# The Meadow-Brook Girls Afloat eBook

## The Meadow-Brook Girls Afloat

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# Contents


The Meadow-Brook Girls Afloat eBook....1

Contents....2

Table of Contents....7

Page 1....8

Page 2....10

Page 3....12

Page 4....14

Page 5....16

Page 6....18

Page 7....20

Page 8....22

Page 9....24

Page 10....26

Page 11....28

Page 12....30

Page 13....32

Page 14....34

Page 15....36

Page 16....38

Page 17....40

Page 18....42

Page 19....44

Page 20....46

Page 21....48

Page 22....50

Page 23.....52
Page 24.....54
Page 25.....56
Page 26.....58
Page 27.....60
Page 28.....62
Page 29.....64
Page 30.....66
Page 31.....68
Page 32.....70
Page 33.....72
Page 34.....74
Page 35.....76
Page 36.....78
Page 37.....80
Page 38.....82
Page 39.....84
Page 40.....86
Page 41.....88
Page 42.....90
Page 43.....92
Page 44.....94
Page 45.....96
Page 46.....98
Page 47.....100
Page 48.....102

Page 49.....104
Page 50.....106
Page 51.....108
Page 52.....110
Page 53.....112
Page 54.....114
Page 55.....116
Page 56.....118
Page 57.....120
Page 58.....122
Page 59.....124
Page 60.....126
Page 61.....128
Page 62.....130
Page 63.....132
Page 64.....134
Page 65.....136
Page 66.....138
Page 67.....140
Page 68.....142
Page 69.....144
Page 70.....146
Page 71.....148
Page 72.....150
Page 73.....152
Page 74.....154

Page 75.....156
Page 76.....158
Page 77.....160
Page 78.....162
Page 79.....164
Page 80.....166
Page 81.....168
Page 82.....170
Page 83.....172
Page 84.....174
Page 85.....176
Page 86.....178
Page 87.....180
Page 88.....182
Page 89.....184
Page 90.....186
Page 91.....188
Page 92.....190
Page 93.....192
Page 94.....194
Page 95.....196
Page 96.....198
Page 97.....199
Page 98.....200
Page 99.....202
Page 100.....204

Page 101.....205

Page 102.....207

# Table of Contents

Table of Contents


| Section | Page |
|---|---|
| Start of eBook | 1 |
| SCENTING A MYSTERY | 1 |
| CHAPTER II | 9 |
| CHAPTER III | 13 |
| CHAPTER IV | 18 |
| CHAPTER V | 23 |
| CHAPTER VI | 27 |
| CHAPTER VII | 30 |
| CHAPTER VIII | 35 |
| CHAPTER IX | 39 |
| CHAPTER X | 42 |
| CHAPTER XI | 47 |
| CHAPTER XII | 51 |
| CHAPTER XIII | 53 |
| CHAPTER XIV | 58 |
| CHAPTER XV | 62 |
| CHAPTER XVI | 65 |
| CHAPTER XVII | 67 |
| CHAPTER XVIII | 71 |
| CHAPTER XIX | 74 |
| CHAPTER XX | 78 |
| CHAPTER XXI | 81 |
| CHAPTER XXII | 83 |
| CHAPTER XXIII | 87 |
| CHAPTER XXIV | 91 |
| CONCLUSION | 91 |

# Page 1

## SCENTING A MYSTERY

“I wouldn’t advise you young ladies to take the boat out.”

Miss Elting instantly recalled the message from her brother. The telegram was in her pocket at that moment, “If you have any trouble, Dee Dickinson will see that you are protected,” read the message. It was Dee Dickinson who had spoken to her that moment.

Dee had made a distinctly unfavorable impression on Miss Elting, the guardian and companion of the Meadow-Brook Girls. Her brother’s fishing boat had been left in the care of this man by her brother Bert, who had now turned it over to his sister and the Meadow-Brook Girls for their summer vacation.

“Why not?” questioned the young woman in answer to his words of warning. “Isn’t the boat in good condition?”

“Oh, yes. That is, it isn’t by any means in a sinking condition.”

“Then why do you advise us not to use it?”

“The lake gets rather rough at times, you know,” he replied evasively.

“My brother wrote you that we were coming up here, did he not?”

“Oh, yes. But you see it’s been a year since he used the old scow. She is a year older, now, and—”

“I am quite sure that my brother would not have permitted us to take the houseboat were it not perfectly safe for us to do so. Please tell me what is the matter with it?”

“There’s nothing the matter with it, I tell you, except that it’s an old fishing scow with a roof over it. It isn’t a fit place for a party of young ladies,” Dee replied, with a shrug of his shoulders. “Of course, if you are set on taking the boat, I’ll have to get it ready for you; but, if anything happens to it, remember that I warned you.”

“We shall not forget,” answered the guardian dryly. “If it stays on top of the lake we surely cannot expect anything more. Where is the boat?”

“A couple of miles down the lake.”

“Kindly direct us so that we may find it, and—”

“No, no,” interposed Dickinson hastily. “I’ll have it brought up here to the dock, so you can get at it more easily. There’ll be some things you will wish to do to it. Having it here

at Wantagh will be much more convenient for you. I'll try to have it here for you by to-night, or early in the morning. But you'll be sick of your bargain, I promise you that."

"Do you mean us to infer that the boat is not safe?" interjected Harriet Burrell.

"I haven't said so," answered the man rather sharply, turning to her. "I've told you that it isn't the kind of craft for young women to live on all summer."

"We shall decide that matter ourselves," returned Miss Elting coldly.

"Very good. Suit yourselves."

"I think you had better take us to the boat now before anything further is done in the matter."

"No. You had better have it brought here," persisted Dickinson. "Do you know where Johnson's dock is?"

# Page 2

The guardian hesitated. She was regarding the man with some suspicion.

“It’s at the foot of the second street beyond, down that way. I’ll have the boat down there in a couple of hours. I’ve got to get a motor boat, or something of the sort to tow it down. It probably will leak some, not having been in the water this season until yesterday. You had better go over to the hotel and get your dinner. I’ll come up and let you know when the scow is ready. Go right over and make yourself at home. I’ll do the best I can. Bert’s an old friend of mine.”

Dickinson hurried away, without further words. The girls looked at each other and laughed.

“Well, if Dee Dickinson is a friend of your brother, I must say I don’t admire your brother’s friends,” declared Harriet.

“That ith what I thay,” agreed Grace Thompson.

“Tommy, you shouldn’t have said that,” reproved Hazel Holland.

“She didn’t. Harriet said it,” retorted Margery.

“Buster is right,” laughed Jane McCarthy. “Come on, girls! Let’s go to dinner, as the shifty-eyed gentleman advised. I hope it is dinner. I never could get used to luncheon in the middle of the day when Nature intended that a girl should have a full meal of the real food. Where is the old hotel?”

“I don’t know, Jane. There is something strange about this affair. I am sure that Bert must have known what he was about, or he wouldn’t have sent me the message he did. However, we shall see. There is no need to borrow trouble. We shall know how to deal with it when we meet it face to face. Let’s go and look for this hotel that our friend, Mr. Dee, has recommended.”

Getting into the automobile Jane started her car, and they drove through the town in search of the hotel, which they found after a few inquiries. The prosperous village of Wantagh was located on the shore of Lake Winnipesaukee. It was there that Miss Elting’s brother had begun to practice law, but after one year’s practice in the little village had listened to the call of the West. He had left in Wantagh the old scow, dignified by the name of “houseboat” to which was attached the further title of “Red Rover.” It was in this lumbering craft that Miss Elting and her young friends, the Meadow-Brook Girls, had planned to spend part of their summer vacation. Their meeting with Dickinson, in whose care the boat had been left, was quite discouraging. Dee was not a prepossessing fellow; what impressed them most unfavorably about him was his shifty eyes. He seldom permitted himself to meet the gaze of the person with whom he was talking.

Some inquiry, after reaching the hotel, developed the fact that Dee Dickinson was a notary, did a little real estate business, and drew a few papers for his neighbors, thus managing to eke out a precarious living. So far as the girls were able to find out, Dickinson's character was above reproach. Miss Elting chided herself for having formed a wrong opinion of the man. Still she could not overcome her irritation at his evident reluctance in getting the boat ready.

# Page 3

It was quite late in the afternoon when Dee appeared at the hotel, red of face, his clothes soiled and wet.

“Well, we got the old thing,” was his greeting.

“Is the boat here?” inquired the guardian coldly.

“Yes, Miss Elting. It’s down at Johnson’s dock this very minute. You can go down there and look at it. I’ve got some business to—”

“Please go with us. There will be things about it which we shall wish to ask you. Does the boat leak much?”

He shook his head.

“It’s all right,” he said. “I can’t spare the time to go to-day.”

“If I might venture to offer to pay you for your trouble,” suggested the guardian, not certain whether he would resent her offer of money. Dickinson, however, was not easily insulted.

“Of course, if—if you wish, I—yes, of course,” he mumbled.

Miss Elting handed him two dollars. Dickinson led the way down to the dock, though without enthusiasm.

“There’s the tub,” he said, pointing toward what appeared, at first glance, to be a huge box. “That is it.”

The girls walked out on the dock and stood gazing at the boat. In the first place, the “Red Rover” was not red at all. It had once had a prime coat of yellow paint, but this had succumbed to storm and sunshine. The windows had been boarded up; and the exterior of the craft bore out all that Dee Dickinson had said of it.

“Thirty feet on the water line,” explained the man, for want of something better to say.

The boat, originally, had been a scow used for the purpose of towing the effects of summer residents of the island across the lake. Bert Elting had bought it for a small sum of money, and had built the house over it. He and a friend, had spent many days and nights aboard, anchored out on the fishing grounds. When they desired to change their location a launch usually could be found to tow them about.

At each end of the house there was a cockpit some three feet long. In other words the house did not extend the full length of the boat. At the rear there was a long-handed tiller. The boat was flat as a floor.

“If the inside is as handsome as the outside, we shall have the nightmare all the time,” declared Margery.

“We had better look at the inside,” reflected Miss Elting.

There were doors at each end.  The girls entered by the rear door.

“Mercy!” exclaimed the guardian.  “How warm it is in here.  Mr. Dickinson, is there any glass in those windows?”

Dickinson shook his head.

“Then please knock out the boards.”

Harriet already was doing this.  She succeeded in ripping off a few planks, letting in the fresh air and sunlight.  What they saw then did not please them.  The floor was covered with rubbish.  There was food scattered about, the walls were greasy.  At one side stood an old stove, red with rust, its pipe dented in, and the ashes heaped high on the floor where the last occupant had left them.

# Page 4

Harriet stepped over by the stove to get a different perspective of the interior of the old craft. She rested one hand on the stove, but withdrew it quickly. She seemed about to say something, then abruptly checked her speech.

“Girls,” said Miss Elting, “I don’t know whether we shall be able to do anything with this boat or not. What do you think?”

“Of course we shall,” answered Harriet promptly. “A good scrubbing and a little fixing up will make a delightful summer home of it.”

“This is my treat, you know,” interjected Jane. “That is, you know Miss Elting was to furnish the boat and I was to do all the rest.”

“Oh, no! We couldn’t permit you to do that,” answered the guardian.

“A bargain’s a bargain,” declared Jane. “I’ll get the paint. You folks, in the meantime, look the place over and see what else you need. I’ll go back to the village for the things you decide on when we get ready for them.”

“What color shall we paint the boat?” questioned Miss Elting.

“Red, of course,” cried Harriet. “Surely, you wouldn’t paint a ’Red Rover’ green, would you?”

“I think we had better paint the inside of the boat white,” advised Miss Elting.

“Then white it shall be,” declared Jane. “Mr. Dickinson, you come with me and show me where to get the paint. I’m off, girls. I think we’d better stay at the hotel to-night. Our palatial yacht won’t be ready for us.”

Jane hurried out, followed by Dickinson. He was eager to get away. While she was gone the girls consulted with Miss Elting as to what was necessary to be done to the boat. They were full of enthusiasm despite the discouraging condition in which they had found the “Red Rover,” for the possibilities of making it a delightful home, were plain to all of them.

Jane McCarthy came racing back with her car, three quarters of an hour later. Two men were in the car with her who wore overalls and small round caps.

“Here are the painters who are going to make the outside of the boat look pretty,” cried the girl. “Now, men, get to work and do your best! If you do a good job you get your money. If you don’t, you get a ducking in the pond! Here, girls, help me unload this stuff.”

There were cans of paint, a mop, two brooms, tin and wooden pails, scrub brushes, soap and a miscellaneous assortment of useful articles.

“Now, girls, let’s get to work,” cried Jane. “This is our busy day. There’ll be another man down here with some windows, soon. We’ve got to have some hot water. Harriet, can you heat it?”

For answer Harriet hurried along the beach, picking up such dry sticks as she could find. She soon had a fire started in the stove.

“We must stand by the fire with pails of water. I haven’t much confidence in that stovepipe,” she exclaimed laughingly. “However, we have plenty of water near, in case of need.”

# Page 5

Tommy had gotten a broom and a dustpan and was already raising a cloud of dust by her efforts at sweeping.

“For goodness’ sake, sprinkle the floor before you sweep,” begged Margery chokingly. Hazel dipped up a pail of water from the lake and sprinkled it through her fingers over the floor of the boat. All the others save Harriet had fled, driven out by the choking dust. The sweeping was now attended with more comfort. Dustpan after dustpan full of dirt was gathered up and tossed into the lake. Tommy surveyed her work with a frowning face.

“It lookth worthe than it did before,” she declared. “Thee the greathe thpotth. What fine houthekeeping.”

“Men are lazy housekeepers,” laughed Miss Elting. “I shall have to write to Bert and tell him what we think of his housekeeping.”

As soon as the water was heated, Jane produced some full length gingham aprons, which she tossed to her companions. Arrayed in these, the girls took up scrub brushes and soap and got to work on the inside of the cabin. Their skirts were pinned up, their sleeves rolled back to the shoulders and they looked like veritable scrub women.

“Let’s all work on the same side of the boat,” called Jane. “I want one side to get dry so we can begin to paint it.” The slap, slap of the painters’ brushes already was heard on the outside. The remaining boards over the windows had been torn off and carefully laid aside for other uses.

Two hours later Jane got the painters to open the cans of white paint and stir up the contents. The men put in plenty of drier so the paint would dry quickly and began their work. Tommy could not resist trying to paint too. Seizing a brush she began laying about her, sending the paint into her hair, over her clothes and spattering her companions until they threatened to throw her overboard if she did not desist. Tommy’s impish face already was decorated with polka dots of white paint.

“I would suggest that Tommy go out and use some red paint,” said Harriet laughingly. “Some red dots would make you look perfectly lovely, dear.”

“Yes and some blue,” added Jane. “She’d be red, white and blue then, and we could hang her over the stern. That would save getting a flag.”

“Girls, what are we going to do with the ceiling!” asked Miss Elting, regarding it with wrinkled forehead.

“We might paint in white between the beams, covering the beams themselves with green,” suggested Harriet.

“That would be pretty,” agreed the guardian, tilting her head to one side and regarding the ceiling reflectively. “Yes, it would be very artistic. Have we any green paint?”

“We’ll have some,” answered Jane promptly. “What shade?”

“Grath green,” suggested Tommy.

“Olive,” suggested Hazel.

Miss Elting nodded. Olive green paint would look well for the ceiling, she decided. Already the interior of the houseboat was beginning to brighten. But they saw that, to do a thoroughly good job, at least two coats of paint would be necessary. They hoped to get one coat of paint on before night, putting on the finishing coat on the following morning.

# Page 6

The slap, slap of the brushes outside had ceased and the men were heard talking. Jane rushed out brandishing her paint brush.

“Get to work, you lazy bones!” she shouted. “Am I paying you for holding conversations about red paint! On with your work!”

Jane presented such a ferocious appearance that the painters resumed their work hurriedly. There was no more lagging on their part. Jane frequently ran out to see what they were doing. The result was that the “Red Rover” was painted in record time, both outside and in, and a coat of paint laid on the top of the house. Jane McCarthy had an idea in regard to this roof. The next morning she put the plan into execution.

That night the girls were so tired that they gave no thought to their appearance until they had reached their rooms at the hotel and looked into their mirrors. Their paint-streaked countenances were a sight to behold and Tommy carried a part of her facial decorations to bed with her.

They were up early on the following morning, and were first in the dining room at breakfast.

“I just can’t wait until I get to work,” declared Jane McCarthy, her eyes shining.

“I can wait until I’ve eaten my breakfast,” replied Margery, then flushed as Tommy giggled meaningly.

Readers of the first volume of this series, “*The Meadow-Brook girls under canvas*” will recall the many exciting adventures that befell the five girls and their guardian, Miss Elting, while summering at Camp Wau-Wau, a part of the Camp Girls’ organization. The attempts of two mischief-making camp girls to disgrace Harriet in the eyes of the camp, Harriet’s brave rescue of her enemies during a severe storm and her generous method of dealing with them aroused the interest and admiration of the reader. The various ludicrous happenings in which Grace Thompson and Jane McCarthy figured prominently also added to this absorbing narrative of outdoor life.

“*The Meadow-Brook girls across country*” relates the adventures of the girls and their guardian on their homeward march from Camp Wau-Wau. Their meeting with a number of boys on a hike, who styled themselves the Tramp Club, and the subsequent wager made with them by the Meadow-Brook Girls to race them to the town of Meadow-Brook, furnished the theme for the narrative. While following the fortunes of the road the girls met with numerous adventures. The reader will recall their encounter with the tramps, their rescue by Sybarina, the Gipsy, and the night spent in the Gipsy camp where Harriet, disguised as a Gipsy, told the fortune of George Baker the leader of the Tramp Club, and at the same time under the pretense of revealing his past rated him soundly for a trick which he and his band had played upon the girls.

Once back in Meadow-Brook the girls had settled down to a busy winter in high school. Now that summer had come again, accompanied by Miss Elting, they had planned to spend their vacation on Lake Winnipesaukee, aboard a houseboat owned by Miss Elting's brother.

# Page 7

The “Red Rover” in its coat of bright new paint looked really fine that morning. As the girls neared it the odor of fresh paint was borne to their nostrils on the breeze that drifted in from the lake. Full of enthusiasm the girls hurried aboard the boat. There was much to be done, and all were eager to settle their home and to begin the fascinating life that was before them, a life that not one of the girls had ever before enjoyed. The painters came soon after, and began putting on the second coat of paint. The girls, as soon as they had donned aprons and gloves, started to put on the second coat in the interior of the boat. The windows were on hand, ready to be set in place and everyone went to work with a will.

So rapidly did the girls and Jane’s painters work that, by noon, the work, both inside and out, had been completed, including a coat of paint on the floor. The painters were paid off by Jane and dismissed. Jane stepped out on the pier to survey the work.

“Girls, we’ve forgotten something,” she cried. “We must have the name on the side of the boat. The ‘Red Rover’ you know? I forgot that when the men were here. Can any of you print?”

“I think perhaps I might do it,” answered Miss Elting. “But we shall have to wait until the red paint dries. Suppose we sit down and rest for an hour or so?”

“Rest!” shouted Crazy Jane. “There’s no rest for the Meadow-Brook Girls. It’s work and trouble and trouble and work all day and all night. Girls, we’ve got to have a new stove, and we must have a lot of other things, including some curtains and home comforts. Can you help me load the old stove into the car?”

“Not without breaking it, I’m afraid,” answered Miss Elting laughingly.

“Then get the axe. We’ll smash the old thing. Hey there, you man,” Jane shouted at a passing farmer. “Want to earn fifty cents? Well, get busy here, and help us move the stove.”

With the aid of the farmer they took down the old wood stove and loaded it into the automobile. Next they made a hurried toilet and drove into the village. Most of the afternoon was spent in making purchases. All the bedding had been shipped by freight, as had the folding cots, the cooking utensils and their tent. Harriet proposed that they make the tent into an awning over the upper deck. She thought it would be a pleasant place to sit in the evenings. Her companions agreed with her. This necessitated calling in a carpenter. He was sent out to the boat to do the work while they were finishing their shopping.

Among the purchases was an oil stove—Jane had sold the old one—a large quantity of canned goods, potatoes and other vegetables, all of which they planned to stow in the front of the houseboat under oilcloth. Here also was stowed a huge sea chest that had

belonged to Jane's great-grandfather. It was supposed to be water-tight and in this the Meadow-Brook Girls decided to place all their extra clothing. A rag carpet was found that answered very well to cut up into rugs to lay on the floor. The carpenter made a ladder by which to climb to the upper deck. Then there was rope and an anchor, the latter a piece of an old mowing machine; a rowboat, which Jane rented, and heavy green shades at the windows so that they should have greater seclusion; also a cask to hold drinking water.

# Page 8

When the girls finished their work that night Crazy Jane McCarthy had spent quite a sum of money, but the equipment for the “Red Rover” was as nearly complete as they were able to make it. Just before sunset they went out to watch Miss Elting paint the name on the side of the boat. In large, neat letters she painted the name in white. The letters stood out in bold relief against the brilliant red of the boat.

“I propose three cheers for the artist,” cried Harriet.

“Wait a minute,” called Tommy.

“Well, what is it?” demanded Margery.

“The job ith not finithhed yet. Mith Elting hathn’t painted the name on the other thide.”

“That is true, but to do so I should have to stand in the water,” laughed the guardian.

“If you must paint the other side, of course we can turn the boat around,” said Harriet. “I think a name on one side will answer our purpose for the present. Later on we can finish the job, if we think best.”

“Yes,” agreed Jane. “We’ve done enough for the present. Don’t forget that we’ve got to settle the house in the morning. I want you all to think hard to-night, to see if we have forgotten anything.”

“The only thing we have forgotten is our dinner. We haven’t had a bite to eat since morning,” Margery Brown reminded her friends.

“Margery can’t think of anything but thomething to eat,” laughed Tommy. “You mutht learn to eat atmothphere when you’re hungry. That ith the way I do.”

“I fear you will never grow fat on that sort of diet,” laughed the guardian.

“I don’t want to get fat, like Buthter,” replied Tommy scornfully.

In the meantime Harriet and Jane had drawn away from the others and were engaged in a whispered conversation. Then the two girls got into the rowboat dragged the houseboat out into the lake, a few rods, and anchored it. They did not explain their action. The other girls laughed at them, and Miss Elting questioned them with her eyes but said nothing. She knew the two girls had some good reason for anchoring the “Red Rover” a little distance from the shore.

Early on the following morning, Jane and Harriet were out, loading the automobile with the supplies that had been delivered at the hotel the previous night. The car was piled high with bundles of various shapes and sizes. There was room for Jane and Harriet in front, but none for their companions elsewhere.

“We will go down to the dock with the stuff,” explained Harriet, “then come back in time to take breakfast with you girls. We shan’t try to put the supplies on board. We’ll just dump them on the pier.”

“You can put them on the boat if you want to. I don’t care,” answered Grace.

“Tommy is trying to get out of working to-day,” scoffed Margery.

“I’m not,” protested the little lisping girl indignantly. “If I were ath fat ath you, I might. I’ll work after breakfatht, but I won’t work before breakfatht.”

# Page 9

“Nobody wants you to,” flung back Jane, as she started her car ahead. “We’ll do all the before-breakfast work, and we’ll have the real appetites when we get to the food. You watch us.”

They watched her skid around a sharp corner and heard her car for some few moments thereafter, but that was all. They were too well used to Crazy Jane McCarthy, by this time, to be surprised at anything she might do or say.

The drive to Johnson’s dock was a short one. The two girls made it in a few moments. As they turned into the street that led down to the river they opened their eyes a little wider, but neither spoke. Nor was there a word said until they had driven out on the pier and halted the car. Then both girls burst out in exclamations of amazement at the same instant.

That which they discovered filled the hearts of the Meadow-Brook Girls with alarm. The “Red Rover” was nowhere in sight. The shore end of the rope, with which it had been secured to the dock when they anchored it out in the lake, was still securely tied to the string piece at the outer side of the dock.

“What is it, darlin’?” questioned Jane, with eyes wide and wondering.

“It looks to me very much as though our ‘Red Rover’ were at the bottom of the lake, Jane. Oh, what shall we do if she has sunk? Something has been going on here. Something occurred the first day we were here, to excite my suspicion. And now this strange thing has happened. There’s the rowboat. Let’s go out and look around. Oh, this is too bad, too bad!”

## CHAPTER II

### CRAZY JANE MAKES A DISCOVERY

“Wait!”

Jane sprang forward, and grasping the rope, lifted it from the water and began hauling in on it. She uttered a shout of joy.

“There’s no ‘Red Rover’ on the other end of this rope, Harriet,” she cried.

“Then it has broken away and sunk,” answered Harriet gloomily. “Let’s get into the rowboat and go out yonder.”

“In a minute. I want to see what is at the other end of this rope, Harriet, dear. There’s nothing like beginning at the right end. This is the right end; after we get the rope in we

will move on to the other end.  We may have to dive, but you and I know how to do that, don't we darlin'?"

Harriet nodded.  The long rope came in dripping, so cold to the touch as to make Jane's fingers numb.

"There!" exclaimed Jane, slamming the rope down on the wharf.  "There's the old thing. Didn't I tell you there was no 'Red Rover' on the end of it."

"Then we had better take to the rowboat.  I don't understand this at all," said Harriet, in a troubled voice.

"Just a minute, Harriet.  Will you look at this and tell Jane McCarthy the meaning of it?" She extended the end of the rope toward Harriet.  The latter took it, permitting the dripping rope to lie across the palm of one hand for a minute.  Harriet glanced up at her companion with troubled eyes.

# Page 10

“Do you know what has been done to it?” asked Harriet.

“I think so,” nodded Jane.

“The rope has been cut,” reflected Harriet.

“It has,” agreed Jane.

“But, who could have done such a thing?” Harriet wondered.

“If I knew, I’d make him suffer for this piece of work,” retorted Jane.

“I don’t know; I can’t even think,” answered Harriet solemnly. “What do you suppose has become of the boat, Jane?”

“Goodness knows,” replied Jane.

“I’m going to search the lake.” Harriet ran around the end of the pier, where, shoving off the rowboat, she leaped in. Jane followed her. “I’m going to the west. The wind is blowing that way.”

Jane McCarthy nodded understandingly. Harriet was rowing, Jane sitting in the stern of the boat.

“Watch the shore, Jane. I will do the rowing. I am going to tell you what I discovered that day we first went aboard the houseboat. I put my hand on the stove quite by accident that morning. The stove was so hot that it burned my hand.”

“You don’t say?”

“Yes. Now explain how that stove happened to be hot,” continued Harriet.

“That’s easy. Somebody had had a fire in it,” nodded Jane.

“Exactly. And not long before we went aboard. Then there were bread crumbs on the floor. Jane, some person had been living on that boat. You remember how anxious Dee Dickinson was that we should not go to the boat until he had first been there?”

“Yes, but what has that to do with the cutting of the rope, last night, and losing the boat?”

“I don’t know. That the two puzzles have some connection I am positive. What we wish most, just now, is to find the ‘Red Rover.’”

“There’s something red on the shore; it looks like a fire!” cried Jane, pointing excitedly. “Oh, if it should be the boat.”

Harriet ceased rowing and quickly turned her head over her right shoulder. She gazed, at first half startled, then uttered a cry of delight.

“It’s the ‘Red Rover.’ Don’t you see? Hurrah! We’ve found the boat. It’s the sun shining on those red sides that made it look like a fire.”

Harriet swung the prow of the boat and began rowing shoreward with all her might. After a few minutes of rowing she drove the boat in alongside of the “Red Rover,” then leaped out on the shore. The unknown miscreant having cut her from her moorings the houseboat had drifted down the lake. She had stranded among a forest of rushes, the bottom of the boat being hard and fast on the gravel.

The girls breathless with excitement, climbed aboard. The after-half of the house floor was under water. There were fully two feet of water in the stern. In the after cockpit were several bushels of sand and gravel that had been thrown up by the wind and waves during the night.

“Oh, the villains, to do a thing like this!” raged Jane. She started to run aft for a pail but losing her footing on the slippery floor she went sprawling and splashing into the water. Jane scrambled up, wet from head to feet.

# Page 11

“Oh, me!  Oh my!  What a mess!”

Harriet leaned against the side of the cabin screaming with laughter.  Jane looked at her an instant, then, joined in the merriment.

“You are a sight!” gasped Harriet.

“Why shouldn’t I be?  I’ve been in the water?  Are we going to stand here and laugh all the morning, or are we going to get busy?”

For answer Harriet Burrell picked up a pail and began bailing out the cockpit.  Jane, dripping, took up another pail and together the girls worked feverishly.  There were several barrels of water in the cockpit, so their backs were aching by the time they had finished bailing out the water.  The stern of the boat now floated clear, but the forward end was hard and fast on the ground.

“The next thing is to get the boat off the gravel,” announced Harriet.

“Maybe we can hitch the rowboat on and drag the ‘Red Rover’ off,” suggested Jane.

Harriet shook her head.

“It won’t work.  We shall have to drag it off by main force.  You can’t be any wetter, and I’m not afraid of a little water.  Let’s get outside the boat and see what we can do.”

A few seconds later as they took hold and directed their strength to the task of moving the heavy boat, Harriet’s feet slipped from under her.  She fell over into the water, coming up coughing, the water streaming from her hair and shoulders, and falling into the lake in a shower.  Jane screamed with delight.  “You’re wet all right, now!  No mistake about that,” jeered Crazy Jane.  “And what have we done?  Moved the old tub three quarters of an inch.  At this rate we’ll have her afloat about supper time.  I wish I had my car hitched to it.  I’d drag the old thing out so fast it would make her dizzy.”

Harriet had grasped the edge of the boat, tugging with all her might.  Jane dashed around to the other side, adding her strength to the task.  The boat gave way with such suddenness that both girls fell into the lake.  But they did not care.  They could get no wetter.  Therefore they laughed and joked over their bedraggled condition.  The “Red Rover” floated clear of the rushes.

“Do the best you can.  I’ll get the rowboat,” cried Harriet, splashing toward the shore.  Her clothes were so heavy with water that they impeded her movements.  She shoved the rowboat out, and, leaping in, rowed it out into the lake with strong sweeps of the oars.  In a few moments she was alongside.

“The rope is too short.  What shall we do?” called Jane.

“There is a rope attached to this boat.  I think it will be long enough for towing.  Wait, I’ll toss it to you.  Make it fast.  The boat is heavy and we are going to have a hard pull, but I don’t dare leave it here until we can get help.”

# Page 12

Jane waded over to the rowboat for the rope. She made it fast; then, getting behind the houseboat, she pushed while Harriet rowed. The “Red Rover” started but slowly. It was all the two girls could do to get it in motion. Then when, finally, they had gotten under way with it, Jane was obliged to wade out in water nearly to her neck to reach the rowboat. She nearly upset it in getting aboard. Two pairs of oars, instead of one, were now bent to the work of towing the houseboat. The boat went broadside to the waves, nearly pulling them overboard. They saw that it would be impossible to tow it to the Johnson dock in this fashion.

“One of us must row and the other steer,” declared Harriet.

“I’ll do the rowing. You’ve had your share,” cried Jane. “Wait, I’ll pull you alongside.”

“No. You must keep the oars going, or the big boat will drift back into shallow water again. I’ll get back there all right.” Harriet unshipped her oars and stood up in the boat. She took a clean, curving dive into the lake. Jane shouted delightedly.

“What a beauty!”

Harriet came up, shaking her head to free it from water, then struck out for the houseboat. Getting aboard, weighted down by her clothes as she was, was not an easy task. Finally, however, the girl managed to get one foot over the edge. She clung there for a moment breathing heavily, then slowly climbed aboard.

“Hur-r-r-ro-o-o-o!” wailed Jane. “They can’t stop a Meadow-Brook Girl with fire or water.”

“Now pull,” shouted Harriet, “I’ll change places with you when you get tired.”

“I’ll rest when I get tired,” was the very practical reply of Crazy Jane McCarthy.

Harriet took the tiller and straightened out the scow’s course, though she discovered that the old boat was a most unmanageable craft. It simply would not keep on any one course for more than thirty seconds at a time. Jane was shouting her directions, making sarcastic remarks about Harriet’s steering, but the latter merely smiled. She knew she was doing the best she could, and that was all any one could do. Jane was making but slow headway. They had not yet rounded the point that hid the Johnson dock from view. Her strokes became uneven, and jerky. All at once the rope broke. Crazy Jane McCarthy landed in the bottom of the rowboat.

“Save me,” she screamed.

Harriet, who could not see the small boat, the deck house being in the way, continued on her course, smiling good-naturedly at Jane’s noisy objections. But all at once a crash and a yell startled Harriet. She threw the tiller over and leaned far out. The

rowboat was bottom-side-up, with Crazy Jane McCarthy struggling in the water. Her mouth was too full of water, just at that moment, to allow her to raise an outcry. The momentum of the houseboat carried it alongside the overturned rowboat, Harriet leaned over and grasped one of her companion's arms.

# Page 13

“Why, Jane!  You shouldn’t have stopped rowing to go in for a swim.”

“Go in for a swim!” exploded Jane.  “And didn’t you run me down.  Look at the boat, will you!  Now, what are we going to do, will you tell me?”

“The first thing is to get you on board.  After that I don’t know.”

Crazy Jane was dragged aboard the “Red Rover.”  She lay clinging to the gunwale, laughing immoderately.

“It’s a fine start we are having, darling isn’t it, now!”

“A wet one,” amended Harriet.  “See!  The rowboat is drifting ashore.  You stay on board.  I’m going after it.  I’m not tired.  Keep the houseboat away from the shore, if you can.”

Harriet sprang into the water, swimming leisurely shoreward.  Reaching the rowboat, she took hold of and clung to it, drifting ashore with it.  The houseboat also was coming in.  Jane was shouting to her companion to hurry.  Harriet was doing the best she could under the circumstances, struggling with all her strength to right the rowboat.  By the time she had succeeded in doing so, the “Red Rover” was fairly on top of her.

“Steer out!” cried Harriet warningly.

“I can’t steer in or out,” flung back Jane.

Harriet began tugging at the rowboat to get it out of the way of the oncoming houseboat.  The former had grounded in the shallow water.  The houseboat caught the stranded rowboat, turned it over and slowly ground it under its prow, accompanied by the sound of crushing planks.  Harriet was caught and thrown down, disappearing under the bow of the “Red Rover.”

## CHAPTER III

### SETTING UP HOUSEKEEPING

Jane, receiving no answer to her calls, ran up on top of the house.  A quick glance about showed her that Harriet was nowhere in sight.  Jane did not dare to dive, knowing that the water was shallow.  She jumped, feet first, instead, landing in the shallow water with great force.

“She’s under there!” cried the girl, staggering toward the bow of the houseboat.  Putting her shoulders against it she shoved the heavy boat back a little.  Harriet Burrell came to the surface, then made a feeble attempt to swim.  Jane picked her up and carried her

ashore; or, rather, dragged her there, for, impeded by the water, Jane found Harriet too heavy a burden.

Harriet was gasping. She had held her breath until she could hold it no longer. The result was that she had swallowed considerable water. Crazy Jane was working over her. It was but a few minutes before Harriet Burrell had wholly recovered from the effects of the recent catastrophe. She was considerably bruised and was rendered nervous by her trying experience.

“Is—is the small boat damaged?” she gasped.

“Never mind the small boat. There are more boats where that came from,” answered Jane. “You lie down here while I go for another boat. Shall I get some one to help us?”

# Page 14

Harriet shook her head.

“If we are going to be fresh water sailors we must learn to do things for ourselves.”

“That’s what I say,” agreed Jane, nodding with great emphasis. “But are you sure you are all right?”

“I’m awfully wet, Jane.”

“That’s nothing. We’ll be wet many a time before we get through with this cruise.”

“We shall have to get started first,” answered Harriet, chuckling. “Run along for another boat. I’ll try to keep the ‘Red Rover’ off the shore while you are gone. Hurry!”

Jane ran toward the landing, still some distance away. There were several boats tied up there. She helped herself to one and rowed back with all speed. She espied Harriet out in the lake with the houseboat, where the latter had succeeded in pushing it and was doing her best to keep the craft from drifting back to the shore. Jane brought a rope with her that she had taken from a third boat. This she quickly made fast to the scow, then began pulling it out into the lake. The wind had died out and the rowing was found to be much easier, though of course, the “Red Rover” was as heavy and cumbersome as before.

“We’ll make it,” cried Jane encouragingly.

It was a full half hour later when Harriet steered the houseboat alongside the pier. The girls made fast, then threw themselves down on the dock, utterly exhausted from their efforts.

In the meantime, Miss Elting and the other girls, becoming worried over the long absence of Crazy Jane and Harriet, had left the hotel, starting out for Johnson’s dock on foot. They found Harriet and Jane making the boat more secure, preparatory to leaving for the hotel.

“Why, girls, whatever is the matter? You are wet through! Go up to the hotel and get into dry clothes at once. You will both catch cold. You are too late for breakfast, too. What happened to you?” exclaimed Miss Elting. “You are certainly bedraggled looking specimens.”

Harriet told the guardian of their search for the “Red Rover.” Miss Elting frowned. The message from her brother was still in her pocket. She recalled the peculiar actions of Dee Dickinson, wondering if perchance he had anything to do with the casting adrift of their houseboat, Harriet had not told the guardian of having found a hot stove on the occasion of their first visit to their summer home. That, perhaps, might have enlightened the guardian.

Now that Miss Elting and the other girls were there to unload the automobile, Jane and Harriet turned to go.

“We will begin to settle while you girls go to town for breakfast,” called the guardian after them.

“You will have to wait a while until the rear end of the boat dries out,” returned Harriet. “I don’t think it will take long. But, in the meantime, there are the windows and the walls that need fixing.”

The other girls and the guardian fell to work while Jane and Harriet were at breakfast, and dainty chintz curtains were draped over each window. There were green shades hung over the windows also, but these, during the day, were to be rolled up out of sight.

# Page 15

Jane and Harriet changed their wet clothing, ate breakfast and returned early in the forenoon. With them they brought a chart of the big lake that they had bought of a boat owner. While in the village Jane also had paid for the damaged rowboat and arranged for another, as it would be necessary to have a rowboat with them at all times. A new anchor, this time a real one, was purchased and piled into the automobile.

The girls worked all that day setting their cabin to rights. It was to them a delightful task, and late in the afternoon the cabin of the “Red Rover” was as homelike a place as one could wish. Covers had been made for the folding cots, so that by day they offered attractive lounging places. The upper deck had some rough seats, made by the carpenter who had put up the awning. Then there were boxes for plants, in case the girls should wish to have flowers. But it was the interior of the cabin that was the real delight. The white walls and green trimmings gave it a fresh, cool appearance. One could scarcely have believed this to be the lumbering, dirty, old fishing scow of a few days since. Bert Elting never would have recognized the craft in its new dress.

That night the Meadow-Brook Girls decided to have their first meal on board. They also decided to clear away and set sail before sitting down to the meal. Jane drove her car to town, leaving it at a garage, after which she walked back to the dock. She found the “Red Rover” ready to sail. The girls were discussing the question of where to go for an anchorage for the night.

“Is that all?” called Jane. “Leave it to the boat. She’ll find a place for herself. Say, I’m not going to try to tow that house out of here with all these boats about.”

There were launches and steamers coming in constantly. The waters in that vicinity were dotted with rowboats and small skiffs as well. Jane did not like the idea of dragging out the “Red Rover” through that gathering of craft. Neither did Harriet Burrell. Jane was looking over the launches and their occupants as they came up to the dock either to take on or discharge passengers. All at once she pounced upon two boys, who had left a third boy on the dock and bade him good-bye.

“Will you give us a tow?” demanded Jane.

“Where do you want to go?” answered one of the lads, touching his cap.

“Which way are you going?”

“Down the lake.”

“That’s the way we are going. Say, which way is down the lake?” she asked Harriet in a whisper. The latter indicated the direction by a wave of the hand.

“We’ll give you a rope and tell you when you are to drop us,” added Jane.

The boys regarded the houseboat rather dubiously. They did not know whether or not their little launch would be able to tow it. Jane and Harriet explained to their companions that they were to have a tow. Then the two girls made fast the line, carrying the latter to the motor boat, after which they cast off from the pier.

# Page 16

The Meadow-Brook Girls uttered a cheer, as the “Red Rover” slowly drifted sideways clear of the dock. The dock was thronged with people, all of whom were now observing the houseboat. The latter’s upper deck held the girls, with the exception of Jane, who was at the helm to steer as soon as their craft had been turned about and headed in the right direction. The houseboat came about slowly; then, as the motor boat chugged away the line grew taut and the “Red Rover” began to move.

“You give me steering directions, Harriet,” cried Jane.

“I will wave to you. That will be better than shouting.”

“Whatever you say.”

“Look out!”

A heavy shock, following Harriet’s warning, caused Jane to shove the tiller hard over. The girls were piled in a heap on the upper deck and it seemed as though the front part of the houseboat must have been crushed.

Loud, threatening voices forward brought Crazy Jane to the upper deck instantly. Then she saw what had occurred. The “Red Rover” had taken a sudden dive to the left, colliding with an anchored sailboat.

“If you don’t know how to steer, keep off the lake!” raged the owner, shaking both fists at the red terror.

“If you don’t know how to keep out of the way, then you ought to get pushed off the lake,” flung back Jane McCarthy defiantly.

Harriet laid a hand on her arm.

“Don’t argue with them, Jane. It isn’t well-bred to do a thing like that.”

The launch was sputtering away trying to extricate the “Red Rover” from its position, which, by this time, was broadside against the sailboat. The “Red Rover” was rising and falling, each time rubbing off some red paint onto the white sides of the yacht. With each blotch of paint, so acquired, the anger of the owner of the yacht increased. It was fortunate for the Meadow-Brook Girls that they succeeded in getting away promptly. Jane was getting more and more angry, and Harriet had all she could do to restrain her companion.

But their troubles were not yet ended. The “Red Rover” plunged through the fleet, smash-into a sailboat here, nearly sinking a rowboat there, grazing the side of a steamer, rubbing off some more paint in the operation, and continuing her voyage of destruction by smashing in the gunwale of a launch that was unfortunate enough to be

anchored within range of the “Red Rover’s” tow line. Jane’s steering was anything but skilful. She steered too much, not giving the boat half a chance to respond to one turn of the tiller, before she turned it the other way. But Harriet Burrell offered no suggestions. At least, she remained silent until after the “Red Rover” had upset a canoe, spilling a young man and two girls into the lake. It was then that Harriet sprang down and casting off the rowboat pulled to their rescue. It was well that she did so, for neither of the girls could swim.

The motor boat that was towing the “Red Rover” had stopped instantly but the “Red Rover” was still drifting, managing to collide with two more small boats before finally coming to a stop. In the meantime, Harriet had hauled the dripping girls aboard her rowboat, and assisted the young man to right his canoe. The girls refused to get into it again.

# Page 17

“Bring the young ladies aboard and let us give them some dry clothes,” called Miss Elting.

“They wish to be put ashore here,” answered Harriet.

“We are very sorry that we have caused you all this trouble. Our boat doesn’t seem to steer well. I don’t know what the trouble is,” continued the guardian.

The two girls were very courteous about the matter. They assured Miss Elting and Harriet that they knew the accident had been unavoidable, and that it had been more their fault than the “Red Rover’s.” The young man, however, was inclined to grumble. Harriet put the wet girls ashore, where they were followed by their companion. The “Red Rover” then moved on, following a zig-zag course, narrowly missing running into other boats, until finally one of the lads in the motor boat put his hands to his lips and shouted:

“How much farther are you folks going?”

Harriet consulted with Miss Elting.

“If you will be good enough to tow us into that cove just ahead, we shall be very much obliged,” answered Harriet. The motor boat was instantly headed toward the cove. Harriet chuckled. “They are eager to be rid of us, and I don’t blame them at all.”

“They look like nice boys. I think I will invite them to come aboard,” decided the guardian. Harriet nodded her approval. When, finally, the houseboat had been dragged in, Harriet shouted to the boys to cast off. It was then that Miss Elting asked them to come aboard. The boy at the wheel said they would come some other time, that they were obliged to get back to their camp farther down the lake. They would accept no pay for their towing and chugged away, waving their hands, leaving a snowy wake behind them.

Harriet had already climbed down, and, with a long string, at the end of which had been tied the piece of broken poker from the old stove, was taking sounding to get the depth of water.

“Eight feet. That’s deep enough. Jane! Come help me put over the anchor, please,” she called.

The anchor went over with a splash, after which the rope was tied to a heavy hard wood cleat that the carpenter had secured to the forward lower deck. The “Red Rover” drifted to the end of its anchor rope, then swung to the gentle breeze that was blowing.

“Thank goodness we aren’t at the bottom of the lake,” exclaimed Crazy Jane.

“It’s the other folks who have reason to be thankful,” answered Harriet smilingly. “Now let’s get supper. We have a lot to do, and even more to discuss.”

“Had we not better work in closer to shore?” questioned the guardian, regarding the wooded cove critically.

“No, I think not. I have my reasons for wanting to be away from the shore,” answered Harriet.

It would have perhaps been better had they chosen some other location for their anchorage, for the night in the cove was to be a trying one for the Meadow-Brook Girls and another of those mysterious happenings that had so disturbed them was to overtake them at the very beginning of the cruise of the “Red Rover.”

# Page 18

## CHAPTER IV

### A SUDDEN AWAKENING

“There!  I knew we had forgotten something.”

“What have we forgotten, Jane?”

“An ice box, Miss Elting.  How are we to keep our food without an ice box?”

“But, my dear, what would be the good of an ice box without ice?”

“That’s so.  I hadn’t thought of that.  Where would we get our ice?”

“That ith eathy,” piped Tommy.  “Get your ithe out of the lake, of courthe.  I never did thee thuch thtupid people.  Did you thuppothe they got ithe on land?  That it grew in the fieldth?”

“No, darlin’.  We didn’t suppose anything of the sort.  But knowing so much, please tell us how we are to get ice from the lake in the good old summer time?  Answer me that question, will you now?”

“That ith tho,” reflected Tommy.  “Really, I hadn’t thought of it that way.  I gueth I wath too previouth.”

“Grace!” rebuked Miss Elting, “I am amazed at your using such expressions.  You really must be more careful of your language.”

“Yeth; I will.”

“Until the next time,” muttered Harriet, an amused smile hovering about the corners of her mouth.  Harriet was busily engaged in getting supper.  “Bring me a pail of water, please,” she called.  “We must put the water on to heat so that we can wash dishes directly after supper.  Dishes mustn’t go unwashed on board the ‘Red Rover,’ no matter whatever else may be neglected.”

Jane was setting the table.  The dishes that they had purchased were not expensive. Rather were they strong and serviceable, but even at this, the table looked very pretty. Miss Elting had gathered a bunch of wild flowers and these had been placed in a pitcher and stood in the centre of the table.  Of course the chairs were camp stools.  In this instance they were provided with backs, which made them quite comfortable.  Soon beefsteak was broiling over the fire, potatoes were frying in the pan and the tantalizing fragrance of coffee filled the air.

“Bring the drinking water, Tommy.  And look out that you don’t fall with it.  We can’t afford to buy dishes every day.  Will you be careful?”

“Yeth; I’ll be careful.”

“Hurry back.  Supper will be on the table by the time you get below again.”

Tommy, pitcher in hand, ran up the ladder to the deck above, Harriet and Miss Elting, in the meantime, putting the food on the table.

“Tom-m-m-y-y-y!” called Jane after some minutes had elapsed.  “The little girl has gone to sleep up there, I’ll wager.”

A scream, followed by a loud splash, startled the passengers on board the “Red Rover.” They rushed for the door.

“Tommy’s fallen overboard!” yelled Harriet.

Beaching the lower deck they saw one little white hand holding aloft a pitcher, and lower down, scarcely discernible, a bit of tow hair and a freckled nose.

# Page 19

“Thave me!” wailed Tommy.

“We ought to leave you,” flung back Margery. “What’s the matter? Can’t you swim?”

“Yeth. But the pitcher can’t.”

Knowing that Tommy could take care of herself in the water, no one went overboard to her rescue. Harriet flung out a coil of rope.

“Grab it!” she commanded. Tommy needed no second invitation to do so. She grasped the rope with one hand, still clinging to the pitcher with the other and holding it above the water. In this position Harriet drew her in. The pitcher was rescued before they helped the little girl to the deck.

“Ith thupper ready?” demanded Tommy, after getting aboard.

“Yes, it is and it’s getting cold,” answered Harriet.

“Then I gueth I’ll thit down and eat.”

“Not until you get off those wet clothes,” answered Jane. “How did you come to fall overboard?”

“I—I wath trying to walk on the railing,” explained the girl lamely. “I thtubbed my toe and fell in.”

“Oh, help!” moaned Margery. Tommy shot a threatening look at her.

“I can thwim. Buthter ith too fat to thwim.” With that parting shot, Tommy hastened inside the cabin and proceeded to change her wet clothing for dry garments. The other girls sat down to their supper, without waiting for her.

None of them, ever had eaten a meal under quite such novel conditions. Through the open door at one end they could see the lake, touched with the gorgeous red and gold of the setting sun. A pleasant breeze was drifting through the cabin from door and window, while the slight motion of the boat rather added to than took from the keen enjoyment of the hour.

“I have been wondering what we shall do in case the water gets really rough?” said Jane.

“We shall have to put something on the table to keep the dishes from sliding off,” replied Harriet.

“That would be like an ocean steamer.  On the tables there they have racks, strips running the full length of the table—usually brass—and others standing on edge at right angles to them.  This leaves squares about the size of a plate and the strips keep the dishes from sliding off the table.  They are called racks by the passengers.  Among sailors they are known as ‘fiddles,’” explained the guardian.

“Yeth, but the thoup will thpill over jutht the thame,” observed Tommy from the cabin.

“Your soup will not, for I’m going to eat it,” jeered Margery.

Tommy hurried forth, fastening her collar as she walked.  She was taking no chances of losing her supper.

“Speaking of food,” reflected Harriet.  “Why can’t we take our meats and other perishable things and put them in a pail which we can weight down until it sinks?  That will keep the food cool.”

“Yes.  But what will you do with it when the boat is moving?” asked the guardian.

“If I have to row the small boat, and pull the ‘Red Rover,’ it won’t move fast enough to harm the pail,” spoke up Jane.  “Do we have to drag this tub all over the lake?”

# Page 20

“I am afraid we shall have to do so when we wish to move.”

“Then it’s my own self for a tug,” declared Crazy Jane. “I shall go out to-morrow looking for a good stout steam tug. I wonder if there is such a thing in this neighborhood?”

“Maybe they have one at the farm houthe up there on the hill,” suggested Tommy. But not a smile did her observation draw from her companions.

“No, Jane. We aren’t going to let you spend any more money for us. We are out to rough it, and we are going to do so. We must get along by ourselves,” announced Miss Elting. “Of course it was different when those young men towed us out, and now and then we may accept a tow. The way to do will be to make short journeys, not to try to take long trips. Moving by easy stages we should be able to make the complete circuit of the lake before the vacation is ended.”

“How long is the lake?” questioned Harriet.

“About thirty miles in a straight line, I believe.”

“Thirty miles,” groaned Crazy Jane.

“Oh, help!” moaned Margery.

“Thave uth!” lisped Grace.

“I thought you girls wanted recreation and exercise,” laughed the guardian.

“Why, of course we do, Miss Elting,” declared Harriet.

“Of course,” agreed Jane, nodding. “But dragging a house all around a thirty-mile lake is neither exercise nor recreation. It’s hard labor. If you don’t think so just get out and drag us around this cove once—*Once!*”

“I have a plan,” announced Harriet.

“It’s a good one, if Harriet Burrell thought it out,” returned Miss Elting smilingly. “What is your plan, Harriet?”

“Some of you may not like the idea, but it is an excellent one, I am sure. This is my idea. When we decide to cross the lake, if we do, I would suggest waiting until some day when the wind is blowing directly across. Then we can tow the ‘Red Rover’ out with the rowboat until the wind catches us. The rower should then get aboard the houseboat, after which the wind will carry us all the way across the lake. How do you like it?”

“Oh, thave me!” piped Tommy.

“Yes.  You need some one to save you about once every five minutes I’m thinking, Tommy Thompson.  Now, if Crazy Jane had thought out such a plan, no one would have been surprised.  But for Harriet Burrell to do so—oh, my!” exclaimed Jane.

“I do not think the plan feasible,” declared Miss Elting.  “I am not saying that it would not work, but I don’t believe I care to trust myself to drift across the lake in a gale.  No, thank you.  We will keep to the shore.  Remember, we are on the water, Harriet.”

“Yes.  And it isn’t so long ago since we were in it,” nodded Jane.  “Tommy was the last to be in it.  Please pass the potatoes.  This life at sea does sharpen one’s appetite.  It wouldn’t do for me to go to sea really.  I’d get so hungry between meals that I’d gnaw the masts off short.”

# Page 21

“I really can’t eat another mouthful!” exclaimed Tommy. “I gueth I’ll go up on deck and walk thome.”

“And I guess you will stay right here and wash the dishes with me,” commanded Margery Brown. “Do you think I am going to wash them alone, while you promenade on deck? Not I!”

“I had forgotten about the dithheth. But I’ve got a plan about that. You jutht put the dithheth in a bag and thouthe them up and down in the lake. Then you put them on deck till they dry off. Now, ithn’t that a plan? That ith a better plan than Harriet thaid jutht now.”

“I feel sorry for your house if you ever own one,” laughed Harriet, beginning to clear off the table.

“Yeth tho do I. But I feel more thorry for the folkth who have to live with me.”

“I propose that we all take a hand in doing the work,” suggested Harriet. “The evening is so fine that we should enjoy it together. I’ll clear off the table.”

“And I’ll brush it,” offered Jane. “Then I’ll sweep the floor. Say, this is fine. All one has to do with the rubbish is just to drop it overboard. The fishes will come and clean it up. It’s easy to keep house on a houseboat. We’re going to have a fine time this summer. I feel it in my bones.”

The supper work was cleared away quickly. Jane filled the hanging lamps, while Harriet trimmed and filled the lantern that was to be put out as a night light so that other craft should not run into them during the night.

“All hands on deck!” commanded Harriet, after the last of the work had been finished.

“That reminds me. We must elect our officers,” said Miss Elting, after the girls had climbed to the pleasant upper deck. “Whom shall we have for our captain?”

“I gueth Harriet will make a good captain,” suggested Tommy.

The girls agreed to this.

“I suggest then, that Jane McCarthy be chief officer—that is, the next in line to the captain—with Margery as purser, Hazel as third officer, and Tommy, what would you like to be?” asked Miss Elting.

“I gueth I’ll be the pathenger,” decided little Tommy wisely.

There was a chorus of protests at this.

“You and I will be the fourth and fifth officers respectively,” announced the guardian.

“What doeth the fourth offither do?”

“Not much of anything.”

Tommy nodded approvingly.

“Then I am that,” she announced. “Harriet ith a good captain. Harriet knowth thomething about everything.”

Harriet shook her head. She protested that she knew nothing at all about any boat larger than a rowboat. To be the captain of a scow, was something of a responsibility. She knew that she would have to be captain in fact as well as in name, and that the navigation and protection of the craft would be on the shoulders of Jane McCarthy and herself.

“There is one thing I do not know, Tommy,” answered Harriet. “I don’t know how this captain is ever going to get along with the crew she has. I fear she will have to ship a new crew. Perhaps you’ll be glad of that, eh, dears?”

# Page 22

“Tommy would be willing if, as she already has said, she could be the whole passenger list,” chuckled Miss Elting.

The girls joked and talked until the night had fallen. A few faint rays of light filtered through the cabin windows and the dim light from the anchor lantern that hung at the stern of the boat was their only illumination.

Harriet got up and walked to the bow of the boat, now pointed outward. She sniffed the air.

“Well, what is it, Captain?” inquired Jane.

“Wind,” answered Harriet. “The wind is freshening, and it’s blowing straight into the little cove here. The ‘Red Rover’ will be straining at its leashes like an angry dog before morning, unless the wind veers, which I hardly think will be the case.”

“Hooray for Captain Burrell!” cried Crazy Jane.

The sky was overcast and the wind, as Harriet had said, was freshening rapidly. She went to the lower deck to test the anchor rope. The anchor was holding firmly. The wind was now blowing so strongly that the girls found little comfort in sitting on the upper deck. All hands went below. With the front cabin door closed the cabin was a comfortable and cosy place in which to sit. But the cabin floor was acquiring an unpleasant habit of rising and falling. Tommy’s face, ordinarily pale, had grown ghastly, but she pluckily kept her discomfort to herself. As a matter of fact the little girl was suffering from a mild attack of seasickness.

“I—I gueth I’ll go to bed,” she stammered. “Will thomebody pleathe take off my thhoeth? If I bend down I’ll thurely fall over on my nothe.”

There was a shout at this. Both Harriet and Jane knelt on the floor to remove the shoes that Tommy feared to unbutton. They assisted her into her cot, after which they arranged their own, each girl preparing for bed behind a curtain that had been strung across the cabin, thus making part of the kitchen a dressing room. In the daytime the curtain was drawn back.

Harriet was the last to retire. She sat up for an hour after the others had retired, rather anxiously watching the weather and the anchor rope, together with the behavior of the “Red Rover.” The latter was riding the swells finely and with much less motion than might have been looked for in the fairly heavy sea that was running into the cove. At last, well satisfied that the boat would ride out the moderate blow, Harriet entered the cabin and extinguishing the lamp prepared for bed, leaving only the solitary anchor light outside to dispel the gloom.

As the night went on, the seas grew with it. Great swells were sweeping into the cove, and the “Red Rover” was at times rolling heavily. Once in the night Harriet got up and staggered out through the rear door, whence she made her way to the upper deck. From there, with the spray dashing over her, she gazed off over the water. The moon had come up, and she could see fairly well; some light being furnished by it, though heavy clouds intervened. White-capped waves dashed against the boat. It was unusually rough for a lake of its size. She inhaled deeply the strong, bracing air, until, discovering that she was getting wet from the spray, the girl hurried below and crawled into her cot, shivering a little. Then she fell into a deep sleep, soothed by the rocking of the boat.

# Page 23

Tommy was moaning in her sleep. The others appeared to be sleeping soundly. It was late in the night when Harriet was awakened by a terrific crash. It seemed to her as though something had collided with the “Red Rover.” Then came a second crash, much louder than the first. The second was followed by a sound of breaking woodwork. A draught of cold air smote her in the face, then a huge volume of water swept into the cabin overwhelming and half drowning the occupants.

Cots were overturned, the oil stove went over with a crash, and the table was hurled the length of the cabin, landing bottom side up at the rear end of the cabin.

A chorus of terrified, choking screams followed the second crash, that, to their overwrought imaginations, seemed to have lasted for hours.

“Thave me! We’re thinking!” wailed Tommy Thompson.

“Harriet! What has happened?” cried Miss Elting.

“I—I don’t know.”

The “Red Rover” lurched heavily to one side. The rush of water that accompanied the lurch tumbled the Meadow-Brook Girls to the lower side of the cabin. A volume of water rushed over them, and the furnishings of the cabin were piled on top of them; in some instances a crushing weight pinioned them to the floor.

The houseboat had sustained a severe blow, though as yet they could not determine the nature of it. To make the situation more terrifying the cabin was in utter darkness. For a moment the voices of the Meadow-Brook Girls were stilled; then a chorus of screams, more terrified than before, rose from the lips of the frightened girls.

## CHAPTER V

*Land ho*!

“Please—please keep quiet,” cried Harriet, making herself heard above the tumult. “Don’t be frightened! We aren’t sinking, and we are not going to. Answer loudly when I call your names, so that I may know each one of you is here.”

“Now,” she continued after the frightened girls had answered to their names. “We’ll try to find out what happened. You see that the boat has stopped pitching, and the side roll isn’t as pronounced as it was.”

“What’th the anthwer?” piped Tommy.

“I don’t know—yet,” Harriet confessed. “But I’m going to know.”

“The water is still coming in, and getting deeper,” shivered Margery.

“Get out through the rear door,” Harriet commanded. “One at a time.”

“Which door is the rear one?” queried Crazy Jane. “All doors look alike to me.”

“Move away from the direction that the water is coming from,” Harriet continued.

Assisted by Jane McCarthy the girls obeyed Harriet’s directions. Tommy and Margery first, then Miss Elting and Hazel. In the cockpit the water was not as deep, but Jane drove them all to the upper deck.

“The captain must go last, you know,” laughed Harriet, as she climbed up to join them.

# Page 24

By this time the girls were shivering with cold. The kimonos of washable crepe in which they had elected to sleep during the cruise afforded them little warmth.

“Get close together and keep each other warm,” called Miss Elting.

“What! Sit down and shiver here all night long?” shouted Harriet. “No, indeed. We must do something or we shall lose our boat.”

“Wha—at happened?” shivered Margery.

“The waves smashed the front door in. That’s all I know about it now.”

“Oh, look!” screamed Hazel. “It’s land!”

“Land, ho!” cried Crazy Jane.

“Yes, I know,” replied Harriet calmly. “We are on shore. We have been blown partly ashore. I saw that a moment after we came out here. There is no danger to us, but there is to the boat.”

“Did the anchor give way?” questioned the guardian, a sigh of relief escaping her upon learning that the immediate danger was over.

“I don’t know. Jane! I want you. We must go to the front of the boat and see what can be done to stop the water from coming in. Are you ready?”

“All ready,” called Jane. “Where away?”

“Below there.”

“I want to go, too. I want to go down there and get thome dry clotheth,” wailed Tommy.

“You’ll look a long time on this boat before you’ll find anything dry,” laughed Crazy Jane. “Get up and run. Sprint back and forth along this slippery deck, and, if you don’t fall down and break your precious necks, you’ll start your circulation and get warm. Run for it!”

“Jane’s advice is excellent, girls. Join hands and run back and forth, while Jane and Harriet see what can be done for us,” answered Miss Elting.

Jane and Harriet climbed down the aft ladder and made their way into the cabin. Everything was afloat there. It was with difficulty that they made their way through and out to the forward deck over which the waves were still dashing. Both girls were knocked flat almost the instant they stepped out into the rear cockpit. They were picked up an instant afterwards, only to be hurled against the deck house by a second wave.

Neither girl screamed; for a moment or two they were too nearly drowned to speak. The rear end of the boat being driven up on the shore, the forward end lay several inches lower. The lower deck in that part of the boat was entirely under water.

“What are we going to do about it?” gasped Jane finally.

Harriet was groping about on the deck, her head under water a good part of the time.

“I’ve found it,” she cried.

“Found what?” demanded Miss McCarthy.

“The cleats.”

“Well, what are they?”

“Maybe our last hope. Climb up to the top. I’ll tell you my plan.”

Jane lost no time in getting up where the rest of the party were dancing about the deck, trying their best to get warm, and succeeding but poorly.

# Page 25

“Harriet, don’t you think we had better go ashore?” asked Miss Elting.

“You will be little better off there. But wait. Yes, the very thing. I was going to use that awning for something else. It is the only dry thing on the boat. Come, Jane; we’ll do the best we can under the circumstances.”

Together the two girls got down the awning, which had once served them as a tent. Assisted by Miss Elting they lugged it ashore and placing it back far enough to be out of reach of the water, smoothed it out on the ground. This would at least furnish them with a place to sleep. By this time Tommy, Hazel and Margery had made their way ashore.

“How I wish we had some matches now! I’d build a fire. Jane, do you think that box of matches could have kept dry through all this?” questioned Harriet.

“It wouldn’t do you any good if it had. How are you going to find it if it is there?”

“That’s so. Now, I think we had better take all the things out of the cabin. Most of the stuff may be gone by morning. Miss Elting, will you stay with the girls?” asked Harriet. “Then they won’t feel afraid. Besides we shall only be in each other’s way if more than two of us try to work in that cabin in the dark. The first thing to be done is to try to stop the water from beating in through that wrecked doorway. I have an idea. Jane, see if you can find some rope. There should be some on the upper deck.”

Jane McCarthy reported that there was no rope there. Harriet decided to go on without it, believing that she knew a way to check the flood. Calling Jane to assist her, the two girls carried the dining table out to the upper deck. This they left there for the moment.

“Now hand out the cots,” directed Harriet.

As this was being done, Harriet worked standing in water most of the time. She placed the cots on edge across the doorway until three of them had been set in place. Directing Jane to try to hold them in place, Harriet grasped the table. This she braced against the cots. The table held them in place.

“Hurrah! We’ve done it. See if you can find some blankets in there. One will do.”

After some searching about Jane announced that she had found a heavy blanket. Acting under Harriet’s directions Jane carried the blanket to the upper deck and lowered it over the barricade of cots, weighting it with heavy stones from the beach so that the end would remain on the upper deck.

Harriet was unable to get either to the upper deck or into the boat, without danger of pulling down her barricade, so she promptly jumped into the lake and waded ashore. She fell down several times before reaching dry land, knocked over by waves that overtook her and laid her low. She sat down on the beach gasping.

“Come over here and rest a moment, Harriet,” urged the guardian.

“I am all right, thank you.  I haven’t time to think about resting.  I am going to try to get our belongings out of the boat.  We aren’t so badly off as we might be.”

# Page 26

“If I had thome dry clotheth on I gueth I’d be all right,” observed a lisping voice from the darkness. “My kimono is thoaking wet.”

“Now, Jane, I’m ready,” finally announced Harriet. “Let’s get that stove out first of all. I fear it is ruined.”

“Set the girls at it with dry leaves. They can wipe it dry and the exercise will do them good,” suggested Jane McCarthy.

“Fine! Come!”

The stove was carried out to the beach and stood up. Jane and Harriet gathered leaves from weeds and bushes, together with such dry grass as they were able to find in the darkness, heaping their plunder on the canvas and directing the girls to polish the stove, hoping thereby to keep it from rusting very badly. The occupation did Tommy, Hazel and Margery good. They almost forgot their troubles for the time being.

The bedding and the clothing were next carried out and spread on the ground to dry. This, too, gave the girls on shore something to do. They wrung the water out of the bedding and clothing as thoroughly as possible. The clothing was then hung on nearby bushes.

“I do not believe your clothing will be dry enough to wear until after the sun shines on it,” decided Miss Elting.

The girls groaned dismally. They did not relish the idea of going about in kimonos for the better part of the next forenoon. Harriet and Jane paid little attention to their own discomfort, however, for there were still many things to be done. The cabin had held quite a stock of supplies. Cans of provisions lay all about the floor. The two girls were unable to gather up their supplies in the darkness. The water would not damage the canned goods, so they decided to let these remain where they were for the time being.

“I’ll tell you what!” said Harriet, after pondering over the best course to follow. “Let’s take pails and go to bailing. Of course some water will still leak in around the bottom cot, but we can bail out down to that point. The water must come out. We might as well bail now as after daylight. We won’t get any wetter, and we don’t mind lame backs, do we?”

“We don’t, if you say not,” agreed Jane. “What the captain of the ’Red Rover’ orders, is to be done. Where are the pails?”

“I think I remember having carried one outside.”

“Here’s the other,” called Crazy Jane, who, at that moment, fell over the missing pail and went sprawling in the water. She rose to her feet, dripping, but in great good humor.

The two plucky girls set to work bailing. They did not wish to call in their companions to help them, as they believed they could accomplish more by themselves. Bailing out the boat was back-breaking work, and there was so much water in the hold of the “Red Rover,” that at first their bailing seemed to have no effect whatever. Now and then they would go ashore and throw themselves down for a brief rest. Miss Elting begged them to do no more, but both Jane and Harriet were deaf to her entreaties. They alternately bailed and rested until early in the morning, when utterly exhausted from the strain of the past few hours’ work they were glad to throw themselves down on the canvas beside their friends for a little rest.

# Page 27

By this time the dawn had begun to break and soon after the sun shone brightly. The wind had died down and the lake lay smooth and glassy in the morning sunlight.

“I’m going to try to get into that big chest that holds our clothes,” announced Harriet. “If it really is water tight, then we shall not have to worry long about dry garments.”

“I’ll go with you,” said Miss Elting.

The two women made their way to the cabin of the houseboat, where they were soon joined by Jane. By their united efforts the barricade was removed from the door, and as the water had almost subsided Harriet had little difficulty in getting at the chest.

“Hurrah!” she exclaimed as she turned the key which had been allowed to stand in the lock, and lifted the lid. “Everything is all right. These things are scarcely damp! Jane will you call the girls? We ought to dress as quickly as possible.”

Fifteen minutes later the Meadow-Brook Girls and Miss Elting were enjoying the luxury of clean, dry clothing. Their hasty toilets were scarcely completed, however, when they heard the steady chug! chug of an approaching motor boat. Harriet climbed to the upper deck and shading her hands with her eyes looked out over the waters. Suddenly she exclaimed: “Girls, girls! Look at that boat!”

## CHAPTER VI

### CAPTAIN GEORGE MAKES A FIND

“Well, well, if it isn’t the Meadow-Brook Girls.”

“It’s Captain George Baker,” cried Harriet, really overjoyed to meet their old friend whom, last season, they had beaten in a cross country contest of endurance and cleverness.

The girls left the boat and ran down to the shore to welcome the newcomers. The boys were calling their welcome before they had fairly landed. With Captain Baker were his friends Dill Dodd and Sam Crocker, and two other lads, whom Captain Baker introduced as Larry Goheen and Billy Gordon.

“Where are the rest of the tramps?” asked Miss Elting laughingly, hurrying down to the beach to greet the boys.

“In camp about two miles below here.”

“I believe we have met Mr. Gordon and Mr. Goheen before,” said the guardian. “They were good enough to give us a tow.”

“Yes,” answered George. “They told us about that. Somehow, I half suspected it to be you folks. After the storm of last night I wondered how the houseboat with its crew of girls had fared, so we set out to look for you this morning. We found you. Well, you are in a mess, aren’t you?”

“Harriet and Jane were bailing water out of the boat nearly all night, Captain Baker,” Miss Elting informed him.

“You certainly must have had a bad night,” returned George Baker sympathetically.

The guardian related briefly the experience of the night.

“Once more I take off my hat to you,” said Captain Baker admiringly. “And I take off my coat too. Fellows, all off with your coats! There’s work to be done here. How is your boat?”

# Page 28

At this juncture Billy Gordon, who had been looking about the deck of the houseboat, stepped ashore.

“I don’t think the hull is damaged at all. One door is smashed in and things are pretty well soaked up. If you will permit it, we fellows will clean up. There’s a ton or more of sand and gravel in the after cockpit. Have you a shovel?”

The girls shook their heads.

“We have a dutht pan,” Tommy answered.

“We will use that and a pail, if you have one.”

The lads started for the boat, having discarded their coats.

“Oh, by the way, have you any matches?” asked Harriet. “We need some coffee this morning, but we have nothing with which to build a fire.”

“Sam, you make a fire.”

“The oil stove may work,” suggested Miss Elting. They tried it, but there was still too much water in the tanks, so Sam built a fire on shore, and shortly after Harriet and Jane were busily engaged in getting breakfast, while the boys worked steadily in the houseboat. Finding nails, saw and hammer, they patched up the broken door and hung it back in place. Then they removed all the supplies that had been left aboard and began cleaning up. They bailed the remaining water out, also shoveling out the gravel and the sand, after which they scrubbed the floor and the walls to a height of about three feet from the floor, where the water had left a dark line on the white woodwork.

An hour after the visiting boys had begun their work the cabin was ready for occupancy again, but the quilts, sheets and blankets were still wet. A larger fire was built. The boys rigged a clothes line about the campfire and assisted the girls to hang up the wet bedding. By this time the lads were hungry. They readily accepted the invitation of the Meadow-Brook Girls to sit down with them to breakfast. The table and chairs had been brought ashore, and there in the cove, with the trees and bushes for a background, the Meadow-Brook Girls and the Tramp Club sat down to breakfast. There was plenty of good cheer, though the faces of the girls were pale, and Harriet and Jane looked particularly tired.

“I’ll tell you what you must do,” declared Captain George during breakfast. “When you wish to shift your position, let us know, and we’ll tow you about. Did your rope break?”

Harriet confessed that she had not looked. The captain said he would look into the matter after breakfast. The first thing to be done, after getting the equipment back on board, would be to tow the “Red Rover” off the shore. To do this they arranged to pass

a rope to the launch, the launch to pull ahead while some of the boys pushed on the houseboat.

In the meantime, while waiting for the equipment to dry out, George and his friend, Billy Gordon, who owned the launch, took Harriet and Jane to town, where Jane wished to go to renew some of their supplies, as well as to purchase a couple of flatirons with which to press their wet clothing that had hung in the cabin when the deluge came.

# Page 29

During the trip George had drawn out the story of their previous disaster when they had drifted ashore, though Harriet refrained from mentioning the fact that their anchor rope had been cut on that occasion. From George's questions it was plain that he suspected something was wrong, though Harriet failed to gratify his suspicions by direct answers to direct questions.

George explained, during the trip to the town, that the Tramp Club had been invited by Billy Gordon, who owned the launch, to spend a few weeks with him on the lake. He was to furnish the launch for their cruises, while the boys supplied the camp equipment. Billy knew the lake and they knew how to camp, and now that they had renewed acquaintance with their old rivals, the Meadow-Brook Girls, the Tramp Club were glad they had accepted Gordon's invitation.

The trip to town was quickly made, and the two girls completed their purchases with little loss of time, and were back on board the launch within an hour from the time they had started.

"Now," said George, after they had started on their return voyage, "is there any place you wish to go?"

"I want as soon as possible to get back to the boat and discuss with the girls what is to be done," answered Harriet.

"Well, can we help you? Is there anywhere you wish us to tow your houseboat?"

"Let me see," pondered Captain Burrell, "I think I should like to get out of that cove. We haven't made any plans."

"Then suppose we tow you over in front of our camp? We'll be handy, then, in case you need us again."

Harriet shook her head.

"I don't think that would be best. You see, we wish to go it alone. We don't wish to have to depend upon any one."

"You don't have to do so. You are able to take care of yourselves. I'd back the Meadow-Brook Girls against the world," declared George, confidently, which aroused a laugh from the other occupants of the boat. "We helped you this morning, did we not?"

"Indeed, you did."

"But they would have gotten out of the scrape without us," nodded Billy.

“Surely we would,” chuckled Crazy Jane. “We always do get out of our scrapes, somehow. But we thank you just the same.”

“Indeed, we do,” agreed Harriet earnestly. “I was about to say, when you asked me if there were any place we wished to go, that we do wish to go over to the other side of the lake some day soon, and—”

“Any time,” interrupted Billy. “I’ll take you over to-day, if you say the word.”

Harriet shook her head.

“Boys, we’ve got business on hand to-day,” said Jane briskly. “There is plenty to be done. It will take us two days to get well settled again. You will look us up occasionally, I am sure. We can then let you know where and when we wish to go, can’t we?”

“Surely you can,” agreed George enthusiastically. “But I’m sorry you won’t come to anchor near our camp.”

# Page 30

Harriet told him they should be moving frequently; that they hoped to be able to make a complete circuit of the lake before they had finished their vacation. George said that the boys, too, were going to move their camp now and then. He told the girls the Tramp Club had planned to spend a week on one of the islands in the lake, and that they would so arrange the time as to do so when the Meadow-Brook party was in that vicinity.

By the time they had reached the cove where the “Red Rover” lay the boys who had remained behind had gotten nearly all the belongings aboard. Miss Elting and the girls were helping them, Tommy taking it upon herself to “boss” the whole job.

As soon as the motor boat party had landed, Harriet said she must look for the anchor rope, which had not been seen that morning.

“I’ll do that,” offered Larry Goheen. “You ought to make it secure, so that the boat can’t get away,” he added.

“I thought I secured it last night. I made a stout loop and slipped it over the cleat on the deck. I don’t see how the boat could have gotten away unless the rope broke, which it undoubtedly did.”

George said he would see about that. The rowboat had drifted ashore unharmed. Captain George launched the boat and rowed out, paddling about until finally they saw him stop and raise the end of a rope from the water.

“Bring the launch out here, Bill,” he called. “Yes, I’ve found it, and I’ve found something else too. There’s been some crooked work here!”

“What do you mean?” called Harriet.

“I’ll tell you when I come in. I’ve made a find, all right!”

The captain had indeed made a find—one that more than confirmed the suspicions he had formed earlier in the morning.

## CHAPTER VII

### A MYSTERIOUS NIGHT JOURNEY

Billy Gordon got aboard the launch and paddled it out to where Captain Baker sat examining the rope, the end of which he had picked up from the water.

“What have you found? More mystery?” shouted Crazy Jane.

“Yes. I’ll tell you when I get ashore. What kind of an anchor have you down here?”

“Just an anchor, that’s all,” answered Harriet. “Why?”

“Nothing. I was just wondering.”

George climbed over into the launch, tying the rowboat behind it. Then the two lads hauled the anchor aboard the power boat. After examining the anchor, they paddled the launch ashore, towing the smaller boat behind them.

“We have the old anchor. It’s a good one too,” announced Billy, stepping ashore. “I take back all I said. George has some questions to ask you.”

“Yes,” nodded young Baker. “Was the anchor rope in good condition when you put out the anchor, Miss Burrell?”

“So far as I know. Did it break?”

“It broke, all right. Will you show me where you made it fast last night?”

# Page 31

Harriet led the way to the forward deck of the “Red Rover,” pointing to a hard wood cleat.

“I made a loop in the rope and slipped it over the cleat, drawing it tight. I do not see how it would be possible for the loop to slip off, nor, in fact, for the rope to break.”

“Hm-m-m-m!” pondered George, feeling the cleat with critical fingers. “Smooth. No chance for it to have worn through. There is something to be explained in this affair, Miss Burrell.”

Harriet gazed searchingly at him, but said nothing.

“I wish you would have a look at the rope. It’s there on the shore. Then, after you have examined it, tell me what you think about the matter, but tell me just whatever you wish to. I’m not going to question you about something you don’t wish me to know.”

“What do you mean, Captain?”

“Have you any enemies up here?”

“I do not know of any. I have a rival here, though.”

“Eh? Who?”

“You,” answered Harriet, with a smile.

“Oh!” Captain Baker flushed, then he laughed heartily. “That was last summer. You beat us fairly. Of course we wanted to win the race home, and so did you, but you won it fairly and squarely, and that’s all there was about it. We got you into trouble by stealing the melons and giving them to you, but honestly, we didn’t mean to have the farmer hold you responsible.”

“We owe you something for telling George’s fortune,” laughed Sam.

“Then pay your debts,” retorted Harriet.

“Don’t you do anything of the sort, boys,” warned Jane. “You know what will happen to you, if you do.”

“What will happen?” demanded Baker, turning to Crazy Jane.

“Oh, that would be telling. We should be even with you before we had finished, you know. Girls are always more resourceful than boys.”

“I don’t agree with you,” retorted George Baker.

“Do you wish us to prove it to you?” asked Harriet laughingly.

“I’ll give you a chance to fail,” returned George. “As long as we’re going to spend our vacations on this lake we’ll give you girls a chance to prove your superiority as strategists. I’ll wager you a No. 2 Brownie Camera, to be the joint property of whichever side wins it, that the Tramp Club can completely outwit the Meadow-Brook Girls three times inside of three weeks. What do you say?”

“Shall we accept the challenge, Miss Elting?” asked Harriet. “What do you say, girls?”

“Done!” chorused the girls and their guardian.

“Very well,” smiled Harriet. “The contest begins now, and of course all unfair tricks are to be barred out by both sides.”

“Of course,” agreed George. “But come along and have a look at the rope.”

Harriet stepped briskly ashore, followed by Jane and the two boys. She went directly to where the rope and the anchor lay. Picking up the former she ran it through her hands until she came to the loop that had been drawn about the cleat on the deck when the boat had been anchored on the previous afternoon. The Meadow-Brook Girl held the loop on the palm of her left hand, gazing at the rope reflectively. She frowned slightly as she looked at it.

# Page 32

“Well, what do you find?” questioned the captain briskly.

Harriet glanced up at him quickly.

“I understand,” she said.

“What is it, Harriet, dear?” asked Miss Elting.

“Oh, what a mess!” muttered Jane, who had been looking over Harriet’s shoulder. “Here’s more trouble for the Meadow-Brook Girls, and trouble for somebody besides them, too.”

“You can see for yourself,” replied Harriet, handing the end of the rope to the guardian.

“The loop has been cut!” exclaimed Miss Elting.

Harriet nodded.

“It has, indeed,” agreed Jane.

Miss Elting and Harriet Burrell exchanged significant glances. George Baker observed the looks. He nodded to Billy. Larry Goheen winked wisely.

“There is something behind this business then, Miss Elting?” asked the captain.

“I don’t mind admitting that there is, Mr. Baker,” answered the guardian. “What do you say, girls, shall we tell the boys?” she inquired, turning to her wards.

“If you think best,” agreed Harriet.

“Surely. Tell them. Maybe they’ll be able to catch the rascal,” urged Jane McCarthy.

“This is not the first time we have been troubled by some person who wishes to annoy us,” Miss Elting informed the Tramp Club. “Before we began to live on the boat, and while we were getting it ready for occupancy, some person did the same thing. That is, he cut the rope and cast the boat adrift. It was anchored at Johnson’s dock. Perhaps you do not know where that is.”

“I know,” spoke up Billy. “It’s about two miles above here. That’s where we landed to-day, George.”

Captain Baker nodded.

“How do you know they cast the ‘Red Rover’ adrift?” he asked.

“The rope had been cut,” replied Harriet Burrell. “It was just as Miss Elting has told you. The anchor rope had been cut cleanly with a sharp knife. This time the loop, instead of the rope, has been cut.”

“I thought you said you had no enemies,” observed Sam Crocker.

“Nor have we, as far as we know,” answered the guardian.

“I don’t know what you would call the person who did this, then. This is all the more reason why you should anchor near our camp.”

“Oh, no. We are perfectly able to take care of ourselves,” smiled Miss Elting. “Experiences such as these aid in making us self-reliant.”

“Have you a revolver on board?” questioned Gordon.

“Miss Elting has a revolver,” answered Jane.

“We hope never to be forced to use it, however. The trouble is that our friend doesn’t show himself. But just wait. One of these fine nights we’ll catch him, then he’ll take a bath in the lake.”

“You have no idea who he is?”

“I can’t say that we have,” replied the guardian slowly.

“Do you know Mr. Dickinson?” asked Harriet, looking sharply at Gordon.

# Page 33

“Dee?  Yes.”

“What sort of person is he?”

“Oh, Dee’s all right.  He doesn’t amount to a whole lot, but he is a good fellow.  Why?” He shot a suspicious glance at Harriet.

“Nothing, except that he was looking after the boat for Miss Elting’s brother before we came down here.”

George put an end to the conversation by announcing that it was time they got the “Red Rover” out.  The motor boat was paddled out into deeper water, then the houseboat was fastened to the motor boat and the power started, while all the boys save two pulled and hauled on the heavy houseboat.  It floated slowly out into deeper water, while the girls cheered the efforts of the Tramp Club.

The anchor, in the meantime, had been put on board and a new loop made at the end of the rope.  The girls now climbed into the rowboat and were rowed out to the “Red Rover,” after which the motor boat began towing the “Red Rover” into the lake, with Captain George Baker at the helm.  He had remained aboard to give further assistance, if needed.

“This is the worst old tub to steer that ever I took hold of,” he declared.

“We found it so,” agreed Harriet.  “You will get the knack of it soon.  When you do, you will find steering it rather easy.”

They reached a cove farther up the lake, shortly after noon.  Here the Meadow-Brook Girls decided to anchor, as there was a farmhouse on a bluff a little way inland, where they thought they would be able to get milk, eggs and vegetables.  George decided that he would call in the motor boat and return to camp, promising to come over and see them later to get their orders for the following day.

Miss Elting and her girls expressed their appreciation of the kindness of Captain Baker and his friends.

“We haven’t done anything worth while yet,” retorted Captain Baker.  “Perhaps we may give you a real opportunity to thank us, later on.  On the other hand, you may not wish to thank us,” he added, with a mischievous twinkle in his eyes.

“Now, I wonder what the boy meant by that?” thought Crazy Jane, regarding George shrewdly through half-closed eyes.

Captain Baker went over the side, boarding the motor boat after he had cast anchor for the girls and made everything snug.  Then, with many good-byes on both sides, the

power boat chugged away toward the Tramp Club camp, the Meadow-Brook Girls turning to the duties of the day.

The first task was to get their clothing in condition.  There was now no one to interfere with them.  Flatirons were put on the oil stove, which was once more in working order, and the work of pressing out their wrinkled clothing was begun.  Harriet and Jane handled the irons.  Miss Elting took down the curtains, which also were sadly in need of ironing, while Margery and Hazel prepared the noon meal.  Tommy perched herself on the rail of the upper deck, and caroled forth a lisping ditty.

# Page 34

After dinner, Harriet and Jane rowed ashore and purchased supplies from the farmhouse that they had observed on their way to the present anchorage. The day passed all too quickly. Twilight was upon them almost before they realized it. Supper was late that night, and ere they had finished the dishes the motor boat drew up to them and the Tramp Club swarmed over the side of the houseboat with merry greetings.

“It is almost like being boarded by pirates,” laughed Harriet. “In this case the pirates are welcome.”

The boys had brought with them a bag of early apples, which Captain Baker gravely assured them had been duly bought and paid for. The boys also had brought their harmonicas, and later in the evening there was a harmonica concert on the upper deck of the “Red Rover.” Later on the girls served their guests with cake and coffee. Larry Goheen, who, like Jane McCarthy, was gifted with true Irish wit, was the life of the party. He and Crazy Jane bandied words and said witty things to each other to the delight of the rest of the company.

The boys took their leave at ten o’clock. First, they left a lantern for the houseboat, which George Baker lighted and set in place at the stern. The anchor light of the houseboat had been lost in the storm of the previous night, or else it had been stolen, which latter they doubted. The girls were quite ready to retire, and lost no time in turning in after the departure of their guests. Then quiet settled down upon the “Red Rover.” A gentle swell on the water lulled the girls into deep, peaceful slumber, until after sunrise next morning.

Tommy, for a wonder, was the first to get out of bed in the morning. Half-asleep she staggered, blinking, to the after deck, and then leaned over to wash the last of the sleep out of her eyes. There followed a sudden, sharp splash, and a moment later the blonde head of Tommy Thompson appeared from out of the lake. Tommy had fallen in again. This time she did not scream. She climbed aboard the boat, grumbling to herself, and proceeded to dress without further delay.

“For goodness’ sake, Tommy, what is the matter?” demanded Harriet, sitting up in bed, rubbing her blinking eyes. “Did you fall into the lake again?”

“I gueth I had a bath thith morning,” answered Tommy.

“An impromptu plunge, I should call it,” answered Harriet smiling. Then she glanced sharply out through the rear door of the cabin. Her eyes narrowed as she gazed. She rose from her cot and walked to the door, looking over the water towards the opposite shore, her forehead wrinkling into a perplexed frown. “Girls! Get up! Come out and view the scenery. I promise you it is well worth seeing this morning. Oh, Miss Elting, do you know where you are?”

“Why—why, what does it mean?” gasped the girls who had hurriedly tumbled out following Harriet’s summons.

The guardian could scarcely believe her eyes.  They were not in the cove where the boat had been anchored the day before.  The scenery on the shore near them was strange and new.

# Page 35

“What does it mean, Harriet?” demanded the guardian.

“I think a fairy must have touched the world with her wand and changed it into something else during the night,” replied Harriet. “But don’t you know where you are, Miss Elting?”

“I do not. Do you?”

“I think I do.”

“I know,” piped Tommy. “We are on the water. I wath in it earlier thith morning.”

No one gave any heed to Tommy’s pleasantry. They were too amazed and perplexed to give thought to anything but the strangeness of their surroundings.

“Then I will tell you,” said Harriet, “We are on the other side of the lake. Do you see that white house on the bluff across the lake? Well, that is the farmhouse where we got our milk yesterday.”

“But—but——” gasped Miss Elting.

“We are now where we wanted to be, across the lake near the beautiful islands and the pretty wooded shores.”

“But how did we get here?” finished Miss Elting.

“I don’t know. I know only that we’re here. Somehow we must have made a mysterious journey across the lake during the night, or else the fairy that I spoke of has turned the lake around in the night and left us standing exactly as we were. But I can’t think on an empty stomach. Let’s dress and get breakfast; then we will consider what has happened to us. We are anchored all right, so there is no occasion for worry. The weather is fine too. Our unknown enemy did us a good turn, this time, if he only knew it. Come along, girls.”

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE ISLAND OF DELIGHT

“It is the most mysterious thing I ever encountered,” declared Miss Elting at breakfast, after she had stepped to the window again to gaze off over the lake to the cove—in the distance—where the “Red Rover” had lain when they retired the night before.

None of the girls except Harriet and Jane had much appetite for breakfast. They were too excited over the mysterious changing of their position.

“What I cannot understand,” continued the guardian, “is how we, who pride ourselves on being woodsmen, trailers and scouts and all the other things, could possibly be carried across a lake, dragged over several miles of water and not know anything about it. Can you explain why we didn’t wake up, Harriet Burrell?”

Harriet shook her head.

“And we are anchored just the same as we were last night,” remarked Jane. “It’s spirits, girls. No mistake about that.”

“Now, Jane,” laughed Harriet. “You know very well that the mere fact that our anchor was pulled up before we left the other side of the lake, then let down on this side, makes your spirit theory impossible.”

“It *wath* thpookth,” declared Tommy. “I thaw one thtanding on the handle of the mop pail latht night after I went to bed. I heard the water thplathh when he jumped in the pail.”

# Page 36

“What a marvelous imagination you have,” jeered Jane.

“All this talk doesn’t help us to solve the mystery,” averred Hazel. “How did we get here?”

“We do not know, but we are going to find out,” replied Harriet.

“How?”

“I can’t tell you. Something will turn up to give us a clue to this and the other mysteries. I have my suspicions of the Tramp Club in this matter. I am very glad that the rope was not cut, this time, or thrown overboard after being removed from the boat. If the boys are responsible for this, rest assured they’ll be the first to tell us. You know the island that we admired so much from a distance, Miss Elting?

“We are within a mile of it now. After breakfast, with your permission I’ll row over,” continued Harriet. “I want to see that island at close range. Jane, will you come with me?” Jane was prompt to accept Harriet’s invitation. Miss Elting also was invited, but concluded to remain with the other girls on the houseboat.

Harriet and her companion rowed rapidly to the island shortly after breakfast. It was a good sized island, as they discovered by rowing down one side of it, the side nearest to the shore of the mainland near which the houseboat was anchored. The girls rowed in so close that they were able to reach up and touch the foliage overhead and in places it trailed in the water. The island was rocky, still it was heavily wooded. One side of it was popular with picnic parties, but on the side where the girls were few boats ever landed. As they were rowing slowly along the edge, Harriet’s eyes were constantly searching the shore.

“This is about what I thought we should find, Jane.”

“What are you looking for, dear?”

“I am trying to find a place where we can run the ‘Red Rover’ in under the trees, and where the boat cannot be seen from the lake on either side of the island.”

“You will have to change its color then. Why, in the sunlight you could see that tub fifty miles away.”

Harriet did not answer. She had rested on the oars, and was peering over her right shoulder towards the thicket at the shore of the island.

“No, my dear, not where I am going to put the boat provided there is room for it. Do you see that current swirling right into the island there? I saw that from the deck of the ‘Red Rover,’ this morning, when looking through the glasses. At least I thought it was a

current.  The water everywhere else was very still, but a slight discoloration there, as you see it, led me to believe there was a creek running into the island."

"You have sharp eyes, Harriet.  But where's your creek?  I don't see it," laughed Jane.

"Neither do I. There may be no creek there, but if there is, it's going to be a splendid place to hide."

"Hide?" wondered Jane.

"Yes."

"But why should we hide, darlin'?"

"In that way we may be able to get some clue to our unknown enemy," nodded Harriet. "If the boys did tow us over here, of course they'll wonder what became of us."

# Page 37

“Do you think our enemy will try to find us?” asked Jane.

“Yes.”

“I don’t. We’ll be wasting our time. The boys won’t look for us, here, either.”

“Well, here is the creek, at any rate,” exclaimed Harriet, swinging the bow of the boat in as she spoke. “And oh, Jane! Look!”

A smooth sheet of dark water was revealed to the eyes of the girls. It was shimmering in the deep shadow of the foliage under which it flowed until it became lost in the shadows of foliage and rocks. Harriet drove her boat in without the least hesitancy. She saw by glancing above her head that there were no heavy limbs of trees hanging over the little waterway. A sounding with the oar developed the fact that there was only about three feet of water in the stream.

“Do you know where you are going, Harriet?” questioned Jane anxiously.

“No. But I don’t care. Do you?”

“Not I. I can go where you go. Oh, look at that hole. It’s a cave, Harriet, and the stream goes right into it.”

“I think you are mistaken, Jane. That looks to me more as if the water had worn an opening in the rocks. The water must have been very high to make such a large opening. Yes. See! The water swirls in at one side of the opening and comes out on the other side, making a sort of horseshoe shape of the cut-out place. Isn’t this a place in which to hide, Jane McCarthy?” cried Harriet triumphantly.

“Hurrah! The greatest hiding place in the world.”

“And won’t the Tramp Club be amazed when they find we are missing? They’ll think their chance of winning the camera is doubtful.”

“Perhaps they’ll think we’re drowned,” answered Jane, her eyes sparkling mischievously.

“A little scare will do them good,” returned Harriet, the mischievous sparkle appearing in the depths of her brown eyes. “What do you think of it, dear?”

“Fine! It’s glorious. We’ll have a picnic here. What fun, what fun! And it’s such a beautiful place too. What shall we call it?”

“I think we might call it the Island of Delight,” answered Harriet, after brief reflection.

“That’s the name!  Now, let’s explore the place.”

“Oh, no, not now, Jane.  We must go and lay our plan before Miss Elting first.  I do not think she will object, but we must ask her, of course, before we make any further arrangements.”

“When do you plan to move in here?”

“Just as soon as we are able to get the ‘Red Rover’ in here.  I am in a hurry.  The boys are likely to be sailing over here almost any time now.  We must get out of sight before they come near here.”

“Hurrah!” shouted Crazy Jane.

“Save your breath.  You will need it before we have gotten our big boat in.  It is going to be a hard pull to get it through all this foliage and then it is going to be another difficult job to get it out again.  When we get those boys on the Island of Delight we are going to give them something to think about,” chuckled Harriet.  “This time, the Meadow-Brook Girls will score.”

# Page 38

“I should like to know how you are going to get them here?” wondered Jane.

“Oh, that is easy. One doesn’t even need to think to know how to do that,” laughed Harriet Burrell.

Jane regarded her admiringly.

“You sure are a wonderful girl. My daddy says he’d give a million if you were his daughter.”

“I’m worth much less than that,” smiled Harriet. “Now let’s go back. We haven’t any time to spare. When we get out into the lake both of us will row, but let’s be certain that there is no one in sight. We don’t want to be seen coming from this place or our plans will be spoiled before we have had a chance to carry them out.”

They shoved the rowboat back through the foliage by placing the oars on the bottom and pushing. They made better progress this way than they could have made by rowing, for the low hanging branches of the trees fouled the oars, making rowing a difficult method of travel, as they had learned when they entered the narrow little waterway.

No person was in sight when they emerged. The two girls bent to their oars with a will and made rapid progress on their way back toward the “Red Rover.”

Those on the houseboat saw the girls coming.

“Harriet ith in a hurry about thomething,” observed Tommy, wrinkling her forehead into sharp little ridges of perplexity. She did not understand how any one could be in a hurry on such a hot day as this.

The rowers reached the “Red Rover,” and jumping aboard, their faces flushed and eyes sparkling, proceeded to tell their companions of their great find.

“And what is your plan?” asked the guardian, smiling good-naturedly.

Harriet told her, whispering part of what she had to say, in the ear of Miss Elting.

“That will be fine,” glowed the guardian, instantly entering into the spirit of the plan. “We shall at least have a good time there.”

“And we’ll be hidden from the world so no one will know we are on this island at all,” interjected Jane.

“I am with you, girls. But we must not let people get the idea that anything has happened to us. That would not be right, you know.”

“No one about here knows, or at least cares, what happens to us, unless it is the Tramp Club,” replied Harriet, “Besides, I shall find a way to let them know we are above water, rather than underneath it.”

“All right.  I suppose you wish to move into this retreat to-day, Captain Harriet?”

“Yes.  At once.”

“Then get under way, Captain, as soon as you wish.  Able seaman Tommy Thompson will heave the anchor for you,” averred the guardian merrily.

“Able theaman Tommy will do nothing of the thort,” retorted Tommy.  “Able theaman Tommy will heave herthelf overboard if thhe trieth to do any heaving at all.”

“Miss Elting, I think you can steer the boat.  I am needed in the rowboat with Jane,” interrupted Harriet.

# Page 39

“Girls, I am afraid it is going to be a pretty hard pull in this heat. Hadn’t we better wait until the evening?” suggested the guardian.

Harriet and Jane protested that they didn’t mind the heat at all, and that they could pull the big boat over to the island without the least difficulty. Miss Elting offered no further objections. The “Red Rover” was a scene of activity from that moment on. All hands except Tommy assisted in getting the anchor aboard. Harriet and Jane, without loss of time, jumped into the rowboat and began pulling away. It was hard work to get the houseboat started, but once under way it followed along fairly well.

Miss Elting handled the tiller, while Hazel, Margery and Tommy acted as lookouts to inform the rowers if any motor boats were sighted. The lookouts watched the lake through their glasses. The sun glaring down on the red sides of the “Red Rover” made the boat visible as far as eyes could reach. It was even discovered by one of the Tramp Club boys, but so slowly did it move that he was not aware that it was moving at all. From the other side of the lake the houseboat appeared to be standing still, until finally it disappeared altogether. He wondered a little over this at the time, then forgot all about the circumstance until later.

[Illustration: Miss Elting Handled the Tiller.]

In the meantime Harriet and Crazy Jane were heading toward the Island of Delight, pulling at the oars with backs bent to their task. They were destined to have a most delightful time on this their Island of Delight and to experience some thrills as well, and Harriet’s plans were to work out better than she knew.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE TRAMP CLUB IS ALARMED

Now that they were masked by the island, the girls also were shut off from a view of the lake, save for the narrow ribbon of water that lay between them and the nearby shore, so they rowed faster than before.

“Can you steer into this opening?” called Harriet.

“I am afraid I can’t,” answered Miss Elting. “You will have to put me aboard, Jane, I’ll have Hazel help you pull in; then we shall have to push the rest of the way.”

Harriet Burrell sprang on board a few minutes later. She set Miss Elting and Margery at work with poles at the stern of the boat pushing, as soon as they entered the shallow water. Tommy had been posted on the upper deck, from which the awning posts had been removed. Tommy’s business was to hold her arms out at right angles to her body and by moving them as directed indicate to Harriet which way to steer. It will be

remembered that Harriet was unable to see over the deckhouse from where she stood when guiding the craft.  She could see only by leaning out on either side.

They entered the narrow channel very slowly.  But no sooner had they gotten well in than a cry from Tommy Thompson told them that the little lisping girl was in trouble.

# Page 40

Tommy had been swept from her feet by the foliage. Not only that, but in floundering about she had rolled over the side of the boat. A mighty splash and a second cry gave additional evidence that Tommy was in further difficulties.

“Help me! I’m in the water!” she screamed, coming up sputtering and coughing.

“Stay there and push,” answered Harriet, laughing so that she bumped the nose of the houseboat into the bank on the right side of the creek. “You can’t get any wetter. The water is shallow. Come. Don’t hold up the ship.”

Tommy had no intention of pushing. Her sole ambition at this moment was to get aboard.

“You may do your own piloting after thith,” she declared, sitting down on the stern of the boat with a suggestion of a sob in her voice.

“There, there, Tommy. You must learn to take the bitter with the sweet. We must do that all through life,” comforted Harriet wisely. “You aren’t hurt.”

“No, but I’m wet. My feelingth are hurt, too.”

“Don’t think about it any more,” advised Harriet. “Go into the cabin and change your wet clothes. Then you’ll feel better.”

“Will you steer, Miss Elting?” Harriet asked the guardian. “We are slowing down too much. If we stop it will be difficult to get another start.”

The boat moved faster when Harriet took hold of the pushing pole. Jane had ceased rowing because she was at the end of her tow line and had proceeded as far into the cave-like opening in the rocks as she could go. She pulled the rowboat to one side and called to the helmswoman of the “Red Rover” not to run her down.

“Snub her nose against the side. We don’t want to bump into the rocks,” ordered Captain Harriet.

“Thnub whothe nothe?” questioned Tommy apprehensively.

“The boat’s, of course, you goose,” answered Harriet laughingly. “That’s it. Will it go in clear, Jane?”

“Yes, all right.”

“Good. I was certain it would.”

“How are we going to keep the boat in here?  It will drift out with the current, will it not?” asked the guardian.

“We will put out the anchor at the other end, giving it a short rope.  That will hold us. The current is not swift.”

While she was holding the “Red Rover” in place, Jane and Miss Elting dragged the anchor to the inner end of the opening, put it over and made it fast with a shortened rope.

“There.  Now let’s sit down and rest our backs,” exclaimed Harriet.  Her face was red and perspiring.  “I’m tired.”

“Harriet, you must be tired.  You have wonderful endurance,” said the guardian.

“Tho am I tired.  I’m worn out,” declared Tommy.

“Tired?  Why, you haven’t done a thing, you dear little goose,” chuckled Crazy Jane.

“I know that.  It maketh me tired to watch you folkth work.  Now, what crathy thing are we going to do?”

“After we have rested we are going to explore our Island of Delight.  Won’t that be splendid?” questioned Harriet, with glowing eyes.  “Just imagine that we are on an unknown, mysterious island.  Perhaps there are savages, wild beasts and——”

# Page 41

“And thingth,” finished Tommy.

“Yes, and things,” agreed Harriet.

“Perhaps there is another phase of this game of hide and seek that you have not thought of, Harriet,” pondered Miss Elting. “How are we to get fresh supplies?”

“There are several farmhouses within half an hour’s row of us. By going to them early in the evening we shall not be discovered.”

Miss Elting nodded. Margery wanted to know how long they were going to stay in that hole in the ground.

“Until you girls get tired of it,” answered Harriet good-naturedly. “As I understand our arrangement, we have the privilege of expressing our choice in all matters that come up, Miss Elting’s decision being final. What a glorious place this is!”

“Aren’t we going to explore our Island of Delight now?” demanded Jane.

“It is your discovery—yours and Harriet’s,” was Miss Elting’s smiling reply. “Suit yourselves as to exploring it.”

“We have time to look about a little before night,” answered Harriet. “It won’t be dark for a little while yet.”

They were about to start out when the distant chug of a motor boat was heard. “I guess we will not go just yet,” she added. “Wait. I’ll row down to the mouth and see if it is the Tramp Club’s boat.”

Harriet paddled part way to the lake edge, then finding the bank accessible, sprang out and crept the rest of the way on shore. She was in time to see a power boat moving slowly past. It was close to the shore of the island. Several young men were aboard. One was standing up, gazing toward the island, one hand shading his eyes. Harriet chuckled when she recognized the standing boy as George Baker. There could be no doubt that the boys were looking for the Meadow-Brook Girls. The watching girl chuckled with delight. Then the thought occurred to her that some way must be found to communicate with the boys soon, so that the latter might know they were safe. Just how that was to be accomplished Harriet did not know. The launch soon passed on out of sight.

As a matter of fact, Captain George Baker and his companions were a little disturbed over not finding the “Red Rover.” Sam said he had seen the boat that afternoon, and unless it had picked up a tow the houseboat could not be far away. They moved along the shore, peering into each cove on that side of the lake until twilight fell and it was no longer light enough to see into the shadows.

“It’s my opinion that those girls will win the wager unless we do some hustling,” declared Larry Goheen, when they had once more returned to their camp on the other side of the lake.

“Harriet Burrell is very clever,” answered George. “I wish we had gone ashore over there near where we last saw the ‘Red Rover.’ I’ll tell you what we’ll do. We’ll run over there to-morrow and make inquiries of the farmers nearby. We ought at least to get some trace of them.”

# Page 42

The boat turned homeward after having encircled the island. Harriet, as soon as the motor boat had passed on out of sight, hurried back to her companions.

“Girls! It’s the boys,” she cried. “They are looking for us. I could see that. They were so close to the island that I could almost have hit them with a stone.”

“Provided you could throw straight,” interjected Miss Elting.

“Yes. I wouldn’t have to be a very good thrower to reach a boat so close as that one was.”

“Shall we go exploring now?” asked Margery.

“I don’t believe it would be prudent. Those boys are sharp. They may be on the island at this very moment. I don’t hear their boat any more,” replied Harriet.

“We will postpone exploring until to-morrow,” announced Miss Elting. “And now, suppose we get supper? This is a cosy place. I never saw a more delightful nook. To-morrow morning, if the coast be clear, we will look about us. How about the farmhouse?”

“I am going over there as soon as it gets a little darker.”

Harriet did not go until after supper, which proved to be one of the most enjoyable meals to which the girls had ever sat down. Their surroundings were so romantic that the situation appealed strongly to each of them. The Meadow-Brook Girls were in high good humor. Later in the evening, Harriet, accompanied by Jane and Hazel, paddled the rowboat out from the island and rowed almost straight across to the shore of the mainland. Hiding their boat in some bushes they made their way to a farmhouse, and there arranged for milk. Harriet had a confidential chat with the woman of the house, who readily agreed to the girl’s proposition to assist in fooling the boys. The woman further agreed to provide them with such supplies as they needed. For such as they took with them the girls paid then and there. Harriet chuckled all the way back to the island. She believed that she had planned in such a way as thoroughly to mystify George Baker and his friends, and at the same time convince the latter that the Meadow-Brook Girls were not in trouble.

Reaching the island they found their companions eagerly awaiting them. To Miss Elting, Harriet confided her plan. Then, after a happy evening, the houseboat party went to bed, looking forward with keen expectation to what awaited them on the morrow, when Harriet’s new plan was to be tried.

# CHAPTER X

## THEIR SUSPICIONS AROUSED

That night there was a shower. The rain, beating down on the foliage and the end of the houseboat that protruded from the cave, served to freshen the air and brought out the fragrance of green leaves and flowers. When the sun came out next morning every leaf and petal was glistening, birds were singing overhead and the girls uttered exclamations of delight as they ran out in their bathing suits and jumped into the water for their morning baths.

# Page 43

For several moments they splashed about in the shallow water, then, scrambling aboard their houseboat, enjoyed brisk rub downs, after which their appetites were sufficiently sharpened to cause them to hurry the breakfast with all possible speed. They ate under the light of the lamp that hung from the cabin ceiling. Had the foliage not been so wet they would have permitted the “Red Rover” to drift out from under the rocks, but it was decided that the trees were too wet for this, so they ate in the darkened cave.

Immediately after breakfast they put on their old khaki skirts, that they had worn part of the time on their long tramp across country the previous season, and started out on their deferred exploring trip about the island. Exclamations of delight were frequent. The island was full of rocky nooks and dells; there were numerous wild flowers, while in the great trees that overhung the shore of the island an occasional squirrel whisked back and forth.

“It really is the Island of Delight!” cried Crazy Jane. “How I wish my dear old dad were here! Wouldn’t he want to buy this island? I’m going to ask him to come here some day, but I’m afraid he’ll say he hasn’t the time.”

“This island is too large to explore this morning,” declared Miss Elting.

“It may take some days,” Harriet nodded, as they strolled about, “but it will be delightful work.”

On the outer side they discovered evidences that picnic parties had been there. And then they came upon the remains of a campfire, but it was a small one, as though there had been but a solitary camper, and that some time back.

“I hope no one comes while we’re here,” murmured Margery.

“How selfish!” laughed Hazel.

By seven o’clock the delighted girls began to retrace their steps toward the houseboat.

“Now, let’s go down to the shore and take a look out over the lake,” proposed Harriet, and this was done.

There were several boats in sight, but at the distance these looked like mere specks. A large excursion steamer was passing in the middle of the lake. Feeling quite certain that they were in no danger of being discovered the girls found a place in the sunlight and there sat down to bask in the pleasant warmth of the sun.

“Get back, at once!” cried Harriet, suddenly springing to her feet, then crouching. “We don’t want to be seen.”

The girls retreated up the shore in some confusion, not stopping to ask questions until they were concealed.

“Oh, now I hear it,” cried Hazel.  “A motor boat coming!  Do you think it’s the one the boys are using?”

“I don’t know,” Harriet replied, “but it’s heading straight for the island, and we must be ready to seek hiding on the ‘Red Rover.’”

Anxious eyes peered through the bushes, watching the approaching boat for some time.

“It *is* the boys!” announced Miss Elting finally.

# Page 44

Tommy leaped up, and started to run.

“Wait!” commanded Harriet. “Let’s make sure what they are going to do before we run away. We may have to creep across that open space there. I think they can see it from the lake. If they are coming to land on the island they will have to go farther to the right. That will be our time to get back.”

But the Tramp Club had no intention of landing at that moment. They were nearing the island for the purpose of looking it over. When they had come as close as they cared to run they turned the boat sharply and moved along at a slower rate of speed. They were out of sight of the girls a few moments after that.

“Now for the boat. They are going around to the other side of the island,” declared Harriet. “I think our plan is going to work.”

* * * * *

For some reason George Baker was considerably interested in that island. There were many other islands in the lake, but this one had come to hold a sort of fascination for him.

“I don’t believe they are over there,” reflected George.

“We should have seen them yesterday if they had been,” answered Billy Gordon. “It’s a jolly place, though. We’ll come over here and camp when we get ready. It is seldom that any one goes there.”

“Where’s that farmhouse we saw yesterday?” questioned Sam.

“On the other side of the lake, about half way down,” answered Gordon. “There is a pier there so we can land.”

Of course all of this the Meadow-Brook Girls did not hear. But, having reached the houseboat, they made their way down the inlet, and were near the mouth of it when they sighted the motor boat on that side of the island. The girls saw it head straight for the pier where Harriet had landed the previous evening on her way to the farmhouse for supplies. The boys tied up the boat and two of them got out and went up the slope toward the farmhouse.

The two boys, George and Billy, returned to the motor boat walking rapidly.

“Did you find out anything?” called Sam.

“Yes.”

“Anything wrong?” asked Larry.

“I don’t know.  It’s a puzzle,” replied Captain Baker.  “Two of them were up at that farmhouse last night.  The queer thing about it is that the woman up there saw the ‘Red Rover’ lying down here yesterday.  Then the boat was gone when she looked again.  I don’t understand it.”

“Some one gave them a tow.  Don’t you tumble to that?” asked Sam.

“Where to?”

“I give it up.  I don’t know.”

“If nothing has happened them they can’t be far away, or the girls wouldn’t have gone up there last night.”

“What time were they there, George?”

“Some time after dark.  I didn’t ask the time.  I asked the woman if they were coming again.  She said she didn’t know.  I told her we would come back later in the day, and, if she saw either of the girls in the meantime, to tell them that we wished to know where they are, as we had something to tell them.  It was after dark when they were there.  I don’t know what to make of it.”

# Page 45

“Well, they are all right, so what’s the use in worrying?” asked Larry.

“Yes, they aren’t drowned. I haven’t any too much confidence in that old scow. It is likely to spring a leak and go down any old time,” declared Billy Gordon. “I wouldn’t trust myself in it over night.”

“You are not likely to get the chance,” jeered Sam. “What are we going to do now?”

“Go on to Wantagh, then to camp. We will come back before supper. While we are out we’ll make inquiries. Some one may have seen the boat. It probably is laid up in a cove somewhere along this shore,” decided George.

“We should have seen it if it had been,” replied Billy.

“How about that island? Is there any place along the shore where they could hide the boat?” questioned Baker.

Billy shook his head.

“You have seen the whole island. We went all the way around it yesterday. It is my opinion that they are going to tie the score.”

“I am beginning to think so myself. But we’ll beat them yet,” chuckled Larry Goheen.

“We will have to wake up in the morning earlier than we usually do,” returned George. “You ought to have seen the way they won that walking match. Outwit the Meadow-Brook Girls three times in succession. Well, try it!”

“If they are so smart, what’s the use in bothering about them?” answered Larry.

“Because I don’t propose to have them get the best of us every time,” returned George. “That’s why I made this wager.”

“They didn’t get the best of us the other night, did they?” grinned Billy. “We’re one trick ahead.” All the boys except George laughed heartily over some little joke of their own.

“Look here, fellows,” said Baker. “We think we are mighty smart, but I’m telling you that we may not be as smart as we believe. They may be laughing at us all the time.”

The two boys got into the launch and Billy started the motor. The launch backed away, turned slowly about, then followed nearly the same course that it had on the previous day. This time it crept along still closer to the Island of Delight. The girls, who were watching it, crouched low, almost flattening themselves on the ground in their efforts to avoid discovery. The boys, at one time, seemed to be gazing right at them.

Yet even with this keen study of the shores of the island the Tramp Club boys passed by the entrance to the anchorage of the “Red Rover” without having discovered the little inlet.

“I’m going over there to find out what they found out,” cried Harriet. “Who is going along? Tommy, I’ll take you, Hazel and Margery this time if you wish to go. You haven’t been out with me at all.”

The four got into the small boat and rowed across the water to the same landing where less than half an hour before the boys’ boat had been tied up. What Harriet learned at the farmhouse, filled her with delight.

# Page 46

“The boys know we are all right now. They are coming back again this afternoon. They are going to get another surprise, girls. Oh, we’ll win that camera, won’t we? Won’t Miss Elting be amused when she hears what we have to tell her?” said Harriet.

“I gueth they won’t want to thee uth again,” suggested Tommy.

“Yes, they will. They have something to tell us,” returned Harriet mysteriously.

“What is it?” asked Margery.

“I am not going to say. At least, not until I am sure it is so. I wonder if they will get suspicious of the island and search it for us?”

The Meadow-Brook Girls were on the alert all the rest of the day. They posted a lookout for the boys, in the person of Hazel Holland, who was to be depended upon. They drew the “Red Rover” into the cave as far as it would go, only the tip of the after deck protruding from the mouth of the cave. There was no more exploring that day. They did not dare get too far away from their hidden home, fearing lest the boys might come upon them unawares. Every boat on the lake in the vicinity was regarded with suspicion. But it was not until nearly five o’clock that Hazel came in with the report that the launch was heading across the upper end of the island, evidently making for the dock visited by it earlier in the day.

After reaching the landing, Captain Baker went up to the farmhouse alone. With his companions he had been searching along the lake the greater part of the afternoon for information about the “Red Rover,” but without result. It was therefore with some misgivings that he once more knocked at the door of the farmhouse.

“Have you seen anything of the young ladies?” he asked the instant the door was opened in response to his knock.

“Oh! You are the young man who was here this morning? Yes, I’ve heard from them,” replied the woman, with a twinkle in her eyes that Captain Baker failed to observe.

“You have? What have you heard?”

“The young women were here very shortly after you left this morning.”

“You don’t say so? Thank you ever so much. Did they say where they were stopping?” he questioned eagerly.

The woman shook her head.

“But they must be near here?”

“Maybe they are and maybe they ain’t.” The farmer’s wife did not know exactly where the girls were, so she had told him no untruth.

“Haven’t you seen their boat?”

“Not since the other day.”

“That is queer. I don’t understand it,” pondered George. “Did they leave any message for us?”

“Yes,” laughed the farmer’s wife, keenly enjoying the puzzled look on Baker’s face. “The young lady left word that if you wanted to see them you’d have to find them.”

“That’s the word, is it?” demanded George grimly, pulling his hat down over his eyes. “The challenge is accepted, and we’ll find them!”

“Not!” added Larry Goheen skeptically, when he heard of George’s confident answer.

# Page 47

## CHAPTER XI

### MARGERY MAKES A CUSTARD

“Oh, dear, but I jutht *do* wonder what the boyth are going to do!” lisped Tommy, as the motor boat started once more on its travels.

“There’s nothing very uncertain, in their own minds,” laughed Harriet. “Just see how fast they’re going. They’ve decided upon something.”

“They’re going back to their camp, but I’ve an idea they’re going to come over soon,” guessed Hazel, “and make a regular search for us.”

“Something of that sort,” agreed Miss Elting.

“Well,” said Jane sagely, “from their speed and the comfortable way they’re all sitting, I’m sure the boys are not doing any guessing about their plans.”

“No. They’ve pathed the guething over to uth,” lisped Tommy sagely.

“Anyway,” said Jane McCarthy, “if our friends can’t find us, then our enemies can’t, either.”

“I hadn’t thought of that,” Harriet nodded.

“I wish I knew what the boys’ plan is. At any rate we must begin to think of outwitting them a second time.”

“How?” asked Hazel eagerly.

“Oh, I have the greatest scheme! That is, if they come back again,” added Harriet. “We will just have those boys so mystified that they won’t know what they are doing.”

“What do you propose to do?” asked Hazel.

“That is a dark secret. We won’t even whisper it to the little birds yet, lest they carry it to our friends the tramps. I have an idea that our friends will be back here to-night. Just what they are going to do I don’t know, but I think they are going to spy on the farmhouse. I wish they would come over to our Island of Delight. There are a number of things we could do to puzzle them. And then—”

“And then the wise housekeeper forgot all about her supper,” interrupted Miss Elting, amid a chorus of laughter and many blushes from Harriet, who, in the excitement of planning to get the better of George Baker and his friends, had forgotten her household duties.

“Very good.  I will confess that I have been dilatory.  What do you girls wish for supper?”

“The same old thing—the old stand-by, bacon and eggs and coffee, and—”

“I know what I am going to have,” interrupted Margery.  “I’m going to have some custard.  I haven’t had any custard since I left home.”

“Can you make it?” asked the guardian.

“Of course I can.”

“You are quite sure of that?” teased Harriet.

“I guess I know.  I’ve made it ever so many times.  You will like it, if you get a chance to eat any of it.  I am making this for myself.”

“Thelfithh,” jeered Tommy.  “Make me thome plum pudding and thome angel food while you are about it.  I jutht love angel food and plum duff, ath my father callth it.”

“Custard is good enough for you, Tommy Thompson,” laughed Margery.  “May I make the custard, Miss Elting?”

# Page 48

The guardian nodded smilingly.

“If you think you can.”

“I’ll show you.  Where are the milk and the eggs and the other things?”

“The milk is in that pail that hangs over the side at the other end of the boat.  The eggs are in the paper box behind the stove.  The rest of your materials are in the supply box.  As for water, there is a lake full of it, enough to make custard for the whole world,” remarked Miss Elting.

“Now you are teasing me—and you, too, Harriet.  You will be glad I thought of it, however, after you have tasted the custard.”

“After I have tasted it, yes,” returned Harriet significantly.

That there was some hidden meaning in Harriet’s remark, Margery well knew.  That was as near as she got to understanding just then.  Later on she understood more fully.

“I am afraid you haven’t time to make the custard for supper,” added Harriet.

“It will do for dessert later in the evening.  We don’t have to eat everything all at once, you know.”  Margery was in a flurry of importance, over the idea of making the custard.  Tommy, despite her apparent indifference, was eagerly waiting for the custard.  It was one of her favorite dishes.

Buster broke the eggs in an agate dish, then added the milk, a cupful for each person.  The eggs, of course, had first been beaten up and the sugar added.  Harriet, with her skirt pinned up, was frying bacon and potatoes until the smoke in the cabin was so thick as to drive out those who were not actively engaged in getting the supper.  Harriet and Margery stuck to their posts, Tommy Thompson watched the operations from the deck, now and then coughing to remind them that she was there.

“There, I think everything is ready,” announced Buster.  “How soon are you going to finish with the oil stove?”

“Please do not wait for me.  I shall not be done here for some little time.  The coffee isn’t ground yet.  What part of the stove do you require for your custard?”

“The oven, of course.  Don’t you know how to make custard?”

“Oh, yes.”  Harriet turned her face from her companion, apparently to avoid the smoke, but in reality that Margery might not observe her laughter.  “Help yourself to the oven.”

Margery groped about underneath the oil stove, burned her fingers and bumped her forehead against the edge of the stove.

“If you please, don’t knock the top of the stove off.  We are some distance from another stove,” reminded Harriet.

“I—I can’t find the oven,” wailed Margery.

“Don’t you know why?”

“No-o.”

“That is strange.”

“Where is the oven?”

“There isn’t any on this stove.  Hadn’t you discovered that yet, you silly?”

“No—oven?” repeated Buster.

“No.  No oven.”

“Then I’ve mixed my custard for nothing?”

“I am afraid you have unless you can turn the mixture to some other purpose.”

# Page 49

Margery stared at Harriet in silence, then carefully setting the dish on the little shelf above the stove she sat down on the floor and burst into tears.

Harriet left her frying pan, and, taking Buster firmly by an arm, lifted the girl to her feet and led her out to the after deck.

“Wha—at are you go—oing to do?”

“Bathe your face for you and set you down on the deck to cool off,” replied Harriet.

“You knew all the time that there wasn’t any oven,” sobbed Buster.

“Yes, of course I did.  So should you have known.  I let you go on—”

“Because you are mean,” interjected the unhappy Margery.

“No.  To teach you to use your eyes.  You should learn to be observing.  Didn’t you hear us talking about that oven when Jane brought home the stove?”

“Ye—es.  I had forgotten.”

“Of course you had.  Now get ready for supper.  To-morrow I will make an oven of stones on the shore and you shall make your custard and you shall have it all to yourself, if you wish, just to punish us for being so mean to you.  Will that satisfy you, Buster?”

“Ye—ye—yes,” answered Buster, with three distinct catches in her voice.

“Come, now, dry your eyes, that’s a dear,” urged Harriet.  “Tommy!”

“Yeth?”

“Will you kindly place the chairs.  Supper will be served in the cabin as soon as the coffee is ready.”

Tommy proceeded noisily about her task of putting the chairs in place at the table. Soon after that Harriet with a dish towel whipped the smoke out of the cabin and then announced that supper was ready.  Margery’s eyes were red and she had little to say, but her appetite was unaffected by her late bitter disappointment.

“Now tell us of your latest scheme, Harriet,” urged the guardian after they had settled down to their supper.

“My scheme?  Which scheme?”

There was a laugh at Harriet’s expense.

“There, girls!  You see.  Harriet has so many schemes and plans in her head that she doesn’t know which is which.  I mean your second scheme for fooling the Tramp Club, Harriet.”

“Oh, yes.  I know.  I am not going to put it into operation until to-morrow.  You may not approve of it, but I hope you will.”

“I don’t think you have reason to complain of my opposing your plans, Harriet.  To tell the truth, I enjoy them as much as you.  But before we go any further with our discussion, do you not think it would be an excellent idea to hang a blanket over that rear door.  The light might attract attention from the lake and bring undesirable persons here.”

“Thank you.  I never thought of it.”  Harriet rose at once.  Selecting a long blanket, she fastened it over the doorway, after which she drew down the shades.  The door at the other end of the boat opened on to a solid wall of rock, so that no light could escape from that end.  Harriet was about to resume her seat at the table, when she paused sharply, raising her hand as a signal for silence.

# Page 50

“What is it, dear?” asked Miss Elting in a low voice.

“I heard a shout.  There is it again.  Did you hear?”

The guardian and the other girls nodded.

“It isn’t far from here.  May I go down to the end of the creek and find out what it means?”

“Wait a moment.”  The guardian turned down the light, then stepped out to the after deck, followed by the girls.  From the deck they could hear the shouts much more plainly, but the shouters were too far away to make it possible to distinguish what they were saying.

“Yes, you may go, but do nothing imprudent,” added Miss Elting.

“I will try not to do so.”

“May I go with you, Harriet?” asked Jane.

“Perhaps it would be better for me to go alone.”  Miss Elting agreed with this, fearing that the girls might begin to laugh or talk and thus attract attention to themselves. Harriet quickly got the rowboat and began pushing her way down through the overhanging foliage that smote her in the face with every move of the oar.

The night was very dark.  She had to feel her way along, but even at that the boat frequently bumped into the bank.  Reaching the lake, she paused to look and listen. Not more than ten rods above she saw lights on the shore of the island and a light on the water.  A motor boat chugged a few times, the plash of an oar followed, then more shouts.

“I simply must find out what is going on there,” muttered Harriet.  “I wonder if it can be —Yes, I’ll row a little further along.  No one will see me unless I get within range of the lanterns there.”

Taking careful note of the entrance to their secret creek that she might recognize the spot when she returned, Harriet crept to the stern of the rowboat and using one oar as a paddle propelled the boat through the water as quietly as possible.

As she neared the scene of activity the voices of the newcomers grew louder.  Harriet finally ceased paddling and permitted her boat to drift, steering well into the shadows, hugging the shore of the island until she could touch it with an oar.  Unless she splashed with the oar, she was reasonably certain of being able to avoid discovery.  The Meadow-Brook girl was now within a few yards of where the operations were going on. Her eyes were fixed on the outlines of a launch in which two persons appeared to be

working, when all at once and with a suddenness that nearly brought a cry to her lips, a canoe shot out of the shadows directly ahead of her and sped noiselessly out into the lake. The girl did not even remember to have seen any one in the canoe so quickly had it appeared and disappeared. She wondered, too, at the skill that enabled one to paddle without noise. A gentle ripple—the wake of the canoe—splashed against the bows of her own boat.

"Surely, I am not dreaming," whispered the girl. "I must have startled the man. Who could it have been, and is it possible that he has been here watching us?" A number of surmises entered the mind of Harriet Burrell. She collected her thoughts quickly and held her boat with the oar, for she was drifting perilously close to the launch. She was now in plain sight of the campers on shore. She could hear every word that was uttered there.

# Page 51

Harriet listened for fully fifteen minutes. All at once, she swung the rowboat about, leaning her body to one side to assist in the turning. The second oar that had been laid across the seats lengthwise of the boat rolled to the other side with a rumble and a clatter that to her strained nerves sounded like thunder.

“Who’s there?” called a voice from the launch.

There was no reply. Harriet, in her haste to get away, splashed noisily. She heard a quick exclamation, then the sound of two people jumping into a rowboat. She knew it was the rowboat she had seen lying alongside the launch. She knew, too, that the rowers were pursuing her. But even then Harriet did not lose her presence of mind. Instead of doing so, she dipped her oars and sent the boat shooting ahead, with the water rippling away from the bows, making a noise that she feared her pursuers would hear and thus be able to locate her position accurately. Harriet had not once glanced over her shoulder, but her ears were on the alert and by the sense of sound she was able to gauge the distance between herself and the pursuing boat.

“They’re gaining on me!” she muttered. “But I’m going to fool them just the same.”

## CHAPTER XII

### MAKING AN EXCITING DISCOVERY

The Meadow-Brook girl did not dare to go on and enter the secret channel for fear of exposing the hiding place of the houseboat. She was watching for some other nook into which to drive her boat. In case her pursuers discovered her she determined to jump out and make her escape as best she could, leaving the boat on the beach. Then a sudden idea occurred to her.

Harriet picked up a tin dipper that lay in the boat and that had been used for bailing. This she hurled as far out in the lake as she could throw it. The dipper fell with a splash that was plainly heard both by herself and those in the pursuing boat.

“Out there he is!” cried a voice in the other boat. She heard the pursuers head out. Harriet took advantage of the opportunity to move her rowboat ahead a few rods. She then turned it sharply to the shore. The girl was fortunate in being able to find cover in the overhanging foliage, behind which she took refuge. The water was quite shallow there. The keel of the rowboat touched bottom. She heard the grating sound as the boat grounded, but knew that she was not so firmly aground that she could not get away.

The men in the rowboat found neither the dipper nor the boat of which they were in pursuit. Instead of rowing on, they craftily turned sharply in toward shore in order to get the benefit of the shadows. One within the shadow could see out fairly well, but to one

who was out in the lake, the shores and the water for some rods about were enveloped in blackness.

“Pull out a little, but keep close to the shore,” commanded a voice. “That fellow played some sort of trick on us and has gone on. It’s curious we didn’t hear him. Row fast and I’ll keep watch. If he gets out into the lake we’ve got him.”

# Page 52

The rowboat shot past Harriet Burrell's hiding place so close that she might have reached out an oar and touched it. She was tempted to give the person in the stern of the boat a poke with her oar, but wisely refrained from doing anything of the sort. After the boat had passed, Harriet sat perfectly still, arms folded, a quiet smile on her face.

"Harriet Burrell, you are a pretty good scout, after all. You wouldn't have made such a bad Indian. I'll rap on wood."

She drummed on the gunwale of the boat. "I hope they won't go far. The girls will worry if I do not return soon. Still, Miss Elting will know that there is a good reason for my remaining away so long. There they come."

The rowboat was returning. The rowers were moving more slowly now, talking and wondering as to the man who had been spying on them. They passed her talking loudly. One of them was threatening vengeance. The girl waited until they had rowed a safe distance from her, after which she cautiously pushed her boat out and began rowing toward home. Harriet was chuckling under her breath, but her eyes and ears were on the alert. She had not forgotten that canoe. Any person who could paddle like that was well worth looking out for.

Harriet rowed past the entrance to their retreat without having observed it. But it was only a few moments later when she discovered her error. She turned her boat more carefully this time, then rowed it into the secret waterway. So quietly did she enter that her companions did not discover her until the nose of her rowboat bumped the scow.

There was a little scream, quickly suppressed by Miss Elting.

"Is that you, Harriet?" she questioned, with no trace of alarm in her voice.

"Yes."

"You were so quiet about it that you gave me the creeps," declared Margery.

"Did you find them, Harriet?" asked Jane.

"Yes. And they came near to finding me too. They chased me nearly all the way home. I hid in the bushes and waited. They passed me and came on this way, I should judge nearly up to the entrance, after which they turned about and went back. That isn't the only strange experience I have had since I left you." Harriet related the incident of the mysterious canoe.

"What were the men doing?"

"They were pitching camp. We are going to have near neighbors," answered Harriet, unshipping the oar and tying the rowboat to the scow.

“Of course, you do not know who they are?”

“Yes, I do.  It is George Baker and his friends.”

A chorus of exclamations greeted this announcement.

“They have come over here to find us.  I think we will play our second trick on them to-night.  It won’t do to wait until to-morrow.  We will get caught if we do.”

“Those boys certainly are persistent.  They must suspect that we are in hiding somewhere hereabouts.”

“Yes.  I wanted them to think so.  I did not wish them to believe we had been drowned and have the entire lakeside out looking for us.  That wouldn’t be fun.  It is more fun to tease and tantalize them.”

# Page 53

“Maybe they’ve got an oven tho Buthter can make her cuthtard,” suggested Tommy Thompson.

“Please do be quiet, Tommy. We want to hear about the Tramp Club and what we are to do to outwit them,” said Miss Elting. “Did they bring their tent with them, Harriet?”

“Yes. At least they have a small tent. I don’t believe they have moved their permanent camp, but they are here in force, that is certain. Now, I’ll tell you about the surprise I propose to give them.”

Harriet explained briefly. At first the girls were not in favor of it, but after she had gone into further details they grew enthusiastic.

“You certainly do love to work, don’t you, Harriet Burrell?” said Miss Elting with a laugh. “But it is good for you. I like to see you all active. One is likely to grow lazy on a houseboat.”

“Not on thith houtheboat,” complained Tommy. “It keepeth me tired out all the time watching other folkth work. My boneth ache all night long, I am tho tired. When I get home I’ll thleep for a month to make up for lotht time.”

“Had we better start now, Harriet?” asked the guardian.

“Oh, mercy, no; The boys are up yet and perhaps out on the lake. I propose that we go to bed, setting our alarm clock for two o’clock in the morning.”

“Help, help!” moaned Margery. “You’ll be the death of me.”

“Thave me!” murmured Tommy.

## CHAPTER XIII

### AN EARLY MORNING SURPRISE

Half an hour after Harriet had outlined her scheme to surprise their friends, the girls were in bed. They were tired, as usual, and went promptly to sleep.

In the meantime the Tramp Club boys had been busy making camp. They built up a campfire, and, before going to bed, cooked some fish that had been caught by one of their number that day.

“I don’t believe the Meadow-Brook Girls are in these parts at all,” declared Larry Goheen.

“It’s a lark coming over here for a night’s camping out, anyway,” answered Billy Gordon, “It is like being real Indians.”

“We aren’t Indians,” answered George, “It is those girls who are the Indians. I’d just like to see any other girls in the state of New Hampshire make the hike they did that last day we were on the trail. They may be twenty miles from here by this time. If we don’t find them to-morrow I, for one, shall be in favor of making a trip around the lake in the launch. We can pretend that we had to go on an errand, or for some fishing bait or something of the sort. We mustn’t let them know we have been looking for them.”

It was after midnight when the boys turned in. They, too, went sound asleep directly they rolled up in their blankets in their little tent. Two hours later while the Tramp Club were oblivious to sound and time, the alarm clock on the “Red Rover” went off with a thrilling whirr. The girls sprang from their cots, Margery and Tommy protesting over being awakened at that unseemly hour, as they characterized it. Harriet lighted the oil stove and put the kettle on. The others went out to the deck to wash their faces. Harriet, having finished her labors for the time being, followed them.

# Page 54

The air was chill at that hour. The girls were shivering, Tommy's teeth, chattered. She stammered as well as lisped when she essayed to speak now.

"One more night like this, and Tommy won't be able to talk at all," chuckled Jane.

"My kingdom for another such a night, then!" returned Margery fervently.

"Buthter ith too fat to feel the cold," observed Tommy Thompson. She loved to tease Margery, and to mention her weight always annoyed Buster. Margery was unable to think of anything sufficiently irritating to fit that particular case, so she tossed her head and remained silent, while Tommy's twinkling eyes were fixed upon her.

By the time they had washed and dressed the tea kettle was singing merrily. It was a welcome sound and made the girls feel almost warm. Miss Elting, being first dressed, made the coffee. Harriet set out some biscuits, together with the milk and sugar.

"Now, I think we are ready," she announced.

After drinking the hot coffee the girls felt themselves equal to almost any task. The fire was put out and the light in the cabin extinguished, then Harriet and Jane stepped noiselessly into the rowboat after fastening the tow line to the scow.

"All aboard," called Harriet softly.

The "Red Rover" moved to the sound of muffled splashes; then a few moments later silence settled over the secret channel.

* * * * *

It was early on the following morning that Captain George Baker opened his eyes sleepily. He yawned, blinked and sat up.

"I guess I'll take an early morning plunge," he decided. "I won't wake up all day if I don't." Donning his bathing suit he stumbled out to the lake and permitted himself to fall in. The captain splashed and paddled about in the cool water for a quarter of an hour. His companions were still sleeping. George did not awaken them, preferring to take a solitary swim and rub down before calling them out.

At last the captain of the Tramp Club emerged dripping from the water and ran quickly for the tent. A few minutes later he appeared dressed for the day. Walking down to the shore of the lake he gazed across the water then uttered a sudden yell and began dancing up and down.

"Come out, fellows! Come out!" he howled, "Look! Look!"

Larry Goheen, Billy Gordon and the others came tumbling out, rubbing their eyes and blinking sleepily.

“What’s the row?” cried Billy.

“Mean shame to play pranks on a fellow when he’s dead for sleep,” growled Sam.

“Now, what did you do it for?” demanded Larry.  “Explain, or in the lake you go!”

“I’ve already been in the lake.  I’m dressed for the day.  But open your eyes.  You are the sleepiest lot of fellows I ever saw.  Why, a baby could stalk you and you’d never hear it say ‘goo.’  Come, don’t you sleepy-heads see anything that interests you?”

# Page 55

Instead of looking out over the lake they were looking at George.

“Wait, I’ll draw a map of the scene and write a directory to the map. Even then you’d need a private tutor to explain it to you. Look over there? Do you see anything? Wait, I’ll get the telescope.”

Following the direction indicated by Captain George’s upraised arm the boys gazed and as they gazed their eyes grew wide with wonder. Then suddenly an ear-splitting yell rose from the lips of the Tramp Club.

“It’s the ’Red Rover’!” shouted Sam.

“We’ve found them at last, the tramps!” cried Larry Goheen, his shock of fiery red hair fairly standing on end.

“We’ve found them?” scoffed George. “Guess again, Reddy. You mean they have found themselves for us.”

“Well, what do you know about that?” wondered Billy. “Where in the world did they come from?”

“They probably rose from the sea like Neptune,” scoffed George.

The “Red Rover” lay idly rising and falling on the slight swell, standing out a glistening flame in the bright morning sunlight. There were no signs of life on board. The boat was anchored some distance from the camp occupied by the boys, but not far out from the shore of the island. Naturally the houseboat was a little distance from the secret channel.

“Come on, fellows, let’s go out and see them,” urged Larry enthusiastically.

George gave him a withering look.

“The girls are not yet up. Can’t you see that? A fine opinion of us they would have, were we to go out there at this hour. Do you know what time it is?”

“I can’t see well enough in the morning to tell the time of day,” replied Larry, with a wry twist of his mouth.

“Well, it is a quarter after five.”

The boys groaned.

“Fine time to get a party of gentlemen out of bed,” growled Sam. “What are we going to do about it, anyway?”

“You fellows are going to take a cold plunge, then get into your clothes. We will have breakfast. I will start the fire while you are bathing.”

The boys hurried into their bathing suits, and with many a shout and yell, plunged into the lake. They were making all the noise they could, hoping to attract the attention of the girls so as to have the opportunity to get out to the houseboat as early as possible. But eagerly as the lads gazed up the lake, the houseboat showed no activity.

“They must be good sleepers over there,” said Larry.

Captain George smiled to himself.

“They are only shamming,” he muttered under his breath.

Breakfast was served about an hour later. The fire warmed the boys, and the coffee and food did likewise. After they had finished their breakfast they were in great good humor. At half past eight, there still being no signs of life on board the houseboat, Billy declared that he was going out in the launch to see if he couldn’t stir up something. All hands piled into the launch. It was a matter of only a few moments to run to the houseboat. The boys circled the scow slowly, talking loudly. The windows of the house were open, the curtains flapping in the gentle breeze, but the doors at either end were tightly closed.

# Page 56

Having failed to attract any attention from the “Red Rover” the Tramp Boys returned to camp, tied up the motor boat and sat down to watch and wait. Nine o’clock came, then ten, but still no sign of life on board.

Captain George grew a little uneasy. He did not know that the Meadow-Brook Girls had eaten their breakfast more than an hour before that, and that the girls were watching the boys, chuckling over the perplexity of the latter.

Once more the motor boat was taken out. As they neared the houseboat for a second time they saw Harriet Burrell come out to the after deck, and stooping over examine the anchor rope.

“Halloo, there!” shouted George.

Harriet paid no attention to the “halloo.” Apparently she did not hear them. George called again, and when Harriet turned and entered the house, without having once glanced in George’s direction, he grew red in the face.

“She didn’t hear you,” chuckled Larry. “You didn’t yell loudly enough. Why didn’t you let me give them a roar? I’ll guarantee to attract the attention of any one within half a mile of me.”

“Run alongside, Billy. I’m going to make somebody notice me.”

Billy grinned, then steered the launch up close to the “Red Rover.” George rapped on the deck of the scow with a boathook. He had rapped several times, and was again getting red in the face when some one appeared. It was Harriet, who finally opened the door and peered out. Her face wore an expression of disapproving inquiry.

“Good morning,” called George. The boys took off their hats.

“Why, it’s George Baker,” cried Harriet as though greatly surprised to see these visitors. “Girls, come out. Here are the boys.”

The Meadow-Brook Girls hurried on deck.

“Where have you been?” questioned Miss Elting. “We did not think you would desert us in this fashion. We have been expecting you ever since we last saw you.”

George blinked rapidly. The boys glanced at each other and looked perplexed and uneasy. Somehow, they had a feeling that they were being placed in an unenviable light.

“The question is, where have you been?” asked George in as gruff a tone as he could assume.

“Where have we been?” repeated Harriet wonderingly. “Are you joking, Mr. Baker?”

“No, I’m not joking. We have been worried about you. Where have you been?”

“Why, we have been not far from here all the time. And you mean to tell me that you didn’t know where we were?”

George shook his head. His companions looked sheepish.

“Did you sail over here so early in the morning to call on us?” questioned Harriet innocently.

“No, we are camping over there.”

“Oh! Then you came over to be near us? Isn’t that fine?” laughed Crazy Jane.

“We—we thought may—maybe the fishing was better over here,” replied George lamely.

# Page 57

“Oh, thave me!” muttered Tommy, then fled into the cabin that they might not observe her laughter.

“May we come aboard?” asked Billy.

“Not yet, boys,” returned Miss Elting in reply. “Our house is not set to rights for company. Come over later. We should be pleased to have you.”

“Say. It’s hot out here. Suppose we tow you in nearer to our camp. There will be more shade there too,” suggested Larry.

“Thank you. That will be nice.”

“Come over and have luncheon with us to-day noon,” urged George.

Miss Elting also accepted this invitation, rather to the surprise of the boys. Billy, without loss of time, fastened a line to the houseboat attaching the other end of the line to a cleat on the after deck of the launch. In the meantime Larry had jumped aboard the “Red Rover” and hauled in the anchor for them. The launch then towed the scow up to the camp of the tramps. Miss Elting motioned for them to draw the boat a little beyond the camp, which was done.

“Cast off,” shouted Captain Harriet.

Jane slipped the tow line then let the anchor go over with a splash.

“You girls work just like regular sailors,” declared Larry admiringly.

“We will see you at noon,” called Miss Elting. “You needn’t mind to come out for us. We have our rowboat.”

“No. We will come for you with the launch,” answered Billy.

As agreed, the boys came out with the launch shortly before twelve o’clock and took the Meadow-Brook party ashore. George, with an apron tied about his neck, was deep in preparations for dinner. Harriet and Jane immediately put on their own aprons, which they had brought along, and went to work, while Hazel and Margery bustled about assisting Larry and Sam in getting the table ready. The boys had arranged rustic seats in place of chairs, and the table, set under the spreading foliage, looked very neat and attractive.

[Illustration: George Was Deep in Preparations for Dinner.]

That luncheon was one of the most enjoyable that any member of the party ever recalled having sat down to. No reference was made to the mysterious appearance and disappearance of the Meadow-Brook Girls until near the close of the meal.

“You haven’t told us where you have been all the time,” said Captain Baker with affected gayety.

“Oh, yes, I have. I told you we had been near here all the time,” answered Miss Elting, smiling tolerantly.

“But how did you get over to this side of the lake? That is what you haven’t told us,” spoke up Billy Gordon.

“You mean that that is what you wish to tell us,” replied Harriet. “You towed us over of course during the night. You played the first trick and won. But now you must tell us what became of the ‘Red Rover,’ the next day.”

“But we can’t,” exclaimed George. “We hunted—”

“Of course you did,” laughed Harriet. “We were watching you all the time.”

# Page 58

The faces of the boys grew crimson.  Forks were dropped on plates with a noisy clatter.

“What’s the use?” cried George Baker, getting up hurriedly.  “Fellows, we’ve got to confess that we’re beaten in the first round by a lot of girls who are a good deal smarter than we think we are, or than we ever shall be.”

George sat down again and began mopping the perspiration from his damp forehead.

“And that isn’t all,” continued Harriet, laughing.  “Unless you are prepared to tell us just how we got back into the lake again we shall consider ourselves entitled to the second honors, too.”

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE MIDNIGHT ALARM

The Meadow-Brook Girls shouted with laughter at this speech.  Then, after a few seconds of hesitation, the boys of the Tramp Club joined in the merriment.

“You win,” replied George.  “We can’t answer you.  Now tell us how you disappeared so mysteriously, boat and all, and reappeared just as suddenly.”

“Excuse me, but I don’t propose to reveal our methods of procedure,” laughed Harriet. “Oh, you can’t outwit us.  You will find us ready for you every time.  We know all about last night, too.”

“I’d certainly like to know where you were last night,” said Captain Baker.

“We were near you all the time, and you didn’t know us,” laughed Harriet.  “Even when you came out here yesterday you passed us by without a single look.  You did not see us.  Then last night, when you were chasing some one whom you thought was spying on your camp, you passed us again, and—”

“So that was you, eh?” jeered Larry.

“Who was I?” answered Harriet innocently.

“The mysterious boat we were pursuing,” answered George, eyeing her keenly.

“Harriet ith not a boat,” averred Tommy.

“No.  She is a mermaid,” declared George with emphasis.

“I beg to differ with all of you,” said Sam. “The Meadow-Brook Girls are the original will o’ the wisps. But you haven’t seen the last of the Tramp Club yet. You have won twice but you shan’t win again. Hereafter we’ll be on the alert.”

“You’ll have to keep a watch on us night and day then,” chuckled Jane.

“This pleasant spirit of rivalry makes matters interesting,” interjected Miss Elting. “You have been very kind to us and helped to make our vacation enjoyable. We enjoy harmless fun as well as yourselves. I might add that we haven’t fully exhausted our resources, either. And we wish to thank you for warning us of your intentions.”

The boys blushed sheepishly.

“Sam, you’d better keep still,” suggested George.

“That’s what I say,” nodded Larry.

“Yeth, he talkth too much,” agreed Tommy wisely. “But you ought to have been with uth. We’ve had an awful time, too.”

“How so?” questioned Billy politely.

“I fell in the water and Buthter made cuthtard and had no oven to bake it in, and then—”

# Page 59

“Who is talking now?” demanded Margery.

Tommy subsided at once.

“The question is, are you going to run away from us again?” demanded George.

“We never have.  Remember, we followed you over here,” suggested Jane.  “We shall be near here for some time in all probability.  We have plenty of time.  After we get tired of this spot we probably shall move to some other anchorage, but we’ll be here for a few days yet.”

“Keep your eyes open, or you will miss us again and your last chance will be gone,” warned Harriet.

“We shall keep our eyes open,” answered George with an emphatic nod.

The luncheon having been finished, Billy suggested that they spend the afternoon in exploring the island.  This suited Harriet.  She wanted to see how familiar the boys were with their island.  So all started out, leaving the dishes to be washed later.  The girls shook their heads disapprovingly.

“Oh, we have a patent dish washing machine,” announced Larry.  “You see, we dump the whole lot of dishes into the lake after having smeared them with sand.  We leave the dishes there and the waves wash them.  All we have to do is to take them out and lay them in the sun an hour or so afterwards.  As soon as the dishes dry off they are ready for another meal to be served on them.”

“Ithn’t that jutht like a man?” demanded Tommy.

“This is Willow Island,” Billy informed them after they had mounted a ridge that commanded a view of about a quarter of the island.

“It used to be,” answered Harriet.  “We have rechristened it.”

“What have you named it?” said Billy, regarding her inquiringly.

“We have named it the ‘Island of Delight.’  How do you like it?”

“Great!” shouted the boys in chorus.

“Have you been all over it yet?” asked Sam.

“No, we have not,” replied Jane, and with truth, for they had not yet explored the entire island.  They were going to do so that day.

Harriet wanted to test their woodsmanship, so she skilfully led the boys toward the spot where the “Red Rover” had been so successfully secreted during the time the boys had been searching for them. By making a wide detour Harriet finally brought up right over the place where the cave and the secret creek lay.

Jane turned away that they might not see her laughter. In the meantime Harriet and George were discussing the beauties of the place. She gave him every opportunity to discover the retreat, but George looked about him with unseeing eyes. As a matter of fact, Harriet admitted to herself that had she not known that the stream lay below her she never would have dreamed of its existence.

There were smiles on the faces of all the Meadow-Brook Girls when finally they turned away and slowly beat their trail through the thick growth of vegetation to the lower end of the island. They spent some time there, sitting on rocks, watching the boats on the lake. Many admiring glances were directed toward the girls by the Tramp Club boys who were very much pleased with the straightforward friendly manner of the Meadow-Brook Girls.

# Page 60

Finally they turned their footsteps homeward, reaching the camp late in the afternoon. Larry ran on ahead and gazed out over the water.

“What do you see?” called Jane.

“I was looking to see if that ‘Red Rover’ had disappeared while we were away,” answered the red-headed Larry. “You can’t tell about that craft. It’s just as likely not to be there as it is to be there,” he added lamely, then flushed when his companions laughed at him.

“You’re mixed, Larry,” jeered Sam.

“The ‘Red Rover’ behaves well when we are away,” said the guardian in reply. “We work our spells on it only when we are aboard. It would be rather embarrassing to have the ‘Red Rover’ disappear while we were absent. By the way, we should be happy to have you young gentlemen come over and take tea with us this evening. Will you come?”

George shook his head.

“No, thank you. Not to tea. There are too many of us. But I’ll tell you what we will do. We will come over later in the evening and have a visit and another concert. Larry plays the banjo. He’ll give you an Irish jig if you wish.”

“That would be fine,” answered Crazy Jane enthusiastically. “Now, if I only had my automobile horn, what a lot of noise we would make, wouldn’t we, boys?”

“Bring the banjo by all means,” urged Miss Elting.

The boys assisted their guests into the rowboat which had been towed ashore behind the launch. The little boat was well loaded and settled perilously low after all had gotten in. Gordon shook his head and declared it wasn’t safe. Miss Elting answered that they didn’t mind a wetting.

The rowboat was pushed out, the girls and the boys waving and shouting their adieus. During the rest of the afternoon the girls were busy sewing, ironing, getting their clothes in fit condition. Supper time came all too soon for them. The dishes were washed and put away with all speed that night, and about eight o’clock the boys put off in their own rowboat. Larry was twanging his banjo on the way over. The “Red Rover” was all alight in honor of their coming, and following the arrival of the tramps, a jolly evening was spent. Larry played and the girls sang. Sam essayed to join in, but ceased his efforts when his companions threatened to throw him overboard.

The party broke up about ten o’clock. The boys went home singing “Good night ladies” to the accompaniment of Larry’s banjo. The girls stood on the upper deck watching the

lads until a shout from the shore told the watchers that their guests had arrived at the camp.

“Now, what are your plans for to-morrow, girls?” asked Miss Elting when they had gone below.  “Do you wish to go into retirement?”

“No.  The boys have invited us for a ride in the launch to-morrow,” answered Harriet. “What troubles me is the matter of leaving the ’Red Rover’ alone so long.  I think perhaps it would be better for me to remain here to look after the boat while the rest of you go on the motor boat trip.”

# Page 61

The girls declared they would not go at all unless Harriet went with them.

“That matter already has been settled,” replied Miss Elting. “I am the one who will remain aboard the ‘Red Rover.’ Harriet, you will chaperon the girls on the motor boat ride. That will settle the objections, and you will be every bit as good a chaperon as myself.”

The arrangement did not wholly satisfy the Meadow-Brook Girls. All were very fond of their guardian, and they wished her to have a part in all their enjoyments. They had not fully decided upon going when they retired.

“I wonder if those boys are planning anything for to-night?” mused Miss Elting, a moment after turning out the lights.

“Yes,” answered Harriet confidently, as if she had been consulted.

“What?” demanded a chorus of voices.

“They are planning to go to bed. I saw them fixing the fire, just before I got into bed.”

“Oh, fudge!” groaned Margery.

“Thave me!” wailed Tommy.

Jane suggested that Harriet ought to have a ducking, then one by one the girls dropped off to sleep.

The clock that Harriet consulted showed the hour to be ten minutes after midnight. She had awakened suddenly, and with a feeling that something were not as it should be. The girl rose softly, peering through the window. The “Red Rover” was lying very quietly, there being little movement of the water. No one was about, nor was there a boat in sight. She stepped out on the deck, glancing about in all directions, her eyes finally fixing themselves on the camp of the Tramp Club.

“Those boys are up and moving about,” she mused. “They have stirred up the fire.” Just then the girl heard the rattle of an oar in a rowboat. The sound seemed to come from the camp. Harriet watched a few minutes. Then turning quickly she went inside.

“What is it?” demanded Miss Elting sharply. “Who is it?”

“Harriet. Those boys are awake, and, I think, getting ready to come out on the lake. I believe they are up to something.”

“What do you suspect?”

“I don’t know.  Would it not be wise to awaken the girls and all get dressed?  We don’t want to be caught napping, you know.”

“I should say not,” agreed the guardian.  She got up and went to the window.  Their conversation had been carried on in so low a tone that none of the others had been awakened.  Miss Elting gazed keenly; then, bringing her glasses, peered through them at the camp of the tramps.  “Yes, they are up to mischief of some sort,” she decided, lowering the glasses and laying them aside.  “Girls!”

“Wha—wha-at?” cried Jane, her feet landing on the floor almost ere the words were out of her mouth.

Tommy hopped out of bed a few seconds behind Crazy Jane, but instead of landing on her feet, the little girl went sprawling on the floor on her face.

“Thave me!  Are we thinking?” she cried.

# Page 62

“No, you foolish girl.  We aren’t sinking,” answered Harriet laughing.

Margery stood shivering in the middle of the cabin.  Hazel had begun to dress.

“Dress yourselves at once,” ordered Miss Elting.  “Be quick about it.  They may not be coming here, but if they are, they will be here in a very few minutes.”

“Who will be here?” demanded Crazy Jane.  “Why don’t you tell us what all the uproar is about?”

“Yes.  You might better tell us than to frighten us half to death in this way,” complained Margery.

“It is the boys.  We think they are coming here to play a trick on us, and if so, we wish to be ready for them,” explained Harriet, who was hurriedly dressing.  The girls lost no time in putting on their clothes, each dressing herself completely.  Their hair, braided down their backs for the night, was left as it was.  There was no time to do anything with that.

“The boys are putting off in the rowboat, or at least getting ready to do so,” Miss Elting informed the girls, after another look at the camp through the glasses.  “What shall we do?”

“I will fix it,” answered Harriet.  She rummaged about at the rear of the cabin, then ran out to the after deck.  They heard her on the upper deck shortly after that.  She soon bustled back into the cabin.

“They have started.  All of you get up on the deck overhead.  Listen!  I will tell you briefly what we will do.  We will give the boys a scare that they won’t soon forget.”

There were hurried preparations within the cabin of the “Red Rover,” following Harriet Burrell’s quick orders, which were approved of by Miss Elting.  The girls then crept to the upper deck, where they crouched down, peering across the water that lay between the houseboat and the island.

“There they come!  Not a word from now on, girls,” warned Miss Elting.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE ROUT OF THE PIRATE CREW

“Take your positions, and don’t miss when I give the order to let go,” commanded Captain Harriet.  “Oh, we won’t do a thing to those boys!”

Margery giggled.

“Silence!” The captain’s voice was stern.

“If you cannot keep quiet you will have to go below,” rebuked Miss Elting. “You will spoil it all. Now, not another word.”

The silence of sleep settled over the “Red Rover.” A gentle ripple at the bows gave off a soothing, musical sound, but that was all. The girls were now able to see a boat approaching them from the island, though unable to make out the forms of the occupants of the craft. Miss Elting, with glasses in hand, was studying the approaching boat. Fortunately the night was dark, though the stars were shining brilliantly.

# Page 63

“All lie down!” came the quiet command from the captain of the “Red Rover.” All except Harriet flattened themselves on the deck. The rowboat drew slowly up toward the scow, then was permitted to drift in the rest of the way. When almost alongside, the boys in the rowboat decided to go around to the other side. This nearly upset the plans of Harriet Burrell, but she quickly moved her force to the opposite side of the deck near the stern end. Had the boys been sufficiently alert they might have caught a faint rattle and a scuffle of feet. They were too intent on their mission, however, to realize that anything out of the ordinary was going on aboard the houseboat.

A whispered conversation ensued in the rowboat, then two boys got cautiously to the deck of the cockpit. There followed a period of silence and a low-spoken command from below.

A mighty yell suddenly broke from the midnight visitors. Howls and shrieks, Indian war-whoops and beating on the cabin with sticks, accompanied the shouts.

“Pirates! Surrender!” howled a voice that was easily recognizable as belonging to the red-headed Larry Goheen. “Whoop! Hi-yi-yip yah!”

“We will settle the pirates,” muttered Harriet.

“Just listen to those lads,” chuckled Crazy Jane.

“Let go!” The command came sharp and incisive. A rattle of tin dishes followed. Pails and pans were raised to the rail as five figures stood up suddenly. “Stand by to repel boarders!” was the second command. Five pans and pails of water were tilted, sending a flood of water down on the heads of the surprised “pirates.” From a tub of water on deck the pails were quickly refilled and the water dumped over the rail. Not many drops were wasted. Nearly every drop reached a pirate.

Crazy Jane uttered a shrill war-whoop, then the girls grabbed and shook her. The amazed pirates were in a panic. Three of them had been left on the lower deck of the “Red Rover.” The rowboat had been quickly pushed off as soon as the occupants recovered from their first surprise. The three Tramps made a leap for the rowboat. They landed in the lake with a splash and went floundering toward the small boat.

Tommy climbed to the rail and hurled a pan at the beaten pirates. But in hurling the pan she lost her balance.

“Thave me!” she screamed. Tommy plunged sideways from the rail, making a complete turn in the air, landing in the lake with a mighty splash.

Harriet dived off after her, fearing that her little companion might have been stunned by striking the water on her back. But Tommy came up before Harriet rose from her dive.

“Oh, thave me!” wailed Tommy in a choking voice.

All this had happened without the boys understanding what was going on. They had taken aboard their three companions and were pulling into the shadow of the island with all speed. Miss Elting and Jane had run down to the lower deck. The guardian cast a rope. Harriet and Tommy brushed the rope aside and swam easily to the end of the boat, where Harriet assisted Tommy up, afterwards being herself assisted aboard by Crazy Jane. The two thoroughly soaked girls staggered into the cabin, where Harriet sat down on the floor, laughing hysterically.

# Page 64

Miss Elting pulled down the shades and lighted the lamp. She stood regarding her charges with a quizzical twinkle in her eyes.

“What a mess! What a mess,” laughed Crazy Jane. “But we repelled the boarders, didn’t we, darlin’?”

“They won’t try to play any tricks on us after this, I am sure,” agreed the guardian. “I’ll warrant they are still wondering what happened to them. But it was too bad. What a wetting they did get!”

“Too bad!” exploded Harriet.

“No. It served them right,” interjected Hazel. “Why, they might have frightened us to death.”

“They will be at our feet to-morrow,” giggled Jane. “Tommy, did you ever have any one fall at your feet!”

“Yeth. You know Jake Thpooner? Well, he had a conniption fit, one day, in the thtreet, and fell down right at my feet.”

“You mean an epileptic fit. But you shouldn’t joke about a serious matter like that,” rebuked Miss Elting.

“I wathn’t joking. He did. It wath Buthter who laughed. I didn’t. But Buthter ith fat, you know. Fat folkth alwayth laugh when they thhouldn’t. They thhake all over when they laugh. I’m glad I’m not fat like Buthter.”

Margery’s face was flushed and indignant. Her companions were laughing merrily at her expense. Harriet had gotten up and was removing her wet clothing. Miss Elting lifted Tommy, who also had sat down, and gave her a gentle push toward the dressing room.

“Take off your wet clothes and get on your kimono. Girls, you may as well prepare for bed, too. I don’t believe we shall be troubled by pirates again this night,” said the guardian, with a merry twinkle in her eyes. “You will not want to get up in the morning when you are called. I fear we are losing too much sleep these nights.”

While they were preparing for bed Miss Elting took a final look at the camp of the Tramp Club. There was activity there, but not nearly so much of it as the last time she had examined the camp through her glasses. The guardian smiled grimly at thought of the surprise they had given those fun-loving boys. They had thought to make good their boast to get the better of the Meadow-Brook Girls, but had met an ignominious defeat.

“I should not be surprised to see that camp deserted to-morrow morning,” mused Miss Elting. “I hope not. They are nice boys.”

“Are they coming out again?” asked a voice at the guardian’s side.

“No, Harriet. I think not. I am just taking a final look their way before retiring. Did we leave the pails and pans upstairs?”

“Yes. Shall I bring them down?”

“Oh, no. It is not necessary. Morning will be time enough. Now go to bed. We shall not be disturbed again to-night. Good night, girls. Sweet dreams.”

# Page 65

“And pleathant nightmareth,” mumbled Tommy from under the blanket. She was found curled up in a ball when the guardian went over to see that the little girl was comfortable for the night. The light was blown out just as Harriet sought her cot. Miss Elting was in bed a moment afterwards, and peace and quiet again settled over the clumsy “Red Rover.” This peace, however, was not destined to last long. It was to be rudely broken ere the morning dawned. From down the lake a canoe was coming, propelled swiftly and silently by a pair of muscular arms. The canoe, if it continued on its present course, would hit the “Red Rover” fairly on its nose. But just before reaching the houseboat, the canoe veered to one side a little and the paddle trailed the water behind. The canoe glided along to one side of the “Red Rover,” then stopped.

## CHAPTER XVI

### A MIDNIGHT VISITOR

The same dark canoe that Harriet Burrell had seen shoot out into the lake before her the night she was reconnoitering near the camp of the Tramp Club was now hovering about the houseboat. It would have appeared almost uncanny to one not experienced in canoeing to observe the absolute noiselessness with which the frail little craft was propelled about the larger boat. When it was turned, it was as though the boat were swinging on a pivot. When the half of its length was let down to the water after such a swing, there followed not the slightest suggestion of a splash.

Lulled by the gentle lapping of the water against the side of the boat, the Meadow-Brook Girls slept soundly. On shore the boys of the Tramp Club also were sleeping. The girls on board the “Red Rover,” as already mentioned, had no fear of a second attack that night, nor had the youthful pirates the slightest intention of repeating the experiment that had turned out so badly for them and so triumphantly for the Meadow-Brook Girls. It was quite evident that the newcomer did not belong to the Tramp Club. His face looked dark and swarthy in the moonlight. He had straight black hair and high cheek bones and there was a revengeful light in his sharp black eyes as he scanned the silent houseboat.

Once more the canoe shifted its position and slid to a point directly under one of the little windows. The window was open, the curtains were streaming out through the opening. The intruder stood up in his canoe without disturbing its balance in the least.

Just about this time Tommy Thompson awoke with a little gasp. She had been dreaming that Buster, in the guise of a pirate, was trying to smother her with a sofa pillow. Tommy had been skirting the edge of one of the “pleathant nightmareth” she had prophesied for the girls on retiring. She sat up in bed and rubbed her eyes. Suddenly she uttered a terrified scream.

For the second time that night the Meadow-Brook Girls scrambled from their beds in alarm.

# Page 66

“Tommy, Tommy, what is the matter?” cried Harriet, springing to the little girl’s side.

“I thaw the motht terrible fathe,” moaned Tommy. “Oh, thave me.”

“Nonsense, Tommy,” laughed Harriet.

“You’ve just had one of those nightmares you were talking about when you bade us good night.”

“No, thir,” reiterated Tommy. “I thaw thomething. It wath a man and he thtood right in front of the window. You thee I wath dreaming that Buthter wath a pirate, and wath trying to thmother me with a thofa pillow and all of a thudden I that up in bed and thaw thith fathe looking in the window at me. That ith why I thcreamed,” concluded Tommy, with dignity. “I didn’t have the nightmare. I tell you I thaw a fathe.”

“How ridiculous,” sniffed Buster. “How could she see a face when we are away out here on the lake. Why look!” she continued, stepping to the window. “It’s bright moonlight, and there isn’t a boat to be seen on the water.”

“Buthter doethn’t know what I thaw,” retorted Tommy angrily. “Thhe hathn’t my eyeth hath thhe? Buthter maketh me tired.”

“There, there, girls,” reproved Miss Elting. “That will do. Harriet, I think you and I had better dress, then get into the rowboat and do a little investigating. Perhaps some prowler has visited the boat while we were asleep. Light the lamp, Jane, and we’ll see if all our belongings are safe.”

Jane and Hazel made a rapid search about the boat while Harriet and Miss Elting were dressing. Meanwhile Tommy and Margery sat on the edges of their cots and conducted a spirited argument as to whether Tommy really had seen a “fathe” at the window.

“All ready,” called Harriet as she ran to where the rowboat was fastened. Then she gave a little cry of alarm that brought Miss Elting and the others to her side on the run.

“What is it, Harriet?” cried the guardian.

Harriet stood looking out over the water, a piece of rope in her hand. “Some one has stolen our rowboat,” she gasped. “See, the rope has been cut.”

“Then the Tramp Club must have come over here again in the night and stolen it,” decided Miss Elting. “Still that would hardly account for the face Tommy saw at the window, and she is positive that she really saw some one. I am inclined to think, however, that she had the nightmare, and simply dreamed about that frightful face.”

“I can’t see that there is anything particularly clever or original about stealing a rowboat in the dead of night,” said Harriet slowly, “and I don’t believe that the boys would think so either.  There is something peculiar about this affair and I believe that the Tramp Club have had nothing to do with this latest puzzle.”

“That ith what I think,” agreed Tommy.  “It wathn’t thothe boyth that thcared me tho.”

“Nothing has been stolen from the boat,” declared Hazel, “so it looks as though our midnight prowler vanished when he heard Tommy’s first scream.”

# Page 67

“I’m going to mount guard for the rest of the night,” announced Jane. “It’s half past two now, and by five o’clock it will be light. The rest of you can go back to bed, and if any one else comes sneaking around this boat, he’ll have to come forward and state his business to Jane McCarthy.”

## CHAPTER XVII

### A STRANGE DISAPPEARANCE

It seemed to the tired girls as though they had hardly closed their eyes when they heard Jane call out: “Seven o’clock. All hands on deck.”

“I’m tho thleepy,” murmured Tommy as she struggled into her clothes.

“I’m pretty near dead,” growled Hazel. “I think I’ll never get rested.”

“Do let’s hurry and have breakfast,” pleaded Margery, “I’m so hungry.”

“Chronic thtate,” murmured Tommy.

“I don’t have nightmares and wake every one up in the middle of the night,” retorted Margery, “even if I do get hungry sometimes.”

“My nightmare wath utheful, Buthter,” returned Tommy calmly. “It helped uth to dithcover that our boat wath gone. But your appetite ithn’t the leatht bit utheful, not even to yourthelf.”

“I’ll never speak to you again, Tommy Thompson,” declared Buster wrathfully.

“That maketh me feel very thad, Buthter,” replied Tommy sarcastically.

Breakfast was prepared and eaten in record time that morning. Then the dishes were speedily washed and put away. The Tramp Club’s camp showed no activity until after eight o’clock, when the smoke from their cook fire was observed curling up through the foliage on the shore of the Island of Delight. A long-drawn “Hoo-oo-oo” from the camp told the girls that they had been observed by some of the boys.

Before nine o’clock the launch put out and sailed rapidly over to the “Red Rover.”

“We didn’t come to call. We just ran over to see what time you wished to go for a sail?” asked Billy Gordon.

“Come right on board, boys. We finished our work shortly after daylight this morning. You see we are early risers,” replied Miss Elting.

The lads needed no urging. They hopped to the after deck of the houseboat. But no sooner had they come aboard than they perceived that something was amiss. George glanced at Harriet inquiringly.

“What’s the matter with you girls, this morning?” he asked lamely.

“We had considerable excitement here last night. We were visited by pirates,” said the guardian.

The boys flushed guiltily.

“But that is not all,” added Jane McCarthy. “We were visited later in the night by a real thief.”

“Wha—at!” gasped George, somehow feeling that they were involved.

“We will tell you all about it. Come upstairs, where we can sit down in comfort and talk. Perhaps we may ask you to assist us in finding the thief,” said Miss Elting.

The boys followed the girls to the upper deck, and after they had seated themselves Miss Elting related what had happened. “Now, boys,” she concluded, “have you the remotest idea as to who could have taken the boat?”

# Page 68

For a moment George stared at the guardian in silence, then he said gravely, “Perhaps you think, Miss Elting, that one of us sneaked over here last night. I’ll admit that we did play pirates, and got the worst of it, but none of our fellows left camp after we got back from that pirate trip. There is something strange about this, and it looks to me as though you had a really malicious enemy.”

“That is what I think,” replied Harriet. “You know, of course, of our previous experiences. Some one is seeking to drive us away. To me it is the work of a man who for some reason is our enemy. I thought we had given him the slip, but he has found us again.”

“I will tell you what to do, ladies,” spoke up George after pondering the subject briefly. “You had better run your boat right up on the shore at one end of our camp, where we can keep our eyes on you. When you wish to move we will move with you. In that way you will have no further trouble.”

“You boys wouldn’t be of any help to us,” interrupted Jane.

“Why not?” demanded Larry Goheen, bristling.

“Because you sleep too well.”

“I don’t believe I should dare to spend a night on that island,” said Harriet Burrell, regarding the shores of the Island of Delight with troubled eyes.

“Why not?” repeated Larry.

“There are strange things there,” said Harriet, pointing. “Haven’t you seen them?”

“Good gracious, no,” answered Billy. “What do you mean, Miss Burrell?”

“Ghosts!” answered Harriet, leaning toward their guests. The boys fairly jumped at the words, then laughed heartily.

“There aren’t any such things,” scoffed George. “Besides, if there were, do you think we men would be afraid of them? I guess not. I’d like to see the ghost that I would be afraid of. You bring out your ghosts! We’ll show you how quickly we will lay them.”

“Oh, I can’t bring them out,” murmured Harriet. “I thought perhaps you had seen them.”

“Have you?” demanded Sam, turning on her sharply.

“Oh, don’t ask me,” begged Harriet, in such apparent distress that Sam did not question her further.

“What’s this that Harriet is telling you?” asked Miss Elting.

“She’s been seeing things, and thinks it queer that we have not, too,” answered George. “I wish we might. Then you don’t think you would like to run the boat ashore at the camp, so as to be where we can look after you?”

“I should not mind. But the girls think they are able to take care of themselves, and I must say that I agree with them, George. Don’t you think they are?” asked the guardian.

“They beat any boys I’ve ever seen. But then, you see, there are a lot of us fellows, and then again, your enemies won’t be so bold when they know there are men around the premises,” declared George pompously.

Harriet turned her head away that they might not see her laughter.

# Page 69

“Any way, let us tow you in closer to shore,” urged George.

Harriet shook her head.

“Thank you, but we will fight our own battles. If we find we are getting the worst of it we will scream for you. That is, if you are able to see us. You gentlemen are short-sighted at times. The very idea of your hunting all over the lake for us when we were here fairly before your eyes! Look out that you’re not so careless as to lose us again. Remember it will be the winning stroke for us.”

Harriet’s manner was so superbly disdainful, yet there was so much pity in her tone, that the boys flushed painfully.

“You won’t lose us again the same way—don’t worry about that,” George Baker retorted, with some heat. “But when are you going for a ride in the launch with us?”

“Why, I think we are ready now,” smiled Miss Elting. “For one, I would like very much to go to Wantagh, if you will be kind enough to take me there. Harriet, I have changed my mind about remaining with the ’Red Rover’ and I shall accept your suggestion to leave you as watchman on the ‘Red Rover.’”

“By all means, Miss Elting,” replied Harriet.

“I don’t like to see you remaining alone,” protested Hazel, as she stepped, half-reluctantly, into the launch. “I know you’ll be dreadfully lonesome.”

Harriet, however, was far from lonesome. It was really pleasant to be all by herself for a little while.

When the launch reached Wantagh the girls promptly went shopping, with the exception of Jane, who went to engage a rowboat, and Miss Elting, to hunt up Dee Dickinson. It was an uncomfortable half hour for Dee, for Miss Elting reported the loss of the rowboat and said very plainly to him that she believed he understood the cause of the persecutions the girls were undergoing. Still, Dee could not be made to talk freely. Miss Elting left him, dissatisfied.

“That man knows the cause of our troubles, and he simply won’t tell me,” said the guardian indignantly to herself, as she walked away. “And just a hint or two might enable us to save ourselves a good deal of annoyance, and even protect us from real dangers. I wonder what it all means.”

She said nothing to the girls about having seen Dickinson, when finally she joined them at the pier. The girls had filled every available space in the boat with their purchases and the new dingy was fastened to the stern. The run back in the late afternoon was a

delightful one.  When they came in sight of the “Red Rover” they uttered cries of delight.  The “Red Rover” looked like a huge flame in the sunlight.

“It doesn’t seem possible that such a boat could be lost sight of anywhere, does it?” questioned Jane brightly, turning to Captain Baker.

“No,” he answered gloomily.  “And it won’t be again.”

“You can’t tell, you know.  It may disappear from the face of the waters this very night.”

George looked at Billy.  Jane had given them a hint that they were not slow to catch. They did not know that she was teasing them for the very purpose of making their surprise greater when it did come.

# Page 70

The boys left their passengers at the “Red Rover” and then sailed over to their own camp. The girls were glad to be back. The houseboat had come to be a real home to them, one that they would be sorry to leave when their vacation came to an end.

Jane had purchased a dozen colored lanterns in town. As soon as darkness fell, these were lighted and strung above the upper deck. The interior was brightly lighted, so that the “Red Rover,” that evening, stood out more prominently than anything else on that part of the lake. Later in the evening, after having disposed of their work, the girls took out the new rowboat and rowed slowly round and round the “Red Rover” singing. The boys came out at that and joined them. Together, the two boats drifted about until the hour grew late and Miss Elting called to the girls that it was time to come in. They responded promptly. The boys rowed up alongside and holding to the gunwale of the “Red Rover,” chatted for a few moments.

“So long! We will see you in the morning,” called George as they pushed the rowboat off.

“Yes. In the morning—maybe,” answered Harriet laughingly.

“It’s my opinion that those girls are going to try to play more tricks to-night,” declared Billy, after they had gotten a short distance from the “Red Rover.” He was speaking in a tone louder than he imagined. Harriet heard every word he said.

“Yes,” agreed George. “I’ll tell you what we’ll do. We’ll put a boy on watch to-night. Then, if they try to run away from us, we will just follow and give them a surprise. We can’t let those girls get the better of us this time.”

That was the last that Harriet heard. They had rowed so far away that their words were inaudible. But what she had heard was quite sufficient.

“And about those ghosts?” questioned Larry.

“A bluff,” scoffed George. “You don’t believe in ghosts, do you?”

“Well, I don’t know. I have heard of such things,” admitted Larry solemnly.

“Nonsense. I guess we will elect you to watch the houseboat to-night. How about it?” demanded George.

“I don’t care.”

“But don’t you dare go to sleep.”

“What if I do?”

“You will get a ducking,” interjected Sam. “You will get your distinguished head held under water until you’re wide awake.”

The plan, however, was put into operation soon after their arrival at the camp. They watched the “Red Rover” together until all the lights except the anchor light, had been put out. They knew, by this sign, that the Meadow-Brook Girls had retired for the night. The Tramp Club then went to bed, leaving Larry on guard. All he could see of the “Red Rover” was the anchor light, the night being very dark and a little hazy. But he never lost sight of this anchor light for more than a few moments at a time. Were the girls to get away without his discovering it he knew what to expect at the hands of his companions. Then again, Larry Goheen prided himself on his keenness. It would be very humiliating to be outwitted by the girls. He, with the rest of the boys fully believed that the girls were planning some trick for that night.

# Page 71

Larry watched that anchor light until just before the break of day, when he called Sam to come out and take the watch until breakfast time. The daylight had not yet become pronounced enough to make out objects distinctly, but shortly after Sam took the watch the day broke bright and clear. The anchor light seemed to fade away and merge into thin air before his very eyes. He did not stop to reason that this was because the morning light had become stronger than that of the lantern.

Sam blinked and rubbed his eyes. He could hardly believe what they told him. He uttered a yell that brought his companions out on the run.

“What’s up?” shouted Billy.

“Everything. They’ve tricked us! They’ve gone!” cried Sam.

“They have, I do declare,” added George in a hushed tone. “When did they go?”

“Just now. I saw them.”

“You were asleep,” rebuked Billy.

“I wasn’t! They disappeared! They went up in thin air.”

Just then they were interrupted by a long, piercing wail that seemed to come from the air above and around them. The boys gazed into each others faces.

“It’s a banshee’s wail,” whispered Larry. “Somebody’s going to die.”

## CHAPTER XVIII

### A FRUITLESS SEARCH

“Don’t be an idiot, Larry,” rebuked If Billy Gordon. “Don’t you know what that was?”

“Yes. I told you,” whispered the red-headed boy.

“Pshaw! It was only a cat bird,” scoffed George Baker. “Who’s afraid of spooks, anyway? The fact is that those girls have outwitted us three times. We have lost the wager. Now the question is, when did they get away?”

Larry declared that he had never removed his gaze from the anchor light during his whole watch, except when he went to get wood for the campfire.

“There’s only one way out of it,” decided Billy. “Duck the two of them. We will be certain to get the right party then.”

"'Nuff said," nodded George. The boys grabbed the two lads, and, despite their struggles, managed to throw them into the lake, but in doing so, George and Billy found themselves in the water, also.

This little experience put them in a better frame of mind. The lads quickly divested themselves of their wet pajamas and put on their clothes. Breakfast was a hurried meal that morning. After breakfast they sat down to take counsel among themselves while Sam scraped the dishes then threw them in the lake to be washed by the lake itself. They decided that either Larry or Sam must have fallen asleep, and that at a time when the girls had moved from their anchorage.

Both lads protested that nothing of the kind had happened. Sam stuck to his story that the anchor light had faded away and that the "Red Rover" had disappeared all in the same moment.

"What are we going to do about it?" questioned Larry Goheen.

# Page 72

“We are going to take up a collection for that camera, and then we are going to find them,” answered Billy.

“We are going to try, you mean,” answered George with a mirthless smile. “We have tried before—and failed, and now we are obliged to confess that we are beaten for good and all. However let us reason this thing out. The ‘Red Rover’ couldn’t have disappeared, it could have gone only by being towed away. If a launch had towed it, the noise would have awakened us, even though Larry or Sam had been asleep. If the houseboat was towed by the girls, which it undoubtedly was, it can’t be far away. That makes our work easier.”

“There is only one flaw in your argument, George,” interrupted Billy Gordon. “Granting that they did row away from here, how do you know that at daylight they did not pick up a launch and hike half the length of the lake?”

George shook his head slowly.

“There wouldn’t be any fun for them in that. They would want to be on hand, to make faces at us behind our backs.”

“You may be right at that.” Billy gazed reflectively over the lake. As he gazed his eyes took on an expression of new interest. “What’s that out there, fellows?” he demanded.

It was some seconds before they discovered that which had attracted his attention. Then when they did so, they were unable to decide what it was. They were certain that the object had not been there the night before.

“That’s right where the ‘Red Rover’ lay,” cried Larry Goheen. “Maybe they have sunk.”

The boys with one accord ran for the rowboat. They shoved it off, leaped in and began rowing at top speed toward the object that had attracted their attention. Larry began to grin long before they reached the spot. They finally pulled up alongside the object and stopped.

The boys regarded it solemnly, then looked into each other’s eyes. There followed a shout of laughter.

The object that had been discovered by them was a stick, which had been thrust down into the soft bottom in shallow water. A lantern had been tied to the top of the stick. It was this lantern, at the end of a stick, that Larry Goheen had been watching all night, believing it to be the anchor light of the “Red Rover.” It was plain that the girls had known that they were to be watched, and that they had taken the easiest possible way to outwit their friends, by placing the anchor light on a stick and leaving it at the anchorage while the “Red Rover” slipped away unobserved under cover of the darkness.

“Stung!” groaned Sam.

“Worse than that,” answered George. “There aren’t any words in the language to express what we’d like to say. Wait till I get the lantern.” The lantern was still burning and the chimney was considerably smoked. George took it aboard and blew out the light. “You didn’t see it go out after all, Sam.”

“I—I thought I did.”

“I wonder when they left?” mused Billy.

# Page 73

“Larry, what have you to say about that?” demanded George Baker.

“Absolutely nothing.”

“They went away during your watch.”

“You can’t blame him,” answered Sam. “Anybody would have been fooled under the circumstances.”

“Don’t try to make lame excuses,” jeered Billy. “Be a man and own up. They outwitted you, and that’s all there is about it. Now, what are we going to do?”

“Get out the launch and go on a hunt for them,” declared George. “Any one got a better plan?”

No one had. They had no plans at all, but were too dazed by this last trick that had been played on them to be able to think at all clearly. They reached the shore and George stepped out. His foot had no more than touched the ground before that same wailing cry rang in their ears again.

“I tell you it’s a banshee,” cried Larry, his shock of red hair fairly standing on end.

“We will attend to the ghosts after we have found the ’Red Rover’,” answered George. His face had paled slightly at the sound, and he admitted to himself that he felt creepy. He was glad that they were going away from their camp for a time. It was evident that whatever the noise might be, it was intended to express disapproval of their presence on the island. George remembered what Harriet Burrell had said about ghosts on the previous evening. He had laughed at it at the time. He did not laugh now. He was thinking and thinking seriously.

No further cries were heard that morning. The boys put out their campfire and set the camp to rights, Billy in the meantime being engaged in cleaning and oiling his motor preparatory to the morning run around the island and along the shore of the mainland.

It was not exactly a joyous party that set out in the launch half an hour later. They were chagrined at losing the contest and disgusted that they should have fallen such easy victims to the ingenious schemes of the girls.

“Do you know, I have been thinking,” spoke up Larry after they had started.

“That’s something new,” jeered Sam.

“I have been wondering if all the strange things that have occurred to the girls haven’t been part of a plan to keep us stirred up.”

“Larry, I’m ashamed of you,” exclaimed George indignantly. “Those girls may be full of mischief, but they don’t tell lies. They told us the truth, about their mysterious enemy, and I don’t want to hear any boy intimate that they haven’t. He and I will have a falling out right on the spot, if he does.”

“I apologize. I—I guess I didn’t mean it that way,” stammered Larry.

“They are too clever for us, that’s all there is to it,” added George. “Run into that cove, please, Billy. There is something that looks like a red boat in there.”

The something proved to be a small boathouse painted red. It did resemble the “Red Rover” somewhat. They headed out of the cove, saying little, but keeping up a lively thinking. The launch was run up the shore of the mainland for several miles.

# Page 74

“Shall I turn back?” asked Billy.

“You might as well,” nodded George. “I would suggest that we circle the island once more. Shut down as low as you can. We must keep a sharp lookout. There may be some way of getting a boat out of sight. I am positive that they are about here somewhere.”

The encircling of the island was attended with no better results. Not a trace of either Meadow-Brook Girls or “Red Rover” was discovered. Disgusted and disappointed the boys headed the launch toward home.

“I’ll tell you what we will do,” declared George as they were landing. “We will spread out and search the island. I can’t get the idea out of my mind that they are not far away.”

“But what would they do with their boat? It isn’t anywhere in the lake about here, and surely they couldn’t drag it ashore,” objected Billy.

“I don’t know. I am beginning to think those girls can do almost anything they set out to do. They are a clever lot. I never knew them to start anything yet that they didn’t go through with, usually ending up by giving us the worst of it.”

Sam hopped ashore first and ran up to the tent. He peered in, then uttered a yell.

“Somebody’s been here,” he cried. “Wow!”

The boys hurried up to the tent. The interior was in confusion. The contents of the tent had been piled in a great heap in the middle of the floor. A suit of khaki had been draped over sticks and leaned against the side of the tent, looking like a live man at first glance. Outside an oven had been constructed of rocks, and a fire put under it. On a flat stone the coffee pot stood ready. The table had been set, the potatoes pared and sliced ready for frying, in fact everything was ready for the noon meal with the exception of the cooking.

The boys looked at each other then burst out laughing.

“We’ve had company,” grinned George.

“I wish they would come every day,” added Larry. “They have sense whoever they are, even if they turn our tent topsy-turvy. But wait. We’ve got those girls now. We know they are somewhere about, and we’ll find them if it takes all day and all night to do it.”

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE TRAMP CLUB FINDS A CLUE

“Hello!  What’s this?”

Larry, stooping over, picked up a piece of filmy linen.

“A handkerchief, isn’t it?” asked Sam.

“Let me see that, please,” demanded George Baker.  Larry handed it to him.  “It’s a girl’s handkerchief, boys.  And here are two initials in one corner.  Hello!  ‘H.B.’  What does that stand for?”

“It stands for ’Have Been’,” declared Larry.  “Meaning that they have been here.  But they needn’t have told us.  We know that.”

“Yes; they’ve been here,” replied George promptly.  “Those initials stand for ‘Harriet Burrell.’  They mean that the Meadow-Brook Girls have been here and turned our tent upside down.  But they made amends by getting our noon meal started.  I suppose we had better forgive them.  What do you say, fellows?”

# Page 75

“Of course,” nodded Billy. The others agreed.

“Miss Burrell, having no card, left her handkerchief. But fellows, while we are fussing around here, they may be getting away again. This may be another of their tricks,” declared George. “I would suggest, Billy, that you eat your luncheon at once, then run out the launch and keep sailing around to head them off in case they are running away.”

To this proposition, Billy demurred. He did not fancy going away by himself.

“I’ll tell you what I’ll do,” he proposed. “I’ll eat luncheon with you first. They can’t get far away before I get out, and even if they did I should overhaul them. You know that old scow can be seen for miles.”

“I notice we weren’t able to see it a few rods from us,” observed George dryly. “All right. Start the potatoes to frying. Did they hide the ham?”

“They didn’t find it. It’s in the spring back there,” answered Sam. “I looked.”

The luncheon was prepared in a hurry and the boys ate ravenously. The excitement of the morning had not interfered with their appetites.

“Now, Billy, if you see anything, blow your motor horn and keep it going until we hear it. Some of us will hear you. I propose that we spread out so as to cover the island, but still keeping within yelling distance of each other. We know now that the girls are on this island.”

“Well find them.” Billy walked slowly down to his launch, got in, and reversing the engine, backed out, waving an indolent hand at his companions.

Suddenly a weird scream rang out on the still air.

“Run for it, boys. That way,” cried George, pointing excitedly.

“No! It’s the other way,” shouted Sam.

“You’re both wrong. It’s toward the other side of the island,” declared Larry.

“Now look here, fellows. We are all of us wrong. If we are going to accomplish anything we must stop fooling and go at this business scientifically. I will take this side of the island. Sam, you and two of the fellows take the middle, and Larry the other side, keeping within sight of the shore. We will search every inch of it, though I don’t believe we can finish the job before night.”

“We had better take our lanterns with us, or we shall break our precious necks,” suggested Sam.

“Yes.  We will do that.  Larry, when you catch sight of Billy on the other side, beckon him in and tell him we may not be back until late this evening, and for him to keep circling the island until he finds us back in camp again.  Better take some grub along.  We can stand it to eat a cold supper for once.  We will have a warm one when we get back.”

After having made their preparations the boys started out, all the others waiting until Larry got a good start, Sam’s party starting next, George Baker leaving the camp last. In that way they planned to keep pretty nearly abreast.

# Page 76

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About this time Crazy Jane McCarthy, face flushed, hair down, her skirt torn in several places, might have been seen fleeing along the shore of the island, running away from the Tramp Club's camp and toward their own secret nook, where the "Red Rover" was lying calmly at anchor in the half cave that had furnished a hiding place for the girls before.

She came tearing through the bushes nearly falling into the lower end of the stream.

"They're coming!" she shouted. "Get to cover!"

"Sh-h-h!" warned Hazel, who sat awaiting Jane, in the rowboat. "I hear a motor boat outside. I think it is the boys' boat."

"I tell you they are on their way to search the island," answered Jane.

"All of them?"

"All but Billy Gordon. He has gone off in the launch to keep an eye on the shore."

"Then that is his boat out there. Get in here. I am worried that Harriet is still out."

Just then a soft "hoo-e-e-e" from the bushes on the opposite side of the stream, told them that Harriet Burrell had returned. She had been out on a scouting expedition. Hazel rowed over to the other side of the creek. Harriet jumped aboard. Jane, in excited whispers, told her that the boys were coming and that Billy was out in the launch.

"I know. I saw him just a few moments ago. What are their plans?"

Crazy Jane explained what she had been able to hear when she was observing the Tramp Club's camp. She had seen Larry pick up Harriet's handkerchief, though she was not aware that it was Harriet's.

"That is where I lost it, is it?" laughed Harriet. "It is all right. That will encourage them. If they go on beyond here they will find other evidences that will lead them still further on. You see I wanted to get them as far away from home as possible so as to keep them out after dark."

Hazel manipulated the rowboat until they were in the deep shadows of the rocks, after which they climbed aboard the "Red Rover." Harriet explained her plans to her companions and directed them to keep as quiet as possible in case any of the searchers should come that way. The girls had pulled the houseboat into the secret retreat on the previous night. They had kept a watchful eye on the boys all the morning,

to see what they were planning to do, and Jane had given the lads the creeps by uttering wild, weird cries in the depths of the forest.

Harriet and Jane cooked themselves something to eat. They had been out for a long time and were hungry. Their companions and guardian were sitting about chatting with them. Miss Elting was of the opinion that they were much better off in their hiding place than at an anchorage out in the lake, always provided that their enemy did not find them out. Harriet agreed with her, but thought they would be in a serious situation if their unknown enemy were to find them. He had shown evidences of keenness that made the finding of the “Red Rover” appear to be a simple task for him. That he would annoy them further, the girls were positive; that he already had located them was more than possible.

# Page 77

Splash!

Their conversation was suddenly checked. A stone had dropped but a few feet from the rear end of the “Red Rover,” falling into the creek. Harriet laid a finger on her lips. Tommy had started to speak, but checked herself in time. Harriet and Jane crept to the door of the houseboat and peered out. As they did so a second splash startled them. This time they saw the stone. It was a good-sized rock. It fell some feet below the rear end of the “Red Rover.” Some one was sounding the thick growth there. Who it was, they discovered a moment later.

“There’s water down there, but it’s shallow. I can tell by the splash,” announced a voice above them.

“It’s George,” whispered Jane.

“I’ll take a look along the shore on my way back. There may be an inlet that we haven’t seen,” continued George Baker, talking to himself.

Jane gripped an arm of her companion.

“If he does, we shall be discovered,” she whispered.

“Never mind. We will have scared them off long before then. He will strike the trail I left for them, before long, if he keeps straight on. That will mean that he will go right on and that he will call to the others to join him when it begins to get dark. You know the island begins to narrow a short distance beyond here. Won’t it be funny to see them following that trail? And what a surprise they will get before they have finished with this day’s work.” Harriet chuckled. She had been whispering. She paused suddenly as a pebble rattled down within a foot of the stern of the “Red Rover.”

“They’re getting rather close,” whispered Jane.

“Captain Baker kicked that pebble down. He is going away. Do you hear him?” George was whistling to himself as he tramped away toward the other end of the island. They heard him call to his companions shortly after that and shout some directions to them. Then nothing more was heard from the boys for the rest of the afternoon.

The girls discussed the situation with Miss Elting. The guardian decided that all the girls save one should remain on board the scow. One, she agreed, might go out to reconnoitre. If the boys returned before dark it would be well to know about it. Their further plans depended upon the immediate actions of the Tramp Club. Harriet was the one who was chosen to keep watch of their rivals.

She began at once to make her preparations, tying her hair in a tight knot on top of her head and drawing a waterproof bathing cap over all.

“I am going to protect my hair,” she smiled in answer to the unspoken question in the eyes of her companion. “Those bushes pull out a few strands every time I go scouting among them. I’ll imitate the sound that a crow makes if I see them coming back,” she added. “No one must go out in the meantime. All we can do is to keep quiet and wait. We’ve already won the camera. We will have our fun when night comes, however, and if we don’t give those boys the fright of their lives I shall be keenly disappointed.”

# Page 78

“Which way shall you come back?” asked Jane.

“The way we came in. Don’t have the boat wait for me down there. If I have to come back in a hurry I will wade. Meadow-Brook Girls aren’t afraid of the water, you know.”

“We know,” answered Miss Elting, smiling, “but be careful that you don’t fall and hurt yourself. Good-bye. I will have the sheets and other things ready by the time you return. We have the poles here. I do hope we get an opportunity to use the stuff now that we have been at so much pains to get it ready. You see, I am just as anxious to play this trick as the rest of you girls.”

Harriet laughed merrily at the prospect of the coming fun, then stepped out into the rowboat that Hazel had pulled close to the stern of the houseboat. A few moments later Hazel left her companion on the west bank at the lower end of the little stream. Harriet slipped away through the bushes almost noiselessly. If everything worked smoothly the Tramp Club were to receive an overwhelming surprise.

## CHAPTER XX

### JANE PLAYS EAVESDROPPER

Two hours later the Meadow-Brook Girls were startled to hear a voice directly over their heads call:

“Girls, girls.”

“Who is it?” asked Miss Elting cautiously.

“It’s I. I’m up here, right where we heard George Baker talking this morning.”

“You nearly thcared me to death!” gasped Tommy.

“Speak more quietly, please,” warned Harriet. “Jane, I wish you would come up here. No; I’m not going to take you far. I want you within reach of the boat.”

“Do you see anything of the boys, Harriet?” asked Miss Elting.

“No, but I hear them occasionally. They are quite a distance ahead, traveling fast, and ought to be back long before dark.”

Jane lost no time in hurrying to the lower end of the creek in order to join her friend. Harriet lay on the rocks, at a point where she could not see the water, and there Jane joined her.

“What I want you to do,” Harriet explained in whispers, at the same time on the alert for sound or sign of the boys, “is to stay here, or not far from here, so that you can warn the girls in case I signal by making a cawing noise like a crow. I don’t want the girls to make too much noise, for it would spoil our fun if the boys should discover our hiding place.”

“But how am I going to get back if I have to do so in a hurry?”

“Can you go down a rope?”

“Show me the rope that I can’t go down,” boasted Jane.

“How about this one?” smiled Harriet, producing a coil of quarter inch manila rope.

“Well, it’s small, but I’ll try it. Where do you wish me to climb?”

“I’ll show you. Take hold of my feet and don’t you dare let go. I surely shall break my neck if you do.” Harriet crawled over the edge, Jane grasping her by the ankles to prevent her from falling. Then Harriet tied one end of the rope to a root of a tree that stood on the brink. “Look out below!” she warned, at the same time dropping the coil through the foliage and shaking the rope until the coil finally dropped into the stream. “Please draw the rope up to the boat,” she called. “That’s it. Now pull me back, Jane.”

# Page 79

Jane McCarthy did so with some assistance from Harriet, who clawed at the roots of the tree and pushed with her hands until she finally got to the top once more. Reaching there she got up and surveyed the work with approval.

“Can you see the rope, Jane?”

Miss McCarthy shook her head.

“If you have to go down it be careful that you don’t fall before you get to the rope. Now do you understand?”

“Do I? This is going to be great fun. Won’t the boys be surprised when we play our great trick on them?”

“Provided they do not surprise us first,” answered Harriet.

“Where are you going?”

“To follow George Baker’s trail for a time. I can’t tell beyond that what I shall do. It will depend upon circumstances. Remember the signal. I’m off now.”

Jane watched Harriet slip away. There was undisguised admiration in the eyes of Jane McCarthy. Not a sound could she hear from her companion, so silently did the latter move away. After Harriet had gone, Jane called down to her friends that she was going to move from the spot and that they should keep quiet.

The hours passed slowly for Jane. She was too active to care to sit down calmly and wait when there were things to be done, so Jane decided that she too would explore a little on her own account. She started slowly, edging down nearer to the shore, thus taking a different course from that followed by her companion, toward the upper end of the island.

Jane had been gone about an hour when she heard voices directly ahead of her. She glanced about in quest of a safe hiding place. Not knowing exactly the direction that was being followed by those whose voices she had heard, she decided to run toward home. A shout from behind her at that juncture told her that at least one of the party had gotten between her and the hiding place of the “Red Rover.”

Without an instant’s hesitation Crazy Jane ran to a low, bushy tree and climbed up in its foliage with almost the quickness of a cat. Her clothes suffered, but she did not care. Her sole desire now was to get out of sight as quickly as possible. She would never forgive herself if she were to be the means of their being discovered. As yet she had heard no warning cry from Harriet Burrell.

Jane had hardly secreted herself in the foliage of the tree when another hail sounded between her tree and home.

“Is that you, boys?” It was the voice of George Baker.

“Yes,” answered Sam. “What’s up?”

George made his way toward them. Jane could hear him forcing his way through the bushes.

The two parties met in an open space a short distance from the tree that held Jane. She was straining every muscle to get a glimpse of them.

“Some one has been along here since I passed,” declared George. “I found a footprint in the moss over there, and it was a woman’s.”

“So did we find the same thing,” answered Larry. “There’s something queer about this whole island. I feel spooky all the time. Did you hear any one?”

# Page 80

“No.”

“Well, I did. Some one threw a stone at me. It dropped right at my feet.”

Jane giggled softly. Harriet had been playing tricks on them. She wondered where Harriet was. Jane would have given the signal, but dared not do so. In the first place she was not sure that she could imitate a crow so as to deceive a person, and in the second place the boys were too close to her to run any chances.

“They are here, all right, boys,” cried George. “I was certain of it all the time.”

“It may be spooks,” answered Larry Goheen.

“Well, just let them come out. I guess we can take care of any spooks that we shall find on this island. But we must get busy again. It will soon be dark. Spread out, fellows. I’ll tell you what we’ll do. Taking that tree there for a centre”—waving toward the tree occupied by Crazy Jane McCarthy—“we will circle about, making the circle larger each time we start out.”

“Wait. I’ll climb the tree and take a look around,” interjected Sam. He started for the tree. His hands had grasped it ere Jane realized that hers was the tree meant. For once in her life Crazy Jane McCarthy was at a loss to proceed. She did not know what to do. But George unknowingly came to her rescue.

“Never mind the tree. It’s too low. You can’t get high enough to look over the tops of the bushes. You come along as I suggested.”

“How ever am I going to get out of this?” muttered Jane. “Won’t Harriet be cross when she finds I’ve quit my post and gone out on my own responsibility?” Her further reflections were interrupted by a loud “caw, caw, caw!”

“What’s that?” cried Larry in alarm.

“It’s a crow, you tenderfoot,” jeered George. “Didn’t you ever hear one before?”

“Harriet!” exclaimed Jane under her breath. “She has discovered where the boys are. She’s giving me warning and I dare not answer her. What shall I do?”

“Yes, I have heard crows, but I never heard a crow with a voice like that,” answered Larry. “I’ll bet it’s no more crow than I am.”

Once more the crow cawed. This time the bird’s voice sounded much farther away. Jane reasoned it out when she said to herself that Harriet had probably turned her head away or else had cawed in a lower tone to deceive the boys, who were now moving rapidly away, making as many circles as there were boys in the party.

Jane dared not get down from the tree, but she began moving about, seeking a better position from which she might look the ground over. If the boys got far enough away she might try to run, but then there was the probability of meeting their rivals, no matter which way she sought to escape.

[Illustration: Jane Dared Not Get Down From the Tree.]

The crow cawed again.

“I tell you that isn’t a crow,” shouted Larry.

“Go on, go on!” called George.

Jane listening intently, concentrating her attention on what was being said, rather than what she was doing, lost her footing. She grasped frantically for a limb and caught one. But the limb did not hold. It snapped and came away in her hand.

# Page 81

Crash! She landed on a bunch of small limbs and branches. She went right on through them, tearing off leaves with frantic hands in her efforts to get hold of something that would stop her progress. The foliage checked her fall a little, but not sufficiently to prevent her falling the rest of the way.

A yell from Larry Goheen, an answering shout from George, and another from Sam, told that the boys had heard the fall. They began running toward the tree, with shouts of triumph.

“We’ve got somebody,” yelled George. “Look sharp, fellows.”

“I’m on the job,” howled Sam.

“Get clubs. It may be a spook,” howled Larry.

The Tramp Club surrounded the tree, keeping their formation as well as possible, not forgetting that their prey might slip away from them did they not guard all sides. As yet they did not now who or what that prey was. A moment later they halted with exclamations of surprise.

Directly beneath the tree in which Jane McCarthy had been hiding stood a man. He was dark and swarthy, with high cheek bones and jet black hair. He was an Indian half-breed. The fellow stood scowling, regarding the boys with angry eyes. Broken limbs and scattered leaves showed where Jane McCarthy had fallen from the tree, and broken bushes also showed where she had floundered after reaching the ground.

The Tramp Club gazed at the scowling face of the half-breed in speechless amazement.

## CHAPTER XXI

### A DOUBLE SURPRISE

“Who you?” growled the strange man.

“We—we—” began Larry.

“I beg your pardon, sir. You aren’t the person we were seeking,” apologized George Baker.

“Who you look for?”

“Oh, a friend of ours. I am sorry if I disturbed you. Were you up in that tree?” demanded George, a sudden thought occurring to him. He wondered if this

questionable-looking half-breed had been up there while they were holding their conference a short time before that.

The fellow made no reply. He stood regarding them with inquiring, suspicious eyes until the boys grew restless under his scrutiny.

“Well, you needn’t look at us that way,” declared George, flushing under the steady, disconcerting gaze of the stranger. “We don’t know you and you don’t know us, and I guess you don’t own the island. Come on, fellows.”

The boys started away, trudging thoughtfully towards home. As for Jane McCarthy, the instant she reached the ground, she had scrambled to her feet and darted into the bushes, where she threw herself on the ground, breathing heavily, waiting for what might come. What did come amazed her. She saw the man dash up and glance hurriedly about him. It was evident that her fall had attracted his attention, and that he had run to the tree, hoping to catch some one. Gazing at him through the bushes, the girl decided that he must be an Indian. She gazed at him long and earnestly, forgetting for the moment her own precarious position.

# Page 82

Then the boys came. The half-breed stood scowling after them as they hurried away. At this juncture the “caw” of a crow was heard again. He started slightly, bent his head and listened, but there was no repetition of the signal, for which Crazy Jane McCarthy was devoutly thankful. It was plain that he knew it was not a crow, that he understood it to be a signal of some sort.

The half-breed suddenly turned, starting toward the shore of the lake at a brisk pace, worming his way through the bushes with almost no disturbance at all, even at the swift pace he was keeping up.

Jane had lost her fear now. The boys had gone on out of sight and sound and the intruder was hurrying toward the lake. The girl, however, did not dare to run. She feared to meet the Indian, so she crept along cautiously. It was but a short distance to the shore of the lake. She reached there after having followed the Indian’s trail. Jane was just in time to see the fellow launching a canoe. It was a dark green boat, showing long and hard usage.

The fellow leaped in and sent the boat well out into the lake with a single stroke of the paddle, after which he glided up the lake, keeping close in shore under the partial protection of the foliage. Fortunately Jane had thrown herself down again immediately on seeing him, else he might have caught sight of her. That he was a man experienced in the woods, as well as on the water, was plain to be seen. She watched him out of sight, then hurried back to the spot where she had met with disaster and gave the crow signal. It was not much of a success. She repeated it and did better. Jane called several times. Then she jumped clear off the ground at the sound of a voice behind her.

“Jane McCarthy! What are you doing here?”

“Harriet!”

“Yes, it’s I. But what on earth have you been doing?”

“Di—did you see the man?” gasped Jane.

“Wait a moment. I don’t understand you. What is it about a man?”

“I—I was in the tree there when the boys came back. I heard them coming and climbed the tree to hide.”

“I was doing the same thing.”

“I—I fell out of the tree—”

“Gracious! They didn’t discover you, did they? I heard them shouting and running, and wondered what they had discovered.”

“No.  I dived into those bushes and lay down.  Just then a man appeared.  He looked to me like an Indian.  He is a dangerous man, Harriet.  When the boys came up and found him standing here you ought to have seen the expressions on their faces.  Oh, it was funny.”

“Which way did he go?” questioned Harriet eagerly.  She was not laughing now. Another idea had occurred to her.

“Down to the lake.  I followed him and saw him get into his canoe and paddle away.”

“A canoe, did you say?”

“Yes.  It was an old thing, but, my goodness, how it could go!  And the man paddled without making a sound.  I never saw any one handle a canoe like that.”

# Page 83

Harriet gazed at her companion, the lines of her face contracting.

“Jane,” she said, “I saw that man myself. It was the night I rowed out to see who was making camp near us. He shot out ahead of me in his canoe and disappeared. I must have disturbed him.”

“But who—what?” gasped Jane.

“I believe he is the man who has been following us and trying to drive us away. I can’t think of any other reason for his acting as he has. He undoubtedly knows that we are somewhere about, and has been looking for us just as the boys themselves have been doing.”

“Good gracious,” muttered Crazy Jane. “I’m sorry I didn’t stay on the boat.”

“And I am glad you did not. You surely have discovered something. Would you know the man if you were to see him again?”

“Yes.”

“Then we will see if we can’t discover him again. I believe we are getting near to a solution of the enemy that has been following us. Either we must settle him or he will do us some injury. I am glad the boys saw him, too. I am going to suggest to Miss Elting that we go back to our old anchorage to-morrow. To-day we have other plans on hand. And that reminds me. It is getting dark and it is time we were getting back to the boat. We will go down the rope when we reach there. Come.”

The two girls hurried along, keeping a sharp lookout, not knowing but that the boys might be lying in wait for them. They reached the rocks above the houseboat. All was quiet below. Jane went down the rope first, landing in the creek. Harriet did the same, and none of their companions discovered either of them until Jane had climbed aboard the boat and appeared dripping before them.

“Here we are, girls,” laughed Jane.

“Did you discover anything?” asked Miss Elting eagerly.

“We did.”

“Tell us what happened,” urged the guardian.

“The boys found the false trail we made, as well as the one we did not wish them to find. They nearly discovered Jane, too. She sat in a tree while they made their plans nearby. Then Jane fell out of the tree.”

The girls shouted.

“And what do you think?” continued Harriet. “The boys were only a short distance away. They hurried to the scene, and when they got there they found—”

“Jane,” finished Tommy.

“No. A man. A half-breed from what Jane says. He went away in a canoe. He did not see her.”

Miss Elting regarded Harriet reflectively.

“Yes, I think it was the same one,” said Harriet in answer to the guardian’s unspoken question. “It is evident that our presence here is suspected by others than the Tramps. I would suggest that we carry out our plans to-night, then move away from here to-morrow.”

# CHAPTER XXII

### SPOOKS OF THE LONESOME ISLE

“Yes, I know the way. I could go there blindfolded,” answered Harriet, in reply to a question from Miss Elting.

# Page 84

The hour was nine o'clock in the evening. The night was very dark, though the stars were shining. It had been decided that Margery and Tommy should remain on board the "Red Rover," putting out all lights and locking the doors, though no anxiety was felt about them, as there was scarcely a chance that their presence would be discovered, provided the girls remained quiet.

The paraphernalia for the evening's enterprise was carefully loaded into the rowboat; then, with final admonitions to Tommy and Margery to keep silent and not be afraid, the party set out in the rowboat for the entrance of the creek. They paused there long enough to make certain that no one was about, after which they rowed along the shore a short distance and made a landing at a point where the ground was fairly level.

"Now be very quiet," whispered Harriet. "Remember the signal to return to the boat is one long caw. Two caws in quick succession mean 'hurry.'"

"We shan't be far apart, shall we?" questioned Hazel, somewhat apprehensively.

"No. Within speaking distance," replied Miss Elting. "Leave it to Harriet and Jane to make the first advance. We will follow when the time is right. It is fortunate that we left Tommy and Margery at home. Are you ready, Harriet?"

It was a silent party of four shadowy figures that made its way cautiously along the shore of the island for some little distance. The party then turned sharply to the right and disappeared among the bushes that marked a slight rise of ground. Reaching this rise they turned to the left and once more proceeded straight ahead.

The lights of a campfire were soon distinguishable between the trees. The party was nearing the camp of the Tramp Club. The time to prepare for their final triumph was at hand.

"Now, Harriet," urged Miss Elting in a half whisper.

"Yes. I will go around to the other side of the camp. That will be the most difficult position to get away from, so I am choosing it for myself. Jane, you will remain here, while Miss Elting and Hazel will take a position halfway between us. You see that will enable us practically to surround the camp. After you hear me, wait a moment, then give them a thriller."

Harriet, accompanied by the guardian and Hazel, stepped promptly away. After going on for some distance, the girl directed Miss Elting and Hazel to stop and remain where they were, except that they were to separate, yet keep within easy call of each other. This detail arranged, Harriet went on.

According to previous arrangement, Jane, Miss Elting and Hazel gradually crept nearer to the camp, continuing until they could make out the figures of the boys quite plainly.

The latter were sitting about the campfire.  Their attitude was one of dejection.  They had been outwitted and they knew it.

“If we don’t find those girls to-night, then to-morrow morning we’ll get out of here,” announced George.  “They know that they have won and we’ll let them come and tell us so rather than hunt all summer for them.”

# Page 85

“What about that half-breed?” asked Sam. “I think we’d better find out who he is. I didn’t like the looks of that fellow a little bit.”

“Neither did I,” agreed George. “Queer we never saw him around here before.”

“You must remember this is a large lake,” Billy informed them. “He probably is a fisherman who hangs out on the island, and who resented our encroaching upon his preserves. I think I saw the same fellow once in a canoe, but he was so far away that I don’t think I would know him were we to meet face to face.”

“There are too many mysterious things on this island,” averred Larry Goheen, with emphasis. “I, for one, shall be glad to get away from it. I know there are spooks here.”

“Spooks!” jeered George. “Who’s afraid of spooks? Who—” George’s voice trailed off almost into a whisper. “I heard something,” he exclaimed.

“So did I,” added Larry, nodding.

A laugh, a distinctly human laugh, shrill and mocking, was wafted to them. The boys gazed questioningly at each other. Larry glanced about apprehensively. Then out of the night came the most weird, most demoniacal laugh any member of the Tramp Club ever had heard.

The boys sprang to their feet.

Other laughs, accompanied by shrieks, followed each other in quick succession. The laughs seemed to come from all quarters. It was difficult to say from just what particular point any one of them did come.

“Spooks!” yelled Larry Goheen, bolting toward the lake. Billy caught and jerked him back.

“No, you don’t,” growled Billy. “We stand together.”

“I don’t want to stay here,” chattered Larry. “I never try to fool people with fake courage when I know that running is my one best course to pursue.”

“Is there a lunatic asylum in this part of the country?” asked Baker. “Can it be possible that any of the inmates have escaped.”

Billy Gordon shook his head. “Nothing as easy as that,” he sighed.

“Great Scott! There it goes again!” breathed Larry. “It’s down that way, too,” pointing in the direction taken by Harriet Burrell.

It was a long, weird wail, well calculated to freeze the marrow in one's bones.

"Come on, fellows!" cried George, with a fine showing of resolution. "We'll lay that ghost!"

George was the only one of the boys who thought to snatch up a club as he ran. But now the unearthly sounds came from the rear, instead of ahead of them. The boys wheeled abruptly, only to hear right in front of them a dismaying chorus of ghostly noises.

"Let's go!" urged Larry. "It's surely a lot of banshees!"

"Great Scott! Look!" quivered Sam, pointing with trembling finger.

In the faint light the boys made out a white figure that might have been anywhere from seven to ten feet in height. The boys were too scared to judge of length. The awful thing raised its draped arms, a frightful scream sounding on the air.

# Page 86

At that Billy lost his grip on Larry's arm. Goheen made no apologies, but made a straight, swift dash for camp.

The other boys hesitated for a few brief seconds; then they, too, headed for camp. They were not exactly running. They were leaping like as many frightened rabbits, fleeing from a rabbit hound. In their haste they lost their way and were proceeding directly toward the spot where Jane McCarthy was standing.

Jane finally heard them coming. She was filled with glee. She had feared that she was not to have an opportunity to play an important part in this ghost party. Making a noise like a ghost did not wholly satisfy Crazy Jane McCarthy. What she wanted was something more exciting. Her opportunity came very quickly. The boys were nearly up to her, ere she realized that they were so close.

A wild wail halted them.

"Come on, you fellows!" yelled George to his faltering companions.

"There it is!" howled Sam.

He had espied another figure that looked exactly like the first ghost. George discovered it at about the same time. George made a brave rush toward the figure, yelling to frighten it. But Crazy Jane was not easily frightened. She advanced slowly, waving the long, draped arms, and moaning. All at once something came down on the head of George Baker, just as he had raised his club to hurl it at the ghost. The something was a long tough stick in the hand of Jane McCarthy.

George uttered a howl and sprang back. The ghost advanced on him. Billy got a light tap, then Sam yelled as something damp brushed his cheek. He did not know that it was the leaf of a bush. He thought it the cold, clammy hand of the ghost.

The boys having gotten more than they had looked for, began to retreat. Sam was the first after Larry to run. He did so with all speed, followed closely by George and Billy. They were confused. They did not know just where the camp was located. Glancing over their shoulders they saw that the ghost was pursuing them. The boys began to shout anew, and to run even at greater speed.

"There's some more of them," howled Sam.

"Yeow!" yelled George. He sprang to the left, in which direction he believed the camp lay, then he halted. Another ghost was confronting him. George hesitated. The ghost uttered a moan. The brave George Baker, captain of the Tramp Club, took to his heels. The others did the same, except that each took a different direction. Wherever they ran they were followed by moans and screams, principally from the lips of Crazy Jane McCarthy.

It seemed to their excited imaginations that the woods were full of ghosts of giant stature, with voices capable of making one's hair stand on end. The worst of it was that the ghosts persisted in pursuing them. They chased the brave Tramp Club right into camp, where the lads arrived one by one. Instead of stopping the boys bolted for the launch, in which the frightened Larry Goheen already had sought safety.

# Page 87

“Cast off,” yelled George, the last to leap into the boat.

The launch was shoved from the shore and allowed to drift while the boys sat shivering, listening to the wails from the forest.

“Good-bye,” answered Sam.

“Fellows, we are all cowards,” declared George, beginning to get control of himself. “We should have staid and knocked them out.”

“I’ll go back, if you say so,” answered Billy promptly.

“No. I’ve got enough of this place. To-morrow morning we break camp and go back to the other camping place. No more ghost parties for mine.”

“As long as we have decided to move why not go now,” suggested Larry.

The boys discussed the matter briefly, then decided that they would. Sam was put on guard to watch for the return of the ghosts while the others hurriedly broke camp. But there were no more ghostly moans nor ghostly intruders that night.

The ghosts in the persons of the Meadow-Brook Girls were on their way to their rowboat. Beaching it they sat down and laughed until their eyes were wet with tears.

“It was a mean trick to play on them,” gasped Miss Elting. “But I think we have more than won our wager. It is a wonder that they didn’t suspect us.”

“There goes a boat!” cried Jane. “It’s a launch.”

“It is the boys. We have frightened them off,” answered Miss Elting.

The girls rowed quickly home, but ere they had reached the entrance to the secret creek they were startled by the sound of a shrill scream. They recognized the voice as Tommy’s and began to shout, and to row with all their might. A moment later, just as they were about to turn into the opening with their boat, a canoe shot out and darted across their bows, disappearing in the darkness.

“A man, a man!” yelled Tommy as Harriet shouted to know if the two girls were all right. Tommy threw open the door and in her excitement walked off the after deck of the “Red Rover” and fell forward into the stream.

“Jane, do you recognize that man?” cried Harriet excitedly.

“Yes,” exclaimed Jane, “he’s the man I saw this afternoon, and he’s our mysterious enemy too, or my name’s not Jane McCarthy.”

# CHAPTER XXIII

## ON A STORMY CRUISE

It was late on the following forenoon when the Meadow-Brook Girls might have been observed towing the “Red Rover” out from the creek in which it had been anchored. They decided that it was high time to leave.

During their absence, and while they were frightening the Tramp Club with sheets draped over sticks and carried high above their heads, Tommy and Margery had been having an exciting experience. They had been anxiously peering out of the cabin, when after an hour or so they discovered a canoe approaching the scow. At first they thought it one of their own party who was paddling the canoe. They soon discovered that it was a man. The girls were too frightened to do more than watch him in almost breathless silence. But when the man climbed aboard the after deck, after satisfying himself that the boat was deserted, they decided that it was time to move.

# Page 88

Tommy uttered a scream. Margery followed suit and their cries had been heard by the returning ghost party. The man did not tarry to see who had screamed. He sprang into the creek, where, pushing his canoe ahead of him, he ran down the stream. He had then leaped in and had given the paddle the first swift sweep when discovered by Harriet and her party.

Miss Elting was really alarmed when she heard their story. She decided to sit up all night and watch. Jane and Harriet kept watch with her. They did not retire until daylight, after which they got a few hours of sleep. Then came a late breakfast and the preparations for departure. They were going back to the other side of the lake, where they intended to tie up at their old anchorage near the main camp of the Tramp Club.

After dragging the houseboat out and finding a suitable anchorage, Harriet rowed over to the mainland. Running up to the farmhouse she telephoned to the nearest town for a launch to come down and give them a tow. Billy Gordon and his motor boat were not on hand for the purpose this morning.

When about eleven o'clock a launch came down the coast in search of them the wind had risen and the lake was rough. It was an old boat and did not look as though it could stand much weather. The man running the boat said there was rather a stiff sea on the other side of the island, but he thought he could make it. Miss Elting said she would give him five dollars if he would take them across. He made fast to the "Red Rover" and started.

Once they had rounded the island they did not think the waves would be very high. Being protected by a point of land they did not get the full force of the wind. Nor did they realize what a chance they had taken until they had gotten well out into the lake. There the gale struck them with full force. Harriet grew really alarmed. She feared the "Red Rover" was not strong enough to stand up under it. Margery was seasick and the others also felt the effects of the gale.

The "Red Rover" was now pitching more violently than ever. Jane was gazing at the launch wide-eyed, expecting every moment to see it take a dive, not to come up again. Everything movable in the "Red Rover's" cabin was being hurled about. The oil stove long since had tipped over, glass was being smashed, dishes broken, pieces of each of these were rattling over the floor. Miss Elting decided that they would be better off outside.

Harriet protested against their going on the upper deck, saying that they might be blown off into the lake. Jane was protecting herself by clinging to a rope. The awning suddenly ballooned and went up into the air, taking some of the awning posts with it. Miss Elting had no further desire to go up on deck after that. With her charges she kept close to the deck house, where they shielded themselves from the wind as much as possible.

“He’s turning round,” shouted Jane, with hands to lips.

# Page 89

“Don’t let him.  He will upset us.”

Jane yelled at the man in the launch, who—not daring to brave the seas any longer, was slowly turning his launch about.  He shook his head, evidently thinking she was ordering him to continue.  Seeing that her words were of no avail, Crazy Jane leaped down to the forward deck and casting the tow line from the cleat, flung it out on the water.

“Hook on the other end and tow us back if you want to.  Don’t you know better than to turn us around in all this storm?” she yelled.

The boatman ran up to the stern where Harriet was doing her best to keep the boat’s head to the wind, but was slowly losing ground.  She motioned to him to keep off and beckoned to him to cast the tow line to her so she could make it fast at that end.  Harriet had forgotten that there was no rudder at the other end.  But the boatman persisted in getting up close to the houseboat.  All at once what Harriet had feared did happen.  The launch was picked up on a heavy swell and hurled against the houseboat.  There followed the sound of crunching woodwork.  The launch began to fill with water.

“Jump!” shouted Captain Harriet.  “You’re sinking.”

The boatman clung to his craft a moment longer, then leaped into the lake.  He was not a good swimmer, but fortunately the waves were rolling toward the houseboat, carrying him in that direction.  Harriet had dropped the tiller and was watching him narrowly.  There was no rope ready, the one that usually lay at hand having been lost with the launch, which slowly settled in the water, then disappeared.

The girl saw that the man was likely to be hurled against the side of the houseboat.  She snatched up a boathook and when he came within reach thrust it out to him.

“Hold steady until that wave passes, then I’ll pull you in,” she called.  The blow from the waves took nearly all the breath out of the man, but as soon as it had passed, Harriet hauled him quickly aboard.

Miss Elting reported that the “Red Rover” was leaking, that the launch had crushed in a plank on the side.

“Stuff clothing in the hole,” ordered Jane.  “Here you, Mr. Man, please go in there and see if you can’t nail up the broken place.  You’ve got to do something or you’ll never set foot on land again.”

Off in the camp of the Tramp Club there was great excitement.  The boys had discovered the craft laboring in the heavy sea, and as it drew nearer to their side of the lake, they discovered that it was none other than the “Red Rover.”

“They’re in trouble, boys.  Billy, will your boat stand it?” asked George.

“As long as we can keep the water out of her.”

“Then let’s get aboard.  No, you fellows stay here.  There’s a load of them out there to fetch back if we ever get close enough to take them off.”

The motors were working, but no sooner had the two boys gotten clear of the little pier at their camp than the engines suddenly stopped and the boat drifted back.

# Page 90

“There’s a short circuit somewhere,” called Billy. “Hold her. I’ll find it and we’ll be going very shortly.”

“Hurry, Billy! They’re in an awful mess over there,” urged George.

It seemed as though the “Red Rover” must be torn to pieces. The boat was now drifting broadside to the waves. Every large wave would break against the side, then leap clear over the boat. Every wave seemed powerful enough to crush in the sides. But they came out dripping, glistening red after each onslaught. The boatman had succeeded in patching the rent caused by the collision, but the upper deck was leaking in many places. The “Red Rover” had been strained almost to the breaking-up point. It was now fairly wallowing in the foaming sea dashing against its weather side. Harriet had given up trying to do anything with the rudder. She could not keep the bow of the boat around to the seas. It persisted in lying broadside on, where it took the full force of the waves.

“There comes a boat,” cried Jane, who had been on the upper deck, waving a sheet as a signal that they were in distress. All hands peered toward the mainland. They saw a launch making slow progress toward them. The little boat seemed to be standing with her bow in the air most of the time. First it would rear then plunge. As it neared them they saw that it was Billy Gordon’s boat, bearing himself and George Baker.

“Cast a line! I don’t dare get near,” shouted Billy when close enough to make his voice heard.

“We haven’t any. Cast your own,” answered Harriet.

George did the casting. He failed three times but on the fourth cast Harriet caught the line and quickly made it fast to a cleat at the forward end being nearly swept overboard in the effort. The “Red Rover” straightened out on her course. For a moment the launch seemed to be losing ground rather than gaining, then slowly it began to pick up and shortly after that was making slow progress toward shore.

There were many spectators to that battle, none of whom believed that either launch or houseboat, ever would reach the land. Other boats refused to venture out in such a gale. Even the big boats remained tied up. So much water was taken aboard by the launch that George was fully occupied in bailing. A piece of oilcloth had been thrown over the engines and battery coils to keep these from getting soaked and thus causing a stoppage of the engine.

For two hours did launch and houseboat labor through the seas, fighting every inch of the way. Harriet’s arms ached from handling the tiller. She was wet to the skin but clung steadily to her work. The boatman was kept inside to watch for and stop leaks, of which there were many before the voyage came to an end. At last the “Red Rover”

slipped into comparatively calm water, amid a chorus of yells from the boys on shore. George got up and waved his cap to the girls. They answered the salute with three cheers, then Billy pulled the scow up to her former anchorage, and in a few moments she lay rolling easily in a moderate swell, safe, though considerably strained from her wild voyage across a lake that many larger and more seaworthy boats would have hesitated to brave.

# Page 91

## CHAPTER XXIV

## CONCLUSION

It was late in the evening when some sort of order had been restored in the cabin of the "Red Rover." The boys had turned to and worked like Trojans, helping to get the water out of the boat, to mend broken places and throw the broken dishes overboard.

When all was done Miss Elting served a luncheon to them, mostly canned stuff, all the other food having been ruined in the voyage across the lake. It was during the luncheon that she made a confession for herself and companions. She told the Tramp Club how they had dressed up in white sheets and chased the boys from the island; how they had hidden in the cave with their boat; how Jane had discovered the half-breed and narrowly missed a double discovery herself.

"And now," concluded Miss Elting, "that is the way we played our tricks. Perhaps we won the contest but after your bravery to-day we feel that far greater honors are due to you boys."

The boys, whose faces had flushed during the recital, now broke into a hearty laugh.

"That's the best joke ever played on a bunch of fellows," cried Billy. "And you've won the wager fairly enough. You don't need to apologize for the ghosts. The trouble is we tried to play worse jokes on you, but you turned them on us every time. If we got you out of the lake it was by good luck, not because we were so awfully brave. I'll never brag about bravery after last night. And now good night. You folks are tired and want to go to bed. We'll see that you aren't disturbed this evening. You don't think of working your disappearing act to-night, do you?"

"No. We have had sufficient excitement for one day," answered Miss Elting laughingly. "We are going to invite you over to dinner soon, then we will have a happy good-bye party before we leave. By the way, boys, we are going ashore in the morning on a shopping trip. As all of us wish to go I am going to ask you if you will keep an eye on the 'Red Rover.' There is very little possibility that our enemy will visit it in broad daylight, still it is best to take proper precautions against further attacks."

"We'll be very glad to look out for the 'Red Rover' while you're away," responded George heartily. "That is if you can assure us that you won't try any new vanishing tricks."

"We give you our solemn promise," laughed Harriet. "The 'Red Rover' has played her last trick."

Harriet's laughing assurance, however, was destined to prove truer than she had dreamed.  The next morning the girls rose early, and after a hasty breakfast went ashore to do their shopping, secure in the thought that the Tramp Club would keep an eye on the "Red Rover."

In the meantime the boys had posted a watch on the shore, in the person of Billy Gordon, who seated comfortably on the ground, his back against a big tree, glanced frequently out over the lake to where the "Red Rover" lay at anchor, her red sides glistening in the sun.

# Page 92

It was well towards noon when Billy rose from the ground and strolled lazily down to the beach. Suddenly his good-natured face took on a startled look as he stared anxiously toward the houseboat. A moment later he was running toward the tent at full speed.

“Fellows, come out here!” he shouted. “Hurry up!”

“What’s the matter?” asked George Baker, hurrying out of the tent, the other members of the Tramp Club at his heels.

“Look!” gasped Billy, pointing toward the “Red Rover.” “What do you make of that?”

“Why—why—” stammered George Baker. Then he uttered a sudden cry of alarm. “By George, she’s on fire. That scamp has sneaked in and set fire to the boat under our very noses. I’m positive that he did it. Pile into the launch with all the pails you can find and let’s get out there. That villain must have swum over, climbed aboard, and set fire to the side of the boat away from the shore. That’s why we didn’t notice the smoke when she first began to burn.”

By the time they were on their way toward the doomed houseboat the fire had made tremendous headway. Being an old boat, the “Red Rover” burned like kindling. It seemed to be fairly wrapped in flames.

“It’s no use,” groaned George. “She’ll be gone inside of the next five minutes. We can’t save the boat or anything on board. I’m thankful the girls were all on shore. That villain must have watched them go, and then swam out here. If he’d paddled out in his canoe this morning we’d have seen him. Don’t go too near her, fellows. She’s likely to collapse any minute.”

“Look out! She’s going!” exclaimed Larry Goheen. A moment later the whole top of the unwieldy boat fell in, while the flames attacked the hull with renewed fury.

* * * * *

When the Meadow-Brook Girls returned to the shore of the lake, that afternoon, well laden with the fruits of their shopping, they were met by the members of the Tramp Club, who looked unduly solemn. One glance at their grave faces and Harriet cried out apprehensively, “What on earth has happened to you, boys?”

“We’re all right,” stammered George, “but the ’Red Rover’—well, it is—”

The Meadow-Brook Girls all looked involuntarily in the direction of where the “Red Rover” had lain that morning.

“Why—why—where is our boat?” faltered Miss Elting.

Then George poured forth the story of the morning's disaster, while the girls listened in consternation to the recital of the way in which the houseboat had been set fire to and sunk.

"Of course that half-breed did it," concluded George, "and now that we've told you all about it, we are going to start out after him. I'll wager he's somewhere around this lake yet."

"I shall go back to the village at once and put the matter in the hands of the constable," declared Miss Elting. "I shall also see Dee Dickinson. I hold him indirectly responsible for all the disagreeable things that have happened to us, and for this, too."

# Page 93

“Wait until to-night before you do anything about it,” begged George. “Give the Tramp Club a chance to distinguish themselves. If we don’t get our man by six o’clock to-night, then put the matter in the hands of the authorities. In the meantime, won’t you accept our hospitality for the day? We offer you the use of our camp while we go out on a man hunt.”

After some further conversation Miss Elting reluctantly agreed to the boys’ plan, and after considerable mourning over the lost “Red Rover,” the girls settled themselves in the camp of the tramps to await the return of the boys.

“It looks as though we would have to go back to Meadow-Brook a little sooner than we expected, girls,” declared Miss Elting.

“I’d rather go home than thtay around where there are crathy Indianth,” retorted Tommy. “Thuppothe we had been on that boat when it thank.”

“We wouldn’t have been so foolish as to stay on it if it had been sinking,” laughed Harriet. “Besides all of us can swim. Our enemy took good care to set fire to the boat when we weren’t on it.”

“I wonder what his object is in persecuting us so,” mused Hazel. “None of us have ever harmed him.”

“Ask Dee Dickinson,” advised Jane dryly.

“We certainly shall do so, this very night,” returned Miss Elting, with compressed lips.

Meanwhile the Tramp Club had pursued what bade fair to be a fruitless quest. Search as they might they could find no trace of their quarry. Late in the afternoon the launch reached the entrance to the hidden creek where the “Red Rover” had recently lain snug and secure.

“This is certainly an ideal hiding place,” declared George, as he scanned the bank on both sides. “I don’t wonder—”

He was interrupted by an excited shout from Larry, who had also been keeping a sharp lookout. “There he goes!” he yelled.

A long dark green canoe had shot out from under an overhanging ledge of rock. The sole occupant was paddling with swift, noiseless strokes toward the mouth of the creek, intent on reaching the lake and making his escape.

“It’s the half-breed!” yelled Larry excitedly.

“He’s been hiding up here waiting for night to come.  He thought that we didn’t know about this place.  Now that we’ve hunted him down, he’s trying to make a quick get-away.  Once out of the creek he can give us the slip.  Fellows, we’ve got to get him!”

Billy, who was at the wheel, began backing the launch toward the mouth of the creek. Not for an instant did the boys lose sight of their man, and the moment the boat reached open water it was sent ahead at full speed.  Soon they began to gain on the fugitive, who was paddling with a speed little short of marvelous.

“Hold on there!” shouted George.  “We’ve got you anyway.  You might as well surrender!”

The man in the canoe refused to halt at command, but continued to paddle desperately, until Billy deliberately ran him down.  An instant later George was holding on to their captive with an iron grip.

# Page 94

“Shut down.  I’ve got him!” he yelled.  Billy obeyed, and the half-breed was hauled into the launch, kicking and struggling furiously.

“Get a rope,” commanded George.  “There’s a coil of it in the bow of the launch.”

Five minutes later the Indian was lying in the bottom of the boat tied beyond all possibility of escape, and the boys were triumphantly heading for camp.

“We’ve got the Indian!” yelled Larry to the little group on shore as the launch neared the landing in front of the Tramp Club’s camp.

“We’ve been watching for you,” called Harriet.  “We saw you when you were away up the lake.  Have you really got him?”

“Indeed we have, and tied so that he’d have hard work getting away,” laughed Gordon.

“What shall we do with him?” asked Larry as they bore the Indian ashore in triumph.

“Stand him up against that tree for the present,” ordered George, then grimly wound coil after coil of rope around the half-breed, securing him with many a hard knot.  At last George stood back to survey his work with admiration.

“I’d like to see even an Indian get out of that harness,” Baker remarked complacently.

Harriet and Jane walked over to the tree and looked searchingly at the captive.  Both recognized him as the man they had seen while the “Red Rover” lay hidden in the creek.

“Larry and I are going up to the village at once to notify the authorities,” announced George.  “We want to get rid of this fellow as soon as possible.”

“And I am going with you,” announced Miss Elting firmly, “to hunt up Mr. Dee Dickinson.  He knows all about this man and the time has arrived for him to tell me the truth.”

* * * * *

Dickinson at first refused flatly to give Miss Elting any satisfaction concerning the Indian.

“Then I shall have you arrested as a suspicious character, also,” declared Miss Elting sternly.  “Unless you give me a full explanation of this whole affair I shall have you taken in custody by the authorities.  Understand you are to tell me everything.”

Dickinson, however, seeing that Miss Elting would admit of no trifling, decided that it would be better to make a clean breast of the matter.

“The Indian’s name is Charlie Lavaille,” he began sullenly, “though he’s commonly called French Charlie.  He makes a sort of living at fishing, and he hired the houseboat from me.”

“Then you rented the boat to some one else, and afterwards turned it over to us without letting us know?” asked Miss Elting.

“He rented the houseboat after a fashion,” Dickinson explained lamely, “though he didn’t pay any rent down, and hasn’t paid a penny since.  He was going to pay me, he said, at the end of the season.  Now, of course, when you came up here with a message from your brother, and claimed the boat, I had to let you have it.  If Charlie had paid any money, I would have refunded it to him; but as he hadn’t paid a cent there was nothing to do but to turn the boat over to you.”

# Page 95

“And you left us in ignorance of all this, when the knowledge of it might have saved us much trouble, let alone the danger we ran and the final loss of the boat?” Miss Elting asked accusingly.

“Well, you see, it was hard to explain,” replied Dee Dickinson reluctantly. “At any rate, at the time I thought it would be hard to explain, so I let it go without telling you. I tried to make it all clear to Charlie that, having paid no money, he had no claim on the boat, but you can’t explain a thing like that to an Indian. So Charlie wouldn’t listen to anything I could say. The half-breed isn’t right in his head, anyway, I’m inclined to think.”

“So, without warning, you left us at the mercy of a possibly insane Indian?” Miss Elting persisted. “Mr. Dickinson, you have acted in a very cowardly fashion toward women who had been sent here believing that they were to be in a measure under your protection. You should be compelled to suffer for it. I shall write to my brother at once and tell him just what sort of man you are.”

Dickinson cringed at Miss Elting’s severe words and fairly slunk from the guardian’s presence at the close of the interview.

The village constable and one of his men returned to the camp with Miss Elting and the boys to take charge of the Indian. He was locked up for a few days by the authorities at Wantagh, then subjected to a rigid examination by a medical board, and being pronounced insane, was sent away to one of the state institutions for the demented.

The Meadow-Brook Girls and Miss Elting said good-bye to the Tramp Club that evening and spent the night at the village hotel.

“We’ve had a fine time at any rate,” said Jane McCarthy as they discussed all over again the exciting happenings of the day before, at breakfast the next morning. “Where are we going next? Vacation isn’t half over yet.”

“Why we’re going home, aren’t we?” asked Harriet, turning to Miss Elting.

“Not so you could notice it!” exclaimed Jane slangily. “That is not if Miss Elting will listen to my plan. Promise me you’ll do as I ask, Miss Elting.”

“I never make rash promises,” laughed Miss Elting. “Tell us what you wish to do and then we’ll see about it.”

“I want to take you all for a week’s drive in my car. You’ve been through so much here at the lake that my peculiar style of driving will hold no terrors for you. What do you say? Will you go?”

“If I thought you could be depended upon, for once, to drive safely—” began Miss Elting somewhat dubiously. “What is your pleasure, girls?”

“We want to go with Jane,” was the chorus.

“Hurrah!” cried Jane. “It’s settled. I’ll promise to bring you back home all safe and sound.”

The day was spent in shopping at the village store, as their belongings had all been aboard the ill-fated “Red Rover.” The Meadow-Brook Girls decided to get along as best they could with their limited supply of clothing, and depended on buying their meals at the various hotels and farmhouses along the way. After a happy week on the road, during which time Jane McCarthy proved herself to be a safe and careful driver, they turned their faces toward their own town.

# Page 96

Once home, Miss Elting lost no time in sending in a report, to the Chief Guardian of the Camp Girls' Association, of the "honors" won by the Meadow-Brook Girls. In due time the girls received their honor beads, which added considerably to the length of the strings of beads they had already won for achievement and bravery.

The Meadow-Brook Girls were destined, however, to win many more of the coveted beads, and shortly after their return home, Jane McCarthy held a lengthy consultation with her father; then invited them and Miss Elting to be her guests on a trip to the White Mountains. What befell them during their outing in the New Hampshire hills will be fully set forth in the next volume of this series entitled, "*The Meadow-Brook girls in the hills*; Or, The Missing Pilot of the White Mountains."

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# Page 97

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