

Kit of Greenacre Farm eBook

Kit of Greenacre Farm by Izola forrester

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CHAPTER I

"No trespassing"

Kit was on lookout duty, and had been for the past hour and a half. The cupola room, with its six windows, commanded a panoramic view of the countryside, and from here she had done sentry duty over the huckleberry patch.

It lay to the northeast of the house, a great, rambling, rocky, ten acre lot that straggled unevenly from the wood road down to the river. To the casual onlooker, it seemed just a patch of underbrush. There were half-grown birches all over it, and now and then a little dwarf spruce tree or cluster of hazel bushes. But to the girls of Greenacres, that ten acre lot represented a treasure trove in the month of August when huckleberries and blueberries were ripe. Shad said knowing the proper time to pick huckleberries was just born in one, so the girls had guarded the old pasture from any marauding youngsters or wayside peddlers.

"You've got to keep a good eye out for them this year," Shad warned them. "Last year wasn't good for huckleberries, apples or nuts, but this is going to be a regular jubilee harvest. Them bushes up there are hanging so full that you can put up quarts and quarts and quarts of them and send huckleberry pies to the heathen all winter if you want to."

And he had likewise warned them that that particular berry patch had been famous throughout the countryside ever since the days when Greenacres had belonged to the Trowbridges. Several times when it had happened to be a good year for the huckleberry crop, raiders had swept down and culled the best of the harvest. Not from around the near-by villages had they come, but from the small towns, ten or fifteen miles away.

"Them mill boys and girls," Shad declared, "just think that the Lord grows things in the country for anybody to come along and pick. They don't pay no more attention to a 'No Trespassing' sign than they would to a woodchuck's tracks. The only thing to do is watch, and when you see 'em turn in through the bars off the main road, you come down and let me know, and telephone over for Hannibal Hicks to come and ketch 'em. Hannibal ain't doin' nothin' to earn his fifteen dollars a year as constable 'round here, and we ought to help him out if we can."

So to-day, it was Kit's turn to watch the huckleberry patch from the cupola room, and along towards three o'clock she beheld a trig-looking red-wheeled, black-bodied wagon, drawn unmistakably by a livery horse, pull up at the pasture bars, and its driver calmly and shamelessly hitch there. He took out of the wagon not a burlap bag, but a tan

leather hand bag of generous size, and also something else that looked like a capacious box with a handle to it.

“Camouflage,” said Kit to herself, scornfully. “He’s going to fill them with our berries, and then make believe he’s selling books.”

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Down-stairs she sped with the news. Doris was out at the barn negotiating peace terms with a half-grown calf that she had been trying to tame for days, and which still persisted in butting its head every time she came near it with friendly overtures. Jean and Helen had gone up to Norwich with Mrs. Robbins for the day, and her father was out in the apple orchard with Philemon Weaver, spraying the trees against the attacks of the gypsy moths. Leastwise, Philemon held to spraying, but Mr. Robbins was anxious to experiment with some of the newer methods advocated by the government.

All unconscious of Kit's intentions or Shad's eagerness to abet them, the two rambled off towards the upland orchards. Kit had started Shad after the trespasser, while she went back to telephone to Mr. Hicks. The very last thing she had said to Shad was to put the vandal in the corn-crib and stand guard over him until Mr. Hicks came.

"Don't you worry one bit, Miss Kit," the constable of Gilead Township assured her over the wire. "I'll be there in my car in less than twenty minutes. You folks ain't the only ones that's suffering this year from fruit thieves, and it's time we taught these high fliers from town that they can't light anywhere they like and pick what they like. I'll take him right down to the judge this afternoon."

Kit sat by the open window and fanned herself with a feeling of triumphant indignation. If Jean or Helen had been home, she knew perfectly well they would have been soft-hearted and lenient, but every berry on every bush was precious to Kit, and she felt that now was the appointed hour, as Cousin Roxy would have said.

Inside of a few minutes, Shad came back, perspiring and red faced, but filled with unholy glee. He dipped a tin bucket into the water pail.

"I've got him," he said, happily, "safe and sound in the corn-crib, and it's hotter than all get out in there. He can't escape unless he slips through a crack in the floor. I just caught him red handed as he was bending down right over the bushes, and what do you suppose he tried to tell me, Miss Kit? He said he was looking for caterpillars." Shad laughed riotously at the recollection. "Did you call up Han Hicks?"

Kit nodded, looking out at the corn-crib. The midsummer sun beat down upon it pitilessly, at the end of the lane behind the barn.

"Do you suppose he'll survive, Shad? I'll bet a cookie it's a hundred and six inside there."

"Do him good," retorted Shad. "Probably it's the only chance he's ever had to meditate on his misdoings. Don't you fret about him. He's just as husky as I be, and twice as hefty. It was all I could do to ketch a good holt on him."

"Oh, Shad," exclaimed Kit. "I didn't want you to touch him, you know."

“I didn’t,” Shad laughed. “I just gave him a bit of sound scripture reasoning, aided by fist persuasion when he was inclined to put up an argument. I’ll stand guard over him until Han comes along, and takes him quietly off our hands. I reckon he didn’t think we had any majesty of the law here in Gilead.”

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Kit looked after his retreating figure somewhat dubiously. It was one thing to act on the impulse of the moment and quite another to face the consequences. Now that the prisoner was safe in the corn-crib, she wondered somewhat uneasily just what her father would say when he found out what she had done to protect the berry patch. But just now he was safe in the upper orchard with old Mr. Weaver, deep in apple culture, and she thought she could get rid of the trespasser before he returned.

Mrs. Gorham was in the kitchen putting up peaches. Her voice came with droning, old-fashioned sweetness through the screen door.

“When I can read my title dear
To mansions in the skies,
I'll bid farewell to every fear,
And wipe my weeping eyes.”

Kit slipped around the side drive behind the house out to the hill road. Mr. Hicks would have to come from Gilead Green in this direction, and here she sat on one of the high entrance posts, waiting and cogitating.

The woodbine that clambered over the two high, white posts was still green, but scrambling along the ground were wild blackberry runners just turning a rich brown crimson.

The minutes passed and still Mr. Hicks failed to appear. If Kit could have visualized his journey hither, she might have beheld him, lingering here and there along the country roads, stopping to tell the news to any neighbor who might be working out his road tax in the lull of the season between haying and harvest time. Beside him sat Elvira, his youngest, drinking in every word with tense appreciation of the novelty. It was the first chance Mr. Hicks had had to make an arrest during his term of office, and as a special test and reward of diligence, Elvira had been permitted to come along and behold the climax with her own eyes. But the twenty minutes stretched out into nearly an hour's time and more, and Kit's heart sank when she beheld her father strolling leisurely down the orchard path, just as Mr. Hicks hove in sight.

Mr. Weaver hobbled beside him, smiling contentedly.

“Well, I guess we've got 'em licked this time, Jerry,” he chuckled. “If there's a bug or a moth that can stand that leetle dose of mine, I'll eat the whole apple crop myself.”

“Still, I'll feel better satisfied when Howard gets here, and gives an expert opinion,” Mr. Robbins rejoined. “He wrote he expected to be here to-day without fail.”

“Well, of course you're entitled to your opinion, Jerry,” Mr. Weaver replied doubtfully. “But I never did set any store at all by these here government chaps with their little

satchels and tree doctor books. I'd just as soon walk up to an apple tree and hand it a blue pill or a shin plaster."

Kit slid hastily down from the post as Mr. Hicks' black and white horse turned in from the road.

"Hello," he called out, cheerily. "How be you, Jerry? Howdy, Philemon? Miss Kit here tells me you've been harboring a fruit thief, and you've caught him."

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Kit's cheeks were bright red as she laid one hand on her father's shoulder.

"Shad's got him right over in the corn-crib, Mr. Hicks. I haven't told father yet, because it might worry him. It isn't anything at all, Dad," she added, hurriedly. "We girls have been keeping a watch on the berry patch, you know, and to-day it was my turn to stand guard up in the cupola. I just happened to see somebody over there after the berries, so I told Shad to go and get him, and I called up Mr. Hicks."

Mr. Robbins shook his head with a little smile.

"I'm afraid Kit has been overzealous, Hannibal," he said. "I don't know anything about this, but we'll go over to the corn-crib and find out what it's all about."

Kit and Evie secured a good point of vantage up on the porch while the others skirted around the garden over to the old corn-crib where Shad stood sentinel duty.

"My, I like your place over here," Evie exclaimed, wistfully. "You've got so many ornaments out-of-doors. Ma says she can't even grow a nasturtium on our place without the hens scratching it up."

Kit nodded, but could not answer. Already she had what Cynthia Allen called a "premonition" that all was not as it should be at the corn-crib. She saw Shad stealthily and cautiously put back the wide wooden bars that held the door, then Mr. Hicks, fully on the defensive with a stout hickory cane held in readiness for any unseemly onslaught on the part of the culprit, advanced into the corn-crib. Evie drew closer, her little freckled face full of curiosity.

"Ain't Pop brave?" she whispered, "and he never made but two arrests before in all his life. One was over at Miss Hornaby's when she wouldn't let Minnie and Myron go to school 'cause their shoes were all out on the ground, and the other time he got that French weaver over at Beacon Hill for selling cider."

Still Kit had no answer, for over at the corn-crib she beheld the strangest scene. Out stepped the prisoner as fearlessly and blithely as possible, spoke to her father, and the two of them instantly clasped hands, while Shad, Mr. Hicks and Philemon stared with all their might. The next the girls knew, the whole party came strolling back leisurely, and Kit could see the stranger was regaling her father with a humorous view of the whole affair. Shad tried to signal to her behind his back some mysterious warning, and even Mr. Hicks looked jocular.

Kit leaned both hands on the railing, and stared hard at the trespasser. He was a young man, dressed in a light gray suit with high sport boots. He was, as Mrs. Gorham expressed it later, "light complected" and tanned so deeply that his blonde, curly hair

seemed even lighter. He lifted his hat to Kit, with one foot on the lower step, while Mr. Robbins called up:

“Mr. Howard, my dear, our fruit expert from Washington, whom I was expecting.”

And Kit bowed, blushing furiously and wishing with all her heart she might have silenced Evie’s audible and disappointed ejaculation:

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"Didn't he hook huckleberries after all?"

CHAPTER II

MRS. GORHAM SMELLS SMOKE

"I was perfectly positive that if we went away and left you in charge for one single day, Kit, you would manage to get into some kind of misadventure," Jean said, reproachfully, that evening. "If you only wouldn't act on the impulse of the moment. Why on earth didn't you tell father, and ask his advice before you telephoned to Mr. Hicks?"

"That's a sensible thing for you to say," retorted Kit, hotly, "after you've all warned me not to worry Dad about anything. And I did not act upon the impulse of the moment," very haughtily. "I made certain logical deductions from certain facts. How was I to know he was hunting gypsy moths and other winged beasts when I saw him bending over bushes in our berry patch? Anyhow it would simplify matters if Dad would let us know when he expected illustrious visitors. Did you see old Hannibal's face and Evie's, too? They were so disappointed at not having a prisoner in tow to exhibit to the Gilead populace on the way over to the jail."

Mrs. Gorham glanced up over her spectacles at the circle of faces around the sitting-room table. The girls had volunteered to help her pick over berries for canning the following day. It was a sacrifice to make, too, with the midsummer evening calling to them in all its varied orchestral tones: Katydids and peep frogs, the swish of the wind through the big Norway pines on the terraces, and the scrape of Shad's old fiddle from the back porch. It was Friday evening, and Mr. and Mrs. Robbins had driven over to the Judge's to attend a community meeting, the latter being one of Cousin Roxy's innovations in Gilead.

"Land alive," she had been wont to say. "Here we are all living on the same hills and valleys and never meeting 'cept on Sundays when we have to, or now and again when there happens to be a funeral. I declare if I didn't drive about all the time behind Ella Lou, I'd never know how folks were getting on. So every two weeks the Judge and I are going to hold an old-time social, only we call it a community meeting so as to try to give it the new spirit. It's just as well for us to remember that we ain't all dead yet by a long shot, 'though I do think there's a whole lot that ain't got any more get up and get to them than Noah's old gray mule that had to be shoved off the Ark."

Mr. Robbins had invited the erstwhile prisoner to accompany them, but he had decided instead to keep on his way to the old Inn on the hill above the village, much to Jean and Helen's disappointment.

Helen had discovered that his first name was Stanley, which relieved her mind considerably.

“If it had been Abijah or Silas, I know I could never have forgiven him for getting in the berry patch,” she said, “but there is something promising about Stanley. Seems as if he lit like Mercury just when there wasn’t anything happening here at all.”

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"Wonder if I turned out that oil stove," Mrs. Gorham said thoughtfully. "Seems like I smell something. Shad," raising her voice, "do you get up and go out in that 'ell' room and see if I turned out that fire under the syrup. I smell smoke."

"Oh, Lord," groaned Shad, laying aside his cherished instrument. "You could smell ice if you half tried."

He got up lumberingly and sauntered out through the kitchen into the long lean-to addition, that was used as a summer kitchen now, and the moment he opened the door there poured out a thick volume of black smoke and flying soot. The old-fashioned oil stove had a way of letting its wicks "work up," as Shad said, if left too long to its own devices.

There was a spurt of flame from the woodwork behind the stove, and Shad slammed the door to, and ran for the water bucket.

It seemed incredible how fast the flames spread. Summoned by his outcry, the girls formed a bucket brigade from the well to the kitchen door, while Shad, his mouth bound around in a drenched Turkish towel, fought the blaze single handed.

Mrs. Gorham made straight for the telephone, calling up the Judge, and two or three of the nearest neighbors for help. The Peckham boys from the sawmill were the first to respond, and five minutes later Hiram was on the spot, having seen the rising smoke and flare in the sky from Maple Lawn.

"You'll never save the place," old Mr. Peckham told them flatly. "The well's low and everything is dry as tinder. Better start carrying things out, girls, because the best we men-folks can do is to keep the roofs wet down and try to save the barn."

While the fire was confined to the "ell" kitchen, the two older Peckham boys set to work up-stairs, under Jean's direction. Kit had made for her father's room the first thing. When Jean opened the door she found her piling the contents of the desk and chiffonier drawers helter-skelter into blankets.

"It's all right, Jean," she called. "I'm not missing a thing. You tie the corners up and have the boys carry these down-stairs and bring back the clothes-basket and a couple of tubs for the books. Tell Helen to take the canaries out."

"Doris has them, and Gladsome, too," answered Jean. "And Mrs. Gorham is getting all of the preserves out of the cellar, and Mr. Peckham says he's sure they'll save the piano and most of the best furniture, but, oh, Kit, just think of how father and mother will feel when they see the flames in the sky, and know it's Greenacres burning."

"You'd better start in at mother's room and stop cogitating, or we'll be sliding down a lightning rod to get out of here."

Nobody quite noticed Helen in the excitement, but later when all was over, it was found that she had rescued all the treasures possible, the pictures and bric-a-brac, the sofa pillows and all the linen and family silver that had been packed away in the bottom of the sideboard.

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As the rising glow of the flames lighted up the sky help began to arrive from all quarters. Mrs. Gorham's thoughtfulness in telephoning immediately brought the Judge first, with all of the neighbors that had been present at the community meeting. Cousin Roxy was bareheaded, little curly wisps of hair fluttering around her face.

"I made your father stay up at our place," she told the girls. "You'll all probably have to come back with me anyhow and excitement isn't good for him. Besides, he wouldn't be a bit of good around here. Seems like they're getting the fire under pretty good control. I don't believe all the house will go. It was fearful old anyway, and it needed to be rebuilt if you ever expect your great-grandchildren to live here."

Kit noticed an entirely new and unsuspected trait in Cousin Roxy on this night of excitement. It was the only time when she had not seen her take command of the situation. But to-night she helped Mrs. Gorham pack all the necessary household supplies into the back of the wagon for Shad to drive up to Maple Lawn. As soon as she had seen the extent of the damage she had said immediately that the robin's nest must be moved up the hill to her own old home, where she had lived before her marriage to Judge Ellis.

"It won't take but a couple of days to put it into shape for you, and Hiram's right up there to look after things. You'll be back here before snow flies, with a few modern improvements put in, and all of you the better for the change. Helen, go bring the family treasures from under that pine tree, and put them in the back of our car."

"You know, Cousin Roxy," Kit exclaimed, "I thought the minute you showed up down here to-night you'd be the chief of the fire department."

Cousin Roxy laughed heartily.

"Did you, child? Well, I've always held that there are times and seasons when you ought to let the men-folks alone. After you've lived a lifetime in these parts, you'll know that every boy born and bred around here is taught how to fight fire from the time he can tote a water bucket. Did you save all the chickens, Shad?"

"Ain't lost even a guinea hen!" Shad assured her. "The barn ain't touched, and so I'm going to sleep over the harness room and watch out for the stock."

It was always a secret joy to the girls to hear the way Shad would roll out about the Greenacre "stock."

"Just as if," Jean said, "we had all the cattle upon a thousand hills and racers and thoroughbreds into the bargain, instead of Bonnibel and Lady Bountiful, with Princess and the hens. I think Helen put him up to it. She always thinks in royal terms of affluence."

CHAPTER III

KIT RISES TO PROPHECY

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The morning after the fire found the family at breakfast over with the Judge's family. It was impossible as yet for the girls to feel the full reaction over their loss. As the Judge remarked, youth responds to change and variety quicker than any new interest, and they were already planning a wonderful reconstruction period. Kit and Billy rode down on horseback to look at the ruins, and came back with an encouraging report. The back of the house was badly damaged, but the main building stood intact, though the charred clapboards and wide vacant windows looked desolate enough.

"Thank goodness the wind was from the south, and blew the flames away from the pines," said Kit, dropping into her chair, hungrily. "Doesn't it seem good to get some of Cousin Roxy's huckleberry pancakes again, girls? Oh yes, we met my prisoner—I should say, my erstwhile prisoner—on the road. He was tapping chestnut trees over on Peck's Hill like a woodpecker. You needn't laugh, Doris, 'cause Billie saw him too, didn't you, Bill? And he's got a sweet forgiving nature. He doffed his hat to me and I smiled back just as though I'd never caught him in our berry patch, and had Shad lock him up in the corn-crib."

"Was he heading this way?" the Judge asked. "I want him to look at my peach trees and tell me what in tunket ails them."

"Why, Judge, I'm surprised at you, and before the children, too." Cousin Roxy's eyes twinkled with mirth at having caught the Judge in a lapse.

"I only said tunket, Roxy," he began, but Cousin Roxy cut him short.

"Tunket's been good Connecticut for Tophet ever since I was knee high to a toadstool, and we won't say anything more about that. Jerry will be glad to go up with you to the peach orchard, and you can take the youngsters with you. I want Jean and Kit to drive over with us and help fix Maple Lawn."

But before a week was out, all of the carefully laid plans for housing the "robins" before snow fell were knocked higher than a kite. Kit said that one of the most delightful things about country life, anyway, was its uncertainty. You went ahead and laid a lot of plans on the lap of the Norns, and then the old ladies stood up and scattered everything helter-skelter. The beauty of it was, though, that they usually turned around and handed you unexpected gifts so much better than anything you had hoped for, that you were left without a chance for argument.

The family had taken up its new quarters at Maple Lawn, and two of the local carpenters, Mr. Peleg Weaver, Philemon's brother, and Mr. Delaplaine, had been persuaded to devote a portion of their valuable time to rehabilitating Greenacre Farm. It took tact and persuasion to induce the aforesaid gentlemen to desert their favorite chairs on the little stoop in front of Byers' Grocery Store, and approach anything resembling daily toil. There had been a Squire in the Weaver family three generations

back, and Peleg held firmly to established precedent. He might be landed gentry, but he was no tiller of the soil, and he secretly looked down on his elder brother for personally cultivating the family acres.

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Mr. Delaplaine was likewise addicted to reverie and historic retrospect. Nothing delighted Billie and Kit so much as to ride down to the store and get a chance to converse with both of the old men on local history and family “trees.” Mr. Delaplaine’s mail, which consisted mostly of catalogues, came addressed to N.B. Delaplaine, Esq., and even the little French Canadian kiddies tumbling around the gardens of the mill houses down in Nantic knew what that N.B. stood for, but to Gilead he was just “Bony” Delaplaine.

Every day that first week found the girls down at the Farm prying around the ruins for any lost treasures. Stanley Howard struck up a friendship with both the Judge and Mr. Bobbins, and usually drove by on his way from the village. He would stop and chat for a few moments with them, but Kit was elusive. Vaguely, she felt that the proper thing for her to do was to offer an apology, for even considering him an unlawful trespasser. When Stanley would drive away, Jean would laugh at her teasingly.

“Oh, why should the spirit of mortal be proud, sister mine? He seems a very sightly young man, even if he does ‘chase caterpillars for a living.’ I never did see any one except you, Kit, who hated to acknowledge herself in the wrong. The rest of us all have the most peaceful, forgiving sort of dispositions, but you can be a regular porcupine when you want to be.”

“It could come from Uncle Cassius,” retorted Kit. “Did you hear them all talking about him over at Elmwood while we were there? Let’s sit here under the pines a minute until the mailman goes by. I’m awfully tired poking over cinders. Cousin Roxy said he was the only notable in our family. Dean Cassius Cato Peabody. We ought to tell ‘Bony’ that.”

“Don’t you call him ‘Bony’ so he’ll hear you,” whispered Jean. “It would hurt his feelings.” She glanced back over her shoulder to where Mr. Delaplaine worked, taking off the outer layer of charred clapboards from the front of the house.

“Still it is nice to own a dean, almost as good as a squire,” repeated Kit, placidly. “There were only seven original ones here in Gilead; and his grandfather was one of those. Let’s see, Jean, he would have been our great-great-great-grandfather, wouldn’t he? Great-Uncle Cassius is named for him, Cassius Cato Peabody. Just think of him, Jean, with a name like that when he was a little boy, in a braided jacket and those funny high waisted breeches you see in the little painted woodcuts in Cousin Roxy’s childhood books.”

“I didn’t pay much attention to what they were saying about him,” said Jean, dreamily. “Is he still alive?”

“He is, but I guess he might as well be dead as far as the rest of the family is concerned. Cousin Roxy said he’d never married, and he lived with his old maiden lady

sister out west somewhere. Not the real west, either; I mean the interesting west like Saskatchewan and Saskatoon and—and California; you know what I mean, Jean?"

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"I didn't even hear where they lived. I'm afraid I wasn't interested. Aren't you glad the fire didn't bum the cupola? I almost wish they could leave the house that lovely weathered brown tone, instead of painting it white with green blinds again. Dad would like it that way, too. I suppose everybody would say it was flying in the face of tradition, after the Trowbridge place has been white two hundred years."

"There comes the mail," called Jean, starting up and running down the drive like a young deer, as the little cart hove in sight. The carrier waved a newspaper and letter at them.

"Nothin' for you girls, to-day, only a letter for your pa, and weekly newspaper for Hiram. I'll leave it up at the old place as I go by." He added as a happy afterthought to relieve any possible anxiety on their part, "It's from Delphi, Mich."

Kit stood transfixed with wonder, as he passed on up the hill.

"Jean," she said, slowly, "there's something awfully queer about me. I heard Cousin Roxy say once, I was born with a veil, and ought to be able to prognosticate. That letter was from Uncle Cassius Cato Peabody."

"Well, what if it is?" asked Jean, shaking the needles from her serge skirt as she rose leisurely.

Kit drew on her freshman knowledge of ancient history, and quoted:

"Last night the eagles circled over Rome,
And Caesar's destiny——"

Jean laughed and pointed to a line of crows rising leisurely from a clump of pine woods.

"What does it mean when the crows circle over Gilead?"

Kit jammed her velvet "tam" down over one ear adventurously, and started towards the gateway, finishing the quotation as she went:

"—crowned him thrice king!"

CHAPTER IV

THE ORACLE AT DELPHI

It appeared that Uncle Cassius lived strictly up to tradition, for it had been over fifteen years since any word had been received from the oracle at Delphi, as the girls dubbed him from the very first. The letter which broke the long silence was read aloud several

times that day, the girls especially searching between its lines for any hidden sentiment or hint of family affection.

"I don't see why on earth he tries to be generous when he doesn't know how," Helen said, musingly. "I wonder if he's got bushy gray hair and whiskers, like somebody we were studying about yesterday. Who was that, Kit?"

Kit glanced up from Uncle Cassius' letter with a preoccupied expression.

"Whiskers?" she repeated. "Why, I don't know; Walt Whitman, Ibsen, Longfellow, Joaquin Miller? Tolstoi had long straggly ones, didn't he?"

"These were kind of bushy ones. I think it was Carlyle."

"Wait a minute while I read this thing over carefully again," Kit warned them. "I think while we're alone we ought to discuss it freely. Mother just took it as if it were a case of 'Which shall it be, which shall it be, I looked at John, John looked at me.' It seems to me, since it concerns us vitally, that we ought to have some selection in the matter ourselves."

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"But Kit, dear, you didn't read carefully," Jean interposed with a little laugh. "See here," she followed the writing with her finger tip. "He says, 'Send me the boy.' There isn't any boy."

"No," Kit agreed, thoughtfully, "but I presume there should have been a boy. I'm more like father than any of you, and I'd love to have been the boy in the family. I wonder why he said that."

"Well, it certainly shuts off any further negotiations because 'there ain't no sech animal' in the 'robin's' roster. And no matter what you say, Kit, I don't think you're 'specially like father at all. He hasn't a quick temper and he's not a single bit domineering."

Kit leaned over her tenderly.

"Dearest, am I domineering to you? Have I crushed your spirit, and made you all weak and pindlin'? I'm awfully sorry. I didn't mean that my bad traits were inherited from Dad. What I meant was my glorious initiative and craving for novelty. Just at the moment I can't think of anything that would be more interesting or adventurous than going out to Uncle Cassius, and trying to fulfill all his expectations."

"Thought you wanted to go out to the Alameda Ranch with Uncle Hal more than anything in the world, a little while ago. You're the original weather-vane, Kit."

"Well, I wouldn't give a snap of my finger for a person who couldn't face new emergencies and feel within them the surge of—of——"

"Don't declaim in the family circle, Kit. We admit the surge, but would you really and truly be willing to go to this place? I don't even know what state it's in."

"The Lady Jean is forgetful of her mythology," chanted Kit. "Delphi is in Greece, somewhere near Delos, and I don't think it's so very far from the grove where Atalanta took refuge before she ran her races."

Helen glanced up in her absent-minded way.

"Delphi?" she said, musingly. "Wasn't that the place where they used to put a tripod over a rift in the rock and a veiled priestess sat down and waited for Apollo's message to come to her? We had that up at school when we took up Greece."

"I shall take a milking stool out with me," said Kit, promptly, "and if the situation is not already filled, I shall be the veiled priestess of Delphi."

There was a footstep in the long hallway, and the mother bird came in from the kitchen. The kitchen at Maple Lawn still bore the stamp of Cousin Roxy's taste. It was more a living-room than a "cookery." There was no library proper here, only the parlor, a large

corner bedroom, and a dining-room which took up the width of the house except for the hall. This latter was the favorite consulting room of the girls, and to-day they were all busily paring early apples and quinces to put down in stone crocks, against the coming of winter days.

“Mother,” called Helen, “were you ever in Delphi, where Uncle Cassius lives?”

Mrs. Robbins sat down on the arm of Jean’s chair and smiled at the eager faces upturned to hers.

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"Just once, long ago when I was about eight years old. We were passing through on our way east from California, and mother stayed for about a week at Delphi. It's a little college town on Lake Nadonis, about twelve miles inland from Lake Michigan, and perhaps sixty miles north of Chicago on the big bluffs that line the shore nearly all the way to Milwaukee. Uncle Cassius was a first settler there, I believe. You don't have to be very old to have been a first settler in Wisconsin. I think about the first thing he helped establish there was Hope College. I don't remember so very much about it, girls, it was so long ago. I know I loved the bluffs and the little winding paths that led up from the shore below, but it seems to me Uncle Cassius' house was rather cheerless and formal. He was a good deal of a scholar and antiquarian. Aunt Daphne seemed to me just a deprecating little shadow that trotted after him, and made life smooth."

Kit listened with the attentive curiosity of a squirrel, and Jean, who knew every changing expression on her face, was sure she was having a little private debate with herself.

"I don't think," continued Mrs. Robbins, easily, "that it is such a misfortune after all our not having a boy to fill his order. It wouldn't be a very cheerful or sympathetic home for any young person."

"Oh, but mother, dear," Kit burst forth, eagerly. "Think what glorious fun it would be to train them, and make them understand how much more interesting you can make life if you only take the right point of view."

"Yes, but supposing what seemed to be the right point of view to you, Kit, was not the right point of view to them at all. Every one looks at life from his own angle."

"Carlota always said that, too," Jean put in. "I remember at our art class each student would see the subject from a different angle and sketch accordingly. Carlota said it was exactly like life, where each one gets his own perspective."

"But you can't get any perspective at all if you shut yourself up in the dark," Kit argued. She leaned her chin on both palms, elbows planted firmly on the table, as she prepared to influence the opinion of the family. "Now just listen to this, and don't all speak at once until I get through. You went away, Jean, down to New York, and then up to Boston, and though I say it as shouldn't, right to your face, you came back to the bosom of your family, very much better satisfied and pleasanter to live with. I think after you've stayed in one place too long you get, well—as Billie says, 'fed up' and wish to goodness you could get away somewhere. I haven't any art at all, or anything special that I could wave at you and demand 'expression' as Bab Crane calls it. What I need is something new to develop my special gifts and talents, and mother darling, if you would only consent to let me go for even two or three months, I will come back to you a perfect angel, besides doing Uncle Cassius and Aunt Daphne a pile of good, I know."

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"It sounds right enough, dear," Mrs. Robbins said, her brown eyes full of amusement, "but we can't very well disguise you as a boy, and Uncle Cassius is not the kind of person to trifle with."

Kit thought this over seriously.

"Don't tell them until I've started," she suggested, "and be sure and mail the letter so it will get there after I do, and send me quick, so they won't have any chance to change their minds. Jean will be home until the middle of October, and you really and truly don't need me here at all. I'm sure there must have been a missionary concealed away in our family like a hidden spring, for I feel the zeal of conversion upon me. I long to descend on Delphi."

"Well, I don't know what to say, Kit. I'll have to talk it over with your father first. I wonder why Uncle Cassius thought we had a boy in the family, and why he wanted him specially."

"Maybe he thought a boy would be more interested in antiques. Are they Chinese porcelains and jewels, or just mummy things?"

"Mostly ruins, as I remember," laughed her mother. "When he was young, Uncle Cassius used to be sent away by the Geographical Society to explore buried cities in Chaldea and Egypt."

"Bless his heart, I wish I could coax him to start in again, right now, and take me with him," Kit exclaimed, blithely. "Anyhow, I'm going to hope that it will come right and I can go. I shall collect my Lares and Penates and start packing. Can I borrow your steamer trunk, Jean? Just write a charming letter, mother dear, sort of in the abstract, you know, thanking him, and calling us 'the children' in the aggregate, so he can't detect just what we are, then when I depart, you can wire them, 'Kit arrives such and such a time.' They'll probably expect a Christopher, and once I land there, and they realize the treasure you have sent them, they will forgive me anything."

Uncle Cassius' letter was read over again carefully by Mr. Robbins. Kit carried it out to the grape arbor, where he and Hiram were untangling and training some vagrant vines to travel in the way they should go, up over the trellis work. There was a round table here made of birchwood that just fitted nicely into the octagonal arbor, encircled by birch seats. Leading away from the arbor proper were two long pergolas, likewise built by Hiram, of birchwood. The arbor had always been a favorite spot with the girls, when Aunt Roxy had lived in the rambling old white homestead. Now that it was their abiding place *pro tem.*, they spent nearly all their leisure time out there. There was always a breeze from the south that made the arbor a port of call, and each one of its vine-framed openings was a lookout over wide spaces of beauty. Cousin Roxy had once said that she had made a point of using the arbor as a spot to "rest and invite her soul,"

for years. It had been to her like David's tower, with all its windows open towards Jerusalem.

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"I don't mind Hiram hearing," Kit said; "maybe he can suggest some way out. Just read that letter over, Dad, very, very carefully, and see if there isn't some way you can smuggle me out to Delphi, without hurting Uncle Cassius' feelings."

Mr. Robbins adjusted his eye-glasses, smiling the little whimsical smile that Kit loved, and together they read the missive again——

"My dear Jerrold:—

"I trust both you and Elizabeth are enjoying good health, and that this finds you both facing a more prosperous time than when I heard last from you.

"It has occurred to both Daphne and myself that we may be able to relieve you of part of your responsibility and care, at least for a short time. If the experiment should prove advantageous to all concerned we might be able to arrange a longer stay. One suggestion, however, I feel privileged to make. We would prefer that you would send the boy, as you know this is a college town, and I am sure it would broaden his views to come west, even for a short time. I need hardly add that we will do all in our power to make his stay a pleasant and profitable one.

"Another point to consider is this. I would like to interest him in a few of my little hobbies, archaeology, geology, etc. I have delved deeply into the mysteries of the past, and feel I should pass what I have learned on as a heritage to youth.

"Trusting that you and Elizabeth will be able to coincide with our views in the matter, I remain,

*"Yours faithfully,
Cassius C. Peabody."*

"You know, Dad," here Kit slipped her arm persuasively around her father's neck and patted his shoulder, "you've always said yourself that I was the 'David Copperfield' in the family. Don't you know how the child was to be named after his aunt, Betsy Trotwood, and she never really forgave him for turning out to be a boy instead of a girl. Mother has told me how she named me Jerrold, Jr., and anyway I've done the best I could to live up to it. Billie says I'm an awfully good pal, and he'd much rather talk to me than any of the boys he knows at school, because I understand what he's driving at."

"But don't you think your mother will need you here? Jean will be going back to Boston in October to her art class, and Helen is only fourteen. I don't think it would matter, if you only visited them for a couple of months, but supposing Uncle Cassius took a fancy to you." Mr. Robbins' eyes twinkled as he watched Kit's grave face.

"You mean," she said, "supposing he decided that my brain measured up to his expectations of Jerry, Jr., and they wanted me to stay all winter? Couldn't I go to school there, just as well as here? You know, Dad, I'm really not a child any longer. Don't you realize that I'm fifteen and a half?"

"Reaching years of discretion, aren't you, girlie?" smiled her father. "I suppose it would do you a lot of good in a broadening way to go through a new experience like this."

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"I'm not thinking about that," Kit sent back an understanding gleam of fun, "but I'm perfectly positive that it would do Uncle Cassius and Aunt Daphne an awful lot of good."

"Then we must not deprive them of the opportunity. Do you think so, Hiram?"

Hiram stuck his head through the clambering vines and clustering leaves, like a tousled freckle-faced New England faun.

"Couldn't do no harm either way, s'far as I can see," he said, judiciously. "And if the old folks need any sort of discipline, I'd certainly start Miss Kit after them."

CHAPTER V

SHEPHERD SWEETINGS

That was the end of August. Cousin Roxy heartily approved of the plan, and said no doubt the fire down at Greenacres had been a direct dispensation of Providence.

"You were all of you settling down into a rut before it happened, and the old place needed a thorough going over anyhow. You know you couldn't have afforded it, Jerry, if it hadn't been for the fire insurance money coming in so handy like. Now, you'll all move back the first part of the winter, with the new furnace set up, and no cracks for the wind to whistle through. Jean will be started off on her path of glory, and I don't think Kit's a mite too young to be fluttering her wings a bit. Land alive, Elizabeth, you ought to be so thankful that you've got children with any get up and get to them in this day and age. The Judge and I were saying just the other night it seems as if most of the young folks up around here haven't got any pluck or initiative at all. They're born to feel that they're heirs of grace, and most of them are sure of having a farm or wood-lot in their own right, sooner or later."

So the steamer trunk stood open most of the time, and Kit prepared for her pilgrimage to Delphi. Mr. Robbins was inclined to take it as rather a good joke on the Dean, but the mother bird could not get over a certain little feeling of conscience in the matter, perhaps because she could remember her own visit with her uncle and aunt, and still retained a certain feeling of veneration for the two old people. But the rest of the family pinned its faith on Kit's persuasive adaptability.

Helen and Doris, especially, felt that, if anything, the Robbins family was conferring a high favor on the "Oracle of Delphi." Kit had always been the starter and organizer ever since they could remember, and Helen especially dreaded going back to school without her.

"Piney and Sally will go over with you," Kit told her, cheerfully, "and just think of the wonderful letters you'll have from me, Helenita. Miss Cogswell says that I always shine



best when I wield the pen of a ready writer, and I'll tell you all the news of Hope College. By the way, mother told me last night that she's pretty sure in those little family colleges they run a 'prep' department, which takes in the last two years of high school. Perhaps I could persuade them that the great-grandniece of Cassius Cato would be a deserving object of their consideration. Don't forget to pack my skates, Helen. I loaned them to you last, and they're hanging in your closet."

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Cousin Roxy decided to have a farewell party, two nights before Kit left, and the girls were delighted. Any party launched by Cousin Roxy promised novelty and excitement.

A big dancing platform was built on the lawn under the great elms, and rows of Japanese lanterns hung like glowworms all among the branches.

Cady Graves was there with his violin, and called out for the dancing, but Jean took the piano between times in the house, and the girls and boys gathered around her, Billie leading in the old college songs they all knew best.

It really seemed as though there were a special moon hung up in the August sky just for the occasion. It was so richly luminous, and as Doris said, so near you. The children had been playing forfeits, and in Gilead you played games at parties until you were at least twenty. Piney Haddock was giving out the forfeits, sitting blindfolded on a chair, while Jean held them over her head, calling out with each one:

“Heavy, heavy hangs over your head,
What shall the owner do to redeem it?”

Whereupon Piney would have to respond interestedly,

“Fine or superfine?”

It happened that Kit’s little turquoise forget-me-not ring was the particular forfeit dangling over Piney’s head, when Billie stuck his head in at the open window with a couple of other boys, and Piney lifted her chin at the sound of his voice.

“She must catch Billie Ellis, and bring him back to kneel at my feet, and hand over his forfeit.”

Billie had evaded this, escaping with Banty Herrick, and the big Peckham boy, to show them his Belgian hares. Billie never had liked kissing games, and one of the Judge’s favorite stories was how he had tried to give Billie a birthday party once, when he was seven years old. Most of the guests were the Judge’s friends, with a small scattering of youngsters, and it appeared that just as the Judge had lined up some sweet-faced old ladies to kiss Billie, Billie had been found missing. Later he was located, clad only in overalls, leading the whole string of other children to a ruined sawmill that stood on a winding stream below the house.

So to-night the spirit of adversity whirled him about from the driveway, and he sped down the long lane with Kit in fast pursuit. Overhead the mulberry trees met in a leafy arcade, and out of the hazel thicket a whippoorwill called, flying low down the lane after the two darting forms, as if it were trying to find out what the excitement was about at that time of night. At the turn of the lane there were three apple trees, early Shepherd Sweetings, and here Billie slipped down and lay breathing heavily, his hands hunting for

windfalls in the tall grass. Kit passed him by, speeding the full length of the lane, and bringing up at the end of the log-run, before the old mill.

“Billie Ellis, you come out of there,” she called. “I’ve got my slippers wet already chasing after you, and I’m not going to climb all over those old timbers hunting for you.”

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Only the whippoorwill answered, calling now from a clump of elderberry bushes close by the water's edge, and while she stood listening, there was the dull splash in the pond where some big bullfrog had taken alarm at her coming.

Billie gathered a goodly supply of apples, and stole after her in the shadows.

"Well, I'm not going to stay out here all night waiting for you," Kit said, decisively, addressing the wide dark entrance to the mill, when all at once there came his voice, directly behind her shoulder.

"Why didn't you try to catch me? I was resting back under the apple tree. Let's sit down over the falls and eat some. If Piney's waiting for me to kneel in front of her, she'll wait all night. I'd like to see myself kneeling in front of a girl!"

The words had hardly left his lips, before Kit played an old-time schoolgirl trick on him. Catching him by his collar, she twirled him about with an odd twist until he knelt in front of her. Although they were just about of an age, she was taller and stronger, and Billie shook himself ruefully when he rose.

"You always catch a fellow off guard," he said.

"Do you good," she retorted serenely. "Ever since you went away to school, you've had a high and mighty opinion of yourself. I don't know what will become of you after I've gone away, and there's no one who really knows how to make you behave. Aren't these apples bully though? Do you suppose they'll mind very much if we stay just a few minutes? Don't you love this old pond, Billie? Remember your flat-bottomed boat that always leaked when we used to go fishing in it. How I hated to take turns bailing it out."

Billie dipped into his inner coat pocket and drew forth a little leather bill fold, somewhat sheepishly.

"I've got a snap shot here that I wanted you to take out with you. It's funny you just happened to speak about it. That hat nearly covered your face, but anybody could tell it was you, Kit. It was the day we got caught in the rain, when we were out after pickerel, and when the sun came out, Ben came along, and snapped us with my camera."

Kit took the little photograph in her hand. There was plenty of light to see it by. The little old, red, flat-bottomed boat out in midstream, with Billie standing, barelegged to his knees, straddling from the stem seat to the rear middle one, while he strove persuasively with a big pickerel. Kit was half kneeling in the other end of the boat, bailing for dear life, dressed in an old middy and wash skirt, with a boy's farm hat pulled low over her eyes.

"Wouldn't it be strange, Billie, if either of us were famous some day," she said, thoughtfully, "and this picture would just be priceless? You know, that's one thing

awfully nice about us two. We've always appreciated each other so much. I know you're going to be somebody special. Maybe it will just be in natural history, but I wish it were exploring, or something awfully adventurous."

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Billie laughed comfortably, perching himself just below her on the heavy timbers of the old sluice gate.

“Grandfather says I have a great responsibility on my shoulders, because I’m the last of the Ellis family. He says there’s always been an Ellis in the State Legislature at Hartford, ever since there was a Legislature, and just as soon as I’m old enough, he’s going to set me to reading law. Gee, I wish he wouldn’t. Think of being shut up all day long in an office.”

Far down the lane they heard the others calling them and Kit sprang up, scattering the apples as she did so.

“I’d forgotten all about the party,” she exclaimed. “Anyway, I’m glad we had a chance to talk, because I won’t see you again before I leave. If I were you, I’d just read and study everything I could lay my hands on about entymology, all the time I was in school, and then when the Judge sees that you’re in dead earnest about it, he’ll let you go on if Cousin Roxy says so. I heard Dad say that Mr. Howard knew more about insects than any man he’d ever met, and that he was considered one of the coming experts in government work. Why, Billie, it’s just like a great surgeon or doctor, who is able to discover a certain germ that can be used as a toxin, only you doctor Mother Nature.”

“I know,” Billie agreed, enthusiastically. “There was some fellow who discovered the cause of the wheat blight in the south a few years ago, and somebody else is trying to land whatever is killing our chestnuts off. Kit, you’re a bully pal. If it wasn’t for you, I don’t know whether I’d ever have seen a chance to win out or not, but you do spur a fellow on.”

Kit laughed, and tagged him on the shoulder as she broke into a run.

“You’re it,” she cried. “Don’t give any one else the credit for starting you off in the way you know you ought to go. Just take a good deep breath and race for it.”

CHAPTER VI

Expecting “Kit”

Mr. Robbins had answered the first letter from Delphi, under Kit’s careful supervision, and the acceptance was couched in language ambiguous enough to please even her.

It aroused no suspicions whatever in the minds of Dean Peabody or Miss Daphne. The only question was, who was to meet the child in Chicago. The through express would leave *him* there, and in order to connect with the Wisconsin trains it was necessary to make the change over to the Northwestern Depot.

Miss Daphne was far more perturbed over it than her brother. One of the latter's favorite mottoes was inscribed in old English lettering over his desk:

*"Never set in motion forces which
you cannot control."*

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Having set in motion the coming guest, he believed firmly that an unfaltering Fate would direct his footsteps safely to Delphi. Cassius Cato Peabody had been peculiar all his life. He had been a peculiar boy, unsettled, studious, impractical. Miss Daphne was his younger sister, and ever since her girlhood had tried to give him all the love and encouragement that others refused. She had trotted after him faithfully and happily on all of his exploring expeditions. Perhaps one reason why these had been so successful was because somehow she had always managed to surround him with home comforts, even in the wilds of the upper Nile. The Dean had had his regular meals and clean changes of clothing in the shadow of Nineveh's ruins in far Chaldea, just as though he had been in his own domicile.

And perhaps the quaintest thing about it all was that Miss Daphne herself, no matter on what particular point of the globe she had happened to pitch her tent, had always retained her courage, although she had faced dangers that the average woman would have fled from. Perhaps she carried in her heart an unfailing faith that Providence could not deny her protection when she was enabling the Dean to give the benefit of his great gifts to the world.

Their house stood on the same hill as Hope College, the highest point in the rising ridge of bluffs along the Lake Shore at Delphi. It was built of dark red brick, a square double edifice, with long French windows and two rotunda shaped wings, somewhat in the French style. A grove of pine trees almost hid it from view on its street side, the stately Norway pines that Kit always loved. The back of the house looked directly out over the lake, and the land here was frankly left to nature. Trees, grass and underbrush rioted at will, until they suddenly ended on the brow of the bluff, where there was a sheer declivity of sand to the beach. Looking at it from below, Kit afterwards thought it was like a miniature section of the Yosemite, the sand had hardened into such fantastic shapes, and the strata in places was so plainly visible.

Mrs. Robbins' telegram arrived the night before Kit herself. It was brief and non-committal.

"Kit arrives Union Station, Chicago, Thursday, 10:22 A.M."

"Kit," repeated the Dean. "Humph! Nickname. Superfluous and derogatory."

Miss Daphne took the telegram from his desk with a little smile that was almost tremulous with excitement.

"It's probably the diminutive for Christopher, brother," she said. "I think it's a nice name. I always liked the legend of St. Christopher. Somebody'll have to meet him down in Chicago. He might lose his head and take the wrong train."

“He’s about fourteen, isn’t he? Old enough to change from one train to another, and use his tongue if he’s in doubt. When I was fourteen, Daphne, I was earning my own living working on a farm, summers, and going to a school in the winter time where we all had to work for our board. Never hurt us a bit. The greatest trait of character you can inculcate in a child is self-reliance.”

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Miss Daphne had a little way of appearing to listen while her brother expatiated on any of his favorite topics. It had grown to be a loving habit with her, and she had a way of answering absently.

"Yes, dear, I'm quite sure of it," which always satisfied him that he had her attention. But now, she sat looking out the window and thinking, a perplexed expression on her face. It had not altogether been her desire that the coming child should be a boy, although not one word had she breathed of this to Dean Peabody. Their lives had run in tranquil grooves. Everything about their daily routine was as St. Paul suggested, "Decently and in order."

The determination to take one of the Greenacre brood had been a sudden one. The Dean had been reading somebody's theory about the obligations of age to youth.

"Daphne, my dear," he had remarked one evening, as the two sat quietly in the old library, "we have been leading very narrow, selfish lives, and we will suffer for it as we grow older. We have shut ourselves away from youth. I am seventy-four now, and what heritage am I leaving to the world beyond a few books of reference, and my collections? What I should do is to take some child, still in the impressionable stage, and impart to it all I know."

Miss Daphne glanced up with a little amused twinkle in her eyes.

"But, brother, what about the child? Surely you would require an exceptional child for such an experiment. One who would have the mentality to grasp all that you were trying to impart to it."

The Dean cogitated over this, pursing his lips and tapping his knuckles with his rimless eye-glasses.

"Possibly," he granted, "and yet, Daphne, surely there would be far more credit attached to planting the seed of knowledge where it needed much cultivating. It has surprised and amazed me up at the college to find that usually the children who appreciate an education are the farmer boys, and very often the foreign element."

Miss Daphne rocked to and fro gently. She knew her brother well enough to understand that this had become a fixed idea with him, and the easiest way out was to find him an impressionable child. And then, it happened that she thought of Elizabeth Ann Robbins, their niece, and all her nestful of young mouths to be satisfied with life's gifts and privileges. She remembered having one letter after the breaking up of the home on Long Island. This had told them of Mr. Robbins' illness and breakdown. But with the optimism that was inherent in every one of the family, there had been no appeal for aid or cry of despondency over the sudden change in their fortunes.

Several times the Dean had written to Mr. Robbins but always on archaeological topics. Some little point of controversy upon which he desired confirmation. Somehow material needs never seemed to suggest themselves to the Dean. Blessed with absolute self-reliance from his boyhood, he had educated and made a success of himself, and he could not understand how any one could falter or repine in the race. Particularly, if Nature had granted them any precious ratio of Peabody blood.

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“Do you know, brother,” began Miss Daphne, in the bright, abrupt little way she had, “I think it would be the right thing if we took one of the Robbins’ children. There are four or five of them——”

“Boys or girls?” interrupted the Dean.

“Well, now I’m not quite sure, but if my memory serves me, I think there’s a boy amongst them. I know the eldest girl is named Jean Daphne, because I’ve always sent her a silver spoon on her birthday since she was born. They’re all of them over ten, I am sure. Why don’t you just write to Jerrold and make known your willingness? I am sure they would take it in the spirit in which it was offered.”

CHAPTER VII

PERSONALLY CONDUCTED

So this was how it happened that the Dean’s letter went forth to Gilead, and produced the hour when Kit stood on the platform of the Union Station in Chicago, looking around her to discover any one who might appear to be seeking a small boy.

Gradually the long platform that led up to the concourse cleared. Kit went leisurely on, following the porter who carried her suit-case. She was looking for some one who might resemble either the Dean or Miss Daphne from her mother’s description of them.

“As I remember him,” Mrs. Robbins had said, “the Dean was very tall, rather sparely built, but broad-shouldered and always with his head up to the wind. His hair was gray, worn rather long and curly at the ends, and he had the old-fashioned Gladstone whiskers. Miss Daphne was like a little bird, a gentle, plump, busy Jenny Wren, with bright brown eyes and a little smile that never left her lips. I am sure you can’t mistake them, Kit, for in their way they are very distinctive.”

Yet Kit was positive now that neither the Dean nor his sister had come to meet her. She stood in the waiting-room quite unconscious of the attention she attracted, for Kit would have been singled out from the multitude anywhere by reason of what Jean called “her unique individuality.”

She wore a dark tan serge traveling coat with a brown service cap to match that set a bit rakishly on her red curls. There was about her an air of buoyant and friendly self-possession, which always ingratiated her with any casual acquaintances. Therefore it was no wonder that Mr. Bellamy glanced at her several times with interest, even while his gaze sought through the crowd for a young New England type of boy, bound for Delphi, Wis.

But Kit noticed Mr. Bellamy. Noticed his alert anxiety as he walked up and down, eyeing every newcomer. He was eighteen or nineteen, and unmistakably looking for some one. Even while Kit watched him, she saw a girl of about her own age hurry up to him. Her voice reached her plainly, as she said:

“I’ve looked up and down that end, and I’m positive he isn’t there. Oh, but the Dean will lecture you, Rex, if you miss him.”

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At this identical moment, Rex's eyes met a pair of dancing, mischievous ones, and Kit crossed over to where they stood.

"I do believe you must be looking for me," she said. "I'm Kit Robbins."

"Oh, but we were expecting your brother," exclaimed the other girl, eagerly.

"I know, the whole family have," said Kit, placidly, "for years and years. But there aren't any boys at all in our family," and here she smiled sweetly, and quite innocently. "I'm afraid the Dean made a little mistake, didn't he? Do you think he'll mind so very much when he sees me?"

"Mind?" repeated Mr. Bellamy. "Why, I think he'll be perfectly delighted. My name is Rex Wade Bellamy, Miss Robbins, and this is my sister, Anne. We're close neighbors of the Dean and Miss Daphne, and as we happened to be coming in town to-day they asked us to be sure to meet your——" Here he hesitated.

"My brother," laughed Kit. "Well, here I am, and I only hope that mother's letter reached them this morning, explaining everything. Of course, they did write for a boy, and it takes so long for a letter to get out here and be answered, that I told mother and Dad I knew it would be perfectly all right for me to come instead. Don't you think it will be?"

Anne's blue eyes were brimful of merriment.

"Oh, dear," she exclaimed. "I do wish I could go back with you, so I could see their faces when they find out. I don't live in Delphi. Mother and I have been here all summer so I could keep up my music at the conservatory. Rex has had to 'batch it' alone, but we'll be back in a week, so I'll see you then, and anyway, we're sure to visit back and forth. I'm awfully glad you're a girl."

"But I won't be here all winter," Kit answered. "I've only come for a couple of months. On trial, you know. Maybe it'll only be a couple of days, if they're fearfully disappointed."

Anne exchanged quick glances with her brother and he smiled as he led the way to the waiting car.

"You don't know the elaborate plans the Dean has laid out for your education," he said. "It will take you all winter long to live up to them, but I'm sure he will not be disappointed."

Kit had her own opinion about this, still it was impossible for her to feel apprehensive or unhappy, as the car sped over towards the Lake Shore Drive. The novelty of everything after two years up in the Gilead hills of rest was wonderfully stimulating. But it was not until they had left the city and river behind and had reached Lincoln Park that she really

gave vent to her feelings. It was a wonderful day and the lake lay in sparkling ripples beyond the long stretch of shore.

“Are we going all the way in the car?” she asked, eagerly.

Rex shook his head.

“No, only as far as Evanston. We’ll drop Anne off, and have lunch with mother and then catch the train to Delphi. I have an errand for the Dean out at the University.”

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"You know," said Kit, "we lived right on the edge of Long Island Sound before we moved up to Connecticut, and ever since I was in rompers, I can remember going away somewhere to the seashore every summer, but I think your lake is ever so much more interesting than the ocean. Somehow it seems to belong to one more. I always felt with the ocean as if it just condescended to come over to my special beach, after it had rambled all over the world, and belonged to everybody."

"But you have all the shells and the seaweed, and we haven't," demurred Anne. "Before I ever went East, we had a couple of clam shells, just plain every-day old round clam shells, that had come from Cape May, and I used to think they were perfectly wonderful because they had belonged in the real ocean."

After the rugged landscape of New England, Kit found this level land very attractive. They passed through one suburb after another, with the beautiful Drive following the curving shore line out to Evanston. Here she caught her first glimpse of the Northwestern University, its terra-cotta hued buildings showing picturesquely through the beautiful giant willows around the campus.

They left Rex at the main entrance and drove on to where Mrs. Bellamy was stopping. The houses made Kit think of those back at the Cove, with their spacious lawns and large restful homes of plenty. Mrs. Bellamy was filled with amusement when she heard the story of Kit's substitution of herself for the boy the Dean had asked for. She was a tall, slender woman with ashen gold hair and gray eyes, who seemed almost like an elder sister of Anne's. They occupied a suite of rooms near the campus.

"It is ever so much pleasanter than living in the heart of the city," she said, "and Rex has so many friends among the boys out here that it makes it pleasant for both of the children. We used to live in North Evanston before Mr. Bellamy took the chair of modern history up at Delphi. I wish that you were going to live here for Anne's sake."

"Well, that's almost selfish, mother, because Delphi is a hundred times more fun than Evanston," Anne declared, "and we're sure to see a lot of each other, anyway, when school opens. Kit's promised to tell me all about her sisters and Greenacres. It must be awfully queer to live up in the hills like that."

"Queer?" repeated Kit, laughingly. "It's a joy to the soul and a discipline to the body, Cousin Roxy says."

Anne immediately wanted to know who Cousin Roxy was, and Kit waxed eloquent on her favorite topic.

"She's an angel in a gingham apron, we girls think," she concluded, "and yet she can take off the gingham apron and stand up and address any kind of a meeting. I just can't tell you all that she's been to us since we lived there."

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Early in the afternoon Rex returned, and they caught the 2:45 local up to Delphi. Kit could hardly keep from looking out of the car window all the time. Every now and then the rich blueness of the lake would flash through the trees in the distance, and to the westward there stretched long level vistas of prairie land, dipping ravines which unexpectedly led one into woodland ways. Gradually the bluffs heightened as they neared the Wisconsin line above Waukegan, and just beyond the state line, between the shore and the region of the small lakes, Oconomowoc and Delevan, they came suddenly upon Delphi. It stood high upon the bluff, its college dominating the shady serenity of its quiet avenues.

"The Dean doesn't keep a carriage or car," said Rex as they alighted at the gray stone station covered with clambering vines. "Besides, he thought I was bringing a boy, who would not mind the hike up the hill!"

"I don't mind a bit," returned Kit. "I like it. It seems so good to find real hills after all. I thought everything out here was just prairie. I do hope they won't be watching for us. It will be ever so much easier if I can just walk in before they get any kind of a shock, don't you know."

Rex did not tell her which was the house until they came to the two tall sentinel poplars at the entrance to the drive. Kit caught the murmur of the waves as they broke on the shore below and lifted her chin eagerly.

"Oh, I like it," she cried. "This is it, isn't it? Isn't it a dear, drowsy dreamful place? I only hope they'll let me stay."

CHAPTER VIII

AT THE SIGN OF THE MUMMY

"Dearly beloved family:—

"I can't stop to write separate letters to-night to all of you, because I'm so full of Delphitis that I can hardly think of anything else. First of all, Rex met me at the train with his sister Anne. It's quite all right to call him Rex, Aunt Daphne says. No relation to us but he lives next door, and is Uncle Cassius' pet educational proposition next to your little sister Katherine.

"Mother's letter had not arrived, and they were expecting 'brother' any moment, when Rex and I walked in on them, and right here I must say they showed presence of mind, and what Cousin Roxy would call resignation to the ways of Providence. The Dean's eyes twinkled as Rex explained things, and then I kissed Aunt Daphne, and explained to her too, and I'm sure that she was relieved. After Rex had gone, the Dean took me into

his study after dinner, and we had a long heart-to-heart talk. I want you all to understand that he thinks I'm a good specimen of the undeveloped feminine brain.

"I am going to enter the preparatory class at the college in October, and take what the Dean calls supplementary lessons from him along special lines. I don't quite know

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all that this means, but I guess I can weather it. It probably has to do with what Rex called the 'cosmic makings,' geology and all sorts of prehistoric stuff. I know the Dean mentioned one thing that began with a 'paleo' but I have forgotten the rest of it. I'll let you know later.

"I have a perfectly darling room. It looks right out over Lake Michigan. There's a big square bay window to it, that overhangs the edge of the bluff like the balcony of a Spanish beauty. Our back garden just topples right over into a ravine that ends up short on the shore. I never saw such abrupt little chasms in my life. Uncle Cassius was showing me the layers of strata there that a little recent landslide had shown up, and he says that the formation is just exactly like it is out west in Wyoming and Colorado.

"Aunt Daphne is just a dear. It's more fun to hear her tell of how she worried over a boy coming into the family. The whole house is filled from one end to the other with Uncle Cassius' treasures that he's been collecting for years. You're liable to stumble over a stuffed armadillo or a petrified slice of some prehistoric monster anywhere at all. I found a mummy case in the library closet, but there wasn't anything in it at all, and I was awfully disappointed. I don't know but what I like it after all, although I miss you fearfully, dear nestful of robins. I don't even dare to think there are about a thousand miles between us.

"This is all I can write to you to-night because I'm so sleepy I can hardly keep my eyes open. Aunt Daphne just came in and kissed me good-night. She told me again how glad she is that I'm not a boy. Uncle Cassius hasn't committed himself yet, but I think he's curious about me anyway. Good-night all, and write oodles of news to me.

"Devotedly yours,
Kit.

*"Sign of the Mummy,
Delphi, Wis."*

At the same moment that Kit was writing home, the Dean and Miss Daphne stepped out on the broad veranda. Every evening about nine-thirty passers-by might have seen the flickering glow of the Dean's good-night cigar. He was not an habitual smoker, but the evening cigar was a sort of nocturnal ceremonial. It gave him an excuse to step out into the fragrant darkness of the garden walk for a quiet little stroll before bedtime, and usually Miss Daphne would try to join him.

So to-night they paced together, discussing the girl with the red curls who had come to them from far-off New England, in lieu of the boy they had sent for.

“There’s no reason,” remarked the Dean, reflectively, “why the child should not have a pleasant visit, since she is here. I have had a long conversation with her, and while I would not say that she was exceptionally—er——”

“Bright,” suggested Daphne.

“I should like to call it intellectual,” the Dean said kindly, “she is keenly impressionable and self-reliant. I think I may be able to interest her, at least in a simplified course of study. I have always believed that boys were more amenable to routine discipline in education than girls, but we shall see.”

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Miss Daphne's eyes, if he could only have seen them, held a twinkle of mirth, and her smile was a little more pronounced than usual.

"I think," she said, softly, "that she is a very lovable, attractive girl. I am quite relieved, brother, not to have a boy in the house."

Kit wakened the following morning with the sunlight calling to her. It was early, but back on the farm the girls usually rose about five. There did not seem to be any one stirring yet, so she dressed quietly, and found her way down-stairs. The Dean kept a cook, gardener and second girl. Kit heard Delia, the latter, singing in the dining-room and went out at once to make friends with her.

"Is it very far down the bluff to the shore, Delia?" she asked, eagerly. "I'm dying to climb down there, if I have time before breakfast."

"Sure, Miss, it's as easy as rolling off a log. You take the roundabout way through the garden, and the little path, behind the tool shed, and you just follow it until you can't go any farther, and there's the bluff. I haven't been down myself, but Dan says there's a little path you take to the shore if you don't mind scrambling a bit."

Kit waved good-bye to her and went in search of the path. She found Dan, the gardener, raking up leaves in the back garden. He was a plump rosy-cheeked old Irishman, his face wrinkled like a winter pippin, and he lifted his cap at her approach with a smile of frank curiosity and approval.

A half-grown black retriever came bounding to meet her, his nose and forepaws tipped with white.

"That's a welcome he's giving you you wouldn't have had if you'd been a boy, Miss," Danny said, shrewdly. "I'm glad to meet you, and hope you'll like it here."

Kit was stroking Sandy's silky curls. His real name he told her was Lysander. Anything that the Dean had the naming of received the benediction of ancient Greece, but Sandy, in his puppyhood, had managed to acquire a happy diminutive.

"I don't see," Kit said, laughingly, "why you dreaded a boy coming. I know some awfully nice boys back home, and there's one specially"—she paused just a moment, before she added—"named Billie. He's kind of related to us, because his grandfather married Cousin Roxy, and she's my father's cousin. It's a little bit hard to figure it out, but still we're related, and we're very, very good friends. I think he's just the kind of a boy the Dean expected to see, but perhaps he'll get used to me. Do you think he will?"

"Sure, it's like asking me could he get used to the sunshine," answered Danny, gallantly. —"If you leave it to Sandy to find the shore, he'll take you the quickest way."



CHAPTER IX

ALL SANDY'S FAULT

Everything was so different from the Connecticut verdure and underbrush. Instead of the thick, lush growth which came from richly watered black loam, here one found sand cherries and little dwarf willows and beeches springing up from the sand. Tall sword grass waved almost like Cousin Roxy's striped ribbon grass in the home garden, and wild sunflowers showed like golden glow here and there.

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The beach was level and rockless, different entirely from the Eastern Atlantic shores, but the sand was beautifully white and fine, and there were great weather-beaten, wave-washed boulders lying half buried in the sand, also trunks of trees, their roots uprearing grotesquely like strange heads of animals. Kit thought whimsically how the Dean might have added them with profit to his prehistoric collection. There was no glimpse or hint of the town to be seen down here. Not even a boat house, only one long pier. About a mile and a half from shore was a lightship, and farther out a white steamer showed in perfect outline against the blueness of the morning sky.

Kit followed Sandy's lead, hardly realizing the distance she was covering, until he suddenly disappeared behind a nosing headland. When she rounded it, she saw a cottage built close under the shelter of the bluff. The sand drifted like snow half-way up to its windows. It had been painted red once, but now its old clapboards were the color of sorrel, and weather-beaten and wave-washed like the boulders. There were fish nets drying on tall staples driven in behind a couple of overturned rowboats, and at that first glimpse it seemed to her as if there were children everywhere. Four stalwart boys from fourteen to eighteen worked over the nets, mending them; around the back door there were four or five more, and sitting in the sunlight in a low rocking-chair was an old woman as picturesque as some ancient sibyl.

Sandy seemed to greet them as old acquaintances, so Kit called good-morning in good old Yankee fashion. The boys eyed her, somewhat askance, and all of the children scurried like a flock of startled chickens as she came up the boardwalk to the kitchen door, but the old grandmother kept serenely on paring potatoes, calm-eyed and unembarrassed.

"How do you do?" said Kit, smilingly. "I'm Dean Peabody's grandniece. I just came west yesterday, and Sandy brought me here this morning. I didn't know where he was going, but he seemed to know the way."

The old woman's brown eyes followed the movement of the dog.

"He ver' fine, that dog," she said, deliberately. "He come ver' often. I know him since he is un petit chien, ver' small pup—so beeg." She measured with her hand from the ground.

"Do you know the Dean?" Kit asked, sitting down on the doorstep beside her. "He lives up in the big house on the bluff, where the pine and maples are."

The old woman shook her head placidly.

"I not go up that bluff in forty-eight year."

Kit's eyes widened with quick interest. Just then a girl a little older than herself came out of the kitchen door. Two long braids of straight brown hair hung over her shoulders, and her dress was slouchy and gypsy-like. She looked at Kit with quiet, steady scrutiny, and then questioningly over at the boys. But Kit herself relieved the tension.

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"Hello," she said. "I think you've got an awfully nice place down here. I like it because it looks old like our houses back home. All the other places I've seen since I came west have looked so newly painted."

"This isn't new," the girl told her slowly. "This place belonged to my grandfather's father, Louis Beaubien. There were Indians around here then. Most of them 'Jibways."

Jean used to say that the instant Kit's curiosity was aroused, she was just exactly like a squirrel after nuts, and here was an entirely new field of romance and adventure to be uncovered. She fairly sniffed the air. The wonderful old grandmother, basking in the sun with memories of the past like a Mother Time. The strong, tanned boys working at the nets, the flock of dark-skinned youngsters, and the girl, Marcelle, whom she was to know so well before her stay in Delphi was over.

She hurried back, eager to ask questions about the Beaubiens, and found herself late for breakfast the very first morning she was there. The Dean's face was a study as she entered, and Miss Daphne's fingers fluttered somewhat nervously over the coffee urn, and fragile cups. Kit was out of breath, and so full of excitement that she did not even notice the air was chill.

"I've had a perfectly wonderful time," she began. "No coffee, Aunt Daphne, please. Mother doesn't allow me to have any. It's all Sandy's fault. I just wanted to run down the bluff to the shore, and he led me way round that headland to the funniest old house, half-sunken in the sand, and I got acquainted with the old grandmother and Marcelle. The boys and the little youngsters seemed half-scared to death at the sight of me, and so I didn't bother to get acquainted with them yet."

The Dean looked up at her over his glasses with a quizzical expression, and Miss Daphne fairly caught her breath.

"The Beaubiens on the shore, my dear?" she asked. "Those half-breed French Canadians?"

"Well, I didn't know just what they were," answered Kit, cheerfully, "but I think they're awfully interesting. Don't you think that they look like the Breton fisher people in some of the old French paintings? That girl looked just exactly like the youngest one crossing the sands at low tide at St. Malo. We have the painting at home, and I love it. And there was another girl about thirteen that I saw staring at me from the kitchen, and she looked just like 'The Song of the Lark' girl where she's crossing the fields at dawn."

"The Beaubiens have not a very good reputation, my dear," the Dean coughed slightly behind his hand as he spoke. "The present generation may be law-abiding, but even within my memory, the Beaubiens had a little habit of smuggling."

“Smuggling?” repeated Kit, interestedly. “How could they smuggle way off here?”

“Very easily. There were schooners that used to make the run down from the Canadian shore around the Straits carrying contraband goods in war time. Besides, there is the Indian strain in them, and they are squatters. There have been several lawsuits against them, and they have persisted in staying there on the shore when the property owners on the bluff distinctly purchased riparian rights.”

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"But, brother, the Beaubiens won all their suits, didn't they?" asked Miss Daphne, pleasantly. "I'm sure the older boys are very industrious, and I think the girl Marcelle is strikingly attractive. You're not really forbidding Kit to go down there, I'm sure."

The Dean said something that was lost in a murmur, for he had been one of the property owners vanquished in the lawsuits by the Beaubiens. After breakfast Kit went up-stairs with Miss Daphne into her own little sitting-room. This looked towards the street, out over the maple and pine-shaded lawn. Also, you could command a very fair view of the college. This was built of gray stone like a Norman castle, with square towers, and was overgrown with woodbine just beginning to show a tinge of crimson.

"It seems awfully queer, Aunt Daphne," Kit said as she leaned out of the window, "to think that I am going there into the 'prep' class. Rex said on the way up here——"

She leaned suddenly farther out and waved.

"Hello, Rex, are you coming over?"

Rex glanced up at the radiant face as he came along the hedge-bordered drive between his home and the Dean's and waved back in neighborly fashion.

"I'm going up to the campus now," he said. "Ask Miss Daphne if she'd let you be in the library club. There's a meeting this morning."

"Could I, Aunt Daphne? Please say yes. I haven't joined anything in ages," Kit begged. "I don't care whether it's a library club or an Indian powwow. I am just dying to be in something out here, where I'll meet every one and get acquainted. If you don't need me this morning——" She hesitated, but some of her enthusiasm had caught Miss Daphne, and she immediately succumbed to the whim of the moment.

"Why, I think, my dear, that I'll go with you. The Dean has taken up so much of my time that I've rather lost my interest and activity in affairs. You go down with Rex, and I'll join you presently."

The Dean's desk stood in a wide square bay window which overlooked the driveway. He had settled down to his morning's portion of labor and was blocking out a curriculum of study for Kit, when he happened to glance up, and beheld the trio passing happily out through the gates. Certainly they did not realize, nor did he at that moment, that already the leaven of youth was at work in the old shadowy house behind the sentinel pines.

CHAPTER X

THE DEAN'S OUTPOSTS

The first budget of family letters arrived the following week. Kit fairly pounced on them when the mail carrier came up the walk, for she had been watching anxiously at each delivery. After all, it was the first time she had been away from home, and after the first excitement and novelty had worn off, her heart, she told herself laughingly, “harked back to Dixie.”

It seemed the Dean had written to her father on the night of her arrival, and this was a surprise to Kit.

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"It is a great relief to us all to know that you have made such a favorable impression," Mr. Bobbins' letter read. "After all, it was somewhat of an experiment, and I confess that I was rather sceptical of the result, knowing the Dean as I do. Try to adapt yourself as much as possible to the home conditions there, Kit. You know, we have always lived somewhat of an easy-going life so far as discipline and set routine go, and consequently you girls have been brought up in a happy-go-lucky fashion. Do you remember what Emerson had inscribed over his study door? 'Whim.' The old Concord philosopher and Thoreau have been close pals of mine, and I fear that I adopted at an early age the same motto. Be considerate of all the Dean's notions, and make yourself as useful and lovable as you can while you are with them, dear.

"The rebuilding of the house is going along splendidly, and we hope to have our Christmas there. I have followed the old plan, but with some improvements, I think, putting in a good furnace, and enlarging the dining-room and kitchen. The veranda also will extend around three sides of the house instead of two, and we are building the supports of field stone. There will be an outdoor fireplace on the west side also, and I know you will enjoy this."

Enjoy it? Kit stared ahead of her at the shady lawn. Miss Daphne was bending over nasturtium beds gathering the black seeds, but instead, Kit saw in a vision ahead a great hickory fire burning in the outdoor veranda fireplace with the mystery of the night crooning low over the sleeping hills. Her mother's letter came next. Kit read it with delight. She could tell just exactly the mood the mother bird was in when she wrote, just how her conscience pricked her for having been a party to Kit's plan.

"Of course, while the Dean's letter was very nice, still I am sure he felt 'put upon,' as Cousin Roxy would say. I am ever so sorry that we did not write sooner, and tell them that you were coming. It rests with you now, Kit, to make yourself so adaptable that they will forget all about the boy they wanted. I have no objection to your staying for the winter term at Hope College. Between ourselves, dear, our plans are a little unsettled here. Father is certain that the house will be ready for us this winter, but you know we have kept from him any worry about financial matters, and I am afraid he figures on a wider latitude in expense than we can afford. At the little farm here, and with you and Jean both away we could manage very well. In order to rebuild at all, we had to part with some securities which I had always hoped to save for you girls. It will be sad, won't it, if the royal princesses have to be launched without wedding chests and dowries?

"Make all the friends that you possibly can among your college mates. You won't realize it now, but so many of these friendships become precious lifelong ones. Billie is leaving this week for school. You remember Mr. Howard, who came to look after our trees? He has been staying up at the Judge's, and took a great interest in Billie. Instead of going back to Blackwood Hall, Billie is going on to a school in Virginia, not far from Washington, that Mr. Howard suggested sending him to. He is a great believer in the value of environment that is associated with historic traditions."

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Kit read this last over twice, but could not agree with it at all. She had always liked the pioneer outlook, the longing to break new trails, the starting of little colonies in clearings of one's own making. If there was an ivy around her castle, she wanted the joy of planting it herself, and seeing it grow from her own efforts.

Jean had always told her that this came from the distaff side of the family. There had been a Virginian ancestor long ago, who had broken away from the conventional life on the big river estate, near Roanoke, and had gone faring forth into the wilderness. This was Kit's favorite ancestor, John Carisbrook. He had wandered far through the west, and had married a girl in one of the outlying settlements along the Ohio River, a girl with French blood in her, Gabrielle de la Chapelle. Kit always liked to believe that it was from these two she had received her love of adventure, and of trail blazing.

She had never felt an affinity with "haunts of ancient peace" like Jean and Helen. Only that week she had been reading in one of the Dean's early English histories of real roof-trees. How, in the earliest times, primitive people built their houses around some selected giant oak or other king of the forest, with the massive trunk itself upholding the structure. If she could have done so, Kit would have gladly selected for herself her own special tree in the forest primeval, rather than have fallen heir to any ancestral castle such as Helen hankered for.

So, the little town perched high on the bluff above the lake had appealed to her mightily. Although from a western standpoint it was quite old, dating at least five years before the outbreak of the Civil War, from the colonial standpoint it was a mere youngster.

"Historic tradition?" repeated Kit. "When all around here are the old Indian trails, and the footprints left by the French explorers. I just wish I could get Billie out here for a little while. He'll settle down in some old school that thinks it is wonderful because John Smith built a camp-fire on its site once upon a time, or Pocahontas planted corn in its back field."

Kit sighed, tucked her mother's and father's letters in her sweater pocket and started off for her favorite lookout point on the bluff. Here, with Sandy crouching at her feet, she read the three letters from the girls. Jean's was full of plans for her coming trip to New York. She was not going to Boston this year, but Aunt Beth had promised her three months at the Art school, and she was to take pupils besides, to help out expenses.

"You know, if the war had ended as we planned, I could have gone to Italy with Carlota and the Countess, but the villa is still used as a hospital, and though I am dying to go, Dad and mother won't hear of it. Don't I wish I were twenty so I could do some Red Cross work and get over? It seems so perfectly futile dabbling away at one's own little petty ambitions, with humanity needing one so."

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That was quite like Jean, Kit thought, glancing over the rest of the letter hurriedly. Cousin Roxy had given a community social, and Mr. Howard had interested Jean considerably, especially as he told her he was bound for France the first of November. Jean was always so easily impressed just the first few times she met a person. It took Kit a long time to really admit a stranger to her circle of selected ones, and she had never quite forgiven Stanley Howard for trespassing in the berry patch, even though it had been in the cause of science. Besides, the last year, Jean had seemed to grow somewhat aloof from the others. Perhaps it had been her trips away from home, or her ambition. Kit could not precisely define the change, but it was there, and she felt that Jean troubled herself altogether too much over things unseen. One of Kit's favorite mottoes was from Stevenson:

"In things immaterial, Davey, be soople."

Helen's letter was all about the opening of school, and Doris' asked questions about Delphi.

"When you write, do tell us about the things that happen there, and not just what you think about it. I don't like descriptions in books, I like the talk part. You know what I mean, Kit. Has Uncle Cassius got any pets at all?"

Kit laughed over this. Bless her heart, if she could only have seen Uncle Cassius' pets. His stuffed mummy and horned toads, the chimpanzee skull beaming at one from a dark corner, and the Cambodian war mask from another. It seemed as if every time she looked around the house she found something new, and with each curio there went a story. Oddly enough, the Dean thawed more under Kit's persuasion when she begged for the stories than at any other time. After each meal, it was his custom to take what he called "four draws" in his study. Kit found at these times that he was in his best humor. Relaxed and thoughtful, he would lean back in the deep Morris chair between the flat-topped desk and the fireplace, and smoke leisurely. Even his pipe had come from Persia, its amber stem very slender and beautifully curved, its bowl a marvel of carving.

Kit sat pondering over her father's and mother's letters, after putting those of the two girls away. School would begin in another week, and she was to enter the sophomore preparatory, which corresponded to the second year in high school back home. And yet, after what her father had written, she felt that she was not giving the Dean a square deal.

The odor of tobacco came through the library window, and acting on the spur of the moment, she stepped around the corner of the veranda and perched herself on the window sill.

“Are you busy, Uncle Cassius?” Anybody who was well acquainted with Kit would have suspected the gentleness of her tone, but the Dean looked over at her with a little pleased smile. Her coming was almost an answer to his reverie.

“Not at all, my dear, not at all. In fact, I was just thinking of you. I am inclined to think after all that we will begin with the geological periods. I wish you to get your data assembled in your mind on prehistoric peoples before we take up any definite groups.”

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"That's all right," Kit answered, comfortably. "I don't mind one bit. I'll do anything you tell me to, Uncle Cassius, because," this very earnestly, "I do feel as if I hadn't played quite fair. I mean in coming out here, and landing on you suddenly, without warning you I was a girl, and I want to make up to you for it in every possible way. I'll study bones and ruins and rocks, and anything you tell me to, but I want to make sure first that you really like me. Just as I am, I mean, before you know for certain whether all this is going to 'take.'"

The Dean glanced up in a startled manner and looked at the face framed by the window quite as if he had never really given it an interested scrutiny before. Not being inclined to sentiment by nature, he had regarded Kit so far solely from the experimental standpoint. Since she had turned out to be a girl, he had decided to make the best of it, and at least try the effect of the course of instruction upon her. The personal equation had never entered into his calculation, and yet here was Kit forcing it upon him, quite as plainly as though she had said:

"Do you like me or don't you? If you don't I think I had better go back home."

"Well, bless my heart," he said, rubbing his head. "I thought that we had settled all that. Of course, my dear, the reason I preferred a boy was because, well"—the Dean floundered,—“because scientists hold a consensus of opinion that through—hem—through centuries of cultivation, I may say, collegiate development,—the male brain offers a better soil, as it were, for the—er—er——”

"The flower of genius?" suggested Kit, happily. "I don't think that's so at all, Uncle Cassius, and I'll tell you why. You take it on the farm down home. Dad says that our land in Gilead is no good because it's been worked over and over, and it's all worn out, but if you plow deep and strike a brand new subsoil you get wonderful crops. Just think what a lovely time you'll have planting crops in my unplowed brain cells."

The first laugh she had ever heard came from the Dean's lips, although it was more of a chuckle. His next question was apparently irrelevant.

"How do you think you're going to like Hope College?"

"All right," Kit responded, cheerfully. "I only hope it likes me. I've met a few of the boys and girls through Rex and Aunt Daphne, and I like them awfully well. You know, down home they're nice to you if they know who you are, and all about your family. Cousin Roxy says it's better to have a private burial lot well filled with ancestors than your name in the Social Register. But out west here it seems as if they either like you or not. Just when they first meet you, you're taken right into the fold on the strength of what you are yourself. Rex said an awfully funny thing the other day when Barty Browning declared that he had two Indian chiefs in his family, and Rex asked me if we had a little 'tommyhawk' in our family."

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The door opened with a little, light, deprecating tap first from Miss Daphne's finger-tips. She glanced around the side of it cautiously to be sure she was not disturbing the Dean, and smiled whimsically when she saw the two. The Dean's pipe had gone out, and he was leaning over the desk listening as eagerly as though he had been a boy himself, while Kit, with her hands clasped behind her head, chatted. Usually people conversed with the Dean, they never chatted, and Miss Daphne realized that Kit had already passed the outposts of the Dean's defenses.

CHAPTER XI

"Keep out"

Hope College was founded in 1871. This date was graven on the corner stone, which the Dean had been careful to show Kit, telling her at the same time how the first settlers through the middle Northwest followed the customs of the Puritans and Cavaliers.

"A church, a schoolhouse for every clearing, and a college before the county courthouse."

It seemed queer to Kit to think of Hope College as being any kind of an historic pile, but Rex had assured her anything that dated before Custer was ancient history, and if you wanted to get almost prehistoric, you went back to Lewis and Clarke, and the Jesuit explorers.

"Why, back at Gilead," Kit told him, "even the mounting stone at Cousin Roxy's had 1721 on it."

The college was built of gray field stone covered with climbing woodbine and Virginia creeper, and it dominated the little town. There were five buildings in the campus group, the main building, laboratory, library and gymnasium, boys' dormitory, and chapel.

Kit never forgot the first morning when the classes met in Assembly Hall, and the Dean addressed them on the work and aims of the coming year. For the life of her, she could not keep her mind on all he was saying or the solemnity of the moment, because, just at the very last minute when the chapel chimes stopped ringing, Marcelle Beaubien entered through the dark green swinging doors at the back of the big, crowded hall. It seemed as though every one's eyes were watching the platform, but Kit saw the slender, silent figure standing there alone. She was dressed in black, a thin black lawn, with collar and cuffs of dark red linen, and her heavy brown hair was braided in two long plaits down her back. She waited there, it seemed to Kit, expectant on the threshold of opportunity, not knowing which way to go, and without a friendly hand extended to her in welcome or guidance.

Norma Riggs, who sat next to Kit, glanced back to see what had attracted her attention, and made a funny little deprecating sound with her mouth.

“I never thought she’d have the nerve to really do it,” she whispered. “Isn’t she odd?”

A quick impulsive wave of indignation swept over Kit, and she rose from her seat, passing straight down the aisle without even being aware of the curious glances which followed her. She took Marcelle by storm.

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"You're in my class, aren't you?" she whispered quickly. "It's right over here, and there's a seat beside me. I don't know any one either, and I'm so glad to see you, so I'll have some one to talk to."

Marcelle never answered, but smiled with a quick flash of appreciation, the smile which always seemed to illumine her rather grave face. She followed Kit back to the latter's seat, and Norma exchanged glances with her right-hand neighbor, Amy Parker. Kit was altogether too new to realize just exactly what she had done. Being the Dean's grandniece, she considered herself unconsciously a privileged person. As a matter of course, Miss Daphne had accompanied her that morning, and introduced her to four or five girls in the sophomore "prep" class, who came from the representative best families of the town. Also, as a matter of course, she had been welcomed as one of them, but Kit, with her democratic notions, never even realized that she occupied one of the seats of the mighty, in a circle of the favored few, and that she had smashed all tradition by introducing into that circle a Beaubien. In fact, even if she had known, she would probably have been thoroughly indignant at any such spirit among the girls themselves.

Jean and Helen were the natural-born aristocrats in the family, Kit always said. They loved to feel themselves aloof and not part of the populace.

"The sedan chair and palanquin for both of you," Kit had been wont to say, scornfully, "but give me a good horse and a wide trail, or if I can't have the horse, I'll hike."

And here she loved to quote Stevenson's "Vagabond" to them.

"Give to me the life I love,
Let the lave go by me,
Give the jolly heaven above
And the byway nigh me.

"Wealth I ask not, hope nor love,
Nor a friend to know me;
All I ask, the heaven above,
And the road below me."

The whole morning was taken up with the assigning of students to classes. Kit loved the curious bustle and excitement of it all. It was so different from the small high school back home, and there were many more boys and girls than she had expected to see. Almost, as she passed from room to room, through the different buildings, she wished she were staying right there as a year pupil. Amy introduced her to her closest friend, Peggy Barrows, a girl from South Dakota, who took them up to her quarters in one of the dormitories.

“Dear me,” Kit said, looking around her speculatively. “I wish I were going to live here. Peggy, you’ll have to entertain us often. It’s so kind of solitary and restful, isn’t it, up here?”

“Solitary,” scoffed Peggy. “I’ve been here four days getting settled, and you might just as well call the side show of a circus solitary. There isn’t even the ghost of privacy. I’m mobbed every time I try to sit and meditate.”

“Who wants to meditate, anyway?” asked Amy. “Don’t you feel ‘the rushing torrent of ambition’s flood sweeping away the barriers’ and—what else did the Dean say?”

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"Log jam," Kit put in. "That's what he meant, log jam of laziness. Have you discovered all these shelves in your wardrobe? I'd take off those doors and hang lovely velvety curtains in front and make a bookcase out of it."

"Will you gaze upon her Chinese tea cupboard," exclaimed Norma, standing before the high black box, with one middle shelf, and little green and gold curtains hung before the tea set. "Where did you purloin that, Peg?"

"Peter gave it to me for fifty cents. It used to be a dumb waiter, and I painted it black myself. Isn't it beautiful? Have you seen Charity's room? Wait." Peggy darted out of her door and across the hall. On the door opposite a card bore the legend in large black letters:

"Keep out."

"Study hour."

"That's perfectly ridiculous," she said, tapping just the same. "Nobody's studying today. Let us in, Charity."

A sound of scraping over the floor, and muffled giggles came to the waiting ones in the hall, then the door was thrown wide, and Kit caught her first glimpse of Charity Parks, the best loved girl at Hope. She was about seventeen, but a short, roly-poly type, with curly rumpled hair and gray eyes that never seemed to keep from mirth. There were five other girls with her, and spread over the couch, chairs, and table were writing material and papers.

"We're frightfully busy, girls," Charity said, discouragingly. "What do you want?"

"Just to look at your room. Isn't it inspiring, Kit? This is Kit Robbins, Charity."

"Hope you'll like it at Hope." Charity gave Kit her hand with a warm grip. "I'm from the east, too, only not so far as you are, but we think Pennsylvania's east, out here. How do you like the decoration?"

Kit liked it, and said so emphatically. The room was in Chinese blue and black, tea table, chiffonier and two chairs painted a dull black, and the walls tinted a soft deep gray blue.

"I hunted all over Chicago for Chinese things, and I found a few. Isn't this a celestial rose jar? I think it's big enough for a pot of basil. Who was the gentle poet that sang of the lady who buried her fond lover's head in a flower pot and watered it with her tears?"

"Bet you use it for orange punch before the year is up," Peggy laughed. "Oh, Kit, she makes wonderful fruit punch. Each guest brings her own favorite fruit, then Charity mashes them all together and it's delicious."

"I wish I stayed here all the time," Kit exclaimed. "You miss the fun, being a day student, don't you?"

"Never mind, child," Charity told her consolingly, "we will have some special daylight celebrations all for you. Now clear out, girls, because I'm dying to lay out the first edition schedule."

"Charity's editor of the '*Glamour*,'" Peg said. "The boys call it the '*Clamour*,' but we don't mind. It used to be the '*Gleam*,' but we thought '*Glamour*' carried more intensity with it. Kit's going to dash off some little simple trifle in spare moments for us, aren't you? Amy writes poetry, free verse. Show them that bit you made up in Assembly."

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Amy took out a sheet of copy paper from her Ancient History, and read aloud:

“Oh, wayward maid,
Hast strayed
Too far from native strand.
Lost in a maze, the savage gaze
Becomes a frightened, spellbound gaze,
By fond ambition fanned.”

“Sounds just like Pope, doesn’t it?” said Kit. “I like that last line, ‘by fond ambition fanned.’”

“Seek not the sacred hall of fame,
Cling to thy simple life,
On Hope’s high banner, Beaubien,
Shall never, never——”

But Kit interrupted pointblank. She was sitting up very straight on the divan, with a certain expression around her mouth, and a very steady purposeful look in her eyes, which even Jean at home paid attention to.

“Just a minute,” she said, quickly. “Do you mean Marcelle Beaubien? Because if you do, I don’t think that’s fair.”

CHAPTER XII

Kit locates A “Founder”

Peg patted her in a conciliatory manner.

“Now, my child,” she said, “curb that swift and rising wrath, and bottle the vials thereof. What is Hecuba to you, or you to Hecuba?”

“Poor little Peggy,” Charity murmured, “getting into trim for a Shakespeare drive? You know, Kit, our Peg is president of the Portia Dramatic Club, and the mantle doth not rest lightly on her young shoulders.”

But Kit could not be diverted, and the color rose somewhat belligerently in Amy’s cheeks, too;

“I don’t see,” she said, “why you feel that you have to take Marcelle Beaubien’s part. If you knew all about her the way we girls do, you’d let her alone.”

"I don't see how she ever came up here anyway," Norma remarked. "It's just exactly as if one of her brothers tried to come in. Do you think the boys would stand for that?"

"Why on earth shouldn't they?" demanded Kit, hotly. "And I'd like to know what they've got to say about it anyway. I don't think that's the college spirit. Any one who wants an education and is willing to work for it should be admitted."

"Yes, but if they had any sense at all," responded Norma, placidly, "they wouldn't put themselves into the position of being snubbed. You can talk all you want to about the college spirit from the standpoint of Deans and faculties, but when all's said and done, it's the student spirit that rules. I'll bet that she doesn't stay here a month. She hasn't any one to help her at home, and can't afford tutoring, so she'll just peter out."

"Dear, dear friends of my youth," Charity exclaimed, on her knees before the couch, "here are some wonderful chocolates and cheese straws and pimentoes. Let's have a love feast immediately and bury the hatchet. Kit, your hair isn't red enough to warrant any such exhibitions, and you'll have to cut them out."

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The gong sounded in the hall below for afternoon classes, and there was just time to snatch a little refreshment before they joined the other girls trooping through the corridors. Kit found herself watching Marcelle. There was a peculiar aloofness about the girl which seemed to put almost a wall of defense around her. She was intensely interested in everything, one could see that plainly, except the other students, and it seemed as if she simply overlooked them. When Kit came down the staircase, she glanced into the library and saw Marcelle in there alone, bending down before the long wall bookcases. Across the wide hall there were groups of boys and girls in the two long double parlors, laughing and talking together, and every couch and settee along the T-shaped hall was occupied, but Marcelle was alone.

Whoever had built Hope College had managed to work out some of his dreams of old world beauty. The library was wainscoted in some dull satin finished wood, with the graining of olive wood. In the west wall was set a deeply embrasured mullioned window of stained glass, with the figure of a young girl in white in college cap and gown, her face upturned, as she seemed to come towards one through a garden of foxgloves, pale-pink and hyacinth in hue. Beneath was the one word, Hope. Scattered about the room on top of bookcases and shelves were the usual beloved bits of bronze and statuary, Dante's head, the Nike, with widespread wings, busts of Emerson, Longfellow, Lowell, Whitman, Whittier, Mrs. Stowe, Louisa Alcott, and a beautiful bowed head of Mrs. Browning, her curls half-shadowing her face.

Marcelle had a volume of "Treasure Island" in her hand, illustrated in color. She turned in surprise at the touch of Kit's hand on her shoulder.

"I thought we could walk down towards the bluff together, because we go the same way," said the latter. "How do you like it here?"

"I like it," responded Marcelle, slowly, with a certain dignified shyness that was characteristic of her. "My mother has told me all about it. She liked the library when she was here. She told me where her room was up-stairs, too, but I did not want to go up while the girls were there."

"Let's go up now, while they're all down-stairs," Kit suggested impulsively. "I'll take you. Which dormitory was she in?"

"Her name was Mary Douglas. It is the Douglas Dormitory. Her father was one of the founders here, Malcolm Douglas."

Kit listened in utter amazement and with a rising sense of joy. Here was Marcelle Beaubien, flouted and disdained by the little crowd of girls who happened to live in a certain restricted district of Delphi, but claiming her grandfather was a founder of the college. At that very moment Kit planned her surprise on the girls.

As they walked through the hall together, Pauline and the other girls followed them with their glances and smiled. The two paused before a big bronze tablet with the name of the founders on it. There it was, third from the last, Malcolm Douglas, and date, 1871.

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"He came from Canada," said Marcelle, "and settled here. Later on he went into Minnesota, and on into Dakota as one of the first of the Indian fighters in the Sioux wars there, but he was really seeking gold. The family was very poor after he died, but my mother came here for two years, and even when I was a little bit of a girl, seven or eight, years old, before she died, she used to tell me how she loved it, and that I must come here, too."

"Don't any of your brothers want to come?" asked Kit impulsively. "They're all older than you, aren't they?"

Marcelle shook her head with a curious little smile.

"They are all Beaubien, every one. They eat, and they sleep and fish, that is all."

Kit led the way to the upper floor, where the dormitories were, and meeting Charity, she asked the way to the Douglas.

"Why, you were in that one to-day," replied Charity in surprise. "It's our dormitory, don't you know?"

"Oh, thank you so much," Kit said, with suspicious alacrity, as she guided Marcelle down the corridor, and Charity glanced back at them both, speculatively, wondering just what special business could take two new day girls into the most exclusive dormitory at Hope.

CHAPTER XIII

ENTER THE ROYAL MUMMIES

Kit deliberately planned her campaign for the following week, and the only girl she took into her confidence was Anne Bellamy. It had been the greatest relief, somehow, when Anne returned to Delphi for the fall term. There was something good-natured and comfortably serene about Anne that made her companionship a relief from that of the other girls. Jean often said back home that Kit was such a bunch of fireworks herself, she always needed the background of a calm silent night or a flaccid temperament, to set her off properly.

"You know, Anne," Kit exclaimed, sinking with a luxurious sigh of content down among the cushions on the broad couch in Anne's room, "I'd give anything, sometimes, if I'd been an only child; of course, you've got a brother, but you're the only girl. You don't know what it is to be one of four. I share my room with Helen, back home, and all honors with Jean. Then, of course, Doris is the baby, and while we all love each other devotedly, still you do have to elbow your way through a large family, if you want to keep

on being yourself. I read somewhere about old Joaquin Miller, the poet of the Sierras. Know him?"

Anne shook her head, as she combed out her long brown hair, holding one roll with her teeth.

"No, I don't suppose you do," Kit went on happily. "That's one reason why you and I are going to be fearfully good friends, 'cause you don't know everything in creation. It seems to me I can't speak of anything at all at home now that Jean doesn't know more about it than I do, or Helen thinks she does, which is worse. Don't mind me this morning. I just got a family budget, full of don'ts."

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"Yes, and you're just as likely as not to be homesick to-morrow," laughed Anne. "Go on about your poet."

"Oh, nothing, except that he didn't believe there should be more than one room in a house, and he built little individual houses all over 'The Heights' out in California. I'd love to do that back home, with a dining-room on one green hill, and the kitchen down in the valley."

"You'd need a mountain railway on an up grade, when it came meal time."

"Well maybe," Kit assented, "but at least I'd have my own bower in a pine grove, and each of the royal princesses could go and do likewise. But that isn't what I came over for. You know Marcelle Beaubien? The girls don't like her going to Hope."

"Don't they?" Anne asked, mildly. "Well, what are they going to do about it? I thought that's what colleges were for. Who's against her?"

"I don't think it's exactly anything definite or violent, but you know how mighty uncomfortable they can make her. There's Amy Roberts and Norma and Peggy Porter and the Tony Conyers crowd."

"She won't miss anything special, even if they do try to snub her," answered Anne laughingly.

"This is my second year at Hope, and I want to tell you right now that Charity rules in the Douglas Dormitory. If you can get her on Marcelle's side, the other girls will trot along like little lambkins."

"Do you suppose," Kit leaned forward impressively, as she sprang her plan, "do you suppose Charity would loan her room for a Founders' Tea?"

"A Founders' Tea," repeated Anne. "What's that?"

Kit proclaimed grandiloquently:

"A tea in honor of Malcolm Douglas, pioneer founder of Hope College, and grandfather of Marcelle Beaubien."

Anne's blue eyes widened in amazement, and her hair-brush was suspended in mid-air.

"How did you find out?" she whispered. "Does Marcelle know?"

"Of course she knows. She told me all about it herself, but I don't think she's got sense enough to realize what a nice handy little club of defense it gives her against the girls to spring it on them at the tea, and you've got to help me get it up. We'll coax Charity into

loaning us her room first, and I'll look up all about Malcolm Douglas, and write a cute little essay about the historic founding of Hope. Then we'll send out mysterious little invitations, and just say on them, 'To meet a Founder's granddaughter.'"

"When?" asked Anne, reflectively. "You ought to do it soon, so if it works they'll take her into the different clubs right away. I think you ought to try and see Charity to-day after classes and get her advice. Another thing, Kit, do you suppose Marcelle would have any relics around of her grandfather that we could kind of spring on them unexpectedly?"

Kit's eyes kindled with appreciation.

"That's a worthy thought. Sort of corroborative evidence, as it were. Anne, you're a wonder." She sprang up from the couch, her hands deep in her white sweater pockets, looking very fit and purposeful. "I think it's up to me to go and prepare Charity. You make out a list of things that we'll want for the tea. You'd better be the refreshment chairman, and we'll try and make it a week from next Saturday."

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"Too far off," Anne demurred. "Better do it while it's fresh in your mind, before you start lectures."

"I believe I'll go over now. It's only a little after five, and that'll keep me from answering that family budget until I've calmed down. If you see any one looking for me, tell them I'll be right straight back. I'll stop in the library and look up Malcolm's historic record, on my way, so you may truthfully announce I'm delving into research."

Kit went up the hill road buoyantly. Dearly she loved to set a goal ahead of her, and then run for it. Delphi had appeared rather barren as a field for her real endeavor, but now with the opening of school, she could see her way ahead to conscientiously starting something, which she sincerely hoped she could finish. Coming along the sidewalk which bounded the campus on the south, she met Charity on her way back from the post-office.

"This is ever so much better than going up-stairs," Kit said. "Let's walk around the campus twice, while I unburden my soul."

At the second lap, the whole plan had been matured by Charity's quick sympathy and understanding.

"And it will do them good, too," she said, as they parted. "That's not the college spirit by a long shot, and you're perfectly right, Kit, but just the same it's easier to get it on the girls in this way with a nice friendly accompaniment of sandwiches, and iced tea, and whatever you do, Kit, don't breathe one blessed word to anybody. I wouldn't even tell Marcelle herself that she is to be the guest of honor. She'd run like a deer, if she even suspected it."

The date of the Founders' Tea was set for the following Saturday. Kit evolved the invitations herself and wrote them on blank cards, as she remembered doing back at the Cove in the days of opulence and entertainment.

Saturday, October Second, Three to Five.

You are invited to attend a Founders' Tea, Douglas Dormitory,
Hope College, Miss Allen's Study.

"Diffident, modest and correct," quoth Kit, critically, when she showed them to Anne. "Now, what are you going to eat, Anne? Isn't there something besides just plain tea? Couldn't we fix up some kind of glorified lemonade?"

"I've got it all down," answered Anne. "Grape juice, ginger ale and lemons. It's wonderful, and six kinds of sandwiches. Cheese with pimento, and cheese with chopped walnuts, lettuce and egg, chopped raisins with beaten white of egg, and

raspberry jam and cream cheese, sardine on lettuce with mayonnaise and deviled ham, with macaroons on the side.”

“It’s perfectly dandy,” exclaimed Kit. “Aunt Daphne told me when I first started in that I could give a spread for the girls, and this is it. After it’s all over, I’ll tell her about Marcelle, and I know she’ll enjoy it and approve. I think we ought to get Peggy or Amy to write some kind of an anniversary ode for us. It might begin like this:

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“Oh, have you a family founder,
On your ancestral tree,
Who laid the corner-stone of Hope
On the campus at Del-pee.”

“Better finish that up, and read it at the tea,” advised Anne; “there’s something so spirited about it. Is Charity going to decorate the study for the festal occasion? We ought to have something sort of different, don’t you think so?”

“Pioneer relics would be the only thing, and I don’t know where we’d scare those up.”

“There’s a whole cabinet of them in the Dean’s room at the Assembly Hall.”

The two girls looked at each other wisely. The subject really needed no argument or discussion. Kit said briefly:

“I’ll try. I think I can get some of them anyway if I approach Uncle Cassius as a humble student seeking knowledge.”

All unprepared for the onslaught, the Dean sat enjoying his after dinner smoke that evening when Kit tapped at the door.

“Come in,” he called, a little bit testily, looking over his eye-glasses at the intruder. “I don’t think I can talk with you just now, my dear,” he said. “I am very busy working out a dynasty problem.”

“Oh, but I’d love to help,” Kit pleaded, “and I did help before on the aborigines of Japan, didn’t I? I even remember their names, the Ainos.”

“This is early Egyptian. Something you know nothing whatever about.”

“Just mummies?” inquired Kit. “Oh, Uncle Cassius, we girls back home made up a lovely little couplet about that when we were studying Egypt at high school.

““Heaven bless the royal mommies,
And the jewels in their tummies.””

No answering gleam of amusement showed in the Dean’s eyes. In fact, he regarded her, Kit thought, rather severely for this unseemly display of levity.

“Of course,” she added, hastily, “that was when I was very much younger than I am now. It was two years ago.”

The Dean coughed deprecatingly, and turned back to the pamphlets before him.

"Remains have been discovered," he began in quite the tone he used in Assembly, "of the lost tribe of the Nemi. When the Greeks, my dear, obtained a foothold in Carthage and along the Mediterranean coast, the Nemi remained unconquered and retreated to the mountain fastnesses, west of the source of the Nile."

"Well, I know all about that," Kit answered, encouragingly, perching herself on the arm of a chair, across from him. "Just see," and she counted off on her fingers, "Livingstone-Stanley,—Victoria Falls—Zambesi—and Kipling wrote all about the people in 'Fuzzy-Wuzzy.'"

"No, no, no, not a bit like it!" the Dean exclaimed. "My dear child, learn to think in centuries and epochs. The long and short of it is, there have been some very wonderful remains of the Nemi recently discovered, and I have been honored by a commission from the Institute to write a complete summary of the results of the expedition and its historic significance."

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"Don't you wish you'd been there when they dug them up? That's what I'd love, the exploring part, don't you know. I should think it would be fearfully dry trying to make bones sit up and talk, when you are so far away from it all."

"They are not sending me bones," replied the Dean with dignity, "but they are sending me the Amenotaph urn, and a sitting image of Annui. I believe with these two I shall be able to establish as a fact the survival of the Greek influence in ancient Egypt. My dear, you have no idea," he added, warmly, "how much this explains if it is true. There may be even some Phoenician data before I finish investigating."

"Phoenicians," thought Kit, although she said nothing. "Yes, I do remember about them, too. Tin,—ancient Britain—and something about Carthage, or was that Queen Dido?" Then she said aloud very positively and earnestly:

"I know I can help you a lot with this, Uncle Cassius, if you will only let me, because history is my favorite study, and the reason I came to speak to you to-night is this: We girls are going to have a Founders' Tea, Saturday afternoon, up at Hope; just a little informal affair, but I'd like to give it a——" She hesitated for the right word, and the Dean nodded encouragingly, being in a better mood.

"Semblance of verity? Are you preparing a treatise?"

"No. I want something they can look at," Kit explained, "and I knew if I told you about it, you'd let us take a few of the old things out of that cabinet in your room at Assembly Hall. All I need would be—well, say a few portraits of any of the founders of Hope, and any of the relics of the Indians or French explorers."

The Dean graciously detached a key from the ring at one end of the slender chain which barred his waistcoat.

Kit retired with it, as though she bore a trophy, and the next day the last preparations were completed for impressing on the freshman class the honor of having a Founder's granddaughter in their midst.

CHAPTER XIV

IN HONOR OF MARCELLE

"I think you ought to preside, Kit," Charity said as she arranged the tea table more handily before the corner couch. "It's your party, and you ought to pour."

"Takes too much concentration," Kit returned. "Anne'll help you. I want to have my mind perfectly clear to manage the thing. You see, Marcelle doesn't know a blessed

thing about it yet, and there's no knowing how she'll take it. Wouldn't it be funny if she got proud and haughty, and marched away from our Founders' Tea?"

"I don't think you ought to spring it until after we've had refreshments. Food has such a mellowing effect on human nature. It's all a question of tact, though. If I were you, I'd talk to them in an intimate sort of way instead of lingering too much on the historic value. Better straighten Malcolm, over yonder; he looks kind of topoly."

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Kit regarded the framed steel engraving of Malcolm Douglas almost fondly. It had been taken from a history of early Wisconsin, together with some other founders fortunate enough to be included on the roll of honor, and had hung down in the Dean's room. Now it occupied a prominent spot specially cleared for it in the middle of the wall, and Kit had twined a long, double tendril of southern smilax around it, culled from the local florist's supply for any chance Delphi festivities.

Backed by Miss Daphne's approval and interest, Kit had called at several homes where lived the descendants of other founders, and the results were manifest. Mrs. Peter Bradbury had contributed two Indian blankets and a hunting-bag, besides an old pair of saddle bags used by her father, one of the early missionary bishops of the northwest, in his travels through the wilderness. Two fine timber wolf pelts lay on the floor, and of these Kit was specially proud. She had beguiled them from the treasure store of old Madame Giron, whose husband could still tell with fiery eyes and thrilling tone of how he had killed the animals not a quarter of a mile from the site of Hope College, in the old settler days.

From the cabinet in the Dean's room had come mostly records, old documents carefully framed, and several letters written by the founders themselves.

"You know," Kit said, as she gave a last touch to her exhibit, "of course these are important, but I like the Indian and hunting things best. I wish I could run away with that double pair of buffalo horns that belonged to Dr. Gleason's granduncle or somebody. I like them better than anything."

A quick rap came on the door, and before Charity could even call "come in" Peggy entered with her usual galaxy behind her, Amy, Norma, and a newcomer from Iowa, Henrietta Jinks, whom the girls had instantly dubbed "the Jinx," because of her infallible habit of everlastingly doing the inopportune thing.

"If it wasn't that her father was a congressman, she'd never get by with it," Amy had said, "but as it is, if you'll just remember that she's been reared on rhetoric and torch-light parades, you can understand that little abrupt way she has. I think it's rather interesting to be a 'Jinx,' it's so different, and the boys only have mascots. This way, it shows we have a fine, proud disregard for the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. Kit, my child, did you hear that? I'll be playing Ophelia before the New Year dawns."

"Tony Conyers sent word she'd be ready in five minutes," said Norma. "I think she's dressing up as something symbolical, and she's got a lot of the girls in there with her. Charity, I think this is a perfectly stupendous idea of yours."

"Tisn't mine," retorted Charity, hurtling cushions handily from one couch to another in order to balance the room. "It's Kit's. This is her party. Her coming out party at Hope."

“Oh, are you the founder’s granddaughter?” Amy inquired, her blue eyes opening widely.

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"No, precious, I'm not," replied Kit, happily. "I wish this minute I could mount yon rostrum, Mid declaim the feats of my ancestors. They were pathfinders and Cavaliers, but I don't know of a single blessed founder among them. Peggy, don't sit on the almonds. They're right behind you in that glass dish."

The room filled up rapidly with members of the freshman class, and Kit declared after she had been the rounds four times that she felt exactly like the lecturer in the curio hall in a museum, telling the history of the relics over and over again. Nobody but Anne knew how anxious she became as the moments slipped by and no Marcelle appeared. It would never do to have a climax happen without the surprise of her presence to carry it off. The refreshments had all been served, and the little bronze dragon clock on top of the book shelves showed the hour of five, when Charity called:

"You'd better start in on your Founders' talk, Kit; we've only got about half an hour."

There was a baffled look in Kit's eyes, as she picked up the challenge and rose from the brown willow chair. Charity must know perfectly well how untimely it was to start to spring the surprise while there was a running chance of Marcelle appearing. Still there was a hush, and the girls faced her expectantly.

"As you all know," began Kit, "the old bronze tablet in the lower hall carries names on its roll of honor which not only uphold the glory of Hope College, but also of the entire town of Delphi, of the entire state, I may say, of Wisconsin."

"Kit," murmured Peggy, sotto voce, "if you start declaiming like that you'll have 'the Jinx' after your scalp. First thing we know, you'll begin, 'Ladies and fellow constituents.'"

Kit waited until the laugh had subsided, and Peggy had replaced the shell pins from her tumbled braids after a tussle with "the Jinx," who took all political allusions as personal affronts.

"There are few of us here to-day, if any," continued Kit, slowly, one eye watching the concrete walk across the campus from the nearest window, "who can boast of a Hope founder in her family."

"I can, almost," interrupted Antoinette, otherwise Tony; "my big sister Marie was engaged for a very little while to Bernard Giron. If she had only married him, we would have had a 'Founder' in the family."

"Tony," said Kit, severely, "I am dealing with facts, not prospects, and you ought not to reveal any family secrets, either. I say it is a great honor to be a direct descendant of a 'Founder,' and we have one in our class. A girl, too modest to take advantage of her grandfather's record." She paused impressively, but with a quickening gleam in her eyes, as there suddenly came in view a hurrying figure in gray sweater and dark crimson

cap on the campus walk. It was Marcelle herself, late, but in time to create the desired sensation.

Kit drew a deep breath, and plunged back to her subject, considering exactly the time it would take for the belated guest to reach the study.

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"Since all the girls here belong to this dormitory, it seems appropriate that the founder whose memory we honor should be Malcolm Douglas. His portrait hangs upon the wall, evidently taken from an old likeness." Oh, how she wished the home folks could hear her roll her phrases! "There is no more adventurous or thrilling career in the annals of historic Delphi than that of the illustrious Scotchman. Making his way through the perils of the wilderness, he came from Quebec with a party of fur traders and pioneer explorers."

"Don't hit too far back, Kit," interrupted Peggy, alertly. "If he was a founder in '71, you can't have him trotting over wilderness trails with Marquette and Lasalle, you know."

"Nevertheless," responded Kit, ignoring the levity of her nearest neighbor, "he is one of the heroes of our Wisconsin pioneer times. He came here in his early twenties, and married Lucia, the daughter of Captain Peter Morton. Their daughter was Mary, and, girls, she was the mother of one of our classmates, the very same Mary who went through Hope and graduated with high honors. You'll find her initials carved in Number 10 across the hall, and her portrait—the only one I could find—is in this graduating group."

The girls all crowded forward to look at the group photograph which Kit held out to them, just as a knock came at the door. For one dramatic instant Kit held the knob, her back against the door as she announced in almost a whisper:

"The granddaughter of Malcolm Douglas."

The girls leaned forward, eagerly, every eye fixed upon the door. As Kit said afterwards, laughingly to Anne:

"Goodness knows who they expected to see, but I almost felt as though I had promised them the excitement of a live mummy and then had sprung Marcelle. Oh, but wasn't she splendid, Anne? The way she stood the introduction and the shock of finding herself the guest of honor. As I looked at her, I thought to myself, you may be Douglas, and you may be Morton, fine old Scotch and English stock, but if it wasn't for the dash of debonair Beaubien in you too, you could never carry this off the way you are doing."

Marcelle was not the only person present who had to fall back on inherent caste for their manners of the moment, but Tony was the only one that gave an audible gasp. Even Peggy and Norma smiled, and greeted the Founder's granddaughter in the proper spirit.

She was dressed in white, just a plain kilted skirt and smock, but Kit gloried in the way she took her place beside Charity at the tea table, and parried the questions of the girls with laughing ease.



“Of course,” she said, with the little slight accent she seemed to have caught from her father and old Grandmother Beaubien, “I thought every one in Delphi knew. For myself, I am proud of him, and of all my mother’s people, but I am also proud of being a Beaubien. You girls do not know perhaps that some of my father’s people helped to found Fort Dearborn, and they were very brave and courageous voyagers in the early days of New France.”

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Peggy really rose to the occasion remarkably, Kit thought. Probably the most zealously guarded membership in Hope's freshman class was that of the Portia Club, and yet, before the tea was over, she had invited Marcelle to attend the next meeting and be proposed for membership.

"We're not going to try a whole play at first, just famous scenes, and I know you'd fit in somewhere and enjoy it. Don't you want to, Marcelle?"

Marcelle shrugged her shoulders, deprecatingly.

"I shall be glad to help always," she said, with simple dignity, "if you wish to make me one of you. We have an old copy of Shakespeare at home that was my mother's, and I have read much of it in the long winter evenings. I think," she added, whimsically, "that I would rather play parts like Shylock or Hamlet than the girl roles, and best of all, I should love dearly to play Prince Hal."

"What do you think of that?" Anne said on the way home. "The idea of her being interested in Shakespeare at all or knowing anything about it, after living all her life in that little sand dump. Kit, you certainly have discovered a flower that was born to blush unseen."

"It will take her out of her shell, anyway," Kit replied, happily. "And I do think the girls came up to the mark splendidly. Heaven knows how they are talking about us now, behind our backs, but they acted their parts nobly when I swung that door open, and there stood, just Marcelle!"

CHAPTER XV

THE FAMILY ADVISES

No qualms of homesickness visited Kit the first two months after school opened. Not even New England could eclipse the glory of autumn when it swept in full splendor over this corner of the Lake States. Down east there was a sort of middle-aged relaxation to this season of the year. Kit always said it reminded her of the state of mind Cousin Roxy had reached, where one stood on the Delectable Mountains and could look both ways.

But here autumn came as a veritable gypsy. The stretches of forest that fringed the ravines rioted in color. The lakes seemed to take on the very deepest sapphire blue. No hush lay over the land as it did in the east, but there were wild sudden storm flurries, and as Kit expressed it, a feeling in the air as if there might be a regular circus of a cataclysm any minute.

Hardly a Saturday passed but what she was included in some motoring party. The Dean never joined these, but Miss Daphne thoroughly enjoyed her new role of chaperon. Sometimes the run would be further north, along the route to Milwaukee. Other days they would dip into the beautiful wooded roads that cut through the ravines, leading over towards Lake Delevan. And once, towards the end of November, in the very last spurt of Indian Summer weather, they took a week-end tour up to Eau Claire and Chippewa Falls.

"I only wish," Rex said, "that we could come up here next spring when they have their big logging time. It's one of the greatest sights you ever saw, Kit. I have seen the logs jammed out there in the river until they looked like a giant's game of jackstraws. Maybe we could arrange a trip, don't you think so, mother?"

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"I don't see any reason why not," replied Mrs. Bellamy.

"But I won't be here then," protested Kit.

"Oh, you'll stay till the end of the spring term, dear," Miss Daphne corrected, and right there and then Kit experienced her first pang of homesickness. Would she really be away from the home nest until next June? Even with this novelty of recreation, backed by wealth, she felt suddenly as though she could have slipped away from it all without a single regret, just to find herself safely back home with the family.

When her next letter arrived at Maple Lawn, Jean read it over her mother's shoulder. The two younger girls were at school, and a little puzzled frown drew Jean's straight dark brows together.

"She's getting homesick, mother. Kit never writes tenderly like that unless she feels a heart throb. I never thought she'd last as long as she has——"

But Mrs. Bobbins looked dubious.

"She seems to have made such a good impression. I hate to have her spoil it by jumping back too soon. It's such a benefit for her."

Jean stopped polishing lamp chimneys and gazed out of the kitchen window towards the far-reaching fields, where none but the crows could find a living now. She was only able to run up from New York once a month, since she had taken a position of junior instructor at the Academy, and yet each time she found herself turning with a sigh of relief and safety from the city life to the peace of these everlasting hills.

"I don't blame her a bit if she wants to come back home before summer, mother dear. Money isn't everything."

"Oh, but Jean," sighed the Mother Bird, "it means so much in life. It's foolish to blind ourselves to all that it will do for us. I never try to deceive myself one bit, and I shall always miss the little luxuries and greater comforts of life that we had back at the Cove, before your father's health broke down, especially now that you girls are growing up so soon into womanhood. It isn't for myself I want it, but for you."

Jean laughed as she slipped her arms closer around her mother's neck.

"But you mustn't apprentice Kit to the Sign of the Dollar, just for the forlorn hope that Uncle Cassius and Aunt Daphne may send her home with a shower of gold. It seems to me if they were really and truly the right kind of family people, and cared for you and father, that they couldn't rest until they had handed over a splendid, generous slice of their money right now when it would do the most good."

“Oh, Jean, people never do that. But I do think they will leave something to you all.”

“Leave something!” sniffed Jean, scornfully. “If there’s anything in the world I thoroughly despise, it’s old, mouldy, dead men’s shoes. If I were you, I’d write and tell Kit that she could come home at the Christmas vacation if she wanted to.”

But Cousin Roxy took an entirely different view of the matter when she was consulted.

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"Fiddlesticks," she said. "No girl of Kit's age knows what she wants two minutes of the time. She's doing good missionary work out there, and she must not become weary in well doing or draw back her hand from the plow. You don't need her here at all, Elizabeth. Helen's getting plenty old enough to take hold and help."

"Oh, but she's so young, Roxy, to have responsibility thrust upon her."

"Can't have it too young," retorted Mrs. Ellis, buoyantly. "It's what tones up the muscles of the spirit. From what I know about Cassius Cato Peabody, I should say that what he needed most was a trumpet call from the Lord to make him take an interest in the land of the living instead of mummies and buried cities."

So two letters went back to Kit, and in hers the Mother Bird could not resist slipping a hint that perhaps it would be a wise thing to ask the Dean about terminating her visit at Christmas time. But Jean added in hers:

"Mother's afraid you are homesick, or that they may be tired of you by this time, but if I were in your place, Kit, I'd try to stay until June. Father thinks the Hall may be done in time for us to go into it next month, but we've had lots of wet weather, and Cousin Roxy says it would be horribly unhealthy to move in before the plaster has had a chance to thoroughly dry. Shad goes down every day with father, and they've kept the fire going in the furnace, so I suppose that will help some, but there isn't a particle of need for your coming back, except mother's dread that you may be homesick, and you're getting too old to mollycoddle yourself, Kit, where there's a big interest at stake."

Kit read this with lowering brow.

"It's so nice to have been born Jean, and speak on any subject as the eldest sister," she said, scornfully. "I know perfectly well that mother needs me when she is moving back into the new house, and I never expected to stay so long when I came, anyway."

She stopped short, meditating on just what this queer, choky feeling was that had swept over her. Helen and Jean always liked to take a new emotion and analyze it, but Kit rarely concerned herself with motives or causes. And now she only knew that she would have given up everything, future hopes of the Dean's bestowing bequests broadcast in the robins' nest, and all the winter's fun at Hope College, just to be safely back home with all the dear familiar faces around her.

CHAPTER XVI

SHOPPING FOR SHAKESPEARE

It was Saturday morning. She had been elected a member of the Portia Club, and even now rehearsals were under way for the first performance the second week in

December. There was to be one that morning at Amy's study, the scene between Rosalind, Orlando, and Celia. Kit was Orlando on account of her height and carriage. As Amy said:

"You've got the air, Kit, that goes with doublet and hose and Lincoln green."

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"Lincoln green was in Robin Hood's time," retorted Kit.

"Yes, but it's all that foresty stuff, don't you know. You can play Mercutio next month in the 'Merchant of Venice.'"

"No, I want to be Shylock. I love character parts. I don't see why you have to pick out these little tame scenes when we could have Lear and Edgar and the Fool on the heath, or Dick the Third or Macbeth. I'd play any of those for you. We used to have plays back home just amongst us girls, and I was always the leading heavy. We even tried putting on 'Faust' in the barn when the hay-lofts were empty, but that does need atmosphere."

"Dear wayward, fearless sister," answered Amy, kindly, "what you haven't found out here is this. Thus far we can go and no farther. The faculty would expire seeing you as King Lear. Discreetly may ye pose as Orlando, or any other gentle lad, with a sweeping cloak about thee, but I doubt if the Dean would even beam on Hamlet."

"I'm a splendid Hamlet," Kit said, thoughtfully. "I doubled in 'Hamlet' and 'The Raven' in the same costume down home. Just the soliloquy, of course, though we'd have tried the grave-diggers scene only we didn't have any skulls."

But Amy had not thought favorably of deviating from the usual program. Scenes from "As You Like It," as usual, was to be the first effort. Kit glanced at the clock, and caught up her sweater and cap. It was quarter of ten, and she was due at Amy's at ten. As she ran down-stairs, she encountered the Dean, happily directing two expressmen carry a large box back into the study.

"My dear, it has come," he told her. "I'm hoping they will both be here, the Amenotaph urn and the statue of Annui. I do not wish to be disturbed just now while I am unpacking them, as it takes a great deal of care and delicacy and you will ask too many questions, Kit, but if you will come in after lunch, I will explain the inscriptions to you."

"Oh, I'd love to, Uncle Cassius," Kit answered, eyeing the box hopefully. "I'm going up to a rehearsal at the Hall."

The Dean smiled absently and nodded his head at her.

"Look up Annui while you are there, also Semele."

Lysander, the puppy, bounded to meet her as she hurried down the walk, and at the sidewalk curb she found the Bellamy car waiting.

"Just in time," called Rex, cheerily. "Where are you bound for?"

Kit took the seat beside him gratefully. The wind from the lake blew cuttingly, and there was a flurry of first snowflakes in the air wavering about uncertainly like birds that had lost their way.

“Where’s Anne?” she asked. “Isn’t she going up to rehearsal?”

“Gone down to Brent’s first. I’m going to stop and pick her up. She’s been building a costume all the morning.”

The car swung around the corner of Maple Avenue and down the hill towards the village, leaving Lysander sitting at the corner, wailing dolefully.

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Brent's was the local emporium for everything needed, from the college standpoint. Not only were its shelves filled with goods which varied from library supplies to latest fiction, but there was an ice cream parlor annex patronized almost entirely by students.

Anne was engrossed over a selection of patterns at the counter in the back of the store. She was to play Celia, and Norma was Rosalind. Charity always said that Norma's profile and long corn-colored hair brought her more undeserved honors than any qualities of excellence she possessed.

"I'm so glad you came along just now," sighed Anne. "Mother says I ought to dress very simply, but a Duke's daughter would have even a stuff dress cut in fashion, wouldn't she? Besides, I can show a lot of taste in my cap. Norma's got a perfectly wonderful cloak made of a dark green felt piano cover."

Kit helped her select a dull violet goods, with white underslip that showed through the slashes in the sleeves. Anne had been hovering over an old rose that absolutely killed any glint of color in her light brown hair.

"Never, never," warned Kit, "let old rose come near you, if you've got freckles or sandy hair. Don't you notice, Anne, how I cling to all the soft pastel nondescript tones? That's because my eldest sister is an artist, and we all have to live up to it more or less now. When Jean wants a new dress she slips away and communes with nature, until she's hit the right tone values. You should have seen her face one day when some one asked Doris her favorite color, and she said, 'plaid.'"

"We're going to be late to rehearsal," Anne declared with a sigh, as they rose to leave.

"We are late now," rejoined Kit, cheerfully. "They'll prize us all the more if we keep ourselves kind of scarce. Rex told me to order walnut sundae for him, and wait until he comes back."

Just at this moment Anne laid her finger on her lips and glanced impressively at a table on the other side of the room. There sat Amy with Peggy Porter and Norma, all of them dreamily imbibing ice cream sodas, just as though Shakespearian rehearsals were occasions unknown in their engagement calendars.

Kit rose and crossed the room with caution until she stood behind Amy and intoned sepulchrally from Macbeth:

"What ho! Ye secret, black and midnight hags, what is't ye do?"

CHAPTER XVII

HOPE'S PRIMROSE PATH

“Well, we waited fifteen minutes for you,” protested Amy, laughingly, “and Norma had to come down-town to try and find some high boots like Julia Marlowe wore for Rosalind. She’s had that old picture of her pinned up on the wall for two weeks.”

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"Oh, and listen, Kit," Norma broke in; "you know that suede brown leather table cover of mine; I just took and slashed it around the edges and bent it over an old tam-o'-shanter crown and it looks exactly like the hat she wore. You know I've been considering rather seriously. Don't you really think that I'm peculiarly fitted for this sort of a career? Of course I'd only play Shakespearian parts, although I'd love to be Joan of Arc like Maude Adams was at Harvard, or play the old Greek tragedies at that Stadium place, somewhere in California. I've been studying Electra a little bit."

"Have you?" questioned Kit, kindly. "You dear child, you. So young and yet so aspiring. Finish your chocolate ice cream soda, and we'll run along. Rex just came with his car and we can all pile into it."

The rehearsal passed off splendidly, barring sundry interpolations by Kit into Orlando's flights of fancy.

"I think he would have had to have been much more interesting to have held the love of such a girl as Rosalind," she protested. "Heroes are awful people anyway, I think. The only ones I really like are explorers. Uncle Cassius said the other day that the most unique experience was to be the first white man to step foot on new territory. I may take up forestry as a profession, but I'd much rather be a woman explorer."

"Deserts, islands or mountain peaks?" queried Amy, as she dipped into her store of supplies under the couch for some hasty refreshments.

"Caves, I think," said Kit, darkly; "caves or islands. Don't give me anything to eat, 'cause I have to look up something in the library before I go home, and I'm late for lunch now."

"Just pimento cheese on crackers, and I've got some chocolate marshmallows here somewhere." Amy's voice was muffled under the couch cover. But the clock on the mantel pointed at twelve-fifteen, and Kit knew the Dean's punctilious regard for keeping meal hours.

The library was unoccupied, apparently. Kit went over to the lower book shelves which contained the reference books on archaeology, dragging a low stool after her.

"A-men-o-taph," she said, under her breath. "Likewise Semele."

With the two volumes on her knees, she started to read up the references which the Dean wanted, when all at once she was conscious of some one who stood in the embrasured window at the west end of the room, looking at her. For a moment Kit was absolutely speechless, not believing the evidence of her own eyes. But the next moment Billie's own laugh, when he found out he had been discovered, startled her with its reality.

“Billie Ellis,” she exclaimed, springing to her feet and scattering reference books and note paper helter-skelter. “How on earth did you ever get way out here?”

Billie shook hands with her, coloring boyishly, as he always did at any display of emotion, and trying to act as if it were the most natural and ordinary thing in the world for him to appear at Delphi, Wis., when he was supposed to be at Washington in school.

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"We got our test exams last week, and Stanley had to run out to Minnesota for the government, so he took me along to help him."

"Billie, are you really after bugs and things—I mean, are you going to really be a naturalist?"

"I guess you'd kind of call it being a business naturalist," laughed Billie. "I don't think I'll ever live in a shack on a mountainside, and write beautiful things about them, now that I know Stanley. You want to roll up your sleeves and go to work like he does."

"Is he here, now?" asked Kit, eagerly.

"Yep." Billie nodded out of the window, towards Kemp Hall, the boys' dormitory. "After we found out that you didn't live here, we were going on down to the Dean's to find you, but he looked over the boys' freshman class, and found he had a cousin or nephew or somebody on the list, Clayton Diggs."

"I know him," Kit exclaimed. "He's High Jinks' cousin. Regular bean pole, with freckles, but mighty nice. I've got to be back for lunch, and you're coming down with me, of course. How long can you stay?"

"Just this afternoon. We're going back on the five forty-five, and catch the night express east. If you wait here, I'll chase after Stanley, 'cause he'll want to have lunch with the Diggs boy, and he can join us later."

Kit walked along the macadamized path which crossed the campus. It was bordered by dwarf evergreen, but the students had named it Hope's primrose path, owing to the temptation to dally along it, whenever one had the chance.

The coming of Billie unexpectedly, just at a time when she was feeling her first homesickness, struck Kit as being a special little gift handed out to her by Providence. But with only five hours to visit with him, she knew it would be all the harder after he had gone. He joined her on a run as she reached the sidewalk, and they hurried down to the Dean's just in time for luncheon. Kit's face was fairly radiant as she presented her old-time chum of the hills to Miss Daphne and the Dean.

"Don't you remember, Uncle Cassius," she asked eagerly, "how, when I first came, I told you all about the boy back home who would have just suited you? Well, that was Billie."

The Dean's gray eyes wrinkled as he surveyed Billie over the tops of his eye-glasses.

"You come highly recommended, young man," he said. "Kit almost persuaded me that if she didn't suit I might be able to coax you away from your grandfather."

“I’ll bet you wouldn’t change now,” Billie responded, gallantly. “Kit knows a hundred per cent, more than I do, sir. I used to hate history until she took to telling me stories about it, and making it interesting. All I really care about is natural history, especially insects and birds.”

“Well, you could have a lovely time studying over uncle’s Egyptian scarabs,” said Kit, placidly. “Weren’t you telling me something about a place in China where they had a whole grove filled with sacred silkworms, Aunt Daphne?”

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Miss Peabody smiled and nodded, looking from one young face to the other. Never before had youth sat lunching at that table with her and her brother in quite such a radiant guise. The Dean usually took his noontide meal in absolute silence when they were alone together, as he held that desultory conversation disturbed his train of thought. But since Kit's coming, it had been impossible to check her flow of talk, until now the Dean actually missed it if she happened to be absent.

CHAPTER XVIII

STANLEY APOLOGIZES

After lunch they all went into the library to look over the Dean's newly arrived treasures.

"Well, for pity's sakes," exclaimed Kit, as she stood before the plain, squat, terra-cotta urn, "is that the royal urn? I expected to see something enormous, like everything else that is wonderful and ancient in Egypt."

"Dear child," the Dean responded, happily, as he bent down to trace the curious, cuneiform markings which circled the urn. "This antedates the time of the Captivity and Moses. I cannot tell positively, until I have opened it and deciphered what I can of the papyrus rolls within. If it should go back to Moses, it will be wonderful. I cannot believe that it is contemporary with Nineveh. Daphne, you can recall how overjoyed I was when we unearthed that library of precious clay under the Nineveh mounds years ago. Think of reading something which was written by living man several thousand years before that."

"What fun it must have been," Billie remarked. "If you wanted to write anything in those days, you just picked up a handful of mud and made a little brick out of it, and wrote away with a stick, didn't you?"

"Stylus, my boy, stylus," corrected the Dean, absently. "Yes, I doubt not but what it did away with much of our modern detail."

"Oh," exclaimed Kit, suddenly, "I left all the notes on Semele in the library. I'm awfully sorry, Uncle Cassius, but when I saw Billy standing there unexpectedly, I just forgot everything. We can walk up there this afternoon and get them. Is the statue very beautiful?"

"Perfect, perfect," murmured the Dean, as he still hung over the urn abstractedly. "It's just behind you, my dear."

Kit turned, expecting to face one of the usual blandly smiling Egyptian colossi, even in miniature, with a few wings scattered over it here and there. But instead, there stood in the center of the Dean's library table a strangely attenuated figure about three feet

high. As Billie said afterwards, it appeared to be dancing the Grasshopper's Nocturnal Rhapsody. It had a head that was a cross between an intelligent antelope and a rather toploftical baby rat. Its arms were extended at sharp angles, and seemed to be pointing in arch accusation at one. Wings spread fanwise from the shoulders, and its feet were like the feet of a griffin.

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"I never thought it would look just like that, did you, Billie?" Kit asked confidentially, when they started back to the campus, after the notes on Semele.

"Well, I knew well what to expect, because we've been doing the Smithsonian Institute pretty well," responded Billie, rather knowingly. "Some of them look worse than that. But they can't beat our own little Alaskan and Mexican beauties. I wonder what people were thinking about back in those days to worship that sort of thing?"

But Kit caught sight of five of the girls just rounding the corner after a hike along the shore, and she hailed them, much to Billie's inward disgust. While he approved thoroughly of Kit, he viewed the average girl from a safe altitude indifference. But Kit introduced him in an off-hand, casual manner which put him at his ease, and when they started up the primrose path, it was the "Jinx" herself who had taken possession of Billie, and was interesting him thoroughly, telling of her father's big stock farm outside of Maquoketa.

They found Stanley Howard awaiting them on one of the big tree seats, outside the Hall. Clayton was with him, strumming on a ukulele, as they talked, happily and lazily. The girls followed Kit into the library, as she went on a hunt after Semele, and here Amy faced her accusingly.

"You never told us a word about this Billie boy," she declared, "and ever since you came here, you've made believe to overlook boys. You haven't wanted them in any of our affairs. You made fun of the girls who did want them, and all the time you've had this one up your sleeve. Kathleen, explain."

"If he's a relative," Peggy interposed, serenely, "we'll let you off. You've never been initiated into anything. You haven't even had your freshman hazing, because the Dean doesn't approve of such doings, and we felt that we'd better keep it out of the family, but there are limits, aren't there, girls?"

Kit laughed up at them, as she groped about on the floor picking up the scattered pages of notes.

"Well, he's a relative, if you must know," she retorted. "He's my father's first cousin's husband's grandchild. Now haze me if you like."

Vowing that this connection was altogether too nebulous to save her from the threatened penalty, the girls buried the hatchet for the time being in the entertainment of the guests.

"I suppose Hope looks pretty small to you after the universities back east," Norma said to Billie, as they made the rounds of the buildings, after Amy had played hostess with Kit's help, and had brought down a goodly supply of fudge and peanut nougat.

“Looks mighty good,” returned Billie, heartily. “I think you can have loads more fun in a place like this than you can at the big schools. And you know, I’m not going to a university or anything of that sort. I’m just at the ‘Prep’ and taking up special branches outside with Mr. Howard.”

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"What kind of branches?" queried Norma.

"Oh, science, and physics, but specially entomology and forestry. He's in government service, you know."

"He doesn't act a bit important or dignified, does he?" Norma said thoughtfully. "You'd almost think he was a sort of grown-up boy."

"I wish I knew all he does. It's mighty nice for a fellow to have a friend like Stanley. It's like being a little bicycle running in the track of a speeding motorcycle. You may not be able to keep up, but it's mighty good exercise trying to hit the pace."

Kit was walking behind the others with Amy and Anne. Now that they had joined the others, and the girls were talking about Stanley also, she had become strangely silent.

"You don't know him very well, do you?" Amy asked, curiously. "I mean, he isn't related to you."

Kit shook her head with bland indifference.

"He's a friend of Billie's. I only met him down east when he came to chase the gypsy moth in Gilead."

She did not add that with Shad's help and able cooperation, she had managed to curtail the chase of the gypsy moth, temporarily, by holding the chaser captive in the family corn-crib, but she inwardly suspected that Stanley was remembering it. Every once in a while she accidentally caught him looking at her, with a look of amused, interested retrospection that made her vaguely uncomfortable.

As they left the campus, Norma, leading with Billie, took the street that led to the bluffs overlooking the lake, and somehow or other in the subsequent scramble down the narrow pathways, Kit found Stanley at her elbow. Even Jean could not have been more dignified or distant in her manner, but Stanley refused to be frozen out.

"You know," he said, genially, "I've just found out something, Miss Kit. I forgave you long ago for locking me up in your corn-crib, and nearly landing me in the local calaboose, but you don't forgive me one bit for trespassing in your berry patch."

Kit's profile tilted ever so slightly heavenward. Jean had loved to quote to her in the old days that consistency was a jewel, and William of Avon had said so positively, whereupon Kit would swing always, feeling herself backed by Emerson's opinion that "consistency was a hobgoblin of little minds." Yet now she felt herself feeling almost righteously consistent. She had thoroughly made up her mind that very day when Mr. Hicks made his memorable and fruitless journey to Greenacres that not even government experts had any right to climb over fences into people's private property

without first asking permission. Perhaps the sudden popularity of the trespasser with all the other members of the family had something to do with Kit's stand against him. Even Helen had remarked that she didn't see how on earth Kit could ever have imagined a person looking like Mr. Howard could be a berry hooker.

"I don't want you to forgive me," she said, calmly. "I've never been one bit sorry for it. I think you ought to have come up to the house and asked permission to go in there. And you never said that you were sorry. It always seemed to me as if you rather acted as if you thought it was a good joke"—she hesitated a moment, before adding pointedly,—
"on me."

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"Suppose I apologize now." Stanley's tone was absolutely serious, but Kit, with one quick look at the precipitous path, ahead of them, laughed.

"Not here, please. Wait until we hit the level shore. You do really have to pay attention on this path, or you miss your footing and toboggan all at once."

"Then, suppose," he persisted, "we just consider that I have apologized. And if you accept, you can raise your right hand at me."

Kit immediately raised her left one, and wagged it provocatively over her shoulder. Before he could say any more, she had hurried ahead and caught up with the rest.

CHAPTER XIX

THE COURT OF APPEAL

It was not until after they had gone, when Kit was by herself, that she remembered all Billie had told her, at the very last of his stay.

They had walked along the lake shore together, a little behind the others, after the Beaubien family had been visited.

"You haven't told me anything at all," Kit said, "about home. When were you in Gilead last?"

"Just before we came west," Billie answered.

"Was everything all right?" Billie hesitated. "Oh, for heaven's sake, Billie, tell me if there is anything. You can't give me any nervous shocks at all, and I'm dying to find an excuse to get back home."

"Why, there isn't anything the matter, exactly," Billie said, cheerfully, but with a certain reservation in his tone, that made Kit long to get him with a good grip in his curly hair and shake him the way she used to do two years ago. "The only thing that I know about, I heard grandfather telling Uncle Jerry. I don't suppose I ought to repeat it either."

"Billie, I wish I could shake you right here by the Michigander sea. How dare you keep back any news of my family from me?"

"It was something about there not being any more dividends until after the war, on some stock. I guess it hit grandfather, too, but I heard him say that there wasn't a farm up there that couldn't support itself, properly run, and he guessed they'd all weather the storm."

Kit frowned heavily.

“Stock,” she repeated with scorn. “The very idea, anyway, of taking real money and giving it away for a lot of little certificates. If I had money I’d put it in a nice clean, dry, covered tin pail, and hang it down my well, just like Jerushy said she always did when she had a ten-dollar bill around that worried her. And there Dad’s got all the expense of rebuilding Greenacres. It’s going to be a regular White Elephant, I’m afraid, because it isn’t all paid for anyway, and there’s the yearly interest.” She hesitated before she added, slowly, “I wonder why on earth it is, Bill Ellis, that the people with the most children who need the most money always seem to be hunting for it, and these nice, old, placid darlings, like the Dean and Miss Daphne, have simply got oodles planted away somewhere, and never have to think twice over where the next windfall is coming from.”

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But Billie was inclined to take an optimistic view of the whole affair.

“Grandfather said that there was no cause for worry; it was just a case of pitch in and get your living out of the farms again.”

“Yes,” said Kit, with fine scorn, “get your living out of the farms. That’s all very well for him to say, when he’s got everything to do with, and twenty of the best cows in Windham County, but we moved up there on hope and a shoe-string. And we’ve never really raised anything except chickens and children. You know, Billie, even with a small income, how you can play country gentleman to your heart’s content in a little place like Gilead.”

“Stanley says your place, if it was properly worked, would make one of the finest fruit farms up there, ’cause all your land slopes to the south as far as the river. He says if he had it he’d sell off the heavy timber for cash and put the money right into hardy varieties of fruit and hogs.”

Kit laughed.

“Can’t you see Helen’s face over the hogs, when she has wanted to raise bulbuls and white peacocks, with a few antelopes and gazelles wandering around. But I suppose one could keep the hogs out of sight, they wouldn’t have to graze on the front lawn. Did he tell Dad that?”

“I don’t know,” Billie said, doubtfully. “You know, Uncle Jerry’s kind of hard to get confidential with over his own affairs, but I wouldn’t worry, Kit, if I were you. Things always come out all right.”

“They do not,” returned Kit, calmly. “Even Cousin Roxy says that you have to give Providence a helping hand now and then. I’m going to think up a way to start those hogs rambling over the southern slopes of Greenacre Hall.”

Billie smiled at her mischievously.

“That’s the new name, isn’t it? You’ll be a nice crowd of farmerettes next summer, won’t you?”

“Maybe it’ll happen before next summer,” prophesied Kit, sagely. “Jean and mother like to call it Greenacre Hall, but I like Greenacre Farm, if we’re going to do any business there. Thanks ever so much for telling me, Billie. You may have changed the course of destiny, because I can tell you now I’m going home.”

After dinner that night Kit was out on the veranda alone for a while with only Sandy at her feet. There was a light in the study bay window. Miss Daphne had gone over to a meeting of the Women’s War Chest committee at the Bellamys’. Kit was wondering

whether it would be best to write first to her mother or to Jean. Jean would be leaving a few days after Christmas for New York anyway. How she longed to know just exactly what the family's plans were for the winter. But the worst of it was, one of the Robbins' failings or virtues as a family was for each member to spare the other members all the worry and bother possible, by carefully concealing any little personal troubles. To Kit this was all wrong. What on earth, she used to argue, was the use of being a family if you didn't all lean on each other and derive mutual strength and support?

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Finally, she decided to write to Cousin Roxy herself. There was always something satisfactory in making her the court of appeal, on any point of doubt; even though her decision might not be a favorable one, you always felt sure you were getting it straight without any affectionate bias.

Accordingly, a confidential appeal went speeding east, and back came the reply, by return mail, as Kit had known it would.

"Dear child:—

"I had been thinking about you when your letter came, so I suppose our mental wireless calls must have crossed.

"There's no doubt at all but what your mother needs you badly right here, especially with Jean leaving right after Christmas. What Billie told you was about the truth. Out of the wreck of matter and crush of worlds that happened at Shady Cove, when your father's business and health failed, they did manage to save enough to give them a little income. Then, as you know, it was mostly your mother's money that was paid down on Greenacres in a lump, so that stopped her share coming in.

"The fire didn't help matters along one bit, but the Judge took a first mortgage on the property, and the money went into the repairs.

"I don't see why you aren't old enough to know these things, 'cause land knows the time is coming soon enough when you will have to put your shoulder to the wheel, like Jean, and help. It seems too bad that some folks I could mention can't see their duty when it's right under their nose. Just as soon as the Lord sees fit to call him home, Cassius Cato Peabody will have to leave some of his money to his nephew, your father, Jerry. Of course, he may take it into his head to endow some sacred seat of learning on the banks of the Nile, where they can study all the stars and cats and cows they want to. For my part, I think if he'd look a little way beyond his nose this minute, and see his duty to the living, he'd be a good deal happier in the long run.

"Be careful how you open up the ashes of old Amenotaph. I don't see how he can keep the pesky things around. Makes me think of Eliza Ann Gifford, after the Deacon died. She had his ashes in a little bronze, brown box on the front room mantel, and fresh flowers on 'em every day of her life. Used to give one a fearful turn every time they called on her. So far as I'm concerned, I'm perfectly willing to wait for Gabriel's last trump to let my dust and ashes rest in a decent grave.

"If I were you, Kit, I'd have a heart-to-heart talk with the Dean himself, and I know your mother will be just as relieved as can be to hear you're homeward bound."

CHAPTER XX

HOGS AND HORACE

Kit was delighted over the whole spirit of the letter, and went directly to the Dean with its message. He was deeply engrossed in getting up his first notes and commentaries on the urn and statue. It had not seemed for the past two or three weeks as if he resided any longer in Delphi at all. Kit told Miss Daphne she was positive he was wandering through Egypt all the time, the Egypt of five thousand years ago. And it was only the shadow of his self that seemed to sit closeted for hours in the study.

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He hardly glanced up now as she came in, but smiled and nodded when he saw who it was, keeping on with his writing.

“Just hand me that volume on the second shelf to your right by the door. Second volume, ‘Explorations in Upper Egypt.’ Look up Seti I in the index.”

Kit found the place and laid it before him, perching herself on one end of the desk, as she always did when she wanted to attract his attention. The little statuette of Annui smiled grotesquely down upon her from its pedestal. The urn stood in a handy place of honor upon the desk itself as the Dean had been deciphering the inscriptions upon it.

“I hate to disturb you, Uncle Cassius,” Kit began, with the directness so characteristic of her, “but I really think I ought to go back home. You’ve been wonderful to give me such a long visit, and I’ve enjoyed the school work immensely, but somehow I begin to feel like a soldier who has been away on a furlough. It’s time for me to get back to the firing line, because mother needs me.”

The Dean glanced up in surprise, and came slowly out of his dream of concentration as the meaning of her words dawned upon him.

“Why, my dear child,” he exclaimed, “this is very sudden. There has never been any question about your going back, at least——” He coughed deprecatingly. “Not since we became acquainted with you. Has anything happened?”

“Why, nothing special—I mean, nothing tragic. It’s only this, Dad’s lost a lot of money all at once. He did have a little income, enough so we never have had to depend on the farm entirely, but now, even that has been swept away. I suppose it will come back some time after the war, but as I understand it, the stock he had has stopped paying dividends.”

“Jerry never had any head for business.” The Dean tapped one hand lightly with his tortoise-shell rimmed spectacles in an absent-minded musing way that nearly drove Kit frantic. “But what can you do about it, my dear? Surely by returning at such a time you merely add to your father’s burdens.”

“No, I won’t,” Kit answered, decidedly, “because I’ve got a plan that I’ve been thinking about for ever and ever so long. I’m going to try and persuade Dad to let us put in hogs.”

“Hogs,” repeated the Dean, in a baffled tone. “Hogs, my dear. Who ever heard of raising hogs when they could raise anything else at all? I’m sure that Horace never tried hogs on his farm.”

Now it just happened that Kit had a smattering knowledge of Horace, gleaned from Billie. In the old days back home, when they had studied together, they had seemed to



always get the personal side of the old heroes and people of fame. And just now the only thing she could remember about Horace popped up in her mind.

“Well, I’ll bet a cookie there was many a time when he wished he had. Don’t you remember how he wrote,

“Give me again my hollow tree,
A crust of bread and liberty.’

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"We've had our hollow tree, and I'm afraid unless we get right down to business now, we'll have all the crusts of bread and liberty we fancy. I just can't stay here in this beautiful place with nothing to worry over, while the family are practically in a lifeboat with breakers ahead."

If the Dean had known Kit better, he would have realized that in emotional moments she was prone to exaggerated similes, but as it was, he felt impressed.

"Why, God bless my heart and soul," he exclaimed, "I had no idea it was as bad as this. I thought Jerry was very comfortably fixed."

"Oh, we were at the Cove. We had everything we wanted, but father was sick an awfully long while after his breakdown, and he's never been able to do any work since."

"But how ridiculous for a man to bury himself and all his capital in a place like Gilead," the Dean protested, somewhat testily. "He could have done a great many other things, I should imagine."

Kit leaned over and looked at him, right in the eye.

"Uncle Cassius, what would you do if everything was just swept away from you, health, money, home and your work; what do you suppose you would do? If there was any spot of earth that was peaceful and restful, and that you loved best, wouldn't you want to go to it? That's what Gilead means, 'the place of healing.'"

There was silence in the old study. The Dean was looking straight at Annui as if for inspiration, and yet it was not the old image which he saw, but a vision of Gilead as he remembered it in his boyhood, a vision of green hills spanning the horizon, of fertile valleys and many watercourses. Memories stirred in his mind of Jerry Robbins' mother, his sister. Sometimes Kit reminded him of her, in her buoyant self-reliance and optimism.

The bonds of relationship had always been somewhat intangible to him, since he had grown up. He had laid out his own career himself, and had carried every ambition to completion and reality. The last twenty years had been years of fruition, of honors freely given, years of fulfillment. He had not been, like Judge Ellis, intolerant of other men's failures; he had simply ignored them, never feeling any responsibility towards the weaker ones who fell in the race. In his way, he prided himself upon a gentle, aloof philosophy of life which left him the boundaries of the old study as a horizon of happiness.

Probably not until that moment had he realized the gradual revolutionary process Kit had been putting him through ever since her arrival. She had trained him into having an



interest in other people and things, until now it was impossible for him not to see the picture of Greenacres as she did.

“How did you find out about this, my dear?” he asked.

“Well,” Kit replied, honestly, “partly from Billie and partly from this letter from Cousin Roxy. You know Cousin Roxy, don’t you, Uncle Cassius?”

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The Dean's eyes twinkled reminiscently as he took the letter.

"Oh, yes, I remember Roxana well. She used to bully me outrageously." He opened the letter and started to read slowly, just as Kit suddenly remembered Cousin Roxy's remarks on Cassius Cato Peabody. But there was no turning back now. Straight through to the end he read, and several deep chuckles broke the silence, real chuckles of delight, such as Kit had never heard from the Dean. When he had finished, he handed it back to her.

"Perfectly true, my dear," he said. "I can quite see why you feel that you are needed. You had better take your midwinter examinations, and prepare to return home about Christmas. In all likelihood your Aunt Daphne and I will accompany you."

CHAPTER XXI

THE CIRCLE OF RA

The next thing was to break the news gently and convincingly to the family. Kit figured it out from all sides, and finally decided to walk right up to the horns of the dilemma in a fearless attack. Writing back a long, chatty letter to the Mother Bird, she simply tacked on the postscript:

"Don't be at all surprised to see me arrive with the other Christmas packages, and have a fire laid in the guest room."

At first she had thought only the Dean would accompany her, but when Miss Daphne heard of the plan, she declared she would not be left out of it.

"Why, brother, I haven't seen any of the folks down east in years and years, and it would hearten me up wonderfully to visit them. I think I'd like to be with Roxy as much as possible, because we were girl friends together."

Whether it was the prospect of going home or the longing to leave a good record behind her, no one could say, not even Kit herself, but she took her midwinter examinations with full speed up and colors flying, as Billie would say.

The girls took her coming departure with many objections, but they proceeded to give her various send-offs. Charity and Anne decided on a formal tea, up in the former's room, but the solemnity of the occasion was banished when Peggy rose to read some farewell poesy, concocted by herself and the "Jinx."

"She hoped to be the hope of Hope
Alas, how soon she flew,

To bleak New England's rock-ribbed hills,
Ere she her Virgil knew."

"And we her comrades tried and true,
No laurel crowns may weave.
The magic circle broken is,
For Kathleen fair we grieve."

After which, Amy led a procession of solemn-visaged, sombre-clad academic maidens, who approached the divan where Kit sat, and each presented her with some sage advice, in couplets. Amy explained later that she got the idea from Sargent's "Gifts of the Hours."

"Although, if it had been summer time, we would have tried to make it more like Tennyson's 'Princess,' but I think this carries the idea all right. Norma wrote the couplets, and they almost have a prophetic note. Don't you think so, Kit?"

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Kit agreed that they did, and long afterwards, up in the old cupola council room, she read them aloud to Helen and some of the Gilead girls. One in particular rather hit her fancy, because Kit hated early rising.

“Rise, sweet maid, when the cock is crowing,
If Fortune’s bugles you’d be blowing.”

The Saturday before they left was Kit’s day for entertaining. Miss Daphne took the keenest delight in making it a success. There was a luncheon at one, followed by a whole afternoon of entertaining. Even the Dean emerged from his sanctum to mingle a little, and the “Jinx” declared she had never seen him so human before. He brought out the royal statuette of Annuï and even the sacred memorial urn to show the girls. As Miss Daphne said afterwards, this showed what a friendly, benign mood he was in.

Kit was standing on the outskirts of the group around the old grand piano, where he had placed both antiques, when she suddenly saw, through the long French windows, Marcelle Beaubien coming up the drive. The Dean was deep in a happy, explanatory speech and she slipped away unnoticed by the rest.

“It was awfully nice of you to come, Marcelle,” she exclaimed. “I’ve been watching for you ever since lunch. Why didn’t you come earlier?”

“But I am early,” smiled Marcelle. “It is only about three o’clock. Generally, I have to stay in all day Saturday, and give the boys a chance to go out. Will you write to me when you are away?”

“I’d love to. You know it’s a queer thing, Marcelle, but really and truly, out of all the girls I have met here I feel better acquainted with you than with any of them.”

Kit said this rather slowly, as if it were a sort of self-revelation which she had just discovered that minute. And yet it was true. She had enjoyed the class friendships at Hope immensely, but Marcelle had seemed to stand out from the rest of the girls as such a distinctly interesting personality. In a way, she was like Billie, because she loved nature and all the romance of adventure. There was in her nature the mingling of the three races, the French, the Indian, and the Scotch, and besides, Kit felt personally responsible for her success up at Hope. The girls had played absolutely fair and square, once they had decided to bury the hatchet, and given the chance, Marcelle herself had justified the opening of doors to her. As Amy said:

“It doth not behoove us to say a blessed word against Marcelle when she is racing ahead in all our classes, and plucking honors right and left.”

Marcelle smiled at Kit’s remark.

“I have heard my grandmother say that in her girlhood her people of the northern forests pledged their friendships by saying, ‘While the grass grows and the waters run, so long shall we be friends.’” She turned and smiled at Kit her grave-eyed slow smile. “I will say that to you now, before you go.”

Kit laid one arm around her shoulders.

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"Me too," she answered, heartily. "Sounds like the blood brother vow they used to take."

They went up the steps together and into the long double parlors. The girls were singing at the piano while Amy played one class song after another, and the Dean hung broodingly over the urn. Kit thought she had never seen the house so full of life and happiness, and the look on Miss Daphne's face was one of positive radiance.

"You know," she said, confidentially to Kit, in a low voice, "after we return from the east, I have undertaken something that I know will do me good and the Dean, too. I've just been appointed head of the Junior Red Cross in Delphi, and the girls will meet here every Saturday. We shall miss you, Kit, but if it gives you any pleasure, my dear, to know it, I want to tell you it was your coming which opened my eyes to the folly of sitting with empty hands while there was work to be done. I don't think I can ever belong to what the Dean calls 'the rocking-chair squad' again, without a guilty conscience."

Kit hugged her fervently.

"Oh, but you're a dear, Aunt Daphne, to say such things. I only wish I could stay right here and be in two places at once. I'll tell you what I've learned here, organization." Kit said this very firmly and earnestly. "Back home they always said that I knew just what I wanted to do, but I didn't know how to do it. Well, I know what I want to do now. I want to go back home and organize."

Miss Daphne laughed and shook her head.

"Oh, Kit, child, do go easy," she said. "Organize yourself all you like, but be terribly careful how you start organizing other people's lives."

The girls had to leave early, as the Shakespearian entertainment was to happen that night up at Assembly Hall.

"Your very last chance to mingle, Kit," Norma called, as they all trooped out of the lower hall. "Don't lose your presence of mind to-night, when you find yourself in doublet and hose."

Kit stood on the veranda steps waving to them until they turned the corner of Maple Avenue.

"Oh, dear," she sighed, "I do wish that friendships lasted longer. I mean, I wish I could have all my friends here down in Gilead. You see, there us girls are all so scattered around on adjacent hilltops that it's hard to get together regularly. We've only got our hiking club. I think when I go back I'm going to start some more."

"The Dean wanted to have a little talk with you before dinner, dear. I think you'd better go in now, because we want to reach the Hall in good time for you to dress, and I'm

going to have an early dinner. Don't talk too long. You know how he is when he gets absorbed in anything."

Kit promised and joined the Dean. He had carried back the statue of Annui and stood before it regarding it with perplexity. Kit slipped her arm through his. It seemed as though there had sprung up a new comradeship and understanding between them since their last talk.

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"Won't he tell you his secrets, Uncle Cassius?" she asked. "He has such an aggravating smile, just as if he were amused at baffling you."

"I am baffled," the Dean conceded, genially. "I've reached a certain point and there there is a blank which no historic record seems to fill. I thought when I had restored the inscription on the urn that it would tell me several of the missing points, but it seems to be merely a sort of sacred invocation. I am amazed at the urn being hollow. Every other memorial urn which I found during our excavations in Egypt was sealed, and upon being opened we always found rolls of papyri within. I am disappointed."

Kit went into the back parlor and lifted the urn from the piano very carefully, carrying it out to its customary place on the Dean's desk. Then she stood staring at it, reflectively. It certainly was not exactly a thing of beauty, although, as the Dean had pointed out to her, one saw the influence of Grecian art in its graceful lines. It always reminded Kit of Indian pottery down among the Zunis and Mexicans.

"What does the inscription say?" Kit leaned forward anxiously.

"It merely traces the origin of King Amenotaph to the god Thoth," said the Dean, thoughtfully; "that is, the Egyptian Hermes, or Mercury, as we know him, and it is extremely vague, being a curious mixture of the Coptic and the ancient Aramaic."

"But what does it say?" asked Kit again.

The Dean followed the curious markings on the urn with his finger-tip, bending forward and peering over the rims of his tortoise-shell glasses.

"It says, 'Amenotaph, born of Thoth, shall reign in wisdom. Kings shall serve at his footstool. Ra shall shine upon him. He shall lie in peace, encompassed by Ra.'"

"Is that all?"

"That is all," sighed the Dean. "It seems merely a laudatory sentiment."

"Who was Ra?" asked Kit, curiously, running her hand around the top of the urn.

"The Sun god. His symbol was the circle. You see it here."

Kit repeated again, slowly:

"'He shall lie in peace, encompassed by Ra,' That means surrounded by Ra, doesn't it, Uncle Cassius?" She picked up the urn in both hands and shook it close to her ear.

"My dear child, do be careful," cried the Dean; "it is priceless."

But Kit put it under one arm as though it had been a milk pail and tapped around the inside with her knuckles, listening.

“That’s a perfectly good hollow jug,” she said, solemnly. “Just you tap it, and listen, uncle. I’ll bet a cookie they’ve hidden something inside the outside and that Ra has guarded it all these years.”

“Just a moment, just a moment, my dear,” exclaimed the Dean, smiling like a happy boy. “You’ve given me an idea. This may be a cryptogram, or an ideographic cypher. Just a moment, now; don’t speak to me.”

He sat down at the desk and figured laboriously for nearly twenty minutes, working out the inscription in cypher, while Kit stared at him delightedly. After all, it was rather gratifying, she thought, to have somebody in the family who could take a little remark made thousands of years ago in old Egypt and make sense out of it to-day. She waited patiently until he had finished. His hands were trembling as he reached for the urn.

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"The circle," he repeated, "the circle. 'Ra in his circle shall guard Amenotaph.' The secret lies in the circle, Kit. Do you suppose it could mean the rim of the urn?"

Kit knelt beside him, following the inscription on the outside of the urn carefully with her finger-tip, the same as the Dean had done, and stopping when she came to a small circle in black and red outline.

"Do you suppose Ra lives here, Uncle Cassius?" she asked, poking at it thoughtfully. She peered on the inner side at the corresponding spot to the circle, and gave a little cry of excitement. There was the faintest sign of a circle here also, like one of the age cracks on Cousin Roxy's antique china. "See," she cried. "When you push on this side, the other gives a little bit."

The Dean could not speak. He took the urn from her over to the window and carefully examined the inner circle through a microscope.

"Yes," he said, fervently, "you are perfectly right, my dear. The circle moves. I think I shall have to take it to Washington on our way east. I would not take the responsibility of trying to remove it myself."

"Oh, dear, it seems awful to have to wait so long," Kit exclaimed, regretfully. "You know it seemed to me as if you could just press it through with your thumb, like this."

She had not intended pressing so hard, but merely to show him what she meant, and lo, as Cousin Roxy would have said, under the pressure of Kit's strong, young, capable thumb, the circle of Ra depressed and pushed slowly through, just exactly as Kit told the girls long afterwards, like when you plug a watermelon. The Dean looked on in utter amazement, as Kit lifted the urn and tested the inner section by shaking it. Then she peered into the circular hole, about the size of a quarter. The urn was fully two inches thick, and by inserting her finger into the space she found that it was made in two sections, with enough room between for a place of concealment.

"There's something in here like asbestos, Uncle Cassius," she began, and turning the urn upside down, she tried shaking it, using a little pressure on the circle to separate the two rims. Slowly they gave, while the Dean hovered over her, cautioning and directing the operation, until two complete urns lay before them. But it was not these which the Dean literally snatched at. It was the curious cap-shaped mass which fell out in the form of a cone. To Kit it appeared to be of no significance whatever, but the Dean handled it as tenderly as a new-born infant, and under his deft and tender touch it unrolled in long scrolls of papyrus.

The Dean rose to his feet solemnly, and his voice was hushed, as he said:



“Kit, you do not know what you have done. Some day the significance of this occasion will recur to you. All I can say is that you have lifted the veil of the past, and revealed the secret of Amenotaph.”

CHAPTER XXII

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HEADED FOR GILEAD

It was very hard for Kit to keep her mind on Orlando that evening, between the excitement of the coming trip and the revelation of the urn. But after it was over the girls clustered around her for one last send-off, and she realized then how closely the ties of friendship had been cemented in her few months at Hope.

She looked around at them with eyes filled with tears, and Kit was not at all of the crying type, but it seemed as if each girl of her own special crowd had filled a particular niche in her life for the time being. There was Charity, with her eye-glasses, and placid face, upturned smiling lips and quizzical eyes. How often she had taken the edge off Kit's rancor and indignation with just a few timely, humorous words. Amy, Norma, Peggy, and High Jinks had been the starters in all kinds of fun and recreation, while Anne had seemed to come the nearest to her of them all in actual comradeship. Then last of all, Marcelle. It was she who clasped Kit's hand, as she repeated in her low voice:

"While the grass grows and the waters run, so long shall we be friends."

"For pity's sakes, girls," exclaimed Miss Daphne, "don't act as if you were never going to see her again. I shall see that she comes back in vacation next year, because the Dean and I couldn't possibly do without her, now."

Just before it was time to leave for the train Monday morning, Rex and Anne brought over their farewell gift.

"It's supposed to be like a steamer basket," Anne said, "only this is a train basket. We figured on your being on the train for at least two days, if you do happen to stop over in Washington."

Kit did not open it until they boarded the limited in Chicago and were well on their way, speeding eastward. There was no sign of snow as yet, but the land seemed to lie locked in a frosty grip of barrenness. The Dean seemed to smile perpetually now. He occupied the lower part of the section across the aisle, and Kit loved to watch him as he sat by the window, his little black skullcap making him look like a portrait of an old-time French savant. Every now and then he would glance up and meet her eyes with a little smile of mutual understanding. It was as if they, too, were united in a close bond of sympathy, ever since they had solved the mystery of Amenotaph and Ra's circle.

When lunch time drew near Kit opened the train basket. There were fruit and home-made preserves, little tempting jars of sweet pickles and stuffed olives, home-made fruit cake and jars of club cheese with thin wafers that just matched them. The girls at Hope had sent down five pounds of fudge as a parting gift to be included in the basket, but best of all, Kit thought, was a young wild turkey, roasted to perfection, and stuffed with chestnuts.

“Isn’t this just like Anne!” Kit exclaimed, exultantly. “She knows how I love to nibble on good things to eat. Now we won’t have to go into the dining-car for lunch, and it will seem like a regular picnic having it here.”

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The Dean was like a boy in his enjoyment of the unconventional luncheon. He ordered a wonderful salad as his share and a pot of French cocoa.

“Doesn’t this remind you, Daphne, of some of the basket luncheons we used to have in England and France years ago?” he said, happily.

“Cousin Beth told us last year about a party she was with that went to the North Cape,” Kit related, “and just when they were all transfixed by the majesty of the midnight sun one of the ladies said it was the most unique experience of her whole life, eating crackers and cheese on the North Cape.”

“She would have left peanut shells on Fujiyama,” the Dean replied, gravely.

They reached Washington the following day, and here the weather was even milder, with almost a touch of autumn left in the air. Christmas was Thursday, and Kit had pleaded for them not to miss Christmas Eve at home, so while the Dean took the urn up to the Institute, and left his records there, Miss Daphne and Kit spent nearly four hours driving around the city and visiting famous points of interest.

“Be sure and take a taxi, so you’ll cover more ground,” the Dean suggested when he left them, but Kit could not resist the beaming smile of one of the old-time darky coachmen, who sat drowsing on the seat of an open victoria outside the Capitol grounds. He was dressed in an old Colonial blue livery, with a tall silk hat, curving out at the top like those of the seventies.

“But, Aunt Daphne, doesn’t he act just exactly as though he had been a retainer in our honored family for generations?” Kit regarded his back with distinct approbation as they drove along Pennsylvania Avenue, and when the old fellow raised his whip in salute to every other old retainer perched on the box of a victoria that they met, she was delighted.

The Dean joined them for dinner at one of the old exclusive hotels in the White House section of town, and here Kit fairly reveled in the general atmosphere of diplomatic tone. She sighed involuntarily, watching a very beautiful woman who sat at an adjoining table, when she extended her hand in greeting to two foreign-appearing gentlemen in uniform, and they both bowed over it and kissed it.

“That’s the Continental custom, my dear,” Miss Daphne murmured.

“Oh, dear, I wish they’d do it here still,” Kit said. “It makes one think of powdered hair and lovely, flouncy hoop skirts. I’m going to practice it when I get home.”

It was not until they took the through train from Washington for New London that Kit relaxed. It was the last home stretch, and now that the end of the journey drew near, the full importance of the Dean’s visit at such a time grew upon her. The little hint she

had given about the guest chamber being ready was the only thing that would have made the family suspect she was bringing any guests with her. Not a word had been sent to notify them of their arrival, but the last two hours in Washington had been given up to the purchasing of gifts, and Kit had looked positively dazed when the Dean handed her twenty-five dollars with the remark:

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"You'll want to buy a few little things too, my dear."

A few little things. Kit wondered if he had any idea at all of how little cash had figured in the purchasing of home gifts at Greenacres the past two years.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE DEAN SEES THE STAR

They arrived at Nantic a little past noon, after leaving Washington on the midnight express. There was no stop-over at New York in the morning, the train going straight through to New England, and here they found the first snowstorm.

"There are the old gray rock walls, bless them," exclaimed the Dean, delightedly, "and the evergreens. The west may keep its towering white pines, but give me the old hemlocks and junipers, with the birches and oaks behind them."

Kit was so glad to see Mr. Briggs' smiling face on the platform at Nantic that she almost threw her arms around him, as she jumped from the platform of the train.

"Well, well," he ejaculated, "didn't expect to see you around so soon, Miss Robbins. Come to stay a while? Brought company with you, too, didn't you? Home folks or just visitors?"

"Home folks," said the Dean, directly behind them, as he extended his hand, "who haven't been home in thirty years."

"You don't say so," Mr. Briggs smiled at him, curiously. "Well, you won't find many things changed around here in only that time. Want me to 'phone over for a rig to take you up? The Robbinses are settled in the Hall now. Shouldn't wonder if it was kind of damp there yet. Had quite a spell 'round here of rainy weather before the frost set in. Looks as if 'twas going to stay in for a spell of snow now, though. Some boxes came up from New York yesterday for your folks, but I couldn't tell what was in 'em off-hand. Felt sort of hefty, though."

"It seems so good," Kit said, fervently, as he moved away from them out of hearing, "to be around where even the baggage man knows all about you, and takes an interest in everything. People don't do that out west, do they, Uncle Cassius? Not even in a little place like Delphi. I wonder if any one will remember you."

Perhaps the Dean was wondering the same thing as they drove up through the old hill road towards Gilead. One by one he recognized the old familiar landmarks and farms as they passed them, but Miss Daphne was far too engrossed in watching the Dean's own face to care for familiar spots on the landscape.

It was not until they got up near the Peckham mill that they met any of the old neighbors, but here Mr. Peckham himself came leisurely down from the mill path to the bridge and hailed Kit.

“Howdy, Kit. Home for Christmas?” he called cheerily, then taking a good look at the other occupants of the old station surrey, “Well, Cass Peabody, who in creation ever thought of seeing you around these parts again.”

The Dean leaned forward, peering over the tops of his glasses with almost the smile of a boy.

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"It's Dan Peckham, isn't it?" he said. "Yours is the first voice to welcome me home, Dan."

Mr. Peckham insisted on their waiting a moment while he hurried up to the house to call Elvira. Kit sat back in the carriage enjoying the reunion. Miss Daphne had gone to school years before at the Select Academy for Young Ladies, over in Willimantic, with Elvira Evans long before she became Mrs. Peckham. Kit felt, listening to the four of them go over dear old reminiscences, that it was as though she stood at the curtain of the past, on tiptoe at a peep-hole.

The early twilight had already begun to set in by the time they reached the turn of the road below the Greenacre entrance gates. On the silent, frosty air, Kit heard Shad's clear whistle, and over the fringe of pines along the river there came the murmur of the waterfall. There was none of the family in sight when they turned up the drive, but suddenly Kit's eager eyes saw a familiar figure out by the chicken coops, and leaning forward she gave a shrill co-ooo!

Doris' head went up like a startled deer. She dropped the pan of feed to the ground and fairly flew to meet them, and then before Kit could even detach herself from these clinging arms, the big front door swung open, and there in the lamplight was the Mother Bird and Helen.

Jean was up-stairs as usual at this hour when she was home, reading with her father, but Kit never forgot the feeling of relief that came to her when she finally found herself before the open fire in the big living-room with all of the family around her, and the full satisfaction of having brought home the Peabodys after all these years of estrangement.

That night, after dinner, while Shad and the Dean were closeted in the big front room erecting the huge hemlock Christmas tree, the girls assembled in Jean's room.

"Cousin Roxy invited us all over to their place," Helen said, as she dove into a lower bureau drawer, filled with carefully wrapped parcels, "but mother wanted to have a home Christmas, because the house does seem new to us all, and we never expected to see you home at all."

"You didn't? Well, I wrote and told you to be sure and have the guest chamber ready. I didn't know myself that Uncle Cassius and Aunt Daphne were coming until the last minute." Kit sat perched on the bed in a pink kimono, brushing her hair. And just at this moment she caught Jean's eye in the mirror, such an amused, knowing eye that Kit caught the full significance of that glance immediately, and laughed.

"I suppose you feel as though you had brought home the wealth of the Indies, Kit Robbins. You can't tell me that it wasn't intentional, because I know you. All I want to know is, who told you?"

“Told me what?” asked Kit innocently. Not for worlds would she have betrayed Cousin Roxy’s confidence. “Any one to hear you talk, Jean, would think that you didn’t want to see me at all.”

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Jean laughed. It was impossible to get past Kit's wall of evasion when she chose to take refuge behind it.

"Well, never mind how it has happened," she said happily. "I'm sure that you managed it in some way, and I can tell you right now, it has happened in the nick of time. You have no idea, Kit, how I have dreaded going back to the city and leaving things as they are. Dad seems to get so discouraged now when matters go wrong, and that throws the load of keeping up right on mother's shoulders."

"I know it," Kit rejoined, "but if it's anything to you all, I'd be willing to bet anything that right this minute Uncle Cassius is springing some glad tidings down-stairs that will turn the tide of fortune."

"Oh, Kit," begged Doris, "don't you and Jean talk like that, because I can't understand what you're driving at; tell it all out at once."

But Kit only slipped from the bed, and started to dance around the room provokingly, with many mysterious gestures.

"Supposing, curious damsel, that I were to speak unto you in the mystic language of past ages, and say that this windfall has come to the robins' nest out of the tomb of Amenotaph, out of the desert of Ra, supposing," she had to stop and chuckle at the look of utter astonishment on Doris' round eager face, "supposing I was to tell you that Annui had smiled upon the revelation, and that the sacred circle had given up its secret at the punch of your sister's delicate thumb. You see, even when I tell you, you don't understand, so you'll just have to wait until Uncle Cassius himself tells the story."

"Kit, you poor child," Jean exclaimed, laughingly, "you're raving. They'll have the tree up by now, and it's long after ten. Mother said that we were to take turns going down in the dark and putting our presents wherever we wanted to."

"I want to be last of all," Kit announced. "Doris, you come on in my room and help me wrap and tie the bundles. Good-night, sweet sisters; happy dreams."

But for the next hour after the lights went out, strange, flitting figures slipped through the halls and down-stairs into the front room, where the giant hemlock stood. And the very last one of all was clad in a bath robe and wore a black skullcap.

Perhaps no one in all Gilead, or indeed wherever the message of the angels might reach in the hearts of men that night, had grasped the inner meaning of their song as the old Dean. He had just finished placing his gifts upon the tree, and was turning to leave, when suddenly from the room above, where Jean and Helen slept, there came a wonderful sound. The old clock down the hall was striking midnight, and keeping to the

custom of those fortunate enough to have been born in the Robbins family, the girls had opened their windows to the silent moonlit glory of the night, and sang in chorus:

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“Oh, come all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant,
Oh, come ye, oh, come ye to Bethlehem,
Come and behold Him, born the King of Angels,
Oh, come let us adore Him,
Oh, come let us adore Him,
Oh, come let us adore Him,
Christ the Lord.”

The Dean knelt in prayer beside the Christmas tree.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE TENTS OF GREENACRES

If it had not been for the opening of Hope College the week after New Years, Miss Daphne declared, for her part, she would not have gone back to Delphi until she had at least seen the arbutus bloom again in April. After Christmas at Greenacres, Cousin Roxy insisted on both her and the Dean visiting at Elmhurst, but before they left, the Dean had unfolded his plan.

“Daphne is well provided for in case of my passing over,” he said, genially and unexpectedly, the last evening he was with them, “and I have been thinking a good deal lately over what Kit has well named the folly of ‘dead men’s shoes.’” He turned to where Mr. Robbins sat on the opposite side of the round library table, nearest the fire. “So I’ve taken the liberty, Jerry, of making over to you now what you would have had inevitably some day. Don’t say anything, please. It’s a personal indulgence on my part. I want to see, while I am alive, just exactly how much happiness it will bring you and yours. It is all well invested, but you may do as you like with it. I would suggest that you would live on the income, and stop worrying.”

And when both Mr. Robbins and the Mother Bird tried to expostulate, the Dean only laughed at them, brushing their arguments aside.

“Why, if I were to turn over everything I own to the clan of Robbins, I could hardly pay back all that Kit has done for me. I’m a new man, Jerry. Sometimes I feel like a prehistoric toad just released from a clay-bank and blinking in the sunlight. Not only has she taught me the joy of living, but through her ingenuity she brought about one of the greatest discoveries that has been made in years on ancient Egypt. I feel guilty in taking any credit for it whatsoever, for while I was groping blindly after the solution, she put her finger, as it were, on the whole source of the trouble.”

After they had returned west, and Jean had gone back to New York, Kit found her opportunity of laying her summer plan before her mother and father.

“There are acres and acres here that we never use at all. All that wonderful land on both sides of the river up through the valley, and the two islands besides. What I thought we could do was this, if you could just let us girls manage it. Couldn’t we start a regular tent colony? Jean was telling me before she left about an artists’ colony up in the Catskills, where they have tents fitted up for light housekeeping, and I’m sure we could do it here.”

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It had taken much argument and figuring on paper before the consent of both was won, but Cousin Roxy approved of the scheme highly.

"Land alive, Elizabeth Ann," she exclaimed, heartily, "don't crush anything that looks like budding initiative in your girls. I'd let them put tents all over the place until it blossomed like the wilderness. There's a stack of old furniture up in the garret at Maple Lawn and over at Elmhurst, too, and they're welcome to it. Get some pots of paint in and go to work, girls."

Kit acted immediately on the suggestion and drove up with Shad to look over the collection of discarded antiques in the two garrets. What she liked best of all were the three-drawer, old-fashioned chests and hand-made wooden chairs. There were ewer stands also, and several old single slat bedsteads.

"We're going to paint them all over, mother dear, in the loveliest yellows and grays, and Shad says that it won't be any trick at all for him to build the floors for us, and he says he can fix up little hanging-cupboards like they have in the tea-rooms, don't you know, to hold a few plates and dishes for light housekeeping."

"I don't see what else we're going to need," Helen put in, thoughtfully, "except the finishing touches, and I can add those. They'll need some jars for wild flowers and cushions and little things like that."

"Well, don't forget that they'll have to eat some time," Cousin Roxy remarked. "Get some two-burner oil stoves and folding tables and camp chairs, or if you want to be real rustic and quaint, have Shad here knock some white birch ones together, and probably the city folks will admire them more than anything you could buy. Lay in a stock of candles and bracket lamps. I'd make them bring up their own bedding if I were you, 'cause that would be the only nuisance you'd have to contend with."

"It's too bad," Kit said, reflectively, "that we're so far away from any kind of stores. I'm planning on eight tents all together, and there'll be ever so many things people will want to buy. Do you suppose, mother, that Mr. Peckham would let Sally manage anything like that up here? She's just dying to do something besides housework all her life."

"But where would you put her, dear?"

"Put her in another tent, if we couldn't do anything else, but I'll bet a cookie the boys down there at the mill could throw together a perfectly dandy little slab shack with birch trimmings. They could either have it down by the mill or put it right here at the crossroads. Sally could put in all kinds of supplies, kodaks and phonographs and post-cards and candy."

“Better put in a few canned goods, too, and staples,” added Cousin Roxy. “I declare, I’d kind of like to have a hand in that myself. I’d put Cynthy to work right away at home bakery goods. Kit, I do believe, child, you’ve started something that may waken Gilead out of its Rip Van Winkle slumber.”

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Kit thought so too before she had half started the winter's work. Shad became a tower of strength when it came to painting the old furniture. They took one of the large upper chambers that was unoccupied, and set up a stove to keep it warm. Helen called it the atelier, but it was more like a paint shop before Shad finished.

Jean did her share by sending up some stencils she had designed herself for the backs of the chairs and panels in the chests and headboards.

"They look just exactly like the painted furniture you see in the New York shops," Cousin Roxy declared, the first time she inspected the results. "When the Judge and I were down before Christmas, I saw a little dining-room set that looked kind of cute, although it wasn't anything but plain gray with a few morning-glory vines trailing over it. I think you've done splendidly, girls. You've set your hand to the plow and started some fine deep furrows. But just remember, it's a long way around a ten-acre lot, so faint not in the heat of the day."

Kit herself attacked the problem of winning over the Peckhams to her idea of Sally's taking charge of a little store at the crossroads. Sally herself sat with wide anxious eyes on the extreme edge of a black haircloth armchair, while her mother said over and over again it was utterly impossible.

"Why, I couldn't get along without Sally, especially in the summer, with all the fruit to put up and the young ones home from school."

"But, Mrs. Peckham," pleaded Kit, "when you were Sally's age, wasn't there ever anything that you wanted to do or be with all your heart and soul? Didn't you ever just want to get away from what you had been doing for years, and start something new?"

"Well, come to think of it now," smiled Mrs. Peckham, "I'd have given my eye-teeth to have left home and gone to be a teacher in some town."

"Then please let Sally do this. Cousin Roxy says she's willing to keep an eye over everything, and one of us girls will probably be helping her out most of the time, too. It would only be until the middle of September, although if it wasn't too cold later on, we might be able to rent the tents and outfits to the hunters when they come up. Piney'll be home for vacation and Elvy and Sylvie can help you. They're eight years old now, and Anne's fifteen and Charlotte's twelve. Why, it isn't fair to them to let them think all Sally's good for is to stay at home and do housework. You will let her go, won't you, Mrs. Peckham?"

Mrs. Peckham sighed and smiled at the same time.

"You're a fearful good pleader. I don't suppose it would hurt the other girls any to take hold and help, but it's such a nuisance to have to teach them everything when Sally can

go right ahead. Still, I'm willing, and if her father is, why, she can go. Seems as if you girls are starting something you can't finish, but mebbe you can."

Piney Hancock had boarded in Willimantic that winter for her third year in high school. So the girls had seen very little of her since the previous September, but Kit rounded up the old members of the Hiking Club, and welded them together into a sort of efficiency committee to help with the summer plan.

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CHAPTER XXV

COAXING THE WILDERNESS

The first part of April was unusually mild. A sort of balmy hush seemed to lie over the barren land, as though spring had chosen to steal upon it sleeping. Doris brought in the first violets on the fifteenth, with a few wisps of saxifrage and ragged robin. Shad brought up a load of lumber from the mill the same day, and started to make the flooring for the tents.

Second-hand army tents had been secured, and almost daily something was added to the store of supplies for the summer venture. The next problem to be solved was finding the occupants for the tents, and here it was Jean who helped out.

"You don't want to get a lot of people," she wrote, "who will be expecting all the comforts of a typical summer resort or the excitement of the boardwalk. You want nature-lovers, the kind of people who really and truly want to rest and invite their souls. So I suggest my spreading the glad tidings among the art students here of Greenacre Farms. They are sure to pass it along to their friends. Make your prices, sisters mine, attractive and alluring, and I know the world will make a pathway to your door, as some famous hermit remarked. I am going to sketch a few wonderful placards announcing the golden opportunity."

The next surprise that came was a visit from Piney Hancock, one Saturday afternoon in May. The girls had gone up after wild flowers into the wood-lot. Here Shad and Mr. Robbins had been cutting birches for nearly a week. Helen wandered through the violet-carpeted glades in a perfect day-dream. The warmth and glow had fallen on the land so unexpectedly after days of rain, and now the whole woodland was athrill with the songs of birds and the chirp and chatter of brooding things.

"I wonder just who Helen is making believe she is now," Doris said, reflectively, as she watched the sauntering figure in the misty distance.

"Probably Fair Rosamond, or Blanchefleur," Kit replied, down on her hands and knees after a little patch of flag-root that bordered the bed of a brook. "You know, this fall I'm going to take a whole sack of bulbs and come up here through these woods and plant whole clumps of crocus and narcissus and hyacinths broadcast. Just imagine poet's narcissus underneath those drooping hemlocks."

"I think there's a deer breaking through that path," Helen called to them softly, "with long, spreading antlers!"



The girls listened and caught the unmistakable sound of some large animal pushing its way through the overgrown cow path, but instead of an antlered head, Molly's white nose showed, and Piney called to them gaily from her perch on the old mare's back:

"I had to ride over the minute I got the letter. Who on earth do you suppose, girls, wants to rent one of your tents for the whole summer?"

She slipped off the saddle and held up an envelope, and every one of the three girls guessed the same name:

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"Ralph MacRae!"

"Oh, dear, I thought it would be a surprise to you," Piney laughed, dropping down on a patch of green moss. "I had written out to Honey, and told him all about your tent colony. You know they had planned to come east the first of June anyway, and he wants to know whether you have one to spare along the river."

"It's the gem of the whole collection," Kit announced proudly. "Do you remember, Piney, the place where Billie and I had our birch tepee long ago? He used to call it Turtle Cove. There's a dandy shore there, and canoeing on the lake above the Falls. I'd much rather have Honey and Ralph there than strangers."

"Well, you'll probably have me, too," Piney announced, "because I'm just dying to go camping. It seems so queer, Kit, that none of us ever thought of it before. Here are these glorious woods and hills around us, with miles and miles of land as wild as you'd find anywhere, yet we all cling to the little farm spots. I hope somebody else will go ahead and put up tents the way you folks have done. I was telling a lot of the girls at high school about it, and they may take a tent for a couple of weeks."

"And Cousin Roxy told me yesterday that she was positive Billie and Mr. Howard would come down for a while in July or August." Kit heaved a sigh of contentment, as she rose from the ground. "I see that my wilderness is going to blossom like the rose, Proserpine Hancock. Now, if you'll kindly tell me where all these tent dwellers of mine are going to get fresh water from when the brooks dry up, I'll be glad. They can't all trot way up to the house to our well."

"Trot it to them," Piney suggested instantly. "Charge them five cents a pail for it, and let one of the little Peckham boys handle that. I'll tell you one thing I bet you girls don't know. There's a never-failing spring about a mile up the road, and a lot of them could get water there. It's right near Cynthia Allen's old place."

Kit regarded her admiringly, as they all started back down the woodroad towards home, Molly trailing along behind leisurely.

"I believe Cousin Roxy was perfectly right. She told me long ago, Piney, before I ever knew you, that you knew where every single wild flower bloomed in all Gilead Township, and every cow path and brook."

Piney's eyes held a little wistful gleam, but she smiled with the old dauntless tilt to her head.

"I guess I do around Greenacres," she said. "You see, Honey and I always thought it would be our home some day, and about the first thing that I can remember is mother

telling us all the places around here that she loved best when she was a girl. I suppose that's why I remember them all."

Doris and Helen were far ahead, trying to get down some branches of dogwood that hung invitingly over the stone wall at the side of the road, and Kit laid one hand in comradely fashion on Piney's shoulder. What she meant to say was how wonderful and brave she had always thought Piney was, and how oftentimes, when her own pluck failed her, she would think of the Hancocks and how they had kept their faces valiantly turned to the sunny side of care through all the years of necessity and privation, but girls are curious people, and all that she really said was:



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"Life's awfully queer, isn't it, Piney?"

Piney nodded with a little smile.

"It's fun though," she said, "if you just keep your face to the front and never look behind."

CHAPTER XXVI

PAYING GUESTS

The first campers were due to arrive the second week in June, but everything was in complete readiness long before that time. The girls never wearied of making their tours of inspection to be sure nothing had been overlooked, and each time it seemed as if they added a few more finishing touches.

Cousin Roxy declared it was all so inviting that she felt like closing up the big house and coaxing the Judge to camp out with her.

Instead of grouping the tents together, they had chosen the most picturesque and sequestered spots to hide them away in. There was one on a little jutting point of land near the Peckham mill. Here, the river swept out in a wide U-shaped curve that was crowned with gray rocks and pines. The music of the falls reached it, and the road was only about quarter of a mile across the fields to the north, but apparently it was completely isolated.

"I'd like to put a poet in there," Helen said, "or a musician. Wasn't it Rubenstein, Kit, who used to take his violin and play the music of the rain and falling water?"

"Ask me not, child, ask me not," returned Kit, practically. "All I'm wondering about this minute is how on earth Shad ever expected this fly to stay put, if a good, old-fashioned Gilead thunder-storm ever hit it."

Helen watched her as she climbed up on a camp stool, with most precarious footing, and tried to readjust the fly at the back of the tent.

"Don't you have to take them in when it storms or the wind blows, just like sails?" she asked. "Ingeborg and Astrid told me that. They learned it from their camp-fire rules. I'm sure you don't leave them stringing out like that, Kit."

All at once Doris came speeding around the rock path, her eyes wide with excitement, her whole manner full of mystery.

"There's an automobile just stopped in the road," she exclaimed, "and the man in it asked me who lived in the tent over here."

"I never supposed any one could see that tent from the road." Kit's tone held a distinct note of disappointment. "What did he want to sell us, Dorrie, lightning rods or sewing machines?"

"Oh, Kit, don't," pleaded Doris. "He's really in earnest, and he's coming over here right now. I told him all about everything, and he thinks he might want to rent a tent."

Kit's countenance cleared like magic. She forgot the refractory strip of canvas, and descended immediately from the camp stool.

"Lead me, sister darling, to this first paying guest, who cannot resist the woodland lure. Helen, don't you dare say anything to spoil the inviting picture which I shall give him. I don't see what more he could want." She hesitated a moment, surveying the river, almost directly below the sloping rock. "Why, he could almost sit up in bed in the morning and haul in his fish-lines from yon winding stream with a fine catch for breakfast on it."

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"Oh, hurry, Kit, and don't stop to spout," Doris begged. "He is really awfully nice, and he's in earnest, I know he is."

But Kit went with dignity across the fields to the road where the automobile stood with its lone occupant. He must have been over forty years of age, but with his closely curled dark hair and alert smile he appeared much younger. He wore no hat, and was heavily tanned. It seemed to Kit at first glance as though she had never seen eyes so full of keen curiosity and genial friendliness.

"How do you do?" he called as soon as she came within hailing distance. "Are you the young lady who has the renting of these tents which I see every once in a while?"

Kit admitted that she was. He nodded his head approvingly and smiled, a broad pleasant smile which seemed to include the entire landscape.

"I like it here," he announced with emphasis. "It is sequestered and silent. I have not met a single team or car on the road for miles."

"Oh, that happens often," said Kit, eagerly. "There are days when nobody passes at all except the mail carrier."

"It suits me," he exclaimed, buoyantly. "I must have quiet and perfect relaxation. I will rent one of your tents and occupy it at once. I have been touring this part of the country looking for a spot which appealed to me."

"We have one on the hill yonder," Kit suggested. He seemed rather peculiar, and perhaps it would be just as well to sequester him as far off as possible. "It is right on the edge of the pines, and faces the west. The sunsets are beautiful from there."

"No, no," he repeated. "I like the sound of the water. I hear falls below here. I will take that tent I see over there."

So came the first tent dweller to Greenacres. Kit had still been in doubt, and taking no chances on strangers within the gates, she had guided Mr. Ormond up to her father to make the closing arrangements on renting the waterfall tent, as the girls called it, for the entire summer. The most amazing part was that he left a check that first day for \$75.00, full rental for ten weeks.

"I must not be interrupted or bothered by little things," he told Mr. Robbins, earnestly. "I must have perfect isolation or I cannot do my work."

"Now, what on earth do you suppose he meant by that?" Kit asked, after the underslung gray roadster had passed out of sight. "My goodness, girls, he may be a counterfeiter. You can bet a cookie Gilead would look upon him as a suspicious character when he could pay seventy-five dollars right down all at once."

"I rather liked his face," Mrs. Robbins remarked, "and he gave your father excellent business references. I think you're very fortunate that he happened to travel this way."

He arrived promptly the following day and arranged with Shad to put up the automobile in the barn.

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"Well, I've lugged down all his belongings to the tent," Shad said, rather hopelessly, that night, "and I can't find out for the life of me what kind of business he's in. He had a lot of heavy bundles, and I asked him a few questions about them, but he didn't seem to take kindly to it, so I let him alone. There's one thing though he's got, and that's a big photograph in a silver frame of an all-fired handsome woman he says is his wife. She's dressed just like a queen, crown and all."

Helen's eyes were bright with interest, as she listened, but Kit's straight, dark brows were drawn together in a frown of perplexity.

"I suppose we'll just have to wait until we find out," she said, "but we'll hope for the best. Piney says he's made arrangements to buy eggs and chickens from them, so I see where our paying guests are going to scatter prosperity around the neighborhood."

Ralph MacRae and Honey arrived the seventeenth of June and took the Turtle Cove tent. The girls did not see very much of them until after Jean came up from the city, but then Ralph became what Doris called "the unexpected guest," dropping in at any time. Helen was the one who suspected a budding romance, but she contented herself with watching Jean meditatively, and investing her with the glamour of all her favorite heroines.

The first fruits of Jean's efforts to colonize the tents came with a letter from Bab Crane.

"You're going to have four of the girls from school through July anyway, and August if they like it. I've told them the scenery is perfectly gorgeous and they can pitch their easels anywhere they like, so be sure and give them the tents with the best outlook. I think it probable that you may catch Miss Emery, too, if Frances writes back approvingly. She's awfully odd, and lives all alone in a beautiful old mansion down on Washington Square, but her pictures are splendid, and she's a member of the N.A.D."

The next surprise was a letter from Billie. He could not reach home before the middle of July, as he was going on another trip with Stanley, but there were five of the boys from his class who wanted to come up and camp.

"I've told them the fishing is great around there, and they're going to make the trip from here in Jeff Saunders' car. Jeff's from Georgia, and most of the fellows have never been north. We're going to join them later on, so if you've got a bunch of tents together, you better save us three."

"Now, Kit, listen here, when I struck Delphi, and landed with all that crowd of girls unexpectedly, you know how well I behaved, just for your sake. Don't you get superior and toploftical with the boys when they come, because every last one of them is the right sort, and they're expecting to find Gilead folks waiting for them with open arms from what I've told them."

“Well, upon my word, I like that,” exclaimed Kit, as she threw the letter down on the table. “Any one would think that I didn’t know how to treat people. Just the same, we’ll put them all over in the glen, where they can do just as they please, and not interfere with high art or our mysterious stranger.”

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Sally opened her “General Emporium” the first of June. It stood exactly at the crossroads, beside Greenacre Hall. There was the waterfall, and the old bridge leading to the Scotland road. With Shad to superintend the work, the Peckham boys had erected a little slab shack, and Sally had planted wild cucumber and morning-glory vines thickly about the outside, the last week in April, so that by June they had clambered half-way up. There were rustic window boxes of birch, filled with nasturtiums and Wandering Jew.

Inside the store there were two counters, one on either side as you entered, and these had been Mr. Peckham’s contribution to the good cause. Several old hickory armchairs from Cousin Roxy’s helped to give the interior an inviting appearance, and Sally put up little, thin scrim curtains at the windows.

At first the stocking up of the store had been somewhat of a problem, but Cousin Roxy helped out with the business plan, and by this time nearly every one in Gilead was taking a keen, personal interest in the girls’ venture.

It was Ma Parmalee who first suggested Sally selling on the commission plan.

“I’ve got thirty-five jars of the best kind of preserves and canned goods in Gilead, though I say it as shouldn’t,” she announced, one day, when she had stopped on her way by the crossroads to look over the new establishment. “Most of them are pints, and besides I’ve got—land, I don’t know how many glasses of jell. I’d be willing to give you a right good share of whatever you could make on ’em, if you could sell ’em off for me down here.”

Sally agreed gladly, and the fruit made a splendid showing along the upper shelves behind the counters. Not only that, but it began to sell at once. Mr. Ormond bought up all of the quince jelly after sampling one glass, and Ralph acknowledged that he and Honey were perfectly willing to become responsible for the strawberry preserves and spiced pears. By the time Frances Cunningham and the other girls from the Academy had arrived, Sally was already looking around for more supplies.

Then Cynthia Allen had come over with Cousin Roxy one day. Ever since her home had burned the year before she had been under the friendly roof up at Elmhurst, helping out according to her strength, and never fully realizing how the shelter of the old house kept her from the poor-farm down on the Plains. She came into the store with an old black lace veil fluttering as usual from her hat, and a brown bombazine dress that dated from the eighties.

“Well, you’ve got the place fixed up real sightly,” she said. “I wonder—I don’t suppose you’d have any sale for braided rag rugs, would you? I’ve got some awful pretty ones packed away in my chest, brand new, too. I’ve been sewing and winding all winter for Roxana, too, but I guess she plans to use them for carpets.”



Sally accepted the suggestion instantly, and down came half a dozen oval rugs, braided in Cynthia's best style, that were snapped up at once by the tent dwellers. Frances bought three to put around in the tent which she had reserved for Miss Emery.

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"Haven't you got some of that painted tinware, too, Sally?" she asked. "I don't know just what you call it, but I mean the black candlesticks and little trays with trailing vines on them. I'd like to put some of those around."

The very next day Helen started off with Piney on the trail of old candlesticks. They stopped at nearly every house they came to, and returned with a perfect treasure trove of old relics.

"Why, we found candlesticks stuck out in wood-sheds and corn-cribs, rusty as could be, but the real thing in colonial art, and mother," Helen added, almost lowering her voice with a touch of awe, "what on earth do you think Mrs. Parmalee had on her hen-house door? This!"

She held up an ancient brass knocker, a smiling faun's head encircled in wreathing vines.

"That doesn't look as if it ever belonged on a Puritan's front door," said Mrs. Robbins, laughingly. "I rather think it must have come from Merry Mount, where they held the first Maypole dance and shocked good Cotton Mather. I think I'll have to buy that from Sally myself."

There were several old lacquered trays and a couple of old gray stone dasher churns.

"We'll take those and fill them with yellow daisies," Piney said, admiringly, "and I'll bet a cookie they'll sell the first day to some of the artist crowd. I found them in the Bennetts' smoke-house covered with the dust of ages."

It was little things like these that made Sally's shop unusual and inviting, but Piney started a new venture herself accidentally. She and Sally had always been chums, and now she spent most of her time helping her. It became the order of the day for them to have a cup of tea about four o'clock. Piney would take a candle-stand by the west window and make it look so inviting with a little strip of homespun linen and a spray of flowering almond that no one could resist tea from the old blue ware which Mrs. Peckham had donated.

They were just having tea one afternoon when Miss Emery came in with the girls from the Academy in New York. There was Frances, and the two Farley sisters, Gwen and Elise. The other girl was Cecil Fanshawe. Kit had a way of summing up family history with a few brief, terse remarks, and she had all four indexed and filed, so to speak.

"Cecil's from Fanshawe Grange, somewhere in Middlesex, England. Father's a Major in France, mother's dead, got two aunts in New York. Gwen and Elise come from Ohio, got French blood from colonial days. Frances is old Knickerbocker stock, born on Washington Square, warranted sterling. I like Cecil best."

When they discovered the tea-table that afternoon, Miss Emery insisted that she would not leave until she had partaken also from the willow pattern cups, and Sally, all blushes and smiles, prepared her first guest tea.

After they had gone she looked at the seventy-five cents in her hand, as though it had fallen from the sky, but Piney took the cue from Fate.

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"We will serve afternoon tea here from now on," she said, "and it's going to be twenty cents instead of fifteen. I know what we'll call this place, Sally. There are willow trees all around here, and along the river. This is the 'Sign of the Willow Tree.' We'll make it a stopping-off place for all good pilgrims."

CHAPTER XXVII

HELENITA'S SONG-BIRD

The tenth of July was always a momentous date in Gilead local history. Every year on that day, down in the little church on the Plains, the grand old guard of '83 held their Carberry Reunion.

The girls had heard of it first through Cousin Roxy, who had been one of the pupils of Professor Carberry in the old days at the Gayhead schoolhouse.

"Land, girls, if we didn't have our reunion every year, we'd begin to feel some of us were growing old," she had said laughingly. "The Professor's class has held that reunion every year since he had to give up the school in '89. There are a few empty places with the coming around of each July, but I guess we'll keep on holding them as long as the Professor holds out."

It was quite an exclusive affair in its way, so that this year, when they were both invited to attend with their mother, Jean and Kit felt the honor. Long afterwards, when she had attained her assured place in the world of art, Jean exhibited a painting which won her her first medal. It was only a shadowy interior of an old meetinghouse. The sunshine filtered through half-closed green blinds at the long windows. Up on the platform there sat Professor Carberry, a little, shrunken figure in black broadcloth, the lean, scholarly old face, blanched with the snows of eighty-odd years, filled with eagerness as he looked down on the little assembled remnant of the old guard.

Cousin Bethiah Newell always said that this picture was Jean's masterpiece, and she got the inspiration for it on this day. Kit sat very erect at her end of the pew, but even she, who prided herself on being unemotional, had tears on her lashes listening to these dear old-time scholars reciting the poetry out of their old fourth and fifth readers.

Judge Ellis rose with a radiant light in his eyes and spouted, "At midnight in his guarded tent, the Turk lay dreaming of the hour," and for an encore he rolled out "Old Ironsides."

"Ay, tear her tattered ensign down,
Long has it waved on high."

Cousin Roxy obliged with "Woodman, spare that tree," but for an encore she gave a tender poem of old-time days, called "Twenty Years Ago." Its verses rang in Kit's head

all the way home, and when she learned that Miss Daphne, too, had been one of the old Professor's scholars, she wrote them down and sent them west to her.

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"I've wandered to the village, Tom,
I've sat beneath the tree,
Upon that schoolhouse playground,
That sheltered you and me.
But few were there to greet me, Tom,
And few were left we know,
Who played with us upon the green,
Just twenty years ago."

"I'll never forget it as long as I live, Cousin Roxy," Kit declared, fervently; "talk about the twanging of heart strings; why, it seemed to me as though I could just feel the way you all felt as you sat there. It was the queerest thing, because Mrs. Peckham is stout and getting gray, and yet when she got up to recite she actually looked like a plump little girl with her brown eyes and rosy cheeks. And Deacon Simmons was as boyish as could be, when he stood there blushing and reading his class paper on 'Old Friendships.'"

"Well, child," said Mrs. Ellis, "I'm glad that you could see a little of the glory that gave light to us. You'll find out as you grow older and stand upon life's hills of rest that the days of childhood and going to school are the sweetest and best that life gives to you. I don't mind saying that I love every clapboard in the little old red schoolhouse, and when I read in a magazine the other day that such things were a thing of the past I wanted to call out that it wasn't any such thing. We had one right here at our crossroads over a hundred and thirty years old, and still turning out its hundred per cent. graduates."

The next morning, just after Shad had gone whistling up to the barn, Doris spied a familiar figure coming along the side drive towards the well sweep, and leaned out of the window, calling with all her heart:

"Hello, Billie!"

Billie waved back with a cheery greeting that brought the other girls hurrying to the window, too.

"The camp's immense," he said. "We got in late last night and I knew the way down, so we didn't disturb anybody. Even found the old boat in the same place, Kit."

"Well, you wouldn't have if I hadn't hauled it there, where I knew you could lay your hand right on it. I rather thought it would be just like you to arrive by the light of the moon and try to swim over."

Billie chuckled. He knew from old, past experience that Kit's scoldings didn't amount to any more than the perturbed clucking of a hen. They had brought up a load of supplies with them, but huckleberry pancakes with honey lured them both up for breakfast that first morning. And even Kit was silent as Stanley related all of his adventures during the

year. It seemed to her that she had never really looked at him before, that is, to get the best impression, without prejudice. Somehow, he looked younger and more boyish this year, anyway, in his camper's low-necked sport shirt and khaki riding breeches. Kit noted for the first time his crispy, curly yellow hair, and long, half-closed blue eyes, that always seemed to be laughing at you. He had dimples, too, and these Kit resented.

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"I can't abide dimples in a boy or a man's face," she declared, privately, to Helen, when the latter was dwelling on Stanley's good looks.

"But, Kit, all of the Roman emperors had dimples in their chins."

"What if they did? They're a fine lot to judge by." Kit meditated for a moment and then added, "I don't think I like blonde, curly hair either."

"Well, I do," Helen answered, placidly. "I think he'd look wonderful in doublet and hose with a long cloak thrown around him. I think he's much better looking than Ralph."

"You'd better not let Jean hear you say so," Kit told her sagely. "I wouldn't be very much surprised if something mighty interesting happened here this summer. I heard mother and Cousin Roxy talking about Ralph and Jean the other day."

"Oh, Kit, don't be mean. Tell me what they said, please. I won't tell."

"Impossible, child," returned Kit, loftily. "In fact, it was only what I might call a family rumor. But, I can tell you this much, I know perfectly well that Ralph MacRae has asked Dad for his eldest daughter's hand, and I don't know a blessed thing more."

Helen sighed happily.

"I hope she has a September wedding, all gold and purple. It would just suit Jean. If one could only dress her in violet velvet with a girdle of amethysts set with pearls, and braid her hair with strands of jewels, too. Jean always has that far-away look, in her eyes that princesses should have."

"Well, I don't see where you get your princess pattern from," remarked Kit. "From all the recent pictures that I've seen, they're a very ordinary, old-fashioned lot of young persons, and decidedly at the dumpling stage. Besides, Jean herself might have something to say about it. It will be her wedding, you know, Helen."

They had walked down to the Peckham mill after supper to get some supplies that Danny Peckham had promised to bring up from Nantic. Just as they came to the turn of the road there came a strange sound from the direction of the waterfall tent, deep, rich strains of music, almost as low pitched and thrilling as the sound of the water itself. Both girls stood stock still listening, until Helen whispered:

"It must be Mr. Ormond. He's playing on something, isn't he?"

"A 'cello, child," Kit said, drawing in a deep breath as though she could fairly inhale the sweetness of the music on the night air. "I haven't heard one since we left the Cove, and it's mother's favorite music. I wish I knew what he's playing. It sounds like Solveig's song from Peer Gynt, and I love that."



"Then, that's what he does." Helen's tone held a touch of admiring awe as she listened. "And we thought he might be anything from a counterfeiter to an escaped convict hiding away up here. Oh, Kit, why do you suppose he keeps away from every one?"

"Probably got a hidden sorrow," Kit answered. "Still he's got a terrible appetite. Mrs. Gorham says she doesn't see how he ever puts away the amount of food he does. He buys whole roast chickens and eats them all himself."

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Just then the music ceased suddenly. The flap of the tent lifted towards the roadway, and Mr. Ormond sent a hail across the twilight gloom.

"Is that you, Shad?"

"No, sir, it's just us girls," answered Kit. "We're going down to the mill."

"Would you mind so very much, Miss Kit, asking if any one has telephoned a telegram up for me from the station? I am expecting one."

"There, you see," Helen said, dubiously, as they went on down the road. "We just get rid of one mystery, and he hands us another one to solve. Who on earth would he be getting a telegram from?"

Kit laughed and slipped her arm around the slender shoulders that were growing so quickly up to her own.

"You're getting just as bad as every one else here in Gilead, Helenita. I thought only Mr. Ricketts took an interest in telegrams and post-cards."

Nevertheless, when Sally told them that there had been a message 'phoned up from Nantic, even Kit showed quick interest.

It was signed "Concetta," and the message read:

"Arrive Nantic, ten-two. All love and tenderness. Contract signed."

The girls returned after delivering the message, brimful of the news, but Mr. Robbins laughed at them.

"Why, bless your hearts," he said, "I could have told you long ago all about Bryan Ormond. He is one of the greatest 'cellists we have, and is married to Madame Concetta Doria, the grand-opera singer. He told me when he first took the tent for the summer, but as he was composing a new opera, he wanted absolute solitude up here, and asked me not to let any one know who they were."

"Talk about entertaining an angel unawares," Jean exclaimed. "Now, Helen, you'll have your chance, if you can only get acquainted with her. I can see you perched on their threshold drinking in trills and quavers the rest of the summer."

Helen only smiled happily. It was she who had pleaded most for the preservation of the empire grand piano. The one in the gold case with all the Watteau figures and garlands painted on it, that had been saved as one of the "white hyacinths" from the old home. After the day's work was over, it was always Helen who stole into the dim front room to listen while her mother played over favorite airs from the old grand-operas. Perhaps

only Helen really understood how at this time Gilead and all its rural delights vanished, and in their place came memories of the days back at the Cove, when the season tickets at the opera had been as natural a part of the year's pleasures as setting hens were here.

"Have you ever heard her sing, mother?" she asked, that first evening, after Mrs. Robbins had played the "Shadow Dance" from "Dinorah" and the trio from "Traviata."

"I heard her in both of these, dear, and ever so many more. I think my favorite was Rigoletto. She was a beautiful, girlish Gilda, but that is years ago. You girls will love her."

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"And just to think of her coming to live in a tent at Greenacre Farms," Helen said, almost in a hushed whisper. "It seems as if we ought to offer them the royal suite."

"If you did, they would run away. That is just what they have come here to escape from, all the royal suites and pomp."

Even Jean was on the tiptoe of expectancy to get her first look at Madame Ormond. While not one of the girls could have explained just exactly how they suspected she would look, still they held a blurred picture of a picturesque mortal set apart from ordinary home folks, who would probably dress more or less eccentrically.

Kit was in the kitchen making scones for lunch, when a shadow fell across the entry threshold. Doris sat on the edge of the table by the window picking over blackberries, and the two stared fixedly at the intruder. She was frankly over forty, a large buoyant type of woman with a mass of curly ashen blonde hair and sparkling black eyes, the north of Italy type, with a wonderful complexion, as Helen said later, like the skin of a yellow peach. Perhaps it was her smile that charmed the girls mostly, though, at that first glance. It was such a radiant smile of good fellowship when she peered into the shadowy interior of the old kitchen.

"Good-morning, everybody. I have come for butter and eggs, and milk." She spied the two-quart pail of berries on the table, and gave a little cry of interest. "Where do you find those, my dear?"

Doris told her shyly that they came from the rock pasture on the hill behind the house.

"Will you come down to the tent this afternoon and take me there? Mr. Ormond is very, very busy working on his new opera, and I must be away and let him write in peace, so you and I will have to follow the trails together, yes?" She smiled down into Doris' piquant, freckled little face, and just at this moment there came from the living-room, where Helen was dusting, Dinorah's Shadow Song, sung in a clear, girlish soprano.

Madame Ormond laid her finger on her lips and listened, her eyes bright with attention and interest.

"It is still another one of you?" she asked, softly, when the melody died away. "You shall bring her down to the tent to me and let my husband try her voice with the 'cello. It is his big baby, that 'cello, but it is very wise; it never gives the wrong decision on a voice, and she has a very beautiful one."

"Well," Kit declared, with a deep sigh, after the diva had gone on down towards the road with her butter, eggs and milk, "we've always believed we were an exceptional family. In fact Mrs. Gorham told me once she thought every last one of us had very intelligent faces, but now we know we are budding geniuses. Of course, Dorrie, you and I haven't

budded very much so far, but with an artist and a prima donna in a family, we'll have to begin our song of triumph pretty soon. I'll bet a cookie she'll go up there in the pasture every day and do her vocal practicing out of hearing of the 'cello, and Helenita will perch on the nearest rock and play echo."

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CHAPTER XXVIII

STANLEY PAYS AN OLD SCORE

The first week in August, Jean, who had acted as treasurer of the tent fund, announced that it had proved a solid financial success. Every tent was full and booked up to the middle of September. The girls from the Art School had persuaded two more batches to find the trail to Gilead, and Billie's boy friends had turned their tents into headquarters for the club they belonged to at school.

Jeff Saunders had used his car back and forth until Kit declared it made her think of the fox, goose and bag of corn story.

"Jeff skips down to Richmond and takes back a couple of boys, lays off himself for a couple of weeks, and lo, and behold, the car comes back with three new ones, but I must say that they're the best behaved lot of boys I ever saw. You'd hardly know they were around at all, except for the twanging of ukuleles and guitars at night. And they certainly have kept us supplied with fish ever since they came. I think it's done Dad a world of good going away with them and kind of turning into a boy again. Stanley said the other day they were going out fishing all night just as soon as the bass were running."

Mrs. Gorham was setting the table for lunch and stopped at the last words, one hand on her ample hip, and a look of anxiety in her eyes.

"They ain't calculatin' to fish over there beyond the dam, are they? That's where the Gaskell boy come near drowning a year ago, when his boat upset. It's just full of sunken snags for half a mile up the river above the island."

"I guess that's where they're going just the same. Billie Ellis thinks that he knows every foot of space on that upper lake and river just because he's poled around on it for years with that old leaky, flat-bottomed boat of his."

"Well, it's all right in the daytime," Mrs. Gorham rejoined, "but I wouldn't give two cents for their safety fishing for bass on a dark night among those snags."

It happened that the very next day Kit decided that it was high time to garner in the crabapple crop and start making jelly. The best trees around Greenacres were up on the old Cynthia Allen place. While the house had burned down the year before, still Cynthia's fruit trees were famous all over Gilead and Mr. Robbins had bought up the crop in advance from her. As Cynthia said rather pathetically when the money was placed in her hand:

“Land, Jerry, I never thought those old fruit trees would bring me a windfall just when I needed it most for taxes and such like.”

It was only about a mile and a half to Cynthy’s place from the crossroads, but Shad had taken Princess down to Nantic after grain, and Kit had no inclination to carry several pecks of crabapples in a sack along a dusty road. Doris and Helen were out with Madame Ormond on a wood hike, and Jean and her mother had been invited by Miss Emery to afternoon tea at her tent, so that Kit was left to her own devices.

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She stood on the veranda irresolutely, a couple of grain sacks thrown over her shoulder, and suddenly the sparkle of the river through the trees in the distance caught her eye. Certainly, that was the answer. She had not had a chance the whole summer to go out in the boat and bask in idleness. Always before this, Billie and she had chummed together through the summer months, and she knew Little River all the way from the Fort Ned Falls at the crossroads to where it slipped away in a shallow stream to the upper hills.

There were several old rowboats lying bottom side up on the shore above the falls. Kit selected the newest of the lot, a slender green boat that Billie had lately acquired, although she had never tried rowing anything but a flat-bottomed boat. It was the very first time also that she had been out in a boat alone, but this fact never daunted Kit. She rowed up the river with a firm level stroke, thoroughly enjoying herself and the novelty of solitude. When she passed the island, Stanley was down on the little stretch of beach cleaning a mess of fish for supper. She sent him a hail across the water, and he held up a string of pickerel invitingly. There had been a thunder-storm and a quick midsummer rain the early part of the afternoon, and the campers had been quick to take advantage of the fishing.

"I'll stop for them on my way back," Kit called. "Just going up after crabapples at the Allen place." She had swerved the boat towards the bank on the opposite side of the island, without looking behind her, when suddenly Stanley sprang to his feet, and shouted across the water:

"To the left, Kit—hard to the left, do you hear!"

Instead of obeying without question, Kit turned her head to see what on earth he was warning her against, and before she could stop herself the rowboat was caught in an eddy that formed a miniature maelstrom at this point, from a large sunken tree that fell nearly to midstream from the shore. The frail rowboat overturned like a crumpled leaf. Kit was bareheaded and it seemed to Stanley as long as he lived he would never forget the sight of her upturned face, as it slipped down into the dark, swirling water. She did not cry out, or even seem to make an attempt to swim, it all happened so suddenly. There was only the horrible, warm silence of the drowsy, midsummer landscape, and the dancing, pitching rowboat, twirling around and around in circles.

It seemed an hour to him before he had plunged into the river, and swam across to the spot where she had disappeared. The gripping horror was that she hadn't come up at all. Even before he reached the spot where he had seen her go under, Stanley dove and swam under water with his eyes open. The river bottom was a mass of swaying vegetation and gnarled, sunken roots of old trees. It seemed for the moment like outreaching fingers clutching upward. He could see the black trunk of the tree, but there was no sign of Kit until he was fairly upon her, and then he found her, her dress and hair held fast on the bare branches.

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Billie had been in the tent, getting the potatoes on for dinner, and otherwise performing his duties as assistant camp cook. He had heard Stanley's voice calling to some one, but had not taken the trouble to look out until he failed to find a favorite pot on its accustomed hook. Sticking his head out through the tent flap, he called down to the beach:

"Say, Stan, where's the granite pot with the long handle?" He listened for an answer but none came, and after a second call he started to investigate. The sudden complete disappearance of Stanley mystified him. Their boat lay in its accustomed place on the shore with the oars beside it, and there were the fish beside the cleaning board just as he had left them a moment ago.

"Well, I'll be jiggered," muttered Billie when there came a cry across the river—Stanley calling for help.

Billie could just see him swimming with one long overhand stroke, and holding up something on his other shoulder, but following scout law, he stopped not to meditate, but pushed the boat off to the rescue.

There was no sign of life, at least to Billie's fear-struck eyes, in the limp, dripping figure which Stanley laid so tenderly in the bottom of the boat.

"Quit shaking like that, Bill," he ordered in husky sternness. "You row to the island as fast as you can."

On the way across he knelt beside her, applying first-aid methods, while Billie rowed blindly, trying to choke back the dry sobs that would rise in his throat, and the hot, boyish tears that blinded him every time he looked at Kit's face, and thought of the Mother Bird. It did not seem as if it could possibly be Kit, his dauntless, self-reliant pal, lying there so white and still. When they reached the shore of the island, Stanley carried her in his arms to his own cot.

"Hadn't I better go for help?" Billie asked.

"There isn't time," Stanley answered, shortly. "Warm those blankets, get me the bottle of aromatic spirits of ammonia, and unlace her boots."

All the time he was talking, he worked over Kit as swiftly and tenderly as any nurse, but it seemed hours to Billie before there came at last a half-sobbing sigh from her lips, as the agonized lungs caught their first breath of air, and she opened her eyes.

Neither Stanley nor Billie spoke as she stared from one to the other in slow surprise, taking in the interior of the tent, and Stanley's dripping clothing, and then she said, the most comical thing at such a time:

“Billie, did I lose the crabapples, or haven’t I gotten them yet?”

“So that’s what you were after,” Billie cried wrathfully, “poking up the river by yourself in that beastly little boat that turns over if you look at it, and you can swim about as well as a tree-toad. If it hadn’t been for Stan here, you’d be absolutely drowned dead by now.”

The color stole back into Kit’s face. Perhaps if he had sympathized with her, she might have broken down, but as it was, she looked up into Stanley’s eyes almost appealingly.

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"I'm awfully sorry," she began, but Stanley stopped her with a laugh, as he rolled her up tighter in another blanket.

"I'm the doctor here, now," he said, "and you'll have to mind. I guess if I carry you, we can get you home somehow. The sooner you're in bed, the better."

Mrs. Robbins and the girls were just coming along the road when they beheld the startling procession coming up from the river bank, Stanley carrying the blanketed figure and Billie bringing up the rear. Not the buoyant, carefree Billie they were accustomed to see, a dejected, rather limp-looking figure, with his eyes still full of horror.

"Why, mother," Jean exclaimed, "some one's been hurt." But it seemed as though by some mysterious telepathy of love the news had already flashed on Mrs. Robbins' mind, and she hurried down the road to meet them.

"She's all right," called Stanley, cheerily. "Just took a dip in the river, Mrs. Robbins. If you'll go ahead, please, and get a bed ready, I'll bring her up."

Kit's eyes were closed. He had told her to put her arms around his neck so that he could carry her easier up the hill. Just as they got to the veranda steps he said, under his breath:

"Are you all right, Kit?"

She nodded her head slowly, and opened her eyes.

"Thank you for getting me out," she whispered, with a shyness absolutely new to the Kathleen of yore. "You don't know how I felt when I found myself caught down there, and couldn't get away. I thought that was just all."

"Bring her up-stairs, Stanley," called Jean. "Mother's telephoning to Dr. Gallup, but I suppose the danger's all past now. Kit, you big goose, what did you ever go in that boat alone for? The minute you're left alone, you're always up to something. Just like the day when she had you locked up in the corn-crib, Stanley."

Stanley smiled, a curious reminiscent smile, as he laid his burden down on the white bed by the window.

Probably only Kit heard his answer, for Jean had sped after hot ginger tea, and Helen and Doris were filling hot-water bottles, but Kit heard and smiled as he said:

"God bless the corn-crib."

CHAPTER XXIX

KIT GIVES HER BLESSING

Probably the next three days were the longest Kit had ever spent in her life. Under Dr. Gallup's orders, she remained in bed to get over the shock of her immersion.

"When I don't feel shocked a bit," she expostulated. "I don't see why I can't sit in a chair down on the veranda."

"Yes, you just want to pose as an interesting invalid," Jean laughed. She laid a rose-pink negligee jacket on the foot of the bed, with a little white lace boudoir cap, caught here and there with pink satin rosebuds. "Mother just took these out of the treasures of the past for you to dress up in, and Cousin Roxy sent down a stack of books for you to read. Stanley and Billie call about six times a day to inquire after you, and Madame Ormond has offered to come and sing for you. Ralph told us he heard she gets a thousand dollars a night in New York, so you can see how honored you are, Kit."

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"Jean, look at me," said Kit suddenly. "Will you tell me something, honest and true?"

"I think mother's calling." Jean's voice was rather hurried, as she started for the door.

"No, she isn't any such thing. I want to know if you and Ralph are engaged. I don't see why you should try to keep it a secret when everybody thinks you are anyway. And a wedding in the family would be so exciting."

But Jean shook her head, coloring quickly, and hurried down-stairs, with only a laugh for an answer. Kit stared out of the window, rather resentfully. She would be sixteen in November, and Jean was past eighteen. Eighteen loomed ahead of her as a year of discretion, a time when you naturally came into your heritage of mature reason and common sense. She remembered once the Dean remarking that the human brain did not reach its full development until eighteen, and how at the time she resented it, feeling absolutely sure at fifteen there was nothing under the sun she could not understand fully.

But the tumble in the river and peril to her life had left her completely stranded, as it were, upon an unknown shore of indecision. Evidently it was just what Billie had called it, a fool stunt for her to try and row up that river alone. Kit had always gone rather jauntily on her way doing as she thought best with an unshakable confidence that nothing could happen to her. Now she suddenly faced life with a new respect for the unexpected. Snags and sunken trees in the way of intrepid voyagers were evidently facts which one had to guard against.

Another thing, there was a very uncomfortable sensation around Kit's crown of glory, for her enemy had heaped coals of fire on her head, and returned good for evil in such an overwhelming measure, she never could repay him. Surely twenty-four hours had made an enormous difference in Kit's outlook on life, for she considered these things instead of the pink negligee on the foot of the bed.

The afternoon of the third day she was allowed to sit down on the veranda in a large willow armchair. Helen and Doris hovered over her quite as if she had been the heroine of some romantic adventure, and nearly all the tent colonists visited her in relays. Billie came up last of all, and brought her a live walking-stick on a spray of sassafras, as a special token, but Stanley did not appear.

"He's gone off up in the hills," Billie told her, "chasing some kind of a new moth. You'd be awfully dead by now, Kit, if he hadn't happened to see you go down, because I was in the tent and didn't know anything about it. But it was just like him to dash after you, and pull you out. He did that one day in Washington last winter, and saved a little darky from being run down by a fire engine. I told him he was a regular emergency doctor. I wish I could be like he is; I mean right on the job when there's any real danger."

Kit leaned her chin reflectively on her hand.

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"Heroes are such uncomfortable people in everyday life, Billie," she said. "Everybody, even Dad and mother, keep telling me how everlastingly grateful I must be to him for saving my life. I don't see what I can do except thank him, and I have done that."

"Treat him decently," Billie suggested, encouragingly. "Even if you don't like him, hide it."

"Oh, I like him well enough," Kit answered, "only he's never seemed like Ralph, and Honey, and you. I guess I've always resented every one thinking he was so wonderful. It was as though he had had a sort of sweet revenge on me for taking him for a berry hooker."

She stopped as Ralph and Jean came slowly up the drive together. Jean's arms were filled with early goldenrod, and she had some woodbine leaves fastened in a close fillet crown about her smooth dark hair. Ralph came up the veranda steps and seated himself on a pile of straw mats beside the willow chair.

"We've just decided," he announced, "and Jean says I may tell you all. It's going to happen in September, so she can go west with me. How do you like your new brother, Kit?"

"I approve," answered Kit, solemnly. "You know I've always liked you, Ralph, and I hereby bestow the hand of Jean upon you with all my blessings. Are you going to let her keep on painting?"

"She can do anything she likes," Ralph promised. "And if she can find any more beautiful scenery than we have in Saskatchewan and throughout Northwest Canada, then I'll live and die right here in Gilead."

If it had been any one but Ralph MacRae, Mrs. Robbins said, the family would never have given its united consent to Jean's marriage, but ever since that first summer when he had arrived at Greenacres as their unknown landlord, Ralph had been accepted as one of the family circle.

Piney and Honey were delighted over this new bond between the two families.

"We will be all cousins by marriage now," Piney said, "and if you girls don't let me be a bridesmaid, too, I'll never pass your portals again."

CHAPTER XXX

FACING REALITY



The wedding was set for the twentieth of September, and the last of the tent colony departed two weeks previously. The boys had gone first of all, and then the art students. The night before they left there had been a moonlight lawn party up at Greenacres, with dancing in a pavilion of young willows built by the boys. Kit declared she had never imagined anything so easy and so striking. With a good floor laid for dancing, they had erected a framework and then tied the willow trees to this on the four sides of the pavilion. Crisscrossing overhead were rows of Japanese lanterns. Old Cady Graves paced up and down playing his violin, as usual, and calling off for the quadrille, in his high pitched rhythmic cadence.

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But the biggest surprise of all came when Bryan Ormond, who had stirred the musical circles of two worlds, took his place on the little country platform and played for them on his 'cello. The Judge and Mrs. Ellis enjoyed it just as the Robbinses did. It was a novel treat to hear the strains of Lizst and Chopin sounding in the purple silences of those old country hills, but when he had finished, Cynthy leaned over to Kit, who sat next to her and who was in an uplifted rhapsody of meditation.

"Do you suppose he'd be willing to play 'Home, Sweet Home' on that thing if we asked him to? 'Tain't nothin' but a big fiddle, is it?"

Before Kit could answer, Madame Ormond herself stood facing them on the veranda steps under the big yellow porch light, and instead of any grand-opera aria, her golden voice floated out for them, singing Cynthy's favorite as surely it had never been sung before in Gilead.

After it was all over and the girls were in their own rooms, Kit stepped to Helen's door for an extra match, and found her standing before the mirror, a long green velvet portiere draped around her shoulders, and a strip of gold braid banding her hair. She turned around with quick embarrassment, and exclaimed breathlessly:

"Oh, Kit, please don't tell. I was just trying to look like Isolde. Madame Ormond has a photograph of herself dressed like this, and I was wondering if I ever would sing it."

Kit wrapped her arms around her as she stood behind her, almost as if she would have protected her from any dizzy flights of fancy.

"You look more like Brunehilda the Golden-haired," she said. "There's one thing about us Robbinses, nobody can say that we lack courage in our ambitions."

"Oh, but Kit, Madame Ormond says that she is sure my voice will develop into something worth while."

"Well, let's hope so, anyhow," Kit answered, practically, but with an affectionate squeeze that took away any offense from her words. "You know that old favorite saying of Cousin Roxy's, 'It's better to aim at the stars and hit the bar post, than to aim at the bar post and hit the ground.'"

Helen turned around, an anxious look in her blue eyes.

"You're always so matter-of-fact, Kit. You see, I am fourteen now, and it's about time I was having some kind of an ambition. Isn't there anything at all that you long to do more than anything in the world? Something that you've thought and thought about for months and months until it became like a light ahead of you?"

Kit sat down on the edge of the bed and thought a minute. Life had never presented itself to her in vistas. She lived each day as it came with an unconquerable optimism, such as no one else except Cousin Roxy seemed to possess in the family.

“Don’t worry, Kit,” Mrs. Ellis was wont to say to her, cheerily. “Good works and an abiding faith yoked up with a sense of humor will carry any one to the golden gates.”

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And perhaps secretly Kit had always considered personal ambition a little private form of selfishness. As she ransacked her mind now, trying to find her own ambition and get it safely on a pin for examination like one of Billie's specimens, only her old-time love of forestry answered her.

"I guess I'm a kind of a gypsy, Helenita," she sighed regretfully, "'cause there isn't anything I really want to do so much as travel and hit new trails. I don't just want to start out like Jean is doing and rush over three thousand just to settle down at the other end for ever and ever. I'd want to keep on going. It's such a comfort to know that the world is round after all, and you can't topple off the end."

Helen regarded her doubtfully.

"You know, I heard Stanley talking almost exactly like that. He said that after his work was finished in France he would just want to travel on and on into all the beautiful, lonesome places of the world, where there had never been any war."

Kit stared at her in startled amazement.

"In France?" she repeated. "Billie never said a word about it."

"I heard him telling father he was leaving this fall with one of the engineering units from Virginia on reconstruction work in the forests. Why, Kit?"

"Nothing," answered Kit, shortly. "Take off that golden crown and get to bed. It's after midnight. You'll probably dream of being a grand-opera queen, and wake up in the morning hearing Doris calling the guinea hens."

Two days later the Ormonds left. The little camp over on the island had broken up the day before. Billie had gone up to his grandfather's to spend a few days before returning to school, but Stanley remained over at Greenacres as Mr. Robbins' guest.

With a steady income assured him by the Dean's gift, Mr. Robbins was planning to develop the farm along the intensive lines he had always longed for. The girls on their side were fairly gloating over their own harvesting from the summer labors. Sally had made her own profit out of the little store, and the tent colony had yielded dividends sufficient to give each of the older girls a golden nest egg. Most of Jean's was going into her trousseau, but Kit took hers on the quiet and dropped it into her mother's lap as Mrs. Robbins sat reading in her favorite chair on the veranda.

"But, Kit, I don't need it now, dear," protested her mother. "Why don't you buy yourself some things that you've been wanting? I don't mean useful things. I mean 'white hyacinths' to feed the soul."

Kit sat down on the top step, hugging her knees and rocking to and fro contentedly.

“You know I can’t think of a single ‘white hyacinth’ that I’m hungering for,” she said. “I suppose I’ve got to go back to high school next week, and I don’t want to very much at all. I can’t bear general educations, mother darling. I wish there was a school I could go into and only study what I love best. Mountain climbing, island hunting and forestry. I want to be an explorer.”

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"There is such a school," her mother smiled down at her, "presided over by old dean experience, and you go to it all your life."

"But I mean something tangible," Kit explained. "It seems such a terrible waste of time just going to high school, and just filling up on a lot of things you're not particularly interested in." Mrs. Robbins looked down at the eager, troubled face, and there was a note of understanding sympathy in her voice, as she said:

"You're my only restless spirit, Kit, always reaching out after the mighty, real things of life, where Jean and Helen follow hopes and dreams. Realities are very hard to face sometimes even when we find them."

"Yes, I know," Kit said, shortly. "Stanley's going to France, and I haven't even found out yet how to thank him properly for fishing me out of the river and saving my life. I wish Billie had done it."

She looked off at the tree-tops that showed as a patch of green in the river where the island lay, with a deep perplexity in her eyes. Up-stairs there came the steady whirr of a sewing machine, where little Miss Dusenberry, the village dressmaker, was already deep in the mysteries of Jean's trousseau. In the living-room, Helen was practicing her vocal lesson, trying to follow the rules Mr. Ormond had given her, and Doris was completely hidden in the big, brown camp hammock under the maples reading a favorite book. It seemed as though all the members of the family but herself were following their natural bent, and she couldn't even see a natural bent ahead of her, nothing but a long winding trail that called.

She gave a quick sigh, and put her head down on her mother's knee, almost as Doris might have done.

"I'll go through with it, motherie," she said, "high school and anything else you say, if only some day I can just drop everything and blaze my own paths."

"Remember, you don't blaze them for yourself, but for those who follow after." Mrs. Robbins put her arms down around the young shoulders that already longed to carry burdens. "Stanley was telling us last night of the death of General Maude at Bagdad. To me he is one of the great heroes of the war, and the word he left to his soldiers seems like a battle cry of inspiration to the race. It was just this, 'Carry on.' It's what we can't avoid, Kit, no matter whether we find ourselves blazing new trails through the wilderness or trying to find the way to happiness right here in little old Gilead. You have to 'carry on' for those who come after."

Jean called to her for some advice immediately, and she hurried up-stairs. Kit sat cogitating over what she had said, just as Stanley came through the orchard with a

huge basket on his shoulder of early sweet apples, the first fruits of the Greenacre harvest. He set them down beside her with the old whimsical laugh in his eyes.

“If you’ll be a real good girl, Kit, and never call me a berry hooker again, you can have first pick of these Shepherd Sweetings.”

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He was only joking, but there was no answering glint of humor in Kit's eyes. Very seriously, she stretched out her hand to him.

"I'll never, never even think of you as a berry hooker again, Stanley," she promised. "I didn't know you were going away off over there until Billie told me, and I'm willing now to say I am sorry for that first day, and Shad locking you up, and Mr. Hicks coming to arrest you."

"I do believe you're trying to forgive me, Kit," Stanley said, teasingly. "Is this a truce, or a lasting peace? You see, I want to know for sure, because I haven't any sisters, or mother, or any one who cares a rap whether I go or stay, and you're the first person who's even mentioned it. I guess that must be why I like to stay around Greenacres so well. I never knew anything about the fun of being in a family before until you all took me in here. There ought to be a tablet on that old corn-crib, 'Sacred to the memory of the day I found a family.'"

"It's peace," Kit answered, firmly, giving him her hand. "Here, you can have my watch strap as security. That's the way we always do."

She slipped the little silver watch out, and handed him the strap.

"If it won't fit your wrist, just carry it. I'd like to think something of mine was really over there, and I've always loved that. Jean cut it out of leather for me, and made it; even the little copper slides she hammered out herself."

Stanley was very busy detaching the charm he wore on his fob. It was a little amulet-shaped oblong of dull silver with a tree on it in relief.

"Like playing forfeits, isn't it?" he said, rather boyishly. "This is all I've got. It's an Indian charm I had given me down in New Mexico, but the tree is alive and growing. It isn't a sunken snag."

Kit held it up in delight. It was exactly to her liking, and she said laughingly the little, childish formula of party days:

"Heavy, heavy hangs over your head,
What shall the owner do to redeem it?"

"Are you going to eat all those apples, Kit?" asked Doris, her curly rumpled hair showing over the top of the hammock, and Kit tucked away her service charm against the day of its redemption.

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