



# THE TOWER SECRET

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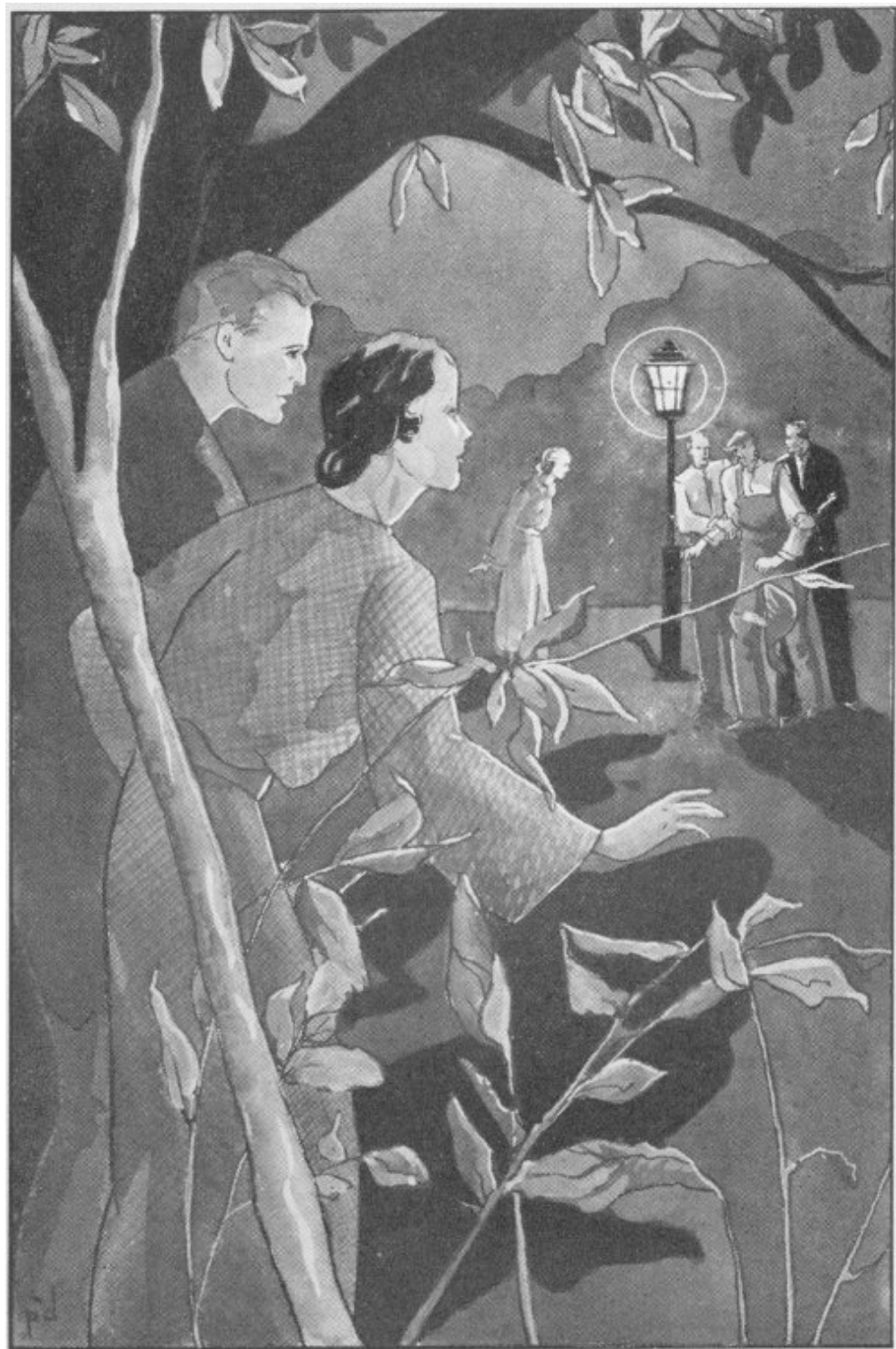
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**THEY HAD DRAGGED THE CAPTIVE UNDER THE  
GLARE OF THE STREET LAMP. (*[Page 199](#)*)**

**MELODY LANE MYSTERY STORIES**

# THE TOWER SECRET

BY  
LILIAN GARIS

*Author of*

THE GHOST OF MELODY LANE, THE FORBIDDEN TRAIL, JUDY JORDAN'S DISCOVERY, ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY  
PELAGIE DOANE

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## BOOKS BY LILIAN GARIS

### MYSTERY STORIES

THE GHOST OF MELODY LANE

THE FORBIDDEN TRAIL

THE TOWER SECRET

BARBARA HALE

BARBARA HALE'S MYSTERY FRIEND

NANCY BRANDON

NANCY BRANDON'S MYSTERY

JUDY JORDAN

JUDY JORDAN'S DISCOVERY

**BOOKS FOR GIRLS**

GLORIA: A GIRL AND HER DAD

GLORIA AT BOARDING SCHOOL

JOAN: JUST GIRL

JOAN'S GARDEN OF ADVENTURE

CONNIE LORING

CONNIE LORING'S GYPSY FRIEND

CLEO'S MISTY RAINBOW

CLEO'S CONQUEST

A GIRL CALLED TED

TED AND TONY, TWO GIRLS OF TODAY

SALLY FOR SHORT

SALLY FOUND OUT

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TO THE REED TWINS  
ROSEMARY AND RUTH ANN

# CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	<a href="#"><u>CALLIOPE</u></a>	1
II	<a href="#"><u>FERN HILL</u></a>	12
III	<a href="#"><u>WHEN IT RAINS ON CIRCUS FOLKS</u></a>	20
IV	<a href="#"><u>RESCUED</u></a>	30
V	<a href="#"><u>THE GIRLS' IDEA</u></a>	39
VI	<a href="#"><u>THE MIDNIGHT BRIDE</u></a>	49
VII	<a href="#"><u>CECY AND ROSIE</u></a>	58
VIII	<a href="#"><u>THE HUMAN GHOST</u></a>	69
IX	<a href="#"><u>A LADY IN DISTRESS</u></a>	78
X	<a href="#"><u>TRAPPED</u></a>	89
XI	<a href="#"><u>RIDING THE RAILS</u></a>	100
XII	<a href="#"><u>A STRANGE CLUE</u></a>	110
XIII	<a href="#"><u>TELLING GLENN</u></a>	120
XIV	<a href="#"><u>STARS OR DIAMONDS</u></a>	131
XV	<a href="#"><u>THE IVY-MANTLED TOWER</u></a>	141
XVI	<a href="#"><u>CRUEL DESTRUCTION</u></a>	153
XVII	<a href="#"><u>HEAVY HEART</u></a>	163
XVIII	<a href="#"><u>CLAMMY HANDS</u></a>	173
XIX	<a href="#"><u>DEEPER AND DARKER</u></a>	183
XX	<a href="#"><u>ALL NIGHT LONG</u></a>	193
XXI	<a href="#"><u>CAPTURE</u></a>	204
XXII	<a href="#"><u>THE QUARREL</u></a>	216
XXIII	<a href="#"><u>AN UP-TO-DATE SECRET</u></a>	226
XXIV	<a href="#"><u>THE BIG HOUR</u></a>	234



# THE TOWER SECRET

## CHAPTER I CALLIOPE

When that good old tooter, called by the classic name of Calliope, comes wheezing and squealing into town, everyone drops everything, runs to the window, the gate, and even to the corner with a wild shout of:

“Circus! Here comes the circus!”

Everyone was doing that right now, for there was no mistake about it. The noise was being made by a calliope, and it was coming into town, into the town of Branchville which bordered on Oakleigh, running right off Melody Lane, following the lake, the brook, and the woods.

“A circus! Who said there was going to be a circus?” demanded Mrs. Gilmore Smith, who was always called Mrs. Gilmore Smith because she hated the name Smith, and whose husband was always called Gil Smith because he couldn’t do anything about it. Mrs. Smith had lost no time in

reaching her front gate and in taking the iron wheel band off the top so she could get outside and have a look down the road. The gate had a regular good strong catch in the middle, but youngsters could open that, so the nice iron band off the old wheelbarrow had been painted gray to match the fence, and was put on the top post to keep children off the place.

Mrs. Robert Russell, wife of Big Bob, was also outside her gate as all the way along the country street folks were responding to the call of the calliope, with the acute interest usually saved for the fireman's parade or the veteran's picnic turnout.

"Whatever is it? I didn't hear anything about a circus coming," asked Mrs. Smith.

"Well, here it comes! Look, there's the cally-opp!" declared Mrs. Will Dobbins, calling the wheezing machine one of the many names being made up to fit the occasion.

"Sure enough. And look at the—girls on the organ car!"

There it was. The grand old instrument that must once have been grand indeed, when its gold pipes were gold and its fancy paintings fresh, was truly trundling along. Squatted around it in float fashion were at least three persons, their heads lost beneath great straw hats, for it was a warm day in July. At the back of the machine sat a man playing the keyboard, and hanging from all available spots on the car that carried the machine, were boxes, bags, and bulky objects, unmistakably circus baggage.

As the noise came abreast of the home of Gil Smith, the car stopped. When the wheeze had completely died out, the man standing near the keyboard shouted to the women standing along the sidewalk. He had his big straw hat in his hand and a pleasant smile on a face that was not bad-looking, but molded in the pattern of hard work, plenty of rough weather, and lots of determination.

“Can you ladies direct me to Bird’s Woods?” he asked the surprised congregation.

They could, and all started to do it at once. But, while they were at it, Gil Smith, himself, came out the drive—he never used the front gate—and what he said was not a matter of directing the caravan to Bird’s Woods.

“What you doin’ here?” he demanded sharply.

“Well, friend,” answered the calliope man, “we ain’t doin’ nuthin’ just now. But we aim to. Just want to find a cool spot to rest and maybe get a good drink of spring water. Any springs——”

“You got a permit?”

“For what?”

“To come in here, into Branchville?” Gil Smith said that like a man on a platform.

“Well—no. But why a permit? We’re not sellin’ anything.”

“Selling! Selling noise.” Smith broke off a piece of the white lilac bush, he was so mad. “No circus comes to this town without the councilmen’s permission. You better turn right around——”

A girl was standing up now, in fact, two girls were standing up on the car. The one sitting down had removed the big hat and appeared to be a woman, not another girl.

“Please, mister,” the girl with the reddest hair began, “we are no circus. We just got to rest. We’re dead, all in, hungry ——”

“That ain’t no business of ourn,” Gil Smith snarled back. “Ef you’re hungry, there’s places to eat——”

“Oh, Gil, have a heart,” called out Mrs. Dugan. “On a day like this you’d give a dog a drink.”

“And you’d do more for your old howlin’ cur than you would for human beings, Gil Smith,” snapped back Mrs. Foster. “Go right along this road till you come to a place they’re digging out that way.” She waved her arms toward that way. “Then turn and you’ll see the hemlock trees. That’s Bird’s Woods, and there’s a fine spring there——”

The girls were so profuse in their thanks that the growling of the belligerent Gil Smith was completely drowned out, and when the car started off again, the calliope stilled with only the car brakes grinding, the girls and the women on top were waving happily while calling out answers to pleasantly asked questions.

Mrs. Gilmore Smith and Gil Smith had gone inside, that is, they couldn't be seen from outside, but it was a safe guess they were peeking from behind the hedge. They never missed anything.

As the strange car passed along and was getting near the turn in the road, the kindly neighbors drew up to Mrs. Foster's hedge (she had never had a gate), and there they held a sort of meeting.

"The old crank," muttered Mrs. Dugan. "Think he owned the town."

"And if he don't shut up that rooster that wakes the neighborhood at crack o' dawn," announced Miss Hattie Baldwin, the music teacher, "*I'll* see what *I* can do about that."

"We have a health law against crowing fowls," Mrs. Foster reminded the group. "And Smiths are the only people who keep chickens in this whole neighborhood."

So Gil Smith's meanness to the calliope folks was being resented at once, and in such a manner as might bring *him* a little trouble.

"They seemed like nice girls," Mrs. Foster went on, referring, of course, to the girls on the circus wagon.

"And refined. You could tell by their talk. What pretty hair, too. My Mabel is crazy about red hair," Mrs. Oliver told them.

“Too bad hers is so black,” remarked Mrs. Dugan innocently.

“’Tain’t black, it’s brown——”

“But about those hungry folks,” Mrs. Foster interrupted. “It’s past dinner time. We could fetch them a bite.”

“Certainly, we could.” That was Mrs. Newman, and she always baked a big pot of pork and beans on Wednesdays. It may have been the circus possibility that the appearance of the calliope car suggested that so intrigued the women, for at least that promised some excitement.

Just then a roadster came along. In it were Carol Duncan and Thally Bond. These two girls were unmistakably associated with many of the exciting adventures of Oakleigh and Branchville, and the two first volumes of the Melody Lane series, *The Ghost of Melody Lane*, and *The Forbidden Trail*, are made up almost entirely of the activities of Carol Duncan and her friends.

A number of cars had followed the circus wagon, as usual, even Bennie Arndt, the butcher’s boy, trailing along with all his dinner meats in the car, and he must have known he would “catch it” for that.

Now Carol and Thally—it was Thally’s car and she was driving—were stopping in answer to Mrs. Dugan’s violent handwaving.

“You’re the very ones we want,” she called out. “We’ve got to send some food to those poor, stranded circus folks, and

you girls can do it nicely. Their show was closed last night,” she tried to explain.

Carol and Thally were instantly interested. In fact, they wouldn’t even spoil Mrs. Dugan’s story by telling her they too were following the circus wagon.

“We’ve all got something to chip in,” Mrs. Newman offered, “and you girls having the car will just about fix it all up.”

“We can make a regular picnic of it,” offered Carol Duncan, her dark eyes laughing and her dark hair flying playfully about her pretty oval face. Thally wasn’t as pretty as Carol, but she had dimples. Now, dimples go a long way in any girl’s face, and Thally Bond’s smile was like laughing out loud. She was big and strong and hearty, like the outdoor girl she had always been, and everybody liked Thally. She had, besides those dimples, big brown eyes and beautiful brown hair.

“A picnic with hard-boiled eggs and big fat pickles,” Thally joined in. “We need a picnic ourselves. How about all you ladies coming?”

The outburst of merriment that followed that suggestion gave the old circus wagon a place in the amusement business of Oakleigh and Branchville, and while it was not exactly circus stunting, a picnic was not so bad on a hot day. The idea had possibilities.

“But we had better go out first and sort of find out how the land lays,” Carol suggested. “It might seem queer to rush in

with Thally's hard-boiled eggs and pickles and not know whether we would be welcome or not."

"Might not agree with them," roared Mrs. Dugan who had fame as a joker.

So, while the women reluctantly went indoors to find out what food they could spare, Carol and Thally continued down the road towards Branchville.

"Weren't those women precious?" Carol asked.

"Imagine them making up a picnic for the circus folks."

"And a grand idea, too, if you want my opinion," Thally answered. "If we can't have a circus, let's have a picnic, say I."

"Do you suppose the folks are real performers?"

"Well, they had a pretty good show out in Montmara. Joe Taylor said it was fine, but nobody went to it."

"That's why they had to disband, I suppose. Cecy went and she raved about the girls' acts. They played the Human Fly and floated through the air and I don't know what they didn't do."

"But there's the noise maker. I see them over by the fern bank. What shall we say to them?"

"Hello, and a few things like that," laughed Carol. "No use making up a speech we may not get a chance to deliver. There's a couple of girls——"



“And the man. He’s the most important. I saw him playing the organ when the car stopped at the railroad. He had a nice face——”

“Thally, you always notice a man’s face.” But the necessity of driving in along the single track road diverted the girls’ attention, so with eyes on the calliope car as well as on their own driving, they proceeded without making any more foolish remarks.

Nearing the shady spot where the strangers were parked, Carol gave one last warning to Thally.

“Now don’t promise them anything.”

“You mean to eat?”

“No, certainly I don’t. I mean in the way of a show.”

“*You* mean in the way of an audience for a show?”

“Well, maybe I do. Let’s get out. See, the girl is coming over \_\_\_\_\_”

And she was, the one with the reddest hair. She was smiling and rather pretty, in spite of the ravages of cheap make-up that must have eaten into her skin. She looked less than twenty years old and was wearing a common gingham dress, the kind that washes easiest in hand basins or clean brooks.

“Hello!” she called out pleasantly. “Are we trespassing?”

“Trespassing?” Carol repeated. She had not heard old Gil Smith go at them. “Why, no. These are just woods.”

“That’s good, because—well, we would like to stop here, if it’s all right,” the girl replied with a note of relief in her tired voice.

“We have the woods, the lake, the hills, and maybe a few snakes to give away absolutely free,” joined in Thally, “but *we* came over to see if we couldn’t bring you folks a little treat. It must be hard to travel in the dust on a day like this!”

“Bring us a treat? Say, girls, I wouldn’t kid you,” the girl said with enough softness in her voice to excuse the slang, “but if we don’t get something more to eat than those wet crackers Pete has been feeding us since we busted up, there’ll be a couple of military funerals around here soon.” She was smiling, but a serious look peeped through.

“And *we* want something to do that looks like work and isn’t,” laughed Carol. “Get your gypsy dinner-set out and we’ll be right back.”

## CHAPTER II

### FERN HILL

“The poor things! Imagine being hungry enough to admit it.” Thally couldn’t get over that.

“But imagine them being hungry enough to feel it,” Carol rejoined. “I heard Glenn and Paul talking about the stranded circus, but I thought they had all left for parts unknown. They had a great laugh about the fat lady. It seems no one wanted to trust a bed to her weight and she had to sleep two or three nights on a truck. Lucky it didn’t rain.”

“Don’t you think we had better go back to the women on Elm Street?” Thally asked. “They may have dumped their ice boxes on the sidewalk to make sure they would give us enough, and it’s a pretty hot day.”

“Yes, and it would be a shame to spoil their private picnic by adding other attractions. Did you see Mrs. Dugan’s face when she spoke of the pickles? She scrunched up her eyes until they got tangled in her pompadour. And Mrs. Foster, too; she must have had some good samples of food to spare.”

“Well, we’ll drop off there and gather up the fragments. It makes me hungry to think of it. What shall we get them to drink?”

“Becker’s have a special on ginger ale. We could phone for a case and make them put a hunk of ice on the box,” Carol figured out. “Too bad we can’t let Cecy and Paul in on this. Cecy will never forgive me. I never knew what my little sister amounted to until she came home from boarding school last spring,” Carol added. “She amounts to so much I don’t dare leave her out of anything. Those youngsters certainly are fighting for a place in the sun,” the sister finished. Cecy was that younger sister who had helped unravel the mystery of *The Ghost of Melody Lane*, but who had been away at boarding school when *The Forbidden Trail* adventure was under way.

“You think you are so much older,” scoffed Thally. “Why, Cecy’s as big as you are, and she surely did get young ladyish at boarding school. Well, now for our food show. There’s Mrs. Dugan, watching for us.”

“With a basket! Hope she did the collecting. I’d hate to have to taste everything and think up ways of saying what fine cooks the Elm Street ladies are. Hello, Mrs. Dugan!” Carol called out. “Here we are, all ready for the supplies.”

“And we’re all ready for you,” called back the smiling woman. “There’s sandwiches, half a chocolate cake, some doughnuts——”

“Oh, that’s wonderful!” Thally assured her. “And there’s Mrs. Newman with her pail of beans. No one can bake beans like she can.”

When Thally went to the houses on the north, and Carol turned to those on the south, and the women came out with their provisions on both ends of the street, the contributions looked like more than a picnic; more like two or three picnics when paper bags, bundles, baskets, and pails were all finally piled into the back of Thally's car. Mrs. Foster sent a gallon thermos of ice-cold lemonade, so the girls didn't have to order the ginger ale after all.

"And now about sleeping? We can't let those girls sleep out in the woods tonight," Hattie Baldwin declared. She had contributed potato salad. Why do music teachers always make such good salad?

"Hush! There's old Gil Smith," warned Mrs. Foster. "Don't let him see the food, girls. Just move off without any remarks. He was awfully mean to the poor things when they came along. There's Mrs. Smith, too. Just fool them for once."

No need for further warning. Even Carol and Thally knew the two Smiths. Hadn't they refused to give the children flowers for Memorial Day, and their old garden bursting with blooms?

"What's Gil Smith got to do with it, anyway?" Thally didn't exactly ask, but more likely stated.

"Oh, Dad says, he's on the Town Council and there's no standing his crankiness," Carol answered. "Let's not stop for another thing. There's Ted's car. Keep going so he can't stop us. We haven't time now even to talk with a nice boy like

Ted. It's so long after lunch time, and you know our redhead said she couldn't live another hour on the musty crackers."

They were back in the little grove almost at once, it was so short a run, and were those folks ready for their picnic!

"Look! Look!" Thally was exclaiming, just as if Carol could help looking. "A tablecloth and dishes. Where did they carry the stuff?"

"Didn't you see the car loaded down like a Christmas tree? Here you are!" Carol was calling to the two girls. The other also had red hair, as if the two heads had been matched for an act, but she was not as pleasant-looking as the one in the blue gingham dress, although she was rather pretty.

"This is Stella," the gingham girl was announcing, "and I'm Fausta which means lucky, so just call me Lucky to remind me," she said whimsically. "I have so little luck——"

"You had a lot of luck when you didn't break your neck the other night when that rope broke," Pete, the calliope man, reminded her, but she didn't notice the interruption.

"Stella and I are twins, you know," she continued. "Only a couple of years apart, but a circus doesn't mind a little thing like that. All this stuff! For us! Say Pete and Ranay! Come over here! It's Christmas——" and so they flocked around the car, completely overwhelmed with the sudden shower of food they evidently so badly needed. Ranay, who probably spelled the name Renée, was Pete's sister, a woman much too

fat for bareback circus riding, yet, that was the talent she at once claimed as her specialty.

“But there are no more horses to ride,” she chanted, “so I suppose I’ll be camp cook after this.” She had hair with a real antique bleach, running all the way from old ivory to hammered brass. But her eyes were still very blue, and Carol thought, as she glanced at her in a most friendly way, Ranay must have been one of those pretty little buttercup girls when she joined up with the circus, years and years ago.

Pete had the same shade blue eyes, and his gray hair was bleached a little like Ranay’s, only his bleach was from the sun. It was easy to guess he was a showman, even his laugh had a tingle in it, and when he talked he seemed to be calling out to the gallery—or whatever they call the highest tent seats in circuses.

As soon as the girls had gotten all the stuff out of the car, they wanted to leave and give the people a chance to eat, but Carol whispered to Thally something about the night. Where would they sleep?

“Yes, that’s so,” Thally repeated. “Are you going to stay tonight? Where are you——”

“Stay tonight!” exclaimed Lucky. “I’d like to see anyone get us to move tonight. We haven’t a drop of gas and if we did have——”

“But where will you sleep?” Carol asked, as if she hated to put so direct a question.

“Sleep? Under the stars. This is a wonderful place,” Pete assured them, “and unless someone puts us off the hillside we will be very happy to camp here for a few days.”

“That man out at Railroad Place should be able to get us some money in a day or two,” Ranay said, over her arms full of the eatables. “And we’re ever so thankful. Stella, look out for that cake. It’s slipping.”

Stella bunched her boxes more securely, but apparently she was not one for wasting words or smiles. Lucky kept up a string of chatter as if trying to force a little polite pleasantry from the other girl, but her attempts were not successful.

“Don’t go away without taking your baskets and thermos,” called Ranay. “It’s a shame you won’t stay and share the picnic with us.”

Which was polite but not practical, so Carol and Thally gathered the two baskets and the one jug, and left as quickly as the exchange of questions and answers permitted.

“But about their sleeping out tonight,” Thally returned to that question as once more they neared Elm Street to give back baskets and jug. “There are so many places all furnished, and no one in them this summer, it does seem we might do a little more and get them a couple of beds under a roof.”

“And be blamed for every clothesline robbery for the next six months,” Carol objected. “Better not let our circus interest run away with us, as my precious maid Rachel might say. And there’s old skin-flint Gil Smith to remember,



you know. He may even be getting an order to chase them out of town right now, if Mayor Blake has any ink in his fountain pen,” Carol wound up, as Thally jumped out to put the lunch things on Mrs. Dugan’s porch.

But there was something more than a picnic going on over in the little grove at Fern Hill. Those four persons were each battling against more than the bankruptcy of their show. The girl Stella, always secretive and apt to be sullen, was, as she expressed it, “going to make a break.” She had had enough of road shows, was sick of it all, and going “to quit.”

## **CHAPTER III**

### **WHEN IT RAINS ON CIRCUS FOLKS**

“You should be thankful for a good meal,” Ranay was speaking.

“Yeah! Thankful and what else?” Stella sneered. Just lately she had become very discontented.

“Thankful and decent,” spoke up Pete. “With such food as this and a sunset like that, you should say your prayers, it seems to me.”

They were seated on the grass, under the glow of a marvelous sunset. The scent of sweet fern floated down from the gentle hill, and the very, very small murmur of a hidden brook mocked the silent calliope that Pete had covered up for the night.

Lucky, or Fausta as she should properly be called, had taken the few hairpins out of her red hair to let the air get at it, Pete had discarded that old necktie that Ranay called “door-crêpe,” and Ranay herself was basking in a bungalow apron with no dress under it. It “surely had been a hot day.”

It was Stella who spoiled everything. She had refused to make herself comfortable, and her sweater waist looked so hot it made those around her feel hot just looking

at it. And she was grouchy. Even Ranay, her foster mother, could not understand her now.

Fausta would turn her blue eyes from the good food to glance up at her, but it seemed too risky to say a word. It might start something.

But Ranay and Pete were less cautious. This Stella was the girl they had rescued from a baby parade, where she had been deliberately left in an unadorned baby carriage, uncalled for. They remembered now the precious time they had lost, and the money that went with that time when they cancelled their next show in another town, because they had to fill out so many papers showing their responsibility, proving they were the right sort of people to adopt a baby girl.

No trace of her parents ever turned up, and now after all those years the girl, being of age, was “walking out on them.”

Fausta was the daughter of their own brother and in her young life had been no disappointment to her family. Her mother, a widow living in New England, would and did welcome her home any time she could come, and Pete and Ranay always counted on that stay in Connecticut as their real vacation. But they wouldn't go there now—things were “not so good” with the widow of Pete King's brother Tom.

Yes, Fausta, whose home name was plain Mary, had been a good little girl all through the five years she had been on the road with them, and it had been to make a team with Stella,

that Pete and Ranay had taken her from her own home. Now Stella was going to leave, Mary could not be taken back to her mother whose home had lately become a small room over a kitchen where she did general housework. Besides all this, Pete would not give up; he felt he had part in a pretty good show and some day it would “come back.”

“I suppose you think I’m a quitter, Lucky,” Stella finally spoke. “But if I were you, I wouldn’t run the risk of getting blue-moldy out in the open. I’m not going to.”

“I guess I can stand it, if they can,” Mary answered slowly. “Let’s pick these things up. It’s starting to thunder.”

“So it is. Sorry, kid, but I can’t wait, I’ve got to get a bus before the storm breaks——”

“You’re not actually—going!”

“Sure, I am. Didn’t I ever travel alone before?”

“But Pete and Ranay—they brought you up, Stella.”

“I know. But I’ve done a little work since. What would their act be if you and I didn’t walk the ceilings and get shot out of cannons? But listen, Lucky, do something for me. Don’t tell them. I’ll write. I hate scenes, and I’ll just say I’m going to that little boarding house where the thin lady said she would give me a job washing dishes. You’ll do that for me, won’t you, Lucky? Of course—I love them.” This was an admission of her true feelings.

“I can’t believe you’d be a quitter, Stella. And right now when they’re heartbroken.” Mary King had an eloquence in that thin voice of hers, perhaps it betrayed the loyalty she felt for their sponsors, Pete and Ranay.

“I’m sick of being black and blue all the time. We got more falls in our last two shows than we ever had in a whole season. I’m going to try for some sort of civilized work,” Stella retorted.

“Sure, that’s all right; I will, too, when I can,” Mary answered. “But that doesn’t mean I’m going to run away and leave them this way.”

“Less to feed,” Stella whispered. “Now, remember, I’m counting on you, little sister,” she half smiled. “Don’t worry. I won’t disgrace the family.”

When she was saying good-bye to Pete and Ranay, she wasn’t fooling them at all. They knew she was determined “to quit the show business,” and since she was of age, they saw no point in trying to hold her.

“But there’s one thing I’d like to say to you, Stella,” Pete began, while she waited impatiently, her shabby bag in her hand, “don’t be foolish about Flippo.”

“Oh, I supposed you would say something like that, Pete, but Flippo is no clown nor dwarf, either. He’s just a little fellow that likes the fun of it. His folks have plenty of money and he’s smart. He doesn’t have to work but he likes it.”

“I know his story. All the more shame for him to pretend he is a dwarf,” Pete cut in. “And he does, as you say, like the game. He quit college because he was so good at tricks he wanted to try some of them out; and he got in on our show because they needed a little man to play dwarf for Big Thombo. Well, we won’t go into that, but listen, girl,” Pete had to put his hand on Ranay’s to keep her from interrupting him, “we brought you up as well as any girl could be brought up in our circumstances. You had your schooling, clothes, and all we could give you. Now, we are just asking you—not to forget us.”

When Stella kissed them both, she made no attempt to check the tears that were spoiling her make-up. But the storm was coming, and she had to get that bus.

They stood there in the shadows watching her hurry through the trees, her yellow sweater darting its color as she went, and the chestnut burr hat hiding that bright red hair.

“She’s gone,” murmured the woman who had been mother to her.

“Better to let her go that way than to quarrel,” said Pete in an even voice. “She’ll be back——”

“Of course,” Mary tried to smile. “She’s going to that boarding house over the line. She met some of the girls yesterday and she knows them. Stella will be all right; don’t worry.”

But her own blue eyes were following the figure so fast melting into the shadows, and she put her hand on Ranay's to lead her away.

"We must get everything put up," she ordered brightly. "Hear that thunder!"

"Will she—be on the bus?" quavered Ranay.

"Surely, there it goes now. She's O.K. Let's get all the good food left under cover, Pete. It was such a grand feed and tomorrow we may eat again. Sounds like 'meet again,' doesn't it?"

"Storm won't amount to much, but you girls better get under cover," Pete ordered. He had secured the stout canvas over the top of the calliope auto, the high pipes of the instrument serving as tent poles; but there was little air space in spite of Pete's attention to that very detail. "Mary," he said, strange how quickly they had dropped the show names and were calling her Mary, "I hope you get a chance to meet those young ladies and thank them before we leave. They certainly saved our lives."

"I'll make a chance," Mary answered, "but we haven't a name——"

"One is Carol and the other Thally," spoke up Ranay, as she finally got her plentiful self under the cover and was huddling close to Mary. "With names like that you should have no trouble finding them. Here, Pete, get in. There's the rain, and if *you* get wet——"

“It’s hot enough yet to dry this rain as it falls,” Pete protested. Like most men he loved a thunder shower and would turn his face up to meet it every chance he got, if Ranay wasn’t too nervous.

Mary wasn’t thinking of the shower but of Stella. Wondering where she really would go, wondering if she really would marry Flippo. He was from a good family and not the dwarf he pretended to be in the show; and Mary had always heard folks say he was so unhappy about being undersized that he just learned all sorts of tricks to prove how smart he could be. He was pleasant enough, and had always been good-natured to both girls, until Stella seemed to claim him as her special friend. After that Mary stayed behind when they went on drives in that queer little green car—another one of Flippo’s affectations.

And he had never told anyone his real name, although Heavy Harriot, the fat woman, said she saw his mother one day when she came to see him, and she could hear the mother begging him to go home. And Harriot said she was “simply swell.”

“Those girls were simply swell.” Ranay had just hissed those same words into Mary’s ear, for the canvas with the rain beating on it made everything sound like hisses.

“Those girls— Oh, you mean Carol and Thally. Yes, weren’t they?” sighed Mary. It must be easy to be swell, she was thinking, when a girl has everything she wants.



“Pete! Pete!” Ranay was calling. “He’s talking to someone. Look out that corner, Mary.”

Skillfully raising the flap, Mary did peek out, and, sure enough, Pete was talking to someone. There was an auto on the roadside, and a man was calling out to Pete.

“Listen! Can’t you hear what they’re saying?” pleaded Ranay. “Hope it isn’t that old skin-flint down the road, trying to drive us away.”

“It isn’t. It’s a gentleman’s voice, and I hear girls— Oh, Ranay! It’s our girls back. Maybe they’ve come to take us to lodgings!”

Pete was standing bareheaded, and the shower was almost over. Just a light sprinkle trickled down on the gray head, while the man in the car, it was a big sedan, had his head out the door window, talking to Pete. The suspense was too much for Ranay, and quickly warning Mary not to say anything about Stella, she jumped down from her tent and was out beside her brother, before Mary had decided what it was all about.

“Oh, hello, Ranay!” came Carol’s voice from the back of the car. “Where are the girls?”

Mary could not distinctly hear Ranay’s answer, but that Stella had gone to visit friends and Fausta was hiding from the shower was a safe guess.

“I better get out from under cover,” Mary decided, feeling again the necessity for a “bold front before the public.” It

came back at the sound of her show name, Fausta. She sighed. Mary King was at heart shy and retiring. No one who had ever seen her “do her act with Stella” would have believed that of her. It was Stella who led always, and the younger girl was only confident of herself because she had so much confidence in Pete, in Ranay, and in Stella. But Stella was gone now, and she would have to face things alone. At the moment she was slipping out from under that canvas cover with some show of circus skill. But she hated to meet Carol. She wished the shower had not gone over so quickly.

But, in spite of misgiving, Mary King was smiling broadly as she joined Pete and Ranay around the sedan.

“They want us to go to a house for the night,” Ranay quickly explained. “Too bad Stella didn’t wait.” This, Mary understood, was intended to ward off any inquiries as to where Stella had gone.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESCUED

What happened was this. Carol and Thally, having provided the circus folks with food, were interested and wanted to do more for them. They both thought it a shame to have those nice people out in heavy rain while there were plenty of houses idle in Oakleigh, and furnished, too.

“I am sure Miss Splartier and Vera would be glad to turn old Splatter Castle over to them,” Carol reminded Thally.

“Suppose we find out.”

“You go ahead, Carol, but have you, by any chance, forgotten that *my* family has a moving on hand? And, after waiting practically all summer for the workmen to get out of the place, you can’t blame Mother for being impatient to get in.”

“Oh, I know, Thally, and I want to help with that moving \_\_\_\_\_”

“We’re counting on you for the piano and the family wardrobe—” Thally had to have her joke.

“Oh, do listen, please,” Carol begged. “Have you heard any more about the ghosts in the tower? Going to move

in the house and take pot shots at the ghosts from the house?”

“I did hear a lot more,” Thally admitted. “But, since you and I specialize in ghosts, *this* may be our star chance, so, yes, we’re going to move in and not do anything about the tower. Just let it stand there and display its ghosts. The pot shots from the house may give you and me our opportunity.”

“Well, all right, Thally, but I imagine we are going to be pretty busy. That tower has had so many weird tales to its credit; I am sure your dad is not going to be fooled by any boys’ pranks.”

“Not Dad. He’s one hard-headed gentleman. And, as you know, both Mother and our precious maid, Felice, are just naturally scared to death of ghosts. So when, and if, the ghosts appear in the old tower, I can see you and me laying for them, guns in hands.”

“Then, I’ll see Vera and Miss Splartier about housing the homeless. Dad has already heard old Gil Smith on the subject. Gil can’t think of enough mean things to say about them. Glad my dad hasn’t that kind of disposition.”

“Disposition?” repeated Thally, disdainfully. “That isn’t disposition, it’s cussedness. Dad says Gil’s so mean the men can’t bear to go to the Council meetings since he got in. He just crabs and growls all the time.”

Miss Splartier and her niece, Vera, who owned the old place humorously called Splatter Castle, had been only too glad to

have the strangers take shelter there, so that was why Carol had called up her friend, Glenn Garrison. He had brought his big car out to pick up Carol and Mr. Duncan, Carol's father, so that they might all go out to Fern Hill and, if possible, induce the circus folks to go to the big old house and camp there until they might make some more suitable arrangements.

Carol was at home now and trying to make her sister Cecy understand that she "just couldn't be in on everything." Cecy was demanding to know why Thally and Carol had gone off and made a picnic for the circus folks without inviting her and Rosie.

"If we don't take them under our wing," Carol had argued, "old Gil Smith will just pester them until they move on. I know they have no gas for their calliope car and no money for other expenses."

"And it would be simply terrible to let them get away without giving us a little private show," the exuberant Cecy declared. "If I hadn't promised to go to Rosie's for tea you couldn't hold me out of this party," Cecy went on. "But Paul and Bob are coming out to play tennis——"

"Good thing for us," laughed her sister Carol. "This is a rescue party, not a circus."

So it was Carol, Glenn, and Carol's father who were in the car; and Mary King, whom Carol was still calling Fausta, had already agreed with Ranay that it was simply a grand idea to take quarters in the big house over on the other road,

and it would be all right for Pete to follow later with Mr. Duncan. Incidentally, Mr. Duncan was seeing about gas, or money for gas, for the calliope car, so the two men were themselves having something of a grand time talking over machines, cars, calliopes, and circuses, while the women had piled into Glenn's car and were out of the men's way.

"Call me Mary, won't you?" Mary King asked Carol, when the two girls were attempting to make camp in the big old-fashioned place that had played so important a part in the plot of *The Forbidden Trail* story. "I only used the name Fausta in show work. And I'm out of that now."

"For good?" Carol asked. She was seeing about the lights while Glenn had turned on the electric power at the switch in the cellar.

"I guess we are through, this time," the girl answered, "and I'm not sorry."

"Must be pretty hard work. This fixture needs a bulb. Where's Glenn?"

"Yes, it is hard work. But we have nothing else to do and we must—eat," laughed Mary. "Can I put our duffle bag in this closet?"

"Any place you like. The owners of this place have moved out to the boulevard, and they are glad to have some one in here; boys are very mischievous around these big places where fruit trees still bear apples," Carol declared. "And your sister Stella has gone on to friends, you say?"

“Yes,” said Mary simply. “Oh, Ranay!” she called out suddenly, “come up here and see the moon coming out of a big cloud. Have you ever noticed,” to Carol, “how much brighter the moon is *after* it gets out of clouds?”

“Yes, like us, don’t you think? We are always so much happier when troubles are lifted than before they come.”

This serious remark was so unexpected both girls stopped short in their work and gazed at each other. Carol wondered why it had so impressed the girl, and the girl, evidently, was wondering why Carol had made the remark.

“You mean,” Mary stammered, “that *our* lives will be brighter after these troubles pass?”

“Yes, I do,” declared Carol firmly. “I have seen things happen that way so many times. For instance, last spring I had a dear friend who was in such trouble she just didn’t think life worth living. When, suddenly, everything cleared up, and now she is so happy she just wonders how she could have ever worried about anything.” Carol was referring to Veronica Flint, the girl who had had the terrible experiences described in the story *The Forbidden Trail*.

“Well,” sighed Mary, “*we* certainly have had enough troubles for a change to be about due us.”

“Are you worried about your sister Stella?” Carol asked impulsively. They had come to a stop in their settling of the

few things Ranay and Mary had crammed into Glenn's sedan.

"She isn't my sister; in fact, she is not related to our family," Mary answered. "Uncle Peter and Aunt Ranay are my own relations, but they adopted and brought up Stella. Of course, we all love her," there was a wistful note in that remark, "but—we just don't understand her at times. Relations are so much easier to understand. Don't you think so?"

"Oh, certainly," Carol assured her. "But, let me tell you something. My friend Thally and I are such chums we just seem to know each other's thoughts, and right now we are expecting some great, exciting things to happen." Carol was teasingly mysterious.

"Exciting?"

"Yes. Ever know anything about ghosts?"

"Who doesn't?" smiled Mary. "Why?"

"Well, the Bonds, that's Thally and her folks, are moving into an immense old place that has a haunted tower on the property. They are moving in, now, have been at it for days, and I'm just dying to spend a night there and find out if anything happens in the old tower."

"You mean that queer looking tower that stands just at the bend of the road overlooking the little lake and the state line?" Mary surprisingly asked.



“Yes. But how did you know?” Carol inquired.

“Oh, we came by that way several times. You see, we have been giving little shows wherever they would give us a permit, and we gave one for an orphans’ home just over the line there. We all noticed the tower. It looks spooky even in broad daylight.”

“Listen!” Carol interrupted.

“Yes, that’s Pete. I hear the calliope. Isn’t it funny he can never start the old bus without giving Cally a turn or two? He knows that cranky man may get after us—” Mary was hurrying toward the door and Carol was following her. Her remark about the cranky man referred to Gil Smith.

“Don’t worry about old Gil Smith,” Carol made a chance to say, although Mary was now at the door. “This is private property—you may tune up and turn on Cally all you like, and no one will dare stop you.”

“But it’s dark—” The sound of a car interrupted them.

“That’s Dad. Glenn,” called Carol, “tear yourself away from that gas meter and come up here. There are gentlemen—to be—entertained!” Carol was shouting merrily, and her clear young voice rang through the big place like a clarion call.

And, when the men came in, there was Pete with Mr. Duncan, and Glenn was waving big monkey wrenches around, singing wild songs, and doing odd dance steps as all boys will do when anything like moving or a vacant house gives them the longed-for chance to display their talents.

“He’s great,” said Mary simply, aside to Carol. “It’s a wonder you and your friend Thally don’t fight about him.”

“About Glenn! Why Glenn is one of—” she stopped and ended the sentence on a ringing laugh, for Pete, the circus man, was giving a demonstration of his “barking skill,” while Glenn became more and more Indian-like with his dance of the big iron tools.

Carol was thinking, “Wouldn’t Cecy have a grand time if she were here?”

Mary was looking on with a grin too natural to be anything else.

And Ranay was standing in the kitchen door playing the tambourine on a big black frying pan.

And all that was the beginning of a friendship that was to carry these people through thick and thin.

## CHAPTER V

### THE GIRLS' IDEA

Before they left, Carol had promised Mary King she would surely let her know if anything happened in the old tower.

“I’m going over there tomorrow night,” she told Mary, “and, if nothing really happens, I’m sure Thally’s friends will make something happen. Everybody knows the stories of that tower, and everybody knows Thally Bond.”

“I hope the ghost gets busy before we move on,” Mary replied. “Of course, we must go back home soon,” she added slowly.

“There might be work around here,” Carol said, so that only Mary heard her. “Don’t be in a hurry. We are so rushed now with Thally Bond moving into her wonderful new home—you can hardly imagine how one girl’s moving gets us all excited around here.”

“Oh, yes, I can. Moving into homes is something I have only imagined. I have been moving ever so long, but never into—a home.”

“Cheer up,” prompted Carol, “isn’t this a home?” She was bound to keep things merry.

“I’ll say it is,” Mary answered. “But tell me about that place your friend is moving into. Isn’t there supposed to be some sort of hoodoo about it? Doesn’t the round window in the old tower wink its eyes or something?”

“Really, there are plenty of stories about the tower, and where there are plenty of stories, there must be one with some reason for it,” Carol declared. “However, you folks just make yourselves comfortable tonight and depend upon us, Mary, we girls always dig up some excitement about this time of year. Stick around,” she chanted. “My sister Cecy just can’t wait to meet you. She’s one of those youngsters who believe everything should mean fun, even when it isn’t a bit funny?”

“I know. And I love kids like that.” Mary answered wistfully. “Well, you can’t imagine what you’ve done for us——”

“There’s Glenn calling again. Take the Number Four bus and get off *at* Oak Lodge, when you run out to see us. We live in the stone cottage on the grounds there.” Breathless, Carol escaped, and thus saved Mary King an overflow of embarrassing thanks.

They had been rescued from dusty, dirty traveling along roads, where the tune of Pete’s calliope brought them more derision than poor honest good-natured Pete could ever blame people for, because he could never think them capable of being that mean to decent show folks. Rescued from the days of relentless summer sun, and nights of cowardly showers, that would steal down upon them unawares, when they had boasted of going to sleep under the

stars; and even rescued from the new feeling of a hunger that was not merely accidental, but hunger that brought with it the fear of no food and also no money to buy food. This was what rescue had meant to the King family.

Carol Duncan and Thally Bond were possibly no wiser than other girls, but as their friends would declare, they were quick to think and fearless in acting. It did not concern them what anyone might say about their “taking up with circus people.” Neither did they hesitate to ask Miss Marah Splartier for the use of this old house called Splatter Castle. And now they did not guess what it all could mean to Mary King, her Uncle Peter, and her Aunt Ranay. It was just “all right” as far as Carol and Thally were concerned, and they made no fuss about it.

Seated in the big old-fashioned kitchen, the three adventurers, Pete, Ranay, and Mary King, were joking about their “new streak of luck,” as Pete called it. He had had the best talk he’d had in a long time with Mr. Duncan. And he wouldn’t be surprised if he found some work on the big corn farms just across the state line. Mr. Duncan had been telling him about the bumper crops, and they had talked about that pest, the corn borer. What a shame the measly worm couldn’t be controlled and the lovely ears of corn left clean and beautiful!

And, while he talked and Ranay interrupted, Mary was thinking of Stella. Where would she go? Stella might marry Flippo—Mary hoped she wouldn’t. She just didn’t want Stella to marry. Of course, he was not a dwarf as he pretended to be, just a very small young man, too fond of

impish tricks. Mary remembered how he used to scare her and Stella by creeping up on them so silently. He always liked to tease and joke. But, after all, he was jolly and had a nice face, and everyone admitted he was too smart to be with their little show. Perhaps he loved Stella and he would take good care of her. He had plenty of money—Mary was sure of that, but somehow he didn't seem to care much about money. All he cared about was learning new tricks and making what he called scientific experiments.

“Suppose Stella comes back to that lot to look for us,” Ranay suddenly said, when Pete went for his drink of water which he always took just before going to bed.

“I left a note tied in an old handkerchief under a stone she knows about,” Mary replied.

“You mean she and you picked out a stone?” Ranay asked in surprise.

“Yes, sort of. She was determined to go to the boarding house by the track—she had a few dollars—you know, and I told her if she should come back after we left——”

“You're dead tired, Mary,” the aunt interrupted. “You must go up to our little room——”

“I *must*! Think of a bed! And you are telling me I *must* go up to it. Nighty-nite,” she joked, playfully touching the cheek of that kind and unselfish aunt. “Let's see what we will all dream about. Pete, don't forget your dream tonight,” she called after the retreating figure. “I hope I dream——”

But she did not say of what.

“If Pete could get work on a farm, and if Ranay and I could get in at the canning factory, maybe we *could* stick around here, as Carol said. But after tonight we mustn’t bother *those* folks,” Mary was silently, but bravely, determining. “We just are not in their class.”

“Those are the nicest girls,” Ranay remarked, as if sensing Mary’s thoughts while slipping the soiled gingham dress over her head with more of a physical effort and more audible grunts than might have been expected from a former circus queen. “I’m so sorry Stella didn’t wait.” She was sorry; and she couldn’t stop worrying about Stella.

“We may hear from her in the morning,” Mary said hopefully. “Stella’s all right, Ranay. You needn’t worry about her. She’s just tired out, and I don’t blame her.”

“No, I suppose not.” Ranay’s sigh was only half hidden in her brushing of that mop of variegated hair. “Don’t leave the window open much. We’re so tired, we would go right on sleeping through another shower, and the rain could spoil the wall paper. Isn’t it old-fashioned?” She was looking at the quaint wall paper on one of the maid’s rooms over Miss Splartier’s kitchen.

“I’ll sleep, even if they move us, house and all,” Mary declared. “And I don’t want to think about tomorrow. This is bound to be perfect.”

“Tomorrow you and I will look over the whole place, Carol said we should. There’s a cave out back, don’t you know the cave we read about in the papers last spring?” Mary gave a weak little groan for answer. She was plainly fishing for that dream she had been determined to remember.

“Well, it seems they found something very valuable in the cave, and they’ve got it all fenced in, now, with a high iron fence,” continued Ranay. “The young lady who lived here”—(she meant Vera Flint)—“owns that part of the property, and her father, who was supposed to be dead, it seems is coming back from foreign lands— Are you asleep, dear?”

She was asleep, so Ranay switched off the light as she crept into the bed by the other window.

Carol had gone for the night to the big new house with Thally. It was not a new house, but one so old that the complete renovation given it by the Bonds almost changed its identity. Still, there were the massive white marble mantels said to have been brought over from Italy for the original owners. There were the gorgeous crystal chandeliers, and also such interesting features as the stained glass ceiling in the billiard room, the wrought-iron railings around the stair-well, and other really valuable bits of antique decorations.

Just now the girls, Thally and Carol, were in the library with Mr. and Mrs. Bond. After the long days of moving, everyone was tired, and a hearth fire had been laid there, because Mrs. Bond insisted the house was damp,



having been closed so long. The evening shower, too, had had a suddenly cooling effect; so the hearth fire was quite enjoyable.

But the girls soon rambled off by themselves. Carol had so much to tell Thally about the King family, and Thally had so much to tell Carol—about the old tower.

“When Jo Berg came up here late last night with the last basket load of Mother’s precious china,” Thally was saying, “he declared he *saw* a ghost in the tower.”

“*Saw* a ghost! Then it couldn’t have been a ghost.”

“Of course we all agree to that—all except Mother and Felice. They just won’t let you use the word ghost,” Thally went on. “But Jo said the round window in the top of the tower winked!”

“How absurd!” retorted Carol.

“Certainly the winking is absurd, but it must have looked like that. You know, the window is long and narrow like a big eye, and the hood over it put there to protect it from storms, I suppose, looks just like an eyebrow when it is shown up by a light beneath.”

“You’re not timid about it, I’m sure, Thally?” Carol asked.

“Timid? No. But you know what it means, Carol. We have had ‘ghosts’ around here ever since the big properties began to change hands. Certainly, we have been able to run most of

them down, but look at the work that sort of running brings us.”

“If it were not for your mother being so nervous, I suppose we might all sit back and let the old ghosts hang themselves with their own ropes,” Carol said. “But in the meantime, your mother might be having nervous prostration.”

“Exactly. And since it was I who begged Dad to let the old tower stand—he wanted to have it torn down, you know—why, I feel I’ve got to do something about the ghosts.”

“What time did Jo say he saw the thing?”

“It must have been after eleven o’clock. I know Mother was anxious to get him started off, but he was tired from moving all day and he couldn’t seem to hurry another step. Mother asked me what time it was before he left, and I remember telling her it was ten minutes of eleven.”

“Can you see the tower from any window?”

“Yes, but not clearly, there are so many trees. Come on upstairs and we’ll watch from my window. Wait, let’s tell the folks we are going up.”

And, amid all sorts of warnings and joking admonitions from Mr. Bond, with a wistful word of caution from Mrs. Bond, the girls trotted off, up the beautiful winding stairs, to watch the old tower “wink its eye.”

## CHAPTER VI

### THE MIDNIGHT BRIDE

Carol and Thally were determined to sit up without undressing, and to watch the tower from the south window. The night was pretty breezy after the early brisk shower, and as they sat huddled together on one big chair that Thally managed to clear from the moving disorder, every unexpected sound would give them a jolt.

“Cecy will never forgive me if the eye winks and she misses it,” Carol was sleepily remarking.

“Why didn’t she come?”

“Oh, she went to Rosie’s for tea, so I thought the crowd would bring her home, and they are sure to have their own kind of fun when we leave them to themselves,” said Carol, with that older sister manner that Thally always laughed at.

The roaring of a big truck going by on the highway gave them something to listen to.

“I should think those trucks would bother your mother,” Carol remarked as the heavy one rolled by.

“Oh, they will. That’s what comes of being on a main road,” Thally answered. “But we are so far in from the road—the

grounds are two hundred feet deep at the front—the noise isn't so bad. But the trucks, of course, are pretty rattling.”

“Let's go to bed——”

“And it is almost eleven! Why, Carol, I'm surprised——”

Thally stopped short. Both girls were directly in front of a big window with lights all out. They were watching the tower, the tiptop of which, with its big window eye, could just be discerned if a light should appear there.

It had appeared! It was blinking! There was no mistaking that flickering light. The girls were speechless, watching it.

One, two, three; then a wait. The next moment two quick flashes in succession, a pause, then three.

“That's a signal!” Carol exclaimed, as they waited and no more lights shone.

“But *who* could signal from there?” gasped Thally.

“Why, anyone——”

“No; Dad had the place searched for wires in every possible way. He even had the ground dug up for underground wires. We had Mr. Guthrie, the engineer surveyor from Mr. Hutton's office, go all over the place,” Thally declared.

“Well, those were lights in that tower and they made the old eye wink,” Carol rejoined.

“I wish I had let Dad tear the old thing down,” Thally said dejectedly. “I know it’s going to give us a lot of trouble.”

“As if *you* minded trouble, Thally.”

“No, it isn’t that; but I worry about Mother. I’m so glad no one saw it but us.”

“It would take more than a blinking light down at the lake point to wake the folks in this house tonight, I imagine. But now the show is over. No more winking. And what are we going to do about it?” Carol asked.

“What can we do?”

“Listen! There’s someone on the porch——”

A very light ring of the bell, sounding from the button on the porch to the rear hall, could just be heard. Carol and Thally waited breathlessly.

“We must go down,” Carol whispered.

“Yes, and before the ring disturbs the others. Where’s the big flashlight?”

Not depending on hall lights alone, the girls started down, armed with the long beam flashlight. Without hesitation, Carol turned the lock and opened the door to the big marble-floored vestibule. Thally touched the second button that flashed on the porch light.

“A girl!” she exclaimed instantly.

“Yes, a girl, and the girl—is—Stella,” Carol whispered. For there, under the light on the porch, stood the girl who had been with the Kings on the calliope car, Stella King, adopted daughter of Pete and Ranay.

“Stella!” Thalia echoed in surprise.

Quickly Carol opened the door. Then it was the girl Stella who appeared most surprised.

“Why, say,” she stammered. “I didn’t know *you* lived here.” She was speaking to Carol; not to Thally, and she seemed almost too surprised to speak at all.

“I don’t, I’m just visiting,” Carol answered pleasantly.

“I saw a light and stopped to inquire the way to Turnbull’s,” the girl said, but somehow the explanation didn’t seem just clear, as there had been no light showing in the house.

“Turnbull’s is a long old-fashioned hotel just beyond First Mountain,” Thally volunteered. “Won’t—you—come in?” she invited, still wondering.

“You see,” Stella began again, “I was married today \_\_\_\_\_”

“Married!” both girls echoed.

“Yes; I guess the folks expected it.” She was digging the toe of the white pump into the door mat. “But I couldn’t find where they had gone to,” she continued.

“They are at Splartier’s,” Carol began.

“But I wouldn’t have time to go there now, and, of course, I want them to know at once.” Stella was looking for something in her hand bag. “I wonder would you give dear Ranay and Pete this letter?” she asked, a catch in her voice. “I had it ready to mail——”

“We’d be glad to, of course,” Thally promptly offered.

“And our car is down the drive, I really must run off——” Stella was plainly nervous to get away.

“We haven’t even had time to kiss you for luck,” Carol said impulsively, at the moment playfully grasping the shoulders of Stella and touching her cheeks with her lips. Thally did the same thing the next moment, and, as Stella was hurrying off, laughing happily, she turned to say:

“I am Mrs. Lyndon Carter now.”

The girls stood there while the car, which was evidently of good make, for the motor purred smoothly as the shadow left the driveway, rumbled off.

“Oh, of all things,” whispered Thally. “Can you beat that?”

“Which?” asked Carol. They had closed the door noiselessly, crept upstairs and were near their own bedroom door again.

“Which? Why, that marriage announcement. Turn on the light, dear. I feel as if things are going to jump out at me.” Thally was quite breathless.

“I expected she would be married soon,” Carol explained.  
“Mary King told me about the romance.”

“Whom did she marry? Who owns the high sounding name?”  
Thally had her shoes off and was at her stockings, deadlly tired, now, but not too tired for romance.

“They called him Flippo in the show,” Carol explained, “but it seems he is a college boy with home, money, and parents.”

“Quite the ideal match then,” drawled Thally, clapping her hand on a yawn.

“Not exactly. He’s too small to be happy, it seems, so he took to show work to prove that little men can be extra smart. Mary King said he was really very clever and thought of nothing in life but working out new tricks and experiments.”

“Not such a good prospect for Stella. He may want her to be the Human Cricket that flies through the air——”

“Oh, I believe he is very fond of Stella and never has a partner in his acts. Always works alone. That’s why she is bound to be happy, Mary said. She was very anxious to give up the show business. Just hated it,” Carol declared.

“Don’t blame her.” Thally was still yawning, but could not spare a hand for her mouth on account of her undies. “Say, Carol, what about the light?”

“You mean Stella saying she saw a light that wasn’t?”



“Don’t ball me up. If she saw a light in *this* house that wasn’t, we might as well pack up again right now. That would mean we have all gone goofy.”

“No,” laughed Carol, “I didn’t mean that. But she said she saw a light here, and there wasn’t a light on in the house, that is, one that could be seen from the front, at any rate.”

“Oh, Mother says a poor excuse is better than none. She just wanted to ring our doorbell, I guess.” Thally was getting so sleepy she couldn’t think.

“But why? I don’t believe she ever intended to leave that note for the Kings here. She knew they would be at our quaint little post office as soon as the mail was sorted tomorrow morning. So, why shouldn’t she have mailed it?” Carol was quite wide awake.

“But she wanted to inquire for Turnbull’s.”

“I can’t believe that, either. The Kings came through Cattail Hollow on their way into Oakleigh. And can you imagine hungry folks passing that sign of ‘Turnbull’s Hotel, Meals at All Hours’ Without noticing it?”

“I can’t. But what time is it?” Poor, tired Thally!

“The stroke of midnight. Want to look for more lights in the tower?”

“I do not. They can blow the old thing up, for all I care.” Thally had one of those yawning spells that threatened to

choke her or dislocate her jaw. “Got plenty of covers on your bed?” she managed to ask.

“Loads; and these pajamas are warm as toast.” Carol was slipping under the covers. “But, Thally,” she ventured, as Thally’s head was seeking the seclusion of a soft pillow and a downy comforter, “you know we did see the eye wink.”

“Whose eye?”

“You must be asleep already,” laughed Carol. “The eye in the tower, of course.”

“Oh, sure, we saw it wink. But who cares?”

Lights were out, and girls were “going out,” too.

## **CHAPTER VII**

### **CECY AND ROSIE**

When Sister Cecy and her friend Rosie danced around the girls' beds next morning, both Carol and Thally rubbed their eyes skeptically.

“Hey! What is this? How did you kids get in here? Disturbing poor tired girls—” Thally was trying to say something like that, but the bombardment of pillows made it difficult.

“Get up! Get up, sleepy heads!” Rosie was chanting, while Cecy who was now known as the liveliest girl in any “bunch,” had paused to admire the big mahogany wardrobe that Thally was waiting for the moving men to get out of her room.

“Why?” Cecy demanded. “It’s simply gorgeous. You could build your hope chest in it.”

“That’s what’s the matter. It’s too enormous. First night I was in here those two doors suddenly sprang open and nearly scared me pink.”

“Oh!” squealed Cecy, “let me see.” She promptly sprang up the step and inside the closet, then pulled the

two doors together. Next, of course, she jumped out pooh-ing and hoo-ing in imitation of something to be afraid of.

“Who let you two in here, anyway?” Carol demanded. She, with Thally, had been rudely awakened by the two younger girls, evidently out early to have a good long day of fun.

“Felice, of course,” Cecy answered. “And we brought her a lovely bunch of delphinium——”

“Cecy! You didn’t cut those lovely blue flowers——”

“You’re telling me!” Cecy loved that sort of slang, and she really was cute enough to use it effectively. She no longer wore glasses, her eye trouble having been cured by school discipline, and she was much rounder than she used to be when some mean folks called her String Bean. She had nice blond hair, and in her yellow linen dress was quite *chic* this morning, although no one but herself ever liked her in high-heeled shoes. And they looked particularly silly with a linen dress in the morning.

“Get out, now,” ordered Thally, “and we’ll dress. That ought to be an inducement.”

“Seeing you do it might be,” lisped Rosie, who also had improved in manners and was not nearly as affected as she used to be. Cecy called her Rosie, but most of her friends called her Lindy. The answer to that combination was, of course, her name, Rosalind Wells.

“We have news!” Thally blurted out. “Our little circus star was married yesterday,” she announced dramatically.

“Married! Not—Mary King!” Cecy exclaimed.

“No, her sister Stella,” Carol explained. “You know I told you how she ran away——”

“But if the other girl runs away, we’ll never even see a flip-flop,” wailed Cecy. “We were just going over to Splatter Castle to see Mary King. Can’t we go? Can’t you come? Think you’ll ever get into that dress, Carol? You seem to get one arm out as fast as you stick the other in.”

“Now, listen, love,” cooed Carol. “If you will promise a lot of promises, I’ll give you a message to take over to Mary King.”

“Ca-rol! You love. Give it to me—the message. What is it and——”

“Whoa!” called Thally. “It’s just a little note from the bride whose new name is Mrs. Lyndon Carter.”

“What a swell name!” chimed in Rosie. “Who’s Lyndon?”

“A friend, now friend husband, of course,” Carol answered. “And it is said he has money, education——”

“Stop! Halt!” sang out the dancing Cecy. “Give me that letter. She might write another, and someone else would bring it over. Come along, Rosie.” Carol was actually getting Stella’s letter from the dresser drawer, “Let’s get going.”

“Now, listen here, Cecy, and be sure you understand,” Carol warned her sister, “You are not to do any cutting-up over

there. Mary King is a nice girl, and you could easily hurt her feelings with your silly nonsense.”

“I understand, sister dear. How’s this?” and Cecy began to jabber in an absurd way, strutting about in pretended dignity until Thally threw a cake of soap at her.

“But suppose,” queried Rosie, “they should throw us out? Not like the news of Stella’s elopement?”

“Oh, she didn’t elope. And they are not the kind of folks to throw people out. For goodness’ sake, run along,” Carol urged. “We have a lot of things to do and just look at that clock.”

“How come the clock kept going in moving?” Rosie asked. “Why didn’t you stop it? It’s bad luck——”

“Bad luck?” roared Thally. “Look out for the nail in the packing case. Why must you wear silk dresses in this sort of mix-up, Rosie? Just look at that jab——”

Finally, the two younger girls were off, but being too young to drive a car, and having no older friends available at that early hour, they were obliged to go by bus to old Splatter Castle to see the Kings and deliver Stella’s letter.

But, after all, a bus is quite as dependable as a car, and they reached the old house with the stone wall around it, just as Pete was tuning up his calliope. Pete had to give that machine a few wheezes every once in a while to make sure it didn’t forget how to play.

As Rosie and Cecy raced in the back gate and made a dive for the garage in which the calliope was parked, Pete must have thought another picnic had broken loose.

“Oh, go ahead and play. Don’t stop,” begged Cecy, crowding in at the side of the chariot, with Rosie close at her heels. “I’m Carol Duncan’s sister Cecy, and this is my friend Rosalind Wells——”

The new voices must have reached Ranay and Mary King at the back porch, for they were now coming down the path. Mary’s blue gingham had been freshly washed and ironed, and she looked quite pretty—not a bit like the “circus star” the girls had expected to meet.

It was hard for Cecy to repress her spirits. Never did a girl seem to have more “bounce and bubble” than did Cecy. But she was trying to adhere to Carol’s orders, “Not to treat Mary King like a circus animal out of a job, because she wasn’t; she was a very nice girl.”

“I’m Carol Duncan’s sister,” Cecy was telling Mary, “and this is my friend Rosalind Wells. We are so anxious to know you——”

“Thanks,” Mary King quickly cut in, for even she could see that Cecy was trying to be like Carol, kind, but not patronizing. “It has been simply wonderful of you girls to get us this chance to rest here. Of course, we must be moving \_\_\_\_\_”

“Moving!” exclaimed Rosie. “Oh, please don’t. We are counting on having such a lot of fun. We could give a party or a picnic here; couldn’t we, Cecy? And Mr. Peter could play that grand old wheezer——”

“His calliope,” smiled Ranay, who had been smiling ever since she met these girls. They were so jolly.

“Oh, that would be simply great!” gasped Cecy. “Why can’t you folks stay here? You could take care of the old place.”

All this time she was holding Stella’s note inside her coat pocket, as if she hated to give these nice people its surprising news. But now she was ready to hand it to Ranay. It was addressed to Miss Ranay King.

“This letter,” Cecy began, “my sister asked me to give it to you, Miss King.”

Quietly Ranay took the offered envelope. Pete merely brushed his hair back, and Mary stooped to pick a brown-eyed Susan that grew in the pebbled drive.

What composure, what discipline, these folks were steeled to, thought Cecy. Even Ranay took her time, although her hands trembled a little in opening the letter. With a simple apology, she had stepped aside to read Stella’s note. No one appeared to notice, but upon reading it she had started a little, bit her lip, and then, very deliberately, slid the paper into the front of her dress. When she turned to the chattering group, she merely smiled reassuringly at Mary.

Rosie was thinking: “She doesn’t like that marriage news.”



And Cecy was thinking: “Wait until she gets hold of that Stella.”

But Ranay was thinking: “Our little girl is gone. But Lyndon Carter had better be good to her.”

“Oh!” shrilled Cecy, a new note of excitement breaking loose in her voice. “Look who’s coming! Miss Splartier and Vera. Now you will all have to stay. Wait until you see if Miss Splartier doesn’t insist upon it.”

Which was really what happened. Our old friend, Marah Splartier, and her niece Veronica Flint, who provided such interesting action in *The Forbidden Trail* story, were there now with the group in the side grounds of Splatter Castle, and when Cecy said Miss Splartier would insist upon the Kings staying in her place, she had made a perfect guess.

“I just needed someone to look after this place,” Marah Splartier told them, “and why shouldn’t you?”

“That’s fine of you, Miss Splartier,” Pete answered before Ranay could do so, “but we are not people to impose upon kindness.”

“Impose! I always mean what I say,” and so she did. “And, when I heard that old skin-flint Gil Smith talking about and against strangers coming in to this town, I hurried out to keep you here. Nothing would give me more pleasure than to get back at Gil Smith.” Miss Splartier was very emphatic.

They all laughed at Marah’s way of extending her welcome, and Cecy remembered her father also had said Gil Smith had

no right to chase people away merely because they rode on a calliope chariot. But Cecy made no remarks, for a wonder.

Vera had been talking aside with the girls. It was hard to realize, looking at her now, that this smart, stylishly dressed young girl was she who had drooped in utter despair so few months ago. The old cave back of this place was now like a quarry, with workmens' huts about it, and great machines in operation extracting the precious minerals and stones only lately discovered there.

"Then you'll all stay on here and save me a lot of trouble looking for reliable caretakers. Of course, I have inquired about you," Marah admitted, "and everyone says you are strictly honest——"

"But dead broke," put in Pete, shaking his silvery head.

"But where's the other girl?" Vera asked. "Carol said there were two."

"There were, but now there is only one; Mary here. Stella was married yesterday." That was Ranay.

"Married!" The chorus of surprise seemed to mean that a show girl was not supposed to marry.

"Certainly," spoke up Mary, hiding her own surprise. "Stella has been expecting to be married for quite a while, but she couldn't leave me in the act—we acted together, you know. So, when things just 'busted up' and there was no more acting to be done, that gave Stella her chance."

“Yes,” Pete said, but his manner was not enthusiastic.

“Yes,” echoed Ranay, “that was how it was.”

“But, wasn’t it too bad we didn’t know about it?” Vera continued. “We might have given her a party.”

“That would have been lovely,” Mary said gratefully. “But you see, the—gentleman she married is pretty well off, and perhaps they may not want any publicity.”

“Why not?” asked Marah sharply. “Are they the only people in the world with a little money?”

“Oh, I didn’t mean that,” blushed Mary. “I meant because we are in the show business.”

And, during all this, Ranay said not a word about what really was written on the stiff paper that was scratching her breast.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE HUMAN GHOST

While Cecy and Rosie were dashing around with all the news they could collect and scatter, Carol and Thally were devoting their time to very different matters.

They had agreed to say nothing of the light in the tower, but to “watch, wait, and listen.”

“If we watch, we may see something else, if we wait, someone is surely going to give us a clue, and if we listen—we may hear something to our advantage.” Thally was making that sententious speech.

“But we can’t go down to the tower now without Cecy and Rosie trailing along, and what kind of investigating could we do with those babies at our heels?” Carol lamented. The girls had only finished breakfast, and the two younger girls had gone to discover the Kings.

“Today, I’m determined to find out what’s wrong with the old tower. Last night I was too tired to care,” Thally said under her breath, for the maid, Felice, was gliding in and out of the room. She was a treasure as a maid, but a coward about “ghosts.” In fact, it took much persuasion, and many an argument to get her to consent to move to Lake Bend with

the Bonds, because even she, in her sheltered place, had heard weird stories of the tower at Tomahawk Point.

“If *she* ever knew we saw the light,” Carol said, her finger on her lip, “you would have to hang up your own clothes, I’m afraid.”

“Yes. And Mother is getting Bridetta in as cook,” Thally told Carol, “and she’s Irish. You know how the Irish spin ghost stories. I rather think that pretty name Bridetta was originally Bridget, don’t you?”

“It might be. But say, Thally, look! There’s an old man under—the window,” Carol whispered.

“Probably a peddler. Where?”

“He’s certainly sneaking through the bushes. It isn’t hard to find your kitchen door, so why should he do that?”

“Let’s find out.” Without passing through the pantry where Felice would have seen them, they went instead through the small, square hall into the library. A side door opening on a porch there brought them in line with the long, low, dining-room windows.

“There he is! What do you want?” Carol called out to a tattered figure of a man with a broken basket on his arm.

He turned, and they saw at once he was a farmer. Vegetables were sticking out of the old basket, and as he approached the steps where the girls waited, he took out an ear of corn.

“I’ve got nice fresh vegetables,” he began, “just fresh from the farm——”

“You’ll find the back door at the back of the house,” said Thally sharply. She had no patience with bad manners.

“Yeah, I knowed that. But I was sorta lookin’ for one of the family. You one?” he asked, turning his face up crookedly.

“Yes,” Thally snapped.

“Then, I wonder.” He deliberately sat down on the step, took his torn felt hat off and placed it right over the vegetables. “Kinda thought you folks might want to sell the Point,” he began. “‘Tain’t no use to anybody, stickin’ out there in the lake——”

“Sell the Point? Why should we do that?” Thally demanded.

“Well, seein’ as how you moved in here and got everything all nice and fixed up, it looks like a black eye to have the old ghost tower stickin’ out there.”

“But who would want to buy it?” Carol asked. She was glad Mrs. Bond had gone marketing and could not hear this.

“I’ve got a good customer.” The man stood up and was instantly alert. He stood squarely in front of the steps and faced the girls. “Yes, ma’am,” he declared, “I could sell that there tower for your Pa quicker’n wink.”

The two girls exchanged knowing glances. Why should an old farmer like this want to buy or sell the tower? He was keen enough to read their questioning.

“Think it’s queer, eh?” he continued. “But you got to remember this here old place has been vacant a long time, and we folks out Farmingdale way sort of got used to—well, sort of making a picnic ground of the place.” He chuckled loudly at the bright idea. “And you know how country folks likes a good picnic grounds.”

“What brought you here?” Thally demanded. She was afraid that at any moment her mother’s car would turn in the drive, and if she ever heard this old fellow talk, all her tower fears would surely be revived and even increased.

“I come here to see you folks,” the man answered rather sharply.

“Well, you ought to know that my father owns this place, and if you have any business you must see him at his office in town,” snapped Thally.

“Oh, yes, yes, I knowed that. But sometimes womenfolks \_\_\_\_\_,”

“We know what you mean,” Carol interrupted. “You thought if you could get us scared about the tower, we might talk the old folks into selling it. Well, you’re all wrong. We are not scared one bit. And you can tell anyone who tries any more tricks about our tower, they are running the risk of landing in

jail. You had better go, now. There's a young man due here soon, and he's not as easy on intruders as we girls are."

"Get going," Thally ordered, glad of Carol's help with this man. "And go out the back gate. There's a good road there and you won't meet our watchman. He's got a great memory for queer sorts of people," she threateningly added.

"Think you are smart, don't you?" snarled the man, grabbing up his hat and slinging it on his head. "But don't try to be *too* smart—things might happen," he also threatened. At that he started for the front gate.

"Hey, there!" called Carol. "The other way out!"

But the man merely threw back bold glances and continued toward the gate.

"He may meet Mother, and stop her," Thally said. "I'm going after him."

Both girls started swiftly down the winding driveway. A huge truck rolling by was so noisy they made no effort to speak to each other. Neither could they see the old man now, because of the sharp turns hedged with shrubbery.

Finally they emerged at the broad entrance that was level with the road.

"Where is he?" breathed Carol.

"Nowhere in sight," Thally answered.



“And he could not have hidden anywhere along the drive; we can see clearly on the lawn beyond the hedge.”

“That man has—simply disappeared!” breathed Thally.

“Why, Thally, what do you mean?” Carol asked, her own voice betraying keen excitement. “He couldn’t have disappeared, actually.”

“But he has. Where is he?”

They looked on each side of the carefully clipped hedge. Not even a dog could have hidden there. Then they went out into the street and looked both ways. Not a figure, not even a car, nothing but the cloud of dust that showed how fast the big truck had traveled.

“And he hadn’t time to get past this gate,” mused Carol. “Come on back, Thally. I hate to tell you, but, honestly, you look scared.”

“I am. I never felt so peculiarly scared before.”

“But why? Just an old farmer in broad daylight; he shouldn’t scare a child.”

“But he scared me.” Thally was going along the drive toward the big house. It looked beautifully cool in the shadows of morning sunlight shifting through the trees; and the air all about was sweet with the perfume from flowering bushes.

“This certainly is one gorgeous home,” Carol remarked, in genuine appreciation.

“Yes,” said Thally, tonelessly.

“Why, what’s the matter? Don’t you love it, Thally?”

“I do, Carol, but, frankly, I don’t like this tower business.”

“Why, we can run that down in no time. This old fellow coming gives us a real clue. Someone wants to buy it,” Carol declared.

“Maybe. But the old fellow coming has given me a clue to something else, and I don’t like it,” Thally answered surprisingly.

“Why, Thally, you can’t be superstitious!”

“Well, I don’t know what you call it—let’s sit down here,” Thally indicated a rustic bench under a tree. “I’ll tell you, Carol. I feel I should have let Dad have the old tower torn down. He wanted to, because he’s a practical man. He says anything that’s no good and makes trouble should be removed. But I thought it would be such a lot of fun for us girls to go up there and look at the sun, moon, and stars, that he agreed to let it stand.”

“It will be wonderful,” Carol agreed.

“And that’s one reason Dad agreed to let it stand,” Thally continued. “He said he would put a good telescope in it for our class girls to use.”

“Oh, how splendid!”

“There’s Mother’s car. We’ll let Ryan take her things in, and we’ll go in a little later.”

“Yes, you still look a bit scared,” teased Carol.

“Oh, of course—I’m not really scared, Carol,” declared Thally. “But somehow queer things do happen.”

“What, for instance? What’s on your mind, as Glenn would say?”

“I’ll admit this is silly, but when that old scarecrow snarled his threat at us that something would happen, I couldn’t help thinking of this. One day last winter, an old tramp came to the door, and as Mother is always afraid of tramps, Felice never gives them anything. Well, this fellow was troublesome. He turned around on the poor girl and snarled at her that something would happen to her for her cruelty to the poor.”

“What happened?”

“She got a cable from France that very night. Her only brother had been killed in a motor accident.”

“Thally Bond! You are not the kind of girl to believe that the tramp’s remark had anything to do with a motor accident in France!”

“No, I don’t believe the tramp had anything to do with Pierre’s death, but it served to make the sister think of other people’s troubles and make her realize trouble might be due her—in the law of averages, you know.”

“Too deep for me!” sighed Carol. “Let’s go in. I’ve got to be getting home. Rachel expects me to do the marketing, you know.”

“O.K.” sighed Thally. And then they went indoors.

## CHAPTER IX

### A LADY IN DISTRESS

“I’m going to telephone Dad,” Thally whispered to Carol, as they entered the house. “You go out in the kitchen and tell Mother what wonderful marketing she did; keep her busy.”

“But why bother your dad, Thal——”

“I’m taking no more responsibility about that tower——”

“Oh, listen, Thally,” Carol grasped her friend’s arm, “he might go ahead and tear it down—now.”

“No, he wouldn’t do that. When my father, Fowler Bond, makes up his mind, it stays made up. And *he* wouldn’t ask better fun than fighting the tower ghosts. Dad is just like that.”

“All right.” Dutifully Carol followed Mrs. Bond and her chauffeur, Ryan, through the back porch into the big kitchen, with bags and baskets from the early marketing.

One of the real features of summer life around Oakleigh was to go out over the wide dirt roads into the country, where wayside stands stood out in proud array of summer fruits and vegetables. There were so many stands all equally attractive, that women in and out of the surrounding

towns would choose one and usually stick to it throughout the season. Mrs. Bond's first supplies bore evidence of how good a choice she had made.

"M-m-m!" breathed Carol. "They have captured the dew, I do believe. But I like the cucumbers best. I must go out to your stand to get Rachel some cucumbers. We all love them."

"The corn is going to be good, old Barny says, but it will be a little late. The nights have been so cold." Mrs. Bond was opening up her bags on the kitchen table, while Bridetta, the new cook, stood respectfully by.

"How about the corn-borer this year?" Carol asked just to make talk and give Thally time to complete her telephone call.

"Oh, the farmers never tell customers anything about the corn-borer," Mrs. Bond replied. "That might interfere with business. But Mr. Bond and I were talking about it last night. It has caused a really serious loss to farmers around here. You see," she continued, "we are on the state border line, and they can't sell or even carry the corn from one state to another."

Mrs. Bond was a very pretty woman, her brown hair was only slightly gray, and that merely added to the luster of her wonderful gray eyes. She was the dimply kind of lady, and that perhaps accounted for her daughter Thally's dimples.

“I must get Thally to go out to your stand with me, perhaps we could go this afternoon. I know things are fresher in the morning, but I’m too late for morning now, and I promised Rachel I’d get her some fresh stuff for dinner tonight.” Carol was watching the door near the telephone, expecting Thally to walk through it, but she had not yet appeared.

Mrs. Bond was apparently fascinated with her fresh garden stuff and had not missed Thally.

“Oh, they gather the vegetables several times a day. If you go this afternoon, you will be sure to get what you want,” she told Carol.

When Thally finally appeared, Carol was glad to see an expression of relief on her face, and, when Thally winked at her, she was sure all was well.

Presently Rosie and Cecy were back from King’s with great ideas for a private show out at Splatter Castle.

“You should see old Marah,” Cecy sang out. “As soon as she found out that the Kings were the strangers old Gil Smith talked about and against at the Council meeting, she almost made nice Peter sign a contract to stay in her old place. Wonder why people don’t elect Miss Marah Splartier a member of the Council? *She* would make them stand around. Can she talk!”

“Can *you* talk?” Carol reminded her. “And do you know what time of day it is? Jump in and Thally will drive us all to our homes. And be glad to get rid of us, too.”

“Then, you’ll be out this afternoon to go to the farm?” Thally asked Carol.

“I’ll phone first. Maybe it would be better to go out after the sun goes down. Stuff will be cooler then, and we’ll have it all ready for tomorrow. I imagine Rachel has fixed things up for today by this time,” Carol reasoned.

From so small a matter as that decision resulted a genuine adventure.

Carol and Thally started off for the farms in the twilight of that evening. The ride was delightful. They stopped for a few minutes at the Polo Field and watched the men practising. How gay the players looked in their blue blouses and white shorts, as their long mallets swept the balls with sure but violent cracks across the velvet green fields! And how the ponies went after the balls, as sure and as swift as any football men might sweep the fields, chasing the larger ball to its goal!

“One thing I have always wanted and never achieved,” murmured Thally, “was to be a really good rider.”

“Why, you do ride well, Thally,” Carol assured her.

“Pretty well. But Mother never got over the day our horses fell on Ocean Drive, one upon another—don’t you remember?”

“Oh, yes, at Spring Lake, wasn’t it? But no one was really hurt.”



“No, but Jane’s horse stumbled and threw her right up on the grass at the Bathing and Tennis Club. My horse was next and he stumbled. I held on, but Mother heard about it.”

“And she would never let you have a really good horse since, I suppose.”

“No. Let’s go. Look at all the cars at the golf grounds. People around here know how to enjoy the summer.”

“But wait until we cross the line. The farmers will show us a very different picture. We take the next turn right, then drive over a dirt road for three miles. And the dirt is plenty deep, I remember that,” Carol laughed.

All along the way were stands, some not more than a few baskets piled together with tomatoes, red apples, and big yellow pumpkins massed around. The more pretentious places were adorned with awnings over neat shelves, everything in season lavishly displayed, and the women tending these stands were quite gay in their bright bungalow dresses.

“Ours is just out here,” Thally remarked. “It’s Baker’s. See the yellow gas tank out front?”

A sharp turn in the road brought them up to a very old farmhouse, colorless, paintless, and miserable-looking. A woman was hanging over the gate, her head bent so that she seemed not to notice the car making the turn.

“What can be the matter with that poor thing?” Thally said. “Looks as if she is crying.”

“Let’s stop and see if she has anything to sell. There’s a tree of early red apples, in the side yard,” Carol suggested.

They drew up in the deep gutter until the car step was about level with the rough walk.

“Have you any apples?” Carol called out.

The woman raised her head. Her face was streaked with the dirty lines that only thick dust and heavy tears can make. She was not old, but oh, so wretched looking.

“Apples, no,” she answered, gulping back a sob.

“Are you sick?” Thally asked. “Can we do anything for you?”

“No, I’m not sick, and I don’t think you can do anything—for me.”

Instinctively both girls jumped out of the car. Farmers were sure to have keen troubles—these days, and a lone woman farmer might even be destitute.

“Just tell us,” pleaded Carol. “We *might* be able to help.”

“Won’t—you—come in? The porch isn’t fit to sit on——”

“It’s all right. Busy season is no time for fixing up porches,” Thally said smiling, and taking one step up on the disordered porch.

“No, I have worked from night till morn and late in the night,” the woman sighed, “to get a few crates of perfect strawberries to send to the convention at Rocky Falls. I got them all picked and crated, I had a boy helping, but he took sick and I finished them myself. But now I can’t get them to the freight,” she sighed, and strange as it seemed for a woman like her to cry, she was certainly crying.

“The freight? You mean over at the junction?” Carol asked.

“Yes. It leaves in half an hour, and the man I depended upon hasn’t come.”

“How far is it to Rocky Falls?” Thally asked.

“Almost a night’s ride, and those berries must be there for breakfast. You never saw such beauties. See, here’s a few left over. I packed them with the hulls and leaves—just perfect.”

“Oh, aren’t they wonderful?” exclaimed Thally. “How awful if they should spoil.”

“If you knew,” the woman sobbed, “how I covered and uncovered them, saving them from heavy rain, and from too much sun. You see, I had the special order for this convention. My husband belonged to the lodge,” she broke down and sobbed.

“*We* can take them over to the junction,” Carol offered. “No trouble at all. How many crates?”

“Only two. But you couldn’t——”

“Sure we could,” insisted Thally. “Are they all tagged and ready?”

“Tagged and everything. They only have to be set in the car. It’s open. I saw it when I was over for the tags.” She was already carefully pulling the two precious crates to the edge of the steps.

“Then, don’t worry,” Carol laughed. “We’ll get them there. Do we get a receipt or anything?”

“No, just put them in carefully. But you couldn’t get your car up the hill,” she demurred, “it’s too steep.”

“Don’t have to. We can carry them up. We are Carol Duncan and Thally Bond,” Carol was saying, as she held one side of the crate while Thally held on to the other, and they quickly started down the little path to their car.

“Don’t need to tell me who you are,” the happy woman declared. “I’ve seen this girl—” She meant Thally.

“Oh, yes, I come out to Baker’s with Mother. Sure, we don’t have to do anything but put the crates in the car?” They were safely in the little car now.

“That’s all; not another thing, but I’ve been standing at this gate more than an hour, watching for a farmer’s car. They’re mean enough, those fellows. All *they* think about is their old worm-eaten corn. They laugh at the idea of late strawberries. And I suppose they’re just trying to fix me for not selling this place.”

“We’ll stop on our way back. Have to hurry,” called out Carol as the little car with the two precious crates of berries started off for North Junction.

It was rather thrilling to rescue a lady in distress, and the girls were conscious of some elation, as they listened for train whistles that might give the time for the big freight to start.

“She said the car directly in front of the River Road with twenty-eight on its last number,” Carol said. “But they may have shifted——”

“Don’t you suppose we will see any of the train men to ask?” Thally wondered.

“No time for asking. If we see that car there we’ll just push these boxes in it. There’s the track. Yes, and there’s the open car door. See the number along the side——”

“A string of numbers, but this ends in twenty-eight.” They were at the foot of the embankment beside the freight cars.

“Right,” Carol called out. “Here—we—go. Can you climb a slippery hill, Thally—darling?”

“I can try.”

Already they were digging their heels into the slithery cinders that slid away at every footfall. But the girls with the strawberry crate ploughed forward and were soon on top of the hill.

## CHAPTER X

### TRAPPED

“Got to hurry!” warned Carol. “Feel them testing the brakes?” The long train had given that crashing jolt that starts and stops again at the release of the brakes.

Down the embankment they slid, took the other crate out of the car and, without speaking a word lest that might mean a moment’s delay, they trudged back again to the open car door, carefully mounted the old box that had served as a step, and, as Carol went inside Thally handed up the crate and stepped in after her.

“Oh!” breathed Thally, “we got them in, at any rate. Where should we place them?”

“The woman said to put them in carefully. I suppose the door may be open all night, and there might be rain, or too much dew, or early sun. See, over in this corner. What’s in these sacks?” Carol had come upon sacks of potatoes heaped across the end of the big car.

“Yes,” Thally conceded, “let’s put them right in here, and the men will be sure to see them when they go for the potatoes.”

“There’s the whistle—they’re steaming up. Better not delay too—long—” Carol stopped suddenly; there was a distinct movement——

“We’re moving!” Thally exclaimed. “Carol!”

“Don’t get excited,” although Carol had grabbed her companion. “They always move back and forth——”

“But—Carol! We’re going!”

Fascinated by their danger, they stood there, actually clasped in each other’s arms. Then Carol broke loose and rushed to the door.

“The embankment!” she gasped. “And the bridge!”

“Carol!” yelled Thally, for the big train was actually thundering now. “Don’t jump!”

“No, I couldn’t jump.” Her voice echoed through the great empty space, that was a freight car with the double doors open.

“But why didn’t they come to close the doors?” wailed Thally.

“Let’s think quickly,” Carol ordered. “I’ve got my pencil and little pad. We must write a note and throw it out——”

“Who would find it in these woods?”

“Thally, please help. See if you can get a loose potato——”

Recognizing the meaning in her friend’s voice, Thally did manage to get a potato out of a sack while Carol was trying to write something on the little pad she had brought out with Rachel’s vegetable order.

“There!” she said. “Now, if we can find a small stick——” Carol easily found a sliver of wood, and carefully thrust it through the slip of paper and then through the potato. She made the note fast to the weight, went quickly to the door again, and while Thally held on to her skirt to make sure she couldn’t throw herself out, Carol tossed the potato back just as the car swung onto the long river bridge.

The girls again clung to each other. Thally’s head fell on Carol’s shoulder, and no one could blame them for feeling frightened.

“What shall we do?” moaned Thally.

“What can we do?”

“The woman said this freight traveled almost all night.”

“And freight trains make no station stops.”

“I know. This is a single track——”

“Thally, let’s sit down and think. There are the potato sacks.”

“All right. If I don’t sit down, I’ll fall down. Whew! Potatoes are not the best sort of cushions.” Thally was



trying one out.

“But better than the floor. We’re picking up speed——”

“Goodness sake, don’t remind me.”

“But that’s better than going—slow.”

“Why?”

“Well, tramps, for instance.”

“Carol Duncan, do you mean to say——”

“Thally Bond, try to keep cool. When a freight train travels as fast as this is going now, no one could jump on, could they?”

“I should say not.”

“And we could see clearly all under the cars as we went up the hill twice. There certainly was no one hanging on the rails.”

“No. I looked under because I remembered reading stories of men riding the rods.”

“So did I. So we are safe from tramps. But my greatest worry is about the folks at home. Whatever will they imagine could have happened to us?” Carol was now on a bag of potatoes she had pulled out beside Thally, and both girls were still holding each other’s hands.

“They will find our car, of course,” Thally said.

“And you left your purse in it, didn’t you? If someone other than our friends find it, are there cards——”

“And bills and a lot of papers from moving,” sighed Thally. “But Mother will be terribly upset.”

“That was why I threw the note out pinned to the potato. I wrote: ‘Safe on car. Will phone’ and I signed C. and T. I had no time for considering.”

“You did that quicker than I could even think what had happened to us. Carol, dear, is there any possible way we could signal a train man?”

“I’m afraid not, Thally. But, after all, we are comparatively safe, and if folks are worried to death, they probably won’t die.”

“No, I guess that’s right. But will we be able to send any message?”

“Not unless we are sure the old train stops at a station that’s lighted up. I would not get out of this old caboose, bad as it is, and get left in the woods; would you?”

“Oh, no,” and Thally actually snuggled down into the potato bags. “At least no one will find us here until they find the potatoes.”

“And strawberries.”

“Carol, don’t, please. I never want to hear that word again.”

“Why, Thally Bond! Suppose getting those berries to Rocky Falls in time for the convention men should bring poor Weeping Caroline good luck; like meeting an old friend of her husband’s—when they look as badly as all that, they are always widows. And suppose this friend should come away out here for more strawberries, pity her, marry her——”

“Hey! Hey! Was that the brakes grinding, or your fairy story? Carol, I never knew before I had so many bones. I bet we’ll be sprouting potatoes when we get out of this.”

They were silent for a while after that. Both had been “whistling to keep up their courage,” and now the dull, deadly roar of the heavy cars on the vibrant steel rails seemed strangely terrifying.

Going under a trestle or over a bridge, the roar would howl sharply, and Thally would clutch Carol’s hand tighter.

“Isn’t it—awful!” she breathed.

“I think that was Twin Bridges we just crossed, it took so long to go over. You know away out——”

“Carol, darling, why ever did we get trapped this way?” Thally was altogether unlike herself. Certainly the car was black and threatening, now, for night had settled down upon the lovely world they used to know. But this couldn’t last forever. Morning would have to come and that freight train would have to stop somewhere.

“Thally, there’s just no use worrying so. Why, Girl Scouts would think this a lark——”

“Girl Scouts! I’ve slept in their dugouts, and I’ll tell you they’re feather beds to this. Any rats, do you suppose?”

“Rats ride on this noise!”

“Well, that’s something. I hate rats. Carol, let’s see if we could stretch out. Maybe we would fall asleep.”

“Maybe. I fully intend to.” Carol was trying to shift potato sacks. “I wonder who will find my potato?”

“Who could? You threw it in the bushes near the bridge.”

“Yes, I suppose it would be hard to find there,” Carol admitted. “But when they find our car—I’m afraid they’ll think we’ve been kidnapped or something dreadful like that.” This was the first thing Carol had said to betray her real anxiety.

“Oh! Mercy! I hope Mother doesn’t think of anything so terrible as that,” moaned Thally.

“If only Baker’s had seen our car stop at the widow’s gate,” Carol went on. “And, Thally, I do believe they must have, for there were people at the stand.”

“Oh, yes.” How much better that thought made them feel! “And when they send out to Baker’s—Mother would surely do that because she knew we were going there—they may be able to say they saw us alive, at least.”

“I’ll bet Glenn and Cecy were out there looking under haystacks for us before the sun went down,” Carol tried to joke.

“But when they found the car with my old purse in it——”

“Thally, darling, I feel as if I could sleep. This Pullman can’t possibly stop without waking us, so suppose we try.”

“Yes, I’m willing to try anything. But in a jam like this, bad habits show themselves. I have been eating crackers every night lately, and I feel the pangs of hunger, right now.”

“Wait, dear. This old leather jacket of mine has always been better than a rumble seat or a wardrobe trunk. Let’s try all the pockets.” Carol was trying them.

“Yes,” she said as merrily as she could, “here’s a whole package of chewing gum. Let’s chew.”

“Saved!” murmured Thally. “Good old chewing gum.”

“Glad I had a good dinner. Hope you did, Thal.”

“I did. But, listen! Someone is walking on top of the car \_\_\_\_\_”

They listened, waited. A heavy step evenly spaced was surely crossing the roof of their car.

“Better lie low. If he is a brakeman, he couldn’t possibly stop to send a wire——”

“Gone, anyhow. So we don’t need to try throwing potatoes at him.”

They settled down again as best they could. The wind from the big door and the velocity of the train cut sharply through their summer clothing, and the protecting bags of potatoes made a welcome fortress for the stowaways.

“Whew!” murmured Thally, “smell them strawberries!”

“Try not to,” retorted Carol.

“Told you that old geezer with the wormy corn meant it when he said we would have bad luck,” complained Thally.

“This game isn’t over yet,” Carol reminded her. “How do you know they won’t meet this strawberry committee with a brass band at dawn, and escort us to the convention hall. Think of reading *that* in the paper.”

“Yeah,” groaned Thally, “and think what may be going on in our old tower tonight.”

“What did your father say over the phone?”

“Not much, but he was mad. He said if he caught any old tramps loitering around our place— But, Carol, don’t let’s *speak* or think of—tramps.”

“And we intended to go all over the ground around the tower looking for footprints,” Carol sighed. “The youngsters held us back on that job.”

“Let’s make it finger prints; they’re more easily classified.” Thally was fussing around, trying to get something like a bit of comfort.

She seemed sleepy, certainly, she was deadly tired. Carol couldn’t boast of any better condition, and, when Thally finally threw her arm up and it rested across Carol’s throat, she only shoved it down a little and let it lie there.

But Carol couldn’t sleep. A ray of moonlight was now running with their car, and Carol could see something like a bundle of bags in another corner. No need to move silently for fear of waking Thally. Nothing could be heard above the car roar, unless it was a shout in one’s ear.

“Poor Thally,” Carol was thinking, “if I could get her some empty bags to lie on.”

Carefully she shifted the sleeping girl, then got up and went after the bags. A good big bundle was her welcome find, and when again she shifted Thally, she managed to get some of them under her.

“Oh! Oh!” Thally screamed suddenly, sitting bolt upright. “That man, that horrible old man!”

Then she felt Carol’s arm around her and remembered.

“I was dreaming of the old farmer—” she murmured.

“Go to sleep, dear,” soothed Carol. “Everything is all right.”

Again she settled down, grateful for Carol’s cushions.

“Riding the rods,” is what the tramps call such an experience, but this was really riding the potatoes for Carol and Thally.



## **CHAPTER XI**

### **RIDING THE RAILS**

When Carol and Thally did not come back home from the vegetable farm, Cecy soon became alarmed. That is, she began to worry when it grew dark, and after phoning all reasonable places, she phoned Glenn.

Briefly, and in words no one overhearing would easily understand, she asked him could he come and get her.

“I don’t want Dad to know,” she whispered into the phone, “nor Rachel either. But you know, Glenn, that road through the country is pretty lonely after dark.”

Glenn needed no urging. He was around in a few minutes with the sedan, picked Cecy up, who made some reasonable sounding excuse of meeting the girls to her father and Rachel, then the hunt began.

They made the same sort of excuse when they went to Bond’s, where they saw, at once, Thally had not returned, nor sent any message.

“I do hope they haven’t stayed out in the country as late as this,” Mrs. Bond worried. “They went to Baker’s farm stand, you know, to get some late evening vegetables.”

Cecy had not known the name of the stand, and this remark inadvertently gave her the necessary information.

After that they drove to Splatter Castle. There was no phone in the old place, and possibly something might detain the girls there, thought Cecy.

If there ever had been any doubt of the Kings' gratitude to Carol and Thally, it was surely dispelled when they heard of Cecy's and Glenn's anxiety.

"Let us all go hunt," Pete immediately proffered. "Can't tell about folks——"

"But I feel certain we shall find them out on the country road, maybe with a busted tire," Glenn suggested, although he and Cecy had already done considerable phoning to gas stations along the country road for reports on possible car accidents.

"If I could help——" There was such a wistful look in Mary King's eyes as she spoke, that Cecy promptly asked her to go along with them, and, when they started off for Baker's place, Mary was in the front seat with Cecy and Glenn.

All along the way they kept blowing the horn of Glenn's car, and, because it was a queer sounding horn, they felt the lost girls would surely recognize it, if they were within hearing. Cecy had fallen into a dejected silence, and Glenn was glad Mary King was along to keep up some semblance of cheer.

At Baker's, the real blow fell. No one had seen the girls nor a car corresponding to Carol's.

"But they came out here for vegetables," persisted Cecy, now almost in tears.

"I'm sorry," replied the farmer, "but they have not been here. I know Mrs. Bond's daughter. They come here often."

And all this dreadful time, the woman only a few lots away knew the girls had taken her strawberries to the freight, and she was happily contemplating the success of that prize crop!

"Where can we go now?" sighed Cecy.

"Don't you think you had better send some word to Mrs. Bond?" suggested Mary King. "Better to tell her everything is all right than to keep her worrying."

"All right," repeated Cecy, "and we haven't a clue!"

"But even so. You often have to have to tell sick folks things are all right, when they aren't. It saves them from——"

"You're right, Mary. We'll go over to North Junction to telephone," Glenn proposed. "Besides, we might find something out there; it's the only telephone station around here."

And that was how they came upon the abandoned car.

"Look!" screamed Cecy, as they turned toward the track.  
"There's the car!"

It was almost dark, but the strip of road by the track where the car was standing was easily picked out by Glenn's headlights.

"Why—there!" he gasped, fear of accident seizing him like the evil he had been trying to fight off since they started out.

"Oh, Glenn——"

"Cecy," begged Mary King. "Don't think of dreadful things. You know, you surely would have heard of a train accident. The station is in sight from here."

"Oh, yes, Mary, of course, that's so. But where are they?"

They were all out of Glenn's car, and were now looking anxiously over the little abandoned car that Carol had so happily driven away in.

"Here's Thally's purse!" Cecy exclaimed. "What can have happened?"

"Let's go to the station. Here's the key in the car, I'll lock it." Poor Glenn! He had gone through many frolics and interesting adventures with the girls and boys of this crowd, but never before had he been afraid for Carol, or for Thally.

A few minutes later, they were at the little station.

"Yes," the agent answered, "I was wondering about that little auto by the track there. I saw it right after the freight pulled out from the station."

“But did you see the girls?” Cecy pleaded.

“No, no one around. Just the car parked there.”

“Could you get in touch with that freight?” Glenn asked eagerly.

“I’m afraid not. It’s away out on a single track with no stop this side of Rocky Falls.”

“What time does it get there?”

“About four tomorrow morning!”

“But how about flag men? Could you wire a flag man to search that train?” Glenn argued. He was showing his nervousness, but nevertheless determined to catch up with that train.

“Well, I’ll try. Wait. Come inside. I’ll telegraph,” the railroad man offered.

The minutes were like hours, while they waited for a reply to the message.

“I’ll get ahead of them at Pompton. I got the agent there. Just wait a few minutes—” the railroad man was busy at the telegraph instrument.

By this time Cecy was crying bitterly, and Mary King could do little to comfort her. Glenn had phoned an evasive message to Mrs. Bond and another to Mr. Duncan. They had the car, he said, and all would be right along soon.

The telegraph operator was ticking away, and, now, his face brightened.

And that was why Carol and Thally had been shaken loose both from sleep and from bags of potatoes, by an astounded trainman who had received from a station the telegraphed message. He first espied the crates of berries and was then sure to find the girls back of the heap of potatoes, for his orders had been to search every car thoroughly.

“Yes, they found them!” sang out the telegrapher, who in a few minutes had received an answer. “They were putting berries on the train when it started off.”

He did not need to say another word, for no human beings could have been quicker to reach phones and send messages than were Glenn, Cecy, and Mary King at that memorable moment. Each had rushed into a station booth and each was now calling home the welcome report.

But imagine Carol and Thally when the trainman shook them awake!

“Oh, how glad!”

“Can we get off?”

“Can we phone home?”

“Is there another train going back?”

“What time is it?”

“Where are we?”

“The train is stopped!”

“Do, please, let us get off!” Thally made that plea.

“Sorry, girls, but we can’t let you off. This is a neck-of-the-woods with a man at the station just to check our train. He flagged us and it has taken some time to search. But I never expected to find you in this empty car.” The trainman was too astonished to say much, and it seemed to the girls that trainmen are trained “to keep their heads no matter what happens.”

He went over to the open door and presently was swinging his lantern and calling to Dave.

“Hey, Dave! Report to Jack, girls O.K. Will go back on train from Highland. We’ll get them over there somehow.”

Dave was soon running back to the station with the message for Jack, and that was the message that had been received by Glenn and the girls at North Junction.

Then the brakeman turned back to the breathless Thally and Carol.

“You say you got on with those crates?” he asked, and they nodded assent. “Mrs. Pierson has been pestering us all week about getting her strawberries over to the Rocky Falls Convention. But we’ve got to hurry. Come along with me, and I’ll put you in the caboose. More comfort there. This was pretty rough, I guess.”

Holding his lantern for their guidance, he helped each down the high jump, but never was a jump more enjoyable. The train was tooting again, and men were swinging lanterns in signals, so the girls knew they had to run to make the caboose without further delay.

The train was standing on an embankment, so they ran single file along the narrow strip beside the cars that again were threatening to move. Then, at the steps of that little end car called the caboose, they climbed on.

“Oh,” sighed Carol as her eyes swept the rather comfortable half car, “isn’t this a relief!”

“This is Mr. Travis in charge of the train,” said their rescuer, who was called Ed. “He is to take care of you,” said Ed, cheerfully, as he left the girls with Mr. Travis, a nice gray-haired man, with his cap set jauntily back on his head and pleasant eyes shining through horn-rimmed glasses. There was another man at a little desk, writing, and, as the girls looked over this scene, a degree of pleasant interest was quickly wiping out their fears and anxieties.

“What a cute little car!” Thally whispered to Carol. Everything seemed so businesslike there, she hesitated at being merely girlish with a remark like that.

“Cute!” repeated Carol. “No Pullman was ever like this.”

The leather seats ran along the sides of the queer little car, and there was a sort of skylight in the center. The girls guessed this was how the trainmen in charge looked along



the line of cars, sort of observatory, for there was an iron ladder leading to it from each side.

“Make yourselves comfortable,” Mr. Travis was telling the girls, indicating they were to take seats on the leather-covered benches. “After I send a dispatch, I’ll be at liberty to be a little more polite.”

“Oh, this is great!” Carol exclaimed. “I have always wanted to ride inside a caboose. They look so—sort of cozy beside the big freight car.”

“You are thinking of those potato sacks,” Thally said in her ear, “I will smell them forever.”

Mr. Travis, who was freight conductor, they understood, was through presently with sending the dispatch, which they guessed rightly was an account of finding the two girls and of their safety. He smiled now as he came up to take a seat by them.

“Quiet an adventure!” he began.

Then, briefly as possible, they told their story. Instinctively, they knew that he would need to know all the facts for his detailed report.

## CHAPTER XII

### A STRANGE CLUE

While the girls were in the caboose, two trainmen had come in and were making coffee on the funny, round pot stove. Mr. Travis went to a little cupboard and brought out two white porcelain cups and saucers, and a shiny new strainer. When the men had made their coffee, one of them filled Mr. Travis' guests' cups with the aromatic liquid, opened up a bottle of cream that had been handed in from the milk car, and with crackers also from the corner cupboard, the stowaways were invited, and they accepted the offer of this emergency breakfast.

“Funny thing about those strawberry crates,” Mr. Travis said as he sat comfortably on the long, leather side seat. “Mrs. Pierson—the berries are hers—has been fighting farmers ever since her husband died suddenly a year ago. We all knew Nat, in fact, he had been a train dispatcher until he got the farm bug and bought that miserable place. Then he worked so hard, he was out in all kinds of weather, and he went off with pneumonia last Fall.”

“And does that young woman live alone there in that old place?” Thally asked, recalling the misery of the woman at the gate.

“I believe she has some relatives that come and go, mostly go, I guess,” chuckled Mr. Travis. “But what I was going to say was, that these old farmers have been trying to crowd out little people like Mrs. Pierson who won’t go in on their combines.”

“Do you think they purposely held back her berries from getting on the freight?” Thally asked, more interested than ever, now that she and Carol had taken part in breaking up that sort of thing.

“Not a doubt of it. Here, have another cup of coffee,” Mr. Travis was putting more of the good coffee into their cups, even against their polite protests. “We are having our hands full with those farmers just now. You see, this is their busy season,” he added, “and they’re trying to do more than make hay while the sun shines. Well, are you comfortable?” He was on his feet now. “I’ve got some reports to fill out. You see, we don’t often find two pretty girl stowaways among our potato sacks,” he chortled. “Best we can do is to dig up a turtle or a snake now and then.”

“Oh,” squealed Thally—it was a subdued squeal and not like one of Cecy’s. “Could there have been snakes —”

“If there were,” interrupted Carol, “they were polite, like all the railroad folks,” she said smilingly to Mr. Travis.

“Seems to me I might know your dad,” the conductor remarked. “Isn’t he Felix Duncan with the Everbright people in Oakleigh?”

This talk delayed the official business a little, but it was pleasant to find that Mr. Travis could use a name Carol's father would know in sending the next message home, with complete reassurance of the girls' safety.

He explained what Glenn said in his phone call while they waited, directly after locating the girls. Glenn wanted to ride out and try to get to Highland, instead of having the girls take a train there. But Mr. Travis had objected to this, because of the uncertainty of such connections, and because he now felt personally responsible for their safe return to their homes. So the folks at home had to worry a little longer.

The freight was going in toward Rocky Falls, and the girls thanked Mr. Travis for all his trouble and soon were upon the platform at the small station.

It was one of those beautiful, blushing, rosy dawns, and the air was like a bath of some secret ambrosia, as the girls chatted gaily with the few railroad men around the station. Mr. Travis had told them it would take about fifteen or twenty minutes for the men to get a work car out, and the prospect of riding on still another kind of car in their adventure, naturally gave them plenty to laugh about.

"Imagine!" Carol said to Thally. "First a freight, then the caboose, and now the hand car. Talk about the latest models in cars, we surely have tried them all."

Down the track the small motor-driven car was now coming along slowly. This, the girls saw, had taken the place of the

old hand-pumping cars, and the prospects were they would have to sit along its sides with their feet dangling down—oh!

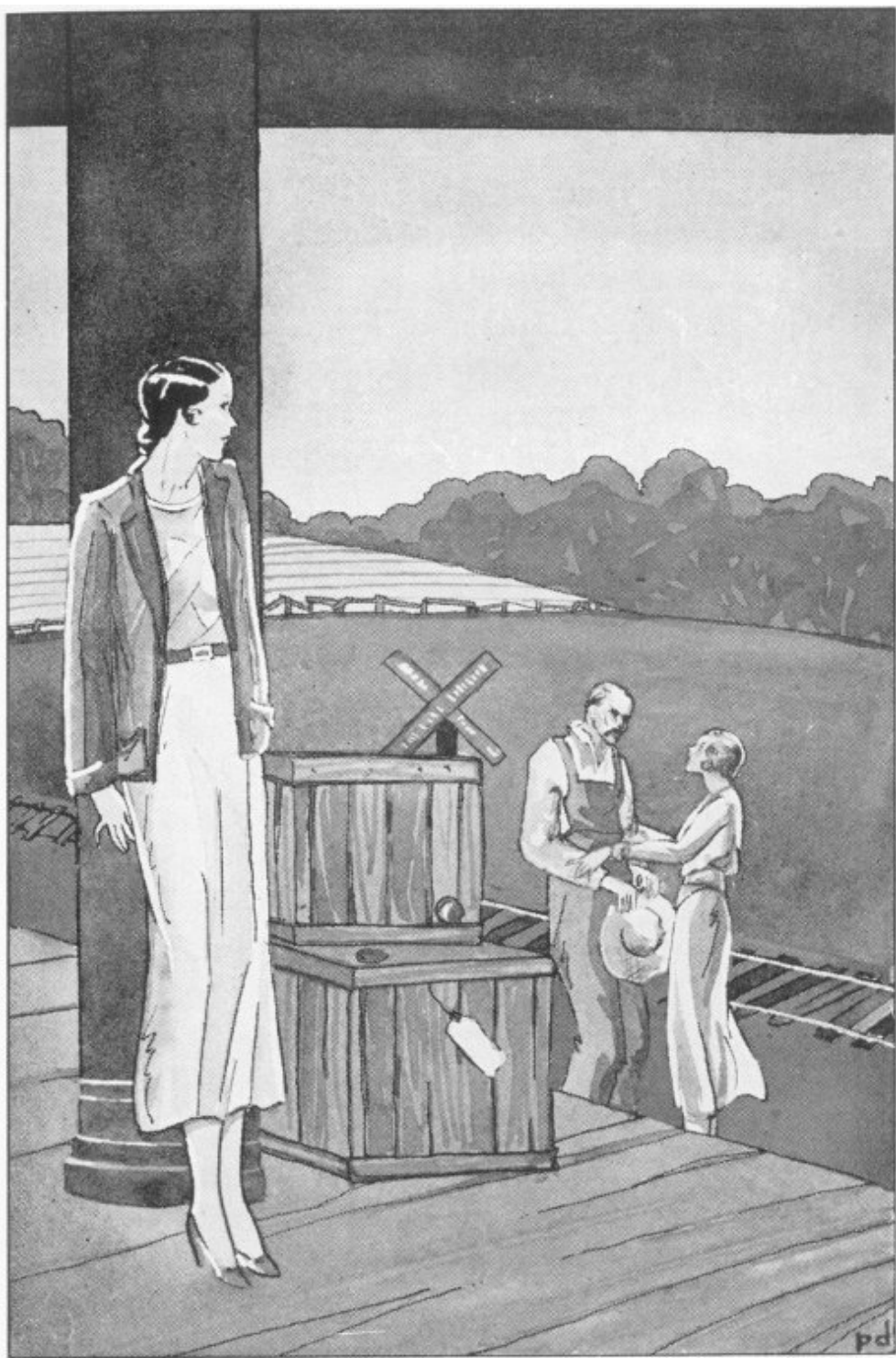
At that moment Carol saw someone, a young girl and a man evidently looking over the two historic strawberry crates that had been taken off the freight and were left down at the end of the platform. Thally was in the waiting room at the moment, so Carol walked down to the crates without attracting her attention.

There Carol heard a voice she recognized at once as that of the former Stella King, and she was talking to an old farmer who actually looked like the scarecrow farmer who had so peculiarly frightened Thally.

What could Stella King be doing out there at that time of morning? It was barely daylight. And why should *she* be talking to that farmer?

But she was talking, so earnestly she had not heard Carol coming along.

And Carol distinctly heard her say, “Don’t worry about the Bonds. I can take care of them!”



**CAROL DISTINCTLY HEARD HER SAY “DON’T  
WORRY ABOUT THE BONDS, I CAN TAKE CARE OF  
THEM.”**

“Take care of the Bonds, of Thally’s folks!” Carol was secretly repeating.

Then the old man was shaking his head and mumbling something Carol could not hear.

“And they are going to do something about our strawberries and my little car will be leaving immediately,” Carol was thinking in real excitement at that prospect.

With that thought and a guess at its consequences, Carol rushed right up to Stella King.

“Why, good morning!” she called out merrily. “Are you admiring *our* strawberries?”

“Oh!” Stella certainly was too surprised to hide it. “Why, however did you get out here?”

“By train,” said Carol, casually. “And what do you think of our strawberries?” The old man had turned away, drawn into his shell, so to speak, and his face could not be seen by Carol, but she knew him, nevertheless.

“*Your* strawberries? These have been shipped out here and we may buy them. Why not? I’d like to.”

“Oh, no, Stella,” said Carol, sweeter than she felt. “They are not for sale. There’s Thally. Sorry I must run along.” She had seen the green roadster now, that queer green thing that

looked like an inverted canoe that Mary King had told her was one of Flippo's, Stella King's husband's affectations. It was standing by the platform's edge, but the small husband was not in it.

"Going?" Stella repeated, as Carol started off. She seemed surprised, as if wanting to say more.

"Yes. Mr. Travis, the freight conductor, is taking care of our strawberries. They're a very special order. Aren't they wonderful?" Carol called out, as she rushed back toward the station to answer Thally's excited questions.

"Wasn't that Stella King?" demanded Thally.

"Yes, and wasn't I surprised to see her at this hour of the morning," Carol answered. "Oh, look, here's our new car; the latest model."

The queer little railroad car had pulled up in front of the station, and the station master, acting under advice given by Mr. Travis, was giving orders to the two men on the car. They took two boxes from the station and tied them securely to the center contraption, then strapped them around, so they would not easily slip. This completed, Carol and Thally were invited to "get aboard."

Each girl took her place on one of the boxes, sitting one on each side of the small, upright, center motor, and, as the men took their places at the little engine, they started at once.

"Isn't this wonderful?" Carol called around the corner to Thally, and, of course, Thally answered, it certainly was.



They knew it would only be a seven-mile run into Highland Station, where they were to meet the train that would finally bring them into Oakleigh. And there was no doubt about it, a welcoming committee would meet them there.

Rolling down over the track that cut through dewy woodland, the girls were fully conscious of the real delight of their adventure, now that apparent danger was past. But Carol was simply amazed at her meeting with Stella King. She had quickly decided not to tell Thally about the scarecrow farmer. Thally already had enough fears about him, and, as for telling her of the remark she overheard, that Stella “would take care of the Bonds, not to worry about them,” Carol knew this must positively be kept from her chum.

“But to think that the old tower secret should follow us away out here,” she was debating secretly, as the car so smoothly rolled along, yet conversation with Thally was difficult, because of their positions. “For whatever the tower secret is,” she had determined, “that old farmer is in it, and now I very much suspect Stella King. But what on earth could a girl like Stella have to do with the mysterious happenings of the tower at Tomahawk Point?” Carol could not even guess at that. She put her hand out to tug at Thally’s skirt.

“We are seeing enough of nature now,” Thally called around her corner. “Pity we couldn’t have had the whole class along.”

“They would surely have something new to write about,” Carol called back, and the younger man in the blue jumper

and overall that were really blue and not faded, said chantingly:

“If you want to see the world, just join a railroad gang.” He was really good-looking, and the girls guessed it must have been very lately that *he* had “joined the gang.”

“There’s our station,” Carol called. “What will the break-o-day commuters think when they see our Pullman?”

“Hope no one knows us. Imagine meeting Stella King out at Rocky Falls. What will *she* tell the world?” demanded Thally.

“Nothing, if she knows what’s good for her,” Carol answered. But Thally could not guess what she really meant by that.

Carol was positive now of what she had merely been suspicious of before. It was that the call at Thally Bond’s house, of Stella, the midnight bride, meant more than the excuse she had tried to put it over with. But she must not make Thally more suspicious, more anxious. Strange, always before in their many exciting adventures, Thally had been so plucky, the first to dash into danger. But this time she had been alarmed from the start.

“It must be on account of her mother,” Carol was deciding. “She is afraid of her mother getting a nervous shock from some sudden excitement. I do hope she has not been too much alarmed by our all night adventure—”

Carol was just thinking to herself, when the brown-eyed, blue overalled brakeman suddenly switched their little private car to a “siding” where it would be safe to alight, for the passenger train was now thundering along on the main track.

They were the only passengers to get on this early train at that out-of-the-way station, but how heartily they did sink down into the good old red plush passenger seats!

“Hey, Carol,” whispered Thally, “don’t look just now, but there’s a strawberry blonde across the aisle.”

## CHAPTER XIII

### TELLING GLENN

The train travel and stowaway adventures were over as soon as the girls boarded that train. And they were not sorry. It had been interesting and thrilling, but, now, home was in sight, good old home with loved ones waiting for them.

“Listen, Carol,” Thally said, just as Carol had been expecting, “what about that red-headed Stella King?”

“What about her?” stalled Carol.

“Yes. What in the world was she doing out at Rocky Falls at daybreak?”

“Why, possibly they had been motoring all night, and while friend husband was out hunting up bacon and eggs, Stella was over at the station looking for fresh fruit.”

“Yes,” Thally said, which plainly meant no. “Suppose she got our precious berries, by any chance?”

“No, I took care of that. I called in to the station man to be sure and take care of those berries, as Mr. Travis had ordered, and I saw him walk right down to where Stella had been, before we got on the little car. I also saw her get

into the old green cucumber auto and drive away, so she certainly didn't touch the berries."

Silence then; both girls were plainly tired out; neither showed her usual vim. They would soon be in Oakleigh, and the day's bright sun was now streaming in the car windows.

"Say, Carol, don't let's tell the folks everything. We did have rather a rough time, you know."

"Sure did, Thal. What's your idea of a secret?"

"Well, for instance, that time the potato crawled up under my chin and I yelled I had a tumor——"

"That wasn't what you yelled," teased Carol, but she did not mention Thally's nightmare about the old farmer.

"Well, better tell them they took us into the caboose, and omit our bedmaking among the potatoes. Let's keep something to ourselves. After all, it was *our* adventure, and it might make a good story later on."

"Yes. And better not tell them about Stella King——"

"Why not?"

"Mary would hear it, and we can't tell how people might talk about them all."

"Why should we care? She's married and gone away from the Kings, anyway," persisted Thally, not having the remotest idea of Carol's reasons for not speaking of Stella.

But further remarks, Carol knew, might complicate things more, so they began to fix themselves up a bit in preparation for meeting those who might be at the station to welcome them home.

The next minute they were calling:

“There they are! There’s Glenn, Cecy——”

“And my mother!” Thally cried joyfully. “I’m so glad she was able to come. I’ve been worrying——”

“Thal, wait till the train stops,” cautioned Carol, for Thally was trying to steady herself between the last seat by the door and the little cabinet there.

But the next moment the clash of brakes gave the signal for a full stop, and the two adventurers were in the arms of their loved ones.

If Cecy ever danced before, she was simply prancing now.

“Oh, girls! You don’t know. We had the police and fire departments out.”

“Fine!” called back Carol. “*But just lead us home. We want ter—go—home!*”

They went. They told their stories together and separately. Cecy was insatiable in her demand for details, but both Thally and Carol had kept to themselves the real trouble about the strawberry cartage, and also their seeing Stella King at Rocky Falls Station.

Thally had truly been worried about her mother, and that her father had also taken the matter seriously was all too plain.

But the question uppermost in everyone's mind was not being mentioned. The question of what was the secret of the tower?

Only one night had passed, but something might have happened then; yet neither Carol nor Thally had the courage to ask about it.

The excitement was subsiding somewhat—and both Carol and Thally were to be “dragged off to a set of tennis,” after Cecy insisted all the girls were talking about them not going anywhere. So, after a good, natural sleep that seemed to come as soon as heads touched the pillows, and then the glory of baths, the two runaways were once more mingling with their friends.

“But the tower?” Carol whispered, as Thally took her place behind the net, “Anything new?”

“Dad looks very serious. I'll tell you later——”

Then Carol knew she would have to talk to Glenn. She could not tell Thally about Stella King, but she could and must talk to Glenn.

Some girls will say that that was just an excuse, that she wanted to talk to Glenn, anyhow. However that might be, no one need blame her, for Glenn was the very boy most girls would want to talk to.

It was two days after the train adventure, when Glenn and Carol finally had a little time to themselves.

“Let’s go out to our own little lake,” Glenn suggested.

“Nothing like paddling a canoe for straightening out tangled nerves.”

“Suits me perfectly,” Carol answered. “Seems to me we have been racing around after our own shadows all summer.”

They drove in Glenn’s car to the little wharf that gave residents a chance to go out over the water without getting their feet wet. It was early afternoon, and no boats were on the lake’s surface, not even that flat-bottom rowboat that small schoolboys were always in, yelling about their worms, their fishing tackle, and their rods.

“Let’s sit here awhile, Glenn,” Carol proposed. “I feel I’ve got to talk, talk, talk.”

“As serious as all that?” He spread a convenient newspaper on the old bench, and they sat there under the big elephant-colored beachtree.

First, she told him about the farmer coming to Bonds’ and wanting to buy the tower.

“Did he limp a little?” Glenn asked, instantly interested.

“I believe he did, as I think of it, now. But I didn’t remember it before. Yes, he certainly did limp a little,” Carol answered.



“I’ve seen that old bird going around. Saw him at Walker’s vegetable store only the other day. He seemed to be sneaking around, but somehow I thought him—well, the men in the store certainly did not want him there,” Glenn finished definitely.

“I can easily understand that. He’s one of those sour individuals that breathe brine.”

Glenn laughed at that and gave Carol’s hand a jerk that set her up in self-defense.

“Don’t be too smart,” he cautioned. “You know I’m rather dumb.”

“Yes, I know,” she conceded artfully. “But do try to be serious, Glenn,” she begged. “You know, I told you the old fellow went down to the gate and disappeared.”

“Yes, I remember.”

“But do you know what disappeared means?”

“I used to. To vamoose, to skiddoo, to scram——”

“Oh, well,” and Carol turned away, as if offended. “If you won’t be serious——”

“I will Car-roll-ly. Now, do go on like a good girl. How did he disappear?”

“He simply was, then he wasn’t.”

“Oh, hey!”

“Honestly, Glenn. He went down the path to the gate, and we hurried after him. When we got there, he was nowhere to be seen, and there just wasn’t any possible place he could hide. You know, there is nothing but that ivy-covered high stone wall across the street.”

“No cars go by?”

“Not a car. A truck passed, and we noticed it as he was going down the drive. But it never stopped or even slowed down. By the time we got to the roadway, all we could see of it was the dust it had raised.”

“Oh, but that bird is human, Carol, though he doesn’t look it. He couldn’t evaporate,” Glenn declared.

“I know that, but it certainly was very queer. Thally couldn’t get over it.”

“Wonder what makes her so jumpy these days?”

“The old tower,” Carol promptly answered. “She asked her father to leave it there, and now her mother and Felice are scared to death about it. But let me hurry to tell you about Stella King. I couldn’t talk before the others. She said to the man—that old farmer at the station away out in Rocky Falls, ‘Don’t worry about the Bonds, I can take care of them.’”

“Take care of them?” Glenn repeated incredulously.

“Yes. And she was trying to get those crates of strawberries; I am sure of that, too, Glenn.”

“Why not go straight to her folks, they’re over at Splatter Castle yet, and just tell them the whole story?” he suggested indignantly.

“I thought of that, of course. But, after all, why should we drive them away, because Stella seems to be doing something tricky? They’re nice people; Mary is a mighty nice girl——”

“I think so, too,” conceded Glenn. But Carol didn’t notice.

“And, if we showed our suspicions, they would just fade out of sight. I’m sure they would. And that would not be the easiest way of solving the puzzle, either.”

“I guess you’re right, there,” Glenn agreed. “If she comes to see them, and she surely will, *they* won’t let her take care of the Bonds as she threatened to. I’ll bet my hat on that. But what are you thinking of doing, Portia?”

“I think I’ll go over to Kings’ if you want to go with me, and I’ll tell Mary, if she’s there, that I saw Stella, then, I’ll wait to hear what they have to say. Perhaps she’s boarding in some little place out at the Falls.”

“Yes, that’s so. But you said you were going to tell me another tower secret. I believe there’s a new one every day,” scoffed Glenn. His tan seemed darker than ever under the trees.

“Oh, yes. You know the night Thally moved in, I stayed over there with her, and we were determined to watch the tower all night.” Carol recalled.

“Great idea. Did you?”

“We watched until we saw the big eye wink——”

“Carol Duncan! If I didn’t know you as well as I do——”

“But, honestly, Glenn, the light did strike out suddenly from that queerly-shaped window. Thally and I were so astonished, we just gazed at it, spellbound, until the doorbell rang and we had to answer it. It was Stella King calling—near midnight; you know. *She* was the one that was surprised when she saw me open the door.”

“Said she was driving through and couldn’t find her folks; wasn’t that it? Thally told me that much, but she didn’t mention the big eyewinker,” Glenn prompted.

“Yes, Stella did have a letter she wanted me to give her folks. It was to tell them she had been married that afternoon, which I suppose was reasonable enough,” conceded Carol. “But, somehow, I wasn’t quite sure that she had actually intended to give us that letter.”

“Do you think *she* had anything to do with the eye-winking window?”

“Oh, no. That would have been impossible. No one can get out onto the point, unless they go down the narrow strip of land that runs out from the big house, and Stella’s car

certainly came up the road. No, the ghost that night, at least, must have been an old timer,” Carol joked. “He must have had quarters there, for Mr. Bond had had the place all barred and bolted, and no one could possibly have gotten in.”

“Shall we go over to the Kings’ now?” Glenn invited. “You look as if you had talked enough about ghosts for one afternoon.”

“All right; we’ll come back for our canoe ride when the sun goes down. But you haven’t told me if anything happened at the tower since we took our famous train excursion. I haven’t had a chance to ask Thally.”

“Yes, something did happen. I’ll tell you about it as we walk back for the car.”

“Thrilling?” she asked, impatiently.

“Exciting,” corrected her friend.

## **CHAPTER XIV**

### **STARS OR DIAMONDS**

“Go ahead, Glenn, tell me. I’m just dying to hear.”

They were in the car and headed for Splatter Castle. Glenn had already told Carol that Peter King had been busy with grass cutting, and that he had heard Mary King was going to get work in a canning factory, but was not to start in until the next week.

“Oh, I hope we find Mary at the castle now,” Carol remarked, as they neared the place, “I want to tell her about that sister of hers.”

She was there, and ran out to meet the car as Glenn drove in. It was easy to see she was especially happy about something.

After all the “hellos” were exchanged, Mary, who had on a yellow gingham dress this time, began at once on the subject of Stella.

“She was out to see us this morning,” she began, “and she wants us to move over to Rocky Falls.”

“To move—out there!” Carol repeated mechanically.

“Why? Isn’t this—all right?”

“Oh, yes, it’s lovely,” Mary flushed at the inference. “But Stella thinks we ought not to impose on you people like this.”

“But Miss Splartier is really glad to have you folks here; she needs some people in charge of the old place, and she and Vera are going away; I heard that today,” Glenn spoke up truthfully. Judging from the look on Carol’s face, she needed support in her argument to keep Mary and her folks away from Stella.

“Oh, of course, we wouldn’t want to put *her* to any inconvenience,” Mary quickly replied, “but Stella made us feel——” She stopped, then gave Carol that honest, diverting smile. “Well, I’ll tell you just what she said,” Mary finally blurted out. “She said we were living—on charity.”

A rush of hot anger stained Carol’s face. For some moments she just looked from Mary to Glenn, then back to Mary.

“Well,” she then said indignantly, “it seems to me Mrs. Carter wasn’t worried about anything like that when she went away and left you alone. And now that you have found friends, and are getting along all right, why should she bother you?”

“That’s exactly what Pete said. Ranay wasn’t here when Stella came. See, she brought me this ring,” and Mary exhibited a pretty jade ring that Stella had given her.

But Carol could hardly see it. She felt Stella had deliberately tried to get these folks away from Oakleigh for her own

private schemes, whatever they might be. And *she* was determined that the young bride would not get ahead of her when it was a matter of preventing that threat to the Bonds, not even if she had to tell Thally all about it and warn her.

This turn in affairs completely absorbed Carol's interest, so that all her plans were entirely upset. She just couldn't say anything more to Mary, so she passed a little secret signal to Glenn, and they got in the car.

"Come for a canoe ride with us this evening, eh, Mary?" Glenn invited. "Carol and I are going, and there's always room for one more in midships," he said, good-naturedly.

Mary said maybe. She, too, seemed infected with Carol's anxiety. But when Glenn and Carol were out on the road, Carol said she didn't believe she wanted to go out on the lake herself.

"Not afraid of the tower in broad daylight, I hope," Glenn teased, as they would have had a fine view of the old tower from the lake.

"No, I'm not afraid of anything. But I'm mad, clear through. We just got Mary's folks happy in the old castle, and even Dad got a lot of friends to give Pete grass cutting, and along comes that Stella in her silly roadster and insists they must leave, that they are living on charity."

"Lots of the very best people think that's the very best way to live," joked Glenn; but Carol wasn't even listening.



It was hours later, in fact ten o'clock that night, and Cecy, all ready for Sylvia's party, was, as usual, parading around the whole house with a special parking place for admiration in Carol's room, when the telephone shrilled and Carol answered.

It was Thally, and she was terribly excited. Could Carol come right over? Felice had fainted from fright. Could she bring someone to do things, perhaps Ranay King, as Thally's mother was almost as badly off as Felice.

"Yes, they were terribly frightened," Thally was answering Carol's rapid questions. A hideous light, as big as an automobile headlight had been flashed in the window just where Felice was sitting reading, and, though Thally rushed outdoors immediately, there was no sign of anyone around. And Felice had fainted. She was still hysterical. All this came quickly over the phone.

"Cecy," ordered Carol, "now don't stop to ask questions, please. Call Glenn and ask him to go get Miss King, that's Ranay, you know, and take her out to Thally's. I'm going now in my own car——"

"But aren't you going to drive me to Sylvia's?" begged Cecy, who was even then at the phone.

"No, sis, sorry, but I can't. Get some of the other girls to take you," and Carol hurried off for her car.

Thally met her as she reached the Bond home.

“Dad is frantic,” she whispered. “He blames the tower secret, of course. But he’s fighting mad. Now he *is* going to find out who is responsible for all this.” Thally was in her robe and had evidently been reading when the scream from downstairs had given the alarm.

“Is Felice all right now?” Carol asked first.

“No. She is really quite ill. Dad thinks she must go away for a rest. He says her nerves are bad for Mother’s——”

“Let’s sit down, Thal. You look shaky,” Carol interposed, leading her chum toward a couch. “What happened?”

“First, that scream—it was Felice. Then, when I reached her sitting room, on the first floor, the light was just leaving the window. But I saw it. It was simply blinding!”

“And you didn’t hear anything, Thally?”

“Not a sound. I was at the door almost instantly, and not a leaf on a bush stirred. Honest, Carol, I wish we had never seen this ghostly old place,” and Thally brushed her hand across her head in unhidden distress.

“I know we can’t take time to talk now, but I just want to ask you,” Carol continued. “Where did the light seem to come from?”

“Out of the sky, Felice declared. If I had not seen the tail of it myself, I would have declared she was just having a fit of

nerves. She has been awfully nervous, but this time she collapsed,” Thally finished, with a sigh.

“It’s a shame,” declared Carol. “And if anyone thinks they’re being funny——”

“How about our help? Did you do anything about asking Ranay King?” Thally asked.

“Yes, Glenn has gone over. It makes slow going where there’s no telephone,” Carol explained.

“Yes, a cook as big as Bridetta would have been handy around here. Too bad she didn’t stay. Come on upstairs. A stranger always cheers Mother—not that you’re a stranger,” Thally warmly assured her chum.

They found Mr. Bond sitting by his wife’s bedside, assuring her everything would be all right, and that she could depend upon him to make it so.

Mr. Bond was a very solid type of man, strong, athletic, and determined. He was known as one of the best golfers in Oakleigh, and had encouraged Thally in her athletics ever since she had been able to understand the word. This was fortunate for Thally, and did much to offset the unhealthy influence of a nervous mother, with whom Thally greatly sympathized.

Carol, seeing the father there now, stroking the white hand of the little lady so dearly beloved, appreciated the scene, for she vaguely remembered her own delicate mother who had left her and little Cecy so long ago. Since her death, Mr.

Duncan had done everything possible for his home and his children, but the mother was still sorely missed.

A call from downstairs made known Glenn's arrival, and Carol hurried down. Ranay was with him, and in her soft pongee dress, her hair pinned neatly back, Carol was glad she could look so unlike the excited circus lady they had first met at Fern Hill.

Mr. Bond had ordered the chauffeur, Ryan, to get out the big car to take Felice to her friends, as she was too terrified to stay at the Bonds', and now Ranay was getting her ready and would drive with her to take care of her until friends would assume that responsibility.

Strange, as soon as Felice had been driven off, it seemed the nervous pressure on the house was lifted. Certainly, Thally was not afraid of any light, no matter whether it came from earth or sky, but like her father, each time "the ghost walked," she was more and more determined to "get that ghost."

Nothing more of importance happened that night, except that Ranay agreed to give up her other work and take Felice's place, and, since a friend of theirs, Hilda Hansen, was now staying with Mary King at the old castle, the arrangements seemed most convenient. Hilda was one of the stranded circus folks and had got work in the canning factory, so she was able to pay for her own food at least, and Miss Splartier was only too glad to offer shelter to her as well as to the Kings.

Next morning Carol and Thally were determined to go on their investigating search of the old tower. Thally, of course, had been in and out of the place a number of times, and Carol knew it well from the days when Girl Scouts did scouting around there. But now their interest was, as she told Thally, “at concert pitch.”

“And we have got to go alone,” Thally insisted.

“Better look around opposite the maid’s sitting room window first,” Carol suggested. “We might find some footprints there.”

Looking quietly under windows lest Thally’s mother would suspect their intentions, they found no shrubbery broken, although the place was overrun with growing things, and not even the tender little lily-of-the-valley had been crushed.

“Let’s go out straight from that window,” Carol suggested, indicating the maid’s sitting room on the first floor, “and walk directly over to that tree.”

They did, watching for marks, footprints, or any evidence of recent intrusion. Suddenly, Thally, who was ahead, turned and motioned to Carol.

“Look!” she said. “What’s that?”

They were looking at what seemed to be small round holes in the earth, where a little grass was growing beneath a pear tree.

“Like a lot of holes—” they were discovering more of the queer marks. Carol stooped down to observe closer. “Thally, see here,” she said under her breath. “There’s a mark that looks like a star or a diamond in the bottom of this hole.”

And there was. By looking closely the girls could see in more than one of the queer, small holes, this curious marking. The holes were of different depths and went straight down a few inches into the soft earth. The mark, at the bottom of those most clearly outlined, was like a star or a diamond.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE IVY-MANTLED TOWER

“Well, at any rate,” breathed Thally, in evident relief, “no ghost made those holes in the ground.”

“No, but what did?” Carol reasoned. “No animal?”

“Never heard of a star-footed or a diamond-footed animal,” Thally admitted.

“Better go over on the drive—I think your mother is at her window.”

“Better pick a few of these roses, they need picking. Roses must not die on the bush.” This was intended, of course, to avert suspicion from their investigating.

Thus, casually, the two girls did gather a few of the glorious midsummer roses, the two-toned yellows were so beautiful that their admiration for this special variety almost beclouded their interest in the queer marks around the pear tree.

“I’ll hand these in to Ranay,” Thally said. “Mother adores these golden sunbeams.”

At the kitchen door, Ranay was smiling. What confidence a woman of her experience and kind heart

can instill!

“Say, Carol,” Thally said, coming back to the pebbly drive, “if you ever did a good turn, it was in getting Ranay to come here. She’s a lot like Glenn’s Aunt Mary.”

“Isn’t she? Aunt Mary will be jealous. We had better call her over this afternoon to see your mother. No one should slight Aunt Mary.”

“I would be the last to do that—she’s a peach. We all love her. Father says she should be in the real estate business; she has such practical ideas. What’s the matter with your foot?”

“A pebble, I guess.”

“More likely a potato. Better dump it out.”

Carol was glad to hear Thally taking things in this frivolous way. She had been so glum lately.

“Now we are positively going down to the tower,” Carol remarked, more as an outlet for her pent-up reasoning than as a useless explanation, for they were on the path to the tower. “Can we get in?”

“Yes, I have the key, and all the trick locks will answer to my magic. Carol, how would you like to live in this so-called grand old place, and have ghosts shooting lights out at you all hours of the night?”

“I’d love it, Thal. Of course, we know they are not ghosts, and when it comes to brains, which some folks call wits, are



we willing to run and let them have things their own way?”

Thally’s answer to that was a rather vicious whack at a poor little elderberry bush that had grown out of line.

Where the narrow path met the small circle that surrounded the tower, the girls came to a standstill.

“Thally!” gasped Carol, “this is breath-taking. It is simply beautiful.”

“Didn’t you know?”

“I must have forgotten. And the ivy has grown like a satiny fur coat. I never saw anything so gorgeous.”

“Think that’s why they want to buy it?” scoffed Thally.

“Do you?”

“No. That scarecrow farmer is no artist. But I wish *I* could paint.”

“You appreciate beauty, and that’s a great deal. Thally, we must not let your father tear this tower down.” Carol was gazing at it, spellbound.

“No. *I* don’t want him to, now.”

“Then we have got to find out who and what is making all this trouble. Can we go inside?”

“Yes, let’s. Not afraid of goblins or dragons jumping out at you?”

“I always loved them in my fairy stories,” declared Carol.

Thally had no trouble turning the new key in the new lock of the old tower. And as the door swung back, there emitted a rush of pent-up, musty atmosphere.

“Well,” Thally’s voice echoed weirdly, “here we are! Want to climb up?”

“Let’s see what’s down here first,” Carol proposed.

“Whatever was this place built for? It must have cost a lot of money.” She was regarding the woodwork, which was still handsome in its mottled polish and natural markings.

“I believe the man who built our house was mildly scientific,” Thally explained, jabbing her head through a sieve of cobwebs and coming out on the other side. “And the second generation also liked to look out at the stars without paying a man to focus the big spyglass, so they kept it up. When we get to the top, I’ll show you the famous window that winks its eye. It used to be used as a lookout.”

They began the ascent, and the old place seemed to Carol more and more attractive, as she and Thally paused on the winding stairs to look out a window that offered unusual beauty of view, stretching into the distance.

“From here,” Carol remarked, “I can see both up and down the lake right into the bend on the road both coming and

going. This Tomahawk Point certainly is marvelously situated.”

“Isn’t it? One Sunday before we moved in, Dad and I spent a long time up here—see our seats?”

“Yes, I suppose they came with the tower. But these leather cushions look new.”

“They are. They are out of last year’s canoe. We got new ones for all the boats, you know.”

“Do I? Everybody is talking about the orange trimmings on the Bond boats. Let’s sit down.”

“Yes, let’s. There doesn’t seem to be a chance of a scare of any kind,” Thally pretended to lament.

“It would take angels to get in here, the way your father has things bolted up,” commented Carol.

“Yes. And he had the electric light men working here for a whole day—that day we were traveling salesmen for fresh strawberries, you know. Now, no light can be turned on in this old tower except by touching off the switch which is in Dad’s own room. He wouldn’t trust it in any other part of the house.”

“So, when the eye winks, we can’t blame cross currents, or anything simple as that.”

“No, we can’t,” said Thally definitely.

This brought them to a casual observation of the electric fixtures which seemed in no way unusual.

“Grand view, though,” commented Carol. “When I come to spend my two weeks with you, Thal, I think I’ll swing a hammock up here.”

“Not afraid of anything! Brave little girl. But I think I’d prefer to sleep nearer a telephone.”

“Oh, if you insist upon a scare—” Carol grabbed Thally so suddenly she actually screamed.

“Don’t, Carol, remember we are alone here, and it’s quite a long ways from home.”

“Want to go back?”

“If you’re sure you have fully investigated everything. We didn’t open this little closet,” Carol remarked. “Anything in here?”

They opened the small door under a small window.



**THEY OPENED A SMALL DOOR UNDER A  
WINDOW.**

“Nothing but tools—looks like electrician’s stuff.”

“And they’re rusty. So that’s no clue.”

“Oh, here’s a map!” cried Carol. “Now, you know, Thal, girls always find a map with the directions for that deep, dark, underground tunnel, through which they finally fight their way to the great secret. That simply must be a part of all good mystery stories. Ouch!” she yelled, dropping the wrinkled paper. “See that black spider? And a black spider’s bite is poisonous, so they always say.”

“What’s the old map?” Thally asked, ignoring the spider, as they both stepped upon the rolling paper to scrutinize it.

“Stars!” scoffed Carol. “Look at the old Milky Way. Just some amateur astronomer’s guide, I guess. Kick it in, and we’ll shut the door.”

They slammed the door shut. They had no interest in spider webs, discarded light bulbs, and musty maps.

Still, Carol was not satisfied. She stood facing the half-moon window, as if she were a magician invoking some secret magic here.

“It must be here some place,” she chanted.

“What?” demanded the ever-practical Thally.

“The secret—the tower secret, of course,” she answered.

“As bare of secrets as was old Mother Hubbard’s cupboard of bones. Come on, you make me creepy. First thing you know, we may get shot at from a canoe out on our silly little lake—” and Thally started on a run down the long winding stairs with Carol, laughing, at her heels.

Outside the tower they stopped, and made fun of themselves for being so silly.

“The idea of ghosts being in that darling old tower,” scoffed Carol. “*I* wouldn’t be afraid to stay there all alone.”

“We didn’t say there were *ghosts* there,” Thally corrected, “but we did say, and do say, there’s some queer secret about the place.”

“Look at those lovely long-stemmed violets,” Carol exclaimed, jumping over some bushes to reach a spot where only violets would think of growing. Quickly she was down gathering a bunch; they were white and of some unusual variety to be blooming in midsummer.

Carol stopped suddenly, just as she was about to pluck a particularly lovely stem. She started to exclaim, then checked herself.

There were those queer holes in the ground with the indefinite marking like stars!

But she must not tell Thally, it would do no possible good and perhaps add to her uneasiness. So she came back to her chum and offered to share the violets.

“Oh, you keep them, Carol. Our house is suffocating with flowers since Ranay came. She seems to really love them,” explained Thally.

Cecy, Rosie, and Ranay were waiting for them in the drive near the side door of the big house as they returned.

Cecy found speech first. “Your strawberry lady is here! She brought the grandest berries——”

“I kept her to see you,” Ranay smiled. “She brought some wonderful berries.”

“Wherever have you been?” Cecy rattled on as usual.

“We’ve been waiting hours,” chimed in Rosie. “Thought you were coming out for tennis.”

“Thanks, children,” Thally remarked. “But not this afternoon. We’ve been loitering, and it’s time to do our daily good deed, you know.”

Carol had stepped aside to talk with Mrs. Pierson, the woman who had so innocently thrown them into a wild adventure with the freighting of her strawberries.

She was quite dressed up, now, in a brown and white voile dress and her hair was really pretty, in dark twists at each ear, and one at the back of her neck.



“I wanted to get out here before to thank you,” she was saying, as Cecy and Rosie had raced off and left the atmosphere clearer for conversation. “The men at the convention wrote me a letter. I brought it,” she said shyly, taking from her shabby bag a letter which proved to be a typewritten note from the lodge, written on lodge paper. And it was certainly profuse in expression of thanks “To Mrs. Nathaniel Pierson, widow of their late lamented brother.”

Carol read the note and said some words of approval. Then Thally invited everyone to go up and sit on the porch while she read it.

Mrs. Pierson took the green rocker in the corner. She had so many smiles in her expression that the girls guessed rightly—she had pleasant news to tell all of them.

“You see, the reason I was so worried about my berries getting to the lodge convention,” Mrs. Pierson had the cutest little lisp, “was because, now, I can close my place and go to my sister’s. I didn’t plant any corn, and I’m glad I didn’t. The farmers are making so much trouble——”

“Is there an old man who limps a little going around making some special trouble?” Carol asked.

“Limps? Oh, yes, that’s old Sam Parsons. Parsnips, they call him. He tries to interfere with everybody that has a foot of ground, but he doesn’t get a chance to talk to me.” Mrs. Pierson was standing up, and, like all nervous people who are overworked, she kept on moving when she should have sat quietly and rested.

“I’ve seen that old farmer around here,” Thally said, anxious to hear about Parsnips without asking direct questions.

“Who hasn’t seen him? Can’t chase him away. But I’ve got to hurry. I wanted to fetch you the berries. Hope your ma will like them.”

“She will love them,” Thally declared warmly.

“And I’d like to have you girls go out to my place any time and help yourselves. There’ll be seckel pears and early apples and plenty of blackberries there now——”

“We’ll be out there,” agreed Carol. “My family loves blackberries——”

“Oh, that’s so; you’re not sisters, are you?” This seemed to embarrass her. “I should have brought more berries.”

“We’ll divide them,” chirped up Thally. “And we are both awfully glad they got there in time.” And although Thally didn’t mention it, they were glad she didn’t know what had happened to them while they were putting those berries aboard the train.

“Well, I brought this card; it’s just one my husband made by hand to tell folks where our place is. I wrote on the back that you girls were to be admitted to my place. You see, Mrs. Bradley on the next farm is going to look out for things while I’m away——” And she talked and talked, until an old-fashioned horse-drawn buggy came along and picked her up.

“So that’s that,” laughed Thally.

“Hope she gets a good husband from the lodge,” commented Carol, because she was bound to look for romance in the story of the perfect strawberries.

## **CHAPTER XVI**

### **CRUEL DESTRUCTION**

Whether it was just then the calm before the storm, or a sudden storm that sprang up without bothering about any calm, no one attempted to determine. Not only was that group of people in Oakleigh, headed by the Bonds and the Duncans drawn into the net of happenings, but others, quite a few others, were suddenly appalled by a real calamity.

The greatest flowering acres of dahlias in that part of the country, if not in the entire country, had been laid low, cut through stem after stem, by the destructive dahlia-borer. That sneaking little worm, that hides itself completely in its green victims, had gotten out of control, had seized upon the delicate fibre of the gorgeous dahlia plants now in rich summer bloom, and there they lay stricken down, stalk upon stalk, flower upon flower, acre upon acre.

It was unbelievable. The horticultural company was composed of business men from various surrounding locations, some from Oakleigh, some from Newberry, which was across the state line and where the dahlia farm was located.

The news spread quickly and crowds hurried to the scene of destruction. It was like a fire or a flood; everybody went. And it quickly turned out to be a fire, for the stricken flowers

and stalks had to be burned quickly lest the pest would spread into the distant territory.

Rosie and Cecy had gone to spend the week-end with Rosie's friend, Eve Trainor, ten miles away, in Higherton. Carol and Thally, Glenn and Paul had gone out in Glenn's phaeton and were among the first to arrive at the scene of disaster.

"How terrible!" sighed Carol. "And we can't even gather the flowers!"

"A terrible loss," Glenn added. "Just look at those huge blooms."

"And the colors! What work and scientific investigation it must have taken to bring them to this point of beauty," Paul commented.

"People over there are crying. See, that woman is trying to get one great red flower, but the officer won't let her," Thally said, for indeed the distress and emotion of those watching that scene was being expressed openly, frankly, in a wild disorder.

Farmers were raking up the stricken plants, putting them into great hills. Then another crew of workers would follow along, pour kerosene or gasoline over the green mass and set fire to it. It burned slowly, for it was all so gloriously fresh and green, but what a precious holocaust it made!

Excited people were, of course, making all sorts of foolish statements, about the worm attacking trees, destroying

potatoes, and such absurd predictions.

Carol and Glenn were standing near the roadside on the edge of an area pretty well cleared off. Turning toward the sidewalk, Carol saw Mary King step out of a car.

“Oh, there’s Mary King,” she called so Thally could hear, and the little party turned to greet Mary.

“And Stella,” said Thally, “and is that—Stella’s husband?”

They all guessed rightly that it was, for Mary was leading them forward to be introduced; Stella, quite radiant in a really handsome midsummer costume of green shantung, and her husband, Lyndon Carter, looked very fit indeed, in a splendidly tailored white linen suit and a Panama hat.

The same thought must have rushed to the minds of all Carol’s friends. They were thinking:

“What a nice-looking fellow! No wonder Stella ran off with him!”

Glenn was separately thinking: “He is small, but darn smart-looking.”

He, Glenn, and Paul at once fell into conversation. Stella, Mary, and the girls made a group of merry talkers, and Mary seemed particularly happy to have her friends again meet Stella and also become acquainted with Stella’s husband.

“But that’s no corn-borer,” Stella’s husband was insisting, “that’s an entirely different worm. I’ll show you one. It’s the

dahlia-borer.”

With some regard for his white shoes, he picked his way across the uprooted earth, looked around until he saw a stalk he wanted, then, carefully picking it up, he brought it over to Glenn and Paul.

“This is the baby that is doing the damage. See him?” he pointed out, as he laid the stalk with the worm moving around it on a stone where all could see it.

The surprised and angry little worm that suddenly found itself upon a cold, hard stone, instead of being hidden in the luscious warmth of some tender stalk, was evidently trying to get away.

“See,” Lyndon, who was being called Don, pointed out, “this is the dahlia-borer. It is gray and green and can do more damage than any other worm twice its size.”

“But they say the corn-borer is doing a lot of damage around here just now,” Glenn insisted. “You know, they have tightened the police and inspectors’ lines so they stop every car passing over the state line.”

“Yes, I know,” Don said evenly. “But even the corn-borer can be controlled.”

At that, Stella called him to look at something she had discovered, and Carol and Thally must have been thinking that this vivacious little bride was getting quite a lot of fun out of showing off her new husband.

“Oh, let’s go home,” Carol presently suggested. “I just can’t bear to see those women crying. There’s one actually kissing a yellow dahlia.”

“Yes, I suppose she’s tended it all through its infancy,” Thally remarked, not unkindly, “and it must be hard to see it go like this.”

So Carol, Glenn, Paul, and Thally came away, leaving Mary King, Stella, and Don still watching the excitement. It was plain that Don was seriously interested.

“Well! What do you think of that?” exclaimed Thally, before they even had a chance to start off in the car.

“You mean the hubby, of course,” Glenn answered.

“Well, if you ask me, *I* think he’s all right.”

“Smart fellow,” added Paul, who was driving.

“And we thought he was a dwarf, or something,” Glenn charged.

“No, that wasn’t it,” Carol corrected. “We said *Mary* said he was very small, and so he is.”

“But we all had the idea,” Thally chimed in as if blaming Carol, “that he was something of a freak. *I* think he’s stunning.”

“Oh, you mustn’t, Thal,” scoffed Paul. “He’s married.”



“And wasn’t Stella really radiant? She certainly has been spending money on clothes lately,” Thally added.

“They say he has it,” commented Carol, dryly. “But whatever will the poor people do now who were depending upon that dahlia farm?”

“Hope it was insured,” Glenn said. “Cruel loss, right at the height of the season. That bug is surely something to be afraid of.”

“That’s why they have tightened the lines so on passing corn into our state. That’s another awfully hard thing. The farmers in Newberry depend upon the canneries and hotels out this way, and now they can’t pass their corn in for sale.”

“But the corn isn’t any good, is it?” Paul asked.

“Oh, it’s good enough when the borer is cut out, or when it doesn’t get a chance to destroy the stalk,” Carol said.

“There’s nothing poisonous about it.”

They were speeding along and were now almost at Thally’s. It was Saturday afternoon, and, as usual in midsummer, in so beautiful a place as Oakleigh, tennis courts were crowded, the lake was alive with craft, older men and women were finishing their games on the golf links, and polo devotees were resting after the violent exercise of the afternoon.

“How about our tower?” Paul asked casually. “Any more trouble?”

“Not—at the moment,” answered Thally. “But we expect it—tonight, maybe.”

“You do?” It was Glenn who spoke so quickly.

“Well, it has been good for a couple of nights—not a blink since the light in the window knocked out poor Felice.”

“And good strong Ranay came on the scene. Maybe that’s why,” guessed Carol.

“Hope so, at any rate,” Thally finished. “Come on in and drink lemonade,” she invited as they came up to the drive.

“Impossible,” Carol declared. “If I don’t go home, Dad says he’s going to lock me out. And Cecy’s away, you know. So I’ll run along, Thal. If the eye winks in the tower, give me a call.”

As Paul turned Glenn’s car into the main road for Newberry, they came upon another car. It was stopped and an officer was standing beside it.

“Speeding, I suppose,” Glenn remarked. “Fine day, fine roads——”

“But that’s Stella’s car,” exclaimed Carol, “and that’s Don getting out.”

“Let’s go up and see what it’s all about,” Paul suggested.

“As if we wouldn’t,” Glenn said laughingly.

There they saw and heard what it was all about.

“You know very well you can’t carry corn from one state to the other,” the officer was saying angrily. “And you have just seen the damage in that dahlia farm——”

“Listen, officer,” Don Carter answered pleasantly, “that damage wasn’t done by a corn-borer—it—was—oh, what’s the use?” he interrupted himself, while Mary and Stella were now greeting those in Glenn’s car. “Just take the old corn, we don’t like corn anyhow,” and Don deliberately took a bag from his car and tossed it into the roadway.

“You’ve got to burn it,” the officer insisted. “Since it’s only a couple of dozen you were going to have for dinner, I’ll not fine you. But it must be burned. And see that it doesn’t happen again.”

“All right, all right,” the young man in the linen suit called back, “anything for peace. Got any matches, Stella?”

Of course she had, always had plenty of matches with her cigarettes, so the whole crowd got out and had a little bonfire in celebration of the forbidden corn.

“Can’t help it,” the officer seemed to apologize. “There’s so much corn bootlegging lately, we have got to follow the rules, you know.”

The corn didn’t burn very quickly, nor did it burn entirely, but some newspapers from Glenn’s car helped the blaze along, and finally the officer was satisfied to let them all drive on.

Glenn was going one way, and the Carters with Mary King turned off at a fork in the road, but they all waved merrily and seemed to enjoy the incident, as if it had been quite a joke.

“Notice how that fellow obeyed the officer without the slightest protest?” Paul asked, as he switched to their own road.

“Yes, I did,” said Glenn, “another evidence that he’s pretty smart. Only a dumbbell would argue with an officer when he catches you with the goods.”

And Carol, as well as Paul, agreed with Glenn.

## CHAPTER XVII

### HEAVY HEART

Mary King had been very happy to be with Stella again and to have her meet her friends, and so get the chance to have that important little group become acquainted with Stella's husband.

But all was not perfect. After the inspector on the highway had halted Don's car and found in it the small bag of bootlegged corn which he caused to be burned to save the adjoining state from possible dangers of the corn-borer, Mary had the unpleasant sensation of distrust.

Stella and Don laughed heartily over the episode, and seemed to think it the best joke they had run across in a long time. But Mary didn't like it.

She imagined the officer was scrutinizing Stella's husband very sharply, but then his size, in spite of his pleasing personality, might account for that. Then, when he took Don's name, address, and car license, Don gave his own home outside of Boston, whereas he had not really lived there since he so suddenly left college to join up with that little show, the Magic Makers, which went out of business the day before the Kings' triumphal entry into Oakleigh on Pete's calliope chariot.

Stella and Don teased Mary about taking a thing like that so seriously, but, all the same, it did seem serious to her. Pete had always obliged everyone he had control over to keep within the law while he was partner to William Hill, who ran the Magic Makers show.

“Why don’t you go over to see Ranay at Bonds’,” Mary had urged as they were leaving her at Splatter Castle.

“Oh, we are not on calling terms there,” laughed Stella. “In fact, you know we wanted all of you to leave this dugout and come out into the real world again, but you got so interested in those Bond and Duncan people, for some reason——”

“Don’t *you* like them?” Mary asked sharply.

She thought she noticed that Don had passed a silent signal to his wife, but, at any rate, they both quickly changed to praising Carol and Thally, and Don said the boys, Glenn and Paul, “were fine fellows.”

“In fact, we all got so interested in scientific questions we promised to meet soon again,” he said warmly.

“Then why don’t you both go over to the Bonds’ now and say hello to Ranay? She’s just dying to see Stella.”

“Oh, not today,” Stella casually objected. “We’ve got to be going. We spent a lot of time with the old green worms in the dahlia patch.” She was at the wheel of the car and about to start it. “Remember, Lucky,” she said, calling Mary by her familiar show name, “any time you folks want to change

trails, we'll be seeing you. Some lovely places out at the Falls."

So they went away and left Mary pondering. It was Saturday afternoon, now, and the girl who had been staying with Mary King, Hilda Hansen, was out with her friends. Pete was trimming a hedge on the Boulevard, so that Mary was alone in the back of the old castle, the part they had been using. All the big rooms at the front of the house were bolted and locked, as the Kings preferred them to be.

It is always lonely when outdoors is alive with cars, people, noises, and distractions, and one is alone indoors—with serious thoughts.

Mary slipped the bolt on the kitchen door after she entered with her key, putting the key back into her bag. She threw up a window over the sink that looked out into a tunnel of grapevines. The big yellow cat, Copper, that had joined them the day after they came to the castle was all hunched up on Pete's old rocking chair near the lilac bush. The back gate was in line and led to the walk under the grape arbor. The gate was opening; a man was coming in.

"Oh!" Mary gasped, a little breathless, "who can that be?"

He was not the sort of person to be afraid of; in fact, the young man, like Don, was wearing a good white linen suit and a good-looking Panama hat. He was tall, walked with a businesslike stride, and was whistling.

Still Mary felt herself trembling a little. She wondered how she had ever been called The Little Wonder of the Magic Makers, she was now so easily upset.

He was at the door; she could hear the soft whistle as he tapped a light knock.

Of course, Mary opened the door; what else could she do?

“Good afternoon,” sang out a deep, but friendly voice. “Is Mr. Carter here?”

“Mr. Carter? No; he and Mrs. Carter left an hour ago.” Instinctively Mary stepped outside the screened door. It seemed better to be outside, and she was glad when Copper, the big yellow cat, came up and rubbed against her, in secure friendliness.

“I hoped I might catch him before he left,” said the young man, his hat in his hand and his slick black hair showing to advantage against the linen coat collar background.

“He left——”

“Has he—gone?”

“Why, yes. He left here an hour ago.”

“I mean has he started on his trip?”

“His trip? I didn’t know—he was going away,” faltered Mary, a new and unhappy thought possessing her.



“Oh, I mean the little auto trip he had been expecting to take,” the young man explained, rather eagerly, Mary thought. “I just thought I might catch him before he left.”

“If it’s anything important, perhaps *I* could tell—my sister is his wife, you know,” Mary ventured.

“No, thanks. It can wait. This is a great old place, isn’t it?” he remarked pleasantly, as the softness of moist green foliage gave real aroma to the late afternoon.

“Yes, it is lovely,” Mary said. “We are only visiting here,” she added.

He left with a few more words, taking to his whistling again as he reached the gate. Mary could not see his car, but she heard it, and stood there on the vine-screened porch as the auto purred away.

When she went inside—she had hooked the screen door after her—she got out her purse to make sure of how much money was in the big roll of bills Stella had crowded into her hand secretly while they were all in the car.

“Fifty dollars!” she found to her amazement. “Why should Stella give us all that?”

Then it seemed simple enough. Stella’s husband, Don, had plenty of money and had always been known to be generous. Perhaps this was just a part of her own personal allowance.

Mary’s thoughts were interrupted by the light step she knew to be Hilda’s.

“Lo, there, kid!” sang out Hilda. “Why weren’t you in when I came to get you for a ride? Come on, now. We’re going out to the Park,” Hilda urged.

“Now? I’ve just come in.”

“What of it? Can’t you just go out again?” giggled Hilda. She was gay with Saturday afternoon freedom from the canning factory, and really wanted lonely little Mary King to share her good times.

“I’m rich,” joked Mary, opening her brown bag and displaying the big roll of bills. “Look at those riches!”

“Oh!” Hilda paused. “Bet I know. Stella gave it to you. Saw her in our office this morning—there’s only glass partitions between for light, you know, and I saw the boss hand her a roll that just looked like that,” Hilda went on, powdering her nose.

“In your office,” gasped Mary, “getting bills?”

“Sure, why not? And I even saw her shake her head when he offered her a check. She wanted cash. I’ll tell you, Mary, Stella’s smart and good-natured, too. She gave it right to you. I got to be goin’. Hear the old horn. But Mary, what was the boss doing in here? Just saw him getting in his car at our back gate as we came along.”

“Your boss!”

“Sure. Didn’t he leave his card? Handsome Hank, the big, tall, good-looking son of the owner of our famous canning

works, Harrison Stanley. Oh, come on, Mary, the air will do you good. You look sickish——”

“I do feel a little sickish,” admitted Mary, feeling a lot worse than that. “And thanks, Hilda. Run along; have a good time. *That’s* what time is for.”

Confronted with an unnamed suspicion, Mary snapped her bag shut and put it far back in the knife drawer of the cabinet. Hilda’s car was chugging off, and again Mary King was alone.

“Whatever could Stella be doing in the canning factory?” she wondered. “And taking money from the office! I can never go to work there now, and I was all ready to go Monday!”

Then, the weight of hidden fears seemed to crush her. Why must they stay in this place, now? Pete had sold the calliope and got one hundred dollars for it; why couldn’t they go home, back to Connecticut where her own patient mother was working?

She would ask Ranay and Pete to let her go. They could stay here if they wanted to, although they both had mentioned going back home soon.

As Mary toyed with the plan, it obsessed her. If only she could get away from this place, and not have to worry about what Stella might do. She had no fears about Stella’s character, she had always been honorable and honest, but she had rebel ideas. For instance, that time when one of Pete’s acrobats was sick and couldn’t do his act, it was Stella

who proposed fooling the audience by putting on an act that was nothing more than illusions against mirrors, marvelous things done like heads talking without bodies, bodies floating through the air, she herself jumping twenty feet up into the air, a weird trick that, even Pete was afraid to trust to the spring board for. But Stella wasn't afraid. And the audience liked it all; just illusions done with mirrors, weird, breath-taking tricks, common everyday tricks, out of an old book on magic.

“No wonder Don liked her,” thought Mary. “She would go in for anything, and he himself liked nothing better than to fool most of the people most of the time.”

But the Kings were not like that. Ranay would ride a horse, not a mirror, Mary could fall into a net if she had to, but there must be a net, and Pete wanted everything on the square, even to full measure in the five-cent peanut bags.

Now they were out of the circus business, and what could Stella do that she might take real money for at the canning factory?

Mary wanted to run away before she found out, but she knew she could not go at once.

When Pete came home, she showed him the money Stella had given her.

“She's got a good husband, all right,” said Pete, “and she's got a good heart herself.”

“Pete, could I go back to Connecticut to see Mother?” Mary asked, trying to keep her impatience out of her voice.

“Thought you liked it here, Mary?”

“Oh, I do. But it—it gets lonely, and I haven’t seen Mother for such a long time.”

“That’s so. Ranay was saying she would like to go back herself.” Pete was in the big kitchen, and Mary was squeezing lemons for a cool drink for him.

“When could we go—Pete?”

“When? Any time. In a hurry, little lady?”

“I’d like to get down there in time to have a little vacation. It’s midsummer now.”

“Vacation?” He laughed a little. “Thought you wanted to go to work?”

She just couldn’t think of a thing to say, and Pete, dear, old kind Pete, didn’t ask her any more questions.

“Sure, baby, we ought to go. You must want to see your own mother. Guess Ranay and I have been selfish, but we didn’t mean to be. Stella being married and settled and happy makes things easier. I’ll see what Ranay says. The calliope is gone, and we have our carfare.” He stopped and ran his hand through his thinning gray hair. “Yes, it was a good thing I

sold the old wheeze box, it gave us a bit of money, and we can go back home now.”

## CHAPTER XVIII

### CLAMMY HANDS

Thally Bond was standing at the dining room door, her face white, her heart beating fast. At the breakfast table her father was still buried in his morning paper as he sipped his coffee. She must tell him.

“Dad,” she said, as her father caught sight of her face, “Ryan is gone!”

“Gone!”

“Yes. I haven’t heard him around this morning, and the garage was wide open.”

“Cars all right?” Mr. Bond was on his feet, now.

“Yes, everything seems all right; but where is Ryan?”

“Don’t look so tragic, dear. Chauffeurs have been known to take nights off, you know.” He was going toward the door.

“But Ryan hasn’t taken a night off, Dad. I was talking with him last night, and he said nothing would make him leave this place, now, that *he* was determined to solve the tower secret himself.”

“Good luck to him,” said Mr. Bond, “or to anyone else who can solve it. I’m glad your mother consented to go away at last. You and I can now get after some things we had to hide from her. Come along, Honey,” he put his arm through his daughter’s affectionately, “let’s go out and find Ryan.”

First they asked the new cook, Lena, if he had been around for his breakfast. Lena was nice and fat, with a peach-blown complexion, fat legs, and great blue eyes, and two braids of yellow hair twisted around her round head. She had a way of posing like a rain-barrel when any of “the family” addressed her. Now she stood and looked just that way, as she declared Ryan had not been near the kitchen, had had no breakfast, and she hadn’t even seen him today.

Her accent and her words could not literally be transcribed, but that was what she meant.

When Thally and her father hurried down to the garage, Lena stood just outside the door, for the screen had to be closed, and, as she watched them, she shook her head.

“It was that ghost-light,” she was murmuring. “I saw it last night. If ever it comes near this house, I go away. I can’t stand no ghosts.”

At the garage Mr. Bond was beginning to show his own anxiety about his trustworthy chauffeur.

“Ryan is never late for my train,” he declared, “and I’m late now.”



“Yes, you were almost late when I came out to look for him. Shall I call a cab?”

“No, I couldn’t go and leave you alone until we find out something about him,” Mr. Bond insisted. “Did you see him last night after we came in?”

“Yes, I did, Dad. And he told me he was going to watch all night, if necessary, to find out about the tower. He said he was glad Mother had gone away, as he had been afraid of disturbing her. Now, he said, he would arouse all creation, if necessary.”

“Yes, that’s like Ryan. He’s a good fellow,” Mr. Bond remarked. “I hope nothing has happened to him.”

“The ground is quite soft; see, here are his footprints,” Thally declared, as, looking closely, she saw the unmistakable footmarks that must have been made from the garage door into the damp lawn, that, in turn, led out to a wooded strip bordering on the main road some distance away.

Thally and her father began at once to follow the tracks. Quite far out they lost them, but markings in the grass could still be followed.

“Here! Here!” came a muffled voice.

They stood! Listened!

Again and clearer came the call:

“Over—here by—the big elm!”

“That’s Ryan,” cried Thally, before her father could speak, and both hurried across the meadow where the big elm stood almost solitary at the end of the property, perhaps an ordinary block distant from the main house and from the old tower.

“Ryan!” cried Thally before she reached the elm. “Ryan—are you—all right?”



**“RYAN!” CRIED THALLY. “RYAN—ARE YOU—ALL  
RIGHT?”**

“He’s still gagged,” her father reminded her, as they were beside the tree now. “He can’t talk until we release him.”

And there was poor, faithful Ryan, at the foot of a small tree to which he had been cruelly and securely bound, directly in front of the huge historic elm.

It took but a few moments for Mr. Bond to cut the ropes with his penknife, although Thally could see how his hands trembled. Then Ryan, who seemed very little worried, but naturally very uncomfortable, sank down into a restful position with a huge sigh.

“That’s better,” he said cheerily. “Let me get these rags off my eyes.”

The gag from his mouth had been the first of his confines removed by Mr. Bond, then the rope that had tied his hands behind him was cut, and with it was cut the same heavy rope that had bound him to the tree. Now, he himself was able and quickly did tear the bandage from his eyes.

“Oh!” gasped Thally, “we were scared!”

“Sorry, miss, but you needn’t have been. Fact of the matter is, I think I fell asleep about five o’clock,” he said lightly. “My mother always declared I could sleep standing up, and now I’ve proved it.”

He looked queer, more like a sailor than a chauffeur, for he was wearing white slacks, a white shirt, and the dinky little white cap he always wore when off duty around the garage had somehow stuck to his head.

“Let’s get back to the garage,” suggested Mr. Bond. “You need a cup of coffee, Ryan——”

“And you have missed your train, sir,” Ryan said, apologetically.

“Nothing to that—glad we found you—all right and uninjured. Sure you’re all right?”

“Tiptop,” said Ryan. “Matter of fact, if I had used a little common sense, they would never have got me.”

“Come on to the kitchen,” Thally suggested. “Lena has your coffee waiting.” All three were bravely hiding the real excitement they felt.

So they went to the kitchen, and between mouthfuls he told them what had happened.

As Thally had said, he had been determined to watch all night, if necessary, to discover the tower secret. So he had taken his chair which always stood outside the garage door, tilted it back, and prepared for a long vigil. He slept and woke intermittently until after midnight, when the eye of light blinked out of the tower.

“I stood up then, but stood still,” he told his eager listeners, “for if I moved I felt I might miss something. As I stood I

could see the line of the little path to the tower from the house, and the moonlight showed that was clear. I listened. Not a sound. The light had flashed three times, and I knew I had been awake when it began, for I was eating a bite of apple.”

“Did it seem like a light thrown on from the outside?” Mr. Bond asked evenly.

“No, sir, it wasn’t from the outside. There was no beam, no ray, and I could see clear to that window. You see, it opens on a slant so it goes down the road after it turns off our point,” Ryan explained definitely.

“Yes. Of course, I’ve had men go over the whole thing——”

“But who—kidnapped you? Who tied you up?” Thally asked impatiently.

“Who? Miss, I don’t think it was a human being at all.”

“What?” exclaimed Mr. Bond, scoffing at Ryan’s words.  
“Not a human being?”

“Well, I heard a queer little noise, like a thump, thump, thump. I couldn’t figure out what it was, and I couldn’t see a thing. I was following the sound. That’s what brought me away out there. It seemed to me to come from that direction.” Ryan was taking a third cup of coffee, and Lena was fairly beaming on him. She liked Ryan; he wasn’t married, and neither was she.

“What was the noise like?” Thally asked critically.

“Like nothing I ever heard, and I couldn’t see a thing. It would thump, thump, and it wasn’t near by, but I have a good pair of ears if they are a bit too big.” Ryan was a good-looking fellow, and, as Thally took a squint at him now, there was nothing the matter with his ears, that she could see.

“But who got you?” Mr. Bond asked. He certainly must get the next train, and Ryan would have to drive him to the station, so he was pressing his questions.

“That’s the queerest part of it,” Ryan answered, leaving his coffee cup in Lena’s happy hands and realizing that Mr. Bond wanted him to hurry. “I was creeping through the bushes. I didn’t see a thing. I had looked back at the tower, but there were no more lights. Then, suddenly, as if some terrible thing had sprung out of the earth, I felt—clammy hands!”

“Clammy hands!” exclaimed Thally. Lena had just broken the coffee cup in the sink.

“Yes,” said Ryan. “They grabbed me, and I smelled a queer smell—I suppose it was chloroform, for that’s all I knew until I found myself strapped up there.”

“You didn’t see anyone?” Mr. Bond asked.

“I did not, sir. I was just creeping along when I felt that cold deathlike grip——”

“*Auch du! Auch du!*” screamed Lena. “You mean cold, ghosty hands!”

“Now, Lena,” cautioned Thally, “ghosts don’t tie people to trees. Dad must be going. I’ll drive you to the station, Dad. Ryan needs a rest.”

“All right. Ryan, don’t do any talking. Better keep this to ourselves, until we plan just what to do. Now remember, keep around the place and keep quiet about your experience. If anyone asks questions, then we’ll be sure they *know* something about it.”

Ryan readily agreed, while Thally hurried to the car, as her father was preparing to leave. She was at the door as quickly as he had his hat on.

“Better have Carol Duncan come over with you, Daughter,” her father said, as they rode to the station. “You and she always get along together, and we can trust her not to talk.”

“Yes,” Thally readily agreed, “and Carol is sort of lonely herself when she’s at home. Her sister Cecy is away. Almost everyone is away now, the end of summer,” she said quietly.

“Would you like to go? Your mother wanted you to go with her and only that she is with her sister Margaret, I should have insisted upon your going.”

“But, Dad, I’d so much rather stay here with you, you know. Besides, I might—miss—a lot of fun.”

“Yes, that’s so, you might, for I imagine we are going to have a lot of something, and I hope it will be funny.” He kissed her, then stepped from the car to meet his



train. He had no need to caution Thally; she would know what to do should an emergency arise in his absence.

The first thing she did was to call Carol. And the next thing Carol did was to come right over. She got a ride with Terry Paine who was going out to play golf, so she did not have to bring her own car.

“Come on over to the little summerhouse,” Thally said quickly, as Carol got there. “I want to talk to you without even hearing the telephone. Ryan is mowing the back lawn, and Lena is dusting in the living room, so the house is well guarded.”

“Guarded?” exclaimed Carol in surprise. “Why, Thally?”

“Because the ghost walked last night and tied poor Ryan to a tree. He says he slept standing up, but he would. Ryan is so good-natured.”

“Tell me——”

“Sit down, dear, I’m going to.”

And they sat down and Thally told her.

## CHAPTER XIX

### DEEPER AND DARKER

Thus began a new phase in the queer situation.

Everyone connected with the Bond estate was now “out to get the ghost,” with Ryan more determined than ever, and with Lena secretly giving him “a clean cloth and a bit of salve” for his bruised hands, because he didn’t want the folks to know they had been bruised with the ropes he had tried so desperately to free himself from. When driving for the family, Ryan wore thin summer gloves, although everyone assured him he might just as well be more comfortable, but now he was wearing the gloves for more reasons than mere formality.

Carol and Thally, leaving their secret conference in the rustic summerhouse, were ready and prepared for action.

“We should talk to Ryan first,” Carol said. “He certainly has not told *his* whole story.”

“You mean he knows more than he told Dad?” Thally exclaimed.

“I don’t mean he is deceiving you, Thal, but the fact that a big fellow like him let a pair of clammy hands

tie him to a tree doesn't seem like a complete story to me," smiled Carol.

"All right; he's just finishing the lawn. I'll ask him over to the side porch."

"We are going in the detective business as usual, Ryan," Thally told the chauffeur, as he took off the dinky work cap and put one foot up on the lower step of the porch, "and we've decided to interview you first."

"Fine, Miss Thally, go ahead. I'd like to find out myself just what I know." His wit had always delighted folks, and that he was going about his regular work today, after hanging on a tree for at least the early hours of the morning, added to his favor.

"What really happened, Ryan?" Carol began. "Did you see the old tower eye blink distinctly?"

"Indeed I did, miss, so distinctly that my own eye blinked in answer."

"Did it give a succession of blinks, like a signal?" Thally asked.

"Yes, it did, it always does that, I've noticed it before," said Ryan. "I waited till the light—went out, or wherever it went. Then I listened. I thought I heard a queer thump-like sound, I had heard that before, too," he assured the girls.

"When?" Carol asked.

“Well, once I remember was the night the light shone into the house and scared poor Felice out of her wits,” he answered seriously.

“Then go ahead, Ryan, and tell us exactly what happened, and what you did when you left the garage. You see,” Carol told him, “Thally and I have been at this mystery ever since we came here, and, of course, we have some clues we hope to clear it up with.”

“Hope you do, miss, for it’s got to be cleared up soon. Well, when I heard that sound, I got down to creep or crawl toward the little clump of trees over by the road where our property ends. But I no sooner started than the thumping stopped.”

“And you didn’t see a thing?” Thally asked.

“Not a thing, not even a leaf seemed to be stirring, for it was a still night last night.”

“Then what?” pressed Carol. She seemed to be afraid Ryan would stop, or forget or something.

“I crept over to the big tree. There were the farmers’ trucks rattling up and down, they’re beginning to bring the new potatoes in from the farms now, you know. I thought I just would hide myself and see if there was anyone else hiding there.”

“And you found out!” declared Carol.

“I did that, and so quick I couldn’t move. I was bending over when I felt those clammy fingers go over my face and

something leaped on my back——”

“Could it have been an animal?” Thally asked.

“While I was able to think, that was what I thought, but the minute a rag was thrust into my face, before I could straighten up to grab the enemy—well, after that—they had it all their own way,” said Ryan regretfully.

“Then the next you knew was when Dad and I found you?” Thally asked.

“Well, no, not exactly, miss, I was trying for a long time to get out of the ropes after my senses came back, and, when I realized I would be apt to hurt my hands and then be laid up for driving, I knew that wouldn’t do, so I decided to wait till someone would pass I could call out to.”

“And you finally fell asleep?” laughed Thally.

Ryan shifted himself and declined to answer that little question.

“All right, Ryan,” Carol said brightly. “You have helped us a lot. And, when we get the prize for solving this mystery, we shall give you full credit.”

“There’s one thing I should like to say,” Ryan began again very hesitantly, “and it’s this. Mr. Bond has the right idea. He told me, and I know he told you, Miss Thally, we were to keep quiet, and whoever is doing this will hang themselves with their own rope. You know what I mean,” he concluded deferentially.

“Yes, just lay low and they will convict themselves,” Thally added.

“Exactly. And it would only make trouble to report it to our police; they draw a crowd but——”

“And when we have to deal with crawling creatures we must *crawl*, not *run* after them,” said Carol philosophically.

Just as they all stood up to leave, Lena came out of the house. Evidently she had been within hearing, if not actually listening all the time. She looked like a comic picture as she braced herself, hands on hips and big gingham apron flying in the breeze.

“I saw it,” she gulped. “I knowed all the time it was that!”

“What?” Thally asked.

“The eye winker in the tower. I heard one of them trucks going by, they go by so much now from the farms, and I just got up to look at the time.” It seemed Lena wanted to tell her story, and, while the girls had not called upon her to do so, she realized this possibly was her last chance.

“You see, I am so high up there I can see, like out of a tower myself. Where is Ryan going?” she asked suddenly, as the chauffeur, released from his questioners, was on his way to rake up the newly mowed grass.

Lena, not being answered by the girls who merely smiled at her question, looked a bit wistfully after the retreating form

of Ryan, and went on with her story.

“Anyway,” she began, “when I looked out—I—saw—that—old eye—wink!”

“You mean the light in the tower?” Thally asked indifferently. She was not going to encourage this maid to go into hysterics as Felice had done.

“Yep, I saw that!”

“Nothing else? No one on the road? No cars?” pressed Carol.

“Always them trucks, and I guess maybe one stopped by the brook to give someone a ride, but I wasn’t looking then, I only hear. Then I crawls into bed and pulls up my blankets.”

“Well, come on, Thally,” Carol proposed. “We’ve got a lot to do.”

“Yes,” Thally answered. “And, Lena, be sure to have that fresh corn for lunch, and the strawberries. The market man said they were especially nice.” This was a point-blank dismissal for Lena, if not an actual order for her to go back to her work.

“I’m not going to have any more fainting maids on my hands, if I know it,” Thally told Carol. “Lena is strong enough to stand as much as poor Ryan, if need be.”

“Hurry, let’s look all over the grounds, especially over around the elm tree; we may find clues,” Carol urged.

“There’s the mail man; wait until I see what he brings us,” Thally suggested.

Among the letters received was one with a Connecticut postmark, and it was addressed to Carol, care of Thally.

“From Connecticut? Oh, it must be from Mary King, let’s see,” Carol asked.

They sat down again and Carol quickly glanced over the letter.

“Yes, it is from Mary. She thanks us for everything and all that, and here’s the queer part.” Carol paused then and read:

““We are anxious to reach Stella and Don. They have been motoring along the Indian Trail. If you should happen to see them, will you please ask Stella to get in touch with us at once?””

“Queer, isn’t it?” Thally pondered. “Have you given up your suspicions about Stella?”

“No, have you?”

“No, I haven’t. I think the Kings hurried away on her account. I believe Mary had some reason for calling Ranay in that awful hurry Saturday evening, after we had been out to the dahlia farm, you know, and they all quickly decided to go back home.”

“I thought that strange, too,” Carol agreed. “But after what happened to poor Ryan last night, while Stella and her



husband are following the Indian Trail, can we suspect them of knowing anything about the tower secret?"

"Well, come along, Carol. Time is flying, and we've got to search these old moldy grounds before the big news gets out. I mean about Ryan, of course. But isn't it queer that nobody on the other side of the lake complains about the eye-blinker?"

"They couldn't see it from the other side," Carol replied. "It darts in here from the point and then is in line with the highway. Don't you remember where the inspector stopped Stella's husband? That's the state line."

Mary King's letter and the peculiar actions of Stella gave the girls plenty to talk about as they carefully traversed the ground that Ryan must have passed over to reach the big elm tree. But they found no telltale footprints or other clues that they might have been able to distinguish from Ryan's.

"You saved the rope, I suppose," Carol asked.

"Yes, Ryan and Dad both said it was a sort used in binding heavy bundles. I noticed it was thin but very strong, and the kind that cuts," Thally explained.

"Ryan was wise not to try to get out of it," Carol remarked. "He could easily have been cut if he had."

"I must go back to the house," Thally interrupted. "Come along, Carol. Lena may be doing something foolish like

telephoning to her friend that cooks for Lorings. And Dad said we simply must keep this quiet.”

Thally was walking on ahead; she seemed tired of the whole thing, and even Carol was ready to admit they were just going around in circles without getting anywhere. Then her sharp eye caught sight of something. It was an old, broken basket, the kind people use to carry goods to and from country stores.

She was just going to call Thally’s attention to it when she thought of something that changed her mind. She hurried after Thally instead, and again started to talk of Mary King’s letter.

“Strange thing, Carol,” Thally broke in without answering her chum’s question regarding the Kings, “we seem to be getting more and more puzzled instead of clearing this up. It really looks very serious now.”

“You mean about Ryan?”

“Yes. How do we know what terrible thing they will try next?”

“Of course, we don’t. But I believe when a thing like that happens, the big game is nearly over.”

“You think they have tried everything to scare us out and we don’t go?” Thally asked hopefully.

“Yes, Thally. And now we know at least that hands tied Ryan up, even if he declares they were clammy hands.”

“Yes. And I’m sort of glad all the Kings are gone, it takes them away from suspicion. In fact, I don’t know whom to suspect now,” Thally admitted.

“Let’s not suspect anyone. Thally, as our Rachel says, ‘I’ve got plans.’”

## CHAPTER XX

### ALL NIGHT LONG

“I should say you did have plans, Carol,” Thally agreed, as the girl with the dancing violet eyes proceeded to explain her ideas.

“Glenn and Paul have been dying to try their hand at what they call our special detecting, you know, and, if we can get your father to agree to our plans, I am sure we *will* find out something,” Carol declared.

It was after dinner, hours later, that the girls made their appeal to Mr. Bond.

“You want those young boys to risk their lives watching out in the woods?” he asked. “Wasn’t Ryan’s experience enough?”

“But, Dad,” pleaded Thally, “the boys would have telephones with them, the kind the wire men use. All they would have to do in case of danger would be to call the central office, and the office would instantly notify anyone you want called.”

“Tap wires!” Mr. Bond laughed, in spite of his seriousness. “You kids certainly go at things high-handed.”

“But, Mr. Bond,” Carol cautiously interposed, “Glenn and Paul have made all necessary arrangements with the telephone company, subject to your approval, of course.”

“My approval? Seems to me you could even get along without that. You certainly do go at things in a businesslike way. And I suppose these young sleuths are just now waiting for the word to step in on the case.” He looked slyly at Carol, while he gave his daughter a playful little slap. She was in regular movie position, on the arm of her father’s chair.

“You’re right, Dad,” she admitted. “They are all ready for the word.”

“Call them in, then.” Mr. Bond was not the kind of man willing to leave important matters for youngsters to decide. They might be able to get at the bottom of this matter—certainly, the men he had hired hadn’t done that—still, it was his business, as Carol had said, to approve their plans.

Glenn and Paul arrived so quickly it did seem they must actually have been waiting outside. In the lovely panelled library of this old mansion, Mr. Bond sat as “chairman” with the group of his “executive committee,” as he termed them, sitting around seriously, in the big leather chairs.

He must have regarded them favorably, for they looked well worth that impression. Thally, the brown-haired “brown daisy” was, as usual, wearing yellow. She said “yellow to yellow makes yellow look pink” an old nonsense that meant, of course, yellow was becoming to yellow-skinned or dark-skinned people.

Carol loved deep blues, and her dark hair and deep-toned eyes always favored old blue. Attractive girls, both of them. The two boys were fine specimens of young manhood; clean cut and alert looking. Mr. Bond looked just like his name; sturdy, compact, and dependable. That presents the picture.

“Let’s be sure all the doors are closed into the halls,” Thally said, “because Lena might want to join our committee.”

“So you think, boys,” Mr. Bond began, “you can hide out there and catch our ghost-maker?”

“We think, sir,” Paul was very deferential, “there are now two angles to work from. One at the tower and the other at the elm tree.”

“Yes. Well, go ahead and unfold your plans. I’m here to listen,” the gentleman encouraged.

“We will work in groups,” Glenn jumped right in. “I’ll take the tower and Paul the old tree. From each of those posts we can tap a telephone wire. See, I got these little hand sets from the telephone office.” He then displayed the little portable phones that only telephone employees are allowed to use, except by special permission.

“You say you would go to the tower and Paul to the tree. Where does what you call the ‘group’ come in on that arrangement?” Mr. Bond asked.

“Why, sir,” stammered Paul, “the girls want to come along.”

“The girls!”

“Now, Dad, please listen. All we want to do is to see the fun. We promise not to go out of reach of your own good ears. And you know Carol and I have been working on this mystery ever since we came in here,” pleaded Thally.

“You can easily hear anyone call from the tower, Mr. Bond,” Carol pressed. “We have tried it lots of times.”

“Perfect plans,” he admitted good-naturedly. “Well, we’ll see,” which was of course tentative consent.

After that the young folks proceeded to plan every possible detail. Mr. Bond had confessed to his having had watchmen around the place for a week past, with the disastrous results too well known.

“They knew your men,” Glenn pointed out. “Exactly the same as the trucking farmers know the hours when the inspectors are at certain points, and so get by them without being caught with the forbidden corn. That’s why *our* secret service should work out. They, whoever they are, won’t even know we are at it.”

With this understanding the girls gaily prepared for their night in the wilderness. Both having been Girl Scouts, they knew how to prepare carefully, for even a warm summer night may change suddenly, and it is usually unpleasantly damp toward morning. So they dug out old rain capes, got four or five leather cushions, made the boys try their fake alarm pistols to see that they would make a proper noise, and, at eleven o’clock, they started out.

They had turned out almost all of the house lights some time before starting. Paul and Thally went out the back door, waited a few minutes to be sure no one was watching, then Carol and Glenn went out the side door. Ryan was stationed on a seat in the garden in a dark corner, about halfway between each of the selected outposts.

“I told Lena not to answer any calls,” Thally had informed everybody before starting. “If I didn’t, she would be likely to grab a broom and dash down the path if a lightning bug struck a light.”

“Of course, very likely nothing at all will happen tonight, just because we’re all ready,” Carol said to Glenn, as they made their way stealthily to their watch.

“If not tonight, some other night,” chirped Glenn, who didn’t seem to mind the idea at all.

“Glenn,” Carol began again, “I didn’t tell Thally, but I saw an old basket down there in the corner where the ground ends and the road begins.”

“An old basket? What of it?” Glenn asked. They were actually whispering, fearing anyone hiding about might overhear.

“Well, perhaps, whoever tied Ryan up dropped the basket.”

“Couldn’t tie him with the basket, that’s a cinch.”

“This is a terrible time to be funny, Glenn.” Carol was holding his arm tighter, and both were looking for the little



clearing already selected as the best place to wait.

Paul and Thally were having a similar experience, except that Thally insisted Paul keep close to the telephone wire that had already been located, low enough to tap in an emergency.

By Glenn's illumined wrist-watch dial it was just a quarter of twelve, when, after the usual flood of trucks had rattled down the highway, everything seemed to stop.

Carol grasped Glenn's arm, and he held her protectingly. They both sensed some secret hidden life, as if the moon had suddenly torn itself loose from ensnarling clouds and was on its way again. But there was not any moon; merely a hazy summer night's denseness.

Carol breathed deeply. They were stationed about fifteen feet from the tower and could see or hear anything about it.

Glenn asked her if she were all right, and, upon receiving a reassuring answer, he sat bolt upright, his signal pistol ready to pop off, but not a movement of his or Carol's so much as stirred a frightened fern in this dell of fragile greenery.

Yet nothing had happened; it was merely the stifling stillness that had so suddenly descended upon them. Even the distant rumblings of farmers' trucks were fading away; and everything seemed to be waiting.

"I have always wanted this sort of adventure," Carol was thinking, "but it is sort of—breath-taking."

Then, without the slightest warning, that hideously brilliant light from the tower glared out! Its brilliant blade fairly stabbed the darkness.

“Glenn!”

“Steady! Don’t move!”

It flashed one, then one, two!

Glenn was holding Carol’s hand, perhaps he, too, needed that reassurance.

Again the flash! This time one, two, three!

Not a sound had broken the stillness. Both watchers knew that no light could possibly have been turned on or off in that tower. The key to the lights there would have to have been turned in Mr. Bond’s own bedroom.

“Look! Dad is flashing the porch light,” Carol managed to say. “He has seen—it!”

“Yes. Easy. Something may move and give away the secret, if we wait long enough.”

Then, quickly as the light was gone, the crack of Paul’s pistol brought them to their feet. And screams—Thally’s screams!

Instantly every light on the big estate was flashed on, and everyone, even Lena, was running toward the old elm tree in the far corner of the grounds to reach Thally and Paul.

Ryan was just ahead of Glenn and Carol, and he was carrying a powerful hand flash.

“We’ve got him!” came Paul’s smothered voice. “Here! By the gully!”

“Oh, Carol!” screamed Thally—“see—see who it is!”

They *could* see now. They had dragged the captured figure out under the glare of the street lamp. It was the limpy old farmer, Parsnips!

“Tell y’u I didn’t do nuthin’. Don’t know anythin’ about them tower lights,” he was loudly protesting as Ryan, Glenn, and Paul made sure of his capture.

“You don’t, eh?” snarled Ryan. “What are you doing with them rubber gloves?”

“Gloves? Oh, I have to wear them. My hands are sore from cuttin’ corn. Five hundred ears yis’teddy—” The old man was not going to give in without a fight.

“Yeah!” snarled Ryan. “And you’re not counting crawling up on my back and roping me to that tree——”

“You have a hand phone there, Glenn,” Mr. Bond snapped. “Just call the police. They can take a man to jail if they can’t do anything else.”

“I told you I saw his old basket,” Carol reminded anyone who cared to listen. “He dropped it here last night. I suspected then, who was the guilty one.”

“But I’m tellin’ y’u the truth. I didn’t do nothin’ about them lights. I seed them just now and I was scared as you be.” Parsnips had the look of a creature that only strikes in the dark.

“How about these?” called out Thally, picking up two curiously shaped wooden sticks.

“They’re—stilts,” declared Mr. Bond critically. “Yes, and rubber tipped——”

“Oh, Thal, see! Here is what made the queer little holes with the stars in them. These funny stilts are tipped with rubber,” Carol cried out.

“Bits of automobile tires,” Mr. Bond finished. “Well, who are you?” He demanded of the quaking creature the boys and Ryan were holding and handling none too gently.

“I’m Sam Parsons from Newberry. Everybody knows me,” the man answered, while trying to free at least one hand from the iron grip Ryan was treating him to.

“Yes, I guess they do,” snapped Carol. “You’re the individual who came to us and threatened us, if we wouldn’t sell the tower.”

“Well, I wanted it—then,” the man simpered. “You cheated me out of a lot of money because you wouldn’t sell that measly point,” he growled.

“Cheated you?” Thally repeated.

“Yes. Ef I coulda sold it I’d made a lot o’ money. But that was a good while ago. Things is different now.”

“They sure are. Here comes the wagon,” Paul announced. “You won’t need to go, Mr. Bond—better stay with the girls. Glenn and I will be able to make the complaint.”

“Ryan better go and one of you boys at least stay here,” Mr. Bond proposed. “You see, Ryan can make the charge of assault as he was the only one hurt.”

“That I will,” declared Ryan heartily. “And them clammy old hands will have a good rest from shucking corn, if I know anything about the law.”

“But listen, Ryan,” Mr. Bond cautioned. “Just say assault, and keep the tower business quiet. We haven’t got to the bottom of that yet, you know.”

“All right, sir,” agreed Ryan. In a few minutes the police car had arrived and taken the captive, and Ryan and Paul away.

## CHAPTER XXI

### CAPTURE

They had taken “Parsnips” away in the police car, and he seemed glad enough to go. It was easy to understand why. He feared the people he had been foolish enough to try to injure in revenge for having lost his promised commission on the sale of Tomahawk Point, but, as yet at least, he did not fear the little police court trial he might be put through at Oakleigh.

“He said everybody knows him, Dad,” Thally repeated, when again they were back in the house, “and I think they do.”

“I think so, too,” Carol added. “I saw Stella King speaking to him the early morning we were out at Rocky Falls, and Mrs. Pierson, who owned the strawberry patch, said he was always interfering in other folks’ affairs.”

“And I often saw him sneaking around the stores in town,” Glenn contributed. Paul had gone with Ryan to the police station while Glenn had stayed with Mr. Bond and the girls.

“An’ that old limper was often here by the kitchen,” Lena poked her head in to say. “One day I throw potato water on him—” and she chuckled merrily over that good joke.

“Come on upstairs to the sitting room,” Thally invited everyone. “It’s more comfortable there and we certainly need a little comfort after all this.”

“Guess I can be going home,” Glenn ventured.

“Oh, better wait till the men come back from the station,” Carol suggested. “Can’t tell but old Parsnips may confess to a real crime.”

Comfortable in the sitting room upstairs, everyone had views to offer on the night’s developments, but they politely waited for Mr. Bond’s.

“Sure no one could possibly have thrown a flash on that tower, Glenn?” he asked.

“There wasn’t a move about the place for some time before and some time after the light blazed out. We were directly in front of the window. You know how high up it is, too, Mr. Bond,” Glenn answered.

“Yes, I do. It still beats me,” the gentleman admitted.

“But we certainly found out what made those funny holes with the markings in the bottom,” Thally said. “Old Parsnips wore stilts! Can you imagine him thumping around on stilts?”

“My idea is,” Carol said reflectively, “that it was he who flashed the big light in the window the night Felice was so frightened.”

“Yes, I think that’s right,” Mr. Bond agreed. “He could have done that with any large battery light.”

“And that happened just *after* we came here, you know,” Thally recalled. “In fact, directly after he came around and asked us to sell the tower.”

“The day he disappeared in the road,” Carol recalled. Then they told Mr. Bond about Parsnips going down the path and disappearing.

“The actual *impossible* becomes *possible*,” Mr. Bond remarked. “Since Mrs. Bond and Felice are safe from worry, this tower secret has fascinated me. Good as any mystery story. There comes a car; Paul and Ryan back, I suppose.”

Yes, they were back, and Glenn called to Paul to bring Ryan upstairs.

“Goodness sakes! Tell us, quick. What happened?” Thally begged.

“Funny,” Paul was laughing, “that old guy sure has a great opinion of himself. He admitted freely that he had tied Ryan to the tree but said—get this—he *knew* it wouldn’t hurt him!”

“The nerve!” gasped Glenn.

“Yes, nerve is right. He said he was on his way back from town when he just stopped to see if the tower would wink. He had bought a bottle of chloroform to kill a sick cat, and he had his basket with a small bundle of rope——”



“Yes, chloroform for the cat *maybe*,” Glenn interrupted. “But was the rope for the cat, too? Just to tie her up in case of \_\_\_\_\_”

“The rope, he said, they used on trucks,” Paul added.

“They could use ropes in lots of ways on trucks,” Glenn reassured. “Which way did he say his was used?”

“He didn’t say,” Paul answered grinning.

“Ryan, did you manage to keep your hands off him?” Mr. Bond asked, turning to the chauffeur.

“I did, sir. Matter of fact, he wasn’t worth bothering with; the slimy sneak,” scoffed the manly Ryan.

“What did he say about the tower business?” Thally naturally wanted to know.

“I believe he doesn’t know a thing about that,” Paul explained. “He admitted he had done something to scare folks around here, and that before this family,” he indicated Mr. Bond, “had taken over the place he had, as he called it, played some tricks. But he denied emphatically having anything to do with the tower or the secret of the flashing lights there now.”

“If I might say, sir,” Ryan put in, in his attractive accent, “I don’t think he has sense enough for that. The ghost that works those lights—has brains.”

“Which means they will flash no more tonight. So let’s break up the séance. A little sleep would go a long way with me,” Mr. Bond joked. “Just the same, I want to tell you youngsters, you have done a good job—up to now!”

“And from *now* on, it is going to be better,” Thally promised, giving her “best dad in the world” an affectionate kiss.

A little later the two girls pulled the twin beds so close together that Thally’s slipper which she had kicked off after she “got in” couldn’t slip down in the crack, and Carol threw her extra pillow to the foot, making a little bridge across.

And had Lena been able to listen, she certainly would have heard those two girls talk. But Lena was asleep in her attic room, with the shade pulled down so she “couldn’t see anything if it came along, even out of the sky.” Lena was healthy and slept well, and looked well when she was asleep. Her pink crêpe nightgown left her pink satin neck and arms bare, and one leg always stuck out a little to be ready, if she had to get up in a hurry. Lena should sleep; *she* had to work next day.

On their way home Paul and Glenn gave the night’s experience a thorough going over, and, like Mr. Bond, they admitted the secret of the tower was no nearer solution than before the capture of old Parsnips. He most assuredly had nothing to do with the really important strange demonstration, for, while the light was flashing, he was actually being captured by Paul and Thally. He had played tricks, but, as Ryan said, he was not smart enough to be responsible for the tower secret.

After all, one night cannot last forever, although it may often seem that way, so that, as well as the next day, went by somehow, although to Carol and Thally, who were all keyed up for more excitement, even news from the police station that Parsnips was “being held” seemed tame and uninteresting.

“And tonight being Saturday night, no more ghosts,” said Thally.

“Why no more on Saturday night?” Carol asked.

“Don’t know; maybe everybody’s too busy having a good time, even ghosts. But we have always noticed nothing happens on Saturday nights,” was Thally’s answer.

“Then, we can go to the club in peace,” Carol sighed. “And maybe a good time won’t do us any real harm, either.”

They found at the club that the few young people who were in town were not thinking of tower mysteries or the queer adventures of the residents of Green Lake Bend. It was much too late in the season to be bothered about queer things, vacation would be over before anyone knew it, and getting the most fun out of the short time left was a serious matter for those who would soon be back in school.

The group, of which Carol and Thally were acknowledged leaders, always managed to have a good time, perhaps because they were not self-conscious nor suspicious, and not given to gossiping. These virtues may have been the result of favorable circumstances, rather than of actual character,

because most any girl could have a good time with Glenn, Paul, Bob, and Roy.

It was raining when the small dance was over, and a general run for cars from the club porch brought Thally into collision with Myra Todd.

“Oh!” exclaimed Myra. “Hello, Thally. Heard you had gone to the beach.”

“No, Mother went. Carol and I are housekeeping,” Thally replied.

“Entertaining ghosts, I hear,” said Myra, dodging into her car. “Why don’t you ask us around to meet a couple?” Myra always acted cute; so she thought.

“I would, Myra,” Thally called back, as she was getting into Glenn’s car, “if we only could hold them long enough. They’re awfully illusive.”

“So I hear,” called back Myra; and then Ted Wallace started the car.

“Was she just being catty?” Paul asked.

“Oh, no, Myra doesn’t mean to be mean. She just hates to miss anything.”

And that was about all. Everyone was tired, and nobody cared about ghosts nor ghost stories this night. So that presently the boys left the girls safely in Bonds’ hall and hurried away.

It must have been after midnight when Carol heard a bell, the doorbell. She called Thally; then Thally heard it.

“Whatever now?” growled Thally. “Guess I’ll call Dad.”

“Why not call Lena? Doesn’t she ever go down at night?” Carol asked.

“Oh, all right, but I’m dead. Listen to that old bell. We must get a second girl.”

It was Carol who ran up the back stairs and finally got Lena to come down in her lavender wrapper. Lena was too sleepy to talk, but she flashed on the lights promptly enough and opened the front door without a thought of any danger.

Carol could see over Lena’s shoulder; Thally was halfway down the stairs, clinging to the rail.

“Why!” gasped Carol, peering out the door, “it’s Stella.”

“Yes,” said the voice brushing past Lena into the hall, “it is —Stella.”

“All right; Lena. This is a friend,” Carol said quickly. “Lock the door, and we can attend to things.” She saw at once they would get along better without Lena.

Stella, coming in so strangely out of the night, had sunk down wearily on the little wooden seat, under the old silken wall drapery. Thally was now down with Carol, and both could see that something had happened to her.

“What—what has happened?” asked Thally, trying to control her voice.

“Let me take your wet things,” Carol offered, equally cautious.

“Oh, what must you girls think of me” murmured Stella, whose face, devoid of make-up, was white as the handkerchief she so nervously held. She had on a black, early fall suit, and her bright hair would have lent agreeable contrast if her face had not been so white, and her eyes so frightened.

“Let’s go to the kitchen and make a hot drink. You’re soaking wet. *We* only got in a few minutes ago,” Carol said, as if to relieve the tension.

Mechanically Stella followed them to the kitchen, took off her little jacket, and tossed aside the foolish hat.

“I couldn’t stand it, I had to come. I ran away!”

“Stella! You mean you ran away from Don, your husband?” Carol exclaimed.

“Yes. But it’s my fault, all my fault, not his. He’s much too good—for me!” Tears were fairly rolling down her face, but the girls felt powerless to help her.

“Better tell us what happened,” pressed Carol. “It may not be so awful as you think.”

“It is. Don has been wonderful, he’s the very soul of honor, that’s why we quarreled. He couldn’t understand why I should take money——”

“Take money!” both girls echoed.

“Yes, I took fifty dollars from the canning factory for something *he* had done for them. My folks needed it, the factory people pressed it on me, and I didn’t see why I should not accept it.”

“Oh,” sighed Carol in relief. “You mean you merely took money which he had refused. Of course——”

“But I wanted to give it to poor little Mary, and I did not want Don to know. But someone told him——”

“You surely were right in wanting to give something to Mary,” stumbled Thally. There just didn’t seem to be anything she could say but repeat Stella’s own words. “Have this tea. You must have had an awful journey in the rain,” she sympathized.

“But I had to come back to the folks. I knew they could help me. Don likes them and he would listen to them. But when I got here I found—they were gone!”

“Before they left, Mary sent us a note asking us if we got in touch with you to tell you to get in touch with them. They have gone back to Connecticut, and they said they were very anxious to hear from you,” Carol quickly explained.

“Home! To Connecticut? Then the money did do them some good, even if—it did this to me,” Stella dropped her hands helplessly and looked the picture of despair.

Then she was forced to sip the refreshing tea, while the two girls in their bright robes sat near her, trying to make light of a situation they didn’t even understand.



## CHAPTER XXII

### THE QUARREL

She had quarreled with Don about taking the fifty dollars she had given Mary, the fifty dollars Hilda Hansen had so innocently told Mary she had seen Stella accept. But neither Thally nor Carol knew this had been why Mary King and her folks had so suddenly left for Connecticut.

Gradually the girl's composure returned, for she was really not much more than a girl, and then she made her story clearer. Don, she said, had always been proud to do what he called "a big thing." This summer he had found a chance to do something for the canning factory and they had offered to pay him for it. But it had been against his principles ever to take money for his scientific work, and in this case Don was helping the farmers as well as the factory. Stella had not really understood how strict this principle of helping a worthy cause had been with him, she declared, or she never would have touched the money. He had always been generous, would have given her anything she wanted for her folks, and this, Stella said, had added to his anger against her. She had deliberately spoiled his plans.

"He blamed me for not trusting him, for not telling him I wanted to give a little to Mary; he would have loved to have helped. Then he was furious when he thought of what those office men might think of *me* for taking the

money.” Again Stella broke into sobs. “Why was I so silly! I never had money as he had, and it seemed so much to me, I suppose, I lost my common sense, just wanted to do something big for my folks, and I didn’t know enough to let Don’s business alone.”

Now they both understood. But they could not ask *what* Don had done that was worth so much to the canning factory, or how he was trying to help the farmers.

It was useless to attempt to quiet the poor thing. She appeared to have held back her feelings so long that the release was ungovernable. Finally, just to change the subject, Thally blurted out:

“But you should have been here with us last night, Stella. Talk about trouble! That old farmer, Parsnips—you know Parsnips, don’t you?”

“Yes, what about him?” Stella suddenly sat erect, eager.

“Well, he tied our chauffeur to a tree——”

“What!” The question was literally a scream.

“Yes.” Then both girls did their best to tell her what had really happened, and how they had finally captured Parsnips.

“Do—you—really—mean—that!” The words were spaced as if she feared any possible misunderstanding.

“Certainly. Why?” Thally asked.

“Because now *I* must call Don. He must know this at once. Oh, perhaps it will help to straighten it all out— Could I send a message?” Her gloom had suddenly broken out in a frenzy of eagerness.

“Why, certainly. Do you want to long distance?” Thally offered.

“Long distance?” Stella was not as familiar with methods of expensive communication as were these girls. “Yes, that would be fine. I could get him now. Sure I wouldn’t disturb your mother by my calling?”

“Mother is away,” Thally said, but she didn’t say why.

“Oh. It was terrible for that old Parsnips to do what he did—I hope he didn’t hurt your man?” Stella then hurried to ask, as she had forgotten to show solicitude and felt she should do so.

“No, it was more fun than anything else,” Carol smilingly answered. The phone call had already been put in, and they were waiting for the signal. Carol and Thally had brought Stella down to the soundproof booth under the stairs and would leave her as soon as the call came.

“I thought if I gave the money back to the canning factory and explained to them that Don didn’t know I had taken it, he would have to realize how badly I felt about it and forgive me,” Stella was saying. “There’s the call!”

As Stella closed the door and pulled on the little light that insured her private talk on that first quarrel, Thally and Carol

slipped away to the library, keeping very close to each other.

“Whatever is coming now?” whispered Thally.

“Give up,” answered Carol. “But, at any rate, *we* haven’t anything like *that* to worry about.” She meant the lovers’ quarrel.

“Did you ever see a girl so changed?” murmured Thally.

“Just scared, I think. Those people have had such hard times, that with Stella the relief from real hardship must have been wonderful. And the new blow just must have \_\_\_\_\_”

“I know. She thought it was heaven and found it was earth.”

“Grand, Thally! You ought to write a song about it. She didn’t say where Don is, though, did she?”

“No, they seem to have a lot of secrets, those two.”

“Going to ask her to stay tonight, of course?”

“Certainly. Midnight and rain and a weeping bride,” chanted Thally. “More songs. Like it?”

The telephone room door was opening. Both girls went to meet Stella.

“It’s all right, he’ll come!” Her face was alight, color was staining her white cheeks and her eyes were starry.

“So glad you could reach him,” Thally prompted.

“Yes, wasn’t that luck? And my worries—well, they have taken a back seat. It takes a bigger worry to cure a worry, Pete always said.” Stella could smile now.

“A bigger worry?” questioned Carol.

“Yes. Don was simply wild when he heard about old Parsnips. He’s going to take a plane and get here tomorrow, early. Isn’t it wonderful that people can travel so quickly by air now?” But that couldn’t have been what she was thinking of. She was going for her hat and coat.

“You can’t go out tonight, Stella,” Thally quickly interrupted her.

“Oh, I must, really. I promised Don I’d go to the hotel. He thinks your father will feel— Well,” she interrupted herself, “when I promise Don anything after this, I intend to keep my promise. Men are certainly exacting in little things we girls hardly notice.” She had put on her coat. “I can call a taxi, can’t I?”

“*We* don’t want to interfere, Stella,” Carol said cautiously, “but you may not get a taxi so late and the Hotel Birches may not even be open.”

“Then I’ll ring them up, and the station has to keep open for the two o’clock train—you see I’m quite a traveler—so *they* must send me a taxi. Don’t worry, girls. You’ve brought joy back into life for me, at least. You don’t know what an awful

thing a little fight may be among—friends,” she finished, actually laughing.

“And it’s still raining,” again Carol objected.

“But at least I don’t have to worry about the cost of pressing suits,” she said, jabbing the rain-spoiled little hat on her bright, unruly hair.

“So you are all right, happy again?” Thally said, in a most friendly way.

“Looks so. Don was so struck when I told him that old Parsnips had been around here making trouble, he just seemed to forget he had been mad at me. Of course, I’m going to do my part,” she declared. “Before Don gets here, I’m going to see Mr. Harrison Stanley. He’s the manager’s son at the canning factory, and he gave me the money. When I can tell Don I am sorry enough about my mistake to do *that*,” Stella emphasized, “I know he will admit it was only a mistake. You see,” she said seriously, “we folks have had so much trouble about money that the very sight of it—makes us greedy, I suppose,” which was a greater and more important truth than these three young folks could possibly have realized.

“But we do hate to have you go out tonight, Stella,” Thally assured her.

“Don’t worry about that, girls, I’d go out in a tornado the way I feel now. And let me phone for a taxi?”

She was doing it before anyone could have answered. They heard her arguing, but, as usual, she was able to convince the station master that he just had to go outside, wake up a “cabby” and send him out to Lake Bend.

“I can’t tell you how grateful I am,” Stella hurried to say, as a noise like a taxi seemed coming nearer. “I wish I could tell you a little, which I am sure you want to know, but again—I promised Don,” she ended happily.

“Oh, that’s all right; we can wait,” Thally assured her.

“But maybe—likely—you won’t have to wait long,” she said mysteriously, as the cranky cabman blew the horn, not caring whom he might wake at that hour of the night.

When she was gone, the girls stood looking at the dumb closed door. It couldn’t tell them anything, but they stood there watching it as if it should.

Then they turned and went upstairs. More mystified than ever, Carol and Thally wondered what was going to happen next.

“She said it wouldn’t be long now,” said Carol significantly.

“Well, I hope it’s long enough to give me a little sleep,” growled Thally. “Think I’ll get Dad to put in a maid’s room on the first floor. This running down at all hours of the night is just ruining my beauty,” Thally was funniest when she was sleepest.

“After Felice and Bridetta ran away from a light in the window, I wouldn’t try that, Thal. I thought the famous Bridetta would have fought most anything.”

“And she ran first. But I like Lena better, she’s handsomer. Wasn’t Stella a ghost herself when she walked in on us, though? Shut that window, Carol; I hate rain on the roof.”

“But we learned something. The first quarrel is quite an interesting drama.”

“Yeah, over long distance. Let’s go to sleep. We may be yanked out of bed at dawn if any more domestic dramas take a notion to pop. But Stella is pretty when she’s pale——”

Of the many questions crowding Carol’s mind as she tried to sleep was, why, that early morning out at the Rocky Falls, Stella had told old Parsnips that “she could take care of the Bonds.” Certainly Stella had freely admitted she had made mistakes, and that a chance to get money probably had made her “greedy,” but that did not, to Carol’s way of reasoning, explain the remark she had heard that very early and very well-remembered morning at the Rocky Falls station.

“*This* ghost or secret will finally be brought out into the open without handcuffs or pistol shots,” she further reasoned. “Because I am now quite sure the secret of that tower is in the hands of Don and Stella, and they don’t shoot off guns; at least I hope not.”

Thally was sleeping.



## **CHAPTER XXIII**

### **AN UP-TO-DATE SECRET**

Sunday morning woke the girls up according to the calendar; the day was fair, clear, cool, and lovely.

“We’d better be ready early,” warned Carol, “can’t tell when they may come.”

“Who?” asked Thally, drowsily.

“Everybody,” answered Carol. “Don’t you remember last night? Where have you been since you went to sleep?”

“Oh, yes, of course. You mean ‘everybody,’” Thally seemed to understand perfectly. “All right, I’ll dress, after I wash my face,” she yawned. “It seems to—need it.” So they both got up and eventually were both ready for church.

But before they went to church, they left so many instructions with Lena that she was quite excited about it all. She begged time to run upstairs and put on her white uniform, which Thally always had trouble in inducing her to wear, but somehow it seemed to Lena it was better to take important telephone messages in a white uniform, and she was fully expecting the important messages.

Also Ryan was not to go to his mother's to dinner today, although he usually did on Sunday, so that, after all, a white uniform was more becoming to Lena than the blue.

But in spite of all instructions and expectations, the full half day passed, even dinner passed, and no word had come from Stella.

In the afternoon Glenn and Paul came and all together they talked the whole thing over. But there seemed little use of guessing what the outcome would be, in fact, the most clever guess might only spoil the answer.

So they talked about old Parsnips. He had been released, of course, from the so-called police station, and Ryan refused to make a charge against him. Strange as that may seem, such things do happen in country places where everybody knows almost everybody else, and a man like Ryan was too disgusted with the "sneak" to bother about having him punished.

"Unless I meet him some time when I feel like tackling him myself," said the good-natured Ryan. He would think it unmanly to appeal to a court to settle a little fight with another man, but Parsnips was old, and that saved him.

The afternoon wore on into evening. The girls and boys were on the big side porch when Carol espied the taxi coming through the trees.

"Here they are!" she announced. "Now, we surely are going to hear the big news."

“I’m not sure you are going to ask us up to the house,” Don said, as he came near the porch. “You must have a terrible opinion of us,” he sort of apologized.

“Not at all,” Thally answered cordially. “Here are the chairs! See, we really have been waiting for you.”

Stella looked too happy to give any other impression as she took her seat beside Carol, while Don sat down between the two boys.

“I’m still roaring mad.” Don began. “That sneak Parsons has been released, after what he tried to put over.” He surely was excited, his bright eyes were flashing, and his face was much redder than sunburn could have made it.

“What’s it all about, anyway?” Carol asked frankly. “We just don’t understand the what, the why, and the wherefore.”

“I realize that,” Don replied. “But is Mr. Bond at home?”

“Yes, he’s upstairs. Would you like to have him down?” Thally asked.

“I would, if it’s convenient. I certainly owe him an explanation if not an apology.”

Mr. Bond was even then coming down the stairs, so the delay was not longer than a few moments. He was very cordial, of course, and was given the most prominent place in the little group.

“I hope I can show you, sir,” Don began, “that what seemed to me all right, and what I had tried to make a perfectly harmless experiment has turned out quite contrary to the way I had it planned.”

“You mean the tower secret?” Thally could not help asking.

“Yes. You see, this place is on a spot, a point rather, that overlooks the most important area of the big highway. Trucks from farms must cross the state line here and they have been stopped by the inspectors.”

“Because of the corn-borer,” Glenn inserted.

“But it wasn’t a corn-borer,” Don quickly contradicted. “In fact, it was only a perfectly harmless little insect which gets into many vegetables, and those poor farmers should not have had to lose their crops because of it.”

“But hadn’t the inspectors found that out?” Mr. Bond asked pointedly.

“No, sir. They just took orders. They wouldn’t let a dozen ears of perfectly good corn cross the line. I have facts to prove what I say. Anyone who cares may read these papers sent me from the department of agriculture. *They* bear out everything I am telling you. But the trouble was, the summer was here; we had no time for new legislation, the farmers were in despair, and the canning factory, which had contracted for the whole crop, was ready to shut down.”

The little man was almost breathless; not from his long speech, but from the enthusiasm he found in his subject.

Stella was beaming, while Paul and Glenn listened in unhidden admiration. Certainly Don knew what he was talking about. Everyone was intently listening.

“Then, you gave the signals for the trucks to pass?” Carol jumped in. “You threw the light from the tower—” She paused, waiting for Don to finish.

“Go ahead, Miss Duncan,” he prompted, “you’re doing fine!”

“But you couldn’t have thrown the light *from* the tower,” Thally insisted. “No one could get in there and there were no wires——”

“You are also right, Miss Bond,” Don smilingly admitted. He was so proud of his scientific knowledge he enjoyed their suspense.

“Gets like a guessing game,” Mr. Bond chimed in. “My guess is you threw a light *on* the tower.”

“Not quite right, sir,” he answered to that, encouraging the guessers.

“Oh, tell us,” begged Carol. “We all give up guessing.”

“Would you like a demonstration?” Don suggested then.

This plan was literally jumped at, and, as night had fallen during their talk, everybody was ready for a visit to the tower, and everybody was becoming excited at the prospect.

“It’s going to be tame,” Don warned. “No fireworks or anything like that.”

“All right,” Thally answered, “so long as it explains the tower secret, it will be plenty lively enough for us.”

At which point Don went in to send a message about some business, while Mr. Bond went to his room for the tower key.

“Let’s call Ryan,” Glenn suggested. “He should be interested in this.”

“And call Lena,” added Carol. “We can lock up; it won’t take but a few minutes, and we could see anyone coming even from the point.”

A short time later it was a merry little parade that wended its way to the tower.

“This is the jolliest ghost party I ever attended,” Paul remarked, as Carol almost fell over a stump.

“A real up-to-date ghost should be jolly, shouldn’t it, Don?” Stella remarked, clinging to Don’s arm as they marched over the broken stone path and finally reached the tower.

“Now,” said Don, “you may all search me if you wish.” It sounded exactly like circus magic, the girls thought. “But I assure you I have nothing concealed about my person. Now, let’s all get out where we can have a good view of——”

“The old eyewinker,” Carol finished merrily.

“Yes. That’s right, it does wink, doesn’t it?” Don agreed.

Following Don’s advice, they all lined up in a good position to see the top window of the tower. Don glanced at his watch, and made some gibberish remarks that everyone wanted to laugh at, but didn’t. Then he solemnly put up his right hand and with his eye on his watch called out:

“Shine!”

Instantly the big eye winked once, twice, stopped. Then again two and one, as in a given signal.

“Oh!” screamed Lena running back along the path. “That’s him, that’s the same old winker!”

“Praise be!” exclaimed Ryan, deliberately walking toward the tower as if on duty to defend the owners.

“What was it?” demanded a chorus from the others.

“Science,” replied Don proudly. “You saw I neither threw a light *on* the tower nor threw a light *from* the tower. Shall we go into the tower now?”

“Yes, I’d like to,” Mr. Bond quickly answered. “I’ve thrown the switch on from the house so we can use the lights. This certainly amazes me.”

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE BIG HOUR

“Science is truly amazing,” Don declared almost reverently.

Carol and Thally were more excited than the others could have been, for they had investigated this tower, they had collected a lot of clues, and theirs were the questions most urgently demanding answers.

Thally knew what *she* wanted to know, and Carol’s questions were fairly sizzling for utterance. The old tower was well lighted from side brackets, but, when they reached the eye-shaped window, they saw at once that the central fixture there, with the big light, was unlighted.

“There!” a chorus explained.

“What’s there?” Don asked triumphantly.

“No light,” answered Carol promptly. “This must be the trick light.”

“An old, worn-out bulb, perhaps,” Don suggested. “Nothing there to make trouble.”

“Oh, come on, Don, tell them,” pleaded Stella. “They have waited long enough.”



“All right, Star, your wish is my command,” replied the happy young man, and the girls noted how he had affectionately turned the name Stella into Star, its real meaning.

Glenn and Paul were whispering that they knew the secret now, but would not venture to interrupt Don.

“This is our new and already famous photo-electric cell,” he began, “one of the greatest of all scientific electrical discoveries.”

Then there was a general hum of excitement. The young folks, being high school pupils, had all learned a little about this great discovery, but so little, they had no idea of its magic power.

But just as Mary King and Stella had always said, Lyndon Carter, familiarly called Don, was in his particular glory when on the subject of magic, whether scientific or otherwise. This was his big hour. No thought of regret for any inconvenience his experiment might have caused could possibly dim its glory. He had worked his photo-electric tube so perfectly that his brief message given in the telephone booth of Bonds’ home, had caused his operator at the other end to actuate the light at a distance of some blocks away. The moment agreed upon for Don to call out “Shine!” had been the signal for a perfect demonstration, and it had all worked without a hitch.

The boys wanted to examine the little apparatus, like a radio cell, that was hidden in the bulky old light

fixture, but the girls begged that they leave the mechanical details for another time. The girls had more interesting questions *they* wanted answered and surely they had the prior right.

“Like to see the other end?” Don inquired gaily.

But no one wanted to go down the road to find an operator there with a little box in which was the infra-red light affair that worked upon the cell in the tower. They took Don’s word for everything now, and were hurrying back to the house.

But Ryan had himself gone down to the old elm tree where he thought he heard a noise like another fight. Sure enough, there was old Parsnips trying to fight the canning factory operator, who had the small box with the other end of the electrical apparatus, and who had been Don’s capable assistant.

“There he is,” Parsnips was yelling. “And there’s the magic in his hands. And *I* was put in jail for that——”

“Oh, no you were not,” Ryan contradicted, “but no matter. Suppose you two both come up to our porch and talk to the folks?” he proposed. “There’s some questions to be answered yet.”

“I’d jest like to tell Mr. Bond about this business,” bellowed the excited farmer, so it was easy enough to get him to go along with the electrician and Ryan. “I’m blamed fer things I didn’t even know nothin’ about.”

They had hard work quieting him in his wild denunciations of “that new devil-magic” as he profanely termed Don’s pet experiment, but, after Don himself was induced to stop his accusations of the old farmer, which were scathing indeed, Stella got a chance at him.

“Didn’t I tell you that morning, out at Rocky Falls station, to keep away from this place, that *I* could take care of the Bonds?” she demanded. “The morning I was out looking for fresh strawberries for our breakfast.”

So that was it! Carol was so glad she had never told Thally. And how easily an overheard remark may be misunderstood, Carol was trying to tell herself that particularly.

The old man was whimpering. He admitted sneaking into the tower and throwing out the signal flashes to farmers on trucks *before* the Bonds moved into Lake Bend, but after that he had been locked out, chased off the grounds—that—it seemed had been his motive for revenge against Ryan. Ryan had chased him away many times.

“And you threw a light in our window and scared my mother and our maid,” charged Thally. “We guessed you must have done that on your old stilts. We found the marks.”

“Stilts!” exclaimed Don. “Did you steal my show stilts?” he demanded angrily.

“Jest took ’em. You kin have ’em. Almost broke my neck  
\_\_\_\_\_”

“Why did you put those things on?” Don flung at him sharply.

“Footprints,” answered Parsnips, as easily as if someone had asked him what time it was.

“Yes,” Mr. Bond joined in finally. He was having such a good time listening, he had not put any questions to Parsnips himself. “I knew when I saw those bits of rubber on the end of the stilts which we picked up at the big tree, that they had made the curious marks in the curious holes the girls had been secretly tracing. And I want to give you girls credit,” he said to Carol and Thally. “You can keep your own secrets.”

“Don’t go, Parsons,” ordered Don, as the old man attempted to go. “The girls have another question to ask. What is it, Carol?” He had stopped calling her Miss Duncan by now.

“About the day he disappeared in the road, you know, Thally. Let’s ask him that. Listen, Parsons! How did you get away that day you went down the path and disappeared?” Carol asked emphatically.

“Oh! Yes! That was pretty good, wasn’t it?” Parsnips chortled. “Y’u know that rope I sort—of—well, used, one night——”

“Yes, we know,” Glenn helped him out.

“Well, that’s the rope. I used to have it dropped from the trucks. Tee! Hee!” he chuckled. “With that old rope dangling

down, I could hop a truck without hardly waitin' for it even to slack down a bit."

"So you hopped the trucks when they dangled the rope that you tied our friend up with," Carol repeated. She didn't want to say much about Ryan; he wouldn't have liked it.

"Oh, let him go," Thally suggested. "Run along, Mr. Parsons, and see that you don't try any more of your tricks around here," she cautioned.

"Won't have nothin' to do with that there magic box —" And finally he was on his way, muttering against the unholy magic of the mysterious electric cell.

The young man from the canning factory with his precious box, was invited inside with the others, and together they all had as pleasant a Sunday night party as any one could have wished for. Lena outdid herself with sandwiches, tea, coffee, and lemonade, while Carol, Thally, and Stella did the honors of serving.

Don kept trying to explain his own position to Mr. Bond. He had been working for the farmers and for the canning factory, he insisted, and everything would have gone all right except for the old man's interference. Parsnips had made the real trouble.

Mr. Bond seemed well satisfied that the ambitious young experimenter had really tried and had succeeded in helping the farmers and the canning factory, until proper legislation

could be put through to prove that the insect infecting the corn was not the dreaded corn-borer.

“And don’t forget, Mr. Bond,” Carol reminded that gentleman, “you promised our high school the use of the tower and—maybe a new telescope, too.”

“You may have it. You deserve it,” Mr. Bond replied heartily. “If it had not been for you and Thally and these boys, I should have had the old tower torn down before I came in here. Now Tomahawk Point will go down in history as the great experimental station of the photo-electric cell.”

“And maybe we’ll get Don to show our class some of his magic experiments,” finished Carol, as she finally sat down by Glenn to her own sandwich and her own cup of tea.

THE END

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# Melody Lane Mystery Stories

*By LILIAN GARIS*

Thrills, secrets, ghosts—adventures that will fascinate you seem to surround pretty Carol Duncan. A vivid, plucky girl, her cleverness at solving mysteries will captivate and thrill every mystery fan.

The author has written many popular mystery stories for girls and in this new series Mrs. Garis is at her best.

## THE GHOST OF MELODY LANE

Mystery surrounds the great organ in the home of the “Cameo Lady”—beloved friend of Carol and sponsor of the girls’ Coral Club. Three people see the “ghost” that wanders in the grove carrying a waxy white rose. And Carol finds the rose! In the end she finds the ghost too!

## THE FORBIDDEN TRAIL

There was a tradition at “Splatter Castle” on Melody Lane, and Marah Splartier, eccentric aunt of Veronica Flint determined to protect Vera from following the long line of family tragedies that had had their beginning on the “forbidden trail.” Carol has several bad frights before she clears up the mystery that keeps the little family at Splatter Castle unhappy and afraid.

## THE TOWER SECRET

The winking lights flashing from the old tower on the grounds of the Bonds' new home defy explanation. There is no one in the tower—and no electric power or connections! Had the engaging circus family that Carol befriended anything to do with the mystery? And what interest had Parsnips, the queer old farmer, in the “ghost” tower?

## THE WILD WARNING

What power did the strange, wild warning in the woods have over Polly Flinders? And why was she so desperately anxious to earn money? Carol brings happiness to three families when she solves this exciting mystery.

## THE TERROR OF MOANING CLIFF

No tenant would stay in the great, bleak house on “moaning cliff” that belonged to Carol's aunt. But Carol, courageous and determined, finally tracks the uncanny “haunts” to their source.

## THE DRAGON OF THE HILLS

When Carol runs a tea shop for a friend, a baffling mystery comes to her with her first customer. Who has the limping man's lost package—the gypsies, the oriental or the neighbor's boy who ran away?

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# THE NANCY DREW MYSTERY STORIES

By CAROLYN KEENE

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Illustrated. Every Volume Complete in Itself.

Here is a thrilling series of mystery stories for girls. Nancy Drew, ingenious, alert, is the daughter of a famous criminal lawyer and she herself is deeply interested in his mystery cases. Her interest involves her often in some very dangerous and exciting situations.

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Nancy, unaided, seeks to locate a missing will and finds herself in the midst of adventure.

## THE HIDDEN STAIRCASE

Mysterious happenings in an old stone mansion lead to an investigation by Nancy.

## THE BUNGALOW MYSTERY

Nancy has some perilous experiences around a deserted bungalow.

## THE MYSTERY AT LILAC INN

Quick thinking and quick action were needed for Nancy to extricate herself from a dangerous situation.

## THE SECRET AT SHADOW RANCH

On a vacation in Arizona Nancy uncovers an old mystery and solves it.

## THE SECRET OF RED GATE FARM

Nancy exposes the doings of a secret society on an isolated farm.

## THE CLUE IN THE DIARY

A fascinating and exciting story of a search for a clue to a surprising mystery.

## NANCY'S MYSTERIOUS LETTER

Nancy receives a letter informing her that she is heir to a fortune. This story tells of her search for another Nancy Drew.

## THE SIGN OF THE TWISTED CANDLES

Nancy, as mediator in a generation-old feud, divulges an unknown birthright.

## THE PASSWORD TO LARKSPUR LANE

A carrier pigeon furnishes Nancy with a clue to a mysterious retreat.

## THE CLUE OF THE BROKEN LOCKET

Nancy's sympathy for adopted twins leads her into a surprising mystery.

## THE MESSAGE IN THE HOLLOW OAK

In Canada, Nancy protects her new property from a crooked promoter.

## THE MYSTERY OF THE IVORY CHARM

Nancy solves an Indian mystery by means of a lucky elephant charm.

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# **The MARY and JERRY MYSTERY STORIES**

By FRANCIS HUNT

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## **THE MESSENGER DOG'S SECRET**

The big police dog Flanders carried a strange message in his collar. By following its directions, Mary and Jerry Denton were able to bring a lost fortune to someone in need.

## **THE MYSTERY OF THE TOY BANK**

Jerry Denton was saving for a bicycle, but when his little bank strangely disappeared he had a big mystery to solve. With the aid of Mary, several chums and a queer old sailor, this eager lad brought about a happy solution.

## **THE STORY THE PARROT TOLD**

A fire in a pet shop started a long chain of adventures for Mary and Jerry Denton. The tale the talking parrot told caused plenty of excitement and mystery before the bird was restored to its rightful owner.

## **THE SECRET OF THE MISSING CLOWN**

Mary and Jerry have many happy adventures at the circus while searching for the missing clown and his beautiful pony, Silverfeet.

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# DANA GIRLS MYSTERY STORIES

BY CAROLYN KEENE

*Author of the*  
NANCY DREW MYSTERY STORIES

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Impetuous, delightful Jean Dana and her charming serious minded sister Louise find themselves in the midst of several mysteries, when they attempt to aid people who are in trouble. Thrilling moments come to the girls as they follow up clue after clue in an endeavor to untangle the knotty problems in which they become enmeshed.

## BY THE LIGHT OF THE STUDY LAMP

A stolen study lamp, a fortune teller, and a distressed schoolmate provide plenty of excitement for the Dana girls before they locate the persons responsible for many mysterious happenings.

## THE SECRET AT LONE TREE COTTAGE

While the girls are at Starhurst School, they learn that their beloved English teacher has vanished in a strange manner. In tracing her, Jean and Louise are able to aid the frantic relatives of a dear little curly-haired tot, but not before they themselves are in danger of disappearing.

## IN THE SHADOW OF THE TOWER

The mingling of unusual characters, who have life interests very different from one another, lends excitement and intrigue to a Christmas vacation of the Dana girls. Their ability to fit together the pieces of a strange puzzle brings happiness to several persons.

## A THREE-CORNERED MYSTERY

There were three strange corners which the Dana girls successfully rounded in their search for clues to clear up a mystery, involving property and an international spy of many aliases.

## THE SECRET AT THE HERMITAGE

When Louise is mistaken for a runaway prisoner, strange things begin to happen, which lead the Danas to uncover the secret of a talented girl and her crippled charge.

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# The Judy Bolton Mystery Stories

By MARGARET SUTTON

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Judy's adventures, every one of them, have been based on something that actually happened. The flood, the house with the round attic windows, the hiding place of the invisible chimes, the school fire, the camp in the Thousand Islands, the queer old house in Parkville and the panic in the theatre—all of them are real!

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**THE INVISIBLE CHIMES**—A strange girl is sheltered by the Boltons and Judy tracks down many clues before she uncovers her real identity.

**SEVEN STRANGE CLUES**—Judy works out seven baffling clues to solve the mystery of a school fire and a prize poster contest.



THE GHOST PARADE—Weird happenings at Thousand Island Camp provide mystery, humor and adventure in this thrilling story.

THE YELLOW PHANTOM—With her quick thinking and courage, Judy rescues a lost friend and solves the mystery of “Golden Girl.”

THE MYSTIC BALL—Irene, “the engaged girl,” is frightened by a crystal gazer but Judy exposes the trickery and saves her friend’s romance.

THE VOICE IN THE SUITCASE—A weird cry leads Judy into excitement and danger in a lonely old house.

THE MYSTERIOUS HALF CAT—Judy and her friends become suspicious of a mysterious old beggar and follow him.

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## Transcriber's Notes

- Silently corrected a few typos.
- Retained publication information from the printed edition: this eBook is public-domain in the country of publication.
- In the text versions only, text in italics is delimited by \_underscores\_.

[The end of *The Tower Secret* by Lilian Garis]