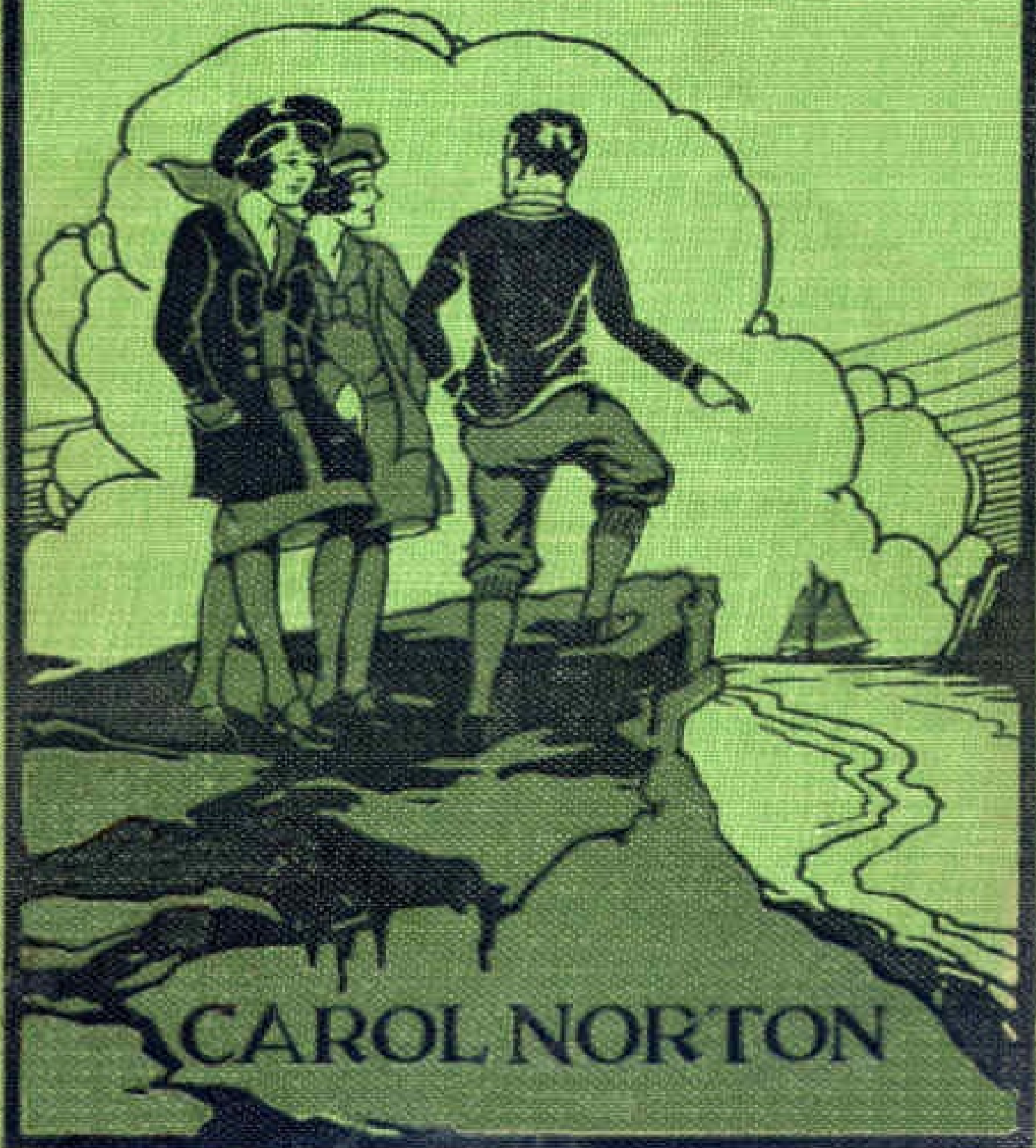


*The*  
**PHANTOM YACHT**



**CAROL NORTON**

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Title: The Phantom Yacht

Author: Carol Norton

Illustrator: D. Curley

Release Date: December 9, 2013 [EBook #44401]

Language: English

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“Look! Look!” he cried. “That’s what I was wantin’ to find.”

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(Page 101) (The Phantom Yacht)

# THE PHANTOM YACHT

By CAROL NORTON

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AUTHOR OF  
"Bobs, A Girl Detective," "The Seven Sleuths' Club," etc.

Girls beside the ocean

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A. L. BURT COMPANY  
Publishers New York  
Printed in U. S. A.

## MYSTERY *and* ADVENTURE SERIES *for* GIRLS

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# **THE PHANTOM YACHT**

## CHAPTER I. FRIENDS PARTED

The face of Doris Moore was as dismal as the day was bright. It was Indian summer and the maple trees under which she was hurrying were joyfully arrayed in red and gold, while crimson, yellow and purple flowers nodded at her from the gardens that she passed with unseeing eyes. She was almost blinded with tears; her scarlet tam was awry, as though she had put it on hurriedly, and her sweater coat, of the same cheerful hue, was unbuttoned and flapping as she fairly ran down the village street. In her hand was a note which had been the cause of the tears and the haste. On it were a few penciled words:

“Dori dear, we are leaving sooner than we expected. I’m sending this to you by little Johnnie-next-door. Do come right over and say good-bye to someone who loves you best of all.

“Your sister-friend,

“NANN.”

At a large old colonial house at the edge of the town, just where the meadows began, the girl turned in at a lilac-guarded gate and hurried up the neatly graveled walk. Her eyes were again brimming with tears as she glanced up at the curtainless windows that looked as dismal and deserted as she felt. Hurrying up the steps, she lifted the quaintly carved old iron knocker and shuddered as she heard the sound echoing uncannily through the big unfurnished rooms. Her sensitive mouth quivered when she heard the sound of running feet on bare floors and when the door was flung open by another girl of about the same age, Dori leaped in and, throwing her arms about her friend, she burst into tears.

“Why, Dories! Dear, dear Dori, don’t cry so hard.” There were sudden tears in the warm brown eyes of Nann Sibbett, as for a moment she held her friend tenderly close.

“One might think that I was going a million miles away.” She tried to speak cheerfully. “Boston isn’t so very far from Elmwood and some day, soon, I am sure that you will be coming to visit me.”

An April-like smile flickered tremulously on the lips of the younger girl as she stepped back and straightened her tam. “Well, that is something to look forward to,” she confessed. “It will be a little strip of silver lining to as black a cloud as ever came into my life. Of course,” Dories amended, “losing father was terrible, but I was too young to know the loneliness of it, and being poor when we should be rich is awfully hard. Sometimes I feel so rebellious, O, nobody knows how rebellious I feel. But losing one’s money is nothing compared to losing one’s only friend.”

The other girl, who was taller by half a head, actually laughed. “Why, Dories Moore, here you talk as though you would not have a single friend left when I have moved away. There isn’t a girl at High who hasn’t been green with envy because I have had the good fortune to be your best friend ever since we were in kindergarten, and just as soon as I’m out of town they’ll be swarming around you, each one aspiring to be your pal.”

There was a scornful curl on the sensitive lips of the listener. “As though I would let anyone have your place, Nann Sibbett. Never, never, never, not if I live to be a thousand years old.” Then with an appealing upward glance, “But you’ll probably like some city girl heaps better than you ever did me. I suppose you’ll forget all about me soon.”

“Silly!” Nann exclaimed brightly, giving her friend an impulsive hug. “Don’t you remember when you were eleven and I was twelve, we had a ceremony out in the meadow under the twin elms and we vowed, just as solemnly as we knew how, that we would be adopted sisters and that real born sisters could not be closer.”

Dories nodded, smiling again at the pleasant recollection. “Do you know, Nann,” she put in, “I sort of feel that we were intended to be sisters some way. It was such a strange coincidence that our birthdays happened to fall on the same day,

the third of September.”

“Maybe if they hadn’t,” Nann chimed in, “you and I wouldn’t have been best friends at all, for, don’t you remember, way back in kindergarten days, you were so shy you didn’t make friends with anyone, and when Miss Sally wanted to find a seat for you that very first morning, she chose me because it was our birthday. After that, since I was a year older, I felt that I ought to look out for you just as a big sister really should.”

Dories nodded, then as she glanced into the bare library, in the wide doorway of which they were standing, she said dismally, “O, Nann, what good times we’ve had in this room. I can almost see now when we were very little girls curled up on that window seat near the fireplace studying our first primer, and on and on until last June when we were cramming for our sophomore finals.”

“I know.” Nann looked wistfully toward the corner which Dories had indicated. “I don’t believe we will either of us know how to study alone.” Then, fearing that tears would come again, she caught her friend’s hand as she exclaimed, “Dories dear, this room is too full of ghosts of our past. Let’s go out in the garden. Dad had to go to the bank to finish up some business, and I had to stay here to see that the last load of furniture got off safely. It left just before you came. We’re going to store it for a time and live in a very fine hotel in Boston. Won’t that be a lark for a change?”

Dories spoke bitterly, “Well, for one thing I *am* thankful, and that is that your father didn’t lose his money the way my father did, though how it happened I never knew and mother never told me.”

“Maybe it will all come back some time in a manner just as mysterious,” her friend said cheerfully as she led her down the steps around the house. Neither of the girls spoke of Nann’s dear mother, who had so recently died, and whose passing had made life in the old house unendurable to the daughter and her father, but they were both thinking of her as they wandered into the garden which she had so loved. Nann slipped an arm about her friend as she paused to look at the blossoms.

“Autumn flowers are always so bright and cheerful, aren’t they, Dori?” She was determined to change the younger girl’s dismal trend of thought. “That bed of scarlet salvia over by the evergreen hedge seems to be just rejoicing about



something, and the asters, of almost every color, look as though they were dressed for a party. They're happy, if we aren't."

"Stupid things!" Dories said petulantly. "They don't know or care because you, who have tended and watered and loved them, are going away forever and ever."

"Yes, they do know," Nann said, smiling a bit tremulously, "for last night when I came out to give them a drink, I told them all about it, but they're just trying to make the best of it. They know it's as hard for me to go away from my old home as it is for them to have me go, but they're trying to make it easier for me, I guess."

Dories flashed a quick glance up at her companion. Then, impulsively, "Oh, Nann, how selfish I always am! Of course it's hard for you to leave your old home and go among strangers. Here all the time I've just been thinking how *hard* it is for *me* to have you go." Then, making a little bow toward the bed of radiant asters, the girl of many moods called to them: "You're setting a good example, you little plant folk in your bright blossom tams. From now on I'll be just as cheerful as ever I can." Smiling up at her companion, Dories exclaimed, "And all this time I've had some news that I haven't told you." Answering verbally her friend's questioning look, she hurried on, "I'm going away myself for the month of October. At least I suppose I am, and that's one of the things that has made me so dismally blue." Nann stopped in the garden path which they had been slowly circling and gazed into the pretty face of her friend, hardly knowing whether to congratulate or condole. Instead of doing either, she queried, "But why are you so dismal about it, Dori? I've often heard you say that you did wish you could see something of the world beyond Elmwood?"

"I know it and I still should wish it if you were going with me, but this journey is anything but pleasant to anticipate."

"Do tell me about it. I'm consumed with curiosity." Nann drew her friend to a garden seat and sat with an arm holding her close. "Now start at the beginning. *Who* are you going with, where and why?" The question, simple as it seemed, brought tears with a rush to the violet-blue eyes of the younger girl, but remembering her recent resolve, she sat up ramrod-straight as she replied, making her mouth into as hard a line as she could. "The one I am going with is an old crab of a great-aunt whom I have never seen. I'm ever so sure she is a crab, although my angel mother always smooths over that part of her nature

when she's telling me about her. She's rich as Cræsus, if that fabled person really was rich. I'm never very sure about those things."

Nann laughed. "He was! You're safe in your comparison. But he got much of his money by taking it away from other people with the cruel taxes he levied."

"Oh, well, of course my Great Aunt Jane isn't so terribly rich," Dories modified, "but Mother said she had plenty for every comfort and luxury, and what's more, Mums *did* agree with *me* when I said that she must be queer. That is, Mother said that even my father, who was Great-Aunt Jane's own nephew, couldn't understand her ways." Then, with eyes solemn-wide, the narrator continued: "Nann Sibbett, as I've often told you, I don't understand in the least what became of our inheritance. If Mother knows, she won't tell, but I'm suspicious of that crabby old Aunt Jane. I think she has it. There now, that's what I think."

Nann was interested and said so. "But, Dori dear, you've sidetracked. You began by saying that you were going somewhere. I take it that your Great-Aunt Jane has invited you to go somewhere with her. Is that right?"

"It is!" the other girl said glumly. "But, believe me, I don't look forward to the excursion with any great pleasure." Then she hurried on. "Think of it, Nann, that awful old lady has actually requested that I spend the whole dismal month of October with her down on the beach at some lonely isolated place called Siquaw Point."

But if Dories expected sympathy, she was disappointed. "Oh, Dori!" was the excited exclamation that she heard, "I know about Siquaw Point. An aunt of mine went there one summer, and she just raved about the rocky cliffs, the sand dunes and the sea. I'd love it, I know, even in the middle of winter, and, dear, sometimes October is a beautiful month. You may have a wonderful time."

But Dories refused to see any hope of happiness ahead. "The Garden of Eden would be a dismal place to me if I had to be alone in it with my Great-Aunt Jane."

Nann laughed, then hearing a siren calling from the front, she sprang up, held out both hands to her friend as she exclaimed, "There's my chauffeur-dad waiting to bear me stationward, but, dear, I've thought of one thing that will help some. To get to Siquaw Point you will have to go through Boston. If you'll let me know the day and the hour I'll be at the station to speed you on your way."

How the younger girl's face brightened. "Nann, darling," she exclaimed, "will you truly? Then that will give me a chance to see you again in just a few weeks, maybe only two, for its nearly October now."

"Righto!" was the cheerful reply. "There's that siren again. I must go. Will you come and say good-bye to Dad?"

But the other girl shook her head, her eyes brimming with tears. "I'd rather not now. You tell him for me. I'm going home across lots. I don't want anyone to see how near I am to crying." As she spoke two tears splashed down her cheeks. Nann caught her in a close embrace. "Dear, dear sister-friend," she said, "I'm going to be just as lonely as you are." Then, stooping, she picked an aster and held it out, saying brightly, "This golden aster wants to go with you to tell you that we're going to be as cheerful as we can, come what may. See you next month, Dori, sure as sure."

Nann turned at the corner of the house to wave, and then Doris walked slowly across lots thinking over the conversation she had had with her dearly loved friend. She paused a moment under the twin elms where, in the long ago, they had vowed to be loyal as any two sisters could be. Then, with a deep sigh, she went on to the cosy brown house under other spreading elms that she called home.

## CHAPTER II. BANISHING GHOSTS

There was a cheerful bustle in the kitchen when Dories opened the side door. Her mother was preparing the noon meal with her customary wordless song, although now and then a merry message to the frail boy, who so often sat in a low chair near the stove, was sung to the melody. Just then the newcomer heard the lilted announcement: "Footsteps I hear, and now will appear my very dear little daughter."

Dories was repentant. "Oh, Mother, if I haven't stayed out too late again, and you've had to stop your sewing to get lunch."

Little Peter paused in his whittling long enough to remark, "Dori, you've been crying. What for?"

But a tactful mother shook her head quickly at the small boy, saying brightly, "O, I was glad to stop sewing and stretch a bit. That brocade dress is hard to work on. I don't know how many machine needles it has broken. But since it belongs to a rich person she won't mind paying for them."

After putting the golden aster in a vase, Dories snatched her apron from its hook in the closet and put it on with darkening looks. "Mother Moore," she threatened, "if you don't go and lie down on the lounge until lunch is ready, I'm not going to let you sew a single bit more today. It's just terribly wicked, and all wrong somehow, that you have to make dresses for other women to keep us alive when my very own father's very own Aunt Jane is simply rolling in wealth, and \_\_\_\_\_"

"Tut! Tut! Little firefly!" Her mother laughingly shook a stirring spoon in her direction. "If you had ever seen your stately old Aunt Jane, you just couldn't

conceive of her rolling in anything. That would be much too undignified.”

“But, Mother, you know I meant that figuratively, not literally. She is rich and we are poor. Now I ask you what right has one member of a family to have all that his heart desires and another to have to sew for a living.”

Little Peter tittered: “It’s *her* heart, if it’s Great-Aunt Jane you’re talking about.” A sharp retort was on the girl’s lips when her mother said cheerily, “Now, kiddies, let’s talk about something else. Mrs. Doran sent us over a whole pint of cream. Shall we have it whipped on those last blackberries that Peter found this morning out in Briary Meadow, or shall I make a little biscuit shortcake?”

“Shortcake! Shortcake! I want shortcake!” Peter sang out.

“But, Mother, you’re too tired to make one,” Dories protested.

“Then you make it, Dori,” Peter pleaded.

“You know I couldn’t make a biscuit shortcake, Peter Moore, not if my life depended on it.” The girl was in a self-accusing mood. “I never learned how to do anything useful.” Dories was putting the pretty lunch dishes on a small table in the kitchen corner breakfast-nook as she talked.

The understanding mother, realizing the conflicting emotions that were making her young daughter so unhappy, brought out the flour and other ingredients as she said, “Never too late to learn, dear. Come and take your first lesson in biscuit-making.”

Half an hour later, as they sat around the lunch table, Dories told as much of her recent conversation with her best friend as she wished to share. Then they had the blackberry shortcake and real cream, and even Peter acknowledged that it was “most as good as Mother’s.”

When the kitchen had been tidied and Peter had gone to his little upper room for the nap that was so necessary for the regaining of his health, Dories went into the small sewing room which formerly had been her father’s den and stood looking discontentedly out of the window. Her mother had resumed sewing on the rich brocaded dress. When the hum of the machine was stilled, she glanced at the pensive girl and said: “Dori dear, this is the first afternoon that I can remember, almost, that you have been at home with me. You and Nann always went

somewhere or did something. You are going to miss your best friend ever so much, I know, but—” there was a break in the voice which caused the girl to turn and look inquiringly at her mother, who was intently pressing a seam, and who finished her sentence a bit pathetically, “it’s going to mean a good deal to me, daughter, to have your companionship once in a while.”

With a little cry the girl sprang across the room and knelt at her mother’s side, her arms about her. “O, Mumsie, was there ever a more selfish girl? I don’t see how you have kept on loving me all these years.” Then her pretty face flushed and she hesitated before confessing: “I hate to say it, for it only shows how truly horrid I am, but I liked to be over at Nann’s, where the furniture was so beautiful, not threadbare like ours.” She was looking through the open door into the living-room, where she could see the old couch with its worn covering. “I ought to have stayed at home and helped you with your sewing, but I will from now on.”

The mother, knowing that tears were near, put a finger beneath the girl’s chin and looked deep into the repentant violet blue eyes. Kissing her tenderly, she said merrily, “Very well, young lady, if you wish to punish yourself for past neglects, sit over there in my low rocker and take the bastings out of this skirt.”

Dories obeyed and was soon busy at the simple task. To change the subject, her mother spoke of the planned trip. “It will be your very first journey away from Elmwood, dear. At your age I would have been ever so excited.”

The girl looked up from her work, a cloud of doubt in her eyes. “Oh, Mother, do you really think that you would have been, if you were going to a summer resort where the cottages were all shut up tight as clams, boarded up, too, probably, and with such a queer, grumpy person as Great-Aunt Jane for company?” The girl shuddered. “Every time I think of it I feel the chills run down my back. I just know the place will be full of ghosts. I won’t sleep a wink all the time I’m there. I’m convinced of that.”

Her mother’s merry laugh was reassuring. “Ghosts, dearie?” she queried, glancing up. “Surely you aren’t in earnest. You don’t believe in ghosts, do you?”

“Well, maybe not, exactly, but there are the queerest stories told about those lonely out-of-the-way places. You know that there are, Mother. I don’t mean made-up stories in books. I mean real newspaper accounts.”

“But it doesn’t matter what kind of paper they’re printed on, Dori,” her mother put in, more seriously, “nothing could make a ghost story true. The only ghosts that haunt us, really, are the memories of loving words left unsaid and loving deeds that were not done, and sometimes,” she concluded sadly, “it is too late to ever banish those ghosts.” Then, not wishing to depress her already heart-broken daughter, she said in a lighter tone, “After all, why worry about your visit to Siquaw Point, when, as yet, you haven’t heard that your Great-Aunt Jane has really decided to go. I expected a letter every day last week, but none came, so she may have given up the plan for this year.” Then, after glancing up at the clock, she added, “Three, and almost time for the postman. I believe I hear his whistle now.”

At that moment Peter bounded in, his face rosy from his nap. “Postman’s coming,” he sang out. “Come on, Dori, I’ll beat you to the gate.”

The girl rose, saying gloomily, “This is probably the fatal day. I’m just sure there’ll be a letter from Great-Aunt Jane. I don’t see why she chose me when she’s never even seen me.”

When Doris reached the front door, she saw that Peter was already out in the road, frantically beckoning to her. “Hurry along, Dori. The postman’s just leaving Mrs. Doran’s,” he called; then as the mail wagon, drawn by a lean white horse, approached, the small boy ran out in the road and waved his arms.

Mr. Higgins, who had stopped at their door ever since Peter had been a baby, beamed at him over his glasses. “Law sakes!” he exclaimed, “Do I see a bandit? Guess you’ve been reading stories about ‘Dick Dead-shot’ holding up mail coaches in the Rockies. Sorry, but there ain’t nothin’ for you.” Then, smilingly, he addressed the girl. “Likely in a day or two I’ll be fetchin’ you a letter, Dori, from your old friend Nann Sibbett. It’ll be powerfully lonesome around here for you, I reckon, now she’s gone.”

The girl nodded. “Just awfully lonesome, Mr. Higgins, and please do bring me a letter soon.” Just then Johnnie Doran called for Peter to come over and play, and the girl went slowly back to the house.

Her mother looked up inquiringly. “No letter at all,” Doris announced in so disappointed a tone that she laughingly confessed, “Mother, I do believe that I’m made up of the contrariest emotions. I do hate the thought of spending that

dismal month of October with Great-Aunt Jane at Siquaw Point, but I hate even worse going back to High without Nann.”

“Dear girl,” the mother’s voice held a tenderly given rebuke, “you aren’t thinking in the least of the pleasure your companionship might give your Great-Aunt Jane. She was very fond of your father when he was a boy, and he spent many a summer with her at Siquaw. That may be her reason for inviting you. Your father seemed to be the only person for whom she really cared.” Then, before the rather surprised girl could reply, the mother continued, “I wish, dear, that you would hunt up your Aunt’s last letter and answer it more fully. I was so busy when it came that I merely sent a few lines, thanking her for the invitation.”

Dories sighed as she rose to obey, but turned back to listen when her mother continued: “I know how hard it is going to be, dear girl, but I have a reason, which I cannot explain just now, for very much wishing you to go. Now write the letter and make it as interesting and newsy as you can.”

Dories, from the door, dropped a curtsy. “Very well, Mrs. Moore,” she said, “to please you I’ll write to the crabbedy old lady, but——” Her mother merrily shook her finger at her. “I want you to withhold judgment, daughter, until you have seen your Great-Aunt Jane.”



## **CHAPTER III. A LOST MOTHER**

A week passed, and though Dories received several picture postcards from her best friend, not a line came from her Great-Aunt Jane.

“She has probably changed her mind about going to Siquaw, dear, and so you would better prepare to start back to school on Monday. I had talked the matter over with the principal, Mr. Setherly, and he told me that you could easily make up October’s work, but, if you are not going away, it will be better for you to begin the term with the others.”

They were at breakfast, and for a long, silent moment the girl sat gazing out of the window at a garden that was beginning to look dry and sear. When she turned back toward her mother, there were tears in her eyes.

The woman placed a hand on the one near her as she tenderly inquired, “Are you disappointed because you’re not going, daughter?”

“No, no, not that, but you can’t know how I dread returning to High without Nann. We had planned graduating together and after that going to college together if only we could find a way.”

Her mother glanced up quickly as though there was something that she wanted to say, then pressed her lips firmly as though to keep some secret from being uttered. Dories listlessly continued eating. There was a closer pressure of her mother’s hand. “It is hard, dear, I know,” the understanding voice was saying. “Life brings many disappointments, but there is always a compensation. You’ll see!” Then, glancing toward the stair door, which was slowly opening, the mother called, “Hurry up, you lazy Peterkins. Come and have your breakfast. I want you and Dories to go to the village and match some silk for me as soon as

you can.”

Then, when she served the little fellow, the loving woman returned to her daily task and left a half self-pitying, half rebellious and wholly dispirited girl to wash and put away the dishes. Then listlessly she donned her scarlet tam and sweater coat and went into the sewing room to get the samples that she was to match. Her mother smiled up into her dismal face. “Dori, daughter, don’t gloom around so much,” she pleaded. “I shall actually believe that you are disappointed because you are *not* going to Siquaw. Now, here’s the silk to be matched and there’s Peterkins waiting for you. Come back as soon as you can, won’t you?”

It was midmorning when Dories and the small boy returned from the shopping expedition. They went at once to the sewing room, but their mother was not there. They looked in the living room and in the kitchen. “Mother, where are you?” they both called, but there was no reply.

“Maybe she’s upstairs,” Peter suggested.

“Of course. How stupid for me to forget that we have an upstairs to our house.” Dories felt strangely excited as she ran up the circling front stairway calling again and again, but still there was no reply. Down the long upper corridor they went, opening one door and another, beginning to feel almost frightened at the stillness.

Then Dories exclaimed, “Oh, maybe she’s gone over to Mrs. Doran’s for a moment. I guess she couldn’t do any sewing until we came back with the silk.” They were about to descend the back stairs when they heard a noise in the garret overhead.

The frail boy caught his sister’s hand and held it tight. “Do you suppose it’s ghosts,” he whispered.

“No, of course not,” the girl replied. The attic was a low, dark, cobwebby place hardly high enough to stand in, and they never went there. “There are no ghosts. Mother said so.”

“Then maybe it’s a rat scratching around,” the boy suggested, “or that wild barn cat may have got in somehow. Do you dare open the door, Dori, and call up?”

“Of course I do, but first I’ll creep up a little way and look.” Very quietly Dories

opened the door and stealthily ascended the dark, short stairway. All was still in the dusky, musty attic. Then a light flashed for a moment in a far corner. Truly frightened, Dories turned and hurried down the stairs. Quick steps were heard above: then a familiar voice called, "Dories, is that you, dear? Why are you stealing about in that way? Come up a moment, daughter! I want you to help me drag this old trunk out of the corner."

Then, when the girl, with Peter following, appeared on the top step, the mother explained: "I thought I'd be down before you could get back. I have news for you, Dori. Just after you left, a night letter was delivered. In it your Great-Aunt Jane said that she had entirely given up her plan to spend a month at Siquaw Point until she received your letter. She had decided that if you were so rude as to ignore her invitation, you were not the kind of a girl she wished to know, even if you are her niece, but your letter caused her to change her mind. She wishes you to meet her this afternoon in Boston and go directly from there to Siquaw Point."

"O, Mother, how terrible!" Dories was truly dismayed. "I won't have time to let Nann know, and she was to meet me at the station. That was the one redeeming feature about the whole thing."

"Well, you can see her when you return, and maybe you can plan to stay a day or two with her. Now help me with this little trunk, dear. We have only two hours to prepare your clothes and pack."

They carried the small steamer trunk down to Dories' room and by noon it was packed and locked, and, soon after, the expressman came to take both the trunk and the girl to the station.

Dories' face was flushed and tears were in her eyes when she said good-bye. "I feel so strange and excited, Mother," she confided, "going out into the world for the very first time, and O, Mumsie, no one knows how I dread being all alone in a boarded-up cottage at a deserted summer resort with such a dreadful old woman." Dories clung to her mother in little girl fashion as though she hoped at the very last moment she might be told that she need not go, but what she heard was: "Mr. Hanson is in a hurry, dear. He has the trunk on his cart and he's waiting to help you up on the seat."

Dories caught her breath in an effort not to cry, kissed her mother and Peter

hurriedly, picked up her hand-satchel and darted down the path.

From the high seat she waved and smiled. Then she called in an effort at cheeriness. "Don't forget, Mrs. Moore, that you promised to take October for a real vacation and not sew a bit after you finish the silk dress."

"I promise!" the mother called. "Peter and I will just play. Write to us often."

Mr. Hanson, finding that it was late, drove rapidly to the station, and it was well that he did, for the train was just drawing in when they arrived. Dories quickly purchased a ticket and checked her trunk with the expressman's help, then, climbing aboard, chose a seat near a window. After all, she found herself quite pleasurably excited. It was such a new experience to be traveling alone. Few of the passengers noticed her and no one spoke. She was glad, as her mother had warned her not to enter into conversation with strangers.

As she watched the flying landscape the girl thought of something her mother had said on the day that she had asked her to answer her Great-Aunt Jane's letter. "I have a reason, Dori, for really wishing you to go to Siquaw with your aunt," she had said. What could that reason be? Not until Boston was neared did her speculation cease; then she became conscious of but two emotions, curiosity about her Great-Aunt Jane and a crushing disappointment because she had not been able to let Nann Sibbett know when to meet her.

When the train finally stopped, Dories, feeling very young and very much alone, followed the crowd of passengers into the huge station. She was to meet her aunt in the woman's waiting room, and she stopped a hurrying porter to inquire where she would find it. Almost timidly she entered the large, comfortably furnished room, then, seeing an elderly woman dressed in black, who was sitting stiffly erect, the girl went toward her as she said diffidently: "Pardon me, but are *you* my Great-Aunt Jane?" The woman threw back a heavy black crepe veil and her sharp gray eyes gazed up at the girl penetratingly.

"Humph!" was the ungracious reply. "Well, at least you've got your father's eyes. That's something to be thankful for, but I've no doubt that you look like your mother otherwise."

There was something about the tone in which this was said that put the girl on the defensive.

“I certainly hope I do look like my darling mother,” she exclaimed, her diffidence vanishing. The elderly woman seemed not to hear.

“Sit down, why don’t you?” she said in a querulous tone. “The train doesn’t go for an hour yet.”

The girl sank into a comfortable chair which faced the one occupied by her aunt; the back of which was toward the door.

For a moment neither spoke, then remembering the coaching she had received, Dorries said hesitatingly, “I want to thank you, Aunt Jane, for having invited me to go with you. I am pleased to——”

A sniff preceded the remark that interrupted: “I know how pleased you are to go with a fussy old woman to a deserted summer resort. About as pleased as a cat is out in the rain.” Then, as though her interest in Dorries had ceased, the old woman drew the heavy crêpe veil down over her face, but the girl was sure that she could see the sharp eyes peering through it as though she were intently watching some object over Dori’s shoulder.

The girl had expected her aunt to be queer, but this was far worse than her most dismal anticipations. At last the girl became so nervous that she glanced back of her to see what her aunt could be watching. She saw only the open door that led into the main waiting room of the station. Women were passing in and out, but that was nothing to stare at. Seeming, at last, to recall her companion’s presence, the old woman addressed her: “Dorries, you wrote me that you had a girl friend here in Boston who would come down to the train to see you off. Why doesn’t she come?”

“I didn’t have time to let her know, Aunt Jane,” was the dismal reply. “I’m just ever so disappointed.”

The old woman nodded her head toward the door. “Is that her?” she asked. “Is that your friend?”

Dorries sprang to her feet and turned. A tall girl, carrying a suitcase, was approaching them. With a cry of mingled amazement and joy, Dorries ran toward her and held out both hands. “Why, Nann, darling, it *can’t* be you.” The newcomer dropped her bag and they flew into each other’s arms. Then, standing back, Dori asked, much mystified, “Why, are you going somewhere Nann?”

It was the old woman who replied grimly: “She is! I invited her to go with us. There now! Don’t try to thank me.” She held up a protesting hand when Dori, flushed and happy, turned toward her. “I did it for myself, I can assure you. I knew having you moping around for a month wouldn’t add any to *my* pleasure.”

An embarrassing moment was saved by a stentorian voice in the doorway announcing: “All aboard for Siquaw Center and way stations.” A colored porter appeared to carry the bags, and the old woman, leaning heavily on her cane, limped after him, followed by the girls, in whose hearts there were mingled emotions, but joy predominated, for, however terrible Dori’s Great-Aunt Jane might be, at least they were to spend a whole long month together.

## CHAPTER IV. SEAWARD BOUND

There were very few people on the seaward-bound train; indeed Miss Jane Moore, Nann and Dories were the only occupants of the chair car. After settling herself comfortably in the chair nearest the front, the old woman, with a sweep of her arm toward the back, said almost petulantly: "Sit as far away from me as you can. I may want to sleep, and I know girls. They chatter, chatter, chatter, titter, titter, titter all about nothing."

Her companions were glad to obey, and when they were seated at the rear end of the car, they kept their heads close together while they visited that they might not disturb the elderly woman, who, to all appearances, fell at once into a light doze.

As soon as the train was under way, Dories asked: "Now do tell me how this perfectly, unbelievably wonderful thing has happened?"

Nann laughed happily. "Maybe your Great-Aunt Jane is a fairy godmother in disguise," she whispered. They both glanced at the far corner, but the black veiled figure was much more suggestive of a witch than a good fairy.

"The disguise surely is a complete one," Dories said with a shudder. "My, it gives me the chilly shivers when I think how I might be going to spend a whole month alone with her. But now tell me, just what did happen?"

"Can't you guess? You wrote your aunt a letter, didn't you, telling all about me and even giving the name of the hotel where Dad and I were staying?"

Dories nodded, "Yes, that's true. Mother wanted me to write to Aunt Jane and I couldn't think of a thing to tell her about, and so I wrote about you."

“Well,” Nann continued to enlighten her friend, “she must have written me that very day inviting me to be her guest at Siquaw Point for the month of October, but she asked me not to let you know. I sent the last picture postcard, the one of our hotel, just after I had received her letter, and you can imagine how wild I was to tell you. I hadn’t started going to the Boston High. Dear old Dad said a month later wouldn’t matter, and so here I am.” The girls clasped hands and beamed joyfully at each other.

Dories’ next glance toward the sleeping old woman was one of gratitude. “I’m going to try hard to love her, that is, if she’ll let me.” Then, after a thoughtful moment, Dories continued: “Great-Aunt Jane must have been very different when Dad was a boy, for he cared a lot for her, Mother said.” Then with one of her quick changes she exclaimed in a low voice, “Nann Sibbett, I have lain awake nights dreading the dismal month I was to spend at that forsaken summer resort. I just knew there’d be ghosts in those boarded-up cottages, but now that you’re going to be with me, I almost hope that something exciting will happen.”

“So do I!” Nann agreed.

It was four o’clock when the train, which consisted of an engine, two coaches and a chair-car, stopped in what seemed at first to be but wide stretches of meadows and marsh lands, but, peering ahead, the girls saw a few wooden buildings and a platform. “Siquaw Center!” the brakeman opened a door to announce. Miss Jane Moore sat up so suddenly, and when she threw back her veil she seemed so very wide awake, the girls found themselves wondering if she had really been asleep at all. The brakeman assisted the old woman to alight and placed her bags on the platform, then, hardly pausing, the train again was under way. Meadows and marshes stretched in all directions, but about a mile to the east the girls could see a wide expanse of gray-blue ocean.

“I guess the name means the center of the marshes,” Dori whispered, making a wry face while her aunt was talking to the station-master, a tall, lank, red-whiskered man in blue overalls who did not remove his cap nor stop chewing what seemed to be a rather large quid.

“Yeah!” the girls heard his reply to the woman’s question. “Gib’ll fetch the stage right over. Quare time o’ year for yo’ to be comin’ out, Mis’ Moore, ain’t it? Yeah! I got your letter this here mornin’. The supplies ar’ all ready to tote over to yer cottage.”



The girls were wondering who Gib might be when they heard a rumbling beyond the wooden building and saw a very old stage coach drawn by a rather boney old white horse and driven by a tall, lank, red-headed boy. A small girl, with curls of the same color, sat on the high seat at his side. "Hurry up, thar, you Gib Strait!" the man, who was recognizable as the boy's father, called to him. "Come tote Mis' Moore's luggage." Then the man sauntered off, having not even glanced in the direction of the two girls, but the rather ungainly boy who was hurrying toward them was looking at them with but slightly concealed curiosity.

Miss Moore greeted him with, "How do you do, Gibraltar Strait." Upon hearing this astonishing name, the two girls found it hard not to laugh, but the lad, evidently understanding, smiled broadly and nodded awkwardly as Miss Moore solemnly proceeded to introduce him.

To cover his embarrassment, the lad hastened to say. "Well, Miss Moore, sort o' surprisin' to see yo' hereabouts this time o' year. Be yo' goin' to the Pint?"

The old woman looked at him scathingly. "Well, Gibraltar, where in heaven's name would I be going? I'm not crazy enough yet to stay long in the Center. Here, you take my bags; the girls can carry their own."

"Yessum, Miss Moore," the boy flushed up to the roots of his red hair. He knew that he wasn't making a very good impression on the young ladies. He glanced at them furtively as they all walked toward the stage; then, when he saw them smiling toward him, not critically but in a most friendly fashion, there was merry response in his warm red-brown eyes. What he said was: "If them bags are too hefty, set 'em down an' I'll come back for 'em."

"O, we can carry them easily," Nann assured him.

The small girl on the high seat was staring down at them with eyes and mouth open. She had on a nondescript dress which very evidently had been made over from a garment meant for someone older. When the girls glanced up, she smiled down at them, showing an open space where two front teeth were missing.

"What's your name, little one?" Nann called up to her. The lad was inside the coach helping Miss Moore to settle among her bags.

The child's grin grew wilder, but she did not reply. Nann turned toward her brother, who was just emerging: "What is your little sister's name?" she asked.

The boy flushed. Nann and Dori decided that he was easily embarrassed or that he was unused to girls of his own age. But they better understood the flush when they heard the answer: "Her name's Behring." Then he hurried on to explain: "I know our names are queer. It was Pa's notion to give us geography names, being as our last is Strait. That's why mine's Gibraltar. Yo' kin laugh if yo' want to," he added good-naturedly. "I would if 'twasn't my name." Then in a low voice, with a swift glance toward the station, he confided, "I mean to change my name when I come of age. I sure sartin do."

The girls felt at once that they would like this boy whose sensitive face expressed his every emotion and who had so evident a sense of humor. They were about to climb inside of the coach with Miss Moore when a shrill, querulous voice from a general store across from the station attracted their attention. A tall, angular woman in a skimp calico dress stood there. "Howdy, Miss Moore," she called, then as though not expecting a reply to her salutation, she continued: "Behring Strait, you come here right this minute and mind the baby. What yo' gallavantin' off fer, and me with the supper gettin' to do?" Nann and Dori glanced at each other merrily, each wondering which strait the baby was named after.

The small girl obeyed quickly. Mrs. Strait impressed the listeners as a woman who demanded instant obedience. As soon as the three passengers were settled inside, the coach started with a lurch. The sandy road wound through the wide, swampy meadows. It was rough and rutty. Miss Moore sat with closed eyes and, as she was wedged in between two heavy bags, she was not jounced about as much as were the girls. They took it good-naturedly, but Doris found it hard to imagine how she could have endured the journey if she had been alone with her queer Aunt Jane. Nann decided that the old woman feined sleep on all occasions to avoid the necessity of talking to them.

At last, even above the rattle of the old coach, could be heard the crashing surf on rocks, and the girls peered eagerly ahead. What they saw was a wide strip of sand and a row of weather-beaten cottages, boarded up, as Dori had prophesied, and beyond them white-crested, huge gray breakers rushing and roaring up on the sand.

The boney white horse came to a sudden stop at the edge of the beach, nor would it attempt to go any farther. The boy leaped over a wheel and threw open the back door. "Guess you'll have to walk a piece along the beach, Miss Moore.

The coach gets stuck so often in the sand ol' Methuselah ain't takin' no chances at tryin' to haul it out," he informed the occupants.

The girls were almost surprised to find that the horse hadn't been named after a strait. Miss Moore threw back her veil and opened her eyes at once. Upon hearing what the boy had to say, she leaned forward to gaze at the largest cottage in the middle of the row. She spoke sharply: "Gibralter, why didn't your father carry out my orders? I wrote him distinctly to open up the cottage and air it out. Why didn't he do that when he brought over the supplies, that's what I'd like to know? I declare to it, even if he is your father, I must say Simon Strait is a most shiftless man."

The boy said at once, as though in an effort to apologize: "Pa's been real sick all summer, Miss Moore, and like 'twas he fergot it, but I kin open up easy, if I kin find suthin' to pry off the boards with. I think likely I'll find an axe, anyhow, out in the back shed whar I used to chop wood fer you. I'm most sure I will."

Miss Moore sank back. "Well, hurry up about it, then. I'll stay in the coach till you get the windows uncovered." When the boy was gone, the woman turned toward her niece. "Open up that small black bag, Dories; the one near you, and get out the back-door key. There's a hammer just inside on the kitchen table, if it's where I left it." She continued her directions: "Give it to Gibralter and tell him, when he gets the boards off the windows, to carry in some wood and make a fire. A fog is coming in this minute and it's as wet as rain."

The key having been found, the girls ran gleefully around the cabin in search of the boy. They found him emerging from a shed carrying a hatchet. He grinned at them as though they were old friends. "Some cheerful place, this!" he commented as he began ripping off the boards from one of the kitchen windows. "You girls must o' needed sea air a lot to come to this place out o' season like this with a—a—wall, with a old lady like Miss Moore is." Dories felt sure that the boy was thinking something quite different, but was not saying it because it was a relative of hers about whom he was talking. What she replied was: "I can't understand it myself. I mean why Great-Aunt Jane wanted to come to this dismal place after everyone else has gone."

They were up on the back porch and, as she looked out across the swampy meadows over which a heavy fog was settling, then she continued, more to Nann than to the boy: "I promised Mother I wouldn't be afraid of ghosts, but honestly

I never saw a spookier place.”

The boy had been making so much noise ripping off boards that he had only heard the last two words. “Spooks war yo’ speakin’ of?” he inquired. “Well, I guess yo’ll think thar’s spooks enough along about the middle of the night when the fog horn’s a moanin’ an’ the surf’s a crashin’ out on the pint o’ rocks, an’ what’s more, thar *is* folks at Siquaw Center as says thar’s a sure enough spook livin’ over in the ruins that used to be ol’ Colonel Wadbury’s place.”

The girls shuddered and Dories cast a “Didn’t I tell you so” glance at her friend, but Nann, less fearful by nature, was interested and curious, and after looking about in vain for the “ruin”, she inquired its whereabouts.

Gibraltar enlightened them. “O, ’t isn’t in sight,” he said, “that is, not from here. It’s over beyant the rocky pint. From the highest rock thar you kin see it plain.”

Then as he went on around the cottage taking off boards, the girls followed to hear more of the interesting subject. “Fine house it used to be when my Pa was a kid, but now thar’s nothing but stone walls a standin’. A human bein’ couldn’t live in that ol’ shell, nohow. But—” the boy could not resist the temptation to elaborate the theme when he saw the wide eyes of his listeners, “’long about midnight folks at the Center do say as how they’ve seen a light movin’ about in the old ruin. Nobody’s dared to go near ’nuf to find out what ’tis. The swamps all about are like quicksand. If you step in ’em, wall, golly gee, it’s good-bye fer yo’. Leastwise that’s what ol’-timers say, an’ so the spook, if thar is one over thar, is safe ’nuf from introosion.”

While the boy had been talking, he had removed all of the wooden blinds, his listeners having followed him about the cabin. Dories had been so interested that she had quite forgotten about the huge key that she had been carrying. “O my!” she exclaimed, suddenly noticing it. “But then you didn’t need the hammer after all. Now I’ll skip around and open the back door, and, Gibraltar, will you bring in some wood, Aunt Jane said, to build us a fire?”

While the boy was gone, Nann confided merrily, “There now, Dories Moore, you’ve been wishing for an adventure, and here is one all ready made and waiting. Pray, what could be more thrilling than an old ruin surrounded by an uncrossable swamp and a mysterious light which appears at midnight?”

The boy returned with an armful of logs left over from the supply of a previous

summer. “Gib,” Nann addressed him in her friendliest fashion, “may we call you that? Gibraltar is so long. I’d like to visit your ruin and inspect the ghost in his lair. Really and truly, isn’t there any way to reach the place?”

The boy looked as though he had a secret which he did not care to reveal. “Well, maybe there is, and maybe there isn’t,” he said uncommittedly. Then, with a brightening expression in his red-brown eyes, “Anyway, I’ll show you the old ruin if yo’ll meet me at sun-up tomorrow mornin’ out at the pint o’ rocks.”

“I’m game,” Nann said gleefully. “It sounds interesting to me all right. How about you, Dori?”

“O, I’m quite willing to see the place from a distance,” the other replied, “but nothing could induce me to go very near it.” Neither of the girls thought of asking the advice of their elderly hostess, who, at that very moment, appeared around a corner of the cabin to inquire why it was taking such an endless time to open up the cottage. Luckily Gib had started a fire in the kitchen stove, which partly mollified the woman’s wrath. After bringing in the bags and supplies, the boy took his departure, and they could hear him whistling as he drove away through the fog.

## **CHAPTER V.**

### **A NEW EXPERIENCE**

With the closing in of the fog, twilight settled about the cabin. The old woman, still in her black bonnet with the veil thrown back, drew a wooden arm chair close to the stove and held her hands out toward the warmth. "Open up the box of supplies, Dories," she commanded, "and get out some candles. Then you can fill a hot-water bottle for me and I'll go right to bed. No use making a fire in the front room until tomorrow. You girls are to sleep upstairs. You'll find bedding in a bureau up there. It may be damp, but you're young. It won't hurt you any."

Dories, having opened up the box of supplies, removed each article, placing it on the table. At the very bottom she found a note scribbled on a piece of wrapping paper: "Out of candles. Send some tomorrow."

Miss Moore sat up ramrod-straight, her sharp gray eyes narrowing angrily. "If that isn't just like that shiftless, good-for-nothing Simon Strait. How did he suppose we could get on without light? I wish now I had ordered kerosene, but I thought, just at first, that candles would do." In the dusk Nann had been looking about the kitchen. On a shelf she saw a lantern and two glass lamps. "O, Miss Moore!" she exclaimed, "Don't you think maybe there might be oil in one of those lamps?"

"No, I don't," the old woman replied. "I always had my maid empty them the last thing for fear of fire." Nann, standing on a chair, had taken down the lantern. Her face brightened. "I hear a swish," she said hopefully, "and so it must be oil." With a piece of wrapping paper she wiped off the dust while Dories brought forth a box of matches.

A dim, sputtering light rewarded them. "It won't last long," Nann said as she

placed the lantern on the table, “So, Miss Moore, if you’ll tell us what to do to make you comfortable, we’ll hurry around and do it.”

“Comfortable? Humph! We won’t any of us be very comfortable with such a wet fog penetrating even into our bones.” The old woman complained so bitterly that Doris found herself wondering why her Great-Aunt Jane had come at all if she had known that she would be uncomfortable. But she had no time to give the matter further thought, for Miss Moore was issuing orders. “Doris, you work that pump-handle over there in the sink. If it needs priming, we won’t get any water tonight. Well, thank goodness, it doesn’t. That’s one thing that went right. Nann, you rinse out the tea kettle, fill it and set it to boil. Now you girls take the lantern and go to my bedroom. It’s just off the big front room, so you can’t miss it; open up the bottom bureau drawer and fetch out my bedding. We’ll hang it over chairs by the stove till the damp gets out of it.”

Nann took the sputtering lantern and, being the fearless one of the two, she led the way into the big front room of the cabin. The furniture could not be seen for the sheetlike coverings. In the dim light the girls could see a few pictures turned face to the wall. “Oh-oo!” Doris shuddered. “It’s clammily damp in here. Think of it, Nann, can you conceive *what* it would have been like for *me* if I had come all alone with Aunt Jane? Well, I know just as well as I know anything that I would never have lived through this first night.”

Nann laughed merrily. “O, Dori,” she exclaimed as she held the lantern up, “Do look at this wonderful, huge stone fireplace. I’m sure we’re going to enjoy it here when we get things straightened around and the sun is shining. You see if we don’t.” Nann was opening a door which she believed must lead into Miss Moore’s bedroom, and she was right. The dim, flickering light revealed an old-fashioned hand-turned bed with four high posts. Near was an antique bureau, and Dori quickly opened the bottom drawer and took out the needed bedding. With her arms piled high, she followed the lantern-bearer back to the kitchen. Miss Moore had evidently not moved from her chair by the stove. “Put on another piece of wood, Dori,” she commanded. “Now fetch all the chairs up and spread the bedding on it.”

When this had been done, the teakettle was singing, and Nann said brightly, “What a little optimist a teakettle is! It sings even when things are darkest.”

“You mean when things are hottest,” Dori put in, actually laughing.

The old woman was still giving orders. “The dishes are in that cupboard over the table,” she nodded in that direction. “Fetch out a cup and saucer, Dories, wash them with some hot water and make me a cup of tea. Then, while I drink it, you can both spread up my bed.”

Fifteen minutes later all these things had been accomplished. The old woman acknowledged that she was as comfortable as possible in her warm bed. When they had said good-night, she called, “Dories, I forgot to tell you the stairway to your room leads up from the back porch.” Then she added, as an afterthought, “You girls will want to eat something, but for mercy sake, do close the living-room door so I won’t hear your clatter.”

Nann, whose enjoyment of the situation was real and not feined, placed the sputtering lantern on the kitchen table while Dories softly closed the door as she had been directed. Then they stood and gazed at the supplies still in boxes and bundles on the oilcloth-covered table. “I never was hungrier!” Dories announced. “But there isn’t time to really cook anything before the light will go out. Oh-oo! Think how terrible it would be to have to climb up that cold, wet outside stairway to a room in the loft and get into cold, wet bedding, and all in the dark.”

Nann laughed. “Well, I’ll confess it *is* rather spooky,” she agreed, “and if I believed in ghosts I might be scared.” Then, as the lantern gave a warning flicker, the older girl suggested: “What say to turning out the light and make more fire in the stove? It really is quite bright over in that corner.”

“I guess it’s the only thing to do,” Dori acknowledged dolefully. “O goodie,” she added more cheerfully as she held up a box of crackers. “These, with butter and some sardines, *ought* to keep us from starving.”

“Great!” Nann seemed determined to be appreciative. “And for a drink let’s have cambric tea with canned milk and sugar. Now the next thing, where is a can opener?”

She opened a drawer in the kitchen table and squealed exultingly, “Dories Moore, see what I’ve found.” She was holding something up. “It’s a little candle end, but it will be just the thing if we need a light in the night when our oil is gone.”

“Goodness!” Dories shuddered. “I hope we’ll sleep so tight we won’t know it is



night until after it's over.”

Nann had also found a can opener and they were soon hungrily eating the supper Dorie had suggested. “I call this a great lark!” the older girl said brightly. They were sitting on straight wooden chairs, drawn close to the bright fire, and their viands were on another chair between them.

“The kitchen is so nice and warm now that I hate plunging out into the fog to go upstairs,” Dorie shudderingly remarked. “I presume that is where Aunt Jane’s maid used to sleep. Mumsie said she had one named Maggie who had been with her forever, almost. But she died last June. That must be why Aunt Jane didn’t come here this summer.”

When the girls had eaten all of the sardines and crackers and had been refreshed with cambric tea, they rose and looked at each other almost tragically. Then Nann smiled. “Don’t let’s give ourselves time to think,” she suggested. “Let’s take a box of matches. You get one while I relight the lantern. I have the candle end in my pocket. Now, bolster up your courage and open the door while I shelter our flickering flame from the cold night air that might blow it out.”

Dorie had her hand on the knob of the door which led out upon the back porch, but before opening it, she whispered, “Nann, you don’t suppose that ghost over in the ruin ever prowls around anywhere else, do you?”

“Of course not, silly!” Nann’s tone was reassuring. “There isn’t a ghost in the old ruin, or anywhere else for that matter. Now open the door and let’s ascend to our chamber.”

The fog on the back porch was so dense that it was difficult for the girls to find the entrance to their boarded-in stairway. As they started the ascent, Nann in the lead, they were both wondering what they would find when they reached their loft bedroom.

## **CHAPTER VI.**

### **A LIGHT IN THE DARK**

The girls cautiously crept up the back stairway which was sheltered from fog and wind only by rough boards between which were often wide cracks. Time and again a puff of air threatened to put out the flickering flame in the lantern. With one hand Nann guarded it, lest it suddenly sputter out and leave them in darkness. There was a closed door at the top of the stairs, and of course, it was locked, but the key was in it.

“Doesn’t that seem sort of queer?” Dories asked as her friend unlocked the door, removed the key and placed it on the inside.

“Well, it does, sort of,” Nann had to acknowledge, “but I’m mighty glad it was there, or how else could we have entered?”

Dories said nothing, but, deep in her heart, she was wishing that she and Nann were safely back in Elmwood, where there were electric lights and other comforts of civilization.

Holding the lantern high, the girls stood in the middle of the loft room and looked around. It was unfinished after the fashion of attics, and though it was quite high at the peak, the sloping roof made a tent-like effect. There were two windows. One opened out toward the rocky point, above which a continuous inward rush of white breakers could be seen, and the other, at the opposite side, opened toward swampy meadows, a mile across which on clear nights could be seen the lights of Siquaw Center.

A big, old-fashioned high posted bed, an equally old-fashioned mahogany bureau and two chairs were all of the furnishings.

They found bedding in the bureau drawers, as Miss Moore had told them. Placing the lantern on the bureau, Nann said: "If we wish to have light on the subject, we'd better make the bed in a hurry. You take that side and I'll take this, and we'll have these quilts spread in a twinkling."

Dories did as she was told and the bed was soon ready for occupancy. Then the girls scrambled out of their dresses, and, just as they leaped in between the quilts, the flame in the lantern sputtered and went out.

Dories clutched her friend fearfully. "Oh, Nann," she said, "we never looked under the bed nor behind that curtained-off corner. I don't dare go to sleep unless I know what's there."

Her companion laughed. "What do you 'spose is there?" she inquired.

"How can I tell?" Dories retorted. "That's why I wish we had looked and then I would know."

Her friend's voice, merry even in the darkness, was reassuring. "I can tell you just as well as if I had looked," she announced with confidence. "Back of these curtains, you would find nothing but a row of nails or hooks on which to hang our garments when we unpack our suitcases, and under the bed there is only dust in little rolled-up heaps—like as not. Now, dear, let's see who can go to sleep first, for you know we have an engagement with our friend, Gibraltar Strait, at sunrise tomorrow morning."

"You say that as though you were pleased with the prospect," Dories complained.

"Pleased fails to express the joy with which I anticipate the——" Nann said no more, for Dories had clutched her, whispering excitedly, "Hark! What was that noise? It sounds far off, maybe where the haunted ruin is."

Nann listened and then calmly replied: "More than likely it's the fog horn about which Gib told us, and that other noise is the muffled roar of the surf crashing over the rocks out on the point. If there are any more noises that you wish me to explain, please produce them now. If not, I'm going to sleep."

After that Dories lay very still for a time, confident that she wouldn't sleep a wink. Nann, however, was soon deep in slumber and Dories soon followed her

example. It was midnight when she awakened with a start, sat up and looked about her. She felt sure that a light had awakened her. At first she couldn't recall where she was. She turned toward the window. The fog had lifted and the night was clear. For a moment she sat watching the white, rushing line of the surf, then, farther along, she saw a dark looming object.

Suddenly she clutched her companion. "Nann," she whispered dramatically, "there it is! There's a light moving over by the point. Do you suppose that's the ghost from the old ruin?"

"The what?" Nann sat up, dazed from being so suddenly awakened. Then, when Doris repeated her remark, her companion gazed out of the window toward the point.

"H'm-m!" she said, "It's a light all right. A lantern, I should say, and its moving slowly along as though it were being carried by someone who is searching for something among the rocks."

Dori's hold on her friend's arm became tighter. "It's coming this way! I'm just ever so sure that it is. Oh, Nann, why did we come to this dreadful place? What if that light came right up to this cottage and saw that it wasn't boarded up and knew someone was here and——"

Nann chuckled. "Aren't you getting rather mixed in your figures of speech?" she teased. "A lantern can't see or know, but of course I understand that you mean the-well-er-person carrying the lantern. I suppose you will agree that it is a person, for ghosts don't have to carry lanterns, you know."

"How do you know so much about ghosts, since you say there are no such things?" Dori flared.

"Well, nothing can't carry a lantern, can it?" was the unruffled reply. Then the two girls were silent, watching the light which seemed now and then to be held high as though whoever carried it paused at times to look about him and then continued to search on the rocks.

Slowly, slowly the light approached the row of boarded-up cabins. The girls crept from bed and knelt at the window on the seaward side. Nann, because she was interested, and Dori because she did not want to be left alone.

“Do you think it’s coming this far?” came the anxious whisper. Nann shook her head. “No,” she said, “it’s going back toward the point and so I’m going back to bed. I’m chilled through as it is.”

They were soon under the covers and when they again glanced toward the window the light had disappeared. “Seems to have been swallowed up,” Nann remarked.

“Maybe it’s fallen over the cliff. I almost hope that it has, and been swept out to sea.”

“Meaning the lantern, I suppose, or do you mean the carrier thereof?”

“Nann Sibbett, I don’t see how you can help being just as afraid of whatever it is, or, rather of whoever it is, as I am.”

“Because I am convinced that since it, or he, doesn’t know of my existence, I am not the object of the search, so why should I be afraid? Now, Miss Dories Moore, if you wish to stay awake speculating as to what became of that light, you may, but I’m going to sleep, and, if this loft bedroom of ours is just swarming with ghosts and mysterious lights, don’t you waken me to look at them until morning.”

So saying, Nann curled up and went to sleep. Dories, fearing that she would again be awakened by a light, drew the quilt up over her head so that she could not see it.

Although she was nearly smothered, like an ostrich, she felt safer, and in time she too slept, but she dreamed of headless horsemen and hollow-eyed skeletons that walked out on the rocky point at midnight carrying lanterns.

It was nearing dawn when a low whistle outside awakened the girls.

“It’s Gibraltar Strait, I do believe,” Nann declared, at once alert. Then, as she sprang up, she whispered, “Do hurry, Dori. I feel ever so sure that we are this day starting on a thrilling adventure.”

## **CHAPTER VII.**

### **THE PHANTOM YACHT**

The girls dressed hurriedly and silently, then crept down the boarded-in stairway and emerged upon the back porch of the cottage. It was not yet dawn, but a rosy glow in the east assured them that the day was near.

The waiting lad knew that the girls had something to tell, nor was he wrong.

“Oh, Gibraltar, what do you think?” Dories began at once in an excited whisper that they might not disturb Great-Aunt Jane, who, without doubt, was still asleep.

“I dunno. What?” the boy was frankly curious.

“We saw it last night. We saw it with our very own eyes! Didn’t we, Nann?” The other maiden agreed.

“You saw what?” asked the mystified boy, looking from one to the other. Then, comprehendingly, he added: “Gee, you don’ mean as you saw the spook from the old ruin, do you?”

Dories nodded, but Nann modified: “Not that, Gibraltar. Since there is no such thing as a ghost, how could we see it? But we did see the light you were telling about. Someone was walking along the rocks out on the point carrying a lighted lantern.”

“Wall,” the boy announced triumphantly, “that proves ’twas a spook, ’cause human beings couldn’t get a foothold out there, the rocks are so jagged and irregular like. But come along, maybe we can find footprints or suthin’.”

The sun was just rising out of the sea when the three young people stole back of the boarded-up cottages that stood in a silent row, and emerged upon the wide stretch of sandy beach that led toward the point.

The tide was low and the waves small and far out. The wet sand glistened with myriad colors as the sun rose higher. The air was tinglingly cold and, once out of hearing of the aunt, the girls, no longer fearful, ran along on the hard sand, laughing and shouting joyfully, while the boy, to express the exuberance of his feelings, occasionally turned a hand-spring just ahead of them.

“Oh, what a wonderful morning!” Nann exclaimed, throwing out her arms toward the sea and taking a deep breath. “It’s good just to be alive.”

Dories agreed. “It’s hard to believe in ghosts on a day like this,” she declared.

“Then why try?” Nan merrily questioned.

They had reached the high headland of jagged rocks that stretched out into the sea, and Gibraltar, bounding ahead, climbed from one rock to another, sure-footed as a goat but the girls remained on the sand.

When he turned, they called up to him: “Do you see anything suspicious looking?”

“Nixy!” was the boy’s reply. Then anxiously: “D’ye think yo’ girls can climb on the tip-top rock?” Then, noting Dories’ anxious expression as she viewed the jagged cliff-like mass ahead of her, he concluded with. “O, course yo’ can’t. Hold on, I’ll give yo’ a hand.”

Very carefully the boy selected crevices that made stairs on which to climb, and the girls, delighted with the adventure, soon arrived on the highest rock, which they were glad to find was so huge and flat that they could all stand there without fear of falling.

“This is a dizzy height,” Dories said, looking down at the waves that were lazily breaking on the lowest rocks. “But there’s one thing that puzzles me and makes me think more than ever that what we saw last night was a ghost.”

“I know,” Nann put in. “I believe I am thinking the same thing. *How* could a man walk back and forth on these jagged rocks carrying a lantern?”

“Huh,” their companion remarked, “Spooks kin walk anywhar’s they choose.”

“Why, Gibraltar Strait, I do believe that you think there is a ghost in—” She paused and turned to look in the direction that the boy was pointing. On the other side of the point, below them, was a swamp, dense with high rattling tullies and cat-tails. It looked dark and treacherous, for, as yet, the sunlight had not reached it. About two hundred feet back from the sea stood the forlorn ruin of what had once been, apparently, a fine stone mansion.

Two stained white pillars, standing in front, were like ghostly sentinels telling where the spacious porch had been. Behind them were jagged heaps of crumbling rock, all that remained of the front and side walls. The wall in the rear was still standing, and from it the roof, having lost its support in front, pitched forward with great yawning gaps in it, where chimneys had been.

Dories unconsciously clung to her friend as they stood gazing down at the old ruin. “Poor, poor thing,” Nann said, “how sad and lonely it must be, for, I suppose, once upon a time it was very fine home filled with love and happiness. Wasn’t it, Gibraltar? If you know the story of the old house, please tell it to us?”

The boy cast a quick glance at the timid Dories. “I dunno as I’d ought to. She scares so easy,” he told them.

“I’ll promise not to scare this time,” Dories hastened to say. “Honest, Gib, I am as eager to hear the story as Nann is, so please tell it.”

Thus urged, the boy began. He did not speak, however, in his usual merry, bantering voice, but in a hollow whisper which he believed better fitted to the tale he had to tell.

“Wall,” he said, as he seated himself on a rock, motioning the girls to do likewise, “I might as well start way back at the beginnin’. Pa says that this here house was built nigh thirty year ago by a fine upstandin’ man as called himself Colonel Wadbury and gave out that he’d come from Virginia for his gal’s health. Pa said the gal was a sad-lookin’ creature as ever he’d set eyes on, an’ bye an’ bye ’twas rumored around Siquaw that she was in love an’ wantin’ to marry some furreigner, an’ that the old Colonel had fetched her to this out-o’-the-way place so that he could keep watch on her. He sure sartin built her a fine mansion to live in.



“Pa said ’twas filled with paintin’s of ancestors, and books an’ queer furreign rugs a hangin’ on the walls, though thar was plenty beside on the floor. Pa’d been to a museum up to Boston onct, an’ he said as ’twas purty much like that inside the place.

“Wall, when ’twas all finished, the two tuk to livin’ in it with a man servant an’ an old woman to keep an eye on the gal, seemed like.

“’Twan’t swamp around here in those days, ’twas sand, and the Colonel had a plant put in that grew all over—sand verbeny he called it, but folks in Siquaw Center shook their heads, knowin’ as how the day would come when the old sea would rise up an’ claim its own, bein’ as that had all been ocean onct on a time.

“Pa says as how he tol’ the Colonel that he was takin’ big chances, buildin’ a house as hefty as that thar one, on nothin’ but sand, but that wan’t all he built either. Furst off ’twas a high sea wall to keep the ocean back off his place, then ’twas a pier wi’ lights along it, and then he fetched a yacht from somewhere.

“Pa says he’d never seen a craft like it, an’ he’d been a sea-farin’ man ever since the North Star tuk to shinin’, or a powerful long time, anyhow. That yacht, Pa says, was the whitest, mos’ glistenin’ thing he’d ever sot eyes on. An’ graceful! When the sailors, as wore white clothes, tuk to sailin’ it up and down, Pa says folks from Siquaw Center tuk a holiday just to come down to the shore to watch the craft. It slid along so silent and was so all-over white, Gus Pilsley, him as was school teacher days and kep’ the poolhall nights, said it looked like a ‘phantom yacht,’ an’ that’s what folks got to callin’ it.

“Pa says it was well named, for, if ever a ghost rode on it, ’twas the gal who went out sailin’ every day. Sometimes the Colonel was with her, but most times ’twas the old woman, but she never was let to go alone. The Colonel’s orders was that the sailors shouldn’t go beyond the three miles that was American. He wasn’t goin’ to have his gal sailin’ in waters that was shared by no furreigners, him bein’ that sot agin them, like as not because the gal wanted to marry one of ’em. So day arter day, early and late, Pa says, she sailed on her ‘Phantom Yacht’ up and down but keepin’ well this side o’ the island over yonder.”

Gibraltar had risen and was pointing out to sea. The girls stood at his side shading their eyes. “That’s it!” he told them. “That’s the island. It’s on the three-mile line, but Pa says it’s the mos’ treacherous island on this here coast, bein’ as

thar's hidden shoals fer half a mile all around it, an' thar's many a whitenin' skeleton out thar of fishin' boats that went too close." The lad reseated himself and the girls did likewise. Then he resumed the tale. "Wall, so it went on all summer long. Pa says if you'd look out at sunrise like's not thar'd be that yacht slidin' silent-like up and down. Pa says it got to hauntin' him. He'd even come down here on moonlit nights an', sure nuf, thar'd be that Phantom Yacht glidin' around, but one night suthin' happened as Pa says he'll never forget if he lives to be as old as Methusalah's grandfather."

"W-what happened?" the girls leaned forward. "Did the yacht run on the shoals?" Nann asked eagerly.

## **CHAPTER VIII. WHAT HAPPENED**

Gibralter was thoroughly enjoying their suspense. "Wall," he drawled, making the moment as dramatic as possible, "'long about midnight, once, Pa heard a gallopin' horse comin' along the road from the sea. Pa knew thar wan't no one as rode horseback but the old Colonel himself, an', bein' as he'd been gettin' gouty, he hadn't been doin' much ridin' of late days, Pa said, but thar was somethin' about the way the horse was gallopin' that made Pa sit right up in bed. He an' Ma'd jst been married an' started keepin' house in the store right whar we live now. Pa woke up and they both listened. Then they heard someone hollerin' an' Pa knew 'twas the old Colonel's voice, an' Ma said, 'Like's not someone's sick over to the mansion!' Pa got into his clothes fast as greased lightnin', took a lantern and went down to the porch, and thar was the ol' Colonel wi'out any hat on. His gray hair was all rumped up and his eyes was wild-like. Pa said the ol' Colonel was brown as leather most times, but that night he was white as sheets.

"As soon as the Colonel saw Pa, he hollered, 'Whar kin I get a steam launch? I wanta foller my daughter. She an' the woman that takes keer o' her is plumb gone, an', what's more, my yacht's gone too. They've made off wi' it. That scalawag of a furriner that's been wantin' to marry her has kidnapped 'em all. She's only seventeen, my daughter is, an' I'll have the law on him.'

"Pa said when he got up clost to the horse the Colonel was ridin', he could see the old man was shakin' like he had the palsy. Pa didn't know no place at all whar a steam launch could be had, leastwise not near enuf to Siquaw to help any, so the old Colonel said he'd take the train an' go up the coast to a town whar he could get a launch an' he'd chase arter that slow-sailin' yacht an' he'd have the law on whoever was kidnappin' his daughter.

“The ol’ Colonel was in an awful state, Pa said. He went into the store part o’ our house and paced up an’ down, an’ up an’ down, an’ up an’ down, till Pa thought he must be goin’ crazy, an’ every onct in a while he’d mutter, like ’twas just for himself to hear, ‘She’ll pay fer this, Darlina will!’”

The boy looked up and smiled at his listeners. “Queer name, wasn’t it?” he queried. “Most as funny as my name, but I guess likely ’taint quite.”

“I suppose they wanted to call her something that meant darling,” Dories began, but Nann put in eagerly with, “Oh, Gib, do go on. What happened next? Did the old Colonel go somewhere and get a fast boat and overtake the yacht. I do hope that he didn’t.”

“Wall, than yo’ get what yer hopin’ fer, all right. About a week arter he’d took the early mornin’ train along back came the ol’ Colonel, Pa said, an’ he looked ten year older. He didn’t s’plain nothin’, but gave Pa some money fer takin’ keer o’ his horse while he’d been gone, an’ then back he came here to his house an’ lived shut in all by himself an’ his man-servant for nigh ten year, Pa said. Nobody ever set eyes on him; his man-servant bein’ the only one who came to the store for mail an’ supplies, an’ he never said nuthin’, tho Pa said now an’ then he’d ask if Darlina’d been heard from. He knew when he’d ask, Pa said, as how he wouldn’t get any answer, but he couldn’t help askin’; he was that interested. But arter a time folks around here began to think morne’n like the Phantom Yacht, as Pa’d called it, had gone to the bottom before it reached wherever ’twas they’d been headin’ fer, when all of a sudden somethin’ happened. Gee, but Pa said he’d never been so excited before in all his days as he was the day that somethin’ happened. It was ten year ago an’ Pa’d jest had a letter from yer aunt —” the boy leaned over to nod at Dori, “askin’ him to go to the Point an’ open up her cottage as she’d built the summer before. Thar was only two cottages on the shore then; hers an’ the Burtons’, that’s nearest the point. Pa said as how he thought he’d get down thar before sun up, so’s he could get back in time to open up the store, bein’ as Ma wan’t well, an’ so he set off to walk to the beach.

“Pa said he was up on the roof of the front porch takin’ the blind off thet little front window in the loft whar yo’ girls sleep when the gray dawn over to the east sort o’ got pink. Pa said ’twas such a purty sight he turned ’round to watch it a spell when, all of a sudden sailin’ right around that long, rocky island out thar, *what* should he see but the Phantom Yacht, her white sails glistening as the sun rose up out o’ the water. Pa said he had to hold on, he was so sure it was a spook

boat. He couldn't no-how believe 'twas real, but thar came up a spry wind wi' the sun an' that yacht sailed as purty as could be right up to the long dock whar the sailors tied it. Wall, Pa said he was so flabbergasted that he fergot all about the blind he was to take off an' slid right down the roof and made fer a place as near the long dock as he could an' hid behind some rocks an' waited. Pa said nothin' happened fer two hours, or seemed that long to him; then out of that yacht stepped the mos' beautiful young woman as Pa'd ever set eyes on. He knew at onct 'twas the ol' Colonel's daughter growed up. She was dressed all in white jest like she'd used to be, but what was different was the two kids she had holdin' on to her hands. One was a boy, Pa said, about nine year old, dressed in black velvet wi' a white lace collar. Pa said he was a handsome little fellar, but 'twas the wee girl, Pa said, that looked like a gold and white angel wi' long yellow curls. She was younger'n the boy by nigh two year, Pa reckoned. Their ma's face was pale and looked like sufferin', Pa said, as she an' her children walked up to the sea wall and went up over the stone steps thar was then to climb over it. Pa knew they was goin' on up to the house, but from whar he hid he couldn't see no more, an' so bein' as he had to go on back to open up the store, he didn't see what the meetin' between the ol' Colonel an' his daughter was like. How-some-ever it couldn't o' been very pleasant, fer along about noon, Pa said he recollected as how he had fergot to take off the blind on yer aunt's cottage, an' knowin' how mad she'd be, he locked up the store an' went back down to the beach, an' the first thing he saw was that glistenin' white yacht a-sailin' away. The wind had been gettin' stiffer all the mornin' an' Pa said as he watched the yacht roundin' the island, it looked to him like it was bound to go on the shoals an' be wrecked on the rocks. Whoever was steerin' Pa said, didn't seem to know nothin' about the reefs. Pa stood starin' till the yacht was out of sight, an' then he heard a hollerin' an' yellin' down the beach, an' thar come the ol' man-servant runnin' an' stumblin' an' shoutin' to Pa to come quick.

“Colonel Wadbury's took a stroke!” was what he was hollerin', an' so Pa follered arter him as fast as he could an' when they got into the big library-room, whar all the books an' pictures was, Pa saw the ol' Colonel on the floor an' his face was all drawed up somethin' awful. Pa helped the man-servant get him to bed, and fer onct the man-servant was willin' to talk. He told Pa all that had happened. He said how Darlina's furrin husband had died an' how she wanted to come back to America to live. She didn't ask to live wi' her Pa, but she did want him to give her the deed to a country place near Boston. It 'pears her ma had left it for her to have when she got to be eighteen, but the ol' Colonel wouldn't give her the papers, though they was hers by rights, an' he wouldn't even look at the

two children; he jest turned 'em all right out, and then as soon as they was gone, he tuk a stroke. 'Twan't likely, so Pa said, he'd ever be able to speak again. The man-servant said as the last words the ol' Colonel spoke was to call a curse down on his daughter's head.

"Wall, the curse come all right," Gibraltar nodded in the direction of the crumbling ruin, "but 'twas himself as it hit.

"You'll recollect awhile back I was mentionin' that folks in Siquaw Center had warned ol' Colonel Wadbury not to build a hefty house on shiftin' sand that was lower'n the sea. Thar was nothin' keepin' the water back but a wall o' rocks. But the Colonel sort o' dared Fate to do its worst, and Fate tuk the dare.

"When November set in, Pa says, folks in town began to take in reefs, so to speak; shuttin' the blinds over their windows and boltin' 'em on to the inside. Gettin' ready for the nor'easter that usually came at that time o' year, sort o' headin' the procession o' winter storms. Wall, it came all right; an' though 'twas allays purty lively, Pa says that one beat all former records, and was a howlin' hurricane. Folks didn't put their heads out o' doors, day or night, while it lasted, an' some of 'em camped in their cellars. That thar storm had all the accompaniments. Thar was hail beatin' down as big and hard as marbles, but the windows, havin' blinds on 'em, didn't get smashed. Then it warmed up some, and how it rained! Pa says Noah's flood was a dribble beside it, he's sure sartin. Then the wind tuk a turn, and how it howled and blustered. All the outbuildin's toppled right over; but the houses in Siquaw Center was built to stand, and they stood. Then on the third night, Pa says, 'long about midnight, thar was a roarin' noise, louder'n wind or rain. It was kinder far off at first, but seemed like 'twas comin' nearer. 'That thar stone wall's broke down,' Pa told Ma, 'an' the sea's coverin' the lowland.'

"Wall, Pa was right. The tide had never risen so high in the memory of Ol' Timer as had been around these parts nigh a hundred years. The waves had banged agin that wall till it went down; then they swirled around the house till they dug the sand out an' the walls fell jest like yo' see 'em now.

"The next mornin' the sky was clear an' smilin', as though nothin' had happened, or else as though 'twas pleased with its work. Pa and Gus Pilsley an' some other Siquaw men made for the coast to see what the damage had been, but they couldn't get within half a mile, bein' as the road was under water. How-some-

ever, 'bout a week later, the road, bein' higher, dried; but the water never left the lowlands, an' that's how the swamp come all about the old ruin—reeds and things grew up, just like 'tis today.

“Pa and Gus come up to this here point an' looked down at what was left of the fine stone house. ‘Pears like it served him right,’ was what the two of 'em said. Then they went away, and the ol' place was left alone. Folks never tried to get to the ruin, sayin' as the marsh around it was oozy, and would draw a body right in.”

“But what became of old Colonel Wadbury and the man-servant?” Dories inquired.

“Dunno,” the boy replied, laconically. “Some thar be as guess one thing, and some another. Ol' Timer said as how he'd seen two men board the train that passes through Siquaw Center 'long 'bout two in the mornin', but Pa says the storm was fiercest then, and no trains went through for three days; and who'd be out to see, if it had? Pa thinks they tried to get away an' was washed out to sea an' drowned, an' I guess likely that's what happened, all right.”

Dories rose. “We ought to be getting back.” She glanced at the sun as she spoke. “Aunt Jane may be needing us.” The other two stood up and for a moment Nann gazed down at the ruin; then she called to it: “Some day I am coming to visit you, old house, and find out the secret that you hold.”

Dories shuddered and seemed glad to climb down on the side of the rocks where the sun was shining so brightly and from where one could not see the dismal swamp and the crumbling old ruin.

## **CHAPTER IX.**

### **A MYSTERIOUS MESSAGE**

As they walked along the hard, glistening beach, Nann glanced over the shimmering water at the gray, forbidding-looking island in the distance, almost as though she thought that the Phantom Yacht might again be seen sailing toward the place where the dock had been. "Poor Darlina," she said turning toward the others, "how I do hope that she is happy now."

"Cain't no one tell as to that, I reckon," Gib commented, when Dories asked: "Gibraltar, how long ago did all this happen? How old would that girl and boy be now?"

"Pa was speakin' o' that 'long about last week," was the reply. "He reckoned 'twas ten year since the Phantom Yacht sailed off agin with the mother and the two little uns. That'd make the boy, Pa said, about nineteen year old he cal'lated, an' the wee girl about fifteen."

"Then little Darlina would be about our age," Dories commented.

"Why do you think that her name would be the same as her mother's?" Nann queried.

"O, just because it is odd and pretty," was Dories' reason. Then, stepping more spryly, she said: "I do hope Aunt Jane has not been awake long, fretting for her breakfast. We've been gone over two hours I do believe."

"Gee!" Gib exclaimed, looking around for his horse. "I'll have ter gallop as fast as the ol' colonel did that thar night I was tellin' yo' about or Pa'll be in my wool. I'd ought to've had the milkin' done this hour past. So long!" he added, bolting suddenly between two of the boarded-up cottages they were passing.



“Thar’s my ol’ steed out by the marsh,” he called back to them.

The girls entered the kitchen very quietly and tiptoed through the living-room hoping that their elderly hostess had not yet awakened, but a querulous voice was calling: “Dories, is that you? Why can’t you be more quiet? I’ve heard you prowling around this house for the past hour. Going up and down those outside stairs. I should think you would know that I want quiet. I came here to rest my nerves. Bring my coffee at once.”

“Yes, Aunt Jane,” the girl meekly replied. Then, darting back to the kitchen, she whispered, her eyes wide and startled, “Nann, somebody has been in this house while we’ve been away. I do believe it was that—that person we saw at midnight carrying a lantern. Aunt Jane has heard footsteps creaking up and down the stairs to our room.”

Nann’s expression was very strange. Instead of replying she held out a small piece of crumpled paper. “I just ran up to the loft to get my apron,” she said, “and I found this lying in the middle of our bed.”

On the paper was written in small red letters: “In thirteen days you shall know all.”

“I have nine minds to tell Aunt Jane that the cabin must be haunted and that we ought to leave for Boston this very day,” Dories said, but her companion detained her.

“Don’t, Dori,” she implored. “I’m sure that there is nothing that will harm us, for pray, why should anyone want to? And I’m simply wild to know, well, just ever so many things. Who prowls about at midnight carrying a lighted lantern, what he is hunting for, who left this crumpled paper on our bed, and what we are to know in thirteen days; but, first of all, I want to find a way to enter that old ruin.”

Dories sank down on a kitchen chair. “Nann Sibbett,” she gasped, “I believe that you are absolutely the only girl in this whole world who is without fear. Well,” more resignedly, “if you aren’t afraid, I’ll try not to be.” Then, springing up, she added, for the querulous voice had again called: “Yes, Aunt Jane, I’ll bring your coffee soon.” Turning to Nann, she added: “We ought to have a calendar so that we could count the days.”

“I guess we won’t need to.” Nann was making a fire in the stove as she spoke. “More than likely the spook will count them for us. There, isn’t that a jolly fire? Polly, put the kettle on, and we’ll soon have coffee.”

Dories, being the “Polly” her friend was addressing, announced that she was ravenously hungry after their long walk and climb and that she was going to have bacon and eggs. Nann said merrily, “Double the order.” Then, while Dories was preparing the menu, she said softly: “Nann, doesn’t it seem queer to you that Great-Aunt Jane can live on nothing but toast and tea? Of course,” she amended, “this morning she wishes toast and coffee, but she surely ought to eat more than that, shouldn’t you think?”

“She would if she got out in this bracing sea air, but lying abed is different. One doesn’t get so hungry.” Nann was setting the kitchen table for two as she talked. After the old woman’s tray had been carried to her bedside, Dories and Nann ate ravenously of the plain, but tempting, fare which they had cooked for themselves. Nann laughed merrily. “This certainly is a lark,” she exclaimed. “I never before had such a good time. I’ve always been crazy to read mystery stories and here we are living one.”

Dories shrugged. “I’m inclined to think that I’d rather read about spooks than meet them,” she remarked as she rose and prepared to wash the dishes.

When the kitchen had been tidied, the two girls went into the sun-flooded living-room, and began to make it look more homelike. The dust covers were removed from the comfortable wicker chairs and the pictures, that had been turned to face the walls while the cabin was unoccupied, were dusted and straightened.

“Now, let’s take a run along the beach and gather a nice lot of drift wood,” Nann suggested. “You know Gibraltar told us that this is the time of year when the first winter storm is likely to arrive.”

Dories shuddered. “I hope it won’t be like the one that wrecked Colonel Wadbury’s house eight years ago. If it were, it might undermine all of these cabins, and, how pray, could we escape if the road was under water?”

“Oh, that isn’t likely to happen,” Nann said comfortingly. “Our beach is higher than that lowland. If it does, we’d find a way out, but, Dories, please don’t be imagining things. We have enough mystery to puzzle us without conjuring up frightful catastrophes that probably never will happen.”

Dories stopped at her aunt's door to tell her their plans, but the old woman was either asleep or feigned slumber, and so, tiptoeing that she might not disturb her, the girl went out on the beach, where Nann awaited her. They were hatless, and as the sun had mounted higher, even the bright colored sweater-coats had been discarded.

"It's such a perfect Indian summer day," Nann said. "I don't even see a tiny, misty cloud." As she spoke, she shaded her eyes with one hand and scanned the horizon.

"Isn't the island clear? Even that fog bank that we saw early this morning has melted away." Then, whirling about, Dories inquired, "Nann, if we should see something white coming around that bleak gray island, what do you think it would be?"

"Why, the Phantom Yacht, of course."

"What would you do, if it were?"

"I don't know, Dori. I hadn't even thought of the coming of that boat as a possibility, and yet—" Nann turned a glowing face, "I don't know why it might not happen. That little woman, for the sake of her children, might try a second time to win her father's forgiveness. If she came, what a desolate homecoming it would be; the old house in ruin and the fate of her father unknown."

For a moment the two girls stood silent. A gentle sea breeze blew their sport skirts about them. They watched the island with shaded eyes as though they really expected the yacht to appear. Then Nann laughed, and leaping along the beach, she confessed: "I know that I'll keep watching for the return of the Phantom Yacht just all of the while. The first thing in the morning and the last thing at night." Then, as she picked up a piece of whitening driftwood, she asked, "Dori, would you rather have the glistening white yacht appear in the sunrise or in the moonlight?"

Dories had darted for another piece of wood higher up the warm beach, but, on returning, she replied: "Oh, I don't know; either way would make a beautiful picture, I should think." Then, after picking up another piece, she added: "I'd like to meet that pretty gold and white girl, wouldn't you?"

"Maybe we will," Nann commented, then sang out: "Do look, Dori, over by the

point of rocks, there is ever so much driftwood. I believe that will be enough to fill our wood shed if we carry it all in. I've always heard that there are such pretty colors in the flames when driftwood burns."

The girls worked for a while carrying the wood to the shed; then they climbed up on the rocks to rest, but not high enough to see the old ruin. When at length the sun was at the zenith, they went indoors to prepare lunch, and again the old woman asked only for toast and tea.

After a leisurely noon hour, the girls returned to their task; there really being nothing else that they wanted to do, and, as Nann suggested, if the rains came they would be well prepared. For a time they rested, lying full length on the warm sand, and so it was not until late afternoon that they had carried in all of the driftwood they could find.

"Goodness!" Dories exclaimed, shudderingly, as she looked down at her last armful. "Doesn't it make you feel queer to know that this wood is probably the broken-up skeleton of a ship that has been wrecked at sea?"

"I suppose that is true," was the thoughtful response. They had started for the cabin, and a late afternoon fog was drifting in.

Suddenly Nann paused and stared at the one window in the loft that faced the sea. Her expression was more puzzled than fearful. For one brief second she had seen a white object pass that window. Dories turned to ask why her friend had delayed. Nann, not wishing to frighten the more timid girl, stooped to pick up a piece of driftwood that had slipped from her arms.

"I'm coming, dear," she said.

On reaching the cabin, Nann went at once to the room of the elderly woman, who had told them in the morning that she intended to remain in bed for one week and be waited on. There she was, her deeply-set dark eyes watching the door when Nann opened it and instantly she began to complain: "I do wish you girls wouldn't go up and down those outside stairs any oftener than you have to. They creaked so about ten minutes ago, they woke me right up." Then she added, "Please tell Dories to bring me my tea at once."

Nann returned to the kitchen truly puzzled. It was always when they were away from the cabin that the aunt heard someone going up and down the outside

stairway. What could it mean? To Doris she said, in so calm a voice that suspicion was not aroused in the heart of her friend, "While you prepare the tea for your aunt, I'll go up to the loft room and make our bed before dark."

Doris had said truly, Nann Sibbett seemed to be a girl without fear.

## **CHAPTER X.**

### **SOUNDS IN THE LOFT**

Nann half believed that the white object she had seen at the loft window was but a flashing ray of the setting sun reflected from the opposite window which faced the west, and yet, curiosity prompted her to go to the loft and be sure that it was unoccupied. This resolution was strengthened when, upon reaching the cabin, she heard Miss Moore's querulous voice complaining that the outer stairs leading to the room above had been creaking constantly, and she requested the girls not to go up and down so often while she was trying to sleep. Nann, knowing that they had not been to their bedroom since morning, was a little puzzled by this, and so, bidding Dories prepare tea for her great-aunt, she went out on the back porch and started to ascend the stairway. When the top was reached, she discovered that the door was locked. For a puzzled moment the girl believed that the key was on the inside, but, stopping, she found that she could see through the keyhole. Although it was dusk, the window in the loft room, which opened toward the sea, was opposite and showed a faint reflection of the setting sun. Nann was relieved but still puzzled, when a whispered voice at the foot of the stairway called to her. Turning, Nann saw Dories standing in the dim light below, holding up the key. "Did you forget that we brought it down?" she inquired.

As Nann hurriedly descended, she noticed that the stairs did not creak, nor indeed could they, for each step was one solid board firmly wedged in grooves at the sides.

"I believe that we are all of us allowing our imaginations to run away with us, Miss Moore included," Nann said as she returned to the kitchen. Then added, "Instead of making our bed now, I will clean the glass lamps and fill them with the oil that Gibraltar brought while it is still twilighty."

This she did, setting briskly to work and humming a gay little tune.

It never would do for Nann Sibbett, the fearless, to allow her imagination to run riot.

Before the lamps were ready to be lighted, the fog, which stole in every night from the sea, had settled about the cabin and the fog horn out beyond the rocky point had started its constantly recurring, long drawn-out wail.

“Goodness!” Dories said, shudderingly, “listen to that!”

“I’m listening!” Nann replied briskly. “I rather like it. It’s so sort of appropriate. You know, at the movies, when the Indians come on, the weird Indian music always begins. Now, that’s the way with the fog.”

She paused to scratch a match, applied the flame to the oil-saturated wick of a small glass lamp and stood back admiringly. “There, friend o’ mine,” she exclaimed, “isn’t that cheerful?”

Dories, instead of looking at the circle of light about the lamp, looked at the wavering shadows in the corners, then at the heavy gray fog which hung like curtains at the windows. She huddled closer to the stove. “If this place spells cheerfulness to you,” she remarked, “I’d like to know what would be dismal.”

Nann whirled about and faced her friend and for a moment she was serious.

“I’m going to preach,” she threatened, “so be prepared. I haven’t the least bit of use in this world for people who are mercurial. What right have we to mope about and create a dismal atmosphere in our homes, just because we can’t see the sunshine. We know positively that it is shining somewhere, and we also know that the clouds never last long. I call it superlative selfishness to be variable in disposition. Pray, why should we impose our doleful moods on our friends?”

Then, noting the downcast expression of her friend, Nann put her arms about her as she said penitently, “Forgive me, dear, if I hurt your feelings. Of course it is dismal here and we could be just miserable if we wanted to be, but isn’t it far better to think of it all as an adventure, a merry lark? We know perfectly well that there is no such thing as a ghost, but the setting for one is so perfect we just can’t resist the temptation to pretend that——”

Nann said no more for something had suddenly banged in the loft room over their heads.

Dories sat up with a start, but Nann laughed gleefully. “You see, even the ghost knows his cue,” she declared. “He came into the story just at the right moment. He can’t scare me, however,” Nann continued, “for I know exactly what made the bang. When I was upstairs I noticed that the blind to the front window had come unfastened, and now that the night wind is rising, the two conspired to make us think a ghost had invaded our chamber.” Then, having placed a lighted lamp on the kitchen table and another on a shelf near the stove, the optimistic girl whirled and with arms akimbo she exclaimed, “Mistress Dori, what will we have for supper? You forage in the supply cupboard and bring forth your choice. I vote for hot chocolate!”

“How would asparagus tips do on toast?” This doubtfully from the girl peering into a closet where stood row after row of bags and cans.

“Great!” was the merry reply. “And we’ll have canned raspberries and wafers for desert.”

It was seven when the meal was finished and nearly eight when the kitchen was tidied. Nann noticed that Dories seemed intentionally slow and that every now and then she seemed to be listening for sounds from above. Ignoring it, however, Nann put out the light in one lamp and, taking the other, she exclaimed, “The earlier we go to bed, the earlier we can get up, and I’m heaps more interested in being awake by day than by night, aren’t you, Dori? Are you all ready?”

Dories nodded, preparing to follow her friend out into the fog that hung like a damp, dense mantle on the back porch. But, as soon as the door was opened, a cold, penetrating wind blew out the flame. “How stupid of me!” Nann exclaimed, backing into the kitchen and closing the door. “I should have lighted the lantern. Now stand still where you are, Dori, and I’ll grope around and find where I left it after I filled it. Didn’t you think I hung it on the nail in the corner? Well, if I did, it isn’t there. Get the matches, dear, will you, and strike one so that I can see.”

But that did not prove to be necessary, as a sudden flaming-up of the dying fire in the stove revealed the lantern standing on the floor near the oil can. Nann pounced on it, found a match before the glow was gone, and then, when the



lantern sent forth its rather faint illumination, they again ventured out into the fog.

All the way up the back stairway Dories expected to hear a bang in the room overhead, but there was no sound. She peered over Nann's shoulder when the door was opened and the faint light penetrated the darkness. "See, I was right!" Nann whispered triumphantly. "The blind blew shut and the hook caught it. That's why we didn't hear it again."

"Let's leave it shut," Dories suggested, "then we won't be able to see the lantern out on the point of rocks if it moves about at midnight."

Nann, realizing that her companion really was excitedly fearful, thought best to comply with her request, and, as there was plenty of air entering the loft room through innumerable cracks, she knew they would not smother.

Too, Dories wanted the lantern left burning, but as soon as Nann was sure that her companion was asleep, she stealthily rose and blew out the flickering flame.

## **CHAPTER XI.**

### **A QUERULOUS OLD AUNT**

It was daylight when the girls awakened and the sun was streaming into their bedroom. Nann leaped to her feet. "It must be late," she declared as she felt under her pillow for her wristwatch. She drew it forth, but with it came a piece of crumpled yellow paper on which in small red letters was written, "In twelve days you shall know all."

Dories luckily had not as yet opened her eyes and Nann was sitting on the edge of the bed with her back toward her companion. For a moment she looked into space meditatively. Should she keep all knowledge of that bit of paper to herself? She decided that she would, and slipping it into the pocket of her sweater-coat, which hung on a chair, she rose and walked across the room to gaze at the door. She remembered distinctly that she had locked it. How could anyone have entered? Not for one moment did the girl believe that their visitor had been a ghostly apparition that could pass through walls and locked doors.

"Hmm! I see," she concluded after a second's scrutiny. "I did lock the door, but I removed the key and put it on the table. A pass-key evidently admitted our visitor." Then, while dressing, Nann continued to soliloquize. "I wonder if the person who walks the cliff carrying the lantern was our visitor. Perhaps it's the old Colonel himself or his man-servant who hides during the day under the leaning part of the roof, but who walks forth at night for exercise and air, although surely there must be air enough in a house that has only one wall."

Having completed her toilet, she shook her friend. "If you don't wake up soon, you won't be downstairs in time for breakfast," she exclaimed.

Dories sat up with a startled cry. "Oh, Nann," she pleaded. "Don't go down and

leave me up here alone, please don't! I'll be dressed before you can say Jack Robinson, if only you will wait."

"Well, I'll be opening this window. I want to see the ocean." As Nann spoke, she lifted the hook and swung out the blind, then exclaimed:

"How wonderfully blue the water is! Oho, someone is out in the cove with a flat-bottomed boat. Why, I do believe it is our friend Gibraltar. Come to think of it, he did say that he had been saving his money for ever so long to buy what he calls a sailing punt."

Nann leaned out of the open window and waved her handkerchief. Then she turned back to smile at her friend. "It is Gib and he's sailing toward shore. Do hurry, Dori, let's run down to the beach and call to him."

Tiptoeing down the flight of stairs, the two girls, taking hands, scrambled over the bank to the hard sand that was glistening in the sun.

The boy, having seen them, turned his boat toward shore, and, as there was very little wind, he let the sail flap and began rowing.

The tide was low and there was almost no surf.

"Want to come out?" he called as soon as he was within hailing distance.

"Oh, how I wish we could," Nann, the fearless, replied, "but we have duties to attend to first. Come back in about an hour and maybe we'll be ready to go."

"All right-ho!" the sea breeze brought to them, then the lad turned into the rising wind, pulled in the sheet and scudded away from the shore.

"That surely looks like jolly sport," Nann declared as, with arms locked, the two girls stood on a boulder, watching for a moment. Then, "We ought to go in, for Great-Aunt Jane may have awakened," Doris said.

When the girls tiptoed to the chamber on the lower floor, they found Miss Moore unusually fretful. "What a noisy night it was," she declared, peevishly. "I came to this place for a complete rest and I just couldn't sleep a wink. I don't see why you girls have to walk around in the night. Don't you know that you are right over my head and every noise you make sounds as though it were right in this

very room?”

“I’m sorry you were disturbed, Aunt Jane,” Dories said, but she was indeed puzzled. Neither she nor Nann had awakened from the hour that they retired until sunrise.

When the girls were in the kitchen preparing breakfast, Dories asked, “Nann, do you think that Great-Aunt Jane may be—I don’t like to say it, but you know how elderly people do, sometimes, wander mentally.”

“No, dear,” the other replied, “I do not think that is true of your aunt.” Then chancing to put her hand in the pocket of her sweater-coat, and feeling there the crumpled paper, Nann drew it out and handed it to Dories.

“Why, where did you find it?” that astonished maiden inquired when she had read the finely written words, “In twelve days you shall know all.”

“Under my pillow,” was the reply, “and so you see who ever leaves these messages has no desire to harm us, hence there is no reason for us to be afraid. At first I thought that I would not tell you, but I want you to understand that your Great Aunt Jane may have heard footsteps over her head last night, even though we did not awaken.”

“Well, if you are not afraid, I’ll try not to be,” Dories assured her friend, but in her heart she knew that she would be glad indeed when the twelve days were over.

Later when Dories went into her aunt’s room to remove the breakfast tray, she bent over the bed to arrange the pillows more comfortably. Then she tripped about, tidying the room. Chancing to turn, she found the dark, deeply sunken eyes of the elderly woman watching her with an expression that was hard to define. Jane Moore smiled faintly at the girl, and there was a tone of wistfulness in her voice as she said, “I suppose you and Nann will be away all day again.”

“Why, Aunt Jane,” Dories heard herself saying as she went to the bedside, “were you lonely? Would you like to have me stay for a while this morning and read to you?”

Even as she spoke she seemed to see her mother’s smiling face and hear her say, “The only ghosts that haunt us are the memories of loving deeds left undone and

kind words that might have been spoken.” As yet Dories had not even thought of trying to do anything to add to her aunt’s pleasure. She was gratified to see the brightening expression. “Well, that would be nice! If you will read to me until I fall asleep, I shall indeed be glad.”

Nann, who had come to the door, had heard, and, as the girls left the room, she slipped an arm about her friend, saying, “That was mighty nice of you, Dori, for I know how much pleasanter it would be for you to go for a boat ride with Gibraltar. I’ll stay with you if you wish.”

“No, indeed, Nann. You go and see if you can’t find another clue to the mystery.”

“I feel in my bones that we will,” that maiden replied as she poured hot water over the few breakfast dishes. “It would be rather a good joke on—well—on the ghost, if we solved the mystery sooner than twelve days. Don’t you think so?”

“But there are so many things that puzzle us,” Dories protested. “I wish we might catch whoever it is leaving those messages. That, at least, would be one mystery solved.”

“I’ll tell you what,” Nann said brightly. “Let’s put on our thinking caps and try to find some way to trap the ghost tonight. Well, good-bye for now! Gib and I will be back soon, I am sure. I’m just wild to go for a little sail with him in his queer punt boat.”

Dories stood in the open front door watching as her friend ran lightly across the hard sand, climbed to a boulder and beckoned to the boy who was not far away.

With a half sigh Dories went into her aunt’s room. Catching a glimpse of her own reflection in a mirror she was surprised to behold a fretful expression which plainly told that she was doing something that she did not want to do in the least. She smiled, and then turning toward the bed, she asked, “What shall I read, Aunt Jane?”

“Are there any books in the living room?” the elderly woman inquired. The girl shook her head. “There are shelves, but the books have been removed.”

There was a sudden brightening of the deeply sunken eyes. “I recall now,” the older woman said, “the books were packed in a box and taken up to the loft.

Suppose you go up there and select any book that you would like to read.”

For one panicky moment Dories felt that she must refuse to go alone to that loft room which she believed was haunted. She had never been up there without Nann.

“Well, are you going?” The inquiry was not impatient, but it was puzzled. “Yes, Aunt Jane, I’ll go at once.” There was nothing for the girl to do but go. Taking the key from its place in the kitchen, she began to ascend the outdoor stairway. How she did wish that she were as fearless as Nann.

The door opened when the key turned, and Dories stood looking about her as though she half believed that someone would appear, either from under the bed or from behind the curtains that sheltered one corner.

There was no sound, and, moreover, the loft room was flooded with sunlight. The box, holding the books, was readily found. Dories approached it, lifted the cover and was about to search for an interesting title when a mouse leaped out, scattering gnawed bits of paper. Seizing the book on top, Dories fled.

“What is the matter?” her aunt inquired when, almost breathless, the girl entered her room.

“Oh—I—I thought it was—but it wasn’t—it was only a mouse.”

“Of course it was only a mouse,” Miss Moore said. “I sincerely hope that a niece of mine is not a coward.”

“I hope not, Aunt Jane.” Then the girl for the first time glanced at the book she held. The title was “Famous Ghost Stories of England and Ireland.”

“Very entertaining, indeed,” the elderly woman remarked, as she settled back among the pillows, and there was nothing for Dories to do but read one hair-raising tale after another. Often she glanced at her wrist-watch. It was almost noon. Why didn’t Nann come?

## **CHAPTER XII.**

### **A BLEACHED SKELETON**

When Gibraltar saw Nann crossing the wide beach that was shimmering in the light of the early morning sun, he turned the punt boat and sailed as close to the point of rocks as he dared go. Then, letting the sail flap, he took the oars and was soon alongside a large flat boulder which, at low tide, was uncovered, although an occasional wave did wash over it.

“Quick! Watch whar ye step,” he cautioned. “Thar now. Here’s yer chance. Heave ho.” Then he added admiringly as the girl stepped into the middle of the punt without losing her balance, “Bully fer you. That’s as steady as a boy could have done it. Whar’s the other gal? Was she skeered to come?”

Nann seated herself on the wide stern seat of the flat-bottomed boat before she replied. “Dori wanted to come just ever so much, but she thought that she ought to stay at home this morning and read to her Great-Aunt Jane.”

“Wall, I don’t envy her none,” the lad said as he stood up to push the boat away from the rocks. “That ol’ Miss Moore is sure sartin the crabbiest sort o’ a person seems like to me.” Then as he sat on the gunnel and pulled on the sheet, he added, beaming at the girl, “Say, Miss Nann, are ye game to sail over clost to the island yonder? Like’s not we’d find the skeleton o’ The Phantom Yacht if it got wrecked thar, as Pa thinks mabbe it did.”

“Oh, Gib,” the girl’s voice expressed real concern, “I do hope that beautiful snow-white yacht was not wrecked. I don’t believe that it was. I feel sure that those sailors took it safely back across the sea with that poor heart-broken mother and the boy who was such a handsome little chap, and the wee gold and white girl whom your daddy said looked like a lily. Honestly, Gib, I’d almost

rather not sail over to that cruel island where so many boats have gone down. If the Phantom Yacht is there, I'd rather not know it. I'd heaps rather believe that it is still sailing, perhaps on the blue, blue waters of the Mediterranean."

The boy looked his disappointment. "I say, Miss Nann," he pleaded, "come on, say you'll go, just this onct. I'm powerful curious to see what the shoals look like. I've been savin' and savin' for ever so long to buy this here punt boat jest so's I could cruise around over thar. Miss Nann, won't you go?"

The girl laughed. "Gibraltar, you look the picture of distress. I just can't be hard-hearted enough to disappoint you. If you'll promise not to wreck me, I'll consent to go at least near enough to see just what the island looks like."

With that promise the boy had to be content. A brisk breeze was blowing from the land and so, before very long, the two and a half miles that lay between the shore and the outer shoals were covered and the long gaunt island of jagged gray rocks loomed large before them.

"The shoals'll come up, sudden-like, clost to the top of the water, most any time now," Gib said, "so keep watchin' ahead. If you see a place whar the color's different, sort o' shallow lookin', jest sing out an' I'll pull away."

Nann, thrilling with the excitement of a new adventure, looked over the side of the punt and into water so deep and dark green that it seemed bottomless, but all at once they sailed right over a sharp-pointed rock. Then another appeared, and another.

"Gib!" the girl's cry was startled, "you'd better stop sailing now and take the oars, slowly, for if we hit a rock, way out here, and capsize, pray, who would there be to save us?"

Nann shuddered as she gazed ahead at the gray, grim island. A flock of long-legged, long-beaked and altogether ungainly looking seabirds arose from the rocks with shrill, unearthly screams, and, after circling overhead for a moment they landed a safe distance away. There was no other sign of life.

Gibraltar let the sail flap at the girl's suggestion and began to row slowly along on the sheltered side of the island.

"Hark!" Nann said, lifting one hand. "Just hear how the surf is pounding on the



outer coast. Don't go too far, Gib; see how the water swirls around the rocks where they jut out into the sea."

As he rowed slowly along, the boy kept a keen-eyed watch along the shore. "Thar'd ought to be a place whar a body could land safely," he said at last. Then added excitedly as he pointed: "Look'et; thar's a big flat shoal that goes way up to the island, an' I'm sure as anything this here punt could slide right up over it an' never touch bottom. Are ye game to try it, Miss Nann? Say, are ye?"

The girl looked at the wide, flat shoal that was about two feet under water and which was evidently connected with the island. Then she looked at the eager face of the boy. "I dare, if you dare," she said with a bright smile.

Gibralter managed to row the punt boat within a length of the island over the submerged shoal, and then it stuck.

"Well," Nann remarked, "I suppose we will have to stay here until the rising tide lifts us off."

"Nary a bit of it," the boy replied as he stripped off his shoes and stockings. This done he stepped over the side of the boat, which, lightened of his weight, again floated.

Taking the rope at the bow, the lad pulled and tugged until the punt was high and dry, then Nann leaped out. Standing on a rock, she shaded her eyes and gazed back across the three miles of sparkling blue waters. She could see the eight cottages in a row on the sandy shore. How strange it seemed to be looking at them from the island.

"We mustn't stay long, Gib," she said to the lad who was examining the rocks with interest. "When the tide rises the waves will be higher and that punt boat of yours may not be very seaworthy."

"Thar's nothin' onusual on this here side," the boy soon reported. "'Twon't take long to climb up top and see what's on the other side." As he spoke, he began to climb over the rocks, holding out his hand to assist the sure-footed girl in the ascent.

"There doesn't seem to be a green thing growing anywhere," Nann remarked as she looked about curiously, "even in the crevices there is nothing but a silvery

gray moss.” Then she inquired, “Are there any serpents on this island, Gib?”

The boy shook his head. “Never heard tell of anything hereabouts, ’cept just an octopus. Pa says onct a fisherman’s boat was pulled under by one of them critters with a lot of arms sort o’ like snakes.”

Nann stood still and stared at the boy. “Gibraltar Strait,” she cried, “if I thought there was one of those terrible sea-serpents about here, I’d go right home this very instant. Why, I’d rather meet a dozen ghosts than one octopus.”

“I guess ’twant nothin’ but a story,” the boy said, sorry that he had happened to mention it. “Guess likely that was all.” Then, as they had reached the top of the rocks that were piled high, they stood for a moment side by side gazing down to the rugged shore far below.

The boy suddenly caught the girl’s arm. “Look! Look!” he cried. “That’s what I was wantin’ to find.” He pointed toward a whitening skeleton of a boat that was high on the rocks well out of reach of the surf and about two hundred feet to the left of where they were standing. “Like as not that wreck’s been thar nigh unto ten year, shouldn’t you say? An’ if so, why mightn’t it be ‘The Phantom Yacht’ as well as any other? I should think it might, shouldn’t you, Miss Nann?”

“I suppose so,” the girl faltered. “But oh, how I do hope that it isn’t. I want to believe that the mother with her boy and girl are safe, somewhere.” Then pleadingly, “Don’t you think we’d better start for home now, Gib? I do want to get away before the tide turns, and even if that old skeleton should be ‘The Phantom Yacht,’ there would be no way for us to prove it. You never did know the real name of the boat, did you?”

“No.” the boy confessed, “I never did. Sort o’ got to thinkin’ ‘Phantom Yacht’ was its name, but like’s not ’twasn’t.”

The bleached skeleton of the boat was soon reached and the lad, leaving Nann standing on a broad flat rock, scrambled down nearer and began searching for something that might identify it as the craft which, many years before, had sailed, white and graceful, to and fro in the sheltered waters of the bay, and which had been called “The Phantom Yacht.”

Half an hour passed, but search as he might, the disappointed boy found nothing that could identify the boat. The storms of many winters had stripped it, leaving

but a whitened skeleton and, before long, even that would be broken up and washed on the shore where the cottages were, to be gathered and burned as driftwood.

It was with real regret that Gibraltar at last left the wrecked boat and returned to the side of the girl. He found her gazing into the swirling green waters beyond the rocks as though she were fascinated.

“What ye lookin’ at, Miss Nann?” he inquired.

She turned toward him, wide-eyed. “Gib,” she said, “I thought I saw that octopus you were telling about. Look, there it is again! See it stretching out a long brown arm.”

The boy laughed heartily. “That thar’s sea weeds, Miss Nann,” he chuckled, “one o’ the long streamer kind.” Then he added, more seriously, “We’d better scud ’long. ’Pears like the tide is turnin’.” Then his optimistic self once again, “All the better if it has turned. It’ll take us to Siquaw Point a scootin’.”

When they reached the ridge of the island, the boy looked regretfully back at the grim skeleton. “D’ye know, Miss Nann,” he remarked, “I’m sure sartin that we’re leavin’ without findin’ a clue that’s hidin’ thar waitin’ to be found. I’m sure sartin we are.”

It was a habit with the boy to repeat, perhaps for the sake of emphasis.

“Wall,” Nann declared, “to be real honest, Gib, I’d heaps rather be standing on that sandy stretch of beach over there where the cottages are than I would to find any clue that the old skeleton may be concealing.” Then she laughed, as she accepted his proffered assistance to descend the rocks. “I don’t know why, but I feel as though something skeery is about to happen. Maybe I’m more imaginative on water than I am on land.”

They slid and scrambled down the rocks and were nearing the bottom when an ejaculation of mingled astonishment and dismay escaped from the boy.

“What is it, Gib?” the girl asked anxiously. “Has the skeery something happened already?”

“The punt. ’Taint thar. The tide rose sooner’n I was countin’ on and like’s not

that boat o' mine is sailin' out to sea."

For one panicky moment the girl stood very still, her hand pressed on her heart. Then she recalled something that her father once had said: "When danger threatens, keep a clear head. That will do more than anything else to avert trouble."

The boy, shading his eyes, was searching for the escaped punt far out on the shining waters, but Nann, looking about her, made a discovery. Then she laughed gleefully. The boy turned toward her in astonishment. Then, being very quick witted, he too understood. "You don' need to tell me," he said, "I'm on! We changed our location, so to speak, when we went to look at the wreck, and that fetched us down at a different place on this here side."

Nann nodded. "I do believe that we'll find the punt beyond the rocks yonder," she hazarded. And they did. Ten minutes later the boy had pushed the boat safely over the submerged shoal. The rising tide carried them swiftly out of danger of the hidden rocks. Although Nann said nothing, she kept intently gazing into the dark green water. She would far rather meet any number of ghosts on land, she assured herself, than even catch a glimpse of one of those dreadful sea monsters.

It was nearly one o'clock when Dories, who was standing on the porch of the cabin, saw the flat-bottomed boat returning, and she ran down to the shore to meet her friend.

"Did you find a clue?" she called as Nan leaped ashore.

"I don't believe so," was the merry response. "We found an old whitening skeleton of some ill-fated boat, but I'm not going to believe it is the Phantom Yacht. Not yet, anyway." Then Nann turned to call to the boy who was pushing his punt away from the rocks, "See you tomorrow, Gib, if you come this way. Thank you for taking me sailing."

As soon as the girls had turned back toward the cottage, Dories exclaimed, "Nann, I believe that I have thought of a splendid way to trap the ghost tonight, but I'm not going to tell you until just before we go to bed."

## **CHAPTER XIII. BELLING THE GHOST**

There was a sharp, cold wind that afternoon and so Nann suggested that they make a big fire on the hearth in the living room and write letters. Miss Moore had told them that she wished to be left alone.

“We have used up nearly all of the wood in the shed,” Nann said as she brought in an armful.

“There’s lots of driftwood on the shore. Let’s gather some tomorrow,” Dories suggested as she made herself comfortable in a deep, easy willow chair near the jolly blaze which Nann had started. “Now I’m going to write the newsiest kind of a letter to mother and brother. I suppose you’ll write to your father.”

Nann nodded as she seated herself on the other side of the fireplace, pencil and pad in readiness. For a few moments they scribbled, then Dories glanced up to remark with a half shudder, “Do hear that mournful wind whistling down the chimney, and here comes the fog drifting in so early. If it weren’t for the fire, this would be a gloomy afternoon.”

Again they wrote for a time, then Dories glanced up to find Nann gazing thoughtfully into the fire. “A penny for your thoughts,” she called.

Nann smiled brightly. “They were rather a jumble. I was wondering if, by any chance, you and I would ever meet the wee girl and the handsome little boy who sailed away on the Phantom Yacht; then, too, I was wondering who was playing a practical joke on us.”

“Meaning what?”

“Why the notes, of course.” Nann folded her finished letter, addressed the envelope and after stamping it, she glanced up to ask, “Why not tell me now, how you intend to trap the joker.”

“You mean the spook. Well this is it. I found a little bell today. One that Aunt Jane used, I suppose, to call her maid in former years.”

Nann’s merry laughter rang out. “I’ve heard of belling a cat,” she said, “but never before did I hear of belling a ghost.”

Dories smiled. “Oh, I didn’t mean that we were to catch the—well, whoever it is that leaves the messages, first, and then hang a bell on him. That, of course, would be impossible.”

“Well, then, what is your plan?”

But before Dories could explain, a querulous voice from the adjoining room called, “Girls, its five o’clock! I do wish you would bring me my toast and tea. The air is so chilly, I need it to warm me up.”

Contritely Dories sprang to the door. She had entirely forgotten her aunt’s existence all of the afternoon. “Wouldn’t you like to have part of the supper that Nann and I will prepare for ourselves?” she asked. “We’ll have anything that you would like.”

“Toast and tea are all I wish, and I want them at once,” was the rather ungracious reply. And so the girls went to the kitchen, made a fire in the stove and set the kettle on to boil.

“Goodness, I’d hate to have nothing to eat but tea and toast day in and day out,” was Dories’ comment. Then to her companion, “It’s your turn to choose from the cupboard tonight and plan the supper.”

“All right, and I’ll get it, too, while you wait on Miss Moore.”

An hour later the girls had finished the really excellent meal which Nann had prepared, and, for a while, they sat close to the kitchen stove to keep warm. The wind, which had been moaning all of the afternoon about the cabin, had risen in velocity and Dories remarked with a shudder that it might be the start of one of those dismal three-day storms about which Gib had told them.

“It may be as terrible as that hurricane that swept the sea up over the wall and undermined old Colonel Wadbury’s house,” she continued, bent, it would seem, on having the picture as dark as she could.

“Won’t it be great?” Nann smiled provokingly. “You ought to be glad, for surely the spook that carries the lantern down on the point will be blown away.” Then, chancing to recall something, she asked, “But you haven’t told me your plan yet. How are you going to bell the ghost?”

“My plan is to hang a little bell on the knob after we have locked our door. Then, of course, if we have a midnight visitor, he won’t be able to enter without ringing the bell,” Dories explained.

“Poor Aunt Jane, if it does ring,” Nann remarked. “How frightened she will be.”

Dories drew her knees up and folded her arms about them. “Well, I do believe that we would be most scared of all,” she said.

“Then why do it?” This merrily from Nann. “And, what’s more, if it is a ghost, it will be able to slip into our room without awakening us. Whoever heard of a ghost having to stop to unlock a door?”

“Maybe not,” Dories agreed, “but if we are going to have any real enjoyment during our stay in this cabin, we must frighten away the ghost that seems to haunt it. I think my plan is an excellent one and, at least, I’d like to try it.”

“Very well, maiden fair.” Nann rose as she spoke. “On your head be the result. Now, shall we ascend to our chamber?”

Taking the lantern, she led the way, and Dories followed, carrying a small bell. When the loft room was reached the lantern was placed on a table. Nann carefully locked the door and, removing the key, she placed it by the lamp.

Then she held the small bell while Dories tied it to the knob. This done, they hastily undressed and hopped into bed.

“Let’s leave the light burning all night so that we may watch the bell,” the more timid maiden suggested.

How her companion laughed. “Why watch it?” she inquired. “We surely will be

able to hear it in the dark if it rings. There is very little oil left in the lantern, so we'd better put the light out now, and then, if along about midnight we hear the bell ringing, we can relight it and see who our visitor may be."

"Nann Sibbett, I'm almost inclined to think that you write those messages yourself, just to tease me, for you don't seem to be the least bit afraid." This accusingly.

"Honest, Injun, I don't write them!" Nann said with sudden seriousness. "I haven't the slightest idea where the messages come from, but I do know that whoever leaves them does not mean harm to us, so why be afraid? Now cuddle down, for I'm going to blow out the light."

Dories ducked under the quilt and, a moment later, when she ventured to peer out, she found the room in complete darkness, for, as usual, a heavy fog shut out the light of the stars.

"How long do you suppose it will be before the bell rings?" she whispered.

"Well, I'm not going to stay awake to listen," Nann replied, but she had not slept long when she was suddenly awakened by her companion, who was clutching her arm. "Did you hear that noise? What was it? Didn't it sound like a faint tinkle?"

The two girls sat up in bed and stared at the door.



## CHAPTER XIV. A PUNT RIDE

The faint tinkle sounded again. Nann sprang up and lighted the lantern. To her amazement the bell was gone. Surprised as she was, she had sufficient presence of mind not to tell her timid companion what had happened. Very softly she turned the knob. The door was still locked. She glanced at the window; the blind was still hooked. Then, blowing out the light, she said in a tone meant to express unconcern, "All is serene on the Potomac as far as I can see." After returning to bed, however, Nann remained awake, long after her companion's even breathing told that she was asleep, wondering what it could all mean. Toward morning Nann fell into a light slumber, from which she was awakened by the sun streaming into the room. Sitting up, she saw that Dories was dressed and had opened the blinds. For a moment she sat in a dazed puzzling. What was it that she had been pondering about in the night? Remembering suddenly, she glanced quickly at the door. There hung the little bell as quietly as though it had never disappeared. Dories, hearing a movement, turned from the window where she had been gazing out at the sparkling sea.

"Good morning to you, Nancy dear," she said gaily. "O, such a lovely day this is! How I hope that I may go sailing with you and Gib." Then, as she saw her friend continuing to stare at the bell as though fascinated, Dories remarked, "Well, I guess the ghost took warning all right and stayed away. We won't find a little paper in our room this morning, I'll wager." As she talked, she was crossing the room to the door. Lifting the little bell, she dropped it again with a clang.

Nann sprang out of bed, all excited interest. "Dories, what happened? Why did you drop the bell?"

Dories pointed to the floor where it lay. Nann bent to pick it up. Tied to the clapper was a bit of paper and on it was written in the familiar penmanship and with the same red ink, "In eleven days you will know all."

Instead of acting frightened, Dories' look was one of triumph. "There now, Mistress Nann," she exclaimed, "you are always saying that it is not a being supernatural that is leaving these notes. What have you to say about it this morning?"

"That I am truly puzzled," was the confession Nann was forced to make; "that the joker is much too clever for us, but we'll catch him yet, if I'm a prophet." She was dressing as she talked.

Dories, standing near the window, was examining the paper. "It seems to be the sort that packages are wrapped in," she speculated. Then, after a silent moment and a closer scrutiny, "Nann, do you suppose that it is written with blood?"

"Good gracious, no!" the denial was emphatic. "Why do you ask such an absurd question?"

"Well, that was what the red ink was made of in one of the ghost stories that I read to Aunt Jane yesterday morning."

Nann, having completed her toilet, went to the window to look out. "Good!" she exclaimed. "There is Gibraltar Strait in his little punt boat. He seems to have plenty of time to go sailing. Oh, I remember now. He did tell me that their country school does not open until after Christmas. So many boys are needed to help their fathers on the farms and with the cranberries until snow falls."

"I suppose I ought to stay at home again this morning and read to Aunt Jane." Dories' voice sounded so doleful that her friend whirled about, and, putting loving arms about her, she exclaimed: "Not a bit of it! You may sail with Gibraltar this morning and I will stay here and read to your Great-Aunt Jane."

But when the two girls visited the room of the elderly woman, she told them that she wished to be left quite alone.

Dories went to the bedside and, almost timidly, she touched the wrinkled head. "Don't you feel well today, Aunt Jane!" she asked, feeling in her heart a sudden pity for the old woman. "Isn't there something I could do for you?"

For one fleeting moment there was that strange expression in the dark, deeply-sunken eyes. It might have been a hungry yearning for love and affection. Impulsively the girl kissed the sallow cheek, but the elderly woman had closed her eyes and she did not open them again, and so Nann and Dories tiptoed out to the kitchen.

“Poor Aunt Jane!” the latter began. “She hasn’t had much love in her life. I don’t remember just how it was. She was engaged to marry somebody once. Then something happened and she didn’t. After that, Mother says she just shut herself up in that fine home of hers outside of Boston and grieved.”

“Poor Aunt Jane, indeed!” Nann commented as she began to prepare the breakfast. “She must be haunted by many of the ghosts that your mother told about, memories of loving deeds that she might have done. With her money and her home, she could have made many people happy, but instead she has spent her life just being sorry for herself.” Then more brightly, “I’m glad we can both go sailing with Gib.”

Half an hour later, the girls in their bright colored sweater-coats and tams raced across the beach. The red-headed boy was on the watch for them and he soon had the punt alongside the broad rock which served as a dock. “Do you want passengers this morning?” Nann called gaily.

“Sure sartin!” was the prompt reply. Then, when the two girls were seated on the broad seat in the stem the lad hauled in the sheet and away they went scudding. “Where are you going, Gib?” Nann inquired curiously.

“We’ll cruise ’long the water side o’ the ol’ ruin,” he told them. “Pa says he’s sure sartin he saw a light burnin’ thar agin late las’ night, an’ like’s not, we’ll see suthin’.”

## CHAPTER XV. A GLOOMY SWAMP

The girls were as eager as the boy to view the old ruin from the water, and the breeze being brisk, they were quickly blown down the coast and into the quiet sheltered water beyond the point. "O, Gib," Dories cried fearfully, "do be careful! There are logs under the water along here that come nearly to the top. Is it a wreck?"

"No, 'taint. It's all that's left of the long dock I was tellin' yo' about whar the Phantom Yacht used to tie up. Pa said ol' Colonel Wadbury had lights clear to the end of it and that, when 'twas lit up, 'twas a purty sight."

"It must have been," Nann agreed. Then Dories inquired: "Doesn't it make you feel strange to realize that you are on the very spot where the Phantom Yacht once sailed?"

"And where some day it may sail again," Nann completed.

The high rocky point cut off the wind and so Gib let the sail flap as they slowly drifted toward the swamp.

"Thar's all that's left of that sea wall I was tellin' about," the boy nodded at huge rocks half sunken in mire.

"The reeds are higher than our heads," Dories commented; then she asked, "Is there a path through the marsh, do you think, Gib?"

"No, I'm *sure* thar ain't one," the boy declared. "Me'n Dick Burton would have found it if thar had been. We've looked times enough from the land side. We never could get here by water, bein' as we didn't have a boat. That's why I've

been savin' to get a punt. Dick, he put in some toward it, an' so its half his'n."

"Who is Dick Burton?" Nann inquired.

"Didn't I tell you?" Gib seemed surprised. "Sort o' thought o' course you knew 'bout the Burtons. Dick's folks own the cabin that's nearest the rocks. He's a city feller 'bout my age, or a leetle older, I reckon. He's been comin' to these parts ever since we was shavers. You'd ought to know him," this to Nann, "he lives in Boston, whar you come from."

The girl addressed laughed good-naturedly. "Gib," she queried, "have you ever been up to Boston?"

The boy reluctantly confessed that he had not. Then the girl explained that since it was much larger than Siquaw Center, two people might live there forever and not become acquainted.

"Yeah." Gib had evidently not been listening to the last part of Nann's remark. "I do wish Dick was here now that we've got the punt," he said. "I sure sartin wish he was."

"Why?" Doris inquired as she let one hand drift in the cool water.

"Wall, me'n he allays thought maybe thar was a channel through the swamp up toward the old ruin. If he was here we'd set out to find it."

"But why can't Dori and I help you as much as he could?" Nann queried. "I believe you are right, Gib," she continued before the boy had time to reply. "I've seen swamps before, and there was always a narrow channel through them where the tide washed when it was high. See ahead there, where the swamp comes down to the water's edge, I wish you'd take the sail down, Gib, and row as close to it as you can."

The boy looked his amazement.

"But, I say, Miss Nann, like's not we'd hit a snag, like's not we would."

"Who's skeered now?" the girl taunted. The boy flushed. "Not me!" he protested, and taking down the sail he rowed along the water side of the dense reedy growths. "Yo' see thar's nothin'," he began when Nann, leaning forward,

pointed as she cried excitedly, “There it is! There’s an opening in the swamp leading right up to that haunted house.”

Nann was right. A narrow channel of clear water appeared among the reeds that were higher than their heads. It led toward the middle of the marsh and was wide enough for a larger boat than theirs to pass through.

“Now, the next question is, do we dare go in?” Nann was gleeful over her find and how she wished that Gib’s friend, Dick Burton, were there to share with them that exciting moment.

“Well, that question is easy to answer,” Dorries hastened to say. “We most certainly do not dare.”

The boy, having removed his nondescript cap, was scratching his ear in a way that he always did when puzzled. Then there was a sudden eager light in his red-brown eyes. Replacing his hat, he seized the oars and began to row rapidly back up the shore and toward the row of eight cottages.

Nann was puzzled and voiced her curiosity. “Got to get back to Siquaw in time for the ten-ten train,” was all the information she received.

Since he had said nothing of this when they started out, and had seemed to be in no hurry whatever, Nann naturally wondered about it.

Some light might have been thrown on his action had she seen him, one hour later, as he sat on the high stool at his father’s desk in the general store. He was painstakingly writing, and, when the ten-ten train arrived, Gibraltar Strait was on the platform waiting to send to the nearby city of Boston the very first letter that he had ever written.

## CHAPTER XVI. OUT IN THE DARK

All the next day the girls waited and watched, but Gibraltar Strait appeared neither on land nor on sea to explain his queer actions. Their hostess asked Dories to read to her and so the morning was passed in that way. Nann, busy at a piece of fancy work she was making for a Christmas present, sat listening. In the afternoon the girls were told to amuse themselves. This they did by climbing to the “tip-top rock,” sitting there in the balmy sun and speculating about the old ruin; about the reason for Gib’s sudden departure for his home the day before, and about the boy and girl who had sailed away on the Phantom Yacht. It was not until a fog, filmy at first, but rapidly increasing in density, began to hide the sun that they thought of returning homewards. As they passed the cabin nearest the rocks, Dories said, “This is the Burton cottage, I suppose. I wonder if Dick is our kind of boy?”

“Meaning what?” Nann wondered.

“O, you know as well as I do. I like Gib, of course. He’s a splendid boy, but he hasn’t had a chance. I merely meant a boy from families like our own.”

“I rather think so,” Nann replied, as she gazed at the boarded-up cabin. Then suddenly she stopped and stared at one of the upper windows. The blind had opened ever so slightly and then had closed again, but of this Nann said nothing. She was afraid that she was becoming almost as imaginative as Dories. Then suddenly she recalled something. Gib had said that his father had seen a light in the old ruin the night before. And what was more, she and Dories *knew* there had been someone carrying a lantern on the beach near the rocks at least twice since they had been there. What if the lantern-carrier hid in the Burton cottage during the day? He couldn’t live in the old ruin, since it had only one wall standing.

Luckily, Dories had been interested in watching the waves breaking at her feet. Turning, she called, “O, but it’s getting cold and damp. Let’s run the rest of the way.”

When they reached their home cabin, Nann went at once to inquire if Miss Moore wished her supper. The girl was sure that she heard a scurrying noise in the old woman’s room. The door was closed and there was silence for a brief moment before she was told to enter. Puzzled, Nann glanced quickly at the bed and noted that the old woman’s cap was awry. She also saw something else that puzzled her, but she merely said, “What would you like tonight with your tea, Miss Moore?”

“Nothing at all but toast, and tell Dories to be sure it doesn’t burn. I don’t relish it when it has been scraped.” The tone in which this was said was impatient and fretful. It was evident that the old woman was not in as pleasant a mood as she had seemed to be in the morning.

Returning to the kitchen, where the kettle was already boiling, Nann made the tea and toasted the bread as well as she could over the blaze; then Dories arranged her aunt’s tray attractively and took it in to her. While she was gone, Nann stood staring out of the window at the gathering dusk. She believed she had a clue to one of the mysteries surrounding them, but decided not to tell her friend until she was a little more certain about it herself.

When Dories returned to the kitchen she said, “Day-dreaming, Nann?”

“No, dusk-dreaming,” was the smiling reply; then, “Now let’s get our evening repast. What shall it be?”

Together they looked in the closet, each selecting a canned vegetable and something for desert. “This is a lazy way to live,” Nann began, when Dories exclaimed: “Do you realize that we haven’t had one of those notes today? I believe my bell scared away the ghost after all.”

Nann laughed merrily. “Nary a bit of it, my friend. Didn’t his spooky highness tie his last note to the bell clapper? I suppose that is why we didn’t hear it tinkle again.”

“But we haven’t found a note today—O dear!” Dories broke off to exclaim: “The fire must be going out, Nann,” she called; “you’re the magician when it



comes to stirring up a blaze. What do you suppose is the matter?"

A quick glance within brought the amused answer: "Wood needed, my dear, that's all! Which reminds me of Dad's wondering why the car won't go when it's out of gas." As she spoke she turned toward the wood box and found it empty. "Hmm!" she ejaculated, "that means one of us will have to hie out to the shed after more wood if we want a hot supper."

Dories, after a swift glance at the black fog-hung window, suggested, "Let's change our menu and have a cold spread."

"Nixy, my dear," Nann said brightly. "I'll be wood-carrier. I'll sally forth with a lighted lantern, like that mysterious midnight prowler. I won't be able to bring in much wood, but I believe a piece or two will provide all the heat we'll need to warm up canned things." She was lighting the lantern as she talked. The lamp was burning on the kitchen table, and, while her friend was gone, Dories laid out the dishes and silver.

Nann, having reached the shed, groped about for the leather thong. To her surprise the door was not fastened, and, as she stood peering into the dense blackness, she was sure that she heard a scrambling noise inside. Then all was still. Nann scratched one of the matches that she had brought with her. In the far corner stood an empty barrel and in front of it was piled the wood that she and Dories had gathered on the beach. Not another thing was to be seen, and although she stood listening intently for several seconds, not another sound was heard.

"A rat probably," the girl thought as she placed her lantern on the floor and picked up several pieces of wood.

Returning to the kitchen, Nann threw her armful of wood into the box near the stove, when Dories suddenly leaped forward, exclaiming excitedly, "There it is. There's the note we have been wondering about."

"Why—why, so it is!" Nann stared as though she could hardly believe her eyes. Then, springing up, she cried joyfully: "Dories Moore, we've caught the ghost. He was leaving this paper when I went out. He must still be in the woodshed somewhere, for I bolted the door on the outside. He must have been hiding in that old empty barrel when I looked in. Light the lantern again and let's go out this minute and see who is there."

Although Dories was not enthusiastic over the prospect of capturing a ghost in a woodshed on so dark a fog-damp night, yet, since her companion was ready to start, she couldn't refuse to accompany her, and so, after closing the kitchen door, they stole along the path leading from the porch to the shed that was nearer the swamp. Suddenly Dories clutched her friend's arm, whispering, "Hark. What's that?"

"It's the ghost. He's still in there." This triumphantly from Nann, the fearless. "That's the same scrambling noise that I heard before. Come on. Don't be afraid. I'll throw open the door and at least we'll see who it is."

Leaping forward, Nann unbolted the door and held up the lantern. The shed was as empty as it had been before, and there was nothing at all in the barrel.

Dories' sigh was one of relief, and she fairly darted back to the warm kitchen, nor did she breathe naturally until the outer door was bolted. Then Nann inquired, "What did the note say. We forgot to read it?" Stooping, she took it from under a splinter of wood and, opening it, read: "In ten days you will know all."

## **CHAPTER XVII. MORE MYSTERIES**

Long after Dories slept that night Nann lay awake thinking of the several mysteries surrounding them. Who was leaving the notes in places where the girls could not help finding them; who was carrying a lantern on the rocky point at night; was it the same light that was seen in the old ruin by people living in Siquaw Center, and why had the blind in the Burton cottage opened ever so little and then closed again as though someone had peered out at them for a brief moment? It was indeed puzzling. Could it possibly have anything to do with the Phantom Yacht? Nann decided that was impossible. At last she fell asleep. When she awakened it was nearly dawn. The fog had drifted away, the stars shone out and the full moon made it as light as day.

Nann, the fearless, decided to dress and go out on the sand and look at the Burton cottage. She was nearly dressed before she realized that if Dories woke and found her gone, she might scream out in her fright and waken the old woman, and so she shook her gently, whispering her plan. Dories' eyes showed her terror at being left alone. She got up at once. "I simply will not stay in this haunted loft," she declared vehemently. "I'm going with you." As it was still dark they took the lighted lantern with them, but when they reached the back porch, Nann whispered that they would have to put out the light as they would be seen if, indeed, there was anyone to see them. "We'll take it, though. I have matches in my pocket. We'll light it if we need it."

Dories clung to her friend's hand as Nann led the way back of the row of boarded-up cottages. When they reached the seventh, Dories suddenly drew back and whispered, "Nann, why are we doing this? What are you expecting to see? I'm simply scared to death." Her companion realized that this was true, since Dories' teeth were chattering. Self-rebukingly, she said, "O, I ought not have

brought you. In fact, I probably shouldn't have come myself, but I am so eager to solve at least one of the mysteries that surround us." Then she told how she had been sure that she had seen a blind open ever so slightly and close late the afternoon before as though someone had been watching them. "I thought if someone goes every night to the old ruin and returns to the Burton cottage to hide during the day, he probably comes just about this hour, and that if we were watching, we might at least see what the—the—well—whoever it is—looks like." They had crouched down in the shadow of the seventh cottage as Nann made this explanation.

Slowly the darkness lightened, the stars and moon dimmed and the east became gray; then rosy, but still there had been no sign of anyone entering the Burton cabin. Nann had been sure that an entrance could not be made in the front of the cottage as the lower windows and door on that side were securely boarded up. The back door was not boarded, and so that was where she was watching.

An hour dragged slowly by. The sun rose and was well on its apparent upward way, and still no one appeared.

"Don't you think that maybe you imagined it all?" Dories inquired at length as she tried to change her position, having become stiffened from crouching so long.

"Why, no, I am sure that I didn't." Then, fearless as usual, Nann announced, "I'm going up to the back porch and try the door."

This she did, and to her surprise it opened, creaking noisily as it swung on rusty hinges.

Dories leaped to her side. "Gracious, Nann, are you going in?" she whispered tragically. "If anyone is in there, he might lock us in or something."

Nann turned to reply, but instead she exclaimed: "Why, Dories Moore, you're whiter than any sheet I ever saw. If you're that scared, we'd better go right home."

"I am!" Dories nodded miserably. "I wouldn't any more dare go into this cottage than—than——"

"Then we won't." Nann took her friend by the hand and together they went

down the back steps, and Dories said: "I'd rather go home by the front beach if you don't mind. It's more open. There's something so uncanny about the swamps at the back."

"Anything to please," was the laughing reply. As they rounded the cottage, Nann looked curiously at the upper windows, and was sure that she saw the same blind open ever so little, then close again. She said nothing of this, and tried to change the trend of her companion's thoughts by talking about Gibraltar Strait and wondering if they would see him during that day which had just dawned. Nann was deciding that she would take Gib into her confidence. A boy as fearless as he was would not mind entering the Burton cottage and finding out why that upper blind had opened and closed as it seemed to do.

As they neared their home cabin, Dories became more like her natural self and even skipped along the hard beach, laughing back at Nann as she called, "Another glorious, sparkling day! I hope something interesting is going to happen."

"I believe something will," Nann replied. They were nearing the front steps when Dories stood still, pointing, "Look at that stone lying in the middle of the top step. How do you suppose it ever got there?"

Nann shook her head and, leaping up the steps, she lifted the small rock, then turned back, exclaiming: "Just what I thought! Here is today's note from your ghost. It's much too clever for us." Then she read: "In nine days you shall know all."

Not wishing to awaken Miss Moore at so early an hour, the girls tiptoed down the steps and went around to the back of the cabin.

"Let's look in the woodshed by daylight," Nann suggested as she unbolted the door. "Nothing within, just as I supposed," she remarked. "Humm-ho. We're not very good detectives, I guess."

They started walking toward the kitchen. "But why try to find out what the mysteries are about if every day brings us one nearer to the time when we are to know all?" Dories inquired.

Nann laughed. "O, I'd heaps rather ferret the thing out for myself than be told." Then she said more seriously: "Honestly, Dori, I don't think the notes refer to the

mystery of the old ruin at all. I think, if that is ever solved, we'll have to find it out for ourselves."

"Why do you think that?"

"I'd rather not tell quite yet." They entered the kitchen. "Now," Nann said, "I'm going to make a fire and get breakfast. We've been up so long that I'm ravenously hungry. I'm going to make flapjacks no less."

"Good!" Dories replied. "I won't refuse to eat them." Although consumed with curiosity concerning what her friend had said, Dories decided to bide her time before asking Nann to explain.

## **CHAPTER XVIII.**

### **AN AIRPLANE SIGHTED**

Miss Moore did not awaken, apparently, until midmorning and the girls did not want to go away until they had served her breakfast. They had been to her door several times and to all appearances the elderly woman had been asleep. When, at length, Miss Moore did awaken, she complained of having been disturbed by noises in the night. "Why did you girls tiptoe around the living-room just before daybreak?"

"Why, we didn't, Aunt Jane! Truly we didn't," Dories replied. She did not like to tell that it would have been a physical impossibility for them to have done so, as they were crouched behind "cabin seven" at that hour watching "cabin eight."

The old woman looked at the speaker sharply, then continued: "I called your name and for a time the tiptoeing stopped. Then, when I pretended to be asleep, it began again. I was sure that under the crack of the door I could see a fire burning as though you had lighted wood on the grate."

"Oh, no, Miss Moore, we didn't, I assure you," Nann exclaimed. "There wasn't any wood on it. We swept it clean yesterday afternoon." A cry from Dories caused the speaker to pause and turn toward her. She was pointing at the fireplace. There was a small charred pile in the center of the grate. The old woman's thoughts had evidently changed their direction for she asked, querulously, if they were going to keep her waiting all the morning for her breakfast.

While out in the kitchen preparing it, Dories whispered, her eyes wide, "Nann, *what* do you make of it all? You are smiling to yourself as if you had solved the mystery."

“I believe I have, one of them; but, Dori, please don’t ask me to explain until I catch the ghost red-handed, so to speak.”

“White-handed, shouldn’t it be?” Dories inquired, her fears lessened by Nann’s evident delight in something she believed she had discovered.

When Miss Moore’s breakfast had been served, the girls, wishing to tidy up the cabin, set to work with a will. Nann was sweeping the porch and Dories was dusting and straightening the living-room when a queer humming noise was heard in the distance. “Dori,” Nann called, “come out here a moment. Can’t you hear a strange buzzing noise? It sounds as though it were high up in the air. What can it be?”

The other girl appeared in the open doorway and they both listened intently.

“Maybe it’s a flock of geese going south for the winter,” Dories ventured, but her friend shook her head. “That noise is coming nearer. Not going farther away,” she said. The buzzing and whizzing sounds increased with great rapidity. Springing down the steps, Nann exclaimed, “Whatever is making that commotion, is now right over our heads.”

Dories bounded to her friend’s side and they both gazed into the gleaming blue sky with shaded eyes.

“There it is!” Nann cried excitedly. “Why, of course, it’s an airplane! We should have guessed that right away. I wonder where it is going to land. There’s nothing but marsh and water around here besides this narrow strip of beach.”

“Oh, look! look!” This from Dories. “It’s dropping right down into the ocean and so it must be one of those combination air and sea planes.”

“Unless it has broken a wing and is falling,” Nann suggested. The airplane, nose downward, had seemed verily to plunge into the sea.

“Let’s run to the Point o’ Rocks.” Dories started as she spoke and Nann, throwing down the broom, raced after her. It was hard to go very rapidly where the sand was deep and dry, and so by the time they had climbed up on the highest boulder out on the rocky point, there was no sign whatever of the airplane either sailing safely on the water nor lying on the shore disabled.



“Hmm! That certainly is puzzling,” Nann said as she half closed her eyes in meditative thought. “Now, where can that huge thing have gone that it has disappeared so entirely?”

“I can’t imagine,” Dories replied. “If only Gibraltar were here with his punt, we might be able to find out.” Then she exclaimed merrily, “Nann, there is another mystery added to the twenty and nine that we already have.”

“Not quite that many,” the other maid replied, giving one last long look in the direction they believed the plane had descended or fallen. “I’m inclined to think,” she ventured, “that there is a bay or something beyond the swamp. O, well, let’s go back to our task. It’s lunch time, if nothing else.”

They decided, as the day was unusually warm for that time of the year, to eat a cold lunch, and, as their aunt did not wish anything then, the girls decided to walk along the beach in the opposite direction and see if they could find the cove where Gib kept his punt in hiding. But, just as they reached the spot where the road from town ended at the beach, they heard a merry hallooing, and, turning, they beheld Gibraltar Strait riding the white horse that was usually hitched to the coach.

“Oh, good, good!” was Dories’ delighted exclamation. “Now perhaps we will find out about the plane. Of course the people in town saw it and Gib may know ——” She stopped talking to stare at the approaching steed and rider in wide-eyed amazement. “How queer!” she ejaculated. “Nann, am I seeing double? I’m sure that I see four legs and Gib certainly has only two.”

There were undeniably four long, slim legs, two on either side of the big white horse, but the mystery was quickly explained by the appearance, over Gib’s shoulder, of a head belonging to another boy.

“Nann Sibbett!” Dories whirled, the light of inspiration in her eyes, “I do believe that other boy is Dick Burton, of whom Gib has so often spoken.”

And Dories was right. Gib waved his cap, then leaped to the sand, closely followed by the newcomer. One glance at the young stranger assured the girls that he was a city lad. His merry brown eyes twinkled when Gibraltar introduced him merely as the “kid that was crazy to find a way into the old ruin.”

The city boy took off his cap in a manner most polite, adding, “By name,

Richard Ralston Burton, but I'm usually called Dick."

Nann, realizing that Gib hadn't the remotest idea how to introduce his friend to them, then told the lad their names, adding, "Oh, Gib, you just can't guess how glad we are that you have come at last. The mysteries are heaping up so high and fast that we simply must solve a few of them."

But it was quite evident that the boys were equally excited about the airplane, which they, too, had seen as they were riding on the white horse along the road in the swamps. "I say," Gib began at once, "did yo'uns see where that airplane fellow dove to? D'you 'spose he's smashed all to smithereens on the rocks over yonder?"

The girls shook their heads. "No," Dories replied, "we just came from there and there wasn't a sign of that airplane. We thought that at least we would see the wreck of it."

"It must o' landed round the curve whar the swamp comes down to the shore," Gib said.

"Come on, old man, let's investigate." Then Dick smiled directly at Nann as he added, "We won't be gone long."

## **CHAPTER XIX.**

### **TWO BOYS INVESTIGATE**

Turning, the two girls, with arms locked, walked slowly back toward their home cabin, but their gaze was following the rapidly disappearing boys.

“My, how they did scramble over the rocks. I wonder why they went over the top. I’m sure one can see better from up there,” Dories turned to her friend to exclaim with enthusiasm. “Isn’t Dick Burton the nicest boy? I’m ever so glad he came. He’ll add a lot to our good times.”

Nann nodded. “One can tell in a moment that Dick has been well brought up,” she commented. “Isn’t it too bad that Gib isn’t going to have a chance to make something of himself? I believe he would be a writer if he had an education. You know how imaginative he is and how he enjoyed telling us the story of the Phantom Yacht.”

The girls sauntered along to the point of rocks and stood watching the waves break over the boulders that projected into the water.

“Isn’t it queer how calm it is sometimes and how rough at others, and yet there isn’t a bit of wind blowing, and it’s as warm and balmy one time as another,” Dories said, then leaped back with a merry laugh as an unusually large breaker pursued her up the beach.

“I think it may be the stage of the tides,” Nann speculated, “or else there may have been a storm at sea. O good! Here come the boys.”

Dick’s expressive face told the girls of his disappointment before he spoke. “Didn’t see a thing unusual,” he said. “Of course we couldn’t go far because of the marsh.”

“It sure is too bad the surf’s crashin’ in the way ’tis today,” Gibraltar told them. “Here’s Dick, come all the way from Boston to stay till Sunday night, jest so’s we could go up that little creek in the marsh. He’s wild to get into the ol’ ruin, aren’t you, Dick?”

“Yep,” the other boy agreed, “but if we can’t make it this week end, I’ll come down next.” Then with sudden interest, “How long are you girls going to be here on Siquaw Point?”

Although Dick asked the question of Nann, it was Dories who replied. “Aunt Jane said this morning that she thinks we will be leaving in about ten days now. You see,” by way of explanation, “my elderly aunt came down here for absolute rest, and now that she is rested, we may go back to town sooner than we expected.”

The four young people had seated themselves on the rocks.

Nann put in with: “I, for one, don’t want to leave this place until we have cleared up a few of the mysteries.” Then, chancing to thrust her hand in the pocket of her sweater-coat, she drew out a half dozen slips of crumpled yellow paper. “Oh, Gib,” she exclaimed, “where in the world do you suppose these came from? We find them in the queerest places. We can’t understand in the least who is leaving them.”

Gibraltar’s face was a blank. “What’s that writin’ on ’em?” He picked one up as he spoke and scrutinized it closely.

“In nine days you shall know all,” Dick read as he looked over his friend’s shoulder.

“Know all o’ what?” Gib queried.

The boys looked from Dories to Nann. The girls shook their heads. “We thought maybe you could help clear up some of the mysteries,” the latter said. “Have you ever heard of any queer person hanging around this beach? A hermit or a—          ”

Gib leaned forward, his red-brown eyes gleaming. “D’y mean, mabbe, the lantern person that yo’ uns saw one night on the rocks?”

Nann nodded. "We thought it might be someone who visited the ruin by night and—" the speaker glanced at the visiting boy, then interrupted herself to inquire, "Dick, do you remember whether your people left your cabin locked or not?"

The lad addressed turned and looked at the cottage nearest for a moment as though trying to recall something. Then a lightening in his eyes proved that he had succeeded. Springing to his feet, he exclaimed, "I declare if I hadn't forgotten it. I'm glad you spoke, Miss Nann. Mother said that in the hurry of getting away she wasn't sure whether or not she had locked the back door. She always hides the key under the back porch, so that if any one of us comes down out of season, he can get in." Then, when the others had also risen, Dick suggested, "Let's walk around that way and see what we will see."

Dories glanced quickly at Nann and saw that her friend was gazing steadily at an upper window. She surmised that Nann was trying to decide whether or not to tell the boys that she had seen the blind moving, for, after all, how could she be sure but that it had been her imagination. The watcher saw Nann's expression change to one of suppressed excitement, then she whirled with her back to the cottage and said in a low voice, "Everybody turn and look at the ocean. I want to tell you something."

Puzzled indeed, the boys and Dories faced about as Nann had done, and, to help her friend, the other maid pointed out toward the island. "What's this all about?" Dick inquired. "Miss Nann, you look as though you had seen something startling. What is it?"

Very quietly Nann explained how for the third time she had seen an upper blind open ever so little as though someone was peering out at them, and then close again.

"You think someone is hiding in our cottage?" Dick asked in amazement. Nann nodded. "Well then, we'll soon find out." The city boy's tone did not suggest hesitancy or fear. "You girls would better go over to your own cabin and wait until we join you."

It was quite evident that Nann did not like this suggestion, but Dories did, and said so frankly. "I'll run home anyway," she said when she saw how disappointed Nann was. "Probably Aunt Jane would like me to read to her."

And so it was that Nann accompanied the two boys around to the back of the Burton cottage. As before, the door creaked open, and very stealthily they entered the dark kitchen. This being the largest cottage in the row, the stairway was boarded off from a narrow hall; there being a door at the foot and another at the top. The one at the bottom was unlocked, and so the three investigators began the ascent, groping their way in the dark. "Wish't we had along some matches," Gib began, when Nann whispered, "I do believe that I have some. I took a dozen with us this morning. Yes, here they are in my watch pocket." Dick, in the lead, took the matches, and as he opened the upper door, he scratched one. It very faintly illumined a long hall with a boarded-up window at the end.

There were four closed doors along the hall. The one at the right front would lead into the room where a window blind had moved. Nann almost held her breath as Dick, after scratching another match, tried the door. It did not open. "Mabbe it's jest stuck," Gib suggested. "Let's all push." This they did and the door burst open so suddenly that they plunged headlong into the room and the flicker of the match went out. How musty and dark it was! Quickly another match was lighted; but there seemed to be no occupant other than themselves. The closet door, standing open, revealed merely row after row of hooks and shelves. There was no furniture in the room of a concealing nature. Nann went at once to the blind and found that it was swinging slightly. "Well," she had to acknowledge, "I believe after all I was wrong in my surmise. Let's get back. Dories will be worried about me."

Dick, before leaving the room, hooked the blind carefully on the inside, and, after closing the window, he remarked, "It's queer Mother should have left a window open as well as the back door. But I remember now. She said that they were afraid of losing the train. Something had delayed them. I had gone on ahead to start school."

When they were again safely out in the sunshine, Nann inquired, "I wonder where your mother left the key. It isn't in the door."

Before replying Dick went to one corner beneath the porch, removed a lattice door which could not have been discovered by anyone not knowing about it, reached his hand around to one of the uprights where, on a nail, he found the key hanging. He held it up triumphantly. Then, after locking the kitchen door, he replaced the key and the lattice, exclaiming as he did so, "I believe I understand now what happened. In the hurry, Mother put the key in the right place without

having locked the door, so that's that." But Nann was not entirely convinced.

The late afternoon fog was drifting in when the three started to walk along the beach. They saw Dories running to meet them. "Well, thanks be you're all alive," was her relieved exclamation.

Nann laughed. "Did you think a cannibal was hiding in the Burton cottage?" Then she added, pretending to be disappointed, "I had at least hoped to find a ghost or a——"

"Look! Look!" Gib cried excitedly, pointing beyond the rocks.

"What? Where?" the girls scrambled to the top step of cabin three, which they happened to be passing, that they might have a better view of whatever had aroused Gib's interest.

"Is it the Phantom Yacht?" Nann asked, almost hoping that it was.

"No, 'tisn't that, I'm sure, because it isn't white." Gib continued to stare into the gathering dusk. "It's some queer kind of craft, as best I can make out, and it's scooting away from the shore at a pretty speedy rate and heading right for the island." For a moment the young people fairly held their breath as they watched.

Dick was the first to break in with, "Gee-whiliker! I know what it is! Stupid that I didn't get on to it from the very first."

"Why, Dick, what do you think it is?" Dories inquired.

"I don't think; I know! It's that seaplane! Look! There she soars. See her take the air! Now the pilot's turning her nose, and heading straight for Boston."

"Whoever 'tis in that airplane is takin' a purty big chance," Gibraltar commented, "startin' up with night a comin' on and fog a sailin' in."

Dick was optimistic. "He'll keep ahead of the fog all right, and those high-powered machines travel so fast he'll be at the landing place, outside of Boston, before it's really dark. He's safe enough, but the big question is, who is he, and what was he doing over there close to the old ruin?"

"Maybe he knows about that opening in the swamp," Nann ventured.

“I bet ye he does! Like’s not he has a little boat and goes up to the ol’ ruin in it.”

“But where do you suppose his airship was anchored?” Dories inquired. “Probably in the cove beyond the marsh,” Dick replied, when Gib broke in with, “Gee, I sure sartin wish we’d taken a chance and gone out in the punt. I sure do. I’d o’ gone, but Dick, he was afraid!”

The city lad flushed, but he said at once, “You are wrong, Gib, but I promised my mother that I would only go out in your punt when the tide was low, and when I give my word, she knows that she can depend upon it.”

“You are right, Dick. It is worth more to have your mother able to trust you, when you are out of her sight, than it is to solve all the mysteries that ever were or will be.” Nann’s voice expressed her approval of the city lad. Gib’s only comment was, “Wall, how kin we go at low tide? It comes ’long ’bout midnight!”

“What if it does? We can—” Dick had started to say, but interrupted himself to add, “’Twouldn’t be fair to go without the girls since they found the opening in the swamp. It will be low tide again tomorrow noon, and I vote we wait until then.”

“O, Dick, that’s ever so nice of you! We girls are wild to go.” Nann fairly beamed at him.

“Wall, so long. We’ll see you ’bout noon tomorrow.” This from Gib. Dick waved his cap and smiled back over his shoulder.

“I can hardly wait,” Nann said, as the two girls went into the cabin. “I feel in my bones that we’re going to find clues that will solve all of the mysteries soon.”



## **CHAPTER XX.**

### **ONE MYSTERY SOLVED**

A glorious autumn morning dawned and Dories sat up suddenly. Shaking Nann, she whispered excitedly: "I hear it again."

"What? The ghost? Was he ringing the bell?" This sleepily from the girl who seemed to have no desire to waken, but, at her companion's urgent: "No, not the bell! Do sit up, Nann, and listen. Isn't that the airplane coming back? Hark!"

Fully awake, the other girl did sit up and listen. Then leaping from the bed, she ran to the window that overlooked the wide expanse of marsh.

"Yes, yes," she cried. "There it is! It's flying low, as though it were going to land, and it's heading straight for the old ruin. Get dressed as quickly as you can."

"But why?" queried the astonished Dories. "We can't get any nearer than we did yesterday; that is, not by land, and the tide is high again, and so we can't go out in the punt."

Nann did not reply, but continued to dress hurriedly, and so her friend did likewise.

"I don't know why it is," the former confided a moment later, "but I feel in my bones that this is the day of the great revelation."

"Not according to the yellow messages. They would tell us that in seven days we would know all." Dories was brushing her brown hair preparing to weave it into two long braids.

“But, as I told you before,” Nann remarked, “I don’t believe the papers refer to the old ruin mystery at all. In fact, I think the ghost that writes the message on the papers does not even know there is an old ruin mystery.”

“Well, you’re a better detective than I am,” Dories confessed as she tied a ribbon bow on the end of each braid. “I haven’t any idea about anything that is happening.”

The girls stole downstairs and ran out on the beach, hoping to see the airplane, but the long, shining white beach was deserted and the only sound was the crashing of the waves over the rocks and along the shore, for the tide was high.

“I wonder if Dick and Gib heard the plane passing over their town?” Dories had just said, when Nann, glancing in the direction of the road, exclaimed gleefully, “They sure did, for here they come at headlong speed this very minute.” The big, boney, white horse stopped so suddenly when it reached the sand that both of the boys were unseated. Laughingly they sprang to the beach and waved their caps to the girls, who hurried to meet them.

“Good morning, boys!” Nann called as soon as they were near enough for her voice to be heard above the crashing of the waves. “I judge you also saw the plane.”

“Yeah! We’uns heerd it comin’ ’long ’fore we saw it, an’ we got ol’ Spindly out’n her stall in a twinklin’, I kin tell you.”

The city lad laughed as though at an amusing memory. “The old mare was sound asleep when we started, but when she heard that buzzing and whirring over her head, she thought she was being pursued by a regiment of demons, seemed like. She lit out of that barn and galloped as she never had before. Of course the airplane passed us long ago, but that gallant steed of ours was going so fast that I wasn’t sure that we would be able to stop her before we got over to the island.”

Gib, it was plain, was impatient to be away, and so promising to report if they found anything of interest, the lads raced toward the point of rocks, while the girls went indoors to prepare breakfast. Dories found her Great-Aunt Jane in a happier frame of mind than usual. She was sitting up in bed, propped with pillows, when her niece carried in the tray. And when a few moments later the girl was leaving the room, she chanced to glance back and was sure that the old woman was chuckling as though she had thought of something very amusing.

Dories confided this astonishing news item to Nann while they ate their breakfast in the kitchen. "What do you suppose Aunt Jane was thinking about? It was surely something which amused her?" Dories was plainly puzzled.

Nann smiled. "Doesn't it seem to you that your aunt must be thoroughly rested by this time? I should think that she would like to get out in the sunshine these wonderful bracing mornings. It would do her a lot more good than being cooped up indoors."

Dories agreed, commenting that old people were certainly queer. It was midmorning when the girls, having completed their few household tasks, again went to the beach to look for the boys. The tide was going out and the waves were quieter. Arm in arm they walked along on the hard sand. Dories was saying, "Aunt Jane told me that she would like to read to herself this morning. I was so afraid that she would ask me to read to her. Not but that I do want to be useful sometimes, but this morning I am so eager to know what the boys are doing. I wish they would come. I wonder where they went."

"I think I know," Nann replied. "I believe they are lying flat on the big smooth rock on which we sat that day Gibraltar told us the story of the Phantom Yacht. You recall that we had a fine view of the old ruin from there."

"But why would they be lying flat?" Dories, who had little imagination, looked up to inquire.

"So that they could observe whoever might enter the old ruin without being observed, my child."

"But, Nann, why would anyone want to get into that dreadful place unless it was just out of curiosity, which, of course, is our only motive."

"I'm sure I don't know," the older girl had to confess, adding: "That is a mystery that we have yet to solve."

Suddenly Nann laughed aloud. "What's the joke?" This from her astonished companion. Since Nann continued to laugh, and was pointing merrily at her, Dories began to bristle. "Well, what's funny about me? Have I buttoned my dress wrong?"

The other maid shook her head. "It's something about your braids," she replied.

“Oh, I suppose I put on different colored ribbons. I remember noticing a yellow one near the red.” She swung both of the braids around as she spoke, but the ribbon bows were of the same hue. Tossing them back over her shoulder, she said complacently: “This isn’t the first of April, my dear. There’s nothing the matter with my braids and so—” But Nann interrupted, “Isn’t there? Unbeliever, behold!” Leaping forward, she lifted a braid, held it in front of her friend, and pointed at a bit of crumpled yellow paper. Dories laughed, too.

“Well,” Nann exclaimed, “that proves to my entire satisfaction that a supernatural being does *not* write the notes and hide them just where we will be sure to find them.”

“But who do you suppose does write them?” Dories asked. “This morning I’ve been close enough to four people to have them slip that folded paper in my hair ribbon. Their names are Nann Sibbett, Great-Aunt Jane, Gibraltar Strait and Dick Moore. Dick, of course, is eliminated because he was nowhere about when the messages first began to appear. It isn’t *your* hand-writing,” the speaker was closely scrutinizing the note, “and, as for Gib, I’m not sure that he can write at all.” Then a light of conviction appeared in her eyes. “Do you know what I believe?” she turned toward her friend as one who had made an astonishing discovery. “I believe Great-Aunt Jane writes these notes and that she gets up out of bed when we are away from home and hides them.”

Nann laughed. “I agree with you perfectly. I suspected her the other day, but I didn’t want to tell you until I was more sure. But why do you suppose she does it—if she does?”

Dories shook her head, then she exclaimed: “Now I know why Aunt Jane was chuckling to herself when I looked back. She had just slipped the folded paper into my hair ribbon, I do believe.”

“The next thing for us to find out is when and why she does it?” The girls had stopped at the foot of the rocks and Nann changed the subject to say: “I wonder why the boys don’t come. It’s almost noon. We’ll have to go back and prepare your Aunt Jane’s lunch.” She turned toward the home cottage as she spoke. Dories gave a last lingering look up toward the tip-top rock. “Maybe they have been carried off in the airplane,” she suggested.

“Impossible!” Nann said. “It couldn’t depart without our hearing.”

When they reached the cabin, Dories whispered, "I've nine minds to show Aunt Jane the notes and watch her expression. I am sure I could tell if she is guilty."

"Don't!" Nann warned. "Let her have her innocent fun if she wishes." Then, when they were in the kitchen making a fire in the wood stove, Nann added, "I believe, my dear girl, that there is more to the meaning of those messages than just innocent fun. I believe your Aunt Jane is going to disclose to you something far more important than the solving of the ruin mystery. She may tell you where the fortune is that your father should have had, or something like that."

Dories, who had been filling the tea-kettle at the kitchen pump, whirled about, her face shining. "Nann Sibbett," she exclaimed in a low voice, "do you really, truly think that may be what we are to know in seven days? O, wouldn't I be glad I came to this terrible place if it were? Then Mother darling wouldn't have to sew any more and you and I could go away to school. Why just all of our dreams would come true."

"Clip fancy's wings, dearie," Nann cautioned as she cut the bread preparing to make toast. "Usually I am the one imagining things, but now it is you."

Dories looked at her aunt with new interest when she went into her room fifteen minutes later with the tray, but the old woman, who was again lying down, motioned her to put the tray on a small table near and not disturb her. As Dories was leaving the room, her aunt called, "I won't need you girls this afternoon."

"Just as though she divined our wish to go somewhere," Nann commented, a few moments later, when Dories had told her.

"I'll tell you what let's do," the younger girl suggested, "let's pack a lunch of sandwiches and olives and cookies. Then when the boys come we can have a picnic. It's noon and they didn't have a lunch with them, I am sure."

"Good, that will be fun," Nann agreed. "I'll look now and see if they are coming. We don't want them to escape us."

A moment later she returned from the front porch shaking her head. "Not a trace of them," she reported. Hurriedly they prepared a lunch and packed it in a box. Then, after donning their bright-colored tams and sweater coats, they went out the back door and were just rounding the front of the cabin when Nann exclaimed, "Here they come, or rather there they go, for they do not seem to

have the least idea of stopping here.”

Nann was right. The two lads had appeared, scrambling over the point of rocks, and away they ran along the hard sand of the beach, acknowledging the existence of the girls merely by a hilarious waving of the arms.

Nann turned toward her friend, her large eyes glowing. “They’ve found a clue, I’m sure certain! You can tell by the way they are racing that they are just ever so excited about something.” As she spoke the boys disappeared over a hummock of sand, going in the direction of the inlet where Gibraltar kept his punt hidden.

Dories clapped her hands. “I know!” she cried elatedly. “They’re going out in the punt. The tide has turned! Oh, Nann, what do you suppose they saw?”

“I believe they saw the pilot of the airplane enter the old ruin, so now they are going to get the punt, and they’re in a great hurry to get back to the creek before the airplane leaves.”

“Oh! How exciting! Do you suppose they will make it?”

Nann intently watched the blue water beyond the hummock of sand as she replied, “I believe they will.” Then she added, “Oh, dear, I do hope they’ll take time to stop and get us. It wouldn’t be fair for them to have all the thrills, since we girls found the channel in the marsh.”

“Of course they’ll take us,” Dories replied, although in her heart of hearts she rather hoped they would not, as she was not as eager as Nann for adventure. “You know Dick said it wouldn’t be fair to go without us.”

Nann nodded. Then, with sudden brightening, “Hurry! Here they come! Let’s race down to the point o’ rocks and see if they want to hail us.”

Then, as they started, “Do you know, Dori, I feel as though something most unexpected is about to happen. I mean something very different from what we think.”

The girls had reached the point of rocks and were standing with shaded eyes, gazing out at the glistening water.

The flat-bottomed boat slowly neared them. Dick held one oar and Gib the other. They both had their backs toward the point and evidently they had not seen the girls.

“Why, I do declare! They aren’t going to stop. They’re going right by without us.” Nann felt very much neglected, when suddenly Gib turned and grinned toward them with so much mischief in his expression that Dories concluded: “They did that just to tease. See, they’re heading in this way now.”

This was true, and Dick, making a trumpet of his hands, called: “Want to come, girls? If so, scramble over to the flat rock, quick’s you can! We’re in a terrifical hurry!”

Dories and Nann needed no second invitation, but climbed over the jagged rocks and stood on the broad one which was uncovered at low tide and which served as a landing dock.

Dick, the gallant, leaped out to assist them into the punt, then, seizing his oar, he commanded his mate, “Make it snappy, old man. We want to catch the modern air pirate before he gets away with his treasure.”

## **CHAPTER XXI.**

### **A CHANNEL IN THE SWAMP**

The wind was from the shore and Gib suggested that the small sail be run up. This was soon done and away the little craft went bounding over the evenly rolling waves and, before very many minutes, the point was rounded and the swamp reached.

“Where is the airplane anchored?” Nann inquired, peering curiously into the cove which was unoccupied by craft of any kind.

“Well, we aren’t sure as to that,” Dick told her, speaking softly as though fearing to be overheard. “We climbed to the top of the rocks and lay there for hours, or so it seemed to me. We were waiting for the tide to turn so we could go out in the punt. But all the time we were there we didn’t see or hear anything of the airplane or the pilot. Of course, since it’s a seaplane, too, it’s probably anchored over beyond the marsh.

“Now my theory is that the pilot has a little tender and that in it he rowed up the creek and probably, right this very minute, he is in the old ruin, and like as not if we go up there we will meet him face to face.”

“Br-r-r!” Dories shuddered and her eyes were big and round. “Don’t you think we’d better wait here? We could hide the punt in the reeds and watch who comes out. You wouldn’t want to meet—a—a—”

Dories was at a loss to conjecture who they might meet, but Gib chimed in with, “Don’t care who ’tis!” Then, looking anxiously at the girl who had spoken, he said, “’Pears we’d ought to’ve left you at home. ’Pears like we’d ought.”

The boy looked so truly troubled that Dories assumed a courage she did not feel.



“No, indeed, Gib! If you three aren’t afraid to meet whoever it is, neither am I. Row ahead.”

Thus advised, the lad lowered the small sail, and the two boys rowed the punt to the opening in the marsh.

It was just wide enough for the punt to enter. “Wall, we uns can’t use the oars no further, that’s sure sartin.” Gib took off his cap to scratch his ear as he always did when perplexed.

“I have it!” Dick seized an oar, stepped to the stern, asked Nann to take the seat in the middle of the boat and then he stood and pushed the punt into the narrow creek.

They had not progressed more than two boat-lengths when a whizzing, whirring noise was heard and the seaplane scudded from behind a reedy point which had obscured it, and crossed their cove before taking to the air. Then it turned its nose toward the island. All that the watchers could see of the pilot was his leather-hooded, dark-goggled head, and, as he had not turned in their direction, it was quite evident that he didn’t know of their existence.

“Gone!” Dick cried dramatically. “‘Foiled again,’ as they say on the stage.”

“Wall, anyhow, we’re here, so let’s go on up the creek and see what’s in the ol’ ruin.”

Dick obeyed by again pushing the boat along with the one oar. Dorries said not a word as the punt moved slowly among the reeds that stood four feet above the water and were tangled and dense.

“There’s one lucky thing for us,” Nann began, after having watched the dark water at the side of the craft. “That sea serpent you were telling about, Gib, couldn’t hide in this marsh.”

“Maybe not,” Dick agreed, “but it’s a favorite feeding ground for slimy water snakes.” Nann glanced anxiously at her friend, then, noting how pale she was, she changed the subject. “How still it is in here,” she commented.

A breeze rustled through the drying reed-tops, but there was indeed no other sound.

In and out, the narrow creek wound, making so many turns that often they could not see three feet ahead of them.

For a moment the four young people in the punt were silent, listening to the faint rustle of the dry reeds all about them in the swamp. There was no other sound save that made by the flat-bottomed boat, as Dick, standing in the stern, pushed it with one oar.

“There’s another curve ahead,” Nann whispered. Somehow in that silent place they could not bring themselves to speak aloud.

“Seems to me the water is getting very shallow,” Dories observed. She was staring over one side of the boat watching for the slimy snakes Dick had told her made the marsh their feeding ground.

“H-m-m! I wonder!” Nann, with half closed eyes looked meditatively ahead.

“Wonder what?” her friend glanced up to inquire.

“I was thinking that perhaps we won’t be able to go much farther up this channel, since the tide is going out. The water in the marsh keeps getting lower and lower.”

“Gee-whiliker, Nann!” Dick looked alarmed. “I believe you’re right. I’ve been thinking for some seconds that the pushing was harder than it has been.”

They had reached a turn in the narrow channel as he spoke, but, when he tried to steer the punt into it, the flat-bottomed boat stopped with such suddenness that, had he not been leaning hard on the oar, he would surely have been thrown into the muddy water. As it was, he lost his balance and fell on the broad stern seat. Dories, too, had been thrown forward, while Gib leaped to the bow to look ahead and see what had obstructed their progress.

“Great fish-hooks! If we haven’t run aground,” was the result of his observation.

“Nann’s right. This here channel dries up with the tide goin’ out.”

“Then the only way to get to the old ruin is to come when the turning tide fills this channel in the marsh,” Dick put in.

“Wall, it’s powerful disappointin’,” Gib looked his distress, “bein’ as the tide won’t turn till ’long about midnight, an’ you’ve got to go back to Boston on the evening train.”

“I’d ought to go, to be there in time for school on Monday,” the lad agreed.

“Couldn’t you make it if you took the early morning train?” Nann inquired.

“May be so,” Dick replied, “but we can decide that later. The big thing just now is, how’re we going to get out of this creek?”

“Why—” The girls looked helplessly from one boy to the other. “Is there any problem about it? Can’t you just push out the way you pushed in?”

Dick’s expression betrayed his perplexity. “Hmm! I’m not at all sure, with the tide going out as fast as it is now.”

“Gracious!” Dories looked up in alarm. “We won’t have to stay in this dreadful marsh until the tide turns, will we?” Then appealingly, “Oh, Dick, please do hurry and try to get us out of here. Aunt Jane will be terribly worried if we don’t get home before dark.”

The boy addressed had already leaped to the stern of the boat and was pushing on the one oar with all his strength. Gib snatched the other oar and tried to help, but still they did not move. Then Nann had an inspiration. “Dori,” she said, “you catch hold of the reeds on that side and I will on this and let’s pull, too. Now, one, two, three! All together!”

Their combined efforts proved successful. The punt floated, but it was quite evident that they would have to travel fast to keep from again being grounded, so they all four continued to push and pull, and it was with a sigh of relief that they at last reached deeper water as the channel widened into the sea.

“Well, that certainly was a narrow escape,” Nann exclaimed as the punt slipped out of the narrow channel of the marsh into the quiet waters of the cove.

“Now we know why the pilot of the airplane left. He probably visits the old ruin only at high tide, when he is sure that there is water enough in the creek,” Dick announced.

Dories seemed greatly relieved that the expedition had returned to the open, and, as it was sheltered in the cove, the boys soon rowed across to the point of rocks. "If Gib could leave the punt here where the water is so sheltered and quiet, your mother, Dick, would not object even if you went out when the tide is high, would she?" Nann inquired.

"No, indeed," the boy replied. "Mother merely had reference to the open sea. A punt would have little chance out there if it were caught between the surf and the rocks, but here it is always calm."

While they had been talking, Gib had been busy letting his home-made anchor overboard. It was a heavy piece of iron tied to a rope, which in turn was fastened to the bow.

"Hold on there, Cap'n!" Dick merrily called. "Let the passengers ashore before you anchor." Gib grinned as he drew the heavy piece of iron back into the punt. Then Dick rowed close to the rocks and assisted the girls out.

"What shall we do now?" he turned to ask when he saw that Gib had pushed off again. He dropped the anchor a little more than a boat length from the point, pulled off his shoes and stockings and waded to the rocks. After putting them on again he joined the others, who had started to climb.

When they reached the wide, flat "tiptop" rock Dorries sank down, exclaiming, "Honestly, I never was so hungry before in all my life." Then, laughingly, she added, "Nann Sibbett, here we have been carrying that box of lunch all this time and forgot to eat it. The boys must be starved."

"Whoopla!" Dick shouted. "Starved doesn't half express my famished condition. Does it yours, Gib?"

The red-headed boy beamed. "I'm powerful hungry all right," he acknowledged, "but I'm sort o' used to that." However, he sat down when he was invited to do so and ate the good sandwiches given him with as much relish as the others.

Half an hour later they were again on the sand walking toward the row of cottages. Nann glanced at the upper window of the Burton cabin, and Dick, noticing, glanced in the same direction. Then, smiling at the girl, he said, "I guess, after all, there has been no one in the cottage. The blind is still closed just as I left it yesterday."

“We’ll look again tonight,” Nann said, adding, “We’ll each have to carry a lantern.”

“What are you two planning?” Dories asked suspiciously.

“Can’t you guess the meaning that underlies our present conversation?” Nann smilingly inquired.

“Goodness, I’m almost afraid that I can,” was her friend’s queer confession. “I do believe you are plotting a visit to the old ruin at the turn of the tide, and that will not be until midnight, Gib said.”

“It’s something like that,” Dick agreed.

“Well, you can count me out.” Dories shuddered as she spoke.

Nann laughed. “I know just exactly what will happen (this teasingly) when you hear me tiptoeing down the back stairs. You’ll dart after me; for you know you’re afraid to stay alone in our loft at night.”

“You are wrong there,” Dories contended. “Now that I know about the ghost, I won’t be afraid to stay alone, and I would be terribly afraid to go to the ruin at midnight, even with three companions.”

“Speaking of lanterns,” Dick put in, “if it’s foggy we won’t be able to go at all. That would be running unnecessary risks, but if it is clear, there ought to be a full moon shining along about midnight, and that will make all the light we will need.” Then he hastened to add, “But we’ll take lanterns, for we might need them inside the old ruin, and what is more, I’ll take my flashlight.”

The boys had left the white horse tied to the cottage nearest the road. When they had mounted, Spindly started off as suddenly as hours before it had stopped.

“Good-bye,” Dick waved his cap to the girls, “we’ll whistle when we get to the beach.”

“Just look at Spindly gallop,” Dories said. “The poor thing is eager to get to its dinner, I suppose.” Arm in arm they turned toward their home-cabin.

“My, such exciting things are happening!” Nann exclaimed joyfully. “I wouldn’t

have missed this month by the sea for anything.”

Dories shuddered. “I’ll have to confess that I’m not very keen about visiting the old ruin at——” She interrupted herself to cry out excitedly, “Nann, do look over toward the island. We forgot all about that sea plane. There it is just taking to the air. What do you suppose it has been doing out on that desolate island all this time?”

Nann shook her head, then shaded her eyes to watch the airplane as it soared high, again headed for Boston.

“Little do you guess, Mr. Pilot,” she called to him, “that tonight we are to discover the secret of your visits to the old ruin.”

“Maybe!” Dories put in laconically.

## **CHAPTER XXII.**

### **THE OLD RUIN AT MIDNIGHT**

Never had two girls been more interested and excited than were Dories and Nann as midnight neared. Of course they neither of them slept a wink nor had they undressed. Nann had truly prophesied. Dories declared that when she came to think of it, nothing could induce her to stay alone in that loft room at midnight, and that if she were to meet a ghost or any other mysterious person, she would rather meet him in company of Nann, Dick and Gib.

Every hour after they retired, they crept from bed to gaze out of the small window which overlooked the ocean. At first the fog was so dense that they could see but dimly the white line of rushing surf out by the point of rocks.

“Well, we might as well give up the plan,” Dories announced as it neared eleven and the sky was still obscured.

But Nann replied that when the moon was full it often succeeded in dispelling the fog by some magic it seemed to possess, and that she didn’t intend to go to sleep until she was sure that the boys weren’t coming. She declared that she wouldn’t miss the adventure for anything.

Dories fell asleep, however, and, for that matter, so, too, did Nann, and since they were both very weary from the unusual excitement and late hours, they would not have awakened until morning had it not been for a low whistle at the back of the cabin.

Instantly Nann sprang up. “That must be Gib,” she whispered. Then added, jubilantly: “It’s as bright as day. The moon is shining now in all its splendor.”

In five seconds the two girls had crept down the outer stairway, and as they

tiptoed across the back porch, two dark forms emerged from the shadows and approached them.

“Hist!” Gib whispered melodramatically, bent on making the adventure as mysterious as possible. “You gals track along arter us fellows, and don’t make any noise.”

Then without further parley, Gib darted into the shadow of the woodshed, and from there crept stealthily along back of the seven boarded-up cabins.

“What’s the idea of stealing along like this?” Nann inquired when the wide sandy spaces were reached.

“We thought we’d keep hidden as much as possible,” Dick told her. “For if that airplane pilot is anywhere around, we don’t want him to get wise to us.”

“But, of course, he isn’t around,” Dories said. “How could he be? An airplane can’t fly over our beach without being heard. It would waken us from the deepest sleep, I am sure.”

They were walking four abreast toward the point which loomed darkly ahead of them. “I suppose you’re right,” Dick agreed, “but it sort of adds to the zip of it to pretend we’re going to steal upon that airplane pilot and catch him at whatever it is that he comes here to do.”

The girls did not need much assistance in climbing the rocks nor in descending on the side of the cove. Gibraltar, as before, removed his shoes and stockings, waded out to the punt, drew up the anchor and then returned for the others. The moon had risen high enough in the clear starlit sky to shine down into the narrow channel in the marsh and, as the water deepened continually and was flowing inward, it was merely a matter of steering the flat-bottomed boat, which the boys did easily, Dick in the stern with an oar while Gib in the bow caught the reeds first on one side and then on the other, thus keeping the blunt nose of the punt always in the middle of the creek.

“Sh! Don’t say a loud word,” Gib cautioned, as they reached the curve where the afternoon before they had run aground.

“Goodness, you make me feel shivery all over,” Dories whispered. “Who do you suppose would hear if we did speak out loud?”



“Dunno,” Dick replied, “but we won’t take any chances.”

The creek was perceptibly widening and the rising tide carried them along more swiftly, but still the reeds were high over their heads and so, even though Dick was standing as he pushed with an oar, he could not see the old ruin, but abruptly the marsh ended and there, high and dry on a mound, stood the object of their search, looking more forlorn and haunted than it had from a distance.

The boys had been about to run the boat up on the mound, when suddenly, and without a sound of warning, Dick shoved the punt as fast he could back into the shelter of the reeds from which they had just emerged.

“Why d’y do that?” Gib inquired in a low voice. “D’y see anything that scared you, kid?”

“I saw it, too!” Dorie’s eyes were wide and startled. “That is, I thought I saw a light, but it went out so quickly I decided maybe it was the moonlight flashing on something.”

“Maybe it was and maybe it wasn’t.” Dick moved the punt close to the edge of the reeds that they might observe the ruin from a safe distance.

“But who could be in there?” Nann wondered. “We have never seen anyone around except the pilot of the airplane and we have all agreed that he can’t be here tonight.”

“No, he isn’t!” Dick was fast recovering his courage. “I believe Dorie may have been right. Probably it was only reflected moonlight. Perhaps you girls had better remain in the punt while we fellows investigate.”

“No, indeed, we’ll all go together.” Nann settled the matter. “Now shove back up to the mound, Dick, and let’s get out.” This was done and the four young people climbed from the punt and stood for a long silent moment staring at the ruin that loomed so dark and desolate just ahead of them.

“Thar ’tis! Thar’s that light agin!” Gib seized his friend’s arm and pointed, adding with conviction: “Dorie was right. It’s suthin’ swingin’ in the wind an’ flashin’ in the moonlight.”

“Gib,” Nann said, “that is probably what the people in Siquaw Center have seen

on moonlight nights.”

“Like’s not!” the red-headed lad agreed. Then stealthily they tiptoed toward the two tall pillars that stood like ghostly sentinels in front of the roofless part of the house which had once been the salon.

The side walls were crumbled, but the rear wall stood erect, supporting one side of the roof which tipped forward till it reached the ground, although one corner was upheld by a heap of fallen stone.

“I suppose we’ll have to creep beneath that corner if we want to see what’s under the roof,” Dick said. He looked anxiously at the girls as he spoke, but Nann replied briskly, “Of course we will. Who’ll lead the way?”

“Since I have a flashlight, I will,” the city boy offered. “Here, Nann, give me your lantern and I’ll light it. Then if you girls get separated from us boys, you won’t be in the dark.”

“Goodness, Dick!” Dories shivered. “What in the world is going to separate us? Can’t we keep all close together?”

“Course we can,” Gib cheerfully assured her. “Dick kin go in furst, you girls follow, an’ I’ll be rear guard.”

“You mean I can go in when I find an opening,” the city boy turned back to whisper. Somehow they just couldn’t bring themselves to talk out loud.

Nann held her lantern high and looked at the corner nearest where a crumbling wall upheld the roof. “There ought to be room to creep in over there,” she pointed, “if it weren’t for all that debris on the ground.”

“We’ll soon dispose of that,” Dick said, going to the spot and placing his flashlight on a rock that it might illumine their labors. The two boys fell to work with a will tossing away bricks and stones and broken pieces of plaster.

At last an opening large enough to be entered on hands and knees appeared. Dick cautioned the girls to stay where they were until he had investigated. Dories gave a little startled cry when the boy disappeared, fearing that the wall or the roof might fall on him. After what seemed like a very long time, they heard a low whistle on the inside of the opening. Gib peered under and received whispered

instructions from Dick. "It's safe enough as far as I can see. Bring the girls in." And so Dories crept through the opening, followed by Nann and Gib. Rising to their feet they found themselves in what had one time been a large and handsomely furnished drawing-room. A huge chandelier with dangling crystals still hung from the cross-beams, and in the night wind that entered from above they kept up a constant low jangling noise. Heavy pieces of mahogany furniture were tilted at strange angles where the rotting floor had given way.

"Watch your step, girls," Dick, in the lead, turned to caution. "See, there's a big hole ahead. I'll go around it first to be sure that the boards will hold. Aha, yonder is a partition that is still standing. I wonder what room is beyond that."

"Look out, Dick!" came in a low terrorized cry from Dories. The boy turned to see the girl, eyes wide and frightened, pointing toward a dark corner ahead. "There's a man crouching over there. I'm sure of it! I saw his face."

Instantly Dick swung the flashlight until it illumined the corner toward which Dories was still pointing. There was unmistakably a face looking at them with piercing dark eyes that were heavily overhung with shaggy grey brows.

For one terrorized moment the four held their breath. Even Dick and Gib were puzzled. Then, with an assumption of bravery, the former called: "Say, who are you? Come on out of there. We're not here to harm anything."

But the upper part of the face (that was all they could see) did not change expression, and so Dick advanced nearer. Then his relieved laughter peeled forth.

"Some man—that," he said, as he flashed the light beyond the pile of debris which partly concealed the face.

"Why, if it isn't an old painting!" Nann ejaculated.

And that, indeed, was what it proved to be. Battered by its fall, the broken frame stood leaning against a partition.

"I believe its a portrait of that cruel old Colonel Woodbury himself," Dories remarked. Then eagerly added, "I do wish we could find a picture of that sweet girl, his daughter. Ever since Gib told us her story I have thought of her as being as lovely as a princess. Though I don't suppose a real princess is always

beautiful.”

“I should say not! I’ve seen pictures of them that couldn’t hold a candle to Nann, here.” This was Dick’s blunt, boyish way of saying that he admired the fearless girl.

Gib, having found a heavy cane, was poking around in the piles of debris that bordered the partition and his exclamation of delight took the others to his side as rapidly as they could go.

“What have you found, old man?” Dick asked, eagerly peering at a heap of rubbish.

“Nuther picture, seems like, or leastwise I reckon it’s one.”

Gib busied himself tossing stones and fragments of plaster to one side, and when he could free it, he lifted a canvas which faced the wall and turned it so that light fell full upon it.

“Gee-whiliker, it’s yer princess all right, all right!” he averred. “Say, wasn’t she some beaut, though?”

There were sudden tears in Nann’s eyes as she spoke. “Oh, you poor, poor girl,” she said as she bent above the pictured face, “how you have suffered since that long-ago day when some artist painted your portrait.”

“Even then she wasn’t happy,” Dories put in softly. “See that little half-wistful smile? It’s as though she felt much more like crying.”

“And now she is a woman and over in Europe somewhere with a little girl and boy,” Nann took up the tale; but Gib amended: “Not so very little. Didn’t we cal’late that if they’re livin’ the gal’d be about sixteen, an’ the boy eighteen or nineteen?”

“Why, that’s so.” Nann looked up brightly. “When I spoke I was remembering the story as you told it, and how sad the young mother looked when she landed from the snow-white yacht and led a little boy and girl up to this very house to beg her father to forgive her. But I recall now, you said that was at least ten years ago.”

“What shall we do with this beautiful picture?” Dories inquired. “It doesn’t seem a bit right to leave it here in all this rubbish, now that we’ve found it.”

“Let’s take it into the next room,” Dick said; “maybe we’ll find a better place to leave it.”

They had reached an opening in the rear partition, but the heavy carved door still hung on one hinge, obstructing their passage.

“We *must* get through somehow,” Nann, the adventurous, said. “I feel in my bones that the next room holds something that will help solve the mystery of the air pilot’s visits.”

Dories held the painting while Nann flashed the light where it would best aid the boys in removing the debris that held the old door in such a way that it obstructed their passage into the room back of the salon.

A long half-hour passed and the boys labored, lifting stones and heavy pieces of ceiling, but, when at last the floor space in front of the heavy door was cleared, they found that something was holding it tight shut on the other side.

“Gee-whiliker!” Dick ejaculated, removing his cap and wiping his brow. “Talk about buried treasure. If it’s as hard to get at as it is to get through this door, I \_\_\_\_\_”

He was interrupted by the younger girl, who said: “Let’s pretend there is a treasure behind this door, and after all, maybe there is. Perhaps the air pilot is a smuggler of some kind and brings things here to hide.” Dories had made a suggestion which had not occurred to the boys.

“That’s so!” Dick agreed. “But if he gets into the next room, he must have an entrance around at the back of the ruin. No one has been through this door since the flood undermined the old house.”

Gib was still trying to open the stubborn door. He put his shoulder against it. “Come on, Dick, help a fellow, will you?” he sang out.

The boys pushed as hard as they could and the door moved just the least bit, then seemed to wedge in a way that no further assaults upon it could effect.

“Whizzle! What if that pilot feller is on the other side holdin’ it. What if he is?”

“But he couldn’t be,” Nann protested. “We all agreed long ago that he couldn’t be here because how could he arrive in the airplane without being heard?”

“I know what I’m a-goin’ to do,” Gib’s expression was determined. “I’m a-goin’ to smash a hole in that ol’ door and crawl through.”

Dick sprang to get a heavy stone from one of the crumbling side walls and Gib, having procured another, the two boys began a battering which soon resulted in a loud splintering sound and one of the heavy panels was crashed in.

Gib wiggled his way through and Dick handed him the searchlight. “Huh, we’re bright uns, we are!” came in a muffled voice from the other room. “Thar’s as much rubbish a holdin’ the door on this side as thar was on the other, but I, fer one, jest won’t move a stick o’ it.”

“No need to!” Nann said blithely. “Make that hole a little bigger and we can all go through the way you did.”

This was quickly done and the boys assisted the two girls through the opening. Then they stood close together looking about them as Dick flashed the light. The room was not quite as much of a wreck as the salon had been. In it a mahogany table stood and the chairs with heavily carved legs and backs had been little harmed. With a little cry of delight, Nann dragged Doris toward an old-fashioned mahogany sideboard. “Don’t you love it?” she said enthusiastically, turning a glowing face toward her companion. “Wouldn’t you adore having it?” But before Doris could voice her admiration, Dick, having looked at his watch, exclaimed: “Gee-whiliker, I’ll have to beat it if I am to catch that early train back to Boston. I hate to break up the party.” He hesitated, glancing from one to the other.

“Of course you must go!” Nann, the sensible, declared. “There’s another weekend coming.” Then turning to her friend, who was still holding the picture, she said: “Dori, let’s leave the painting of our princess standing on the old mahogany sideboard.” When this had been done, she addressed the picture: “Good-bye, Lady of the Phantom Yacht. Keep those sweet blue eyes of yours wide open that you may tell us what mysterious things go on in this old ruin while we are away.”

The pictured eyes were to gaze upon more than the pictured lips would be able to tell.

## **CHAPTER XXIII.**

### **LETTERS OF IMPORTANCE**

The young people found the grey of dawn in the sky when they emerged through the hole under one corner of the roof and a new terror presented itself. "What if the receding tide had left their boat high and dry." But luckily there was still enough water in the narrow creek to take them out to the cove. Since they were in haste, the sail was put in place and a brisk wind from the land took them out and around the point. There was still too high a surf to make possible a landing on the platform rock and so the girls were obliged to go with the boys as far as the inlet in which Gib kept his punt. The white horse had been tied to a scrubby tree near, but, before he mounted, Dick took off his hat and held out a hand to each of the girls in turn, assuring them that he had been ever so glad to meet them and that if all went well, he would return the following week-end.

"And we will promise not to visit the old ruin again until you come," Nann told him. The boy's face brightened. "O, I say!" he exclaimed, "that's too much to ask." But Gib assured him that half the fun was having him along.

Just before they rode away, Dick turned to call: "Keep a watch-out on our cabin, will you, Nann? I really don't believe anyone has been there, however. Mother remembered that she had left the back door open."

"All right. We will. Good-bye."

Slowly the girls walked toward their home-cabin. "Do you suppose we ought to tell Aunt Jane that we visited the old ruin at midnight?" Dories asked.

"Why, no, dear, I don't," was the thoughtful reply. "Your Aunt Jane told us to do anything we could find to amuse us, don't you recall, that very first day after we had opened up the cottage and were wondering what to do?"



Dories nodded. "I remember. She must have heard us talking while we were dusting and straightening the living-room. That was the day that I said I believed the place was haunted, and you said you hoped there was a ghost or something mysterious."

Nann stopped and faced her companion. Her eyes were merry. "Dori Moore," she exclaimed, "I believe your aunt *did* hear my wish and that she has been trying to grant it by writing those mysterious messages and leaving them where we would find them."

"Maybe you are right," her friend agreed. "I wish we could catch her in the act." Then Dories added: "Nann, if Aunt Jane is really doing that just for fun, then she can't be such an old grouch as I thought her. You know I told you how I was sure that I heard her chuckling."

The older girl nodded, then as the back porch of the cabin had been reached, they went quietly up the steps and into the kitchen.

"It's going to be a long week waiting for Dick to return," Dories said as she began to make a fire in the stove. "What shall we do to pass away the time?"

Nann smiled brightly. "O, we'll find plenty to do!" she said. "There is that box of books in the loft. Surely there will be a few that we would like to read and that your Aunt Jane would like to hear. We have left her alone so much," Nann continued, "don't you think this last week that we ought to spend more time adding to her happiness if we can?"

Dories flushed. "I wish I'd been the one to say that," she confessed, "since Great-Aunt Jane loved my father so much when he was a boy."

Although the girls had their breakfast early, it was not until the usual hour that Dories took the tray in to her aunt. Nann followed with something that had been forgotten. They were surprised to see the old woman propped up in bed reading the book of ghost stories which Dories had left in the room. She fairly beamed at them when they entered. Then she asked, "Do you girls believe in ghosts?"

"Oh, no. Aunt Jane," Dories began rather hesitatingly. "That is, I don't believe that I do."

The sharp grey eyes, in which a twinkle seemed to be lurking, turned toward

Nann. "Do you?" she asked briefly.

"No, indeed, Miss Moore, I do not," was the emphatic reply, then, just for mischief, the girl asked, "Do you?"

"Indeed I do," was the unexpected response. "A ghost visited me last night and told me that you girls had gone with Gibraltar Strait and the Burton boy over to visit the old ruin."

"Aunt Jane! Miss Moore!" came in two amazed exclamations.

"We did go. I sincerely hope you do not object," the older girl hastened to say.

"No, I don't object. There's nothing over there that can hurt you. Now I'd like my breakfast, if you please."

When the girls returned to the kitchen, Dories whispered, "Nann, how in the world did she know?"

The older girl shook her head. "Mysteries seem to be piling up instead of being solved," she said.

"Do you suppose Aunt Jane knows who the air pilot is and why he goes to the old ruin?" Dories wondered as they went about their morning tasks.

"I'll tell you what, let's stay around home pretty closely for a few days and see if anyone does visit Aunt Jane, shall we?"

The old woman seemed to be glad to have the companionship of the girls. They read to her in the morning, and on the third afternoon their suspicions were aroused by the fact that their hostess asked them why they stayed around the cabin all of the time. It was quite evident to them that she wanted to be left alone.

"Would it be too far for you to walk into town and see if there isn't some mail for me?" Miss Moore inquired early on the fourth morning of the week. "I am expecting some very important letters. That boy Gibraltar was told to bring them the minute they came, but these Straits are such a shiftless lot." Then, almost eagerly, looking from one girl to another, she inquired: "It isn't too far for you to walk, is it? You can hire Gibraltar to bring you back in the stage."

“We’d love to go,” Nann said most sincerely, and Dories echoed the sentiment. The truth was the girls had been puzzled because Gib had not appeared. Indeed, nothing had happened for four days. Although they had searched everywhere they could think of, there had been no message for them telling in how many days they would know all. An hour later, when they were walking along the marsh-edged sandy road leading to town, they discussed the matter freely, since no one could possibly overhear. “If Aunt Jane really has been writing those notes and leaving them for us to find, do you suppose that she has stopped writing them because she thinks we suspect her of being the ghost?” Dories asked.

“I don’t see why she should suspect, as we have said nothing in her hearing; in fact, we were out on the beach when I told you that I thought your Aunt Jane might be writing the notes,” Nann replied.

Dories nodded. “That is true,” she agreed. Then she stopped and stared at her companion as she exclaimed: “Nann Sibbett, I don’t believe that Aunt Jane writes them at all. I believe Gibraltar Strait does. There hasn’t been a note for four days anywhere in the cabin, and Gib hasn’t been to the point in all that time. There, now, doesn’t that seem to prove my point?”

“It surely does!” Nann said as they started walking on toward the town. “Only I thought we agreed that probably Gib couldn’t write. But I do recall that he said he went to a country school in the winter months when his father didn’t need him to help in the store.”

“If Gib writes them he is a good actor,” Dories commented. “He certainly seemed very much surprised when we showed him the notes, you remember.”

Nann agreed. “It’s all very puzzling,” she said, then added, “What a queer little hamlet this is?” They were passing the first house in Siquaw Center. “I don’t suppose there are more than eight houses in all,” she continued. “What do you suppose the people do for a living?”

“Work on the railroad, I suppose,” Nann guessed. They had reached the ramshackle building that held the post office and general store when they saw Gib driving the stage around from the barns. “Hi thar!” he called to them excitedly. “I got some mail for yo’uns. I was jest a-goin’ to fetch it over, like I promised Miss Moore. It didn’t come till jest this mornin’. Thar’s some mail for yo’uns, too. A letter from Dick Burton. He writ me one along o’ yourn.”

The girls climbed up on the high seat by Gib's side. The day had been growing very warm as noon neared and they had found it hard walking in the sand, and so they were not sorry that they were to ride back. Gib gave them two long legal envelopes addressed to Miss Moore and the letter from Dick.

Eagerly Nann opened it, as it had been written especially to her, and after reading it she exclaimed: "Well, isn't this queer?"

"What?" Dorries, who was consumed with curiosity, exclaimed.

"Dick writes that he told his mother that he had found that upper front room window open and the blind swinging, but she declares that she *knows* all of the upper windows were closed and the blinds securely fastened. She had been in every room to try them just before she left, and that was what had delayed her so long that, in her hurry, she took the key out of the back door, hung it in its hiding place, without having turned it in the lock. Dick says that he's wild to get back to Siquaw, and that the first thing he is going to do is to search in that upper room for clues."

Gib nodded. "That's what he wrote into my letter. He's comin' down Friday arter school lets out, so's we'll have more time over to the ruin. Dick says he's sot on ferritin' out what that pilot fella does thar."

Old Spindly seemed to feel spryer than usual and trotted along the sandy road at such a pace that in a very little while they had reached the end of it at the beach.

"Wall, so long," Gib called when the girls had climbed down from the high seat, but before they had turned to go, he ejaculated: "By time, if I didn't clear fergit ter give yo'uns the rest o' yer mail. Here 'tis!" Leaning down, he handed them another envelope. Before they could look at it, he had snapped his whip and started back toward town. The girls watched the old coach sway in the sand for a minute, then they glanced at the envelope. On it in red ink was written both of their names.

"Well of all queer things!" Nann ejaculated. Tearing it open, they found a message: "*Today you will know all.*"

## **CHAPTER XXIV.**

### **A SURPRISING REVELATION**

The girls stood where Gib had left them staring at each other in puzzled amazement. “Well, what do you make of it?” Dories was the first to exclaim. Nann laughingly shook her head. “I don’t know unless this confirms our theory that Gib writes the notes. I almost think it does.”

They started walking toward the cabin. “Well, time will tell and a short time, too, if we are to know all today,” Dories remarked, then added, “That long walk has made me ravenously hungry and we haven’t a thing cooked up.” Then she paused and sniffed. “What is that delicious odor? It smells like ham and something baking, doesn’t it?”

“We surely are both imaginative,” Nann agreed, “for I also scent a most appetizing aroma on the air. But who could be cooking? We left Miss Moore in bed and anyway, of course, it is not she.”

They had reached the kitchen door and saw that it was standing open and that the tempting odor was actually wafting therefrom. Puzzled indeed, they bounded up the steps.

A surprising sight met their gaze. Miss Jane Moore, dressed in a soft lavender gown partly covered with a fresh white apron, turned from the stove to beam upon them; her eyes were twinkling, her cheeks were rosy from the excitement and the heat.

“Aunt Jane! Miss Moore!” the girls cried in astonishment. “Ought you to be cooking? Are you strong enough?”

“Of course I am strong enough,” was the brisk reply. “Haven’t I been resting for

nearly two weeks? I thought probably you girls would be hungry after your long walk.” Then, as she saw the legal envelopes, she added with apparent satisfaction: “Well, they have come at last, have they? Put them in on my dresser, Dories; then come right back. It is such a fine day I thought we would take the table out on the sheltered side porch and have a sort of picnic-party.”

It was hard for the girls to believe that this was the same old woman who had been so grouchy most of the time since they had known her. Would surprises never cease? The girls were delighted with the plan and carried the small kitchen table to the sunny, sheltered side porch and soon had it set for three.

When they returned they found the flushed old woman taking a pan of biscuits from the oven. How good they looked! Then came baked ham and sweet potatoes, and a brown Betty pudding. The elderly cook seemed to greatly enjoy the girls’ surprise and delight. They made her comfortable in an easy willowed chair at one end of the table facing the sea and, when the viands had been served, they ate with great relish. To their amazement their hostess partook of the entire menu with as evident a zest as their own. Dories could no longer remain silent. “Aunt Jane,” she blurted out, “ought you to eat so heartily after such a long fast? You haven’t had anything but tea and toast since we came.”

Nann had glanced quickly and inquiringly at the old woman, and the suspicions she had previously entertained were confirmed by the merry reply: “I’ll have to confess that I’ve been an old fraud.” Miss Moore was chuckling again. “Every time you girls went away and I was sure you were going to be gone for some time, I got up and had a good meal.”

“But, Aunt Jane,” Dories’ brow gathered in a puzzled frown, “why did you have to do that? It would have been a lot more fun all along to have had our dinners all together like this.”

Miss Moore nodded. “Yes, it would have been, but I’m an odd one. There was something I wanted to find out and I took my own queer way of going about it.”

“D—did you find it out, Aunt Jane?” Dories asked, almost anxiously.

“Yes and no,” was the enigmatical answer. Then, tantalizingly, she remarked as she leaned back in her comfortable willow chair, having finished her share of the pudding, “This is wonderful weather, isn’t it, girls? If it keeps up I won’t want to go back next Monday. Perhaps we’ll stay a week longer as I had planned when

we first came.” Then before the girls could reply, the grey eyes that could be so sharply penetrating turned to scrutinize Dories. “You look much better than you did when we came. You had a sort of fretful look as though you had a grudge against life. Now you actually look eager and interested.” Then, after a glance at Nann, “You are both getting brown as Indians.”

Would Miss Moore never come to the subject that was uppermost in the thoughts of the two girls? If she had written the message telling them that today they were to know all, why didn’t she begin the story, if it was to be a story?

How Dories hoped that she was to hear what had become of the fortune she had always believed should have been her father’s. Her own mother had never told her anything about it, but she had heard them talking before her father died; she had not understood them, but as she grew older she seemed vaguely to remember that there should have been money from somewhere, enough to have kept poverty from their door and more, probably, since her father’s Aunt Jane had so much.

But Miss Moore rose without having satisfied their burning curiosity. “Now, girls,” she said, “I’ll go in and read my letters while you wash the dishes. Later, when the fog drifts in, build a fire on the hearth and I’ll tell you a story.” Then she left them, going to her own room and closing the door.

“I’m so excited that I can hardly carry the dishes without dropping them,” Dories confided to Nann when at last they had returned the table to its place in the kitchen and were busily washing and drying the dishes. “What do you suppose the story is to be about?”

“You and your mother and father chiefly, I believe,” Nann said with conviction.

“Aunt Jane’s saying that she had a story to tell us proves, doesn’t it, that she wrote the messages?”

“I think so, Dori.”

“I hope the fog will come in early,” the younger girl remarked as she hung up the dish-wiper on the line back of the stove.

“It will. It always does. Now let’s go out to the shed and bring in a big armful of driftwood. There’s one log that I’ve been saving for some special occasion.

Surely this is it.”

As Nann had said, the fog came in soon after midafternoon; the girls had drawn the comfortable willow chair close to the hearth. The wood was in place and eagerly the girls awaited the coming of their hostess. At last the bedroom door opened and Miss Moore, without the apron over her lavender dress, emerged. Although she smiled at them, the discerning Nann decided that the letters had contained some disappointing news. Dories at once set fire to the driftwood and a cheerful blaze leaped up. When Miss Moore was seated the girls sat on lower chairs close together. Their faces told their eager curiosity.

Glancing from one to the other, their hostess said: “Dori, you and Nann have been the best of friends for years, I think you wrote me.”

“Oh, yes, Aunt Jane,” was the eager reply, “we started in kindergarten together and we’ve been in the same classes through first year High, but now Nann’s father has taken her away from me. They are going to live in Boston. And so a favorite dream of ours will never be fulfilled, and that was to graduate together.”

“If only your mother would consent to come and live with me, then your wish would be fulfilled,” the old woman began when Dories exclaimed, “Why, Aunt Jane, I didn’t even know that you *wanted* us to live with you in Boston.”

Miss Moore nodded gravely. “But I do and have. I have written your mother repeatedly, since my dear nephew died, telling her that I would like you three to make your home with me, but it seems that she cannot forget.”

“Forget what?” Dories leaned forward to inquire. Nann had been right, she was thinking. The something they were to know did relate to her father’s affairs, she was now sure.

The old woman seemed not to have heard, for she continued looking thoughtfully at the fire. “I know that she has forgiven,” she said at last. “Your mother is too noble a woman not to do that, but her pride will not let her forget.” Then, turning toward the girls who sat each with a hand tightly clasped in the others, the speaker continued: “I must begin at the beginning to make the sad story clear. I loved your father, as I would have loved a son. I brought him up when his parents were gone. The money belonged to my father and he used to say that he would leave your father’s share in my keeping, as he believed in my judgment. I was to turn it over to my nephew when I thought best.” She was



silent a moment, then said: "When your father was old enough to marry, I wanted him to choose a girl I had selected, but instead, when he went away to study art, he married a school teacher of whom I had never heard. I believed that she was designing and marrying him for his money, and I wrote him that unless he freed himself from the union I would never give him one cent. Of course he would not do that, and rightly. Later, in my anger, I turned over to him some oil stock which had proved valueless and told him that was all he was to have. Then began long, lonely years for me because I never again heard from the nephew whose boyish love had been the greatest joy life had ever brought me. I was too stubborn to give him the money which legally I had the right to withhold from him, and he was so hurt that he would not ask my forgiveness. But, when I heard that my boy had died, my heart broke, and I knew myself for what I was—a selfish, stubborn old woman who had not deserved love and consideration. Then, but far too late, I tried to redeem myself in the eyes of your mother. I wrote, begging her to come and bring her two children to my home. I told her how desolate I had been since my boy, your father, had left. Very courteously your mother wrote that, as long as she could sew for a living for herself and her two children, she would not accept charity. Then I conceived the plan of becoming acquainted with you, for two reasons: one that I might discover if in any way you resembled your father, and the other was that I wanted you to use your influence to induce your mother to forget, as well as forgive, and to live with me in Boston and make my cheerless mansion of a house into a real home."

She paused and Doris, seeing that there were tears in the grey eyes, impulsively reached out a hand and took the wrinkled one nearest her.

“Dear Aunt Jane, how you have suffered.” Nann noted with real pleasure that her friend’s first reaction had been pity for the old woman and not rebellion because of the act that had caused her to be brought up in poverty. “Mother has always said that you meant to be kind, she was convinced of that, but she never told me the story. This is the first time that I understood what had happened. Truly, Aunt Jane, if you really wish it, I shall urge Mother to let us all three come and live with you. Selfishly I would love to, because I would be near Nann, if for no other reason, but I have another reason. I believe my father would wish it. Mother has often told me that, as a boy, he loved you.”

The old woman held the girl’s hand in a close clasp and tears unheeded fell over her wrinkled cheeks. “But it’s too late now,” she said dismally.

Dories and Nann exchanged surprised glances. “Too late, Aunt Jane?” Dories inquired. “Do you mean that you do not care to have us now?”

“No, indeed, not that!” The old woman wiped away the tears, then smiled tremulously. “I haven’t finished the story as yet. This is the last chapter, I fear. I ought to be glad for your mother’s sake, but O, I have been so lonely.”

Then, seeing the intense eagerness in her niece’s face, she concluded with, “I must not keep you in such suspense, my dear. That long legal envelope brought me news from your father’s lawyer. It is news that your mother has already received, I presume. The stock, which I turned over to your father years ago, believing it to be worthless, has turned out to be of great value. Your mother will have a larger income than my own, and now, of course, she will not care to make her home with me.”

“O, Aunt Jane!” To the surprise of both of the others, the girl threw her arms about the old woman’s neck and clung to her, sobbing as though in great sorrow, but Nann knew that the tears were caused by the sudden shock of the joyful revelation. The old woman actually kissed the girl, and then said: “I expected to be very sad because I cannot do something for you all to prove the deep regret I feel for my unkind action, but, instead, I am glad, for I know that only in this way would your mother acquire the real independence which means happiness for her.” With a sigh, she continued: “I’ve lived alone for many years, I suppose I can go on living alone until the end of time.” Then she added, a twinkle again appearing in her grey eyes, “and now you know all.”

“O, Aunt Jane, then you *did* write those messages and leave them for us to find?”

“I plead guilty,” the old woman confessed. “I overheard you and Nann saying that you wished something mysterious would happen. I had been wondering when to tell you the story, and I decided to wait until I heard from the lawyer. I know you are wondering how Gibraltar Strait happened to give you that last message the very day a letter came telling about the stock. That is very simple. One day when Mr. Strait came for a grocery order, you were all away somewhere. I gave him that last message and told him to keep it in our box at the office until a letter should arrive from my lawyer, then they were to be brought over and that letter was to be given to you girls.” The old woman leaned back in her chair and it was quite evident that her recent emotion had nearly exhausted her. Nann, excusing herself thoughtfully, left the other two alone.

“Dori,” the old woman said tenderly, “as you grow older, don’t let circumstances of any nature make you cold and critical. If I had been loving and kind when your girl mother married my boy, my life, instead of being bleak and barren, would have been a happy one. No one knows how I have grieved; how my unkindness has haunted me.”

Just then Doris thought of her sweet-faced mother who had borne the trials of poverty so bravely, and again she heard her saying, “The only ghosts that haunt us are the memories of loving words that might have been spoken and loving deeds that might have been done.”

Impulsively the girl leaned over and kissed the wrinkled face. “I love you, Aunt Jane,” she whispered. “And I shall beg Mother to let us all live together in your home, if it is still your wish.” Then, as Miss Moore had risen, seeming suddenly feeble, Doris sprang up and helped her to her room and remained there until the old woman was in her bed.

When the girl went out to the kitchen where her friend was preparing supper, she exclaimed, half laughing and half crying: “Nann Sibbett, I’m so brimming full of conflicting emotions, I don’t feel at all real. Pinch me, please, and see if I am.”

“Instead I’ll give you a hard hug; a congratulatory one. There! Did that seem real?” Then Nann added in her most sensible, matter-of-fact voice: “Now, wake up, Dori. You mustn’t go around in a trance. Of course the only mystery that you

are interested in is solved, and wonderfully solved, but I'm just as keen as ever to know the secret the old ruin is holding."

"I'll try to be!" Doris promised, then confessed: "But, honestly, I am not a bit curious about any mystery, now that my own is solved." A moment later she asked: "Nann, do you suppose Mother will want me to come home right away?"

"Why, I shouldn't think so, Dori," her friend replied. "You always hear from your mother on Friday, so wait and see what tomorrow brings."

The morrow was to hold much of interest for both of the girls.

## CHAPTER XXV. PUZZLED AGAIN

As soon as their breakfast was over, Dories asked her Aunt if she were willing that the girls go to Siquaw Center for the mail. "I always get a letter from Mother on the Friday morning train," was the excuse she gave, "and, of course, I am simply wild to hear what she will have to say today; that is, if she does know about—well, about what you told us that father's lawyer had written."

Miss Moore was glad to be alone, for she had had a sleepless night. She had long dreamed that, perhaps, when she became acquainted with her niece, that young person might be able to influence the stubborn mother to accept the home that the old woman had offered, and that peace might again be restored to the lonely, repentant heart. But now, just as that dream seemed about to be fulfilled, the mother was placed in a position of complete independence, and so, of course, she would never be willing to share the home of her husband's great-aunt. The desolate loneliness of the years ahead, however few they might be, depressed the old woman greatly. Dories, seeing tears in the grey eyes, stooped impulsively, and, for the second time, she kissed her great-aunt. "If you will let me, I'm coming to visit you often," she whispered, as though she had read her aunt's thoughts. Then away the two girls went.

It was a glorious morning and they skipped along as fast as they could on the sandy road. Mrs. Strait, with a baby on one arm, was tending the general store and post office when the girls entered. No one else was in sight.

"Good morning, Mrs. Strait. Is there any mail for Miss Dories Moore?" that young maiden inquired.

"Yeah, thar is, an' a picher card for tother young miss," was the welcome reply.

Dories fairly pounced on the letter that was handed her. “Good, it *is* from Mother! I am almost sure that she will want me to come home,” she exclaimed gleefully. But when the message had been read, Dories looked up with a puzzled expression. “How queer!” she said. “Mother doesn’t say one thing about the stock; not even that she has heard about it, but she does say that she and Brother are leaving today on a business journey and that she may not write again for some time. I’ll read you what she says at the end: ‘Daughter dear, if your Aunt Jane wishes to return to Boston before you again hear from me, I would like you to remain with her until I send for you. Peter is standing at my elbow begging me to tell you that he is going to travel on a train just as you did. I judge from your letters that you and Nann are having an interesting time after all, but, of course, you would be happy, I am sure, anywhere with Nann!’” Dories looked up questioningly. “Don’t you think it is very strange that Mother should go somewhere and not tell me where or why?”

Nann laughed. “Maybe she thought that she would add another mystery to those we are trying to solve,” she suggested, but Dories shook her head. “No, that wasn’t Mother’s reason. Perhaps—O, well, what’s the use of guessing? Who was your card from?”

“Dad, of course. I judge that he will be glad when his daughter returns. O, Dori,” Nann interrupted herself to exclaim, “do look at that pair of black eyes peering at us out of that bundle!” She nodded toward the baby, wrapped in a blanket, that had been placed in a basket on the counter.

The girls leaned over the little creature, who actually tried to talk to them but ended its chatter with a cracked little crow. “He ain’t a mite like Gib,” the pleased mother told them. “The rest of us is sandy complected, but this un is black as a crow, an’ jest as jolly all the time as yo’uns see him now.”

“What is the little fellow’s name, Mrs. Strait?” Nann asked.

The woman looked anxiously toward the door; then said in a low voice: “I’m wantin’ to give the little critter a Christian name—Moses, Jacop, or the like, but his Pa is set on the notion of namin’ ’em all after geography straits, an’ I ain’t one to hold out about nothin’.” She sighed. “But it’s long past time to christen the poor little mite.”

Nann and Dories tried hard not to let their mirth show in their faces. The older

girl inquired: "Why hasn't he been christened, Mrs. Strait? Can't you decide on a name?"

"Wall, yo' see it's this a-way," the gaunt, angular woman explained. "Gib didn't fetch home his geography books, an' school don't open up till snow falls in these here parts. So baby'll have to wait, I reckon, bein' as Gib don't recollect no strait names." Then, with hope lighting her plain face, the woman asked: "Do you girls know any of them geography names?"

Dories and Nann looked at each other blankly. "Why, there is Magellan," one said. "And Dover," the other supplemented.

Mrs. Strait looked pleased. "Seems like that thar Dover one ought to do as well as any. Please to write it down so's Pa kin see it an' tother un along side of it."

The girls left the store as soon as they could, fearing that they would have to laugh, and they did not want to hurt the mother's feelings, and so, after purchasing some chocolate bars, they darted away without having learned where Gib was.

"Not that it matters," Nann said when they were nearing the beach. "He won't come over, probably, until tomorrow morning with Dick."

"But Dick said he would arrive on Friday," Dories reminded her friend.

"Yes, I know, but if he leaves Boston after school is out in the afternoon, he won't get there until evening."

"They might come over then," Dories insisted. A few moments later, as they were nearing the cabin, she added: "There is no appetizing aroma to greet us today. Aunt Jane is probably still in bed." Then, turning toward Nann, the younger girl said earnestly: "Truly, I feel so sorry for her. She seems heartbroken to think that Mother and Peter and I will not need to share her home. I believe she fretted about it all night; she looked so hollow-eyed and sick this morning."

Dories was right. The old woman was still in bed, and when her niece went in to see what she wanted, Miss Moore said: "Will you girls mind so very much if we go home on Monday. I am not feeling at all well, and, if I am in Boston I can send for a doctor. Here I might die before one could reach me."

“Of course we want to go whenever you wish,” Dories declared. She did not mention what her mother had written. There would be time enough later.

Out in the kitchen Dories talked it over with Nann. “You’ll be sorry to go before you solve the mystery of the old ruin, won’t you?” the younger girl asked.

Nann whirled about, eyes laughing, stove poker upheld. “I’ll prophesy that the mystery will all be solved before our train leaves on Monday morning,” she said merrily.

After her lunch, which this time truly was of toast and tea, Miss Moore said that she felt as though she could sleep all the afternoon if she were left alone, and so Dories and Nann donned their bright-colored tams and sweater-coats, as there was a cool wind, and went out on the beach wondering where they would go and what they would do. “Let’s visit the punt and see that nothing has happened to it,” Dories suggested.

They soon reached the end of the sandy road. Nann glanced casually in the direction of Siquaw, then stopped and, narrowing her eyes, she gazed steadily into the distance for a long moment. “Don’t you see a moving object coming this way?” she inquired.

Dories nodded as she declared: “It’s old Spindly, of course, and I suppose Gib is on it. I wonder why he is coming over at this hour. It isn’t later than two, is it?”

“Not that even.” Dories glanced at her wrist-watch as she spoke. For another long moment they stood watching the object grow larger. Not until it was plain to them that it was the old white horse with two riders did they permit their delight to be expressed. “Dick has come! He must have arrived on the noon train. It must be a holiday!” Dories exclaimed, and Nann added, “Or at least Dick has proclaimed it one.” Then they both waved for the boys, having observed them from afar, were swinging their caps.

“Isn’t it great that I could come today?” was Dick’s first remark after the greetings had been exchanged. “Class having exams and I was exempt.”

Nann’s eyes glowed. “Isn’t that splendid, Dick? I know what that means. Your daily average was so high you were excused from the test.”

The city boy flushed. “Well, it wasn’t my fault. It’s an easy subject for me. I’m



wild about history and I don't seem able to forget anything that I read." Then, smiling at the country boy, he added: "Gib, here, tells me that you haven't visited the old ruin since I left. That was mighty nice of you. I've been thinking so much about that mysterious airplane chap this past week, it's a wonder I could get any of my lessons right."

"Isn't it the queerest thing?" Nann said. "That airplane hasn't been seen or heard since you left."

"I ain't so sure." Gib had removed his cap and was scratching one ear as he did when puzzled. "Pa 'n' me both thought we heard a hummin' one night, but 'twas far off, sort o'. I reckon'd, like's not, that pilot fellar lit his boat way out in the water and slid back in quiet-like."

Dick, much interested, nodded. "He could have done that, you know. He may realize that there are people on the point and he may not wish to have his movements observed." Then eagerly: "Can you girls go right now? The tide is just right and we wanted to give that old dining-room a thorough overhauling, you know."

"Yes, we can go. Aunt Jane is going to sleep all of the afternoon." Then impulsively Dorie turned toward the red-headed boy. "Gib," she exclaimed contritely, "I'm just ever so sorry that I called Aunt Jane queer or cross. Something happened this week which has proved that she is very different in her heart from what we supposed her to be. She has just been achingly lonely for years, and some family affairs which, of course, would interest no one but ourselves, have made her shut herself away from everyone. I'm ever so sorry for her, and I know that from now on I'm going to love her just dearly."

"So am I," Nann said very quietly. "I wish we had realized that all this time Miss Moore has been hungering for us to love and be kind to her. We girls sometimes forget that elderly people have much the same feelings that we have."

"I know," Dick agreed as they walked four abreast toward the creek where the punt was hid, "I have an old grandmother who is always so happy when we youngsters include her in our good times." Then he added in a changed tone: "Hurray! There's the old punt! Now, all aboard!" Ever chivalrous, Dick held out a hand to each girl, but it was to Nann that he said with conviction: "This is the day that we are to solve the mystery."

## **CHAPTER XXVI.**

### **A CLUE TO THE OLD RUIN MYSTERY**

The voyage up the narrow channel in the marsh was uneventful and at last the four young people reached the opening near the old ruin. They stopped before entering to look around that they might be sure the place was unoccupied. Then Dick crept through the opening in the crumbling wall to reconnoiter. "All's well!" he called to them a moment later, and in the same order as before the others followed. Everything was just as it had been on their former visit.

Dick flashed his light in the corner where they had seen the picture of old Colonel Wadbury, and the sharp eyes, under heavy brows, seemed to glare at them. Dories, with a shudder, was secretly glad that they were only pictured eyes.

"Sh! Hark!" It was Dick in the lead who, having stopped, turned and held up a warning finger. They had reached the door out of which they had broken a panel the week before.

"What is it? What do you hear?" Nann asked.

"A sort of a scurrying noise," Dick told her. "Nothing but rats, I guess, but just the same you girls had better wait here until Gib and I have looked around in there. Perhaps you'd better go back to the opening," he added as, in the dim light, he noted Dories' pale, frightened face. The younger girl was clutching her friend's arm as though she never meant to let go. "I'm just as afraid of rats," she confessed, "as I am of ghosts."

"We'll wait here," Nann said calmly. "Rats won't hurt us. They would be more afraid of us than even Dori is of them."

Dick climbed through the hole in the door, followed closely by Gib. Nann, holding a lighted lantern, smiled at her friend reassuringly. Although only a few moments passed, they seemed like an eternity to the younger girl; then Dick's beaming face appeared in the opening. It was very evident that he had found something which interested him and which was not of a frightening nature. The boys assisted the girls over the heap of debris which held the door shut and then flashed the light around what had once been a handsomely furnished dining-room. Dories' first glance was toward the sideboard where they had left the painting of the beautiful girl. It was not there.

The boys also had made the discovery. "Which proves," Dick declared, "that Gib was right about that airplane chap having been here. He must have taken the picture, but *why* do you suppose he would want it?"

"I guess you're right," Dick had been looking behind the heavy piece of mahogany furniture as he spoke, "and, whoever was here has left something. The rats we heard scurrying about were trying to drag it away, to make into a nest, I suppose."

Arising from a stooping posture, the boy revealed a note book which he had picked up from behind the sideboard.

He opened it to the first page and turned his flashlight full upon it. "Those plaguiy little rats have torn half of this page nearly off," he complained, "but I guess we can fit it together and read the writing on it."

"October fifteen," Dick read aloud. Then paused while he tried to fit the torn pieces. "There, now I have it," he said, and continued reading: "At Mother's request, I came to her father's old home, but found it in a ruined state. The natives in the village tell me there is no way to reach the place, as it is in a dangerous swamp, sort of a 'quick-mud', all about it, and what's more, one garrulous chap tells me that the place is haunted. Well, I don't care a continental for the ghost, but I'm not hankering to find an early grave in oozy mud."

"I don't recollect any sech fellow," Gib put in, but Dick was continuing to read from the note book:

"I didn't let on who I was. Didn't want to arouse curiosity, so I took the next train back to Boston. I simply can't give up. I *must* reach that old house and give it a real ransacking. Mother is sure her papers are there, and if they are, she must

have them.”

The next page revealed a rapidly scrawled entry: “October 16th. Lay awake nearly all night trying to think out a way to visit that old ruin. Had an inspiration. Shall sail over it in an airplane and get at least a bird’s-eye view. Glad I belong to the Boston Aviation Club.

“October 18. Did the deed! Sailed over Siquaw in an aircraft and saw, when I flew low, that there was a narrow channel leading through the marsh and directly up to the old ruin.

“I’ll come in a seaplane next time, with a small boat on board. Mother’s coming soon and I want to find the deed to the Wetherby place before she arrives. It is her right to have it since her own mother left it to her, but her father, I just can’t call the old skinflint my grandfather, had it hidden in the house that he built by the sea. When Mother went back, she asked for that deed, but he wouldn’t give it to her. She told him that her husband was dead and that she wanted to live in her mother’s old home near Boston, but he said that she never should have it, that he had destroyed the deed. He was mean enough to do it, without doubt, but I don’t believe he did it, somehow. I have a hunch that the papers are still there.

“October 20. Well, I went in a seaplane, made my way up that crooked little channel in the swamp. Found more in the ruin than I had supposed I would. First of all, I hunted for an old chest, or writing desk, the usual place for papers to be kept. Located a heavy walnut desk in what had once been a library, but though there were papers enough, nothing like a deed. Had a mishap. Had left the seaplane anchored in a quiet cove. It broke loose and washed ashore. Wasn’t hurt, but I couldn’t get it off until change of tide, along about midnight. Being curious about a rocky point, I took my flashlight and prowled around a bit. Saw eight boarded-up cottages in a row, and to pass away the time I looked them over. Was rather startled by two occurrences. First was a noise regularly repeated, but that proved to be only a blind on an upper window banging in the wind. That was the cottage nearest the point. Then later I was sure I saw two white faces in an upper window of a cottage farther along. Sort of surprising when you suppose you’re the only living person for a mile around. O well, ghosts can’t turn me from my purpose. Got back to the plane just as it was floating and made off by daybreak. Haven’t made much headway yet, but shall return next week.”

Dick looked up elated. “There, that proves that Mother did forget to fasten that blind,” he exclaimed. Dories was laughing gleefully. “Nann,” she chuckled, “to think that we scared him as much as he scared us. You know we thought the person carrying a light on the rocks was a ghost, and he, seeing us peer out at him, thought we were ghosts.”

Nann smiled at her friend, then urged Dick continue reading, but Dick shook his head. “Can’t,” he replied, “for there is no more.”

“But he came again,” Nann said. “We know that he did, because he left this little note book.”

“And what is more, he took away with him the painting of his lovely girl-mother,” Dories put in.

Dick nodded. “Don’t you see,” he was addressing Nann, “can’t you guess what happened? When he came and found a panel had been broken in this door and the painting on the sideboard, he realized that he was not the only person visiting the old ruin.”

“Even so, that wouldn’t have frightened him away. He evidently is a courageous chap, shouldn’t you say?” Nann inquired, and Dick agreed, adding: “Well then, what *do* you think happened?”

It was Gib who replied: “I reckon that pilot fellar found them papers he was lookin’ fer an’ ain’t comin’ back no more.”

“But perhaps he hasn’t,” Nann declared. “Suppose we hunt around a little. We might just stumble on that old deed, but even if we did, would we know how to send it to him?”

Dick had been closely scrutinizing the small note book. “Yes, we would,” he answered her. “Here is his name and address on the cover. He goes to the Boston Tech, I judge.”

“O, what is his name?” Dories asked eagerly.

“Wouldn’t you love to meet him?” the younger girl continued.

“I intend to look him up when I get back to town,” Dick assured them, “and

wouldn't it be great if we had found the papers; that is, of course, if he hasn't."

Nann glanced about the dining-room. "There's a door at the other end. It's so dark down there I hadn't noticed it before."

The boys went in that direction. "Perhaps it leads to the room where the desk is. We haven't seen that yet." Dories and Nann followed closely.

Dick had his hand on the knob, when again a scurrying noise within made him pause. "Like's not all this time that pilot fellar's been in there waitin' fer us to clear out." Gib almost hoped that his suggestion was true. But it was not, for, where the door opened, as it did readily, the young people saw nothing but a small den in which the furniture had been little disturbed, as the walls that sheltered it had not fallen.

One glance at the desk proved to them that it had been thoroughly ransacked, and so they looked elsewhere. "In all the stories I have ever read," Dories told them, "there were secret drawers, or sliding panels, or——"

"A removable stone in a chimney," Nann merrily added. "But I believe that old Colonel Wadbury would do something quite novel and different," she concluded.

While the girls had been talking, Dick had been flashing his light around the walls. An excited exclamation took the others to his side. "There is the pilot chap's entrance to the ruin." He pointed toward a fireplace. Several stone in the chimney had fallen out, leaving a hole big enough for a person to creep through.

"Perhaps he had never been in the front room, then," Nann remarked.

"I hate to suggest it," Dories said hesitatingly, "but I think we ought to be going. It's getting late."

"I'll say we ought!" Dick glanced at his time-piece. "Tides have a way of turning whether there is a mystery to ferret out or not. We have all day tomorrow to spend here, or at least part of it," he modified.

At Gib's suggestion they went out through the hole in the back of the fireplace. The narrow channel was easily navigated and again they left the punt, as on a former occasion, anchored in the calm waters on the marsh side of the point. Then they climbed over the rocks, and walked along the beach four abreast.

They talked excitedly of one phase of what had occurred and then of another.

“You were right, Dick, when you said that the mystery about the pilot of the airplane would be solved today.” Nann smiled at the boy who was always at her side. Then she glanced over toward the island, misty in the distance. “And to think that that girl-mother and her daughter are really coming back to America.”

“Do you suppose they will come in the Phantom Yacht?” Dories turned toward Gib to inquire.

“I don’t reckon so,” that boy replied. “I cal’late we-uns saw the skeleton of the Phantom Yacht over to the island that day we was thar, Miss Nann. A storm came up, Pa said, an’ he allays thought that thar yacht was wrecked.”

“If that’s true, then everyone on board must have been saved,” Nann said. “Of that much, at least, we’re sure.”

The boys left the girls in front of their home-cabin, promising to be back early the next day. On entering the cottage, Dories went at once to her aunt’s room and was pleased to see that she looked rested. A wrinkled old hand was held out to the girl, and, when Dories had taken it, she was surprised to hear her aunt say, “I’m trying to be resigned to my big disappointment, Dories; but even if I *do* have to live alone all the rest of my days, I’m going to make you and Peter my heirs. Your mother can’t refuse me that.” Tears sprang to the girl’s eyes. She tried to speak, but could not.

Her aunt understood, and, as sentimentality was, on the whole, foreign to her nature, she said, with a return of her brusque manner, “There! That’s all there is to that. Please fetch me a poached egg with my toast and tea.”

## **CHAPTER XXVII. RANSACKING THE OLD RUIN**

It was midmorning when the girls, busy about their simple household tasks, heard a hallooing out on the beach. Nann took off her apron, smiling brightly at her friend. "Good, there are the boys!" she exclaimed, hurrying out to the front porch to meet them. Dories followed with their tams and sweater-coats.

"We've put up a lunch," Nann told the newcomers. "Miss Moore said that we might stay over the noon hour. We have told her all about the mystery we are trying to fathom and she was just ever so interested." They were walking toward the point of rocks while they talked.

Gib leaned forward to look at the speaker. "Say, Miss Dori," he exclaimed, "Miss Moore's been here sech a long time, like's not she knew ol' Colonel Wadbury, didn't she now?"

"No, she didn't know him," Dories replied. "He was such an old hermit he didn't want neighbors, but she did hear the story about his daughter's return and how cruel he had been to her. Aunt Jane wasn't here the year of the storm. She and her maid were in Europe about that time, so she really doesn't know any more than we do."

"We didn't start coming here until after it had all happened," Dick put in.

"I'm so excited." Nann gave a little eager skip. "I almost hope the pilot of the seaplane has not found the deed and that we may find it and give it to him."

"So do I!" Dick seconded. Over the rugged point they went, each time becoming more agile, and into the punt they climbed when Gib, barefooted as usual, had waded out and rowed close to a flat-rock platform. The tide was in and with its



aid they floated rapidly up the channel in the marsh. "Shall we enter by the front or the back?" Nann asked of Dick.

"The front is nearer our landing place," was the reply. "Let's give the old salon a thorough ransacking. I feel in my bones that we are going to make some interesting discovery today, don't you, Gib?"

"Dunno," was that lad's laconic reply. "Mabbe so."

A few moments later they were standing under the twisted chandelier listening to the faint rattle of its many crystal pendants. Nann made a suggestion: "Let's each take a turn in selecting some place to look for the deed, shall we?"

"Oh, yes, let's," Dories seconded. "That will make sort of a game of it all."

Dick held the flashlight out to the older girl. "You make the first selection," he said.

Nann took the light and, standing still with the others under the chandelier, she flashed the bright beam around the room. "There's a broken door almost crushed under the sagging roof." She indicated the front corner opposite the one by which they had entered. "There must have been a room beyond that. I suggest that we try to get through there."

But Dick demurred. "I'm not sure that it would be wise," he told her. "The roof might sag more if that door were pulled away." They heard a noise back of them and turned to see Gib making for the entrance. "I'll be back," was all that he told them. When, a moment later, he did return, he beckoned. "Come along out," he said. "There's a way into that thar room from the outside."

He led them to a window, the pane of which had been broken, leaving only the frame. They peered in and beheld what had been a large bedroom. A heavy oak bed and other pieces of furniture to match were pitched at all angles as the rotting floor had given way. Dick stepped back and looked critically at the sagging roof, then he beckoned Gib and together they talked in low tones. Seeming satisfied with their decision, they returned to the spot where the girls were waiting. "We don't want you to run any risk of being hurt while you are with us," Dick explained. "We want to take just as good care of you as if you were our sisters." Then he assured them: "We think it is safe. Gib showed me how stout the cross-beam is which has kept the roof from sagging farther."

And so they entered the room through the window. For an hour they ransacked. There was no evidence that anyone had been in that room since the storm so long ago. "Queer, sort of, ain't it?" Gib speculated, scratching his ear. "Yo'd think that pilot fellar'd a been all over the place, wouldn't yo' now?"

"Let's go back to the front room again and let Dori choose next for a place to search," the ever chivalrous Dick suggested.

A few seconds later they again were under the chandelier. Dories, as interested and excited now as any of them, took the light and flashed it about the room, letting the round glow rest at last on the huge fireplace. "That's where I'll look," she told the others. "Let's see if there is a loose rock that will come out and behind which we may find a box with the deed in it."

Nann laughed. "Like the story we read when we were twelve or thirteen years old," she told the boys. But though they all rapped on the stones and even tried to pry them out, so well had the masonry been made, each rock remained firmly in place and not one of them was movable.

"Now, Dick, you have a turn." Dories held the flashlight toward him, but he shook his head. "No, Gib first."

The red-headed boy grinned gleefully. "I'll choose a hard place. I reckon ol' Colonel Wadbury hid that thar deed somewhar's up in the attic under the roof." Dories looked dismayed. "O, Gib, don't choose there, for we girls couldn't climb up among the rafters." But Nann put in: "Of course, dear, Gib may choose the loft if he wishes. But how would you get there?"

Gib had been flashing the light along the cracked, tipped ceiling of the room. Suddenly his freckled face brightened. "Come on out agin." He sprang for the low opening as he spoke. Then, when they were outside, he pointed to the spot where the roof was lowest. "Yo' gals stay here whar the punt is," he advised, "while me 'n' Dick shinny up to whar the chimney's broke off. Bet yo' we kin git into the garrit from thar. Bet yo' we kin."

Dick was gazing at the roof appraisingly. "O, I guess it's safe enough," he answered the anxious expression he saw in the face of the older girl. "If our weight is too much, the roof will sag more and close up our entrance perhaps, but we can slide down without being hurt, I am sure of that."

The girls sat in the punt to await the return of the boys, who, after a few moments' scrambling up the sloping roof, actually disappeared into what must have once been an attic.

"I never was so interested or excited in all my life," Nann told her friend. "I do hope we will find that deed today, for tomorrow will be Sunday, and I feel that we ought to remain with your Aunt Jane and put things in readiness for our departure on Monday."

"Yes, so do I." Dories glanced up at the roof, but as the boys were not to be seen, she continued: "I am interested in finding the deed, of course, but I just can't keep my thoughts from wandering. I am so glad that Mother will not have to keep on sewing. She has been so wonderful taking care of Peter and me the way she has ever since that long ago day when father died." Then she sighed. "Of course I wish she hadn't been too proud to accept help from Aunt Jane." But almost at once she contradicted with, "In one way, though, I don't, for if I had lived in Boston all these years, I would never have known you. But now that you are going to live in Boston, how I do wish that Mother and Peter and I were to live there also."

"Maybe you will," Nann began, but Dories shook her head. "I don't believe Mother would want to leave her old home. It isn't much of a place, but she and Father went there when they were married, and we children were born there." Then, excitedly pointing to the roof, Dories exclaimed: "Here come the boys, and they have a packet of papers, haven't they?"

Nann stepped out of the punt to the mound as she called, "O, boys, have you found the deed?"

"We don't know yet," Dick replied, but the girls could see by his glowing expression that he believed that they had.

They all sat in the punt, which had been drawn partly up on the mound and which afforded the only available seats. Dick and Nann occupied the wide stern seat, while Dories and Gib in the middle faced them. Dick unfastened the leather thong which bound the papers and, closing his eyes, just for the lark of it, he passed a folded document to each of his companions. Then he opened them as he said laughingly:

"Just four. How kind of old Colonel Wadbury to help us with our game! Now,

Nann, report about yours first. Is it the Wetherby deed?"

After a moment's eager scrutiny, Nann shook her head. "Alas, no! It's something telling about shares in some corporation," she told them.

"Well, we'll keep it anyway to give to our pilot friend," Dick commented.

"Mine," Dories said, "is a deed, but it seems to be for this Siquaw Point property."

Dick reported that his was a marriage license, and Gib dolefully added that his was some government paper, the meaning of which he could not understand. He handed it to Dick, who, after scrutinizing it, said: "Well, at least one thing is certain, it isn't the deed for which we are searching." Then, rising, he exclaimed: "Now it's my turn. I want to go back to the salon. I had a sort of inspiration awhile ago. I thought I wouldn't mention it until my turn came."

They left the punt and followed the speaker to their low entrance in the wall. Although they were curious to know Dick's plan, no one spoke until again they stood beneath the rattling chandelier. At once the boy flashed the round light toward the corner where the piercing eyes under shaggy brows seemed to be watching them. Then he went in that direction. Dories shuddered as she always did when she saw that stern, unrelenting old face. "Why, Dick," Nann exclaimed, "do you suspect that the picture of the old Colonel can reveal the deed's hiding-place?"

The boy was on his knees in front of the painting. "Yes, I do," he said. "At least I happened all of a sudden to remember of having heard of valuable papers that were hidden in a frame back of a painting. That is why I wanted to look here." He had actually lifted the large painting in the broken frame. Dories cried out in terror: "O, Dick, how dare you touch that terrible thing? He looks so real and so scary." The boy addressed evidently did not hear her. Handing the flashlight to Nann, he asked her to hold it close while he tore off the boards at the back.

For a tense moment the four young people watched, almost holding their breath.

"Wall, it ain't thar, I reckon." Gib was the first to break the silence.

"You're right!" Dick placed the painting from which the frame had been removed against the wall and was about to step back when the rotting boards

beneath him caved in and he fell, disappearing entirely. Dories screamed and Gib, taking the light from Nann, flashed the glow from it down into the dark hole. "Dick! Dick! Are you hurt?" Nann was calling anxiously.

After what seemed like a very long time, Dick's voice was heard: "I'm all right. Don't worry about me. Gib, see if there isn't a trap-door or something. I seem to have fallen into a vault of some kind." Then after another silence, "I guess I've stumbled onto steps leading up." A second later a low door in the dark corner opened and Dick, smiling gleefully, emerged, covered with dust and cobwebs. "Give me the light and let's see what this door is." Then, after a moment's scrutiny, "Aha! That vault was meant to be a secret. The door looks, from this side, like part of the paneling."

"Oh, Dick!" Nann cried exultingly. "*That's* where the Wetherby deed is. Down in that old vault."

"I bet yo' she's right." Gib stooped to peer into the dark hole.

"Can't we all go down and investigate?" Nann asked eagerly.

Dick hesitated. "I'd heaps rather you girls stayed out in the punt," he began, but when he saw the crestfallen expression of the adventurous older girl he ended with, "Well, come, if you want to. I don't suppose anything will hurt us."

Although Dories was afraid to go down, she was even more fearful of remaining alone with those pictured sharp grey eyes glaring at her, and so, clinging to Nann, she descended the rather rickety short flight of steps. The flashlight revealed casks which evidently had contained liquor, and a small iron box. "That box," Dick said with conviction, "contains the Wetherby deed." He was about to try to lift it when Nann grasped his arm. "Hark," she whispered. "I heard someone walking. It sounds as though it might be someone in that library or den where the desk was."

They all listened and were convinced that Nann had been right. "It's that pilot chap, I reckon," Gib said. But Dick was not so sure. "Please, Nann," he pleaded, "you and Dories go out to the punt and wait, while Gib and I discover who is prowling around. I didn't hear an airplane pass overhead, but then, of course, he might have come in from the sea as he did before."

The girls were glad to get out in the sunlight. They stood near the punt with

hands tightly clasped while the boys went around to the back to enter the opening in the wall of the den. It seemed a very long while before Nann and Doris heard voices.

Then three boys approached them. A tall, slender lad, dressed after the fashion of aviators, with a dark handsome face lighted with interest, was listening intently to what Dick was telling him.

The girls heard him say, "Of course, I knew someone else was visiting my grandfather's home, especially after I found the painting of my mother——" He paused when he saw the girls, and Nann was sure that the boys had neglected to tell him that they were not alone. Dick, in his usual manly way, introduced Carl Oviedo. Doris thought the newcomer the nicest looking boy she had ever seen. At once Dick made a confession. "I know that we ought not to have done it, Mr. Oviedo. We read the note book that we found, hoping that it would throw some light on the mystery."

"I'm glad you did!" was the frank reply. "The truth is, I was getting rather desperate. You see, Mother and Sister are to arrive tomorrow from overseas, and I did so want to have the deed of Grandma Wetherby's old home to give to Mother. The place has been vacant for years, but the taxes have been paid. Of course no one would dispute our right to live there, but there couldn't be a clear title without having the deed recorded."

Gib asked a question in his usual indifferent manner, but Nann knew how eager he really was to hear the answer, "Air they comin' in that thar Phantom Yacht, yer mother and sister?"

The newcomer looked at the questioner as though he did not understand his meaning; then turning toward Nann and Doris he asked, "What is the Phantom Yacht?"

Nann told him. Then the lad, with a friendly smile, answered Gib: "No, indeed. That yacht was sold, Mother told me, when we returned to Honolulu. That is where we have lived nearly all of our lives, but ever since my father died, Mother has longed to return to her own home country."

Nann, glancing at Dick, realized that he was very eager to speak, but was courteously waiting until the others were finished, and so she said: "Mr. Oviedo, I believe Dick wishes to tell you of an iron box in which he is almost sure the

lost deed will be found.”

The dark, handsome face lightened. Turning to the boy at his side, he inquired: “Have you really unearthed an iron box? Lead me to it, I beg.”

“We’ll wait in the punt,” Nann told the three boys. Dories knew how hard it was for her friend to say that, since she so loved adventure.

However, it was not long before a joyful shouting was heard and the three boys appeared creeping through the low opening. Carl Ovieda waved a folded document toward them. “It is found!” Never before had three words caused those young people so much rejoicing. After they had each examined the paper, yellowed with age, and Carl had assured them that he and his mother and sister would never be able to thank them enough for the service they had rendered, Nann exclaimed: “I don’t know how the rest of you feel, but I am just ever so hungry.”

“I have a suggestion to make,” Dories put in. “Let’s all go back to the point of rocks and have a picnic.” Then, as the newcomer demurred, the pretty young girl hastened to say, “Oh, indeed we want you, Mr. Ovieda.”

The tall, handsome youth went to the place where he had left his small portable canoe and paddled it around.

“Miss Dories,” he called, “this craft rides better if there are two in it. May I have the pleasure of your company?”

Blushing prettily, Dories took Carl’s proffered hand and stepped in the canoe. Nann, Dick and Gib, in the punt, led the way.

Half an hour later, high on the rocks, the five young people ate the good lunch the girls had prepared and told one another the outstanding events of their lives. “I’m wild to meet your sister, Mr. Ovieda,” Dories told him. “Does she still look like a lily, all gold and white. That was the way Gib’s father described her.”

The tall lad nodded. “Yes, Sister is a very pretty blonde. She has iris blue eyes and hair like spun gold, as fairy books say. I want you all to come to our home in Boston just as soon as we are settled.” His invitation, Nann was pleased to see, included Gib as well as the others. That embarrassed lad replied, with a hunch of his right shoulder, “Dunno as I’ll ever be up to the big town. Dunno’s I ever

will.”

“You’re wrong there, Gib!” Dick exclaimed in the tone of one who could no longer keep a most interesting secret. “You know how you have wished and wished that you could have a chance to go to a real school. Well, Dad has been trying to work it so that you might have that chance, and, just before I came away, he told me that he had managed to get a scholarship for you in a boys’ school just out of Boston. Why, what’s the matter, Gib? It’s what you wanted, isn’t it?”

It was hard to understand the country boy’s expression. “Yeah!” he confessed. “That thar’s what I’ve been hankerin’ fer. It sure is.” Then, as a slow grin lit his freckled face, he exclaimed: “It’s hit me so sudden, sort of, but I reckon I kinder feel the way yo’re feelin’,” he nodded toward the grandson of old Colonel Wadbury, “as though I’d found a deed to suthin, when I’d never expected to have nuthin’ not as long as I’d live.”

The girls were deeply touched by Gib’s sincere joy and they told him how glad they were for his good fortune. Then Carl Ovieda sprang to his feet, saying that he was sorry to break up the party, but that he must be winging on his way. He held out his hand to each of the group as he bade them good-bye, turning, last of all, to Dories, to whom he said: “I shall let you know as soon as we are settled. I want you and my sister to be good friends.”



## **CHAPTER XXVIII.**

### **THE BEST SURPRISE OF ALL**

As the four young people neared the home cabin, they were amazed to behold Miss Moore seated in a rocker on the front porch and, instead of her house dress, she had on her traveling suit. Dories leaped up the steps, exclaiming, "Why, Aunt Jane, what has happened?"

The old woman replied suavely: "Nothing at all, my dear; that is, nothing startling. Mr. Strait drove over this morning with some mail for me and I asked him to return at two. Now hurry and pack up your things. We're going home."

Dories put her hand to her heart. "O," she exclaimed, "I was afraid there had been bad news from Mother." Then, hesitatingly, "I thought we weren't going home until Monday."

"We are going now," was all that her aunt said.

Dories ran back to the beach to explain to the three standing there, then the girls bade the boys good-bye and hastened up to the loft to pack their satchels and don their traveling costumes.

"What can it mean?" Dories almost whispered. "There must have been something urgent in the letter Aunt Jane received this morning," she concluded.

Nann snapped down the cover of her suitcase, then flashed a bright smile at her friend. "To tell you the truth," she confessed, "I am glad that we are going today. Since your Aunt Jane will not travel on Sunday, and since the mysteries have all been solved, there would be nothing to do from now until Monday."

Before the other girl could reply Nann, with eyes glowing, continued

enthusiastically: "And how wonderfully the old ruin mystery turned out, didn't it? I feel ever so sure that Carl Ovieda and his sister will prove good friends." Then, teasingly, "Carl seemed to like you especially well."

Dories' surprised expression was sincere. "Me?" she exclaimed dramatically, then shook her head. "Of course you are wrong! You are so much prettier and wittier and wiser, Nann, boys *always* like you better than they do your friends."

"I hold to my opinion," was the laughing response. "But come along now, I hear the rattly old stage coming. If we are to make the 3:10 train, Spindly will have to make good time." Nann glanced at her wrist watch as she spoke; then, taking their suitcases, they went down the rickety stairs. On the front porch they found Miss Moore waiting among her bags; her heavy black veil thrown back over her bonnet. Gib's father, having left the stage at the beach end of the road, was coming for the baggage. "O, Aunt Jane!" Dories suddenly exclaimed, "aren't we going to put the covers on the furniture and fasten the blinds?"

It was Mr. Strait who answered: "Me'n Amandy'll tend to all them things, Miss. We'll come over fust off Monday an' take the key back to the store."

Miss Moore nodded her assent. Then, with the help of the two girls, she picked her way through the sand to the stage and was soon seated between the two black bags as she had been three weeks previous, but now how different was the expression on the wrinkled old face. On that other ride the girls had been justified in believing her to be a grouchy old woman, but today Dories noticed that when her aunt smiled across at her, there was a wistful expression in the grey eyes that could be so sharp and a quivering about the thin lips. "Poor Aunt Jane," was the thought that accompanied her answering smile, "she dreads going back to her lonely mansion of a home, but of course I am to remain with her for a few days, or, at least, until I hear from Mother."

When Siquaw was reached the girls saw that the train was even then approaching the small station, and, in the rush that followed, they quite forgot to look for Dick and Gibraltar to say good-bye. It was not until they were seated in the coach, and the train well under way, that Dories exclaimed: "We didn't see the boys! Don't you think that is queer, Nann? They knew we were going on that train. I wonder why they weren't at the station to see us off."

A merry laugh back of them was the unexpected answer. Seated directly behind

them were the two boys about whom they had been talking. Rising, they skipped around and took the seat facing the girls.

“Well, where did you come from?” Dories began, then noticed that Gib wore his one best suit and that he was carrying a funny old hand satchel. His freckled face was shining from more than a recent hard scrubbing. Nann interpreted that jubilant expression. “Gibraltar Strait,” she exclaimed, “you’re going away to school, aren’t you?” Then impulsively she held out her hand. “You don’t know how glad I am. I have great faith in you. I know you will amount to something.”

As the country lad was squirming in very evident embarrassment, his friend drew the attention of the girls to himself by saying: “I suppose, Mistress Nann, that you don’t expect *me* to amount to anything.” The good-looking boy tried so hard to assume an abused expression that the girls laughingly assured him that they had some slight hope of his ultimate success in life.

Dories glanced across at the seat where her aunt was sitting and, excusing herself, she went over and sat with the elderly woman, although Nann could see that they talked but little, her heart warmed toward her friend, who was growing daily more thoughtful of others. After a time Miss Moore said: “Dories, dear, I think I’ll try to take a little nap. You would better go back to your friends. I am sure that they are missing you.”

Then as the old lady did close her eyes and seem to sleep, the four young people talked over the past three weeks in quiet voices and made plans for the future. “I hope we will be friends forever,” Dories exclaimed, and Nann added, “Perhaps, when we have made the acquaintance of Mr. Ovieda’s sister, we can form a sort of friendship club with six members. We could meet now and then, and have merry times.” Dories’ doleful expression at this happy suggestion caused Nann to add, as she placed a hand on her friend’s arm, “I know what you are thinking, dear. That all the rest of us will be in Boston, but that you will be in Elmwood. But surely you will come to visit your Aunt Jane often during vacations.”

Before Dories could reply the boys informed them that they were entering the city. Dories, who had traveled little, was eager to stand on the platform at the back of the car that she might have a better view, and later when the young people returned to the coach it was time to collect their baggage and prepare to descend. First of all, Dick and Gib assisted Miss Moore to the platform and then carried out her bags. Then they hailed a taxi driver at her request. Then Miss

Moore surprised the girls by saying hospitably: "Come over and see us tomorrow, Dick and Gibraltar. You know where I live." She actually smiled at the older boy. "Dories will be with me for a few days, I suppose, and Nann as well." Then, when the older girl started to speak, the old woman said firmly, "You accepted an invitation to be my guest for one month, and only three weeks of that month have passed." This being true, Nann did not protest.

Dories squeezed her friend's arm ecstatically. She had dreaded the moment when Nann would leave for the hotel where her father stayed. Gib lifted his cap as he saw Dick doing when the taxi drove away.

Then the old woman addressed the girls. "They're fine boys, both of them!" she said. "That's why I was willing you should go anywhere with them that you wished. I knew they would take as good care of you as they would of their sisters."

Dusk came early that autumn afternoon, and so, try as she might, Dories could see little of the neighborhoods through which the taxi was taking them. It was a long ride. At first it was through a business district where many lights flashed on, and where their progress was very slow because of the traffic. Then the noise gradually lessened, big elm trees could be seen lining the streets, and far back among other trees and on wide lawns, lights from large homes flickered. At last the taxi turned in between two high stone gate posts. Miss Moore was sitting ram-rod straight and the girls, watching, found it hard to interpret her expression. Dories asked: "Aunt Jane, have we reached your home?"

They were surprised at the bitterness of the tone in which the reply was given: "Home? No! We have reached my house. A place where there is only a housekeeper and a maid to welcome you is *not* a home."

Dories slipped a hand in her aunt's and held it close. She wanted to say something comforting, but could think of nothing. The taxi had stopped under the portico by the front steps, and, when she had been helped out, Miss Moore paid the driver. Then they went upon the wide stone porch, followed by the man, laden with their baggage. "I can't understand why there isn't a light in the house. The maids knew I was to return almost any day." Miss Moore rang the bell as she spoke.

Suddenly lights within were flashed on. The heavy oak door was thrown open

and a small boy leaped out and hurled himself at one of the girls. "Dori! Hello, Dori!" he cried jubilantly. "Here's Mother and me waiting to surprise you all." And truly enough, there back of him was Mrs. Moore, smiling and holding out her hand to the old woman, who stood as one dazed. Then, comprehending what it all meant, she went in, tears falling unheeded down her wrinkled cheeks. She took the outstretched hand as she said tremulously, "My Peter's wife is here to welcome me *home*." She was so deeply affected that Mrs. Moore, after stooping to quietly kiss her daughter, led the old woman into a formally furnished parlor and sat with her on a handsome old lounge. Then to the small boy in the doorway she said, "Little Peter, show Dori and Nann up to their room."

What those two women had to say to each other, no one ever knew, but that it drew them very close together was evident by the loving expression in the grey eyes of the older woman when she looked at the younger.

Meanwhile the two girls, led by the small boy, entered a large upper room which seemed to overlook a garden. Like the rooms below, it was formally furnished after the style of an earlier period, but it seemed very grand indeed to Doris.

Her eyes were star-like with wonderment. "Nann," she half whispered in an awed voice when Peter had gleefully displayed the wardrobe where the girls were to hang their dresses and had opened each empty bureau drawer that they were to use, "do you suppose that Mother, Peter and I are to live here forever?"

"I'm sure of it!" Nann replied. "And O, Dori, isn't it wonderful?"

Just then a bell in some room below tinkled musically. "That's the supper bell," the small boy told them. "Hilda's the cook, and O, Dori, such nice puddings as she can make. Yum! Jum!" Then he cried excitedly: "Quick! Take off your hats. Here's the bathroom that belongs to you. Honestly, Dori, you have one all to yourself, and Mother and I, we have one."

The girls smiled at the little fellow's enthusiasm. Doris felt as though she must be dreaming. It all seemed so unreal.

A few moments later they went downstairs and found that Miss Moore, whose room was on the first floor, had changed to a house dress. She was seated in a comfortable chair by the fireplace, on which a log was burning, and she looked content, at peace with the world. She was saying to her nephew's wife: "I do love Doris; she is a dear girl, but I will confess that I was disappointed because

she does not look like the lad I had so loved.”

Hearing a sound at the door, the old woman turned, and for the first time really beheld the small boy who appeared in front of the girls.

“Peter!” was her amazed exclamation; the light of a great joy in her eyes. Then she pointed to a life-size painting over the mantle in which was a pictured boy of about the same age. “They are so alike,” she said, with tears in her eyes, as she looked up at Mrs. Moore, who, having risen, was standing by the older woman’s chair. Dories, gazing up at the picture, thought that it might have been a painting of her small brother except for the old-fashioned costume.

The elderly woman was holding out her arms to the little fellow, and, unafraid, he went to her trustingly. “My cup of joy is now full!” she said, her voice tremulous with emotion. Then, smiling over the boy’s head at his mother, she asked: “Niece, shall we tell our plan to the girls that *their* cup of joy may also be full?”

Mrs. Moore nodded and the old woman continued: “Nann, your father has written to Dories’ mother for advice. It seems that a change in his business will take him traveling about the country for at least a year, and he wanted to know what she thought would be best for you. He was thinking of sending you to some distant relatives, but we, my Peter’s wife and I, have decided to keep you as a sister-companion for our Dori.” Then, before the girls could express their joy, the old woman concluded, as she held little Peter close: “And so, at last, after many years of desolate loneliness, this old house among the elms is to be a real *home*.”

THE END.

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