

PEGGY AND THE
BROTHERHOOD

ELSIE J. OXENHAM



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PEGGY AND THE BROTHERHOOD

BY
ELSIE JEANETTE OXENHAM

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"GLAD TO SEE YOU, BROTHER PIG!"

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CHAPTER I

CAMP KEEMA FINDS A GUARDIAN

‘That’s perfect, Peg,’ said Mrs. Mason. ‘Don’t trouble over it any more.’

‘Perfect enough, mummie?’

‘As perfect as possible, Peg.’

Peggy laughed in recognition of a family joke and rose from the floor she had been staining walnut-brown. The family had moved into this little house only three days before, and everyone except the babes had been hard at work ever since.

Marian, the grown-up eldest of the family, brought the children in for lunch. ‘That garden’s a fearful sight! I don’t know how we’ll ever make it look decent.’

‘I’ll do the garden, if you’ll let me off school for this term,’ Peggy promised.

‘Perfectly able for anything!’ Marian jeered. ‘I wonder we didn’t leave everything to you!’

‘You won’t have me after Monday, if you make me go to school.’

‘We’re nearly straight, thanks to the splendid way you girls have worked,’ said Mrs. Mason. ‘I’m going to sit still this afternoon and sew curtains. Wouldn’t you like to go off and explore?’

‘Oh, mother!’ The tones of rapture showed how much Marian and Peggy had been longing to go.

‘But ought we to leave you? We could sew curtains too, and the hills can wait,’ Peggy began.

‘The hills can wait, but can you?’ her mother retorted. ‘I’ve seen your faces these last two days. You’ve been splendid, both of you, but I’ve known where your hearts were. It’s Saturday afternoon, and we’re straight enough for the week-end. I’ll watch the babies, and we’ll do nothing more till Monday. As Peg will be at school then, the rest of us will have to work hard! Off you go, as soon as you’ve finished lunch. Be home before dark; that’s all I ask.’

‘Mother, you angel!’ cried Peggy.

‘We’ve been dying to go out on the hills,’ Marian admitted. ‘How like you to understand, mother!’

‘She’s perfect. That’s where I get it from,’ Peggy explained.

‘Perfect in every possible way, Peg,’ her mother agreed. ‘But don’t be late home, or I shall be worried.’

‘We won’t worry you, dear,’ and the girls set off in high spirits.

The family was an ill-assorted one, and from this had grown Peggy’s nickname of ‘Peggy-Perfect.’ ‘We’re in spasms,’ Peggy was wont to explain. ‘Marian and Dick were the first spasm. Then after ten years I and my twin turned up, but he died before he was a month old. When I was ten, the family began again, and we had the babes, with just a year between them. I’m the odd man in the middle. I’ve had to be both boy and girl, the whole of my pair, all by myself.’

‘And perfectly capable of it! Perfectly satisfied, Peg!’ Marian would assure her. ‘You know you’ve been thoroughly spoiled because you were only one. You’ve had all the attention for two. Everybody’s been making it up to you all your life. You’ve had all the advantages of belonging to a family, with all the extras of the only child.’

‘I am perfectly satisfied,’ Peggy would agree.

Their new bungalow home was perched with many others on a windy hilltop in Sussex, grouped round an ancient windmill. The hill fell away steeply, and the hill-dwellers looked out over a stretch of country to the shining Channel. Down on the coast was a town, with pointed

church spires; the sun, lighting up the sea, glinted on the rows of glasshouses, where the nursery-gardeners grew grapes and tomatoes and chrysanthemums for the markets. It was a sheltered climate down by the sea, protected by the downs; but on the hill by the black windmill the sunshine was tempered by cool breezes.

Marian and Peggy turned joyfully up the road from the mill and set out along the open downland track, towards the hills which had been calling them all through these working days. A long valley lay on their right, with hills beyond; they gazed down into it and wondered at the endless whirr of motors on the London road.

‘Straight on, I suppose. Peg?’

‘Oh, let’s go as far as we can! I’ve been aching to explore.’

‘So have I,’ Marian agreed, and they plunged down tracks among gorse bushes, and lost themselves, but came back to the road along the crest at last, and went so far that the sea was lost to sight.

‘Here’s a little wood. The road goes right through it. This is thrilling!’ Peggy cried, as they passed a barn standing above a tree-filled hollow.

Their cart-track ran between walls of hazel bushes, spikey hawthorns and worn-looking oaks, still brown and bare, for it was February. Beyond the patch of woodland was the gleam of open, green downs.

The road was muddy under the trees. The girls were picking their way carefully, their eyes on the ruts between the pools, when a shout startled them. As they stood gazing up at the tangled growth on the bank above, three boys broke through the bushes, leapt down into the road, and raced away towards the downs, calling triumphantly to one another. The leader held something wrapped in white paper in his arms.

‘I’d like to know what they’ve been up to!’ Peggy exclaimed. ‘They look a nasty crowd!’

‘There’s someone else up there,’ Marian spoke cautiously. ‘Look, Peg! There’s a clearing, and there are people in it. Perhaps it’s a picnic party and those hooligans interfered.’

Among the bare stems Peggy’s eyes caught gleams of yellow. Were there girls up there, dressed all alike? Was it a school? But what an odd colour for a school uniform!

Then, to her amazement and endless delight, the hazel boughs were parted roughly and a girl stood gazing after the flying boys; a girl in a long, straight gown of old-gold cloth, with brown leather fringe at her knees and under her arms, with a rope of brilliant beads about her neck, and a band of patterned beadwork across her forehead, with hair in two long, brown plaits on her breast.

‘Minnehaha!’ murmured Marian. ‘Are we in the backwoods? Is this really Sussex? Is it a cinema stunt, or a rehearsal of a play?’

‘Or a fancy-dress picnic,’ Peggy whispered. ‘Doesn’t she look top-hole? Oh, speak to her, Marian! She hasn’t seen us yet!’

‘Minnehaha’ was staring ruefully after the boys. ‘It’s no good, Robin,’ she called, to someone behind. ‘The little brutes are miles away. What shall we do? Pack up and go home?’

Behind her came crowding other girls, all wearing yellow gowns and beads; they had bobbed or shingled hair, smooth or curly, under their headbands, but all wore the bands of glittering beadwork. There seemed a great many of them, though presently when the crowd disentangled itself there proved to be only six.

‘We’ll never catch those little beasts,’ a small girl said mournfully. ‘All our cakes and toffee gone!’

‘Better the toffee! They’ve messed up our meeting. What are we going to do about it?’ the elder girl with the brown plaits asked severely.

‘I say, Phyllis, there’s someone there,’ a girl with bobbed yellow hair had spied Marian and Peggy.

A dark, shingled girl began to giggle. 'We look funny, all dressed up out here!'

'It's only two girls,' the tall leader said haughtily, and withdrew with dignity.

But her exit ended ignominiously. She caught her foot in a trail of ivy, and rolled over in a heap among the hazel twigs.

Three of her party collapsed into giggles; the two elder ones sprang to her help. 'Phyl, are you hurt?'

'Come on, Peg! We'll make friends,' and Marian sprang up the bank.

'Have you hurt yourself?' she asked anxiously. 'I hope you haven't twisted your ankle?'

Phyllis sat rubbing one ankle, flushed and annoyed. 'Thanks; no, I think it's all right. It was stupid of me. It isn't hurt, really; only wrenched for a moment. It will be all right after a rest.'

'Then while you rest, *won't* you tell us what you are?' Peggy pleaded, her eyes hungrily on the yellow-clad circle. 'You can't be cinema people! Are you a play? What are you pretending to be?'

'Indian maidens,' Marian said promptly, as a look flashed round the girls. 'Where's your wigwam? Oughtn't you to have a camp fire? These are your deerskin robes, aren't they? I'm sure you're called Minnehaha or Nokomis,' to the girl sitting on the ground.

'Do we look like a cinema crowd?' asked a girl in spectacles pathetically. 'What a blow! You are unkind!'

'You look top-hole,' Peggy assured her. 'I like the one with long hair best, though. Are you acting *Hiawatha*? Is it a rehearsal?'

'We have a camp fire, up there among the trees,' the girl on the ground made up her mind to be friendly. She tossed back her brown plaits, and looked up at Marian. 'And, into the bargain, we *are* a Camp Fire. Do you mean to say you don't know?'

'It's a—a thing for girls, like the Guides,' began the yellow-haired girl, when she was interrupted by a chorus of groans. 'Yes, I know, but they don't understand yet. Be quiet and let Phyl explain.'

'There are Camp Fire Girls all over America and quite a lot in England too,' said Phyllis, from the ground. 'You can have from six to twenty girls in a Camp, but fifteen's about enough. We had a big Camp in our school, and we were all fearfully keen. But our Guardian left and the new gym person who took her place was mad over Guides. She messed up our Camp by starting a Guide Company, and a lot of our girls joined. Yes, that's how we feel,' as the crowd groaned again. 'We don't know how they could. We're the faithful remnant, who wouldn't be talked over.'

'They wanted to stick in with Miss Curtis,' said the fair-haired girl. 'And some were tempted by the thought of being patrol-leaders and wearing stripes and whistles. It broke up our Camp; we couldn't ask anyone to be Guardian to six.'

'There was nobody to ask,' said the girl in spectacles. 'The Guides have bagged everybody who's any good.'

'Were you having a meeting out here?' cried Peggy. 'Oh, would you let me join? We've only been here three days, and I don't know a soul, and I want to know people frightfully badly! Do you wear those dresses for all your meetings? What do the pictures on them mean? Where do you get the lovely beads? Who were those boys we saw running away? Had they stolen something from you?'

'Your name ought to be Wiwanga—"to ask questions,"' the fair girl remarked.

'How do you mean, my name? Oh, is that Indian? How do you know it means that? Do you have Indian names? What's yours? Where do you find them?'

'Peg, you simply pour out questions,' Marian remonstrated. 'You'll hear all about it in time. Did those boys interrupt your meeting?' she asked of Phyllis.

'They barged down on us and stole our "eats"; cakes that I had made and toffee made by Yenís. That kid is Yenís; it means Wild Rose. She's Maud really. We were taken by surprise, or we'd have given the little brutes something to remember. We six have meetings on our own,' Phyllis explained. 'And we were dying to have one out of doors. We're Camp Keema—"in the face of the wind"—and we meet outside whenever we can. It's so early in the year that there aren't many people about, so we decided to risk a meeting on the downs. We couldn't do it in summer, when there are visitors, but hardly anybody comes along here in winter, and although to-day's so topping it's only February. We wore our coats over our gowns and walked up from the bus, and we'd found a clear space and had just begun the meeting when that howling rabble of village hooligans swept down on us and carried off our "eats."'

'Phyl's Indian name is Oyaka, "to tell a story," because she does it so well,' the fair girl explained. 'I'm Sisoka, the Robin. This'—pointing to the girl in glasses—'is Notaway, the Thinker. She's brainy; you can see she looks it. The dark, bobbed kid is Tchuka, "to swim upstream"; she's fearfully ambitious. Maud, my young sister, is Yenís, the Wild Rose; and the other infant is Keya, the Tortoise. We have other names as well, you know.'

'That's enough to remember!' Marian said laughing. 'It sounds most fascinating. Won't you go on with your meeting and let us watch?'

'Those little wretches might come back. No, I think we'll give it up and go home, sadder and wiser than we came,' said the Story-Teller gloomily. 'We were asses to attempt a meeting out here. You must have a private spot for the Council Fire.'

'Couldn't you come to our garden?' Peggy pleaded breathlessly. 'It's just along the hill here, close to the mill. There are robins in it, and it faces the wind, and you could tell stories and think. The wild roses aren't out, and we haven't found a stream or a tortoise yet; but there are trees and bushes to hide you from the lane, and the house shuts off the road. It's private; and we'd be ever so glad to have you. And perhaps you'd let us watch.'

'It isn't much of a garden yet,' Marian explained. 'We've only been in the house three days, and all our time has been taken up indoors. But there is a patch of grass well screened by trees. Would you care to use it?'

'We could fetch cakes from the dairy,' Peggy pleaded. 'Do come!'

The girls of Camp Keema had laughed at her use of their chosen names. Now they looked at one another, and then at Phyllis, who was obviously their leader.

'Would you really have us?' Her face lit up, and she began to scramble to her feet. 'Help me up, Robin! Fetch your coats, girls, and pick up the kit!'

'But what about your foot?' asked Marian.

'I'll help to pack,' and Peggy ran off with the Wild Rose and the Tortoise.

'It's better, thanks. I can walk; it was only a temporary wrench. We'll accept your offer gladly, for a special reason. The girls who went off to be Guides said we'd never be able to have an outdoor meeting in February. We want to say we did,' Phyllis explained.

'I'll bring your coat,' said the Robin. 'You'd better not take any more risks. It was that trailing ivy tripped you up.'

As they walked along the turf road towards the cluster of bungalows, the Story-Teller and the Robin and the Thinker fell behind with Marian, while the younger girls and Peggy ran on ahead, she still asking questions about the Camp Fire.

'Did you say you had only just come here?' asked Phyllis. Notaway, the Thinker, had nudged her and whispered an urgent suggestion. 'Are you living here or are you only visitors?'

'Oh, we're settling down; we came three days ago.'

'Then would you, could you possibly be our Guardian?' the Robin blurted out her question.

‘The Guides can’t have bagged you yet,’ Phyllis added. ‘They bag everybody, so they’re sure to ask you. But wouldn’t you rather have a gown than a uniform? A Council Fire’s much more romantic than a parade.’

‘You’ll want to do something,’ the Thinker urged.

‘But how very sudden!’ Marian objected, laughing. ‘You haven’t known me for half an hour.’

‘We must ask you before the Guides do,’ the Story-Teller pointed out. ‘I’m sure you’d be a jolly Guardian.’

‘But I know nothing whatever about the Camp Fire!’

‘We’d lend you the books. It’s very easy. We’re an awfully nice crowd,’ the Robin hinted. ‘You’d soon love us very much.’

‘I’m sure I should! But I don’t even know what you do.’

‘You will, in about ten minutes,’ Notaway reminded her. ‘It’s not difficult, really.’

‘We’d call you Kitigan, “a garden,” because you’re going to lend us one. You could have flowers, and shady corners, and trees, and little summer-house tents on your gown. You’d think of quiet, peaceful gardens and you’d show us the way into them,’ said the Story-Teller. ‘If the idea appealed to you, that is.’

Marian gave her a startled look. The name and its symbolism appealed to her very much.

‘We’ve given your sister a name,’ the Robin added. ‘Kitigan and Wiwanga! Oh, *do* be our Guardian! It would give us a fresh start.’

‘I’d have to think about it,’ Marian said soberly. ‘It’s a very surprising idea. I feel you ought to know me really well before considering it seriously. No one could say you know me well yet.’

The girls laughed. ‘But you’ve been interested and sympathetic, though we’re strangers to you. There was no need for you to help us with our meeting. You’ve understood how we felt. That means a lot,’ said the Robin.

‘Tell me more about the Camp Fire, and about your school and the Guides,’ Marian demanded.

The younger girls and Peggy, who were all fourteen-year-olds, came racing back, and Peggy hurled herself on her sister.

‘Marian! Oh, isn’t it gorgeous? Isn’t it luck? They’re Miss Ransome’s girls; I saw Maud’s tan jersey, just like my new one. It’s too good to be true. I must join their Camp Fire now! I’m going to tell Mother. Come on, all of you!’ and she dashed off again, with the Wild Rose, the Swimmer, and the Tortoise at her heels.

Marian turned to Ruth and Phyllis. ‘Is this really so? Do you go to Miss Ransome’s? Peg’s to start there on Monday—half-term. Her green tunic and her tan stockings and jersey and tie are waiting, ready for Monday morning.’

‘We are the Green-and-Tans,’ Ruth admitted. ‘The town calls us that. How jolly lucky for Peggy-Wiwanga! If she’d gone to another school she couldn’t have joined Camp Keema.’

‘It looks as if you were our ready-made Guardian, Miss Mason,’ Phyllis coaxed.

‘But it needs thinking over,’ Marian said. ‘Tell me more!’ and the Camp Fire Girls all talked at once till they reached the garden gate.

The Wild Rose, the Tortoise, and the Swimmer Upstream were waiting for them; Peggy had rushed in to explain the invasion to her mother.

She appeared again, waving to them to come in by the back gate. Marian left the elder girls to follow, and slipped into the house.

‘Mother, has Peg explained? But she hasn’t heard the latest. These jolly girls want me to be their Guardian; on a half-hour’s acquaintance. Do tell me what to do! Of course I must

make them wait till they know me better, but do you think I could be encouraging about it? I'd love it; but would I be good enough?"

'I'm sending the children out with Katie. We'll ask if we may watch the meeting,' Mrs. Mason said. 'Peg's sure they will be willing.'

'They want to call her Wiwanga, "to ask questions." It hits her off rather well,' Marian said, laughing. 'And they propose to call me Kitigan, "a garden." Aren't they in a hurry?'

Her mother glanced at her eager face. 'If they're nice girls it would be a great interest for you. I was afraid you'd find life dull in this lonely place. You'll be happier if you have work. You might do worse than make a garden for these jolly girls. It would be excellent for Peg. They seem an impetuous set, but you would teach them caution. Shall we give them that big cake, in place of their lost provisions? We can fetch another from the dairy after tea.'

'How jolly! Oh yes, mother, let's!'

'Won't you and your mother come to watch our meeting, Miss Mason?' It was the Robin and the Thinker at the door.

Marian introduced them in perfect seriousness. 'My mother—Sisoka, the Robin; Notaway, the Thinker. We'd love to come. And will you take this as our gift to the Council Fire?'

'Oh, you are sports!' the Robin cried in delight. Then, pulling herself up hastily, 'You have welcomed us to your lodge with kindness and feasting. Come to our Council Fire, Kitigan and Mother-of-Kitigan, and we will break bread together.'

'That's why we have "eats" at our meetings,' the Thinker explained. 'It's not merely that we want extra cakes. Eating together means eternal friendship. I'm sure it does to the Red Indians. It's a very special ceremony.'

'A symbol full of deep meaning,' Mrs. Mason agreed. 'We will gladly break bread with you, O Notaway.'

The Thinker gave her a quick, amazed look. 'I say! If she won't be our Guardian, perhaps you would? Lots of Guardians are mothers of families.'

Mrs. Mason laughed. 'No, my dear Thinker. I've too much to do, with a husband and a house and two babies and Peggy on my hands. But I'll always be sympathetic and interested, and I'll gladly welcome you here for your meetings.'

'You are jolly decent! We'll tell Oyaka,' and the Robin and Notaway joined the other girls, while Mrs. Mason and Marian sat with Peggy on a dilapidated bench to watch.

The girls had thrown off their coats, and were grouped in their yellow gowns near the garden gate, all but Oyaka, who stood beside a pile of twigs, hastily gathered by Peggy and the younger three from the tangle of bushes at the end of the garden. Under the twigs was placed an electric torch, glowing through a screen of crimson paper.

'We couldn't light a fire in the woods without attracting too much attention,' the Story-Teller had explained to Marian on the way home. 'We didn't want to be noticed. We've arranged for a harmless fire, so we won't spoil your lawn. If we'd had permission from a farmer or owner, we'd have had a real fire, but we didn't know whom to ask. It's only a pretending meeting, anyway, as we've no Guardian.'

Oyaka, raising her right hand till the fore-finger pointed upwards and the fringed sleeve fell back and left her arm bare, gave a haunting call, 'Wo—he—lo!'

One by one, beginning with the Robin and ending with the Wild Rose, the girls came to join her, each repeating the call as she swept her arm up in the ceremonial greeting. Holding hands in a circle round the fire, the six sang a chanting song, followed by another with dramatic actions, in which they seemed to show the kindling of a fire and to invite outsiders to come to share its warmth.

The Wild Rose, the Swimmer, and the Tortoise brought tall candles in wooden holders and set them in a triangle about the fire. These were lit with a long taper, which the Story-Teller

handed first to the Robin, then to the Thinker, and then to the Wild Rose. Each in her turn repeated a verse, then knelt to light her candle.

At a gesture from Oyaka, the circle knelt while she repeated a short poem; they stood to sing again, and then all sat down on the grass, while Notaway read the Count of the last meeting.

Marian ran into the house, and returned with a rug and some cushions, and stood strenuously demanding attention. 'I'm sorry to interrupt, but you mustn't sit on the grass. It's only February. I thought your Law said "Hold on to Health"?'

The Story-Teller had been speaking of future meetings, and proposing a tramp over the downs. She broke off to say warmly, 'How topping of you! We didn't like to ask for rugs, but I was afraid we couldn't sit for many minutes.'

'It was beginning to come through,' said the Robin sadly, and helped to spread the cushions around the fire.

As the girls sat down again and Marian retreated to her place, the Story-Teller remained standing, and addressed the meeting.

'Sisters of Camp Keema! As we've no Guardian, we thought we couldn't do anything but sit round our fire and talk. But — —'

'You could tell stories,' the Tortoise interrupted.

'But some most important business has arisen,' Oyaka frowned at the junior. 'We're all agreed that we want a Guardian. We can't do anything properly till we have one. I propose that we ask Miss Marian Mason to be the new Guardian of Camp Keema, "the Camp that faces the Wind."'

'What a gorgeous idea!' Peggy's astonished cry rang out, but was drowned by the applause from the Camp Fire circle. 'Oh, Marian, would you? And I could join! Oh, Marian, *do*!'

Marian had sprung up, and now stood facing Phyllis across the fire.

'Marian Mason will have to think about it,' she said. 'But she thanks you very warmly for the compliment of the invitation. Mother and I will be pleased if you'll meet in this garden as often as you wish to have outdoor meetings. But as for being your Guardian, there's one very important thing I must say, and you must think it over before you ask me definitely.'

'We have asked you,' the Story-Teller remarked. 'What are we to think about?'

'Break it to us gently,' the Robin pleaded. 'Are you a Guider already?'

'No; but I don't like your attitude to the Guides,' Marian retorted. 'I can't be your Guardian under false pretences. I'm not prepared to lead you in opposition to your school Company.'

'Oh!' said the Robin, rather taken aback.

'You don't want us to love the Guides, do you?' asked the Tortoise, aghast.

'I'm glad you've said that, Miss Mason—I mean Kitigan,' said Notaway, the Thinker. 'I haven't been comfortable. I've felt spiteful towards the Guides, and it feels mean to be so spiteful. But it has been horrid for us. You do see that, don't you?'

'Please tell us how you feel, Miss Mason,' said the Story-Teller, and sat down in her place on the rug.

Marian faced the critical eyes bravely; it needed courage, for she was attracted by the invitation and she felt that this stand on her part might turn the feeling against her. Unknown to her, however, it increased the eagerness of the girls to have her as their leader, as it dispelled any idea that she might be a merely ornamental Guardian. Her honesty and courage won their respect, and showed them that she would be a leader who would indeed 'face the wind' with them.

'Indeed I do see how you have been feeling,' Marian said earnestly. 'It has been very hard for you. But if you make a fresh start, that will surely be the time to put away your sore

feeling. The Guides are a fine organisation and are doing good work. I could never agree to lead any opposition to them. And I am not sure that you were right to stand out, or that your former members were as wrong as you think when they went over to the Guides.'

'They deserted their Camp Fire,' the Story-Teller said. 'They were disloyal.'

'But they were loyal to their school,' Marian pointed out. 'They stood by their new mistress and made her start among you much easier. It was better for the school that they should work loyally under her.'

Silence fell upon Camp Keema. The girls with one accord looked at the Story-Teller.

'Do you really think they were more loyal than we were?' Oyaka asked slowly.

'It's better for your school to be whole-hearted in its Guiding than for there to be strong opposition to the ideas of a new mistress.'

'Don't you think that's rather a grown-up point of view, Miss Mason?' Notaway ventured.

'We may see it when you put it to us, but we were hardly likely to think it out for ourselves.'

'I agree with you, Notaway,' Marian assented. 'But don't you think now that I am right?'

'Yes, I do,' the Thinker said at once. 'I haven't felt nice about us and the Guides.'

'Do you think we ought to join the Guides?' asked Tchuka, the Ambitious One, anxiously.

'Not necessarily. But the more united your school can be the better. My point is, that you oughtn't to criticise the girls who have decided to be Guides. So long as you all work for the good of the school, there's not much harm if some of you remain Camp Fire. But if you turn into a critical opposition and work against one another, then there's real trouble in the school. Don't you see that?' Marian appealed to the circle, who were looking grave.

'Then we ought to bury the hatchet,' the Story-Teller remarked. 'But perhaps they won't agree, Miss Mason? They've asked us and we've refused, you know.'

'As to that,' Marian retorted, 'I don't know how unpleasant you have made yourselves.'

There was a smothered giggle from the younger girls, while the elders looked at one another consciously.

'You could try,' Marian suggested.

'There's the school bazaar coming off,' the Robin said thoughtfully. 'They're having little stalls for each patrol, and decorating them in their patrol colours—the Buttercups, the Ivy-leaves, the Lilies, and the Roses. There are only six or eight in a patrol, and there are six of us; there'll be seven and a Guardian by that time, perhaps. We could have a stall and drape it in brown and gold for the Camp Fire. They've asked us to help,' she said to Marian. 'But I'm afraid we weren't nice about it. You see, they haven't recognised us as being still a Camp Fire, because we haven't had a Guardian. But if you could put up with us, we might make friends with the rest over the bazaar. They're frightfully keen to make it a success. I believe they'd be pleased if our Guardian wrote offering a Camp Fire stall, and they'd have to recognise us then.'

'Miss Mason, if we promise to be nice to the Guides, will you try very hard to put up with us and be our Guardian?' the Story-Teller asked earnestly.

Marian looked round the eager circle. 'Not unless everybody wants me to try. We can't have any more divisions and oppositions.'

'Oh, but we do! We all want you!' The chorus of Camp Keema was unanimous, and Peggy chimed in with the rest.

'And you'll remember you're no longer rivals to the Guides? The Camp Fire must stand for working together—co-operation.'

'We will, if you'll help us, Kitigan.'

'Then I'll do my best,' Marian promised.

'Three cheers for the new Guardian of Camp Keema!' cried the Story-Teller.

CHAPTER II

THE NEW GUARDIAN

‘We’ve found a Guardian!’ The three younger Camp Fire Girls rushed into the cloakroom on Monday morning and proclaimed their news to Miss Ransome’s school.

‘Who? Where?’ The girls wearing Guide badges on their green tunics turned from their pegs and lockers. Shoes and books were dropped, as their owners stared at Con and Kitty and Maud.

‘On Saturday—up on the hills! She’s topping!’

The head of the school, Maribel Ritchie, came forward. She was fair, with a thick plait of yellow hair; besides leading the school, she was patrol-leader of the Buttercups in the Guide Company.

‘Then that’s why Phyl and Ruth were looking so satisfied and mysterious when I met them yesterday! Who is your new Guardian, Wild Rose? I’m jolly glad for Camp Keema’s sake. You’ve “faced the wind” without a Guardian for six months, and it’s too long.’

‘We’ve stuck together, though,’ said Phyllis, in the doorway. ‘You all thought we wouldn’t.’

Maribel turned quickly. ‘Oh, Phyl, come and tell us! Yes, you’ve stuck to the Camp Fire jolly well. Have you really found a Guardian? I thought you’d tried everywhere.’

‘We had. But somebody has come to our rescue. We’ve had a most tremendous stroke of luck. She’s going to be a ripping Guardian,’ and Phyllis came into the cloakroom, followed by Ruth.

The younger Guides were clamouring for information. ‘Tell us, Kitty! Don’t be a Tortoise!’ cried Gina Firth.

‘We had a meeting on the hills on Saturday afternoon—’

‘Oh, you did attempt it?’ Maribel turned to Phyllis. ‘How did it go off? Weren’t you interrupted?’

‘Did you wear your gowns?’ asked Ella, Maribel’s Second in the Buttercups.

‘They couldn’t, out on the hills!’ cried Freda, who was the same age as the Wild Rose.

‘We could and we did,’ Phyllis said haughtily. ‘We had a proper Council Fire. We wore coats over our gowns and walked up from the bus, with our headbands and beads in our attaché cases.’

‘But we were interrupted,’ Jane spoke sadly from the doorway. ‘Though not in the way Maribel expected. She said people would be passing. There weren’t any people about; Phyl was right enough there. But we *were* interrupted!’

‘Oh, Janie, who interrupted the meeting?’ Maribel asked, laughing.

‘Hooligans. Boys. They dashed in and grabbed our “eats,” and were miles away before we knew what had happened.’

‘Oh, hard lines! What little wretches!’

‘You needed sentries,’ said Gina. ‘You should have had a line of Guides outside to protect you.’

The patrol-leaders laughed as Phyllis sniffed.

‘Camp Keema wouldn’t accept Guide protection, Gina,’ said Maribel. ‘What about the new Guardian, Story-Teller? Sorry, Phyl. I forgot.’

Phyllis reddened. ‘It’s all right. She—Miss Mason—says we’ve been silly to keep up a sort of feud because you’re Guides, and we’re to drop it or she won’t be our Guardian. We

want her for a Guardian; she's top-hole. So I suppose you can call me Story-Teller if you want to.'

'My aunts and uncles!' gasped Gina. 'Is the feud all off?'

Her words broke the startled silence that had fallen as the Guides stared at Phyllis. The feud had lasted since the beginning of the autumn term, and it was now February. Had it been swept away by the word of a stranger?

Maribel whirled round on Gina. 'You silly infant! There hasn't been any feud. I say, Phyl —'

'Oh no, only a slight coolness!' Jane murmured.

'Some Guardian, this!' Marcia remarked. She was a tall Guide who had never had any friendly feeling towards the Camp Fire.

'Phyl, tell us,' Maribel pleaded. 'Is Miss Mason your new Guardian? Who is she?'

'I think I'd better tell them that,' and a slim girl of fourteen pushed her way past Kitty and stood before the seniors. She had straight, dark, bobbed hair and bright brown eyes.

'Gracious! Who is it?' cried Marcia. 'Has anybody seen it before? Where did it come from?'

'Who is the kid?' Maribel stared at the stranger. Everybody else was staring too, but Peggy-Perfect did not look flustered or shy.

'I'm new,' she said. 'The Wild Rose and the Tortoise said they'd see me through, but they forgot.'

'Sorry!' the Camp Fire Girls spoke together.

'She's our new Guardian's sister,' said Phyllis. 'We met them on Saturday afternoon.'

'You seem to have done a good deal on Saturday afternoon,' Maribel hinted.

'We did. We had a hectic time,' Ruth laughed.

'I'm —'

But what the new girl was, was lost in the booming of the gong.

'Fly, all of you!' Maribel commanded. 'Tell us the rest at break. Off with your coat, new kid! Change your shoes like lightning!'

Peggy-Perfect was not the only one who had still to change her shoes. A wild scramble filled the cloakroom; then, panting, the girls ran upstairs.

Peggy was hustled away by Con and Kitty, and Maribel raced after them.

'Come to me after prayers, kid, and I'll take you to Miss Ransome. I suppose she's expecting you? Or have you dropped from the skies?'

'She told me to come to-day. Mother brought me to see her on Friday.'

'I see. What's your name?'

'Peg Mason.'

'She's Peggy-Perfect,' said Maud.

'But it doesn't mean I'm a perfect angel,' Peggy-Perfect warned the head girl.

'It doesn't refer to conduct? Tell me later,' and Maribel left Peggy with the Camp Fire trio at the door of the big hall.

'Is the new person really good, Phyl?' she whispered, as they took their places in class, a few minutes later.

'Topping. Just what we've been waiting for. She'll be a splendid Guardian.'

'I'm jolly glad! Then Camp Keema will go ahead.'

Phyllis glanced at her. 'Nice of you to be glad,' she admitted. 'Sporting, Bel! But you always are. Won't you throw over the Guides and come back to us?'

Maribel laughed. 'That would be sporting, wouldn't it? No, old thing, I couldn't do that. But I'll wish you luck.'

'Hel-lo?' questioned Ruth, under her breath.

Miss Ransome, coming in to take her literature lesson, had not come alone. Behind her was a girl of seventeen, whose dark eyes surveyed the astonished Sixth with a mixture of shyness and amusement.

‘Another new girl! A senior. My hat!’ murmured Marcia.

‘Girls,’ said the Head, ‘this is my niece, Charlotte Ransome, who has come to stay with me while her parents take a trip to the East. I know you will make her feel at home. Ella, will you move for to-day and let her sit by Maribel? Sharly, Maribel is head of the school; she will look after you until you begin to know your way about.’

Maribel greeted the stranger with a smile, as Ella moved her books to another desk. ‘Pleased to have you in the Sixth. We’ll talk later.’

‘Yes, please don’t talk just now,’ Miss Ransome suggested, going to her desk.

Maribel laughed, and handed a book to the new girl. ‘We’ll share for to-day. Here’s a pencil, if you want to take notes.’

‘One each, for the Guides and us,’ Ruth whispered to Phyllis. ‘Which shall we choose?’

‘The Guides have too many already. We ought to have them both. Peggy-Perfect’s keen on us already.’

Then Phyllis caught Miss Ransome’s eye and hurriedly opened her Shakespeare.

‘What does Miss Ransome call you?’ Maribel turned to the new girl at the end of the literature hour, while the class waited for Mademoiselle. Talking in the interval was not forbidden, since the Sixth were supposed to have discretion and to use it; but most of the girls were giving hasty final glances at verbs and idioms and had no time for conversation.

‘Charlotte. Isn’t it stodgy?’ said Charlotte. ‘Sounds like George the Fourth’s reign.’

‘Oh, but she called you something else,’ Maribel remonstrated.

Miss Ransome’s niece laughed. ‘I’m Sharly. I spell it with an S, because if I didn’t you’d call me Charlie.’

‘Sharly—that’s better than Charlotte! You aren’t a Guide, are you? Will you join us or the Camp Fire?’

‘What is the Camp Fire?’ Sharly asked cautiously. ‘Do you have to work as hard as you do in the Guides? I knew some Guides at home, and they were always swotting for something. I’m quite satisfied as I am, I think.’

Maribel laughed. ‘Oh, you’d better be something. Don’t stay outside both the camps! I say, Phyl, you ought to know those verbs by now. Sharly wants to hear about Camp Keema.’

‘We were so thrilled by our new Guardian that I didn’t finish my prep on Saturday,’ said Phyllis. ‘Are you keen on Camp Fire?’ She looked at Charlotte. ‘What did Bel call you?’

‘Sharly. I don’t know anything about Camp Fire yet.’

‘Then come to a meeting to-night, in our own Camp Fire room. We’re going to show it to Kitigan; she’s our new Guardian. You’ll love our room; we’re frightfully proud of it.’

‘I’ll have to ask Aunt Mary. I’d love to come.’

‘Is that the Head?’ Phyllis began to laugh. ‘We don’t think of her as Aunt Mary!’

‘Phyl!’ Maribel’s voice was peremptory. ‘How can your new Guardian have a name yet? You said you only found her on Saturday.’

‘That’s right. She’s Kitigan, a garden. She lent us her garden for our meeting,’ Phyllis explained hurriedly, her eyes on Mademoiselle, who had just come in. ‘She liked her name. She’s going to take it properly to-night.’

‘You didn’t lose much time!’ Maribel commented, as she opened the book of French history from which the Sixth were reading.

CHAPTER III

TWO NEW GIRLS

In the school grounds, not far from the house, there was a little sunken garden, a round plot of grass with a pool in the centre and sloping banks. To this sunny corner the younger Camp Fire Girls raced at the mid-morning break, Peggy Mason in their midst.

'We always go out, when it's fine,' Kitty explained. 'Put on your woolly; that's all you need. Maribel and Phyl will come; they'll want to talk to you.'

'Bel wants to know why you're Peggy-Perfect,' said the Wild Rose.

'There's somebody with them,' cried Con, the One who liked to Swim Upstream. 'Somebody new, and old enough for the Sixth. How weird!'

Gina and the other Guides in the Third had followed. 'We want to know why she's Peggy-Perfect too. She doesn't look it,' said Gina.

'She's not perfect at arithmetic or spelling,' Freda remarked.

Peggy laughed. 'It's nothing to do with how much I know. It's a family matter.'

Maribel stood at the top of the bank with Sharly Ransome.

'The Camp Fire used to meet here, when there were no Guides,' she explained. 'This little garden was so peaceful that we called it Wanakiwin—"tranquillity." We all belonged to Camp Keema then; twenty of us. But when Miss Curtis came she started Guides, and it seemed better for us to back her up. Phyl and Ruth and Jane and those three juniors stuck to Camp Keema, and they've been looking for a Guardian all winter. Now they say they found one last Saturday. Story, Phyl! Phyl's Camp Fire name was Oyaka, the Story-Teller, Sharly.'

'Miss Mason has come to live up near the mill,' said Phyllis. 'She and her sister, Peggy, were exploring when they saw those wretched boys running off with our cakes. They came and sympathised and said we might have our meeting in their garden. Their mother's a darling; she was nice to us, and she gave us a big cake instead of the ones we'd lost. Miss Mason—her name is Marian—lent us cushions, and they watched our meeting. We knew they had just come, so that nobody had asked Miss Mason to be anything yet—like a Guider. So we asked her to be our Guardian. She laughed at us for being in such a hurry, but she understood how serious it was, so she said she'd try, and we had a long talk about everything.'

'And she said, if she took on the job, we'd have to be nicer about the Guides,' said Jane.

'Oh, you told her?' Maribel asked.

'We told her a little. She guessed the rest.'

Maribel nodded. 'And that new kid is her sister?'

'Peg. They call her Peggy-Perfect.'

'Don't tell me why. I'll ask her,' and Maribel led Sharly down to the grass circle where the younger girls were waiting.

'Come here, Peg-Perfect,' she called.

The Third came in a body, the new girl in their midst.

'We don't know what part of her's perfect,' said Freda. 'But we know what part isn't! And that's her arithmetic.'

'Or my spelling,' Peggy added. 'It isn't the part of me that does things or that knows things.'

'Or doesn't know things,' Gina suggested.

'Tell us what your name means, Peggy Mason,' the head girl commanded.

'It's a family matter,' Peggy-Perfect began her usual explanation. 'Our family's awfully badly arranged. We're in twos, except me; I'm the odd one in the middle. First there were

Dick and Marian, with only a year between them, so they played together and made a proper couple. Dick's at sea now. Father is a sailor, so he's away a great deal. Marian's twenty-four. After her there was nobody for ten years; then I turned up, and I was twins, but my other half was delicate, and he only lived a few weeks. Everybody thought we were the end of the family, and I grew up as the baby. Then when I was ten, we had Bob, and a year later Betty. So they're like twins, just as Dick and Marian were. They play together; and now that Dick's gone away and father's away too, Marian is always with mother. There's nobody to pair with me.'

'Hard lines!' said Maribel. 'But you don't look as if you'd felt very bad about it. Sure you don't score all round because you're an only one?'

'I expect she was spoiled for ten years, while she was the baby,' Sharly Ransome suggested.

Peggy's eyes danced. 'They tried to make it up to me,' she admitted. 'They didn't want me to be lonely.'

'Exactly! You've had all the luck of being an only kid. Petting and everybody fussing because "the poor child mustn't feel left out, and she hasn't anybody to play with." The elder family trying to be extra nice and kind, because you hadn't any twin. All that sort of thing,' said Ruth.

'I'm an only one, too. In some ways you have a particularly good time, but not in others,' Sharly remarked. 'One's apt to be lonely.'

'Were you lonely, in spite of the coddling, Peggy-Perfect?' Maribel asked. 'And why "Perfect"? You haven't told us that yet.'

Peggy gave her a quick upglance. 'I didn't know I was lonely. But I think perhaps I have been. We've moved about a lot, and though I've been to school I never stayed long enough anywhere to make a real chum. When I saw the Camp Fire on Saturday and knew they came from Miss Ransome's, where I was going, I felt all of a sudden as if I'd needed something without knowing it.'

'You'd needed a crowd. You wanted to be one of a bunch of your own age,' said the head girl. 'I hope you'll settle down and find chums in the Third.'

Peggy looked hopefully at the Third, who grinned at her in a reassuring welcome. 'I think I'm going to settle down,' she said. 'I rather feel it coming on. If they aren't all too busy being chums with one another, I guess I'll find somebody. The trouble is, everybody always is too busy for me. I don't mean unkindly. Mother and Marian are darlings, but they can't have me about with them all the time; they're grown-up, and you can't chum with a grown-up. And our kids are dreadful. They say, "Go 'way, Peg! We're busy."'

'We aren't too busy,' Gina's sympathy was stirred and she spoke warmly. 'How rotten for you, Peg! You won't find us like that.'

'But which part of you is perfect?' Maribel looked down at Peggy with amused eyes. 'You still haven't explained your name.'

'Oh well! That's Marian and Dick; they call me Peg-Perfect.'

'Yes? And why?' Maribel encouraged her.

Peggy-Perfect laughed and reddened. 'They say I'm perfectly satisfied to be only one, and perfectly able to look after myself, and perfectly capable of being a whole couple, although there's only one of me, and they say I think I'm perfect in every possible way. It's rot, of course, but —'

A titter from the crowd behind made her pause. 'Well, what about it?' she demanded.

'But we thought you were so lonely, and people were too busy to be bothered with you. It sounded so tragic!' Freda mocked.

‘So pathetic,’ said Maribel. ‘All the same, I expect there’s a certain amount of truth in both parts of you, Peg-Perfect.’

Peggy’s chin went up. ‘I’ve had to look after myself. The older ones have always looked on me as “the kiddy.” You get past that stage.’

‘Quite so. You want to grow up and be one of the Third, and not the kid in the background or the unnecessary big sister to your babes,’ Maribel agreed.

‘But all the same, you’ve had the advantages of belonging to a family with all the extras of an only child,’ Ruth suggested.

‘I’ve been perfectly satisfied until lately,’ Peggy agreed. ‘But I have been the odd man in the middle. I’ve had to be both boy and girl, the whole of my pair, all by myself.’

‘And perfectly capable of it, I’m sure,’ Sharly Ransome remarked.

‘I haven’t done so badly,’ Peggy admitted.

‘You’ll soon find you aren’t “Peggy-Perfect” here, my dear kid,’ Maribel said.

‘She isn’t in spelling and arithmetic,’ the Third jeered.

Maribel laughed. ‘Look after her, all of you. I suppose she’ll join Camp Keema, if her sister’s going to be the Guardian.’

‘Oh, rather! We’ve bagged her,’ the Tortoise and the Swimmer and the Wild Rose cried together.

‘She ought to choose,’ Gina remonstrated. ‘You bagged her before she knew about the Guides. She hasn’t had a chance.’

‘Oh, but the Camp Fire’s top-hole! I’ve said I’d join Camp Keema,’ Peggy spoke earnestly. ‘I really want to be a Camp Fire Girl.’

‘Righto! Now that the feud’s off it doesn’t matter,’ Gina said cheerfully. ‘It never did matter much in the Third, but it was rather awful among the seniors.’

‘Gina!’ Maribel’s voice was full of warning. ‘You kids had better hurry back,’ she added. ‘It’s time. Take care of Peggy-Perfect.’

‘Peggy, you’ll come with your sister to-night, of course?’ Phyllis called, as the Third began to drift back to school.

‘Rather! Thanks awfully, Story-Teller! Marian’s swotting at the book you lent her. She doesn’t say much, but she’s frightfully thrilled about it all.’

‘She’s the right sort. I’m glad we waited for her.’ Phyl’s tone was full of deep satisfaction.

‘Phyllis is the chief one among the Camp Fire Girls, isn’t she?’ Sharly Ransome asked, as she walked back to the house with Maribel.

‘Oh, quite! She’s been their leader while they’ve had no Guardian, and the Camp Fire room is over the garage at her house. It’s rather gorgeous; you’ll love it. They call it the Lodge of Camp Keema, and they’ve done every bit of it themselves, decorating and furnishing and earning the money to pay for it. They made hundreds of pounds of jam and jelly and sold it; and sweets and cakes and things.’

The head girl’s face clouded and her voice was troubled. She walked in silence, her eyes on Phyllis and Ruth and Jane, who were whispering together.

‘What’s up?’ Sharly demanded. ‘Don’t you like them to have secrets? But they must talk over their Camp Fire affairs.’

‘They have secrets all the time; it isn’t that. I was wishing they’d make sweets and stuff for the school, now that their room is paid for,’ Maribel explained. ‘We’ve a sale of work coming, for school funds; we want to pay for the new games pavilion. The Guides are working for it, and we asked Camp Keema to help. But they won’t join with us in anything. They said they’d help in some other way. I suppose they’ll make stuff and sell it, as they did before; I know they’ve been making marmalade and chutney. It’s a pity we can’t work together.’

‘A ghastly pity,’ Sharly agreed. ‘If people have bought their marmalade and sweets they won’t come to your sale for more. The two sets will spoil one another’s market.’

‘That’s what we feel. But Phyl is afraid the Camp Fire would be swamped, as there are so many of us.’

‘Perhaps their new Guardian will make them have more sense.’

‘It isn’t easy to convert the Story-Teller.’

Phyllis and her two followers came towards them as they reached the school door. Sharly stood aside to let them join Maribel.

‘I think I won’t join the Camp Fire,’ she decided. ‘It sounds as if it meant being bossed by Phyllis, and I wouldn’t care for that. The new Guardian has a big job before her. I wouldn’t like to be in her shoes!’

‘We go to the gym now, Sharly,’ and Maribel turned to look for her. ‘You’ll see Miss Curtis. She’s our Captain, and a jolly good one.’

As they entered the gym Phyllis touched Maribel’s arm. ‘I say, Bel! Will you come to our meeting to-night? You’d like to see Miss Mason.’

Maribel gave her an amazed look. ‘Phyl! You know I’m aching to come. Do you mean it? Will visitors be allowed?’

‘Not a crowd. But we’ve asked Sharly, and Peggy-Perfect will come with her sister. I thought you’d like to see our new Guardian.’

‘I’m wild to see her. She’s a regular sport to take on such a big job—for it is a big job, Phyl.’

‘I know. She’s tremendously sporting. Then you’ll come?’

‘It’s awfully good of you! You took my breath away,’ Maribel exclaimed. ‘Of course I’ll come, and thanks more than I can say. Will Miss Mason mind?’

‘I think she’d like you to be there. She’s very keen on our all being pals and working together.’

‘A million thanks, old thing!’ Maribel murmured, as Miss Curtis came hurrying in in her blue tunic and called them into line.

‘Haven’t you been invited to the Camp Fire room before?’ Sharly asked, when the class was over and she was going upstairs with Maribel.

‘Not to a meeting. Phyl wouldn’t let us see the room since it’s been finished, but she relented after Christmas and took me in; and the Wild Rose was allowed to ask Gina and her crowd. So we’ve all had a glimpse of it. But the Story-Teller wouldn’t have us at meetings, so we haven’t seen the gowns in use in the re-decorated room. They must look gorgeous!’

‘Gowns?’

Maribel laughed. ‘Don’t you know? Oh, wait till to-night! How you’ll love it! Meet me, and we’ll go together. I was going to the concert in the Pier Pavilion, but I’ll give up that or anything else for the sake of being present at Phyl’s meeting. Mother won’t mind; she’ll know what a big thing it is that Phyl should ask me. She’ll take somebody else to the concert.’

‘I say, Bel,’ Phyllis spoke in a low tone, as they entered the classroom. ‘You won’t come in your beastly uniform, will you?’

Sharly Ransome stared at her in horror. But Maribel only laughed.

‘I know how you loathe it. No, Phyl, I’ll come as myself, Bel Ritchie, and not as a Guide. You haven’t asked me as a Guide, have you?’

‘I was afraid you might think it was a case of uniform, and I do so hate to see you in it.’

‘I won’t hurt your feelings, Story-Teller.’

‘She might have hurt yours, it seems to me,’ Sharly exclaimed. ‘It was a horrible thing to say!’

‘My feelings are under better control than Phyl’s,’ Maribel said lightly. ‘She loathes the Guides. She can’t forgive me for giving up the Camp Fire. I was called Stormy Waves, and I was a Torch-Bearer.’

‘It sounds extremely weird and fascinating. I’m looking forward to to-night!’ Sharly said.

CHAPTER IV

THE LODGE OF CAMP KEEMA

Outside the Town Hall at a quarter to seven, Sharly Ransome waited for Maribel.

'I came down by bus,' she greeted the head girl eagerly. 'Aunt Mary's coming later for the concert in the Pavilion, or she'd have run me down in the car. I think she wanted me to come.'

'Miss Ransome's keen on the Guides, but she's interested in the Camp Fire too,' Maribel agreed.

'I saw Ruth and her sister pass a few minutes ago.'

'Ruth is the Robin; Sisoka is her Camp Fire name. Maud is Yenisey, the Wild Rose.'

'You said Phyllis was the Story-Teller. What about Jane?'

'She's Notaway, the Thinker. It suits Janie. She broods over everything. The names are given, not chosen, in Camp Keema. Ruth's very chirpy and not easily squashed; rather aggressive and blatant at times. Phyl tells stories well.'

'Were you very stormy? I wonder what they'd call me, if I joined!'

Maribel laughed. 'They said I swept things along and had to have my own way. Poor Phyl! She feels I swept the Camp Fire almost out of existence and took most of the girls over to the Guides. She felt it was disloyal, and she hasn't quite forgiven me. I felt we had to be loyal to the school and to Miss Curtis. It was very difficult to choose.'

'Awful, I should think!'

'You don't know how awful yet,' Maribel said grimly. 'You'll soon see what I had to give up!'

She led the way in through big gates and across a yard. 'That's where Phyl lives, next door. This is the garage. There are stairs in one corner.'

The electric lights in the garage and on the staircase were switched on. At the top of the steps Maribel paused, and pointed.

The closed door was painted dark brown, and was decorated with symbols. Above, in a white triangle, were painted crossed logs in brown, with a curling red flame. Below this, in a white circle, was a figure of a girl, formed by a small triangle above a larger one, with hair and skirt blown back. Below this was another triangle, with a monogram in colours.

'Wohelo, the password of the Camp Fire,' Maribel whispered. 'The middle one is the girl facing the wind, the symbol of Camp Keema.'

She knocked three times on the closed door. It opened—and then Sharly Ransome caught her breath in a gasp of delight.

Phyllis stood there, the light above the door falling full upon her. She wore her long yellow gown, with brown leather fringe round the hem and under the arms. There were coloured designs on her dress, on her sleeves, and round her neck; long chains of wooden beads of every colour hung from her shoulders. Her thick brown hair hung in two plaits on her breast, and she wore a glittering band of beads across her forehead. Leather moccasins decorated with symbols in beadwork gave the finishing touch to her costume. She wore a silver ring on her little finger and a silver bracelet on her bare arm.

Behind her were other figures; more yellow gowns, more beads, more headbands. The room was brilliantly lit, and a fire was glowing on the hearth. Sharly had a confused impression of colour—of yellow and brown, flame and gold; of tall white candles; of sparkling beads.

'Oh, how wonderful! How beautiful!' She could not keep back the words. Then she grew hot and shrank under Maribel's warning look.

Phyllis, without a word, raised her right hand in a dignified sweeping curve, and pointed upwards, her fringed sleeve falling back from her arm. The five girls standing behind her, who seemed to fill the little room, did the same.

‘Welcome to the Lodge of Camp Keema, Stormy Waves and Sharly.’

Maribel, with grave dignity, returned the greeting. A Guide salute would have jarred on Phyllis, she knew.

‘Greetings to Camp Keema, Story-Teller. We wish you all good things.’

Phyllis held out her hand to Sharly, and led her to a corner, where chairs were waiting. Maribel took one and drew Sharly into the other, and the small Wild Rose switched off the light.

‘Oh!’ Sharly whispered. ‘Oh, but how gorgeous! I can’t help it. I never dreamt of anything like this!’

Maribel pressed her arm, and she sat and gazed in rapt silence.

As the light went out, the Camp Fire Girls had dropped again on their leather cushions in a half circle round the hearth. The firelight flickered on their intent faces and twinkled back from their headbands and the glittering designs on their gowns.

Phyllis lifted three candles from the mantelpiece and placed them in a triangle on the floor, in the middle of the circle. Lighting a taper she handed it to the Robin and asked her to light the Light of Work.

Ruth rose to receive her light, knelt to touch the first candle, and stood to repeat a verse. She handed back the taper to Phyllis, who turned to Notaway, the Thinker, and asked for the Light of Health.

Jane rose, and knelt, and repeated her verse.

‘Yenis, Wild Rose, will you light the Light of Love?’

The Wild Rose came forward. For a moment her candle would not light, and in the tense silence there was a titter from Kitty-Keya, the Tortoise, who sat just in front of Maribel.

Maribel’s toe poked her in the back and Keya pulled herself together, as Maud, with a sigh of relief, stood up and repeated her Wohelo verse.

With jingling beads, the circle rose and began to sing, a chanting song with actions. They waved their arms, and bent, and stood, and turned.

‘Anywhere else, it would look silly,’ Sharly murmured, under cover of the music, while she watched with fascinated eyes. ‘But here, in the dark and in those gowns, it’s It!’

‘You can do it in a gown,’ Maribel agreed, in a whisper. ‘You’d feel an idiot anywhere else. Phyl leads it beautifully. She’s rather fine to-night. This is the end. Now it’s going to be interesting.’

‘Interesting! I’m thrilled to the limit,’ Sharly murmured.

The singers had seated themselves again around the candles. The visitors on their chairs looked down on the glittering circle. There was a long moment of tense silence, while the fire crackled and a car outside rushed past hooting.

Camp Keema looked at the Story-Teller. Phyllis sat staring into the fire. It was the moment for which she had longed for months.

At last she looked up. ‘Sisters of Camp Keema, we have faced the wind alone. It has been a long time. Shall we call a Guardian to lead our Councils?’

‘Yes, Story-Teller! We want a Guardian!’ Camp Keema spoke with one voice.

‘Is there any friend in our Lodge to-night who will be a Guardian to Camp Keema?’ Phyllis looked into the dark corners of the room.

‘If it is the wish of the Camp Fire, I will try to be a Guardian to Camp Keema,’ said a new voice, and a stranger stepped from the shadows into the circle of light.

Marian, like Peggy-Perfect, was dark, with deep brown eyes and hair, but her hair was long and worn over her ears in coils, while Peggy's was bobbed and straight. With a strong sense of what was fitting to the occasion, Marian had spent the morning searching the shops for a yellow dress which would not cost more than she felt entitled to spend; she had found one at last, of old gold linen, left over from the summer's stock. Phyllis's eyes had widened when she saw it.

'I say, Miss Mason—Kitigan—you are a brick! It's the only colour you could wear that wouldn't look too startling beside our gowns.'

'That's what I felt,' the new Guardian had agreed. 'I couldn't bear to come in green or blue or red, or even white.'

In her tawny frock she came into the circle, while Camp Keema sprang to their feet and once more made the welcoming sign of Camp Fire, all raising their right arms.

Marian responded gravely with the same sign. 'Will Camp Keema receive me as a sister? I desire to be a Camp Fire Girl and to keep the Law of the Fire. I will try to Seek Beauty, Give Service, Pursue Knowledge, Be Trustworthy; to Hold on to Health, to Glorify Work, and to Be Happy. I believe Camp Fire will help me in these desires.'

Led by Phyllis, Camp Keema sang a greeting chant.

'Tell us your name, O Guardian!' Phyllis begged.

Marian threw a slip of paper into the fire.

'I am no longer Marian Mason. Within the Lodge of Camp Keema I am Kitigan, a garden. I shall try to grow beautiful flowers and thoughts in my life and to lead Camp Keema into peaceful and shady ways—No!' hastily. 'I mean, sunny ways, of course! We'll have nothing shady in Camp Keema!'

A giggle from Jane infected Ruth. The younger girls joined in, and the Camp Fire forgot to be ceremonial and shouted with laughter.

'Shady ways! Oh, Guardian, what a beginning!' sobbed Jane.

'It's too bad! It's mean to laugh! She was doing it beautifully, you wretches!' Phyllis remonstrated.

'But I spoiled it. I tried so hard, but I made a horrible mess of it,' the new Guardian said sadly. 'Oh, please laugh! Don't keep it in. I'm sure you'll do yourselves some harm. Let's be exactly what we want to be, with no pretence. A moment ago you wanted to be ceremonial, and you did it beautifully. Your ritual is most impressive, and the Story-Teller is a gallant leader. But now you want to laugh, and I don't blame you. Shady ways! And I'd thought it out so carefully!'

'You did put your foot in it that time, Gardener!' said Peggy-Perfect, coming out of her corner.

'I forgot you!' Phyllis exclaimed. 'Are we to make you a member too?'

'Does she call you Gardener now?' Jane asked.

'Always,' Marian confessed. 'I call her the Question-Mark.'

'But why? Oh yes, we gave her a name too, didn't we?'

'Kitigan, will you invite your sister to be a member of Camp Keema?' Phyllis interrupted the discussion.

The other girls took the hint. Dropping on their cushions again they watched while Marian, standing, invited Peggy to repeat the Law. They rose to receive her with a song of greeting, and then Peggy, looking serious, sat down beside Tchuka, the Swimmer Upstream, and the circle all looked at Phyllis and Marian.

Phyllis rose, gathering her swinging chains of beads in one hand. From a corner she brought a wooden tray, holding dishes of small cakes.

'Kitigan, Guardian of Camp Keema, will you break bread with us in sign of friendship?'

She carried the tray round the circle, then turned to Marian and spoke more naturally.

'Mother hopes you'll come into the house after the meeting and have coffee and sandwiches. We have other visitors here to-night, and you'll want to talk to them. But as a part of our meeting we always break bread together.'

'Except when the bread vanishes before we've had time to break it!' said the Tortoise.

'We're jolly glad those wretched boys broke up our meeting,' Tchuka said vigorously.

'For if they hadn't we shouldn't have had a Guardian,' the Wild Rose added.

'Or a Gardener!' Peggy murmured. 'The Gardener Guardian!'

'It isn't Gardener,' Phyllis said sharply. 'Kitigan means a garden.'

'And shady places!' Marian suggested. 'Hadn't Peg better have a name too?'

'I don't like the one they gave me on Saturday,' Peggy urged. 'Can't I choose my own? Wiwanga—to ask questions; it's an ugly word, and I only asked questions because I'd never heard of Camp Fire. It was jolly startling to see you all out there in the woods dressed up like Indians! Of course I asked questions; anybody would!'

'Peggy-Perfect,' Phyllis said thoughtfully. 'We might call you Wacinpiyokipi —"contented."'

'No, thanks!' Peggy said hurriedly. 'I wouldn't be contented with that. And I'd never be able to spell it.'

'There's plenty of it, anyway,' Ruth mocked. 'Phyl's doing her best for you.'

Phyllis leant forward. 'Peggy-Perfect, here's your name. Tawatenya—willing for anything. It would suit you jolly well.'

'Oh, I like that!' Peggy's face grew radiant. 'Oh, may I? I will be ready for anything!'

At a nod from Marian, she scribbled 'Peggy Mason—Peggy-Perfect' on a slip of paper handed to her by the Wild Rose, and throwing it into the fire announced her new name.

The new Guardian addressed the circle of girls.

'I have studied the Manual of the Camp Fire, and this, it seems to me, is how matters stand. Your membership has lapsed and your Charter is out of date. We will collect dues for a new year and send them to Headquarters, and our Charter will be renewed. I shall fill up the application form and receive a Guardian's certificate. Then we'll hold another meeting and begin to work in earnest. In the meantime we'll meet to make plans and learn to know one another better. This room, your Lodge of Camp Keema, is a beautiful quiet spot for the Council Fire and for intimate talks and confidences. I congratulate you on its beauty, especially as I'm told you did all the work yourselves. I'm more than sorry I wasn't here to help in the fun. But we are the Camp that faces the Wind, and we mustn't meet too often indoors, even in the winter. My sister Tawatenya and I are strangers to this place, and we're very anxious to see more of the downs and the woods. We might have some picnic meetings, if the weather is not too hopeless, and you could show us the way about. I propose that we do no more business to-night, so that this first meeting may remain in our minds as an evening of friendship and introduction to Camp Fire. But I invite you all to a walk on the hills next Saturday, and my mother asks you to come to tea with her afterwards. After tea we'll have a business meeting and talk over future plans.'

'But we came to your house last Saturday,' the Thinker protested. 'Won't we be a nuisance to your mother?'

'Nothing is a nuisance to the mother of Kitigan and Tawatenya,' the Story-Teller crushed her with a stern look. 'Notaway, you know how understanding and kind she is. Remember that gorgeous cake!'

Marian laughed. 'She wants you to come often, Thinker. That's arranged, then. No business to-night; we'll just enjoy ourselves. What about community singing round the fire?'

One after another the girls begged for favourite songs. As she listened to 'Mammy Moon,' which was new to her, the Guardian heard another voice join in. She smiled across the circle to the place where Maribel and Sharly were sitting.

Maribel flushed with pleasure in her dark corner.

'I believe she did it on purpose, so that I could join in! Has Phyl told her how keen I used to be on Camp Fire? Does she understand how I loathe being out of it? And does she mean to be friends? That would be the jolliest thing that's happened in the school for six months.'

'She's a lovely Guardian,' Sharly whispered.

Marian, carried away by the music and the happiness of the girls around her, pulled the pins out of her coiled plaits and let her hair fall on her shoulders.

'Now I feel more like one of you,' she declared. 'So long as my hair was up, there was a little gap between us. We mustn't have any gaps. We're all Camp Fire Girls together.'

'Kitigan, you'll look topping in a gown!' cried the Robin.

'Try on my headband and see how it looks,' the Story-Teller said eagerly, and handed her a shining strip of beadwork.

'You must teach me how to make one. I'm in a hurry to start. I shall have flowers of all colours, and trees, on a background of golden sunlight.'

'But weren't we to be a shady Camp Fire?' asked the Thinker innocently.

'Don't tease, Notaway!'

'I shall never hear the end of our shady ways,' the Guardian sighed. 'Story-Teller, time's up. Tawatenya and I have to catch a bus. If we miss the last one we'll have to walk up the hill from The Lamb in the dark. I want to meet your visitors.'

'Yes, it's time to close,' Phyllis agreed reluctantly, and called on the Tortoise and the Swimmer to put out the first two candles.

She knelt to snuff the Light of Love herself. In the dark beside the dying fire, the circle knelt and sang a closing song, very quietly.

In the moment's silence that followed, before anybody moved, Marian glanced round at them all. She was learning to know them and their separate needs very quickly.

The Wild Rose switched on the light, and everyone rose, with jingling beads and dazzled eyes, and looked at Maribel and Sharly.

CHAPTER V

A DEADLY SECRET

‘Wasn’t it a jolly meeting, Bel?’ cried Ruth. ‘Nice to have you here again!’

Phyllis turned quickly to Sharly Ransome. ‘How did you like it? Do you like our room?’

‘I haven’t seen it yet. I want to look at everything.’

‘Show her, Jane,’ and Phyllis turned to Marian. ‘This is Maribel Ritchie, Kitigan. I told you about her.’

‘It was like the Robin to say that,’ Jane murmured to Sharly. ‘It nearly killed Bel to give up Camp Fire, and Phyl has been fearfully unhappy about losing her. And then Robin says, “Nice to have you here again”! She’s always like that.’

‘You care too, don’t you?’ Sharly asked gravely, looking at the leather cushion, with its pansy stencilled in colours, on which Jane had been sitting.

‘That’s my symbol. Pansies for thoughts. Here’s Phyl’s—little figures grouped round a big one, who is telling a story. We each did our own on our cushions. Robin made the brown window-curtains and I stencilled them in gold. Yes, I felt bad too,’ the Thinker admitted. ‘Are you going to join Camp Keema?’

‘I don’t think so. I’d like to belong to the same as Maribel, if I join anything.’

‘We’d all like that. I nearly threw up the Camp Fire and went in with her. But she wouldn’t let me.’

Marian cried laughingly, across the room to Maribel, ‘Give me a moment to put up my hair! You’re the one who has done so much for the Guides and for the whole school, aren’t you?’

‘Did Phyl say that?’ Maribel flushed. ‘It isn’t always so very jolly to be head girl. You can’t just please yourself sometimes.’

‘No. You belong to the school,’ Marian assented, her fingers busy with her plaits. ‘There! Now I feel myself again. Good-night, all!’

Phyllis was hustling the younger girls out of the room. ‘They dress downstairs. We don’t do that sort of thing up here. Buck up, kids! Fly home and finish your prep.’

‘Good-night, Kitigan!’ and then Phyllis closed the door and only Peggy-Perfect was left with the seniors and the new Guardian.

Peggy withdrew discreetly and followed Jane and Sharly round the room. Jane was showing the decorated panels on the walls, the Law, the Credo, and the Desires of the Camp Fire, all surrounded by designs full of meaning and framed in silver-grey wood.

‘These were Bel’s Christmas presents to Camp Keema. They’re the most beautiful things we have.’

‘They’re lovely. Where did they come from?’

‘London Headquarters. Look, Tawatenya,’ and Jane drew Peggy into the group. ‘You’ll have to join Camp Keema properly later on, you know. To-night was quite unofficial. You have to attend a certain number of meetings before you’re really a member.’

‘So you can still back out and join the Guides, if you want to,’ Sharly remarked.

Peggy gave her a startled look. ‘But I don’t want to. I love the Camp Fire. And I must belong with Marian.’

‘You must join again, when we have our new Charter,’ said Jane.

Maribel and Marian were talking together while Ruth tidied the room. Phyllis stood beside her new Guardian, ready to join in.

Marian was conscious of a feeling of irritation. 'Why can't she help Ruth and let me talk to this jolly girl alone?' she thought.

'I've heard about you already from Phyl,' she said to Maribel. 'You and she are real friends. I can guess how you felt when Miss Curtis came. You had to make a very difficult choice. And being head of the school made it all the harder.'

'Yes, that was the worst part,' Maribel agreed. 'I knew most of the girls would follow my lead. You think I chose rightly, don't you, Miss Mason?'

'I do,' Marian said. 'You had to think of the school.'

'We've a topping Guide Company, and it takes in far more than the Camp Fire did. But I still regret my gown,' Maribel owned, with a laugh and a sigh. 'And I envy you all this beautiful room.'

'Won't you come to the house for coffee, Kitigan?' Phyllis interrupted. 'Bel, you and Sharly must come too; mother's expecting you. We're hoping Sharly will join Camp Keema.'

'We'll shove off, Janie,' said Ruth. 'It's Phyl's party now. What about Peg-Perfect, Story-Teller?'

'She'll come with us. She must wait for Kitigan.'

'Yes, I'm afraid Peg can't go home alone,' Marian agreed, as they left the loft and went across the yard.

'Phyl, hadn't I better slip off too?' Maribel suggested. 'You'll want to talk to Miss Mason. Sharly can go home with her and Peg; they all live up on the hill.'

'But the Guardian wants to talk to you and mother's expecting you,' Phyllis urged. 'Come in for a few minutes, Bel.'

Peggy-Perfect followed, wishing Tchuka, the Swimmer, or Keya, the Tortoise, had been invited also.

'It's rather a grown-up party,' she said to herself, and fell behind with a touch of shyness.

As she entered the house a mysterious whistle in the darkness of the yard made her pause and look round. Had the Wild Rose run away from Ruth and come back to speak to her?

A hand grasped her arm. 'Silence! Beware! It's a deadly secret. If you'd like to hear, follow me!'

Peggy-Perfect slipped into the darkness outside the stream of light from the door.

'Who is it? What is it? I'm game.'

'Then come along. Buck up! There isn't a second to spare.'

A dark figure no taller than herself gripped her hand and they ran together across the yard. Peggy's heart was beating wildly, in joyful exultation. To be invited so soon to share a deadly secret! She thought she knew the voice.

'Gina, is it you? It sounds like you,' she pleaded.

'Sh! Beware!' hissed her unseen guide.

A dim light showed before them. It seemed to come from a window whose panes were covered with paper or smeared with dirt.

The hand on Peggy's arm checked her. The unknown somebody rapped three times on an unseen door.

The door opened from within, and Peggy, quivering with excitement, slipped through, following her guide.

The room—stable, tool-shed, whatever it was—was in darkness except for a nightlight on one window-sill. It seemed to be full of people; figures moved silently and strange shadows danced on the wall.

Peggy clutched her guide's arm, but made no sound. Surely the voice had been Gina's, and this deadly secret was all a joke? But it was a little alarming, all the same.

A light sprang up in front of her; and another; and a third. Someone had lit three candles, which stood in a line on a table.

Three candles! There had been three candles at the meeting of Camp Keema. Was this a nightmare of Camp Fire?

Then, as the flames grew steadier, Peggy saw clearly.

She was in a small room or shed. The roof was low and sloping. The candles stood on a table, made of a board standing on two barrels, and draped in a scarlet cloth.

Behind the table, perched on boxes and barrels, sat three figures; at each end stood another. All wore striped coloured blankets thrown over their shoulders and headdresses of feathers of all colours standing upright in bands tied round their heads. Their faces were smutted and streaked with black. They wore chains of grotesque shells and beads round their necks. In front of the central figure, on the table, lay a huge sword.

For one moment there was silence. It was broken by a sigh of rapture from Peggy.

‘How absolutely perfect! Oh, *tell* me all about it! Are you another sort of Camp Fire? What a gorgeous rag! Do they know—Phyllis and the rest?’

‘The Camp Fire Sisterhood does not know,’ said a voice, which tried hard to be as hollow as the circumstances demanded. ‘Dost see the sign of our Brotherhood?’ and the central figure pointed to cross-bones painted on the red cloth in front of the candles.

‘The crossed logs!’ Peggy murmured. ‘And you have three candles—and headbands, *with* feathers—and beads, and robes! Oh, top-hole! But who are you? Gina,’ sternly, ‘you’re one. I knew your voice!’

‘We are the Outcast Brotherhood—the Riotous Redskins—the Camouflaged Camp Fire—the Dwellers in Secret Places,’ hissed the leader. ‘Would’st be one of us, O Perfect One?’

Peggy giggled. ‘Oh, please! I’d give anything to be a Riotous Redskin and an Outcast Brother. How many more things am I going to join to-night? Are you a secret society?’

‘Then put your hand in ours and swear to reveal no jot or tittle of what you see in our Wigwam.’

Peggy’s hand shot out and was grasped by five others. As the Outcast Brothers crowded round, they moaned softly under their breath.

‘Outcast! Outcast! Alone! Alone!’ chanted a Redskin on her right.

‘One more lone Brother in the fold! A twinless brother in our secret place!’ another responded more gruffly.

Peggy snatched her hand away. ‘A twinless *sister*! I believe some of you are boys. Who are you?’ and she grabbed the nearest feathers and pulled.

A round-faced boy with yellow hair grinned at her. ‘Say, you’d better scoot! That’s enough for to-night. Phyl will have missed you by this time. Mind you don’t give the Brotherhood away, or it will be the end of us.’

‘But who are you?’ Peggy urged.

The Redskin on her left flung down her headdress and Gina caught her hand. ‘Come on! No time now. I’ll tell you to-morrow. Don’t breathe a word to your sister or to anybody.’

Before Peggy could protest she had been hustled out into the dark again, and was being dragged towards the garage.

‘But, Gina, tell me — —’

‘It’s a good thing you didn’t yell. If you’d howled the boys wouldn’t have had you. But as you weren’t scared it will be all right. It makes us even numbers. There—up the Camp Fire stair. Phyl will think you stayed behind to look at the room.’

‘Peggy! Where is the child? Peggy-Perfect!’ Phyllis came across the yard. ‘Peg, come along! We thought you were just behind us.’

Shaking with suppressed laughter, Gina crouched in her striped blanket under the stairs.

Peggy ran out to meet Phyllis. 'Did you mean me to come too? I don't care for coffee, Phyllis, but I'd like to see your house.'

'Come along, you silly kid! You can manage to eat some cake, even if you don't like coffee, I suppose? Why did you stay behind? I thought you were Tawatenya, willing for anything,' Phyllis scolded. 'You must live up to your name. Were you shy?'

'Not exactly,' Tawatenya said meekly. 'I am willing for anything, really, Story-Teller.' Her voice quivered at a sudden vision of the tool-shed, the burlesque Camp Fire, the disguised figures, the groans, the cross-bones. She wondered if Gina had heard.

She entered the brightly-lit drawing-room feeling and looking dazed. Maribel, Sharly, and Marian were sitting there, holding coffee-cups and talking; Mrs. Grainger, Phyl's mother, came forward, carrying a plate of cake.

'Were you too shy to come in, you poor new Camp Fire Girl? That was too bad. Phyl shouldn't have forgotten you. Come and sit by the fire and have some of my cake.'

'It wasn't Phyl's fault; thank you very much,' Peggy explained. 'I stayed behind. I—I wasn't sure. Is Phyl all the family there is?' she asked politely. 'She hasn't any sisters at school, except Camp Fire ones, has she?'

Mrs. Grainger laughed. 'No, no sisters at all. She has one brother, a little younger than herself, who goes to the County School. I don't know where Tom is to-night; out with some of his friends. Have you any brothers?'

Peggy explained the badly-assorted family to which she belonged, and her own pathetic position as odd man in the middle. But while she talked her thoughts were busy. It was not difficult to guess where Tom Grainger was, and he was nearer home than his mother imagined.

Phyllis was talking to Sharly Ransome, urging the attractions of Camp Fire.

'You won't want to be a Guide. Join Camp Keema and be one of our crowd.'

'I want to think about it,' Sharly said cautiously. 'I like the ideas behind Camp Fire. "Facing the wind" is fine; and I love the symbols and the Indian names. But I'm not sure that I'll join anything yet.'

'Story-Teller, will you tell me something?' Peggy had been left alone, as Mrs. Grainger turned to speak to Maribel. She spoke coaxingly, and Phyllis answered at once.

'What is it, kid?'

'Why doesn't Gina Firth belong to Camp Keema? I'd have liked to be in the same thing as Gina.'

'Because she only came to school as the Guide Company was being formed, and she decided to join the Guides with the rest. Camp Keema hadn't a Guardian; a new girl wasn't likely to join us. And Gina's sister, Rosalind, who left school at Christmas, is the Guide Lieutenant.'

'Oh, I hadn't heard of her. Is that all Gina's family?' Peggy asked innocently.

'There's a boy; her twin. He's John.'

'Oh, has Gina a twin?' and Peggy's eyes gleamed. Obviously she had identified three of the Outcast Brotherhood of Riotous Redskins. Who were the other two?

Sharly Ransome rose. 'Phyl, Aunt Mary said she'd leave the concert at nine; she doesn't care to be late, but she wanted to hear a little of it. She promised to be outside the Town Hall at five past and to look out for me, in case I hadn't gone home by bus. I'd better go; I'll be just in time to meet her. Thank you very much for everything—the meeting, and the coffee, and all. Miss Mason, Auntie said there'd be nobody in the back seat, if you'd let her run you up the hill.'

'My hat!' Peggy said under her breath. 'Fancy having the Head to run you home!'

Marian accepted the offer gladly. 'It's jolly for us that Miss Ransome has a bungalow on the hill! Come along, Peg-Perfect! Good-night, Maribel. I'm glad to know you; we must meet

again soon. Good-night, Story-Teller and Mrs. Grainger, and many thanks for all your kindness.'

In the back seat of the Head's car, Peggy sat silently by Marian.

'Tired, Peggy?' her sister asked. 'We're later than I'd meant to be.'

'No, not tired. Just a little—you know,' and Peggy nodded towards Miss Ransome's back. 'It's rather awesome to be driving with the Head,' she murmured into Marian's ear.

Marian laughed. 'I thought perhaps the meeting had been too exciting for you.'

'Not a scrap; not the meeting,' Peggy grinned in the darkness. 'I'm longing for to-morrow morning! I want to talk it all over—with Gina,' she added, but not aloud. 'I must know for certain who those boys were and all about the Outcast Brotherhood!'

CHAPTER VI

THE OUTCAST BROTHERHOOD

'There's you and John and Tom. Who are the rest of the other Camp Fire?' Peggy demanded in an urgent whisper.

Gina gave her a startled look. Then she glanced cautiously round the gym.

The Third were waiting for Miss Curtis. Most of the girls were busy with ropes or bars or were sitting on the mattresses on the floor. Gina drew Peggy-Perfect into a corner behind the vaulting-horse.

'Who told you about John and Tom Grainger?'

'Phyllis. Who are the others?' Peggy urged.

'Phyl! She doesn't know anything about the Brotherhood?' Gina cried in dismay.

'Not a thing,' Peggy reassured her hurriedly. 'But she told me you had a twin called John and I found out that she had a brother Tom. I guessed the rest.'

'Oh, I thought somebody had given us away. Why did you ask Phyl questions? Didn't she guess?'

'You ought to be Wiwanga, the Question-Mark,' Peggy grinned. 'Phyl didn't guess anything. I just asked about her family and then about you. She told me your sister is a Guide Officer.'

'Yes, Rosalind's our Lieut. She and Maribel are very pally. John was bad again at Christmas, so Rosalind stays at home to keep an eye on him.'

'Bad? How do you mean—wicked? Was it John I saw last night?'

'Rather! He isn't wicked,' Gina said indignantly. 'I mean bronchitis.'

'Oh!' Peggy looked serious. 'Is he delicate? My twin was delicate. He was called Paul; he only lived three weeks.'

Gina's hand gripped hers. 'That's why John and I asked the Redskins to take you in. It's rotten for you not to have him. We feel it's such bad luck.'

'I say, that's awfully decent of you!' Peggy exclaimed, rather taken aback. 'I've often thought how ripping it would have been; I'm sure he'd have been just like me, and we could have had such bully times. But I didn't know anything about him till I was quite big. It's not as if he'd grown up and then died, Gina.'

'I know. But all the same we're sorry about him. I told John, and he said how rotten it would have been for me to be like that.'

Peggy laughed. 'Without him, I suppose?'

'So he said we'd invite you into the Outcast Brotherhood, and I raced round and consulted Tom, and he fixed it up.'

'But who are the Brotherhood? Why are you Outcasts? Oh, is that Miss Curtis? Bother! Gina, tell me all about it later. Will there be another meeting soon?'

'It's going to be difficult, since you're Camp Fire,' Gina spoke cautiously. 'Come on; Curty's waiting. I'll tell you later.'

One of the difficulties soon became plain to Peggy. The younger Camp Fire trio surrounded her when the gym period was over and escorted her to the geography class, all talking at once.

'What did you think of the meeting last night?'

'Did you like our room? We wanted to show you all the things we made for it. Did you stay long with Phyl?'

'Isn't Phyl a topping pretence-Guardian, Peggy? We thought she could have been our Guardian, but she isn't old enough.'

'Miss Mason's going to be all right, though,' said the Wild Rose.

'Marian's more than all right! She's ripping!' Peggy cried indignantly.

'I forgot she belonged to you,' the Wild Rose said in dismay. 'We'll have to be careful, girls.'

'There isn't any need to be careful,' Con said stoutly. 'Miss Mason's a dear, and we couldn't want to say anything but nice things about her.'

'Peg, you aren't going to chum with Gina, are you?' Kitty-Keya asked anxiously. 'She's a Guide. It would be awfully awkward.'

Again a vision of the tool-shed of the Riotous Redskins flashed before Peggy-Perfect's eyes.

'I am chums with Gina,' she retorted. 'I like her frightfully. What does it matter about her being a Guide? I thought we were all going to be friends with the Guides now?'

'Oh, that's all right. We never gave up being friends with Gina and Winifred. Phyllis would have liked us to, but she soon saw it wouldn't do. We couldn't have that sort of rot in the Third—feuds and all that. But being chums and having secrets is different. If you're going to have secrets, it ought to be with us, Tawatenya!' the Wild Rose urged.

The use of her new name made Peggy pause. 'It wasn't exactly a secret. Gina was telling me about her brother. What's the harm in that?'

'Oh, John! She's frightfully keen on John. But you won't have secrets with Gina, will you, Peg? Freda and she have something they won't tell us. We don't want you hauled into it too.'

'Promise you won't be bagged by Gina and Free, Peg!' Con begged.

This was a result of belonging to a crowd that Peggy had not foreseen. Her temper flared up. 'I'll not be bagged by anybody. But I shall be chums and have secrets with anybody I like. I won't be bossed by other kids, Camp Fire or not.'

'Goodness, what a temper!' said the Wild Rose.

'That's what comes of being an only one,' Con observed. 'Pity there wasn't somebody to keep you in order. You can't expect to be Camp Fire and at the same time be inside all the Guide secrets, Peg. You want a lot.'

'She wants everything,' said the Wild Rose.

'I don't believe it is a Guide secret,' Kitty said. 'Freda isn't a Guide. Winifred told me Freda and Gina had some stunt on, but she didn't know what it was. That doesn't sound like a Guide secret.'

Peggy listened, thoroughly alarmed. The Outcast Brotherhood would not be at all pleased to have the Camp Fire on their trail.

'You do think you're clever, all of you!' she scoffed. 'What are you talking about? Who said Gina had a secret? I told you what she was saying to me. She'd just told me about John's bronchitis when Miss Curtis came in.'

'We don't mind John's bronchitis,' Kitty said, looking worried. 'But Gina and Free have a secret, though you may not have heard about it yet. We don't want you to be hooked for it and have something on hand that we don't know about.'

As this was very definitely Peggy's intention, she promptly lost her temper again. 'I shall have as many stunts going as I like. If Gina invites me into anything I shall go, and so long as it isn't a Guide thing the Camp Fire can't say anything! I'll do what I like and not be bossed by anybody.'

'Perfectly bad-tempered, I should say your name means.' The Wild Rose looked at her in horror.

'Perfectly silly, I think.' Con's tone was crushing.

‘A perfect baby. She doesn’t understand the first thing about school,’ said Kitty-Keya. ‘Peggy, don’t be an idiot! If you’re going to belong to our crowd, you mustn’t go whispering in corners with other people. Don’t you see that?’

‘I see geography looming very near,’ the Wild Rose whispered, as Miss Martin entered. ‘We’ll see to Peg later, Kitty.’

Peggy’s thoughts were not on the great lakes of Africa during the next few minutes. It was imperative that she should hear all about the Outcast Brotherhood at the earliest possible moment, but another private conversation with Gina would rouse the wrath of the Camp Fire juniors to the utmost. Peggy knit her brows and frowned, and was called sharply to order for inattention.

Across the room she caught Gina’s eye, and saw at once that Gina understood. The sympathy and dismay in her friend’s face were so obvious that Peggy was comforted.

Miss Martin called Gina up to the easel, to point out the Victoria Falls on the big map. Then she showed a picture of an African village, and asked Freda to come and show where Livingstone and Stanley had met.

Peggy was bending over her atlas, trying to identify Ujiji and wondering how she was to arrange that talk with Gina, when Freda, returning to her seat, slipped a scrap of paper into her lap.

Peggy looked up with startled eyes; then she bent over her atlas again and smoothed out the crumpled paper.

‘Don’t worry, old girl. It will be all right. Gina says they’re silly asses.’

‘Peggy, bring that paper to me,’ said Miss Martin.

Peggy stared at her in blank dismay.

Miss Martin amended her instructions. ‘Freda, bring me the paper you gave to Peggy.’

Freda grew scarlet. She marched up to the desk and laid the slip upon it.

‘Read it aloud,’ Miss Martin commanded.

‘Oh, please, Miss Martin! It—it was only a message for Peg, because she’s new and she looked so bothered,’ Freda pleaded.

‘I had guessed it was a message for Peggy,’ Miss Martin said drily. ‘Read it aloud, Freda.’

Freda, much embarrassed, read the words aloud, and gazed helplessly at Gina and Peggy.

In spite of her anxiety Peggy could not keep back a laugh. ‘Gina says they’re silly asses.’ She looked nervously at Miss Martin and then at Gina.

The Third felt as she did. They collapsed in joyful laughter, at something so much more important than Stanley and Livingstone.

Gina’s astonished face was sufficient proof that she had nothing to do with the message. She stared blankly at Freda as the words were read out. Then, at the burst of laughter, she bent over her book, crimson and with shaking shoulders.

‘I was only trying to buck Peg up, because she’s new and bothered, Miss Martin,’ Freda pleaded.

‘Most considerate of you,’ Miss Martin said coldly. ‘But if Peggy would attend to her work and not think about other things she would be less bothered. It is not her geography that is bothering her; her thoughts have been wandering all through the lesson. You should know better than to read notes like this, if they are passed to you during school hours, Peggy. Freda, I am sorry to find you stoop to such underhand conduct. It’s unworthy of a Guide.’

‘I’m not a Guide!’ Freda muttered passionately. Miss Martin had touched her on a raw spot.

‘I forgot,’ the mistress acknowledged. ‘It’s a pity you aren’t a Guide. If you were, the rest of your patrol would tell you what they think of you. I advise you to persuade your father to

let you join the Company. Come to me after school, and I will set you some geography questions. Peggy, next time I shall expect you to know what to do with surreptitious notes.'

Peggy gazed at her wide-eyed. 'Does she really think I'd have put up my hand and said: "Please, Freda gave me a letter"? I'd eat the letter first! Poor Free! Miss Martin's a beast.'

Freda, nearly crying, had gone to her seat. Gina edged closer to her in sign of sympathy, but did not speak. Matters were quite stormy enough.

The incident was not over, however.

'Gina, did you use those words about your classmates?' asked Miss Martin.

Gina looked up innocently. 'What words, Miss Martin? Oh, silly asses. Oh, yes, I expect so. I don't remember when I said it; not in class, anyway. I think perhaps it was as we were coming upstairs. But it doesn't mean anything much. They are silly—well, donkeys, then. I'm always telling them so.'

Miss Martin's face cleared. She had been afraid the message had been sent by Gina, but that was evidently not the case.

'The message was entirely yours, Freda?'

'Yes,' Freda said sulkily.

Miss Martin looked at her steadily. But she was regretting her reference to the Guides, which had hurt Freda in her tenderest spot. So she passed over the rudeness of her tone and turned again to Gina.

'"Silly asses" is not the way to refer to your companions, even if you are so firmly convinced of the superiority of your own mind. I have no doubt you use the expression continually and that it therefore has very little meaning to you. It is, however, distinctly forbidden by Miss Ransome's rule, and you will accordingly lose an order mark.'

'Yes, Miss Martin,' Gina's eyes were downcast because they were dangerously full of laughter.

'Winifred, come and show us where Chitambo's Village lies.'

The lesson proceeded, and Freda sat looking sulky. Gina stole a glance at Peggy, and a meaning grin passed between them.

CHAPTER VII

FREDA THE OUTCAST

‘Gina’s so firmly convinced of the superiority of her own mind!’ Kitty-Keya proclaimed, when the Third were safely in the garden at eleven o’clock.

‘Course I am! It was worth a mark to hear Marty yarning so solemnly about silly asses,’ Gina said. ‘You were an idiot, Free. You might have known she’d catch you. Peg would have pulled through.’

‘Marty’s a beast,’ Freda said bitterly.

‘She was rather piggish about the Guides,’ Winifred admitted. ‘But you were soft to try it, Freda.’

‘Tell me what she meant about Freda and the Guides,’ Peggy pleaded.

‘Freda’s dad won’t let her join and she’s dying to be a Guide,’ Gina explained. ‘It’s a very sore point and there was no need for Marty to rub it in.’

‘If Peggy hadn’t looked so flustered Marty might not have noticed,’ Freda wailed.

‘I’m sorry. I was so fearfully surprised.’

‘You can’t put the blame on Peg, old chap,’ Gina’s tone was firm as she put her arm round Freda’s shoulders. ‘Of course the kid was surprised. I expect she thought we didn’t do that sort of thing here, and she’s right; we don’t. Passing notes is a rotten, sneaky trick, and you wouldn’t have done it if you’d thought. But you wanted to buck Peg up, so you forgot. We won’t have any more notes flying round the Third, no matter how miserable anybody looks. We don’t want the Sixth to know we’ve begun that sort of thing. You won’t do it again, Bird.’

‘Why doesn’t Freda join the Camp Fire, if she isn’t allowed to be a Guide?’ Peggy asked the Wild Rose, as Gina and Freda walked away together.

Her eyes followed them wistfully. But it was evident there would be no more private talks for the moment. She waited as patiently as she could for Gina to find an opportunity.

‘Free did belong to Camp Keema, like all the rest,’ said Maud. ‘Her name was Kudeska, the Bird. But she and Audrey—Audrey’s her sister in the Fifth—were in the crowd that said they’d go over to the Guides with Maribel and Rosalind Firth. Then those two found that their father didn’t like the Guides and wouldn’t let them join. But they wouldn’t come back to the Camp Fire. We hadn’t a Guardian—only Phyl and Ruth and Jane; and they thought it wasn’t good enough. So they don’t belong to anything.’

‘What jolly hard lines on Freda! Doesn’t she hate being an outsider?’

‘Loathes it. She’s pining to be a Guide, but I don’t suppose her dad will ever relent. Free stays for dinner, as you do.’

‘We’ve tried to get her back to the Camp Fire,’ Kitty-Keya said. ‘But she’s set her heart on being a Guide with Gina, and nothing else will do.’

‘You’d better try what you can do, Tawatenya,’ Con suggested. ‘Now that we’ve a Guardian and such a ripping one, perhaps you could make the Bird join again.’

‘I don’t believe she’ll come back,’ Maud said. ‘Gina’s been so jolly decent to Freda that Free won’t join anything that hasn’t Gina in it.’

‘We’ve all tried to be extra jolly to Freda, to make it up to her,’ Kitty-Keya remarked. ‘But Gina’s stuck to her best of all. She knows how Freda feels about being left out of everything, because it’s the same for John. He can’t join the Scouts because he isn’t strong enough. He’d have bronchitis at once. Gina’s so sorry about him that she says she knows how Freda feels. What’s the matter, Peggy-Perfect? Why are you looking like that?’

'Like what?' Peggy asked indignantly. 'Can't I look as I like? What did you think I looked like?'

'Startled, as if you'd discovered something,' Kitty said at once.

'Well, I have. I've discovered how jolly kind and decent Gina is. And—and what silly asses some other people are,' Peggy retorted. 'There's Phyl; I want to speak to her.'

She raced away, leaving the younger Camp Fire Girls staring at one another.

'What does she mean? Kitty didn't say anything silly!' Con cried.

'Oh, Peg's a perfect idiot!' The Wild Rose could not understand, so she dismissed the matter.

Peggy ran after Phyllis, who was talking to Sharly Ransome. As she ran, her thoughts were whirling.

'Freda's left out of things. And Gina's John has to be out of things. Is that why they're the Outcast Brotherhood? If Freda and Gina and John and Phyl's Tom are all in it, there's only one more I don't know. Did Gina start the Brotherhood for the left-out people? They chose me because I hadn't a twin. Phyl, how can I make a symbol out of "willing for anything"? I've been wondering about it all night.'

Phyllis turned to her. 'I don't know,' she said frankly. 'It's a puzzle, isn't it? You've time to think it over, though. You can't join the Camp Fire officially until our Charter is renewed and Miss Mason is properly appointed as Guardian. So you must go on thinking, and I'll think about your symbol, too.'

'Thanks awfully! Marian's is easy, but mine's dreadfully hard. But I like my name. I hope I can have a symbol.'

And Peggy turned thoughtfully back towards the school.

'Thanks very much, Phyl,' she heard Sharly say. 'But I can't come to your picnic on Saturday. Maribel has asked me to go to the Guide meeting and I want to see their uniforms and badges.'

'But you won't join the Guides?' Phyllis urged. 'There are plenty of them and so few of us. You'd be a real help to us, Sharly.'

'I don't think I should. I don't know anything about the Camp Fire.'

'You'd soon drop into it. We're weak in seniors,' Phyllis pleaded. 'Ruth's disappointing sometimes; she doesn't understand how I feel about things. And Jane's no use; if anything goes wrong she says, "It's awful! It's hopeless!" She hasn't any ideas.'

'I thought Jane was the Thinker?'

'Yes, but her thinking doesn't lead anywhere. She broods and worries, but she isn't much help. And the kiddies expect everything done for them.'

'It sounds as if you'd been lonely,' Sharly remarked. 'But you'll have Miss Mason now. I don't know that I'll join anything, Phyllis. I'm rather like Peggy-Perfect, quite content as I am. Father sometimes calls me Satisfied Sharly.'

At sound of her own name, Peggy realised that Phyllis's criticisms of her friends had not been meant for younger ears. She hurried after Kitty and Con, who were just ahead.

Before she could join them, a hand caught her arm and she turned to face Freda.

'Sit by me at dinner, will you? I'll have to go to Marty about that disgusting geography after school. Gina says the others had better not see you talking to her too much. But I can tell you all about it. They haven't thought of that. We'll talk at dinner. See?'

Peggy's face blazed with eagerness. 'All about the—the— —'

'Yes. Be careful! Pretend there isn't a secret,' and Freda ran on to join Gina, leaving Peggy radiant and eager.

CHAPTER VIII

A PIP FOR PEGGY-PERFECT

‘The Outcast Brotherhood is for people who can’t join other things,’ Freda explained. She had drawn Peggy into a corner for a chat before the school dinner was ready. ‘But we let you in because John and Gina are twins and they feel it’s so rotten for you not to have your other half.’

‘It’s awfully decent of them!’ Peggy exclaimed. ‘Did Gina start the Brotherhood?’

‘Yes, for John. He had an illness at Christmas and he’s out of everything this term, even school. I’m afraid they’ll go somewhere else before next winter. They live in London, really, and their mother and father are there now. But the twins and Rosalind are living here in a boarding-house for the winter, because it was supposed to be better for John. As he’s been ill here, Queen’s afraid they’ll go somewhere else.’

‘Queen? Oh, is that Gina?’

‘Regina, silly. John’s very sick at being out of school and losing his footer. He wanted to be a Scout, but of course that wouldn’t do. Gina felt she was having everything, with school and games and Guides, and she was awfully upset about it, for John’s sake. So she collected us, John and me and Peter, and Tom Grainger, because he was John’s school chum.’

‘Who is Peter? I know about all the rest.’

‘My brother. He goes to the County School too.’

‘Oh, I didn’t know. And I suppose he wants to be a Scout and your father won’t let him?’

‘That’s it. We’re the Outcasts, and Gina collected us and said, “Now, what about it? Can’t we do something?” So we talked it out, and Tom said it would be a thumping rag to have a mock Camp Fire. Phyl’s in such deadly earnest about Camp Keema; Tom isn’t supposed even to look at the outside of the Lodge door. You couldn’t expect any brother to put up with that. So Tomkins said: “Let’s have a rag! Let’s be another sort of Camp Fire.” So we have three candles and headbands—but we have feathers in ours—and crossed bones, and a password, and names.’

‘It’s a gorgeous idea!’ Peggy exclaimed. ‘Is his name really Tomkins? Or is that only in the Brotherhood?’

‘When he’s a Redskin he’s Tomkins, and Gina and John are David and Jonathan. When we’re the Brotherhood, they’re Brother Tomkins and Brother Jonathan and Brother David.’

‘Not Sister David?’ Peggy asked, laughing.

‘It’s a Brotherhood,’ Freda said firmly. ‘I’m Brother Dick, or the Dicky-Bird. I expect you’ll be Brother Pig, or the Clothes-Peg. Boys are awful, but you have to put up with them.’

‘I haven’t had real boys to put up with. Dick’s too old and Bobby’s just a baby. I’ve sometimes’—Peggy reddened—‘you’ll think me an idiot, but I’ve sometimes imagined Paul—my twin, you know—was here. When they’ve thought I was playing alone, I was really playing with him. But it’s not the same as a real boy. I imagined the things he’d say and do.’

‘It was a good idea, but of course it was just you making up things,’ Freda agreed. ‘You knew what he’d do, because you’d made him up. You never know what real boys will do.’

‘What do you do at your meetings? Are they always in that shed? Was it a tool-shed?’

‘It was once. Now it’s Tom’s workshop. When Phyl had the loft given to her to make into the Camp Fire room, Tom said he must have some place too, or he’d raid the Lodge of Camp Keema whenever he wanted grub. He knew Phyl kept cakes and sweets there. So to keep him quiet they gave him the tool-shed and a key to lock the door. He insisted on having a key, because Phyl had a key for her door,’ Freda explained. ‘Tom’s supposed to use the shed for

carpentry, and he does a little now and then. But we call it the Wigwam of the Riotous Redskins and the Cave of the Outcasts.'

'But doesn't anybody else go in?'

'They're not supposed to. But they wouldn't see anything, if they did. Our things are all locked up in a big box. Nobody could guess it was a Wigwam and a Cave. We don't always meet there,' Freda added. 'If John can't go out, we meet in their rooms. He can't come if it's damp or foggy or when it's too cold. Gina watches him with an eagle eye, he says. But he puts up with it, because he doesn't want another month in bed.'

'It's a jolly good idea,' Peggy admitted. 'It gives him something to think about.'

'That's why Rosalind's so keen about the Brotherhood. Oh, Rosalind knows! John could never have come to any meetings, if she hadn't known.'

'No, I suppose he couldn't have dodged her.'

'She doesn't know what we do,' Freda explained. 'But she knows we're an Outcast Brotherhood. She lets John come out when it's possible, and when it isn't she goes out and lets us have their place. She's awfully jolly and helpful.'

'And what do you do? Just talk?'

'Not likely! We do crossword puzzles. We've had one prize already,' Freda said proudly. 'We bring them from the daily papers, and the local paper always has one. We're a games and puzzle club. And we make them up for one another. John's are awful! It's frightful fun making up clues. Then we do jigsaws—one each—and see who'll be done first. And we play card games and tell stories in the dark and eat toffee.'

'What was the prize and who won it?' Peggy's ambition was aroused. 'I'd like to try! When will there be another meeting?'

'Five shillings. Mr. Firth offered a prize for the most correct set of answers to the crossword in the local paper, the week after we started the Brotherhood. We all worked on our own, and Tom's was almost perfect. So Rosalind presented the prize, and we had a banquet. It doesn't matter who wins; the Brotherhood goes shares; but the Brother who gives the feast has to take the chair and make a speech. About the next meeting'—and Freda took Peggy's arm as they went in to dinner—'it's very awkward, because you're Camp Fire. We were going to meet at John's on Saturday, before Guides; the Guides meet at six on Saturdays, because there's no worry about prep on Saturday nights. But your new Guardian's arranged a meeting for that night; aren't you to go to tea with her?'

Peggy laughed. 'I can't go to tea with my own sister. But I'll have to be there to help.'

'I forgot she was your sister. That makes it worse still,' Freda groaned. 'You might have cut the meeting, but you can't let her down over the tea. I thought you might come to tea with us and go to John's for the Brotherhood, before Gina has to go to Guides.'

'Thanks awfully!' Peggy exclaimed. 'You're a brick to ask me. But I couldn't be away at tea-time. I'd like to watch the Guides,' she added. 'Sharly Ransome's going with Maribel. Couldn't Gina take me?'

'Sure she could. I've been to watch, but it made me feel so bad that I didn't go again,' Freda said.

'Couldn't the Brotherhood meet in the afternoon so that I could be home for tea?'

'Football,' Freda explained. 'Tom and Peter wouldn't miss it. They're not playing, but they go to yell for the school.'

Peggy sighed. 'I suppose yelling for the school's fearfully important.'

'Oh, awfully! More than crosswords. We'll have to think about the meeting. But don't let Maud and that crowd guess we've a secret, Peg.'

'They've guessed it already. They say you and Gina have some stunt on.'

'Queen says we must be more careful. It's convenient that you stay to dinner; you and I can plan things then,' Freda suggested. 'We won't talk about the Brotherhood when the Camp Fire kids are here.'

'I'm a Camp Fire kid myself,' Peggy grinned. 'But I'm a Riotous Brother and an Outcast Redskin too.'

'You've mixed it all up,' Freda said plaintively.

A meaning look from Gina when she arrived for afternoon school and a nod from Freda were all the reference to the Brotherhood that passed, and the Wild Rose and the Tortoise looked in vain for any sign of a secret.

But on Wednesday morning as Peggy came into the cloakroom, something was pressed into her hand and Gina hissed in her ear, 'Friday evening!' and then ran upstairs.

Peggy glanced at the token, which felt very small. Then her eyes widened and she began to laugh. A black speck lay in her palm; an apple pip.

'They've given me the pip,' she murmured. 'It's like the Black Spot in *Treasure Island*!'

'What are you giggling for?' Con demanded.

'A joke of my own,' Peggy retorted, dropping the token. 'I wonder where we're to meet?' she pondered, as she changed her shoes.

'I say, Peggy-Perfect!' Sharly Ransome called across the room. 'Won't you come down in the bus with me sometimes? You were so busy with a book this morning that I thought I'd better not interrupt.'

Peggy laughed. 'It was history. I wasn't sure of some dates. I saw you, but I didn't think you'd want to talk to a kid like me. Why didn't you come in Miss Ransome's car?'

'I do sometimes. But Auntie wasn't coming quite so early this morning. And I often have to go home without her, when she has meetings in the town or business at school.'

'I've seen you going home,' Peggy agreed. 'I'd love to go with you. Thanks awfully!'

'We're both new. I'm still finding out things and I suppose you are,' Sharly said. 'And we live near one another up on the hill.'

'And we're both going to be Camp Fire!'

'I never said so!' Sharly exclaimed. 'As a matter of fact, I'm thinking of joining the Guides.'

'Oh! The Guides are rather fun, aren't they?' There was unconsciously a wistful note in Peggy's voice.

Sharly gave her a keen look. 'Isn't it difficult to choose?' she said, surprised by Peggy's tone into confiding in a Third-Former. 'You sound keen on the Guides—because of Gina, I suppose. And yet you've joined the Camp Fire; of course, you had to. I love the Camp Fire; all the colour and the ideas and the symbols. But I want to be in Maribel's patrol, so I'll have to be a Guide. It's rotten! I wish they all belonged to the same thing.'

'So do I!' Peggy's response was heartfelt. 'I hate having to choose.'

'It makes you feel inclined not to belong to anything,' said Sharly, as she went upstairs.

'Peggy-Perfect!' Freda called across the Third Form room. 'Will you come to tea with me on Friday? Ask your mother and tell me to-morrow!'

Peggy's face lit up. This would make the Brotherhood meeting easy.

'Thanks awfully! I'm sure mother will let me come.'

'I say, Free!' Maud spoke in an injured tone. 'You promised faithfully to ask me next time you had a party. You asked Gina two weeks ago; and you said you'd ask me next.'

'I say, did I?' Freda looked at her, conscience-stricken. 'I'm awfully sorry, old girl. I quite forgot.'

'Shall I come with Peggy?' Maud had something of Ruth's shallow feeling and knew no diffidence.

A look of consternation flashed from Freda to Gina. Peggy listened in dismay, but saw no way to help.

‘It isn’t a party, Maud. It’s only Peg,’ Freda temporised.

But Maud had seen Gina’s look. There was a secret, as she had guessed, and Freda and Gina were going to include Peggy. Maud was hot on the scent and determined to know more. Nothing would stop her now.

‘Then you’ll have plenty of room, if you’ve only asked Peg. It isn’t fair, Free, when Peggy’s so new and you’d promised to ask me.’

‘There’s nothing like inviting yourself,’ Winifred remarked. ‘I don’t see how Free can get out of it now.’

Freda had had a second to think. ‘I don’t want to get out of it,’ she said promptly. ‘It will be jolly to have Maudie. I forgot she hadn’t been lately. All right, Maud. You come too, and we’ll have a party for Peg.’

‘Is Gina coming?’ Maud asked.

‘I haven’t been invited,’ Gina’s tone was one of mock disappointment. ‘I shouldn’t think of hinting that I’d like to be asked.’

There was a laugh from the assembled Third.

‘One for Maud,’ said Winifred.

‘Wild Rose, how could you shove yourself in?’ Kitty remonstrated.

‘Didn’t you see, you silly kid?’ Maud whispered, and bent over Kitty’s arithmetic, as if criticising her work. ‘Freda was going to let Peg into their secret. If I’m there I’ll either find out about the secret or stop Freda talking about it.’

‘Free has plenty of chances—every dinner-hour.’

‘Yes, but only for talk. They can’t do anything in dinner-hour. I’m going to find out what they do.’

‘I don’t believe you’ll find out anything,’ said Kitty.

Freda had turned to Peggy, who was looking bewildered and distressed.

‘Don’t worry, old thing. It will be all right. Gina says they’re silly asses,’ she mumbled, as Miss Ransome came in to take the history lesson.

CHAPTER IX

THE DANCE OF THE REDSKINS

'What shall we do if Maud's there on Friday?' Peggy asked anxiously, when she could speak to Freda alone.

'Don't worry,' Freda said again. 'Gina will think it out. We're meeting at her place; Rosalind has to be out, at Court of Honour.'

'What's that? Something in the Guides?'

'A meeting of all the leaders. Maribel will be there too. If there's no other way, we'll slip out after tea and leave the Wild Rose to be a party all alone. It would serve her right.'

'But she'd be sure about the secret then,' Peggy pointed out.

Racing to the Town Hall after school, Peggy hurled herself into the bus and fell into a seat on top of Sharly Ransome.

'Oh, sorry! Awfully sorry, but I didn't see you. I say,' Peggy cried eagerly, 'if I can come on Saturday evening, will you let me go with you to watch the Guides?'

Sharly laughed. 'You're keen on the Guides! Of course you can come with me. But what about the Camp Fire?'

'I thought if I went for the ramble and helped with the tea, I might escape before the business meeting.'

'Let me know if you can and we'll meet at the corner,' said Sharly, without comment.

But next morning Peggy's face was downcast when they met in the lane leading to the bus.

'Marian says I mustn't cut the meeting. She looked at me as if she thought I was going to join the Guides on the spot.'

'I'm sorry. But I didn't really think you could be watching Guides during a Camp Fire meeting,' Sharly remarked. 'They'd say you must do one thing or the other. But there's another chance for you, Peggy-Perfect. Come with me on Sunday night to Church Parade.'

'What? Where? What is it?' Peggy cried eagerly.

'At St. Andrew's. Maribel asked me to come. All the Guides of the town go to church together once in three months, and they take their flags—'

'In uniform?'

'Of course. It must look topping. Maribel's going to carry the Union Jack for the school; she calls it the King's Colour. Gina Firth and Winifred are her escort. Marcia will carry the Company Colour; that's the school's own Guide flag.'

'It sounds thrilling. I'll come!' Peggy cried; and as soon as she reached school she fired a stream of questions about Church Parade at Gina and Winifred.

On Friday morning Peggy came to school with permission to stay with Freda till seven, but to be sure to catch the half-past seven bus.

Maud, quite impenitent and unashamed, chattered gaily about the 'party.' 'I want to see Peter again. He is a scream!' said she.

'Pete's going to tea with John Firth,' said Freda cruelly.

Maud's face fell. 'Oh, what a shame! I thought you wanted Peg to see him?'

'She'll see him some other time.'

'Serves you right, Maud,' said Winifred. 'You did butt in without being asked.'

'It's mean!' Maud said sulkily. 'Free knows I thought we'd have a game with Peter after tea.'

'Pete can't alter his arrangements because you decide to come to tea with me,' Freda retorted. 'Don't be an idiot, Wild Rose! I can't keep him in just to please you. You must come

another time, when he's going to be in. I never said anything about Peter when I asked Peggy-Perfect.'

'I thought you meant he'd be there'; Maud was deeply disappointed.

'If you find it's dull with just Peg and me, you can come home after tea, and another time I'll make Pete stay in. You see enough of us at school, I'm sure.'

Not only was Peter absent from the tea-table, but Freda's mother and her elder sister Audrey were present. Audrey was two years older than the visitors and two forms above them in school; the difference was quite enough to overawe Peggy and make her shy. Before tea was over the dreaded artist father who objected to the Guides came in, and his appearance reduced Maud to stiff politeness also. The tea-party was definitely not a success, and Maud, with no hope of a Secret Brotherhood meeting to follow, grew more and more gloomy.

Peggy was quiet and extremely well-behaved, but between her and Freda there had passed a meaning look and a private word.

'Stick it out till after tea. Then we'll escape,' Freda had whispered, as they took off their coats.

When tea was over Audrey produced cards and offered to join in a game. 'You can't do much with only three. As it's Friday I can spare a little while, but I have to practise presently. What about Snap?'

'Jolly sporting of you, Audrey,' and Freda brought a chair for Maud. 'It will be much more fun with four. We'll have Animal Grab. I'm a dickey-bird, so you must yell "Cheep, cheep!" What will you be, Peg?'

'I'll be a donkey,' said Peggy.

'Dog,' Audrey announced.

'Cat,' said the Wild Rose.

Freda kicked the donkey under the table by way of applauding the last choice. 'We'll play for half an hour,' she said. 'Then Peg and I will walk home with Maud.'

'Oh?' Audrey looked at her. 'Has Maud to go so soon?'

'I didn't say so,' Maud glared at Freda.

'I know you didn't. But you won't want to stay here with mother and father, and Audrey has to practise. Peg and I have to go out.'

'Oh yes, I forgot. You're going round to see John and Gina, aren't you?' Audrey dealt out the cards.

Peggy arranged her handful neatly, biting her lips. Maud stared at Freda, who looked back at her calmly.

'I'll come with you,' the Wild Rose said at last.

'Awfully jolly of you, but Rosalind didn't suggest it,' said Freda, and played her first card. 'I don't see how you can, Wild Rose.'

Baffled and angry, Maud played badly, and the room rang with catcalls as her cards were snapped up. Freda, trained by the Riotous Redskins, was easily the winner, with Peggy a good second.

Audrey went to the sideboard and brought a bowl of fruit. She solemnly presented the first prize, an orange, to Freda, and an apple to Peggy. The booby prize, a walnut, went to Maud; and then the girls ran up to Freda's room to dress.

Maud was seething, and in the bedroom she exploded.

'Freda, you're the limit! You're taking Peggy to Gina's to let her into your secret! We know all about it.'

'Secret?' Freda gazed at her. 'My dear good Maud, what secret? Gina heard me ask Peg to tea, and she told me to bring her along afterwards to see John. He's had a touch of cold, so he can't go out. What's the secret in that?'

'You know there's a secret. We all know!'

'Very clever of you. What's it about?'

'Free, tell me what you're going to do at Gina's!' Maud changed her tone.

'Crossword puzzles, I expect.'

'I don't believe it!' Maud raged.

'Sorry. What's the use of telling you the truth?'

Maud lapsed into sulky silence, and as soon as they reached the door she turned and walked away towards her home.

'Good-night, Wild Rose!' Freda called, and caught Peggy's hand and ran off in the other direction.

'Nuisance!' she groaned. 'They'll make things difficult. And you haven't much time left. I almost wish we'd given it up altogether for to-night.'

'Maud's sure there's a secret now,' Peggy agreed.

'She was sure before. She hasn't really any more to go on than she had.'

'No, but she's mad now,' Peggy said wisely. 'She'll be much more set on finding out. But I'd have been awfully disappointed if there'd been no meeting. It was only because of the Brotherhood that I could bear that dreadful tea-time! Oh, sorry, Freda! I forgot it was your house.'

Freda laughed. 'I meant it to be dreadful. It served Maud right. We were all as stiff as pokers, weren't we? Audrey kept staring at me and wondering what was wrong. I shall have a lecture from father to-night! He thought I wasn't being kind to Maud.'

'You weren't,' Peggy admitted. 'Neither was I. But he doesn't know we were only making the best of her.'

Freda rang the bell at the boarding-house door, and the maid, smiling as at an old friend, bade her go right up.

'She knows you,' Peggy whispered.

'She knows us all jolly well,' and Freda stood before a door and gave three slow thumps.

'We have to give warning,' she explained. 'Sometimes there's a bit of a row going on, and if we opened the door suddenly the rest of the house would have fits. There are old ladies downstairs.'

The door was opened from within, in most unnatural silence. Peggy followed Freda, holding her breath in delighted anticipation, for the room was as dark as the tool-shed had been, with only one small nightlight burning on a window ledge.

Freda closed the door. 'Tweet, tweet!' she said. 'Grunt, grunt!'

Peggy gave a realistic grunt. Then with a little gasp she caught Freda by the arm.

The room seemed full, not merely of people but of things. Large flapping things moved slowly about and a low moaning began. For a moment that seemed an hour Peggy gazed, fascinated, wondering, eager.

Then she gave a cry. 'Let me see! What are you doing? How do you do it? Don't be pigs! I want to join in!'

The light flashed on as Freda pressed the switch. 'Here's Peggy-Perfect, Redskins. Let her see the dance.'

'Oh, I didn't know it was dressing-up to-night!' Peggy cried. 'I thought we were just going to do puzzles!'

'Always full dress when you get the pip,' the yellow-haired boy threw off his headdress. 'Glad to see you, Brother Pig! Come on; we need another couple.'

The whole Brotherhood was assembled in what was usually the Firths' sitting-room. The table was pushed to the end of the room; the chairs were piled on the sofa.

The four Redskins wore their feathered headbands. Their coloured blankets were flung on the table, however, and each Brother wore a large sheet of white cardboard hung on his chest and another on his back, like a sandwich-man's notice-boards. On each, in dark brown silhouette, was the figure of an animal. John, who had welcomed Peggy, wore a dog; Gina a horse. The other two boys, Tom Grainger and Freda's Peter, wore a fox and a fish. Freda, throwing off her hat and coat, slipped into boards bearing a bird and put on her headdress. Each Brother carried a pole, from which hung another placard, with his animal sign.

'Our totems,' Freda explained. 'John makes them from brown paper. There's yours, if you'd like to join in.'

Peggy, with a suppressed giggle of delight, slipped boards bearing the sign of the Pig over her shoulders and took a pole and raised her totem aloft.

'Gorgeous! What do we do now?'

'Follow me,' said Gina. 'I'm Brother Horse. When we come to doubles, you pair with Brother Fox; he's Tom—that one. Watch us; it's easy. You'll soon fall into it. Moan softly all the time.'

Peggy's moaning was not up to standard, for she was too busy grasping the idea of the ritual dance and keeping one eye on Brother Horse and one on Brother Fox.

Brother Dog led the moaning procession round the room, all holding their signs aloft and marching in a sort of goose-step, very slowly raising their knees and pointing their toes.

'Alone! Alone! Outcast! Alone!' they chanted.

John began a snake-like movement, looping between Brother Fox and Brother Fish and then passing out to become the leader again. Before Peggy had realized it the Brothers were in two files, and she hastily found her place opposite Brother Fox. They went forward to meet their opposites, bowed, lowering their totems, fell back, and then crossed over, faced one another, and repeated the meeting and the salute with drooping signs.

John led them in single file again. Brother Horse held her standard in one hand and struck a triangle which hung from her wrist. Brother Fish clashed a stick on the staff of his totem. The looping movement by the leader, the files, and the meeting, bowing, and crossing were repeated.

'It's easy!' Peggy exulted. 'I can do it!'

Freda switched off the light as she passed the door, and the dance was solemnly performed in darkness, the sharp ting of the triangle and the clash of the sticks mingling with the hoarse moaning chant—'Alone! Alone! Outcast and alone!'

'You dreadful children!' said a brisk voice from the doorway.

The light flashed on. Closing the door behind her was a girl of nineteen, very smart in the blue uniform and turned-up hat of a Guide Lieutenant.

'Rosalind, you've cut the Court of Honour!' Gina cried reproachfully.

Rosalind was not tall, but neat and slim, with dark brown hair coiled closely round her ears. Her brown eyes swept the scene as she explained her presence.

'Madam's ill; the meeting's postponed. I talked to Bel for a while and then came home. Sorry to interrupt your proceedings, but I couldn't walk the streets, and I thought you were merely crosswording. If you don't mind, I'd like to see this new game. Go on! I won't be in your way.'

She perched herself on the table to watch. 'Must it be in the dark? So that's what John's totems were for! I seem to have seen something like this before.'

'Yes, at the Albert Hall,' said John. 'I pinched the idea from those dancing people last Christmas.'

'I guessed that. I want to see how much you've pinched. Isn't there a new Redskin present?'

Brother Pig waggled her standard. 'Yes, please, me! I'm Peg Mason. I haven't any feathers yet.'

'Peggy-Perfect. I've heard about you. Continue your ceremony, Brother Dog!'

'We'll put out the light when you've seen it once through. It's more thrilling in the dark,' said Brother Dog, and led the procession again.

Peggy kept one eye on Rosalind as she marched. What did that little frown on the Lieutenant's pretty face mean? Why should she object to the animal dance?

The light was switched off; the triangle and the sticks clashed. Rosalind gave a whistle under her breath.

'My aunt!' Peggy heard her murmur.

John introduced a new effect. As he passed between the Fox and the Fish he bowed and drooped his totem, and the Brothers responded. As the files met, they saluted their opposites with a little jump which set the standards waving. After one or two failures Brother Pig caught the idea and jumped in time with the rest.

On the table Rosalind began to hum an eerie little tune.

Brother Dog paused and turned up the light. 'I say, Rosalind, is that the real tune? Couldn't you catch Maribel and make her fiddle for us sometime?'

'That's the tune,' Rosalind agreed. 'But I will *not*. I'm not sure that I can allow this. Do you dreadful kids know what you're doing?'

'A war-dance, to match Phyl's Fire business. She does action songs round the fire,' said Brother Fox.

'I saw her!' Peggy cried. 'When I'm Camp Fire and join in the Fire Song I shall think of the animal dance of the Redskins. I hope I shan't giggle.'

Rosalind glanced at her. 'I'm not sure that Camp Keema would have you, if they knew about this.'

'Rosalind, what did you mean?' Freda urged. 'Why are we dreadful? There's nothing wrong about our dance, is there?'

The Brotherhood were carefully taking off their cardboard tabards. They threw their gay blankets round their shoulders and squatted on the floor in front of the fire, looking up at Rosalind.

She gazed down at them from her seat on the table.

'Your dance is a ghastly burlesque—"burlesque" means a mockery—of a very old religious ceremony, so old that it goes back to the days of heathen priests and animal-worship in England. The dance has been kept up in one Staffordshire village and is still done every year. John saw it performed by amateurs at the Albert Hall, in London, the Christmas before last. He has altered it and has left out bits; there aren't enough of you.'

'We need a funny person; a man-woman,' John agreed. 'And a hobby-horse.'

'Yes. You've remembered it marvellously. I'm rather shocked and horrified to see it made fun of.'

'It's only a joke. It does nobody any harm.'

'The moaning is John's addition,' Rosalind looked at Freda and Peggy, who were listening wide-eyed. 'You should carry horns—the antlers of stags—instead of totems. And there are comic characters in the procession. But the march and the actual dance and the triangle and the sticks are all parts of the real thing. *Not* the goose-step! That's John, like the moaning.'

'We were going to give a public performance,' John grumbled. 'With Maribel Ritchie marching in front fiddling the tune. She's a sport; she'd do it for us.'

'You'll not do anything of the sort,' Rosalind said sharply. 'I don't mind what you do at your meetings—here or in the tool-shed. But if there's anybody present to look on, you won't do that dance, Brother Dog. I won't have the Horn Dance burlesqued in public.'

'But if John saw people do it in the Albert Hall, why shouldn't we do it?' Freda cried.

'They do it seriously, for its beauty,' Rosalind retorted. 'They don't make fun of it.'

'We didn't, either,' John said quickly. 'We weren't ragging. It's part of our ritual.'

Rosalind looked at him. Then she said, more quietly, 'Keep it to yourselves, in that case. It's not for public show. It isn't a joke. Now what about a crossword?'

Feather headdresses were thrown aside, and John produced pencils and paper.

Peggy took her first real look at the Brotherhood. John was yellow-haired and thin, much slighter than Gina, who was sturdy and brown-haired like Rosalind. Tom was big and dark, and very like Phyllis. Peter was sandy, a year younger than Freda.

As the Brotherhood knit their brows over the puzzles, Rosalind kept looking at John, as if she had seen him from a new angle.

'Fancy the kid remembering and working out that dance!' she said to herself. Then she asked aloud, 'Brother Pig, don't you live up on the hill?'

Peggy glanced at the clock, and gave a shriek of dismay. 'I forgot the time! Can I catch the half-past seven bus?'

'I'll show you the short cut,' said Freda.

'No, I'll take her to the bus. Is this your coat, Peggy-Perfect? Then hustle!'

The Brotherhood, led by John, moaned its farewell. Peggy laughed, and ran after Rosalind.

'I'm coming to see the parade on Sunday. I'm coming with Sharly,' she said, as they ran to the Town Hall. 'I'm dying to see the Guides! Do you carry a flag too?'

'No, I'm in charge of the Company. I march with the girls,' Rosalind explained.

'Did you mind us doing the animal dance?'

'It was a shock. The real thing is so solemn and beautiful. But there's no harm in it, I suppose,' and Rosalind saw her into the bus and waved her hand.

CHAPTER X

THE CAMP FIRE IN COUNCIL

After Saturday's picnic and tea, Camp Keema followed the new Guardian into her drawing-room, where a wood fire was blazing. Marian put out the light and bade them sit on the hearthrug.

'It isn't Council Fire, but we're sitting in council together, so we'll form a circle. Now, Camp Keema, what are our plans?'

'You said we'd have picnics and rambles,' said the Story-Teller.

'I hope we shall. But we must look ahead. Are we to be merely a club for having good times? Or have we ideals? Can we do anything big?'

'You wouldn't have taken us on, if you hadn't meant to bully us into something worth while, Kitigan,' said the Robin.

Jane leant forward, her elbow on her knee. 'We've messed about long enough. It will be splendid to do something worth while.'

'Notaway, how can you? What about our Lodge?' cried Phyllis.

'That's not quite fair, Thinker,' said the Guardian. 'You've all worked splendidly, especially as you've had no Guardian. That's due to the Story-Teller's leadership, of course.'

Phyllis reddened with pleasure. 'We were all so keen.'

'Phyl's been marvellous,' Jane acknowledged. 'But that was for ourselves, for Camp Keema. It's time we went outside the Camp.'

'That means the school. The school is a wider circle than the Camp Fire, just as Camp Fire is wider than your single selves,' Kitigan said. 'If you could work for the school, then the next step would be service for the town. You and the Guides might work together. After the town, the country; you want to join in some national movement or service. But first we must serve the school. Now what can we do?'

'The bazaar,' Ruth said promptly. 'A stall at the school bazaar. We have the stuff—a cupboard full of marmalade and chutney, Guardian. We could make peppermint creams and toffee and cakes, and those would stock a stall in no time. We'd been thinking of having a sale on our own and perhaps an entertainment, but we could join in the school bazaar if you'd rather we did. That would be working with the Guides.'

Phyllis nursed her knee and stared at the fire.

Marian exclaimed, 'It's not to be my wish! I'm not going to start by being a boss, but I do want to be a leader. It's for the Camp to decide.' She looked at Phyllis.

'It would be jolly to join with the Guides,' Peggy said eagerly. 'Gina wishes we would.'

'What perfect cheek, Peg-Perfect!' said the Thinker. 'Wait till you're asked for your opinion. You aren't even a member yet.'

'Perfectly well pleased with herself,' the Robin said severely.

Peggy coloured and bit her lip. 'I didn't think. I am too new, I know. But I'm used to —'

'To being consulted by the grown-ups,' said the Robin.

'It's perfectly natural,' Marian retorted. 'Phyl, you have nothing to say. Can't you bear to join with the Guides?'

The Story-Teller sighed. 'I know we must, but I'm not keen. We've stood out for so long—all the winter. And it's been chiefly my doing. The others would have buried the hatchet long ago. Janie was the first to fall down before Maribel; then when Bel gave us those panels at Christmas the Robin was ready to fall on her neck. I couldn't. We've been friendly for a month now; but I said I wouldn't work with the Guides. It's difficult to come round.'

‘Very difficult,’ the Guardian spoke with real sympathy. ‘We all have to do it sometimes; so often we go too far and we can’t keep it up, and yet our pride won’t let us come back. It needs real courage to come into the crowd again after standing outside.’

Phyllis gave her an amazed look of appreciation. ‘Thanks awfully, Kitigan!’

‘You do understand us all beautifully, Guardian!’ said Jane.

Marian ignored her and spoke urgently to Phyllis. ‘Story-Teller, I’ve found it a good plan, if one must take a difficult step, to take it with a leap and not to hesitate; to do the hard thing handsomely, not grudgingly; to do more than is asked—to leap into the difficulty. Won’t you do that now?’

Phyllis stared at her. There was little she would not do for Marian Mason, who had understood so fully how she felt and who so plainly trusted her to rise to the heights. ‘How do you mean, Guardian?’

‘On Monday won’t you be the one to make the offer to the Guides? Don’t merely agree to the action of the Camp, but take the lead; go to Maribel and say we’d like to have a stall at the bazaar for the school funds.’

Phyllis grew crimson. She turned and gazed into the fire again, her lips quivering.

‘I say, Kitigan!’ Ruth began.

Marian laid a hand on her knee. ‘Please, Robin!’

Phyllis looked up. ‘I’ll do it,’ she said bravely.

Marian’s hand shot out. ‘Good for you, Story-Teller! That will mean everything to Camp Keema. That’s really “facing the wind.”’

Phyl reddened. ‘I haven’t faced the wind. I’ve stayed in shelter. I’m sorry, Kitigan.’

‘Bully!’ cried the irrepressible Robin. ‘We’ll have the prettiest stall at the sale!’

‘Our brown and gold curtains to drape the back,’ the Wild Rose began eagerly.

‘Masses of yellow beech leaves and catkins from the hills. There are plenty in sheltered places,’ cried the Tortoise.

‘Some long yellow candles among the sweets. The marmalade will fit the rest of the colours,’ Tchuka added.

‘And you all in attendance in your gowns. It will look fascinating,’ said the Guardian.

‘Oh, no,’ Phyllis said quickly. ‘Not gowns! Kitigan, you don’t mean that, do you?’

‘I don’t understand,’ Marian said, surprised. ‘Wouldn’t the gowns be the finishing touch? I was wondering if mine could be ready.’

Phyllis spoke with real feeling. ‘Guardian, our gowns are private, for the Council Fire. We only wear them when we’re alone or with you in our Camp Fire room. They aren’t for show or for selling cakes or for running about a hall.’

‘We’ve put our names and our friends and our hopes and all our deepest feelings into our gowns,’ the Thinker explained. ‘We like to keep them for very special quiet times. It isn’t piggishness, Kitigan. It isn’t that we don’t want to do everything to help the sale. But that’s not the way we care to use our gowns.’

‘It isn’t done,’ the Robin said bluntly.

‘You don’t mind, do you?’ the Story-Teller asked anxiously. Was the Guardian’s understanding going to fail, after all?

Marian was looking at each in turn. ‘Mind? No, I’m deeply interested. I didn’t quite understand your feeling for your gowns. You must remember how new to Camp Fire I am, and forgive me. I’m sure you’re right. What will you wear, then?’

‘Middies; we have them for summer hikes—picnics and walks. Tussore blouses, with brown skirts and stockings and brown silk ties; it’s our outdoor uniform, for public use,’ said the Robin.

‘The gowns are private,’ the Story-Teller said again.

‘I’ll know another time. I must have a middy too,’ Marian said.

‘Kitigan’s rather a dear,’ Phyllis murmured to the Thinker, as they put on their coats. ‘She didn’t mind a scrap being pulled up about the gowns.’

‘She’s sweet; I love her!’ Notaway responded. ‘She didn’t understand. How could she?’

Phyllis was burdened all through Sunday by the task she had promised to carry out on Monday morning.

Peggy-Perfect, on the other hand, passed the day in a state of thrilled expectation.

She chattered all the way to the church, but Sharly was thoughtful and not very responsive.

The church was still nearly empty when they arrived. Sharly chose seats at the end of a pew, and when presently the long stream of girls in blue began to file in, Peggy found she could have touched the badges on their sleeves, they were so close to her.

Wide-eyed, she looked for Gina, but did not see her. Miss Curtis was there, and Rosalind marched with the Company from Miss Ransome’s and ushered the girls into seats. Then came a long pause, while the congregation gathered in the pews behind the Guides, and Peggy scanned the rows of blue hats and wondered what the various coloured cockades of the officers meant. There were green and bright blue and brown and red.

Sharly touched her arm and rose. Peggy, startled, stood also. The Colours were coming.

As the line of standard-bearers and escorts filed up the aisle, bearing the King’s Colour and the special Colour of each Company, Peggy, to her amazement and dismay, found a lump in her throat which nearly choked her. Why should she want to cry? To cry in church? What a baby she must be! And yet there was something strangely moving in that long slow procession of flags.

Sharly touched her arm again. Maribel was passing, holding the Union Jack proudly aloft. Gina and Winifred were close behind, their faces very intent. Then came Marcia with the Company Colour, with Ella and another in attendance.

Peggy’s eyes followed Gina, as she stood stiffly while the flag was taken from Maribel. Then the Colour-party passed to their seats, and a moment later the whole congregation knelt to repeat the Girl Guides’ prayer.

Peggy listened to the address as she had never listened to a sermon before. Her eyes were very wistful as she watched the Colours borne away, followed by the Guides.

In the bus on the way home she was very quiet. At last she sighed. ‘The Guides are great! Lucky you, to be able to join! I hadn’t any choice.’

‘Oh, but the Camp Fire’s top-hole!’ Sharly exclaimed. ‘And everyone says your sister’s a beautiful Guardian.’

‘But weren’t you thrilled when the flags came in? Aren’t you dying to have your uniform and salute as the Guides do, and stand at attention when you see the Colours?’

Sharly gave a little laugh. ‘I was thrilled all right, and the Guides are fine. But the Camp Fire has a very fascinating side. I’d love to sit round the fire and wear a gown.’

‘We’re badly mixed! Something’s gone wrong,’ Peggy-Perfect sighed. ‘I’m not so perfectly satisfied as I was.’

CHAPTER XI

THE MISFITS

'Why did I want to cry when the Colours came into church?' Peggy turned to Marian, as she was setting out for school on Monday morning.

Marian gave her a keen look. Peggy had not said much after the service, but her Guardian-sister suspected that she had been deeply stirred.

'Because the flag is a symbol—of loyalty, of England and of the King. And though you may not have been thinking of your King and country, a very deep part of you is moved at sight of the symbol,' said she.

'I see. Thanks, Gardener! Aren't the Guides marvellous? Or don't you like them, Marian?'

'They're very fine,' Marian agreed. 'You'll lose the bus, Peg-Perfect.'

'I'm not Peg-Perfect,' said Peggy, under her breath, as she ran off. 'I'm Peg-Very-Much-Worried!'

Sharly was not in the bus. This was evidently one of the mornings when she came to school in her aunt's car. Peggy, disappointed, had to bottle up her feelings.

She entered the cloakroom just behind Sharly.

'I wanted to talk to you,' Peggy began.

But Sharly, not noticing her, had gone straight to Maribel. 'Bel, I want to join the Guides. What do I do?'

'Is that the result of last night?' Marcia asked, laughing.

'Oh, Sharly! We hoped you'd come into Camp Keema,' cried Jane. 'Won't you face the wind with us? We've such a topping Guardian now!'

'It is the result of last night,' Sharly looked at Maribel. 'I felt what a big thing the Guides are. I want to belong.'

'Cheers, old girl, that's top-hole! I'll tell Curty,' Maribel cried. 'You'll have to come to meetings and learn your drill for a month before you can be enrolled and have your uniform, though. You could see last night why we have to drill. It didn't just happen.'

'Phyl, Sharly's joined the Guides!' Ruth shouted, as Phyllis came slowly down the steps.

The Guardian's advice was ringing in Phyl's ears.

'Take it with a leap—do the thing handsomely—more than is asked.'

Instead of making her announcement in the seclusion of the Sixth-form room, the Story-Teller spoke out bravely before the crowd of all ages.

'There's something else to tell Miss Curtis. Bel, if she and the Guides are willing, Camp Keema would like to have a stall at the bazaar. We've heaps of stuff. It would be jollier to sell it along with yours than to make a separate thing of it.'

'Phyl, old thing, I'm ever so glad! We'll all be more than glad to make it a united affair,' Maribel cried. 'Off with your coat quickly, and we'll catch Curty before school!'

'And that's the result of the new Guardian,' Marcia remarked, as Phyllis followed Maribel upstairs. 'She's working miracles. And all in one week!'

'Sharly's jolly lucky. I'd have joined the Guides, if there hadn't been any Camp Fire,' Peggy said.

Gina, Maud and Kitty turned on her.

'Join the Guides, if you want to. You don't belong to us yet—not officially,' Maud said huffily.

'I wish you would, Peg-Perfect,' Gina coaxed. 'They didn't give you a chance, bagging you like that. You ought to choose for yourself.'

‘Peg, you couldn’t go back on us now!’ Con cried.

‘It would be jolly awkward, as her sister’s our Guardian,’ said Jane.

‘Perfectly wishy-washy and changeable; doesn’t know her own mind,’ the Robin scoffed.

Peggy’s chin went up. ‘I’ve joined Camp Keema and I’ll stick to it. But the Guides are topping.’

‘Peggy, what did you do at Gina’s on Friday?’ Maud demanded. The question had been on her lips several times during the Saturday meeting, but Peggy had given her no chance to ask.

‘Puzzles,’ said Peggy, a vision of the Animal Dance of the Redskins before her eyes. She glanced at Gina, and they both laughed.

‘It isn’t true!’ Maud said indignantly.

‘My dear Maud, it’s absolutely true,’ Gina assured her.

‘Then there was more!’

‘Oh yes!’ said Peggy. ‘Rosalind came in and talked to us.’

‘Hello, Free! I say, Sharly’s joined the Guides, and the Camp Fire’s having a stall at the bazaar!’ Gina shouted.

‘My aunts and uncles!’ said Freda.

Try as she would, Maud could find out nothing, except, indeed, ample confirmation of her idea that there was a secret. She, Kitty, and Con put their heads together and sought some other way of investigation, and Peggy, Freda, and Gina were closely watched.

‘Peggy’s a traitor to the Camp,’ said Kitty. ‘She shouldn’t have secrets with Guides.’

Dinner-hours gave Peg the necessary chance to talk to Freda, as the Camp Fire trio understood only too well. Maud threatened to ask her mother if she might stay to dinner too, but a highly-coloured account of the school menu made her hesitate.

‘Soup, rather greasy and very thick. All barley,’ Freda said sadly. ‘Lumps of fat floating about in it.’

‘Cold meat and mince on alternate days; and always sago or tapioca pudding,’ Peggy added.

‘I don’t believe it,’ but Maud decided not to take the risk.

‘I wish you weren’t Camp Fire, Brother Pig,’ Freda sighed one day. ‘We used to meet while they were in their Lodge. Then we knew Phyl was safely out of the way. We used to hide under the trees and watch till the whole Camp Fire had gone into the garage; then we scooted past and lit our candles in the shed. We can’t do that now, as you’re Camp Fire.’

‘I could miss the meeting sometimes. What about Guide night? Oh, but Gina couldn’t come.’

‘We could meet before the Camp Fire,’ Freda said thoughtfully. ‘You could come to tea with me or Gina. But we mustn’t let Maud know.’

‘I want to watch the Guides at their drill,’ said Peggy. ‘Maribel said I might, and Sharly’s going to take me and let me go home with her afterwards.’

She watched the Guide meeting a few nights later, and went home with Sharly full of excitement.

‘It’s much more thrilling than the Camp Fire! Lucky you! I’d have loved to be a Guide.’

Sharly, usually placid and friendly, turned on her sharply. ‘You don’t know when you’re well off. The Camp Fire stands for beauty and poetry. But you’re just an infant; you wouldn’t feel the difference.’

She banged the gate of Miss Ransome’s bungalow and disappeared.

‘I say, what a temper!’ Peggy said loudly. ‘I didn’t know Sharly could be like that. I wonder what’s the matter with her? If I could be a Guide, I’d be jolly glad,’ and she went on to her own bungalow, pondering Sharly’s strange outburst.

There was much criticism and disappointment in the school when it was known that the Camp Fire Girls refused to wear their gowns for the sale of work.

'I didn't believe they meant to do the thing handsomely,' said Marcia. 'They always keep something back. They're not in earnest about working with the Guides.'

'Marcia, that's not fair,' Maribel looked up from the Latin she was revising. 'It's not a question of being in earnest. It's a question of their feeling for their gowns and of the proper way to use them. I shouldn't have wanted to wear mine at a public function.'

'And you were our Torch-Bearer once,' Jane added. 'Marcia can't understand, of course.'

'My dear, bear it meekly. None of them can understand, unless they've been Camp Fire,' the Robin said scornfully. 'They run about all over the town in their uniforms. You meet them out on the hills all dressed up in whistles and stripes and badges. They haven't a scrap of poetry or romance in them. How could they know how we feel about our gowns?'

Maribel laughed. 'We have far more use out of our uniforms than you have out of your gowns. Except perhaps once a month your gowns are put away out of sight. We use our uniforms for all our work. But I agree with your not wearing your gowns at the sale. You understand how they feel, don't you, Sharly?'

Sharly had been listening, with a glint in her dark eyes which had called forth the head girl's question.

'Yes, I know how they feel,' Sharly opened her Latin grammar. 'The gowns belong to that lovely room. They can't wear them anywhere else.'

Maribel glanced at her with a touch of anxiety. Sharly was drilling with her patrol, the Buttercups, and was regular and attentive; but Maribel was not sure that she was satisfied.

'They wore their gowns out on the hills, that day they met Miss Mason,' Marcia suggested. 'What about it, Ruth?'

'That was different,' the Robin said haughtily.

'I don't see it! You were running about the hills in beads and gowns and headbands — —'

'Oh, let her off, Marcia!' Maribel cried, laughing. 'We all want to give a final polish to this awful stuff. Robin, you haven't a word to say. You did wear your gown out on the hills! Let's change the subject!'

Ruth discreetly buried herself in her Latin. She was too deeply grateful for Maribel's championship to attempt to argue with her.

The bazaar was coming near, and except for school work and the routine meetings of the Guides and the Camp Fire it absorbed all the energies of the seniors and the more serious juniors. The new Camp Fire Charter had arrived, and Camp Keema was once more officially recognised, so that work done could count for honours; but the ceremonial meeting to receive the Charter and to reconstitute the Camp was postponed for a week or two.

'I'd like to have been your Guardian for about a month before I lead you in the ritual of the Fire,' Marian explained. 'And Peggy-Tawatenya ought to belong for a month before she joins. So we'll wait till she can be received.'

'She might still change her mind,' the Wild Rose hinted, as they sat together on the floor before the fire in Camp Keema's Lodge.

Peggy, busy with some beadwork, did not look up.

'I say, Kitty!' and Con and Kitty whispered together on their way home from the meeting. 'Have you noticed that Peg always comes late when we meet in the Lodge?'

'She'd been to tea with Gina,' said the Tortoise.

'And last week she'd been to tea with Freda.'

'Do you think they'd been at their secret stunt?'

'I'm going to tell Wild Rose to-morrow,' said Con. 'If Peg really has a secret and if she goes to it before the Camp Fire meeting, we're going to find out about it, Keya.'

The Guides had met that night for some extra work for the sale. Marian and Peggy found Sharly in the bus, and Peggy, with an apologetic look at her sister, slipped into the seat by Sharly.

‘Do you mind, Kitigan?’

‘Not at all. You have plenty of me at home,’ and Marian obligingly took a seat on the other side of the gangway.

Sharly’s face was clouded. She smiled at Peggy, however.

‘Have a jolly meeting, kid?’

‘Oh, all right. We’re working for that silly sale.’

‘So are we,’ and Sharly lapsed into silence again.

Peggy glanced at her. ‘They won’t let you wear uniform till you’re enrolled, will they?’

‘No. I have to attend drills for a month.’

‘Aren’t you dying to have your uniform?’

‘No. I don’t want it.’ The words jerked from Sharly; then she pulled herself up quickly. ‘I oughtn’t to have said that. Forget it, please. I didn’t mean it, not exactly.’

‘What did you mean?’ Peggy asked anxiously. ‘I say, do tell me! I won’t tell a soul, but I’d like to understand. I’d love to have a uniform.’

‘You ought to be a Guide, you know,’ Sharly turned to her. ‘You think about them all the time.’

‘I know. I wish I’d met the Guides instead of the Camp Fire. I do like them best, but you mustn’t tell anybody.’

‘I won’t give you away, if you don’t give me away,’ Sharly’s longing for a companion in her difficulties overcame her shyness.

‘Is it the same for you?’ an amazed note crept into Peggy’s tone. ‘Sharly, you wouldn’t rather be Camp Fire, would you?’

‘A thousand times!’ Sharly said vehemently. ‘I only joined the Guides because I wanted to be with Maribel. I was worked up by that Church Parade; the flags excited me, and I thought I was really keen. But that wore off in a day or two, and I knew I was only joining the Guides because of Maribel. I wanted to be in her patrol.’

‘Don’t you like the Guides?’ Peggy asked, bewildered.

‘They’re jolly fine,’ Sharly agreed. ‘I like them immensely. But, for me, there’s more in the Camp Fire.’

‘For you? Oh, you mean different things are better for different people!’ Peggy cried. ‘You don’t mean the Camp Fire’s better than the Guides for everybody?’

‘Not for a second. But for me it takes in things the Guides seem to leave out. And I believe Bel feels the same, though she’s loyal to the Guides and won’t say so. She once said to me that if she came to school now and could choose, she’d be Camp Fire. But she couldn’t choose what she’d like best for herself; she simply had to be a Guide, to help the school.’

Peggy sighed. ‘I’m one who would find more in the Guides. Isn’t it a pity? Neither of us fits. But I couldn’t go back on the Camp Fire now.’

‘Can you go on?’ Sharly asked grimly. ‘That’s what I’m asking myself.’

Peggy gave her a startled look. ‘How do you mean?’

‘Can you join Camp Keema, if you want to be a Guide? Can I go through that enrolment ceremony, knowing I’d rather be Camp Fire?’

‘But I’ll have to, and you’ll have to,’ Peggy urged in dismay. ‘We couldn’t change now! It would be too ghastly! Think how everybody would laugh! The whole of the Third would shriek at me. And what would Maribel say?’

Sharly’s lips tightened unhappily. ‘She’d understand. She wouldn’t laugh. But I’m afraid of Marcia,’ she owned.

‘I’m afraid of Ruth and Phyl and all of them!’ Peggy groaned. ‘I couldn’t do it, Sharly. Jane would be nice; she’d sympathise. But I couldn’t face the rest and say I’d changed my mind!’

‘Then what are you going to do?’

‘Pretend to like Camp Fire,’ Peggy confessed.

‘It’s insincere,’ said Sharly, and bit her lip.

Peggy stole a look at her. ‘But do you mean you—Sharly, you couldn’t!’ Her hand crept into Sharly’s. ‘Oh, Sharly, isn’t it horrible?’

‘The District Commissioner’s coming to our next parade, on purpose to enrol me,’ Sharly spoke almost in a whisper. ‘I daren’t back out now. You’re right; it would be too ghastly. But I shall feel awful when I make those promises. I don’t know how I can do it. I feel it will be doing a wrong thing.’

Peggy looked at her in distress. ‘Does it matter so much? Can’t we join one thing and be keen on the other? Won’t you soon be interested in the Guides?’

‘Oh, I suppose so,’ Sharly’s tone was dreary. ‘And you’ll soon be keen on the Camp Fire,’ she added.

Peggy’s face fell. ‘I’ll always like the Guides best.’

‘Then have you the right to do it? Have I the right? Can we be loyal?’ Sharly wailed, under her breath, as the bus drew up. ‘I say, Peggy-Perfect, you won’t talk about this?’

‘Rather not! I feel too ghastly,’ Peggy whispered, as she rose to follow Marian. ‘Don’t call me that any more! I’m Peggy-Imperfect, or Peggy-Feeling-Rotten!’

CHAPTER XII

THE SIGN OF FIRE

The Wild Rose, the Tortoise, and the Swimmer were whispering together.

‘Will Phyl mind, if we’re all late?’ Keya asked.

‘Rather! There’ll be a row; it’s a pity it’s the Charter meeting,’ Maud admitted. ‘But we must know what Peg-Perfect’s up to with Gina! And the only way is to catch them at it. Peggy’s having tea with Freda again; it’s the third time.’

The Charter meeting had been fixed at last. Peggy was to be received as a member of Camp Keema and was to take her vows and her new name.

‘Peg’s been awfully snappy lately,’ the Wild Rose said. ‘It’s since last week, when we fixed the date of the meeting. I don’t believe she wants to take her name, or something.’

‘Surely Kitigan would know. Peg would tell her,’ Con suggested.

Marian was watching Peggy both as a sister and a Guardian, but Peggy was in a difficult mood and would give her no chance to ask questions.

‘I’m all right,’ she said, time after time, when Marian asked if anything was the matter.

But when the morning of the meeting came, Peggy had a bad cold, to her consternation and Marian’s dismay.

‘I’m truly sorry, Peg! But you can’t be out at night with a cold in your head like that,’ said her mother. ‘You’d better take a day in bed and see if that helps.’

Peggy sneezed and shivered. ‘No, I can’t go. It’s rotten! Marian will have to tell the others.’

‘I’m afraid we can’t postpone the meeting,’ Marian looked at her anxiously. ‘It puts off your joining and your work for honours. I am sorry, Tawatenya!’

Peggy sneezed again. ‘Can’t be helped. I’d give it to all the rest.’

‘I’m afraid you would. They’ll be sorry. I’ll run along to Sharly’s and send a message to Phyllis.’

The younger Camp Fire trio received the news in dismay.

‘That’s a blow,’ said Keya.

‘Peg’s farked the meeting!’ the Wild Rose cried. ‘She wants to put off doing anything definite. She’s a lot too keen on the Guides.’

‘Oh, Yenis, she couldn’t invent a bad cold! Kitigan’s message said: “A very bad cold.” They’d know if she was putting it on,’ Con urged.

‘You’ll see, Peg will be better as soon as the meeting’s over,’ Maud suggested. ‘That spoils our chance of finding out her secret with Gina. Peg won’t be able to go to Freda’s.’

‘No, but Free and Gina will go on with their stunt without her,’ Kitty exclaimed. ‘They had something planned for to-night, or why should Peggy have been going to Freda’s instead of going home and coming to the meeting with Kitigan? I believe they meet for something before the Camp Fire.’

‘Well, what for? And where do they meet?’

‘That’s what we’re going to find out to-night,’ the Wild Rose said. ‘Ask me to tea! I can’t ask you because of Ruth. We’ll hustle through tea and slip along and watch Freda’s gate. If she doesn’t come out we’ll hang about till it’s time for the meeting.’

The plan seemed to hold some chance of success. Con made a counter-suggestion, however.

‘I won’t come to tea, Kitty, thank you very much! I’ll hurry up and be out early, and I’ll watch Gina’s gate. It’s just round the corner from us.’

'Righto! If there's any secret stunt to-night we'll track it to its lair,' Maud said jubilantly.

Camp Keema was to meet at half-past six. By five Maud and Kitty, after a very scanty tea, hurried out. 'To be early, because it's an important occasion,' as Kitty explained to her astonished family.

'Phyl will bring cakes. We shan't starve,' the Wild Rose said, as they took up their places in a dark corner under the bushes of the park, opposite Freda's house.

A boy sauntered down the steps and strolled away whistling.

'That's Peter,' Maud whispered. 'Could he be in it too? We think Gina's John is in it.'

'Did Peter say anything when you were there to tea?' Kitty asked.

'He was out with John Firth. It looks suspicious, doesn't it?'

'Didn't Freda take Peg round to John's after tea?'

'Yes, and they wouldn't take me,' and Maud's face darkened. 'They were pigs about it. I believe Peter and John are in the secret.'

'Shall we follow Peter?'

'Too late; he's gone. Free will come after him, if it's the secret.'

'Perhaps Free's gone to tea with Gina. They went away from school together.'

'That would be disgusting of her,' the Wild Rose said bitterly. 'We ought to have followed them and not minded about tea.'

Cold and impatient, they waited, but Freda did not come. The Town Hall clock struck a quarter-past six, and with a groan of disappointment Maud came out from her corner.

'It's no use. If Peg's in the thing it would have to be over by now. Come and see if Con's had any luck.'

There was no sign of the Swimmer Upstream outside the Lodge of Camp Keema. But as they reached the door of the garage, Maud's arm was grasped and she was tugged back into the darkness.

'Oh, come and see, both of you!' Con whispered. 'I know we'll be late, but you must see this. I've been waiting for you. I hope they haven't stopped!'

'Where are they?' Maud panted, running beside her. 'We never saw Freda; only Peter.'

'Freda came with Gina. They're in the tool-shed; this way. Such a scream!' Con was bubbling over. 'They have three candles and something like crossed logs, and they're all dressed up.'

'What frightful cheek!' the Wild Rose cried.

'The boys too?' Kitty asked incredulously.

'Yes, and Tom Grainger. They're Red Indians, with feathers, and they're marching. There! Don't make a sound!'

The shed was lit by the three candles and the nightlight, all standing on a shelf. The Totem Dance was in progress. Brother Pig's pole and standard stood in a corner; the red banner with the cross-bones hung from the shelf below the lights.

Gina's triangle clashed and Peter struck his stick on his pole as Brother Dog led the procession, all very close together in the confined space. The dance came to an end, and John propped his standard against the wall, the others doing the same.

Throwing his blanket about his shoulders, John faced the rest of the Brotherhood. He crossed his arms on his chest; and the others repeated the action. Then John flung up his arms dramatically, with a ghostly moan, and stood with his legs wide apart. The Redskins did the same.

Maud drew back and looked at Kitty and Con.

'Are they making fun of the Camp Fire?'

'It was like the Fire Sign,' Kitty whispered. 'How awful of them!'

‘Candles—and crossed logs—and headbands—and a dance! And now the Sign! We must tell Phyl!’

‘We’re late, anyway.’ Con exclaimed, as half-past six struck. ‘We haven’t dressed; and we were to start at half-past. Come on! We haven’t time for these idiots just now. There’ll be an awful fuss!’

‘We’re keeping the Guardian and the whole meeting waiting,’ the Wild Rose panted, as they ran across the yard. ‘Phyl will look like nothing on earth. But those wretched boys! What can we do about it?’

They tore off their coats and tunics in a corner of the garage and hurried into their gowns.

Maud was entangled in her fringe and beads. Kitty’s fingers could not tie her headband.

The door at the top of the stair remained coldly shut. No one had appeared to welcome them or even to ask why they were so late.

Very nervous, and unhappily conscious of the chilly silence, the three truants crept up the stair and knocked ceremonially on the door below the crossed logs and the girl who faced the wind.

CHAPTER XIII

CAMP FIRE OR GUIDES?

As Marian took the bus to the meeting in the town, Sharly Ransome came along the lane from her aunt's house and turned in at the Masons' gate.

'Can I see Peggy-Perfect, Mrs. Mason? I'm sorry she's had to miss the Camp Fire. How is her cold to-night?'

'She seems really better. The day in bed has done her good. Will you come in?' Mrs. Mason asked. 'I know she would like to see you. Don't come if you are afraid, but she has stopped sneezing and seems much more herself.'

'Oh, I'm not nervous. I'd love to see her.'

Sharly followed Mrs. Mason across the lounge-hall, where the babies, Bob and Betty, were having their supper, and into the room which Peggy shared with Marian.

Peggy, lying in bed, gave a shout of joy. 'Sharly, you angel! How topping of you to come!'

'Don't sit too close to her.' Mrs. Mason laughingly placed a chair a few feet from the bed. 'Peg-Perfect, don't get excited and make yourself feverish.'

'Oh, I'm all right. Wasn't it silly, Sharly?' Peggy said, as her mother left them together. 'I had a fearful cold this morning, but I've kept warm and cosy and it seems to have gone.'

'But you've missed the meeting,' said Sharly.

'Yes. I won't see Marian giving Phyl the Light of Love. But I saw Marian in her gown last night. She looks lovely!'

'I'm sure she does. Were you sorry to miss the meeting?' Sharly asked restlessly.

'I don't know, really!' Peggy turned and looked at her. 'Some things I was sorry to miss.' Her thoughts flew to the Outcast Brotherhood and the Totem Dance without Brother Pig. 'Isn't your enrolment the day after to-morrow, Sharly? I wonder if I could watch. I'd love to see the District Commissioner! How does she enrol you?'

'I can't go on with it!' Sharly cried. 'I came to tell you. I can't; it isn't straight. It isn't playing the game.' She sprang up and stood by the fire, her back to Peggy.

There was a moment's breathless pause. Then Peggy whispered, 'Sharly! But what will you do?'

Sharly quivered and did not speak.

Peggy exclaimed, 'If you could be ill, they'd have to put it off. You'd have longer to think about it.'

Sharly whirled round on her. 'That's what you've done!'

'I didn't!' Peggy shrank. 'I couldn't make myself have a cold. But I was glad it happened,' she added.

'And now that you've escaped, you're better! I'm not a kid. I can't funk like that.'

'I didn't funk! I didn't!'

'Oh, all right!' Sharly groaned. 'But I'm not ill and I know I shan't be ill, unless I make myself sick with worrying. I must do something, and I must do it at once. I can't let Madam come on purpose to enrol me, and then say I won't. She's a busy person; she won't mind not coming. But I must own up to-morrow, so that they can tell her. It wouldn't be fair to let her come.'

'But what will they all say?' Peggy faltered.

Sharly's lips quivered. But she squared her shoulders and raised her head proudly. 'I'm not going to be a Guide, but I've drilled with them and I know their ideas. I must play up and not funk. They'll laugh and I'll loathe it, but I can't run away.'

She came to Peggy's bedside. 'I've thought till I'm tired. But I see what I have to do. I'm going to tell Aunt Mary I've changed my mind and ask her advice.'

'Tell the Head?' Peggy gasped.

'She's the Head, but she's my aunt and my guardian too. She'd given her consent to my being a Guide. She must be the first to know I'm not keen any longer. I'll tell her that if she says it's right to do it, I'll still join and do my best to be a good Guide, but that I'd far rather be Camp Fire. What I want to know is this—is it right, feeling as I do, to join the Guides? I can't do it unless somebody knows. I'd feel ashamed and sneaky.'

Peggy quivered. 'She'll say you mustn't join.'

'That's what I think. I'd feel I wasn't being sincere.'

'Perhaps she'll tell you to ask Miss Curtis.'

'She may, but I think she'll know what's right without consulting anybody,' Sharly said.

'Shall you tell her about me?' Peggy whispered.

'Rather not! But I wanted you to know before I told her.'

'It's decent of you,' Peggy turned and buried her head in her pillow. 'Sharly, I did funk!' she sobbed. 'I couldn't pretend my cold, but I couldn't have gone to the meeting. I couldn't bear it, and I couldn't tell them. Maud would laugh, and Ruth would say something hateful, and Phyllis would be angry, and Marian would be sorry. How could I, Sharly?'

'It strikes me we're a pair of cowards,' Sharly sat on the bed and laid her hand on Peggy's rough dark head. 'I don't know if Camp Keema will have me after this. But if you're going to be a Guide, Peggy-Perfect, you must behave like a Guide. And that means no funkng.'

Peggy lay rigid under her hand. 'I can't be a Guide! How can I? I'd give anything to be one!'

'But you can't face being laughed at?'

Peggy twisted round and looked at her. 'Oh! Oh, I say, Sharly!'

'That's what it comes to,' Sharly said. 'We've both been idiots, but it isn't too late. If we're brave enough to own up and take the consequences, we can still have what we want. The Guides will love to have you, and I think Phyl will let me into Camp Keema, if your sister is willing.'

'Marian would much rather have you than me! Oh, do you think we could?'

'I think we must, to be honest. It would be awful to start, feeling we hadn't been straight.'

'I've been feeling awful,' Peggy confessed.

She lay thinking, her face hidden by one arm.

Sharly looked at her, then walked away to the fireplace and stood gazing down into the flames.

'Sharly!' Peggy whispered. 'I suppose I ought to tell Marian?'

'That would be easy,' Sharly exclaimed. 'And she'd help you through. You'd have to tell her first, of course, Peg.'

'They called me Tawatenya, "willing for anything." I don't feel willing for this,' Peggy groaned.

Sharly came to the bed again. 'Peg, I want to go and have it over. Aunty's at home to-night. I won't stay any longer. But I felt you ought to know what I was going to do.'

'It was decent of you,' Peggy whispered again. 'Good luck! Good-night!'

Sharly's hand was on the door when Peggy called her back. 'Sharly! I'll do it. I'll tell Marian and mother!'

'That's a little sport!' Sharly exclaimed. 'It will halve it if there are two of us! I'll be glad to know you're in it with me.'

'Couldn't you tell Miss Ransome about me? You could say I'd asked you to tell her.'

Sharly paused. 'Would you really like it? Would it help?'

Peggy swallowed hard. 'Yes, please. If I know you've told her I won't dare to back out. I'll have to tell Marian then. It would make it easier if you'd tell the Head, Sharly.'

'Right! It won't be as bad as you think, Peg,' Sharly spoke comfortingly. 'You don't really care much about anybody in the Camp Fire. If you join the Guides you'll be with Gina.'

'And I'll have my uniform,' Peggy cheered up. 'There's something to look forward to! You are a brick to remind me.'

Then as Sharly turned to the door, Peggy's cry rang out. 'Oh, but what about you? I am a pig and a rotter! You're going away from your chum!—you're leaving Maribel! Oh, Sharly, it's rotten for you!'

'I'm giving up the Guides because I believe it's what Maribel would say I ought to do. She'd say to join the Guides just to be with her wasn't good enough. I'm sure of it. Good-night, Peg! You won't be at school for a day or two; by the time you come back people will have stopped laughing about me.'

'They'll be ready to begin on me,' Peggy groaned.

'Oh, your Guardian-sister will see you through!'

And Sharly went off to interview her headmistress aunt.

CHAPTER XIV

PEGGY'S CONFESSION

Phyllis opened the door of Camp Keema's Lodge, in response to Maud's three knocks, and received the truants with the Sign of Fire and a grimly reproachful face.

Trying to look defiant but feeling very uncomfortable, the younger members met the stony gaze of the Robin and the Thinker and the questioning look of the Guardian.

'Sorry we're late,' the Wild Rose mumbled. 'We were busy, Story-Teller.'

'It was something to do with the Camp Fire, really, Kitigan,' the Tortoise exclaimed.

'Camp Keema waits for you. Take your places in our circle,' the Guardian said gravely.

Much ashamed, the three slipped into the circle and the light was switched off for the meeting.

The candle-lighting ceremony was to have included the Wild Rose and the Swimmer, and they had come prepared to repeat their ritual verses. The taper was not offered to them, however, but was handed to Jane and then to Ruth and then to the Story-Teller. Maud nudged Con, and they looked at one another.

No one asked any questions, but the atmosphere was distinctly frosty. The younger three, full of their discovery and unable to tell of it, were restive and inclined to be sulky.

When the Charter had been formally received and placed upon the ledge above the fire, the Guardian gave a little talk on loyalty and service. As cakes were handed round by the Robin, Maud poked Con and mumbled behind Kitty's back.

'Don't say anything. Keep it to ourselves. They're being piggish; they might know there was a good reason.'

Con gave her a startled look, and then nodded.

At last the Guardian said gravely, 'Camp Keema would like to know why the Swimmer and the Tortoise and the Wild Rose came late.'

The other two looked at Maud. She looked defiantly at Phyllis and Ruth, then answered the Guardian's question.

'Kitigan, the Wild Rose and the Tortoise and the Swimmer have tidings for Camp Keema, but their story cannot be told to-night. We wish Tawatenya to hear what we will say.'

'Yes, Peg ought to be here,' Kitty-Keya agreed.

'We therefore ask that the Camp shall meet again in a few days, when Tawatenya can be here. Then we will tell the thing we have discovered.'

'Gracious! Isn't Maud solemn?' Ruth jeered.

Phyllis leant forward, her brown plaits drooping into her lap under her jewelled band, her dark eyes full of curiosity. 'Are your tidings real, Wild Rose? Or is it all a joke?'

'Frightfully real, and Ruth's an idiot,' the Wild Rose said sulkily. 'We wouldn't tell her, but we'll tell Camp Keema at a proper meeting.'

'But we want Peggy-Perfect to be here,' Con insisted.

'Whatever has poor Peg been doing?' Marian asked laughing. 'I shall give her warning of this! I don't know that we can meet again so soon, Yenise.'

'We were going to come on Thursday to see the bazaar stuff spread out, before we hand it over to the sale committee,' the Story-Teller suggested. 'Couldn't the kids tell us then what it is that's on their minds? Wild horses won't drag it out of the Wild Rose to-night.'

'We want to talk it over,' Maud said importantly, satisfied that she had created an impression and won the attention she wanted.

‘Very well. I think Peg will be all right by Thursday. She was very much better when I left home,’ Marian said. ‘A day in bed always does her good. We’ll meet on Thursday, and the Wild Rose and the others will please come prepared to explain their late arrival.’

She rose, the chains of beads which as Guardian she had a right to claim swinging as she moved and mingling with her long dark plaits. During the month she had made her gown, though it was still undecorated with the ‘garden’ which would some day make it beautiful; her headband, woven on the small loom under Phyllis’s directions, was golden, with coloured flowers and trees and birds, and sparkling beads for fountains and running water. Peggy had watched the weaving wistfully, lamenting that she still had not found a symbol for ‘willing for anything.’

The girls rose also. Their gowns were decorated where the Guardian’s was still plain, but they looked less picturesque with their short hair; Phyllis was the only one who could show long plaits, and on Camp Fire nights Ruth envied her, though at no other time.

The Guardian called on the elder girls to put out the candles and recite the closing verses. They sang a farewell chant quietly, and stood silent in the dark beside the dying fire.

Then Marian switched on the light. ‘Now, off home, all of you, quickly. I’m going to run for the bus as soon as I’ve dressed.’

‘A lovely meeting, Kitigan! It’s top-hole to have you!’ the Story-Teller cried.

Marian sat in the bus, a small suit-case at her feet, and wondered what Peggy-Perfect had been doing to attract so much attention from the Wild Rose. As she reached the bungalow, Mrs. Mason met her at the door.

‘I’m glad you’ve come, dear. Do go at once and speak to Peg. She’s been crying and I think she’s feverish. She has told me her trouble, but it won’t be off her mind till she has told you too.’

‘What is it all about?’ and Marian hurried to the bedroom.

Peggy fairly leapt into her arms. ‘Marian, I can’t bear it any longer! I can’t join the Camp Fire. Oh, isn’t it awful? I like the Guides much better. Oh, Marian, tell me what to do!’

Marian’s arms went round her. ‘You poor kid! Have you been afraid to tell me? Peggy-Perfect, it’s all right. You mustn’t be Camp Fire unless you want to.’

‘They’ll all laugh,’ Peggy sobbed.

‘Well, what if they do? You don’t mind that, surely?’

‘Oh, but I do! I’ll hate it. I don’t know how to tell them. Marian, I’m not wishy-washy and a turncoat! I’ve liked the Guides best from the first. I never chose the Camp Fire.’

‘That’s true,’ Marian comforted her. ‘You hadn’t a chance, kid. Camp Keema adopted you without asking your leave. I’ll make them see that. You want to be with Gina, don’t you?’

Peggy clung to her. ‘Marian, you do understand. You are nice! You’re a jolly Guardian, and I wanted to belong with you; I did, really! But the Guides are so ripping; and when I saw the flags and Gina’s uniform I just couldn’t bear to be left out.’

‘It all pulled you too strongly. I’ve guessed you weren’t happy for some time.’

‘Do you mind, Marian? If there hadn’t been any Guides I’d have loved the Camp Fire.’

‘I don’t mind at all; I’m very glad you’ve told me. It was silly to wait so long and make yourself unhappy,’ Marian scolded gently. ‘I’m glad you told me before you really joined, Peg.’

‘Sharly made me do it,’ Peggy owned. ‘You’ll have her instead of me, won’t you, Kitigan?’

‘Sharly? Do you mean that Sharly isn’t going to join the Guides?’ Marian cried. ‘Have there been two of you worrying your hearts out? What’s this about Sharly, Peg?’

‘She came this evening. She wants to join Camp Keema. She’s telling Miss Ransome now.’

Marian sat on the bed and laughed. 'You poor kids! Oh, I'll love to have Sharly!'

'She's more worth having than I am. You haven't lost much.'

'I think perhaps you'll make a better Guide than Sharly, though. Cheer up, Peg! Don't be a coward; never mind if people laugh. I suppose this is what has excited the Wild Rose so much? How did she find out?'

'She doesn't know. I haven't told anybody. What d'you mean?' Peggy cried.

Marian, puzzled, told of the evening's happenings. 'What is it those three have found out, then?'

Peggy gave a sudden chuckle. 'I can guess. Oh, Marian, be a sport and don't ask me! Wait till Thursday! I'll be all right long before that. It would be too brutal to spoil Maud's secret!'

Marian looked at her. 'There is a secret, then? And you're in it?'

'And Gina and Freda. It's nothing dreadful, Marian. I can't imagine how Maud found out, but she's known for weeks that there was something.'

'I think you ought to tell me,' Marian hesitated.

'It isn't bad, Gardener! It's only a joke! Don't spoil it for Maud and the rest!' Peggy pleaded, intent on a private talk with Gina before the story was told. 'They're dying to be the ones to tell you!'

'Well, I'll wait till Thursday, if you're sure— —'

'Rosalind Firth knows all about it, and she's the Guide Lieutenant, Marian!'

'Then it can't be very bad. I'll try to have patience. But if you aren't perfectly well you won't go out on Thursday night, Peg-Perfect!'

'Oh, I'll be all right now! I think worrying made me have a cold. It will be horrid telling Maud, and I know the Robin will be hateful. But I'll pull through, since you don't mind.'

'Maud and Ruth won't want you, if you're keener on the Guides. I'm sure Gina will be glad.'

'I want to have it over, and settle down in the Guides!' Peggy sighed.

CHAPTER XV

SHARLY FACES THE WIND

Sharly stood beside Miss Ransome, who sat writing at her desk. 'Could you talk to me, aunty?'

The Head left her letters with a tired sigh. 'Joyfully, my child. Why does one have to write letters? Come and sit by the fire. What is it, Sharly?'

Sharly sank on the rug beside her aunt's knee. 'Aunty, would it be right to join a big thing like the Guides just for the sake of being with one particular girl who was a Guide?'

Miss Ransome gave her a quick, amazed look. Sharly met it without flinching, but she reddened.

'I should say, no, certainly not. It isn't a good enough reason for joining the Guides.'

'That's what I've been thinking,' Sharly's lips quivered and she turned to stare into the fire.

Her aunt looked down at her, but saw only the top of her dark head. 'Tell me all about it, Sharly. Your enrolment is on Thursday, isn't it?'

'It was to be. I can't go on with it. Aunty, I can't do it insincerely.'

'I hope you won't think of it! If you really don't wish to be a Guide, the sooner I ring up the Commissioner the better.'

'I hoped you would,' Sharly said meekly.

The headmistress side of Miss Ransome calmed down, after a momentary awakening. 'Tell me, Sharly. Aren't you happy in the Guides?'

'I've liked the Camp Fire better all along,' Sharly exclaimed. 'I love Miss Mason and I'd like to be in her Camp. But I wanted to be with Maribel Ritchie, aunty; she's so sporting, and I've admired her enormously for the way she's so loyal to the Guides. She likes the Camp Fire better too, you know.'

'I guessed she did,' the Head commented. 'But she cares most of all for the school. It has been a great help to me to have Maribel backing up Miss Curtis. She has done a real bit of work for the school.'

'That's what I feel. But she's given up the Camp Fire; and her gown and her ring and all her beads are put away out of sight. She showed them to me when I went to tea with her. She's felt really bad about it, aunty.'

'It has been worth doing, though, and she's an excellent Guide.'

'I felt I'd like to back her up and be in her patrol.'

'It was natural,' Miss Ransome agreed. 'But it isn't enough to make you a good Guide, if your heart is elsewhere. You can see plenty of Maribel without being a Guide, Sharly.'

'I see that now, but I didn't at first.'

'But I thought you were really enthusiastic about the Guides after you saw the Church Parade?'

'I was excited about them,' Sharly confessed. 'But in a few days that wore off and I knew that I was joining only because of Maribel. I've felt horrible, aunty. I haven't felt I could be the real thing.'

'You'd feel disloyal,' her aunt said. 'Well, my dear, you are right. You can't join the Guides. I'm glad you've had the courage to tell me. I'd have thought poorly of you if you had allowed yourself to be enrolled, feeling as you do. You could have withdrawn afterwards, and I've no doubt you'd have found it necessary, but it would have been very much harder. I'll phone to the Commissioner. You must tell Miss Curtis to-morrow.'

‘And the girls,’ Sharly said unsteadily.
Her aunt gave her a keen look. ‘Do you want me to do it all for you?’
‘Oh no, no!’ Sharly cried, flushing. ‘They’d feel I’d funk’d. I’ll tell them, but it won’t be easy.’

‘Of course not. It will need real courage. But you can do it, Sharly.’
‘I didn’t know one could need courage nowadays, and just at school.’
‘My dear! You’ll need courage everywhere.’
‘Aunty, you know Peggy-Perfect?’
‘I know Peggy Mason.’
‘Oh, don’t be the Head at home, aunty dear!’ Sharly implored. ‘You know the kid’s called Peggy-Perfect!’

Miss Ransome laughed. ‘Is she happy in the Camp Fire? I’ve often wondered why she wasn’t a Guide. Gina Firth seems to be her chief companion.’

‘She’s going to be a Guide. She’s telling her sister now.’
‘What?’ the Head cried. Then, like Marian, she began to laugh. ‘Oh well, you must exchange, that’s all. But Peggy’s gown won’t fit you, nor your uniform fit Peggy! We must see what we can do about that!’

‘Peg’s been feeling fearfully bad, aunty. So have I.’
‘I’m glad you’ve both come to your senses,’ her aunt retorted. ‘I believe the Camp Fire will suit you, and I’m certain the Guides will suit Peggy.’

‘I like the ideas behind the Camp Fire,’ Sharly remarked.
‘Then it’s time you “faced the wind” and settled matters properly,’ said Miss Ransome.
Sharly felt she was facing a very piercing wind indeed when she entered the cloakroom next morning. She went straight to Maribel, who was talking to Marcia and Ella.

‘Bel, I don’t know what you’ll think of me! I’ve been telling Captain I can’t join the Guides.’

In petrified silence the three Guides stared at her, while an astonished crowd gathered round.

‘But you can’t back out now!’ Marcia cried wrathfully. ‘Enrolment’s to-morrow!’
‘Enrolment’s off,’ Sharly retorted, her eyes on Maribel. ‘Aunt Mary ’phoned to Madam last night.’

‘But why, Sharly?’ Ella cried.
‘I believe I know,’ Maribel was scanning Sharly’s anxious face. ‘You’re keener on the Camp Fire. Is that it?’

‘I didn’t know at first,’ Sharly pleaded. ‘Do you understand, Bel? I’ve been feeling more and more sure, and worse and worse about the Guides.’

‘How rotten!’ Marcia said in disgust.
‘Not a scrap,’ Maribel said quickly. ‘Sharly’s jolly plucky to own up. It must have been ghastly having to make up her mind. Did you feel awful, old girl?’

‘Fearful. I haven’t known what to do. But I couldn’t go on. I didn’t feel honest.’
‘Like being engaged and realising it was a mistake and that you couldn’t go through with the wedding,’ Maribel suggested.

‘Exactly like that. It would be better to cry off than to marry the wrong man because one was afraid to back out.’

‘Oh, rather!’ Maribel said laughing. ‘If I’m ever engaged, I’ll back out at the church door if I’m not sure about it. I hope you’ll marry the right man now, Sharly. Camp Keema, I presume?’

‘If they’ll have me. I wouldn’t blame them if they refused.’
‘Oh, they’ll have you! Phyl will fall on your neck.’

‘What a rotten business!’ Marcia said gloomily. ‘The Commissioner will think we are a weird crowd!’

‘Aunty told her all about it,’ Sharly urged. ‘She won’t blame the Company. Bel, you don’t mind, do you?’

Maribel said promptly, ‘I mind enormously. I shall miss you; we all will. But I think you’re right, and that’s all that matters.’

‘And I envy you your chance of being Camp Fire,’ she added under her breath.

‘I’d have felt awful if you’d said you didn’t mind,’ Sharly confessed. ‘You see, it was frightfully difficult for me. I have spent hours and hours cogitating about this business, until I felt I couldn’t go on any longer. It was terrible! I thought I should go absolutely crazy!’

Maribel laughed. ‘I shall have to hand you over to Phyl. But don’t forsake me altogether! I say, Story-Teller! Have you room in Camp Keema for one more—somebody very nice?’

Phyllis and Ruth, coming in with Jane, had not heard the news.

‘Who? What? Not Sharly? But what about the Guides?’

‘The Guides are on the shelf. Sharly’s all out for a gown and beads. She’s “faced the wind” and told us she prefers Camp Fire. Jolly plucky thing to do!’ said Maribel.

‘Phyl, will you have me?’ Sharly asked. ‘I won’t change my mind again. I really am keen on Camp Fire. I’ll go and see Miss Mason this evening.’

‘Cheers! We’ll be jolly glad. You’ll be worth more than Peggy-Perfect to Camp Keema.’

Sharly laughed. ‘What do you know about Peg?’

‘Phyl, what did you mean?’ The Wild Rose pushed past Ruth. ‘What about Peggy?’

‘Kitigan has been talking to me on the ’phone. She rang up from the dairy on the hill,’ Phyllis said. ‘That little wretch Peg, after coming to meetings for a month, has decided she’d rather be a Guide. I don’t know if they’ll have her, but she won’t be much loss to us. She’s never been keen on Camp Keema.’

‘Oh, joy! Oh, cheers! Good for Peg! I hoped she would!’ Gina shouted. ‘Can she be a Buttercup, Maribel?’

But her outcry was drowned in the burst of laughter from the crowd.

‘Two of them! Oh, well, the Guides can swop Sharly for Peggy-Perfect!’

‘How disgusting of Peg!’ Maud said indignantly.

‘She was always keen on us,’ Gina was jubilant. ‘You never gave her a chance. You bagged her, and she wouldn’t stay bagged. She had to choose. You mustn’t mind so much, because you’ve got Sharly now, and we shall have Peg. I think it’s a marvellous idea. Best thing that’s happened for years!’ And Gina danced up and down in her excitement.

‘She’ll make a jolly Guide,’ Maribel agreed, laughing.

‘It was like Miss Mason to break the news and make it easy for Peggy-Perfect,’ Sharly said.

‘You knew, then?’ Phyllis and Maribel spoke together.

‘We talked it over last night. We’ve been companions in misery,’ Sharly said with dignity. ‘We decided it was time to put an end to it and face the wind. Bel, I couldn’t let myself be enrolled as a Guide when I didn’t mean it,’ she said, as they went upstairs together.

Maribel’s hand slipped through her arm. ‘Of course not, old thing. You had to speak out. I’m sorry in a way, but I’m sure you’re right. You’ll love Camp Fire.’

‘You won’t turn me down altogether?’

‘Rather not! I hope you’ll tell me all—except Camp secrets, of course—about Camp Keema, and I’ll enjoy it again through you. And Peggy-Perfect will tell her sister about the Guides. You’ve a jolly Guardian, Sharly. How you’ll love it all!’

CHAPTER XVI

THE CAMP AND THE BROTHERHOOD

Peggy-Perfect came to school on Thursday morning a little shy and doubtful of her welcome. But Gina's joy made up for Maud's pointed remarks and a certain coolness on the part of Kitty and Con, and Peggy had important tidings to whisper to Gina at the first opportunity.

Gina's eyes widened.

'You think they followed Free and me and saw the Totem Dance? Gee-whizz! That's why Maud has been looking daggers at me ever since Monday. They'll say we were making fun of the Camp Fire!'

'So we were! I don't know what Marian will say about it.'

'Oh, well! Let them make a fuss if they like. It's the end of the term in a week—they can't stop us meeting in the hols! We're keen on the Totem Dance and we've some splendid new puzzles. We'll have a meeting for you soon, Brother Pig. Next term things may be different.' And Gina's face clouded.

'How do you mean? Because it will be light evenings?'

'We're going away before next winter, because of John. Rosalind thinks we'll go abroad.'

'Oh, Gina! Just when I've joined the Guides to be with you!'

'Rot! You don't join the Guides for that reason,' Gina said bracingly. 'You're going to be a Guide because they're top-hole and you want your uniform and to be allowed to salute the flag.'

'I know. But I wanted to belong to the same thing as you.'

'You'll live without me all right. I wonder what will happen to the Brotherhood? It's rough on Free and Peter. They'll be the only real outcasts left. Tom doesn't really mind about being cast out from the Lodge of Camp Keema! Are you going to the meeting to-night?'

'Marian says I'd better go, as they want me there. And Maud wants me to come; she asked if I was going to funk to-night too!'

'What a nasty way to put it! Just like Maud! I'll dash home after school and talk to John.'

Peggy went to the evening meeting in a defiant mood, prepared to defend herself, if necessary, by insisting that she had never really belonged to the Camp Fire. Maud, Kitty, and Con had kept up a reproachful attitude to her all day, to Gina's amusement.

'Gina says they're silly asses!' Gina whispered into Peggy's ear, as Mademoiselle entered the classroom.

Peggy giggled and collapsed into her French grammar, and the injured Camp Fire members looked at her stonily and then gazed at one another.

The work done for the school bazaar was spread on the table in Camp Keema's Lodge, for the Guardian's inspection. Marian admired and commented, and made useful suggestions of ornamental ways to pack the sweets and marmalade.

Then she called the girls to sit on the rug before the fire. Sharly had been invited, and was sitting in a corner, still feeling very much an outsider.

'Wild Rose, Tortoise, and Swimmer Upstream, Camp Keema waits to know why you were not in your places at the Council Fire,' said the Guardian.

The juniors had forgotten this aspect of the question. Maud had been thinking of herself as the accuser, not the defendant.

'We'd found out that something was going on and we were inquiring into it, Kitigan,' she said.

‘We were so thrilled that we forgot the time,’ Kitty added.

Maud thrust a finger into her ribs. ‘That won’t make things any better, idiot. Kitigan and the rest of Camp Keema, Gina Firth and Freda and a lot of others were having a meeting in the shed behind the garage. We saw them — —’

‘Gracious! *I* didn’t know!’ Phyl cried. ‘Gina and Freda in our tool-shed? Then Tom’s at the bottom of it. He’s the only one who has a key to that shed.’

‘They were making fun of the Camp Fire!’ Maud cried. ‘They had three candles!’

‘And crossed logs or something!’

‘They did a weird dance, and they wore headbands with feathers in them, like Red Indians!’

‘One of them made a sign, like our Sign of Fire, and all the rest answered, just as we do. It was a boy, and I believe it was John Firth. He did this!’ and Maud sprang up, folded her arms, and then flung them up and out, and stood with her legs wide apart.

‘Like a windmill,’ said Kitty. ‘That’s it, Maud!’

The result of Maud’s dramatic action astonished her. The Guardian lay back against the wall and laughed till she cried. Jane, after a doubtful moment, laughed too, and even Ruth joined in.

Peggy was helpless with delight, lying with her head in Marian’s lap.

‘Oh, Maud, you looked so funny! Did John look as funny as that?’

‘Like a jumping-jack suddenly petrified in mid-air,’ Ruth chuckled.

Phyllis was frowning, and Kitty and Con were looking indignant.

‘But don’t you see how dreadful it is?’ Kitty cried. ‘They’re making fun of all we do!’

‘Well, what about it? Let them!’ the Guardian said ruthlessly. ‘Oh, dear, Maudie, I’m tired with laughing! I’ll try to pull myself together, but you were so desperately solemn over it. We quite understand why you were late. We’ll say no more about that. You couldn’t possibly resist anything so gorgeous as a mock Camp Fire, especially if you weren’t expecting it!’

‘But they’ve no right to make fun of us!’ Phyllis urged wrathfully.

‘It won’t hurt us. I wonder what else they do? Do you know who the others are?’

‘We do crosswords and the Animal Dance,’ said Peggy. ‘We told Maud we did crosswords, but she didn’t believe us.’

‘Were you in it too?’ Marian exclaimed.

‘Did you know all about it? Did you make a game out of Camp Fire, while you were pretending to belong to us?’ Phyllis and Ruth spoke hotly.

Peggy quailed. ‘I sort of knew I wasn’t really going to belong,’ she protested. ‘I never felt I was doing anything mean.’

‘You’ve never been in earnest. Your heart’s been in the Guides all along,’ Marian remarked. ‘Phyl, it’s no use looking like that. This is her last appearance in Camp Keema. As a Camp Fire Girl we might have censured her for disloyalty, but it’s obvious she has never been really one of us. Now, Peg, you know all about this affair. Tell us who are in this other Camp Fire, and who started it, and what you do.’

‘Gina said I’d better tell you, if you asked me, or I wouldn’t give them away,’ Peggy said. ‘It’s the Outcast Brotherhood. Gina started it for outcast people—for John first of all, because he can’t go to school or footer or Scouting. Rosalind knows all about it, and the Brotherhood meets at their house when it’s too cold for John to go out.’

‘So far it sounds a very kind thought on Gina’s part,’ the Guardian commented. ‘Who are the other outcasts? And why were you chosen? I don’t see that you were eligible, Peg. You’ve been anything but an outcast, I should say.’

Peggy blushed. ‘I think Gina wanted me, so she made an excuse. She said John was sorry for me because I hadn’t any twin.’

‘Oh, I understand!’ Marian said gravely. ‘And the others?’

‘Freda’s one,’ said Kitty. ‘And we think Peter’s another; he’s Freda’s brother, Kitigan.’

‘Because they aren’t allowed to be Guides and Scouts. Their silly father won’t let them,’ Peggy explained. ‘Freda was feeling so bad about being left out of the Guides. Then there’s Tom. Phyllis had kept him out of this room, so he let us use his tool-shed. That’s all the Brotherhood. I was the sixth; they needed a partner for Tom in the Totem Dance.’

‘Tell us about this dance,’ Marian commanded.

Peggy described the Animal Totems and the procession. ‘Rosalind Firth says John’s copied it from a real dance that’s very ancient and religious. Some village somewhere does it every year; but they carry horns—off stags, you know. We haven’t any horns, so we carry our totems. I’m Brother Pig; Gina’s Brother Horse; John’s Brother Dog.’

‘Brother Pig was a good name for you, Piggy-Perfect,’ said Maud sulkily. ‘You knew you were making fun of the Fire Song.’

‘We weren’t!’

Marian interposed. ‘What is Freda, Peg?’

‘Brother Bird. Tom and Pete are the Fox and the Fish. John says if anybody else joins they’ll have to be Brother Stag and Brother Bull, and then Brother Hare and Brother Cock. He’s very particular about having the sort of animals savage people would know about: he says we’re wild tribesmen and our totems must be the ones they’d choose.’

‘Traditional, in fact,’ Marian remarked. ‘John knows a thing or two. And you wear feathered headdresses? I’d like to see the dance!’

‘We’re the Riotous Redskins as well as the Outcast Brotherhood,’ Peggy said defiantly.

Ruth giggled. ‘What a set of babes! Phyl, they aren’t worth worrying about! Riotous Redskins! Let them riot, if it amuses them!’

‘What was the funny noise they made while they were marching, Piggy?’ Maud asked.

‘Our chant,’ Peggy said haughtily. ‘No, I won’t do it for you. It would sound silly done by one alone.’

‘It all sounds very silly to me,’ Ruth told her.

‘It would,’ Peggy retorted. ‘You and Phyllis are so stodgy, you can’t see a joke. Marian understands.’

‘I’d like to be in that dance!’ Maud cried. ‘I shall ask Gina to take me in! I’ll be Brother Stag. You’d have a better procession with a few more.’

‘I’ll be Brother Cock!’ Con added. ‘We’ll raid their next meeting and make them let us in!’

‘Phyl, can’t you steal the key of your own tool-shed?’ Maud hinted.

‘We shall meet at the Firths’ boarding-house. You can’t follow us there,’ Peggy said triumphantly.

Maud’s face fell. She had already been seeing herself as Brother Stag.

Peggy leaned forward, her eyes sparkling. ‘Gina said I might tell you. I can’t stay any longer; they’re waiting for me. They’re having a meeting now!’

She sprang up and dashed out of the room and down the stairs.

As one man, Camp Keema leapt to their feet and ran after her, Guardian and all. The garage light streamed across the yard. Peggy had disappeared.

Phyllis was leading the way towards the shed, when Marian caught her arm and swept the whole of the Camp Fire into the shadows.

‘Wait! Watch!’ she hissed, and pressed against the wall they gazed, as Brother Dog led the Totem procession out from the tool-shed. Brother Pig was in her place at the end of the line, her totem a little crooked, a band of feathers, prepared for her by Freda, thrust on her head.

‘We’ll show them something worth while!’ John had vowed, as she dashed in with a breathless, ‘They’re all coming!’

Moaning 'Alone! Alone! Outcast and alone!' he led the line of swaying totems round the yard, in the slow processional step. With no sound but the tinkle of the triangle and the clash of the sticks, the looping and meeting and crossing figures were gone through, with the bowing, the little jump, and the drooping standards. The procession passed across the stream of light, into the darkness, and out into the light again. Then they followed Brother Dog into the shed and the door was closed.

Marian woke from a dream, and shook herself.

'How ghostly! We were all hypnotised! It's very eerie and well thought out.'

'It was weird,' Ruth admitted.

'Fancy those kids having it in them!' There was an unwilling note of respect in Phyl's voice.

'It was very well done. You'd better leave the Outcast Brotherhood alone, girls. They won't do you any harm.'

'Oh, but we're going to join!' Maud, Kitty, and Con darted to the tool-shed door.

Maud thumped three times, for inside everybody seemed to be talking at once.

'Who goes there? Friend or foe?' The door was opened an inch from within.

'Brother Bull has come to join the Totem Dance,' said Maud. 'And Brother Stag!'

'And Brother Cock! Let us in, Gina. It will be sport! We'll do crosswords too!'

The door was thrown open, and Maud, Kitty, and Con disappeared.

'And what becomes of the Camp Fire?' cried Phyllis.

'It won't interfere with the Camp Fire,' said Marian. 'Look how keen Gina and Peggy are on the Guides! You can't stop this, Story-Teller. They may tire of it, but at present they're fascinated. And there are boys in it! You can't do anything. John and Gina are wise to take them in. Our three juniors would never have rested till they'd forced their way in. But they'll be loyal to Camp Keema. We'll see to that!'

'Shall I go and pack up the bazaar stuff?' Sharly suggested. 'I'd like to do something for the Camp Fire.'

'We'll do it together,' said the Guardian.

And all that was left of Camp Keema went back to their Lodge and set to work.

CHAPTER XVII

A NEW NAME FOR SHARLY

The school bazaar, on the day before the term ended, was a great success. Sharly and Peggy-Perfect, doing their share with their new comrades, revelled in the feeling of adoption and were sorry for the girls who, for one reason or other, were neither Camp Fire Girls nor Guides.

‘So stuffy not to belong to anything!’ Peggy said.

Sharly laughed. ‘I very nearly didn’t. I’ve felt so awful lately that I really thought I wouldn’t join anything at all.’

‘It’s great to have it settled!’

‘It’s a great relief to my mind,’ Sharly admitted. ‘And I’m sure it is to yours.’

‘Oh, rather! I’m going to have a marvellous time with the Guides.’

‘I’m going to have a gorgeous gown as soon as I’ve the right to wear it. But I have to be a Wood-Gatherer first. It’s dreadfully hard to wait!’

‘What’s your name going to be? I’ll let you be Tawatenya, if you like.’

‘Thanks!’ Sharly retorted. ‘But I have to wait till my name’s given to me. I hope they’ll find me a jolly one! Your symbol was too difficult, Brother Pig.’

‘I don’t need to worry about it any more,’ Peggy exulted.

Sharly laughed again. ‘Camp Keema was too good for you!’

In her tussore middie and brown skirt and tie, Sharly looked a real Camp Fire Girl as she served at the brown and gold stall with Phyllis and Jane and Ruth. She wore no silver ring, but she had worked the Camp Fire monogram and badge on her blouse and at the Story-Teller’s suggestion she had done her hair, as Phyl herself had done, in two plaits drawn forward, as she would wear it at the Council Fire.

‘It will be jolly to have another in the circle with hair,’ the Story-Teller said, when she saw how thick and long the plaits were. ‘We’ve been such a skinny shingled crowd. With you and Kitigan it won’t look so bad. And you’re both dark—that’s splendid too.’

The Guide stalls were decorated in patrol colours. Maribel was in charge of the Buttercup table, which was hung with yellow; Marcia presided over the dark-green Ivy Leaves. The Lilies had white and yellow draping, the Roses had pink and crimson. The school stall, tended by girls who were outside both camps, was blue, since the school colours were so fully represented by the patrols or the Camp Fire.

Peggy-Perfect, running errands at the Buttercup stall, might not wear uniform yet, so she had to be content with her green tunic and tan jersey. She carried messages and tied up parcels, with Gina’s eye upon her, for Gina was particular about knots.

‘You mustn’t let the Buttercups down! *This* way, silly!’ and Gina gave her a lesson.

When the entertainment was over and the last guests had disappeared, the girls set to work to clear up the litter.

Miss Ransome spoke a few words from the platform, thanking all who had helped and commenting on the pleasant spirit of co-operation which had been shown. The Camp Fire Girls looked at one another, conscious that they hardly deserved the praise.

‘It’s a very young spirit of co-operation!’ Ruth whispered.

‘Tisn’t a spirit at all. It’s our new Guardian making her garden,’ Jane murmured.

‘I’m glad we weren’t left out,’ Phyllis admitted. ‘It would have been rather awful if it had been only a Guide affair.’

‘Our stall was the prettiest. We really added to the look of the room,’ Sharly said. ‘Our middies look so jolly.’

Gina poked Peggy-Perfect. ‘That’s your sister’s doing. Those stuffy Camp Fireites wouldn’t have come in, if she hadn’t pushed them.’

‘I know. Marian did it,’ Peggy agreed.

Sharly turned to Phyllis. ‘Aren’t you going to give me a name soon?’

‘But you aren’t a member yet,’ Ruth remarked. ‘Perhaps you’ll—what’s that kick for, Thinker?’

‘Do you good,’ said Notaway.

‘I shan’t change my mind again,’ Sharly gave a little laugh. ‘I’m really keen on Camp Keema, Robin. What’s my name to be? I’d like to know before the holidays. Aunty and I are going to Devonshire. “She who changes her mind!” Do you know the Indian for that?’

Phyllis looked up. ‘We’ve found a name for you, but we don’t know if you’ll like it. If you don’t, we’ll try again.’

‘What is my new name?’ Sharly asked cautiously. ‘I hope it isn’t too hard to say? Some of them are miles long!’

‘Janie says you ought to be Yulalonan—“Moving to and fro.” It isn’t meant as an insult; quite the other way, in fact!’ but the Story-Teller eyed her doubtfully. ‘You moved to and fro and then settled with us because you liked us better.’

Sharly gave her a startled look. ‘May I think about it? It has a pretty sound and it’s easy to say.’

‘You’ll like it when you’ve thought about it,’ Phyllis said, in much relief. ‘We’d like to have Yulalonan in Camp Keema!’

‘You could have wind and water symbols, and leaves and grasses,’ Jane said. ‘They move to and fro, Sharly!’

‘I’ll think about it during the holidays,’ Sharly promised. ‘I believe I shall like my name.’

CHAPTER XVIII

THE MISFITS JOIN UP

‘Peg-Perfect, to-morrow night Camp Keema will receive Sharly Ransome and she’ll take her name,’ Marian said one evening, a month later, when the holidays were nearly over. ‘Would you keep as still as a mouse if we let you be there to watch?’

Peggy’s face lit up. ‘Oh, Gardener! I love Sharly; I’d like to see her made a Camp Firer! But they wouldn’t have me, after the way I played about with Camp Fire, would they?’

‘At first they said no, but I talked them round. If you creep into a corner and don’t say a word, they’ve promised not to turn you out.’

‘You are a jolly Gardener-Guardian!’ Peggy cried. ‘You knew I’d want to go! When did Sharly come back? I didn’t know she was home.’

‘She’s coming to-day, to spend a few days with Phyllis. Miss Ransome doesn’t come till Saturday, but Sharly wanted to be at our meeting.’

‘Perhaps she could come to my enrolment,’ Peggy said wistfully. ‘It’s the day after your meeting, and Sharly and I are sort of chums. We’ve been in the same kind of mess.’

‘You shared a difficult experience,’ Marian agreed.

‘Yes, but Sharly helped me no end. I didn’t help her, I’m afraid.’

‘Perhaps it helped her just to know you were going through the same trouble. I’ll tell her about your enrolment. Phyllis won’t know anything about it.’

‘If she does she won’t tell Sharly, and she won’t want her to come,’ said Peggy.

‘Oh, but Phyl’s much more friendly to the Guides now,’ Marian said quickly. ‘She worked with them at the bazaar. That’s a great improvement on last autumn, from what I’ve heard.’

‘I’ll tell you what I heard, at the end of the bazaar, Gardener. I heard Maud and Kitty say how jolly glad they were to have you, because if you hadn’t made them work for it, Camp Keema would have been left out of all the fun. And Con said, “Kitigan’s making her garden right enough, and we’re getting the benefit.” You’ve made peaceful paths in the school, Marian, and the girls are jolly glad.’

Marian laughed and flushed. ‘In that case it’s time I began to put my garden on my gown. I’ve been waiting till I saw some sign of results really beginning to come.’

‘Marian, what name is Sharly going to take?’ Peggy coaxed.

‘You’ll hear to-morrow night,’ Marian retorted.

Peggy sighed. ‘Well, of course, you can’t tell me Camp Fire secrets. But I’ll tell you something about the Guides, Gardener! You know Captain’s in London with her mother? Well, she’s coming here for one night, just to be at my enrolment! Isn’t it topping of her? She says she can’t have a new Guide received into her Company unless she’s present to welcome her.’

‘That’s most kind of Miss Curtis! I do think she is sporting!’ Marian exclaimed. ‘She’ll do anything for you girls!’

‘All Guiders and Guardians are sporting,’ Peggy said. ‘And Maribel, too, Marian.’

‘What about Maribel? What has she done now?’

‘She’s going away for the week-end, to stay with cousins in town. They wanted her on Friday, but she isn’t going till Saturday morning, because she’s my patrol-leader and she wants to see me through. Isn’t she a brick?’

‘That’s very good of her. You must buck up and be a first-class Buttercup, to repay her properly.’

‘I’ll be the best Buttercup there is—after Gina! I can’t expect to beat Gina,’ Peggy admitted.

The following evening she sat on the floor nursing her knees, in a corner of Camp Keema's Lodge, while the girls and Marian assembled and greeted one another with the Sign of Fire.

Sharly came in her tussock middie blouse, but wore her hair in Camp Fire fashion. She would not be entitled to wear her gown until she had won her rank as a Wood-Gatherer, Peggy knew.

When she had expressed her desire to be a Camp Fire Girl and had repeated the Law and promised to keep it, Marian placed the silver ring on the little finger of her left hand, reminding her of its meaning.

The circle of girls rose to sing a greeting; and then the Guardian invited Sharly to tell Camp Keema her new name.

'I like the name that has been given to me, Guardian,' Sharly said, flushing with the effort to speak out. 'I am Yulalanan, to move to and fro. I want the name to remind me how nearly I lost my chance to belong to the Camp Fire. But it means also that I moved to and fro, and tested things and waited, before I decided on the best; the best for me, I mean. And I hope I shall always move to and fro, and try and test things, and not decide in a hurry on the first thing that takes my fancy. But I hope finally I'll always decide on the best.'

It was a long speech, and difficult, and Sharly was hot with shyness before she finished. But she spoke out bravely, with real earnestness. In her corner, Peggy-Perfect clapped her hands noiselessly.

'We welcome you, Yulalanan,' the Guardian said cordially. 'You have a beautiful meaning for your name, and it has a beautiful sound. And your symbol?'

'On my gown I want to put deep water, that moves slowly to and fro, and wind. But my real symbol, on my headband and moving through wind and water, will be—don't laugh too much!' Sharly pleaded, her face scarlet. 'A goldfish, Kitigan.'

'A—goldfish?' cried Marian.

'Oh, great!' Phyllis laughed. 'They're always moving to and fro. Good for you, Yulalanan!'

'There was a bowl of goldfish in our hotel at Torquay,' Sharly explained. 'I don't like the creatures, but whenever I looked at them there they were, moving slowly to and fro and never stopping. And I thought "Yulalanan!" every time I saw them. It would make a pretty symbol, Story-Teller.'

'Little gold and silver fish, scattered through grey lines for wind and blue ones for deep water,' said the Thinker. 'Splendid, Sharly!'

'Don't be as brainless as a goldfish,' Ruth remarked. 'They goggle at you so.'

'I'll try not to be brainless,' Sharly promised.

'Yulalanan, Goldfish, you are a Sister of Camp Keema,' said the Guardian. 'The Story-Teller will teach you to use the loom and will help you to design your headband, and you will wear it at our next Council Fire.'

'We'll plan it to-morrow night,' Phyllis exclaimed. 'Little gold and silver fish on a dark blue ground; I can see it already. It will look lovely, Yulalanan!'

'I don't think Yulalanan will do it to-morrow night,' Marian remarked. 'Goldfish, Peggy-Perfect's enrolment is to-morrow night. Wouldn't you like to be there?'

Sharly looked across at Peggy. 'Of course I must be there, if they'll admit me. I must see Peg-Perfect really made a Guide at last.'

'You can come with me,' said Marian. 'I'm invited. They'll admit you all right.'

'Then I'll certainly be there. I wouldn't miss it for anything.'

Next evening, as Peggy-Perfect, with real earnestness, made her promise as a Guide and saluted the Colours, there was deep satisfaction in her heart at the thought that Sharly had

come to watch.

‘I saw her made a Camp Firer, and she’ll see me made a Guide. After the mess we nearly made of things, it’s jolly nice for us both,’ she thought, while she waited till the great moment came. ‘I wonder if Sharly’s as keen on her gown as I am on my uniform!’

The presence of the Commissioner and the Colours and the whole Company, the special visit of the Captain, and the fact that Maribel had given up a night in town so that she could take part in the ceremony, made a deep impression on the new Guide, and Peggy felt the occasion was one she would never forget.

‘Jolly to have you in the Guides at last, old girl!’ Gina said, as they left the meeting together. ‘Buck up and get your Second-Class badge! I’d like to see you really started before I disappear.’

‘Oh, Gina! Is it settled?’ Peggy wailed. ‘I can’t do without you!’

‘Fraid you’ll have to, Brother Pig. And I suppose it will be the end of the Brotherhood. I don’t believe Tom and Pete will carry on without John.’

‘Are you really going away?’ Peggy asked dismally.

‘Sure to go somewhere warmer next winter—Torquay or Cornwall or Bournemouth. Rosalind’s got an idea that it might even be Switzerland and that we might go quite soon, before the end of this term.’

‘That would be top-hole for you, but ghastly for us,’ Peggy groaned.

‘I don’t know that it would be top-hole. It might mean going to a French school,’ and Gina voiced a secret fear. ‘Think of doing everything in French!’

‘Awful! Ghastly for you as well as for us,’ Peggy agreed. ‘Oh, poor you! I hope it won’t be as bad as that, Queen!’

‘We should be “outcast and alone,” each at a separate French school,’ Gina’s tone was full of real anxiety. ‘I can’t think father and mother would do it, but you never know. We couldn’t expect to find English schools in Switzerland, though, of course, you never know these days! If I’m an Outcast Brother, alone among strangers, I shall think of the Brotherhood and the Totem Dance and the Camp Fire in the tool-shed!’

‘Don’t go about France moaning “Alone! Alone! Outcast and alone!” whatever you do,’ Peggy laughed.

‘I shall. I know I shall!’ Gina said sadly.

CHAPTER XIX

THE GUARDIAN'S GARDEN

When the summer term began, Guides and Camp Fire Girls found their out-of-school interests centring more and more in the hills and woods. The downs lay only a mile or two from the school; picnics and rambles took the place of indoor meetings, handicraft work gave way to games and Nature Study.

But quietly and without talking about it, Sharly worked on the gown she might not wear until she became a Wood-Gatherer. When it was put together, she began to embroider her grey symbols for wind, and blue and green for deep water; grasses swaying to and fro; leaves which would move gently; and wandering among the wind and water signs, tiny gold and silver fish, in a decorative border.

Peggy-Perfect was the only person allowed to see the gown, except Miss Ransome. Peg, working for her Second-Class badge, with a secret hope that some day she might be chosen as patrol-leader, watched Sharly as she sewed, and fingered the blue and grey and green silks and the gold and silver thread.

'It will be a beautiful gown, Sharly! I'm aching to see you in it!'

'I want it to be beautiful. I shall keep it all my life,' Sharly agreed. 'I'm going to have a row of little circles above my wind and water, Peg.'

'With goldfish in them?'

'No, with every jolly thing I've ever done worked inside them. I shall put a Guide in one—dark blue, with a big hat and a flag—to remind me I was once nearly a Guide.'

Peggy laughed. 'Put in a pig, to make you think of me! Maud and Kitty always call me Pig-Perfect. And I'm Brother Pig in the Totem Dance.'

'Is the Brotherhood still meeting?' Sharly asked, as she worked on a silver fish. 'We don't hear much of them nowadays. I suppose you're all too busy!'

Peggy looked mysterious. 'It isn't disbanded,' she said.

Sharly laughed. 'And I'm not to ask questions!'

'We aren't doing much just now; we are too busy. Gina's going in for badges and I'm trying for my Second-Class. But that's going to take a long time, Sharly-Goldfish!'

'Well, look at Wood-Gatherer! I have to wait four months. It seems a year.'

'Oh, well! Your gown and my Second-Class will be all the more worth having when we've won them!' Peggy said philosophically. 'There's one rotten thing, though! Gina and Rosalind won't be here. They're going away quite soon.'

'What will you do for a Lieutenant?'

'They say Marcia will act as one; she'll be eighteen in June. But she's leaving this term. In the autumn I expect Maribel will be Lieutenant. We'd choose Gina for our P.L., but she'll have gone. It is ghastly! We don't want her to go.'

'Perhaps they'll come back.'

'They won't spend another winter here, because of John,' Peggy groaned. 'They don't want to go abroad one scrap.'

Marian was embroidering her gown also, but Peggy kept faith with her and did not speak of it even to Sharly. The garden on the Guardian's robe was growing, and she promised to wear it at a meeting just before half-term.

'It won't be finished,' she said, as she walked home from a picnic with Ruth and Jane one evening, while Phyllis and Sharly walked on ahead. 'But I think perhaps it will never be really finished.'

'Kitigan!' Ruth seized her chance. 'We've been longing to ask you something, but it isn't easy to find you alone. Couldn't you make the Story-Teller a Torch-Bearer? She's done all the things for it, and you know what a splendid leader she was for Camp Keema all winter, before we found you! She did Torch-Bearer's work for months. Couldn't you, Guardian?'

'She kept the Camp Fire burning,' said Jane. 'She's our oldest. It would be jolly to have a Torch-Bearer again. Maribel was our first, you know.'

Marian's face clouded. 'Girls, I'd like to do it, and I know Phyl has qualified. Her story-telling is first-class and she has been a real leader. But she isn't quite ready. I'd rather wait a little longer.'

'How do you mean—not ready?' Ruth demanded.

'You mean in herself,' Jane, the Thinker, said shrewdly. 'You've been watching, Kitigan. You know the Story-Teller hasn't quite—not *quite*—forgiven the infants for that Redskin business. She's still short with Gina and Peggy-Perfect.'

'She feels they made fun of Camp Fire!' Ruth cried, up in arms to defend her friend. 'And so they did. I could be grumpy with the whole crowd if I thought about it, but it isn't worth while. Phyl cares more, and it is worth while to her. She hasn't forgotten that John made a joke of all we do.'

'She hasn't quite forgiven our own three Wood-Gatherers for joining in the Totem Dance and the Redskin meetings,' said the Guardian. 'We know they still meet occasionally, and Phyl disapproves very strongly. You can see it in her manner towards the Wild Rose at times.'

'Well, you can't blame her!' said Ruth.

'I didn't mean to blame her. But I'd like to see in the Story-Teller some sympathy and understanding for the younger girls before I give her our highest rank. Wait a little longer, Robin. I know she has won it, and she shall have it. But if she could win it handsomely and be a real Torch-Bearer, in sympathy as well as in guidance and craftsmanship, I should feel so much happier about her. At present I feel her sympathy for the juniors is very slight; she can't conquer her resentment and see their point of view. Torch-Bearer should be such a very high standard, the ideal we would all like to reach. I don't want to lower the ideal by giving the rank too soon.'

'Phyl isn't like Bel was,' Jane said at once. 'Guardian, I believe you're right.'

'Phyl's a different sort of person from Maribel,' Ruth argued.

'My dear Robin, I realise that. If the Story-Teller grows into sympathy it will mean a big conquest of herself. To understand difficult juniors, who seem silly or mistaken, and to accept their silliness with sympathy, would be a great achievement for Phyl. We'll give her a little longer. I should feel so proud and happy to see her a real Torch-Bearer.'

'It would be another bit of your garden, Kitigan. You've planted heaps in it already,' said the Thinker.

'It would be a plant that would make me very glad to be your Guardian. I believe Phyl has the sympathy she needs, but she isn't using it yet. Perhaps one day it will come out.'

'She's leaving this term,' said the Robin.

'But leaving school doesn't mean leaving Camp Fire,' the Thinker remonstrated.

'Of course not,' Marian agreed. 'The Story-Teller shall have her Torch-Bearer's pin, Robin. But we'll give her a fair chance to win it in the fullest possible way.'

A few days later the Guardian called Camp Keema together, to make arrangements for a Council Fire and to lay an unusual proposition before them.

'I want Camp Keema to allow me to invite a visitor to our next meeting. It will come during my brother's leave; he is at sea, and we only see him at long intervals. He has heard about the Camp Fire in my letters, and he feels he knows you all. I've promised that if possible he shall see a Council Fire. May I ask him to our next meeting?'

The Camp Fire looked at one another and laughed.

‘Oh, ask him, Guardian!’ cried the Robin.

‘Is he as jolly as you are, Kitigan?’ asked Notaway.

‘It would be fun to have him!’ the Wild Rose and the Tortoise giggled at the thought.

‘He ought to come,’ the Story-Teller had considered the matter. ‘He ought to know what we do, since you’re our Guardian. Has he seen you in your gown, Kitigan?’

‘Nobody has seen my gown since I put my garden on it,’ Marian retorted.

‘Not even Peg-Perfect?’ asked the Robin.

‘Not since the garden really began to grow. She knows I’ve been working at it, but I’ve done it while she was at school. Camp Keema must see it first of all.’

‘I shall be fearfully envious!’ Yulalonan-Sharly sighed. ‘Mine’s going ahead, and I’m longing to wear it.’

‘Then I may invite Dick?’ asked the Guardian. ‘You won’t let his presence spoil our meeting? You must carry on as if he weren’t there.’

‘We’ll try,’ the girls promised.

‘If anybody is silly and giggly she’ll be turned out,’ the Guardian threatened. ‘Dick will sit in a corner, and you must forget all about him.’

‘It won’t be easy, but we will try,’ the Story-Teller promised. ‘We’d like him to see you being a Guardian.’

CHAPTER XX

THE RAID OF THE REDSKINS

The Guardian's brother sat in a corner, watching the lighting of the Council Fire. The fire in this instance was three candles and the hearth was empty, since the day was early in June. The Camp had planned to meet in the garden, but a shower had soaked the grass and driven them indoors. They had rejoiced at the excuse, for though they liked to be outdoors for ordinary meetings, for the Council Fire they all, in their hearts, preferred to meet in the Lodge of Camp Keema.

Dick Mason's eyes were on his sister, as she stood presiding over the candle ceremony. For months Marian's letters had been full of her new interest; he knew the Story-Teller, the Robin, the Thinker, and the Goldfish, and all the juniors, from her descriptions, and had no difficulty in recognising each one. He knew why Sharly wore her tussore middie instead of a gown; why the Wild Rose, the Swimmer, and the Tortoise had silver rings, but wore no bracelets on their arms.

At first the girls had been inclined to giggle. Then they had forgotten all about Dick, and he had watched the ritual of the candles and the recitation of the verses, gazing at his sister as if he found her changed since his last leave—as was indeed the case.

Kitigan had quieted the girls as they crowded round to admire her gown. She had welcomed them at the door with the Sign of Fire, and had bidden them take their places in the circle.

'You shall examine my garden presently. First, we must light our Fire. Wild Rose, will you light the Light of Work?'

She stood looking down at the candles, her long dark plaits drooping under her glittering headband, as the Swimmer lit the Light of Health. Dick's eyes wandered to the Story-Teller and Sharly, sitting side by side. They too had long brown braids hanging down; all the rest had curls or were neatly shingled.

'There's no doubt which way looks best,' the sailor said to himself. 'Marian and those other two look wonderful! She's absolutely marvellous in that amazing dress!'

In spite of themselves, the girls were gazing at the newly-decorated gown. Kitigan knew it, and as soon as the Story-Teller had read the Count of the last meeting from the Record Book, the Guardian bade them come and look into her garden.

'Here are Notaway's pansies and these are wild roses. This brook is for Tchuka, so that she can swim upstream. Here's the garden tortoise, and there are several robins. Under these trees are little people telling one another stories. Here's a quiet pool, with goldfish in it. Come and find yourselves!'

A deep border of flowers and trees, of every kind and colour, reached upwards from her hem and a narrower band of flowers ran round her neck. Her sleeves were edged with smooth strips of green, dotted with white and gold.

'These are lawns, with buttercups and daisies,' she explained. 'Here's a little brown summer-house, and here's a fountain of clear water. There are sunny spots and also, I'll admit, shady places! One wants them all.'

'I say!' the Robin's voice rang out. 'The infants have disappeared!'

The Guardian, the Fire-Makers, and Sharly gazed wildly round the room. The Wood-Gatherers of Camp Keema were nowhere to be seen.

'I thought something was the matter!' cried the Thinker. 'They were nudging one another and whispering.'

'Where have they gone?' Ruth demanded. 'I'll give that little imp Maud something for this!'

'You *know* where they've gone!' the Story-Teller's anger flamed out. 'It's been bad enough to know they were meeting with the boys and making fun of all we do, but to desert the Council Fire! Kitigan, you won't just laugh? You'll never forgive them, will you? I never shall! They shan't come back!'

Kitigan laid a hand on her shoulder. 'Gently, Phyl! It's very wrong of them, but let's take it quietly. We'll gain nothing by being angry.'

She left the indignant Fire-Makers and crossed the room to Dick's corner.

He came to meet her. 'What's the trouble? I saw the youngsters slip out, but I thought it was all part of the ceremony.'

'You couldn't know, of course,' and Marian explained. 'Those younger ones belong to a secret society, started by Phyl's brother and some other boys. Our three found out about it and insisted on joining. They meet in the tool-shed and dress up as Red Indians and have a mock ritual. It's all a joke, but they've modelled their ceremonies on ours, and they have a solemn dance and a secret sign which, Phyl feels, are making fun of Camp Fire. I've tried to make her laugh at it and see how harmless it is; but the Story-Teller is desperately in earnest and she can't bear to feel Camp Fire is being made fun of. I've had trouble with her before, and I'm afraid we're in for it again.'

'Your own juniors shouldn't have anything to do with it, if it's a mock Camp Fire,' Dick remonstrated. 'Isn't it rather mean of them? I strongly sympathise with the Story-Teller.'

'I don't. She knows it isn't serious. Our three are perfectly loyal to Camp Keema, and in public they'd defend it against any criticism or mockery. This other is only a game—the Band of the Riotous Redskins or the Outcast Brotherhood! Their school friends are in it; they couldn't bear to be left out. It doesn't affect their loyalty to the Camp Fire.'

'You'll have to talk your Story-Teller round,' said Dick. 'She looks absolutely raging.'

'The others are hurt because I won't give her higher rank. But how can I make her a Torch-Bearer while she gives way to anger and can't sympathise with the younger girls? A Torch-Bearer is a leader. Phyl was the leader for months, before I became the Guardian. But all her leadership has a touch of bitterness; she was bitter against the Guides, and she has resented the Secret Brotherhood because it burlesqued some of our doings. Now she'll refuse to forgive the younger half of our own Camp. How could she be a Torch— —'

'Hello!' cried Dick, at a clatter of feet on the wooden stair.

He strode forward, but was too late. The door was flung open, and the room was filled with a yelling horde of Redskins, in blankets and feathered headdresses. Waving poles from which hung cardboard panels inscribed with animal totems, six invaders danced wildly round the candles on the floor, while the elder Camp Fire Girls, pulling their gowns about them for safety, drew back into the corners.

But only for a second. Then Phyllis leapt upon a Redskin and took her by the shoulders and flung her towards the door.

'How dare you! Gina Firth, you're abominable! Get out, all of you!'

'I say, look out! Don't hurt her!' John threw off his blanket and feathers. 'That's my sister, please remember!'

'She didn't hurt me,' Gina panted. 'We knew she'd be wild.'

'John, what do you mean by this?' The Guardian came into the circle, where Redskins and Camp Fire Girls were crowded together. In the doorway were the missing Wood-Gatherers, watching anxiously to see what would happen, and to Marian's relief they were not in war-paint but were still wearing their gowns and headbands.

‘Wild Rose, Tortoise, Swimmer!’ said the Guardian. ‘What have you to say for yourselves?’

Phyllis stood staring at the three, her dark eyes blazing. The rest of the Redskins had doffed their feathers, and Dick’s eyes twinkled as he recognised Peggy-Perfect. He could well believe that the idea of the Riotous Redskins had appealed to Peg.

Peggy, and Gina, and John all spoke at once.

‘It’s our last night. The Redskins are being disbanded,’ Gina began.

‘We wanted a final “do.” We had to do something mad!’ Peggy cried.

‘I say, I’m awfully sorry,’ said John. ‘Those three said you’d be most frightfully peeved if we raided your Lodge. They tried to stop us, honest they did. It’s not their fault. They knew what we were going to do, and they’d asked us not to go on with it. They slipped out to have one more try. But we were feeling fearfully sick because it’s our last time, and we wanted to do something too mad for words. Gina and I are off to Switzerland in a day or two, and we may never see the Redskins again.’ The words poured out in a breathless stream; it was plain that John was feeling the coming parting deeply.

‘It’s rather ghastly,’ Gina pleaded. ‘We don’t want to go abroad a scrap. We may never see Tom, and Peter, and Peg, and Freda again.’

‘We were feeling so bad that we had to do something. We didn’t dare to think about its being our last meeting,’ Freda said earnestly.

‘So when Tom said, “Let’s raid the Camp Fire people in their Lodge!” we all said, “Splendid!”’ John exclaimed. ‘We knew you’d loathe it, but we thought perhaps you’d understand when we explained. We apologise a thousand times, don’t we, Redskins?’

‘Oh, rather!’ said the Redskins.

‘But we couldn’t resist it,’ Peggy added.

‘We tried to stop them, Kitigan!’ cried the Wild Rose from the doorway. ‘We were there when they talked about it and we asked them not to do it. Then it was time to start and we didn’t want to keep you waiting, so we had to come away without making them promise. While the others were looking at your gown we slipped out to have another try, but we couldn’t do anything with John to-night.’

‘We’ve been dying to raid the Lodge for weeks,’ Peggy added.

‘It’s been jolly decent of us not to do it before,’ Peter suggested. ‘Old John wouldn’t have it, but it was frightfully tempting.’

‘Old John’ looked apologetically at the Guardian. ‘I’ve kept them off it all these weeks. These chaps have been aching for a raid. But I went a bit mad to-night, because of its being our last chance. You aren’t too fearfully wild, are you? We haven’t smashed anything.’

‘The Lodge of Camp Keema isn’t any the worse for being raided,’ Freda added.

‘It’s only Phyl’s feelings that are upset,’ said Gina, still smarting under the Story-Teller’s clutch on her shoulders. ‘And everybody knows they’re frightfully brittle.’

‘Phyl’s so beastly ceremonial,’ remarked Tom.

‘You’ll call it square, won’t you?’ John pleaded. ‘We’ve apologised. We’re sorry. We can’t say any more.’

The Guardian had been scanning the faces of the culprits. Under their light talk she could read the tragic feeling of parting. They had been an intimate little brotherhood for six months, and now it was at an end.

While Dick in the background watched with interest, she bade the Wood-Gatherers come in and close the door. The Redskins eyed her anxiously as they waited for her answer.

‘Now, girls of Camp Keema!’ said the Guardian. ‘You have heard the explanation from our guests. Let us “face the wind!” What shall we say to them? They have spoiled our meeting and have broken more than they understand. Our Lodge is a place of quietness and friendship,

and until to-night it has never known noise and brawling. It won't be easy for us to forget this scene and the angry thoughts and words it has called forth.'

'I say, we're really frightfully sorry!' John interrupted. 'I hadn't thought of that. We've barged in and messed up your feeling for the place. I wish we hadn't been such asses!'

'Desecrated it,' Kitigan said ruthlessly. 'But you couldn't understand. I can see only one way by which our happy feeling can be restored.'

'We'll do anything, Marian!' Peggy cried.

'We're really awfully sorry,' Gina said humbly.

'It isn't anything you can do. You have done your share by bringing in strife and noise and bitter feeling. Yes, bitter feeling, for you knew that Phyllis at least would be sorely hurt, even if the rest of us could take your raid as a joke.'

'That's true,' Gina admitted. 'We knew she'd feel bad. Can't we do anything, Miss Mason?'

'What can be done, Marian?' Peggy's voice was abject. 'Who can do it, if we can't?'

'Kitigan means that we can be nice about it,' said the Thinker, her eyes on the Guardian's face. 'Kitigan, is it another bit of your peaceful garden? Do you want us to cover up their silliness with kindness?'

'What about planting generosity and understanding in our garden?' the Guardian retorted. 'Girls, I admit they have spoiled our meeting and desecrated our Lodge. But can't you understand how they were feeling? They have told you; haven't you enough imagination to feel it for yourselves? If you have, you'll understand and forgive, and the bitterness will be forgotten because we have planted better things. We can't pretend to take this—this outrage, if you like—as a joke. But we can be generous and realise it's their last evening. Couldn't we say no more about it? Couldn't we even give up the rest of our meeting and invite the Redskins to a sing-song and supper?'

'Yes! Oh, yes, please, Kitigan!' cried the Wild Rose and the Tortoise together.

'Marian, you brick!' cried Peggy.

'Oh, if you only would!' Gina exclaimed.

'It would be a gorgeous wind-up for the Riotous Redskins,' Freda said wistfully.

John looked at the elder Camp Fire Girls. 'I'm sorrier than ever that I was such an idiot,' he said. 'I could have sat on Tom and Pete, and I wish I had. You're a jolly sporting crowd, and I'm frightfully sorry we messed up your meeting.'

The Guardian was looking at her Fire-Makers. 'It is for Camp Keema to say.'

'I'll agree,' the Thinker spoke up. 'I'm always glad when you make another bit of your garden, Kitigan. We won't say another word about it, will we, Story-Teller?' she looked anxiously at Phyllis.

Phyl did not speak. She was standing with bent head, behind the Robin.

'You're a rotten crowd, you Redskins,' said the Robin. 'And you're the worst little wretch of the lot, John Firth. But if this is your last appearance, I suppose we must let you off, though you don't deserve it. Shake!' and she held out her hand.

John took it awkwardly. 'Jolly decent of you! We didn't know you'd care so much.'

'Story-Teller?' the Guardian asked.

For a moment she feared Phyllis would refuse. Then either the spirit of generous friendship must be quenched or Phyl would have to withdraw and leave the rest to a pretence of enjoyment. Either alternative seemed unthinkable. Without the Story-Teller no one could feel the reconciliation was complete.

Marian moved forward, as if to help Phyllis to a decision. Then she checked herself. It would be easier for Phyl if she did not feel she was being forced.

Phyllis knew they were waiting for her. For months her new Guardian's influence had been working in her, pushing her out of her narrow self, urging her to a more generous attitude to life. What the Thinker called 'the making of Kitigan's garden'—bringing pleasant and peaceful ways where before there had been strife and tangle—had attracted the Story-Teller strongly, but she had never quite yielded to it within herself. Outwardly she had given in time after time, but there had been a secret holding-back, a stronghold which had not surrendered to Marian's assault; and so every time the battle had had to be fought over again.

At last she looked up. 'I do see how they were feeling. It's ghastly for them. Perhaps we could help them to pull through. We can't give them supper—we haven't enough to eat. But there are some jam tarts in the house, and a big cake, and strawberries. Shall I fetch them while you're singing? We could have quite a decent feast.'

She flushed at the light in the Guardian's face; her surrender had cost her a good deal.

'Oh, cheers!' shouted Peggy and Gina.

'For she's a jolly good fellow!' John raised the tune, and Camp Keema's Lodge rang with the friendly sound.

Phyllis fled, holding up her gown and tossing back her long plaits. As she went she heard Notaway's cry, 'Guardian, you were right, as usual! That sounds so much jollier than the other yelling that we shall forget they came in like a horde of wild animals!'

'Girls, I want to speak to you!' and Marian called Camp Keema close to her. 'The rest of you sit down on the floor and think what songs you'd like to sing.'

'If you boys would come and help, we could have lemonade and ginger ale. I can't carry it all alone.' It was the Story-Teller's voice out on the stair.

With a shout the Redskins flung aside their blankets and dived down the stair after her.

The Guardian laughed and spoke hurriedly to her girls in a corner.

'Oh, yes, Guardian! Gorgeous!' the two Fire-Makers spoke together.

'I'm sure it's right,' the Thinker added.

'It will buck her up no end,' said the Robin.

When Phyllis came back, followed by the boys laden with bottles and glasses and the girl-Redskins carrying plates of cakes and tarts and fruit, the circle on the floor was waiting for them to take their places. Dick had been invited from his corner to sit by the Guardian. Each Camp Fire Girl had a Redskin's blanket spread on the floor beside her by way of invitation.

'So that we can keep you people in order,' said Yulalonan. 'When you've arranged those interesting-looking bottles, come and sit by me, John Firth.'

'It's only ginger ale,' John protested.

Phyllis placed bowls of strawberries on the floor and put down fruit plates. Gina brought jam tarts, Peggy a big cake, and Freda a plate of buns.

'Some feast!' the Robin exclaimed. 'Jolly decent of you to stand treat, Story-Teller!'

'Will you please all rise?' the Guardian's voice was grave.

Startled by her seriousness, the Redskins slipped into their places and stood between the Camp Fire Girls. Phyllis looked up in astonishment from the cakes she was arranging, then stood with the rest.

'Before our meeting comes to an end, there is one honour Camp Keema wishes to award to-night,' said the Guardian. 'Oyaka, Story-Teller, you have finished the requirements for our highest rank, and you have shown great qualities of leadership. Will you be our Torch-Bearer?'

Phyllis looked at her across the circle. 'Kitigan, I'm not ready for it,' she faltered. 'I've wanted it badly, but now I know I'm not good enough. I'd better wait a little longer.'

'We would like you to be our Torch-Bearer,' said the Guardian. 'One other thing I should like, but only if the thought pleases you. Your name, Oyaka, the Story-Teller, is hardly good

enough for you; you ought now to have one with a fuller meaning. If you are willing, I should like you to be Oyaka Ohiya, the Story-Teller Victorious. You have conquered the hardest enemy, yourself. May Camp Keema give you this new name?’

‘Oh no, please!’ Phyllis cried. ‘I haven’t conquered yet. I don’t deserve so big a name. You don’t know how nearly I didn’t—’

‘We don’t want to know,’ said the Thinker.

‘All that matters is that you did conquer, and you will conquer again. From now you will be our Victorious Story-Teller and our Torch-Bearer. Camp Keema, we will sing to welcome our Sister and to greet her new name,’ said the Guardian.

‘And then we’ll have “A jolly good fellow” over again, just for Phyl!’ shouted Peggy.

During the singing that closed the meeting, Jane poked Gina in the ribs. ‘Who will be gladdest about Phyl, Queen?’

Gina stared. ‘Is it a riddle? Phyl, I should think!’

‘No—Marian, because she’s her Guardian,’ said Peggy-Perfect.

Sharly had heard the question. ‘It isn’t a riddle, Gina. The gladdest person won’t be Phyl, nor Kitigan, nor any of us. It will be Maribel.’

‘Right first time, Yulalonan. You’re a brainy Goldfish,’ said the Thinker.

‘We’ll all go and tell Maribel on our way home,’ the Robin added.

‘Bel! Bel! Phyl’s a Torch-Bearer!’ an excited crowd surrounded Maribel at her garden gate.

Maribel pushed her way through them to where Phyl hesitated on the outskirts.

‘Old girl, I am so glad! Now Camp Keema is really ready to “face the wind” in earnest. You’ll do great things! It’s the best news I’ve heard since you found your new Guardian.’

‘It’s all her doing,’ said Phyl.

‘It’s our Guardian’s garden,’ said the Thinker. ‘She puts us all into it.’

‘She’s making a beautiful garden,’ Maribel agreed. ‘It was a good day for Camp Keema when you found her.’

THE END

[End of *Peggy and the Brotherhood*, by Elsie J. Oxenham (ps. of Elsie Jeanette Dunkerly)]