

# CLEO'S CONQUEST



BY LILIAN GARIS

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*By*

LILIAN GARIS

*Author of*

"CLEO'S MISTY RAINBOW," "BARBARA HALE: A  
DOCTOR'S DAUGHTER," "CONNIE LORING'S  
DILEMMA," "JOAN: JUST GIRL," "GLORIA:  
A GIRL AND HER DAD," "GLORIA AT  
BOARDING SCHOOL," ETC.

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GLORIA AT BOARDING SCHOOL  
CONNIE LORING'S AMBITION  
CONNIE LORING'S DILEMMA  
BARBARA HALE: A DOCTOR'S DAUGHTER  
BARBARA HALE AND COZETTE

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*Cleo's Conquest*

## CONTENTS

- I [REMEMBERING](#)
- II [NELLIE THE REBEL](#)
- III [AS SIMPLE AS THAT](#)
- IV [A CITY'S CROWDED MART](#)
- V [THE MIX-UP](#)
- VI [TRAVELLING ON](#)
- VII [MAKING CAMP](#)
- VIII [NIGHT AND QUEER NOISES](#)
- IX [REVELLE](#)
- X [APRON LAKE](#)
- XI [DANGER](#)
- XII [IN THE ATTIC](#)
- XIII [THE MYSTERIOUS BRIDE](#)
- XIV [EXPLORING](#)
- XV [THE CAMP BAKE](#)
- XVI [WHILE FIRES BLAZED](#)
- XVII [THE DISAPPEARANCE](#)
- XVIII [THE SEARCHING PARTY](#)
- XIX [THE RESCUE](#)
- XX [BEYOND REPAIR](#)
- XXI [FLIGHT FROM THE STORM](#)
- XXII [OUT OF THE RAIN](#)
- XXIII [LAUGHTER AND SHADOWS](#)
- XXIV [LORNA'S RELEASE](#)
- XXV [CLIMAX](#)

# Cleo's Conquest

## CHAPTER I REMEMBERING

Girls often dream of such things, only to wake up and find even the dream itself has vanished. But Cleo's dream had come true.

Ever since her Aunt Sylvia had taken charge of her, she, Cleo, had actually suffered from extravagance—her aunt was the extravagant one and apparently she was ambitious to turn a healthy, happy, normal girl into a product such as they say money can make, but it never does. Mere money is not in itself capable of doing much for anybody, it is only the intelligent handling of it that makes it worth while, and somehow Aunt Sylvia, with the best of intentions, had not quite grasped that well known fact.

But a fortunate circumstance threw Cleo into the path of little Nellie Glennon and Nellie knew an "awful lot" about getting along beautifully and happily without much money. Together the two girls went through a most remarkable maze of circumstances, all told of in our first volume, "Cleo's Misty Rainbow," until her great golden dream had actually come true. She had found her long-lost sister Nannie, and also had discovered the identity of her little mother who, because of a critical illness, had hitherto been shut out of Cleo's eventful life.

At the very end of the last book all this mystery was unfolded, so that the beginning of this volume must take up the tale left vibrant there.

Yes, her dream had come true. Her misty rainbow was now a shining banner in a beautiful sky, and even after months of its benign influence, Cleo and Nannie were still lost in wonderment at the glory of the miracle.

"To think that I really have you!" Cleo would repeat.

“To think that I have you!” Nannie would echo.

And then summer came. The girls’ mother was still in delicate health, but being much better than she had been for years, an ocean voyage was recommended.

Another dream to come true, for Cleo’s mother had been one of those sufferers whose mind had weakened under a heavy strain, and the strengthening of her mind was so delicate an affair that her very children had been separated from her in the interest of her complete recovery.

“But how can I leave them now?” she asked Zita, the faithful friend and companion during all the trying years.

“You must. You have had them all winter and summer is everybody’s playtime. You will be so much improved by your ocean trip and quiet stay in some little place abroad, no tourists running around, you know, that when you come back I’m afraid you won’t need me any more.”

Which was absurd, even to joke about, for Cleo and her mother would no more think of getting along without Zita than they might plan to live without some other important element of life.

So while the girls, Cleo and Nannie, talked of summer plans for themselves, Zita and Madeleine made other plans which would take them away from the girls, and that meant camp for Cleo and Nannie.

“I’ve always imagined camps being made up of burnt bacon, wet tents and bucking broncos,” Cleo joked with Nannie. “But I suppose Camp Climax will be more like a fancy boarding school.”

“The camps I’ve been acquainted with were different from those of your ideas too,” laughed Nannie who had had wide experiences in travel for a girl so young. “You see, we used to make our own camps on motor trips, and that kind sometimes doesn’t even have burnt bacon,” she declared, meaningly.

“You did have hard times, didn’t you?” Cleo sympathized. “Well, I’ve found you at last and we’re going to make up for all that. But I tell you, Nannie, we’ll have quite a time taming Nellie Glennon. She’s a darling, but you never can tell where, what or how she’s going to break out.”

“So long as she doesn’t break out Camp Climax we’ll be lucky, I suppose,” rejoined Nannie. “But say, Cleo, we’ve got something to do, you know. This is the day we were going to put away our wooleys, sweaters and such things, you know.”

“Yes, I know.”

“But you don’t want to.”

“Do you?”

“Yes, I really do. I think I like to handle my clothes.”

“Would you like to handle mine?”

“I wouldn’t mind at all, Cleo, if you want to do something else.”

“But I don’t. I just want to sit here and think. And besides, Nannie-Neddicoat, I’m just sick and tired of clothes.”

“Because you’ve had such a lot of them,” Nannie reasoned. “Maybe that’s why they fascinate me so. These pretty things are just—well,” she sighed, a smile tempered it, “I’m having lots of dreams come true— —”

“If I dreamed all my wooleys were put in the moth stuff and the moth stuff smelled like violets—which it doesn’t—do you think that dream would come true?”

There may be girls too wise and too practical to talk that way, but they were not Cleo nor Nannie. Nannie had been quiet and shy, when she first came, the change from her humble station to that of Cleo’s independence had all but stunned her. But now her own natural ease was back again, and while quieter than Cleo she could talk; and she did.

Today was the third day in a brand new vacation. That was Cleo’s excuse, if she bothered about one, for not wanting to stir from the big chair on the roof, away up there over the city where a lovely apartment commanded, also, this luxurious little roof garden. Around them vines were trying to grow over artificial arbors. These vines and plants were most tenderly cared for by old Pete, who would as soon have gone to bed supperless himself as to have neglected to give plenty of water to the boxed plants and vines that did very well indeed, considering their limitations, on the big dry roof.

The comfortable chairs and wicker tables put around and in place by the same old Pete each morning very early, were always in disorderly bunches by afternoon, books and papers would fly about at the least breezy encouragement, and women, not girls like Nannie and Cleo, would even go to sleep up there, deluding themselves into the belief that sleep was “reducing” while lunch was fattening.

But soon all this artificiality would be lost to the two girls now disputing the odor of moth preventatives, for with their going to Camp Climax and their mother going on her much needed ocean voyage, the city apartment was to be given up permanently, and in the autumn a new home, out in some pretty accessible suburb, would be acquired for the little family.

Cleo's prettiness, in her clear blonde type, seemed accentuated against the equally pretty brunette type of her sister, and everyone who met them declared the contrast most attractive and entirely favorable to both their types.

"When I pick a new, full grown sister," sisterless Nellie Glennon was wont to declare, "I'll have an awful job to get someone to go with my rustiness. Maybe a pure white blonde with pink eyes would make a pretty contrast." Nellie was brown-haired and blue-eyed and by no means vain. She imagined everyone else better looking than she, but her friends, undoubtedly, thought otherwise for Nellie was pretty in her own peculiar way.

She, who came as often as she could steal away from too many duties, was not with the girls today. She might get over later, but now they were alone trying to decide about putting those useless woolen and fur things in moth bags.

Finally Cleo pulled herself up from the steamer chair, influenced however slightly by Nannie's active influence, and together they sought out the wardrobes and closets and began their task.

"You handle those things as if you really loved them," Cleo remarked, as Nannie fondled her newly acquired finery.

"I do. I love bright colors. You see, I always wore dull colors so as not to attract too much attention."

Cleo silently acquiesced. She rarely talked of her sister's past hardships, when their lives had been so tragically separated, and now she only smiled and pegged a roaring red sweater at Nannie's head, defiantly.

"That bright enough for you?" she teased. "I hate red. Aunt Sylvia sent it. But red is your color—"

"I love it. Thanks. This will go beautifully with my gray skirt—"

"But don't stop to try it on, please. The moths might get in our hair and I'd hate to have to sleep with my head in a moth bag. This smell is worse than the bootblack's garlic." Cleo continued either to peg things in the cedar

chest or in the general direction of Nannie, until sweaters, wool skirts, fur trimmed coats and such articles as moths are known to make meals of, were finally put away. Nannie helped her—Cleo had habits not strictly conformable to neatness or good house-keeping, but Nannie couldn't forget the years of hampering this girl had endured, so she realized her own advantages in more exacting upbringing. She had been trained in athletics from early girlhood, and had been able to turn her skill into practical use.

When it was done and the big paper bags clamped tight with the curious clasps, the cedar chest properly closed, and the hat-boxes camphored and tied up, Cleo wanted to go hunt up Nellie.

“We've just got to finish our camp plans,” she insisted, “and if we make plans without Nellie we'll have to make new ones when she comes. Let's call a taxi, get Zita to come along and go get her. Isn't it a nuisance for Nellie not to have a telephone?”

“But mother and Zita have both decided against taxis, you know, Cleo. You did ride in them so constantly you don't half appreciate the cars and subways,” Nannie reminded her.

“I just hate them,” admitted the blonde girl. “I guess there were some nice things about having the big allowance I used to have. That's one good reason why I'm glad we're all going to live out of town.”

“Yes, this is nice,” Nannie agreed, “but I like the country better. I'm sure you will too. And it's so lovely to be all together, I mean it's so nice that Nellie can come along with us.”

“You know, Nannie, Nellie is going to be a singer,” Cleo reminded her sister. “Her teacher thinks she has a wonderful voice. And so she just must have a real outdoor vacation. Nellie never had one before. I suppose we'll have lots of fun breaking her in.”

“Do you know much about the woods? I mean birds and wild things, Cleo?” The question was not asked critically but merely as a matter of finding out what kind of campers the three girls might expect to become.

“Well, no, I don't,” admitted Cleo very slowly. “I've never really been much in the woods, except in the park woods where I saw all the wild animals— —”

Nannie laughed outright. “Well, you won't see any such wild animals at camp as you have seen in the Zoo,” she said finally. “But we may see some — —”

“Bears?”

Nannie allowed her musical laugh to ring out at that. Cleo was still the little romanticist she had been the year before. Even the solution of her great problem which had given her Nannie, was not able to entirely dispel her greed for the childish thrills of the unknown.

“Bears!” Nannie repeated finally. “Cleo, do you like cats?”

“Cats! I said bears.”

“Yes, I know. But suppose we couldn’t have bears would you take cats or dogs?”

“Chickens and ducks,” declared Cleo more in earnest than the absurd words indicated. “I’ve had a dog, for a little while, and a cat for a long time, but chickens and ducks would be different, and this summer has got to be altogether different.”

Nannie had finished the moth-proof packing and Cleo was glad, but neither had any way of guessing how very different indeed was going to be the summer that lay before them.

## CHAPTER II

### NELLIE THE REBEL

Just as Cleo had anticipated it was Nellie Glennon who upset their plans, or at least attempted to. Nellie, the little girl with the deep brown eyes and that disregard for all things systematic which is supposed to be the poetic Irish trait, had her own ideas, they presently learned.

She came upon her two chums that afternoon while the air was still active with moth-tar and cedar chips, her brown hair curling around her face in a very pretty way, if a bit old fashioned, and her little self decked out in the most colorful summer silk dress—purple and yellow stripes—besides a really useless hat of yellow felt—felt mind you, with summer well on its way, but it seemed Nellie was set upon clothes. She was going away for the summer and she was going to have some pretty clothes, apparently, or know the reason why.

“But don’t you see, Nell,” Cleo began gently, “we can’t wear such things at camp?”

“We can’t? I’d like to know why not?” Nellie smoothed out her new silk dress affectionately.

“Because we must wear uniforms.”

“Un-i-forms! Like a—a—” The word deserted her but it might have been orphan, and Nellie shouldn’t say anything about orphans.

“Why yes,” chimed in Nannie cautiously; she was always a little cautious with the bombastic Nellie. “Don’t you like a uniform?”

“Like it? I should say not. I hate it. I had to wear it to school for four years. Those horrid white blouses and old dark blue skirts!” Nellie was getting more excited as she talked. “I just hate a uniform and *I’m* not going to wear it, camp or no camp.”

Cleo wanted to say promptly and with just as much spirit. “Then, it will be *no* camp for you.” But she hesitated wisely. They wanted Nellie to go, both of them. She was always a lot of fun. Besides this, Nellie should go. This was to be her very first real vacation, for Nellie’s circumstances were humble and it had not been possible for her mother to provide means for

such regular, going-away vacations. But Cleo did not reply as curtly as she felt inclined to. She knew very well that Nellie was not being “snippy” but rather that she did not understand the uniform question. So she said, easily:

“Now, Nellie Glennon, you needn’t go up in the air like that. You know perfectly well how cunning you look in a Girl Scout rig— —”

“Yes, don’t I?” Nellie was getting sarcastic. “I look about as cunning as a ginger-snap in a mud puddle.”

“Oh, how funny!” roared Nannie and Cleo joined in the burst of hilarity. “Just imagine a ginger-snap in a mud puddle! It would last about one minute and then it would mix up with the mud.”

“Yes,” fired back the rebel Nellie, “so would I in that old brown uniform. I’d last just about one minute and then they’d try to hang me on the line with the outfit. They couldn’t tell the difference,” and she had a little laugh herself at her joke. She could just see herself hanging on the line, her head wagging and her feet dangling. Surely the thought was enough to make anyone laugh.

“But can’t you see, Nell?” Cleo persisted. “We just have to wear a uniform at camp, and it isn’t brown. Imagine all the girls in foolish silks — —”

“Foolish silks!” Nellie seemed to repeat every word like that; it gave her time to think up a reply, maybe. “Do you call a pretty dress like this foolish?” She stood up, spread out the silly purple and yellow stripes like a tent made of very vivid awning, and wheeled around like a model, only Nellie had not the regular model hitch and twitch. She stamped around more like a boy showing off new shoes. “Don’t you think this dress is awfully pretty?”

Truth to tell, neither Cleo nor Nannie did think so, but there was no need to be too frank, for Nellie took a favorable opinion for granted. But the problem of uniform was still to be settled. If Nellie wouldn’t wear it she couldn’t go. If she did wear it, all her so-called pretty dresses just bought for the summer vacation, would be wasted. They were of the extreme style that last only one summer.

Had the matter concerned anyone other than Nellie the difficulty would have been easy enough to overcome, but with this little girl, who had so long craved pretty things and only just acquired them, it seemed rather cruel to deprive her. Just now Nannie left all or most all of the talking to Cleo, for Nannie was naturally quiet. She merely looked on with her big dark eyes

and had that air about her often termed foreign, for rarely is a real American girl like that. They mostly bubble and overflow with activity, not to say hilarity, and something to talk about is as welcome to them as seeing a show. Nannie did not, however, share this general trait.

“But you do want to come with us, don’t you, Nell?” That was Cleo again.

“Of course I do. Aren’t I going?”

“If you decide to wear the uniform.”

“But I’ve decided not to wear it.”

“It’s one of the rules.”

“Rules!” she scoffed. “Why couldn’t anyone be let off on a silly rule — —”

“But it isn’t a silly rule, it’s very important.”

“Maybe they want to sell their old cast-offs— —”

“Ellen Glennon!” Cleo jumped up and showed her spirit at that. “Don’t you dare talk that way about Camp Climax. It was hard enough for us to get on the list.”

“Oh, well, don’t get excited, Clee. There are other places to go and perhaps I ought to go someplace where I could practice my singing.”

“You know very well, Nellie,” spoke up Nannie finally, “that you can’t practice at all this summer. Your teacher says you’re too young to use your voice so much.”

“Oh, what does she know about it? Because she’s taking a vacation — —”

The two sisters looked at each other in sheer despair. Was this their little chum Nellie? Had she so soon been spoiled by the hint of a voice and a few extra things her mother was so lately able to give her? Why should she act like this? As if those showy clothes meant anything. Cleo had hated the very word, but then, she had always had too much, she realized this. The idea of a simple uniform was like a promised release from fussing and she was most anxious to try it. Nannie, a true athlete, didn’t care either way, but naturally believed in camp uniform.

“Well, all I can say is I’m not going to be tied up like a pound of ginger-snaps. If either of you had my crop of freckles, you’d know exactly how I

feel.” The defense was as silly as the protest.

“Well, I’ve got to go for a walk,” Cleo announced. “That’s one thing I’m going to get used to. I’ll walk miles daily at camp, won’t I, Nan? So I’ve got to tune up. Who wants to come?”

As there was nothing else for her to do, Nellie joined in the walk to the small park that lay but a few blocks beyond the apartment. The city seemed very stale and stuffy these days, to Cleo and Nannie at least, and the prospect of freedom and fresh air out in the woods someplace, was becoming more and more welcome.

“I’m so glad we don’t have to stay here,” Cleo ventured, feeling that remark at least was safe for Nellie’s mood.

“But *you* never did stay in the city during the summer,” fired back Nellie.

“Why, Nellie,” spoke up Nannie, who had a way of making herself heard authoritatively when she did speak, “what ever makes you so cranky today?”

“Cranky!” she sort of sneered. “I heard what you and Cleo said to Margaret Ott about me!”

“About you!” both girls exclaimed in real surprise.

“Yes. I don’t have to go away with you either. Even if I am poor— —”

“Nellie!” Cleo had grasped her arm and was standing still beside her. “You know perfectly well— —”

“Oh, yes, I know.” Nellie’s voice was charged with bitterness. “I know you’ve been awfully good to me— —”

“Nellie— —”

Tears were imminent; Nellie might cry in spite of her assumed temper. And to have her talk this way! It was so impossible to say anything amicable without making things worse. Nannie seemed too surprised even to try to help Cleo, for to her Nellie Glennon had always been difficult, while to Cleo she had always been the irresistible Nellie.

“You know we would never say anything about you, Nellie,” Cleo began again, and the three moved along without knowing they were moving. “Margaret Ott wanted to go to camp with us and I just told her the camp was all full and that you were going— —”

“Yes, she said that. But she said *you* were *taking* me— —”

“Then that was her way of putting it,” rejoined Cleo beginning to lose patience herself. “All I said was that you were going *with* us.”

“Why, Nellie,” murmured Nannie in her peculiarly deep voice, “how can you be so silly? You’ll upset everything, and if mother hears of it— —”

“She won’t hear a word about our—our—nonsense,” broke in Cleo proudly. “She’s sailing away and is sorry to leave us. Do you think I’d let her feel we couldn’t get along— —”

“Yes,” sighed Nellie, “that’s just it, Cleo. You two can get along all right but I’m in the way now. You and Nannie had better go to camp without me then there’ll be no trouble.”

“All right,” said Cleo turning on her heel. “If you feel that way about it, why should we coax you?”

“You shouldn’t. Good bye and thanks for— for— —”

But Nellie was off in the other direction and no one saw her swimming brown eyes or noticed how her little shoulders shook under the vivid silk dress.

Perhaps poor little Nellie was just being jealous. She had had Cleo all to herself until Nannie came and she didn’t know how to share her affections. That and one other secret worry possessed her now.

She couldn’t tell them and she wouldn’t. They might go without her— she could stand the city, the city was her home and she wasn’t going to turn against it, either.

## CHAPTER III

### AS SIMPLE AS THAT

“Isn’t that awful!” Cleo’s voice was tragic.

“She’ll get over that,” Nannie consoled.

“But she may not go to camp with us.”

“Well, what if she doesn’t?”

“Oh, Nannie, you don’t understand,” wailed Cleo. “Nellie has been so much to me, when I didn’t have you or anyone but just stranger after stranger. And I couldn’t get used to girls at that silly, fashionable school. Then Nellie was my best friend—” she stopped. This might hurt Nannie.

“Then perhaps I— —”

“Oh, dear me, Nannie!” exclaimed the distracted Cleo. “Don’t you go misunderstanding. You’re my *sister*.”

They were back again in the disordered apartment. The confusion of packing, in spite of Zita’s efficient management, had made the place look like a baggage room. Zita was the friend and companion to Cleo, the one who had mothered her during the years of her own mother’s illness, and who now was going to Europe with the same mother while the girls betook themselves to camp.

“It isn’t our baggage but our storage that makes all the boxes necessary,” Zita told the girls who seemed surprised at their surroundings. “You don’t need much for camp and we don’t need much for our journey, but we’ve got all these things and we have to take care of them.”

“What an awful lot,” remarked Cleo abstractedly.

“Yes. When things get together there usually is an awful lot,” smiled the pretty mother. She was one of those really pretty mothers who always seem like dainty pieces of bisque. Her hair had been blonde but was now ashen, and her delicate skin had the quality of some fragile flower. She loved her two girls, Cleo was only her step-daughter but the term seemed a misnomer, for she loved her very dearly. Nannie was her own child, the baby that had gone from her in that awful illness. And Nannie seemed more like a stranger

because of her retiring disposition and her peculiar foreign type. But how could two girls be better suited for companionship and to be the daughters of this dreamy little mother, Madeleine Forbes Kimball? They regarded her as a sister, one who needed every consideration. That she should have any responsibility toward them other than to love them as she so obviously did, had never occurred to either of them. That was why Cleo had been so anxious to keep from her any word of Nellie's upheaval. Madeleine was worrying about the most trivial things—that was a feature still left over from that critical illness.

The girls selected the boxes marked for camp, they, of course, had themselves packed and marked them, and then helped Zita classify the other baggage for the steamer or for storage.

"Have you packed the extra little things, you wanted for Nellie, darling?" the mother asked.

"Which things, Mother?" Cleo in her turn asked. Somehow the thought of camp and Nellie confused her.

"The toilet articles, dear. Don't you remember you said you wanted to pack the yellow comb and brush in case Nellie should forget hers?"

"Oh, yes. Thanks for reminding me, Mummie. They're packed," Cleo answered quickly, laying hold of a poor, helpless little shoe-box, unlabeled and unclaimed, and tossing it on top of the steamer rug. "My, but it is getting hot!" she exclaimed then. "I'm so glad you are going on the ocean—"

"Away from you, dear?"

"You won't be away, not really, Mums. You'll only be on the water while we are on land," Cleo had a cunning way of saying pretty meaningless things like that, and they always sounded just right coming from her lips.

"Well, I'm not going to be lonely—"

"Of course you are not, Mother," spoke up Nannie. "Just think of them calling me Anne in camp and you'll know how I've grown up. Anne," she repeated. "Isn't that a quaint old name?"

"Lots better than Cleo," declared the owner of the latter name. "I believe Aunt Sylvia must have named me. She always liked things so fancy."

"No dear," returned the step-mother. "You were called after your own mother's nom de plume."

“Oh, yes, I know,” petulantly. “But it’s Cleo, just the same, and that’s sort of silly. If it were Cleopatra and they called me Pat— —”

“Or Cleodozia and they would call you Doze— —” Zita suggested that. “But do let us be satisfied with our names and get this stuff out of the way. Do you girls realize we sail in exactly two days more and our luggage must go early tomorrow morning?”

That was the signal for renewed efforts with the boxes, and somehow they seemed to grow larger and increase in number right under the eyes of the prospective tourists. There was so much stuff to be disposed of.

Cleo would first think of some particular dress, sweater, coat, hat or pair of shoes she felt she would have to mark “special” so she could reach the precious article early in fall, directly after coming from camp, and possibly before the other goods could either be reached or unpacked. This box would then have to be marked with all sorts of identification signs, said signs being most marvelously made by Cleo, with a chewed match dipped into black and messy ink.

Nannie was much less particular, being satisfied to put away such things as she would not need at camp and let the special occasions in between camp and home take care of themselves.

But Nellie! Every time her name was mentioned the girls felt sort of guilty, and when Zita remarked upon Nellie’s possible reaction to her own name Ellen, when it would be given her at Camp Climax, Cleo almost blurted out the improbability of Nellie’s going and the possibility of Nellie staying at home.

The more she thought over her little friend’s unreasonable attitude, the more she felt like deserting her. But it was late that night when the sisters again had a real chance to talk over the absurd situation.

“Isn’t it too mean?” Cleo began.

“I don’t see why you should care so much, sis,” began the more practical Nan. “Maybe she wouldn’t like camp and she might give us a lot of trouble.”

“That’s so,” Cleo agreed, reasoning quickly that Nell was apt to do something quite unexpected and it just might be a matter of making trouble. “Well—” she turned over and snapped off the little light that marked the space between their twin beds, “I’m not going to worry about it. If she doesn’t want to come she doesn’t have to; that’s all.”

“Now you’re talking sensibly, sis,” complimented Nan the practical.

“And perhaps if we did have her along, as you say, we might have a hard time looking out for her!”

“I’ve seen lots of girls just like Nell,” Nan continued, “and they are always disappointing.”

“How, disappointing?”

“Well, they never seem to do what you expect them to.”

“You mean surprising?”

“Sometimes they are surprising— —”

“Nell always is.” Cleo was in danger of swinging back into sympathy again; her voice showed that.

“We had better get to sleep, little sis,” prompted Nan who was younger but much larger than Cleo. “Think of the big day tomorrow.”

“Yes, I know,” Cleo’s voice was dull now and lifeless. Plainly Nell was still on her mind.

“And only a few days more— —”

“But Nan, I’ll tell you what I’ll do. I’ll just go around and see Nellie’s mother— —”

“And begin your troubles all over again.”

“But how could we leave Nell here, really Nan? Wouldn’t it be awful for her after expecting to go and getting all those new things?”

“But it’s her own fault.”

“I know. But you see, Nan, Nell hasn’t been very well trained in some ways. Her mother always had to work so hard she couldn’t give a lot of time to Nell. They are more like sisters than mother and daughter.”

For some moments the other girl did not reply. She had a way of hesitating and thus making a reply seem more important, when it was necessary for her to disagree with Cleo. Finally she said:

“I’ll tell you what, sis. You do as you say. Go over to Nell’s mother and find out how she feels about it. If Nell is still spunky and her mother agrees with her, then you can go and leave her without worrying about it.”

“But she won’t be, I mean we won’t go and leave her. I’m perfectly sure of that. Nell has got to come. This is her first vacation out of this big, hot

city and I'd be perfectly miserable wondering what she was doing—” Cleo yawned against her will but had to give her yawn its way. Nan did not take up the chance to speak again, so Cleo finished by adding bit by bit to her new scheme, until no one would have recognized the least detail amiss in their plans for camp and Nell's plans for camp, before she finally finished. She was even more enthusiastic than she seemed to have been in the first place. That was being “Cleoistic.”

“All right,” agreed Nan, a little impatiently, “but let's go to sleep.”

“I'm going. Nan, you're a love to agree with me so and to love Nell almost as much as I do.”

That was something of an exaggeration but Nan remained quiet.

“And I'm sure we'll both have a much better time when we know we have helped Nell.”

“Maybe,” groaned Nan, who really was sleepy.

“And you know she sings quite wonderfully. Just think what that will mean—to have her sing the camp songs so beautifully.”

A mere sigh from Nan acquiesced to Nell's vocal talent.

Cleo was quite herself for a few minutes after that. She felt so much better. She could see the camp on the hills just like the pictures in the booklet, she could see Nell sitting on a very high rock singing, almost hear the song.

For Cleo was a little romanticist and she had in her a lot of the poet's soul. She made pictures in her mind and painted them with sunsets and stars and moons and beautiful skies.

Nan was now audibly asleep—her regular breathing warned Cleo, but Cleo was too wide awake to draw the curtain over her brain pictures so promptly.

“And won't Nell look sweet in her uniform?” was the absurd way she finally finished her reverie.

## CHAPTER IV

### A CITY'S CROWDED MART

All large cities are, of necessity, crowded with persons and things. The things are necessary for the very existence of the persons, and all of the materials are not unbeautiful. Along the lower side of New York City, that territory that outlines the great waterways of the East River, where the largest steamers in the world dock, one finds the commission houses, those great, sturdy ware-houses, in which are daily stored and from which are daily sent out the luscious fruits, the fragrant vegetables that go to grace the tables and satisfy the healthful appetites of many other cities in America as well as New York.

These are the wholesale markets, their proximity to the waterways making their establishment necessary there, because of the perishable nature of these fruits and vegetables that come in on the great refrigerator steamers.

A boy or a girl walking along any of the side streets that run off of West Street, New York City would seem so small and unimportant as to be barely noticeable in the heart of the wholesale district. Old women, poor old women, may be seen very early in the mornings collecting crushed fruit and vegetables, given them or saved for them by the kind hearted and thoughtful workmen, but very rarely do the children even of the poor go so far down town for the salvage that so materially helps to supply their scanty tables, in the most important of all foods, green vegetables and uncooked fruit. Every person, rich or poor, must have those to be healthy and all are learning to realize this.

Zita, the capable manager and loving attendant in Cleo's little home, knew that here in this district would she obtain the very freshest and the very finest of fruits for the steamer basket that Cleo and Nan were giving their mother. Flowers, Zita had told the girls, would have to be thrown overboard as quickly as their fragrance, however delightful, would become too heavy and even too fragrant for the small state room. But the steamer basket of fruit could be made to look pretty as flowers themselves, and the fruit would be a grateful gift indeed when the travellers were out upon the water.

So it was down to the market, that would sell retail as well as wholesale, that Zita and Cleo went next morning, and it was because she wanted to help

select the fruit that Cleo was forced to delay her trip to Nell's home. But she would go, she decided, as quickly as fruit shopping was done with.

"Nell and her uniform troubles will have to wait," Cleo told Nan, who was busy with many important small matters. "Mum's going and we've got to get her a dee-lic-ious basket. So that's the most important thing to do, right now."

Zita, of course, knew the particular stall she was to buy from, and leaving the taxi at a convenient corner—taxis are the regular means generally used to fly from one point to another in New York City—she piloted Cleo along through the lanes of boxes piled high, the fresh green produce fairly calling out to humans with their fragrance, a message of health and good-living.

As they turned into a ware-house, Cleo clutched at Zita's elbow.

"Look!" she whispered.

"What, dear?"

"Back of—those—crates—"

Zita turned as Cleo urged her, but did not at once see the object of her interest.

"There!" she whispered, "over there. That poor little boy!"

This time Zita saw him. A poor little boy indeed, huddled behind the boxes, munching at some discarded piece of fruit. Cleo turned immediately to go to him, but as she did he scurried off and was swallowed up by the great friendly crates.

"Oh!" sighed Cleo. "He's gone!"

"Yes. But I guess he's all right—"

"But did you see his eyes?"

"No, dear," Zita would humor Cleo's moods at most times but today they really must hurry. "Come along," she urged. "We have so little time."

But interest in the fruit basket had suddenly waned for Cleo. She wanted to see that little boy again; his big eyes were just like Tommy's, the day little Tommy rode away to the hospital. This memory was a part of the story told in Cleo's Misty Rainbow and the scene was so like it that it now impressed Cleo strangely.

She left Zita talking to the man who was showing her the pears. Rows and piles of fruit crates made the big store-house seem like a very fort of produce, the fragrance of the delicacies assailing one's senses more potently than might have the fragrance of flowers in a great conservatory.

But again even this did not concern Cleo. She was stealing in and out of the boxes in the direction Big Eyes seemed to have gone. Yes, there was something dark— —

"Oh!" she exclaimed in sudden excitement as she almost fell over a crouching figure. "Oh, what's the matter?" she asked the boy huddled there.

"Nuthin'."

She lowered her voice. "Are you hiding?"

"Yep."

"Are you afraid?"

"Yep."

"Why?"

"'Cause."

"He, that man wouldn't say anything to you just for taking an old pear."

A little grunt, but it wasn't a word.

Cleo had her purse in her hand and a coin was quickly taken from it.

"Here," she said, "quick! Take this!"

He was so "quick" he grabbed her hand as he put his out for the coin.

"Come on out with me," urged Cleo. "We won't let him say anything to you."

The boy scrambled to his bare feet and shuffled out after Cleo. Zita was calling for her to hurry and now discovered the reason for her delay.

"Found a friend?" Zita asked kindly, knowing without any explanation just what the ragged boy's presence meant.

"Yes. Could we give him car-fare to ride home?"

"Oh, hello there, Maxie," called out the man with the fruit. "You in here again?"

"Please," interrupted Cleo. "I said he might have a pear. He can pay for it— —"

“Ha—ha, ha!” roared the big man jovially, “Maxie pay for a pear? Why that boy doesn’t have to pay for anything, do you, Max?”

“Nope,” replied the boy promptly. He had picked up quite a few pieces of discarded fruit beneath their eyes, as if seeing him do it made it perfectly all right. In other words, he was plainly imposing upon good nature.

“Run along now, Max,” ordered the man a little sharply, “and when you want stuff again come up to the desk as the other children do. I can’t have you getting killed behind those crates. Here,” he held out a great ivory and green bunch of celery, “take this to your mother. And mind you don’t sell it. I’ll ask her when I see her, you know.”

The boy took the celery without even a smile of thanks to the generous man, and was soon out of sight among the boxes lining the sidewalk.

“We can’t watch them,” the store-man explained. “And if they’re hurt we are held responsible.”

“He seemed so hungry,” Cleo ventured.

“They always are,” the man answered with a knowing smile. “Funny thing how much those youngsters can eat. How are these grapes?” He was again sorting fruit for the basket. “These will keep fresh for days— —”

So their purchases were finally made and together they started back. Just outside the big market again they encountered Maxie. Cleo, always eager to learn more about this peculiar type of city children, drew Zita to a prompt standstill.

Maxie raised his big hopeful eyes. “Me mother’s sick,” he said.

“Where do you live?” Zita hurried to ask. This boy was bound to detain them and time was flying.

“Over dere,” replied Maxie, his free hand shooting out to point to a very old brick place that might hide some sort of living quarters but it must, indeed, be a queer sort that would be hidden behind all the business piled around it.

“We can’t go over there and we haven’t a bit of time.” This Zita said to Cleo who plainly hoped to go on one of her regular tours of investigation.

“She’s got to go to de hospital,” Maxie insisted. He was looking for practical sympathy.

“Give us the number of your house,” Cleo spoke up this time, “and we’ll send someone to see your mother.”

The boy mumbled a number and Cleo repeated it. “Come along, Zita,” she herself urged this time. “I’ll get some of the camp visitors to investigate his case.”

“Thank goodness!” sighed Zita in genuine gratitude, “Cleo, it does seem that more poor children drag after you— —”

“But that’s one good thing about our camp arrangements,” Cleo put in as they both hurried along. “They have regular investigators and they know exactly what to do best for the poor. I’m going to study social service myself when I’m old enough,” she declared bravely.

“All you’ll have to do will be to graduate,” laughed Zita. “You have been studying it all your life. But it isn’t a bad thing to cultivate kindness,” she hurried to add. “The trouble today is we are all apt to be thoughtless about others. Well, dear— —”

“I’ll miss you dreadfully, Zita,” Cleo interrupted. “I’m not quite used to Mumsey yet. She had been sick so long. But *you!* I don’t just see how I’m going to manage without you.”

“Camp is sure to be wonderful for you, dear,” her companion answered a little unsteadily. “Of course, I *want* to be missed but I don’t want to— —”

“You won’t, Zita. I know what you mean. You want me to have at last that freedom I have always been pestering you about.” The taxi was rattling on. “But it’s like the rainbow, Zita. Perhaps it looks brighter at a distance.”

A gentle little squeeze of a very familiar hand was the only answer to that half-way question.

## CHAPTER V

### THE MIX-UP

In still another part of this big city, in small but neatly arranged rooms, crowded but not disorderly, Nellie Glennon was struggling with a real heart-ache. And it was spoiling everything for Nellie.

“They think I’m just mean,” she sobbed all to herself, for her mother was not there at the time. “They think I don’t want to wear a uniform, when they—when they— —” her sobs seemed even to choke her thoughts, “when they don’t know anything about it.”

The brilliant purple and yellow dress lay, carefully placed, on her bed. Nellie’s eyes glanced over it and her head shook as if she was just secretly saying no. It was too bright and too old for Nellie but it was hers.

“Mother didn’t know,” she burst out, aloud this time for those sobs were quite unmanageable. “How could she tell— —”

The girl got up and opened a small portable wardrobe. She was faced by an array of clothes—the clothes her mother had bought as a surprise, and had made much sacrifice to obtain.

“How could I tell her I couldn’t wear any of these all summer?” Nellie pondered, fingering the little garments lovingly. “She wanted me to look so nice.”

A little pink silk slip fell off its hook right onto Nellie’s head. It just seemed to want her to take it, to love it, to wear it, when a bright summer’s day would call for the little white lace dress which this pink slip had expected to shine through.

“The old uniform,” Nellie grumbled secretly. “Of course I’d like a uniform—wouldn’t have to take care of it, but mother didn’t know about camp when she bought all these for my birthday.”

Nellie had never had such pretty things before. It was because of the prospect of her going away with Cleo and Nan, before the camp had really been talked of for the three girls, and because Nellie’s birthday had come the last of May, and yes—perhaps it was because of Mrs. Glennon’s pride in the

pretty voice her daughter seemed to be developing, that she had bought all those things for the little girl who meant so much to that mother-heart.

Never were two—whether sisters or mother and daughter—never were two persons more devoted to each other than were Nellie and her mother. Mrs. Glennon was one of those hard working loving women, with hearts so big they seemed to overflow with generosity at the very slightest excuse. Openly she charged Nellie to be humble, never to be proud, to be very modest in dress and all that, but there, quickly as it had been proposed that her Nellie should go away with Cleo and Nan, those two fortunately situated girls, Mrs. Glennon rushed out in a way that surprised even her thrifty self and bought clothes. Two silk dresses, slips to match, white shoes and a lot of other things less important as mere items but quite as costly when all added up.

Nellie had been delighted. Her joy at the new outfit was by no means assumed, but even then, she was not sure about the camping details.

“I just won’t go,” she pondered now, still absorbed in the survey of that wardrobe. “I can’t. I couldn’t leave these things hanging here for mother to look at all summer. It isn’t as if I could wear them some other time. But to leave them home— —”

She closed the door finally and went over to the corner where her desk stood, for Nellie had a desk in spite of their cramped quarters; her mother had insisted upon that. She would write to Cleo. Cleo would understand even if she didn’t tell her why. Cleo always understood things just as they were, but Nan was different, almost a stranger.

An unruly tear spoiled the first sheet of paper. Well—she’d compose her letter on that sheet and re-write it. But what excuses would she make? Just say she didn’t want to go?

And oh! how much she did want to go! Nellie had been so long in this big crowded city that the prospect of all the joy a wild woods summer could give, seemed like a very trip to Paradise for her. But it couldn’t be had, not at the expense of her mother’s worry about spending money so foolishly for clothes that had to be worn right now this summer, if they were ever to be worn at all, for they would not do for school, they were too showy.

Bravely Nellie attacked her difficult task. She must write a letter that would, if possible, keep Cleo from coming around. How could any one but herself know what those wasted dollars meant to Nellie’s mother? She had earned it all— —

The girl tried not to think of all the fancy washings her mother had done in the name of fine laundry work. She alone knew how bravely her mother had labored and how cheerfully. She alone knew how her mother had secretly spent many hours that might have meant at least some leisure, for there were not many but few to spend on reading the old book her father had given her mother years ago. It was a story book, a book of love stories, and although so old fashioned as to be absolutely uninteresting to Nellie, she had managed to decipher the many pencil marks on the margin. These had been made by her mother and these at least were interesting.

With a heart as faithful as that how could Nellie disappoint her? No, she couldn't and she wouldn't. Summer would come and go; there would be something to do and she would not be lonely at home, for many other girls and boys would be unable to go away and they could go to the parks and near-by places all together.

As she tried to write her letter these thoughts filtered in and out of her confused mind. She was trying to tell Cleo simply that she had decided not to go to camp and there was no use asking her why. She hoped that sounded a little stiff—all the better if the girls grew really angry and just let her alone. She must hurry with her letter before her mother came back. Her hands were shaky but her mind was firm.

It was written, sealed, stamped and hidden in her blouse. She would mail it when she went out for the fresh rolls. Now that it was written Nellie felt much better. It wouldn't be so bad to stay home, but what would Cleo think of her?

Cleo who had been Nellie's ideal girl, who had been so kind and naturally affectionate with her, it was hard to let Cleo think her silly enough to fight about the uniform. But what else could she do? Would anyone in the world expect her to tell *why* she wasn't going? Would she tell Cleo and have Cleo tell Zita, and Zita come right back and tell her (Nellie's) mother?

Of course they were all going away in a day or two but the camp plans had to be all settled at once, Nellie knew that much about business.

She went for the rolls and she posted the letter. At supper her mother inquired anxiously about Nellie's lack of appetite, and when she commented on the benefits camp life was sure to bring her, Nellie knew she would have to break the news.

“But I don't want to go to camp, Mums— —”

“Don't *want* to go!”

“No.” Nellie coughed a little foolishly. “I don’t imagine I’d like all that rough living— —”

“Ellen Glennon!”

“Why? Do I *have* to go?”

“Have to go? Of course you do. What’s turned your silly little head? Maybe you want to go to some swell hotel— —!”

“Oh, Mother!” Tears were flooding Nellie’s eyes. “Please don’t talk that way. I don’t want— —”

“But you’ve got to go. Do you think I could have my best friends treated that way after all the trouble they have gone to?”

Nellie had never expected this. How things were turning against her! Would everything be spoiled? Would it be better to tell her mother she would have to wear an ugly uniform and leave home all the hard earned finery?

Those patient blue eyes across the table from her were searching Nellie’s face. How queer it is that mothers always know? The girl shifted her own gaze to some unimportant object but felt her mother still watching her.

“What is it, Bunny?” the mother asked at last, using that endearing name to insure confidence.

“Why, Mums?”

“You’re holding back.” She was smiling now. “Why have you changed your mind about camp?”

“You’ll be all alone— —”

“Yes, and I would miss you if I didn’t know what a fine chance this was for you. Nellie dear, you’ll never be a singer unless you have a chance at health out doors while you’re young. Look at that young opera star, Marion Farley— —”

“I know, mother. She’s wonderful.” A picture of the young Metropolitan Opera singer hung over Nellie’s desk. “But after all, this one summer— —” It was so hard to say anything sensible.

“This is *the* one summer,” declared Mrs. Glennon very positively. “And if you don’t want to go, if you’ve had some little tiff with the girls— —”

Nellie shook her head abstractedly. It was getting more difficult every minute.

“Tell mother what it is. I just ordered your uniform today— —”

“My uniform!”

“Yes. You know all the girls wear those nice, neat little blouses and skirts  
— —”

“But— what about all— my new things?”

“They’ll keep. You’ll have them fresh for late summer. You’ll be back the first of September.”

“All right, Mother,” Nellie almost gasped. “I’ll go, of course. I was just thinking— —”

“That’s a good darling.” A kiss sealed the contract. “Of course, you’ll go. Little girls shouldn’t do too much thinking.”

And the bewildered Nellie tacitly agreed.

## CHAPTER VI

### TRAVELLING ON

After all their misunderstandings and delays they were on the train, camp bound at last. Neither Cleo nor Nellie ever mentioned the tragic but now meaningless letter. Girls, girls everywhere! Carrying little boxes, little bundles and endless little things, the one important feature being that all things they carried were little. No hat-boxes, no suitcases, no burdensome bundles for the Camp Climax girls. Their baggage was all compact and had all been shipped on ahead—Miss Horton, the director, saw to that.

Nellie was sitting with Cleo and already she had assumed her proper name. She was now Ellen. She sat with Cleo because Cleo, like herself, was a little timid or perhaps more properly speaking, a little shy in all these strange surroundings. It wasn't the travel but the girls! They asked so many questions, did so many little unexpected things, like turning all the seats together in twos and starting right in to play games, as if vacation at camp wouldn't be long enough for that sort of thing.

And all this was as new to Cleo as it was to Nellie, so they both clung to each other, unconsciously holding back from the happy tumult. Nan had quickly found companions, for many of the girls going to Climax were already acquainted with her. She was a gym girl, a girl who had frequented the school gyms and the girls' club gyms and, naturally, it was from such quarters that the camps drew their heaviest following.

Nellie and Cleo, or Ellen and Cleo, were too absorbed in their surroundings to talk much. Mere snatches of conversation passed between them as the express pulled outside of New York City and made its way up through the great state. It was morning and the mountain camp would be reached before sundown, so camp would be made by nightfall.

"Are you going to be lonely, Nell?" Cleo felt constrained to ask her companion when the conductor passed along without exercising his usual formality in demanding tickets. The whole camp travelled on one big ticket.

"I don't think so," Nell replied hesitantly. "Are you?"

"Oh, no," declared Cleo with a brave show of indifference. "Just look at all the girls! How could we be lonely?"

“But they’re all strange girls,” replied Nell, knowingly.

“They won’t be for long. Let’s speak to someone— —”

“Oh no, please don’t,” Nell put out a restraining hand for Cleo had attempted to move. “Wait a while. Maybe,” she whispered this—“we won’t want to be too well acquainted with—certain girls. Let’s wait and see.”

“All right,” her companion agreed, sinking back again into the big cushioned seat. “But we don’t want to get the name of being stand-off. Oh, there’s Marie!” she brightened. “She sees us. You’ll like her, Nell. Hello, Marie!”

“Well, of all things! Look who’s here!” That was Marie, big red cheeked, brown eyes, bobbed headed Marie Morgan. “Trying to hide away from all the rookies.” She stopped to be made acquainted with Nellie. That formality quickly over the laughing girl was prattling on again.

“Come on. Let me drag you around. We’ve got a whole day of this, you know, so you might as well make the best of it. Cleo, what a lark to have you come? Everybody off for Europe, I believe. Same here. Nobody home but pop and he’s gone away. So Marie is all alone— —”

She rattled on while Nellie wondered would she ever stop or even pause for breath. How could she think so fast or didn’t she have to think for that sort of nonsense? This was one of the big girls, and if there was one class more than another which Nellie stood in awe of it was the *big girls* class. They always made her feel so insignificant.

“Come on,” Marie insisted. “Let’s begin at the top. They’re playing some silly little game Harriet Bradner brought in, like a cat out of the rain, you know,” she laughed merrily. “Harriet loves cats and games.”

Cleo was on her feet and Nell felt obliged to follow her. But she was feeling more shy every minute. That was the worst of all this. Girls wouldn’t leave one alone.

But presently some of her embarrassment was wearing off, for while everyone greeted the newcomers with a genuine welcome, there was no possible hint of criticism or even formality in anyone’s manner.

“Come along! Just room for one more. Here, Ellen Terry (this to the quaking Nellie), join in the game before the gates are closed. Who is your favorite artist?” the game leader asked.

“Artist?” Nellie repeated vaguely.

“Yes. Any sort of artist, singer, dancer — —”

“Marion Farley!” replied Nellie promptly whereat such a wild howl went up from the girls she wondered if she had made some foolish blunder.

“Right, right!” called out the leader, a girl who wore glasses and was too fat to be anything but jolly. “That’s the best answer yet, and it makes the exact letters. M. F.”

Thereupon Nellie—it is so hard to call her Ellen—was immediately chosen as leader of the game. After that she simply shone. Everyone wanted to become personally acquainted, and when Cleo very privately confided to Marie that Ellen sang—Well, then there was a demand for the hitherto timid little brown-eyed girl.

Having the big car all to themselves the prospective campers made the most of their privilege, and their two leaders, Miss Horton who was actually in charge and Miss Marlow, her nice young assistant, merely sat up front and read their camp books, allowing their charges full swing of the great red-seated day-coach.

Cleo made a chance to talk to Nan, or Anne as she was now to be called. Surrounded by a bevy of the older girls Anne was drawing up a written schedule of all the things she intended to do daily—the extra things. Her close companions were likewise mapping out their programmes, for girls like Anne are naturally methodical, and real method knows no interference.

Of course, Cleo was promptly welcomed to the charmed circle, and it was easy to see that her prettiness had an immediate salutary effect. She looked prettier than ever in the simple little camp outfit, serge skirt with white blouse. Her close fitting dark felt hat had shown her yellow curls when the party entrained, but now it was the curls that showed off to particular advantage, for the hat was in the rack with the blue serge jacket that matched her skirt.

“My little sister, you know, girls,” Anne attempted to explain.

“But I’m older than she is,” Cleo hurried to interject this explanation which always seemed necessary to Cleo’s sense of fairness.

Every one appeared to be talking and laughing, and the uproar would have been absolutely general but for one girl. Cleo noticed her when she came down the aisle looking for Anne. This girl sat alone in the very end seat. She wore the same uniform and was certainly one of the Camp Climax girls, but why did she sit there so solitary? Her hair was all that could be

seen other than her shoulder, but her hair simply couldn't have been missed, for it was a bright, very vividly bright red and it was bobbed!

With that feeling of sympathy which always possessed Cleo when she discovered a girl solitary like that, because she herself had been so alone before Nan came back, she kept wondering about her. No one appeared to notice her although everyone seemed so friendly otherwise; she just sat there. Cleo could even now see her as she talked herself with Nan's friends, and perhaps she, the solitary girl, would not have been so noticeable had her hair not been so vivid. The contrast was unmistakably striking. Curious beyond bounds, Cleo asked one girl, Helen Downs, if she knew the other.

"Know her! I should say not," answered Helen. "Nobody knows her — —"

"The girl whom nobody knows," quoted Julia Parks. "Isn't it queer there is always one queer girl — —"

"But is she queer?" persisted Cleo.

"Girls," spoke up Anne, who was, of course Nan, "don't mind my little sister. She just can't live long without a mystery and now she's struck something to be mysterious about. The sad girl with the wonderful hair." Anne was not critical, merely observant.

Cleo tried to laugh about that but she felt her cheeks grow warm. That was just it, girls were always thoughtless. Why should one be left all alone like that? And to think that Nan should be so different!

The water cooler was directly in front of where the one lone girl sat, and, while Anne and her crowd were busy with their note books, Cleo slipped off. She stopped, as she planned, to get a drink. Without looking directly at the girl she could see her over the edge of the paper cup. Should she speak to her?

Suddenly a lurch of the train threw Cleo forward and the whole contents of the paper cup was dashed into the strange girl's face.

"Oh, I'm so sorry!" she murmured in real embarrassment.

"It doesn't matter at all," the girl replied smiling. "Saves me getting a drink." She stood up to shake off the little puddles that were trying to settle in her blouse.

"But that's awful," insisted Cleo, ready to laugh but trying not to. "Your blouse is soaking — —"

“Don’t worry,” again the girl told her. “I’m glad it happened. Even a ducking is better than nothing.”

This confirmed Cleo’s suspicions. That girl was being left alone for some reason. Well, *she* wasn’t going to be mean to her. Besides, she herself still had a little feeling of isolation, and misery loves company, always.

It took but a few casual remarks to start their conversation, and that was the beginning of a strange friendship which the innocent little cup of water had so dramatically precipitated.

The girl’s name was Lorna Thornton and this was to be her second summer at Camp Climax. These facts alone she volunteered. But Cleo liked her instantly, and was determined to become her friend.

## CHAPTER VII

### MAKING CAMP

“Hang it here!”

“Here’s a good place.”

“Here’s a better place.”

“But the broom belongs there.”

“How do you know? Are you the—broom captain?”

“No, I’m the kitchen police.”

“Well, I don’t care, I’m going to hang the broom where it will show. Then there’ll be no excuse.”

Camp Climax was settling and these exclamations were seething through the air. Everyone was helping and when everyone attempts to help with any one thing the result is always uncertain.

The pine woods were fragrant with that health giving aroma so much a part of nature’s charm, a lazy sunset looked on indifferently, and flocks of girls in blue skirts and white blouses, like some strange specie of bird, fluttered around the camp grounds to the consternation of old mother crow, who in all her years nesting in that crooked old hemlock had never seen anything like this whirlwind before.

The campers were not to live in tents; big, flat one story buildings had been erected like barracks for the main living requirements, but there were a number of sleeping tents besides, their privilege being much sought after and only obtained by those girls who ranked high in camp grades.

Housekeeping was to be done in shifts, or by squads of the girls, those unfamiliar with routine being taught and trained in such simple duties as plain cooking, neatness, ordering supplies and house-keeping in general. Besides this, there was a chief cook assigned to each group of twenty girls and this cook would give special lessons in special lines to such girls as were domestically inclined. All this had been stated in the preliminary leaflet. The chief cooks were women, of course, and their services were paid for, as Camp Climax was about as expensive a place to summer at as might

have been some of the dignified hotels on the opposite shore of Lake Lookout.

Cleo and Ellen were busy as well as were the others, Cleo was trying to find places for a lot of equipment such as small hatchets, frying pans, camp kettles and other odds and ends, planned to be used in the open by the girls and therefore not being made a part of the big tent supplies.

When a "good place" for some particular implement was decided upon, that place was marked for that especial use, the idea of the camp directors evidently being to develop in the girls a certain resourcefulness, ever a part of primitive life, after which the camp idea is patterned, and so seldom to be found in regular so-called civilization.

"Isn't it fun?" chirped Ellen. "Oh, I had no idea we could do so much by ourselves. They don't boss us at all."

"They'd boss us fast enough, I guess, if we didn't pitch in and do our part," Cleo answered. "But it is fun. Help me to nail this little box up, will you?"

"I'll nail it up. I'm a real carpenter," boasted Ellen. "Here, let me have the hammer. What are you going to put in a box out here in rain, and wind and everything?" She had a little wooden cigar-box in her hand and was about to nail it to a sapling tree Cleo had decided to use as an outpost.

"This is such a lovely little spot I'm going to sort of furnish it for myself," Cleo declared. "And I'll be sure to want the box to put things in. If I nail it on the tree the tree will be mine, if I don't someone will come along and claim the whole place. Just see what a natural seat this curved limb makes! Isn't it simply perfect here?"

"For birds, maybe," laughed Ellen, it was so hard to remember to call her Ellen, "but I don't think I'm going to furnish up any trees. How's that? High enough?"

Cleo put her hand to the box and found it just right. "Well, Ellen," she replied, "you may use my tree if you want to, but please don't make a mail box of my box. The birds might carry off the letters and then you'd blame me. Have you seen Anne lately?"

"Anne?"

"Yes, our Nan, of course. We've got to call her Anne, you know."

"Oh, yes. I saw her carrying boxes into the big kitchen. She's so strong she seems to be quite the expressman for Camp Kickup. Is she going to live

over there?”

“Oh, no. I hope not. We ought to live near each other, we three,” Cleo answered very definitely. “That was the way we tried to engage. But all these little crowds work together. Didn’t you notice the barracks were numbered?”

Nellie was about to answer when a strange voice rang out.

“Hey there!” came a call from one of the small tents. “Help me anchor this, will you, please?”

Both Ellen and Cleo ran over to the fluttering tent where one of the girls, who made herself known as Marjorie Treat, was struggling with the slinking tent pole.

“I had it all hoisted,” Marjorie explained, “when Mary Lohr came in with an extra cot, flopped it down against the pole and the pole went— —” It was going again in spite of the efforts of all three, but finally Marjorie managed to get it in an exact upright position, which seemed to be all the pole wanted, for after that it stayed in place.

“Aren’t you starved?” Marjorie asked, when the pole position was finally all settled. “I could eat a bear. And we aren’t allowed any extra eats tonight either. All got to eat at tables just like common folks. It’s lots more fun when they let us toast bacon over the fires. Um-m-m!” and Marjorie mingled her pleasant um-m-m memories with the whispering of the pines. The pines seemed to love to whistle.

“Is this your sleeping tent?” Ellen ventured to ask. She was still a little shy in spite of her pleasant experience of getting well acquainted with a few girls on the train.

“Nothing is anybody’s here, we just grab what we can get,” answered Marjorie. “I have first chance at this tent because I was here last year and didn’t burn the woods down or do anything very bad like that. But I may incur the wrath of Horton, this very day, if I’m not careful, and then I’ll have to sleep in the barracks. What’s your outfit number?”

“Three,” Cleo replied simply.

“Oh, you’re with the rookies,” chattered on Marjorie who was a nice sort of girl, rather plain in appearance but decidedly striking. She had the greatest of all charm, personality. Her hair was simply bobbed and now ruffled like a wild chrysanthemum, her eyes were dark, maybe brown, maybe blue, even black, one couldn’t be sure of anything other than that

they were dark. And she was tall, slender, agile and of course in her girlish way, graceful. Both Cleo and Ellen at once became Marjorie's slaves and would have been glad to hoist more tent poles for her had the occasion required the effort.

"Everybody seems so busy," murmured Cleo. "I hope we aren't neglecting to do — —"

"Don't worry. Be glad you're free." She had an infectious smile that showed the whitest of white teeth. "It's all very well for this camp to promise our mothers it will make good housekeepers out of us, but I say, don't try to do it in one glad day. There's Tiny, no Etina. You know," she lowered her voice comically, "we don't dast call any nick-names in this camp! 'Gainst the rules, absolutely. Hey Etina! Come over here and help me make beds — —"

So it went. Everybody doing something, but the rookies, those being the girls who had never been at camp before, seemed not to know just what to do, so they mostly wandered around.

It was while Cleo and Ellen were doing some of their wandering that Cleo again saw Lorna, the girl who had travelled alone in the train until she was thrust into Cleo's company by the splashing of the water from the train-rocked drinking cup.

"There's Lorna!" Cleo now exclaimed, as she saw the girl, her arms burdened with camp things just going into one of the kitchens.

"Oh, she's one of the working girls," Ellen retorted a little scornfully. "You don't want to bother with her."

"I don't! Why Nellie Glennon!" The old name seemed stronger just then. "What are you talking about?"

"Oh, I suppose *you* wouldn't mind," Ellen tried to explain, "but the girls told me. She never did mix up with any of them last year."

"You mean they didn't mix up with her, I guess," Cleo retorted. "Well, she's a nice girl and I like her. *I'm* going to make friends with her, if she'll let me."

"She won't, you'll see."

"Why?"

"I don't just know why, but she's *different*."

“Perhaps because she has to work. That would make her different among these girls,” Cleo answered. Her manner was not sharply critical, she was simply stating an obvious fact. The girls at Camp Climax were of the class whose associates are usually selected for them. At that moment Cleo was wondering about Ellen. Would they discover *her* humble station in life? There are so many little betraying mannerisms, and all progressive girls regard a certain culture as a part of life’s education.

Lorna was out from the kitchen again and taking a path that led directly toward them.

“Hello, Lorna!” called out Cleo, happily, hurrying her steps to meet the girl.

“Hello,” came a very reluctant answer and at that Lorna deliberately turned in the opposite direction.

“There!” exclaimed Ellen rather triumphantly. “Didn’t I tell you?”

“But she may only — —”

“Oh, you’d find an excuse, Cleo, you’re so—so awfully kind.” The old Nellie flashed through with real sincerity then. “But if I were you I wouldn’t bother about her.”

“Nellie!”

“Oh, of course, if you want to. But if you do you won’t have many other friends here.”

“I’ll risk it.”

“Just as you like,” and the girl who was so apt to be misunderstood, she whose position was not entirely unlike that in which the girl, Lorna seemed to be engaged, raced off with a crowd of merry-makers, bound, they said, to the spring, to look at the water they were forbidden to drink. Spring water is not considered germ-proof for campers.

## CHAPTER VIII

### NIGHT AND QUEER NOISES

So this was camp! The first night in the woods! In the woods so strange to Cleo and to other girls like her, who, doubtless were lying awake now as she was, wondering vaguely about the new life just being entered upon, and perhaps they too held secretly some particular point of interest that might develop into almost any sort of mystery, centering around the girls' life at Camp Climax.

Yes, the woods are wonderful! The sky above, the great trees, the small trees, the tangled bushes, the gay wildflowers, bees, bugs and butterflies—all very wonderful, indeed, to Cleo, but more interesting by far than all the beauties of nature, was the look in that girl's face, the question Lorna's eyes and the secret she had tried to hide so unsuccessfully.

"They said on the train," Cleo mused, "that there are always a few queer ones at camp, but I know that *she* isn't one of them. She isn't queer a bit, she's just hiding something. I wonder what?"

Girls in the same dorm, or dormitory, were still defying the "keep quiet rule," but it was hard to settle down on this the first night. Giggling, whispering, even guardedly calling, the girls in the rows of cots managed to have a pretty good time of it, in spite of the "guard" who checked them now and then. Ellen was over in one of the merriest rows and Cleo could hear her voice above the others, for whenever Nellie spoke the tones, naturally musical, had a carrying quality.

"I'm glad she likes it," Cleo was telling herself, "but I wish Nan—Anne ——" she corrected her thoughts, "could have been in this unit."

But Anne was not in with the rookies, for she was one of the chosen few, selected because of their experience, to help the directors and leaders. Anne could teach swimming, she could direct exercises, she could lead hikes, in a word Anne was an ideal camper and she was "up front" now in a tent under the stars, with the flaps raised to the pole top, and Cleo wondered if the distance so stretched between them now, would continue to widen and thus separate the sisters.

“Perhaps I’ll be in one of her classes,” she was thinking. “Why shouldn’t I be? I can only swim a little and I’ve got to learn the better strokes.”

A sense of pride in Anne’s importance suffused Cleo’s being. Wherever one is placed it is well to be among the most important, and Anne was quite a star at athletics, so naturally she would be a leader among the girl campers. Nellie, or Ellen, would be lively enough to become popular with the girls who would want to romp and “take chances” but where would she, Cleo, fit in? She was not going to let anyone call her pretty, or treat her as simply a pretty girl.

Again her thoughts flew to the other lone girl, Lorna Thornton. What if she did work at the camp, there was something about her decidedly interesting. Could Cleo have only known what such an attraction meant she would have defined it as personality and intelligence, but she, herself, was not wise enough to put her own estimate of the other girl into that one simple but explanatory word. Lorna was intelligent. It was that quality that caused her to shrink from the other girls who might, she fancied in her pride and sensitiveness, shrink from her because—because—

“They couldn’t be mean enough to slight so nice a girl just because she has to work,” Cleo reasoned, when the girls quieted down to something like bed-time order. “That would be too silly, for anyone can see that Lorna is an awfully nice girl.”

As if her very thoughts took shape and form about her, and were actually talking out loud, she was presently amazed to hear two girls in the very next two cots whispering Lorna’s name.

“Yes, sir,” one said. “I’m sure of it. I saw her.”

“If she’s found out— —”

“She will be.” The whispered words were hissed but were distinct enough to be easily understood. Then the girl in the farthest cot sat up and leaned over closer to her confidant.

“Listen,” she whispered, very cautiously, “if she tries to get away from drill another single time, *I’m* going to follow her.”

“But you’d be found out!” her companion suggested.

“What if I did? Don’t we have to know all about every girl up here? Do you think my folks would let me come if they knew Lorna Thornton— —”

Cleo jerked herself to an upright position. She couldn’t stand another word of that backbiting and she didn’t intend to.

“What’s wrong with Lorna Thornton?” she asked curtly, her own voice by no means as well guarded as had been the others.

“Oh!” scoffed one of the girls. “Who’s this?”

“What difference does it make to you?” scoffed the other.

“It does make a difference, she’s my friend,” blurted out Cleo without even realizing she was going to do so.

“Oh! In that case ‘Good-night!’” continued one disdainfully. “We didn’t know just who *you* were,” and she made a great fuss turning on her cot so that she might face the other way from Cleo’s bed.

There was more tittering, but scarcely any more conversation, for a step could be heard coming softly down among the little beds. It was quite dark, but the unmistakable form of the guard, in her white blouse that stood out above the other dark objects, was now almost in line with the end row where Cleo’s bed was situated.

“I’ve been listening to you girls whispering over here,” said the voice of Miss Dexter, “and I have to warn you. No more whispering, please. The girls are tired and you should all be asleep.”

She was leaning over Cleo and seemed to be especially charging her with the offense. Cleo was tempted at first to resent it and say it was she who had been aroused by the other two. But quickly she thought of Nannie, Anne Kimball, one of the first grade girls must not be hurt in her standing by her sister Cleo’s thoughtlessness. Miss Dexter touched one of the low window screens and making sure the catch was properly adjusted, passed out again to her little Watch, a small shed that stood in the center of the large flat buildings, just big enough for an office with the inevitable cot draped in one corner, and an equally unescapable desk in the other.

For some time after that Cleo felt fluttery, her heart jumped, her breath jumped and even her feet jumped. She was indignant. She had been blamed for breaking a rule and it had been those two gossipers’ fault. Injustice, when brought about by a really heroic effort, always seems doubly hard to bear, and it had taken courage for Cleo to speak up for Lorna. Now she was being blamed for doing it.

“And Nell—Ellen warned me I would have few friends if I bothered with her,” Cleo recalled. “Well, I don’t care,” she was deciding. “I would rather have one worth while friend than a bushel of the other kind.”

Gradually her thoughts drifted to those dear ones who were sailing the ocean blue.

“Dear, dear little mother,” she sighed. “I do hope nothing will happen to spoil my record here for she is so proud of both me and Nannie.”

But what could happen? True, Cleo was not well trained in that sort of obedience expected of girls brought together under such conditions as camp life must exact. She was easily offended, quick to retort, proud, sensitive, and she was now going to be thrown upon her own personal resources. Nan would only be with her during recreation, for Anne was sure to be a very busy girl. Ellen, the irrepressible Nellie, would not be much help to anyone, Cleo knew that, in fact, Ellen was apt to need prompting rather than to give it.

“But I’m going to like it,” was Cleo’s determining thought, for sleep was becoming impatient now. “It’s wonderful to be here and I’m going to make the most of it. I’ll do what I can for Lorna if she will let me,” again came that line of reasoning. “And I’m going to stick to her no matter what the others say.”

Quiet. Birds twittered softly. The waterfall sang a song to the moonlight, all these new and novel country sounds seemed to make the night’s stillness more profound. No trolleys, no autos, no street noises, but just little sounds as if Nature were breathing softly, sometimes sighing, sometimes laughing lightly, as when hidden birds twittered to their restless little ones. Didn’t birds ever sleep?

Camp should be quieting even to a girl’s healthy nerves, but tonight Cleo was not feeling that sense of comfort. It would take time to become attuned to this soft mellowness. She was jumpy as a kitten, and there! That was something to jump for.

“Some one knocking right under my bed!”

She was not speaking aloud but there it was again!

The dormitories were built up on an open elevation to insure dryness and let the air circulate beneath the floors. A person could easily crawl under the buildings that were open all around, and surely some one had crawled under this one.

Tap! Tap! Tap!

It was as if some one were calling her, for the tap on the floor was certainly directly under Cleo’s cot. It made her tremble, shiver! And she was

far from Nellie, only near to those other unfriendly girls.

Should she call out! No, everything was quiet, the girls, apparently, were all sleeping, and to raise an uproar would be awful. Besides, if the tapping stopped she would feel foolish to have bothered about it.

She listened. Yes, it was there still but not so loud. Just a tiny tip-tap-tip. What could it be?

The entire woods for acres around were given up to the campers, and Cleo knew that watchmen, real men in uniform with clubs in their belts and a pistol in its place, were stationed along the roads, so that no prowlers could possibly steal up upon this territory.

Tap! Tap! Tap!

Three times, just like a signal. Well, let it tap, Cleo was not going to pay any attention to it. Bad enough to invite the wrath of Miss Dexter on this the very first night, without waking up the whole dorm to listen to something tapping.

Cleo listened again rather breathlessly. It had not tapped for some minutes. Maybe it was gone. It must be. It was. There, now it surely had stopped and she was going to sleep. Queer way to start in on healthy camp life, lying awake all night, hearing things, thinking things, and imagining things!

But the tap on the wrong side of the floor was nothing that Cleo had imagined. It had tapped and now it was gone.

## CHAPTER IX

### REVEILLE

What was that?

Cleo was awakened by a bugle call; she remembered now, that pretty girl, Rosalie Ambrose, was pointed out to her when they first reached camp. She was to be the bugler for the first two weeks, and now she was calling. How wonderfully the notes sounded over the hills!

Everyone, naturally, awoke at once, as the soft calling notes floated over the camp.

“Can’t get ’em up, can’t get ’em up, can’t get ’em up to-da-a-y!”

Those who could sing were trying to and those who couldn’t didn’t try; they just yelled. Then everyone bounced up from the cots. Such confusion, such shuffling about, such firing and catching of pillows, and other temptingly convenient articles, as marked the change of that attitude.

“Isn’t it fun!” Cleo exclaimed to a girl who was not one of those who had been in the little dispute last night.

“Yes,” the girl replied. “I just love camp. I’ve got a lot of brothers home and so—” She paused to demonstrate by throwing a blanket up in a tangle and catching it in a swirl—“I’m well trained as a camper,” she finished merrily.

Miss Dexter appeared at the big screen door, and called out a pleasant good morning to every one. She smiled broadly at Cleo, and that seemed to settle the matter of late talking. Miss Dexter was a jolly looking girl, maybe twenty or even twenty-five, and the way the girls flocked around her attested to her popularity.

“Hurry along now,” she prompted. “We all want to be on time for breakfast *this* morning. And besides,” she hesitated, “don’t you smell it?”

They did. The coffee, the bacon and even the cereal all had a weird way of sending out their aroma through that woods.

Beds were promptly straightened and the twelve girls of shack No. 3 managed to get in and out of the wash room without anything more serious

happening than Arline slipping on a slipped cake of soap, and Emily throwing a wash cloth in Bab's face instead of on a rack.

Ellen had slept in the very end of the shack and had managed to escape before Cleo caught up with her. Of course, Cleo was anxious to see Nellie, and when the unmistakable ringing voice floated over the tumult Cleo called out to her.

"Oh, isn't it glorious?" Ellen called back. "Cleo! Did you hear the bob white?"

"Yes and I heard— —" She was tempted to say some other colored Bob had tapped on her floor, but she caught herself before making the foolish attempt. It was certain to have brought on merry ridicule.

In the morning light the sight of Camp Climax stood revealed in all its picturesque beauty. It was not a large camp, being built around a handsome old homestead, the original building being used now by the "grown-ups." These included the councilors, guides, teachers and other staff members, and while in all not more than fifty girls were taken at a time, these fifty seemed to require a lot of attention. Besides the big old fashioned building on the summit of the hill, sleeping shacks had been erected, and still another feature were the real tents, their brown canvas canopies standing out on the green sward, like great, big, overaged mushrooms.

Now, as Cleo and Ellen—our Nellie, of course—marched arm in arm along the way led by the happy troopers, they made chance to snatch at something akin to conversation, although it was very much disjointed. Ellen was "just crazy" about everything, as she would be sure to be. She had made so many plans for this first day, most of which she breathlessly imparted to the wondering Cleo, it seemed to the latter, that Nellie's first day would lap over into something like a whole week.

"We're going hiking," Ellen told her, "and we're going to the Waterfall, that's over the mountain, you know. Then we're going birding—to see how many kinds of birds we can sight, you know."

"But you have to take a lesson in swimming this morning and we all have to help clear up the grounds," Cleo reminded Nellie.

"Oh, yes, I know," Ellen airily waved Cleo's suggestion aside, "but Eleanor Morgan is going to big sister me and *she* knows all about everything."

"Big sister you?" Cleo inquired, curiously.

“Yes. You know that’s being my sponsor. She’ll show me around and stand up for me. See, there she is.”

“Hush,” cautioned Cleo. “We are ready for the flag salute.”

Old Glory was sailing on high. In the midst of a beautifully green plateau there had been erected the camp flag pole, and the honor of raising the stars and stripes daily was accorded to three girls, termed color bearers, the privilege having been earned through the performance of some extra special merit.

“How lovely!” breathed Cleo, after the salute had been given, and the flag had furled and unfurled in the breeze as if it understood and appreciated what it stood for in America.

“We’re going to sing,” Ellen reminded her, as that was her especial joy, of course. And when the Star Spangled Banner rang out over those Rip Van Winkle hills, girls’ voices mingling with the songs of the morning birds in treetops and in sheltered underbrush, Cleo and Nellie were not the only ones whose hearts swelled with patriotic pride and enthusiasm.

Scarcely had the brief formalities ended than Ellen espied Anne. She was helping set the breakfast tables, one of many sets of two long boards, put up on “horses” right out in the beautiful sunshine that was not too hot yet, but it might make a noon-day meal less enjoyable.

Everybody chatted, laughed, called or whistled. Cleo was amazed at this new world of girls, so exciting and so care-free. She was glad not to be able to recognize the two girls who had been so imprudent as to talk about Lorna the night before. She might have picked them out, of course, as they must have been in Shack Three dressing, but the general excitement precluded such small matters as keeping up spite, and for this Cleo was grateful. She never could “hold her own” against an enemy, although she had often held out successfully for others when her brave championship counted.

This was not a Campfire Girls’ Camp, neither was it a Girl Scout Camp, but simply a girls’ camp, conducted by capable young women who had stood the test of educational demands for that grade of social service. It was being conducted as might have been a special sort of boarding school, and to be a member of Camp Climax, any girl and every girl had to be vouched for as to character and proper home conditions.

This selection was not however, a matter for the girls themselves to bother about, and only when someone less favored than the general group would come into notice would the matter even be thought of.

It was a true democratic and a real equality spirit that pervaded the entire group. Everyone was friendly and sociable with everyone else, and if a girl was noticed as being shy or maybe a trifle homesick, then *she* became the favored one, the one most looked after and the one most entertained.

Now, at breakfast time, all this, in a subtle sort of way seemed most assured. Until Lorna Thornton came around with that big dish of delicious bacon.

Hardly anyone said good morning to her! They just smiled indifferently.

The contrast to this and their general good-nature was so marked that Cleo once again felt determined to find out why.

“Oh, hello Lorna!” she called out defiantly. “Don’t forget me with that bacon, please.”

“I won’t,” the girl answered, Cleo imagined, gratefully. But the others, so many of them, turned curious eyes at the reckless Cleo, that for the moment she felt she must indeed have made some unpardonable mistake.

Anne also was helping serve and she promptly answered Cleo’s call for bacon, before Lorna could get around that way.

“Hello, little sister!” chirped Anne, her lovely dark eyes dancing in a way Cleo loved to see. “How did you sleep?”

“Oh, good morning, Sister Anne,” Cleo answered, assuming what she hoped was a very good Camp Climax manner, “I slept wonderfully.”

“You look like a yellow — —”

“Now Anne — —”

“Oh. All right. I forgot you are not to be called pretty names.”

“You’re going to spill that coffee if you’re not careful.”

“Into your cup. No, you don’t get coffee, do you?” Anne corrected herself. “Coffee isn’t good for rookies. Here Laurette?” she called to a big girl tilting another shaped pitcher. “Fetch the cocoa over here. These girls have been waiting hours.”

Anne lingered a few minutes to ask Cleo what she had planned to do during the morning.

“Explore, I suppose,” Cleo was answering. But at that moment she caught sight of Lorna. “Oh, there’s Lorna,” she then exclaimed. “Maybe she’ll have time — —”

“Hush,” whispered Anne right into Cleo’s ear. “The girls who help are not—supposed—to—” The remainder of the sentence was a mere suggestion of words, but it gave Cleo the information she needed. Those girls who were paid helpers were never to be treated as such. Camp Climax was a model of democracy, and as only refined girls in moderate circumstances were ever engaged to help with the work, they too were regarded as campers in good standing. So she should not have hinted that Lorna’s time was limited.

Lorna was now coming toward Cleo and Anne had passed on.

“Oh, hello!” Cleo greeted her happily. “Give me a full cup, please. I love cocoa and I’m thirsty as a fish.”

Lorna was filling the cup cautiously. “Come for a walk later?” Cleo said very softly.

“Oh, I don’t—know—”

“Please do,” Cleo pressed. “I have a special reason—”

“All right,” consented Lorna rather reluctantly. “I’ll find you when I’m ready.”

Cleo sighed a little as she finally attacked her cereal. If Lorna would go hiking with her, she would surely be able to get better acquainted with the girl who seemed to hold herself so singularly remote. Besides this, she would ask her about that tapping under her floor. Cleo was afraid of ridicule to mention that to any of the other girls. But it had given her a queer feeling. As if someone had been secretly calling her.

She felt she would never forget that first day’s breakfast under the sky in the mountains. Ellen was so happy across the table from her she would continually burst out into little snatches of song. Yes, Nellie was a songster, and this free life in the open was just what her lungs needed.

Anne, the efficient capable member of their special party, stood out among the others with true patrician grace and bearing. She did things naturally, was always able and ready to help, and withal, a girl of peculiar poise and refinement. Cleo was justly proud of her sister Anne.

But of herself, the pretty girl, the almost spoiled girl, the girl who had always longed to be unlike herself in these special complimentary ways, and to be like other girls in their natural simplicity, she, Cleo had pledged her friends not to dare say or insinuate anything about her being pretty. She left all that behind her in New York.

As if a little buttercup or yellow bird would not always and everywhere attract extra attention!

## CHAPTER X

### APRON LAKE

“But Lorna, why don’t you try to forget that?”

“Why should I?”

“It would make you happier,” Cleo was arguing with Lorna. They were seated under a big oak tree in a solitary corner of the great, wild rustic grounds. Lorna had just explained something of her peculiar position at camp. She had been disciplined the summer before for an infraction of the rules. But she had not told Cleo just what she had been disciplined for. And as it was rather a delicate question to press, Cleo knew she was hardly equal to putting it directly. In other words, she couldn’t ask Lorna what she had done the previous summer that had gotten her into trouble.

Somehow she felt it could not be anything very wrong. Lorna was too nice a girl to deliberately do a wrong thing and now to seem so defiant about it.

“You’re a dear little duck,” said Lorna in a sudden burst of sincerity, “to care about me. Why do you?”

Cleo laughed carelessly. “I just care naturally,” she said frankly. “You know, Lorna, *I’m* a queer girl myself.”

“You’re one of the prettiest girls in camp, and Anne Kimball, the best swimmer, is your sister,” declared Lorna, sitting up straight and confronting Cleo as some portentous judge might have done.

“If you want to be my friend, Lorna, and I hope you do,” Cleo interrupted, “you will not comment upon my looks.”

“Why? Now *you* are being mysterious?”

“Because—well, it would be an awful long story if I told it all to you,” Cleo half sighed. “But you see, Lorna, I’ve had a sort of mix-up in my relations, my family, you know.”

“That’s funny. So have I.”

“And my Aunt Sylvia, with whom I used to live, just thought my looks counted for everything.”

“They do count for a lot.”

“I don’t think so. I was just plagued to death with everything to make me look—pretty.” This last was said with complete contempt for the Aunt Sylvia’s wasted efforts. “I was so tired being fixed up— —” Cleo tossed her pretty yellow head and her natural curls shook as if defying her. “And the reason, maybe the reason I’m sure to be your friend,” she said slyly, “is because I’m just crazy about mysteries.”

“Mysteries!”

“Oh, I don’t mean that you are mysterious,” Cleo hurried to make amends, “but when I saw you sitting all alone on the train I just said to myself, there’s an interesting girl; they always flock by themselves.”

Lorna laughed at that. She was regarding this strange little girl curiously. She couldn’t possibly know that Cleo Kimball had only the year before played at being a girl detective, and that she had actually found that lovely sister Anne just through her own efforts. This was told of in our first volume, “Cleo’s Misty Rainbow,” but naturally it was not to be discussed with a stranger. Anne was Cleo’s real sister, and all the world should know exactly that and nothing more.

At the same time that Lorna was looking at Cleo, there upon the rich green sward, Cleo also was trying to understand Lorna. Their acquaintance had come about without any other introduction than a chance meeting on the train, and while all the Camp Climax girls were supposed to be friends, this one particular girl, Lorna Thornton, was certainly different, in her status, from the others. She was not exactly pretty and yet had real charm. It was undoubtedly that which had attracted Cleo to her. She had a milky white skin and true gray eyes. These features made all the more striking her vivid red hair. It was not an ugly shade but a rich golden red almost metallic in its glints.

But why had she been disciplined? What could she have done to deserve it? And why did she appear now so defiant about it? Surely she must know that the girls were treating her with cool indifference, and because she earned money doing some of the lighter work would never account for that. In fact, there was Mary Turner, who had already broken a whole tray of dishes, *she* too was working and everybody just flocked around Mary; she was so jolly, so strong and such a perfectly fine girl. Even early as this first day in camp, Cleo easily understood Mary’s popularity. So, of course, it wasn’t a question of helping to serve a table.

After chatting a while, during which time just what was said amounted to less than the opportunity to become acquainted, which was thus given the girls, Cleo told Lorna about the queer tapping on her floor the night before.

“What ever could it be?” Cleo asked anxiously.

“I haven’t the faintest idea,” Lorna replied. “But here come a lot of girls. Let’s walk over by Apron Lake.”

“All right,” Cleo agreed, disappointedly. She had hoped Lorna would know something about the tapping, and she could not help but notice the change that so quickly came over Lorna at the approach of the other girls.

“But do you know,” Cleo continued, as they sauntered off toward the glimmering little lake that could be just espied through the trees, “I was so startled at that regular tap, tap, tap, that I could hardly keep from calling some of the girls to listen to it?”

“Why didn’t you?” Lorna asked indifferently. “I’ve been up here two summers and I’ve never heard of anyone getting in on these grounds who didn’t belong here. We’ve got the State Troopers, you know, and they keep prowlers away from this section.”

“Oh, I didn’t think it was a prowler,” Cleo added quickly.

“What or who did you think it was, then?”

“I hadn’t formed any idea. You know how vague things seem at night. And that being my first night in the wild woods,” Cleo remarked childishly, “I suppose I thought things that I didn’t know I was thinking.”

“You certainly are a queer child, Cleo, and I suppose that’s why you bother about me,” Lorna said, a little disdainfully.

“Why, Lorna!”

“Oh, I know that sounds rather stupid, but did you notice how those girls stubbed their nice white shoes over the rough stones over there rather than take *this* path?”

“They may want to go for those wild flowers — —”

“They just wanted to avoid me,” Lorna’s eyes were blazing now. Cleo saw them as she, Lorna, looked sideways at the girls, who really were sliding down a rocky hill when they might have been pleasantly tramping along the smoother way.

Suddenly Lorna grasped Cleo's arm. The motion was so unexpected it brought both of them to a standstill.

"Cleo," she said, rather breathlessly, "it helps me so much to have someone believe in me. I have to pretend not to care but *I* do care, a lot."

"Certainly I believe in you," Cleo assured her warmly, and she knew at that moment that her pledge had been given. Whatever the other girls knew or imagined against Lorna Thornton, she, Cleo Kimball was pledged to be her friend.

After Lorna's impetuous outburst the two girls strolled on in silence. That is, they did not talk, but there was not silence around them; for birds seemed to twitter from every bush and tree; perhaps they resented the invasion of the campers. Little fat frogs scurried through the grass; their haunts had been rudely intruded upon too, and "bees, bugs and butterflies" known as Cleo's favorite woodland combination, made the air hum with their buzzing, or as in the case of butterflies, gave beautiful golden and bronze dots to the sheaf of intangible sunshine.

"What a darling little lake!" It was Cleo who thus exclaimed, for now they stood beside a pool of the silver liquid that so quietly lay in the lap of the mountains, Apron Lake.

"Isn't it beautiful?" Lorna agreed. "I think this spot one of the prettiest up here. Some of the girls rave about the big shaggy rocks that overhang the hills, but I like best this timid little lake. See the apron strings? Those little streams that stand out from the apron."

Cleo found a smooth flat stone and skipped it across. It "skipped" three times and delighted the amateur, who, not being an outdoor girl, considered the feat quite brilliant.

After skipping for a while she heard a call. Someone was calling Cleo's name and she quickly recognized the voice. It was Nellie's.

"Oh, we'll call her down here to see this lake," Cleo decided instantly. "Hey, Ell-en! Come this way!" she called out clearly. "See Apron Lake!"

"But I'll have to be going — —"

"Now, Lorna," Cleo objected. "Why do you want to run away? You'll *love* Nellie."

"Really I'm not running away," the other girl protested, "but I have to go. You see, all my time is not free."

Cleo looked after her as she hurried off. What a lovely girl! Why should she have some sad secret hidden under that charming personality? Well, she would be Cleo's friend, that was now positive, and if as Nellie had warned her it would mean the loss of other possible friends she would have to put up with that.

"Oh, Cleo! Where ever have you been? We thought you were lost."

Ellen was down the hill, coming at such speed she almost kept right on going into the lake. She was having a wonderful time, *that* was certain. And she was the girl who had objected to wearing a camp uniform!

"What have you been doing all morning?" Cleo asked her. There were two other girls with her.

"I? Why I've been doing so many things—taking a swimming lesson—Why didn't you come over to the basin for your lesson?"

"I'll start tomorrow," Cleo replied without giving any reason for not having started that day.

"You haven't been down here all alone?"

"No. Lorna Thornton was showing me around."

As Cleo said that she saw the two strange girls look at her sharply.

"Oh, dear, do excuse me," flustered the excited Nellie. "Girls, this is my bestest friend, Cleo Kimball, and Cleo, this is Jane Pennington and Laura Bird."

Both Jane and Laura seemed pleasant enough girls, and now all four started in to skip stones over the little lake. It was fun. The simple hand skill of making a stone skip water is always fascinating, and to these girls it seemed absorbing, for a short time at least.

Then Ellen declared she had to take some other kind of exercise before dinner time, and as dinner at camp was the mid-day meal, with supper in the evening, the girls started up the hill again toward the camp buildings.

"But you missed so much fun, Cleo," Ellen reminded the tardy one.

"I had a lot of fun," Cleo insisted, "and I'm going to have a lot more every single day that I'm here."

"Come with us this afternoon, then," Jane invited cordially.

She was just an ordinary girl so far as general appearances went, but she had that attractive voice, half boyish and half "cracked" as Nellie might have

described it, that makes a girl seem so individual.

“Thanks, I shall,” Cleo answered gratefully, really glad to be “taken up” by the other girls.

## CHAPTER XI

### DANGER

Each day for more than a week, it seemed to the girls from the big city, that life in the open was far more exciting, more interesting and more attractive than had been their boasted existence in the greatest city in the world.

And it only required a few mountains, a few little pools like Apron Lake and the Witches Dishpan, hills decorated with gray and green rocks, fields carpeted with green velvet grass dotted with gay colored wildflowers—only such wonders of nature were required to make Camp Climax so lovely a setting for the girls fortunate enough to be there.

Yet this contrasted far and above whatever a great city had to boast of, for man made the city after Providence had made it a country. What man has made he may require, but for healthy young girls summer time at least, is ideally situated in the country.

Cleo had found swimming her chief interest. Perhaps because Anne, one of the best swimmers at camp, was most anxious that her little sister also should qualify. For the first few days Cleo took her swimming exercise on dry ground, lying over the padded “horses” arranged for the strokes. Then, after getting at least some of the motions, she was allowed to go in the big basin, or pool, where beginners practice.

She loved it, and was determined to be counted among the good swimmers of the beginners class. This meant regular practice and plenty of it, but Cleo enjoyed the cool, clear water, loved the splash parties and the dipping contests and every other absurd but intriguing prank that such girls as the Climaxes could invent—or develop. But even under such ideal conditions accidents will happen. They did, especially among the tyro swimmers.

Anne was in the big basin, marked out in the lake by a fence of ropes strung on strong posts. The girls were having a wonderful time of it, the newest and youngest sure to show their enthusiasm most, when suddenly there was a call for help.

“Help! Help!” came the terrifying cry and even in that beautiful summer’s day it seemed to pierce the air into frozen little holes.

“Where? Who? What?”

Instantly the pool was a swirling mass of figures, the girls darting here and there in their simple, dark blue jersey suits, all eager to help, but realizing the swimmer’s rule of leaving the pool to the experts in any emergency.

Anne was an expert. Cleo quickly gained the bank where Ellen was soon beside her.

“Who is it?” gasped the excited Nellie.

“Hush!” cautioned Cleo. “We must be quiet. It’s a rule — —”

“But is someone drowning?”

“Nellie! For goodness’ sake don’t get so excited,” again Cleo warned her, forgetting the “Ellen” in her own better controlled effort. “We will have to leave the lake and dress at once if we add to the confusion. See, there comes Miss Horton.”

Miss Horton, the director, was indeed hurrying along from the board walk that led to the lake from the winding way among the pines. The girls noticed her fine features were even now a mask of anxiety, and as she made her way to the little pier that would bring her out toward that dread spot in the water where a number of swimmers were struggling, she scarcely spoke, except to offer a word of caution and to still the natural alarm.

“Oh, I can’t help worrying about our Nan,” Cleo whispered into Nellie’s ear, for they had given up the camp formality now and were as two little girls again. “She’s sure to take the greatest risk.”

“There! See! They’ve got her!” Nellie answered, as a form could be seen being carried along through the water. “Oh, it’s Lorna Thornton!”

“Yes, it is. But where is Nan?” Cleo was trembling so that her teeth chattered loudly and she never before had felt cold that way when standing in the sunshine.

“There’s a crowd out by the post yet,” Nellie continued to report, for indeed there could be seen another group still active in the water, while those girls carrying the figure of Lorna, unmistakable with that head of brilliantly red hair, were now on land.

“She’s hurt,” a girl next to Nellie said.

“Who’s hurt?” Nellie demanded.

“Anne Kimball. She caught Lorna Thornton.”

“Oh, I must get to Nan!” wailed Cleo as she heard the dread words. “I must get—to her!”

“But you can’t, Cleo,” Nellie was trying to hold her. “You couldn’t swim — —”

“I can too. Let me go!”

“You’ll be disciplined,” warned the other girl. “It adds to the danger.”

But Cleo had broken away, and was pushing in and out of the line of girls that stood like sentinels along the bank. She threw herself into the water, and to Nellie’s complete consternation, could now be seen striking out, her yellow head without its protecting cap, shining above the disturbed waters like a pond-lily.

“Oh! Oh! Oh!” came the surprised chorus. “Who is that?”

“That’s Cleo Kimball, Anne’s sister,” Mary Lohr exclaimed. “And she’s only learning to swim!”

All the terror now seemed to be crushing Nellie’s breath out. If only she could have held on to Cleo!

“Nan and Cleo!” she gasped. “Oh, someone — —” her voice was a shriek — “please grab—Cleo!”

The group that had been farthest out was now making its way in, and they were trailing Anne Kimball through the water!

“Nan! Nan!” shrieked poor frightened Cleo, just as someone saw her danger and a strong arm was passed under one of hers. Presently it was guiding her carefully toward shore, reassuring her at every stroke, and finally bringing her to land almost alongside of the seemingly lifeless figure of Anne Kimball.

“Take Cleo to the bath house. Are you able to dress?”

It was the imperative voice of Miss Marlow, and its tone was one of unmistakable displeasure.

“I must see my sister first, please,” begged Cleo. “What is the matter — —”

“You will make yourself ill,” Miss Marlow said again, not quite so sharply. “You can help your sister best by following the rules. *She’s* a brave

girl!”

“Oh, I know it, Miss Marlow,” wailed Cleo. “But is she hurt?”

“A little. She saved Lorna and in doing so was a little hurt by the rough post. She’s coming around all right, but you know you couldn’t do anything for her. Come, that’s a good girl.”

Cleo allowed herself now to be led to the bath house, everyone around kindly trying to comfort her and showing the spirit of the team play which she had heard so much about, but never before had seen actually demonstrated.

“You’re so kind,” she murmured gratefully. “I couldn’t help it. I was so frightened.”

“We know,” soothed Miss Marlow, for Cleo was still trembling and plainly nervous. “It was quite natural for you to try to reach your sister. But, you see, we have to be very particular to avoid panic, always. That’s where the most danger lies in times of emergencies.”

Cleo was getting into her things quickly, and Miss Marlow, usually called Marie because she was so much like one of the girls herself, was busying herself around picking up such trifles as will get scattered in all girls’ bath-houses. Nellie was already dressed, as were a number of the other girls, for all seemed anxious to get outside and find out how the two girls were, Anne Kimball and Lorna Thornton.

It occurred now to Cleo that it was rather strange to have had Lorna and Anne in the accident, and to have herself, almost gotten into trouble, also. A vague feeling of uneasiness was creeping over her. It had to do with Lorna. Anne had all but asked her not to be too friendly with this girl; Nellie had openly charged her not to “go with her”; the others had hinted and made significant remarks, and now here was this girl Lorna, apparently only saved from being drowned by an actual risk of Anne’s own life!

Of course none of this was in any way blamable to Cleo’s interest in Lorna, but, just the same, it gave her a guilty feeling.

“Come girls,” urged Miss Marlow, “we must get back to our camps.”

They needed no urging, however, for every one was now fairly rushing along toward the scattered buildings on the big hill. Those who had not been bathing were already up there, Ellen also had disappeared with the first crowd, and poor little Cleo felt dreadfully alone.

“If anything should happen to Anne!” she said it aloud and one of the girls in the sympathetic little crowd that trudged along with her, answered.

“You’re just nervous, Cleo. You’re shaking like a leaf. Are you cold?”

“Oh, I don’t know. I must see my sister. You see,” she tried to explain, “our mother is in Europe and she’s been very ill.”

“But Anne is perfectly all right, dear,” Miss Marlow stopped to insist. “It’s you who are in danger. You will have to get into a warm bed and have a little doctoring yourself.”

But it was dreadfully provoking to follow that order, simple as it sounded. Cleo wanted to find out what had happened, and here they were putting her to bed and making her drink hot lemonade!

Poor little, spoiled, pretty Cleo!

Rosalie Ambrose, the bugler, she who blew the silver bugle every morning, waking sleeping girls and warning those already awake that breakfast was imminent, she it was who took time to leave the groups who talked outside, and come in to sit beside the imprisoned Cleo.

“Do tell me what happened, Rosalie,” she begged, choking down the last of her lemonade.

“Well, you see, Cleo,” Rosalie began, “it was all Lorna’s fault.”

“What was?”

“The accident.”

“But what happened? What kind of accident was it?”

“Oh, I thought you knew,” Rosalie answered then. “You see, Lorna should not have gone into the water.”

“Why?”

“Because she isn’t allowed to.”

Now Rosalie was sweet. Her blue eyes were those round old fashioned wax doll kind, and she had brilliant brown hair; not red nor blonde but brilliant brown. And she had the cutest dimple in her chin; she was stretching the dimple now with the way she was twisting her half smile. But like most quiet sweet girls she was slow. She had a provoking way of talking all around things without just hitting the point. Cleo was actually quivering now, waiting for her to tell why Lorna Thornton was forbidden to go into the water.

“You know, Rosalie,” Cleo pleaded, “I feel a little guilty, because I sort of chose Lorna for a friend.”

“Oh,” said Rosalie with some show of surprise.

“And if Anne had been drowned trying to save her — —”

“But Anne would have tried to save anyone else just as quickly. She saved a girl last year.”

It was Cleo’s turn to say “Oh.” She said it.

“But why can’t Lorna go in swimming?” she followed up, a little impatiently.

“I don’t know much about it,” evaded Rosalie, “but it’s something about her not being strong enough.”

“Oh,” again said Cleo, relief in this exclamation, for there could be no blame in a girl being physically unable to go into the water. The blame would be in actually going in.

“How long have you been put to bed for?” Rosalie asked kindly. She too was evidently anxious to get out with the girls.

“I said I’d stay until I felt warm—you see Miss Marlow was afraid I had taken a chill.”

“Then, I’ll run out and see how everything is and I’ll come back and tell you — —”

“But can’t I go out now?”

“Well, you see,” said Rosalie cautiously, “you jumped in the water when there was an accident and that’s against the rules. If I were you I’d try to be awfully good for a while.”

“But I’ve got to see Nan,” declared Cleo rebelliously. And when Rosalie went out of the sleeping quarters she went with her.

## CHAPTER XII IN THE ATTIC

Anne was all right, that is everyone said she was, but lying on a very white cot in the infirmary didn't make her look all right to Cleo, although Anne's smile was as assuring as ever and she declared she wasn't hurt a bit.

The girls had told Cleo all about it. It seemed Lorna just couldn't stay out of the water, although she knew her heart was weak, and when she called for help feeling her eyes going dark, Anne came to her assistance. It was a hard struggle out there in the black shadows of the slimy posts that held the ropes up, and it was a blow against those rough posts that had stunned Anne.

"How she ever held on to Lorna until some of the other girls caught both of them, was just wonderful," Julia Parks declared, when she was telling the story to Cleo. "Of course, Lorna was all to blame for going into the water."

Cleo's own part in the excitement, that which she had furnished when she so foolishly plunged into the lake, had been settled by a motherly talking to from the head director, Miss Horton. She had explained to Cleo in a very clear way, that while Camp Climax was not like a Girl Scout Camp nor like any of the other organization camps, there were certain rules that had to be strictly enforced. These had to do with the general protection of the girls for whom the camp managers were responsible.

Rule one was that in time of danger the girls should follow their leader and positively not do things on their own responsibility. Cleo meekly took the reprimand, knowing well that she deserved it. And now everything was as happy as before except that Lorna was not to be seen around and Anne was still in bed.

The first letters had been received from Europe. Cleo and Anne had both had one from their mother, and Cleo had had a single very personal one from Zita. She wanted to know what Cleo would like her to bring from France, from Ireland and from Scotland. These countries would comprise the scenes of their visit, for Cleo's mother was not strong enough to do much travelling. Zita wanted to know from Cleo what she should bring to Nellie, to Nan and to Cleo herself.

To decide on pretty things is a pleasant task for any girl, and although it seemed early to think about the coming back home presents now, Cleo realized that letters travelled slowly from America to foreign places, so she at once set her mind at work to discover what would seem prettiest and most useful for all three.

Cleo had always wanted one of those antique bracelets, the kind that look like slave bands. She might suggest that, if Zita did not think it would be too old for her. Then Nellie had always gone into ecstasies over a fancy glass perfume atomizer. This was clearly not the sort of gift which might be called either appropriate or useful, but since it would be sure to bring joy to Nellie's heart Cleo felt she should suggest it. For Nan—Nan was that sort of individualist who is always easiest to please yet hardest to choose for. Perhaps a hand-made sweater from Scotland! Yes, just that. Cleo had seen some of those wonderful little crocheted sweaters, with the stitches as fine as knitting, little white stars on tan background. She would ask Zita to look for one of those for Nan. Not that this would comprise her complete list of suggestions, but it was something to work on, and Cleo would think it over carefully before sending it off to Zita.

Camp life was now beginning to settle into routine for everyone, although each day seemed to supply some new adventure. Anne was well again, but not allowed to take part in her usual strenuous sports, a great privation for the active, athletic Anne.

Ellen, the happy little song bird, was having a wonderful time. This being her very first real vacation it had all the glamour of a bright new treasure, and because she was so lively, so funny—for Nellie's mother was Irish, don't forget, and because she could yodel like the birds and do all sorts of queer tricks with that clear little voice of hers, Nellie Glennon that was, and Ellen Glennon that is, had become one of the most popular girls at the big summer camp. And she almost hadn't come to camp at all.

One night, when the insistent rain had driven everyone under shelter, the first year girls, called the rookies, planned a little entertainment. Everyone must do something; no matter what it was. Naturally Nellie was going to sing, Cleo was going to dance; she really was a splendid little dancer, and a number of other rookies were ready to contribute their individual parts to the impromptu programme.

They were going to have "the show" in the big room of the big house on the hill. This room was an old fashioned, long drawing room, used now for assembly. There was a big square piano down in the end bay-window, and

the whole room was lighted by a pair of crystal chandeliers. The setting of the old place bespoke the glory of other days, when young folks must have sung and danced there, and when the music from the square piano was as proud and as symphonic as any being diffused in these present days of radio, phonographs and grand squares.

And up in the attic of the old house there was a box of costumes, from which the performers were to choose whatever attire suited their fancy.

The lure and charm of a genuine attic, with its mysterious boxes all tied up with faded strings, its little hidden baskets stuck up in the eaves and the unlimited hidden little things put there by loving hands but never, apparently, reclaimed by them—this mysterious charm of the unknown is ever enticing and attractive to girls of all ages, and when the Camp Climax girls were told they might go to the attic and choose, there was the expected and unavoidable rush.

“Come on, come along,” Rosalie urged Cleo. “Let’s go pick something to wear or we’ll be left. Everybody is going.”

So up the big oak stairs they scampered, and it was fun indeed to rummage in that attic. It was still daylight, with supper over, and even the rain on the roof seemed chiming in to the gay spirits of the camp girls’ entertainment, for it danced a merry jig.

“Oh, here! Just see what I’ve found!” called out Cleo, holding up an old fashioned flowered silk dress, the pannier style, with great bunches on the hips and a little tight waist that looked too small for any girl’s form.

“Oh, how ducky!” called back Rosalie. “But you could never dance in that.”

“No, I suppose I couldn’t,” Cleo reluctantly admitted. “Well, you take it. I’ll find something else.”

“Here’s something perfectly lovely for you,” sang out Rosalie the next minute. She was holding up a costume with a black velvet short jacket and a bright yellow accordion pleated skirt.

“Oh! That’s a Spanish costume. Exactly what I want!” exclaimed Cleo. She would have clapped her hands in pure childish delight but she feared the other girls would laugh at her. They were coming up in perfect troops now, all eager for something pretty, something queer, something comical and any old thing, as Mary Turner put it, for Mary wanted fun, she was intent upon having it and sure of getting it.

Quickly as a costume or part of one could be seized upon, the girl who captured it would manage to get off in a corner to try it on. Lucky there was more than one trunk to be ransacked, for there was quite a number of girls and none of them seemed to be satisfied with clothes. They all wanted costumes.

“Ellen Glennon!”

The dramatic calling out of Nellie’s name was occasioned by the magical appearance of Ellen herself, standing high on an up-ended trunk waving a golden wand, wearing a gold paper crown and trying to hold on her shoulder something intended for wings, it seemed, but really what looked like “busted fire screens” as Mary Turner described them.

“Oh, you are a scream, Ellen!” Mary told her. “But your crown is tippy—there, that’s better. Get down and let me nail on your flappers.”

“Flippers,” Ellen corrected her. “I’ll not wear them if they make me flappery.”

Another shout from another corner.

“Look! Look! A pirate!”

“How terribly funny!”

“Not a pirate, a buccaneer. Look at—the boots!”

Jane Pennington was in the boots, and that expressed it perfectly, for there wasn’t much of Jane outside the boots. And she laughed so she almost crumpled in deeper, for she couldn’t possibly stand up straight, she couldn’t possibly sit down, and she just had to fall into the boots!

“We’ll never get down stairs if we keep this up,” Arline reminded the noisy crowd. She couldn’t lay hands on anything but a couple of old lace curtains, but she said they’d do. She would be a spider in a web, the one the old song was made up about.

“How do I look?” Cleo wanted to know, for she had been busy getting into the Spanish outfit.

“Oh, darling!” Rosalie assured her. “How about me?”

“It won’t go around your waist.”

“It wouldn’t go around anyone’s waist.” Rosalie was tugging at the flowers on the waist, that had been made in the days when women and girls seemed to have lived in sections, with a so-called waist line intervening. But

Rosalie Ambrose's form was never cast in that sort of mold, and she wasn't a bit worried about its plentiful dimensions, either.

Cleo tried to spread the panniers out and up to cover the gap, and when with the aid of some magical safety pins the flowered gown was finally adjusted around the fluttering Rosalie, she and Cleo with Ellen in their wake, her wings flapping, flipping and flopping, in spite of her choice, all three trudged down to the back room where they were to receive instructions from Marie Marlow, in charge of their "stunt."

"Too bad Anne can't be in it, she'd surely do something clever," Rosalie said kindly to Cleo.

"She's got a good seat out front, but even if she were well enough, she couldn't be in this," Ellen reminded them. "This is only for the first year girls."

"Ye-ah!" drawled Jane Pennington. "The Rookies!" and she stamped her boots down like the clap of an old horse that hated automobiles.

"Oh! Look! Who's here!"

"Hush!" cautioned Marie Marlow. "You'll give everything away. This isn't the show; that's going to be outside where our audience is waiting. And please pay attention."

At that the would-be performers settled down to business, that is, some of them did and some of them didn't. But after various attempts to find out what each girl intended to do and then ordering her to do what she, Marie Marlow, thought would be best, the time for the "show" had more than arrived, it had arrived and passed a full half hour before.

Lights were on, the piano was doing all it could, but it was, sad to say, out of true. And keys would stick, although the player, Laura Bird, thumped heroically.

"The overture!" called out Marie, choking back an unruly giggle, for Laura's selection was a famous one, her skill was brave and determined, but that piano!

The next number was called before the applause had subsided, and it was then that Rosalie, in her old fashioned gown with the panniers and safety pins and subdued waistline, ventured forth.

Rosalie was singing "An Old Fashioned Bonnet with a Flower Garden on It", and the bonnet was nothing less important than Marie Marlow's paper scrap-basket, with a bunch of yellow tissue paper pulled through a

hole in its side, said tissue paper being crumpled up into a fungus sort of growth, that they all hoped looked like flowers.

But they didn't, they looked like an accident. Which made Rosalie's little song all the merrier and all the funnier, for the basket would fall down over her face at certain high notes, and how the safety pins ever held out under the strain was beyond even Rosalie's optimistic understanding.

But her song "brought down the house", and she had to sing another.

She chose "Melody Lane" as an encore, and even then they hated to let her go.

There were intervening numbers before Nellie sang, but when she did the camp girls were really taken by surprise. She sang a very simple little couplet, one of the good ones she had taken lessons on, and she did it so naturally and so sweetly that Cleo's pride was completely satisfied.

"I knew she would surprise everyone," she whispered, for she was in the green room still. "Nellie has a really pure, true voice."

No need to tell any one that for now she was singing one of the old classic lullabies, and even the rain on the roof had stopped to listen.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE MYSTERIOUS BRIDE

Rosalie had sung, and Nellie had sung, the pirate had pirated, boots, belt and buckles, and there had been a number of other contributions to the spontaneous programme, when Cleo discovered the loss of her sash.

“Oh, my lovely, long Roman sash!” she wailed to Arline. “I’ve lost it!”

“Where?” asked Arline foolishly.

“I felt a nail catch, or something in the attic — —”

“But you wouldn’t go up there alone,” Arline said discouragingly. “Never mind it. You don’t have to dance with a sash.”

“But I do want it,” Cleo insisted. “It swished so cunningly and I like to slash it up in the air.”

“Sorry I can’t go up with you,” Arline interrupted, “but my turn is next.”

“Oh, I’m not a bit afraid,” declared Cleo. “The lights are all on. If anyone calls for me, please say I’ll be right back.”

“All right; but look out for ghosts,” Arline laughed. “That’s an awfully old attic.”

“Do ghosts like old attics best?” Cleo had just time to half laugh, half express that, as she hurried out toward the stairs and thence on up to the attic.

The hall lights were on but the girls were all downstairs, so Cleo hurried along, remembering the corner of the attic where she had felt a tug at her loosely tied sash, and being sure that was the time and the place where she had lost it.

Up at the last landing, where a square hall opened into the boxed attic stairs, Cleo stopped to listen. She fancied she heard some one walking above her and she wondered who would be up there.

“Maybe some one else has lost something,” she reasoned, again going on.

But as she opened the attic stair door, she thought that a light had been switched off suddenly.

“Who’s there?” called Cleo. “Who’s up there?”

No answer, not a sound.

“Perhaps I only saw the reflection of the hall light,” she prompted her timid nerves. “I’ve got to get that sash. They’ll be waiting for me.”

There was an electric light button at her very hand, a switch button that would light the attic. She pressed this and the place was instantly flooded with light. She waited a moment, quietly, listening intently.

“Anyone up there?” she called again, cautiously.

No answer, not a sound. She was going up to the top of the stairs, any way, she decided. Then, if everything seemed all right she would grab the scarf—she felt she knew just where to put her hands on it—and she would hurry down.

Cleo was not brave but she loved adventure. She never thought of such a thing as ghosts, because she knew there was no such thing to be thought of, but just now she did feel a little shaky. Nevertheless, she tripped up the stairs and stood at the top, taking a critical look at the big, black rafters that were fairly well lighted by a big electric light bulb, that swung so loosely from a long green cord, hooked on to a middle beam, that the shadows it threw were almost enough to frighten anyone; they moved about so weirdly.

Not a sound, nothing but the old grimy attic, and over there near the big trunk Nellie had been all alone! Perhaps there wasn’t anyone even perched upon, Cleo was sure she had lost her precious sash.

She pushed a box out of her way to reach the trunk. But— —

What was that? Something had fallen! And surely she hadn’t knocked anything down. Her breath stopped—she was frightened in earnest now. She shouldn’t have come away up there all alone! Perhaps there wasn’t anyone even on the floor below! No one to hear her if she called.

Too terrified to move she stood still: waited, listened. Then she saw the bright colors of the Roman sash. It was hanging over the trunk just where she had suspected it might be: she would grab it and run down.

She put her arm out to touch it. Then she saw something!

“Oh!” she screamed in real terror. “Oh! Mercy!”

Something white was behind that trunk, and it was moving!

If only she could turn and run, but she couldn't, she just couldn't move!  
She felt actually paralyzed!

And it was coming— —

“Don't be frightened, Cleo, it's Lorna!”

A voice, Lorna's voice was saying that. And it was Lorna. That was her face, her eyes, but the rest— —

“Lorna!” gasped Cleo. “I almost died with fright!”

“I'm sorry. I didn't think anyone would come up. You've got your sash  
— —”

“But Lorna! Let me look!”

“Please don't. Go away. I don't want any one to see me.”

“Not even me?”

“I'm sorry, Cleo.” The voice was husky. “But I'd rather you wouldn't.”

“But Lorna! You're a bride! Oh, you look wonderful!”

“Hush, some one might—hear you.”

“No; they're all down stairs.”

“You had better hurry along too.” Lorna was standing in a little space between the high trunks now, and she looked like a picture framed with their rugged black outlines.

“Lorna,” Cleo pleaded, “you look too sweet for anything. Do come downstairs and take part.”

“Oh, I couldn't.” The secret bride was all flustered now. Her white dress fell in the straight graceful lines of the early empires, she wore a long veil with a short piece falling toward the side. When Cleo discovered her first she had hidden her face in the veil, but now it was thrown back in soft folds over her forehead, and just a fringe of her red-gold hair edged the lacy cloud.

“But you would be better than any one else,” Cleo insisted. “Oh, Lorna,” she had taken one of Lorna's hands in her own, “please come; for my sake,” she pleaded ardently.

Those soft gray eyes looked like pools in the shadows of the swinging light, that picked out the rugged black rafters above, but Lorna's lips were

drawn in a tight line, too severe for just a girl. She pressed Cleo's hand as she held it more firmly in hers. It was plain she was trying hard to control her emotions.

"You don't know, Cleo," she said hesitantly, "but I can't. I can't stand the rules here; I want to stay, I'm here under doctor's orders, but I have made up my mind— —" She stopped. Cleo guessed what she was going to say, and hurried to forestall it.

"But this is just the place for you to get strong. You must stay, Lorna."

"Not if I have to worry all the time. They don't understand me and—I can't explain. But I'm going— —"

"Lorna, please, please don't," Cleo begged in real sincerity. "You know everything and everybody here is working to help everyone else— —"

"Yes, I do know that," said Lorna, "and I'm not ungrateful. But I can't." She sank down on an old box, all her bridal finery forgotten and her pretty soft veil, that must have once graced the happy head of a real bride, crumpled and crushed about her.

Cleo was thinking quickly. She could hardly decide what to do. She realized that Lorna would go away, perhaps early in the morning, before anyone could stop her. So she must stop her now. She must do something to brighten that sad face. If only she could induce her to go downstairs! But they would be looking for her (Cleo) in a moment. How difficult it was to be sure of doing exactly what was right in such a hurry!

"But all the same, Lorna," she said very evenly, "I think you owe it to Miss Marlow to come downstairs and let them see how you look. You wouldn't need to do a thing but just pose."

"Are you a witch, Cleo?" Lorna asked, brightening a little. "I promised Marie Marlow I would take part. That's why I came up here and dressed. But when I heard them below, all so happy, and when I felt my disgrace — —"

"What disgrace?" Cleo's voice made its own answer and simply meant there was no disgrace. "You don't mean to say you care about taking that little dip in the lake on a hot day? See what I did. I jumped in when I knew I was in real danger."

"And don't you believe— —" Lorna's manner was changing—"that the girls think—I'm dreadful?"

“How silly! Why should they? Please come, I’ve got to go—” She was urging her along, still holding her hand. “You can put your veil over your face. Oh, Lorna, won’t we make—a hit!”

How ever she got Lorna down those stairs she never could tell, except that the clapping and the laughing and the uproar in the big drawing room offered so complete a distraction that both she and Lorna were forced to listen, and by doing so to lose their self consciousness. But they did, finally, reach the little room that served as a green room. Miss Marlow met them at the door.

“Girls,” she was just about to begin a little severely when she saw the bride. “Oh, how sweet!” she exclaimed instead. “It isn’t—Lorna!”

“Hush!” cautioned Cleo, “we want a complete surprise.”

“You’ll have it.” Miss Marlow was beaming. “Come over here,” she whispered, taking Lorna’s hand. Cleo noticed she was pressing it kindly, too. “I’ll get them to play a wedding march. Cleo, you take this little dish,” she had picked one up from a table, “and walk just ahead as a ring bearer, and we’ll group the other girls around to form a real old fashioned wedding party.”

The march was presently being played on the hard working piano, and somehow Cleo was treading her way into the big room, walking with that catchy and tricky little step they use in the movies. Lorna was following, her veil covering her face and the long white Josephine robe sweeping on. No one would recognize Lorna, Cleo felt sure of that, and even now the little secret was thrilling to contemplate.

“No one, not even Anne could guess,” thought Cleo, just as the audience broke into genuine applause.

Miss Marlow was moving secretly among the other girls, who were scattered about in the big low bay-window which was serving as a stage. She had collected them all into a circle, with the most attractive figures, such as Rosalie and Jane, standing nearest the bride.

“Who is it?” Jane whispered. But Cleo only shook her head.

The spot light, that invention of some of the girls who knew just how to do it, was being flashed on the bride, but her veiled face could not be recognized. Everyone was whispering and wondering, but the scene had suddenly changed from one of comic nonsense to a real living picture tableau.

Cleo was so happy she wanted to dance before her time—she was to dance as a peasant before the mysterious bride. Miss Marlow, a girl herself, was sure to keep the secret, but even she did not know of Cleo's conquest.

But her struggle with Lorna for her reinstatement as a Climaxer, had only begun. Perhaps it was well in this case as in the old proverb, that Cleo's ignorance of what she was undertaking, actually amounted to bliss.

## CHAPTER XIV

### EXPLORING

Cleo was so happy, so elated over her conquest of Lorna, that not even the excitement of the rookies' entertainment gave her greater pleasure. It was not alone that she had induced Lorna to go into the play and thereby insure a new interest in camp affairs, but it was because she had brought the girl into Miss Marlow's good graces. What Cleo couldn't do, she felt, Miss Marlow surely would manage, and if Lorna became discouraged again and should want to run off somewhere—Cleo had no idea where—there would be two instead of one interested in her behalf.

"No, it isn't her health," Cleo secretly reasoned. "No girl would be foolish enough to make a mystery of just having a weak heart. It's something else, but I can't ask her what. If I did I'd lose her confidence."

Which was truer than even Cleo could have guessed, for the secret of Lorna Thornton's worries and anxieties went too deep into the girl's life to be shared by even so good a friend as little Cleo Kimball.

Anne was well and active again, and had begun to worry about Cleo. A motherly attitude toward the small yellow haired girl had always been a part of Anne's affectionate disposition, and she couldn't understand why Cleo did go off to walk alone—when she might hope to meet Lorna—or stayed in her barracks to write letters when the call of the great out doors, so compelling to Anne and still a bit vagrant to Cleo, was to be heard, seen, felt and understood at every twist and turn of the well-developed encampment.

Anne was lecturing her sister a little just now, and Cleo was making evasive excuses.

"The girls say you knew who the mystery bride was in the play last week," Anne said gently, for she was beginning to understand Cleo's sensitiveness.

"Well, what if I do?"

"But do *you* want to be mysterious?"

"Isn't it interesting to be a little bit mysterious, Sister Anne?"

“Well, maybe it is,” Anne conceded good-naturedly. “But it makes the girls suspicious.”

“About me?”

“Oh, no, not about you.” Anne was becoming involved in one of those pointless arguments that so often turn out disastrously. Cleo understood her embarrassment, for these two girls, although sisters, had been separated when babies, and only lately united again. Because of this there was a formality between them now that other sisters would not have been addicted to. Cleo loved Anne, and, more than that, she thoroughly admired her. So it was not likely she would consciously do anything of which Anne did not approve; especially here, where Anne Kimball’s name was regarded as something like a motto of idealism.

They were walking over to the big sundial. It was early afternoon, and watching the sun tell time was a favorite recreation for both of them. Cleo wound her arm into Anne’s, confidentially.

“You know, big sister,” she said a little shyly, “I’m not going to do anything you oppose.”

“But I don’t want to interfere in your affairs, Cleo— —”

“You aren’t; I understand that, Nan. But you don’t like me—to—to—to bother about Lorna Thornton.”

“Why do you?” Anne quickly asked, glad, evidently of the chance to put that question.

“Well, you see, Anne, Lorna is awfully alone.”

“Isn’t it her own fault?”

“Why? How can she mix up with the girls when they all act— —”

“But she had the same chance everyone else had,” Anne contended. “You know she breaks a lot of rules.”

“You mean taking that little dip?”

“Oh, no; not that exactly. Any girl would have been tempted to try the effect of the water, although it had been said to be unsafe for her.”

“But it nearly killed— —”

“Please don’t say that, Cleo,” Anne interrupted her sister. “Perhaps if I hadn’t become so alarmed when I saw her going down again I shouldn’t

have knocked my old head on the post; you know I did knock my own head; Lorna didn't."

"Oh, yes," Cleo paused and her silence was speaking louder than words.

The sun was having a great fun, trying to tell time with the shaft that formed the dial, on the "face of the clock," those little pieces of pie, as Nellie called the lines in the grassy circle. These were marked out with the hours of the day so that the sun might make correct shadows, or rather that the shaft might make the shadows by obscuring the sun's rays at certain angles, and thus indicate the time to within fifteen minutes of that shown upon the face of an ordinary clock.

Anne and Cleo stood a while to watch the always interesting phenomenon, and then Anne proposed that Cleo go hiking with her girls, a little later, that afternoon.

"All right," Cleo agreed promptly, although she really had had other plans. But she couldn't just then, refuse her sister's invitation; not after the talk they had just been having.

"I'll get you a good strong stick," Anne offered happily. "You know we need a stick to help us over the rocks."

"Oh, do we?" Cleo hadn't done any real mountain climbing yet, and she was rather glad of a chance to try it. She had promised Lorna she would put a letter in their secret tree box down by Apron Lake—she never knew where Lorna lived in camp and wouldn't think of asking her—but the letter would have to wait.

A half hour later the party was ready and they started off. Being classed as the older girls they did not require a guide, and besides, there were going along, Marjory Treat and Mary Lohr, who were going to be councilors at the end of this season, if they had luck in their exams, as Mary expressed it. So there was no need of older or wiser heads to guide the little pilgrimage over the hills, perhaps once the favorite stamping ground of Coopers' heroes,—old Rip Van Winkle himself might even have found a good place to take one of his notable long sleeps among the hills the girls were now about to hike over.

It was a beautifully cool afternoon, so the girls sallied forth hatless. But not "stickless", for the staves they leaned upon so picturesquely were mountain sticks, sturdy and strong every one of them, that being donated to the new hiker, Cleo, actually having her initials cut in its bark by the artistic

Marjorie Treat, who claimed ancestral bearing from that famous old pioneer, Robert Treat of Newark, New Jersey.

“Talk about scenery — —” began Marjorie.

“Who’s talking about it?” Mary Lohr interrupted her. “Now, don’t go getting tragic, Marge. We’ve got some hiking to do.”

“But look! See! Behold!” Marjorie had mounted a great gray rock and was actually surveying a scene such as even mountain witchery rarely affords. The girls stood to survey it, although Marjorie had perhaps the best outlook, for her rock commanded a view unbroken.

Below was the slanting green hill, so green and so varied in its tints and tones as to look like brocade velvet. Beyond that lay strips of water, little lakes ebbing down from the mountains. Farther, one was more green, so smooth and soft, as to suggest a potential golf links for other campers who might invade these parts some day, and then, as far as the eye could see, were hills, hills, hills!

Even these young girls appreciated that view, and no one blamed Marjorie when she loitered behind, poised on her gray rock, for it was hard to leave that feast for the eyes, although the party was bound for explorations, and time, as well as steps, counted ultimately.

But they tramped on valiantly, and if Cleo’s toes were sore from stubbing—and they were—she said nothing about it. Everyone gathered wild flowers, small sprays only, for they were regarding the forester’s plan to let wild flowers live and not disturb their roots, but on such hikes one of the trophies usually prized to bring back to camp, is a bunch of flowers, that bunch containing the greatest variety receiving a special place of honor on the director’s table.

They were up on Old Man’s Hill when Martha Thomas declared she saw a tramp.

“He has a stick over his shoulder,” she insisted, “and I know he’s a tramp.”

“We’ll turn back,” agreed the leader. “We aren’t far from camp. Besides, the state troopers are always scouring around on that nice little road down there. Their motor-cycles love that road,” she added jocularly. “But really, Martha, I doubt your tramp.”

“Do you? Well, just look for yourself then. There he goes.”

They all looked in the direction Martha pointed and they did see “her tramp”. He seemed an old man, for his head, uncovered, showed white hair, and the stick over his shoulders supported a very suspicious looking bundle. He did look trampish.

“Let’s go home,” suggested Cleo timidly. “I’m tired, anyway.”

“All right,” laughed Anne. “That excuse is good enough. But isn’t that one of our girls?”

“She’s running after the tramp,” declared Martha, “and she has on a uniform!”

The man they were watching was too far away for them to see more than the tall figure and the old bundle over his shoulders, but now the unmistakable white blouse of a Climax girl flashed into the distant picture.

They all stood still and watched. Their position was below a hill so that the strangers above could not have seen them, even had they looked that way.

“It’s Lorna Thornton!” exclaimed Marjorie Trent tragically. “What ever do you make of that?”

“Why, she may be helping a poor man,” Cleo quickly defended. “He looks poor enough and as if he needed help.”

“Queer, for her to be away out here alone, though,” remarked Mary Lohr cautiously. They seemed to understand tacitly that Cleo was Lorna’s friend, and so did not want to say anything against her.

“Well, that’s her red head all right,” declared Martha less carefully and more flippantly. “Funny thing how she gets excused from camp hikes and rambles away out here all alone. I wonder if Miss Horton knows that?”

“Couldn’t Lorna get permission to come out here?”

“Cleo,” warned Anne, fearing evidently that her sister would presently become rude in her defense of Lorna, “you don’t know Lorna any better nor as well as the rest of us do, so why do you become so excited about her?”

“Because I like her,” fired back Cleo so frankly that everyone laughed. Marjorie called her a dear, and wished *she* had her for a friend, if she would fight like that to save a girl trouble.

But on the way back to camp Cleo was painfully silent, and anyone could easily have guessed the reason why.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE CAMP BAKE

“Cleo’s a sly one,” joked Marjorie. They were almost back to that turn in the hillside path. One more turn and they would face Camp Climax.

“Yes, isn’t she?” chimed in Mary. “She brought the bride in out of the rain the other night.”

“And wouldn’t let anyone get a peek at her face,” Marjorie continued to tease in nothing but good-natured raillery. There was no underlying motive in her remarks, and she had no idea they were embarrassing Cleo.

“But we couldn’t miss the red hair. Oh! Cleo darling!” went on Mary, “when you want to give us an honest-to-goodness ghost bride next time, dye her hair!”

“All right,” Cleo replied as lightly as she could. “But I *love* red-haired brides.”

Her manner was strained and uneasy, so much so that Anne, who could not easily be deceived, came promptly to the rescue.

“Oh, Cleo did put it over beautifully, now Marjorie, you can’t deny that,” she protested. “The bride and the bridal party were the best parts of the whole show.”

“Yes, they were. I’ve got to admit that,” agreed Marjorie. “But a *secret* bride— —”

“Say,” Mary Lohr spoke up with sudden earnestness, “what ever do you suppose Lorna Thornton was doing away out by Black Rock?”

“Exercising,” said Anne indifferently. “You know she gets special permission. She is not as strong as we are.”

“To talk to tramps?”

“He doesn’t have to be a tramp just because he has his mountain stick over his shoulder, does he?” Cleo asked, not impertinently, for she was much younger than Mary Lohr, but she did ask the question a little sharply, nevertheless.

“That’s right, Cleo,” put in Margaret Dean, who said so little, a word from her was always significant. “We carry our sticks one way and perhaps he just carries his another way.” She jabbed her own stick down firmly to demonstrate.

“Besides,” persisted Cleo, “he might be a poor old man and Lorna might just be directing him, or something.”

“Well, whatever Lorna does, depend upon Cleo to back her up,” Marjorie concluded. “Cleo is the best little champion in Camp Climax,” and to show she meant it Marjorie swung her arm around Cleo and drew her toward her affectionately.

A crowd of girls greeted the pilgrims with the camp cry as they hove in sight.

“Cly! Cly! Max-a-y-y!”

“All—to-gether—in—a—cherry—pie!”

It was not a very dignified cheer but it always found plenty of supporters. It was called out lustily now and answered by the girls returning from their hike.

“Climax! Climax! Hurray! Hurrah! Harroo!”

The harroo was held on to until it sounded like the hoot of a weird old owl.

“But we’re tired,” protested Marjorie, tossing her mountain stick at Etine—the little girl they all wanted to call plain Tiny.

“Whew!” whistled Mary Lohr, “the stones grow harder every year. My poor footsies!” and she flopped right down on the grass to get her weight off the “footsies.”

“Oh, don’t sit down,” begged one of the girls. “We’re going to have a camp bake supper, and it’s almost time. We’re going over in half an hour and the camp-fires are all ready to light.”

“A camp bake!” came a happy chorus. “Oh, what a treat!” sighed Marjorie.

“Somebody’s birthday?” Anne asked eagerly.

“No, somebody’s conscience,” replied Anette Bradner. “We haven’t had one before this summer.”

Everyone was scurrying and hurrying about, for the prospect of supper in the open, with food cooked over embers or even over hot stones, with the kettles swinging over a more briskly burning fire, no tables, just paper plates and tin cups, this was the best sort of picnic any campers might ask for.

“Look! Just see what a nice little pack-mule I make,” called out Nellie- Ellen. She was carrying a stout little pole across her shoulders, Indian fashion, and on each end of the pole hung a camp kettle, empty.

Cleo was intrusted with a basket of cut bread, all ready to be toasted on the sharp smooth sticks, which she also carried in a neatly tied bunch. Everyone seemed to have something to carry, and when the line of girls began to move over the long hill they looked like a procession of primitives, seeking their caves.

“Hit the trail! Hit the trail!” called out the guards and directors, while Rosalie blew her bugle to “root-out” any stragglers that might have failed to hear the other calls.

It was wonderful! If there are girls who fancy camp life dull and monotonous, they should try to see a camp like Climax, in that sort of action. Even a tumble over the rocks—and there were plenty of rocks and even a few tumbles—served to add to the merriment.

“Oh, isn’t it fine!” Cleo kept exclaiming.

“Thought you didn’t like life in the open?” Anette reminded her.

“I didn’t know whether I liked it or not,” Cleo admitted, “but I do. This is wonderful! I’d like to stay out all night.”

“Maybe they’ll let you. We had our merits decided at a council meeting this afternoon, and if you were found to have been a good little Climaxer they’ll let you sleep in a tent, with the flaps up, for a whole week.”

“But I wasn’t good; I jumped in the lake,” sighed Cleo. She had longed for the privilege of sleeping out of doors in a tent.

“Maybe they’ll forgive you for that,” cheered Anette, “especially if you’ve done something that was particularly good to offset it.”

“I didn’t,” confessed Cleo, hitching up her basket and finding a better spot on her shoulder for the bundle of little poles.

But in spite of the big time that the whole camp was enjoying, Cleo’s vagrant thoughts would go back to the figure of that old man of the

mountains, and the girl, with the unmistakable head of red hair, who was trudging along with him.

Who was he? Why was Lorna with him? The answer to those questions must surely hold the key to the mystery that surrounded Lorna; Cleo was sure of that much. But how could she fathom it? Should she tell Lorna she had seen her and thus give the girl a chance to offer some explanation?

This seemed the most reasonable thing to do, but when would she see Lorna? Of late, their letter box on the old tree, which had been like a plaything at first, had become quite a useful means of holding and sending messages. Lorna declared she was busy most of the time, but that she just loved to read Cleo's letters by camp light.

The replies Cleo received from her were also of an interesting nature—for Lorna was a thinking girl, the kind that writes better than she talks—so that her replies really gave Cleo a real pleasure, besides affording her a secret, and a secret is always dear to the heart of any girl who can boast of a spark of romance in her make-up.

“Hey there! Don't go to sleep!” called out Harriet Paxton. “You've got a good part of the grub for our squad in that basket, Cleo.”

“It'll be there on time,” yelled back Anette, who was Cleo's partner on the march. “But *you* look out for the bacon. Don't spill that.”

“I'm toasting it on the way,” declared Harriet. “It's hot enough. Why doesn't the sun go down?”

“Hasn't had its supper, maybe,” suggested Harriet's partner, Margaret Dean.

“I do hope you get a chance to sleep in the tent, Cleo,” Anette said kindly, when the calls from the front ranks ceased “firing” and allowed those in the rear to hear themselves talk. “You'd love it.”

“I'll earn the chance before summer is over,” Cleo declared bravely. “I suppose all new girls make mistakes.”

“Of course they do. I was homesick when I came up first, and I cried and sniffled and kept the girls awake for three nights. You didn't do anything as silly as that.”

“No,” said Cleo simply. She was thinking how unreal her home life used to be, and how absurd it would have been for her to cry for it. Since Nannie came, however, everything had been different.

In a little valley under Sunset Hill the camp bake was spread. Fires crackled, bacon sizzled, bread toasted—Cleo thought it great fun to “thread” the pieces of bread on the long sticks that were held across the fire by the “andirons.” The andirons were big flat rocks, and the fire bed was beneath these so that the toasters were quite safe above, unless a piece of bread had been cut too thin. In that case the hole would give out and the piece would fall into the embers.

There were three different fires. One was for the camp kettle and that was allowed to blaze. The kettle was set on the short end of a long green pole. This was held upright by another pole Y shaped, like those of the old fashioned wells. The wood being green, kept it from crackling over the flames, and as all this was in place when the campers reached the valley, it didn’t take long to get the meal started.

The toasting fire did not blaze but was set in a stone oven and just smouldered. There were two of these, one for the bacon and one for the bread, and the girls stationed at them seemed to think cooking one of the fine and funny arts.

Besides these supplies, the girls had carried a basket of lettuce sandwiches, another of peanut butter sandwiches, and a third of nice fresh cookies that had been baked that very morning in the camp kitchen.

And when all was ready the girls squatted on the grass like gypsies, holding up tin cup or paper plate for welcome waiters to fill. Sunset was looking on, and it was to be hoped that old Sol would go to bed happy now, having had his supper wherever Suns eat, and at least having been able to drink deeply from such supplies as little Apron Lake, to say nothing of the great Hudson River that flowed on majestically not many miles away.

“I never could have believed a camp bake would taste like this.”

“Isn’t burnt bacon de-lic-ious!”

“And don’t you just love perforated toast? Cleo’s stick can certainly make pretty holes.”

“If I should fall in this tin cup please throw me a life preserver.”

So the girls prattled, ate and drank until the bugle call—not now blown by Rosalie for even buglers must eat, but by Marie Marlow—announced the time to pick up and get up and be on their way.

Again there was the happy tumult, gathering things up can be just as much fun as distributing them, but putting the fires out is even a more

exacting task than building them.

Every girl camper worthy of the name knows the danger of forest fires, it is one of the first principles to be learned about camping, and must always be thoroughly understood. Not a spark of fire can be left in the trail of a picnic or of any other woods' occasion, and now the Climax girls were quite sure their fires were absolutely out and that no mischievous breeze could again kindle them.

“All aboard!” came the warning from a leader. “Got to get home in time for a few bed-time stories.”

“Got to get home! Got to get home! Got to get home tonight!” yelled a lusty chorus. Again the campers were “loaded up” with all the baskets and equipment they had carried out. But empty baskets are easier to carry than those that are filled, and it was fun to tramp over the hills again, weary but happy, with a prospect, for the lucky girls at least, of sleeping under the stars.

## CHAPTER XVI

### WHILE FIRES BLAZED

It was dark, but the camp fire lighted up the woodlands. Set in a stone furnace the fire safely glowed, while all around it were the girls assembled, waiting eagerly to hear the first month's report, to be given by Miss Horton.

Each day of the entire month had passed as a single day will, seemingly insignificant and trivial in the scheme of time, but now those little days had totaled up to a big month, and its report, accusing or gratifying, was to be given.

Every girl hoped her name would be called among those honored, especially were the rookies anxious, because they were sleeping in barracks and they longed to get into the tents.

Miss Horton was a slow spoken, deliberate woman, rather severe in appearance, except for her eyes; they twinkled. But the camp fire's glow was not strong enough to make that twinkle show just now, so the girls had to depend upon her voice for their information.

Anne was on the grass beside Cleo, Nellie-Ellen, as the girls had begun calling Nellie, was as ever with Jane Pennington and Laura Bird, who had become her daily, if not hourly, companions.

Many of the girls' names were favorably mentioned by the director as she pointed out what the Camp was trying to do—to develop health, character and ability among its members.

“You are free, as you know,” she said, “to do very much as you please, except, of course, in matters of real importance. And it is only in freedom that we look for genuine character, only in character that we hope for true girlhood, and in girlhood we have unbounded faith.”

As they listened the occasion became more and more serious. It was almost like school. And everytime anyone's name was called for tent nights, as they called the privilege of sleeping in tents, there would be given a hearty cheer.

“We have one girl among us,” said Miss Horton, “who has done more to help another girl than she herself knows, I imagine, and certainly more than

I can publish in this way. She's a little girl who is rather hard to understand," suggested the director. Then she paused.

"Cleo!" sang out a voice, easily recognized as belonging to Nellie-Ellen. It was so unexpected that the girls tittered, some of them actually laughing outright.

"Oh hush, Nellie-Ellen," warned Jane. "You shouldn't speak out that way."

"The director is never interrupted," quickly added Laura.

Nellie hid deeper in the shadows, trying to get back of Jane and Laura, thus to hide her embarrassment. She had not intended to shout out that way and was almost as surprised as were the others, when she heard herself call Cleo's name. Cleo was so provoked she felt she should enjoy shaking Nellie. Why had she done a thing like that?

But Miss Horton, apparently, paid no attention to the outburst. Presently she went right on talking.

"It is often easier to do a really brave thing," she said, "a thing that our companions cannot help noticing, than to perform some simple act of kindness. Yet the simple act may be far more important. I may be able to tell you all a very interesting little story before camp is broken up. But just now I must announce that among the first year girls, who have passed favorably through the first summer month, is Cleo Kimball, who is entitled to promotion."

"Three cheers for Cleo!" cried out a voice over near the fire. It was Marjorie's and to add to its startling effect, Eleanor Morgan, who was tending fire, piled on a great bunch of faggots, and the blaze that shot up, red, yellow and flame color, was like an explosion of real fire works!

There was so much noise after that, for Miss Horton had finished, that no one could tell or perhaps no one cared to tell, just who was saying anything, so long as it was all said.

"You don't move tonight, kitten," Helen Downs managed to tell Cleo, "you stay where you are tonight. But tomorrow night you get that nice tent on the West side where all the breezes blow. Better hold on to your cot—you may blow away and get stolen by the old man of the mountains."

"The old man of the mountain!" Cleo murmured, so that only Anne could hear.

“She means the queer figure that’s outlined in the rocks on the hills. It’s called that, you know,” Anne quickly explained, and somehow Cleo was glad they had not referred to the poor old man they had seen speaking to Lorna.

Cleo was happy. She had been rewarded for what she hardly knew. Of course, it must have been for inducing Lorna to take part in the play, but, surely, that wasn’t much to do. However, she was going to sleep in the open tomorrow night, and that would be something of an adventure.

So it did not take the girls long to get ready for bed this night, for even camp joys may bring on healthy fatigue, and to Cleo and some of the others there had been the hike of the afternoon, as well as the camp bake and the camp fire talk, which had so lately ended.

“I could sleep standing up,” Rose Gaston declared. “And if I don’t wake when the bugle calls—let me sleep!”

Quiet came at last. Lights were out and it was very evident there were plenty of girls who could sleep lying down, if not standing up. Cleo was thinking of her mother. Where might she be now? Had Zita received her letter yet? Would she write again before buying their presents?

Queer, that Nellie so seldom spoke of her mother. Perhaps her mother didn’t write often. But then, Nellie was shy in spite of her pretense at complete self-confidence; no one knew that better than Cleo.

Sleep was coming now, sleep in the barracks for this last night! Cleo turned over and smoothed her blanket. The barracks were all right, perhaps in storms the tents would not be nearly so comfortable. Suppose a tent should blow away? The girls told stories about one summer storm being so heavy that even those girls in the barracks had to take refuge in the big house on the hill. Well, what of it? Wasn’t every adventure worth the experience?

Cleo must have fallen asleep finally, for she felt herself jump when some sound suddenly awakened her.

“What’s that?”

She asked it aloud, but not loud enough to awake anyone else. She listened. There it was again, that same tap, tap, tap, she had heard the very first night she came to camp.

It was fascinating, so regular, so clear and so mysterious. But what was it?

“It’s directly under this cot,” Cleo told herself, “and there’s a big knot hole in the floor. I’m going to look.”

Her little flash light in hand, she turned out of her cot very quietly. On the floor she stopped again to listen to that tap. It was still tapping!

The knot hole was a black spot on the bare boards which still were newly white, and the hole was right under the head of the bed. Cleo crept under, flashing the light before her.

“There! There it is!” she was breathing. “It’s an animal!”

The long haired fur of the “animal” could be plainly seen through the big hole and Cleo knew instinctively it belonged to a dog. A tiny tip of his tail just once shot through the hole.

“Yes! There’s his eye!” she said, just as Norma, in the next cot, woke up and wanted to know what was the matter.

“He’s been tapping and tapping — —”

“For cat’s sake don’t get him howling,” warned Norma, who was too sleepy to be polite.

A friendly little whine from beneath the knothole greeted their voices.

“He’s a lovely big dog — —”

“You can have him. Take him up to the tent with you tomorrow night,” mumbled Norma, who had turned out to be a more pleasant girl than her whispered conversation which Cleo had overheard that night a month ago, had indicated she might become.

“I hope he doesn’t start to bark,” Cleo worried. “I would hate to have some one chase him away.”

“Smells your candy, I guess. Better drop him a few pieces and, land-sakes alive! Go to sleep. I’ve got to do kitchen work in the morning, even if you did get promoted to the officer’s tent.”

Then Cleo subsided. That is, she got back into bed and put her flash light away. But the dog’s tail still flapped against her floor, and she had begun to love him already. He was chummy, comforting and a big dog.

“I hope I’ll see him tomorrow,” she sighed. “I’d love a big dog. Wouldn’t it be wonderful to have him follow me around?”

Cleo remembered the time she had wanted a lamb to follow her around, one with a blue ribbon around its neck. Wasn’t that silly? Of course, she

didn't get it, but she had actually longed for it. It was that spring when Zita had taken her to the country where a few lambs could be found. The small daughter of a farmer petted one little white woolly lamb, used to scrub its tangles, and it followed *her* around. But a lamb was not a practical companion, it seemed.

A dog was different; a dog might be useful. And the one under the floor was certainly friendly.

He was still tapping lightly when she fell asleep. And somehow she felt she had found a friend, a protector.

But the morning came with that rush of day peculiar to the woods. Birds, bugs and butterflies! Everything sang, hummed and swarmed around camp. Every girl on waking seemed to be "too hungry to wait for breakfast" and altogether the new day, brought as usual, its own particular joyous prospects.

Moving day! Cleo was not to take her things up to the hillside tent, these were more safely kept in the long, narrow closet, built from one end of the barracks to the other, each girl having a tiny locked place in it all to herself.

"Just blankets," Norma told her crisply, "and your nightie. And if the blankets are too hot you can bask in the star-light. Hope your friend dog doesn't find a knothole under *my* bed."

"I hope he finds out where my tent is," Cleo replied. "I like him and I'm going to scour the woods for him today. He must live somewhere around here."

"Well, you can have him," agreed Norma. "Dogs are all right in the day time but I don't like them sniffing up knotholes after dark."

Which was merely the way Norma talked of a thing when she didn't care what she said.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE DISAPPEARANCE

Each tent accommodated four girls, and the three who were to share Cleo's tent were Anette Bradner, Margaret Dean and the Big Sister, Eleanor Morgan.

"If you could see how much trouble it was for us to move from our city apartment before we all went away this summer," Cleo told Anette, "you would appreciate this. After all, I guess the early settlers didn't have all the trouble."

"Indeed they didn't," sighed Anette, hitching up her rolled blanket that she was carrying under her arm. "See my own blanket? I could toss it up in the air and catch it without hurting it a bit. But when we were packing our blankets at home, and those lovely light down comfortables that the moths love to eat, it took the whole family and three maids to tie up the bundles."

Both girls laughed at this comparison, but seeing Nellie-Ellen hurrying along another path they stopped to wait for her.

"Oh," she panted. "Oh, my! Have you heard about Lorna Thornton?"

"No, what?" gasped Cleo, fear choking the words as she uttered them.

"They can't find her!"

"Is she lost?" demanded Anette.

"I don't know, I suppose she's lost or drowned or something—"

"Nellie, don't talk so silly," ordered Cleo anxiously. "What have you heard about her?"

"I heard they couldn't find her."

"But why are they looking for her?" Cleo persisted.

"Why? Why not?"

"But she's often been away from camp."

"Not without Miss Horton knowing where she was."

“I suppose not,” said Cleo slowly. She was just beginning to realize that she herself knew very little about Lorna’s habits, for Lorna would appear one day and probably not be seen the next.

“Well, let’s put our blankets in the tent and go see what’s what,” suggested Anette sensibly. “We may have to form a searching party.”

“A searching party?” Cleo repeated, questioningly.

“Yes. It’s a dreadful thing to be lost in the mountains,” Nellie put in.

“But how could she be actually lost?” Cleo kept arguing.

“Why not?” Anette in turn asked. “The paths here all begin but they don’t all end in paths, they end in wild woods. Haven’t you often read about folks being lost in the mountains?”

Racing back to the big house, around the porch of which the campers had assembled, they were in time to hear Miss Horton explaining that Lorna had not reported back to camp, after having had permission to visit a friend the afternoon before.

“Of course,” the director was saying, “we have inquired first about her going there. It seems she did not. She may be well and safe—she is acquainted with quite a few people who summer here, but I have called you together to see if any of you know anything more about her absence.”

No one seemed to know anything. Some girls had seen her hurry away after the noon-day meal, one or two had met her following the oak-ridge trail, and they said she carried a lot of things in her arms. The packages, Dorothy Blake explained, were tied up in newspapers and were quite bulky. “Like eatables,” Dorothy explained.

“Cleo,” said the director, evidently just noticing that Cleo had joined the listening group, “do you happen to know anything that might help us?”

“No, Miss Horton,” Cleo answered, rather breathlessly. “I haven’t seen Lorna in several days.”

“But you told me— —” Miss Horton paused. Whatever she was about to say she had changed her mind concerning it. “Well,” she went on presently, “we must not get excited—that’s our first rule. But it is best that you all should know that Lorna is absent from camp and that we cannot at the time locate her. You may go now, and if we need you further we shall call you. We all know how loyal you are, and how much you would do to help a fellow camper who might need your prompt assistance.”

“Indeed we would, Miss Horton,” spoke up Marjorie Treat, acting as spokeswoman for the others. “If you want us to do anything we’ll be ready, day and night.”

“Thank you. Cleo, I think there is a message for you in the office,” the director said, turning to Cleo, as the girls were dispersing. “You had better come in and get it.”

“A message?”

“Yes, dear. Miss Marlow took it over the phone, I believe.”

A little anxiously Cleo heard the director say this. From whom should she receive a telephone message? But when Miss Marlow explained it had been from a boy who called himself Shammy and whose last name she couldn’t possibly catch, Cleo understood.

“Oh, that’s from Shammy Malanaphy,” Cleo smiled as she explained. “He’s a boy who used to work at our school and— —” she felt constrained to add in loyalty to Shammy—“he’s a great friend of mine.”

“He seemed to be, for he insisted he was coming to see you,” said Marie Marlow.

“Coming away up here?”

“He’s at a boys’ camp over on Mount Hillary, he explained, and he said it wasn’t far from here,” Miss Marlow told Cleo.

“Oh, I’d love to see him!” Cleo exclaimed sincerely. She hadn’t known how much it would mean to see this little boy from New York until the prospect loomed up.

“Well, he’ll be around,” Marie assured her laughingly. “He seemed most anxious to come. I judge he’s quite a business like boy, isn’t he?”

“Oh, yes,” declared Cleo. “He and I used to sell flowers— —” she stopped suddenly, greatly embarrassed. However could she explain that the flowers “they sold” had been those showered upon herself by a foolish and indulgent aunt, and that Shammy had sold them “second-hand” to the woman who kept a fruit stand at the corner?

But there was no need to attempt explanations, for everyone was too busy to bother about personal affairs just then, and when Cleo was ready to leave the general office Miss Horton called her to come into hers.

“Cleo, come here a moment,” she called, and again Cleo shook a little as she knew or guessed the question coming was sure to concern Lorna.

“Yes, Miss Horton,” she answered, stepping into the little room that had once been a reception room in this fine old homestead, but now was the camp director’s office.

“I didn’t want to ask you before the girls, if you had received a message from Lorna yesterday?”

“I didn’t, Miss Horton; I haven’t had a letter from her in days.” Cleo answered very seriously.

“You have a little letter box on the tree by Apron Lake?”

“Yes, Miss Horton.”

“And you would leave your letters there and in turn receive a reply from Lorna?”

Again she replied that that was their custom.

“Have you kept any of the letters?”

“Yes, some of them. Lorna writes pretty letters, Miss Horton.”

“Then perhaps if you bring them to me I might be able to discover some clue. You see, Lorna has had a lot of trouble. Besides that, she is not strong. We have tried to give her all possible freedom, as it was considered the best way to keep her interested here.”

“She told me she was here under doctor’s orders,” Cleo felt bound to say then.

“Yes. And she has improved greatly. But she is inclined to be secretive, and now we don’t know to whom we should go to trace her—absence.”

Cleo noticed that the director did not say her disappearance, and “her absence” sounded less serious.

“She was always friendly with me, Miss Horton,” Cleo said frankly, “because, you see, I made friends with her when we came up on the train.”

“Yes. We noticed she made something of a companion of you, Cleo,” said the director, her voice in itself paying Cleo a compliment, for it was soft and affectionate. “And you saved her from doing a very foolish thing the night of the play.”

“Did I?” Cleo wondered.

“Yes; she came to me the next day and told me all about it. We had agreed when she made a mistake of that kind once before that she should come to me at once if she ever found herself in a similar difficulty, and she

did. But she admitted, frankly, that she was all ready to go away when you induced her to stay.”

“I’m glad,” was all Cleo could say. She felt queer, as if she were going to cry or something.

“If Lorna had gone then she could never have come back to camp again, for, obviously, we can only be responsible for dependable girls.” Miss Horton’s fine face, as she said this, had the expression of a general’s.

“Do you think, Miss Horton,” Cleo found courage to begin, “that there may be some good reason—I mean excusable reason—for all Lorna’s—mistakes?”

“There might be,” admitted the director. Cleo was sitting on one of the chairs near her desk and she watched her tap the desk with her pencil as if meditating on that possibility. “Lorna has some very strong points in her character,” the director added finally.

“Oh, she’s fine! I know it!” Cleo hurried to defend the missing girl. “She’s done lots of generous little things no one has ever known anything about. And I’m sure, Miss Horton, when we find her she will be able to explain everything.”

“But you see, my dear,” said the director unsmilingly, “we simply must find her. Something serious may have happened to her.”

“How shall we begin? Are we going to—form a searching party?” The very idea seemed tragic to Cleo.

“We shall start out this afternoon, unless some word comes from her, and tramp in parties over the various trails, any of which she may have taken. You see, we cannot let night come on and not know something, if it is possible to learn anything.” Miss Horton was standing up, so, of course, Cleo also stood and prepared to leave.

She was downcast, naturally. It was almost as if someone had died. And she had cared most about Lorna. She hoped she had not run away, or done anything that would cause her final dismissal from camp. But, as Miss Horton had said, it was perfectly reasonable for the managers to refuse to care for girls who would not obey orders.

How suddenly everything had changed! Even the message from Shammy, which was welcome indeed, seemed now obscured by this new anxiety. And sleeping in the tent on the west hill would not be a matter to rejoice over, if Lorna was not found.

What could have happened to her? Did Miss Horton know about the old man? Had any of the girls told her?

Rosalie was waiting for Cleo as she left the porch and came slowly down the path, her face a frank index to her thoughts.

“Don’t worry,” Rosalie tried to cheer her. “Lorna has been away before.”

“But this will mean positive dismissal, if it’s her fault, of course.” Cleo didn’t want that to happen.

“Yes, I’m afraid it will.” Rosalie agreed. “Well, there’s no reason why *you* should feel so badly. She’s no relation to you.”

“No, but she’s my friend,” said Cleo, loyally, gulping down something that felt like the beginning of a crying spell.

“But we’ll find her,” Rosalie again tried to cheer, “she may be visiting someone. She knows summer folks here, the girls say.”

“I guess she knows some folks, whether they’re summer or not,” Cleo replied vaguely, and Rosalie wondered what she meant by that.

She went with Cleo to get the little packet of letters for Miss Horton. They were tied separately, Cleo always keeping her mother’s and Zita’s letters by themselves, and were in the plain white envelopes that had never been postmarked except by the imprint of the little cigar-box on the old tree, that in case of rain would stain the white paper slightly.

“I must bring these to Miss Horton,” Cleo said simply. And Rosalie discreetly asked no questions.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE SEARCHING PARTY

Solemnly, if not altogether quietly, the girls took their orders from the guides and prepared to search for the missing Lorna. How different from that other tramp over those same hills when they had made camp in the Valley and had their supper there?

Cleo could hardly keep from crying. She feared Lorna was dead, or that some dreadful thing had happened to her. She had faith in Lorna, and never for an instant believed that this absence without leave or excuse had been of the girl's own doing.

No one laughed now, no one joked, no one ran stumbling over the rough stones as they had always done on other occasions. The very order of their starting off sent chills through Cleo. Anne caught up with her and even the irresponsible Nellie-Ellen managed to get in line with the disheartened Cleo.

"Don't worry, Sis," Anne said in her kind, quiet way. "We'll have her back to supper with us."

"It's too bad she's lost," Nellie ventured, "but just see how much everyone thinks of her. That's something."

Queer how they all consoled Cleo. As if she were the one most to be pitied.

"I know she hasn't done it of her own free will," Cleo felt obliged to defend her absent friend. "I mean, she wouldn't have stayed away without a very good reason."

"I don't believe she would either," Anne agreed. "But the trouble is, we can't take any chance on leaving her out in the mountains at night. There are too many dangers."

"Mountain lions?" suggested the sensational Nellie.

"Oh, I don't suppose there are lions — —"

"We must divide our groups now, girls," Marie Marlow interrupted. "Every four girls will have a leader, and when the leader whistles we shall try to report, if we are not too far apart. We must keep to the paths but look

as deeply into the woodlands as we can. She may have fallen ill on account of her weak heart.”

Then they travelled and travelled, thrashing the brush with their mountain sticks, calling and hoping. Sometimes a girl from another group would answer and for the moment all would think poor Lorna’s plight had been discovered, but they were ever doomed to disappointment.

Marjorie Treat was with Anne and Cleo. She explained that Miss Horton had gone on ahead by auto to a little summer encampment, in hopes someone there would have seen or heard of Lorna.

“The trouble is,” Marjorie explained, “we have to do so many things at once. We can’t let night come on without making every possible effort to locate her.”

“And she may have taken a wrong path and got into the deep woodlands,” suggested Arline, miserably.

“She had a habit of taking lonely walks,” Marjorie continued, “but she knew the woods pretty well and never before went out of calling distance.”

But the ten different groups, each of which had followed a different path up to the big dark mountain, finally reached the end of their trails, and were, therefore, obliged to reverse their routes and journey down again, through the thick, green forest, that was getting blacker with the approach of sundown and nightfall.

“What can have happened to her?” sighed Cleo, now disheartened indeed. “Somehow I feel she is— —”

“You must not be so imaginative, Cleo,” Anne warned her. “First thing you know you’ll be sick.”

No one said anything to that. They were tramping back to camp sadly enough, for girls are ever affectionate and loyal when a companion is in distress, and the Climax girls may not all have agreed with Lorna Thornton’s peculiarities, but they all agreed now that she was one of them, and entitled to their earnest solicitude and unfailing assistance. The hills had been searched but the scouts were still eager to continue.

If only they could find her? To help her in any way or do anything for her. It is easy to understand that some of the girls felt guilty enough for having criticized her at times, perhaps they even felt they had driven her away or slighted her beyond forgiveness. The most careless among them

was as depressed now as the most sensitive, and approaching camp only added to their discouragement.

There was no news, no word, no clue. That word came from the office all too soon upon their arrival from the search. It was supper time and past supper time but eating must only be a duty tonight, not a pleasure.

Miss Horton, Miss Marlow and Miss Dexter tried to cheer the forlorn family, even telling stories while the food went around. But supper was finally over and an accusing sunset spread its search light over the hills.

“And this is my first night in a tent,” deplored Cleo. “How I wish I knew something, anything about poor Lorna.”

She was unwilling to admit her fears even to herself, but what could any one imagine about a girl lost in the mountains?

“Come over to our barracks with me,” asked Rosalie. “I forgot my wash bag.”

The two girls strolled back to number three, arm in arm. Rosalie talked but Cleo merely answered questions. The shacks were quite deserted, and inside the barracks Rosalie looked for her bag as Cleo dropped wearily upon the cot she was to give up that night.

As she did so her attention was suddenly arrested. Then she heard a tap, *the* tap!

Tap! Tap! Tap! The dog was again under the floor. She wouldn't bother with the knothole now, but calling to Rosalie she quickly hurried to the side of the building where it was raised from the ground on the firm little posts.

“Hurry Rosalie!” she called as she went. “I must see this dog.”

Down on her knees she peered under the long narrow building.

“Yes, there he is!” she cried, glad to see that friend in need. Then she whistled for the dog to come out to her.

And surprisingly he came; crawled out wagging that plummy tail and licking Cleo's hand quickly as he reached her.

“Rosalie!” Cleo almost shrieked. “Come here, quick! The dog has something around his neck!” She was patting his head and staring at that something.

Rosalie was beside her almost instantly.

“It’s a tie, a Camp Climax—Oh, Cleo!” yelled the excited Rosalie, “It’s Lorna’s. Here are her letters—on the end!”

“Lorna’s tie!”

“Yes, she must have sent it to you as a clue. Oh, hurry! Let’s get Miss Horton!”

It was Rosalie talking, but Cleo was patting the dog, talking to him, asking him questions that his big soft brown eyes looked so anxious to answer.

“Where is she, boy?” coaxed Cleo. “Where’s Lorna?”

He whined aloud and put out his big pink tongue. Strange how he seemed to know Cleo, but hadn’t he slept under her bed for a number of nights? And dogs have a scent sense said to be more exacting than human sight. Yes, he certainly knew Cleo. Oh, if he would only bring them to Lorna!

Rosalie had rushed on toward the office. The girls were not around, most of them again taking a walk out through the grounds, hopeful, perhaps, of stumbling over some clue. Cleo and the dog were soon following Rosalie who had taken the tie with her. She knew it meant something important and that there would probably be another searching party quickly organized to follow wherever the dog might lead them.

Nor were the directors themselves less excited, when they saw Lorna’s tie and the big dog that walked so docilely along with Cleo.

“He’ll take us to her!” Cleo insisted, “but don’t get him excited. He just must lead us quietly. If we frighten him he may run off.”

“Yes,” Miss Horton quickly agreed, “you are right, Cleo. He might run off and leave us if we frighten him. You just walk along naturally with him and see where he leads. We’ll follow, quietly.”

A clue! Happy! Oh, how good it was to feel some touch with Lorna, if it were only her blue silk tie with the tiny letters on the corner, and this big faithful dog!

But once out on the path and he wanted to run. He barked and acted so excited himself, that for a time Cleo feared he would run away and leave her, as Miss Horton had feared he might.

Such barking! He was calling! Calling them to hurry! To run! To race as he raced! But when Cleo failed to keep up with him he would come back for

her and put his big head against her skirt, assuring her he would wait if she could not run as he did.

By now the news had spread among the other girls.

“A dog! He brought Lorna’s tie! He’s taking them to her. We can go if we follow quietly!”

They followed—everyone within sight or hearing, until soon the long trail was a line of girls following Cleo and the big brown and white collie.

“They’re going over by Apron Lake!” Nellie-Ellen told Emily excitedly. “Oh, maybe she’s drowned!”

“Don’t be silly!” snapped Emily, for it was silly of Nellie to always think of the most sensational things. “Maybe she is taking—a swim!”

Which was equally silly, but then, all the girls were excited and just what anyone said didn’t really matter.

It seemed to Cleo she would just have to tumble down the rocky hill, if she were going to keep the dog in sight. Now that he had gone up one hill, and was racing down another, all his dog energy seemed to be centered in getting to the point of his quest.

“Wait for me,” Cleo begged him, understanding that dogs know the meaning of a tone of voice, although they may not know exactly what words mean.

The shaggy creature stopped when she called him, looked up at her questioningly, his plummy tail waving madly, gave a series of little yelps that were a mixture of barks and yowls, then raced on.

Not even venturing to call Lorna’s name lest any false move might scare the dog away, the girls and their leaders followed.

“Where are you going, Old Fellow?” again Cleo coaxed. But he didn’t even howl in reply. He scratched the rocky path nervously, bounded over bushes and then was lost to view.

“He’s stopped,” breathed Cleo. Then she turned to tell those following her.

“She must be here,” she said breathlessly to Miss Horton. “He has stopped and is waiting for us.”

“You lead us; we shall follow,” said the director, breathing a sigh of relief that might have been guessed at, but was certainly not overheard by

her young adherents.

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE RESCUE

Down a steep ravine, that led to an unfrequented spot in the bank around Apron Lake, they anxiously followed the faithful animal. But when he stopped and crouched down near a great, heavy thicket, he did not bark joyously. Neither did any word from Lorna greet him, if she were there. The silence in that gully was terrifying to the searchers.

Was Lorna there? Why did she not call out to them?

Cleo was the first to actually reach the spot and give answer to that question.

“Oh!” she cried, her voice quaking. “Here she is, but— —”

Miss Horton and the other leaders were there before Cleo could give words to what her eyes were staring at.

There was Lorna, lying across a broken tree limb! She moved slightly as they touched her but she did not speak.

“Thank goodness, she’s alive!” exclaimed the anxious director.

Then Lorna managed to speak. “I couldn’t call—I felt so weak—I was afraid my heart—would fail if I made—any exertion.”

“Lorna, Lorna darling!” breathed Cleo. “You’re safe! Oh, we’re so glad!”

“Wait, dear,” cautioned Miss Horton. “We don’t want to hurry you away, but you see, we must help her at once. She’s in pain and— —”

“Yes, Miss Horton, I know that!” Cleo quickly interrupted. “But I just had to speak to her, a minute. I was so glad to find her.”

Instantly the line of girls were again in action. Those who could not actually assist went directly back to the top of the hill, thus leaving the uncertain path clear for those who would carry Lorna up. The stronger and older girls were chosen for this task, and when Cleo, clinging to Rosalie and Nellie-Ellen, stood under the shaking aspen trees, as that queer procession passed along, with the big dog leading the way, Lorna managed a little hand wave of greeting to her.

“How dreadful she looks,” whispered Rosalie. “She must have had an awful experience.”

“I could see where she had fallen from,” Cleo slowly told her companions. “The bushes were broken in a line above where we found her, all dragged and crushed where she had fallen through them.”

“Do you mean to say she fell from the cliff?” Nellie-Ellen asked, excitedly.

“She must have,” sighed Cleo. “But wasn’t it wonderful that the big dog led us to her?”

“Wasn’t it wonderful that *you* knew where to find the big dog?” Rosalie in turn asked Cleo. “Whoever would think of spying him through a knothole in the floor?”

“And under a cot, too,” Nellie-Ellen put in. “But Cleo always was a wiz at finding things out.”

All of which did not in any way serve to distract Cleo’s attention from the girls who were carrying Lorna, chair fashion, and the dog marching majestically alongside, much like some scene from a foreign country where carrying is the chief mode of conveyance.

That afternoon the late sunset seemed to sympathize with all that was going on at Camp Climax, for it didn’t go down until it couldn’t possibly help itself, and by that time, Lorna Thornton had been comfortably put to bed in the infirmary, where the sun’s last rays lighted up the room, throwing little slashes and sashes of yellows and pink across the unpainted new boards on the low ceiling.

Bit by bit her story was unfolded. Lest it would tax her strength to give all the details at once, Miss Horton had questioned her slowly and cautiously.

“I was carrying some things to a sick friend,” Lorna had told her, “when my dog left the path and started a wild howling in the bushes. I stepped off the path into the bushes to see what was the matter and then — —”

“You were on the edge of the cliff and didn’t know it?” Miss Horton had suggested.

“Yes. No sooner had I stooped over to see what Lance was rooting out of the brush, than I felt the earth give way — —”

“I know, dear. Don’t talk any more about it. You were wise not to try to keep up calling us. That would certainly have exhausted you.”

“Yes, I knew that,” sighed Lorna. “Besides, I had the things to eat. But oh! I was lonely out there all night!” She sighed wearily, as if the thought were still terrifying.

“You poor child!” Miss Horton was acting as nurse and general supervisor, for the real responsibility for the girls rested with her, and Lorna’s condition was not as satisfactory as it might have been. Her weak heart had still to be humored and reckoned with.

“I think I should have been frightened to death if it hadn’t been for Lance,” Lorna said at another time. “I just rested beside him while he did everything but talk to me. Do you think my ankle is much hurt?”

“No, dear, but a strain is very painful and often takes considerable time to heal,” Miss Horton then told her. “Try to sleep. You need complete rest. Have you finished your milk?”

“Yes, Miss Horton.” This was a new and docile Lorna. How grateful she was now to be back in the same camp she had so utterly despised when trifles had upset her?

“I wonder if I could speak to Cleo?” she asked gently.

“I would rather you waited until tomorrow,” Miss Horton replied to that. “Cleo is taking care of your dog. She and he appear to be fast friends,” smiled the director, who was just taking from Lorna’s unsteady hand the emptied glass.

“He knows,” Lorna insisted. “I sent my tie around his neck and Cleo knew, too.”

“Yes,” agreed Miss Horton, and the simple word carried a weight of meaning. She must have been thinking of the way Cleo had led them along after Lance.

Meanwhile Cleo was indeed taking care of Lorna’s dog, and a crowd of the girls were helping her joyously. If ever a dog received generous and affectionate attention it was Lance. Nellie-Ellen was urging upon him a big soup bone, declaring it was lots better than Anne’s mixture that looked like hash and smelled like mush. Rosalie thought he ought to like candy, and every chance she got she would jab a nice fat chocolate in his jaw, while Anette insisted she knew the dog; she had known him when Cleo discovered him under the bed behind the knothole. What he liked better than anything

else, declared Anette, was cracker crumbs. So she ground up crackers between both her hands and tried to get them—or some of them for they spilled horribly—into the dog’s overtaxed mouth.

“But, say girls,” spoke up Margaret Dean, “it’s time to be thinking of bed. Who goes to the tents on the hill?”

Reluctantly they relinquished their task. Lance was a lovely dog, and he had saved Lorna. How different everything seemed now! The relief showed more clearly than could have anything else, how oppressive their anxiety had been.

“Lance can sleep up by our tent,” said Cleo importantly. “He’s used to me and he won’t make a bit of noise.”

“We wouldn’t care if he did make noise,” Anette spoke up for Lance. “A dog that did what he did today ought to have some privileges.”

But girls will be girls, and when they were finally established in their tent on the west side hill, Cleo and her companions wanted Lance to sleep on their door step.

“Just like a real hut in the woods,” suggested Rosalie. “With a big dog to keep the wolves away.”

“Could a dog keep wolves away?”

“Now don’t start anything deep,” begged Jane Pennington. “One thing I’m sure of is that I’m dog tired. And this day, exciting as it has been should end right here. You may allow Sir Lance to sprawl on the door step, but don’t let him in. I hate dogs to lick my face when I’m asleep.”

“So do I,” agreed Anette. “Cleo, do you think your friend is a face-licking dog?”

“Oh, don’t worry,” drawled Cleo, who was tired enough herself. “He doesn’t care a snap about your old faces, nor about this tent either. He’d rather sleep under the barracks and keep his eye on a knothole, wouldn’t you, Lance?”

Lance yawned and curled around again, but it was quite dark in the tent now so the girls merely heard him; they couldn’t see him. Once or twice Cleo sat up to peer out into the darkness, even venturing a muffled call. She had no fear that Lance would wander off and lose himself, but she just liked to know he was there.

But when sleep came even the big dog didn't count. Cleo was out under the stars, the tent flaps up and only the drop mosquito netting making any pretense of screening out the lovely night. A fragrance peculiar to dewy woodlands filtered in and caressed the sleeping girls, who were happy now in their promotion to these new quarters and in the rescue of their companion.

It was probably her last conscious thought that brought Cleo back to wondering about Lorna's mystery. This had, by no means, been solved. For unless Lorna had told Miss Horton privately what it was that had brought her over the mountains that afternoon, and to whom she was fetching that food, then the matter of her accident and rescue, important as it all was in having saved her life, was only an accident after all.

"Why is she so different from the other girls?" Cleo kept asking herself. "And why did she carry food away from camp? It couldn't be for her dog—no, she wouldn't need bread and cereals for him, and she had told Miss Horton about having bread and cereals. Girls who carried her to the infirmary had heard her tell about eating bread and cereals during her long imprisonment in the bushes."

Half awake again Cleo felt that something wet was touching her face. Something warm and wet and alive, like a big slimy bug!

"Oh!" she screamed, jumping up and rubbing her hand across the wet track left on her cheek! "Oh! what was that?"

"Your kissing dog," replied Anette sleepily. "He's over here now. Go away, Lance. I don't like you, go kiss Cleo, she *loves* dogs," and Anette pulled the blanket over her face although the night was too warm for blankets even over one's feet.

But Lance was merely trying to tell them that he was going, so they didn't need to make such a fuss about his gentle tongue touch. He knew that Lorna was some place else near by, also he knew about that nice quiet place under the barracks where a spot of light stole down through a small hole—when there was any light to steal down. So with due regard for the kind hospitality bestowed upon him, the big shaggy dog took himself off.

And if there were any wolves around the tent on the west side hill, they might prowl for all of him. Of course, there were none so they couldn't do anything, but the girls slept on peacefully, like primitives in a hut, according to Rosalie, who was not to be bugler in the morning, as that duty had been turned over to Nellie-Ellen. So Rosalie could sleep until someone called her

— which was another pleasant change for one of the girls who had just been favored with a camp promotion.

## CHAPTER XX

### BEYOND REPAIR

It was two weeks later that something happened so unusual, that it again threw the Camp Climax girls into a state of feverish excitement.

As in most camps, the arts and crafts were being seriously taught and carefully studied. Any girl who could paint even a little had a chance to paint that much and learn that much more; a girl who could model in clay made her jugs and her bookends, and however crude, they were praised and the sculptor encouraged to try her hands at something more difficult. And now that only a few weeks more remained, the arts and crafts classes were painting, modelling, weaving baskets, stringing beads, and one girl had decorated a wooden bowl, begged from the camp kitchen, into a really good looking Indian drum.

But the pride of the rookies was a huge earthen urn, moulded by many hands and to be decorated by as many more. It had been baked first in the kiln out at Bencherly, carted out to that important and artistic little village, in the official camp car, driven by Miss Marlow. After the baking and its return to camp, the Egyptian urn was baked again in the sunshine, until it was said to be as hard and firm as the pyramid itself.

Placed in a most conspicuous position on a nice little green mound, right out in the open—a space cleared of brush and as important to the scenery as was the sundial on its clear plot—the big urn was really an imposing object to behold. All the campers came to view it, to criticize it and to suggest just how it should be decorated. But the art teacher, Marie Morgan, had some ideas of her own on that important point.

“We will decorate it with bunches of grapes,” declared Marie, when it was time to decorate it with something. “We’ll make big bunches of lovely purple grapes, and each one in the class will have a chance to paint a few grapes, if not a small bunch.” Marie knew that all the girls who had tried to paint in that summer class would want to have something to do with these decorations, as the urn was to comprise their share in the annual exhibit to be held, later, in the city.

“But shouldn’t the grapes be moulded in clay first and then painted?” asked Lorna Thornton critically. She was inspecting the gray urn with Miss

Marlow.

“We wouldn’t have time to send it to be baked again, Lorna,” Marie replied gently. “I guess we’ll have to be satisfied with our painting.”

Now that was all that passed between Marie and Lorna about the grapes. Lorna possessed acknowledged artistic tendencies. She painted little articles that had been sold in a village gift shop, she modeled pretty little jugs and jars, when she could make time, but few of the girls knew anything about her talent. In this, as in all things else concerning herself, there was a certain reluctance on her part and she never talked about it. What she did, how she did it, when or where, or to answer questions however tactfully they might have been put to her—none of this formed any part of Lorna’s subjects of conversation.

After the accident at the ridge and her heroic rescue, Lorna had come in for more than her usual share of attention. She was the hero of the hour. Her dog was petted as if he had saved lives from death in snow-drifts in the Alps. Even Cleo, who had done nothing more than discover Lance, the dog that liked to sleep under the floor of barracks number three, even she came in for a share of complimentary attention.

But when Lorna had fully recovered from shock and from the invalidism of a strained ankle, which only took a week’s time, she promptly betook herself out of the infirmary, set about her usual tasks, waiting on table and doing all the secret and mysterious things she was always being accused of but had never been confronted with doing.

“And I told you,” whispered Arline to Emily, “that she’d go right back into her shell as quickly as they let her out of that infirmary. Isn’t she the queerest girl you ever saw?”

But Cleo, and perhaps Anne, had a different opinion.

“She isn’t queer,” Cleo might have answered. “She’s just worried and trying to hide something. But she had a right to her own secrets and they are none of our business, anyway.”

What was Lorna’s idea? Why was she shunning the girls, even those who were anxious to be most friendly with her?

When the girls had seen her talking to the old man on the hill, she had not been merely talking to a tramp, as one of them had privately accused her of doing. She had seen the girls before they saw her, she could easily have imagined their surprise at discovering her out there so far from camp and talking to that bent old man, whose face they could not have seen, whose

voice they could not have heard and whose identity they could not even have guessed at.

They would never understand, Lorna was sure of that, so she went her lonely way, misunderstood, doubted and even suspected. She liked Cleo, trusted her and admired her. But even Cleo she could not take into her confidence yet. There were promises and other things to be considered first.

“I thought it was hard last summer,” Lorna would murmur, alone and unheard, even if she did chance to speak aloud, “but this has been awful. Well, this will be the last. I’ll never come up to Camp Climax again.”

Only the new work, the arts and crafts, interested her. She loved to mould pottery, to paint pretty little gifts, and to draw. Because Lorna had real artistic talent, naturally, the expression of that talent gave her her one real pleasure.

So she was openly interested in the girls’ Egyptian jar. She would run out to take a peek at it as it stood there on the little mound, drying drier than ever, and many of the girls noticed her interest.

Jane Pennington spoke to her about it in a comradely way.

“Why don’t you make a nice little one, Lorna?” Jane had suggested kindly. “Yours might get the prize.”

“Oh, I couldn’t really get time,” Lorna replied evasively. “But that one should have the grapes moulded on instead of painted on. It’s too big to be decorated with flat work.” Lorna was very insistent about that.

And of all things in the world to happen! The urn had been placed in a certain safe position so that nothing would knock it over. It was to be left out one more night because the weather was warm and clear. And that night the Egyptian jar was shattered into pieces!

Before anyone could have imagined what happened, quickly as the crash was heard, a number of the girls jumped up and rushed out to the spot.

“When we got there,” declared Margaret, “we saw someone running away.”

“And we could see her red hair in the moonlight,” added Arline, although she really hated to blame Lorna. Yet the mystery, obviously, should be solved.

“Our lovely urn!”

“And we couldn’t possibly mend it!”

“Neither could we possibly make another!”

“We intended,” this was Margaret speaking again, “to make that our season’s present to Miss Horton after it had been shown in the season’s exhibit. And she liked it so much. Isn’t it too mean for words?”

That was the day after the breaking of the urn, and the Camp Climax girls were still discussing the peculiar accident. And to add to the suspicion that centered around Lorna, she was being absent from camp, had sent word to Miss Horton through a note left in Cleo’s letter box down by the old oak tree, that she would have to be away for a few hours but would be sure to be back that afternoon.

Then Cleo sought out Anne. She just had to talk to her. If Anne now advised her not to bother with Lorna she felt quite willing to do as the other girls were doing; just not bother about her. This decision had only been reached after a miserable time spent in attempting Lorna’s defense.

Anne met Cleo as she was leaving the little practice gym. Anne had been helping a few of the younger girls with their swimming strokes. They were practicing “on the horses” trying to get the strokes with sufficient skill to make one of the late swimming matches.

“Where can we talk alone?” Cleo asked her sister. She had hardly returned Anne’s smiling greeting.

“Why sis!” Anne began. “What ever are you worrying about now? Do you think camp is going to do you any good if you go around with a face like that?”

“Oh, I’m all right, Nan,” Cleo declared, forcing the necessary smile. “But you know about our urn?”

“Yes; and it’s too bad. But no use to worry about it.”

“You know the girls saw Lorna running away from it right after the crash.”

“They think they did.”

“They are sure they did.”

Anne slipped her arm into Cleo’s. “Come along, Little One,” she coaxed affectionately. “We’ve got a full hour to ourselves and we need it. I don’t see you hardly at all these days.”

“I know. But then we are both trying to do so many things and camp will be over soon,” Cleo tried to explain.

“Yes.” Anne had led Cleo to a shelter nook, the very one Cleo had picked out when she first came to camp but had never made any real use of since. “Sit here,” she said. “It’s shady and cool.” Anne was always such a comfort. “Now tell me all your troubles, little Sister Cleo.”

Just then Cleo felt very little and very helpless, as she leaned against the other girl. Who would have believed her to be older than Anne? The difference lay in their upbringing: Anne had been trained to self reliance and resourcefulness. Cleo had been spoiled against her will. Now Anne was a capable girl while Cleo was still timid and temperamental. But she had at least one saving virtue. She was loyal; when she believed in a girl it took something very positive to shake her faith. More than that, this same characteristic of true loyalty had often given her surprising courage to help those she believed in. But she had little courage ever to fight for herself.

Anne understood this quality and sympathized with it. She knew that Cleo would make almost any sacrifice to justify her faith in Lorna Thornton, and Anne now felt it was her own duty to help Cleo achieve her ideal, for she too now believed in Lorna.

“I tell you what it is, Sis,” she began in the way Cleo had come to love for its protectiveness, “Lorna is a victim of some unhappy circumstance.”

“Oh, Anne! Do you really think that is—all?”

“Yes, I do. I like Lorna myself.”

“Anne!” Cleo could have hugged her but she hated to appear babyish to that extent. Instead she squeezed Anne’s hand excitedly. “Two of us together should be able to help her without intruding upon her private affairs. What ever shall we do now? Shall we ask her why she ran away when the urn crashed down?”

“Why not?” Anne asked in answering.

## CHAPTER XXI

### FLIGHT FROM THE STORM

“We shall ask Lorna.”

Both Cleo and Anne had decided to do that, but when would they see Lorna to ask her? There was no time to waste, something had to be done about that urn, the girls were clamoring for something to take its place but no one knew what to suggest, even.

It was late in August, one of those hot August days that simply demand swimming. Because of the unusual heat all other activities had given way to water sports, so that Cleo and Nellie-Ellen would stay in the lake as long as they wanted to for once.

“When I go home,” Nellie declared to Cleo, “I’m going in swimming every day, in the gym, I don’t care how cold it is.”

“You’ll probably do it up to Thanksgiving and then go hunt up sleigh-riding in the parks,” Cleo reminded the changeable one.

“And I’m going to keep up all my other exercises,” Nellie continued to promise, as if Cleo had believed in her. “Mother’s last letter was all about my health and getting a big build if I’m going to be a singer. You’d think I was trying to be a prize fighter. And it isn’t stylish to be stout.”

“Say, girls!” called Anette Bradner, coming up out of the depths just enough to show her head, “we’ve decided what to do about our art exhibit.”

“Going to cut a tree down and carve pictures on it?” joked Helen Downs.

“That wouldn’t be such a bad idea either, Helen,” Anette responded. She was climbing up on the dock now. “We could really cut down a pretty white birch and carve it into a totem pole. Wouldn’t that be a fine idea?”

Nellie-Ellen, Cleo and Jane Pennington climbed up after her. Seated along the low dock that served as a landing for the camp’s launch, the girls proceeded to hold, what Jane designated as, an indignation meeting.

“And what on earth is a totem pole?” demanded Nellie, innocently.

“It’s a big pole with beasties carved on it. Don’t you know American history well enough to know that the Indians— —”

“Oh, I know the old Indians,” Nellie interrupted Helen. “They carried cows’ heads on poles — —”

“Their totem poles were their door plates,” Helen broke in again. “They raised the big pole out front with its curious, weird carvings to tell the world who lived in the hut.”

“They didn’t have huts; you’re thinking of the cave men,” was Jane’s contribution.

“Cave men?” scoffed Helen. “*You* mean the mound builders.”

At that the whole row of dripping girls fell into a laughing fit that almost made them fall into the lake. They roared, shouted, squealed and gasped, doubling up in sheer agony of mirth, and kicking out their bare feet as if taking Nellie-Ellen’s exercise in advance, until the other girls also gathered about the dock, demanding to be “let in” on the fun.

The quiz on American history that followed the spasm of exhilaration, would have done service to a better cause. It would have shown up a lot of ignorance, for instance, and thus made way for some possible definite study along history lines. But the digression had carried the girls far afield from the original idea. The idea jocularly proposed by Helen Downs, was that the rookies, who had lost their Egyptian urn, should cut down a pretty white birch tree and carve figures on it. Anette Bradner declared that wasn’t a bad idea at all, and that a totem pole thus made might be well worth while. It was the idea of the totem pole that had provoked the silly argument.

“What on earth were we talking about?” asked Jane during a pause in the laughing fit. “It was something interesting for I feel it dangling in my mind,” she added facetiously.

“Well, don’t let it get tangled in your appetite,” suggested Helen. “Mine is simply shouting for supper.”

“We were talking about making something to take the place of our lovely urn,” said Anette, serious again at the mention of the lost trophy.

“Nothing ever can take the place of it,” Laura Bird insisted, “but, of course, we’ve got to do something. We’ve got to have something in the annual exhibit of arts and crafts.”

“And Helen suggested a totem pole,” recalled Emily. “Could we really make one out of a little tree? I’ve done some wood carving; not much though,” she admitted ruefully.

“We couldn’t carve on green wood,” Laura explained importantly. “It would all curl up.”

“Like old leather,” laughed Nellie, who felt she was safe in making that comparison, if not on recalling early American history. “I once had a pair of slippers that curled up into a baseball.”

“The funniest thing about it,” reverted Anette, ignoring Nellie’s joke and being at once understood, although her statement began thus vaguely, “was that I had tied a piece of red ribbon—just narrow stationery ribbon, red, with tiny green spots in it you know—around the neck of our urn that night before I went to bed. I’ve asked every one who found it broken and who picked up the pieces if they saw the little red ribbon. They didn’t see it and it wasn’t among the pieces.”

“What do you mean?” asked Nellie-Ellen, alert now with the possibility of a new sensation.

“Just that. Whoever broke the urn took the ribbon.”

“Why should they take a bit of old ribbon?” asked Cleo. She had been listening but not talking up to that time.

“I couldn’t guess,” replied Anette. “But I imagine if we could find out about the ribbon we’d find out who broke the urn.”

“Slim chance,” remarked Jane, cryptically. “But what are we going to do for something to take its place? I believe this whole discussion arose on that issue.”

“Oh, listen!” scoffed Laura. “The big chief speaks.” And she attempted to bow down ceremoniously, but only succeeded in squeezing more water out of her bathing suit.

“What’s the use of talking,” sulked Helen. “No one has sense enough to listen.”

“We’re listening!” shouted a chorus. Then it was Helen’s turn to talk. They expected her to and were going to insist upon her doing it.

“Well,” she began finally, “we could make a decorated metal bowl; make it look like old copper.”

“Out of a dish-pan!” shouted Jane. “There’s a lovely old bunged up one in the discarded equipment. I’m sure the K.P.’s would give us that.”

“Don’t be silly,” chimed in Cleo. “We would need something heavy like—a baby’s bath-tub!”

“A baby’s bath-tub!” that idea set up a perfect howl, more doubling up of laughing girls, more shouting and more agonizing squeals.

“I mean one of those nice little round ones— —” Cleo began again, but they wouldn’t let her finish. They all knew what she meant and had visions of the baby’s bath-tub decorated like old copper and presented to the staff as a real, genuine, early Egyptian bowl, the kind the queens used to wash their feet in before the slaves rubbed in the rose juice.

It was no use; they all admitted it. The only thing to do was to do something, and then show it to the others. The “others” would never be able to decide on anything sensibly.

“All I hope,” Helen attempted, “is that whoever broke our urn and stole the red ribbon will be punished as she deserves to be. We’ll leave the rest to fate.”

But they were presently obliged to answer the warning bell, and, while everyone declared it was too hot to eat, a little later, they all made tracks toward the tables that were set out under the trees and which offered the cool, easy-to-digest supper, the kind that camp dietitians are famous for.

“Look at that sun,” grumbled Mollie Teeter. “Did you ever see anything so red and gory?”

“Hot day tomorrow,” prophesied Nardine, “and we were to take a long hike.”

“Are we hiking tomorrow?” Cleo asked in surprise. She hoped not, because she had other plans. She and Anne were going to look for Lorna.

“Let’s hope it stays too hot,” suggested Rosalie. “I hate hiking this time of year. It’s all right in September but horrible in August.”

“We won’t be here in September,” said Nellie-Ellen foolishly. What she really meant was to draw attention to the fact that camp days were quickly approaching an end. September would bring school-days and how quickly then would Camp Climax be forgotten?

It remained very warm until late in the evening; then a welcome breeze blew up from the west and seemed to want to tear up the tents that were pinioned against the hill.

“We had better sleep standing up tonight,” suggested Rosalie. “This tent may take wings and fly away at any moment.”

“It does blow hard,” admitted Marie, she who was looked upon as the tent’s guardian. “I’m afraid we’re going to have a heavy storm.”

“Shall we sleep in the barracks if we do?” Cleo asked. She wasn’t very much afraid of thunder storms, but the lightning was darting over the hills now, the thunder was beginning to roar and the wind fairly howled through the trees.

“I’m afraid we’ll have to,” answered Marie. She was standing in the doorway of the tent, peering out into the blackness that had suddenly descended, and she knew there was going to be an awful storm. “No one is allowed to stay in the tents during a bad storm, you know,” she added finally, “so let’s hurry and pack up. Just take your bed-bags and run. It’s coming.”

The order was not given a moment too soon, for the storm was, indeed, coming with that sudden ferocity that often marks a break in a great heat spell. Few words were spoken as the girls got their bed-bags, those bags made of cretonne that carried the girls’ necessary night articles.

“Oh, do hurry Cleo,” begged Rosalie. “It’s quite a run down the hill to number three, and hear that thunder!”

“I’ll be right with you,” promised Cleo. “Run along,” she called then over the noise of the wind. “I must get my robe.”

Cleo had a little flashlight in hand and she quickly trained it on the empty tent. Something, a voice, startled her.

“Cleo!”

“Lorna! Where are you?”

“Here. Don’t stop. I just wanted to tell you I’ve got back.” She was breathless and must have just stopped running. “I have to hide something here until morning. I can’t do anything else now on account of the storm. I’m going to hide it under your cot— —”

“All right, Lorna,” Cleo quickly agreed. She could not see what Lorna was hiding, though, for she was again outside the tent; Lorna must have been inside when she first spoke to her.

“I’ll go down to the barracks with you,” Lorna suggested then, as she joined the girl at the tent door. “I must report to Miss Horton. She expects me.”

“Oh, yes, do come along,” begged Cleo, glad Lorna had offered to do so. “Yes, I’m coming, girls!” she called out loudly to those who were shouting

her name through the storm's threats. "I was waiting for Lorna."

She didn't know whether or not they heard that, but she hoped they did. Somehow, having Lorna back was a great relief. Every time an unusual thing happened and Lorna would be away, a certain suspicion centered around her absence and it embarrassed Cleo. But now she was back and she had hidden something under the tent cot.

What could it be? Cleo was hurrying along beside Lorna but the rain was falling now, in a perfect sheet, and they both had to dash for shelter.

## CHAPTER XXII

### OUT OF THE RAIN

Lorna ran to the little circular building situated in the center of the other buildings, while Cleo dashed for number three.

“Whew!” she exclaimed, ducking inside and shaking some of the water off her clothing, “didn’t it come down?”

“Rather!” drawled Laura. “But you seemed to like it. What were you waiting for?”

“For Lorna,” replied Cleo. She knew that she would surprise them.

“For Lorna!” exclaimed Rosalie. “Where on earth did she come from?”

“From the skies, fell down in the shower,” joked Jane. “But look out there!” she called more seriously the next moment. “Close that door! Want us to blow away!”

A roaring wind was forcing the door open against the pressure of three girls trying to close it.

“What an awful storm!”

“We have orders to close every window. Hurry, girls,” ordered Marie. “These are light buildings and we must not let the wind get inside or we may not be able to put it out again.”

No need to urge, for the bravest among them was ready to acknowledge the fury of that storm. Lightning flashed unceasingly, the thunder claps went off with the rapidity of a string of firecrackers, and when the wind got a chance it certainly did howl!

While the storm lasted nothing else was thought of, and when it finally subsided the girls of number three were ready and altogether willing to turn in to bed.

It had been a strenuous hour, as most storm raging hours are when they follow an intense heat spell, but the refreshing cool air that followed it was well worth all the early anxiety. Windows were thrown open, the door was hooked back and the screen door again allowed to swing into place, and it

was with one accord, a great happy if weary sigh, that cots were hugged and the light turned off at last.

Then Cleo had a chance to wonder about Lorna. Where had she come from, really? And what was it she had hidden under the tent cot on the hill?

That unfailing trust in this girl, again made Cleo happy.

“And I was willing to give her up this afternoon,” she secretly accused herself. “Only Anne gave me confidence again. It’s awfully queer.” She almost stopped thinking then for she too was but a girl, and loved sleep when sleep loved her.

“Land-sakes, what’s that! Can’t we get any sleep tonight?” Jane was grumbling and she woke Cleo. There was some noise; what was it?

“Say Cleo,” called a girl in the sort of whisper that travels through silence. “There’s your old friend dog. I hear him calling you.”

“Answer him and tell him to try some other barracks,” suggested another sleepy voice. “We’re all closed up for the night.”

“Lance!” exclaimed Cleo simply, realizing now that the dog was again under the floor and tapping his plummy tail against it, confidently. “Don’t worry, girls,” she spoke up to the grumblers.

“He won’t? He is,” snapped Jane. “I love dogs sometimes but not tonight. Just listen to him whine.”

“He isn’t whining — —” Cleo attempted, “he won’t keep you awake.”

“No; he’s snoring,” interrupted Helen. They all giggled a little then but pretended to be very much aggrieved, nevertheless.

Cleo slipped out of bed and whispered down the knot hole. Lance knew her voice, and while he tapped his tail harder in recognition, he stopped making that pitiful little noise that had made her think of a child crying. Glad she had left a few of the “dog-candies” in a secret spot by the leg of the cot, she dropped the last two down the knot hole, with words only suited for a dog’s ears and which she knew the girls were too sleepy to bother listening to. After that there was quietness for a while. No more whining, no more tail tapping.

But she couldn’t get to sleep. And there was Lance calling again. What could he want?

Making sure that all was quiet and that it was safe for her to move, she took her light in her hand, hid its flash with her other hand and crept to the

screen door. Then she whistled softly.

Instantly the big furry creature bounded to her.

“Lance!” she whispered. “Down! What do you want?”

He sniffed her hands gladly. He licked them, tried to get to her face.

“But what’s the matter?” she whispered, patting him reassuringly, trying to get him to quiet down.

Then he rubbed his ear against her hand. And she felt something—that wasn’t his lovely, soft, furry ear.

“What’s on your ear?” she murmured. The flashlight was snapped on by the little button that released it, and then Cleo looked closely.

“Why, Lance,” she almost said aloud. “Your ear is tied up—with a string.”

At that she squatted down, left the light where it would be safe and began to unravel Lance’s ear.

“No wonder you called,” she soothed him. “Your poor ear was all bent up with this horrid— —”

Then she stopped. She was holding the ribbon in her hand and it was red with green spots! Rain soaked and dirty the colors still could be seen, and that was the very ribbon Anette had described! The one she had tied around the neck of their precious Egyptian urn!

“Lance!” breathed Cleo. “Where did you get it?”

But Lance didn’t care anything about the tragedy of the broken urn; it was his ear that mattered to him and it was all right again. It had been all bent up with something that cut. He remembered when and where he got tangled that way, but he wasn’t telling anyone what he knew about that. It was his secret, and he wouldn’t even bark it in his friend’s ear, although she was coaxing him to do so.

Meanwhile Cleo was crushing the tell-tale ribbon in her hand. No one must see it, for what Lance had now, Lorna must have had before him, and what could that mean?

“Go away, Lance,” she whispered then, giving him a gentle shove, “I must go back to bed. I’ll see you—in the morning.”

As if he knew she was promising him something nice, he gave her another kiss—reaching her face in spite of her protest—then wagged himself

back to the shelter under the knot hole. In another minute Cleo was safely back in her bed, thankful that no head had bobbed up to ask her questions which she would have been obliged to refuse to answer.

“The ribbon off the urn,” was all she could think of. “However did it get on his poor ear?”

She had put the little wet ball of ribbon under her pillow, then she remembered it was red and wet and that the color might run and spoil the pillow case. A box cover lay upon her bedside stand; she dropped it into that; she could feel it in the dark without putting on the flash light.

“It will be dry in the morning,” she assured herself, weary in earnest now. “Then I’ll hide it safely or throw it away. The girls must never know that I found it.”

Anne was right about Cleo’s neglect of her health. Even Cleo was beginning to realize this now. Here was the camp summer almost over, and just because she had taken an interest in a strange girl that interest had brought on all sorts of little troubles that were bothersome, to say the least.

“Well, I’m not going to let a string of dirty red ribbon keep me awake any longer,” she determined now, for very good reasons. “And I’m not going to worry about how it got on Lance’s ear. Maybe it blew there,” she half chuckled, just before she fell asleep.

Could the sunshine be as bright as that? And could it be morning so soon? Yes, the girls were calling her and someone was shaking her.

“Don’t, Helen, please,” she begged, for Helen seemed determined to drag her out of bed. “I had hardly a wink last night.”

“We had hardly two winks,” declared Helen, “and we’re up. Besides it’s breakfast time.” As Helen spoke she sank down for a moment, on the next cot to Cleo’s, which had already been vacated. As she did so her eyes fell upon the ball of wrinkled ribbon. She picked it up indifferently, and, as girls will, she instinctively began to unfold it.

Cleo saw her doing it, realized her own predicament.

“What’s this?” Helen asked suddenly, her eyes growing wider.

“Something I brought in out of the rain,” replied Cleo trying to seem indifferent. “What is it?”

“Why! It’s the ribbon! The ribbon that was tied around the urn!”

“It is!”

“Yes. Just look!”

Helen was holding up the bedraggled red string.

“It must be,” Cleo answered slowly. She was out of bed now and ready for the wash room.

“And the girls all declared it wasn’t to be found any place,” Helen continued to remark holding the string up critically.

“Well,” sighed Cleo, gathering up her bag, “I wouldn’t wonder but that wind would find more than bits of ribbon around this camp. It certainly blew hard enough.”

“But how did you find it?” Helen persisted. She evidently was not to be thrown off the track so easily.

“Just grabbed it by the door. Thought it might belong to somebody,” Cleo replied quite truthfully. She hoped Helen would drop it back into the box cover and say no more about it, but Helen did not seem inclined to do so.

“Well, hurry along,” Helen said instead, “and I’ll wait for you. There’s no end of things to do today. We’ve got to get a dish-pan or a baby’s bathtub or an ash can to decorate, you know. Too bad the wind didn’t blow something like that around. It would come in handy.”

“Say, Helen,” began Cleo, feeling now that one girl should be easier to manage than a whole camp, “suppose we don’t say anything about the red ribbon? You know, they’ll ask me all sorts of questions?”

“All right. We won’t. We’ll hide it.” At that Helen stuck the tell-tale bunch in her blouse.

“You see,” Cleo drew near to Helen to say this, “I’m a friend of Lorna’s and some of the girls— —”

“Yes, I know, Cleo. They might say you knew more about the broken pitcher than you are owning up to. *I* know better, of course, *I* know you don’t know anything about it.” Helen was speaking very emphatically.

“I don’t,” declared Cleo simply, and she meant it.

“So, just let them worry along.” Helen was now urging Cleo along. “There’s so much to do today there’ll be no time to pick fights. I’m going in for the swimming races. Why don’t you?”

“Maybe I will,” Cleo half promised, but she really was not planning to.

Once in the wash room Cleo almost trembled from suppressed excitement. What a narrow squeak? Good old Helen! She hoped she had not actually deceived her. She really had found the ribbon out by the door. Of course, it had been on Lance's ear, but that detail shouldn't matter. What's a dog's ear?

Breakfast was hurriedly partaken of. Cleo was watching to catch sight of Lorna. Or of Anne. There was Nellie over at the other table, but Nellie wouldn't do.

"Sleepy head!" suddenly called out a merry voice, plainly Jane Pennington's. "Want a ride to the village?"

"Who's going?"

"I am, for one."

"Who else?"

"Why? Don't you trust me?"

"Not the way you're swinging that bag," Cleo declared. "Look out for those dishes!"

Jane was swinging a bag dangerously near the big pile of dishes and she really shouldn't have expected any one to trust her at that rate.

"Well," she called out, assuming a most important air, "of course you don't have to go. But we're slithering down the lake in the launch."

"Oh, take me!" called out Laura.

"Me?" begged Anette.

"It's my turn," cried Laura.

"But I asked Cleo," replied the haughty Jane, "and I can only take one. Every other seat is engaged. Of course you may squeeze in but *I* can't invite you."

"I'd love to go," said Cleo when she got a chance.

"Then come along," said Jane.

No use looking for Lorna now; no use even trying to run up to the tent on the hill to look under the cot. Jane was clamoring; the launch was chugging and it was a real treat to get a ride to town in that launch if Jane did call it slithering. Well, Cleo couldn't worry all the time; she was going in for a little fun just now. And the other girls had squeezed in.

“What a peach of a day!” Jane was exclaiming. “Now we’ll get all the benefit of that wild storm last night. Didn’t it wash everything up beautifully?”

“Everything looks brand new, and it’s awfully nice of you, Jane, to choose me for the boat ride,” Cleo responded gratefully.

“Your turn,” said Jane simply. “And while we’re in town we’re going to look around for something to replace the broken jug.”

“Oh,” Cleo didn’t know anything else to say to that.

They stepped into the launch in which a number of girls were already seated. Old Dave was at the engine and Marie Marlow was up front talking to him. What a day for a sail! Cleo could not help noticing that, although everyone was, as usual, saying such silly things, it would have sounded much sillier for her to have remarked upon the beauty of the day. The girls might have even threatened to duck her, to try out the temperature of the water; they were in such a rollicking mood just then.

Hands were trailed through the water. Little splashes were tossed up. Dave’s voice droned over the chug of the engine, and Marie Marlow was also having her say.

But withal, the beauty of the day was simply overwhelming. Even these irresponsible camp girls, who would rather slither down the lake than to sail like other folks, even they could not but feel it. The mountains towered above the glimmering waters on both sides, their green tints were as varied as were the size and shape of the ripples of the lake, but they were every one green, just as every ripple was of pure lake water.

And the sail ended all too soon; Bencherly dock was flaunting its flag in their very faces before they knew it, and then they set out to hunt something to take the place of their broken urn.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### LAUGHTER AND SHADOWS

“So this is Bencherly! Well, I swan!” Arline was doing the swaning. She had never been down the lake to this little village before, and so, as a city girl, felt bound to deprecate the place.

“See that rash breaking out on long hill over there?” Jane pointed out in a similar mood. “Well, those are cottages.”

“Oh, do come along and don’t act as if you lived at the Ritz,” broke in Helen. “I’ll tell you one thing. The folks who live here the year around have good manners.”

“They should have,” persisted the facetious Arline. “They don’t have to have a lot of other things.”

“Come along, girls,” called out Miss Marlow. “We must get to the shops and back to camp before eleven.” She had been vainly trying to pilot the delinquents along the way.

“The shops!” snickered Arline, more in glee than contempt. “Can she mean those shanties?”

“Antique shops,” corrected Laura. “And we’ve got to look for our new urn. Do come on and don’t bother petting kittens.”

“Cats,” corrected Anette. “It’s *a* cat, aren’t you, kitty?” She was trying to pet the cat but the cat was suspicious. It just humped its back and scampered off while Anette was raising her hand for an expert stroke.

In spite of their nonsense, however, they were actually following Marie Marlow, their leader, and she was setting them quite a brisk pace. Campers arriving in the village usually acted just that way—like chickens let loose, the old country folks might have described their descent upon staid, proper and hopeful little Bencherly. For if the campers and cottagers didn’t come to buy, to whom might the shop keepers expect to sell their collections?

“Let’s try that place,” suggested Laura. “See the boot-jack over the door; or is it a — —”

“Boot-jack!” exclaimed Helen. “Where on earth did you ever see or hear of a boot-jack?”

“Now, don’t start any more ancient history,” begged Anette. “We haven’t time. It’s a pair of tongs, the kind the plumbers use. There’s Marie going in.”

Marie was entering the antique shop with the disputed emblem hanging over the doorway, and, presently, as many of the girls as could crowd in, were in with her, while the others looked in through the pokey little windows.

Characteristically the place was littered with so-called antiques, but the stuff might have been very properly called junk. Everything from an old wooden bed to a candle snuffer was scattered some place about, but what the girls were looking for was not in evidence.

“These vases,” declared the store keeper, a little lady every inch a genuine antique herself, “are from Rip Van Winkle’s cabin.”

“Rip Van Winkle’s cabin,” repeated Arline. “Does Rip really live around here?”

“What say, Miss?”

“Hush,” cautioned Marie, who was just dying to laugh herself, but knew better than to start anything like that. “What age did you say the vases were?” she tried to ask politely.

They might have belonged to the stone age for all the little old lady knew, but she said they dated before the American Revolution. As if vases had been commonly popular in America then! And as if old Rip Van Winkle had been described by the pen of Washington Irving before the Revolution!

Which didn’t matter at all, so far as the girls were concerned. They were merely looking around, not buying anyway.

“Oh, isn’t this darling!” exclaimed Jane Pennington quite unexpectedly. She was holding up an old very badly moth-eaten antamacassar, the thing they used to tack on the back of a chair to be carried off on the coat tails of the unsuspecting gentleman visitor.

“Oh, let’s see,” begged Helen, who knew she had never seen anything uglier called fancy work. “Grapes and tomatoes,” she commented kindly, pointing a hesitant finger at the piece of ancient rags.

“Cherries and roses,” corrected the store keeper beamingly. “That’s from a place near Washington’s Headquarters. You can have it for five dollars and

it cost me almost that much.”

“Five dollars!” repeated Helen. Well, at least the woman hadn’t said it had cost her ten. She must have some code of truth for her business, thought more than one of the highly amused, impossible customers.

“But you haven’t a big jug or earthen jar?” asked Miss Marlow, feeling her question would be safely answered in the negative. There were other shops and she would soon have to get the girls out of this one—if she could.

“An earthen jar? Why, yes, I have too,” replied she who looked like Aunt Jerusha, with all her frills and curls and fussings. “Wait a minute. I’ll look.”

She left them and went from the shop to a rear room. While she was gone Marie Marlow made good use of her time scolding the girls, but when she came back with a pickle jug, the kind grandma used to put crullers in, the advice was mere powder to the fire!

They simply roared! Right there in the little woman’s face! And she holding the big fat pickle jar!

Cleo and Anette had been trying to keep out of trouble but they were no better than the rest of them now. Even Marie was laughing, although she bit her lip between gulps, and Helen almost fell into a very old cradle which would surely have been shattered to bits had she so much as bumped a little harder against it, while Laura Bird was actually sitting in a Boston rocker, rocking furiously as she laughed.

The little woman’s face was a mask of indignation.

“I’ve seen camp girls,” she snapped severely, “but you are the worst I’ve ever seen come in this shop. One would think it was a side-show!”

Another set of giggles followed that untimely remark, for this rummage sale being compared to a side-show was screamingly funny. By now Marie was fully discouraged. She couldn’t make the girls behave for, of course, they saw no great harm in laughing. What was laughing, anyhow?

“How much did you say it was?” Marie actually asked the irate store keeper, going closer on a pretense of more critical inspection of the pickle jar.

“You can have it for two fifty,” replied Aunt Jerusha, and she didn’t mean perhaps.

“We’ll take it,” announced Marie, most courteously and when some of the girls didn’t die that moment, they declared when they got the chance,

they'd never die in all their lives.

“Take that!” started Helen, but she was hushed up promptly. Peace at any price! Escape at any rush! What was two fifty even for practically pledged camp girls when such a situation as this had been jammed into?

“Will I do it up?”

“Do it up? Oh, no,” Marie replied. “Do it up” had seemed to imply something about pickles. “We’ll take it just that way, we have the launch at the dock.”

“I’ll take it,” offered Helen, nobly. And there was then one of those silly girl rushes, all wanting to do the same thing, like paying car fare. Everyone, practically, offered to take it, to carry the cookie jar down to the launch. But Marie knew another burst of laughter from the girl with the jug would greatly endanger its safety. If Helen didn’t stop laughing she would just have to drop it. She couldn’t do both—laugh and hold it.

But they got going somehow. Helen clung to the jug as a huntsman might to his game, and the girls closed in about her in a useless attempt at hiding it.

“What shall we ever do with it?” more than one wanted to know.

“Didn’t you hear Miss Larkin tell you how to paint it up and stick shells in putty on it?” Marie was just a girl herself and no girl could fail to enjoy this joke.

“I’ll tell you, Cleo,” Rosalie began with the air of having just received a great inspiration, “you can have it for a drinking jug for your dog.”

“My dog? Drink out of a thing with a neck like that?” shrieked Cleo. “Do you think my dog’s neck is—sectional?”

“Or rubbery, like those funny movie animals,” cried Anette. “No, Cleo’s dog isn’t funny, he’s nice.”

The girls continued their merriment but a sudden cloud of seriousness had fallen over Cleo’s face at the mention of her dog. They meant, of course, Lance, the dog that had played so important a part in the summer’s events; the dog upon whose helpless ear she had found the tell-tale red and green ribbon.

They had visited more shops, had a lot more fun, but had found no jar to answer their purpose, before anyone noticed Cleo’s change of expression. Then it was Rosalie who remarked it.

“What’s the matter, Cleo? Got a pain?” she asked half jokingly.

“No, why?” Cleo replied.

“You look like a tooth-ache. Something the matter?”

“I’m anxious to get back to camp.”

“What for?”

“Oh, I didn’t mean for anything special,” Cleo tried to evade. “But I had a lot of things to do today.”

“So we all have and we’re glad to get out of them. We can only do one thing at a time—that’s a mercy.”

Helen was still marching on with the pickle jar. She wouldn’t give it up no matter how hard the girls coaxed. It was indeed like carrying the game from the hunt, and anyone with a spark of imagination could guess what a howl would go up at camp when the rookies would behold that old brown jar, with its glazed lining and cracked cover. As if anything could be done with *that* for a trophy!

They were almost back at the dock when Rosalie remembered.

“Oh, say!” she exclaimed to Cleo. “I know where there is a place things are sold. If you and I could run back and just look in there we might find something. I’ll ask Marie.”

She hurried ahead, caught up with Marie, made the suggestion and was back before Cleo had time to even think up an answer.

“Come along,” she panted. “Marie says all right. If we see anything good someone will be in again this afternoon and then they can decide. The place is that little shingled cottage just over there. Hurry!”

Swept along, Cleo followed. This place was quite different from any of the other shops. It was an attractive and artistic little rustic bungalow.

“I found it one day when I came in looking for little pictures,” Helen explained as they entered. “Just see those lovely little things—no truck here.”

Rosalie tramped with her feet to call the shopkeeper but it was some minutes before any one answered. Meanwhile the girls had a chance to look around.

“Things are really lovely here,” Cleo whispered. She was looking admiringly at a piece of genuine needlepoint.

Helen's eyes were glued to a love-seat; the early American style with the awfully stiff seat, short straight narrow back, no arms—built like anything else other than a love-seat, but that was what they used to call them.

Stamping again, Helen was growing impatient. She knew Marie would want to start back in the launch.

“But no jugs,” whispered Cleo.

“Not that I can spy,” agreed Helen.

At that moment a door at the rear was opened very quietly and in its frame stood an old man. Instantly Cleo knew this was the old man of the mountains; he whom they had seen Lorna speaking to.

“Miss Logan is out,” he said gravely. “Can I do anything for you?”

What a figure! Not so old as so imposing! Even his bent shoulders and his long white hair seemed to add to his dignity.

“We were looking for an earthen jar,” said Helen as composedly as she could. The old man, appearing so suddenly before them fairly took her breath. As for Cleo, she was frankly speechless.

“An earthen jug,” he repeated, a smile coming into his eyes. “I'm afraid not. The only one Miss Logan had has just been sold.”

“Oh. Thank you,” stumbled Helen. “We're in a hurry to catch our launch or we'd love to look around.”

“Don't apologize,” replied the man, with that air of abstraction usually peculiar to persons who are much alone. “These are choice bits—if Miss Logan does not sell them she may look at them.” His kind old gray eyes—he seemed all gray except his smock—were looking furtively about the little shop. Of course his smock proclaimed him an artist, which only deepened the mystery of his identity.

The girls turned to go. He was still smiling in that tragic way.

“Art, young ladies,” he spoke again, “is nothing but perfect nature. Look as you go. See these mountains and streams, they teach us art.”

“Yes sir, thank you,” murmured Cleo. She was a little bit afraid of the queer old man.

“But in pictures no type is so beautiful as that Titian loved to paint—the girl with the glorious red hair!” As he said that he waved his hand toward an

imaginary painting of the famous artist Titian. He was indeed the one who had given fame to red hair; Titian red.

“Good bye and thank you,” said Rosalie. “We’re from Camp Climax,” she felt was a polite thing to say in parting.

“So I see,” replied the old artist, sweeping his critical eye over their well-known costume. “Camp Climax is a place to be honored,” and he made a sweeping bow.

Neither girl smiled; but they were both glad none of the others, less thoughtful, had seen that old man bow. They would surely have laughed, but there was nothing to laugh at.

“We must hurry,” urged Rosalie. “That old man seemed to hypnotize me.”

“Yes,” said Cleo.

“Why what on earth is the matter?” Rosalie demanded sensing the mood Cleo had fallen into. “This is worse than the pickle jar when the girls told you it would make a good drinking pan for Lance.”

“Weren’t you with us when we saw Lorna in the mountains the day we hiked out to Peaks?” Cleo asked her companion. Of course they were both hurrying along as fast as they could go.

“Why?” Rosalie asked quickly.

“Because that’s the old man the girls called a tramp,” Cleo declared.

“Well, what of it? Don’t most artists usually look trampish? Isn’t that a sign of genius?”

“But you see, Rosalie,” Cleo was desperately in need of a confidante now, “Lorna knows him.”

“What of that? So do we?”

It was useless. Rosalie couldn’t understand Cleo’s sudden interest. She couldn’t make her understand without telling her the whole story. And there was not time to do that just then.

“Well, anyhow,” concluded Rosalie, “don’t look as if someone had just died and left you penniless. Cheer up before we get to the dock.”

“I guess my face is an awful give-away,” Cleo smiled at that. “It seems to tell more than I know myself.”

“That’s the best of having an intelligent face,” answered Rosalie, just as the girls on the dock began to question them.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### LORNA'S RELEASE

“Did you hear what he said about red-haired girls?” Cleo asked Rosalie. They were back at the camp after another hilarious sail on the lake.

“You mean old Santa Claus, of course,” Rosalie responded. “I heard him, but I haven’t got red hair; neither have you.”

“But Lorna has.”

“What of it? Think he’d like her to pose for him?”

“He might.”

“Better tell her about it. She might want to stay up here after we break camp. But for Pete’s sake don’t get Lorna’s troubles on your mind just now,” begged the rushing Rosalie. “We’ve got heaps of things to do.”

“I’m going to look for Anne first thing I do,” Cleo said determinedly.

“Poor Anne!” sighed Rosalie in mock sympathy. “She will have to listen. Don’t forget to tell her about the pickle jug. That seemed to worry you a lot, you know,” and Rosalie laughed so lightly Cleo was obliged to join in.

“When I tell you why, you’ll be sorry you didn’t listen,” she threatened as Rosalie started.

“I’ll listen then,” she promised, running after the procession that was winding its way up the hill from the dock, Helen still leading with the fat brown jug in her arms.

Cleo almost ran into Anne as both met where their paths joined.

“Oh, hello, little sis!” Anne greeted, in her affectionate way. “Where’d you get all the roses that bloom in your cheeks today?”

“Oh, do come some place to talk, Anne,” begged Cleo. “I’ve got so many things to tell you.”

“I’m on my way, but, of course, I’ll stop to listen,” agreed Anne. “But I have to hurry — —”

“Everyone has to hurry today.” There was the least hint of hurt in Cleo’s voice.

“But it’s race day, and you know, sis, I have a lot of girls depending on me for their last touches. But do come along. I’ve got time enough to listen to you no matter who else waits,” and Anne threw an arm around Cleo’s shoulder, reassuringly.

Cleo began her story at once—that is as quickly as both could drop down on the grass, safely away from the girls who seemed to be so ceaselessly running around.

“Anne!” began Cleo, “I know who broke the urn.”

“You do? Who?”

“Lance.”

“Lance? The big dog?”

“Yes. I just found out.”

“How ever did you?” Anne was too surprised to hide her feelings. She was fairly breathless.

“I don’t see why I didn’t think of it before,” Cleo reasoned, “when I found the red ribbon on the poor dog’s ear.”

“The ribbon that was tied around the urn?”

“Yes. You know, the night of the big storm Lance again went under the house, he used to sleep there before I went up to the tent, and when he wouldn’t be quiet,” Cleo was telling it as quickly as she could, “I went to the door— —”

“In all that storm?”

“Oh, no, it was after the storm. And when I went to pat him and try to comfort him, I found his poor ear all snarled up in that ribbon!”

“Cleo, you didn’t! And you think he stuck his head in that urn?”

“And of course couldn’t get it out without breaking it, I mean the urn,” laughed Cleo.

“Of all things!” Anne paused to realize it. “And they half blamed Lorna!”

“They whole blamed her. Some of the girls saw her running away after the crash. That did look awfully suspicious.” Even Cleo was willing to concede that much.

Anne was on her feet now and Cleo too had jumped up suddenly.

“Have you told Miss Horton?” Anne asked her sister.

“I haven’t had a chance. And now it’s lunch time, and oh, Anne, I’ve got lots more to tell you — —”

“There’s one of my star pupils looking for me now,” Anne interrupted. “I’ve got to see her stroke before dinner. She’s so hopeful and has tried so hard I do hope she makes out well. Are you coming this way, Cleo?”

“No thanks, Anne. I am hoping I may get a chance to speak to Lorna soon. I’m so full of exciting news I’m afraid I’ll blow up if I don’t tell it all to somebody soon.”

“Don’t tell them my part,” Anne cautioned playfully. “Oh, hello Barbara! Here I am! All ready for you!” she called out to a girl the next moment, and Cleo watched her as she swung gracefully down the path of broken wildflowers.

A few hours later Cleo did actually manage to find the elusive Lorna, and she found her all smiles!

“Why, Lorna! What has happened?” Cleo asked instantly, for anyone could have seen that something very pleasant must have happened to Lorna.

“Oh, lots of things,” replied Lorna. “But I can’t tell you all at once. What’s your news?”

“Lorna, I know how the urn got broken.”

“You do? How?”

“Don’t *you* know?”

“Cleo! Do you suspect me!”

“Suspect you! Why Lorna! Mercy me! Don’t let’s get all mixed up again. Didn’t you know that Lance broke the urn?” Cleo was beginning to worry again.

“No!”

“Well, he must have for I took the red ribbon that was on the neck of the urn off *his* ear.”

“You did!” Lorna’s really lovely gray eyes were fairly dancing now.

“I thought you might have seen him do it and you ran after him — —”

“I ran after him, and I had heard the crash. But I never thought of his breaking it. I thought *he* was running after someone else who did break it!”

“Oh, how funny!” cried Cleo, laughing in real earnest. “You ran after Lance and you thought Lance was running after someone else?”

“Yes.” Lorna actually managed to laugh herself then. Anyone could see she was happy now, that someone must have given her permission to laugh, was the way it occurred to Cleo.

“Now, that’s exactly what happened,” Lorna said at last, “and I was stupid not to guess it myself, for I couldn’t catch Lance; he was so frightened.”

“At the thing he had stuck his head in, of course,” Cleo went on. “And when he smashed it no wonder the poor dog ran!”

“Oh, Cleo!” exclaimed Lorna suddenly. “How lovely everything is coming out!”

“Isn’t it?” replied Cleo vaguely. She did not yet understand why Lorna was happy at last, but she was being happy with her.

“And I’ve got the biggest secret! But I can’t tell you — —”

“Can’t tell me?” Cleo grumbled.

“Not yet. You’ll know after the races.”

“Oh, I’m not interested in the races,” complained Cleo. They were under the oak tree not far from the west side tents.

“Neither am I interested in the races,” again Lorna laughed. “I guess you know why. No more swimming for me this summer.”

“But say, Lorna,” coaxed her companion, “do you know you never told me what you hid under my cot the other night?”

“Of course I didn’t. That’s part of the secret!”

“Oh!” Cleo turned her head away and pretended to be offended. “Then I guess I won’t tell you my news, either.”

“Have you more news? I’m going right up to the office to tell Miss Horton about Lance. I’m glad my name will be cleared — —”

“It always was clear,” Cleo interrupted her. “You don’t suppose for an instant that anyone thought *you* broke the urn, do you?”

“Well, they acted as if they did. But I don’t care now, anyhow,” and Lorna was ready to trip off just like any other girl, all her moodiness having disappeared as if by magic. “For two summers I have had to take all kinds of

suspicious— —” she stopped and came nearer Cleo. “You know, don’t you,” she said, “that this is your conquest?”

“What?” asked Cleo, innocently.

“What I’m getting now, vindication,” Lorna said, her red head thrown high and her gray eyes flashing. Cleo thought then of the old artist and his Titian haired girls, but she would not risk a word about that at this crowded time.

“Was there anything to vindicate?” she asked instead.

“Well, yes, in a way there was,” Lorna admitted. “You see, I had to do a lot of suspicious things.”

“Why?” risked Cleo simply.

“To help a very dear friend and keep a promise made to him,” Lorna answered, and the laugh had suddenly gone out of her fine gray eyes.

“Don’t tell me about it if you’d rather not,” Cleo said, gently.

“I’m just dying to tell you, Cleo. You should know. If it had not been for you I would have left camp early this summer,” Lorna declared. Cleo, naturally, did not care to be thus praised, but Lorna went on as if being driven by some magic force. “Yes,” she continued, “when all the girls turned against me *you* remained my friend.”

“Oh, they didn’t really turn against you, Lorna,” Cleo defended the absent ones, “but, you see, they didn’t understand.”

“Neither did you, but you guessed. Well, at any rate, Cleo, you have won. I’m happy now and I can do as I please. I don’t have to worry about people seeing me take food from camp— —”

“Lorna!” expostulated Cleo. She hated to hear her talk that way.

“But I did do it, and I’m not ashamed of it, either. If I had not had permission to take the extra food that was given to me here, I just couldn’t have stayed. I had to think of someone else, you see.”

“Yes.” Cleo replied, but she really didn’t see at all.

“But do let’s go,” Lorna begged. “I’m going straight to the office and won’t they laugh when they hear about Lance!”

“I must go down to the lake,” Cleo explained as she too moved away from the quiet spot. “I promised I’d go watch the races, although I really can’t get a bit interested in them today.”

“Good bye!” called Lorna gaily. “See you at sundown,” and then she was off.

No wonder Cleo could not become interested in the races. She was thinking of the revelations which were only part of Lorna’s queer story.

“And she credits me—I wish she couldn’t,” she was thinking. “What I did I just loved to do, and isn’t that all any girl wants?”

The girls had congregated about the lake, and among the others Nellie-Ellen was all excitement. She was taking part in a tub-race and she seemed to fancy she was going up in an air-ship, the way she flew around. And she looked quite capable of even that athletic skill, for Nellie Glennon had improved greatly since coming to Camp Climax. It was to be hoped her fond and good mother would be well satisfied with her experiment when she would eventually behold the buxom Nellie—for Mrs. Glennon wanted to see her daughter big, strong, and even handsome!

Anne was capable as ever, giving encouragement and advice to the group of girls she had been training for the months past. As Cleo watched her glide through the water, showing this girl her arm stroke and that one how to breathe, another how to kick out without making an effort, she thought of the day only a year before when she had seen Anne win a swimming match herself, in the pool at the girls’ club in the city. Then Cleo had longed for a chance to try her own powers in the water, but here she was today not caring, indifferent, only thinking of a story—a girl’s story in which she had found herself one of the active characters.

“I guess we follow our own sweet will, after all,” she was secretly admitting to herself only. “I thought I wanted to come to camp to learn to hike, to swim and to do all the other camp feats, but I guess I love romance best. I just can hardly stay here and watch this race; I’m so anxious to hear Lorna’s secret.”

Which was only partly true, for Cleo had learned many things in camp, things she had planned to learn, although she had not become one of the best swimmers.

Farther down the lake’s shore with another of the groups of girls now watching the sports, was one who, if she had been asked what Cleo had achieved in her summer at Camp Climax, would have unhesitatingly said:

“A conquest!”

Lorna Thornton was only one of many girls to be met wherever girls meet together, who had had just enough trouble, too early in life to make

them oversensitive. To her the least inattention seemed a slight, where another girl would have laughed at her companions and only be spurred on by their competition, she fell back and felt outmatched and outclassed. But more than all of this the one factor that had contributed to her imagined misery, was the necessity of hiding her real self behind a promise which had in two summers become an unbearable and almost cruel restriction.

“If only I could have told them,” Lorna was thinking now as she watched the races, for she, too, was looking back on the summer’s experiences. “But I am going to tell them soon.”

With that release the world had suddenly brightened for Lorna, the skies were true blue today, and the sunshine seemed lovingly warm and affectionate.

In this world where the grown folks are ever the dictators, girls, mere girls are often overlooked in their troubles and their anxieties. But because a girl is only a girl she may actually suffer more and not yet know the comfort of another’s confidence. This had happened to Lorna, until Cleo, in her gentle way, had stolen into that confidence, bit by bit.

And this friendship, so hard to share at first yet so much needed from the very beginning, had now finally bloomed into the full flower of understanding.

“I don’t see how she ever did it,” Lorna had to tell herself as she saw Cleo waving to her. “I was so mean to her at first.”

## CHAPTER XXV

### CLIMAX

When the races were over, and the victorious ones as well as the losers shared honors together, a call came for every one to be ready by five o'clock for a meeting in the assembly room of the big house on the hill.

"Some doings!" Rosalie predicted, "and it isn't anything about the races, either."

"Maybe the winners are going to get prizes," Cleo guessed, curiously.

"No, no indeedy. We don't swim for prizes up here; we swim for sport," Rosalie insisted. "Nellie-Ellen did pretty well, didn't she? Although as a tubber she would have made a wonderful pin-wheel. Did you ever see anyone make as many turn overs? Good thing she was tied in that tub," Rosalie was still showing the excitement of the races. She had done pretty well herself in a homemade canoe race.

"Well, that's over," Anne sighed, "and I guess no one's heart is broken. Come along, sis. There's something big going on." Anne's eyes were twinkling.

"And you know what it is," Cleo complained. "I don't see why I have to be left out."

"You'll know in a few minutes," Anne promised, and it did not seem much longer than that before they were all in the assembly room—every girl in camp, including Lorna Thornton.

"What's under the cover?" whispered Jane. "It looks like our pickle jar."

Jane had reference to something tall, shaped like a vase, covered with one of the art class unbleached cloths. It stood up all alone and was the only object covered. All around on other tables were arranged the articles to be put in the exhibit by the various groups of Camp Climax, for at the season's end, the exhibit always became the most interesting feature of all other affairs, even more generally interesting than sports and athletic events.

The director and her assistants were up around the piano, conferring quietly, but the girls out around the room were conferring noisily. It was not easy to quiet down at once, after shouting by the lake, yelling on the running

track and hollering on the “almost tennis court,” where balls were batted and returned, but the game could hardly have been called tennis.

Finally Miss Horton said; “Silence, please, girls,” and the racket collapsed like a pricked balloon. When the director spoke everyone wanted to listen, expecting to hear something really worth while.

“We’ve had a splendid day,” Miss Horton began, smilingly, “and everyone deserves a word of commendation. Those who didn’t win, at least tried, and those who didn’t try,” she was almost laughing now, “had the fun of cheering the others. So our sport days have been concluded. You will all get your ratings in Miss Marlow’s bulletin report.” Miss Marlow was already putting names and figures on the big black-board and, naturally, the athletic contestants were eagerly watching her.

“But now,” Miss Horton began in that different sort of voice which always means a new subject, “we have something very interesting and very special to talk about.” She paused, looked toward Lorna, smiled, and in another moment went on.

“When the girls of art class A modeled an urn, carried it to town had it baked, brought it back and left it on Little Hill to dry more thoroughly, we all know what happened. The urn was broken in the night, and no one knew how the accident had occurred.”

Cleo was tugging at Anne’s arm but she didn’t know she was doing it. She was so excited she just couldn’t sit still. She could see Lorna with her class, and Lorna’s cheeks certainly were a prettier pink than usual—yes, the old artist was right, Titian knew the color hair that made the prettiest painted pictures.

“I’m afraid,” Miss Horton was still talking, “that some of us made hasty conclusions in trying to solve the mystery, but the matter was really very simple after all, for our good friend, the collie we call Lance, broke that urn!”

“The dog!” a unanimous exclamation.

“Yes. Dogs like to see what’s in jugs and jars, and I suppose Lance poked his big head in, fully expecting to pull it out again, but his head wouldn’t come. He must have had a great time before he finally succeeded in breaking the urn, and I don’t see how we could blame him for doing it, under the circumstances.” Again she paused. The girls were all whispering and exclaiming, and the buzzing in the room sounded like noise made by bees swarming.

Cleo was besieged by questions. The girls insisted that she knew all about it, and when Helen managed to get a whisper to reach her she just said:

“The little red ribbon told the tale.”

“That’s that,” Jane remarked to Laura Bird. “But, what’s under the tablecloth?”

“I think you would like to hear someone else talk now,” said Miss Horton next. “Lorna, will you please tell us what you know about the broken urn?” Silence then descended suddenly.

Lorna stood up and any one could have guessed how she felt. She wanted to explain but the situation was trying and she acted a little embarrassed. It was Cleo who trembled, however. She was very glad Miss Horton had not asked her any questions.

“I was going over to our barracks,” Lorna began in a timid voice, “when I heard a crash. I hadn’t seen Lance until then, and then he was running over toward the garage. Of course, I thought he was after whoever broke the urn because I had just heard the crash—I never thought of his breaking it.”

“Then who found that out?” one of the girls asked impatiently. It was a purely informal meeting and anyone was allowed to talk, so the speaker was not being rude.

“Cleo Kimball found the red ribbon on Lance’s ear,” spoke up Helen, unable to keep still any longer.

This announcement brought out a perfect roar of voices, and presently Lorna was trying to answer all sorts of questions while Cleo didn’t try. She just shook her head and begged the girls to keep still till the rest of the story was told.

“Do you honestly think that’s our pickle jar all covered up so nicely over there?” Jane asked again. She was anxious about that jar.

“It might be,” ventured Anette, “but it isn’t a pickle jar, it’s a cookie jar — —”

“We now have a little presentation to make,” Marie Marlow next announced. “When our urn was broken a kind friend took pity upon us and set about to get us another. It is much handsomer than ours ever could have been made, and it is the gift of Lorna Thornton!”

No one spoke. A gift from Lorna! They were watching Marie uncover the article on the center table.

“There!” she said as she drew the cloth away, “Isn’t that wonderful?”

It was indeed wonderful! A dark, richly colored earthen jar, decorated with grapes, grapes that hung in bunches, modeled so naturally the birds might have been deceived by them, colored in beautiful deep purples and glorious shades of red.

“Lorna gave that!”

“You may have heard of the artist— —” Marie mentioned the name of a famous artist, “who lost his health a few years ago. He is Lorna’s grandfather and has been staying in these mountains so as to live in the open. He had made this jar, Lorna knew we wanted one, so you see how we got it!”

“The lovely old man! He’s Lorna’s grandfather!” Cleo didn’t want to hear any more; she knew the story then. The artist who talked about Titian’s pictures was Lorna’s grandfather. And he had given this beautiful piece to the rookies. This was the urn he had referred to as having just been sold. Now they would all know who Lorna was. The grand-daughter of one of America’s best known artists!

But it was not in the crowded assembly room that Lorna finished telling Cleo the story. The girls were finally scattered, for supper time was imminent. Just Lorna and Cleo had been left alone, although Anne had had quite a time dragging Nellie-Ellen away from them.

“Oh, I’m so happy, Cleo!” Lorna exclaimed, when her friend looked into her eyes, unable herself, for the moment, to say anything. “Do you think the girls like it?”

“Liked it? Lorna, it’s simply beautiful. And your grandfather made it!”

“Oh, he does that sort of thing easily,” Lorna replied. “His best work is pictures. He finished the painting of my head last week, and he has just sold it at a splendid price.”

“He painted your picture?”

“Yes, that’s why I had to be absent so often; I was posing for him. And he wouldn’t even let me tell Miss Horton,” Lorna added. “You see, his mind was endangered last year and we had to humor him. I’m his favorite in our family; that’s why I came up to this camp, to be near him.”

How simple it all was! Of course, Lorna had to be away from camp when she was posing for that great artist. It did seem as if Miss Horton might have been told, but since Lorna had promised her grandfather not to tell anyone, and since Lorna had always obtained an excuse to visit friends in the village, it didn't seem so very peculiar after all.

"I'm so glad he sold the picture, Lorna," Cleo said finally, "but I should loved to have seen it."

"You may. The lady who bought it may exhibit it for grandfather. She is his friend, has always believed in his work and that's what makes me so happy," Lorna declared. "He has consented to leave the little hut he has lived in here for two years, and go back to the city with me. There were times when he even neglected to get his food," she recalled, "and that was why I used to fetch him things from our kitchen."

The supper warning bell was sounding. Even Cleo and Lorna would have to eat. But they didn't feel much like it just then; with hearts and minds filled to overflowing.

"So all our story is told," murmured Cleo, tugging at Lorna's arm as she had a habit of doing when an arm came just so near her.

"All but Lance," sighed Lorna. "What am I going to do with him? He's grandfather's dog and we can't take him in to our apartment."

"You can't?" Cleo was quickly thinking of a plan.

"No. And I hate to part with him, altogether."

"I'll tell you," Cleo began again, "I've got a friend, a boy who is coming to see me tomorrow. He's at a boys' camp here and his folks are moving to the country this fall. Would you let him take care of Lance till our folks get their place ready in the country? I'll want him then."

No more perfect plan could have been devised, for when Shammy Malanaphy dropped out of his flivver the next morning to call at Camp Climax, he found two girls and a lovely big dog waiting to greet him. And when he drove off again the big dog was sitting on the front seat beside him, his plummy tail quiet for once, although his ears were "winking."

Lance liked boys and flivvers better than he liked girls and Egyptian urns, even better than he liked knot holes under a barracks floor, it seemed just then.

But as he rode away the Camp Climax girls almost wept to see him go, although they too would be riding to the city in a few more days, days filled

with such tasks as packing up camp equipment and cementing summer friendships.

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.

Because of copyright considerations, the illustrations by Thelma Gooch (1895-1973) have been omitted from this etext.

[The end of *Cleo's Conquest* by Lilian Garis]