



Campfire Girls at Twin Lake

Campfire Girls at Twin Lakes

OR,

The Quest of a Summer Vacation

BY STELLA M. FRANCIS



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CAMPFIRE GIRLS' SERIES

Campfire Girls in the Alleghany Mountains; or, A Christmas Success Against Odds.

Campfire Girls in the Country; or, The Secret Aunt Hannah Forgot.

Campfire Girls' Trip Up the River; or, Ethel Hollister's First Lesson.

Campfire Girls' Outing; or, Ethel Hollister's Second Summer in Camp.

Campfire Girls' on a hike; or, Lost in the Great North Woods.

Campfire Girls at Twin Lakes; or, The Quest of a Summer Vacation.

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9

CHAPTER I.

ABOUT TEETH AND TEDDY BEARS.

“Girls, I have some great news for you. I’m sure you’ll be interested, and I hope you’ll be as delighted as I am. Come on, all of you. Gather around in a circle just as if we were going to have a Council Fire and I’ll tell you something that will—that will—Teddy Bear your teeth.”

A chorus of laughter, just a little derisive, greeted Katherine Crane’s enigmatical figure of speech. The merriment came from eleven members of Flamingo Camp Fire, who proceeded to form an arc of a circle in front of the speaker on the hillside grass plot near the white canvas tents of the girls’ camp.

“What does it mean to Teddy Bear your teeth?” inquired Julietta Hyde with mock impatience. “Come, Katherine, you are as much of a problem with your ideas as Harriet Newcomb is with her big words. Do you know the nicknames some of us are thinking of giving to her?”¹⁰

“No, what is it?” Katherine asked.

“Polly.”

“Polly? Why Polly?” was the next question of the user of obscure figures of speech, who seemed by this time to have forgotten the subject that she started to introduce when she opened the conversation.

“Polly Syllable, of course,” Julietta answered, and the burst of laughter that followed would have been enough to silence the most ambitious joker, but this girl fun-maker was not in the least ambitious, so she laughed appreciatively with the others.

“Well, anyway,” she declared after the merriment had subsided; “Harriet always uses her polysyllables correctly, so I am not in the least offended at your comparison of my obscurities with her profundities. There, how’s that? Don’t you think you’d better call me Polly, too?”

“Not till you explain to us what it means to Teddy Bear one’s teeth,” Azalia Atwood stipulated sternly. “What I’m afraid of is that you’re trying to introduce politics into this club, and we won’t stand for that a minute.”

“Oh, yes, Julietta, you may have your wish, if what Azalia says is true,” Marie Crismore announced so eagerly that everybody present knew that she had an idea and waited expectantly for it to come out. “We’ll call you Polly—Polly Tix.”

Of course everybody laughed at this, and then Harriet Newcomb demanded, that her rival for enigmatical honors make good.

“What does it mean to Teddy Bear one’s teeth?” she demanded.

“Oh, you girls are making too much of that remark,” Katherine protested modestly, “I really am astonished at every one of you, ashamed of you, in fact, for failing to get me. I meant that you would be delighted—dee-light-ed—get me?—dee-light-ed.”

“Oh, I get you,” Helen Nash announced, lifting her hand over her head with an “I know, teacher,” attitude.

“Well, Helen, get up and speak your piece,” Katherine directed.

“You referred to the way Theodore Roosevelt shows his teeth when he says he’s ‘dee-light-ed’; but we got you wrong. When you said you would tell us something that would ‘Teddy Bear’ our teeth, you meant b-a-r-e, not b-e-a-r. When Teddy laughs, he bares his teeth. Isn’t that it?”

“This isn’t the first time that Helen Nash has proved herself a regular Sherlock Holmes,” Marion Stanlock declared enthusiastically. “We are pretty well equipped with brains in this camp, I want to tell you. We have Harriet, the walking dictionary; Katherine, the girl enigma; and Helen, the detective.”

“Every girl is supposed to be a puzzle,” Ernestine Johanson reminded. “I don’t like to snatch any honors away from anyone, but, you know, we should always have the truth.”

“Yes, let us have the truth about this interesting, Teddy-teeth-baring, dee-light-ing announcement that Katherine has to make to us,” Estelle Adler implored.

“The delay wasn’t my fault,” Katherine said, with an attitude of “perfect willingness if all this nonsense will stop.” “But here comes Miss Ladd. Let’s wait for her to join us, for I know you will all want her opinion of the proposition I am going to put to you.”

Miss Harriet Ladd, Guardian of the Fire, bearing a large bouquet of wild flowers that she had just gathered in timber and along the bank of the stream, joined the group of girls seated on the grass a minute later, and then all waited expectantly for Katherine to begin.

CHAPTER II.

A SPECIAL MEETING CALLED.

Fern hollow—begging the indulgence of those who have read the earlier volume of this series—is a deep, richly vegetated ravine or gully forming one of a series of scenic convolutions of the surface of the earth which gave the neighboring town of Fairberry a wide reputation as a place of beauty.

The thirteen Camp Fire Girls, who had pitched their tents on the lower hillside, a few hundred feet from a boisterous, gravel-and-boulder bedded stream known as Butter creek, were students at Hiawatha Institute, a girls' school in a neighboring state. The students of that school were all Camp Fire Girls, and it was not an uncommon thing for individual Fires to spend parts of their vacations together at favorite camping places. On the present occasion the members of Flamingo Fire were guests of one of their own number, Hazel Edwards, on the farm of the latter's aunt, Mrs. Hannah Hutchins, which included a considerable section of the scenic Ravine known as Fern hollow.

They had had some startling adventures in the last few weeks, and although several days had elapsed since the windup in these events and it seemed that a season of quiet, peaceful camp life was in store for them, still they were sufficiently keyed up to the unusual in life to accept surprises and astonishing climaxes as almost matters of course.

But all of these experiences had not rendered them restless and discontented when events slowed down to the ordinary course of every-day life, including three meals a day, eight hours' sleep, and a program of tramps, exercises and honor endeavors. The girls were really glad to return to their schedule and their handbook for instructions as to how they should occupy their time. After all, adventures make entertaining reading, but very few, if any, persons normally constituted would choose a melodramatic career if offered as an alternative along with an even-tenor existence.

All within one week, these girls had witnessed the execution of an astonishing plot by a band of skilled lawbreakers and subsequently had followed Mrs. Hutchins through a series of experiences relative to the loss of a large amount of property, which she held in trust for a relative of her late husband, and its recovery through the brilliant and energetic endeavors of some of the members of the Camp Fire, particularly Hazel Edwards and Harriet Newcomb. The chief culprit, Percy Teich, a nephew of Mrs. Hutchins' late husband, had been captured, had escaped, had been captured again and lodged in jail, and clues as to the identity of a number of the rest had been worked out by the police, so that the hope was expressed confidently that eventually they, too, would be caught.

"Mrs. Hutchins is very grateful for the part this Camp Fire took in the recovery of the lost securities of which she was trustee," Katherine announced by way of introducing her "great news" to the members of the Fire who assembled in response to her call. "Of course Hazel

did the really big things, assisted and encouraged by the companionship of Harriet and Violet, but Mrs. Hutchins feels like thanking us all for being here and looking pleasant.”

Hazel Edwards, niece of Mrs. Hutchins, was not present during this conversation. By prearranged purpose, she was absent from the camp when Katherine put to the other girls the proposition made by the wealthy aunt of their girl hostess. The reason it was decided best for her to remain away while the other girls were considering the plan was that it was feared that her presence might tend to suppress arguments against its acceptance, and that was a possibility which Hazel and her aunt wished to avoid. So Katherine was selected to lay the matter before the Camp Fire because she was no more chummy with Hazel than any of the other girls.

“Let’s make this a special business meeting,” suggested Miss Ladd, who had already discussed the proposition with Katherine and Mrs. Hutchins. “What Katherine has to say interests you as an organization. You’d have to bring the matter up at a business meeting anyway to take action on it and our regular one is two weeks ahead. We can’t wait that long if we are going to do anything on the subject.”

It was a little after 10 o’clock and the girls had been working for the last hour at various occupations which appeared on their several routine schedules for this part of the day. In fact, all of their regular academic and handwork study hours were in the morning. Just before Katherine called the girls together, they were seated here and there in shaded spots on camp chairs or on the grass in the vicinity of the camp, occupied thus:

Violet Munday and Marie Crismore were studying the lives of well-known Indians. Julietta Hyde and Estelle Adler were reading a book of Indian legends and making a study of Indian symbols. Harriet Newcomb and Azalia Atwood were studying the Camp Fire hand-sign language. Ernestine Johanson and Ethel Zimmerman were crocheting some luncheon sets. Ruth Hazelton and Helen Nash were mending their ceremonial gowns. Marion Stanlock was making a beaded head band and Katherine Crane, secretary of the Fire, was looking over the minutes of the last meeting and preparing a new book in which to enter the records of the next meeting.

Everybody signifying assent to the Guardian’s suggestion, a meeting was declared and called to order, the Wohelo Song was sung,¹⁷ the roll was called, the minutes of the last meeting were read, the reports of the treasurer and committees were deferred, as were also the recording of honors in the Record Book and the decorating of the count, and then the Guardian called for new business. This was the occasion for Katherine to address the meeting formally on the matter she had in mind.

CHAPTER III.

A BOY AND A FORTUNE.

“Now,” said Katherine after all the preliminaries of a business meeting had been gone through, “I’ll begin all over again, so that this whole proceeding may be thoroughly regular. I admit I went at it rather spasmodically, but you know we girls are constituted along sentimental lines, and that is one of the handicaps we are up against in our efforts to develop strong-willed characters like those of men.”

“I don’t agree with you,” Marie Crismore put in with a rather saucy pout. “I don’t believe we are built along sentimental lines at all. I’ve known lots of men—boys—a few, I mean—and have heard of many more who were just as sentimental as the most sentimental girl.”

There were several half-suppressed titters in the semicircle of Camp Fire Girls before whom Katherine stood as she began her address. Marie was an unusually pretty girl, a fact which of itself was quite enough to arouse the humor of laughing eyes when she commented on the sentimentality of the opposite sex. Moreover, her evident confusion as she tangled herself up, in her efforts to avoid personal embarrassment, was exceedingly amusing.

“I would suggest, Katherine,” Miss Ladd interposed,¹⁹ “that you be careful to make your statement simple and direct and not say anything that is likely to start an argument. If you will do that we shall be able to get through much more rapidly and more satisfactorily.”

Katherine accepted this as good advice and continued along the lines suggested.

“Well, the main facts are these,” she said: “Mrs. Hutchins has learned that the child whose property she holds in trust is not being cared for and treated as one would expect a young heir to be treated, and something like \$3,000 a year is being paid to the people who have him in charge for his support and education. The people who have him in charge get this money in monthly installments and make no report to anybody as to the welfare of their ward.

“The name of this young heir is Glen Irving. He is a son of Mrs. Hutchins’ late husband’s nephew. When Glen’s father died he left most of his property in trust for the boy and made Mr. Hutchins trustee, and when Mr. Hutchins died, the trusteeship passed on to Mrs. Hutchins under the terms of the will.

“That, you girls know, is the property which was lost for a year and a half following Mr. Hutchins’ death because he had hidden the securities where they could not be found. Although Hazel, no doubt assisted very much by Harriet, is really the one who discovered those securities and returned them²⁰ to her aunt, still Mrs. Hutchins seems disposed to give us all some of the credit.

“For several months reports have reached Mrs. Hutchins that her grandnephew has not been receiving the best of care from the relatives who have charge of him. She has tried in various ways to find out how much truth there was in these reports, but was unsuccessful. Little Glen, who is only 10 years old, has been in the charge of an uncle and aunt on his mother’s side ever since he became an orphan three or four years ago. His father, in his will, named this uncle and aunt as Glen’s caretakers, but privately executed another instrument in which he gave Mr. and Mrs. Hutchins guardianship powers to supervise the welfare of little Glen. It was understood that these powers were not to be exercised unless special conditions made it necessary for them to step in and take charge of the boy.

“Mrs. Hutchins wants to find out now whether such conditions exist. At the time of the death of Glen’s father, he lived in Baltimore, and his uncle and aunt, who took charge of him, lived there, too. It seems that they were only moderately well-to-do and the \$3,000 a year they got for the care and education of the boy was a boon to them. Of course, \$3,000 a year was more than was needed, but that was the provision made by his father in his will, and as long as they had possession of the boy they were entitled to the 21 money. Moreover, Mrs. Hutching understands that Glen’s father desired to pay the caretakers of his child so well that there could be no doubt that he would get the best of everything he needed, particularly education.

“But apparently his father made a big mistake in selecting the persons who were to take the places of father and mother to the little boy. If reports are true, they have been using most of the money on themselves and their own children and Glen has received but indifferent clothes, care, and education. Now I am coming to the main point of my statement to you.

“Mrs. Hutchins talked the matter over with Miss Ladd and me and asked us to put it up to you in this way: She was wondering if we wouldn’t like to make a trip to the place where Glen is living and find out how he is treated. Mrs. Hutchins has an idea that we are a pretty clever set of girls and there is no use of trying to argue her out of it. So that much must be agreed to so far as she is concerned. She wants to pay all of our expenses and has worked out quite an elaborate plan; or rather she and her lawyer worked it out together. Really, it is very interesting.”

“Why, she wants us to be real detectives,” exclaimed Violet Munday excitedly.

“No, don’t put it that way,” Julietta Hyde objected. “Just say she wants us to take the parts of fourteen Lady Sherlock Holmeses in a Juvenile drama in real life.”²²

“Very cleverly expressed,” Miss Ladd remarked admiringly. “Detective is entirely too coarse a term to apply to any of my Camp Fire Girls and I won’t stand for it.”

“We might call ourselves special agents, operatives, secret emissaries, or mystery probers,” Harriet Newcomb suggested.

“Yes, we could expect something like that from our walking dictionary,” said Ernestine Johanson. “But whatever we call ourselves, I am ready to vote aye. Come on with your—or Mrs. Hutchins and her lawyers’—plan, Katherine. I’m impatient to hear the rest of it.”

Katherine produced an envelope from her middy-blouse pocket and drew from it a folded paper, which she unfolded and spread out before her.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GIRLS VOTE “AYE.”

“Before I take up the plan outlined by Mrs. Hutchins and her lawyer,” Katherine continued, as she unfolded the paper, “I want to explain one circumstance that might be confusing if left unexplained. As I said, the uncle and aunt who have Glen in charge live in Baltimore. They do not own any real estate, but rent a rather expensive apartment, which they never could support on the family income aside from the monthly payments received from Mrs. Hutchins as trustee of Glen’s estate. This family’s name is Graham, and its head, James Graham, is a bookkeeper receiving a salary of about \$1,800 a year. In these war times, when the cost of living is so high, that is a very moderate salary on which to support a family of six: father, mother, two girls and two boys, including Glen.

“But this family, according to reports that have reached Mrs. Hutchins, is living in clover. Mr. Graham, who is a hard working man, still holds his bookkeeping position, but in this instance it is a case of ‘everybody loaf but father.’ He is said to be a very much henpecked husband. Mrs. Graham is said to be the financial dictator of the family.

“Now, Mrs. Graham seems to be a woman of much social ambition. Among the necessities of the best social equipment, you know,²⁴ is a summer cottage in a society summer resort with sufficient means to support it respectably and leisure in the summer to spend at the resort. It is said that the Grahams have all this. They have purchased or leased a cottage at Twin Lakes, which you know is only about a hundred miles from Hiawatha Institute. I think that every one of us has been there at one time or another. It is about three hundred miles from here.

“What Mrs. Hutchins wants us to do is to make a trip to Twin Lakes, pitch our tents and start a Camp Fire program just as if we were there to put in a season of recreation and honor work. But meanwhile, she wants us to become acquainted with the Graham family, cultivate an intimacy with them, if you please, and be able to report back to her just what conditions we find in their family circle, just how Glen is treated, and whether or not he gets reasonable benefits from the money given to the Grahams for his support and education.

“I have given you in detail, I think, what is outlined on this paper I hold in my hand. I don’t think I have left out anything except the names of the children of the Graham family. But there are no names at all on this paper. The reason for this is that it was thought best not to disclose the identity of the family for the information of any other person into whose hands it might fall, if it should be lost by us. The names are indicated thus: ‘A’²⁵ stands for the oldest member of the family, Mrs. Graham, for she is two years older than her husband and the real head of the household; ‘B’ stands for the next younger, Mr. Graham; ‘C’ stands for Addie, the oldest daughter; ‘D’ for the next daughter, Olga; ‘E’ for the only son, James, named after his father; and ‘F’ stands for Glen. There, you have the whole proposition. What do you want to do with it? Mrs. Hutchins, I neglected to mention, wants to pay all of our expenses and hire help to take off our hands all the labor of moving our camp.”

Replies were not slow coming. Nearly every one of the girls had something to say, as indicated by the eager attitudes of all and requests from several to be recognized by the Guardian, who was “in the chair.” Azalia Atwood was the first one called upon.

“I think the proposition of Mrs. Hutchins is simply great,” the latter declared with vim. “It’s delightfully romantic, sounds like a story with a plot, and would make fourteen heroines out of us if we were successful in our mission.”

“I want to warn you against one danger,” Miss Ladd interposed at this point. “The natural thing for you to do at the start, after hearing this lengthy indictment of the Graham family, is to conclude that they are a bad lot and to feel an eagerness to set out to prove it. Now, I admit that that is my feeling in this matter, but I know also that there is a possibility of mistake. The Grahams may be high class people, but they may have enemies who are trying to injure them. If you take up the proposition of Mrs. Hutchins, you must keep this possibility in mind, for unless you do, you might do not only the Grahams a great injustice, but little Glen as well. It would be a pity to tear him away from a perfectly good home that has been vilified by false accusations made by unscrupulous enemies.”

The discussion was continued for nearly an hour, the written instructions in Katherine’s possession were read aloud and then a vote was taken. It was unanimous, in favor of performing the task proposed by Mrs. Hutchins.

CHAPTER V.

HONORS AND SPIES.

“Why couldn’t this expedition be arranged so that we girls could all win some honors out of it?” Ruth Hazelton inquired, after the details of Mrs. Hutchins’ plan had been discussed thoroughly and the vote had been taken.

“That is a good suggestion,” said Miss Ladd. “What kind of honors would you propose, Ruth?”

The latter was silent for some minutes. She was going over in her mind the list of home-craft, health-craft, camp-craft, hand-craft, nature-lore, business and patriotism honors provided for by the organization, but none of them seemed to fit in with the program of the proposed secret investigation.

“I don’t think of any,” she said at last. “There aren’t any, are there?”

“No, there are not,” the Guardian replied. “But now is the time for the exercise of a little ingenuity. Who speaks first with an idea?”

“I have one,” announced Ethel Zimmerman eagerly.

“Well, what is it, Ethel?” Miss Ladd inquired.

“Local honors,” replied the girl with the first idea. “Each Camp Fire is authorized to create local honors and award special beads and other emblems to those who make the requirements.”

“Under what circumstances is such a proceeding authorized?” was Miss Ladd’s next question.

“When it is found that local conditions call for the awarding of honors not provided for in the elective list.”

“Do such honors count for anything in the qualifications for higher rank?”

“They do not,” Ethel answered like a pupil who had learned her lesson very well and felt no hesitancy in making her recitation.

“What kind of honor would you confer on me if I exhibited great skill in spying on someone else?” asked Helen Nash in her usual cool and deliberate manner.

A problematical smile lit up the faces of several of the girls who caught the significance of this suggestion. Miss Ladd smiled, too, but not so problematically.

“You mean to point out the incongruity of honors and spies, I presume,” the Guardian interpreted, addressing Helen.

“Not very seriously,” the latter replied with an expression of dry humor. “I couldn’t resist the temptation to ask the question and, moreover, it occurred to me that a little discussion on the subject of honors and spies might help to complete our study of the problem before us.”

“Do you mean that we are going to be spies?” Violet Munday questioned.²⁹

“Why, of course we are,” Helen replied, with a half-twinkle in her eyes.

“I don’t like the idea of spying on anybody and would rather call it something else,” said Marie Crismore. “First someone calls us detectives and then somebody calls us spies. What next? Ugh!”

“Why don’t you like to spy on anybody?” asked Harriet Newcomb.

“Well,” Marie answered hesitatingly; “you know that there are thousands of foreign spies in this country trying to help our enemies in Europe, and I don’t like to be classed with them.”

“That’s patriotic,” said Helen, the twinkle in her eyes becoming brighter. “But you must remember that there are spies and spies, good spies and bad spies. All of our law-enforcement officials are spies in their attempts to crush crime. Your mother was a spy when she watched you as a little tot stealing into the pantry to poke your fist into the jam. That is what Mrs. Hutchins suspects is taking place now. Someone has got his or her fist in the jam. We must go and peek in through the pantry door.”

“Oh, if you put it that way, it’ll be lots of fun,” Marie exclaimed eagerly. “I’d just like to catch ’em with their fists all—all—smeared!”

She brought the last word out so ecstatically that everybody laughed.

“I’m afraid you have fallen into the pit that I30 warned you against,” Miss Ladd said, addressing Marie. “You mustn’t start out eager to prove the persons, under suspicion, guilty.”

“Then we must drive out of our minds the picture of the fists smeared with jam,” deplored Marie with a playful pout.

“I fear that you must,” was the smiling concurrence of the Guardian.

“Very well; I’m a good soldier,” said Marie, straightening up as if ready to “shoulder arms.” “I won’t imagine any jam until I see it.”

“Here comes Hazel,” cried Julietta, and everybody looked in the direction indicated.

Hazel Edwards had taken advantage of this occasion to go to her aunt’s house and thence to the city Red Cross headquarters for a new supply of yarn for their army and navy knitting. As she emerged from the timber and continued along the edge of the woods toward the site of the camp, the assembled campers could see that she carried a good-sized bundle under one arm.

“She’s got some more yarn, and we can now take up our knitting again,” said Ethel Zimmerman, who had proved herself to be the most rapid of all the members of the Camp Fire with the needles.

Although the business of the meeting was finished, by tacit agreement those present decided not to adjourn until Hazel arrived and received official notice of what had been done.

“I’m delighted with your decision,” Hazel said eagerly. “And, do you know, I believe we are going to have some adventure. I’ve been talking the matter over with Aunt Hannah and she has told me a lot of very interesting things. But when do you want to go?”

“We haven’t discussed that yet,” Miss Ladd replied. “I suppose we could go almost any time.”

“Let’s go at once,” proposed Marion Stanlock. “We haven’t anything to keep us here and we can come back as soon as—as soon as we find the jam on somebody’s fist.”

This figure of speech called for an explanation for Hazel’s benefit. Then Ruth Hazelton moved that the Camp Fire place itself at Mrs. Hutchins’ service to leave for Twin Lakes as soon as she thought best, and this motion was carried unanimously.

“I move that Katherine Crane be appointed a committee of one to notify Mrs. Hutchins of our action and get instructions from her for our next move,” said Violet Munday.

“Second the motion,” said Azalia Atwood.

“Question!” shouted Harriet Newcomb.

“Those in favor say aye,” said Miss Ladd.

A hearty chorus of “ayes” was the response.

“Contrary minded, no.”

Silence.

“The eyes have it.”

The meeting adjourned.

CHAPTER VI.

A TELEGRAM EN ROUTE.

At 9 o'clock in the morning two days later, a train of three coaches, two sleepers and a parlor car, pulled out of Fairberry northwest bound. It was a clear midsummer day, not oppressively warm. The atmosphere had been freshened by a generous shower of rain a few hours before sunup.

In the parlor car near one end sat a group of thirteen girls and one young woman. The latter, Miss Ladd, Guardian of Flamingo Camp Fire, we will hereafter designate as “one of the girls.” She was indeed scarcely more than a girl, having passed her voting majority by less than a year.

The last two days had been devoted principally to preparations for this trip. Mrs. Hutchins had engaged two men who struck the tents and packed these and all the other camp paraphernalia and expressed the entire outfit to Twin Lakes station. On the morning before us, Mrs. Hutchins accompanied the fourteen girls to the train at the Fairberry depot and bade them good-bye and wished them success in their enterprise.

There were few other passengers in the parlor car when the Camp Fire Girls entered. One old gentleman obligingly moved forward from a seat at the rear end, and the new passengers³³ were able to occupy a section all by themselves.

Before starting for the train, Miss Ladd called her little flock of “spies” together and gave them a short lecture.

“Now, girls,” she said with keen deliberation, “we are about to embark on a venture that has in it elements which will put many of your qualities to severe test. And these tests are going to begin right away. Perhaps the first will be a test of your ability to hold your tongues. That’s pretty hard for a bevy of girls who like to talk better than anything else, isn’t it?”

“Do you really mean to accuse us of liking to talk better than anything else?” inquired Marie Crismore, flushing prettily.

“I didn’t say so, did I?” was the Guardian’s answering query.

“Not exactly. But you meant it, didn’t you?”

“I refuse to be pinned down to an answer,” replied Miss Ladd, smiling enigmatically. “I suspect that if I leave you something to guess about on that subject it may sink in deeper. Now, can any of you surmise what specifically I am driving at?”

Nobody ventured an answer, and Miss Ladd continued:

“Don’t talk about our mission to Twin Lakes except on secret occasions. Don’t drop remarks now and then or here and there that may be overheard and make someone listen³⁴ for more. For instance, on the train, forget that you are on anything except a mere pleasure trip or Camp Fire excursion. Be absolutely certain that you don’t drop any remarks that might arouse anybody’s curiosity or suspicion. It might, you know, get to the very people whom we wish to keep in ignorance concerning our moves and motives.”

“I see you are bound to make sure enough spies out of us,” said Marie Crismore pertly. “Well, I’m going to start out with the determination of pulling my hat down over my eyes, hiding in every shadow I see and peeking around every corner I can get to. Oh, I’m going to be some sleuth, believe me.”

“What will you say when you catch somebody with jam on his fingers?” Harriet Newcomb inquired.

Marie leaned forward eagerly and answered dramatically:

“I’ll suddenly appear before the villain and shout: ‘Halt, you are my prisoner! Throw up your jammed hands!’”

After the laugh that greeted this response subsided, Miss Ladd closed her lecture thus:

“I think you all appreciate the importance now of keeping your thoughts to yourselves except when we are in conference. I’m glad to see you have a lot of fun over this subject, but don’t let your gay spirits cause you to permit any unguarded remarks to escape.”

On the train the girls all got out their knitting, and soon their needles were plying merrily³⁵ away on sleeveless sweaters, socks, helmets, and wristlets for the boys at the front, timing their work by their wrist watches for patriotism honors. True to their resolve, following Miss Ladd’s warning lecture, they kept the subject of their mission out of their conversation, and it is probable that no reference to it would have been made during the entire 300-mile journey if something had not happened which forced it keenly to the attention of every one of them.

The train on which they were traveling was a limited and the first stop was fifty miles from Fairberry. A few moments after the train stopped, a telegraph messenger walked into the front entrance of the parlor car and called out:

“Telegram for Miss Harriet Ladd.”

The latter arose and received the message, signed the receipt blank, and tore open the envelope. Imagine her astonishment as she read the following:

“Miss Harriet Ladd, parlor car, Pocahontas Limited: Attorney Pierce Langford is on your train, first coach. Bought ticket for Twin Lakes. Small man, squint eyes, smooth face. Watch out for him. Letter follows telegram. Mrs. Hannah Hutchins.”

CHAPTER VII.

A DOUBLE-ROOM MYSTERY.

Miss Ladd passed the telegram around among the girls after writing the following explanation at the foot of the message:

“Pierce Langford is the Fairberry attorney that represented scheming relatives of Mrs. Hutchins’ late husband, who attempted to force money out of her after the disappearance of the securities belonging to Glen Irving’s estate. Leave this matter to me and don’t talk about it until we reach Twin Lakes.”

Nothing further was said about the incident during the rest of the journey, as requested by Miss Ladd. The girls knitted, rested, chatted, read, and wrote a few postcards or “train letters” to friends. But although there was not a word of conversation among the Camp Fire members relative to the passenger named in Mrs. Hutchins’ telegram, yet the subject was not absent from their minds much of the time.

They were being followed! No other construction could be put upon the telegram. But for what purpose? What did the unscrupulous lawyer—that was the way Mrs. Hutchins had once referred to Pierce Langford—have in mind to do? Would he make trouble for them in any way that would place them in an³⁷ embarrassing position? These girls had had experiences in the last year which were likely to make them apprehensive of almost anything under such circumstances as these.

Warned of the presence on the train of a probable agent of the family that Mrs. Hutchins had under suspicion, the girls were constantly on the alert for some evidence of his interest in them and their movements. And they were rewarded to this extent: In the course of the journey, Langford paid the conductor the extra mileage for parlor car privileges, and as he transferred from the coach, not one of the Flamingoites failed to observe the fact that in personal appearance he answered strikingly the description of the man referred to in the telegram received by Miss Ladd.

The squint-eyed man of mystery, in the coolest and most nonchalant manner, took a seat a short distance in front of the bevy of knitting Camp Fire Girls, unfolded a newspaper and appeared to bury himself in its contents, oblivious to all else about him.

Half an hour later he arose and left the car, passing out toward the rear end of the train. Another half hour elapsed and he did not reappear. Then Katherine Crane and Hazel Edwards put away their knitting and announced that they were going back into the observation car and look over the magazines. They did not communicate to each other their real purpose in

making this move, but neither³⁸ had any doubt as to what was going on in the mind of the other. Marie Crismore looked at them with a little squint of intelligence and said as she arose from her chair:

“I think I’ll go, too, for a change.”

But this is what she interpolated to herself:

“They’re going back there to spy, and I think I’ll go and spy, too.”

They found Langford in the observation car, apparently asleep in a chair. Katherine, who entered first, declared afterwards that she was positive she saw him close his eyes like a flash and lapse into an appearance of drowsiness, but if she was not in error, his subsequent manner was a very clever simulation of midday slumber. Three or four times in the course of the next hour he shifted his position and half opened his eyes, but drooped back quickly into the most comfortable appearance of somnolent lassitude.

The three girls were certain that all this was pure “make-believe,” but they did not communicate their conviction to each other by look or suggestion of any kind. They played their part very well, and it is quite possible that Langford, peeking through his eyewinkers, was considerably puzzled by their manner. He had no reason to believe that he was known to them by name or reputation, much less by personal appearance.

It was in fact a game of spy on both sides during most of the journey, with little but³⁹ mystifying results. The train reached Twin Lakes at about sundown, and even then the girls had discovered no positive evidence as to the “squint-eyed man’s” purpose in taking the trip they were taking. And Langford, as he left the train, could not confidently say to himself that he had detected any suggestion of interest on their part because of his presence on the train.

Flamingo Camp Fire rode in an omnibus to the principal hotel in the town, the Crandell house, and were assigned to rooms on the second floor. They had had their supper on the train and proceeded at once to prepare for a night’s rest. Still no words were exchanged among them relative to the purpose of their visit or the mysterious, squint-eyed passenger concerning whom all of them felt an irrepressible curiosity and not a little apprehension.

Miss Ladd occupied a room with Katherine Crane. After making a general survey of the floor and noting the location of the rooms of the other girls, they entered their own apartment and closed the door. Marie Crismore and Julietta Hyde occupied the room immediately south of theirs, but to none of them had the room immediately north been assigned.

“I wonder if the next room north is occupied,” Katherine remarked as she took off her hat and laid it on a shelf in the closet.

“Someone is entering now,” Miss Ladd⁴⁰ whispered, lifting her hand with a warning for low-toned conversation.

The exchange of a few indistinct words between two persons could be heard; then one of them left, and the other was heard moving about in the room.

“That’s one of the hotel men who just brought a new guest up,” Katherine remarked.

“And I’m going to find out who it is,” the Guardian declared in a low tone, turning toward the door.

“I’ll go with you,” said Katherine, and together they went down to the office.

They sought the register at once and began looking over the list of arrivals. Presently Miss Ladd pointed with her finger the following registration:

“Pierce Langford, Fairberry, Room 36.”

Miss Ladd and Katherine occupied Room 35.

“Anything you wish, ladies?” asked the proprietor, who stood behind the desk.

“Yes,” Miss Ladd answered. “We want another room.”

“I’ll have to give you single rooms, if that one is not satisfactory,” was the reply. “All my double rooms are filled.”

“Isn’t 36 a double room?” Katherine inquired.

“Yes, but it’s occupied. I just sent a man up there.”

“Excuse the question,” Miss Ladd said curiously; “but why did you put one person in a double room when it was the only double room you had and there were vacant single rooms in the house?”

The hotel keeper smiled pleasantly, as if the question was the simplest in the world to answer.

“Because he insisted on having it and paid me double rate in advance,” was the landlord’s startling reply.

CHAPTER VIII.

PLANNING IN SECRET.

Without a word of comment relative to this remarkable information, Miss Ladd turned and started back upstairs, and Katherine followed. In the hall at the upper landing, the Guardian whispered thus in the ear of her roommate:

“Sh! Don’t say a word or commit an act that could arouse suspicion. He’s probably listening, or looking, or both. Just forget this subject and talk about the new middy-blouse you are making, or something like that. Don’t gush, either, or he may suspect your motive. We want to throw him off the track if possible.”

But Katherine preferred to say little, for she was tired, and made haste to get into bed. It was not long before the subject of their plans and problems and visions of spies and “jam-stained fists” were lost in the lethe of dreamland.

They were awakened in the morning by the first breakfast bell and arose at once. They dressed hurriedly and went at once to the dining-room, where they found two of the girls ahead of them. The others appeared presently.

As the second bell rang, Pierce Langford sauntered into the room and took a seat near⁴³ the table occupied by Helen Nash and Violet Munday. He looked about him in a half-vacant inconsequential way and then began to “jolly” the waitress, who approached and sung off a string of alternates on the “Hooverized” bill of fare which she carried in her mind. She coldly ignored his “jollies,” for it was difficult for Langford to be pleasing even when he tried to be pleasant, took his order, and proceeded on her way.

The girls paid no further attention to the supposed spy-lawyer during breakfast, and the latter appeared to pay no further attention to them. After the meal, Miss Ladd called the girls together and suggested that they take a walk. Then she dismissed them to prepare. Twenty minutes later they reassembled, clad in khaki middy suits, brown sailor hats, and hiking shoes, and the walk was begun along a path that led down a wooded hill behind the hotel and toward the nearest lake.

It was not so much for exercise and fresh air that this “hike” was taken as for an opportunity to hold a conference where there was little likelihood of its being overheard. They picked a grassy knoll near the lake, shaded by a border of oak and butternut trees, and sat down close together in order that they might carry on a conversation in subdued tones.

“Now,” said Miss Ladd, “we’ll begin to form our plans. You all realize, I think, that we have an obstacle to work against that we did⁴⁴ not reckon on when we started. But that need not surprise us. In fact, as I think matters over, it would have been surprising if something of the kind had not occurred. This man Langford is undoubtedly here to block our plans. If that is true, in a sense it is an advantage to us.”

“Why?” Hazel Edwards inquired.

“I don’t like the idea of answering questions of that kind without giving you girls an opportunity to answer them,” the Guardian returned. “Now, who can tell me why it is an advantage to us to be followed by someone in the employ of the people whom we have been sent to investigate.”

“I think I can answer it,” Hazel said quickly, observing that two or three of the other girls seemed to have something to say. “Let me speak first, please. I asked the foolish question and want a chance to redeem myself.”

“I wouldn’t call it foolish,” was the Guardian’s reassuring reply. “It was a very natural question and one that comparatively few people would be able to answer without considerable study. And yet, it is simple after you once get it. But go ahead and redeem yourself.”

“The fact that someone has been put on our trail to watch us is pretty good evidence that something wrong is going on,” said Hazel. “You warned us not to be sure that anybody is guilty until we see the jam on his fist. But we can work more confidently if we are reasonably⁴⁵ certain that there is something to work for. If this man Langford is in the employ of the Grahams and is here watching us for them, we may be reasonably certain that Aunt Hannah was right in her suspicions about the way little Glen is being treated, may we not?”

“That is very good, Hazel,” Miss Ladd commented enthusiastically. “Many persons a good deal older than you could not have stated the situation as clearly as you have stated it. Yes, I think I may say that I am almost glad that we are being watched by a spy.

“But I didn’t call you out here to have a long talk with you, girls. There really isn’t much to say right now. First I wanted you all to understand clearly that we are being watched and for what purpose. Langford convicted himself when he asked for the double room next to the one occupied by Katherine and me and offered to pay the regular rate for two. He thinks that he is able to maintain an appearance of utter disinterest in us and throw us off our guard. But he overdoes the thing. He makes too big an effort to appear unconscious of our presence. It doesn’t jibe at all with the expression of decided interest I have caught on his face on two or three occasions. And I flatter myself that I successfully concealed my interest in his interest in us.

“Now, there are two things I want to say to you, and we will return. First, do your best, every one of you, to throw Langford off⁴⁶ the track by affecting the most innocent disinterest in him as of no more importance to us than the most obscure tourist on earth. Don’t overdo it. Just make yourselves think that he is of no consequence and act accordingly without putting forth any effort to do so. The best way to effect this is to forget all about our mission when he is around.

“Second, we must find out where the Graham cottage is and then determine where we want to locate our camp—somewhere in the vicinity of the Graham cottage, of course.”

“Let me go out on a scouting expedition to find out where they live,” Katherine requested.

“And let me go with her,” begged Ruth Hazelton.

“All right,” Miss Ladd assented. “I’ll commission you two to act as spies to approach the border of the enemy’s country and make a map of their fortifications. But whatever you do, don’t get caught. Keep your heads, don’t do anything foolish or spasmodic, and keep this thing well in mind, that it is far better for you to come back empty handed than to make them suspicious of any ulterior motive on your part.”

CHAPTER IX.

FURTHER PLANS.

“Now, girls,” said Miss Ladd, addressing Katherine and Hazel, “let me hear what your plan is, if you have any. If you haven’t any, we must get busy and work one out, for you must not start such an enterprise without having some idea as to how you should go about it. But I will assume that a suggestion must have come to you as to how best to get the first information we want or you would not have volunteered.”

“Can’t we work out an honor plan as we decide upon our duties and how we are to perform them?” Hazel inquired.

“Certainly,” the Guardian replied, “I was going to suggest that very thing. What would you propose, Hazel?”

“Well, something like this,” the latter replied: “that each of us be assigned to some specific duty to perform in the work before it, and that we be awarded honors for performing those duties intelligently and successfully.”

“Very well. I suppose this work you and Katherine have selected may count toward the winning of a bead for each of you. But what will you do after you have finished this task, which can hardly consume more than a few hours?”⁴⁸

“Why not make them a permanent squad of scouts to go out and gather advance information needed at any time before we can determine what to do?” Marion Stanlock suggested.

“That’s a good idea,” Miss Ladd replied. “But it will have to come up at a business meeting of the Camp Fire in order that honors may be awarded regularly. Meanwhile I will appoint you two girls as scouts of the Fire, and this can be confirmed at the next business meeting. We will also stipulate the condition on which honors will be awarded. But how will you go about to get the information we now need?”

“First, I would look in the general residence directory to find out where the Grahams live,” Katherine replied.

“Yes, that is perhaps the best move to make first. But the chances are you will get nothing there. Can you tell me why?”

“Because there are probably few summer cottages within the city limits,” Hazel volunteered.

“Exactly,” the Guardian agreed. “Well, if the city directory fails to give you any information, what would you do next?”

“Consult a telephone directory,” Katherine said quickly.

“Fine!” Miss Ladd exclaimed. “What then?”

“They probably have a telephone; wouldn’t be much society folks if they didn’t,” Katherine⁴⁹ continued; “and there would, no doubt, be some sort of address for them in the ’phone book.”

“Yes.”

“And that would give us some sort of guide for beginning our search. We wouldn’t have to use the names of the people we are looking for.”

“That is excellent!” Miss Ladd exclaimed enthusiastically. “If you two scouts use your heads as cleverly as that all the time, you ought to get along fine in your work. But go on. What next would you do?”

“Go and find out where the people live. That needn’t be hard. Then we’d look over the lay of the land to see if there were a good place nearby for us to pitch our tents.”

“Yes,” put in Hazel; “and if we found a good place nearby, we’d begin the real work that we came here to do by going to the Graham house and asking who owns the land.”

“Fine again,” Miss Ladd said. “I couldn’t do better myself, maybe not as well. I did think of going with you on your first trip, but I guess I’ll leave it all to you. Let’s go back to the hotel now, and while you two scouts are gone scouting, the rest of us will find something to entertain us. Maybe we’ll take a motorboat ride.”

They started back at once and were soon at the hotel. Katherine and Hazel decided that they would not even look for the address of the Grahams in the directories at the hotel,⁵⁰ but would go to a drug store on the main business street for this information.

The other girls waited on the hotel portico while they were away on this mission. They were gone about twenty minutes and returned with a supply of picture postcards to mail to their friends. On a piece of paper Katherine had written an address and she showed it to Miss Ladd. Here is what the latter read:

“Stony Point.”

“That’s about three miles up the lake,” Hazel said. “We thought we’d hire an automobile and go up there.”

“Do,” said Miss Ladd approvingly. “And we’ll take a motorboat and ride up that way too, if we can get one. Oh, I have the idea now. We’ll make it a double inspection, part by land and part from the lake. We’ll meet you at a landing at Stony Point, if there is one, and will bring you back in the boat. Now, you, Katherine and Hazel, wait here while I go and find a motorboatman and make arrangements with him.”

“I’ll go with you,” said Violet Munday.

The Guardian and Violet hastened down toward the main boat landing while the other twelve girls waited eagerly for a successful report on this part of the proposed program.

A TRIP TO STONY POINT.

Miss Ladd and Violet returned in about twenty minutes and reported that satisfactory arrangements had been made for a trip up the lake. They were to start in an hour and a half.

Then Katherine and Hazel engaged an automobile for a few hours' drive and before the motorboat started with its load of passengers, they were speeding along a hard macadam road toward the point around which centered the interest of their interrupted vacation plans at Fairberry and their sudden departure on a very unusual and very romantic journey.

Twin Lakes is a summer-resort town located on the lower of two bodies of water, similar in size, configuration, and scenery. The town has a more or less fixed population of about 2,500, most of whom are retired folk of means or earn their living directly or indirectly through the supplying of amusements, comfort, and sustenance for the thousands of pleasure and recreation seekers that visit the place every year.

Each of the lakes is about four miles long and half as wide. A narrow river, strait, or rapids nearly a mile long connects the two. Originally this rapids was impassable by boats larger than canoes, and even such little craft⁵² were likely to be overturned unless handled by strong and skillful canoemen; but some years earlier the state had cleared this passage by removing numerous great boulders and shelves of rock from the bed of the stream so that although the water rushed along just as swiftly as ever, the passage was nevertheless safe for all boats of whatever draught that moved on the two lakes which it connected.

The lower of the twin bodies of water had been named Twin-One because, perhaps, it was the first one seen, or more often seen by those who chose or approved the name; the other was Twin-Two. Geographically speaking, it may be, these names should have been applied vice versa, for Twin-Two was fed first by a deep and wide river whose source was in the mountains 200 miles away, and Twin-One received these waters after they had laved the shores of Twin-Two.

The road followed by Katherine and Hazel in their automobile drive to Stony Point was a well-kept thoroughfare running from the south end of Twin-One, in gracefully curved windings along the east border of the lake, sometimes over a small stretch of rough or hilly shoreland, but usually through heavy growths of hemlock, white pine, oak, and other trees more or less characteristic of the country. Here and there along the way was a cottage, or summer house of more pretentious proportions, usually constructed near the water or some distance up on the side of⁵³ the hill-shore, with a kind of terrace-walk leading down to a boat landing.

The trip was quickly made. Stony Point the girls found to be a picturesque spot not at all devoid of the verdant beauties of nature in spite of the fact that, geographically, it was well named. This name was due principally to a rock-formed promontory, jutting out into the lake at this point and seeming to be bedded deep into the lofty shore-elevation. Right here was a cluster of cottages, not at all huddled together, but none the less a cluster if viewed from a distance upon the lake, and in this group of summer residences appeared to be almost sufficient excuse for the drawing up of a petition for incorporation as a village. But very few of the owners of these houses lived in them during the winter months. The main and centrally located group consisted of a hotel and a dozen or more cottages, known as "The Hemlocks", and so advertised in the outing and vacation columns of newspapers of various cities.

On arriving at “the Point,” Katherine and Hazel paid the chauffeur and informed him they would not need his machine any more that day. Then they began to look about them.

They were rather disappointed and decidedly puzzled at what they saw. Evidently they had a considerable search before them to discover the location of the Graham cottage without making open inquiry as to where it⁵⁴ stood. First they walked out upon the promontory, which had a flat table-like surface and was well suited for the arousing of the curiosity of tourists. There they had a good view up and down the bluff-jagged, hilly and tree-laden coast.

“It’s 11 o’clock now,” said Hazel, looking at her wrist-watch. “The motorboat will be here at about 1 o’clock, and we have two hours in which to get the information we are after unless we want to share honors for success with the other girls when they arrive.”

“Let’s take a walk through this place and see what we can see,” Katherine suggested. “The road we came along runs through it and undoubtedly there are numerous paths.”

This seemed to be the best thing to do, and the two girls started from the Point toward the macadam highway. The latter was soon reached and they continued along this road northward from the place where they dismissed the automobile. Half a mile they traveled in this direction, their course keeping well along the lake shore. They passed several cottages of designedly rustic appearance and buried, as it were, amid a wealth of tree foliage and wild entanglements of shrubbery. Suddenly Katherine caught hold of Hazel’s arm and held her back.

“Did you hear that?” she inquired.

“Yes, I did,” Hazel replied. “It sounded like a child’s voice, crying.”⁵⁵

“And not very far away, either. Listen; there it is again.”

It was a half-smothered sob that reached their ears and seemed to come from a clump of bushes to the left of the road not more than a dozen yards away. Both girls started for the spot, circling around the bushes and peering carefully, cautiously ahead of them as they advanced. The subdued sobs continued and led the girls directly to the spot whence they came.

Presently they found themselves standing over the form of a little boy, his frightened, tear-stained face turned up toward them while he shrank back into the bushes as if fearing the approach of a fellow human being.

CHAPTER XI.

MISS PERFUME INTERFERES.

The little fellow retreated into the bushes as far as he could get and crouched, there in manifest terror. Katherine and Hazel spoke gently, sympathetically to him, but with no result, at first, except to frighten him still more, if possible.

“Don’t be afraid, little boy,” Hazel said, reaching out her hands toward him. “We won’t hurt you.”

But he only shrank back farther, putting up his hands before his face and crying, “Don’t, don’t!”

“What can be the matter with him?” said Hazel. “He doesn’t seem to be demented. He’s really afraid of something.”

Katherine looked all around carefully through the trees and into the neighboring bushes.

“I can’t imagine what it can be,” she replied. “There’s nothing in sight that could do him any harm. But, do you know, Hazel, I have an idea that may be worth considering. Suppose this should prove to be the little boy for whom we are looking.”

“That could hardly be,” Hazel answered dubiously. “Look at his threadbare clothes, and how unkempt and neglected he appears to be. He surely doesn’t look like a boy for whose care \$250 is paid every month.”⁵⁷

“Don’t forget what it was that sent us here,” Katherine reminded. “Isn’t it just possible that this little boy’s fright is proof of the very condition we came here to expose?”

“Yes, it’s possible,” Hazel replied thoughtfully. “At least, we ought not neglect to find out what this means.”

Then turning again to the crouching figure in the bushes, she said:

“What is your name, little boy? Is it Glen?”

At the utterance of this name, the youth shook as with ague.

“Look out, Hazel; he’ll have a spasm,” Katherine cautioned. “He thinks we are not his friends and are going to do something he doesn’t want us to do. Let me talk to him:

“Listen, little boy,” she continued, addressing the pitiful crouching figure. “We’re not going to hurt you. We’ll do just what you want us to do. We’ll take you where you want to go. Will that be all right?”

A relaxing of the tense attitude of the boy indicated that he was somewhat reassured by these words. His fists went suddenly to his eyes and he began to sob hysterically. Hazel moved toward him with more sympathetic reassurance, when there was an interruption of proceedings from a new source.

A girl about 18 years old stepped up in front of the two Camp Fire Girls and reached forward as if to seize the juvenile refugee with both hands. She was rather ultra-stylishly⁵⁸ clad for a negligee, summer-resort community, wearing a pleated taffeta skirt and Georgette crepe waist

and a white sailor hat of expensive straw with a bright blue ribbon around the crown. Hazel afterwards remarked that “her face was as cold as an iceberg and the odor of perfume about her was enough to asphyxiate a field of phlox and shooting-stars.”

The boy ceased sobbing as he beheld this new arrival and his face became white with fear, while he shrank back again into the bushes as far as he could get. The girl of much perfume and stylish attire seemed to be unmoved by the new panic that seized him, but took hold of him and dragged him roughly out of his hiding place.

“Oh, do be careful,” pleaded Hazel. “Don’t you see he’s scared nearly to death? You may throw him into a spasm.”

“Is that any of your business?” the captor of the frightened youth snapped, looking defiantly at the one who addressed her. “He’s my brother, and I guess I can take him back home without any interference from a perfect stranger. He’s run away.”

“I beg your pardon,” Hazel said gently; “but it didn’t seem to me to be an ordinary case of fright. I didn’t mean to intrude, but he’s such a dear little boy I couldn’t help being sympathetic.”

“He’s a naughty bad runaway and ought to be whipped,” the girl with the cold face returned⁵⁹ as she started along a path through the timber, dragging the little fellow after her.

“Isn’t that a shame!” Hazel muttered, digging her fingernails into the palms of her hands. “My, but I just like to——”

She stopped for want of words to express her feelings not too riotously, and Katherine came to her relief by swinging the subject along a different track.

“Do you really believe that boy is Glen Irving?” she inquired.

“No, I suppose not,” Hazel answered dejectedly. “You heard that girl say he was her brother, didn’t you? Well, Glen has no sister. But, do you know, I really am disappointed to find that he isn’t the boy we are looking for, for my heart went right out to him when I first saw his crouching form and white face. Moreover, I can hardly bear the thought of leaving him in the hands of that frosted bottle of cheap Cologne.”

Katherine laughed at the figure.

“You’ve painted her picture right,” she said warmly. “Come on, let’s follow her. We have as much right to go that way as she has, and we must go someway anyway.”

“All right; lead the way,” Hazel said with smiling emphasis on the “way” to direct attention to Katherine’s phonetic repetition.

The latter started along the path that had been taken by the girl and her frightened prisoner, and Hazel followed. The two in advance⁶⁰ were by this time out of sight beyond a thicket of bushes and small trees, but Katherine and Hazel did not hasten their steps, as they preferred to trust to the path to guide their steps rather than the view of the persons they sought to

follow. In fact, they preferred to trust to the element of chance rather than run a risk of arousing the suspicion of the cold-faced girl with the perfume.

Only once did they catch sight of the boy and his captor in the course of their hesitating pursuit, and this view was so satisfactory that they stopped short in order to avoid possible detection if the girl should look back. A turn in the path brought them to the hip of the elevation where the ground began to slope down to the lake and near the downward bend of this beach-hill was a rustic cottage, with an equally rustic garage to the rear and on one side a cleared space for a tennis court. At the door of the cottage was the girl with the pleated skirt and white sailor hat, still leading the now submissive but quivering youth.

“Fine!” Katharine exclaimed under her breath. “Things have turned out just right. If that should prove to be the Graham home we couldn’t wish for better luck. Come on; let’s back through the timber and approach this place from another direction. They mustn’t suspect that we followed that girl and the little boy.”

CHAPTER XII.

THE MAN IN THE AUTO.

Cautiously Katherine and Hazel withdrew from the path into a thicket and thence retreated along the path by which they had approached the house. They continued their retreat to the point where the path joined the automobile road and where grew the thicket within which they had discovered the frightened runaway child.

“Now, I tell you what we ought to do,” Katherine said. “We ought to follow this road about a mile, maybe, to get a view of the lay of the land and then return to this spot, or near it. We can get the information we want after we learn more of the camping possibilities of this neighborhood and can talk intelligently when we begin to make inquiries.”

“And when we get back,” Hazel added, “we’ll go to some neighboring house and ask all about who lives here and who lives there, and, of course, we’ll be particular to ask the name of the family where that icy bottle of perfume lives.”

“That’s the very idea,” Katherine agreed enthusiastically. “But we haven’t any time to waste, for it is nearly 12 o’clock now, and we have only a little more than an hour to work in if the motorboat arrives on time. We’d better not try to walk a mile—half a mile will be enough, maybe a quarter—just enough to enable us to talk intelligently about the lay of the land right around here.”

They walked north along the road nearly half a mile, found a path which led directly toward the lake, followed it until within view of the water’s edge, satisfied themselves that there were several excellent camping places along the shore in this vicinity and then started back. They had passed three or four cottages on their way and at one of these they stopped to make inquiries as planned.

A pleasant-faced woman in comfortable domestic attire met them at the door and answered their questions with a readiness that bespoke familiarity with the neighborhood and acquaintance with her neighbors. Katherine and Hazel experienced no slight difficulty in concealing their eager satisfaction when Mrs. Scott, the woman they were questioning, said:

“The people who have the cottage just north of us are the Pruitts of Wilmington, those just south of us are the Ertsmans of Richmond, and those just south of the Ertsmans are the Grahams of Baltimore, I think. I am not very well acquainted with that family. I am sure we would be delighted to have a group of Camp Fire Girls near us and you ought to have no difficulty in getting permission to pitch your tents. This land along here belongs to an estate which is managed by a man⁶³ living in Philadelphia. He is represented here by a real estate man, Mr. Ferris, of Twin Lakes. He probably will permit you to camp here for little or nothing.”

The girls thanked the woman warmly for this information and then hurried away.

“We don’t need to call at the Graham cottage now,” Hazel said as they hastened back to the road. “We have all the preliminary information that we want. The next thing for us to do is to get back to the Point and meet the boat when it comes in and have a talk with the other girls. I suppose our first move then ought to be to go to Twin Lakes and get permission from that real estate man, Ferris, to pitch our tents on the land he has charge of.”

The two girls kept up their rapid walk until within a few hundred feet of the drive that led from the main road to the cottage occupied by the Grahams. Then they slowed up a little as they saw an automobile approaching ahead of them. The machine also slowed up somewhat as it neared the drive. Suddenly Hazel exclaimed, half under her breath:

“It’s going to stop. I wonder what for?”

“Yes, and there’s something familiar in that man’s appearance,” Katherine said slowly. “Why——”

She did not finish the sentence, for the automobile was so near she was afraid the driver would hear her. But there was no need for her to say what she had in her mind to say. Hazel⁶⁴ recognized the man as soon as she did.

“Be careful,” Katherine warned. “Don’t let him see that we know him. Just pass him as you would a perfect stranger.”

But they did not pass the automobile as expected. Although slowing up, the machine did not stop, and for the first time the girls realized the probable nature of the man’s visit to Stony Point.

“O Hazel!” Katherine whispered; “he’s turning in at the Graham place.”

“I bet he’s come here to warn them against us,” Hazel returned.

“It must be something of the kind,” Katherine agreed, and then the near approach to the automobile rendered unwise any further conversation on the subject.

The girls were within 100 feet of the machine as it turned in on the Graham drive and found that they had all they could do to preserve a calm and unperturbed demeanor as they met the keen searching gaze of the squint eyes of Pierce Langford, the lawyer from Fairberry.

CHAPTER XIII.

A NONSENSE PLOT.

Katherine and Hazel walked past the drive, into which Attorney Langford's automobile had turned, apparently without any concern or interest in the occupant of the machine. But after they had advanced forty or fifty yards beyond the drive, Hazel's curiosity got the best of her and she turned her head and looked back. The impulse to do this was so strong, she said afterward, that it seemed impossible for her to control the action. Her glance met the gaze of the squint eyes of the man in the auto.

"My! that was a foolish thing for me to do," she said as she quickly faced ahead again. "I suppose that look has done more damage than anything else since we started from Fairberry. And to think that I above all others should have been the one to do it. I'm ashamed of myself."

"Did he see you?" Katherine inquired.

"He was looking right at me," Hazel replied; "and that look was full of suspicion and meaning. There's no doubt he's on our trail and suspects something of the nature of our mission."

"Oh don't let that bother you," Katherine advised. "There's no reason why he should jump to a conclusion just because you looked back at him. That needn't necessarily mean anything. But if you let it make you uneasy, you may give us dead away the next time you meet him."

"I believe he knows what our mission here is already," was Katherine's fatalistic answer.

"If that's the case, you needn't worry any more about what you do or say in his presence," said Hazel. "We might as well go to him and tell him our story and have it all over with."

"I don't agree with you," Katherine replied. "I believe that the worst chance we have to work against is the probability of suspicion on his part. I don't see how he can know anything positively. He probably merely learned of our intended departure for Twin Lakes and, knowing that the Grahams were spending the summer here, began to put two and two together. I figure that he followed us on his own responsibility."

"And that his visit at the Graham cottage today is to give them warning of our coming," Hazel added.

“Yes, very likely,” Katherine agreed. “I’d like to hear the conversation that is about to take place in that house. I bet it would be very interesting to us.”

“No doubt of it,” said the other; “and it might prove helpful to us in our search for the information we were sent to get.”

“Don’t you think it strange, Hazel, that your aunt should select a bunch of girls like us to do so important a piece of work as this?” Katherine inquired. This question had puzzled her a good deal from the moment the proposition had been put to her. Although she had received it originally from Mrs. Hutchins even before the matter had been broached to Hazel, she had not questioned the wisdom of the move, but had accepted the role of advocate assigned to her as if the proceeding were very ordinary and commonsensible.

“If you hadn’t restricted your remark to ‘a bunch of girls like us’, I would answer ‘yes’,” Hazel replied; “I’d say that it was very strange for Aunt Hannah to select a ‘bunch of girls’ to do so important a piece of work as this. But when you speak of the ‘bunch’ as a ‘bunch of girls like us,’ I reply ‘No, it wasn’t strange at all’.”

“I’m afraid you’re getting conceited, Hazel,” Katherine protested gently. “I know you did some remarkable work when you found your aunt’s missing papers, but you shouldn’t pat yourself on the back with such a resounding slap.”

“I wasn’t referring to myself particularly,” Hazel replied with a smile suggestive of “something more coming.” “I was referring principally to my very estimable Camp Fire chums, and of course it would look foolish for me to attempt to leave myself out of the compliment. I suppose I shall have to admit that I am a very classy girl, because if I weren’t, I couldn’t be associated with such a classy bunch—see? Either I have to be classy or⁶⁸ accuse you other girls of being common like myself.”

“I’m quite content to be called common,” said Katherine.

“But I don’t think you are common, and that’s where the difficulty comes in.”

“Won’t you be generous and call me classy, and I’ll admit I’m classy to keep company with my classy associates, and you can do likewise and we can all be an uncommonly classy bunch of common folks.”

“If we could be talking a string of nonsense like this every time we meet Mr. Langford, we could throw him off the track as easy as scat,” said Hazel meditatively. “What do you say, Katherine?—let’s try it the next time he’s around: We’ll be regular imp—, inp— What’s the word—impromptu actors.”

“We mustn’t overdo it,” Katherine cautioned.

“Of course not. Why should we? We’ll do just as we did this time—let one idea lead on to another in easy, rapid succession. Think it over and whenever you get an idea pass it around, and we’ll be all primed for him. It’ll be lots of fun if we get him guessing, and be to our advantage, too.”

Hazel and Katherine reached the Point in time to see the motorboat containing the other members of the Fire approaching about a mile away. They did not know, of course, who were in the boat, and as it was deemed wise not to indulge in any demonstrations, no one on either side did any signalling; but they were not long in doubt as to who the passengers were. A flight of steps led from the top of the point to the landing, and the two advance spies, as they were now quite content to be called, walked down these and were waiting at the water's edge when the boat ran up along the pile-supported platform.

CHAPTER XIV.

SPARRING FOR A FEE.

Pierce Langford drove the automobile, in which he made his first trip to Stony Point, up to the end of the drive near the Graham cottage, and advanced to the front entrance. The porch on which he stood awaiting the appearance of someone to answer his knock—there was no bell at the door—was bordered with a railing of rough-hewn, but uniformly selected, limbs of hard wood or saplings. The main structure of the house was of yellow pine, but the outer trimmings were mainly of such rustic material as the railing of the porch.

The front door was open, giving the visitor a fairly good view of the interior. The front room was large and fairly well furnished with light inexpensive furniture, grass rugs and an assortment of nondescript, "catch-as-catch-can," but not unattractive, art upon the walls. Langford, who was not a sleepy schemer, was able to get a good view of the room before any one appeared to answer his knock.

It was a woman who appeared, a sharp featured, well-dressed matron with a challenging eye. Perhaps no stranger, or person out of the exclusive circle that she assumed to represent ever approached her without being met⁷¹ with the ocular demand, "Who are you?"

Pierce Langford recognized this demand at once. If he had been of less indolent character this unscrupulous attorney might have made a brilliant success as a criminal lawyer in a metropolis. The fact that he was content with the limitations of a practice in a city of 3,500 inhabitants, Fairberry, his home town, was of itself indicative of his indolence. And yet, when he took a case, he manifested gifts of shrewdness that would have made many another lawyer of much greater practice jealous.

Attorney Langford's shrewdness and indolence were alternately intermittent. When the nerve centers of his shrewdness were stimulated his indolence lapsed and he was very much on the alert. The present was one of those instances. He knew something, by reputation, of the woman who confronted him. He had had indirect dealing with her before, but he had never met her. However, he was certain that she would recognize his name.

"Is this Mrs. Graham?" he inquired, although he scarcely needed to ask the question.

"It is," she replied with evidently habitual precision.

“My name is Langford—Pierce Langford,” he announced, and then waited for the effect of this limited information.

The woman started. It was a startled start. The challenge of her countenance wavered;72 the precision of her manner became an attitude of caution.

“Not—not Pierce Langford of—of—?” she began.

The man smiled on one side of his mouth.

“The very one, none other,” he answered cunningly. “Not to be in the least obscure, I am from the pretty, quiet and somewhat sequestered city of Fairberry. You know the place, I believe.”

“I’ve never been there and hope I shall never have occasion to go to your diminutive metropolis,” she returned rather savagely.

“No?” the visitor commented with a rising inflection for rhetorical effect. “By the way, may I come in?”

“Certainly,” Mrs. Graham answered recovering quickly from a partial lapse of mindfulness of the situation.

The woman turned and led the way into the house and the visitor followed. Mrs. Graham directed the lawyer to a reed rockingchair and herself sat down on another reed-rest of the armchair variety. The woman by this time had recovered something of her former challenging attitude and inquired:

“Well, Mr. Langford, what is the meaning of this visit?”

“Very much meaning, Mrs. Graham,” was the reply; “and of very much significance to you, I suspect. I come here well primed with information which I am sure will cause you to73 welcome me as you perhaps would welcome nobody else in the world.”

Mrs. Graham leaned forward eagerly, expectantly, apprehensively.

“You come as a friend, I assume,” she said.

“Have you any reason to doubt it?” the man inquired. “If it were otherwise, I must necessarily come as a traitor. I hope you will not entertain any such opinion of me as that. As long as you treat me fairly, you’ll find me absolutely on the square for you and your interests.”

“I hope so,” returned the woman in a tone of voice that could hardly be said to convey any significance other than the dictionary meaning of the words. “But let’s get down to business. What is this information that you come here primed with? Has it to do with the old subject?”

“Certainly, very intimately, and with nothing else.”

“In what way?” Mrs. Graham asked with more eagerness than she intended to disclose.

“Well, there are some spies in this neck of the woods.”

“Spies!” the woman exclaimed, betraying still more of the eagerness she was still struggling against.

“Yes spies. That’s exactly what they call themselves.”

“Who are they?—how do you know they are here to spy on me?”

“I overheard their plans. I got wind in a74 roundabout way, as a result of talk on the part of Mrs. Hutchins’ servants, that there was something doing, with Twin Lakes as a central point of interest. I suspected at once that your interests were involved; so I stole slyly, Willie Hawkshaw-like, up to their rendezvous one night and listened to some of them as they discussed their plans and—”

“Some of them,” Mrs. Graham interrupted. “How many are there?”

“Oh, a whole troupe of them.”

“That’s a funny story,” the woman commented dubiously, searching the face of her visitor for an explanation of his, to her, queer statements.

“Not at all so funny when you hear it in detail,” Langford returned quietly.

“Well hurry up with the details,” the impatient Mrs. Graham demanded.

“There’s no need of being in a hurry,” the lawyer said with provoking calmness. “Business is business, you see, and full confidences should never be exchanged in a situation of this kind until a contract is drawn up, signed, sealed, witnessed, and recorded. In other words, I ought to have an understanding and a retainer before I go any farther.”

Mrs. Graham had no reason to doubt that this was coming sooner or later, but she winced nevertheless when it came.

CHAPTER XV.

LANGFORD GETS A CHECK.

“I hope you realize, Mr. Langford, that we are not exactly made of money,” Mrs. Graham remarked tentatively by way of meeting the demand which she read between his words. “Moreover, we were under heavy expenses during the last year and you got a good deal of what we paid out.”

“Not so very much,” Langford corrected, from his point of view. “You must remember that I was working for you through another man and he handled the pay roll, on which he and I were the only payees, and naturally he took what he didn’t absolutely have to give to me.”

“Well, how much do you want for this service?” the woman inquired.

“I ought to have at least \$25 a day and my expenses,” the lawyer answered.

“Absolutely out of the question. That’s several times the amount of our income from the source you are interested in. And a considerable part of that has to go for the boy’s clothing, board and education.”

“That is one of the important points to which I am coming,” Langford interrupted. “I come to inform you that Mrs. Hutchins is very much interested in how the boy is being clothed and fed and educated, and also how he⁷⁶ is being treated, and she has decided to find those things out.”

“It’s a case of her old suspicions being revived?” Mrs. Graham asked.

“I suppose so; anyway, she’s mighty suspicious.”

“Who’s been peddling stories to her?”

“That’s something I didn’t find out.”

“Don’t you think a \$25-a-day man ought to find out?”

“Perhaps; and perhaps I could have discovered that very thing if I had thought it wise to spend the time on it. After the mischief was done, it seemed hardly worth while to expend any effort to find the mischief maker. I decided it was best to get after the mischief itself and stop it.”

“I suppose you’re right,” assented Mrs. Graham. “But it really would be a lot of satisfaction to know who the traitor is.”

“This is no time to waste any of your efforts on revenge. That may come later, not now. But how about my fee?”

“You ask too much.”

“I don’t agree with you. That is a very small fee, compared with what some attorneys get. Why, I know lawyers who never take a case under \$100 a day.”

“That’s in the big cities, where they are under heavy expenses—costly offices and office help.”

“Where do you get your information?”

“Oh, I have traveled and lived,” the woman⁷⁷ replied with emphasis on the last word. “And I know there are plenty of judges who get only \$10 a day, some less. Now, what do you think of that? Do you think you ought to get more than a judge?”

“Oh, fudge on the judges,” Langford exclaimed in affected disgust. “No big lawyer will take one of those political jobs. There are lots of big lawyers making \$50,000 or \$100,000 a year, and there are few judges getting more than \$10,000.”

“Well, I can’t pay more than \$10 a day, and I can’t pay that very long. We’re under heavy expenses here and in Baltimore.”

“You ought to economize, Mrs. Graham,” Langford advised. “Remember, this special income can’t last forever. The boy is past 10 years old now, and if nobody takes it away from you earlier, it will stop when he is 21.”

“Take it away!” Mrs. Graham exclaimed in a startled manner, indicating that her apprehension had not carried her imagination as far as this.

“Sure—why not?” the lawyer returned. “What do you think all this talk about spies has been leading up to?—a Christmas present? If Mrs. Hutchins is suspicious enough to send a lot of spies here to get the goods on you, don’t you think she has some notion of taking some sort of drastic action?”

“What kind of ‘goods’ does she expect to get on me?” the woman inquired.

“Can’t you guess?”⁷⁸

“I can’t imagine, dream, or suspect.”

“Just hurry things along to an agreement tween you and me, and I’ll tell you.”

“I’ll give you \$10 a day and reasonable expenses. That doesn’t include your board; only your carfare and such incidentals when you’re away from home. That is all conditioned, of course, on your proving to my satisfaction that you have the information you say you have. There’s no use of my fighting for this income if I have to pay it all out without getting my benefit from it.”

“I’ll try not to be so hard on you as all that,” Langford reassured the woman. “I accept your offer, although it’s the minimum I would consider. I suppose you are prepared to give me a check today?”

“Yes, I can give you something—your expenses thus far and maybe a little besides. Now hurry up and tell your story.”

“I can do it in a few words. Mrs. Hutchins has sent a dozen or more girls up here to find out how you treat the youngster and if he is well fed, clothed and educated. She’s received word from some source to the contrary and is planning to take him away if she discovers that her suspicions are true. These spies are all Camp Fire Girls who were camping on her farm. One of them is her niece. The proof of my statement that they are here to spy on you is in their plan to camp near your cottage and cultivate an intimate acquaintance with your family,

particularly your two daughters. Two⁷⁹ of them were up here looking over the lay of the ground; maybe they're here yet. Undoubtedly you'll see something of them tomorrow or the next day."

Mrs. Graham's eyes flashed dangerously. Langford saw the menace in her look and manner.

"As I am now in your employ as counsel," he said, "I'll begin giving advice at once. Cut out this hate business. It's your worst enemy. Just be all smiles and dimples and give them the sweetest con game welcome imaginable. Pretend to be delighted to meet the bunch of Camp Fire Girls. Tell them you had long held their organization in the highest esteem. Take your two daughters into your full confidence. Tell them they must play their part, too, and play it well. They must be eager to become Camp Fire Girls and seek to be chummy with the spies.

"And as for the boy, in whom they are specially interested, you must treat him as if you regard him the dearest little darling on earth." (Mrs. Graham's face soured at this suggestion.) "No, none of that, or you'll spoil the whole game. Mrs. Hutching means business, and all she needs to do is to prove a few acts of cruelty and neglect, and any court in the land will give her speedy custody of the child, in view of the provisions of his father's will, which, you know, are very exacting of you and very friendly toward Mrs. Hutchins and her late husband. By the way where are⁸⁰ the child and the other members of your family?"

"My husband is in Baltimore working at his regular employment," Mrs. Graham answered. "I expect him here next week; his vacation begins then. My son, James, Jr., went up the lakes this morning with some friends of his. Addie, my oldest daughter, went to Twin Lakes to do some shopping, and the other girl, Olga, is in the next room with Glen."

"By the way, Mrs. Graham, how well is the boy supplied with clothing?" Langford inquired.

"He has some good suits," Mrs. Graham replied slowly as if going over Glen's wardrobe piece by piece, in her mind.

"Dress him up in his best and get some more for special occasions. You might be working on some article of clothing for him also. That would indicate strongly that you are interested in his welfare.

"Now, if you don't mind, I will take my check and go. I'll be back again, but don't think it advisable to come often. I have prepared a short telephone cipher code by which we can carry on a commonplace conversation over the wire and let each other know if all is well or if trouble is brewing or has already broken. Here is a copy of it."

Mrs. Graham wrote the lawyer a check for \$35, and he arose to depart.

"Remember," he said as he stood facing the woman schemer at the doorway; "the success⁸¹ of this little plan of ours rests in the ability of yourself and other members of the family to play the most spontaneously genteel game the cleverest persons ever planned. If you fall down on this, undoubtedly you'll lose your handsome side-issue income of \$3,500 a year."

Then he went out, cranked his rented automobile, and drove away.

CHAPTER XVI.

LANGFORD CHECKS UP.

The twelve girls in the boat landed and proceeded with Katherine and Hazel up the steps to the top of the Point, where a conference was held. The two advance scouts reported developments in detail, much to the interest and delight of the other girls. The progress made thus far was so encouraging that everybody showed a disposition of impatience at the first sign of inactivity.

“We must go right back and get permission from Mr. Ferris to locate our camp somewhere near the Graham home,” said Katherine. “We ought to get our tents pitched just as soon as possible, and we mustn’t run any risk of not being able to find Mr. Ferris today.”

“Don’t you think it would help to allay their suspicions if we all remained here a while and looked around as if interested in the scenery just as tourists?” Azalia Atwood suggested.

“No, I don’t,” Katherine replied quickly. “Either that man Langford suspects us or he doesn’t. If he suspects us, he has grounds for his suspicion, and any such attempt to throw him off the track would result in failure. I think we had better assume that he knows what we are up to and act accordingly, without appearing to admit it.”

“But won’t they try to cover up the evidence that we are after?” Julietta Hyde reasoned.⁸³

“Of course they will,” Katherine answered.

“That will be one of the most interesting features of this adventure,” said Helen Nash, who already had a reputation wider than the Camp Fire circle for natural shrewdness. “When they begin to do that, we’ll have some great fun.”

“Can’t you point out from the lake the place or places where you think it would be well for us to locate our camp?” Miss Ladd inquired, addressing Hazel and Katherine.

“You can get a pretty good view of it right from here,” Hazel replied. “It’s right up the shore between those two cottages which are about the same distance up from the water and have similar paths and flights of steps running down to their boat landings. Between those two places is a stretch of timberland that doesn’t seem to be used by anybody in particular. We didn’t explore it because we didn’t have time, but it surely must contain some good camping places. We saw several small open spots near the road that could be used if nothing better is found. We must make a thorough inspection, of course, before we select a site, but that won’t take long and can be done when we bring our outfit up here.”

“We ought to take a run in the boat along the shore and see if we can’t find a good landing place,” Katherine suggested. “Wouldn’t it be delightful if we could find a suitable place on the side of that hill and overlooking the lake? Let’s take enough time for that.”⁸⁴

“It’s a good idea,” said Miss Ladd warmly. “Let’s do that at once and then run back to Twin Lakes. But remember, girls, don’t say anything about our mission on the boat. The boatman would be sure to start some gossip that probably would reach the ears of the very persons we want to keep in the dark as much as possible.”

They were soon back in the large canopied motorboat, and Miss Ladd gave instructions to the pilot. The latter cranked his engine, took his place at the wheel, and backed the vessel away from the landing. A few moments later the “Big Twin,” as the owner facetiously named the boat to distinguish it from a smaller one which he called the “Little Twin,” was dashing along the wooded hill-shore which extended nearly a mile to the north from Stony Point. They obtained a good view of the section of the shore just north of the Graham cottage and picked out several spots which appeared from the distance viewed to be very good camping sites. Then the prow of the boat was turned to the south and they cut along at full speed toward Twin Lakes.

The run was quickly made, and Katherine and Hazel hastened at once to the Ferris real estate office and presented their petition to Mr. Ferris in person. The latter was much interested when he learned that a Fire of Camp Fire Girls desired permission to pitch their tents on land of which he was the local⁸⁵ agent, and still more interested when informed that they were students at Hiawatha Institute whose reputation was well known to him. He gave them a pen-and-ink drawing of the vicinity, indicating the approximate lines of the lands owned or leased by cottagers then in possession, and granted them permission, free of charge, to locate their camp at any place they desired so long as they did not encroach on the rights of others.

An hour later the squint-eyed man whose activities have already created much of interest in this narrative entered the office of Mr. Ferris and inquired:

“Are you agent for that land along the lake just north of Stony Point?”

“I am,” the real estate man replied.

“Do you allow campers to pitch their tents on the land for a week or two at a time?”

“I don’t object if they are all right. I always require some sort of credentials. I wouldn’t allow strangers to squat there without giving me some kind of notice. I granted permission to a bunch of Camp Fire Girls today to pitch their tents there.”

“Is that so? Where are they going to locate?”

“Just beyond the Graham cottage, if you know where that is.”

“That is where some friends of mine would like to camp,” said Langford in an affected tone of disappointment.

“I don’t think I’d care to grant any more⁸⁶ permits in that vicinity,” Mr. Ferris announced rather meditatively. “I feel rather a personal interest in the girls and don’t want any strangers to pitch a camp too near them. Your friends might, perhaps, locate half a mile farther up the shore.”

“I’ll tell them what you say,” Langford said as he left the office.

Five minutes later he was in a telephone booth calling for No. 123-M. A woman answered the ring.

“Is this Mrs. Graham?” he inquired.

“Yes,” was the reply.

“This is Langford. I just called to inform you that the parties we were talking about have obtained permission to camp near your cottage. You’ll probably see something of them tomorrow.”

“Thank you.”

“And I’ll be at your place tomorrow afternoon between 3 and 4 o’clock.”

“I’ll expect you.”

That ended the conversation.

CHAPTER XVII.

A DAY OF HARD WORK.

That evening Miss Ladd received the letter that Mrs. Hutchins had announced in her telegram addressed to the Guardian on the train, would follow that communication. She did not discuss the matter with any of the girls, but quietly passed it around until all had read it.

In her letter Mrs. Hutchins stated little that had not been read between the lines of the telegram, although her views and comments on the circumstances were interesting. She had seen Pierce Langford arrive at the station just as the train was pulling in, buy a ticket and board the train just as it was pulling out. Curiosity, stirred perhaps by the recollection that this man had recently represented interests hostile to the mission of the Thirteen Camp Fire Girls and their Guardian, and might still represent those interests, caused her to inquire of the agent for what point Mr. Langford had purchased his ticket. The reply was “Twin Lakes.”

That was sufficient. The woman asked for a telegram pad and wrote a few lines. Then she gave the message to the operator with these directions:

“I want that to catch Miss Ladd in the limited as soon as possible. Keep it going from 88 station to station until it is delivered. Have the operator who succeeds in getting the message into Miss Ladd’s hands wire back ‘delivered’ as soon as she receives it.”

On the day following the advance excursion and inspection of the camping prospects at Stony Point, the “Big Twin” was engaged again to convey the Camp Fire Girls to the prospective camping place. On this occasion the tents and other paraphernalia were taken aboard and

conveyed to the scene of the proposed camp. The boat skirted along the shore and a careful examination was made to discover landing places that might provide access from the lake to such camping sites as might later be found.

Several good landing places were found. The one they selected tentatively as a mooring for the boat was a large flat-rock projection a few hundred yards north of the Graham pier. A comparatively level shore margin extended back nearly a hundred feet from this rock to the point, where the wooded incline began. The boatman and a boy of eighteen who had been engaged to assist in handling the heavier paraphernalia, remained in the boat while the girls started off in pairs to explore the nearby territory for the most advantageous and available site.

They came together again half an hour later and compared notes. The result was that the report made by Marion Stanlock and Harriet Newcomb proved the most interesting. They⁸⁹ had found a pretty nook half way up the side of the hill shore and sheltered by a bluff on the inland side and trees and bushes at either end, so that no storm short of a hurricane could seriously damage a well-constructed camp in this place. The area was considerable, quite sufficient for the pitching of the complement of tents of the Fire.

After all the girls had inspected this proposed site in a body, a unanimous vote was taken in favor of its adoption. This being their decision, they returned without delay to the boat and the work of carrying their camping outfit a distance of some three hundred yards was begun.

The pilot and the boy assistant took the heavier luggage while the girls carried the lighter articles and supplies. In this manner everything was transported to the camp site in about an hour. The pilot and the boy then assisted in the work of putting up the tents, and after this was finished they were paid and dismissed.

Everything went along smoothly while all this was being done. Not another person appeared in sight during this period, except the occupants of several boats that motored by. The Graham cottage was about a quarter of a mile to the south and farther up on the hill, but the screen of dense foliage shut it off from view at the girls' camp.

All the rest of the day was required to put the camp into good housekeeper's condition. The⁹⁰ light folding cots had to be set up and got ready for sleeping, the kitchen tent also required much domestic art and ingenuity for the most convenient and practical arrangement, and a fireplace for cooking had to be built with rocks brought up principally from the water's edge.

So eager were they to finish all this work that they did not stop to prepare much of a luncheon. They ate hurriedly-prepared sandwiches, olives, pickles, salmon, and cake, and drank lemonade, picnic style, and kept at their camp preparation "between bites," as it were. In the evening, however, they had a good Camp Fire Girls' supper prepared by Hazel Edwards, Julietta Hyde and the Guardian. Then they sat around their fire and chatted, principally about the beauty of the scenery on every hand.

But they were tired girls and needed no urging to seek rest on their cots as the sun sunk behind the hills on the opposite side of the lake. The move "bedward" was almost simultaneous and the drift toward slumberland not far behind. They had one complete day undisturbed with anything of a mysterious or startling nature, and it was quite a relief to find

it possible to seek a night's repose after eight or nine hours of diligent work without being confronted with apprehensions of some impending danger or possible defeat of their plans.

CHAPTER XVIII.

PLANNING.

Next morning the girls all awoke bright and early, thoroughly refreshed by their night's rest. A breakfast of bacon, flapjacks and maple syrup, bread and butter and chocolate invigorated them for a new day of camp life in a new place.

Their program was already pretty well mapped out, being practically the same as that followed while in camp in Fern Hollow near Fairberry. They still did some work on certain lines arranged under the honor lists of the craft, but were giving particular attention to knitting and sewing for the Red Cross, which they aided in an auxiliary capacity.

The program regularly followed by the girls required three hours of routine work each day. This they usually performed between the hours of 7 and 10 or 8 and 11, depending upon the time of their getting up and the speed with which they disposed of the early morning incidentals.

On this morning, in spite of the fact that they had gone to bed thoroughly tired as a result of the exertions of the preceding day, the girls arose shortly after 6 o'clock and by 7:30 all were engaged in various record-making occupations, including the washing of the breakfast dishes and the making of the beds and the general tidying-up of the camp.⁹²

After the routine had been attended to, the girls took a hike for the purpose of exploring the country to the north of their camp. This exploration extended about two miles along the shore, their route being generally the automobile road that skirted the lake at varying distances of from a few rods to a quarter of a mile from the water's edge, depending upon the configuration of the shore line.

During much of this hike, Katherine, Hazel and Miss Ladd walked together and discussed plans for creating a condition of affairs that might be expected to produce results in harmony with the purpose of their mission. They were all at sea at first, but after a short and fruitless discussion of what appeared to be next to nothing, Katherine made a random suggestion which quickly threw a more hopeful light on affairs.

"It seems to me that we've got to do something that will attract attention," she said. "We'll have to do some sensational, or at least lively, stunts so that everybody will know we are here and will want to know who we are."

"That's the very idea," Miss Ladd said eagerly.

Katherine was a little startled at this reception of her suggestion. When she spoke, she was merely groping for an idea. But Miss Ladd's approval woke her up to a realization that she had unwittingly hit the nail on the head.

"Yes," she said, picking up the thread of a real idea as she proceeded; "we have got to attract attention. That's the only way we can get the people in whom we are most interested to show an interest in us."

"What shall we do?" Hazel inquired.

"Map out a spectacular program of some sort," Katherine replied. "We might build a big bonfire, for one thing, on the shore tonight and go through some of our gym exercises, including folk dances."

"Good," said Hazel. "Let's start off with that. And tomorrow we can have some games that will make it necessary for us to run all over the country—hare and hounds, for instance."

"We ought to find a good safe swimming place near our camp, too," Katherine said.

"Let's look for one this afternoon," Miss Ladd suggested.

"How will we test it?" Hazel inquired.

"That's easy," the Guardian replied. "We'll use poles to try the depth and then one of us will swim out with one end of a rope attached to her and the other end in the hands of two of the girls ready to haul in if she needs assistance. In that way we will be able to locate a good swimming place and not run any risk of anybody's being drowned."

"We've got a good starter, anyway," Katherine remarked in a tone of satisfaction. "By the time we've taken care of those items something more of the same character ought to occur to us. Yes, that's the very way to interest the Grahams in our presence and open the way for an acquaintance."

The three now separated and mingled with the other girls who were some distance ahead or behind, and communicated the new plan to all of them. It was received with general approval and was the main topic of conversation until they all returned to the camp for luncheon.

CHAPTER XIX.

WATCHED.

After luncheon, the girls, with two sharp hatchets among them, began a search through the timber for some long, slim saplings. After a half hour's search they were in possession of three straight cottonwood poles, ten or twelve feet long, and with these in their possession,

they began an examination of the water-depth along the shore for a safe and suitable bathing place.

They might have used their fishing rods for this purpose, but these were not serviceable, as they were of extremely light material and, moreover, were hardly long enough for this purpose. The saplings proved to be excellent “feelers” and the work progressed rapidly from the start.

About 200 yards north of their camp was a sandy beach which extended along the shore a considerable distance. It was here that the girls made their first under-water exploration. They tied a rough stone near one end of each of the poles to increase its specific gravity and then proceeded to “feel” for depth along the water’s edge.

Careful examination with these poles failed to disclose a sudden drop from the gradual downward slope of the beach into the water, so that there appeared to be no treacherous⁹⁶ places near the shore. Satisfied in this respect, they now arranged for a further test. Azalia Atwood, who was an excellent swimmer, returned to the camp, donned a bathing suit, and then rejoined the other girls, bringing with her a long rope of the clothesline variety. One end of this was looped around her waist, and Marion Stanlock had an opportunity to exhibit her skill at tying a bowline.

While two of the girls held the rope and played it out, Azalia advanced into the water, stepping ahead carefully in order to avoid a surprise of any sort resulting from some hidden danger under the surface of the lake. To some, all this caution might seem foolish, inasmuch as Azalia swam well, but one rule of, Flamingo Camp Fire prohibited even the best swimmers from venturing into water more than arm-pit deep unless they were at a beach provided with expert life-saving facilities.

The purpose of Azalia’s exploration was to wade over as large an area of lake bottom as possible and establish a certainty that it was free from deep step-offs, “bottomless” pockets and treacherous undertow. Soon it became evident that she had a bigger undertaking before her than she had reckoned on, for the bed of the lake sloped very gradually at this point, and Katherine Crane and Estelle Adler volunteered to assist her.

“All right,” said Azalia, welcoming the suggestion. “Go and put on your bathing suits and bring a few more hanks of rope. Better⁹⁷ bring all there is there, for we probably can use it.”

Katherine and Estelle hastened back to camp and in a short time returned, clad in their bathing suits and carrying several hundred feet of rope. In a few minutes they too were in the water and taking part in the exploration, protected against treacherous conditions as Azalia was protected.

In half an hour they had explored and pronounced safe as large a bathing place as their supply of rope would “fence in” and then began the “fencing” process. They cut several stout stakes six feet long and took them to the water’s edge. Then the three girls in bathing suits assumed their new duty as water pile-drivers. They took one of the stakes at a time to a point along the proposed boundary line of the bathing place, also a heavy mallet that had been brought along for this purpose. A wooden mallet, by the way, was much more serviceable than a hatchet for such work, inasmuch as, if dropped, it would not sink, and moreover, it could be wielded with much less danger of injury to any of those working together in the water.

The first stake was taken to the northwest corner of the proposed inclosure. Katherine, who carried the mallet, gave it to Estelle and then climbed to a sitting posture on the latter's shoulders. Then Azalia stood the stake on its sharpened end and Katherine took hold of it with one hand and began to drive down⁹⁸ on the upper end with the mallet, which Estelle handed back to her.

It was hard work for several reasons—hard for Estelle to maintain a steady and firm posture under the moving weight, hard for Katherine to wield the mallet with unerring strokes, hard to force the sharpened point into the well-packed bed of the lake. Katherine's right arm became very tired before she had driven the stake deep enough to insure a reasonable degree of firmness. While this task was being performed, the girls were still protected against the danger of being swept into deeper water by the ropes looped around their waists and held at the other ends by some of the girls on the sandy beach.

After this stake had been set firmly into the river bed, the girls returned to the shore and got another. This they took to another position about the same distance from the beach as the first one and drove it into the hardened loam under the water. The same process was continued until six such stakes had been driven.

Then they took up the work of extending rope from stake to stake and completing the inclosure. The sags were supported by buoys of light wood tied to the rope, the two extreme ends of which were attached to stakes driven into the shore close to the water.

"There, that is what I call a pretty good job," declared Miss Ladd gazing with proud satisfaction upon the result of more than three hours' steady work. "Whenever you⁹⁹ girls come out here to go bathing, you will be well warranted in assuming that you have earned your plunge."

All the girls by this time had their bathing suits on, but most of them were too tired to remain in the water any longer; so, by common consent, all adjourned to the camp to rest until suppertime.

"Well, it appears that our activities have not yet aroused any special interest in the Graham household," Hazel Edwards observed as they began their march back toward the sheltered group of tents.

"I'm not so certain of that," Miss Ladd replied.

"Why not?" Katherine inquired, while several of the girls who were near looked curiously at the Guardian.

"Because I believe I have seen evidences of interest."

"You have!" exclaimed two or three unguardedly.

"Now, girls, you are forgetting yourselves," said Miss Ladd warningly. "Remember that the first requisite of skill in your work here is caution. The reason I didn't say anything to you about what I saw is that I was afraid some of you might betray your interest in the fact that we were being watched. I saw two girls half hidden in a clump of bushes up near the top of the hill. I am sure they were watching us. They were there at least half an hour."

CHAPTER XX.

THE MISSILE.

Five of the members of the Camp Fire were present when Miss Ladd made this startling announcement that they had been watched secretly for a considerable time while roping off the limits of their swimming place. The other girls had taken the lead back to the camp and were a considerable distance ahead.

“Are they watching us yet?” Azalia asked.

“I think not,” the Guardian replied. “I haven’t seen any sign of them during the last twenty minutes.”

“How do you know they are girls?” Katherine inquired. “That’s quite a distance to recognize ages.”

“Oh, they may be old women, but I’ll take a chance on a guess that they are not. The millinery I caught a peep at looked too chic for a grandmother. I’ve got pretty good long-distance eyes, I’ll have you know,” Miss Ladd concluded smartly.

There was no little excitement among the other girls when this bit of news was communicated to them. But they had had good experience-training along the lines of self-control, and just a hint of the unwisdom of loud and extravagant remarks put them on their guard.

Some of the girls proposed that the plan of building a bonfire in the evening be given up and nobody objected to this suggestion. All the girls felt more like resting under the shade of a tree than doing anything else, and those who had performed the more arduous tasks in the work of the afternoon were “too tired to eat supper,” as one of them expressed it. So nobody felt like hunting through the timber for a big supply of firewood.

The atmosphere had become very warm in the afternoon, but the girls hardly noticed this condition until their work in the water was finished and they returned to the camp. After they had rested a while some of the girls read books and magazines, but little was done before supper.

After supper some of the girls, who felt more vigorous than those who had performed the more exhausting labor of the afternoon, revived the idea of a bonfire and were soon at work gathering a supply of wood. They busied themselves at this until nearly dusk and then called the other girls down to the water’s edge, where on a large rocky ledge arrangements for the fire had been made.

All of the girls congratulated themselves now on the revival of the bonfire idea, for the mosquitos had become so numerous that comfort was no longer possible without some

agency to drive them away. A bonfire was just the thing, although it would make the closely surrounding atmosphere uncomfortably warm.¹⁰²

Even the girls who had performed the hardest tasks in the “fencing in” of their swimming place were by this time considerably rested and enjoyed watching the fire seize the wood and then leap up into the air as if for bigger prey.

“Let’s sing,” proposed Harriet Newcomb after the fire had grown into a roaring, crackling blaze, throwing a brilliant glow far out onto the water.

“What shall it be?” asked Ethel Zimmerman.

“Burn Fire, Burn,” Hazel Edwards proposed.

“Marion, you start it,” Miss Ladd suggested, for Marion Stanlock was the “star” soprano of the Fire.

In a moment the well-trained voices of fourteen Camp Fire Girls were sending the clear operatic strains of a special adaptation of the fire chant of the Camp Fire ritual. The music had been composed and arranged by Marion Stanlock and Helen Nash a few months previously, and diligent practice had qualified the members of the Camp Fire to render the production impressively.

This song was succeeded by a chorus-rendering of a similar adaptation of the Fire Maker’s Song. Then followed an impromptu program of miscellaneous songs, interspersed here and there with such musical expressions of patriotism as “America,” “Star Spangled Banner,” and “Over There,” in evidence of a¹⁰³ mindfulness of the part of the United States in the great international struggle for democracy.

Meanwhile dusk gathered heavier and heavier, the stars came out, and still the fire blazed up brightly and the girls continued to sing songs and tell stories and drink in the vigor and inspiration of the scene. At last, however, the Guardian announced that it was 9 o’clock, which was Flamingo’s curfew, and there was a general move to extinguish the fire, which by this time had been allowed to burn low.

Suddenly all were startled by an astonishing occurrence. A heavy object, probably a stone as large as a man’s fist, fell in the heap of embers, scattering sparks and burning sticks in all directions. There was a chorus of screams, and a frantic examination, by the girls, of one another’s clothes to see if any of them were afire.

CHAPTER XXI.

“SH!”

“Who in the world do you suppose did that?” Hazel Edwards exclaimed, as she hastily examined her own clothes and then quickly struck out a spark that clung to the skirt of Azalia Atwood.

“Quick, girls,” cried Miss Ladd; “did any of you do that?”

There was a chorus of indignant denials. No room for doubt remained now that the missile had been hurled by someone outside the semicircle near the bonfire.

All eyes were turned back toward the timber a short distance away, but not a sign of a human being could they see in that direction.

“If we’d been on the other side of the bonfire, we’d have got that shower of sparks right in our faces and all over us,” Katherine Crane said indignantly.

“We ought to find out who threw that rock, or whatever it was,” Ethel Zimmerman declared. “It must be a very dangerous person, who ought to be taken care of.”

“If that sort of thing is repeated many times, some of us probably will have to be taken care of,” observed Julietta Hyde.

“Listen!” Miss Ladd interrupted, and the occasion of her interruption did not call for explanation. All heard it. A moment later it was repeated.¹⁰⁵

“Wohelo!”

“No Camp Fire Girl ever made such a noise as that,” said Helen Nash disdainfully.

“It sounds like a man’s voice,” Azalia Atwood remarked.

“I’ll bet a Liberty Bond that it is a man,” ventured Ruth Hazelton.

“Have you a Liberty Bond?” asked Helen.

“I’m paying for one out of my allowance,” Ruth replied.

Just then the “noise” was repeated, a hoarse hollow vocalization of the Camp Fire Watchword. This time it seemed to be farther away.

“The person who gave that call threw the missile into our bonfire,” said Miss Ladd in a tone of conviction. “If he bothers us any more we’ll find out who he is.”

The girls now turned their attention again to the fire. Several pails of water were carried from the lake and dashed into the embers until not a spark remained. Then they returned to their tents and to bed, although apprehensive of further disturbance before morning.

But they heard nothing more of the intruder that night.

Shortly after sunup, the girls arose, put on their bathing suits, and went down to the beach for a before-breakfast plunge. Marie Crismore and Violet Munday reached the water’s edge first,

and presently they were giving utterance to such unusual expressions, indicative seemingly of anything but pleasure¹⁰⁶ that the other girls hastened down to see what was the matter.

There was no need of explanation. The evidence was before them. The stakes that had been driven into the bed of the lake to hold the rope intended to indicate the safety limit had been pulled out and thrown upon the shore. The rope itself had disappeared.

“There surely are some malicious mischief makers in this vicinity,” Helen Nash observed. “I suppose the person who did that was the one who threw a stone into our bonfire and hooted our watchword so hideously.”

“What shall we do?” Violet Munday questioned. “We can’t let this sort of thing go on indefinitely.”

“We must complain to the authorities,” Ernestine Johanson suggested.

“Do you suppose they would do anything?” Estelle Adler asked. “I understand it’s very hard to get these country officials busy on anything except a murder or a robbery.”

“Then we must organize a series of relief watches and take the law into our own hands,” Katherine proposed.

“Spoken like a true soldier,” commented Miss Ladd approvingly. “I was going to suggest something of the same sort, although not quite so much like anarchy.”

“Where do you suppose they hid that rope?” Marion Stanlock inquired.

“Somebody probably needed a clothesline.”

“Here come some people who may be able¹⁰⁷ to throw some light on the situation,” said Marion.

All looked up and saw two girls apparently in their “upper teens,” dressed more suitably for an afternoon tea than a rustic outing. The latter were descending the wooded hill-shore, and had just emerged from a thick arboreal growth into a comparatively clear area a hundred yards away.

“Sh!” Katherine warned quickly. “Be careful what you say or do. Those are the Graham girls.”

CHAPTER XXII.

THE GRAHAM GIRLS CALL.

“They’re early risers; we must say that much for them,” observed Katherine in a low voice. “We must give them credit for not lying in bed until 10 o’clock and, and——”

“And for dressing for an afternoon party before breakfast,” Helen Nash concluded.

“Isn’t it funny!” Hazel Edwards said with a suppressed titter. “I wonder if they are going in bathing.”

“Keep still, girls,” Miss Ladd interposed. “They’re getting pretty near. Let’s not pay too much attention to them. Let them seek our acquaintance, not we theirs. The advantage will be on our side then.”

At this suggestion of the Guardian, the girls turned their attention again to the conditions about their bathing beach. A moment later Katherine made a discovery that centered all interest in unaffected earnest upon the latest depredation of their enemy, or enemies. With a stick she fished out one end of a small rope and was soon hauling away at what appeared to be the “clothes line” they had used to indicate the safety limits of their bathing place.

“Well, conditions are not as bad as they might be,” said Miss Ladd, as she took hold to assist at hauling the line out of the water.¹⁰⁹ “We have the stakes and the rope and can put them back into place.”

“Would you mind telling us what has happened?”

These words drew the attention of the Camp Fire Girls away from the object discovered in the water and to the speaker, who was one of the older of the urbanely clad summer resorters from the Graham cottage.

“Someone has been guilty of some very malicious mischief,” Miss Ladd replied. “We had roped in a bathing place after examining it and finding it safe for those who are not good swimmers, and you see what has been done with our work. The stakes were pulled up and the rope hidden in the water. Fortunately we have just discovered the rope.”

“Isn’t that mean!” said the younger girl, whom the campers surmised correctly to be Olga Graham.

“Mean is no name for it,” the other Graham girl declared vengefully. “Haven’t you any idea who did it?”

“None that is very tangible,” Miss Ladd replied. “There was a mysterious prowler near our camp last evening, but we didn’t catch sight of him. He threw a heavy stone into our bonfire and knocked the sparks and embers in every direction, but he kept himself hidden. A little later we heard a hideous call in the timbers, which we were pretty sure was intended to frighten us.”¹¹⁰

“That’s strange,” commented the older of the visitors.

“Maybe it’s the ghost,” suggested Olga with a faint smile.

“Ghost!” repeated several of the Camp Fire Girls in unison.

“I was just joking,” the younger Graham girl explained hurriedly.

“Why did you suggest a ghost even as a joke?” inquired Katherine. The utterance of the word ghost, together with the probability that there was a neighborhood story behind it, forced upon her imagination an irrational explanation of the strange occurrences of the last evening.

“Oh, I didn’t mean anything by it,” Olga reassured, but her words seemed to come with a slightly forced unnaturalness. “But there has been some talk about a ghost around here, you know.”

“Did anybody ever see it?” asked Hazel Edwards.

“Not that I know of,” avowed Olga. “Of course, I don’t believe in such things, but, then, you never can tell. It might be a half-witted person, and I’m sure I don’t know which I’d rather meet after dark—a ghost or a crazy man.”

“Is there a crazy man running loose around here?” Ernestine Johanson inquired with a shudder.

“There must be,” Olga declared with a suggestion of awe in her voice. “If it isn’t a ghost—and I don’t believe in such things—it must be somebody escaped from a lunatic asylum.”

“I saw something mysterious moving through the woods near our cottage one night,” Addie Graham interposed at this point. “Nobody else in the family would believe me when I told them about it. It looked like a man in a long white robe and long hair and a long white beard. It was moonlight and I was looking out of my bedroom window. Suddenly this strange being appeared near the edge of the timber. He was looking toward the house, and I suppose he saw me, for he picked up a stone and threw it at the window where I stood. It fell a few feet short of its mark, and then the ghost or the insane man—call him what you please—turned and ran away.”

“My sister told us about that next morning, and we all laughed at her,” said Olga, continuing the account. “I told her to go out and find the stone, and she went out and picked one up just about where she said the stone that was thrown at her fell.”

“Were there any other stones near there?” Marion Stanlock inquired.

“We looked around specially to find out if there were any others near, but didn’t find any,” Olga answered. “Addie—that’s my sister—had the laugh on us all after that.”

“Do you live in the cottage over there?” Ethel Zimmerman inquired, pointing toward Graham summer residence.

“Yes,” Addie replied. “Our name is Graham.112 We were very much interested when we learned that a company of Camp Fire Girls were camping near us.”

“Don’t you girls camp out any?” Katherine asked with the view of possibly bringing out an explanation of the Graham girls’ attire, which seemed suited more for promenading along a metropolitan boulevard than for any other purpose.

“Oh, dear no,” Olga answered somewhat deprecatingly. “We’d like to well enough, you know, but we’re in society so much that we just don’t have time.”

Katherine wanted to ask the Graham girls if they were going to a stylish reception before breakfast, but restrained the impulse.

Both Katherine and Hazel recognized Addie as the girl whom, on their first trip to Stony Point, they had seen handle roughly the little boy they believed to be Glen Irving, the grandnephew of Mrs. Hutchins’ late husband in whose interests they made the present trip of inspection. Whether or not she recognized among the campers the two girls to whom she had behaved so rudely on that occasion did not appear from her manner, which was all sweetness now. She continued her social discourse thus:

“I really wish society did not demand so much of our time, and I’m sure my sister feels the same way about it. There’s nothing we’d like better than to become Camp Fire Girls and live close to nature, you know, just the way you girls live. Truly it must be delightful. But when you become an integral figure in society (she really said integral), you are regarded as indispensable, and society won’t let go of you.”

None of the Camp Fire Girls attempted to reply to this speech. Their plan was to bring about an appearance of friendship between them and the Grahams in order that they might associate with the family that had custody of the little boy in whose interests they were working. Any attempt on their part, they felt, to discuss “society” from the point of view of the Graham girls must result in a betrayal of their utter lack of sympathy with this “social indispensability” of such helpless society victims.

“We’d like, however, to do something for you in your unfortunate situation,” Addie Graham continued with a gush of seeming friendliness. “I’m sure my brother James—he’s 16 years old—would be glad to assist you in any way he can. I’m going to send him down here, if you say the word, to help you extend that rope around your swimming place. He’s a very handy boy, and it would be much better for you to let him do the work than to perform such a laborious task yourselves.”

“Thank you ever so much,” returned Miss Ladd with a warmth that seemed to indicate acceptance of the offer. The truth was that anything which tended to increase friendly relations between them and the Grahams was acceptable.

“I’ll send him around today,” the older Graham girl promised. “We must hurry back now for breakfast. We were just out for an early morning constitutional, you know.”

“Come and see us any time you wish,” Miss Ladd urged. “You’ll always be welcome. We haven’t made the acquaintance of anybody around here yet. Come over and help us eat one of our constitutional luncheons, or suppers. We have real picnics every day, the jolliest kind of times—except when the ghost walks. Maybe you can help us catch the ghost, also.”

“Maybe we can,” said Addie. “Well, good-by. You girls come and see us, too.”

“Thank you,” was the acknowledgment uttered by several of the members of Flamingo Camp Fire as the two Misses Graham stepped primly in their French-heel shoes over the uneven

ground and returned homeward along a diagonal course up the side of the hill-shore of Twin One.

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CHAPTER XXIII.

“HIGH C.”

All the members of Flamingo Camp Fire gathered close together on the sandy beach after the departure of the two Graham girls and held a low-toned discussion of the situation.

“There was only one thing missing this morning,” Hazel Edwards observed. “That was the perfume. I suppose they didn’t have time to spill it on in proper proportions.”

“I wonder why they came down here at this time of day?” said Harriet Newcomb. “There must be something in the air.”

“I bet they never got up this early before unless their house was afire,” Ethel Zimmerman ventured.

“Do you suppose they wanted to be on hand to witness our discomfiture when we discovered what had been done to our swimming place?” Azalia Atwood asked.

“That would imply that they knew who did it and may even have been a party to the plot,” Miss Ladd reasoned.

“And why not?” Azalia returned. “They don’t look to me, for a moment, to be above it.”

“I feel like a miserable hypocrite,” Katherine declared with a sarcastic smile. “I’m not used to extending warm expressions of friendship to people for whom I haven’t any use and asking them to call and see me.”

“Remember you’re a spy now,” said Helen Nash slyly. “When engaged in a praiseworthy spy work, always remember your mother and the pantry and the fist in the jam, if you have any doubt as to the worthiness of your occupation.”

“Enough said,” Katherine announced, “I’m convinced. The jam is well spiced and I smell it already. I shall expect to find it on somebody’s fist.”

The girls did not forego their morning plunge because of the removal of the “safety line,” but were careful to keep well within the approximate limit which they remembered fairly well. After about fifteen minutes in the water they returned to the camp and donned their khaki middies; then they had breakfast.

The breakfast dishes had not long been washed and put away when another caller arrived at the camp. Although not unheralded, the appearance of this new arrival was a surprise to all

the girls, for they had not rested much importance upon the promise of Addie Graham to send her brother to them to offer his assistance in repairing the damage done by some mischief-maker in the night before.

The young male scion of the Graham family appeared so suddenly before the eyes of the girl campers that some of them afterward expressed the suspicion that he walked timidly on his tiptoes all the way from his home to the 117 camp. Indeed all the members of Flamingo Fire have today a decided impression that the sound of his voice was the first notice they had of his approach.

Whether this impression be a true one or not, that voice was enough to compel memory of it ahead of anything else. It was the most effeminately high-pitched voice the girls had ever heard.

“Excuse me, young ladies, but my name is James Graham, Jr.,” squeaked the treble clef.

There was a general start throughout the camp. Most of the girls were seated upon the grassy plot within the crescent arrangement of the tents and engaged in their forenoon routine, and several of them actually dropped their craft work into their laps so great was their surprise. Ethel Zimmerman uttered a little cry of astonishment in almost the same key as the announcement of the newcomer.

The latter was almost as effeminate in appearance as in voice. First, he was very much overgrown and fleshy. He probably weighed 150 pounds. His face was round and very pale, and his eyes were not over-endowed with expression. He wore a “peaches-and-cream” two-piece suit and a panama fedora and carried a delicate bamboo cane.

“My two thoughtful sisters info’med me that you young ladies were in need of the assistance of a man, and I volunteered to offer my aid,” continued young Master Graham.

“Oh dear me,” replied Katherine; “it would be a shame to put you to so much trouble. We thank you ever so much for your offer, but we’d much rather retain the friendship of your folks by urging you not to insist. If you really must be so good as you suggest, you might go back and send your hostler or chauffeur, but tell him to bring a pair of rubber boots that reach to his ears.”

This rather enigmatical answer puzzled the not very quick-witted James, Jr., and his chin dropped.

“You see, we want a pile-driver out in the lake to sink some posts into the submarine earth,” Katherine continued. “But, by the way, come to think of it, you might help us wonderfully if you have a rowboat and would lend it to us for an hour or two.”

“Sure I’ve got a boat,” replied the “would-(not)-be ladies’ aid,” as one of the girls afterward dubbed him. The tone of relief with which he now spoke was unmistakable. “I’ll go and row it right over to you.”

“We won’t want it until about 11 o’clock,” said Miss Ladd. “If you need it between now and then you’d better wait.”

“Oh we won’t want it all day,” James, Jr., returned reassuringly. “I’ll bring it right away.”

“I hope he doesn’t tip his boat over on his ‘high C’,” Hazel Edwards said generously, as the caller disappeared in the timber. “He might be drowned in the billows of his own voice.”¹¹⁹

“That’s his name—High C,” declared Estelle Adler enthusiastically. “I refuse to recognize him by any other name. Dear me, girls, did you ever in all your born days hear such a voice?”

“No,” cried several in chorus.

“He’s just the dearest thing I ever saw,” declared Ernestine Johanson, making a face as sour as the reputation of a crabapple.

At this moment the discussion of “High C” was dropped as suddenly as “it” had appeared upon the scene. Another arrival claimed the interest of the girls.

It was a little boy about ten years old, clad in steel-gray Palm Beach knickerbockers and golf cap, but not at all happy in appearance. He was a good looking youth, but there was no sprightly cheerfulness in his countenance. He seemed nervous and on the alert.

“My goodness!” exclaimed Hazel Edwards; “that’s Glen Irving, the little boy we——”

Katherine, who was seated close to Hazel, cut the latter’s utterance short by clapping her hand over the speaker’s mouth.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE RUNAWAY.

The boy was excited. Evidently he was laboring under anything but normal conditions. He had appeared very suddenly around the north end of the bluff which sheltered the camp on the east. “High C” or “Jimmie Junior,” as the girls from now on referred to young Graham, had left the camp around the south extremity of the bluff.

The youth in Palm Beach knickerbockers fairly rushed from the thicket north of the camp and directly toward the girls, all of whom jumped to their feet in astonishment. The newcomer did not slacken his pace, but ran up to the group of startled campers as if seeking their protection from a “Bogy Man.” And as he stopped in the midst of the group which circled around him almost as excited as he, the little fellow looked back as if expecting to behold some frightful looking object bearing down upon him.

“I ran away,” were his first words; “so—so they couldn’t beat me.”

“Who wanted to beat you?” inquired Miss Ladd sympathetically, leaning over and taking him gently by the hand.

“Mom—an’ Ad.—an’ Olg.—an’ Jim—they all hit me,” he replied, his eyes flashing with anger. “Mom locked me in a room, but I121 opened a window an’ clum out.”

“Did they beat you today?” Hazel Edwards questioned.

“No,” replied the youth with a puzzled look; “they don’t want you to know they whipped me. They stopped it after you came and after a man came and told ’em not to.”

“Who is the man?” Hazel asked.

“I don’t know. I heard his name, but I forgot.”

“Was it Langford?”

“Yes, that’s it—Langford. He told ’em all to be good as pie to me while you was here. They thought I was asleep, but I was just pretendin’.”

“Did Mr. Langford say why they must be good to you while we were here?” asked Katherine.

“I guess he did,” the boy replied slowly. “He said somebody’d take me away and Mom ’u’d lose a lot o’ money.”

“That’s just what we thought,” Hazel declared.

“What else did you overhear?” Katherine inquired.

“They’re goin’ to be awful nice and awful mean.”

“Awful nice and awful mean,” Katherine repeated. “That’s interesting. What do you mean by that?”

“They’re goin’ to be awful nice to your face, but mean on the sly.”

“Have they done anything mean yet?” Miss122 Ladd interposed, having in mind the depredations of the night before.

“I don’t know,” the boy answered. “They were talkin’ about doing somethin’ last night, and the man and Jim went out together.”

“You don’t know what they proposed to do?”

“No—just somethin’, anything they could.”

“What is your name, little boy?” Hazel asked.

“Glen” was the answer.

“Glen what?”

“Glen Graham.”

“Isn’t it Glen Irving?”

The boy looked doubtfully at his interrogator.

“I don’t know,” he replied slowly. “I guess not.”

“Didn’t you ever hear the name Irving before?”

The boy’s face brightened up suddenly.

“That was my papa’s name,” he said eagerly.

“Now, I want to ask you an important question,” said Miss Ladd impressively. “Try your best to tell us all you can, and don’t tell any of the Grahams you were down here talking to us. We won’t forget you. If they beat you any more come, and tell us if you can get away. We’ll have the police after them. But be sure to keep this to yourself. Now, here’s the question I want you to answer: Did anybody outside of the Graham family ever see them beat you?”

“Sure,” Glen replied quickly. “Byron Scott did. So did Mrs. Pruitt and Guy Davis and Mark Taylor.”

“Where do they live?” was Miss Ladd’s next question.

“Byron lives here, so does Mrs. Pruitt. Guy and Mark live in Baltimore.”

“Do they live near the Graham’s home in Baltimore?”

“Yes, right in the same block. Mark lives next door.”

“Good. Now, Glen, we are going to take you back to Mrs. Graham. We haven’t any right to keep you here, but if they beat you any more, we will complain to the police and take you away never to come back to them.”

“Oh, I wish you would,” exclaimed the little fellow, throwing his arms around the neck of the Guardian who had seated herself on the grass before him. “I don’t want them to scare you with a ghost.”

“Scare us with a ghost!” Miss Ladd repeated in astonishment. “What do you mean by that?”

“They said——” the boy began, but his explanation was interrupted in a manner so confusing that the group of Camp Fire Girls might easily have wondered if the world were suddenly assuming all the absurdities of a clownish paradise in order to be consistent with what was now taking place.¹²⁴

Addie Graham, the girl of ultra-style and perfume who had behaved so rudely to little Glen when she discovered the runaway with Katherine and Hazel in the woods, suddenly dashed into the deeply interested group of Camp Fire inquisitors, seized the boy in her arms, kissed him with apparent passionate fondness, and addressed him with a gush of endearment that must have brought tears to the eyes of an unsophisticated listener.

CHAPTER XXV.

A LITTLE SCRAPPER.

“Oh, you dear little brother, you dear darling child,” almost sobbed Addie as she seized Glen Irving in her arms and began to shower kisses on his unwilling face.

The boy shrunk away, or into as small a compass as he was able, to escape from the “affectionate attack.” Plainly it was anything but pleasing to him.

The “attack,” however, did not cease in response to his protest. Addie held onto her captive with all her strength, at the same time attempting to soothe his wrath or fear, or both, with as many kisses as she could force in between the boy’s belligerent arms. Glen, conscious of the presence of friends who, he believed, would go to any extreme to assist him, fought as he had never fought before, desperately, viciously. He used his fists and fingernails to good purpose and pulled Addie’s hair until it presented a ludicrous appearance of disarrangement.

Realizing that the boy’s actions might prove harmful to his cause if this affair should ever be contested in the courts, Miss Ladd decided to take a hand and do what she could to pacify the young heir who had suddenly been transformed into a veritable wildcat. She had no doubt that there was good cause in his past experience for the development of such character in him, but expediency demanded that it be checked at once.

“Here, let me take him,” Miss Ladd urged as she laid her hands on his shoulders and attempted to draw him away. A few gentle words and an exhibition of a kind persuasiveness of manner brought success. She drew the lad back some distance and tried to reason with him, whereupon he burst into convulsive sobbing.

His sobs were not a new expression of an outburst of passion. Miss Ladd was certain of this. Little Glen was weeping not because anger “opened the floodgates of his soul,” but because of some picture of dread in his past experience which he feared would be repeated in the future.

But Addie Graham was not equal to the occasion. The veneer of gentleness that she had put on could not withstand the deep-seated spitefulness of her nature, and as she observed a severe scratch on one hand and felt the disarrangement of her hair, she yielded impulsively to vengefulness of spirit that was boiling within her and exclaimed:

“The miserable little pest! Just wait till I get you home, Glen Graham, and I’ll——”

She stopped right there, much to the disappointment of the eagerly listening Camp Fire Girls, who fully expected her to open an avenue to the very evidence for which they were looking.

“Why!” she continued, with a desperate effort to control her temper. “I never knew him to act that way before. He’s usually such a—such a—sweet dispositioned little dear. I don’t know what to make of it. He took me completely by surprise. I don’t understand it—I don’t know what to make of it—I can’t understand the little—the little—d-dear.”

“It is strange, very strange,” Miss Ladd agreed, purposing, for policy’s sake, to help the girl out of her predicament.

“Come to sister, Glennie dear,” Addie continued, after she had succeeded in rearranging her hair and restoring her hat to its normal position on her head. “Don’t you know sister loves you just lots? Why did you run away? Come back home and sister will give you some candy, just lots of it. Come on, now, that’s a good little boy.”

“I don’t want your candy and you ain’t my sister, and I won’t go back. You’ll beat me, and mom’ll beat me and everybody else’ll beat me. Don’t let her take me back, please don’t,” Glen concluded, turning his face pleadingly toward Miss Ladd.

“Oh, you must go back, Glen,” the Guardian replied, reproachfully. “That’s your home, don’t you know? Where in the world will you go if you don’t go back home? Think of it—no place in the world to go, no place in the world.”

There was a tone of awe in the young woman’s voice that impressed the boy. He cooled down considerably and looked meditatively at his monitor.

“They’ll beat me,” he protested earnestly. “They’ll tie me to a bed post and strap me.”

“Why, how perfectly terrible!” Addie exclaimed. “I never heard of such a thing. I can’t understand such remarks.”

“I’ll tell you what we’ll do,” Katherine suggested reassuringly. “We’ll all go back to the house with you and fix everything up nice. They won’t beat you, I’m sure. Come on, Miss Graham, we’ll help you, if you don’t think we’re intruding.”

Addie did not know how to reply and did not attempt to. She started toward home and the Camp Fire Girls followed her, Miss Ladd leading the battling runaway by the hand.

Glen was considerably bewildered and apparently submissive during the journey homeward. He said little, and when he spoke, it was only a short reply to something said to him.

At the door of the cottage, they were met by Mrs. Graham, to whom Addie introduced them. None of the girls were well impressed by the woman’s appearance or manner. She affected the same ungenue interest and affection for Glen that had characterized Addie’s manner toward him. But they managed to bring about a condition more or less reassuring to the boy and left him, with secret misgivings, in the custody of the family which they held more than ever under suspicion.

“We’ve got to do some real spy work now,” said Miss Ladd after they had reached their camp again. “We’ve got to find out what is going on in that house when those people have no suspicion that they are being watched.”

CHAPTER XXVI.

AMMUNITION AND CATAPULTS.

The thirteen Camp Fire Girls and their Guardian are hardly to be censured because they did little more work of a routine nature that day. One could hardly expect them to fix their minds upon any "even tenor" occupation while the thrills of recent developments supplied so much stimulus for discussion of future prospect.

They were careful in these discussions not to leave open any possibility of their being overheard. Their conversations were always held in low tones and in places where it would be difficult for any of the members of the Graham family to find positions of concealment near enough to overhear what was being said.

One thing decided upon was in line with Miss Ladd's declaration that they must find out "what was going on in the Graham house," having reference, of course, to the treatment received there by little Glen in view of his violent protest against being returned to the care and custody of the people whom he charged with acts of cruelty toward himself. A scouting expedition was planned for the evening, the "official scouts" of the Fire—Katherine and Hazel—being delegated to this work. Katherine proposed that two others be selected to assist them, and Miss Ladd suggested¹³¹ that they choose their assistants themselves.

"We'll think it over and pick them before suppertime," said Katherine after conferring with Hazel.

The result was that before sundown Azalia Atwood and Ernestine Johanson had been added to the spy squad. Their selection came as a result of general discussions of the work in prospect, in the course of which both Azalia and Ernestine made several suggestions that were regarded as clever and helpful for the scouting plans.

Shortly after the girls returned from the Graham cottage to their camp, "Jimmie Junior" of the "treble cleff voice" appeared with the announcement that he had brought his boat to the Camp Fire landing and moored it by tying the painter to a projecting rock. They thanked him and proceeded at once with the task of restoring the safety-guard line to their bathing place. All put on their bathing suits and went down to the beach.

With the aid of the boat their work was much easier than it had been the first time. It is no easy performance for one person to sit on the shoulders of another and wield a mallet on the upper end of a stake held by a third person in water arm-pit deep. If you doubt this assertion, just try it.

Well, this difficult feat was unnecessary this time. The stakes, rope, and mallet were put into the boat, and three of the girls got in¹³² and rowed out to the point where the southwest stake had been driven before. Then two of them plunged overboard and, while one of these

steadied the boat and the other held the stake in position, the girl in the boat drove it firmly into the sand-clay bed of the lake.

This operation was repeated until the supports of the buoy-line were all restored. Then the rope was stretched from stake to stake and wooden buoys attached as before.

The work was speedily performed and then the girls all had a good swim. When they returned to their camp, it was lunch time and the “gastronomic committee,” as Harriet, the “walking dictionary,” had dubbed the commissary department, got busy. During the meal, which they ate on a “newspaper tablecloth,” picnic-style, the subject of organized self-protection against further depredations was discussed.

“I believe we ought to establish a relief watch system to be kept up all night every night as long as there seems to be any danger of our being molested by prowlers like those who paid us a visit last night,” Estelle announced.

“What would we do if we caught anybody at any mischief?” asked Azalia.

“We’d sail right into ’em and give ’em Hail Columbia,” declared Hazel like a vigilance committee chairman.

“Yes, we’d pull their hair,” said Marie Crismore.¹³³

“And scratch their eyes out,” Ernestine chimed in.

“And boo-shoo ’em away,” added Julietta Hyde.

“I’m positively ashamed of you for talking that way,” Miss Ladd interposed. “You’re laughing at yourselves because you are girls. Now, you ought not to do that, even in fun. How many of you can do some real boys’ stunts just as well as the boys can?”

“I can swim half a mile,” announced Hazel.

“I can do a fly-away from the horizontal bar,” declared Violet Munday.

“I can run a hundred-yard dash in thirteen seconds,” said Ernestine; “and that’s better than lots of boys can do it.”

“I can throw a ball like a boy,” said Helen Nash.

“So can I”—this from Marion Stanlock.

“Oh, several of us can do that,” Katherine declared. “We’ve played ball with the boys. But now you’re getting close to what I was driving at. We’ll proceed to gather a supply of ammunition.”

“Ammunition!” several exclaimed.

“Surely,” Katherine replied. “We’ll get it down on the beach.”

“Oh, I get you,” said Estelle. “You mean——”

“Rocks,” cried Marie, getting the word in ahead of Estelle.

“That’s it,” Katherine admitted. “We’ll¹³⁴ shower rocks at anybody that makes us any more trouble.”

“Very ingenious,” Miss Ladd said approvingly. “If those persons who visited us last night come again, they’ll get a warm reception.”

“And a hard one,” Marion supplemented.

“I have another idea,” Helen announced, and everybody turned attention to her. “I have some heavy rubber bands in my grip. I always carry them because they come in very handy sometimes.”

“What can you do with them?” Estelle asked.

“What do you think?” Helen returned.

“I know,” cried Ethel Zimmerman. “Make catapults with them.”

“Good!” several of the girls exclaimed.

“The boys call them slingshots,” said the Guardian.

“How do you make a slingshot?” Julietta inquired.

“I know,” Marion announced. “You cut a forked stick, like the letter ‘Y.’ Then you tie two rubber bands to it, one to each fork. Between the other ends of the bands you tie a little sack, or shallow pocket, made of leather or strong cloth. You put a stone in this pocket and pull it back, stretching the rubber bands, take aim, and let it fly.”

“You must have had experience making those things,” Katherine suggested.

“No, I never made one,” Marion replied: “but I’ve¹³⁵ watched my cousin make them and shoot them, too. He was very skillful at it.”

“Can you shoot a catapult?” Katherine inquired.

“I think I can,” Marion answered.

“Good,” said Katherine. “We’ll make several, and those who can’t throw stones can use slingshots.”

That was a very busy afternoon for this warlike group of girls. While the luncheon dishes were being washed and put away, Katherine and Hazel rowed the boat back to the Graham landing, thanked “Jimmie Junior” for its use, accepted with solemn countenances his “high-C” “You’re welcome,” and returned to their camp. Then the work of manufacturing arms and ammunition, in anticipation of another midnight invasion, began.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE GHOST.

Before the “preparedness program” of the afternoon was started, Miss Ladd addressed the group of Camp Fire Girls thus, speaking in low tone, of course, in order that she might not be overheard by any eavesdropper who might be in hiding in the vicinity:

“Now, we want to do this thing right. How many of you feel that you can throw a stone a considerable distance and accurately?”

Katherine, Helen, Marion and Violet held up their hands.

“How many of you would like to use catapults?” was the Guardian’s next question.

The hands of Harriet, Marie, Ethel, and Ruth went up promptly. A moment later Estelle and Ernestine also put up theirs.

“I believe I could learn how,” said Estelle.

“We don’t want too much demonstration around here this afternoon,” Miss Ladd warned. “Everything must proceed quietly and as if nothing unusual were taking place. How many rubber bands have you, Helen?”

“Oh, a dozen or twenty,” the latter replied.

“Well, we’ll proceed to cut half a dozen Y-forks and make them into catapults. We’ll start out at once. Hazel, you get a hatchet, and, Marie, you get a saw; the rest of you get your combination knives.”¹³⁷

In a few minutes they were in the thick of the timber, searching the small trees and saplings for Y-forks to serve as catapult handles. In half an hour they returned with a dozen of varying degree of symmetry and excellence.

Then the work of assembling the parts of these miniature engines of war began. Some of the girls exhibited a good deal of mechanical skill, while others made moves and suggestions so awkward as to occasion much laughter.

“Well, anyway,” said Marie after she had been merrily criticised for sewing up the “mouth” of a “pocket” so narrowly that a stone could hardly fly out of it; “there are lots of boys who would make a worse job sewing on a button. Don’t you remember last winter at a button-sewing contest, Paul Wetzler cast the thread over and over and over the side of the button—and he didn’t know any better.”

“That’s a very convenient way to dodge a joke on you, Marie,” said Violet. “But just because boys don’t know anything is no reason why we shouldn’t.”

“Whew! some slam at me,” Marie exclaimed. “I’m very properly squelched.”

After half a dozen catapults had been made, the girls practiced slinging stones for an hour and several of them developed considerable skill. In this way it was determined who should have the preference in the use of these weapons.

Then at the suggestion of Miss Ladd, 138 dozen slings were made to be tied about the waist for carrying a supply of stones, some the size of an egg, for throwing with the hand and pebbles for use in the catapults. After these were completed, the girls went down to the beach and gathered a plentiful supply and took them back to the camp. Then a score or two of these stones were deposited in the slings, and the latter were put in convenient places in the tents on short notice. The catapults also were turned over to those of the girls who proved most capable of using them skillfully.

The last item of preparations on the program of the day consisted of completing plans for a succession of night watch reliefs. As Katherine, Hazel, Azalia, and Ernestine were assigned to special scout duty immediately after dusk, they were excused from assignment on any of the reliefs. This left ten girls among whom the watches might be divided, which was done in the following manner:

The eight sleeping hours from 9 P. M. to 5 A. M. were divided into five watches of equal length and assignments were made thus:

First watch: Marion Stanlock and Helen Nash. Second watch: Ruth Hazelton and Ethel Zimmerman. Third watch: Violet Munday and Harriet Newcomb. Fourth watch: Julietta Hyde and Marie Crismore. Fifth watch: Estelle Adler and the Guardian, Miss Ladd.

Nothing further of particular interest took place during the rest of the day, except that shortly before supertime Addie and Olga Graham, both dressed “fit to kill,” called at the camp and thanked the girls for their assistance in getting “their brother” back home.

“Is he all right now?” Hazel inquired with genuine concern.

“Yes, he’s fine,” Addie replied. “You see he has spells of that kind every now and then, and we don’t know what to make of it. But today’s was the worst spell he ever had.”

“Don’t you do anything for him?” Hazel asked.

“What can we do?” Addie returned. “He isn’t sick. I’m afraid it’s just a little distemper. There is absolutely no reason for it.”

Miss Ladd asked the Graham girls to remain at the camp for supper, but they “begged to be excused on account of a pressing social engagement.”

After darkness had fallen as heavily as could be expected on a clear, though moonless night, the four scouts set out through the timber toward the Graham cottage. All of them carried flashlights and clubs which might easily have been mistaken in the dark for mere walking

sticks. The clubs were for protection against dogs or any other living being which might exhibit hostility toward them. Katherine and Hazel had also two of the rubber-band catapults, as they had exhibited no little skill, for novices, in the use of them.

The other girls built a small fire near the 140 tents, to keep the mosquitos away, and sat around it chatting and waited for the scouts to return. Miss Ladd insisted, as soon as dusk began to gather, that they bring out their "ammunition" from the tents and keep it close at hand for immediate use if anything should happen to require it.

And something did happen, something of quite unexpected and startling character. The scouts had been gone about half an hour and the night had settled down to a blanket of darkness on the earth, a sprinkle of starlight in the sky, the croaking of frogs, the songs of katydids and the occasional ripple of water on the lake shore. A poet might have breathed a sigh of delightful awe. Well, the girls were pleasureably impressed with scene and the sounds, if they were not exactly delighted, and the awe was coming.

It came without warning and was before them very suddenly. It was in the form of a man in a long, white robe, long white hair and whiskers, the latter reaching almost to his waist. He stalked, stiffly, unemotionally out of the darkness south of the camp and across the open space within thirty feet of the fire, where sat the startled, chill-thrilled group of girls, speechless with something akin to fear and momentarily powerless to shake off the spell that held them as rigid as statues.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A BUMP ON THE HEAD.

Suddenly Helen Nash's memory served her so well that she regained control of her wits with a shock. Here is what she remembered:

"I don't want them to scare you with a ghost"—these words uttered by little Glen just before his warning speech was interrupted by the appearance of Addie Graham at the girls' camp.

That recollection was enough for Helen. There was nothing tenuous, elusively subtle, or impenetrably mysterious any longer about the ghostly apparition. Little Glen had something very clear and definite in his mind when he made that remark.

Her muscles having relaxed from their rigid strain of superstitious suspense, Helen reached for the "ammunition sling" that she had placed beside her and drew therefrom one of the catapults they had made in the afternoon, also a pebble about the size of a marble, and fitted the latter in the pocket of the weapon. Then she drew back the pocket and the pebble, stretching the rubber bands as far as she could extend them, and took careful aim.

Helen had practiced with this weapon a good deal in the last two or three hours and acquired considerable proficiency for so short a period of experience. Moreover, she was skilled in

amateur archery and could pull a bow with a strong right arm. This experience, together with a general systematic athletic training at school, rendered her particularly well adapted for her present undertaking.

The other girls, under the spell of awe-fascination which had seized and held Helen before it was broken by a sudden jog of her memory, knew nothing of what was going on in their midst until they heard the snap of the rubber bands. And doubtless it would have taken them considerable time to fathom it had the pebble-shooter's aim not proved to be remarkably good. It struck the "ghost" on the head.

Of course even Helen could not follow the pebble through the air with her eyes, nor could she see where it struck, but other unmistakable evidence informed her as to the trueness of her aim and the effect of the blow. A sharp thud informed her that she had hit something of substantial resistance, and the next bit of evidence broke the spell for the other girls with a realization of what had taken place.

The "ghost" wavered and seemed about to topple over, at the same time emitting a groan of pain which proved him to be thoroughly human. Helen was frightened, but there was a new kind of awe in this fright. All suggestion of superstition had left her and in its place was the dread that she might have killed a man.

The latter dread, however, was soon dispelled. The "ghost" did not fall. He staggered, it is true—evidently the pain of the blow had stunned him considerably; but he managed to put speed into his pace, although the evidence of his suffering was even greater after he began to run. In a minute he disappeared in the darkness of the timber.

"My! that was a good shot, Helen," Ethel Zimmerman exclaimed. "And he will surely wear some lump on his head for some time to come."

"I was afraid I pulled too hard," Helen replied with a sigh of relief; "and, believe me, I'd rather be scared by a ghost several times over than with the prospect of having a murder record."

"Who is he?—have you any idea?" Violet asked.

"Can't you guess?" Helen answered. "Isn't he someone connected with the Graham family?"

"What was he trying to do—scare us?" Julietta inquired, addressing the question as much to herself as to anybody else.

"I should imagine something of the kind, although he may be the crazy man the Graham girls spoke about," said Helen.

"I don't believe there is any such person," Miss Ladd volunteered at this point.¹⁴⁴

"Then why did they suggest such an idea?" Violet questioned.

"I don't know, unless it was to frighten us," the Guardian replied.

"Frighten us away from here," Harriet supplemented.

“Exactly,” said Helen. “That’s my theory of the affair. Don’t you remember what Glen Irving said just before Addie Graham put in her appearance and cut short our interview with the boy?”

“He said something about ghosts,” Harriet recalled.

“Not about ghosts, but *a* ghost,” Helen corrected. “It made quite an impression on me. Didn’t any of you wonder what he meant?”

“I did,” announced Violet; “and I remember exactly what he said. It was this: ‘I don’t want them to scare you with a ghost.’”

“Those were the very words,” Helen declared. “Now do you get the connection between that remark and what just took place? Glen had heard them talking over their plans, isn’t it all very clear?”

“At least it is very interesting,” commented Miss Ladd.

“Since you have got so near a solution of this affair, perhaps you’ll go a step farther and tell your interested audience who that ghost was,” Ruth Hazelton suggested.

“Oh, no, I wouldn’t be so rash as that,” Helen responded; “but if I were going to write to Mrs. Hutchins tonight, I would suggest¹⁴⁵ to her that, if Mr. Pierce Langford should return to Fairberry in the next week or two, she might have somebody examine his head for a bump.”

“A phrenological bump?” inquired Harriet, the “walking dictionary.”

There was a general laugh.

“Not a phrenological bump,” Helen answered.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A CRUEL WOMAN.

Katherine, Hazel, Ernestine and Azalia found it no easy task to pick their way through the dark timber more than half a mile to the Graham cottage. Several times, finding themselves hopelessly entangled in a thicket, or stumbling over disagreeably uneven ground, and fearful of losing their way, they made use of their flash lights until able to continue their journey satisfactorily.

But after they caught their first glimpse of the light in the Graham cottage, they made no further use of the flash lights. Guided by the illuminated windows and their memory of the surroundings, they made their way over the intervening space until within a hundred feet of the house, where they halted and looked and listened for about fifteen minutes.

First, they wished to make sure that there was no dog on the place. They were reasonably certain that the Grahams kept no watchdog, as several of the girls had been careful to check up in this regard when passing near or calling at the cottage. But as additional precaution, they made a careful inspection from a safe distance on this scouting expedition before venturing close to the house.

The night was clear and warm, but no moon was shining. There was a stillness in the air¹⁴⁷ which alone might have been expected to cause a dog to howl for very lonesomeness. Even while the four scouts were waiting for evidence of a canine guard at the Graham place, far away in the distance there came a mournful howl from a mournful hound in a farmyard. The sound was repeated several times, and although there were two or three echoing responses from as many neighboring sources, none came from a kinship kennel of the Graham premises.

At last Katherine and Hazel decided that it was safe to advance nearer to the house. Leaving Azalia and Ernestine at the edge of the timber to watch for any condition or circumstance that might prove unfriendly to their venture, the two leaders advanced across the clearing.

As they neared the building, a sound, which they had not heard before reached their ears and drove from their minds all thought or fear of a watchdog. The sound was like the plaintive cry of a child and seemed to be muffled as if coming through two or three thick walls.

There were two windows on the side of the house nearest the advancing girl scouts. Through the drawn shade of one of these came the rays of incandescent bulbs which lighted the room. The other window was dark.

The advance of Katherine and Hazel was guided now by the seeming source of the muffled¹⁴⁸ cry. As they started for the house, their initial impulse was to direct their steps toward the lighted window. But as they approached the building, almost unconsciously they veered gradually to the right until they found themselves standing close to the unlighted window at the rear.

Without a doubt the muffled sounds came from this part of the cottage. A whispered conversation between the girls resulted in the following procedure: Hazel stood guard at a distance of ten or fifteen feet while Katherine stood close to the window, almost pressing her ear against the glass in order the better to hear the sounds that interested them. For two or three minutes the listener continued in this attitude; then she went to where Hazel stood and the latter advanced to the window and did likewise. She also tried the sash to see if it was locked, succeeding in raising it slightly, so that the sounds within reached her ear more distinctly.

Several minutes later both of these girls returned to the edge of the clearing and rejoined their two companions stationed there. A low-voiced consultation was held, at the close of which Hazel said:

“Well, all this means that we’ll have to return to the cottage and stay there until we find out something more. Let’s see what we can discover in the front of the house.”

She and Katherine accordingly went back and directed their inspection as Hazel had¹⁴⁹ suggested. The shade trees did not cover the lower pane to the full limit and they were able to look in and get a fairly good view of the room.

Mrs. Graham and "Jimmie Junior" apparently were the only members of the family at home, if we may disregard as one of the family, little Glen, who undoubtedly was the author of the muffled sobs. Mrs. Graham was reading a fashion magazine and her son was playing solitaire at a card table.

Almost the first view acquainted the girls with the fact that the woman was much disconcerted over something, and it soon became evident that the cause of this nervousness was the sound of weeping that reached her through the closed door of an adjoining room. Presently she arose, with a hard look on her face and determined manner, and moved in the direction from which the offending noise came.

Katherine and Hazel did not take the additional precaution this time of alternating as watcher and guard. They stood together at the window, and as they saw Mrs. Graham open the door they moved quickly to the window next toward the rear. By the time they reached it, this room also was lighted.

Fortunately a similar condition existed here also with reference to the width of the window shade and they were able to get a fairly good view of this apartment. Mrs. Graham evidently was disposed to lose no time¹⁵⁰ and to leave ground for no misunderstanding as to her purpose. She threw open a second door, this time a closet door, and the girls beheld a sight that fairly made their blood boil.

There sat little Glen on a chair with a rope wound around his body, arms, and legs, securing him so firmly to the article of furniture on which he was seated that he could scarcely move a muscle. His face was wet with tears and a picture of suffering.

For the first time the watchers observed that the woman had a leather strap in her hand, and they were still further horrified when they saw her swing it cruelly against the bare legs of the quivering child.

Once, twice she struck the boy. Hazel and Katherine could hardly contain their indignation. Indeed it is not at all to be doubted that they would have attempted to interfere on the spot if an interruption had not come from another source before the third blow could fall.

There was a disturbance in the front of the house. Somebody had entered and was talking in a loud voice. Mrs. Graham let her arm fall without dealing the third blow for which she had raised it as a man entered the room in anything but mild and pleasant manner.

"What are you doing, Mrs. Graham?" he demanded. "What did I tell you about this conduct of yours? Do you realize that you are bringing things to a climax where I'll wash my hands of the whole affair?"

The speaker was Pierce Langford.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE GIRLS WIN.

Mrs. Graham looked uncomfortable—not ashamed or abashed. Doubtless the conflict within her was between the cruelty of her nature and the fear of financial reverses in consequence of that cruelty. She did not answer the rebuke of her confederate attorney.

The latter drew a knife from his pocket and in a moment was severing the rope that bound the child to the chair. After he had released the boy, who looked gratefully toward him as a protector, the man threw cold water on little Glen's natural feeling of confidence toward him by saying:

“Now, mind you, Mrs. Graham, my interference is not moved by any sentiment of sympathy for the kid. I merely want to inform you that things are coming to such a pass that I may be forced to drop out of this game purely as a move of self-salvation. For instance, it appears very unwise to make any further attempts to frighten that bunch of girls. They simply don't scare. See that?”

Langford indicated the object of his question by taking off his hat, which he had neglected to remove when he entered the house, and caressing gently with two or three fingers a badly swollen wound on the side of his head almost directly over his right ear. Mrs. 152 Graham looked at it curiously, not sympathetically.

“Where did you get that?” she inquired.

“Those girls did it, or one of them, I presume. I thought my make-up would paralyze them, but instead they nearly paralyzed me. I think they fired some rocks at me, for something of that description struck my head, and you see the result.

“I drove my machine into the timber a little farther up the road and put on my ghost outfit. Then I walked through the woods to the girls' camp and stalked past them. You would have thought my appearance was enough to freeze their veins and arteries. Well, they pretty nearly put mine in cold storage for eternity. Now, what do you know about ‘first aid to the injured?’ Will you get some cold water and alcohol or liniment? I'm going to have a fierce swelling. I don't suppose I can keep it down much now, but I'm going to have an awful headache and I'd like to prevent that as much as possible. Let the kid go to bed, and do something for me.”

Glen took advantage of this suggestion and went into another room. Mrs. Graham and the lawyer returned to the living room. Katherine and Hazel watched them for about twenty minutes, but heard little more conversation. Then Langford left the house and Mrs. Graham and her son prepared to retire. As it appeared that they would be able to get no further information of interest to them¹⁵³ at the Graham cottage that night, Katherine and Hazel and the other two girls who waited at the edge of the clearing returned to their camp and reported the success of their expedition.

Early next day, Miss Ladd, Katherine, and Hazel went by boat to Twin Lakes and appeared before a magistrate and swore out a warrant for the arrest of Mrs. Graham on a charge of cruel and inhuman treatment of a child in her custody. Before leaving Fairberry she had been given authority to take this move if in her judgment such emergency action were advisable. She also asked that Glen Irving be removed from the custody of the Grahams. Then Miss Ladd sent a telegram to Mrs. Hutchins asking her to "come at once."

Mrs. Hutchins arrived at Twin Lakes next day. Meanwhile Mrs. Graham was arrested and the boy was taken temporarily as a ward of the court. When she was confronted with the charges against her and the evidence of the two Camp Fire Girls who had witnessed one instance of outrageous cruelty, her cold resistance was broken and she promised to accede to Mrs. Hutchins demands if the prosecution were dropped.

This seemed to be the best settlement of the whole affair, and it was accepted. By order of court Glen was turned over to Mrs. Hutchins¹⁵⁴ who assumed the obligation of his care and custody.

Mrs. Hutchins remained with the girls a week at their camp at Stony Point, and then all returned to Fairberry, where the tents were pitched again in the broad and scenic ravine known as Fern Hollow. Here they camped again for another week, summarized, tabulated, and classified the achievements of the last few weeks, conferred honors, and finally adjourned to their several homes, there to remain until the autumn opening of school.

But the adventures of the year for this Camp Fire were not complete. More of equally stirring character were in store for three of the girls, and those who would follow these events should read the volume entitled:

CAMP FIRE GIRLS ON A HIKE;

or,

LOST IN THE GREAT NORTHERN WOODS.