

DORIS FORCE
AT
BARRY MANOR

JULIA K. DUNCAN

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Title: Doris Force at Barry Manor

Date of first publication: 1931

Author: Julia K. Duncan

Date first posted: Jan. 30, 2020

Date last updated: Jan. 30, 2020

Faded Page eBook #20200155

This eBook was produced by: Stephen Hutcheson & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <https://www.pgdpCanada.net>

DORIS FORCE AT BARRY MANOR

Or
Mysterious Adventures Between Classes

By
JULIA K. DUNCAN

THE GOLDSMITH PUBLISHING CO.
CHICAGO NEW YORK

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DORIS FORCE AT BARRY MANOR

CHAPTER I “ALL OUT!”

“Barry the next stop. Barry! All out for Barry Manor!”

The conductor’s announcement caused a stir in the railroad car. A score of girls reached for bags and wraps that had been stowed in the baggage racks, and a hum of voices rose above the clicking of the wheels on the rails.

Doris Force tucked a strand of reddish-brown hair beneath her modestly modish little hat and pressed her face against the window.

“We ought to be able to see the flag soon,” she said to the girl beside her. “Dear old Barry Manor! And to think, Kitty, we are Juniors!”

Kitty Norris, Doris's chum and companion in adventure, leaned over her friend's shoulder. She was a girl pretty enough to attract attention anywhere except when with Doris, whose auburn locks and creamy complexion made that tall, slender young woman exceptionally attractive.

"Think about it?" Kitty laughed. "I have been pondering over it for a week. Juniors! That means trigonometry, French III, home economics, 'Test-tube' Tyler's course in the chemistry of foods and—"

"And curfew at ten o'clock instead of nine-thirty, canoe privileges every afternoon instead of Wednesdays and Saturdays," Doris answered. "There it is!"

Doris pointed to a flag fluttering in the September breeze just discernible above the crimsoning tree-tops. There was a rush to that side of the car and the babble of girlish voices grew louder.

Adult passengers in the coach smiled good-humoredly at the excitement which animated the students, that is, most of the students. Three of those obviously bound for the school did not show the spirited animation of the others.

One, seated by herself, was evidently making her first trip to the school. She seemed timid and unhappy, her fingers twisting nervously in her lap as she stared wide-eyed at the frolicsome girls.

Of the other two, one was another red-haired girl, who wore a close-fitting crimson hat and a silken scarf of the same

vivid hue loosely knotted around her throat. She looked, as Kitty had remarked when she and Doris entered the train at Chilton, “like a three-alarm fire.” Clarice Crowin was the girl’s name, and as she is a classmate of Doris, we will learn to know her well.

Beside her, inwardly fidgeting but trying to imitate Clarice’s air of scornful self-possession, was Beatrice Busey, dark-haired and small. Beatrice, known (but not affectionately so) as “Busy Bea” to most of the new Juniors, was Clarice’s roommate and flattering imitator.

The locomotive puffed to the top of the grade, and with a blast of its whistle began to coast down the opposite side of the ridge.

Then Barry Manor came into full view below. It was a great U-shaped building in colonial style, with towering, wide-throated chimneys that hinted at big open fireplaces inside. Standing on a knoll overlooking a lazily winding river, the white building was indeed a picture.

Cheers broke from eager young throats as the train swept past the school, a mile distant from the tracks, yet in plain view. The conductor threw open the door at one end of the coach and bawled out:

“Barry! All out for Barry Manor!” This was followed by a rush for stray parcels and missing gloves.

The aisle was filled with laughing, chatting girls, crowding toward the doors of the car. Doris was among them. She

nodded to Clarice as she moved past that young woman, who retained her seat as if disdainful to mingle with the exuberant crowd.

As she passed the seat of the strange girl, who seemed more nervous and upset than before, Doris paused for a moment.

“Aren’t you a new student?” she asked kindly. “Excuse me if I am wrong.”

The girl, a pretty, dark-haired young woman who seemed to owe her slenderness to some recent illness or consuming worry, raised large, violet-blue eyes to those of Doris.

“Yes, I—I’m going to Barry,” the girl replied.

“May I help you? Come along with us. This is my roommate, Kitty Norris, and I’m Doris Force.”

“Oh, no, thank you,” the girl replied, lowering her eyes. “I—I’ll be all right. I’d rather you didn’t—bother.”

Doris stared at the bowed head and clasped hands of the stranger in surprise, then looked at Kitty with raised eyebrows. Kitty shrugged her shoulders as if to say that the kindest thing would be to leave the girl to her own devices, so Doris closed the gap that the delay had created between her and the others near the door.

With a hiss of air-brakes and escaping steam, followed by a tolling of its brazen bell, the train rolled into the station.

“All out for Barry Manor! Ba-a-rr-ry!”

The girls dashed out of the car, as did the rest of the students from other coaches in the train.

Suddenly from a seat near the door a little old woman scrambled into the aisle, clasping tightly an old-fashioned black satchel.

Doris paused to give the old lady room to pass her.

“Barry, did he say?” the woman asked anxiously.

“Yes, this is Barry,” Doris replied.

“Oh, I’m so glad,” the old lady cried, making for the door.

“Wait, let me help you,” Doris urged. “I’ll take your bag so the conductor can help you down the steps.”

“No, no! No, no!” the woman said emphatically, with a sharp shake of her head, which set the ornaments on her old-fashioned black bonnet to bobbing.

Nevertheless, Doris held fast to one of the frail, black-clad elbows and assisted the woman from the platform of the car, while the conductor helped her to the ground.

The station was in a turmoil. Girls who had arrived in the morning or the previous day were on hand to greet old friends. The air was filled with shouts and laughter, and the platform was piled with suitcases, gripsacks, kitbags, and satchels. The baggage car was disgorging dozens of steamer-trunks.

Backed against the platform were two large buses labeled “Barry Manor,” while a truck for the baggage was similarly inscribed. Half a dozen taxicabs were lined up as well, their drivers adding to the babel with their shouts for customers.

Doris and Kitty were warmly greeted by two old friends, Shirley Dawson and Miriam Collins, who had arrived at Barry the day before and were excitedly telling their friends that everything was the same as before at the beloved school.

Clarice Crowin emerged from the car, followed by Beatrice.

“Oh, Bea, please call one of those taxi drivers, won’t you?” Clarice said, in a voice designed to be heard above the chatter and laughter.

“Busy Bea” leaped obediently forward, and then remembered herself sufficiently to adopt a languid walk.

“Oh, driver! This way, my good man,” she called.

Doris turned her head to hide a smile. Miriam snorted.

“My stars!” she exclaimed. ““This way, my good man,’ indeed! Look at the clothes on Queen Clarice, will you!”

“She always did like red,” Shirley commented. “Somebody ought to tell her she looks like a steeple on fire.”

The four girls watched with amusement as Clarice sauntered to the taxi, disdaining the school bus. She allowed Beatrice to tell the baggage-burdened driver their destination.

“Come on, let’s hop on the first bus,” Kitty urged.

“Let’s wait until it is filled up more,” Doris suggested. “All the seats are taken anyhow, so if we stand near the door we’ll be out first.”

Most of the girls were clustered around the two buses by this time, and Doris, picking up her suitcase, music roll and hand bag, started to follow the crowd.

As she did so, the train gave a warning toot of its whistle. There was a shout from the guard on the last coach which was echoed by the others, and slowly the cars began to move forward.

“Let’s watch the train wind around the bend,” Doris cried. “I love to watch trains.”

“I thought you liked airplanes better,” Kitty laughed mischievously.

Doris could not repress a smile. The remark was a pointed one, aimed at Doris’s friendship for Dave Chamberlin, a promising young pilot whom all of us who are old friends of Doris will recall with affection and admiration.

Its red and green flags fluttering from the rear platform of the last car, the train vanished around the curve half a mile down the track.

“Let’s go,” Miriam exclaimed, “or we’ll have to ride on the bus’s bumper.”

“Oh, wait a moment,” Doris cried. “There’s that little old lady. She looks bewildered.”

Indeed, the frail little figure in black whom Doris had assisted from the coach did appear thoroughly frightened and dazed.

She stood close to the wall of the station, her little old-fashioned grip still clutched in both hands, her eyes roving anxiously about her.

“You girls go on ahead and save me foot-room,” Doris said. “I’m going to see if I can help the poor woman.”

“Oh, come on, she’s probably waiting for somebody to call for her,” Shirley cried.

Doris, however, dropped her luggage and hurried across the platform. Kitty, after a moment of indecision, put her bags down also and followed her chum.

“Could I be of any assistance to you?” Doris asked the forlorn, black-clad figure.

The woman shrank back against the wall, and stared at Doris without saying a word.

“Are you waiting for somebody to call for you or shall I help you to a taxicab?” Doris pressed.

“I—I thought the man said Barry!” the woman murmured.

Doris knit her brows, more puzzled than ever.

“This is Barry,” she said. “That is the town’s name.”

“Town?” repeated the woman vaguely. “I don’t want a town. Barry, that’s whom I want here. Not a town. I just left town.”

Doris stared at the woman in perplexity, then turned to Kitty.

“What does she mean?” she asked.

Kitty shrugged her shoulders hopelessly.

“Didn’t you want to get off at Barry?” Doris asked the old lady.

“I wanted to see Barry,” the woman responded.

“It’s on the other side of the station,” Doris replied. “There’s not much to see.”

“On the other side? Oh, that’s fine,” the woman said, tottering feebly forward. Doris took her arm and guided her around the building.

“Oh, Doris! Yoo-hoo!”

The hail came from one of the buses, and was punctuated by blasts of the vehicle’s horn. The other auto had already backed out and was heading for school.

“Go ahead, I’ll take a taxi!” Doris shouted. “I’m not ready to come yet.”

She urged Kitty to go along with the crowd on the bus.

“I’ll stick with you,” Kitty said, “and pay half the fare.”

On the far side of the station Doris halted her charge and waved her hand toward the hamlet of Barry, with its background of granite hills.

“There’s Barry,” she said, “such as it is.”

“I don’t see him at all,” the old woman said, peering about her. “I’d know him in a minute. A tall lad he is, is Barry.”

“You—you are looking for a man named Barry?” the astonished Doris demanded. “This is a town called Barry, you know. And the school up on the hill is called Barry Manor. I am sure there is no person named Barry living here any more, though.”

“Oh, dear me,” sighed the little old lady. “It’s Barry I wanted to see. I went to the railroad depot in New York and the man there—Barry is a fine lad, that he is. Yes, indeed.”

Doris looked at Kitty helplessly.

“What shall we do? Put her back on the train for New York? Don’t you think that’s the best idea?” she asked her chum.

“I haven’t the faintest idea what’s the best thing to do,” Kitty replied.

Upon inquiry, the station master said there was no train for New York until eleven P. M., and that would bring the woman into the city before sun-up.

Doris bit her lip.

“What a complication to step into the very first thing,” she said to herself. “The poor old woman is practically helpless. What on earth shall I do?”

Of course, the easiest thing to do never entered Doris’s mind. That was to leave the old lady to her own devices.

“You can’t take her up to the Manor,” Kitty said a trifle impatiently.

“No-o, but—” Doris mused. “I have it! The Pie-azza!”

CHAPTER II

A SHRINKING VIOLET

“The Pie-azza! Well, perhaps—” Kitty repeated doubtfully. “Mrs. Matterhorn may not want to be bothered with—”

She nodded significantly toward the old woman, who was now reading with marked interest a placard on the station wall describing the penalties for throwing burning cigar stubs on train floors.

“She’ll be safer there than in the hotel,” Doris declared. “And it will just be for tonight. Tomorrow morning she can take the train to New York.”

“She must have wandered away from a guardian,” Kitty mused, surveying their unexpected ward.

Doris took the old woman by the arm.

“I will take you to a house where you can get a comfortable room for the night,” she said smilingly. “Then you can take the morning train back to New York.”

“New York?” exclaimed the confused woman. “Why, what is the name of this place?”

“This is Barry,” Doris repeated patiently.

“Oh, no, you aren’t Barry,” chuckled the woman, shaking a finger reprovingly at the girl. “Barry is head and shoulders taller than you are, and besides, he is a man.”

Doris sighed and signaled to the one remaining cab driver, who had been watching the three with mild interest.

“Yes, Miss,” the man cried, jumping from his vehicle and running toward the group. “To the school?”

“Take us to Mrs. Matterhorn’s first,” Doris directed.

“I suppose your grandma’s come up for the big doings tomorrow?” the man asked cheerily, as he picked up the girls’ baggage.

“She’s not a relative of mine,” Doris replied. “I don’t know who she is, come to think of it.”

When the woman was unprotestingly seated in the taxi between the girls, Doris introduced her chum and herself.

“I am Mrs. Tindell,” the old lady said. “Kate Tindell, because I don’t like Kathryn. I never did like the name. I didn’t name my daughter Kathryn.”

Doris wondered what that could possibly have to do with the case, but decided that the daughter might provide a clue to the woman’s identity.

“Do you live with your daughter?” she asked.

Mrs. Tindell’s eyes suddenly filled with tears.

“My daughter—left me,” she said simply. “Barry is all I have, and he doesn’t know that.”

Barry again!

Doris tried a new method of approach.

“Have you anyone at home to whom we can send a message, to say you are safe and will return tomorrow?” she asked.

“There’s Josephine, but she had to go to her sister’s,” Mrs. Tindell replied vaguely. “She said she would send somebody to take her place. But nobody came. Would you like the job? I pay very good wages.”

“We go to school here, my chum and I,” Doris answered. “Perhaps if you gave us your address—where do you live in New York?”

“Oh, it’s a very convenient location,” Mrs. Tindell replied brightly. “Just a short block from the subway, and quite near the park.”

“What is the street and number?” Doris probed.

“I—I’m sure I don’t remember,” the old lady smiled. “I can find my way there, though. At least, I found my way away from there, so it should not be hard to find my way back.”

The cab stopped with a jerk at this moment, and the driver, turning to the girls, said:

“Here we are at Mrs. Matterhorn’s.”

They had halted in front of a neat frame cottage standing close to the sidewalk. A piazza ran across the front of the house, and from the railing hung a shingle with one word painted on it—“Pies.”

Every girl who attended Barry Manor, the wrought-iron gateway to which was immediately across the elm-shaded street, knew Mrs. Matterhorn. Her home was slangily but affectionately known to the student body as “The Pie-azza.”

Mrs. Matterhorn was a brisk, capable Yankee widow who let out two furnished rooms to parents visiting the school for week-ends, but all year round she carried on a thriving trade in pies, cakes, cookies, home-made candies and similar goodies.

Doris left the cab and rang the bell of “The Pie-azza.” When Mrs. Matterhorn came to the door she negotiated with that good woman for sheltering the aged Mrs. Tindell.

“She doesn’t seem to be very clear in her mind,” Doris explained. “But she’s evidently a woman of refinement. Probably a search is being made for her right now.”

“Show her in,” Mrs. Matterhorn said. “I’m busy, but I guess I can sort of look after the poor thing for one night.”

Mrs. Tindell was shortly afterward safely ensconced in a pleasant second-floor room overlooking the Matterhorn backyard, where phlox and rose o'Sharon blooms lingered and chrysanthemums were just at the height of their glory.

"Isn't it charming here?" Doris asked of no one in particular, as she turned her glance away from the window and back over the room with its gay, braided rag rugs on the floor and its old maple furnishings.

"You can't hear the street cars and the elevated, can you?" Mrs. Tindell remarked. "We must be very high up. What floor is this?"

Mrs. Matterhorn's mouth opened in surprise.

"Where does she think she is?" the pastry-artist demanded. "In the Astor Hotel?"

"I think I'll take a little nap," Mrs. Tindell said instead of answering.

On the way downstairs Doris promised Mrs. Matterhorn that she would be over in the morning to guide Mrs. Tindell to the station and see her aboard the train.

"She's kind of queer, to say the least," Mrs. Matterhorn said. "I hope she don't walk in her sleep. I have some folks in the next room, a couple come to put their girl into the school. I'll count on you, Miss."

Doris reëntered the cab with a gusty sigh of relief.

“Now take us to the school,” she directed the driver. “We’ll make an imposing entrance, all right. Half an hour late, and in a taxi. The girls will think we are getting snobbish.”

However, no unkind remarks were made as Doris and Kitty dismounted, paid the cab driver, and carried their luggage into the high-ceilinged entrance hall of the school. Throngs of girls were still in the excitement of reunion.

“There’s the Ogress!” Doris cried, dropping her bags and running forward to greet a tall, middle-aged woman dressed in a severe, tailor-made costume.

“How do you do, Miss Bartlett! Oh, it’s good to be back again,” Doris exclaimed, and the “Ogress,” merely a term of affection, smiled from behind her nose-glasses and warmly shook hands with the girl.

“How are you, Doris? I hope you had a splendid summer,” Miss Bartlett said. She was the dean of Barry Manor, and it was the secret ambition of almost every one of her pupils some day to have the poise and judgment which Miss Bartlett possessed.

“I had a glorious summer and an exciting one,” Doris replied.

That was putting it mildly, to say the least, as we old friends of Doris well know. To begin with, there was the adventure experienced by “DORIS FORCE AT LOCKED GATES,” which is the title of the first volume of Doris’s experiences.

This was not the time or place for Doris to tell Miss Bartlett how she had visited the mysterious mansion inhabited by the hermit-like Misses Gates, recluse twin sisters. Doris had gone there to claim an inheritance, as we know, but instead had become involved in an intricate plot full of mystery and not without danger. She had managed most cleverly to bring a notorious swindler to justice, and had won a ruby ring as a reward, but we all remember how that ring had involved her in other adventures.

The long-missing uncle, John Trent, whose courtship of one or the other of the Gates twins had ended in tragedy before either of them had known which was the favored one, was hunted by “DORIS FORCE AT CLOUDY COVE,” and in that book our young friend’s unexpected talent for solving mysteries gained full recognition. Up to that time Doris had thought her only talent was her glorious, golden voice.

The high light of the summer had been reached by “DORIS FORCE AT RAVEN ROCK,” and Kitty had declared many times that that experience would provide her with true stories to tell to her grandchildren. Doris and Kitty had found themselves literally dropped into the heart of the Wild West, as a result of that first visit to Locked Gates. In a powerful, tri-motored cabin plane which her friend Dave Chamberlin had helped pilot across the continent, Doris had the wonderful opportunity to frustrate the designs of old pirates who had come within an ace of cheating the Misses Gates and John Trent out of a fortune. Those who can recall without a shudder Doris’s imprisonment in the cave full of explosives possess sterner nerves than those of Kitty or even

Dave, not to speak of “Marshmallow” Mallow, the amiable stout lad from Chilton.

Speaking of “Marshmallow” immediately brings to mind Mrs. Matterhorn, who is destined to find in that friendly youth the most enthusiastic customer of her career, as will be disclosed to the reader later.

Mrs. Matterhorn found that Mrs. Tindell was rational enough to appreciate the jellied chicken broth, the crisp waffles with real maple syrup, and the green-apple pie with cream cheese which the widow carried up to her.

“She told me she couldn’t boil water without scorching it herself,” Mrs. Matterhorn told the woman who helped her in the kitchen. “But I declare to goodness, Lizzie, the very next words she said were, ‘Do you think I’m foolish to carry my pearls around?’—and her with no more pearls on her than I have feathers!”

Doris and Kitty registered at the school and were assigned to new quarters in the west wing, where the juniors and freshmen were housed. The east wing was the dormitory for the seniors and the sophomores, the latter being placed under the watchful eyes of the dignified graduating class because of the well-known sophomore tendency for escapades.

“Good! We have a corner room!” Doris cried, as she opened the doors of the chamber she was to share with Kitty until June.

The setting sun was pouring its flood of golden light into the room, warmly lighting up the few framed etchings which were thus far the only ornaments upon the cream-tinted walls. Two empty book-cases, two couch-beds starkly white in their fresh linens but soon to be transformed by colorful coverlets the girls had brought with them, twin desks and four chairs, two of them of the great wide-armed variety, completed the furnishings.

Barry Manor was an endowed school; that is to say, a very wealthy alumna had left her entire fortune to the academy. Tuition costs and board had been reduced by the trustees, and enough remained from the income the school now boasted to make its appointments of the finest type, in good taste and extremely comfortable.

“Won’t we have fun fixing this room up!” Doris exclaimed, flying from window to bed, then from closet to book-case. “We won’t have time tonight, though. Oh, here’s the bathroom. I wonder who has the room on the other side to share it with us? Who’s at the door?”

Shirley and Miriam entered.

“We’ve the room next door,” they announced. “Isn’t this luck? And Clarice and Busy Bea are moving in across the hall. Clarice is mad because she wants this room you have.”

“And if she had it she’d want the one she is in now,” Doris said meaningly. “Toss a penny to see who gets the first bath, Kitty. I’m full of cinders. Tails! Well, you win.”

Other girls dropped in to chat and gossip while Kitty unpacked her bags. The trunks would not be delivered to the rooms until morning, she learned.

“Where did you leave your grandmother?” one girl asked.

“My—my grandmother?” Doris repeated, puzzled. “Oh, you mean the old lady from the station. She’s not related to me at all.”

“She is by adoption, though,” someone laughed.

“She was lost,” Doris explained. “Didn’t want to come to this town at all.”

“That proves she must be a freshman,” a girl in the group chuckled. “Half a dozen of them are weeping in their rooms because they want their mamas!”

“Come on, let’s clear out so Doris can get dressed for the reception,” somebody remarked. “Big doings tonight, you know.”

“Faculty reception, as usual,” Doris nodded.

“You’ll probably be asked to sing,” Miriam said, as she closed the door behind her.

From the bathroom came sounds of energetic splashing, and presently Kitty emerged, her head tied up in a towel, a vivid Chinese kimono draped around her form.

“Your turn,” she announced.

“Do you hear that queer sound?” Doris asked, her fingers to her lips.

Kitty perked her head.

“Somebody crying in the next room,” Doris decided.

“I’ll bet it’s that new girl that was in the car with us. I’m going to see.”

She ran into the hallway and tapped at the door to the right.

“Violet Washington” was the name on the card.

“C—come in,” came in muffled tones.

Doris opened the door, and saw the strange girl, just as she had surmised, lying on the bed.

“I—I—oh, I thought it was one of the tu-tu-teachers,” the girl wailed, burying her face in her pillow. “Go away, please!”

CHAPTER III

A RACE WITH DEATH

Doris hesitated, her hand on the knob.

“I know how homesick you must feel,” she said at last. “I want to help you. Let me unpack your suitcase for you while you wash your face.”

The only reply was a violent shake of the girl’s head.

“It won’t be long before dinner will be served, and right after it there will be the faculty reception,” Doris went on. “When you get to know the girls and the teachers you will feel better.”

Violet propped herself up on one elbow and looked at Doris through tear-swollen eyes.

“How—how do you know?” she demanded. “I’ll never be happy here.”

Doris was tempted to leave the girl to her tears, but thought better of it and approached the mournful stranger.

“Cheer up,” she said lightly. “Put on the prettiest frock you have and you’ll feel lots better. Come into my room next

door when you are ready.”

Violet did not answer, nor did she hide her face again. She sat up on the edge of her bed.

“Perhaps you’d feel better if you shared a room with somebody who has been at the Manor before,” Doris suggested. “This is a single room, isn’t it?”

Violet nodded.

“I asked for a single room,” she said. “I want to be alone. But as long as I’m here I guess I must make the best of it.”

“That’s the only thing to do,” Doris urged. “You can’t stay up here weeping, so you might as well be as cheerful as you can. Come into our room when you are ready and Kitty and I will guide you around. We are old-timers here.”

“All right,” Violet sighed. “I’ll be there in a jiffy.”

Doris returned to her room, and told Kitty the news of their mysterious neighbor while she made ready for her bath.

She was just slipping a frock over her head when a timid knock sounded on the door and Violet entered. Doris smiled cheerily at the girl, as she pulled her dress into place, and made short work of the introduction to Kitty.

“You’ll grow to love it here,” Doris chatted as she busied herself with comb and brush in front of the mirror. “Canoes galore, and juniors have the privilege of using them every afternoon. And tennis and hockey, and later on basketball.”

She watched Violet in the mirror as she spoke and decided she had taken the wrong tack. The dark-eyed girl seemed to shrink in upon herself, either from fright or from self-consciousness.

“I—I never was in a canoe,” she stammered. “And I don’t know any games.”

“Well, we aim to please,” Doris laughed. “There’s a huge library, and an observatory if you like to count the mountains on the moon. We have dances every month, and there is horse-back riding on Saturdays if you care to pay extra. We’ll show you the room for games, too.”

Violet sighed.

“I guess I just don’t fit in anywhere,” she said.

“Nonsense,” Doris and Kitty chorused, linking their arms in those of the girl. “Let’s go downstairs.”

Doris’s red-brown curls were set off charmingly by a frock of creamy yellow tint, a combination made possible by her flawless complexion. Kitty’s brown hair, softly waved, and her summer-tanned skin were lovely against her dress that in color was almost the shade of her chum’s hair. Violet was dressed in black, which made her seem more tiny and shrinking than she really was. The girls wondered if she was in mourning, but wisely asked no questions.

In the gaily-thronged hall below Doris and Kitty introduced their new friend to fellow-students, and in turn met several other newcomers to the upper classes.

“Who—who is that red-haired girl in that terribly bright dress?” Violet whispered.

“Clarice Crowin, a junior, too,” Doris replied. “She and the girl with her room across the hall.”

“She must be color-blind,” Violet murmured.

Clarice was again making the most of her passion for red. She wore a flame-colored dress with puffed short sleeves which would have been delightfully old-fashioned and charming on a certain type of blonde or a brunette of Spanish ancestry. On Clarice, with her carrot-red hair and florid complexion, the garment was decidedly out of place.

However, Doris led Violet over and introduced her to Clarice.

“I’m glad to know your real name,” Clarice said. “I suspected it was Rain-in-the-Face. You cried enough on the way up. Never mind, little girl. Your mama won’t know her big girl when you get out of here.”

To everyone’s consternation, even Clarice’s, the remark made Violet burst into tears, and the girl threw her arms about Doris and sobbed aloud. Doris and Kitty, with furious glances at Clarice, led the tearful Violet to a seat in a corner and there comforted her.

Dinner was announced presently.

Doris knew where the juniors sat in the long dining hall. At the head of the table waited Miss Armstrong, the

mathematics teacher, and at the foot stood a new teacher, who was introduced to the girls as Mrs. Kalter, instructor of home economics.

After the simple but ample meal the students sauntered into the reception room, where the faculty stood grouped around Miss Bartlett in front of the big fireplace.

The pretty annual custom was then observed in which the girls, led by the seniors, each with a freshman in tow, curtsied to the dean, introduced themselves by name and recalled some happy event of the preceding year, or expressed a hope for the coming terms. Miss De Stella, the music teacher, played softly on the old grand piano during the reception.

Seated in the room were groups of delighted parents, charmed with the scene. They had been Miss Bartlett's guests at dinner, which was spread in the flower-filled sun parlor facing the river and the mountain beyond.

Of course, Doris was asked to sing, and she rejoiced to find that, since Lolita Bedelle's encouragement at Raven Rock, she had considerably more self-assurance than before. Her voice rose unfalteringly in the sweet, simple music of "Believe Me, If All Those Endearing Young Charms." As an encore to the thundering applause, she feelingly rendered "Flow Gently, Sweet Afton."

Other girls obligingly displayed their talents, some at the piano, one on a violin, while two sang a duet which won well-merited applause. Nevertheless, there were

meaning glances cast at Doris as the listeners unconsciously compared her voice with those of the others.

“You ought to get a job calling out trains at the station,” Clarice drawled to Doris as the party broke up. “It’s a shame to waste your talents.”

Doris was hurt and vexed at the unkind remark, the only flaw in a happy evening. She swallowed the angry retort that rose to her lips, knowing that she would gain nothing and only demean herself by engaging in repartee with the malicious girl.

Violet was escorted to her door by Doris and Kitty, but refused any further attention.

“I’m not worth bothering with,” she said sadly. “You have been too good to me. Goodnight.”

As they lay in their beds Kitty and Doris agreed that Violet’s case was a puzzle indeed.

“There is some mystery there,” Doris commented.

Kitty groaned hollowly.

“I’ve had enough mysteries for a life-time,” she announced. “Don’t hunt up any more, please!”

The girls at once fell asleep, and did not know they had shut their eyes until the rising bell awakened them to sparkling daylight.

School had not yet officially begun, and after breakfast and bed-making the two chums had no difficulty in obtaining permission from Dean Bartlett to leave the campus. Of course, their first object was to visit old Mrs. Tindell. They briskly walked the quarter-mile to the gates opposite Mrs. Matterhorn's pie emporium.

"Why, there is Mrs. Matterhorn now!" Doris exclaimed.
"Hello, there! How is your guest?"

Mrs. Matterhorn, swinging an empty basket, halted at the greeting.

"Good morning, girls," she replied. "I was just down to Mrs. Cornish's with three dozen raised rolls. The old lady? She was still sleeping when I left. Come on in."

Doris and Kitty gladly entered the tidy little cottage, redolent with the odors of bakings past and present. The Pie-azza always exhaled a fragrance of ginger and cinnamon with an elusive dash of lemon, which made one's mouth water at the first breath.

"I got to see how my dough's rising," Mrs. Matterhorn said. "You know the way to the room. Suppose you look in on the lady."

Doris willingly ran up the steep old carpeted stairs to the bedroom, in which she had placed Mrs. Tindell the day before.

It was empty!

The bed was rumpled, but not a soul was in the room. After making sure of that fact Doris flew to the head of the stairs and called urgently to Mrs. Matterhorn, who responded immediately.

“Well, I declare,” the woman exclaimed as she surveyed the empty room.

“What’s this?” Doris cried, running to the dresser.
“Goodness! Look! She didn’t skip out trying to cheat you, Mrs. Matterhorn.”

Doris displayed a green banknote.

“A—a fifty-dollar bill!” Mrs. Matterhorn gasped, while Kitty cried, “I never saw so much money in one piece in my life!”

“I can’t take it,” Mrs. Matterhorn announced. “My conscience wouldn’t let me sleep again.”

“We’ll find Mrs. Tindell,” Doris cried. “Come on, Kitty. I’m sure she went to the station.”

The two girls ran toward Barry village, a short three-quarters of a mile from the house. At the railroad station they inquired of the ticket agent if Mrs. Tindell had been seen.

“Little old lady in black with a satchel? Kind of queer way of speaking? Sure, she was here just a minute ago asking for trains,” the agent said. “She must be out on the platform.”

Doris ran through the little waiting room to the platform, but no one was in sight.

“She is not here, Kitty,” the girl said. “I wonder where she might be. Look in the—oh!”

Doris stared down the track, and Kitty followed her gaze.

Stumbling over the ties was the little bent figure of Mrs. Tindell.

“She has started to walk back to New York,” Doris cried, a break in her voice that was half laughter, half compassion. “And the poor thing is going the wrong way! Come on, Kitty, let’s catch her.”

The girl darted off, her chum at her heels.

They had not left the station more than a few yards behind, when a sound came to their ears that made them falter and then fly forward faster than ever. It was the hoarse whistle of a train from behind the bend.

“Hurry, Kitty, hurry!” panted Doris. “She’ll be killed! The engineer will never see her in time to stop!”

Again the whistle sounded, and now the panting of the locomotive could be heard as it thundered up the long grade.

Mrs. Tindell seemed deaf to her approaching danger. Doggedly she stumbled on, heeding neither the whistle nor the cries of the girls behind her.

Doris raced on, slipping in the cinders and stumbling over the ties. Her heart drummed in her ears. Truly she was racing death to that bent, unhurried little figure ahead of her!

CHAPTER IV

THE BLACK SATCHEL

Doris was never able to tell just what happened at the curve in the track.

She saw the black locomotive, spurting smoke and sparks, poke its nose around the corner of the hill. She saw the tall plume of steam spurt from the valve as the whistle sent forth a triumphant blast. She saw also the wee, bent figure of Mrs. Tindell falter in the path of the onrushing steel monster.

Doris flung herself forward and literally threw the old lady from the tracks. Then the train thundered by, seemingly mountain-high. A cloud of steam engulfed the girl, and when it cleared she discovered herself sitting in the cinders with Mrs. Tindell in her lap.

The cars of the train clicked by, showering sparks as the air-brakes were applied. Faces with expressions of amazement and wonder flitted past, framed in the car windows.

But Kitty—where was Kitty?

The train came to a halt. The cars bumped together, brakes squealing. The conductor and flag-man leaped from the cars and hurried toward Doris.

“Do you think this is a public highway?” cried the conductor angrily. “With all the world to promenade in, why in the name of little cabooses do you have to be sauntering on the tracks?”

“I—I saw this lady and I heard the train coming,” Doris replied, trying hard to control her trembling lips as the reaction from the strain on mind and body set in.

“Where is Kitty, though?” she cried, struggling to her feet as the trainmen drew Mrs. Tindell upright.

Just then Kitty came racing around the rear of the train, which had halted between her and Doris.

“Doris, are you hurt?” Kitty cried, her face paper-white with fear.

“No, and Mrs. Tindell is safe,” Doris replied, limply mopping her forehead on her arm.

“I’m sorry I spoke so roughly,” the conductor said. “It was a brave deed, a very brave deed. You saved the old lady’s life, and saved the railroad trouble and disgrace. I’d like to have your name, Miss. You shall have the company’s thanks.”

“No, no, please don’t talk about it,” Doris said. “I’d rather forget all about it.”

“Just as you say,” the man answered with a perplexed shake of his head. He looked at his watch.

“All right, Jake,” he told the flag-man. “Go back to your seats, please!” he shouted to the passengers who had begun to pour from the cars.

The locomotive hooted impatiently, and soon the train moved forward and slowly rolled into Barry station.

“Well, such excitement,” Mrs. Tindell exclaimed. “It is worse than the subway, I do declare. And my satchel has burst open!”

Doris and Kitty looked at the ground and gasped at what they saw there. The black bag which Mrs. Tindell had always clasped to her bosom was lying in the cinders, its fastenings torn open. From the bag there spilled packets of money, neatly fastened together with bands of brown paper; more than that, jewels glittered in the dirt, and a manila envelope lay between the rails, half emptied of its contents, which were unmistakably government bonds.

“Hurry, before some of the people from the station come here to investigate!” Doris cried, scooping up emerald brooches and diamond bangles all mixed up with clinkers and dirt, and dumping them into the bag.

Kitty followed suit, while Mrs. Tindell looked on in wondering silence.

“Now let’s cut across here to the road,” Doris said. “Some people are coming along the tracks from the station, sure enough.”

Each girl took one of Mrs. Tindell's arms, Doris carrying the satchel, and the queer trio scrambled across the tracks and plunged into the bushes that lined the railroad right-of-way. There was an old snake fence to negotiate as well as a meadow.

Mrs. Tindell's feet scarcely touched the ground as the girls fled from the curious crowd that was surging up the tracks from the station.

A friendly copse of second-growth birch trees afforded some shelter, and after a hundred yards of painful going through the brush, the road was at last reached.

"And here comes a truck! I'll flag it," Doris panted.

A great yellow moving van was rumbling toward them, headed for Barry. As Doris planted herself in the road and waved frantically, the van came to an abrupt halt, and the driver leaped to the ground.

"What's the matter, sister?" he asked genially. "In trouble?"

"Would you give us a lift to Barry, please?" Doris asked.

"This old lady is exhausted, and can't move another step."

"We-ell, I ain't got much room," the man replied, regarding the three. "I got a big basket of chiny-ware on the seat next to me, and the inside is chock full of old furniture."

"Oh, I'm sure we can tuck ourselves away somewhere," Doris cried. "Let me look, please."

“Ride anywheres you can find toe-hold,” the driver laughed. “Ride the roof, if you like.”

Doris ran to the rear of the truck. At first glance it seemed to be dismayingly full of chairs lashed together, bed-ends, baskets and barrels. The tailboard was down to accommodate the projecting ends of bulky pieces of furniture.

However, Mrs. Tindell had to reach town!

Doris swung herself up to the tailboard, and surveyed the vanload more closely.

“Here’s just the thing,” she exclaimed to Kitty. “There’s an old sofa here that Mrs. Tindell can stretch out on, and you and I can sit on the back and hang on to the tailboard.”

The driver grinned broadly.

“This sure is a hold-up,” he laughed. “Have it your own way, Miss. Here, I’ll give your granny a boost up, and you lay her out on the sofy.”

The unprotesting Mrs. Tindell was almost hurled from the ground to the tailboard of the van, and without comment she stretched herself out upon the overstuffed couch. She had her satchel in her hands again, and hugged the bag closely to her.

“My, my, who would think they had buses with conveniences like this ’way out in the country,” she murmured. “The steps are awfully high, though.”

Doris smiled pityingly.

“Give me your hand, Kitty, and I’ll help you up,” she said.

“All ready, driver.”

“All set?” came the driver’s hail, and then the big van rolled forward.

“Does this go all the way to New York?” Mrs. Tindell asked.

“New York!” Doris exclaimed. “I forgot all about the train. That was the New York express that we dodged there, and now it is gone! Mrs. Tindell, you’ll have to stay over another night at the Pie—I mean, at Mrs. Matterhorn’s.”

As Mrs. Tindell did not answer, the girls craned their necks to see if she had fainted. Quite to the contrary, the little old lady was sitting up on the couch, and had her bag open upon her knees.

“You—you had better close that or you will—you will lose something,” Doris called out, the words literally jerked from her mouth as the van bumped over the uneven road.

Mrs. Tindell looked up in bewilderment and snapped the satchel shut. Without another word or gesture she lay back upon the couch again.

The van was now rolling through the streets of Barry. Kitty and Doris were busily engaged in planning for Mrs. Tindell’s welfare, and were unaware of the strange sight they must have presented as they sat, legs dangling, on the rear of the loaded van.

Their passage through the village did not go unnoticed, however. Some small boys whistled rudely, and two girls who were walking arm in arm along the elm-shaded sidewalk looked up and immediately assumed looks of outraged propriety.

It was Doris's misfortune that the two Barry Manor students walking in the village at that time happened to be Clarice Crowin and Beatrice Busey.

"Did you see that?" Busy Bea asked in a shocked whisper.

"Who could help seeing it?" Clarice replied, pursing her lips. "Such tomboys. Dean Bartlett ought to hear about it. It is a reflection on the whole school."

Busy Bea nodded significantly.

While those two girls had their heads together, deep in a conversation that was punctuated with sniffs of assumed disdain, Doris and Kitty were helping Mrs. Tindell dismount in front of Mrs. Matterhorn's.

"Why, how did I get back here?" the old lady asked in bewilderment. "How in the world is it possible? I left here hours ago!"

Doris tried to explain, but knew that the task was useless. She saw Mrs. Tindell safely to her room, then returned to school with Kitty. As the chums passed through the hall they saw Clarice and Beatrice just entering the Dean's office.

“I am certainly glad those two didn’t see us arriving at the school gates in our imported limousine,” Doris smiled. “Well, we have Mrs. Tindell to worry about for another day, but that will be all, I hope.”

Kitty heartily seconded both opinions, but the girls did not realize how mistaken they were in all respects. The first intimation of their error came when Miss Whalen, Dean Bartlett’s secretary, rapped at their door and informed them that they were wanted in the office at once.

Light-heartedly Doris and Kitty descended the stairs and knocked at the dean’s office. They did not expect anything more serious than a discussion of the semester’s studies.

“Sit down, girls,” was Miss Bartlett’s greeting. “I have heard an unfortunate report of misconduct on your part.”

CHAPTER V

VIOLET'S SECRET SORROW

Doris and Kitty looked at each other in dismay.

Miss Bartlett removed her glasses and leaned back in her chair, regarding the girls across her tidy desk.

“Ordinarily, you know,” the dean began, “I do not encourage tale-bearing by paying any attention to it. I consider that every girl in Barry Manor has reached an age when she can be trusted to behave herself with dignity.

“However, a report reached me a few minutes ago that you, Doris, and you, Kitty, rode through the village to the door of the school seated on the back of a moving van. Is that true?”

Doris's heart sank within her, but she was instinctively honest.

“Yes, Miss Bartlett.”

“I am pleased at your truthfulness, although of course I should not expect otherwise,” the dean said. “However, I am really shocked at your admission. Surely you must realize that hitch-hiking is not only unbecoming but dangerous. I

cannot imagine your walking so far this morning that you were unable to return to school without begging a ride.”

Doris was at the point of explaining to Miss Bartlett, but she thought better of it. The explanation would have to be a lengthy one, and it did not alter the fact that she and Kitty had been guilty of the offense.

“I realize that it is hard to settle down to the routine and discipline of school so soon after vacation,” Miss Bartlett continued, replacing her glasses. “Therefore, I shall not punish either of you for this misdemeanor. I hope you both are impressed with the silliness and the false impression such conduct brings to bear upon you. You are both excused on pledge of good behavior.”

The girls rose and at a nod from the dean left the room. As the door closed behind them Kitty turned to Doris and exclaimed:

“Busy Bea! I see her hand in this, and that busybody Clarice, too!”

“No great harm done,” Doris said. “Let’s see if there has been any mail. We have a few minutes before luncheon.”

Arm in arm the girls sauntered through the pleasant hall to the room which served as a post office under supervision of a senior, who was helping to pay for her tuition by this duty.

Neither Doris nor Kitty really expected a letter on the second day of their school term. Both were agreeably surprised, therefore, as each was handed an envelope.

“Why, it’s from Marshmallow!” Kitty cried, as she recognized the chubby handwriting, so like its author.

“Mine is from Dave,” Doris said, putting the letter into the pocket of her sweater with an assumed air of nonchalance.

“Aren’t you going to read it?” Kitty demanded.

Another student entered the office at this juncture and timidly approached the desk.

“Is there—there was a note on my door,” she said in a timid voice. “Any telegram for me?”

“Hello, Violet!” Doris greeted the girl genially.

Violet Washington turned and smiled fleetingly.

“What’s your name?” the girl in charge of the mail asked brusquely.

“Why—Washington, Violet Washington,” the timid one replied.

“One telegram, right,” the postmistress announced. “Sign your name here first.”

Doris and Kitty saw Violet’s hand tremble as she wrote her name on the indicated form. She then tore the yellow envelope open, extracted the typed message eagerly, and after reading it let the paper flutter to the floor.

“I’ll bet a cookie she will cry again,” said Kitty under her breath.

Sure enough, great tears welled into Violet’s eyes as she stooped to pick up the telegram. The tears spilled down upon her cheeks as she tore the paper into many small bits.

“I have to stay here, and I du-don’t want to,” Violet confessed chokingly to the two girls.

“It isn’t such a bad place,” Doris replied. “Come along, Violet. There’s the luncheon bell. It’s a rule here we must not come to the table with a sad face. Cheer up! And after luncheon we’ll have a good chat together.”

Violet swallowed hard, shaking her head despairingly. She followed the girls from the room, and at the table sat silently, eating very little and declining her dessert.

Clarice and Busy Bea seemed to be rather crestfallen that Doris and Kitty should be at the table and in apparently good spirits. They expected the girls to be confined to their room on limited rations for the offense they had related to the dean. Doris and Kitty, however, did not even give the two plotters the satisfaction of a harsh glance, but were purposely unusually kind and attentive to the uncongenial pair. Clarice seemed particularly nettled, and finally begged to be excused when Doris was heard to say that the morning had been one of the most interesting she had ever passed at Barry Manor!

Luncheon over, Doris and Kitty made a point of linking arms with Violet and escorting the despondent girl to their room.

“We want your opinion on our decorations,” Doris said. “Shall we put cretonne curtains on the book-shelves, or shall we leave them open and just put a scarf of some bright color on the tops?”

Violet seemed to cheer up once she was in the chums’ gay room. She admired the pictures, read the titles of the books on the shelves, and chatted almost gaily on the subject of curtains.

“In my room at home I had—” she began. Then her face clouded and she bowed her head, suddenly silent. Doris and Kitty looked at each other, and the former immediately began a spirited discourse on sports.

“Each class has a big war canoe, with twelve paddles, and we have races in the spring,” Doris said. “And we juniors have the privilege of using the canoes every afternoon, so long as we can swim. You can swim, can’t you, Violet?”

Violet nodded mutely.

“Shall we go for a paddle this afternoon? We begin work in earnest tomorrow, you know. Or do you like rowing better?” Doris rattled on, intent upon dispelling Violet’s gloom.

Kitty came to her rescue with the argument that tennis was better than canoeing.

“Tennis is all right, of course, but I prefer the team-work of canoeing or basketball,” Doris resumed. “Do you play either of those, Violet? I should think you would make a good forward. You’ll come out for the class team, won’t you?”

Violet heaved a gusty sigh.

“I hope I shall be out of this place when the basketball season comes around,” she said, staring wistfully into space. “If only—”

Impulsively Doris sat down beside Violet and put her arms around the girl’s thin shoulders.

“It is none of my business,” Doris said, “but really, Violet, you must not be so homesick. After you get to know the girls and join in the games, and the class-work too, of course, you will have an entirely different idea of boarding school. This is your first time away from home, isn’t it?”

Violet again nodded mutely.

“Come on, let’s go for a walk along the river,” Kitty suggested. “It will do us all good, and Violet can get an idea of the grounds at the same time.”

“Oh, I’d rather—well, I’ll come,” Violet said without enthusiasm. “But I shan’t be happy until—if—”

Her chin quivered, and she blinked back the tears that seemed always so close to the surface.

Convinced that Violet was too much alone with her hidden sorrows, Doris bundled the girl out of doors and together with Kitty led her on a tour of the school grounds.

“There are over one hundred acres to the campus,” Doris lectured. “On your left, Ladies and Gentlemen, the Bylow

River, especially made for the enjoyment of the Barry Manor girls.”

“Directly ahead of us is the hockey field,” added Kitty, “and the garbage incinerator looms beyond. The tennis courts are just beyond the boathouses. It is a regular country club, and if you do not let your lessons interfere with your fun you can have a grand time at Barry Manor!”

Violet smiled wanly at the girls’ amusing chatter. The trio sauntered along the river’s edge to the limits of the school grounds, tossing twigs at the frogs that blinked from the haven of cat-tail clumps.

“I’m getting sort of tired,” Violet confessed at last. “Do you mind if I go back to my room? You girls are dears to be so kind to an old cross-patch like myself, but if you—”

Again she let her words trail into silence. Doris and Kitty, their patience almost exhausted, said nothing further as the three turned their steps back toward the school building.

The chums bade farewell to Violet at her door, and entered their own room, more puzzled than ever at their recent companion’s strange behavior.

“There is some mystery about her, I am sure,” Doris insisted. “Of course, it would not be right to try to pry into her affairs.”

“I think she has been spoiled at home and now that she is among strangers she can’t adjust herself,” Kitty declared.

“Just the same, this letter has been burning a hole in my pocket.”

Without further ado she took Marshmallow’s note to the window and began to read. Doris as promptly slit the envelope of her own letter and read what Dave had to say.

“Isn’t it splendid!” Doris exclaimed. “Dave says Pete Speary—you remember Pete, of course, who helped Dave pilot us to Raven Rock?—has come back and opened the state agency for the autogyro, and Dave hopes to fly one up here!”

“It sounds sort of crazy to me,” Kitty said. “However, I’ll be awfully glad to see Marshmallow—and Dave, of course. It will make Clarice’s red hair turn green with envy when the boys come here in an airplane! Can’t you just imagine what she’ll think up to go us one better? She will probably say she is expecting friends to arrive in a submarine on the Bylow River.”

The girls laughed at the picture Kitty had conjured, but a knock at the door halted their merriment.

“Telephone, Doris,” was the message called through the door.

“Who in the world would be telephoning?” Doris wondered aloud.

“Maybe the boys have already arrived,” Kitty suggested hopefully.

“The best way to find out is to answer the ’phone,” Doris said, as she dashed down the hall.

CHAPTER VI

MISSING TREASURE

“Is this Miss Doris—Miss Doris Force?”

The voice that came over the wire was unfamiliar to Doris’s ears, and her heart skipped a beat as the thought flashed through her mind that some trouble had arisen back home in Chilton.

“Yes, this is Doris Force,” she replied. “Who is this, please?”

“This is Mrs. Matterhorn, across the road,” was the answer.

“Yes, Mrs. Matterhorn,” Doris said, as a premonition of more troubles on Mrs. Tindell’s account came to her.

“You know that old lady you brought back to my rooms?”

“Mrs. Tindell—yes, yes! Is anything the matter with her?”

Mrs. Matterhorn sniffed distinctly over the wire.

“Anything the matter? You certainly ought to know by now that the poor thing is not as strong-minded as she ought to be, so far away from home and all,” the widow said tartly.

“Oh, I understand all that, and I am sorry if she is a bother to you,” Doris cried.

“That isn’t it,” Mrs. Matterhorn interrupted. “Now she claims to have lost a pearl necklace she says is worth over \$5,000, and she is poking in the mattress and looking under the rugs.”

“A pearl necklace!” the astounded Doris repeated. “Did somebody steal it?”

“Not from my house,” snapped Mrs. Matterhorn, “I can promise you that. Now I can’t stop my baking, what with pies in the oven and biscuit dough rising, and walnuts to be shelled, to help look for a necklace that for all I know is pure imagination. Can’t you come over and calm the old lady? She is so forgetful she probably is wearing the thing under her dress or maybe she sold it fifty years ago and forgot about it.”

The widow would have rattled on in that strain for half an hour, had not Doris broken into the monologue with the promise to be over as soon as her feet could carry her across the campus. She did not wait to tell Kitty the disquieting news, but hastened down the winding driveway to the cottage.

Mrs. Matterhorn was waiting at the door for Doris and continued the conversation where she had left it off on the telephone.

“I can’t be a nurse to an absent-minded old lady and run my home and my business at the same time,” she announced. “Can’t you find out who her folks are and have them call for her? It would be a shame to put her on a train by herself. I think she has had a shock of some kind that unbalanced her.”

“I’ll do my best,” said Doris, a worried little frown wrinkling her forehead. “Now let me run up and see what I can do.”

The sight that met Doris’s eyes when she entered Mrs. Tindell’s room made her gasp aloud. The old lady had dragged the mattress from the bed. Sheets and blankets made a heap on the floor, and the bare mattress was spread with an array of wealth that resembled the combined efforts of a bank and a jewelry store.

Mrs. Tindell, however, had evidently forgotten about her loss and was busily crocheting as she rocked in front of the windows.

“How do you do, my dear?” Mrs. Tindell greeted Doris brightly. “I just found this lace I was making in the bottom of my satchel. I forgot all about bringing it with me. Don’t you think it is a pretty design?”

“Oh, it is lovely,” Doris exclaimed. “Did you find your pearls, too?”

“Pearls? Did I lose my pearls? Oh, yes!”

Mrs. Tindell dropped her crocheting and wrung her hands.

“The Tindell pearls!” she cried. “They were my husband’s mother’s, and have been in the family for generations. What could have become of them?”

“Are you sure you had them with you?” Doris asked.

“Of course I am sure,” Mrs. Tindell cried. “Do you think I am absent-minded? I wanted Barry to have them. Barry is my grandson, you know.”

“Barry? Oh, yes!” Doris said. “Perhaps you dropped them on the railroad tracks. I’ll go look for them there. First you must make sure you have not lost anything else.”

“There is all the stuff I brought with me,” Mrs. Tindell said with a wave of her hand toward the array on the mattress. “You can see for yourself if anything is missing.”

“How would I know?” Doris exclaimed.

Nevertheless, she mentally checked the articles on the mattress. Some of the brooches and rings set with precious stones she recognized as those she had scooped up from between the railroad ties, but most of the things she had not seen before.

There was a miniature of a curly-haired boy in rather old-fashioned garb, beautifully painted on ivory, and a necklace of gossamer-fine gold chain in which diamonds were woven like stars caught in wisps of golden cloud. Beside that was a tin of tooth-powder and a little pile of fine linen handkerchiefs. An old-fashioned high-necked nightgown

with a deep yoke of crocheted lace was spread out and on it the bonds and packets of currency were laid in orderly rows.

It was a dazzling display, made the more vivid by contrast with the homely personal articles with which the wealth was mixed.

Mrs. Tindell kept no watch over Doris as she surveyed the articles on the mattress. She had retrieved her crochet-needle and with its hooked end was scraping some dried mud from her old-fashioned high black shoes, humming to herself as she worked away.

“I’ll tell you what I’ll do,” Doris promised. “I will call up my chum and we will search the spot along the tracks to see if we can find the pearls. They may have been picked up by now. I hope not. If they are still there we will find them, although I am sure we gathered up everything that spilled from your satchel.”

“That’s a good girl,” Mrs. Tindell said as if she were addressing a six-year-old. Doris almost expected to be promised a candy reward if she found the pearls, as she hastened down the stairs and searched for Mrs. Matterhorn.

The widow was only too glad to have Doris use the telephone, if it was on the mission of finding the pearls. Kitty, thrilled and alarmed at Doris’s message, promised to meet her chum in two minutes.

“If this ever becomes noised around it will be the ruin of me,” Mrs. Matterhorn complained, wiping a smudge

of flour from her nose. “There are some jealous tongues in town that won’t be above hinting I took the pearls myself. Every penny I have I earned with these two hands, except for what poor Claude left me when he was blown up in the granite quarry, poor man, and that wasn’t enough to live on. He was a good provider, was Claude, but not what you would call a provident man. He didn’t have any insurance.”

The faults and virtues of the unfortunate Claude Matterhorn would all have become known to Doris, had not Kitty made her breathless appearance at that moment. The two chums started out at a brisk pace for the village, Doris explaining as she went along all about the treasure the satchel had concealed.

“A lot of people started up the track after the train stopped, don’t you remember?” Kitty said. “Perhaps they picked up the pearls.”

“We will ask the station agent if any jewels were turned in to him,” Doris suggested. “I don’t think they were picked up, however. If the pearls were in sight we would have seen them. We searched pretty carefully for what was spilled from the satchel. Our hope is that the necklace was all covered with coal or cinders, or maybe flung into the grass.”

“At any rate, we won’t ask any moving man to give us a lift back to the school,” Kitty laughed, as the girls entered the railroad depot.

The station agent recognized them, and insisted on ignoring their questions until he had delivered himself

of some sage advice about walking along railroad tracks and similar dangerous diversions. At last he told them that no valuables had been returned to his safe-keeping.

Doris learned that no trains were due on either track for several hours, and then led Kitty back over the route they had traveled at such speed in their race with the locomotive that morning.

“This is the spot—yes, you can see our foot-prints,” Doris announced. “See, here is where the conductor and the flag-man walked.”

The two girls probed and searched among the cinders of the rail-bed until they were begrimed with soot, and all their fingers were bruised. Not a single pearl rewarded their search, nor did they find any other article of value, which might have served as a clue that they had overlooked something when they retrieved the spilled contents of the satchel.

“It is getting pretty dark,” Doris observed anxiously. “If we don’t find it soon we will have to give up.”

The search was now directed to the scorched weeds that fringed the edge of the right-of-way.

Sneezing in the dust, their probing hands raised from the fading goldenrod and sturdy ironweed, Doris and Kitty hunted until their eyes and backs ached.

“Either the pearls weren’t lost here,” Doris said at last as she straightened her twinging back, “or else—oh, what’s that?”

“That” was a low growl at her heels. Doris whirled to confront a thick-set, brown-spotted dog from whose mixed ancestry the traits of the bull-terrier seemed most apparent. The animal bared its teeth menacingly, and growled again.

“Here, Bum!”

The command came from a tall figure lurching down the tracks, evidently a tramp. The dog, with a rumble in his throat, turned and trotted toward the man.

“Let’s get away from here,” Kitty said nervously. “I don’t like that man’s looks.”

“Lookin’ for anything, girls?” the hobo hailed the chums.
“Need any help?”

CHAPTER VII

CLARICE'S MEDDLING

Doris surveyed the ill-kempt figure coolly.

“No, thank you,” she said in answer to his question, her voice calm. “Come, Kitty. It is getting dark.”

“Not a bit sociable, are you?” the tramp sneered, but he advanced no further. His spotted mongrel stood at his knee with bared fangs.

Doris and Kitty turned their backs upon the menacing pair and walked on toward the station without turning their heads. Had they given a backward glance they would have seen the tramp drop to his knees, and by the light of a battered pocket flashlight begin to search over the ground they had combed for the necklace.

“No luck so far,” Doris mused, as she and her chum left the station behind and started to climb to the gates of Barry Manor.

“I don't believe she ever had a pearl necklace,” Kitty declared. “Mrs. Tindell is very forgetful, to put it mildly.”

“That tramp complicates matters,” Doris observed. “I hope he keeps right on down the tracks and doesn’t stop here.”

“Oh, we will never see him again,” Kitty said.

“I am more afraid of the dog than of the man,” said Doris. “That was a vicious-looking animal.”

It was quite dark by the time the girls reached the edge of the campus, and through the chilled air came the sound of the dinner bell.

“Oh, we’ll have to run!” Doris exclaimed, suiting action to words. “Over the fence, and cut across the lawn, Kitty!”

“But what about Mrs. Matterhorn?” Kitty cried.

“We’ll ’phone her after dinner if we can’t manage to see her,” Doris shouted back, as she sped over the ground.

The girls were only a few minutes late for the evening meal, and nothing was said about their tardiness. When the meal was over Doris’s plan for a visit to Mrs. Tindell was dashed when Dean Bartlett announced that there would be a meeting of the student body in the reception hall to organize the student council and athletic association.

She had to content herself with telephoning to the widowed pastry cook, reporting that the first search for the pearls had been fruitless but that the quest would be continued the next day.

Mrs. Matterhorn was disappointed.

“I suppose the old lady will not leave for home until she gets her pearls,” she mourned. “It isn’t that I’m inhospitable, or that I don’t feel sorry for the poor creature, but she is a worry and a responsibility to me, and—”

“Excuse me, Mrs. Matterhorn,” Doris was forced to interrupt. “I must attend a school meeting. I know how you feel and I am sorry to think I was responsible for adding to your worries. I shall see you tomorrow afternoon.”

Doris hung up the receiver and entered the hall intent upon reaching the meeting. A few stragglers were crowded around the doors to the room, and Clarice Crowin’s red head was conspicuous among them.

As Doris pressed toward the entrance she heard Clarice say something which brought an angry flush to her cheeks.

“—some drop cakes,” Clarice’s voice uttered shrilly. “And there was that crazy old woman that she tried to pretend didn’t belong to her on the train. But Doris Force isn’t too smart for me! I saw her smuggle the crazy grandma to Mrs. Mat—”

One of Clarice’s cronies nudged her violently, and the girl closed her mouth suddenly. She turned and saw Doris, lowered her eyes, her face turning scarlet with embarrassment.

Thoroughly angry, Doris stalked past the flustered Clarice to the seat Kitty had saved for her.

“What’s the matter?” her chum asked. “You look mad enough to eat glass!”

“Oh, nothing,” Doris frowned. “I just overheard Clarice say something mean and I more than suspect I was the victim of her gossip. It isn’t worth getting angry about, really.”

The meeting was opened with the singing of the school song, and then Dean Bartlett spoke briefly, chiefly for the benefit of the newcomers. She announced that on the morrow the study groups would start and the year’s schedule would be begun.

Now the business of the student body, Miss Bartlett continued, was to organize its self-government. She explained the rules, stipulating that each class was to elect two members to the council, and that the student body as a whole would elect two members at large, both juniors. The one with the highest number of votes was to become vice-president of the student council, and the runner-up secretary. The vice-president automatically became president in her senior year, according to the by-laws.

Then Miss Bartlett introduced the president, a tall, serious-looking senior named Patricia Lewis, last year’s vice-president.

“I declare the meeting open for nominations,” Patricia announced in a clear voice, punctuating her announcement with a rap of her gavel.

For a moment silence fell over the students, and then a hum of voices filled the auditorium.

One of the Freshmen arose and asked if members of her class could make nominations.

“There is nothing in the by-laws against it,” Patricia said. “However, this meeting is just for the election of a vice-president and secretary. Your class president and other officers are to be elected at a special class meeting.”

“Then I should like to nominate a girl whom all of us, even we freshmen, have heard about and have admired from— from—er—from the time we met her,” the Freshman said, as if reciting a piece from memory. “I—we—I think that we should choose for our vice-president, who will become next year’s president, a girl representative of Barry Manor and its ideals.

“We want our school leaders to be girls we can respect, admire and look upon as examples, not girls who give the school a questionable reputation by hitching on trucks and hanging around the railroad station. I nominate Clarice Crowin!”

Kitty jumped to her feet, her face scarlet, but Doris pulled her back in her seat.

Both girls were dumbfounded. As a matter of fact, not one girl in twenty knew that the nominating speech had any personal attack concealed in it. Some of the students giggled,

while others looked puzzled. Of course there was applause, which broke out from all parts of the room as if by a signal.

“Clarice has been doing some clever campaigning,” Kitty whispered between clenched teeth. “She has organized the Freshmen and her clique to stampede this meeting.”

“Well, what about it?” Doris smiled. “She may be governor some day, or our first lady President of the United States if she keeps up her clever politics. Sh-sh-sh. Somebody is going to speak.”

Shirley Dawson was on her feet, and gained the recognition of the chairman.

“I haven’t practiced any speech,” Shirley said with a meaningful look at the Freshman. “All I can say is that if this school wants to pick a junior it can be proud of, one who stands for the best traditions and ideals of Barry Manor, they’ll elect Doris Force. I nominate Doris Force!”

Again applause rocked the auditorium. Doris turned pale, then blushed. She had not expected the nomination, and sat speechless and embarrassed while the girls in the seats around her turned, clapped vigorously, and nodded and smiled to her.

“I second the nomination!” Miriam cried, leaping to her feet.

“And I!” came echoing shouts from half a dozen throats.

The auditorium buzzed with excitement, and everywhere heads were clustered together in earnest discussion.

“I have a plan to frustrate Clarice’s scheme,” Kitty announced, a grim look in her eyes. “If she can be a politician, so can I. I’ll split the vote for her supporters.”

Before Doris could question her chum, Kitty was on her feet, and in a ringing voice nominated Beatrice Busey, Clarice’s crony and accomplice.

“There,” Kitty said with a knowing smile, as she sat down again. “We’ll have the two of them opposing each other.”

Immediately there was a “second.” Busy Bea, meanwhile, was standing in an aisle clamoring for recognition.

“I refuse the nomination!” she shouted. “It is a trick. I won’t run for the office.”

“I move the nominations be closed,” somebody cried.

“Miss Crowin’s nomination has not yet been seconded,” the president announced.

There was a roar of laughter from Doris’s supporters as Busy Bea again stood up and stammered a second to her chief’s nomination.

“It is moved and seconded that the nominations be closed,” the president announced. The ayes carried.

“As usual, the vote will be by secret ballot. The ballot box will be placed in the hall and will be open until after the noon recess tomorrow. Please remember to give your names to Miss Whalen as you vote.”

“Move we adjourn!” cried half a dozen voices.

“Aye!” responded the crowd, without waiting for comment from the president, all the girls crowding the aisles, chatting and buzzing excitedly.

Clarice, a self-composed smile on her lips, was being introduced to a group of wide-eyed Freshmen by Busy Bea, her efficient campaign manager.

“Come on, Doris, let’s go off somewhere and plan your campaign,” Kitty urged, as several groups of girls converged upon Doris and cheerily promised her their votes.

“Nonsense, Kitty. I don’t intend to make any campaign. If the girls want to elect me, I shall do my level best to fill whichever office I win,” Doris said firmly. “But I certainly shall not go around seeking votes.”

“In the meantime Clarice will just charm the Freshmen into eating out of her hands,” Kitty groaned. “They’ll vote for her solidly, and they have the biggest class, as usual.”

“Oh, come along, Kitty, and put your scheming brain to better use,” Doris laughed. “What about the pearls?”

“There you go worrying over other folks’ troubles instead of your own,” Kitty mourned.

“My own? I haven’t any troubles,” Doris laughed.

She urged her chum through the hall and up the stairs to their room, and there flung herself at full length on the couch, her

chin in her palms.

“You know,” she began, “I was thinking during the meeting. I have a plan.”

“Good! I knew that you wouldn’t let Clarice walk away with this election,” Kitty exclaimed. “What is the scheme?”

“Oh, bother Clarice,” Doris laughed. “My plan is, suppose we tell Violet about the lost pearls and get her to help us look for them. That will give her something exciting to occupy her mind between classes.”

Kitty looked at Doris with what she hoped was an expression of deep disgust.

“Why in the world don’t you pay some attention to the election instead of borrowing other people’s troubles, I repeat?” Kitty demanded.

Doris, however, had rolled over on her back and was dreamily contemplating the ceiling.

Suddenly she sat up and clapped her hands.

“The moving van!” she cried.

CHAPTER VIII

THE ACCIDENT

“What about the moving van?” Kitty demanded.

“Oh, it is just a hunch I had,” Doris laughed. “I didn’t mean to talk out loud. Beginning tomorrow we start getting up early. What do you say to a little sleep, Kitty?”

“Say, of all the mysteries I have known in your company you are the greatest of them all,” Kitty grumbled good-naturedly.

The girls slept soundly, and at the first clamor of the rising bell they were on their feet, refreshed and ready for what the day might bring forth.

Immediately after breakfast the morning assembly was held, and there Dean Bartlett announced that the annual Autumn music festival program was being formulated.

“All candidates for the school orchestra will please report here this afternoon,” she said. “We have a number of last year’s soloists with us. Helen Ash, I know, will delight us all with her violin again, and Doris Force’s voice is something each of us who heard her last year is eagerly looking forward to hearing again. Julia Stevenson and Eleanor Frye, I hope, will favor us again with some of their charming piano duets.

If those four girls will come to my office this afternoon I will discuss their special numbers.”

As the girls left the hall to scatter to their various classes, Doris heard Busy Bea loudly and indignantly complain to the girls near her that the dean’s mention of Doris’s name in the assembly was unfair.

“So long as Doris is trying to win the election from Clarice, the dean should not have given her that pretty speech about her squeaky old voice,” Busy Bea cried.

Doris pretended not to have heard as she made her way past the electioneer to her class.

The first day of active school work passed quickly. Doris, after debating with herself the propriety of casting a vote in an election where she was a candidate, finally cast a ballot for herself.

“After all, I can’t be neutral,” she admitted to herself. “The newspapers always print pictures of the candidates for Governor and President voting for themselves. It is the honest thing to do.”

And so, of course, it was. To have voted for her opponent or to have cast no ballot at all would have been false modesty.

However, the outcome of the election did not occupy Doris’s mind very much. Her greatest concern was for the welfare of Mrs. Tindell and the restoration of the pearl necklace.

In accordance with her plan, Doris told Violet, while passing from one class room to another, of the lost jewelry and the pathetic old lady. Violet accepted Doris's invitation to join Kitty and herself in attempting a solution of the two mysteries, and promised to accompany the chums to Mrs. Matterhorn's that afternoon.

Doris met the other soloists in the dean's office after the last bell rang, and was given her choice from a number of musical selections to sing at the concert. She hummed over the opening bars of several and made her selections, which won Miss Bartlett's hearty approval.

Then she joined the waiting Kitty and Violet. With linked arms the three girls strolled toward the Pie-azza, Doris telling Violet more of the details of the problem that confronted them as they walked along.

"I don't think I can be of much help," Violet said. "I haven't had any experience in solving mysteries, but I'd love to try. It's awfully good of you to include me, Doris."

"Nonsense," Doris exclaimed. "I shouldn't have asked you if I hadn't thought you could be of some assistance."

None of the three, and least of all Violet, suspected how much the girl's entry into the situation would complicate the affair and yet help in its unfolding.

Mrs. Matterhorn's cottage was apparent to the nose almost as soon as it was to the eye. On Friday afternoons the widow baked cookies and gingerbread so

Saturday could be devoted to the pies, coffee cakes, tarts and more perishable goodies for the big week-end trade.

The door was open and some students were in the cottage making small purchases, so the three girls walked in without ceremony.

“I’m certainly glad to see you,” was Mrs. Matterhorn’s greeting. “I haven’t had much chance to look in on Mrs. Tindell.”

The girls followed the busy woman into the kitchen, to discuss their plans while she worked. Mrs. Matterhorn was beating up a rich, golden batter in a huge bowl, leaving it occasionally to open the oven door, from which escaped the most tantalizing odors. Mrs. Matterhorn’s helper was busy chopping nuts, candied cherries, citron and orange peel in a big wooden dish, and two broad tables were covered with rows and rows of cookies in fancy shapes waiting to be iced.

“Um-mm!” Doris exclaimed rapturously. “I think I’ll quit school and take a job here as your helper, Mrs. Matterhorn.”

“Can you bake? Can you mix the batter for an angel cake or make a sponge cake that won’t fall?”

“N-no,” Doris admitted. “But I could be your official smeller. I’d work for my board and no salary.”

“I wish you could smell out those pearls,” Mrs. Matterhorn said. “I tell you, that old lady is a real responsibility.”

“If only we could find out who her grandson is and where he lives,” Doris said. “We could notify him and have him call for her. Mrs. Tindell is a worry to you, I know, and yet I think it would be too risky to put her on the train all by herself.”

“The way she keeps mourning about those pearls has convinced me she really had them with her and lost them somewhere nearby,” Mrs. Matterhorn said.

“We hunted all along the tracks until dark yesterday,” Doris explained. “I am pretty well convinced that they are not there, or if they were dropped there, either the tramp we saw found them or else—”

“Well, or else what?” Kitty and Mrs. Matterhorn cried in unison.

“There is a chance they were dropped in the moving van,” Doris suggested. “Mrs. Tindell had her bag open while we were riding home, and then again she may have been wearing them and perhaps the string broke.”

“Then they are gone,” Kitty decided. “I think the most important thing is to get Mrs. Tindell back home, and then try to find the pearls as a second consideration.”

“So do I,” Doris said, “if she will go. Let us ask her some more about her grandson Barry.”

The girls, standing in the doorway that led from the hallway to the kitchen so they would be out of Mrs.

Matterhorn's way, did not realize that the conversation was being overheard.

Mrs. Tindell, about to descend the stairs, halted at the mention of her name and that of her grandson.

"Barry? Who said Barry?" she cried in a high, cracked voice.

"I said the name," Doris replied, with a start of surprise. "I was suggesting that you ought to go to your grandson Barry —"

"Are you going to take me there?" cried the old woman, leaning far over the balustrade. "Now? At once—oh!"

Doris leaped for the foot of the stairs, but too late. Mrs. Tindell had lost her balance in the excitement of the mistaken hope that she was to be taken to her grandson, and plunged down the full length of the stairs.

"Oh! Oh! I can't look!" screamed the overwrought Violet, as with hands over her eyes she dashed into the kitchen.

Mrs. Matterhorn, a tray of fresh cakes steaming from the oven in her hand, was directly in the path of the fleeing girl.

Crash!

The two collided, and down clattered the baking tin while the cakes rolled into every corner.

Violet reeled back from the impact and stumbled against a great sack of sugar that was propped against

the legs of the mixing table. The bag collapsed, sending a stream of its gritty white ingredients over the floor. To make matters worse Mrs. Matterhorn's assistant leaped to her feet in agitation, dropping her chopping bowl and its contents.

Kitty stood as if turned to stone, staring at the scene of chaos and destruction with eyes that nearly popped from their sockets.

"My land o' Goshen!" cried the anguished Mrs. Matterhorn. "Has a cyclone struck us?"

"Mrs. Matterhorn, come here, please," came Doris's urgent voice from the hallway.

The widow and her helper, together with Kitty and Violet, ran to where Doris sat on the bottom step of the stairs, supporting Mrs. Tindell's head in her lap. The old woman was unconscious.

Violet covered her eyes with her hands again, and leaned against the wall, shaken and trembling.

"I think she's hurt badly," Doris said, her face white with concern as Mrs. Matterhorn reached her. "She fell all the way down stairs."

"Don't move, then, and I'll call a doctor," Mrs. Matterhorn directed, reaching the telephone in three strides and lifting the receiver from the hook.

"Pshaw, the line is busy," she said. "That's the trouble with these country 'phones."

“Hello, there,” she shouted into the mouthpiece.

“Excuse me for butting in, but this is Mrs. Matterhorn. I want Doctor Williams right away. Will you get Central to put the call through?”

Then the capable woman turned to the injured old lady.

“She may have been knocked unconscious or she may have fainted from pain,” Mrs. Matterhorn said.

“Then let us do something for her,” Doris cried. “Have you any smelling salts?”

“No, I haven’t,” Mrs. Matterhorn replied. “Shall we bathe her face with cold water?”

“If you haven’t any smelling salts pour a little household ammonia on a cloth and let her smell of it,” Doris directed.

Mrs. Matterhorn obeyed promptly.

“You certainly don’t get flustered easily in a crisis,” she said to Doris.

Mrs. Tindell moaned softly when the aromatic odor filled her nostrils. She opened her eyes and looked about her.

“Where am I?” she asked, and then tried to sit up. She sank back with a groan.

“My side hurts me so,” she complained.

“Don’t move. We have sent for a doctor,” Doris whispered. “Just lie quietly, and as soon as the doctor looks you over we will carry you upstairs.”

“We might as well make her a little more comfortable,” Mrs. Matterhorn said. “Here, you two girls, lift her up a little and I’ll slip these cushions under her poor old bones.”

The widow ran into her living room and snatched some pillows from a sofa.

Kitty and Violet, the latter on the verge of swooning from shock and terror, helped to adjust the pillows. Scarcely had they finished when they heard a car screech to a halt in front of the house. A moment later the door opened to admit a middle-aged man carrying the familiar little satchel which stamps the doctor everywhere.

For a moment, however, Doris paid no attention to the physician’s arrival. She was staring at Violet who, in turn, was gazing at Mrs. Tindell’s face with amazement. Then the timid girl cried out:

“Why, I have seen this woman before!”

CHAPTER IX

VIOLET'S STORY

“You say you know the old lady?” Mrs. Matterhorn demanded. “Thank goodness for that! Who is she, Miss?”

“She is Mrs. Tin—something,” Violet answered, thinking hard. “Mrs. Tindell, that’s it.”

“Well, we knew that all the time,” the widow said, a little crossly. “Where does she live and who are her kinfolk?”

“Excuse me,” the physician interrupted. “I think this woman ought to be put to bed immediately. She has broken no bones, but her side is wrenched, and on account of her age the shock of the fall may have serious consequences.”

“I can’t take care of a sick woman,” Mrs. Matterhorn cried aghast.

“She ought to have constant care,” the doctor said. “Can she afford to pay for a practical nurse? I could send Miss Snyder here.”

“She could pay for a whole hospital,” Mrs. Matterhorn declared. “Very well, you send Millie Snyder around to care for the patient. I certainly wouldn’t begrudge her shelter.”

“Then if you young ladies will help me carry the patient upstairs,” the physician addressed Doris and her friends, “we will soon have her resting comfortably.”

Slowly and gently Mrs. Tindell was carried up the steep steps and placed on her bed. Doris removed the old lady’s shoes and Mrs. Tindell, her eyes fluttering open, rewarded the girl with a sweet smile.

“Thank you, dear,” she said. “You may go now but be sure to be back at eight o’clock sharp.”

Doris was puzzled for a moment, and then concluded that Mrs. Tindell had in all probability confused her with her maid.

The physician left, promising to send the practical nurse at once so Mrs. Tindell could be undressed and made comfortable. Doris and her chums realized that all their plans for the afternoon were spoiled. It was too late to search further for the pearls, and they had certainly not succeeded in learning anything about Mrs. Tindell’s connections from her.

“We will keep searching for the missing necklace,” Doris assured Mrs. Matterhorn. “And now—by the way, where is my music?”

“What music?” asked the widow.

“I had some sheet music with me when I came in,” Doris explained, her eyes roving around the room. “They were the songs I am to sing at the music festival.”

“Goodness gracious, I don’t remember seeing any music,” Mrs. Matterhorn fretted. “Come to think of it, you were carrying something.”

A hurried search was made of the hall, the living room and finally the kitchen, where Mrs. Matterhorn’s assistant, a neighbor who came over two or three afternoons a week to help with the heaviest work, was still struggling to repair the damage done during the excitement.

“A girl from the school came in, Mis’ Matterhorn, and bought a dozen cream puffs,” the woman said. “The money’s on the sideboard, there.”

“Did you see anything of some sheet music?” Doris asked.

“Oh, the girl got it!” beamed the woman. “She said as how she had left it on the hat-rack there earlier in the day, and she took it with her.”

“She did—what?” Doris cried. “What did the girl look like, please?”

“She had red hair, begging your pardon, Miss. Not pretty red like yours but more like barn paint, and she wore a red sweater,” was the reply.

“Clarice Crowin!” Doris and Kitty cried in unison.

“Is anything wrong?” Mrs. Matterhorn asked.

“Plenty,” Kitty replied slangily. “But we can take care of it.”

The three girls made their farewells, after purchasing some of the fresh drop-cakes now iced with black walnut butter-cream.

“Violet, where did you ever see Mrs. Tindell before?” Doris asked, as they started on the short walk to the school.

“Why, Mrs. Tindell used to live in the same apartment house we did in New York, about a year ago,” Violet said.

“You don’t know where she lives now, do you?” Doris demanded, her hopes running high.

Violet merely shook her head as if reluctant to discuss the matter further.

“Where was this apartment house?” Doris pressed, eager for any slender clue as to the old lady’s identity.

“In Central Park West,” Violet replied. “She moved in shortly after we did. She had the reputation of being rather queer. In fact, I was always a little frightened of her.”

“Please tell us all you know about her,” Doris pleaded. “Her relatives ought to be informed. They must be worrying about her.”

“I don’t know whether she has any relatives,” Violet said slowly. “She had only a colored maid as a companion.”

“Didn’t you ever hear her talk about a grandson of whom she was especially fond?” asked Doris.

“No,” Violet answered. “She never discussed anything with me at all. Mrs. Tindell kept very much to herself. She was said to be wealthy.”

“Then she must have bank accounts through which she can be traced,” Doris mused. “I suppose an advertisement in the New York newspapers might help, if anything will. However, if she has no relatives she is probably as well off here as in New York for the time being. There is the grandson that she seems to dote upon, but you are quite sure that he never visited her in the apartment?”

“Quite sure,” Violet said. “In fact, she made a point of having no relatives at all. She often mentioned being alone in the world. Her maid told ours that Mrs. Tindell had suffered a great loss; some great family tragedy had occurred that had affected her mind.”

Doris knit her brows in deeper thought. Perhaps Mrs. Tindell’s loss had preyed upon her mind to such an extent that she just imagined she had a grandson.

“Won’t you go over everything in your mind and tell us all you can remember about her?” she urged Violet. “We must help her.”

Violet was silent as they all mounted the steps of Barry Manor. Doris and Kitty wondered very much at the girl’s silence. Could she possibly be concealing something?

“Well, she was very fond of Bud,” Violet said at last.

“Bud?” inquired Doris. “Who is Bud?”

Violet's reply came with a rush, as if she disliked saying what she had been urged to tell.

“Bud was—is my brother,” she said. “Mrs. Tindell picked him out for special attention. She was always asking him to do her favors and run errands and to go to the library for her. She seemed to ask him to do things for her just so she could reward him. She bought him penknives and neckties and books and socks all the time.

“She paid no attention to me, but I was glad of that because she frightened me, as I said. In fact, she did not pay much attention to another soul except Buddy.”

“Well, then,” said Doris with an air of vast relief, as the trio paused outside Violet's door, “the thing to do is to telegraph Buddy!”

To Doris's consternation Violet burst into tears at the suggestion, and hurriedly closed the door of her room between them.

CHAPTER X

ELECTION AND FUDGE

“Well, what do you make of that?” the astonished Kitty demanded, when the girls were in their own room.

“It leaves me completely baffled,” Doris admitted. “Violet seems to hold the key to this mystery, but for some reason she is loath to let us have it.”

“Meanwhile,” Kitty reminded her chum, “there is the missing music to consider.”

“Of course!” Doris cried, jumping to her feet. “And I am sure I know where to find it.”

She ran from the room, leaving her chum further overcome with astonishment. Kitty subdued her curiosity as best she could by proceeding to tidy herself for dinner, which was not far away.

“And tonight the winner of the election will be announced, too!” she thought, as she vigorously brushed her hair.

The door flew open and Doris entered, holding the missing sheets of music triumphantly aloft.

“Just as I suspected, it was returned to the dean’s office,” she cried.

“Oh, Clarice is such a trouble-maker!” Kitty cried, slamming her hair-brush down.

“I went direct to Miss Bartlett and told her that while I was in Mrs. Matterhorn’s kitchen my music had been taken—obviously by mistake, I said with emphasis—from the hall-rack,” Doris explained. “The dean looked at me sort of queerly. I guess she was told another story about the finding of the music, but I told her Mrs. Matterhorn had seen me bring it in and was quite worried over its disappearance.”

“Good! I guess that will spike Clarice’s yarn,” Kitty laughed.

“I found out something else. Maybe we can have some fun,” Doris said slowly. “I hear she is giving a party tonight.”

“To celebrate her election as vice-president, I presume?” Kitty asked with sarcasm.

“I forgot all about the election,” Doris exclaimed.

“Regardless of that, Miriam told me downstairs it was one of Clarice’s ‘exclusive’ affairs and the main course will be some creamy fudge she learned to make this summer. It has to be beaten with an egg-whipper—”

“We won’t get any of it,” Kitty retorted. “Why are you so interested in it?”

“I was just thinking, wouldn’t it be funny if the fudge were a failure?”

“It would be very, very funny, of course,” Kitty replied. “But how are you going to manage that?”

“I didn’t say I was going to manage that,” Doris laughed. She preferred keeping her plans to herself until they had matured.

The dinner bell rang, and the two chums joined in the hurried procession for the dining hall. Barry Manor girls rarely lingered on the way to their delicious and plentiful meals, but tonight there was a special incentive in making haste.

When everyone was seated the president of the Student Council arose, rapped for attention, and announced that at the conclusion of the meal the results of the election would be given out.

To everyone’s vast amusement Clarice knocked over her glass of water in her excitement. For a girl who made such a point of cold self-possession the accident was very humiliating to her and amusing to the others.

No one waited for second helpings that evening. At last all the girls sat expectantly behind their emptied dessert plates, looking toward Patricia. The president arose, holding a slip of paper in her hands.

“I am very happy to announce that the election came off without any irregularities,” she said. “Two candidates were nominated, Clarice Crowin and Doris Force. The rules are, as you know, that the one polling the highest vote becomes

vice-president, and automatically becomes president in her senior year.

“The other candidate receives the office of secretary, and in her senior year automatically becomes the very important officer in charge of the S. C.’s funds, the treasurer.”

Everybody knew that, and there was much fidgeting while Patricia delivered her speech.

“The results are as follows,” Patricia said, raising her voice. “Clarice Crowin—”

With a squeal of joy Busy Bea turned to her idol and threw her arms around Clarice’s neck.

“Congratulations, darling!” she cried, in a voice that carried to the four corners of the room.

“Clarice Crowin,” Patricia continued, frowning and raising her voice a notch higher, “received thirty-seven votes and Doris Force received fifty-nine. I congratulate them both.”

Clarice and Busy Bea sat staring blankly at the tablecloth in front of their noses, while a thunder of handclapping burst loose throughout the room.

Doris, blushing and embarrassed, dropped her eyes. She was delighted at the confidence the students had shown in her.

“Speech! Speech from the new vice-president!”

Doris arose, her knees trembling.

“Of course I am very proud and very happy,” she said, her voice quivering. “I don’t think it would have made any difference who won, and I am certain that the Student Council will have a fine secretary this year and treasurer next.”

“Hooray! Bravo!” cried the assembled girls. “Now a speech from the new secretary! Speech! Speech!”

Clarice rose to her feet, white-faced and with lips compressed.

“I want to thank my friends for the support they gave me,” she said. “I shall do my best to work for the Student Council.”

She sat down, and for a moment there was complete silence in the room. Busy Bea broke it by clapping her hands, and a dozen others joined, mostly from among the Freshmen. The rest made it very plain that Clarice’s ungracious words, without a hint of congratulation to her opponent, had displeased them all.

Then the signal was given to arise, and the girls started to move slowly toward the doors. Scores of them clustered around Doris to shake her hand. Clarice and Beatrice vanished promptly.

“It is silly of her to act so ungraciously,” Doris said to Kitty on the way upstairs.

She paused outside Clarice's door on an impulse and rapped. Busy Bea opened the door.

"I just wanted to shake hands with Clarice and tell her—" Doris began pleasantly, raising her voice so Clarice could hear.

"Oh, shut the door, Bea," came a command in Clarice's voice. "I feel a draft."

The door slammed in Doris's face, and for a moment the girl had a difficult time controlling her temper. Indeed, Kitty stamped her foot and offered to push the door open and demand an apology.

"Never mind," Doris said, and flew downstairs before Kitty knew what she was up to.

Ten minutes later she returned, a blissful look upon her face.

"I asked the chef if some groceries had come for Clarice," Doris explained. "I told him I wanted to carry them upstairs to her room, and I also asked if I might have a bag of salt."

"What in the world!" Kitty spluttered. "That makes no sense at all!"

"On the way upstairs I stopped long enough to empty half the sugar out of the window, and fill the bag up with the salt," Doris concluded with sparkling eyes. "Then I just left the basket outside the door without knocking."

It took ten minutes more for Kitty to regain her composure. At last, gasping for breath, she vowed she would wait up in the dark to eavesdrop and hear the reception the special-recipe fudge received, if she caught her death of cold.

“Let’s have a little spread of our own, and ask Violet in,” Doris suggested. “We have the cakes from Mrs. Matterhorn’s, and there’s that bottle of strawberry syrup to mix with cold water!”

Violet came willingly to the little party, and was told of the plot. The three girls whispered as they heard soft footsteps approaching Clarice’s room, and then subdued laughter and conversation from the room across the hall.

Doris tried to lead Violet into a further discussion of her brother’s relationship with the eccentric and wealthy Mrs. Tindell, but the girl always changed the subject. She agreed, however, to join the chums in a further search for the missing pearls.

Doris’s concern over Mrs. Tindell was chased from her mind, however, when the muffled voices that came to the waiting trio from Clarice’s room suddenly took on a higher pitch.

“Aha, something has happened,” Kitty giggled. “Turn out the light, Violet. The switch is just over your head.”

Doris opened the door an inch so they could hear better, and the girls sat in the darkness choking back their laughter.

From Clarice’s room came the hum of angry voices. Occasionally a word or two could be made out. “Poor joke”

and “sickening” were heard. Then the door opened and three seniors emerged.

“And I want you to understand,” one paused to remark pointedly, “that I think it is outrageous of you to invite us here and then play a joke like that on your guests. Just because you did not win the election you need not take out your spite on everyone.”

Others streamed out of the room, some with handkerchiefs to their mouths. At last every guest had left, and soon after the light in Clarice’s room was extinguished.

“I suspect that the fudge was bad,” Doris said soberly.

CHAPTER XI

VIOLET'S STORY CONCLUDED

“Get up, Kitty! It’s a splendid day!”

Doris shook her sleeping chum’s shoulder, and Kitty promptly sat up in a tumble of blankets and blinked her eyes.

“Wha-what’s the matter?”

“I said it was a gorgeous day, Kitty. Let’s ask the chef to pack us a lunch and we’ll go on a picnic.”

“Ho-ha-a-yum!” yawned Kitty. “Picnic? I had the idea we were going to hunt the pearls.”

“We’ll combine business with pleasure,” Doris called back from the bathroom above the sound of running water.

It was Saturday, which meant that the girls at Barry Manor had a holiday.

“We’ll take Violet,” Doris said, to the accompaniment of vigorous splashing. “I think as she places more confidence in us she will tell us a great deal more about Mrs. Tindell.”

Thus it came about that the three girls were about an hour later floating down the Bylow River in a broad-beamed canoe. Kitty was in the bow, while Doris piloted the craft from the stern. Violet, a little fearful, sat amidships with the basket of lunch between her feet.

“We’ll paddle down past the village until we come opposite the place on the tracks where Mrs. Tindell’s bag flew open,” Doris said in outlining her plans. “Then we’ll make a last thorough search of the ground all around.”

“I wish you had Wags here,” Kitty said over her shoulder. “Perhaps some hidden streak of bloodhound might crop to the surface if we set him to searching for the pearls. He’s rather good at digging up jewelry, you know.”

Wags was Doris’s frisky terrier, who, it will be remembered, unearthed the beautiful ruby ring at Locked Gates which was Doris’s prized possession. Intended by her uncle, John Trent, then in his youth, for whichever of the Gates sisters he hoped to make his wife, the ring had been lost in the tragic circumstances which halted the romance. When Wags unearthed it, the Gates sisters presented the jewel to his mistress, Doris.

The girl, although she was far from sure that Wags could locate the pearls, thought wistfully for a moment of the saucy little fellow who had been left in Marshmallow’s care.

She shook off the mood, however, as she recognized the bend in the river where the hills closed down above Barry

Village. The railroad tracks followed the stream through the gap or “notch,” as it was known locally.

“Here’s where we head for shore,” Doris said, holding her paddle deep in the water so that the canoe’s nose turned toward the banks.

While Kitty, at Doris’s direction, once more combed the rail-bed with painstaking care, Doris as leader of the expedition searched again through the yellowing weeds that fringed the tracks. Violet helped first one and then the other.

“Whoopee!” Doris shouted, after twenty minutes of dusty work. “Don’t get excited. I didn’t find the pearls, but I found a half-dollar. That’s a clue!”

The girls fingered the silver disc with renewed hope, and then flew back to their search with fresh energy.

An hour passed with no more results. They were just about to declare the search at an end when Kitty accidentally found a small tortoise-shell comb in a black leather case. There was no evidence to show it had belonged to Mrs. Tindell, but the find restored their hopes and inspired them to another hour of back-aching labor.

“It’s no use,” Doris said at last. “We have picked up every stone and turned over every twig in an area of a hundred square yards. The pearls are not here—if they could have been in the first place.”

“I discovered one thing, though,” Kitty observed, “and that is an enormous appetite. Let’s go down stream further and eat

our lunch.”

So, silent and disappointed, the three girls took their places in the canoe again and pushed it out into the current. They drifted for about a mile until an inviting bit of rocky strand attracted them, and there they landed and unpacked their basket.

Boiled eggs and chicken sandwiches. Lettuce and radishes, crisp and cool in their wrapping of damp cheesecloth, and a jar of mayonnaise with which to garnish them. Peanut cookies, half-a-dozen Fall peaches and a quart jar of malted milk. A feast for princesses, especially if the princesses had spent a morning doubled over groping for pearls along a railroad track!

Rugs were spread on the sand and the three leaned back against a sun-warmed rock and ate to their hearts' content. When the last scrap of food was gone they dug a hole in the gravel and carefully buried the paper sandwich wrappings and the peach pits.

The exciting, if fruitless, morning and the open-air lunch worked wonders with Violet. She spoke with animation, and there was no sign of tears at any time. In fact, she began, in a hesitating way at first but with increasing self-confidence, to apologize for her unsociable manner of the three past days.

“You don't know how much I appreciate your kindness and thoughtfulness,” Violet said with a warm smile in Doris's direction. “What I would have done if you two girls had not befriended me, I cannot imagine. I must explain

everything. It—I—well, I will probably feel better myself if I share my sorrow with you.”

Her lip trembled, and tears dimmed her large dark eyes for a moment, but Violet quickly regained her self-control and continued her tale.

“My father, Alexander Washington, was a very famous scientist, an anthropologist. You probably know that that means a person engaged in the study of the human race, principally in its past history. He spent years in Mexico and in Mongolia digging up ancient ruins. A little more than a year ago he went to Africa at the head of an expedition for the study of ancient man in Rhodesia, South Africa. Some amazing ruins had been discovered in the jungle which indicated that perhaps thousands of years ago a highly developed race, since extinct, lived there.

“Buddy, my brother—he is much older than I am, if I didn’t tell you before—went with Father as his assistant. Father said Buddy was as good an expert on prehistoric men as he was.

“Mother and I moved from the apartment to a little hotel far uptown, and that was the last I saw of Mrs. Tindell until yesterday. I meant to tell you that Mrs. Tindell begged Buddy not to go to Africa, and that when he finally sailed she gave him many expensive and useful gifts—a revolver and a waterproof traveling tent and field-glasses.

“About four months ago we received a cablegram from the British South African government that the whole

expedition had been wiped out by savages!”

Doris could not restrain a gasp of horror. Violet, her face pale, lifted her hand to prevent interruption and hastened on with her strange story.

“Mother cabled back for details, and the New York newspapers—I guess all the big papers in the country—had their correspondents working on the story. We received conflicting reports. Some confirmed the original report, others said that the men were prisoners. Mother is a very brave woman. She had spent years in the wilds with Father. She determined to go to Africa to find out the truth for herself.

“I wanted to go along. Mother, however, put me in the care of a great-aunt, Aunt Victoria. She was frightfully strict and old-fashioned and most unsympathetic. She would sit around telling how she had always warned Father to go into some ‘honest business,’ as she called it, and that there was nothing but bad luck in disturbing old ruins. She almost drove me mad.

“I did not know that the worst was yet to come. Aunt Victoria decided to send me away to school and enrolled me in Barry Manor. I was glad to go. Just a week before school opened I received a long letter from Mother. It was very sad. Father was—dead. There was no doubt about that. Buddy, though, had escaped. Oh, that made me so happy, although Mother wrote that all she knew was that he had made his way across country to Portuguese West Africa, despite serious wounds, and had been taken aboard a

steamer. No one knew the steamer's name. It was a tramp ship, thought to be bound for New Orleans.

“The very next day another cablegram came. It—it was the final blow. Poor, brave Mother had died from sleeping sickness. She had been bitten by the tse-tse fly in the jungle, and passed away before white doctors could reach her.

“Now do you wonder that I have been sad? Aunt Victoria shipped me off to school, although I wanted to stay in New York until Bud came back—if he is coming back.”

Doris leaned over to the girl and put her arms around her. Violet put her head down upon Doris's shoulder.

“I won't cry,” she said, clenching her fists. “I must be brave. But I have been so lonesome.”

Doris looked at Kitty, and each girl saw that the other's eyes were bright with tears.

“We'll do our best to make up for your sorrows,” Doris said softly. “You know, I am an orphan too, Violet. My uncle, Wardell Force, has had to be both mother and father to me. He's a splendid man, and you'll love him when you meet him.”

“And you'll like Buddy,” Violet said, sitting up and smiling happily. “Oh, he is a peach, Doris! So big and strong and kind. I have worshipped him ever since I was a little tot.”

“No wonder Mrs. Tindell liked him, then,” Doris smiled.

“I feel so much better after telling you both my story,” Violet said. “Aunt Victoria forbade me to discuss my affairs with anyone. She said it was impolite, and my heart has just been bursting for a little comfort. Now I am worried that Buddy may be too ill to send me word when he arrives. He may not even know where I am.”

A cloud gathered on Violet’s countenance, and Doris decided that it was time to change the subject by degrees.

“I am certain he’ll be well and strong after a long sea voyage,” she declared. “He will be here before you know it. I hope he comes soon, too, because he may know who Mrs. Tindell’s grandson is and help the poor old lady back home.”

Kitty, who had remained silent up to this moment, asked Violet if she was sure that Mrs. Tindell had never mentioned a grandson to her, and Violet repeated that she had never known the eccentric old lady to have a caller.

“It worries me, though, to think of her lying there at Mrs. Matterhorn’s, an invalid now, with a king’s ransom in jewels and money,” Doris mused.

“She doesn’t seem to be clear in her mind as to where she lives, and it would be unkind, to say the least, to put her on a train for New York with that fortune in her satchel. If only her grandson could trace her here!”

The girls sat silent, staring thoughtfully at the sparkling river.

“Sh-sh!” Doris whispered suddenly. “I thought I heard something moving behind the rock!”

“Oh, are there any bears around here?” Violet cried, jumping to her feet.

“Nothing bigger than a woodchuck,” Doris assured her.
“Let’s see what it was.”

The girls crept cautiously around the boulder. Before them stretched a dense birch woods. No living creature was in sight.

“It must have been two trees rubbing together in the wind,” Kitty suggested.

“It didn’t sound like that, and there is no wind to speak of,” Doris replied. “Look, there is a trail of some sort leading into the woods.”

She pointed out a dimly trodden path that wound in and out among the trees.

“Perhaps it is where the woodchucks come down to the river to drink,” Violet said.

“I don’t think so,” Doris said, concealing a smile.
“Woodchucks are little fat burrowing animals about as big as collie pups. Say, I’m tired from sitting so long. Let’s follow this trail and see where it leads.”

The others were willing, so in single file, with keen-eyed Doris in the lead, the three plunged into the woods. Twisting in and out between the trees, the trail was a difficult one to follow, and where there was no grass it was practically invisible.

“Let’s turn back,” Kitty suggested.

“Oh, just five minutes more,” Doris cried, lengthening her stride. “We may find—oh!”

A deep-throated snarl from the gloom ahead brought the girls to an abrupt standstill.

“It—it—is a bub-bub-bear!” Violet exclaimed, her teeth chattering.

Doris took another cautious step forward.

“I never heard of a bear up here,” she whispered. “It may be some poor animal caught in a trap.”

The snarl was repeated, and then it broke into a throaty bark.

“It’s only a dog!” the girls exclaimed with vast relief.

“It must be caught in a trap, or else it would come closer,” Doris said. “I am going to investigate.”

“It may be mad or vicious,” Kitty warned.

Doris, however, was creeping slowly forward, slipping noiselessly from tree to tree. All at once the girls saw her stiffen and stare, and with that she turned and beckoned them to approach her.

“Look!” Doris whispered, as they came close. “Just look at that!”

CHAPTER XII

A BUSY WEEK

Peering over Doris's shoulder the two girls saw, not fifty feet beyond, a brown-spotted dog tied to a tree. He was barking furiously and tugging at the leash which held him securely.

The reason for his presence was evident. A rough lean-to, made of branches propped against a pole supported in the crotches of two trees, and covered with balsam boughs, had been erected within the radius of the dog's rope. Balsam boughs, covered with a tattered blanket, made a rough bed beneath the shelter, and from a string suspended from a couple of trees hung some articles of clothing.

Doris was the first to speak.

"The tramp's dog Bum!" she said.

"A tramp?" Violet cried. "Oh, I am more afraid of tramps than I am of bears!"

"So am I," Kitty said. "Oh, let us go back to the canoe, Doris. Perhaps the sound you heard was the tramp spying on us."

Doris agreed that the wisest course for the present lay in retreat, although secretly she yearned to search the shack for the pearl necklace. The three girls retraced their steps to the river's edge, Doris half-fearing that the tramp might have stolen the thermos bottle and the basket, and even the canoe. However, everything was as they had left it, and as soon as they could accomplish it Kitty and Doris were paddling upstream.

It was hard work to paddle against the swift, black mountain current, but neither Kitty nor Doris was a weakling. The burden fell heaviest on Doris, who not only had to paddle but also to steer the canoe. Her practiced eye scanned the water ahead for smooth patches that told of sand-bars, or the little eddies which betrayed sharp rocks or submerged logs just under the surface.

“We had better report to Mrs. Matterhorn,” Doris suggested as they came abreast of the village. “She will think we are deserting her, and leaving Mrs. Tindell on her hands.”

So, as soon as the canoe was beached and carried to its rack in the boathouse, the girls made haste to take back the basket and vacuum bottle to the chef and to restore their blankets to their rooms. Then they turned their faces toward the widow's cottage, and soon were asking that worthy artist in dough how Mrs. Tindell was.

“She's as well as can be expected, I guess,” Mrs. Matterhorn said, busy fashioning a festoon of pink on a layer cake with a cone of cherry-flavored butter-cream. “Millie Snyder is taking care of her, and Millie is as capable

and handy as you might ask for,” she continued, putting the completed cake aside and beginning on a new one. “Mrs. Tindell seems to be just as absent-minded as ever. She forgets she had a fall and tries to get up.”

“May we go upstairs to see her?” Doris asked.

“I suspect she’s sleeping and I wouldn’t wake her up because it will spoil Millie’s chance for a little peace and quiet,” Mrs. Matterhorn smiled.

At that moment steps were heard on the stairs, and a woman, dressed in a crisply starched white overall-apron, entered the kitchen. She was a pleasant-faced, capable-looking person with slightly grayed hair.

“This is Millie,” Mrs. Matterhorn said. “I want you to meet three young friends of your patient. This is Miss Force, Miss Snyder, and Miss Norris and—I can’t for the life of me remember your name, Miss.”

“Washington, Violet Washington,” laughed that person. “It shouldn’t be hard to remember that name.”

“I never heard anybody called Washington before,” Miss Snyder replied, smiling. “It seems as if the name should begin and end with George Washington himself, just as there shouldn’t be anybody called Lincoln except Honest Abe, although I guess there must be plenty of people with both those names.”

“Oh, yes,” Violet agreed pleasantly. “There are a number of Washingtons and Lincolns in the New York

directory alone, not to mention Franklins and even Columbuses.”

“My gracious, are you from New York?” Millie Snyder cried. “It must be wonderful. I’ve never been there. I went to Boston once when I was a tot. I’d love to go to New York some time and see all the millionaires.”

“They must look just like anybody else or I have never seen one,” Violet laughed. Then she turned to Mrs. Matterhorn and said:

“You know, I recognized Mrs. Tindell yesterday. She once lived in the same apartment house that we did, but she moved away.”

“Then maybe you can help locate that grandson she talks about all the time, Berry or Larry or whatever his name is,” Mrs. Matterhorn exclaimed.

“No, that’s just the trouble,” Violet explained. “I did not know she had any relatives or friends.”

“She talks more about him than about her necklace,” Mrs. Matterhorn observed, while the nurse filled a kettle with water to heat for some purpose.

“We searched all morning for the necklace and I am certain it is not anywhere near where her satchel spilled,” Doris remarked. “We saw a tramp in the neighborhood that same afternoon, and there is a chance he may have found it, or else ___”

“Yes, or else what?” Kitty cried.

“The only other chance is that she dropped it in the moving van,” Doris said.

“Oh, I am sure it would have been found and reported in that case,” Kitty said.

Violet seemed to be attracted very much by the kindly, efficient Mrs. Matterhorn. She watched the woman wistfully, as if mentally comparing her with the mother she had so recently lost.

“There is to be a concert at the school next week, a week from today, as a matter of fact,” she said. “Would you care to come as my guest, Mrs. Matterhorn?”

Mrs. Matterhorn seemed a little surprised at the invitation, yet also very much pleased.

“Why, I’d love to,” she replied. “I love music, and I’m proud of Barry Manor. Mostly, though, the young ladies just take it for granted that I am all wrapped up in my cakes and pies, so I don’t often get an invitation to visit there. Yes, indeed, I’ll come, Miss—I declare, now, I’m getting as bad as Mrs. Tindell—Miss Lafayette? No, Washington, that’s the name.”

Everyone laughed merrily at this, when the doorbell jingled to announce the arrival of a customer. Mrs. Matterhorn wiped her hands on a towel and started for the front room where her goodies were on display, but the customer walked straight to the kitchen.

A loud sniff from the newcomer made the girls look up to see Clarice Crowin framed in the doorway, a vermilion beret on her red hair and a maroon-colored woollen dress, embroidered with flowers in orange worsted, making the combination of hues even more startling.

“Yes, Miss Crowin?” Mrs. Matterhorn waved a hand toward the freshly iced layer cakes on her table. “Would you like one of these?”

Clarice’s eyes grew cold and hard, and she compressed her lips.

“No, nothing at all, thank you,” she said haughtily. “I did think I might have some of those individual mince pies and a dozen brownies, but my appetite has become quite spoiled.”

“Oh, why don’t you take some bicarbonate of soda?” Miss Snyder, the nurse, asked professionally.

Clarice gave her a look of contempt.

“The only remedy for my lost appetite would be to see your kitchen less crowded,” she said with a sneer. “Really, Mrs. Matterhorn, if you want to keep my trade you must be more careful whom you entertain in your shop.”

With that the ungracious girl turned on her spike-like heels and flounced out, leaving Mrs. Matterhorn and Miss Snyder staring after her with open mouths.

Doris, Kitty and Violet were also speechless. Doris’s face flushed with anger, and then the ridiculousness of Clarice’s

behavior chased away all her resentment and she burst out laughing.

“Is that temperamental red-top mad at you girls?” Mrs. Matterhorn demanded. “Is that what she meant by her crazy talk? Well, if ever she buys another pie from me I’ll fill it full of quinine and castor oil, and let’s see if that will make her appetite improve!”

“Oh, oh, oh!” laughed Doris. “No, please don’t do that. You must not lose any trade on our account. But wasn’t she funny?”

“You see, Mrs. Matterhorn,” Kitty explained, “Doris beat her by a big majority for the most important office in the school, and she is still furious over it.”

“I suspect, too,” Doris chuckled, “that the fudge last night put a damper on her appetite.”

Then it was Violet’s and Kitty’s turn to laugh in earnest, as they recalled the indignant departure of Clarice’s guests the night before.

Each of the girls purchased some especially tempting goody from Mrs. Matterhorn and then the three friends departed together. Kitty had succumbed to the lure of an apple turnover, light and crispy and still hot. Violet bore off a circlet of Danish pastry that seemed to have more nuts in it than flour or any other ingredient.

Doris had not been able to resist three French pastries: one in the shape of a four-leaf clover, its airy layers

separated by rich pistache icing, another a cup of fragile, crisp pastry filled with whipped cream and sprinkled over with minced candied cherries, and the third a confectioner's triumph of nut paste, jellies and crystallized orange-peel barely kept apart by golden wafers of crunchy crust.

"If I keep on buying goodies like these," Doris said thoughtfully as they crossed the campus, "I will not be center on the basketball team this winter. I won't be able to jump an inch from the floor."

"Well, I'd rather be able to swallow pastry than to jump," Kitty declared. "I wonder if there is any mail."

There was, to the great delight of Doris and Kitty, although Violet's wistfulness at receiving nothing tempered their joy.

"Come on to our room, Violet, and we'll share our letters," Doris suggested.

Of course there were letters from Marshmallow and Dave, and in addition Doris had messages from Mrs. Mallow, Marshmallow's mother with whom Doris and her uncle boarded, while Kitty had a letter from her parents. Comfortably ensconced in their room, the girls opened their mail.

"Hurrah! Uncle Wardell sends me a check!" Doris cried. "Oh, a nice fat one, too. I shall buy a new dress for the concert."

"No money for me, but advice to wear my rubbers when it rains and to rub camphor oil on my chest if I get a cold,"

Kitty laughed. “Mother isn’t accustomed yet to having me out of her sight.”

“Mrs. Mallow writes that Wags moped around the house for two days after I left but that he is getting over it, although he insists on curling up on my bed if he can sneak the chance,” Doris reported next. “Dear old Wags, I do wish I could have him up here.”

“And listen to this!” crowed Kitty. “Marshmallow writes that Dave and he may fly up here next week-end. Maybe they can get here for the concert! I’m sure they can. Let’s both write them right away, and maybe they can bring Wags!”

Doris hastily opened her letter from Dave, and confirmed the news. Just then the dinner bell sounded, putting an end to the planning for the time being, and Violet fled to her room to make ready for the meal.

“Of course Dave and Marshmallow will just be the biggest help in the search for the pearls,” Doris said hopefully. “They will tackle the tramp without fear.”

The ensuing week gave the girls, Doris in particular, little opportunity to ponder the mystery of the missing necklace, or the greater mystery of its stricken owner. Every afternoon there were rehearsals for the concert. The school as a whole practiced its songs, the glee club worked on its specialties, and the orchestra labored to gain harmonious coöperation. Doris and the other soloists had to spend an hour a day in rehearsal.

Of course there was no let-up in the main work of lessons and laboratory, recitations and study. Finally, however, the week drew toward its close, and again there were letters from the boys containing the glad news that they would fly to Barry on Saturday.

“Wire me at the airport,” Dave wrote, “about the best landing facilities.”

“There is no airport here,” Doris exclaimed. “I wonder what we can tell Dave.”

An idea struck her, and she went to see the dean.

“Miss Bartlett,” she said to the astonished school head, “may I have permission for an airplane to land on the campus?”

“An airplane? On our campus? Why—why—”

Doris smiled. For the first time in her career at Barry Manor she was witnessing Miss Bartlett momentarily startled from her habitual self-composure.

CHAPTER XIII

VISITORS FROM THE SKY

“Two friends of Kitty and myself are planning to attend the concert,” Doris explained. “One is the son of Mrs. Mallow, who keeps house for my guardian, Uncle Wardell. His name is Marshall Mallow.

“The other is David Chamberlin, an aviation pilot,” she continued. “I have known both since I was a little girl, and last summer Kitty and I and Mrs. Mallow flew to the Southwest with them.”

“You have flown across the continent?” Dean Bartlett exclaimed. “Dear me! I thought that as head of a school I had to keep one jump ahead of the younger generation, but I might as well give up trying.”

She looked at Doris with eyes that twinkled behind her glasses.

“I have never been up in an airplane,” the dean went on. “Nor have I the slightest desire to fly.”

“It was Mrs. Mallow’s first flight, too,” Doris remarked, smiling to herself at the difficulty with which they had got Marshmallow’s mother into the airplane.

“Will the airplane tear up the ground or endanger the buildings in any way?” Miss Bartlett continued. “Does not an airplane require hundreds of yards to land in and to—er—take off, as I think the expression is?”

“David and Marshmal—Marshall, I mean—plan to fly here in an autogyro,” Doris explained. “These machines land very, very slowly and come straight down, not on a long slant. And they shoot almost straight up when they take off.”

“It is an unusual request,” Miss Bartlett mused. “However, I am very curious to see the autogyro, and I should like to meet two young men who fly with as little concern as young men used to hitch up a buggy when I was your age. Yes, you have my consent, Doris, on the condition that you will let me know when they are due so I may see them arrive.”

“Thank you very much, Miss Bartlett,” Doris cried, restraining the impulse to hug the Ogress, as the dean was known to the girls, chiefly because she was less like an ogress than anything one could imagine.

Doris had a busy time of it for the next half hour. She telegraphed to Dave that he was to be permitted to land on the campus, and she reserved Mrs. Matterhorn’s other room for the boys, incidentally learning that Mrs. Tindell was slowly recovering from the effects of her fall, but with no betterment in her mental condition.

The succeeding day, Friday, was no less busy. Lessons, of course, went on as if no extra event was to take

place. The teachers were kind, however, in assigning no additional studies for over the week-end.

At noon Doris received a telegram from Dave announcing that he was about to take off for Barry, and that as he was writing Marshmallow was already in the airplane eating peanuts. He expected to arrive at about half past four, the message stated.

Lessons were over at three o'clock, and a final rehearsal followed immediately for the soloists. Doris feared that her excitement would cause her voice to quaver, a groundless fear because the music teacher and dramatic coach both told her that they hoped she would sing as well the next evening.

Released from all routine now, Doris hastened to her room to change into a pretty new frock. Accompanied by Kitty, she went to inform the dean that the aerial visitors would soon be due.

“I shall accompany you to the hockey field,” Miss Bartlett said. “I instructed Angelo, the grounds-keeper, to mount a long white pennant on a pole as a signal to the aviators.”

Doris noticed that the girls they encountered on the way to the transformed hockey field looked with great curiosity at the sight of the dean taking a stroll with the two juniors.

The sun was just disappearing behind the granite hills as Doris, Kitty and Miss Bartlett stationed themselves at the base of the pole from which the makeshift signal fluttered in the breeze. The grounds-keeper and his two

helpers, eager to see the aircraft land, pretended to be busy with rakes nearby.

“There it is!” Doris cried, pointing to the South.

“Where? I can’t see anything!” Kitty said, straining her eyes at the blue, cloud-flecked sky.

“Nor do I,” Miss Bartlett added.

“It has disappeared behind that cloud there, the one that is shaped something like a camel without legs,” Doris said, jumping up and down with excitement. “Watch, now. There it is!”

“I see it now!” Kitty cried, and “So do I!” exclaimed Miss Bartlett. The workmen dropped their tools and stared.

“It seems to have fluttering wings,” the dean observed. “Airplanes don’t flap like birds, do they?”

“That’s the revolving apparatus on top,” Kitty put in.

“Now you can hear the motor,” Doris cried.

The wavering speck took on definite shape as the autogyro came closer and lost altitude as its pilot recognized his destination was near. The watchers on the ground craned their necks in silence as the skycraft neared.

Dave circled the school at an altitude of about 1,000 feet, the motor now plainly audible even to those busy within Barry Manor’s thick stone walls. Windows flew open

and necks were craned, while a score of girls ran out upon the terrace and looked up at the descending machine.

“It is going to land!” Doris cried to the dean.

The shout brought every student forth from the building, as well as the entire faculty and the household staff.

Now at an altitude of about 600 feet, the autogyro suddenly ceased its forward motion. To those on the ground it seemed to be standing still, the huge rotor fans flapping almost lazily over the tapering fuselage.

“I never expected to see anything stand still in mid-air,” Miss Bartlett gasped.

The aircraft was not, however, “standing still,” as soon became apparent. It was descending slowly in a perpendicular line, like an elevator on invisible cables.

“Run back! It is going to land on top of us,” the dean cried, retreating suddenly.

Almost soundlessly, and with its propeller motionless, the autogyro was now but 100 feet overhead, then fifty feet, and then without a jar its wheels and tailskid touched the ground simultaneously, not a dozen yards from where Doris and Kitty waited, their arms around each other. The ship stood where it landed. Almost at the moment of contact a rotund figure heaved itself from the front cockpit and scrambled to earth.

“Hi-yo!” it shouted, doffing fur-padded goggles and revealing the beaming countenance of Marshmallow himself. “When do we eat?”

Dave leaped lightly to the ground, and with a broad grin approached Doris and Kitty, who waited sedately beside Miss Bartlett.

“Hello, Dave! Hello, Marshmallow!” the girls chorused, and then, remembering their manners, they turned and said, “Miss Bartlett, may we present Mr. Chamberlin and Mr. Mallow? Miss Bartlett is our dean, boys.”

Dave doffed his gauntlets and shook the hand Miss Bartlett offered, but Marshmallow, remembering his initial greeting, blushed vividly as he bowed.

“I—I didn’t mean that, about eating,” he said, stammering with embarrassment. “I just finished a couple of bananas, and I did my best to drop the skins in the river, too.”

“I am delighted to welcome you,” the dean laughed. “I am sure the girls have made arrangements for the completion of your meal, Mr. Mallow.”

At that juncture the students of Barry Manor arrived in a body. Dave was now no less embarrassed than Marshmallow as scores of pretty girls surrounded the aviators and their machine, unhesitant in their comments on both.

“I must look after my ship,” Dave mumbled, retreating to the shelter of the aircraft. From a compartment in

the tail he drew a great bundle of canvas and ropes, Marshmallow eagerly lending a hand.

The girls pressed closer to watch the two young men throw hemp cables over their machine and peg it securely to earth. Dave swathed the motor in its canvas covering, while Marshmallow did the same service for the two cockpits.

“Did they have an accident? Why did they land here?”

Doris recognized Clarice’s high-pitched voice. In a moment that person elbowed her way through the crowd to a front-line position. She was attired in her usual flaming combination of red, and when Marshmallow raised his head timidly and saw the brilliant figure almost at his elbow he winced and hastily thrust his shoulders into the baggage compartment again.

Miss Bartlett, meanwhile, had explained that the aviators were friends visiting Doris and Kitty, and those two chums were being pelted with questions and threats of terrible reprisals if introductions were not immediately forthcoming.

Doris stepped up beside Dave.

“Stop fussing,” she said with a smile. “You will have to run the gauntlet sooner or later, so come along now and meet the girls.”

“I didn’t expect they’d turn out the fire department for us,” Dave said under his breath, as Clarice planted herself in his way.

Doris introduced the two. Clarice evidently was torn between the desire to snub Doris and to make friends with the handsome young airman, so chose the latter.

“Doris and I are classmates and fellow officers of the school,” Clarice said archly. “I am sure we shall see each other often while you are here.”

Half a dozen other young men who were visiting the school for the concert stood somewhat dejectedly in the background, not a little jealous when they recalled how dashing they had thought themselves, arriving in snappy roadsters or imposing sedans.

Doris and Kitty proudly led their two friends through the admiring throng, and headed the boys toward Mrs. Matterhorn’s.

“It isn’t a hotel, but it will be just as comfortable as a room in either of the village inns, and is half a mile or more nearer school,” Doris explained.

“Is it a boarding house?” Marshmallow asked.

“Not exactly. It is a bakery, after a fashion,” Doris told him, and gave the boys a brief sketch of Mrs. Matterhorn’s calling.

Marshmallow pretended to swoon.

“I always was lucky,” he cried. “Imagine living right over a pastry baker’s, right in the same house! I always yearned to

have chocolate eclairs for breakfast and now my life's ambition will be fulfilled.”

Indeed, when Mrs. Matterhorn's was reached, it was no easy task to tear Marshmallow away from the room in which the widow's wares were displayed.

“Can't you just let me sleep on the floor in here?” he asked wistfully.

The girls left, promising to call for the young men after breakfast the next morning. Returning to the school they were met with a barrage of queries and demands that the visitors from the sky take each and every student for a trip into the air.

The following morning Doris and Kitty met Dave and Marshmallow as planned. Doris at once plunged into a vivid account of the eccentric Mrs. Tindell, the mystery of her grandson, Barry, and the greater mystery of the missing pearls. Needless to say, the boys eagerly promised to do all they could to help solve the case.

“You just tell us what to do, Doris,” Dave said.

“Suppose, then, that you come with us for a canoe ride and we'll explore the tramp's shack in the woods,” Doris suggested.

“Ours not to reason why, ours but to do and die,” Marshmallow misquoted. “Lead on, Madame MacDuff, but first let me buy two dozen cream rolls.”

When Marshmallow was well fortified with an armload of pastry, he pointed out the possibility that they might be shipwrecked on a desert island in the Bylow River—hence their need to lay in a precautionary stock of food. The four friends started off in a canoe for the spot where the girls had picnicked, arriving there in a short time.

“We must go quietly now,” Doris warned, and all four tiptoed through the birch woods, stepping carefully lest some snapping twig betray their approach.

“Sh-sh-sh, I see the shack,” Doris whispered.

She motioned the others to remain behind and moved slowly forward to spy out the territory.

“It’s deserted,” she called back to them.

Abandoning all caution the other three ran up to where Doris stood contemplating the lean-to. The blankets had been removed, while the ashes in the crude fireplace were dew-drenched and cold.

“Well, that eliminates the tramp, anyhow,” Doris laughed, poking with a stick among the balsam boughs that had formed the tramp’s bed. “If he did find the pearls he has gone away from here, so there is no use searching for them. If he didn’t find them, so much the—”

“What you doin’ dere?” bellowed a hoarse voice from behind the trees.

Doris leaped back in alarm, treading on Kitty's toes. Kitty, in her fright, did not feel the pain. She threw her trembling arms around Doris and stammered: "Th-th-the tu-tu-tr-ramp!"

"Git outen dere," the rough voice thundered again. "I got de poils, all right!"

Doris racked her brains for some rejoinder to the challenge, when suddenly the voice changed from an angry tone to one of convulsive mirth.

Still further alarmed, because she was sure that they were now dealing with a mad-man, Doris turned to her friends for help.

"Why—where's Marshmallow?" she cried.

Then realization dawned upon her that it was all a hoax conceived by the irrepressible Marshall Mallow—a realization immediately confirmed as the youth, doubled with laughter, staggered from his hiding-place. Everyone laughed equally loud, although Doris made a mental note that Marshmallow would have to be made to pay for his joke.

"Well, there's nothing to do but go back to the school," she said. "We will show you all around the place, and you in turn can show us how the autogyro works."

"I'll take you up after lunch," Dave volunteered, but Doris shook her head.

"I doubt if Miss Bartlett will give us permission," she said, "and if you do take us up, every girl in the place will clamor

for a ride, too.”

The boys paddled the canoe back to the school grounds and left for luncheon at Mrs. Matterhorn’s, promising to be waiting near the aircraft as soon as they had eaten.

The afternoon was devoted to a lecture tour of Barry Manor, gossip about home and a report from Marshmallow on Wags’s behavior, as well as a verbal demonstration from Dave on the principles of the autogyro.

“Half a dozen companies are making them now,” he said. “A Spaniard, Juan de Cierva, invented the principle. The rotors, those big fan-like blades, are turned by the wind, not by a motor, while in flight, and act like wings on a monoplane. In going up or coming down the action is different again. The tremendous lift of the air-screw makes it possible to take to the air after a very short run, and in descending it is something like a parachute.”

The girls resolved soon to learn about the craft at first hand, and then, all of a sudden, it was time for dinner—and the concert!

Clarice sat in the window of her room watching the four walk up from the flying machine.

“Doris is just too lucky,” she thought. “I wish she would have a little hard luck for a change—tonight, for instance, when she begins to sing.”

Clarice settled down to deep thought.

CHAPTER XIV

MUSIC AND MYSTERY

The annual Fall music festival of Barry Manor had a unique setting. The huge reception room, which stretched forty feet, the full depth of the building, was the scene of the concert, chosen instead of the small school chapel for reasons of comfort and beauty as well as of size.

At one end of the beautiful paneled room with its vast fireplace and mellow old oil paintings, a triple row of folding seats was placed, the front row accommodating the school orchestra and the soloists, while the two rear rows were reserved for the Glee Club. The chairs were arranged in an arc, with a grand piano at one wing.

A space of about fifteen feet was left open, and from there on the walls were lined with comfortable couches, many of them moved from the dormitories for the occasion. These seats were for the student body. The faculty and guests occupied library chairs arranged in groups to avoid any similarity to an auditorium. Bouquets of chrysanthemums and autumn leaves made the scene even more homelike.

Clarice, who had been appointed one of the four ushers, surveyed the completed arrangements in company with her

three attractive colleagues.

“Everything looks perfect, except for the music on the piano,” she remarked. “That looks sloppy.”

She walked down the long room, followed by the eyes of the other girls.

“Rather a gaudy get-up, don’t you think?” the Sophomore of the group observed. “I mean, a red evening dress sprinkled with silver stars looks—well, you know.”

The Freshman usher looked troubled. Anything a Junior said, thought, ate or wore was above questioning to her mind.

“Don’t be catty,” the head usher, a Senior, said, although an understanding smile hovered at the corners of her mouth. “No personal remarks, if you please.”

Clarice, of course, did not hear the criticism. She reached the piano and began to arrange the music in an orderly pile, her mind on but one thought.

“Ah, here it is,” she thought. “I’ve had this in my hands before.”

She flipped open a sheaf of music, and concealing her action from the others in the room took a folded paper which she had concealed in her handkerchief and sprinkled its contents between the pages, carefully holding her breath.

“When Doris Force opens that page of her music, her performance ought to have a lot of pep to it,” Clarice

thought as she walked away from the piano. “That is, if that white pepper is good and hot. It ought to be. It came from a new can.”

“Hurry up, Clarice,” the head usher called. “Don’t be so nervous, though. Here comes the dean with the guests.”

As the eight o’clock chimes of the grandfather’s clock in the hall died away, the students and guests began to pour into the concert room. The girls had been carefully coached to enter the room slowly and in small groups, to avoid any appearance of marching in to an assembly.

Thus with no formality at all every seat was soon filled. A pleasant hum of conversation sounded, as the Glee Club and members of the orchestra entered in a group and, pausing to say a word to a chum or to bow to a guest, they slowly wound between the chairs to their appointed places.

Doris, dressed in a new sleeveless frock of light blue-green, with stockings and slippers to match, her only ornament a square-cut jade pendant at her throat presented to her by her Uncle John, recognized Marshmallow and Dave. She smiled at her friends without self-consciousness, and Dave swelled with pride when he saw that Doris wore the corsage of bronze chrysanthemums he had sent her.

Miss Bartlett arose from the group of guests with whom she was sitting and faced the room.

“It is very pleasant for us all to be gathered here tonight for an hour or two of music,” she said simply.

“Shall we begin by singing our school song, ‘The Hills of Old Barry’?”

The girl at the piano struck a chord, and all the students plunged at once into the stately verses of the song. No one arose, for to carry out the spirit of informality they had been coached to sing while seated. It was as pleasant to watch as to listen to, as the girls in their gay dresses, many with their arms about each other, lifted their faces and sang with genuine delight and affection for the school.

At the last verse the orchestra picked up the tune, and as the final words of the song died away the musicians continued without halt into a medley of other school songs, songs of victory on the athletic field, the school marches and last of all the traditional Seniors’ song, the words of which every student knew but which by custom were reserved for the graduating class alone to sing.

“Doris, won’t you sing for us?” Miss Bartlett asked, when the applause died away. To the guests the dean said, by way of explanation:

“Miss Force is our soloist. We are very proud of her voice, and we are sure that she will have audiences hundreds of times larger than tonight’s, but none more appreciative!”

Doris rose from her seat with a smile and advanced to the piano. She took the music of her first songs from the pile. Back in the audience Busy Bea whispered to Clarice.

“Stop fidgeting so, Clarice. Doris’s squawking will soon be over. Can’t you stand it just a few minutes?”

Clarice twisted her handkerchief between her fingers until the wisp of lace was in shreds, and bit her lips without ceasing as she watched Doris. To Busy Bea she paid no attention at all.

Now for Doris’s downfall!

To the consternation of the plotter, however, Doris did not step forward with the music in her hands. How was Clarice to know that, earlier in the evening, the music teacher had suggested that inasmuch as Doris knew her songs perfectly, it would appear more natural and unstudied if she did not hold the score as she sang? The accompanist began to play the opening bars very softly as Doris smiled upon the audience.

“I shall sing a group of three old Scotch ballads.”

The introduction was a long one. The girl at the piano turned a page of the music and suddenly her face puckered in agony. Doris, ready to begin her song, looked at her pianist with surprise as the girl’s eyes filled with tears and her nose and mouth twitched convulsively. Then she snatched a handkerchief from her waist and held it to her face. With an imploring look at Doris the girl rose from the piano and vanished through a side door.

Doris, however, turned bravely to her audience and at once lifted her voice into song. At first there had been an uneasy stir among those in the room at the strange

behavior of the accompanist, but as Doris sang her hearers settled back in their seats, lost to all thought except delight at the sweet, clear music.

They were simple, lilting little melodies that Doris sang, words and music that had been composed nearly two centuries ago and suggested fragrant fields, flowering hedges and young men in knee breeches bowing to damsels in puffed skirts of sprigged muslin. When Doris concluded she dropped a curtsy, and turned to her seat.

There was not a sound from the audience!

Doris took two steps in the utter silence, dismay clutching at her heart. Was her singing so bad that not even the courtesy of a few clapping hands was to be accorded her? Had the strange behavior of the pianist spoiled everything?

Suddenly, with a crash like surf breaking upon the rocks, palm beat against palm in a perfect storm of appreciation as the audience broke the spell Doris's voice had woven. She turned in surprise and bowed again as the applause mounted higher and higher. Doris noted especially that one man seated with Miss Bartlett stood up and clapped his hands vigorously above his head, beaming and smiling at her. The rule for the evening was no encores, and Doris merely bowed again and again, smiling her thanks.

At last Miss Bartlett prevailed upon the audience to be quiet and announced the next number, an orchestral piece. While the music was being played Doris's

accompanist returned, red-eyed and panting. She leaned over the chair of the young singer.

“Somebody put a handful of pepper between the pages of the music,” she whispered. “When I turned the page it flew into my nose and eyes. I had to leave in a hurry or I would not have been able to control my sneezing and it would have ruined your number. Who could have thought up such a contemptible practical joke?”

Doris gasped. Who, indeed, could have been the author of a trick so mean? She had her suspicions, of course, but wisely she kept them to herself and praised the pianist for her self-control.

A piano duet, another orchestral piece and then two numbers by the Glee Club followed in order, each warmly applauded. Soon it was Doris’s turn to sing again.

“My numbers this time are again three songs, a modern French ballad, a German lullaby and Victor Herbert’s ‘My Gipsy Sweetheart,’” she announced.

This time the piano successfully followed her voice through the three selections, and at their conclusion the applause broke out as the last note trailed away, louder even than before.

The violinist followed, and after some more of the Glee Club’s efforts and another piano duet the orchestra struck up the Alma Mater, the entire school joining in the words. This completed the program.

Everyone arose as the musicians and songsters mingled with the audience. The white-haired gentleman who had expressed such enthusiasm at Doris's singing was talking excitedly to Miss Bartlett, who smiled and shook her head.

"I do not want the heads of my young girls turned by too much praise," she said. "No, Signor, I know that Doris is a level-headed and modest young woman, but you must promise me not to tell her all you have told me."

"Ver-r-ry well, Mees Bar-rtlett," the man bowed. "But let me speak wiz ze young lady, ple-ease!"

The dean guided the man to Doris's side. Doris was laughing at some joke Kitty had made, with one eye on Dave and Marshmallow, who were trying to reach the girls without using their elbows on the admiring students clustered around the young aviators.

"Doris, just a moment, please," Miss Bartlett said. "This is Signor Grotti-Mazzata—"

"Oh, the famous conductor!" Doris exclaimed.

"Mees For-rce, permit an old man to pr-resent hees thanks for-r your be-eautiful songs!" Signor Grotti-Mazzata exclaimed, bowing deeply. "In my life-time I have hear-rd mooch singing, I have leesten to many, many pr-odigies br-rought to me by doting parents and teachers. May I say never have I hear-r sooch a natural sopr-rano like you'self. And your composure when something happen to

your-r accompanist—superb! Signorina, you have one grand future!”

Doris’s eyes widened at the old man’s praise. She looked at Miss Bartlett’s face for guidance, but the dean was smiling proudly.

“Thank you, Signor,” Doris said simply. “I am doing my best to train my voice. Some day I hope to sing operatic arias. You encourage me more than you know.”

“Ah, but I have pr-romise not to pr-raise you, Signorina,” Grotti-Mazzata said with another bow. “My lips are seal! Only, please come to see me in New Yor-rk. I can help you a leetle, for you do not need mooch help. You maked me ver-ry happy!”

Doris smiled again, puzzled as to the proper reply to make. The Signor bowed again and again, and would have continued had not Miss Bartlett led him away.

“Who was the old cotton-top?” Marshmallow demanded irreverently. “He seemed to be doing setting-up exercises. Gee, Doris, you sang swell!”

This was the sort of praise Doris understood. Dave told her that her voice gave him the same sort of thrill that a loop-the-loop over the clouds did, and that pleased her better than all the Signor had said.

Next Mrs. Matterhorn came up and told Doris she had a voice as sweet as fresh cream, and Doris proposed that the boys, Kitty, Violet and she accompany Mrs.

Matterhorn to her home. Wraps were donned and the happy group sauntered down the sweeping drive over the campus to the widow's cottage.

Miss Snyder, Mrs. Tindell's nurse, was on the front steps "just gettin' a mouthful of air."

"Say," she exclaimed, "the old lady's grandson was here tonight."

"Wha-at!" gasped her hearers.

"Yes, you know, the fellow she is always ravin' about," the nurse said. "Though why she does I don't know, after seein' him. He's a pretty fresh city slicker. Mis' Tindell didn't recognize him at all, but he identified himself all right."

"Is he staying in the village? Will he call again?" Doris demanded.

CHAPTER XV

THE LAST CLUE?

Nurse Snyder seemed to relish the sensation she had caused. Up to now she had merely been a very unimportant actor in the mystery. All of a sudden she was in the center of the stage, getting all the attention.

“I don’t know where the gentleman is staying,” she said. “He didn’t say. He came in an automobile. He said he didn’t think this was the best place for his grandmother and he was going to take her to a nursing home.”

Mrs. Matterhorn’s backbone stiffened.

“What is wrong with my house, I’d like to know?” she sniffed. “There ain’t a more comfortable bed in all Barry than the one Mrs. Tindell’s in. My rooms are clean and the food is nourishing and my prices are low!”

“Don’t argue with me, Mrs. Matterhorn,” Miss Snyder said. “I guess I’m as good at caring for the old lady as any nurse anywhere, too. But the gentleman said that his grandmother was always used to every luxury and that her old family doctor had advised long ago to have her sent to a nursing home so she could have her mind treated.”

“When is he coming back?” Doris asked. “Did you notice the number on his license plate, or the state it was from? What does he look like?”

“My land o’ Goshen!” Miss Snyder cried, throwing up her hands. “What a sight of questions you can ask! Why, none of that’s any business of mine. I didn’t spy on the gentleman.”

“Didn’t he even leave his name?” Doris demanded.

“No, he said as how he was Mrs. Tindell’s grandson, and then I took him upstairs and said we’d been expecting him, and he says ‘Hello, Grandma,’ he says, but the old lady had one of her absent spells and she just says, ‘I don’t buy from—tee hee!—agents,’ and that made me laugh, so I left ’em.”

“Didn’t he say when he would be back?” Doris repeated.

“He said in a day or two,” the nurse replied, with a sharp look at the seemingly inquisitive girl.

Kitty, Violet and the two boys stood wordlessly, more surprised at the nurse’s stupidity than at Doris’s pointed questioning.

“We shall have to wait until we see him,” Doris said at last, turning to her friends. “Will you call me up when the grandson calls again, Mrs. Matterhorn?”

“Gladly,” the widow replied.

Goodnights were exchanged and the three girls walked back to the school together.

“Why are you so anxious about the grandson, Doris?” Kitty asked, smothering a yawn. “I should think you would be relieved and happy now that he has turned up.”

“Oh, for two reasons,” Doris laughed. “Of course, I want to tell him all about the missing necklace, and secondly, I want to find out how he traced Mrs. Tindell to Barry. Professional curiosity. It was a clever piece of detective work.”

“I didn’t know Mrs. Tindell was under a doctor’s care, but of course I haven’t seen her for more than a year,” Violet remarked. “However, she has not always been used to every luxury. She lived like a miser when we knew her.”

“That is interesting,” Doris said. “I am curious to meet the grandson. He is very solicitous about Mrs. Tindell.”

Then the conversation turned to Doris’s triumph at the concert, and she had to explain the mysterious ailment that had stricken the pianist.

“Clarice!” snapped Kitty. “It is just the sort of mean trick she would play!”

“She may have done it,” Doris said. “And again it may have been an accident, although I don’t see how pepper could get into the music between the time I laid it on the piano and when I picked it up again an hour later. Well, least said soonest mended. Clarice will over-reach herself some day and stand exposed by her own doings.”

The trio separated for the night, and soon all of Barry Manor was in darkness.

The next day proved to be a rainy one. The girls gathered in each others' rooms to gossip and attend to their correspondence. The cold autumnal rains slashed against the windows, while the wind sent the elm leaves down in great showers of yellow.

“There go the boys!” Kitty exclaimed, her face against the window of the chums' room which faced the athletic field. “They just drove up to the airplane in a car with another man.”

Doris joined her chum at the window and recognized the third man as Signor Grotti-Mazzata, the opera conductor. Undoubtedly it was his limousine in which the boys had driven to the field, for the man spoke to a chauffeur who descended from the car and joined the others in an examination of the rain-soaked aircraft.

“They will all get cold,” Doris fretted. “Couldn't they wait until it stopped raining to look at the 'gyro? Dave is so fascinated by planes that he would drag anybody out in the middle of a tornado to demonstrate one.”

For fully fifteen minutes the four men slogged through the mud around the autogyro, and from his motions it was evident that Dave Chamberlin was explaining how the craft worked. Then they all reentered the automobile and drove off toward the village, leaving the girls a little disappointed.

In less than half an hour, however, they were called to the telephone, and Doris, the first one summoned, heard Dave's voice at the other end of the wire.

"Such luck!" shouted the youth, until Doris's ears tingled. "That white-haired old man who got so excited about your singing, you know?"

"Signor Grotti-Mazzata?" Doris interjected.

"That's the one! Marshmallow and I met him at the hotel here this morning when we came down to look the town over. And what do you think? He is interested in buying one of the ships!"

"Could he learn to run one?" Doris asked.

"Sure, a baby could run one," Dave bragged. "But he is going to have his chauffeur learn first. He wants a couple of demonstrations, Doris. That means I can stay up here a few days more. I've wired Pete to tell him I have a prospect."

"That's great, Dave!" Doris cried. "I'm so glad."

"What are the visiting hours at your institution?" Dave asked. "Marshmallow and I will come up if it isn't against the rules."

"You may come between three and five o'clock," Doris told him. "However, you must be soaked to the skin. You had best get dried out first."

“Oh, we have a change of clothing with us,” Dave replied. “Now Marshmallow wants to talk with Kitty. I think he plans to describe the pastry he invented and wants Mrs. Matterhorn to try out. A combination strawberry-shortcake-chocolate-pie-plum-pudding-jell—”

There was the sound of a violent scuffle at the other end of the wire, and then Marshmallow’s voice came to Doris.

“Hello! That you, Doris? Dave just choked to death on a low, base fib. Ouch! Leggo of me, you—you— There, how do you like that?”

Choking with laughter, Doris turned the telephone over to Kitty.

When the boys called after dinner and the four friends were toasting in front of the log fire in one of the sitting rooms, Dave proceeded to go into ecstasies over his aircraft until Marshmallow interrupted.

“You poke fun at me because I like food,” he said. “Well, anybody can understand words like ‘chocolate’ and ‘cocoanut’ and ‘angel food,’ and if they haven’t dyspepsia they can appreciate ’em, too, but your jabber about ‘engine torque’ and ‘tachometers’ and ‘angle of climb’ I suppose are just pure poetry.”

Abashed, Dave lapsed into silence, although the girls protested that his conversation was as valuable as a ground course in aviation.

“What I want to hear about is the mystery of this Mrs. Tindell,” Marshmallow said. “And about the lost pearls. Aren’t you afraid, Doris, that the grandson may suspect you stole them?”

“I hadn’t thought of that!” Doris exclaimed, sitting bolt upright. “Oh, surely he wouldn’t suspect me. And yet—” her voice trailed off. “Well, that makes it all the more important that we find the necklace. I have pondered and pondered and it seems to me there is one last clue.”

“What is it?” cried the others, leaning forward in excitement.

“The moving van,” Doris said. “Not the moving van itself, because I am sure that if the pearls had dropped to the floor they would have been discovered and reported.

“Mrs. Tindell sat on that big, upholstered sofa, you remember, Kitty. Did you ever discover how quickly an overstuffed couch will swallow up anything you drop?”

“Yes, but how are you going to find out the name of the moving company, and of that particular van’s destination?” Dave asked.

Doris did not reply, and presently it was five o’clock, so the boys had to depart. After they had gone, the girls discussed the new angle to the mystery from time to time until they fell asleep that night.

Studies at Barry Manor were interrupted the next morning when the noise of the aircraft’s motor came to the ears of the

students occupied with Latin gerunds, French participles and the areas of triangles.

Doris and Kitty saw from the windows of their recitation room the machine, with its great revolving top, climbing into the sky, and realized that Dave was demonstrating it to the wealthy and retired director of operas. Everyone else, though, thought the boys were departing for good, and many were the downcast faces when the sound of the motor was finally swallowed up by distance.

“It’s coming back!” was the excited whisper audible in every study hall and classroom half an hour later, and one of those most cheered by the news was Clarice.

Luncheon time arrived, and Doris hurried to the telephone as soon as it was over. Her first move was to call up the Chamber of Commerce in the largest town to the north, the direction from which the moving van had come.

“Is there any storage company or furniture moving concern in your town that uses vans painted a bright yellow?” she asked the secretary of the organization.

The answer at once delighted and disappointed her.

“Yes, there is one,” the man told her. “Why do you ask? If you want the name of the company I am afraid I cannot tell you over the telephone.”

“Why not?” demanded Doris.

“Why do you want to find out?” the man asked.

Doris thought swiftly. How could she explain?

“If it is against your rules to give information over the telephone, we will dismiss the matter,” she said quickly.

“You understand, of course, that unscrupulous persons might—” the secretary began to explain.

“I understand perfectly,” Doris said. “Thank you. Goodbye.”

She hung up the receiver and turned to the classified advertising pages in the back of the telephone book. Under the heading of “Storage and Moving” she rejoiced to see that the town had only six such concerns listed. She called the first number.

“Good afternoon,” she said to the man who answered the telephone. “Will you please tell me if your vans are painted a sort of orange-yellow?”

“I shall be glad to send a van to your home at once, Madam,” was the answer. “We have the lowest rates in the state, and the safest vans and the most experienced men. Estimates cheerfully given and no distance too—”

“Are the vans yellow?” Doris interrupted.

“The color certainly makes no difference,” the voice went on. “Yellow or pink, it is service and efficiency—”

Doris knew that she had not obtained the right concern on her first try. She could not refrain from playing a little joke

on the rival company which was trying so hard to lure a customer from the operators of the yellow vans.

“I’ll tell you why I am asking,” Doris said. “I am doing a little investigating, trying to trace something valuable that was lost. In fact, it is worth several thousand dollars. Now it was a yellow van—”

“What! Well, Ma’am, you have the wrong company. That’s the Costigan Brothers who have the yellow vans,” was the indignant answer.

“Thank you very, very much,” cried Doris warmly, and she meant it. The identification had saved her a great deal of time and toll costs.

When she had secured a connection with the Costigan Brothers’ concern she frankly stated her case.

“The driver of one of your vans very kindly gave a lift to an old lady who was ill, and two girls near Barry a few days ago,” she said. “The old lady dropped a necklace she valued very highly, and I was wondering if you had found it.”

“Our drivers are strictly forbidden to give rides to anybody,” was the reply.

Doris heard the speaker shout to someone:

“Who took a load through Barry a couple of days ago, Ed?”

Faintly Doris heard “Ed” reply that he had driven the van himself, and who wanted to know?

“Wait, Miss, it was my brother, one of the partners, on the van himself. I’ll put him on the wire.”

Doris re-stated her query to Ed Costigan, who recalled the incident but denied that any necklace had been found in the van, which he had emptied himself.

“It may have slipped in behind a cushion on the sofa,” Doris said. “Where was the furniture taken to, could you tell me?”

“Sure, I took it over the state line to Orangetown,” the man said without hesitation. “I took it to the old Van Gestel place on the Post Road, a big old house surrounded by fields on the edge of a lake.”

Doris thanked the speaker, and with a high heart she returned to the study hall to round out the forty-minute period of relaxation and study which followed luncheon.

“I found the van company, and the place where the furniture was delivered,” she whispered to Kitty.

That astounded young woman dropped her chemistry notebook with a bang that caused the teacher in charge of the hall to raise her eyebrows and then lower them in a frown.

“How in the world!” Kitty gasped. “Have you a Hindu crystal-gazing globe, or what?”

“Tell you after school,” Doris whispered.

During the rest of the afternoon Kitty could often be seen staring at Doris with wonder and pride.

When lessons were at last finished for the day Kitty and Doris donned out-door clothing and walked down to where the autogyro was once more pegged to the ground, its mechanism swathed in canvas. As the girls had hoped, Dave and Marshmallow were waiting, sitting in one of the cockpits.

“Doris has just completed an amazing piece of detective work,” Kitty called out. “I don’t know yet how she did it, but she practically has the missing pearls in her hand.”

“Nonsense, Kitty,” Doris laughed. “That is a whopper, and you know it. Let’s go for a row. It is a little too windy for a canoe ride.”

A few minutes later the four were sculling up the river, while Doris told how she had managed to locate the owners of the yellow van.

CHAPTER XVI

“SHE IS GONE!”

“It was a big, modern truck, so I inferred it came from a fairly big town,” Doris explained to her fascinated audience. “And the truck was coming loaded from the north, so naturally I called up the nearest big town north of here, and by good luck I was right the first time.”

“She calls it luck!” Dave announced to the waves and wind. “If that’s luck, what could you do if you really used your brains?”

Step by step Doris outlined her search for the moving company, the particular van and its destination.

“There is one complication, though,” she said. “Orangetown is more than a hundred miles from here. I don’t know how we will get there, and once we are there, how are we going to persuade the owners of the furniture to let us rummage through their sofa?”

“The first complication is solved,” Dave said proudly. “We’ll fly over!”

“Can you stay over until Saturday?” Kitty asked the boys. “Miss Bartlett won’t mind if we go on a holiday.”

“Speaking of holidays, day after tomorrow is Armistice Day,” Doris pointed out. “There will be no lessons after the morning exercises. Shall we plan to go then if Miss Bartlett will permit us?”

Dave agreed. He said he had promised Signor Grotti-Mazzata a further demonstration the next day, and that he had received a wire from Pete Speary, his employer, giving him permission to remain away as long as he wished if there was a sale in view.

There remained, therefore, only two obstacles to the conclusion of the last clue. One was permission from Miss Bartlett to make the flight. The other and more difficult problem was to convince the owners of the furniture that their sofa should be literally taken apart by utter strangers.

“Now we have something to report,” Marshmallow burst forth, unable to contain himself any longer. “Mrs. Tindell’s son-in-law called again this morning!”

“Her son-in-law?” Doris exclaimed.

“Oh, shucks, I would get it all balled up,” Marshmallow said. “I mean her grandson. He is evidently trying to charm the nurse. I saw him try to kiss her in the hall, but she slapped his face. I don’t think she was awfully offended, though, because she took a bill he slipped her on the way out.”

“I wonder if we could find out some more about him,” Doris mused. “His name, where he lives, and how he found his grandmother.”

“Say, we aren’t as stupid as we look,” Marshmallow replied. “By the way, I’m getting winded. Let’s turn around and drift downstream.”

The boat was put about, and Marshmallow explained that he had questioned Miss Snyder, learning that the grandson gave his name as Tindell also, and that the old woman had not yet recovered sufficiently to recognize him.

“And meanwhile I took a look at his car,” Dave chimed in. “It isn’t a very good one. A three-year old one, licensed in this state. I took the number down, too, if it will do you any good, Doris. Mrs. Matterhorn doesn’t like Grandson Tindell at all, incidentally. He is a pretty smooth talker, but he doesn’t use good English. If he had a wealthy grandmother who doted on him you’d think she would have sent him to school.”

“The more I hear about the grandson the more suspicious I am that he isn’t to be trusted, not while Mrs. Tindell is helpless and has all that wealth with her,” Doris observed. “It isn’t any of our business, of course. Doesn’t the school look pretty from here?”

“And doesn’t the autogyro look pretty, too,” Dave said proudly. “The girls can be trusted not to step inside the ropes, can’t they, Doris?”

“Of course,” Doris replied, but Kitty sniffed and amended that by adding, “All but one or two I can think of.”

“And thinking of a certain person,” Kitty said, “I say, look at that spot of scarlet on the dock down there. It can be no one else but Clarice Crowin. But where is her little shadow, Busy Bea?”

“Is that the girl who had on the red dress the night of the concert?” Dave asked. “The usher? Say, I’m very partial to red hair, but that young lady goes around as an advertisement for barn paint, doesn’t she?”

As the rowboat drifted close to the floating dock where the canoes were beached and the rowboats tied, Clarice waved to its four occupants.

“I can’t imagine your being satisfied with a rowboat when you might be flying, Mr. Aviator,” she called out as she stepped into a canoe and awkwardly shoved it out into the current.

The frail craft shot across the bow of the rowboat, wobbling dangerously.

“Oh! Help! Help!” Clarice screamed. “I’ve lost the paddle! The canoe is going to tip over!”

“She will certainly turn that canoe over if she isn’t careful,” Dave exclaimed, and then, raising his voice, he called a warning to Clarice.

“Sit down,” he cried. “Don’t move around! We’ll help you!”

The two boys maneuvered the rowboat until Dave could reach the stern of the rocking canoe in which Clarice

crouched with mock terror.

Now that young lady actually prided herself on her ability to handle a canoe. In fact, she had once won a paddling race on the Bylow. She had conceived the idea of appearing to be in danger just to attract attention to herself and to force herself on Dave.

“Oh, I’m so frightened,” she said, as the canoe was drawn up beside the rowboat. “You are so quick and masterful, Mr. Aviator!”

Kitty glared her disgust at the back of Clarice’s carrotty head, but Doris suppressed a smile of derision.

“The water is pretty cold and swift,” Dave said sternly. “You might have been drowned.”

“I would have been except for you,” Clarice replied, flashing what she meant to be a dazzling smile but which really made David think of an exaggerated tooth-paste advertisement.

“Won’t you please climb in and paddle me to shore, Dave—that is your name, isn’t it?” Clarice continued boldly. “You could use one of the oars.”

“It is too risky, climbing from a rowboat into a canoe,” he answered shortly. “You just hold on to the gunwales of the boat and we’ll tow you in.”

Clarice bit her lip with vexation, carefully keeping her head averted from Kitty and Doris. The boys rowed slowly to the

float, and after helping Doris and Kitty to shore they drew the canoe close so that Clarice could step to the dock.

“A canoe is a tricky thing,” Dave said as he helped her ashore. “You had better keep out of them until you have been taught how to handle a paddle. Perhaps Doris will teach you.”

“Thank you for your help,” Clarice said, her voice choking with rage. “I—”

She turned on her heel and stalked away, trembling with fury. To do her justice, it must be recorded that she was most angry at herself for the failure of her scheme.

“Say, that was a narrow escape,” Marshmallow said with a profound shake of his head.

“Don’t be fooled!” Kitty snorted. “Clarice planned the whole stunt just to make herself conspicuous.”

“That isn’t what I meant,” Marshmallow replied, a smile lurking at the corners of his mouth. “It was a narrow escape for Dave. My lands, if that lady fireman had lured Dave into her boat she would have paddled off to the South Sea Islands with him.”

“Shucks, she’s just vacant in the upper story,” Dave growled.

“Just the same, I’m glad I am not good-looking,” Marshmallow laughed. “It saves me a lot of trouble, being built on the general outlines of an airship.”

“Who said you were not good-looking?” Kitty demanded. “You—you’d be real handsome if you would comb your hair oftener.”

“What, and wear it all off?” Marshmallow cried in mock horror. “Nobody loves a fat man, so what chances would I have if I were bald as well as overstuffed?”

“Oh, come on, you two,” Doris laughed, shaking with mirth. “Let’s go over to Mrs. Matterhorn’s and ask if she will make us some tea, and we’ll have toasted crumpets.”

“Hurrah for coasted trumpets!” Marshmallow shouted. “Come along, Dave! We’ll take care of you so no kidnaping can be performed.”

“Be still,” Dave mumbled with embarrassment. “If you want my guess that brick-topped siren was planning to gobble you up.”

With banter and good-natured teasing the four friends made their way across the broad school grounds, Dave insisting upon a detour to examine his autogyro.

“It’s a three-place job,” he said proudly, “but there is lots of room. She’ll fly four.”

“Meaning, I gather, that it is designed to accommodate three persons, but will carry four in a pinch?” Doris translated, with a twinkle in her eye.

“That’s exactly what I said, in simpler language,” Dave retorted. “We’ll just hop over to Orangetown and pick up the

pearls any time you say.”

As the jolly quartette walked down the slope toward Barry Manor’s east gates, Dave suddenly pointed toward the road.

“There goes the grandson!” he shouted.

“Where? Where?” chorused the others.

“See that car disappearing down the road?” Dave exclaimed.
“That’s his. I remember that tear on the spare tire cover.”

“Oh, dear, we just missed him,” Doris cried with disappointment in every syllable. “If only we had reached here five minutes earlier we could have interviewed him.”

“It is all Clarice’s fault,” Kitty stormed.

“Oh, well, now that he has taken to calling in the middle of the afternoon we shall probably see him again,” Doris said hopefully. “Come along, or it will be too close to dinner-time to have tea.”

On Mrs. Matterhorn’s door, however, they found a note pinned conspicuously. Doris stooped and read it aloud.

““Dear Mrs. M.: I was called to Mrs. Murdock to take a splinter out of her hand. Back in 15 minutes sure,”” she read.
“Why, Mrs. Matterhorn must be out, and this note must have been written by Miss Snyder.”

“Yes, here she comes now,” Dave announced. “She acts sort of angry, too.”

Nurse Snyder, clutching a sweater to her throat, was storming up the street in great strides.

“Say, none of you played that joke on me, did you?” she demanded when she came up to the steps.

“What joke?” the four demanded.

“A man called up and said he was Mr. Murdock, down the street a ways, you know. He said his wife had run a splinter ’way into her hand and he wanted me to come and dress it,” the nurse said. “Well, it wasn’t true at all!”

“That is a shame,” Doris said. “I certainly dislike practical jokers who put anybody to trouble like that.”

“I’d like to lay my hands on the fellow,” Miss Snyder grumbled. “Come in or you’ll catch your death, out here in the cold. Mrs. Matterhorn went to Mt. Vincent on the train to buy herself an electric gadget that whips cream and eggs.”

“We hoped to get some tea,” Doris said.

“I’ll fix you a cup,” the nurse said. “Just let me run upstairs and see how Mrs. Tindell is.”

Doris and her friends seated themselves at the one small table in Mrs. Matterhorn’s little front room where her pastries were displayed.

“Never mind your poasted truncets,” Marshmallow misspoke. “I’m going to have that chocolate layer cake with the—”

He broke off his sentence and stared at the others, his jaw dropping. From the chamber above had arisen a shrill scream. Then the four heard the sound of running feet clattering down the stairs.

“Mrs. Tindell is gone!” Miss Snyder cried as she burst into the room. “Everything’s gone—vanished!”

CHAPTER XVII

KIDNAPING OR KINDNESS?

Doris was the first to reach her feet.

“Are you sure she is not in another room?” she asked.

“No, her bag is gone, her hat and coat, and this note was left,” wailed the nurse.

She thrust out a piece of paper to which a twenty-dollar bill was pinned.

“Sorry to find no one at home,” Doris read. “Doctor advises I must remove my grandmother to a nursing home.”

The signature was merely “Tindell.”

Doris handed the note to her friends.

“To think that we came within a minute or two of seeing him take Mrs. Tindell,” she said. “Now, where shall we send the pearls if we find them?”

“Advertise them,” Dave said with a shrug of his broad shoulders. “They will be claimed in a hurry.”

Miss Snyder sat down on the edge of the table, clasping and unclasping her trembling hands.

“It was such a shock to find the room empty,” she sighed. “I never in my life had a patient disappear on my hands like that. It isn’t at all decent and orderly.”

“I guess our tea party will have to be postponed,” Doris whispered to her friends. “Come along, Kitty, and let us tell Violet that Mrs. Tindell has gone.”

The boys volunteered to escort the girls back to the school building again, and as the four descended the steps of the house they encountered Mrs. Matterhorn, who received the news of Mrs. Tindell’s abrupt departure with a frown.

“That is mighty queer business,” she said. “Miss Snyder can keep the twenty dollars. I have been overpaid as it is by the fifty dollars Mrs. Tindell left with me. Oh, good afternoon, Mrs. Butterworth.”

The greeting was addressed to a woman who opened the window of the neighboring house, an apron thrown over her head for protection.

“Your boarder left in a hurry, Mis’ Matterhorn,” she called. “I hope she didn’t go without payin’ her bill.”

“The old busybody,” Mrs. Matterhorn said under her breath. “Mrs. Butterworth is the town gossip.”

Then, raising her voice, she assured Mrs. Butterworth that Mrs. Tindell’s finances had all been in order.

“Where did she go to?” the gossip queried.

“To a hospital,” Mrs. Matterhorn replied shortly.

“Yes, I thought she was right sick the way the gentleman carried her out,” the neighbor said. “He was in an awful hurry. He left his motor running. The car might have been stolen, but I kept an eye on it and that dog of his seemed to be pretty well able to scare off any meddler.”

“I have no doubt about it,” Mrs. Matterhorn said. “Thank you for your interest.”

With that she stalked into her house, leaving the four young friends to resume their walk back to Barry Manor. Doris was silent as she strolled up the long drive.

“You know, this whole business strikes me as decidedly strange,” she said as they reached the steps of the school. “That fake telephone call for help that took Miss Snyder away from the house just long enough for the grandson to appear and take the old lady away—that was not just a coincidence.”

“What do you mean, Doris?” the others cried as they clustered around the girl.

“I mean that the grandson didn’t want to make any explanations when he took Mrs. Tindell away,” Doris said emphatically.

“Then you think this is a kidnaping?” Dave exclaimed.

“Why, Doris! I think that is rather far-fetched.”

“Perhaps it is,” Doris replied. “And yet you must consider that it sounds just as preposterous to have the invalid carried out bodily from her sick-bed, just for the sake of kindness on her grandson’s part.”

“The whole thing is crazy, no matter how you look at it,” Marshmallow said. “What’s the use of worrying? Just think of the chocolate layer cake I didn’t get!”

“You can have it for your dinner, Marshmallow,” Doris said, smiling sweetly. “And now we’ll have to say goodnight. Shall we meet you at the airplane tomorrow after school?”

“We’ll be there,” Dave promised. “Goodnight!”

Doris stopped at Violet’s door and rapped. Violet was delighted to see her friend and counselor. Her eyes were reddened as if she had been crying again, and Doris reproached herself for having neglected the lonely girl for over three days.

“I have exciting news,” Doris said, linking her arm in Violet’s. “Are you all primed up for dinner? Come into our room, then, and we’ll tell you the news while we freshen up.”

Violet listened to the story of Mrs. Tindell’s removal from Barry with a frown.

“It sounds more like an abduction,” she said.

“I could hug you for that!” Doris laughed. “That was exactly what I thought. The ‘loving’ grandson is after the money and jewels and bonds which he must have seen on previous visits. It’s more kidnaping than kindness.”

“Granting that he is her grandson in the first place,” Violet said slowly. “He may be an impostor, you know.”

Doris pondered this theory.

“I can’t figure out who would be able to work himself into Mrs. Tindell’s confidence unless he were somebody she knew,” the girl mused. “And yet—Miss Snyder said Mrs. Tindell never seemed to recognize the visitor, in fact, she took him for a canvasser or an agent of some kind.”

“Oh, I guess I’m just full of romantic ideas,” Violet sighed. “I had a letter from my aunt just now. It came special delivery in answer to one I mailed Friday telling her about you and how kind and helpful you have been, and how much your sympathy meant to me.”

“Nonsense, we did only what any old-timer at the school would do for a newcomer,” Doris protested.

“Well, one old-timer called me Rain-in-the-Face,” Violet said with a wry smile. “Anyhow, my aunt did nothing but scold me for letting others meddle into my affairs, and she said there was no word at all from Buddy.”

The girl’s lips trembled again.

“Oh, I wish my big brother were here,” she cried passionately. “He would take care of me! He would comfort me! Oh, girls, I miss my father and mother so, and I’ll never see them again. Buddy is all I have left.”

The tears came to Doris’s eyes at the heart-broken tones in Violet’s expressions of sorrow. She sat down beside her and hugged the grief-stricken girl.

“Hush, Violet! It takes a long, long time for a boat to cross the ocean from Africa, especially a tramp steamer,” Doris said. “I think you are just splendid—and your hunch that the grandson may be an impostor is marvelous. I’ll tell you what: you join us in tracking down the missing Mrs. Tindell. We must find her!”

“What about the pearls?” Violet asked.

CHAPTER XVIII

“WHAT ABOUT THE PEARLS?”

Doris had her plans for tracing down the last clue to the lost pearl necklace, and these she started to put into effect immediately after the evening meal.

“Miss Bartlett,” she said to the dean in the hallway, “may we have permission to make a flight in the autogyro on our Armistice Day holiday?”

Miss Bartlett considered the request for a moment before answering.

“I did tell you, before your friends arrived, that you might—what is the right expression—take a flyer? I still have no objections.”

Doris thanked the school head warmly, and ran to break the good news to Kitty.

“We will tell the boys tomorrow afternoon,” Doris planned. “They can have the motors warmed up and all ready to start, and we can have a lunch all packed.”

“And then, ho for the pearls!” Kitty cried.

“I fancy this is the first time that pearls were ever hunted from the air,” Doris laughed. “Usually they are sought from boats.”

“It is too bad there isn’t room to take Violet along,” Kitty remarked.

“Do you know what I’d like to do?” Doris said. “Find Violet’s brother for her. I never saw a girl whose happiness depended more upon the return of a single person than does Violet’s.”

“Doris, you simply can’t rest, can you, unless you are solving mysteries?” Kitty laughed. “It is a wonder you have any room in your mind for lessons.”

“Speaking of lessons,” Doris remarked, “may I remind you that the first marks will be posted on the bulletin board tomorrow? I feel pretty certain that I am above passing in everything except mathematics.”

“The English exam wasn’t very hard,” Kitty said, “except for that question which asked us to locate the proper plays for all those Shakespearean characters. Who was Launcelot Gobbo? It sounds like a name out of a fairy tale.”

“I missed out on Launcelot Gobbo, too,” Doris confessed. “What worried me most was that question in math, as to the diameter of a circle that would have the exact area of a square twelve feet on a side.”

“I just didn’t do it,” Kitty said. “What did you put down?”

“I wrote: ‘It can’t be done by Doris Force,’” the owner of that name laughed.

The next day, the tenth of November, found the girls of Barry Manor clustered around the bulletin board where the standings by classes were posted. Doris gave the Junior Class rating a quick look, then her heart skipped a beat.

With her cheeks a shade pinker than usual, she hurried away to the study hall. Kitty caught up with her and gave Doris’s arm an affectionate squeeze.

“Congratulations, old dear,” she cried. “Right on top of the heap—not even tied for first place, and with a general average of 96, no less.”

“I am happy about it,” Doris admitted. “But everybody will think I am nothing but a bookworm.”

“Nonsense. Not after the basketball season starts,” Kitty said. “That’s something I don’t have to worry about for myself. Eighth, with a general average of 88. I bested Violet, anyway. Did you see the close race Clarice and Busy Bea made, though?”

“No, I didn’t stop to look after seeing my own name,” Doris said.

“Clarice just topped Bea for last place by half a point,” Kitty chuckled. “Bea’s average was 75 and Clarice’s 74.5 per cent. She almost failed not to fail.”

“She’ll make it up, though,” Doris said. “That isn’t a big margin to make up.”

“She won’t make it up until Dave leaves,” Kitty replied. “Clarice is going to have him take her up for a flight even if she has to hide in the gas tank.”

Later in the day Doris was astonished to learn that she had received a perfect mark in the mathematics examination, despite her failure to answer the question on the area of a circle. That proved to be a mystery she could not solve. Certain that Miss Carmichael, the instructor, had made an error, Doris questioned her at the close of the recitation.

“Why, Doris, didn’t you write for your answer that ‘This cannot be done by Doris Force’?” the teacher asked.

“Yes, I did,” the mystified girl admitted. And then recollection came to her and she laughed aloud.

“That is the impossible problem of ‘squaring the circle,’ isn’t it?” she asked. “I remember we spent the second day of the semester discussing that. No one can do it!”

“It was a catch question, I admit,” Miss Carmichael said. “So for those who tried to work it I only deducted half a credit. Those who did not answer of course gave the correct answer.”

Doris made a mental note that she would catch the boys on the query some day when time hung heavy on everyone’s hands.

At last the afternoon drew to a close, and Doris and Kitty met the boys as prearranged, there to give the good news of Miss Bartlett's permission for the flight.

The next day promised to be fair, and thus it proved to be when Armistice Day dawned. The school assembled for patriotic services, and Doris sang the national anthem, "The Star Spangled Banner," as a solo. Then school was dismissed, with complete freedom for all for the rest of the day.

Doris and Kitty got the heavy lunch basket from the kitchen and hurried off to where Dave and Marshmallow were waiting at the improvised airfield. They dressed in their heaviest winter clothing, for the autogyro was not a cabin craft.

The girls found that most of their schoolmates had beaten them to the spot, for the sight of the boys making ready for a flight had proved an irresistible attraction. Foremost among those present was Clarice, of course.

Doris saw that Dave was talking to Clarice with great animation. When he saw Doris approaching he broke off and ran to meet her, taking the lunch basket.

"But Dave, you didn't finish telling me about that thrilling experience," Clarice cried coquettishly, as the young aviator stowed the basket in the tail of the aircraft.

"I was telling Miss Crowin about the time I ran out of gas 50,000 feet above the Rockies," Dave said, turning to Doris

and winking so broadly that a score of girls caught the gesture and came closer to share in the expected fun.

“Wasn’t it a-aw-ful!” Clarice exclaimed, clasping her hands and rolling her eyes.

“Awful is no word for it,” Dave said gravely. “I couldn’t come down, of course. There I was, stuck nearly ten miles above the earth, and the motor dead. I couldn’t move. It was ’way below zero. Night came and passed. Another day. I dropped notes over the side and rigged up a distress signal. No one came to help me. And—I had no parachute. I couldn’t jump.”

“Oh, what on earth did you do?” Clarice cried.

“Nothing on earth, Miss,” Dave responded. “I’ve been trying to tell you I was ten miles above it. There was nothing to do, of course.”

“And were you finally rescued?” Clarice asked.

“Of course not,” Dave said sorrowfully. “I starved to death in less than a month.”

Clarice looked at the youth blankly, and as a roar of laughter went up from all within earshot her face turned as red as her hat.

“All aboard,” Dave sang out. “Up in front, Kitty, with Marshmallow. Here you are, Doris!”

None of the girls had realized that their schoolmates were going on a flight, and they clustered closer with exclamations of envy and surprise.

“Please get back,” Dave shouted. “Away back, over there by the goal posts.”

He climbed into the cockpit and cranked a small motor which caused the great fan-like arrangement which replaces the upper wing on the autogyro. The huge vanes began to flap like a windmill.

With a roar the motor came to life spinning the propeller on the nose of the craft, and Dave switched off the engine that operated the rotary fan. Suddenly the autogyro darted forward, and then pointed its nose into the air after a run of less than fifty feet.

So sharp was the angle at which the craft left the earth that the uninitiated girls felt as if they were falling backward. They could see nothing but sky. That was a flight that thrilled and impressed Doris as had no adventure since the escape from the cave in Raven Rock.

Dave demonstrated how they could loaf along at less than automobile speed, and even to remain suspended in the air over a certain landmark for a few minutes. He shut off the motor and allowed the autogyro to settle until its landing gear was almost brushing the tree-tops, and then “gave her the gun” so the ship darted skyward like a bird.

With such antics in mid-air the trip to Orangetown took more than two hours to complete. At last the town appeared beneath them, and Dave forced the autogyro higher to get a full view of the locality.

“There’s the lake,” Doris pointed.

“And that must be the Van Gestel estate, that big house near the highway and the lake,” Dave shouted. “We’ll surprise them by landing on the lawn.”

The autogyro shot forward until it was almost directly above the estate, and then, with stilled motors, it began its leisurely perpendicular descent. Dave had gauged well. The craft settled upon the acre-wide frozen lawn with scarcely a jar, and no forward motion at all.

“Nobody seems excited at our arrival,” the young aviator said, as he helped Doris to alight.

“Why, the house is closed!” Doris cried, pale with disappointment.

The big, old-fashioned mansion with its turrets and lightning-rods was indeed closed. The windows were boarded, and great drifts of dead leaves covered the porch.

“Here comes a little boy,” Kitty said.

A young fellow, apparently not yet ten years of age, was scampering across the hard ground toward the group. He stopped short when he saw he was noticed, and Doris

stepped forth from her friends and soon won the little chap's confidence.

His name proved to be Van Gestel, too. He explained that he lived with his mother in "the gate house," that the owners of the place had gone South for the winter, and that his widowed mother, a relative of theirs, was caretaker for the mansion's proprietors.

A promise that he would be allowed to "sit in the engineer's seat" of the aircraft was sufficient inducement to have the youngster fetch his mother, who had neither heard nor seen the 'gyro's descent. Her amazement gave way to curiosity, and that in turn to suspicion when she heard Doris's request to be allowed to examine the furniture in the closed house.

"You certainly seem honest enough," Mrs. Van Gestel said at last. "I'll risk it. I've the key with me."

The eager quartette followed the woman to the front door of the deserted house. She fitted a key, and a moment later all were standing in the profound gloom of the shuttered mansion.

"Whew, but it is cold," Dave shivered.

"The furniture that van brought is in here," Mrs. Van Gestel said, opening a door to a large, high-ceilinged room and pointing to a vast, shapeless arrangement that looked to Doris much like a tent that had been worsted by a Windstorm.

“The things are all covered with a big canvas to keep the dust off,” Mrs. Van Gestel explained.

With trembling hands Doris helped the boys take the tarpaulin from the cluster of furniture. Her heart was pounding within her as the huddle of chairs, cabinet clocks, mirrors and what-not stood exposed.

“And there’s the couch,” Doris cried.

“Hurry, Doris, hurry,” Kitty begged. “I’m dying with suspense.”

First, however, scores of books and a fragile Chippendale mirror, a bronze statuette, and several unidentified bundles had to be taken from the large sofa.

“Now, here goes for the last place I can imagine the necklace to be,” Doris cried, a quiver in her voice.

She plunged her slim fingers beneath the cushions and between the seat and the back of the couch. All eyes were fixed on her face.

They saw first anxiety, then disappointment, written on Doris’s pretty features. Then her expression changed to alertness, hope—triumph!

“The pearls!” Doris shouted, drawing forth a great rope of jewels which even in the gloomy half-light glowed as if internally illuminated. “The pearls!”

CHAPTER XIX

FORCED DOWN

“Doris, you genius!” Kitty cried, hugging her chum.

Mrs. Van Gestel stared first at the girl, then with bulging eyes at the magnificent necklace.

Dave and Marshmallow were solemnly doing an Indian war-dance around the pile of furniture.

“Madam,” said Marshmallow, bowing before the still more amazed caretaker, “permit me to suggest that if ever you need a mystery solved do not employ the police, do not summon detectives. Use Force!”

Of course the poor woman could make no sense out of Marshmallow’s pun, and she edged nervously away from the young people as they burst into laughter, and then groaned as loudly at the joke.

Doris tried hard to thank Mrs. Van Gestel for her assistance and kindness. That person’s chief anxiety, however, was to get the four out of the house and from her sight speedily. She could not make head nor tail of the queer business.

“Excuse me, please,” Doris said to the woman, as they stepped out into the sunlight again. “Have you a telephone directory? A big one?”

Mrs. Van Gestel gave the girl a look which plainly meant that she believed it probable Doris would next ask permission to climb down her well.

“Run get the big telephone book, Sonny,” she told her boy.

“I want to look up some sanitoria,” Doris said with a smile to Mrs. Van Gestel.

“I think I’ll want to look some up myself after this afternoon,” that person said wildly. “First of all you come flying here in a contraption that looks as if you made it yourself out of an auto and a windmill. Then you want to poke around my cousin’s furniture, and you fish out a string of pearls a queen would envy.”

Sonny put an end to his mother’s soliloquy by appearing with the regional telephone directory, which Doris hastily opened to the back pages. They had stood her in good stead in locating the pearls. Would they help her find Mrs. Tindell?

She looked under the heading of “Hospitals,” but between Barry and Orangetown found only general institutions listed. “Sanitoria” headed a long list, with disappointment in every line, for they were either tuberculosis hospitals, homes for crippled children, or otherwise specifically unfit for Mrs. Tindell’s needs. Under “Nursing Homes” was listed only one place, expressly for small babies!

Dave gave the little boy his reward, seating him at the controls of the ship and showing him how they worked.

“And now that you have the pearls,” Kitty was meanwhile saying to Doris, stroking the satiny, lustrous gems, “what are you going to do with them?”

“Give them to Miss Bartlett to put in her safe until we find Mrs. Tindell, of course,” Doris said. “So long as we have the license number of her grandson’s car that shouldn’t be very difficult.”

“All set?” Dave called out, lifting the youngster to the ground. “Let’s go!”

Marshmallow and Kitty climbed into the double seat in the fore-part of the ship, and Doris again made herself as small as possible in the pilot’s cockpit, which was fortunately of generous proportions.

The gyro-planes began to revolve slowly, the propeller roared into life, and before the astounded eyes of Mrs. Van Gestel and her small son the contraption leaped into the air like a grasshopper and soared almost straight up toward the clouds.

“Where shall we eat?” Dave shouted into Doris’s ear.

Doris indicated with a wave of her hand that he was to select the picnic grounds. He knew how to select a landing place.

Dave elected to follow the winding course of the river, which looked to those in the air like a silver thread dropped on a

russet carpet. The river twisted in and out among rounded hills.

Then he shut off the motors, and let the ship hover for a moment.

“This is in our general direction,” he said. “Barry is northeast of here. These hills are full of picturesque old abandoned farms, and we might find just the spot for putting the ship down without having a lot of curious farmers and cows flocking around.”

Doris nodded, and Dave “gave her the gun” again, causing the ship to surge forward. The clock on the instrument board pointed to ten minutes past noon when Doris looked at it, after a glance over the side which showed a great expanse of evergreen forest, checkered here and there with clearings and threaded by narrow dirt roads.

Ten minutes past twelve, exactly. The motor’s tune suddenly changed from a purr to a hacking growl, and up forward Marshmallow threw his arms in front of his face, while Kitty was seen to crouch below the cowling.

“What is it, Dave?” Doris cried.

The young pilot pointed the nose of his craft upward, scanning the instrument board with grimly compressed lips.

“The oil line has snapped,” Dave announced, shutting off the motor.

Except for the noise of the huge rotors overhead beating against the air, there was utter silence. Slowly the ship began to settle.

“We’ll lose every bit of oil and be stalled here in the forest, if we have the luck to land safely,” the pilot exclaimed.

Doris peered over the edge of the cockpit.

“Can’t we make that clearing?” she asked.

Dave craned his neck for a look at the earth below.

“We may make it if the wind doesn’t make us drift too far to the west,” he said. “Listen, Doris! Can you hold the controls like this?”

“You want me to guide the ship?” the girl cried.

“Yes,” Dave explained rapidly. “I’ll climb forward and see if I can stop the leak. There’s no danger. We are dropping at about ten miles an hour. It’s our only chance.”

Doris moved over as Dave inched out of his seat. She took the stick as his hands left it, and very carefully substituted her feet for the pilot’s on the rudder bar.

“Everything will depend on your keeping your hands and feet steady,” Dave said, as he swung himself out of the cockpit and straddled the body of the aircraft. “I’ll have to work fast. Hold it, Doris!”

Marshmallow and Kitty had disappeared from view, crouching in their cockpit to escape the spray of oil which the propeller, whirled about by the air pressure although the motor was cut off, pumped through the leak.

Marshmallow's head shot up like a jack-in-the-box as Dave leap-frogged over the passengers. He gave one despairing look over the side, then turned and gazed for a second at Doris, who was calmly occupying the pilot's seat. She was far from feeling as calm as she looked. She knew that if her hands or feet allowed the autogyro to tilt in any direction Dave would lose his balance.

She saw the young pilot reach the motor, saw him sitting astride the ship's nose as unconcernedly as if he were on a pony, busily engaged with the mechanism. Doris did not even venture a peep over the edge of the cockpit, although she felt that at any moment the sharp tops of the pine trees would come crushing through the fragile floor.

At last Dave began to inch his way back. It was impossible for him to turn around, and he had to work his way backwards.

He had trouble negotiating the passenger cockpit, and it seemed to Doris as if he spent more time crossing that gap than he had over the engine. Finally, after what felt like hours of suspense Dave reached the end of his precarious journey. Carefully he lowered himself down beside Doris, who gasped on seeing his face blackened with oil and the brown flying overalls he wore drenched with the greasy fluid.

“I think we’ll make it,” Dave gasped. “I had to bite the end of the copper tubing shut.”

He reached past Doris and took the stick from her cramped fingers.

“Keep your feet steady,” he said.

Under Dave’s manipulation the aircraft dived forward at a more shallow angle.

“Got to clear those trees,” he panted.

The ship suddenly seemed to throw up its tail as if to somersault. Simultaneously there was a crackling, ripping sound from the rear. Doris instinctively shut her eyes. There was a jar that made her teeth rattle, and then all sound, all motion, ceased.

CHAPTER XX

A LUCKY ACCIDENT

“All out! Train stops here twenty minutes for lunch!”

Dave tried to make his voice seem light-hearted and carefree, but he was already scrambling over the side of the crippled gyroplane.

Doris stood up and looked around her. They had barely reached the tiny clearing. The black wall of trees was not six paces behind them.

“Am I alive?” Marshmallow cried, sticking his oil-smeared countenance into view.

“Do you feel hungry?” Doris called to him.

“I could eat pine cones!” Marshmallow thundered.

“Then you are probably alive,” Doris replied. “Are we badly damaged, Dave?”

“No, thank goodness,” the pilot answered, appearing at the side. “A rip in the fabric, that’s all. The worst damage must have happened to the tree we grazed.”

Kitty arose timidly from her hiding-place.

“My coat is ruined,” she wailed.

“You are lucky you aren’t ruined,” Dave laughed.

“If it hadn’t been for your courage we should have crashed,” Kitty cried. “How could you climb out on the front of the ship away up in the air?”

“You are wrong,” Dave answered. “We should have crashed if it hadn’t been for Doris. She kept a steady hand on the controls while I stopped the flow of oil. As it is, I am sure we have enough oil to take us to the next airport, if not all the way back to Barry.

“Yet if Doris had been too frightened to take the controls we should have lost all the oil, and then we’d have been stuck here in the woods for no one knows how long.”

All hands had scrambled to the ground by this time, and Kitty ran up to Doris, stopping short a pace from her chum.

“I was going to hug you, but I’d get you as oily as I am myself,” she said. “I think you are wonderful, Doris.”

“Yes, and I second that,” Marshmallow proclaimed. “In behalf of Mrs. Mallow I want to thank you for saving the life of her favorite son.”

“Well, I wasn’t going to allow myself to get hurt or marooned in the woods,” Doris laughed. “I am rather fond of Doris Force, too, you must remember.”

“Was my life spared from being crushed out only to be lost by starvation?” Marshmallow groaned.

Thus the four comrades turned their thrilling experience into light-hearted comedy. While Doris spread the lunch the boys searched for a spring, for water was urgently needed to cleanse the hands and faces of at least three members of the party.

A tiny brook was discovered, and all washed and refreshed themselves in its shallow bed. Then they proceeded to partake of the food Doris had laid out.

“It will take about twenty minutes or half an hour with pliers and soldering kit to fix the broken oil line,” Dave said, as the four leaned back from the clean-swept picnic cloth.

“If I had known that this was going to happen I would have brought a good book along,” Marshmallow yawned.

“For Kitty?” Dave asked, lifting his eyebrows to their limit. “Because you know you are going to be rather busy helping me.”

“There you go, there you go,” Marshmallow groaned.

“People are forever looking for work for me to do. Is there no justice?”

“What shall we do, Doris?” Kitty asked.

“Burn up the rubbish from the lunch first,” Doris said conscientiously. “Then—I don’t know. Shall we explore the woods?”

Kitty looked at the forbidding forest, looming blackly on all four sides.

“Ugh, there will be spiders and snakes,” she grimaced.

However, Kitty finally accompanied Doris on a tour of the meadow, skirting the edge of the woods.

“Why, here’s an old road,” Doris exclaimed, as they came abreast of a trail through the trees, thickly covered with pine needles. “Let’s see where it goes.”

After following the twisting trail for a hundred yards or so, Kitty announced that she was unable to proceed any farther.

“I guess it is a nervous reaction to the experience we just went through,” she said. “My knees simply refuse to work. I was sure the plane was going to explode and burn us up.”

She sat down upon an ancient, fungus-covered log and urged Doris to continue her exploration.

That was exactly what Doris intended to do. Her curiosity was always aroused by the unseen and unknown, which was what enabled her to solve mysteries so naturally.

“I’ll be back soon,” Doris said.

She set off down the shadowed road at a brisk stride, breathing the pine-scented air to the bottom of her lungs.

Presently a new odor in the air caused the girl to pause and sniff.

“Hm! Smoke,” Doris said to herself. “There must be a house nearby.”

The next curve in the road disclosed another sunlit clearing, and on its edge a weather-beaten little farmhouse in typical New England style; that is, the wood-shed connected the house with the barn and stables. In the clearing a broken-kneed old nag grazed sleepily on the withered herbage.

“I wonder who lives out in this forsaken place,” Doris thought. She approached the house. It was surrounded by a picket fence of stout locust-wood. A tangle of lilac bushes, untrimmed for years, grew in the dooryard. From the sagging chimney of the desolate-looking house a thin spiral of blue smoke floated lazily upward.

“Halloa! Anybody home?” Doris called out.

In response to her hail a dog, somewhere at the rear, began to bark furiously. Skidding on the frozen ground the animal dashed around the corner of the house, fangs bared.

“Hello, old-timer,” Doris soothed. “Nice fellow!”

The dog launched himself against the fence, plainly showing that his one desire was to tear Doris into little scraps.

“Sh-sh! Lie down, sir!” Doris commanded, but the only effect her words had was to make the dog more furious.

“I say, haven’t we met before?” Doris queried, as she regarded the spotted brute between the palings. “Where have

I seen a brown-and-white mongrel bulldog before? Why, it's the hobo's dog!"

Doris's memory flashed back to the encounter on the railroad tracks, in the first hours of her search for the missing pearls. Instinctively, her hand groped in the pocket of her coat, to close comfortingly about the necklace.

"The tramp found himself a snug hiding place, all right," Doris thought. "However, this is not the safest place in the world to be with a fortune in one's pocket."

She stepped back softly, and the dog, seeing that the stranger was retreating, changed his bellow to a throaty snarl.

Doris was suddenly electrified to hear a tapping on a window pane. She turned as if to flee, but instinctively her eyes swept over the shabby building to see from whence the signal came.

It was not the tramp whom she had expected to see framed in the window of a room on the second floor, when her eyes located the source of the tapping.

"Why, it is a woman," Doris exclaimed. "Perhaps I was wrong about that being the tramp's dog."

She waved to the figure in the window, and at that the tapping became a veritable tattoo beaten on the glass. The woman's gestures became more excited.

"Perhaps she is in trouble," flashed through Doris's mind, and with that she retraced her steps toward the house.

The dog began to bark again, hurling his stout figure against the fence in a frenzy of anger. Doris saw that the enclosure was stout and firm, and that she had nothing to fear from the dog as long as the sturdy pickets remained between them.

Close to the fence Doris peered up at the woman, who seemed now to be struggling to raise the window. She was dressed in a strange, loose sort of robe.

Doris stared. Could her eyes be deceiving her? Certainly, if the dog was not the tramp's, there was no mistaking the fact that she had seen the woman before.

“It’s Mrs. Tindell!” Doris cried aloud.

CHAPTER XXI

THE RESCUE

“Mrs. Tindell! Is that really you?” Doris shouted at the top of her voice.

The woman pressed her face close to the glass and gestured urgently to the girl below. There was not the slightest doubt in the world that the old lady was indeed the missing Mrs. Tindell, still garbed in the faded old kimono she had worn at Mrs. Matterhorn’s.

“She must be in trouble!” Doris said to herself. “How can I ever pass that vicious dog?”

The girl looked around for a club or anything else that would serve as a weapon against the frothing bull-terrier. Nothing was in sight that would serve to cow the furious beast. Doris contemplated running back for the boys, then decided that by so doing minutes would be lost which might prove all too precious.

“Why, the horse! Maybe I can ride him through the gate,” Doris thought.

Acting on her inspiration, she ran to the ancient nag, which raised its head and whinnied at her approach. Doris fumbled

with the rope to which he was tied at the halter.

“That’s a silly idea, Doris Force,” the girl exclaimed, as a better suggestion flashed through her mind. “The horse would be afraid of the dog, of course.”

Nevertheless, she untied the rope; then leaving the horse to his own devices she uprooted the stake to which he had been fastened. Coiling the line over her arm, she ran swiftly back to the cottage fence.

Doris’s nimble fingers knotted a sturdy slip-noose in one end of the rope as she ran. Carefully she dangled it just out of the frantic dog’s reach. He leaped and snapped at it with slavering jaws, and as he dropped back to the ground Doris threw the loop over his neck and jerked the rope taut.

Working feverishly, she tied the other end of the snare to a particularly firm picket. The dog was made captive! He leaped against the bond, and whenever he jumped the noose tightened on his throat, choking him.

Doris knew that the dog had too much intelligence to come to any permanent harm. She threw open the recently mended gate and dashed for the house.

As she had feared, the door was locked. One twist of the knob proved to her the futility of trying to open the door by any method except force, and with that she kicked with her stout shoes at the ancient panels.

The weathered boards split at the first blow, and Doris tore the pieces away with her hands until she had

made a hole sufficiently large to give entrance to one arm. She turned back the old-fashioned latch from the inside and pushed the door open.

She found herself in a low-ceilinged kitchen. A cast-iron stove of venerable age glowed in the center of the room, and a table drawn up close to it was littered with chipped and dirty dishes.

“A fine nursing home for the loving grandson to bring his sick relative to,” Doris thought, as she ran through the room to the enclosed stairway visible through a door in one corner. Up the steep and creaking steps she leaped to the upper hall.

There she stared at two closed doors.

“Which is the front of the house?” Doris wondered, calling out the captive woman’s name.

“Here I am,” came in muffled accents from behind one of the doors. “I’m locked in!”

Doris hurled herself at the door. Beneath the thrust of her athletic young shoulder the boards bent. Again she launched herself at the barrier, and with a crash the door parted from its hinges. Panting from her exertions, Doris leaned for a moment in the doorway.

Mrs. Tindell cowered against the window on the opposite side of the room, which was bare of all furnishings save for a bundle of ragged bedding on the floor. A hole cut in the planks allowed warmth from the kitchen to ascend to the chamber. Doris took all this in at a glance.

“Mrs. Tindell,” she cried, “we’ve hunted for you. Quick, come with me!”

“Are you really the young lady that was so good to me?” the old woman quavered, tears rolling down her withered cheeks. “I was afraid I had delirium, that I was seeing visions.”

“Never mind that, you must come with me.”

Mrs. Tindell hugged the bathrobe closer to her frail body, and Doris saw that she clutched beneath the voluminous kimono the familiar little black satchel.

“You still have all your belongings?” Doris asked. “Thank goodness for that, for I have also found your pearl necklace.”

“I wouldn’t let him have the bag,” Mrs. Tindell said weakly. “First he begged me for it and then he threatened me. Oh, take me away, please! Take me to Barry!”

“Wasn’t it Barry who brought you here?” Doris demanded, leading the tottering old lady to the steps.

“That ruffian?” cried Mrs. Tindell. “He tried to tell me he was Barry. Then he said he was Barry’s best friend and that he was going to take me to my dear grandson. He lied. He is a crook. He took my money, but he didn’t get my other belongings.”

Step by step Doris guided the frail old lady to the floor below.

“Hurry, hurry,” Mrs. Tindell begged, although it was her own weakness that made progress so slow. “He said he would be back at four o’clock.”

Doris automatically glanced at her wrist-watch. The hands stood at ten minutes to that hour!

“We haven’t far to go,” Doris encouraged Mrs. Tindell. “Just through the woods there, along the old road. Anyhow, he will stop to talk to my friends.”

Mrs. Tindell took two tottering steps forward in the vile-smelling kitchen, and then slumped against Doris. She had fainted.

“Oh, what am I to do?” Doris cried, looking around her desperately. She was not one to ask idle questions of herself, though, for even as she spoke her mind was busy planning.

“The old horse!”

Doris picked up Mrs. Tindell bodily, marveling at how light the invalid was. She carried the unconscious woman into the dooryard, where the dog was busy chewing the rope in two. Stumblingly Doris ran to the gate, and for lack of anything better laid Mrs. Tindell on the bare earth and then fastened the gate.

When Doris had first stepped into the clearing she had seen a crazy, rickety old buggy, the springs protruding from the worn-out leather of the seat, standing half in, half out of the woodshed.

Now she ran over to the feeble old nag, and grabbing the horse by the forelock led him to the rickety carriage and backed the animal between the shafts. On pegs in the shed harness moldered, and Doris jerked down a collar to which a pair of tugs was still attached.

The leather was stiff, but Doris's desperation gave her added strength. She slipped the collar over the horse's head, attaching the lines to the whiffle-tree. With another strap and a piece of old rope she lashed the shafts to the harness, and led the crazy combination of senile horse and disintegrating buggy to where Mrs. Tindell lay.

The hands on her watch stood at exactly four o'clock!

It was the work of a few seconds to lift the still unconscious invalid to the seat of the buggy.

"And now, old horse, do your level best," Doris cried, as she took the sway-backed steed by his forelock again and urged him toward the old road.

The horse shambled along good-naturedly.

"Oh, can't you go faster?" Doris cried to the animal. "I could crawl backwards and beat you! Kitty! Kitty! Come quickly!"

Panting, stumbling, alternately urging the horse along and shouting for her chum, Doris reached the edge of the woods. Behind her the furious barking of the dog revealed that the brute had freed himself, and Doris prayed that she had fastened the gate securely.

“Doris! Where are you? What’s the matter?”

Faintly but clearly the hail came to Doris’s ears in Kitty’s familiar voice.

“Down the road,” Doris cried. “Come! Come!”

A minute later Doris saw Kitty’s figure flying toward her. As soon as Kitty caught sight of the strange procession approaching she stopped stark still.

“Doris, are you crazy?” she called out. “You can’t bring that along in the plane!”

“I—have—Mrs. Tindell,” Doris panted, but Kitty could not hear. Fancying that Doris was playing some sort of joke the girl turned and ran back toward the gyroplane, laughing merrily.

“Kitty, please!” Doris tried to call, but her throat was dry and sore from over-straining it, and for a fearful moment Doris contemplated the chance that perhaps she had ruined her voice forever.

She urged the aged nag on impatiently, and the animal broke into a shambling trot with which Doris had no difficulty in keeping pace.

Then the voices of her friends, mingled with laughter, came to Doris’s ears. A moment later all three appeared around the bend. At sight of Doris tugging at the old horse’s forelock they all but rolled on the ground in mirth.

“My feelings are hurt, Doris,” Dave called out. “Did you think you were going to rescue us with that old fossil? The—say, what’s that on the seat?”

Suddenly turning grave, Dave raced over the hundred feet or so that still separated the chums from Doris. Kitty and Marshmallow ran after him in curiosity.

“What is the matter? Somebody hurt?” Dave cried.

“It’s Mrs. Tindell,” Doris answered hoarsely.

“Mrs. Tindell!”

The three friends were astounded. They clustered around the decrepit buggy, but Doris urged them to help pull it instead.

“She was kidnaped and hidden away in an old farmhouse down the road,” Doris panted. “She had to sleep on the floor. Her grandson—if it is really he—went to town. He’s due back any minute.”

In short sentences, interrupted by the frequent necessity of giving the weak old horse encouragement, Doris told the story of her discovery and the release of Mrs. Tindell.

“And now—what?” Dave asked, as the gyroplane was at last reached.

“What else but to fly Mrs. Tindell back to Barry at once?” Doris declared. “She needs a doctor’s attention.”

“Well, one of you will have to stay behind because there isn’t room,” the young aviator replied. “And I fear that it will have to be our plump little playmate Marshmallow.”

“What am I supposed to do?” Marshmallow asked.

“Dress up and pretend I’m the old lady when the kidnaper comes back?”

“There is not a second to waste,” Doris interrupted. “I’m afraid it is up to you, Marshmallow. The ‘grandson’ will be back any minute and will make trouble.”

The boys lifted the semiconscious Mrs. Tindell into the wide passenger cockpit of the aircraft. Doris took her place beside the invalid, supporting the woman’s head on her lap.

“If Marshmallow has to stay behind I shall stay with him,” Kitty announced. “I can help him if he gets into trouble.”

“Don’t be foolish,” Marshmallow retorted. “I’m going to cut this fiery steed loose from the chariot and ride him into town, wherever and whatever that is.”

Dave was consulting a detailed geodetic survey map of the sort prepared by the government, which shows the altitude of every foot of ground and every road and building in a given area.

“We are right here,” he said, marking the place with a pencil. “It is about twelve miles to the nearest village, South Barton. You hop on the horse, Marshmallow, and get there as quickly as you can. Kitty, you’ll only delay matters if you go with Marsh.”

“Tell the police in the village,” Doris called out.

“Make a charge of kidnaping and robbery against the man.”

Marshmallow unhitched the horse, jumped upon it, dug his heels into its ribs, and the bony beast trotted off. Kitty watched him out of sight and then climbed into the cockpit beside Dave.

“Here we go,” the pilot announced, as he switched the self-starter.

Just at that moment an automobile roared into the clearing.

CHAPTER XXII

CHALLENGED

It was the “grandson’s” automobile; of that there could be no doubt. A man leaped out from behind the wheel, and although his overcoat collar was turned up, and his hat pulled down, concealing most of his face, Dave cried out: “That’s the fellow!”

“Do you know you are trespassing?” the man called out angrily, yet keeping his distance.

“Say, I’m glad he came up a different road than the one Marshmallow took,” Dave said under his breath, just loud enough for Doris and Kitty to hear. “Maybe the other way is too rough for cars to negotiate.”

“Are you deaf and dumb?” the man shouted. “Why don’t you answer me?”

“Stall for time so Marshmallow will get a good start,” Doris suggested. Raising her voice she called out to the man that they had had an accident, but would leave in a minute.

“Well, hurry up about it. You are blocking my road,” the man cried. “Isn’t there any privacy no more, with arrowplanes doing what they like?”

“Back up, then, and give us a clear field,” Doris called.

The man climbed into his machine and backed it abruptly into the woods. The motors of the gyroplane snapped into action and the great rotors began to fan the breeze.

However, Dave was in no hurry to take the air. He sat back, with his hand on the throttle, as though warming up the motor. The man dismounted from his car and approached on foot.

Then he saw the old buggy, just where Marshmallow had discarded it. He jumped up and down in a rage and at once ran back to his car.

Just as Dave put the autogyro into motion the car charged toward them. Evidently the grandson suspected something and was desperately intent on preventing the flight.

Dave pulled back the stick and the gyroplane leaped abruptly into the air. The automobile veered and cut beneath the aircraft, heading for the road that led to the old house. Mrs. Tindell stirred in Doris’s grasp.

“I—why, where are we, my dear?” were the words her lips framed, as the old woman stared with blank amazement at the whirling rotor-planes overhead.

Doris put her lips close to Mrs. Tindell’s ear.

“We are in an airplane, and we are going back to Barry. Don’t move!” she informed the old lady. Mrs. Tindell

seemed to take the information as calmly as if Doris had announced she was safe in her own bed.

Half an hour later the flying machine settled softly down upon its temporary field at Barry Manor.

“Kitty, will you please scoot over to school and call a taxi from the village?” Doris asked.

The few girls who had remained on the school grounds for the holiday gathered around the gyroplane. They saw Kitty scamper off to the school while Dave climbed down and stood chatting with Doris. The spectators were unaware of the new passenger, and after a while drifted away from the unexciting scene.

“I hope Marshmallow made his escape,” Doris said.

The taxi was prompt, arriving before Kitty returned from the telephone booth in the school. Mrs. Tindell, still clutching her satchel beneath her bathrobe, was lifted into the car by Dave and the driver, just as Kitty reappeared with Violet.

The three girls accompanied the invalid on the short drive to Mrs. Matterhorn’s, while Dave stayed behind to make his aircraft shipshape and secure.

“For the land’s sakes!” was Mrs. Matterhorn’s greeting at her boarder’s return. “I never in all my born days—”

Speechless for once in her life, she led the way upstairs and turned down the bedcovers for Mrs. Tindell, who was wide awake and alert by now, although very weak.

“It all comes back to me,” she said, pressing her fingers to her eyes. “My, how good this bed feels after all I’ve been through.”

Doris leaned over Mrs. Tindell. Her mind seemed to be clearer than ever, and the girl hoped that at last the secret of Mrs. Tindell’s identity could be learned.

Mrs. Tindell opened her mouth, and Doris trembled with expectancy. But suddenly Mrs. Tindell snored gently. The warmth and softness of the bed had triumphed over the invalid’s newly aroused mind.

There was nothing for the girls to do but to let Nature take its course in restoring new vigor to the old woman’s pain-wracked and sleep-hungry body. When Doris telephoned after dinner, Dave told her from Mrs. Matterhorn’s that all was well. Marshmallow had called up, saying he was safe and coming in on the midnight train. Mrs. Tindell was still asleep, the doctor having called and having ordered that she should not be disturbed.

At lunch-time the next day Marshmallow called Kitty on the ’phone to report his safe return; also, that he had told the authorities at South Barton of the suspected kidnaping. County officers were coming to interview Mrs. Tindell that afternoon.

“We’ll be there, too,” Doris said when Kitty reported the conversation, and as soon as lesson time was over the three girls, Doris, Violet and Kitty, presented themselves at Mrs. Tindell’s bedside.

“How are you, my dears?” Mrs. Tindell smiled. “Do come in. Fancy me taking to flying at my age! I can scarcely believe it myself.”

With a thrill of delight Doris realized that Mrs. Tindell’s mind was even more clear than on the previous day.

“I think you might talk to her about New York and your former friendship,” she whispered to Violet, “but don’t tell her about Buddy.”

“How do you do, Mrs. Tindell?” Violet said, seating herself at the head of the bed. “Do you remember me?”

“Of course I do, although I can’t imagine how you happen to be here,” the invalid smiled. “I used to know you in New York, I am sure.”

“That is right,” Violet replied happily.

“Let me see, aren’t you the young lady who used to sketch the animals in the Central Park Zoo?” the invalid went on, studying Violet’s face. “No, she was much older. You are—”

“Violet Washington,” the girl said.

“Violet Washington?” Mrs. Tindell sat up in bed. “Violet Washington—Washington. Oh, where is my grandson? Tell me that, girl! Where is he?”

Violet shrank back, frightened at the incoherent demand. Mrs. Tindell raised her trembling clenched hands to her temples.

“Oh, she is going to have another attack,” Doris cried, forcing Mrs. Tindell, who was shaking violently, back upon her pillow. Suddenly Doris broke into song, hoping that the soothing strains of a lullaby would quiet the woman’s tortured nerves.

“Mighty Lak’ a Rose,” was the song she sang. At the lovely melody Mrs. Tindell relaxed, looked up at Doris mutely, and then began quietly to weep, patting the girl’s hand. Doris sang softly, and at last the aged invalid dozed off again.

“Let’s go down and have some tea and cakes,” Doris whispered to her friends.

Mrs. Matterhorn put on the kettle, chatting with the girls about Mrs. Tindell’s strange disappearance and even more amazing return, when the door flew open and admitted Clarice.

“Why, fancy you here when your noble knights of the air are hanging around their machine all alone,” she exclaimed loudly to Doris and Kitty. “They looked so lonesome I decided to come over and get them some pie.”

“I’m afraid you are too late,” Doris smiled as her alert ear caught the sound of the gyroplane’s motor. “Dave was waiting for a prospective customer, and there they fly now.”

From upstairs Mrs. Tindell’s voice was suddenly heard calling to Doris.

“Oh, is that creature back?” Clarice snapped. “Well, I don’t fancy buying my pastry from a hospital for the insane.”

With these words she flounced out, as Doris whisked past her and up the stairs to see what the invalid wanted.

Clarice, however, paused at the door.

“You ought to be more careful whom you choose for your friends, Violet,” she called back. “Come along with me. There’s a telegram for you.”

CHAPTER XXIII

MRS. TINDELL TALKS

“Oh, there you are, dear Doris,” Mrs. Tindell said. “I was afraid you had gone.”

“We just went downstairs to order some tea and cakes,” Doris explained. “Wouldn’t you like some?”

“I should like a cup of weak tea,” Mrs. Tindell smiled. “Come right back again, won’t you?”

“I will,” Doris promised, and ran downstairs to order the invalid’s refreshments. Kitty in great indignation told her of Clarice’s parting shot.

“I don’t know if I should believe her about the telegram,” Violet added. “It may be from Buddy!”

“You had better see about it,” Doris counseled. “Then do hurry back. Mrs. Tindell is getting stronger by the minute. We shall have our tea-party anyhow and we may learn something interesting from her.”

“Then you come with me, Kitty,” Violet urged, “just to show Clarice Crowin that I shall choose my friends as I please.”

The two girls departed hastily, and Doris returned to the invalid's bedroom. She led up to a discussion of Mrs. Tindell's removal by her supposed grandson by easy degrees, and was somewhat alarmed when the sick woman sat upright in bed again.

"That was not Barry!" she cried emphatically. "I never saw the man before he came here, although he seemed to know a lot about my affairs!"

"Shall we check over the things in your satchel to see that nothing is missing?" Doris asked.

"I know the money is missing," Mrs. Tindell sighed. "I gave it to him to save myself from harm."

Item by item she checked off the contents of her satchel, Doris helping her by holding up each brooch, each ring, each bond. She realized that a great deal of wealth was represented by the jewels and documents—thousands upon thousands of dollars.

"So I am the loser by only about two hundred dollars," Mrs. Tindell sighed. "That is nothing compared with being out of that man's clutches, though I must count in the pearl necklace. That's gone."

Doris leaned over the bed, her eyes dancing.

"Can't you remember where you had it last?"

"No, I can't. I have tried, but I forget," Mrs. Tindell said.

“Do you remember the ride we had in the moving van?”
Doris laughed.

“Moving van? I—riding in a moving van with you?” Mrs. Tindell gasped. “When?”

“About a week or ten days ago,” Doris said. “You were almost run down by a train on the tracks.”

“I thought I dreamed that,” Mrs. Tindell said, closing her eyes. “I was sure that was a nightmare.”

Doris slipped the pearl necklace from her pocket and softly laid it on the bed between Mrs. Tindell’s outstretched hands.

“No, it really happened,” she said. “You rode on a big, overstuffed sofa in the van. You opened your bag to see if you had lost anything. The pearls slipped out and fell behind the cushions.”

“How do you know all this?” Mrs. Tindell asked, opening her eyes.

“Because we found the pearls,” Doris laughed happily. “There they are, Mrs. Tindell!”

The old woman stared in disbelief, and then snatched the necklace to her lips, kissing the strands of pearls as if they were human.

“How can I ever thank you,” Mrs. Tindell sobbed. “I should love to give them to you for being so wonderfully good to me, Doris, but they are heirlooms. They are not mine to give

away. These are the Tindell pearls. They belonged to my husband's mother. My own daughter should have inherited them but she—”

Doris held her breath. Was she at last to hear the story all had longed to learn? Or would Mrs. Tindell lapse once more into forgetfulness?

“No, she—she lost the right,” Mrs. Tindell said in a voice scarcely above a whisper. “Barry shall have them. Barry's wife will wear them!”

“Is Barry married?” Doris asked after a pause, hoping to prolong the story.

“No, Barry does not know he is Barry,” Mrs. Tindell said absent-mindedly. “Barry isn't married yet. He—oh, don't think I am losing my mind, dear Doris.

“I shall tell you my sad story. My only child was a girl whom I spoiled and her father spoiled. We let her have everything she asked for—except one thing. And because she had always had her way she determined to have it even when we objected.

“She was just a young woman, not yet out of college, when she met a British army officer attached to the embassy in Washington. They fell in love. The officer was about to be transferred to duty in India, and against her parents' wishes Evelyn—my daughter—married Captain Keith-Foster. They sailed without seeing Mr. Tindell or me.”

Mrs. Matterhorn silenced the story by rapping at the door at this juncture and bringing in tea. As soon as she had gone, rather reluctantly it must be said, Mrs. Tindell went on with her romantic story.

“Mr. Tindell and I did a very unwise and selfish thing,” she continued. “We cut ourselves off from Evelyn and her husband. We sent them word through our lawyers that we wished never to hear from either of them again, and that we had stricken our daughter’s name from our will. Foolishly we believed that Evelyn would give up the man she loved for the sake of—her parents’ wealth. Ah, how very unwise and selfish we were.

“Several years passed. Mr. Tindell died, and I was all alone. Then I began to realize how inconsiderate I had been to my daughter. I instructed my lawyers to trace her. It was not difficult for them to do so. Captain Keith-Foster was a major now, and stationed in Hong Kong. I determined to surprise them. I set sail for China.”

Mrs. Tindell sipped some tea. It seemed to give her renewed strength. Doris’s tea, untouched, was cooling in her cup as she listened wide-eyed to the romantic history.

“Those were the days before radio, my dear,” Mrs. Tindell sighed. “While I was on the high seas there had been a native uprising. You have probably read of the Boxer rebellions. This was the aftermath of the Peking riots. Evelyn was dead. Major Keith-Foster was also killed. Their baby son, not quite two years old, had been taken by the American refugees no one knew where, then.”

Mrs. Tindell turned her face upon her pillow and began to cry softly.

CHAPTER XXIV

WHO IS RIGHT?

Doris waited tensely for Mrs. Tindell to recover her self-possession, and at last the invalid dried her eyes.

“The little boy was named Barry for his father,” she went on at last. “I hired detectives. I used all the influence I could summon with the State Department in Washington to aid me. Years passed, and at last I learned where my grandson was.

“He had been adopted by an American couple who had been in China. The little fellow could not yet pronounce his last name, so they reared him as their own child, permitting him to keep the name of Barry, which he could pronounce. I could not tear the lad away from the only parents he knew, and I had suffered enough over a lost child to deprive this noble couple of their only son, even if he were not of their own blood.”

“And where is he now?” Doris asked eagerly.

“I do not know,” Mrs. Tindell sighed. “I have been frightfully ill with influenza, and at times my memory is not as keen as it used to be. However, I am sure that—”

A thunderous knock at the door interrupted her, and Doris rose to open it, wondering who could be so noisily demanding admission to the sick-room. A burly man confronted her.

“So it was you, after all!” he exclaimed with a mirthless laugh.

Shouldering Doris aside the man strode into the room, and with a cry of terror Mrs. Tindell drew the covers of the bed to her eyes when she saw him.

“Come, come, Grandma!” the man said, attempting to make his voice sound soothing. “You mustn’t act like this.”

“Who are you?” Doris demanded, taking her stand at Mrs. Tindell’s side and facing the intruder. Then, as recognition came to her, she gasped. Here was the tramp who had accosted her on the railroad tracks. She was sure of it.

“I am Mr. Tindell, this lady’s grandson,” the man replied. “It is more to the point to ask who you are, young lady! What do you mean by kidnaping my poor, insane old grandmother and hiding her away here?”

Doris was dismayed. The man was actually accusing her of the crime she believed him to have committed.

“Where is your dog?” she asked, to gain time. “I saw him the first time on the railroad tracks, before you became prosperous enough to buy some soap and clean clothes. He didn’t recognize me at the old farmhouse, though.”

“Don’t talk in riddles,” the man sneered. “You and I will settle our account later. Your boy friend deliberately helped you kidnap this poor woman in your airplane. You will all land in jail for this!”

“Go away, you impostor,” Mrs. Tindell gasped. “Doris, call a policeman.”

“Poor thing, poor thing,” the man sighed.

“I’m afraid you will have to present better evidence of relationship before you can remove Mrs. Tindell from here,” Doris said bravely. “And you will have to explain why you kept her in a tumble-down farmhouse with no bed at all, when you said you were taking her to a nursing home.”

“Listen, little lady, I am under no obligations to make explanations to you or nobody else,” the man said.

“However, suppose I tell you that that’s where the old lady lives? That’s her own home, and she is a crazy old miser. She wouldn’t buy herself a bed. She likes to lug around a bag filled with jewelry—look at them pearls! I better take care of ’em.”

He snatched at the necklace on the bed, but Doris was too quick for him. She seized the pearls and held them behind her back.

“Go on with your story first,” she said icily.

“I told you this woman is insane,” the man said. “You have to handle her carefully or she gets violent. I took her home because she refused to go to a hospital, and I have

been working hard trying to get a nurse and a cook who will stay in that deserted old shack with her, and to get some furniture for it, all with my own money, too.”

“Don’t believe a word he says,” Mrs. Tindell begged. “He is the crazy one. I don’t know him.”

“If you are her grandson, what is your full name?” Doris asked.

“John Tindell,” was the reply.

“Where were you born?”

“Right there on the old farm,” the man said.

“What was your mother’s first name?”

“Mary Tindell—oh, her maiden name was Walker,” the man explained. “She married John Tindell, this old woman’s only son.”

Doris shook her head.

“The answers are all wrong,” she said. “You are an impostor and I warn you to leave before I summon the police.”

“How do you know the answers are wrong?” the man laughed. “Haven’t you been listening to some of the romantic fairy tales the old lady spins? One day she is a countess, the next day her son was killed discovering the South Pole, and the day after she never had a son at all!”

The grandson assumed a brisk, business-like air.

“Come on, now, Grandma! Come along with me, and you, Miss, just give back those fake pearls to the old lady. They came from the ten-cent store but she likes to play with them.”

Doris was greatly perplexed.

It was not to be denied that Mrs. Tindell’s mind had not always been clear. Could it be possible that her fanciful story was an invention, and that the man was really her grandson doing his best to be kind to the poor, demented old woman?

“There is no need to hurry, is there?” she asked the man.

“There is a girl in the school whom I expect here shortly. She knew Mrs. Tindell in New York. There is no doubt about that.”

The request only made the man seem more determined to leave.

“We have a long way to go over dangerous roads,” he said curtly. “Please help the lady on with her wraps—I’ll carry her down.”

Doris hesitated, and as she stood planning her next move there came a most welcome rap on the door. The grandson whirled, his hand over his face, as the door swung open.

CHAPTER XXV

AN ALL-AROUND REUNION

“Hello, what goes on?” Dave asked as he stepped into Mrs. Tindell’s bedroom with Marshmallow at his heels.

Without waiting for an answer he turned to Doris with a happy grin.

“I sold a ship to your old friend Grotti-Mazzata,” he said. “Got the signed contract in my pocket, and what’s more, I’m hired to teach him and his chauffeur how to fly it!”

“But first you are going to settle with me for trespassing on my farm and busting into my house, to say nothing about kidnaping my grandmother,” the grandson snarled.

“I thought I recognized you,” Dave said coolly.

“Well, we’ll let it go for now,” the man said. “I am in a hurry to get home. I have a rough road to travel, and I expect a lot of furniture at the house, to say nothing about a couple of servants I hired who will be waiting. Come along, Grandma.”

“I shan’t move,” Mrs. Tindell cried shrilly. “He wants to kidnap me.”

“Come on, clear out of here or you will get in trouble,” Dave said angrily to the grandson.

“Oh, no I won’t,” the latter chuckled. “You are apt to get into trouble, not me. But I ain’t one to persecute a lot of silly kids who get roped in by a crazy woman’s fancy stories. You can settle with me for trespassing, and we’ll call it quits. I’ll send you a bill.

“Just the same, this ain’t getting home. I’ll have to take the old lady just as she is, blankets and all.”

He stepped closer to the bed, but Doris leaped between him and the invalid. Hastily throwing her arms around Mrs. Tindell Doris whispered to her, “Quick, tell me your grandson’s adopted name and where he was when you saw him last. It may stop—”

Mrs. Tindell struggled to a sitting position.

“I repeat once more that this man is an impostor!” she cried. “I do not know where my grandson is, but I know that his sister is nearby—his adopted sister. My grandson is known as Buddy Washington!”

In the dead silence that followed the old woman fell back in a swoon, overcome with the strain.

Buddy Washington—Barry!

“I guess that proves to you that the old lady has bats in her attic, hey?” chuckled the grandson as he stooped over the unconscious figure. “Next she’ll tell you her grandson is

George Washington himself, or Abraham Lincoln or Buddy Santa Claus.”

“Just a minute—just a minute,” Dave said meaningly.

“All right, Marshmallow. Tell them to come up.”

Marshmallow, who had stood like a sentry at the door during the dramatic proceedings, opened it and called an “O. K.! Come along,” down the stairs.

“Who’s coming up?” snarled the grandson, standing suddenly erect and advancing upon Dave. “Now what’s your little game?”

The door slammed open and two burly men strode into the room. Marshmallow indicated the grandson with his finger, and with the speed of a sleight-of-hand trick there was a flash of polished metal, a click, and the man was handcuffed.

“What’s this?” he blustered. “I’ll have you men put off the force for false arrest. You have the wrong prisoner. Arrest that girl and that young chap there. I accuse them of kidnaping and robbery.”

The police officers looked a bit puzzled.

“That’s what the warrant says Mr. Mallow swore out against you,” one of them said.

Doris stepped forward, all eyes turned upon her as she pointed to the grandson.

“This man is an impostor and is guilty of the charges he accuses us of,” she said in cool and even tones. “The first time I saw him he was a ragged tramp walking along the railroad. He camped in a woods near the river, and overheard me and my friends discussing the sad case of Mrs. Tindell. He heard us talk about her fortune in jewels and her clouded mind.

“I can piece the whole story together now. We heard him in the rocks behind us. Our story gave him the inspiration to pose as the missing grandson.”

“That’s a lie,” shouted the prisoner. “I didn’t hear a word you girls was talking!”

“You see, he knows about the eavesdropping,” Doris pointed out. “I didn’t say anything about us ‘girls’—but it so happened that the boys were not there.”

There was another commotion at the door, and this time Kitty slipped through the opening. She looked with amazement at the tableau in the bedroom, and then turned to whisper something to somebody who remained in the hallway.

“What is this?” Kitty demanded. “Are you playing charades or wax-works?”

“Kitty, look at that man closely and see if you recognize him,” Doris cried.

“I recognize him all right,” Kitty said. “He is the man who drove up in the car yesterday when we were—oh! Now I

know. He is the hobo who called to us when we were looking for Mrs. Tindell's pearls along the tracks."

"Well, feller, what have you to say to that?" one of the detectives asked.

"It's a made-up story they agreed to in advance," the captive sneered. "It won't do them any good, though. They'll have the handcuffs on them before long."

"We can settle this in short order, however," Doris said. "Where is Violet, Kitty?"

"Right outside with a surprise," Kitty replied mysteriously. "We didn't know if Mrs. Tindell was strong enough to have unexpected company, so we left the surprise in the hall. I guess if she has stood all this, though, a little more excitement won't hurt her."

She opened the door and called, "Come on in!"

Violet shyly entered the bedroom, leading by the hand a tall, bronzed young man who looked about him with astonishment until he caught sight of the frail little figure on the bed.

"Grandmother!" he cried, in a deep, low voice.

For all of his six feet, the young man threw his arms around Mrs. Tindell like a little boy, hugging her to him. The old lady, tears streaming down her withered cheeks, tried to speak, but the words would not come. At last the sunburned youth sat up and stared at the assemblage in the room.

“What is the meaning of all this?” he asked. “Is something going to happen, or did it?”

“Barry, Barry,” Mrs. Tindell gasped.

“Oh, Doris—this is my brother, Buddy,” Violet cried. “Only I have just learned—but that doesn’t make any difference. I love him even more.”

“This is truly my grandson, the one I have been searching for,” Mrs. Tindell quavered. “This is Barry Washington, really Barry Keith-Foster.”

“Well, Ma’am, I guess that settles this masquerader for good, then,” one of the detectives said, as he twisted the links of the handcuffs on the impostor.

The tramp made no further bluff. With head bowed he followed the police officers, darting a wrathful glance at Doris who had been the instrument for spoiling his elaborate scheme.

Later developments proved the man to have a long criminal record, and also to have had an accomplice who supplied him with funds so that he could kidnap Mrs. Tindell and not only gain the wealth she had with her but extort more from her. Both men were sent to prison for long terms, which has nothing to do with Doris Force’s adventures from now on.

“Father Washington told me the true story of my life when he was dying in Africa,” Buddy said, as he drew Violet closer to him. “He told me that Mrs. Tindell was my grandmother,

which explained the mystery of why she took such a deep interest in my welfare.”

“Everything will be all right now that you are back,” Violet said softly, smiling up at the miraculously restored young explorer, who looked down into her big, blue eyes from which every sign of tears was now removed, and happily smiled his assurance.

“Let us leave the reunited family together,” Doris whispered, leading Kitty, Marshmallow and Dave from the room.

“When Mrs. Tindell first told me, a few minutes before you came, that her grandson was Buddy Washington, and that he was not Violet’s relative at all,” Doris said, “my first thought was what a shock it would be to the poor girl, but she seems happier than if he were really her own brother who had come back.”

Mrs. Matterhorn bustled in.

“Well, girls, I hear the dinner bell over at the school,” she said. “And supper’s ready for you gentlemen whenever you want it.”

“Oh, we must go!” Doris cried.

“Wait just a minute,” Dave said to Mrs. Matterhorn. “We’ll walk back to the school.

“You see,” he added to Doris. “I have to fly back first thing in the morning to deliver this order and make arrangements

with Pete.”

“Oh, we have so much to say to each other to make the story complete,” Doris cried. “I’ll write you all that Mrs. Tindell told me.”

“It certainly has proved to be the most exciting concert I ever attended,” Dave laughed. “However, Doris, if you asked me what I shall remember the longest and with most pleasure during the whole affair, it will be how wonderfully you sang when your pianist’s sneezing spell almost ruined your recital.”

“You had better not tell Mrs. Matterhorn that,” Doris laughed. “Thanks very much, Dave. You make me very happy, but you must tell Mrs. Matterhorn you will always remember her black-walnut fudge cake. It is her special pride.”

“Anyhow, I hope no more mysteries will disturb you up here,” Dave remarked. “Doesn’t everything look peaceful? I can’t imagine anything happening around this calm old spot.”

As we bid the four friends farewell, while they themselves are exchanging goodbyes on the steps of Barry Manor, we wonder how accurate the forecast will prove to be.

THE END

Transcriber's Notes

- Copyright notice provided as in the original—this e-text is public domain in the country of publication.
- Silently corrected palpable typos; left non-standard spellings and dialect unchanged.
- In the text versions, delimited italics text in underscores (the HTML version reproduces the font form of the printed book.)

[The end of *Doris Force at Barry Manor* by Julia K. Duncan]