

BETTY GORDON

and the **LOST PEARLS**



By the Author of
**RUTH
FIELDING**

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BETTY GORDON *and the* LOST PEARLS



By the Author of
**RUTH
FIELDING**

Betty Gordon and the Lost Pearls

OR
A Mystery of the Seaside

BY
ALICE B. EMERSON

AUTHOR OF "BETTY GORDON AT BRAMBLE FARM," "BETTY
GORDON IN MEXICAN WILDS," "THE RUTH FIELDING SERIES,"
ETC.

ILLUSTRATED



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Books for Girls

BY ALICE B. EMERSON

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	<u>A DISAGREEABLE WOMAN</u>	1
II	<u>THE WRECK</u>	11
III	<u>A WELL DESERVED LESSON</u>	20
IV	<u>THE SNAKE</u>	27
V	<u>BRISKET AND GOLD</u>	35
VI	<u>THE PEARL NECKLACE</u>	45
VII	<u>MISSING</u>	51
VIII	<u>THE CHIEF OF POLICE</u>	60
IX	<u>QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS</u>	66
X	<u>MRS. HILLER'S STORY</u>	76
XI	<u>THE MYSTERY DEEPENS</u>	84
XII	<u>BETTY MAKES A DISCOVERY</u>	90
XIII	<u>BETTY'S DILEMMA</u>	100
XIV	<u>BETTY'S DECISION</u>	108
XV	<u>ACCUSED</u>	116
XVI	<u>MRS. HILLER PROVES A FRIEND</u>	121
XVII	<u>MR. HAMMON TAKES A HAND</u>	126
XVIII	<u>BOB IS EXPECTED</u>	134
XIX	<u>A DISCOVERY</u>	141
XX	<u>RICHARD GORDON ARRIVES</u>	150
XXI	<u>OVERHEARD</u>	157
XXII	<u>THE CHASE</u>	164
XXIII	<u>THE PICNIC</u>	175
XXIV	<u>THE REAL THIEVES</u>	185
XXV	<u>THE MYSTERY SOLVED</u>	196

BETTY GORDON AND THE LOST PEARLS

CHAPTER I A DISAGREEABLE WOMAN

“Good-by, Uncle Dick! Oh, how I wish you could go with us!”

Betty Gordon gave her only living relative a loving embrace, turned her back on the Union Station at Washington, D. C., and sped towards the gates.

“Come on, Norma and Alice! We have only two minutes to make the train! Mercy! We’ll have to hurry!”

The Guerin girls followed close at Betty’s heels. The warm sunshine lighted their eager, upturned faces.

“Oh, Betty!” panted the soft-voiced Alice, “I fear we shall never make it!”

“We must!” Betty’s voice was determined.

“Lead on, Betty!” ordered the irrepressible Norma. “We’re with you.”

“Step lively, girls,” exclaimed the genial gatekeeper. “Tickets! Orchard Cove? Off to a summer resort, eh? Well, have a good time.”

2

The girls passed through the gates and sped on. The engine clanged a warning signal.

Betty could not resist a backward glance at her bachelor uncle and flung him a wave of the hand.

Richard Gordon raised his hat with a courtly gesture and smiled his cheery, whimsical smile. A distinguished figure in any crowd, thought Betty fondly.

The girls were not the only late arrivals. A large, showily dressed woman, accompanied by a frail, sweet-faced little lady in black, was just boarding the train. A small black bag dangled from a cord thrown over the arm of the larger woman.

The overdressed woman had just stepped from the little yellow footstool the colored porter had provided to the first step of the Pullman coach.

The porter, in a kindly effort to adjust the stool to the shorter step of the little lady who followed, brought the wrath of the overdressed one down upon his unfortunate head.

The large woman's foot slipped on the first step. Her feet made an unsuccessful effort to find the stool, then slid with some violence to the ground. She turned a flushed and angry face to the crestfallen negro.

“Porter! How dare you trip me? I——”

“Fo' goodness sake, ma'am! Pa'don' me, ma'am! I sho' didn't mean to, ma'am.”

3

“Don't argue with me! I am Mrs. Pryde Calott. I shall report you for neglect of duty.”

“Why, he didn't trip you!” exclaimed Betty indignantly. “You slipped!”

Upon the ample bosom of Mrs. Pryde Calott reposed a showy diamond pin, from which dangled a long chain and monocle.

With a pompous gesture of indescribable insolence, she raised the monocle to one eye and stared at Betty and her friends.

After she had coolly inspected them from head to feet, she turned haughtily and mounted the steps.

“I shall report your negligence, porter!” she threw back over her shoulder. “I am Mrs. Pryde Calott.”

The little woman in black was visibly embarrassed.

“I am sure you were in no way to blame,” Betty heard her say kindly to the unfortunate man, and saw the gleam of silver pass from the lady's hand to his.

The porter revived, somewhat.

“Thank yo’, ma’am! Thank yo’, ma’am! De young ladies must hop on or yo’ sho’ gwine to git lef’.” He revealed a gleaming set of faultless teeth in a wide grin.

Betty and the two Guerin sisters scrambled up the steps, and the train was under way.

4

The little lady in black turned at the entrance to the car, looked over her shoulder and smiled straight into Betty’s eyes.

Betty, sore of heart, had been thinking:

“Now I have made an enemy, unnecessarily. When shall I be able to bridle my tongue and curb my temper?”

But the look in the little lady’s eyes calmed the girl and restored her self-respect.

Norma followed close at Betty’s heels. She was giggling at every step.

“Betty to the rescue,
Of darkeys in distress,”

she chanted in a whisper.

“I don’t care!” replied Betty in a low voice, as they found their seats in the parlor car. “I detest to see any one try to blame another when they are in fault themselves.”

“Yes,” said Alice softly, “the porter did not trip her; she slipped after she had safely reached the step. I cannot imagine why she should wish to blame the poor man.”

“Why,” laughed Norma, “it is because ‘I am Mrs. Pryde Calott.’ I cannot do anything wrong. I——”

“Hush, Norma! They are not far behind us. She will hear you.”

5

“Well, I will, Alice, if you’ll only tell me what that one-eyed thing is that she raised to give us the cold and deadly stare?”

“You know well enough that’s a monocle. Its use is affected by the English, somewhat, but very few are used in America.”

“Well, I don’t care for one-eyed specks, myself,” declared the frank Norma, in disgust.

Many admiring glances followed the three girls as they established themselves comfortably in the chair car. They lingered longer on the vivid face of Betty Gordon. Betty had removed her stylish little sport hat, and her glowing face, framed in masses of dark hair, was one to attract attention anywhere.

“Here are some chocolates Uncle Dick bought for us,” said Betty presently. She dived into her trim traveling bag.

Norma gave a little squeal of delight.

“How lovely!” exclaimed Alice. “You are fortunate to have such a dear Uncle Dick, Betty.”

“Yes, indeed! Oh, how I wish he could have come, too!”

Somehow, Betty could not forget the gallant figure of her uncle as she last saw it, standing alone in the crowd, his eyes following her until she disappeared from sight. What a lonely life he must lead most of the time!

6

Richard Gordon was a promoter of various industrial enterprises that compelled him to travel much of the time. For this reason, during the school term, he established Betty, his niece, at Shadyside School, and Bob Henderson, his ward, at Salsette Military Academy for boys. The two schools were located near the town of Shadyside and were separated from each other by a lake. The Guerin girls also attended Shadyside School.

“Your uncle will probably get down for the week-end,” Alice comforted. “And in a few days, Bob will be on hand with the Tucker twins. You say the Littell girls have promised to come down as soon as they get back to Fairfields from New York. Your uncle and Bob will not let you out of sight long, since your terrible experiences in Mexico.”

After Betty and Bob’s harrowing experiences as told in “Betty Gordon in Mexican Wilds,” Richard Gordon had planned a week or more of rest at Orchard Cove for the young people. The Cove was a smart summer resort on the Atlantic coast.

Here, Betty, Bob, and their friends were to stay until the fall term at Shadyside School and Salsette Military Academy opened.

“Yes, Mexico was an unpleasant experience, but we have

Orchard Cove ahead to make up for it,” Betty declared, dimpling.

7

At that moment the conductor entered the coach and the girls turned their attention to their tickets. As the conductor passed on, Alice whispered:

“That Mrs. Calott has been nagging that poor little woman in black ever since they sat down. I don’t know what the trouble is. I believe the little woman in black must be a widow. She has a sad, sweet face.”

Suddenly, the rasping voice of Mrs. Pryde Calott was heard.

“I am sure I gave you the tickets. How could you be so careless as to lose them?”

“You are mistaken,” the girls heard the little woman say, in deep distress. “I have never had them. Look in your black bag. They may be in your purse.”

Fussing and fuming, Mrs. Pryde Calott grudgingly complied. The tickets were in her purse.

Furious, because she was caught in fault, the woman began berating the company, the conductor, the service and everything connected with the railroad.

Norma was astounded.

“Did you ever hear of such a disagreeable woman, Betty?”

But presently, Mrs. Pryde Calott and her unpleasantness

8

were forgotten in the enjoyment of the view.

“My, those chocolates make me thirsty!” exclaimed Betty a little later. “I’m going to get a drink.”

At the water cooler, she was joined by the little lady in black. In a few moments they were chatting pleasantly.

Presently, they returned to their seats. The little lady had kindly taken a glass of water to Mrs. Pryde Calott.

“Her name is Mrs. Hiller,” whispered Betty to Norma and Alice. “She has lost her husband and all her money and is acting as a companion and a sort of maid to Mrs. Calott. Oh, I am so sorry for Mrs. Hiller! That Mrs. Calott must lead her a dog’s life. Mrs. Hiller is so sad!”

The girls could not resist a backward glance at Mrs. Hiller. She was courteously offering the glass of water to Mrs. Calott.

Suddenly the voice of Mrs. Pryde Calott sounded through the coach.

“There! You have spilled water on my dress. It spots, too! How very annoying!”

Mrs. Hiller murmured a quick apology. Her pale cheeks turned crimson.

“Why, the old pill!” exclaimed Norma, in surprise. “She knocked the glass with her book and spilled the water herself! I saw her do it!”

Alice turned to her sister and frowned.

“Norma, be more respectful! ‘Pill’!”

“Pill is a mild word for her,” declared Betty indignantly. “I am afraid I shall slay that woman before she leaves the coach!”

Norma began to giggle. It always amused her when Betty went on the warpath.

“Now I shall get water myself, since you seem incompetent to get it for me,” continued the rasping voice of Mrs. Calott. “And remember this, when you travel with me, you are not to take up with strange people on trains.”

Mrs. Calott rose from her chair with a pompous air. The ever-present bag was dangling from her arm. As a parting shot, she continued:

“A woman in my position cannot afford to. They may be impostors or even”—her voice sank to a whisper that carried, nevertheless, through the entire car—“*thieves!*”

She sailed majestically down the aisle to the water cooler.

Betty was confusedly conscious of the smiling occupants of the car. But gentle Mrs. Hiller was not smiling. She had sunk into her chair as though overcome by the weight of her embarrassment.

“That woman is simply impossible!” exclaimed Alice. “Come, Betty, forget her! Where did the chocolates go?”

Betty hunted for a few moments in vain.

“I declare,” she exclaimed, “if that box hasn’t fallen on the floor!”

“Oh, save the chocolates!” shrilled Norma.

Betty stooped to get the box.

“All safe, Norma,” she reported gleefully.

Unnoticed by Betty, Mrs. Pryde Calott was returning down the aisle. Betty took a backward step and slightly brushed against the woman.

“Will you kindly allow me to pass?” demanded the woman haughtily.

“Oh, I beg your pardon!”

Suddenly the train gave a lurch. There was a jarring and grinding of brakes, a swaying of the coach. Betty was thrown violently against the big woman.

To Betty’s horror and dismay, Mrs. Pryde Calott lost her balance, clutched wildly at Betty for support, and collapsed to the floor of the coach, dragging Betty with her!

CHAPTER II

THE WRECK

“Oh, Betty!” screamed Norma. “Betty, are you hurt?”

With the help of Alice, Betty struggled dazedly to her feet.

Mrs. Pryde Calott arose, panting and furious.

“You miserable girl! How dare you knock me down?” she shrieked.

“Oh, excuse me! I don’t know how it ever happened!” Betty was confused and, truth to tell, her own anger was rising.

“Happened? Happened? You knocked me down, that’s how it happened! I am Mrs. Pryde Calott. I shall report——”

What she would report was never known. The coach began to sway violently. The girls screamed in terror.

“The train’s leaving the track!” screeched Mrs. Calott. “Save us! Save us!”

The words were scarcely out of her mouth before there was a deafening crash, the sound of breaking glass, a lurching forward and settling back of the coach. A number of passengers were thrown from their seats.

The car swayed horribly. Betty was thrown violently upon Alice. Both girls went to the floor.

After a moment of nausea, Betty struggled to her feet. There was great excitement. The girls did not know what to do.

A brakeman ran through the car.

“All out! Train wrecked!” he yelled. He was evidently as excited as anybody.

Betty turned and looked down at Alice, who, disheveled and white, was struggling to a sitting posture.

“Oh, Alice, did I hurt you much? Where’s Norma?”

“Here—what’s left of me.” Norma was holding her head.

“What’s happened, anyway? My, but my head got a fearful whack!”

“Wreck. Is any one hurt?” asked the thoughtful Alice. “Betty, I feel like a pancake since you passed over.”

Mrs. Hiller was helping Mrs. Pryde Calott from the floor of the coach. The face of the lady in black was full of concern.

“Are you hurt, Mrs. Calott?” she asked anxiously.

“How can you ask such a question?” the overdressed woman demanded. “My back is broken. I am black and blue all over! What a train! What a railroad! I will sue the company. I am——”

But the passengers were hastening from the car and paid scant heed to the querulous woman.

“Make haste, girls!” advised a kindly old gentleman. “The cars may catch fire at any minute.”

The girls hastily gathered together their belongings. A quick glance around revealed the fact that no one in the coach was seriously hurt. The girls made a hasty exit.

As they stepped from the train they noted that woods were on either side of them. Not a house was in sight. The girls looked around with a queer sinking at heart.

An excited brakeman came running toward them.

“What happened?” asked Betty. “Is any one hurt?”

“Not seriously,” he panted. “Engineer and fireman jumped. A close shave, I tell you! Some one left the switch open and we hit a bunch of freight cars on the siding.”

“That is lucky—no one hurt seriously,” Alice said softly.

“How long before we can go on?”

“Oh, gosh, girls, that engine never will go on! I wish you’d see her! She’s fit only for the scrap pile! It will be hours before the wreck is cleared away.” The man ran on down the line.

Betty eyed her friends in dismay.

“What shall we do?” questioned Alice.

Mrs. Pryde Calott and Mrs. Hiller had followed the three girls from the car. At every step Mrs. Calott was protesting and threatening to sue the railroad company. No one paid the least attention but Mrs. Hiller, who sought in vain to quiet her. Suddenly the overbearing woman screamed frantically.

“My black handbag! Where is it? I’ve been robbed! Help! Help! Thieves! My money! My je— Everything is gone!”

A crowd quickly collected. Mrs. Pryde Calott was in the midst of it, gesticulating and screaming hysterically.

“I have been robbed, I tell you! Find the thief!”

“Are you sure you did not put the handbag in your grip?” Mrs. Hiller was white with anxiety.

“You know it never left my arm. I have been robbed, I tell you! Find the thief! Find the thief!”

“Oh, please!” implored Mrs. Hiller, “wait until we know for sure. You must have dropped it in the coach. I will go back at once and look for it.”

The gray-haired man and several other passengers volunteered to help her. Mrs. Pryde Calott stumbled after them, loath to have another touch the precious bag. For the moment, her egotism was in eclipse. She looked like a broken old woman.

15

The girls found themselves in the midst of a small crowd.

“The old girl will find it just where she dropped it,”

prophesied a rough-looking man who had shared the same coach. He laughed loudly and many of the passengers joined in the laugh. The crowd was not sympathetic.

“She is absent-minded,” remarked Alice in a low voice.

“But she’d rather die than admit it,” finished Betty grimly.

“I believe she has something more valuable in that bag than she lets on,” whispered Norma excitedly.

The rough-looking man overheard her.

“A brass brooch from the five and ten or a paper of pins!” he chuckled. “The old girl’d make a fuss over anything!”

Presently the little party reappeared. Mrs. Pryde Calott was leaning heavily on the gray-haired man. Her face was ashen. The kindly old man looked as if he wished the earth would open and swallow him. However, he was doing all he could for Mrs. Calott.

“The bag was not in the car,” Mrs. Hiller stated. Her face was like chalk.

16

Mrs. Calott revived, somewhat.

“Every one must be searched!” she shrilled. “It contained a large amount of money, my—Oh, I cannot lose it! Find the thief! Find the thief!”

Every one was talking at once and asking questions. The crowd scattered. They were no longer interested in Mrs. Pryde

Calott, but curious to see the damage done to the engine.

The woman was left with no one for an audience but Mrs. Hiller, the gray-haired man, and the three girls, who were a short distance from them.

“Let’s go up and take a look at the engine,” suggested Norma, eagerly.

“All right,” Betty agreed. “Come on, Alice.”

But Norma did not stir. She stood staring at Betty’s skirt. Her eyes grew as round as saucers.

“Betty! What is that hanging below your traveling bag?”

“What’s what?” Betty looked down and her eyes grew wide with amazement. “Why, it’s Mrs. Calott’s bag!” she gasped.

“If it isn’t!” Norma was dumbfounded. “How in the world _____”

“That is easily explained.” Alice spoke quietly. “When Mrs. Calott fell the bag must have fallen from her hand and caught on the metal clasp of your traveling bag, Betty. In the excitement of the wreck we did not notice it hanging there until now. Don’t get excited, Betty. She can’t eat you,” concluded Alice, with a smile.

“That woman and I are hoodooed!” groaned Betty. Her face was crimson with embarrassment. Nevertheless, with head in the air and chin high with determination, but with inward misgivings, she retraced her steps toward Mrs. Calott. From

Betty's traveling bag still dangled the little black bag.

"I will show her just how I found it," thought Betty.

The gimlet eyes of Mrs. Calott bored their way to the bag before Betty reached her.

"Look at that girl!" she screamed, suddenly galvanized into action. "She has my bag!"

The woman rushed forward, followed by Mrs. Hiller and the gray-haired man.

Betty began to explain, but without a word of thanks and heedless of her explanations, Mrs. Calott jerked the bag from the catch of the traveling bag and, turning her back upon them all, began to examine thoroughly the contents of the bag.

Mrs. Hiller put her arms around Betty and smiled her gentle, kindly smile.

"You dear child, I am so glad you found the bag. It contained quite a bit of money and caused us much uneasiness. Yes, yes, it is quite plain how it happened."

18

Mrs. Calott turned from her examination of the bag and said grudgingly.

"Everything is safe. Come, let us get out of this horrid place! I am not accustomed to so much annoyance."

Without a glance in Betty's direction, she walked haughtily toward the wrecked engine. Mrs. Hiller and the gray-haired

man followed reluctantly.

“Well, that’s over,” sighed Betty, in relief, as she joined Norma and Alice, who had watched the little scene with much interest. “Come on, girls, we’ll take a look at the wreck and find out if there isn’t some way of getting to Orchard Cove from here without waiting until the wreck is cleared away.”

“Oh, look at that engine!” exclaimed Norma, a few moments later.

The remains of the engine were piled in a fantastic heap. Passenger coaches remained intact, but overturned freight cars spilled their messy contents in every direction—eggs, fresh fruit, tomatoes, watermelons.

A smashed freight car, filled with barrels of molasses, was disgorging its dark and sticky contents. The crowd moved gingerly forward.

19

The voice of Mrs. Pryde Calott was heard demanding explanations. Elated at the recovery of her bag, her old arrogance had returned threefold.

“Who is responsible for this wreck? I must get on at once. I am Mrs. Pryde Calott,” she announced importantly. Raising her monocle, she inspected a man in overalls, who was evidently the engineer. “I demand an explanation for all this annoyance,” she went on.

The engineer, his head bound up and arm in a sling, replied civilly enough.

“An accident, ma’am—an open switch.”

Mrs. Calott’s eyes blazed with anger.

“Such carelessness! Why did you leave it open? I shall report you to the president of the road. I shall——”

Further threat was prevented by a backward step into something dark and sticky. Mrs. Calott’s foot slipped. Her unwieldy form toppled. She fell, shrieking, into a half-filled barrel of molasses!

CHAPTER III

A WELL DESERVED LESSON

“Oh, get her out! Get her out!” shrieked Norma excitedly.
“She’ll drown in the molasses barrel!”

A titter went up, followed by a shout of laughter as the engineer reached down and rescued Mrs. Calott from the molasses barrel.

Spluttering and dripping molasses at every move, the woman presented as comical a sight as any comedy picture on the screen.

Betty found herself laughing in spite of her innate refinement and good breeding.

“Madam,” demanded the engineer with twitching lips, “why such carelessness? Why did you fall into the molasses barrel?”

“This is an outrage!” spluttered Mrs. Calott. She wiped molasses from her eyes with a handkerchief the gray-haired man provided and eyed the engineer indignantly.

“You ask me why? Why? You accuse me of carelessness? I fell because I could not help it! I didn’t put the barrel there, did I? I’ll sue——”

“Exactly, ma’am. I went into the open switch because I couldn’t help it, ma’am! I didn’t open it, ma’am, but it was there—open.”

“Bravo! Hot shot!” exclaimed the rough-looking man. “Ha! Ha!” His loud laugh echoed through the woods.

Spluttering and dripping molasses at every step, the furious woman was led by Mrs. Hiller back to the coach to make a more presentable appearance.

Alice looked at Betty.

“‘Pride goeth before a fall and a haughty spirit before destruction,’” she quoted in a whisper. Her eyes were dancing. Her sweet mouth quivered with mirth.

Betty turned to the chuckling engineer.

“How long do you think it will take to clear away the wreck?” she asked.

“Hours, ma’am. Probably all day.”

“Was any one hurt much?”

“No one seriously.”

“Is there any possible way of getting on to Orchard Cove without waiting for the wreck to be cleared away?”

“Yes; the main-line station is less than a mile away—through the woods. You can easily walk it, if you’re in a hurry to get

on.”

“How’s that?” several voices inquired. The crowd pressed eagerly forward.

The engineer repeated his instructions. “Just follow the railroad track to the bend, then cut across the woods to the east and you’ll be there,” he concluded.

22

Passengers stood here and there discussing what they should do. Several moments passed. Little groups began to straggle down the tracks.

“Why not walk?” Betty turned her vivid, animated face toward her two friends. “Our traveling bags are light and it is a beautiful morning.”

“A tramp through the woods would be delightful, wouldn’t it?” and Alice smiled.

“Lead on!” commanded Norma, “we’ll follow!” In spite of their misfortunes, Norma had been in high spirits all day.

Norma and Alice Guerin were daughters of a country physician who lived at a little town called Glenside. The two girls were Betty’s first real friends, and how she came to know them is related in the first volume of this series, entitled “Betty Gordon at Bramble Farm.”

Bluff, gray-haired Doctor Guerin’s name was a household word in three counties for strength, goodness, and unflinching generosity. Indeed, he was generous to a fault. So generous that, with hundreds of unpaid bills for services rendered, the

Guerins were often hard pressed financially until Betty Gordon and Bob Henderson had been instrumental in restoring a lost fortune to them. This incident, related in “Betty Gordon at Boarding School,” had cemented an already intimate friendship. Financial independence had brought gayer and better times to the Guerin household.

The girls were following the railroad tracks as the engineer had directed. A group of passengers were walking in front of them. Another group followed close at their heels.

23

Suddenly the voice of Mrs. Pryde Calott was heard in the rear.

“I must have auto service at once! I cannot stay here all day!”

“That impossible woman again!” exclaimed Alice, laughing. “How can she expect auto service here? Woods to the right of us, woods to the left of us!”

“I wonder how she got rid of the molasses,” giggled Norma. “I bet her hair is in a mess yet. Oh, didn’t she look funny when the engineer fished her out of the molasses barrel? Ha! Ha!”

“Norma,” remonstrated Alice, but her own eyes were dancing.

“That little Mrs. Hiller has been crying,” announced Betty in a low voice full of indignation. “See how sad she looks? I’ll bet that awful woman has taken her spite out on the poor little thing!”

Mrs. Hiller did indeed look ill. Her face was startling in its

pallor.

“That suitcase is too heavy for her,” said kind-hearted Betty. “Walk more slowly, girls, so that they can overtake us. I will help her.”

24

“But my dear, you have your own traveling bag to carry, and this is very heavy,” remonstrated the gentle Mrs. Hiller when Betty offered assistance.

“I am strong,” returned Betty, smiling, “and my own traveling bag is very light.”

Mrs. Hiller insisted on carrying Betty’s bag and observed:

“I sent my things ahead, but Mrs. Calott has quite a bit of baggage with her. Of course, we did not dream of having to walk.”

Mrs. Calott glanced uneasily at Mrs. Hiller as though she would fain stop the flow of conversation. Fury consumed the woman. That she, Mrs. Pryde Calott, had experienced such inconvenience and ignominy in the last half hour was almost past belief. She preserved a sullen silence and ignored the three girls. She could not forget that they had laughed at her.

“Well,” reflected Betty, not unappreciative of the humor of the situation, “here I am carrying Mrs. Calott’s suitcase when I thought I had Mrs. Hiller’s, and Mrs. Calott won’t even speak to me for my pains!”

However, Betty was glad to oblige the frail little woman at her side. Meanwhile, Mrs. Hiller’s face grew whiter and

whiter.

“Madam,” said the kindly voice of the gray-haired man to Mrs. Hiller, “allow me to carry that bag. You look quite faint.”

25

“Here, take my smelling salts,” exclaimed Mrs. Calott sharply. “I can’t manage this heavy suitcase and have you fainting on my hands.”

Betty observed with quiet satisfaction that the gray-haired man did not offer to relieve Mrs. Calott, but was doing everything in his power for the comfort of Mrs. Hiller, who had all unconsciously won his sympathy. Betty also observed that the suitcase Mrs. Calott was carrying was much smaller than the one she had thrust upon Mrs. Hiller.

“How can she stand it to be bullied by that Mrs. Calott?” thought Betty.

Mrs. Hiller revived somewhat.

“Thank you very much,” she said in a few moments, and handed the smelling salts back to Mrs. Calott. “I have a nervous headache. That helped me very much, but I think the fresh air will ease the pain.”

By this time the little party had reached the bend of the road and now struck out boldly through the woods.

“Ooh! Ooh!” shivered Alice, stepping carefully. “How thick the underbrush is! I’m afraid of snakes!”

“Alice is more afraid of snakes than she is of a lion or a wildcat!” laughed Norma.

“I’ll take the snakes instead of the wildcat,” said Betty grimly. She could not forget her harrowing experiences with a wildcat the previous summer while she was at Rainbow Ranch. 26

“My, isn’t this a dense wood! It certainly is not traveled much, or we surely would find a path!” exclaimed Norma.

“The engineer said it was not far. We’re just to keep to the east and we’ll bring out at a town called Grubville and the main-line station,” stated the gray-haired man. “I think we have time to catch the train if we make haste.”

“Yes, we had better make haste!” exclaimed Alice nervously.

The words were scarcely out of her mouth when she stumbled and fell against a rotten tree stump.

“My, but I’m getting awkward!” she laughed, all unconscious of the peril so close at hand.

But Betty had seen the horrid yellow body quivering among the decaying leaves and she stood transfixed with horror as a snake several feet in length prepared to spring upon her defenseless friend!

CHAPTER IV

THE SNAKE

There was not a moment to lose! Norma and the gray-haired man were too far in advance to be of any help.

Afterwards Betty wondered how she had the presence of mind and the courage to do what she did.

As the snake struck, Betty sprang forward and brought Mrs. Calott's suitcase down with force upon the reptile's head.

Alice turned, saw the snake, and, aware of her danger, screamed in terror.

Norma and the gray-haired man came running.

“Help! Help!” cried Betty. “A snake! A snake!”

“Hold it down! Hit it over the head!” yelled Mrs. Pryde Calott, commanding from a safe distance where she quickly established herself on a tall tree-stump.

But Betty was not able to hold down the snake. The reptile struggled free. It's head was mashed and bleeding and just as the gray-haired man struck at it with a heavy stick, it turned quickly and wormed away into the underbrush.

“Oh, Betty!” Alice's face was ghastly. “I believe I'm going to

faint!”

“Don’t you dare! We must get out of here before we meet with more snakes!” said the practical Betty. “Come, Alice, brace up!”

Alice began to cry.

“Suppose you had not thrown that—suitcase—when—you—did?”

“I did, though—for a wonder. Forget it,” advised Betty cheerfully.

“Ooh!” shivered Norma, her arms about Alice. “Let’s not talk about it! Let’s get out of here!”

“I saw a path a short distance away. Follow me and I think we will have no further trouble,” said the gray-haired man.

The girls silently followed. The incident of the snake had depressed their high spirits, and to them the woods had taken on a sinister look.

Mrs. Calott cast several indignant glances at her suitcase but wisely refrained from saying anything.

“She thinks I would not carry it for her if she complained,” thought Betty: and smiled to herself.

Presently the little party, weary and disheveled, were relieved to find themselves clear of the woods and on the outskirts of Grubville.

“If I’m not mistaken, we can catch a street car to the main-line station by walking around that corner,” said the gray-haired man. “We had better take a street car as the quickest means to get on our way.”

Mrs. Calott seated herself on a grassy knoll and adjusted her skirts, hugging to her bosom the precious black bag. She adjusted her monocle and stared at Mrs. Hiller.

“I’ll sit right here,” announced Mrs. Calott, “until you telephone for a taxi. I shall not ride in a street car! I’ve had enough of common things for one day!”

“I suppose we are the ‘common things’ she mentioned,” laughed Norma, her high spirits returning, now that the woods and the snake were left behind.

Betty and her two friends reached the main-line station just fifteen minutes late. The man had stayed behind to assist Mrs. Hiller.

“When does the next train leave?” asked Betty anxiously of the ticket agent.

“Not until midnight. But a through train stops at the next station in about an hour.”

“How far is the next station?”

“Just four miles to Maysville. You could easily make that train if you had some one to drive you over.”

“How about a bus or taxi?”

The station agent smiled.

“Slim chance, I’m afraid. They have all left the station now. Hello, though! There’s Mose. Hey there, Mose!”

A colored man ambled into the station.

“Want to use that new car of yours to take these girls to Maysville?”

Mose chuckled.

“I’d sho’ be delighted, suh!”

“Well, go on, girls. Mose is perfectly reliable if the car doesn’t prove to be,” laughed the ticket agent.

The girls, expecting to see a new car, were surprised when they went outside and Mose indicated a dilapidated flivver.

However, they got in, and with many creaks and groans, the ramshackle old car started on its way. It was evident that Mose was in love with his new toy, for he talked to it constantly.

They had perhaps gone a couple of miles when the car began to shake and quiver.

“Ooh! what’s the matter? Look out for another smash-up!” cried Norma.

The words were scarcely out of her mouth when the car lurched forward, a back door swung open, and the three girls

were thrown pell-mell to the ground. Mose, alone kept his seat.

“Whoa dere, Hen’y,” soothed Mose. “What am de mattah wid yo’? Yo’ sho’ am actin’ up, Hen’y. Hey, dere! Is you-all’s hu’t?” he demanded anxiously, peering over the side of the car and looking down at the girls. 31

“Not a bit!” they exclaimed all in one breath and scrambled laughing to their feet.

“Oh, look, Mose!” exclaimed Norma. “You have a broken axle. The wheel has rolled over here into the brushwood.”

“I decla’e to gracious!” Mose descended stiffly and surveyed the car with mournful eyes. He scratched his head in perplexity. “And I done bought Hen’y only yist’day!” he groaned. “How’s de young ladies gwine to git dar now?”

How, indeed? The girls looked at one another in dismay.

The road ahead lay like a yellow ribbon in the sunlight and beckoned invitingly. The girls glanced ruefully down at the three-wheeled car. Betty turned to the downcast chauffeur.

“How much farther is it, Mose?” she asked.

“Two miles yit to Maysville. I sho’ feel baid to disoblige de young ladies.”

“Why, Mose, you can’t help it!” said Betty cheerfully.

“Here’s some money. We’ll get on some way and telephone a garage to send some one to tow you in.”

The girls gathered their belongings together and decided to walk on down the road.

“Perhaps some one will come along and give us a lift!” said the optimistic Betty.

32

Alice glanced uneasily around. She looked worried.

At that moment a long gray touring car glided by. Two dapper young men, occupants of the car, cast interested glances toward the girls.

“Oh, look!” exclaimed Betty gleefully. “They’re slowing down. Perhaps they will ask us to ride!”

The young men had stopped the car and were looking back. The driver was a thick, heavy-set man with light hair and a sandy mustache. The other young man was tall and darkly handsome.

The girls hastened forward and approached the car.

“Have you had tire trouble?” the dark man inquired gayly.

“Worse than that,” answered Betty, smiling. “A wheel off. We were on our way to Maysville.”

“So were we. Hop in! We can’t pass up such good-looking girls, can we, buddy?” the darkly handsome man exclaimed, nudging the driver, who agreed with a loud laugh.

Alice drew back.

“Oh, girls,” she whispered, “I don’t think we should go with them.”

“Nonsense,” said Betty in a low voice. “It is broad daylight and there are three of us! Don’t be silly!” Betty had been known to “rush in where angels fear to tread.”

The handsome young man jumped out and opened a back door of the car with a flourish.

“Mine the honor, ladies!” he exclaimed, bowing low with mock deference.

Betty and Norma got into the car, and the dark young man unexpectedly jumped in after them.

“You go and sit with my buddy on the front seat and be sociable,” he called back to the surprised Alice, who was left no choice but to obey.

The girls’ hearts sank with misgiving as the gray touring car sped like a flash of lightning down the road and they were left to the mercy of the two men upon whose breath, so they now discovered, the odor of liquor was very strong. Betty began to regret her impulsiveness.

How often had Mrs. Eustice, the principal of Shadyside School, cautioned the girls in her charge about getting into cars with strange men.

“My name is Walter Brisket and my buddy’s name is Sidney Gold,” said the darkly handsome young man, taking a cigarette from a little blue and gold pasteboard box. He

lighted the cigarette and leaned familiarly toward Betty, fixing his bold, questioning eyes upon her face.

“How about a date this evening?” he inquired. “The minute I set eyes on you I said, ‘That is the girl for me!’”

34

“Oh!” exclaimed Betty, startled. She moved a little closer to Norma. Alice glanced back and Betty was aware that her friend’s face was white with anxiety.

The car dashed madly on at the rate of sixty miles an hour.

Walter Brisket laughed loudly and edged nearer to Betty. “Must not spring the shy violet act. It isn’t done these days, you know.”

“Please sit over,” demanded Betty, suddenly losing her temper. “I’m not springing any kind of an act and I’m not making dates. All I want is to get to Maysville. I shall gladly pay you for your trouble if you’ll only behave yourself and get us there.”

Walter Brisket laughed loudly.

“Pretty little spitfire! Pay? Pay? Your payment is goin’ to be a kiss and I’m goin’ to get payment in advance!”

He seized the indignant girl in his arms. Betty felt his foul breath upon her cheek, and she screamed in terror.

35

CHAPTER V

BRISKET AND GOLD

As Betty Gordon cried out in terror Alice and Norma screamed in sympathy. The whole affair seemed like some dreadful nightmare to the three schoolgirls.

Sidney Gold chuckled wickedly to himself and stepped on the gas. The car shot forward at such terrific speed that it swayed from side to side and was in danger of overturning.

“Make her kiss you, Walt!” Gold cried, with a grin. “Have your fun. You always were a winner with the girls!”

Betty struggled in vain while Alice and Norma looked on, not knowing what to do. Brisket drew closer until his mouth was close to Betty’s cheek.

Then Betty regained a bit of her self-possession. Not for nothing had she gone through those trying experiences in Mexican wilds and elsewhere. She broke loose and gave the young man a violent shove that sent Brisket up against the door of the car.

Crash! It was the sound of glass being broken. Brisket’s arm shot through the window. When he brought it back there was a deep scratch on the back of his hand, from which the blood spurted.

“Ouch!” he yelled. “Oh, my hand! Ouch!”

Betty was startled, and the other girls were speechless. Brisket forgot all about them and started to nurse the cut hand, bringing out a handkerchief for the purpose.

“What’s the matter?” demanded Gold, bringing the car to slow speed. Then he saw the handkerchief stained with blood and stared in wonder.

“A car is coming,” announced Betty, through clenched teeth. “If you do not let us out at once, we three girls will scream as loudly as we can.”

“We certainly will,” chimed in Norma and Alice. “We’ll get the police after you!”

“The little fools are in earnest. We had better let them out,” said the driver to Walter Brisket. He was now plainly alarmed.

Sidney Gold slowed down the car and the girls were allowed to alight. The car the girls had seen coming passed them. The occupants of this car cast curious glances backward, both at the girls and their suitcases resting in the dust.

Walter Brisket leaned out of the gray touring car and looked at Betty with blazing eyes.

“You’re a poor fish,” he sneered, “to object to a little fun! Hope you all walk yourselves lame!”

“Enjoy your limousine!” jeered Sidney Gold as they drove

away. His loud, raucous laughter drifted back. “It’s a nice hot day to carry those bags!”

The girls, tired and travel-worn, looked at one another in relief.

“My, I’m glad we’re out of there!” sighed Alice. “I was afraid they wouldn’t let us out!”

“They wouldn’t if Betty hadn’t shoved his arm through the glass.” Then Norma began to laugh hysterically.

“Don’t fool yourself!” replied the shrewd Betty. “If the other car had not come along——”

She gave a little shiver and opening her traveling bag, took from it a clean handkerchief, and began to wipe her cheek. “This has taught me a lesson about getting in cars with strange young men.”

“Yes. Such fellows! They should be horse-whipped! I think we had better walk the remaining distance and take no chances,” said Alice, leading the way, Norma and Betty following.

“It can’t be more than half a mile,” Betty observed. “We can see the town from here.”

Without further adventure the girls reached the station at Maysville. Here they telephoned to a garage to go to the help of poor old Mose, then sat down to wait for their train.

It was about four o’clock in the afternoon when the train bore

the three girls safely into Orchard Cove.

“Oh, how beautiful!” exclaimed Norma, as the train slowed down for the station.

Orchard Cove was indeed beautiful—a wild and natural beauty of sea and rock and sky.

Betty, who had an artist’s eye for line and color, exclaimed with delight when she stepped from the train.

“Pardon me, but are you not Betty Gordon?” The voice was sweetly modulated and softened with a slight southern accent.

Betty turned to see one of the most exquisitely gowned and best groomed women it had ever been her privilege to behold.

“Why, she looks like some rare jewel—clean cut, exquisite, sparkling!” thought Betty quickly. Aloud she said wonderingly:

“Yes, I am Betty Gordon.”

“Then these are your friends, the Guerin girls. I am Mrs. Raymond.” The lady shook hands warmly with the three girls. “Welcome to Orchard Cove. I came down in our own car for you. Mr. Raymond had intended to meet you, but he was detained at the last minute. Just follow me. The car is not far away. Rastus, take the bags!”

The girls followed the exquisite little figure in admiring silence. The colored chauffeur brought up the rear.

“We learned about the wreck, Betty,” said Mrs. Raymond, stopping a moment and looking back. “I was worried, and it was a great relief to see you step from the train.”

Mrs. Raymond laughed and shook her golden head at Betty’s bewilderment.

“Your Uncle Dick has shown me your picture, and I knew you instantly. Poor man! We were so sorry to get Richard’s wire saying he could not come, but we were delighted that he was sending you, anyway! You know, Mr. Raymond and I have been lifelong friends of your Uncle Dick’s.

“But tell me,” she inquired, with a quick change of expression that Betty grew to feel was one of her chief charms, “how you made such good time when your train was wrecked? We’ve been meeting each train, to make sure we’d be on hand to greet you.”

A spirited account of their adventures followed. Mrs. Raymond was much interested. By this time they had reached the car. The colored chauffeur opened the door of the limousine and after Mrs. Raymond and the girls were seated deftly piled the traveling bags at their feet.

“Rastus will come back for your trunks,” said Mrs. Raymond as the car glided smoothly away.

40

Betty watched the trim little figure on the front seat and recalled what her Uncle Dick had told her of Mrs. Raymond. Both Mr. and Mrs. Raymond had come of old and cultured families who, having many foreign investments, had lost their fortunes during the World War.

Patricia Raymond, who had reigned so graciously in society, now turned all her wit and talents to the task of helping her husband gain a firm financial footing.

Richard Gordon held by far the greater financial interest in Raymond House, the leading hotel at Orchard Cove, but it was Patricia and Paul Raymond who were making it famous.

“Now girls,” the musical voice of Mrs. Raymond broke into Betty’s train of thought, “we are at the Washington Entrance to Raymond House.”

The car glided under the beautiful white arched entrance.

The Raymond House, a large white house of colonial architecture, was built on a high hill overlooking the sea. To the southward and back of the Raymond House stretched acre after acre of apple orchards. Paul Raymond’s apples were fast becoming as famous as his hotel.

“Welcome to Raymond House!” exclaimed Mrs. Raymond brightly.

41

She ran on before. A man in livery opened the door. Mrs. Raymond stepped back and the girls entered the foyer of the hotel, she following.

“Now, girls,” Mrs. Raymond said briskly, “first thing, you must send messages home to your people that you are safe and sound! Come with me and we will get that matter attended to. Then you must register at the desk and get the keys to your rooms.”

These matters were soon attended to, and the girls, accompanied by Mrs. Raymond, entered the elevator. George Washington Sims, a colored boy of about sixteen, grinned a delighted welcome.

“Here we are!” exclaimed Mrs. Raymond a moment later. “Third floor, Room 48 and Room 49. Two rooms, each with private bath. The two bedrooms, separated by a folding door, can be thrown together. I thought you would like that. I hope, girls, you will be very comfortable here.”

“Oh, thank you! Everything is lovely, Mrs. Raymond. I am sure we could not be otherwise than comfortable,” returned Betty sincerely.

After Mrs. Raymond left them, Alice sank down in a soft-cushioned chair and looked around. “My, doesn’t this look nice and homey?” she exclaimed.

The room was furnished in blue and gold. A fine old four-poster bed invited repose, and near the windows a couch upholstered in soft gray was piled with pillows of blue and gold. A dresser, several small tables and chairs completed the furniture, but for ornament there was a big fern in a pot near the window.

42

Betty peeped into the adjoining room. “Just like this one, only two beds,” she reported; “so I guess this one is mine. Now if we don’t have to put up with Mrs. Pryde Calott, everything will be lovely.”

“Oh, perhaps she won’t come to the Raymond House,” said Norma hopefully.

Betty went over to the window and exclaimed with delight at the beautiful view. Norma and Alice joined her. Their bedroom windows commanded a view of the ocean and the bathing beach. The swish of the waves as they beat against the shore was plainly heard. Far out at sea, an immense ocean liner heading for a larger port plowed majestically through the foaming waters. A number of private yachts studded the cove, and the bathing beach was spotted with gayly colored figures enjoying the surf.

For miles along the shore stretched the Boardwalk, where hundreds of people promenaded daily.

“Isn’t it lovely and restful?” sighed Alice. “I am going to put on my kimono, sit here in this comfy chair, enjoy the view and the sea breeze until it is time to dress for dinner. I feel a little tired.”

43

“No wonder, Alice, after your fright with that snake!” Betty looked at her friend with anxiety.

Alice laughed.

“I was more frightened at those awful men,” she acknowledged. “Betty, I would give anything for your pluck and judgment.”

Betty looked at Alice with a rueful smile.

“I may not be lacking in pluck, but don’t say anything about judgment. I should never have gotten into that car.”

“Well, you knew what to do to get us out of the scrape,

anyway,” laughed the loyal Norma. “Come on, Betty, let’s explore our rooms.”

Alice donned her kimono and sat by the window while Betty and Norma went on a tour of investigation around the two rooms. The two girls exclaimed with pleasure at the many conveniences, the up-to-date baths and showers, the big roomy closets. The trunks were brought up promptly and left in Betty’s room.

After chatting a while together, the girls took baths in their spotless bathtubs and donned their simple evening dresses just as the gong sounded for dinner.

“Betty, you look sweet in that soft blue crêpe—I love you in it!” exclaimed Norma.

44

“To say nothing of how pretty you two look!” laughed Betty, in return.

In truth the girls, though simply gowned, did look pretty, Betty in the soft, becoming blue and Norma and Alice in white. Alice’s only ornament was a short string of pearl beads around her neck, but Norma had added color to her costume by fastening a big, pink, velvet rose on the shoulder.

When the girls entered the dining room, which was on the first floor, the room was crowded with beautifully gowned women and men in evening dress. An orchestra was playing a popular song of the day.

Betty’s brown eyes sparkled with interest as she looked around at the gay scene. The girls were given a table which

commanded a view of the sea.

Suddenly Norma grasped Betty's arm and said in a tense whisper.

“Look! Behold Mrs. Pryde Calott—at the next table!”

CHAPTER VI

THE PEARL NECKLACE

Betty Gordon glanced in the direction indicated. Sure enough, dressed in a rose-colored satin gown, the entire front of which was elaborately beaded in pearls, Mrs. Calott sat in queenly state. A magnificent rope of pink-tinted pearls hung almost to her waist and diamonds flashed from her jewel-laden fingers.

“What a display!” Alice gave a little shiver of distaste. “What a lack of taste and good breeding!”

“Oh, but look at those pearls!” exclaimed Betty excitedly. “They are the most exquisite things I have seen for many a day!”

“Yes, they are lovely!” acknowledged Alice. “And worth a fortune, too, I venture to say.”

Mrs. Hiller, an inconspicuous figure in modest black, sat at Mrs. Calott’s right. She looked up at that moment and, catching Betty’s eye, smiled sweetly and bowed.

Frowning heavily, Mrs. Calott turned to see who was claiming Mrs. Hiller’s attention. She raised her monocle and insolently inspected the simple costumes of the three girls, then turned away with a disdainful shrug of her bare shoulder. The girls heard her say something to Mrs. Hiller

about “that rude girl, who knocked me down.”

“Cut!” exclaimed Alice, in a whisper.

“Who cares?” inquired Betty sturdily. “The less we see of that woman, the better for us.”

Norma looked over at the two women who were such contrasts in dress and character.

“We have made one friend and one enemy,” she said slowly. “I feel sorry for that little Mrs. Hiller, somehow. I wonder why she stays with that awful woman?”

The dinner was excellently prepared and was deftly served by colored waiters. The hungry girls ate with healthy enjoyment.

Presently a tall man with a shaggy mop of light-colored hair and a little patch of light mustache made his way down the long dining room and approached the girls.

“I think here comes Mr. Raymond, the manager of the hotel,” whispered Betty. “Uncle Dick likes him very much.”

The man paused at their table and bowed engagingly.

“I think I’d make a very good detective,” he boasted, smiling. “Out of a room full of people, I have picked you girls out. If I am not mistaken, this is Miss Betty Gordon and her friends, the Misses Guerin?”

47

“Yes. You are right,” acknowledged Betty. “But how did you happen to know us?” For the moment Betty had forgotten

about the picture.

“Mrs. Raymond told me to look for the three prettiest girls in the room,” was the manager’s ready answer; “and so I am here.” He bowed engagingly.

“Oh, thank you! What a pretty speech! Now I know why you have made the Raymond House so famous,” dimpled Betty, thinking of the picture Mrs. Raymond had mentioned.

For a few moments Paul Raymond chatted pleasantly with them.

“And now, girls,” he said in conclusion, “I want you to feel perfectly at home and have a good time here. There are many transients, of course—people I scarcely know—but some people have been here year after year, so that we are like a little family.”

He passed on, smiling and bowing to people as he went.

“Isn’t he nice?” demanded Betty. “Every one seems to like him. Uncle Dick says he is very popular.”

Mrs. Calott and Mrs. Hiller arose to leave the dining room.

“Just as I thought!” exclaimed Mrs. Calott, turning to Mrs. Hiller, and her voice carried to where the three girls sat. “They are the associates of innkeepers. I forbid you to have anything to do with them!”

Mrs. Hiller’s face was crimson as the two women left the room.

“The woman is impossible!” exclaimed Betty indignantly.

“Don’t let it worry you, Betty,” soothed Alice. “Here comes Mrs. Raymond now. Isn’t she beautiful?”

“Here are my girls!” cried Mrs. Raymond gayly. “Now come with me and listen to some good music. The Alton Orchestra will entertain us to-night and Madam Schuman will sing. It is a rare chance to have Madam Schuman at a hotel. We’re very lucky—and grateful.”

She led the way into the large Blue Room adjoining. Comfortable chairs and couches were scattered everywhere among the palms and ferns. On a stage built for entertainment sat the Alton Orchestra, their instruments ready.

A tall woman with a great mass of copper-colored hair came down the room towards Mrs. Raymond. As she reached the little party, introductions were made and Mrs. Raymond turned to the three girls and smiled.

“Miss Lyons is our hotel hostess and my right-hand partner in everything social,” she stated. “I could not get along without her.”

49

With a nod and smile Mrs. Raymond passed gracefully on, the girls following. Presently she paused before a gray-haired man and exclaimed:

“Why, Mr. Hammon, this is indeed a pleasure! When did you arrive?”

“About six o’clock,” he replied. “We took a taxi from

Grubville.”

“I thought you would not come until to-morrow. Paul is worried over some business transactions and wishes your advice. It is nice to have a lawyer friend!” Mrs. Raymond laughed and turned to Betty.

“Miss Gordon, allow me to present a very dear friend of ours, Mr. Hammon. Miss Gordon, Mr. Hammon. The Misses Guerin, Mr. Hammon.”

Betty found herself looking into the kindly eyes of the gray-haired man, their traveling companion of the morning!

“Well, well, well! We meet again!” he exclaimed. “To think this is Richard Gordon’s niece and Dr. Guerin’s daughters and I did not know it until now! I know your uncle quite well, Miss Betty, and Dr. Guerin also. Bless my soul, how I’d like to see the doctor.”

He turned to Mrs. Raymond.

“The girls came up on the same train with me as far as the wreck. At Grubville I took a taxi to Orchard Cove.”

50

He smiled at Alice. “How are you girls after your scare of the morning?”

“That is a thing of the past,” laughed Betty. “We are enjoying ourselves very much at present.”

“Nothing foolish about you,” approved Mr. Hammon, “I see you are normal girls.”

At that moment Madam Schuman entered the Blue Room. Necks were craned for a view of the famous singer. She paused in the doorway, sought Mrs. Raymond out, and came smiling toward the manager's wife. Mrs. Raymond went to meet the celebrated singer and held out her hand.

But Madam Schuman was not content with a mere handshake. She took the exquisite little figure of Mrs. Raymond in her arms and kissed her affectionately.

Betty saw Mrs. Calott, who was seated in a near-by chair, raise her monocle and stare in amazement.

“Look at Mrs. Calott!” giggled Norma. “I guess she wishes she hadn't said what she did about innkeepers!”

CHAPTER VII

MISSING

After a brief chat Madam Schuman, smiling her wide smile, left hurriedly for the stage.

Mr. Raymond entered the room and looked around for his beautiful wife. His eyes lighted up at sight of her and, straight as a homing pigeon, he came to her side.

“Girls, Madam Schuman will join us after she sings. I want you to meet her. She has a wonderful voice that touches the heart strings,” said Mrs. Raymond, as her husband joined the little party.

“Well, if here isn’t dear old Hammon coming a day before we expected him!” exclaimed Mr. Raymond. “I am glad to see you again, Henry.” The two men shook hands warmly.

“Do you know, girls,” said Mr. Raymond, with an affectionate hand on his friend’s arm, “that this is the best criminal lawyer in the state?”

“Tut! Tut! Paul! Now don’t embarrass me before the young ladies,” laughed Mr. Hammon.

Betty’s eyes sparkled with fun.

“We mustn’t fall into crime then, Mr. Hammon, while

you're here or we'll surely be found out, shan't we?"

The celebrated lawyer started to give some laughing rejoinder, but hesitated. Betty saw his eye following the little black-robed figure of Mrs. Hiller.

"Patricia," he said in a low voice, "look over there at that little lady in black. She is as helpless to make her way in the world as a babe in the woods or a little white kitten. She is domineered over by that she-dragon in pearls. I want you to take the little one under your wing and save her from the dragon."

"Why not save her from the dragon yourself, Henry?" suggested the quick-witted Mrs. Raymond. Her sweet mouth was quirked with humor.

Mr. Hammon shook his head, and, drawing her to one side, began to talk to Mrs. Raymond in a low earnest voice. Presently the two made their way to Mrs. Hiller and Mrs. Calott.

Betty watched them as introductions were given and received. She smiled at Mrs. Calott's change of attitude, for Mrs. Calott was very cordial, realizing by this time that Mrs. Raymond was a woman of no small importance socially. It would therefore pay her to be polite to the manager's wife.

Mrs. Hiller was her gentle, natural self.

Presently Mrs. Raymond and Mr. Hammon returned to their chairs and the Alton Orchestra began playing. After a while Madam Schuman came on the stage and there was

deafening applause.

Betty was oblivious of everything around her as she listened to the lovely voice. Out on a sea of enchantment, she rode the wonderful waves of sound.

“Now, girls,” said Mrs. Raymond after the concert was over and the applause had died away, “come and meet Madam Schuman. Then I’m going to turn you over to Ann for the evening while Mr. Raymond and I take the Madam to the station.”

The girls liked the friendly grip of the hand, the wide smile of the well-known singer. As Betty quaintly expressed it, “it was one of the things to place in memory’s garden.”

“Girls,” exclaimed Mrs. Raymond, turning in the crowd to a keen-eyed, laughing-faced woman in brown, “it gives me great pleasure to present Mrs. Ann McLane Hall, the famous author of ‘Patty and the Peace Club.’” It was the name of a girl’s book, one of the best sellers of the year before.

Betty gave a little gasp. How she had laughed and cried over “Patty,” enjoying to the full the sparkling fun and tender pathos of a really wonderful book for girls.

“Now, Patricia—” Ann McLane Hall looked annoyed —“don’t scare the girls away from me! Come on, before she tells you any more rubbish, for I am to show you around to-night. I spend my summers here whenever my husband cannot take me with him. His summers are spent aboard in the interest of an oil company. This summer he went to China. I am Ann Hall to every girl in Orchard Grove. Very few of

them know I wrote ‘Patty and the Peace Club,’ and don’t you dare tell them!”

“I won’t,” promised Betty meekly.

“Off we go on our sightseeing tour, then. Good-by, everybody! Good-by, dear Madam Schuman! Hope to see you again before long.”

A flurry for wraps and then they were off like a whirlwind. Betty adored Mrs. Hall instantly.

Like Mrs. Raymond, Mrs. Hall was bubbling over with energy and life, but where Mrs. Raymond was all elegance, fastidiousness and poise, Mrs. Hall was blunt, plain spoken, and a bit temperamental. A dress was just a dress to Ann Hall, a thing to be suffered and borne with, not a work of art to be enjoyed. But the two women, so opposite in temperament, were intimate friends.

“You can get but a general idea of the place to-night,” said Mrs. Hall briskly, as she led the way down the steps of the hotel to the brilliantly lighted grounds. “As you know, the Raymond House is the largest hotel in the place. It faces the east and the sea. The Hoffer House and the Maxwell Place are the other large hotels. That’s the Hoffer House over there to the north. Maxwell Place is to the south. As you see, all the buildings, including the cottages, are painted white and are of Colonial architecture. We have a good lighting system here. Our nights are as light as our days.”

The place was indeed a place of light, color and gayety. An orchestra was playing out on the large Steel Pier and dancing

figures moved to and fro. Youth thrilled to the call of youth!

“I think it is lovely!” breathed Alice. “Everything white and green with splotches of crimson flowers to add a bit of vivid color.”

“What do most people do, who come here?” inquired Betty as the little party made their way down the hill to the Boardwalk.

Mrs. Hall laughed.

“Bathing is the popular daily diversion here. Behold my coat of tan to prove it!” She turned an eager, brown face to the three girls. “We’ll get out in the ocean to-morrow. It is fine sport!”

Ann Hall had quick, birdlike actions that reminded Betty of a little brown thrush. Her hair, eyes and complexion were brown. She wore a brown dress and wrap. Ann Hall always wore brown.

56

“Then the Boardwalk is very popular, especially to the reducers,” laughed Mrs. Hall. “It is several miles long. People walk here as they do nowhere else.

“You see, girls, the shops and theaters are built along the shore line of the Boardwalk. There are many attractions here. A ballroom is built at the farther end of the Steel Pier and a theater is found there which provides most excellent talent from all over the country. Orchard Cove is famed for fish and sea food as well as apples. You can see the apple orchards back of the Raymond House. In another month they will be shipping apples all over the world. Now, where shall we go?”

Ann Hall turned her bright face to the three girls.

Norma looked at Betty.

“Oh, I’d like to promenade on the Boardwalk! Wouldn’t you, girls? That would give us a good view of everything!”

“That would be lovely,” replied Alice, and Betty agreed.

The little party joined the promenaders on the Boardwalk.

“How interesting to watch the people!” exclaimed Alice.

“Yes, but I’d rather have on my bathing suit and ride the waves!” Betty’s eyes, sparkling with excitement, were fixed upon the ocean.

57

Mrs. Hall laughed her jolly laugh.

“I see I am not the only water duck. There is nothing like the ocean for recreation. And then to come out and lie lazily on the beach, while the sun dries you out and you blissfully dig your toes in the sand. Oh, there’s nothing like it!”

“When Bob comes down, he will like to do that,” observed Betty.

“What day is Bob coming?” asked Norma.

“I don’t know yet, but in a very few days. He is visiting Tommy and Teddy Tucker, you know, and they have promised to come down with Bob.”

“How jolly!”

“Yes, and you said, Betty, that Bobby and Louise Littell would come down if they returned from their trip to New York in time,” added Alice. “We’ll have quite a little party!”

Betty turned to Mrs. Hall.

“Bobby and Louise Littell are very dear friends of ours, who have promised to come down to Orchard Cove for the weekend.”

Ann Hall’s brown eyes sparkled.

“That will be great fun. We must plan some picnics and theater parties.”

“Oh, Betty,” whispered Norma, “here comes Mrs. Calott!”

The woman, accompanied by Mrs. Hiller, was approaching. She was breathing heavily. Evidently intent on reduction, Mrs. Calott had walked the entire length of the Boardwalk and was now returning, spent but victorious.

58

She passed the three girls without recognition. Her face flushed with anger that they should see her so fatigued. Mrs. Hiller spoke to the girls and smiled her sweet, gentle smile.

“Isn’t it queer,” said Alice softly, “that we girls have to put up with some unpleasant person all the time? If it isn’t Ada Nansen, it’s a Mrs. Calott!” Ada Nansen was a Shadyside student, who had made school life very unpleasant for the three girls.

Ann Hall's laugh rang out.

“Well, ‘the bitter with the sweet,’ you know! We must know all kinds of people!”

“Mrs. Hall, look how many boats!” Betty pointed to the shoreline where boats of every description lay at anchor.

“Yes, the boating is fine here,” returned the author. “We will charter a motor boat while you are here and picnic on the rocky side of the Cove. And now I think we had better go in. Mrs. Raymond tells me you have had a hard and exciting day.”

“I hate to leave the sea,” sighed Betty happily. The little group turned and walked slowly up the terraced walks to the top of the hill. “I am glad our bedrooms face the ocean!” she added.

59

A frightened-faced hall man admitted them.

“All the hotel patrons are requested to enter the Blue Room at once,” he stated.

“Why, I wonder what's up, now!” exclaimed Ann Hall, and hurriedly led the way to the Blue Room.

The little party paused in the doorway and looked anxiously about.

A crowd had collected around some one who was crying hysterically. Betty recognized the voice of Mrs. Calott as it rose to a despairing shriek.

“How can I tell you? I had it on and now it is gone! A fortune, I tell you! Gone! Gone!”

Mr. and Mrs. Raymond detached themselves from the crowd and came hurriedly toward the door where Ann Hall and the girls stood.

“Ann,” said Mrs. Raymond, and even in that moment of strain and stress her customary poise did not desert her, “a very unfortunate thing has occurred. Mrs. Calott’s pearl necklace, valued at thirty thousand dollars, is missing!”

CHAPTER VIII

THE CHIEF OF POLICE

“Patricia! Was it stolen?” Mrs. Hall exclaimed on hearing Mrs. Raymond’s news.

Betty Gordon and the two Guerin girls were speechless with amazement and a mixed feeling that could not be called sympathy for the pompous woman.

“Mrs. Calott thinks so. At any rate, the necklace is missing. It is very unfortunate, Ann. We have telephoned to the police.”

“There’s the Chief, now!” exclaimed Mr. Raymond, and went to meet the blue-coated figure of the Chief of Police.

Unlike Mrs. Raymond, Paul Raymond was decidedly nervous. The hand that brushed back his shaggy mop of light-colored hair trembled visibly.

Mrs. Raymond looked adoringly after the tall form of her husband. Her eyes held a look of anxiety quite foreign to their clear depths.

“Oh, Betty,” breathed Alice, “I feel so frightened!”

“Let no one leave the room, please,” said the Chief in a loud voice.

Another blue-coated figure appeared and stationed himself, sentinel like, in the doorway.

The Chief strode into the room and, accompanied by Mr. Raymond, made his way toward Mrs. Calott, who had collapsed on a couch. Mrs. Hiller was administering smelling salts and Mrs. Calott, nothing loath to be the center of attraction, was dramatizing the scene to suit her fancy. She wrung her hands; she wept hysterically; she denounced, all in one breath.

“Now, madam, calm yourself,” demanded the Chief of Police sternly, “and tell me how it happened!”

“How it happened? Listen to the man! How do I know how it happened?” Mrs. Calott wrung her hands. “A fortune gone! Gone in a night! Thirty thousand dollars, I tell you!” Her voice rose to a shriek.

“Now, madam, you must calm yourself. Sit up and answer my questions. It is necessary if I am to be of any use to you. When did you last wear the pearl necklace?”

“To-night! To-night! Oh, my pearls! My beautiful pearls!”

“You wore the necklace to-night? When did you become aware of your loss?”

“Thirty thousand dollars,” came in a scream. “It shall not go! Do something! Get the thief! Get the thief! Jail them! Jail them!”

Mrs. Calott’s heavy body jerked convulsively. Her eyes

rolled backward until only the whites were visible. She began to froth at the mouth.

The house physician bent over the woman.

“A fine case of hysteria!” he exclaimed cheerfully.

The Chief of Police turned impatiently to Mrs. Raymond.

“Where can I get the necessary information? Was any one with the woman?”

“I was,” answered Mrs. Hiller promptly, but Betty could see that the little woman was trembling with fright.

“Were you with her all evening?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Were you with her when she put the necklace on and with her all the time until the pearls were missing?”

“Yes, sir.”

“At what time were the jewels missing?”

“Only a few moments ago—when we returned to the hotel.”

“Where had you been?”

“On the Boardwalk.”

“Did you go anywhere else?”

“No. We went to the end of the Boardwalk and returned.”

“Are you prepared to swear that she wore the necklace when you started on your promenade?”

“Yes. I know that she had the necklace on then.”

63

“Why?”

“I saw it. We paused on the hotel veranda before we took the promenade and I adjusted the clasp of the necklace for her. I noticed the clasp had slipped a little and she remarked that she would send it to the jeweler in the morning.”

“It’s false! It’s false!” shrieked Mrs. Calott suddenly.

The doctor pushed her down upon the couch and administered restoratives.

The effect of Mrs. Calott’s words on Mrs. Hiller was startling.

Every drop of blood left the little woman’s face. Shaking like a leaf, she collapsed into the nearest chair and shrank from the Chief of Police like a frightened kitten.

“Why, Mrs. Hiller acts as if she were guilty!” thought Betty, in surprise.

“You say the catch was faulty?” The question came like the shot of a gun.

“Yes, sir,” quivered Mrs. Hiller doggedly and with a frightened glance at the couch.

“False! False!” shrieked Mrs. Calott. “You want to make me out careless when some one has stolen it. Stolen it, I tell you!”

The Chief of Police looked keenly at Mrs. Hiller.

“Who was the first to notice the loss of the necklace?”

64

“Mrs. Calott,” answered Mrs. Hiller faintly.

“Where were you?”

“We were just coming up the steps of the hotel.”

“Then the necklace was lost or stolen some time between your departure from the hotel foyer and your return to it?”

The Chief was using his notebook frequently.

“Yes, sir.”

“Were you the only person to accompany Mrs. Calott?”

“Yes.”

“And you were with her all the time?”

“Yes, sir.”

The Chief turned to Mr. Raymond and the crowd pressed eagerly forward to hear what the officer had to say.

“Then whether lost or stolen, the loss occurred either on the hotel grounds or on the Boardwalk. That fact is established, according to the testimony. I will send my men at once to

search the grounds. If lost, perhaps it can be found. If stolen —” the Chief gave an expressive shrug of the shoulder. “We must call in a detective. In the meanwhile let no one out of the hotel to-night while we are searching the grounds. I will station a guard at the door.”

Mrs. Calott revived somewhat under the doctor’s care and sat up, dabbing a handkerchief to her swollen features.

65

“Mrs. Calott,” the Chief turned impatiently to the woman, “have you any reason to suspect any one?”

“How can I tell who stole them? That’s your business to find out, isn’t it?” Mrs. Calott’s voice was low and sullen.

“Have you any enemies?” persisted the Chief.

Mrs. Calott’s green eyes wandered over the crowd and fixed themselves on Betty. A spiteful expression passed over the woman’s face. Her eyes narrowed to catlike slits.

“Is there any one in this room you have reason to suspect? Did you pass any of these people on the Boardwalk?”

Mrs. Calott moistened her lips like a cat ready to spring on a mouse.

“I passed those girls on the Boardwalk,” she said with satisfaction, and pointed an accusing finger at Betty and the two Guerin girls.

66

CHAPTER IX

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

A gasp went up from Betty Gordon and the Guerin sisters at Mrs. Calott's speech.

The Chief of Police turned quickly and looked at them.

"I'll have none of this," began Mr. Raymond angrily. "These girls are my guests. They are——"

"Paul," interposed Mrs. Raymond quietly. Her calm voice had the effect of water upon flame.

"I must question every one, Mr. Raymond," soothed the Chief of Police, "in order to get the necessary information. Now, young ladies, did you see this woman on the Boardwalk?"

"We did," answered Betty bravely.

"Did you notice the pearl necklace on; her throat at that time?"

"No, sir."

"Why not? They are very beautiful and unusual pearls, I understand."

Betty's heart was beating loudly with fright.

“We noticed the pearls at dinner, but Mrs. Calott wore a wrap on the Boardwalk and we did not notice them when she passed us.”

“Did she pass you at a distance or close?”

“Close,” acknowledged Betty faintly.

“How close?”

“So close that she brushed against me as she walked by,” said Betty honestly.

Mrs. Calott cleared her throat with spiteful satisfaction.

“And did you not observe the pearls?” questioned the Chief of Police, looking keenly at Betty.

“No, sir.”

“Then they were not on her throat when she passed you?”

“I could not say, I just did not notice.”

The officer turned to Mrs. Calott.

“Mrs. Calott, did you wear your wrap opened or closed?”

“Open!” exclaimed Mrs. Calott and licked her lips in quiet satisfaction.

The Chief of Police addressed Betty.

“Then why didn’t you notice the necklace at such close

range? Did you notice the necklace was gone?"

"No," said Betty, trying to still the trembling of her limbs. All eyes were turned in her direction. "I just did not notice anything except that she looked fatigued."

Mrs. Calott cast a furious glance in Betty's direction, and Betty realized, too late, that she had spoken unwisely.

68

Quite unexpectedly Mrs. Hiller spoke up. A spot of crimson burned on either cheek.

"Mrs. Calott is mistaken about her coat being open. Remarking that the sea breeze was chilly, she buttoned her coat to the throat before we reached these girls. Mrs. Calott did not unbutton her coat until we reached the hotel steps, where she discovered her loss."

"How is that?" questioned the Chief sharply of Mrs. Calott.

"That woman lies!" cried Mrs. Calott furiously.

Mrs. Hiller shrank back into her chair.

Ann Hall stepped forward.

"I was with the girls, but in the crowd I did not notice whether the woman wore her coat open or closed—who would?"

The author's voice was tinged with impatience. Betty could plainly see that her new friend was very indignant at the suspicion placed upon them.

The Chief of Police glanced impatiently around and drew Mr. Raymond aside.

“Now, Mr. Raymond,” Betty heard him say, “I know you are worried about this matter and I will do all I can to avoid publicity. The grounds will be searched and if the pearls are not found, I will even telegraph for a private detective if our detectives fail to find the pearls or some clue that leads to their recovery without delay. In the meantime, I must get the names of the girls who accompanied Mrs. Hall.”

69

“I’ll not—” began Paul Raymond furiously, but the Chief of Police cut in.

“Now, Mr. Raymond, this is an absolute necessity.

“So far, these girls seem to be the only ones in the hotel, with the exception of Mrs. Hall, who passed the woman on the Boardwalk. I must have their names. I am not accusing them, understand!”

“You’d better not! Why, man, don’t you know one of the girls is Richard Gordon’s niece? Richard Gordon owns this hotel of which I am manager. What would he think of me if I allowed his niece to be branded as a common thief? I——”

“Now, Mr. Raymond, don’t get excited. I am sure no suspicion will be directed toward Miss Gordon or her friends. But I am also sure they will not object to helping me gather the evidence.”

Paul Raymond gave the names reluctantly. He looked at Mrs. Calott as though he would gladly slay her.

The Chief of Police left the building, ordering some of his men to guard the door.

70

The patrons of the hotel began to gather in groups and discuss the loss of the necklace. Many a curious, speculative glance was cast in Betty's direction.

"Oh, Mrs. Raymond," whispered Norma, "do you think they suspect us?"

"Nonsense, Norma!" exclaimed Betty, but her own heart was beating hard with fright.

"I do not know," said Mrs. Raymond gravely. "She seems to be a very disagreeable woman. From what you have told me about your adventures with her this morning, I gather she would not be averse, merely in spite, to fastening suspicion upon you. Be careful, girls! Of course, nothing can be proved against you, so do not worry. I cannot tell you how I regret this."

"It is a shame that this should happen the first night of your stay with us!" exclaimed Ann Hall indignantly. "Come on, girls, I am going to take you up to bed. My room is across the hall from yours."

Far into the night, Betty Gordon lay wide-eyed and sleepless, staring out into the grounds where blue-coated figures with flashlights walked to and fro searching for the missing pearls.

In the adjoining room, the regular breathing of Norma and Alice at last gave proof that they were asleep, but still Betty lay, her thoughts pounding relentlessly.

71

“If Uncle Dick were here, he’d make it all come out right,” thought the loyal Betty. With that last thought she fell into a troubled sleep.

Betty was awakened the next morning by Norma and Alice, who had come into her bedroom and were tickling her under the chin.

“Wake up, lazybones!” they called. “We are going for a swim!”

Betty bounced out of bed. Her eyes were sparkling. In the middle of the room she paused uncertainly, suddenly remembering the events of the night before.

“Why, we can’t leave the hotel, can we?” she asked forlornly looking at her two friends.

“Oh, yes, silly,” returned Norma. “Mrs. Hall forbade us to think any more about it. She wants us to have a good time.”

“Mrs. Hall? When did you see her?”

Norma laughed, though a little forcedly.

“She came to our room. We have been up quite a while and had a morning chat with her. She said she was always free before nine o’clock in the morning and after four in the afternoon. The rest of the day she’s busy. Mrs. Raymond says Mrs. Hall locks herself up in her room and writes—but she’d die rather than admit it to any one but a few intimate friends.” Norma’s laugh rang out—a very genuine laugh this time. “Isn’t that queer of Mrs. Hall? She acts as if it were a crime to

be a celebrity!”

“I suppose,” said Alice thoughtfully, “that Mrs. Hall wishes above everything else to be loved as a woman first and an author second.”

72

“Did you say Mrs. Hall was in your room this morning?” Betty looked her surprise.

Norma laughed.

“Yes. This time you are the sleepy one instead of Alice.”

Betty looked from Norma to Alice and lowered her voice.

“Have they found the pearls, Alice?” she asked anxiously.

“No. Isn’t that strange? I felt sure that awful woman had lost them after Mrs. Hiller said what she did about the catch.”

“Do you suppose,” Norma glanced fearfully around and her voice sank to a whisper, “Mrs. Hiller could have taken them?”

“Norma!” exclaimed Alice. “That poor little kitten of a woman wouldn’t steal a saucer of milk!”

“Well, if they can’t be found, somebody took them, that’s certain!” declared Norma.

Alice walked over to the trunks. They had all been left in Betty’s room.

“Mrs. Hall said to try to forget about it! Here’s trying! A

73

private detective will be telegraphed for if the police don't turn up something in a few days, and I guess nothing will be accomplished until he arrives. Gracious! We haven't unpacked! I wonder if my bathing suit is at the bottom of my trunk?"

A mad scramble ensued, from which the girls came out into the hall, breathless but triumphant. They were found by Ann Hall, who looked more like a little brown bird than ever in her brown bathing suit and cap.

"Good morning, girls!" she exclaimed. "Isn't this a lovely morning for a dip? This is the time I like to go, when few people are on the beach."

"Betty looks like little Red Riding Hood in her red suit and cap," laughed Alice fondly.

Ann turned to Betty. Admiration shone in her brown eyes.

"She is lovely in that red outfit. So are you, Norma, in green and Alice in blue. How I love girls! Come, this elevator will take us down to the side entrance."

They were soon outside and ran down the terraced walks of the hotel grounds to the foot of the little hill and around to the sea, which beckoned invitingly.

"We can't check our capes," said Mrs. Hall. "The dressing rooms and booths are not open for another hour. I always leave mine in this coast-guard boat out here. It has never been bothered."

The girls threw their capes into the boat, and, with shouts of laughter, leaped into the surf and waded out into the Cove. Betty felt the first delicious chill and sense of shock as the water reached her chest. She struck boldly out into the Cove, swimming the overhand stroke. Many heads were bobbing here and there upon the water.

“My, I wish Bob was here,” thought Betty as she rose to meet a wave. “I can scarcely wait until he comes. What fun we’ll have!”

A half hour later, Ann Hall’s signal—a whistle agreed upon before—sounded shrilly. The girls swam reluctantly for shore.

Many people were now arriving on the beach. Procuring their capes, the little party walked arm in arm toward the hotel. When they reached the hotel and entered the upper hall which led to their rooms, who should they see approaching but Mrs. Calott and Mrs. Hiller.

“Oh, here comes the dragon!” shivered Norma. “She must room on our floor!”

Mrs. Calott bore down upon them. She raised her monocle, stared hard at Betty, and said importantly:

“Young lady, I wish to speak to you.”

“Yes?” said Betty, and despised herself for trembling.

“I wish to speak to these girls alone,” said Mrs. Calott haughtily. She turned her monocle on the author, who instantly withdrew.

“Now,” said Mrs. Calott lowering her voice, “I just want to say this. If you,” pointing a fat finger at Betty, “and your accomplices have my pearls and give them up now, I shall make no trouble for you. If you persist in keeping them until you are found out, I shall prosecute you to the fullest extent of the law!”

“Mrs. Calott!” gasped Mrs. Hiller. “Don’t insult the girls. They haven’t your pearls!”

“They were the only persons in the hotel who passed us,” sneered Mrs. Calott. “Who has them, then? Have you?” She cast a suspicious glance at Mrs. Hiller. “You wouldn’t want the pearls, but you’d like mighty well to have the money they’d bring.”

The little woman shrank back and began to tremble.

Betty was a high-spirited girl. Every drop of blood in her body was on fire with indignation.

She came close to Mrs. Calott and pointed a shaking finger in the woman’s fat face.

“Don’t dare accuse me of this!” she cried furiously. “If you do when the thief is found I’ll—I’ll sue you for slander!”

CHAPTER X

MRS. HILLER'S STORY

Later in the morning the three girls were unpacking their clothes and arranging them in the big closets when some one knocked timidly on Betty's door.

"Come in," called Betty, and opened the door.

Mrs. Hiller stood in the doorway.

"Why, how do you do, Mrs. Hiller!" Betty was somewhat taken back. "Come in."

Mrs. Hiller came into the room, casting fearful glances over her shoulder.

"I—I just wanted to talk with you a little while," she said nervously.

"We are glad to have you, Mrs. Hiller," returned Betty cordially.

"Yes, indeed," chorused Norma and Alice, coming forward.

Mrs. Hiller sank into a chair and looked at the three girls. Dressed in somber black, she was, indeed, a pathetic figure.

"You were all so kind to me yesterday that I did not wish you

to think me unappreciative,” she began.

Tears came into her gentle eyes and she wiped them away with a snowy handkerchief before she continued.

77

“Girls, I do not think for a moment that you know anything about Mrs. Calott’s pearls. She—” a red spot flamed on either cheek—“is impossible!”

“How can you stand her?” exclaimed the frank Norma.

Mrs. Hiller began to cry, great racking sobs that shook her slight frame.

“Oh, Willie! Willie! If you had only lived how different life would be! Oh, girls, he was so kind to me—my dear husband! Never an unkind word in all our life together. He took all the worries on his own shoulders and called me ‘Kittens.’ He was so good, so kind, so capable! I feel so lost without him! I waken in the night and reach for his dear head upon the pillow. My arms come back empty. Oh, Willie! Willie!”

A lump rose in Betty’s throat. The muscles ached in sympathy for the frail little woman. Mrs. Hiller’s dark hair was streaked with gray and she was probably sixty years old, reflected Betty, but her dead husband was “Willie” to her yet.

Alice Guerin’s eyes were full of tears.

Mrs. Hiller leaned forward and her voice sank to a whisper.

“Girls, I—I am afraid all the time!” she blurted out.

78

Betty looked her surprise.

“Of what are you afraid?” she demanded sturdily.

“Of her—of Mrs. Calott!” Mrs. Hiller glanced nervously around and said in a low voice. “There is something queer about our business relations and I catch her looking at me so strangely as—as if she hated me, and yet she and Sam have befriended me and offered me a home. I think sometimes I must be losing my mind.”

“Any one would lose his mind if he lived with that woman!” exclaimed Norma. “Why do you stay? I would leave her.”

“You know, I have no money,” said Mrs. Hiller, as if that settled the matter.

“Why don’t you—” But Betty checked the useless words. Mr. Hammon’s description of Mrs. Hiller flashed through her mind. “A kitten, a babe in the woods” were as well fitted to make their living as Mrs. Hiller.

“It is so queer,” continued Mrs. Hiller in a low voice. “Willie told me I would have plenty of money.” She began to cry again in a childish, heart-broken fashion.

“Your husband said you would have plenty of money and when he died you had none?” questioned Betty.

“I had my home, but I had to sell it to pay some of Willie’s debts, and there was nothing but a couple of hundred dollars left.”

“And your husband led you to believe you would have plenty of money?”

“He often said: ‘Kittens, you will never want for anything. Sam will look after all your business when I am gone and you will have plenty of money.’”

“Sam?” questioned Alice. “Who is he?”

“Willie’s business partner, Mr. Calott. You know, Willie had heart trouble for years. He worried about my future if he should be taken first.”

“What did Mr. Calott say about the money?” questioned Betty wonderingly.

Mrs. Hiller began to cry again.

“He said that poor Willie had invested heavily and unwisely in something just before his death and lost nearly all his money.”

Betty looked pityingly at Mrs. Hiller. Something strange there, she thought with sudden suspicion.

“Do you trust this Mr. Calott, Mrs. Hiller?” she asked hesitatingly.

“Yes. I have known Sam all my life. He was Willie’s best friend. After things turned out as they did, Sam insisted on giving me a home. He was very kind, but a lawyer—an old friend of Willie’s—was suspicious. He advised me, however, to live with them for a while. He—he thought I

might find out something to my advantage. But I cannot imagine Sam doing anything but right!

“You see Willie was ill for more than a year before his death—not confined to his bed but it threw all the active management on Sam—Mr. Calott. The doctor said that Willie was liable to drop off at any moment.” Mrs. Hiller began to cry again. “So my husband turned over everything he had to Mr. Calott to hold in trust for me. He—he trusted Mr. Calott like a brother. It—it seems impossible that Sam would wrong me!” sobbed Mrs. Hiller. “It is that awful woman, I am sure!”

Betty looked amazed.

“Your husband turned his fortune over to Mr. Calott?” she gasped. “Why did he do that?”

“In trust for me, you understand. Willie always wanted to make things easy for me. I had no head for business and he had implicit faith in Sam.”

“But surely there were papers to that effect?” exclaimed Betty. “Why, you know your husband wouldn’t turn over a fortune to Mr. Calott without a written agreement that it was held in trust for you!”

Mrs. Hiller began to cry again.

“That is the strange part!” she sobbed. “That is what the lawyer said. But they say there are no papers and no money. The Calotts say that when Willie was ill, he turned the money over to them to pay some heavy losses in oil. We have not been able to find any papers.”

“Were you and Mrs. Calott friends?” asked Betty wonderingly.

“No, dear. I did not know Mr. Calott’s second wife until I came to their home after Willie’s death. Sam remarried, after being a widower for many years. I think he must have married a very wealthy woman, for he seems so much more prosperous.”

“Didn’t you live in the same town with them?” asked Alice.

“No, dear,” replied Mrs. Hiller. “After Sam married, he bought a fine home in the town where his bride lived, thirty miles from the city. We lived out, too, but in the other direction.”

Ah, thought Betty, that explains a lot.

“Then you did not know the second Mrs. Calott until Mr. Calott brought you to live with them after your husband’s death?” she inquired.

“No, I had never seen her. I—I did not dream of her being—” Mrs. Hiller fought for self-control. “I—I do not think she wants me. I—I think she has me around because Sam insists. Oh, Willie! Willie!”

The frail little woman began to sob again in that pitifully childish, heartbroken way.

“Oh, dear Mrs. Hiller!” cried Betty, “don’t cry! I’m sure something can be done so you will not have to stay with that dreadful woman and be so unhappy. I—I will tell my Uncle

Dick about it. I am sure he can do something!”

“There! There!” Mrs. Hiller arose and wiped her eyes. She tried to smile, but it was a pathetic attempt. “I am a selfish old woman to put my troubles on your young shoulders. Forgive me, if you can!”

The girls gathered around the little woman and protested that they were glad she had confided in them.

“Now, this trouble about the pearls!” went on Mrs. Hiller. “It worries me so!” She gave a nervous glance around and lowered her voice. “I am so afraid she will accuse me of stealing them because I was with her!”

“I think she would much rather accuse me,” said Betty. “I get mad every time I think of what she said in the hall!”

“Be careful, dear!” Mrs. Hiller took Betty’s hand and they walked toward the door. “She is a dangerous woman. I am afraid—afraid for all of us!”

Worried and troubled, Mrs. Hiller left the room. Betty watched the pathetic figure scurry down the corridor. The little woman cast nervous, fearful glances to right and left.

The girls went back to their trunks. The work progressed slowly, for their thoughts were with Mrs. Hiller.

“Betty,” said Norma, lowering her voice, “do you suppose Mrs. Hiller could have taken the pearls?”

“Norma!” exclaimed Alice in a shocked voice. “That little woman wouldn’t steal a pin!”

“But she seemed so frightened and so anxious to clear us of blame! Perhaps she thinks she was cheated out of a fortune and it was her way to get back what rightfully belonged to her.”

“She didn’t say she was cheated, did she?” Alice’s voice was sharp. “How you do run on, Norma!”

“No, but I think all of us thought so, just the same!” persisted the frank Norma.

“Oh, Betty,” shivered Alice, “do you think Mrs. Calott could have us arrested on suspicion?”

At that moment there came a heavy knock on the bedroom door.

CHAPTER XI

THE MYSTERY DEEPENS

Betty Gordon looked at her two friends. Their faces whitened with fright.

“Pshaw! if we don’t take ourselves in hand, we’ll have a fine case of nerves,” exclaimed Betty. She strode across the room and flung open the door.

Mr. Raymond stood in the doorway, smoothing back his shaggy mop of straw-colored hair.

“How do you do, girls?” he smiled. “Mrs. Raymond sent me up before lunch to see how you were and to tell you not to be nervous about that little affair last night.”

“Oh, have they found the pearls?” questioned Norma excitedly.

“No. A thorough search of the grounds and Boardwalk revealed nothing whatever. But do not worry. Nothing further can be done until the private detective arrives from New York. In the meanwhile, have a good time and forget it!”

“Oh, Mr. Raymond!” said Alice softly, “do you think Mrs. Calott can arrest us on suspicion?” And the girls gave a spirited account of their meeting with Mrs. Calott in

the hall.

Mr. Raymond's fair skin turned red with anger.

"She'd better not try it! I'll not stand for it! I'll order her out!"

"Mr. Raymond goes on the warpath, too," thought Betty, with a touch of humor.

After Mr. Raymond left the girls began to prepare for lunch.

"Will Mrs. Hall go down to the dining room with us?" questioned Betty. Ann Hall had made firm friends of the three girls.

"No. She said she was busy from nine o'clock in the morning until four o'clock in the afternoon and always took lunch in her own room," returned Alice. "I think she writes on her books, then, but she would rather die than admit it."

Norma laughed and brushed her dark hair back from her eyes. "If I could write a book like 'Patty and the Peace Club,' I'd be out proclaiming it from the housetops!" she declared gayly.

Mrs. Raymond came to meet the girls as they entered the long dining room. "Ann Hall reports a splendid time in the ocean," she cried gayly. "And now you must forget everything unpleasant and have a good time. I have arranged for Ann to accompany you to the amusement park at four o'clock. I wish I could spend more time with you, but, as you see, my many duties forbid." She smiled at them and passed on.

Betty's eyes followed Mrs. Raymond as the slight,

exquisite figure moved gracefully through the crowd. She, like many others, admired the manager's wife very much.

"If here aren't my friends of yesterday!" exclaimed a deep, pleasant voice. "Come and sit down with a lonely old man and keep him company."

The girls looked in the direction of the voice and saw Mr. Hammon, the lawyer, sitting at a near-by table. "Here are three empty chairs waiting for three pretty girls!" He smiled in his kindly way, and arose pushing back the chairs.

"We shall be delighted!" exclaimed Betty. Then a sudden thought brought a roguish look to her lovely brown eyes. "Perhaps Mr. Hammon wishes to study us after last night," she observed slyly.

Mr. Hammon was so natural and kindly that the girls did not stand in awe of the great lawyer; indeed, they numbered him among their new friends.

"Ahem!" exclaimed Mr. Hammon smoothing back his gray hair as they were all seated. "Patricia and Paul tell me there was quite a little scene here last night! I missed a lot by being out of town." His eyes flashed from one girlish face to another. "I understand the distraught lady ate luncheon in her own room."

"Oh, Mr. Hammon!" exclaimed Alice, half laughing, half serious, after they had related Mrs. Calott's conversation in the hall, "if we get into any trouble with her, you'll stand by us and be our lawyer, won't you?"

“I certainly will,” replied Mr. Hammon cheerfully. “And we’ll make her case look like a house of cards when we get through. Now, girls,” as they began to study the menu, “I want you to try Orchard Cove crab-meat, it’s the finest in the state. Better than chicken, any day!”

Betty agreed with him, as her fork scraped the delicious white meat from the pink and rose-tinted shell.

“I’ll not be contented until I take you crabbing,” he commented. “It’s great sport!”

“How do you catch them?” inquired Betty, with interest. “Their shape makes me think of a huge spider!”

“Most of the tourists who come here go out on the Pier a little way and fish for crabs. Stout twine is baited with meat and lowered into the water. A long-handled, basket-shaped net is also lowered into the water at the same time. When Mr. Crab nibbles, up comes the baited cord until the net can be slipped under the greedy fellow, and there you are with your crab!”

“That shrimp salad we had last night was the most delicious I ever ate!” exclaimed Norma.

88

“Yes, Orchard Cove is noted for its sea foods,” said Mr. Hammon, with pride. “Apples are now ripening in the famous orchard. In a short time Orchard Cove apples will be shipped everywhere.”

“It would be blissful here if we did not have Mrs. Calott to worry us,” sighed Alice.

Betty nodded.

“I feel worried about Mrs. Hiller, too. Mr. Hammon, could any one cheat a person out of a fortune and cover up his tracks so that it was never known?”

Mr. Hammon smiled.

“It has been done very often. Why, Miss Betty?”

Betty repeated Mrs. Hiller’s story, and the eminent criminal lawyer listened with interest.

“I know very little about the law, but the two men should have had some kind of written agreement between them, should they not?” the girl added.

“Yes, indeed! Was there none?”

“It could not be found; and Mr. Calott claims that Mr. Hiller invested unwisely and lost heavily before his death and practically nothing of Mr. Hiller’s share remained for the widow.”

“Ahem!” Mr. Hammon looked thoughtful. “Was the business carried on under the partnership name or under Mr. Calott’s name?”

89

“I don’t know, but Mrs. Hiller said her husband had not been well for more than a year before his death and Mr. Calott carried on the active business.”

Mr. Hammon looked grave.

“It may bear looking into. If Mr. Calott carried on the business in his own name, he was in a position to cheat the widow. I am very much interested in her case and will do all I can.”

In a few moments the girls went thoughtfully back to their rooms. They were a little depressed and decided they would stay in their rooms until Ann Hall came to accompany them to the amusement park.

CHAPTER XII

BETTY MAKES A DISCOVERY

“Ship Ahoy! Are you ready to sail?”

Ann Hall stood in the doorway of Betty’s room looking as much like a little brown bird as ever in her brown dress and hat.

It was four o’clock in the afternoon and the three girls turned eagerly to greet their new friend.

“Aye, aye, sir!” they chorused gleefully.

A most delightful trip through the amusement park followed. The girls enjoyed the zoo and Alice had almost to be dragged away from Zumbo, the big, fat elephant.

“Alice loves to feed Zumbo peanuts and watch the big elephant’s trunk come down to the tiny peanuts, seize them, turn in a soft coil and adroitly reach the mouth,” laughed Norma.

Alice cared not at all for her sister’s banter but gave little shrieks of delighted laughter at each attempt.

The chattering monkeys, the lions, the long-necked giraffes, all came in for their share of attention.

Tiring of the animals, the little party decided to take a trip up in a Ferris Wheel. Betty was as eager-eyed and gay as a small child of six as she contemplated the big wheel.

At the foot of the Ferris Wheel Ann saw a group of young people that she knew, and introduced her new friends to them gayly. After a few minutes' chat they all went forward together to begin the round.

Betty, Alice and Ann found themselves in one compartment of the big wheel, Norma having entered another car with some of the young people to whom she and Alice and Betty had just been introduced.

When the car in which Betty rode reached the top of the great circle, it commanded a delightful view of Orchard Cove, including the wonderful bay, the three large hotels, and the immense orchards inland. The summer cottages were located to the west, and the Boardwalk stood out boldly with its numerous shops on the shoreward side.

“Look at the big Steel Pier, Alice!” exclaimed Betty, in delight. “Isn't it grand?”

“It's like a wonderful panorama,” answered Alice, her eyes drinking in every part of the wonderful view.

“It is fine, isn't it?” came from Ann.

“Yes; but being away up here makes me sort of dizzy,” and for a moment Alice placed her hands over her eyes.

While coming up to the top of the circle the car had stopped a

number of times, this being done to let passengers get off and on at the bottom of the wheel. Now, as the car did not move after several minutes had passed, Alice looked at Betty curiously.

“It’s funny we don’t start going down,” remarked Betty, in answer to this look.

“Oh, Mrs. Hall, what shall we do if we get stuck?” exclaimed Alice.

“I don’t think we’ll get stuck,” was the quiet reply.

“We might,” came from Betty, as the car still remained stationary high in the air. Once or twice it quivered a little, as if about to start, but that was all.

Finally, Ann Hall, too, began to grow nervous and did her best to look out over the grating of the car window in an effort to make out what was going on below. Betty, likewise, stretched and strained in an attempt to see what was taking place on the ground.

“Do be careful, Betty!” pleaded Alice, catching hold of her skirt.

“I shan’t fall out,” was the reply. “But something is wrong, all right. People seem to be running to the wheel from all directions.”

“Do you really think something is broken?” wailed Alice.

“I don’t know,” and Betty’s tone was sober. “If they can’t move the wheel, Mrs. Hall, how are we ever going to get down to the ground?” she questioned.

“We’ll have to climb down.”

“Could we do that? Is there a ladder?”

“I don’t see anything like a ladder around here,” Ann Hall answered, after a careful look around. “To tell the truth, I don’t know what we could do,” she went on.

Five minutes more passed, and, looking out over the grating again, Betty announced that the crowd below seemed to be larger than ever.

“Maybe the engine broke down,” she suggested.

“Can’t they turn this wheel by hand?” questioned Alice.

“I don’t suppose so. It’s too big,” answered Betty. “It’s run by electricity, you know, and I guess it takes a lot of juice even to budge it.” In this particular the girl was right. It required a large amount of electric power to keep the immense Ferris Wheel running.

Ten minutes more passed, and those in the car grew more nervous each instant. They wondered how those in the other cars were faring.

“I wish Norma was in here with us,” said Alice.

“So do I,” replied Betty. “She wouldn’t be any better off,

though,” she added.

“I know; but we’d be together, and that would be some comfort.”

“They must be closer to the ground than we are. Certainly, we are right on top, so they must be somewhere under us.”

Suddenly the car gave a little jerk as if it were going backward. Then came another jerk, and in a few seconds the huge Ferris Wheel was turning as steadily as ever.

“Hurrah, we’re off!” cried Betty.

“I hope we don’t stop until we get to the ground,” sighed Alice. “You’ll never catch me going in a Ferris Wheel again!” she added decisively.

But the car came to a halt several times before it reached the lower level, the reason for this being that the passengers in the cars ahead of Betty’s wanted to alight. Everybody on the wheel had had enough of riding for the present.

When Betty and Alice and Ann Hall finally got down on the ground again they found they had still to wait for the others of their party. When they were all together again there was a great chattering, all talking at once.

“What was the trouble?” questioned Norma after some of the excitement had died down.

“It was nothing but the electricity,” was Betty’s reply. “It just gave out, and when they turned on another switch

one of the fuses blew out. One of the workmen told us just before you landed.”

“Oh, what an experience!” was Norma’s exclamation. “I was afraid we’d have to stay up there all night!”

“Well, I don’t know what they could have done,” came from Ann Hall. “I don’t believe they could get ladders away up there,” she went on, looking upward at the immense wheel.

Still a little nervous, the young folks wandered around the amusement park. The two parties presently separated, and Ann Hall took Betty and her chums to a place where she treated them to ice-cream sodas. Then they began to joke over the matter, and finally felt much better.

“Come on, let’s have some fun!” cried Ann. “That’s what we’re here for!”

Later the little party went on the Thriller and lost all their handkerchiefs in their excitement. They giggled delightedly over the Crazy House, a house whose interior was made entirely of distorting mirrors. How awkward they felt! How they shrieked with laughter over their comical appearance. Ann Hall, small and birdlike, was shown in one mirror so grotesquely fat that she waddled like a duck. Ann laughed until the tears ran down her brown cheeks.

Tired but happy, the girls and Ann Hall returned to the Raymond House.

That night, before Betty retired, she wrote to Bob Henderson. After telling him all her adventures, she ended the letter by

saying:

“Now do not put off coming any longer, Bob, but bring Teddy and Tommy and come just as soon as you get this letter. It is delightful here and we could enjoy every minute if it were not for that awful woman, Mrs. Calott. I shall feel better when you are here to protect me from the ‘Dragon’—as Norma calls her.

“I am getting awfully sleepy, so good-night and come soon.

“Cordially yours,

BETTY.”

Several days passed in happy enjoyment of the Cove, but the mystery of the pearls still remained unsolved.

Betty thought quite often of Mrs. Hiller and wondered if it were possible that the frail little woman had been tempted to take the pearls. But the girl wisely kept her own council.

Betty had been questioned more fully by the Chief of Police, but she could add nothing to her previous testimony. Mrs. Calott talked daily with Mr. Raymond and the Chief, fuming and fretting because a private detective had not yet arrived.

97

Norma and Alice came into Betty’s room one morning and sank down upon the couch which commanded a view of the sea.

“Well, Bettykins, what have you planned to do this afternoon?” inquired Norma. “Alice and I are going shopping to get some souvenirs to send home. Won’t you come along with us?”

“I believe I’ll stay at home and write letters, if you’ll excuse me,” replied Betty slowly. “Uncle Dick will think I’m awful! I haven’t written a letter to him yet—just scratched off a card—and I want to write to Mrs. Bender, too.” The Benders had been intimate friends of Betty and Bob since the young people had lived at Bramble Farm.

“Well, write your letters and don’t let the Dragon get you while we are gone,” laughed Norma. “Give our love to the Benders, too.”

Alice looked at her friend affectionately.

“Betty, you look too sweet in that white jersey! You are the dearest thing!”

“Fie on you, old flatterer!” laughed Betty, but her face flushed with pleasure at praise from the gentle Alice.

That afternoon Norma and Alice left the hotel and the moments passed quickly for Betty. The letters written, she donned a red tie and her red sport hat and made her way out of the hotel. The day was sunny and warm, but tempered by a delightful sea breeze.

“I’ll not put my letters in the hotel mailbox, but take them to the post-office, then wander around a bit,” said Betty to herself.

Having deposited her letters in the post-office, she sauntered back along the Boardwalk, looking with interest at the gayly dressed throng.

On and on she walked, head erect, shoulders thrown back, and sniffing the sea breeze like a little terrier puppy.

Gradually the crowd began to thin, but on Betty pressed. Her mind was busy with the events of the past few days. But presently, growing tired, she saw a seat a short distance from the Boardwalk and went toward it.

“I’ll rest here a bit and enjoy the view, then I’ll return to the hotel,” thought Betty.

She sat down. A sense of peace enveloped her which was restful to her tired nerves. Very few people were in sight, and in this isolated spot the bathing beach was almost deserted. The tall pines stood, sentinel like, guarding the sea.

Suddenly, with a snapping and rending of boards, the seat gave way beneath Betty, and, catching the arm for support, she struggled to her feet.

“Well, you’re not much of a seat. Guess you were broken when I first sat down,” remarked Betty aloud, as she looked ruefully down at the broken seat. She changed to a better one near by.

How long she sat there turning over in her mind the events of the past few days, Betty could not tell. But her attention was presently attracted to the broken seat. Something was gleaming between the boards!

With a start of surprise, she arose and went over to the seat she had just vacated a few moments before. She bent down and again saw something shining. Her fingers sought the broken crevice where the arm and back of the seat were joined. They clung to something round and hard. With a thumping heart, Betty held on to it and pulled, bringing forth—a magnificent string of pearls!

Shaded, exquisite, perfect, they gleamed in the yellow sunlight—Mrs. Calott's thirty-thousand-dollar pearls!

CHAPTER XIII

BETTY'S DILEMMA

Betty Gordon quickly covered the necklace with her handkerchief and sank to the ground, overcome by the weight of her discovery.

“Mrs. Calott’s pearls, and she will insist I stole them!” exclaimed the girl, trembling with fright.

She gave a nervous glance around. No one was near. Two or three people straggled along the Boardwalk, but they were not looking in her direction.

“If I only had a witness,” thought Betty, and tried to still the nervous trembling of her limbs. A wild desire shook her to leave the jewels where she had found them.

“Coward! Coward!” she whispered between clenched teeth, and struggled to her feet.

“If I leave them here some one may steal them, and then I would always feel responsible for their loss. No, I must report I have discovered them, even though they jail me for it!”

With a nervous glance around, she dropped the handkerchief which contained the jewels into the upper part of her brassière.

Holding her hand to her bosom so the jewels would not drop and be lost, Betty made her way slowly to the Raymond House.

She started guiltily at every sound and imagined every one on the Boardwalk was looking at her with suspicion.

She had reached the steps of the hotel in safety when she heard running footsteps from behind.

“Betty! Betty! Wait a moment.” It was Alice and Norma returning from their shopping trip.

“Why, Betty Gordon! Are you sick? You’re as white as a sheet!” exclaimed Norma excitedly, as Betty turned her face toward her two chums.

Betty motioned them to silence and said in a strange, unnatural voice:

“Hush! Don’t say anything! A terrible thing has happened. Let us get to our rooms at once. I have something to tell you.”

Norma and Alice, with wondering glances, complied.

It seemed hours to the impatient Betty before George Washington Sims brought the elevator to their floor. The girls filed silently into their apartment and Betty shut the door.

With a nervous, furtive glance around, Betty reached into her bosom, drew forth the necklace of pearls, and held it out to her two friends.

It was a thing of beauty gleaming, exquisite, perfect!

“Oh!” screamed Norma, “that’s Mrs. Cal—,” but Alice clapped a firm hand over her sister’s mouth.

“Be still,” Alice ordered sternly, and her voice shook. She went quickly to the door, locked it, and then turned to her chum.

“Betty, where did you find it?” she questioned in a low voice. “Was any one with you when you found it?” Alice Guerin’s face was white with fright.

“No one!” groaned Betty. “And now Mrs. Calott will be sure to say I stole it, became frightened, and returned it!”

“Where did you find it, anyway?” Norma’s eyes were like stars. “Oh, Betty, isn’t it lovely?”

“It looks hateful to me now since it has gotten me in such a scrape!” Betty was almost in tears. “What shall I do?”

“Where did you find it, Betty?” Alice took the necklace and touched lingeringly the pink-tinted perfect jewels.

“I found it in a seat near the Boardwalk.”

Alice looked her astonishment.

“But it has been lost several days!” exclaimed Norma, “and they searched the grounds and the Boardwalk thoroughly. It just doesn’t seem possible it could still have been there!”

Betty sank into the nearest chair and took off her hat with trembling fingers.

“It was a broken seat, Norma, and the pearls were wedged under a broken board. I never would have discovered them, but I sat down on the seat and broke the board some more, making a larger opening.

“I did not discover them until I’d sat for quite a while on another seat near by. From where I sat the sun struck the pearls just right, and I was attracted by their gleam. When I investigated there were the pearls! Oh, why did it have to happen to me? That woman will have me arrested, I know! She will declare that I have had them all along!”

“Yes, and she’ll have us arrested as accomplices!” cried Norma excitedly. “You know what she said in the hall! Oh, dear, I’d almost be tempted to sneak into her room and leave them somewhere!”

“Norma!”

“Oh, don’t look so shocked, Alice! Of course I shan’t really attempt that!”

“No,” said Betty firmly. “I shall have to take the necklace to Mrs. Calott and tell her just how I found it. If she does not believe me, I shall have to take the consequences.”

“Don’t be frightened, Betty,” comforted Alice. “The broken seat will bear up your evidence and we can testify we saw you coming up the hotel steps with what later proved to be the necklace.”

“She won’t believe any of us,” said Norma gloomily.

Betty arose from her chair and looked at her two friends.

“Come on out on the Boardwalk,” she urged. “I would like to show you just where I found it.”

Alice nodded.

“But what will you do with the pearls, Betty?”

“I’ll hide them in the room somewhere. No—I’m afraid to do that, and I should show them at once to Mr. Raymond and Mrs. Calott.”

Betty looked searchingly around the room. Her eyes fell on an empty chocolate box. “Why not put them in this?”

“The very thing! Every one will think we have a box of chocolates!” and the irrepressible Norma could not resist a giggle.

In the foyer of the hotel, Betty turned to her two friends. She was holding the chocolate box tightly in her arms and her eyes were big and frightened.

“I think I had better find Mr. Raymond and have him go with us when we tell Mrs. Calott,” she whispered.

“Yes that would be best,” Alice assented.

Betty approached the desk and made inquiry.

“Mr. Raymond is not in the hotel,” stated the noncommittal clerk.

Betty turned away with a sinking heart.

“Mr. Raymond isn’t here, girls,” she said forlornly. “Come on, let’s go out and talk the matter over before we decide what to do. I hate to go to Mrs. Calott without Mr. Raymond—she will be so hateful! Perhaps by the time we come back to the hotel Mr. Raymond will be here.”

A few minutes later the three girls stood before the broken seat on the Boardwalk.

“I found the necklace right here,” explained Betty. “It was wedged in between the seat and the back, where the arm joins. The pearls could not have fallen in if the board had not been broken.”

“Mrs. Calott sat here in this seat and she lost the pearls herself!” declared Norma excitedly.

“It looks that way,” commented Alice slowly. “Betty, do you remember what Mrs. Hiller said about the clasp?”

“That it had slipped a little? Yes, I remember.”

“Let’s examine the clasp.”

“We-ell.” Betty looked cautiously around. “I’ll go over and sit down on that seat. You and Norma stand in front of me and serve as a screen.”

A moment later Betty raised the lid of the chocolate box and examined the clasp.

“See, girls,” she exclaimed in a low voice, “the clasp slips a little—just as Mrs. Hiller said! When the seat gave way beneath her, it was probably jerked from her neck.”

“The old pill!” exclaimed Norma indignantly. “She lost the necklace herself—a thirty-thousand-dollar necklace—then tried to make Mrs. Hiller out untruthful about the clasp!”

“Norma! Not so loud!” Alice cast a fearful glance around.

“Well,” said Betty in a low voice, “there’s nothing left for me to do but to meet the Dragon!”

The girls went slowly back to the hotel. Betty was so engrossed with her thoughts that she did not observe a large stone in her path until too late. She tripped and fell sprawling to the ground. The chocolate box hurtled through the air and spilled its lovely contents on the ground.

Mrs. Calott’s thirty-thousand-dollar necklace lay gleaming on the yellow sands!

With a low cry of dismay, Alice stooped and covered the gleaming jewels with her handkerchief. Norma rescued the box, and, with shaking fingers, Alice returned the necklace to it.

“Did any one see?” panted Betty, regaining her feet and looking fearfully around.

“I do not think so, but oh, Betty, be careful!”

107

Alice was almost in tears.

Holding the box tightly in her arms, Betty scurried for the hotel. Alice and Norma followed close at her heels.

If Betty had glanced back, she would have seen two men, one heavy set, the other tall and darkly handsome, come stealthily out from the spiling of the Boardwalk.

“Hot zippity zip! Did you see those jewels?”

The heavy-set man nodded his head slowly. The two men looked at each other and grinned knowingly.

“Looks pretty good to me!” said the heavy-set man.

“So it does,” answered the other in a low voice.

“We’d better investigate a little further, old boy. A pearl necklace like that is worth a heap of money. Better than a dozen pocketbooks or diamond pins. We must find out all about those girls and where they stay.”

108

CHAPTER XIV

BETTY'S DECISION

Betty and the two Guerin girls sped quickly toward the hotel.

"I'll see if Mr. Raymond has come and we'll tell Mrs. Calott at once," said Betty, hugging the box tightly against her breast and almost running in her haste.

"Isn't this just awful luck!" panted Norma fiercely. "How I detest that woman, and goodness knows what she'll do to us!"

"She can't do anything to you, honey," returned Betty breathlessly. "But what she'll do to me will be a-plenty, I know. If she gets too hot for me, I'll—I'll telegraph for Uncle Dick." Richard Gordon had always been to the orphan girl a safe haven in times of storm.

Alice gave her friend a quick anxious glance of sympathy.

"Don't worry, Betty, you have plenty of friends who will stand by you!"

Betty flashed Alice a grateful look and sped on.

"No," replied the clerk at the desk, when the girls came hastily into the hotel, "Mr. Raymond is not here."

"Where is he?" questioned Betty anxiously. Her heart sank at

the prospect of facing Mrs. Calott alone. "It is very important that I see him!"

The clerk unbent a little before Betty's evident distress.

"Mr. and Mrs. Raymond had a very urgent telegram calling them to New York. They left the hotel about two hours ago."

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed Betty. "What shall I do? Do—do you know if Mr. Hammon is in the hotel?"

"Mr. Hammon went on the river excursion to the Point this afternoon. He'll not return until ten o'clock to-night."

"And Mrs. Hall, please, is she in the hotel?"

"I think she went with the Raymonds." Then the clerk seemed to remember something. His face flushed scarlet. "I almost forgot! Mr. and Mrs. Raymond left a note for you, Miss Gordon."

The clerk fumbled around in the drawer and brought forth a dainty bit of monogrammed paper.

Betty reached for the note, thinking how much it reminded her of Patricia Raymond. It read:

110

"Dear Betty: Urgent business connected with the hotel has called us to New York. We are taking Ann with us, as she wished to consult her publisher about a new book she is writing.

“We shall be back home to-morrow evening, as we are making the trip by airplane. I am sorry this has occurred, Betty. We made every effort to find you after we received the telegram, but you were not in the hotel.

“It was necessary for us to depart at once in order to attend an important meeting in New York City. However, we shall soon be back and if anything unpleasant should occur while we are away, go to Mr. Hammon as you would to us.

“Lovingly, PATRICIA RAYMOND.”

Betty silently handed the note to Alice and turned again to the desk clerk.

“You say Mr. Hammon will not be back until ten o’clock to-night?” Betty sighed. She must face Mrs. Calott alone! Until that moment, Betty did not realize how much she had counted on the kindly gray-haired lawyer’s support. “Then will you please ring Mrs. Calott’s room and see if she is in the hotel?”

“Mrs. Calott, accompanied by Mrs. Hiller, took the river excursion to the Point,” said the desk clerk in a bored tone.

111

“Oh!” It was a sigh of vast relief. A few blessed hours of postponement before the sword fell! Betty turned to her two friends. The chocolate box was still tightly clutched to her bosom. “Well, we can’t do anything here. Let’s go to our room and talk things over?”

“And now what in the world are we going to do?” The girls had reached Betty’s room and closed the door. It was Alice who spoke. She looked at her chum anxiously.

“I don’t know, Alice.” Betty sat down in a chair. She held the box in her lap and looked at it in perplexity.

“Oh, Betty!” cried Norma excitedly, “it should be in a safety vault over night! Just think—thirty thousand dollars!”

“I know. But Mr. Hammon will be here by ten o’clock. I feel afraid to give the necklace to the desk clerk or the hotel hostess. I doubt if Mr. Raymond or Uncle Dick allows them the combination to the vault, and then what would they do with the necklace? I feel responsible for it until it is restored to Mrs. Calott. Oh, dear! aren’t we in a mix-up?”

“I think,” said Alice gravely, “that we had better wait and tell Mr. Hammon all about it. He is a lawyer and he would know the right thing to do.”

112

“But what shall we do with it?” cried Norma, wringing her hands. “Thirty thousand dollars! I’m afraid some one will steal it!”

“Hush, Norma!” exclaimed Alice, looking fearfully around. “Some one may hear you!”

“We’ll hide it in the room somewhere!” whispered Betty. “Alice, you go and lock the door to your room and I’ll lock this one so no one can come in and see us.”

This accomplished, the three conspirators met in the center of

Betty's room. They were pale but undaunted.

"Now, where shall we hide it?" whispered Norma.

"I'll wrap the necklace tightly in a handkerchief," said Betty, sitting down and suiting the action to her words, "leave it in this box and put the box in my suitcase. I'll lock the suitcase and put it in this closet. No one would possibly think of looking there, unless they knew we had it, and who knows?"

"And you must carry the key with you!" urged Norma nervously.

"Yes."

"Oh, suppose you should lose it?"

"I will wrap the key in a handkerchief, pin the handkerchief together with a safety pin, and pin it securely to the bosom of my brassière. How's that?"

113

"Fine!" chorused the two girls.

Betty went over to the closet and put the chocolate box in her suitcase and pushed the case far back into the closet. "Now," she said, coming out of the closet and closing the closet door, "that's done! Now I'll put the key on the dresser, and don't let me forget to get it when we dress for dinner."

"Oh, we must go right now and dress, Alice," exclaimed Norma. "Look how late it is getting."

Norma and Alice went into their own room.

After taking a bath, Betty slipped into clean clothes and a pretty evening dress.

“Now, I feel like a different person,” she remarked to her reflection in the mirror. “Why worry? Mrs. Calott will get her jewels back, and even if she does accuse you of stealing them, she can’t prove it!” Which, of course, was quite true.

Betty took the key from the dresser, put it in a handkerchief, pinned the handkerchief together and fastened it securely to the bosom of her brassière.

“All ready!” she called just as the gong sounded for dinner.

The hotel hostess, a conspicuous figure with her mass of copper-colored hair, stood in the doorway of the long dining room and greeted the three girls pleasantly as they entered the room.

114

“Girls, after dinner, a famous Washington band will give us a concert. Don’t miss it!” she called after them.

“We shall be glad to hear it,” returned Betty. The three girls sat down at their table.

“I’m going to have some more of that delicious shrimp salad,” declared Norma, studying the menu.

“I feel as if baked fish would taste good to-night, so I’ll take a fruit salad,” said Alice. “I should not mix the little fishes up too much!”

“I don’t know just what yet, but I’m going to have a big

dinner!” declared Betty firmly. “I tell you I’m about starved!”

After dinner the girls wandered out on the grounds until time for the concert. Betty loved band music, and the hours of the concert passed swiftly. During the rendition of the last number, Mrs. Calott and Mrs. Hiller, accompanied by Mr. Hammon, entered the Blue Room and sat down.

Betty whispered to Alice.

“This is the last number, I’m going up and get that box, so that I can give it to Mrs. Calott when the concert is over.”

“We’ll go with you,” returned Alice. The three girls slipped out through a near-by door.

“I’m so glad Mr. Hammon is here,” said Betty, opening her bedroom door. “He’ll stand by us, so I do not feel so much afraid.”

115

She pressed the electric switch and the bedroom was flooded with light. The three girls screamed at what the light revealed. Clothing was scattered everywhere about the room, contents of dresser drawers were emptied. The mattress lay on the floor, and everywhere was disorder and confusion.

With one accord, the girls looked toward the closet. The door stood open!

“Oh, look quick and see if the suitcase is gone!” screamed Norma.

Betty reached the closet first.

“The suitcase is here!” she cried in quick relief. But even as she spoke, she looked despairingly down into a great yawning hole where a sharp knife had cut into the leather. With trembling fingers, she picked up the chocolate box, which lay on the floor of the closet. Premonition turned her fingers to ice.

The box was empty!

CHAPTER XV

ACCUSED

“The pearls have been stolen!” Betty Gordon said dully. “The pearls have been stolen!” she repeated.

Norma began to wring her hands. Alice went over and closed the door which led into the hall.

Betty sank into a chair and looked at the empty box. She seemed oblivious of her two chums and numbed by the extent of the calamity which has befallen her.

Alice turned to her sister.

“Be still, Norma! We must keep this matter as quiet as possible. Stay here with Betty. I’m going to find Mr. Hammon!” So saying, she rushed from the room.

“Oh, Betty,” moaned Norma, “now Mrs. Calott will say you stole the pearls and we are your accomplices!”

Betty nodded. A mantle of despair had fallen upon her. The girls looked around the disordered room.

“Oh, who could have stolen them? Who could have stolen them?” exclaimed Norma.

“I don’t see how it could have happened,” said Betty,

looking with unbelieving eyes at the empty box.

Ten minutes passed, Betty in the meanwhile trying her best to get her wits together. Then the strident voice of Mrs. Calott was heard in the corridor.

“I never heard of such a patched-up tale! Of course, she has stolen them!”

The eyes of the two girls met.

“Oh, Betty,” said Norma, with a sob, “brace up! Don’t let her crush you!”

“I won’t,” promised Betty, and managed a wry smile.

The hotel hostess, Mrs. Calott, Mrs. Hiller, the desk clerk, Mr. Hammon and the Chief of Police entered the room and closed the door.

The desk clerk looked around in amazement.

“Whew!” he exclaimed as he stumbled over the mattress.

“There’s sure been a good search made here!”

“She did it herself!” screamed Mrs. Calott. “I demand the arrest of that girl!” She pointed a shaking finger at Betty.

“Be quiet, madam! Sit down, every one. There will be no arrests until questions are asked and answered and then only if the evidence warrants it.”

The Chief went over and examined Betty’s suitcase.

Mr. Hammon stooped over Betty.

“This is very unfortunate, but keep up your courage,” he said in a low voice. “There will be a way out!”

Betty looked up and tried to smile. She thought, with a quick flash of gratitude, how kind and dependable he was—like Uncle Dick!

The Chief of Police put down the suitcase and advanced toward Betty.

“And now we are ready to hear your story,” he said, not unpleasantly.

Betty arose, leaned against the chair to steady the trembling of her limbs, and told the story of how she had found the pearls and their subsequent loss in a simple and straightforward manner.

“Your story tallies with what this young lady”—he pointed to Alice—“told us downstairs.”

“It is all a hatched-up plot between them!” exclaimed Mrs. Calott. “It is false! False!”

Betty turned to the desk clerk.

“You remember when I was questioning you at the desk this afternoon?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Did you notice that I carried a chocolate candy box?”

“Yes, I did. I wondered why you clutched it so tightly to your breast.”

“Ah,” breathed the Chief, “another link in your evidence!”

119

Betty turned to the Chief.

“If you will go out on the Boardwalk, you will find the broken seat just as we told you.”

“All a cleverly hatched-up scheme between them to gain protection. That girl took my pearls, I tell you, became frightened, and thought up this story.”

“Why did she become frightened?” questioned the Chief.

“Because I accused her.”

“You have heard her story. The other two girls substantiate it. Have you any real reason other than suspicion for thinking Betty Gordon took your pearls?”

“Yes.”

“What is it?”

“She tried to take them once before!”

“That is not true!” Betty turned furiously on her feet and pointed a shaking finger at Mrs. Calott. “Don’t you dare tell

such a falsehood! I'll—I'll scratch your eyes out!"

"Betty, calm yourself!" Mr. Hammon laid a restraining hand on her arm.

The hotel hostess repressed a smile and put her arms around the girl's shaking figure.

"Just a moment," the voice of the Chief of Police intervened. "You say she tried to take them once before? Tell me about it."

120

Mrs. Calott leaned importantly forward and adjusted her monocle.

"It was coming over on the train. I shared the same coach with—these people." She pointed disdainfully at the three girls. "I was afraid to risk the jewels being shipped in my trunk, so I carried them with me in a small black bag."

Mrs. Calott's eyes narrowed to tiny slits. She pointed a fat finger at Betty.

"That girl tried to steal my bag!"

121

CHAPTER XVI

MRS. HILLER PROVES A FRIEND

If a thunderbolt had descended upon Betty, she could not have been more stunned. It had never entered her mind that Mrs. Calott carried anything but money in the little black bag.

“Oh, Chief, that’s not so!” cried Norma excitedly.

Mrs. Hiller looked quietly at the officer. Her pale face was flushed with indignation.

“Chief, this is a case of gross misrepresentation. I was on the train. As you know, there was a wreck, and in the confusion Mrs. Calott’s bag was accidentally caught in Betty Gordon’s luggage. The little black bag was returned to Mrs. Calott as soon as Betty Gordon observed it. Miss Gordon had no way of knowing what the bag contained. Nothing was disturbed. Mr. Hammon and the Guerin girls can testify that my statements are correct.”

Norma, Alice and Mr. Hammon nodded assent.

“You ingrate! How dare you say I misrepresent? You pale-faced little shrimp!” raged Mrs. Calott, jumping to her feet. “You——”

“Be seated, madam!” The Chief’s voice was stern. “It seems,

by the testimony, that the train episode was entirely accidental, and that no one but you knew exactly what was in the bag. It was returned to you intact,” he observed dryly.

Mrs. Calott sat down, glaring at Mrs. Hiller. If looks could slay, Mrs. Hiller would have passed out quickly. She turned to the Chief.

“Somehow that girl knew I had my pearls in that bag and she was determined to gain possession of that necklace. I saw her looking at it enviously during the dinner hour in the dining room. I passed her later on the Boardwalk, and I think she must have gained possession of them then. She became frightened when I accused her and she and her friends hatched up this plot to cover up their guilt. I demand her arrest! Where are my pearls, you little, brown-eyed sauce-box?”

The Chief held up his hand.

“Just a moment, there are a number of things I must know.” He turned to Betty. “You say the room was all right when you went down to dinner and this way”—he waved his hand around the disordered apartment—“when you returned a few moments ago. If any one can be found who entered your room between the time you left and the time the burglars came and found the room in order, that will establish an alibi for you.”

“I don’t know who would come to our rooms.” Betty was hopeless. “Mr. and Mrs. Raymond and Mrs. Hall might, but they have gone to New York.”

123

“Who brought up the ice-water?” asked Mr. Hammon. His eyes were thoughtful.

The desk clerk jumped to his feet.

“By cracky! Why didn’t I think of that before? It is our custom to send the maids around at seven o’clock to each room with ice-water. I’ll interview the maids.”

The Chief of Police nodded his head and the clerk left the room. In a few moments the desk clerk was back, followed by a trim, white-clad little maid.

The clerk looked elated.

“This girl brought ice-water here at seven o’clock,” he stated.

The Chief questioned the maid.

“You brought ice-water to these two rooms at seven o’clock, did you?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Was the room in its present condition?”

The maid’s eyes grew round with surprise.

“No, sir; it was in perfect order,” she answered promptly.

Betty gave a sigh of thankfulness.

“That’s all. You may go.” The Chief waved the maid away.

“Girl,” demanded Mrs. Calott sternly, “have you been hired to

tell a falsehood?”

The maid looked startled. She left the room hurriedly without replying to the question.

“That establishes, for a certainty, that none of these three girls is responsible for this upheaval,” went on the Chief.

“They could have hired some one to do it,” said Mrs. Calott sullenly. “I have every reason to think the girls stole my pearls.”

Mrs. Hiller faced the Chief of Police. Her face was flushed with indignation.

“She has no reason whatever to think so,” she declared firmly. “I am satisfied the girls are telling the truth. Mrs. Calott and I sat down on a bench near the end of the Boardwalk. It gave way under Mrs. Calott’s weight. We——”

“You—you——” Mrs. Calott choked with rage. Any reference to her size had much the same effect on Mrs. Calott as waving a red rag in the face of a bull.

“We returned to the hotel,” Mrs. Hiller resumed. “On the steps of the hotel Mrs. Calott noticed her loss. As I said before, the clasp had slipped a little and I am satisfied that Mrs. Calott lost the necklace.”

Betty’s heart went out to the timid little woman who had mustered up enough courage to speak in her defense.

For a moment Mrs. Calott was speechless with rage.

“Now I understand your friendship for these girls!” she cried, trembling with fury. “Mrs. Hiller, you are in with them to share in the thirty thousand dollars!”

“No, Mrs. Calott,” said Mrs. Hiller, with unexpected pluck and pride. “I do not want your money. But I have every reason to believe that you have wanted and taken mine.”

Mrs. Calott’s jaw dropped. Her mouth flew open. She gave Mrs. Hiller a look in which astonishment and fear were strangely mingled. She was plainly disconcerted by the little woman’s remarks.

“What do you mean?” she stammered.

“That you have gained by trickery my husband’s fortune. I have a lawyer looking into the matter. I——”

Mrs. Calott’s face grew purple with rage. She arose and pointed a shaking finger at the door.

“Get out!” she screamed. “Get out of the hotel this minute! I’m through with you. You pauper! You ingrate!”

CHAPTER XVII

MR. HAMMON TAKES A HAND

Mr. Hammon's eyes flashed. He quickly crossed the room and stood by Mrs. Hiller's chair.

“No one leaves this room, madam. The Chief of Police made that plain, and we must have order.”

There were a few more questions asked, then the Chief said slowly.

“Well, the jewels have been stolen, but these girls tell a straightforward story, and there is not enough evidence as yet for an arrest. Nothing can be done but await developments. We'll have a private detective here to-morrow. In the meanwhile, I will do all I can, madam, to recover your jewels.”

“And you are not going to arrest this girl?”

“No, madam. I do not consider there is enough evidence of guilt.”

“Where is there justice in the law? My pearls! My beautiful pearls! And this is all your fault!” Mrs. Calott turned towards Mrs. Hiller with flashing eyes. “'Tis you who opposed me, you miserable little mushroom! Biasing their minds with your

false tales. Get out of here! Get out of the hotel at once! I wash my hands of you!”

The Chief took Mrs. Calott by the arm and led her forcibly from the room. The hotel hostess came and laid a kindly hand on Mrs. Hiller’s arm.

127

“Don’t worry. I shall be glad to furnish you a room until this trouble blows over.”

“Yes,” said Mr. Hammon anxiously, “under no circumstances must you let her drive you from the hotel.”

“Oh, what have I done!” moaned Mrs. Hiller, looking like a frightened kitten. “What have I done!”

“Nothing but what was right,” said Alice Guerin sympathetically. “Why can’t she stay with us girls? There are two beds in our room, and Norma and I always sleep together. We shall be glad to have you, Mrs. Hiller.”

“I think that would be a fine arrangement,” said the hotel hostess. Mr. Hammon nodded assent.

“I am sorry,” said the clerk, “but the Chief said the room would have to stay just as it is until the detective arrives. But I can make arrangements for another suite where all of you can be together. Just stay here until I can make arrangements,” he added, and left the room.

Mr. Hammon took Betty’s hand in his and patted it affectionately.

128

“You are a plucky girl, Betty Gordon. You’re your Uncle Dick’s girl! And all this has been very unfortunate. But we will find the thief and you will be cleared of all suspicion. And now—” he turned to Mrs. Hiller—“you must not worry either. As I told you this afternoon, I will look thoroughly into your business affairs, for I feel sure there’s something wrong, and you may recover a part of your inheritance.”

“You are so kind, so kind!” murmured the little woman in black.

“Oh, Mr. Hammon,” said Betty nervously, “will you send a telegram to Uncle Dick? Tell him to come at once.”

“Certainly, Betty. I shall be glad to. Where shall I send it?”

“He was to have been in Chicago to-day,” and Betty gave the address of the hotel.

Mr. Hammon left the room.

“I feel as if I were intruding on you girls.” Mrs. Hiller looked worriedly from one girl to another.

“No indeed,” chorused the three girls.

“Where would we be if you had not come to our defense?” questioned Betty warmly, and took the sweet little woman in her arms. “Oh, Mrs. Hiller, do you think Mrs. Calott will succeed in having me arrested? I wish Uncle Dick was here!”

“She will if she can,” answered Mrs. Hiller. “But, you see, they could not break down your testimony in any

way. Until they can, you will not be arrested.”

“Oh,” moaned Norma, “I’m scared to death! I’m afraid they’ll arrest the whole caboodle of us!”

Some time went by during which the girls fidgeted about nervously, and waited for the summons to go to the new suite.

An urgent knock presently sounded on the door. The faces of the three girls went white. Mrs. Hiller answered the door.

The Chief of Police entered the room, accompanied by a tall, keen-eyed man in a black suit.

“Well, girls,” said the Chief. “We are in luck. Mr. Stone, the detective, was here at the Hoffer House, so my telegram was relayed to him there and he answered in person. I brought him up right away to get a view of the room before any changes were made.” The Chief made the introduction in rather clumsy fashion and Betty was aware of the keen, penetrating glance of Mr. Stone.

“Well, young ladies!” he exclaimed, looking around the room, “is this the way you keep house? I don’t think I can recommend you to any nice boys I know.”

130

The little joke relieved the tension and the detective went on kindly!

“The Chief has told me the story, as you told it to him. It is very late and I will not question you until morning, but I must examine the room to-night and verify the facts. Then we will cover the ground thoroughly in the morning.”

As he walked around the room Betty noticed his keen eyes were taking in every detail. The pitcher of water—the traveling bag—everything. He walked into the Guerin girls' room. It was in disorder also. He looked for finger prints on chairs and tables, but held his own counsel and said nothing.

“Now—” he turned to the Chief—“we will place the mattress back on the beds so the girls can take their rest. I want all the rest of the room left just the way it is until the morning. It is not necessary to give them other rooms.”

After they were gone four frightened, disheartened people crept silently to bed.

Betty could not sleep. Once she got out of bed and peeped into the adjoining room. The regular breathing of Alice and Norma reassured her.

Mrs. Hiller's bed was near a window, and Betty could plainly see her pathetic little figure curled like a kitten asleep.

131

The young girl felt a great loneliness and aching misery of spirit. She longed for the familiar faces of Bob and her Uncle Dick. She could not refrain from shedding a few quiet tears upon the snowy pillow. But at last sleep brought much needed rest and release from her troubles.

The next morning the girls and Mrs. Hiller had scarcely returned from their breakfast when the detective and the Chief of Police knocked for entrance. Mrs. Calott was called in, also the desk clerk, Mr. Hammon, and the hotel hostess.

Betty and all concerned were questioned as closely as before.

After the ground had been thoroughly covered and the detective arose to go, Mrs. Calott exclaimed:

“Now that you have heard all the facts, I demand you arrest this girl and her accomplices.”

“Well, madam, the evidence is not yet sufficient,” said the detective. “If the pearls are recovered and Miss Gordon’s story is proved true, do you know that you are liable to a big damage suit?”

“Are you threatening me?” demanded the woman.

“I am merely stating the law, madam,” returned the detective dryly. “It applies to you as well as any one.”

132

Mrs. Calott seemed crestfallen and somewhat taken aback. A look of fear crept into her catlike eyes.

The detective and the Chief promised to do all in their power to bring the thief to justice.

Every one departed. The girls and Mrs. Hiller were left alone. The maid came in to straighten up the rooms. The lives of the girls began to take on a more normal outlook.

“The hotel hostess tells me that Henry Barry is to play ‘The Sunshine Girl’ this afternoon,” called Betty in to her two friends. “What do you say? Shall we go?”

“Oh, let’s do,” returned Norma, coming in to Betty’s room

and sinking down into an easy-chair. “Where is it, Betty?”

“At the big theater on the Pier. I’d love to go and get our minds off this awful mess!”

Norma’s eyes sparkled.

“All right, we’ll do that very thing. I’m so glad that we were not arrested that I feel like singing hallelujah. ‘The Sunshine Girl’ for me!”

“I believe,” said Betty slowly, “I should have given the necklace to the desk clerk. I wish I had now.”

“And probably it would have been stolen from him. Don’t think about it. Let’s think of seeing that play this afternoon. Of course,” Norma lowered her voice, “we’ll take Mrs. Hiller.”

133

“Oh, yes. Insist on her going. I feel so sorry for the poor woman, Norma!”

However, the girls could not prevail on Mrs. Hiller to accompany them.

The afternoon passed quickly in the big theater. The girls were delighted with the play and the acting. It was late in the afternoon when they returned to the hotel.

“Betty,” said Norma, “all the time the domineering aunt of the Sunshine Girl was playing, I thought of Mrs. Calott.”

Betty laughed.

“I wouldn’t doubt but that she was another Mrs. Knowall, all right!”

The three girls went up the steps of the hotel and into the foyer.

“I’m going to see if I have a letter,” and Betty stepped over to the desk.

She came back waving one in the air. Her face was aglow with happiness.

“I’ve a letter from Bob. He says,” she cried gayly, “that he and the Tucker twins will be here on the morning train.”

CHAPTER XVIII

BOB IS EXPECTED

That evening as Betty and her friends in the adjoining room were preparing for bed, Betty heard a rush in the hall followed by an impatient knock upon her bedroom door. In answer to her "Come in," Mrs. Hall rushed into the room and took Betty in her arms.

"We have just got back!" she cried breathlessly. "We've heard about the mess that awful woman has succeeded in getting you into. You poor child! How I wish I had been here! Then it would never have happened! I could have seen to it that the necklace was locked in the vault for you. Oh, dear! I shall never forgive myself."

The author emphasized each sentence by giving Betty little pats of sympathy. Her face was full of concern.

Betty could not refrain from smiling at Ann Hall's ardent championship of her cause and was drawn more closely than ever to her new friend.

"Did Mr. and Mrs. Raymond return?" she asked anxiously.

"Yes, they are coming up, but I couldn't wait for them. I was consumed with a desire to get here first."

Ann Hall jerked her small head around and, as Norma and Alice, followed by Mrs. Hiller, stepped from the adjoining room, exclaimed:

“Oh, here come the rest of my girls!” Ann embraced the girls and shook hands with the older woman warmly.

Just at that moment, Mr. and Mrs. Raymond appeared in the doorway. Mrs. Raymond was as calm and as well poised as usual. Well groomed, exquisite, perfect, she had all the appearance of just stepping from a beauty parlor instead of from an airplane. Only her eyes betrayed her.

“Betty, this is indeed an unfortunate thing that occurred in our absence!” With a graceful gesture, Mrs. Raymond held out her hand, and as Betty’s fingers touched hers, the young girl was as convinced of her sincerity as she had been of Ann Hall’s.

Mr. Raymond came forward, and for a while there were many questions asked and answered. Mr. and Mrs. Raymond shook hands warmly with Mrs. Hiller and thanked her for the action she had taken.

“You see, Mrs. Hiller,” Mr. Raymond concluded, “if you had allowed Mrs. Calott to misrepresent—and she seems a very unscrupulous woman—it would have gone hard with Betty and the girls. We cannot thank you enough!”

136

“It was only what I should have done,” the gentle woman remonstrated. “It was the simple truth. If—if I can be of any service to you in the hotel, I shall be glad——”

“Mrs. Hiller, consider yourself an honored guest in this hotel. I have heard your story from Mr. Hammon. You could not have your affairs in better hands than in his. He is convinced that you have been defrauded, but as yet he has, of course, no proof. In the meantime, it is absolutely imperative that you stay here where we can consult you, and it is a pleasure to have you.”

Mrs. Hiller murmured her thanks.

“I can’t imagine Sam’s wronging me. I—whatever comes up, I do not want Sam to suffer. If he has wronged me, I am sure that woman is back of it. She is quite unscrupulous!”

“And now, Betty,” Mr. Raymond said, “you are not to worry either. The Chief telegraphed for McRafferty, the famous Irish detective, but he was working on a case that would take him two weeks. Headquarters sent word to Stone, who was already here, to substitute until McRafferty should arrive.

“We know very little about him, but he can at least gather the evidence and have that ready for McRafferty. And if we have Mr. Hammon on the trail—he is about as good as a detective like McRafferty—the thief will be found, I am sure, and we’ll do all we can to make the rest of your stay with us a happy one.”

137

“Oh, Mr. Raymond,” exclaimed Betty, with sparkling eyes, “it is lovely here, and we have enjoyed our visit so much in spite of the worry!”

“Well, well! You can’t squelch the spirit of normal youth!” Mr. Raymond laughed. “They tell me Bob Henderson and his

friends are coming to-morrow; so there'll be plenty of good times around here in spite of everything!"

"Come, Paul, it is late and I know the girls wish to meet that early train," said Mrs. Raymond. "Rastus will drive you to the station and I'll have the desk clerk ring your room to awaken you in the morning."

Ann Hall looked at Betty and laughed.

"Thanks, Patricia, but it is not at all necessary to leave word at the desk. The girls and I are perfect water fowls, and we take our dip in the ocean every morning while you are taking your beauty nap."

"Now, Ann," laughed Mrs. Raymond, "don't make me out so useless!"

"You are the most capable woman I know," replied the author sincerely. "How about our usual morning dip, girls?"

"Oh, we'd love it!" chorused the three girls.

"Then we'd be sure to meet the train on time," added Betty.

138

"Well, good night, everybody! See you in the morning!" cried Ann Hall gayly, and left the room, followed by Mr. and Mrs. Raymond.

"Don't let me oversleep, Mrs. Hall!" called Betty after Ann's retreating figure.

“I’ll pound on your door,” promised Ann gayly.

Betty turned to Mrs. Hiller and the Guerin girls with a sigh of relief.

“Oh I feel so much happier now that they have returned!” she exclaimed. “I do not dread Mrs. Calott quite so much.”

Mrs. Hiller put her arms around Betty and patted her shoulder.

“Go to bed, dear, or you will be worn out in the morning.”

But Betty was awake bright and early the next day. Thoughts of Bob made her bounce out of bed and consult her wrist watch. Plenty of time! She tiptoed to the adjoining room. Mrs. Hiller was fast asleep, but Alice and Norma, clad in their bathing suits, were sitting on the bed.

The two girls motioned Betty to silence and slipped over toward the door and entered Betty’s room.

“Let’s not awaken Mrs. Hiller,” whispered Alice. “I—I heard her crying for a long time last night. It was terrible!”

“Poor thing!” whispered Betty. “She misses her husband so! Come and sit down while I dress. Norma, perhaps you had better knock on Mrs. Hall’s door. I am afraid she has overslept.”

139

Norma hesitated.

“Wait a minute until I get into my bathing suit and I’ll go with you,” laughed Betty. “I’m afraid Mrs. Calott will get you!”

The girls knocked timidly on Ann Hall's door. No response. They were about to knock again when the voice of the author cried out full and strong.

“Don't dare come to me and expect me to uphold you. Take your miserable rags and get out!”

The girls looked at one another and their eyes grew round with amazement.

“Who is in there?” whispered Alice.

No answer to Ann Hall's outbreak. The only thing the girls could hear was the restless pacing of their friend's feet as she walked back and forth across the floor.

“Is she talking to us?” gasped Betty.

Norma knocked loudly on the door. Again Ann's voice came clearly.

“The grief stricken woman replied with dignity: I——”

“Oh, she is composing her book!” whispered Norma, and began to giggle softly.

Ann Hall, clad in a bathing suit, threw open the door and looked unseeingly at the three girls. Her face had the look of a sleep walker. “I do not care for— Oh, if it isn't my blessed girls!” Her gay laugh rang out. “And here I have kept you waiting while the Muse descended on me at this unheard-of hour, and I was dead to the world!”

The little episode, so characteristic of Ann Hall, lightened the girls' heavy spirits and they made their way gayly to the beach.

“We mustn't stay in too long, girls,” warned Betty as she plunged into the blue surf. “I don't want to miss Bob and the boys!”

“I hope a crab won't bite me,” shivered Alice. “I dreamed of one biting my toe. I know it will happen some day!”

It was a beautiful morning, and at that early hour few people were on the beach. Betty swam for a while, then, resting on her back and engrossed in her thoughts, she began to float with the tide.

Suddenly she gave a scream of fright. Something had hold of her arm.

“Oh, a crab's got me!” she yelled.

CHAPTER XIX

A DISCOVERY

“Since when have I become a crab?” demanded a well known voice, and Bob Henderson’s head made its appearance above the water at her side.

“Bob!” shouted Betty joyously. “How in the world did you get here?”

“Last night on the midnight train,” and Bob grinned in delight. “Mr. Raymond told us that you girls would be on the beach early, so we boys thought it would be great fun to surprise you!”

“You surprised me all right. I surely thought a crab had me. Oh, Bob, but I’m glad you’ve come! I am in terrible trouble!”

“Mr. Raymond told me.” Bob Henderson’s mouth set in grim lines. “Let’s make for that skiff over there. We can sit in it and talk.”

Betty began to swim toward shore.

“All right. But where are Tommy and Teddy?”

“Out in the briny deep somewhere with Norma and Alice. Come! I want to talk with you alone.”

They reached the skiff. Bob drew the dripping Betty inside.

“Now tell me all about it,” he demanded when they were seated in the light skiff.

Betty told her story. Bob’s face grew darker as the tale progressed and the grim lines about his young mouth grew taut.

“Oh, Bob,” concluded Betty, “do you think she will succeed in getting me arrested?”

“She had just better not!” exploded Bob. Then he reached over and patted Betty’s hand. “Poor old Betsey! Buck up! ‘Murder will out.’ They’ll find the thief, yet, you just see!”

“Whoopee! What you two holding a confab about?” Bob’s chums at Salsette Military Academy, the Tucker twins, accompanied by Norma and Alice Guerin, pulled up to the side of the boat. They stood in water waist deep and looked at Betty.

“Well, Betty,” grinned Tommy Tucker, “I hear you have developed into a real villainess since I saw you last.”

“Hello, there, Tommy and Teddy! Welcome to Orchard Cove! Don’t you joke about my predicament. I may land behind prison bars yet!” Betty was half laughing, half serious.

“We’ll cut the bars, dear comrade,” promised Teddy Tucker.

Ann Hall’s whistle rang out and Betty saw her pulling for shore.

“That’s a jolly woman!” exclaimed Tommy Tucker admiringly. “I like her!”

“Every one does! You have met her, then?” inquired Betty.

“Yes, a few minutes ago,” came from Teddy.

“Jerusalem crickets! How that woman can swim!” Tommy was watching Ann’s brown-capped head as it approached through the water. “Gee! she’s using the long crawl! How I wish she would teach it to me!”

“Last one in!” Ann called gayly as she waded toward them.

“Why, Mrs. Hall, you are just like a young girl!” exclaimed Tommy, who was not noted for tact.

“Who says I’m not young?” demanded the writer sternly.

Tommy was covered with confusion. He began to stammer when Ann’s gay laugh rang out.

“No apologies, young man! Who is it that has said, ‘In the heart is eternal youth’?”

“Search me!” exclaimed Tommy inelegantly. “But, oh, boy! how I’d like you to teach me that particular crawl!”

“I’ll do it!” promised Ann Hall, and thereby won Tommy Tucker’s undying friendship.

“Well, let’s get up to the Raymond House and change our wet togs,” suggested Bob. “I, for one, am eager to

get on the trail of the thieves! May we come to your rooms, Betty, and look around?”

“Of course, Bob; but I don’t think you’ll find anything. It’s been thoroughly gone over.”

“Gee! A regular detective mystery!” exclaimed Bob. “But they’ve never had Bob Henderson, world-famed detective, on their track!” Bob struck his chest and assumed a dramatic pose.

“I am Mrs. Pryde Calott!” cried Norma slyly, and looked through an imaginary monocle. The girls giggled appreciatively.

Half an hour later, Bob and the Tucker twins knocked on Betty’s door. The girls had gathered in Betty’s room, for Mrs. Hiller was still asleep in the adjoining room.

“We’d like to look around a little before breakfast—” Bob broke off. “Gee, what a pleasant room!” he exclaimed.

Tommy and Teddy Tucker followed Bob. The twins were direct opposites, Tommy dark, Teddy fair.

Bob Henderson went over to the windows which faced the Cove. “A bully view of the sea!” he exclaimed, then turned eagerly to Betty.

“How do they think the thieves entered?” he asked.

“I—I don’t know,” replied Betty. “But I noticed that the detective paid very little attention to the windows but

examined my door, which opens on the corridor.”

Bob went out to the door with Tommy and Teddy close at his heels.

“Here are some finger marks all right. No, don’t touch them, Tommy.”

The girls crowded around.

“But perhaps they’re not the thief’s,” said Alice quietly. “They may or they may not be.”

Bob’s keen eyes were examining the room.

“Yes, that’s true. What’s that piece of paper under the bed?” he demanded suddenly. “It’s sticking out from a shoe,” he continued, and stooped to get it. “A cash bill for ties from the Wentworth Department Store, Grubville,” he said. “Who does this belong to?”

The girls shook their heads and gathered around Bob to look at the paper.

“Oh, do you suppose it could have belonged to the thieves?” exclaimed Betty excitedly. “It isn’t mine!”

“Nor mine,” added Alice and Norma.

“Of course we can’t tell now, but I think it will bear keeping. I can give it to the detective, and if it belongs to the thieves it may help to trace them.”

“Hurrah, Detective Henderson!” cried Teddy. “Perhaps you have hit the trail.”

“It is very doubtful,” said Bob thoughtfully. “A good many people have been in here, and some one could have dropped it from his pocket. Then some one else, in walking by, could easily have knocked it under the bed, and even into the shoe. Where is the suitcase they cut open?”

146

“The detective took that,” Betty replied. “I suppose he wished to keep it for evidence. Oh, Bob, what do you think Mrs. Calott will do to me? Do you think she will sue Uncle Dick for the price of the pearls?”

Bob’s face was grave.

“I imagine she’ll try it if she can’t prove you out a thief.”

“Oh, Bob,” groaned Betty, “I’ve gotten all of you into so much trouble!” Tears stood in her brown eyes.

“Buck up, Betty! You did the very best you knew how. But some one must have known that you had the jewels or your room would never have been searched.”

“That’s the queer part about it,” breathed Norma. “Somebody besides ourselves knew Betty had found them!”

“I don’t know who it could be unless some one was listening in the hall,” said Betty tearfully. “Oh, dear! I wish Uncle Dick was here!”

“Didn’t you say you’d telegraphed for him?” Bob looked

anxiously over at Betty.

“Yes. I think he’ll get here by to-morrow.”

“Then forget it! It was proved you were at dinner when the theft occurred.”

147

“But, oh, Bob, if Uncle Dick has to lose thirty thousand dollars all because of me!” For the first time Betty broke down utterly and cried.

“Jerusalem crickets! do you need my handkerchief?” asked Tommy Tucker uncomfortably, taking out an unused white one.

Bob coughed, grew red in the face, and fled into the bathroom, saying he wanted a drink.

Betty laughed through her tears at Tommy’s distress.

“Come on back, Bob!” yelled Teddy. “She’s laughing now.”

Bob came out of the bathroom with a glass of water in his hand.

“That’s better,” he said encouragingly. Bob had the healthy boy’s dread of tears.

“Don’t want all this water, after all. Guess I’ll water your fern. It’s a beauty, Betty!” Bob went over to the window and separated the leaves of the immense fern.

But the fern was never watered by Bob.

“What’s this?” he exclaimed sharply, and drew forth a small pasteboard box. “Since when have you begun to smoke cigarettes, Betty?”

Betty’s eyes flashed.

“I don’t smoke cigarettes, and you know it, Bob Henderson!”

“This is a cigarette box, all right!”

148

“The thieves!” exclaimed Tommy, rushing forward. “I’ll bet my hat, Bob!”

“Murder will out,” said Teddy. “They’ve dropped this.”

“And even the wily Mr. Stone didn’t find it!” exclaimed Tommy. “You’ve hit the trail this time, Bob, old boy!”

The young people gathered around Bob to examine the box.

“The loss of the box is evidently accidental, for see here is a cigarette in it.” Bob drew out the cigarette and held it to view.

“You might give it to me to smoke,” suggested Betty with lofty sarcasm, eyes flashing.

Bob’s mouth twitched with humor.

“Of course I was only joking, Betty. Don’t explode.”

Somewhat mollified, Betty approached and looked at the little blue and gold box. Her eyes grew round and thoughtful. “I’ve seen a box like that somewhere,” she observed.

“Humph! Probably in a cigar store window,” commented Teddy Tucker. “There are thousands like it.”

Bob put the box in his pocket.

“I wonder if the detective stays here. I must give it to him at once.”

“Yes; he moved over here,” answered Betty. “He has been interviewing most of the hotel people.”

149

The gong sounded for breakfast, and the girls peeped through the folding doors to see if Mrs. Hiller had awakened. She was still asleep.

Betty adjusted the doors carefully. “Let the poor woman sleep. I’ll have her breakfast sent to her when she awakens.”

“She cried nearly all night,” whispered Alice pityingly.

Betty turned away and exclaimed.

“Well, Mr. Sleuth, come on! I have a most awful appetite.”

But her mind was busy with other thoughts. Where had she seen a cigarette box like the one found?

150

CHAPTER XX

RICHARD GORDON ARRIVES

As soon as breakfast was over, Bob sought the detective, and Betty, taking advantage of the opportunity afforded her, ran up to see Mrs. Hiller. She was uneasy about the frail little woman.

But Mrs. Hiller was up and dressed, sitting by the window, her face to the sea and with a faraway look in her eyes. She turned as Betty entered and smiled her sad smile.

“Good morning, Betty! I am quite a lazy old woman this morning.”

“I am so glad that you could sleep, Mrs. Hiller. I will telephone down for your breakfast.”

Soon a white-capped waitress appeared with a tempting breakfast and set it out on a folding table close beside Mrs. Hiller. Then, as the waitress departed, Betty drew up beside the woman in black.

“Mrs. Hiller, I think Uncle Dick will come to-day, and I would like to ask you some questions. Not through idle curiosity, but I feel you have in some way been defrauded and I’m sure Uncle Dick will help us find out how. It does not look reasonable that your husband would tell you you were a

wealthy woman if you were not.”

“You are a dear child to worry with my affairs when you are in so much trouble yourself,” remonstrated Mrs. Hiller, with tears in her eyes. “Both my home lawyer and Mr. Hammon are very suspicious, but there seems to be no definite proof to uphold our suspicions.”

151

At that moment the telephone rang. It was the desk clerk.

“Is Miss Betty Gordon in her room?”

“This is Betty Gordon.”

“Mr. Richard Gordon to see you.”

With a cry of delight, Betty hung up the receiver. “My Uncle Dick has come! My Uncle Dick has come!” she cried joyously, and ran out into the hall.

The moment the tall, distinguished figure of Richard Gordon stepped from the elevator, Betty was in his arms, laughing and crying by turns.

“There, there, Betty!” he soothed. “Don’t let them bluff you like that!”

Mr. Raymond, Mr. Hammon, Mr. Stone and Bob stepped from the elevator.

“Oh, Uncle Dick!” sobbed Betty, “have they told you about the awful mess I’m in? And, oh, I am so afraid if that awful woman can’t arrest me, she’ll sue you for thirty thousand

dollars!”

Richard Gordon patted Betty’s shaking shoulders.

152

“Now, now, Betty! Mr. Raymond has told me all about it. Don’t worry!” Humor touched his kindly eyes. “What is thirty thousand dollars to an oil man!”

Mr. Stone stepped forward.

“It’s my business, Miss Betty, to find the thief. We came up just now to question Mrs. Hiller. We have also sent for Mrs. Calott.”

“Mrs. Hiller is in my room,” replied Betty, and led the way.

Mrs. Hiller was still sitting by the window. The breakfast stood on the small table, the food almost untouched. At sight of Betty and the others, she arose quietly to her feet.

“Mrs. Hiller, Mr. Gordon. Mrs. Hiller has been very kind to me, Uncle Dick, and shielded me in every way she could.”

Mrs. Hiller came forward with outstretched hand.

“And your niece has been very kind to me, Mr. Gordon. I really feel that it is an imposition for me to stay here.”

Richard Gordon held Mrs. Hiller’s hand and looked down into her sad face.

“There are some things far above a money value. Such are some of the things Paul Raymond tells me you have done for

my niece. I consider myself forever indebted to you.” Richard Gordon had a talent for putting people at ease.

“Now, Mrs. Hiller,” said Mr. Stone, “if we’ll all be seated I would like to ask you a few questions.” He paused a moment. “How long have you known Mrs. Calott?”

153

“About three months.”

“How’s that? I understand your husbands were in business together.”

“Yes, I’ve known Sam—Mr. Calott—practically all my life. But Mrs. Calott is Sam’s second wife. They have been married about six months.”

“Then you have known her for six months?”

“No. About three months. I had never met Sam’s second wife until after my husband’s death, when Sam offered me a home.”

“I wish to question you about your financial affairs later on, as Mr. Gordon and Mr. Hammon have engaged my services in your behalf. But at present I wish to question you only on that which pertains to the recovery of the necklace. What was Mrs. Calott’s attitude towards you?”

Mrs. Hiller flushed.

“That of a superior.”

“Then you hated her? You were not friends?”

“I hate no one,” replied Mrs. Hiller with dignity. “But I could scarcely call her a friend.”

“Then your relationship with her was not pleasant?”

“No. She was not a pleasant woman.”

154

The door of the bedroom opened quickly. Mrs. Pryde Calott stood in the doorway with the ever-present monocle to her eye.

“Well, Mr. Stone, have you gotten my pearls away from that girl?” she demanded coldly.

The detective arose and offered Mrs. Calott a chair.

Paul Raymond came forward.

“Mrs. Calott,” he said courteously, but his voice shook with anger, “allow me to present Mr. Gordon—the uncle of Miss Betty Gordon.”

“So—another Gordon,” sneered Mrs. Calott. “Mr. Gordon, I demand you turn over the pearls your niece stole or the thirty thousand dollars they cost me!”

Richard Gordon bowed politely.

“Gladly, madam, if she had them. This is a very grave charge you have made against my niece with no more evidence than you have.”

“No more evidence? I have enough if there is any justice in

the law!” Mrs. Calott sat down and glared at Richard Gordon.

“We are making every effort to find your pearls for you, Mrs. Calott,” interposed Mr. Stone. “I have interviewed you before and do not need your evidence. But Mr. Gordon wished to see you and talk to you.”

“Mrs. Calott,” said Richard Gordon firmly, “I will make good the thirty thousand dollars if your pearls are not restored in a reasonable length of time. Not because Betty stole them but because she found them for you and they were stolen from her room.”

155

“Oh, Uncle Dick!” exclaimed Betty, in distress.

Richard Gordon smiled reassuringly at Betty and motioned her to silence.

“Surely nothing can be fairer than this, Mrs. Calott? In comparison, thirty thousand dollars is small to the shame of having my niece’s name blazoned all over the country as a common thief.”

Mrs. Calott’s sly eyes narrowed to tiny slits.

“It shall be blazoned, all right, unless your niece turns over the pearls at once or you turn over the thirty thousand dollars to me now.”

“Dick, you shall not do it!” Paul Raymond jumped to his feet excitedly. His fair face was crimson with anger.

“Oh!” groaned Betty, and turned to Bob, who placed a

comforting hand over hers.

“This is an unreasonable demand,” interposed Mr. Hammon quickly. “Don’t let her bluff you.”

“I have no such intentions,” replied Richard Gordon, and again turned to Mrs. Calott. “Madam, I will pay you the thirty thousand dollars in a reasonable length of time if your jewels are not found and if you bring no court action against my niece. Otherwise, you get nothing from me.”

“I’ll see about that!” Mrs. Calott’s face was distorted with rage. “This is all a hatched-up plot between you! I don’t believe you have any intention of paying it or you would pay it now! I know that girl stole my pearls, and now you are all plotting together to shield her and cheat me out of my jewels.”

156

“Mrs. Calott!” exclaimed Mrs. Hiller in a shocked voice.

Mrs. Calott’s glance swept the little group of hostile faces and she was lashed to a greater fury.

“You are all against me! Even the fine-haired detective supposed to come from New York but probably hired in your service! I shall consult my own lawyer at once and my husband is coming to-day.” She pointed a shaking finger at Paul Raymond. “I shall not stay another day in your hotel! I shall remove my things at once to the Maxwell Place!”

Adjusting her monocle, the furious woman walked haughtily from the room.

CHAPTER XXI

OVERHEARD

“Gee, but that woman is a regular Fourth of July celebration—fireworks and all!” exclaimed Bob, grinning.

“I hope she makes good her threat and leaves the hotel, or I don’t know what I may do to her!” flashed Paul Raymond.

Richard Gordon looked affectionately at his friend.

“Well, Mr. Gordon,” said the detective, “I don’t think the woman will sue you. She will be only too glad to accept your offer. But for some reason, she wants the money now.” The detective’s brow drew together in thought. “It will be my business to find out why. Now Mr. Hammon and I would like to interview Mrs. Hiller privately.”

Richard Gordon, Mr. Raymond, Bob, and Betty quietly left the room.

Richard Gordon put his arm around his niece. “Now, Betty, don’t worry! I have the utmost confidence in Stone and, as he says, it will not pay Mrs. Calott to take the act she threatened.”

“Oh, Uncle Dick, I am so sorry to have gotten you in all this trouble!” cried Betty, with tears in her eyes.

“Forget it, Betty! You look positively ill. You and Bob run along, for Mr. Raymond and I have some business matters to attend to.”

When the elevator reached the first floor, Richard Gordon and Paul Raymond entered the office and Betty and Bob wandered out into the grounds. Betty was sick at heart.

“Uncle Dick has been so good to us, Bob, that I cannot bear the idea of his losing thirty thousand dollars because of my carelessness.”

“You could scarcely call it that,” said the fair-minded Bob. “You took every precaution when you hid the pearls.”

Betty flashed him a grateful look.

“I can’t imagine who could know that I had it!” she pondered.

“Look at that little rustic arbor over there in the grounds!” exclaimed Bob. “Perhaps there are seats inside where we can sit down and talk.”

The young people approached quietly and their feet made no sound on the velvety grass. Both Betty and Bob were engrossed in their own thoughts.

“But what have you done with it?” a deep voice demanded.

The sound came from the rustic arbor.

“Nothing. Your accusations are absurd!” a haughty voice replied.

Startled, Betty looked at Bob.

“It’s Mrs. Calott!” she whispered.

Bob’s eyes sparkled.

“Here’s where we play detective!”

“Flora, there is no use for you to say that,” a weary voice declared. “When I failed to get the dividend check from the stocks, I wrote to Frothingham and Barrows about it. They said they had sent the check on the first of this month.

“I replied, saying I had not received it. Frothingham telephoned me that the cashed check had come in to the bank at New York with my indorsement on the back. Later, he sent the canceled check to me though the mail. It was a clever forgery of my name. Flora, I did not dream—I went to the bank and they told me that you had cashed the check!”

A moment of silence. Then a cool voice inquired:

“What are you going to do about it?”

“Do? Heavens, Flora, you must return it! I did not give you away to the bank, but you know what a mess I am in. You know—” he lowered his voice—“that half of it is not mine. You must give the money to me at once, Flora!”

A moment of silence, then Mrs. Calott’s voice.

“I cannot. I bought a pearl necklace with the money and it has been stolen. That is the reason I telephoned for

you to come at once.”

“You spent all of that money—thirty thousand dollars—on a necklace?”

“Yes. And you will have to stand by me!”

The man groaned.

“You knew the state of my finances and did this? My life blood for a bauble! Flora!”

“You will have to stand by me,” the cold voice persisted. “If you expose me for forging the check, I will expose your crooked dealings.”

“Crooked dealings! It was you who first suggested the temporary loan. Oh, Bill! Bill! What a traitor I have been, and you trusted me!”

“Hush, you fool! No one can possibly find it out unless you give yourself away. This Richard Gordon promises to pay if the jewels are not found.”

“Again I ask you, Flora, tell me the truth. Did you take that paper from the vault?”

“No, of course not! You have carelessly misplaced it. You will find it. Don’t dare accuse me of such a thing! If you don’t stand by me, I will ruin you.”

The man gave a hollow groan.

“I am ruined now, in my own conscience.”

“Fool! Come! Let us go before some one comes. I am leaving the hotel at once for the Maxwell Place.”

As the two speakers came out the door of the rustic arbor, Betty and Bob tiptoed to the rear of it, where they hid from view.

161

“That was Mrs. Calott!” whispered Betty excitedly. “And now I think we have proof that they are cheating Mrs. Hiller!”

“By crickety, but we were lucky!” answered Bob. “As soon as they get out of sight, let’s report this to Mr. Hammon and the detective. I guess that man was her husband, all right, the way they talked.”

“He talked about a paper that was missing from the vault. Do you suppose that could have been the written agreement between the two men?” asked Betty.

“I’ll bet a farm in Texas it was and I’ll bet that old Dragon did it, too!” Bob was excited.

“And her husband suspects her, but will shield her!” ventured Betty breathlessly.

“Oh, he’s in the mire, too. But I’ll bet my hat that woman put him there!”

“Bob, let’s find Uncle Dick, and he’ll go with us to talk to Mr. Stone.”

The young people could not find Richard Gordon, and Mr. Stone had taken the train for Grubville. He was following the clue of the bill for ties and wished to find out, if possible, who had purchased them at the department store. But the young people found Mr. Hammon sitting out in the hotel grounds, and they breathlessly poured out their story to the criminal lawyer.

He listened with kindly interest and rapt attention.

162

“The way Mr. Calott talked, he was cheating Mrs. Hiller out of money. But how could he do it and she not know it?” questioned Betty in conclusion.

“It is permissible by law,” Mr. Hammon answered gravely, “for one partner to run the business under his own name with a written agreement between them as to the amount they share in the profits. According to what you tell me, Mr. Hiller and Mr. Calott could have had holdings in real estate and other things. If stocks were in Mr. Calott’s name, the dividends on such stocks would come in when due and the check would be mailed to him, although only part of the money belonged to him.”

“And,” interposed Bob excitedly, “if Mrs. Calott cashed the entire check in order to buy her pearls, then Mr. Calott can’t pay Mrs. Hiller without exposing his wife.”

“You forget,” Mr. Hammon pointed out, “that Mr. Calott has always told Mrs. Hiller that there was no money—that Mr. Hiller lost it in oil. I will go to Horosburg at once, the city where Mr. Calott conducts the business, and see

163

what I can find out. In the meantime, not a word to Mrs. Hiller concerning this until all the evidence is in and it is proved that she has been defrauded. We must not raise false hopes.”

Mr. Hammon took a bus for the station and Betty and Bob wandered idly around the grounds, looking for the other young people.

“Well,” observed Bob, “this may clear up Mrs. Hiller’s trouble. But the mystery of who stole the pearls is still unsolved.”

Betty nodded.

“I can’t imagine, Bob, who could have taken them or who could have known I had them!”

“It’s a mystery, all right! And between you and me, Mr. Stone is not unraveling it any too fast!”

“Why, Bob!” Betty laughed, “the man’s been here only two days. You are impatient!”

Bob grinned and changed the subject.

“I wonder where Norma and Alice, Tommy and Teddy are?” Shading his eyes with his hand, he looked out at the blue waters of the Cove. “Gee! it’s nice here, isn’t it?” he sighed.

“There’s our crowd, now!” exclaimed Betty, looking out toward the Cove where a skiff had just pointed its nose in the sand of the shore.

CHAPTER XXII

THE CHASE

“I’m mighty glad your confab is over,” called Norma, as Betty and Bob approached. “Mrs. Hall has planned a fish-fry luncheon for us in the orchard. It is one of her off days.”

“How are we going to fry the fish in the orchard?” inquired the practical Betty.

“She said there was an oven built of brick with iron across the top and that it was a dandy. Some of the cottagers caught the fish for her. She has everything prepared.”

“Won’t that be bully!” exclaimed Tommy Tucker, with relish. “I like that woman!”

“What do you think happened while you were gone?” Betty looked from one friend to the other and her eyes flashed with animation.

Alice clasped her hands together.

“Oh, Betty, did they find the pearls?”

“No. But we are almost sure that the Calotts are withholding money from Mrs. Hiller!”

Betty told the story to an interested audience.

“Oh, I am so glad for Mrs. Hiller!” exclaimed Alice.

“Gee, that’s one time you were in luck to hear them talking!” Teddy Tucker exclaimed.

“Well, let’s go up to the hotel, for it’s about time Mrs. Hall said we should start,” cried Norma.

When the young people entered the hotel, several letters were waiting for Betty. The one bearing Bobby Littell’s handwriting she tore open and read eagerly.

“Bobby, Louise, and Libbie Littell and Timothy Derby are coming down for the week-end,” Betty announced happily.

“Tim Derby? Of course he’d follow in Libbie’s trail!” laughed Teddy Tucker.

“I wonder how many books of poetry he will bring to read to Libbie,” added Tommy.

“They’ll have plenty of poetry all around them here,” said Betty. “I’m sure Timothy will be ranting about

The sea, the sea,
The beautiful blue sea.”

“Everything set! Are you ready to go?” exclaimed Ann Hall. She came towards them, looking more like a little brown bird than ever in her brown sweater and hat.

“Wait until I get my sweater,” begged Betty, and flew to her room.

Mrs. Hiller, with a sad, faraway look in her eyes, was sitting by the window, her face to the sea.

“Oh, Mrs. Hiller, we are going to have a fish-fry in the orchard back of the Raymond House! Won’t you please go with us?” asked Betty.

The little woman smiled her sad smile.

“Please excuse me, dear, I couldn’t! I—I miss Willie so! Go and enjoy yourself, as young people should. I—it is Willie’s birthday to-day, and I have been recalling many happy memories.”

Betty was filled with pity.

“Would you rather eat your lunch here than in the dining room?” she asked thoughtfully.

“Oh, yes!” Mrs. Hiller’s face brightened. “I’d love it! Here by the sea and my memories of Willie.”

With a lump in her throat, Betty turned to the telephone and ordered Mrs. Hiller’s luncheon sent to her room.

She joined the merry crowd of picnickers below and they trooped out of the hotel and made their way to the famous orchard.

The Raymond orchards were a delight to the eye and heavily laden with fruit.

“These orchards are not open to the general public,”

Ann Hall informed her guests. She led the way toward a long table under a big apple tree. “They are open only to Mr. Raymond’s or Mr. Gordon’s intimate friends.”

“Gee, I’m glad I’m one!” exclaimed Tommy Tucker.

“Now, Bob,” said the author, and her brown eyes flashed with eagerness, “you and the Tucker twins get some short twigs for the fire. Rastus brought out all our provisions half an hour ago. Alice, you get the skillets ready with butter in them. Betty can dip the fish in cornmeal and Norma in egg. I will beat the eggs.”

Ann enveloped her small person in a brown apron and began to beat eggs.

“Isn’t it nice out here?” said Betty, sniffing the air. “It smells appley!”

Bob and the twins came with the twigs, and a roaring fire was soon built.

“The butter is hot! Come on with your fish!” called Alice, a few moments later.

Betty came forward with a big blue crock filled with fish.

“How nice they look!” exclaimed Alice, as she lifted the quivering pieces into a skillet.

“Norma, while Betty and Alice fry the fish, you and I will set the table. There are plenty of pickles and salad, angel cake and ice-cream. These paper plates were provided, so we shall

not have to bother with much dish washing.”

“Bob!” exclaimed Betty suddenly, and waved the fish ladle in the air. “Uncle Dick! Where is he? If we haven’t come off and forgotten him!”

168

“You mean he’s forgotten us,” replied Bob scornfully. “He and Mr. Raymond took the airplane trip across to the Point. He didn’t even tell us he was going!”

“I think there was ‘method in his madness!’” replied Ann Hall, laughing. “He would have had two youngsters holding on to the tail of the machine whether or no, and he did not wish you to take the risk.”

“I’d take it, all right!” exclaimed Bob, with sparkling eyes, “and be bully glad of the chance!”

“Oh, wouldn’t I, though!” Betty’s eyes were dancing.

“Yum! Yum! That fish smells good!” exclaimed Tommy Tucker. “I’m getting up a most awful appetite, Betty! Are you sure you have fish enough?”

Ann Hall’s jolly laugh rang out.

“Bushels! Two big crocks full, and there are only seven of us.”

After luncheon the silverware was washed and packed into the hamper and then the little party explored the orchard. They wandered through the packing house, the shipping house, and the cider mill, inquiring as they went. Ann Hall

answered all questions in her eager, interested way.

Tiring of the orchard, the young people left it behind and wandered down the road.

“I haven’t been down this way yet,” said Betty. “The scenery is beautiful around here, isn’t it?”

Ann Hall nodded assent.

“I love it! I have spent my summers here for a number of years.”

“Oh, look!” exclaimed Teddy Tucker. “Some fellow’s had tire trouble!”

Betty looked up. Down the road a little distance stood a long, gray touring car which looked vaguely familiar. Two young men were down in the dust finishing repairs on a tire. One young man was fair and heavy set, the other darkly handsome.

“Those are the fellows who asked us to ride and then insulted us!” Alice cried.

As the young people approached, the men got into their car and drove away in a cloud of dust.

Suddenly something which had worried Betty’s mind for some time was made clear. She seized Bob by the arm and shook him in her excitement.

“Bob!” she exclaimed, “that’s where I saw a cigarette box like the one found in my room! That Walter Brisket, who asked us

to ride, had one just like it!”

Bob slapped his hands together and his eyes glowed with excitement.

“By cracky, I’ll bet they are the thieves! We must follow them at once!”

170

“But how?” groaned Betty.

“Perhaps a car will come along,” suggested Ann Hall eagerly, as Betty quickly related their experiences with the two young men. “Oh I do hope so!”

“Here comes a car around the bend!” shouted Tommy. “Only one man in it! Stop him! Stop him!”

The young people rushed forward and waved. The driver slowed down his car and looked at them in amazed inquiry.

“Take us in and follow that car and we’ll give you five dollars for your trouble!” yelled Bob excitedly.

“Pile in!” said the driver, grinning. “An easy way to make five dollars.”

The little party, laughing and excited, got into the big car. The girls were compelled to sit on one another’s laps.

“Now step on the gas pretty lively. We think we may be running down some thieves!” explained Bob to the driver.

The big black car shot down the road, and the long gray

touring car was soon in sight.

Then began a merry chase, for the gray car had observed the black one and seemed determined to keep the lead.

“I wonder if they recognized us, or just think we’re trying to race with them,” pondered Alice.

171

“We’re gaining, all right!” exulted Bob. “Step on the gas! Step on her lively! We’ll soon be past them so we can get out!”

“Get their license number, Tommy,” cried Teddy. “Look out. There’s railroad tracks! Oh, a train’s coming! Look at the thing!”

The driver of the black car slowed down, but the gray car shot across the track right in front of the oncoming train. It cleared the track on the other side not an instant too soon. The freight went rushing by.

“We’ll lose them now! We’ll lose them now!” wailed Betty regretfully.

When the track was clear of the freight train, the long gray car was not in sight.

“Drive on,” cried Bob. “Perhaps we can overtake them even yet.”

But after half an hour of futile search for the gray car, the black one was turned towards Orchard Cove. There, Bob paid the driver for the trouble he had taken, and the young people

got out.

“We must report this to Mr. Stone,” said Ann Hall.

“He’s not in town,” Bob answered. “But I’ll call the Chief of Police as soon as we reach the hotel. I’m sorry we failed to get that car’s license number in time.”

172

The Chief of Police listened attentively and promised to send out men to look for the gray car and its occupants. Richard Gordon and Mr. Raymond praised Bob and his friends for their quick action.

“Mr. Bob,” said Patricia Raymond in her soft southern accent, “you’ll take all the laurels from Mr. Stone yet. I believe you would make a good criminal lawyer like Mr. Hammon.”

Bob flushed with pleasure at her praise.

“And now who wants to take a dip in the Cove before time to dress for dinner?” questioned eager-eyed Ann Hall.

All the young people cried at once.

“I!” “Count me in!” “Sure!”

Patricia Raymond looked at her friend with affection.

“Ann, you certainly are a magician with young people!” she exclaimed admiringly.

When the young folks, accompanied by Ann Hall, reached the shore, a little wind had sprung up and the waters of the Cove

were unusually rough. The waves were higher than usual, and the young people exclaimed with delight at the prospect.

“Oh, how I love to ride the waves when the sea is rough!” exclaimed Betty.

“We must be very careful,” admonished Ann, “and not venture out too far.”

173

“The life-guards are out now, and they wouldn’t let us,” said Bob. “See their boats?”

“Oh, Mrs. Hall! Remember me!” cried Tommy Tucker. “I’m crazy about that long crawl!”

“The Women’s Swimming Association is responsible for the development of that crawl,” said the author. “I will gladly teach you the system, Tommy. Come on, we’ll have to practice in water a little over waist deep!” Ann’s voice was eager and gay.

Betty and Bob plunged into the surf and swam away together. Teddy Tucker followed with Norma and Alice.

It was almost an hour before Betty heard Ann’s signal and the young people pulled for shore.

“Well, how did the long crawl progress?” questioned Bob of Tommy.

“Fine! Mrs. Hall’s a dandy teacher! The movements of the crawl are great!”

“He was a dandy pupil!” declared the author enthusiastically. Her brown eyes were dancing.

“I want to tell you a secret,” whispered Betty to Bob. “You’d never think Mrs. Hall was a famous writer, would you?”

“A what?” Bob’s mouth flew open.

Betty laughed merrily.

“Didn’t you read ‘Patty and the Peace Club’?”

174

“I heard a lot about it.”

“She wrote it!”

“Great Scott! But she’s nothing but a kid! I can’t believe it!”

“She’s twenty-three—eight years older than I. But you would think to look at her that she wasn’t over twenty. It’s true about her writing that book, Bob, for Mrs. Raymond said so.”

Bob Henderson gave a low whistle.

“Don’t tell Tommy,” cautioned Betty. “You know what queer tactless things he blurts out sometimes, and Mrs. Hall doesn’t like people to know she writes.”

“Why, pray tell?”

“Because she says when people find it out they treat her like a walking encyclopedia and not like a human being. And—Oh, Bob!” Betty broke off with a shiver. “Here comes Mrs.

Calott!”

Mrs. Pryde Calott, grotesque in a purple bathing suit, approached with a tall, weary-eyed man whom Betty instantly recognized as the one she had seen in the arbor.

Mrs. Calott passed with her head in the air and without a word of recognition. The couple walked toward the Maxwell Place.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE PICNIC

In the days which followed, the young people enjoyed themselves in spite of the nervous strain connected with the loss of the pearl necklace. Boating, swimming, shopping, theater going and dancing on the Pier all came in for their attention.

Great preparations were being made for the three Littell girls and Timothy Derby, who were coming down for the last week-end of the girl chums' stay at Orchard Cove.

Betty had written to the Littell girls about the trouble of the necklace, cautioning them not to tell. They were very indignant and sympathetic and were determined to come down and stand by Betty.

Mr. Stone, the detective, went on in his quiet way. He listened to all fresh evidence, but gave out no information. If he had found clues, no one could tell but the Chief of Police and Mr. Hammon, with whom he worked. Betty had more confidence in the ability and long experience of the older man. Mrs. Calott had not brought suit, evidently thinking it wiser to await developments.

The Littell girls and Timothy Derby were to arrive on Friday afternoon. Ann Hall had chartered a motor boat

for Saturday and planned to cross the Cove and give a picnic for the girls and boys on the rocky shore of the Cove some miles away.

Saturday dawned. The Littell girls and Timothy Derby had arrived the afternoon before and had quickly made friends with Mr. and Mrs. Raymond, Ann Hall, Mrs. Hiller and Mr. Hammon. Many eager questions in regard to the loss of the pearl necklace had been asked and answered.

Betty had begged Bobby Littell to share her bedroom and her bed. The two girls were roommates at school, and Bobby eagerly consented to the arrangement.

Louise Littell and her cousin Libbie shared a room near by.

Bob Henderson had taken Timothy Derby in, and the last thing Bob did before the young people retired for the night was to whisper in Betty's ear.

"If old Timothy gets to spouting off poetry in the night, I will call for help!"

Betty laughed.

"Call Libbie, then," she advised. "Don't expect me to save you!"

177

In the morning Betty was awakened by Bobby Littell, who was dancing madly in the middle of the floor.

"Wake up, lazy bones!" Bobby exclaimed. "I'm crazy to get out for a swim! My, but it is lovely here, Betty!"

She ran to the window and looked out at the blue sea. Bobby Littell was filled with an abounding energy and high spirits.

Betty bounced out of bed and joined her friend.

“I love it! I’ve had a wonderful time here in spite of Mrs. Calott and her lost pearls!”

A half hour later all the young people gathered on the beach for a dip in the surf before breakfast. Ann Hall obligingly demonstrated the movements of the long crawl and Tommy Tucker proved to be the most apt pupil, with Betty a close second.

Bob Henderson had promised to play pilot and run the motor boat over to the rocky shore of the Cove, and after breakfast, the little party set out.

Richard Gordon watched them off. He had smilingly refused an invitation to go with them.

“Paul and I have some business to attend to, Betty,” he had replied to his niece’s urgent plea for him to join them. “Then, I am helping the detective and Mr. Hammon find the thieves, you know.”

178

“I should think I was the one to help instead of you,” replied Betty. “If you have to pay all that money, I shall never forgive myself.”

“Run along and have a good time. Mrs. Hiller’s problem is going to be solved if ours isn’t.”

“Oh, do you think so?”

“Hammon has just a few more things to find out. Yes, I think so.” He smiled down into Betty’s eyes. “But not a word to Mrs. Hiller until we are sure.”

“I cannot get her to go out much. She would not come on the picnic. I feel sorry when I leave her, yet I know that she really would rather be alone.”

“I am sure she would, Betty. Her grief is so recent, you know.”

“Come on, Betty!” yelled Bob. “The gang’s ready!”

“I must go. Good-by, Uncle Dick!”

“Good-by, dear!”

It was a beautiful and balmy day and the girls and boys were in gay spirits. They ran laughingly down to the trim little motor boat.

Betty sat by Bob and exulted in his strength and skill as he guided the boat across the sparkling waters of the Cove.

“Gee, this boat has a bully engine!” exclaimed Bob.
“Just listen to her go, will you?”

179

The boat shot out over the blue waters of the Cove.

Timothy Derby looked out through his shell spectacles at the sea and began, much to Betty’s amusement, to recite poetry to

Libbie Littell.

“I brought May Ceza’s ‘North Wind’ along,” Betty heard him whisper in Libbie’s ear.

Without mishap they reached the opposite shore and with much laughter scrambled out, carrying their provisions with them.

“Well,” exclaimed Ann Hall with sparkling eyes, “it’s the wilds of nature for us! We’ll have the ground for a table!”

They clambered up the rocks.

“Oh, look!” exclaimed Betty. “Look at that picturesque old ruin of a house amid the pines! I wish I had my camera.”

“I brought mine along,” said Bob. “I’ll snap it for you.”

“What is that old building near the house?” asked Betty.

“It looks like the remains of an old sawmill,” replied Bob. “Want a picture of it, too?”

“Yes, thanks! I’d love it!”

“Come on!” called Bobby Littell. “Robinson Crusoe wants to explore!” Her sturdy figure was far ahead.

Scrambling over rocks, they came at last to a large wood.

“Oh, isn’t this lovely!” exclaimed Louise Littell. “How I love

a picnic!”

Much to Betty’s amusement, Timothy Derby began to quote from a nature poem.

“What shall we do first?” asked Ann, looking eagerly around.

“We’re going to put the provisions under this big tree!” sang out Teddy.

“Let’s explore that old ruin of a house,” suggested Bobby.

“Who knows but what we may find hidden treasure!”

“Me for the treasure!” exclaimed Tommy Tucker. “Lead on, fellow pirates!”

The old ruin was quite a distance away. On investigation, it proved to be the remains of what had once been a fine old colonial house.

“If here isn’t an old sun dial in the grounds!” exclaimed Betty. She lifted up a tangled mass of vines and bent forward. Bob joined her.

Presently the young people wandered off in little groups and Betty was left alone with Bob.

““Age and decay in all around I see,”” quoted Bob solemnly.

“Bob!” exclaimed Betty impatiently. “Don’t be a Timothy Derby!”

“Well, it’s true, isn’t it? That bold ruin must be

hundreds of years old. I— By cracky, look how dark it's getting, Betty! It's going to rain!"

With the suddenness of summer showers, the rain was soon upon them. The boy and girl looked around for shelter. Bob took hold of Betty's hand.

"Come, let's make for the old sawmill—it's closer!"

Laughing and gasping for breath, they raced toward the old ruin. Rain descended now in torrents and thunder reverberated overhead.

"I wonder where the rest of the crowd are?" remarked Betty as, panting for breath, they gained the shelter of the old mill.

"They ran into the house, I suppose, for they were headed that way."

"Why, there are several rooms in here," observed Betty, looking around the mill.

A peal of thunder, a vivid flash of lightning, answered her, and she moved closer to Bob. He scrutinized the interior of the room for a moment.

"Here's an old box that will make us a dandy seat! Sit down, Betty. It is nothing but a summer thunderstorm. It will soon be over."

Betty seated herself and Bob sat down beside her. A sense of peace enveloped the young girl. She stole a glance at Bob's profile and felt a little glow of pride in the rugged strength of

its outlines.

“Bob,” she whispered, voicing a worry that was ever present with her, “do you think Mr. Stone is going to catch the thief?”

182

“Doesn’t look like it!” he answered frankly. “I don’t think he’s had any great amount of experience. Uncle Dick was terribly disappointed when he could not get McRafferty, but Mr. Stone seems a good sort and is working with Mr. Hammon, and I think takes the right attitude. The detective told me that Mr. Hammon knew more about criminals than he himself would ever hope to know. If he finds them, I think it will be Mr. Hammon who sets him on the right track.”

Betty groaned.

“Oh, if Uncle Dick has to pay that thirty thousand dollars, our vacation will be a costly one for him! If that freight train hadn’t come along just when it did, we’d probably have had the thieves. I bet anything those two men did it!”

“Well, that’s rather doubtful, Betty. You know there are lots of cigarette boxes like that, and some hotel employee could easily have dropped it in the fern.”

Betty had to acknowledge the truth of this remark. At heart she was thoroughly discouraged. With this clue removed, the mystery of who stole the pearls was more of a mystery than ever.

They sat in silence for a long while. Lightning flashed and thunder reverberated overhead.

Presently there was a lull in the storm and Bob turned to Betty.

“Listen, I thought I heard voices,” he said softly.

Betty was silent, then nodded assent.

“Yes, I hear two men talking. We’d better go. The rain is about over.”

Bob led the way and Betty followed. But some strange intuition made her footsteps lag.

“Bob, wait a minute! I thought those voices sounded familiar!”

“Maybe some of our crowd. Let’s go and see.”

“Come on, but be still. Those weren’t the voices of our boys. Don’t let them hear you,” cautioned Betty. Something in the tone of the voices had struck a vague memory.

The boy and girl moved cautiously over the ground and peeped into an adjoining room. No one was in sight. Quietly they tiptoed along. The voices were louder now.

“What’s the idea?” whispered Bob. “Do you want to——”

Betty motioned for silence and stepped carefully over the débris of the old mill. They could hear voices more distinctly now.

“Hot zippety zip! You want me to take all the risk and you get

half the dough!” exclaimed an angry voice. “Not on your sweet life!”

“Come on, Betty. It’s just two men quarreling. You should not be here!”

184

“Hush,” whispered Betty excitedly. “Wait a minute. It’s those men we chased the other day!”

Bob’s eyes grew dark with excitement. He pressed eagerly forward and listened.

“Now, Sid, you know I wouldn’t double cross you. But you are shrewder in driving a bargain. We will go to New York and you are the one to get rid of the thing! You know more about the value of such things than I do.”

“If I take all the risk of getting rid of the necklace and of getting pinched you’ll not get half of the boodle, old boy! So ram that in your pipe and smoke it!”

“They said ‘necklace,’” whispered Betty excitedly. “Oh, Bob, it’s the thieves. It’s the thieves!”

185

CHAPTER XXIV

THE REAL THIEVES

“It sure is!” gloated Bob.

“What are we going to do?” questioned Betty in a whisper.

“We’ll get help from our crowd,” whispered Bob excitedly.
“Those men must not get away with the pearls.”

“There’s Libbie and Timothy Derby now!” exclaimed Betty in an undertone, looking out the window.

“You go and give the alarm, and I’ll stay on guard here,” whispered Bob. “Hurry, Betty, and tell them not to make any noise, but to file in here quietly and we’ll surround the door!”

Betty nodded assent and silently withdrew. Once outside, her feet fairly flew over the wet grass towards Libbie and Timothy.

“Hey there, Betty! Did you get drowned?” sang out Timothy Derby.

Betty made frantic motions for silence until she came closer.

“Be still!” she gasped breathlessly. “The pearl necklace robbers are in the old mill! Go and tell the others! Go quickly so we can catch them! Bob is on guard. Hurry,

Timothy!” Betty stamped her foot. “Don’t stand there with your mouth open, but go!”

Timothy went. The last thing that Betty heard as she turned and raced back to the old mill was a shrill shriek from Libbie.

“Don’t go! Don’t go! They’ll shoot you, Betty! Don’t go! Don’t go!”

“Might have known,” panted Betty in deep disgust, “that Libbie would spoil everything!”

Libbie had, indeed “spoiled everything,” for the thieves were aroused by her cries and came forth before reinforcements arrived. Bob was not able to hold the two men. As Betty rushed into the old ruin, Bob had a heavy-set man down and they were fighting like tigers. A tall, darkly handsome man rushed towards Betty.

“Head him off! Head him off!” shouted Bob. “Don’t let him get away!”

Betty’s knowledge of football came into good play. She charged into the oncoming man. An instant later he lay surprised and sprawling on the ground of the sawmill.

A small box fell from his pocket and spilled its lovely contents on the ground.

“The pearl necklace!” shrieked Betty.

With trembling fingers, she snatched up the necklace. But the tall man struggled to his feet and rushed towards her.

“You don’t pull anything over on me this time, Miss!” he cried, with a quick flash of recognition.

“Walter Brisket!” Screaming, Betty clutched the necklace and ran towards Bob, who was putting up a stiff fight with Sidney Gold.

At that moment the crowd of other young people came trooping in.

Walter Brisket looked desperately around. Exit by the door was cut off by at least seven people. He snatched an old box from the ground and ran with it to the window. Mounting the box, he climbed through the window and Betty heard the thud of his body as it struck the ground outside.

The boys of the crowd turned and gave chase.

The girls and Ann Hall joined Betty and rushed to Bob’s assistance.

“Oh, Betty!” gasped Bob, “the other thief got away with the necklace!”

“No; I have it! I have it, Bob!” she exulted.

“You have it?”

“Yes! Yes!”

“Thank goodness for that!”

Sidney Gold began to kick viciously. Ann Hall and Norma

promptly sat down on his legs. It was then but the work of a moment for Betty and Bob to bind Gold's arms and legs with their belts. Then Bob took a ball of cord from his pocket and bound the man more securely.

The thief lay helpless on the floor of the old mill,
panting breathlessly.

188

“Hot zippity zip! Hot zippity zip! That was a stiff fight!”

“Are you sure you have the jewels?” demanded Bob of Betty.

Betty took them from her pocket and held them aloft.

“You keep them and stay here. I'm going to chase the other man.” Bob ran out into the wet grass.

Betty was silent for a moment, watching Bob's retreating figure. Then she turned and impulsively ran after him.

“Betty! Come back here, Betty!” called Ann Hall.

But Betty ran on unheeding. She ran swiftly, keeping a desperate hold on the necklace in her pocket. She had forgotten it in the moment of her fear for Bob's safety.

“Oh, I should have left it behind! Why did I forget it?”

But she stumbled on, keeping Bob in sight.

“Bob!” she sobbed. “Bob!” But he did not look around. He did not even hear.

She ran on, but presently Bob disappeared from view. A few moments later Betty leaned, a spent runner, against an old tree. “I can’t go a step farther!” she panted.

The trunk of the immense tree was hollow. As Betty looked up, she met the blazing eyes of Walter Brisket.

189

“Make a noise,” he whispered, “and you’re not long for this world!”

Betty’s blood turned to ice and her fingers clutched the pearl necklace in her pocket.

“Bob! Bob!” she screamed. “Help! Help! Here’s the thief!” and ran as fast as she could away from the tree.

But Walter Brisket was after her. She could hear the sound of his feet behind her—gaining! gaining! And not a friend in sight!

“Bob!” she screamed sobbingly. “Bob!”

“Your precious Bob can’t save you now!”

Walter Brisket seized Betty and shook her roughly.

“Where are those pearls? Quick! Have you got them? Tell me quick!”

“I won’t!” gasped Betty.

The rascal’s hand sought her pocket. His fingers closed over hers.

“Give it to me, I tell you!”

“I won’t.”

The man struck Betty over the head with his clenched fist.

“Bob! Bob!” she called before darkness enveloped her.

The tears of Bobby Littell were wetting her face when Betty regained consciousness.

190

“The necklace!” she gasped. “He got it!”

“No he didn’t, either!” exulted Bob. “We came just in time. How are you, anyway? My! but you gave me an awful scare!” He cast an anxious glance at the girl.

Betty sat up and looked around with surprise. They were in one of the rooms of the sawmill.

“How did I get here?” she inquired.

Ann Hall ground her teeth.

“That villain nearly killed you!” She turned to Walter Brisket, who lay bound by the side of Sidney Gold. “I don’t know what I couldn’t do to you!” she stormed.

Walter Brisket gave her a venomous glance.

“He can’t answer you, Mrs. Hall,” laughed Tommy Tucker. “I have him gagged!”

“Well, we have the thieves and the pearls!” exulted Bob, “and no one is hurt but Betty. I——”

Betty rose shakily to her feet.

“No one hurt but Betty!” she half laughed, half sobbed. “Bob Henderson, I wish you could see yourself! You have a black eye, your lips are swollen, there’s a big cut across your forehead!”

“He didn’t even know it!” laughed Bobby Littell.

Bob grinned and put his hand to his mouth in surprise.

191

“Now,” he said, turning to the others, “how are we going to manage this? I think you boys had better stay here with these men while I run the boat back and get the police to come for them. I’ll take the girls back as I go.”

“Oh, we never got to have our picnic!” wailed Libbie.

“We’ve had a picnic, all right, but not the kind we planned!” exclaimed Timothy Derby. “I think Bob is right. We’d never get these men down to the boat without a lot of trouble. They kick like mules!”

“Come on, then,” called Bobby Littell, and led the way to the motor boat. The other girls and Bob Henderson followed.

“Don’t let those men get away from you, boys,” Bob called back over his shoulder.

“Go on and get the police,” exclaimed Tommy. “The gents

will be right here when you get back.”

“I hope so!” sighed Betty. “We’ve had a hard enough time getting them!”

The rain had ceased, and the sun came out as they left the old mill behind and made their way over the wet grass.

“I wonder if old Timothy will read ‘North Wind’ to the thieves,” laughed Bob.

Betty smiled.

“That depends on how long we are gone. The poetry track is the main line track for Timothy. Oh, Bob, I can scarcely wait until we tell Uncle Dick that we have caught the thieves!”

192

“I don’t mind confessing I look forward to that privilege myself. Let’s hurry! The others are getting ahead of us.”

“Oh, Betty!” wailed Libbie, as the two young people caught up with Mrs. Hall and the five girls, “we never did get to have our picnic!”

Louise looked at her cousin sharply.

“Why worry, Libbie? We can have picnics any day, but thirty thousand dollars is not found every day of the year.”

Alice looked back at Betty.

“Are you sure you have the pearl necklace?” she asked

anxiously.

“Oh, Betty, don’t lose it again!” exclaimed Norma. “Have you got it? Where is it, anyway? If you carry it in your pocket it might drop out!”

Bob gave a reassuring pat to the inside pocket of his coat.

“I have it right here. It’s safe, all right!”

They clambered down the rocks towards the motor boat and got in.

“Oh, hurry!” exclaimed Libbie fearfully. “I’m afraid the thieves will kill the boys before we get back!”

Ann Hall gave her a reassuring pat.

193

“Don’t worry, they can’t possibly get loose. I examined their fastenings and the boys did a good job!”

“Mr. Stone may not like it because we have found the thieves and taken the laurels away from him,” remarked Alice Guerin thoughtfully.

“Oh, gee!” exclaimed Bob, as he set the motor to running and headed the boat for the home stretch. “If he’s half a man, he’ll be glad the thieves are caught and the jewels are recovered, regardless of the laurels!”

“Oh,” giggled Norma, “it’ll be a perfect circus to see how Mrs. Calott acts when she hears about the thieves. She was so certain you took the pearls, Betty!”

“Mrs. Hiller will be relieved,” remarked Alice. “She has always been afraid of Mrs. Calott’s accusing her of taking them.”

Bob Henderson was a good pilot and soon had the motor boat in the harbor on the opposite shore.

“There’s Mrs. Raymond!” exclaimed Norma, as they climbed out of the boat and started for the hotel.

“And Uncle Dick, Mr. Raymond and Mr. Hammon!” cried Bob.

The older folks were advancing with anxious faces toward the young people.

“What is it, Betty? What is wrong? Oh, Bob Henderson, you are hurt!” Mrs. Raymond’s lovely face was full of concern.

194

“No, indeed, Mrs. Raymond! Nothing is wrong! Only we have caught the pearl necklace robbers and they left their mark on me!”

Bob grinned with delight at the surprised exclamations that greeted his news.

“Where are the thieves?” demanded Paul Raymond. “Who are they?”

Bob related briefly the happenings of the last hour.

“Now, Mr. Hammon, what shall we do first?” he asked.

The young people crowded eagerly around the eminent criminal lawyer. He patted Bob on the shoulder.

“Fine work, my boy,” he said. “I’m proud of you and proud of Miss Betty.”

Richard Gordon’s arms were around his niece.

“But the risk, Henry! The risk these youngsters ran!” he shuddered.

Mrs. Raymond turned to Ann Hall.

“We were out in the grounds and saw you coming. I knew at once that something unusual had occurred. I was afraid the other boys had been hurt.”

“Who has the pearls?” questioned Paul Raymond, excitedly running his fingers through his mop of light-colored hair.

195

Bob tapped the pocket of his coat.

“Well,” said Mr. Hammon, “come on and we’ll go in. Stone left Orchard Cove this morning on the trail of the robbers. He’ll be surprised when he comes back to-night to learn you youngsters have beat him to it! We’ll go in, telephone the police, go across and get the thieves, jail them, call Mrs. Calott to come over, and we’ll hold a confab in your office, Paul.”

“Oh, don’t tell Mrs. Calott they are found until she gets here!” begged Norma. “I want to see her face!”

Mr. Hammon's eyes twinkled. He solemnly promised.

"Betty," whispered Richard Gordon. "Mrs. Hiller's troubles are about over!"

"Oh, Uncle Dick! Tell me about it! What have you found out?"

"Wait! Hammon is a wise old owl! He'll spring his surprise shortly. You tell Mrs. Hiller to come down to Paul Raymond's office in about an hour and the mystery of the lost pearls will be solved—as well as other mysteries," he added, smiling at Betty's curiosity.

CHAPTER XXV

THE MYSTERY SOLVED

An hour later a little crowd composed of Betty and her friends, her Uncle Dick, the Chief of Police, Mr. Hammon, Mr. and Mrs. Calott and Mrs. Hiller gathered in Paul Raymond's office.

When all were assembled, the Chief of Police rose to his feet.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” he began, “Mrs. Calott, a patron of this hotel, recently lost a very valuable pearl necklace estimated at thirty thousand dollars.”

“Yes,” cut in Mrs. Calott scathingly, “and where is the fine-haired detective who was going to return it so fast?”

The Chief hid a smile.

“Mr. Stone left Orchard Cove this morning, following certain clues.”

“Certain, nothing!” sneered Mrs. Calott. “But one thing is certain, gentlemen, unless I have my pearl necklace within a week I shall bring suit against Richard Gordon's niece for sixty thousand dollars—thirty thousand for the pearls and thirty thousand for the worry and annoyance to which I have been subjected!”

“Flora,” interposed her weary looking husband, “you know I would not stand for that!”

197

“It is entirely unnecessary, madam,” returned the Chief. “I have the pleasure of returning the jewels to you—now.” The Chief crossed the room to where Mrs. Calott sat and, reaching in his pocket, drew forth the jewels.

“My pearls!” gasped Mrs. Calott, snatching at them eagerly. “Did the little sauce-box confess?”

“Madam,” declared the Chief of Police sternly, “Miss Gordon did not steal your necklace. Do you realize that her uncle is a very wealthy man and that you have put yourself in a position whereby, if he choose, Richard Gordon can sue you for slander?”

Mrs. Calott’s jaw dropped. For a moment she looked frightened.

“Miss Gordon told you the truth,” continued the Chief. “She found your necklace in the broken seat where you had lost it, but she was observed by two men who later broke into her room and stole the jewels. The thieves have confessed, and it was solely through the united efforts of these young people”—a wave of his hand around the room—“that the men were caught and your necklace restored to you.”

In short, terse sentences the Chief described the struggle of the young people with the thieves as it had been related to him.

198

“And now, Mrs. Calott,” he ended, “you can verify all this by

calling on the thieves—at the jail.”

Mrs. Calott looked crestfallen but not for long. With thirty thousand dollars in her possession, all her arrogant pride returned. She adjusted her monocle and said loftily:

“I will reward you very amply—Miss—er—Gordon.”

Betty’s cheeks blazed.

“No, Mrs. Calott,” she exclaimed furiously, “you will not reward me! I am glad to be instrumental in their recovery—as I felt in a measure responsible for their loss. But I’d rather touch a rattlesnake than touch a cent of your money!”

“Good old Betty!” encouraged Bob in a whisper.

“Suit yourself!” replied Mrs. Calott insolently. “Suit yourself!”

“And now,” resumed the Chief of Police, “the criminal lawyer, Mr. Hammon, has a few things to say regarding the business affairs of Mrs. Hiller, who has employed him to take care of her interests in a matter of the greatest importance. Remember that I represent the law and no one can leave this room without permission.”

Mrs. Hiller gave a nervous start of surprise and Mrs. Calott’s face turned ghastly as she cast a swift, suspicious look at the impassive face of her husband.

Mr. Hammon shifted in his seat and the Chief of Police went over to the door and locked it.

“Mr. Calott,” said Mr. Hammon, “as Mrs. Hiller’s lawyer, I wish to question you concerning certain business transactions.”

Mr. Calott with impassive face gravely bowed acknowledgment.

“You and Mr. Hiller were business partners, I understand—sharing equally—but the business of late was carried on in your name.”

“Yes, necessarily so, since Mr. Hiller was ill much of the time during the last year of his life,” returned Mr. Calott.

“At Mr. Hiller’s death, you claimed that very little was left for the widow. I now accuse you of criminally defrauding Mrs. Hiller out of a fortune.”

A gasp of amazement went up from the assembled people.

“It is false! It is false!” screamed Mrs. Calott, jumping to her feet.

Mr. Calott turned a stony face to the lawyer.

“This is a grave charge, sir, you have made against me. Have you anything to prove it?”

“You cannot prove it!” angrily cried Mrs. Calott. “We shall sue you for slander!”

“Just a moment,” answered Mr. Hammon. “The business was run under the name of Calott and Company but you and Mr.

Hiller held equal shares. Dividends from certain stocks were paid to you by check last month. Where is Mrs. Hiller's share of those dividends? She has received nothing."

Mrs. Calott's face turned ghastly. She sat down, casting a fearful, uneasy glance at her husband.

"Mr. Hammon," said Mr. Calott slowly, "I have no wish to cheat the wife of the best friend a man ever had."

"Sam!" exclaimed Mrs. Calott warningly. But Mr. Calott went on, paying no attention to his wife.

"It is true we shared equally, but before Will's death he invested unwisely in oil—in the firm name of Calott and Company—and lost about everything he had. My books will prove my statements, Mr. Hammon."

A look of vast relief swept over Mrs. Calott's face.

"And I charge that you doctored the books," said Mr. Hammon quietly. "The losses in oil to which you refer were your own individual losses, and in order not to face ruin, you confiscated the money which belonged to your partner and to his widow."

Mr. Calott's face did not change expression, but Betty noticed that his hands were trembling.

201

"Sam!" exclaimed Mrs. Calott sharply, "don't let them down you. It is all false! He cannot prove it!"

"You are mistaken, madam," replied Mr. Hammon quietly.

“Here is the proof!”

At sight of the long legal looking document which Mr. Hammon drew from his pocket, Mrs. Calott’s face turned the color of chalk. She collapsed into a chair, screaming hysterically.

Betty was sitting by Mr. Calott. With ashen face he leaned over and whispered only four words into his wife’s ear, but the effect was magical. The woman ceased screaming and a look of vast relief crept over her fat features, succeeded by one of crafty cunning. The words were, “I will protect you.”

“This,” said Mr. Hammon tapping the long envelope, “is an agreement of partnership signed by the two partners.”

“Oh, Mr. Hammon!” exclaimed Mrs. Hiller, “where did you find it? I am sure Willie kept all his important papers in the office vault, but my lawyer could find nothing to my advantage.”

Mr. Hammon looked from Mr. Calott to Mrs. Calott.

“Behind a picture frame in your own home is not always a safe place, especially when a criminal lawyer is searching,” he remarked dryly. “This document named the stocks Mr. Hiller holds. The Ogden stocks are among them. The dividends were paid last month and a check was sent you, Mr. Calott, for thirty thousand dollars. It was cashed at the bank. Where is Mrs. Hiller’s share of that thirty thousand dollars?”

202

Mr. Calott groaned.

“I was in financial difficulties. I—I did not mean to cheat Mary. I was just fighting for time. I—I spent the fifteen thousand.”

Mrs. Calott looked vastly relieved. She adjusted her monocle and sat erect.

“Sam! Sam!” exclaimed the gentle Mrs. Hiller. “Why didn’t you tell me? I would have helped you out!”

The sympathetic words broke Sam Calott utterly. He buried his face in his hands and great, racking sobs shook him.

“Mary! Mary! How I have wronged you!”

“Mr. Calott,” resumed the voice of Mr. Hammon, “I have proof that you and your wife have criminally withheld a large fortune from Mrs. Hiller. Through unwise investments in oil, you are practically penniless while Mrs. Hiller owns the business. Do you know this is a penitentiary offense?”

“I had nothing to do with all this!” exclaimed Mrs. Calott indignantly. “I know nothing whatever about it!”

203

Betty jumped angrily to her feet, but Mr. Hammon gave her a quick, warning glance and motioned for silence. She sat down, boiling with indignation.

“Mrs. Calott,” continued Mr. Hammon, “did you not hide the written agreement behind the picture frame?”

“I did not! How dare you make such a charge against me?”

“Did your husband hide it—fighting for time to pay his debts?”

“I do not know. I know nothing whatever about it!”

“Mr. Calott, did you hide the agreement?”

“I did,” answered Mr. Calott.

His wife licked her lips and a look of satisfaction crept over her crafty features. She adjusted the pearls around her neck and arose.

“Penniless and a criminal!” she exclaimed coldly. “Sam Calott, I am through with you! There are two people for whom I have no use, a poor man and a fool—you are both!”

Mr. Calott looked at his wife as if he were seeing her for the first time. He groaned aloud and Betty heard him murmur to himself, “My life-blood for a bauble!”

“Sam Calott, I shall leave you now,” continued Mrs. Calott coldly, “and bring action at once for divorce.” She moved haughtily toward the door.

204

Betty sprang to her feet, and this time Mr. Hammon nodded approval. Bob also arose.

“You cowardly woman!” exclaimed Betty, looking indignantly at Mrs. Calott. “You are the guilty one!”

Quickly and vividly, Betty and Bob related the conversation they had overheard in the arbor.

“You miserable woman! You are a forger and a thief!” cried Bob in a rage. “And you tried to put the loss of the pearls off on Betty! You—you big, fat rat!”

Mrs. Calott ran towards the door and shook it in an effort to escape.

The Chief of Police forced her to a seat. She collapsed into a chair crying:

“Sam! Sam! Save me!”

Mr. Hammon held a short conversation with Mrs. Hiller then turned to Mr. Calott.

“Is it true that your wife took the check sent you from the Ogden Company, cashed it, forging your signature, and purchased a pearl necklace with the money?”

Mr. Calott was silent.

“I do not need your evidence, Mr. Calott. I have thoroughly worked the case. The banker bears testimony that your wife cashed the check; the jeweler that she purchased the necklace; these young people that it was done without your knowledge.”

Mr. Calott groaned.

205

“Luckily for you, Mr. Calott, Mrs. Hiller does not wish to make charges against you or your wife. She only wishes the money honestly due her. As fifteen thousand dollars of her money is invested in the necklace, we shall have to retain it for a settlement.” Mr. Hammon walked over to Mrs. Calott,

followed by the Chief.

“The necklace, madam,” demanded Mr. Hammon.

Mrs. Calott’s hands went up to her neck in a desperate, protective gesture. She looked wildly around.

“You shall not have my pearls!” she cried. “They are mine! mine! Oh, my beautiful pearls! Sam! Sam! Half of the money in them is yours. Pay Mrs. Hiller and let me keep my pearls!” she wheedled.

Norma looked at Betty in amazement.

“She’d strip him of every cent!” she cried.

“Let her keep them,” said Mr. Calott bitterly. “They are cheap—the price of a man’s honor!”

But the Chief of Police held out his hand.

“The jewels or jail—choose.”

With trembling fingers Mrs. Calott unclasped the pearls and dropped them into the Chief’s hand. Her eyes rested on the bowed head of her husband.

206

“Sam Calott!” she exclaimed, “you are a ruined man. I am not fool enough to stay on a sinking ship.”

“I do not expect it—now.” replied her husband.

“I shall take action for divorce at once.” Mrs. Calott arose,

adjusted her monocle and walked haughtily toward the door. The Chief unlocked it and she passed out. Mr. Calott did not look up.

“Now, Mr. Calott,” said Mr. Hammon, “for certain reasons, I have withheld a bit of news until the last. You have not been to your place of business for several days. I searched your office thoroughly as only a detective or criminal lawyer can. In your mail was a letter from the B. T. L. Marchante Oil Company, saying that new and successful wells had been drilled and that the stock you thought worthless is now worth thousands of dollars. You will be a very wealthy man.”

Mr. Calott’s hands came down from his face and he stared at Mr. Hammon unbelievably. “I do not deserve it, sir!” he said finally.

The lawyer placed his hand on Mr. Calott’s shoulder.

“You are not the first man ruined by a selfish, unscrupulous woman. You are given another chance. Make the most of it!”

Bob Henderson turned to Betty and whispered excitedly.

207

“Bully for Mr. Calott! Won’t Mrs. Calott be sorry when she finds out the ship didn’t sink, after all?”

Bobby Littell grinned understandingly at Bob’s enthusiasm.

Richard Gordon came and took Betty’s hand in his.

“Uncle Dick,” she exclaimed, rubbing her cheek against his

coat sleeve, “this is the most satisfactory morning I have ever spent!”

Mr. Hammon approached with Mrs. Hiller, and the little woman put her arms around Betty.

“I owe all my friends a debt of gratitude I can never pay,” she murmured, crying softly.

“There’s the gong for luncheon!” exclaimed Ann Hall excitedly. “My gracious, these blessed children never did eat!”

Slowly they trooped out into the hall.

“Oh, Uncle Dick,” murmured Betty holding on to Richard Gordon’s arm, “I am so happy! The pearl necklace is found! Mrs. Hiller’s fortune is restored! Everything is lovely! Oh, I am so happy!”

“You are not the only one,” laughed Bob, looking around at the happy, excited faces of their friends.

The Chief of Police passed. He held in his hand the pearl necklace—gleaming, exquisite, perfect.

208

“A little thing to cause so great a disturbance,” reflected Patricia Raymond. Her eyes sought Betty’s white face and a solicitous expression crept into their lovely depths.

“Paul,” she said softly to her husband, “you must see the house physician at once and have him attend to Betty and Bob. They will never wish to visit us again!”

“Oh, Mrs. Raymond!” breathed Betty, “I have brought worry upon all of you. But now it is over! I was never so happy in my life as I am now!”

“I, too!” exclaimed Alice and Norma, both as in one breath.

“And I,” cried Bob fervently.

The door of the foyer slammed violently. The Chief of Police was taking his departure. The episode of the lost pearls was over.

THE END



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[The end of *Betty Gordon and the Lost Pearls* by Alice B. Emerson]