



T
HE
GHOST OF
MELODY LANE

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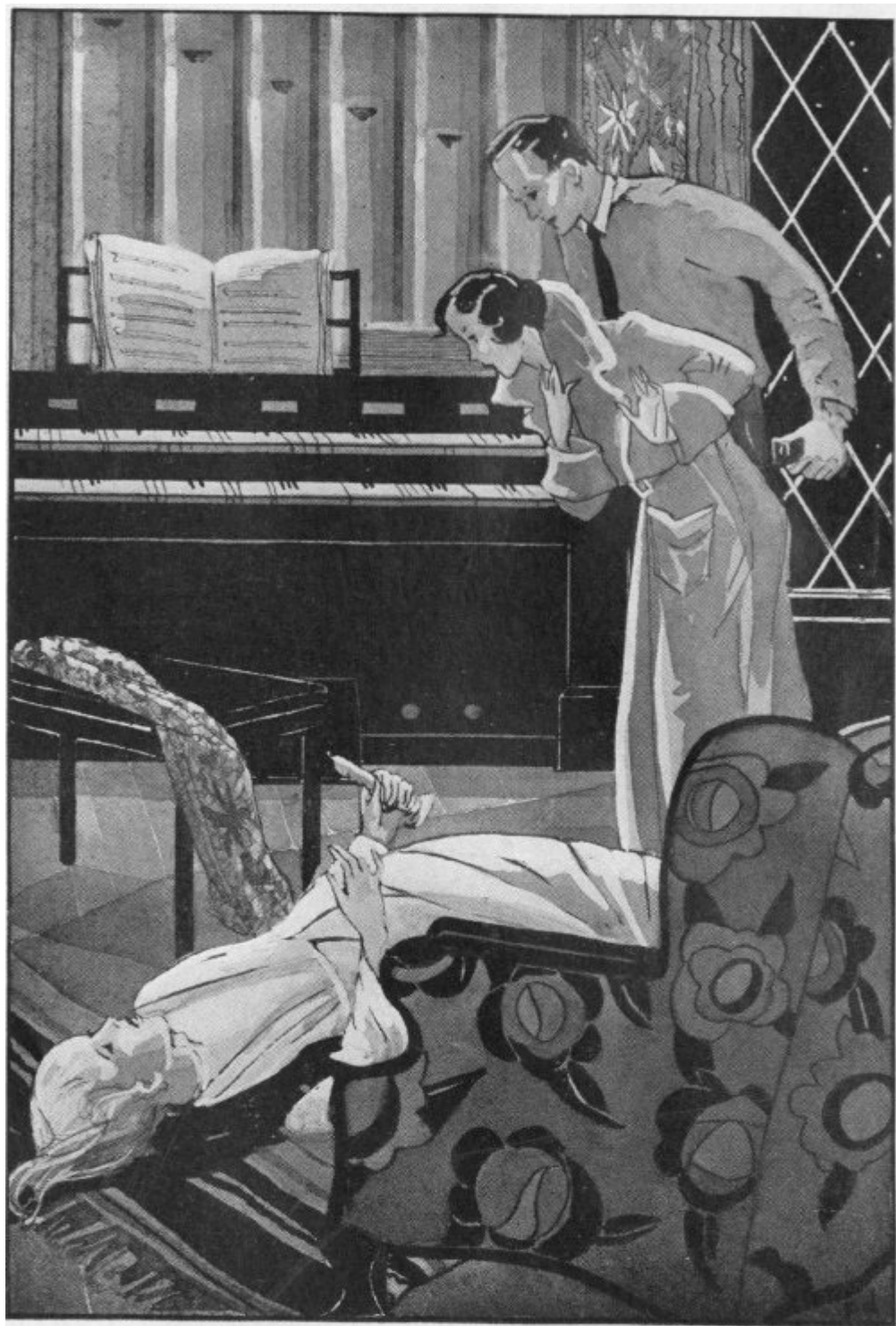
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T
HE
GHOST OF
MELODY LANE



“I—FELL. MY HIP, I GUESS——” ([Page 56](#))

MELODY LANE MYSTERY STORIES

THE GHOST OF MELODY LANE

BY
LILIAN GARIS

Author of
NANCY BRANDON'S MYSTERY,
THE FORBIDDEN TRAIL,
JUDY JORDAN, ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY
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BOOKS BY LILIAN GARIS

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

BARBARA HALE
BARBARA HALE'S MYSTERY FRIEND
CLEO'S MISTY RAINBOW
CLEO'S CONQUEST
NANCY BRANDON
NANCY BRANDON'S MYSTERY
A GIRL CALLED TED
TED AND TONY
SALLY FOR SHORT
SALLY FOUND OUT
JUDY JORDAN
JUDY JORDAN'S DISCOVERY

MELODY LANE MYSTERY STORIES

THE GHOST OF MELODY LANE
THE FORBIDDEN TRAIL
THE TOWER SECRET

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TO THE REAL CAROL

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THE GHOST OF MELODY LANE

CHAPTER I IT HAPPENED

There was only one way to go home, though to Carol it did not seem to matter which way she went. Just outside the marbled lobby of the moving picture theatre she stood, looking first down Cedar Street, which would lead her home, and then over Fourth Street, which wound out of town toward the trolleys, busses, and a railroad station.

But Carol did not sigh as she took the road to her little home. Instead she squared her fine shoulders and perked up her head until another blue-black tangle of hair shot out from the side of her small hat.

“And yet,” she was remembering, “I knew it was coming.”

The early afternoon performance had just dislodged its few patrons, for money was scarce in Oakleigh, just as in other places, and few were reckless enough to spend any on picture matinées. That was why this had happened to Carol.

“I’ve lost my job.” She could not help telling herself the cruel fact. “And now what are we going to do?”

Oakleigh’s cozy little theatre, the Silvertone, had kept its organ and kept Carol on, playing it, long after other places had substituted the sound music that came with the films. People liked Carol’s playing, and she studied hard to please them. But now the management could no longer afford the extra expense and Carol’s eighteen dollars per week. The very last pay check was tucked into her brown purse with some business cards she was wondering about.

“I’ll have to go right over to Long Hill,” she was deciding. “And, worse yet, I’ll have to buy gas. Good thing we have the old flivver. I never could get out of town twice a day without that. Providing,” she mocked herself, “I get the job.”

In the late afternoon few persons stop to say hello. They merely call a hasty greeting and run along, as they did now, while Carol rushed past them because she just had to hurry.

There were her father and Cecy to confront. Her father, poor dear, would try to cheer her up, but she dreaded that beaten look in his tired eyes, the look that had come there and had remained ever since he lost his splendid position last year because of his poor health which, somehow, did not seem to improve in spite of doctoring.

“Dad will want to start right off again tomorrow on the everlasting looking which just wears out hearts and shoes,” mused Carol as she almost bumped into a man barging along as if the whole sidewalk were his. But the dreaded look in her father’s dear, loving eyes would not be as hard to deal with as would Cecy. She was a trial, always. Younger than Carol, she had played baby; always shirked, except in cooking, for she liked to cook. She read just because she loved to read; had to wear glasses because she had not taken care of her eyes; had to see a doctor once in a while because she ate candy and shouldn’t. In fact, Cecy was as unlike Carol as a sister possibly could be. Even the mother who had spoiled Cecy admitted before she closed her eyes that long, dark evening, which brought no morning to her: “Cecy should try to be more practical.”

“I suppose I’ll find her making fudge with the last of the sugar,” Carol was desperately telling herself as she hurried along. Then came a sudden revulsion. She stopped short, turned down a side street, and with a new look on her face murmured:

4

“I just can’t stand it! I’m not going to stand it! I’m not going home with the bad news—just yet. I’m going to see Cousin Kitty and have a last, mad, grand riot of music on her wonderful pipe organ before I have to come down to earth again. Yes, I’ll go see Cousin Kitty and play and play and play——”

With a new objective, Carol swung along, her head up, her eyes brighter, and with that same stray lock of her blue-black hair streaming in the wind she hurried on, managed to catch

one of the infrequent busses and sank into a seat. It was rather a long distance to Melody Lane, that picturesque, strange, tree-shaded thoroughfare where Oak Lodge added to its mysteriousness.

Mrs. Katheryn Becket, once “Kitty Adair,” known to a large and delighted public because of her singing and acting, lived in a big, gloomy old mansion, Oak Lodge, on the other side of town. The old house was set in a large estate, at least it had once been an estate, though it had now rather fallen into ruin and was difficult to care for.

“Cousin Kitty” Carol and many of her girl friends called the beautiful, elderly lady, who though no longer an actress, had still her passion for music. She had formed and trained the girls’ Choral Club and had given Carol all her organ lessons without charge. At times Mrs. Becket had delightful entertainments at her big house, based on “home talent” and fortified by that always alluring professional talent, willing to come out from the city to help. 5

But lately something had been wrong. Since Mr. Becket’s sudden death, about a year and a half ago, a change had gradually come over the fine old place he had bought for his wife.

There had been rumors that the house was haunted—that ghosts came in the wee hours and played mournful music on the great organ. No one quite believed these stories, but many did begin to feel that there was something strange about the house on Melody Lane.

However, it was always a relief for Carol to go to Mrs. Becket's, for the often tired girl always found surcease around the great organ whose deep notes seemed to be a voice from the sky. Carol loved Mrs. Becket as she loved her music, and the thought, now, that at least for a little while she could sense the flow of melody around her, not hampered by having to play something to fit trite films, made a brief break in the tension of worry.

“Oh, Carol! How nice of you to come and see me!” greeted Mrs. Becket as she opened the door.

“I—I just had to come!” was the murmured reply.

“You had to come? Is anything the matter? Oh, you mean you are hungry for music, is that it?”

“Yes, part of it!” Carol laughed a short, little laugh that had less of mirth in it than she could have wished. “Do you mind if I go to the organ—just for a little while?”

“Not at all—only you can't go just yet. You see——”

Mrs. Becket paused and seemed to be listening. From a distant part of the old mansion, where the organ loft was built, there came a few harsh notes vibrating through the half-darkness, for Mrs. Becket never did seem to care for bright lights.

“Some one is playing!” Carol exclaimed, and she wondered, for she knew neither Jacob, the grouchy man of all work, nor Mrs. Becket's maid were ever allowed near the great organ.

“No, not playing, Carol, dear, just mending. I suppose he accidentally touched a key, for I left the power on so he could see if anything else was wrong.”

“Something wrong with the organ?” Carol almost gasped.
“Oh——!”

“Nothing serious, my dear. That is, nothing wrong with the keys, the motor, or the pipes, or the stops. But part of the railing seemed to me to be weak, and the bench of late has developed a tendency to be ‘wobbily,’ to quote Mr. Bancroft.”

“Mr. Bancroft?” repeated Carol, wonderingly.

“Yes. Mr. Lenton Bancroft, but, as he says himself, ‘everybody around these here parts allers calls me Len,’” and Mrs. Becket imitated so well the garrulous tones of an old, crabbed man, that Carol laughed almost like some of the higher, tremulous notes of the great organ.

“Who is Len Bancroft?” asked Carol, when she and Cousin Kitty had finished their mutual mirth.

“A carpenter I had to call in,” was the answer. “He’s a strange, queer old man. I don’t like him. There’s an odd look in his eyes, sort of stupid, probably.”

8

“Why did you call him in?” asked Carol. “Does he live around here? I don’t remember the name.”

“No, he comes from Burrstown. Jacob knew of him and got him for me. He seems to be a good carpenter, but I don’t know whether or not he knows anything about organs, though

Jacob says he does and Mr. Bancroft, himself, admits the charge,” Mrs. Becket explained. “I left him and Jacob in the loft, to come and answer the door,” she went on. “The carpenter has been here nearly all day and he has just finished. So if you want to come along——”

“I’d love to,” murmured Carol, her fingers longing to touch the shining ivory keys.

“Come along then.” Mrs. Becket led the way to the tower room, almost a complete ell built off the great hall, where the massive organ had been installed. In the first hall they passed Jacob Vroom, who was furnace man, gardener, butler, and whatever else seemed to be called for in the way of help around Oak Lodge.

“Has the carpenter finished, Jacob?” asked Mrs. Becket.

“Yes’m, jest about. He says it ain’t what he’d call a good job, but it’s good an’ firm.”

9

“That’s what I wanted,” Mrs. Becket responded. “Was that him or you trying to play, Jacob?” Her voice was sterner now.

“You know I wouldn’t, Mrs. Becket,” Jacob seemed hurt. “I never put a finger on the keys. But Len might have; couldn’t say.”

“I suppose so. Well, I’m glad he’s finished.”

A tall, lanky man, with a seamed, lined nutcracker kind of face, arose from a little clutter of shavings and sawdust, dusting off his overalls as he stood up with a chisel in his

hand. He had suddenly appeared from the rear of the great organ, like some gnome who had been engaged in putting new and sinister notes into a perfect melody.

“Is everything all right, Mr. Bancroft?” asked Mrs. Becket.

“Yes’m, I’ve got th’ rail solid now. A elephant could lean ag’in it now an’ not bust it.”

“But I don’t allow elephants in here,” was the quick retort. “I hope you haven’t one in prospect.”

“What, ma’am?” Len seemed a bit taken aback, and Mrs. Becket, seeing he had no sense of humor, let it go.

“About the bench?” she asked.

“Oh, yes’m, I tightened that, too. This is a mighty fine organ, ain’t it, ma’am?”

10

“It has always been considered so.”

“That’s what I thought.”

“Do you know anything about organs, Mr. Bancroft?”

“Well, not what you could really call knowin’. But I know wood, Mrs. Becket. Wood’s my specialty. I couldn’t put back in the busted rail jest the same kind of wood it had in it original, but I done the best I could. The bench I jest had to tighten.”

“Well, I’m glad everything is all right. You touched some of

the keys, didn't you?"

"Oh, you heard that, did you?" and Len seemed a bit surprised.

"The organ carries to the farthest part of the house," said Mrs. Becket, while Carol looked at the crabbed old carpenter, looked again, and decided she didn't like him. Not that it mattered.

"Yes'm, I saw you had the power on an' I jest sort of wanted to see how one of these things sounded close by. So I touched a few keys. I hope I didn't do no harm."

Mrs. Becket did not answer. She sat down at the bench, assured herself, by rocking to and fro, that it was now firm, and then she put her feet on the great lever keys that emitted the trembling notes, pulled out a few stops and, touching the ivory black and white keys, sent a burst of wild, haunting melody vibrating through the mansion.

11

"That's grand, ma'am, jest grand!" complimented the strange carpenter as he gathered up his tools. "Shall I clean up this mess or——"

"Jacob will clean it up, thank you. And let him have your bill, Mr. Bancroft."

"Yes'm, I will. But there's no hurry about that. I'll have to come back in a couple of days, anyhow."

"Come back? What for? I thought you said you had finished."

“Wa’al, I have, sort of.” Len Bancroft’s face was bent over his chest of tools. “But I might want to look an’ make sure them joints ain’t slipped none. The glue has to set, you know.”

“Oh, by all means come back if you need to,” said Mrs. Becket.

“Yes’m, I shall,” promised Mr. Bancroft. “You see, it’s all in knowin’ wood—all in knowin’ wood!” and he seemed to chuckle like a sardonic gnome as he went behind the organ for a moment.

Then, with another promise to come again in a few days, “to sorter look things over,” the strange carpenter melted away in the darkness that, save for a few dim lights, shrouded the organ loft. 12

“Well, I’m glad he’s gone,” murmured Mrs. Becket with a sigh of relief as she and Carol were left to themselves.

“So am I. So you think I might play now?”

“Surely, Carol. Just look and see if the air motor is full on. There is no telling what that silly man might have done—trying a few keys.”

Carol went behind the instrument, looked at the indicator, listened to the dull, almost silent hum of the motor, and was about to come back in front to the repaired bench, where Mrs. Becket awaited her, when she saw some peculiar marks on the corner of the great organ.

“Just as if some one had been cutting slivers out,” Carol mused. “I wonder if that ugly gnome of a carpenter could have done some damage, by accident, and be afraid to speak of it,” she asked herself.

Delaying a moment, she looked again at the strange marks—cuts and slashes they seemed to be in the very woodwork of the organ itself.

“Is anything wrong?” called Cousin Kitty.

“Wrong? Oh, no!” Carol made a sudden resolve not to mention what she had seen. It might make Mrs. Becket worry and, as Carol well knew, she had troubles enough as it was. “If it’s anything, which I can see by daylight,” Carol mused, “I can tell her then, and she can force that ugly little man to make it good. But perhaps it isn’t anything.”

13

“Come and play,” Mrs. Becket invited. “I believe I am hungry for music, and I don’t feel like making it myself. Come and play, my dear,” she urged again.

As Carol sat down at the bench, adjusted her feet to the pedal stops, and ran her fingers softly over the smooth ivory keys, old Jacob was letting Len out of the side door.

“Yes, I know wood!” chuckled the nutcracker face to himself. “I sure do, an’ if that old organ is what I feel certain it is—why—” He went into a mirthless chuckle.

He turned to look up at a lighted window on which was the shadow of Carol Duncan at the organ bench, and as she swung into the pealing notes of a soothing melody, old Len

Bancroft shuffled down the road.

The deepening twilight cast his shadow before him, a ghostly, sinister shadow that appeared to dance up and down in unholy glee.

CHAPTER II

NOW FOR SISTER CECY

“Feel better, Carol?”

“Much better, Cousin Kitty!”

The girl, her black hair now a tangle over her eyes, for she had thrown herself body as well as soul into interpreting the music she loved, swung around on the bench the strange carpenter had repaired. It creaked the least bit.

“Oh, I must be careful!” Carol murmured. “He said the glue wasn’t quite set. Funny man!”

“Yes, he was a bit odd,” admitted Mrs. Becket. “I didn’t quite like him.”

Carol didn’t say she had the same feelings. She was thinking of those strange marks back of the organ. It would be time enough later, if anything developed, to chime in her feelings with those of the dear “Cameo lady.”

“I’m so glad you feel better.” Mrs. Becket arose from the deep chair beside the organ.

“Music always makes me feel better,” said the girl.

“Now I must run along home. I just came from the picture place—isn’t it strange they call them pictures when so many of them aren’t that?”

“Aren’t what?”

“Aren’t really pictures, you know. I mean—well, I suppose you could call it art.”

“Yes, it is strange. Carol, you’re in trouble, child! Tell me!” Carol seemed to shrink away from the thin, outstretched hands.

“No! Cousin Kitty. I’m all right, really.”

“You mean you aren’t in trouble or that you won’t tell me?” Mrs. Becket smiled warmly.

“I’m not in trouble—not really. You might call it a temporary embarrassment, but——”

There was a moment of silence.

“If I can help, you must be sure to let me know.” Mrs. Becket was too wise to insist.

“I shall, Cousin Kitty. And thanks, just heaps and heaps, for letting me come here to work off one of my moods.”

“Are you sure it’s only a mood, Carol, dear?”

“Quite sure, Cousin Kitty. Now I must run along. I hope——”

“You hope what?” for Carol had not finished.

“I hope I don’t meet that queer carpenter. He might—he might think I was a piece of—wood and try to glue me fast!”

“You are far from being woodeny, Carol. Your playing alone would prove that. Come soon again, dear.”

“I shall, Cousin Kitty. And, thanks again.”

Carol, at home finally, found her sister in the living room reading some sort of document.

“Cecy, what is that paper?” she demanded.

“A contract.” The blonde girl with the big glasses, which made her eyes seem extraordinarily large, waved a crackling sheet.

“A contract? What for?”

“The car. The flivver. Pet Lizzie.”

“The car?”

“Exactly. It’s going to look like new. I’ve decided on pigeon blood for the color.”

“Cecy Duncan!” Carol grasped the paper. “What are you talking about?”

“If you’ll just listen a second and cut out the dramatics, I’ll tell you, my dear.”

“But a contract—?”

“It’s for painting our family car.” Cecy’s mocking tones rang through the small room so near the kitchen where some gas burners sent out a little heat.

17

Carol dropped into the rocker. Her face was white. She pulled off her hat.

“Whatever ails you?” Cecy demanded. “You look like——”

“I feel a darn sight worse.” Carol was on the verge of sighing. “You little idiot!”

“Idiot nothing! I didn’t sign this contract. Dad did!”

“Where’s the car?”

“At Crawford’s, all cleaned down to the pin feathers by this time, I hope.”

“Do you mean it’s already scraped?”

“I should hope so. It’s only a flivver, and he started on it this morning. What’s all the row? Didn’t we all agree it should be done?”

“We did a week ago,” admitted Carol, in that hopeless tone. “But it’s different now.” She turned toward the window, outside of which the rocking shadows of the horse-chestnut tree seemed to be threatening her. Like the shadows of the man with the carpenter kit in his hand. “But now—now—I’ve lost my job!”

“Carol Duncan! You never!” That woke Cecy up.

“I certainly did, and I didn’t chuck it either. They merely fired me.”

“What ever will you do now?”

18

“Whatever will *I* do? Whatever will *you* do?”

“I!”

“Yes, you. It’s time you stopped reading library books at five cents a day extra. And movie magazines——”

“You can just mind your own business——”

“I intend to. What’s Crawford’s number? I’ve got to have that car if it looks like a Mexican Hairless. I’ve got to go over to Long Hill.”

Cecy had washed her glasses under the faucet, the better to see this awful situation.

“It’s even worse than that. A major operation, Dad said—it would have to be turned inside out to be a good job.”

“Where is Dad?”

“Over at Crawford’s, holding Lizzie’s hand. He was so tickled, he took the bus over to see how they did it. I was glad when he went out.”

“You would be.” Carol’s tone was scathing. “Poor Dad! But

we can't starve."

"You're right, we can't. And that lamb stew is two days old."

"It may have whiskers before we finish it. You don't seem—" she stopped. After all, Cecy was not more than a child. "You just don't seem to realize the enormity of our situation."

19

"Don't I, though. And I counted on a new coat before I freeze to death."

"Please try to think of— What's Crawford's number?"

"Union, two hundred, a neat little number. But don't go calling up, Caro. Dad might be there——"

"Yes, that's so. But why ever did you rush it so? Couldn't you wait until I came home?"

The two sisters, so unlike in temperament, were bound to clash under excitement. It was their way of adjusting differences; of getting to a spot where they could agree. Even Cecy, who was ever on the defensive because she had so much to defend, was now settling down to something like common sense.

"Darling," she said to Carol, "I'll make you a cup of tea. You certainly need it."

"Oh, don't bother, Sis. You see, I needed the car at once. They still run an organ in Long Hill, and the man who played it has gone or is going West. I might get it. But it won't wait."

“Why don’t you phone?”

“They hardly listen——”

“But they know your name. We all sang there and you played a solo at Mrs. Becket’s fest.”

20

“Yes, that’s right.” Carol was on her feet again, she needed to move about. “They might happen to remember.”

“Try it.” Cecy had the tea ready, poured in Carol’s favorite black and white cup, with a fruit cracker on the side. “You can be sipping this. I’ll get the number.”

A long, anxious wait. What is slower than slow telephoning? Finally Cecy had it, and had reached the manager’s office, who was not only manager, but treasurer and general boss besides.

Carol spilled her tea, but Cecy caught it up noiselessly—just a little puddle on the pretty table oilcloth. Not an extra sound, lest the conversation might be interrupted, for Carol was talking eagerly.

“Well——” Cecy asked, breathlessly. “The place isn’t taken?”

“No, and he’ll see me soon. How can I get over there?”

The problem of the stripped car was seething in Carol’s mind. How could she reach Long Hill?

“Why, Glenn will take you over!” burst out Cecy. “He’ll be tickled pink.”

“Glenn?”

“Sure, Glenn! You don’t give that boy half a chance, Carol. He’s a peach!”

21

“I know it.”

“And you act it—not!”

“Cecy—please! I’ve got to think this out. Dad may be in any moment now. We’ve got to do something.”

“But what are you going to do, Carol?” Cecy’s voice was just the least bit impatient.

“It’s about your turn to do something, Cecy!” Carol retorted somewhat vehemently. “Why don’t you go into the Vienna bakeshop? See if they could give you anything to do. That’s a fine place for fancy baking.”

In answer Cecy piled a mound of crumbled cheese over on a palisade of bread, with expertness akin to the movies.

“Me in a bakeshop!” she muttered.

“Why not? It’s a lot cleaner than a mouldy old organ loft and not so hard on your feet, either. My shoes are just shedding their soles. Another expense!”

“Oh, well!” sighed Cecy indecisively.

A step was heard outside.

“It’s Dad!” murmured Cecy. “Let’s not tell him—just yet.”

“It’s only putting off the evil day,” Carol sighed. “But I suppose there’s no use worrying him tonight.”

Mr. Duncan entered, and it either speaks well for the dissimulation of the girls or not so well for his observation, for he did not notice their perturbed looks. Flashed glances passed between Carol and her sister and then, as if by common consent, they began a conversation in which Mr. Duncan could join. 22

Muddled, worried, and uncertain, Carol did not sleep well that night. As for Cecy—well, she was just Cecy and, as she boasted, it took more than that to keep her awake. Mingled with Carol’s wakefulness were worries which seemed involved in the wailing organ and the strange carpenter’s work upon it.

It was raining hard when morning broke, and this put a most effectual damper on any plans Carol had for herself or for Cecy. They remained indoors most of the day, slipping out, still indecisively, when the rain ceased for a moment or two.

The storm continued, intermittently, for two days more, during which Carol could do nothing to advance her own plans nor those of her sister. She wondered what was happening at Oak Lodge.

It was on an evening after the long storm when a red sunset gave promise of a fair next day that Carol and Cecy were again talking in the absence of Mr. Duncan. Carol had been speaking to Glenn on the telephone. Somewhat 23

jokingly he had asked her if she had seen or heard anything more of the ghosts in the organ.

“I never said there were ghosts in the organ, and I don’t believe anyone else did!” countered Carol. “As a matter of fact, I don’t believe in ghosts.”

“I do—certain kinds!” chuckled Glenn. “I’ll tell you about them when I come over for you.” He had promised to run her to Long Hill in his car. Carol hung up and went back to join her sister. Mr. Duncan had gone out for a walk, he was moody and depressed, Carol thought, sadly.

“Well,” began Cecy belligerently, “I’m not going to——”

The tingling of the telephone startled them both. It might mean any one of so many important things.

CHAPTER III

THE TELEPHONE CALL

Thalia Bond was speaking. She was all but breathless, Carol noted, as she listened.

“Oh, Oh, Carol!” Thalia almost gasped.

“Yes! Yes. What is it?”

“It’s Mrs. Becket. They just called and told me that she is ill—very strangely ill, it seems. They tried to get you, but—”

“I know. I was talking to Glenn. Oh, what is it?”

“She seems to be ill.”

“Ill?” Carol was much disturbed. “Why,” she said, “I saw her just for a moment this morning. She was all right then. What can be the matter?”

“If you ask me,” drawled Thalia’s voice, “I think she’s just scared, Carol.”

“Frightened! Of what?”

“That’s it—what? If she knew, she wouldn’t be scared. Can

you run over with me?”

“I can’t! I’d love to, but I am going out with Glenn to Long Hill. It’s important to me.”

“I can imagine that. But——”

25

“Cecy can go.”

“Go where?” snapped Cecy, overhearing. “Are you making dates for me?”

“It’s all right, Cecy,” Carol explained in an aside. “Mrs. Becket is suddenly taken ill—or alarmed. Thalia is going over. You’ll go with her, won’t you—please?”

“Oh, I suppose so. Is it more—ghosts?”

“I don’t know. You’ll have a chance to find out.”

“Then I’ll go. But not until I’ve had tea. Here’s Dad coming back. We can eat together. Shall we tell him—all the news?”

“Not yet,” Carol decided. And she was glad of this decision when her father, at his tea, enthused over the prospect of the repainted and all but rebuilt car—which refurbishing might now be indefinitely postponed.

Both girls listened with somewhat guilty knowledge as he rambled on so happily. It might have been kinder to tell him at once about Carol’s loss of position. It seemed, now, little short of cruel to let him talk on so eagerly. But, having thus started, the matter had to run its course now.

It was almost half-past seven, the hour when Glenn was to call.

“But,” mused Carol, “what could have happened to Mrs. Becket?”

26

There was small time to wonder. She must go with Glenn. Cecy must accompany Thalia to Oak Lodge. What would she find there?

In their room, while both girls were getting ready to go out, Cecy was all excited about Mrs. Becket.

“It’s that old organ,” she insisted, exuding mystery in gobs of breath.

“Silly! What could be scary about that marvelous organ?”

“What couldn’t be? Stubby told me——”

“Cecy, you haven’t been talking to that horrid boy again!” Carol stopped pondering to ask.

“Carol, how quaint! Horrid boy. You sound like an old woman. Besides, what’s horrid about a boy that knows all the ghost stories of Melody Lane? I think he’s fascinating.” Cecy’s laugh belied that. She was agreeing secretly with Carol about that Stubby—the queer boy that worked for Mrs. Becket because she had to take him with the house, like the old black dog Rover, who never roved, so died conveniently. Stubby was not fascinating, except at a good, safe distance. He was ugly, unkempt, and hard to understand. Cecy herself had once caught him trying to tie a tin can to old Tommy’s

tail. And Tommy was a good, quiet cat, if ever there was one.

“Please, Cecy, don’t be seen talking to that——”

27

“I won’t. But he told me the organ plays of ‘its ownself’! He says Mrs. Becket is so scared she stays up nights.”

“Now listen, Sis. I just beg of you not to go on that way with Thally. You know how stuff like that spreads around here. And Mrs. Becket is our best friend.”

“Don’t worry. I’m out to listen, not to talk,” and for once Carol felt she might depend upon some discretion from the flighty Cecy.

Then Glenn called. He didn’t honk outside, but dashed in, hatless and handsome, bringing a sweep of the pure outdoor air in along with him.

“I’ll be ready in a jiff.” Carol had only to pick up a few sheets of music. They might ask her to play.

“No hurry, we’ve got all our lives. How are you, Mr. Duncan?” The father had come into the living room.

He liked Glenn. When the boy asked that sort of personal question, he seemed interested in the answer. Most boys only listened to their own voices. So Mr. Duncan told Glenn about the car.

28

“Seems to me well worth the money,” he was saying, while Carol winced at the mention of money. “And we all enjoy the car. As a matter of fact, Carol needs it.” He seemed trying to

justify the expense. Mr. Duncan certainly was good-looking. Black hair like Carol's, with a wonderful "white wing" in the front like an actor's. And his eyes still blue through his glasses. Clean shaven and of soldierly carriage, any daughter might well be proud of so fine a father. It was dreadful that he had had to lose his position, and now that so many fine men were going through the despond of the depression, Felix Duncan was no exception.

Finally Carol and Glenn got away. Cecy and Thalia had gone to Oak Lodge.

"I'm petrified," Carol began as she and Glenn took the wide road out to Long Hill. "I'm just scared to death."

"Hold on to me."

"Glenn, I mean it. We're in an awful jam."

"Who isn't?"

"Please be serious."

"At your attention. Can I help, Carol?"

Instinctively she slipped down closer to Glenn. He was protective.

29

"I've lost my job. I'm going over to the Keystone to try there. I couldn't tell you before Dad."

"That's tough, Carol. But if there's a vacant chair or bench in front of that old Keystone organ, it's yours."

“Why so sure?”

“I know Mr. Cameron. He’s in Dad’s bank company. If you can’t charm him into giving you the job, I’ll threaten him. They say I look like my dad.”

“Honest, Glenn, do you know him?”

“Certain thing, and he isn’t so bad either. Rather pleasant. He gave Mother twenty-five smackers for her poor kids.”

“Glenn, I’m hopeful now. I was terribly sunk. You see, there’s Dad and Cecy.”

“I know. But you’ll pull out, Carol. My dad had to lay off three men today, and I’m going in the factory.”

“Oh, no, Glenn!” Carol’s voice.

“Why not? Am I so good? Saves Dad twenty-five a week. Not that I’m worth all that, but the other fellow had to get it.” They were rounding a curve with high banks on all sides and Glenn slowed down. The extra lights at the dangerous point flickered in the late September uncertainty. It was darker than it looked, Glenn had remarked, which was true if trite.

30

“There’s the glimmering Keystone. See if you can make out anything in my favor,” suggested Carol as they swung into the village centre.

“Sure I can. The lights. Carol dear, the lights are always in your favor,” which served to give them the green traffic

signal, allowing them to speed on without further delay.

Glenn reminded Carol he was within reach if she needed influence with Mr. Cameron, the manager who was on the board of Glenn's father's bank.

"All right," Carol told him with the rare smile which was sweeter for its wistfulness. "But I always like to try my own hand first."

"Now, Carol," he had secured her hand in a playful little grasp, "my hand's pretty good too. You have no idea."

"Haven't I?" Which of course meant she had.

Then Glenn took up a waiting spot while Carol went to the small door marked private.

Just as Cecy had reminded her, the manager had remembered Mrs. Becket's music festival the year before, and he was sure Carol would be satisfactory at the organ. Mr. Cameron was a quiet, pleasant little man, more like a country storekeeper than a movie manager. He was most agreeable, and Carol felt quite elated until he said, as if he was ashamed to say it:

31

"Trouble is, no patronage. Can't tell when we'll have to close up."

"Oh, of course." Carol fought back, in a surge of bitterness that this run of hard times seemed to spare no corners. "But no one can help that," she said finally. "I'd be glad to go with you as far as you could go."

“That’s fine.” Mr. Cameron answered. But he showed no enthusiasm, Carol wondered why.

“Do you have afternoon shows?” she asked hesitantly.

“That’s just it. We have only afternoon shows where the organ is used, and we have to take the sound music at night. Three afternoons weekly. I’m afraid, Miss Duncan, it will hardly pay you,” he faltered.

“Oh, but I’m glad to take anything,” she hurried to assure him, while her heart felt heavier. “You see, Father——”

“Yes, I know your father, Felix Duncan. A fine man. Pity the Standard Works couldn’t take him back after his illness. He knows more about that company than all those youngsters put together,” Mr. Cameron declared, warmly.

32

“You know Father? Yes, it was too bad he had to lose his place. It’s so hard to get a new one in these times.”

“Yes. But he’ll be taken back. I suppose these college boys in the owners’ families have to be put somewhere, and that’s right enough, too. But a man like Felix Duncan is going to be missed.” He paused for a moment as Carol bit a lip pulled into a defiant line. “But about your salary,” Mr. Cameron went on. “That is, if I can call it that,” and he smiled grimly. “I can’t promise more than twelve dollars a week.”

“Oh, that’s all right,” Carol quickly gulped, her brain instantly at work upon the loss of the six dollars from the Silvertone. But this, at least, she must make sure of.

So it was arranged, and she had not needed Glenn's kindly offered influence. Neither did she mention to Glenn, when she joined him, the small salary she had promised to take.

"I told you that you'd get it," Glenn chuckled as she sat beside him.

"Yes, thanks." Then she said, impulsively. "But the plucked car! How am I to get over here without it?"

"When will it be ready?"

33

"It's the money I mean."

"Oh," mused Glenn. "Well, we might manage that quicker than the painting."

"You're kind, Glenn," sighed Carol. "But— Oh, I don't know! Why did Cecy pick such a time to turn in our car?"

34

CHAPTER IV

THE JOB

Glenn didn't answer. It may have seemed an unanswerable question to him. Certainly it was to Carol. The sudden accumulation of troubles had stirred in Carol every ounce of her determination to fight them. But there were so many. What was far from a minor one was means of getting back and forth to Long Hill, now that she had a job there. Even the afternoon performances with Carol at the organ would mean arrival at the movie house early, so that she would have to cut school classes beyond repair. The things she had to think of just now were those she had to do, not those she hated doing, although they were, just now, identical.

Glenn swerved the car to avoid a bump in the road, and when they were running steadily again he remarked:

“You say Cecy had to hurry over to Mrs. Becket's? I didn't pay much attention at the time. What's wrong?”

“I don't know. I was so excited about getting this job, I didn't give it much thought myself. But it seems that Mrs. Becket was taken suddenly ill—frightened, Thalia said—she begged me to go over with her, but I didn't dare.”

35

“Didn't dare? You don't mean you were afraid?”

“No, but I didn’t dare pass up this chance for a job. I might not get another opportunity.”

“Oh, I guess you would, all right. But what could have frightened Mrs. Becket?”

“It’s hard to say. Oh, Glenn, do you know they tell the craziest things about Mrs. Becket’s place?”

“Sure, I do. Who doesn’t? The old organ seems to harbor a ghostly Saint Cecilia.”

“It’s terribly silly, of course——”

“But Jane Jackson is no fool, and she stopped going there for lessons. Says it’s too spooky.”

“Jane Jackson has stopped her lessons? Why, Glenn, that’s awful.”

“Why is Jane so important?”

“Because she’s rich, and all the girls follow her. It might even break up our Choral Club.” Carol was now truly dismayed.

“What can *I* do about it?” Jane Jackson was not exactly a rival of Carol’s, but everybody knew Jane liked Glenn.

36

“Maybe you could do something about it, Glenn,” Carol told him. “If it’s all a trick, we’ve got to run it down, that’s all. Certainly Thally seemed worried about Mrs. Becket being sick. She wanted me to go right over there, and when I couldn’t, she took Cecy.”

“Well, Cecy’ll know all about it,” he answered good-naturedly. “She surely loves detective stories.”

“Yes, too much. She just thinks of nothing but mysteries and reading silly movie stuff. But she’s got to do something now.” Carol meant that.

“She will; you’ll see. Cecy’s all right, but maybe not busy enough.” Glenn wasn’t the boy to say more than that about any girl.

“But she talks to that awful boy, Stubby. I’m afraid her interest in mysteries may lead her too far.”

“Stubby is not good company,” Glenn grudgingly agreed.

“But, Glenn, haven’t you any plans for running down the organ ghost? We can’t let Jane’s scare get all over town.” Carol returned to that important subject as they neared home.

“Maybe I could get Jane to reconsider.” Glenn was being “foxy” about Jane. But Carol didn’t mind, at least she pretended she didn’t. Her hand still on the open door of the roadster, she smiled her sweetest into Glenn’s eyes and assured him that he could do just that very thing about Jane if anyone could, adding:

37

“I hope you will!”

Glenn burst into a roar of laughter at what Carol said, covered her hand with his own firm clasp, and called her a good little sport.

“But, Carrola,” he teased, “don’t worry about everything. The ghost is O. K.; that’s a good healthy worry, and I’ll bet it’s an all right ghost too. We’ll get after that if we have to bust the famous organ of Melody Lane.”

“Nothing could be hidden in the organ,” Carol insisted.

“Oh, mice and things, bats maybe, or some sort of gibbering animals——”

“No, nothing so simple,” Carol again insisted. “But wait until we hear Cecy’s story. Maybe she’s home. Come along in and hear the ghostly details.”

“If you insist——”

“There’s Thally’s car coming now. We’ll make a fine audience for them, for they’re sure to have a thrilling story.”

Cecy sprang out of the car, but Thalia couldn’t wait. Had to go right off with no more than hellos and good-bys. But Cecy would make up for the loss. In fact, she had already started.

38

“What happened?” asked Glenn.

“Oh, you’d never guess——”

“Come inside. I’m cold,” urged Carol. “Besides, we’re all tired. Let’s get sitting down.”

They found the living room empty, only the low light awaiting them.

“Dad’s asleep. Don’t let’s talk loud.” Again it was Carol who admonished them.

“But oh, really,” Cecy had flopped down, was tossing off her hat and all but kicking up her heels, the way she swung herself back in a big easy-chair. “Honest, poor Mrs. Becket!”

“No parking, Cecy,” ordered Glenn. “Put out your hand and keep going. What does the ghost look like?”

“Look like? Who knows! But you ought to see poor Mrs. Becket. *She* looks like a ghost, all right,” Cecy was not to be stampeded into telling her story too rashly.

“Is she really sick?” Carol asked.

“I’ll say she’s sick. I would have stayed with her if I hadn’t been afraid to.”

“Does she need someone tonight?” Carol pressed.

39

“Well, she didn’t say she did. But Thally said she hated to leave her.”

“What happened?” Direct-action Glenn.

“She wouldn’t say just what happened. But she did say that things were happening around there—things hard to understand.”

“Now, Cecy, don’t be silly. You know she didn’t say anything like that,” Carol objected.

“Well, she said she hadn’t slept for nights. And Stubby won’t pump the organ any more, and the electric thing is disconnected. And all the girls are quitting their lessons.” Cecy’s feet both went up and down so violently at that statement, her left pump almost dropped off.

Glenn and Carol were talking in glances. Plainly they both agreed something should promptly be done about the beloved Mrs. Becket, who was worse than alone because she seemed to be among enemies. There was that crabbed old caretaker, Jacob Vroom, who lived in the gate house, and his wife Lena, who acted as though afraid to draw her own breath without his permission. The queer episode of the carpenter was still Carol’s secret. Then there was a girl at the Vroom cottage, a niece or some relative of Lena’s, but no one ever saw her around unless she was shaking a rug or hanging up clothes. And now Cecy had just said that Stubby, the queer boy who always had pumped the organ in spite of some other indefinite mechanical arrangement, was on a strike. Wouldn’t go near the thing because it was too spooky, as he said.

40

“Well, what do you think?” Cecy demanded impatiently, for the language of their glances was not entirely lost upon her, although Carol was keeping things quiet, lest her father might be awakened. “Isn’t it simply terrifying?”

“What?” asked Glenn exasperatingly.

“Ghosts, of course,” snapped Cecy.

“Ghosts,” repeated Carol scornfully.

“Ghosts!” echoed Glenn whimsically.

After that chorus and refrain they all subsided into a silence that might mean anything. But to Carol it meant just one thing. She must go to Mrs. Becket at once.

“I guess I’ll go over and stay with Cousin Kitty tonight,” she said with as much indifference as she could assume. “I have a lot to tell her, anyhow. Things have happened to me since I saw her for a moment this morning.”

“Carol Duncan! It’s a wonder you wouldn’t stay home and tell me,” accused Cecy. “Besides, I’ve got some extra school work to do and with breakfast——”

41

“I wouldn’t kick if that were all I had to do,” Carol reminded her. “And from my latest financial reports you had better consider the plan we mentioned.” She referred to the idea of Cecy getting some extra hours in the pretty yellow and white Vienna Bakery, where any girl who had had domestic science at school might have been glad to show off.

But Cecy glared at Carol. She wouldn’t even mention that before Glenn. Her working in a bakery!

“Take me over, Glenn,” begged Carol.

“To Cousin Kitty’s? Certainly. Maybe we can run down the ghost on the way.”

Which wild idea did more to make Cecy satisfied with Carol’s absence from home that night than all Carol’s promises to let her have a night off very soon.

42

CHAPTER V

FEARS

“No lights!” Carol was at the heavy front door of the mansion which was Kitty Becket’s home.

“Maybe a fuse burned out.” Glenn was always reassuring.

Carol pushed the bell button again and they waited. Still no answer.

“That’s queer. Let’s try the side door,” Glenn suggested.

The night was now dark and dreary, as fall nights are apt to be, and the massive trees with heavy shrubbery seemed to weave sinister figures into the very darkness.

Carol drew her coat around her. “You should have worn a sweater, Glenn,” she remarked to the boy who so gallantly stood beside her.

“Oh, I’m all right,” he declared. “But I would just like to know why we can’t get in.” He rattled the door thoroughly.

They tried the windows; all locked and perhaps even bolted, for Mrs. Becket had lately been having trouble to keep even one maid with her; the spook story had frightened

several away.

“Isn’t Lizzie Towner here?” Glenn asked.

“She was yesterday, but who knows? Oh, Glenn, I am afraid something really serious has happened.”

“Maybe Kitty went away for the night.”

“Not likely. I was here this afternoon and Cecy was here an hour ago. Do you suppose there is any possible window unlocked?”

“We’ll try them all. But old windows seem locked when they ain’t,” he tried to joke.

“The pantry is above the cellar door,” Carol remembered.

“Wait, I’ll get my flash light from the car.”

The few moments Carol stood alone on the great wide porch seemed to add to her fears. What could be wrong around that place? What could have happened to dear Kitty Adair—Mrs. Becket? She had done so much for so many girls, including Carol, herself.

Memories of her many kindnesses flashed into Carol’s mind, like a shaft of light cutting through the hideous black night, as she waited for Glenn with his flash light.

They tried the pantry window, Glenn standing on the slanting cellar door, but it did not budge.

“We’ll have to break something, I guess,” he said finally. “Are you sure it’s best to get in?”

“Oh, yes, we must. Glenn, she may be very ill.”

“All right. Never mind windows,” he concluded. “That old French door in the library shouldn’t be hard to convince. Let’s try it.”

“You mean—batter it down?”

“Or bust it in. I don’t care which. Do you?”

“No.” But she didn’t lighten her voice to match his. It was heavy with keen anxiety.

“Why didn’t she ever keep a dog?” he asked, as they again tramped around to the side porch.

“Old Jacob Vroom is a crank about dogs.”

“And about a lot of other things. But no lone woman should ever stay in a place like this without a good watchdog.”

“Oh, she never did intend to be alone. She always had visitors, and her maid Tillie was very faithful. But lately—oh, I don’t know,” sighed Carol. “It does seem to me everything comes at once.”

“Now for the door.” Glenn was edging his shoulder against it with premonitory tests.

“Suppose we ring the bell once more,” suggested Carol,

disliking the possibility of hearing that glass door splinter.
“She might just hear us.”

“All right. But don’t let’s waste too much time.”

First they rang the side doorbell and could hear it plainly. But there was no step inside; no answer. Then they raced around to the front, having to leave the porch to do so; but neither was that attempt successful.

“Looks like busting the old door,” Glenn decided, and down the steps they trotted again, wasting no time now on other possibilities.

A step from the back gate was crunching up the gravel path.

“Someone coming,” whispered Carol.

“Yes,” Glenn had her arm and she was instinctively crowding nearer to him.

“A man—it’s Jacob,” Carol whispered. “He may be ugly.”

“Will be,” Glenn corrected. “But maybe he has a pass-key. Easier than breaking the door.”

“Who’s that?” came a gruff command. “What you doin’ here?”

“I’m Carol Duncan and we are here to see Mrs. Becket,” Carol promptly answered. “She does not answer the door. Do you know if she is at home?”

“I don’t. Maybe she ain’t. If she don’t answer, so why make all that noise? It’s nighttime, ain’t it?”

He was ugly, his voice almost snarling. The few times Carol had spoken to him before he had been like this, she remembered. He always growled and snarled, and Mrs. Becket would have sent him away long ago but for some legal angle that seemed to give him a home on the old estate as long as he should want it. He had taken care of an invalid son of the original owner, and while well paid for his services, the home idea was evidently a matter of extreme gratitude. Carol remembered hearing all this, and she hoped Glenn would not argue with Jacob Vroom. Glenn could answer quickly enough, and what he was saying just now showed the very danger Carol was hoping to avoid.

“You can get yourselves out of this,” Jacob began when Glenn paused for breath. “How’s this your business, I’d like to know?”

“I came to spend the night with Mrs. Becket,” Carol tried to explain.

“And we are not going away till we see her,” fired back Glenn. “Have you got a key or shall I break in?”

“You break in! Want to go to jail? I’ll call Tim Clark just this minute——”

47

“Never mind Tim Clark, he’s a friend of mine and a good cop. You just open a door or I’ll call him myself after I get through investigating, maybe,” Glenn retorted.

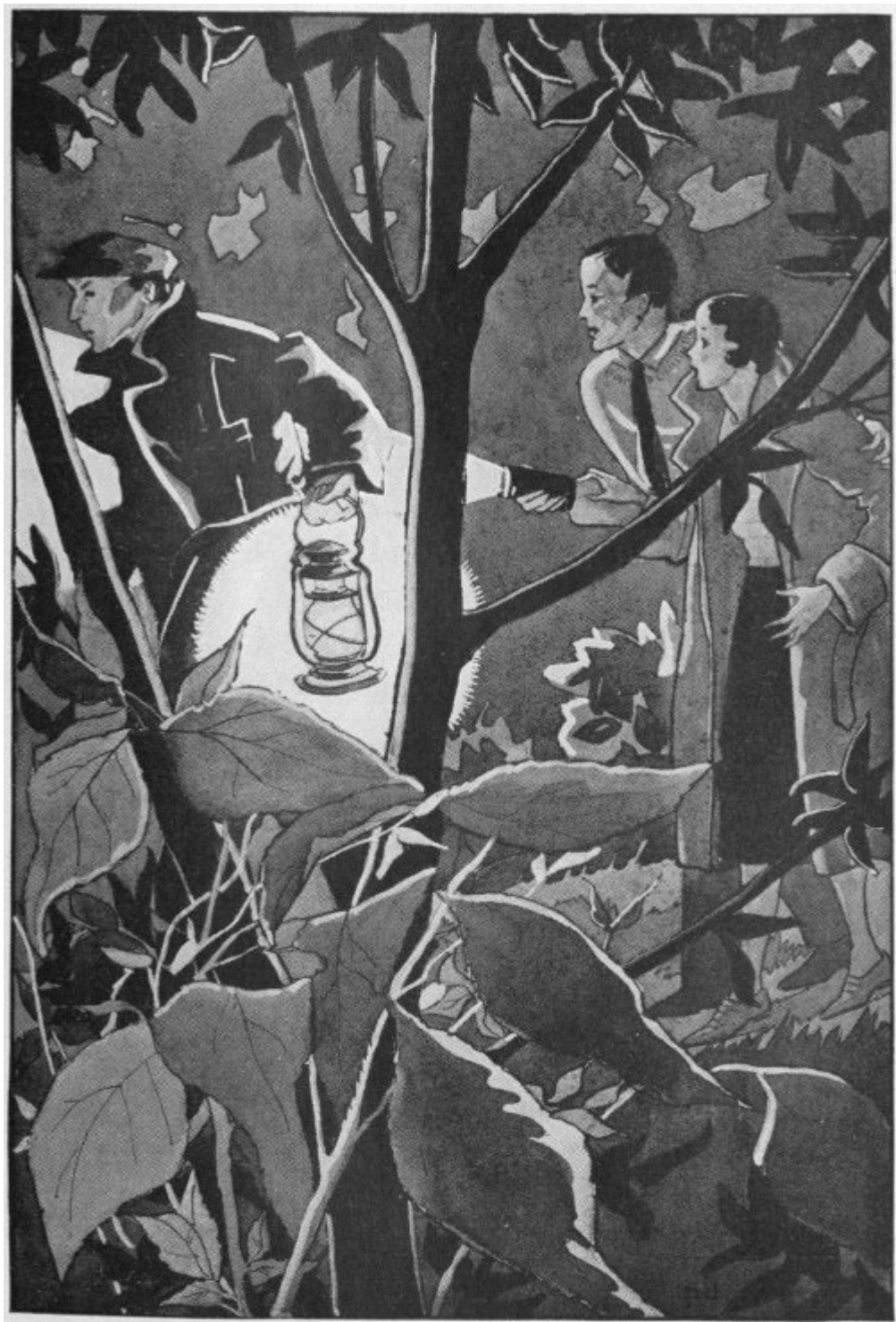
Which had the effect of cooling Jacob's anger, for he at once changed his tone.

“Tain't no use gettin' so mad——”

“But I must get inside quickly,” pressed Carol. “If Mrs. Becket *is* in, she must be dreadfully ill.”

“I ain't seen no light since maybe eight o'clock. I can go in by the back door, the ice house door.”

They followed him, with his dingy lantern, all around the house, for the ice house door was on the extreme end. Trees and bushes were thick about the old door, for it was no longer used, and Carol as well as Glenn wondered Jacob did not use a more convenient entrance. Near the little round extension that bulged out back of the kitchen he suddenly stopped.



**THEY FOLLOWED HIM WITH HIS DINGY
LANTERN.**

“You wait here. I’ll open the door when I get in.”

“We can just as well go in the door you use,” Glenn urged quickly. He wondered why they shouldn’t.

“Tain’t necessary, and it’s dark. I’ll open the kitchen way for you. You stay here.” Jacob was ordering them now.

48

“Let’s wait,” Carol asked, as if fearful of further complications. Also, she was pretty well used up and didn’t feel like prowling around dark corners.

Glenn made a way for her to follow. If there ever had been a path that way, it must have been a long time ago, for the underbrush was in a terrible tangle.

“Why didn’t he park us in a clearing?” Glenn wondered. “Maybe he’s trying to lose us.”

“Lose us?” Carol repeated.

“I mean slip away from us. But fat chance. Here, hold on to me, Carol, dear. I’m your hero.”

She did hold on to him and refused to notice the hero joke. Comic hero business was farthest from her thoughts just then.

“This is the door he will open, I suppose,” she said, going up another little flight of steps to a door almost hidden in the arch of a window.

“More doors than keys,” Glenn added. “Say, Carol,” he changed to seriousness, “don’t worry so. After all, Kitty may really have gone out for the night, you know.”

“If only I could think so. Listen, here comes Jacob.”

49

They listened, waited, but the step they had heard coming was now apparently going away from the door.

“He’s calling. Hear him yell! Calling Mrs. Becket,” Glenn said, as the rough, raucous voice of the man sounded through the big dark house. “Wonder he wouldn’t scare her, yelling like that.”

“She may be glad to hear his voice. Oh, Glenn, why doesn’t he open the door!” Carol was shuddering.

“I’ll find out why. Hey there, Vroom!” Glenn yelled himself this time. “Let us in!” and he pounded on the door as if he meant business. “Open up here! If you don’t soon, I’ll go after Tim Clark, pretty quick. Get a move on,” ordered Glenn. “I’ve got a good little car here, you know.”

They waited after that and, yes, the step was coming down the stairs again. Jacob Vroom had stopped calling out Mrs. Becket’s name. Couldn’t he find her?

A new dread seized Carol. Her nerves were on edge from the anxieties of the afternoon, and this seemed like the last straw. Still, if only nothing serious had happened to her dear, good friend Mrs. Becket, she would be glad and willing not to complain of anything else.

A sound of stumbling and more growls within told them what they could not help knowing. Jacob was stumbling about in the dark, trying to reach the door, for no light showed, and the dingy lantern could be little use as a guide.

Finally, after many knocks and bumps, the bolt was shot back and the door pulled open.

“Come in,” the man uttered, “but she ain’t here.”

“Isn’t here!” They had stepped quickly into the dark hall that Carol knew so well under more pleasant circumstances.

“Where can she be? Have you looked everywhere?”

“And yelled my t’roat sore. She ain’t nowheres.” They saw now that Jacob, too, was scared, for he was holding the lantern high and its faint glow cast a queer pallor over his hardened face. “I don’t see what she could do—” he went on. “She was here at supper time.”

“Let’s look,” ordered Glenn sensibly. “What’s wrong with the lights?”

“That’s funny, too, they’re off. Not a button works.” Jacob Vroom may have been mean and ugly, but he showed deep concern now. “I takes as good care of her as she’ll let me,” he defended himself, “but she’s queer.”

“I don’t think she’s a bit queer,” Carol exploded. “But queer things are happening around here lately. I know that much. Come along, Glenn, let’s try her bedroom first.”

“I was in there,” Jacob declared.

“Well, we’ll take another look,” Glenn answered. “It’s a pretty big house and we have only my flash light and your lantern. So let’s get going. Wait for me, Carol. You can’t see without some light,” for Carol was rushing up the stairs, fearing she knew not what, and wishing every button she touched would answer presently with at least a friendly light. But her wish was vain; it was in darkness they went first to the big bedroom, where that delicate perfume Carol had always loved flooded about in the darkness now, friendly enough but not reassuring.

“Cousin Kitty!” Carol called softly. “Are—you—here!”

Glenn flashed his light first on the bed. Its pretty satin coverlet had been neatly turned back, and the dainty little pink head pillow Carol had given Cousin Kitty at Christmas showed the crush of a head only lately withdrawn.

But there was no sign of the owner. Jacob was opening the closet doors, Carol was looking everywhere while her heart sank to deeper fears, as she realized the enormity of their quest.

52

53

CHAPTER VI

A DREADFUL EXPERIENCE

They were not arguing now, even Jacob had stopped growling; Glenn would say a cheerful word when he stumbled in the dark or kicked his shins against a chair, but Carol was silent. She knew this handsome, big old house so well, and loved it. Her happiest hours had been spent here with the girls Mrs. Becket assembled about her, determined to pass on to them as much of her musical knowledge as they could absorb, for both Kitty Adair the actress and musician, and her late beloved husband, Wilmer Becket, had been known for their quiet charities, their individual philanthropies. Music was their passion.

When they had bought this house, Oak Lodge, after it had been standing unoccupied for more than a year, people, friends, advised them against it.

“You’ll have no luck there,” they argued.

“Since that poor boy came back to the lodge with his back broken—a mere youngster from some junior college—there’s been nothing but trouble and mystery in that end of Melody Lane.” This was the general opinion of people in Oakleigh.

But the real attraction for the Becketts was the great organ. This had been built in by the original owner for his young wife, whose early death had added one more tragedy to the history of Melody Lane.

Far and near the organ was known. Famed artists had come to try out its unbounded melody, but it was found, on account of its intricate building, too expensive to move from its original setting. That was why Wilmer Becket had bought the great old place, Oak Lodge, with the famous organ built in.

But the weird, menacing history of its mysterious power was working the old-time disaster tonight.

Where was Kitty Becket? What could have happened to her?

The searching party had not yet looked in the organ loft. That was set out in a circular wing off the great staircase, and there could be no reason, at least not much reason, to expect to find her there.

“If only the lights would come on,” sighed Carol as all three searchers stood, beaten, discouraged.

55

“But them buttons—don’t strike no more of them. What must *I* do if they all blaze up later maybe?” growled Jacob, not unreasonably. “I now go after you Miss, Miss——”

“Carol,” the girl supplied.

“Yes. And I turn out all I can find. But this house is all lights _____”

“And doors,” Glenn added.

They were on the first floor again, in the wide hall beneath the grand stairway, where jutting out in a tower, with stained glass windows on all sides, the great organ was now hidden in cruel darkness.

“Listen!” whispered Carol, “I heard——”

“So did I. Give me the lantern, Jacob,” Glenn demanded, “it’s better than my flash.”

“Come on,” begged Carol. “I know I heard—There it is again! In the loft.” She was going up the broad stairs ahead of Glenn, following the sound that now seemed positively to come from somewhere near the organ. “If only those lights——”

“Look out! Don’t trip,” warned Glenn, for her foot had slipped sharply.

“But that is Kitty. Kitty!” she called out, “we’re coming. Where are you?”

56

“Here, here,” came back the beloved voice, feeble and strangely constrained. “Here—by—the—organ!”

“Wait; I go first,” ordered Jacob, gruff and coarse again. “It is *my* business——”

“It is *our* business,” retorted Glenn, “Come along—*after* us!”

Carol was not listening to the men arguing, her light shoes scarcely tapped the steps as she hurried up, past the alcove

where the red leather seats had so often enticed the girls of the Choral Club—they looked black, not red, now in the darkness—then up four more steps and out into the tower where the giant organ was so majestically built.

“I’m coming, Kitty darling,” she kept calling. “If only these lights—” She put her finger to the spot where she knew a button marked the way, and instantly the whole place was flooded with light.

“Oh, the lights!” she breathed thankfully, “now we will be all right.”

Yes, the lights were indeed welcome and now, one more step, a turn——

“Kitty!”

“Dear Carol!”

“What happened?”

“I—fell. My hip, I guess——”

57

“Don’t try to move. Glenn, Jacob——”

“Jacob,” repeated the prostrate woman in a queer way. Then, “Oh, yes, Jacob.” She was lying almost under the long organ bench and still holding a candle, a futile, foolish little candle in a little silver stick. Its light was out, of course, but evidently the helpless woman had clung to it in vain hope that some light might be brought into her prison of darkness.

Her blue silk gown, her wavy white hair, white as platinum, and her now too white face made a strange picture there in the organ's shadow. The golden pipes above and the gleam from the gold dome did something heavenly to the scene, and Carol recalled the famous painting of Saint Cecilia—this was a prostrate Saint Cecilia.

Glenn and Jacob were lifting her, Carol cautioning at every touch.

“Does it pain much, dear?”

“Frightfully. I must have fainted. I could hear sounds but—could not—call——”

“Don't talk. What a mercy the lights are on. This way, Glenn. Can you keep her hip from jarring?”

“Yes, we're as good as a stretcher. Aren't we, Jake?” He was so relieved at finding Mrs. Becket, for even this injury was not as bad as a head blow might have been, that he felt much more friendly now toward Jacob. Perhaps, after all, it was a mere mean suspicion that had caused him and Carol to blame the caretaker in a vague way for the uncanny tricks of a night of terror, without lights, in the big house, the site of the mystery of Melody Lane.

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On the bed, in that beautiful room of ivory and old blue, Kitty Adair looked the actress she once was, as if again acting a part; a part of a lovely lady in a lovely room, surrounded by an anxious boy, an anxious girl, and that other figure, alien to the group but lending drama to the picture, Jacob Vroom.

“We must get a doctor at once,” Carol said aside to Glenn. “I hope the telephone is all right.”

“I’ll test it. What doctor? Want a nurse too?”

“I wonder—but the doctor will tell us. The phone is under the stairs, in the alcove. Kitty always has Doctor Hadley.”

“O. K.” Glenn was making for the telephone. Jacob stood in the doorway, awkward and puzzled. He kept looking at the woman on the bed, but he said scarcely a word. And occasionally she would look at him, her look also questioning and bewildered. As Carol noticed this exchange of glances, she wondered. Jacob had come with the place, he appeared odd as many hard-working men are apt to, but he had been faithful, according to Mrs. Becket, and would send his wife Lena over to stay with her any night she might be alone and want Lena’s company. 59

Glenn was back. “Be right over,” he said quietly. “Lucky I found him in.”

And Doctor Hadley was right over. Carol felt a new importance in assuming the duties of a nurse, but when the doctor’s opinion rendered a verdict of nothing more serious than strains and sprains, the erstwhile nurse was happy enough to take the hot water Glenn was so expertly toting in from the bathroom, hand the doctor his bandages, using scissor tips to keep the antiseptic qualities intact, and generally fulfilling her new duties with promptness, if not with professional skill.

“Feel better, dear?” Carol had suddenly grown up enough to

call Mrs. Becket dear, instead of the usual Cousin Kitty.

“Oh, I’m in heaven now! If you knew what it was to lie there so—helpless!” Mrs. Becket bit her lip to suppress further complaint.

“If you could only tell us about it,” suggested Carol, trying not to show any alarm.

“I heard a noise,” was the faltering reply.

“What has been frightening you?” again Glenn asked in his direct way.

“I don’t know; I’m not a bit timid usually. My dear husband and I have braved many dangers, traveling and even exploring. That is why I have been determined not to let any foolish tricks or—well,” she stopped suddenly, as if not knowing how to go on.

“We’ve heard all sort of rumors,” Carol helped out, “but believed none of them. I wouldn’t be afraid to stay alone here tonight,” she declared bravely.

“You did come to stay with me, didn’t you, Carol?”

“Certainly did. And Glenn, you had better be moving on,” Carol suggested. “Even injured ladies and *beautiful* nurses must sleep, you know.”

“Leave you two alone! *I* guess not.”

“Surely not thinking of staying as special night watchman, are

you?” Carol asked in surprise. Mrs. Becket was merely smiling at the youngsters’ squabble.

“I might at that. But I have a better plan. Know my nice, big, fat, lusty Aunt Mary?”

61

“Yes.”

“Well, she declares she adores nursing and never gets a whack at it. How about my going for Aunt Mary?” Glenn was smiling at Carol in such a way as to beg her to agree. He must have known that Mrs. Becket’s strained hip might cause sudden pain, and he knew that Carol was scarcely able to take care of everything. Aunt Mary would be so much more congenial and less alarming than a regular nurse.

Carol was hesitating, looking to the lady on the bed to offer an answer. But Mrs. Becket was waiting for Carol. Finally Mrs. Becket said she thought having Glenn’s Aunt Mary would be splendid, if she would like to come.

“Sure, she will,” declared Glenn. “Aunt Mary is the guardian angel who spoiled me, according to my folks. So I take her at her word, that she will always be my best friend. This is just one more chance.”

But when Glenn had gone and Carol busied herself to get Mrs. Becket fixed for the night, slipping things on and off without stirring that injured hip, she was not thinking entirely of the accident, but of what had caused the accident. Knowing she should ask Cousin Kitty no more questions that night, she also knew that her own fears were crowding her to a new sort of anxiety. It had not been the loss of her organ at

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the Silvertone, although that was indeed serious, neither had it been Cecy's foolish mistake in inducing her father to have the old car painted, although that too was mildly tragic, but it was this sinister influence, this unknown cruel power that had suddenly developed upon Oak Lodge. And Mrs. Becket's accident tonight was too real to laugh at, too serious to attempt to ignore.

But there were many strange things happening in Melody Lane and more were to follow.

Jacob Vroom, who had followed the doctor to the front door, had watched him get into his car. Then, with a shake of his head, sparing of words even when communing with himself, Jacob shuffled off down the path that led to his own cottage. Something—a shadow or that which made a shadow—startled him as he moved past a bulky bush. Jacob saw first a crouching figure, then one that became upright.

“Who's there?” he demanded.

“Oh, is that you, Vroom?” asked a human voice, and Jacob's heart began to slow its rapid beating.

63

“Bancroft!” exclaimed Jacob, recognizing the tones of the carpenter. “What are you doing back here?”

“Lost my best saw. It must have slipped out of my box when I left here this afternoon. I come to look for it.”

“Hum! Queer time to be looking for a saw. Did you find it?”

“No, but I found somethin' else!”

“What?”

“A ghost, I think.”

“A ghost in Melody Lane! Stuff and nonsense!”

“Ho! Not so much nonsense, Vroom, an’ enough stuff t’ scare me. Didn’t you see it?”

“See what?” Jacob’s voice was clearly skeptical.

“Suthin’ white an’ wavylike, sort of floatin’ or flyin’ through the trees an’ then vanishin’ jest like ghosts! I tell you it scared me for a minute!”

“Stuff and nonsense! Just a bit of fog—night mist. I’ve often seen that here in the Lane. You can’t locate a saw after dark. I’ll look for it in the morning. Good night!”

“All right. Reckon I can’t locate it now. But I did see somethin’ white,” and with that the carpenter with the nutcracker face shuffled away as Jacob went on to his cottage. 64

Darkness and silence shrouded Melody Lane, but sinister influences were at work there. Carol seemed to sense them as she ministered to Mrs. Becket.

CHAPTER VII

QUEER HAPPENINGS

Carol wondered why every family in the world was not blessed with an Aunt Mary. So soothing and kind without any silly “my dear and my darling,” so really authoritative without being a bit bossy, and so cheering without straining common sense.

Just now Aunt Mary was actually laughing, as Carol told her a discreet part of the spook stories that had been circulated about the big place they were visiting.

“I’ve been in this town of Oakleigh quite a long time,” she said in that velvet voice that seems to go with generous physical build, “and I’ve never *met up* with a ghost yet, although I have heard some thrilling ghost stories,” she told Carol. Mrs. Becket’s door was closed and Carol was with Aunt Mary in the big room next Mrs. Becket’s. Carol had insisted upon taking the yellow room at the end of the long hall, because that was *her* room by right of habit. She had slept there the night of the big party, when Mrs. Becket entertained the Choral Club and their friends. Also the night of the awful windstorm, when Mrs. Becket wouldn’t let her go home even in a big closed car. And other nights, a number of them. So tonight she would take the same place.

“You are not afraid to be so far away from me?” Aunt Mary teased.

“Not a bit. I’d just like to meet up with that ghost and settle his or her hash,” declared Carol, shaking her head until the hair, loosened by long service of that night, fell all but free from its last few hairpins.

“Exactly what Glenn said coming over.” Aunt Mary’s ready smile returned for a moment, and her fine, fair face assumed a questioning expression. “I have heard rumors, of course,” she went on in a very low voice, lest Mrs. Becket might overhear a single syllable, “but folks who have little to do usually do it in other folks’ affairs,” she finished wisely.

“What rumors have *you* heard, Aunt Mary?” Carol asked, directly.

“Oh, about the big organ, of course. How it plays, is played they say, by ghost hands. Also the passing of a white vision about the place. That’s silly, of course. But Melody Lane always did seem mysterious. My mother—she’s gone now, used to tell me when I was a child to stay out of Melody Lane, for some queer reason.”

“Was it called Melody Lane then?”

“Before this house was built with the big organ in it? Yes, it was; I think that was why the Fenton family chose this spot to build the big house for their big organ.”

“Fenton was the name of the first family here?”

“Yes. Robert Fenton was a wealthy manufacturer. He came in here, according to my childhood stories, with a beautiful Spanish wife. And when they say a Spanish beauty, you know all that means.”

“Oh, yes,” Carol agreed, who looked a little bit Spanish herself. “The dark lady, with the silky lashes, rosy lips, wide smile, flashing eyes——”

“White rose between her teeth. Don’t forget the rose,” Aunt Mary suggested, her smile coming back again.

“Oh, yes, the rose they always carry between their teeth in dancing,” went on Carol, seeming to enjoy the romantic idea. “The shawl they always seem to be going to commit suicide with and—oh, why bother. Go on, Aunt Mary, please tell me what happened to the Spanish bride of Robert Fenton.”

“Something tragic, indeed. She fell from her horse on the West Hill——”

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“Where the drive is cut through?”

“Exactly. Mr. Fenton had the hill torn down and a road cut through its very heart, after the lovely lady died from the fall when her horse stumbled on the hill.”

Both Carol and Aunt Mary were silent then, picturing the scene, perhaps, of that beautiful young woman lying dead in one of those very rooms—Which room? Carol was wondering. It did not seem superstitious, but uncanny, weird, and all but malevolent, that the young Spanish beauty should have died, been killed on those grounds, and that the strange

house had ever since refused to be silent, but had seemingly tried to wake the very dead by its unaccounted for organ peals.

Neither Aunt Mary nor Carol could forget this, as again a beautiful woman, Mrs. Becket, not young but middle aged, not a bride but a widow, was lying in a room, fortunately not dead, but suffering from some sinister influence that had cast its spell over Oak Lodge.

“You don’t believe in real ghosts, Aunt Mary?” Carol broke the prolonged silence.

“Yes, real enough, when things happen that should not happen, and when people or things can stay out of sight, even vanish without our being able to know why. *That’s* real ghost enough for me,” the pleasant woman declared emphatically.

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“Yes, and for me,” assented Carol.

“Nobody likes Jacob nor Stub,” Aunt Mary went on in a hushed voice, “but they came in a sort of deed to the place, so Mrs. Becket keeps them on.”

“Yes, I understand that. I don’t like Jacob, but he acted really alarmed tonight when we discovered Cousin Kitty lying there like death.”

“Yes?” It was a question.

“But at first Glenn and I were both suspicious; the way he acted about letting us in.”

“I can imagine that. He’s very jealous of his place here. When the Guild comes for flowers for the hospital during summer, they always expect Jake to count the thorns on the rose stalks they cut. He tags at their heels as if he owned the place.”

“He’s that way always. When the girls come, he just spoils everything, watching lest they break a blade of grass. But Cousin Kitty says all good gardeners are that way; they love their gardens so much they make fools of themselves over everything growing.”

“We must get to bed, but I felt a talk would straighten out your nerves. You have been through so much today and tonight; Glenn told me about the organ.”

70

“Yes, that’s one of my own troubles. And the old car. Did he tell you about that?”

“He did. Glenn’s a great boy,” his Aunt declared proudly. “But don’t worry about the car. He’ll help you with that, I’m sure.”

Carol said nothing in answer to the kind assurance, but her smile was a little restrained. She didn’t see just how Glenn was going to help her get back the “plucked” car.

They were now moving toward bed, Aunt Mary was out in the hall in her soft slippers, and Carol had taken her own shoes off.

“We’ll leave this light burning,” Aunt Mary pointed out to the side wall bracket under the picture of Mozart.

“Leave it burning, but how long will it go?” Carol asked, remembering the darkness of the earlier hours.

“I’ve got Glenn’s flash light for you; I forgot it. I’ll bring it down to your room.” She turned to go back, when a noise, a soft, shuffling sound, arrested them.

“What’s that?” whispered Carol.

“I wonder.”

They naturally both thought of the ghost, of their boasts they would like to “meet up with it,” but now they were not so sure of that.

“It’s at the back stairs.”

71

“I’ll get the flash.”

“Yes, if the lights went out now—” Carol shuddered at the thought.

Aunt Mary was back almost instantly. How glad Carol was to have the big, strong, courageous woman at her side now! She was going softly toward the back stairs. The noise was stilled, just the merest sound like something slipping, slithering.

They waited. No further sounds. But they had both heard it. And they would have to find out what it was. They moved stealthfully down the red-carpeted hall to the bolted door that separated the rear from the front of the house and led to the lonely back stairs.

“Don’t open the door—yet,” whispered Carol. She had a fear that perhaps someone, something would spring in upon them.

Aunt Mary stood there; the lights were on and she had no present need for the flash.

“But we had better find out—” She stopped as another sound rustled behind the bolted door. But not near it; it was shuffling down the stairs.

“Let it go,” begged Carol. “It can’t get to the front. All the house is bolted at the back.”

“All right,” Aunt Mary agreed, glad, seemingly, that whatever was there surely now was running away. “In a strange house, it may even be a servant.”

72

“No, Lizzie Towner went away today. But let us go back. No one can get through.” Carol was unmistakably glad of all those bolts that completely separated the back from the front of the house. She had had Glenn try every one of them before he left.

“Spooky, all right,” whispered Aunt Mary, as they went up the hall again. “Good thing the doctor gave Mrs. Becket that quieting powder.”

“I’ve been wondering—should we peek in?” They were about to pass the door where the injured woman had lain so quietly.

“No, better not; she might just wake. I can see from my door. That’s open a crack.”

“I’ll wait. I want to be sure she’s all right.”

Both went into the room next Mrs. Becket’s.

“That you, Carol?” It was her voice, soft, almost weak.

“Yes, dear, we’re here. Want us?” Both were beside her instantly.

“Oh, I’ve had such a dreadful dream—” Her hand went to her head in a gesture of fearful memory.

“That’s all right, Mrs. Becket,” Aunt Mary promptly assured her. “You would be sure to have bad dreams after your accident.” Carol was now gently rubbing the white hand with its long, tapering fingers. 73

“Yes, I suppose so. I have been terribly frightened. I believe now—” She paused, looked about her with that wild glance peculiar to those just emerging from a drugged sleep. “I believe I should not have stayed there. The place—it——”

“Now don’t talk, dear,” Carol begged. “Everything will be all right, I know.”

“I wonder,” murmured the unsteady voice.

But there was something stirring around the place; queer sounds, too faint to be positive, but sounds, fluttering, eerie, creeping sounds. Carol made her way to the very small window down over the kitchen. She pulled aside the useless scrim curtain and peered out into the darkness.

There was something fluttering in that tree at the gate; something white! There must have been a light near by, for she could see that waving, cloudlike mass moving amid the branches. Fascinated, she stood there while the queer thing disappeared suddenly, like a light extinguished.

CHAPTER VIII

THE BRIDAL ROSE

“A rose! A beautiful, waxy white bridal rose!”

It was the morning after that eventful night. Carol was alone in that darkened back stairway where the strange, unearthly rustle, that seemed more like a wild wind than could any noise made by human agency, had so startled Aunt Mary and her when they were preparing for bed. She was now investigating, secretly going over the whole place, and had picked up the flower.

Carol held in her hand the waxy white bridal rose. It too seemed unreal, it was so frail, so lovely. The white bloom was perfect and not wilted, although it must have been in the damp darkened place all night.

She counted the shining deep-green leaves, one rose with five perfect green leaves. These too seemed waxed, so heavy was their texture. Even the thorns were tender, not sharp, not rough, but like bits of wax exuding from the waxy stems.

“All wax,” she was thinking, “and a bride rose. However could it have come here?”

Naturally she thought of that Spanish bride killed some years

before; at her death they would have brought her bride roses like this one. But who now, about that strangely unhappy house, could care for or have such a flower? Where could it have come from? There were none of this precious variety about Oak Lodge. The conservatory of a few years before had never been used by Mrs. Becket, nor was it even heated to give out so beautiful a bloom. It would never have bloomed out of doors and this was the blustery weather of early fall, death to all vagrant roses.

“Mysterious,” Carol admitted to herself, at the same moment determining to keep it secret. Somehow she felt that rose was a clue to the mystery of Melody Lane, and that the solution of that mystery would depend upon caution, prudence, and secrecy. Therefore she would not even tell Aunt Mary, certainly not Mrs. Becket; such a thing might further alarm her.

But what had that frail little rose to do with the mirage in the tree? This was, really, the terrifying question.

Carol’s nerves were taut and her mind, as she told herself, was twisting and turning as though in a maze.

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“I must run out and get a few breaths of fresh air,” she murmured as she hid the mysterious rose in a fold of her skirt, tucking the stem beneath her belt. She could not decide just what to do with it.

Down to the grove of trees where, often, in the summer Carol had sat and talked with Cousin Kitty, she now hastened. It was restful there. Soon there would be nuts to gather.

“But it looks,” mused Carol as she paused near a tree, “as though some one had been here after nuts a little ahead of time.” She saw large footprints in the soft ground beneath the branches and then, as her eyes roved to the tree trunk, she saw marks and scratches in the bark as if some one, wearing sharp spurs, had been climbing.

“Perhaps the ghost!” said Carol aloud, with a little, uneasy laugh. “And yet no ghost I ever heard of left footprints in the earth nor marks in trees. Yet might it not be the physical manifestations of some unphysical being?” Carol didn’t know what to think, she was dazed.

She breathed deep of the crisp air and then hurried back to the kitchen, where Lizzie Towner, who had been off the day before, was again at her pots and pans and groans and sighs. 77

Mrs. Becket was much better. The doctor had not yet called, but Aunt Mary was staying, so Carol was leaving the patient in the best of good hands.

“She doesn’t seem to want to talk about last night,” Aunt Mary whispered when Carol was going. “My idea is, she had a pretty bad shock.”

“Before she fell?” Carol had asked.

“It caused her to fall,” was Aunt Mary’s hushed reply.

“A shock that had caused her to fall and lie there helpless until we found her?”

It was hard to forget all that, even to push it back far enough in her mind to make room for the new day's demands, but Carol was not like Cecy, she would not sit down and think it over between the pages of a book. Glenn was there with his car, ready to take her to school.

“Lay your ghost?” he wanted to know. He was starting the roadster, and Carol was glad of the short ride that would give her even that much rest from her active duties.

“Almost,” she told him. “I’m about convinced there is a ghost or a near-ghost over there.”

“Bet it’s a near-ghost but not near enough to—well, to have its picture taken, for instance,” the boy teased her.

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Then she told him about finding the exquisite bridal rose and of the queer noise on the back stairs, so queer and “slithering” she could not even describe it.

“Maybe a dove, or some big bird, fluttering,” he ventured. “We had a dove get down in our chimney once, and it fluttered for days before it died, I suppose. There was no way of getting the poor thing out. It couldn’t fly out, and the flutter just fluted away.”

“But doves, however lovely, do not carry bridal roses, do they?” Carol reminded him. “And do they ever send out fluttering visions in trees?”

He agreed this, at least, was not the ordinary thing for doves to do, unless they were human doves, and they, he reminded her, usually kept their feet on the ground.

Glenn was dropping her off at her own door—she would have a half hour home before schooltime. The early morning sunshine was kind to the little shingled house, and it did not look entirely shabby now, with its vines, bushes, and huge clumps of box-wood, fighting every blast of the oncoming winter.

“See you around noon, Glenn?” Her eyes and smile were thanking him for his unfailing attention.

79

“Afraid not, Ca-rol,” he answered. “I’m leaving a little early. Got a big job on this after——”

“O.K. Don’t work too hard.”

“Me! That advice is *your* prescription. Just don’t kill *yourself*. S’long!”

Glenn was a comfort, a genuine comfort. He had been her chum for a long, long time, since grammar school days. He had given her a pretty little manicure set for a graduation gift then, the small pieces that roll in a little leather holder, tied with a cream satin ribbon. And she had given him a magnifying glass, because he liked to look at ants and bugs and study their interesting habits.

Now they were high school chums, went to parties together, to movies, on little country rides, and above all, Carol found Glenn her one sure refuge in the increasing financial storms besetting her young life. He was wise, and he was encouraging. Carol needed both these props.

“Aunt Mary just saved my life last night,” she was

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telling herself, “not to say how many lives she saved
Cousin Kitty.”

It was next to impossible for her to thrust back the exciting affairs at Mrs. Becket’s, to take up, as she knew she must, the tiresome, boring, and commonplace worries of her own humble home. Her step was not light as she hurried in the house, it was merely quick without her usual spring of expectancy.

CHAPTER IX

WHAT COLOR BLUE

There was excitement at school when Carol got there. Some one was telling everyone about “the awful thing that happened last night.” Only a few minutes remained before assembly, but Carol stopped to listen.

It was Cecy’s friend Rosalind who was doing the loudest talking.

“And it’s a wonder she wasn’t killed,” Rosie declared to her eager listeners.

“A ghost couldn’t——”

“A ghost!”

“Why couldn’t a ghost? Who knows anything about a ghost or what it can do?” This last was Jane Jackson’s question. The other remarks were echoes from a number of girls’ questions.

“Oh, here’s Carol. She’ll know. Ask Carol,” Mary Dodd suggested. “Carol, what happened to Mrs. Becket last night?” she asked excitedly.

“Yes, Carol, quick. It’s belltime. What happened?” Marcia

Walsh demanded.

“Mrs. Becket merely slipped on a step and hurt her hip,” Carol answered indignantly. “Anything spooky about that?”

82

No one answered the challenge in words, but the looks passed around were not in agreement. She noticed Myra Todd take Jane’s arm and smile directly up into her face. It was clear neither Jane nor Myra actually believed Carol. In fact, as the bell sounded, and the girls trooped in, only Thalia and Adele Shane clung to Carol.

“They’ve been telling the wildest things,” Thally whispered.

“Thought you too had been gobbled up by the spooks until we saw you in flesh and blood,” laughed Adele. “But *you* told them.”

Could there really be a reason for all this? Carol wondered. Why should the whole town go ghost hunting? And did she, herself, believe there was actual cause for the stories?

She remembered the little white rose, that at least was something real. Not wanting to leave it at Mrs. Becket’s, for some indefinable reason, she had wrapped it in a piece of wax paper found in Lizzie Towner’s kitchen drawer at Mrs. Becket’s, taken it home, and in spite of hurry she had stuck it in a glass of water. Her father would find it there when he came in from marketing. He loved flowers, and Carol knew this beauty would interest him.

Jane Jackson giving up her music at Mrs. Becket’s was

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an open call to other girls to follow. It would break up the Choral Club, and what wouldn't it do to Mrs. Becket, whose one aim in life was music, music for girls?

“Glenn,” Carol was deciding. “I’ve got to get Glenn to talk to Jane. He can influence her if anyone can.”

Instead of going back to the little home that would somehow seem dreary today, Carol walked around a way that would bring her past Glenn’s home. Her father might still be there, she reasoned, and they would walk the remainder of the road together.

There was no one around in front of Glenn’s home, but one half the garage door was opened, so she went back there to Glenn’s usual hangout. A head was thrust out of the open door; Glenn’s. He made queer noises, then came out and shut the door. With both arms out to bar her progress he rushed toward her.

“No admittance,” he yelled. “Who told *you* you could come around here?”

“Whatever is the matter, Glenn? What are you hiding in the garage?” Carol demanded, sensing at once the boys were hiding something there. Stray voices were coming out in the way boys yell when they think they are only talking.

84

“For the love of Pete! Come on out front. This is no place for little girls—” Glenn began, which was the signal for Carol’s charge through the line he was attempting to hold against her. She broke through and made a bee line for the garage!

“Hey there, fellows!” Glenn shouted. But too late. Carol had the door open.

Shouts and yells greeted her, for there she saw the reason Glenn wanted to keep her out. They were painting her car, the car Cecy had farmed out to a regular painter, had her father sign a paper for the work, and then find out it just couldn't be paid for!

“Boys!” Carol exclaimed. She was utterly dumfounded. “How swell of you!”

“Like the shade?”

“How about the nickel? That's my work of art.”

“Lady, take a look at that hood! I ask you!”

Every one of the half dozen boys was pointing out to her his particular achievement in the paint line. And did they look funny! Some wore last year's white slacks, one had on a smock, relic from his sister's outfit, evidently; Glenn had on now what he had dropped when he went out to meet Carol, a big rubber apron from his mother's kitchen.

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“Your father thinks it's swell,” Glenn told her. “We all changed our mind on that robin's egg blue. *That* was no good.”

“You mean the pigeon egg yellow, dope,” corrected Billy Button, whose name was Billy Brennon, but who was always called Billy Button.

Carol was still all but speechless. She was walking around the car incredulously, while the boys waved their paint brushes perilously near her best school clothes.

“Isn’t this one swell job?” Bob Ryan demanded. “We’re going in the business, we are. This is only a tryout.”

“Whatever did Dad say?” she made a chance to ask.

“What could he say? Says we’re the nuts. Do you blame him?” Glenn replied, so delighted himself that his paint brush was flopping right against the rubber apron and he never noticed.

“Well, I’ll say you’re the *nuts*, the best kind of nuts,” Carol exclaimed. “This is what *I* call a real party; a paint party. Billy, you’re a picture.”

“I always have been.” Billy struck a ridiculous pose with his paint brush over his ear. The gob of dark blue that squashed his cheek seemed of no consequence whatever.

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“The color,” Glenn solemnly announced, “is royal blue.”

“Royal blue my eye!” contradicted Bob. “It’s Yale blue. My uncle went to Yale.”

“Yale blue nothing! My area is Delft blue and I’m the little Dutch boy,” whereat Tom Winters was on parade.

In spite of all their nonsense they really were doing a wonderful job, and only Carol knew what it would mean to have that car soon ready for use. She wondered how the boys

had managed it. They must have paid the painter for the cleaning off process; perhaps buying the paint from him had helped. She knew Glenn had been the genius of the plot, and she knew Glenn!

“When do you plan to deliver it?” she asked with mock importance.

“It will be dry tomorrow. This is *the* new process. And when we say *new*—what we mean!” Ted Sherman was delivering that speech; Ted so tall they called him Shorty.

So the car would be blue, whether royal, Yale, or Delft, but not the pigeon blood nor the robin’s egg. Truly the little old flivver looked very well indeed, and Carol was happy at the prospect of having it back soon again, for she surely needed it.

87

There was further celebration, but, in spite of it, the boys did get in some painting dabs, and when Carol insisted she had to leave, it was Ted who took her home in his car, because Glenn just had to stay to boss the job, as he called it.

On the way, as they swung through the village, Carol caught a glimpse, as Ted paused in traffic, of the nutcracker-faced carpenter standing on a corner talking to a well-dressed but shady-looking stranger, who wore beneath his nose a toothbrush style moustache. In a momentary pause of silence, before one line of traffic started as the other stopped, Carol heard Len Bancroft saying somewhat excitedly and earnestly:

“But I tell you it’s solid ebony! Don’t you s’pose I know wood when I see it?”

“Well, maybe you do,” admitted he of the toothbrush moustache.

Carol turned her head quickly to observe the two more closely. Ted saw her and, as he let in the gears, asked:

“What’s the matter?”

“Oh—nothing,” was the answer. “I was just looking at those two men.”

“Neither one of ’em much to look at!” chuckled Ted.

“But, speaking of men, what’s all this talk of ghosts?”

88

“What do you mean?” asked Carol, to gain time.

“Queer thing,” he said seriously, “no one admits he believes in ghosts, yet everyone is talking about them. My mother says that place is blighted—you know, like a tree with a pest on it. It simply can’t bear up. Something gets it.”

“I’m beginning to feel that way too, Ted,” Carol answered, for no other happening, however interesting, had put out of her mind the fears, the strange anxieties that had overwhelmed her the night before. *This* was the one irrepressible terror she knew could only be overcome when completely understood. But who could explain it?

“Mother remembers when the lovely Mrs. Fenton was killed. She said the whole town went to see her like they do movie stars. It was a nine days’ wonder,” Ted concluded, boyishly.

“Yes, I’ve heard about that too,” Carol was now thinking of

the rose, the bridal rose that Cecy had carelessly pinned on her coat and worn to school without even asking where Carol got it.

“Too bad Mrs. Becket sticks there,” Ted persisted. “It isn’t lucky.”

89

“Yes,” Carol admitted. But she could not help thinking of Len Bancroft, the nutcracker faced carpenter. Who was he, really? What was his meaning in speaking of ebony? Who was the man with the toothbrush moustache? What had they in common?

“No,” said Ted again. “It isn’t lucky!”

90

CHAPTER X

RUMORS

Not lucky!

There was no need to tell Carol that. More and more she felt the truth of the old saying: “Where there’s so much smoke, there must be some fire.” Ghosts! She was sick of the very word. Everyone talked of ghosts, but not a single person was willing even to guess what sort of ghost was supposed to hang around Oak Lodge. They all said it was terrible. Some said, “Mrs. Becket had been actually attacked by the thing,” while still others said, “She had fallen in a faint from the shock.” Carol wanted to know what shock. She wanted to know what were the signs and manifestations of the “spirits” everyone seemed so eager to talk about and so reluctant to *tell* about.

But she herself had seen something in the trees and had heard that noise on the back stairs. Then she had found the bridal rose. What could *that* mean in the great old house so late at night, with no human being around?

Also, she wanted very much to know what had actually happened to Mrs. Becket, and she could not press that question until Mrs. Becket was over the shock.

In all the tumult of the paint party in Glenn’s garage, she

managed to ask him, and to find out that the kind and much needed Aunt Mary was going to stay at Oak Lodge possibly for a few days, maybe longer if needed. There was a kind friend for you, and Carol again wondered why such Aunt Marys did not come automatically in every family.

All of which had very little to do with what happened next. It was after their evening meal, properly called supper, and Cecy and Carol were alone; their father was finding many little excuses for seeing Tom Loftus and Jim Norris, his old friends in the little village. They would sit around Clayton's Hardware Store, although Carol's father, Felix Duncan, was apt to get behind the new broom cabinet, where folks could not see him so plainly. They would talk about the hard times getting harder, and about members of their families losing their precious jobs, like seeing its very last brave apple fall off the big tree in the tempest that always does take the last apple off a tree, no matter how tight it holds on.

But Felix Duncan did not talk about having lost his job, they all knew about that. Neither did he say that his daughter Carol, who had played the big organ in the Silvertone, had lost hers. No, Mr. Duncan was not a man to discuss such matters even with his good old friends in Clayton's Store. They knew by his manner and his very lack of conversation how worried he really was.

92

“Gettin’ so a man can’t even pay his rent these days,” grumbled Tom Loftus, sticking his left foot up on the high stool in front of him, where his right foot alone couldn’t find room. Tom was a mill worker and the mills were not even running on part time now.

“Pay rent!” echoed Jim Norris, “I just about gave Oscar Steinmetz the house for the price of his bit of plumbing. Can’t own a house when all the mortgage is paid. ’Tain’t worth owning.” Thus the men complained about the hard times, while Felix Duncan was all but silent. He had never tried to own a house in Oakleigh, and now he didn’t see how he was even going to pay the rent. He had two splendid girls, Carol was as smart as any and a lot smarter than most, he realized that, and Cecy would be all right when she settled down a little. But how were they going to manage now with Carol’s little money so reduced and his own small savings about gone? He could see nothing but despair ahead. To move to where relatives might help would mean breaking up the girl’s school and social life; this he would only consent to when all other expedients had failed.

Thalia told Carol about it. Jane Jackson, it seemed, and her little set had been making trouble; deliberately talking about Carol. Some one had said she lost her place playing the organ at the Silvertone because she would not take orders about playing popular music. This was too silly even to talk about, because everyone knew that music now came with the pictures. But when Thalia heard the girls talking about Carol, just what they said didn’t matter so much. She was Carol’s friend, and that underlying secret threat of the other girls’ “cutting Carol” meant more than girlish gossip. It meant a loss of confidence that would upset all the big plans already made for the Choral Club. It meant a great disappointment to Mrs. Becket, who had given so much time and so much money to training twenty or thirty girls and boys, many of whom had no previous musical study.

“And it isn’t only that,” Thalia insisted, “but there’s something more back of it. My father says he thinks perhaps Mrs. Becket is just being driven out of that beautiful place.”

“Driven out! Why?” This was news to Carol.

94

“Who knows? But doesn’t it seem queer to you that all these ghost stories should get going at once?” Thalia was not pretty, but if ever there was a girl “full of pep,” she was the girl. As a friend she was a champion, but as an enemy she was a fighter. She had her own car and was what they call “well off,” but she loved the outdoors and the big free things it means, despising petty affectations and scorning silly gossip.

“The ghost stories,” Carol repeated, “are certainly thick and fast. But what about the ghost? Isn’t that, after all, the real, important matter?”

“The ghost.” Thalia was sitting with Carol on her own side porch. The late afternoon was fragrant with the incense of burning dried leaves, and the breeze was lazily enjoying itself, just giving a playful little puff here and there, and not bothering at all to blow things up or interfere with the uncurling smoke coming from the autumn altar pyre.

“Carol,” Thalia began, after a thoughtful pause, “tell me honestly, do you believe there is something wrong at Mrs. Becket’s?”

“Yes, Thally, I do,” Carol answered. “In fact, I know there is.”

95

“You do!”

“Yes. Since you are fair enough to tell me that Jane and her crowd are going to boycott us, I think I should be fair with you. And I know I can trust you.”

The girls were making up for lost time. They had been separated a good deal lately, because Carol had been so busy in various directions and Thally had spent all her spare time scouting in the crowds where unpleasant rumors seemed to be picking up force and speed.

“Thanks, Carol,” Thally answered Carol’s offer to trust her, as they continued their confidences. “It’s a grand idea to have a real live ghost in this dead town, but we have got to get after it, haven’t we?”

“Exactly; and I have a plan.”

“You would have. Do *I* stay out all night in that big back yard just to entice it—the ghost?”

“Thally dear, I do believe you would if that looked like a good idea, but it doesn’t. Do you mind if I hold back the plan for a day or two?”

“Mind? Who am I to dictate ghost plans?”

“Oh, I don’t mean you wouldn’t keep it secret,” Carol hurried to explain, “but there’s one loose end——”

96

“I hate loose ends. Tighten it up, Carol, before you draft me for the onslaught. And give me time to get my winter coat out of the moth closet. We may need winter coats in a ghost jaunt these cold nights.”

The girls both enjoyed the prospect. They had a good laugh at the idea of a ghost hunt in winter coats, Carol going so far as to suggest carrying another coat along for the poor frozen ghost. When the laugh was over and had died down to a mere titter, Carol drew up closer to Thally on the outdoor settee and began by whispering:

“Listen, Thally. I’m going to tell you something.”

“Go ahead. I’m not doing a thing but listening.” Thally’s dimples played in and out like disappearing raindrops.

“It’s about that there ghost.”

“My ears are bigger than ever.”

“Now, honest, Thally, I wish you would be serious. I haven’t told this to anyone.”

“Not even to Glenn?”

“No, not all of it.”

“Well, that’s something; in fact, it’s a whole lot.” Thally was always teasing Carol about Glenn. She usually called him Brother Glenn, he was with Carol so often. “Do tell me, Carol. I promise not to interrupt again.”

97

“All right.” Carol snatched off her wool béret as if she needed a cooler head. “It’s about the night of Mrs. Becket’s accident.”

For once Thally was as she promised to be, “all ears.” She

scarcely spoke during Carol's long story of that night they had found Mrs. Becket helpless in front of the organ bench. She did put in a lot of questions about Jacob. Thally didn't like Jacob, neither did Carol for that matter, but Carol was not now as suspicious of him as was Thally.

"That old Jake is a crab," Thally declared. "I wouldn't trust him to black my sport boots, brown them, I mean," she indifferently corrected.

"But you should have seen how scared he was when we found Cousin Kitty," Carol explained. "Both Glenn and I were suspicious of him at first, he was so ugly about letting us in. But when we found her lying there like a dead person, I tell you, Jake was just as shocked as we were," Carol declared.

"Well, maybe," grudgingly admitted Thally. "But just the same, I don't like him. What about that Cinderella they keep all locked up like a prisoner? Ever see her?"

"Cinderella? Oh, you mean Dwila. Yes, I have seen her, but she's queer. Runs like a whitehead every time we almost get near her. I guess it's because she's from a strange country," Carol surmised.

98

"I guess it's because she's afraid of Jacob," Thally ventured. "And I don't blame her. He's fierce enough to scare anyone. What do you say we call there some day and just ask for this little Dwila? We should, don't you know. She ought to be at school."

"Yes, Miss Sturgis asked me if I knew her. Perhaps we ought to try digging her out. But sometimes that sort of thing just

makes more trouble. It might,” Carol pointed out, “if Jake is as mean as you think.”

“Let’s take a chance. Poor kid, maybe she is just dying to see a couple of girls. It must be terrible to be stuck with old folks that way. When they drive their old rattletrap of a car down the street she is squeezed in between them till only her eyes stick out. They’re lovely blue eyes, too. I had a chance to find that out when the so-called car was parked, also so-called, while Jake went into the hardware store the other day. Her eyes are like blue—golf balls,” Thally concluded, bulging her own brown eyes out to prove to Carol that eyes could look that way.

CHAPTER XI

BIG IDEA

Carol was on the verge of telling Thalia about the mysterious bride rose and the strange, white vision in the tree, but now she hesitated.

The rose was such a little thing, or, more properly speaking, so little a thing. After all, a rose picked up in a big house like Cousin Kitty's—well, Carol decided, she wouldn't bother trying to explain the secret of the back stairs to Thally. How could she explain one mystery by relating another? Carol was musing deeply—almost desperately.

“Say, Carol,” Thally happily broke in on her indecision, “what about this new boy friend I hear Cecy has met?”

“Oh, you mean Paul?” Carol seemed to come out of a fog.

“If that's his name—yes. Cecy has been talking about some boy to all the girls until even I can't wait to see him. Who is he and when do I?”

“He is Paul Hanley,” answered Carol. “He's a handsome blond boy from Long Hill. Cecy discovered him at an athletic meet. He has a swell cowlick she's crazy about.”

“But when do I meet him?” persisted Thally, laughing.

“Seeing Paul is part of my ghost plan,” murmured Carol.

“Paul can’t be the ghost?”

“I should say not. If he could be, we wouldn’t ever be afraid of ghosts again.”

“Must you go?” mocked Thally, as she always did. “But listen to me, love. I’m not the biggest gossip in the crowd, I hope, but I am ready to listen to gossip right now. And what I told you about Jane Jackson and her little set is true, positively. They are having a grand time thinking up ways to make trouble for you and Mrs. Becket, and we have got to go them one better. If you, in your brilliant way, can think of things to make trouble for Jane, or Betty, or even Sylvia, though she’s a harmless little thing if they’d leave her alone, yet, we must give *them* something to worry about, or they may make more mischief than we believe them capable of.”

“I know what you mean, Thally. But you have got to admit I’m too busy to bother with their nonsense.”

“That’s all right,” pursued Thalia, “but it might pay to heed some of the warnings. I tell you, what looks like silly ghost stories can do a lot of harm if they’re not nipped pretty soon.”

101

“You are right there, dear. They’ve done plenty of harm already. Cousin Kitty has just about collapsed from the accident and from worry. Glenn’s Aunt Mary is staying with her, you know.”

“Yes, I know, and *that’s* grand. I’d like to see a ghost run up against Aunt Mary,” finished Thalia joyfully.

Which was all in an afternoon, but only the beginning of the real ghost hunt.

Some time later Carol called together all her crowd. There were present Thalia, Marcia Walsh, Myra Todd, Adele Shane, and a few others. Never were girls more eager to hear what was soon to be told. The word ghost was used so often, some of the party got to saying “hush” instead. But since Thally had called the meeting at her home in the evening, the affair seemed more like a party than a get-together for plans.

“Carol, you take *the* chair,” Thalia ordered, pushing forward the biggest of the sunporch set. “You’ve got a lot of explaining to do, we imagine.”

“O. K.” Carol was wearing her orange sport suit from last summer, and it seemed prettier than ever now—102—or was it Carol who was prettier? All the girls seemed to have that same idea of another turnout of summer things, and the room was brilliant with their colorful outfits. Thally looked ready for a race, with her white knitted blouse and dark blue skirt; she looked best in severe sport clothes.

Then Carol began. She told them all quite frankly about Mrs. Becket’s accident, and just as Thalia had done, many suspected Jacob. They insisted he was there, around there all the time, and that if he didn’t make the trouble, he knew who did. Which seemed like a sound argument.

“But that boy Stubby is a queer one too,” Marcia reminded

them. “He’s the one to watch.”

“Watch?” retorted Adele, “you might as well try to watch a squirrel. I saw him away out Waterway today, in that car that goes though it shouldn’t.”

This brought out strong sentiment against Stubby, and Carol was glad she had made Cecy promise not to come tonight. She had stayed home with their father who was answering telephone calls on an “ad” for work. Had Cecy been at the meeting she would have fought everybody in standing up for Stubby the outcast. As it was, he hadn’t a friend there.

103

“We couldn’t dash out and wait for things to happen,” Thalia explained. “That’s the way to make a lot of excitement and just spread the bad news.”

“The way girls are supposed to do in these wild days,” laughed Marcia. “You’re right, we don’t do things that way. We could have called the fire department and made a real name for ourselves.”

“But it is not that kind of a funny matter,” Carol agreed. “Mrs. Becket has been a dear friend to all of us and her real interests are concerned in this. Whatever is behind all this is certainly not for us to blare all over town. It may be private business.”

“Let’s get at the old ghost,” put in Thalia, “and the business can take care of itself. Now, Carol, go ahead. What’s the big idea?”

“A ghost party.”

“A ghost party!” echo was a grand chorus.

“Yes. And a big one too. We want to show folks we *believe* in ghosts and are going to prove it.”

“You mean, have a real party at Mrs. Becket’s?” Adele asked.

“Exactly. She thinks it a grand idea.”

“So do I,” agreed Myra, getting up to change places with Adele, which was merely a routine gesture.

104

Once their surprise was over, they settled down to make the plans. Even the other crowd, Jane Jackson and her set, were to be invited.

“They won’t come, of course,” Thally put in.

“Oh, won’t they? You watch. They’ll send a couple of good reporters if they don’t all come. Catch them missing,” Mary Burke remarked wisely.

When everyone had had her say a couple of times over, it looked as if the big idea was pretty well planned. They would have a party, invitations to be given personally and by telephone and to include the message that the affair would be a ghost hunt. Boys and girls were warned it was not to be any silly affair with cap pistols or high-powered flash lights, as no attic exploration was considered as part of the plan.

“But why not the attic?” persisted Mary. “Isn’t the attic a swell place for ghosts?”

“Most attics might be,” Carol agreed, “but not the one at Oak Lodge. That has been locked, sealed you might say, since Mr. Becket died, and I promised Mrs. Becket we would not attempt to go up there.”

“Oh, pshaw!” grumbled Julia Hampton, “that’s just the reason we should look there. Being sealed just means being a good place to hide.”

“Sure it does,” other girls joined in.

“But I don’t think it will bother us a bit not to go up there,” Carol declared, “for so far as ‘happenings’ are concerned, there’s no suspicion attached to that attic.”

“How do you get up there?” Marcia wanted to know.

“You don’t,” Myra told her again.

“I mean how could one get up there?” she corrected.

“There are the usual boxed in stairs, and I think one of those side wall ladders just used to open the skylight. But I’ll promise you this much,” Carol went on. “If we *think* we should go up there, I’ll ask Cousin Kitty to let us go. But we would have to promise not to disturb Mr. Becket’s things.”

“That will be all right,” Mary conceded. “But I’d hate to think we were shut out of the attic. Everybody knows all genuine attics have ghosts in them.”

“But this is a musical ghost, you see,” Thalia reminded them. “He has even been heard to play that big organ.

Someone guessed that, of course.”

“Has he, honest, Carol?” eagerly asked Mary Burke.

“There have been organ noises,” she admitted, “but big organs always groan.”

“Without any one being near the organ?” Adele demanded to know.

“Now, let’s all wait,” suggested Marcia. “If we get things in our heads before we go to the party, the whole thing will be a flop. And we’ve just got to run this thing down.”

“I hope it doesn’t run us down,” Myra murmured to Thalia, as the girls were leaving, and the matter merely waited for two weeks from that evening.

CHAPTER XII

DOOR SLAMMER

When Miss Sturgis, the school principal, spoke to Carol about the strange girl at Jacob Vroom's cottage, she was not merely inquiring if Carol or the other girls happened to know her, but she was using her authority regarding the girl's education. Some time before this Miss Sturgis had tried to get Jacob himself to agree that Dwila should come to school, but he put it off, said she was too shy and timid, and too awfully homesick for her own country. In fact, he hinted, she might not stay long in America, but would possibly go back to Europe with her Aunt Lena, when times were a little better.

But again the school principal inquired, first from Carol and then from Thalia. Even if Dwila did not actually go to school, Miss Sturgis had told them, she should not be left all alone there; the girls should at least be friendly with her.

So it was that Thalia came to Carol with Miss Sturgis' order.

"We have just got to go there," she told Carol, "and if they don't let us in, so much the better. We won't have to waste too much time."

108

"But, honestly, Thally, I have positively *no* time, I'm so busy going away out to Long Hill afternoons."

“How does the newly painted car go? It looks fine.”

“It is fine. You know, Cecy had it all given out to the garage the very day I lost the organ job. But somehow Glenn bought the painter off. After it was all cleaned off, imagine!”

“Oh, that wasn’t much to do,” Thally said, easing the obligation for Carol, “and the boys had a grand time painting it. I believe some of them will carry the marks, paint marks, to their graves, to hear their families tell it.”

“They surely did daub themselves up. And as for their clothes!” Carol’s pause was eloquent.

“You’re telling me! Didn’t I see a few of them after the battle? But let’s get back to this Mimi or whatever her name is.”

“Dwila, I believe.”

“Just as you say. Can you run over there for a few minutes now? My chariot is at the door, you know.”

“I’ve got such a lot to do,” Carol sighed. “And when Cecy’s here, I just scold. She gets more unreasonable all the time. She can’t believe or understand what these hard times mean.” There were shadows under Carol’s eyes and a straight line across her forehead. Surely if Cecy did not know what the hard times meant, Carol did.

109

“But then, darling,” Thally tried to cheer her, “Cecy is a ‘very mere’ kid, and if she was a worrier she might be sick on your hands. Think of that.”

Carol smiled and the shadows under her eyes brightened a bit. She was glad to have Thally defend Cecy; it made things easier to bear. But what was really her greatest worry, the possibility of giving up that little home very soon, she did not mention even to Thally.

“Come on,” Thalia coaxed. “Let’s run over and do our daily good deed for Miss Sturgis. Let’s root out the girl with the cable braids and golf ball eyes.”

“All right. The sooner it’s over with, the more time I’ll have for other troubles,” Carol agreed.

Jacob’s home was in a small cottage at the side entrance to Mrs. Becket’s grounds. Originally it had been called the gate house, and a big gate was closed there at night. The girls left their car at the drive and took the flapjack stone step walk to the cottage.

110

“Pretty little place, all right,” Thally remarked. “I have never been in here before.”

“It is pretty and completely hidden from the road. Lonesome, don’t you think?” Carol asked indifferently.

“Rather. Any dogs?”

“No, Jake doesn’t like dogs.”

“Good for Jake. I hate them too—in strange places. Flip the knocker.”

Carol did so. She picked up the brass knocker and gave it

three distinct raps. A moment later the door was partly opened and a girl's head appeared. She smiled cautiously but shook her head.

“Good afternoon,” called out Thalia afraid the picture would vanish, for the face was lovely, the eyes as big and bright as Thalia had said they were, and two big braids, framing the round face, hung over gingham-covered shoulders. Where could gingham like that come from these days?

The girl's lips parted, but she did not speak. Instead her eyes did the talking. She seemed about to run even from the two friendly girls.

“We are from the school——”

That was enough; the door went shut suddenly with a real bang.

“Did it hit you?” Carol asked Thalia jokingly, for they both felt foolish standing there, facing the old brown door with the antique knocker.

111

They turned away and were a few feet down the path when again they heard the door open. Turning quickly, they saw the head peek out and Carol called:

“Can't you speak any English?”

But the answer was another slamming of the door.

“Well,” snapped Thalia, “maybe she thinks that funny, but I don't.”

“Neither do I,” agreed Carol, “but we’re through. She may open and shut that door all afternoon, for all we care. Take me home, darling, I have to get to work.”

“So have I. But we *called* anyhow.” They were in the car and both seemed glad of it. “So we can tell Sturgis *all* about it, in about two seconds.”

Then they fell into a thoughtful silence. Plainly there was something interesting about the girl, but at that moment neither Thalia nor Carol had the time nor inclination to face any more slamming doors.

“She’s pretty, though,” Carol said next, answering Thalia’s thoughts.

“In any other clothes. Imagine her dressed right. Wouldn’t she make a hit with Bob, for instance? He loves that type. Remember how he raved about the long-haired ones in the school play?”

112

“Yes, and Billy Button. He’s all for the Mimi girls,” Carol remembered. “But no use spoiling our own slim chances by introducing a natural peach.”

“I should say not. But don’t you think we should go there again and ask for Jacob’s wife? She’s the one to talk to. She doesn’t talk in signs, like slamming doors in faces, I imagine.”

“Lena? Oh, I couldn’t go to see Lena and dig into her family affairs. You see, I meet Lena once in a while at Cousin Kitty’s. But you could go,” Carol suggested.

“Sure. I’m a regular hard-hearted social service person, can ask all kinds of questions.”

“I don’t mean just that, Thally.”

“I know. And you are quite right. O. K. I’ll call there again first chance I get and report to you later. And I bet I’ll have a cheerful little earful. You wait and see.”

“Heard from any others on the ghost party?” Carol asked, as going along the hedge-lined roads around Melody Lane they had a good chance to guess at the party’s prospects.

“The Jane crowd, of course, are holding their heads up, being high-hat and pretending they wouldn’t be seen dead at that party,” Thalia replied. “But they’ll come. Imagine Jean or Leona missing anything so sensational.”

113

“I hope it won’t turn out *too* sensational,” demurred Carol. “I’ve been warning all the boys they may come only on condition of guaranteed good behavior. Be sure you check up on Bob and his outfit.”

“I had the same idea. Told them first thing that no guns, no lariats would be allowed. Say, Carol dear, is Becket’s place the only one haunted around here? I never knew there were such a lot of spooky old places on Melody Lane. And it’s a long lane, all right. Here’s the turn.”

“There are romantic places out this way,” Carol replied, “and just as you say, the lane is long enough to make a turnpike. I guess they started it down at the end where Becket’s place is and when it got going they didn’t know where to stop it off.

Everybody thinks Melody Lane is a wonderful way. There are more fine old places on it than can be found anywhere else in the county.”

“Yes; even my practical dad was interested in one last year. But it had so many rooms we would have had to hire a guide. So Ma put the kibosh on that grand idea. Well, here we are, at our own little homes; yours at any rate. I’ll let you know about the door slammer if I get the spunk to go over there again.”

114

Cecy was at home and for once she did not pop innumerable questions at Carol as she entered. Instead, Cecy was actually solemn.

“What’s the matter?” Carol asked.

“Oh, nothing.”

“But there is, Cecy. Tell me. Things are so black that another blot can’t do anything.”

“Well, Dad is awfully disappointed. Poor dear, he worked so hard on that old ad. And he has just walked his poor feet off. But it’s no good. He didn’t get anything.”

“Not even that work promised temporarily?”

“No, not one hour. Carol, he went out to walk it off, and he wouldn’t let me go with him.”

115

CHAPTER XIII

OMENS

It was a day later and Carol had returned from playing for the late afternoon feature at the Keystone. During the afternoon Mr. Cameron had lingered beside the organ, seemingly worried at the small audience. As Carol and Cecy moved aimlessly about the home that now seemed crumbling, as though built upon sand, Cecy didn't even ask her sister if she had seen the nice new boy Paul, nor blame her for not giving him a chance to drive her over. Cecy was sniffing, almost crying. Carol tried to cheer her, but like all sensitive girls, Cecy was extreme. Her gaiety gone, she was now in despair.

“But what *can* we do?” she sobbed. “People will think——”

“Never mind what people think,” Carol retorted sharply. “We are poor and so are many others. It never has been any disgrace to be poor.”

“But the rent!”

“I know. I'll borrow that from Cousin Kitty. But Dad is not to know.”

116

“You always have been able to dig us out, Carol.” This was a challenge. Why couldn't Carol dig them out now?

“But things are different now.” Carol could have said much more than that, but, as usual, she must hide her feelings and be brave before Cecy. “I wish Dad would just stay in the house and get over that awful restlessness,” she sighed this time. “But I suppose he feels better moving about. Poor Dad! It’s dreadfully hard on men, isn’t it?”

“But even paying the rent, Carol,” Cecy urged, “you know we have to have coal.”

“Cecy dear, we don’t have to have it today. Maybe Winter will turn back and let Spring come. Why don’t you take your books over to Rosie’s? It will do you good to get out. You see, I’ve been out, and even playing the old asthmatic organ is something.”

“And you saw a picture, too. Was it any good?”

“I really don’t know; I didn’t look at it.”

“You didn’t! I wish I had your chance.”

Cecy gone, Carol went to the small desk where bills were kept. The old, disused bank book mocked her in its important place, for no entries had been made since her father came home with that last precious pay.

Cecy was right, of course. People would talk, for the Duncans had always held their heads high, a little too high to be really popular in the small town.

Carol looked for the last coal bill; it was only partly paid. But creditors were being generous and perhaps it would not be too

much to ask for a little more time. Everyone knew and respected her father, he had always paid his bills; that should help now.

But only for a while. Since their expenses were plainly more than their income, no credit could help except for a real emergency. Carol looked around at their comfortable little home and took stock mentally.

“If we moved, where would we go? And could we, after all, get cheaper rent?”

The threat of living “in rooms” appalled the girl. This, indeed, would be hard on all of them, for “rooms” in Oakleigh, as in most country places, meant the most inadequate sort of makeshift.

“No conveniences, everything grimy and worn out—” She could not go on with that dull picture. “After all, I am no homemaker; Cecy is the one who can cook and keep house.”

Which was quite true. For Carol, like her mother before her, had always taken the homemaking very casually.

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Carol did what she had to do about the house, but she never had a good time doing it. Whereas Cecy would scramble up a dozen scraps from the ice box, stew them with chopped green pepper—her father loved green pepper—season that gravy red with catsup, and spread the mess on toast, while every one would ask:

“What smells so good?”

It was all mysterious to Carol. Her mother had played a

church organ, and her father had humored the talent. Carol was playing a movie organ, and talent had gone out of style.

But Cecy still made grand stews, calling them absurd made-up French names and “getting away with it.” Yes, after all, it was a great thing to be a good homemaker, and Cecy was that.

Baffled now at the disastrous outlook, Carol just sank down into a chair decorated with big bunches of walnut grapes.

“The darkest hour——”

Her thought was interrupted by a ring of the doorbell. It was Glenn.

“You’re all in, Carol.”

“Or out.” Carol was glad to see him, but her mood was too serious to shift with a moment’s relief.

“I know; we’re all in the same boat.” Glenn sat down and flung his hat across the room to land on the piano bench.

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“Not the same boat, exactly,” Carol said. “Our boat is floundering. Others are still afloat.”

“But leaking badly. Say, look here, Carol, don’t let’s talk words. I’ve got a proposal——”

They both burst out laughing. A proposal!

“Not that kind,” Glenn stammered, “not yet, at any rate. But

Aunt Mary asked me to make this one.”

“Then it’s good. Aunt Mary couldn’t ask anything that wasn’t. What is it?”

“Mrs. Becket would like you folks, all of you, bag and baggage, to move into Oak Lodge.”

“To Oak Lodge!” gasped Carol. “Glenn, you’re joking.”

“Not a bit of it.” Glenn was handsome when his eyes flashed like that. “Why shouldn’t she want you to live with her? There she is, scared to death with all the ghost stuff. There the big house has to be heated all winter and who is to get the heat? Just Mrs. Becket and a couple of dumb ghosts.”

“Glenn, really,” Carol stammered. Here was certainly an answer to all her worries, a home, heated, the bills to be paid!

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“You see, she has no very near relatives, just some cousins who are not musical, I believe, and her heart and soul are set in the organ house. She won’t leave it, and what could be better than having your father and you girls there? It’s perfect, according to Aunt Mary. She says Mrs. Becket can’t forget how kind your father was after Mr. Becket’s death. It seems Mr. Becket and he were great friends.”

“Yes, that’s how I got to know Mrs. Becket,” Carol said, softly. Her eyes were blinking; the sudden thought of relief from the overwhelming burden of worry, for rent money, for coal money, and for all the unlisted needs—the relief was so great she just felt like crying.

“You like the idea, don’t you?” Glenn pressed. “You see, I’m the advance agent, and I want to report progress.”

“I like the idea immensely,” Carol spoke up. “It’s like a shower of blessing this very minute, if I can get Dad to agree.”

“You can if you make the plea for Mrs. Becket. Tell him she has to have a man in the house, and with two daughters, he’s the most available man. Then you and Cecy could go on studying——”

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Glenn had it all worked out. His enthusiasm was actually bubbling.

Carol was completely surprised at the proposition, but now that she considered it, it seemed most sensible. That her father could oversee the big place, not interfering with Jacob, who was, after all, only a gardener, was a splendid idea, and then she and Cecy, relieved of rent and coal worries, could be girls again.

“Mrs. Becket talked it all over with Aunt Mary,” Glenn began again, when Carol interrupted him.

“Say, Glenn, haven’t you any mother of your own?”

“Sure I have, and she’s the very best,” Glenn loyally proclaimed, “but she isn’t like Aunt Mary. *She* minds her own business; Aunt Mary and I do just the opposite.”

Carol laughed; it was easy to laugh now. “I think I can talk Dad over,” Carol was reflecting, “but Cecy may balk. She

declares there is a ghost there and that Stubby has told her all sorts of wild tales.”

“Oh, Cecy, she’ll be crazy to go. Bet she writes a book of ghost stories and makes a lot of money,” Glenn guessed. “I wouldn’t worry about Cecy. And now, I’m going back to the Lodge, to report—progress.”

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“But I can’t speak for Dad and Cecy, the whole family,” she demurred.

“Why not? Haven’t you *worked* for the whole family?” he reminded her.

“Glenn, you are better than a good brother.”

“Oh, brothers aren’t so good. Look at mine, sunning himself in Egypt.”

“How is Phil?”

“All right, I guess. Mother fusses about him going out on the desert. She thinks he’s sick and must sit in a beach chair. But Phil is wise. He is seeing the world. Might as well get all kinds of sun while he’s about it.”

“Guess your Aunt Mary takes special care of you because your mother takes special care of Phil,” Carol teased. “At any rate, I’m glad we’ve got Aunt Mary.”

“You bet. Then I’ll report——”

“Please, Glenn, it would not be fair to report anything until I

“speak to Father and Cecy. Can’t I phone a little later?”

That was what happened. First Cecy came in and Carol told her.

“Live *there!*” shrilled Cecy. “With all those spooks and everything!”

“Don’t be silly. If there are spooks, as you call them, the thing to do *is* to live there and run them down.”

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“Out, would be my idea. Well, Carol darling, you are a genius for luck, I’ll say that. And the roof, the coal and wood, to say nothing of all the rest of the grandeur——”

“Think of you having a blue room, or a pink room, or a yellow room,” Carol baited her. “You are a born homemaker, Cecy, and here’s your big chance.”

“In a false home, sort of living on——”

“Now, you just listen,” ordered Carol severely. “We’ve got to do something. We can’t even stay here, and where do you think we could go?”

“I can’t think.”

“Exactly. Neither can I. And the only way we’ll get Dad to consent is to make him feel Mrs. Becket needs us there. He was Mr. Becket’s friend, and that’s why Cousin Kitty has done so much for us. Oh, Cecy!” cried out Carol, “I must count on you. You have got to win Dad over. He will think *I* merely see the business end of it.”

“O. K., darling; count on me. I’ll see the romantic end of it, if that’s the missing link.”

And that was exactly the way the great idea worked out.

CHAPTER XIV

THALIA

It was decided, just as Carol hoped it would be.

“I would do anything I could for Wilmer Becket’s widow,” Carol’s father loyally responded to the girls’ argument that they go into Oak Lodge. “And if my services there are worth anything, I’m not too proud to take the place of overseer.”

“Attaboy!” crooned Carol. The relief amounted to exuberance. No one said a word about the real need of their taking the wonderful offer. What was the use of floundering about in sordid details?

Now that she had decided, Cecy was building up hopes of the most romantic possibilities, beyond even her own wildest, fantastic dreams.

“It will be just like living in a castle,” she declared. “I hope we get a few dollars for clothes. I wouldn’t care to be the ragged princess in the tower.”

“Cecy, be yourself,” ordered Carol. “If we get a few dollars, there are a few bills to pay. Don’t forget that.”

“Girls, I’ve always let you have your way,” their father spoke

up, “because your way seemed about as good as mine. But if we go into the Lodge, we will start to save the very first week —” And so on they planned with all the delight of new-found hopes, where so short a time before the world seemed gray to blackness.

“Like being rescued from drowning,” Carol thought, and no doubt her father and Cecy were thinking the same thing.

While secret plans were being made for their moving, as it was considered best to keep it all quiet until after the ghost party, Thalia was doing her good deed by trying to get the foreign girl, Dwila, to go to school. It was bound to be interesting if she could get her at school, and perhaps that, as well as Miss Sturgis’ orders, influenced Thalia in her desperate efforts.

“It would be a lot of fun if we could get her out of her shell,” thought Thalia. “But she would have to tuck up those braids or get tangled in traffic. Wouldn’t the boys think her a scream? Like an old bit of *bisque* statuary.”

So off went Thalia to Jacob’s cottage. This time *she* flipped the knocker, and Jacob’s wife, Lena, promptly opened the door.

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Lena was a squatty, squarish sort of woman, with a wide face, a wide part in her yellowish hair, a wide space between her gray-blue eyes, and, of course, she had a wide figure to match it all.

“Can I speak to you a moment, Mrs. Vroom?” smiled Thalia, getting one foot inside the door and beaming most graciously.

“Me you want?” Lena liked that. “Come in, yes, I take off my apron. So much work.” Lena’s smile was fully explanatory. The apron, however, was spick and span, and showed no signs of the “so much work.”

As Thalia followed from the small square hall into the big living room, she almost gasped.

“What a wonderful room.”

“But so big, such rough stone,” complained the farmer’s wife, with absolutely no appreciation for the real art of her surroundings. She squatted down in a glorious little carved wooden rocker, filling it to overflowing, while Thalia hated to sit in the chair placed for her, a high-backed ladder, exquisite in design and fascinating in period.

“Chairs are like people, don’t you think so?” Thalia foolishly ventured to ask the expansive Lena, who could only know chairs in their relation to people’s comfort.

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Thalia was thinking: “If only Carol and her folks could have a place like this. *They* would appreciate it.”

She had heard nothing of Carol’s new plans of going to live with Mrs. Becket, but even that would not mean their having this unique place. It seemed to Thalia that architects often do best with the smaller house, wherein they are not bound by formal plans, as in the big building on such an estate.

But she had only a moment to glance at the fieldstone hearth with the stone slab mantle, the wonderful rug that looked like a hooked design but must have come from some foreign land;

all this could not now hold Thalia's attention.

"I wonder, Mrs. Vroom, if you wouldn't like the girl—your niece, to come out with the other girls——"

"She won't go," Lena interrupted vehemently. "We say go out, but she is so mad with us, she never will go."

"Mad with you?" Thalia's manner was ingratiating, she was trying to win Lena's confidence by showing her own. "Why should she be mad with *you*?"

"She shouldn't, but she is." Lena lowered her voice and glanced toward the door at the end of the room. "See, there she goes. She hears us."

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"Where will she go?" Thalia cautiously asked.

"No place at all. Just around here all the time. She picks up leaves, pretty ones, but they make dirt. I throw them out. She hunts all over everywhere for flowers, says they make magic." She made a queer face at the idea and her eyes were almost lost in her pudgy cheeks. "But she is all right," the woman protested. "Not crazy, but silly."

"Romantic, maybe," Thalia suggested.

"Yes, that's it. She tinks queer stuff. She puts vines in all the bottles. Jacob dumps them out. But, ach! She's queer." The woman stood up as if that settled it.

"But she's your niece?"

“No, no. She’s not my kin. Just my sister’s friend’s girl. She was so crazy for music and dancing and stage stuff. Jacob said she could come here to get cured. And they paid Jacob good money, of course. But she isn’t gettin’ cured. Now, I guess maybe I take her home soon. If I can go.”

“That’s why you don’t send her to school,” Thalia began to see why. “Because she’s going back.”

“Yes, what’s the use? Anyhow, she likes to dress queer. It’s all that stage business. What you call stage——”

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“Stage-struck,” Thalia finished. “That’s too bad.”

“Very bad,” agreed the little woman with the braids wound around her wide head. “But she’s a very good girl, Dwila is, only just foolish,” she expounded. “And her mother in Vienna had so many children Dwila just went to dancing like the Russian girls, and she loves so much the opera music.” Lena paused and her face became a study in deep thinking. “It was the doctor over there said America might be good for her. All the excitement made her too nervous.”

“She isn’t sick?”

“No, not sick a bit. Just she wants dancing and music, so doctors say take all that away for a while. So here,” she spread out her hands, “here we are very quiet.”

“She may be too quiet,” Thalia kindly suggested.

“Sometimes she runs out and we let her go. We know she never goes away. And I tell Jacob let her work it off.” At this

Lena almost laughed but not quite, for Lena was not a jolly woman.

“Well,” said Thalia, feeling like the social service worker she told Carol she was sure to be taken for, “I would be awfully glad to have her meet some of the girls if ever she wants to. If only we could overcome her shyness, I’m sure she’d have a good time.”

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“That’s it, she’s too shy. Always running like a deer, and always writing letters. But we have plenty of work, and work is a good cure.”

As they stood a moment, Lena cautiously whispered:

“You see, my Jacob has little money now. He had all these mortgages and no one pays.”

“But you live here, free?”

“Free? Just the house. When we came from the old country just a young couple,” she smiled an apology for remembering they once were young, “Jacob had a little store. There that young man came in in his wheel chair.” She stopped and raised her eyes prayerfully. “Jacob liked him. We talked to him, and his father asked us to come here. So we came.” Again she stopped and looked about reverently.

“Oh, yes,” Thalia helped, “we have heard about the young man; he was only a boy and was hurt at college sport and died afterwards.”

“Yes, only a boy, a fine boy. We did love him. I used to

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wheel him in his chair. And Jacob made wooden things for him—” The look that sought these memory pictures made the plain Lena beautiful—her eyes were so filled with reverence. “But when he died,” she went on, “and his father fixed it so we can live here as long as we like, he didn’t know what hard times could come or how hard it would be to buy coal.”

In parting, Thalia felt she had made a friend of Lena, hoping sometime to make a friend of Dwila. Wouldn’t the girl be fascinating with her experiences in music and dancing? And perhaps, too, it was her good looks that made her fear for her future. She was too pretty not to know it some day, soon, and a too-pretty girl is always handicapped.

“That settles that!” Thalia secretly concluded. “No more need to try getting her to school. She could teach our teachers—music and dancing. But there’s no doubt about it, that Dwila girl would be a whole lot of fun.”

And Lena had said they let her run out when she wanted to, but pretended they didn’t know it. Thalia recalled that Bob had told her he saw the “freak” posting a letter before daylight at the box outside the big hedge. He said before daylight because it had been early—for Bob.

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“Too bad!” sighed Thalia, “I’m a total loss as a truant agent, but I’d hate to spoil that girl’s fun, if any. After all, why should she go to school?”

Near Oak Lodge drive she drew up a moment at the quaint little platform the railroad still maintained there. No trains

ever stopped there now, autos being used to bring passengers to the main station. But in deference to the important, near-by estates the platform was swept regularly by a trackman and the light under the roof was set glowing every night. Thalia only stopped long enough to pick a bunch of purple ironweed flowers and a few other brave, straggling blossoms.

“That mushroom station would make a fine meeting place for visiting ghosts,” she was thinking. “It ought to be torn down or given over to the Girl Scouts.” Thalia, being an outdoor girl herself, had a great respect for that big organization.

But it was too late for summer and too early for winter sports, the deadline in such activities.

CHAPTER XV

THE GHOST PARTY

It came with a rush, after all the talk and all the wild stories. It was the night of the ghost party. No one but Glenn and Thalia knew that the Duncans were going to move into Oak Lodge very soon after, in fact, by the end of the month, and that the packing, mostly books and the best of their old furniture, was already about finished. This packing had given their father, Mr. Duncan, a most happy release from enforced idleness.

“Don’t let’s take that old love seat,” protested Cecy. “It’s so old there’s whiskers on the roses.”

“That, my dear child,” explained her father, “is the first piece of furniture your mother and I bought after we were engaged.”

“Oh, the ring, so to speak,” dared the insolent Cecy.

“You might call it that,” her father answered, stopping, hammer raised to nail the box cover on some utensils Carol had insisted must be covered. “We were so happy to have found that piece in an auction room as we were walking home that evening,” (memories can be tragically sweet) “that we had it sent to your grandmother’s home to wait for our own. Yes, you are right, Cecy,” he surprisingly assured her,

“we sat on that love seat when I put the ring on your mother’s finger.”

“Dad,” she murmured, brushing back a stray hair to cover the brushing away of a stray tear, “I didn’t mean to be so—fresh.”

So the love seat was to be moved, as well as the old American chair, and the mirror no one could or would want to look in.

“Now we can take it easy,” Carol announced, “and enjoy the party. Cecy, I do hope you will act your age and remember how the older girls criticize *me*.” This was a mild warning, of course.

“Because they’re jealous,” fired back Cecy. “Everyone knows Jane Jackson has a hole in her lip from biting it. She just can’t stand any one else being popular.”

“Never mind Jane, she’s coming to the party herself.”

“My word! She is! Shall we stretch red carpet——”

“There you go, Cecy. Won’t you please just try to have a good time? None of the other younger girls are coming. Just you and Rosie.”

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“All right, Carol, I won’t tease.” Prospects were too bright for a good time to permit of even Cecy’s teasing.

So at last the big night had come. That was the night!

“But why don’t you wear your yellow dress?” Carol asked.
“It’s your best.”

“To a ghost party?”

“It is not going to be a rough party; we have made sure of that,” Carol insisted.

“How can you make sure? I’ll bet it will turn out plenty rough.” Cecy was dressed in her green organdie, pretty enough with her blond slimness, but her yellow dress was better.

“I promised Cousin Kitty it would be a thoroughly nice affair,” Carol primly stated.

“Is *she* going to be there?”

“Why?”

“You said she wasn’t.”

“She isn’t.”

Cecy’s expression changed; Carol noticed it.

“Why are *you* so anxious about her *not* being there?”

“Oh, nothing. But you know it’s always more fun when the old folks are away.”

“Old folks! Cousin Kitty isn’t old, but she was so anxious for us to have everything to ourselves she’s gone to New York. She really didn’t seem well enough,” went on Carol, “but the doctor thought the change might do her good.”

“Sure it will,” responded the jubilant Cecy, dancing around before the old cheval glass that didn’t have to be packed. “And there won’t be any one to worry about.”

“Worry about?”

“Oh, don’t be tragic, Carol. This is a party. I mean, of course, the old idea of too much noise, etc.”

“Aunt Mary will be there to keep order,” Carol reminded her.

“Aunt Mary? Oh, she’s a good sport. There’s the bell. I’ll go.”

From the door Carol could hear whispers, and, as she had feared, the vocal tones seemed to be that boy’s, Stubby’s.

“I hope *he* isn’t going to be hanging around,” she grumbled. “He always does loom up when he isn’t wanted.”

But Cecy was back, and with elaborate indifference and no explanation she fixed a foolish little curl on her forehead, over her left eye.

“Who was it?” Carol asked.

“Stubby.”

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“Stubby! What did *he* want?”

“If you must know, he wanted to know had I seen his green sweater any place. He lost it.”

“Cecy Duncan! What are you thinking of! His green

sweater!”

“What’s so terrible about that! He was good enough to run me over to Rosie’s the night you drove me out with my books, and it was so cold he loaned me his sweater. Don’t think his clothes are not clean, dainty darling, his sister takes good care of him.”

“He looks it,” retorted Carol. “Let’s hurry; I’ve got to be there early.”

“Go ahead. Rosie is calling for me.”

“Why not come with me?”

“Why should I? Don’t you know they always make the little girls do all the work? Run along, sister. I’ll be there, you can count on that.”

Carol was lovely in her scarlet chiffon. It had been necessary for her to keep attractive clothes as part of the overhead expense in playing the movie organ, and though she was not a famous housekeeper, she could keep her clothes in good shape. She always hung them carefully, and always took spots off promptly. Her taste was reflected in the fine details of her clothes, never really costly but always individual. The scarlet chiffon she was wearing tonight was nothing more than a swathing red flame, wrapped about her lithe form, but how it was wrapped!

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Glenn was driving her, and they picked up Thalia, Edna Bolling, and Marcia Walsh. Paul Hanley was no longer a strange boy in the crowd, his immediate popularity being

assured from the start. He was calling for Adele Shane, which arrangement pleased Carol, for Adele was inclined to hold back and depend upon Carol a good deal.

Glenn was having his family's sedan tonight and could well afford to be generous with lifts.

"Fine night for ghosts," was only one of his remarks as they sped toward Melody Lane, for remarks were merely an opportunity for a word in edgewise.

The light swinging under the mushroom station looked like a firefly amid the surrounding shadows.

"They're crazy to waste all that illumination," Glenn remarked as the car swung around the curve.

"It adds something to the scenery," remarked Carol, who was interested in everything around Melody Lane, now that she was soon to live there.

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At Oak Lodge the drive was already black with cars, but a lane to the door was left clear.

"Gorgeous place," Edna exclaimed, and Carol felt a little squeal of glee trying to escape, as she secretly sensed her own living in the gorgeous place. Lights beamed from the wrought iron lanterns at the massive door and oceans of lights streamed within.

No servants were to be in evidence, as the young folks wanted to do everything themselves. There was help in the kitchen, of course, with Lizzie Towner in full charge, and it was sure to

be full charge in Lizzie's kitchen.

When Carol and her friends entered, they were greeted with loud growls and queer noises, not even pretending to be made by ghosts, but by the crowd of boys on the organ loft, in close harmony. Bill Button, Bob, Paul, Tom, and as many others as could squeeze together were on the organ bench, while scattered around in squirms, curls, and impossible human knots, the boys were doing their best to make the big place sound like the high school auditorium on a Glee Club night and look like the gym in an exhibition.

“Whoa there!” yelled Glenn. “Don't choke, it's bad luck and might bring on the ghosts.”

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But that only produced more cheer and louder noises. Every new boy arriving joined the crowd until the stairs were impassable.

“It's always that way,” murmured Jane Jackson to Jean. “Boys make the fun and keep it to themselves.”

“Don't they, though?” agreed Leona, standing up to shake out possible wrinkles and to show off her new black velvet. Leona had style and wore black velvet in early fall.

“We've got to break that up,” Carol moved around to tell the girls. “The boys must think they are out in the great open spaces. Sounds to me like an Indian war cry, or something.”

“How can we break it up?” Jane was polite enough to ask. “No matter what we do, they'll take it for applause.”

“I’ll tell you, Carol, you jump up on that big chair in the corner and make a speech,” Thalia suggested. “No one will hear you, just make your mouth go.”

“Then we’ll all clap and maybe they will look this way,” suggested Edna, who had on a pretty dress herself and was petting a nice finger wave which she liked to display.

“Give them time,” Carol said agreeably. “After all, we asked the boys, and why shouldn’t they have a good time in their own way?”

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“Right you are,” intoned Thalia. “Jane, that’s an awfully pretty dress. Why don’t we ever see such colors?”

“Like it?” Jane was looking smart, and, as usual, beautifully groomed, which made up for her lack of actual prettiness. Her dress was a glorious deep orange. Her heavy brown hair framed her rather heavy features, with just enough of margin to look soft. Jane’s eyes were called aquamarine by her friends and green by her foes. She had a very special and studied way of using them.

Carol felt all the responsibilities of a hostess. Thalia was her first lieutenant and following in order were a number of other girls, willing and ready to pass things or pick things up, when the time came.

Cecy was hopping around with Rosie at her heels. It seemed to Carol, Cecy was being too jumpy, as if she might do something foolish, like breaking out into a song against the boys’ racket, or in some way betraying their great secret that this beautiful place was soon to be their own home.

“Cecy, why on earth don’t you sit down once in a while?” Carol joked, as the younger sister rushed to the front door, opened it and the next minute was in the end of the room near a door to the dining room.

She laughed at Carol and gave her arm a pinch in passing, merely remarking that the boys were fine on endurance, for there were still howls coming from the organ loft.

“We’ve got to break it up,” Marcia declared. “Go ahead, Carol. Pretend to make a speech. See if that doesn’t stop them.”

With a little more urging, Carol was standing on the semicircular window seat, with an appropriate candle light on either side and her audience in front, quite like the regular stage setting.

Of course she began by laughing. Titter after titter joined in, then roar after roar, until all the girls were simply howling in glee, as if Carol had made the funniest speech possible, when she hadn’t said a word.

The boys were beginning to slide down the stairs.

“Quick,” prompted Edna Bolling, “be talking about the ghost. Say, this ghost——”

“This ghost,” sang out Carol, “must be around here.” She stopped to choke a laugh. “We’ve all heard of it——”

“And some of us have seen it.” Who said that?

“So we came here tonight,” went on Carol, to an audience now, surprisingly, listening, “to see what we can do about it.”

“Sure!” yelled the boys.

“Let’s see,” suggested some one boy.

As if that had been a signal for real ghostly action, at that very moment the sound of clanking chains broke in on the happy party, clear, heavy, and appalling.

“Chains!” gasped a chorus of girls.

“Outside,” came from the boys; and the way they got outside through that front door looked like good football work with no interference.

CHAPTER XVI

PERIL

“Oh, mercy! What shall we do?” yelled the timid Adele, who hadn’t the slightest idea of doing anything. She just cuddled deeper into the big chair and hoped no ghost could find her there.

“Hear those chains!” Marcia liked the idea and was determined no one should miss it.

But it was rather terrifying. Chains, great, heavy inkling, ankling, clanging chains were making ominous threats of ghosts or something, somewhere; but where?

“Look at that little side porch,” Glenn was yelling.

“Turn on the car lights!” suggested Bob.

“Yeah; take it easy,” reported Billy Button, “and don’t get excited. See it!”

There was a grand rush to a corner of the house where the unused, narrow little steps led from a sharp end of the porch down to the walk.

“Hey! Hey! Let up there!” the ghost with the chains was

begging. “What’s the—”

“Idea of murdering a poor helpless ghost!”

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But no plea for mercy had any effect upon the combatants. There were just a few boys with car chains in the ghost brigade, to rattle good old car chains over the porch, but they were no match for the crowd that fell on them when their game was discovered.

“Oh, please don’t make so much noise,” Carol begged, though she had to make a lot of noise to hope to be heard. “We promised——”

“Yes, *you* promised us a ghost party,” panted Bob, “and when we supply the ghost——” he had hard work to ward off the raining blows, “look what happens.”

“Where are those chains?” yelled Tom Winters. “Don’t dump them out of reach. I’ve got to return them to the garage.”

But it took some time to get the boys, who were off the porch, on the porch again, and to get those on the porch from jumping back to the ground after the dodgers. The girls were glad of the fun, it was better than dancing, and although Aunt Mary had called to them to put wraps on, some were lingering outside with the boys, as some always will. It was lots better than the former harmony for boys only.

Aunt Mary came out to tell Carol and Thalia they must get everyone ready to eat, and those joyful tidings worked magic. In less than no time every boy and girl was inside, sitting down decorously, if not quietly, ready to eat.

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They didn't exactly have their mouths open or hands extended, but that was the general idea.

Thalia, Adele, Carol, and Marcia were taking the dishes from the stacks in the pantry, and even Jane, the high-hatter, had laid hold of a platter of sandwiches—to pass them, of course.

It was better to give the boys something good to eat, than to wait for the boys to find a girl later. Merrily they roamed around, all the ghost scare adding to the zest for the fine food Mrs. Becket, Aunt Mary, and Lizzie Towner had provided.

“Hunting ghosts should give you boys a good appetite,” Adele ventured to remark, as she passed the dish of old-fashioned ham sandwiches, with real ham in them, to Billy and Bob, who unwound their arms from each other's shoulders to accept the offering.

“Not that we need anything to help our appetites,” Bob, replied. “In fact, it might be risky——”

“Have you seen Cecy?” Carol came up to them asking, her voice anxious, her face very serious.

147

“Why, no,” Adele answered. “She was here when we all ran out.”

“But did you see her come in?”

No one had. Carol was plainly trying not to show her anxiety, but when she had easily located Rosie and Edna, Cecy's companions, and when no one could recall having seen Cecy since the chain racket on the porch, Carol was too anxious to

be longer composed.

“Might she have gone home with some one?” Thalia suggested.

“Oh, no, she wouldn’t do that,” Carol insisted.

“Or could she be taking a little ride?” Tom whispered. He didn’t want to be funny.

“No, Cecy would not go off without some of the girls; I’m sure of—” Carol stopped suddenly.

“What was that?” Thalia asked.

Instantly everyone listened. Wild shrieks had followed a loud bang. Some one was shrieking.

“A door slammed!” Glenn declared.

But Carol was waiting for no one. She thought that shriek was a cry from Cecy, and it was outside the house. She could not be deceived in Cecy’s cry.

Rushing out, girls and boys following, the cries could be heard—yes, they were outside, but where?

148

“The roof, the roof!” yelled Paul Hanley. “At the north side _____”

“Turn on the car lights!” ordered Glenn. “It’s dark as pitch.”

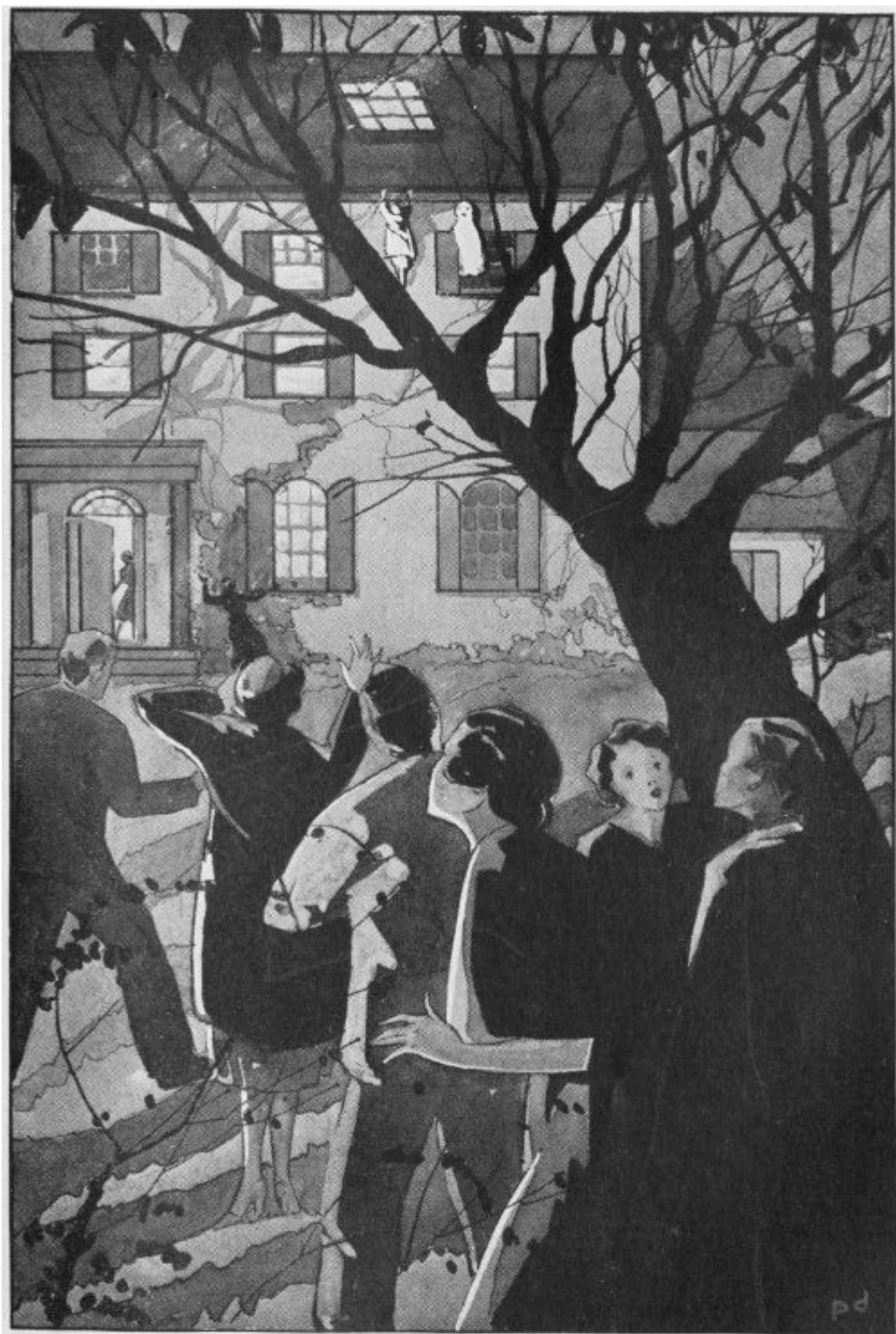
“But the roof is so—so high and pointed,” wailed Carol.

“How could anyone——”

At that moment a light, a spotlight from one of the boys’ cars, was trained on the side of the house, and there, dangling from the roof, was—surely it was Cecy!

“Cecy, Cecy!” cried Carol. “Don’t drop!”

“Hold on, we’ll get you!” came call after call, but there was something or some one else dangling beside Cecy.



**“HOLD ON, WE’LL GET YOU!” CAME CALL AFTER
CALL.**

“What is it?”

“The ghost—”

“That’s two pillows tied together—”

“Oh, Cecy, hold on!” shouted Marcia wildly.

But Carol was not among them. She had dashed into the house with Thalia, Glenn, and Paul after her.

“The back stairs!” She was gasping. “There’s a wall stairway _____”

Aunt Mary and Lizzie Towner had turned on every light in the house, and no one needed to say where they were going, as Carol led the way through the kitchen and up the back stairs.

149

Yes, there was that queer ladder built against the wall, and quickly as they reached the third stairs where this ladder began, they saw the lights leading up to the attic had been turned on.

“Why ever would she come up here?” Carol managed to say, as they hurried, hurried, to get to the ladder.

“Here, let me go first,” Paul insisted. “We’ve got to open that skylight!”

“But oh, suppose she can’t hold on!” poor Carol wailed.

“I’ll go into a bedroom here and call from a window,” Thalia offered. “I might even reach her, help her down.”

“No, there are no windows under that end,” Carol said in despair.

“Got it, Paul?” Glenn was asking the boy, who from the small footrest at the top of the ladder, directly under the skylight, was pushing against the framed glass, trying to open the window.

“Yes,” it was open, “here—it is!”

Quicker than the telling of it, Carol followed to the open skylight, supported by Glenn. Paul was on the roof.

“Don’t let go, Cecy,” he was calling. “We’re here!”

150

“Oh—I—can’t——”

“Cecy, darling,” wailed Carol. “Just another minute.”

“No wonder she slid down here,” Glenn took breath to say, for the slope of the roof from the skylight was steep and sharp.

“Now, don’t let—go—till I have you!” Paul was admonishing, for while he was now at the very edge of the roof, his feet far apart braced to the ledge, one false move and the poor girl dangling there might drop to her death.

“Please, dear Lord—” Glenn heard Carol pray. She was holding back, knowing the boys were better able to get Cecy

than she could possibly be.

“There! There!” Paul was whispering, but even with the powerful spotlight from the car below trained fully on the point of peril, there were dark corners, and Carol, crouched safely from falling, put her hands over her eyes and held her breath.

“Have you, have you—” she tried to ask.

“Yes, we’ve got her! All right, Carol. All right, everybody!”

It was Glenn calling out the news; Paul was holding Cecy.

“You go down, Carol,” Glenn said to the girl who, herself, seemed so near collapse. “Cecy will be safer—I mean in less danger of falling, if we take her down.”

151

Carol saw Cecy, poor frightened, terrified Cecy, sitting still on the roof, but on the edge near the skylight. Paul was holding her there. The lights Paul and Glenn were using were powerful hand flash lights, set to stay lighted. What a change had come over Cecy! She seemed limp, lifeless.

“Are you all right, dear?” Carol faltered.

But Paul answered: “Certainly. You go down first, Carol. We’ll be right along.”

“If you go to the second floor and tell Aunt Mary to have a bed ready—” Glenn began.

“It’s all ready.” Aunt Mary had heard and answered from the

attic stairway. “Carol and Thalia,” she called out, “you tell the crowd everything is all right. That Cecy got caught with the skylight closed—”

“That she went up there to stop some one from playing the pillow-ghost trick on us,” Glenn added quickly.

“Did she?” Carol asked, stopping so suddenly in her ladder descent, she literally fell into Aunt Mary’s arms.

“Certainly,” said Aunt Mary, as she would, to back up anything Glenn might say.

Carol then realized Aunt Mary’s and Glenn’s plan was to give the crowd that simple story, as they would be naturally eager to hear all about the adventure on the roof.

152

“But that other thing, that—stuffed ghost?” Carol reminded Glenn.

“That’s it,” he replied. “Tell them some one wanted to drop that down to scare us, and Cecy went up to stop them. Then the door slammed, and it only opens from the inside.” While Glenn was saying this in a hurried whisper he had hold of Cecy on one side, while Paul supported her on the other. Aunt Mary was holding Carol back and urging her to go downstairs to the waiting boys and girls while she, herself, put Cecy to bed.

“She must be put right to bed,” Aunt Mary was wisely saying. “She’s had a shock, and she must rest.”

“A shock!” Carol repeated.

“Yes, whatever it was, it shocked her, and the way she cries shows she’s hysterical.” Cecy was sobbing and moaning. “Better leave her alone with me. If you are there, she is apt to have a worse attack.”

Which was correct. When persons are hysterical, strangers are their best nurses.

CHAPTER XVII

SHE SAW IT

While all this was going on between the roof and the upper floors, the young folks waiting below had suddenly changed from a noisy party to an anxious crowd. While Cecy had been hanging in peril over that high jutting roof, scarcely a word had been spoken, each one feeling responsible for the sort of quiet that defies the slightest sound, lest any trifling shock should have meant Cecy's fall and terrible consequences.

When more light had been needed higher on the roof, Bob had switched the big spotlight until a flood of gleam spread over the house.

Now Carol and Thalia were coming down the stairs.

“Is she hurt?” Rosie was asking.

“Where is Cecy?” demanded Marcia.

“Her poor hands!” sighed Leona.

“Carol, don't talk, don't say a word. You look like a ghost yourself,” said Jane, who so lately had been considered an enemy. “Come over on the couch. Jean, please bring her some good, strong coffee.”

Which was none too soon, for Carol indeed was all but collapsing.

“Thanks, Jane,” she said, her eyes more eloquent. “Hasn’t this been dreadful?”

“Not so bad,” spoke up Bob. “Two ghosts at one party is pretty good, I’ll say. Take it easy, Carol. Your little sister is no coward. We are all ready to tell that to the world,” Bob wound up loyally.

“Brave!” echoed Billy. “I never in my life saw a girl do a stunt like that before.”

“Hope she’s all right,” Marcia said quietly.

“How about all going home?” Paul suggested.

“Quietly and orderly. A grand idea,” Thalia carried the motion.

They were gone surprisingly soon—all but Thalia and Glenn, who insisted upon staying with Carol and Cecy.

“Please, Thally,” Carol was saying, “ask Aunt Mary if I can’t go up now. I must talk to Cecy.”

“All right, dear.” Carol had been begging to see her sister, but Aunt Mary insisted she be left quiet. But now Carol was going up the stairs. At the top Aunt Mary stopped her.

“Come in here,” she whispered, directing the way to a small reading room. Carol followed.

“What *is* the matter?” she asked in deep concern. “What has happened?”

“I couldn’t let her talk, she was so hysterical,” Aunt Mary replied. “Of course, I couldn’t stop her talking, she talked constantly, but I did not dare ask questions. Sit down a minute.”

“Can’t I see her?” Carol was truly alarmed.

“Certainly, after I tell you to do as I have done; let her talk, it may relieve her, but don’t put any more strain on her by asking questions.”

“Yes, Aunt Mary, I’ll do exactly as you say,” Carol willingly promised. “But why did she go up there? Have you found out?”

“She keeps saying, ‘I saw it, oh, Aunt Mary, I saw it!’”

“What?”

“Perhaps what you and I heard that night,” whispered Aunt Mary. “Certainly you and I *heard* something the night Mrs. Becket was hurt.”

“Yes,” said Carol. She had slumped down in the chair and was the picture of despair. If Cecy had seen what they had heard—what Carol had seen out that window—what could it be?

“Aunt Mary, dear, you know we are coming to live here. I planned this party tonight to prove to everyone this was a—

wonderful place. And see what has happened!”

“After all, dear, what *has* happened? Your friends, Glenn says, now know your sister as well as they know you, and they think her wonderful.”

“That’s what amazes me,” Carol replied. “My first thought, after knowing Cecy was safe, was what would they think? What would they say? And here they are praising my little sister.”

“That proves, doesn’t it, dear, that we have better friends than we realize? But you can go over to her now. She can’t be alone. I left her dozing.” Aunt Mary did not tell Carol that a very small dose of bromide had been necessary to quiet the hysterical girl to the point of dozing.

Carol found Cecy lying in the pretty guest room bed, her clothes removed and a blue gown around her shoulders. As they opened the door, she opened her eyes.

“Carol!” she cried out sharply.

“Yes, dear. Carol is here with you.” She had taken the slim hand and was stroking it affectionately. Then Carol put her head down to the one on the pillow and pressed her cheek against her sister’s. “Darling,” she murmured.

157

“Oh, Carol! Where have you been? I wanted you so.” The voice was hoarse, strange. Cecy had surely had a severe shock.

“You are all right——”

“But I saw it! I tell you I saw it!”

“Yes, I know, Cecy. But nothing is going to hurt you,” Carol tried to reassure the sobbing girl.

“You don’t know,” she began again. “I tell you I was all right, everything was all right,” she gulped, “until I saw—that!”

“What?” Carol had asked.

“That—white thing—moving among the trees! Oh, Carol it must have been the—ghost!”

“Now, Cecy!” Aunt Mary protested beside her. She had motioned Carol away. “You promised if I let Carol in you would be quiet.”

“Yes, I know.” She sighed deeply.

“It was my fault,” admitted Carol. “I asked her.”

“Let me talk! I’ve got to tell Carol, or Dad. Where is Dad?” The shrill tones threatened more hysteria.

“Tell *me*, dear, I’ll get Dad.” At the moment Carol remembered she had asked Paul to stop and tell their father they were staying for the night with Aunt Mary. Now she must quiet Cecy, who had sprung up in the bed and was throwing her arms wildly about her in an attempt to explain.

158

“First,” muttered Cecy, “I just saw a light.”

“But what harm was there in a light?” Carol tried to point out.

“That wasn’t all,” Cecy went on, with gasping breath.

“Well, what else?” Carol was being very patient.

“It was something tall and white—oh, very like what a ghost should be. It floated up and up and up——”

“Then it must have gone up into the trees,” Carol interrupted.

“It did!” declared Cecy. “Right up into the trees, almost as if it might be an angel! It floated so lightly, so airily, and so silently,” she recalled breathlessly.

“Did it disappear?” asked Aunt Mary, a bit surprised herself.

“For a time I thought it did,” Cecy went on. Her voice was only a whisper now. “Then it floated down again and went up. Then I didn’t see it any more.”

159

“Not much to be frightened at!” suggested Aunt Mary. “Probably a wisp of fog.”

“It wasn’t fog, I’m sure!” Cecy declared. “But that wasn’t all.”

“What else?” Carol still was patient.

“The white hand and the light and—and the rose—a white rose!”

“A *white rose!*” Carol and Aunt Mary exclaimed together.

“Yes. I could see the rose because the round light was right

beside it!” Cecy declared, and her voice was very positive.

“But *where* did you see it?” Aunt Mary asked, very cautiously.

“Where? Down by the lane that leads to that path——”

“The one to the ice house door?” Carol suggested.

“I guess so. I was just at the skylight, had just stood up to—to ——” She hesitated. Even in her weakness she seemed able to hide the real reason for her journey to the roof. Neither Carol nor Aunt Mary interrupted her story.

“I just stood there tugging at that crazy rope——”

“With the stuffed pillows dangling over the edge?”
Carol did prompt that much.

160

“Yes. I didn’t want them to go—down—in front of the windows.” As she said all that, Cecy buried her head in the pillow. It was evidently a part of her confession.

“I know,” Aunt Mary appeased her. “You were trying to fool whoever was going to play that ghost trick on the crowd downstairs.”

“Yes, I was. I was determined to. I wasn’t going to have Carol talked about and laughed about——” She talked rapidly now.

“Don’t, Cecy, dear,” begged Carol, for her sister was sobbing again, and she feared another hysterical outburst.

“Carol! Carol!” she wailed. “If only I had listened to you!”

“But you were doing something to help me,” Carol insisted.

“That was too late.” Cecy had stopped sobbing, stopped tossing, she seemed utterly exhausted, almost asleep.

Aunt Mary took Carol aside. “She’ll sleep,” she whispered. “Slip out.”

Carol leaned over to press her lips to Cecy’s cheek, but Cecy did not seem to feel the tear that dropped so lightly there.

Aunt Mary motioned for silence. Carol tiptoed out of the room after her.

161

“Thalia and Glenn must go,” she told Carol. “Thalia wants you to go home with her.”

“To Thalia’s?”

“Yes, dear. You should, you must.”

“But I must stay here——”

“No. She will sleep now. I gave her a bromide. She is not hurt. It is just shock.”

“But Cecy is like that. Always so nervous. She will want me,” protested Carol, leaning against the doorpost, dejectedly.

“No, believe me, dear, she is better with strangers. Nervous girls always are. When she sees you, she goes all to pieces.”

“I suppose that’s so,” Carol interrupted. “And Thalia and Glenn should go. It’s so late.”

They stood at the foot of the stairs, waiting for her. She managed a smile that was more like a flickering shadow of sadness.

“You have been so good to wait,” she began.

“How is she?” whispered Thalia. Glenn was holding out Carol’s coat.

“Quiet now. But hasn’t it been dreadful?” Her arms were in her coat and Thalia jammed the little hat on her head.

“It’s all right as long as Cecy held on to that roof,” Glenn murmured. “Gosh! I never saw such grit.”

162

“Poor kid!” said Thalia, “she was trying to save the party.”

What surprised Carol was that this attitude should be taken. She, herself, felt everyone would blame Cecy for *spoiling* the party.

“I really should go home to Dad,” she hesitated.

“No, indeed, you shouldn’t. I phoned him you were coming with me,” Thalia told her. “If you went home tonight, you could never deceive *your* dad. Think of all that worry.”

“Thally, you’re a dear.”

“What about me?” Glenn had his arm in Carol’s, and after

having been upstairs just long enough to say good night to his Aunt Mary, he was now all ready to drive the girls home.

“I hate to go,” Carol held back. Her eyes were heavy with fatigue, but more heavy with crushing love and anxiety for her little sister.

“You know Aunt Mary,” Glenn reminded her. “I don’t lend her out to *all* my girls.”

“Yes, I do know her, Glenn,” Carol said as they softly opened the big door. Lizzie Towner, the picture of a maid in distress, stood waiting to lock it after them. She wasn’t wringing her hands, but she seemed dying to. The young folks smiled confidently as they bade her good night.

163

“Who took Adele home?” Carol asked, as they got into the car.

“Paul,” Thalia told her. “Do you know, Paul was dreadfully worried about Cecy?”

“He’s a nice boy,” Carol was looking up at the window where the light marked Cecy’s room in the darkness. As she watched, the light was lowered, and she knew Aunt Mary was tucking in the sick girl; she hoped she was asleep.

“Know what?” Glenn suddenly asked. “Ted was driving in from Overton just when we were outside trying to save Cecy, he was late but determined to come for a few minutes. And he told me he saw that guy Stubby driving for dear life away from here.”

“Stubby!” Carol exclaimed.

“Yes,” Thalia joined in. “I’ll bet he was the genius who thought up the fat ghost made of a big bolster. That was what fell from the roof.”

“Then Cecy was fighting *his* plan,” Carol said slowly. “But she hasn’t mentioned his name—yet.”

CHAPTER XVIII

NOT STUBBY

The night was crisp and clear, the sky twinkling with spangled stars.

“Nothing like a gust of fresh air to clear the head,” Thalia remarked as their car, all windows open, swung out from Melody Lane into the crossroad that would bring them to Thalia’s home.

“The air was pretty fresh tonight when those girls were out in their thin things,” Glenn added. “Bet they’ll have colds tomorrow.”

“But, Glenn, dear,” continued Thalia, “there’s something about thin clothes and excitement which always saves a girl from getting cold. It may be her one grand attempt of showing what a husky she is.”

Carol was not joining in the persiflage. Instead, she put a question to Glenn.

“Are you sure Stubby was not around the place after we found Cecy on the roof?”

“Sure as shootin’. But I am also sure he was there

before and hoisted the fat ghost; the one made from his family bolster. What won't happen when his sister misses that bolster?"

"I'm just trying to get the thing straightened out," Carol went on. "Cecy was hanging there after having seen the thing——"

"What thing?" both asked at once.

"Oh, I forgot, you hadn't heard about it. She couldn't give any real clear idea, she cried so hysterically, but she did say she had just got the skylight open, and was standing tugging at the string——"

"To pull the fat ghost back," Glenn inserted.

"And she insisted she was all right till she saw that thing, then she slipped." As Carol talked, Glenn had slowed the car so that no traffic noise interfered.

"Did she say what she saw?" Thalia asked.

"A white thing floating in the trees, and something with a round light, and—a—white—rose!"

"Carol! A white rose!" Thalia exclaimed.

"Yes."

"What's so tricky about a white rose?" broke in Glenn. "My mother has a bush full, and we have them three times a day."

"Garden roses are out of season," Thalia reminded him.

“Maybe,” he agreed. “But our kind is doing first rate in a corner of the sun porch. Mother says roses are very much misunderstood. All they want is peace and quietness.”

“Like the rest of us,” murmured Carol, with a deep-drawn sigh.

A little later, in Thalia’s lovely room, both girls sank down gratefully. It had been a strenuous night, and while many questions were urging for answers, both knew that sleep should get in somewhere.

“Do you want the bed by the window, Carol, or this one?”

“Whichever one you don’t usually use.”

“I have no choice. If I want to get up early, I fling up the shade and go by the window. If it is to be just one of the common everyday days, I flop anywhere. The beds aren’t a bit strange,” she joked. “Neither will know the difference.”

So in the yellow guest pajamas, under the softly shaded bedside lamp, Carol presently found herself opposite Thalia.

“I hope Cecy——”

“Now look here, Carol,” Thalia interrupted, “if you insist upon talking, let me do it. Cecy is all right, as Glenn says, a great kid.” Thalia shifted her pillow until it was balled into a doorknob. “And that good-looking Paul——” She paused to draw an appropriate deep breath of approval—“he seems to have found out long before tonight what a peach Cecy is. And all this time, big sister, you have been treating

her like a baby!”

“I suppose I have.”

“It often happens. We read about the strong girl and the weak little sister. That’s why they get that way. Now, Carol, like a lamb, shut up. I’m dead.”

Strong light was streaming in at the window by Thalia’s bed when the girls again remembered things. Funny, they both seemed to wake together, for they found themselves looking into each others eyes.

“Hello!” crooned Carol. Her nerves were rested, her voice vibrant.

“Yourself,” continued Thalia. “Slept so hard I thought I was dead.” She kicked off the covers. “How did you sleep?”

“The same way. May I phone?” She was reaching to the bedside table.

“Go ahead. But don’t promise anything. We’ve got to eat, and hurrying kills more people—” Thalia settled deeper into her pillow as Carol phoned.

Thalia’s unhurried breakfast was over; her guest, Carol, agreeing it was luxurious not to hurry the first meal of the day.

“We have such sketchy meals,” she told Thalia. “Only for Cecy, Dad and I would eat off the gas range. I hate

housework.”

“It is trying,” said the complaisant Thalia, who had stacked the pretty dishes and was bringing them from the nook to the kitchen, in defiance of all contrary social rules. The Bonds kept but one maid and knew how to treat her.

“Lucky it’s Saturday,” said Carol, referring to their freedom from school.

“That’s why you had a Friday night party, wasn’t it?”

“Yes, naturally. I must run over to see Dad before I go to Cecy. He’s alone and helpless; besides, everything’s packed but the looking glasses,” said Carol.

“Inspiration!” Thalia struck a silly pose that put an awful strain on her blue sports skirt. “Let’s make him a breakfast basket. They say at camp I’m pretty good at baskets, getting some one else to fix them up, you know. There’s Felice in the kitchen,” and she was off to the kitchen to order a breakfast basket for Carol’s father, in that playful way that disarmed all embarrassment. Wasn’t Thalia simply splendid!

She stayed a few moments in the kitchen herself, poking her head in the door at intervals to ask did he like honeydew melon, or if he liked applecake. Carol knew what a treat her dad was going to have, and while impatient to get to Cecy, the breakfast basket was promising to be a great lift in the day’s uncertainties.

Thalia drove Carol home with the basket, but waited for her outside. Carol was back in a few minutes, her face still

echoing that smile her father bestowed upon her.

“A picnic for Dad, Thally, is a carnival for the whole family,” she told her friend. “And I rather think he had been pining for homemade applecake.” She looked back at the house to see, as usual, her dad waving from the window. She waved gaily, but could not help the little squeeze that caught at her breath when she remembered that this little house, home for some years past, would soon be but a memory. Thalia must have guessed this sentiment, for she instantly began a running talk of everything except homes.

Then over the road to Mrs. Becket’s. A big car, the one Mrs. Becket had been driving home in from New York, was in the driveway.

“I’m glad Cousin Kitty is back,” Carol remarked. “If there are any explanations due her about last night, I shall be glad to get them over with.”

170

“Now look here, Carol; I want to tell you something. We’ll stop here a minute.” She stopped the small car and turned to face Carol. “You still seem to think there was something disgraceful in Cecy’s adventure. It’s the other way round.”

“But she did go up there and cause all that excitement!”

“Yes, so she did, and she took a big chance on her own safety in doing it. But if you could have heard what those youngsters said was going on down there while you and Glenn, Paul, and I were inside trying to rescue Cecy, you would understand things better.”

“I know they were all dreadfully anxious about her. Marcia said no one breathed while—she hung there.”

“I know, but I don’t mean that exactly. I mean all this ghost business has now been completely cleared up.”

“Why? How can you say that?”

“I mean as far as all the others are concerned. Don’t you see, when Ted, or was it Tom, came driving in just after the crowd had gone inside the house, *he* told them about having met Stubby escaping. That simply solved the mystery to them. They believed, and we believe, that Stubby was trying the ghost trick with the twin pillows, and it didn’t work. Cecy wouldn’t let it work. So, of course, they instantly blamed Stubby for doing it all, and to them there is no more ghost story.”

171

“Oh, I see,” said Carol, her face confirming the statement.

“Well, I’m glad you do, I thought you never would.” Thalia was starting the car. “So whatever else happened last night, the ghost stories of Oak Lodge are explained.”

“But—are—they?”

“They are not. But that’s our affair. Let’s get going. We’ve been standing here too long!”

“But just another minute, Thally. I must ask you before I meet Cousin Kitty. Do you think we, I mean our family, should come to live here, now?”

“For Pete’s sake, why not?”

“If these queer things are going to keep on happening——”

“And if you are right here, on the ground floor, you will very quickly find out how and why they happen.”

“But we couldn’t have our nerves on edge all the time.”

172

Carol was no softy, but she knew about nerves, especially Cecy’s nerves.

“You’re not believing in ghosts!” exclaimed Thally as her car neared the steps.

“No, not the disappearing kind. But I do believe queer things can make a queer lot of trouble.”

There was not time for another word. Cecy was already at the door. Her face was scratched and comically streaked with mercurochrome, and her hands were bandaged. But no one remarked about these things, just a smile of complete understanding seemed all that was necessary.

Cecy greeted them with girlish laughter. “Did you think I would be dead this morning?” she managed to say, as Carol kissed her and Thalia pinched her.

“Dead! We’re the ones to be dead,” Carol answered. “You had Aunt Mary. Oh, hello Cousin Kitty! You missed it. Your mansion is more famous than ever.”

Mrs. Becket, too, had a kiss all ready, and in her gracious way she put all three girls before the blazing hearth fire in the

library, before any one of them had time to do more than chatter, and gurgle, and giggle, all about “last night.”

Experienced with girls and loving even their silliness, she joined Aunt Mary in the dining room, while the three girls had a perfectly hilarious time, trying to tell one another about it. Cecy carried off the honors, for both Carol and Thalia felt she had a good right to, so they let her do a whole lot of the talking.

173

“The one big thing that stands out in my mind,” Carol interjected, “is how fine they all were.”

“How fine!” repeated Thalia. “What do you mean? Did you expect them to peg stones up at Cecy?”

They laughed at that, but Carol persisted.

“What I mean is, they forgot all their hard feelings.”

“Surely. A real test will do that. I learned it in a book—at camp. A mean girl was the meanest thing until a cat got a bird. Then she was the only one in the bunch that would do anything for that poor wounded bird. We were all either afraid of the cat or too nice to touch the bird.”

“Certainly,” said Cecy, adjusting her glasses. “One thing, Carol, you can give me credit for,” she suggested. “I saved my glasses.”

“How?”

“I left them downstairs.”

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Another laugh. Cousin Kitty and Aunt Mary were there now to join in. This gave Carol a chance to *casually* slip out and wink Aunt Mary along with her.

Out of reach of the others' hearing, Carol asked many questions about Cecy.

“Did she sleep?”

“Of course. It's wonderful to be young.” But Aunt Mary's ready smile also proved it is wonderful to be middle-aged, kind, and well loved. “She just asked where you were, and while I pretended to be answering her, she was off to sleep. This morning she was up and dressed and down in the kitchen showing Lizzie how to make puffball biscuits, before I had my eyes entirely open. She's a great little cook,” conceded Aunt Mary, who ought to know about cooks, good, bad, and indifferent.

“Then you think—did she say anything about our coming here to live?”

“Well, no, she didn't exactly,” Aunt Mary sort of hesitated. “But I'm sure that will be all right. Wait until you hear Mrs. Becket's plans.”

They were calling Carol, and she went back to the group in the library.

“Don't walk without your cane, Cousin Kitty,” she warned Mrs. Becket. “Besides, a cane is frightfully aristocratic,” she mocked the possible need of any such support.

“They have been telling me what a wonderful time they had last night,” Mrs. Becket answered the cane order. “I hope Cecy didn’t try too hard to lay the foolish, fat ghost,” she laughed.

“Well,” exclaimed Thally, who was ready to leave and let Mrs. Becket and the Duncan girls talk quietly over their personal affairs—“well,” she began again, “all I can say is, Cecy is a great little ghost layer.”

CHAPTER XIX

A GRAND PLAN

No, Cecy was determined. She just couldn't come to live there. She wouldn't sleep a wink.

"But listen, please, Cecy," Carol was speaking. "You know we must move somewhere."

Aunt Mary, Cousin Kitty, Carol, and Cecy were together, talking of the Duncans' moving into Oak Lodge. They all knew that Cecy's fright from the night before and her insistence that she had really seen a ghost, "a thing that couldn't be human, moving about under the trees, a dead white hand holding a white rose with a light behind it"—that all this would be sure to frighten the girl so badly, she would not now want to come to the old mansion.

"I know it's dreadful, and Cousin Kitty offering to let me pick out new furniture for my own room." Cecy was sniffing a little. "Nothing could make me happier than that." She smiled thankfully at the gentle lady sitting there, still cameolike, although it was morning, and Mrs. Becket was wearing a soft, blue wool suit she had come down in from New York. "But you see, I went at it so deliberately" (no one had spoken to her about Stubby's part) "that when I was just ready to yank that rope with the bolster on, the *real thing*

came out of the darkness—” she paused and put a bandaged hand to her eyes—“I felt so guilty. As if I had done something—to actually arouse the—*real ghost!*”

“Let me tell you all something,” Mrs. Becket said, quite seriously. “The night I fell and was hurt, I was in precisely the same situation that Cecy experienced when she was hurt.”

“Do tell us,” breathed Carol, for no one yet had heard all that part of the story.

“I had heard a noise around the side porch under the organ loft,” Mrs. Becket began again. “You know, the porch there has a rail that runs almost in line with the glass window on the first stair landing. It is not a half story high there, and standing on the flat rail top one can reach the window.”

They all nodded assent, but no one interrupted. All were too eager to hear the details of that night’s story.

“Just like Cecy, too, when I heard a queer rustling, somewhere around the organ window, I was determined to find out what it was. When the girls were stopping their music because of foolish ghost stories, I had to be determined,” she explained.

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“That’s exactly how I felt,” Cecy interrupted. “When I found out *some one*” (she seemed too ashamed to say Stubby) “was going to play a ghost joke and have that thing drop all the way from the roof——”

“Was he going to let it dangle there?” Aunt Mary asked casually.

“Only for as long as he made sure it had scared everybody. Then he was ready to cut the rope from the little porch, grab the thing, stick it in the car, and—race away.” Cecy stopped abruptly.

“He did race away,” Carol said, “but he didn’t get his ghost. But please go on, Cousin Kitty.”

“I had not been feeling well that evening,” she continued. “You remember, Carol, Thalia and Cecy had come over to see me.”

“Yes. They said you were really sick.”

“Indigestion, I suppose,” Mrs. Becket tried to make light of her sick spell. “Well, I was lying in the dark, because there must have been something the matter with the power.”

“There was,” Carol put in. “We heard afterwards there was trouble on the electric lines. We were here in the dark for quite a while.” She did not say it had seemed to her as long as the Dark Ages.

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“As I kept hearing the noise, I went up the stairs with the little candle lighted. We keep it handy, you know, because the lights are so uncertain. The strange carpenter had been in, you know, Carol, and I thought he might have left the little window open.” They nodded, and Mrs. Becket continued. “I had the candle in my hand and I was going up cautiously. My head was still a little dizzy, when suddenly, right in front of the leaded glass window, I saw a round light.”

“That’s just what I saw!” Cecy exclaimed.

“I blew out my candle (I had matches with me), then I thought I saw a hand, holding something! It looked so unearthly, I slipped and fell. I was sort of shocked, I guess.” Mrs. Becket stopped her account there.

No one spoke for some minutes. Aunt Mary found it necessary to soften her cushion, and Carol got up to walk to the window. Cecy sat there, looking at Mrs. Becket as if the two of them alone shared some mysterious secret.

Carol came back to her chair and sat down. Mrs. Becket’s story and Cecy’s story were very much alike, both mentioning the white rose. Again she was puzzled. Aunt Mary spoke first.

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“Now let’s settle it all,” she began. “We certainly do not believe in ghosts.”

“Don’t we?” burst out Cecy.

“No, we don’t,” Aunt Mary insisted. “Not the common kind, anyway. We always find out what we thought were spirits were just flesh and blood. Some one is around here, that’s certain. They may not mean any harm. But why can’t we four just get together, fight our fears, and solve the mystery?”

“Good for you, Aunt Mary,” Carol applauded. “That’s exactly my idea, and count me as leader in the hunt.”

“But I just—couldn’t—again,” moaned Cecy. “You don’t know what it’s like, Carol.”

“All right, Cecy,” Carol replied. “We won’t urge you. You

have had a shock. And Cousin Kitty too. She should not be here if there is danger of any more shocks.”

“But I’d hate to miss it,” Mrs. Becket pointed out.

“Well, we’ll see,” tempered Aunt Mary. “Carol, why not pack Cecy off to New York to spend a week with the Todds?”

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“Oh, glorious!” sang out Cecy, “a grand idea. And I could buy my lovely things Cousin Kitty is treating me to. Miriam Todd wrote again last week. She’s going to work in a branch library.”

“If Miriam brings the other branch of the library home with her, Cecy will have a glorious time,” Carol inserted.

It was indeed a splendid solution of the new problem, for Cecy was too nervous to be useful if the Duncan family were going to move in, as they had arranged, two days later.

From that moment, in spite of her bandaged hands and mercurochrome face, there were no more ghosts for Cecy. She was off ghosts for life—going to New York to buy things.

“It’s so wonderful of you, Cousin Kitty,” she panted, “to let me get a new bedroom suite. Are you sure you really want it?”

“Cecy, dear, I’ve got to have it. That room is all right, but its furnishings are dreadful. I’m just delighted to have a young girl’s taste in the selection,” Mrs. Becket assured the excited Cecy.

“When can I go, Carrie?” When Cecy called Carol
“Carrie,” it was a love feast.

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“Tomorrow, I suppose, if we are to be rid of you for the moving. But you know, Cecy, *you’re* the housekeeper.”

“But she won’t have to be housekeeper here,” Mrs. Becket reminded them. “That’s what Lizzie is for.”

“Think of it!” exhaled Cecy. “No more orders all written and all scratched out because the grocery sends a new list of specials! Carol, maybe I’ll even get fat now.”

“How do your hands feel?” her sister asked.

“They’re all right; I’ve just got the rags on for effect and to mind Aunt Mary. And my face. How do you like the decoration?” She was going toward a mirror to find out how she, herself, liked it.

“There’s the mail,” Aunt Mary told them. “I’ll get it.”

“Oh, my! However did they get party letters written so soon. There’s one from Jane,” said Carol, handing to Mrs. Becket an envelope with Jane’s monogram upon the flap.

When Mrs. Becket read it, she smiled and handed it to Carol. “It is really as much to you as to me,” she said.

Carol read the short note. “That’s fine of Jane,” she remarked the next moment. “She says she’s terribly sorry she has been so silly about everything, and will do all she can to get the girls back into the Choral Club.”

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“Because,” said Cecy archly, “you made Glenn run her out home when she found she had to go back for something, maybe a hankie. I’ll tell you, Carol, when you want to fight a real battle with any girl, just ask Glenn to help out.”

“Cecy, don’t be absurd. I think it’s fine of Jane. She always has the girls with her, and what she says they will do,” insisted Carol. “At any rate, Cousin Kitty, when we get rid of our secret ghost, we should give them all a real party.”

“Hey, Carol!” called out the irrepressible Cecy. “What do you say if *I* give a party tonight?”

“You!”

“Don’t choke. I know how I look, and I know about parties. What I mean is, I’ll cook up one big fine meal at our old house. I’ll get Rosie over, and she’ll do everything I tell her, but these rags,” she was pulling them off, “are no longer needed. And I’ll wash my face.”

Which seemed like a good idea, and in this, at least, everyone agreed with Cecy.

“I’ve still got things to pack,” Carol told them, “and if we were in better order, we would ask you to come, Cousin Kitty and Aunt Mary.”

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“We are going to have a try at Cecy’s cooking when she comes back from New York,” Mrs. Becket interrupted. “And let me tell you now, though my words cannot tell you half of it, I am very, very happy at the prospect of having a real family with me again.” Her eyes were misty and her voice

restrained.

“I think the whole idea is perfect,” Aunt Mary declared. “All I hope is, you’ll save room for me, when *I* want to visit.”

“Room!” exclaimed Carol.

“Indeed,” added Mrs. Becket, “if it hadn’t been for Aunt Mary——”

“I wonder why real Aunt Marys are so scarce,” mused Carol.

CHAPTER XX

SISTER AND BROTHER

She was all ready; Cecy was actually going to New York.

“You know, Cecy,” said Carol rather proudly, “I wouldn’t let you go to New York and run around with Miriam if I didn’t know Martha. She’ll keep track of you. I missed Martha when they moved to New York.”

“Yes, it’s wonderful, having big sisters. You’re mine, Martha is Miriam’s. But listen, Carol, I want to tell you *all*, as they say in confessions, before I go.”

“All what, Cecy? The man is coming to give us a price on moving this precious stuff. If it wasn’t precious as family keepsakes, it wouldn’t be worth moving at any price.” Carol wondered why her dad would insist upon the big floor lamp with the terribly tasselled shade.

“About the bolster ghost,” Cecy said quickly, as if she were afraid of backing out. “I must tell you. I have felt so ashamed of myself.” She stopped. Cecy really looked like a little girl when she took her glasses off and put her finger to her lip that way.

“Don’t worry about that any more, Cecy.”

“I won’t, after I tell you. But at first, Caro, I thought it would be a good joke. I told Stubby so.”

“Cecy!”

“Yes, I know how it all looks now, but it didn’t seem that way at all then. It was before we had thought of moving there.”

“But didn’t you think of Cousin Kitty?”

“Certainly, but she wasn’t going to be there, you know. And besides, Carol, what was so bad about an old bolster? Didn’t the boys drag chains?”

Carol hesitated. She had not liked Cecy’s confession. Yet, it was true that other ghost pranks had been played that night, and the crowd had merely laughed them off.

“Carol, if you had not warned me about Stubby, I wouldn’t feel so guilty. But then, poor fellow, nobody likes him!” Cecy was, as usual, being sentimental.

“All right, Sis, don’t think of it again. You see, you *are* sentimental. You have been kind to Stubby because no one else has noticed him. But just listen, little girl,” Carol smiled to explain that. “Things are or they are not, and sentiment makes them seem to be something else, which is just too bad and balls everything up.”

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“I know what you mean, *I* am sentimental,” admitted Cecy. “But you don’t know Stubby; nobody does except his sister Veronica. Stubby leans over crooked and has a queer look, but it never touches his eyes. Carol, he has eyes like our

yellow cat that Dad called Kennecott because he was copper color; remember? Well, Stubby's eyes are just that shade."

Carol laughed, she couldn't help it. "Cecy," she said, "it's no use. You are incurably sentimental. Stubby with eyes like our old Cottykat!"

"But when I found out just what Stubby was going to do, that he had 'the ghost'—away up on the roof, I determined he just couldn't do that. That was why I went up there." Cecy sighed, her confession was complete. She seemed glad of it.

"Here's Rosie——"

"Oh, yes. I'm going over to Thurber's. I need a few new hankies, in case I should feel worse," she laughingly told Carol. "I'll have plenty of time. All right, Rosie!" she called out, grabbing up Carol's hat and coat she was to wear to New York over Carol's rose sport dress, although rose was not Cecy's color, and rushed out to Rosie, who was waiting in her car. "S'long! I'll be back in plenty of time."

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"Cecy, remember, New York trains do not run every half hour."

"I'll be back!" and she was off.

Hardly had the door slammed and the car chugged off, when Carol went to the door to answer a ring. A young girl stood there; Carol did not know her.

"Miss Duncan?" the stranger asked.

“Yes,” answered Carol.

“I’m Veronica Flint, Steven’s sister. May I speak to you a few minutes?”

“Certainly.” Carol led the way in. Stubby’s sister! This well-dressed, refined-looking girl. “Sit down,” Carol invited. “As you see, we are moving.”

“Yes, I won’t detain you. I came to tell you how sorry I am about my brother.” As she paused, Carol could not help noting those coppery eyes. They were lovely. “Steven has always given us trouble, but he cannot help that,” the sister began. “He is honest and has never done any real harm, but, you see, Miss Duncan, my mother is an invalid, and my father went away.” She did not explain why her father went away. “Steven has always been delicate in some respects, his nerves have never been right; but physically he is larger than other boys of his age.”

Carol didn’t know what to say, so she did not attempt to say anything. She just smiled encouragement.

189

“I knew your sister was being kind to him, it did him a lot of good. But I was always watching, as neither appeared to be too wise,” said Stubby’s sister.

“Cecy is kind,” Carol said carefully, “but she is not wise; in fact, sometimes I, like you with your brother, am afraid she is very unwise, and I have been watching her, too.”

“I realized that from things Cecy said when she rode out one day with Steven,” said Veronica. “But I must hurry back,” she

continued. “I have interrupted you.”

“No, you haven’t really. We are all packed. I am just waiting for a message.”

“Then I must tell you this. The morning after that party a crowd of boys came to our house and demanded that Steven come out.”

“A crowd of boys!”

“Yes. They made him come outside, then they tied that bolster—to—his back!”

“They did!”

“I was terribly frightened at first. I didn’t know what it was all about. But I soon saw they were not going to be cruel.”

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“Who were they?” gasped Carol.

“Of course, I didn’t know them, but I heard some of their names. Glenn, Paul, and I think Bob——”

“Those boys! How could they do a thing like that?” Carol was amazed.

“Don’t feel badly, Miss Duncan,” the girl told Carol, “for it really was not as bad as I feared it would be. You see, they brought that bolster—I found out after that Steven had gone to the attic for that—well, the boys brought it back in the car, and as I told you, they called for Steven. First he would not go

out, then one boy, Paul, threatened to come in, and Steven came down. Of course, I followed when they made him go to the garage.”

“You must have been frightened to death.”

“I was scared at first, but one of the boys drew me aside and told me not to worry, they wouldn’t hurt him. I could easily believe him, for he was a fine-looking boy.”

“Glenn, perhaps,” guessed Carol.

“Yes, I think it was. Well, if it had not been my own brother, I’m sure I should have laughed, it was so funny to see him sitting with the bolster tied to his shoulders and knees.”

Carol, at this, breathed a sigh of relief. She had had wild visions of what those angry boys might have done to the unfortunate Stubby.

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“But they really would never have hurt him, not those boys,” she remarked as her visitor paused.

“No, but imagine him sitting there on an old chair in the middle of the garage and the boys lecturing him. They told him he just had to behave and if he didn’t promise—oh, I don’t know what all they wouldn’t do.”

“Did they just *talk* to him?” Carol asked.

“I’m sure they intended to ‘teach him a lesson,’ as I heard some of them say, but when Steve insisted he had nothing to do with any other scares, and that he was only playing a joke

on the party, they just cut the cords and let the old bolster flop.”

Both girls laughed. Carol out of sheer relief, and Veronica, probably sensing Carol’s idea of the “inquisition,” was glad she could make her laugh about it.

“Steven never has had anything to do with all those other scares,” she said very positively. “I wanted you to know that.”

“You mean the ghost stories we have been hearing lately? We never thought Steven had anything to do with them,” Carol said kindly.

“But that was why the boys went for him so,” the sister declared. “It was not the trick on the night of the party they were objecting to, but when they found Steve had made up that ghost they suspected him of the other happenings. He has been just as scared over at that big house as anyone else has,” Veronica said.

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“Do you mean he had reason to be frightened?”

“Well, I wouldn’t pay much attention to him. But at times he came home with very queer stories, and I could tell he really had been frightened,” she answered.

“Did he ever say just what frightened him?” pressed Carol.

“Something moving about in the evening, under the trees, he would tell me. You see, Mr. Becket was kind to Steve when he was a little boy. You know how kindly people feel toward children who are—well, not as fortunate as others.” Veronica

was finding it difficult to refer to Steven's infirmity.

"Yes," Carol said. "Mrs. Becket herself has always spoken well of Steve. He would pump the organ when the electric power would go off, and was always ready to help her when she needed him, she has told me."

"Yes. He got to feeling he had a right around there, but he hadn't, of course. Mr. Becket being so good to him, Mrs. Becket was just as kind. But there is no reason for imposing on her any longer. In fact, Mother and I have fully decided now to let Steve go to Uncle Martin. He has offered to take charge of him before, but Mother hated to let him go. She feels now it would not be fair to him to allow him to go around without better guidance than we can give him, and strange to say, he is satisfied to go."

193

"You mean Steve is going away?"

"Yes. Uncle Martin lives in the Middle West and is now in New York on business. He is coming out to see us perhaps today, and Steve may go with him at once. He is father's brother and always wanted to take Steve since father went away."

"I should think that would be fine," Carol said, "although you will miss him, naturally."

"Yes. Boys like Steve are much more babyish and affectionate to those very near to them than others would imagine." Veronica was standing up and Carol was hoping she would go before Cecy came. This story, if repeated to Cecy, would surely make some sort of scene, and they should

avoid delay.

“I wanted you and your sister to know how much Mother and I have appreciated your kindness to Steve. Who can tell, he may sometime become—quite different. My father is a scientist. He went North years ago, and we have not heard from him in a very long time. But we always hope to,” finished this girl who was Stubby’s sister and his loyal champion. 194

Carol felt drawn to this attractive, thoughtful girl and resolved to make a friend of her.

CHAPTER XXI

PACKING THE FLUTE

Cecy was gone, and Carol was alone with her father. The house seemed barren, indeed, with boxes standing around, one barrel of dishes moved near the door to save extra jarring of the family china, and one of the old portières tied securely over the love seat, while the other hid the armchair that had so long been promised a new covering.

“Aren’t we desolate, Dad?” Carol asked. “Cecy surely does leave a big hole in the noise around here, doesn’t she?”

“Yes, she’s lively around a house, when she isn’t lost in a book,” the father remarked kindly. “Just like my sister Laura. Mother used to allow her only two books a week from the library, and she would read each one in a day.” He laughed over the memory and his comparison with Cecy.

“When we get her broken in, I mean used to the big place,” Carol remarked, folding the piano scarf as she talked, “I think she’ll love it.”

“Certainly she will. Notice how particular she was to pack all those foolish unframed pictures she had in her room?”

“Yes, but she does seem ghost-scared. Are you really sure it’s all right, Dad?”

“Carol, I’m surprised that you should even ask me that.” Her father was going around with his old flute in his hand, wondering where to pack it. He used to play with Carol’s mother, piano and flute duets, and he had played with Carol, but not lately.

“My bureau drawer is the best place for that, Dad. There’s just room, and it won’t knock against anything. Let me take it. We’ve got to bring music to Melody Lane.”

In its green felt case the flute fitted in easily enough as Carol slipped it down inside the drawer.

“You mean *you* are afraid of anything there?” her father asked, as they finally left the packing and settled down again to talking.

“No, Dad, honestly, I don’t believe I am. In fact, I am terribly anxious to solve the mystery, and with a big man like you around maybe the old ghost won’t be quite so cocky.”

Mr. Duncan liked Carol’s arguments. Cecy might hug and kiss him and act as kittenish as a child, but girls like Carol, with too early responsibilities, are never like that.

“What you mean is,” her father drolled, “you don’t believe there is a ghost around there, but you are determined to find one.”

“Yes, that’s about it. I know there is something that gives a

very good ghost imitation, but I am not silly enough to believe it can vanish into thin air. But don't you think it queer, Dad, that so many should have had the same sort of fright from it?"

"You mean Mrs. Becket and Cecy?"

"And Aunt Mary and I. Besides, Veronica Flint said Stubby had talked of seeing a white figure——"

"No, I don't think that part is queer, Carol. Certainly any self-respecting ghost should always stick to type. It would be queer if one saw a white ghost and another a black ghost. Now, wouldn't it?"

"All right, Dad, you win. But did you happen to see Cecy's ukulele around? I'm determined that this family shall bring and have its own music in the big house. We could give trios. Cecy really accompanies very well, and a uke is always noisy, if it isn't always melodious."

"Yes, Cecy makes interesting sounds with it. I saw her pack it in the cedar chest."

"Then I guess that takes care of everything. Did you say the men couldn't come until noon? That will make us late getting in, but we don't need to use any of our furniture until later. We really didn't have to take it, but Mrs. Becket said she felt we would like to."

198

"Yes, it will be more like home with a few of the old things around." Her father gulped suspiciously and Carol didn't speak for a few minutes.

“But Jacob may go back to Europe with Lena and that girl Dwila,” she said finally, “and Cousin Kitty told me yesterday if they did, we could have that wonderful cottage all to ourselves.”

“She did?” His pleasure at that prospect was unmistakable.

“Yes, she did, really. It seems Jacob has lost a lot of money and he is only entitled to live free in the house. What Cousin Kitty paid him for his caretaking wasn’t much, and lately he has not been able to get the extra work he used to have,” Carol went on, glad her father showed such enthusiasm. Her one worry had been that he would feel Oak Lodge was not his own home, and that he could no longer afford a home of his own.

“Don’t you think Mrs. Becket was just trying——”

“No, Dad,” Carol interrupted, “she means it. Jacob wants to go back to Germany.”

199

“But why just now?”

“Because this girl—you remember I told you about her being so unhappy here—she insists upon going back. She seems to be stage-struck, so Lena, Jacob’s wife, told Thalia, and he brought her over here to cure her. But it hasn’t worked. Lena says she’s worse; moonstruck as well as stage-struck now.” Carol finished musingly.

“Do you know her, Carol?”

“No; I’ve seen her in the car with them and around the

grounds, but I don't really know her. She seems a nice sort of girl and very pretty."

"Maybe that's her trouble."

"What, Dad?"

"Being pretty," slyly said her father.

"At any rate, if Jacob and his family went away, and Stubby is really going away, it would be rather nice for us, if *you* like it there."

Mr. Duncan said nothing to that. Carol still felt it was very hard for him to give up his own home, simple as it was; it had been their own.

"I wonder what Cecy will say when she hears Stubby is going away to school?" Carol said, by way of changing the subject.

Mr. Duncan stroked his chin thoughtfully and smiled.

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"He'll be her hero, I suppose, and she'll call him Steven," he said dryly.

"Yes, that's about it," Carol willingly agreed. "But honestly, Dad, she was kind to him, and she always stood up for him. But I never wanted her even to speak to him. He seemed so queer."

"Just as well for his folks to let a man's hand guide him," Carol's father remarked. "Wonderful sometimes how boys who are unruly when women try to rule are quite gentle when

a man takes the trouble to tell them what to do.”

“Maybe example, hero worship, you know.”

“Yes, something in that. Well, I guess we had better be locking up. Not much to lock, but the doors are used to it,” and he went to the windows as well as to the doors.

Carol looked at him and wondered—should she tell him? Mr. Cameron had told her that afternoon that after next Saturday there would be no need for her to go out to Long Hill to play the movie organ. She hated to tell him, and she just couldn't, not tonight. She had a few dollars more than the moving would cost, and then surely things would be brighter; then her father would himself be on salary as manager of Oak Lodge.

“What a blessing this new chance has been to us, Dad,” was all she had said when he kissed her good night. But he held her very close; the last night in their old home.

201

Carol woke very early, and she was glad of it. She really had to see Mrs. Becket early, and she vaguely wished she might see that girl Dwila. Having heard more than one boy say he had seen the girl go to the letter box at Tanglepath to post letters for the early mail, Carol thought there might be a chance she would do that this morning. If she could only meet her there, outside of the cottage, she might prevail upon her to talk.

And if Dwila would talk to Carol, surely she would tell her whether or not she expected to go back to Europe soon. This would be the simplest way to find out, and upon this depended so much for the Duncans. For if the cottage would

soon be empty, they would soon have a home of their own again. Carol hated to remember how her father blinked when he handed her his flute.

It was quite dark, although it was after seven o'clock, for the late fall has a way of being lazy in the morning. It took but a short time to prepare her father's breakfast and eat her own, then, leaving him with a word that she had something to attend to very early, the little car with its still fresh and new coat of the much-disputed blue paint was out and rolling away with Carol at the wheel, bound for Oak Lodge.

202

A strange sense of excitement possessed her. Today they would move in! All the ghost stories would now be put to a final test.

"Glad Cecy is safely out of it," Carol was thinking. "She gets so excited and does such queer things. Of course, she's young." Young! And Carol was only two and a half years older.

She was just crossing the little white bridge that spanned the lake leading into the end of Melody Lane where all the old romantic places seemed centered. Early workers were jogging along in their junky cars, and a few were walking. The old town hadn't changed much as long as Carol could remember. The milkmen didn't run in and out of houses as she had noticed them doing in the town of Milburn, and there was the same old bakery wagon with two windows in the back for Pete to watch out for boys riding on the little back step.

But all this was only the usual attempt at making a center; out in the residential section people did know how to build houses and to live in them.

203

“If only I can meet that girl,” Carol ruminated, referring to Dwila. “She may be interesting; Thalia said she was, but I imagine her dumb, else why should she stick so close to that cottage?”

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CHAPTER XXII

UNDER THE LINDEN

The morning light seemed slower than usual today; perhaps it was going to rain.

“I hope it holds off until after that car brings our poor little moving in,” Carol was sighing. “A moving is pitiful in the rain.”

She was turning in where the road split for Oak Lodge. Large trees hung low with heavy moisture. There was the outside letter box; Carol slowed down. No one around the box, but on the iron bench under the old linden tree was a form; surely that was some one sitting there.

Carol was driving very slowly near the box; she could get out and drop a card. She did, a card to Cecy. Yes, that was some one on the bench, and, yes, it was the girl, Dwila.

“She must love that little box. I’m going straight up to her.”

But just as Carol expected, the girl jumped up quickly. She was wearing a long blue cape, certainly never made in America, and her heavy blond hair, wound like a crown of braids, was all broken out in a rash of little curls from the dampness.

“Good morning, Dwila! Wait a minute. I want to speak to you.” The girl stopped and smiled, bowing just slightly.



“WAIT A MINUTE. I WANT TO SPEAK TO YOU——”

“Good morning,” she replied without a trace of accent, with merely the musical rising inflection of the European. She looked straight at Carol in evident surprise.

“I’m going to be your neighbor, you know,” Carol said with all the grace she was capable of, “and I’m so glad we can get acquainted this morning.”

“My neighbor?”

“Yes. We are coming to Mrs. Becket’s.”

“To the big house, yes, Jacob said so,” she was trying to edge away without being rude enough to run.

“Don’t you think it lovely here?” Carol pressed.

“Lovely, yes. But so—lonely.” Tears seemed to live in those round, blue eyes.

“Yes, it is lonely.” Carol was not going to oppose her. “But when we come I hope it won’t be so bad. There are two girls of us——”

“You are—Car—ol?”

“Yes; how did you know?”

“I have known. Jacob talks of you sometimes.”

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“Yes, of course I know Jacob.” Carol wondered if he had told her about the night of the ghost scare. “But my sister is

younger than I, you and she should be friends. You could have great times around here together.”

“I shall not be here.” Her precise English was matched in its fluting tones. Carol wondered why Americans always spoiled their own language with harsh monotones. The girl was wrapping the big blue cloak around her as they say girls used to do when they left parties, before they had conquered the elements with modern audacity and filmy wraps.

“You won’t be here?” Carol said *won’t*. “Are you going away?”

“If only I could, but I must!” What a perfectly tragic sigh. It made Carol gasp.

“When do you expect to go? I hope my sister and I shall have time to know you before you leave. She is away just now.”

“I cannot tell, I cannot tell!” It sounded as if she were on the stage and wringing her hands. “I am always so disappointed.” Melodrama supreme.

“In getting a letter?” It was a wild guess from Carol.

“Yes,” she seemed alarmed. “But how did you know?”

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“Oh, I don’t *know*,” Carol laughed to ease that alarm so quickly gathering. “But all girls are apt to be disappointed in getting letters, you know.”

“Oh, are they! Thank you.” A sigh of relief. “If you think that is so, perhaps, perhaps—” She did not seem to know how to

finish the sentence.

“Perhaps you shouldn’t worry,” Carol told her, smiling her own bright, reassuring smile into the face of the girl, whose anxiety over a letter she had not received might merely mean she was too anxious to get it, impatient.

“Oh, but so many times, and I have had to come out without the people knowing, always to this letter box, or to—” She stopped and gulped, then smiled bravely. “How foolish I am! I talk in—in riddles,” she finished, and Carol wondered at the fine choice of words.

“Here is my car; I am going in, we can ride together,” Carol invited, moving herself toward the little car and sort of urging Dwila to go along.

“Oh, I do thank you. But it is not far, I should walk.” She was embarrassed at refusing.

“Why not ride? Don’t you want to be friends with me?”

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“Friends? Oh, yes, if I could. But I shall not be here long enough.” More melodrama.

“Where are you going?”

“Back to my friends,” a haughty, defiant look changed the childlike face into the face of a determined young woman.

“Back in Vienna I shall dance again and sing.”

“Oh, do come, ride over with me, Dwila. I shall truly feel you do not like me if you will not come.” Carol was using her best

coaxing method.

“You are kind. Certainly I like you. But I have no pleasure here. I did not want to come. And they must take me back—soon.” She was moving away from, not towards the parked car.

“Oh, all right,” said Carol, a trifle haughty herself. “I hope we shall meet again before you go, however.”

“Perhaps. Thank you. If you come to Europe, you may see me. Sometime my name, Dwila, will be in the big lights—I hope.”

“Oh, yes, of course. Certainly you shall succeed. Then, good-bye, Dwila, if I don’t see you again before I find—your name in the big lights.”

Carol did not smile, she would not have dared risk such offense. The girl was too serious and so queerly pathetic as she wound that blue cloak around her. And her golden hair slipped out in new curls, as if the heavy dew touched off its springs. 209

“Let me know if I can help you in any way,” Carol impulsively offered.

“Jacob says he has no money now for his ticket and Lena’s. But if my letter comes, it will be all right.” Dwila said this as if she must try to make some explanation. Then, with a wan smile of farewell, she ran off through the wet leaves as Carol got in her little blue car.

That so beautiful a young girl should be so desperately unhappy! Carol could hardly imagine this as she sat in her car and looked after the dark-blue figure. The figure was barely a blur in the deep shadows, and it was moving swiftly toward that other blur, Jacob's cottage at the gateway.

“So that's it,” mused Carol. “She haunts the letter box, mailing letters, and with her brass key is waiting to open the private box for the Vroom mail, which should contain anything sent to Dwila.” Carol started her car and turned to the longer drive that would come out at the cut in the hill. This, she remembered, was that road the original owner had had cut through the hill on which his young wife had been killed. The bride's bridle path had been as completely obliterated as was possible, so that no tragic memory might be invoked in mute, innocent monuments there. “It has been sad, this place,” Carol could not help realizing. “Mr. Becket died, but he had been delicate before he came here. And now these ghost scares! I wanted to ask Dwila had she ever seen anything queer, but perhaps it's better that I didn't. If she didn't understand, she might have thought I was blaming her in some way, and surely she has enough to worry about; so she thinks, at any rate.”

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Carol drove along, thinking of many things—of mysterious happenings for which there seemed no explanation. She glanced at the gasoline gauge and started.

“Things will happen to me if I don't get some gas!” she murmured. Carol recalled the old filling station down the road. It was in rather an out-of-the-way section, but she had stopped there before, and she now drove to it, hoping the tank

wouldn't go dry. Luck was with her.

Waiting a moment, she heard talk from inside the little shack where the owner of the station kept his oil pots and a few spare parts. One voice puzzled Carol until a look through the dirty window showed her the nutcracker face of the carpenter who had repaired Mrs. Becket's organ. The other speaker, curiously enough, was Jacob Vroom. Carol could not help hearing them, they were almost shouting. 211

"You didn't come back to look over the work you did on the organ," Jacob was saying. "You might have got some other jobs off the old lady, Len."

"Oh, I couldn't bother to come back."

"Not bother? Are jobs so plentiful you can pick and choose?"

"No, but I sold out."

"Sold out! Who'd want to buy your carpenter jobbing business, Len?"

"Well, a feller from the city. He didn't exactly want to buy the business, but I knew a thing or two, an' I sort of sold him my information like, you see."

"No, I don't quite see," Jacob said. "You mean somebody else is coming around to fix Mrs. Becket's organ if it needs it?"

"'Twon't need much more fixin'!" chuckled Len. "It's about finished, I take it."

“Hum! Something else might go wrong on it. If it does, don’t you want I should send for you, Len?”

“No, I can’t come. I turned all that sort of work over to this other man. But I dunno’s he’ll do jobbin’.”

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“Hum,” said Jacob again. “Then I’ll have to get some other carpenter from around here if Mrs. Becket wants one. But she don’t like taking up with strangers any more’n what I do. So you’ve quit?”

“That job, yes. The other man’ll have to finish. I told him all I knowed,” and Len chuckled, his nutcracker face working oddly.

The voices died away into indistinguishable murmurs, and it seemed to Carol that the men had moved toward the rear of the shack as the service man filled her tank. She paid for the gas and drove on. As she again neared the linden tree under which she had talked to Dwila, Carol thought she had a puncture and, stopping the car, got out to look. She was relieved to find that the shoe was only a bit flabby and in need of air, and she wondered why the service station man hadn’t noticed it. Those chaps are so sharp.

“But I can manage to drive back on it,” Carol told herself. As she started to get in the car again, the unmistakable sound of nuts falling from a near-by tree attracted her. She never could resist the first, sweet nuts of autumn, and she walked toward the big tree under which she had once seen a man’s footprints and where the bark was strangely scarred. She found the nuts, but they were small

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hickories, scarcely worth picking up. She passed the first few she saw and walked on, hoping for larger ones, when she found herself near a gnarled crab-apple tree. Caught on one of the knobby branches Carol saw a piece of cloth. It was clinging, white stuff, somewhat rubbery or waterproof, she thought.

“A strange material,” she murmured, inspecting it. Then, with a queer idea of finding out what it might be, she pulled from the tree some strings which seemed as if they might have once been tied to the cloth, which smelled of rubber, and carried it all to her car.

“It can’t be any kind of a garment,” she thought, “and yet _____”

A new suspicion to think about, but Carol could not forget the encounter under the linden. She wished, so earnestly, that she could show Dwila how foolish she was to be so desperately homesick. But, as Thalia had told Carol, and now Carol fully understood, the girl was not only homesick but incurably stage-struck and, as everyone knows, that is a serious combination.

Carol drove on to Melody Lane, wondering, thinking, planning—but, most of all, puzzled.

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At the house, she found Aunt Mary busily at work arranging space for the newcomers’ furniture.

“Aunt Mary,” begged Carol, “please don’t work so hard. Our moving is, well, only a very few, poor little things that can be stuck anywhere.”

“Mrs. Becket wants you to feel at home here; she is as happy as a girl at the prospect. Between you and me, she has spent many lonely hours here, but she loves the place.” Aunt Mary was almost whispering this.

“And we are going to love it, too,” spoke up Carol. “I feel sure that when Dad comes he will solve the ghost mystery, then we’ll have clear sailing.”

“Why don’t you solve it?” Aunt Mary asked. “Seems to me you are all set for doing just that.”

“Well, I’m no coward, and I have always said I didn’t believe in the spooky ghost. But there can be other kinds, you know.”

“Would you be afraid of the other kinds?”

“Unless they are a lot bigger than I am, I wouldn’t let them run away,” Carol declared thoughtfully.

“All right then, we’ll see. If this ghost turns up again, and I am just as sure as you are that it will, you have promised to give it a run for its money,” teased Aunt Mary, retrieving the mop.

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“Unless, remember I said, it is a lot bigger than I am.”

“Say, Carol, listen another minute, then we’ll work harder to make up for this lost time. Did you ever hear of a ghost hurting anyone?”

“No, I never did. I’ve heard of people hurting themselves hunting for ghosts, though.”

“So have I.” The mop was beginning to work. “We had better look out for that sort of thing, as every ghost ever reported upon has taken dangerous ways of disappearing.”

“We’ll give this one a chance to come out in the open,” was Carol’s rejoinder to that remark.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE WHITE STREAK

It was a wonderful house; even Carol's simple belongings seemed to fit in well, it was that sort of congenial place.

"Dad, you should put your books in that little study. Cousin Kitty will be disappointed if you don't."

"All right, Carol, I will. Is your trunk empty? I'll shift it to the storeroom."

"You needn't lift a thing, Dad. That's what Jacob is for. Are you happy?" Carol was flushed and smiling happily herself. Everything was being settled so easily. And their rooms—Mrs. Becket was a royal hostess.

"Can't you folks leave something for tomorrow?" she was now calling to Carol and her father. "I am so anxious to have Mr. Duncan see my organ—all over again. This is the time to get the light effects through the colored windows; at sunset."

So they all went to the organ loft, and it was new to Mr. Duncan because he could always discover a new wonder in that glorious instrument, new to Mrs. Becket because her delight never lagged in displaying it.

“Has the power held well lately?” Mr. Duncan asked, looking critically at the intricate wires and cables.

“Yes, lately it has. And I hope it does until I get some one to replace Steve Flint. He never disappointed me, and Mr. Becket liked him. But I’m glad his folks are sending him to a special school; he needs special training,” Mrs. Becket stated, with kindly interest in this strange boy.

“Did the organ ever play of itself; I mean, was there any truth in that rumor, Cousin Kitty?” Carol asked, smiling an apology for the unusual question.

“No, certainly not. That, at least, was sheer nonsense. You know, when the air is escaping from the pipes there is often sound with it. But our organ is still the glorious monument of Melody Lane.”

No one spoke for a few seconds. Mrs. Becket was plainly affected that this so-called ghost talk should ever have touched the great organ.

“Play for us, Cousin Kitty, won’t you?” Carol asked presently. “We will have time before dinner, don’t you think so?”

“Yes.” As the Cameo Lady sat on the bench and turned on the motor, there was a rumbling pause, then the mighty swell of melody as her fingers brushed the keys.

Carol dropped on a cushion by her father’s side in an attitude of sure contentment.

“Wonderful, Dad?”

He only nodded. No spoken word should mar the beauty of the organ melody. Mrs. Becket herself seemed under its influence; she apparently had forgotten her guests for the moment, as she sat there like a Saint Cecilia, her head held high, her eyes searching the golden pipes above her.

What was she thinking? Wondering why such blissful moments need be spoiled by cruel threats from unknown sources? Why need there have been unexplained, if not actually sinister, forces battling to spoil all this beauty?

Suddenly she broke off on a sharp chord and turned to Carol and her father.

“Wonderful,” Mr. Duncan was exclaiming. “Is there any other instrument made with the fullness of the organ’s tone?”

“I was just wondering what you two were thinking of?” Mrs. Becket asked. “I am sure Carol’s dream must be worth telling.”

“My dream?” Carol only laughed in reply. She had no intention of telling them her dream, for it had been about ghosts, or what people were calling ghosts.

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“Anyone who has bad dreams around here,” Mr. Duncan mercifully interposed, “must be hard to please.”

“I was just wondering what Cecy is doing,” Carol felt she ought to say something.

“Imagine—” The telephone interrupted Mrs. Becket. Carol went to answer it.

“It’s Cecy,” she announced. “Cecy, please, not so fast! Not so loud!”

But Cecy went right on. “Wonderful! Simply marvelous! You should see my sports suit!” Then Carol stopped her with a question, but didn’t get far.

“Hey, Carol! Listen! How about ghosts! No, I didn’t say goats, g-h-o-s-t-s!”

“You listen to me, Cecy!” called back Carol. “Dad says you must come home not later than Thursday!”

Cecy again. “Thursday! But, darling,” and a long lingo of foolish talk, then: “Tonight is the first night, you know. That’s why I’m away off in New York, to escape the ghosts!”

Carol’s face was burning. Suppose Mrs. Becket should catch any of this. And, besides, Carol didn’t want any one to mention ghosts, not tonight, at any rate. It jarred her nerves, and she, herself, wished this first night was over.

Finally Cecy subsided at the New York end of the line, after calmly telling her sister the phone charge, more than a dollar, was Miriam’s treat instead of going to a movie.

Carol turned toward her father and Mrs. Becket, still gasping, all out of breath, from the pace set by Cecy in her flighty telephone dialogue.

“She’s having a grand time and buying out New York, was about all I could get from the call,” Carol said, withholding the ghost questions that had ended unanswered.

“Well, that’s just what we all wanted, wasn’t it?” Mrs. Becket replied. “The child needed a real change, and evidently she is getting it.”

Dinner was the pleasant meal to be expected, but Carol was a little anxious about her father. Would he feel all right? Not like a patronized visitor being put on a salary because he needed it so badly. It was this persistent worry that saved Carol more serious thought of the possible first night experience in Oak Lodge. She knew he would require time to make the change seem reasonable to him, in spite of Mrs. Becket’s carefully outlined plan of convincing him that she had so many and such important things waiting for his expert attention. It was thinking of her father that helped Carol to think less of what might happen there.

“I’m as silly as Cecy,” she was thinking. “Why should anything happen tonight?”

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As they read or talked or moved around to turn on lights, for Mrs. Becket wanted the old house to be especially cheerful tonight, Carol felt bluer and more blue.

“I guess I’m just tired,” she was thinking. “This has been a long day. We should all go to bed early.”

But she didn’t want to go to bed early. In fact, it was eight o’clock before she even mentioned the advisability of her father retiring. And this was an October night.

“You can read in comfort, Dad,” she whispered, “with your own, green-shaded bedside light.”

Perhaps he did want to read, or perhaps he only wanted to be alone, but, at any rate, Felix Duncan soon said good night and went to that quiet room, in one of the many ells artistically built into Oak Lodge.

Carol had taken from the case one book after another, restless, tired, but too nervous to settle down. Mrs. Becket talked frankly with her about things that had happened there lately, being positive it would all be explained away.

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“And, somehow, I feel it will be soon,” she said. “Perhaps it’s because we are all here together now.”

The words gave Carol a little start. The clock was just striking half past nine when she suggested asking Aunt Mary if Glenn might run over for a little while. She felt that Glenn would easily banish the “willies” she felt were getting the better of her.

Aunt Mary telephoned Glenn, and he said he would come over as soon as he could settle some bookwork stuff.

It was the maid, Lizzie Towner, who broke up the little conference Carol, Aunt Mary, and Mrs. Becket were holding. Lizzie burst in upon them violently.

“Mrs. Becket!” she gasped, “I’ve just seen *it* again!”

“Seen what?” all asked at once.

“That white thing——”

“Do you mean the—ghost?” Carol asked, in almost a whisper.

“Yes, I saw it, I tell you!” Lizzie ran from the room almost in hysterics. She would not stop, they knew, until she had reached her own room.

Carol started for the door. The time had come, she was sure, to carry out a plan she had decided upon.

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“Where are you going?” asked Mrs. Becket apprehensively.

“Out—to find that ghost!”

“Oh, but Carol! You mustn’t! It might be dangerous! All alone! Wait for Glenn.”

“He’ll be along presently. Besides, I’m not afraid. I have my brightest flash light and—this!” Carol held up a police whistle.

“Whatever is that for?” asked Mrs. Becket.

“To signal you, Cousin Kitty,” was the answer. “As for going out alone, this so-called ghost only appears when a person *is* alone. I am beginning to think it is a very human sort of ghost. Now listen, dear Cousin Kitty. I’m not at all afraid. When Glenn comes, send him out to me. And when you hear me whistle, telephone for Constable Rollinson. I stopped in to see him this afternoon and told him we might have need of him tonight. He’s ready and waiting with his car. It won’t take him long to get here.”

“Oh, Carol, I’m afraid to have you do this.”

“I’m not. I think tonight is going to mark the ending of this ghost business. Now listen for my whistle and be near the telephone.”

CHAPTER XXIV

THE GHOST OF MELODY LANE

Pausing a moment to allow her eyes to focus in the darkness, Carol then moved silently forward, the flash light in one hand and in the other the small but trusty whistle.

Suddenly she glimpsed something white fluttering amid the trees. At first glimpse its shadowy outline had an eerie, ghostly look, but as Carol drew nearer she could see dimly the figure of a girl in flowing white garments. She heard the murmur of a girl's voice, then deeper tones; a man was arguing. She could not clearly hear the words, but she could see where the shadowy figures were moving beneath the trees, and she caught snatches of their talking.

“Now is the time!” Carol murmured. Deliberately she blew a shrill blast on her whistle. As she had hoped, it was mistaken for the warning signal of some state trooper after a speeding motorist on the highway, for the man's voice, in more distinct tones, was heard to say:

“After a speeder.”

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Then came more of the indistinguishable dual tones. In silence Carol waited, hoping Cousin Kitty had heard her signal and had telephoned. The minutes passed, and, in spite

of her resolve, Carol was nervous.

“Oh, why doesn’t that constable come!” she thought impatiently. “I know Cousin Kitty called him. I could see the light at the phone.”

There were distant sounds now of an auto out on the highway—two autos. She waited. The cars had stopped. They were coming toward her. She plainly heard the gravel crunching beneath rapidly running feet.

Then: “Carol!” breathed a voice close to her.

“Oh, Glenn! I’m so glad you’ve come!” She had been frightened but was not running away.

“Are you all right, Carol? I met Constable Sim Rollinson on the way here, driving like mad,” Glenn panted. “He has that nutcracker-faced carpenter with him.”

“Where are they?”

“Right behind me! Here they come.” The breathless constable and the carpenter arrived in that moment. “But where’s the ghost?” asked Glenn in a low voice.

“Right there!” Carol pointed to the now distant white and shadowy shapes. “Listen!”

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The four ghost catchers, standing there with Carol in the dark except for Glenn’s car lights, were silent, listening. Then there floated on the velvety blackness of the night the voice of Dwila, saying:

“But what about all the money I sent you?”

“Money? Huh! You never sent me any money!” It was a man’s sneering voice, and Carol knew that voice. It was that of the smartly dressed stranger she had seen and heard talking to Len Bancroft in the shack of the filling station.

“I sent money to somebody,” insisted the girl, faintly seen, “and I helped you with your play. I did all you asked me to in taking the part of a ghost—a part I hope to play on the stage. Didn’t I help you?” She seemed to be sobbing as she struggled with the words.

“Hush, some people going to the house! Don’t shout!” the man ordered sharply.

There was a moment of silence during which the girl and the mysterious man seemed to be considering matters—as if they were both afraid of something.

Carol, Glenn, the constable, and Len Bancroft crept back, making sure no sound, not even the rustling of a leaf, should betray their presence. Silence now enshrouded both little groups of actors in this strange drama. The man, shifting about restlessly, and the girl in those clinging, white garments were more easily discernible now as they moved into the range of the headlights of a car near the gate. To Carol and those with her it seemed to be a test of who should next speak—the man or the girl. Finally, as if unable to keep the strained silence any longer, they heard her say:

“But I did everything you asked me to. Didn’t I?”

“Yes, I’ll admit you did, but things haven’t turned out as I thought they would. I can’t get it out. Your ghost and my ghost didn’t scare the people here as I counted on. Now it’s all over!” The man was saying that. “I’ve got to go——”

“Not yet!” cried Constable Rollinson as, followed by Glenn and Len, he made a rush for the man who was suddenly illuminated by the strong beam from Carol’s flash light. “It isn’t all over for you! I’ve got you now!”

“Let go of me, you fools! What do you mean?” snarled the man.

“I mean to say,” panted the constable, “that we’ve got you, Mr. Ghost Maker, and we’re going to hold you. You won’t do any more of your tricks with a trick balloon and them white cloth streamers. There! You would have it!”

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There was the dull sound of a blow and the man, unable to fight longer, slumped down in a shapeless heap as Carol, her light still on, walked toward the group.

“A trick balloon!” murmured Glenn, looking at Carol. “What does it all mean?”

“You’ll know pretty soon,” she answered. “I must go back to Cousin Kitty and we must find Dwila, poor girl! She has run away.”

“So she was in with this rascal,” Glenn commented as they moved along.

“Not willingly, I think,” Carol said. “Is he badly hurt?” she

inquired as she saw the constable and the carpenter lifting their prisoner to his feet.

“Not much,” Sim Rollinson answered. “I just tapped him a little with my stick to take the fight out of him.”

“This is all nonsense!” protested the man, suddenly alert. “You can’t prove a thing.”

“What about this?” asked the constable, pulling a mass of white cloth from the prisoner’s coat pocket. “There’s one of the ghosts, just as you told me you thought it would turn out, Miss Carol,” he said, tossing the clinging mass to the girl.

As Carol caught it, Glenn also reached out.

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“What’s this?” he asked.

“One of the ghosts,” Carol answered. “When I found some cloth like this, a bit of a rubber bag and some strings caught on the crab-apple tree, I began to suspect the kind of a trick that was being played.”

“Whew!” Glenn whistled. “A big toy balloon.”

“Yes, that was the great, white object which seemed to float up out of the tree,” Carol went on. “The object of it, the object of all the ghostly manifestations, was to create such fear as to cause Mrs. Becket to abandon the place, as if she ever would!” Carol’s voice was coldly sarcastic. “Cousin Kitty has gone back to the house, hasn’t she?”

“Yes,” the constable answered.

“I’m glad she has gone in,” Carol said. “She came out on the path after she telephoned for you, Mr. Rollinson. She didn’t want me to come out here alone, but I guess she thinks I’m all right, now that you are here, Glenn. Now we must find that girl Dwila. I saw her making a mad dash for the grove. She may do something desperate. Come on, Glenn!”

CHAPTER XXV

STRANGE BUT TRUE

Hurrying together through the darkness, it did not take Carol and Glenn long to find Dwila. A ball of white on the ground beneath the big oak tree was unmistakable.

“There she is!” whispered Glenn, striding forward.

“Let me go first,” begged Carol in a low voice.

He stepped back and Carol walked slowly toward a pathetic, white-shrouded figure, now prostrate on the ground.

“Dwila! Dwila!” Carol murmured as she touched the shrinking form. There was no answer.

“Dwila! Look at me! Speak to me! It’s Carol!”

There was a little tremor of the collapsed body. Then came a voice hardly more than a breath, saying:

“Oh! Oh, let me die!”

Beautiful, broken little Dwila! What a strange heap of misery she was, lying there under the tree. Everything was black in the darkness, but she was all in white.

“Dwila,” Carol called again. “Let me help you. Are you all right? Surely you’re all right!” Carol made the substitution quickly.

“Oh, but what did he mean—what have I been doing——?”

Glenn’s flash light, which he quickly snapped on, caught the pallor of her face. It was like the cloak, the dress beneath it, everything white.

Carol got down on her knees and lifted the girl’s head. She was afraid something had happened to her. But there was no sign of injury nor of illness. Dwila was clutching a letter.

“Come on, dear, I’m sure the letter disappointed you——”

“It has done more than that, it has killed me!” Dwila, always dramatic, was tragic now. “And I was acting out here in the night, believing it would get me a star part in a play,” she said defiantly.

The girl was sitting up, then was up on her feet. But she would not raise her head, she begged them to let her alone, kept talking of wanting to die, of not being able to “stand it any more.” They understood now; she thought she had merely been acting a part. That crook had made her think so.

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Now they were getting her to walk indoors. And Carol had slipped her arm under the long white cloak—where did Dwila get these cloaks? When the house light fell upon the strange figure, the white cloak, a white costume beneath it, and those two long golden braids, Carol could just discern the perfume

of a flower, of a white bridal rose!

“Sit down, dear,” Mrs. Becket had come to meet her. “We will do all we can for you.”

A spasm of heavy sobbing and crying convulsed the girl, so that it took both Glenn and Carol to get the long entangled cloak free, and to get Dwila sitting in a big chair. Her head was still determinedly down, avoiding their questioning gaze.

Aunt Mary and Mrs. Becket tried to soothe her, as did Carol. It was easy to see what had disappointed her, for this was a stage costume, and there was the letter!

With a sudden defiant gesture the girl tossed the paper across the room.

“I will not read it all! I never want to know more,” she sobbed.

“Shall I read it?” Carol asked. This was one of their “ghosts,” but why had she acted so, Carol wondered?

“Read it and please burn it,” she begged. “Never let Jacob or Lena know. What would they say?” She seemed terrified at this thought.

Carol and Glenn went to the other end of the room under a light, to read the letter that had caused all this trouble. It was as they both had guessed. Some fraudulent theatrical agency had been taking her money, leading her on with ridiculous promises of “starring” her, telling her from her pictures she was exactly “the type,” and that a special agent, a woman,

“Madam Lavallo,” would come out to Oakleigh to see her in costume. The letter in Carol’s hand did not contain all this, but the excuses made in the letter showed plainly what they had been promising. And the other swindler, finding her ready to work in with his plans, had cruelly duped her further.

Aunt Mary was pressing a drink of warm milk upon the exhausted girl, and now she pulled herself together and seemed ready to talk.

“So many letters they have sent,” she began, “and I believed them.”

“You sent them money?” Carol ventured.

“Yes, yes, all I had, even my ticket money. If ever Jacob knows——”

“He won’t, dear,” said Mrs. Becket, “don’t worry about that.”

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“Oh, thank you! But now they have fooled me! I made a little rose bush bloom three beautiful flowers, so that with it I could be perfect in costume of *Nini* when they would send the woman to see me,” she said. “She was to come to the big gate, to the little lighted platform like a station.”

“The Mushroom Station?” Glenn asked.

“Yes. I was fool enough to believe all they wrote me, and I thought they had sent that crazy man with a balloon.”

“And you wanted them to think that you lived here?” smiled

Mrs. Becket, pitying her efforts at telling this strange story.

“Yes. I must have been mad. One night I came in the back door; I was frightened, some man seemed following me.”

“And you dropped your bride rose,” said Carol.

Her blue eyes were no longer misty but sparkling now. “That little bush was my great friend. It, too, was all alone in the big, abandoned conservatory.”

“Where did you learn such fine English?” Glenn asked, surprised at her forceful speech.

“A very rich aunt has educated me. She let me come here, but I must go back soon.”

“Listen, Dwila,” Carol spoke decisively, “you have had a lot of trouble, and we are all very sorry for you. But many girls here in America make similar mistakes. Do not blame yourself so.”

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“They do? I thought I only could be so fooled.”

“No; these frauds use good paper and big sounding names to get your money,” Glenn helped out, “then they write a final letter like this one.”

“I see!” she was quiet a moment as if before some new emotion. “But I *can* act!” she shouted, getting to her feet and standing before them, beautiful indeed. “I have had good parts, and now see my beautiful costume from—all these woods!”

They watched, listened. Her voice had that ringing, carrying quality peculiar to the stage.

“See my poor, last rose!” she faltered, snatching from her breast a crushed, broken flower. “It is just like me. There are no more buds.”

“But, Dwila, do you know you have done a wonderful thing for us tonight?” Carol asked, her own tones a trifle theatrical.

“Wonderful! All this—trouble!”

“Yes. If you had not come, and come in all this beautiful white costume, we could not have known—what an actress you are!” She did not say impersonating ghosts. “Something good may come of all this, yet.”

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“Oh, if it only can!” half sobbed Dwila.

“You must rest for a while now,” insisted Mrs. Becket. “You can tell us more a little later. I think some one is coming.”

It was Constable Rollinson. His cheeks were flushed triumphantly, and he seemed well pleased with himself.

“I’ve got Ratner locked up,” he announced fatuously.

“Is that the name of the balloon ghost?” asked Glenn.

“Sure is,” chuckled the officer. “Len is telling his story to Justice Flackart so’s he can write out a complaint. But I thought I’d come back and see if everything was all right. You know, Ratner didn’t do all this ghost business.”

“We know who did the rest,” said Carol softly, motioning toward the room where Dwila had gone with Mrs. Becket.

“Well, for cat’s sake, will somebody please tell me!” begged Glenn. “I don’t want to be nosey, but——”

“I think it’s about time to explain all I know,” Carol said, as Mrs. Becket re-entered the room. “Mr. Rollinson can fill in the gaps. I was a bit suspicious of the queer, little carpenter when I first saw him,” Carol began, “and especially when I heard him speak about wood as he worked on the organ. Still, I couldn’t dream that some one might try to steal it. My suspicions grew when I saw where slivers had been cut out of a back board, and they were strengthened when, later, I found a big piece missing. I didn’t say anything to you, Cousin Kitty, for it seemed unbelievable. Then I saw Mr. Bancroft talking to this man Ratner, something about ebony he kept repeating, and he also spoke of turning his jobbing work over to some one else. All this began to be connected, in my mind, with your organ, Cousin Kitty, but still I had nothing tangible to go on.”

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No one offered any interruption; everyone was listening intently to Carol’s story.

“After I found the piece of white cloth and a bit of a rubber balloon near the scratched tree,” Carol went on while Glenn looked at her with admiring eyes, “I decided something had better be done. So I told what I suspected to Mr. Rollinson and suggested that he hold himself in readiness for a telephone call.”

“And I telephoned when you whistled, Carol,” said Mrs. Becket in pleased tones. “I am glad I had some little part to play in this strange drama.”

“So that’s how you got here?” asked Glenn of the smiling constable.

“Yes, I was waiting for a call, Len and I,” the officer said. “Len began to get suspicious of this Ratner, too, and he sort of tipped me off, Len did. We worked together with Miss Carol here.”

“Good work!” Glenn commented. “But to try to steal a pipe organ out of a house where folks lived—just plain crazy!”

“Not so much so as it sounds,” the constable went on. “As I pieced the story together, from what Len told me and what this Ratner let fall as I was locking him up, it was this way.”

The constable, rather wordy over it all in his pride, explained that when Len Bancroft was first called in to repair the rail and organ bench, he had seen that the instrument was almost solid ebony which, from his experience of woods, he knew to be very valuable.

Later, in doing some work for the man Ratner, who had hired a summer cottage in town, perhaps to further some of his other illegal schemes, the carpenter mentioned about the ebony organ. Then Ratner, who, to quote the constable, was a “slick” talker, pretended to buy from Len the right to do further repair work on the organ, stating that he was an expert at this sort of thing. But Ratner’s object was to steal the organ piecemeal. To do this, however, it was

necessary to scare Mrs. Becket and her servants away from the place. The ghost idea came to him, and he carried it out easily with the aid of poor, stage-struck Dwila.

His own part was easy. Sometimes he slipped into the old mansion and made strange noises near the organ. He really did know something about its mechanism. And he did manage, once, to cut out a valuable piece of wood, which he sold to a dealer.

But Dwila was his best “ghost,” so to speak. The poor girl, with her exaggerated notion of becoming an actress, was just the tool Ratner needed, and when he learned she was sending money to some one, he guessed her weakness and played upon it, though he never really took any of her money himself. That had gone to the agency with the fancy stationery.

“Anyhow, he’s where he can’t do any more harm for a while,” the constable concluded. “And if you think, Mrs. Becket, that you can settle the other part of this ghost business for yourself, why, I’ll be getting along.”

“Oh, yes, the rest is easily settled,” said Cousin Kitty. 240
“But we want to thank you,” she told the constable as he was leaving them. And thank him she did, most heartily.

Quickly, as he had gone, Dwila entered the room. She was weeping.

“Oh,” she sobbed, “to think how foolish I was, letting that man and woman lead me on. But I did not intend harm—really!” she murmured, as if apologizing directly to Mrs.

Becket.

“I know,” soothed Cousin Kitty. “It’s all right, dear. Calm yourself.”

“How did you happen to meet this Ratner?” asked Carol, to divert her.

“It—it just sort of happened, I guess,” was the low-voiced reply. “I was practicing my poor little acting—in white—when this man, who seemed to be prowling around, saw me one night.”

“He was good at prowling,” chuckled Glenn.

“He spoke to me,” Dwila went on. “He was very polite and nice, and said if I developed what he called a ‘ghost act,’ he might get me the big part in his new play. He asked me to help him work out the details of the ghost part. So I did just what he told me to. I didn’t know it was all meant to scare you. I thought the agency had sent him.”

“It was a little scary at times,” confessed Mrs. Becket.

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“Too much so,” Carol agreed. “It turned out to be more than even I expected it to be.”

“Romance and mystery—yes, dear, I know,” interposed Cousin Kitty, gently. “Well, we must forget about it for a time. All that sort of romance and mystery have departed from Melody Lane, I hope,” she sighed gently.

But for once Cousin Kitty was not quite right. All the

romance and mystery had not departed. There was more to come, as Carol found out, and the story of it will be related in the next volume of this series, to be called “The Forbidden Trail.” In that Carol had a strange part to play.

“Well, whatever can I do now?” Dwila asked, still bewildered.

“You must stay here tonight,” said Mrs. Becket.

“Oh, no, I—I couldn’t, after what has happened. Lena and Jacob——”

“Leave that to me,” interrupted Mrs. Becket. “We want you to stay. I shall tell them you are to be company for Carol.”

“Oh, if I could——”

“You can, dear,” Carol murmured. “You are going to have a chance now, and perhaps, after all, you may become an actress, though not with the help of those who so deceived you in the past.”

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“I think I can help her from now on,” said Cousin Kitty with a warm smile. “I haven’t lost all the good friends I had in the profession just because I came to live in the country—with a big organ.”

“Oh, if anything had happened to that organ,” Carol murmured.

“That fellow was crazy to think he could steal it!” declared Glenn. “Sneaking a big pipe organ out of a house.”

“He didn’t want the pipes,” Carol remarked. “Just the wood.”

“Well, he didn’t get much of it,” Glenn insisted. “As a matter of fact, I don’t believe they can give him much of a sentence in jail for what he did. He’s too slick to be caught so easily.”

And so it turned out, for it was a hard case to prove, and as Mrs. Becket did not want any more publicity, the worst that could be done to Ratner was to sentence him to a few months for malicious mischief, based on what he had done in taking away part of the organ.

“Well,” asked Glenn of Carol on a later day when he was driving her down town, “are you glad it’s all over?”

“In some ways, yes,” she answered, smiling at him.

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“And yet it was thrillingly exciting at times, wasn’t it?”

“Too much so!” he replied. “Hey, look where you’re driving!” he called to a careless motorist. “I’ve got a valuable cargo aboard.”

“That’s nice of you,” murmured Carol.

THE END

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[The end of *The Ghost of Melody Lane* by Lilian Garis]