

THE STRANGE ECHO



by Frances K. Judd

gapped key, waiting
came a roll of thunder
it. It was followed
it. The girl started violently
down. "Sally" - there was a
ring.
must have
something
the way. In that
at night a glimpse of the moon
of had been split apart. An

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(See [Page 100](#))

Kay and the twins set out in pursuit of the old man.

KAY TRACEY MYSTERY STORIES

THE
STRANGE ECHO

By

FRANCES K. JUDD

Author of

THE SECRET OF THE RED SCARF

ILLUSTRATED

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MYSTERY STORIES

BY FRANCES K. JUDD

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The Strange Echo

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CHAPTER I

THE FOREIGN WOMAN

“HERE comes the postman, Kay,” said Mrs. Tracey, as the familiar blue-coated figure turned in at the walk. “See what he has for us, will you, dear?”

“I hope there will be a letter for me from Betty or Wilma,” responded Kay. “The twins haven’t written since they went to Lost Lake.”

Mrs. Tracey smiled at her daughter. She saw a tall, graceful figure with a face more remarkable for its quick play of expression than for regularity of feature. The brown eyes sparkled with intelligence, and the firm mouth showed strength of character.

Kay intercepted the postman at the door, and returned a moment or two later with several fat envelopes in her hand.

“Three for you, Mother, and one for me. Mine is from Betty, I guess. It has the Lost Lake postmark. I am relieved.”

Betty and Wilma Worth were twins, but of that rare sort who resemble each other neither in looks nor in disposition. Wilma, dark-haired and blue-eyed, was a dreamer; rather melancholy in her outlook on life, and given to reciting poetry. Betty, on the other hand, was fair-haired and blue-eyed, energetic and fun loving.

Directly following the close of the Carmont High School, at which Kay and the Worth twins were students, Wilma and Betty had gone with their mother to their new summer home at a place named romantically Lost Lake. Their departure had left Kay rather lonesome. Now she seized eagerly on Betty’s letter.

“What do you suppose Betty wants me to do?” she cried with delight when she had read half through the missive.

“I can’t imagine,” smiled Mrs. Tracey.

“She wants me to go out there—to Lost Lake. Isn’t it marvelous? Oh, may I go, please?”

“This is all very sudden,” her mother protested. “Lost Lake sounds fascinating, I admit, but how would you get there, and how long do the Worths want you to stay?”

“Three weeks,” cried Kay, answering the last question first. She had skimmed over the rest of the letter, and now her glance returned to her mother. “They want me to drive up with Mr. Worth in his car on Friday.”

In the end Mrs. Tracey gave her consent to the visit, and Kay began to make happy plans for an immediate trip into Carmont to do some necessary shopping.

“I have a long list of things,” she announced, coming into the living room half an hour later, dressed in street clothes. “Is there anything I can get for you while I am in town, Mother?”

“You might stop at the Old Bookshop,” Mrs. Tracey suggested, “and see if Herr Entveg has that volume he promised to get for me.”

Kay made a note of the errand at the bottom of her list, and was about to leave the room when the doorbell rang. The visitor proved to be a Mr. Miller, a friend of Kay’s Cousin Bill, who had come, so he said, to see the young lawyer on legal business.

“Mr. Tracey isn’t home just now,” said Kay, leading the way to the front room, “but if you have an appointment with my cousin he will probably be here very soon.”

Mr. Miller was profuse in his apologies over what he termed his intrusion, but Mrs. Tracey received him graciously; the more so since he offered to adjust the radio set which she had just discovered was out of order.

“Sound is a wonderful thing,” he said, beginning to turn knobs expertly, while he peered into the mysterious depths of the machine’s interior. “The radio is a marvelous instrument,” he went on, speaking over his shoulder, “but it is nothing compared to the amazing devices which we have turned out in our research laboratory. I am head of the Scientific Instrument Company.”

“Your place sounds mysterious,” commented Kay.

“I suppose it is,” responded the man. “Many of our inventions are so weird and uncanny that they seem like witchcraft.”

“Would you mind telling me about some of them?” asked Kay, now thoroughly interested.

“Oh, they are of all sorts,” returned Mr. Miller with a genial laugh. “Some are marvelously delicate and intricate, others just unusual or funny. Take the sound makers, for instance——”

“Sound makers?” prompted Kay.

“Instruments that produce artificial sounds,” the caller explained. “Like the ones used in broadcasting studios to make noises like rain or wind. Hundreds of them. And I have a secret laboratory, too.”

Kay’s eyes sparkled with enthusiasm.

“How would you and Mrs. Tracey like to come down to my place some day?” the inventor asked. “I’d be delighted to show you around.”

“We should love to accept your invitation, wouldn’t we, Mother?”

Mrs. Tracey assented, adding that it was very kind of Mr. Miller to make the suggestion.

Kay waited around for a few moments, hoping that their new acquaintance would set a definite day for the expedition to his strange place. Since he did not do so, however, but was once more deeply absorbed in the mysterious workings of the radio, she waved good-bye to her mother and set out on her shopping tour.

The thriving town of Carmont was only a short trip by rail from Brantwood, where the Traceys and Worths made their home. Kay’s feet seemed winged as she hurried toward Simpson’s Department Store.

“Two wonderful invitations in one day,” she thought over and over again. “I can hardly wait to see Mr. Miller’s laboratory, and I’m going to Lost Lake!”

Lost Lake! What an odd, romantic sound that name had! Thrilling, a little mysterious, somewhat sad. Anything might happen at a place called Lost Lake.

The thought of a trip to the Scientific Instrument Company intrigued Kay. Mr. Miller’s talk about queer mechanical devices and artificial sound makers had fascinated her, for such things appealed to Kay’s deep love of the mysterious, even when the “mysteries” could be explained away by sober scientific facts.

She decided that she had better give some thought to the errands at hand, for being a good planner, she knew the uselessness of several trips to town, when one was sufficient.

Having arrived at the store, Kay hurried from counter to counter, making numerous purchases. After a time she decided to visit the waiting room, where she might check her list.

She had barely seated herself at one of the small desks, when her attention was diverted by the odd behavior of a woman seated at an adjoining writing table. The stranger was very attractive in appearance,

having the high cheek bones, very fair complexion, and whitish-gold hair of the Nordic.

She was muttering to herself, partly in English and partly in some foreign language, consulting some secret memoranda which was concealed within her open purse. She seemed to be translating what was contained in the hidden notes.

“‘Echo from a mountain,’” overheard Kay. “‘—carries three miles,’” the woman whispered.

Kay, increasingly curious, saw this stranger shut her purse hurriedly and dart into a nearby telephone booth. In a few moments she began to pour into the instrument a torrent of agitated phrases, some in English, some in an alien tongue.

“Oh, please come right down—somet’ing very strange has happened—I vill not start for de lake till you come. I vill wait for you here, only hurry!”

When the woman returned to her desk, she glanced at the girl, then leaned forward, her face white as chalk.

“You heard what I said—yes?” she whispered worriedly.

Before Kay had a chance to reply, the strange woman suddenly burst into a torrent of speech—in a foreign language!

Kay merely stared at her. Her expression seemed to reassure the woman that the girl had not caught all she had said. She accordingly broke off abruptly in her flow of words and leaned back in her seat.

“Ach, you do not understand,” she muttered. “I was afraid, maybe— Oh, but you are a nice girl,” she added abruptly. “Vill you do somet’ing for me?”

CHAPTER II

A QUEER INTERVIEW

“Of course I’ll help you,” said Kay to the foreign woman, feeling very much bewildered. “That is, I will—if——”

The stranger leaned toward the Tracey girl confidently.

“It is this English of yours. Sometimes I find the words not so easy, when they are of science. And to spell them—poof—it is quite, what you say ‘beyond me.’”

“You want me to spell some words for you?” asked Kay, and the woman took her up eagerly.

“Yes, dat is it, if you vill be so kind. And help me with some ideas.”

“Gladly,” offered the wondering girl.

“Vat you call dis lots of air?” asked Kay’s new acquaintance.

“Do you mean space?”

“Yah. And vat you send by space?”

“‘What you send by space?’” Kay repeated. “Do you mean wireless—broadcast?”

“Yah, that is right,” said the stranger, scribbling hastily. “And how you spell broadcast?”

Kay gave her the required information, and after a few more questions the woman thanked the girl profusely, and sank back in her chair. Kay once more began to check her shopping list, and finding that her allowance still showed a margin of safety, she began to make plans.

“I can get myself one new evening dress, anyway,” she thought happily. “And I must be sure to stop at the jeweler’s and leave my wrist watch to be adjusted.”

As Kay left the waiting room a few moments later she glanced back, and saw that the strange woman seemed lost in deep thought.

“A queer person,” mused the girl. “Very attractive in a way, too; yet how relieved she seemed when it came out that I did not understand her language. Why should she feel that way unless she feared that I had overheard something that might prove damaging to her? In that case she must have had something to conceal. What could it have been, I wonder?”

At this point Kay caught herself up with a little laugh.

“There I go,” she thought, “trying to make a mystery where there probably isn’t any. Why must I always see mysteries in the most ordinary things?”

Yet her curiosity concerning the foreigner persisted.

“The woman said something about an echo, too,” Kay reflected. “What was it? Ah, I know. ‘Echo from a mountain—carries three miles.’ That’s the second time today I’ve heard something about queer sounds—first from Mr. Miller, and then from this foreigner.”

All the while these thoughts were in her mind, Kay nevertheless was attending strictly to the business of shopping. Remembering her mother’s request that she bring home a certain book, she turned down Main Street, intending to call at Herr Entveg’s book store.

She had not gone very far, however, when a cheery voice hailed her and a familiar figure blocked her way. It was her cousin, Bill Tracey, the jolly young lawyer who had made his home with the Traceys ever since the death of Kay’s father, Roger Tracey, several years before.

Cousin Bill was in his early thirties. He was of medium height, plump, and almost invariably good-natured. His position in the household was unique. Devoted to both mother and daughter, he had constituted himself a sort of combination brother and guardian to Kay, a relationship that was eminently satisfactory to both.

Now, as Cousin Bill loomed up in front of her, Kay greeted him joyfully.

“Oh, I have the most glorious news!” she cried.

“What about?” asked her cousin.

Kay told him about Betty’s invitation to visit Lost Lake. Her relative was properly pleased and sympathetic. Then she told him about Mr. Miller.

“Great Scott, I forgot all about him!” Cousin Bill confessed when Kay mentioned the name. “I’ll drive right home now on the chance that he’s still there. But Kay, will you do something for me?”

“That depends,” she said with a teasing smile, “on what it is.”

“Well, you see,” said Cousin Bill, looking uncomfortable, “I want to buy a birthday present for a certain young lady. I thought of a bottle of perfume, but I don’t know just what kind she likes.”

“And you want me to find out?” asked Kay.

“Oh, would you?” asked the man gratefully. His face was flushed and he looked like an overgrown schoolboy in his embarrassment. “It’s a thing you don’t like to—I mean, it’s kind of hard to——”

“I understand perfectly,” laughed Kay. “But you will have to give me the name of the lady.”

“Oh, yes! Of course! It’s Elise Conklin.”

Flustered, the young lawyer reached into his pocket and drew forth a business card on which he scribbled a telephone number.

“Thanks, Kay,” he grinned. “I’ll be no end obliged. Maybe I’ll do something for you some day.”

There was a drug store next to Herr Entveg’s bookshop, and Kay stopped there to carry out her cousin’s errand.

She was only slightly acquainted with Elise Conklin, the young lady of Cousin Bill’s stumbling confession. As Elise was several years older than Kay, it was natural that the girls, moving in different groups, seldom met.

Now, as she slipped into a telephone booth, Kay glanced down at Cousin Bill’s card. The call which followed was, from Kay’s standpoint at least, a perfect success. She managed to get information from Elise on the subject of her favorite perfume without revealing her reason for desiring it. If the young woman suspected anything concerning the real motive behind Kay’s call, she concealed it admirably. After a few moments of casual conversation, Kay said good-bye and approached the drug counter.

She made her purchase, a vial of rare French perfume which bore the name of a famous importer. While the gift was being wrapped up, Kay could not resist the temptation of playing a joke on Cousin Bill. She picked up a cheap bottle dressed in a tawdry wrapper, and bearing the flaunting title “Heart’s Desire.”

“I’ll take this one, too,” she said, pretending not to notice the drug clerk’s look of surprise.

She chuckled over this latest purchase as she wended her way to Herr Entveg’s bookshop.

“Won’t Cousin Bill be furious!” she thought. “It will be worth the price of ‘Heart’s Desire’ just to see his face.”

When she arrived at the Old Bookshop, Kay found its proprietor in a state of great perturbation and distress. Poor Herr Entveg was fuming about the place in distracted fashion. His scanty hair was pushed up in ridiculous points all over his head; his spectacles had fallen down on his nose so that he was forced to peer over them; his entire appearance was one of extreme agitation and excitement.

“Why, Herr Entveg!” cried Kay. “Is anything wrong?”

“Wrong!” cried the book dealer, pulling at his hair, and causing the spectacles to tremble on the end of his nose. “It is terrible! It is the most tragic thing that has ever happen to me! The book, he is ruined!”

“What book?” asked Kay.

“What book, she asks!” he cried, raising his arms above his head as though calling the heavens to witness. “What book should, it be but—Here, then, you shall see with your own eyes!”

He broke off abruptly, and approached Kay. In his hands was a thick volume printed in a foreign language which he thrust toward the girl.

“Look!” he exclaimed, opening it to a page which Kay noticed was numbered 183. “Some of it has been stolen, do you see? The pages ripped out—five of dem. Now the book, he is ruined. It is no good to me any more. And he is old, very old, and rare.”

“What a pity,” cried Kay as she took the volume from Herr Entveg’s shaking hands. “Is it very valuable?”

“Four, five hundred dollars I could get for him.” The dealer took out a handkerchief and mopped his forehead. “But now part of him is gone—all the part about echoes. It is no longer any good to me.”

“Echoes!” repeated Kay thoughtfully. “That reminds me of something. Just a minute! Let me think!”

Before Kay’s mental vision there flashed a picture of the waiting room in Simpson’s Department Store. A fair-haired woman, seated before a desk, was glancing furtively at something which she kept hidden in a purse. Muttered phrases were coming from her lips—“echo from a mountain—carries three miles——”

“Herr Entveg,” cried Kay suddenly, “if you will come with me, I think I can show you the thief!”

CHAPTER III

INSTRUMENTS OF MAGIC

“WAIT just a minute and I will be with you,” said Herr Entveg. “First I must close up the shop.”

A few moments later the book store was securely locked, and a sign affixed to the outside of the door announcing that the proprietor would soon return. Then Kay, accompanied by the excitable owner, started back to Simpson’s Department Store.

Straight up to the waiting room Kay led her companion, pausing at the entrance to look toward the seat which she had so recently occupied. A stranger of undistinguished appearance sat there now; the desk next to it was empty. The fair-haired, foreign-looking woman had gone!

Kay looked around the various sections of the waiting room while poor Herr Entveg waited for her just outside the entrance.

“Vell,” he cried, when she came back to him, “vat is it for which you look? You have not told me. You have only promise to show me the thief, this woman. Now where is she?”

“Gone, I am afraid,” said Kay reluctantly. “I am sorry to have raised your hopes all for nothing, Herr Entveg. But I honestly thought I was on the right track. I still think so,” she added thoughtfully.

“You are quite sure—she—is gone?”

“I have searched in every corner,” Kay assured him. “But I’ll go back with you to your bookshop if you like. On the way I’ll tell you about this person we are looking for, and why I suspect she may know something about the pages stolen from your book.”

Her companion eagerly assenting, Kay told of her interesting encounter with the foreign woman, including the hurried telephone call. By the time she had finished they had retraced their steps to the bookshop, and Herr Entveg had become almost speechless with excitement.

“The woman, she is the thief, there is no doubt of it,” he cried, fitting the key in the lock with trembling fingers. “The ‘notes’ of which you speak and which she kept hidden in her purse, what could they be but the missing pages of my book? Ach, if I could but catch her, I would tell her what I think of her, the thief! And I would get my pages back!”

With these words Herr Entveg removed his hat, the better to pull at his much-abused hair. Kay did her best to calm him. Finally, after promising to try to find the fair-haired woman she left the shop, the book for which her mother had asked under her arm.

On her way home Kay pondered the strange coincidence of her meeting with the foreign woman and her discovery of Herr Entveg's misfortune. She still felt that the two incidents were connected, but how, or in what way, she could not determine.

Kay sank back in the train seat with a deep sigh. She was happy to have a problem confronting her once more. She was confident that, given time and a reasonable amount of good luck, she would be able to fit the pieces of the puzzle together.

It was not until after dinner that Kay recalled her purchase of the two bottles of perfume, and her intention of playing a joke on good-natured Cousin Bill with one of them. With a twinkle in her eye she excused herself, and ran up to her room to get the package.

When she had gone, Mrs. Tracey looked up long enough from her appraisal of the book Kay had brought her from Herr Entveg's shop, to smile at Cousin Bill.

"Our Kay is very happy," she remarked. "If the prospect of going to Lost Lake has done this for her, then I'm glad the Worths asked her to be their guest."

"Just between you and me, I believe she has run into some sort of a mystery," said Bill Tracey. "She hasn't said much, but her looks betray her. I know the signs."

Mrs. Tracey nodded.

"You may be right. How much Kay is like her father," she added thoughtfully, a sad note in her voice. "Roger was a newspaperman by profession, but I always felt that he should have been a detective. He had a passion for apparently unimportant little details that most people would have passed by. He used to work out the solution of criminal cases just for fun, and he was usually correct."

"I know," Cousin Bill nodded. "He would have made a good lawyer. And his daughter *is* like him—a regular chip off the old block."

When Kay returned she went over to Cousin Bill and held out to him a small, neatly wrapped parcel.

"For 'the young lady'," she said, with a twinkle in her eye. "I do hope she will like it, Cousin Bill."

“What—oh—yes—the perfume, I suppose.” Feeling Kathryn Tracey’s amused look on him, Cousin Bill took the packet from Kay a little sheepishly. “I—ah—appreciate your going to the trouble, Kay.”

He fumbled with the string, getting it in a hard knot, man-fashion, so that Kay was forced to come to his rescue.

There emerged, in all its blatant vulgarity, the bottle of cheap perfume labeled “Heart’s Desire.” Kathryn Tracey looked, sniffed, and wrinkled her nose. Then she cried:

“Kay, how dreadful! Where in the world did you get it?”

The girl gave her mother a mischievous glance and nodded toward Cousin Bill.

That poor man was eyeing the bottle of “Heart’s Desire” dubiously. He turned it over and smelled of it suspiciously, carefully avoiding the two pair of amused eyes regarding him.

“We-el,” he said finally, “I don’t know much about ladies’ perfume. This smells a bit strong to me, but if it’s what Elise likes——”

A smothered chuckle made him glance quickly at Kay.

“You little tease!” he cried suspiciously. “Are you playing a joke on me?”

Kay now drew from a place of concealment the second bottle, the costly French product which had been Elise Conklin’s real choice. She thrust this toward her cousin.

“There,” she demanded, “is that any better?”

Cousin Bill took the vial and sniffed appreciatively. His eyes twinkled as they rested on Kay.

“This is the real thing, of course,” he said. “What am I going to do with you? Have you no respect for years?”

He joined in the hearty laughter, however, and then began to question his young relative about her plans. She spoke of Mr. Miller’s invitation, wondering when he would set a time for the visit.

On the day before Kay was to start for Lost Lake, that gentleman telephoned, saying that if the girl and her mother could come, he would send them special passes for two o’clock. Kay was delighted with the prospect, and accepted happily for her mother and herself.

At the appointed hour Mrs. Tracey and her daughter arrived at the watchman’s shed at the exterior of the grounds of the Scientific Instrument Company. Ahead of them was a lean, fiery-eyed stranger arguing with the gateman.

“I worked here for several years—now you refuse me admittance. What’s the idea?”

“You haven’t a pass. Can’t let you by,” returned the guard wearily. “Orders is orders.”

“You make me tired. I’m a first-rate inventor. I’ll show this outfit a thing or two. Even if they don’t need me any more, I’ll get back here some day—and with a royal welcome, too!”

Kay and her mother stepped forward. The girl held the magical passes. The unwanted stranger glared at the Traceys as they were admitted to the grounds and escorted to Mr. Miller’s office. The tall, dark, bushy-haired fellow, who had long white teeth and full red lips, shook his fist at the guard, then stalked off.

“He is certainly undesirable,” said Mrs. Tracey. “I’m not surprised the management discharged him.”

“He’s crazy,” commented the watchman. “This is no place for such as he. Secrets are too valuable for a snoop to light on. Everything is guarded.”

“How thrilling!” murmured Kay. “We surely are favored.”

Mr. Miller, though busy over a strange blueprint, greeted his guests genially and conducted them through various departments, each one more intriguing and mystifying than the last.

“I suppose you have rivals or disgruntled workmen whom you must guard against all the time,” remarked Kay, thinking of the unruly man at the outer gate.

“Yes,” whispered Mr. Miller confidentially. “More than we care to admit. Our ideas and inventions are strictly original and very valuable, so we must be extremely cautious.”

An instrument that interested Kay for some time was one which “scrambled” speech. This magical contrivance made it possible for two people to send and receive messages which would be intelligible only to the sender and the receiver. Any one else trying to “listen in” would hear only a hodge-podge of jumbled sounds which would be entirely meaningless to him.

“This is very valuable as a means of secret communication,” Mr. Miller explained. “I should never want this machine stolen.”

“Well, I should think not,” breathed Kay. “It’s perfectly marvelous!”

The wonders she had seen so impressed themselves upon the girl that they lingered in her thoughts long after the visit to the laboratory was over

and she was at home again. She was still thinking of them—the scrambled speech instrument in particular—when Cousin Bill came upon her.

“Oho!” he cried. “What have we here?”

Kay’s riding habit, freshly brushed, hung over the back of a garden bench. Its owner was industriously engaged in tinting a pair of fancy low shoes. Cousin Bill pointed jovially from the evening slippers to the outfit to be worn by her on horseback.

“Those two things go well together, don’t they, when one has a *night-mare*?” he laughed. “But, all joking aside,” he added, “you will probably have plenty of them at Lost Lake.”

“Plenty of what?” asked Kay, surprised.

“Night-mares,” said Cousin Bill. “Very queer things happen up at Lost Lake, or so I’m told.”

“What kind of queer things?” Kay demanded.

“Oh, strange noises and terrible storms. A very weird place, from all accounts. Elise Conklin’s family has a cottage up there, you know. Her father was interested in the development of the place.”

“I *didn’t* know,” said Kay, adding with a teasing smile, “I suppose we will be seeing a good deal of you at Lost Lake, then, if Elise is there.”

After Cousin Bill had gone into the house Kay pondered over his words. It did not alarm her to hear that Lost Lake was a queer place, harboring strange noises, and visited by frightful storms. On the contrary, her spirits rose elatedly to meet the challenge. If there was a mystery at Lost Lake, then the sooner Kay Tracey reached that place, the better!

Anticipation would not allow her to sleep very much that night. She was up early, eager for the start of her glorious adventure. There was the usual last minute flurry, with Kay remembering things that she should have put in her bag and Kathryn Tracey hurrying up and down stairs to help her daughter collect them.

Finally Mr. Worth was seen coming up the street. Kay kissed her mother and patted Cousin Bill on the arm.

“I wish you two were coming with me. Mother, do I look all right?”

“Very sweet, dear. Now take good care of yourself, and write often, won’t you?”

Kay promised, and was out of the door with a wave of her hand just as Mr. Worth drew up at the curb. The latter greeted Kay cordially, and opened the car door for her.

“On the dot as usual,” he smiled. “I wish my own daughters would be as punctual.”

Cousin Bill came out with Kay’s luggage, which he thrust unceremoniously into the back seat of the car. Then the travelers were off.

The hours literally flew by. Mr. Worth was on the point of suggesting that they stop somewhere on the road for a bite to eat, when a strange old figure plodding along at the side of the highway diverted his attention.

It was that of an old man, clad shabbily, yet wearing his clothes with a certain dignity; a grizzly bearded person who leaned heavily on a cane. As the big car came abreast of him, Kay noticed that he stumbled and seemed on the point of falling.

“Oh, the poor old man,” she cried pityingly. “I wonder if he is ill.”

“Only weary, probably,” said Mr. Worth, drawing up at the side of the road. “Still, we can stop and find out.”

As the auto came to a standstill, Kay jumped out and walked back.

“I thought perhaps you were ill,” she said kindly to the elderly pedestrian.

The old man looked up at her. Kay saw a pair of twinkling, kindly grey eyes and a smiling mouth.

“Not ill, my dear,” he said, “only tired. I am getting along in years and my legs are not as strong as they used to be.”

Mr. Worth joined Kay, presently discovering that the stranger, like themselves, was bound for Lost Lake.

“But you can never expect to walk there!” cried Kay.

“And that I do, my dear,” said the aged traveler, his eyes twinkling at her.

Neither Kay nor Mr. Worth would hear of this, and when the latter suggested that the old gentleman accept a lift for the remainder of the journey he received the invitation with a simple gratitude that touched them both.

So they went on again with the extra passenger comfortably established in the back seat. He seemed very weary and sat back with his eyes closed. When Mr. Worth finally drew up before a tea shop Kay was undecided about awakening their elderly companion.

“He is probably hungry as well as tired,” said Mr. Worth. “We’d better rouse him up and take him in with us.”

Soon Kay and Mr. Worth, with their elderly charge, were seated at one of the little round tables in the pleasant tea room. Kay had leaned forward to

say something to the old man when her attention was attracted by a group which had just entered the room. Heading it was none other than Ethel Eaton, a Carmont High School girl who was unpopular and unpleasant with most of the students.

Suddenly Ethel caught sight of Kay. The girl's glance swept the latter's companions and rested with undisguised contempt on the shabby person. She turned to her friends and said in a voice that could be heard throughout the place:

"I call it an imposition! He's nothing but a tramp! He shouldn't be allowed in a place like this!"

As the elderly traveler hung his head in shame, Kay jumped to her feet and confronted the speaker. Her face was flushed and her eyes gleamed angrily.

"If you don't like my friends, Ethel Eaton," she cried furiously, "you should leave!"

The eyes of the two girls met for a long minute, and Ethel scowled.

"I suppose that's what you would like me to do, isn't it?" she retorted.

Kay shrugged, and sat down with her back to the annoying girl.

"I don't care what you do," she flung over her shoulder, "as long as you keep your unpleasant remarks to yourself."

Ethel hesitated as though longing to retort, but changed her mind and went with her group to a table near by. Kay heard one of the party mention Lost Lake, whereupon Ethel retorted pettishly that she would be very glad indeed when they reached the hotel there; that the trip thus far had been anything but a success.

So Ethel Eaton was going to Lost Lake, too! This girl, who was very jealous of Kay's popularity, never missed an opportunity to make Kay uncomfortable or to try to assert her own superiority!

"What awful luck," thought the Tracey girl. "Ethel just seems to haunt me!"

Now the old man was speaking to her, leaning across the table to touch her hand with his gaunt fingers.

"You are a gallant champion, my child," he was saying, his keen old eyes very soft. "Some day soon I can reward you with more than gratitude—when I locate my fortune in Faraway Valley."

CHAPTER IV

A VOICE IN THE DARK

KAY and Mr. Worth regarded their companion keenly. The old man's eyes shone like stars, but hinted at hidden tears.

"Your fortune!" repeated Kay. "Why, what do you mean by that, Mr. _____"

"Nelson is the name, my child," he replied, adding, as a dreamy look crept into his eyes, "Yes, I have a fortune hidden away somewhere in Faraway Valley. Under rocks and débris it has waited for me all these years, and now, at last, I am going to locate it."

Kay regarded the old gentleman still more closely. Was it possible, she wondered, that he might be slightly unbalanced mentally by age and misfortune?

That the same thought was in Mr. Worth's mind was evidenced by his hastily changing the subject.

"Well, here is food," he said briskly, as a steaming platter arrived. "And that is more satisfying right at this moment, I should say, than any amount of buried treasure, isn't it?"

However, once they were in the car again the old man returned to the subject.

"I suppose you both know the story of Lost Lake," he began.

Mr. Worth said nothing; merely frowned over his driving. Kay turned to the speaker.

"*Has* Lost Lake a story?" she asked pleasantly.

"Indeed it has, my dear child, and a most interesting one. You see, in the days before the Civil War Faraway Valley was a very pleasant place to live in, or so I've been told. It was fertile because of the streams that ran down from the mountains and fed the lake."

"Lost Lake?" Kay queried eagerly.

"Sure enough, only it wasn't called that then. But there, I'm getting ahead of my story. As I was saying, the valley was a fertile one, the farmers found it easy to make a living, and there was a thriving little town there.

“Then, ’bout the time I was born, there came rumors of civil war. My father got scared he’d lose his money, so he drew his life savings out of the bank. They was fairly considerable, my mother used to tell me. He buried them in his back yard somewhere, close to the old well.”

“I remember hearing that a good many people buried their money during the war,” said Kay.

At this point Mr. Worth gave her a look under uplifted brows as if to say, “Don’t believe everything you hear, my dear. The old fellow is probably wandering in his mind.”

“Yes, sir, that’s just what my father did,” went on the quavering old voice. “Then one night—the crash came.”

“You mean war was declared?”

“No, my child—something even worse than that. The inhabitants of that pleasant little valley awoke one night to hear a rumbling in the earth, a frightful noise as though all the universe were crashing about their ears.

“They rushed out o’ their homes, terror-stricken, gathering up what few things they could lay hand to. And while they crouched in the lanes and roads and streets of the village, huddled together for comfort, they felt the earth rock under their feet.

“Looking up to where the crackling and roaring came from, it seemed as though the mountain was breaking up. And as they watched, thousands of tons of dirt and rock came hurtling down upon that helpless village!”

“Oh, how frightful!” gasped Kay. “What a night-mare!”

“Yes, it was a night-mare, my child, and the last that many o’ those poor folk would ever have. Some of them ran screaming to the far side of the valley, and a few of them escaped. But for the most part the people were caught before they could get away—caught and trapped beneath tons of dirt and rock.

“My father,” he added, the quavering old voice suddenly solemn and strained, “was one of them.”

Kay felt tears in her eyes. She held out her hand to the old man, and he took it, gently, tapping it with his old weather-worn fingers.

“My mother escaped with me. I was a little fellow,” he continued. “Afterwards she made a fresh start, working like a slave and seeing to it that I got a proper schooling.

“I tried to make something of myself.” Again the old voice quavered and broke. “If only to pay her back for all she did for me. But I’ve never had much success making money. I’ve tried a lot o’ things—once I was on the

track of an invention that would have made me a fortune, but it didn't pan out. Guess I'm just what some folks have called me, a no-account, shiftless dreamer."

"And so you are on your way back to Faraway Valley to find the small fortune your father buried in his back yard near the old well," mused Kay. "But what about the story of Lost Lake?" she added.

"Well, in a manner o' speaking, what I have been telling you *is* the story of Lost Lake, my child, because during the earthquake the old lake was lost, you see. Its banks were riven and cracked, and the water was diverted and gradually drained away until only the dry lake-bed was left. That's how the place came to be called Lost Lake."

"Well, what about that lake that is there now?" asked Kay. "It couldn't just have happened."

"Some real estate people thought it would be good business to dam up the cracks in the lake basin and flood it with water to make a new lake; then build a few cottages and a hotel about it to catch the summer trade," said Mr. Nelson, a touch of scorn in his words. "What with the romantic story about Faraway Valley and the fine natural setting, they should do a thriving business."

Hours passed while old Mr. Nelson dozed in his corner. Kay remained lost in interesting speculation, and Mr. Worth attended strictly to the business of driving. They came at last to the outskirts of Lost Lake where Mr. Nelson asked to be "let down." Kay took leave of the old man reluctantly. She gave him the location of the Worth cottage, and obtained his promise to look her up if he needed aid at any time.

"I'd really like to do anything I can to help you find your money," she assured him earnestly, and the kind old eyes rested on her very gently.

"You are a sweet child," he said. "If I had had a granddaughter, I think she would have been just like you!"

And so they left him, a lonely figure in the dusty road, leaning heavily on his cane. In spite of Mr. Worth's warning against the folly of believing such a wild tale as the old man had told, Kay could not put his story out of her mind.

"I'd like to be there when he starts digging on the site of his old home," she thought. "What a thrill!"

It was dark before Mr. Worth turned his car into the wooded road that wound around behind the lake homes. Through the trees Kay caught tantalizing glimpses of the water, and could hear its gentle lapping against the bank.

Then a cottage loomed up at them through the dusk and Mr. Worth turned off the motor.

“Here we are,” he announced. “Welcome to Camp Worthy.”

From within the cottage there came joyful sounds. Before Kay had fairly touched the ground she felt herself caught up in welcoming arms as Betty and Wilma bombarded her with eager questions. Then the latter quoted:

“ ‘A hundred thousand welcomes;
I could weep, and I could laugh;
Welcome!’ ”

During supper the twins chattered like magpies, and as soon as the meal was over, insisted upon taking Kay out for a look at the lake.

“We’ll go for a paddle. You didn’t know we had a canoe, did you, Kay?” asked Betty, leading the way to the dock. “We’re lucky to get Mother’s consent, too,” she added, “because she doesn’t like us out on the lake after dark.”

“Why not?” asked Kay, as she stepped into the canoe after Wilma, and Betty pushed off from the dock.

“Oh, queer things have been happening here,” explained Betty with a shrug of her shoulders. “But you will find that out before you’ve been here long. All right, Wilma? Got your paddle?”

“Ready,” came the answer, and the canoe floated out on the quiet water to the accompaniment of the lazy dip-and-swing, dip-and-swing of the paddles.

“This is marvelous!” said Kay, settling down among the cushions. “I could go to sleep here!”

Even as she spoke, however, she started up, wide awake. Another canoe had slipped out, wraith-like, from a brush-shrouded cove. From this craft a voice, marked by a familiar foreign accent, was wafted across to Kay. Instantly the girl thought of part of a certain telephone conversation she had overheard at Simpson’s Department Store. “I vill not start for de lake till you come.”

Could this be the lake the stranger had referred to, pondered Kay, as she strained her ears to catch some of the conversation.

“What splendid luck!” she thought, “if that same woman is in the vicinity! Perhaps I can keep my promise to the old book dealer, Herr Entveg!”

Her thoughts were interrupted, for almost instantly a sharp clap of thunder sounded, which made Betty and Wilma swing the canoe about and head for shore.

“Oh, dear,” exclaimed Kay. “I wish——”

“Another of those thunder and lightning storms without any rain!” exclaimed Betty hastily. “It’s so strange. It *is* spooky at this place.”

“Entirely *too* spooky,” commented Wilma.

Kay sighed. She had lost a valuable opportunity. It was not until later that she became interested in the idea of Lost Lake having electrical storms without rain so often.

CHAPTER V

SUSPICIOUS SMOKE

KAY had many interesting thoughts to occupy her mind. Long after she was snug in bed beside Betty that night, with Wilma occupying the small room adjoining, she lay awake trying to straighten out things in her mind.

First of all there was the question as to the identity of the occupant of that other canoe that had passed so close to theirs in the shadows. Had that voice belonged to the fair-haired foreign woman whom she suspected in connection with the valuable stolen pages from Herr Entveg's book, or had she only imagined the resemblance?

"It seems altogether unlikely that the woman should be here at Lost Lake, of all places."

Still, Kay could almost have sworn to the identity of that voice, with its musical foreign accent.

"It won't do any harm to make inquiries," she told herself, "and that I will do—the first thing tomorrow morning!"

This vital matter being temporarily settled, Kay passed in her thoughts to the even more absorbing problem of Lost Lake and the phenomena of which Wilma and Betty had told her. Kay herself had witnessed one of these strange manifestations of Nature, and one, moreover, which she had been assured was of common occurrence in this mysterious place; an electrical storm *without* any rain.

"That might happen once—with thunder and lightning in the distance and the storm passing over before it has had time to break—but to happen again and again, well, that's odd. I believe the real estate people will have a hard time getting visitors to stay here this summer."

It was not this alone, however, which caused Kay's uneasiness. It was rather some strange brooding quality of the place itself.

"As though Lost Lake were holding its breath," she thought, "waiting for something strange—something weird and rather awful to happen. It's in the air, that feeling of tense expectancy. I know it isn't altogether my imagination, either. There *is* something queer about this place."

In the brilliant morning sunlight Lost Lake and all the surrounding country shone so bright and glorious that Kay was inclined to look back

upon her thoughts of the previous night as having been exaggerated, even a little morbid.

Towering hills, rich with verdure, rose on either side of the pleasant lake. Along the banks, each in its snug little pocket of woodland, nestled the cottages. At the far end was a rather pretentious looking hotel, still very new, and glistening with fresh paint. Although it was an early hour, boats were already pushing off, while docks were dotted with a few bathers for whom the chill of the water seemed to hold no terrors.

Wilma, standing near Kay, quoted softly:

“ ‘Soon called, the mother of the dawn
Slipt silently away.
Fresh as a fawn
Came in the day.
Why did the bird on yonder bough
Sing a sweet saddened note?
Was it that, even until now
Night left a sadness in his throat?’ ”

“Why, Wilma,” cried Kay, turning to her friend, her eyes shining, “that’s really beautiful! I love it!”

“Once in a while Wilma’s poetry isn’t so bad,” observed Betty with the resigned tolerance of a twin sister who has endured much. “Oh, there’s Mother calling from the cottage. Guess breakfast must be ready.”

The girls ran up to the cottage, where they greeted Mrs. Worth and immediately applied themselves, with great vigor and dispatch, to a breakfast of ham, eggs, and corn pone.

“We’ve a surprise for you,” said Wilma to Kay as they rose from the table a few moments later. “Come and look.”

Mr. Worth had provided horses for the entertainment of his family and their friends during the summer vacation. Now, as Kay looked at the splendid mounts, she was touched by the fact that he had provided for her a beautiful little roan mare.

“Isn’t she a darling?” cried Betty, flinging open the door of the stall. “We call her Maud, and she’s gentle as a kitten and trots like a lamb.”

While Kay, speechless with delight, stood by admiringly, a young darky groom who spent his nights at the servants’ quarters of the hotel, and came up to attend the stable in the daytime, saddled her roan and the two horses

which Betty and Wilma were to ride. They were black, identical except for a star on the nose of one.

“They’re Ike and Mike,” explained Wilma. “I ride Mike—he’s the one with the star.”

Kay was wearing her riding togs, as the twins had warned her that they were to go for a canter soon after breakfast. Now, the roan horse being ready, Kay leaped into the saddle, holding the reins lightly but firmly.

“Where do we go?” cried Kay.

“To the general store,” said Wilma prosaically. “Mother wants some things.”

Though the errand may have been prosaic, that early morning ride through the sweet-scented woods certainly was not. The road for a short distance was no more than a wagon trail. Along this the two black horses and Kay’s roan mare picked their way daintily.

Where the road broadened it was possible to ride three abreast, so the girls put their mounts to a trot, tearing along at a good speed, their hair flying, and cheeks whipped to a healthy red.

Suddenly they came out upon an eminence from which they could look across into a distant valley—a strange place denuded of vegetation, barren and bleak.

“What’s that place?” asked Kay, pointing with her quirt.

“Faraway Valley,” explained Betty.

Remembering old Mr. Nelson’s story, Kay said, “It seems very desolate to me. A grim, sad place, I should say.”

“And look!” cried Betty, pointing to where, dotted at intervals over the barren valley, thick columns of smoke arose. “I’ve never seen smoke there before.”

“Nor have I,” said Wilma thoughtfully. “But isn’t it frightful?”

“ ‘And where two raging fires meet
Together
They do consume the thing that feeds
Their fury.’ ”

“But there isn’t any fire,” objected Kay, “unless we’re too far away to be able to see it.”

As they rode on to the general store, Kay recalled her determination to find out if the twins knew anything of the foreign woman with whom she

had spoken in Simpson's Department Store, and whom she suspected of being the owner of the melodious voice she had heard on the lake the previous evening.

The Worth girls listened eagerly while Kay told them of her experiences in Carmont, including the one about the pages that had been stolen from Herr Entveg's book. The twins were unable to identify Kay's fair-haired woman among the list of their acquaintances, however.

"She may be staying at one of the cottages or at the hotel, but we don't know her, that's certain," said Betty.

At the general store Kay pursued her inquiries but with no better results. Although the man in charge was both obliging and talkative, it was soon evident that he knew as little as Betty or Wilma about the woman.

He was surprised when the girls mentioned the smoke they had seen rising from the barren wastes of Faraway Valley.

"Now that's queer," he said thoughtfully. "There ain't been no smoke nor yet other signs of life in that there unfort'nate valley, not since the earthquake."

"There *was* an earthquake, then?" asked Kay eagerly.

"Yes, Ma'am! Half the mountain come away, as you might say, and plumb buried the village. Folks won't go near the place now; say it's ha'nted. That's why it seems queer when you say as there's smoke rising from the valley. 'Tain't nat'ral!"

After further conversation on the same subject, during which Kay was very thoughtful, the girls made their purchases and left. On a side road they stopped at a farm to buy eggs, milk and cream.

"A horse isn't the best means of conveyance for such food," laughed Betty, as she handed Wilma three dozen eggs in boxes, and gave Kay a bottle of cream to hold.

Just as the riders were about to turn into the main lake road, a big touring car flashed around a bend. A horn shrieked, frightening the horses.

Kay heard Betty scream and saw Wilma's black steed rear up on its hind legs. As the auto flashed past, almost grazing her trim little mare, Kay caught a glimpse of the driver. Then she cried out:

"That blonde woman! I know her! I must catch her!"

CHAPTER VI

THE STRANGE ECHO

GRIPPING her bottle of cream tightly, and leaping her little mare over the mess of milk and eggs which the twins had dropped in the road, Kay set off at a gallop after the disappearing car. Far up the road she overtook Wilma and Betty, and paused beside them, reining in her frightened horse.

“Did you see the license number on that car?” she demanded.

Betty shook her head.

“We were too busy spilling milk and eggs,” she giggled.

Thereupon Kay set out after the auto once more, feeling all the time that the chase was a hopeless one. Maud was willing, but could never hope to catch up to the high-powered car, especially as it had had such a long head start.

At the crest of a steep hill Kay reined in the spirited horse. The car was no longer in sight. She had lost it!

“Why were you so eager to get the license number?” asked Betty, as Kay returned to her chums.

“Yes, tell us what was so interesting about that particular car,” added Wilma.

“That fair-haired foreign woman I’m looking for was at the wheel,” said Kay. “Of course, I caught only a glimpse of her as the car flashed by, but I’m practically sure she was the same person I met in Simpson’s Department Store.”

“Well, you are certain to run into her again if she stays up here,” Betty assured her chum. “Everybody at Lost Lake meets everybody else sooner or later.”

“I suppose so,” said Kay. “But I do wish I could have caught the license number of her car. It would have been such a help in tracing her.”

The girls went back to the farm for a fresh supply of milk and eggs. Then they returned to the Worth camp. The day had grown very hot and sultry, so some time after luncheon was over, the girls put on their bathing suits.

“Let’s swim,” begged Kay presently. “The water looks marvelous.”

“Who’ll race me to that motorboat out there?” asked Betty.

“I will,” cried Kay, joyfully accepting the challenge. “And beat you, too!”

The boat rode at the end of a long dock which extended for some distance into the lake. As Kay swam toward the pretty craft, leading both Betty and Wilma by a good half length, she read the name *Jolly Roger* painted in gleaming gold letters on the stern.

“A pirate ship,” she panted, grasping the tow-line and turning to face her chums. “And a pretty nice one, too, in spite of her name. Do you know who owns her?”

“Lady,” said a lazy voice from just above Kay’s head, “you’re looking at him, right now.”

Kay glanced up, squinting against the sun, and saw above her a tousled red head, eyes that laughed down at her, and a wide mouth stretched in a friendly grin.

“Hello!” said Kay. “Are you the skipper of the *Jolly Roger*?”

“That I be, Ma’am, and at your service. And these be my messmates,” as two heads appeared beside his at the boat’s rail. “Tubby Granger and Cracker MacCloud—as fair and able seamen as ever shipped before a mast. Avast below!” he added, as Wilma and Betty joined Kay at the tow-line. “How about coming aboard?”

Betty giggled.

“What do you say, Kay? Wilma and I have known these pirates for about a week. Though I can’t say they improve much on acquaintance, they’re really entirely harmless. They live next door. Shall we board their tidy craft?”

“Come on, say yes,” pleaded the red-haired youth, and Kay nodded, smiling.

“I’m willing to try anything once,” she agreed.

The crew of the *Jolly Roger* proved ideal companions for a summer afternoon. Kay particularly liked the “skipper”, that youth of the flaming hair whose real name, Raymond Greene, had been shortened to “Red” Greene by his intimates.

“Sounds like a traffic light, doesn’t it?” he admitted ruefully. “The awful result of having the name of Greene and being born with red hair.”

“Tubby” Granger was short and rather fat, and was at the age when he liked to play practical jokes on any one who appeared a likely victim. “Cracker” MacCloud, a long, lanky lad, had been so called because his first

name, unfortunately for him, was Graham. Yet in spite of their peculiarities, they were as congenial lads as one would be likely to meet.

After circling the lake twice in the *Jolly Roger*, which was really a large rowboat equipped with a motor, Red Greene turned into a pleasant little cove and clipped off the engine. The young people began to joke—all except Kay. Her attention had been drawn to a figure moving through the trees near the shore.

“What’s the matter, Kay?” asked Wilma. “See a ghost?”

“Almost,” replied her chum. “That man—I’ve seen him before. Let me think.”

“What do you want to think about?” queried Red Greene.

“Oh, we should have told you that Kay’s a detective,” explained Betty solemnly. “Never interrupt her when she’s thinking.”

“We’d better be careful after this what we say and do,” suggested Tubby. “And now, Fair Sleuth, may we know what you were going to ponder over?”

Kay smiled.

“If you really want to know, I just caught a glimpse of a man disappearing into that woods. He has the kind of a face one doesn’t forget easily. I saw him once at a place where scientific instruments are secretly made. I heard him threaten the owners.”

“What’s he doing around here?” queried Cracker.

“I wish I knew,” said Kay seriously. “I didn’t like his looks at all. But come on. I mustn’t bother you with my mysteries. Let’s swim.”

“I’m going in right now,” said Betty, jumping up. “Do you think it’s deep enough to dive here, Red?”

“Not unless you want a broken skull,” returned Red lazily. “Better wade out a ways.”

“And watch out for crabs,” warned Tubby, preparing to follow.

Betty drew back her foot with a little scream.

“Crabs!” she cried. “Oh, where?”

Kay gave Tubby a disgusted look.

“Don’t let him fool you, Betty,” she warned. “Whoever heard of crabs in a fresh water lake like this?”

Then, as Tubby Granger, with a smug expression on his face, jumped over the side of the boat into shallow water, Kay exercised a gift which she had cultivated assiduously in childhood, but now rarely used—that of

throwing her voice into different places, so that it seemed to come from in front of or behind her, as the occasion required.

As Tubby splashed after Betty, a voice apparently a hundred yards or so from shore cried out:

“Help! Help! I’m drowning! Oh-h he-elp!”

“Great jumping crickets!” cried Tubby, and set out with a great deal of splashing and puffing in the direction of the frantic shriek.

Red and Cracker, too, had risen to their feet, but Kay waved them back nonchalantly.

“Let Tubby suffer,” she chuckled, relishing her joke.

“But somebody’s in trouble out there—” began Red excitedly, then broke off abruptly as he caught Kay’s mischievous look. “Say—you didn’t do that, did you?” he stammered. “That cry for help——”

“What do you think?” laughed Kay.

“Ventriloquism!” muttered Red, regarding the Tracey girl with wonder and a new interest.

Kay was watching Tubby, who had been swimming about madly in circles, diving again and again for the supposed victim of drowning. As he rose to the surface, shaking the water from his eyes and puffing noisily, Kay called again, this time making her voice sound as though it came from shore.

“Don’t be silly,” came in clear tones. “I’m all right, Tubby. I’m safe on shore. What are you looking for, anyway?”

At this point the stout lad realized that someone had played a joke on him. He stared about, a comical look on his chubby features, and then swam slowly back toward land.

“Take care you don’t step on any crabs,” said Kay sweetly, in the same voice she had used in her demonstration of ventriloquism.

A burst of laughter greeted Tubby’s astounded look, in which, to do the fat boy justice, he presently joined as heartily as any of them.

“Well, you paid me back, all right.”

From Kay’s ventriloquistic exploit the talk finally veered to the subject of other queer sounds, including echoes. Kay was alert. The boys claimed to have heard a strange echo several times while camping on a ridge on the side of the mountain opposite from Lost Lake.

“What kind of an echo?” asked Kay, hugging her knees and listening intently for the answer.

“Sort of queer and eerie,” rejoined Cracker. “Like a voice coming from the clouds.”

“The first part sounded like ‘your Kate’,” explained Red.

“‘Your Kate’,” repeated Kay. “That certainly sounds funny.”

“The second part came after a pause. It was ‘rise ten’,” amplified Tubby. “Both phrases were repeated several times.”

“‘Your Kate—rise ten’,” Kay murmured.

“It was weird, all right; made your hair stand on end,” said Cracker.

“It was near here, too,” said Tubby with a wave of his hand. “Right over No Man’s Ridge.”

Kay stood up impulsively, her eyes shining with excitement.

“Would you take us there?” she demanded of the boys. “Let’s go right now.”

“But Kay,” Wilma protested, “we haven’t any shoes.”

The boys settled that question by producing several pairs of old sneakers from the boat’s locker, where they reposed among fishing tackle, rusty hooks, and pieces of stained tarpaulin.

“They’re pretty big,” Red admitted. “But perhaps you can manage.”

The girls, once ashore, fitted their feet into the worn footgear amid a good deal of laughing comment. After making fast the *Jolly Roger*, the young people started off into the woods.

“Do you suppose that man you don’t like is still prowling around in here?” asked Wilma.

“I hope not. He may be dangerous,” added Betty hastily.

“Just the same, I should like to know what he’s doing here,” responded Kay.

“Better not bother to find out,” advised Wilma.

“‘Seek not to know what must not be revealed;
Joys only flow where Fate is most concealed.’”

As the boys and girls topped the ridge where the lads had made their camp and heard the strange echo, the young people tried echoing themselves. They were amused and sometimes a little startled at the results. Their voices came back to them at times dolefully, then heartily, and often in a thin little squeak that faltered in the quiet air and died off plaintively into silence.

Laughing, they began to descend the slope which led toward part of Faraway Valley. Then they drew up sharply as a man’s voice, deep and sinister, thundered at them from the sky:

“Turn—back! Dan-ger—a-head!”

CHAPTER VII

WEIRD LIGHTS

THE young people paused and stared at one another unbelievably. Wilma put an arm through Kay's and clung to her chum, shivering.

"What—was it?" she whispered.

"Your guess is as good as mine," replied Kay, trying to speak nonchalantly, yet all the while aware of a strange prickling of her scalp. To herself she said, "I wonder if that man could have anything to do with it?" Aloud she went on, "It was rather—odd, wasn't it?"

"Odd? It was awful!" said Betty with a shudder. "Like somebody shouting at us from the sky. It was—uncanny!"

"Look here," said Red abruptly. "That's worse than anything we boys heard here. I don't like it. I think we'd better get you girls back across the lake as soon as possible."

"And leave the mystery unexplained?" Kay reproached him. "That *would* be too bad, Red."

"You mean you want to go on—after that?" asked the lad incredulously.

"Why, of course," returned Kay. "We can't simply leave the mystery up in the air, can we?"

"Up in the air is right," said Cracker thoughtfully. "I'd give a lot to know where that voice spoke from."

"Then come on, and let's find out," Kay urged. "It won't do any harm to look around a little and see if we can find some sort of a clue."

"And stumble into the danger the voice warned us against!" added Red. "No, sir, I'm taking no chances. I'm responsible for getting you here and I'm going to see that I bring you back safely."

As he spoke, a faint, wailing sound broke out in the woods behind them, followed by a rasping sputter; then sudden silence.

Betty and Wilma started running up the slope away from the sound, their ungainly shoes flopping about their ankles. Red Greene grasped Kay's arm, his face grim.

"Come away," he said. "We're getting out of this at once!"

As Kay stumbled along in her “sneakers”, she kept a sharp lookout, striving to pierce the shadows that clothed the woods in mystery. Although she was more shaken than she cared to admit by this strange experience, her mind had never been more active.

Something, she knew, was responsible for that sharp cry of warning and the faint, wailing shriek that had followed it. Was there an insane man hiding in the woods, she wondered—some poor, crazed recluse whose mind had given way in solitude? Then she recalled the words of the guard at the gates of the Scientific Instrument Company that the stranger who wished to enter was crazy. That last wailing note had sounded like nothing human. Still——

The young people had topped No Man’s Ridge. Kay stooped to recover a small slip of paper which had become entangled in the bushes at the foot of a tree.

“What did you find?” queried Red. “Anything interesting?”

“I don’t know.” Kay spoke thoughtfully, smoothing out the sheet and studying it intently. “Important numbers—apparently. Scrawled in black. It looks like 930. Now what—can that mean?”

Kay was well aware of the value of apparently unimportant trifles in the solving of mysteries. So, instead of flinging her find back into the bushes, she folded it and held it tightly in her hand until the *Jolly Roger* had recrossed the lake, and she was safe on the dock at Camp Worthy.

“See you tonight at the dance,” called Red, as the boat cast off.

“What dance?” asked Kay, as she walked toward the cottage with Betty and Wilma.

“At Lake House,” explained Betty. “The hotel gives a big affair every Saturday night—musicians up from the city and everything. Everybody goes.”

“Possibly I shall locate that blonde-haired woman again,” said Kay.

During dinner, and while the girls dressed for the festivities, the conversation revolved around one thing—the weird and terrifying experience that had overtaken them on the far side of No Man’s Ridge. Carefully Kay put the note with the number on it in her suitcase.

That deep voice, booming at them “Turn back! Danger ahead!” seemed almost more horrible in retrospect than it had at the time; and the weird, wailing shriek that followed it still echoed in their ears.

“I wonder who it was,” reflected Betty.

“We’ll have to go back there some day soon, take a picnic lunch, and do some exploring,” Kay announced.

Wilma looked doubtful.

“I don’t know whether we could get Mother’s consent. She’s already suspicious of the queer things that happen around here. I’m afraid that from now on No Man’s Ridge will be forbidden ground.

“ ‘Where voices boom
A threat of doom,
And shrieks sound eerily,
There will I wander nevermore
To ponder on forgotten lore
But stay at home right cheerily.’ ”

“Well, you may stay at home if you like,” said Kay, slipping her feet into silver slippers, “but I’m going over to that place again and try to find out where that voice came from—if I have to go alone,” she added under her breath.

Red Greene and his companions possessed a rickety old car in which they were accustomed to ride around Lost Lake, to the alarm and dismay of all law-abiding citizens. In this they called for Kay and the twins, and escorted them to the dance at Lake House with much pomp and ceremony.

It was a hilarious ride, the laughter and shouts of the young people being interspersed with the chug-chug of the almost broken-down auto. Arriving at the hotel, they went directly to the ballroom, where the orchestra was already tuning up.

The place was only partly filled. When Kay remarked about this, Red replied that the queer happenings in the neighborhood were keeping summer visitors away.

“It’s a shame,” said Kay. “This is a beautiful place, and the real estate people deserve to succeed.”

Red Greene swung Kay out onto the dance floor. Before they had gone halfway around the room, a hand touched Red’s shoulder and a voice familiar to Kay said:

“Sorry, but this part of the dance is mine. You don’t mind, do you?”

“Why, Ronnie Earle,” Kay cried, staring at the lad who had just cut in. “How did you get here—and when?”

“By bus—and about two hours ago,” rejoined the newcomer. “Your mother told me you were up here and I decided that a change of air was just the thing I needed. So here I am at Lake House for the week-end. I hope you don’t mind.”

“Well,” said Red, feeling somewhat ignored, “I guess I’ll toddle along, since you two are acquainted——”

After an introduction the two lads shook hands, but it was evident from the first that they were destined not to be the best of friends. However, they murmured something polite. Then Red made off in the throng, promising to see Kay later.

As for Kay, the unexpected appearance of Ronald Earle at Lost Lake was a genuinely pleasant surprise. The two had grown up together in Brantwood, had attended the same high school, and were almost always seen at neighborhood dances and parties in each other’s company.

“Found any mysteries since you came up here?” Ronnie teased, when the dance was finished.

“Plenty,” his partner replied.

“Honestly? I was only fooling. Do you mean that?”

“Yes, I do,” said Kay.

Then she told about the strange woman, the bookstore theft, the “crazy” man, and finally about the strange echo of “your Kate—rise ten”.

“Whew!” whistled the lad. “I should say you had found plenty of mysteries. Any connection between them all?”

“I’d like to think so,” responded Kay. “But at present there isn’t a thing which puts them together. Oh, I forgot to tell you about old Mr.——”

At this moment a “lucky number” dance was announced, and a request made that there be no change of partners. Ronald claimed Kay, whirling her out on the floor as soon as the music began.

As each couple passed the musicians’ platform, they were given a slip of paper upon which was printed a number. At the end of the dance the two holding the lucky number, as read out by the master of ceremonies, were to receive prizes. Naturally, all were eager to be the fortunate pair, and each scrap of paper was examined eagerly as it was handed out.

“Nine hundred and thirty,” read Kay from her slip of paper, frowning as she recalled that she had seen that same number elsewhere very recently.

Now she had it! It was the one scrawled on the torn bit of paper which she, Kay, had picked up on the far side of No Man’s Ridge. An interesting coincidence, nothing more, she decided. Still, it *was* rather strange.

Suddenly the music stopped, and from the raised platform the master of ceremonies held up a warning hand.

“The winning number,” he announced as the hum and chatter died down, “is—nine hundred and thirty. Will the lucky couple please step forward?”

Amid a burst of applause, and a little good-natured envy from the less fortunate couples, Kay and Ronnie walked up to receive the prizes—a small model boat for Ronnie, and for Kay a miniature log cabin filled with candy, with “Welcome to Lost Lake” printed over the doorway.

“Solo! Give us a solo dance!” came from all parts of the room.

Although Kay hung back, Ronald drew her into the cleared space that had been made for them, and motioned to the orchestra leader.

“A waltz, please,” he said. “Something slow and dreamy.” Then, turning to Kay, he said, “We’ll give them that thing we did at our class entertainment.”

For a moment Kay was embarrassed. Then the lazy, lovely rhythm of the music caught her up. Ronald was a perfect partner, and together the two gave a charming performance. The music increased in tempo, the orchestra flashed into a brilliant finale, and with a whirl of skirts and a curtsey almost to the floor, the solo dance came to a triumphant end. At once there was an enthusiastic outburst of clapping.

“No encores, please,” begged Kay.

Catching up her wrap from the back of a chair, Ronnie led Kay out onto the veranda. Instantly their attention was directed to a strange sight in the sky. They stopped short, astounded at what they saw.

“Ronnie!” cried Kay. “What can it be?”

At some distance from Lake House, and in the general direction of Faraway Valley, the sky was illuminated by strange, murky lights. From time to time this weird illumination would be streaked across by vivid flashes of lightning.

“Lightning without thunder and without rain,” murmured Kay. “Ronnie,” she added, drawing her pretty cloak more closely about her shoulders, “you can see for yourself that there’s something awfully queer about this place. All sorts of odd things have been happening, and now—this!” with a wave of her hand toward the mysterious illumination. “What do you make of it?”

“Why, I don’t know,” said Ronnie slowly. “Couldn’t be fireworks, could it?”

Kay shook her head.

“Much too steady for fireworks, I should say. And the lightning—well, that was never made by rockets.”

“You spoke of other strange things happening here at Lost Lake,” the lad reminded her. “We were interrupted before. Shall we take a walk in the hotel grounds while you tell me about them?”

Kay agreed, and the two wandered down to the lake. She then recounted her meeting with old Mr. Nelson, and what he had told about a buried treasure in Faraway Valley.

“It all sounds pretty mysterious,” Ronald agreed. “I think I’ll have to go over to this Faraway Valley myself sometime and have a look around.”

“I knew I could count on you to be interested,” said Kay gratefully, adding, “Now we’d better be getting back to the dance. There’s Betty on the porch looking for us.”

From her chums and others of the young people who had spent some time at Lost Lake, Kay learned that the illumination of the sky and the flashing lights over Faraway Valley were no novelty. They had been seen, it was said, on several previous occasions.

Although many were exceedingly curious and several had suggested investigating the strange phenomena, none had, as yet, sufficient courage to enter that bleak, forbidding place. In fact, the natives were too frightened to try, and the summer people had not bothered.

The real estate men were the ones most concerned, but had done nothing as yet—they were too busy trying to rent their cottages and fill their hotel rooms. However, they were finding it more and more difficult to do so, as the news was spreading that Lost Lake was a good place from which to stay away.

Long after the dance was over and Kay and her chums were in bed, they lay awake, talking over the strange illumination they had witnessed, and making eager plans for the immediate future.

“Tomorrow, if Mother will consent, we’ll pack up a lunch and go over to No Man’s Ridge,” were Betty’s last words before she drifted off to sleep.

“And I’d like to visit Faraway Valley soon,” said Kay drowsily. “I’m going to, if I have to go there alone. Goodnight, Wilma.”

“Goodnight,” drifted back from the other room. “Pleasant dreams.”

How long they had been asleep the chums afterwards could not have said; but suddenly they were rudely awakened by a violent shaking of the earth. A fearful, sharp sound was rocketed back from the mountainside in a thunderous echo.

Boom! Boom!! Boom!!!

Kay leaped to her feet, quivering with excitement. The twins were up immediately.

“It’s another earthquake!” shrieked Wilma.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CRUEL TRAP

KAY pulled a robe about her, thrust her feet into slippers, and rushed out of the house, Betty and Wilma hard on her heels. The latter was whimpering with shock and fright.

“It’s an earthquake!” she cried again and again. “Like the one that buried Faraway Valley! Did you feel the earth shake? Oh, dear, what shall we do! We shall all be buried alive!”

From the neighboring cottages people were pouring out into the open. They gathered in agitated groups, staring up at the lowering bulk of the mountain, and searching the sky in fear of some new and frightful phenomenon.

With the legend of the destruction of Faraway Valley in mind, some were inclined to share Wilma’s view that the locality had been visited by a second—though slight—earthquake. Others, among them Mr. Worth, were of the opinion that the detonation which had stricken the earth and sent the echoes thundering down from the mountainside had been caused by an explosion at some distance.

“We’ll probably get full reports in the morning,” he added. “Meanwhile, you girls had better go back to bed. It won’t help matters any for you to catch cold.”

The girls retired obediently enough, but there was no sleep for them the rest of that night. They lay awake until dawn, excitedly discussing this latest and most startling of all the odd phenomena which they had encountered at Lost Lake.

Morning brought no solution of the mystery, and the inhabitants of Lost Lake were forced to fall back on their own conclusions as to the origin of their midnight fright.

For several days thereafter Mrs. Worth kept her young charges close to Camp Worthy. The girls chafed at the restraint, but spent the time to good effect, nevertheless, practicing fancy diving and swimming strokes for a contest that was soon to take place from the Lake House dock.

One morning the cottage telephone rang loudly. Betty answered, and learned it was a long distance call for “Mees Tracey.”

“Hello,” said Kay, raising her voice into the mouthpiece.

“Thees is Herr Entveg speaking,” came the rejoinder. “Your mutter gave me your number. Haf you found my thief yet?”

“I’m sorry,” returned the young sleuth, “but I’ve not been able to locate her definitely. But I have a clue!”

“Yah? Vell, don’t forget me,” said the old book dealer. “I vant my pages back, und her in jail.”

“All right,” shouted Kay. “I’ll do my best, Herr Entveg. Good-bye.”

Kay determined then and there to set out again very soon to make inquiry in the neighborhood for the foreign woman. Meanwhile, she had another mystery to solve, and only a few minutes before Mrs. Worth had given Kay and her chums permission to take a picnic lunch over to No Man’s Ridge.

The girls went in one of the Worth canoes, and after a pleasant paddle reached the opposite shore of the lake.

“Here we are,” said Kay, as the bow of the craft ground into the bank. “Hop out, and we’ll make all fast. Then ho for No Man’s Ridge!”

“And if we can solve it we’re better than I think we are,” said Betty, jumping lightly ashore.

Talking and chatting of what lay before them, the girls reached the crest of No Man’s Ridge. Then their spirits suddenly received a jolt as they recollected what had happened to them on almost that identical spot such a short time before.

They began to descend warily, dreading lest at any moment they might be halted by that eerie warning of trouble ahead. Nothing happened, however, and they went on undisturbed until they reached the foot of the ridge.

As they stopped to look about them and listen, their nerves keyed up, they were startled by a sound near them—a pitiful whimper followed by a long-drawn-out and dismal moan.

Wilma clutched Kay and started to draw her away.

“More ghosts!” she whispered fearfully. “Oh, Kay, let’s go back! I don’t like this!”

But Kay shook herself free and plunged into the woods, Wilma and Betty reluctantly following.

The moan came again, guiding them. A moment later Kay pushed aside a screen of vines. As she saw what lay hidden behind them she stopped short.

“Girls, look here!” she cried. “It’s a dog caught in a trap! Oh, you poor old boy! Let me see if I can do something to help you!”

The animal, desperate with fright and pain, its hind foot clamped by a cruel steel trap, looked up entreatingly as Kay knelt beside it, and tried pathetically to lick her hand with its hot tongue.

“Watch out! It may bite you!” warned Wilma, as Kay picked up a heavy pointed stick and tried to force it between the cruel jaws of the trap.

As she did so, she noticed a paper tied to the dog’s collar. On the sheet a number was printed in black figures that stared up at Kay challengingly.

“930!” she read wonderingly. “That same number again! It must mean something this time—something important! And I must find out what that something is!”

The trap was a heavy one, and sullenly resisted any attempt to pry it open. However, the girls persisted, and finally succeeded in getting the ugly teeth far enough apart to permit the animal to draw its mangled foot away. The dog struggled to an upright position, then in a moment disappeared among the underbrush.

“Follow him!” directed Kay, breathing quickly. “We mustn’t let him get away!”

But the dog had entered the thickest of the underbrush, and was nowhere to be seen by the time the girls had forced their way through the tangled mass of vines and bushes. The trail was comparatively easy to pick up, however, for the injured animal had left a track of blood behind it.

The path ended extremely abruptly at the edge of a brook. The girls could see plainly enough where the little beast had plunged into the water, yet there was nothing to indicate where it had emerged. Patiently Kay scouted up and down the bank, directing Wilma and Betty where they should look for the telltale red drops which had guided them thus far.

“It’s no use,” said Kay at last. “The cold water must have checked the bleeding, or else the dog waded up the brook for a long distance before coming out on the bank. If it had deliberately tried to put us off the trail, it couldn’t have done better,” she added, vexed.

They had definitely given up the chase and were turning back along the devious route by which they had come, when Betty caught sight of a small cabin half hidden in the woods.

“Maybe that’s where the mongrel has run to,” she suggested. “It won’t do any harm to have a look, anyway.”

Kay responded to the suggestion eagerly, but Wilma hung back.

“I’m hungry,” she complained, “and I’ve been carrying this lunch basket so long my arm aches. When do we eat?”

“Any minute now,” said Kay cheerfully. “Only let’s have a look at this secluded shack first.”

It was a lonely enough place, that little unpainted building set down in the heart of the wilderness. Underbrush pressed close against the crumbling front step, while trees mingled their branches over the sagging roof. Vines were interlaced on its little porch, so that nothing of the interior was visible. Betty shuddered and drew back.

“I don’t like this place. Do come away, Kay! There’s something sinister about it.”

At these words Wilma quoted dismally:

“ ‘If I must die
O let it be
Away from man’s hypocrisy—
Upon some lonely hill where sky
Dips down to close the dying eye
While clouds of mist keep rolling by!’ ”

“Well, I must say that’s cheerful!” said Kay.

She leaned down and tried the knob of the door. To her surprise it turned easily and swung inward on creaking hinges. Another moment, and the three girls were inside.

The cabin appeared to consist of one large room. At the rear was a shed fairly well stocked with firewood.

Two cots stood in one corner. In the center was a plain pine table and some rude chairs. The fireplace, grimy with age and neglect, looked as if it would smoke vilely if a fire were made in it. The only other object of interest was a shelf on which were ranged several tins of canned food.

“Ugh, it’s a horrid place,” shuddered Betty. “You know now that no one lives here, Kay,” she added. “Please let’s go.”

“It’s plain that no one has stayed here for ages,” added Wilma. “It’s creepy, Kay. Besides, I want to eat.”

Kay was about to yield to their entreaties when she saw something that neither of her companions had noticed—that one of the cans on the shelf had been opened only recently.

Kay took it down and touched the inside with her finger. She had not been mistaken; the receptacle had been emptied so recently that the inside

still retained its moisture!

“Some one has been here,” she said thoughtfully. “Some one has been here and eaten food out of a can! Now, I wonder——”

In the act of replacing the tin on the shelf, Kay caught sight of something white that had slipped down between it and the wall.

She tugged experimentally at the object, and brought forth something that looked like a crumpled slip of paper. Frowning thoughtfully, she took her find over to a dirty-paned window and carefully smoothed out the creases.

“What is it?” asked Betty curiously.

“Oh girls, look!” cried Kay. “This is wonderful!”

CHAPTER IX

KAY SPIES

“WHAT’S so wonderful about that crumpled thing?” asked Wilma. “It looks like a piece of dirty paper to me,” she added.

“It’s a page from a book,” said Kay slowly.

“It is written in a foreign language,” Betty discovered, looking over her chum’s shoulder.

“That’s just the point!” cried Kay excitedly. “I know where I have seen other pages just like this one! Do you notice of what a heavy, imported paper it is made? It has a deckle-edge, too, and the print is small and closely spaced. It is just like those in Herr Entveg’s book from which certain papers were stolen!”

“Oh, Kay, are you sure?” cried Betty.

“Positive,” she returned, smoothing out the leaf. “The same quality of deckle-edged paper—but wait!” she added, taking a restless turn about the room. “I think I have a surer way of identifying it. You see,” she explained excitedly, “I remember looking at the numbers of the missing pages when Herr Entveg showed me the book. I only wish I could bring them to mind now! Oh, dear, I should have made a note of them at the time. Why didn’t I do it?”

Kay paced restlessly about the room for a few moments. Then she paused, snapped her fingers, and cried:

“Now I remember! Herr Entveg opened the book at page 183. The five pages after that were torn out——”

Again she went to the window, and held the crumpled leaf to the light. The number at the top was clearly distinguishable. Kay read it aloud in triumph.

“One hundred and eighty-six! Girls, that practically proves it! This must be a missing page from Herr Entveg’s book—the volume which was worth five hundred dollars, the one which had the chapter on echoes——”

As she uttered the word “echoes,” Kay stopped abruptly and stared at the girls.

“Echoes!” she repeated slowly. “‘Echoes from a mountain’— Oh, girls, don’t you see how it all hooks up?”

“You mean Red Greene’s telling us of noticing echoes at No Man’s Ridge, and then our hearing the voice and the weird wailing afterward—could they have been echoes, too?” asked Betty.

“Well, not the latter necessarily,” said Kay in great excitement. “But surely the first one was—the one the boys heard. But it does prove that somebody—or bodies—is mighty interested in echoes.

“And now we find this page torn from a certain section of a book. It can’t be just chance that all these mysterious happenings revolve about an echo——”

“My head’s spinning like a top,” complained Wilma. “I admit it’s funny that all these strange things appear to be connected with some echo or other,” she added argumentatively, “but I don’t see how that fact helps to explain the queer things that have been going on at Lost Lake.”

“Neither do I yet—but I will,” said Kay confidently. “One thing seems reasonably certain, and that is that an echo *is* at the heart of this mystery. When we have found out about that, I think we shall have solved several mysteries!”

Then Wilma burst into poetry.

“‘Lost Echo sits amid the voiceless mountains,
And feeds her grief.’”

After further argument it was decided that the wisest course to pursue just then would be to remain in the vicinity of the cabin in the hope that it would be revisited during the afternoon by those who had left behind them the crumpled, telltale page from Herr Entveg’s expensive old book.

“What would you do, Kay,” asked Betty, “if the thief should come?”

“You couldn’t arrest her,” put in Wilma, “and there’s not a policeman within miles.”

“At least I’ll not lose a valuable opportunity, if it presents itself, to do something,” said Kay decidedly.

The girls chose a small grove from which they could see the cabin, yet would themselves be screened from view. There they sat down to enjoy the hamper of good things which Mrs. Worth had packed for them that morning.

“Um—this *is* nice!” cried Betty, biting hungrily into a chicken sandwich. “I was half starved!”

Suddenly Wilma gave a cry and jumped to her feet, almost upsetting the lunch basket.

“Do you see some one spying on us?” exclaimed her twin excitedly.

“Oh,” Wilma moaned. “I’m stung! Something bit me!”

“That’s what you get for reciting poetry,” retorted Betty, unmoved. “If I were a bee I’d sting you, too!”

“It wasn’t a bee,” said Wilma, tears of pain in her eyes. “It was a hornet, I think. Oh, look! There’s another—and another! There must be a nest around here!”

The girls “‘stayed not on the order of their going, but went at once,’” as Wilma afterward remarked. They left the hornets in undisturbed possession of their retreat and retired even deeper into the woods, where they could keep an eye on the cabin.

Kay applied a compress of mud and moss to the sting on Wilma’s throat. When this was done, the chums settled down once more to finish their interrupted meal, but presently were disturbed again—not by hornets this time, but by something far more difficult for them to understand.

“Echoes again!” cried Kay, jumping to her feet. “Listen, girls!”

“Oh, dear, this is awful—” began Betty, when she was suddenly interrupted by the furious barking of a dog very near them.

“It’s that poor old mongrel again,” cried Kay, darting through the brush. The next moment she called wonderingly:

“The slip of paper is gone from its collar, and the injured paw has been bandaged. Now, I should like to know who is responsible for that!”

“Kay, some one is coming!” said Betty suddenly. “We’d better hide!”

The girls hurriedly secreted themselves behind trees, thankful that the dog did not try to follow them, and thereby betray their whereabouts. As the voices and the sound of twigs breaking underfoot steadily grew nearer, Kay peered around the corner of the massive trunk. Her breath came fast; her nerves tingled.

Suddenly into the tangle of weeds and shrubs before the cabin there emerged a man and a woman. Kay blinked, passed a hand before her eyes, and looked again. She had not been mistaken.

One of this strangely-assorted couple was, without doubt, the fair-haired foreign woman for whom Kay was looking. The other was—and this was what the girl found so hard to believe—none other than Mr. Nelson, the kindly-eyed, voluble old gentleman to whom Mr. Worth had given a ride, the

stranger who had been on his way to locate a buried treasure in Faraway Valley.

A more decidedly contrasting pair it was impossible to imagine. How they had come together, and what they had in common, was a mystery—one which Kay determined to solve as soon as possible.

She saw old Mr. Nelson disappear into the cabin. After a moment's delay, the woman followed him. Silently Kay slipped from behind the tree, with the intention of getting nearer to the shack to learn what she could about the strange companions.

“Don't go in!” whispered Wilma, who was following close behind.

“I don't intend to,” replied Kay in a hushed voice. “At least not yet,” she added. Then she held up a warning hand. “Listen! Some one else is coming!”

CHAPTER X

SECRETS

THE girls darted behind the trees again just in the nick of time. They had barely reached their hiding place when a man came striding toward the shack; not an old man this time, but one in the prime of life. He was rather an attractive looking person, broad-shouldered and well set up, yet with the slight forward thrust of the head and the peering, near-sighted eyes of one who is accustomed to spend much of his time over books.

The newcomer reached the cabin in a few long strides, and disappeared within.

“Is he the man you saw the other day?” asked Wilma. “The one that the guard at Mr. Miller’s plant said was crazy?”

“No,” replied Kay. “I admit I half expected him to be.”

“Do you know who this is?” inquired Betty.

“Never saw him before,” Kay responded.

The girls stole forward, keeping well hidden behind the many trees. Suddenly from within the cabin things began to happen rather rapidly. Voices were upraised in angry dispute, and in another moment old Mr. Nelson burst from the front door, muttering to himself.

“Oh, come back! Come back!” the woman began to plead, running after him. “Do not hurry away in anger, Mr. Nelson. Please come back and let us talk this over. You vill do thees for me, vill you not?”

The old gentleman continued on his way, not even turning his head. The woman meanwhile cried distractedly. Then she turned to address the younger man who had appeared on the little porch.

“You mus’ not let him go! You mus’ bring him back! He vill tell all your secret—not so? Oh, John, if you luff me, you vill go after him, you vill bring him back.”

“Hilda, will you be quiet!” cried the man whom she had addressed as John. “I am tired of your interference. I know what I am doing. If you don’t stop it,” he added in a louder voice, “I’ll do something desperate!”

“Oh, so you frighten me with that!” cried the woman furiously. “You think you are the only one who can threaten, ees it not so?”

“Vell then, I vill tell you something. You are *not* the only one who can threaten! *I* know things, too, more than you theenk, you foolish John——”

“Hush, Hilda!” the man’s voice interrupted. “Keep quiet, I say! I will not listen to you!”

“Oh yes, you vill listen to me, my John. An’ maybe other people vill listen, too, when I tell them what I know and suspect about those people you work for. Yes? Ees it not so?”

“I’ve had enough of this!” cried the man angrily. He strode to the step and dashed away. “I’m leaving, Hilda, and—I won’t come back!”

From the place where the girls were crouching, they could hear the sound of retreating footsteps. The woman had turned back into the cabin. There was breathless silence within for a few minutes; then the sound of heartbroken weeping.

“You wait here,” Kay whispered to the twins. “I’m going into the shack!”

“But what if that man should come back!” protested Wilma.

“I’ll chance it,” said Kay. “Anyway, I must have a talk with Hilda.”

Kay made no secret of her approach to the house; it would be just as well, she told herself, if the woman had a moment in which to compose herself and prepare for the intrusion. At the door she paused and knocked gently.

“May I come in?” she asked.

The foreigner had started up, a wet handkerchief pressed to her lips.

“Who are you?” she cried. “What do you vant?”

“Perhaps I should introduce myself,” said Kay with a smile. “I believe we met one time in Carmont—at Simpson’s Department Store, to be exact.”

“Yes, I remember,” said the woman slowly, without altering the look of suspicion on her face. “You are that girl at the next desk—yes. But what do you do here—at Lost Lake?”

“I’m visiting some friends named Worth. Perhaps you know them?”

“No,” the woman said, brushing the question aside as being unimportant. “How long have you been here, close to this cabin?” she added feverishly. “Ees it possible you have heard what goes on here—the foolish things I have said? They have not a word of truth in them, I swear it!”

Kay thought of her promise to the book dealer to ensnare the thief of his valuable book, so she decided to lead up to what might prove to be a conviction.

“I think you are very unhappy,” the girl said gently. “And I feel very sorry for you. Won’t you let me help you?”

There was now genuine sympathy in Kay’s tone. She was surprised at the uprush of compassion she felt for this red-eyed, distracted person.

“Help me?” repeated the woman, holding out her hands despairingly, the tears welling to her eyes again. “I fear nobody can help me. But you are right when you say that I am un’appy. Oh, I am very, very un’appy, and I do not know where to turn. And John, as you have seen, has lef’ me an’ vill not return. Oh, I am so desolate!”

Gradually, and with infinite tact, Kay drew from the unhappy Hilda something of her sad story.

John Fort and Hilda Arno, it seemed, had been engaged to be married for over a year. Up to a short time ago, Kay gathered from Hilda’s broken confidences, the engagement had been an exceedingly happy one, the lovers even going so far as to plan their marriage in the fall.

“Then, suddenly, my John he become so strange, so diff’rent,” Hilda continued with a tragic gesture. “Sometimes I feel I do not know him—he is like a stranger to me. He even has tried to jilt me—what you call break our engagement. An’ it is not because he does not love me any more. It is because he is—what you say—so bound up in business that he thinks of nothing else.”

“Then why is he way out here in the woods?” asked Kay.

The woman’s eyes were suddenly guarded as they met Kay’s look.

“It ees summer. My John, he likes the outdoor life. He must rest, but he must not worry. He is no business man. He is a scientist. Any one can—what you call—take him in. Yes, and that is why, you see, I mus’ look after him. He is not my old John, oh no, no. He is quite some diff’rent person.”

Now, as Hilda Arno drifted into unhappy reflections about her personal problems, Kay recalled her intention of questioning the woman on the subject of the missing pages from Herr Entveg’s book.

It was impossible to charge Hilda openly with theft, so Kay put her questions as guardedly as she could, working around the subject adroitly, hoping all the time that the woman might be inveigled into a confession that would lead eventually to an explanation of her connection with the missing pages.

That there was a definite relation Kay no longer doubted. Hilda Arno being in the cabin where the leaf had been found was almost indisputable evidence that she was linked with the theft.

However, Kay finally concluded that either all her own premises were wrong, or else Hilda Arno was an extraordinarily clever actress. The woman avoided adroitly all the pitfalls Kay set for her, having made not a single admission damaging to herself.

Kay next turned to the subject of Mr. Nelson, and his mysterious connection with Hilda Arno.

“Oh, he is just an old man I met one day when I was trying to find my John,” answered Hilda carelessly. “He told me John is camping in this cabin—an’ it is a dirty, horrid place, I think,” with a shuddering look about, “and so he brought me here to find my lover. But John was not so very glad to see me, I am afraid,” she added sadly.

“Are you going to stay here now?” asked Kay.

The woman’s eyes opened wide.

“Me? No—oh, I am surprise you should think such a theeng,” said Hilda, apparently very much shocked by the suggestion. “I shall go away at once, of course, an’ try to persuade John that he go away, also.”

The last few words were drowned by a terrifying shriek from the woods outside.

“Help! Help!”

Hilda Arno jumped to her feet in fright. Kay rushed to the door to see who was in such grave danger.

CHAPTER XI

PLANS FOR A BROADCAST

OUTSIDE the cabin all was apparently peaceful. Kay looked about her anxiously, but could see nothing to indicate the source of the wild scream that had so frightened her and Hilda Arno.

Suddenly, from behind a tree, she saw an arm beckon to her. Kay hurried forward, and as she did so the hand belonging to the arm reached for her and drew her back into the shelter of the trees. Kay found herself face to face with the twins.

“That man John is coming again,” Betty whispered urgently. “We saw him and I shrieked to warn you.”

“Oh, so it was you who screamed!” cried Kay.

“I told you I saw that man coming back,” said Betty impatiently. “I wanted to frighten him away so he wouldn’t catch you in the cabin.”

“I half wish he had,” returned Kay thoughtfully. “I might have enjoyed a short conversation with Mr. John Fort.”

“I wish you’d drop this detective stuff and come on home,” complained Betty.

“What!” objected Kay. “And not talk to that woman again!”

As John Fort was nowhere in sight, apparently having been warned away by the screaming, Kay insisted upon returning to the cabin to speak again to Hilda Arno. A surprise awaited her, however; the foreigner had vanished!

Vexed, Kay called Hilda Arno’s name, but there was no response. She searched around to see if the woman were hiding. No. The stranger had left by a rear door, no doubt, and disappeared completely.

“Don’t be downcast, Kay,” said Wilma, as her chum joined the Worths. “We’ll find her again.”

“I’m very sorry if I spoiled your plans by screaming,” apologized Betty. “But I was so afraid something dreadful might happen to you.”

“That’s all right,” smiled Kay. “I appreciate your thought.”

“I’m tired,” complained Wilma. “Let’s get back to camp.”

The twins had had their fill of adventure for the time being. As the afternoon was far advanced and the chances of gathering any further

information hopeless, they had little trouble in persuading Kay to start for home.

Although somewhat disappointed about the day's events, Kay felt nevertheless that she had stumbled upon clues that might be of inestimable help to her. The feel of the crumpled, deckle-edged page from Herr Entveg's book gave her a sense of power, and strengthened her determination to follow her investigations through to a successful conclusion.

"I was getting worried about you girls," greeted Mrs. Worth, as the three wearily climbed the steps to the porch of the cottage. "Such queer things can happen. You didn't go near Faraway Valley, did you?"

"Oh, no," they replied in chorus, refraining, however, from saying anything further for the present.

A dip in the lake, a half hour's rest, and an excellent meal put renewed vigor into Kay and her chums, so that when callers arrived in the early evening the girls were full of spirit.

"Oh, how do you do, Mr. Conklin?" greeted Kay. "And Mrs. Conklin, I'm glad to see you. Hello, Elise."

"We are driving around the lake to call on some of the summer people to find out if they have any suggestions for improvements," explained Mr. Conklin. "Are you enjoying your stay, Mrs. Worth?"

"Yes, in general," replied the twins' mother, "but I must admit I don't like some of the queer things which have been going on."

"It is most unfortunate," sighed Mrs. Conklin. "And it has made a big difference in the rental of the cottages this year. The hotel is feeling it, too. I'm glad Mr. Conklin hasn't as much money tied up in this development as have some of the men in the real estate company."

"It's pretty hard on several of them," agreed her husband.

"Bill Tracey tells me Kay is a good detective," put in Elise with a smile. "Maybe she can help you out, Dad."

"Is that so?" asked her father. "Well, Kay, you would win the everlasting thanks of many people if you could find what causes the strange happenings around here."

"Kay has already—" Betty began, but a warning look from her chum made her gulp and finish, "has already said she wishes she could."

At this moment Red Greene walked up the porch steps, saying:

"I hope I'm not intruding." Then, after introductions were over, he went on, "I came to find out if the girls wouldn't help me put on a program over the air."

“You mean broadcast?” inquired Kay. “Where? How?”

“We boys are amateur broadcasters,” expounded the lad. “We belong to a club—members all over the country—and we take turns putting on programs at two A.M.”

“How exciting!” exclaimed Wilma. Then she quoted:

“ ‘And the night shall be filled with music,
And the cares that infest the day
Shall fold their tents like the Arabs,
And as silently steal away.’ ”

“What could we do?” inquired Betty.

“You girls sing duets beautifully,” announced Kay.

“And you, Miss Ventriloquist, can throw your voice anywhere!” said Betty.

“Yes,” agreed Red Greene. “And with my sending set you can throw it thousands of miles.”

During the laugh which followed Kay whispered something to the boy, and after a few moments he remarked:

“Miss Conklin, I understand you are an accomplished elocutionist. I wonder if you—if you——”

“If I would be on your program?” the young woman finished, smiling at the lad’s embarrassment. “Why, yes, I’d be glad to. And how would it be if we mentioned Lost Lake?”

“Of course,” said Red eagerly. “We’ll tell what a grand place it is—’cause it is.”

Mr. Conklin caught up the lad’s enthusiasm, and in no time the young people had gone over to the boys’ cottage, and were beginning a rehearsal. Tubby was to play his ukulele and sing a cowboy song.

“But I’m no crooner,” he insisted.

Cracker MacCloud was busy tinkering with a sending set. The girls were fascinated by the ingenious contrivance, and listened with interest as the lanky youth went into technical discussions of wave lengths, interference, and similar subjects.

“We’ve had a lot of trouble with interference,” the young technician declared. “More than we had last summer. Seems as if someone else around here must be experimenting with sending. I haven’t been able to locate him,

though. Sometimes it's almost impossible to get a message through clearly, or to hear anything plainly on our receiving set."

Kay was reminded of some remarks of Mr. Miller of the Scientific Instrument Company about the delights of radio. She knew that; now she was learning that it also could be quite the opposite.

"I wonder," she reflected, "if the interference could come from Faraway Valley. Everyone says that place is deserted, yet——"

"We'll put on the show promptly at two A.M. tomorrow morning," announced Cracker. "By having it at that time, we'll avoid interference. We'll be glad to have you come too, Mrs. Worth," he added gallantly.

"I'd be delighted to accept," said the twins' mother, laughing. "I wouldn't miss the fun for anything."

All next day the girls practiced for the amateur broadcast, pausing only for meals, a brief swim, and a canter. At dinner time a car rolled up the wagon road at the back of Camp Worthy. The familiar honk of a horn brought Kay racing from the house.

"Oh, Cousin Bill!" she cried to the lone occupant of the car. "I'm so glad to see you! Do tell me all about Brantwood. How is Mother?"

"Splendid! I tried to coax her to come along, but she couldn't do so this time."

Mrs. Worth greeted the new arrival cordially. Afterward, when he and Kay were left alone for a few moments on the cottage porch, they began to talk of personal matters.

"By the way," said Cousin Bill, breaking off abruptly, and staring contemplatively at Kay, "I believe I have interesting news for you."

"Yes?" asked his young relative, suddenly intent. "What do you mean? What news?"

"It's about Herr Entveg," said Bill Tracey. "His book store was broken into the other night."

"Why, Cousin Bill, this is news!" cried Kay excitedly. "Do you mean that the Old Bookshop was robbed? Was the thief caught? Was anything of value taken?"

"You have a way of firing half a dozen questions at once," complained the young lawyer, settling himself more comfortably in the deep chair. "The shop was broken into, all right, but Herr Entveg had had a burglar alarm installed so that the thief didn't get a thing."

"Oh!" said Kay, and the exclamation had a disappointed ring. "Then there was nothing to show what the person was after?"

“Nothing conclusive, I suppose,” said Cousin Bill soberly. “However, I do recall hearing that one of the books—a very valuable scientific volume written in a foreign language—was found on the floor near the door of the shop where the would-be robber had evidently dropped it in his hurry to escape.”

“Um-m!” mused Kay, relaxing and staring out at the shadowy lake. “I suppose it hasn’t occurred to you, Cousin Bill, that the thief might have been—a woman?”

“Eh?” said Bill Tracey, staring at her. “What’s that?”

“A woman named Hilda Arno—a fair-haired European woman with a passion for foreign scientific books,” nodded Kay, pursuing her line of reasoning. “Still, on second thought I cannot see how it could have been Hilda who tried to rob Herr Entveg’s shop, for at the time of the attempted theft she was no doubt here at Lost Lake, looking for her missing friend John. Of course,” she added thoughtfully, “she might have made a flying trip to Carmont for that purpose—or she might possibly have an accomplice.”

“If I had the slightest idea what you were talking about, I might join in the conversation,” complained Cousin Bill. “Who is Hilda Arno, and this person you speak of as ‘her John’?”

“I’ll tell you—if you are not in too much of a hurry.”

The young lawyer took out his watch, and found he had a full hour before he would need to start for the cottage of Elise Conklin, on whom he confessed he was about to call.

“Elise is coming over here at two A.M.,” Kay informed Cousin Bill with a twinkle in her eye.

After a bit of teasing she gave the facts, ending with, “Bring her over in your car and enjoy the broadcast yourself. I hope there won’t be any interference. That’s just one of the many strange happenings around this place.”

“Let’s hear them,” proposed the young man.

“The queerest of all are the echoes. Some of them we girls heard one day, but one which the boys heard distinctly repeated over and over again was ‘your Kate—rise ten’.”

“Probably just someone camping in the woods, telling a friend his wife needn’t get up until ten o’clock.”

“Cousin Bill!” cried Kay. “Nobody would say such a thing over and over! I’m sure there’s something important connected with those words, and I intend to find out what they mean. And oh, just a minute——”

The girl darted into the cottage and returned a few moments later.

“Look!” she cried proudly. “One of the missing pages from Herr Entveg’s book!”

“Wonderful!” complimented her cousin, and after hearing her story about her discovery of it, added, “Don’t you want me to give it to the old gentleman tomorrow?”

“No,” Kay replied. “I have a hunch the rest of the pages can be found. This one won’t do any good. I’m hoping to locate the other four and return all of them at the same time. Anyway, I need this one to compare the rest with.”

“Good logic, Little Detective,” said the lawyer. “I’m almost tempted to take you with me tomorrow for an interview with some people a few miles from here. You’d be sure to get information of importance out of them.”

“May I know something about it?” asked Kay.

“Of course it’s a professional secret,” Cousin Bill responded, “but I can tell you a little. You recall Mr. Miller’s visit to our house. He wanted me to look into a matter of certain inventions being copied. Someone around the plant knew more than he should, and evidently told some secrets.”

Instantly Kay was alert.

“I’ll bet I know who it was,” she said.

“Now this time I can’t believe you,” laughed Cousin Bill. “That’s going a bit too far.”

“Nevertheless,” replied the girl with a faraway look in her eyes, “I think I know. A man was at the gate of the Instrument Company, trying to get inside the day Mother and I went there. He was very threatening. I didn’t like his looks.”

At these remarks her relative stopped smiling and began to ask serious questions.

“There might be something in what you say, at that. Can you describe this person?”

Kay did so, and then suddenly, as an idea popped into her mind, made a strange bargain with her Cousin Bill.

“If you’ll come up again very soon and do me a favor, I’ll tell you a secret of great importance.”

“H’m,” mused the lawyer, “you’re surely a little schemer. Well, let’s hear your proposal.”

“I must get to Faraway Valley, and I can’t do it.”

“Why not?”

“Mrs. Worth won’t hear of my going, even with a crowd of girls and boys.”

“So you want me to take you there?”

“You’ve guessed it. Please.”

“It’s pretty risky.”

“You made a bargain,” Kay coaxed.

“Oh, all right,” came the promise. “I can only hope that nothing happens to us. I’ll be up for the week-end. We’ll go then.”

“Thanks, Cousin Bill. Thanks so much.”

“And now, what’s the big secret?”

CHAPTER XII

THE OLD MAN

“ONE day when the twins and I were out on the lake in the boys’ motorboat,” Kay began, “we drew into a cove which was quite sheltered.”

“Yes, go on,” urged Cousin Bill.

“I saw a man disappear hurriedly into the woods. He was the same one I saw at the gate of Mr. Miller’s place.”

“By Jove, this is important.”

“Very possibly he’s still in this neighborhood,” Kay suggested, “and if so, you may see him when we make our trip—or you may find out where he’s staying.”

“It’s certainly worth a try,” commented Bill Tracey. “And now, Little Detective, I must be off. See you later.”

After Cousin Bill had gone, the girls and Mrs. Worth went over to the cottage next door where another hilarious rehearsal for the amateur broadcast was to take place. Later, they picked up the rugs and danced to the music of the radio.

The hours passed so swiftly that every one was amazed when Cracker suddenly held up his hand and announced, in solemn tones, that it was nearly two o’clock. As he spoke, a car stopped just outside the back door of the cottage. Presently Cousin Bill and Elise Conklin entered, and the hum of voices started again.

“Silence, everyone!” Red cried. “We are about to go on the air!”

With the look of a martyr, Tubby got out his ukulele, while young MacCloud made sure that the receiving set in the adjoining room was tuned right. Mrs. Worth was to be in that place to give her opinion and to signal to Cracker if the performance did not sound well. Cousin Bill joined her.

The girls were surprised to find themselves excited to the point of nervousness. There was something thrilling about “going on the air” at two o’clock in the morning with an unknown audience listening in. They sat down on a group of chairs, each performer ready to arise when it should be his turn to hold forth.

“Everybody ready?” asked Cracker at the sending set. “Got your uke, Tubby? Right! Now begin!”

He turned a dial—and the program was on the air.

“This is Station LLX,” announced Red, stepping up to the microphone. His voice sounded deep and impressive. “We are broadcasting from Lost Lake, the unrivaled summer resort. Not only can one find beauty and rest here, but all kinds of sport. Every wish of those at the hotel or in the cottages has been anticipated. No one could have a better time anywhere——

“We are about to put on a show, folks, by some of the talented summer residents. The first number on our program will be a tenor solo, that old favorite, ‘Home on the Range’, sung by our famous crooner, Tubby Granger!”

Tubby shot Red a wicked look, stepped over to the microphone, and picked up his ukulele. The next moment his voice was lifted in the familiar strains of the cowboys’ lament.

“It’s magic!” whispered Betty. “Nothing less!”

Magic it certainly seemed as the program progressed, and was faithfully echoed back into the receiving set in the other room.

Fired with enthusiasm, the girls and boys performed far more brilliantly than they had at any of the rehearsals. Kay made the biggest hit of all with a ventriloquistic monologue which she remembered from childhood days. After much applause she graciously complied with a mystery skit of her own.

Just as Red was about to “sign off” at the conclusion of the performance, and Mrs. Worth was reporting that the broadcast had been excellent, there came from the receiving set uncanny screeching and crackling sounds.

“Interference again!” cried Cracker, jumping to the dials. “And at this hour of the night—or rather morning! That’s queer now, I should say! Very queer!”

Kay was thinking hard. Something told her the sounds were not all screeching and crackling noises. There was a familiarity about it all beneath the actual “interference.”

“Jumping crickets!” suddenly exclaimed Tubby. “There’s that thunder and lightning again—and I bet there won’t be any rain with it, either.”

The young folks rushed outside. There, in the distance, were the strange lights over Faraway Valley, broken by vivid, spectacular flashes like lightning.

“And not a drop of rain!” said Betty, holding out her hand, palm upward. “I don’t mind telling you,” she added with a shudder, “that all this is getting on my nerves. Enough mystery is enough!”

Wilma murmured:

“It rained and rained,
Till the heavens themselves were drained.”

“I wish it would rain,” said Mrs. Worth, putting an arm about her poetical daughter and anxiously scanning the sky. “These storms without it are uncanny. I can’t help but feel that there is something sinister about Faraway Valley. I am afraid of it—especially after that explosion the other night. The wisest thing would be to leave this place and go back to Brantwood.”

The girls protested loudly, however, and Kay begged earnestly for a few more days in which to try to solve the mystery.

“All right,” Mrs. Worth finally conceded, “but I have made myself responsible for your safety. I can’t permit you to take any unnecessary chances.”

Meanwhile, Kay had approached Cracker MacCloud on the subject of fixing up a portable receiving set which she could carry into Faraway Valley with her, when Cousin Bill should take her.

“I’ll do it all right,” promised the lad. “But the chances are all against your picking up anything in a place like that. You need altitude for good reception, you know.”

“I’ll have to take a chance on that,” said Kay. “It’s very kind of you to promise to fix a set for me.”

The next morning Cousin Bill stopped at Camp Worthy on his way back to town. He had with him an invitation from Elise Conklin, which was warmly seconded by her parents, to join them at the Lake House for dinner the following Saturday. The three girls, as well as Mr. and Mrs. Worth, were invited. Kay went in to consult with the latter before sending an acceptance by the colored stable boy.

“I wish you would,” said Cousin Bill, patting her shoulder affectionately. “I want you and Elise to know each other better.”

After he had gone, the girls set off, at the request of Mrs. Worth, in one of the canoes for a hidden cove where water-lilies abounded. They would bring back many of the sweet, attractive flowers. As they paddled along,

they discussed the lively events of the night before, all of which brought to Kay's mind the subject of strange sounds.

"I've been thinking over what the boys told us about the echoes they heard the night they camped on the ridge," she began. "You recall they said the words sounded like 'your Kate' and 'rise ten'. Well, I've a theory about that and should like to ask your advice."

"Go ahead," said Wilma, lazily dipping her hand into the warm water. "What is it?"

"I remember reading some place that words sent at an angle to an object which reflects them are split, so that a listener not in the direct path of the returning sounds hears only a part.

"If that's true," she went on, warming to her subject, "isn't it logical to believe that the echoes the boys heard, and which were so unintelligible to them, might have been clear enough had our friends been able to supply the missing syllables?"

"I think it very possible," agreed Betty, stroking gently in the bow of the canoe. "It would be interesting to try to work out the completed echo, beginning with 'your Kate' and 'rise ten'."

"'Rise' might be the last syllable of sunrise or enterprise," Wilma suggested. "There are also 'arise' and 'surprise'—and any number of others."

The girls continued the fascinating game of piecing out the fragmentary words in accordance with Kay's new theory, until they reached the outer fringes of the cove of water-lilies. Kay, seated in the stern, brought the canoe around with a long sweep of the paddle.

"What a gorgeous spot," she exclaimed.

"Some rare varieties have been put in here," explained Wilma.

"See those rose-colored ones over there!" pointed out Betty. "Aren't they beautiful?"

"We must gather a lot," said Kay.

As the little craft nosed in among the flowers the girls noticed that they were not the only invaders of this quiet retreat. Close to the shore a rowboat was moored. Its lone occupant was engaged in climbing with much difficulty from the craft to the bank of the lake.

"I believe it's old Mr. Nelson!" said Kay, pushing with long, sweeping strokes through the water-lilies. "Oh, Mr. Nelson," she cried, making a cup of her hands, "wait a minute! Wait—a—minute!"

The old man did not seem to hear her. He continued on along the bank, and the next moment was lost to view in the woods.

The girls drove their canoe to shore, drew the bow up onto the bank so that the light boat could not drift away, and set out in pursuit of the old man whom they had seen with the foreign woman—the man who was trying to locate a buried treasure in Faraway Valley.

The girls could hear his plodding footsteps ahead of them, and as they drew nearer it seemed to them that he broke into a shuffling run.

Suddenly there was a sharp exclamation, the sound of a fall—and silence!

CHAPTER XIII

OFFICERS OF THE LAW

THOROUGHLY alarmed, Kay and her chums rushed forward. A moment later they came upon the old man, lying face downward at the foot of a gully.

“Oh, poor Mr. Nelson, he didn’t see this place. It is almost covered with underbrush! He must have stumbled right into it!”

Kay had her first-aid kit along. From it she took a bit of bandage which she saturated with a pungent liquid, and held it under the nose of the unconscious man. When this had no effect, she again moistened the cloth.

Then Wilma and Betty opened his collar, and rubbed his hands and chest to stimulate the circulation. However, Mr. Nelson still lay motionless, his face white and drawn. He looked so death-like that the girls grew seriously alarmed.

“He’s still breathing, and I can hear his heart beat very faintly,” said Kay. “Yet he looks very ill. The thing to do now is to get him to Camp Worthy as soon as possible.”

“If we could only carry him,” said Betty.

“Let’s try,” suggested Kay, jumping to her feet. “We’re three strong girls and he’s very frail. We should be able to manage it.”

They maneuvered things admirably, but were very tired when they finally emerged from the woods and placed their still-unconscious burden on the bank.

“We’ll have to use his boat,” said Kay quietly. “We can come back for the canoe later.”

With a great deal of scrabbling, pulling and tugging, they managed to get the old man into the bottom of the craft—which was very dirty and damp—and started back across the lake.

Halfway home the *Jolly Roger* overtook the group, threw them a line, and towed them the remaining distance to Camp Worthy. There eager hands relieved Kay and her chums of their burden. Mrs. Worth met the little procession at the door of the cottage, and with words of sympathy led the way into the front room.

“You may place him on the couch,” she said. “Some one had better go for the doctor right away.”

“Red and Tubby said they’d go in the *Jolly Roger*, and pick up our stranded canoe on the way back,” said Kay quietly. “They should be here in fifteen or twenty minutes with aid.”

“You are the greatest girl,” said Mrs. Worth, patting Kay’s hand. “You think of things before any one else does. Well, I guess I’ll run along and heat up some broth,” she added. “When the poor old fellow comes to himself he will need it. He looks as if he hadn’t eaten in days.”

Mrs. Worth was not far wrong in her surmise. When the doctor finally arrived after a time that seemed interminable to the impatient girls, he very bluntly pronounced his new patient a victim of malnutrition.

“In plain English, that means starvation,” he added. “I’d venture at a guess this man hasn’t had a square meal in days. That’s right,” he said, as Mrs. Worth brought in a bowl of steaming chicken broth. “That’s the medicine he needs. Better than pills and tonics.”

When Mr. Nelson had recovered sufficiently to comprehend what had occurred, he seemed very much abashed at what he termed his “weakness.”

“’Tisn’t like me to do such a thing,” he protested. “In all my seventy odd years I don’t recollect ever having so much as a faint spell. I’m sorry,” he added wistfully, “to have made so much trouble.”

The girls assured him that it had been no trouble at all to take care of him, thus making him feel better. Due to their kindness and the effects of the hot soup, the old man was soon his cheerful self again.

In response to Kay’s tactful question, he admitted that he had not been eating “very regular” for some time. He was “camping out” in an empty summer cottage. His meals, the girls gathered, were of the sketchiest kind, taken only when he “happened to think of it.”

“You see, I have so much on my mind I don’t always think of eating,” he explained naïvely.

“Are you still looking for your fortune in Faraway Valley?” asked Kay.

She was sorry she had spoken, for his expression changed instantly, and he looked so unhappy that her heart went out to him in pity.

“I don’t seem to have much luck,” he muttered. “It’s hard for an old man to do anything alone. A nice young fellow at a cabin in the woods promised to help me, but—I don’t know. He hasn’t done much yet.”

“Who is this young man?” Kay asked casually, deciding to try to find out why Mr. Nelson had been with Hilda and John.

The old man shook his head.

“Can’t say as I’ve ever heard his last name, but his first name’s John, and that’s what I call him. He’s a scientist of some kind.”

“Then you didn’t know him before you came up here?” queried the Tracey girl.

“Oh, no. Just met him one day in the woods. He asked me what I was doing, and when I told him, he said he’d help me locate my treasure some time.”

“Does anyone stay at the cabin with him?” was Kay’s next question.

“No. At least, I think not. I saw a woman wandering around near there,” came the reply. “She doesn’t live there, though. In fact, she asked me if I knew of such a place, and I took her there. Another time she came where I’m staying and wanted me to take her to the cabin again. So I did.”

“And what was her name?” she asked eagerly.

Mr. Nelson’s answer was slow in coming.

“John called her Hilda.”

“I see,” reflected Kay.

So part of the foreign woman’s story was true! Kay was delighted to have been able to check up, and wished she might for more of it.

“Where is Hilda now?” she asked.

“I don’t know where she lives,” he responded. “But maybe I can find out for you from John. I’m going to meet him on Saturday.”

“At his cabin?”

“No,” said the old man wearily. “At a place called Sulphur Pond near Faraway Valley.”

Perhaps Kay’s interest in this bit of information was reflected too plainly on her face. At any rate, Mr. Nelson appeared suddenly uneasy and suspicious. He kept silent, asking only to be taken back to the cottage which he called his temporary home.

“As soon as you are strong enough the boys will take you back in their motorboat,” Kay assured him. “We can tie your rowboat to it.”

“It isn’t mine,” said Mr. Nelson rather sheepishly. “It was floating down the water near where I’m staying, so I used it.”

“We’ll try to find the owner,” offered Kay. “Now just lie here and rest, please, and before you go perhaps you will have another bowl of Mrs. Worth’s excellent broth.”

An hour or so later, when the old man embarked on the *Jolly Roger*, there went with him a basket of good things from Mrs. Worth's own larder—a roast chicken rich with dressing; two loaves of bread; a pound of butter; a berry pie, freshly baked, and a jar of home-made cookies.

"That will keep him from want for a little while, anyway," said Betty, as they stood on the dock and waved good-bye to their guest.

"Poor old man," said Kay pityingly. "I wish we could help him find his fortune. Well, who knows? Maybe we will."

As they approached the cottage, the girls became aware of loud voices raised in altercation. In the front room they found Mrs. Worth, looking very indignant. With her were an old man clad in faded overalls and two rather bored-looking village constables.

"I tell you they up an' stole my rowboat," the former was saying as Kay and the twins entered the room. "'Tain't no use to deny it, nuther," he added, turning to the girls. "My eyes is as good as they ever was, and I guess I knows my own rowboat, aswinging at the end of your dock!"

Kay felt inclined to laugh—especially so when Betty took her arm and whispered, "Watch his goatee woggle up and down!"

"This—person," said Mrs. Worth indignantly, "has the effrontery to come into my house and accuse my daughters and their guest of having stolen a rowboat, when all they did was to try to help an old man in trouble. I—I never was so—so outraged in my life!"

"Sorry, Ma'am," said one of the bored constables placatingly. "But where there's been a theft, we gotta make an arrest."

"Arrest!" repeated Wilma, horrified. "You mean to say you would actually arrest us, just because——"

Kay turned to the farmer, challenging him. "How can you prove that the rowboat is yours?" she demanded.

The man, unprepared for this counter-attack, merely gaped at her.

"You have to prove it, you know," Kay went on. "If it isn't yours, you can't very well arrest us for stealing it."

"I don't have to prove it," he shouted. "I know my own rowboat——"

Here one of the officers interrupted him.

"Seems like the young lady's right, Farmer Patton," he drawled.

Betty and Wilma, who had been enjoying Kay's handling of the situation, felt almost sorry for the farmer, so pathetically bewildered did his expression become.

“Do you mean to stand here and tell me that that rowboat tied to the end o’ your dock ain’t mine! By cracky, I——”

“Oh, if you want that leaky thing, you’re welcome to it,” said Kay.

“You better take the boat while you can, Granddad,” one of the constables chuckled. “Next thing you know, this young lady will be darin’ you to prove the rowboat ain’t her’n. Then where would you be?”

As the trio went off to claim the craft, Wilma and Betty hugged Kay, while Mrs. Worth gave her young guest a whimsical glance of admiration.

“What a lawyer you would make, Kay Tracey,” she declared. “Have you ever thought of studying for the Bar?”

“No,” said Kay lightly. “I’d like being a detective better.”

The mail arrived shortly thereafter, and the girls eagerly fell upon the letters and newspapers. Kay found a missive from her mother and several from friends in Carmont.

One of the envelopes was postmarked Lost Lake. Curious to know who was writing to her at the resort, Kay opened that one first. A moment later she uttered an exclamation of surprise and handed the letter to Wilma.

“It’s for you girls, too,” she said. “Ethel Eaton has invited all of us to join her party at the hotel Saturday night!”

“Well, of all things!” said Wilma wonderingly. “Why did she do that, do you suppose?”

“We can’t accept, of course,” remarked Betty.

“We have already promised to be the guests of Mr. and Mrs. Conklin,” Kay reminded her friends. “But *why* did she ask us? Maybe we’ll find out some time later.”

She spoke absently, for she had picked up a Carmont newspaper. Opening it at a paragraph that at once caught and held her attention, Kay leaned forward, reading eagerly.

CHAPTER XIV

STOLEN!

THE item that had evoked Kay's startled exclamation would not, under ordinary circumstances, have attracted her attention especially. Just now, it seemed to be extremely important.

The account read:

"Last night a report came to Police Headquarters that several days ago a thief gained access to the plant of the Scientific Instrument Company, and stole a valuable outfit used for demonstrating sound. The robbery was not reported earlier, for Mr. Miller, head of the concern, had a private detective working.

"The theft was unusual, in that many things that might have been taken and easily disposed of were left untouched. On the other hand, the apparatus in question could find a purchaser only with difficulty, for very few people know how to use it.

"Mr. Miller stated, when interviewed by our reporter, that if the instrument were returned intact there would be no questions asked."

"Too bad for Mr. Miller," Kay commented to her friends. "I hope he gets it back. I wonder if by any chance it could be the 'scrambled speech' machine. And—it might just be possible that the 'crazy' man I saw at the gate got in there somehow and took it."

Kay wanted to start making inquiries about the inventor at once. But, after all, she was a guest, so she must play the part of a guest and not worry her hostess.

The next day the twins insisted upon a trip to the one store of which the lakeside boasted—a place which Kay had visited the morning after her arrival. This time the girls were going merely for sodas, but Kay came away with a feeling that the trip had been profitable in the matter of information.

The chums had barely seated themselves at the store counter, when Ethel Eaton came in, accompanied by two of her friends. She nodded rather distantly to Kay and the Worths.

"Not getting upstage or anything like that, are you?" Ethel asked, coming over to the soda counter.

"I don't know what you mean," replied Kay, speaking for the group.

“I mean, by not accepting my invitation,” replied Ethel.

“You received our letter of explanation?” asked Kay. “We have an engagement for that night with Mr. and Mrs. Conklin.”

“So you said,” replied Ethel, “but I think you might very easily put that off. I’m not accustomed to having my invitations turned down.”

She drew herself up with an assumption of haughtiness and disdain. Then, summoning her companions, she left the store. The girls looked at one another, their eyes twinkling with amusement.

“Guess that dame is tryin’ to hook onto the best lookin’ girls in the place,” ventured the young soda clerk with an ingratiating smile. “She ain’t any too popular in this resort, I can tell you, with her highfalutin’ ways.”

The girls paid little attention to the youth’s compliment, but out of it came a possible explanation of Ethel’s invitation: Kay and the Worths were popular among the young people, and the Eaton girl was not.

Presently an old man hobbled into the store.

“Hello, Grandpap,” the soda boy greeted him. “How’s tricks this bright and glorious morning? Sit down and take a load off your feet.”

“Don’t care ef I do,” was the reply, as the old man sidled into a seat at the counter. “Ain’t so young as I uster wuz, an’ my rheumatiz is pow’ful bad this mornin’. My, what a bunch of purty girls!” he added, as his eyes rested on Kay and her companions.

His age and simple good-nature robbed the comment of impertinence, and the three smiled at him pleasantly.

“I’m sorry that you are troubled with rheumatism,” remarked Kay.

“Oh, I got kinda used to it by this time,” was the reply. “Orter, anyway, sence it’s been playin’ hob with me fur the last thutty years.”

“I can see that you’re a philosopher,” dimpled Betty.

“That’s a new one,” grinned the old man. “I’ve been called almost everythin’ else some time or t’other in the course of my eighty-six years, but nothin’ so high soundin’ as that.”

“Have you lived in this one place all your life?” queried Kay of Abner Jenkins, as she now learned was his name.

“Wuz born here just over the hill a piece,” replied Abner, “an’ bin here off an’ on most of the time since.”

A thought struck Kay and prompted a question.

“Do you remember a family living here by the name of Nelson?” she asked.

“Sure I do,” replied Abner, “but that was before the airthquake or the landslide—some folks give it one name and some t’other, but it wuz jest as bad whatever name you call it—ruined the town. I wuz only a lad then, but I remember it as plain as though it wuz yestiddy. Yes, I remember Nelson. Fine feller he wuz, too. Too bad he got killed, like a lot of other folks.”

“But the whole family wasn’t killed,” interposed Kay.

“No,” ruminated Abner. “Seems ter me as how the woman got away with her baby. Yer see, she got separated from her man in the confusion an’ he wuz killed, while she an’ the baby got safe to an open place. But what became of them I dunno. Haven’t seen hide nor hair of them since.”

“I’ve heard that a good deal of money as well as many lives were lost at that time,” pursued Kay. “Some one was telling me that during the Civil War a lot of people buried their money for fear it would be taken from them. Then in the excitement of the landslide they thought only of saving their lives and left their money behind them. Do you think that is true?”

Abner pondered.

“Well, I s’pose some of it is true,” he answered. “The Nelsons, f’r instance, wuz said to be pretty well fixed in the matter of money. He wuz forehanded an’ his woman wuz of the savin’ kind. But shucks, who knows anythin’ about it? Them kind o’ stories alluz gets aroun’, but a good deal of the talk is jest guesswork.

“But say,” he went on with more animation in his manner, “by cricky, you’re the second person that’s spoke ter me about buried money in a week, an’ the third one in the las’ three months.”

Kay was instantly alert.

“Who were the other two that asked you about it?”

“Let me see,” meditated Abner. “One wuz a man, kind of a young feller, an’ the other wuz a woman—a furrin’ woman, speaks kinda queer. Yes, them wuz the two. Happen to know them, by any chanct?” the old native asked as an afterthought.

“I don’t know many of the people around here,” evaded Kay. “I’ve been here only a little while. And I’ll have to be going now,” she added, rising. “It’s been wonderfully interesting to hear you tell of those old times. I hope your rheumatism will stop bothering you.”

“It’s druv my rheumatics away jest lookin’ at your purty faces,” responded the old fellow gallantly.

“Well, we haven’t wasted our morning, anyway,” remarked Kay happily, as they swung themselves into their saddles.

“I should say not,” agreed Betty. “That ice cream was delicious.”

“I wasn’t thinking about that,” returned Kay.

“Oh,” said Betty rather blankly, “then what were you thinking about—if you were thinking,” she added mischievously.

“I was thinking,” said Kay seriously, “all the time that old man was talking—and thinking hard. Don’t you see how his story bears out the one of Mr. Nelson—the earthquake, the death of his father, the flight of his mother?”

“That’s true,” agreed Wilma eagerly. “It looks as if there were some truth in the tale, at that. If he’s right in some things, he may be right in all.”

“Still, we haven’t any proof that there was any money left by the Nelsons among the ruins,” objected Betty.

“Not what you could call proof,” admitted Kay. “But you remember what the old man said about the father being forehanded and the mother very thrifty, which would indicate that they were in good circumstances. Wouldn’t it be marvelous,” she added, “if all poor old Mr. Nelson’s dreams were to come true?”

“Of course it would,” said Betty, “but there are so many things to be considered. Even if the money’s there, how is he going to get at it?”

“That’s the problem, of course,” said Kay. “But I have a feeling there must be some way whereby we might help him figure it out. Money that has seemed just as hopelessly buried as this has been recovered in the past, and what has happened once may happen again. We are not the only ones who think so, either,” she added significantly.

Wilma looked at her inquiringly, but Betty grasped her meaning at once.

“You’re thinking of what old Abner said about the ‘young sort of feller and the furrin’ woman’,” she suggested.

“Bright girl,” applauded Kay. “Don’t you see that his description fits John Fort and Hilda Arno perfectly? But now the question is,” she added thoughtfully, “what motive these two people might have in quizzing that old man about money. Is it possible that they want to get hold of Mr. Nelson’s fortune, and are using him to help them in their schemes?”

The twins agreed that this was a rather alarming possibility, and fell in readily with Kay’s suggestion that they visit Mr. Nelson at once. They found the old man in fairly good health and spirits, in spite of his mishap of the previous day.

“We’re glad you feel better,” said Kay. “And we came to tell you that we’d like to help you locate your buried treasure.”

“That’s kind of you,” smiled the man. “But John’s going to help me. I said I would meet him at Sulphur Pond near Faraway Valley,” he went on, his blue eyes feverishly bright. “It is very necessary that I do so. I guess,” wistfully, “that I’ll find some one to take me over to the other side of the lake.”

“Why, we’ll do that if you are certain you want to go,” offered Kay, looking to her chums for assent.

They nodded readily.

“It’s very good of you, I’m sure,” returned Mr. Nelson gratefully.

“We will take you as far as John Fort’s cabin, at least,” went on Kay, recalling her promise to Mrs. Worth to be careful. “And from there you may be able to find your way to Sulphur Pond.”

“That’s all right,” said the old man. “You see, John doesn’t live at the cabin; he only goes there sometimes.”

“Where does he live?” asked Kay patiently. “He must have some place where he eats and sleeps.”

Mr. Nelson waved his hand helplessly.

“Of course,” he agreed. “But he hasn’t told me about it. He’s kind of mysterious—has his reasons, I suppose. All I know is that he may be able to help me find my fortune.”

The glance Kay gave the old man was one of wonder and pity. It seemed to her that the poor old fellow was almost child-like in his dealings with men.

“I’d be a little on my guard against John,” she warned him gently. “He may be sincere in his efforts to help you, but I must say there is a great deal about him that I don’t understand. If you find your fortune, you will have to watch out so that he doesn’t try to get it away from you.”

“I’ll be careful,” promised Mr. Nelson, but the assurance failed to carry any conviction to the minds of the girls.

However, they promised to take him to meet John Fort that same afternoon. Promptly at the appointed time they embarked with him on the *Jolly Roger*, which they had borrowed from Red Greene and his friends for the occasion.

Everything went splendidly until they reached the middle of the lake. Then suddenly there was a severe shock that threw them all from their seats. In a moment water came pouring into the motorboat through a hole rammed in the side.

“We’re sinking!” screamed Wilma. “It’s the deepest part of the lake. We’ll never reach shore. We’ll all drown!”

“Can you swim, Mr. Nelson?” cried Kay.

The old man’s face was chalky white. He was too frightened to utter a sound. He merely shook his head, as if saying:

“No. This is the end.”

CHAPTER XV

AN EXCITING EXPERIENCE

AS the water poured into the boat, Betty echoed Wilma's screams. Kay was the only one in the group to keep her head. Her cheeks had paled and her heart was beating fast, but she grasped the situation at once and acted like lightning.

Tearing off her sweater, she thrust it into the hole in the side of the boat. That checked for a moment the inrush of water, but it was not enough.

"Quick, girls!" she cried. "Off with your sweaters and push them into this hole. Mr. Nelson, you get over to the other side, so as to tip the boat and keep as much of the torn side above the waterline as possible. There, that's better," she exclaimed, as the others recovered from the shock and obeyed her orders.

Kay cast a hasty glance about for possible help from other boats, but at the moment there was no craft in sight. Then she measured the distance they were from the banks on either side, and saw that the one before them was the nearer. It was better to go on than to turn back.

"We can make it," she declared cheerily, though there was more conviction in her words than in her heart. "You keep the engine going, Wilma, and Betty and I will bail. Don't you worry, Mr. Nelson," she added, turning to her passenger. "We'll get through all right."

The girls worked with a will. Yet, despite all their efforts, the water kept spurting in upon them, and the boat, waterlogged, proceeded with exasperating slowness. In their feverish excitement it seemed to the little group that the craft was merely crawling along.

The anxiety of the girls was not for themselves. They were all strong swimmers, and if the *Jolly Roger* should sink it would not be impossible for them to reach shore. But there was Mr. Nelson, frail and old, who could not save himself. It might be hopeless for the others to help him. They shuddered at the thought of what might happen.

Laboring feverishly, and spurred on by Kay's indomitable will, the group finally had the situation well in hand. The boat sank lower, but was steadily being drawn nearer shallow water. At last, with a sigh of relief and joy from all on board, the bow of the *Jolly Roger* touched shore.

Kay jumped out and secured the craft to a tree with a rope. Betty and Wilma followed her, and all three turned to give assistance to Mr. Nelson.

“We’ve spoiled three good sweaters,” remarked Betty ruefully, as she looked at the soiled and sodden garments.

“We’ve done more than that,” said Kay. “We’ve ruined the *Jolly Roger*.”

“I think it’s only badly damaged,” Betty comforted. “A little carpenter work will mend that hole, I’m sure. I wonder what caused it,” she added thoughtfully.

“We probably struck a floating log,” explained Kay. “The thing that’s puzzling me now,” she added, “is how we are going to get back to Camp Worthy.”

The girls looked about them helplessly.

“I’ll tell you,” suggested Betty. “It’s still fairly early. Suppose you two girls go on with Mr. Nelson as far as the cabin. I’ll stay here and wave distress signals. If no one comes along we’ll just have to walk home around the lake.”

So Kay and Wilma, leaving Betty to her duties, set out for John Fort’s cabin on the far side of No Man’s Ridge. There was a chance that the scientist would be there. If such were the case, Mr. Nelson would not be obliged to keep the rather indefinite appointment in the vicinity of Sulphur Pond.

It was not a long walk from the top of No Man’s Ridge. Even so, both the girls and their companion were tired after their unpleasant experience on the lake, and were very glad when the cabin came in view. Presently Mr. Nelson was forced to rest on a rock, so the chums walked on slowly.

“Haven’t heard any strange echoes this time,” said Wilma in a low tone to Kay.

“Perhaps the person responsible is not here today,” Kay whispered back, as the two made their way through the underbrush.

“Do you suspect someone?”

“Yes. That ‘crazy’ man who was at Mr. Miller’s plant and whom I saw in these woods. As a matter of fact, he said he once worked at that scientific place. So he is probably a scientist. And here’s another thought. John Fort is a scientist. What more natural conclusion than to assume the two men have some connection?”

“Kay, you’re the most wonderful— Oh—what’s that?”

There had come to their ears a horrible sound, half-moan, half-wail.

“That isn’t human,” quavered Wilma.

Kay was listening intently for a repetition of the queer noise.

She tried the door, which was not locked, and it yielded easily. Bravely she went in alone and found the shack destitute of human beings. But from somewhere below there came again the whining that had at first terrified Wilma so greatly.

“It’s a dog!” she called with a laugh to Wilma. “Come in. Perhaps he’s hungry. I wonder how we’re going to get at him. Where’s the cellar door?”

Sheepishly the Worth girl entered, and together they hunted for an opening in the floor. They looked about without locating it.

“Perhaps the poor thing’s buried alive,” suggested Wilma in an awed voice.

“He wouldn’t be howling if he were,” rejoined the more practical Kay, her eyes still searching the place. “Ah, I have it!”

Her exclamation was evoked by the discovery of a ring in the floor. She tugged at it, and the trap door to which the ring was attached gradually lifted.

“There it is!” she exclaimed, as she caught sight of an animal tied to a small post in the shallow aperture beneath the floor. “Open the cabin door so that I can get more light, Wilma,” she directed. “It’s the same dog that carried the message,” she went on, as the revealing light streamed down through the hole. “Poor fellow! He’s frightened and he’s hungry. See how he wags his tail! Let’s find something for him to eat.”

This was easily done, for they had brought along a generous lunch. They fed the animal liberally from the meat in their sandwiches, and opened one of the dusty tins of beef on the shelf over the stove.

“Everything’s queer about this place,” remarked Kay, as she reluctantly let down the trap door. “I wish I could get to the bottom of the mystery.”

“I’d rather leave them alone,” murmured Wilma uneasily.

The girls returned to Mr. Nelson with the lunch. The old gentleman ate heartily.

“Well, I guess I’d better be going along,” he observed a little later as he rose from the rock on which he was sitting. “I’ll walk on toward Sulphur Pond and try to find John.”

The girls would rather have halted him, but they saw how determined he was to pursue his errand, and knew that remonstrance of any kind would be of no use. Any attempt on their part to accompany him would look presumptuous, and would doubtless be resented by the mysterious John. So,

with repeated warnings to be very careful, they wished Mr. Nelson good luck.

“But how will you get back home?” asked Kay. “We can’t take you in the boat. Perhaps Betty will hail someone and get help, and we can all go along with her.”

“That’s mighty good of you,” returned Mr. Nelson, “but don’t worry about me the least bit. Maybe I’ll stay overnight with John, or maybe he’ll find some way to get me back.”

The girls watched him depart with some misgivings, and then returned to the cabin. Their attention had been so completely absorbed by the dog, that they had failed to notice much else in the little shack. Now Kay’s eyes swept the room, and detected several scraps of paper lying on the table.

“What are these, I wonder?” she remarked, picking up one of them. “Looks as though their proper place would be in the waste basket. Still, one never can tell——”

“Is there anything written on the papers?” asked Wilma, looking over Kay’s shoulder.

“Nothing except a lot of figures,” replied Kay. “Let’s see. Here’s 730. Here’s another, 330. Then there’s a third one marked 1230. What a lot of thirties!”

“I don’t see any sense to them,” was Wilma’s comment. “And that ‘crazy’ man may come around. I don’t want to meet him. Let’s go.”

“No, not yet,” replied Kay. “You walk outside and wait. I want to look around some more.”

Wilma went out and stretched herself lazily on a patch of grass. Left to herself, Kay made a thorough search of the cabin. She had had one of the “hunches” that so often came to her.

A stone in the fireplace attracted her attention. It was rather loose, and looked as though it had been moved only recently. She tugged at it, and after considerable exertion pulled it away. Reaching her hand into the cavity, her groping fingers touched what seemed to be a mass of crumpled paper.

As she brought her find to the light, her heart almost skipped a beat. She had wished that she would find what was now in her hands, but had not dared hope for such good luck. She held a number of pages torn from a book.

She perused them eagerly. They were deckle-edge, similar in size to the one she had already found, and which had been stolen from the precious

volume belonging to Herr Entveg! Moreover, they were numbered 184, 185, 187, 188—without a doubt the remaining pages from the pilfered book!

She rolled them carefully and thrust them into her bag. How thankful she was for the chance that had brought her there that day!

Her cause for rejoicing was two-fold. In the first place, she could restore the stolen property to its real owner. In the second place, she might find in the pages a key to the mysteries connected with Lost Lake that had so perplexed her and aroused her sleuthing prowess.

For the moment Kay decided to keep the knowledge of her find to herself. She wanted to ponder over it and decide what to do, without being forced to answer distracting questions. There would be enough time later to reveal the facts to Betty and Wilma.

Soon afterward Kay and Wilma shut up the cabin, first making sure that the dog was not imprisoned in it a second time. Then they hurried to the shore where they had left Betty.

On the way Kay kept going over in her mind the meaning of the scraps of paper she had found on the table of the cabin, which contained the numbers. Strange, she thought, that 30 should recur at the end of each figure! Did it have any real significance? Or were the notations simply the meanderings of a blank mind, idly scribbling the same thing over and over?

Then a thought came to her that made her pulses quicken.

“I’ve found it!” she exclaimed excitedly to Wilma. “Those numbers all ending in 30—why, of course they must represent times of the day. 7:30, 12:30, 3:30, 9:30. Don’t you see? They are probably warnings, or messages, that something is going to happen at that moment!”

Wilma stared at her.

“You may be right,” she breathed. “I’d never have thought of that. Then the note attached to the dog’s collar the day we found him in the trap—that slip of paper with the number 9:30 on it——”

“Was a warning, or message, that something was going to happen at 9:30. The dog had been sent to deliver it, and was on his way, probably, when the trap caught his foot,” said Kay exultantly. “Doesn’t that sound reasonable?”

“So much so, that I think you must be right,” said Wilma slowly. “I really believe that is a clue worth thinking over, Kay.

“ ‘Time shall unfold what plighted cunning hides;
Who covers faults, at last shame them derides.’ ”

Kay was busy pondering when the two girls came out on the shore of the lake, and did not notice that Betty was not there, until Wilma called it to her attention.

“Betty!” cried Wilma. “Where are you?”

There was no answer. The girls were surprised, then alarmed. Where was the missing twin? Had anything happened to her?

If it had, they felt they could not return to the cottage with bad news.

CHAPTER XVI

TROUBLE

KAY and Wilma searched desperately throughout the entire surrounding district, peering cautiously behind every rock, thicket, and clump of trees.

A long time passed, and the girls were beginning to be seriously worried, when a strange sight finally broke the monotony of a trail near the water. Into view came the lost Betty, riding a mule and leading another.

“Oh Betty!” wailed Wilma, relief taking the place of anxiety in her voice.

The relief that came to Kay and Wilma was beyond words. They ran forward eagerly to meet her. She laughingly greeted them, and upon dismounting found herself in the fervent embrace of two pair of arms.

“Why the sudden affection?” she exclaimed.

“We thought something had happened to you,” replied Wilma, on the verge of tears.

“We were terribly worried,” added Kay reproachfully. “Why didn’t you leave some word of where you were going? You could have scribbled a line and put a stone on it to keep it from blowing away.”

“I should have done that, I suppose,” replied Betty penitently. “I’m sorry. But the truth is I didn’t think I’d be half as late in getting back as I really am. You see, I waited here and signaled so long without result that I got tired and decided to look around. So I went on until I found an old farmer and borrowed these two beauties from him.”

The girls laughed as they turned their eyes upon the mules, which regarded them stolidly.

“Beauties!” chuckled Kay. “The homeliest pair of animals I ever laid eyes on.”

“Beggars can’t be choosers,” said Betty philosophically. “These were the best ones I could get from the farmer—the only ones, in fact, that he had left. He told me that he had already hired out two teams of mules with carts to a scientific gentleman who wanted to do a little excavating. Whoa, Belshazzar!” she cried, tightening the rein, as one of the mules showed signs of bolting.

“A scientific gentleman!” exclaimed Kay.

“Sounds mysterious,” Wilma added. “What else did he say?”

“That the other mule is named Beelzebub,” replied Betty.

Her companions burst into unrestrained laughter.

“I hope they don’t live up to their names,” exclaimed Kay, when she had recovered herself.

“One of them will have to carry two of us,” said Betty.

“You ride Belshazzar, Betty,” Kay suggested, “and Wilma and I will ride Beelzebub.”

Soon it developed that Beelzebub had decided views of his own on the subject. Perhaps he rebelled at being burdened with two passengers, while his luckier comrade was forced to carry only one. At any rate, he showed his disapproval of the procedure by spreading his four legs and refusing to budge.

The girls looked at one another in dismay.

“What are we going to do now?” wailed Wilma. “We ought to get home.”

“Speak coaxingly to him,” urged Betty from the back of the more docile animal.

These tactics had no effect upon Beelzebub. He refused to be coaxed and wheedled by honeyed accents.

“Suppose you dismount and try to lead him a little way, Betty,” suggested Kay. “If we can only get him started, perhaps he will keep on going.”

Betty complied with the request, but all her urging and pulling were of no avail.

“There’s a piece of sugar in my bag,” said Kay. “Try that on him.”

Betty did so, holding the lump under his nose. For a moment Beelzebub’s resolution seemed to waver. He took a step forward, then recollected himself, and stepped back. Suddenly he thrust out his head and snatched the lump from Betty’s hand before she could withdraw it.

“I’ve read somewhere about building a fire under a balky mule to make him start,” remarked Wilma.

“That might be a bit too drastic,” objected Kay. “But your speaking of that reminds me of something Cousin Bill once told me. Here, I’ll show you how the thing is done.”

She dismounted, hunted about until she found a small pebble, tied it up tight with a piece of cord, and made a loop in the string.

The girls watched her in wonderment.

“What on earth are you going to do with that?” asked Betty.

“I’ll show you in a minute,” promised Kay, “but first I want to get back in my seat so as to be there if he should start.”

She climbed up nimbly. When she was firmly established she handed the loop to Betty.

“Slip this over his ear,” Kay directed, “and let the pebble rest inside. Then get back on Belshazzar and see what happens.”

As Betty obeyed, it was evident that something new had come into Beelzebub’s life. He shook his head from side to side, trying to get rid of the annoying pebble. But the ear was so long and shaggy that the loop refused to slide over it, shake as he might.

He became so absorbed in his preoccupation that when Kay gently shook the reins and told him to go on he obeyed automatically, forgetting all about his resolution to balk. Something far more important was occupying his attention!

All through the homeward journey the trick worked. It was a sadly disturbed Beelzebub that finally drew up at Camp Worthy, where the arrival of the girls and their strange mounts evoked peals of laughter. They dismounted, and Kay drew the loop from Beelzebub’s ear and threw string and pebble away.

“Poor old fellow!” she said. “Did we play a mean trick on you? Well, here are some extra lumps of sugar to make up for it.”

After a complete change of clothing the girls went over to the boys’ camp to tell of the accident to the *Jolly Roger*.

Betty explained that the farmer from whom she had borrowed Belshazzar and Beelzebub had contracted to take care of the boat for the night and to repair it, in consideration of a sum which all the young folks thought ridiculously small.

“Of course, we shall pay for the repairs,” said Kay. “After all, we are responsible.”

However, the boys would not hear of this for a minute, saying that they would borrow a canoe from the girls in the morning, retrieve the motorboat, and themselves settle with the farmer.

So that matter was arranged, and Kay was once again putting her mind on the mystery. She was not satisfied with Betty’s indefinite information that

a scientific gentleman was in the vicinity and hiring mules and carts. She must find out more about that.

Betty and Wilma retired early and Kay promised to follow shortly. First, however, she wanted to try out the portable radio set that Cracker had fixed for her. She found to her satisfaction that it did credit to the young mechanic's skill, and worked perfectly. She got several stations, and noted that the reception was exceptionally clear and distinct.

A dreamy violin solo had just come to an end when a deep voice suddenly called out:

“Kay Tracey, you must stop working against me or you shall be punished!”

CHAPTER XVII

SULPHUR POND

STARTLED beyond words, Kay sprang from her chair and looked wildly at the radio set. The threat seemed to have come directly from that instrument. What enemy had voiced it? Who had named her personally and predicted disaster?

The spell was broken by a laugh from the direction of the porch. Kay whirled about and saw the grinning countenance of her Cousin Bill Tracey, who had just come for his week-end at Lost Lake.

“Fooled you that time, young lady,” remarked that jovial gentleman, as he stepped over a low window-sill into the room.

“You ought to be ashamed of yourself, even though I am glad to see you,” Kay said severely. “Honestly, Cousin Bill, you frightened me out of a year’s growth. As a practical joker you are even better—or worse—than Tubby Granger.”

“I plead guilty and throw myself on the mercy of the court,” said Cousin Bill with affected humility. “Hello,” he added in a startled tone, “what’s the matter with the radio? Going on a rampage?”

A strange, discordant jumble of sounds had come from the machine, filling the room with a torrent of queer jargon.

“Sounds like some barbaric language,” pronounced Cousin Bill.

“I think not,” said Kay with a puzzled frown. “Wait!” she exclaimed, as a thought struck her.

She searched frantically about the room until she found a pencil and a pad. Then she seated herself and rested the paper on her knee, jotting down as accurately as she could the syllables, if such they were, that were tumbling over one another.

Cousin Bill watched her in astonishment.

“What’s the idea?” he asked. “Cultivating radio shorthand?”

“Just wait until this noise stops,” breathed Kay, “and I’ll tell you.”

For several moments her pencil flew over the paper, until the strange sounds subsided. Kay drew a long breath, while Cousin Bill watched her curiously.

“I should think you’d have writer’s cramp after all that scribbling,” he ventured. “Now, will you condescend to tell me what this means?”

“I was just taking a chance,” confessed Kay. “Of course, it may have been, as you said, a foreign tongue or something wrong with the radio. But an idea came to me and I wanted to get down the sounds, or should I say words, to study them more carefully later on.

“Do you recall, Cousin Bill, that queer instrument Mr. Miller had, that jumbled words as they went through space, so that they could be understood only by the person sending and the person for whom they were intended at the other end?”

“That scrambled speech invention?” replied Cousin Bill. “Yes, I remember it, all right. One of the queerest contraptions I ever came across. But what of it?”

“Just this,” said Kay. “Those sounds we’ve just heard weren’t sent from a regular broadcasting station. I believe they came from a scrambled speech instrument that broke in on the regular radio program.”

“You may be right,” her cousin said thoughtfully, “but if so, what of it? Why were you so keen about taking down the words?”

“Because,” explained Kay, “it seems to fit in with the mysterious things that are going on here at Lost Lake.”

“More mysteries, eh?” grinned Cousin Bill. “There speaks the Little Detective, who, when once she has put her teeth in anything, doesn’t let go.”

“You needn’t laugh,” protested Kay. “This thing is more serious than you think. And there’s one side of it that seems to have a connection with Mr. Miller. That ought to interest you.”

“It does,” admitted Cousin Bill. “Miller is a fine fellow. But where does he come in?”

“Of course you know about the recent robbery at the Scientific Instrument Company?”

Cousin Bill nodded.

“Was it by chance the ‘scrambled speech’ machine which was stolen?”

“Yes,” responded the young lawyer. “It was.”

“There was a curious side to the robbery,” explained Kay. “There were lots of articles the thief might have taken and easily disposed of. But he took only one thing—this scrambled speech instrument. Now, that is a machine which the thief couldn’t have sold readily without arousing suspicion. So the inference is that whoever stole it took it for his own use.”

Light began to dawn upon Cousin Bill.

"I see," he said. "And since the contrivance is rare, you believe the outfit that made those queer sounds tonight might be from the instrument that was stolen from Miller's laboratory?"

"That's what I think," agreed Kay. "If it is, I want to see that Mr. Miller gets it back. Not only does it belong to him, but its return might clear up a lot of things that have been puzzling this community."

Cousin Bill pondered for a moment.

"I'll drop a line to Miller and tell him about it," he said.

"Isn't there a quicker way than that?" suggested Kay, as she glanced at the clock. "It's early yet. Why not call him up long distance and ask him to run out here? Then he could examine the things I've jotted down and probably get some clue from them that might lead him to the thief."

"Good idea," approved Bill Tracey, rising. "I'll try it anyway, and we'll see if we can locate him."

He got his connection with the Miller home. As he listened to what came over the wire a frown of disappointment overspread his face.

"No good," he announced, returning to Kay. "Miller himself is away for the week-end, but I'll write tonight."

The next morning was filled with activity. It was the day set for the diving contest, and the girls were radiant with anticipation. Moreover, Kay had reminded Cousin Bill of his promise to take her to Faraway Valley that afternoon.

Practically all the dwellers at the summer resort were gathered at Lake House pier, the elders chiefly as spectators, the more skillful of the younger set as contestants. The competition was a spirited one.

Kay, in an attractive blue suit, was at her best. Her jack-knife dive was a thing of grace and beauty; her swan dive from the springboard elicited gasps of admiration from the onlookers. The climax was reached when she turned a cartwheel on the board and cleaved the water with a half turn that was worth going far to see.

The fun was at its height when an interruption occurred. A woman guest of the hotel came up, panting.

"I have just discovered that I lost a valuable diamond ring while in bathing this morning," she said excitedly. "I'll give a hundred dollars to anyone who recovers it!"

Scarcely had the offer been made than the water was alive with those seeking to win the reward. One young fellow, Don Ralston, seemed

desperately eager, coming up from one dive and going into another with hardly a pause.

“You’ll tire yourself out,” said Kay to him as they both drew out on the pier together, preparatory to making another attempt.

“I don’t care if I do,” he panted. “A hundred dollars would mean everything to me just now.”

A few minutes later Kay swerved under water and swept in below the pier, a place neglected by most of the others, who were searching farther out. Her heart beat fast as she detected a gleaming object close to one of the piles of the dock. It was the diamond ring!

Eagerly she reached out for it. But she did not touch it. While her hand was outstretched, a remark she had heard a few moments before darted into her mind, and made her pause.

“A hundred dollars would mean everything to me just now.”

Kay rose to the surface and clambered out onto the landing. A minute later Don Ralston sat down for a moment’s rest beside her. His face was drawn with disappointment.

“No luck,” he gasped. “But I might have known. Nothing ever comes my way.”

“Why don’t you take a chance under the pier?” remarked Kay carelessly. “Most of the swimmers seem to leave that location alone.”

“That’s a tip,” exclaimed Don eagerly. “Why didn’t I think of it before? By George, I’ll have a try.”

So saying, he dived again. A few seconds elapsed. Then he reappeared, dripping but jubilant. Up came his hand, holding something that glistened in the sunlight.

“I have it!” he panted. “I have it!”

There were excited exclamations, and a rush of spectators to greet him, as he climbed out to the pier. Foremost among them was the owner of the ring. The woman, overjoyed at its recovery, handed over the hundred dollars at once.

Don Ralston sought out Kay, his eyes shining.

“That was certainly a lucky guess of yours!” he ejaculated. “I surely appreciate it.”

“I’m so glad,” beamed Kay. And Don Ralston never guessed to whom he really owed that hundred dollars.

After the excitement caused by the search for the ring had subsided, the contests were resumed. The result was that Kay was awarded first prize for

diving for the girls, while Wilma and Betty came in for third and fourth, respectively.

After she had changed from her swim suit to sport clothing, Kay approached Cousin Bill, who had been enjoying immensely the events of the morning without, however, taking part in them.

“Congratulations, Kay,” he beamed at his young relative. “Fine work.”

“Thanks a lot,” she replied. “And now, let’s get a bite to eat and then start for Faraway Valley.”

The young lawyer was loath to leave, but a promise was a promise. Accordingly Elise, who was with Cousin Bill, together with Kay and the young man had a lunch in the hotel coffee shoppe. Then the Traceys bade the Conklin girl good-bye and started for the valley of mystery.

“First we go to Sulphur Pond,” Kay announced.

“Tell me how you’re going to reach the enchanted spot,” teased her relative. “The name doesn’t exactly give promise of the odors of Araby.”

“I’m afraid it will be pretty smelly,” agreed Kay. “As to how we’re going to get there, I don’t know that any too well myself. But I am familiar with the general direction.”

“Probably our noses will help us, if Sulphur Pond lives up to its name,” grinned Cousin Bill. “And I hope we catch a glimpse of that man you suspect of stealing and selling some of Mr. Miller’s secrets. I’d like to question him.”

They hired a rowboat and started on their way. Cousin Bill plied the oars as Kay narrated to him in detail some of the clues she had gathered since his former visit. He listened with the closest attention.

“You are a great little detective, Kay,” he praised when she had finished. “But there appear to be many unscrupulous figures mixed up with this,” he added soberly.

They reached the farther shore and moored the boat. Then they set out on their tramp through the woods.

For a long time they hiked without any indication that they were nearing their destination. Then suddenly a quick shift of wind brought to their nostrils an odor that nearly choked them.

“Ugh!” exclaimed Cousin Bill, wrinkling his nose. “Sulphur Pond!”

In a moment they were peeking through the trees at the loathsome spot. There was no sign of either Mr. Nelson or John Fort.

But there were two other figures—strange, disheveled looking workmen, who were shoveling. One was throwing up yellow dirt into a cart. The other

was gathering leaves, twigs, logs, and other burnable débris. Tied to nearby trees was a pair of mules.

“What can they be doing that for?” asked Cousin Bill in low tones.

“For no good purpose,” came the tense, hushed reply from Kay. “And I’m sure that I know what that dishonest purpose is.”

CHAPTER XVIII

SUSPENSE

“YOU know why these men are getting this queer stuff?” asked Cousin Bill. “It looks as if they are making ready for a gigantic bonfire.”

“That’s exactly right,” agreed Kay, “but one that will produce more smoke than fire. Sodden leaves mixed with a lot of sulphurous dirt tend to cause that effect, don’t they?”

“I suppose they do,” replied her cousin, “though just why these men should go to so much trouble to send up a lot of smoke is beyond my comprehension.”

“It’s just one more thing that might give the impression that the valley was haunted,” said Kay thoughtfully. “The queer noises that have been heard, the nasty odor of the pond, the thunder and lightning without rain, columns of smoke mysteriously ascending—all would help to keep away intruders from the neighborhood. Give a place the reputation of being haunted, and almost everybody will steer clear of it.

“But why do they want to keep people away, unless there is something going on that will not bear investigation?” the enthusiastic girl added in low tones. “Let’s sneak up to these men and find out if they know anything of the whereabouts of Mr. Nelson and John Fort.”

They followed the suggestion, but might as well have spared themselves the trouble. The workmen did not know, or else pretended not to know, how to speak English. They looked at the newcomers vacantly, and spread out their hands helplessly to all questions. Even the sign language, by which the visitors sought to express what they were after, came up against the same blank wall of silence and headshaking.

“Can’t get anything out of them,” muttered Cousin Bill in chagrin, as he suspended his efforts. “I don’t know whether they are stupid or cunning.”

“Perhaps both,” conjectured Kay. “Now, let’s go on a little farther to Faraway Valley.”

“Not right away,” objected Cousin Bill. “See those clouds over there?” pointing to a dark bank on the horizon. “If I’m any judge of weather, and I fancy I am, they mean rain, and plenty of it. I’m not concerned about myself, but I’m not going to let you get caught in it if I can help it.”

“Oh, come on and risk it,” coaxed Kay. “I’m not sugar or salt, that I’ll melt in a little rain.”

“Not today,” declared Bill Tracey with decision. “It’s getting dusky, and moreover we’re not going to miss the Conklin party tonight. Those clouds are getting bigger and blacker all the time. I don’t fancy being on the lake in a bad storm.”

In spite of her disappointment, Kay realized that her cousin was taking the commonsense view, and raised no further objection. The two made quick time back to the boat, and were lucky enough to reach Camp Worthy just before the rain started to come down in torrents.

“We’re certainly glad you two are back,” said the Worths warmly. And the solicitous mother added, “I never feel safe when you’re way off with queer things going on.”

Kay was appreciative of her hostess’s solicitude, and tried to reassure her. Then she went with the twins to dress.

“Do tell us what happened,” begged Betty.

“Not now,” said Kay. “But this I will say. I think I can safely assure Mr. Conklin that it will not be long now before the queer things will stop happening around here. Then he’ll have no more trouble renting his cottages and hotel rooms.”

“Oh, Kay,” exclaimed Wilma, “that will be wonderful. Are you sure? How——”

But the “little detective” would say no more, so her chums had to be content.

Kay’s heart beat a trifle faster as she walked into the lobby of the hotel and looked inquiringly for the Conklins. Elise saw the group including the Worth family, and came over at once, her hand extended cordially. Chatting pleasantly, Elise led the little party over to her parents.

During the dance which followed the dinner, boys swarmed about the Tracey girl and the Worth twins. Prominent among them was Kay’s new admirer, Tom Conklin, young brother of Elise.

“Ethel Eaton likes Tom,” Wilma whispered during the course of the evening. “I’ve seen her watching you with flashing eyes. Kay, you had better look out!”

“It would take more than Ethel Eaton to spoil my fun this evening,” retorted Kay happily. Then she danced off with Tom.

“I’m jealous,” he said presently.

“Jealous!” echoed Kay. “Of whom?”

His answer was very unexpected and startled her.

“Of my father. Do you realize you’ve spent more of this evening with him than with me? And you’re so mysterious about your conversations with him!”

Kay laughed.

“I’m sorry if it disturbed you,” she said. “As a matter of fact, the things we’re talking about are no secret. I have a few ideas as to what makes the queer happenings around here, and I was telling your father something about it.”

“I see. It sounds interesting.”

“I’m sorry that Mr. Conklin and the other real estate people have had a hard time this year,” said Kay, “and I’d like to help them if I can.”

“I’d like to help *you* in helping *them*,” laughed the lad.

Weary as Kay was when she sought her bed that night, she found it difficult to go to sleep. Her body alone was tired; her mind seemed fresh and active. She reviewed the incidents, not only of that day, but of the others that had elapsed since she had come to Lost Lake.

Pondering over the matter, the thought came to her that the meaning of the echoes “your Kate” and “rise ten”, which Red Greene and his companions had heard at No Man’s Ridge, must be explained.

“Your—your—your,” she repeated over and over. “Is that the first part of a word or the last?”

Then her thoughts drifted to old Mr. Nelson and his fortune—his buried—why, fortune and treasure were synonyms. Excitedly Kay thought:

“I’m positive the first word of that echo ‘your Kate’ is treasure—the last syllable of treasure would sound the same as ‘your’. I believe I’m right so far. But then, how about ‘Kate’ and ‘rise ten’?”

The following morning Cousin Bill had to leave for home. Kay entrusted to him the pages which she had found in the cabin, and which she felt sure were part of the cherished volume belonging to Herr Entveg. Her cousin promised to restore them at once to the old bookseller.

He also pledged himself to see Mr. Miller at the first possible moment, and tell him of Kay’s supposition that the scrambled speech she had heard was in some way connected with the theft from his plant.

After he had gone, Kay decided she must try to get in touch with Hilda Arno again. But the woman appeared to have vanished. No one knew anything about her.

One forlorn hope remained. Kay had seen either Hilda Arno or some one who resembled her very closely, seated at the wheel of a car the day after she had arrived at Camp Worthy. Now, if Hilda Arno were to come and go to Lost Lake by automobile, she would have to do so by way of one road. That road led past the general store. Perhaps the owner, who included among his services a gasoline filling station, would watch out for the foreigner.

Acting on this idea, Kay saddled the roan mare and rode down to the store. The man, upon questioning, proved as talkative as on the previous occasion of Kay's meeting with him. He could not, however, tell her anything about Hilda Arno.

"So many folks pass here," he said with a shake of his head, "that you just can't remember them all."

He promised to keep a sharp lookout, however, and listened good-naturedly to Kay's description of Hilda and the car she drove.

"You couldn't miss her," explained Kay, "because she doesn't look like the women around here."

"Oh!" said the man.

"She's very blond—a European, and speaks with an accent."

The store-keeper laughed.

"If this furrin' woman turns up I'll let you know," he promised.

The following evening while Kay was at supper the telephone rang. It was a message from the store-keeper.

"That furrin' woman is here," he said. "She has a flat tire for me to fix. I'll work slow. If you hurry mebbe you can get here in time."

CHAPTER XIX

A STRIKING LIKENESS

MAKING a hurried explanation and excusing herself, Kay left her meal unfinished, brought the beautiful roan horse from the stable, and rode out at top speed to the general store. Her pulse quickened as she noted that an automobile was there.

The store-keeper had kept his word, and was busy on the tire. He nodded with a smile as he saw Kay, and with a slight motion of his head indicated a woman whose back was turned to the girl at the moment.

As Kay neared her, it became evident that the stranger was not Hilda Arno, but one so similar in form and feature that Kay felt sure she must be a relative.

"I beg your pardon," said Kay as she approached, "but I was under the impression that you were Miss Hilda Arno."

"A very natural error," smiled the woman. "I am very often mistaken for my sister."

"The resemblance is striking," returned Kay. "When you turned around I felt sure I would see your sister's face."

"You know her well, then?" asked the other quickly, as Kay detected an accent similar to that of Hilda Arno, but less pronounced. "I am very glad if she has some friends in this region."

"I don't know her intimately," returned Kay.

"Perhaps you were a pupil in her school," conjectured the newcomer. "She has taught foreign languages for several years, and I am frequently meeting girls who have studied under her."

"No," replied Kay. "I have met her once or twice in connection with other things. But of late I have missed her, and was wondering if she had left Lost Lake."

"No," and as she spoke the woman looked about her uneasily. "I almost wish she had. There is something up here that seems to affect her strangely. Judging from letters I have received from her, she seems nervous, almost hysterical."

“I grew uneasy about her, and that is the reason for my trip up here now. If I can do so, I am going to try to persuade her to go back with me to my home in Carmont.”

“Oh, you live in Carmont?” asked Kay. “I attend the high school there. My home is in Brantwood, several miles from there.”

“Indeed,” said the stranger cordially. “I shall be glad to know you better. My name is Crosby—Mrs. Alice Crosby—and I live within two blocks of the high school.”

“I am Kay Tracey. I am sorry to hear that Miss Arno is not feeling very well,” she added. “Is there anything seriously wrong?”

“I think her trouble is more mental than physical,” said Mrs. Crosby with a puzzled shake of the head. “Hilda was never nervous—up to the time she met John Fort——”

“John Fort?” repeated Kay quickly.

“The man she is to marry,” Mrs. Crosby explained. “He taught science in the school where my sister is a teacher of languages. Hilda became infatuated with him. He will never make her happy, though. He is causing her to be miserable; so much so, that her health is breaking under the strain.”

“He must be a very unpleasant person—this John Fort,” remarked Kay, secretly angling for information. “I don’t believe I should like him.”

“Oh, he is all right in some ways,” said Mrs. Crosby casually. “I know nothing against his character. But I think he is not very reliable. He is visionary—too easily led by others, and eager to get rich quickly. He is putting off the marriage until he shall have saved a great deal of money, and that has made Hilda unhappy.

“She would be satisfied with very little, but he wants so much. He has given up a good teaching position so that he can make money in some wildcat scheme. Hilda does not approve of this, either. I think that is why she is so nervous and unhappy.

“I am up here to find out if I can persuade my poor sister to come back with me to Carmont. But here I am gossiping away,” she interrupted herself with a quick smile, “and boring you to death, no doubt.”

“Indeed you aren’t,” denied Kay very sincerely. “I am sorry to hear that Miss Arno is unhappy.” Then she added casually, though secretly waiting upon a reply with great eagerness, “Did you say she was staying at some place nearby?”

“At a farmhouse down the road,” said Mrs. Crosby. “I believe it is the second one from here. Now I must say good-bye, my dear, for I see the man

has completed the repairs to my car.”

“Good-bye,” said Kay, adding under her breath, “Thank you very much, Hilda Arno’s sister! You have told me just exactly what I wanted to know!”

After expressing her appreciation to the store-keeper, Kay rode home, thinking all the while of what had just transpired.

She liked Mrs. Crosby, who was a genial and cultured woman. How shocked she would be, Kay thought, if she were to discover the theft of the missing pages and Hilda’s probable connection with it!

Kay had learned many things in her recent conversation, but by far the most important, of course, was the information concerning the present whereabouts of Hilda Arno. Kay decided to make a call at the farmhouse the following morning.

She wished she might have gone at once, but she and the twins had arranged, with three of the boys as escorts, to take a trip across the lake that evening, Mrs. Worth having finally consented.

It was not merely the thought of pleasure that had prompted the arrangement. Kay’s plans went further than that.

She was eager to get near Faraway Valley after dark, for it was at night that most of the queer things had happened which had so perplexed the natives and visitors at the resort. Besides, her own actions and those of her companions would not be so open to observation as in the daytime.

The twins had yielded to the plan with more or less trepidation. Behind their assent had been the reservation that if things became too “ghosty”, they would scuttle back to safety, despite any arguments Kay might put forth.

Then, too, they would have the boys with them, for Red, Tubby and Cracker had gladly agreed to go. In fact, they were looking forward to the adventure with considerable anticipation, Tubby declaring that he was ready for anything from spooks to lions.

As twilight was merging into darkness the group set out in one of the rowboats for the opposite shore. They took with them the portable radio of Cracker’s construction, several powerful flashlights, a few sandwiches in a basket, and Tubby’s ukulele. Kay had remembered to bring paper and pencil. She had an idea that they would come in handy before the evening was over.

Presently Tubby relinquished his oars to Cracker and took up the ukulele.

“That’s right,” approved Betty. “Give us some music.”

“Yes,” murmured Wilma, adding,

“ ‘Music that kindlier on the spirit lies,
Than tired eyelids upon tired eyes.
Music that brings sweet sleep
Down from the blissful skies.’ ”

“Not so bad,” applauded Tubby.

“Let’s sing,” suggested Kay. “And in good old-fashioned harmony.”

“Righto,” said Tubby. “Get set, then.”

He strummed a few chords on the ukulele; then the young voices rose and swelled out over the quiet lake. Presently the opposite shore was reached, and as Wilma was pulled up on the bank by Cracker, she shivered.

“I like our side of the lake better,” she quavered. “How dark the woods are! Kay! Betty! Are you there?”

“Right here.” Kay’s cool hand touched hers reassuringly. “And there’s no use being scared, Wilma. We’re going to have fun.”

“It all depends on your idea of fun,” murmured Betty. She stumbled over an outflung root, said “ouch,” and was saved from falling only by Red’s steadying touch on her arm. “I—I thought it was a snake,” she stammered. “It’s dark as pitch in here.”

In a little while the young people were passing through a densely wooded section. Kay and Cracker MacCloud were in the lead, carrying a flashlight and the portable radio set, when a terrific growling arose nearby. At the same time two huge, glowing eyes glared at them from a nearby thicket!

CHAPTER XX

EYES IN THE NIGHT

BETTY and Wilma screamed. Kay gave a startled exclamation and went with the boys to investigate.

“It’s a bear!” cried Betty.

“I want to go home,” quavered Wilma. “We’ll all be killed!”

“Don’t be foolish!” exclaimed Kay, looking about her eagerly. “Turn on your flashlight, Cracker. You too, Red!”

As the lads did so there was a great scrambling in the bushes—then silence.

Kay and the boys pressed their way into the thicket and searched through it thoroughly. Nowhere, however, was there a sign of anything living. The flashlights revealed no tracks, though the ground was soft from recent rains.

“Nothing to be seen anywhere,” said Kay thoughtfully. “No tracks that might give us a clue, and no sign of broken bushes.”

“But there must have been something there,” cried Betty, bewildered. “Those eyes! We all saw them.”

“And something growled at us,” wailed Wilma. “We couldn’t have imagined it.”

“Perhaps it was just a trick,” suggested Kay, her eyes glowing in the light of the torch. “A trick to frighten us away. The ‘eyes’ could have been made by electric bulbs, you know, and the growling could easily have been done by any sort of noise-making machine. Maybe we stepped on something that set the things going.”

“Oh, well, those eyes didn’t look like electric bulbs to me,” quavered Wilma, at which Betty chuckled.

“Wilma prefers to believe in ghosts,” she said.

The little party went on again after awhile, proceeding cautiously, eyes alert, ears strained for any unfamiliar sounds. Nothing further happened, however, until they were about halfway to the cabin.

Then into the air there arose a jumble of queer sounds, coming, apparently, from the portable radio which Cracker was carrying with him. The lad was so surprised that he almost dropped the set.

“Hold on to it, Cracker,” cried Kay, frantically searching for pencil and paper. “And switch the flashlight toward me. That’s right!”

“I didn’t know the dial was turned on,” muttered Cracker. “Must have pushed it around by accident.”

In a moment Kay had found her writing materials, and for several minutes her fingers flew as she wrote down the strange syllables. Then as suddenly as it had begun, the “broadcasting” ceased.

Kay’s companions had watched her feverish energy with surprise.

“Why did you want to take down that hodge-podge?”

“Hodge-podge is right, if you don’t understand it,” admitted Kay. “If my theory is right, two people were talking on a scrambled speech outfit. As the words went through the air, they were scrambled so no one listening in could understand them. But at some time or other I hope to do some of the unscrambling, and find out what the messages were.”

The group resumed their journey, and in a short time came in sight of the cabin. Kay’s heart beat quickly as she saw a light streaming from the window. Just outside that zone the party halted.

“What’s next?” asked Tubby.

“I’m going to do a little investigating,” declared Kay.

“Oh, do watch out, Kay!” wailed Wilma.

“Better be careful,” counseled Red soberly. “There may be some rough characters there. Why not let us fellows look in the window? We’ll report to you what we see.”

“Oh, no, I want to go myself,” said Kay urgently. “One of you come with me if you like, but the rest of you stay where you are, and please don’t make any noise. It would be awful if we were discovered here.”

“I c-couldn’t make any noise if I w-wanted to,” shuddered Wilma. Betty tugged at Kay’s skirt and whispered, “Do be careful. I’m convinced this place is really dangerous.”

Kay promised to heed her advice. She and Red then crept cautiously toward the cabin. They avoided the streaming light and edged along the wall of the shack until they reached a window.

While the lad crouched beneath the sill, Kay raised herself guardedly, inch by inch, and peered inside. The only occupant was John Fort. In the light of the lamp that stood on the table, Kay had a chance to study his face. He was not bad looking. The features were well cut, the forehead high and broad, the nose aquiline, the mouth firm and determined. It looked like the

face of a scholar and a gentleman, and Kay did not wonder at the attraction which the man held for Hilda Arno.

Could he be engaged in some shady, perhaps criminal, scheme, she wondered. It seemed incredible. Yet everything certainly pointed to it. All his actions had been mysterious and suspicious.

Mrs. Crosby had spoken of his eager desire to get rich quickly. Perhaps, thought Kay, he had yielded to the temptation of acquiring money without being scrupulous as to the method used.

Kay did not dwell long on his face, for his actions interested her far more. He was bending over an instrument into which he spoke at intervals; pausing frequently between the sentences.

Kay Tracey's eyes narrowed, and her heart beat rapidly. That instrument, Kay felt sure, *was* part of the scrambled speech contrivance she had seen in Mr. Miller's plant. Was John Fort the thief?

She strained her ears, but could not distinguish any words.

After a few moments the man ceased speaking. He put a cover on the instrument, as though he intended to use it no more that night.

He had been in his shirt sleeves, but now turned to a chair on which his coat was lying, and prepared to put it on. As it was evident that he would leave the shack in a moment, Kay and Red scurried back to the group waiting for them in the bushes.

"Well, did you see anything worthwhile?" asked Red in his blunt, good-natured manner.

"Yes," replied Kay breathlessly, almost unable to keep from shouting with glee at the discovery she had made. However, she could not enlighten the youth, for he would not understand about the stolen machine and what it meant to have located it. But she ought to explain something to her companion.

"I don't want to say too much until I am sure," she went on, "but I think it won't be long now before we'll have definite proof about a very queer thief."

"I realize," said Red, "that when you work on a case you never make a statement until it has been proven."

They had scarcely rejoined their friends when the light in the cabin went out. A second later the door opened. They could dimly make out the man's figure as he made a hasty exit, going off in a direction at right angles to the one they had been pursuing.

They breathed more freely. It would have been embarrassing had he happened to pass the hiding place and discover them. It might have entailed awkward explanations.

“Well, Miss Detective,” grinned Tubby, “did you have a profitable session at the window?”

“I believe so,” replied Kay rather abstractedly. “Now let’s go on to Faraway Valley.”

“Haven’t we done enough for one night?” asked Wilma fearfully.

“Come along, Wilma,” urged Betty. “The night’s yet young. Let’s show that the Worths are heroines.”

“I don’t want to be a heroine,” protested her quavering twin.

“I know you’d rather be a poetess,” said her sister, “but for this one night try being both!”

Once more Wilma allowed herself to be overridden, and the party proceeded. A little later an obnoxious odor brought the group to an abrupt halt.

“What are we stumbling into?” asked Red.

“It’s Sulphur Pond,” explained Kay. “I know it has a frightful odor, but we’ll soon leave it behind us. Then we’ll be close to Faraway Valley.”

“What a great thing it is to be an optimist,” grinned Red.

“Kay’s like the Pied Piper of Hamelin,” remarked Tubby. “We have to follow when she strikes the tune.”

The girls and boys soon reached the Pond, and skirted it at as far a distance as possible, all the while holding handkerchiefs to their faces. They climbed a high ridge and suddenly came in view of Faraway Valley.

But such a view! The sight that met the eyes of the young people would have caused the stoutest heart to quail!

Wilma shrieked wildly. Betty echoed her.

CHAPTER XXI

GHOSTLY SHADOWS

IN the valley were a number of spectral figures moving back and forth and waving ghostly hands. They seemed, to the startled fancy of the boys and girls, to be swirling in the air far above the ground. From time to time horrible wailings would arise that sounded like the outcries of tormented souls.

The whole thing was ghastly beyond expression, and the appalled spectators could feel the gooseflesh rising, while cold chills ran up and down their spines.

Kay was the first to emerge from the terror that had gripped the members of the party. Her keen ear had divined that the sound came from some source close at hand, while the ghostly figures were at a much greater distance. The cries and the specters did not synchronize.

“I believe it’s all stage stuff!” Kay cried out excitedly. “The sounds and the ghosts don’t belong together. The whole thing is a hoax, designed to scare off intruders.”

The confident ring in her voice calmed to some extent the trepidation of the others.

“Are you s-s-sure?” stuttered Wilma.

“Of course I’m sure,” declared Kay eagerly. “And you will be, too, if you stop to think a minute. The whole thing is connected with the eyes we saw and the growling we heard a little while ago.

“A skillful arrangement of lights,” she went on, “a blast from some noise-making machine, and the thing is complete. Any intelligent theatrical manager could produce the same effect. It looks to me as if this is simply a big outdoor show.”

At that moment the indistinct wailing ceased, and some sharp staccato sounds took their place. From these there came back a series of echoes. Prominent among them were what sounded like “rise ten”; then, with a pause between, “shun—shun.”

Kay made a mental note of the words, then turned to her companions.

“I guess we’ve had enough ‘ghosting’ for one night,” she said. “What about getting back to the boat?”

The proposal met with instant acclaim, in which none joined so fervidly as Wilma. The young people left the weird region behind them and made rapid time back to the shore.

There they stopped and ate the sandwiches they had brought along. This helped enormously to fortify their spirits. Soon they were talking and laughing as usual, while Red picked out random notes on Tubby's ukulele.

The calm was not to last long, however, for one more shock was in store for the group. Just as they were about to embark, there came a deep roar and a shaking of the earth that almost threw them off their feet.

"Another earthquake!" cried Wilma.

"Sounded more like an explosion," said Tubby practically. "Maybe somebody's doing some blasting or excavating not far from here."

"Ought to put up caution signs before they let it off, then," grumbled Red.

Kay caught at a word.

"Caution, caution," she repeated. "I wonder if that has anything to do with the 'shun—shun' we heard?"

"While we're guessing, how about that 'rise ten'?" put in Cracker.

"It's possible that the 'rise' may really be 'sunrise' or something like that," Kay conjectured.

"Likely enough," agreed Red, "and 'ten' is probably the last syllable of 'mountain.' Old Abner was telling me that the heap of rocks and stones that buried the village was called 'Sunrise Mountain'."

"That sounds like a good explanation," said Kay reflectively. "Sunrise Mountain. I'll remember that."

The girls and boys reached home safe to find the Worths much disturbed by the explosion; so much so, in fact, that Mr. Worth put his foot down firmly on any other night excursions to the far side of the lake.

The first thing Kay did the following morning was to write to Mr. Miller about the machine in the cabin. Then she set out to make a call on Hilda Arno. She located the farmhouse without difficulty, and in it found Mrs. Crosby, very anxious and disturbed.

Hilda, she said, was very ill. Some heavy burden lay on her sister's mind. What it was she had been unable to ferret out. At times the teacher had delirious spells.

"In fact, she is raving now, and I do not know what she means."

"I'm sorry," said Kay. "May I see her?"

As the two entered the sick room, they could hear the woman on the bed mumbling.

“I didn’t do it—but I’ll go to jail—the pages are gone—I didn’t steal them, but they’re lost—lost——”

Kay offered to sit by the patient for a while. As soon as Mrs. Crosby had gone outside, the girl gently stroked the woman’s feverish brow, and spoke to her slowly and distinctly.

“Hilda Arno, I have found the missing pages of the book. They have been returned to the owner.”

After repeating this over and over, she noticed a sign of returning consciousness on the part of the teacher. As the woman opened her eyes, she looked frightened. Then, as Kay smiled and reassured her, she began to speak.

“Is thees true, what you have been telling me?”

“Yes,” Kay replied. “And now, if you would care to let me hear your story, I promise you it will remain a secret with me.”

“I told you some things that day at the cabin—but I did not tell you everything.”

“I know you didn’t,” said Kay gently. “But I found out more by myself. Why don’t you,” she went on earnestly, “tell me all you know?”

“I vill,” said Hilda impulsively. “You are good. You are kind. Yes, I vill tell.”

Then her words poured out in a torrent that Kay had to check at times, lest the invalid become too excited.

“John told me one day of a valuable book about echoes. He wanted to buy it, but it was far beyond his means. He especially mentioned half a dozen pages.”

It chanced that later on Hilda had mentioned the matter more or less casually to Christine, Mrs. Crosby’s maid, at whose home Hilda was staying. On the day of the department store incident, Christine, who was starting on a long vacation, had handed Hilda a package in the street and hurried away.

“She said it was a present. I could not thank her, for nobody knew where she had gone,” the teacher explained.

Hilda had taken the bundle to the waiting room of the department store to examine it. What was her surprise and horror to find the contents to be pages torn from the valuable volume. She guessed that they had been taken

by Mrs. Crosby's maid, who had a great affection for her, and had used this method in an attempt to please her.

"I did not know what to do. I could not return them, for I had no idea who the owner was," Hilda went on. "So I translated them into English for my John—there was no harm in that."

The day she had gone to the cabin when Kay had seen her she had taken the pages with her and lost them at the shack. When she had gone back for them, they had disappeared.

"But you found them?" she asked delightedly. "And the owner has them. I am so glad. Now I will get vell. I must, for my John needs me."

"Did John Fort ever have any connection with a concern that manufactured unusual scientific instruments?" asked Kay.

"No," replied Hilda, "but he has a relative who knows all about such things and has tried to get John interested in them. Oh, how I dislike that Henry Wolf! A bad man. Very clever, but with no scruples."

"Can you tell me what he looks like?"

The description exactly fitted that of the "crazy" man whom Kay had seen at the gate of Mr. Miller's plant and later in the woods. She could hardly contain her excitement.

"One other thing," went on Kay. "Do you know anything about the strange noises and sights near Sulphur Pond and in Faraway Valley? Did you ever see any queer instruments in the cabin?"

"No," said Hilda. "I would never notice such things. I was thinking only of John. He is good; he is only unwise."

She looked pathetically at Kay.

"You do not think ill of me?" she asked.

"No," answered Kay heartily. "I think you are fine. I know John will be lucky when you are his wife."

Mrs. Crosby came in at that moment.

"What magic have you brought with you?" she asked Kay, seeing Hilda's happy, radiant face.

"We've had a very interesting chat," smiled Kay, as she rose to go.

"I shall get vell now," declared Hilda. "Oh, please come again. Please!"

Kay was exultant as she hurried back to Camp Worthy. It was a relief to feel that Hilda was exonerated of the theft. John, too, had not been a party to it. That much was clear.

However, there still remained unsolved the mystery of Faraway Valley and the strange echo. What was that other name that Hilda had mentioned? Oh yes, Wolf—Henry Wolf.

On reaching Camp Worthy she was delighted to find Cousin Bill and Mr. Miller, both of whom had just arrived. She greeted them enthusiastically.

“I was very much pleased to receive your letter,” said Mr. Miller. “You’re surely a great Little Detective. Thanks to you, Miss Kay, I have a chance now to get back my stolen outfit.”

“Did you make out anything from the scrambled words I sent you?”

“Yes. I ‘translated’ them in my laboratory on another machine.”

“What did they say?” exclaimed Kay eagerly.

“They are all in the form of warnings,” was the reply. “They tell that ‘an old man’, ‘a smart young girl’, and ‘the girl and her big brother’ are being too inquisitive.”

“The old man must be Mr. Nelson,” cried Kay, “and the young girl myself. No doubt Cousin Bill was mistaken for my big brother!”

“So certain persons are being warned against us, are they?” exclaimed Bill Tracey. “I’d take that as a compliment, Kay, to have people worried about your investigations.”

“If they were honest men, they wouldn’t mind us. And they’ll find us still more inquisitive before they get through with us!” she added resolutely.

“That’s the spirit,” approved Cousin Bill. “By the way, Kay, old Entveg is tickled to death to get back his missing pages. He doesn’t know how to express himself when he speaks of you.”

“I’m glad,” said Kay simply. “He’s a charming old gentleman.”

It was arranged that Mr. Miller was to stay over as a guest of the Worths. Then the following day they would visit the shack in the woods and perhaps go on to Faraway Valley, should it seem advisable.

It was late when they all retired. Ordinarily, Kay would have fallen asleep at once. But so many things had crowded upon her of late that her mind was in a tumult. Pieces of the puzzle were beginning to fit, but still there remained the missing word in the strange echo.

There were “treasure”, “sunrise”, “mountain”. But something was lacking. What was that other word? Kate. Kate. It must be the last syllable of some word.

Then one of her hunches came to her, and Kay bounced out of bed, calling eagerly to the twins:

“I have it! I’ve found it!”

CHAPTER XXII

KAY'S CLUES

BETTY was awake in an instant. Wilma opened her eyes slowly and looked about her dazedly.

“Wake up, sleepy-head,” Betty commanded. “Can’t you see that something exciting has struck Kay?”

“Hope it—didn’t hurt her,” Wilma muttered drowsily, only really waking up when her exasperated twin threatened to throw cold water on her.

“Now tell us about it, Kay!” urged Betty.

“Oh,” said Wilma, “has Kay discovered another idea, or found another clue?”

“Yes,” replied her twin, “and if you’ll be quiet a few moments and concentrate on what she has to tell us, we can learn something, otherwise it will be just a waste of time.”

“I’m always eager to hear about anything that Kay has to say,” said Wilma, slightly peeved.

“All right,” returned Betty, laughing at the turn of events. “We’ll give Kay a chance to explain everything.”

“It’s that strange echo,” exclaimed Kay. “You remember we had parts of it—or thought we had—but nothing that really made sense. I think I have it now. Old Mr. Nelson and his buried fortune made me decipher it. He kept saying he hoped to *locate* his treasure. Suppose ‘Kate’ stands for ‘located’. If that’s right, then the message reads: ‘Treasure located—Sunrise Mountain.’”

“Marvelous!” cried Betty. “I believe you’re right, Kay. And I wonder if there really *is* treasure.”

“Maybe. Anyway, I’m beginning to get the pattern of the puzzle. Listen, and I’ll tell you what I think.”

To the wide-eyed Wilma and Betty, Kay exultantly revealed her conclusions.

“It seems to me that the people who have been at the root of all the mysterious happenings in this vicinity are treasure hunters,” she propounded.

“Really!” gasped Betty. “Gold?”

“That’s my theory. Suppose they had found a clue somewhere that there was a lot of money in the village when it was buried in the landslide and had decided to try to get it? It would be natural, wouldn’t it, for them to try to keep curious people away while they were excavating for the treasure?”

“Of course,” cried Wilma, “that is plain.”

“Then what could be better than to make the Valley appear to be haunted? The thunder and lightning without rain, the weird lights, the horrid noises, and the smoke screen would contribute to that effect. No one would dare go into the Valley,” finished Kay sincerely.

“Not if he had any sense!” said Wilma, adding, “Do you suppose it could be old Mr. Nelson’s treasure they’re after?”

“Perhaps,” said Kay. “But I think they are after something bigger. Suppose, for instance, that there was a really worthwhile buried fortune down there in the Valley—gold and other valuable things amounting to hundreds of thousands of dollars. That would be a treasure worth trying for!”

“But Kay, if that’s so, why haven’t the people to whom it belonged tried to get it?” asked Betty. “That would seem the natural thing to do.”

“A great many were killed during the earthquake, you know, perhaps the owner or owners among them. Probably no one who escaped knew about the treasure, or bothered to look for it if he did. At that time there weren’t the excavating implements there are today.”

“Whatever might be found would really belong to the heirs, wouldn’t it?” asked Wilma.

“Yes, if they can be traced,” agreed Kay. “What is unclaimed belongs to the state, I suppose. That’s where the dishonesty of the thing comes in,” she added.

“If my theory is right, and men are excavating on Sunrise Mountain, it’s pretty certain that they haven’t notified the real heirs or the state of what they are doing. They want to keep all the treasure to themselves. I suspect they have even gone so far as to steal the instruments of magic by which they’re keeping people away!”

“Kay, let’s test your theory,” cried out Betty.

“We will,” Kay promised, “first thing in the morning.”

She was up early, awakening the twins.

“Up, sluggards!” she admonished gaily. “We’ve lots of work on hand today.”

“Work,” yawned Wilma. “Why do we have to work?”

“ ‘All other things have rest from weariness
Why should we only toil, who are the crown of things?’ ”

“That’s all right for the lotus eaters,” rejoined Kay, “but I’m afraid we’d soon find ourselves hungry and homeless if we went on that theory.”

At breakfast Kay repeated the idea that had come to her during the night, and all her hearers were deeply impressed with it.

“By Jove, I believe you’ve hit it!” exclaimed Mr. Miller. “And if you have, there’s no time to be lost. For if those men have actually located the treasure, they must have made considerable progress in their excavations and are almost ready to decamp.”

“By the way,” said Kay to Mr. Miller, “did you ever have a man working for you named Henry Wolf?”

Mr. Miller looked at her in astonishment.

“Queer that you should ask me that,” he said. “Yes, and what is more, I know no good of him. He was employed by me once, and I had to discharge him. He was lying and unscrupulous.”

When Kay asked for a description of the man, she found it tallied exactly with that of the strange individual at the gate of the Instrument Company, whom she had later seen in the woods.

“Unscrupulous—um!” mused Kay. “Do you think he would steal?”

“Don’t think he’d hesitate much,” was the reply. “But why do you ask?”

“I’ve heard some things in confidence,” replied Kay mysteriously. “If you don’t mind, I’d like to have you make a call with me this morning before we cross the lake.”

Mr. Miller readily agreed, and immediately after breakfast he and Kay saddled horses and visited Hilda Arno. Mr. Miller came away with the same impression as Kay—that John Fort was being used as a tool by some shrewdly cunning mind, and that he probably had no knowledge whatsoever that the instrument he had been using had been stolen.

They had also learned from Hilda that old Mr. Nelson had called there at a very early hour, and told her of his disappointment in not meeting John on Saturday. She had given the old man a note to her lover and had urged Mr. Nelson to go to the cabin and wait there until John should come.

It had been arranged that Cousin Bill and the twins should ride around the lake in one direction, and meet Kay and Mr. Miller at the place

belonging to the old farmer who had hired out the mules to the “scientific gentleman.”

They found that native greatly perturbed because the beasts and the carts had not been returned. The group assured him that the animals soon would be. Then they rode on to the cabin.

Mr. Nelson’s joy at meeting Kay again was almost pathetic. The strain he had been under and his recent wanderings in the weird valley made him appear more frail than ever. Kay’s heart warmed toward him as he told her of his recent experiences.

What he said coincided almost perfectly with her own conception of the situation. He had been looked upon with suspicion wherever he had appeared, had been warned off, and more than once threatened with personal violence. He had seen the “ghosts” at night. He had been almost deafened by a pandemonium of weird and eerie sounds. Fiery eyes had glared at him from the bushes.

As a result, his nerves had become so shaken by these fiendish devices that he had retreated. This, thought Kay, was exactly what the people behind these evil workings desired.

Mr. Nelson had noted, however, that the principal scene of operations was at Sunrise Mountain in Faraway Valley, where deep excavations were in progress.

“Seems as if my fortune was going to be stolen by somebody else,” the old man mourned.

“Not if we can help it,” declared Kay vigorously. “You’re sure to come out all right.”

“Just depend on us,” said Betty stoutly.

Mr. Miller’s gaze had been attracted at once by the instrument in the cabin. He hurried over to it.

“That’s mine!” he declared jubilantly after a moment’s examination. “See, it has my initials underneath. Miss Kay, I can’t thank you enough for what you’ve done for me in recovering this valuable machine.”

“I’m only too glad that you have it again,” the girl replied quietly.

“I’ll dismantle it in part,” said Mr. Miller, beginning to suit the action to the word, “so that it can’t be used in my absence. Then we’ll stop for it here on our way back.”

The group searched the cabin and all the surrounding area to see if they could locate any noise-making apparatus, but were unsuccessful in their quest.

“Probably they’re across the Valley near Sunrise Mountain,” suggested Kay. “Let’s hurry over there.”

Kay scribbled a note for John Fort and left it with Mr. Nelson. Then the group set out, skirting Sulphur Pond at some distance to avoid the gaze of the men who were working there. Then abruptly they found themselves facing a smoke screen.

The horses balked at any attempt to penetrate it, so that the riders were forced to make a wide detour. At last they found a space comparatively free from the thick fumes.

They were cantering briskly across a clearing, when without warning a strange, unheralded tornado struck them with such force that it threw them from their horses to the ground!

CHAPTER XXIII

THE MYSTERIOUS BLAST

THE blast had been so unexpected that all the members of the party were utterly bewildered. They lay for a moment where they had been thrown. Then one by one they struggled to their feet.

Luckily, no one had suffered any broken bones, though all were more or less bruised and sore. They stared at one another, dazed.

“Now, who would have looked for anything like that?” exclaimed Cousin Bill. “Talk about lightning from a clear sky! There wasn’t a sign of a rising wind. Then along comes this tornado and knocks us endways.”

“I’m afraid that was no tornado,” said Kay, puzzled. “There wasn’t anything natural about it.”

“Then it must have been supernatural,” wailed Wilma. “Let’s get away from here.”

“I doubt if it was supernatural, either,” declared Kay, looking about her with rising interest. “I believe it was artificial.”

Cousin Bill looked at her curiously.

“I wonder,” he muttered.

“By George, I believe you’re right,” said Mr. Miller to Kay, “and I’m going to find out. Come along—in the direction from which the blast came.”

Their horses, though frightened at first, had not run far and were now nibbling at the grass. The riders caught them without difficulty, mounted, and went in the direction indicated.

A shout from Mr. Miller, who was in the lead, was evoked by the sight of a small shed at the side of the trail. Outside of this stood a giant bellows.

“Just like one in our laboratory,” he exclaimed. “It has a tremendous expelling force and can easily simulate a young tornado. It’s a blast from this that knocked us off our horses. Now, who was the miscreant that handled it?”

There was no reply to this question, and no person could be seen in the immediate vicinity. The shed, however, contained a number of noise-making instruments, scientifically constructed, evidently by some very ingenious person.

These, however, they examined only perfunctorily. They wanted, if possible, to get hold of the operator.

Kay's quick eye detected footprints in the soft ground. The bent bushes indicated that somebody had recently forced his way through them.

"Here are his tracks," she exclaimed. "Let's see if we can catch up with him."

All followed her suggestion, and for a time the trail was reasonably obvious. Then it ended abruptly. The followers looked at one another in chagrin.

"What shall we do now?" queried Cousin Bill.

"We started for Sunrise Mountain," suggested Betty. "Let's keep on until we get there."

"That's all right," said Kay, "but I have a hunch that if we find this man we may be able to get some information from him. He is probably hiding around here.

"Suppose Cousin Bill and I do a little further searching for him. You girls and Mr. Miller go on toward Sunrise Mountain. We may meet you there later, or, if not, we can all come back to the cabin."

There was no objection to the suggestion, and it was acted upon at once.

Left together, Kay and Cousin Bill scouted the surrounding woodland thoroughly, beating every thicket, and looking behind each boulder and clump of trees. But there was not a trace of anyone. The miscreant had made good his retreat.

Convinced of this, they finally turned their horses' heads in the direction of Faraway Valley and Sunrise Mountain. Much of their way lay over woodland trails. They were glad of this, for it made them less liable to detection by prying eyes.

In a little while, however, the trees became widely scattered, and the two proceeded with extreme caution. They eventually came to a clearing, where an extensive view opened up before them.

Kay's pulses beat feverishly. At last she was gazing upon Sunrise Mountain—the vast landslide that had overwhelmed the village on that disastrous night so long ago!

It was now the scene of great activity. A huge steam shovel was digging deep into a certain section, around which a number of men were gathered. All seemed intent upon that special area. Between it and the unseen observers there were great mounds of earth that shut off part of the view.

“There’s a hillock over there,” said Kay, pointing to a place about fifty yards distant. “If we could reach that we’d be able to look down into the excavation.”

“Right you are,” agreed Cousin Bill, “but we’d have to cross this open space and might be seen.”

“Let’s take a chance on that,” urged Kay. “They’re so intent just now they haven’t eyes for anything else. We can tether our horses here. No one will see us.”

Cousin Bill agreed, for he had caught some of the eagerness that made Kay glow with excitement. They tied their horses and darted across the open space. In a few moments they had reached the coveted observation post. The top of this elevation was fringed with bushes behind which they were screened from sight.

There was no stir to indicate that their flight had been noticed. Kay cautiously parted the bushes and looked through them.

A number of the wrecked stone houses had been uncovered, in whole or in part, by the excavators. But the throng of men, in a state of great excitement, were gathered about a more pretentious structure that had been almost entirely freed of the clinging dirt.

“The real buried treasure, I shouldn’t wonder,” muttered Cousin Bill.

Before Kay could answer, a great shout arose. A man, apparently the foreman, stooped and lifted up a rectangular object. Although it was partly covered with dirt, it gleamed yellow in the sunlight.

“A gold bar!” gasped Kay. “They’ve located the treasure! Now we *must* tell the authorities.”

As they stared, fascinated, at the gleaming object, three pair of eyes from an entirely different direction were also fastened on the scene. Mr. Miller and the twins, pursuing a separate course, had ensconced themselves at another spot and were gazing as though hypnotized at the solution of the mystery that had so long baffled and intrigued them.

If Betty and Wilma had been looking for excitement, they were not disappointed. Their flushed faces and shining eyes revealed that they had found it. Mr. Miller was almost equally stirred, but his practical mind leaped to the same conclusion as had Kay’s.

“The police must be notified,” he said. “Come!”

They tore themselves from the scene and rode back to the cabin. But the hours passed, and Kay and Cousin Bill did not come.

Mr. Miller looked grave.

“Those men at Sunrise Mountain are desperate,” he muttered to himself. “They’ll stop at nothing to keep their loot. If they have discovered Miss Kay and Bill——”

He paused for a moment and closed his eyes as if blotting out some horrible picture.

“If anything were to happen——”

CHAPTER XXIV

FOLLOWING THE TRAIL

AT this ominous and unfinished sentence Wilma and Betty looked at each other fearfully. If anything were to happen to Kay——

Thus far they had been more impatient than anxious. Having reached the conclusion that their chum and her Cousin Bill had gone off on a scouting expedition of their own, the twins had felt a little put out because they and Mr. Miller had not been included in the expedition.

Now, however, the alternative to their first hasty conclusion struck them with full force. Suppose, in trying to get away from the dangerous vicinity of Sunrise Mountain, Kay and Bill Tracey had fallen in with some of the unscrupulous men who had just uncovered the secret of Faraway Valley!

“Oh, I can’t bear it!” Betty cried. “I—oh, I’m sure Wilma and I should both just die if anything should happen to Kay. Can’t we do something?”

“I think we must,” said Mr. Miller with a sober nod. “The question is, what will be the wisest thing? If we all go back to Sunrise Mountain, then Miss Kay and her cousin may come here after we are gone and be alarmed about us as we are now about them. On the other hand, I don’t quite like to leave you two girls all alone in this queer place.”

“It’s haunted,” said Wilma with a shudder. “Oh, I’m afraid, afraid—for Kay!” She turned away and began to cry. Betty placed a trembling arm about her sister.

“Oh, please, Mr. Miller, don’t bother about us. We will be all right here. Go and find Kay. Please—please!”

Mr. Miller had turned irresolutely away, when there came the sound of some one approaching through the woods. A twig snapped; then a man’s voice could be heard, raised in argument.

Wilma’s head jerked up. Her face, tear-stained as it was, became suddenly alight.

“There they are!” she cried. “Oh, Betty, Betty, they’re coming!”

“No,” said her twin with a slow shake of her head, “that isn’t Cousin Bill’s voice.”

As she spoke, the newcomers emerged from the woods. They were John Fort and Mr. Nelson.

The former drew up abruptly at sight of the girls and Mr. Miller. He frowned as his old companion put a hand on his arm and drew him forward.

“These are the friends I have been telling you about, John Fort,” he said, his husky voice quavering with eagerness. “They have been very good to me. They are going to help me find my fortune. And I believe they have something to say to you,” he added.

There was a suggestion of haughtiness in John Fort’s manner.

“I am happy to meet your friends, of course, but I am at a loss to imagine what they can possibly have to say to me.”

“In another minute or two you will no longer be at a loss,” said Mr. Miller grimly. “I think it is about time that some one had a thing or two to say to you, John Fort. A good plain talk straight from the shoulder is what you need—and I am the man to deliver it!”

The scientist drew himself up, and there was more than a suggestion of arrogance in his tone.

“I don’t understand you,” Fort said contemptuously.

“Perhaps you will begin to understand,” said Mr. Miller, speaking slowly and very distinctly, “when I tell you that the scrambled speech machine which you have been using so freely was *stolen from my laboratory*. Or, perhaps,” with studied insolence, “you are already aware of that!”

“No—no,” said John Fort, his arrogant manner suddenly gone. “That machine was bought with good money from some big scientific concern. Henry Wolf told me so.”

“And you believed him, I suppose,” said Mr. Miller grimly. “Well, come inside the cabin and I will show you a thing or two.”

They all went into the shack. There Mr. Miller pointed out to John Fort the patented trade-mark on the instrument; also its individual number, which was an even more certain identification.

“Henry Wolf lied if he told you that he bought this apparatus,” said Mr. Miller sternly. “He, or somebody commissioned by him, stole it from my company laboratory, and you, John Fort, have been working with stolen goods!”

“No—no!” muttered the man, nervously fingering the machine. “I cannot believe it——”

Now Betty pushed her way forward and pointed to the notes which Kay had left on the table.

“Won’t you please read these, Mr. Fort?” she begged. “One is from Miss Hilda Arno and the other is from my friend, Kay Tracey. But oh, please hurry,” she added entreatingly, “for I am afraid Kay is in danger and we must go to her help.”

John Fort looked at her wonderingly, picked up the notes, and then began to read. As those in the cabin watched him, anxiously and grimly, it seemed to them that John Fort was as a man awakening from a troubled dream which had more pain than happiness in it.

He read the notes twice, then turned to his companions with kindling eyes.

“I have been a fool!” he cried, striking the table with his clenched fist. “An arrogant, conceited fool. I have allowed Henry Wolf to pull the wool over my eyes. I believed him when he said this was an honest business. I may have been a fool, but I swear to you I’ve been an honest fool.

“But now I know that Henry Wolf is no better than a common thief—and I have been a thief’s accomplice!”

“Yet any one would take you for an honest man!” said Mr. Miller quietly.

John Fort whirled toward him, and for a moment the eyes of the two men met and held; then the science teacher turned away, the muscles of his face quivering.

“Thanks,” he muttered thickly. “You will never know how much—I needed that!”

Betty came up to him and touched him on the arm.

“Mr. Fort,” she said, pointing to the slip of paper which he held crumpled in his long fingers, “the girl who wrote that note to you is out on Sunrise Mountain somewhere. She and her cousin are perhaps lost in Faraway Valley, or probably have fallen into the hands of this Henry Wolf and his men. You doubtless know the place well—and you know Henry Wolf. Will you help us find Kay?”

John Fort turned and took the girl’s hand in his. His face was drawn and haggard from strain, but his eyes glowed with a steady purpose.

“Yes, we will find her,” he said grimly. “At the same time we will punish—Henry Wolf!”

Meanwhile, Kay and Cousin Bill were in all the danger that their friends suspected.

Having filled their eyes with the fascinating sight of gold bricks piled bar upon bar, and other valuable securities and gems being taken from the

long hidden vault, Kay and her cousin retrieved their horses and started back toward the cabin.

Had they followed their original purpose of picking up the others at the small abode and then going after the state police as fast as they could, all might have been well. Instead, Kay's indefatigable detective instinct got the better of her. She saw something that caused her to rein in her mount abruptly.

"Cousin Bill, do you see that tree over there?"

"I do. What about it?"

"Notice how it hugs the hill? Wouldn't it be easy for a man to swing himself up into the branches, and from there reach the higher level of ground?"

"I should say so, provided he were reasonably spry," Cousin Bill agreed. "But why do you ask?"

"Because it was here that we lost the man's trail," explained Kay excitedly. "I remember now that his footprints stopped near the foot of that tree. Cousin Bill, I do believe that's the way he escaped!"

"Well, we can ride around to the top of the hill and try to pick up the trail from there if you like."

Imagine Kay's excitement when they actually did pick up the trail again on the brow, thus proving that her theory was right! Deep footprints were clearly visible for a short distance, then stopped abruptly and doubled back upon themselves.

"He found we weren't following him," Kay surmised. "He therefore decided he had shaken off pursuit and turned back."

Again they followed the fugitive's trail, losing it now and then, only to pick it up again, each time coming a little closer to the shack where the curious machinery was stored.

Then, abruptly, they arrived at the shed—and the end of the trail. They had tracked their quarry to earth!

They dismounted, tethered their horses, and approached the cabin on foot. Kay's sharp eyes caught a movement near the shack. She thought the door had been open—just the merest crack—then had been cautiously closed by an unseen hand.

"I saw the door move, Cousin Bill. There's some one inside. Do you suppose it's John Fort's cousin, Henry Wolf?"

"We'll find out," said the lawyer.

The young man took a step or two into the open, calling loudly in a threatening voice:

“Come out of there, Henry Wolf! Will you give yourself up, or must we enter and get you?”

A diabolical laugh came from within the cabin—such a frightful, hair-raising sound that even Kay’s stout courage failed her for a moment. Then a voice, deep and sepulchral, and seeming to hang in the air over their heads, thundered at them:

“Yes, come and get me—if you can!”

As they shrank back, Kay and her companion were overwhelmed by such a frightful pandemonium of sound that they were all but deafened. Sirens shrieked at them, as voices thundered at them; they were caught by a gale of wind and sent reeling back among the trees.

Kay fought hard to retain her footing, knowing that Cousin Bill’s hand was reached out for her, but missed it. Then she felt herself falling, falling into a bottomless pit.

CHAPTER XXV

REUNION

WHEN KAY regained consciousness she found herself sitting on the hard ground.

The awful noises and the frightful wind had ceased. Now, in contrast thereto, a death-like silence hung over the woods. She looked about for her cousin, and saw him lying prone on the ground, as if unconscious.

“Oh! Cousin Bill! Are you hurt?”

Bill Tracey opened his eyes. “I guess not, but my head is sore!”

“I think you hit it against the tree when you fell. Feeling a little better now?” asked Kay kindly.

“Oh, yes, I’m all right,” said the lawyer, struggling to his feet with Kay’s help. “But how about that man in the shack—Henry Wolf? Did he escape?”

Kay was forced to admit she did not know. Deafened by noise, blown about by a hurricane, and aiding her cousin, she had not noticed.

“Just as well,” sighed Bill, rubbing his head, “if he did.”

“Oh, but he mustn’t get away,” said Kay, and took a step into the clearing.

“Watch out!” warned Bill Tracey sharply. “You are probably walking straight into a trap!”

Unfortunately, the warning came a second too late. As Cousin Bill stepped out into the clearing after Kay, meaning to draw her back into the shelter of the trees by force, a soft, whirring noise came from the direction of the shack; he felt himself caught in a sucking vacuum that filled him with an awful, nameless dread. Against his will, he was being drawn forward across the clearing!

At the same moment Kay flung a glance of sheer horror in his direction.

“Cousin Bill, something is pulling me toward the shed! I can’t stop myself! It’s drawing me in! Oh—Cousin Bill!”

“Give me your hand!” cried the young man between gritted teeth. Stronger and stronger grew the force of that powerful suction which was pulling him remorselessly, irresistibly toward the shack and its fiendish occupant.

He gripped Kay's hand. With all the strength of his muscles, with all the power of his will, he set himself to resist that awful suction. Kay fought too, turning the same horror-stricken look upon her cousin, seeing his face convulsed with the fearful effort he was making.

It was no use! They were being drawn, resistlessly, remorselessly, step by step, across the clearing, as helpless as flies in a spider's web.

"Cousin Bill," gasped Kay, "I can't fight—any more. What do you suppose—will happen—to us——"

A sardonic laugh answered her. The shed grew larger and larger, wavered, then grew gigantic before her.

She could hear Cousin Bill's voice calling to her, but it seemed to come from a long distance. He could not help her any more, thought Kay dazedly. He could not even help himself. Poor Cousin Bill!

The whirring was now like the roar of thunder in her ears. The shack loomed above her, strangely distorted, like a child's crazy house of blocks. In another moment it would fall upon her, crushing her——

Then, when it seemed to Kay that she could not bear the horror of it any longer, that she must either scream or go mad, she became aware that there was a commotion all around her. Voices shouted. Some one cried hoarsely:

"Don't turn it off too quickly! Easy, now!"

Relief welled up in Kay's heart, so keen that it almost pained her. Help had come!

Then the awful suction stopped. She felt herself reeling backward, falling, falling——

Kay returned to consciousness to find Betty's arms about her and Wilma chafing her hands and weeping over her.

"Oh, Kay, Kay, have they killed you? Oh, Kay dear, please wake up! Please speak to us!"

There was a crowd about her. Someone said, "We came just in the nick of time." Another voice—was it Cousin Bill's, or Mr. Miller's, or John Fort's—urged, "Stand back a little and give her air. I think she's coming 'round."

"Hello!" said Kay feebly. Then she added, trying to sit up, "Did they catch Henry Wolf?"

Betty's arms tightened about her; Wilma kissed her, laughing a little wildly. A face bent over her—Cousin Bill's round, jolly countenance, very gentle now.

“They have Wolf, Little Detective,” he said, “and the state police are rounding up the rest of the men.”

“Oh, then it’s all right,” said Kay contentedly. “Everything’s all right!”

Half an hour later John Fort, who had ridden on to Sunrise Mountain with the state troopers, came back alone. He was dashing along at a fearful gallop, carrying something before him on the saddle.

He rode his horse straight up to the group that surrounded Kay, and which now opened to admit him. He strode up to the Little Detective and placed a battered tin box on her lap.

“I stumbled over it just a short time ago near the scene of our latest blasting operation,” he told her simply. “It was lying near a ruined old well, half covered with dirt and stones. It has the name of James Nelson scratched on the top,” he added. “I thought you’d like to give old Mr. Nelson his father’s buried fortune.”

“Was James Nelson old Mr. Nelson’s father?” breathed Kay, looking at the man eagerly.

Oh, if it were only true! If the story of the pathetic figure should really prove to be right!

“I believe so,” replied John Fort. “There was only one family by that name in the valley, so the treasure belongs to the present claimant.”

“Treasure!” repeated Kay, her eyes glowing like stars. “Then——”

“The lock was rusted, or else broken by the explosion,” John Fort explained. “When I picked up the box, it opened of its own accord.”

He lifted the lid. The girls, Mr. Miller and Cousin Bill crowded about to look at the contents. In the box, pressed close together and neatly bound by rubber bands, were row upon row of treasury notes of large denomination.

“A small fortune!” breathed Kay. “Enough to keep old Mr. Nelson in comfort for the rest of his life!”

“And so I have redeemed myself a little!” John Fort’s tone was bitter and his look was stern as it rested on the treasure chest. “There is at least one good thing that has come out of this wretched month—one promise, at least, that I have kept, and that is to restore old Mr. Nelson’s fortune to him.”

“I think a great many good things will have come out of this summer,” said Kay gently. “And there are other promises that you are going to keep, John Fort.”

Impulsively she held out her hand, and the man gripped it and pressed it for a long moment.

“Thank you, Miss Tracey,” he said quietly. “You have restored to me a little confidence in myself again. And now I shall give myself up to the police!”

“The police,” said Kay with conviction, “will never hold you!”

“They didn’t hold him, evidently,” said Ronald Earle.

Although this was quite another occasion from that crowded, exciting day at Faraway Valley, the subject under discussion was still John Fort. It was several days later, and the Worths were giving a party to celebrate Kay’s solution of the mystery. The Tracey girl was out on the porch alone with Ronnie.

Among the guests was Mr. Conklin, whose praise of Kay’s cleverness had been of the highest.

“You’ve saved Lost Lake for us real estate people. We can never repay you,” he had said warmly.

Mrs. Conklin, Elise, and her brother Tom were present, as were Red, Cracker, and Tubby. Cousin Bill and Ronald Earle had run up for the weekend, and Hilda Arno and John Fort were very conspicuously present because of the happiness that radiated from them and their complete absorption in each other. Mrs. Crosby, Hilda Arno’s sister, and Mr. Nelson completed the happy throng.

“No, they didn’t hold John Fort,” Kay replied to Ronald’s question. “He was the one who really brought the state police to the scene, you know. Besides, it was proven that he had no direct knowledge of Henry Wolf’s rascality, his part being merely to warn off intruders and to send messages to the laborers of blasting operations.

“The first message, which Red Greene and his friends heard as the echo ‘your Kate’—‘rise ten’, was really ‘treasure located, Sunrise Mountain’, and was given out in error by John when the real treasure was definitely located.”

“Then was that what Henry Wolf was after all the time?” asked Ronnie. “How did he know there was a fortune buried under the débris in Faraway Valley?”

“Henry Wolf confessed to having found the yellowed pages of a letter in a very old book, telling of a secret cache of gold,” explained Kay. “So he got some men together. He knew well enough that this was an offense against

the state. Nevertheless, he interested John Fort in his tale of fabulous fortune and began to excavate.

“Henry Wolf is now in a sanatorium; his mind, already queer, went back on him completely.”

“How about the stolen pages from Herr Entveg’s book?” asked Ronald.

“Why, they have been returned to him. The maid, Christine, has been given a sound scolding for pilfering them. When Hilda Arno dropped them in the cabin, Henry Wolf found the pages. Knowing their value, he hid them, expecting later to avail himself of their use in some way.

“Oh, and there’s one more thing—the dog. The number 930 on his collar *did* indicate the time of day. He was used by Henry Wolf to carry messages announcing blasting operations to John Fort, who called warnings through giant megaphones to the workmen across the valley. It was really his voice which came back in the strange echoes.”

“I understand,” said Ronnie. “But why was John Fort so far away from the Valley, and why was the shed with the queer machines at a different place?”

“John Fort was in the woods to warn off intruders. Henry Wolf ran the scientific machines. His workmen were not allowed to find out how it was done.”

“And the scrambled speech outfit?”

“Part of it was in the shed, where Wolf communicated with John Fort speaking in the cabin. It was not necessary for the demented scientist to have gone to the risk of stealing, but then, one cannot understand such queer people ever.”

Kay and Ronnie walked into the house, there to be accosted by Hilda Arno and John Fort.

“We were just saying that you,” smiling at Kay, “and your young friends, those sweet twins who are not at all alike, should come to our school, where John and I will teach again in the fall after we are married.”

“We’d love to,” said Kay, giving Hilda’s arm a little squeeze, “but I am afraid we are too fond of dear old Carmont High to change now. The halls there will resound for a while yet with the echo of our voices.”

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *The Strange Echo* by Elizabeth Mildred Duffield Ward (as Frances K. Judd)]