

ST NICHOLAS BOOKS

EIGHT  
GIRLS AND  
A DOG  
*BY* CAROLYN WELLS



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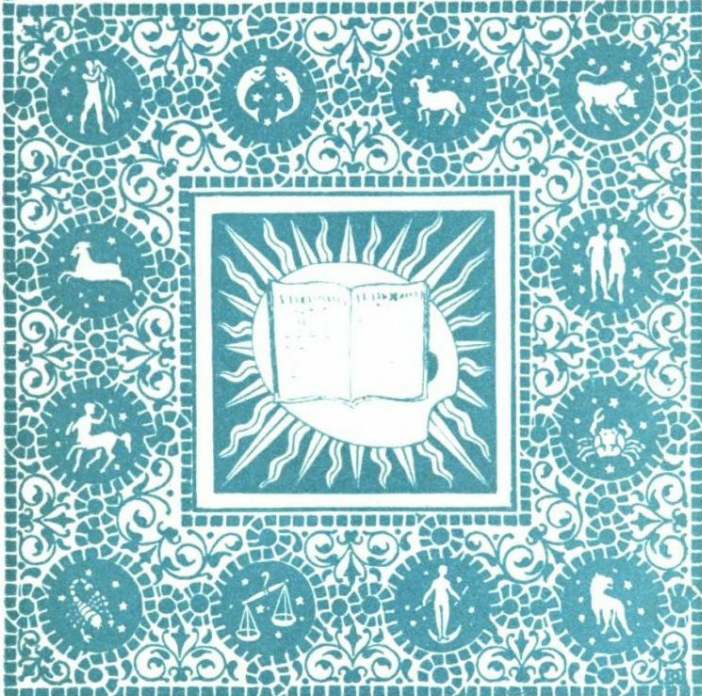
**EIGHT GIRLS AND  
A DOG**



“ ‘WELL, YOU ARE A PROPER-LOOKING LOT!’ MRS. LENNOX EXCLAIMED AS THE GIRLS FILED IN.”

ST. NICHOLAS BOOKS

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GIRLS AND  
A DOG  
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TO  
LOUISE FRANCES STEVENS

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in the “St. Nicholas Magazine”  
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# **EIGHT GIRLS AND A DOG**

# CHAPTER I

## PILLOWS AND PITCHERS

“IS there any way to pack pillows in pitchers?” said Marjorie, framing herself in the front doorway, one hand grasping recklessly the handles of three large pitchers, and both arms full of sofa-pillows.

The group on the veranda looked up at her doubtfully.

“Yes,” said brilliant Nan. “Have your pitchers bigger than your pillows, and the thing is done.”

“But the pillows are bigger than the pitchers.”

“Then pack the pitchers in the pillows,” said Betty.

“Why, of course! Betty, you’re a genius!” And Marjorie disappeared with her burdens, while the girls on the veranda fell to chattering again like half a dozen shirt-waisted magpies.

Now I know that a story with eight heroines is an imposition upon even the gentlest of readers; but you see there were eight girls in the Blue Ribbon Cooking Club; and when their president, Marjorie Bond, proposed that they go down to Long Beach and spend a fortnight all by themselves in her father’s cottage, the whole club rose up as one girl and voted aye.

Objections were disposed of as fast as they were raised. Permission? The girls were sure that the sixteen parents concerned could be persuaded to see the matter in a favorable light. Expense? That should be divided equally among them all. Trouble? Would be more than compensated by the fun. Luggage? Not so very much required; the house was completely furnished, except with linen and silver, and each girl should take her share. Burglars? That idea caused some apprehension; but when Marjorie said that Uncle Ned and Aunt Molly would be right next door, plans were suggested sufficient to scare any reasonably cautious burglar out of his wits. And so the preliminaries had been arranged, and the date decided upon, and the day had come.

It was Thursday morning, and they were to leave on the noon train; and now, although ten o’clock had struck, six sailor-hatted girls were gathered on the Bonds’ veranda, hurriedly making final arrangements and frantically trying to remember what were the most important things they had forgotten.

“It’s like a fire,” Jessie Carroll was saying; “you know people always save

their old trash and leave their best things to burn up. Now I'm sure I've packed just the very things we won't want and left at home the things we'll need most. And that reminds me—Nan, can't I put my best hat in your box? I just *had* to take my down comfortable, and it was so puffy it wouldn't leave room for anything else.”

“Oh, don't take your best hat,” cried Betty Miller; “we're not going down to Long Beach to dress up and be giddy. It's so late in the season none of the summer boarders will be there, and we're just going to wear flannel frocks all day, and tramp in the woods and loll in the hammocks and get brown as berries and hungry as hunters and uncivilized as—as Hottentots.”

“Yes, Betty; but remember somebody has to cook for these hungry Hottentots,” said Mrs. Bond, smiling.

“Aren't you afraid, girls, that you'll get tired of cooking? And you'll find that there's a great deal of work connected with housekeeping if you do it all yourselves.”

“Oh, no, indeed, Mrs. Bond,” said Nan Kellogg. “I just love to cook, and I don't mind housework a bit. Mamma thinks it will be good training for me.”

“Such doings!” exclaimed Grandma Bond, a lovely old lady of the silver-haired, apple-cheeked variety. “Living on chafing-dish foolery for two weeks! You'll all be ill or starved to death in three days, and you'll wish yourselves back in your comfortable homes.”

“Not we, grandma!” cried Betty. “We have a gas-stove and a range besides our beloved chafing-dish, and we won't starve. But if Nan makes our Welsh rarebits I'll not promise that we won't be ill. Her concoctions are the stuff that dreams are made on. Oh, here's Helen. What's your misfortune, my pretty maid?”

Helen Morris came up on the veranda and dropped into a big wicker chair and fanned herself with her hat.

“Girls, I'm exhausted! You know I said I'd take all the things for afternoon tea, but I had no idea there were so many. Why, I've packed a whole barrel and they're not all in yet. To be sure, it's mostly tissue-paper and excelsior; but I was so afraid they'd break. And I couldn't get the tea-cozy in at all, or the Dresden cups; I'd hate to break *them*.”

“Yes,” said Betty, sympathetically; “*don't* break the tea-cozy, whatever you do, if it's that pretty yellow satin one. But you've no ingenuity, Nell; why don't you wear it down on your head? Then you'll look like a drum-major.”

“I will if you'll all obey my orders. Well, this won't do for me. I must go back and reason with those tea-things. I just ran over a minute because I saw you all here. If I can't get them into the barrel I'll have to take a cask besides.

Good-by. I'll meet you at the train. What time do we start?"

"Twelve-ten," replied Hester Laverack. "I'll go home with you, Helen, and help you pack your china."

"Yes, do," said Betty; "two heads are better than one in any barrel."

But the two heads were already bobbing down the walk, and didn't hear Betty's parting shot.

"Nell's crazy," remarked Millicent Payne, who always did everything leisurely, yet always had it done on time. "I do hope her barrel will go safely, for her tea-cups and things are lovely."

"Shall we have tea *every* afternoon?" asked Marguerite Alden, a fragile wisp of a girl who looked as if a real strong ocean breeze would blow her away. "I'm so glad! I don't care for the tea at all, but the having it with all us girls together will be such fun, only—I do hate to wash up the tea-things."

"Girlies," said Mrs. Bond, "I think it would be much better all round if you'd hire a neat little maid to wash your dishes for you. You can probably find one down there, and I'm sure you'll be glad to have help when you discover what dish-washing for eight means."

"I think it would be heaps better, Mrs. Bond," said Marguerite. "I don't see how we can have any fun if we have to work all the time."

"Lazy Daisy!" said Betty. "You won't do any more than your share. But we won't let the interloper do any of our cooking; I insist on that."

"All right, Betty," said Marguerite, or Daisy, as the girls called her, though she wished they wouldn't; "and you may be chief cook."

"No," said Betty, "I'm not chief cook—Marjorie is that. I'll be the first assistant. I'll prepare the vegetables for her, and be a—a peeler."

"Hurrah for Betty the Peeler!" said Marjorie, appearing again in the front door. "And what am I?"

"You're the cook," said Millicent.

"But we're all cooks."

"Yes, I know; but you're head cook, chief cook—cook plenipotentiary, or any title you prefer."

"Then I'll be cook," said Marjorie, "just plain cook."

"Indeed, you'll be more than a plain cook," said her mother, laughing, "if you attempt all the fancy dishes in all those recipe-books I saw you stowing away in your trunk."

"Oh, they weren't all recipe-books. Some of them were delectable tales to be read aloud at the twilight hour. I could only take light literature, as the box

weighs about a ton now. So I was forced to leave out 'Advice to Young Maidens' and Carlyle's 'French Revolution,' for I really hadn't room."

"I hope you took 'Rollo Learning to Work,' for I'm sure we'll need it."

"No, Betty, I didn't; but I packed 'First Aid to the Injured' and 'Alice in Wonderland'; we can struggle along with those."

"There's a circulating library down at Long Beach," said Nan Kellogg; "we can get books there."

"Now look here, my rising young authoress," said Betty; "you're not going down there to read all the time, or write, either. So you may as well make up your mind to it, milady, first as last. We'll have no bookworms or blue-stockings. 'Cooks, not Books,' is our motto. Now, Duchess, look over your lists for the last time; I'm going home to lock my trunk, and then I'm going to don my war-paint and feathers."

"I am, too," said Nan; "and I want to go down to the station an hour before train-time, so as to have ample leisure to come back for what I forget."

"Good idea," said Marjorie, approvingly. The girls called her "Duchess" because she had a high-and-mighty way of giving orders. Not an unpleasant way—oh, dear, no! Marjorie Bond was the favorite of the whole village of Middleton. Her stately air was due to the fact that she was rather tall for her sixteen years, and carried herself as straight as an arrow. She could have posed admirably for a picture of Pocahontas. Her dark, bright eyes were always dancing, and her saucy gipsy face was always smiling; for Marjorie had a talent for enjoyment, which she cultivated at every opportunity. The girls said she could get fun out of anything, from a scolding to a jug of sour cream. And that latter fact suggests Marjorie's pet accomplishment, which, though prosaic, afforded much pleasure to herself and her friends. She was a born cook, and by experiment and experience had become a proficient one. Two years ago she had proposed the Cooking Club, and though not very enthusiastic at first, every one of the eight members would tell you now that nothing in Middleton was ever quite so much fun as the Cooking Club.

"I'm sure I've thought of everything," said the Duchess, wrinkling her pretty brows over a handful of scribbled lists. "You're to bring the forks, Nannie, and a pair of blankets and a table-cloth, and don't forget your napkin-ring, and your jolly Vienna coffee-pot; and, Betty, take your chafing-dish—we'll need two; Millicent, you're responsible for the spoons, and Jessie, knives. Lazy Daisy will take a hammock, and I'll take one, too; and I've packed lots of sofa-pillows, and I hope Helen will take her banjo. I've lost my most important list, so I may have forgotten something. But I've packed towels, hand and dish, and a scrub-brush and a tack-hammer—and isn't that all

we need to keep house?—except this good-for-nothing little bundle, my own, my only Timmy Loo. Will you go with us, honey?” Marjorie picked up the bundle in question, who wagged his absurd moppy, silvery ears and his still more absurd moppy, silvery tail, and accepted the invitation with a few staccato barks of joy.

“That means yes, of course,” said Betty; “his French accent is so perfect, even I can understand it. Well, good-by, Timmy; I’ll see you later. Can you take him on the train, Marjorie?”

“No; he’ll have to ride in the baggage-car. But I’ve explained it all to him, and he doesn’t mind; and he’ll keep an eye on our trunks and wheels.”

Timmy Loo barked again and blinked his eyes acquiescently, and Betty gave him a final pat on his funny little nose and ran away home.

“I must go, too,” said Marguerite, rising as she spoke and picking a full-blown rose from the trellis above her head.

A careless observer probably would have called Marguerite the prettiest of all the Cooking Club girls. She was small, slender, and graceful, with a rose-leaf complexion and sea-blue eyes, and a glory of golden hair that the girls called her halo. She was visionary and romantic, and her special chum was Nan Kellogg, who was lounging in the hammock with her hands clasped behind her head and her eyes closed. Nan was a dark-haired, olive-skinned Southern girl, with a poetic temperament and a secret ambition to write verse.

“Come, girl,” said Marguerite, dropping rose-petals, one by one, on Nan’s nose. “What are you dreaming of?”

“Oh,” said Nan, opening her eyes, “I was thinking what gay old times we’re going to have down there. I’m so glad we’re going! Marjorie, you’re *such* a darling, I shall dedicate my first book of poems to you.”

“Do,” said Marjorie; “but don’t write them while we’re down at Long Beach. What shall we do if you go off on a poetic flight when it’s your turn to boil the potatoes?”

“Oh, I sha’n’t boil potatoes; they’re too prosaic. Omelet soufflé is the very plainest thing I shall ever cook.”

Grandma Bond groaned.

“Margy,” she said despairingly, “I *hope* you packed the medicine-chest I gave you.”

“Oh, yes, grandma; and your bundle of old linen and salve for burns, and your arnica-flowers for bruises, and your sticking-plaster for cuts, and your toothache drops, and your Balsam Balm. Oh, the hospital department will give you a vote of thanks, engrossed and framed. Now go on home, Nan and Daisy;



I know you'll miss the train."

"Yes, we must go. Good-by, grandma." For all the girls insisted on sharing Marjorie's grandma, and the dear old lady's heart was big enough for them all. "Good-by, grandma; give us a parting word."

Grandma's eyes twinkled as she replied: "Well, I advise you to remember that too many broths spoil the cook."

Six merry laughs greeted this speech, and Nan replied: "Indeed they do, and I won't allow more than three kinds of soup at any one meal. Now I'm off, Marjorie; I'll meet you at the train—and oh, Duchess, I 'most forgot to ask you. Brother Jack says, can he and Ted come down and spend a day with us?"

"No, indeed!" cried Marjorie. "We are not going to allow a boy in sight all the time we are there. Tell them we're sorry to refuse, but we're not running a co-educational institution, and only girls need apply."

"I did tell him that, but he begged me to ask you again—"

"No," said Marjorie, laughing but positive; "tell him we turn a deaf ear—I mean sixteen deaf ears—to his entreaties, and harden our eight hearts to his appeal. There is no use, girls; if the boys come down they'll spoil everything; don't you think so?"

"Yes," said each girl, but with such varying accents that Mrs. Bond laughed heartily, while Marguerite shook her yellow curls and protested that she didn't want the boys anyway, even if they *did* bring candy.

Then she and Nan went home, and Jessie Carroll said: "We'll have plenty of candy, Marjorie, for father will send it down whenever I want him to."

"Oh, Jessie, that will be fine! It will be just like boarding-school when the boxes come from home," said Hester Laverack, who had returned from Helen and her refractory tea-things. Hester was an English girl who had only been in America about a year, and was not yet quite accustomed to the rollicking ways of the rest of the club. "I think," she went on slowly, "I may take my camera down, if you like; it'll be rather good fun to take pictures of us all."

"Yes, indeed; you must take your camera," said Marjorie. "What larks! We'll have jolly pictures. And if Helen takes her banjo we can sing songs and have concerts, and—oh, dear, the time won't be half long enough!"

"Send me up a picture of the group when you've spoiled your dinner in the cooking, and haven't anything to eat," said grandma, slyly.

"Now, Grandma Cassandra, you mustn't talk like that," said Marjorie; "but you can't dampen our spirits with your dire prognostications; we have too much confidence in our own capabilities. Skip along, girls; I'm going to get ready now, and we'll all meet at the station."

The crowd scattered, and Millicent Payne said: “Well, I’m the last little Injun, and I reckon I’ll go too, and then there’ll be none.”

Millicent Payne was Marjorie’s dearest friend and chum, and lived next door; at least, she was supposed to, but she almost lived at the Bonds’. Millicent was a delightful girl to know; she was so clever and bright, and took such an interest in anything that interested anybody else—such a kind, whole-hearted interest, that was neither curious nor critical. And she had such funny little tricks of imagination. If, for any reason, her surroundings were not quite what she wished they were, she immediately created for herself an environment that suited her better, and, quite oblivious of facts, lived and moved among her fancies. She was devoted to stories and fairy-tales, and would repeat them in an irresistibly funny manner, becoming at times so imbued with the spirit of fantasy that she seemed a veritable witch or pixy herself.

“Run along, Millikens,” called Marjorie. “Come back when you’re ready, and we’ll go down together.”

## CHAPTER II

### ON THE ROAD

THE clock in the railroad station announced high noon, but of all the party only Marjorie and Millicent were there to hear it. Nan Kellogg had fulfilled her own prophecy by coming down fifteen minutes earlier, and then going back home for her cuckoo-clock, which was one of her pet possessions, and which she decided she couldn't be parted from for two whole weeks. She came flying back, and entered the station by one door just as Betty Miller came in at the other.

"Oh," said Nan, breathlessly, "I thought of course I'd be the last one here. Where are the other girls? But since they're not here, won't you hold the clock, Marjorie, and let me run back home and—"

"No," said Betty, decidedly. "You *cannot* go back for anything else. Follow the example of your clock and stop running for a while."

"Has it stopped? I was afraid it would. Never mind; I can set it going after we get there. But I do want to go back and—"

"Nan Kellogg, you'll be put in chains if you are so insubordinate," broke in Marjorie. "I am commander of this expedition, and I order you to sit down on that bench and not move until the train comes."

Nan laughed, but sat down obediently, holding her precious clock; and then Helen appeared with her banjo, and Hester with her camera.

"Have you checked your wheels, girls?" asked Betty.

"Yes, with our trunks," said Helen. "Mr. Bond is keeping watch over them until the train comes; and he is holding Timmy Loo, who is a most important-looking animal just now, dressed in a new red ribbon and a baggage-tag."

"Oh, he's delighted with his prospective journey," said Marjorie. "I told him he had the entire charge of our trunks and wheels, and he feels the responsibility. Oh, here's Jessie. Now we're all here but Marguerite. Where is she, Nan?"

"Who? Daisy? Oh, she'll be here in a minute. I think she waited to learn how to make soup."

"She'll be in it if she doesn't hurry," said Nan. "I think I'll go and poke her up."

“Don’t do it!” cried Betty. “You’ll miss her, and then we won’t have either of you. Here she comes now, grinning like a Chassy cat.”

Dainty Marguerite, in her fresh white duck suit and pink shirt-waist, came in, smiling radiantly.



“MR. BOND IS HOLDING TIMMY LOO.’ SAID HELEN.”

“Girls,” said she, “Aunt Annie was at our house, and she taught me a new soup. It’s wonderful, and I’ll make it for you, if you want it, the first thing.”

“Of course we want it the first thing,” said Nan. “Did you suppose we thought it was a dessert?”

“Come, girls!” called Mr. Bond, from the platform, as the train that was to have the honor of carrying the party puffed into the station and came noisily to a standstill. “Are you ready? All aboard! Good-by, Margy dear; don’t set the house afire. Who is the Matron of this crowd, anyway? I’d like a word with her.”

Marjorie looked at the girls. “I think Marguerite is,” she said. “She’s the youngest and smallest and rattle-patedest. Yes, she shall be our Matron.”

“Very well, then, Matron Daisy, I consign these young barbarians to your care, and I put them and my house in your charge, and I shall expect you to render me an account when you come back.”

“Don’t scare me, Mr. Bond,” pleaded Marguerite, shaking her yellow curls. “If the responsibility proves too much for me I shall run away and leave them

to their fate. But I think I can manage them, and I'll rule them with a rod of iron."

And then the bell rang, and Mr. Bond jumped off the train just in time; and he waved his hat, and the girls waved their handkerchiefs from the windows, until they were whisked away out of his sight.

"Now, my children," said Marguerite, highly elated at her absurd title of Matron, "you are in my care, and I must look after you. Why, where are Nan and Helen?"

Sure enough, only six of the girls were to be seen; but just at that moment the two missing ones were escorted through the now wabbling doorway by an official. They were rather red-faced, and explained that they had seated themselves in the smoking-car by mistake, and the brakeman had kindly brought them back to their friends.

"I am shocked," said Marguerite, severely. "Sit down there at once, and after this follow my directions more closely."

Then the eight girls were quickly paired off, and the general chatter was broken up into dialogues.

Mindful of her position as Matron, Marguerite kept a watchful eye on her charges. To be sure, the watchful eye was so bright and merry that as a means of restraint it was practically useless. But the Blue Ribbon Cooking Club knew how to behave itself in a public conveyance—oh, dear, yes! and, save for a few sudden and really unavoidable bursts of merriment, it was as proper and decorous a rosebud garland of girls as one could wish to see.

To be sure, there was some commotion when the conductor asked for Marguerite's ticket, and she suddenly remembered she had written Aunt Annie's soup recipe on the back of it, intending to copy it before the conductor came around.

"It was the only bit of paper I had," she explained, "and it is such a good recipe. What shall I do?"

Nan had a blank-book with her which she always carried in case of poetic fire, and the conductor obligingly left the soup-ticket, as Betty called it, for them to copy, and returned later to receive the yellow card, much crumpled by the process of erasure. But the precious recipe was safe, and at least one page of Nan's book was worth having.

And there was another mild excitement when Nan's cuckoo-clock, which was carefully laid away up in the rack, suddenly announced in shrill pipes that it was twelve o'clock. It wasn't twelve o'clock at all, and that rascally cuckoo knew it; but having been silenced by Nan's breathless run down to the station, he was well pleased to be set going again by the jar of the train, and he chirped

his twelve double notes with an evident enjoyment of the situation.

Nan tried her best to look unconscious, but only succeeded in looking so funny that the girls went off into peals of laughter.

Betty leaned over, and picking up Nan's blank-book, scribbled in it:

Nannie had a little clock,  
But it was rather slow;  
And when she thought that it had stopped,  
The clock was sure to go.

This was passed around, and caused such hilarity that Marguerite confiscated the book and, assuming an air of rigid decorum, sat staring straight before her with all the appalling dignity of a blonde wax doll.

Upon which, Millicent slyly regained the book, unobserved by the stern Matron, and drew a funny sketch of Marguerite wearing epaulets and a cocked hat, mounted on a fiery steed, and commanding a great army. The curly mop of hair, the stiff duck skirt, and the side-saddle, contrasted with the military pose and uplifted sword, was very funny; and when Millicent labeled it "A Daisy Napoleon," and passed it over to Betty and Jessie, they giggled outright. But now they had passed Spring Grove, and the next station would be Long Beach. Gathering up their belongings, they were all ready, when the train stopped, to jump out on the platform, and there they found Uncle Ned and Aunt Molly waiting for them.

"All here?" sang out Uncle Ned, in his cheery way. "Where are your checks?"

A dozen metal medals were produced by Betty, who announced herself as Courier. It was an appalling lot of luggage to which these checks entitled Uncle Ned; but he soon found a man with a big wagon, and trunks, wheels, and boxes were lifted into it and despatched to the cottage, while Marjorie received frantic expressions of affection from Timmy Loo, who had had quite enough of baggage-cars for one while.

Uncle Ned politely put the spare seats of his carriage at the disposal of the girls, but the loyal crowd refused to be divided. Not they indeed! They would find a conveyance that would hold them all, or they would walk. It was only about a mile. But a capacious stage lumbered up, and the whole eight were bundled into it.

Timmy Loo, as was his custom when riding, jumped up on Marjorie's shoulder, and sat there fairly quivering with curiosity to know what kind of a performance was going on, anyway. For his part, he couldn't understand it at

all. But Marjorie gave him a little whack on his nose, and he subsided into a wary indifference.

“Want any milk?” The loud words seemed to roll in at the door of the stage, and there on the steps stood a burly, red-faced man, smiling with fun and curiosity.

“I heard as how you young ladies was a-comin’, an’ I thought as you might want to engage milk at onct.”

“Oh, not now, please,” said Marguerite, who sat in the end of the stage, and who was startled by the sudden apparition. “Come round to the house after we get settled.”

“All right, mum; thank ye, mum!” And the red-faced one disappeared as mysteriously as he had come.

“Wasn’t he awful?” said Marguerite. “He hopped up like a jack-in-the-box, and that off-with-his-head tone of voice scared me out of my wits.”

“Oh, that was old Farmer Hobbs,” said Marjorie, laughing; “he always brings us milk when we’re here in the summer.”

“Here’s the ocean, Nan; get out your best pensive expression and put it on,” cried Betty, as the stage bumped around a corner and the blue sea shone before them.

But Nan was already wearing what the girls called her rapt look, and she paid no attention to their banter.

“ ‘Roll on, thou deep and dark blue ocean, roll!’ ” began Millicent.

“Should you dry up, ’twould leave an awful hole,” continued Marjorie. “Oh, how good this salt air is! It makes me feel like a mermaid.”

“It has a worse effect on me than that,” exclaimed Betty. “It makes me just awfully hungry. Do we really have to get settled to housekeeping and all that before we can have anything to eat?”

“No, indeed,” said Marjorie; “we’ll have a picnic supper as soon as we can get enough things unpacked to have it with, and then we’ll begin our regular living to-morrow. There’s the house, girls; that shingled one next to the one with the yellow dog in front of it.”

And in another minute they had stopped in front of the shingled house and were tumbling over one another out of the stage.

Nan landed first, and no sooner had she touched the ground than, as if by magic, a swarm of men appeared, who gathered round her, outvying each other in impressive politeness, and offered her cards.

Bewildered at the suddenness of the onslaught, Nan glanced helplessly at

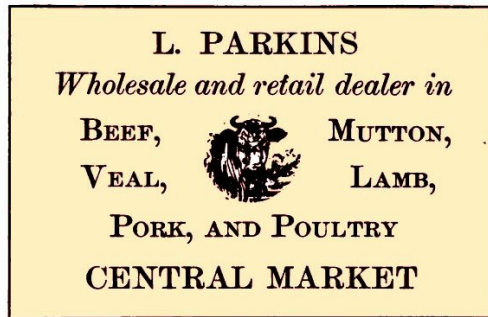
Marjorie with a scared “What *do* they want?”

At this the swarm turned their attention to Marjorie and the cards were pointed at her, while the men stood respectfully silent.

The Duchess, though as ignorant as Nan of the nature of the bits of pasteboard thrust upon her, summoned all her dignity to her aid, and sternly demanded:

“What *do* you want?”

But the answers came from a dozen manly throats in such a jumble that no word was intelligible. Then, looking at two cards which had been fairly pushed into her hands, she read on one:



and on the other:



Then these two rival butchers began each to dilate on his superiority over all other butchers that ever had been or ever would be at Long Beach, and each claimed the honor of having supplied the first families there since the settlement of the place.

Marjorie, alive to the fun of the thing, tried to make a decision. Finally she said: “I will order meat from one of you to-day, and the other to-morrow, and whichever sends me the best meats I will continue to patronize. And I will try first the one whose card is decorated with this very beautiful cow’s head. That’s you, Mr. Parkins. But I can’t order now, for I’m too busy. Come around



again in about an hour. And you, Mr. Merton & Finch, may come to-morrow morning for your order.”

“Yes, mum,” said the two men, and, gallantly lifting their caps, they went away.

The cards of the other men announced them to be fish and vegetable merchants, bakers and milkmen, and one, being card-less, declared himself the coal and wood agent.

“We may as well order that at once,” said Marjorie, reflectively. “Please send us a barrel of kindling-wood and a—Girls, how much coal ought we to have for two weeks?”

“A ton, I should think,” said Marguerite, with an air of superior wisdom that made her look like the canary who wanted to be an owl.

“Crazy Daisy!” said Betty. “We couldn’t *begin* to use a ton, nor a half, nor a quarter. Why, we only use twenty tons for a whole year at home, radiators and all.”

“If six Millers in one year burn twenty tons, how much is necessary to supply one Miller and seven other insects that they may have coal to burn?”

“I’ll be Stoker,” said Hester Laverack. “The only thing I’m a real success at is making a fire and keeping it going. And *I* think we’ll need a barrel of coal.”

“A barrel! Just the thing!” cried Betty. “That’s lots better than a fraction of a ton; and there are so few fractions of a ton to choose from.”

“All right,” said Marjorie; “you may send us a barrel of coal and some wood for the open fire.”

“A quarter of a cord?” suggested the man, as if he feared another lengthy discussion.

“Yes,” said Marjorie, breathing a sigh of relief as he went away. Then she stood looking helplessly at her handful of cards. “Girls,” said she, “the responsibilities of housekeeping are wearing me out, and we haven’t even entered the house yet.”

“Where are the keys?” said impatient Marguerite.

Marjorie flourished her bunch of keys importantly, unlocked the door, and, with a wild whoop from Betty and a responsive bark from Timmy Loo they all went in.

## CHAPTER III

### THE FUN BEGINS

“SAVED! I have fallen into a grotto!” exclaimed Millicent, dashing through the hall and into the parlor, where she flung herself into a big wicker rocker.

“What do you mean by that?” said Hester, who always liked to have everything explained.

“Why, don’t you remember that ridiculous hero in one of Jules Verne’s stories who fell thousands of miles down into the earth, and landed in a beautiful grotto, which caused him delight but no surprise? Those are exactly my sensations.”

“Well, your grotto is full of unused atmosphere. Let’s turn it out and get some fresh.” And swish! up went the shades, and bang! up went the windows, and in came the air and sunlight; and after eight girls had flung down their hats and wraps and bags and bundles the place began to look quite homelike.

“Here are the trunks and bicycles,” cried Helen, as a wagon stopped before the cottage.

“Oh, dear,” said Marjorie, “we haven’t chosen our rooms yet! Two will have to sleep downstairs. Who wants to?”

“I will,” said Betty. “I’m not afraid; are you, Jessie?”

“No, indeed!” And the Invincibles immediately appropriated the pretty bedroom that opened off the parlor.

Haven’t I told you about these two girls yet? Well, Betty was fifteen, a very tall girl, with that kind of tallness that is called overgrown. She was fond of all outdoor sports, and strong, athletic, and muscular, she strode through life regardless of conventions, but making friends as she went. Jessie was of directly opposite type in most ways. A chubby little maiden with a happy-go-lucky disposition, she had a positive genius for getting her own way. Always amiable and acquiescent, and very generous, she yet managed never to do anything she didn’t wish to do. She was a frivolous little creature, devoted to finery and dress, but so winning and affectionate that it was really impossible to interfere with her wishes. And so Betty’s determination and Jessie’s persistency had won them the name of the Invincibles, and whatever they

agreed on always came to pass. But as they rarely agreed on anything this was not so disastrous as it might have been.

The social economy of the eight was very clearly defined. The Octave, as they called themselves, divided very naturally into two quartets or four duets whenever occasion required. And just now occasion did require; so, leaving Betty and Jessie, the other six flew upstairs, and Marjorie and Millicent took one room, Nan and Marguerite another, and Helen and Hester the third, so that when the trunks were sent up they were put at once where they belonged. The wheels were stacked in the hall—only five of them, for Millicent, Nan, and Marguerite didn't ride. Then the trunks were unpacked, shelves divided fairly, hooks counted out, top bureau drawers tossed up for, and the settling process had begun.

Soon Betty's voice was heard from below: "Don't fiddle with your finery any longer now, girls; come on down and let's see about supper."

The six upstairs, feeling a responsive thrill, suspended operations at once and skipped down.

Then they all flocked out to the kitchen, and great and joyous were the exclamations of the Blue Ribbon Cooking Club when they beheld the completeness of the furnishings thereof.

The old corner cupboard disclosed griddles and gridirons, saucepans and frying-pans; rows of shining tins hung over the sink; egg-beaters and syllabub-churns smiled out at them from the shelves; and a big fat pudding-mold beamed a welcome from its corner.

Betty seized two tin kettle-covers, and, clashing them like cymbals, broke into the club's "battle-song," which they sang on every possible occasion. Marjorie played an accompaniment on the coffee-mill, Nan whisked in some trills with the egg-beater, and they all sang:

Rub-a-dub-dub!  
Rub-a-dub-dub!  
Hurrah for the girls of the Blue Ribbon Club!  
And whether we're beating,  
Or heating,  
Or eating,  
We always have fun at the Blue Ribbon Club!

A loud knock at the back door made them all jump.

"You go, Marjorie," said Nan.

So Marjorie opened the door and faced again the persistent crowd of

venders. The Parkins butcher, the grocer, the baker, milkman, vegetable-man, fish-man, all stood, beaming and expectant.

“The club will please come to order!” said Marjorie, turning to the girls. “These claimants must be satisfied. *What*, ladies of the Blue Ribbon Cooking Club, *what*, I ask you, do you want to eat?”

A serious silence fell on the crowd. They realized that at last they must cope with the great question.

“We’ll divide forces and appoint committees,” went on the president. “Betty, you and Jessie order the meat—whatever you like; Nan, do up the baker; Marguerite, the milkman; Helen and Hester, reason with the vegetarian; and Millikens and I will attend to the grocer.”

Nan soon despatched the baker with a standing order of two loaves per day, subject to amendment. Marguerite discussed the milk problem at length with good-natured old Farmer Hobbs, and wound up by deciding on two quarts every morning, or three quarts if there was a clothes-pin on the pail which he would find on the back steps; also a quart of cream each morning, with a like understanding of the clothes-pin. “For,” said the sagacious Matron, “what with whips and charlottes, we’ll need a lot of cream.”

Helen and Hester decided they would attend to their department in an orderly and systematic manner. Taking the index of a cookery-book for a guide, they decided they would eat their vegetables alphabetically.

“Have you any artichokes?” said Hester.

“No, mum,” replied the man, looking as if she had asked for a salamander.

“Any Brussels sprouts?” asked Helen.

“No, mum.”

“Any celery?”

“Yis, mum; fine celery indeed. Will ye look at it, mum?”

“We oughtn’t to have celery until day after to-morrow,” said Helen, dubiously, as they went out to the wagon, “but I guess we’ll have to give up the alphabet plan. Let’s order celery and potatoes. And oh, look at that big pumpkin! Wouldn’t a pumpkin-pie be grand?”

“Gay,” said Hester. “We’ll take that—and that’s enough for to-day; you’ll call to-morrow, won’t you?”

“Yis, mum,” replied the man; and when the purchases were deposited on the kitchen table Helen and Hester felt proud of their choice.

Jessie had disappeared, but the stray notes of song floating out from her room made it an open secret that the attractions of her trinkets and fripperies

had charmed her away from the culinary pastures. So Betty faced the butcher alone. She was very decided and businesslike. "We want meat for supper to-night," said she, looking at Mr. Parkins's card as if for inspiration. "'Beef, Veal, Mutton, Lamb, Pork, and Poultry'—h'm! Well, we'll begin at the beginning. Beefsteak, I think; you may send two nice porterhouse-steaks, and please send them as soon as possible. Then we'll have a roast for to-morrow—a two-rib roast of beef; you may send that to-morrow morning." The butcher noted down her orders, and went away.

Then the only committee still out was Marjorie and Millicent. When Betty, having finished her course, turned to them, they were in a wild state of excitement. They had decided to suggest things alternately, while the grocer wrote the list.

The grocer was a lanky, raw-boned young man with bushy red hair, and, seated in a chair with his pad and pencil, looked for all the world like a district schoolmaster; while the two girls stood before him, looking like a very animated spelling-match.

Marjorie, dancing on one foot, was twisting up the corners of her apron into knots, which she tied and untied with unconscious rapidity. Millicent stood firmly facing her, with folded arms and screwed-up forehead.

"Flour," said Marjorie.

"Butter," said Millicent.

"Sugar," said Marjorie.

"Salt," said Millicent.

"Pepper."

"Mustard."

"Ketchup."

"Sardines."

"Olives."

"Oh, we must get staples! Molasses."

"Buckwheat."

"No; we don't want buckwheat. Kerosene."

"Oh, yes; and candles."

"Matches."

"Starch."

"We don't need starch. Corn-starch."

"Eggs."

“Vanilla.”

“Worcestershire sauce.”



MARJORIE AND MILLICENT ORDERING THINGS ALTERNATELY.

“Dear! I’m sure we’ve forgotten the most important things. Lard.”

“Rice.”

“We ought to have some canned things.”

“Well, let him bring what we’ve ordered, and then we can remember what we’ve forgotten. Soap.”

“Ammonia.”

“Salad-oil.”

“Now one thing suggests another! Lemons.”

“Cheese.”

“Macaroni.”

“Macaroons.”

“He doesn’t keep those; the baker does. Don’t let’s order any more things now; I’m all mixed up.”

Mr. Fenn went away well pleased with his order, and Millicent dropped into a kitchen chair exhausted.

“Girls,” said Hester, “you’ve run up an awful big order; *do* you suppose it will cost all our money?”

“Oh, no,” said the wise and matronly Marguerite, shaking her halo; “and, besides, most of those things won’t need to be ordered again; the staples will last us all the time we’re here. Now when they bring the bills I’ll fix up my accounts. I have a little red book, real Russia, and I’ll have a page for each department. Are these committees standing ones, Miss President?”

“Oh, *no!*” said Marjorie, “we’ll take turns at things. I don’t want to order groceries again. I’m quite worn out.”

“Poor Margy! ‘Come rest in this bosom, my own stricken deer,’ ” sang Nan, catching Marjorie about the waist and dancing round the kitchen with her.

“Oh, I am so hungry!” pleaded Betty. “Can’t we get out the silver and table-cloth and set the table now?”

“Yes, come on; I love to set a table,” said Nan. “But oh, *how* I hate to wash dishes! I thought we were going to have an Irish lady to do that, eh, Marjorie?”

“Aunt Molly says there’s a nice Irish girl who lives up the beach somewhere who would come and help us for a consideration. You and Marguerite go and hunt her up. Her name is Rosie O’Neill.”

“Beautiful name!” said Nan.

“A lady named Rosie O’Neill  
I’m sure will be loyal and leal;  
Fulfilling our wishes,  
She’ll wash up our dishes,  
And our apples and onions she’ll peel.

There! we forgot to order apples.”

“Let’s have a slate on the kitchen table and write down orders whenever

they occur to us.”

“Come on, Matron; we’ll go and hunt the radiant Rosie. Where does she live, Duchess?”

“Oh, I don’t know. Stop in and ask Aunt Molly; she’ll direct you.”

“’Tis well, O chief! We will return in triumph with our enchained captive!”

“Now,” said Marjorie, as the door banged behind Nan and Marguerite, “those rattle-pated girls are sure to get lost, and we’ll never see them again. Meantime let’s get to work. We haven’t explored the cellar yet. Perhaps the people who’ve been in the cottage all summer left a lot of good things.”

Down cellar they went; but a thorough search revealed nothing of interest but a basket of onions, a refrigerator, and an old trunk, which attracted Hester’s attention at once.

“Why, that’s a real old English trunk!” she cried. “Where did it come from? It’s locked, and the lock is all rusty. What do you find, Marjorie?”

“Nothing but onions and flour; but the flour looks queer—I don’t believe it’s good.”

“That isn’t flour, you goose; it’s Indian meal. It’ll be gay for corn-bread.”

“Who can make corn-bread? *I* can’t,” confessed Betty.

“Oh, yes, you can, if you try,” declared Marjorie. “Your cooking always turns out all right. Now, as we’re going to have steak for supper, what do you say to having fried onions? There are plenty here, and I do love ’em, don’t you?”

“Yes; and we never have them at home, they’re so—so intrusive. Let’s do it!”

“All right, Betty; and as you’ve announced yourself Peeler, you can begin your vocation. Oh, you’ve got a future before you!”

Betty looked a little dubious, but bravely picked up the basket, saying: “Very well; I’ll peel them, if some one else will fry them.”

“I’ll fry them,” returned Marjorie. “In my capacity of chief cook I’ll do all the cooking for this first supper. Now let me see; what are we going to have?”

The others, as usual, all began to talk at once.

Marjorie seized a long iron spoon, and, rapping on the table, said: “This meeting will please come to order. If you don’t we’ll never have any supper. Now don’t all talk at once, but if you’ve any sensible propositions to make, make them when you’re called on. Betty the Peeler, have you any suggestions to offer?”



But Betty was speechless. She held a great pan filled with water in her lap, in which the onions were bobbing up and down. She was peeling away vigorously, but her eyes were very red and the tears were rolling down her cheeks.

“‘With a smile on her lip and a tear in her eye,’” quoted Marjorie, laughing.

“She’s more like Niobe—*all* tears,” said Helen; “come, Hester, let’s wipe her weeping eyes for her”; and the two stationed themselves on either side of Betty, with their handkerchiefs in readiness.

“Now!” said Helen, “left! right! left! right!” And they dabbed poor Betty’s eyes so energetically that they were redder than ever.

“Clear out, girls, or you’ll soon weep with those that weep,” cried Betty. “Go away; these are nearly done. Who’ll carry out the pan of skins?”

“‘Oh, promise me—oh, *promise me-e-e!*’” came floating out from the bedroom where Jessie was still arranging and rearranging her cherished belongings.

“Jessie ought to do *some* work,” said Millicent. “She’s too dainty and dressy for any use. She ought to be disciplined. Let’s make her come out here and be Scullery-maid.”

So they all crowded in at Jessie’s doorway, and found her sitting on the floor by her open trunk, surrounded by laces and ribbons and fans, and still musically begging the required promise.

“We’ll promise you nothing until you come out and do some work for it,” said Marjorie. “So get up at once.” Then, picking up an elaborate little Swiss apron, she tied its ribbons round Jessie’s waist. “There!” she said. “Now you’re appropriately decorated, and I herewith appoint you Scullery-maid of this institution. Now skip along and empty that pan of onion-skins.”

“Oh, *don’t* let her spoil that pretty apron,” said Hester the practical, and she took off her own big gingham one and tied it over the dainty affair.

“Is this a game?” said Betty, taking off her own apron and tying it over Hester’s on Jessie.

Like a flash the three other aprons came off their owners and were piled on the luckless Jessie—round her waist, round her neck, before and behind, until Millicent declared she looked like Tweedledee prepared for his fight with Tweedledum.

Good-natured Jessie trotted off with the pan, and on her return was seized by Betty the Peeler, who peeled off the numerous aprons and restored them to their owners.



“MILLICENT DECLARED SHE LOOKED LIKE TWEEDLEDEE PREPARED FOR HIS FIGHT WITH TWEEDLEDUM.”

## CHAPTER IV

### THE "WHITECAP"

**A** GAIN Marjorie rapped on the table with her iron spoon.

"As none of you seems to offer any suggestions," she went on, as if she had not been interrupted at all, "I will lay down the law. Hester, you're Stoker. The coal and wood has come. Now see if you can make a fire that shall be worthy of one whom England expects this day to do her duty!"

"Aye, aye!" said Hester, bringing her hand to her temple, palm forward, with the quick, jerky salute of a British marine.

"Helen, you and Jessie might set the table; but don't both of you get to singing at once, for you'll drive us distracted. Millicent, what are *you* good for, anyway?"

Millicent was putting away the groceries that were piled on the table in the outer kitchen, or buttery, as Hester called it, and she replied: "Oh, I would ornament any calling; but when I see these candles and kerosene it makes me just long to fill the lamps and candlesticks, 'cause it's going to get dark pretty soon."

"You're a wise virgin," said Betty, "and you shall be our honored Lamplighter. I suppose I must peel these potatoes. How many, Duchess?"

"Two apiece," replied Marjorie. "We'll have them mashed, and the onions fried, and the steak broiled, and I'll make coffee, and that's all we'll have cooked for supper. You can hunt up some dessert out of the things that came from the grocer's."

Many hands make light work, and in half an hour everything was about ready. The table was laid, and wonderfully pretty it looked, too; for under Jessie's supervision it had blossomed out into dainty doilies, and bits of shining glass and silver; and in the center was a low basket of goldenrod.

Not finding a satisfactory dessert in the cupboard, Helen had run over to the grocer's herself, and returned triumphantly with a box of candied ginger, an Edam cheese, and a tin box of biscuits. These and the coffee-cups she arranged on a side-table, and surveyed the result with a very pardonable pride.

Millicent had filled and lighted the large swinging-lamp over the table, and candles twinkled from a pair of old-fashioned candelabra which Jessie had

discovered in the attic. In the kitchen, too, all was in readiness.

Betty had boiled and mashed the potatoes until Millicent declared they looked like cotton batting. Marjorie had broiled the steak to the proverbial turn, fried the onions to an odoriferous brown, and made a potful of her celebrated coffee; and now, flushed with success and Hester's fire, she sat on the edge of the kitchen table, her iron spoon still in her hand, like a scepter.

"Whe-e-w!" said Helen, coming out. "You must be cooking comparisons out here, they're so odorous."

"In onion is strength," replied Betty.

"Why don't you take something for that punning habit, Betty? Really, it's getting worse, I think. Oh, I wish Nan and the Matron would come! I *am* so starved."

And in a few minutes they did come—tired and chilled with their long walk, and without the much-desired Irish lady.

"Where's your captive?"

"Couldn't you catch her?"

"Is she coming?"

"Yes," said Marguerite, "it's all right. Don't all talk at once; let me tell you. She can't come until to-morrow, but she'll be here early—before breakfast."

"Then we've got to wash the dishes to-night, haven't we?" groaned Jessie.

"Never mind, my pretty Scullery-maid," said Betty; "you needn't do it: you can put them away with neatness and despatch." And Jessie beamed again.

"Can you guess what we're going to have for supper?" said Marjorie.

"Guess!" said Nan. "I should think we could! Why, we met the announcement three blocks up the street, and it led us all the way home, like the Israelites' pillar of fire. Is supper ready?"

"Yes," chimed a chorus; and in less time than it takes to tell it the feast was on the table.

"You sit at the head, Duchess," said Betty, "and I'll sit at the foot and carve, for none of the rest of you know how. The fair Scullery-maid can sit at my right hand in case I need her assistance, Nan and Daisy next, then Millicent at Marjorie's right, and then Helen and Hester; and there you are!"

There they were indeed, and a merrier meal was never eaten by the Blue Ribbon Cooking Club.

The prosaic onions were pronounced better than any complicated French concoction, and were portioned out with exact fairness by the conscientious

Betty.

Nan and Marguerite, having done nothing toward the preparations, offered their services as waitresses, and, like well-trained club members, they removed one course and served the other in the most approved fashion.

Then Marjorie poured coffee, and the red-coated cheese was placed before Betty, who thoroughly enjoyed "scooping," and there was much laughter and merry talk. And they all complimented each other and congratulated each other, and they feasted and jested, and laughed and chaffed; and as they all talked at once, each made jokes that never were heard, and told stories that never were listened to, and asked questions that never were answered. And Timmy Loo thought it was all a great entertainment for his special benefit; and he barked his funniest barks, and ran round the table like mad, and paused in front of each one, standing up and putting out his paw in his very best beggarly manner, receiving always a bit of ginger or biscuit on his solicitous little nose. Until finally Marjorie said. "Now, sisters, if there's any redding up to be done, 'twere well 'twere done quickly. I don't mind washing the dishes, and if we all fly round we'll have things in order in no time."

They did fly round, and in very little more than no time things were in order, and the eight girls, feeling very proud of their tidy kitchen, gathered round Hester's wood fire in the Grotto, as Millicent persisted in calling the parlor.

And then Uncle Ned and Aunt Molly came over to call, and were nearly talked to death by the enthusiastic eight, who were delighted to have some one to "tell things to."

The much-amused guests were escorted out to the kitchen to see how beautifully the young housekeepers had "redded up," and then they were invited to partake of crackers and cheese in the dining-room; and such a hospitable spirit pervaded the hostesses that they refreshed themselves also, until the crackers were all gone and the cheese required deep-sea scooping.

"Well, you certainly seem a capable crowd," said Aunt Molly, as she was taking leave. "Are you sure you won't be afraid to-night?"

"Of course they won't," said Uncle Ned, in tones that would have inspired confidence in a lame rabbit. "What is there to be afraid of? Long Beach is the safest old place in the world. But, my lambs, if you want us at any hour of the day or night, you've only to push this bell in the hall, which communicates with our bell, and we'll fly over."

"Now," said Matron Marguerite, as they returned to the Grotto, "I am going to make up my accounts. I have all the bills that came in to-day, and I have five dollars apiece from each one of you for the first week, though I'm

afraid it won't be enough, and Helen forgot to give me hers anyway, and Betty gave hers to me and then borrowed it back again; and I haven't paid my own yet either, but I paid out eighty cents for our stage-fares, and twenty-five cents expressage,—no, fifty,—and fourteen cents for two quarts of milk. You see, I didn't know we were going to have bills, and I almost wish we hadn't. Oh, yes, and I owe Marjorie thirty-six cents that she paid to the butter-and-egg lady—I mean the club owes it. But I guess I can straighten it all out."

"You ought to have one of those cash-register things," said Millicent. "You just play on it with your fingers, and it rings a bell and counts your money for you."

"I wish I had one," said Marguerite, who was beginning to be arithmetically bewildered. "But I'll be all right if you girls will let me alone."

"We will, we will," said Nan. "Just remember, Daisy, that two and two make four, and then go ahead. Now I'm going to begin our Journal. I brought a grand and elegant new blank-book for the purpose. We must write something in it every day, and we'll keep it here on the table where anyone can write a page when she feels disposed. What shall we call it? What's the name of this cottage, Marjorie?"

"Oh, father calls it Fair View, but I don't think that's much of a name. Let's christen it for ourselves."

"Call it Liberty Hall," said Jessie, "because we're going to do just as we like all the time we're here."

"Too hackneyed," returned Betty. "Let's call it Hilarity Hall, because we're going to have lots of fun here."

So Hilarity Hall it was, and Nan printed it in big letters on the fly-leaf of her book. Then she began to scribble, and the others leaned over her shoulder and knelt at her side, and helped and suggested and amended, until the first instalment of the Journal stood thus, and Nan read it aloud, amid a fire of running comment:

"A SEPTEMBER SESSION OF THE BLUE RIBBON COOKING  
CLUB

"HILARITY HALL, BLUE BEACH,  
September 21.

"The entire club left Middleton on the twelve-ten train. The Wandering Minstrel [that's you, Helen] and the Poet [that's me], musing on higher things, strayed into the smoking-car, from which they were summarily ejected by the brakeman. Except for an ill-

behaved cuckoo, who gave his unsolicited and also incorrect opinion as to the time of day, the club behaved itself with dignity and decorum.

“Here, you see, it drops into verse:

“On reaching Long Beach these maids demure  
In haste the local stage secure;  
And all the gaping rustics gaze  
With open mouth and much amaze  
At all the boxes, trunks, and wheels,  
And Timmy Loo’s pugnacious squeals.  
But all these curious stares and looks  
Can’t disconcert the calm-eyed cooks.  
Quickly the festive stage they fill,  
And amble slowly up the hill.

[Poetic license—no hill!]

And so at last with anxious feet  
They gain their much-desired retreat.

“Now we come to the account of the ‘Truly Awful Encounter with the Greedy Grocer.’

“If it isn’t all quite true, you must remember that we poets must often sacrifice veracity to the demands of poetic diction.”

This was agreed to, and Nan read on:

“Ere the cooks had time for napping,  
Suddenly there came a tapping,  
As of some one gently rapping,  
Rapping at the kitchen door.

“Then the Chief, up quickly getting,  
All her pots and pans upsetting,  
All her dignity forgetting,  
Sprang across the kitchen floor  
(With one leap she cleared the floor);

“Oped the door with perturbation,  
And observed with indignation  
That a Man—oh, desecration!—  
Stood outside the kitchen door.

“Then the cooks drew close and closer,  
And the Chief said sternly, ‘Go, sir!’  
But he murmured, ‘I’m the grocer,  
    Grocer from the neighboring store’  
    (Red-haired grocer from the store).

“ ‘For I am the groceryman—  
    Garrulous groceryman—  
        Red-headed, ready, and spry;  
    A versatile groceryman,  
    Close-fisted groceryman,  
        Silver-tongued groceryman, I.’

“So the cooks made out their order,  
    Made a long and costly order;  
And the grocer’s heart was gladdened,  
And he left them, smiling brightly.  
Then the Matron, slow departing,  
And the Poet going with her,  
Said, ‘We go to seek a Lady,  
Strong and willing Irish Lady,  
Who will wash our dinner-dishes.’

“So, the other cooks agreeing,  
    These two maidens went to Northward,  
    Seeking for the Irish Lady  
    Who would wash the dinner-dishes.  
And the hopes of all went with them.

“Then the others went exploring,  
    In the cellar went exploring;  
    Found there—onions! Many onions!  
    Onions strong of mighty flavor!  
    Quickly then they grasped the basket,  
    Grasped that basket full of onions,  
    Hurried with them to the kitchen,  
    Chopped them, cooked them with precaution;  
    Then the house from roof to cellar  
    Told a mighty tale of onions!  
    On their groaning board they placed them,



And with greediness devoured them.  
When the Matron and the Poet,  
Weary and belated travelers,  
Turned the corner near the cottage,  
They were greeted by the odor,  
And their hungry hearts were gladdened.  
Then they all sat down to supper.

“Oh, who could describe all the laughter and chatter,  
As quickly they cleared every dish and each platter? —  
Each feeling they’d now reached the height of their wishes,  
Excepting that some one must wash up the dishes.

“There, that’s as far as I’ve written.”

“Give it to me,” said Millicent; “I’m no poet, but I’ll write the kitchen chronicles.”

She scribbled away, reading aloud as she wrote —

“The dish-washing was exciting in the extreme. The Duchess, being overcome at the sight of so much work, was laid upon the buttery shelf. The Duchess’s apron fell on the Peeler, who, with the valuable assistance of the Stoker, smashed three plates and a cup. The Poet, not seeing the Matron, fell over her while crossing the kitchen, which made the Matron cross (the threshold). The Duchess (very naturally) slipped off the buttery shelf, and the Wandering Minstrel and Scullery-maid, sneaking away from the glorious company of dish-washers, made night hideous with their wild howlings in the Grotto (banjo accompaniment).”

“Now, Lamplighter, give it to me. As Matron I am the one to write up the account of our social functions”; and Marguerite threw down her account-book and took the Journal, writing and reading:

“Hilarity Hall was the scene of unparalleled gaiety this evening, the occasion being a reception which was tendered to distinguished and honored guests, Sir Edward and Lady Mary. The reception was held in the Grotto, after which the Duchess led the way to the Refectory, where a limited collation was enjoyed. The honored guests then inspected the Cinderella Section, and, expressing themselves much pleased with their visit, they reluctantly departed.”

“Why, this book is going to be fine,” said Betty. “What shall we call it? Just the Journal?”

“No; let’s call it ‘Annals of Hilarity Hall,’ ” said Nan.

“What are annals?”

“I don’t know, but they’re things they always have in a quiet neighborhood.”

“I don’t think much of annals anyway,” said Millicent; “let’s call it something to do with cooking.”

“No; we have our ‘Blotter’ for that.”

The “Blotter” was the recipe scrap-book of the club, and was supposed to be a very funny joke on Professor Blot.

“Why not call it something to suggest the sea?” said Nan.

“Call it the Whitecap,” said Millicent. “Then those who are prosaic can mean the cook’s white cap, which is the badge of our club, and poetic souls like Nan can mean the whitecaps of the breaking waves dashed high.”

All agreed to this, and “The Whitecap” was scrawled across the cover in artistically uncertain characters.

“Now, my lambs, you must go to bed,” said the Matron, ruffling up her halo and looking very sleepy. “What time do we rise, Duchess?”

“Oh, whenever we unanimously agree to. We’ll all call each other. Where are your candles, Lamplighter?”

“On the hall table”; and, sure enough, there stood eight candles, burning in a heterogeneous assortment of candlesticks. Helen grasped her banjo and began to play a lullaby.

“Put up the book, Poet, and come along.”

But Nan was adding a final verse, though her sleepy audience would scarcely wait to hear:

“The rest of the evening passed quickly away,  
And thus came to a close the first happy day.  
Then each maid with her candle filed slowly upstairs,  
The Minstrel preceding them, playing sweet airs.”

# CHAPTER V

## THE ENCHANTED PRINCESS

THE sun was shining o'er the sea, shining with all its might, and had been doing so for two hours, but no one in Hilarity Hall had awakened to the fact. A loud rap at the kitchen door partially roused sleepy Jessie, who murmured, "Yes, mamma," and dozed off again. But Betty was thoroughly awakened by the sound, and, giving Jessie a shake, she exclaimed: "I believe it's that horde of men again!" Then, springing up, she began to dress hastily.

The knocking not only continued but was supplemented by other peremptory sounds,—a ring at the front-door bell, a toot on a tin fish-horn, the postman's whistle,—all of which were responded to by frantic barkings from Timmy Loo, who tore madly from one door to another, bouncing at last into Betty's room and waltzing before her on his hind legs. His fat little body was quivering with excitement, and his bright eyes blinked through the wispy locks that hung over them.

But Betty was struggling with a stiff shirt-waist and a pair of sleeve-links, and her fruitless endeavors to bring them into harmony rendered her incapable of good work in that direction. Then Timmy Loo grew wheedlesome and patted Betty's foot, as was his custom when he wanted anybody to go anywhere. Betty pushed him aside, a little impatiently it seemed to Tim, and he ran to Jessie, who was enjoying the added luxury of Betty's pillow, and looking as if she would stay there undisturbed though China fell.

But the second-story contingent was also aroused by this time, and six frowzled heads hung over the banister and twelve bare feet poked themselves between the rails.

"Can't you go, Betty?" said Marguerite's plaintive voice.

"I'll be down in a minute," sang out Marjorie, as she skipped back to her room and made things fly.

"Oh, hang!" said Betty, throwing her links down on the bureau and flinging her shirt-waist across the room.

"Take mine, dear," said Jessie, placidly; "it's on that chair, and the buttons are all in it."

Betty's face cleared, and she slipped on Jessie's waist in a jiffy, and was at

the front door in another.

There she found the postman and a pleasant-faced Irish girl who said:

“I’m Rosie, mum.”

“You are indeed,” said Betty, looking at her red cheeks; “come in.”

Just then Hester landed in the lower hall with a jump which had included the last four stairs.

“I’m glad to see you, Rosie,” said she, kindly; “come along with us and we’ll face the bombardment.”

Rosie, looking somewhat bewildered, followed the two girls to the kitchen. Going through, Betty unlocked the door which opened into a sort of outer kitchen or shed with latticed and morning-gloried walls. The door of the shed too was barred, and when this was finally unfastened, instead of the looked-for multitude they saw only the red-haired grocer sitting dejectedly on the stump of a tree.

He took off his cap as he saw the girls, and his hair blazed merrily in the sunshine.

“Morning, young ladies,” said he; “the fish-man he couldn’t wait no longer, and the vegetable-man likewise was in a hurry. But I sez, I’ll wait, fer like as not there’ll be things you fergot overnight, besides fresh orders.”

“Yes,” said Hester, abstractedly; “but couldn’t you come round again later? We’re—we haven’t decided yet what we *do* want.”

“Well, no, mum, I couldn’t call later—not to say *later*. I’ll be round again to *deliver* the goods, but not to take orders.”

“I’ll tell you what, Hester,” said Betty; “don’t order now, and after breakfast some of us can ride over on our wheels and leave the order in time for him to bring the things. Er—what shall I call you, sir?”

“Dan’l, mum.”

“Well, Daniel, we won’t give you any order now, but we’ll send it over to the store.”

“All right, mum”; and looking a little injured, the red-haired one shambled off.

“Now,” said Betty, “we must have breakfast first of all; and as I cooked most of the dinner last night, it isn’t my turn this morning. Marguerite’s the Matron of this establishment, and I think she ought to assume some responsibility.”

“So do I,” said Betty; “let’s go and read the Riot Act to her.”

“No,” said Hester; “let’s write a mandamus or habeas corpus or whatever

they call it, and send it up to her by Rosie, and we'll go for a spin on our wheels."

Whisking a leaf off the order-pad, Betty wrote in large letters:

MATRON MARGUERITE  
OF  
HILARITY HALL  
WILL PREPARE AND SERVE  
BREAKFAST  
THIS (FRIDAY) MORNING  
IN THE  
REFECTORY  
COVERS LAID FOR EIGHT

"There, Rosie; take that upstairs, please, and knock at the first door at the head of the stairs, and give this to the young lady with the fly-away yellow hair: the one that came to see you last night, you know—Miss Marguerite."

"Yes, mum," said Rosie.

Then Hester and Betty each drank a tumblerful of the fresh milk Farmer Hobbs had brought, and in great glee started off on their wheels, while Timmy Loo scampered along behind.

"It seems mean to run away," said Hester; but Betty replied:

"Not at all; it's only fair that Daisy should do some work. Let's go around by the church and down that road to the beach."

Rosie started obediently on her errand; but Jessie stopped her as she passed the door, inquiring:

"Where did the girls go?"

"I cudden't tell ye, miss; they wint galloping away on their bicycles."

"They did! What about breakfast?"

"They towld me to give this note to Miss Margreet."

"Oho!" said Jessie, reading the notice, "they did, did they? Well, take it up, Rosie." And Jessie sauntered out on the piazza and sniffed the salt morning air.

Rosie went upstairs with the note, but her knock at the door received no response. After another gentle rap she opened the door, to find the room vacated. The bed-clothing was thrown back and the windows wide open.

"Faix, they've been shpirited away," thought the astonished maid. "If this ain't the quarest family! I'll be l'avin' if things goes on like this."

Uncertain how to proceed, she returned to the kitchen, and sat down with folded hands to await developments.

Helen came downstairs next. Seeing nobody around, she went into the kitchen, and looked amazed at the solitary Rosie.

“Where *is* everybody?” began Helen.

“Sure, I don’t know, mum. Them as was in the house wint out, and the rest was gone before.”

“Well, of all performances!” And Helen wandered out to the front veranda, and discovered Jessie there.

Now the front door of Hilarity Hall was at the side, and so faced Aunt Molly’s front door, which was also on the side. And just as the two puzzled-looking maidens met on their veranda, Aunt Molly stepped out on hers.

“Good morning, girlies! Had your breakfast?”

“No,” said they.

“Come over and breakfast with us,” cried jolly Uncle Ned, not expecting at all that they would do so.

But Helen replied: “Indeed we will; for I’m awfully hungry, and it doesn’t look at all hopeful over here.” And the two girls ran across and gratefully seated themselves at Aunt Molly’s cozy table.

And that’s how it happened that the mystified Rosie waited alone in the silent kitchen until she could stand it no longer, and resolved to take her hat and go home. But first she thought she would go upstairs and make sure that the fairy-like “Miss Margreet” had not reappeared in the same mysterious fashion in which she must have taken her departure.

But no, she found the room still empty.

Uncertain what to do, she opened the door of the next room, and there were Millicent and Marjorie, who had returned to bed and to sleep, just waking up, startled at the sudden apparition.

The apparition was startled, too, and exclaimed:

“Oh, young ladies, I was thot shcared! Sure there’s nobody in the house at all, at all—savin’ your prisince.”

Millicent could think of no explanation for this extraordinary statement, but that didn’t bother her in the least. Here was a dramatic situation just to her mind, and she grasped it at once.

“Who are you?” she said in a low, mysterious whisper.

“Rosie O’Neill, miss,” said the Irish girl, fascinated by Millicent’s gaze.

“Roseoneal,” continued Millicent, pronouncing it as if it were one word, and speaking in a thrilling tone, “I am a Princess—the Princess Millikens. This lady beside me is my first gold-stick in waiting. But, alas! we are under an

enchantment, and dare not leave this bed. If I were to set foot to the floor I should at once be changed into a red dragon breathing forth fire and flames.”

“Oh, Lor’, miss!” exclaimed Rosie, clasping her hands and gazing, horror-stricken, at Millicent’s tragic face.

“But there is one thing that will break the direful spell,” went on the mendacious maiden. “If any one should bring me a mug of mead and a golden pomegranate, I would be freed from the enchantment and regain my liberty.”

“What’s thim things, miss? Could I get ’em fer ye?”

“Alas, no! they grow in the land of the cypress and myrtle, where Afric’s sunny fountains roll down their golden sand. But a base imitation *might* answer the purpose. Is there aught of food below?”



“‘WHO ARE YOU?’ SHE SAID IN A LOW, MYSTERIOUS WHISPER.”

“Plenty of milk an’ bread, miss; an’ I can make you a toast.”

“Roseoneal, truly thou art a man-of-infinite-resource-and-sagacity. But, stay! Can you indeed make a golden toast which may play the part of the missing pomegranate? I want no slice of charred bread. Listen! I will give minute directions which, if faithfully carried out, *may* be the means of releasing my Royal Highness and my gold-stick, who is, alas! dumb and all unable to speak for herself, from our unfortunate predicament. First, cut two slices from last night’s loaf—this morning’s bread is too fresh to toast. Let

them be of even thickness, about the thickness of—of a lead-pencil. Then, having trimmed off the upper crusts, lay them in the oven—the slices, I mean, not the crusts. Then get the little Japanese tray from the sideboard, and lay on it a fresh napkin from the upper drawer; find one that fits. Then add two of those gold-edged plates and two thin glass tumblers. Now pour milk in the tumblers until it reaches three quarters of an inch from the top; but have a care that no drip or drop appears on the glass above the sea-level. Have a bit of butter in readiness. And now comes the exciting part. Toast your bread over a clear, bright fire. Have you one handy?”

“Yes, miss—Princess, I mean.”

“That’s right. Or say, ‘Yes, your Royal Highness.’ Well, then, make your toast with the greatest care; brown first one side and then the other until each is a clear, golden crisp that *may* deceive the enchanter into thinking it is the golden pomegranate. Then, the moment it is done, spread it lightly with the bit of butter, lay it on the plate, and fly upstairs, that we may nibble the portion in all its pristine hotness. Hast thou understood me, O maiden?”

“Yes, your Royal Highness; but wouldn’t you like some jam?”

“Roseoneal, I am your friend, and therefore your future is assured. Right heartily will I like jam, if jam there be. Place a generous spoonful on a small glass saucer, but prepare it ere thou toastest thy toast. And lay also on the tray a silver knife and spoon. Now hie thee to thy task, and we may yet cheat the enchanter of his dire intent. But beware of a crumb or a drop out of place! All is lost unless it be conveyed hither with neatness and despatch. And before you go please hand me my gold crown which is on the bureau.”

“I don’t see it, your Highness; there’s nothing here but brushes and hair-pins.”

“What! has my crown been stolen? Alackaday! What shall I do? Bring me then a bunch of goldenrod, and we may devise a temporary coronet that shall at least proclaim my rank and station. Disappear!” And Millicent waved her hands with such an impressive gesture that Rosie shot out of the door as if under the influence of a real enchantment. Marjorie lay back on her pillows choking with laughter at Millicent’s dramatics, and wondering whether Rosie would really bring them some breakfast.



## CHAPTER VI

### HESTER'S DINNER

“ISN'T it splendiferous!” cried Betty, as they reached the beach. “Hester Laverack, you are the most exasperating girl! You just sit there like a bump on a log. Why don't you shout, or turn a handspring, or do something to express your delight?”

“Let dogs delight  
To bark and bite,”

said Hester; “ ’t isn't *my* nature to. I'm enjoying it all just as much as you are, but I don't make such a fuss about it.”

“Well, I don't see how any one can look at that great, boiling blue ocean, and those jolly big waves coming up ker-smash! and not feel like yelling. I shall have to burst into song. ‘*Columbia the gem of the o-shun!*’ ”

“Betty, you haven't a speck of romance in your nature,” said Hester, laughing. “Now if Daisy were here she'd quote an appropriate ditty instead of howling a national air.”

“Pooh! I'd rather have *real* patriotism than all Daisy's make-believe romantic notions. She puts on all that, but she can't fool me.”

“Oh, I don't think she pretends always.”

“Yes, she does; she's never sincere; and that's the one thing I can't stand. I'd rather be honest and say what I mean than to be the petted favorite of everybody, as she is.”

“Marguerite has so many talents,” put in Hester; “she does everything so well that people can't help praising her.”

“She *doesn't* do things well,” went on Betty; “she pretends to. But she's lazy, and she thinks whenever she gets half a chance—”

“Oh, dear!” said Hester. “Don't let's be so hard on poor Daisy, especially when she's hard at work getting our breakfast. Let's take a run to the end of the board walk and back, and then go up to the house, for even a snail would have breakfast ready by that time.”

The girls got up and shook off a flying shower of sand which nearly buried

poor Timmy Loo. But he did some shaking on his own account, and scampered along beside them. All at once he gave a squeal and darted ahead, and then flew back with a great news written all over his funny little face.

“He’s found somebody,” said Hester. “Who is it, Tim?”

Tim flew round the corner of an old pier, the girls followed, and there, leaning cozily against a post, were Marguerite and Nan.

“Did you come for us?” said Marguerite. “We were just going to start. We’ve been here a long while, and we’ve had the loveliest time.”

“You have!” exclaimed Hester. “How did you get here?”

The two scapegraces laughed, and Nan said: “Well, you see, it was such a pleasant morning, and such a short walk, we left our hats to home, and, not to disturb the rest of you, we climbed out of our window, and crawled down that low sloping roof, and jumped off.”

“Then you didn’t get our note?” said Betty.

“What note?”

“Oh, girls, there’s no breakfast ready—or anything.”

“Well,” confessed Marguerite, “when we jumped down by the shed steps, there was the pail of milk, and—we just took a drink, and, truly, we didn’t mean to stay so long; but Nannie’s been writing a poem, and I hated to interrupt her till she finished.”

“Yes, yes,” said Betty, “that’s all very well; but I’m hungry as a bear, and I’m going home to forage.”

The others agreed to this, and Betty and Hester led their wheels, while they all walked along together.

Half-way home they met Helen and Jessie coming down to the beach. A general explanation followed, and Marjorie exclaimed:

“Well, we are the best set of housekeepers I ever *did* see! But perhaps that duck of a Millicent has a gay old breakfast all ready for us. It would be just like her to do it, and I say let’s hurry up and not keep her waiting.”

Helen and Jessie turned back with them to see the fun; and the six, with Timmy Loo at their heels, burst into the house. No one was in sight; but as the little dog wagged his sagacious tail and hopped upstairs, they all followed and bundled into Millicent’s room.

That absurd damsel was still in bed, propped up against a pillowy background; a red shawl draped her shoulders, and a wobbly wreath of goldenrod lay gracefully on her black curls, while a shaking mound under the bed-covers was the only indication of Marjorie’s presence. Rosie sat on the

edge of a chair, her hands tightly clasped and her eyes wide open, enthralled by the tales of magical experiences that Millicent was dramatically pouring forth.

“Why, Millicent Payne!”

“Why, Marjorie Bond!”

“For goodness’ sake!”

“Well, you *are* nice ones!”

“Look at that tray!”

“Did you ever?”

These exclamations, being all shouted at once, conveyed no intelligence, and the serene Millicent waved her scepter, which was a long stalk of goldenrod, and said:

“Minions and slaves, how dare you rush thus unannounced into the royal presence? And—where in the world have you been?”

Concerted explanation followed, and Marguerite protested so prettily that she would gladly have prepared breakfast if she had received the notice before she jumped out of the window that of course she was forgiven.

Timmy Loo had stationed himself before the table which held the tray of empty dishes, and sat up motionless, his fore paw extended in his very best beggarly manner.

“You precious poodle-puppy,” said Marjorie, catching him up. “You haven’t had a single speck to eat this day; and I think it’s a shame, so I do! Girls, we’re a high old cooking club; we’ve been here nearly twenty-four hours and we’ve had *one* meal! Now I call a conference of the powers, and let’s settle on some definite line of action, or we’ll have the agent from the Associated Charities down here giving us soup-tickets. Rosie, won’t you please take Tim down to the kitchen and give him some bread and milk? And the Blue Ribbon Cooking Club will please come to order.”

Marjorie had on her “presidential pose,” and when that was the case the girls always became rational and quit fooling.

But Hester broke in with her slow English drawl: “Miss President, I’ve a suggestion to make. With the exception of Helen and myself, who were breakfasting out, and the somewhat eccentric-looking lady in the red scarf and her fellow-conspirator, who breakfasted in their room, our members have had neither bit nor sup. I therefore propose that Helen and I be excused from the meeting, with the understanding that we will agree to any decisions the rest of you may come to, and that we go down and get breakfast for the crowd.”

This speech was received with enthusiastic clapping of hands and cries of “Good for you!” “Go ahead!”

“Furthermore,” Hester went on, “as it is already half after eleven, I move we let bygones be bygones and make this breakfast a dinner.”

“All right,” said Marjorie; “go on, and cook whatever you like, whichever way you want to.”

So the English sister and her chum disappeared.

“Now, my fellow-sufferers,” said their president, “we’ve got to have some sort of a system. We thought it was going to be such lots of fun to do all the work, and already we’re sneaking out of it. Do you want to give up the scheme and go home?”

“No!” chorused the crowd.

“Well, then, here’s my plan, and any one can improve upon it who wants to. We’ll have three meals a day, with dinner at noon and a supper or high tea at six o’clock, and we’ll take turns by twos. Two is enough to have in the kitchen at once besides Rosie, and then, having four pairs of people and three meals, we won’t have to cook the same kinds of things each time. Am I clear?”

“Clear as mud,” said Millicent; “your plan would be lucid to a doddering idiot.”

“That’s why *you* understand it so thoroughly,” returned the president, with a withering glance at the enchanted princess.

“Now Helen and Hester are getting dinner to-day, so suppose Marguerite and Nan take charge to-night; then Millikens and I will get breakfast for you to-morrow morning,—and we’ll *do* it, too,—and Betty and Jessie can dine us, and so on over again.”

All agreed that the plan was fair, and Marguerite announced that any one who felt at all incapable could call on her for assistance at any time, and she would always be glad to cook, whether it was her turn or not.

Betty sniffed a little, and said that if Daisy was on time with her scheduled performances that was all that would be expected or required of her; at which Marguerite looked injured, but put her good intentions into practice at once by running down to help Hester.

The kitchen was already a scene of action. Hester possessed administrative power as well as executive ability, and while she roasted the beef and made the soup she directed her helpers, Helen and Rosie, so that everything was going on in the most systematic manner.

“Oh, do let me help you!” said Marguerite. “What are you going to have?”

“I only know how to cook a few things,” said Hester, “so I’m going to have those. Roast beef and Yorkshire pudding and browned potatoes. And I know two soups, bean and tomato. Bean is the best, but we didn’t have any beans,

and anyway you have to soak 'em overnight; so I'm making the other."

"Let me see you make it; I love to watch people cook. What do you do first?"

"Why, I've just put the tomatoes on to heat; one apiece,—that's nine,—cut up in a quart of water. Then I threw in with them a small onion cut in bits, a couple of stalks of celery, and a little parsley. I would put in a bay-leaf if I had it, but I haven't. Then a tablespoonful of sugar."

"Sugar in soup! I never heard of such a thing."

"Oh, yes, in tomato soup; and then a little pepper and a teaspoonful of salt. Now while that's cooking I put a large tablespoonful of butter in this tiny spider. It melts quickly, and then I stir in a tablespoonful of flour. You see it's a thin, smooth paste. Now the tomatoes are boiling, so I turn it in and stir while it thickens. Have you the colander ready, Rosie? Now I strain it all through the colander into this big bowl, and then turn it back again into the kettle, and set it on the back of the range until we want to use it. Now that's done."

"And it's beautiful, too," commented Marguerite. "I say, Hester, let's have a salad."

"No," said Hester, decidedly; "I can't make salad dressing, and I'm running this dinner myself. You can have salad when it's your turn. If you want to help, go and set the table." Hester's manner was brusque and very matter-of-fact; but she meant no offense, and Marguerite knew it.

"Come on, Rosie," cried the merry Matron; "I'll show you how to set the table. Goodness! Millicent, what *are* you doing?"

Millicent, evidently freed from her enchantment, stood on the dining-table with a kerosene-can in one hand and a lamp-chimney in the other. The lamp-shade was on her head, and she was with difficulty holding the swing-lamp still while she filled it.

"Why didn't you take the lamp down?" began Marguerite.

"Who's Lamplighter of this establishment, I'd like to know! This is the only correct and elegant way to fill a swing-lamp. It is a patented way, and recommended by all the crowned heads of Europe, of which I am one. Now, you see, I set down my can, then my chimney, replace the shade—and there you are!" And Millicent sprang off the table and betook herself and her can to the Grotto.

"Oh, there's kerosene all over the table—shall I scrub it, miss?" said Rosie, anxiously.

"No," said the Matron; "just wipe it off with a dry cloth. Now lay the felt and then the table-cloth—so; no, wait, Rosie, get it perfectly straight; *almost*

straight is crooked, you know. There, that will do.”

Marguerite arranged an embroidered centerpiece in place just as Helen came in with a dish of fruit.

“This is our dessert,” she announced.



“THIS IS THE ONLY CORRECT AND ELEGANT WAY TO FILL A SWING-LAMP.’”

“Set it right here,” said Marguerite; “just the thing for the center of the table. Now, Helen, you finish showing Rosie how to set the table, will you? I promised to help Hester make the Yorkshire pudding.”

But the pudding was already made and browning.

“Oh, I wanted to see you do it,” said the aggrieved Marguerite; “what did you put in?”

“It’s awfully easy,” said Hester, “and yet so few people make it right. I just took a quart of milk—no, I only took part of it at first. Well, first of all I beat two eggs very light, and added a teaspoonful of salt and two tablespoonfuls of flour and about a third of the quart of milk. Then I beat all that to a nice, smooth batter, and added the rest of the milk. Then I turned it into a boiling-hot baking-pan with about three tablespoonfuls of nice beef dripping, and gravy from the roasting joint; now it is nearly cooked, so I add a little more gravy from the joint-pan.”

“Your expressions are so funny, Hester; I never heard of a ‘joint-pan’ before.”

“Why, what do you call it?”

“Oh, I don’t know; meat-pan, I suppose.”

Then Betty invaded the kitchen, and peeped into the soup-kettle, remarking: “I don’t think there’s very much there; I could eat all that myself. What else is there, Hester?”

Hester’s menu seemed small to hungry Betty, and she said so; and Marguerite observed:

“I offered to make a salad, but Hester said no.”

“We’ll do it, all the same,” said Betty. “Hester may rule Britannia if she wants to, but she can’t rule Hilarity Hall. Come on, Daisy; let’s mutiny. As Peeler-in-Chief I’ll peel some tomatoes, and you stir up a mayonnaise.”

“All right,” said Marguerite; “or rather, as Hester is managing this dinner, she can stir while I dump in the things.”

Marguerite was “great on mayonnaise,” and she broke two eggs, daintily separating the whites and yolks, and put the latter in a soup-plate, stirring them round and round with a silver fork. Then she added oil, drop by drop at first, and then a trifle faster as the dressing began to thicken.

“Here, Hester; it’s all nonsense to say you can’t do this, and you Stoker! Come and stir it while I hunt up some more ingrejents.”

So Hester stirred away briskly but evenly, and added oil, while Marguerite dropped in a tablespoonful of vinegar at intervals. Then she flirted in a dash of Cayenne and sprinkled in a teaspoonful of salt, and then, taking the dish into

her own hands, gave it a final whisk or two and declared it completed.

Betty had her tomatoes pared carefully and cored with an apple-corer; then Marguerite arranged them each on a few crisp lettuce-leaves, and filled the centers with her dressing.

And now all was ready, and Betty announced dinner by sounding a bicycle-bell. There was no table-bell to be found, so she blocked her bicycle beside her chair, and explained to Rosie that she must answer the summons.

The girls came flying to their places at table with the alacrity of horses in a well-ordered fire department, and Timmy Loo was so excited that he jumped up into Marjorie's chair without realizing what he was doing. The Duchess brushed him out with scant ceremony, giving him a cracker to console himself with; but Tim spurned this, and sat up begging for sugar.

Rosie proved to be a deft waitress, and she brought in the soup and placed it before Marguerite, who presided very prettily.

But a hungry howl rent the air as the cover was removed, for certainly the soup looked very scant.

"Never mind," said the tactful Matron. "We'll divide it evenly, and we have several other courses."

"Fish?" asked Jessie, hopefully, for she was fond of it.

"No," said Hester, feeling as if she had defrauded the girls somehow; "but there's a beautiful salad."

Hester's self-respect returned, however, with the next course, for the Yorkshire pudding was pronounced wonderful, and the roast was tender and beautifully cooked.

"It doesn't seem a very big roast for two dollars and ten cents, does it?" said Marguerite, thinking of her accounts.

"Don't be prosaic, Daisy," said Nan; "never count the cost during the feast."

Then the salad was brought, and was enjoyed and much complimented; and then the great dish of fruit was passed around.

"I didn't make any pastry," said Hester, apologetically; "for I had no time, and I thought the ripe fruit would do as well."

"Yes, indeed," said Marjorie, "I love pears. Ow!" And simultaneously Betty made a wry face and left the table.

"What is the matter?"

"Ugh! the fruit is all kerosene."

The luckless Lamplighter looked up at the swing-lamp, and, sure enough, it



was still dripping.

“I must have put in too much oil,” she said calmly, scrutinizing it with interest, “and it—it overflowed.”

“I should think it did,” wailed Jessie, looking at her pretty centerpiece spotted with drops of oil.

“It won’t hurt it any,” said Marguerite. “I’ll wash it for you myself. Is there any more fruit?”

But there wasn’t, and the girls didn’t care very much anyway; and leaving the table to Rosie, they all went out on the veranda.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE INDIAN CALLER

THE veranda at Hilarity Hall was a most attractive place. Hammocks, rockers, and wicker settees abounded, and pillows were as sands of the sea-shore for multitude.

Marjorie threw herself into a hammock, and declared that she should just stay there.

The Matron settled her small person in the biggest rocking-chair, and, with an air of weighty responsibility, frowned over her account-books.

Nan appropriated a wicker couch, and announced that she was going to dream dreams and see visions.

Betty and Jessie sat together in another hammock, swinging themselves by vigorous kicks, which scratched much paint off the piazza floor.

Hester sat bolt upright in a small straight-backed chair, and crocheted lace from a gently bobbing spool of thread.

Helen was trying to write a letter, but was much hampered by Millicent's teasing.

It pleased the ingenious Lamplighter to substitute various articles in place of Helen's inkstand, and that preoccupied scribe had dipped her pen successively into an apple, a hat, a slipper, and, finally, into Millicent's own curly topknot.

Long-suffering Helen smiled good-naturedly at each prank, and patiently set her inkstand in place again. So Millicent declared it was no fun to tease her, and transferred her attention to Timmy Loo.

Taking a sheet of Helen's paper, she made a cocked hat for him, and, with a paper-cutter for a sword, he posed successfully as Napoleon.

The applause at this performance was so great that it caused Aunt Molly to appear at her window.

"Come over," called Marjorie.

"Yea, come, Fairy Godmother," chimed in Millicent; and well pleased, Aunt Molly trotted over and joined the merry group.

They had a good time telling her all about their most recent fun, for what is

nicer than a really interested listener? Marjorie read the “Whitecap” to her, which she declared was the work of genius.

“Why,” said the Duchess, as she reached the end of what they had written the night before, “here’s another page. Who wrote it?”

“Read it,” said Betty, and Marjorie read:

“There’s something gone wrong in Hilarity Hall,  
There’s something awry, I guess;  
For the Scullery-maid to the parlor has strayed,  
And the Stoker is mending her dress!

“The Wandering Minstrel is cooking the soup,  
The Peeler is writing a pome;  
The Lamplighter’s painting a ‘Sunrise at Sea,’  
Resplendent with madder and chrome.

“The dignified Duchess is washing the hearth,  
The Matron’s embroidering a scarf;  
While the Peeler is writing this lyrical ode  
In hopes that the others will larf.

“Why, that’s fine, Betty; I’m proud of you!” cried Marjorie; but Betty only said, “Pooh, that’s nothing; read the next page.”

So Marjorie read:

“TO NAN

“Our poet writes such clever verse,  
I’m sure no one writes prettier;  
And though some poets have done Moore,  
I know that she is Whittier.

“Of course our poet fair is Young,  
Although she is not quite a Child;  
And if in years to come she’s Gray,  
She never, never will be Wilde.

“She almost always is all Smiles,  
And of her kind Harte I speak highly;  
But on occasions she is Sterne,

And when she's nervous she is Riley.

“Our poet wants to be a Cook  
And turn her mind to Ruskin jelly;  
She's very, very fond of Crabbe—  
Indeed, of anything that's Shelley.

“She yearns for Browning, fears not Burns,  
And for a Piatt times has sighed;  
But yesterday she had a Payne,  
And day before an Akenside.

“She scorns the Wordsworth of her brain,  
Though she's as wise as forty owls;  
But when her muse once gets a start,  
Look out! for, great Scott, Howitt Howells!”

“Who wrote it? Who wrote it?” queried the girls in chorus; and then each one tried to blush and pretended to look conscious, and Hester said suddenly:

“Oh, look at that queer man coming up the road!”

The queer man, who carried a large pack on his back, came nearer, turned in at the cottage gate, and paused at the foot of the veranda steps. He was evidently a foreigner, a great, gaunt creature with a swarthy skin, coarse black hair, and black, beady eyes. He wore a long mantle heavy with embroidery, and on his head was a gay-colored turban-like arrangement.

“He looks like a supplement to an art magazine,” whispered Millicent to Marjorie.

“He has something to sell,” returned Marjorie, and indeed he had.

Beautiful Oriental fabrics were quickly spread out before the eyes of the delighted girls. Scarfs, handkerchiefs, embroidered jackets, and spangled sashes were shaken out one after another by the long bony fingers of the East Indian. He had, too, a lot of fancy baskets and some hideous little idols.

His talk was a queer kind of half-foreign jargon, and he addressed himself principally to Aunt Molly.

But Jessie and Marguerite were so dazzled by the glory of his wares that he turned his attention to them as more likely purchasers.

“Ach, mees, ver' fine, ver' fine,” he would say, clasping his not overclean hands and rolling his eyes.

Then, catching up a white-and-gold scarf, he deftly twisted it into a turban,

which he placed on Marguerite's curly head and then struck an attitude of mute adoration.

"Ver' fine, ver' fine," he repeated, which phrase seemed to be his entire stock of English.

Then, seeing Millicent's eyes wander toward the grotesque images, he picked up a snake, which uncoiled itself in such a realistic way that the girls squealed. This seemed to amuse him very much, and he began to tell a horrible snake story. Only a few words were intelligible, but his gestures were so dramatic that he was easily understood, and the girls were thrilled at the pantomimic relation of his fearful encounter with a rattlesnake in the wilds of his own country.

The prices of his goods were exorbitant, but Aunt Molly had dealt with his kind before, and by reason of her sagacious hints of the girls' limited means he was induced to accept about half of what he at first asked, and the bargains were finally concluded to the satisfaction of all concerned.

Then the picturesque peddler departed with gestures of respectful admiration and regretful leave-taking.

Jessie had bought a scarf of exquisite embroidery on pale-blue gauze, which was very becoming to her pretty girlishness.

Hester and Betty bought baskets of bright-colored sweet-grass, and Hester put hers at once to use by dropping her crochet work into it.

Millicent bought a bolero jacket, which she put on at once, and catching up the red fez which was Marjorie's purchase, she perched it sidewise on her saucy head and began to dance a fandango, while Helen played a tinkling air on her banjo.

"He was a funny old chap," said Nan, looking at the curious little idol she had bought; "let's write him up in the 'Whitecap.'"

"Do," said Millicent, "and I'll draw his portrait to illustrate it. He looked like the Ancient Mariner."

The hint was enough for Nan, and while Millicent drew a startling-looking sketch which the girls declared was exactly like him, the club Poet produced the

## RIME OF THE INDIAN PEDDLER

Ye Indian intervieweth ye maids

It is an Ancient In-di-an,  
And he stoppeth here by we;

“By thy swarthy face and coal-black hair,  
Now wherefore loiter ye?”

He displayeth his wares

He takes his pack from off his back,  
Displaying costly wares;  
The while the girls his movements watch  
With interested stares.

He seeth snakes (all see snakes)

Then many a creepy tale he tells  
Of snakes and sich-like cattle,  
Dramatically showing forth  
Their snaky curve and rattle.

Ye maidens buy his wares (75 cents reduced from \$1.50)

Ye maidens buy his gaudy wares,  
His prices crying down;  
And slowly and reluctantly  
He wends his way to town.

This was hailed with enthusiasm, and Betty declared they really ought to write an account of Hester’s dinner. Seizing the “Whitecap,” she began a fresh page with a grand flourish reading as she wrote:

“On Friday the Hilarious Populace gathered round their festal board and partook of a dinner which was most successfully served by the Stoker and the Wandering Minstrel, et al.”

“We didn’t eat all,” said Helen, laughing.

“That’s Latin,” said Betty, “and it means that Marguerite helped you.”

Then she proceeded to write:

## THE DINNER

### MENU

*Soup*  
(Nota Bene) Tomato Soup à la Deficit

*Fish*  
Fish à la Nun

*Roast*  
Beef (Cost \$2.10)

*Salad*  
Tomatoes (Peeled by the Peeler)  
Mayonnaise (Stirred by the Stoker)  
Dressed by the Matron

*Dessert*  
Fruit à la Kerosene  
Dressed by the Lamplighter

“Girls,” said Hester, suddenly, “there’s a fine light just now. I’ll take your pictures if you like.”

This speech had seven different answers all at once, but they were all acquiescent, so Hester went to get her camera.

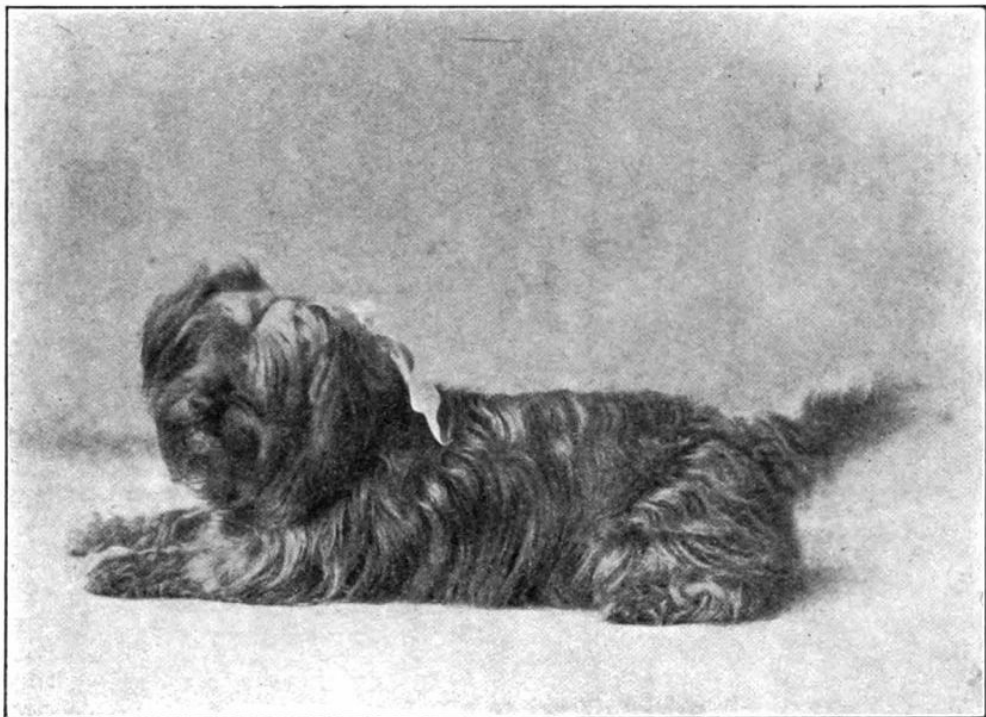
“But let’s go down to the beach,” she said, returning; “it’s so much more picturesque than the piazza.”

In a moment of inspiration Betty seized the “Whitecap” and wrote a stanza:

#### THE CAMERA FIEND

The Camera Fiend is abroad in the land;  
Her tripod beareth she;  
And she lureth us all with a beckoning hand  
Toward the blue and shining sea.  
'Tis little we reckon of the fate that impends  
As we follow her hurrying feet,  
Till she catches the crowd with a kodak snap,  
And the photograph is complete.

“Of course,” said Hester, after they had laughed at Betty’s effort, “I can’t be in the picture, because I’ll have to take it, you know.”



TIMMY LOO.

“Oh, then it’s no fun if we can’t have the eight together,” said Helen.

“Let me snap it off,” said Aunt Molly, kindly. “I don’t know anything about a camera, but couldn’t you show me?”

“Yes, indeed,” said Hester; “that will be jolly of you—and I’ll take your picture afterward.”

So they all went down to the beach, and pictures were taken of most fantastic groups and duets and solitaires, as Millicent called them. Last but not least, they took a very fine solitaire of Timmy Loo in one of his fits of good behavior, and then Hester declared she must save the rest of her plates for another day.

“Do you know,” said Nan, in her slow, dreamy way, “if Marguerite and I are to get supper to-night, I really believe it’s time we began to think about it.”

“Oh, do something more than think about it,” groaned Betty. “I’m as hungry as if I hadn’t attended that grand and elegant dinner.”

“Are you, dear?” said Marguerite, with mock-solicitude. “Well, you shall soon be fed. Come on, Nan; the path of glory leads up to our cottage, and we must tread it like the brave heroes that we are.”



“When may we hope supper will be ready?” called out Jessie, as the Matron and the Poet wandered off.

“ ’Twill be served at six-thirty precisely,” replied Marguerite, with one of her unsuccessful attempts at a dignified mien. “Brush your hair and put on clean pinafores, and be prompt when the bell rings.”

“Aye, aye,” called out Hester; and the group on the beach watched the departing pair, and chuckled as they wondered what the two rattlepates would give them to eat.

## CHAPTER VIII

### FRITTERS AND SALAD

“WHAT *are* we going to have for supper, Daisy?” asked Nan, as, arm in arm, they sauntered toward the cottage.

“I don’t know, I’m sure; but, Nannie, just look at those clouds,—those gorgeous ones behind that clump of pine-trees,—all gold and pink, pushing themselves through the green.”

“Yes, they are beautiful. The sun never sets like that at home, does it?”

“No. Oh, here’s the vegetable-man’s cart. Wonder what he’s around so late for? But suppose we get some of his things, ’cause I know there’s nothing in the house to cook.”

“Yes; let’s give them a vegetable supper. They ought to have a light meal after that hearty dinner. What shall we buy?”

“Whatever he has the freshest,” replied Marguerite, with one of her wisest nods.

“Good afternoon, young ladies,” called out the huckster, reining up his horse. “What’ll ye hev in my line?”

“Have you any very nice asparagus?” asked Marguerite.

“Grass? No mum; it’s a leetle late fer grass. Nice egg-plants now, or cauliflower.”

“Oh, cauliflower!” cried Nan. “That will be fine—you can make a salad.”

“So I can,” said Marguerite; “and here’s lovely-looking corn. You make some of your delicious corn fritters.”

“I will,” said Nan; “and let’s buy a watermelon, and then, with bread and butter and coffee, that will be enough.”

“Seems’s if we ought to have a made dessert,” said Marguerite, as they followed the huckster’s slowly moving vehicle to the house.

“I’ll make a snow pudding,” said Nan. “Let’s give them a real bang-up supper.”

“All right,” said Marguerite; and the two fell to work with such vigor that Rosie stared at them in astonishment, for she had secretly thought this particular duet ornamental rather than useful.

“Fly round, Rosie,” said Marguerite to the smiling Irish girl. “Husk this corn, please, and cut it carefully from the ears—we want to make fritters. Perhaps you’d better grate it.”

“No, cut it,” said Nan; “it’s so young and tender.”

“Well, cut it, Rosie,” went on the Matron; “and then boil the cauliflower for twenty minutes in salted water—oh, you’d better do that before you fix the corn, so it can get ice-cold for the salad.”

“But, Rosie,” put in Nan, “first I wish you’d get out the eggs for me; and just open this box of gelatine and put it to soak in cold water.”

“There ain’t no eggs, miss,” announced Rosie, after a search in the cupboard.

“Oh, what a shame! I’ve set my heart on making a snow pudding. Well, Rosie, can’t you run over to the grocer’s and get some? It won’t take a minute.”

“Yes’m,” said the willing maid, and away she went.

“Oh, dear!” groaned Marguerite, “she didn’t put the cauliflower on to cook; she might have done that before she started.”

“I’ll do it,” said Nan. “Is it that it must be washed?”

“Yes, of course; oh—no—I don’t know,” replied Marguerite, somewhat vaguely. “Does it look soiled?”

“Not much,” said Nan, cheerfully; “just a few stains of good old Mother Earth on its fair face. That won’t hurt anybody—so here goes.”

She dropped the cauliflower into a kettle of water and set it on the stove.

“We’ll have everything served separately,” said the canny Marguerite, “and then it will seem like more. Somehow I don’t see much around to eat.”

“Oh, there’s plenty,” said Nan, who was weighing sugar. “Corn fritters are hearty, you know.”

Rosie soon returned with the eggs, and the preparations went merrily on. Nan sang and Marguerite whistled, and occasionally they bumped against each other, and then waltzed a few turns around the kitchen.

“Now, Rosie, supply me with oil and vinegar and salt and pepper, and I’ll whisk up this mayonnaise in a jiffy. Phew! what’s burning?”

It was the cauliflower, but luckily it was only scorched on one side. Marguerite pared off the brown part, pronounced it done, and set it aside to cool.

“Don’t speak to me,” cried Nan, who was wildly manipulating a Dover beater; “this snow pudding won’t snow; it never will when I’m in a hurry.”

“Never mind, deary; it will be just as good soft.”

“It won’t,” wailed Nan; “and Betty will make fun of it—hers are always perfect.”

“Well, you’re perfect, so who cares about a pudding more or less? But jiminetty! when are you going to make the corn fritters? The girls will be here in a minute.”

“I can make corn fritters, miss. Shall I be afther doin’ ’em?” said Rosie.

“Oh, do,” cried Nan, still beating away for dear life; “and get the frying-pan on the stove—it wants to be awfully hot.”

And then, somehow, the things got done: the snow pudding was *nearly* a success; the cauliflower salad looked fine; and as for Rosie’s corn fritters, they were of a melting golden brown that appealed very strongly to the two hungry cooks.

“How many are there, Rosie?” asked Nan, eyeing the pile.

“Thirteen, miss; the corn wouldn’t make no more.”

“Thirteen! An unlucky number!” exclaimed Marguerite. “Nannie, let’s eat one, and offer our friends a decent dozen.”

“All right,” said Nan, and a fritter was carefully halved and eaten with a relish.

“Those are simply great!” said Marguerite, with a hungry glance at the heaped-up plate. “You like them, don’t you, Rosie?”

“No, ma’am; I never touches corn in any way.”

“You don’t! Now see here, Nan; we would, of course, have left two for Rosie, and since she doesn’t care for them, and the girls haven’t come yet, let’s you and I eat Rosie’s share now.”

Nan willingly agreed, and the plate was further depleted by two.

Still the girls came not.

“It’s ridiculous,” said Nan, in a hesitating way, “to serve ten fritters to eight people. One apiece seems so much more reasonable.”

“It does,” said Marguerite, solemnly nodding her pretty head. “Let us so arrange matters that eight shall be served.”

Whereupon the cooks appropriated one more fritter apiece, and declared that they really increased in deliciousness. Then they sat and wondered why the girls didn’t come.

“It’s just half-past,” said Nan; “I supposed they’d be here howling before this.”

“Do you know,” said Marguerite, “I don’t feel like waiting, and I don’t

believe they'd care if we—you and I, I mean—ate our two fritters now. They're so much better hot."

"We'll do it," said Nan; "two of them are ours, of course."

So two more of Rosie's fritters had just disappeared when a barking announced the approach of the cavalcade.

"Supper ready?" cried Betty, as they all trooped in.

"Yes," said Marguerite, beaming with pride at her ability to answer the question in the affirmative; "bring it in, Rosie."

The girls seated themselves at table, and Timmy Loo waltzed gaily about in great expectation when Rosie brought in the plate of six corn fritters and passed it round.

"Oh, how good!" cried Marjorie, helping herself. "I just love these things, and it's so nice of you not to bake them all at once. They're lovely just off the pan. Hurry up the next lot, Rosie."

Nan blushed and thought seriously of slipping under the table; but Marguerite said blandly:

"Oh, these are individual fritters. There's only one apiece, and Nan and I ate ours before you came home. What made you so late?"

"Only one apiece!" exclaimed Betty, ignoring Marguerite's question. "Why, I could eat six!"

"So could I," said Millicent; but Marguerite went on airily:

"Pooh! do you think we're going to have nothing else? There are several courses yet to come."

This mollified the girls, and each ate her fritter hopefully, while Nan and Marguerite chattered very fast to hide their rapidly growing embarrassment.

The next course was the salad, though it did seem as if something else ought to have preceded it.

"H'm!" said Marjorie, as the not over-bounteous-looking bowl was placed before her. "I see the salads are also to be served individually. Mine looks very nice."

"No, no!" cried Nan; but Marguerite laughed gaily and said: "Why, you girls would ruin a hotel proprietor. How *can* you want so much to eat? No, madam; we offer you a variety in our service. The salad is to be served at table."

Just then Rosie brought eight plates, and by careful division the Duchess portioned to each about a tablespoonful of salad.

"There's really plenty of it, after all," said Betty, laying down her fork after

the first taste.

“Why?” said Marguerite, hurriedly trying hers. “Oh, it’s scorched, isn’t it? Well, you see, it burned a little while it was cooking, but I thought we scraped the burnt part all off. Queer how that scorchy taste permeates the whole thing!”

“Take it away, Rosie,” said Marjorie; “remove the smoked salad and delight our eyes with the next course.”

The next delicacy seemed to be a great bowl of yellow custard.

“Dessert already?” said Jessie. “Oh, perhaps we’re having one of those backward dinners. I’ve read about them. You begin with coffee and end with soup, you know.”

“I love custard,” said Millicent. “What do we eat it on?”

“It’s—it’s a snow pudding,” faltered Nan.

“Oh, so it is,” cried Millicent, “and the snow has all melted.”

“I think it’s down underneath,” Nan went on hopefully.

“Of course it must be,” replied teasing Millicent. “Get the snow-shovel; perhaps we can dig it up.”

However, the dessert was all eaten, for a snow pudding tastes good even when its shape is not all that could be desired.

“What, something else?” cried Millicent, as Rosie appeared with a pile of fresh plates. “You astonish me! Girls, you really oughtn’t to overfeed us in this mad fashion. A watermelon, as I live!”

The great green melon was hailed with delight by all, and, except that it was a bit warmish from having traveled about in the sun all day, it was pronounced extremely satisfactory. Coffee followed, and Betty remarked that that made up in quality and quantity for what the other courses had lacked in both.

“Some of the things *didn’t* turn out quite right,” admitted Marguerite, “but you had quite enough of them. You can’t expect the lavishness of a Nero on five dollars a week.”

“Let’s go in the Grotto and write in the ‘Whitecap,’” said Helen, who always interposed when Betty and Marguerite began a discussion.

So into the Grotto they went, and while Helen picked at her banjo, and Nan and Jessie sang, the others made up rhymes for their book.

After some struggles, in which Marguerite joined with as much good will as the others, they produced this masterpiece, which they read aloud to the musicians, who applauded most heartily:

# OMELET'S SOLILOQUY

BY THE COOK

To fry or not to fry; that is the question —  
Whether 'tis better in this pan to sizzle  
A scarce and scanty lot of small corn fritters,  
And by devouring end them. To fry, to brown,  
No more. And by this dish to say we fill  
Our suffering companions and ourselves.  
Fritters and salad! 'Tis a combination  
Devoutly to be wished. To fry, to brown,  
To brown, perchance to burn, aye, there's the rub,  
For in that kitchen range what flames may come  
When we have shoveled on this mortal coal.  
But who would want the roasts of beef or lamb,  
The apple-pie, Welsh rarebit, deviled crabs,  
The quail on toast, or duck with canvasback,  
When he might such a royal dinner make  
With a corn fritter? Who would these dainties wish,  
And run the risk of nightmare or of gout?  
And so the thought of soda-mints to come  
Impels us to be careful what we eat,  
And makes us rather bear the ills we have  
Than fly to others that we know not of.  
Thus indigestion doth make cowards of all.  
And so instead of rich meringues and pastry,  
Instead of oysters, terrapin, or pie,  
Give us a single fritter!

## CHAPTER IX

### GENIUS BURNS

“MY hearers,” said Nan, as they all dawdled on the veranda one morning, “a truly magnificent scheme is forming itself in my fertile brain.”

“Pray expound and elucidate,” murmured Marguerite, from the hammock, where she was lazily swaying to and fro.

“Oh, it’s nothing much,” said Nan; “only that we give a play.”

“Is that all?” said Marguerite. “I thought you meant something nice.”

“Let’s do it,” cried Betty. “I just love that sort of thing—‘Oh, Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou, Romeo?’ ”

“Shall we hire the town hall, or wouldn’t that be big enough?” inquired Helen.

“And don’t let’s do it half-way,” said Marjorie. “We can get scenery and costumes from New York and give ‘L’Aiglon’ or ‘Faust’ or something worth while.”

“Nonsense!” said Nan. “Do be quiet, girls, until I tell you what I mean. You see, we’ve written such really good and funny things in the ‘Whitecap’ that I’m sure we could write a little play, with songs and things, and then act it; and it would be lots of fun.”

“Oh, you mean an opera,” said Millicent. “Why, of course we could dash off an opera any morning, just as easy as not. Come on; let’s begin.”

“No, wait!” cried Nan; “you don’t understand, and I won’t be made fun of. I’m serious.”

“Of course you are; no one took you for a joke. But, even so, you can’t stop us now we’re started”; and Hester grasped a pencil, and taking the “Whitecap,” began to write:

Time: Midnight.

Scene: A dark corridor.

“We must have it gloomy and mysterious, it’s so much more interesting.”



“Yes,” said Helen, who was hanging over Hester’s shoulder. “Who’ll appear first?”

“You,” said Hester, writing rapidly.

Enter the Wandering Minstrel.

“Oh, I never could! I’d be scared to death!” cried Helen, who had a way of taking things seriously.

“Let her be asleep,” said Marjorie; “then she won’t feel embarrassed, and she’s used to walking in her sleep, you know.”

This was true enough, and Hester rewrote:

Enter the Wandering Minstrel, sound asleep. She sings to her banjo:

### THE WANDERING MINSTREL’S SONG

I’ve something weird to tell you—  
’Twill make you crawl and creep;  
For I love to harrow up your souls  
When walking in my sleep.

’Tis something most appalling—  
’Twill make you shriek and yell;  
But you must not breathe a sentence  
Of the tale that I shall tell.

The most awful thing has happened;  
There’s a—

“Oh, I can’t go on with this. I don’t know what happened! Somebody else finish it.”

“No; each must finish the song she begins. Wind that up, and then I’ll write my song,” said Marguerite.

So Hester wrote:

The Wandering Minstrel awakens, gives a scared look over her shoulder, and scurries back to her room.

“Oh, that’s no fair!” cried Marguerite, but Helen said:

“Yes, it is; I’ll be glad of a chance to vanish. Go on, Daisy.”

“You know I’m the Chaperon of this crowd,” said Marguerite, “and as such I’ll relate my woes.”

With some assistance from Nan, the rattlepated Chaperon composed her song:

### THE CHAPERON’S SONG

I am the unfortunate Chaperon;  
I never can call a minute my own:  
For the girls treat with mirthful derision  
The precision of my kind supervision.

Oh, terribly hard is my luckless lot!  
I’m forced to hurry from spot to spot,  
And then all the thanks that I get for my trouble  
Is that I’m completely ignored.

“Why, that’s fine!” cried Marjorie; “but how can you sing it? Helen’s has a tune to it, ‘Talking in My Sleep,’ you know.”

“Are we really going to sing this thing?” said Marguerite, looking awestruck.

“Of course,” said Nan, decidedly. “We’ll write the words to tunes we know, and we’ll rehearse the whole thing and give it some evening to an audience composed of our friends next door.”

“And across the street, too,” said Jessie. “The Marlowes and Hillises over there are awfully nice people, and they’d love to be invited.”

“Don’t invite your chickens before the play is hatched,” said Betty. “But, Daisy, you ought to do a dance with your song. You’re a born soubrette.”

“I’ll tell you,” cried Nan. “Write it to the air of the ‘Kerry Dance.’ You sing that so prettily, and you can have a banjo accompaniment and hop around all you like.”

So, with much help from Nan and Hester, Marguerite accomplished a new

### CHAPERON’S SONG

I’m the Chaperon gay and frisky,  
And the rôle that I have to play  
Is decidedly rash and risky,

And I know I'll slip up some day.

When the girls are all around me,  
I'm as staid as a cup of tea;  
And my prudish airs astound me,  
When I think of what I can be.

Oh, my prudery! Oh, my dignity!  
And what I can be!

I'm the Chaperon gay and frisky,  
And the rôle that I have to play  
Is decidedly rash and risky,  
And I know I'll slip up some day.

Oh, it's slow when we all sit round in state,  
Eyes cast down and faces long and straight;  
Prim and staid, our manners quite correct;  
All approach to frivolousness checked.  
I assume a pedantic pose,  
But at heart I feel—

I'm the Chaperon, gay and frisky, etc.

“Oh, that's awfully pretty!” cried Marjorie, as they tried it over to the accompaniment of Helen's banjo. “Why, the play will be a howling success if we keep on like this.”

“Indeed it will—a howling, screaming success.”

“Now, Jessie, it's your turn. Let's see what a Scullery-maid can do at making a song for herself.”

“Oh, I couldn't make a rime to save my life,” said Jessie, with such a scared look that everybody laughed.

“But you'll have to,” cried Betty. “Every one of us must write our own song, whether we can do it or not.”

“Help me out, Nannie,” said Jessie, pleadingly; “you're a real live Poet, and you ought to teach the art to one who is but a lowly Scullery-maid.”

“Well, we'll have a duet,” said Nan, good-naturedly, “and I'll write it for us both, and then you and I will sing it together. Here goes!”

Enter Scullery-maid, carrying under her arm a dictionary, and in her hand a pad and pencil.

Enter Poet, with frying-pan and cake of soap.

## SCULLERY-MAID AND POET

*(A Duet)*

“Where are you going, my Scullery-maid?”

“I seek inspiration, kind Poet,” she said.

“And why inspiration, my Scullery-maid?”

“I want to write verses, like you,” she said.

“We’ll make a good bargain, my Scullery-maid.”

“And what is the bargain, kind Poet?” she said.

“You teach me scouring, my Scullery-maid.”

“And then you can brighten my wits,” she said.

“That’s lovely, and you two girls sing beautifully together,” said Marjorie; “but you must have solos, too; you’re our best singers, and you can’t get off with one duet.”

“All right; I’ll write a solo for Jessie,” said Nan. “It can follow right after this duet, you know. It’s to the tune of ‘My Mother Dear.’ ”

## SCULLERY-MAID’S SONG

Do you think I’m asking much of you, my Poet?

I’ve longed to be poetic for a week.

My longings are intense, did you but know it,

And now I come your kind advice to seek.

Each day I’m riming, dictionaries buying;

I cull from books each sweet poetic flower;

But though like any furnace I am sighing,

I really can’t do anything but scour—

Scour, my Poet,

Scour, my Poet,

I really can’t do anything but scour.

“That’s gay,” said Millicent, “and it’s specially funny for Jessie, who really is farther removed from scullery-maidism than any of the rest of us.”

“I don’t care,” said Jessie. “I’ll sing anything you want me to, if I don’t have to write it.”

“I’ll write Nan’s solo,” volunteered Hester. “It’s more fun to write each other’s than our own. This is to the tune of the Burglar Song in ‘The Pirates.’ ”

## POET’S SONG

When the interesting Poet’s not composing,  
Or rolling round her fine poetic eye,  
Oh, she loves to leave her tragic muse a-dozing,  
And spend her time in making cake and pie.

But the other girls her aspirations smother,  
And will not let her have a bit of fun;  
Taking one consideration with another,  
The Poet’s life is not a happy one.

Oh, she’d love to make a salad or a fritter,  
Or even polish up the parlor grate;  
Yet they must suppose she is a helpless critter,  
For they bind her to her melancholy fate.

They make her pump out verses, when she’d ruther  
Turn out a pie, a pudding, or a bun;  
Taking one consideration with another,  
The Poet’s life is not a happy one.

“Well, turn about is fair play,” said Nan, with fun in her eyes. “I’ll write Hester’s solo. She’s a fine Stoker for our open fire, but she can’t do much with stoves. I’ve tried her.”

“We always have open fires in England,” said Hester, “and really, girls, you don’t know how much nicer they are than your old registers and radiators.”

“Very well, my loyal Briton,” said Nan; “you shall air those national views of yours to a small but highly appreciative audience. Do you know that old tune, ‘You should see me dance the polka?’ ”

“Yes,” said Hester, laughing. “I’ve known it all my life.”

“ ’Tis well,” said Nan; “your success as a songster is assured.”

Then, amid much laughter and advice from the merry crowd, Nan achieved this masterpiece:

### STOKER’S SONG

A fig for the air-tight furnace,  
A fig for the shut-up stove;  
They may suit the modern stoker,  
But I really can’t approve.

A fig for the radiator,  
The steam-heat of to-day;  
Hot-air pipes, too, may do for you,  
But I don’t like that way.

### CHORUS

But you should see me use the poker,  
You should see me shovel coal;  
I’m a rattling, raking Stoker,  
And that’s my only rôle.  
When the fire begins a-burning  
I’ll show what I can do,  
For the rattling rollicking Stoker  
Will be poking fun at you.

I cannot sing the praises  
Of the gas-log with its flame—  
Although it burns like blazes,  
And it gets there just the same.  
But when I come in freezing,  
And with cold I shiver and shake,  
The Yule log bright, with its blazing light,  
Is the fire that takes the cake.

Chorus.

Hester’s well-known aversion to slang made this song a good joke, and it was fully appreciated, even by the victim herself.

“Now let’s have a big chorus, so we can all sing together,” said Helen.

“Yes,” said Nan, “with solos in it—a regular descriptive piece.”

“But I can’t sing,” said Millicent.

“Oh, yes, you can,” said Nan. “I’ll write your verse first. How would that tune from ‘Patience’ go? Don’t you know—about the *je ne sais quoi* young man. Let’s try it anyway.”

A Lamplighter trim you see  
Whenever you look at me;  
    You may sneer, you may flout,  
    But you can’t put me out,  
For I am as bright as can be.

#### CHORUS

The Cooking Club girls are we,  
As happy as we can be,  
    Whether walking or riding  
    Or skating or sliding,  
Or sitting at dinner or tea.

“How absurd!” said Hester. “We can’t skate or slide in September.”

“That’s poetic license,” explained Nan, calmly, “but of course you’re too English to see the joke.”

“Well, it’s a good tune,” said Hester; “let’s write verses for the rest.”

Many heads make light work, and though some of the girls did more than others, all helped, and the result was this fine collection of stanzas:

Oh, I am the Peeler serene,  
Though never at peeling I’m seen.  
    The girls say I’m lazy—  
    I think they are crazy;  
There’s nothing about me that’s green.

#### Chorus.

A Camera Fiend you see;  
A sister to you I’ll be.  
    We’re both of us making

A business of taking—  
I'll take you, and you can take me.

Chorus.

Oh, I am the Chaperon gay;  
I sing and I whistle all day.  
    And though I don't shirk  
    My share of the work,  
I'd much rather run out and play.

Chorus

A Wandering Minstrel I—  
My voice 'way up in the sky;  
    My banjo I'm picking,  
    While others are kicking,  
Though I can't imagine why.

Chorus.

Oh, I am the Scullery-maid;  
Of kitchen work I'm afraid;  
    While I should be scrubbing,  
    My wits I am rubbing,  
To shine in the Poet's trade.

Chorus.

It seems to be my fate  
To be Poet Laureate;  
    Though I always am shrinking  
    From doing much thinking,  
I'd far rather polish the grate.

Chorus.

I'm a Cook of undoubted skill;  
The girls praise my dishes, but still—  
    I cannot tell why—  
    After eating my pie



They always are awfully ill.

Chorus.

“That’s a fine chorus; let’s practise it now,” said Marjorie. So Helen played her banjo, and the girls all sang until, to their great surprise, they found it was dinner-time.

## CHAPTER X

### THE PLAY'S THE THING

ONCE started, the play monopolized all the interest and attention of the club.

Aunt Molly was called over and the great project was laid before her.

“Why, it will be lovely, girlies,” she said. “What can I do to help?”

“We need sympathy and advice,” said Marjorie, with the judicial air that marked the Duchess’s serious moments.

“Oh, I’ll give you those,” said Aunt Molly, “but I want to be of more material help. Suppose I provide you with an audience.”

“Yes, do,” cried Betty. “Ask the Marlowes and the Hillises, and those nice people who live the other side of your house—I forget their name.”

“But we can’t sing this foolishness we’ve written to a lot of strangers,” said Nan.

“Indeed we can,” responded Marguerite. “The Blue Ribbon Club can do anything, if it makes up its mind to.”

“The music would be prettier if we had some men’s voices in it,” said Nan, who was looking over the written sheets. “It’s all so high and light.”

“Uncle Ned sings a fine barytone,” said Marjorie. “Do you suppose he’d help us out, aunty?”

“Of course he would,” answered Aunt Molly, heartily; “he’d do anything in his power for the ‘lambs,’ as he always calls you girls.”

“Let’s write a part for him, then,” said Hester. “What could he be?”

“What is the plot of your play?” asked Aunt Molly.

The girls looked at each other blankly.

“Why, it hasn’t any plot,” said Nan. “Do plays always have to have plots? You see, we’ve just written songs for each of us in the characters we’ve assumed down here.”

“Then I don’t exactly see how Uncle Ned could be brought in,” said Aunt Molly, smiling.

“He can’t be *brought in*; he’ll just have to *come in*,” said Betty.

“Like a burglar,” said Nan; “we’ve expected one ever since we’ve been here, and we may as well have our expectations realized.”

“That’s not a bad idea,” said Hester. “The play, of course, will represent all us girls here in this cottage; and Uncle Ned might appear as a burglar—a nice, kind one, you know, like ‘Editha’s Burglar.’”

“Yes, and he can be real affable and social, and sing solos as he prowls about for his plunder.”

“That seems more like a plot. Let’s do it,” said Nan.

Out came the paper-pad and pencils, and genius was set to burning, all of which resulted in several songs for Uncle Ned, whose consent to the plan was fully guaranteed by Aunt Molly.

The Amiable Burglar was destined to enter through a window while singing this solo to the tune of “Robin Adair”:

### ROBBIN’ A BANK

I am a burglar bold,  
Fearless and frank;  
From Fate’s insistent hold  
Fortunes I yank.  
When honest people sleep,  
When cats their vigils keep,  
Forth on my raids I creep,  
Robbin’ a bank.

What’s petty larceny to  
Robbin’ a bank?  
What is sneak-thievery to  
Robbin’ a bank?  
How else is burglary  
What it’s cracked up to be?  
Herein is joy for me—  
Robbin’ a bank.

Here meet, on boodle bent,  
Men of each rank;  
Burglar and president,  
Cashier and crank.

Then, when the deed is done,  
Canada-ward we run.  
Oh, but it's lots of fun,  
Robbin' a bank!

On finding himself fairly in the dining-room of Hilarity Hall, he is seized with compunction at being obliged to rob such a charming and dainty home, which causes him again to break forth into song:

### BURGLAR'S SONG

I'm a tender-hearted chap,  
And I do not care a rap  
For my dangerous profession,  
Taking underhand possession  
Of the plate—silver plate.

And I do not think it fun  
To burglarize the timid one,  
But I think it is my duty  
To obtain the costly booty  
Of the great—rich and great.

So I will fulfil my mission  
Softly, yet with expedition;  
I my hobnailed boots have taken  
Off—for fear the girls will waken,  
For 'tis late—very late.

“Those are beautiful verses,” said Aunt Molly, who knew as much about poetry as a hoptoad, “and Uncle Ned will be perfectly delighted to sing them. When do your rehearsals begin?”

“To-night,” said Marjorie, growing presidential of aspect. “Look here, girls, if this thing is going to be at all, it's going to be a success with a big S. You hear me?”

“We do!” shouted the other seven.

“Then listen further. There's no use of our all fussing with these verses, for Hester and Nan are quite capable of making them up alone. So let them finish the libretto of the play, as they call it. *I* call it an operetta. Now for stage-manager I appoint Betty, and she can get any one to help her who will, but

they must attend entirely to staging the whole thing—look out for scenery, lights, and all that. The costumes I put in the capable hands of Marguerite and Jessie, who know more about clothes in a minute than the rest of us in a thousand years. Helen, of course, is the orchestra; if she can get any one to help her, so much the better. Millicent and I will look after the supper; for I'm sure you'll need one after this wonderful performance, to say nothing of the audience, who, I feel sure, will be utterly exhausted."

"Bravo, Marjorie!" cried Aunt Molly. "You're a manager, and no mistake. Now I'll help any one or all of these committees. Call on me for anything, and you'll find me willing if not always capable."

"Hooray for Aunt Molly!" cried Marjorie, and all responded with a will.

Then Marguerite and Jessie put their pretty heads together and planned costumes for the young actresses that were to be dreams of beauty.

"But how can we get all this tarlatan and stuff?" said Marguerite.

"I'll run up to New York," said Jessie. "I can go in the morning and be back by six o'clock; and you know the success of this thing depends as much on the costume effects as on the music."

Betty announced that her committee of stage-managers would be increased by the addition of Aunt Molly and Uncle Ned; and this proved a wise arrangement, for it insured attractive stage-settings and a curtain and footlights that worked beautifully.

Hester and Nan, feeling the burden of the libretto heavy upon them, went to work and soon achieved a jolly duet for Marguerite and Uncle Ned, whose voices were most harmonious. The air was from the "Mikado," and the words were these:

## CHAPERON, BURGLAR

*(A Duet)*

BURGLAR

There's beauty in the trade of burglary—

There's a subtle fascination that I feel.

As I search from ground to attic,

I admit a thrill ecstatic,

As long as there is anything to steal.

CHAPERON

Yes, I have a kindred feeling  
That there's something nice in stealing,  
As long as there is anything to steal.

CHORUS

If that is so, sing derry down derry;  
It's very evident, very  
Our tastes are one.  
We'll dance and sing,  
So merrily tripping  
And happily skipping,  
Till set of sun.

BURGLAR

The darkness has attractions oftentimes;  
Electric lighting has no charms for me;  
Though I must say when I'm scooting  
That the merits of quick shooting  
Have often struck me very forcibly.

CHAPERON

Yes, although I cannot stifle  
My objections to a rifle,  
Yet its merits sometimes strike me forcibly.

Chorus.

This was pronounced so clever, and was sung at rehearsal so prettily by Marguerite and the Amiable Burglar, that the librettists wrote another duet for the same voices:

## CHAPERON, BURGLAR

*(A Duet)*

CHAPERON

Prithee, gentle Burglar, tell me, tell me true—  
Hey, but I'm curious, willow, willow, waly—  
All the strange adventures that have happened unto you,  
Hey, willow, waly, oh!  
All your deeds discover, oh, my gentle rover,  
Hey, willow, waly, oh.

BURGLAR

Chaperon, I've wallowed all my life in gore—  
Hey, but she's curious, willow, willow, waly!  
You would shrink in terror if I told you more,  
Hey, willow, waly, oh!  
Lift not the dark curtain from my life uncertain,  
Hey, willow, waly, oh.

Then the play began to assume a sort of a plot; a bit incoherent, to be sure, but still enough of a thread to string songs upon.

The Burglar, proving to be a most kind gentleman, quite won the hearts of the inmates of Hilarity Hall, and they, in turn, grew so fond of him that they wished to be adopted. Their plea was that, all being nieces of the Burglar's wife, he ought to give them a home.

This was musically set forth by solos and choruses to the old tune of "Solomon Levi."

## SOLOS AND CHORUS

Oh, I'm the capable Chaperon—  
I'll come at your command;  
And I will rule with a rod of iron  
This rollicking, frolicking band.  
And I'm the shining Scullery-maid;  
I'll keep your pans so bright  
That your kitchen will seem a golden dream  
And your scullery your delight.

### CHORUS

Oh, Mr. Burglar, take us to live with you,  
Dear Mr. Burglar, take us to live with you.  
We're nieces of your wife, you know—you ought to care for such;  
And besides we're very capable girls, and we could help you much;  
So you must see what a scheme 'twould be  
To let the sisters come,  
And we'll do our best to make a success  
Of Mr. Burglar's home.

And I'm the capable Camera Fiend—  
With you I'd like to live;  
And though I take most everything,  
I won't take a negative.  
And I'm the Wandering Minstrel,  
And my banjo I will bring,  
And should you give a minstrel show  
I'll play for you and sing.

Chorus.

And I'm the Popular Poet;  
Should there ever come a time  
When you will not listen to reason  
I will make you listen to rime.  
And I'm the Snipping Snuffer,  
And I know what I'm about;  
Should any flame of anger rise



I'll quickly snuff it out.

Chorus.

I'm the Peregrinating Peeler;  
I will peel your onions well,  
And when the dinner's ready  
I will gladly peel the bell.  
And you must see, and we all agree,  
When every one else is took,  
You'll certainly make an awful mistake,  
Unless you take the Cook.

Chorus.

The Burglar, appalled at the idea of introducing eight merry maidens into his quiet and secluded home, voices his indignation in a barytone solo:

### BURGLAR'S SONG

1. Oh, you must admit that it's not a bit  
The theme for a jovial song—  
That a man, should he marry, is obliged to carry  
His wife's relations along.  
And I do declare that it makes my hair  
Stand up in the wildest twirls  
When I pause on the brink and stop and think  
Of the appetites of those girls.

### CHORUS

For the Cooking Club eats all night,  
And the Cooking Club eats all day,  
And don't you think that you would shrink  
From boarding them without pay?

I shall tear my hair in wild despair,  
And pipe my lachrymal glands,  
And curse my lot that ever I got  
A Cooking Club on my hands.

So great those girls' demands  
That my lachrymal glands  
I shall pipe and rave when I find I have  
A Cooking Club on my hands.

2. I shall have no rest, for Huyler's best  
They will crave from morn till night,  
And express their wishes for dainty dishes,  
Not offering me a bite.  
They will make it a habit to cook Welsh rabbit  
In the hours wee and small;  
And again I vow that I don't know how  
I shall stand the expense at all.

Chorus.

But, notwithstanding his misgivings, the Burglar takes the eight sisters to his palatial home and installs them there; whereupon his remonstrances with them for their great extravagance calls forth this musical gem:

### THE BURGLE SONG

The Burglar blows about the clothes  
And costly jewels the girls are getting;  
He swears and scowls and groans and growls,  
His previous contract sore regretting.

Blow, Burglar, blow!  
Send the wild sisters flying.  
Blow, Burglar, answer echoes,  
Flying, flying, flying.

Oh, hark! oh, hear! how loud and clear,  
And louder, nearer, madder growing,  
With direful threats about his debts,  
The blustering Burglar still is blowing.

Blow, Burglar, blow!  
Send the wild sisters flying.  
Blow, Burglar, answer echoes,  
Sighing, sighing, sighing.

Although his tread may wake the dead,  
Although his voice with rage may quiver,  
We'll never stop; from shop to shop,  
We'll buy forever and forever.

Blow, Burglar, blow!  
Send the wild sisters flying.  
Blow, Burglar, answer sisters,  
Buying, buying, buying.

This declaration of independence meets with favor among the extravagant  
eight, and they indulge in a gleeful

### CHORUS

Sing a song of samples,  
A pocket full of stuff;  
Four-and-twenty patterns,  
But we haven't got enough.  
When the shops are open  
The girls begin to flock;  
Isn't *that* a pretty piece  
To make a pretty frock?

The Burglar's in the tantrums  
'Cause we spend his money;  
He's always in a fidget  
'Cause creditors are dunny;  
But the sisters are in clover,  
As you may suppose,  
Sitting on the parlor floor  
Choosing summer clothes.

As Millicent positively declared she could not sing a solo, Nan wrote a  
recitation for her, and one of the gems of the whole performance was  
Millicent's well-rendered

## MONOLOGUE

All the world's a stage,  
And all the men and women merely players;  
But lovely woman with her witching wiles  
Far better acts her part than awkward man;  
With clever, ready wit she takes her cues,  
Adapts herself to each and every rôle,  
Is sad or merry, grave or gay, at will;  
Enacts with equal ease the pert soubrette,  
Or blushing ingénue, or tragic queen,  
And in her time plays many various parts,  
Her acts being seven ages.

At first the infant,  
Noting the ribbons on her nurse's cap.  
And then the school-girl with her shining braids  
And spotless pinafore, conning her task,  
Rising from form to form, until she blooms  
In cap and gown, a sweet girl graduate.  
And then the lovely debutante all smiles,  
And airy chiffon gown and ribbons white,  
And flowers and fans, and just a trace or two  
Of sentiment embodied in a note,  
Or faded flower, or treasured photograph.  
And then the beauteous belle of all the ball-rooms,  
Heroine of several winters; clever, cool,  
Graciously kind to foreign noblemen,  
Seeking a title rôle, lest she remain,  
As now, a peerless beauty. Then the bride,  
In fair white trailing robes, with orange-blooms,  
Priceless ancestral lace, and family pearls,  
With blushing, downcast glance and modest mien,  
Unthinking vows, "Love, honor, and obey."  
And then the widow in her dainty weeds,  
Whose youthful charms and coquette glance belie  
Her stalwart sons, her matron's voice  
Turning again to happy girlish tones,  
So well she plays her part. Last scene of all,  
That ends this strange, eventful history:

The dowager, with jewels and feathers decked —  
Eager to gossip, eager too to hear  
The latest scandal; seeing everything  
Through glasses darkly; charming to the last,  
A wondrous masterpiece of modern art —  
False teeth, false hair, false skin, false everything.

## CHAPTER XI

### A SUCCESSFUL PERFORMANCE

THE great day drew near. The play was to be presented on Friday evening, and much was to be done by way of preparation.

Uncle Ned and two carpenters were building a stage in the parlor, which, though small, was a jolly little affair; and Aunt Molly, who was a bit of an artist, was painting some crude but effective scenery.

Betty was supposed to be helping Uncle Ned, and Marjorie and Millicent were trying to help the scenic artist; but if their assistance wasn't very valuable, they at least knew enough not to hinder the head workers.

Jessie and Marguerite were devising stunning costumes and strange-looking "properties," the use of which no one could guess.

These two modistes were continually making pilgrimages to the shops of Long Beach; which emporiums never, by any chance, yielded up the materials the anxious maidens were in search of.

"Going to the store again?" said Marjorie, as Marguerite flew by her with an anxious face.

"Yes; we *must* have some red stuff, if I have to use paper."

"Take Timmy Loo, won't you? He hasn't had a run to-day."

"Course I will. Come on, Tim." And the Chaperon flew away, followed by the silver-blue Skye. After an hour or more the yellow-haired Chaperon returned in a state of exhaustion.

"I'll *never* take that dog out with me again," she declared, with such a tragic air that Marjorie felt certain her pet must have brought disgrace upon the whole club.

"Why, what has my bad little bundle of a dog been a-doing?" she inquired, grabbing up the quivering bunch of silver curls and blue ribbon.

"He wasn't bad," said Marguerite, laughing, "but he's such a nuisance. I thought I should never get home. He made me go into every shop in the village."

"That didn't take *very* long," observed Betty, dryly.

"No; but he insisted on being fed at each place; and he knows exactly

where they all keep their eatables. At the grocer's he flew to the glass case where the chocolates are, and pawed at it and whined until Mr. Forbes had to open it and give him some. Then at the milliner's, where I was buying ribbon, he tore out into her back parlor, and jumped up on a table, trying to reach a little chest of drawers where, it seems, she keeps sugar-lumps. And even at the dry-goods shop he dived behind a lot of rolls of stuff and found a paper bag of ginger cookies. Oh, he's a terror! How does he know all these places?"

"He smells them out!" said Marjorie, patting Tim's head, while the dog, understanding that he was being praised, wagged his bit of a tail and blinked his eyes proudly.

"And when he had found the things," continued Marguerite, "he never offered to touch them, but just sat up and begged, with that cocky blue bow sticking up behind, and of course nobody could refuse him."

"I should think not!" cried Marjorie, hugging her treasure. "Of course nobody could refuse a bit of chocolate or sugar to such a polite, refined, well-bred little doggikins, who *always* keeps his bow at the back of his neck!" And Tim fairly glowed at her fond appreciation.

Although for several days Hilarity Hall was in a most chaotic state of preparation, and although it seemed as if order never could come of it, yet on Friday evening at seven o'clock everything was in complete readiness.

Helen's banjo music was augmented by the two Hillis boys, Frank and Raymond, one of whom played the banjo and the other the mandolin.

They were nice boys, and when Aunt Molly invited them to play for the Hilarity Hall girls they were more than pleased.

The girls liked it too, especially Marguerite and Jessie, who immediately assumed the coy and bewitching airs which they thought the occasion demanded.

"But why so many chairs?" asked Marjorie, as Uncle Ned brought over more and more from his own cottage, and Aunt Molly placed them in compact rows in the parlor.

"Don't ask questions, miss," said her uncle. "You left the invitation of an audience to your charming and capable aunt, and now 'tis yours not to make reply, yours not to wonder why, but run along and don that fetching costume in which you're to dazzle the eyes of this large and imposing audience."

"Imposed-on audience you mean, Uncle Ned," said Marjorie, as she danced away.

The Blue Ribbon Club had a uniform, which they had concluded to wear in their play. It was a plain gown of soft light-gray material, with a ruffled white

muslin kerchief. A picturesque effect was gained by a hooded cape of the gray lined with pink.

Marguerite declared that Aunt Molly was an honorary member of the club, and she must have a uniform too. So one was made for her, and the nine ladies made a pretty picture in the nun-like garb.

At last all was in readiness, and the audience was beginning to arrive.

From behind the curtain the girls could hear the rustling of the programs and hearty laughter from the appreciative readers. The programs were the work of Betty and Hester, and were declared by all to be a triumph of genius.

Here is a copy of one:

ANNUAL ENGAGEMENT  
OF THE  
HILARITY HALL OPERA COMPANY

PRESENTING  
A NEW AND ORIGINAL  
MUSICAL FARCE  
ENTITLED

HILARITY HALL

FIRST PRODUCTION ON ANY STAGE  
OF THIS POPULAR OPERETTA

*Libretto by the Blue Ribbon Club*  
*Music by Sir Arthur Sullivan and others*

INTERPRETED BY THE FOLLOWING  
PHENOMENAL CAST  
(THE ONLY COMPANY AUTHORIZED TO  
PRESENT THIS OPERA)



THE CHAPERON, MATRON, AND GENERAL GUARDIAN,  
*Miss Marguerite Alden*

THE POET, whose rime is even worse than her reason,  
*Miss Anna Kellogg*

THE CAMERA FIEND, a taking young lady,  
*Miss Hester Laverack*

THE SCULLERY-MAID, a shining success,  
*Miss Jessica Carroll*

THE LAMPLIGHTER, with wick-ed ways,  
*Miss Millicent Payne*

THE WANDERING MINSTREL, who wanders in her mind,  
*Miss Helen Morris*

THE PEELER, who plays a skin game,  
*Miss Elizabeth Miller*

THE COOK, winner of the Blue Ribbon,  
*Miss Marjorie Bond*

ROBIN STEELE, an Amiable Burglar,  
*Mr. Edward Warburton*

ADVISORY BOARD  
*Mrs. Edward Warburton*

NOTICE. In case of fire, escape may be made by any door or window.  
NOTICE. Explanatory diagrams of the principal jokes will be supplied  
by the ushers, free of charge.

Patrons of this theater will confer a favor on the management by  
reporting any inattention on the part of the employees (or the  
audience).

Tickets picked up on the sidewalk are worthless, and will not be  
received at the door.

The management begs respectfully to call the attention of the  
audience to the unique electric-lighting defects.

The piano used on this occasion doesn't seem to be here.

As the curtain began to rise, the audience gave way to wild and enthusiastic applause, more boisterous indeed than might have been expected from the sedate and decorous friends whom Aunt Molly had invited.

But the curtain was not fairly up before the flustered girls on the stage perceived the reason of this outburst.

The front row of chairs was entirely occupied by the Middleton boys whose presence they had so insistently forbidden.

There were Marjorie's two brothers, and Nan's one; there were the Burleigh boys, Ted Lewis, Dick Morton, and Roger Hale.

With faces on a broad grin, they proceeded to make both manual and vociferous protestations of delight until the opening chorus began.

But this did not entirely silence the happy ones in the front row. No; the airs of the operetta being familiar to them, the boys joined their strong young voices to those of the prima donnas on the stage, and the result was truly fine.

The play went on beautifully. Marguerite looked so pretty and sang so well that she, perhaps, received the most applause among the girls.

But Uncle Ned was so funny as the Amiable Burglar, and introduced such funny jokes and antics into his part, that he was by all odds the star of the evening.

Betty forgot her part several times, but, being quick-witted, she extemporized bits that were better than her original lines.

Helen proved to be the best actress, and her sleep-walking scene was so effective that she was advised to study for *Lady Macbeth*.

Jessie was stage-struck. Her round, rosy little face grew pale, her blue eyes stared, and her voice failed her entirely. Less embarrassed than dazed, she walked to a chair at one end of the stage, and sat down, calmly folding her arms. This delighted the audience, who greatly applauded the bewildered actress.

In the second act the girls all wore frilled white tarlatan dresses, with sashes and bows of pale green ribbon.

The scene was a flowery garden, and it was most attractive, with a rose hedge at the back, and palms and flowering bushes all about. To be sure, the roses were made of pink tissue-paper, but they were very effective, and the group of lovely girls were slowly waving feather fans in time to a slow, soft

## CHORUS

Waft, waft in slow, sweet cadences  
Each fan whose use a maiden's is,  
More worthy praise, in summer days,  
    Than needle, spoon, or pen.

Touch lightly each resounding string,  
O Wandering Minstrel, while we sing  
Of hearts by fate made desolate  
    And of the Now and Then.

Waft, waft in slow, sweet cadences  
Each fan whose use a maiden's is.

“Ah!” cried the boys, in concert, as the chorus concluded. “Ah, ah, ah!” But though they were in a teasing mood, they were careful not to disturb the play seriously, and the merry farce came successfully to a finish.

Then the boys' merriment broke loose. They swarmed up on to the stage; they kissed the girls who were their sisters or cousins, and shook hands vigorously with those who were not. They greeted Uncle Ned and Aunt Molly effusively; for was it not owing to them that this joyful treat was brought about? Indeed, you never saw such gay, irrepressible spirits as those Middleton guests were.

When they adjourned to the dining-room the Feast Committee found that their provision had been amply supplemented, and the rose-garlanded, tarlatan-frocked ladies found that histrionic laurels in no way affected their appetites.

“When did you come?” asked Marjorie of Jack Kellogg. “You know I told you you positively couldn't.”

Marjorie had on her Duchess air, but Jack, being a brave youth, was not afraid of her.

“I know,” he replied; “but your Aunt Molly said we positively could, and so we're here, and—what do you think of this? We're staying at the Long Beach Inn, and we're not going home until to-morrow night!”

## CHAPTER XII

### THE BOYS' ENTERTAINMENT

“WELL,” said Marjorie, “I suppose we’ve got those boys on our hands for this whole day”; and the Duchess’s pretty brow wrinkled as if with the cares of a nation.

It was the morning after the play, and the house was in a state of “chaos and old night,” as Betty expressed it.

“I’m glad of it,” said Marguerite, frankly. “I think we’ll have lots of fun, and there are so many things we can do.”

“We can clear up this house, for one,” said Hester, looking dubiously at the wreck of scenery and properties scattered all about.

“Let’s make the boys clear it up,” suggested Betty.

“Good for you!” cried Jessie. “You *do* have brilliant ideas sometimes, don’t you, Betsy? Those scapegraces have imposed themselves upon us, and they may as well be put to use.”

“Where are they? I don’t see them,” said Nan, peering under the tables and chairs.

“Oh, they’ll be here soon enough; don’t worry,” said Millicent, who was calmly eating a late breakfast. “They are but henchmen; let us command them. They should be only too glad to do our bidding.”

Very soon after, with a wild war-whoop, the boys appeared.

“What a lazy lot!” they cried, looking at the table. “Why, we had breakfast hours ago, and we’ve had a swim and a run, and we’ve called on Aunt Molly, and—oh, I say, give us some jam?”

“Not until you work for it,” said Millicent, putting the jam-jar in the cupboard and standing in front of the closed door. “You see the disarray of our household gods. Well, restore this palace to its original exquisite tidiness and order, and you shall have—a spoonful of jam apiece.”

“A spoonful!” cried Harry Bond. “A jarful, you mean! But come on, fellows; let’s fire out this trash.”

There were ten boys, for the eight who came down from Middleton had promptly annexed the two Hillis boys; and the rapidity with which Hilarity

Hall was put in order was suggestive of a Western cyclone.

“You girls vamoose,” shouted Roger Hale. “Run upstairs, or outdoors, or across the street, or somewhere, and quick!”

The Blue Ribbon Club as one girl flew upstairs, and proceeded to dictate orders over the banister, which, however, were unheeded and even unheard.

Timmy Loo danced frantically about among the marauding boys until he was unceremoniously swept out of the front door by Roger’s broom. He was rescued by Rosie, who, much astounded at the turn things had taken, ran over to Aunt Molly’s for shelter and safety. But soon the squall was over and calm reigned again.

“Come down, girls,” called Ted Lewis. “One free, all free!”

Down came the club, bright and smiling, with fresh shirt-waists and the additional ribbons or trinkets that masculine presence always seems to necessitate.

“There, milady,” said Harry Bond to Millicent, “your palace is restored to all its pristine glory, and now fork over that jam.”

So the jam and everything else the larder contained was set forth, and those voracious boys speedily despatched it all.

“Now,” said Harry Bond, “we’re all going down to the beach to take pictures and otherwise enjoy ourselves this pleasant morning; and then, since you urge us so, we’re all coming back here to dinner.”

“Do,” said Marjorie, heartily; “that will be lots of fun.” And all the other girls echoed her opinion, except Marguerite and Nan.

“But you *can’t!*” exclaimed the embarrassed Matron. “You see, it’s Nannie’s and my turn to get dinner to-day, and there isn’t half enough in the house for such a horde of pirates, and—and we’d have to stay home all the morning to get ready for you!”

Marguerite looked the picture of distress at the thought of missing the fun on the beach, and Nan looked placidly indifferent, but had no appearance of intending to be left behind.

“We’ll take the ‘Whitecap’ to the beach with us,” she said, as she put on her hat, “and the boys can draw pictures in it. Jack’s quite clever at catching a likeness.”

“But *what* about dinner?” said Marguerite, piteously, her responsibilities as Chaperon suddenly beginning to weigh upon her.

“That’s all right, Daisy,” said Tom Burleigh, who had been holding a whispered but emphatic conversation with Harry Bond. “We realize the unexpectedness of this visitation, and ’tis but natural that you girls should find

yourselves unable to cope with it—whereupon and therefore and for which reason we beg to inform you that we will get the dinner ourselves, and all we ask of you, fair ladies, is your gracious company.”

With a flourish and a grand bow, Tom completed his speech and awaited a reply.

“It doesn’t seem quite right,” said Marguerite; but Betty said:

“Oh, bother! of course it’s all right. It’ll do you boys good to do a little work, and I, for one, accept your invitation with delight.”

“Me, too!” shouted all the other girls, and Marjorie inquired where the dinner would be served.

“In Hilarity Hall, of course,” said Tom. “But don’t ask questions, miss. When you’re invited out you mustn’t be rude.”

“And we’ll invite the kind lady and gentleman next door,” put in Roger, “for ’tis to them we owe this trip, anyway.”

Uncle Ned and Aunt Molly were pleased to accept the invitation which was duly offered them; and then, after a few mysterious confabs with Rosie, the boys declared they were at the young ladies’ services, and all ran down to the beach.

They stayed until noon, when Tom Burleigh, who announced himself as Master of Ceremonies, ordered the whole crowd back to the cottage.

“Now, ladies,” he said, as they arrived, “every one of you fly upstairs to your rooms, and occupy yourselves with sewing dolls’ rags, or knitting aprons, or whatever pastime pleases you. Take beauty-naps if you like, but don’t dare to appear on the first floor of this cottage until summoned by the dinner-horn.”

Marguerite and Jessie wanted to stay and help the new cooks, but it was not allowed; so upstairs the girls trooped, and Ted Lewis tied rope barriers across the staircase.

“Those ridiculous boys!” said Marjorie, as the girls congregated in her room. “They won’t have half enough plates or forks or anything.”

“Yes, they will,” said Betty, confidently; “they’ll have everything ship-shape; don’t you worry.”

“From the noise, I should think they were building a house,” said Nan; and, sure enough, hammering and pounding was going on below, as well as the clattering of dishes and much scurrying to and fro.

Of course the girls looked out of the windows, and they saw Rosie and some of the boys bringing piles of plates and cups from Aunt Molly’s; but as that lady herself did not appear, they guessed she, too, had been forbidden to assist.

After an hour or more of impatient excitement on the part of the girls, Rosie came up to them, broadly smiling.

“The young gintlemin bid me say that dinner is about to be served, and w’u’d yez please come down to the parlor.”

So the girls trooped down, and found Uncle Ned and Aunt Molly awaiting them.

Then the boys appeared, and, with obsequious demonstrations of greeting and compliment, they invited their guests to the dining-room.

The boys all wore aprons, having confiscated, with Rosie’s help, all those belonging to the club.

Big Tom Burleigh looked especially funny in a lacy, frilly little affair of Jessie’s, and as there had not been quite enough to go round, Harry Bond had made a big pinafore of newspapers. Then some of the boys had found time to make cooks’ paper caps for them all, and, with paper roses left from the night before in their buttonholes, their appearance was festive indeed.

The dining-room was a sight to behold. They had discarded the regular dining-table, and built a long narrow one of the boards of the dismantled stage. This table, whose length was such that it required three table-cloths, was decorated with great bowls of paper roses; and the whole room was decked with green branches, palms, and paper flowers, all of which had done duty as the garden in the play.

The twenty people seated themselves at the long and festive board, Uncle Ned and Aunt Molly, of course, being invited to sit at the head and foot; and then Rosie began to serve the feast.

But one waitress was far from being enough for that hungry crowd, so the be-aproned boys took turns in playing waiter.

The first course was clam chowder, of which the Burleigh boys were justly famed concocters. It was wonderfully good, and as they had made a great kettleful, there was enough and to spare.

Next was a course of broiled lobster. Although the boys pretended at first that they had cooked these, they afterward confessed that they had ordered them sent over from the Inn. But their guests cared not a jot where the lobsters had met their fiery fate, and pronounced them the most delicious ever tasted.

After this came blackberry-pies, half a dozen of them, and Aunt Molly fairly blushed as encomiums were showered on her contribution to the spread.

The coffee was fine. Ted Lewis always made it in camp, and being accustomed to making large quantities, and in a big tin pail instead of a coffee-pot, he had no trouble in turning out a perfect concoction.

Crackers and a red-coated cheese made their appearance, also a big basket of fruit, and Uncle Ned had brought over a box of bonbons, so the merry crowd sat for a long time over their dessert—so long, indeed, that the boys were obliged to leave the table and scurry away to catch their home-bound train.

“You’ll have a few dishes to wash,” said Harry Bond, with a twinkle in his eye. “But that’s woman’s work—a nice housewifely occupation.”

“Oh, they’ll be done all right,” said his sister; “and now run, Harry, or you’ll be late. Give lots of love to mamma and grandma, and tell them—” But Harry was out of sight and hearing by that time, so Marjorie didn’t send her message.

“Now!” said Betty, as they turned back to the deserted dining-room. “What a clatteration! But I s’pose if ’twere done when ’tis done, ’twere well ’twere done quickly.”

“Yes,” said Hester the practical; “let’s fly at it and clear everything up, and then sit out on the veranda and talk it all over.”

Aunt Molly and Uncle Ned were politely invited to go home, and then the many hands went at the work, and it was accomplished with surprising quickness.

Then the Blue Ribbon Club grouped itself on the veranda, and if those eight tongues didn’t wag!

They talked as an octave until bed-time, and then, breaking up into duets, they kept on talking until they fell asleep.



## CHAPTER XIII

### HIDE-AND-SEEK

**A**ND so the days danced on, each one happier than the last, and all too short for the amount of fun that had to be crammed into them. Wheeling, walking, boating, bathing, fishing, and crabbing were favorite amusements; but best of all the girls loved to play some rollicking, frolicking game that called forth peals of laughter which had no cause save sheer gladness of living.

“Let’s play hide-and-peek,” said Betty, one morning.

“All right,” said Jessie, loyally but lazily. “You go and hide and cry ‘Coop!’ and we’ll all come and find you.”

“No, I don’t mean that baby way; I mean a nice new way. I’ve invented it myself just now, and it’s gay.”

“Elucidate further,” said Marjorie, looking up from her work, which was the combing of Timmy Loo’s silvery tangled curls.

“It’s a gorgeous game,” went on Betty, “but it’s not adapted to or for dogs. If the nondescript mop in your lap goes by that name he’ll have to be buried before we can proceed.”

“Buried indeed! my own, my only Timmy Loo!” cried Marjorie, caressing the muppy mass in question. “Not that, not that, I pray you; but, if really necessary, I could secrete him with a kind neighbor until your wild project has fizzled out.”

“Well, listen, then,” said Betty. “We all hide, you know, and find each other one by one, and then the one who stays hidden longest gets a prize.”

“Beautiful—beautiful,” sighed Marguerite; “but what is the prize? Might it be worth winning?”

“The prize can be that photograph I took of you girls in your bathing-suits,” said Hester. “I’ll never be able to get another as good, and it’s so funny it’s worth having.”

“So it is,” cried Nan. “I’d love to have it. But you vowed you were going to keep it yourself, Hester.”

“I know; but I’m so noble I offer it freely in this noble cause. Besides, I

may win it.”

“Sure enough,” cried Betty; “now let’s begin. Dispose of Timmy Loo, Marjorie, and then all come into the Grotto.”

“Rosie,” called Marjorie, “won’t you please take this valuable and high-bred morsel of caninity over to Mrs. Warburton’s? And then you may go for a run on the beach. ’Twill do you good, and besides we want to use the whole of this palatial residence for a while.”

Rosie departed, beaming as usual, and the girls went into the parlor, and Betty closed the door.

“Now,” said she, “we first draw lots for the seeker.”

This ceremony was gone through with, and the lot fell upon Helen.

“I’m glad of it,” said she. “I’d far rather hunt than hide.”

“Next,” said Betty, “the rest of us must draw these numbered papers, and—well, draw, then I’ll tell you.”

Each took a folded paper, and Millicent’s proved to be number one.

“Then you go first,” said Betty; “we’ll give you two minutes by Helen’s watch. In that time you must have hidden yourself either in this house or about its large and spacious grounds. No fair going off the premises.”

Millicent departed on tiptoe, closing the door after her, and Betty continued:

“I’m second; so when the two minutes are up, I go and hide, and you allow me also two minutes in which to tuck myself away. Then so on until all are gone but our Helen, our pride and joy. After the last two minutes she starts to hunt, and the first one she finds goes with her to hunt the others; and so on, you know, until all are found but one, who is, of course, the lucky owner of Hester’s masterpiece of photographic art.”

The two minutes passed, and Betty went to hide. Then the others, one by one, until at last Helen was ready to start on her hunting expedition.

“They wouldn’t be so babyish as to hide behind doors,” she thought, as she looked behind several. “However, it’s best to be systematic. I’ll open every door I see.”

Acting on this plan, she opened the door of the sideboard as she passed that old-fashioned and roomy piece of furniture, and, to her surprise, there was the chubby Marguerite squeezed in between two shelves.

“Oh, help me out!” she cried. “I’m nearly dead.”

It was a close fit, but Helen pulled her out, and together they continued the search.

“Some one would be sure to hide in the kitchen,” declared the canny Matron, so they explored the cupboards there. And, as might have been expected, away back behind some pots and pans was Hester, who looked angrily at her discoverers.

“I thought I had such a good place,” she said, crawling out. “How ever did you find me?”

“Come on,” cried Helen; “it’s getting to be more fun; let’s find the others.”

“Let’s get some buns and milk first,” said Marguerite; “I’m fearfully hungry, and the sight of the cake-box maddens me.”

So the three sat down to a light repast, and as they fell to chatting they quite forgot the game and the other players thereof.

“Well, you’re a nice lot!” said Marjorie, suddenly appearing from the cellar. “I hid in the coal-bin, and I’m sure you never would have found me; but when I heard you talking up here, I thought you had found all the rest.”

“Never mind,” said Hester; “you’re on our side now. Come on; let’s dig up the others.”

Nan was easily found, as she had climbed out her bedroom window and was calmly sitting on the roof, gazing at the sea.

“You needn’t have hurried on my account,” she said; “I’d just as lief sit here all day.”

Jessie was discovered next, standing in a wardrobe among a lot of dresses, which she had fondly hoped would conceal her. And they would have done so, save that her head showed above them, and her feet below.

Then the six began to hunt for Betty and Millicent.

It was really a hunt, for they looked in every likely place and a great many unlikely ones without success. They went downstairs and out of doors, only to return and search from cellar to attic.

At last Jessie, who was peering through the dim, dusty recesses of the low-ceiled attic, saw an old trunk, and, throwing it open, found Betty, cramped and aching, but game to the last.

“‘Oh, the mistletoe bough. Oh, the mistletoe bough,’ ” sang Jessie, as she helped Betty out.

“Am I the last?” cried Betty, looking at the girls, who came trooping up to see her hiding-place.

“No; Millicent is still missing,” said Marjorie.

“Then she gets the picture,” said Betty, looking disappointed, “and I wanted it.”

“Never mind, Peeler,” said Hester; “I’ll take another for you, and it will be just as jolly.”

Then they hunted for Millicent. But no trace of her could be found.

“She’s been shpirited away, I’m thinkin’,” said Rosie, who had returned and was much startled at what she thought an alarming disappearance.

“Let’s get Timmy Loo and see if he can’t find her,” said Marjorie, after they had called and yelled and begged Millicent to come to them.

“Yes; set the bloodhound on her track,” said Nan.

So Timmy Loo was brought home, and each girl told him what he was to do, and showed him Millicent’s shoes and gloves and dresses until the poor little dog was quite bewildered.

But he finally understood, and with a bound he sprang upon Marjorie’s bed, which, by the way, was covered with clean shirt-waists and stiffly starched skirts just home from the laundry.

“Oh, Tim, get off those clothes!” cried Marjorie; but Tim only danced around on them and barked.

Then he flew to the pillows, and, though much tangled up in the frills of one of Jessie’s clean aprons, he burrowed until he disclosed some tangled curls and a tortoise-shell comb.

“There she is!” cried Marjorie; and, flinging back the counterpane, they saw a flushed, rosy face.

“I’ve been asleep,” said Millicent, yawning and stretching. “What do you girls want? Oh, I was hiding, wasn’t I? Well, I hid in such a nice place I inadvertently took a nap, and I’ve had lovely dreams.”

“Get up,” cried Betty; “you’re spoiling all the clean clothes, and—you’ve won the prize.”

“Have I? Goody! And I haven’t hurt the clothes a bit. Tim did, though, and he woke me up jumping on me.”

Then Millicent slid out of the bed, did up her hair, and was led downstairs in triumph to receive her prize.

It was presented by Betty, “because,” as she said, “I came next nearest to getting it, and so I ought to have the melancholy pleasure of handing it over to me hated rival.”

The presentation speech, and the grandiloquent thanks expressed by the recipient, caused such hilarity that Aunt Molly came running over to hear the fun. Then they told her all about the game, and as she was such an appreciative listener, they told her much more, until suddenly Betty cried out:

“Oh, see that queer-looking person; I believe she’s coming here!”

All looked and beheld a tall, imperious-looking lady, garbed in eccentric fashion, stalking toward them at a rapid gait. Her bonnet was elaborately decked with high feathers, which nodded and bobbed in unison with her quick, jerky footsteps, and over an old-fashioned black silk gown she wore a rich lace mantilla.

“Why, it’s Mrs. Lennox,” said Aunt Molly, rising. “I dare say she’s coming to call on me. Excuse me, girlies; I must run home.”

“Let us go with you,” cried Marjorie; “I’m sure you’ll need protection from that warlike Amazon. I wouldn’t dare face her alone.”

“I’ll call you over if I feel timid,” returned Aunt Molly, who was already half-way down the steps.

Sure enough, the stranger turned in at Aunt Molly’s gate, and marched up the walk as if she were storming a citadel.

“Jiminy crickets!” whispered Betty, “what can she be? She’s too distinguished for a book-agent and too excited for a plain every-day caller.”

“She’s Zenobia,” said Millicent, “returned to earth in disguise. I think she’s collecting a regiment and wants us to join it.”

“She’s Minerva in modern clothes,” said Betty, “and she wants Aunt Molly to take her to board.”

“Not she,” said Hester; “she’s no summer boarder. I think she’s a dowager countess with several castles of her own.”

By this time they were all watching the old lady, who was evidently telling Aunt Molly a fearful tale of woe, for she gesticulated angrily; and though the girls could not hear her words, they gazed at her bobbing feathers and her clenched hands in sympathy with her trouble, whatever it might be.

Suddenly Aunt Molly called out: “Come over here, girlies; I want you.”

Over flew the Octave helter-skelter; but they stood up politely enough while Aunt Molly introduced them to her guest.

“Dear Mrs. Lennox,” continued Aunt Molly, “is in a sad dilemma. Only yesterday—but I will ask her to tell you about it herself.”

“Yes, I will tell you,” cried Mrs. Lennox, fairly glaring at the flock of girls, who fell in an expectant group at her feet, “for the tale ought to be blazoned abroad to the four winds of heaven! Gratitude, thou’rt but an empty name! Respect, honor, deference? Chimeras all—chimeras all!”

The girls sat enthralled, though Millicent with difficulty restrained herself from replying to the old lady in kind.

“We are told,” went on Mrs. Lennox, waving her hand dramatically, “that this is a free country! No greater, graver misstatement was ever made. We are slaves!” And she shook her clenched fist at Nan, who chanced to be nearest her, with such a belligerent air that the poor Poet feared she was responsible for the national bondage.

“Slaves!” continued Mrs. Lennox, warming to her subject and waving both arms about. “Slaves to our servants! The time has come when they rule us; they dictate to us; they make the laws and we obey them!”

“Yes’m,” murmured Helen, who thought the ensuing pause ought to be filled somehow.

“And now what have my servants done?” she cried, looking from one young face to another, but too engrossed to notice the various expressions of mirth or bewilderment on each.

As no one was in a position to reply, she continued:

“What have they done? They have left me! Departed, one and all, with no word of warning, no cause for offense.”

“Why did they go?” inquired Betty, who liked to know reasons for things.

“Alas! James, my butler, obtained a fine position in a large hotel in the city, and, viper that he is, he must needs tell all the others of it, and one and all, from the head cook down to the footman, ungratefully left my kind service and followed James to the unknown, untried hardships of a city hotel.”

“But you can get a new set of servants,” said Aunt Molly, soothingly.

“Of course I can,” cried Mrs. Lennox, bristling up as if her dignity had been menaced. “Of course I can! Hosts of the best servants in the country are only awaiting an opportunity to come to my service. But it takes time to procure and install a new lot, and here is the culmination of my dismay. But now I received a telegram bidding me expect Lady Pendered and her daughter to-morrow, to remain with me overnight. Ah, my dear friend, you do not know Lady Pendered, but she represents the very flower of the British aristocracy. Her fair daughter Lucy is a sweet gem of purest ray serene, and they have never known what it was to have less than twenty servants at their finger-ends. And my James was such a paragon of a butler! Alas, alas! how sharper than a servant’s tooth—no, a thankless tooth—ah, well, the quotation has slipped my memory for the moment, but I will recall it anon.”

“When are your English friends coming?” asked Aunt Molly.

“To-morrow afternoon,” replied Mrs. Lennox; “and oh, how it would have pleased me were I but able to offer them such hospitality as ’tis in my heart to give! They can remain with me but twenty-four hours, and then they will speed

away to publish broadcast the news that Miranda Lennox has no establishment save one old colored woman and a good-for-nothing boy. For those, alas! are all I can find in this howling wilderness of a sea-shore town.”

“Girls,” was all Aunt Molly said, but she looked volumes of meaning out of her kind, clever eyes.

Marjorie was first to understand and respond.

“Of course we can,” she cried, “can’t we, girls? It would be the jolliest sort of a lark, and a ‘helping hand’ besides.”

“We could,” said Betty, “but—”

“But me no buts,” cried Hester. “We can and we will!”

“Vote!” exclaimed Marjorie. “Shall we or sha’n’t we? All in favor, aye!”

“Aye!” yelled the eight; and so quickly was it all done that Mrs. Lennox still wore a look of frightened bewilderment when Marjorie began:

“My dear Mrs. Lennox, you want accomplished and experienced servants to permit you to entertain your friends properly. We claim to be such, and we offer you our services with the greatest pleasure, the only condition being that you take the whole eight.”

## CHAPTER XIV

### WILLING SERVICE

**A**T this unexpected solution of her great problem Mrs. Lennox recovered herself quickly, and exclaimed:

“Oh, my dears, if you only would! But do you really mean it? Do they?” And she looked at Aunt Molly for confirmation of an offer too good to be true.

“I think they do,” said Aunt Molly, smiling; “and I can assure you, dear Mrs. Lennox, that whatever these young ladies undertake will be well and thoroughly done.”

“How can we do it?” said Nan. “Do you mean for the English ladies to think we’re really servants?”

“Of course they must,” cried Millicent, who had waked up to the glorious possibilities of the situation. “Unless it’s a real masquerade it’ll be no fun at all. But where can we get the right kind of caps and aprons?”

Aunt Molly volunteered to go to town for them that very afternoon, and Mrs. Lennox, seeing that these strange girls were really in earnest, accepted the blessing Heaven had so unexpectedly sent her, and at once began to make the most of it.

“Which of you are the best cooks?” she inquired, with the air of a general marshaling his forces—but such a capable and straightforward general that no offense could possibly be felt.

“Hester and Marjorie,” was the immediate reply of the other six.

“Very well,” said Mrs. Lennox. “Hester shall be head cook, since you named her first, and Marjorie assistant.”

Then Jessie and Betty were selected as being the deftest waitresses, and Millicent and Helen were declared ideal lady’s-maids. Helen preferred to be Mrs. Lennox’s own maid, so Millicent was allotted to the English visitors.

All agreed that Marguerite would make the most picturesque parlor-maid, and as no other post could be thought of, Nan said she would be private secretary and librarian.

Mrs. Lennox entered heartily into all the details of the scheme, and agreed



with Millicent that if the thing were done at all, it must be done completely and with most careful attention to minutiae.

“Could you submit to be spoken to as menials?” said Mrs. Lennox. “For I am most anxious to impress my English friends with the superiority of our servants over theirs. You would have to be modest and deferential, address me as ‘madam,’ and both the visitors as ‘your ladyship.’ ”

But all this only made it seem more of a lark, and after copious directions Mrs. Lennox went home, the eight girls promising to appear the next afternoon at two.

That night Aunt Molly returned from the city, bringing wonderful paraphernalia.

The waitresses were to wear white—pique skirts and linen shirt-waists; their caps were of the conventional shape, and their aprons were voluminous indeed, with crossed straps and broad wings, which Uncle Ned declared could not be surpassed for acreage in all London.

The cooks were to wear white, too—linen blouses with rolled-up sleeves, and real cooks’ caps.

The lady’s-maids wore pink and blue gingham respectively, with aprons befrilled and beflounced, and most fetching little caps with ribbon bows.



“THE GEM OF THE COLLECTION.”

But Marguerite was pronounced “the gem of the collection.” In her plain black dress, with a white apron of thin lawn, trimmed with a wide accordion-

plaited ruffle, and tied back with a most enormous bow, a hand in each pocket of her apron, she looked like the coquettish parlor-maid one sees on the stage or in the comic papers. A bewitching little cap was jauntily perched on her fluffy golden hair, and her high-heeled slippers clicked gaily as she tripped around.

At two o'clock precisely, on the day of the performance, the eight presented themselves at Mrs. Lennox's door and were admitted by that lady herself.

"Well, you *are* a proper-looking lot," she exclaimed as the girls filed in, "and you've taken a weight off my mind, I can tell you. When I woke this morning I thought it was all a dream,—your coming, I mean,—and I have not really felt sure of you until I saw you approaching. Goodness gracious, Miss Marguerite, I think her ladyship will open her eyes at my parlor-maid! Of course I shall call you all by your first names; they're rather unusual for servants, some of them, but I'll explain that American servants are often elaborately dubbed."

Then the girls flew to their respective places, and work began in earnest.

Hester and Marjorie were a bit appalled at the overflowing condition of Mrs. Lennox's larder; but Nan and Millicent, having nothing to do, came to their assistance, and a really fine dinner was soon in course of preparation.

Jessie and Betty set the table, while Marguerite gathered flowers and decorated the various rooms until they were fragrant bowers of beauty.

Mrs. Lennox's house was a large and luxurious mansion, exquisitely appointed and with beautiful furnishings. Indeed, so delighted was Marguerite with her surroundings and with the mirrored representations of her pretty self that she almost forgot to do her work.

"Isn't it fun?" said Jessie, as she passed the parlor door with a huge silver-basket which Mrs. Lennox had just intrusted to her. "It's a delight to set a table with such lovely things."

"How are the cooks?" said Marguerite, leaving off pirouetting before the pier-glass and coming out to chum with the others.

But her entrance to the kitchen was not welcomed.

"Go away!" cried Marjorie. "Fly away, you butterfly. We're really busy, and much flustered besides."

"You seem to be frying everything," commented Marguerite, teasingly. "There is a sound as of sizzling grease."

"The crackling of grease saved Rome," called out Hester, and Marguerite went back giggling.

But at last everything was in readiness, and not any too soon, either; for the door-bell rang a resounding peal. Hurriedly the servants confabbed as to whose place it was to go to the door. In the absence of a man-servant they concluded it was a waitress's place; but Marguerite settled the question by remarking that, no matter whose place it was, *she* would go anyhow.

Nan was ensconced in the library, Helen was with Mrs. Lennox in her boudoir, and Millicent waiting in the guests' apartments; but the eyes of the other four were peering cautiously from behind doors and portières as the pretty and audacious parlor-maid flung open the front door with an air that would have done credit to a Lord Chamberlain.

"Mrs. Lennox?" murmured the grand lady visitor, somewhat taken aback at the lovely vision confronting her.

"Yes, your ladyships," said Marguerite's pretty voice. "Will your ladyships enter?"

She curtsied low, then ushered the visitors into the drawing-room and presented her silver tray for cards.

"Lady Pendered and Lady Lucy Pendered," said the elder guest, in dignified tones; and Marguerite reddened and whipped her tray behind her, wondering if she had made a mistake.

She thought she caught the echo of a giggling retreat to the kitchen, but, determined to play her part as well as she could, she tripped upstairs and announced the guests to Mrs. Lennox.

"I will go down at once," said that lady. "Helen, my shawl."

"Yes, madam," said Helen, gracefully offering the dainty trifle of a shawl; and then Mrs. Lennox sailed downstairs, and the two girls dropped to the floor and rocked back and forth in silent paroxysms of mirth.

Then a bell summoned Helen and Millicent, and, resolutely assuming a prim demeanor, they went downstairs side by side and presented themselves for orders.

Although a woman of age and experience, Lady Pendered had never seen just such lady's-maids as these before, and she raised her lorgnon and stared at them with perhaps pardonable curiosity.

"Millicent, attend these ladies," said Mrs. Lennox, easily. "I trust she will make you comfortable, Lady Pendered. Helen is my own maid, but I beg you will command her, Lady Lucy."

Lady Lucy Pendered was a pale, willowy girl of perhaps eighteen or twenty, with light-blue eyes and straw-colored hair which was most exceedingly frizzed. Millicent and Helen promptly disliked her; but with

demure deference they relieved the distinguished visitors of their wraps and hand-bags and preceded them upstairs.

Arriving at their rooms, Lady Pendered dismissed Helen, declaring that Mrs. Lennox must need her, and stating that she and her daughter could easily manage with one maid. Which Millicent discovered to mean that Lady Lucy would monopolize her services, and Lady Pendered would shift for herself.

As a beginning, Lady Lucy reclined languidly on a couch and thrust out her foot, which was heavily shod, after the most exaggerated English fashion.

For a moment Millicent felt annoyed, and her face flushed deep red; then, remembering it was a game, she threw herself into it in her own whole-souled way, and, dropping on her knees before the pale-haired aristocrat, she removed her heavy boots, brought her slippers and put them on for her, and then proceeded to assist her through the intricacies of a very elaborate toilet.

Millicent afterward confessed to Marjorie that she *did* want to burn the Lady Lucy's noble forehead when she frizzed that ridiculous nest on top of her head; but at the time she was a most exemplary lady's-maid, deft, patient, and willing.

Meanwhile Helen was assisting Mrs. Lennox to don her grandest attire in honor of her titled guests, and not having to masquerade just then, Helen and the eccentric old lady were becoming fast friends.

## CHAPTER XV

### HILARIOUS HOSPITALITY

THE dinner-table was a surprise even to Mrs. Lennox. Although her own table appointments were fastidiously correct, they had been supplemented by Jessie's exquisite arrangement of flowers, and by dainty dinner-cards which Millicent had that morning painted in water-color.

The two "white-winged angels," as the immaculate waitresses called each other, stood like marble statues while the guests entered the dining-room.

This brought Lady Pendered's lorgnon again into requisition, and she scanned Betty and Jessie until, as they afterward declared, they felt like waxworks at the Eden Musée.

Then the fun began. The two waitresses, intent on doing their best, were so careful and thoughtful that Mrs. Lennox grew more and more dignified and important, as befitted the mistress of such a fine establishment.

Hester and Marjorie sent in most deliciously cooked dishes, which were faultlessly served by the expert waitresses.

Lady Pendered expatiated on the extreme delicacy of her daughter's constitution, and averred that the Lady Lucy had absolutely no appetite and ate literally nothing.

This moved the apparently oblivious Betty to offer Lady Lucy braised sweet-breads for the second time, and as the fragile one helped herself bountifully, Jessie again urged upon her the stuffed cucumbers, of which she again partook.

"My child, my child, you will be ill," said Lady Pendered, in real and well-founded alarm.

"I don't care if I am, mamma," said the wilful Lady Lucy. "These American things are very good. Why don't we have them at home?"

"Tut, tut, my daughter; all the world knows nothing can excel England's well-spread boards. This America of yours," she continued, turning to Mrs. Lennox, "is a most extraordinary place. I've been here but a fortnight, and that I spent in New York. Very awful town, isn't it?"

"Do you think so?" said Mrs. Lennox, politely non-committal.

“Indeed, yes. It’s so sudden and unexpected. One never knows what will happen next.”

“I’m rather fond of New York,” said Mrs. Lennox; “but of course its homes are different from English country houses.”

“Oh, quite different; and the service is something atrocious. My dear Miranda, you are to be congratulated on your establishment. I haven’t seen a decent lady’s-maid since I left England until I reached here. That pretty Millicent of yours is a treasure.”

Although inwardly convulsed, Betty managed to control her features, and by biting her lips achieved an expression of intense agony, which was, however, better than laughing aloud.

Not so Jessie. The sudden mental picture of Millicent assisting these ladies at their toilet was too much for her, and with a smothered sound, something between a chuckle and a scream, she hurriedly retreated to the kitchen.

“What is it?” cried Hester and Marjorie, seeing the waitress appear unexpectedly and almost in hysterics.

But Jessie had a plucky determination of her own, and, without a word to the bewildered cooks, she pulled herself together, straightened her face to an expression of demure propriety, and was back in the dining-room with her tray in less than two minutes.

But the ordeal was not yet over. When she returned, Lady Pendered was still recounting Millicent’s virtues.

“Why, really,” said the English lady, “she crimped my fringe quite as well as Parkins does at home. And my clothes were never brushed more neatly.”

Millicent brushing clothes! This was almost too much for Betty; but, not daring to glance at Jessie, she went on about her work, endeavoring not to listen to any further disclosures.

“Yes, she’s not bad,” drawled Lady Lucy; “she darned a bit of a rent in my lace bodice, and smiled amiably when I asked her to do up my fine handkerchiefs.”

Millicent as a laundress! The girls nearly broke down at this. But Mrs. Lennox’s clear, even voice speaking restored their calm. Surely if she could preserve her equanimity they ought to do so.

“Millicent is indeed a perfect servant,” the hostess was saying; “but all of my maids are. I could not wish for a better lot.”

“Dear Mrs. Lennox,” said the languid Lucy, “they do seem superior—all except that frivolous parlor-maid of yours. We wouldn’t like to have such a pretty one at home. But then, I have brothers.”

A heavy portière at the end of the dining-room waved convulsively at this, and the too pretty parlor-maid scurried away to a distant room where she could enjoy the joke with some of her fellow-servants.

Now one of Hester's greatest feats was the concoction of Yorkshire pudding. It was the real thing, and was a favorite dish at the club table.

On this occasion, therefore, she fairly outdid herself, and when it accompanied a very English-looking joint to the table, Lady Pendered's delight knew no bounds.

"Yorkshire pudding!" she exclaimed. "Ah, Miranda, you have an English cook."

As Mrs. Lennox was but very slightly acquainted with her cooks, she felt a trifle uncertain as to their nationality. But she was not easily disconcerted, and, turning to Jessie, she said indifferently:

"My head cook *is* English, is she not?"

"Yes, madam," replied Jessie; "Hester is English."

"And my assistant cook, what is her name?"

But the sound of her own voice had been too much for Jessie, and her wits deserted her entirely. In a half-dazed way she realized that Mrs. Lennox was asking her to name Marjorie, and, quite without her own volition, she replied mechanically:

"The Duchess, madam."

"What!" cried Lady Pendered, raising her eye-glass to look at the luckless Jessie.

But Betty came quickly to the rescue.

"Yes, Dutch, madam," she said, addressing Mrs. Lennox; "the cook's assistant is Dutch, and her name is Marjorie."

"So it is," said Mrs. Lennox, calmly. "I remember now. But really, dear Lady Pendered, in America one troubles one's self so little with these matters. I rarely see my kitchen servants, and almost never have occasion to call them by name."

"Wonderful system!" said Lady Pendered, appalled at this state of culinary perfection. "As a mere gratification of my curiosity, may I see your English cook? I would be glad to interview one who can make such a pudding as this."

"Certainly," said Mrs. Lennox, though not without some misgivings. "Jessie, summon Hester to the dining-room."

"Yes, madam," said Jessie, and she flew into the kitchen.

"Oh, Hester, Lady Pendered wants to interview you; you're to come in at



once. And she'll nearly kill you—she's so funny, I mean; but do be careful, Hester, and don't laugh or anything."

"Trust me," said Hester, smoothing out her apron and straightening her cap.

"Am I sent for?" asked Marjorie. "I don't care; I'm going anyway. I won't be kept out of the fun."

Jessie returned to the dining-room, followed by Hester. After hesitating a moment, Marjorie followed, and stood modestly behind her chief. These tidy and well-favored cooks seemed to rouse Lady Pendered's ire.

"Well!" she exclaimed. "I never saw anything like it. Are you an English girl? Where are you from?"

"'Igham Ferrers, your ladyship," said Hester, dropping a very British curtsy.

"How long have you been in America?"

"A matter of a year, your ladyship."

"With whom did you live in Higham Ferrers, that you learned to cook so well?"

"With the Laveracks, your ladyship; a grand family, and most hexacting."

With another curtsy, Hester was gone, and Marjorie, too, for with Jessie and Betty looking at them they felt sure they couldn't keep from laughing another moment.

"It's most extraordinary," said Lady Pendered; "not only that you should have such capable and well-trained servants, but that they should all be such pretty and neat young girls."

"I trust my servants are always tidy," said Mrs. Lennox, with great dignity; and then she resolutely changed the subject, and forced the conversation into other channels.

After dinner the ladies went for a stroll on the beach, Millicent and Helen accompanying them, carrying veils, wraps, purses, and other impedimenta.

The rest of the club-members were much annoyed that the two girls had to go, for they had planned to have a hilarious dinner of their own after the more formal meal was over.

But the two lady's-maids declared they wanted to go, saying it was great fun to attend on the high-bred foreigners.

And the fun was greatly increased when, on reaching the pavilion, they met Uncle Ned and Aunt Molly.

Mrs. Lennox greeted these delightful people, and presented them to her

guests.

The lady's-maids sat, demurely unobtrusive, a little apart from the group, but not out of range of Uncle Ned's merry eyes, which twinkled and winked at them whenever opportunity offered.

"Those are uncommonly pretty attendants you have, Mrs. Lennox," said Uncle Ned, in a stage-whisper; but Aunt Molly pulled his coat-tail furtively, and said, "How blue the sea is to-night!"

Meantime Mrs. Lennox's usually quiet and dignified home was the scene of wonderful hilarity.

Jessie and Betty were recounting all the details of the dinner at which they had served so successfully. Marguerite confessed that she and Nan had basely spied from behind the portières. Hester and Marjorie owned up that their iced pudding had failed to freeze properly, and they had had to send Helen to the confectioner's for ices.

But all agreed that Mrs. Lennox was a dear, and that they were glad of the opportunity to help her in her time of need.

Not realizing how fast time was flying, they gathered in the music-room, and Marguerite played on Mrs. Lennox's grand piano, while all sang their favorite songs lustily and with a will.

"Now," cried Marguerite, "in honor of our distinguished English guests and our far more distinguished English cook, we will sing 'Rule Britannia!'"

At it they went pell-mell, and as the chorus rose high and strong the beach-party returned, and entered the front door to be greeted by the assurance that Britons never, never, never should be slaves!

# CHAPTER XVI

## A WELCOME INVITATION

WITH great presence of mind Hester suddenly turned out the lights in the music-room, and under cover of the darkness the girls scurried away.

Mrs. Lennox, grasping the situation, led her guests to the parlor, remarking:

“I allow my maids the use of the piano once a week. One can’t be *too* strict with them, and besides it keeps the instrument in better condition.”

Lady Pendered sniffed a little at this, and opined that the American customs were beyond her ken.

As the services of the lady’s-maids were required late at night, it had been arranged that Millicent and Helen should sleep at Mrs. Lennox’s; but the other six returned to Hilarity Hall.

Uncle Ned and Aunt Molly called for them at the kitchen door, and it was with difficulty they repressed their merriment until they were far enough down the street to be out of ear-shot.

Then all the girls talked at once, and as they had most appreciative listeners, the fun waxed high.

Next morning, bright and early, they returned to the scene of their labors.

Marguerite, armed with a huge and fluffy feather duster, posed anew before the pier-glasses.

Helen seated herself at a desk in the library, and though looking like the primmest and most industrious of amanuenses, was in reality writing a letter to her mother.

But the cooks and waitresses went to work, and exerted themselves to the utmost to show those “English sillies,” as Marjorie called them, what an American breakfast in its perfection is like.

“She wants her hair frizzed again!” said Millicent, in tones of deepest disgust, as she came into the kitchen to fill an alcohol-lamp.

“Well, it’s lucky they selected you, Lamplighter, for that position; I couldn’t have filled it.”

“No; you couldn’t even have filled the lamp,” said Millicent, as she hurried to her uncongenial work.

The breakfast was ideal—beautifully cooked, perfectly served, and appreciatively eaten.

When it was over, Hester sat for a few moments on the vine-clad piazza that ran across the back of the house.

To her came Lady Pendered, stepping softly and looking cautiously about her.

“You’re the cook, Hester, are you not?” she said.

“Yes, your ladyship,” answered Hester, and not over-graciously, for she didn’t like her countrywoman at all.

“Hester, I want you to go back to England and live with me. I’m sure you’d like your own home better than this savage country, and I’ll give you a pound a week and found.”

When Lady Pendered began her speech Hester felt angry; but as she continued, the funny side of it struck the pseudo-cook, and she answered:

“Hi couldn’t do it nohow, your ladyship. Hi ’ave a good ’ome ’ere, and Hi likes my missus, and Hi’d not be by way of livin’ with the haristocracy hanyway—but meanin’ no hoffense to your ladyship.”

After further useless attempts to persuade the superior cook to go home with her, Lady Pendered walked off in high dudgeon, and Hester flew back into the kitchen to tell Marjorie about it, which was not altogether necessary, as that young woman had gleefully viewed the scene through a latticed window.

Meantime Lady Lucy, in her boudoir, was trying to persuade Millicent to enter her service, and that romantic purveyor of fairy-tales was astonishing the English girl, to her own mischievous delight.

“I’d be glad to go with your ladyship,” she was saying. “I’m sure there couldn’t be a lovelier lady to work for in all England or Arabia. Your hair is just beautiful, miss—my lady, I mean. And of course my mistress could easily fill my place here.”

“Then come with me,” said Lady Lucy, eagerly. “I’ll be very good to you; you shall have every other Sunday afternoon out.”

“Oh, my lady, you’re too generous! But it’s no use tempting me thus. I cannot go. I fear to cross the wild and wavy ocean.”

“Nonsense!” cried Lady Lucy. “Is that all? Why, there’s not a bit of danger. We’ll go on the safest ship afloat.”

“It isn’t that, my lady; I fear not shipwrecks, but *sharks!*”

When Millicent put on her deep tragic tones and gazed intently at her hearer, she was very impressive; and the Lady Lucy began to feel a trifle scared.

“Sharks! What trash!” she said; but she was fascinated by Millicent’s eyes.

“Nay, my lady; ’tis true. A strange fatality follows all my family. My great-uncle fell overboard and was eaten by a shark; my second cousin was caught by a shark while swimming; and my aunt’s grandmother”—here her voice fell to a thrilling whisper—“went out for a walk in her garden, and a shark came right up out of the brook and bit off her left foot. Oh, no, my lady; never would I dare the terrors of the briny deep. ’Tis a curse—a fatal curse!”

By this time Millicent was stalking up and down the room, waving her arms about tragically and groaning deeply.

“Ah, my lady, tempt me not to a dire fate! Urge me not on an errand which would but lead me to my fearful doom! Fain would I serve so fair a mistress; but, alas! it is not mine to choose my lot. I am forever beneath a ban—a ban—a ban!”

At this point Mrs. Lennox entered, and Millicent at once assumed her ordinary manner, though Lady Lucy was quite unstrung.

This could not be explained, as she had no intention of telling her hostess how she had tried to lure away one of her servants, and so Mrs. Lennox came to the conclusion that her old friend’s daughter was a very hysterical, weak-minded young woman.

The morning wore away, and soon after luncheon the visitors prepared to depart.

Pretty Marguerite was a little too much in evidence for a parlor-maid; but she was so anxious to see as much as possible of the interesting English ladies that she couldn’t keep properly in the background. Her reward was a withering glance from Lady Pendered as she drove away, and an overheard remark that “Miranda’s servants were all admirable except that yellow-haired popinjay.”

But when the carriage containing the Ladies Pendered was entirely out of sight Mrs. Lennox’s manner underwent a decided change, and the girls realized for the first time how much she, too, had been masquerading.

“You’re perfect dears!” she cried. “Let me kiss you—the whole lot of you! It was the most wonderful success! And I rather think I impressed Mary Pendered with our American superiority in some ways at least. Girls, I shall never forget your kindness. You were trumps—absolute trumps. Now listen to me, my dearies. I have to go to the city to-morrow to get a new staff of

servants, though I can assure you they'll never give me such fine work as you girls have done. But that was fairyland, and we must now drop back to a prosaic reality in the matter of housekeeping. Now this is what I want you to do. Go back to your cottage for a couple of days, and then shut it up and come to stay with me as my guests for the rest of the time you are at Long Beach."

"Oh, Mrs. Lennox," cried Marguerite, "how lovely that would be! The housekeeping at the cottage was fun in some ways; but I'd far rather stay in this lovely home, and *not* cook my own meals."

"Lazy Daisy!" said Marjorie. "But I own up that I, too, am a little tired of the working part of Hilarity Hall."

"And well you may be," chimed in Betty, "for you did far more than your share of it."

"No, I didn't," declared Marjorie. "But as president of the Cooking Club I move we accept Mrs. Lennox's invitation with heartfelt gratitude, and that a copy of these resolutions be engrossed and framed and presented to the lady in question."

"Aye, aye!" cried seven voices; and Mrs. Lennox beamed with delight at the anticipation of the frolics of these young girls in her somewhat lonely house.

So the good lady went to New York, and the girls trooped back to Hilarity Hall and told Aunt Molly all about it.

"It seems a bit like defeat," said Hester, who always liked to carry out successfully anything she undertook.

"Oh, no," said Aunt Molly. "You have no especial reason for staying in the cottage if a pleasanter plan offers itself. Take the goods the gods provide, and be thankful."

"And I do hate to cook," confessed Marguerite. "It's all very well for Hester and Marjorie. They can put a bone in a kettle of water, set it on the fire, and wag a bay-leaf at it, and behold a delicious soup! But I follow carefully that grimy old cookery-book, get out all the utensils in the cupboard, and stew myself into a salamander, and then I've only an uneatable mess as the result."

"Never mind, my pretty parlor-maid," said Marjorie; "some are born cooks—that's me; some achieve cooks—that's Mrs. Lennox; and some have cooking thrust upon them—and that's what we'll do after to-morrow. Now let's write up the annals."

"Who'll write up the annals of our sojourn at Mrs. Lennox's?" said Betty.

"Past or future?" queried Nan.

"Oh, past! We'll all do the future ones when we get there."

“Let’s leave the annals of the Pendered party to do after we get there, too,” proposed Millicent; “we’ll have more time and can do them better.”

All agreed to this; so Hester took the “Whitecap” and said she’d wind up the cottage annals in short order; which she did, with this result:

Of the merriment and laughter,  
Of the jolly jokes and jesting,  
Of the boating and the bathing,  
Of the games of golf and tennis,  
Of the happy, fleeting moments,  
Much must here be left unwritten.

Of the play so nobly written,  
Of the fine and clever acting,  
Of the stirring, soulful music,  
Of the wonderful stage-setting,  
Of the appreciative audience,  
We can make but hasty mention.

Of the masculine invasion,  
Of the gorgeous spread they gave us  
Of our grief at their departure,  
Nothing can our pen betoken.

But we must express our thankful-  
Ness to our devoted neighbors,  
Uncle Edward and Aunt Molly,  
For their never-failing kindness.  
And we must admit, my sisters,  
That we feel a trifle saddened  
As we leave the little cottage  
Where so gaily we have frolicked.

Ah, the sadness of the parting,  
Ah, the chaos of the packing,  
Ah, the settlements unwilling  
With the butcher and the grocer!  
Ah, the desolated cottage,  
Ah, the sad and doleful maidens,  
Ah, the weeping, wailing maidens —

“There, there, Hester, stop!” cried Helen, reading over her shoulder. “Your machine has run down; it’s out of gear; the spindle is broken! Stop, I beg of you!”

So Hester stopped; and—would you believe it?—such a good time did those girls have at Mrs. Lennox’s house that they never wrote in the “Whitecap” again until after they had left Long Beach and returned to their homes.

And, besides giving them the jolliest house-party they had ever known, Mrs. Lennox presented each of the eight with the dearest little chatelaine watch, engraved with her name and the date of the memorable visit of the Ladies Pendered.

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### **Transcriber’s Notes:**

Some illustrations have been moved slightly to keep paragraphs intact. Archaic spellings and hyphenation have been retained as in the original publication.

[The end of *Eight Girls and a Dog* by Carolyn Wells]