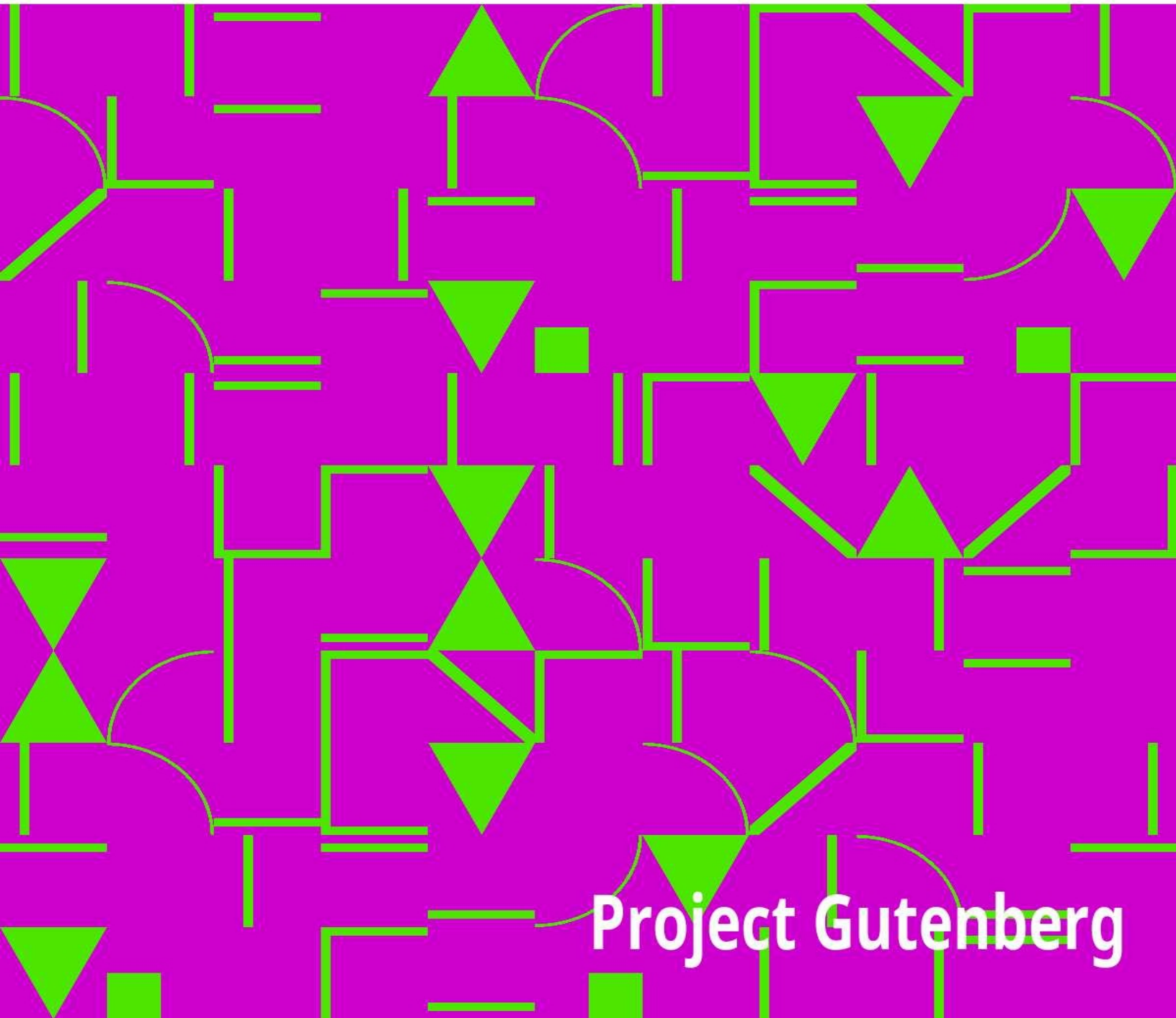
The Automobile Girls in the Berkshires; Or, The Ghost of Lost Man's Trail

Laura Dent Crane



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The Splash Descended on Unsuspecting Bab. *Frontispiece.*

The Automobile Girls in the Berkshires

OR

The Ghost of Lost Man's Trail

By

LAURA DENT CRANE

Author of The Automobile Girls at Newport, The Automobile Girls Along the Hudson, Etc., Etc.

Illustrated

PHILADELPHIA
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The Automobile Girls in the Berkshires

CHAPTER I

THE REUNION

“Mollie Thurston, we are lost!” cried Barbara dramatically.

The two sisters were in the depth of a New Jersey woods one afternoon in early September.

“Well, what if we are!” laughed Mollie, leaning over to add a cluster of wild asters to her great bunch of golden rod. “We have two hours ahead of us. Surely such clever woodsmen as we are can find our way out of woods which are but a few miles from home. Suppose we should explore a real forest some day. Wouldn’t it be too heavenly! Come on, lazy Barbara! We shall reach a clearing in a few moments.”

“You lack sympathy, Miss Mollie Thurston; that’s your trouble.”

Barbara was laughing, yet she anxiously scanned the marshy ground as she picked her way along.

“I wouldn’t mind being lost in these woods a bit more than you do, if I were not so horribly afraid of snakes. Oh, my! this place looks full of ’em.”

“They are not poisonous, Bab, or I might be more sympathetic,” said Mollie reassuringly. “The snakes in these woods are harmless. How can a girl as brave as you are be such a goose about a poor, wriggly little ‘sarpint,’ that couldn’t harm you if it tried.”

“O-o-o!” shivered Bab. “One’s own pet fear has nothing to do with sense or nonsense. Kindly remember your own feelings toward the timid mouse! Just the same, I should like to play ‘Maid Marian’ for a while and dwell in the heart of a woodland glen. If ever I have a chance to go on a camping trip, I shall get rid of my fear of snakes, somehow.”

“Bab,” said Mollie, after a moment’s pause, “hasn’t it been dreadfully dull since Ruth and her father went away? Do you think they will ever come back? I can hardly believe it has been only three weeks since they left Kingsbridge, and only six weeks since we came back from Newport. Anyhow I am glad Grace Carter is

home again from her visit to her brother."

"Cheer up, Mollie, do!" encouraged Bab. "Ruth has promised to pay us a visit before she goes home to Chicago, and she is a girl of her word, as you and I well know. I am expecting a letter from her every day."

"Well," Mollie ejaculated in heart-felt tones, "I know I am nearly dead to see her. Grace and I were talking of it only yesterday."

"Mollie, I don't want to be a croaker," began Bab, after a little hesitation, "but have you noticed that mother seems worried about something? When I was talking yesterday about how crazy I was to go to Vassar some day, mother looked as though she wanted to cry. I stopped there and then. She has seemed so gay and cheerful until recently. I wonder whether she is worried about money."

Mollie nodded her head and frowned. "Now you speak of it, Bab, I believe I have noticed that she seems depressed at times. I think she is tired out and needs a complete change. She had a long letter from Cousin Betty in St. Paul yesterday, asking her to make a visit. I think mother should accept. You and I are certainly big enough to look after ourselves until school commences. Let's beg her to go."

"All right, Mollie, we will," said her older sister, "but if the family funds are even lower than usual, where is the money to come from for such an expensive trip? Just the same, I shall question mother, and find out what's the matter."

Bab was walking on bravely, trying to forget her horror of snakes.

"I am sure," she thought, "that I can feel my feet trembling inside my boots; I am so afraid of stepping on one of the wretched little pests."

It had rained the day before, and the ground under the thick tangle of trees and underbrush being unusually marshy, the girls had to pick their way carefully. Mollie walked ahead while they were talking. Barbara jumping from the twisted root of one tree to another half a yard away, felt something writhe and wriggle under her foot. Without stopping to look down, she shrieked—"A snake! a snake!"—and ran blindly forward. Before Mollie had time to look around, Barbara caught her foot under a root and tumbled headlong into the wet mud.

"Bab," cried Mollie, "you certainly have gone and done it this time! How wet and muddy you are!"

She picked up a stick and raked in the leaves near her sister.

"See, here's what you have made such a fuss about, a tiny garter snake, that couldn't hurt a thing. You've crushed the thing with your heel."

Mollie turned suddenly. “Barbara, what is the matter with you?” she asked, as she caught a glimpse of her sister’s face. “Why don’t you get up? Can I help you?” She leaned over her sister.

Poor Bab’s face was white as a sheet, and she was trembling.

“Yes, do help me if you can,” she answered. “I can’t get up by myself. I’m afraid I have turned my ankle. Here, take my hand. Sitting here in this mud I feel as if I had fallen into a nest of snakes.”

Mollie gave Bab both her hands. Setting her teeth, Bab tried to rise, but, with a groan, sat down again. The second time Mollie pulled with all her might. Barbara, summoning her courage, rose slowly to her feet. Without speaking she leaned against the trunk of the nearest tree.

“Wait here, dear,” urged Mollie, more worried than she would show. “I will try and find you a stick. Then if you lean on me and use the stick in the other hand, perhaps we can get along all right.”

They were several miles from home and in another hour the dusk would be upon them. So the two girls struggled bravely on through the thick woods, though it was difficult to walk abreast in the narrow path. Barbara insisted she was better with each step, but Mollie knew otherwise. With every foot of ground they covered Bab limped more and more painfully. Now and then when her injured foot pressed too heavily on the rough ground, she caught her breath and swallowed a groan. Mollie realized they would not get home before midnight at the rate they were now moving.

“Rest here, Bab,” she insisted, when they came to an opening in the woods where the shade was less dense. “I think I see a place over there that must lead into a road. I will run on ahead and find some one to come back to help you.”

Bab was glad to sit down. Her foot was swelling and growing more painful every moment; her pulses were throbbing. She was almost crying, but she would never mention surrender; she was not sorry, however, when Mollie suggested that she should rest.

Mollie sped through the woods as fast as she could run. As soon as her back was turned, Bab closed her eyes. “How glad I am to rest,” she thought gratefully.

In the half hour that Barbara Thurston waited alone her mind wandered to many of her own hopes and fears. First, she couldn’t help worrying over her mother. Then, she thought of her own ambition. More than anything in the world she longed to go to Vassar College. In two years more she would be ready to enter,

but where was the money to come from? Barbara realized that her mother would never be able to pay her expenses from their small income; nevertheless, she meant to go. The Kingsbridge High School offered a scholarship at Vassar to the girl who passed the best final examinations during the four years of its course. Barbara had won the highest honors in her freshman and sophomore years, but she had two more winters of hard work ahead of her.

“I wonder,” she thought at last, “if I can persuade Ruth to go to college with me?” Then she must have fallen into a little doze.

Readers of the preceding volume, “The Automobile Girls at Newport,” will remember how the famous little club, known as “The Automobile Girls” came to be organized, and they are familiar with the exciting and humorous incidents of that journey in Ruth Stuart’s motor car. There were many adventures along the way, including mysterious encounters with a gentlemanly young rascal, known to the police as “The Boy Raffles.” The same “Raffles” afterwards turned up at Newport, where the girls for several weeks led a life of thrilling interest. “The Automobile Girls” it was who caught “Raffles” red-handed, and who saved Bab’s snobbish cousin, Gladys Le Baron, from falling in love with him.

Six weeks before, on their return from the trip to Newport, “The Automobile Girls” had disbanded. Mr. Stuart had given a dinner in their honor, and at the close of the meal, he formally presented each of the girls with a miniature model of Ruth’s motor car, forming pins of red enamel about the size of a dime.

“You must wear them forever,” Ruth insisted, almost in tears. “Who knows what luck they may bring to us? Remember this isn’t a real breaking up of ‘The Automobile Girls’; it is only an ‘*auf wiedersehen*.’”

The morning after Mr. Stuart’s dinner, Grace left Kingsbridge to visit her brother. Later, Mr. Stuart and his sister, Miss Stuart, bore Ruth away to spend several weeks with some relatives in northern New York.

Ruth confided to Bab her grief at leaving them.

“I perfectly hate to go,” she protested. “Just think, Bab, how soon I shall have to go back to Chicago, and leave you here in New Jersey. Other people are well enough in their places, but they are not my Barbara, Mollie and Grace!”

It was after this confidence, that Bab made Ruth solemnly promise to pay them a visit before she returned home.

Barbara opened her eyes suddenly. Had she been asleep and dreamed of Ruth? She could almost hear her voice and laugh. Some one was coming along the

path. She could hear the dead leaves crunch under flying feet.

“Barbara, my Barbara!” Was it Mollie’s voice calling her?

“Here I am,” cried Bab faintly.

Through the trees running straight toward her, her eyes shining, her cheeks aglow, was Ruth Stuart. Barbara tried to leap up.

“Sit down, you poor dear, do,” Ruth commanded. “What have you done to your silly little self? Never mind; here is your friend and always devoted slave come to your rescue.”

“Where did you come from?” inquired Bab, weakly.

“Out of the everywhere into the here. Father and Mollie will be along in a few seconds and explain to you. I simply couldn’t wait for them. Another dear friend of yours is up the road desiring to offer you assistance. You may recall ‘Mr. A. Bubble.’”

Ruth took out the flask of beef tea which she always carried on a motor trip, and made Barbara drink a few swallows. “Now,” she declared, “I will try to tell you how I happen to be here. Three days ago I told father I simply couldn’t bear to be away from Kingsbridge twenty-four hours longer. So he and I decided that as soon as manners would permit we should put the automobile in commission and fly to you as fast as we could. And here we are! Besides, just think how quickly the holiday time is passing. I have another scheme—but here come Mollie and father!”

Mr. Stuart and Mollie were approaching quickly.

“Let me help you, Barbara,” said Mr. Stuart, putting his strong arm around the injured girl and nearly lifting her from the ground. “Can you manage to walk? Ruth, you help from the other side. It is not far to the road, and once we get you there, the auto will soon take you home to that little mother of yours.”

“I declare I would just like to kiss ‘Mr. A. Bubble,’ if I knew an appropriate place,” declared Barbara, when she was at last safely stowed away in the automobile. Her lame foot was propped up on soft cushions while close beside her sat her beloved Ruth holding her hand. Mollie was sitting in front with Mr. Stuart.

“Tell me,” Barbara continued, “no one has properly explained it to me how you happened to be at the right place just at the right moment? And how did Mollie find you to tell you I was concealed in the woods with a sprained ankle? It’s too

much for me. Please explain?"

"Not so fast, Miss Thurston, if you please," pleaded Mr. Stuart. "Ruth and I would like to be regarded as angels dropped from the sky, but the truth must be told! She and I were speeding along this very road, a little faster than is perfectly proper, as we were hoping to make our way before dusk to the home of a charming lady, Mrs. Thurston, who lives with her two attractive daughters, in Laurel Cottage, Kingsbridge. What did we see? A small, excited girl ahead of us, who seemed to be trying to run faster than our auto could travel. Nevertheless, we caught up with her. Who do you think she was? Miss Mollie Thurston! We were all so surprised that it must have taken us quite a minute to explain matters to each other."

"You can imagine," added Mistress Mollie from the front seat, "how jolly glad I was!"

For some time Mrs. Thurston had been anxiously awaiting her daughters' return. She was standing at the gate of her home, when a familiar chug, chug, chug, sounded up the road. "I must be dreaming," she thought. "I am so worried at the girls being out late that I imagine I hear Ruth's automobile bringing them home to me. How lonely it has been for us all since Ruth and her father went away!"

"Chug, chug, chug," the noise sounded louder than ever. A splash of red appeared at the turn of the road, a siren whistle blew, and a well-known, crimson motor car rapidly approached her gate. Mrs. Thurston rubbed her eyes. It was the Stuart's automobile and no other. Sitting enthroned in it was that gentleman and his daughter. And, could it be possible? Barbara and Mollie, as well!

Mrs. Thurston's gentle face glowed with pleasure. Switfly as a girl she threw open her gate and was waiting on the sidewalk when the car stopped in front of her with a flourish.

"I am so delighted to see you," she said, extending her hand to Mr. Stuart and kissing Ruth on both cheeks. "Where did you find my daughters? But what's the matter with you, Bab?" she asked, as she noticed her child's pale cheeks.

"Nothing, now, mother," said Bab, hopping up, but sitting down again just as promptly. "I have sprained my ankle a little, not very much. I would like to get into the house to take off my shoe. It pinches until I feel like the mean sister trying to squeeze her foot into Cinderella's slipper."

"Come on in with me, every one of you," she pleaded. "Dear Mr. Stuart, you are not going to take Ruth up to the hotel with you for even one night. Remember,

you promised she was to visit us, as soon as you returned."

"Do let me stay, father," coaxed Ruth, dancing after them. "I have no trunk to worry about at present. Aunt Sallie is coming back, day after to-morrow, and she is to bring my trunk with her. Father and I traveled all the way in the automobile."

Mrs. Thurston followed Mr. Stuart out as he was saying good-bye. He had agreed to leave Ruth with them. "Mr. Stuart, you can go to your hotel, if you wish to engage your room, but you must come back and have tea with us. We have hot rolls, honey, and fresh milk for supper. There is no use in your denying that is your favorite evening meal."

"I don't want to deny it, Mrs. Thurston," was Mr. Stuart's answer, as he stepped into his car. "I will come back with pleasure. On my way to the hotel I shall call at the doctor's and ask him to come around and look after Bab's foot."

CHAPTER II

NEW LIGHT ON OLD PAPERS

“Mother, you are worried about something,” said Barbara to her mother early the next morning as they sat alone in their little dining room, which was bright with the September sun.

Mrs. Thurston started nervously. She had been thinking so deeply that Bab’s voice had startled her.

Mollie and Ruth had rushed off early to find Grace and bring her back with them. Susan, the maid, was in the yard hanging up her dish towels. Mrs. Thurston had supposed Bab was deep in reading the history of David Copperfield, which lay open on her lap.

“You don’t answer me, mother,” complained Barbara, as she saw her mother’s face flush under her gaze. “You might as well ‘’fess up’ and be done with it. I know there is something wrong.”

Mrs. Thurston hesitated; then she answered quietly: “You are right, Bab, dear. I am very much worried and it is about money. But I did not want you children to know of it until I was obliged to tell you. Barbara, half of our income is gone!”

“Oh, mother!” cried Barbara, “what do you mean?”

“Well, dear,” said her mother quietly, “the money has not entirely gone yet. But I fear it soon will go. Your uncle wrote me that some stock he bought for me had been going down, down, until finally it will cease paying dividends altogether and be of no value. How shall we manage then? I have been lying awake at night trying to plan. You know it takes every cent we have to live in even the simplest way. Oh, Bab, what shall we do?”

Barbara looked grave. “Did Uncle Ralph write you about this?”

“Oh, yes,” said Mrs. Thurston, “two or three weeks ago. I have had it on my mind ever since. Your uncle used to own some of this same stock, but he wrote

me he had sold out some time ago."

"It is strange he didn't tell us to sell at the same time," Barbara reflected. "What does Uncle Ralph propose that we do? He is so rich I think he might show some interest in you, poor dear. You are his only sister, especially since he has made all his money out of the business father founded."

"Your Uncle Ralph suggests," Mrs. Thurston faltered, "that we find some work to do. But you and Mollie must be educated, and I am so ignorant of business."

Barbara's cheeks were crimson and her brown eyes flashed. "I think, mother," she said quietly, "it will be just as well for us to learn a little more about Uncle Ralph's management of our business. I am going to consult Mr. Stuart; I am sure he will give us good advice; he is such a clear-headed business man. Don't you worry, mother, dear, for I am sure things will turn out all right."

Mrs. Thurston rose to go out to market.

"Before you go, mother," Barbara begged, "will you please let me see the roll of father's business papers you have stored away in the trunk in the attic. Oh, I know they are of no value, but just the same I am curious to see them."

"Well, if you are so determined, all right," sighed Mrs. Thurston.

Before she left the house she handed Barbara a roll of old papers tied with a crimson cord.

Bab sat pondering with the papers in her lap. She was more frightened at her mother's news than she would show. They were mere girls, she and Mollie, and their little mother had no knowledge of business. She shook herself impatiently. Barbara was an optimist—things would turn out all right.

Soon Bab wrinkled her forehead and tried to settle down to her work; the papers were altogether incomprehensible to her. Most of them were old business contracts. Yet, here was one that seemed a bit different. It was in Uncle Ralph Le Baron's handwriting, but so faded that it was difficult to read. Slowly Bab deciphered it: "On demand, I promise to pay to John Thurston the sum of five thousand dollars for value received." To this was appended her uncle's well-known signature, Ralph Le Baron.

"Well," sighed Barbara, as she started to tie the papers together again, "I suppose Uncle Ralph settled this debt a long time ago."

Suddenly a big, cheerful presence darkened the doorway.

“Hello, Bab!” called Mr. Stuart. “Why are you alone?”

“The girls have gone up to the Squire’s for Grace,” Bab explained, “and mother is at market. But do please come in and wait for them. Ruth told me to keep you; she wants to ask you about something very important.”

“May I inquire what you are doing, Barbara?” Mr. Stuart queried, taking a seat. “Are you preparing to be a lawyer’s clerk that you spend your spare hours poring over musty business papers?”

Barbara blushed. “I am almost ashamed to tell you, Mr. Stuart, but you and Ruth have been so awfully good to us, I think I shall just ask you one more favor. These are some business papers my father left when he died. No one has ever looked them over. I have always wondered if they could be of any value. Of course I know it is foolish of me to even dream of such a thing. But would you mind glancing at them, please?”

Barbara handed the roll of documents to her friend with such a pretty look of pleading in her brown eyes that a much harder hearted man than Mr. Stuart could not have refused her.

“Certainly; I shall be glad to have a look at them,” Mr. Stuart answered.

Tick, tock, tick, tock. The only sound in the room was the soft refrain of the old clock on the mantel. Barbara held her breath, but she knew she was foolish to feel so excited.

Mr. Stuart examined the papers closely. One after another he read them through. This big western man who had made a fortune by his own brains and ability, was devoting the same care to Barbara’s apparently worthless papers that he would give to his own important business affairs. Suddenly he looked up. He held in his hand the promissory note signed by Ralph Le Baron acknowledging his debt for five thousand dollars to his brother-in-law, John Thurston.

“I presume,” Mr. Stuart said quietly to Bab, “that your uncle settled this debt years ago; but if he did, why was the note never canceled?”

At this moment Mr. Stuart and Barbara heard a rustle of skirts, and looking up they saw Mrs. Thurston, her arms full of bundles, and her face white. “What do you mean?” she said in a strange, hard voice. “What money should have been paid by my brother years ago? Please explain.”

“Why,” said Mr. Stuart, so quietly you could have heard a pin drop in the stillness of the little room, “I mean, of course, this five thousand dollars, which,

as I see by the date, your brother borrowed from your husband eleven years ago. Let me see, that was one year before your husband's death!"

Mrs. Thurston sank into a chair. Mr. Stuart reached her just in time to save her from falling. He took the bundles from her hand and waited. For a minute Mrs. Thurston could not speak.

Barbara felt her heart pounding away and her pulses throbbing; but she made no sound.

"Was this money paid you by your brother when he settled your estate?" Mr. Stuart repeated his question.

"No!" faltered Mrs. Thurston.

"Have you any memorandum among your husband's papers which would prove that the money was returned to him before his death?"

Mrs. Thurston shook her head. Barbara was staring at her mother with wide open brown eyes, her cheeks paling, then flushing. Here was a mystery!

"My brother," said Mrs. Thurston finally, "settled my affairs for me at the time of my husband's sudden death. I was too crushed to realize what was taking place, and I had no idea that we would be brought to poverty. But I know I saw no such paper as you mention. Until this minute, I never heard that my brother borrowed any money from my husband. Oh, it simply can't be true——"

"What can't be true, mother?" inquired Bab at last. Her mother did not answer.

Mr. Stuart quietly folded up the mysterious paper and put it in his pocket. "It may be that Mr. Le Baron can explain this situation at once," he said. "He is staying at the same hotel with me. If you will permit me I will inquire into the matter for you. Now don't worry yourselves about it any more," Mr. Stuart ended, resuming his natural manner.

To himself he told a different story. "This looks bad, very bad!" he thought. "If Ralph Le Baron had paid this money back he would have seen that the note was returned to him. I know him well enough for that. If he never has paid it, can he be forced to do so now?" reflected Mr. Stuart, looking at the matter from all sides. "He has never been asked for the money before, and I do not believe the law requires a debt to be paid after six years, if no claim has been previously made for it, and it is now eleven years since the note was made. I must look into the matter. A man who could rob his widowed sister and nieces of five thousand dollars would be guilty of any crime. I shall make it hot for him unless he can

tell a straight story."

"Why is everybody looking so serious?" called out a gay voice, and Ruth, followed by Mollie and Grace, entered the room.

The little group within the room started guiltily.

"There is mystery in the very air," declaimed Ruth, "you are trying to conceal something!"

"You are a goose," replied her father fondly, then nodding reassuringly to Bab and her mother. "Who knows what a day may bring forth?" he said.

CHAPTER III

HAPPINESS, AND ANOTHER SCHEME

The next morning Mr. Stuart left his hotel and went into New York with Mr. Le Baron. They left Kingsbridge at eight o'clock, and did not return until six. Half an hour later Mr. Stuart called at Laurel Cottage for Mrs. Thurston in his automobile.

"We will take Miss Barbara with us to the hotel," he said to her mother, "if you feel it will not injure her ankle. She need do no walking. I should prefer that she be with you when you have an interview with your brother. He is to see you at the hotel to-night. You will dine with me first."

Barbara's foot being better, she and her mother asked no questions, but with trembling fingers made ready to go.

"What do you mean," demanded Ruth and Mollie, "by going off on such a mysterious errand? Why, Mr. Stuart," asked Ruth, "are Mollie and I not also invited to dinner?"

Mr. Stuart was obdurate. He offered no explanations. When Ruth whispered something in his ear, he answered quietly: "That will keep," and Ruth said no more.

Mr. and Mrs. Le Baron bowed coldly to Mrs. Thurston and Barbara, when entering the hotel dining room that night, they found the mother and daughter dining with Mr. Stuart. But Gladys Le Baron stopped for a moment at the able to inquire after Bab's foot. She was not the haughty girl she once had been. Since her return from Newport she had seemed strangely fond of Bab.

Barbara and her mother never knew how they got through their meal. But Mr. Stuart was a tower of strength.

"We will not discuss business matters," he explained, "until we go upstairs to my sitting room. Mr. Le Baron will join us there at half-past eight."

When Ralph Le Baron entered Mr. Stuart's apartment to keep his appointment, he did not look into his sister's face. He merely inquired coldly: "How are you, Mollie?" and sat down near the small wood fire which was burning cosily in the open grate. Not once did he glance at Barbara, though she kept her eyes fixed steadily on him. He was a tall, thin man, with high cheek bones and a nose like an eagle's.

"Mrs. Thurston," began Mr. Stuart, "your brother does not claim that he paid to you or your husband the five thousand dollars which he undoubtedly borrowed. When I first spoke to him of the matter he declared he had never been loaned any such sum. He had great difficulty in recalling the incident until I showed him his note which I still have in my pocket. He explained afterwards, however, that the matter had passed entirely out of his mind after your husband's death."

Mrs. Thurston looked at her brother questioningly. "It seems very strange to me, Ralph, that you could have forgotten," she declared. "But perhaps it is all for the best! We need the money more now than we ever have before."

Mr. Le Baron did not answer his sister.

"I think you will find it the wisest plan, Mr. Le Baron," continued Mr. Stuart, breaking the silence, "to pay over this money to Mrs. Thurston and her daughters as soon as you conveniently can."

Ralph Le Baron knit his brows. Barbara was watching him closely. There was no love lost between Bab and her uncle. She had long looked for some difficulty to arise out of his management of her mother's affairs, but nothing so serious as this.

Mr. Le Baron's voice sounded cold and hard as steel.

"Do not deceive yourselves," he said, with a sneer. "I mean you, Mollie, and Mr. Stuart, who seems to be taking an unusual interest in your affairs. I have not the slightest intention of ever paying back the money!"

Mrs. Thurston's manner changed. She spoke firmly. "I should be exceedingly sorry, Ralph, to have any trouble with you over the matter; but the law must compel you to pay your debt."

"Not so fast, sister," smiled Mr. Le Baron, sarcastically. "You are coming into a remarkable business knowledge all at once, but you do not yet know quite enough. The law does not compel me after six years to pay a debt which has not been presented to me within that time. Perhaps you have never heard of the statute of limitation. Perhaps your friend, Mr. Stuart, will make it clear to you.

You should have asked me for this money five or six years ago. The New York law does not require a debt to be paid unless a request has been made for its settlement within six years after the time it was contracted. The money was loaned to me by your husband eleven years ago, as we all know by the date on the note. I have no further concern in the matter."

"Great heavens, man!" cried Mr. Stuart, breaking in fiercely, "you cannot mean to play your own sister such a low-down, scoundrelly trick! You will not pay back the money to her which you confess to owing, simply because she has not asked you for it before! How could she ask for it when you alone knew of the debt and kept the matter a secret? I am not so sure how your law would stand in such a case. A pretty story it will make to tell to the men who respect your business integrity. Mrs. Thurston shall have a lawyer to inquire into the situation immediately!"

A low knock sounded at the door. Before anyone could answer, Gladys Le Baron walked smilingly into the room. She looked in surprise at her father's dark, revengeful face.

"Is anything the matter?" she inquired, her face sobering in an instant. "I wondered why father ran off by himself to see Aunt Mollie and Bab. I thought you would like to have me join you——"

"Go back to your apartment at once, Gladys!" interrupted her father sternly.

Mr. Stuart turned upon him. "Ralph Le Baron, I am going to do something, to-night, that I never expected to do in my life. I am going to expose a father to his own child. Wait here a minute, Gladys."

Mr. Stuart then told Gladys the whole story. She stood listening in utter silence, her face crimson with blushes. Barbara could only look at her cousin through a mist of tears. When Mr. Stuart had ended his story, he said: "I am sorry indeed to tell you this, Gladys, but you must have learned it some day. I do not know whether your father is right in regard to the law in this matter, but Mrs. Thurston will carry the case to court."

Gladys went over to her father, who had never raised his eyes to look at her, while Mr. Stuart was speaking, nor did he make any denial.

"Is it true, father?" she asked him at last.

"It is in a measure true, Gladys," her father answered, "but it is purely a matter of business, which you cannot be expected to understand."

Gladys put her head down on the arm of the sofa, where she now sat by her father, and wept bitterly. There was no other sound in the room, except an occasional suppressed sob from Mrs. Thurston. Bab was far too excited and too angry to cry!

Finally Gladys raised her head. “Father, on my sixteenth birthday, you settled five thousand dollars on me in my own name!” She spoke in a low voice. “If you do not feel that you ought to pay back to Aunt Mollie the money you borrowed from Uncle John, won’t you please let me give her this money of mine? I must do it, father. I can’t understand the business side of it, but it just seems to me we owe her the money and that’s all there is to it! I have been horrid and haughty many times, but I can’t bear that we should seem—dishonest!”

Poor Gladys whispered this last dreadful word under her breath. Then she put her arms round her father and kissed him. “You are not angry with me?” she asked him.

If there was one person in the world Ralph Le Baron truly loved it was his only child, Gladys. Not for ten times five thousand dollars would he have had her a witness to the scene which had just passed between him and his sister. He meant, of course, to tell her and his wife what had happened, but he meant to put his own interpretation on the affair before they heard of it from anyone else.

Did his better nature move him? Perhaps it did. He looked around the room and answered testily: “The law certainly does not require that I return this money to my sister, and business is business with me. But since my daughter Gladys and my sister seem to look upon the matter as a case of sentiment, why I——” He spoke slowly. It was hard work for him to get the words out. “I will waive strictly business principles on this occasion, and return the money to my sister.”

“O Ralph!” cried Mrs. Thurston, as though a great load was lifted from her mind. Barbara rejoiced. But in her heart of hearts she thought it was hard to have her uncle act as though he were doing them a favor when he was only paying them their just dues.

A few minutes later Gladys and her father withdrew from the room. “I am so glad,” whispered Gladys to Bab, as she passed her cousin on her way out.

Barbara held her hand just long enough to murmur gently: “Gladys, dear, if I once did you a kindness, I think you have repaid me a thousand-fold.”

It was after ten o’clock when “Mr. A. Bubble” bore the travelers home to Laurel Cottage. Mollie and Ruth were waiting in the sitting room, with a fire burning

cheerily in the grate and the candles lit over the mantelpiece. In front of the fire, they had mounted twelve marshmallows, which they were toasting to a beautiful brown on twelve hatpins.

“We thought you were never coming back, Mummy,” said Mollie, taking off her mother’s light wrap. “What has happened to you?” she asked as she viewed her mother’s shining eyes.

“Good news indeed, Mollie baby!” her mother answered. “We are five thousand dollars richer than we were when we left home. Now, perhaps Bab can go to Vassar, and things will be a little easier for us, even if the other money has gone. Mr. Stuart thinks we ought to have twenty-five dollars a month income from the five thousand dollars! Isn’t it too wonderful?”

“Have a marshmallow, everyone, do,” said Ruth, extending her hatpins. They were comfortably seated around the fire and the subject of the money had been dropped. “I want all of you to be eating marshmallows except me, so I can do all the talking. I think I have been a perfect angel. Father, you know I have kept a secret to myself for three whole days. Of course, I told Mollie to-night, when you left us by ourselves, but that doesn’t count.”

Mollie’s cheeks were glowing and her eyes dancing in the soft firelight. “Oh, yes,” she added naughtily, “Ruth and I can keep good news to ourselves as well as other people. At least,” she continued wistfully, her eyes turning to her mother, “I hope it is good news.”

“Mrs. Thurston,” inquired Ruth, “don’t you dearly love ‘The Automobile Girls’?”

Mrs. Thurston smiled. “I most certainly do,” she replied.

“Then all is well!” Ruth made her a low curtsey. “Anyone who truly loves ‘The Auto-Girls’ cannot fail to rejoice at my news. Mrs. Thurston, we cannot bear to be disbanded. We must get together again before I go home to Chicago. Mollie told me she and Bab wanted you to go on a visit to a cousin in St. Paul, but they feared you would not consent to leave them alone. Here’s where I come in! I want you to let me take care of your babies, while you go on your trip.”

Ruth gave an impudent pull at Mollie’s curls, as she went on with her request. “Father and I have planned another per-fect-ly grand trip for ‘The Automobile Girls!’ Now please don’t anybody object until I have finished. Here, eat another marshmallow! This trip is not to be in the least like the other one. What I want is to go for a month on a camping party in the Berkshire Hills!”

“Hear! Hear!” called out Bab, hopping up, and forgetting all about her sprained ankle.

“I have just had this letter from Aunt Sallie, father,” continued Ruth. “She is game! Of course, she started out by saying she thought the trip was perfect nonsense; she knew we would have pneumonia and various other diseases if we attempted it, but she ended by declaring that, of course, she could not be left behind if we were determined on the frolic. She is a darling! So, now, Mrs. Thurston, if only you will consent, in a few days we want dear old ‘Bubble,’ to make a start for the Berkshires. This is the perfect time of the year and the mountains will be simply glorious! Oh, I can’t talk any more, I am so out of breath! Do go on please, father.”

“Mrs. Thurston, our plan is not so wild as it sounds. Ruth will take the girls in her car up into the Berkshires. I have discovered that on one of the mountains some distance from the regular line of travel, is a well built log cabin. It has big fireplaces in it, and can be made thoroughly comfortable for September. Early in October, Ruth wants to go with the girls to the hotel at Lenox, for a week or two of the autumn sports there. The automobile can travel comfortably over most of the Berkshire roads.”

Mr. Stuart’s tones were as persuasive as Ruth’s. “But, when the girls come to the chosen place, they can store the car in some suitable garage, and take the trails up the sides of the mountain, either on horseback or afoot.”

“But Barbara’s foot,” insisted Mrs. Thurston weakly, in the first pause that gave her an opportunity to speak.

“Oh, Bab’s ankle will be all right, mother!” Mollie cried. “We have spoken to the doctor, and he says Bab will be jumping about as lively as a cricket in a few days.”

“Mrs. Thurston,” said Mr. Stuart, speaking in his heartiest voice, “I want to be allowed the floor in this conversation. I have something to propose on my own account. A party of friends of my sister’s and mine are going west on a sight seeing trip. Among them is a railroad president and his wife, and their private car is to be used for the tour. It would give me great pleasure to have you meet them and make your journey to St. Paul in their company. My sister wishes to assure you that you will find them thoroughly congenial and will no doubt enjoy the trip. To tell the truth, Miss Stuart has already written our friends to expect you, for I had determined that you should go at all events.

“As for our daughters,” he continued, “I am greatly interested in this camping

scheme for them. I know, from my own experience, that nothing can be made more delightful than our modern fashion of ‘roughing it.’ I intend to make the necessary arrangements, and properly equip this camping party myself. I shall even run up to the Berkshires for a day or two, to look over the ground. I want to engage a guide for the party, and a woman to do the cooking. Then I must see if the little log cabin is all the circular says it is. It is rented out to camping parties all through the year. Come, Mrs. Thurston,” questioned Mr. Stuart, “don’t you think this is a good scheme for everyone?”

“Right you are, Mr. Stuart!” Bab called out rapturously. By this time Mollie and Ruth were both on the floor, with their arms around Mrs. Thurston.

“We do so want to lead ‘the simple life,’ dear Mrs. Thurston,” Ruth begged. “Think how splendid for us to have a month out of doors before we go back to hard work at school.” Ruth made a wry face. She was not fond of study, like Barbara. “We may spend a week or so in Lenox, to please Aunt Sallie. But most of the time we want to be right in the mountains. Let me see—there is Greylock, and Monument Mountain, and hosts of others not too far from Lenox. At least, we shall be able to see them from our mountain top. And we must escort Bab over to Rattlesnake Mountain, in honor of her well known fondness for those charming pets.”

“Oh, I’ll look after Bab,” Mollie spoke in superior tones.

“Mother,” said Barbara earnestly, “you must accept Mr. Stuart’s charming invitation, even if you think it wiser for us not to go on the camping trip with Ruth. I know you need a change. You have had so much worry, and now your mind is at rest.”

“Ruth,” said Mrs. Thurston, looking as bright and happy as one of the girls, “accept my best wishes for the ‘Robin Hood Band’ of ‘Automobile Girls!’ I am sure they will soon rival that celebrated set of woodsmen. Only, I beg of you, confine your adventures strictly within the limits of the law.”

“Then you mean that Bab and Mollie may go!” cried Ruth in tones of rapture. “But we don’t intend to play at being an outlaw band. Kindly regard us as early Puritan settlers in the New England hills, compelled to seek protection from the Indians in our log hut. I wish we could run across a few Indians up there; we shall be right on their old camping grounds. There are still some Indian trails in the mountains, but the Berkshires are so highly civilized, these days, we shall never find even a trace of a red man, or a red woman either!”

“When do we start, Ruth?” asked Mollie. “I should like to be off to-morrow.

Remember how fast the time is going. School begins the middle of October."

"What about Grace?" asked Bab thoughtfully. "It would hardly be a real 'Automobile Girls' party if one of their number should be left out."

"Oh, it is all right about Grace, of course!" Ruth answered. "Goodness me! Haven't I told you? We have already talked our plan over with Squire Carter, who is delighted to have Grace go. He says a month out of doors will do wonders for her. He only wished he was not too old to join us."

One week later, Miss Sallie Stuart and the quartette of "Automobile Girls" gathered at the station to speed Mrs. Thurston on her journey. Mr. Stuart was to accompany her as far as New York City, and see her safely established among his friends.

"Be good children, all of you," urged Mrs. Thurston at the last minute. "And remember to keep your feet dry."

"In case the camping outfit is not thoroughly satisfactory, Sallie," counseled Mr. Stuart, "telegraph to New York for whatever you like. I believe everything is O. K. Remember to keep your camp fires always burning. You are to have the most trustworthy guide in the Berkshires, as well as his wife, to look after you, and you will never be far from civilization if you wish to go, Sallie?" he ended, for Miss Sallie was looking dismal at the idea of parting.

Miss Sallie nodded her head. "You know my views, Robert. If you *will* permit Ruth to follow any wild fancy that pops into her head, at least, I shall be near to see that she gets into as little mischief as possible."

Mr. Stuart's last whisper before the train started was for Bab. "Don't worry about your little mother," he said. "We will see that things are well with her. That copper stock she owns is looking up again. She is not to sell out."

Mr. Stuart turned to find Ruth for his last kiss. "Remember, daughter," he declared, "I rely on you and Bab to keep cool heads and clear brains in any emergency."

As the train moved off, Mr. Stuart and Mrs. Thurston watched for a few moments a circle of waving hands. A little later their car swung around a curve and Kingsbridge was lost to view.

"The Automobile Girls" and Miss Sallie then repaired to the hotel. Grace, Mollie and Bab were to be Ruth's guests until they started for the Berkshires. All was in readiness.

The week before, Mr. Stuart had taken the girls to New York for a few days' shopping. If ever there were young women fitted up in the proper styles for mountain climbing they were. Each girl was presented with two pairs of thick, high boots and leather leggins. Ruth insisted that her heavy wool dress be made of the Stuart plaid. She then had a tam o'shanter designed from the same Scotch tartan. But Ruth's proudest possession was a short Norfolk jacket made of the same leather as her leggins, and a knapsack to carry over her shoulders. Attired in her woodland costume, she looked not unlike "Rosalind" in Shakespeare's play, when that maid comes into the woods disguised as a boy to seek for her father.

Barbara's suit was of dark brown corduroy, with jacket and cap to match. Grace would choose nothing but her favorite dark blue. But her costume was the most striking of them all, for, with her blue skirt and blouse, she was to wear a coat of hunter's pink and a smart, little hat of the same bright scarlet shade. Mr. Stuart selected the costume for Mistress Mollie. She at least, he insisted, should be arrayed in the proper shade of Lincoln green; and like a veritable "Maid Marian" she appeared.

For once Miss Sallie was entirely satisfied with their selection of costumes. "For me," she argued in her most decided manner, "the most necessary garments are half a dozen pairs of overshoes, and the same number of mackintoshes and umbrellas. I shall also take an extra trunk of warm flannels. If the fall rains begin while we are camping in the mountains we shall surely be washed down into the valley before we can make our escape."

CHAPTER IV

IN THE HEART OF THE BERKSHIRES

A crimson automobile was climbing the steep inclines of the Berkshire Hills. Now it rose to the crest of a road. Again it dipped into a valley. It looked like a scarlet autumn leaf blown down from one of the giant forest trees that guarded the slopes of the mountains.

Mollie Thurston stood up in the back of the motor car, waving a long green veil.

“Isn’t the scenery just too perfect for words?” she called to Ruth.

The day was wonderful; the September sun shone warm and golden through the shadows of dancing, many-colored leaves. “The Automobile Girls” had left summer behind them in Kingsbridge. Three days of traveling found them in the early autumn glory of the Berkshire woods.

Ruth did not answer Mollie’s question.

“My dear child, wake up!” commanded Miss Sallie, leaning over to give her niece a gentle poke with her violet parasol. “Have you grown suddenly deaf? Can you not hear when you are spoken to?”

Ruth glanced up from her steering wheel. “Did some one speak to me?” she queried. “I am so sorry I did not hear. I am afraid I am both deaf and dumb to-day. But we simply must get to our mountain by noon. Driving a car over these mountain roads isn’t the easiest task in the world.”

Barbara laughed back over her shoulder at the occupants of the end seat in the car. “Miss Sallie Stuart,” she said in solemn tones, “please, let our chauffeur alone! Suppose the dark descends upon us in the woods and you have ‘nary’ a place to lay your head!”

“Then I should immediately find a hotel and ask for a room and a bath,” protested Miss Stuart, who did not favor the idea of the log cabin in the woods. “Remember, children, you may pretend as hard as you like that we are a

thousand miles from civilization; but, unless we are perfectly comfortable in the woods, I shall take you to the best hotel in Lenox. From there you may do your mountaineering in a respectable way."

"All the more need for you to hurry, Ruth," whispered Bab in her friend's ear. "I feel sure we shall find the guides and wagons waiting for us at the foot of the hill. If we get an early enough start up the mountain we can get fairly settled by night time."

Ruth nodded with her eyes straight in front of her. She kept her car moving swiftly ahead.

"Barbara, it is quite idle to talk to Ruth," broke in Miss Sallie, who had not heard just what Bab had said. "She is her father's daughter. Once her mind is made up to accomplish a thing, she will do it or die! So we might as well resign ourselves to our fate. She will reach 'her mountain,' as she calls it, by noon, even if we have to jump a few of these embankments to succeed."

Miss Sallie was growing tired.

"Why did I ever allow myself to be brought on such a wild expedition after the experiences you girls led me into in Newport!" she said.

"Now, Miss Sallie!" said Grace Carter gently—Grace was always the peacemaker—"you know you love these glorious woods as much as we do. Think how jolly things will be when we go down into Lenox after it grows too cold to stay in camp. Who knows but you will turn out the best sportsman in the lot? And we shall probably have our guide teach you to shoot before we are through this trip."

Miss Stuart sniffed indignantly. Then she laughed at the thought of her plump fingers pulling the trigger of a gun. "What is our guide's outlandish name?" she inquired in milder tones.

"Naki, and his wife is called Ceally," Grace answered. "You remember Mr. Stuart explained they were originally French Canadians, but they have been living in these mountains for a number of years. Because they used to be guides up in the Canadian forests they don't know any other trade to follow in these peaceful woods."

"These woods were by no means always peaceful, my lady Grace!" asserted Bab. "You can't even be perfectly sure they are peaceful now. Why," she went on in thrilling tones, "these hillsides once ran red with the blood of our ancestors and of the friendly Indian tribes who fought with them against the French."

“Oh, come! come! No more American history!” remarked Mollie. “Beg pardon, but I do object to Bab’s school-teacher manner. Did you ever see anything so lovely as these hills are now? The scenery around here is like the enchanted forests of Arcady.”

“Oh, Miss Sallie, girls, look!” called Grace. From the high crest of a hill “The Automobile Girls” gazed down upon one of the loveliest valleys in the Berkshires. Afar off they could see the narrow Housatonic River winding its way past villages and fields, from the hillsides, which gave it the Indian name; for Housatonic means “a stream over the mountains.” Nestling in the valleys lay a chain of silver lakes.

Ruth paused an instant. “Over there ahead of us is ‘our mountain.’ I think we can reach it in an hour or so.”

While they were pursuing their journey, another small party was gathering on the slope of the hill opposite. A long, lean man burned to the color and texture of leather sat on the front seat of a wagon drawn by two strong mountain horses. By his side was his wife, almost as thin and brown; behind them, piled up in the wagon, were trunks, rolls of steamer rugs, kitchen utensils, making altogether as odd an assortment of goods as if the couple were peddlers.

Strolling around near them was a younger man, evidently the driver of a well filled grocery wagon. His horse stood patiently cropping the fine, hillside grass. Farther up the roadside a chauffeur nibbled a spear of mint. He had no car near him, but his costume was unmistakable. Evidently something was in the air. Somebody or something was being waited for.

Soon after twelve o’clock, there was a whirr along the road. The cart horses raised their ears, and without a motion from their drivers, moved farther to the right side of the path. Berkshire Hills horses, in whatever station of life, needed no further notice. An automobile was approaching!

“Here they come!” cried the grocer’s boy, jumping back into his wagon. The chauffeur dropped his piece of mint and gazed down the road. Now at least there was something worth seeing!

“Hip! hip! hurrah!” “The Automobile Girls” landed with a flourish beside the wagons. Their laughter woke the sleeping echoes in the hills.

“Are you Naki and Ceally?” cried Ruth, jumping out of the car and running forward with her hand extended. “And are these our things you have in the wagon? I am so sorry we are a few minutes late; but these mountain roads take

longer to drive over than I had expected. I hope I haven't kept you waiting very long."

"No'm," said the guide, sliding slowly down from his perch on the camping outfit. He emptied the pipe he had been comfortably smoking. "Time enough," he answered. Naki was a man of few words.

The chauffeur had walked over to Ruth's car and was assisting Miss Sallie to descend. "You are to take this car into Lenox, I believe," Miss Stuart began. "My niece will explain matters to you more fully. I am told we cannot take the car any further up this side of the hill. Where is the carriage in which we are to drive?"

"Oh, Aunt Sallie!" cried Ruth in consternation. "What are we to do? When Naki wrote there would be seats in his wagon for those of us who wished to drive up the hill, I am afraid he meant those seats in front by him and his wife."

The guide looked perfectly solemn, even when he beheld Miss Sallie's face. Imagine, if you can, Miss Sallie Stuart, nervous, as she was, perched on top of a rickety wagon! Add the fact that she was to be driven up an unexplored hillside by the side of the two queer, brown people to whom they were confiding their fates!

"We don't ride 'longside of you, Miss," explained Naki to Ruth. "I leads the horses up and my wife walks by their side. There's room for three of you up there on the front seat. It's more comfortable than it looks. The other two of you had better walk or you can ride in the grocery wagon. The man's coming along behind us with the provisions."

Miss Sallie had not spoken again. Her expression was that of a martyr.

"Do you think you can manage, Miss Sallie?" Bab pleaded.

Ruth was explaining matters to the chauffeur. He was to take the car to Lenox. Every afternoon at one o'clock he was to return with it to this fork in the road and wait for half an hour. If "The Automobile Girls" decided on a trip to one of the nearby towns, they would join him at this place; for here the good road ended and the trail up the hillside began. The camp was a long way from any town, but an automobile defies distance.

Miss Stuart looked truly miserable when she saw their car disappear down the foot of the hill. Then she looked around her carefully. The place was entirely deserted.

"Very well," she declared, resignedly. "I suppose there is nothing for me to do

but to climb up into that wretched wagon."

Ruth, Barbara, Grace, Mollie, Naki and his wife all assisted her to mount over the wheel to the seat of honor. Violet cushions were piled back of her, Grace sat on one side of her, Mollie on the other. Ruth and Barbara were determined to walk.

"We are dreadfully tired sitting still, Aunt Sallie," Ruth begged. "Please let us follow the wagon!"

"Certainly, you can walk if you are able. In fact, you have no way to ride except in the grocery wagon, where you would probably get mixed up with the pickles and preserves," responded Miss Stuart. "Walk by all means!"

The cavalcade started.

"Let's pretend," proposed Bab to Ruth, "that we are starting out on what the Indians called 'the long walk.'"

"Surely, Bab, it's a long walk, all right. But why introduce the Indians?"

The girls were climbing up the steep path ahead of the wagon. Bab laughed. "Oh, I read somewhere," she explained, "that the Indians used to sell their land that way. Suppose you and I were early settlers, who were trying to purchase this hillside from the Indians. They would tell us we could have, for a fixed sum, as much land as we could cover in the 'long walk.' That would mean that we were to walk along quietly from sunrise to sunset, sitting down occasionally to smoke a pipe of peace, to break bread, and to drink water. That reminds me, are we ever going to break bread again? I am starving!"

But Ruth was not sympathetic at the moment. "It is curious," she replied. "These mountains are so full of Indian legends, we shall think, hear and dream of nothing but Indians in the next few weeks. The names of all the places around were once Indian. I suppose we shall do almost everything except see an Indian. The last of them has vanished from here. Oh, Bab, do look at Aunt Sallie!"

Miss Stuart had forgotten her fright. Fortunately, she did not realize how absurd she appeared.

"Ruth!" she called from her throne on the wagon seat. "Here is a perfectly good place for our lunch. There is water near and view enough, I am sure. I must be given food before I am taken another step up these hills. I am famished!"

The party found a clear space in the woods. In a short time Naki had built a fire of pine twigs, and Ceally had a giant pot of coffee boiling over it. Its delicious

perfume mingled with the fresh mountain air.

“I declare I haven’t been so hungry since I was a girl,” Miss Sallie avowed. She was seated on a log, with a sandwich in one hand and a cup of coffee on the ground by her. Her hat was on one side of her head, and her pompadour drooped dejectedly, but Miss Sallie was blissfully unconscious. The color in her cheeks shone as fresh and rosy as the tints in the cheeks of any other of “The Automobile Girls.”

Mollie flitted around like the spirit of the woods. Nothing could induce her to keep still. “Do let me get the water,” she coaxed the guide. Like a flash she was off and back bearing a heavy bucket. “Here, Ruth,” she volunteered, pouring a stream of water into the tiny silver cup that Ruth always carried. Ruth was just in time. With a jump to one side, she escaped, but the splash descended on unsuspecting Bab, who Was nibbling a doughnut.

In her ardor at playing waitress in the woods Mollie had turned her bucket upside down. Instead of dispensing nectar, this little cup-bearer to “The Automobile Girls” had nearly drowned one of them.

“It’s a blessed thing you are my sister,” cried Bab.

Mollie apologized, dabbing at Bab with her small pocket handkerchief. “You can tell me exactly what you think of me. Ruth and Grace might be too polite. I am so sorry; I was trying to be useful.”

“Go over to the fire, Barbara, and dry your dress,” advised Miss Sallie. “It is just as well you have on a thick suit. We must learn to expect occasional mishaps.”

Barbara winked solemnly at Ruth as she arose from the table. Miss Sallie was sure to be in a good humor when she talked in this philosophical fashion.

For an hour after luncheon the camping party continued their climb. Finally Ruth and Bab, who were in front, came to a sudden stop. “Hurrah!” they shouted, turning to wave their handkerchiefs to the occupants of the wagon.

Mollie nearly pitched out of the wagon in her excitement, but Grace and Miss Sallie clutched at her skirts in time.

“Have we arrived?” Mollie cried. “Oh, do stop the wagon!” The little log cabin in the woods was now plainly in view.

“It’s the gingerbread house, I know it is,” exclaimed Grace, making a flying leap over the wheel of the cart. “The logs are the soft, brown color of good gingerbread, and the little windows must be made of sugar frosting.”

In a clearing on top of a hillside stood the “hut,” as the girls christened it in an instant. A circle of pine and cedar trees hid it from sight. All around it were thick woods. Higher hills rose at the back of it. A roaring brook tumbled down the hillside fifty feet from their cabin door.

By nightfall the little house in the woods was made thoroughly livable. The girls hammered and worked, assisted by Naki and his wife. Miss Sallie sat by the big fire in the living room and gave directions. Adjoining this big room, which ran across one side of the cabin, were two bedrooms. Farther back Naki and Ceally shared a small chamber that connected with the kitchen.

Just before supper time Ruth took Miss Sallie by the arm; Grace, Barbara and Mollie followed them; around and around their new home “The Automobile Girls” marched.

“See your elegance!” said Ruth to her aunt, pointing to a mirror, which hung by a nail over Miss Sallie’s rough pine wood dressing table. Her favorite toilet articles were already laid out upon it, her wrapper hung over the back of a chair.

“Most noble lady,” continued Ruth, “behold what miracles your willing slaves have performed for your comfort! Everything is here for your convenience except your perfumed bath.”

“Don’t speak of a bath, child!” cried Miss Sallie, with a real shudder of horror. “It is the lack of a proper bathtub that makes this camping business truly awful!”

“Come, Miss Sallie,” called Barbara, quick to change the subject. “I want you to see the wonderful sunset.” Overhead Miss Sallie beheld a golden radiance that bathed the hilltop in a wonderful light. In the west the sun was sinking behind a line of blue mountains.

That evening the girls sat around an open campfire piled high with pine logs. It was a cool night, and although they were tired, no one would suggest going in to bed. Every now and then Mollie would tumble forward and awake with a start. She was half listening, half dreaming as Grace’s lovely voice floated out through the still night air, singing, while she strummed idly her guitar:

“Lovely moon that softly glides,
Through the realms where God abides.”

“I wonder,” said Mollie to Grace, as she finally followed her into bed, “what wonderful adventures we shall have in this forest? Perhaps we shall awaken a wood nymph and teach her to become a mortal maid. Do you suppose she would

like the change?”

CHAPTER V

A DAY IN THE WOODS

Mollie crept to the door of their hut at sunrise next morning. She thought she heard light footfalls outside their door. The other girls were fast asleep, worn out by the long trip of the day before. Yet when Mollie peeped outside no one was in sight; all was silence.

Only the birds had begun to stir in their nests and call their morning greetings across from one tree top to another. As far as Mollie could see stretched the unbroken forest. A narrow path ran down the hill between the trees. A steeper incline rose back of them and this was broken with deep ravines. Mollie could neither see nor hear anyone. Yet it seemed to her that she was not alone. She had a sense of some unknown presence.

She crept back into the room and put on her crimson dressing gown and slippers. She was bent on making a discovery. It could not be Naki or his wife, whose light footfalls she had heard moving swiftly around the house. They were nowhere to be seen. She was nervous about going out, as Miss Sallie had made dreadful suggestions about wolves and wild cats, yet she slipped out on the tiny porch. Far away through the trees and up the steep hillside she saw flying like a deer, a thin, brown creature. Was it human or a sprite? Mollie could not guess. She caught a glimpse of it, but it had been impossible to observe it accurately, so fast it flew. There was only a whirr of flying feet, and a flash of brown and scarlet to be seen. Could it be the famous ghost of Lost Man’s Trail?

At this same moment Naki came around from the back of the house. “I thought I heard some one,” he grumbled, looking suspiciously at Mollie.

“Yes, so did I,” she answered. “And I saw some one or something fly up the steep side of that hill.”

Naki did not answer. Mollie thought he looked at her queerly.

“You must have been mistaken, Miss,” he declared. “Nothing could have gone

up that ravine over yonder. There's only an Indian trail back there. Nobody travels much over that hill. It's all cliffs and dangerous."

Mollie shook her pretty head. She did not argue, but she knew what she had seen.

"I am going to try climbing it, some day, just the same," she thought to herself, "but of course, I must get used to finding my way about first. I must find out just what I saw this morning."

"Where have you been, Mollie?" asked Grace, opening her eyes as Mollie came back to bed.

"What's up?" called Ruth from the next room, where she slept with Miss Sallie.

"Oh, nothing," Mollie answered, fearful of being thought superstitious. "I thought I heard a sound at the door, but I was mistaken."

"Girls," Ruth demanded later, as they sat over their breakfast, "is there anything in the world so good to eat as bacon fried by Ceally over an open fire?" Ruth helped herself to all that was left on the dish.

"Ruth Stuart!" called Barbara. "How dare you take all the bacon, when you have just declared it was so delicious? Miss Sallie, make her divide with me."

Miss Stuart looked up from her eggs and toast: "What are you children quarreling about?" she asked placidly. "Suppose you bring us another dish of bacon, Ceally. The mountain air certainly creates an appetite. I am sure I don't see what benefit I am to get from 'roughing it!' The one thing I hoped to do by living outdoors was to reduce my figure, but, if my appetite continues at the present rate, I shall certainly not lose an ounce."

"Don't you be too sure, auntie," Ruth demurred. "Wait till we get through with you to-day. Think you can climb the hill back of us?"

Mollie interrupted. "Naki warns us against that particular hill. He says it is unpopular for climbing because of its cliffs and ravines. But he hints that there is an Indian trail over it, so I am dying to explore it. Aren't you, Bab?"

"Well, it's not for me!" laughed Ruth hastily. "I am not any too devoted to scaling cliffs, you may remember."

"What's the programme for to-day?" Grace asked.

"Somebody must go down the hill with me this afternoon," Ruth answered. "The automobile is to meet us there you know, to take us to a postoffice to mail our

letters to our beloved families. This morning we can just poke round the camp. I want Naki to teach us how to make a camp fire."

Mollie looked down at her dainty hands. "It is rather dirty work, isn't it?" she asked.

"Not a bit of it, Mollie," put in Bab. "Don't be finicky, or we shall put you out of camp. It's a good thing to know how to build a first-class fire. Suppose one of us should be lost in the woods some day!"

"We will suppose no such thing," protested Miss Stuart.

Early in the afternoon Miss Sallie and the four girls started down the hill. Bab, Mollie and Miss Stuart were to go only a part of the way with Ruth and Grace, the two girls continuing their walk until they met the chauffeur, who was to bring the motor car up to the point of the road where Ruth had told him to meet her.

Mollie and Bab begged off from the excursion. "I don't want to know," Bab argued, "how near we still are to civilization. If I go to town with you to-day, no matter how long the drive is, it will take away a part of the romance of living in the hills."

Miss Stuart was not much of a walker. Before they had gone half a mile she decided that it was high time to turn back.

"Good-bye girls," she called to Ruth and Grace, who were hurrying on. "Do not stay too late. You must be back by dusk, or I shall be most uneasy. At five-thirty I shall expect you in camp. These are my orders." Miss Sallie turned to Bab and Mollie. "Seriously, children," she explained, "I think I shall establish military rules. If one of you stays out after dusk, I believe I shall shut you up in the guard house for twenty-four hours."

"But where is the guard house please, Miss Sallie?" inquired Mollie meekly.

Miss Sallie laughed. "In this case the guard house means only the cabin. The girl who fails to appear when the roll is called in the evening must remain within the limits of the camp all the following day."

Bab and Mollie left Miss Stuart before the log fire in the living room of their hut. Miss Sallie, who had a taste for romance in the lives of other people, was deep in the reading of a new novel. A part of the camping supplies had been a collection of new books for her.

"Come on, Mollie," cried Bab gayly. "Let's go over in the woods and gather

some pine and cedar branches for our fire this evening." Barbara walked ahead, pulling a small wagon behind her with all the ardor of a young boy. "You see," she avowed to Mollie, "I don't have to remember I am sixteen, or a girl, while we are living in the woods. I can be just as independent as I like."

The two sisters were deep in their task. The little wagon was piled high with evergreens. Suddenly Mollie started. She thought she heard a voice calling from somewhere above their heads. "Hi, there! Hello! Hello!"

"Did you hear some one calling?" asked Mollie.

"Why, no," responded Barbara. "What is the matter with you, Mollie? This morning you heard a 'spook' outside the door, this afternoon you believe you hear a voice calling you. Beware, child! Perhaps you are already afflicted with the wood madness, and may see that wonderful ghost."

"Hi, there! Hi, there!" A voice was surely floating down from the sky.

This time Bab stared. Mollie looked triumphant. As far as they could see around them, there was no other human creature. And the sound did not come from the ground. Mollie was right. The noise was from overhead. But it was so far off and faint, it could not come from the trees above them.

Bab and Mollie ran out into an open space. There was a strange, rattling, swinging noise above their heads, as though a pair of mammoth wings were beating in the sky. The two girls looked up. There, about twenty yards above the tops of the highest trees was the strangest object ever seen by Mollie and Bab!

"What on earth is it?" Bab breathed faintly. The voice sounded more distinctly this time. "Is there some one down there in the woods?"

Bab caught the words. The sound was coming from a megaphone from the strange ship in the air. But Mollie and Bab had no megaphone at their command through which to answer back—only two frightened girl voices.

"Yes, yes!" they called together as loud as they could shout. The sound was ridiculous even to their own ears, and was lost in the vast spaces of the forest. The strange vehicle over their heads was gliding a little closer to the ground. Bab and Mollie could faintly see the figure of a man—two men—when they looked again.

This time the voice came through the megaphone: "Can you get me help? I have broken the rudder of my balloon. We cannot alight without assistance. If we come too close to the ground we will catch in the trees. I want some one to pull

us down with ropes."

"Well," Mollie spoke to herself, "it is a relief to know that that object is an airship, not some hideous hobgoblin. I would like to know, Bab, how you and I are to get the thing to the ground?"

"Run, fly, Molliekins!" cried Bab, whose mind was always quick in action. "Go to the cabin for Naki and Ceally. Tell them to come here as fast as they can tear. We can manage together."

Mollie was off in a flash.

Barbara's voice could now be heard by the men in the balloon above her. "Drop me a line," she called to them, "before you float too far away. I will tie you to a tree."

Bab had realized that with a broken rudder it was impossible for the dirigible balloon to remain poised in the air.

A long coil of rope floated down from the sky. Barbara caught it and ran to a tree which was bare of branches. Then she knotted the rope with all her skill and strength. There was nothing to do, now, but wait. Bab fastened her gaze upon the strange white bird she had captured, which hung fluttering and quivering in the sky above her.

CHAPTER VI

“THE GREAT WHITE ALSO”

Two minutes later Naki came running along the path. Even his solemn face was aglow with excitement. Ceally was close behind him. Just after them danced Mollie, who was followed by Miss Sallie. The latter had deserted her novel at the critical moment of the story. She must discover what Mollie was talking about. The child was too excited to explain.

A Long Coil of Rope Floated Down from the Sky.

When the little party reached the clearing where Bab stood it was easy to see what had happened. An aerial navigator had come to grief and was calling for assistance.

As Naki joined Bab, the aeronauts dropped more ropes from their basket, which hung beneath the great balloon. The big guide seized hold of one; his wife grabbed another; before Miss Sallie could stop her, Bab was swinging on a third.

“Great heavens child, let go!” Miss Sallie called out in tones of intense alarm. “You will be rising up in the air in another moment!”

“Oh, no!” laughed Bab out of breath. “There’s no danger now. Don’t you smell something horrible?”

The delicious air of the woods was being permeated with a detestable odor. The great balloon above their heads was shrinking. It was growing smaller and smaller. The gas was being allowed slowly to escape from it.

“Why, it looks like an enormous slug,” cried Mollie, “now that we can see the thing closely.”

By this time the balloon had neared the ground. Two men sprang over the sides

of the basket, both alighting on their feet. Half a moment later the older of the two was bowing politely to Miss Sallie and wiping his glasses. Landing from a balloon on top of a mountain was apparently an ordinary occurrence with him. His companion was busy with the airship, which now lay on one side on the ground. It was shuddering and exhaling deep breaths.

“Madam,” said the aeronaut addressing Miss Sallie, but looking at Barbara, who stood by her side. “More than I can express I thank you for your assistance. We were, I think, in rather a dangerous position and we might very easily have been killed. At best, in trying to alight without help, I should have torn my balloon in the branches of the trees. Perhaps you ladies would like to examine the balloon more thoroughly. This is my nephew, Reginald Latham.”

A young man arose from the ground. He wore a close fitting tan costume, a cap with a visor and short trousers.

He brought his heels together with a click, and bowed low to Miss Sallie. Then he extended his hand to Mollie and Barbara. “It was immensely clever of you,” he spoke, with a slightly foreign accent, “to have helped us out of our difficulty. Tying us to the tree, while we were obliged to wait, really saved the situation. I do not think the balloon is injured at all, except for the broken rudder.”

The young man spoke of his balloon as tenderly as though it were a cherished friend. He looked about twenty-three or four years old. He was thin and dark, with clever eyes; but an expression of restlessness and discontent spoiled an otherwise interesting face.

“I am Winthrop Latham,” his uncle continued. “I have a summer place down here, but my nephew and I spend most of our time, both summer and winter in Lenox. We have a house in my grounds where we are both working on models for airships.”

Mr. Latham paused. It was natural that he should expect some explanation. What was a handsome, middle-aged woman doing on top of a mountain? Why were her only companions two charming young girls and a rough looking man and his wife?

“I suppose,” Miss Stuart replied, laughing, “that you are almost as much surprised at our appearance as we are at yours! I am sure no thanks are necessary for our part in your rescue! We were delighted to assist in such a novel and up-to-date adventure.” Miss Sallie looked smilingly at Mollie and Barbara. She was rather enjoying their unusual experience. Moreover, she had heard of Mr. Latham’s beautiful home in Lenox. And was assured they were in the best of

company.

“We are camping on this hill for a few weeks,” she continued. “I am Miss Stuart, of Chicago. My niece and I, and three girl friends, are the entire camping party, except for our guide and his wife. Won’t you come to our hut? Can we be of any assistance to you?”

“Indeed, you can!” heartily declared Mr. Latham, who was evidently an old bachelor of about fifty-five years of age, with charming manners. “I wonder if you will take care of my balloon for me until my nephew can get down the hill to send a wagon up for it. That very inferior looking object you now see collapsed on the ground is really my latest treasure. It is one of the best dirigible balloons invented up to the present time.”

Barbara was already down on her hands and knees beside the balloon. As her new acquaintance explained the details of its construction to her, his face burned with enthusiasm. Mollie, watching him, thought he looked almost handsome. Nevertheless she didn’t like Reginald Latham. Bab, however, was delighted. She had a thirst for information and here was a young man who could intelligently talk to her about the most marvelous inventions of the century, the airship and the aeroplane.

“I think,” Bab volunteered, “if the balloon can be folded without harming it, we might carry it to the house in our small express wagon. We could each hold up a side of it, and it would be better than carrying it altogether.”

The queer procession started for the cabin. Miss Sallie and Mollie walked on in front. Mr. Latham, Reginald Latham, Naki and Ceally, each supported a corner of the balloon, while Bab solemnly dragged the express wagon. Her pile of evergreens had been rudely dumped out on the ground.

“Well, for goodness sake!” Ruth and Grace stood at the door of their cabin, transfixed with surprise. “What on earth has happened this time?”

“Let nothing surprise you, girls, in this world of strange adventure,” called Barbara. She had forgotten the strangers when she saw the amazed faces of Ruth and Grace. “Sometimes it is the stay-at-homes who have the exciting experiences come to them.”

“Do come in and have tea with us, Mr. Latham!” urged Miss Stuart. “Naki will go down to a farmhouse, only a mile or so away, where he keeps his horses, and will bring up his wagon to take your balloon home for you. You really must explain matters to my niece and her friend, Miss Carter, or they will perish with

curiosity! If traveling in the air makes one as hungry as living on a hilltop, the tea may be acceptable for its own sake."

"Of course I want to come into your castle," laughed Mr. Latham. "I feel so certain I have run across a party of fairies that I must peep into your dwelling to see if you are real people."

"You are not ahead of us, Mr. Latham," laughed Barbara, "Mollie and I thought you were angels calling down to us from the sky."

"I hope, Miss Stuart," begged their visitor, as he was making his adieus, "that you will soon come down from your high retreat and bring these young ladies to see my place in Lenox. Reginald and I promise not to talk airships incessantly. But, if you refuse to descend the hill very soon, my nephew and I shall climb up to see you. Next time I promise to appear in a more conventional fashion."

That night, when the girls were undressing, Mollie announced unexpectedly: "I don't like that Reginald Latham."

"Why not, Mollie?" asked Bab. "He is a very interesting fellow. His mother is a German and he has been educated in Germany. His father, who was Mr. Latham's younger brother, is dead. I think Reginald is his uncle's heir. He told me he and his uncle mean to devote all their time to inventing airships. He studied about them in Germany, even before he came to live with his uncle three years ago."

"Mercy!" Mollie ejaculated. "Then he is even more queer than I thought him. What a useless life for a man of his age. I don't like him even if he is ever so clever, and though his uncle is a dear. Girls, if I tell you something will you promise me not to laugh? Cross your heart and body. I won't tell you unless you do."

"Oh, then we have no choice, Mollie," laughed Grace.

"You may laugh a little," relented Mollie, who was giggling softly to herself. "Do you know what I suddenly thought, when Bab and I saw that great white object come sailing over our heads this afternoon? Like a flash it popped into my mind. Here comes 'The Great White Also!'"

Barbara shrieked with laughter in spite of her promise. "Oh, you funny Mollie!" she exclaimed.

"What is the child talking about?" inquired the puzzled Ruth. "The Great White Also! What utter nonsense!"

Mollie blushed. “Do you remember,” she asked, “a paragraph in the first geography you studied at school? It read: ‘The brown bear, the black bear, and the great white also inhabit the northern regions of North America.’ Well, when I was small child I always thought ‘the great white also’ was some strange kind of animal. For a long time I wondered and wondered what it could be. Finally I asked mother and Bab to explain the sentence to me. Of course they thought it a lovely joke; but, just the same, I never could get over my first impression. It flashed into my head this afternoon, when I saw that strange white thing struggling in the air—at last here comes ‘The Great White Also!’ Wasn’t it too absurd? I have been laughing to myself ever since.”

“Children, what on earth is the matter?” inquired Miss Sallie, appearing at the bedroom door in her dressing gown. “You will waken the dead with your racket. Ruth, come to bed, at once, and tell me what you are laughing about.”

CHAPTER VII

MOLLIE FOLLOWS THE TRAIL

“Mollie have you seen my red sweater?” called Grace a few days later. “I can’t find it anywhere; yet I am sure I left it out here on this bench last night. Naki and Ceally haven’t seen it. Horrid thing! It has taken wings and flown away just when I wanted it. Do come with us. Ruth, Bab and I are going over into the forest to try to learn to shoot. Naki is to teach us.”

“Does Miss Sallie know?” asked Mollie, who was not in a good humor. Bab had been lecturing her for her sudden dislike of Reginald Latham. It seemed to Mistress Barbara unreasonable that Mollie had taken such an unaccountable prejudice against a young man whom they had barely met.

“You talk, Mollie, as if he were a villain in a play,” Bab protested.

Mollie knew she had been obstinate. All she had answered was: “Well, he would probably be a villain, if he had the opportunity. I hope I shan’t see him again. I don’t see, Bab, why you should be so interested in him. He’s lots older than you are.”

“I am not interested in him,” Bab retorted indignantly. And the two sisters had separated.

“Of course, Miss Sallie knows we are going to practise shooting?” mimicked Grace. “What is the matter with Miss Mollie Thurston this morning? Don’t you know Mr. Stuart sent us a rifle. He told us learning to shoot might prove a useful part of our education. *Do* come on with us Mollie.”

“No, thank you,” Mollie declared. “I hate the noise of a gun. Oh, I am not afraid, Grace Carter, so you needn’t tease; but I prefer more ladylike amusements. I am going for a walk.”

“Don’t go too far by yourself, Mollie,” pleaded Grace, who didn’t mind Mollie’s tantrums. “You don’t know your way about these hills, yet, and it isn’t safe to wander any distance. How I wish I could find my coat.”

“Here, take Aunt Sallie’s,” cried Ruth, appearing suddenly in the doorway. “It is not such a charming color as your scarlet one, and it may be a trifle large, but it will keep you warm. Coming, child?” she asked Mollie.

Mollie shook her head. Without waiting for Bab to join them she started on her walk. The child wanted to be alone. Besides being in a bad humor she had several things to think about. She certainly would not tell Bab and the other girls, just to be laughed at; but again that morning she had heard a light noise outside their window. It didn’t sound like an animal. Mollie wrinkled her pretty forehead, and a puzzled expression crept into her blue eyes. How absurd even to dream of a thief, here on their beautiful hillside far away from the rest of the world. And, she, a great girl of fourteen, knew better than to believe in ghosts.

Mollie slipped down the path and crossed the gully that divided the nearer hill from the higher one back of it. Already her bad humor was disappearing. She had no idea of going far from their cabin; another day she might persuade the girls to explore this mysterious hill, with its lost Indian trail; but she should not attempt it alone. This morning she wanted only to creep away for an hour or so into the woodland quiet.

Mollie Thurston had a curious passion for the woods. When she was alone in them she would stand still a long time, calling to the birds, and she delighted in having them steal near and shyly listen to the sweet sounds she made in return for theirs. No one knew of this accomplishment of Mollie’s, not even Bab.

Up the steep hillside Mollie clambered. Below her she could hear the pop, pop, pop, of a rifle. The girls were evidently taking their lesson in target practice from Naki.

“I suppose I am fairly safe up here,” Mollie chuckled, “but I wouldn’t care to be too near those shooting experts. I know they will hit everything near them except their target.”

She sat down on the root of an old tree that jutted out from an overhanging bank, and drew a sheet of paper from her pocket. She would write to her mother of their rescue of an airship. Mollie bit the end of her pencil—she was not in a writing mood. Why had she taken such a dislike to Reginald Latham? He had been polite enough, and was rather good-looking. It was Bab’s habit to feel prejudices, not hers. She wouldn’t say anything to her mother about him, but certainly Bab seemed to like him unusually well.

Crack! Crack! The sound came from the bushes! She looked quickly around. It must have been a gust of wind that stirred. In another minute there tumbled over

her head a shower of leaves and acorns, that for an instant blinded her. But she could hear plainly this time; light feet were running along the bank above the ravine where she sat.

Without pausing a moment she jumped to her feet and ran up the path that led from the bottom of the ravine to the hilltop. Nothing was in sight; but further on through a thicket of trees, she caught the distant sound of flying footsteps. She could see the underbrush move, as though shaken by something in passing.

A shivering sense of mystery possessed the girl. Could it be the ghost?

Without stopping to think Mollie flew in pursuit; determined to discover what had disturbed her. Once she saw a bright object flash ahead of her, brown and scarlet, through the trees. It was gone in an instant. Surely it was but a shadow from the autumn leaves.

For some distance Mollie had been following what seemed to be a pathway through a tangled thicket of bushes and trees. Suddenly she stopped. So far as she could see the path ended abruptly. Yet, at this very moment, she heard a faint hallo!

It was the voice of temptation to Mollie, and she let her curiosity get the better of her. Without in the least knowing where she was going she pushed on. Ducking her head through an opening in one place, turning and twisting wherever she found it possible to make her way, the child came at last into a thick forest. On every side of her stretched endless avenues of trees. Now no sound of flying feet urged her on; no voice called her.

Poor Mollie was entirely alone.

“What an utter goose I am!” she declared out loud. “I don’t believe I ever heard anyone, or saw anything. It was just my imagination that led me on. Now, I hope,” Mollie gave a rueful smile and sat down to pull the brambles out of her dress, “I hope my imagination will kindly show me the way home again!”

Which way should she go? There were half a dozen different directions open to her. Which was the right one?

“I wonder,” thought Mollie, “if, somehow, I have struck the famous ‘Lost Man’s Trail?’ It is a lost girl’s trail all right!”

She turned this way, then that. In front of her between the sumach and the holly trees was an open space, which might lead somewhere toward home. Mollie pushed her way through. There were trees, trees, trees! No path was visible

between them.

For half a mile Mollie walked on blindly, feeling sure that, at any minute, she would catch a glimpse of their familiar hillside. A sense of sinking warned her that luncheon time had passed. High overhead she could see by the sun that noon had passed.

Several times she called aloud. But Naki had warned her. This hill was entirely deserted. No one ever walked or rode over it.

“I don’t wonder,” the little girl thought, with a lump in her throat. “No one except myself would be such a goose as to try to find her way about up here, or be silly enough to go on a ghost hunt.”

She called again. “Hello! hello! I am lost! Is anyone near?” There was no answer. Once Mollie thought she heard a strange sound, half-wild, half-human, and called more loudly. This time there was no reply.

After several hours of walking, Mollie found her way out of the woods. As she came again to an open hilltop she thought she could see the smoke curling out of the chimney of their little, brown cabin, but far and near, there was no familiar object. She had followed the wrong trail, and was in an entirely different part of the country. There was nothing to do but to return to the woods.

Wearily she walked back. “I am sure the girls must be looking for me,” she said, trying to revive her courage. “When I wasn’t home in time for lunch Bab would know I was lost.”

On and on, Mollie wandered. Finally, toward dusk, she found herself again in the heart of the forest where she had lost her way in the morning. She was so tired, there was nothing to do but to sit down and rest, but she had not given up. Of course, she would find her way out of this labyrinth of trees somehow. However, just for the time, she must wait.

Mollie sank down on a pile of leaves that had been blown in a heap under the shelter of a great cedar tree. It was growing cold, and the September day was closing. All morning and afternoon the little girl had wandered alone in the woods. How many miles she had traveled she did not know.

The child shivered, as she dropped on the ground. Tired as she was, she had plenty of courage left. Not a tear had been shed in these miles of weary tramping; indeed she had often laughed at her own mistakes, though the laughter had sometimes been close to tears; but Mollie knew that she must not lose her head.

“Suppose, I do have to stay in the woods all night?” she reflected. “It wouldn’t kill me. I have wanted to have adventures in a forest; here is my opportunity. I wish, though, I knew how to make a fire; I’m so cold and hungry; but I haven’t a sign of a match, so there is no use of thinking about it.”

If Mollie could but have kept awake a little longer! No sooner had she dropped on the soft leaves than fatigue overcame her, and she was fast asleep.

Suddenly a figure came out of the underbrush—a strange young figure all brown and scarlet. It moved so softly that scarcely a leaf trembled. For a minute it paused and gazed down on the sleeping child. The little girl stirred in her sleep. With a bound the wood sprite vanished. It need not have hurried; Mollie was too utterly weary to awaken soon.

What had happened at the log cabin, meantime?

All morning Ruth, Bab and Grace had been practising under the instruction of Naki. Bab was growing into a clever shot, and Ruth was playing her a close second, when the luncheon gong sounded. The girls had given no further thought to Mollie, supposing she had grown tired of her walk, and was at home with Miss Sallie. The latter naturally was not worried, as she thought Mollie was with Naki and the others.

When the girls filed into the living room for their lunch Bab asked carelessly: “Where’s Mollie?”

“Where’s Mollie?” repeated Miss Sallie. “Hasn’t she been shooting with you? Perhaps she is somewhere near. Here is Ceally; I will ask her.”

At this moment Ceally entered with a great bowl of vegetable soup that looked most inviting to the hungry girls.

“I haven’t seen Miss Mollie all morning,” she explained. “Not since she started for a walk up that hill over ‘yond’.”

Barbara, Grace and Ruth stared at each other with white, frightened faces. They remembered Mollie had gone off for a walk early that morning; but she had promised not to go far up the hill.

“Call Naki, at once,” said Miss Stuart hurriedly. “He will probably know where Mollie is.”

“No, auntie.” Ruth shook her head. “Naki doesn’t know. He has been teaching us to shoot all the forenoon.”

Bab jumped up from the table. “Please, Miss Sallie,” she cried hastily, “may Naki and I go out to look for Mollie? I am afraid she is lost on the hill.”

“Sit down, Bab,” quietly said Miss Sallie, in the voice the girls recognized as final. “You and the other girls must each eat a plate of this soup. You are not to start out to look for Mollie when you are tired and hungry. Ceally, see that Naki has some food at once, and bring the coffee to me.”

Barbara was almost crying. “Oh, Miss Sallie,” she pleaded, “I can’t eat. Don’t make me wait. I must go at once.”

“Eat your soup, Barbara,” was Miss Sallie’s reply.

Poor Bab obediently choked it down, while Ruth and Grace followed her example. Then they each drank a cup of coffee.

It was Miss Sallie who ate nothing. She was more frightened than the girls; for the woods were more terrible to her than to the young people. Then, Mollie was the youngest of the party, and Miss Stuart felt she was less able to look after herself. Besides, Ceally had hinted strange tales of the haunted mountain back of them. At the time, Miss Sallie had refused to listen; it had seemed utter nonsense, that tale of a ghost which haunted a lost Indian trail. Now, the idea came to Miss Stuart, that perhaps the ghost on the mountain was some criminal, a fugitive from justice, who made his home on the deserted hill.

It was Bab who led the way up to the top of the ravine. But there she stopped and waited for Naki and the girls to join her.

Looking for lost people in the woods was an old business with the guide. He did not take the fact of disobedient Mollie’s disappearance any too seriously. Once up the hill, he blew on a great horn which he carried. Once, twice, thrice! There was no response. He blew again, then waited. Evidently the young lady was out of earshot.

Then Naki made a mistake. Instead of going into the woods, where Mollie had pursued her will-o’-the-wisp, he turned in the opposite direction. It did not dawn on him that she had been led astray by a forgotten Indian trail.

“You must keep close to me, young ladies,” Naki insisted. “None of ye know your way about up here. If we should separate, I should soon be searching for the whole lot of ye, instead of just one.”

All afternoon they searched and searched for the lost one, yet all in vain.

If Mollie shed no tears while she was lost, Barbara shed plenty in the effort to

find her. Poor Grace and Ruth tried vainly to comfort her.

“If only we hadn’t quarreled this morning over that horrid Reginald Latham!” Bab sobbed, running on ahead of the others. “I told Mollie she was foolish to say she hated anyone whom she did not know. Yet I do it all the time myself.”

“Oh, do cheer up, Bab,” said Grace, choking back her own tears. “You didn’t quarrel with Mollie. I never saw two sisters who fussed so little. I know we shall find her soon.”

“There’s nothing up here can harm your sister, Miss,” Naki explained to frightened Bab. “The country around here is perfectly peaceful.”

At dusk Naki and his searching party returned alone to the top of the ravine from whence they had started. Looking down, they could see their log cabin, where Miss Sallie and Ceally stood at the open door. There was no sign of Mollie.

“It is harder work than I expected to find the young lady,” Naki apologized to Ruth. “I am sorry, but you had better go back to your aunt. I must go down to the farm for help. It will take a number of people to make a thorough search of this place to-night. The underbrush is so thick that it is hard work traveling about.”

“Oh, I can’t go home without Mollie!” sobbed Bab. “I am not a bit afraid to stay up here alone. Leave me, Ruth, you and Grace. I’ll just sit at the top of this ravine and call and call! Then, if Mollie comes anywhere near me, she will hear. You and Grace go and have supper with Miss Sallie. You can bring me something to eat afterwards, if you like.” Barbara smiled feebly.

Ruth and Grace both turned on her indignantly. It was a relief to pretend to be offended. “Oh, yes, Bab, we are both delighted to go down and comfortably eat our supper! It is so pleasant to think of your sitting up here alone, like a stone image, and poor little Mollie lost—goodness knows where!”

Ruth kissed Bab for comfort. Then she turned to Grace. “Grace,” she asked, “will you be a perfect dear? I know Naki is right; he must get some one to help him search for Mollie, and one of us must go to Aunt Sallie, who is terribly worried. See! she has already seen us, and is waving her hand. But if you will go tell her what has happened, I shall stay up here with Bab, and Ceally can bring us some dinner. You can come back afterwards. By that time Naki will have returned with assistance and we can go on with our search again.”

“I hate to leave you,” Grace protested, “but I will go.”

“Wait for me,” Naki cautioned. Both girls nodded. They were too tired to speak.

CHAPTER VIII

END OF THE SEARCH

When Grace and Naki had finally disappeared Bab put her head down on Ruth's shoulder and cried bitterly.

"I am so frightened!" she sobbed. "If only I were lost instead of my little sister! Mother always trusts me to look after Mollie. I ought not to have let her go off alone!"

Ruth wisely allowed Bab to have her cry out, before she said: "Bab, dear, remember father said he relied on us to keep cool heads and strong hearts in any case of emergency. Now let's gather ourselves together. Let's say over and over again: 'We will find Mollie! We will find Mollie!'"

Bab braced up at once and repeated quietly, "Certainly we will find her, Ruth dear."

Both girls were looking toward the woods. It was not yet night, but the dusk was falling quickly. Suddenly, off through the trees, the two girls distinctly saw a light that shone on a level with their eyes. Once, twice, then again, it sparkled through the underbrush.

"What is it?" Bab breathed faintly.

Ruth shook her head. "I don't know," she answered, under her breath.

The light advanced toward them; then it drew back again, never ceasing to sparkle. It seemed to be beckoning to them.

"Oh, Ruth," cried Barbara, "could it be a signal from Mollie?"

"How could it, Barbara, dear?" Ruth replied.

Both girls waited a little longer. The light came again. It seemed almost to call to them. Barbara started to her feet impatiently. "I must go and see what it is," she declared.

“Wait a minute, Bab!” pleaded Ruth. It was second nature with Ruth to be ready for emergencies. Rapidly she tore from a pad in her leather knapsack a sheet of paper and wrote on it: “Bab and I are going into the woods at the left. Follow the trail of the paper I shall drop as we walk.”

Like a flash she pulled off her white petticoat, and tied it to a bush near the place where she and Bab had been sitting. The skirt fluttered and swung in the breeze. Beneath it, under a small stone, Ruth placed her note.

“Come on, Bab!” she cried. “Let’s be off!”

Barbara bounded ahead; Ruth closely followed, leaving behind her a trail of white paper which she tore into bits as she ran.

The light ahead of the two girls beckoned them deeper and deeper into the forests. They must have followed it for more than a mile. Ruth’s paper was giving out. Suddenly the light dipped to the ground and was gone!

At the same moment, Ruth and Barbara heard a sizzling crackling noise. A tongue of flame darted up between two distant trees, and a warm glow like that of a camp fire lit up the shadows of the forest.

Ruth and Bab rushed to the spot. In the center of a small open space some one had lighted a fire. Sitting on a bank of autumn leaves, slowly rubbing her eyes was a girl. A scarlet coat caught Bab’s eyes; then a tangle of yellow curls.

“It’s my Mollie!” she cried, springing toward her and gathering her in her arms.

“Why, Bab,” asked Mollie sleepily, “when did you and Ruth find me? I must have been dreaming. I did not hear you make the fire. How did you happen to light a fire before you awakened me?”

The girls stared at Mollie. “Build a fire?” they queried in amazement. “Surely, Mollie, you made the fire yourself.”

Mollie shook her head. “How could I possibly light a fire?” she inquired. “I haven’t a match.” Then she smiled faintly. “I am not enough of an ‘early settler’ to know how to make a light by striking two flints together. But please take me home.” The little girl was too tired to care about anything beyond the blessed fact that she had been found.

It was Bab and Ruth who were overcome with the mystery of the dancing light that led them through the forest straight to Mollie. And who could have started the fire, that now roared and blazed, lighting the woods with its many tongues of flame. What did it all mean? The mystery of it all gave them long, creepy thrills.

Barbara helped Mollie to her feet. The child was so stiff she could hardly move, but as she arose something red dropped to the ground. Ruth picked it up. “Why, it is Grace’s sweater!” she exclaimed. “I am so glad you found it, Mollie, before you went for your walk. What a blessed thing you had it to keep you warm!”

“Grace’s sweater! What are you talking about, Ruth? I didn’t have it with me. I was nearly frozen. You or Bab must have brought it with you. I found it over my shoulders when I awoke,” protested Mollie.

Ruth and Bab said nothing. There was nothing to be said. It was all a puzzle! Where was the clue to the mystery?

The two girls were leading poor, tired Mollie through the thick tangle of shrubs, along which Ruth’s bits of torn paper gleamed white and cheerful pointing their pathway home. Even Mollie smiled on seeing them.

“If only I had remembered to play ‘Hop-o-my-thumb,’ Ruth, dear,” Mollie whispered, “I needn’t have created all this trouble. Do you think Miss Sallie will ever forgive me?”

“Indeed she will,” Ruth assured her. “She will be so happy to see you again, you poor, tired Mollie, she’ll forget to scold!”

By this time the girls could hear the noise of voices and the beating of bushes. “Here we are!” Ruth called out cheerfully. “Don’t worry. We have found Mollie!”

Naki burst through the opening. Ceally and Grace were with him and two strange men from the farm below them on the hill.

Naki picked up Mollie in his arms as though she had been a baby, and the party trudged on to their little log cabin.

At the top of the fateful ravine they found Miss Sallie. She could bear the suspense of waiting no longer and had climbed up alone.

“Home for sure!” proclaimed Naki briefly, as he deposited Mollie, still wrapped in Grace’s red sweater, on the couch before the fire in their cosy living room.

CHAPTER IX

SPIRIT OF THE FOREST

“It is perfectly incredible!” exclaimed Miss Sallie.

She and Bab were discussing Mollie’s adventure the next morning at breakfast.

“The more I try to reason out the whole thing, the more in the dark I am,” Bab answered.

“Have you talked with Mollie?” Miss Sallie inquired.

Bab nodded, and replied thoughtfully: “The truth of the matter is, Mollie knows less on the subject than the rest of us. All that she can tell is that she was sitting quietly at the bottom of the ravine, when suddenly a shower of leaves fell over her head, and she heard the noise of feet running along the bank above her. Determined to discover what had startled her, Mollie climbed up the ravine and kept on with her pursuit until she was completely lost. She must have wandered around all day. Finally she was so tired she sat down to rest. When she awoke Ruth and I had found her.”

“But Grace’s sweater! Where did it come from?” asked Miss Sallie weakly.

Ceally who entered the room at this moment, with her arms full of logs for the fire, caught the end of the conversation. She looked about her cautiously. Naki, her husband, was some distance away, cutting down the underbrush which was growing too high near their cabin.

“Miss,” whispered Ceally cautiously, “they do say there is a ghost up on that mountain. It must have been a ghost that led Miss Mollie on that lost trail. Once you strike that trail, there ain’t no way of finding your way back again, unless you follow some such clue as Miss Ruth’s bits of paper.”

“Ghosts! Utter nonsense, Ceally!” scolded Miss Sallie. But under her breath she confessed to herself: “If anything in this world could bring me to believe in ghosts it would be this mysterious occurrence.”

Ruth flew in at the door.

“Aunt Sallie,” she cried, “here is a man on horseback, with a note from Mr. Latham. He wants us to come down and spend the afternoon with him. He says he will send for us in a carriage that can come almost all the way up the hill, so we need only walk a little way. Do let’s go! Want to, Bab?” Ruth finished.

Miss Sallie looked dubious. “It is a good deal of a task, child, to go down this hill, except when we mean to stay down,” she protested.

“Oh, no, Aunt Sallie!” Ruth begged. “You know Naki goes down the hill every day, on some errand or other. I have been to Lenox twice myself and to Pittsfield once. I won’t give you and Bab these letters, unless you promise to accept. One is for Bab, from her mother; the other is for you, from father.”

Miss Stuart was reading Mr. Latham’s note.

“My sister-in-law is with me,” it read. “She joins her entreaties to Reginald’s and mine to beg our hillside fairies to come down to the earth and have afternoon tea with us. We are to have no other guests, except a few young people whom I am sure your girls will like to meet. Later on, when you condescend to spend a few weeks in Lenox, it may be a pleasure for you to know them. Certainly it will be a pleasure for them to know you.”

“The man is waiting outside for your answer,” proclaimed Ruth, dancing first on one foot and then on the other. “Here are pen and paper. Do write and let me take the note out to him.”

Miss Stuart allowed herself to be persuaded into accepting Mr. Latham’s invitation. Life on the hill was growing a bit dull for Miss Sallie. She dreaded the long trip, but Mr. Latham’s place lay between their hill and the town of Lenox.

Mollie came into the room as Ruth ran out to deliver the note of acceptance. “Who is out there?” she inquired languidly. The little girl was not yet rested from her experience of the day before.

“We are invited to the Latham place this afternoon, Molliekins!” Bab explained.

“Are you going, Miss Sallie?” Mollie asked.

Miss Stuart nodded. “Yes, I think so, child,” she declared. “It is a dreadfully long journey, but Ruth is determined to go, and I am as wax in her hands.”

“Aunt Sallie Stuart, you are no such thing!” Ruth laughed, as she returned to the

little group. “I am the most obedient niece in the world. You know you liked Mr. Latham. And he has a marvelous place, with a wonderful fish pond on it. From his veranda he says you can see over into four states, New York, Connecticut, Massachusetts and Vermont!”

“Well, girls, we will start promptly after an early lunch,” Miss Stuart remarked.

“Miss Sallie,” interrupted Mollie gently, “remember I am in the guard house for the next twenty-four hours. I broke all camp regulations by being lost yesterday. So I can’t go with the party to Mr. Latham’s.”

“Nonsense, Mollie!” said Miss Stuart kindly. “I was only joking when I threatened to establish military discipline in my camp. Besides, if you were disobedient, you were well enough punished for it. Don’t you wish to come with us?”

Mollie shook her head. “If you don’t mind, Miss Sallie, I would rather not,” she replied. “I am a little tired and I would rather stay quietly up here. You can count on my promise this time. I won’t go more than a yard from the cabin. Naki and Ceally will both be here to look after me.”

“I will stay with Mollie,” spoke up Bab. “I prefer not to leave her alone.”

Mollie protested energetically. “Bab, you must not stay behind with me. If you insist on doing it, I shall go with you, no matter how tired I feel. You know you are the one original lady rescuer of an airship yet on record! I was only the legs of the rescue, as I ran after Naki and Ceally. You were the brains of the whole business. Besides, you know you are simply dying to see Reginald Latham’s airship models, as well as their beautiful house and grounds. Make her go, Miss Sallie!” Mollie ended.

“I see no reason, Bab, why you shouldn’t accompany us.” Miss Sallie declared. “Naki and Ceally will look after Mollie, and an afternoon’s rest will be much better for the child than a long, fatiguing excursion.”

Mollie walked to the edge of the hill to see Miss Sallie and her charges start off on their excursion to Mr. Latham’s. Then she thankfully crept home to the little cabin and stretched herself out on her cot, with the eider down comfort drawn up to her head. The child, who was not so vigorous as Bab, was worn out from her fright and exposure. An hour later she awakened, feeling bright and rested as though she had never been lost in a strange woods.

It was a lovely, bright afternoon. Mollie could hear the leaves rustling outside, as the wind stirred them and they fluttered to the ground. The little girl had read

that a swan sings a wonderful song just as he is about to die. She walked out on the porch with an odd fancy in her head. She stopped and listened again to the sound the autumn leaves made, as they swirled from the trees to the earth.

“I believe,” Mollie smiled to herself, “that the autumn leaves sing their swan song, too.” She pointed to a beautiful, golden maple leaf, that was fluttering in the air. “See, there is a leaf! It is singing its good-bye song to the tree, which has borne it all summer! The little leaf is traveling to an unknown land down under the ground.”

Mollie laughed at her own idea. It was difficult for her to keep her eyes turned away from her ravine. She glanced up the hill. Surely she saw a figure moving there. It was a slight young creature, no larger than Mollie herself. Was it a boy or girl? It was impossible to tell, though the figure was drawing toward her.

The little girl watched with fascinated eyes. Down the ravine crept a thin, brown body. Now it looked this way, then that. Hardly touching the earth, it flew from one high rock to the other. Then it dipped into the hollow between the two hills and was gone.

This time Mollie did not stir from her veranda, but through her brain flashed the thought—the ghost at last!

In another moment she saw a black head rise up on a level with her eyes. Mollie gave a gasp of surprise, then was silent. A thin, brown creature moved softly toward her on velvet feet. Mollie hardly breathed. Never in her life had she beheld so odd, so exquisite a figure.

A girl about her own age stood before her. Her hair hung over her shoulders, black and straight. Her cheeks were a deep carmine. Her complexion was too dark to be olive, yet it was neither brown nor red. She was dressed in a thin, soft garment that fitted her closely from her bare neck to her ankles. Around her waist she had knotted a crimson scarf. On her head she wore a fantastic wreath of scarlet autumn leaves.

The newcomer stared at Mollie. Once, like a startled fawn, she turned to flee. But Mollie was too wise to speak or to move. Reassured, the quaint visitor drew nearer.

Mollie smiled at her quietly. “Are you afraid of me?” she asked gently. “Come here, I shall not hurt you.”

Suddenly the stranger’s dark, sad little face burst into a smile. “I am not afraid,” she insisted. “I am never afraid. But is it well with you?” She spoke English, but

with a strange guttural note Mollie had never heard before.

“Why should it not be well with me?” asked Mollie in surprise.

“Because,” the wood sprite answered, “you were lost yesterday in the hills.”

“How did you know?” Mollie demanded.

“How did I know?” The girl lifted her head proudly. “I know all things that take place in the woods,” she replied. “The woods are my home.”

Mollie looked thoughtful; then she spoke in a firm voice: “You know for other reasons, as well. You know I was lost because you led me away yesterday.”

The girl’s brown face crimsoned, her eyes flashed. Then she lifted her head proudly. “I led you nowhere!” she declared. “You would follow me. No one can run as I do, or capture me when they hunt.”

“Who are you?” Mollie asked her.

“I am nobody,” the young girl replied. It seemed to Mollie she spoke sadly. But she dropped down on the steps of the porch and waited until Mollie joined her there.

Mollie put out her own soft, white hand and took the other girl’s brown fingers in her own. The hands were slender and long, with hard muscles trained to the work of the woods.

“Well,” said Mollie gently, “if I *would* follow you, perhaps my getting lost was my own fault. But was it quite fair of you to come each morning to our windows, and then fly away again before anyone could see you?” Mollie was only guessing at this; but it was easy to see her guess had struck home.

Her visitor turned a deeper crimson and dropped her eyes.

“I am sure you meant no harm by your morning calls,” continued Mollie smilingly. “But, if you didn’t lead me away into the woods, there is one thing I feel very sure of; you did show my friends how to find me.”

“Hush, hush!” cried the wood nymph, rising to her feet and looking around in terror, her slender body poised for flight. “Promise me,” she pleaded, “that you will not tell you have seen me, nor that I ever came here to you.” The girl dropped on her knees at Mollie’s feet. “I am an Indian girl,” she explained. “I live on Lost Man’s Mountain, but I know no one, and no one knows me. Only Naki your guide has seen me. But he, too, has Indian blood. He will not betray me. My name is Eunice. I have no other name.”

“But you cannot live alone,” Mollie protested.

The Indian girl shook her head without answering. “If I tell you,” she implored, “will you promise me by the stars never to betray me? Promise, promise, or I shall disappear and you will see me never again.”

“Oh,” Mollie answered thoughtlessly, “I promise.”

A swift change swept over the Indian girl’s face. She leaned confidingly toward Mollie, who realized for the first time what her promise meant. She was already dying to tell Bab and the other girls of her afternoon’s experience, but she vowed to herself to keep the child’s secret.

“I do not live alone,” Eunice declared. “I have a grandmother, who is an old, old Indian woman. Our hut is far back in the hills. All day I have watched and waited by your cabin, until the others went away. I wanted to see that all was right with you. I trust you with my secret. Now, I must be far away.”

“But won’t you come again, Eunice?” begged Mollie. “Why not come and see all of us? We are only other girls like you. My sister and her friends have only gone away for a visit to the Lathams’.”

Eunice started and shook her black hair. “Latham! You must not speak the name to me!” she cried fiercely. “My grandmother says it is an evil name, and will work harm to me.”

Mollie laughed at her. “The name of Latham is nothing to you, Eunice,” she protested. “But won’t you let me thank you for leading my sister to me? You must have been the will-o’-the-wisp with the dark lantern. You must have made the fire, and—and—you must even have put Grace’s sweater over my shoulders as I lay asleep. You are my ghost!”

The Indian girl drew herself up proudly, but her dark face turned curiously white. “Yes,” she muttered, “I took the red cloak away. My grandmother says that I stole it, and Indians of royal blood do not steal. I am no ghost, I am a princess!” Eunice looked at Mollie with haughty grace.

“I did not know I was stealing,” she insisted. “I saw the soft, red thing. I did not think. I love the scarlet colors in the world.” She touched the crimson leaves in her hair. “When I found that I had stolen I meant to bring the cloak back. Then I saw you asleep in the woods. You looked so cold and white that I put the cloak over your shoulders to keep you warm. Now you have your own again.”

“But, Eunice,” Mollie inquired, more and more puzzled by the girl’s appearance

and conversation, “are you a pure-blooded Indian? You do not look like one. Your eyes are as big and brown as my sister Bab’s, only a little darker. And your features are so fine and pretty. Then you speak such good English and your name is Eunice. Have you ever been to school?”

Eunice shook her head. “A long time a woman stayed in the tent with my grandmother and me. She taught me to speak and to read books. She comes again each winter with the snows. My teacher is part Indian and part white. My grandmother says that an Indian princess must know, these days, all that the white race knows, and she must have the knowledge of her own people as well. But I go now. You will not tell you have seen me. Then, some day when you are alone, I may return.”

“Wait a second, Eunice?” begged Mollie and disappeared inside their cabin. She came out with a lovely red silk scarf in her hand. “Take this, Eunice, it is for you!” she explained.

Eunice shook her head. “An Indian princess does not accept gifts,” she demurred.

“Oh,” laughed Mollie, throwing her gift over Eunice’s brown shoulder, “you are a proud little goose! I am sure it is a small enough gift. I want to thank you for the service you did for me in the woods.”

Ceally was stirring about in the kitchen. Like a flash the Indian girl was gone. Mollie sat on the veranda steps rubbing her eyes. Had her visitor been a real girl, or was Mollie bewitched by a brown elf?

CHAPTER X

A KNOCK AT THE DOOR

The moon had come up over the tree-tops before Miss Sallie, with Ruth, Bab and Grace returned from their visit to Mr. Winthrop Latham.

“Well, you certainly have missed it, this time, Miss Mollie!” cried Bab, running into the room where Mollie sat reading. “We have had the most wonderful time, and met the most charming people. I never saw anything so beautiful as the village of Lenox. We had a splendid view of it from the tower in Mr. Latham’s house. Lenox is called a village of seventy hills, but I am sure we counted more than seventy.”

“I am truly sorry you were not with us, Mollie,” declared Miss Sallie, coming into the house with the other two girls. “But you will have plenty of opportunity for seeing what we did later on. It will not be long now, before we shall go down in the town to stay. Did you have a nice, quiet time by yourself?” Mollie felt embarrassed. She had hardly been alone. But the other girls did not give her an opportunity to answer.

“Mollie, we have the finest plan!” Ruth broke in. “We are going to have a coon hunt up on the hill. Mr. Latham says it is just the thing to do on these early autumn nights. All the people we met at his house this afternoon are to come up to supper with us to-morrow evening. Afterwards, we are to start out after Br’er Possum and Br’er Coon. Won’t it be a jolly lark?”

“I don’t approve of it, Ruth,” said Miss Sallie. “I am sure young girls never before took part in such an excursion. I shouldn’t allow it, except that Mr. Latham and his sister both assured me it was done by the best people in Lenox. Then the English ambassador’s daughters are to join you.”

Ruth looked solemnly at Bab and Grace. The girls were secretly amused at Miss Sallie’s social ambitions.

“Mollie,” Ruth explained, “we did meet two such nice English girls this

afternoon—Gwendolin and Dorothy Morton—and an awfully funny, little man, a secretary at the German embassy. They say that ambassadors are as common in Lenox, in the season, as millionaires!”

“Did you like Reginald Latham to-day, Bab?” Mollie inquired, as the two sisters walked into their bedroom together.

“Why, yes,” admitted Bab. “I liked him as usual. He is a peaceable kind of man, but rather queer. He is too learned for me. His mother seems terribly vain of him. She does nothing but talk about his inventive skill. I believe she encourages the airship business just to get on the good side of his uncle. Mr. Winthrop Latham is simply crazy on the subject and does not seem to care about anything else. And he must have a tremendous lot of money. But Mrs. Latham, the German sister-in-law, as good as told Aunt Sallie she and her son were dreadfully poor. They had always been obliged to live on the income Mr. Winthrop Latham allowed them, since her husband lost his money. But I shouldn’t think she and her son need worry; Reginald assured me that he was his uncle’s only heir.”

“Bab,” Grace asked, joining the two sisters, “why did you spend so much time out in that shed looking at airship models? You know you did not understand them in the least; but our host and his blessed nephew were certainly pleased at your interest. Mrs. Latham showed Aunt Sallie and Ruth and me over the house. They have an art gallery and rooms full of curios, just like a museum. The house is a perfect palace.”

“There was an older Mr. Latham once!” Ruth announced, sticking her head in from the door of her bedroom to join in the conversation. “But I don’t think he was a credit to the family. They are silent about him. I asked one of the girls we met this afternoon if Mr. Winthrop Latham and his nephew were all of the Latham family. Just as she started to tell me, Reginald Latham came up to us, and she stopped talking in a hurry.”

“Miss Ruth Stuart, I believe I was talking,” interrupted Grace severely. “Kindly allow me the floor! Mollie is most certainly not interested in the Latham family history. Who is? Nor does she care a fig for Mr. Reginald Latham and his toy balloons. But, Mollie, I was endeavoring to tell you about the wonderful curios they have in their house. The late lamented brother, we were informed, has left behind him one of the most famous collection of Indian relics in the world. If I am obliged to mention the stupid subject of family history, I must say that the Lathams are an old family up in this part of the country. They do not belong to the ‘newly rich.’ The queer elder brother devoted his life to the study of the

history of the Indians in this part of the world, and has written a book about them."

"Grace, have you finished making your speech?" inquired Ruth, with mock politeness. "Poor Mollie must be bored stiff with all this useless information. How did you spend the afternoon, dear? We have talked so much about coon hunts and Indian relics and the Lathams that you have had no chance to answer."

"Oh, I took a nap!" responded Mollie, vaguely, and led the way into supper.

Late that evening, as the girls sat by the fire, they heard a sudden knocking at their cabin door. Miss Sallie, who was in bed, bounded out again. For the first time since their arrival in the woods the camping party was alone. Naki had been obliged to go down the hill on an errand. No one had dreamed of any possible danger in his absence.

The knocking continued. "Open! Open!" cried the voices of two men.

"Who on earth can they be?" Grace asked of the circle of girls. No one answered. Ceally came hurriedly in from the kitchen. Miss Sallie stood at her door.

The knocks were repeated in quick succession.

Ceally had taken the precaution, earlier in the evening, to close and bolt all the doors and windows except one. The shutters of this were open on the outside.

"Sh-sh!" whispered Bab, creeping on tiptoes to the window. Before their front door, she could dimly outline the figures of two men, who were evidently arguing and protesting about something.

"Open! Open!" cried the voices again. "We are friends, and will do you no harm."

"Then go away at once!" Miss Sallie commanded.

There was a muffled sound outside the door. Could it be laughter? Then a voice called more roughly. "How long must we wait?"

Ruth and Bab looked at each other blankly. Miss Stuart had gone back into her own room. "What on earth shall we do? Shall we open the door?" Ruth inquired.

Mollie and Grace both shook their heads.

"Ruth," whispered Barbara resourcefully, "your rifle is behind that door, and Naki's big shotgun is next to it. Of course, we don't know how to shoot either one of the guns very well at present, but, if you will hold your rifle pointed

toward the door, I shall try to shoulder this heavy shotgun. Oh, I have a splendid idea!”

“Out with it, child!” ordered Ruth. “I believe the knocking on the door will keep up all night, unless we open it.”

“Who’s there?” inquired Grace, timidly, before Bab could answer.

“Friends!” responded the men on the outside.

Barbara motioned silence. “Listen to me,” she said. “We have no way of knowing if those men on the outside are friends, whatever they may say. Here is my scheme! Remember the story of the women in a town near here, who once defended their fort against an attack by the Indians, when the men were all away at work in the cornfields? The women dressed up in their husbands’ clothes and frightened the Indians away. Ruth, let’s disguise ourselves as men and then let Ceally open the door.”

“Bab, you and Ruth are both crazy!” protested Mollie, half-laughing, and half-frightened.

Bang! Bang! The blows on the door were tremendous. “If you don’t let us in, you’ll be sorry!” called one of the men.

Bab had already found an old hat of Naki’s conveniently near. Ceally, who was giggling nervously, produced a hunting jacket of her husband’s, which had seen much service. It was not clean, but Bab slipped into it, determined to see her plan through.

Nor was Barbara the only hero. While she was making her extraordinary costume, Ruth had torn down a squirrel skin, which some previous hunter had tacked on their cabin wall and twisted it around her head so that the tail hung down to one side. Then she slipped on her own leather coat, which she gave a more dilapidated appearance, by wearing it wrong side out.

Both girls got behind chairs to hide their skirts.

“Good gracious, Ruth!” giggled Bab, in spite of her excitement. “You look like Daniel Boone.”

During their preparation not a word was heard from Miss Sallie, who was closeted in her own room.

“Ceally, open the door!” cried Ruth, raising her rifle and leveling it in front of her.

Bab put her elbow on the back of her chair to steady her shotgun.

“Girls!” cried Miss Stuart, unexpectedly. “Don’t dare to open that door!”

But she spoke too late. Ceally had already drawn the heavy bolt back and the door swung aside.

There rushed into the room two men—or to be strictly truthful, two boys.

They looked first at Mollie and Grace, then at Ruth and Bab. Without a word they dropped into two chairs.

“Oh, oh, oh!” they shouted. “Did you ever see anything in the world so funny? Ralph, look at Ruth!” cried Hugh.

“Ralph Ewing and Hugh Post, where did you come from?” demanded four girls’ voices together. “We took you for highwaymen.”

Bab set down her shotgun and Ruth her rifle. Both girls began pulling off their masculine disguises.

“Don’t take off those terrifying garments, Bab!” cried Ralph Ewing. “You, Ruth, should have your picture taken in that hat.”

By this time, Miss Stuart, fully dressed, with her pompadour neatly arranged appeared at the door. Highwaymen or no highwaymen, Miss Sallie had no intention of appearing before strange men without being properly dressed. Now she was mistress of herself and of the situation.

Both Huge Post and Ralph Ewing stopped laughing when they saw Miss Sallie’s face. She did not appear overpleased to see her two young friends, whose doings were fully described in the preceding volume. “The Automobile Girls at Newport.”

“Where did you come from?” she asked politely, but without enthusiasm. “And why did you knock on our door at this time of the evening, without informing us who you were?”

“Ruth,” continued Miss Sallie severely, “what are you and Barbara doing in those clothes? Take them off at once.”

“Please, ma’am,” responded Bab meekly, but with a twinkle in her eye, “we dressed up as men to frighten the highwaymen.”

“You are enough to frighten them, I am sure,” retorted Miss Stuart scornfully.

Here, Ralph Ewing spoke in his most charming manner: “Miss Sallie, we do owe

you an apology and we make it with all our hearts. We had no intention of playing any pranks when we came up the hill to see you. Several days ago we were informed that 'The Automobile Girls' were camping in the Berkshires. Well, Hugh and I are on our way to Boston to join Mrs. Post, and——"

"Ralph, do let me do my share of the apologizing," interrupted Hugh. "See here, Miss Sallie, this nonsense to-night is all my fault. Ralph was dead against my pounding at the door and refusing to give our names; but I thought it would be fun to stir the girls up. I knew two such valiant girls as Ruth and Barbara would not be really frightened, even if we had been a whole band of outlaws. It was a stupid practical joke and I am ashamed of it."

"But how did you find us, Hugh?" put in Ruth, who was embarrassed by her aunt's lack of cordiality to their old Newport friends.

"Please, Aunt Sallie, say you'll forgive us!" Hugh pleaded. "See how many miles we have traveled to see you. We would have been here in the broad daylight, only one of the tires in my machine would get a puncture. The man at the garage told us which hill to climb to find you. We met your guide coming down the hill, and he gave us further instructions. So here we are! Aren't you just a little glad to see us?"

"Of course, I am," laughed Aunt Sallie, amiably. "But there is one thing certain: you can't get down our hill again to-night, and we have no place to offer you to sleep."

"Is that what is preying on my hospitable aunt's mind all this time?" cried Ruth, throwing her arms about Miss Sallie. "I thought she wasn't her usual charming self. Of course the boys shan't go down the hill again to-night. I don't know where they will sleep, either; but Bab will bring her fertile brain to bear upon the situation."

"Why, Miss Stuart!" Ralph spoke in relieved tones. "Is this why you are not pleased to see us? We expect to go down the hill a little later. On our way up we stopped at a farm house, and the people promised to take us in for the night. We'll come back early in the morning, since Hugh and I must be off again by afternoon. Mrs. Post is waiting for us in Boston."

"Oh, must you go so soon, boys?" pleaded Ruth. "We are planning the jolliest lark. We are to have a coon hunt up on the hill with some acquaintances we have just made in Lenox. They are to have supper with us, and are to bring up a guide and some coon dogs for our hunt later on. And you simply must stay at the cabin to-night. See, there is a lounge here in the living room, and we have plenty of

quilts and steamer rugs. One of you can have the couch and the other can sleep on the floor by the fire."

"May we, Miss Sallie?" Hugh queried.

"As you like, boys," declared Miss Stuart, now completely restored to good humor.

"Then let's stay by all means!" urged Ralph. "What should we expect to sleep on except the floor or the ground? This is the most effete camping party I ever saw," he declared, looking around their cosy little cabin. "You have all the comforts of home, here!"

"Do you think you and Ralph can stay for our coon hunt, Hugh?" asked Bab.

"Oh, for sure, Barbara," Hugh asserted. "I will fix things up with the mater for a day; but we shall have to be off the next day without fail. Now, I have an awful confession to make."

"What is it Hugh?" Ruth demanded.

"Ralph and I are starving!" he answered. "We were so bent on getting up to your hut before it was too late, we didn't have time to get any dinner. Could you, would you, just give us each a hunk of bread to stay our appetites?"

"You poor souls!" cried Ruth. "Come on out in the kitchen with me, Mollie. Let Bab and Grace do the entertaining. We'll fix you some eggs and bacon in no time, the best you ever tasted. Our cook has gone to bed."

"Let's have a feast for everybody," proposed Bab. "May we, Miss Sallie? I am dreadfully hungry again. I haven't had anything to eat for at least two hours and a half."

"Come, turn in then, everybody," Ruth called cheerily. "Here, Bab, you undertake the Welsh rarebit and get out the pickles and crackers. Mollie, get Hugh to help you open these cans of soup. Grace, you and Ralph, set the table and talk to Aunt Sallie, while I fry my precious bacon."

"I never heard of such an extraordinary combination of things to eat. You will ruin your digestions," was Miss Sallie's comment. But she ate just as much as anyone else.

At midnight the girls were at last in bed. Hugh and Ralph, both wrapped in blankets, were in blissful sleep before the camp fire. They had scorned to accept the offer of the couch, wishing to enjoy camp life to the fullest extent. So peace

followed good cheer in the hut.

CHAPTER XI

THE COON HUNT

"Ere in the northern gale
The summer tresses of the trees are gone,
The woods of autumn all around our vale
Have put their glory on."

chanted Ralph bowing low to Barbara, as she joined him in the clearing in front of their house before breakfast next morning. "See, mademoiselle, what a fine poem I have thought out for you! Behold in me the poet of the Berkshires!"

Barbara laughed. "You are a second-hand poet, I am afraid, Ralph. I happen to know that those lines were written by William Cullen Bryant. But come into breakfast and stop your poetizing. We have a busy day ahead of us."

Ralph and Barbara found Ruth with a big sheet of paper in her hand and her brow wrinkled into a serious frown.

"We must decide at once what to have to eat at our supper party to-night. Naki is in a hurry to get off to the village, so as to be back in time to help with the preparations. Listen, chilluns, while I read you my menu," commanded Ruth solemnly. "I am going to have a regular, old-fashioned supper party with everything on the table at once. Naki and Ceally can't serve so many people in any other style. Besides, if we have to eat supper at eight and start off on our coon hunt at nine, there won't be time for many courses. So here goes: Roast chicken, 'ole Virginy' ham, sent by Mr. Robert Stuart for just such a special occasion, roast pig and apple sauce, chestnuts, sweet potatoes, jellies, pies, doughnuts——"

"Cease, and give me breakfast ere I perish at the thought of overeating," remonstrated Hugh. While Miss Sallie protested, as she sat down to her breakfast, "My dear Ruth, are you planning to feed an army, or to entertain a few guests at supper?"

“What shall we do to help with the preparations, Miss Sallie?” queried Grace.

“Just keep out of the way as much as possible, child,” Miss Stuart answered.

But this suggestion did not agree with Ruth’s ideas. “At least, Aunt Sallie,” she expostulated, “we may be allowed to decorate the hut as we like.”

“Certainly, child. Spend the day bringing the woods into the house, and to-morrow in throwing the trash out again, if you like. Only don’t interrupt Ceally and Naki.”

At half-past seven everything was ready for supper. As for the coon hunt, no one of “The Automobile Girls” had the faintest conception of what it would be like, and Miss Sallie was as ignorant as the rest of them.

“It is only an excuse for a midnight frolic among the young people,” she thought, indulgently. “I presume no mischief will come of it.”

A barking of dogs announced the approach of the guests. Four lean hounds, brown and yellow, baying and straining at their leashes, tore up the hill. Already the keen mountain air stirred them. Br’er Possum and Br’er Coon were even now placidly eating their suppers. The dogs longed to be at the night’s business.

While the young people feasted inside the cabin, the men who were to conduct the hunt prepared the pine torches to light them on their way.

“You feel sure this is a proper expedition, Mr. Latham?” asked Aunt Sallie nervously. She was standing at the door, waiting to see the party start off. “Hugh,” she called at the last minute, “promise me to look after Ruth and Grace. Don’t get separated from them, or I shall never forgive you. Ralph, I trust you to take care of Mollie and Bab.”

But Reginald Latham was standing near Miss Stuart and overheard her instructions to the two boys.

“Oh, I say, Miss Stuart,” he quizzed in the affected fashion that so angered Mollie, “can’t you trust me to look after Miss Thurston? I have a score to pay back to her for her rescue of me in my airship.”

Mollie put her arm in Ralph’s as they walked out the door together. “Don’t mind that Latham man,” she whispered. “I can’t see why Bab likes him. See, they are starting off together.”

The great horn blew; the dogs barked violently.

Twenty people, each carrying a pine torch, lit up the shadows of the quiet woods.

“When I count three,” said Mr. Latham to the keepers, “you can let the dogs go.”

One! two! three! and the hounds were off, their noses pointed along the ground, their tails standing out straight behind them.

“Is coon hunting a cruel sport, Ralph?” Mollie inquired. “If it is, I would rather stay home.”

“I don’t know; this is my first experience,” Ralph replied. “But hurry along, little girl!”

“Hurrah! The dogs have a coon on the run!” shouted some one in front. A poor old coon had been driven from his comfortable hollow tree, and was running for his life over the hard ground, pursued by excited dogs. Close behind followed the hunters with their horns. And, tumbling over one another rushing pell-mell after them, came the crowd of heedless young people. The party separated. Two of the dogs tracked another coon.

“I half hope Mr. Coon will win this race!” panted Barbara, close behind Reginald Latham. “Remember Uncle Remus says, ‘Br’er Coon, he was wunner deze here natchul pacers.’ Certainly he has me outclassed as a runner. Do wait for me, Mr. Latham!”

Reginald Latham had run ahead of the rest of the party, and was tearing down a steep hill with no light except from his pine torch. The moon had gone behind a cloud.

Barbara, farther up the hill, could see the reflection of a sheet of water. Into it the poor little hunted coon jumped, swimming for dear life to the opposite shore. The dogs hesitated a minute, then went into the water after it. But Reginald Latham was now going so rapidly he could not stop himself.

With a rush he was in the water, just as Bab’s warning cry rang out.

“Help me! I am drowning!” he shouted. For the minute he and Barbara were alone. The rest of the party had followed the two dogs, whose baying sounded some distance across through the woods.

Barbara was down the bank, and out in the stream in a second. To her disgust she found the water only up to her waist. They were at the edge of a small pond, but Reginald Latham clutched at Barbara, panic-stricken.

“Why, Mr. Latham,” cried Bab in disgust, “you are not drowning. This water is not three feet deep. We have only to walk out.”

At this instant, Ralph Ewing and Mollie came rushing down the hill.

“What on earth’s the matter, Bab?” asked Mollie.

“Oh, nothing,” said Bab loyally, “except that Mr. Coon has led us into a nice mud bath. I expect Mr. Latham and I had better return home. I don’t believe I am a first-class hunter. My sympathies are too much on the side of the coon.”

“Can I help either of you?” asked Ralph Ewing courteously. But when Bab said “no,” he and Mollie were off through the woods again.

“It was good of you, Miss Thurston,” Reginald Latham apologized, as he and Bab made their way up the hill again, “to take part of the responsibility for our plunge into the pond on yourself. I am an awful coward about the water. I would take my share of the blame, except that my uncle would be so angry.”

“But you are not afraid of your uncle, are you?” Bab inquired impetuously. “You seem grown up to me, and I don’t see why you should be afraid. Mr. Latham is awfully nice anyhow.”

“Oh, you don’t understand, Miss Thurston,” declared Reginald Latham peevishly. “Everything in the world depends on my keeping on the good side of my uncle. My mother has talked of nothing else to me since I was a child. You see, uncle has all the money in the family now. He doesn’t have to leave me a red cent unless he chooses.”

“Well, I would rather be independent than rich,” protested Bab. “Oh, I beg your pardon,” she said blushing. “I am sure I don’t know you well enough to say a thing like that to you. But do let’s hurry back to camp.”

On their way back they met Gwendolin Morton and the young German secretary, Franz Heller. Gwendolin had sprained her ankle in getting over a log, and had given up her part in the hunt.

By midnight nearly all the coon hunters had returned to the log cabin for repairs before making their way down the hill again. Reginald Latham sat before the fire drying his wet clothes.

“What is the matter with you, Reginald?” asked his uncle, sharply. “We’ve bagged three coons, Miss Stuart, but I am afraid we have had more disasters than good luck. Now, we must be off home again. Look here, young ladies,” said Mr. Latham, turning to Ruth and Mollie, who were saying good-bye to their guests, “is there a wood nymph, who lives anywhere about in these woods? Several times to-night I thought I spied a little figure flying between the trees.”

“Nonsense, Mr. Latham,” laughed Ruth. “Our woods are not haunted.”

But Mollie answered never a word.

“Miss Thurston,” called Reginald Latham, as Barbara, who had gone out to change her wet clothes came into the room to say good night to her guests, “may I come up and see you and your friends in the morning?”

Barbara hesitated. She did not object to Reginald Latham as the other girls did; she even thought Ruth, Grace and Mollie were prejudiced against him, but she had an idea that something disagreeable might grow out of a further intimacy.

“I am sorry, Mr. Latham,” she exclaimed politely, “but we have planned to do some target practice in the morning? We are going to stay but a short time up here in the woods, and Mr. Stuart, Ruth’s father, is anxious that we should learn to shoot.”

“But I am a fairly good shot myself,” protested Reginald Latham. “Why can’t I come up and help with the teaching? May I, Miss Stuart?” he asked, turning to Ruth, who much against her will, was obliged to consent.

“Never again shall I allow you to engage in such an unladylike and cruel sport as a coon hunt!” announced Miss Sallie, when the last guest had gone. The girls agreed with her, as the baying of the hounds and the noise from the hunters’ horns at last died away in the distance.

CHAPTER XII

THE WOUNDED BIRD

“Good-bye Ralph!” said Barbara, extending her hand to her old friend.

“Good-bye, Barbara,” Ralph answered, politely. “It has been a great pleasure for Hugh and me to see you and the other girls in your forest retreat. I am sorry we must be off so soon.”

“But you will come back again, in a week or two won’t you?” begged Ruth. “I heard you promise those lovely English girls, Hugh, to take part in the autumn sports at Lenox.”

“Oh, we shall be back if possible, Ruth.” Hugh assured her. “I think we can promise to give Lenox a taste of our charming society, say near the first week in October.”

“Let’s be off, Hugh,” called Ralph. “Here is that Latham fellow coming up the hill.”

Bab laid her hand on Ralph’s sleeve. “You are not angry with me for going off with Reginald Latham last night are you? Truth of the matter, Ralph, I don’t believe I like Mr. Latham any better than the others do. But I am rather sorry for him; he seems queer and nervous. Why, the other day, even at his own house, all the young people except me ran away from him. I don’t think he is very happy. That’s why he is always fooling with inventions and things. He’s a weak kind of fellow, Ralph, but I don’t think he is horrid.”

Ralph laughed and his face cleared. “Good for you, Bab. Always looking after the oppressed. But I don’t think you need feel sorry for a fellow who has such a lot of money coming his way as Reg Latham.”

“He hasn’t it yet!” was Bab’s wise comment.

As Ralph and Hugh disappeared, Reginald Latham joined the four girls. He wore his shooting clothes, and his dark face was transformed with pleasure. He knew

he was not popular with young people and the idea made him unhappy. He had been brought up in a foreign country and was shy and ill at ease. His mother had always kept him in her society. Now, he was delighted with the independence and courage of “The Automobile Girls” and longed to be friends with them.

“I hope I am in time for the shooting,” he declared. “My uncle sent me up to apologize for the chapter of accidents that occurred last night in our coon hunt. Gwendolin Morton is laid up with a bad ankle, Franz Heller has influenza, and everyone else is tired out with the long tramp. But you look entirely rested.” He turned to Barbara and spoke under his breath. “Forgive me for last night’s performance.”

“Come, Naki,” called Ruth to their guide, “we are ready for our target practice. Mr. Latham is here.”

Ruth led the way over the hill. At a little distance from the house Naki set up a pasteboard target, which he nailed to the side of a big cedar tree, at the edge of a slight embankment. Below it was nothing but underbrush. No one was near. It seemed a perfectly safe place for the rifle practice.

Mollie sat on the ground back of the eager sportsmen. Nothing could induce her to handle a gun. “I suppose I am safe, back here,” she laughed, “so, I shall sit here and watch this famous shooting match. Only, for goodness’ sake, all of you be careful!”

Bab, Ruth and Grace were each to have ten shots at the target, Naki showing them how to load and fire. Reginald Latham would keep the score. The girl who hit the bull’s eye the greatest number of times was to be proclaimed champion.

Bab fired first. She hit the second ring from the center of the bull’s eye.

“Good for you!” Ruth cried, taking aim. But she missed the target altogether. The shot from her rifle went down the hill.

Mollie thought she saw something stir. “Isn’t this a dangerous business?” she asked Reginald Latham.

“There is nothing in these woods to harm, Miss Mollie,” he explained. “Most of the birds have already flown away.”

For an hour the girls fired at the target. Grace had grown tired and had taken her seat by Mollie, but Ruth and Barbara were both enthusiastic shots. Ruth’s score stood two ahead of Bab’s, who still had three more shots to fire.

Suddenly Barbara raised her rifle. “No, don’t show me, Naki,” she protested. “I

think I can take aim myself." As Bab fired Mollie rose to her feet with a cry. She had seen something brown and scarlet moving in the underbrush on the hill below them.

Bab's shot had missed the target. But did they hear a low moan like the sound of a wounded dove?

Barbara turned a livid white. "I have hit something!" she called to Ruth. But Ruth was after Mollie, who was scrambling down the hill.

The whole party followed them, Barbara's knees trembling so that she could hardly walk.

There were tears streaming from Mollie's eyes as she looked up at Bab. The child's arms were around a little figure that had fallen in the underbrush, a little figure in brown and scarlet, with a wreath of scarlet autumn leaves in her hair.

"I have been afraid of this," said Naki, pushing the others aside.

"It's my little Indian girl!" Mollie explained. "She couldn't bear to keep away from us, and at first I thought her the ghost of Lost Man's Trail. I have seen her around our hut nearly every day; but I promised not to tell you girls about her. Is she much hurt, Naki?"

The man shook his head. "I can't tell," he said. "Better take her to the house and see."

At this Eunice opened her eyes. Her lips were drawn in a fine line of pain, but she did not flinch.

"I will go home to my own tent," she protested. "I will not enter the abode of my enemies." The little girl struggled out of Mollie's hold and rose to her feet. One arm hung limp and useless at her side.

When Reginald Latham touched her, she shuddered. Tiny drops of blood trickled down to the ground.

"Give me your handkerchief, please?" asked Bab as she went up to Eunice. "It is I who have hurt you," she said, "though I did not mean to do so. Surely you will let me help you a little if I can."

She tore open Eunice's sleeve and tenderly wiped the blood. Naki brought two sticks, and, with his assistance, Bab bound up the wounded arm, so the blood no longer flowed. "Now you must go home to our cabin with us!" she pleaded.

But Eunice broke away from them and started to flee. She trembled and would

have fallen had not Mollie caught her.

“See, you can’t go home alone, Eunice dear,” Mollie remonstrated. “And you must see a doctor. The bullet from the rifle may still be in your arm.”

Eunice was obstinate. “Indians do not need doctors,” she asserted.

But Naki came and took her in his arms. “We will take you to your own tent,” he declared. “She will rest better there,” he explained to the girls, “and I know the way over the hills. You may come with me. The Indian squaw, her grandmother, will be hard to manage.”

“But how shall we get a doctor up there?” asked Grace.

“I will go down for him later,” Naki answered briefly. “You need have no fear. An Indian knows how to treat a wound. They have small use for doctors.”

“Is your guide an Indian?” asked Reginald Latham of Ruth.

Ruth shook her head. “He may have some Indian blood,” she said. “I didn’t know it. But this Indian child, where did she come from? And to think her name is Eunice!”

“Eunice!” cried Reginald Latham in a strange voice. “Impossible. Why Eunice is not an Indian name!”

“But it is what Mollie called her,” protested Ruth. “And Mollie seems to know who she is.”

Reginald Latham’s face had turned white.

Ruth felt her dislike of him slipping away. He seemed very sympathetic. Mollie, Bab and Grace were hurrying along after Naki, over whose broad shoulder hung the little Indian girl. Her black hair swept his sleeve, her broken arm drooped like the wing of a wounded bird.

Once she roused herself to say. “My grandmother will not like these people to come to our tent. We live alone like the beasts in the forest.”

But Barbara, Ruth, Grace and Mollie trudged on after Naki. While silently by their side walked Reginald Latham.

CHAPTER XIII

THE WIGWAM

“How much farther must we walk, Naki?” asked Mollie, after an hour’s hard tramping. “Surely Eunice and her grandmother must live somewhere near. Eunice could not have traveled such a distance to our hut every day.”

“An Indian girl flies like the wind,” Naki answered. “But another half hour will find us at the wigwam. The Indian woman lives in her tent. She will have nothing like the white race, neither house, nor friendships. She is the last of a lost race. She and the child live alone on the hill. Sometimes other Indians visit them, those of the race who have studied and become as white men. They have taught the child what she knows. But Mother Eunice, as the grandmother is known, still smokes her pipe by an open fireside.”

“Is the old woman also named Eunice?” Ruth inquired curiously. “I do not understand. Eunice is not an Indian name.”

Reginald Latham, who was walking next Ruth, panted with the exertion of climbing the hill; his breath came quick and fast. He seemed intent on Naki’s answer to Ruth’s simple question.

“Eunice is a family name in these parts among a certain tribe of Indians. But you are right; it is not properly speaking an Indian name. Many years ago a little girl named Eunice, the daughter of a white man, was stolen by the Indians. She grew up by their firesides and married an Indian chief. In after years, she would never return to her own people. And so her children and her children’s children have from that day borne the name of Eunice. The Mohawk Indians have the white man’s blood as well as the red man’s in their veins.”

Mollie was walking near Eunice, whom Naki still carried in his arms, and then Mollie would lean over every now and then and gently touch the child. Once or twice, during their long walk, she thought the little Indian girl lost consciousness. But never once did Eunice moan or give a cry of pain.

“Over there,” said Naki finally, “lies the Indian wigwam.” He pointed in front of him, where a solitary hill rose before them, shaded by dense woods.

“But I can’t see an opening there,” Ruth cried; “neither smoke, nor anything to suggest that people are living on that hill.”

Naki smiled wisely. “The Indians have forgotten much of their father’s wisdom,” he declared. “But not yet have they forgotten how to hide in their own forests.”

“Do you think I had better go ahead, Naki?” Bab queried. “Some one ought to tell the grandmother that Eunice is hurt. Since I am responsible for the accident, it is my place to break the news to her. I will run on ahead.”

“Not alone, Bab!” protested loyal Ruth. “You are no more responsible for Eunice’s injury than the rest of us. It just happened to be your shot that wounded her. It might just as easily have been mine. How could we have dreamed the child was hiding in the underbrush? I shall go ahead with you.”

“Better keep with me,” enjoined Naki. “You could not find your way to the wigwam. We have followed the ‘Lost Man’s Trail.’ When we get up to the tent, keep a little in the background. The Indian woman is very old. She cannot forgive easily. It is best that I explain to her as well as I can. I will go first, alone, with the child.”

Eunice stirred a little on Naki’s shoulder. “The little one,” she declared feebly. “She of the pale face and the hair like the sun. I wish her to go with me to the tent of my grandmother.” And Eunice pointed with her uninjured arm toward Mollie.

Under a canopy formed of the interlaced branches of great hemlock trees stood an Indian wigwam. It looked as much a part of the landscape as the trees themselves. The rains and the sun had bleached it to an ashen gray. Outside the tent hung a bunch of arrows. Against the side leaned a long bow. A fire near by had been hastily covered over. But nowhere about was there a sign of human life.

“Your grandmother has heard the footsteps of strangers approaching,” Naki said to Eunice. “Let her know that you are here.”

Naki set the little girl down on her feet. Mollie stood by her; but Bab, Ruth, Grace and Reginald Latham were concealed by some thick bushes a few yards away.

Eunice spoke a few words in the Indian tongue. Suddenly the flap of the

wigwam opened, revealing an aged Indian woman. She looked older than anyone that the girls had ever seen before. Her brown face was a network of fine wrinkles; but her black eyes blazed with youthful fire. She was tall and straight like the pine trees in her own forest. The old woman wore an ordinary woolen dress. Over her shoulders she had thrown an Indian blanket, striped in orange, black and red. She knew that strangers were near. But her grandchild called her!

At the sight of Eunice the Indian woman gave a curious cry, which she quickly stifled. In a voice that only Mollie, who stood near, could hear she asked: “My little wood pigeon is wounded? I have long feared it.”

Mollie marveled that the old Indian squaw spoke English.

Mother Eunice gathered her child in her arms and carried her within the wigwam, laying her on a bed of cedar boughs covered with a heavy blanket. Naki explained that Eunice had been accidentally shot by a rifle. The old woman grunted. Without a word she tore down a bunch of herbs that hung at the side of a wall. Placing them in an iron pot she went out of her tent and stirred her fire into a quick blaze.

All this time the Indian woman had not spoken to Mollie, nor had she appeared to know that anyone else was near.

Mollie had followed Eunice into the wigwam and knelt by her side. The child moved restlessly. Mollie leaned over her and unfastened her dress. Around Eunice’s neck was an amulet of gold, each link in the chain carved with curious Indian characters. At the end of the amulet, on a square of beaten gold about an inch in size, was a monogram in English lettering. Mollie had only time to see that the letters, looked like E. L. or E. S. She could not tell which, for the Indian squaw was back in the room, scowling at her.

As the grandmother tore the bandage from the little Indian girl’s arm and washed the wound with her healing herbs, Mollie saw that under the clothing, the child’s skin was several shades fairer.

At last the Indian woman rose up from her knees. “Let them come,” she requested of Naki. “Let those who linger in the bushes outside my wigwam draw near to it. But beware how they cross the threshold of my tent!”

The squaw stood at her own door, waiting to speak to the girls and Reginald Latham, as they drew near. “You have injured my child!” she said bitterly. “Even in times of peace no Indian seems safe before the bullets of the white man.”

Bab colored deeply. “I am dreadfully sorry!” she declared. “It was I who hurt

your grandchild. Naki has told you what happened. How could we know she was hiding near us? But, now that I have hurt her, you must at least let us do what we can for her. Naki shall go down the hill and send a doctor up here to look at Eunice's arm."

"Ugh!" grunted the squaw. "An Indian has no need of the white man's doctor. I shall tend my child. Begone, all of you!"

Reginald Latham moved back a few paces; but Bab, Grace and Ruth did not stir.

"Naki," Ruth gave her order quietly, "go down the hill at once and see that a doctor comes up to look at this child's arm. An Indian's treatment for a bullet wound may be a good one. I do not know. But I do know I am not willing that this child should not see a doctor. Bab and I would feel responsible all our lives if anything serious resulted from this accident. Go immediately, Naki," Ruth ended. She was her father's daughter. Though she seldom asserted her authority, there were times when she insisted on obedience.

"We want no doctor here," the Indian woman repeated, rocking back and forth. "No good comes to the Indian from his white neighbors. Therefore, have I tried to keep my child away from them."

But Eunice's voice was heard calling inside the tent.

"Let the ladies come in, grandmother. I wish to have a talk with them."

Sullenly the old woman moved aside and let the girls and Reginald Latham enter the wigwam.

"Little brown one," Eunice cried, smiling at Bab, "you would be almost as brown as I am, if you lived always in the woods. Do not be so sorry that you hurt my arm. It was my fault, not yours. I should not have been in hiding. I disobeyed the commands of my grandmother. See, I am better. She will not let a white doctor look at me, perhaps, because my skin is too fair for an Indian."

"Mr. Latham," Bab turned to Reginald, who had not spoken. He was looking curiously at the furnishings of the wigwam, at the Indian squaw and at Eunice. He did not hear Bab.

"Mr. Latham!" Bab called more distinctly, "can't you persuade——"

A curious guttural noise interrupted her. The old Indian woman's eyes were blazing. She had seized a pine stick in her hand and held it over Reginald Latham's head. "Out of my wigwam! Shall your name forever sound in my ears? Am I not safe in my own house? Out with you!"

Reginald Latham had not waited before the old woman's wrath. He was already several yards down the hill.

The girls were thunderstruck. Why had the name of Latham fired this old squaw to such a burst of fury?

"Come on, Ruth," said Grace, finally. "Let us go back home. We shall do no good by staying here. I suppose we can find our way home! The old Indian woman seems dreadfully upset, and our staying can only make matters worse. Naki will bring the doctor and attend to everything. Then he will let you know about Eunice."

"I think we had better go," Mollie agreed. "I know it will be best for Eunice." She kissed the little Indian girl good-bye. "Tell your grandmother," Mollie explained, "that Mr. Latham had nothing to do with the injury to you. She may have thought he was responsible."

"I told you," whispered Eunice in Mollie's ear, "the name of Latham must not be mentioned in my house. When I first learned to read I found it written in an old book that told only the story of the Indian races. My grandmother tore it from my hand and threw it into the fire, and said I must never hear that English name again."

"Oh!" Mollie faltered. "I remember you did say something about this to me, the first time I saw you, but I did not think about it. I do not understand it now. But never mind. Good-bye."

"The Automobile Girls" joined Reginald Latham farther down the hill.

"What a crazy old thing that Indian woman is!" he muttered, laughing nervously. "She was only making a scene. She never heard the name of Latham before in her life."

"I wonder if that is true?" pondered Mollie to herself all the way back to their cabin.

CHAPTER XIV

GIVE WAY TO MISS SALLIE!

“Aunt Sallie,” declared Ruth mournfully about two o’clock the next day, “we are in great trouble!”

“My dear child, what is the matter now?” demanded Miss Stuart.

“Well,” continued Ruth, “you remember about the little Indian girl whom Bab accidentally shot yesterday? Naki has come back from a visit to her and says she is very ill. He found the doctor there, who says he won’t answer for the child’s life unless she is taken to a hospital in the village, where he can see her often, and where she can have the proper care. The doctor told Naki we waited too long yesterday to send for him. He had to probe Eunice’s arm to get out the bullet. But she will be all right if she is only properly looked after.”

“Then,” declared Miss Sallie, “the matter is a very simple one. Have Naki see to it. The child must be taken to a hospital in Lenox at once. Everything shall be done for her comfort.”

“Indeed, auntie, this is not such a simple matter to attend to as it seems. The Indian grandmother positively refuses to let Eunice be moved. She has kept the child hidden in these hills all her life, until she believes Eunice will be eaten up, or run away with, if once she allows her to go among white people.”

“Nonsense!” sniffed Miss Sallie.

“It is all very well for you to say nonsense, Aunt Sallie, but you do not dream how obstinate this old woman is. She declares an Indian does not need treatment from a doctor. In the meantime, poor little Eunice’s temperature is going up, and she is delirious from the fever. What shall we do? Poor Bab is feeling perfectly miserable.”

“Take me to this obstinate old woman,” said Miss Stuart, firmly.

“You?” cried Ruth, in astonishment.

“Certainly!” answered Aunt Sallie. “I *said*, ‘*take me*.’”

“But, auntie, you will so hate the climb up that trail,” Ruth argued. “And the wigwam is dreadful after you get there. Only the little Indian girl is exquisite, like a flower growing in some horrid place. I don’t believe you will ever be equal to the trip.”

“Ruth,” insisted Miss Stuart in stately tones, “since I have thrown in my fortunes as chaperon to ‘The Automobile Girls’ I have had many strange adventures. Doubtless I shall have many others. Persuading an obstinate woman to do what is best for the child she loves is not an impossible task. It does not matter in the least whether the woman is white or an Indian. Tell Naki to take me to the wigwam at once.”

“Aunt Sallie, you are an angel!” cried Ruth, throwing her arms around her aunt. “Now, Bab, don’t you worry any more,” she called into the next room.

“Aunt Sallie does not know what she promises!” said Barbara, joining Ruth and her aunt.

“Just let’s leave her alone, Bab,” whispered Ruth. “We will go along with her to see Eunice. I think I am counting on my Aunt Sallie to win.”

Miss Stuart paused to draw one deep breath, when she finally reached the Indian woman’s wigwam. Then she quietly entered the tent and walked over to Eunice’s bedside. Crouched on the floor by the child was the old Indian squaw, who did not even lift her eyes to look at Miss Sallie.

Eunice was lying on her cedar bed, with her cheeks the color of the scarlet leaves that once crowned her black hair.

“How do you do?” asked Miss Stuart politely, bowing to the Indian woman. As Miss Sallie put her soft hand on Eunice’s hot head, the child stopped her restless movements for a second. The grandmother looked up.

“Your little girl is very ill!” Miss Stuart continued quietly. “I have come to see that she has proper care. She must be taken to a hospital at once. Naki will see to the arrangements. The doctor says the child must be moved to-day.”

The Indian woman shook her head. “The child shall not leave my wigwam!” she declared, obstinately.

“Listen to me!” commanded Miss Stuart, quietly. Ruth and Barbara stood near her, trembling with excitement. “We mean no harm to your little girl. Naki will explain matters to you. But she must be properly looked after. You are too old to

attend to her, and your wigwam is not a fit place. You declare your Eunice shall not go away from you even for a little time." Miss Sallie spoke slowly and impressively. "If you do not allow the child to go away, now, for a short time, so that the doctor can make her well for you, she will leave you forever!"

But still the Indian woman muttered: "My child shall not leave my wigwam. Indians have no need for white men's doctors."

"You are alone, aren't you?" inquired Miss Stuart, gently. "Are not you and your grandchild the last of your race? Perhaps, if you had allowed it, the doctors might have kept other members of your family for you."

The Indian woman shivered. Miss Stuart had touched some chord in her memory. She raised her black eyes to Miss Sallie and spoke mournfully. "You are right!" she asserted. "My grandchild and I are the last of a great race. I am very old and I am now afraid. Let your white medicine man make my Eunice well again. But I must follow where the child goes. Down in the village they will steal her from me."

"Why, who would wish to steal her from you?" inquired Miss Stuart.

The old woman mumbled. "An enemy came to my door but yesterday." Then a look of cunning crossed her face. She spoke childishly. "The lady is wise!" she declared. "Who could wish to steal a poor little Indian girl? Who in all this world has a claim on her but her poor old grandmother? Enough has been said. An Indian does not like too much talk. The child and I will go down into the valley to ask the service of the white doctor. Naki is my friend. I will do as he says. An Indian can keep a secret. Naki has long known that my child and I lived on this hilltop, but he has not betrayed us. He has not even told his own wife. An Indian can keep a secret." The old woman rocked back and forth as though well pleased with herself.

"Keep whatever secrets you will!" Miss Sallie replied. "It is enough that you will permit the child to have proper care."

"Girls!" Miss Stuart spoke from the depth of the largest chair in the living room of their log cabin. It was nearly dusk and she was worn out from her long walk to the Indian wigwam. "Girls, I want to ask you something."

"Attention, girls!" cried Bab. "What is it, Miss Sallie?"

"What do you say," continued Miss Stuart, "to our going back to civilization? We have had a beautiful time on our hill. I, for one, shall long remember it. But the days are growing shorter. If we are to enjoy Lenox, and all the delights it

offers, don’t you think it is about time we were moving there? To tell you the truth, I have already engaged our board at the hotel.”

“Well then, Aunt Sallie, we have no choice in the matter, have we?” asked Ruth, ruefully. “I want to enjoy Lenox, too, but I do so hate to leave this heavenly hill.”

“I vote for Lenox with Aunt Sallie!” Grace exclaimed.

“Sensible Grace!” Miss Stuart murmured.

“See here, Ruth, dear,” protested Grace, “please don’t look as if you were offended with me. We have had a simply perfect time in the log cabin, but I am just longing to see the lovely places down in Lenox, and to meet the delightful people.”

“Ruth,” Barbara spoke sadly, “I, too, want to go down into Lenox now. If Eunice is to be laid up in the hospital I want to be near her, so I can find out how she is each day. I shall never be happy again until I know she is well.”

Mollie put her arm round her sister. “Don’t you worry so, Bab, dear,” she pleaded. “I don’t believe your shooting poor little Eunice in the arm is going to do her harm in the end. Poor little thing! It was simply dreadful for her to have to spend all her time with her old Indian grandmother. She never had a chance to see anybody, or to learn anything. She was simply sick for companions of her own age. That is why she was always haunting our cabin. I don’t believe Eunice is more than part Indian, anyway!” Mollie ended impressively. “I’ve a feeling that we shall do her more good, in the end, from this accident than we have done her harm.”

“You are a dear!” cried Bab, already comforted by her sister’s prophecy.

“You are all against me!” quoth Ruth, rising. “I surrender, as usual, to my beloved aunt. I want to go to Lenox, but—I want to be here on the hill, too. So runs the world. We can’t manage to have all the things we want at the same time; so hurrah for Lenox and the gay world again! Come here to the door with me, children. Let us say farewell to our sweet hillside!”

The girls stood arm in arm on their front porch. The evening wind swept up the hill and rustled through the pines. The brook near their house hurried down the slope into the valley as though it were late for a night’s engagement.

“Ruth,” Barbara declared solemnly, “whatever happens to ‘The Automobile Girls,’ one thing is certain, nothing can ever be lovelier than the weeks we have

spent together on this beautiful hill. Let us kiss all around. Call Aunt Sallie. She must be a party to the agreement. We will never forget our little log cabin—never, no, never, in all our lives."

CHAPTER XV

SOCIETY IN LENOX

“Miss Sallie, is Lenox the oldest summer resort in the United States?” inquired Barbara, as they sat on a private veranda which opened into their own sitting-room, in the most beautiful hotel in Lenox.

“I am sure I don’t know, Bab, dear,” Miss Sallie answered complacently. “I think modern Lenox has been transformed by the wealth that has come into the place in the last fifty years. I am told that it once had more literary associations than any other town in the country. As Ruth tells me you are ambitious to become a writer some day, this will interest you. You girls must go about, while you are here, and see all the sights.”

Barbara blushed and changed the subject. She did not like to talk of her literary ambitions.

“Ruth and Mollie are late in getting back, aren’t they?” she asked. “You know they have gone over in the automobile to inquire for Eunice. I hope they will be back in time for tea. Did Ruth remember to tell you that the British Ambassador’s daughters, Dorothy and Gwendolin Morton, are coming in to tea? And perhaps Mr. Winthrop Latham and Reginald Latham will be here also.”

Miss Sallie nodded. “Yes; I am expecting them,” she declared. “It is most kind of them to call on us so promptly. I was afraid we would know no one in Lenox, as I have no acquaintances here. I did not expect you and little Mollie to pull friends down from the sky for us, as you seem to have done by your rescue of Mr. Latham and his nephew. What a strange thing life is!”

“Do you know, Miss Sallie,” Barbara continued, “it seems awfully funny for Mollie and me to to be associating with such important people as the daughters of the English Ambassador. I am even impressed with that funny little German Secretary, Franz Heller, just because he is attached to the German Embassy. It makes me feel as though I were a character in a book, to even meet such clever people. Dear me, what a lot you and Ruth have done for us!”

“Barbara, dear,” replied Miss Stuart, kindly, “we have not done much more for you than you girls have done for us in a different way. True, through my brother, we happened to have the money to pay for our good times; but poor Ruth and I couldn’t have had those good times without the other three ‘Automobile Girls.’ How is Grace’s headache? Will she be able to see our friends this afternoon?”

“Shall I ask her?” Bab suggested, going in to the bedroom through the French window which opened onto their porch.

She came out, shaking her head. “Grace is not well enough to get up yet,” she explained. “She says she may be able to join us for a few minutes when our guests arrive; but you are not to worry. Her headache is better.”

“Shall we have tea out on our veranda, Barbara?” Miss Sallie asked. “I cannot tear myself away from this view. How exquisite the lake looks down between those mountains. And what is the name of that hill over there? Oh, yes, I know you girls have told me the name of it many times before, but as I cannot remember it, you will probably have to tell it to me repeatedly. Monument Mountain, did you say? Oh, I recall the story now. An Indian girl is supposed to have flung herself off of it on account of some love affair. Curious people the Indians,” she continued. “Do you know, Bab, I am much interested in our little Indian girl? She is a very beautiful child, and her race is not usually beautiful. I don’t understand the girl looking as she does. I shall go to the hospital with you to see her soon. Now, hurry along, child, and order the tea.” Miss Sallie paused for an instant. “And tell the waiter to see that the service is good. English people are so particular about their tea!”

Barbara was back from her errand just in time to see a pony carriage drive up in front of the hotel. She went forward to meet their guests, sighing a little to herself. “I do wish Ruth and Mollie would come. I am sure I shan’t know how to talk to these English girls by myself. I hardly spoke to them the night of our famous coon hunt.”

Gwendolin and Dorothy Morton came half shyly forward. They were tall, willowy girls, with soft, brown hair and lovely complexions.

“I know why English girls are thought to look like roses,” flashed through Bab’s mind. “These girls are just like roses bending from long stems.” Barbara came forward, speaking in her usual frank fashion. “I am so glad to see you,” she declared. “Will you come to our little private balcony? If it is not too cold for you, Miss Stuart wishes to have tea out there.”

Gwendolin and Dorothy Morton followed Bab in silence. As English girls do not

talk so much as American girls on first acquaintance, Barbara felt compelled to keep up the conversation.

“I am ever so sorry,” she went on; “but my friend, Ruth Stuart, and my sister, Mollie, are not yet back from the hospital. They have gone to ask about our little Indian girl.”

“Your little Indian girl!” exclaimed Dorothy Morton, surprised into talking. “Why, what do you mean?”

Bab glanced back over her shoulder as the three girls started into the hotel. “There come Ruth and Mollie now!” she exclaimed. “They can tell you about our little Eunice better than lean.”

A crimson motor car was speeding up the avenue.

“How well Miss Stuart drives her car!” laughed Gwendolin Morton. “But she will have to be very careful; the road laws are very strict in Lenox. I must tell her that, if she is arrested, she will surely be taken to prison. I don’t know how to drive a car. My sister and I are more fond of horses. Do you ride, Miss Thurston?”

Barbara colored. She wondered what these wealthy English girls would think of the kind of riding to which she had been accustomed. An old bareback horse, a Texas pony, once even a mule had been Barbara’s steeds. So she answered shyly: “Yes, I do ride a little. But, of course, I don’t ride in the beautiful way I know you and your sister do.”

“We are very anxious to have you and your friends take part in our autumn sports at Lenox,” urged Dorothy Morton.

Barbara and the two English girls were waiting at the hotel door for Ruth and Mollie.

In another moment Ruth jumped from her car, and, followed by Mollie, came hurrying up to her guests.

“I am so sorry not to be here when you arrived,” she explained. “We just flew home. I was afraid of being held up every minute. But we were kept waiting so long at the hospital that I knew we were late. Do let’s join Aunt Sallie. She will grow impatient.”

Miss Stuart came forward from her veranda into their private sitting-room. “I am so glad to see you,” she said to the two English girls.

“And we are delighted to be your first guests, Miss Stuart,” said Gwendolin, who was the elder of the two girls. “Mr. Heller wishes to come in and pay his respects to you later, and I believe Mr. Winthrop Latham and his nephew are on their way now. We passed them as we drove here.”

“Aunt Sallie,” Ruth spoke softly a few moments later, when she thought no one was listening, “little Eunice is better. But Naki had to take her to the hospital at Pittsfield. He could not find a place for her here. Fortunately, Pittsfield is only a few miles from Lenox over a simply perfect road, so we shan’t mind going back and forth in the car. Naki and Ceally are keeping the poor old Indian grandmother with them. Ceally says she seems subdued and frightened.”

Ruth turned rosy red. From the silence in the room she knew her guests were hearing what she said. “I beg your pardon,” she explained, turning to Dorothy Morton, who was nearest her. “Please forgive my bad manners. We are so interested in our new protégée that I forget that you know nothing of her.”

“But we should like to know, awfully!” Dorothy declared. “Who is this Indian girl? I thought all the Indians had vanished from the Berkshires.”

But Mr. Winthrop Latham and his nephew Reginald were at the door.

Behind them was a plump little German, with blond hair parted in the middle, a tiny waxed mustache and near-sighted blue eyes. He was Franz Heller, the Secretary at the German Embassy. He could usually be found somewhere in the neighborhood of Gwendolin Morton.

Reginald Latham came up to Bab and sat down next her.

“Please,” he whispered immediately, “do not speak of the little Indian girl before my uncle.”

“Why not?” queried Bab, in astonishment.

“I can’t explain to you now!” Reginald faltered. His uncle’s eyes were fastened on him.

Miss Stuart announcing that tea was waiting on the balcony, the little party adjourned to the veranda and stood talking and admiring the view. It was a wonderful, clear October day, radiant with warm sunshine.

Mr. Winthrop Latham stood near Miss Stuart, assisting her to serve the tea. The young people were talking in a group near them.

“I say, Ruth!” exclaimed Dorothy Morton. “Forgive my calling you Ruth so

early in our acquaintance, but if I call you Miss Stuart, your aunt may think I am speaking to her. Do please tell us about the mysterious little Indian girl, who is your protégée. Where did you find her?”

Reginald Latham, who was near Barbara, broke into the conversation.

“Tell Miss Stuart about our fall sports, Dorothy!” he urged.

“Tell me of them afterwards,” said Dorothy. “I must hear about this Indian child first.”

“Well, the story of our little Indian girl is a long and rather odd one,” Ruth asserted. “As she is really Mollie’s discovery, not mine, Mollie must tell you about her.”

Mollie was embarrassed at suddenly finding herself the center of so many eyes.

Mr. Winthrop Latham had turned around, and was also watching her. He had caught Ruth’s last speech.

“Why,” confessed Mollie, “the story of our little Indian girl is simple enough, but it is very strange.”

The little girl paused. Reginald Latham’s eyes were fixed on her in a strange gaze; but she had started to tell her tale and must go on. Mollie looked over at Aunt Sallie, and the latter nodded her approval.

Quietly Mollie told of her wood nymph first leading her astray on the mountain; of Eunice’s visit to her, next day, and of Bab’s accidental shooting of the child afterwards.

“I don’t think our discovery of the little Indian girl was so odd,” said Mollie. “What I think is strange is that no one around here ever knew of her before. Just think, Eunice is thirteen or fourteen years old and she has been kept hidden in these hills by her old Indian grandmother all her life. She had never been to a town until she was taken to the hospital by our guide, Naki. Yet she is so pretty and gentle. I love her already.” The little girl had a queer feeling as if she were defending Eunice—she did not know why.

A voice broke into the conversation. “You say, my dear”—Mr. Latham spoke sternly—“that you and your friends have found an old Indian woman and a child called Eunice hidden in the woods back of you? The thing is impossible. The old woman and the girl are probably gypsies or tramps. They cannot be Indians. I have reason to know the history of the Indians in this part of the country very well. My eldest brother married an Indian girl. She was the last of her people in

this vicinity, and she died about fifteen years ago."

Mollie did not answer. A sudden silence fell upon the little group.

Barbara looked at Reginald. She understood, now, why he was often afraid of his uncle. The older man would not endure contradiction.

"Reginald, we must say good-bye to Miss Stuart," his uncle commanded.

"Don't go just yet, Mr. Latham," pleaded Gwendolin Morton. "You promised to help me explain to Miss Stuart the plan for our day of sports. You see, Miss Stuart, every season at Lenox we have an annual entertainment for the benefit of our hospital fund. This year father is to take charge of the sports, which we try to make just as informal and jolly as possible. One of the reasons for my call was to ask you to let your girls help us out with our amusements. As soon as I told my father we had met some delightful American girls who were camping near here, he suggested that we invite them to join in our sports. We intend to have some really good riding; but the other games are only jokes. Did you ever hear of a dummy race or a thread-and-needle race?"

Miss Stuart shook her head, smilingly, as she said, "Miss Morton, I don't even try to keep up with the ways young people have of entertaining themselves these days; but I am sure, whatever your Lenox sports may be, my 'Automobile Girls' will be happy to take part in them."

"That's awfully jolly of you, Miss Stuart!" declared Dorothy Morton, who was the younger and more informal of the English girls. She turned to Ruth.

"Won't you come in and have a game of archery with us to-morrow afternoon? Father and mother will both be at home. We can tell you all of our plans for next week."

"We'll be happy to come," laughed Ruth, "but none of us know how to use the bow. That is an English game, isn't it? We shall be delighted to look on."

"Oh, archery is all the rage at Lenox," little Mr. Heller explained. "Perhaps you will let me show your friends how to shoot."

Ruth shook her head. "We shall have plenty to learn if we are to take part in your queer races next week. If my friend, Miss Carter, is better to-morrow you may expect us."

Grace came out on the porch. "I am well, already!" she apologized. "At least I decided that, headache or no headache, I couldn't miss all the fun this afternoon. So here I am!"

“Now, we must positively say good-bye, Miss Stuart,” declared Mr. Latham, extending his hand. “I want to take you and your girls for a drive to Lake Queechy. Then you must see the place where the Hawthorne’s ‘little red house’ formerly stood. The house burned down some years ago, but the site is interesting, for Hawthorne lived in the Berkshires a number of years and wrote ‘The House of Seven Gables’ here. We have plenty of literary associations, Miss Stuart. My people have lived here so long that I take a deep interest in the history of the place.”

“Lake Queechy,” Miss Sallie exclaimed sentimentally, “is the lake named for Susan Warner, the author of ‘Queechy’ and ‘The Wide, Wide World.’ Dear me, I shed quantities of tears over those books in my day. But girls don’t care for such weepy books nowadays, do they? They want more fire and adventure. I am sure I should be ashamed of my ‘Automobile Girls’ if they fell to crying in the face of an obstacle. They prefer to overcome it. We shall be delighted to drive with you. Good-bye!”

“Curious, Reginald!” declared Mr. Winthrop Latham, when the two men had walked several yards from the hotel in silence. “That is a very remarkable story that your friends tell of the discovery of an unknown Indian child. Did they call her Eunice? That is strangest of all! You have been up on the hill with these girls a number of times. Have you seen this girl?”

Reginald mumbled something. It was not audible. But his uncle understood he had not seen the girl.

“Oh, well, the old woman is probably a gypsy tramp,” Mr. Latham concluded, “but I will look up the child, some day, for my own satisfaction. Reg, boy, the rudder of our airship will be repaired in the next few days. Do you feel equal to another aerial flight?”

“Most assuredly I do,” the nephew replied. The two men walked on. But, for once, they were not thinking of their favorite hobby. The mind of each man dwelt upon Mollie’s story of a poor little Indian girl. What connection could she have with these two men of wealth and position?

Reginald Latham’s suspicions were growing. The Indian girl might be an obstacle in his path.

“I must tell mother all I have heard and guessed,” he reflected. “Under no circumstances must uncle be allowed to see this child. Mother will know how to manage. We may have to spirit the girl away, if she is the child I fear she is. But we must make sure.”

Reginald Latham was not a pleasant man, but he was clever. If he had reason to fear little Eunice he would work quietly. What chance had the child and her ignorant, uncivilized grandmother against him?

Mr. Winthrop Latham's thoughts were of a different kind. "The young Indian girl," he assured himself, "can have no further possible interest for me."

CHAPTER XVI

AT THE AMBASSADOR'S

"Shall we walk down to the postoffice, Ruth?" Barbara asked. "I am awfully anxious for a letter from mother."

"Let's all go!" urged Grace. "We have just time enough before dressing for our call at the Ambassador's. I am told that everyone goes for his own letters in Lenox. We shall see all the social lights. They say titled foreigners line up in front of the Lenox postoffice to look for heiresses. Ruth, you are our only heiress. Here's a chance for you!" teased Grace.

Ruth looked provoked. "I won't be called horrid names, Grace Carter!" she asserted, indignantly. "Heiress or no heiress, when my turn comes for a husband I won't look at any old foreigner. A good American citizen will be a fine enough husband for me!"

"Hear! hear!" laughed Mollie, putting on her hat. "Don't let us quarrel over Ruth's prospective husband just at present. It reminds me of the old maid who shed tears before the pot of boiling fat. When her neighbor inquired what troubled her, the spinster said she was thinking that if she had ever been married her child might have played in the kitchen, and might have fallen into the pot of boiling oil! Come on, 'old maid Ruth,' let's be off."

The girls walked briskly through the bracing mountain air.

"I expect you will have a letter from Hugh or Ralph, Ruth," Barbara suggested. "They told you they would write you if they could come to Lenox for the week of games."

Ruth went into the postoffice to inquire for their mail. The other girls waited on the outside. A tall young woman swept by them, leading a beautiful English deerhound on a long silver chain. She had very blond hair and light blue eyes. Her glance rested on Barbara for the space of half a second.

"Dear me!" Barbara laughed. "How very young and insignificant that intensely

superior person makes me feel! Maybe she is one of the heiresses Grace told us about."

"Here is a letter for you, Grace!" said Ruth, returning to her friends. "The one addressed to you, Bab, is probably for you and Mollie together. It is from your mother. Then I have two letters for myself and two for Aunt Sallie. It is all right; Hugh and Ralph will be here the first thing next week," announced Ruth, tearing open one of her notes.

"What would Aunt Sallie say if she could see us opening our mail on the street?" queried Barbara, as she promptly followed Ruth's bad example. "But this is such a quiet spot, under these old elms, that I must have a peep at mother's letter. Mother is having a beautiful time in St. Paul with Cousin Betty, Molliekins," continued Bab. "And what do you think? Our queer old cousin is sending us another present. What has come over her? First she sends the beautiful silk dresses and now—but mother doesn't tell what this last gift is. She says it is to be a surprise for us when we come back from Lenox."

"What fun!" cried Mollie. "Our crabbed cousin is having a slight change of heart. She has always been dreadfully bored with Bab and me," Mollie explained to Ruth and Grace, "but she is devoted to mother, and used to want her to live with her. But she never could make up her mind to endure us girls. Tell me some more news, Bab."

"Well," Barbara read on, "mother has had a letter from Mr. Stuart; but Ruth's letter will give her this news. He writes that his new gold mine is a perfect wonder. I am so glad for you, Ruth, dear!" Barbara ended.

"Oh!" Ruth exclaimed. "Father is so lucky! But we really don't need any more money. Just think, father only has Aunt Sallie and poor me to spend it all on. If he only had a big family it would be worth while to grow richer and richer. I wish you were really my sisters. Then you would let me share some of all this money with you, Bab dear," whispered Ruth in her best friend's ear, as the two girls dropped behind Mollie and Grace.

Barbara shook her head. Yet the tears started to her eyes in spite of the fact that she was out on the street. "You generous darling!" she replied. "If you aren't sharing your money with us by giving us all these good times, what are you doing? But, of course, we couldn't take your money in any other way. Mollie and I are used to being poor. We don't mind it so very much. Let's hurry. Aunt Sallie will want us to put on our best clothes for our call at the Ambassador's. Thank goodness for Cousin Betty's present to Mollie and me of the silk suits. We

have never had such fine clothes before in our lives."

"Miss Sallie," inquired Barbara, an hour later, "will Mollie and I do for the call at the Ambassador's? You know this is the great event in our lives. Who knows but the Ambassador may even shake hands with humble me! Do Ambassadors shake hands, Aunt Sallie? Why, 'The Automobile Girls' may meet the President some day, we are getting so high in the world."

"Who knows indeed, Barbara?" responded Miss Stuart complacently. "Far more unlikely things have often happened. You and Mollie look very well, dear. Indeed, I never saw you in more becoming frocks. They are very dainty and stylish."

"Aunt Sallie," confessed Mollie, "I never had a silk dress before in all my life. Bab had one made over from an old one of mother's, but this is positively my first appearance 'in silk attire.'"

Bab's costume was of apricot rajah silk, made with a plaited skirt and a long coat, which fastened across her chest with a single gilt ornament. With it she wore a delicate lace blouse over silk of the same shade as her suit. Her hat was a large black chip with one long curling feather.

Mollie's dress was like Bab's, except that it was a delicate shade of robin's-egg blue, while her hat was of soft white felt, trimmed with a long blue feather.

"Let us look at ourselves in the mirror, Bab, until Miss Sallie is ready," whispered Mollie. "I want to try to get used to my appearance. Maybe you think this wealthy-looking person you now behold is some relative of yours—possibly your sister! But just understand that, as I look at myself in that mirror, nothing can make me believe I am poor little Mollie Thurston, of Kingsbridge, New Jersey! Why, I am now about to call on the English Ambassador, younger brother to an earl. But I am a brave girl. I shall put on as bold a front as possible, and I shall try not to disgrace Aunt Sallie by making any breaks."

"You goose you!" laughed Bab. "But to tell you the truth, sweet Mistress Mollie, I feel pretty much as you do. There is Ruth calling us. They are ready to start."

"Come on, children!" cried Ruth. "The automobile is waiting. My goodness!" she exclaimed, as Mollie and Bab appeared before her. "How very elegant you look! Don't tell me fine feathers don't make fine-looking birds! Aunt Sallie, I am not magnificent enough to associate with these two persons." Ruth had on a beautiful white serge suit and Grace a long tan coat over a light silk dress; but, for the first time, Mollie and Barbara were the most elegantly dressed of the four

girls.

“People will be taking *you* for the heiress, and marrying you to some horrid titled foreigner!” teased Ruth, pinching Mollie’s pretty cheek.

Miss Stuart and her girls found the English Ambassador and his wife in the stately drawing room of their summer place in Lenox. The room was sixty feet in length and hung with beautiful paintings. The walls and furniture were upholstered in rose-colored brocade. Flowers were arranged in every possible place.

The newcomers had a confused feeling that there were twenty or thirty guests in the drawing room; but as the butler announced their names their hostess moved forward from a group of friends to speak to them. In another moment Dorothy Morton spied them, and came up with her arm through that of a tall, middle-aged man, very slender, with closely cut blond hair and a long drooping mustache. He looked very intellectual and impressive.

“Miss Stuart, this is my father,” said Dorothy simply. The Ambassador bowed low over Miss Stuart’s hand. He was then introduced to each of “The Automobile Girls” in turn.

The Ambassador’s eyes twinkled. He saw his young guests were a little awed at meeting so great a diplomatic personage.

“You are the girls, aren’t you, who have been camping on one of our Berkshire hills?” the Ambassador inquired. “My daughters have told me about your delightful hut. Curious, I never heard of the little cabin’s existence. I want you to show me the place. Some day I may follow your example and run away to the woods for a few weeks. Dorothy tells me you will help us with our games next week.”

Miss Stuart excused herself. Mrs. Latham wished to talk with her in another part of the drawing room.

“May we count on you for the Gymkana races, Ruth?” asked Dorothy Morton.

“Gymkana races!” questioned Ruth, shaking her head. “What in the world can you mean?”

“Remember,” laughed her hostess, “I told you our sports were to be a huge joke. You must have a sense of humor, or you won’t want to take part. You know we have horse show grounds here in Lenox. Well, the Gymkana race this year will take place over their meadow. Indeed, all the sports are to be held there. Father,

you explain what the games are like," Dorothy requested.

The Ambassador looked very grave.

"Miss Stuart," he asked, "will you or your friends drive a turkey, a duck, a hen, or a gander in our Gymkana race? My daughter, Dorothy, has, I believe, reserved an old gray goose as her especial steed; but you can make any other choice of racer that you may desire. The only point of the game is to get the nose of your steed first under the blue ribbon. It may take a good deal of racing and chasing on your own part to accomplish it."

Dorothy inquired, turning first to Ruth, then to Bab, Mollie and Grace, "May I put down your names for this race?"

Ruth laughed. "Certainly I shall enter," she declared. "I have as good a nerve as anyone else. You must give me time to decide on what animal I shall drive."

"I'll join, too!" Grace agreed. "Is this game for women only?"

"Yes," Dorothy replied. "Other distinguished sports are reserved for the men. What do you think of my serious-minded father? He is down for the 'egg and spoon' race. So are Franz Heller and Mr. Winthrop Latham. I mean to ask your two men friends, Mr. Post and Mr. Ewing, to enter, too. It's great sport. The men have to run across the track carrying a raw egg in a desert spoon. The man who first gets to the winning post without a mishap is the winner. But there will be other games as well. I am just mentioning a few of them."

Gwendolin Morton approached with Franz Heller and the tall blond girl whom "The Automobile Girls" had seen for a moment at the postoffice.

"We have to come to believe in the American fashion of introducing our friends," declared Miss Morton. "You know, in England it is not the custom to introduce people to one another at a tea party. May I present my friend, Maud Warren, to you, Miss Stuart, Miss Carter, and the Misses Thurston."

The four girls bowed. Maud Warren inclined her head slightly, giving each girl in turn a supercilious stare.

"I suppose father and Dorothy have been persuading you to take part in the nonsensical side of our entertainment next week," inquired Gwendolin. "I am trying to look after the riding. Do any of you ride horseback well enough to go in for the hurdle jumping? I warn you, you will find it difficult to win. Miss Warren is one of the best riders in New York. She has taken prizes at hurdle jumping before, at her riding school."

Ruth declined. “I am afraid no one of us rides well enough to go in for this contest. I ride, of course, but I am not equal to the jumping.”

Ruth spied Barbara looking at her with longing eyes.

“I beg your pardon, Bab!” Ruth laughed. “I had no right to decline the hurdle jumping for all of us. Would you like to try?”

“Of course, I should like to try!” Barbara exclaimed. “But I know it is out of the question. I have no horse, and I haven’t a riding habit here.” Barbara turned shyly to the Ambassador. “I have never done any real hurdle jumping,” she explained. “But I have jumped over all kinds of fences riding through the country.”

The Ambassador smiled. “You need no better training for hurdle races,” he replied.

“If a horse is what you need,” cried Dorothy Morton, “why not use one from our stables. We have a number of riding horses. Do let me lend you one and enter the hurdle jumping contest. It is a dangerous amusement, however. I won’t try it.”

“Oh, I am not in the least afraid,” Bab declared. “Only, if I am left at the post, and can’t take a single hurdle, you must forgive me.”

“Well, you understand,” finished the Ambassador, “our amusements are only for our own friends.”

“Come here, Mollie,” called Miss Stuart, from her corner of the room, where she was seated near Mrs. Latham.

“Mollie,” explained Miss Sallie, as the child approached, “Mrs. Latham is much interested in our little Indian girl. Her son, Reginald, has told her of the accident to Eunice. Mrs. Latham is anxious to know to what hospital in Pittsfield Naki has taken the child. I did not ask Ruth. Can you tell us the name?”

Mollie looked at Mrs. Latham steadily. The older woman dropped her eyes. “Eunice is not yet allowed to see visitors,” she answered.

“Oh, I have no wish to call on the child,” Mrs. Latham protested, “but if the Indian girl and her old grandmother are in want I shall send a man to look after them. My brother is most generous to the poor, Miss Stuart.”

But Mollie went on. “Thank you, Mrs. Latham, but Eunice and her grandmother are not poor. Ruth is looking after them now. The grandmother wishes to take Eunice back to their wigwam on the hill, when the little girl is well enough to be

moved."

Mrs. Latham frowned. She had her own reasons for wishing to discover the address of the Indian woman and her child. Yet she did not want to appear to be much interested.

Barbara came up to join Mollie.

"Your sister seems determined that no one shall take interest in your little Indian protégée except her own friends," declared Mrs. Latham, smiling at Bab. "Perhaps you would not object to telling me where the child is located."

"Why certainly not!" Barbara exclaimed frankly, looking in surprise at Mollie.

But Mollie interrupted her. The little girl's cheeks were burning hot. She was conscious of her own bad manners, and of Miss Stuart's look of disappointment. Yet she spoke before Bab could continue.

"I am sorry for Mrs. Latham to think I am rude in not telling her where Eunice is staying; but it seems to me that, if her old Indian grandmother has kept Eunice hidden all these years, she must have had some good reason. It does not seem fair to me for us to talk about her just because, through an accident, we had to send her to town. I think, if the grandmother wishes to keep Eunice hidden, we ought at least to ask the old woman's permission before we tell anyone where she is staying. I am awfully sorry," Mollie ended, apologetically, "but I do feel that I am right."

Mrs. Latham was very angry. "I am sure I beg your pardon, Miss Thurston," she rejoined icily, before she moved away. "I meant nothing by my harmless inquiry. I can assure you I am not unduly interested in your protégée. If you wish to keep the gypsy girl's hiding place a secret, do so, by all means."

"Mollie, I am exceedingly angry with you!" said Miss Sallie.

"How could you be so horrid, Mollie?" whispered Bab.

Mollie's blue eyes were swimming in tears, but she would not let them fall on her flushed cheeks. She knew she must say good-bye to her new acquaintances, so she dared not answer Miss Sallie then.

But on the way back to their hotel, seated next Miss Stuart in the automobile, Mollie tried to offer an explanation for her rude behavior.

"Miss Sallie," she pleaded softly, "I know you are dreadfully angry with me; and I am afraid you won't forgive me; but I just couldn't make up my mind to let

Mrs. Latham know where to find Eunice and her old grandmother. I know you will think I am foolish. Perhaps I am. But I have a feeling that Reginald Latham and his mother mean no good to Eunice. I can't help remembering how the old squaw acted when she first heard the name of Latham. I cannot believe she was just acting for effect as Reginald Latham said she was. There is some mystery about little Eunice. Do you think, Miss Sallie, we girls have a right to betray the old Indian woman's secrets?"

"My sympathies are all with Mollie, Aunt Sallie!" Ruth declared. "I shall have to come in for a share of her scolding."

But Barbara shook her head. "I never knew anyone so prejudiced as Mollie is against Reginald Latham. What on earth do you suppose he and his mother could have against a poor old squaw and her little girl? Would you have helped pulled Reginald down out of his airship, if you had known how you would dislike him, Mollie?" Bab asked.

But Mollie was looking wistfully at Miss Sallie, and did not heed Barbara's question.

"I don't care what a young girl may think on any subject," Miss Stuart declared firmly, "she has no right to be rude to an older woman. And Mollie was undeniably rude to Mrs. Latham in refusing to answer her simple question. It could have done no harm to have told her the name of the hospital where Eunice is being treated."

"No, it wouldn't have done Eunice any harm to tell that much, Mollie," Ruth agreed, "because, if that very determined Mrs. Latham wishes to discover where little Eunice is, she will certainly accomplish it. Why, she rules her grown-up son with a rod of iron!"

"Mark my words!" said Grace, joining quietly in the conversation—Grace was not often given to expressing an opinion, so even Miss Sallie listened to her with respect. "I would like to bet a great big box of candy that Mrs. Latham sees Eunice and her Indian grandmother before they are many weeks older. The Lathams have some connection with little Eunice, though goodness knows I can't guess what it is."

Mollie had nothing more to say. She was in the motor car now. Her tears could flow freely.

Miss Sallie pretended, for a few moments, not to see that Mollie was crying. A breach in social etiquette was a sore offense to Miss Stuart. But after a little

while she put her arm around the little girl and gave her a gentle squeeze.

“I will forgive you, this time, dear,” she murmured, “but I never want you, Mollie, to be rude to a grown person again. And I don’t think, my dear, it is a good idea to have a suspicious nature.”

“I didn’t mean to be rude,” Mollie sighed, putting her head against Miss Stuart’s arm. “I was only trying not to tell Mrs. Latham what she wanted to know.” Because it was now dark, and Mollie could not see her face, Miss Sallie smiled.

CHAPTER XVII

A VISIT TO EUNICE

“O girls, I have had the most splendiferous time!” cried Bab, bounding into the hotel sitting room. She wore Ruth’s tan colored riding habit and a little brown derby. Her curls were drawn up in a knot at the back of her head. Her brown eyes were sparkling. She pranced into the room, as though she were still on horseback.

“Miss Sallie, I never knew what horseback riding could mean until to-day. Dorothy Morton has lent me a perfect dream of a horse. Its name is Beauty. It is black and slim and has a white star on its nose. My, don’t I wish it were mine! Well, Beauty and I took our hurdles to-day, at the Ambassador’s farm, as though we had been jumping together all our lives. See, here!” Barbara vaulted lightly over a low stool, and stood in the center of the room, brandishing her riding crop.

“Barbara Thurston!” Mollie exclaimed.

“Good gracious!” protested Bab. “I didn’t dream we had a visitor. I am so sorry! I have been practising for the hurdle jumping next week,” Bab ended tamely.

A stout man, with iron gray hair and a kindly expression, smiled at Barbara.

“Oh, don’t mind my presence,” he said. “I have a daughter of my own who is fond of horseback riding.”

“Barbara,” explained Miss Stuart, “this is Doctor Lewis. He has been good enough to come over from the hospital to tell us about Eunice.”

Barbara noticed that Ruth, Grace and Mollie had been listening to the doctor with absorbed attention.

“The Indian girl has asked for her friends several times in the last few days,” the doctor continued, “but she has not been well enough to be permitted to talk. The nurses tell me the child had been most patient. They are much attracted toward

her. Now, I think it may do the little girl good to see you. Naki, your guide has explained to me the circumstances of your finding of the child. It is most remarkable. But I wonder if you are really interested in the girl, or whether you are being kind to her, now, only because of her accident?"

"Why do you ask me, doctor?" Miss Stuart inquired quietly.

"Because," the doctor answered honestly, "I am much interested in the child myself. I would like to know that she has friends. The grandmother, stupid and ignorant though she is, seems devoted to the child. As for Eunice herself, she is an enigma. She is not in the least like the grandmother. The old Indian woman is probably of mixed white and Indian blood, but the child has less Indian blood. Eunice must have had a white mother or father. I have asked the child about her parents, but she knows absolutely nothing about them, and the Indian woman will not tell. She told me, very decidedly, that it was not my business to inquire; that I was to make Eunice well after which she and her grandchild would go back to their wigwam and live in peace. But that beautiful little girl ought not to grow up in entire ignorance. She should be educated, and given an opportunity to develop."

"I agree with you, doctor," Miss Sallie rejoined, "but the case will present difficulties. The old grandmother is the child's natural guardian. She will never be persuaded to give her up."

"Doctor," declared Ruth shyly, "if it were possible I should love to educate little Eunice. I could send her to school and do whatever is best for her. But I am afraid we have no right to do it for her."

"Well, I cannot recommend kidnapping the child, Miss Ruth," the doctor replied, "but, perhaps, you girls can persuade the old Indian to be less obstinate. Come and see my little charge when you can. She is quite well enough to see you. I shall not have to keep her at the hospital a great while longer. Her arm is still bandaged. She will soon be able to walk about."

"Aunt Sallie," Ruth asked, as soon as the doctor left, "may I have Eunice up at the hotel with us, as soon as she is well enough to leave the hospital?"

Miss Sallie demurred. "I must see the child again first, Ruth, dear. She can come here for the day, but not longer. She will be best with Naki and Ceally for a time. Now, Ruth, don't be so impetuous. You must not plan impossible schemes. Remember, this Indian child is entirely uneducated. She does not know the first principles of good manners. But I am perfectly willing that you should do what seems best for her."

“When shall we go to see Eunice?” Ruth asked, turning to the other three girls.

“Oh, let us go this afternoon, please, Ruth,” pleaded Mollie.

“But Mr. Latham has asked us to go driving with him,” Barbara objected.

“Mr. Latham has only asked Aunt Sallie and one of us, Bab,” Ruth rejoined. “Suppose you go with Aunt Sallie. Reginald Latham would rather have you along. And, to tell you the truth, Grace and Mollie and I would much rather go to see Eunice.”

Mollie and Grace both nodded.

“But I don’t want to be left out of the visit to Eunice, either,” Bab protested. “Never mind,” she went on, lowering her voice; “if Reginald Latham has any connection with Eunice, see if I don’t find it out this afternoon.”

“Never, Bab!” cried Grace.

“Well, just you wait and see!” ended Mistress Barbara.

“Mollie, you go into the room to see Eunice first,” said Ruth as they reached the hospital. “Grace and I will wait outside the door. You can call us when you think we may come in. Eunice may be frightened.”

But Ruth need not have feared.

As Mollie went into her room, Eunice was sitting up in bed. Her straight black hair was neatly combed and hung over her shoulders in two heavy braids. The child had on a fresh white night gown. Already she looked fairer from the short time spent indoors.

Eunice stretched out her slim brown hands to Mollie.

“My little fair one!” she cried rapturously.

“I feared never to see you again. My grandmother told me I must return to the wigwam as soon as I am well; but I do not want to leave this pretty bed. See how white and soft it is.”

Mollie kissed Eunice.

The child looked at her curiously. “Why do you do such a strange thing to me?” asked Eunice.

Mollie was amazed. “Don’t you know what a kiss is, Eunice? I kissed you because I am fond of you.”

Eunice laughed gleefully. “Indians do not kiss,” she declared. “But I like it.”

“Shall I ask the other girls to come in?” Mollie inquired. “My two friends, Ruth and Grace, are waiting in the hall. They wish to see you.”

Eunice nodded. “I like to see you while grandmother is away,” she confided. “Grandmother says it is not wise for me to talk so much. But it is hard to be all the time so silent as the Indians are. Some days I have talked to the wild things in the woods.”

Ruth dropped a bunch of red roses on Eunice’s bed.

The child clutched them eagerly. “It is the red color that I love!” she cried in delight.

“Eunice,” Ruth asked, “do you remember your father and mother?”

Eunice shook her head. “I remember no one,” she replied. “Long ago, there was an old Indian man. He made canoes for me out of birch bark. He was my grandmother’s man—husband, I think you call him in your language.”

The three “Automobile Girls” were disappointed. Eunice could remember no associations but Indian ones. There was nothing to prove that Eunice was not an Indian except the child’s appearance.

Mollie decided to make another venture.

“Eunice,” she asked, “do you still wear the gold chain around your neck? I saw it the day you were hurt. It is so pretty I should like you to show it to my friends.”

The Indian girl looked frightened. “You will not tell my grandmother?” she pleaded. “She would be very angry if she knew I wore it. I found the pretty chain, one day, among some other gold things in an old box in the wigwam.” Why! Eunice pointed in sudden excitement to the watch Ruth wore fastened on the outside of her blouse—“there was a round shiny thing like that in the box. The other golden ornaments are at the wigwam. Only this chain is Indian. So there seemed no wrong in my wearing it.”

Eunice slipped her chain from under her gown. Ruth and Grace examined it closely.

“Eunice,” Grace exclaimed, “there are two English letters engraved on the pendant of your chain. They are E. L., I am pretty sure.”

“The same letters are on all the gold things,” Eunice declared.

“Well, E. stands for Eunice plainly enough,” volunteered Ruth, “but I can’t guess

what the L. means."

Mollie said nothing.

"You know, Ruth," protested Grace, "the initials may not be Eunice's. The child only found the chain at the wigwam. There is no telling where the jewelry she speaks of came from."

"Oh!" Ruth cried, in a disappointed tone, "I never thought of that!"

"Eunice, we must go now," announced Ruth, "but I want you to promise me not to go back to the wigwam with your grandmother until you have first seen me. Tell your grandmother I wish to talk with her. I want you to come to see where I live."

Eunice shook her head. "I should be afraid," she replied simply.

"But you are not afraid with me, Eunice," Mollie said. "If you will promise to come to see us, when you are better, you shall stay right by me all the time. Will you promise?"

"I promise," agreed the child.

"Naki is to let me hear as soon as you are well enough to leave the hospital," said Ruth.

"O Ruth," whispered Mollie. "Eunice will have no clothes to wear up at the hotel, even to spend the day. Shall I send her a dress of mine?"

"Eunice," Ruth asked, "do you know what a present is?"

"No," was the reply.

"Well, a present is something that comes in a box, and is soft and warm this time," Ruth explained. "Eunice must wear the present when she is ready to leave the hospital. When you are well enough to come to see us, I am coming to the hospital for you. I am going to take you flying to the hotel where we are staying, on the back of a big red bird."

"You make fun," said the Indian solemnly.

"You just wait until you see my motor car, Eunice!" cried Ruth. "It is the biggest bird, and it flies as fast as any you have ever seen. So do please hurry up and get well."

"I will, now. I did not wish to get well before," Eunice replied. "It is cold and lonely up on the hill in the snow time."

CHAPTER XVIII

PLANS FOR THE SOCIETY CIRCUS

“Ralph and Hugh! I am so delighted to see you!” cried Mollie Thurston, a few days later. She was alone in their sitting room writing a letter, when the two friends arrived. “We girls have been dreadfully afraid you would not arrive in time for our Society Circus. You know the games take place to-morrow.”

“Oh, it is a ‘Society Circus’ we have come to! So that is the name Lenox has given to its latest form of social entertainment?” laughed Hugh. “Sorry we couldn’t get here sooner, Mollie; but you knew you could depend on our turning up at the appointed time. Where are the other girls and Aunt Sallie?”

“They are over at the Fair Grounds, watching Bab ride,” Mollie explained. “Ralph, I am awfully worried about Bab. One of the amusements of the circus is to be a riding contest. Of course, Bab rides very well, but I don’t think mother would approve of her undertaking such dangerous riding as jumping over hurdles. Ambassador Morton has told Aunt Sallie that there will be no danger. He is used to English girls riding across the country; and I know, at the riding schools in New York, they give these same contests; but we have never had any riding lessons. I can’t help being nervous.”

“I wouldn’t worry, Mollie,” Ralph replied kindly. “I am sure Bab is equal to any kind of horseback exercise. Remember the first time we saw her, Hugh? She was riding down the road in the rain, astride an old bareback horse. We nicknamed her ‘Miss Paul Revere’ then and there. There isn’t any use trying to keep Bab off a horse, Mollie, when she has the faintest chance to get on one.”

“Come on, then,” laughed Mollie, smiling at the picture Ralph’s remark had brought to her mind. “We will walk over to the Fair Grounds. You will find nearly everybody we know in Lenox over there. You remember that you boys gave Ruth and Bab liberty to put your names down for any of the games; come and find out what trouble they have gotten you into. You never dreamed of such absurd amusements as we are to have.”

“Oh, we are game for anything,” Hugh declared. “Lenox sports are the jolliest I have yet run across. Don’t think any other place can produce anything just like them. Certainly the amusements are a bit unconventional, but they are all the more fun. ‘Society Circus’ is a good name for the entertainment. Anything goes in a ‘Society Circus.’”

“What curious amusements people *do* have for the benefit of charities!” reflected Mollie. “But I expect the Lenox Hospital will receive a great deal of money from the sports this year. You see, they are in charge of the English Ambassador. That alone would make the entertainment popular.”

“Is Mollie growing worldly wise, Hugh?” asked Ralph, with mock horror.

“Looks like it, Ralph,” was the reply.

The boys and Mollie found Barbara in the midst of a gay circle of young people. Grace and Ruth were nowhere to be seen.

Aunt Sallie sat with Mrs. Morton in the grandstand. The Ambassador and Mr. Winthrop Latham wandered about near them. Many preparations were necessary for the next day’s frolic.

In front of the grandstand stretched a wide, green field, enclosed with a low fence. A little distance off stood the club house.

Bab came forward with both hands extended to greet her friends. She gave one hand to Ralph, the other to Hugh.

“I am so glad to see you!” she declared. “I can’t wait to shake your hands in the right way. We girls were so afraid you had turned ‘quitters’! Come, this minute, and see Aunt Sallie. You must be introduced, too, to Ambassador and Mrs. Morton.”

“But where are Ruth and Grace?” inquired Ralph.

“Over yonder,” laughed Bab, pointing to the green inclosure in front of them.

The boys spied Ruth and Grace some distance off. The two girls were deep in conversation with a farm boy. Strutting around near them were a fat turkey gobbler and a Plymouth Rock rooster.

Just at this moment Ruth was giving her instructions. “Be sure you bring the turkey and the rooster over to the Fair Grounds by ten o’clock to-morrow morning.”

The boy grinned. “I’ll have ’em here sure, Miss.”

“Ruth,” asked Grace, as the two girls started back across the meadow to join their friends, “do you suppose it will be unkind for us to try to drive these poor barnyard fowls across a field before so many people? I presume the poor old birds will be frightened stiff. Whoever heard of anything so utterly absurd as a Gymkana race.”

“Oh, no, you tender-hearted Grace,” Ruth assured her. “I don’t think the kind of pets we are to drive to-morrow will be much affected by our efforts. Indeed they are likely to lead us more of a chase than we shall lead them. And I don’t believe the annoyance of being run across this field by us for a few yards equals the nervous shock of being scared by an automobile or a carriage. That alarm may overtake poor Brother Turkey and Mr. Rooster any day. I think our race is going to be the greatest fun ever! Why! I think I see Ralph Ewing and Hugh over there with the girls. Isn’t that great?”

“Miss Morton!” Hugh was protesting gayly, as Grace and Ruth joined the crowd of their friends. “You don’t mean to say that Barbara and Ruth have put Ralph’s name and mine down for three of your performances? How shall we ever live through such a tremendous strain! Kindly explain to me what is expected of us.”

Dorothy Morton got out her blankbook, where she had written each item of the next day’s programme. “Well, Mr. Post, you and Mr. Ewing are down for three of our best events, ‘The Egg and Spoon Race,’ ‘The Dummy Race’ and ‘The Thread and Needle Race.’”

“All right,” declared Ralph, meekly accepting his fate, “but will you kindly tell me what a Thread and Needle Race is?”

“It is a very easy task, Ralph, compared with what Grace and I have undertaken,” Ruth assured him. “All you do, in the ‘Thread and Needle Race,’ is to ride across this field on horseback carrying a needle. Of course, the real burden is on the woman. It always is. Some fair one is waiting for you at the end of your ride; she must sew a button on your coat. The sooner she can accomplish this, the better; for back you must ride, again, to the starting place, with the button firmly attached to your coat.”

“Will you sew the button on for me, Mollie?” Ralph begged. He saw that Mollie was taking less part in the amusements than the other girls.

“Certainly!” agreed Mollie. “I accept your proffered honor. To tell you the truth, you stand a better chance of winning with my assistance. I am a much better seamstress than Bab.”

“Oh, Bab, will be busy winning the riding prize,” declared Ralph under his breath, smiling at his two friends, Mollie and Barbara.

Maud Warren, the New York girl famous for her skillful riding, was standing near them, talking with Reginald Latham. As she overheard Ralph’s remark, a sarcastic smile flitted across her pale face. She had ignored Bab since their introduction at the Ambassador’s; but the thought of this poor country girl’s really knowing how to ride horseback was too much for her.

Barbara caught Maud Warren’s look of amusement and blushed furiously. Then she turned to Ralph and said aloud, “Oh, I am not a rider when compared with Miss Warren.”

“I don’t believe in comparisons, Miss Thurston,” declared the Ambassador, who had walked up to them. “But I think you are an excellent horsewoman. And I much prefer your riding in the old-fashioned way with a side saddle. I have observed that it is now fashionable, in Lenox, for the young women to ride astride.”

“Girls,” Miss Stuart declared, “it is luncheon time. We must return to the hotel.”

“Now, does everybody understand about to-morrow?” asked Gwendolin Morton, when the last farewells had been said. “Remember, the Gymkana race is first. We started with this spectacle for fear the girls who have promised to take part might back out. Then, immediately after lunch, we shall have our horseback riding and jumping.”

“I don’t believe I have been wise in permitting you to engage in this horseback riding, Barbara,” Miss Stuart declared on their way home. “I am afraid this jumping over fences is a dangerous sport. And I am not sure it is ladylike.”

“But English girls do it all the time, Aunt Sallie. Jumping hurdles is taught in the best riding schools.”

“You have had no lessons, Bab. Are you perfectly sure you do not feel afraid?” queried Miss Stuart.

“Oh, perfectly, dear Aunt Sallie,” Bab assured her.

CHAPTER XIX

THE OLD GRAY GOOSE

The day for the Lenox sports dawned clear and beautiful. By breakfast time the mists had rolled away from the hilltops. The trees, which were now beginning to show bare places among their leafy branches, beheld their own reflections in the lakes that nestled at the feet of the Lenox hills.

From their veranda Miss Stuart and her girls could see every style of handsome vehicle gliding along the perfect roads that led toward the Fair Grounds from the beautiful homes surrounding the old township.

The Society Circus could be enjoyed only by invitation. The tickets had been sent out only to the chosen. An invitation meant the payment of five dollars to the Hospital Fund.

Barbara was the first of the girls to be ready to start to the Fair Grounds. She wore the tan riding-habit that Ruth had loaned her. She was not to ride until later in the day, but it would not be feasible to return to the hotel to change her costume.

Miss Stuart and her party had been asked to be the guests at luncheon of Ambassador and Mrs. Morton.

Ruth and Grace were dressed in short skirts, loose blouses, and coats. They, also, looked ready for business. So only Miss Stuart and Mollie were able to wear the handsome toilets suited to the occasion. Mollie appeared in her blue silk costume. Miss Sallie was resplendent in a pearl gray broadcloth and a hat of violet orchids.

At half-past nine, Hugh Post and Ralph Ewing knocked at Miss Stuart’s sitting-room door. Barbara had already seen Ruth’s and Hugh’s automobiles waiting for them on the hotel driveway. The boys were impatient to be off.

“Kindly explain to me, Ruth,” asked Hugh, as the party finally started, “why you are carrying those two large bolts of ribbon? Are you going into the millinery

business to-day?”

Ruth laughed. “Remember, if you please, that Grace and I are going in for a much more serious undertaking. These ribbons are the reins that we intend to use for our extraordinary race to-day. I shall endeavor to drive my turkey with blue strings. Grace considers red ribbon more adapted to the disposition and appearance of a rooster.”

“Well, you girls certainly have nerve to take part in such a wild goose chase!” laughed the boy.

At the Fair Grounds Miss Stuart had reserved seats for her party near the green inclosure. Just in front of them was a little platform, decorated in red, white and blue bunting. On this were seated the Ambassador, Franz Heller, Mr. Winthrop Latham, Reginald and several other prominent Lenox residents.

Grace and Ruth were not allowed to remain with their friends; they were immediately hurried off to the clubhouse, where they found eight other girls waiting for them. The entrance of the ten girls, driving their extraordinary steeds, was to be the great opening event of the Society Circus.

At ten-thirty Mr. Winthrop Latham announced the first feature of their entertainment.

A peal of laughter burst from hundreds of throats.

Marching from the clubhouse were ten pretty girls, “shooing” in front of them ten varieties of barnyard fowls!

Dorothy Morton walked along in a stately fashion, led by an old gray goose. Neither Miss Morton nor the goose seemed in the least degree disturbed by the applause and laughter.

Ruth’s turkey was not so amiable. It stopped several times in its promenade from the clubhouse, to crane its long neck back at the driver. The turkey’s small eyes surveyed the scene about it with a look of mingled suspicion and indignation. The old rooster, which regarded the occasion as given in its honor, traveled in front of Grace at a lively pace.

Within the inclosed field, just in front of the little stand, where the Ambassador and his friends sat, two poles had been placed ten yards apart. Across the meadow, about an eighth of a mile, were two other poles of the same kind.

The girls were to try to persuade their curious steeds to run across the field from the first posts to those opposite. There the drivers were expected to turn their

steeds and come safely back to the starting place.

Of the ten entrances Grace and her rooster made the best start. Ruth's turkey refused to stir; he had found a fat worm on the ground in front of him. His attention was riveted to that. Ruth flapped her blue silk reins in vain.

But a peacock bore the turkey company. Seeing himself and his barnyard acquaintances the center of so many eyes, Mr. Peacock was properly vain. He spread his beautiful fan-shaped tail, and would not be driven from the starting-place.

Dorothy Morton and her old gray goose continued their stately walk across the meadow. Only once did the goose's dignity forsake it. Grace's excitable rooster crossed its path! The rooster had made a short scurry to the side, his driver trying to persuade him back to the straight path. As the rooster hurried past the old gray goose, the latter stopped short, gave an indignant flap of its wings, rose a few inches from the ground, and pecked at Mr. Rooster. A moment later the goose continued its dignified march.

This incident was too much for Grace's irascible rooster. With a terrified crow he darted first this way, then that, until Grace was wound up in her own red silk reins. It seemed a hopeless task to try to reach the goal.

It was another instance of the old story of the hare and the tortoise. While Grace struggled with her rooster, a fat duck waddled past her. The duck's mistress had enticed her nearly the whole length of the journey by throwing grains of corn a yard or so ahead of her steed. Of course, any well disposed duck would move forward for refreshments.

Dorothy Morton arrived safely at the first goal with her old gray goose. But now her troubles really began. Her steed had no disposition to return to the crowd of noisy spectators that it had so cheerfully left behind. Dorothy tugged at one of her heavy white reins. The goose continued placidly on its way across the broad field. A goose is not a pleasant bird in attack, and Dorothy did not like to resort to forcible methods.

Assistance came from an unexpected quarter. Grace's rooster had at last been persuaded to rush violently between the required posts. In one of its excited turns, it brushed close behind the old goose. Here was a chance for revenge! The rooster gave a flying peck at the goose's tail feathers and flew on.

With a loud squawk the goose turned completely around. It flew up in the air, then down to the ground again, and made a rush for its opponent. But the rooster

was unworthy game. It tacked too often to the right and left. The old gray goose gave up its pursuit in disgust. Since it was headed toward the starting-place it took up its walk again, Dorothy Morton meekly following it.

Only three of the girls remained in the race. Ruth had given up in despair. Her turkey had wandered off to parts unknown. Another girl sat on an upturned stump feeding crumbs to a motherly hen that had found walking disagreeable and had taken to scratching around the roots of a tree.

Dorothy passed her rival with the duck midway on her journey back home. The duck took no further interest in corn. It had eaten all that a well-bred fowl could desire. Now it squatted in the grass to enjoy a well-earned repose.

Shrieks of laughter rose when Dorothy Morton at last drove her gray goose back to the judge's stand.

"Hurrah for the old gray goose!" shouted the spectators in merry applause.

Franz Heller rushed down from the platform, carrying two wreaths in his hands. One was made of smilax and pink roses; the other a small wreath of evergreens with a silver bell fastened to it. Franz dropped the rose garland over Dorothy Morton's head. The small wreath with the bell he placed on the neck of the old gray goose.

Exhausted, Dorothy dropped into the nearest seat. The old gray goose wandered off toward home, led by a proud farmer's boy.

Scarcely had the laughter from the first event ceased, when the Thread and Needle Race was called for.

Ralph Ewing was an easy winner, thanks to Mollie's skill as a seamstress. Ralph declared the button she sewed on him should ornament his coat for evermore.

But the Egg and Spoon Race was a closely contested event.

The race appeared to be a tie between Ambassador Morton and Mr. Winthrop Latham.

Near-sighted Franz Heller made a brave start, but his eyes betrayed him. Carefully carrying his egg in a spoon which he bore at arm's length, Franz forgot to look down at his feet. He stumped his toe against a small stone. Crash, the egg rolled from his spoon! A yellow stream marked the place where it fell.

Mr. Latham and the Ambassador were painstaking men. They ran along, side by side, at a gentle pace. The man who arrived first at the appointed goal with an

unbroken egg was, of course, the victor.

Unfortunately for Mr. Latham, an old habit overcame him. In the midst of the contest he paused to adjust his glasses. The movement of his arm was fatal. His spoon tipped and his egg rolled gently to the earth.

Still the Ambassador continued unmoved on his stately journey. With a smile he solemnly handed an unbroken white egg to Reginald Latham.

“Here, cook this for your breakfast!” he advised Reginald, who was acting as judge of this famous event.

Cutting a lemon with a saber, and the Dummy Race, ended the morning’s sports. The afternoon was to be devoted to riding.

CHAPTER XX

BARBARA AND BEAUTY

“Barbara, you are eating very little luncheon,” Ralph Ewing whispered in Bab’s ear.

Ambassador and Mrs. Morton were entertaining a large number of friends in the dining-room of the clubhouse.

Maud Warren smiled patronizingly across the table at Barbara.

“Are you nervous about our riding this afternoon?” Maud asked. “Mr. Heller, do please pass Miss Thurston those sandwiches. She must want something to keep up her courage.”

Kind-hearted Franz Heller hurriedly presented Bab with all the good things he could reach.

“Thank you, Mr. Heller,” said Barbara, gratefully. Her cheeks were crimson; her brown eyes flashed, but she made no reply. Mollie, who knew Bab’s quick temper, wondered how her sister controlled herself.

A horn blew to announce that the luncheon hour was ended.

“Run along, child,” Miss Stuart called nervously to Bab. “Now, do, pray be careful! I shall certainly be glad when this riding contest is over.”

While the guests of the Society Circus were at luncheon the field had been arranged for the hurdle-jumping.

Inside the green meadow four short length fences had been set up, a quarter of a mile apart. The girls were to ride around the field on their horses and jump the four hurdles.

Besides Bab and Maud Warren, four other Lenox girls had entered for this race. The riders were all skilled horsewomen.

Ambassador Morton waved his hand to Bab as she cantered by him on his little

horse, Beauty. Her friends called out their good wishes. Bab smiled and nodded. She never looked so well or so happy as when she was on the back of a horse.

Ambassador Morton cautioned the girls before they started for their ride. “Remember, this is just a friendly contest,” he urged. “We merely want to see you young people ride. No one may allow her horse to cross too close in front of another horse. Two of you must not try to jump the hurdle at the same time.”

The six girls cantered bravely down the field.

Maud Warren and Bab rode side by side. Barbara was the youngest and smallest of the girls, but she rode her little horse as though she were a part of it.

“Don’t sit too closely in your saddle,” Maud Warren leaned over and spoke patronizingly to Barbara.

“Thank you!” Bab replied.

The girls were now riding swiftly across the meadow.

Ralph, Hugh, Ruth, Mollie and Grace left their places and hurried down to the fence that inclosed the riding ring.

At the first fence two of the horses refused to jump. The other four sprang easily over the bars.

By the rules of the contest, the girls were not allowed to urge their horses, so the two riders went quietly back.

At the second hurdle, another horse faltered. This left the riding contest to Bab, Maud Warren, and a Lenox girl, Bertha Brokaw.

Barbara was as gay and happy as possible. She had no thought of fear in riding. Beauty was a splendid little horse accustomed to being ridden across country. The beautiful little animal jumped over the low bars as easily as if she were running along the ground.

Bertha Brokaw was the first of the three girls to go over the third hurdle. Bab was close behind her.

Barbara had just risen in her saddle. “Go it, Beauty!” she whispered, gently.

At this instant, Maud Warren gave a smart cut to her horse and crossed immediately in front of Bab.

Beauty reared on her hind feet. Barbara and the horse swayed an instant in the air.

Miss Stuart rose from the chair where she sat. Mrs. Morton gave a gasp. A sudden terror shook all the spectators. Poor Mollie turned sick and faint. She imagined her beloved Bab crushed beneath a falling horse.

But Barbara was not conscious of anything but Beauty. As her little horse rose trembling on its hind feet Bab remembered to keep her reins slack. With one pull on the horse's tender mouth, she and Beauty would have gone over backwards.

"Steady, Beauty! Steady!" she cried. The horse ceased to tremble, and a moment later stood on all four feet again.

In the meantime Maud Warren had cleared the third fence and was riding across the field. Not a sound of applause followed her. But as Beauty, with Barbara still cool and collected, sprang easily over the hurdle, loud applause rang out.

"Bully for Bab!" cried Ralph, shaking Ruth's hand in his excitement.

"What a trick! I didn't think Maud Warren capable of it," protested Dorothy to her father.

Bertha Brokaw's horse was tired. She did not finish the mile course.

Now again Barbara rode side by side with Miss Warren. Just before the last jump Bab reined in a little. She remembered the Ambassador's instructions. This was only a riding match, not a racing contest. No two girls were allowed to jump a hurdle at the same time.

So Barbara gave Maud Warren the first opportunity to make the jump. But Maud was nervous; she realized she had taken an unfair advantage of Bab. Her horse refused to jump. Bab waited only an instant. Then, urging Beauty on, they rose over their last hurdle like swallows.

Barbara came cantering back to her friends, her cheeks rosy, her eyes shining with delight.

Franz Heller rushed forward with a big bunch of American Beauty roses. Flowers were the only prizes given during the day. Barbara slid down off her horse.

The Ambassador moved forward to shake hands with her; Bab's friends were waving their handkerchiefs; but Bab had eyes for Beauty only. A stable boy had come to lead the horse away.

“Good-bye, you little Beauty!” Bab whispered, with her brown head close to the horse’s face. “You are the dearest little horse in the world. Don’t I wish you were my very own!”

Ambassador Morton overheard Bab’s speech.

“Let me give the horse to you, Miss Thurston,” he urged. “It will give me the greatest pleasure, if you will allow it. He ought to belong to you for the pretty piece of riding you did out in the field. Let me congratulate you. Beauty’s compliments and mine to the young girl who has been her own riding teacher.”

A warm wave of color swept over Barbara’s face. “I did not mean you to overhear me, Mr. Morton,” she declared. “Forgive me. Of course I couldn’t accept your horse. But I do appreciate your kindness. Thank you for lending me Beauty to ride.”

Bab took her roses from Mr. Heller and made her way to Miss Stuart.

“Child!” protested Miss Sallie, “sit down! I shall ask your mother never to let you ride a horse again unless you promise never to try to jump over another fence rail. Oh, what I went through, when I thought you were about to fall off that horse!” Miss Stuart raised both hands in horror. “There ought to be a law against riding masters being allowed to teach women to jump over hurdles.”

“But the law wouldn’t act against Bab, auntie,” declared Ruth, who was feeling very vain over Bab’s success. “Because, you know, Barbara never took a riding lesson in her life.”

In a short time Miss Stuart took her party home.

Ralph and Hugh were to return to New Haven on the night train.

“Miss Sallie,” begged Mollie, as they made their way through the crowd, “there is Mr. Winthrop Latham. *Do* ask him to come to tea with you to-morrow.”

“But why, my child?” Miss Sallie naturally inquired.

“Please, ask just him, not his nephew, Reginald. Do, Aunt Sallie, dear. I can’t tell you why, now, but I shall explain as soon as we get home.”

“Very well, you funny little girl.” And Miss Stuart complied with Mollie’s request.

Mr. Winthrop Latham promised to call on Miss Stuart and her girls at their hotel

the next afternoon at four o’clock.

CHAPTER XXI

EUNICE AND MR. WINTHROP LATHAM

“Ruth, may I go with you to get Eunice?” Mollie Thurston asked next day.

“Certainly, Mollie. Are not the four of us going? We want to bring little Eunice back to the hotel in style. We have had a hard enough time getting hold of her. Her old Indian grandmother would not have let us have the child if it had not been for Naki. The Indian woman seems really to be attached to Ceally and Naki.”

“I am going to ask you a weeny little favor, Ruth. I won’t tell you why I ask you now; but I will tell you as soon as we are in the automobile. Don’t ask Bab to come with us for Eunice,” Mollie entreated.

“Don’t ask Bab? Why, Mollie!” protested Ruth, in surprise. “Bab’s feelings would be dreadfully hurt if I did not ask her.”

“No, they won’t, Ruth. I have already talked to Aunt Sallie. She told Bab she wanted her to stay in the house this morning. Aunt Sallie thinks Barbara is tired from her ride yesterday.”

“Oh, very well, Mollie, I won’t urge Bab to come with us, then; though I can’t understand why you don’t want her along. I shall be glad when you explain the mystery to me,” Ruth concluded.

“That is why I wish to drive over with you. Sh! Aunt Sallie is coming. Don’t say anything before her.”

“Ruth,” explained Mollie, as the three girls were hurrying toward Pittsfield in their motor car, “I want to tell you why I did not wish Bab to come along with us to the hospital for Eunice. I don’t know what you and Grace may think of me; but I intend to try an experiment.”

“An experiment, Mollie!” Grace exclaimed. “What experiment do you intend to try?”

“Well girls,” Mollie continued, “do you recall that Bab went driving, a few days ago, with Reginald Latham, Mr. Winthrop Latham and Aunt Sallie?”

Ruth and Grace both nodded.

“And you remember Bab said she was going to discover, on that drive, what connection Eunice had with the Latham family?”

“Yes,” Grace assented. “Do hurry on to the point of your story.”

“No; you must hear it all over again,” Mollie protested. “I want you and Ruth to remember just exactly the story Bab told us. Reginald Latham did not wish the subject of Eunice mentioned before his uncle, because Mr. Winthrop Latham’s oldest brother had married an Indian girl. It seems the brother met the Indian girl while he was studying the history of the Indians in this neighborhood; so he just married her without mentioning the fact to his family. Of course the Lathams, who were very rich and very distinguished, were heart-broken over the marriage. And I guessed they were not any too good to the poor little Indian woman, when Mr. William Latham brought her back to his home to live. As soon as her husband died, she ran away to her own people. When Mr. Winthrop Latham tried to find her some time afterwards, to give her her husband’s property, it seems that the Indian wife was dead. At any rate Reginald declares this to be the case. From that day to this, the Latham family never speak of anything that even relates to Indians.” Mollie ended her speech in a slightly scornful tone.

“Why, Mollie, don’t you think that is a good enough explanation of Reginald Latham’s attitude toward Eunice?” Ruth asked.

“I most certainly do not!” Miss Mollie replied. “And how do you explain the Indian squaw’s feeling against the name of Latham?”

“Oh, Bab told us, Reginald explained all that to her, too. It seems that the Indians in this vicinity believed poor little Mrs. Latham had been persecuted by her husband’s family. So, if this old squaw ever heard the story, Latham would be an evil name to her,” Grace put in.

Mistress Mollie shrugged her shoulders. “I think that story is very unlikely. But, maybe, you believe it, just as Bab did. All I ask of you is—just be on the look-out to-day! I have been doing a little detective work myself. I do not agree with Bab’s explanation. I told you I was going to try an experiment, and I want you to help me. Then maybe, I can convince you, Bab, and Aunt Sallie of something that I believe! I am sure our little Indian Eunice has a closer connection with the Latham family than any of you dream!”

“Dear me, but you are interesting, Mollie!” interrupted Ruth. “I have a suspicion of what you mean. But go ahead, little Miss Sherlock Holmes! We are with you to the end. We shall be delighted to render any humble assistance necessary to your detective work.”

“I only want you to watch developments this afternoon, girls!” Mollie asserted mysteriously. “Later on, there may be some real work for us to do. So far, I have planned everything myself.”

“Well, Mollie, you are a nice one!” laughed Grace. “Kindly ‘put us on,’ as the saying goes. What have you planned?”

“Nothing but a meeting between Eunice and Mr. Winthrop Latham,” Mollie responded. “We are to take Eunice to the hotel to spend the day with us. She will be looking her best in the lovely clothes Ruth sent to her. And she has grown almost fair from her weeks in the hospital. Mr. Winthrop Latham is to have tea with us this afternoon. I asked Aunt Sallie to invite nobody but him. I shall bring Eunice quietly in, introduce her to Mr. Latham: then we shall see what happens! I did not wish to tell Bab my plan,” Mollie continued, “because she might make me give it up. But I believe Aunt Sallie agrees with me, though she did give me a scolding for having a suspicious nature! She declared, this morning, that it would be very well to have Mr. Winthrop Latham see Eunice. So just let’s wait, and watch with all our eyes this afternoon.”

“Bully for your experiment, Mollie!” nodded Grace. Ruth bowed her head to show how fully she agreed with both of the girls.

A pretty hospital nurse brought Eunice out to Ruth’s motor car. The child had on a soft ecru dress, cut low at the throat and simply made. She wore a brown coat, lined with scarlet, and a big brown felt hat with a scarf knotted loosely around it.

And Eunice looked very lovely! Her hair was braided in two plaits, tied with soft scarlet ribbons. Her eyes were big and black with the excitement of entering a strange world. Her complexion was now only a little darker than olive. Her cheeks were like two scarlet flames.

Eunice hugged Mollie close, once she was seated in the automobile. When the big car started, she laughed gleefully, clapping her hands as she cried. “It is truly a red bird, that carries us on its wings!” She remembered what Ruth had told her.

“Always Eunice has longed for wings like the birds!” Eunice whispered softly to Mollie. “Now, behold! We are almost flying!”

“Look overhead, Mollie, Eunice, Ruth!” called Grace suddenly.

The four girls looked up.

A great white object sailed above them.

Eunice clutched Mollie. “Is it the great white spirit, my grandmother has told me about?” she inquired.

“Oh, that is Reginald Latham in his airship,” Mollie explained to Grace. “He said the rudder of Mr. Latham’s balloon had been mended. He meant to try some short flights to see if it was all right.”

“But I do not understand!” Eunice protested. “Is a man riding on that great, great big bird?”

“Yes, Eunice,” Mollie assented. “But that object above our heads is an airship, not a bird.”

“Then I wish to ride in an airship,” Eunice murmured. “It flies up in the air like a real bird. This car runs only along the earth.” The child was no longer impressed with the automobile. Reginald Latham’s airship was the most marvelous thing she had ever beheld.

After arriving at their hotel “The Automobile Girls” showed Eunice everything they could find to amuse her. They rode up and down with her in the elevator. They gave her a peep into the hotel’s splendid reception rooms. Poor little Eunice was in a daze! She wandered about like a child in a dream. Every now and then she would ask Mollie some question in regard to Reginald Latham’s airship. She had not forgotten it.

Miss Stuart wisely had luncheon served in the private sitting-room. She did not think it best for Eunice to be seen by so many people; besides, she did not know how Eunice would behave at the table.

To Miss Sallie’s unspeakable relief the child had learned at the hospital to eat with a knife and fork. Her manners were those of a frightened child. She was neither noisy nor vulgar.

“The child is certainly an enigma!” Miss Stuart said to herself, half a dozen times during the morning. “What the doctor says is true! The child is almost refined. It is marvelous! In spite of her ignorance, she does nothing to offend one!”

After luncheon, Miss Stuart noticed that Eunice looked white and exhausted. The scarlet color had faded from her cheeks and lips. The little girl was not strong enough for so much excitement after her recent illness.

“Mollie,” Miss Sallie suggested, about half-past two o’clock, “take Eunice to your room. Give her a dressing gown, and see that she rests for an hour or so. You may stay with the child, Mollie, for fear she may be frightened, but you other girls keep away. The child is worn out. Mollie, you may bring her back to us at tea-time.”

Mollie agreed. She guessed that Miss Sallie was furthering her idea about the experiment.

“Remember, Bab, you have promised me to be here at tea-time,” Mollie reminded her sister.

“Certainly, I shall be here, Mollie. Did you think I was going away?”

Mollie then took Eunice away to lie down.

The child was so tired she soon fell asleep on Mollie’s bed.

Mollie sat thinking quietly by the darkened window. She had taken a deep fancy to little Eunice, who had seemed to cling to her since their first strange meeting.

Barbara and Mollie Thurston were both unusually thoughtful girls. Their mother’s devoted companions for years, their poverty had made them understand more of life. Mollie realized it would not do for Eunice to grow up ignorant and wild, with only her old grandmother for a companion. The little Indian was already thirsting for a different life. And, some day, the grandmother would die. What would then become of Eunice?

A little before four o’clock Eunice awakened, having slept nearly two hours. She was refreshed and happy again.

Mollie made Eunice bathe her face. She herself fixed the child’s hair, now smooth and glossy from the care that the nurses at the hospital had given to it.

“We will go back to see our friends now, Eunice,” explained Mollie.

Eunice nodded. “It is wonderful here where you live!” she declared. “Sometimes I think I have dreamed of people like you and your friends. I think I have seen things like what you have here in this house. But how could I dream of what I knew nothing?”

Mollie shook her head thoughtfully. “Eunice, dear, you will have to ask a wiser person than I am about your dreams. Who knows what may be stored away in that little head of yours? Come, dear, let us put your gold chain on the outside of your dress. There can be no harm in that. I think Miss Sallie, the lady with the

white hair, would like to look at it."

Eunice, who had a girl's fancy for pretty ornaments, was glad to have Mollie pull the chain out from under her dress. The curious, beautiful ornament shone glittering and lovely against the light background formed by the child's dress.

"Wait for me here, Eunice," requested Mollie. "I want to go into the other room for a minute."

Mollie peeped inside the sitting-room door.

Mr. Winthrop Latham was cosily drinking his tea in the best of humor. He had a decided liking for Miss Stuart and her "Automobile Girls."

Bab was joking with Mr. Latham as she plied him with sandwiches and cakes.

For half a minute Mollie's heart misgave her. She was afraid to try her experiment.

The Cup in Mr. Latham's Hand Trembled.

"Good gracious!" she thought, finally, "what possible harm can it do Mr. Winthrop Latham to look at poor, pretty little Eunice? If the child means nothing to him, he will not even notice her. If she turns out to be the child I believe she is, why, then—then—it is only right that her uncle, Mr. Winthrop Latham, should know of her existence."

"Come, now, Eunice!" cried Mollie. "Come into the sitting-room with me. The girls have some pretty cakes and sweet things they are saving for you."

Mollie took Eunice's hand. The two girls were nearly of the same size and age. They quietly walked into the sitting-room.

"Where is 'Automobile Girl' number four?" Mollie heard Mr. Latham ask, just as the two girls entered the room.

"Here I am!" Mollie replied.

Mr. Latham glanced up. His ruddy face turned white as chalk.

Mollie never took her eyes from Mr. Latham's face. Miss Stuart, Bab, Grace and Ruth stared at him.

But Mr. Latham did not notice any one of them. His jaw dropped. The cup in his

hand trembled. Still he did not speak.

Barbara broke the silence. “Mr. Latham, are you ill?” she asked. “May I take your teacup from you?”

Mr. Latham shook his head. He continued to gaze steadily at Eunice.

Little Eunice was frightened by the strange man’s stare. She trembled. Her rosebud lips quivered. Tears rolled down her cheeks.

“Come to me, Eunice,” Ruth called comfortingly. “See the candies I have been saving for you! Mr. Latham, this is the little Indian girl who was hurt. You remember that we have spoken of her before?”

“Will some one take the child away?” Mr. Latham asked, brokenly.

Mollie led Eunice back to her bedroom. Then she hurried in again to rejoin the others.

“Miss Stuart, I owe you and your girls an explanation for my strange conduct,” Mr. Latham declared. “I feel, this afternoon, that I have seen a ghost! I do not understand this Indian child’s likeness to my dead sister-in-law. I must seek an explanation somewhere. This little Eunice is the living image of my brother’s Indian wife—the poor girl whom our cruelty drove from our home back to the tents of her own people to die. I was told that her little child died with her. There is a mystery here that must be solved. If this little girl is the daughter of my brother and his Indian wife, one-half of my fortune belongs to her.”

“Mr. Latham,” Miss Stuart quietly interrupted him, “this Indian child has an old grandmother who will be able to tell you whether this child has any connection with you. I have always thought there must be some explanation. The squaw has kept the child hidden for a purpose.”

“You are right, Miss Stuart,” Mr. Latham interrupted. “You tell me this child’s name is Eunice? Eunice was the name of my brother’s wife. It is also the Christian name for the female Indians of a certain tribe, but there is little doubt, in my mind, of this girl’s identity. The gold chain about her throat was my brother’s gift to his wife. That chain has the story of my brother’s love and courtship engraved on it in Indian characters. But I am too much upset to discuss the matter any further to-day. When can I see the Indian grandmother?”

“To-morrow,” Miss Stuart replied quietly. “I would not advise you to delay.”

“Will you go with me to see her at ten o’clock to-morrow morning, Miss Stuart?” queried Mr. Latham.

“Certainly,” Miss Sallie agreed.

“I beg of you then not to mention what has taken place in this room this afternoon,” Mr. Latham urged. “When we know the truth in regard to this child it will be time to tell the strange story. Good-bye until to-morrow morning.”

“Mollie,” Bab cried as soon as the door closed on Mr. Latham, “I surrender. And I humbly beg your pardon. You are a better detective than I am. What is the discovery of the Boy Raffles compared with your bringing to light the family history of poor little Eunice! Just think, instead of being a poor, despised Indian girl, Eunice is heiress to a large fortune.”

“Then you believe in me now, Bab!” Mollie rejoined. “I have always thought Eunice was in some way connected with the Latham family.”

“Girls,” Miss Stuart cautioned quietly, “when you take Eunice to her grandmother, at Naki’s house, say nothing. Remember, you are to speak to no one of what happened this afternoon.”

CHAPTER XXII

THE AUTOMOBILE WINS

Immediately after breakfast, next morning, “The Automobile Girls” started in Ruth’s car for Naki’s house in Pittsfield.

Miss Stuart had decided that it would be best to have Eunice out of the way when she and Mr. Latham made their call on the grandmother.

So the girls hurried off after Eunice.

They were in splendid spirits as they approached Naki’s house. No one of them doubted, for an instant, that Mr. Winthrop Latham would find little Eunice was his niece.

“You run in and ask the grandmother whether Eunice may take a ride with us, Mollie,” Ruth suggested as she stopped her car. “If Naki is at home, ask him to step out here a minute. I want to prepare him for the call of Aunt Sallie and Mr. Latham.”

In three minutes Mollie flew out of the house again. She was alone. There was no sign of Eunice!

“O girls!” Mollie cried, “Eunice and her grandmother are gone!”

“Gone where?” Bab queried.

“Back to their own wigwam!” Mollie continued. “Last night Ceally says a woman, heavily veiled, came here, accompanied by a young man. They talked to the Indian woman and Eunice a long time. They told the squaw a man was in pursuit of her. He would come this morning to take her away. She was so frightened that Naki and Ceally could do nothing to influence her. She started with Eunice, last night, for their wigwam in the hills. Who do you think her visitors were?”

“Mrs. Latham and Reginald!” cried the other three girls at once.

“It is all so plain,” argued Ruth. “Mr. Latham probably told his sister, last night, that he had seen Eunice, and meant to come here, this morning, and find out who the child really was. Mrs. Latham and Reginald then rushed here to get the squaw and the child out of the way until they could have time to plan.”

“But what shall we do now?” asked Mollie, her eyes full of tears. “I do not believe Mrs. Latham and Reginald will be content with sending Eunice and her grandmother back to their own hill. Mr. Latham could follow them up there. I know they will try to spirit Eunice away altogether. They will not wait. Oh, what, what can we do?”

“I know,” Ruth answered quietly.

“Have you any money, girls?” she inquired. “I have twenty-five dollars with me.”

“I have twenty with me,” Grace replied. “I have ten,” declared Bab. “And I have only five,” Mollie answered.

“Then we are all right for money,” said Ruth. “Naki,” she continued, turning to their guide, who had now come out to them, “I want you to give this note to Aunt Sallie and Mr. Latham when they come here. It will explain all. Tell them not to worry. I shall send a telegram before night.”

Taking a piece of paper from her pocket, Ruth hurriedly wrote a letter of some length.

“Now, let’s be off!” Ruth insisted.

“What are you going to do now, Ruth Stuart?” Mollie demanded.

“Why, what can we do,” Ruth replied, “except go straight up to the wigwam for Eunice and run away with her before anyone else can.”

“Run away with her!” faltered Grace.

“What else can we do?” queried Ruth. “If we delay in getting Eunice out of Mrs. Latham’s and Reginald’s clutches, they will place the child where no one can ever find her. Mrs. Latham will then persuade her brother to give up his search. We must save Eunice.”

“But what will Aunt Sallie say?” cried Barbara.

“I have written Aunt Sallie,” Ruth explained, “that we would take Eunice to a nearby town. We can telegraph Aunt Sallie from there.”

“But, suppose, Ruth,” Grace suggested, “the Indian grandmother will not let

Eunice go with us."

"Never mind, Grace," Bab retorted, "'The Automobile Girls' must overcome obstacles. I believe the old grandmother will let Eunice come with us, if we tell her the whole story. We must explain that Mr. Winthrop Latham wants to see Eunice in order to be kind to her and not to harm her, and ask the squaw if Eunice is Mr. William Latham's child. We must make her understand that Mrs. Latham and Reginald are her enemies, we are her friends——"

"Is that all, Bab?" laughed Grace. "It sounds simple."

"Never mind," Mollie now broke in to the conversation, "I believe I can somehow explain matters to Mother Eunice."

By noon "The Automobile Girls" were halfway up the hill that led to the wigwam.

Mollie, who was walking ahead, heard a low sound like a sob. Crouched under a tree, several yards away, was little Eunice. At the sight of Mollie she ran forward. A few feet from her she stopped. A look of distrust crossed her face.

"Why did you come here?" she asked in her old wild fashion.

"Why, Eunice," Mollie asked quietly, "are you not glad to see your friends?"

At first, Eunice shook her head. Then she flung her arms around Mollie's neck. "I want to give you that strange thing you called a kiss," she said. "I am so glad to see you that my heart sings. But grandmother told me you meant to sell me to the strange man, who looked at me so curiously yesterday. So I came back up the hill with her. You would not sell me, would you? You are my friends?"

"Look into my eyes, Eunice," Mollie whispered. "Do I look as though I meant to harm you? You told me once that if you could see straight into the eyes of the creatures in the woods you would know whether their hearts were good. Is my heart good?"

"Yes, yes!" Eunice cried. "Forgive me."

"But we want you to have a great deal of faith in us, Eunice," Mollie persisted. "We want you to go away with us this very afternoon. Take us to your grandmother. We must ask her consent."

Eunice shook her head. "I cannot go," she declared, finally.

"But, Eunice, if you will only go with us, you can buy more pretty gold chains. You can buy beads and Indian blankets for your grandmother," coaxed Grace.

“Who knows? Some day you may even own a big, red bird like Ruth’s, and fly like ‘The Automobile Girls.’”

Still Eunice shook her head.

“But you will come with us, if your grandmother says you may?” Ruth urged.

“No,” Eunice declared. “I cannot.”

“Why, Eunice?” Mollie queried gently.

“Because,” said Eunice, “to-day I fly up in the sky!” The child pointed over her head.

“Why, the child is mad from her illness and the fatigue of her long walk up here,” Grace ejaculated in distress.

But Eunice laughed happily. “To-day I fly like the birds, high overhead. Long have I wished to go up into the big blue heaven away over the trees and the hilltops. To-day I shall fly away, truly!”

The girls stared at Eunice in puzzled wonder. They could understand nothing of the strange tale she told them. Was the child dreaming?

A light dawned upon Mollie.

“Girls!” Mollie cried, “Reginald Latham is going to take Eunice off in his airship!”

“Can it be possible?” Bab exclaimed.

“Eunice,” asked Mollie, “are you going for a ride in the big balloon I showed you yesterday as we rode away from the hospital?”

“Yes,” Eunice declared. “Last night the young man who came to Naki’s house talked with me. He whispered to me, that if I were good and did not tell my grandmother, he would take me to ride with him in his great ship of the winds. But he will bring me home to my own wigwam to-night. I will go with you in your carriage to-morrow. Now, I wait for the man to find me. He told me to meet him here, away from my grandmother’s far-seeing eyes.”

“Eunice,” Mollie commanded firmly, “come with me to your wigwam.”

“But you will tell my grandmother! Then she will not let me fly away!” Eunice cried.

“You cannot fly with Reginald Latham, Eunice,” Mollie asserted. “He will not bring you back again to the wigwam. He will leave you in some strange town,

away from your own people. You will never see your grandmother. You will never see us again!”

Eunice, trembling, followed the other girls to the wigwam.

“I believe,” Bab said thoughtfully as they walked on, “that Reginald Latham planned to get Eunice away from this place forever. He did not mean to injure her. He would probably have put her in some school far away. But Mr. Winthrop Latham would never have seen her. Eunice would not then take half of the Latham fortune from Reginald. Just think! Who could ever trace a child carried away in an airship? She might be searched for if she went in trains or carriages, but no one but the birds could know of her flight through the air.”

The old grandmother heard “The Automobile Girls” approaching.

She was standing in front of a blazing fire. With a grunt of rage, the old woman seized a flaming pine torch and ran straight at Mollie.

“Put that down!” commanded Barbara, hotly. “You are a stupid old woman. We have come to save Eunice for you. Unless you listen to us she will be stolen from you this very afternoon. You will never see her again. There is no use in your trying to hide Eunice any longer. We know and her uncle knows, that she is the child of your daughter and of Mr. William Latham. You told Mr. Winthrop Latham that Eunice died when her mother did.” Barbara had depended on her imagination for the latter part of her speech, but she knew, now, that she had guessed the truth.

Under her brown leather-like skin the old squaw turned pale.

Then Mollie explained gently to the old woman that Mrs. Latham and Reginald were Eunice’s enemies; that they wished to be rid of Eunice so that they might inherit her father’s money. She told of Reginald Latham’s plan to carry Eunice away that afternoon.

“Now, Mother Eunice,” Mollie ended, “won’t you let little Eunice go away with us this afternoon, instead? We will take good care of her, and will bring her home to you in a few days. But Eunice must see her uncle, Mr. Winthrop Latham. You will not stand in the way of little Eunice’s happiness, I know!” Mollie laid her hand on the old squaw’s arm.

But the squaw had bowed her head. She did not notice Mollie.

“It is the end!” The old woman spoke to herself. “I give up my child. The white blood is stronger than the Indian. She will return to the race of her father. Her

mother’s people shall know her no more.”

“May Eunice go away with us now?” Ruth urged. “And won’t you go down to the village, and stay with Naki and Ceally until Eunice comes back?”

“Take the child, when you will,” assented the Indian woman. “She is mine no longer.”

“Then come, hurry, Eunice. We must be off,” Bab cried.

Eunice got her new coat and hat. Then she flung her arms around her grandmother, and kissed her in the way Mollie had taught her.

The old Indian woman hugged the child to her for one brief instant; then she relaxed her hold and went back into her wigwam.

“The Automobile Girls” and Eunice ran down the hill.

In half an hour they found “Mr. A. Bubble.” He was patiently awaiting their return.

“Jump into the car in a hurry,” Ruth cried. “Put Eunice in the middle. We have a long distance to travel before night falls.”

The girls leaped into the automobile. It sped away through the autumnal woods.

“Look, do look up above us!” Mollie exclaimed.

Away above their heads something white sailed and circled in the air.

“It is Reginald Latham in his airship,” cried Grace.

“Well, Mr. Reginald Latham,” laughed Mollie, “an airship may do the business of the future; but for present purposes I’ll bet on the automobile.”

For hours “The Automobile Girls” drove steadily on. The roads were well marked with signposts. Ruth wished to make a nearby town away from the main line of travel.

At dusk they arrived in North Adams.

Ruth drove at once to a telegraph office, where she telegraphed to Miss Sallie: “Safe in North Adams with Eunice. Had a fine trip. Expect you and Mr. Latham in the morning. All is well. Do not worry. Ruth.”

Ruth and her friends put up at the Wilson House in North Adams. They explained to the hotel proprietor that they were staying in Lenox. Their aunt would join them the next day.

Five weary girls slept the sleep of the just.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE RECOGNITION

Miss Stuart and Mr. Winthrop Latham did not arrive in North Adams the next morning.

A little before noon, Miss Sallie telegraphed to Ruth: “Must see Indian woman before we join you. Proof of child’s identity required. Wait.”

Ruth showed her telegram to the girls.

Barbara shook her head. “More of the work of Mrs. Latham and Reginald,” she suggested.

Soon after the receipt of Ruth’s telegram, the afternoon before, Miss Stuart telephoned Mr. Winthrop Latham, “Will you please come to the hotel to see me immediately?”

Now, Miss Sallie realized her difficult position. How was she to protect the interests of Eunice without accusing Mr. Latham’s relatives of evil designs against the child?

She called up Naki in Pittsfield and told him to come to her hotel that evening. “Naki can tell Mr. Latham what I cannot,” Miss Sallie reflected. “He can report the visit of Mrs. Latham and Reginald to the Indian squaw, and can make Mr. Latham see his sister’s intentions.”

Mr. Latham arrived first for the interview with Miss Stuart. He looked worn and tired.

“My ‘Automobile Girls’ have run off with Eunice!” Miss Stuart at once informed him.

“Why should there be any running away with the child?” Mr. Latham asked impatiently. “I could very easily have gone up to the wigwam in the morning. I think, in many respects, it will be wisest to see the Indian woman and child on their own ground. To tell you the truth, Miss Stuart, I shall require positive

proofs that this Indian girl is the child that my brother's Indian wife carried away from our home years ago."

"Certainly, Mr. Latham," Miss Stuart replied quietly. "I entirely agree with you; but I think it may be possible to secure such proofs."

"I have been talking to my sister and nephew of this child," Mr. Latham continued. "They regard the idea that this little Eunice is the daughter of my brother's wife as absurd. They recalled the fact that we were positively assured of the child's death. They do not believe it possible that the Indian relatives would not have claimed the child's fortune for her. There were a number of educated Indians living in the town of Stockbridge at the time. My brother's wife took refuge with them after leaving us."

"Then, Mr. Latham," Aunt Sallie rejoined, "if the Indian grandmother cannot give you satisfactory proofs of the child's parentage, possibly you can find the additional proofs in Stockbridge."

Mr. Latham was silent. He had not been sorry to be persuaded by Mrs. Latham and Reginald that Eunice was an impostor.

Naki knocked at the door.

"I would rather not see visitors, Miss Stuart," Mr. Latham declared. "I am entirely upset by this present situation."

"It is only our Indian guide, Naki," Miss Sallie explained. "I sent for him."

"Naki," Miss Sallie began, as soon as the man entered the room. "My niece has taken Eunice away for a few days. She told me to ask you to go up to the wigwam and bring the Indian woman down to your house again."

Naki shut his lips together. "The Indian woman will not return to my house," he said.

"Why not?" Miss Stuart asked, angrily. "It is much better for her to be with you. She will die up there."

"She wishes to die up there," Naki avowed.

"Nonsense!" retorted Miss Stuart. "We cannot let her suffer so because of the child."

"She is afraid to come down the hill again," Naki continued. "She is afraid of the law."

"Why should she be afraid of the law?" inquired Mr. Latham.

“I cannot tell,” Naki replied; “but the woman who came to my house with her son told the old squaw she must hide. If her secret was discovered she would be sent to prison.”

“What woman and her son came to your house to see this squaw?” asked Mr. Latham.

Miss Sallie sat with her hands tightly clasped, scarcely daring to breathe. She had not dared to hope that her plan would work out so well.

“I do not know the lady,” said Naki sullenly. “But the young man was Reginald Latham. He was on the hill the day Eunice was hurt. He went with us to the Indian woman’s wigwam. She was angry at his coming.” Naki paused.

Mr. Winthrop Latham was frowning and looking down at the pattern of the carpet. Miss Stuart knew he realized that his sister and nephew were playing a double game which, for the time being, he preferred to ignore.

“Good-night, Miss Stuart,” said Mr. Latham, a few minutes later. “I shall join you in the morning. If the Indian woman is at Naki’s house, I will see her there; if not, I shall go to her wigwam. Notwithstanding all that has happened, she must have satisfactory proofs.”

Miss Stuart knew Mr. Latham now suspected that both his sister-in-law and nephew were convinced of Eunice’s identity.

“Naki,” Miss Sallie asked, “at daylight, to-morrow, will you go to the old squaw’s wigwam? Tell her that she shall not be punished,” continued Miss Stuart. “I am very sorry for her.”

Naki was looking at Miss Stuart. His solemn face expressed surprise. “Do you mean you have found out about Eunice?” he asked.

“Certainly, Naki,” Miss Stuart rejoined. “If you have known Eunice’s story, and have not told it before, you have behaved very badly. Tell the Indian woman to bring what proofs she has to convince Mr. Latham that little Eunice is the child of her daughter.”

“I will,” Naki promised. “But I knowed of Eunice in another way. There is a man in Stockbridge as knows who the child is. He was a preacher once. He is part Indian, part white. He was with Eunice’s mother when she died. She told him about the child, but begged him to keep it a secret. The Indian mother did not want the child to go back to the Lathams. She was afraid they would be unkind to her baby. The man told me the story several years ago.”

Miss Sallie was deeply interested. “Naki, when you bring the squaw to your house in the morning, go to Stockbridge. Then find the man who knows the story of Eunice, and bring him, too.”

“You can count on me,” were Naki’s last words.

The next morning Miss Stuart and Mr. Latham drove to Naki’s home. Neither Naki nor the Indian woman was there!

Naki had left for the wigwam before five o’clock that morning. It was now ten. There was nothing to do but wait.

At eleven o’clock Miss Sallie sent her telegram to Ruth. At noon she and Mr. Latham still waited. There was no sign of Naki or the squaw.

“Don’t you think we had better go up to the wigwam?” Mr. Latham asked impatiently.

“We cannot find our way there without Naki or one of my girls,” Miss Sallie answered.

“What do you think has happened?” Miss Stuart asked Ceally. Ceally shook her head.

“Something is the matter,” she declared, “or Naki would have been here with the old woman hours ago.”

What had become of Naki?

At daylight he reached the hilltop, but no sound of life came from the silent tent.

Naki called to the Indian squaw. There was no answer. “I come to bring you news of Eunice!” he shouted. Still no answer.

He stalked inside the wigwam. The tent was deserted. The Indian woman had disappeared.

Naki was puzzled. He searched the woods near the tent.

Half way down the hill Naki came across a small wooden box, half covered with leaves. Naki opened it. In it he found half a dozen pieces of old jewelry, and an old fashioned daguerreotype of an Indian girl holding a baby in her arms.

Naki had been born and brought up in the woods. He kept his eyes turned to the ground, thinking to trace the footprints of Mother Eunice down the hill. On her departure she had, as she thought, buried her box of treasures. Then she had gone—where?

Naki discovered, midway on the hill, two pairs of footprints, which seemed to indicate that two persons had lately started up the hill. But they must have given up and gone down again.

Naki made up his mind to go at once to Stockbridge. Even though he could not trace the squaw, the testimony of the man who had seen Eunice's mother die, the box of jewelry Naki had found—these proofs of Eunice's identity would convince even Mr. Winthrop Latham.

Miss Stuart and Mr. Latham were at luncheon when Ceally entered the room. Miss Sallie knew, at once, something had happened.

"What is it, Ceally?" she asked.

"They have come!" said Ceally.

"Who?" Mr. Latham demanded.

"Naki, the Indian woman, and another man," was Ceally's reply. There was a short pause, and then the two entered.

Naki spoke first. He explained that he had found the Indian woman at Stockbridge when he had given her up for lost. Then she told in her own way that she had made up her mind to return to Stockbridge and ask help from the man who, alone, knew the story of her grandchild's parentage. The old squaw had completely broken down. She said that she knew that it was best for Eunice to be allowed to come into her inheritance. She said she remembered that Barbara had told her of Mrs. Latham and Reginald's wish to keep Eunice concealed. She finished by telling that midway on the hill, in the early dawn, she had met Reginald Latham and his mother climbing up to her tent. The old squaw, who was wise, had told Mrs. Latham that there was one man in Stockbridge who could prove who Eunice was and that she would go and implore him to keep the child's parentage a secret. Mrs. Latham and Reginald were delighted, and urged the old woman to go.

Mr. Latham listened quietly to Mother Eunice's story and to that of the man from Stockbridge, who bore the old woman witness.

It was a simple story. The Indian grandmother thought her daughter had been unhappy because of her marriage into the Latham family, believing the girl had been persecuted because of her Indian blood. So she wished to spare her grandchild the same fate.

Mr. Latham was entirely convinced. Eunice was his niece.

“Come,” he said, finally, to Miss Stuart. “Let us be off to our girls!”

“Mother Eunice,” he said solemnly, shaking the old squaw’s hand, “I promise to be good to your child. You shall not be separated from her. But she must be educated as other girls are. Stay here with Ceally and Naki.”

The Indian woman bowed her head. She had given in forever when she surrendered Eunice to “The Automobile Girls” the afternoon before.

But what about Eunice and her protectors? They had not dared to leave the hotel for fear that Aunt Sallie and Mr. Latham might arrive in their absence.

So the girls were waiting with the best patience possible, curled up in the chairs and on the sofa. Barbara was reading aloud. Little Eunice had fallen fast asleep on the bed.

Suddenly Miss Sallie and Mr. Latham walked in unannounced.

“Well, this is a cosy party!” declared Mr. Latham, smiling.

Bab dropped her magazine, Ruth sat up straight in her chair, while Mollie and Grace nearly rolled off their sofa.

Their noise wakened Eunice, who sat up in bed with her cheeks flushed. Her black hair was massed about her face. She wore a red dressing gown that Ruth had bought for her the night before. She was so pretty that Mr. Latham was moved by her appearance.

But Eunice was frightened when she saw Mr. Latham—he was the man who had stared at her so strangely—he was the man who meant to steal her, so, at least, Reginald Latham had told Eunice. The little girl began to cry softly.

Mollie started up to go to Eunice, but she stopped at a frown from Miss Sallie. Mr. Latham was approaching Eunice.

“I am not going to hurt you, Eunice,” he declared. “Do I look like the bogie man, who lives in the woods and comes to steal away naughty children?”

Eunice shook her head. “There are no bogie men in the woods. Wood fairies are all good.”

“Well, I am no kind of fairy, Eunice. I am an uncle. Do you know what an uncle is?” Mr. Latham inquired.

Eunice shook her head again.

“O Eunice, an uncle can be the nicest person in the world!” Mollie exclaimed.

“And that is what Mr. Latham is going to be to you. Kiss him, and tell him you mean to be good.”

Mr. Winthrop Latham and little Indian Eunice kissed each other shyly and solemnly. But in that kiss their affection was sealed.

What Reginald Latham and his mother thought of the discovery of the relationship between Eunice and Mr. Winthrop Latham may be easily imagined. Eunice as his niece would undoubtedly inherit a large portion of his fortune. And how was Reginald to be provided for? Bent on the effort to conceal the relationship, Reginald and his mother had started long before dawn to walk up to the grandmother’s hut, and, as the old squaw had explained, had met her on the side of the hill. They had tried to induce her to give them the name of the man in Stockbridge who knew of Eunice’s parentage, but the old woman was obdurate. Failing in this, mother and son had returned to their home.

CHAPTER XXIV

WHAT TO DO WITH EUNICE

“Bab, will you come out on the hotel driveway a minute?” Ruth asked of Barbara. Miss Sallie and the girls were back in Lenox. Little Eunice was, for the present, staying at their hotel with them.

“I am not dressed, Ruth, dear. I shall join you in a minute,” Bab called back to her. “What’s the matter?”

“Wait and see, lady mine,” sang Ruth. “But do, do hurry. Mollie, Grace and I are waiting for you, and there is another friend with us whom you will be de-lighted to see!”

“Ralph, or Hugh?” Bab guessed.

“Neither one this time!” Ruth declared. “But now I must fly back. If you wish to know what is going on, hurry along.”

On the hotel driveway Bab first discovered Mr. Winthrop Latham with Aunt Sallie and Eunice. Eunice had her hand in her uncle’s. They had grown to be great friends.

A little farther on Barbara spied Ruth, Mollie and Grace. Near them stood a stable boy. He was leading a beautiful little horse about by the bridle. It was Beauty.

Barbara looked around for Dorothy or Gwendolin Morton. However, neither of the girls could be seen.

“Here comes Bab,” called Mollie.

But Barbara had already run up to Beauty.

“O girls, I believe she knows me!” Bab exclaimed in delight. The little horse neighed as Bab stroked its glossy neck. It put its pretty nose down near her hand and sniffed. Beauty plainly expected a lump of sugar as a reward for her morning

call.

“How did you happen to bring the horse over?” Bab asked of the stable boy.

“The master said I was to put the horse in the hotel stables until it could be shipped,” the boy explained.

“Oh, some one has bought Beauty!” Bab cried, in distress. “I am so sorry! How could Dorothy Morton ever have been willing to sell her?”

Barbara noticed that Grace, Ruth and Mollie were smiling broadly. Mr. Winthrop Latham, Aunt Sallie and Eunice had drawn near.

“Why shouldn’t Dorothy Morton sell Beauty to a girl who cares more for the horse than Dorothy does?” Ruth inquired.

Bab shrugged her shoulders. “Oh, very well!” she pouted. “If Dorothy thinks there is any other horse in the world to compare with Beauty, she deserves to lose her. My sweet little Beauty, good-bye!” Barbara cried.

The stable boy grinned. Everyone was smiling.

“What’s the joke?” Bab asked.

“Beauty is yours, Bab!” cried Mollie.

Bab looked at Mollie indignantly. “It isn’t fair to tease me, Mollie,” she declared. “You know how much I really care.”

“But Mollie is not teasing you, Bab,” Ruth interrupted. “Read that tag!”

Surely enough, on a card fastened by a blue ribbon to Beauty’s bridle, Bab read her own name and her sister’s.

“But we cannot accept such a gift from the Ambassador!” Bab protested, feelingly.

“The Ambassador did not give us Beauty, Bab!” exclaimed Mollie.

But Barbara had thrown her arms around Ruth’s neck. “You are just the dearest, sweetest friend in the world, Ruth Stuart!” she cried. “And I’d love you more than ever if I could. But Mollie and I cannot accept Beauty from you. You have done too much for us.”

“Well, Bab,” laughed Ruth, “you are the most difficult person in the world to bestow a present upon; but I am not guilty.”

“Then who has given Beauty to us?” demanded Bab.

“No other person than Cousin Betty in St. Paul!” answered Mistress Mollie. “Do you remember, Bab? Mother wrote that Cousin Betty meant to give us a beautiful present when she came home. The present was to be a horse, and Cousin Betty is going to give us the money to take care of it. Mother was to buy the horse when she returned to Kingsbridge. When you wrote of your ride on Beauty, mother wrote to Ruth to inquire if the horse were for sale. The Ambassador and Dorothy were both willing to sell her to us, but to no one else.”

“I do not know what we have ever done to deserve such good fortune.” Barbara spoke so solemnly that her friends all laughed.

“But I have more news, and better news for you, Bab!” cried Mollie, triumphantly, “mother is willing for us to bring Eunice home with us for the winter!”

“Dear little Eunice!” Bab said, kissing the Indian girl.

“I shall never cease to be grateful to you and to your mother for this kindness,” declared Mr. Winthrop Latham, taking Barbara’s hand. “You know the difficult situation in which I am placed in regard to Eunice. I dare not take the child home, at present, to live with my sister-in-law and my nephew. It seemed even more cruel to send Eunice to boarding school while the child knows nothing of the world. But, if your kind mother will keep her with you, let her go to school, and teach her just a little of what you know, I shall be deeply in your debt.”

“No such thing, Mr. Latham!” laughed Mollie. “We are going to be in your debt for lending us Eunice. Mother will just love her.”

“But I am coming back next summer to see you and my grandmother?” Eunice begged. “You said, if I were very good, you would take me to ride in your balloon some day.”

Mr. Latham laughed. “Eunice will never be happy until she learns to fly,” he declared.

“I hate good-byes, don’t you, Aunt Sallie?” Barbara asked Miss Stuart that night. Ruth, Grace and Mollie were standing on a trunk trying to fasten it. “The Automobile Girls” were to leave Lenox early the next morning.

“Barbara, remember Ruth’s motto for ‘The Automobile Girls.’ We are never to say good-bye!”

“What then, Aunt Sallie?” asked Bab, Grace, Mollie and Ruth in chorus.

“‘The Automobile Girls’ are always to say,” declared Miss Sallie, gently, “not

good-bye, but *Auf Wiedersehen*."

POSTSCRIPT

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