ruth Fielding."

"Don't you feel that way yourself—the way she acts with Chess Copley?"

"I wouldn't mind punching 'Lasses' head," returned Tom. "But that's different."

"Is that so? What do you know about their being out on the river together right now? Humph!"

“Where have they gone?” asked her brother. “Why aren’t you with them? Are they alone?”

This brought out the full particulars of the affair, and Tom listened to the end of a rather excited account of what had happened that afternoon—both on the island where Helen and Ruth had been “marooned” and here at the camp—together with the suspicions and curiosity about the island which had been dubbed the Kingdom of Pipes. Nor did it lack interest in Tom’s ears in spite of his sister’s rather excited way of telling it.

“But look here,” he asked. “Why didn’t you go with Ruth and ’Lasses?”

“Humph! They didn’t want me,” sniffed Helen.

“Now, Helen, you know better. Ruth never slighted you in the world. I know her better than that.”

“Well, she makes too much of Chess Copley. She is always praising him up to me. And I don’t like it. I’ll treat him just as I want to—so there!”

Tom looked rather sober at this. He hesitated a moment. He wanted to ask his pettish sister a question, but evidently did not know how to go about it.

“It can’t be helped now, I suppose. They will be back after a while. Where were they going besides to that crazy fellow’s island?”

“Just there. That’s all.”

“Come on and watch me eat. I’m starved.”

“Thanks! I watched the pythons fed at the zoo once,” said Helen with unwonted sharpness. “I will sit here till the scene of savagery is over. You can come back.”

“You are in a fine mood, I see,” observed Tom, and went off chuckling.

Nevertheless, he was not feeling very happy himself over the thought that Ruth and Chess Copley were out on the river together.

“Looks mighty fishy,” muttered Tom Cameron. “I could punch ’Lasses’ head, the way I feel.”

These thoughts seemed to take Tom’s appetite away. To his sister’s surprise, he returned in a very few minutes to the front porch of the bungalow.

“I told you that you had boa-constrictor habits,” she gasped. “Why, Tom Cameron! you must have swallowed your supper whole.”

“I didn’t swallow as much as I expected,” returned the young man, smiling. But

he grew serious again. “How long was Chess going to stay out in his boat?” he asked.

“You don’t suppose that I saw him go?” asked Helen, with surprise.

“Do you know that it is after eleven o’clock?” said her brother. “If they went no further than that crazy man’s island, what do you suppose is keeping them?”

“Mercy’s sake! is that the time, Tommy-boy? Why, the crazy man himself must be keeping them! Do you suppose the King of the Pipes has captured Ruth and Chess?”

“Don’t try to be funny,” advised Tom. “It may be no laughing matter.”

“Well, I like that!”

“I don’t think that Chess would keep her out so late if everything was all right. Sure they were not going to Copley Island?”

“Sure. The girls have gone away. There’s no fun going on there.”

“Well, of course the motor-boat may have broken down. Such things happen,” said Tom reflectively.

“Now you have got me stirred up,” cried Helen. “I had no idea it was so late. And Ruthie does not believe in late hours.”

“She would not stay out on the river with me half the night, that is sure,” grumbled Tom.

“Oh, Tommy-boy!” exclaimed his sister, “I don’t believe she cares so much for Chess. I really don’t.”

“Well, that is not here nor there. What’s to be done? Where’s Mr. Hammond—or Willie?”

“They haven’t got back from Chippewa Bay with the *Gem*.”

“This clumsy old *Tamarack* is too big for me to handle alone. And the boys have all gone to bed by this time.”

“The canoes aren’t too big for us to handle,” Helen said.

“Us?”

“Yes. I insist on going, too, if you start out to look for the *Lauriette*. And it will look better too. If we are simply paddling about, there being nothing the matter with Chess and Ruth, they won’t be able to laugh at us. Come on!” exclaimed

Helen, picking up her sweater. “I am a loyal sister, Tom Cameron.”

“Right-o!” he agreed, more cheerfully. “I suppose there really is nothing the matter. Yet, whatever else Chess Copley is, he’s not the sort of fellow to keep a girl out till midnight on the river when there is nobody else along.”

“Humph! Do you think Ruth is a mere chit of a flapper? You are old-fashioned, Tommy-boy. The day of the chaperon is about over.”

“You know it isn’t over in our set, and never will be,” he returned. “You girls have a lot of freedom, I admit. But there are limits.”

“Baa!” was Helen’s utterly impudent remark.

They ran down to the shore and got out one of the canoes. Helen was familiar with the use of the paddle and served her brother as a good second. They drove the canoe out into the open river, but only just for a look up its expanse.

There was no motor-boat in sight or hearing—not even the distant lights of one. The current was so strong that the Cameron twins went back among the islands where the water was smoother. Besides, it was much more romantic, Helen said wickedly, among the islands, and Chess and Ruth were more likely to remain in the tortuous passages.

The two laid a pretty direct course, however, for the Kingdom of Pipes. As they spied it, and drew nearer, Tom suddenly stopped paddling and held up his hand.

“What’s the matter?” demanded his sister, likewise raising her paddle out of the water.

“Listen,” warned Tom.

Faintly there came the noise of a motor-boat to their straining ears.

“Here they are!” shrilled Helen.

“Will you be still?” demanded her brother. “That’s not Copley’s boat. It’s a deal bigger craft. She’s on the other side of the island.”

Helen leaned forward and caught at his sleeve. “Look there!” she whispered. “There is the *Lauriette*.”

She had been the first to see the outline of the Copley launch moored close to the shore of the island at its upper end.

“They’ve gone ashore,” said Tom. “Where can they be? If that other boat is approaching this island——”

“Oh, Tom! The pirates!”

“Oh, fudge!”

“The smugglers, then. Chess said he believed there were smugglers here.”

“What do they smuggle?” demanded Tom with some scorn.

“I don’t know. He did not seem very clear about it.”

“Just the same,” Tom observed, sinking his paddle again in the water, “there may be trouble in the air.”

“Trouble on the river, I guess you mean,” giggled Helen.

But she giggled because she was excited and nervous. She was quite as alarmed as Tom was over the possibility that Chess and Ruth had got into some difficulty on the King of the Pipes’ island.

CHAPTER XXIII

TROUBLE ENOUGH

Returning to Ruth Fielding in the cavern: Although her heart beat rapidly and she really was fearful, she showed little perturbation in her countenance and manner after she had talked with Charley Pond, if that was the real name of the King of the Pipes.

Just how mentally disturbed the old man was it was difficult for the girl to judge. But she feared that he had, after all his claims, absolutely no influence with the Chinamen.

She believed that the leader of the Orientals was the heavy-set Chinaman who had struck Chessleigh Copley down with the club. The others—some smoking the little brass pipes, and others not smoking—were probably men who were endeavoring to get into the States without the knowledge of the emigration authorities. Indeed, they were already in New York. This island was south of the American line. But from the Kingdom of Pipes to any city where the Chinamen would be safe from apprehension was a pretty big jump.

As for the opium—the smoke of which Ruth smelled now for the first time—she had no idea how that commodity might be handled or disposed of. She knew that it was valuable, even when imported for medicinal purposes. There was a heavy tariff on it, as well as restrictions upon the trading in it.

If those boxes—each as heavy as a man could lift and which she and Chess had seen brought ashore on this island—contained opium, there might be many thousand of dollars' worth of the drug, in its paste form, here now. Perhaps it was hidden somewhere in this cave.

Ruth had seated herself upon the end of one of the low tables. She knew that all the furniture in the cavern, including the rugs, must be of Chinese manufacture. There could be no doubt that the place was fitted up for the convenience of the Orientals.

She looked about, trying to penetrate the obscurity of the place. Were there passages besides the one by which she and Chess had been dragged in? Were there other apartments in the cavern, shut off by some of the hanging rugs which she saw?

Her principal thought, however, was of the possibility of escape. And she wished heartily that she and Copley could get out of the cave before the arrival of the "others" of whom the King of the Pipes had spoken. Whoever they might be—or whether Horatio Bilby was one of them—Ruth did not want to meet the smugglers and Chinese runners.

She feared very much for her safety, and for that of her companion. The law-breakers would know immediately that their safety was threatened. They must know that if they allowed Ruth and Chess to depart from the cave, their presence here and what they were doing would be reported to the police. And men like Bilby, who would stoop to anything for money, were not likely to give over such a profitable business as the smuggling of opium without a fight.

Just how much did Bilby and his companions care for the law? It was a question that created no little anxiety in Ruth's mind. And she wondered, too, what Chess thought about it.

The young fellow lay upon the floor of the cavern, silent and immovable. She was quite sure, by the exceedingly knowing wink that he had given her, that he was neither panic-stricken nor seriously hurt. He was merely waiting to see what would turn up.

And what would happen when the new chance did turn up? Already Chess was in opposition to at least seven Chinamen, if he attempted anything. And if those the old man had spoken of, likewise appeared, what could Copley do against such numbers?

There was nothing Ruth, herself, could do. She sat quietly on the end of the low table and looked sadly about the dimly lighted place. This was certainly a situation from which her usually ingenious mind could invent no means of escape.

Suddenly the old man who called himself the monarch of this island came from the corner where he had been standing, watching Ruth, and made his way swiftly to the entrance to the cave. The big Chinaman got up and looked at him. The King of the Pipes waved his hand and pointed through the passage.

It seemed to be sufficiently clear—that gesture—for the Chinaman began to

gabble to his friends. They scrambled to their feet—all but two who had fallen into a sluggish state after their indulgence in the use of the drug. They looked toward the cavern entrance. The King of the Pipes disappeared through the passage.

Ruth stole a stealthy glance at Chess. She saw that he had moved. He was lying with his right hand covered by his body. There seemed an alertness about him—in posture and in gleaming, half-closed eyes—that startled Ruth. What had the young fellow in his mind to do. For what was he waiting?

In a minute she heard the ring of quick steps upon the rock-floor of the tunnel.

Ruth shrank away from the table and stood at her companion's head. What would the newcomers—Bilby, perhaps—do to Copley and to her?

And it was Bilby! The little, red-faced, greenish-eyed man, projected himself into the cavern as though he had been shot out of a gun.

"What's the matter here? What's going on, I want to know? That crazy-head is trying to tell me something—Ye gods! A girl?"

He saw Ruth vaguely. Then he glanced down at the prostrate Copley.

"Who knocked him out?" demanded Bilby.

The burly Chinaman was the one he addressed, who answered in a form of English:

"Allee same me. I get um, Mist' Blibly."

"For mercy's sake!" whined Bilby, wringing his fat hands. "These people aren't police. They are some of the summer visitors. Now we *are* in a mess!"

"Allee same look-see," growled the Chinaman. He kicked Chessleigh, and not gently. "Number one sneakee—him! She——"

He nodded violently toward Ruth, thus drawing Bilby's attention to the girl. Bilby strained his fat neck forward to see the girl more closely. There were other sounds coming from the passage.

"What's doing, Mr Bilby?" asked a gruff voice.

The fat little man was panting. He pointed waveringly at Ruth.

"Here's a pretty mess," he gasped. "What between these Chinks and that crazy old duffer, they have got me in a nice mess. I know this girl. She belongs to that moving picture outfit. Now what are we going to do?"

“Knock her in the head,” was the advice of the growling voice.

The advice probably was not intended to be followed. It was said perhaps to scare Ruth. But it excited somebody else besides the girl of the Red Mill.

Before Bilby could reply or anybody else could speak, Copley came to his feet with all the suddenness of a jumping-jack. Bilby squealed and started back, falling against the gruff man who had followed him into the cave and who was evidently the boatman.

“What’s this?” ejaculated this man.

But that was all he said. The Chinamen squealed in unison, and that was all from them. Bilby himself faintly groaned.

“Put your hands up—all of you!” commanded Copley, and one of the most amazing things about the whole wild extravaganza was that the young fellow’s voice was perfectly unshaken.

Lads that have been in the army are apt to consider circumstances like these as meat and drink to them. Chessleigh had not served Uncle Sam in vain. He was as cool as the proverbial cucumber!

“Put your hands up—all of you! There are ten shots in this magazine and every one of them will get its man. Quick! Up with ’em!”

In all probability only one of the Chinamen understood this strictly American form of expression. But when the burly Chinaman elevated his yellow hands, his fellow countrymen did the same.

As for Bilby and the boatman, they reached toward the roof of the cavern hastily. There was no hesitation on their part. Although Copley was alone, his unwavering attitude and the threat of the automatic pistol, played hob with such shreds of courage as the malefactors possessed.

CHAPTER XXIV

A LETTER COMES

Nobody had come through the passage into the cave save Bilby and the boatman. Chess stood where he could keep half an eye, at least, upon the opening, and although the passage was filled with shadow he was quite sure there was nobody lurking there who was friendly to the law-breakers.

“Just step around behind those two men and see if they are armed, Miss Ruth, will you?” went on Copley. “Take ’em from behind. Don’t get in line with my pistol. For if I begin to shoot, somebody is bound to get hit. Keep your hands up, you fellows!” and he gestured toward the Chinamen.

Even the two of their number who had been half-overcome with the fumes of opium had come to attention when Chess produced his pistol. The Chinamen huddled together at one side. The boatman and Bilby were opposite the doorway of the tunnel. Ruth promptly obeyed Chess and went around behind the last-named two of the enemy.

Ruth hesitated a moment in the dusk there at the opening of the passage. She hated to touch either Bilby or the other man. But probably both of them were armed, and for the sake of safety their weapons must be taken from them.

While she hesitated she heard a faint rustle in the passage. Then came the softest possible whisper:

“Ss-st!”

Ruth jumped and glanced over her shoulder. Was it friend or enemy who evidently tried to attract her attention by this sibilant sound?

A figure moved in the gloom. Before she could cry any warning to Copley an arm was put firmly about her and Ruth was almost lifted to one side. She saw the gleam of a weapon in the other hand of her neighbor, and the point of this weapon was dug suddenly into the broad back of the gruff boatman who was Bilby’s companion.

“Don’t get nervous, ’Lasses,” came in Tom Cameron’s voice. “We’re all friends here. Ah! A nice automatic pistol from our friend, Mr. Bilby. Just so. Here, Nell!”

But it was Ruth’s hand that took the captured weapon, although Helen stood at her side squeezing her other hand and whispering:

“My goodness, Ruthie, what a perfectly glorious experience! Are those the real smugglers?”

“I shouldn’t wonder,” replied her friend. Then she accepted the revolver extracted from the hip pocket of the boatman by Tom Cameron. “Where is the King of the Pipes?”

“Taking the air. We heard the talk below here through the hollow tree. Do you know,” whispered Helen, “that old beech is a regular chimney. And we saw the boat come here. Then we grabbed the King of the Pipes outside.”

“Tom did not hurt him, I hope?” murmured Ruth.

“Not a bit of it. In fact, the queer old fellow said he was willing to abdicate in Tom’s favor, and now, I suppose, Tommy-boy is King of the Pipes,” and Helen, the irrepressible, grinned.

The two ex-army men, however, took the matter quite seriously. Tom disarmed the Chinamen as well as the white men. And to search and disarm a squirming Oriental, they found not easy work.

“But I disarmed enough Fritzies in Europe to learn my job pretty well. How’s the weather, Sergeant?”

“All right here, Captain Cameron,” said Copley seriously.

“Then I’ll back out with this bunch of junk. Here’s a pair of brass knuckles in the bunch. I’ll use ’em on any of these fellows who try to run. We’ll keep ’em hived up here till the police come. One fellow can hold ’em. Unless they try to climb up that hollow beech tree.”

“No fear,” said Copley. “Get the girls out first.”

Tom had already loaded both Ruth and Helen down with the loot from the malefactors’ pockets. He motioned to the girls to leave the cavern.

“Hold on! Hold on!” Bilby cried. “I beg of you, don’t leave me with these men. I only happen to be here by chance—”

“A bad chance for you, then,” said Chess Copley. “Don’t listen to him, Captain

Cameron.”

“No, don’t listen to him,” said Ruth severely. “I know he is worse than the others. Why, Tom! he is the man who has made us all that trouble about Wonota and my picture.”

“Sure,” agreed Tom. “I know the snake. Go ahead, girls. Chess and I will follow you. And one of us will be right in this passage all the time,” he added, addressing the two white men. “Don’t make any mistake. We’ll shoot if you try to come out until you are told to.”

The girls were already feeling their way through the darkness of the tunnel. At the turn Ruth kicked something, and, stooping, secured Chess’ electric torch. She pressed the switch and the illumination allowed the two young men to overtake them with more certainty, Chess backing out with his pistol trained on the opening into the cavern.

When once the four friends were around the turn and out of hearing of the prisoners, Tom Cameron began to chuckle.

“This is no laughing matter!” exclaimed his sister. “I am so excited I don’t know what to do.”

“Keep right on,” said Ruth. “I want to get home just as soon as I can. I don’t believe I shall care hereafter to leave the island until we are through with the picture and can go back to the Red Mill. What are you laughing about, Tom Cameron?”

“I don’t know how ’Lasses is fixed,” said the amused Tom. “But my pistol isn’t loaded. It is my old service automatic and needs repairing, anyway.”

“Don’t fret, Cameron. Mine is loaded all right,” said Chess grimly.

“Then you stay and guard the cave,” said Tom.

“You bet you! You couldn’t get me away from here until you have sent for the sheriff and he comes for the gang. I believe we have done a good night’s work.”

“Oh, you were wonderful!” Helen burst out. “And Ruth says they knocked you down and hurt you.”

“I shall get over that all right,” returned Chess quietly.

But when they were out of the passage and on the open shore Helen insisted upon fussing around Chessleigh, bathing the lump on his head, and otherwise “mothering” him in a way that secretly delighted Ruth. Tom looked at his sister

in some amazement.

“What do you know about that?” he whispered to Ruth. “She was as sore at him as she could be an hour ago.”

“You don’t know your own sister very well, Tom,” retorted Ruth.

“Humph!” ejaculated Tom Cameron. “Perhaps we fellows don’t understand any girl very well.”

But Ruth was not to be led into any discussion of that topic then. It was agreed that she and Helen and Tom should hurry back to the motion picture camp at once.

“The King of the Pipes won’t bite you,” Tom said to Chess. “Only don’t let him go back into the cave. Those fellows might do him some harm. And the sheriff will want him for a witness against the gang. He is not so crazy as he makes out to be.”

The night’s adventures were by no means completed, for Ruth and Helen could not go to bed after they reached the bungalow until they knew how it all turned out. Mr. Hammond had returned before them, and Willie and Tom started at once for Chippewa Bay in the *Gem*.

The capture of Bilby in connection with the smugglers and Chinese runners delighted the motion picture producer.

“That will settle the controversy, I believe,” Mr. Hammond said to the two girls. “Bilby’s attempt to annoy us must fall through now. We will get Totantora and Wonota back from Canada and finish the picture properly. But, believe me! I have had all the experience I want with freak stars. The expense and trouble I have been put to regarding Wonota has taught me a lesson. I’d sell my contract with Wonota to-morrow—or after the picture is done—for a song.”

Ruth looked at him steadily for a moment.

“Do you mean that, Mr. Hammond?” she asked quietly.

“Yes, I do.”

Helen laughed. “I guess Ruth is thinking of singing that song. Ruth believes in Wonota.”

“If I could carry the tune,” her chum said, more lightly. “We’ll talk of that later, Mr. Hammond.”

“Oh, I would give you first chance, Miss Ruth,” said the producer. “By the way,”

and he turned to his desk. “I brought mail from the town. Here are several letters for you, Miss Ruth, and one for Miss Cameron.”

The girls began to open their letters as soon as they reached their room. But it was Helen’s single epistle that created the most excitement.

“It’s from Carrie Perrin,” she said to Ruth. Then, in a moment, she uttered a cry that drew Ruth’s full attention. “Listen to this! What do you know about this, Ruth?”

“What is it, my dear?” asked her chum, in her usual composed manner.

“Just think of that!” cried Helen, in tears. “And I have treated him so hatefully. He’ll never forgive me in this world, I suppose. It is about Chess,” she sobbed, and handed her chum the letter.

CHAPTER XXV

THE HEART'S DESIRE

"And what do you think of this, Nell? I've wormed out of Bill Kenmore the truth about that mean joke the boys played on us last spring when we were all at Jennie Stone's. Excuse! I suppose I should say Madame Marchand's. To think of Heavy Stone being an old married woman now!

"Well, Bill Kenmore always did have a crazy streak—and he wasn't shell-shocked in France, either. You remember the time you went away down town in answer to a telegram, thinking it was somebody who needed you very much, and you walked into that place and found the boys all dressed up and ready to give you the 'ha, ha!'?

"I know it got you awfully mad—and I don't blame you. Chess was there, I know. But he didn't even know what the row was all about. Bill engineered the whole thing, and he thinks still that it was an awfully good joke. His ideas of humor must have originated in the Stone Age.

"I made him tell me all about it, he thinking I would be amused. Then I turned him right out of our parlor and told him not to call again. I hear that he thinks I am a regular cat!

"But who wouldn't be cattish with a fellow who has no more sense? Anyhow, we know the truth now. Perhaps Chess Copley is not very sharp, but I couldn't think of his doing anything really mean. So now you know. If Chess is up there at the Thousand Islands you can tell him from me, at least, that 'all is forgiven.' Sounds like a newspaper personal, doesn't it?"

Ruth stopped reading there, and looked brightly at her chum.

"What do you think of that?" asked the latter, wiping her eyes.

"Well, my dear, I shouldn't cry about it," said Ruth. "I think it is an occasion to be joyful."

“But, Chess—”

“Is of a forgiving nature, I think,” Ruth said. “At any rate, I would not let the matter stand between me and a nice boy friend any longer. I could never suspect Chess of doing an unkind thing.”

“But I have wronged him!” cried Helen, who was, after all, tender-hearted.

“Do you know,” said her friend, “I believe you can make it up to him very nicely, if you want to, Helen?”

The *Gem* returned to the island just at daybreak. The girls ran down to the dock to meet the returned young men and Willie. Chess Copley had come to get his own motor-boat, and the report they made of the end of the smuggling affair was very satisfactory.

The sheriff and his posse in a big motor-boat had gone to the Kingdom of Pipes and relieved Chess of his duty as guardian of the cave. The Chinamen, who were hiding there until they could be shipped into the States dressed in feminine garments, were all handcuffed, together with the owner of the launch and Horatio Bilby, and loaded into the sheriff’s launch.

“And you should have heard Bilby squeal,” said Tom. “There is one bad egg who is likely to pay a considerable penalty for his crimes. He’ll not get out of the mess very easy.”

“What of the King of the Pipes?” asked Ruth.

“Poor old Charley-Horse Pond,” Willie, the boatman, said, “will be detained as a witness. Already he has got a new name for himself. He isn’t ‘King of the Pipes’ any longer.”

“What do you mean?” Ruth inquired, for she was interested in the queer old man and his fate.

“He told me that he was Major André,” chuckled Willie. “He is a Number One spy. The sheriff knows him well and knows there isn’t a mite of harm in him.”

Later it came out that the old man had been living on the island for some time, having found the cave there. The smugglers of opium and the Chinese found him there and made use of him. But when the court proceedings came on, Pond was merely used by the prosecution as a witness. His harmlessness was too apparent for the court to doubt him.

That particular day had to be a day of rest for Ruth and her friends, for they had

had no sleep the night before. But while they slept Mr. Hammond's representative went in search of Totantora and Wonota and the two Osage Indians were brought back to the moving picture camp before night.

The work of making the last scenes of "The Long Lane's Turning" was taken up at once, and until the last scene was taken Ruth and her associates were very busy indeed. The Cameron twins spent most of the ensuing time with the Copleys and the other summer visitors. And it was noticeable that Helen was attended by Chess Copley almost everywhere she went.

Tom saw this with some wonder; but he found very little opportunity to talk to Ruth about it. And when he tried to question Helen regarding her change toward Chess, she quite ignored the subject.

"Looks to me," Tom said to himself, "as though I was shut out in the cold. I wish I hadn't come up here. I might as well be slaving in that old office. Gee, I'm an unlucky dog!"

For Tom, no more than Helen, could not see that Ruth's attitude toward the matter of strenuous occupation for a wealthy young man was a fair one. Tom certainly had none of Uncle Jabez Potter's blood in his veins.

The big scene at the end of the picture—the throne room of the French king—was as carefully made as the other parts of the picture had been. And because of Ruth's coaching Wonota did her part so well that Mr. Hooley was enthusiastic—and to raise enthusiasm in the bosom of a case-hardened director is no small matter.

"The Boss is rather sore on the whole business," Hooley said to Ruth. "It has been an expensive picture, I admit. We have gone away over the studio estimate.

"But that is not my fault, nor your fault, nor the Indian girl's fault. Mr. Hammond is not to be blamed either, I suppose, for feeling worried. The motion picture business is getting to that stage now where lavish expenditure must be curtailed. I fancy Mr. Hammond will make only five-reel program pictures for some time. And where will your big feature pictures come in, Miss Fielding?"

"The program pictures are sure-fire, I suppose," the girl admitted. "But it doesn't take much of a story to make those. Nor does it give the stars as good a chance."

"Well, lean years may be coming. We shall all have to draw in our horns. Remember me, Miss Fielding, if you decide to produce with some other firm. I like to work with you, and I have a more or less elastic contract with the Alectrion Corporation."

Ruth actually did have an idea for the future. It was in embryo as yet. But, as will be seen in the next volume of this series, entitled, “Ruth Fielding Treasure Hunting; Or, A Moving Picture that Became Real,” it led the girl of the Red Mill into new fields and drew her and her friends into new adventures.

The last scene being completed, Ruth and Helen packed their trunks. But Helen was to ship hers to the Copley’s island up the river, where she would stay for a week or so before returning to Cheslow. Ruth was going back to the Red Mill, and after that she was not sure of her movements.

Tom would accompany her home. She was glad of this, for she knew that, once at home, he must of necessity take up his work again with his father. Tom Cameron, however, confessed that he “hated” the dry goods business.

Chess Copley showed his appreciation of Ruth’s kindness and friendship in a very pretty way indeed. He came to her secretly with a jeweler’s box in his hand.

“You know, Ruth, you have been just like a sister to me since you have been up here. I think as much of you as I do of Sara and Jean—I declare I do! And I know Helen—or—or anybody, won’t mind if you wear this little trinket. When you wear it remember you’ve got a good friend whose initials are engraved on the inside.”

Ruth accepted the present frankly, for she liked Chess. But she did not know how beautiful the bracelet was until after Copley had disappeared in his *Lauriette*. It was more costly than Ruth thought a present from that source should be.

So, rather doubtful, she said nothing to Tom Cameron about the bracelet, although she wore it. She knew that she would have refused such a present from Tom himself. But, then—there was a difference!

She did not intend to be rushed into any agreement with Tom Cameron that would at all interfere with her freedom. She still had her career in mind.

They got back to Cheslow early in July. And how glad Aunt Alvirah was to see her pretty. As for Uncle Jabez, his interest was in the commercial end of the picture Ruth had made.

Was it going to make money when it was distributed? How much money had Ruth already drawn in advance royalties? And a multitude of other questions of that character came from the old miller’s lips.

“And when do you begin on another of them pictures, Niece Ruth?” he added.

“You ain’t going to stop now, when there is so much to be made in ’em?”

“I do not know exactly what I shall do next,” she told him, shaking her head. “But I think I shall try to make my next picture under different circumstances. But as I don’t really know, how can I tell you?”

“Never mind, my pretty,” put in Aunt Alvirah, “you are here with us now, and that means a lot. You certainly deserve a rest,” and the old woman placed an affectionate hand on Ruth’s shoulder.

At this the girl of the Red Mill smiled.

“Maybe I do,” she replied, “after all those strenuous happenings on the St. Lawrence.”

THE END

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